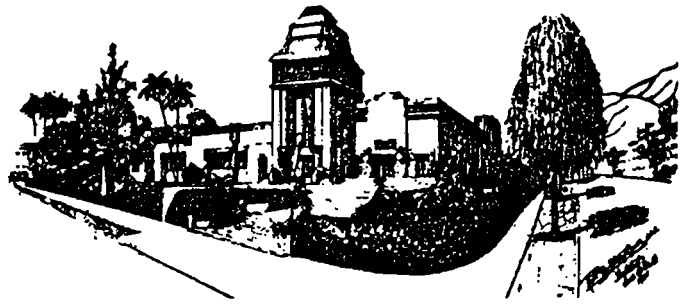


L



MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

Feb. 15, 1937

AKHNATON, Adorer of the Aton.

Dear Friend:

Amen-hotep IV, the Golden Hawk, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Only One of Ra, Son of the Sun, Great in Duration, the Mighty Bull, Lofty of Plumes, Beloved of Amon-Ra, and Lord of Heaven, was born at Thebes in the year B. C. 1388 (?). The name Amen-hotep, in Greek Amenophis, means "the peace of Amon." This great king was the only surviving son of Amen-hotep III and his consort Queen Tiy. On his father's side he was descended from Thutmosis III, the Spoiler of his Enemies, conqueror of Syria, and the Smiter of the Princes of Zahi. It was Thutmosis III who built up the Empire which fell in the reign of Amen-hotep IV. Queen Tiy, a woman of extraordinary abilities, for many years Regent of the Double Empire, is said to have been of Syrian origin. In the opinion of Dr. E. Wallis Budge, it was the alien blood of his mother and grandmother that was responsible, in part at least, for the multitude of strange ideas on religion, government and art that dominated the mind of Amen-hotep IV.

The childhood of the young Pharaoh seems to have been a continual struggle against the limitations of health which afflicted so many of his dynasty. Amen-hotep III, surnamed the Magnificent, appears to have been an incurable invalid, who

had been married to the Princess Tiy in his twelfth year. It was the tendency of the entire family to marry at an extremely early age.

When Amen-hotep IV had reached his twelfth year his health brought general concern not only to his family but to the whole Empire. If he died childless, the dynasty would end. A suitable bride was therefore sought among the vassal states, and a hasty marriage was contracted. Royal families did not seem to enjoy good health in those days. Marriageable daughters of noble birth were difficult to find, many dying in childhood. The Prince was united in marriage with an Egyptian girl named Nefertiti. She was of noble birth, the daughter of a Prince named Ay. At the time of this marriage, the Pharaoh was about twelve years of age and his bride nine or ten. A short time after the marriage, Amen-hotep III died in his early fifties, leaving the crown to the thirteen-year-old invalid who already showed a strange tendency to visions and dreams.

In addition to being the Wearer of Diadems, Amen-hotep IV was High Priest of Ra-Horakhti, Sovereign of the spirits, souls and bodies of the Egyptian people—Priest-King of the greatest Empire on earth. There is a legend to the effect that

Queen Tiy, longing for a son, had vowed him to the gods before his birth. Be this true or no, from earliest childhood the young Pharaoh was more of a priest than a statesman and well deserved the title "the Great of Visions." Arthur Weigall thus describes the young King:

"One may imagine now the Pharaoh as a pale, sickly youth. His head seemed too large for his body; his eyelids were heavy, his eyes were eloquent of dreams. His features were delicately molded, and his mouth, in spite of a somewhat protruding lower jaw, is reminiscent of the best of the art of Rosetti. He seems to have been a quiet, studious boy, whose thoughts wandered in fair places, searching for that happiness which his physical condition had denied to him. His nature was gentle; his young heart overflowed with love. He delighted, it would seem, to walk in the gardens of the palace, to hear the birds singing, to watch the fish in the lake, to smell the flowers, to follow butterflies, to warm his small bones in the sunshine. Already he was sometimes called 'Lord of the breath of sweetness.'"

Amen-hotep IV ruled Egypt for seventeen years. During the first four years of his reign he exercised little individual authority. Queen Tiy, as Regent, was the actual Sovereign. She was deeply impressed by the extraordinary mentality of her son and recognized in him forces more divine than human. The young King matured early, and by his seventeenth or eighteenth year was the actual governor of his country.

