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BOOK SECTION

Preparing for the Wesley 250th: British Methodist Studies, 1980-88

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THE two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the evangelical experiences of the Wesley brothers, which falls in May 1988, seems destined to raise the historical consciousness of ordinary Methodists to a level which was never remotely reached in this country at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of British Methodist reunion in 1982. It seems an ideal opportunity, therefore, to assess recent and forthcoming* contributions to British Methodist studies which can provide the literary foundation for this year's celebrations. The present article picks up from where Henry Rack left off in his survey of 'Recent books on Methodism' in the January 1980 issue of *Epworth Review*. Like him, this author has felt somewhat daunted by the sheer volume of material which merits consideration, and some drastic and, at times, quite arbitrary decisions have had to be taken in order to contain this guide within manageable, and readable, proportions. Amongst the major categories of works which are generally excluded from discussion here are those whose primary focus is not on British Methodism; articles or essays in journals, *festschriften* and anthologies, together with other publications of fewer than fifty pages; reprints; mimeographed or other fugitive titles of limited circulation and doubtful availability; university postgraduate theses; items in a foreign language; contemporary writings of a controversial, doctrinal, pastoral or devotional nature; audio-visual aids; juvenile literature.

General works

Readers who wish to explore the secondary literature of Methodism in greater detail than can be attempted here may be referred to this author's 'Bibliography of Methodist Historical Literature' which has been published annually in the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* since June 1976: the 1980-86 editions (the 1987 guide is still being prepared) list no fewer than 740 items. Still more comprehensive, at least from a historiographical point of view, is the bibliography of 1,841 fully classified and indexed entries which will appear, alongside a selection of original documents, in the fourth volume of *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (Epworth Press, 1988). Rather less demanding on the user are Laurie Gage's *English Methodism* (Gage Postal

*The text of this article was virtually complete when *Celebrate '88*, 'the official selection of special productions for the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Conversion of John Wesley', was released by the Methodist Publishing House. As a consequence, it has only proved possible to take account of some of the more significant works which are forthcoming from this source.

Books, 1985), which provides both a commentary upon, and a somewhat inaccurate list of, 122 reference and other works, and the apparently anonymous (but actually compiled by John Vickers) *Methodism and the Wesleys* (WMHS Publications, 1987) which records 50 titles of likely interest to the 'ordinary' (as opposed to the academic) reader.

The needs of the serious student of Methodist history who wants to come to terms with the primary sources have been well served by several recent publications. On the manuscript side, Part 6, Section 1 of Homer Calkin's *Catalog of Methodist Archival and Manuscript Collections* (World Methodist Historical Society, 1985), dealing with the holdings of the Methodist Archives and Research Centre at Manchester, has appeared; although at $40 it is expensive for a spiral-bound volume reproduced from typescript, and whose document-numbering system bears absolutely no relation to the one actually in use at the Archives, it represents a phenomenal amount of labour and is especially valuable as a guide to the approximately 50,000 letters, diaries and other papers of 4,115 individual ministers and laymen. More modest in scope is the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts' *Papers of British Churchmen* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1987) which surveys the extant material for 807 ecclesiastics active in the period 1780-1940; 54 of these are Methodist, mostly of the Wesleyan persuasion, whose papers are to be found not just in Manchester but in eleven other British or North American institutions. For printed books the fifth and sixth of the projected twenty volumes which will comprise Kenneth Rowe's *Methodist Union Catalog* have been issued (Scarecrow Press, 1981-85); they record the holdings of works of authors whose initial surname letter is from G to I in 267 libraries around the world. Despite its avowedly incomplete and provisional nature, Alan Rose's *A Checklist of British Methodist Periodicals* (WMHS Publications, 1981) is a most useful guide to the whereabouts, in 62 public and private collections, of 142 different serial titles published from 1778 to the present day.

There are several general histories of Methodism deserving of note. Rupert Davies' tried and tested *Methodism*, first published as a Pelican Original in 1963, has appeared in what is described as 'a second, revised edition' (Epworth Press, 1985). However, the extent of revision is actually quite minimal, even in the chapter on 'Modern Methodism', and amounts to little more than a cosmetic facelift (a reference to *Hymns and Psalms* here or to Mission England there) to 1960s scholarship. One suspects that the publisher's concern for economy rather than the author's complacency is responsible for this state of affairs because those few alterations which have been made are effected in such a scissors and paste fashion that the book now begins on page 5, changes fonts two thirds of the way down page 182, and concludes nonsensically on pages 183-6 as paragraphs become muddled between the two final chapters.

Of the genuinely new works, Leonard Barnett's *What is Methodism?* (Epworth Press, 1980) is written in a jaunty and conversational style for the benefit of 'the people in the pew'; in fourteen brief chapters the history and polity of Methodism are summarized and set firmly within the wider context of the Christian Church as it has evolved from New Testament roots. Geoffrey Milburn's *Methodism* (North of England Institute for Christian Education, 1985) is a six-unit study course, complete with discussion questions and homework exercises, for the use of church groups, especially non-Methodist ones. Visually, Milburn's book is as unattractive as Cyril Davey's *John Wesley and the Methodists* (Marshall

Pickering, 1985) is elegant; with its colour illustrations and succinct summaries of complex topics the latter can be thoroughly recommended, despite the occasional error of fact, to anyone seeking a popular introduction to the Methodist movement. For readers with a knowledge of Italian, Sergio Carile's *Il Metodismo* (Claudiana Editrice, 1984) should not be overlooked; it is, in fact, a history of global rather than Italian Methodism, paying proper attention to British developments, and written from an ecumenical perspective. Finally, in this section, attention may be drawn to two works in which Methodism does not entirely occupy centre-stage. Paul Sangster's *A History of the Free Churches* (Heinemann, 1983) is disappointing, much given to simplistic and romanticized judgements and based on an eclectic reading of the secondary literature; it is decidedly no match for Michael Watts' *The Dissenters* (1978). The third volume of David Edwards' *Christian England* (Collins, 1984, with a paperback reprint in 1985), which covers the period from the 1730s to the First World War, is much sounder in its grasp of recent scholarship, although the author's genuine forte for the vignette tends to result in a slavish preoccupation with the acts of religious leaders such as Wesley and Bunting and in insufficient attention being paid to other human or impersonal influences.

