

BOOK REVIEWS

Bettie Wilson Story, *Gospel Trailblazer: The Exciting Story of Francis Asbury*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984, 125 pp.

Gospel Trailblazer is listed by Abingdon as being for ages nine to eleven, when in fact it is for the average reader of all ages and for historians who wish to learn how to tell their stories more effectively.

Mrs. Story portrays Francis Asbury as a timid, sad child—desiring “to do good and get good”—whose mother dreamed he would become Archbishop of Canterbury. Instead, he became Archbishop of Columbia the Gem of the Ocean, the first and only primate of American Methodism. Along the way to that eminence, he endured a cruel schoolmaster, served as some sort of apprentice, became a Methodist lay preacher, volunteered for service in America, grumbled over the preaching assignments Thomas Rankin gave him, fretted about his involuntary location during part of the Revolution, instigated the forming of a church molded largely in his image, was ordained deacon, elder and superintendent on three successive days, announced the appointments of preachers, jumped on his horse and rode . . . and rode . . . and rode.

Indeed, if Mrs. Story has a thesis it is that Bishop Asbury rode to maintain his sanity. He suffered a host of physical ailments on horseback because he dreaded the demon that invaded any house where he settled down—the demon of melancholy, perhaps of acedia.

Mrs. Story's portrait of a man who “would have gone mad if he could not keep traveling” is placed against a skillfully limned background of political and religious events in Britain and America. She is particularly successful in evoking how it must have felt to live in America during the Revolution.

Flaws in her work are few. One is her contribution to the growing impression that Barratt's Chapel is portable. Bishop John B. Warman misspells it and places it in New Jersey.¹ Mrs. Story misspells it and finds it in Maryland. Thomas Coke did *not* go with Asbury to present the Methodist Episcopal Church's address to President Washington.² Also, calling the mature Asbury, “Francis,” grates on my inner ear. And I missed Henry Boehm's *Reminiscences* in the bibliography. But those blemishes do not lessen the insight a Methodist historian can gain from examining Mrs. Story's word portrait of Asbury and from studying the way she picks and places her words.

John G. McEllhenney

¹*Circuit Rider*, March 1984, p. 6.

²J. W. Etheridge, *The Life of Thomas Coke* (London: John Mason, 1860), p. 190.

James Edward Scanlon, *Randolph-Macon College, A Southern History, 1825-1967*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983, 480 pp.

We have the history of a college. Query: where are the lists? Where is the enumeration of trustees from 1880 to 1910, or the faculty during 1920-1940, and those interminable catalogings of alumni, year by year? Also, what about graphs and charts designating the rise and fall of the endowment, faculty salaries, and volumes in the library? Answer: they are not here. Rather, Professor Scanlon has meticulously researched, written, and documented the story of a distinguished Methodist college, with appropriate attention to the *Zeitgeist* which brought it into being and played so large a role in its subsequent history. With wit and wisdom, Scanlon has produced a fascinating study. It is history at its best.

"This history was commissioned in the fall of 1978 as part of the sesquicentennial. . . . The . . . committee decided to conclude . . . with the end of the Moreland administration in 1967." (p. xv). Scanlon's gestalt generally follows chronological outlines, dividing the work into three sections: Boydton, 1825-65; Randolph-Macon in Ashland, 1868-1913; Ashland, 1914-67. Steering clear of attempts "to arrange events within the neat and artificial categories of presidential administrations," (p. 285), the writer enables the reader to see Southern history come alive. "For whatever purposes, external forces always bring a school into being, and external forces, often for quite different reasons, keep it alive or allow it to perish." (p. xiii)

Candor is a hallmark. The role of Methodism—especially Virginia Methodism—is paramount, and the clergy and laity are real: zealous as well as stubborn. Stephen Olin, first president, was a realist, "We may boast of preaching to the poor, but without the due intermixture of the rich and influential, we can not fulfill our destiny as a Church. Nothing can save us but an able ministry, and this can not be had but by thorough education." (p. 20). Slavery at early RM is honestly discussed (pp. 109-110). Conflicts in personalities are clear, as in Chapter 8, "Whose College? The Controversy over Ownership, 1906-13," wherein the future bishop, James Cannon, Jr. plays a conspicuous part. The heated debate with the Carnegie Foundation, amid "the puzzling and contradictory currents of modernity and piety" (p. 246) in the early 1900s is enthralling. The same is true of the intriguing way wily students appealed to President William Howard Taft to make a brief stop to shame the college administration into permitting RM students to see a football game (p. 237).

