

## Centers of Civilization

Reviewer—Carol J. Robinson



Mark of Distinction

*Athens in the Age of Pericles* by Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr., University of Oklahoma Press.

THROUGH the ages as the great centers of civilization approached the pinnacle of their power and cultural influence, they simultaneously began to prepare for their own decline and ultimate destruction. Athens in the 5th century B.C. was no exception.

Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr., Brown University classics professor, has taken only 50,000 words to capture the Athenian glory at its height. His purpose in *Athens in the Age of Pericles* is to present a clearer picture of the people whose intellectual vision gave birth to vital democracy and whose lack of faith in their creation doomed the great experiment to disaster.

THE world's great cities have been shaping civilization since man first decided to give up independent living for next door neighbors and indoor plumbing. But until now a clear picture of these metropolises at the heights of their influence was available only to the devoted scholar willing to research the musty files of the better-stocked libraries.

To fill this literary void, the University of Oklahoma Press has spent long years developing its Centers of Civilization Series, the first of which, *Athens in the Age of Pericles* by Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr., appeared on book shelves September 21. (See review below.)

The Press is not attempting a synoptic history with the series but rather a capsule view of a community of people, their literature, arts, religion, sciences, engineering, administration—at the time when they meant the most to the world.

To provide this insight, the world's outstanding scholars of each period in history are being commissioned by the Press to turn out a strictly layman-language essay for the intelligent reader, not the specialist. All the books bearing the intertwined CCS device

"It is a startling fact that each of the politically dominant people of antiquity, the Greeks and the Romans, should first win at least theoretical or potential democracy, then lose faith in it and finally succumb to one-man rule," Author Robinson says. In the case of mighty Athens, that one man was Pericles, the first citizen whom the Athenians trusted more than they trusted themselves.

The constitution became a mere tool for Pericles, to be used, not followed. And when death robbed Athens of his strong arm, the way was open to the countless demagogues locked in a self-seeking power struggle.

What were these Athenians like in the twilight of their glory—these proud citizens so willing to sacrifice democracy for the security of the promises of Pericles? What shaped the thinking of these men? What made them the most civilized people

on the jacket are to be of standard size (144 to 160 pages) at a set price (\$2.75).

*Centers of Civilization* is the fourth series to be added to the OU Press catalog, joining the 55 volumes of the Civilization of the American Indian Series, 28 American Exploration and Travel Series books and 13 from the Western Frontier Library.

Savoie Lottinville, director of the Press, became interested in a series on great cities before World War II and kept the idea alive until the Press could actively promote the project about five years ago.

*Rome in the Augustan Age* by Henry Thompson Rowell is scheduled for January, 1960, with C. Bradford Welles' *Alexandria*, Elizabeth Riefstahl's *Thebes in the Eighteenth Dynasty*, Glanville Downey's *Constantinople*, and *London in the Age of Chaucer* by Alec R. Myers nearing completion. More than a dozen other authors have begun work on volumes for the series, envisioned by the Press as its most extensive.

Even the London of Sir Winston Churchill and New York City during the Franklin D. Roosevelt era are on tap as the Press coverage envelops the near at hand as well as the dim past.

of an era? These questions dominate this readable, compact volume.

Yet through it all, the visual Athens comes alive—the mudbrick houses rising beside their narrow, crooked streets, the awe-inspiring Parthenon culminating Greek architecture and sculpture, young Plato being awakened to intellectual greatness by the wisdom of Socrates.

The cultural flowering was on the wane and soon was crushed in the disastrous war with Sparta. The Athenians had discovered man—but they only proved what succeeding civilizations have gone on proving—that man has less success in dealing with himself than with any other segment of his world.

RECOMMENDED: A worthwhile study of antiquity's giant for anyone pondering the fate of today's top dog.