These generalized accounts at the connexional level are paralleled by several studies of Methodism at the grass roots. There is a second edition of Max Woodward's *One at London* (Friends of Wesley's Chapel, 1983) which contains a new appendix by Ron Gibbins, covering the restoration and reopening of Mr Wesley's preaching-house, as well as revised photographs and an index. The main thrust of Christoper Stell's *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1986) is architectural, as one would expect from a volume which comes from the stable of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England; 1,213 places of worship erected in 13 counties before 1914 are reviewed, amongst them 511 from the various Methodist denominations including the New Room at Bristol which, like all the other pre-1800 buildings featured in the book, is discussed and illustrated in some detail. Rowland Swift's *Lively People* (University of Nottingham Department of Adult Education, 1982) is a history of Methodism in Nottingham from 1740 to 1979; its densely-factual content and miniscule type size do not make for easy reading, and it is also unfortunate that almost three quarters of the available space is devoted to the period up to *c.*1860 with the last 80 years — which the author could have enlivened from his own reminiscences based upon a 35-year residence in the city — being dealt with in just 13 pages.

For Lincolnshire there is soon to be William Leary's *The Story of Lincolnshire Methodism* (Barracuda Books, 1988) which will combine a text of approximately 20,000 words with 150 pictures, whilst we already have *Methodism in the Countryside* by J. N. Clarke and C. L. Anderson (F. W. Cupit Ltd, 1986), a somewhat jumbled history of the Horncastle Wesleyan Circuit from 1786 to 1986 based upon a wide range of manuscript and printed sources, including some which are now in Australia, and containing an ample index. Two scholars have produced books on Cumbrian Methodism which derive from postgraduate research theses. *A History of Cumbrian Methodism* by John Burgess (Titus Wilson, 1980) is the more general of the two but gets totally bogged down in a discussion of the institutional development of circuits and societies and of the internecine conflicts which rent them in the mid-nineteenth century. David Clarke's *This other Eden* (Thomas K. Clarke, 1985), by contrast, comes closer to catching the real spirit of Methodists chapel life and worship — in this case in

Westmorland's Upper Eden Valley between 1758 and 1984; however, Clarke arranges his evidence poorly and fails to exploit some of his best sources (occupational data in baptismal registers, for instance) to the full. *Yr Eglwys Fethodistaidd* by Eric Edwards (Gwasg Gomer, 1980, with a supplement, 1987) is an encyclopaedia of statistics (of membership) and lists (of office-holders, ministers and chapels) for Welsh Wesleyan Methodism since its origins in 1800; the author has added, as an afterthought, a two-page guide for the English reader which amounts to little more than a translation of the contents page but is just about adequate for its purpose.

These historical works are neatly complemented by others which explore the theological roots of Methodism and their implications for the contemporary ecumenical scene. In fact, the new edition of *What Methodists Believe* by Rupert Davies (Epworth Press, 1988), like the original 1976 version, will be more concerned with the vast territory of belief common to all Christians than with peculiarly Methodist emphases. The objectives of Michael Townsend's *Our Tradition of Faith* (Epworth Press, 1980) are equally broad, first to determine whether it is possible to have doctrinal standards at all and then to try to make sense of the 'four alls' of Methodism for today's local preachers. Thomas Langford's *Practical Divinity* (Abingdon Press, 1983), by comparison, is a veritable who-was-who of Methodist theologians the world over; four of the twelve chapters deal with the inheritance of British Methodism from John Wesley to Geoffrey Wainwright, and, although these are generally workmanlike, they are not without omissions (it is somewhat disconcerting, in this connection, to read the admission on page 278 that 'I have . . . discovered William Arthur . . . too late to set him into the general context'). Langford's conclusion is that 'the time of separable Methodist thought may now be past in Great Britain', a theological 'common current' having emerged which transcends ancestral denominational boundaries. The emergence and subsequent erosion of such boundaries is the theme of John Munsey Turner's *Conflict and Reconciliation* (Epworth Press, 1985) which is largely preoccupied with, to quote from the Archbishop of York's foreword, the 'love-hate relationship between Methodism and the Church of England' from 1740 to 1982. In reality, it is not so much a unified monograph as a series of essays which synthesize recent secondary literature and/or repackage research which Turner himself has undertaken for other projects from his 1956 Bristol MA thesis onwards; the book's strength lies in its accounts of nineteenth-century trends, and the weakest chapter, paradoxically, is the last (on the years 1955-82) which is somewhat tainted by partisanship and also manages to discuss the Anglican-Methodist Conversations without reporting the attitudes of Methodists at grass-roots level as surveyed by David Clark, Michael Hill, Peter Wakeford, Bryan Turner and John Gore at the time.

