

# Ramblings . . .

By Helen S. Sharpe



Rev. Allen Lee

When I meet up with Allen Lee he's full of himself with more things to tell than I hardly have time to hear, since I might be needing to buy the groceries, or read a proof, cook a meal or do household chores. Allen Lee doesn't seem to be bound by time; yet in his cheerful, self-confident way, he appears to get all the above attended to and stay in charge of his life while he pours immense energy into reading and study, preparing lectures and inspirational talks, establishing a library of Bibles comparable to collections housed in divinity schools, accumulating rare books, collecting stamps and rare coins, making scrapbooks, playing the violin, collecting recipes and turning out delectable results in the kitchen, gardening, playing golf, keeping up with several sports, assembling bric-a-brac, finding stones and rocks, Indian artifacts, gravestone epitaphs, and obtaining a store of unusual historical data.

Rev. Allen Lee is supposed to be in retirement, living in Red Springs with his charming wife Mildred, in a home comfortably and tastefully furnished, with several displays of his collections. He's still busy with pastoral visiting; and practically every Sunday teaches or preaches. Often he is called upon to give programs. He's well equipped to give the programs, for he has almost a limitless supply of materials on numerous subjects. In fact, in his attic he has a file fifty feet in length, which contains selected materials for use in preparing talks. Since retirement he has sifted through these materials twice, selecting choice pieces to be placed in scrapbooks, which are comparable to *Leaves of Gold*, ever richer.

You might think that a man like Allen Lee, so filled with intellectual curiosity and the stamina to pursue many interests, would feel a little boxed in, living in a small town in rural Robeson County on a Methodist minister's retirement pension. Admittedly Red Springs, with all the Meigs fostering education and religion, is a special place, but not to be compared to the great cultural centers of the world. To Allen Lee, Red Springs is only one facet of his existence. He claims the universe as his home and cites a favorite poem to illustrate his view:

*How can you live in Goshen?  
Said a friend from afar.  
This is a wretched little place  
where people talk about  
tawdry things  
And plant cabbages in the  
moonlight . . .*

*But I do not live in Goshen,  
I answered.  
I live in Greece  
Where Plato taught and  
Phidias carved.*

*I live in Rome  
Where Cicero penned  
Immortal lines  
And Michelangelo dreamed  
things of beauty.*

*Do not think my world is small  
Because you find me in a little  
village.*

*I have my books, my pictures,  
my dreams,  
Enchantments that transcend  
Time and Space.*

*I do not live in Goshen at all,  
I live in an unbounded  
universe  
With the great souls of all the  
ages*

*For my companions,  
—Selected, The Princeton Seminary  
Bulletin, 1972.*

## THE BEGINNING

I was on the scene, in the background, during Rev. Lee's first appointment, when in 1938 he came with his young bride to the Methodist church in St. Pauls. He has planned to be there today for homecoming. I used to go with my friend Madge Poole to the annual Methodist picnics at Page's Lake, and I remember Rev. Lee, his dark, thick, wavy hair, striding around the gathering with the same warmth and vigor he exudes today. Lee spent thirty-seven years his filling appointments of the Methodist church and five years at Chestnut Street in Lumberton, where he was associate minister.

## BRITCHES BIBLE

I went over to Red Springs a few days ago to have an interview with Allen Lee, since I wanted to write about some of his many avocations, all of which are rather caught up

into the sweep of his general vocation of ministering. I thought I would probably write about his collection of Bibles and tombstone epitaphs. Once he started talking about his beloved Bibles there was no changing the subject until dark fell upon us. He had to tell me about the "Bitches Bible" that served the founding fathers of this nation, the "He" Bible, the Scottish Bible, from which he read a few verses, his deep, melodic voice conjuring up memories of the poetry of Robert Burns and the Scottish ballads. To hear a Scotman with a well-practiced burr and a resonant voice like Lee's was certainly more comparable to listening to a beautiful rendition by a symphonic orchestra.

