

The Burning Heart: John Wesley, Evangelist. By A. SKEVINGTON WOOD. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967. 286 pp. \$4.95.

This is an updated sample of an old tradition of Methodist hagiography. It is filled with much learning and some wisdom, but all its axial themes are repetitions of the familiar stereotypes: the utterly parlous condition of English Christianity in the eighteenth century; Wesley as *particeps sterilis* in this shameful situation until his Aldersgate experience, the essence of which is said to have been "his abandonment of the [prevailing] libertarian theology and his adoption of the Luther-Calvin position"; his ensuing triumphal progress (to wit, "turning England upside down" and founding the Methodist Church!). The critical difficulties that abound in these stereotypes are largely disregarded.

What is comparatively new and interesting here is Wood's painstaking reconstruction of Wesley's "vagabond life," the places he preached and the people who heard him, his manner and style, his response to persecution and "the way in which Wesley's organization was geared to the after-care of his converts" (p. 194).

Of its sort, this is better than most of the sectarian eulogies of Wesley and early Methodism. The historian can learn much from its lavish detail, but he will also discover that there is more zeal and diligence in *The Burning Heart* than critical insight.

Southern Methodist University

ALBERT C. OUTLER

The Origins of the Brethren, 1825-1850. By HAROLD H. ROWDON. London: Pickering and Inglis, Ltd., 1967. xii + 223 pp. 42s.

The Origins of the Brethren provides a journey over a rather rough road through an obscure section of the landscape of modern church history in Britain. The territory covered is the Plymouth Brethren movement during the first quarter-century of its development. The route is a slightly revised doctoral thesis of about three hundred pages of text and appendices, nearly one-fourth of which is footnotes.

Rowdon, professor at London Bible College, probes deeply into the primary source material of the movement, including some materials not accessible before. His treatment is geographical and biographical, a parade mostly of little known figures shaping and working out the principles of the Brethren in Dublin, Plymouth, Bristol, and elsewhere.

Though active among the Brethren himself the author has sought to "tell it the way it is," even though the strong individualism of the leaders brought faction and schism. No doubt the work will stand as authoritative on the subject for the period treated. There is merit in such a work, for the small body of Brethren has had influence out of proportion to its size.

The work gives insight into the thought and practices of the Brethren in the beginnings, the development, and after the division which resulted in the establishment of the Exclusive Brethren as opposed to the Open Brethren. The study has an interesting appendix on the ecumenical perspective of the body: the objective was Christian unity, but the methods led to division.

By indirection the book gives useful insights into the religious situation in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century—the decadence of the church in a time of world disorder, the struggles of evangelicals within and dissenters without the church to bring religious vitality, and the new movements which in nature were spiritual, enthusiastic, apocalyptic, and/or ascetic.

Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio

OWEN H. ALDERFER