The personality of Robert E. Blackwell is made vivid. He came to RM in 1868 as a student—at age thirteen—and essentially remained until his death. His remarkable presidency, 1902-38, encountered heights and depths. When it was once noted, in public, Blackwell's resemblance to Robert E. Lee, Blackwell responded, "Yes, we both work for very little money." (p. 310). Blackwell protected his faculty from fundamentalists; he was a founder and president of the Virginia interracial commission (p. 311).

Hundreds of individuals are brought into the story. This exciting chronicle concludes amid changing tempo and maturing college: a "brash Texan" (p. 348) arrives. J. Earl Moreland, who served during turbulent and significant years, 1939-67, made an enormous contribution to RM and to Methodist higher education.

What of limitations of the work? There are a few errors. Coke consecrated Asbury in Baltimore, not Philadelphia (p. 5) and it was The Methodist Church which came into being in 1939 (p. 345) not The United Methodist Church of 1968. (Which raises a question for all writers regarding the several official names since 1784.) Dr. Scanlon's favorite punctuation mark is the bracket, and his pet Latin term is [*sic*]. He almost overdoes it, even when nineteenth century authors failed to employ proper punctuation.

Rich in portraits, photographs, and document reproductions, this handsomely bound volume is a valuable contribution.

Warren Thomas Smith

Robert E. Chiles, *Scriptural Christianity: A Call to John Wesley's Disciples*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Francis Asbury Press, 1984. 143 pp.

Steve Harper, *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Nashville: The Upper Room, 1983. 80 pp.

Steve Harper, *John Wesley's Message for Today*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1983. 146 pp.

Interest in the life and theology of John Wesley remains lively. These volumes, profitable for private as well as group study, not only set forth Wesleyan themes, but also assess the value of Wesley's theology for our time.

Chiles' book, which originated in lectures presented at Drew University, is divided into two main sections. In the first part he examines some of the major topics in Wesley's journal which he compares to parallels in the Book of Acts. The second part deals with themes in Wesley's letters which are contrasted with St. Paul's epistles. In both sections there are liberal quotes from Wesley's pen which illuminate his personality and work. This is an excellent book to introduce or to review Wesley's commitment to scriptural Christianity and evangelical ministry.

Likewise, Steve Harper has succeeded in writing two very helpful books about Wesley. *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* examines Wesley's views of what we call today Christian spirituality or spiritual formation. The "instituted means of grace" (scripture, prayer, fasting, the Lord's Supper, "Christian Conference") and the "prudential means of grace" (doing no harm, doing good, attending the ordinances of God) are briefly set forth and clearly explained. Discussion questions are appended to each chapter.

In *John Wesley's Message for Today*, Harper traces Wesley's views on the order of salvation (sin, prevenient grace, justification, the new birth, assurance, sanctification and perfection, and glorification), ecclesiology and church renewal. As in the case of his volume on devotional life, the author includes discussion questions. This is a simple, straight-forward introduction to Wesley's thought and will prove most beneficial to those whose acquaintance with his theology is somewhat deficient. Both of Harper's books are usable for small group study as well as for personal reflection.

Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.

Edwin S. Gaustad, editor, *A Documentary History of Religion in America Since 1865*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1983. 610 pp.

This helpful and valuable collection of original source documents completes Edwin S. Gaustad's two volumes of representative materials related to American religious history. It traces major issues from Reconstruction to the present through important primary sources. The Methodist tradition is represented in selections concerning Francis J. McConnell, E. Stanley Jones, G. Bromley Oxnam, the Freedmen's Aid Society, the first issue of *The Upper Room* (1935), an issue of *Concern* on social problems in the 1960s, a Chinese Methodist's experience in San Francisco at the turn of the century, the Holiness and Pentecostal movements, and others. Like its companion volume, this is an excellent assemblage of illustrative materials.

Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.