BISHOP ELLIOTT

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FOR: Dr. Roger Warlick
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On Christmas Eve, 1916, a eulogy\textsuperscript{1} was given by the Right Reverend F. F. Reese, the then Bishop of Georgia (4th) at Christ Church in Savannah. The eulogy commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Stephen Elliott, Rector of Christ Church and first Episcopal Bishop of Georgia. Reverend Reese began with the gospel of St. John, first chapter, seventh verse, and then went on to say:

"It is trite, but still tragically true to say that the memory of most men abides among the living but a short span of years. Excepting the most distinguished dead, after a few years only a name remains. That this should be true of most of us is no great misfortune to the world. But there are some the forgetfulness of whose life and character is a loss.\textsuperscript{2}

The memory of, or it would be better said the facts of, Stephen Elliott's early life are preserved in several biographical sketches.\textsuperscript{3} He was born in Beaufort, South Carolina, on August 31, 1806, oldest son\textsuperscript{3\text{A}} of Stephen and Esther Habersham Elliott. The family moved to Charleston shortly after Stephen's birth. At sixteen he attended Harvard University for one year. He finished his education at South Carolina College graduating in 1825. He thereafter studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1827. In 1828 Elliott married Mary Gibbes Barnwell.\textsuperscript{4} He began his law practice in Charleston, then moved back to Beaufort sometime before 1833. In the early 1830's moved by the new evangelical spirit of the Episcopal Church and a need to rejuvenate his spiritual life, Elliott along with six other men from the same law office gave up the practice of law for
the ministry. He became a candidate for holy orders in 1833. In 1835 he was ordained a deacon and one month later was elected Professor of Sacred Literature and the Evidences of Christianity and Chaplain of South Carolina College. In 1836 Stephen Elliott was ordained a priest. Elliott's first wife died in September of 1837 and left him with two small children, a boy and a girl. Sometime after Mary Barnwell's death and before 1840, Elliott remarried Charlotte Barnwell of South Carolina. Elliott's second marriage produced seven children who lived through early childhood, Robert, John, Hessie, Habershon, Shara, Hester, and Charlotte. Charlotte Barnwell remained Elliott's wife until his death.

Elliott's Diocese Building

The year 1841 could be argued to be the keystone date in Stephen Elliott's life. In that year on February 28 at Christ Church Savannah, Stephen Elliott was consecrated first Bishop of Georgia by Bishop Meade of Virginia, Bishop Ives of North Carolina, and Bishop Gadsden of South Carolina.

Although a form of what would become the Episcopal Church in Georgia had been present since 1733, it would not be far from the mark to say that in 1841 Georgia was very much a missionary field for the Episcopal branch of the church universal. In 1841 the Revolutionary War was not a long distant memory and the War of 1812 was less than thirty years past. For many the American Episcopal Church and the Church of England were synonymous and in so being did not attract the masses of
a newly independent nation. But regardless of this fact of history, Bishop Elliott would make one of the calls of his bishopry the very thing that called him into the ministry in the first place, spiritual revivalism which manifested itself in Elliott as evangelism. To bolster this statement, one may point to the religious tone of Beaufort, South Carolina, at the time of Elliott's calling into the ministry. Beaufort in the 1830's was a town of culture and refinement with less than 600 white citizens. In 1831 there were only two churches, a Baptist and an Episcopal. At about the same time a Presbyterian evangelist, the Reverend Daniel Baker, traveled through the south earnestly preaching a gospel of love rather than fear.

"When Dr. Baker received and accepted the invitation to go to Beaufort, it was arranged by the resident pastors to hold services alternately in the two churches. There were those who while unaccustomed to such services as were contemplated, trusted their pastors and were prepared to give their interest and encouragement to them. There were others who looked askance at the innovation and viewed it with rather critical if not hostile eyes. When the time came, the entire community was in a state of eager expectation. A notice was sent out daily to every house, giving the place and the hour at which services were to be held. From the first it was apparent that the time was ripe for the ingathering of the harvest of souls. As the services continued, the interest extended and deepened until the entire community, almost without exception, was profoundly affected. The churches were crowded at every service, and the manifestations of religious feeling were frequent and marked."

