

EXTENSION OF THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE UNIVERSE UNDER THE PTOLEMIES.—MUSEUM AT SERAPEUM.—PECULIAR CHARACTER OF THE DIRECTION OF SCIENCE AT THIS PERIOD.—ENCYCLOPÆDIC LEARNING.—GENERALIZATION OF THE VIEWS OF NATURE RESPECTING THE EARTH AND THE REGIONS OF SPACE.

AFTER the dissolution of the Macedonian empire, which included territories in three continents, those germs were variously developed which the uniting and combining system of government of the great conqueror had cast abroad in a fruitful soil. The more the national exclusiveness of the Hellenic mode of thought vanished, and the more its creative force of inspiration lost in depth and intensity, the greater was the increase in the knowledge acquired of the connection of phenomena by a more animated and extensive intercourse with other nations, as well as by a rational mode of generalizing views of nature. In the Syrian kingdom, under the Attalidæ of Pergamus, and under the Seleucidæ and the Ptolemies, learning was universally favored by distinguished rulers. Grecian-Egypt enjoyed the advantage of political unity, as well as that of a geographical position, by which the traffic of the Indian Ocean was brought within a few miles of the Mediterranean by the influx of the Arabian Gulf from the Straits of Baber-Mandeb to Suez and Akaba (running in the line of intersection that inclines from south-southeast to north-northwest).*

The kingdom of the Seleucidæ did not enjoy the same advantage of maritime trade as that afforded by the form and configuration of the territories of the Lagides (the Ptolemies), and its stability was endangered by the dissensions fomented by the various nations occupying the different satrapies. The traffic carried on in the Seleucidæan kingdom was besides more an inland one, limited to the course of rivers or to the caravan routes, which defied all the natural obstacles presented by snow-capped mountain chains, elevated plateaux, and extensive deserts. The great inland caravan trade, whose most valuable articles of barter were silk, passed from the interior of Asia, from the elevated plains of the Seres, north of Uttara Kuru, by the stony tower† (probably a fortified caravansery), south of the sources of the Jaxartes, through the Valley of the Oxus to the Caspian and Black Seas. On the other hand, the principal traffic of the Ptolemaic empire was, in the strict-

* See *ante*, p. 123.

† Compare my geographical researches, in *Asie Centrale*, t. i., p. 145 and 151-157; t. ii., p. 179.