

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.

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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.).

MEDICINE AND MEN (Burns and Oates, 21s.), by Alphonus Bonnar, O.F.M., provides a supplement to the same author's well-known *The Catholic Doctor*, with essays on such specialized topics as the morality of pre-frontal leucotomy, the background and treatment of juvenile delinquency and the celebrated Bourne case of 1938.

CHRISTIANS IN CONVERSATION (Newman Press, Maryland, \$3.00) provides the texts of the papers delivered at a colloquy between American Catholics and Protestants held at St John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota in December 1960. Four contributions by Jaroslav Pelikan, Raymond Bosler, Dr Berhold von Schenk and Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., on 'Issues that Divide Us' and 'Factors that Unite Us' give a useful theological introduction the main issues in ecumenical dialogues today.

WHAT IS A BISHOP? (by Mgr Joseph Urtasun) and WHAT IS THE INCARNATION? (by Francis Gerrier) are the two latest titles in the 'Faith and Fact' series (Burns and Oates, 8s. 6d. each).

THE FUTURE OF UNBELIEF, by Gerhard Szczesny (Heinemann; 25s.) and NIHILISM, by Helmut Thielicke (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 15s.) come from the German-speaking world. They envisage a somewhat different situation from our own. Dr Szczesny is an unbeliever who feels suffocated by an environment in which organized religion exerts, or seems to exert, an influence all out of proportion to its real basis in personal committedness. It is a complaint that many German intellectuals make. Dr Szczesny puts a fairly standard case for the repudiation of Christianity and its replacement by a patient and gentle humanism. He does so, alas, with far greater clarity and persuasiveness than Dr Thielicke (a Protestant theologian) ever achieves in his book, which purports to be a Christian answer to a much more lurid and extreme form of atheism than that subscribed to by Dr Szczesny. Dr Thielicke makes a great to-do about nothingness and anxiety. The ordinary atheist would be hard put to make head or tail of it all.