Also consider Elliott's feelings in the election of Reverend Gadsden as Bishop of South Carolina.
"It was in St. Michael's Church on Friday, February 14, 1840, that the Rev. Christopher Edwards Gadsden, D.D., was elected on the first ballot as the fourth Bishop of South Carolina. His election was by a large majority of the laity but a small majority of the clergy. The division among the clergy of the diocese had lately developed on the question of revivalism in the Church. Gadsden, along with some of the other clergy, stood with Bishop Bowen in opposition to it; while others, including Stephen Elliott, afterwards first Bishop of Georgia, were sympathetic.  

From the time of his calling into the ministry through his term as Georgia Bishop, Elliott felt a strong call to revitalize the Episcopal Church, and as he began his term as Bishop, he went to work with vigor.

In 1840 the convention of the Georgia diocese met in Clarkesville at Grace Church. Seven priests and eight laymen represented 323 communicants\textsuperscript{13} who elected Stephen Elliott Bishop. That Bishop would one year later address the 1841 convention that would represent the congregations of Christ Church of Savannah, 160 communicants; St. Pauls of Augusta, 82 communicants; Christ Church of Macon, 55 communicants; Trinity Church of Columbus, 47 communicants; John Hunt Missionary at Lexington, 6 communicants; Rev. Charles Fay, Missionary at Montpelier, 6 communicants; and Grace Church of Clarkesville, 6 communicants.\textsuperscript{14} The 1842 convention would represent eight congregations and 437 communicants.\textsuperscript{15}

"The year 1850 marked the tenth anniversary of the Episcopate of Bishop Stephen Elliott. By the end of that year his flock numbered twenty-one churches and 870 communicants. Leading in membership and in support of the Bishop's entire program of church activity and expansion was Christ Church, Savannah,
with 160 members. Second was St. Paul's, Augusta, with 136. St. John's, Savannah, had 109, while close behind was Trinity Church, Columbus, with 105. The other 377 members were divided through the state as follows: Christ Church, Macon, 80; St. James', Marietta, 48; Emmanuel Church, Athens, 31; St. Andrew's, Darien, 26; Church of the Messiah, St. Mary's, 25; Christ Church, St. Simon's, 23; St. Peter's, Rome, 22; Church of the Atonement, August, 18; Ogeechee Mission, 17; Grace Church, Clarkesville, 12; St. Stephen's, Milledgeville, 11; St. David's, Glynn County, 10; Church of the Advent, Madison, St. Philip's, Atlanta, and Zion Church, Talbotton, 8 each; Church of the Ascension, Cass County, 7; and St. Paul's, Albany, 6.16

To accomplish an almost 270 percent increase in communicants in ten years is a remarkable achievement. But from the beginning of his term as Bishop, Stephen Elliott "expressed his 'decided opinion' that the bishop should be free to move about the diocese 'pioneering the way for the local missionary and settled pastor.'"17 And move he did. The 1846 address to the diocese convention when Elliott outlined his travels reads like the agenda for a whistle stop campaign. He reports that year he traveled nearly 6,000 miles in the work of the church.18

In an 1862 Pastoral Address, the Bishops of the South, now broken from the United Church and worried about their financial situation, still wanted to carry on with missionary work.

"Many of the States of this Confederacy are Missionary ground. The population is sparse and scattered; the children of the Church are few and far between; the Priests of the Lord can reach them only after great labor and privation."19

Elliott continued to persist and the crowning statistic to his evangelical work might be that in 1866, his last year as Bishop,
it was reported at the diocese convention that Christ Church had 383 communicants; more than the entire diocese when he took office, and the total communicants of the Georgia diocese was 1,559; nearly a 500% increase. Bishop Elliott's style of revivalism did not include reform rather his mission was to evangelize the gospel as he expects it in the ecclesiasticism style of the Episcopal Church.

