

# Some Philosophical Fragments

## Supplement to Students Monthly Letter

### NOTICE

THOSE interested in this work will be glad to know that we recently held a very successful exhibition of rare and curious occult books and manuscripts in the British Empire Building in Rockefeller Center, Radio City, New York City. In connection with this exhibit, which attracted wide interest, we delivered the following talk over radio station WMCA, New York City:

## The Destruction Of The Alexandrian Library

BY MANLY HALL

It is generally acknowledged that the ancient Egyptians possessed an extraordinary knowledge of the arts and sciences. Their earliest Pharaohs were patrons of learning in all its branches. Their priests and philosophers were the most scholarly of men. The architecture of the Egyptians has awed the world for fifty centuries, and their wisdom in chemistry, anatomy, medicine and astronomy was no less amazing.

Under the dynasty of the Ptolemies the city of Alexandria became a mecca for scholars. The studios of all nations congregated there to enjoy unparalleled opportunities for mental self-improvement. Poets, historians, philosophers and dramatists assembled in the city of the Ptolemies largely to consult the vast libraries which had been accumulated by the Pharaohs of this illustrious line.

Knowledge, like a magnet, draws more knowledge to itself, and by the second century, before the

Christian era the city of Alexandria became a veritable metropolis of books. Its libraries are referred to in ancient documents as the glory of the world—the axis of the intellectual universe. In addition to numerous private libraries collected by specialists in various departments of learning, and the secret collections written in the hieratic glyphs of the priests, there were two immense public collections. The largest of these was the BRUCHEIUM which formed a branch of the national Museum of Antiquities, and contained some 490,000 papyri, vellums, tablets and inscriptions, magnificently arranged in the niches and wings of a great rotunda-like gallery. The second and smaller public collection, devoted almost exclusively to obscure forms of knowledge and therefore probably of greater practical value, was contained in the Temple of Serapis, the patron deity of the Ptolemies. This building called the Serapeum housed 42,800 rolls, preserved in fire-proof containers shaped somewhat like buckets with tightly fitted lids. The various private collections brought the total number of priceless literary treasures in Alexandria to a figure exceeding ONE MILLION DOCUMENTS.

It is difficult to compare this ancient collection with any modern library. Many institutions of the present day contain a larger number of books, as for example the British Museum which has over 70 miles of bookshelves. But modern collections are mostly printed books of which there are numerous copies, comparatively inexpensive and easily secured. The Alexandrian collection was made up entirely of hand-written works, for the most part unique copies of the greatest antiquity, each of which today would be worth a king's ransom. There is not enough money in the world to buy the Alexandrian library if it existed today. When we realize



that one fourth-century Greek manuscript, the *Codex Sinaiticus*, is now being purchased by the British Museum for half a million dollars, we get some idea of the values.

The fate of the Alexandrian libraries is one of the greatest tragedies of history. In the first century B. C. Cleopatra contested with her brother for the throne of Egypt. Caesar ordered the burning of the fleet in the harbor of Alexandria. A strong wind rose, the fire reached the docks and spread. Before the conflagration could be checked it destroyed the BRUCHEIUM and the greater part of the city. When Cleopatra entered Alexandria under the favor of Caesar, she ordered herself carried to the ruins of the great library. The old accounts tell that she beheld a veritable mountain of charred manuscripts and rolls, and the Queen of the Sun cursed her ancestors that they had not made adequate provision to protect the library from fire. The burning of the Brucheiium was regarded by the Egyptians as a national disaster and by way of atonement Rome presented to Cleopatra several valuable collections of manuscripts which it had accumulated from conquered peoples. Mark Antony was especially active in the restoration of the Brucheiium.

The great Alexandrian libraries were a second time destroyed by Aurelian about 273 A.D. The Serapeum was completely razed by the Christians in A. D. 389 by the Edict of Theodosius. The colossal statue of the weeping god Serapis, which stood in the midst of the Serapeum, was also demolished at this time. Alexandria never entirely recovered from this third catastrophe. The love of learning lingered on however until the last of the great collections was entirely wiped out by Amru the Saracen in A. D. 640. Thus perished the glory of the world, the sanctuary of the arts and sciences, mother of wisdom.

If we were asked to estimate what humanity has lost through the destruction of the Alexandrian libraries, we need only say that after Alexandria came the Dark Ages—the total eclipse of essential learning. Today a hundred branches of art and science, philosophy and religion are laboring patiently and painfully to restore a body of knowledge which perished at the hands of ignorance and van-

dalism. The lost arts and sciences, the secrets of everlasting pigments, the mystery of malleable glass, the ever-burning lamps, and the transmutation of metals are among the minor losses. The greater tragedy is the loss of the histories of the antediluvian world—the beginnings of civilization—the origin of races, philosophies, religions and sciences—the secrets and accumulated knowledge of the lost Atlantis—and the story of its final destruction, when, according to the Troano Codex of the Mayans, it sank some 10 to 12 thousand years ago, carrying 60,000,000 souls to death in a single night!

