

BOOK REVIEWS

J. Ralph Randolph, *British Travelers Among the Southern Indians, 1660-1763*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973, 183 pp., \$8.95.

This volume surveys the writings of some fifty British travelers among Southern Indians during the period of 1660-1763. Of these travelers one fourth were ministers of the Presbyterian or Anglican Church or leaders of the Society of Friends. Most of these church leaders (sometimes called "Sunday men" by the Indians) were concerned with evangelizing the Indians, but the record here of their efforts does not reveal adequate understanding of or preparation for the task. Nor does it reveal any significant success in that time resulting from the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

As early as 1703 the Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts sent the Rev. Samuel Thomas to South Carolina to work among the Yamassee Indians. However, the Governor felt it best for Thomas to confine his work to the English and not until his successor (Francis Le Jau) came in 1706 were the Indians involved. Le Jau sent to England in 1708 a copy of the Lord's Prayer in the "Savannah tongue."

These early travelers reported that Indians believed in a Superior Being or God (whom some groups called "the Man above" or "the Great man above"); they held ceremonies of thanksgiving to God for good crops (including a "green corn dance"); they allowed considerable diversity in religious beliefs "amongst those that . . . think"; some believed in reward and punishment after death, "Hell" being a cold place where inhabitants were always hungry while "heaven" was warm, with plentiful food.

Many of the early travelers advocated intermarriage between Europeans and Indians as a means of creating better race relations. At the same time most travelers deplored the effect of European influences on the Indians, some writers accusing the whites of "teaching Indians drunkenness, stealing, lying, and prostitution, in addition to cheating them."

One of the most famous English ministers who came to America to "convert the Indians" was John Wesley—and one of the least successful—though none made much headway in winning the Indians to Christianity in these early years. Considerable space is given to the account of John Wesley's contacts with and opinions of the Indians, chiefly to Wesley's discredit. In fact, Dr. Randolph charges that Wesley's evaluation of the Indians was unjust and unrealistic. Much of this he attributes to Wesley's lack of concern for Christian influences, and his private hurt and confusion over

his experiences with Sophia Hopkey. Once when Wesley pressed Tomochichi to become a Christian the old chief heatedly replied, "Christians drunk! Christians beat men! Christians tell lies! Me no Christian." Each man, it seems, was judging the other on the basis of the least worthy representatives of the other group.

These accounts are very helpful in understanding what early travelers found out—or thought they found out—regarding Indian life, character, and customs during the century studied.

—Walter N. Vernon
Nashville, Tennessee

Recollections of a Long Life, by the Rev. Elijah L. Shettles. Edited With an Introduction by Archie P. McDonald. Foreword by J. Frank Dobie. Nashville: Blue and Gray Press, 1973. 199 pp., index, \$7.95.

Those of us who are not professionally trained in history and archives may take heart that there may be hope for us from the example of Elijah Leroy Shettles, expert bibliophile and historian, as well as pastor. For he was for twenty years a professional gambler, for thirty years an active Methodist pastor, and, lastly, for twenty years a collector of rare books and pamphlets on Texas and South history, and on Methodist history, especially in Texas.

The autobiography of Mr. Shettles was written in the 1930s, and he "whittled it up for articles in such magazines as *The Southwestern Advocate*, but it was principally published . . . in the *Pontotoc* (Mississippi) *Progress*, with installments appearing [in] 1935 and . . . 1936," writes Professor Archie P. McDonald of Stephen F. Austin University in the Introduction. This edition is the first publication in book form.

Mr. Shettles is an interesting autobiographer. He tells well the story of his childhood and youth in Mississippi, just before and during the Civil War. He reports that his parents "were poor, honest, hardworking good folks, belonging to that class called by some slaveholders and many negroes, by way of distinction, 'poor white trash.'" He adds that he felt a lingering "sting and feeling of resentment for the contempt shown for my sort of people because they were poor and had to work hard in order to live."

In order to get out of this cycle of poverty he first left home when only eighteen with little formal education. He did rather poorly in his first jobs, and soon turned to gambling, adding to this the usual habit of drinking, though he never became a drunkard. But the twenty years of gambling was a succession of short stays in various cities and towns—St. Louis, Little Rock, Hot Springs, Fort Smith, Muskogee, Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio,

Houston, El Paso, and Jackson, Mississippi.

