

Treasury on the Nile

THE ALEXANDRIAN LIBRARY. By Edward Alexander Parsons. Houston, Tex.: Elsevier Press. 468 pp. \$7.50.

By C. A. ROBINSON, JR.

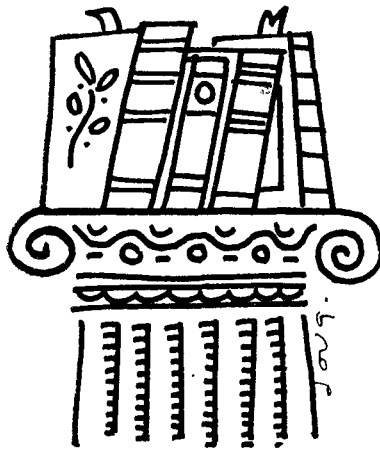
THE immediate effect of the life of Alexander the Great (died 323 B.C.) was the birth of a vast and strange world that was occupied and exploited by myriads of Greeks. In the new Hellenistic Age, when Hellenism or Greek culture became widespread, some of Alexander's ideas took root slowly, such as his insistence on cooperation between peoples, but his conception of the inhabited world won instant approval. Now man thought of himself more and more as a member of a world society, a society in which there might be (and were) sharp differences, but in which a common Greek culture nonetheless acted as a natural bond.

One of the striking features of the new day was the growth of cities, the greatest of which was Alexander's own foundation, Alexandria in Egypt, the metropolis of the civilized world. Its landmark was the lighthouse by Sostratus of Cnidus, 400 feet high, while the population of the city itself eventually grew to about a million, a motley conglomeration of Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, Jews, Syrians, Anatolians, Arabs, Indians, Negroes, and Italians, who were ever ready to riot in the streets.

The mental attitude of the Hellenistic Age was essentially an appreciation of the past. In order to master and cultivate the immense intellectual treasures a library and museum were founded at Alexandria, and here we catch the bid of the ruling Ptolemies to foster a sort of university center, rivaling Athens and giving some glamour and substance to a government which, at heart, was sordid. The best scholars, scientists, poets, and artists of the day were invited to live in Alexandria at public expense. It is interesting to observe that the city had almost no influence on them, for their work was mainly Hellenic and international, rather than Alexandrian. At the same time the world was assiduously searched to create what became the largest and most important library of antiquity. It comprised perhaps 500,000 volumes or rolls; the catalogue by Callimachus, one of the chief librarians and a man of stupendous learning, is said to have filled 120 volumes and included biographies of the authors and critical data.

The author of the latest work on the library of Alexandria is a distin-

guished citizen of New Orleans, a man of letters, lawyer, bibliographer, and builder of a library of some 50,000 books, manuscripts, and historical documents. According to the jacket, Mr. Parsons spent seven years in the writing of his book, which I can well believe. He has produced a large and attractively illustrated volume, which commences with the libraries of Old Greece, Pergamum, and Antioch, and



proceeds to a description of Alexandria. We are then told of the founding and conduct of the museum and library, and finally of the library's destruction early in our era.

Mr. Parsons has amassed a large body of material, but his rather ponderous presentation of it will not, I fear, attract the layman nor will the scholar applaud his uncritical methods. Ten pages are devoted to Caesar and Cleopatra—to cite a typical example of discursiveness—on the excuse that the library was damaged during Caesar's visit to Alexandria. Mr. Parsons lists hundreds upon hundreds of books in his bibliography, though most of them have no particular connection with his subject. The hundreds of footnotes refer to modern works of varying worth at random. Two definitions of the word "founder"—from the "Oxford English Dictionary" and the "Century Dictionary"—are actually set out in the text, so that we may embark soundly on a precise, or rather labored, recital of the library's foundation. And "for those archeologically minded we append short cartographical comments on interesting plans of ancient Alexandria." But the four plans were drawn in the nineteenth century and merely demonstrate the growth of knowledge during that time.

Mr. Parsons is as enthusiastic as he is industrious. James Westfall Thompson's "Ancient Libraries" is more satisfying, however. In less than 100 pages of graceful text the entire subject of ancient books, libraries, format, cataloguing, bookselling, etc., is there authoritatively reviewed.

On & On & On

A SHORT-TITLE CATALOGUE OF BOOKS PRINTED IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, IRELAND, WALES, AND BRITISH AMERICA, AND OF ENGLISH BOOKS PRINTED IN OTHER COUNTRIES, 1641-1700. Compiled by Donald Wing. New York: The Index Society. 3 vols., 1945, 1948, 1951. \$55 the set.

