Book Review: God and General Longstreet, by Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows

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GOD AND GENERAL LONGSTREET by Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) 155pp., $12.95

Always provocative, Thomas Connelly has done it again. Author of previous books on the Army of the Tennessee and Robert E. Lee, he has (in collaboration with a research person at his fellow institution, the University of South Carolina) traced the persistence and the transformation of the “Lost Cause” from the end of the Confederacy down to the present time. Known for his criticism of Lee, his contention that Lee was too much oriented to the Virginia area, and therefore did not have a real conception of the strategic importance of the Trans-Appalachian West, is continued here by the authors in an excellent chapter, “Robert E. Lee and the Southern Mind.”

Perhaps the authors’ most interesting chapter is their last, “The Enduring Memory,” in which the contention is made that the South was and is viewed by the rest of the country, beginning in the 1970s, “as an alternate society with considerable appeal.” This new attractiveness was evident in three cultural phenomena: the “huge growth of southern evangelical bodies in the country, the mass media and the national interest in country music.” To Connelly and Bellows, Elvis Presley was “the most obvious public symbol of the ‘Lost Cause.’” When he died in 1977 there “was an outpouring of grief unmatched since the 1870 funeral of Robert E. Lee”!! Presley and Lee? As I said, most interesting.