There are frequent accounts similar to this in his story: "I at once entered into the sport [gambling] that was running high and lasted about three days before whiskey, cards, and other forms of sport had me stripped to my last dollar. I had to get the Pacific Express Company to advance me enough money on my trunk to get out of town. . ." He once told J. Frank Dobie (who reports this in a eulogy at Shettles' funeral, printed in the book as a foreword) that "despite the fictionizing of gamblers, there was never a professional who did not play tricks or cheat."

Converted in 1891, he entered the Methodist ministry that fall, and for thirty years he served small and large churches and was twice presiding elder. In his earlier years as pastor he was unhappy at several appointments, but as a whole he felt his ministry was worthwhile. He retired in 1921, and moved the next year to Austin where he entered what he called "the out-of-print book business as an employment."

Mr. Shettles had already been dealing in out-of-print books before he retired—ever since 1895 when, as a pastor in Austin, he got acquainted with Judge W. C. Raines, who published the next year his *Bibliography of Texas* literature; Dr. George P. Garrison, history professor at the University of Texas; and Mr. H. P. N. Gammel, a dealer in old books. Gradually his interest and activity widened, as he had opportunities to secure materials in Waco, Dallas, Houston, Austin, San Antonio, and Fort Worth.

Eventually he traveled more widely, securing books on Methodism, the Civil War, Texas, and Southern history. He became the authorized agent to secure materials for the Littlefield Southern History Collection at the University of Texas. He donated his collection of Wesleyana to Southern Methodist University in 1917, and, he writes, "in that collection may be found some of the rarest materials on the early activities of the Methodist people in America." He provided important acquisitions also to the Texas State Library, the Rosenberg Library (Galveston), the San Antonio libraries, and Sam Houston State University (Huntsville). For a few years he was employed by the Methodist Publishing House in Dallas, and in that relationship he also spent his time traveling and collecting pamphlets and books.

Mr. Shettles made significant contributions to the historical interests of Methodism in Texas. He helped organize a Texas Methodist Historical Society, which produced seven issues of the *Texas Methodist Historical Quarterly*. He provided much of the material that enabled Macum Phelan to write his two-volume *History of Methodism in Texas*, and he was the publisher of *The Texas Colonists and Religion* by William Stuart Red.

The life of E. L. Shettles was varied; it was colorful; it was fruitful. What more can one desire?

—Walter N. Vernon
Nashville, Tennessee

H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910*. Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1972, pp. x, 318, index. \$8.50

The gates of hell may not finally prevail against the church. In the meantime, however, there are times when the outcome seems rather to hang in the balance. One period of partial capitulation of the churches in America was that extending from 1780—and even earlier—until 1910. This was an era when clergy and laity claimed that all men mirror God but at the same time held that for various reasons, mostly scripturally based, members of the Anglo-Saxon race were most favored as His likeness.

Why such a notion persists somewhat more quietly but very stubbornly today can be understood through the reading of this remarkable book. That the South is not fully humane even yet is noted in the author's dedication to his six grandchildren "who will," he hopes, "work for a more humane South." That the North is not entirely humane is not a major point in this story, but the taint of their history is made quite clear.

The story of racism in America—the violation of the equalitarian principle implicit in the *imago Dei* concept of Christianity—is recounted movingly and yet in so scholarly a manner that only the most obdurate will raise a voice or poise a pen against it.*

From the time twenty "Negars" were landed at Jamestown in 1619, anti-Negro—and indeed anti-Indian—sentiments were clearly expressed even in law. In the course of time Anglo-Saxon exclusivism would apply to Orientals too. But the enslavement of the Black is the focus of much of our history, condoned at the very outset by all religious groups, even the one that eventually pioneered the anti-slavery movement—the Society of Friends. Some deemed Blacks human and, therefore, deserving of concern for the salvation of their souls if not the freedom of their persons. Others in the seventeenth century categorized the Blacks as non-human. Then and later they called them "black dogs," some objecting to the very notion of seeing them "in heaven."

A few conscientious churchmen and statesmen made tentative moves against slavery from time to time, but more often than not

* While *In His Image But . . .* reads as interestingly as dramatic fiction it will serve also as an excellent reference work, with its 1215 footnotes and 11½ pages of double-column, small print index!

found it "inconvenient" to do without slaves or "imprudent" to press the issue, and certainly inappropriate to separate slaveholders from communion. Fewer still devoted considerable energy in the cause of freedom, and they proved powerless in the face of growing racism. By 1780 denomination after denomination in the South passed laudable resolutions against slavery only to honor such resolutions in the breach. The various church groups became increasingly and hopelessly entangled in the dreadful institution of bondage.