Elliott's Mission to the Slaves

The South in Elliott's time had two populations of the human race, the free white and the black slave. For many this plan was ordained by God and God ordained plans ought to be followed by man. Bishop Elliott was a man of his locale and his time. Elliott himself was a slave holder. "His views on slavery both reflected and led the majority of his people: "slavery, he felt, was ordained by God as a means of bringing a benighted people to the throne of Grace." So Elliott took serious the commission to bring the black slaves to the throne of grace.

"The religious instruction of our domestics, and of the negroes upon plantations, is a subject that should never be passed over in the address of the Bishop. It is a subject that ought to press upon us as a church, with great power, and we think, without any disparagement, that there is no arrangement of worship so well qualified as ours, to meet exactly the wants of our colored population, what they need is sound religious instruction -- such instruction as they can lay hold upon and retain -- exactly such as is prepared to their hand in our Liturgy and Catechisms. There is no lack, among the negroes of the State of Georgia who have not, within their reach, some kind of religious exercise; but it is, for the most part, a religion of excitement, occupied entirely
with the feelings, while they need to be instructed in the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. What they require, we can furnish, if we will only stir up ourselves, brethren of the clergy, to this most interesting and necessary labor. It is a mistake to suppose that our Church repels, by her liturgical forms, this class of our population, it ought to be and it might be emphatically their church, if we, her ministers, would do our duty in the matter. But that duty requires, on our part, persevering effort, assiduous attention, indefatigable patience. They must be taught the Liturgy before they can relish it, and that instruction must be given, line upon line and precept upon precept -- beginning with them in the Sunday School as children, and gradually training them up into church people. I would suggest that each clergyman should make a list of all the colored children belonging to the families in his congregation, should collect them into a Sunday School in connexion with his church -- should baptize all that were young enough to receive the rite, persuading their masters and mistresses to act as their sponsors -- should train them up to repeat and understand and appreciate the Liturgy -- should consider them an integral part of his stock watching over them as he does over the white children of his congregation -- should present them, at proper times, for Confirmation, and finally connect them with the Communion of the church. To carry out this plan fully, comfortable settings should be provided for them in every Church, and they should be made to feel that they were welcome at our table. I feel confident that, in a few years, should this suggestion be carried out, we should see large congregations of well instructed colored people connected with every Episcopal Church.\textsuperscript{24}

Taking his own word to heart, Bishop Elliott during his trips through the diocese would "baptize and confirm a number of negro slaves on various plantations."\textsuperscript{25}

With the emancipation less than two months away, Elliott along with other Southern Bishops still held fast to their God given commission.

"Voices of supplication come to us also from the distant shores of Africa and the East: but only
their echo reaches us from the Throne of Grace. The policy of man has shut out those utterances from us. How it can help their cause to separate the children of God from one another, He only knows: but we can hear them when we kneel in prayer, and commune with their spirits through the Spirit of Christ. But God is perchance intending, through these inscrutable measures to shut us up to that great work which He has placed at our very doors, and which is, next to her own expansion, the Church's greatest work in these Confederate States. The religious instruction of the negroes has been thrust upon us in such a wonderful manner, that we must be blind not to perceive that not only our spiritual but our national life is wrapped up in their welfare. With them we stand or fall; and God will not permit us to be separated in interest or in fortune."

The Bishops, Elliott a senior among them, would conclude and state:

"The time has come when the Church should press more urgently than she has hitherto done upon her laity, the solemn fact, that the slaves of the South are not merely so much property: but are a sacred trust committed to us, as a people to be prepared for the work which God may have for them to do in the future. While under this tutelage. He freely gives to us their labor, but expects us to give back to them that religious and moral instruction which is to elevate them in the scale of being."

However, when emancipation did come Elliott expressed a new feeling on the stewardship of the white for the black.

"The emancipation of slaves, which has practically taken place since our last meeting, has placed the Diocese of Georgia under no new obligations, it has rather freed her from a fearful responsibility."