## THE BIBLES

Rev. Lee has three hundred volumes in his collection of Bibles, copies of the very earliest to current ones. His library houses nine different versions of the famous *King James* translation, authorized in 1604 and published in 1611. He is very proud of the five volume exact duplication of the original 1611 *King James* version printed in Old English, including the Apocrypha, which was deleted by the Puritans in 1628. This 1611 translation is called the "He" Bible because of a wrong translation in Ruth and chapter 19th verse where "he" is wrongly used for "she." After the first edition was exhausted, this error was corrected in later publications. The duplication of the "He" Bible in Lee's possession was issued in the year 1890. Other *King James* versions owned by him include one for children, one for teen-agers and seven for adults.

Lee has in hand a facsimile copy of the oldest church manual in existence, the *Didache* which is the original teaching of the twelve apostles used for about 265 years until the Council of Nicea in Nice, France in 325 A.D. when the first *New Testament* was compiled into the present twenty-seven books by Roman Catholic scholars. He also has a commentary on this early work. Until the Nicea meeting the scriptures consisted only of the *Old Testament* and letters of the Apostles which were passed from church to church.

## OLD ENGLISH

He has a facsimile of the first complete Bible ever published in English (Old English), written in Langland by the *Wycliffe* brought out in 1382. In fact, this was the first non-Latin translation. He has a copy of the first printed *New Testament*, 1534, by William Tyndale. The favorite in his collection is a *King James* version in Old English, the *Geneva Bible* of 1560 is most interesting. It is called the "Bitches" Bible because in the story of Adam and Eve this translation has them making bitches of fig leaves. Then there is a *Crammer Bible* of 1539, a *Rheims Bible* of 1582.

## ENGLISH TRANSLATION

There are several fragmentary versions of the history of the English Bible. This Bible dates back to the seventh century when an illiterate farmer in northern England sang some biblical passages, which were translated into the rough language of that period. A few parts of his work are found in the *Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History*. (Bede was the most prominent scholar of the eighth century.) Translation continued intermittently through the following centuries, with King Alfred in the ninth century translating the Ten Commandments and other sections of *Exodus* and the *Psalms* into Anglo-Saxon. The Gospels were translated by the tenth century, with various scholars continuing the effort until the first full translation by King Alfred in the fourteenth century. The details of this development are of immense interest to Lee, appealing to the historian aspect of his personality.

## AMERICAN BIBLE

Lee has an American Bible Society facsimile of the first Bible published in two volumes in the United States, 1782, by Thomas Aitken. Prior to the Revolution the English permitted no Bibles to be published in the Colonies. Of especial interest to Episcopalians would be Lee's leather-bound *Polyglot Bible* published in 1853, containing also the *Book of Common Prayer* and included as the last chapter all the 150 *Psalms* arranged to be sung to one of seventeen tunes.

Also included in his Biblical literature is the book of *Barnabas*, written in Greek and discovered in an archaeological find in Egypt in 1945. The church scholars elected to omit these books when compiling the *New Testament*.

## HUMAN INTEREST

Lee can tell a human interest story about Mary and Janie Duggan, who in 1883 bought a first edition of the *English Revised Bible* of 1881 and traveled to Rome. There they searched diligently in print shops for works of art illustrating the great writings of the Bible. They inserted prints of the master works along with corresponding scripture throughout the Bible and had the volume rebound in Roman vellum. Eventually the volume found its way to an old bookstore where Lee came across it, his luckiest delight.

Each one of Rev. Lee's books has a special meaning to him, and he is acquainted with how it became published. For example, he has a signed English translation of Constantine Tischendorf's translation of the *New Testament*, published in Leipzig in 1868. This translation was compiled from the oldest Hebrew and Greek manuscripts yet found. Tischendorf discovered these manuscripts when traveling in the Sinai in 1844, and again in 1857 when visiting the Monastery of Saint

Katherine. These manuscripts now are kept in the British Museum.