A prolonged era of debate within churches and legislative bodies resulted. Men on both sides of the issue appealed to the same Bible. Arguments pro and con raged. And the arguments ranged over the implications for or against slavery in the doctrines of original sin, regeneration, justification, tipping Noah's curse of Ham, the Golden Rule, and Paul's handling of the Philemon-Onesimus relationship, with occasional digressions into secular views of the nature of man and the nature of various types of men.

The obvious result of the debates was the split of the three major Protestant denominations, Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist. Less obvious, but important in history, was the common pattern of the North-South debates in the various denominations which placed northern conservatives and southerners together, a coalition which balked abolitionism for a time but eventually fell apart under the pressure of political events.

Picking up the pieces, however, ministers, professors of ethics and legislators, mainly in the South, defended bondage vigorously and often wildly. They were never incoherent in the sense of being unclear. But they were blind to inconsistencies in their polemics. One argued that by purchase of a slave he acquired only the slave's labor, not his flesh and blood and not his mind, as if these could be separated. Another reasoned that education would improve the slaves' well-being both here and hereafter, but advised limits lest education ill fit them for bondage. Some appealed to the very nature of our government as necessitating slavery and in their next breath condemned Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence as subversive, tainted by an infidel philosophy. Polemicists extolled slavery as an instrument for raising Blacks from barbarism but recommended their removal to another land, should they by quite remote chance ever merit freedom. Proponents of slavery adapted the single theory of racial origins to their purposes and did likewise with the multiple theory of racial origins. They contended that freedom would produce frightful conflict between races and yet feared that individual members of the races would love each other even romantically to the stage of marriage.

They hesitated neither to beg the question nor to advance totally

unsupported arguments. Slavery had elevated women (white women, of course) by giving them leisure for cultural pursuits. Slavery was the sole cause [sic!] of human progress. Providence had designed cotton growing for the specific qualities possessed by black laborers. Slavery divided profits for needs. Freedom would produce an amalgamation of races and saddle the South with infertile hybrids, this in the face of the obvious fact that mulattoes were quite fecund.

When the clash of abolitionism and slavery sentiment reached fever pitch, focusing upon political maneuvering, secessionist sentiment developed. Thus was added to the denial of the *imago Dei* concept a denial that Christian love could possibly point the way to the peaceful solution of so severe a problem. Religious leaders now urged the establishment of a military school and the equipping of 20,000 soldiers in every southern state. They appealed for an emulation of revolutionary ancestors to wrest freedom from "a foreign, hostile government." One college president promised that in the event of battle any shot that killed a man (a loyal southerner, that is) would translate the fallen hero to heaven!

So war came and the Confederacy fell. But racism did not perish. Churchmen held tenaciously to the old premises and developed new, oppressive patterns of thought and conduct to build upon them. Ministers, professors of ethics and editors replayed over and over the old arguments in defense of slavery. At the same time they and the general populace seemed determined that the dire predictions of trouble from freed Blacks would come true. Biracial churches gave way to segregated churches in both individual congregations and in conferences, assemblies and associations.

Again a few courageous and devoted men urged colorblind policies, but segregationism carried the day. It was "ordained of God." Jim Crow laws spread and civil rights were something for the privileged white only. To be sure, the oft-reported troubles of the Reconstruction Period aggravated the situation, setting whites against Negroes and often against each other. But churchmen were ineffectual in discovering any ameliorating measures. Thus it came about that erstwhile abolitionists, North and South, one by one capitulated to notions that segregation was necessary, that whites must maintain control, that education for Negroes must be designed to continue them as laborers. Those that dared challenge these tenets were effectively silenced. A pulpiteer, professor or politician either advocated Anglo-Saxon superiority or found himself without an adequate forum.

Racial orthodoxy that placed Anglo-Saxons at the top grew stronger even through the first decade of the twentieth century.

And what is saddest of all is that those who proclaimed an *imago Dei* theology proved to be "enslaved to the traditional spirit of color caste (with) little prospect of their emancipation in the foreseeable future" (p. 205). Recent years have brought changes, some for the better and quite possibly to be credited in part to the churches. But this is a story that still needs telling and readers of *In His Image, But . . .* will want a sequel.

Shelton Smith is a man of profound concern for and sharp sensitivity to man's nature and needs. Those whose consciences have been pricked by his vigorous classroom teaching, his probing sermons and his perceptive lectures before assorted assemblies will sense that transitional narrative materials in this book have been modified in the interest of the strictest scholarly reporting. The message nonetheless rings clear. Men still reflect the image of what they *prefer* God to be like.

—John B. Bennett
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