

THE TRAGEDY OF APPOMATTOX

JOHN J. SYNOR

There is a phrase of Shakespeare's that plays in my mind: "The evil that men do lives after them."

I write of the tragedy that was Appomattox.

And however unfashionable it may be to recall that mournful day, the fact stands: It would have been better — perhaps, for both sides — had the South won its independence.

Appomattox was more than a matter of physical exhaustion. That sort of thing can be, as it has been, overcome. What went with the wind when Lee said goodbye was the Southern way of life — and that can never be recaptured. Therein lies the tragedy.

The 19th Century North, be it remembered, measured an individual's worth by money earned or owned. It gave little value to things of the mind; recall Ichabod's social position. The few intellectuals clustered around Boston represented nearly all there was in the way of culture, north of the Mason-Dixon.

That this is so is seen in what grew out of the muscular vigor of the industrial, mercantile section of the nation. Its 19th Century personality is remembered by the phrase, Robber Barons. Such were the people who marked the land, who made of Chicago the hog butcher to the world, and of Wall Street the repository of the nation's wealth: Armour, Cooke, Vanderbilt, Carnegie, Morgan, Rockefeller, Drew, Huntington, Hill, and Harriman — and a host of others. They set the tenor of the times, the Robber Barons. The one thing that made Northern men different, one from the other, was money. One's position in life was governed so, by one's "success".

None of which is to say the South was an Athens-like land of erudition. It was not. The bulk of Southern people, in the 19th Century, as the bulk of 19th Century Northern people were poor and unlettered.

That isn't the point. It is this: In the ante-bellum South, a person's position in life, his rung, was determined not by his money but by his "breeding", and his breeding was not confined — as is the literal definition of the word — to the identification of his forebears: Jefferson Davis, as true an intellectual as this nation ever produced, came from a so-so family. Judah Benjamin, "the brains of the Confederacy", was a Jewish immigrant who, following his escape to England, became the foremost attorney in the British Isles. Edgar Allen Poe was the son of an itinerant actor.

No, position in the South was due to cultural attainment. The libraries of the great planters, those still extant, bear testimony to that. That of William Byrd, a 4,000-volume collection, was the largest in the colonies. But learning, per se, was only part of it. Equal stress was laid on honor, fidelity and virtue, on manners and beliefs. It was the combination of all these factors that made the Southern "gentleman".

And as one way of life served as the incubus out of which grew the wealthiest nation in the world, so the other was serving as an incubus full of promise of a level of cultural attainment

greater than the world has ever known — and it was destroyed. As I say, therein lies tragedy.

True, out of this nation's wealth has grown a culture, one of sorts. Even so, what impresses us, today, about a painting by Cezanne or an Epstein bust is not so much the turn of the artist's hand as the price the object brings at Soothby's. The American culture, true son of its father, has money as its life's blood.

What I would say is this: Life in these United States, since 1865, has been dominated by the dollar. Out of the dollar has come what we are, a degenerating nation: Dollars, we are now learning, cannot solve spiritual, ethical, or moral problems.

Had the South won its independence, the flourishing cultural bud that was Dixie, today, would be as dominant in the land of Lee as the dollar remains north of the Potomac. As culture grew out of the dollar, in the North, so, it is reasonable to believe, wealth would have grown from Southern manners. And a land grown great on spiritual, ethical, and moral values might, in this time of uncertainty, serve as a guiding hand — North and South, alike.

As it is, the remnant of the Southern way of life that still exists, as flax among thistles, is lampooned by the philistines who have no understanding of the worth of manners or morals, or very little. They have even less appreciation of the meaning deep in the phrase, he-is-a-man-of-honor. They abjure the common civility inherent in "sir" and "m'am", and look upon a vibrant love of country and a fear of God as somehow square, even subversive.

It is a sad thing. How well Shakespeare knew the world.

"Music Man" This Week at ECU Summer Theatre

Meredith Willson's spectacular Broadway and motion picture hit musical, "The Music Man" opened a nine-night run Monday, July 17, at the East Carolina University Summer Theatre.

"Music Man," the third production of the 1967 season, will be the first production of the Summer Theatre to run on Sunday night (July 23). Another hit musical, "South Pacific," will also offer a Sunday night performance on July 30. The two popular musicals are expected to be the top attractions of the 1967 season.