"The Church in our Diocese had always considered slavery as a trust committed to her by God -- a sacred trust to be held by her until taken out of her hands by permission of the same power who placed it there. Slavery was no institution of her making."
seven months later by black pallbearers from St. Stephen's Church, a church he was instrumental in founding.

"An observer, Thomas A. Hanckel, commented on the incident: "Considering the peculiar and momentous issues of the time, we think it was the grandest and most instructive spectacle, amidst all the solemn, mournful and agitating ceremonies of the day, on which the city of Savannah was hushed to listen to the footfalls of those who thus bore their Bishop to the tomb." 29

St. Stephen's petitioned for membership in the diocese in 1867 but withdrew its application for union with the diocese at the convention of the same year.

Montpelier

"It was in the earlier days of his Episcopal administration that he sacrificed his private fortune, and reduced himself to poverty and want, in his uncalculating efforts to establish an eminent school for female education at Montpelier, in the centre of his Diocese. No man had a higher estimate of the blessings of a healthy and thorough education ... When the funds at his disposal were exhausted, he unhesitatingly pledged his private property and credit for the completion of the undertaking. His obligations were all faithfully met, and the debts he incurred were all paid. But it left him without a dollar; and he had scarcely the means of providing the daily bread of his family."

The how and why of this project is the biography of Bishop Elliott. Unfortunately, there is little in this project that cannot be commonly found.

Montpelier was started when G. B. Lamar, Esquire of Savannah, purchased Montpelier Springs -- "presented it, with seven or eight hundred acres of land in its vicinity, to the Episcopal Church, vesting the property in a Board of Trustees, all of who are members of our church; The Bishop of the Diocese
being, ex-officio, its President, with the injunctions that the school shall be conducted upon Episcopal principle."31

The Bishop at about the same time purchased a large tract of land, some 682 1/4 acres, from a Mr. Threatt, for a sum of $4,777.50, bordered on the north by Mr. Horton and W. C. Hill and bordered on the south and southwest by Montpelier Institute.32

Bishop Elliott would live in Monroe County from 1841 through 1853, and here he would try out his plan to fund the school.

"Our plan -- one struck out very much by the circumstances of the case -- is to make a stock farm cultivated by a slave force owned by the Institute, pay all the expenses of the schools except the salaries of the instructors. By throwing only this burden upon the tuition money, we are enabled, should the plan continue to work as well as it has hitherto done, to furnish the best education ... Another striking advantage -- expansiveness. It can be enlarged -- twenty schools as well as one -- at the same time that the capital required to be invested in land and negroes for their support, will diminish in proportion as the schools increase. Our present investment sustains one school -- double the number of laborers and we can make it sustain four schools ... It seems strange, that among all the other plans which have been adapted in the slave-holding states for the promotion of education, the one, upon which turns the success of our Institute should never before have engaged the public attention, especially when the same kind has been successfully carried on, for many years, in the Island of Barbadoes."33

Between 1842 and 1850 the school seemed to flourish. Indeed in the Bishop's Address to the Dioceses of 1842, he wrote "the girl's school is flourishing beyond all expectation, there being 43 students."34 Academics seemed to be rigorous
at the school. Rebecca Mathews Meriwether, a then sixteen-year-old student at the institute, wrote in a letter to her uncle on April 25, 1843, "I am studying History, Philosophy, Geography, Logic, Rhetoric, Mathematics, French, Italian. I commit a great deal of poetry to memory. I take music lessons, drawing, painting and writing, and 'goodness' knows that is enough for any one."35 The school term was from January through May and June through December with May and December as vacation. Tuition, board, and lodging were $250 per year;36 not a sum to be taken lightly as is reflected in a letter from Mr. William Martin to his daughter, Nancy Jane Martin, who was attending Montpelier Female Institute. "You must try and improve yourself. Make good use of your time, recollect the amount of money it takes for so short a time, therefore the necessity of improving every moment." Though she must have felt it was money well spent. "I should like to have seen the Bishop and his wife again, before I left. I was pleased with them, also Mr. Bragg. I take him to be a perfect Gentleman. Indeed I was pleased with all with whom I became acquainted. Give my respects to all of them. Miss Wells is so pleasant, also Madam."37

It seems that sometime after 1850 and the school’s closing in 1855 Elliott put in a considerable amount of his own money.38 Elliott’s financial fortune, unlike many men of his time, was not ravaged by war. It was ravaged by his dream.