Thus the most precious secrets of human origin, to which we have recovered only the faintest clues, vanished away in smoke. Serapis, the sorrowful god, had the literature of a thousand generations for a funeral pyre.

But wisdom did not entirely die with the burning of its shrine. According to Theodas, faithful librarians and priests rescued a few of the most priceless of the manuscripts, hiding them in various places, and secreting a considerable number in underground temples in the Sahara desert. Our great libraries and museums probably include among their various collections some mutilated fragments of this old collection that came to light in various excavations. But the important parts, if preserved, have not yet been rediscovered by the modern world.

There is a curious tradition to the effect that the priests and librarians of the Alexandrian institutions remained a group apart even after the destruction of their buildings. They gradually formed a community of their own and attempted to perpetuate orally and to set down from memory a part at least of the great teaching and literature which they had guarded and served for so many centuries. Thus a certain part of the old knowledge is said to have been perpetuated through the centuries. There has always been a certain type of mind that loves to explore into the mysteries of life and nature. In the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries several groups of scholars appeared who attempted to piece together from tradition the lost learning of the ancients. Through the years darkened by religious and scientific bigotry and superstition, these



research scholars worked secretly to restore what they believed to be the elements of essential knowledge. They did not for the most part commit their findings to printed books, but, even after the invention of printing, they circulated their writings only among small groups of sympathetic thinkers.

Thus, manuscripts may be divided into two general periods. The first period, most generally collected and termed medieval, consists mainly of theological writings, illuminated Books of Hours, Psalmsters and sermons. These books are collected mainly for their artistic merit but seldom for their contents. The second type of manuscripts, with the exception of a few isolated examples, belongs to a much later period and flourished most in the three centuries which succeeded the discovery of printing. These manuscripts are seldom collected, and as far as we have been able to discover, there are no important collections of them in America.

These later manuscripts, written between 1450 and 1800, were not intended primarily as artistic or literary productions. Their artistic merit is of the accidents rather than the intention. These books, rolls, et cetera, are only collected by persons who actually desire to make use of their contents. They are not simply to be owned; they are to be studied and interpreted. Within them is to be found much real knowledge and many facts not generally known to even the scholars of the present day. The majority of these early modern manuscripts derived their inspiration from the classical collections of Alexandria. They attempt to bridge the centuries, to interpret the symbols and fables of the Egyptians and Chaldeans, to rediscover the scientific secrets of the Greeks and to render available to the modern world the profound lore of India and Arabia.

For the past fifteen years it has been my purpose to collect for use in America the curious manuscripts and early printed books produced by these secret groups of 16th to 18th century scholars whose findings and rediscoveries constitute the very foundation of modern science. The library was originally intended for private use but it appears that an ever-increasing number of intelligent men and women are becoming interested in the sources of modern thought. For example modern chemistry arose from the speculations of the medieval alchemists, and this collection contains many fine illumined alchemical manuscripts. The Hermetic wisdom of Alexandria gave rise to the biology and physics of today. The 16th century is the pivot between classical and modern learning, and the curious literary productions of this century are far greater in practical and intrinsic value than the theological Missalis of the preceding centuries. It seems indeed a lamentable error of judgment that great modern institutions of learning do not concern themselves more specifically with the examination and restoration of these systems of fundamental learning to which they owe their very existence.

Through the courtesy of the British Empire Building of Rockefeller Center, arrangements have been made for an exhibition of some 200 items from my personal collection of these curious books and manuscripts, many of them unique. In the collection are numerous items not to be found even in such libraries as the British Museum and the Bibliotheque National of Paris. We believe the exhibit will be unique not only for the strange documents with their extraordinary figures and diagrams but also in that it represents a valuable working library of source material which it is my intention to make available to the public.



Manly Hall



Publications

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Dear Friend:

With this month's issue the first year of our Student's Monthly Letter is completed. We are happy that so many people have been interested in keeping in touch with our message through these little monthly talks. It has been a great joy to me to feel that through these letters I have been in closer touch with our friends in all parts of the world.

In this first series we have attempted to outline the first principles of philosophy. Already a great number of re-subscriptions have been mailed to us from those who desire that this monthly message shall continue to come to their homes. Therefore beginning next month we shall start a new series of 12 letters to be devoted to specific applications of the principles of occult philosophy to the spiritual problems which confront all students of the higher wisdom. The first section of each letter will be devoted to a fundamental problem of life in its spiritual aspect. We shall derive these problems from the countless questions that have been asked us during the years of our teaching. The second section of each letter will be devoted in part to specific questions sent in by subscribers to the letters, and in part to interesting sidelights on issues vital to our work, news, items, etc.

The first letter of the new series, beginning May 1st, will be devoted to answering the question of how the student shall contact bona fide sources of occult philosophy and spiritual instruction. We shall attempt to answer the questions: How shall I study, what shall I join, and how shall I know whether the claims of various individuals and organizations are true or false?

We hope that through this new series of letters we can answer many of your pressing questions.

If you will fill in the enclosed form, these letters will continue to come to you each month. We are most grateful for your past support and look forward with sincere pleasure to our continued contact with you.

Very truly yours,

Manly P. Hall