"Music Man" is the second musical of the season. Last week's production of "How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" was rated by guest critic Beverly Wolter as a "witty . . . satirical . . . fun-filled evening."

With book, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson, "Music Man" opened on Broadway on December 19, 1957. It was immediately acclaimed by one critic as "one of the best musicals of our time."

Tickets remain for all performances. Information is available from the Summer Theatre Box Office (P. O. Box 2712 or phone 752-7565, Greenville, N. C.)

OTHER EDITOR WRAL-TV VIEWPOINT

Religion and Government

A couple of the more prominent national news magazines have devoted a considerable amount of space during the past few weeks to comments by first one "modern" theologian and then another who seem determined to break down such remaining faith as exists among the people. For the most part, these theologians are connected with colleges and universities; some even hold posts on the campuses of divinity schools.

One of them, in a speech in the mid-west, ridiculed most of the Ten Commandments, describing them as out-of-date and not applicable, as he put it, "to the mores and stresses of modern times". Sin, he contends, is relative, and depends upon the situation. The emphasis is on man, and what he wants to do — not on what he ought to do or aspire to be.

This is dangerous business, and the greatest regret is that such wide circulation is being given to such utterances by men who not only defy the very concepts of the teachings of Christ, but who do so under the pretense of serving the religious needs of the people.

For there is not much difference in what they are saying and the declaration of the first Russian cosmonaut upon his return from a flight into space. This communist cosmonaut, Titov, sneeringly said: "Some people say there is a God out there but, in my travels around the earth all day long, I looked around and did not see Him. I saw no God or angels. I believe in man, his strength, his possibilities, and his reason."

We remember thinking at the time: How silly can a man get? Who ever suggested that God is an entity to be seen by an atheistic earthling who, by his very nature, refuses to see?

But there is a great deal of the Russian cosmonaut's kind of thinking being spread across our own land — and by a distressingly large number of men who call themselves clergymen.

We fell to thinking about the swift dissipation in America of our allegiance to the fundamentals of this country. There isn't any question about where the fidelities of our Founding Fathers lay. Time and time again, each of them — all of them — emphasized an acknowledgment of the dependency of this republic upon Christian precepts. "The liberties of a nation cannot be thought secure," they said, "if we remove the only firm basis — a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God."

But isn't that conviction being removed, step by step, day by day, in our time?

Benjamin Franklin was not regarded particularly as a religionist in his time. He was not even an active churchman. But during the Constitutional Convention,

he arose one day to make a comment that ought to serve as a warning to all of us. Let us quote precisely what Dr. Franklin said:

"I have lived, sirs, a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth — that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that a nation can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sirs, in the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it'. I firmly believe this;" Benjamin Franklin said, "and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in (our efforts here) no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and byword to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance, wars and conquest."

So spoke Benjamin during the time of the drafting of the Constitution. What he was saying was that if America — either then or later — turned its back on the source of all of its blessings, it would be an invitation to destruction and failure.

Could it be that today, nearly

360 New Freshmen Attend Summer Orientation at ECU

About 360 of next fall's freshmen attended the fifth two-day segment of this summer's pre-entrance counseling program at East Carolina University.

They came from 17 North Carolina counties, Hawaii and the District of Columbia, and 15 other states — Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Freshmen from Lenoir County are: Bernard Hines Arnold, Kathryn Elaine Baker, Johnnie Frank Braxton Jr., Dwight Frederick Buck, William Colon Byrd, Carolyn Yvonne Davis, Treva Nan Denmark, Diana Lou Dunne, Walter David Ezzell Jr., John William Farbow Jr., Scarlett Marlene Forsyth, Ann Elizabeth Kinney, Joan Marie Kivett, Dorothy Carol Lang, Frances Lee, Randy Ray Moorehead, Beck Layne Noble, Edward Hillery Stroud Jr. Elbert West Owens Jr., John Walter Owens, Lois Jean Utley, Robert Elliott Whitley, and Brenda Joyce Pelletier.

200 years later, the people of America are being persuaded by false prophets to turn their backs on the principles that deserve to survive? It's worth thinking about, isn't it?

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