

not-yet and already! When we allow that tension to snap, our quest peters out in aimless wandering, or gets stuck in a compulsive settling down" (p. 126). Denis Edwards, on the other hand, makes our experience of God hard to come by. It begins with a 'pre-conceptual' experience of the presence, and in order to make this into expressible theology we have to investigate our different modes of experiencing, of knowing by love, of recognising the beauty of nature, of feeling hurt, of being confronted by death, by failure, by loneliness...And so we continue to analyse our own contacts with reality, Jesus's contact with his Father, the process continues until a synthesis of vital experiences is elaborated. Behold, we have a theology of experience before, it seems, we have actual experience of God, when we may understand our social surroundings in the light of His presence and eventually open the door to contemplative prayer. More difficult to read, with less felicity of expression, but this may be a way to allow the reality of the Spirit to guide us on The Way.

The contemporaneity of *Christian Mysticism Today* appears in a surprising chapter on 'The Irish Conflict' in which one might be excused for thinking the author had some sympathy for the mysticism of blood. But, no, the exigencies of contemporary society press William Johnston into collaboration with Gandhi as well as with the Buddhist tradition. "As Christians we must join hands with people of other faiths. We must humbly learn from their theological insights and their age-old wisdom" and work for world peace (p. 154). The reader should not skip 'The Irish Conflict', but he should certainly continue to the end through the final chapter on our Lady, 'The Woman'.

On last analysis it must be said that the shortest and least 'scientific' of these four volumes is the most satisfactory. This is the simple work of Jock Dalrymple, *Simple Prayer*. 'Simple' should not be confused with 'easy' or taken as a 'short cut'. But following him 'Towards Unity', through the Dark Night and the Cloud of Unknowing, the Way is not complicated.

CONRAD PEPLER OP

**CHRISTIAN ENGLAND: FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR, by David Edwards. Collins, London, 1984. Pp. 378. £12.95.**

This is the third and final volume of the Provost of Southwark's lively, well-written canter through English religious history. The terrain is for the most part familiar, but Dr Edwards relieves the onward march of institutional history by literary interludes, especially studies of religious poets such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson and Hopkins. The work is up-to-date, and an excellent bibliography is provided in the footnotes. Dr Edwards says that his three volumes are 'the first ecumenical history of English Christianity': this is true in the sense that in the present volume he divides his space very fairly between different denominations, but he finds it difficult to avoid an Anglican perspective. English religious history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was far from being 'ecumenical' in its tone and content; one needs a conflict model, which church historians have been loath to use in recent years.

It is his professional anxiety to be 'ecumenical' which explains Dr Edward's reliance on a familiar framework of interpretation. Ecumenism by itself does not give him a radically fresh view of the changes in English religion since the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival. Dr Edwards is aware of the church historian's occupational hazard, the temptation to see triumphs of grace in all directions, and he closes his book on a sombre note, describing the England of the Great War as 'no longer Christian in any very substantial sense'. On the way to 1914, however, grace has certainly had its moments, and one is left wondering why so many remarkable Christians did not leave something more substantial behind them. Part of the answer lies in exaggeration: Elizabeth Fry, for example, is praised for bringing the gospel to people in prison, but we are not told that she *failed*, and knew that she had failed, to prevent the transformation of the old prisons into the inhuman penitentiary system which we have inherited, but

not very much improved. The triumphs of grace usually have their limitations.

More important, however, is the need for a new look at the pattern of events, and this comes out in Dr Edward's treatment of nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism. He emphasises, quite rightly, the separateness of the community, the devotion of its priests, the Irishness of the majority of its laity as time went on, the intransigence of Manning, the elder Ward and Vaughan as they faced what to them was an alien society. He does not share Edward Norman's enthusiasm for the Ultramontane tone, but neither does he quite take in the sadness of Derek Holmes's view of what had happened to English Catholicism by 1914. Because his own point of view is both traditional and ecumenical, he cannot get close to the phenomenon of a Catholic resurgence. As the twentieth century advances, however, it becomes clearer that Wiseman, Newman and von Hügel built better than they knew, that the fundamental events in ecclesiastical history in nineteenth-century England were Catholic Emancipation, the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, the mass movement of Irish Catholics into England, the Catholic Modernist crisis, and the rejection of Anglican orders in *Apostolicae curae* in 1896—I am well aware that one should not mention this last event as important, but nothing has actually been done to change that situation after nearly one hundred years. In other words, what slowly gathered was a profound shift in the English religious subculture, the collapse of Nonconformity, the decline of Anglicanism and the growth of Catholicism to a point at which a conflict-model is more significant than an ecumenical one. Dr Edwards's sombre coda does not cover him against the possibility that his account needed a still more radically altered structure. It is perhaps significant that he leaves his story of British missions in China poised as though the societies were on the eve of great advances; this no doubt reflects the optimism of the missionaries in the years after the Boxer rising, but Dr Edwards is well aware that modern missionary historians have no doubt that Victorian Christianity made only slight inroads into Chinese society. Much the same was probably true of the immense efforts of Victorian Christians to rebuild England as a Christian country.

JOHN KENT

**THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY: A Historical Introduction to the New Testament** by Schuyler Brown. *Oxford University Press, 1984. Pp x + 169. paper £3.95.*

This is the most recent of the highly commendable Oxford Bible Series edited by Peter Ackroyd and Graham Stanton, which has begun to provide a sequence of excellent introductory studies where established scholars can review broader themes and questions without becoming entangled in complex detail. The author in this case, formerly of Heythrop College, is now Associate Professor of New Testament in St. Michael's College, University of Toronto.

The key to a proper appreciation of the volume is the subtitle—particularly the word 'historical'. Brown has a clear idea of what is the historian's task and of what are the possibilities and limitations of the historian's method. He quite properly insists that 'a critical reading of the sources is the only one possible for the historian .... He has no choice but to ask whether things really happened in the way in which they are represented in his material' (p. 17). Brown recognizes also the importance of 'faith affirmations', but insists that 'his proper task is a "horizontal" explanation which neither denies nor takes into consideration the possible operation of "vertical" influences' (p. 17). In the following pages he stays firmly within the limits of the historical method thus defined, but rightly refuses to let the methodological limitation push him towards reductionist explanations. Good examples of the careful balance he thus achieves are his brief treatments of Jesus' miracles and the empty tomb tradition (pp. 60—1, 75—7).

The opening chapter, on 'History and the New Testament', also deals with other preliminary questions like the dating of the NT books and the character of their sources,