John Wesley and eighteenth-century Methodism

There is remarkably little to report by way of general surveys for this period. *Religion in England, 1688-1791* (Clarendon Press, 1986), the fifth volume to appear in the 'Oxford History of the Christian Church', was Gordon Rupp's last book and may well turn out to be the one for which, for good or ill, he will be best remembered. As an overview of the eighteenth-century English ecclesiastical scene it seems destined to reign supreme for as many decades as the work of Norman Sykes which it now displaces. As an introduction to the rise and progress of Methodism, however, it will lack neither competitors nor critics since the two

60-page chapters devoted to the movement are written largely from the perspective of the theologian; the comparative neglect of the social, economic, political, educational, intellectual and cultural impact of Methodism and the implied rejection of quantitative and sociological techniques give the book a curiously old-fashioned air. The same bias is also rather evident in two recent collections of conference papers. *Dig or Die* (World Methodist Historical Society Australasian Section, 1981) is edited by James Udy and Eric Gerald Clancy and contains twenty essays of which six concern eighteenth-century English Methodism; Frank Baker writes on Susanna Wesley and on John Wesley's 'postal ministry', Harold Wood contributes two studies of Charles Wesley's hymns (one to isolate their distinctive characteristics, the other to document their teaching on holiness), Robert John Hillman examines grace in the preaching of Calvin and John Wesley, and Stuart Piggin questions Edward Thompson's interpretation of the counter-revolutionary role of Methodism. Only seven of the forty-six contributions to *Wesleyan Theology Today* (Kingswood Books, 1985), edited by Theodore Runyon, are of immediate relevance, and six of these (by Brown, Chilcote, Clapper, Hynson, Matthews and White) largely summarize research which has already appeared elsewhere; the one exception is Thomas Albin's statistical analysis of the spiritual life histories of 555 British and Irish Methodists born between 1677 and 1776, derived from data in the *Arminian Magazine* and other early sources.

No new, full-scale biography of John Wesley has been published during the years under review, Stanley Ayling's (1979) still being the most recent until the appearance of Henry Rack's *Reasonable Enthusiast* (Epworth Press, 1988). However, T. Crichton Mitchell has brought out an enlarged edition of his 'intimate sketch', now entitled *Meet Mr Wesley* (Beacon Hill Press, 1981), and Richard Heitzenrater has gone in search of *The Elusive Mr Wesley* (Abingdon Press, 1984). Heitzenrater's work comprises two volumes, the first of which embodies a self-portrait of Wesley derived from 40 unattributed extracts from his writings (including several unpublished ones), with running commentaries from the author which weave them into a connecting narrative and expose many of the legends surrounding the father of Methodism; the second combines 29 contemporary estimates of Wesley (both favourable and hostile) with a splendid 50-page introduction by Heitzenrater to Wesley historiography.

Readers who prefer to discover Wesley at first hand will find that they are spoilt for choice when it comes to editions of his various publications. The heavyweight in this field, literally as well as figuratively, is the Bicentennial (formerly Oxford) Edition of the Works of John Wesley, with Frank Baker as Editor-in-Chief; six more of the projected thirty-four volumes have appeared recently, comprising the letters from 1721 to 1755 (edited by Baker, Clarendon Press, 1980-82), the 1780 hymnbook (edited by Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver Beckerlegge, with the assistance of James Dale, Clarendon Press, 1983) and sermons 1-114 (edited by Albert Outler, Abingdon Press, 1984-86). Each book is a model of erudition, averaging 730 pages in length, packed with editorial annotations, introductions, appendices and indexes which seemingly leave no stone unturned, and unlikely to face serious academic challenge for several generations to come. More the pity, therefore, that the understandably high cover prices will mainly confine purchases of the set to the major research libraries.

For those who can neither stomach nor afford such a plethora of detail, there are several short cuts. The best general (if rather Americanized) anthology of

John's writings is to be found in *John and Charles Wesley*, edited (and generously introduced) by Frank Whaling, in 'The Classics of Western Spirituality' series (SPCK, 1981); it reproduces, *inter alia, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, described as providing 'a partial spiritual autobiography of John Wesley', in its entirety. Two attempts have been made to translate the sermons into modern English, one by Thomas Oden (*John Wesley: The New Birth*, Harper and Row, 1984), the other by James Holway (*Sermons on Several Occasions*, Moorley's Bible & Bookshop Ltd, 1987); neither is really satisfactory, the former's 'dynamic equivalency rendition' altering the sense of the text at critical points and becoming absurdly addicted to the imposition of sexually-inclusive language, with editorial matter in the latter being confined to a two-page translator's note. Abridgements of *The Journal of John Wesley* have been made by Christopher Idle (Lion Publishing, 1986) and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford University Press, 1987); academically, Jay's effort has the slight edge, although it is somewhat spoiled by careless proof-reading and an unhelpful index. *John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* has been reprinted in facsimile (Quarterly Review, 1984), without the collects, epistles, gospels and psalter but with a prefatory essay by James Floyd White which compares and contrasts it with the 1784 Oxford edition of the Book of Common Prayer. *Milton for Methodists* (Epworth Press, 1988) is a reissue of Wesley's annotated extracts from *Paradise Lost*, first printed in 1763, together with an introduction by Frank Baker.