By CARL PURLINGTON ROLLINS

ATALLY of all the books which have been printed since "the Gothic sun set behind the gigantic presses of Mayence" would be a labor to daunt the most ambitious and persevering bibliographer. In the first fifty years of printing there were published an average of about 800 titles a year. The printing press was invented to speed up the production of books, and the acceleration has been so great that last year some 30,000 titles were issued in England and America alone. Obviously an all-inclusive listing covering the past 500 years is an impossibility. It is possible, however, to compile lists for limited and specific areas of time and place and interest, such as the great German "Gesamptkatalog der Weigendrucke" of books printed before 1501 (40,000 probable titles), or the list of "Scientific, Medical and Technical Books in Print in the United States from 1930 to 1948" (nearly 8,000 titles), or Mr. Wing's monumental work covering the period between 1641 and 1700 (about 80,000 titles). These few examples of the listing of printed books give some idea of the scope of the task.

"A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England" is a continuation of Pollard and Redfield's volume, issued in 1926 and covering the same material from 1475 (the date of Caxton's "Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers," printed at Bruges) to 1640. The size and arrangement of the three new volumes is in general similar to the Pollard-Redfield book. The first volume of Wing appeared in 1945, the second in 1948, and now the third and last volume is published. The preface, which appears in Volume I, should be consulted for valuable information regarding the scope and method of the work.

Mr. Wing's treatment of his material is substantially like that of the earlier Pollard-Redfield volume, but differs in

Carl Purlington Rollins, printer emeritus to Yale University, edited *The Saturday Review's* quondam column THE COMPLEAT COLLECTOR.

The Saturday Review



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The Two Faces of War

Man has always been in a state of warfare, whether united against each other in tribes, cities, nations, or leagues of nations. But it has remained for this country to conceive of a united world and to invent the legislative machinery that might in some future day make it possible. There is a law of opposites without which life as we know it could not exist. Nature is in a state of attraction and repulsion; religion must have in some form its heaven and its hell; human beings are both good and bad. And war, unfortunately, draws men together for the purpose of destroying each other so that the political, economic, or religious concepts of one group will prevail over the other.

We do not have to be told that war is cruel, destructive, and evil, for men and women have been aware of it since civilization began. The conflict between Athens and Sparta which destroyed Greece was in microcosm the same conflict between the principles of liberty and of tyranny which has confronted twentieth-century man for the last forty years and which now threatens the extinction of civilization for perhaps centuries to come. The fact is that men have always tolerated war and have only too often found in it an instrument of progress, and therefore to some extent of good. It would be difficult to prove that the interminable conquests of the Roman Empire were not beneficial to the advance of man or that European colonization of Africa and the Orient did not in the past achieve the same purpose.

There is nothing new in this ancient concept of war, though at this moment in history it is obvious that we not

only wish to discard it forever but that we must do so. If war has served humanity in the past, we are now certain that it is wholly evil, for it has the power to destroy all of us. There is an old and dismally prophetic childhood rhyme about "ten little Indians sitting on a fence." One by one they fell to the ground and "then there was none," prophetic because at the beginning of this century there were ten nations capable of going to war or of starting a conflict that might embrace all Europe, and now there are only two. We are awakened to the frightful thought that soon there may be none.

The old concept of the dual nature of war must be destroyed, root and branch, since it still remains with us. For how easily it can be argued that, if total war is now total destruction, the fear of war is a stimulus to science, invention, and to the rapid de-

velopment of the atomic age. Where, a cynic might ask, would the billions have come from to build the plants that produced the atomic bomb if we were not terrified that Hitler's scientists would get ahead of us? The rapid development of the airplane and a thousand other inventions, the recent discovery of enormous sources of oil and minerals, as useful to the arts of peace as to war, were products of war. In this generation only a madman would conceive of building a rocket to take men beyond the gravitation of the earth so that they might erect an atomic armed satellite to the moon, unless we feared that the Russians might get there first.

WE know that the rulers of the USSR are using the threat of an attack by the United States as the most powerful means of rapidly industrializing their vast country and uniting their people through an unrelenting campaign of hate. But are we not consciously or unconsciously using the same method through every instrument of communication at our command? Even a pacifist must be aware that if we do not arm and unite with strong allies in readiness for war we will be courting the very evil we are preparing for and yet trying to avoid. Can we now, faced with this menace, ask our people to love all men as our brothers?

Yet there is an answer to this dilemma; let us rid ourselves of fear and despair, those two words so readily used by our writers. If we must be strong and armed to the teeth to ward off war, let us do so. If we believe, as we must, that a third of the population of the earth will not for long submit to exploitation and tyranny, we must remain confident in that belief, and unite our energies and ingenuity to bring it about. —H. S.

Ezekiel, 1; 16

By Robert Nathan

THESE are the Creatures we have called Divine,
The Holy Ones, in awe and wonder dressed,
Seraph and Angel, in their own design,
By Fire nurtured and by Chaos blessed.
Such silent portents, lighted like the stars,
Were never cousins to the human race;
These are no men from Jupiter or Mars,
No living visitors from outer space.
Ezekiel saw them with his prophet's eye;
A wheel within a wheel; and heard their mirth
Awful and lonely in the noonday sky,
Singing to God a music not of earth,
Watching without compassion or regret
Man's wretched course upon this planet set.