

Proceedings
OF THE
Wesley Historical Society

Editor: REV. JOHN C. BOWMER, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.

Volume XLII

May 1980

BOOK NOTICES

Pietismus—Methodismus—Gemeinschaftsbewegung. Zum Wandel des Begriffs "Methodisten". Ein Fragment, by Karl-Heinz Voigt. (Bremen, 1979: pp. 49, cyclostyled.)

"Your name is new, (at least, as used in a religious sense,) not heard of, till a few years ago, either in our own or any other nation." So John Wesley boldly announced to his fellow-Methodists in 1745, and reiterated in 1764 and 1777; but in fact he was quite mistaken. Given, then, Wesley's *faux pas*, key questions arise: when, where, and how was the term Methodist ("in a religious sense") first coined? In what countries and contexts was it used between the time of its first minting and spring 1729, when it became a nickname for a group of three Oxford undergraduates?

So far, answers to these and related questions pertinent to "Methodist" origins have been piecemeal and elusive. But in the first four chapters of *Pietism, Methodism and the Brethren Movement. Side lights on the changes in meaning of the term "Methodists"*, fortuitously published in the year which marked the 250th anniversary of the founding and dubbing of the "Oxford Methodists", Voigt largely remedies this long-standing omission. His headings are: 1. The term "Methodists" in the 16th and 17th centuries; 2. The term "Methodists" in German Pietism; 3. The dissemination of Pietism in England; 4. The epithet Methodist as understood by the Wesleys themselves. In these chapters Voigt monitors the double use to which the term Methodist was put in Germany and France for 150 years before the English Methodist movement. Originally, Voigt avers, "Methodist" was a technical term describing a methodic approach to inter-Confessional polemics first adopted by Roman Catholic theologians in France and then taken up in Protestantism. Later it became a thematic term relating to the rigidly methodical views about conversion held by and against Pietism *à la* Francke. It was from this latter mainstream of ideas, suggests Voigt, that the term flowed into English Methodism.

Voigt's panoramic view of Methodist semantics serves, however, only as a backcloth to his main scene, the gist of which is readily gathered from the remaining chapter-headings. These are: 5. The first interpretations in Germany of the term Methodists as applied to the English movement; 6. The propagation of Methodism on the continent of Europe; 7. Reactions to the evangelistic activities of the Methodist churches on the European continent; 8. The term "Methodists" in the polemical literature directed against the various branches of the Methodist churches in Germany between 1850 and 1900; 9. The origin of the concepts used in the adverse evaluation of the Methodist churches in Germany; 10. Summary and conclusions.

The technical shortcomings and brief compass of Voigt's work belie its intrinsic importance. The sooner the opening chapters are published in English, the better for all concerned with "Methodist" origins. Further, without accepting Voigt's tentative conclusion, plausible as it is, that Pietism was the formative factor behind the term Methodist being applied to the Wesleys and their adherents, the clues given by Voigt (and others before him) as to the semantics of the term Methodist in England need to be tested and a coherent whole made of the emergent picture of the term Methodist as used before 1729 in English theology and church life.

Irrespective of further research and its results, however, this little masterpiece stands in its own right as essential reading on "Methodist" history prior to the Wesleys.

DENIS INMAN.

Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860, by Niel Gunson. (Melbourne and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. x. 437, illustrated, £19 25p.)

Histoire des missions et églises protestantes en Afrique Occidentale des origines à 1884, par Jean Faure. Texte préparé pour l'édition par Pierre Cadier. (Yaoundé, Cameroun: Editions CLE, 1978, pp. 363, no price stated.)

Structure, content and style combine to make Gunson's workmanlike and slowly-matured book a model of missionary history. The chronological framework is provided in an 18-page prologue, the rest of the material being arranged thematically under three main headings: "The Missionary in the Making" (the social background, motives, educational level and training of the missionaries); "The Missionary in the Field" (including "culture shock", material conditions, moral and physical problems, and attitudes to local culture); and "The Missionary as a Social Force" (including the missionaries' evangelistic and educational activities, their political impact, and church growth). The conclusion is all the more devastating for being thoroughly documented, and stated with every due qualification: "It was the first duty of the missionary to save souls, but wherever he went he brought havoc to the existing social systems" (p. 333).

The missionaries in question are primarily Methodists (both Wesleyan and Calvinistic) and those of the London Missionary Society. The author is careful to distinguish where necessary between the various groups (Methodists being more often ordained, until the founding of the Theological Institution in 1834 less well educated, and more inclined to revivalism); but denominational differences seem to have been generally subordinated to the common task, and theological controversy (except, of course, with Roman Catholics) was rare.

A hundred pages of addenda set the author free to tell a complex story with admirable clarity and a fair balance between fact and comment—the latter marked at times by a humour so dry as to leave the reader pleasantly uncertain whether it is unintentional. Mistakes and questionable statements are few, but R. A. Knox is not the best authority for Wesley's doctrine of the New Birth (p. 47); the author would not have worked in 1958 "in the Muniments Room of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society" (p. 396); and it would be a remarkable missionary indeed who "had read the Bible and the Septuagint in Hebrew" (p. 75)!

So little is available in French on the history of Christianity in West Africa that our first and most important word regarding Faure's book must be one of thanks to Pierre Cadier for rescuing and revising the manuscript, which was virtually completed in 1952, and whose author died in 1967.

As one might expect, the book bears the marks of its origin. It is based on printed sources, and these not generally the most recent, though a "complementary bibliography" by Robert Cornevin is appended. The basic facts are presented clearly and (give or take a few misspellings of English names) generally accurately; but the impression of a chronicle is alleviated by the listing of "conclusions" at the end of each chapter.

Methodist missions, of British and American origin, are given their fair place. It is puzzling to find Gold Coast Methodism represented in Parts I ("The Beginnings", to 1840) and III ("The Problems", to 1884), but not in Part II ("The Rise", 1840-69). This points to a defect in the book's structure rather than to unfounded criticism of Methodist beginnings in Ghana.

Faure and Cadier have provided an invaluable manual for theological education in French-speaking Africa, though not, even at this level, a definitive work.

PAUL ELLINGWORTH.