Gilbert Haven was obsessed with the dream of a casteless society. His passionate commitment to racial equality and to the creation of an American conscience shaped his career—as preacher, editor and bishop—in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Yet, when he died in 1880 at the age of fifty-eight, his church had disavowed his leadership and the national government had abandoned its commitment to the enforcement of civil rights. Haven’s dream was little closer to realization than it had been when he entered the New England Conference in 1851.

With the nation and its churches grappling anew today with the issues of race and the persisting tradition of racial Christianity, a fresh examination of Haven’s story is timely. William Gravely did not intend a comprehensive biography. He has done the better thing in presenting Haven’s authentic Christian radicalism in the face of developments in the nation and the denomination. His study reveals “the extent to which, despite Haven’s own dedicated churchmanship, nineteenth-century American religion was unable to assist or lead the nation toward humane solutions for its racial dilemma.”

Haven’s preaching on social and political issues placed him clearly to the left of his fellow Methodists. His writings and platform appearances assured him an audience extending far beyond New England. However, his vigorous criticism of denominational policy alienated him from the Methodist establishment. By 1866 his church, celebrating its centennial in a mood of self-congratulation, was not disposed to mount a crusade for racial equality.

After almost a year of retirement because of “nervous prostration” Haven accepted the editorship of Zion’s Herald. Now given a platform for his crusade against caste, he touched upon every significant reform movement in church and society. Although the paper prospered under Haven’s five-year editorship, he was unable to check the conservative reaction already under way. In 1872 the General Conference voted down his proposals for racial reform in the church; but in a curious turn of things Haven himself was elected bishop and assigned to supervise the conferences in the South. Four years later the General Conference in effect repudiated his episcopal administration in the South, and his senior colleagues sent him to visit the Liberian Mission Conference. A severe case of malaria contracted in Africa permanently impaired his health but
did not silence his prophetic voice. In the remaining months of his life he contributed significantly to strengthening his denomination's educational institutions in the South.

Gilbert Haven spoke for the radical wing remaining in the denomination after the defection of Methodist abolitionists in the 1840's. That position has needed the scholarly statement that Professor Gravely provides here in terms of Haven's thought and strategy. Of further interest is his treatment of Haven's churchmanship in its relation to the sense of public responsibility and social concern in his Puritan heritage. Haven had not abandoned the idea of a national bond with God, "a covenant relation which subsumed national destiny and political authority to divine sovereignty." His views, to be sure, were tinctured with the Christian nationalism and the imperialist visions of his time. But he did not simply identify national destiny with a northern victory. He called both nation and church, both North and South, to repentance.

Professor Gravely's book was awarded the Jesse Lee Prize in American Methodist History offered biennially by the Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church.

—James W. May
Candler School of Theology


Soon after this biography of prominent Methodist Augustus B. Longstreet first appeared in 1924, Allen Tate called John Donald Wade, the author, "the most remarkable stylist in biography we have had in America since the War." And Thomas Inge observes in the Introduction that "Wade produced such a definitive assessment [of Longstreet] that nothing new or of consequence has been written about Longstreet or his work since then."

Longstreet was one of the "giants" in Southern Methodism and in the South during his career that spanned almost three-quarters of the 19th Century. Wade catalogs the various capacities in which he served as "lawyer, politician, orator, judge, farmer, businessman, patron of medical education, teacher, scholar, college president, author, newspaper editor, preacher, musician, naturalist, carpenter, artisan, sportsman... And whatever he did, he did well, not with the greatest distinction, to be sure, but with something far above mediocrity."

Longstreet is revealed in this volume as an amazingly versatile
man. His major vocations were lawyer-politician (23 years), author (an intermittent side line), minister and educator (the latter chiefly but not exclusively church related, for 22 years). He actually spent little time as a pastor, but continued his preaching during his years as a college president. Wade says, “It is the general testimony that the man could not preach.” A contemporary wrote, “Though his manner is not suited to the pulpit, yet I think even there he shows he has genius.”

Many readers may be surprised to learn of the status of Judge Longstreet, as he was called most of his life, as a literary figure. About one-fifth of the book is devoted to describing and evaluating his literary efforts. Wade declares he was not a professional author, usually dashing off his writings hurriedly and rarely giving them the careful attention one might expect. Nevertheless, his Georgia Scenes attained wide popularity, and were commended by such persons as Edgar Allen Poe. Ten editions were printed by Harpers from 1840 to 1897, and at the suggestion of his friend, John C. Calhoun, Yale University (Longstreet’s alma mater) gave the author an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

As a churchman Longstreet made his greatest contribution as president of Emory College, Oxford, Georgia (1840-1849) and in helping the new Methodist Episcopal Church, South to find its place in the South. As an educator (and still an active churchman) he headed the University of Mississippi (1849-1856) and the University of South Carolina (1858-1861).

Born of parents from New England, and himself a graduate of Yale University, Longstreet nevertheless became an ardent supporter of the South and was hailed as “a Southern gentleman of the old school.” When Division came in the Methodist Episcopal Church at the General Conference of 1844, Longstreet was there as a delegate, and he championed the cause of Bishop Andrew, a close personal friend.

“He had had more capacity for work than is given to most men, and more intelligence, and he had been as honest as a man could be,” writes Wade. He was a man of his times, conforming to many of the cultural and economic influences around him. He fretted over certain situations that he knew were wrong, such as the Andersonville prison, but he did not know how to remedy them.

He spent a long life devoted actively and sincerely to the uplift of his fellows and at the end he saw many of his fondest dreams come to nought. In God alone, he felt then, could men find any lasting hope. Such are the uses of adversity in certain eras of human history.

—Walter N. Vernon
Nashville, Tennessee
This marker for the graves of United Methodist ministers is made of bronze and designed so that bolts in the back of the marker can be embedded in the tombstone. The marker can be ordered from the Commission on Archives and History, P. O. Box 488, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina 28745. The price is $20 for one marker, or $15 each in lots of five.