

PIOUS SHERMANITES. A Peculiar Class of People Living in Alabama. They Are Honest, Temperate, Wash One Another's Feet, But Never Cut Their Hair - Religious Enthusiasts Full of Quaint Concepts.

The other day a rough-looking countryman walked into a general supply store in this city and stated to the proprietor that he wanted to purchase \$100 worth of goods on credit, writes a Birmingham (Ala.) correspondent of the Cincinnati Commercial-Gazette. The man wore his hair long like a woman, and his beard reached almost to his waist. His clothes were all made at home; they were ill-fitting and of the cheapest material, and altogether he was a strange specimen of humanity.

"What is your name?" asked the merchant, when the man stated his business. "John Smith," answered the countryman. "When can you pay for the goods?" "I'll pay you in November, when I sell my cotton crop."

"All right, Mr. Smith; you can have the goods." The goods were soon loaded on Smith's wagon, and he drove away without giving the merchant a note or any kind of security. "Do you know the man?" I asked of the merchant.

"Never saw him before." "Will he pay you for those goods?" "Certainly." "How do you know?" "Because he is a Shermanite. He is a member of a remarkable religious society, and if he failed to pay a debt he would be expelled from his church, and driven from the community in which he lives, in disgrace. I may not see or hear of him again until next November, but if he is living he will come and pay me every cent he owes me. The Shermanites all wear their hair long like this one, and they are easily recognized anywhere."

In Leed's Valley, in the northwestern part of this county, there is a colony of Shermanites. There are about one hundred families, and a happier, more contented people can not be found in the world. Their religious rites and ceremonies are peculiar. Who founded the society none of them seem to know, but it is very old, as the fathers and grandfathers of the present generation were Shermanites. They claim to follow the teachings of the New Testament in spirit and letter, and they believe that only Shermanites will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. They have churches and preachers and worship in a manner similar to many other religious sects. One of their peculiar rites is the washing of feet. A foot-washing service is held once every month, at which the preacher washes the feet of every member of the church. The members then in turn wash the feet of the preacher and of each other. This service usually lasts all day, being interspersed with singing and praying.

Members of all other religious denominations they regard as heathen, and send missionaries among them instead of sending them to foreign lands. Shermanites never cut their hair or beard, claiming that Christ never patronized barber-shops. In every home may be found ancient woodcut representing Christ and His Apostles as wearing long hair and beard. A Shermanite who falls from grace is lost forever, and he must always live up to certain moral and business rules which are very rigid. To pay all debts is a part of their religion. No man can be saved, they say, who does not pay his washing when he holds him. They never charge one another interest on a loan, and no written acknowledgment of a debt is ever given. The word of a Shermanite is his bond, and it becomes his sacred duty for him to fulfill every promise made. They are an industrious people because industry is a part of their creed.

The Shermanites are all small farmers, but most of them own their farms and some stock. Many of them are compelled to purchase a few supplies in this city every year, for which they are unable to pay cash. Where their peculiar religion is known they have no trouble in obtaining all the credit they want. They give no notes or security of any kind, but merchants who have done business with them for years have never lost a dollar due from a Shermanite customer. Their preachers accept no pay for preaching the Gospel, working on their farms during the week as hard as any member of the Church. Divorce is something unknown among these people, and the women are all virtuous. Drunkenness is another vice unknown among these people, as they follow to the letter the advice of the Apostle, who said: "Be temperate in all things." Their homes are models of neatness and comfort, and the stranger is always welcome within their gates. It would be almost a insult to them when payment for food, lodging or any other favor shows a stranger. The Shermanites make few converts to their peculiar religion, but they lose no members, and seem happy and contented in simply holding their own.

One remarkable thing about them is that they will have nothing to do with courts and lawyers. A law-suit in which a Shermanite was plaintiff can not be filed on the court records of this county. They never seek legal advice unless it is actually necessary. All their differences are settled by arbitration, mutual friends being the arbitrators, and the civil courts are never under any circumstances resorted to. They seek in every way possible to avoid jury duty or being summoned as witnesses in any cases. They take no part in politics, and a Shermanite was never known to hold an office of any kind. Some of them vote at every election, but they have no campaign clubs in their community, and every man is allowed to vote as he pleases. Many of them never vote at all.

The first settlers of this Shermanite colony came to Alabama from South Carolina and Georgia about forty-five years ago. The oldest of them say their ancestors came originally from New England, but they are unable to say who was the founder of their society.

Thoughts of the Dying. It is affirmed that a dying person in his last moments thinks of the chief events of his life. Persons resuscitated from drowning, epileptics with grave attacks, persons dying and already unconscious, but momentarily brought back to consciousness by other injections to utter their last thoughts, all acknowledge that their last thoughts revert to momentous events of their life. Such an ether injection revives once more the normal disposition of cerebral activity, already nearly extinguished, and it might be possible at this moment to learn of certain important events of the past life. Brown-Sequard mentions the remarkable fact that persons who, in consequence of grave cerebral affections, have been paralyzed for years, get back at once when dying their sensibility, mobility and intelligence. All such facts clearly show that at the moment of dissolution important changes take place, reacting upon the composition of the blood and the functions of the organs.

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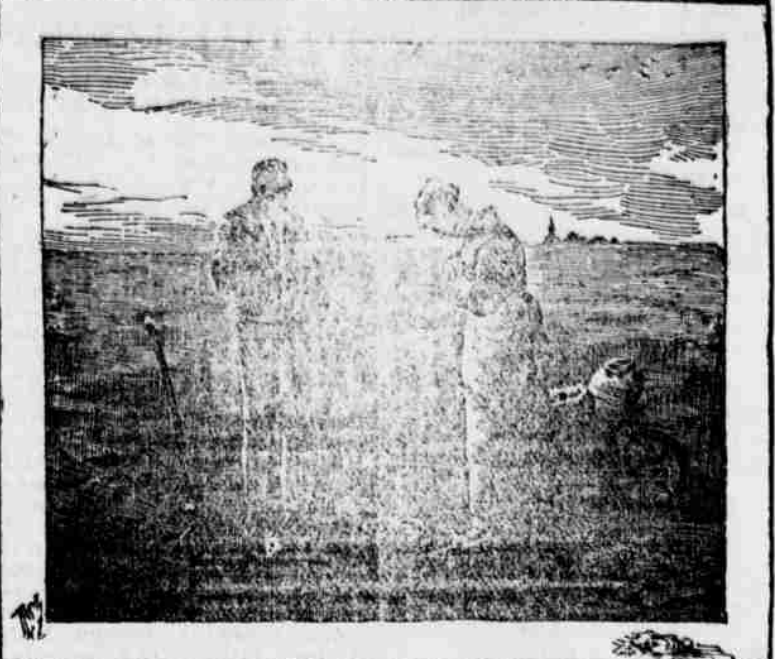
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PUBLIC SCHOOLS. Fine structures abound throughout the city. The school buildings are numerous and large and the high school is as grand a pile as is often seen. The famous Chemetete hotel, built as a matter of pride by Salem's wealthy capitalists, leads all on the Pacific coast as a fine hotel. The state has located here extensive and imposing buildings, the State house, State Penitentiary, State Insane Asylum, State Blind School, State Deaf and Dumb male school and the United States Indian Training School. Elegant private residences are common but of yet greater interest than these are the miles and miles of pleasant homes of our thrifty mechanics; therein lies the surety of our future.

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