Several particular facets of Wesley's life and work have been singled out for special study. His labours in the North-East of England are documented by Geoffrey Milburn in *The Travelling Preacher* (Wesley Historical Society North-East Branch, 1987) which is based on a series of talks given on BBC Radio Newcastle in 1985; the book is pleasantly written in a conversational style but, being largely derived from the *Journal*, is not especially original, and the small font size and excessive use of italic type make it difficult to read. Wesley's relations with women form the subject of Maldwyn Edwards' posthumously-published *My Dear Sister* (Penwork, Leeds Ltd, [1980]); his mother and sisters, Cotswold circle of friends, Sophy Hopkey, Grace Murray, Mrs Vazeille, Martha Thompson, Sarah Ryan, the Countess of Huntingdon, Hannah Ball, Mary Bosanquet, Ann Bolton, Hester Ann Roe and Elizabeth Ritchie are all discussed but in a fairly superficial manner, as one might expect in a book of only 124 pages where 75 illustrations take up part of the available space. John Banks throws some more light on Wesley's dealings with Ann Bolton by scrutinizing her correspondence and spiritual journals in *'Nancy, Nancy'* (Penwork, Leeds Ltd, 1984); the book's scholarly status may be judged from the author's bald admission of his philosophy — 'I have worked on the basis that facts are sacred, comment is free and that the imagination should be allowed to work providing it is backed up, and controlled, by some evidence'. Bosanquet, Ritchie, the Countess and Roe also appear along with Darcy, Lady Maxwell and Sarah Crosby in Earl Kent Brown's *Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), which combines short biographies of the six of them with a group portrait of the leadership roles of women in early Methodism, drawn from a more general sample of 110 cases; the distinguishing feature of the volume is the author's patronizing tone towards his subjects whom, to the fury of feminist reviewers, he continually refers to as 'the ladies'.

John Wesley's literary achievement is appraised by Samuel Rogal whose *John and Charles Wesley* (Twayne Publishers, 1983) considers no fewer than 37 of his

works and gives disproportionate emphasis, perhaps rightly so, to some of the lesser-known ones (the 1780 hymnbook, for example, receives just a few lines, yet his life of John Fletcher is given over four pages). Richard Brantley's attempt, in *Locke, Wesley and the Method of English Romanticism* (University of Florida Press, 1984), to prove that Wesley's brand of philosophical theology, derived from the rational empiricism of John Locke as expounded by Peter Browne, significantly influenced the development of English Romantic literature is not entirely convincing and is certainly presented in a stylistically-tortuous and pretentious manner. Wesley's teachings on the order of salvation and the means of grace respectively are neatly summarized in Steven Harper's *John Wesley's Message for Today* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1983) and *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* (The Upper Room, 1983) which are ideal for either individual or small-group study. His ecclesiology is examined as a whole by Howard Snyder in *The Radical Wesley* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), a book which seeks to demonstrate Wesley's continuity with 'the Radical Protestant tradition', from the days of sixteenth-century Anabaptism onwards, in order to provide some kind of retrospective justification for the author's own theory of contemporary church renewal. A similar concern permeates David Lowes Watson's *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Discipleship Resources, 1985) which views it as an instrument of 'accountable discipleship' and seeks to apply its rationale to current American needs; the historical treatment is satisfactory so far as it goes, but, for a more practical and less theological assessment of the class meeting in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the reader will need to consult other recent secondary works, notably those of William Dean. David Naglee's 1966 Ph.D. thesis on Wesley's attitudes towards infant baptism and the nurture of children makes a belated appearance in print as *From Font to Faith* (Peter Lang, 1987).

Wesley's social ethics are the subject of three monographs. Leon Hynson's *To Reform the Nation* (Francis Asbury Press, 1984) explores their theological foundations, drawing together the threads of numerous articles which have emerged from his pen since the early 1970s. Warren Thomas Smith's *John Wesley and Slavery* (Abingdon Press, 1986) sheds no new light on the topic but performs a useful service in quarrying Wesley's writings for every reference to Africans and the slave trade, and in including a facsimile of his *Thoughts upon Slavery* (1774). E. Brooks Holifield gives full weight to Wesley's opinions in his *Health and Medicine in the Methodist Tradition* (Crossroads Press, 1986) which covers an immense territory of human experience from sexuality to death.

After successive generations of relative neglect by scholars, it is pleasing to note that Charles Wesley is at last coming into his own. John Tyson has compiled a splendid 'reader' of his writings (Oxford University Press, 1986) and also produced *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* (Francis Asbury Press, 1986) which relates this doctrine both to the events of Charles' life and to his wider teachings on redemption, demonstrating in the process that, theologically speaking, he was no mere cipher of his brother John. There is no sign yet of a definitive modern edition of all his works, but at least Thomas Albin and Oliver Beckerlegge have made a start with their *Charles Wesley's Earliest Evangelical Sermons* (Wesley Historical Society, 1987) which transcribes, with appropriate editorial matter, six shorthand manuscript sermons first preached between 1738 and 1743, and now preserved in the British Methodist Archives.

All the other recent publications about Charles Wesley are concerned,

predictably enough, with his poetry. Frank Baker's *Charles Wesley's Verse* (Epworth Press, 1988), newly rewritten to reflect research which has taken place since it first appeared in 1964, is still the best overall introduction to the field. For readers looking for a relatively uncomplicated devotional tool, the selections made by Jack Burton (*The Richest Legacy*, [the editor, 1981]) and Timothy Dudley-Smith (*A Flame of Love*, Triangle, 1987) can be recommended; the former includes a modernized text of 120 eucharistic hymns principally derived from *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745), the latter 138 miscellaneous items of verse taken from the Osborn edition of 1868-72. Those whose preference is for a more clinical dissection of the inner message and inspirational sources of the hymns should consult *Thirty Hymns of the Wesleys* by David and Jill Wright (1985) or John Lawson's *A Thousand Tongues* (1987), both published by the Paternoster Press. Lawson's is the longer and, in many respects, the better of the two books; he reproduces 140 hymns in all, organized into 53 theological groupings ranging from 'God the Sovereign Creator' to 'The Second Advent', and offers both a succinct statement of the doctrine concerned and a line-by-line annotation of the scriptural quotations and/or allusions in each hymn. Madeleine Marshall and Janet Todd, meanwhile, examine Charles Wesley's achievements alongside those of Watts, Newton and Cowper; their *English Congregational Hymns in the Eighteenth Century* (University Press of Kentucky, 1982) identifies 'didactic subjectivity' as the major characteristic of Charles' hymn-writing, his purpose for the singer being 'not the expressive *venting* of feeling but rather the evangelical *directing* of feeling'.

