

AN HISTORIAN'S APPROACH TO RELIGION. By Arnold Toynbee.  
(Oxford University Press; 21s.)

This is a book whose importance can easily be misconceived. Its title is open to the charge of ambiguity, an ambiguity which appears in the book itself. 'The present book', we read, 'is an attempt to describe, not the personal religion of the author, but the glimpse of the Universe that his fellow-historians and he are able to catch from the point of view at which they arrive following the historian's professional path.' In fact, as the book develops, it is inevitably the author's own approach to religion which becomes the business of the book. Herein lies its importance, and herein lies its interest.

To begin with, it is true, Professor Toynbee expands and develops much which has appeared in *The Study of History*: the behaviour, the problems, the psychology and the normal evolution of religious bodies, the rhythm of their development and their decline. Perhaps, at any rate for many readers, the most interesting section is his exposition of the recurring problems and mistakes of their leaders, and also the section on 'Encounters between Higher Religions and Idolized Oecumenical Empires'. The history, then, is very much what the readers of Professor Toynbee's earlier books will expect: it has the same virtues and is open to the same objections. What of the religion?

Professor Toynbee, it goes without saying, has pleased neither side. The Christians find him a far less enthusiastic ally than, clearly, some of them had hoped that he might be; while those historians who affect the thesis that religion is just one particularly tiresome form of nonsense are naturally loud in their disapproval. Faced by such sentences as 'self-centredness is thus a necessity of Life, but this necessity is also a sin', the Christian hesitates. The infidel is inclined to make Castlereagh's description of the Holy Alliance, 'a piece of sublime mysticism and nonsense', his own description of a view of history which makes civilization the handmaid of religion, and history not so much a fascinating appraisal of the contents of the laundry baskets of politics and economics as an exercise in erudite prophecy. And the protests of the 'antinomian historians' at being summoned to the top of Mount Carmel by a highly individual Elias have been understandably vigorous.

Yet, in fact, the book is not really that 'Glimpse of the Universe' which the historian can catch from the vantage point in time of his own professional standpoint. It is the glimpse gained by one man who is, among other things, a distinguished historian; and the difference is considerable. It is this which explains the startling fact that half a closely packed page of the index is taken up by Bayle, while Augustine has to be content with three casual references. So far as this book is concerned, the *City of God* might never have been written.

How much of this book, one must ask, is the last cartridge—and how splendidly it bangs!—of Edwardian liberalism, and how much does it display the shape of things to come? Twenty-five years from now, when the book is taken from the shelf by an intelligent young man, will the author's attitude to religion evoke a stifled yawn or a start of recognition? For what is both important and fascinating is precisely Professor Toynbee's attitude to religion. The book is not only an interpretation of religion from the standpoint of a gifted historian. It is much more: it is an intensely personal drama played against the backcloth of universal history. Hence its importance.

T. CHARLES EDWARDS

THE EARLY CHURCH: HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES. By Oscar Cullman. (S.C.M. Press; 25s.)

Dr Cullman's work has always been marked by three rare qualities: strong sanity, exact scholarship and the spirit of Christian charity. Any attempt by him to write the history of the early Church would be of exceptional interest. Unfortunately the title of this volume is slightly misleading. It consists of papers already published, barely linked together and of unequal value. They include a study on the origins of the Christmas feast which is an admirable example of *vulgarisation* in the good French sense of the term. An article on early Christianity and civilization is doomed to fail through lack of space—only fourteen pages are allotted to it, and there is no attempt to define civilization or to allow for regional or social differentiation among early Christians. There is a particularly stimulating essay on the meaning of '*regnum Christi*' which contains a convincing interpretation of the meaning of *exousia*. It includes two articles which will be of vital importance for any study of the development of Dr Cullman's thought: his 'Necessity and Function of Higher Criticism', first printed in 1949, and 'The Tradition', written three years ago, in which he makes his answer to P. Daniélou with consistent and characteristic courtesy. Even if the present volume does not add very greatly to our knowledge of the history of the early Church, it is an invaluable source for the history of early Cullman.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

BYZANTIUM AND ISTANBUL. By Robert Liddell. (Cape; 25s.)

Mr Robert Liddell has written the best of all travel books on Aegean Greece perhaps partly because he cared for it so much. If now he fails with Constantinople it is perhaps primarily because he so much dislikes it.