Note: Valuable resources I discovered too late to
fully use for this project are the Middle Georgia Archives in the Public Library in Macon, Monroe County Courthouse in Forsythe, Georgia, and Wesleyan College Library, Macon, Georgia, housing Elliott's correspondence at Montpelier.

The War

It is poor theology but a weakness of almost all that in times of war man is always certain on whose side God is on. Bishop Elliott is not an exception. "'Ye may go to battle without any fear, and strike boldly for your homes and your altars without any guilt,' he assured the members. 'The church will sound the trumpets that shall summon you to the battle.'"39 He also preached a sermon entitled, "'God's Presence with our Army at Manassas,' Stephen Elliott affirmed that 'God was evidently there, strengthening the hearts of our struggling soldiers and bringing the haughty down to the dust.'"40 But as the glories and rightness of the cause gave way to the reality of the war, Elliott's skill as a pastor is shown.

"In a sermon preached by Stephen Elliott in 1862 he praised the spirit of the Southern woman who 'bears it all and bows submissive to the stroke.' Her daily language, according to the Bishop, was, 'He perished for his country, I would not have it otherwise, but I should like to have given the dying boy my blessing, the expiring husband my last kiss of affection, the bleeding lover the comfort of knowing that I knelted beside him.'"41

As victory fades from sight, consider the profound theology expressed in this sermon preached August 22, 1864.

"There are virtues which are suitable to all the circumstances of life by which we may be surrounded; duties becoming every condition which God may place us under...They are in God's hands; and as He appoints them, so must we adapt ourselves to them."42
Elliott will go on in the sermon to tell the congregation that all things good and evil are in the hands of God. The problems that we suffer in life are problems given to us by God.

"Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground. They come from God, whether they be personal or national, and are meant to exercise our patience." But when the world is tumultuous and agitated; when sorrow and distress are all around us; when the dark clouds which cover the heavens seem thick as night and give no signs of breaking; when Death is frequent and always threatening; when there is little joy to be found in home or society, and no rest for the tired spirit."43

When you consider the audience Elliott preached those words to, how it probably personally touched all the listeners on August 22, 1864, you are given an insight into Elliott's moral character. He will end the sermon by saying:

"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" and it is a question which you should weigh, and ponder upon, in these days when God is trying us in the furnace of affliction. Whatever else you lose, do not lose your own souls!"44

**Elliott's Death**

"The sudden death of the Rt. Rev. Stephen Elliott, Bishop of Georgia, which took place at his residence in this city, shortly after nine o'clock last night, as is supposed, from disease of the heart. Bishop Elliott had returned to the city in the evening Central Railroad train from a visit to the interior of the State, and was apparently in his usual health up to the moment of his death, which was without premonition."45

But listen to some of the words of his last sermon preached in Montpelier the day before.

"How many plans, extending far into the future are arranging and executing! How many hopes, cherished
in the sanctuary of the heart, are looking for their fulfilment to long years ahead! The world is eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, as if nothing was ever to change it from its usual routine. Ask its people what they dread, why their hearts are fainting within them: and they will answer you: -- 'We tremble at the loss of property; at the loss of office; at the loss of position; at the loss of reputation;' but seldom 'Because we remember the coming of the Lord.' ...Life is too solemn a thing to be trifled with. Death is too terrible an enemy to be met unexpectedly. Both demand watchfulness: life, that we may spend it aright, and do our allotted task; Death, that we may meet it calmly, feeling that it has no sting."

Elliott did his allotted task. He was an educator, a missionary, an administrator, a pastor, and a priest. The First Bishop of Georgia is buried in Lot 455 of Laurel Grove Cemetery in Savannah below a brown marble full casket grave marker.
FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid.

