DONALD GUTHRIE BD MTH PHD reviews Christianity and the Computer by A. Q. Morton and James McLennan (Hodder and Stoughton, 1964, 95pp. 5s.) and The Structure of Luke and Acts by A. Q. Morton and G. H. C. Macgregor (Hodder and Stoughton, 1964, 155pp. 21s.). This review first appeared in The Christian Graduate (December 1964) and is reprinted as the sequel to the article by PROFESSOR D. M. MACKAY which appeared in the Autumn 1964 issue of this Bulletin.

Considerable interest was aroused by an article in The Observer in November last year written by A. Q. Morton. In this he claimed that the application of computer methods to Christian literature would result in a radical reappraisal not only of the literature but of the doctrines based upon it. This author made the most sweeping claims of a thoroughly dogmatic kind; these were supported by very little tangible evidence, although couched in scientific terminology, and linked with extremely liberal views. In the conclusion of the article Morton declared that his work had cut the ground from under any notion of absolute religious authority. The recent appearance of two books in which Morton has a part share seemed to hold promise of a more adequately reasoned approach. However, those who expect to find a clearer exposition of his principles will be largely disappointed, for his so-called scientific approach is mixed up with a good deal of muddled thinking.

Morton and McLennan's book on Christianity and the Computer is
claimed to be a simple and non-technical account of the work so far done in the use of the computer in New Testament literary studies. The book is in two parts; one on the Bible and the other on the Church. In both parts a potemical purpose is unmistakeable. The authors aim at an objective presentation of the position of authority, in order to leave the modern Christian perfectly free to formulate his own ideas of true personal religion. It is in their attempt at understanding of their presuppositions before assessing the book, and fortunately they leave us in no doubt in their initial chapter. Accordingly scientific reading of the Bible must lead to an exculsion of all miraculous elements. In short, miracles are impossible (p. 12). Moreover they find it impossible to dissociate the historical truth of any narratives, provided some symbolic meaning can be attached to them (p. 13). With presuppositions such as these it is not surprising that at the close of the opening chapter the authors can characterize the evangelist who clutches his Bible and thundering words as a man who exercises less care and thought than when choosing his wallpaper (p. 14). The inappropriateness of the comparison will not blind the thoughtful reader to the deep-seated prejudice with which the book is written.

All this initial airing of ideas appears before the computer comes into the argument at all. It inevitably creates the impression that the computer is going to be used to support the authors' own presuppositions. This impression proves true. Before any computer evidence is cited to disprove the Pauline authorship of most of the Pauline Epistles the reader is informed that the introduction to one of them (p. 32). But the computer did not tell them that. They have interpreted the computer data to support this principle, but it is not self-evident. Isocrates and Herodotus were literary men and were very different from the missionary Paul. Moreover, Morton and McLennan make a significant step here: they have accumulated short 100 sentences as a minimum sample (p. 28), and yet according to their own table most of Paul's Epistles fall short of this requirement. Indeed, apart from the four Epistles which these writers accept as genuine (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians), only Philippians and Hebrews are long enough to contain more than 100 sentences. Moreover, as the writers admit, samples from longer works give a different proportion in the case of Kraft that they may find some stimulus from this book. But other evidence, however, will see it in a muddled and unsuccessful attempt to produce something positive out of essentially negative modern criticism.

In the other book, The Structure of Luke and Acts, A. Q. Morton collaborates with the late G. H. C. Macgregor. This book is on the same pattern as that already being on the structure of John's Gospel. The main idea is that Luke was dominated by the physical restriction of the fixed length of the manuscript material which he used and was therefore obliged to adapt his literary structure accordingly. In the case of Luke's Gospel the Proto-Luke hypothesis is accepted as a working basis; the main idea is that the text by the number of lines in each section, a mathematical basis for the Proto-Luke theory is evolved. The argument leads to the enunciation of a circular, for unless the Proto-Luke theory is first accepted on other grounds no mathematical calculations could lead one to be committed to it.

Because the writers, in common with practically all scholars, accept that one author wrote both the Gospel and Acts they proceed to study Acts on the analogy of Matthew, involving the production of a Proto-Acts theory. Unfortunately such a priori edition of Acts cannot be reconstructed by extracting any source whatever from the late G. H. C., and Pro-Acts is created by extracting Mark. The procedure used is to accept Harnack's theory regarding the early part of Acts, that Paul's mission was to the Gentiles only, and to the S2 source which was used to supplement Pro-Acts. In spite of the appeal of Harnack's theory, together with the production of a Proto-Acts theory, the authors, by the method used in this book is based on definite theological presuppositions. For instance, all miracles are assigned to the S2 source and Acts free of all kinds of difficulty. But are we to accept as scientific a process which assigns all problematic data to later editions, or procedure? It is not surprising that these writers' reconstruction of Acts is somewhat radical. It is surely a more logical procedure to make sense of Acts as it stands, if that is possible. These authors give no grounds for supposing that it is not.