Other leaders of the Revival have also found their biographers and historians. Arnold Dallimore has published the second volume of his *George Whitefield* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), covering the years 1739-70, which persists with the eulogizing of Whitefield and the demythologizing of John Wesley which was such a marked feature of its predecessor. The *Diary of an Oxford Methodist*, which has been so meticulously transliterated and edited by Richard Heitzenrater (Duke University Press, 1985), is the one kept by Benjamin Ingham as a confessional aid in 1733-34; it admirably fills in gaps in John Wesley's own diaries and clearly reveals that his experience of the warmed heart was a far longer process than much Methodist historiography would have us believe. Patrick Streiff's German-language life of *Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère* (Peter Lang, 1984) must come close to being definitive; it provides admirable coverage of Fletcher's continental background, his pastorate at Madeley and his adversarial theology, and it includes, as an appendix, a chronological register of all his correspondence between 1752 and 1785. Paul Matlock's *The Four Justifications in John Fletcher's Theology* (Schmul Publishers, 1980) is simply not in the same league; its author, fired by a commitment to 'doctrinal precision', has retrospectively abstracted from Fletcher's polemical (as distinct from his pastoral and practical) writings a model of justification which progresses through four distinct stages (infant — by faith — by works — eternal). Cyril Davey's reputation as a writer of popular biographies can only be enhanced by his *Mad about Mission* (Marshalls, 1985), the story of Thomas Coke updated from his earlier *The Man who wanted the World* (1947) in the light of the scholarly research embodied in John Vickers' *Thomas Coke* (1969).

From Wesley to Methodist union

The third volume of *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, prepared

under the general editorship of Rupert Davies, Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, finally emerged from the Epworth Press in 1983, fifteen years or so after most of its contributors seem to have completed their original manuscripts, eighteen years after publication of the first volume, and twenty-nine years after Conference commissioned the enterprise. It has to be admitted, with regret, that, as a consequence of these delays, the book only sporadically reflects the findings of modern scholarship. It purports to deal with the years 1849-1932, but, in fact, only three of the ten chapters are exclusively devoted to this period, most of the remainder tackling themes which were passed over in the earlier volumes. There are, for example, three sketchy and rather unsatisfactory chapters on Methodism in Wales (1739-*c.*1900) by Griffith Roberts, Scotland (1751 to the mid-nineteenth century) by Skevington Wood, and Ireland (1747 to the present day) by Eric Gallagher, the last-mentioned being drafted by Lee Cole who died (in 1963) before he could revise it. Allen Birtwhistle's opening chapter on overseas missions, 1786-1932 (at 116 pages the longest in the work) and Frank Cyril Pritchard's on education, 1744-1932 are more encyclopaedic in content, and even an inspiration to read, yet they largely fail to address themselves to the sort of questions which historians of those subjects are now asking. Two other contributors carry the story forward beyond Methodist union, Rupert Davies reaching a broadly optimistic assessment of the last half-century of 'official' Methodism, and omitting his own notable role in it, and William Strawson surveying Methodist theology between 1850 and 1950, finding its popular exposition wanting both on spiritual and intellectual grounds. Of the three chapters which really do belong to the book in their entirety, John Wilkinson's on the non-Wesleyan traditions is, by common consent, the weakest and Henry Rack's on 'Wesleyan Methodism, 1849-1902' the best, if only by a short head from John Munsey Turner's on 'Methodism in England, 1900-1932'.

The failings of Wilkinson's sketch of the non-Wesleyan bodies have been made good, in some measure, by other writers. Stephen Hatcher's *A Primitive Methodist Bibliography* (Laurie Gage Books, 1980), although inelegantly-produced and 'far from complete', is still a most useful list of 1,613 books and, much more selectively, articles by Primitive Methodist authors or about the denomination. *From Mow Cop to Peake, 1807-1932* (Wesley Historical Society Yorkshire Branch, 1982), which is also duplicated from typescript, contains eight essays on Primitive Methodism of widely differing length and quality; the best papers are by John Munsey Turner (who provides a connexional overview), Colin Dews (on Ann Carr and the Female Revivalists of Leeds), Geoffrey Milburn (on John Petty) and Sidney Richardson (on John Skevington, Loughborough Chartist and lapsed Primitive Methodist). Julia Stewart Werner's *The Primitive Methodist Connexion* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1984) is a thoughtful and vividly-written, if slightly repetitious, study, with an interesting concluding account of the experience of being a first-generation Primitive Methodist, but it only takes the story up to 1823, and, derived from a mere ten months of primary research in England, it is not inclined to stray far from the well-established sources (the failure to utilize non-parochial registers and other local chapel records is especially disappointing). Deborah Valenze's *Prophetic Sons and Daughters* (Princeton University Press, 1985) uses a series of regional studies to demonstrate the vitality of cottage-based evangelism in England from the 1790s to the 1850s, drawing her examples from 'sectarian Methodism' (Quaker, Magic, Independent and Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians and Female Revi-

