BOOK REVIEWS


This book adds much to an understanding of one of the important aspects of the early developing civilization of western Pennsylvania and its borders. It deals with the development of the Pittsburgh Methodist Conference from its beginning to the present. Dr. James R. Joy, librarian of the Methodist Historical Society, evaluates this volume as follows: "Among about 100 volumes of Regional History on our shelves this one easily ranks first. I congratulate the author, the Conference (Pittsburgh), and the readers of this volume."

The particular occasion for the publication of this book was to help celebrate the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Pittsburgh Methodist Conference, which then included western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and much of West Virginia. The writing of this volume was officially authorized and sponsored by the conference. Dr. Smeltzer was requested to write it, since he has been a careful student of Methodist history for many years.

The story is presented in eight chapters entitled as follows: I—Settlement of the Headwaters of the Ohio, 1750-1800; II—The Story of Methodist Beginnings, 1750-1800; III—How Early Methodism Gathered Strength, 1800-1825; IV—Formation of the Pittsburgh Conference: Period of Growth, Division, and Schism, 1825-1850; V—The Transition from Circuits to Churches, 1850-1875; VI—Final Division of Conference: New Agencies, 1875-1900; VII—Pittsburgh Becomes a Great Conference, 1900-1925; and VIII—To the Mid-Twentieth Century, 1925-1950. The above titles indicate how the author developed the story in a meaningful and rather dramatic manner. Even though the number of pages of this book indicates that it is not a small volume, yet the mere number does not indicate the exhaustive amount of material contained in it. Seemingly, the author did not overlook the developmental story of any of the numerous phases and activities of Methodism in this area.

In order to present the regional story more meaningfully he com-
monly begins the development of any phase or activity by introducing its beginnings in Methodism in general before its regional development. In this way the author shows in what matters local Methodism was a follower or a leader and what part it played in the development of Methodism in general. He shows that this part has been a very important one.

The "mother" circuit which first served this area was formed in Berkeley, on the upper Potomac just east of the mountains, in 1778. Later this circuit was divided and subdivided until many circuits covered the area. The oldest circuit in the local area was Redstone, formed in 1784. Bishop Francis Asbury played a unique role in the early development of Methodism here. The story of the early circuit riders is nothing less than thrilling. Camp meetings and revivals greatly helped the circuit riders in whipping up religious emotions and convictions.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this story, as has also been true in the history of other denominations, was the divisions and schisms which took place. The first of these was led by certain church leaders who believed in a greater democratization in the administration of Methodism and more lay participation. These differences led to the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church in Baltimore in 1830. Another dissenting group formed the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Utica in 1843. Then the slavery issue caused the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to be formed in Louisville in 1845. In 1939 all these groups reunited, except the Wesleyans, to form the Methodist Church, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.

Among the topics and matters dealt with in one or more of the chapters, as they began and developed, are missionary efforts and enterprises, admissions and qualifications of ministers, recognition of both clerical and lay leaders, church publications such as the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, the growth of churches and membership (presented by numerous tables), the establishment of ministerial tenure, the development of a pension system, the publication of hymnals, the establishment of colleges, the organization of women's work such as the ladies' aid work, the introduction and promotion of Sunday School work, the organization of youth work in the form of the Epworth Leagues, the creation and development of the Home for the Aged, the work of the Methodist Church Union, the development of the Jumonville Training Center, and data revealing ministerial salaries during the different periods. Most of these matters are treated very factually, often with the aid of tables and graphs.
However, the facts are presented in such a way as not to destroy the readability of the historical story. Neither is the book encyclopedic.

The data have largely been secured from primary sources. The statistical data were largely secured from the General Conference Minutes, and the annual Minutes of the Pittsburgh Conference, originally covering parts of three states. Other very valuable sources were: Bishop Asbury's Journal, covering the years from 1771 to 1815; the manuscript diaries of Robert Ayres (on file at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania), a Methodist circuit rider from 1785 to 1789, and a Protestant Episcopal clergyman thereafter; and the issues of the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate from 1834 to 1932. Throughout, the book is well documented. However, a bibliography should have been included at the end.

Dr. Smeltzer is to be commended for presenting very objectively, yet interestingly, the development of a church in a vital region of the United States. Only a reading of the book will convince one of the exhaustive research and work that was involved in the writing of this history.

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Anyone at all familiar with the publication of a body of historical documents knows the great difficulty of locating all relevant items. This was the case with the publication of the papers of Sir William Johnson. The first eight volumes, organized chronologically, contained mainly papers at Albany listed in the famous Johnson Calendar. As all who have used the eight volumes know well, some of the papers so listed and published in these early volumes were badly mutilated as a result of the disastrous fire of 1911.

While the first eight volumes were in process of publication, knowledge of the existence elsewhere of papers, not published there in chronological order, began to accumulate. Provision for the publication of such additional items was relatively inescapable. This situation has led to what