Rev. Lee has one Bible which is exactly literal from the Greek and Hebrew — strange sounding indeed, with no allowance for easy flow of English, context or interpretation. His collection includes the books of *Enoch*, mentioned in *June 1, 14*, only found in the *Ethiopian Bible*, Coptic version, first published in English in 1912. Another is a deluxe edition translated by the Hebrew and Greek scholar Ferrar Fenton, who gave copies of this special edition published at the end of the nineteenth century to King Edward VII of England, Kaiser Wilhelm, President Theodore Roosevelt and Dr. J. G. Ramsbottom, who helped with the translation.

A poignant translation is entitled *St. Paul of the Trenches*, the work of an English scholar from Oxford, Gerald Cornish, who during odd moments in the trenches in World War I translated *Corinthians* and *Ephesians*. He was killed during the war, and Lee laments the loss of this talent. Rev. Lee showed me an edition by Hugh J. Schonfield, the only Jew ever to translate the *New Testament*. He even has a Bible written in shorthand, Pitman method, which preceded Greek shorthand.

## BAPTIST BIBLE

In all there are 31 complete Bibles and 135 different versions of the *New Testament*. The most recently acquired *New Testament* was prepared especially for the deaf. Of interest to Baptists, a Bible especially for that denomination was requested in 1883 in Saratoga Springs, New York, and became the work of a half dozen scholars on behalf of a group of ladies who wanted a translation emphasizing emersion. The word "emersion" is placed in parenthesis each time baptism is mentioned. The work by the American Baptist Publication Society appeared in 1913, compiled from both the *King James* version and the 1901 *American Standard* translation.

Rev. Lee also has an English translation of the *Septuagint*, a Greek translation of the *Old Testament* said to be the work of about seventy scholars in the third century B.C. This *Old Testament* was in wide use during the time of Jesus.

## THE SAINTS

In the collection are thirty-eight condensed Bibles. For example, the beloved Charles M. Sheldon, author of *In His Steps* published a Bible in which he deleted material he did not consider important. Lee noted that some peo-



Rev. Lee stands with his large collection of Bibles at his home in Red Springs. He is holding his favorite, a leather-bound 1684 *King James* translation in Old English.

ple have raised a commotion about the *Revised Bible* because Lee has this version of Bible — apparently unaware that quite fundamental writers and editors have been doing so throughout the years. At this point Rev. Lee made an aside that "Saints cause more trouble than the sinners."

To help preachers read dramatically a Bible entitled *Emphasized Bible* has been published, and of course Lee has this version by Dr. Joseph Bryan Rotherham. There is even a Bible presented in newspaper form, with headlines about the dramatic episodes chronicled in the Bible. Another version arranges the *Old Testament* in chronological order, which places *Job* after chapter 11 in *Genesis*, because *Job* pre-dated Abraham. In addition to the collection of 300 Bibles, Rev. Lee has 200 books that tie in with the Bible collection. He loves his Bible collection so much that he brought me a page of famous quotations about the value of the Bible, after I had completed the column. We chose one especially beautiful quotation to insert:

*What a book! great and wide as the world,  
rooted in the abyssal depths of creation  
and rising aloft into the blue mysteries of heaven  
... Sunrise and sunset, promise and fulfill-  
ment, birth and death, the whole human  
drama, everything is in this book . . . It is the  
book of books, Bible.*

—Henrich Heine, 1840.

THE RARE BOOKS

We could have gone on looking at still more Bibles, but I asked Rev. Lee to show me just a few of his other collections. He has the Second Revision of the *Methodist Hymnal*, 1827, the *First Discipline* of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1846, the first edition of John Charles McNeill's *Lyrics of Cottonland*, 1907, McNeill's *Songs Merry and Sad*, 1906. Especially prized is *Bay Psalm Book* published in Old English in 1640, the first book ever printed in America. His is a rare copy of one of the almost priceless text in existence.

After the time I have spent with Rev. Lee, I really am convinced that he is scarcely limited by time and space. He has found ways to tune in with the life of the past, and he finds many fascinations all around him, when he prepares a talk on his study of the stars, when he might discover a rock that especially pleases him, or has one of his plants flourish especially well, or conceals a relaxed kitchen speciality. It's pretty inspiring to visit Rev. and Mrs. Lee, because it is evident they have learned a whole lot about how to live.