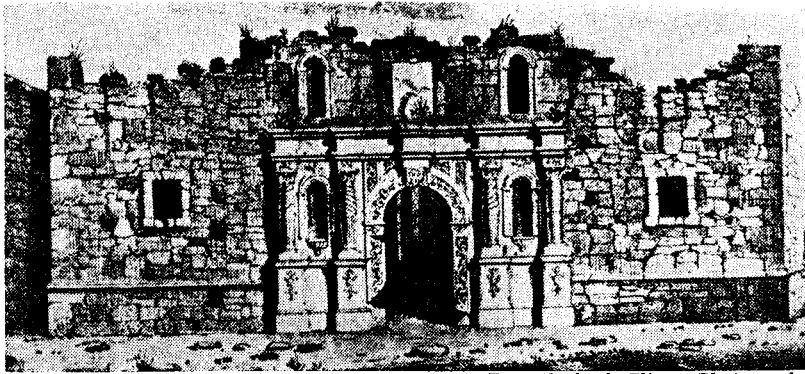


HISTORY



—From the book, *Elicson Photography*.

Exterior of Alamo Chapel in 1846.

An American Epic

"Thirteen Days to Glory," by Lon Tinkle (McGraw-Hill, 255 pp. \$3.95), is the story of the siege of the Alamo. Reviewer H. B. Parkes is the author of *"History of Mexico."*

By H. B. Parkes

IN A less sophisticated era the siege of the Alamo would have become a theme for heroic poetry. This story of how a small group of adventurers, disobeying orders to retreat, insisted on holding their ground against an enemy army, how all of them were eventually slaughtered but not before they had killed immensely larger numbers of their opponents, and how their deaths were afterwards avenged by their compatriots has the flavor of primeval saga. Both in the nature of the action and in the behavior of the leading personalities it recalls the battle fought by Charlemagne's rear guard in the pass of Roncesvaux, as described in the "Chanson de Roland." The bloody outcome resembles also the last stand of the Burgundians against the Huns in the finale of the "Nibelungenlied." The whole early history of Texas, as of some other sections of the American frontier, has, in fact, the qualities of the epic ages. Chaotic social conditions, highly individualistic characters, emphasis on the values of physical courage, generosity, and personal loyalty, conflict with alien enemies: such are the factors that gave rise to the Homeric poems.

Frontier conditions did not endure long enough to produce the appropriate literary expressions, and instead of heroic poetry we have prose history. Yet when the history is well written, with an appreciation of its

intrinsically dramatic aspects, it is extraordinary how much of the epic flavor it can convey. Mr. Tinkle is scrupulous about his facts, and appears to have done a thorough job of research. Only in one instance, as he explains, has he gone beyond documentary evidence in describing the actions of his characters. His book is a careful, detailed record of the siege, along with flashbacks describing the earlier lives of the leading personalities. Yet simply by describing what was said and done he has produced a narrative with the qualities of a good work of fiction. The story of the Alamo has been often told, but never so movingly as in this book.

William Barret Travis is the central figure of Mr. Tinkle's story. This young Alabama lawyer, reserved, sensitive, and dominated by an exaggerated sense of personal honor, had apparently killed a man for insulting his wife before coming to Texas. His claim to be the commander of the beleaguered garrison was at first challenged by Jim Bowie, an adventurer of a very different type who had been a slave-trader and an ambitious land-speculator and was famous throughout the Southwest for his prowess in knife fights. But Bowie

was seriously injured early in the siege by a rolling cannon, after which he forgot his quarrel with Travis and loyally supported his leadership.

A third Homeric character who died in the Alamo was Davy Crockett, ex-Congressman from Tennessee, whose exploits as a frontier hunter were already mythical. During the siege he apparently lived up to his reputation both as a marksman and as a humorist. Nor does the story lack the element of betrayal that is an integral part of most epic legends. The men in the Alamo expected help from Colonel Fannin, in command of Texan troops at Goliad a hundred miles to the Southeast; but although Fannin received a series of messengers from Travis, he refused to move. These and other men are clearly characterized by Mr. Tinkle.

He is less successful with the Mexicans, and Santa Anna remains a monster who never becomes understandably human. But this extraordinary figure has been an enigma to all his biographers. Mr. Tinkle, however, emphasizes the fact that this was not a war of races. A number of Mexicans, refusing to accept the destruction of their country's liberties, fought with the Texans, and some of them died in the Alamo.

THE WAYS WEST: That improved transportation facilities were essential to the winning of the American West is well known. Not so well known is the part played by the Army Engineer Department in providing these facilities. Forest G. Hill in *"Roads, Rails, & Waterways: The Army Engineers and Early Transportation"* (University of Oklahoma Press, \$4) points out that West Point was until 1824 the only school of engineering in the United States, and that it remained the nation's leading technical school until the Civil War. Since most engineers were in the Army, civil as well as military construction in this period needed Army technological aid. In the 1820s Army engineers began working on civil projects, and soon under the internal improvements programs of the national government this

In Memory of an Overambitious Poem

By Richard Moore

THAT great, meaningless poem! It races
Still through my empty spaces,
A darkened star, ill starred:
It drew down into itself so hard
It disturbed all motion and all rest
Even to vastest distance—
But in the process it compressed
Itself out of existence.

activity expanded into broad surveys of roads, canals, and railroads. The author's scholarly study of these developments, based largely upon the manuscript records of the Engineer Department in the National Archives, covers the period between 1815 and the Civil War. It affords valuable information on the nation's military and economic history and on its westward expansion. —HAL BRIDGES.

