

movements is well known. War, the mediocrity of democracy, the cult of the hero, primitive virility—Professor Horowitz knows well where we have heard all these slogans before. The unfaced question is: can they possibly lead to anything else? By and large, creeds of pointless violence, though we should take note of them, are a dead bore, and this book does not make us change our minds. In the second section of the book, which I find most interesting (pp. 190–5), the author makes a gallant attempt to sum up the paradoxes of Sorel's thought under five heads. These are, as he says, unresolved paradoxes, and they should go far to discourage other writers from trying to straighten Sorel out. They also help to estimate Sorel's position: a confused, minor thinker in the tradition of one country. Horowitz amusingly says that the Anglo-American Socialist tradition has not managed to produce so important a figure—unless it be Harold Laski? This is an even more telling assessment.

BERNICE HAMILTON

VOICES IN STONE, by Ernst Doblhofer; Souvenir Press; 30s.

Of the half million or so years during which, we are told, our ancestors have lived on the earth, it is only in the last 5,000 years that man has learnt to perpetuate his thought in writing. When the Sumerians began, about 3,000 B.C., to formulate their primitive script, man's development from the savage state towards civilization seems to have received a sudden, but lasting, impulse. 'Writing allows the thinking man to reflect upon himself', writes Ernst Doblhofer. The extent to which it has in fact stimulated our reflective capacity is marked by the very evident impetus which every form of speculation, knowledge and culture has manifested since the invention of writing. To-day we know about 400 distinct scripts (not counting forerunners and minor variants), some of which were for long, even for thousands of years, utterly forgotten, until discovered by archaeologists. Egyptian hieroglyphs on the other hand were never actually lost from view, but were nevertheless the subject of many fanciful 'readings' and were even considered by some to be mere ornament. Most of the ancient writings have now been deciphered, with the resulting revelation that everyone has read about—of the cultures of vast civilizations belonging to what used to be called 'the prehistoric age'. But no culture is necessarily prehistoric, if it produced writing which can be dug up and read to-day.

In *Voices in Stone* we have a fascinating series of accounts of the actual decipherment of scripts, ranging from Mesopotamian and Old Persian cuneiform to Creto-Mycenaean Linear B, which has been broken only in the last ten years. Included is the story of Dhorme's success in 1946 with the Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra and with Gublitic writing. The author has wisely not attempted to give a universal view of decipherment, but has concentrated on eight or nine scripts 'significant for the civilization of the West'. Full of enthusiasm for his

subject, he tells us the stories from the point of view of the decipherers themselves. We follow their progress at each step, whether it be a true advance or an error leading to a false trail which may not be discovered in the lifetime of that investigator. We see to what extent success is due to luck or accident (it is a remarkable extent actually, as Doblhofer makes a point of showing us), and how much it owes to brilliant intuition and reasoning, and to sheer perseverance. Many of the memorable episodes in the history of decipherment are here: the moment, for example, in 1872, when George Smith found that what he was reading on Assyrian clay tablets was a version of the story of the great Flood in the Bible. The tablets were part of a 'Chaldean Genesis', then still unknown to the Christian world. We are told too of Champollion, perhaps the greatest of all decipherers, who, fifty years earlier, burst into the Institut in Paris, where his brother was working, with the excited cry '*je tiens l'affaire*', and immediately collapsed in a dead faint. He had just found the solution to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, thereby at last opening the sealed volumes of ancient Egyptian history, which had remained unread for 1,500 years. And then, if we may mention one more example, there is the account of the decipherment of the Linear B script in 1952 by Ventris and Chadwick, and the consequent discovery of 'the most ancient known form of the Greek language such as was spoken 700 years before Homer'.

This book has been written for the general public, as must by now be obvious; but it should make interesting and even useful reading to many who are not already expert in the sciences of philology and decipherment. For anyone who cares to try his hand in this field, there remains the Etruscan tongue, whose 9,000 inscriptions that we possess still retain their secret. And the world still awaits an explanation of the mystifying resemblance between the so far unbroken scripts of the Indus valley and Easter Island, some 4,000 years and several times as many miles, apart.

ROBERT SHARP, O.P.

Notices

CROSS AND CRUCIFIX (Mowbray, 21s.) is a study, by C. E. Pocknee, of the place of the symbol of redemption in Christian worship and devotion. More than thirty illustrations illustrate the theme, and especially the development of realism in its representation.

THE MORAL LAW, a translation with analysis and notes of Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* by H. J. Paton, now appears (after six impressions in another format) in Hutchinson's University Library (12s. 6d.).