In 1860 Bishop Daniel A. Payne, the founder of Wilberforce University and a perennial advocate of an educated clergy, anxiously received Benjamin T. Tanner into the ministry of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Tanner fulfilled exactly what Payne wanted in the AME clergy. Educated at Avery Institute and Western Theological Seminary in his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he was born in 1835, Tanner succeeded Payne as the denomination’s leading intellectual. While the careers of most of Tanner’s AME peers derived from their pastoral service in prestigious pulpits, his rise to denominational prominence stemmed from his role of an editor and writer. Since its founding in 1852, Payne had wanted The Christian Recorder, the church’s official organ, to become the preeminent newspaper among African Americans. Hence, he and others successfully pushed Tanner’s election as editor in 1868. Tanner did not disappoint his supporters. For sixteen years the pages of the Recorder were filled with articles and debates about crucial issues that confronted African Americans in politics, theology, and racial ideology. Eventually, Tanner sensed a need for a literary outlet for fuller discussions of these matters. Hence, in 1884 the General Conference allowed him to leave the Recorder and found the A.M.E. Church Review. Tanner drew articles from leading thinkers within the denomination and among African Americans in general. When Tanner was elected a Bishop in 1888, some interested onlookers had mixed feelings about his elevation. He had been such a good editor, thought T. Thomas Fortune, that it seemed a “pity” that his exemplary journalistic skills would go to waste. Both before and after Tanner entered the episcopacy he wrote several books and pamphlets on AME and African American subjects. In his An Apology For African Methodism Tanner defended the notion that the racial origins of his denomination had both sacred and secular significance. His Color Of Solomon—What? challenged the conventional wisdom that Solomon and other Biblical figures were whites instead of persons of color. While Tanner was an integrationist and opposed separatism, his racial pride was always a salient theme in his writings.

These and other matters were all carefully chronicled in Seraile’s biography. Although the author provided ample coverage to Tanner’s activities as a bishop in several regions within the United States, Canada, and Bermuda, Seraile’s principal interest lay in Tanner’s writings. In this respect the sources that he used may have mattered. Seraile relied heavily upon Tanner’s diary, The Christian Recorder, and the A.M.E. Church Review. Although he cited relevant minutes of AME General Conferences, he did not
draw significantly from annual conference minutes from those jurisdictions over which Tanner presided. These sources offer another perspective on Tanner in interaction with the clergy and laity of his episcopal districts. The author also juxtaposed Tanner's views on racial ideology, politics, women in the ministry, and other subjects with his learned contemporaries. His pioneering works on blacks in the Bible, however, were not adequately discussed in comparison with contemporaneous perspectives that Henry M. Turner and Benjamin W. Arnett advanced on the same topic. Additionally, Seraile does not take advantage of new scholarship in books and articles about other black Wesleyan bishops including William F. Dickerson, Henry M. Turner, James W. Hood, and Lucious Holsey. Works on these AME, AME Zion, and CME bishops now permit scholars to talk generally about the Wesleyan episcopacy within post–Civil War black denominations. Consequently, an analysis of Tanner within this ecclesiastical context was bypassed.

Nonetheless, those who are unfamiliar with Tanner and the details of his distinguished career as a minister, editor, author, and bishop will find Seraile's volume a valuable introduction to this important figure in Methodist history.

DENNIS C. DICKERSON
Nashville, TN


A life that spans all but one decade of the 19th century and reflects the transformation of the Methodist Episcopal Church from revivalist sect to the "most American of all churches" is a story that should add much to Methodist historiography. Such is the promise of this biography of Joseph Tarkington, a Methodist preacher in Indiana who went from being a frontier circuit rider to presiding elder. The subtitle suggests that within the details of one preacher's life can be found a broader pattern of change from frontier revivalist religion to small town respectability and affluence.

Joseph Tarkington was born near Franklin, Tennessee on October 30, 1800. At the age of fifteen, the family moved to Indiana to avoid slavery, legal in Tennessee. Following a conversion experience, Joseph joined the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1821, and within three years, began preaching on an Indiana circuit. For the next thirteen years, he served several circuits, experiencing the typical travails of a frontier preacher. Later, he was appointed to some of the more significant stations within the Indiana Conference as well as presiding elder and served as agent for Indiana Asbury
University. He married Maria Slawson while still a circuit rider and they had seven children. Their most noted grandchild was author Booth Tarkington. After a lengthy retirement, he died on September 22, 1891.

While not adding new insights or understanding of 19th century American Methodism, the book does provide a rich detail and an in-depth look at the life of one preacher, placed in the context of Indiana church life. Attention is given to issues of slavery, African-Americans, women, the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages, church trials, and education, including the founding of Indiana Asbury College, which would later become DePauw University. The book is well researched and is especially strong in its use of original resources. These include the Autobiography of Rev. Joseph Tarkington (1899) and extensive collections of Tarkington letters and papers. The usefulness of the book for Methodist historians is enhanced with its end notes, bibliography and index.

Unless the reader has a particular interest in Indiana Methodism, the Tarkington family, or the well-known travails of the circuit rider, there is little in this treatment that will hold the reader. There are occasional apparent inaccuracies, and a lack of clarity about the Methodist context. For example, on page thirty-one, the author writes, “prior to 1800, the Methodist Conference in the West was part of the Kentucky Conference. During 1800 the name ‘was changed to the Western Conference.’” And then the same assertion is repeated on page 57: “prior to 1801, the Methodist Conference in the West was known as the Kentucky Conference.” The Encyclopedia of World Methodism, on the other hand, makes no reference to such nomenclature. Greater clarity is needed on the structural changes within Indiana Methodism so that a sentence, indicating that in 1845 Joseph was transferred to the Indiana Conference from the Northern Conference, would offer the reader some context and increase clarity. The narrative and the chronology are not consistent as to which districts Tarkington served between 1848 and 1851.

The historian can be grateful whenever a primary source, such as Joseph Tarkington’s Autobiography is discovered and is then made available to a wider audience through a biography that includes some of the social issues of the era.

ROBERT J. WILLIAMS
Cherry Hill, New Jersey
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