valists), and paying particular attention to the role of women preachers; her solid achievement is somewhat undermined, however, by a marked tendency to let her claims for the counter-industrializing and domus-centred nature of 'sectarian Methodism' outrun the actual evidence, some of which, to quote one reviewer, is 'wishfully interpreted'. A more conventional portrait of the Bible Christians entitled *The Westcountry Preachers* (the author, 1987) has been produced by Michael Wickes, a genealogist whose original research appears to have been largely confined to mid-Devon and to the kinds of sources with which he is professionally familiar; there is, for example, a fascinating discussion of the Bible Christian community in the county as revealed in the pre-1840 baptismal registers and of the early days of Shebbear College as recorded in the civil census returns for 1841-81. Finally, in this section, attention may be drawn to the imminent publication by Gage Postal Books of a five-part 'United Methodist Bibliographic Series', compiled by Oliver Beckerlegge and covering all the denominations which joined to form the United Methodist Church in 1907.

Other scholars have chosen to examine the Methodist experience at a local rather than a connexional level. *Scottish Methodism in the Early Victorian Period* (Edinburgh University Press, 1981) is a model edition, by Alan Hayes and David Gowland, of 127 letters (111 'in' and 16 'out') from the Jabez Bunting correspondence; light is shed both on the cultural and financial obstacles to Methodist growth north of the Border during the years 1818-49, and on Wesleyan attitudes to the Disruption in the Church of Scotland in 1843. The account and minute books of the South Petherton Wesleyan Methodist Circuit and the Crewkerne Bible Christian Mission from 1808 to 1907 have been edited by M. D. Costen as *Wesleyans and Bible Christians in South Somerset* (Somerset Record Society, 1984); this is the first such volume to have appeared for *any* county, but no one can pretend that it makes for exhilarating reading or springs any academic surprises. Wesleyan evangelism in the inner city forms the subject of John Banks' *The Story . . . so far* (Manchester and Salford Methodist Mission, 1986) and Philip Bagwell's *Outcast London* (Epworth Press, 1987), the centenary histories of the Manchester and West London Missions respectively. Bagwell is an eminent economic historian and former Polytechnic Professor, and his book stands head and shoulders above Banks' in every department of research and writing. The Free Methodist witness is illuminated by the first publication of two autobiographical writings: *The Diary of John Young . . . 1841-1843*, edited by Geoffrey Milburn (Surtees Society, 1983) and *Journals of a Methodist Farmer, 1871-1875*, edited by Jean Stovin (Croom Helm, 1982). Young (1820-1904) was a Wesleyan Methodist Association lay preacher and chemist in Sunderland, Cornelius Stovin (1830-1921) a Free Methodist lay preacher and tenant farmer of nearly 600 acres of arable and pasture land on the Lincolnshire Wolds; both diaries are exceptionally revealing of the overlap and tension between spiritual and secular concerns, a tension exacerbated in Stovin's case by the onset of agricultural depression, the emergence of farmworkers' trade unions (which he fiercely resisted), and by the demands of an ailing and status-seeking Wesleyan-reared wife.

This interface between Methodism and the world is nowhere more apparent than in the political arena, and it is pleasing to report that scholarship is at last advancing beyond the sterile debates sparked off by the 'Halévy thesis'. David Hempton's *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (Hutchinson, 1984, with a paperback reprint in 1987) is misleadingly entitled for, in terms of

original research, it is exclusively concerned with Wesleyan Methodism after the death of its founder; the discussions of the Irish and anti-Catholic dimension and of the education issue are the best parts of the book, but no new evidence is provided about grass-roots political attitudes and the extent to which they diverged from the increasing conservatism of the connexional hierarchy. David Bebbington's *The Nonconformist Conscience* (George Allen & Unwin, 1982) covers broadly similar ground, approached from a thematic rather than a chronological perspective, but for a later period (1870-1914) and a wider denominational range; its story too is largely played out on the national or metropolitan stage (with, for the Wesleyans, Hugh Price Hughes and Sir Robert Perks assuming their traditionally high profiles), and it derives from an alarmingly narrow range of sources, notably the *British Weekly* and *Christian World*, whose reliability is never questioned (curiously, only two of the more than a thousand end-notes refer to the *Methodist Times* and none to the *Methodist Recorder*). A good example of what can be achieved by painstaking local investigation of socio-political trends is afforded by Nigel Scotland's *Methodism and the Revolt of the Field* (Alan Sutton, 1981) which documents the Methodist contribution to agricultural trade unionism in Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire from 1872 to 1896. Although the author sometimes gets carried away with an enthusiasm to detect Wearmouth-style links (especially causal ones) where none exist, and unduly neglects alternative secular influences such as friendly societies, the biographical data on some 950 union leaders and activists (of whom 51% can be positively identified as Methodist adherents — preponderantly Primitives — and 31% as Methodist office-holders) are certainly impressive.

