

Book Review

ROBINSON, James, *Divine Healing: The Holiness–Pentecostal Transition Years, 1890–1906*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013. vi + 208pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9781620324080. £15.00 (Kindle edn £6.65).

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This ambitious survey of the divine healing movement 1890–1906, and how it fed into the nascent Pentecostal movement, is a welcome contribution to the history of charismatic Christianity, and while its focus is acknowledged to be Western-centric (p. ix), many will find this a useful synthesis of some of the latest research on the subject. This is the second of a trilogy on divine healing, the first volume addressing the formative years 1830–90, and the third is planned to cover the period 1906–30. In this volume, the opening two chapters focus on the various facets of transition from the divine healing movement, to Pentecostalism, in the Wesleyan–Holiness tradition in America (p. 35), and the Reformed–Holiness tradition in America respectively (p. 37), with a discussion of John Alexander Dowie taking up a large section of the latter (27 pages, or more than 10% of the book). Chapter 3 continues the focus on Dowie (a further 23 pages) by charting the legacy of Zion City in Africa, Britain and Europe, and through a series of biographical character studies (p. 85). Laudable attention is given to women in the divine healing movement throughout, but chapter 4 is dedicated to the “feminine contribution” (p. 109), with two interesting excursions on neurasthenia and Christian Science. Robinson then turns his attention to the role of divine healing in the British Holiness–Pentecostal transition (pp. 154–83) before reaching a lengthy (twenty eight page) conclusion. In this review I will concentrate on aspects most pertinent to the development of Pentecostalism.

The American Frank Sandford (1862–1948) is the subject of the first of numerous biographical vignettes that form the backbone of Robinson’s book (p. 16). Sandford was drawn into the Holiness movement by reading Hannah Whitall Smith, and by meeting A.B. Simpson at a healing conference. He and his wife broke all denominational ties and established a small Bible school in 1894 that eventually became a large complex, colloquially known as “Shiloh” (p. 17). Sandford and others are defined by Robinson as “radical healers”, believing physical healing was guaranteed in the atonement, by faith, and without medical intervention (p. 2). Tongues also featured among the charismatic expressions at Shiloh, and it was here that Charles Parham first heard ecstatic utterances in 1900 (p. 16). Robinson’s treatment of Sandford and others is “warts and all”, resisting the temptation to slip into hagiography, yet he is not overly cynical

content to take some accounts of healing at face value. John Alexander Dowie (1847–1907) and his legacy naturally occupy a large section of the book (pp. 47–108). Dowie's centrality in this volume is explained by Robinson's conviction that his ministry was pivotal. It began the move away from former Holiness-era healings – “Christocentric, theologically creative, individualised in practice, restrictive in being sanctification-directed” – towards a more Pentecostal-era type healing practice: “Spirit-centred, outward facing, personality driven, with mass appeal and conversion directed” (p. 62). In 1900 Dowie established Zion City, an alcohol-free, medicine-free religious utopia. It attracted some 6,000 residents, among them many names that are familiar to the early years of Pentecostalism: Charles Parham, John G. Lake, Arthur Booth-Clibborn, Gerrit Polman, Harry and Margaret Cantel, and many others indirectly connected. The few pages Robinson devotes to R.A. Torrey and A.T. Pierson (pp. 74–8), by comparison, sandwiched between large Dowie sections, could be viewed as somewhat perfunctory.

Two female healing evangelists of contrasting style constitute the subject of much of chapter 4. The rise of Maria Woodworth-Etter (1844–1924), “the trance evangelist”, from a deprived background, plagued with tragedy, and with no formal education to an internationally recognized healing evangelist, is as fascinating as it was unlikely (p. 111). Her ministry began drawing considerable attention in 1883 when two women fell prostrate, “as if dead”, a phenomenon (more recently termed “slain in the Spirit”) that became a recurring feature of her ministry, in addition to divine healings (pp. 112–13). She precipitated the so-called “power evangelism” typified in the ministries of John Wimber and “third wavers” (p. 114). Carrie Judd Montgomery (1858–1946) was by contrast middle-class, well educated and had a more reserved style. She had herself been healed as a result of advice from the Afro-American healing evangelist Mrs Sarah Mix (p. 123). Montgomery and her husband opened healing homes, attended the London Healing Conference of 1885, were made honorary officers of the Salvation Army, and both eventually became Pentecostal shortly after the Azusa Street revival (pp. 131–2). Her books and periodical (*Triumphs of Faith*) were widely enjoyed by Holiness and Pentecostal adherents of divine healing alike.

The Holiness–Pentecostal transition in Britain is addressed in chapter 5, but after an opening section on “metaphysical alternatives”, such as pseudo-Christian spiritualism, the segue into the section on Keswick Holiness feels awkward (p. 162). I would suggest that this section could certainly have benefited from engaging with the most obvious primary source for Keswick: *The Keswick Week*, an annual book of sermons recorded verbatim at every convention since 1893. Both Pierson and Torrey were regular speakers at Keswick, and both Alexander Boddy and Polhill attended the conventions, although its importance was diminished, in the eyes of Boddy and Polhill, by the emergence of Pentecostalism. A series of biographical vignettes complete the chapter: James M. Pollock (Alexander Boddy's brother-in-law and contributor to Elizabeth Baxter's *Eleventh Hour* periodical) became Pentecostal, although he later doubted the validity of his experiences (pp. 171–4); Max Reich (who succeeded Boardman at Bethshan healing home in London) became “to all appearances” Pentecostal

(pp. 174–6); Eleanor Crisp and Lydia Walshaw (both with a history of involvement at Bethshan) became definite and active Pentecostals (pp. 176–80); and Richard Howton, a healing evangelist, probably became sympathetic to Pentecostalism on the basis that his church was subsequently taken over by George Jeffreys (the healing evangelist and founder of Elim Pentecostal denomination; pp. 180–82).

Those interested in charismatic Christianity will find Robinson's series of biographical vignettes a helpful reference tool. I enjoyed it; although I was frequently frustrated by statements with no obvious supporting reference, but it is by the same token a very accessible read. I encountered typos and some minor factual inaccuracies, perhaps inevitable in such a sweeping survey, but this volume represents a helpful weaving of the various divine healing streams into a cogent narrative with respect to their influence on the emergence of Pentecostalism in America and England (and to a much lesser extent elsewhere).