



The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity, 1825-1925

Dale A. Johnson

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This book addresses several dimensions of the transformation of English Nonconformity over the course of an important century in its history. It begins with the question of education for ministry, considering the activities undertaken by four major evangelical traditions (Congregationalist, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian) to establish theological colleges for this purpose, and then takes up the complex three-way relationship of ministry/churches/colleges that evolved from these activities. As author Dale Johnson illustrates, this evolution came to have significant implications for the Nonconformist engagement with its message and with the culture at large. These implications are investigated in chapters on the changing perception or understanding of ministry itself, religious authority, theological questions (such as the doctrines of God and the atonement), and religious identity.

In Johnson's exploration of these issues, conversations about these topics are located primarily in addresses at denominational meetings, conferences that took up specific questions, and representative religious and theological publications of the day that participated in key debates or advocated contentious positions. While attending to some important denominational differences, *The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity, 1825-1925* focuses on the representative discussion of these topics across the whole spectrum of evangelical Nonconformity rather than on specific denominational traditions.

Johnson maintains that too many interpretations of nineteenth-century Nonconformity, especially those that deal with aspects of the theological discussion within these traditions, have tended to depict such developments as occasions of decline from earlier phases of evangelical vitality and appeal. This book instead argues that it is more appropriate to assess these Nonconformist developments as a collective, necessary, and deeply serious effort to come to terms with modernity and, further, to retain a responsible understanding of what it meant to be evangelical. It also shows these developments to be part of a larger schema through which Nonconformity assumed a more prominent place in the English culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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