Most post-war work on the ordained ministry in nineteenth-century Methodism has focussed on the theological and educational dimensions of the topic. *Seeds of Joy* by Stuart Burgess (Ecumenical Chaplaincy, University of Birmingham, 1985) falls full-square within this tradition in attempting a survey of the training of Wesleyan ministers until 1842; it is based entirely upon printed sources and adds nothing new to earlier studies by Kenneth Garlick and others. Kenneth Brown, by contrast, successfully breaks out of this straightjacket with his *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1830-1930* (Clarendon Press, 1988) which applies a prosopographical approach to the ministries of the Baptist, Congregational and Methodist (Wesleyan, Primitive and United) Churches; he has assembled a veritable mass of data for two quite distinct samples of ministers, numbering 4,367 men in all (of whom 2,332 are Methodist), and offers some fascinating insights into their social, geographical and educational backgrounds, occupational experience, family structure, career patterns and extra-church activities. Stuart Piggin's *Making Evangelical Missionaries* (Sutton Courtenay Press, 1984) is conceived and executed in a similar vein, although it is concerned only with 550 British missionaries who served in India with 13 Protestant agencies, 63 of them with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, between 1789 and 1858; for Methodist readers there is an added bonus in the form of an appendix challenging the opinions of Edward Thompson, and concluding: 'Instead of viewing Methodism as "a reflex" of the "despair" of the labouring class it should be thought of as an expression of hope, of the aspirations of the upper working class'. Norman Taggart's *The Irish in World Methodism, 1760-1900* (Epworth Press, 1986) reverts to the normal pattern of missionary historiography in providing a series of biographical sketches of Ireland's famous (amongst them Adam Clarke and

William Arthur) and lesser-known sons whose labours and writings have contributed to the extension of Methodism in most corners of the globe.

Since 1932

At its current remaindered price of just £5.00 (down from the original £34.50) for a hardback volume of nearly 900 pages and well over half a million words, George Thompson Brake's *Policy and Politics in British Methodism, 1932-1982* (Edsall, 1984) is an absolute bargain to buy but nothing less than an intellectual assault course to use! It is not so much a work of scholarship as an exercise in historical journalism, a factual and thematically-ordered account of the development of the Methodist Church since union seen from the perspective of Conference (that body's *Agenda* is the most frequently-cited source) and the corridors of connexional power. Despite the occasional personal comment, the author provides little in the way of systematic analysis and detached interpretation in this particular book, but he more than compensates for the deficiency in his subsequent *Taking the Pulse of the Methodist Church* (Robert Odcombe Associates, [1987]); with his diatribes against 'radical Methodists' inspired by 'Marxist-type collectivism', 'raving charismatics', 'business management structures', the British Council of Churches, the Division of Social Responsibility and other ecclesiastical cancers, Brake is surely right to 'expect at least as much criticism as appreciation of what I have written'. Jeffrey Harris, by contrast, is less concerned with the causes of the Methodist malaise than with solutions to it; he poses the question *Can British Methodism grow again?* (Methodist Church Home Mission Division, [1980]) and proceeds to answer it in the affirmative, identifying the means of renewal as being a judicious implementation and modification at the local church level of the tools and insights afforded by the Church Growth movement.

Harris has also been responsible for one of several quantitative studies of contemporary Methodism at the national level. His *A Profile of Methodism* (Methodist Church Home Mission Division, 1982) redistributes the 1980 connexional returns under various headings, most interestingly perhaps along a six-stage urban-rural continuum. *Prospects for the Eighties* (2 volumes, Bible Society, 1980 and MARC Europe, 1983) and *Prospects for Wales* by Peter Brierley and Byron Evans (Bible Society/MARC Europe, 1983) are the final reports on the voluntary censuses of church attendance and membership organized by the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism in England in November 1979 and by the Bible Society in Wales in May 1982; the quality of the data leaves something to be desired, especially in the English case where only 39% of Methodist churches directly responded to the questionnaire, but there are certainly advantages in having the Methodist figures juxtaposed with those from other major denominational groupings and disaggregated by county, sex and age. A similar enquiry was undertaken in Scotland in March 1984, but the Methodist results were not separately tabulated, and in Northern Ireland the only information relates to religious profession, not participation, and is collected by the Government; *The Northern Ireland Census 1981: Religion Report* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1984) classifies the 58,731 self-identifying Methodists in the province by a wide range of social and demographic variables and even enables the reader to determine how many of them are employed as welders or live in households with an inside flush toilet!

The aforementioned statistical studies are all based upon total surveys of their

respective populations, but other data have been gathered on a sample basis. Heather Walton's *A Tree God Planted* (Ethnic Minorities in Methodism Working Group, 1985), written with the assistance of Robin Ward and Mark Johnson, quantifies the black (Asian as well as Afro/Caribbean) presence in Methodism as evidenced from a questionnaire which was sent to one in ten of English and Welsh churches in June 1983 and answered by 71% of them. The authors claim to have uncovered 'many instances of how our church is hindered in presenting a faithful witness to God's love by the racist attitudes of some of its members and by the way it functions as an institution geared towards the interests of white middle-class people'. Edward Lehman's *Women Clergy in England* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1987) is a more comparative work of scholarship, using a complex range of statistical techniques to analyze opinions expressed about women's ministry by a national, stratified multi-stage cluster sample of lay church members from four mainstream denominations; 349 Methodists from about 80 different congregations were amongst the 1,414 respondents to the self-administered questionnaire distributed in January 1984.

