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**BIBLIOGRAPHY OF
METHODIST
HISTORICAL
LITERATURE
1998**

**SILVER JUBILEE
EDITION
1974-98**

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AFTERWORD: A RETROSPECT OF TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

This completes the twenty-fifth annual bibliography of Methodist historical literature to have been published in these *Proceedings*, all prepared by the present compiler. During the course of this quarter-century some 3,500 items have been noted, and the bibliographies have extended to some 250 printed pages, the equivalent of a book in their own right or of a volume of the *Proceedings* themselves. With an average of 150 items per annum, well exceeded this year, the bibliography has become something of a monument to the quantity and quality of international writing on Methodist historical topics.

It was Alan Cass who first suggested to the compiler that it would be helpful to scholars if such a bibliography could be prepared on a regular basis, to reflect the increasing number of publications on the history of Methodism, many of them appearing in less than obvious places. This suggestion was made in a chance conversation at a conference on Methodism and British society, organized by the British Section of the World Methodist Historical Society and held at Kingsmead College, Selly Oak, Birmingham in July 1975.

The compiler approached the then editor of these *Proceedings*, the Reverend Dr Jack Bowmer, who readily agreed to find regular space in his pages for a bibliography of the history of Methodism. The first edition of the bibliography, covering publications of the year 1974, was prepared during the final months of 1975, submitted in January 1976 and published in the June 1976 issue of the *Proceedings*. It was, in retrospect, a rather imperfect piece of work, extending to a mere four and a half pages and taking the form of a single alphabetical (by author) listing of 120 entries described with a bare minimum of bibliographic detail.

Since that time a number of improvements have been made to the content and appearance of the bibliography. Fuller bibliographic descriptions of the entries commenced with the 1978 edition, as did articulation of some clearer criteria for inclusion and exclusion of material. From the 1981 edition the single alphabetical listing was abandoned in favour of the present structure, with entries grouped by subject and serially-numbered to facilitate cross-referencing. The subject headings have been refined on a number of occasions since. From the 1987 edition the bibliography has been published as a supplement to the *Proceedings*, rather than as an article within them.

Timeliness of publication was a problem for a number of years, arising from a variety of circumstances. Matters were greatly improved thanks to the willingness of the Executive Committee of the Wesley Historical Society to fund the printing of the 1992, 1993 and 1994 bibliographies within a twelve-month period from May 1994 to May 1995, in an effort to clear the backlog, and to transfer the printing of the 1993 and subsequent bibliographies to the Methodist Publishing House. This latter move means that the bibliography can be typeset directly from the compiler's word-processed file

on diskette. The bibliography is now prepared within three months of the end of the year covered and issued to subscribers two months later.

The bibliography has concentrated on recording books, pamphlets, articles, essays and unpublished postgraduate theses on the history of British and Irish Methodism. Items dealing with British and Irish overseas missions, and the native churches which they gave rise to, have only been included to the extent that they cast light on Methodist developments in the British Isles. Coverage of chapel and circuit histories has been restricted, in the main, to publications of more than fifty pages, unless of special significance. Other works of an ephemeral or substantially non-historical nature are also mostly overlooked.

Although most of the works recorded have been published in English, attempts have been made to identify important publications in Welsh and the major Western European languages. Sadly, both the compiler's linguistic competence and the limited holdings of United Kingdom libraries have meant that the bibliography has generally not extended to Far Eastern Methodist scholarship, which is considerable. In particular, there has been a good deal of writing in Japanese on John Wesley and other aspects of British Methodist history which deserves a wider audience.

Despite repeated appeals for assistance, just a tiny minority of entries in the bibliography derive from suggestions made by readers of the *Proceedings*. The compiler would be greatly helped if, in particular, authors could alert him to their latest publications and, wherever practicable, let him have offprints. In the relative absence of contributor input, the compiler is dependent upon his own systematic searching of publications, including regular monitoring of nearly 300 periodicals. Bibliographies, footnotes, book reviews, abstracts and publishers' catalogues are also all avidly scoured for ideas. Inevitably, many items are still (worryingly) discovered by the purest serendipity.

Wherever possible, no item is included in the bibliography unless it has been seen and its relevance personally verified, even if this occasions a delay in its listing. Regrettably, physical inspection does not prove possible in approximately one sixth of entries, especially for articles in specialized American theological journals, which are not widely held in United Kingdom libraries and where reliance has to be placed on abstracting and indexing services. Betty Jarboe's *John and Charles Wesley: a bibliography* (1987) and Kenneth Collins' 'A Wesley bibliography' site on the World Wide Web have also been extremely useful in retrospectively uncovering American journal literature.

The bibliography has been largely conceived as a current awareness tool, directing researchers to the most recent works on the history of British and Irish Methodism. Now that it has reached twenty-five separate editions, it has to be admitted that it has become somewhat unwieldy as a mechanism for retrospective enquiry. Unfortunately, there are currently no plans (nor resources) to compile and publish a cumulative list

nor to create a searchable electronic database. However, a selection of the most important entries from the 1974-85 bibliographies does appear in the compiler's retrospective bibliography in the fourth volume of *A history of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (1988), and the non-serial publications from the 1980-87 bibliographies are critically reviewed in the author's article in the May 1988 issue of the *Epworth Review*.

It is hard to determine whether the bibliography as presently conceived and delivered will survive for another twenty-five years to celebrate its golden jubilee. Setting aside the compiler's physical, mental and financial ability to continue with the task, it is possible that a bibliography published as print on paper and devoted to a listing of works output as print on paper may at some stage become an anachronism in the face of an ongoing revolution in electronic publishing. Whatever the future may hold, the compiler is certainly grateful to his two editors (Jack Bowmer and Alan Rose) for supporting the publication of the bibliography, to his two typesetters (Alfred Taberer and Sue Gascoigne) for coping so accurately with what is always a complex text, and to his many readers who write with periodic testimonials to the value which they attach to his work.

CLIVE D. FIELD