

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

THE destruction of books during the last war was a disaster whose results are still not fully appreciated. We are thinking not so much of the destruction of books which are classics and of text books, whose loss, grievous though it be, can ultimately be made good, but rather of the destruction of stocks of source-books, such as those which contains the reports of excavations or the critical editions and translations of historical documents. So long as a single copy of such books remains a reprint can of course always be made; but so long as there exist only one or two copies, there is ground for anxiety. We cannot be sure that even those which are preserved in great public libraries will survive, for more than one such library was completely destroyed during the war. There is one, and only one, safeguard against extinction and that is nature's own practice—multiplication. Many species survive because each individual produces millions of eggs or seeds, a few of which germinate, grow and do likewise. The larger the edition of a book, the greater are its chances of survival, and the same is true of manuscripts. Several of the most famous works of antiquity (e.g. Bede's History) probably owe their survival to the fact that, being popular, large numbers of copies were made. Unfortunately today standards of popularity are different, and the real permanent value of a book is often in inverse proportion to the number of copies printed. (But not always—some of the Penguins, for instance).



Every scholar and every archaeologist will be able to give instances proving the truth of the above statements. Ever since the invention of printing whole editions of some books and maps have completely vanished. Of many only a single copy survives. Only a few years ago there turned up a copy of a hitherto unknown book printed at Lisbon in 1522 and giving an official account of what has been called the European discovery of Abyssinia. With most commendable promptitude the Trustees of the British Museum, who had bought it, published an excellent facsimile edition. That suggests the remedy which we propose might be adopted today. The need for multiplication of copies of unique manuscripts is of course so obvious that it hardly needs to be stated. Such multiplication, by mechanical means, would not only serve the first paramount need of ensuring, so far as humanly possible, the survival of copies of the document, but it would also, as a valuable by-product, confer an enormous benefit upon students, who may not

ANTIQUITY

be able to afford the cost of photostats for their own exclusive use or the time, cost and other difficulties of travel, today, to consult the originals.

But we would go further and suggest that the time is now ripe for an even more ambitious programme—the multiplication of copies of quite modern printed source-books. Most of these appeared in limited editions, and of some the stocks were destroyed during the war, so that they are no longer obtainable. Two examples may be cited, the Reports of the Royal Commissions on Ancient Monuments, and the series called *Corpus Scriptorum Orientalium*. The former are the fullest and most authoritative source for all that concerns the history and archaeology of the various countries concerned. They are indispensable books of reference which, together with the volumes of the *Victoria County History*, are the first to be consulted when any problem arises. The latter contain (amongst much else) the text and translation of the *Abyssinian Annals*—contemporary records whose accuracy is proved by the independent evidence of eclipses and other cross-checks. The whole stock was destroyed at Louvain during the war. Single sets exist in some big libraries, but it is uncertain whether even all these are complete. (The lists printed in each volume of the series do not state whether a particular volume has been published or is merely in preparation). Without these books no one can even begin to study the history of Abyssinia itself, and that history concerns also the history of several adjacent regions, including the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. These are merely instances quoted because they happen to come within the writer's purview at the moment. There must be scores of similar, and more urgent, needs.

Here is a task that might well be undertaken by one of the big trust funds, or even by an imaginative millionaire. It would be costly and unprofitable (in the usual sense), but it would be well worth doing, for it is, in fact, nothing less than the safeguarding for posterity of some of the best work of the pre-atomic age. It is the exact equivalent of that which was performed by the monasteries in the last Dark Age; and if we cannot prevent the onset of the next one, we can at least ensure that less is irrevocably lost. For we have what they had not—a historical vista long enough to prove the recurrence of Dark Ages. Thus forewarned we should hasten to be forearmed.

Experience shows that, to be effective, things have to be said over and over again. We shall not weary our readers by doing this, but we should be willing to publish a few titles of a few unique unprinted manuscripts considered by competent scholars to deserve multiplication, and a few source-books of which the number of existing copies is known to be very small. Thus reinforced, the plan could be submitted to some public body, in the hope that it, or some modification of it, might obtain their approval and be adopted. With some such backing it would have far more chance of success than it has in its present necessarily vague form. If those of our readers with specialist knowledge will send us a few such titles as may occur to them within their own range of study, we will do this. The chances of achieving anything may not seem bright, but an attempt should be made. (The *Loeb Library*, an equally ambitious project, succeeded). The plan has the merit of serving two purposes; it will benefit students by multiplying, and thereby rendering more accessible, works which are at present difficult to consult, and

EDITORIAL NOTES

perhaps of preserving them from destruction. If there is no Dark Age this time, the benefits conferred on learning will alone be quite enough to make it worthwhile.



In a recent editorial we had occasion to notice some of the shortcomings of archaeology in India, and urged upon archaeologists in that country a more realistic approach and a fuller appreciation of the relation of archaeology to the everyday life of ordinary human beings. We feel that anthropology in general is also handicapped in much the same way. From the point of view of archaeology, the algebraics of the kinship-charts of exogamous clans, phratries or whatnots, and the inevitable sameness, wherever they may originate, of those plain spoken chants which we are told are in the interests of fertility, do not help the archaeologist to form a true picture of the life and work of bygone peoples, any more than does that literary antiquarianism which, if their periodicals are any criterion, still passes for archaeology among many Indians today.



We have lately received a copy of the first number of the new series of the Journal of the Indian Anthropological Institute which shows a welcome change, achieving throughout a general level of objectivity unusual in Indian publications. This number reproduces in English a very valuable contribution by the late Sir Aurel Stein on 'Desiccation in Asia', made originally in 1938 to the Hungarian Quarterly. This paper modifies considerably Professor Huntington's theory of climatic pulsation, by showing the effect on various regions of centralized law and order as against tribal insecurity; indicating that whereas the latter might bring devastation by anarchy, the former can produce the same effect by over-exploitation. A painstaking survey of Gandhara, which gives much detailed information for the first time, and a comprehensive summary of the Megalithic Cultures of Southern India both deal with concrete observed facts and are valuable contributions to these particular studies. It is to be hoped that the Indian Anthropological Institute which is not so well known as it deserves to be, will continue to produce work of this standard of objectivity. There is plenty about which we would wish to be more fully informed, and this applies in particular to such articles of material culture as pottery, agricultural implements, spinning and weaving devices, transport and house and village plans: not so much examples of the equipment of the uncivilized as of civilization in the making. We believe that the Indian Anthropological Institute has, in common with most of us, passed through difficult times during the last few years, but it seems to have begun a new lease of life, and impresses us as having a comprehension of what its aims should be. With the assistance of Dr B. S. Guha and Dr Verrier Elwin, the Director and Asst. Director respectively of the newly formed Anthropological Survey of India, this body may well produce the results we have always hoped for but seldom found.



In our last Editorial Notes we credited Denmark with the invention of pollen-analysis. A Swedish reader writes to correct this, pointing out that 'pollen-analysis is a Swedish scientific method inaugurated by the Swedish geologist, Professor G. Lagerheim, and subsequently elaborated by his colleague Professor L. von Post and others'. Our mistake arose from the work done on the subject in recent years in Denmark, and we are sorry that due credit was not given to the Swedish scientists who were actually the first in this field.