

POTTED EVANGELICALS

Donald M. Lewis, ed., *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860*, 2 vols., Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, pp.xxviii (repeated in vol.2) + 1259. £175-00.

To judge from the number of dictionaries and encyclopedias which roll (or thud) from the presses, there is an insatiable demand for packaged information. We have long since learned to value such tomes as *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* and *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* for their breadth of coverage. But of late numerous other volumes have appeared which are, however complete within their respective terms of reference, limited by confession (*Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*), or geography (*Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*), or period (*The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*), or discipline (*Biographical Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Philosophers* - to be followed by comparable volumes for the three preceding centuries), or theme (*Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*). Were it not calculated to leave one open to the charge of evincing an unsanctified mind one might plaintively enquire how many potted Wesleys do we need? But, of course, he is too important to be omitted from appropriate works of reference. Moreover, fresh accounts of the well-known can, given adequate space and competent authorship, incorporate the latest scholarly interpretations and list the most recent relevant works. Badly done - in which case the longevity of such volumes is a disadvantage - a dictionary article can mislead those whose main recourse is to handy sources into perpetrating errors for years to come.

How does the *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* measure up? The editor clearly states his objectives, which are (in brief): to fill a gap; to acknowledge the significance of evangelicalism during the period in question; to serve a wide range of professional and lay readers; and to package in convenient form a considerable amount of recent scholarship. The field of vision is not narrow: evangelicalism's impact upon society - not excluding the contribution of women - is constantly in view. The focus is on the period from the beginnings of the evangelical revival to the 'Prayer-Meeting Revival' of 1858-9; and the concern is largely with the English-speaking world. Following David Bebbington's characterization, contributors were asked to make the following definition their canon:

Evangelical Protestantism was a movement marked by: conversionism (involving a call to personal repentance and moral transformation); crucicentrism (evangelicals have centred their theology on the cross of Christ, the doctrine of the Atonement being central to their theological understanding); biblicism (the Bible being taken as the supreme authority in matters of faith and practice); and activism (a commitment to doing which springs from the moral radicalism rooted in a sense of personal

responsibility).

Under this rubric are happily gathered ministers and missionaries, officers of evangelical organizations, numerous lay people in many fields of endeavour, and a selection of non-English-speaking evangelicals - César Malan and Zinzendorf among them - who could not be excluded. Anglicans, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and also members of such important but sometimes neglected groups as the Moravians, Plymouth Brethren and Strict Baptists - all are here.

The predictable people - the Wesleys, Whitefield, the Countess of Huntingdon, Howell Harris, William Carey, Jonathan Edwards, Adoniram Judson, Charles Grandison Finney, and many others are competently handled, as one would expect. But the particular value of such a focused volume as this is that due attention can be paid to many hinterland worthies who were insufficiently famous or notorious to qualify for admission to the general reference books.

Not the least encouragement to the conscientious reviewer of such a sizeable work is the miscellaneous information which jumps off the page along the way. Thus, the American Methodist itinerant, Benjamin Abbott, was converted following a dream, while the Episcopalian, Thomasia Meade, was similarly blessed during a bout of measles. James Acland, Principal of Bradford Baptist Academy, denied the right of the state to enforce observance of the Lord's Day, and the anti-slavery Quaker, Anthony Benezet, wished to be remembered as 'a poor creature, and, through divine favour, enabled to know it'. The picture of Elizabeth Bultitude, the itinerant Primitive Methodist preacher, with her 'large round rubicund face in a poke bonnet' and her 'ejaculatory prayers with many fervent repetitions' is difficult to dislodge from the mind. David Cargill, a Wesleyan missionary to Fiji, was one of a number of evangelicals who devised a written language for those amongst whom they went. It was good to make the acquaintance of Anna Gambold, Moravian, pioneer botanist, poet and musician, who engaged in mission to the Cherokees. The way in which the naval officer turned missionary, Allen Francis Gardiner, persisted in his calling despite numerous setbacks and hardships is as inspiring as it is humbling. The black Baptist preacher, John Jasper, freed from slavery after fifty years, presided over a church which grew from nine members to two thousand - despite a preaching style which incorporated 'grunts and heavings terrible to bear'. I welcomed the full article on the Plymouth Brother, George Müller, who devoted himself to orphaned children and to the financial support of missionaries. The least flattering verdict in the entire two volumes must surely be that passed upon the 'obstinacy and Puritanism' of Charles Perry, the first Anglican bishop of Melbourne: 'What a disaster it is when a Presbyterian or Dissenting minister who has missed his way and got into the church is made a Bishop'. It would appear that few took more of the evangelistic opportunities which came their way than John Russell, the distinguished portrait painter, who pleaded for the conversion of his unsaved subjects during sittings. The house of the New York merchant and philanthropist, Lewis

Tappan, a supporter of Finney, was wrecked by a mob who disapproved of his abolitionism. No such fate befell Octavius Winslow, the notable Baptist minister who seceded to the Church of England and was *ordained* by the Bishop of Chichester in 1870.

It is always possible to think of persons missing - my old friends, James Rooker and Henry Rogers, for example. And what of James Wells and Benjamin Wallin? But the *Dictionary* is as comprehensive as may reasonably be expected, and for the most part the authors are well chosen. Similarly, it is not difficult to find gaps in the information provided - R. S. Candlish's critique of F. D. Maurice, for example - but one appreciates that when word allowances are tight hard choices have to be made. Again, the relative length of articles prompts a raised eyebrow from time to time. Alexander Duff is allowed twice as much space as Philip Doddridge; Francis Asbury receives a column more than John Wesley, and two more than Whitefield. Three columns for Henry Bidleman Bascom seems over-generous, and fourteen lines for Benjamin Beddome niggardly. On the other hand, in cases where the present entry is virtually the only treatment of a lesser known but significant person (William Briggs, for example), a longer entry is fully justified. The fact that a number of bibliographies omit significant works, by no means all of which are so recent as to have appeared during the publishing process, is much to be regretted.

These sturdily-bound volumes contain some 3,500 articles and have occupied 360 scholars drawn from many parts of the world. An index assists the user to identify the geographical area, denomination (where known), and occupation of the several subjects; however, it contains a number of slips and should be used with caution: for example, the Baptist A. Austin is also listed as a Congregational minister.

As compared with the tomes mentioned at the outset, the distinguishing characteristic of this *Dictionary* is not comprehensiveness in the ODCC sense, confession, geography, discipline or theme, but a movement or party (very broadly conceived). This suggests that the work is least effective (because one-sided) in the field of intellectual history in general and polemics in particular; for some of those against whom the evangelicals sharpened their quills (not being themselves evangelicals) are not present. But for the many good things we have received we may return thanks to the editor, his specialist advisers, the legion of contributors, and the publisher. Since for many this *Dictionary* will provide the only source of information on a large number of evangelicals of the period 1730-1860, it may be hoped that theological and other libraries will make every effort to accommodate its cost within their increasingly strained budgets.

ALAN P. F. SELL

A. P. F. Sell (ed.), *Protestant Nonconformists and the West Midlands of England*, Keele University Press 1996, 192pp + ix, hb £40.00.

It is heartening to see work whose design is to encourage followers of Nonconformity