BLUNDERS UP NORTH: Literary excellence has distinguished the first two volumes of the Canadian history series edited by Thomas B. Costain, and Volume III, "The Path of Destiny: Canada from the British Conquest to Home Rule: 1763-1850," by Thomas H. Raddall (Doubleday, \$5), is up to standard. Mr. Raddall deals ably with Northwest exploration and the attainment of home rule in Canada, but he is at his best when applying his fresh metaphors and similes and his graphic descriptions of battle to the military history of the American Revolution and the War of 1812. United States blunders in these two wars look glaring indeed when seen from the Canadian side. During the Revolution, Washington and the Continental Congress failed to make the slight efforts needed to win Nova Scotia away from Great Britain, and in the War of 1812, when United States armies sought to conquer all of Canada, they flopped ludicrously. This second conflict is to Canada, the author points out, what the Revolution is to the United States. —H. B.

LIFE IN THE REGIMENT: The overwhelming sensory and emotional impact of Civil War combat upon the officers and men of one Northern infantry regiment is superbly recaptured by John J. Pullen in "The Twentieth Maine: A Volunteer Regiment in the Civil War" (Lippincott, \$5). Foregoing any attempt to analyze grand strategy, Mr. Pullen by means of wartime letters, journals, and published records recreates the day-by-day existence of the regiment: how it trained, how it marched and bivouacked, how it fought from Fredericksburg to Appomattox, and how it buried its dead on the battlefield, while the wounded fell back to hideous suffering and probable death in the field hospitals. Mr. Pullen, who saw action as an artillery captain in the Second World War, imparts to all this a truly remarkable sense of reality. When the regiment in its finest hours holds the Union left at Gettysburg with a last-ditch bayonet charge against heavy odds, you are there, undergoing a strange combination of reading pleasure and near battle fatigue. —H. B.

ESSAYISTS

Business of Evolution

"New Bottles for New Wine," by Julian Huxley (Harper, 318 pp. \$4.50), is comprised of thirteen essays and addresses whose sum is the credo of a modern scientist.

By Joseph Wood Krutch

JULIAN (now Sir Julian) Huxley is, of course, one of the most distinguished living biologists and a product of the most rigid scientific discipline. Like his grandfather before him, he is also preeminently tough-minded, almost fanatically committed to fact and to reason alone. No one could more perfectly represent the twentieth-century successor of those nineteenth-century scientific rationalists who dethroned religion and committed the world to the belief that (in T. H. Huxley's words) we must follow Nature "no matter to what black abyss she may lead." But it is for precisely these reasons that what is new in his attitudes, emphases, and convictions is so tremendously significant.

The present volume brings together thirteen essays and addresses. A few of them are on such limited subjects as "New Light on Heredity" and, even, "Natural History in Iceland." But the majority deal in broad terms with a related series of themes which, taken together, brilliantly set forth the credo of a modern scientist. This is in itself significant because it recognizes the fact that the nineteenth-century ideal of "knowing more and more about less and less" has given way to the realization that the world now desperately needs men who will again "take all knowledge for their province"—however formidable that task may be. Even more significant is the new attitude toward those realities with which religion, metaphysics, and poetry have always been concerned but which so many nineteenth-century scientists dismissed as phantoms for the simple reason that they did not know how to measure or account for them.

No one could have less patience than Sir Julian has with superstition, guesswork, revelation, or wishful thinking. But he knows that the elusive and intangible realities are really real. And he knows that this admis-



Julian Huxley—"... tough-minded."

sion means the end of the attitude so neatly summed up in the pronouncement "I don't believe in the soul because I can't find it in my test tube." It means the end of positivism, of anything resembling the nineteenth-century version of materialism, mechanism, and determinism. Mind, consciousness, choice, and purpose (human purpose even if no other is in all the universe) are as real as anything and more important than most things. A science which does not recognize them is arid and utterly unfit to dominate a civilization.

Dismissing all the dualisms—natural-supernatural, material-spiritual, body-mind, and mind-spirit—Sir Julian is a monist in the simple sense that he sees them all as equally real aspects of the same thing. Of this single reality the dynamic aspect is evolution—which means not merely change or even merely increased complexity but the development of what Mr. Huxley is willing to call self—evidently "higher" in some meaningful sense.

THE first sector of evolution was inorganic (the suns and planets); the second was organic; the third human. Of these the organic is inconceivably slow—the life of a star being of the appalling order of 10^{12} years. The second is so much faster that the entire evolution of life from the pre-cellular to man occurred during a period of time far, far shorter than that of the life of a single star. The

(Continued on page 60)