

EIGHT DECISIVE BOOKS OF ANTIQUITY. By F. R. Hoare. (Sheed and Ward; 16s.)

Too often history is thought of in terms of dates, periods and personalities; whereas the real facts that should be the historian's concern are what Maitland called the 'common thoughts' that make these dates and period and personalities intelligible. Ultimately the course of history is ruled by mind. At times, indeed, we contact that mind only after long, detailed and often wearisome studies of the minutiae of a period; but at other times we are fortunate in having that mind presented to us in a form which is the crystallisation of the common thoughts. It is with eight such crystallising influences that Mr Hoare's *Eight Decisive Books of Antiquity* deals; for he felt that the fact is inescapable that a very high proportion of the ideas that have shaped or at least turned the course of history either were given to the world in the first instance in a book, or became the fixed form of a civilisation or of a political system as a result of being embodied in a book. On this basis he selects and analyses *The Laws of Hammurabi* (which 'gave legal form and sanction to the first bourgeois state'); *The Book of the Dead* ('catering for that preoccupation with another world that was largely responsible for the static character of Egyptian civilisation'); *The Torah* ('the charter of the Chosen People'); the *Epics of Homer* ('that preserved the unity of the disunited Hellenes'); *The Laws of Manu* ('which fixed the caste system that still characterises Hindu India'); *The Sayings of Confucius* ('they formed the minds . . . of the bureaucracy of the literati which for centuries ruled China'); Plato's *Republic* and the *Politics* of Aristotle. Few can quarrel with his choice; and our only regret on putting down this book is that the author did not live to write the second and third series of *Decisive Books* which he had planned to cover the period from Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* to Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. The incisive analyses of the *Defensor Pacis*, the *Il Principe* or Calvin's *Institutes*, which reasonably we might have looked forward to after reading this present book, would have been value at any price.

LEONARD BOYLE, O.P.

THE MAKING OF FRANCE. By Marie-Madeleine Martin. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 21s.)

NAPOLÉON BONAPARTE: His Rise and Fall. By J. M. Thompson. (Blackwell; 35s.)

It is easy for an insular reviewer to underestimate the difficulties which attended the unification of France. The island imposes its frontiers; the continent tantalises with wide possibilities. The size of England, so much more compact than that of France, has been an enormous help in establishing central institutions without losing touch with regional idiosyncrasies. Mlle Martin's book deals historically with

the far more complex task with which the makers of French unity were faced, unity within clearly established frontiers, and unity of sentiment binding together such widely differing types as the Provençal and the Norman.

Mlle Martin traces the beginning of effective French unity to the establishment of the Capetian dynasty in the tenth century and the major part of her book is devoted to the enormous achievements of France's line of kings. They did provide a rallying point of the national culture, all the stronger, as she points out, for being essentially a mystical, personal, supra-rational rallying-point, the kind of thing man needs, man as he really is, not man according to some ideologic abstraction. Undoubtedly they deserved well of the country they ruled, up to a point. But the praise of the French kingship in this book seems indiscriminate. The criticism of the *Ancien Régime* by de Tocqueville, whom Mlle Martin does not mention, revealed the weakness of the kingship in allowing too great a diversity of regional economic and political institutions, which it attempted to correct by an arbitrary and all-embracing royal centralisation. Why were the criticisms of the *Philosophes* so abstract and therefore so destructive? Because the nobility and upper middle-class, from which they sprang, had not been incorporated into a tradition of service and responsible administration. De Tocqueville maintains, with some justice, not that France had an unwritten constitution, as Mlle Martin puts it, but that, in 1789, it had no constitution at all. The arbitrary monarchy needed some central body either to correct the megalomania of Louis XIV or the lethargy of Louis XV and XVI.

In the second section of her book Mlle Martin goes on to discuss the revival in France of various teachings about patriotism and nationality which sought to modify the abstract ideas of the Revolutionaries, ending up with the theories of Charles Maurras. Here another question occurs to the insular reviewer. Are not these teachings and theories remote from the real problem, the fairly obvious faults in the Constitutions of the Third and Fourth Republics? However complex, intelligent and embracing those theories may be, is not the urgent task of the French to exorcise finally the shade of the Abbé Sieyès and, one may add, the shade of Napoleon? For the constitution-making of the Abbé, designed to limit the powers of the executive, was so abstract that it was easy for a man of supreme executive ability, such as Napoleon, to do exactly as he liked. The one merit of the Third Republic, with which the Fourth is virtually continuous, is that it lasted, and it is in the quality of endurance that a constitution can principally glory.

The Napoleonic constitution has not endured, for it was the same thing as the man. Mr Thompson's excellent work on Napoleon gives

him full credit for that which does endure, the Code, the system of education and local government which his incomparable energy created. In a life based mainly upon the correspondence, as the most reliable source of information, there has not been scope, presumably, for a large discussion of that energy, that width, brilliance and persistence of administrative and military decision that astounded the world for two decades. But Mr Thompson has made a very fair division of the different activities of that career, and has stated their phases very clearly, while keeping a firm grasp of his central theme, the rise and fall of a great man. Despite an occasional dig at the Catholic Church, he deliberately places the summit of Napoleon's career at the Elevation of the Mass in Notre Dame, the day after signing the Treaty of Amiens. And the finest figure in the book, the one to whom the greatest significance is attached, is that of Pope Pius VII, whom Napoleon so persecuted, and who lived to pray for the repose of Napoleon's soul.

PAUL FOSTER, O.P.

LEISURE THE BASIS OF CULTURE. By Josef Pieper. Translated by Alexander Dru. With an introduction by T. S. Eliot. (Faber and Faber; 10s. 6d.)

A world of 'total work' is pressing in upon modern man in which real leisure and philosophy become impossible; for to have leisure is to be calm, receptive, and at one with oneself, and to be a philosopher is to transcend the workaday world and bring the whole of being into play. This is the theme of two short essays which have been well chosen to introduce the thought of one of the best-known contemporary German philosophers to English readers. He shows how the Kantian identification of knowledge with discursive activity, outlawing contemplation, changed the original concept of leisure, derived from the Greek *skole* and the Latin *scola*. St Thomas, with the ancient philosophers, held that the essence of virtue consists in the good rather than the difficult, that truth, like grace, was a gift, but the modern world made effort its idol. Carlyle, changing the emphasis of St Benedict's *ora et labora*, said that to work is to pray, and Stalin demanded that the worker must be paid according to the work done and not according to his needs. In such a world leisure becomes practically the same as idleness, a form of non-activity, a mere pause in work, whereas it is really the fundamental condition of human freedom, inseparable from its original religious significance as a day of rest and worship. And just as the functional process has led to the death of leisure, so it has destroyed philosophy by identifying it with scientific activity. Bacon's 'Knowledge is power', Descartes' philosophers as 'the masters and owners of nature' and Marx's formula that philosophy ought to alter the world rather than interpret it—all dispense with the essential element of philosophy: