

cases a criterion for discriminating between peridotites that come directly from the substratum and those that are merely accumulations of the early crystals of basaltic magma.

The work of Fersman shows that the nepheline-syenites and their relatives have associations of elements which differ considerably from those of both the granitic and basaltic families. This feature seems fatal to the general application of the Daly hypothesis of limestone assimilation, and consequently more detailed analyses are indispensable if the origin of the alkali rocks is to be intelligently discussed. It is disappointing to find in the majority of petrological papers analyses that are copious in number but deficient in detail. Petrologists should insist on all the detail they can get, for even the rarity or absence of a minor constituent is likely to be evidence of positive value. The high standard in this respect reached by the analysts of the Geological Survey of Great Britain, and particularly by Dr. H. F. Harwood, of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, is already directing attention to problems of fundamental importance that cannot as yet be adequately discussed on a world-wide scale for lack of the necessary data.

Dr. Washington's book is of particular value because of his insistence on a high ideal of accuracy and completeness. If time be a consideration, it is well that the petrologist and his chemical colleague should realise that a few detailed analyses are worth very much more than a large number that stop after twelve or fourteen constituents have been determined.

ARTHUR HOLMES.

Language through the Looking Glass

Through Basque to Minoan: Transliterations and Translations of the Minoan Tablets. By F. G. Gordon. Pp. v + 83. (London: Oxford University Press, 1931.) 10s. 6d. net.

IN this book the experiment is tried of assigning modern Basque values to the Minoan characters on bronze age tablets from Crete. As Mr. Gordon says (p. 1), "such a method must obviously begin as pure guess-work". It also ends there; for "not only did the system yield a language indistinguishable (at present) from Basque, but it revealed unmistakable references to Hellenic deities, several old Greek names, and three poems, one in hexameter verse, one in elegiac, and one in couplets . . ." etc. Basque is lovely for the purpose: "the language is highly fluid, the aspirate is uncertain, and inversions are common" (p. 2); and

"it appears to make no distinction between B, P, and M, T and N, G and K, L and R, O and U". It was also "an obvious convenience" that "the authors of the script were able to select signs with several meanings" (p. 3); and Mr. Gordon's "method", as he frankly says (p. 4), "consists in applying a series of hypothetical values, and endeavouring to show that they fit everywhere". For example (p. 9), with a sign which "appears to represent a conical eminence of some kind, and is provisionally rendered *iaq* or *iq*, Basque *ik*, 'height'", he thinks it "possible to write the plural, the agential suffix, the partitive suffix, the past participle, and the imperative singular, besides using the sign as a connecting link". English itself has never attempted as much; and it is not surprising that "it would constantly occur, therefore, as in fact it does". Another sign (for "a beard, *bizal*, Basque *bizar*") "may also stand for a univalve of contorted type" (for which no Basque word is given), because it "stands as a decoration in a marine subject", being in fact what the Germans call a "Füllenornament" of the commonest, in Late Minoan pot-painting.

The proof of the pudding is, however, in the eating. A well-known tablet (Hull, "Ægean Archæology", pl. xxxiii.) not only "tells a connected story" (p. 4), but tells it "quite in the spirit of the Greek Anthology". Scholars familiar with the Anthology must judge for themselves a composition which is "only what might have been expected from the Minoan genius". Here is this "epigram", an "elegiac Muiopotmos", and "the work of a practised hand", of which "the rhythm goes with a swing" (p. 16): *A spider in its web, holding thread in its mouth; a flesh-fly, round-headed, flower-skinned, the little wine-jar tapper. Take care, drinker, embracing a tomb with the mouth, drinking wine—alas! alas! He has spun round, dead!* As Mr. Gordon says (p. 14), it is "a little disconcerting at first"; but it is sober prose compared with the translation of the Phaestos Disc which he offers on pp. 55-67. This latter document, he thinks, is a metrical calendar, partly elegiac. Here is one of the pentameters: *Yasali dad bidiaq yadzua ulluedugi izal*; and it means (through Basque to Minoan) "the lord, smiter of the horsehide (or the surface of the rock), the dog climbing the path, the dog emptying with the foot the water-pitchers".

Indeed, only one question remains unanswered. Does the imprint "Oxford University Press" on the title page mean what it says or (into Basque through Minoan) something different? JOHN L. MYRES.