3 Though none are particularly quoted a reading of these combination of sources has given me this general information.

A Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina, 1820-1957; The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957; As Grain Once Scattered; Savannah Morning News, Monday, December 25, 1916.


5 The Episcopal Church in South Carolina, 1820-1957, Page 25.


7 Here there is some conjecture on my part knowing his first wife died September 1837 and next find him in the 1840 Beaufort County Census, Page 261, with a household of two children between the ages of 5 and 10, one male and one female, and one male and one female, age 30-40, I assumed he remarried and the two children were his first wife's.


9 A combination reading of the 1850 Monroe County, Georgia, Census, M432 R-78, Page 52, and the 1860 Chatham County, Georgia, Census, M-653 R-115, Page 346.

10 The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957, Page 69.


12 Ibid, Page 32.

14 _Journals of the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Georgia_, Vol. I, 1823-1854, 1841 Convention, Pages 11-16.


16 _The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957_, Page 83.

17 _As Grain Once Scattered, The History of Christ Church, Savannah, Georgia, 1733-1983_, Page 73.

18 _Journals of the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Georgia_, Vol. II, 1823-1854, 1846 Convention.


20 _Journals of the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Georgia_, Vol. II, 1866 Convention.

21 Pastoral Letter, November 22, 1862, found in _Sermons by R. R. Stephen Elliott, D.D._, Pages 567-580. If read in its entirety would indicate that Elliott had no intention to change the Episcopal form.

22 1840 Beaufort County, South Carolina, Census shows Stephen Elliott as owning 38 slaves, Page 261.

23 _Cerveraus Savannah_, Page 56.


25 _The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957_, Page 85 and also Pages 86, 87, 88, and 89 show other interest in the slave population by the Episcopal Church.


27 Ibid.


29 _The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957_, Page 113.


32 Deed Book, Rec.M, Page 220. The same property would be sold at public auction in 1851 Rec.M, Page 544. This information came to me via a phone conversation with a clerk in the Monroe County Probate Court.


34 Ibid.

35 Copy of a letter written April 25, 1843, by a student, Rebecca Mathews Meriwether, 16 years old, at Montpelier Institute, Monroe County, Georgia, to her uncle, Thomas Coke Brodus a medical student in New York. Found in the Middle Georgia Archives, Macon Public Library.

36 The Episcopal Church in Georgia, 1733-1957, Page 72.

37 Copy of a letter written July 9, 1851, by Mrs. William D. Martin of Greenville, Georgia, to her daughter, Nancy Jane Martin, who was a student at Montpelier Female Institute. Found in the Middle Georgia Archives, Macon Public Library.

38 A comparative reading of Elliott's financial worth in the 1850 Monroe County, Georgia, Census showing $80,000 personal property and the 1860 Chatham County, Georgia, Census showing $5,000 personal property.

39 A Present for Mr. Lincoln, Page 30.

40 Ibid, Page 33.

41 Ibid, Page 137.


43 Ibid, Page 489.

44 Ibid, Page 495.

45 Obituary, Savannah News Press, December 22, 1866.

47. General Index to Groundskeepers Record Books, Laurel Grove Cemetery, Ogeechee at 35 Street. Rt. Reverend Elliott, Lot 455, D 12/21/66, B 12/25/66, Last place of residence was Jones and Bull Streets.
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Cerveau. Cerveau's Savannah.


Martin, Mrs. William D. Letter written July 9, 1851. Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, Georgia.

Meriwether, Rebecca Mathews. Letter written April 25, 1843. Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, Georgia.


1840 Census, Beaufort, South Carolina, Page 261, No. 3 and 4.

1850 Census, Monroe County, Georgia, M432 R-78, Page 52.

1860 Census, Chatham County, Georgia, M-653 R-115, Page 346.

The Deed Book of Monroe County Probate Court, Record M, Page 220.

Journals of the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Georgia, Vols. I, 1823-1854, and II, 1855-.


South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, Vol. II.