

RELIGION IN BRITAIN SINCE 1900. By G. Stephens Spinks. (Andrew Dakers; 18s.)

This survey is one of the series of *The Twentieth Century Histories*. It deals mainly of course with Christianity but devotes a chapter to the (other) religions of modern Britain. Dr Spinks, until lately editor of the *Hibbert Journal*, has written the principal chapters, with the collaboration of Dr E. L. Allen for those on developments in British theology, and of Dr J. W. Parkes for those on sociology and the ecumenical movement.

Covering an immense amount of ground, (hardly any religious event or development is unmentioned), the treatment is necessarily factual, and, where assessment or explanation of the nature of theological tendency is attempted, is too superficial to be of any great value except as a handy index of events and circumstances. Anyone who wants the details and dates, for instance, of the union of the various separated branches of Scottish Presbyterianism, or the circumstances of the formation of the Free Church Federal Council, or the stages in the growth of the Student Christian Movement, or the main landmarks of ecumenical progress, will find them all here, clearly set out, together with much more information of a similar kind.

The authors are Liberal Christians with little sympathy for post-liberal theological developments which they suspect as authoritarian escapism from historical reality; still less have they any feeling for the fundamental positions for which the Catholic Church stands. They have made good resolutions about impartiality but these would seem to have fallen short of consulting a Catholic authority on this aspect of their subject. A Catholic naturally turns to references to the position and influence of the Church in Britain. Unconscious prepossession peeps out at many points. We are authoritarian, and so any enthusiasm for freedom we show must be suspect as arising from expediency rather than principle.

The diminishing success of the co-operation movement which began with such a flourish at the time of the inauguration of the *Sword of the Spirit* is attributed to the many limitations imposed from the Catholic side. Such limitations as were imposed were there from the first and were accepted by all as being involved in the Catholic position. The movement came to a standstill as far as Christian co-operation was concerned because, having accepted these limitations as necessary, Free Church and Anglican participants found them uncongenial in practice and grew cold in their support.

The long-drawn-out battle for primary education under the leadership of the Catholic hierarchy elicits the comment that it long prevented Catholicism in England from making those impressive contributions

which it obviously had the gifts to make but not the leisure to produce. This is sympathetic and generous, but the account given of the contribution actually made is scarcely adequate even by the standards of other parts of the book. For the rest, *Religion in Britain since 1900* is an excellently constructed atlas or guide book of events; it is not much more.

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

THE ASCENT OF MOUNT SION. By Bernardino of Laredo. Translated, with introduction and notes, by E. Allison Peers. (Faber; 21s.)

At a time when pseudo-mysticism is all the fashion, when materialism itself has developed a 'mystique' and when the term 'mysticism' is so often interpreted as synonymous with emotion, it is refreshing to turn to the pre-Tridentine spiritual writers who, when they wrote of mysticism, viewed it against the background of a sound theological system in which it had its allotted place.

*The Ascent of Mount Sion* forms the third part of a treatise on the spiritual life written by a Franciscan lay-brother who before he became a friar had been a doctor and who had earlier written two medical treatises. Born in 1482, Bernardino of Laredo lived the greater part of his life in Seville, where he died in 1540. According to Professor Peers, in philosophy and theology he was largely self-taught (Introduction, p. 14). *The Ascent*, with Osuna's *Abecedario* and Alonso de Madrid's *Arte de Servis a Dios*, was the book which most profoundly influenced St Teresa.

Laredo's teaching is in many respects similar to that of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and he lays great stress on 'quiet contemplation', though he is careful to point out in several places that the duties of one's state of life must come before all. The book is not a systematic treatise and it is not always clear whether Laredo is referring to what is technically known as 'the prayer of quiet' or not. There are passages in the book of great lyrical beauty and it contains much that will be new to those who are familiar only with the English mystics. Laredo's teaching that one may begin the ways of contemplation by trying to find God in creatures, even in so tiny a creature as the ant, for instance, is beyond the reach of no one.

The translation is of the high quality one has come to associate with the name of Professor Peers. One small point: 'our very great Lady' and 'our great Lady' (pp. 73, 115), might surely be rendered by 'our Most Blessed Lady' or some such more usual phrase without doing too much violence to the Spanish original.

K.P.

GUILT. By Caryl Houselander. (Sheed and Ward; 18s.)

The word *guilt*, together with its derivatives, has a variety of inter-related but quite different meanings. It can mean plain wrong-doing; or it can be applied to states and dispositions arising from wrong-