

LASCAUX: A COMMENTARY. By Alan Houghton Brodrick. (Lindsay Drummond; 15s.)

This is a lovely picture book of the prehistoric cave-paintings of Lascaux and a descriptive commentary. It will appeal to many different kinds of reader: to the prehistorian who is concerned to date and classify the material, to the student of art who can see, in wonderful photography, genuine primitive art, to everyone who observes the evidence of man's striving and who regards all that he has created as throwing light on his essential nature; to his main interest history, psychology, religion, painting, the chemistry of pigments, the effects of heat, cold, light; everyone is catered for in this delightful work. Even he who is only moved by the 'thriller' cannot fail to be stirred by the finding of the cave.

In September 1940 five youths went out to pot rabbits with a couple of guns and a dog. The dog disappeared but muffled barks were heard. They found a crevice through which he had presumably fallen. This they enlarged to allow a boy to enter. He dropped 25ft. into a large cave. The others followed; they struck matches and found themselves surrounded by magnificent paintings of horses, cows, bulls, bison, deer, auroch and others.

The text is mainly descriptive of the paintings and their possible date. There is a chapter on the meaning and purpose of prehistoric cave-paintings. The most accepted theory is that they are magico-religious in origin.

The magical side is apparent in the number of pregnant mares followed by stallions and pregnant cows and bulls, besides a realistic presentation of what the author describes as charging bison in the rutting season. These illustrate the fertility aspect. The hunting magic is represented by many missiles directed towards the animals, and in one case of a horse falling into a pit.

There is one unique and controversial scene. It shows a disembowelled bison with a javelin in its hinderparts. Next to this is a stylised human figure wearing a bird-head mask extended on his back. Lying near him is a pole bearing a bird-image on one end and also a propulsor. The author's view is that the man wounded the bison which turned on him and gored him to death. He calls it 'Pre-historic Tragedy'. Miss G. R. Levy in her important work *The Gate of Horn* sees him as 'no corpse gored by a bull' and sees the significant relationship being between the man and the pole. She stresses the religious emotion behind the paintings and thinks 'that reciprocity was their aim, a participation in the splendour of the beasts which was of the nature of religion itself'.

My own view of the prostrate vested figure with his insignia beside him, is that he is undergoing ritual death which results in the death of the bison. The evidence of early belief in the relationship between sacrificer and sacrifice is too great to be discarded. Perhaps this is the earliest portrayal of the ritual act whereby the sacrificer becomes the sacrifice.

To return to the actual paintings. It is impossible to describe their beauty showing as they do sensitive awareness of their subjects with great technical skill in execution. DORIS LAYARD.

THE MARCH OF THE MODERNS. By William Gaunt. (Cape; 12s. 6d.)

The difficulty of preserving the arts in a mechanistic and sub-human world 'geared to war' has been met for the last hundred years or so in two ways. Either the artist cedes to the *zeitgeist* and invents—Marinetti is a case in point—a smash-and-grab art to fit a smash-and-grab age; or he withdraws, like Cézanne, from the world and does something solely to please himself which he has obvious and well-justified difficulty in marketing. Yet withdrawal from a corrupt and chaotic society might foster, even in the domain of art, eremitic vocations; and one would like, before embarking on a review of other alternatives, to point out that recluses like Eric Gill, in the tradition of the hermit bridge-builders and lighthouse-keepers of the Middle Ages, have in the long run been more socially effective than worldlings.

From this standpoint nothing could come handier than Mr William Gaunt's precise and vivid survey of what one of the most able of the English Impressionists called 'the way up the cul-de-sac' of modern art and letters. That these interpretative faculties should themselves need interpreters has seemed to many of us sufficient reason for ignoring them. With the world before us, why learn the language of a country we do not feel particularly drawn to visit? Here, however, is a born interpreter, who, starting with Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin, leaves you confronting a film of 1929 by two disciples of M. de Sade. As many of the 'isms'—Synthesism, Symbolism, Pointillism, Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and so forth—had literary prophets and practitioners—for the 'visual chemistry' of Soviet art is obviously akin to the audible chemistry of James Joyce—the artistic movements exhibit a union with and dependence on letters which emphasise at once the force of their ideology and the weakness of their methods.

It is impossible in a short notice to suggest all that is conveyed by a study admirable in its compression and coherence. All intelligenzia—the word and the caste come from Russia—are displaced persons, but there is an affinity between them. And 'promoters of intellectual companies' like Apollinaire (Kostrowiski) can generally flogher, like other directors of international cartels, while honest fellows of more civilised persuasions are bombing each other's cities. Art is a freemasonry—an alternative religion. It will not endure what Rilke called 'the drab, desolate sham' life of the proletariat. Neither can you shut it up in the sacristy. Snubbed and rejected, a culture becomes a cult. It can give up its hieratic pretensions and help build the *civitas dei*—but only on honourable terms. (At the start the artist might possibly send his products to Moloch's nearest market, as the farmer sends his butter and eggs, from the ever-