Readers who are concerned about the potentially dehumanizing implications of this fascination with the Church's corporate identity can derive comfort from the fact that the biographical approach to Methodism has certainly not gone out of fashion. Despite apparently poor sales (the volume has now been remaindered for a mere £2.50 for a 400-page hardback), (Kenneth) *Garlick's Methodist Registry* (Edsall, 1983) can be recommended as the first full-length Free Church who's who to have appeared in this country for several decades; brief biographical sketches are given of 2,643 British and 115 Irish Methodist ministers (some 78% of the total), and, as a bonus, there is a Crockford's-style exordium by 'The Spirit of John Wesley', a summary of Methodist history, and three appendices listing all the key connexional office-holders since 1744. Studies of individual ministers include two of Edward Tegla Davies (1880-1967), both concentrating on his literary achievements, one written in Welsh by Huw Ethall (John Perry, 1980), the other in English by Pennar Davies (University of Wales Press, 1983). John Newton's *A Man for all Churches* (Epworth Press, 1984) is a life of Marcus Ward (1906-78), highlighting his ecumenical endeavours and his contribution to theological education in England and India, whilst *A Mountain Road* (Margaret Thompson, 1983) is the posthumously-published autobiography of Douglas Thompson (1903-81) who had an immensely varied career in Methodism as China missionary, army chaplain, circuit superintendent, General Secretary of what is now the Overseas Division, and President of Conference. Donald Soper's *Calling for Action* (Robson Books, 1984) 'makes no attempt at the strict continuity of a personal chronicle'; rather is it 'an autobiographical enquiry', illustrating the three propositions of the Gospel ('Peace on earth', 'Goodwill among men', 'Glory to God') by reference to the author's commitment to pacifism, socialism and Christianity respectively. William Purcell's *Odd Man Out* (Mowbray, 1983) is more conventional, a revised edition of his *Portrait of Soper* (1972) which the great man, writing in the introduction, regards as 'the definitive biography of myself'.

Several interesting studies of prominent members of the laity have also appeared. Betty Vernon has written a major work about the private and public life of the Labour politician *Ellen Wilkinson, 1891-1947* (Croom Helm, 1982) who was reared in Manchester Wesleyanism and never succeeded in getting 'its special glow' out of her blood; the narrative is necessarily thin in places on account of the

destruction of Wilkinson's personal papers after her death (the incriminating finger here seems to point to the influence of Herbert Morrison with whom she had an affair), creating a vacuum which even the extensive recourse to interview material has been unable to fill completely. Ramon Hunston's *Order! Order!* (Marshalls, 1981) is cast in the heroic, not to say quasi-hagiographical, mould, telling the story of George Thomas, who 'achieved . . . success without the aid of wealth, influential friends or intrigue', and of his loyalties to the Church, the National Union of Teachers, and the Labour Party. Hunston has drawn heavily upon many hours of conversation with Thomas who has since published his own memoirs under the title *George Thomas, Mr Speaker* (Century Publishing Co., 1985); these, however, focus almost exclusively upon his political and parliamentary career, and there are only fleeting glimpses of his Methodist involvement. Douglas Cock's *Every other Inch a Methodist* (Epworth Press, 1987) offers some chaotically-ordered jottings about Methodist life and personalities (especially at the grass roots) since the late 1930s; these mainly derive from the articles which he filed as a staff reporter on the *Methodist Recorder*, but they are supplemented by more homiletical or anecdotal matter and enlivened occasionally by some properly autobiographical elements (his recollections of Moral Re-Armament and wartime conscientious objection are particularly useful yet tantalizingly brief).

Cock's is by no means the only recent work to illuminate the local Methodist experience. David Clark's *Between Pulpit and Pew* (Cambridge University Press, 1982) is a portrait of official and folk religion in the North Yorkshire fishing village of Staithes, with special reference to the ramifications of 'Wesleyan' and 'Primitive' Methodism which continue to survive as quite separate traditions some half a century after Methodist union. The book is brilliantly researched and written, successfully combining the tools and perspectives of history, sociology and social anthropology, and making effective use of the period of participant observation which the author spent in Staithes in 1975-76. By comparison, the histories of eight Methodist secondary schools which have appeared seem rather pedestrian, but, mixing reminiscences with archival evidence, their appeal will still probably extend to others besides the former pupils and staff for whom, primarily, they are intended. In order of publication, the volumes concerned are for Penrhos College — by Monica Beardsworth [1980], Culford School — by F. E. Watson (1980), Edgehill College — by Mary Shaw (1983), Rydal School — edited by Ernest Bradfield (1985), Kent College, Canterbury — by Christopher Wright (B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1985), Kent College, Pembury — by Margaret James [1986], Trinity Hall — edited by Margaret Rawcliffe (the editor, 1986), and Shebbear College — edited by Tony Fairchild (1987). Unless otherwise stated, the schools have been their own publishers.

In conclusion, what do the 127 titles which have been discussed in this article tell us about the current state of British Methodist studies? First, they confirm that they are alive and well; considering how much literature has been excluded from analysis by the unavoidably restricted terms of reference, an average of fifteen volumes a year is surely a healthy one. Secondly, it soon becomes apparent that these works are often insufficiently well known to scholars and others reading or researching in the field; of the 127 titles, for example, only 18 have so far been noted in *Epworth Review*. Thirdly, the 'shift in interest away from the eighteenth-century origins towards later periods', which Henry Rack detected in

1980, has continued; of the 98 volumes which can be assigned to one of the three chronological divisions used in this paper, 50 deal exclusively with the generations after Wesley's death and up to the present day. Fourthly, the traditional Anglo-American dominance of British Methodist studies remains unchallenged; 124 of the 127 works emanate from publishing houses in the United Kingdom (92) or United States (32), and the national distribution of authors is essentially the same. Fifthly, the near-monopolistic position in this specialized market formerly enjoyed by religious publishers in general and by Epworth Press in particular has been well and truly broken; the Press accounts for only 14 of the 127 books, other British Methodist imprints for 23, other religious publishers for 35, and secular publishers for 55. Whilst some people may deplore this fact as an indication of the economic collapse of the religious publishing industry or of the decline of denominational consciousness in an era of ecumenical endeavour, many more will derive encouragement from the willingness of general and academic publishers to invest so heavily in Methodist-related titles, and from the growing public and scholarly demand for them, which is implicit in this trend. Two and a half centuries on from the events of Aldersgate, the future of Methodism's past, if not perhaps of its present, seems secure enough.