The inevitable conflict between the youthful idealist and the priesthood of Amon-Ra took definite shape in the fifth and sixth years of his reign. Most writers, in comparing the religious ideals of Amen-hotep IV with those of Amon-ism, speak in most depreciatory terms of Egypt's state religion. There is no doubt that the conquests of Thutmosis III and the magnificence of Amen-hotep III had filled the temples with priceless treasures. It is also quite possible that grandeur had deflected the priests from their sacred duties and had allowed innumerable corruptions to undermine the integrity

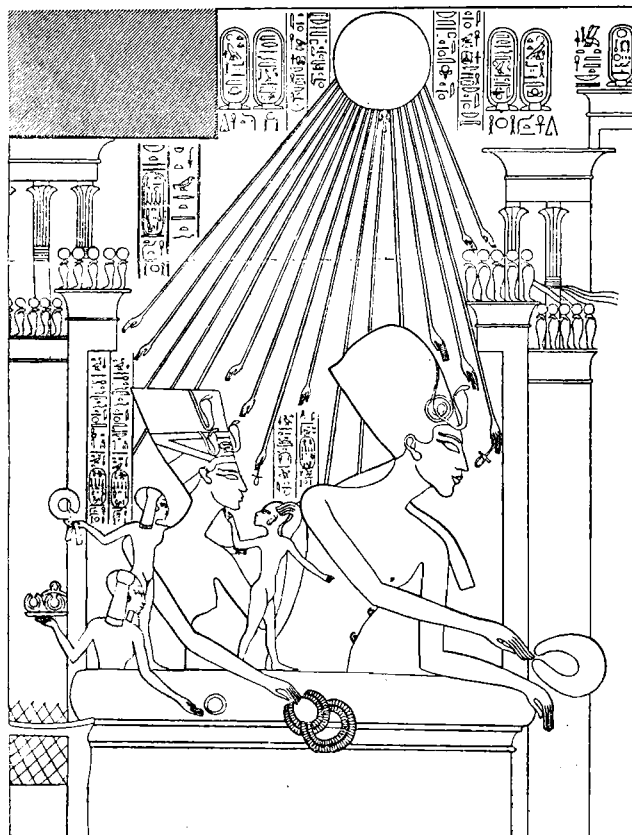
of their cult. This was not entirely the fault of the priests, however, for in Egypt the Pharaoh was both priest and king, and a ruler given to war and plunder, being likewise the chief priest of the state religion, set a bad example to the whole priesthood. We may therefore say that the religions of Egypt were corrupted from the top down. When spirituality failed in the prince, it disappeared from the temples.

It would be quite wrong to deny a deep spiritual significance to the ancient Egyptian religion. The gods of the various nomes, or provinces, of the Empire were symbols of the great spiritual truths of life. The Mysteries of Egypt were among the deepest of religious institutions, and the secret doctrines of India and the old world were preserved in the adyta of the Egyptian temples.

In examining the religious beliefs of Amen-hotep IV, we should not therefore think of his religion as entirely original. Rather, he had perceived certain corruptions and limitations in the state religion, and, being a man of exceptional spiritual perception, he attempted to correct these errors by a new interpretation of the spiritual facts of life. It is difficult to say now whether he actually founded Aton-ism, or merely encouraged a religious tendency already arising among his people. Certainly he did not invent the term Aton, but rather gave new profundity to symbols and beliefs that had descended from the remote periods of Egyptian beginnings. The King's philosophy did not develop immediately into its final state but evolved gradually over a period of several years. It is quite probable that during this period of unfoldment the King had the assistance and advice of religious reformers and philosophers who helped him to shape the general structure and define the boundaries of his reformation. He drew away from the state religion, gradually breaking one after another the immemorial traditions of the Empire.

It was when Amen-hotep IV reached the nineteenth year of his life that he broke finally with the priesthood of Amon-Ra. He did not immediately attempt the overthrow of the Theban hierarchy.

Rather he set up his own faith in the midst of his adversaries, giving it the influence and authority of his own position as demi-god of the Nile. It was after this official break with the old hierarchy that he changed his name. Amen-hotep is a name rooted in the faith of Amon; therefore it was no longer ap-



AKHNATON WITH HIS QUEEN AND THREE OF THEIR DAUGHTERS ON THE BALCONY OF HIS PALACE. AKHNATON IS BESTOWING GIFTS, AND IN THE SKY ABOVE IS THE RADIANT ATON, ITS RAYS ENDING IN HUMAN HANDS.

propriate for a ruler who had withdrawn his allegiance to the old order. The name which he chose, and by which he is now remembered, was Akhnaton, which means "the Aton is satisfied."

Having broken forever with the old faith, Akhnaton found the way before him far from easy. The city of his fathers was dedicated to the elder gods. The state religion was firmly ensconced in the hearts and lives of the people. As time passed, he

realized that he must not only break with the ancient faith, but he must also depart from its city and all of the ties of tradition and culture that flourished there. The young Pharaoh chose a site for his new capital about a hundred and sixty miles up the Nile from Cairo. Here he built the city of Khut-en-Aton—the Horizon of Aton. When he came to the site he spoke to all who were assembled there, and they bowed before his will, and did homage to him, and these are his words: "Ye behold the City of the Horizon of Aton, which the Aton has desired me to make for Him as a monument, in the great name of my Majesty forever. For it was Aton, my Father, that brought me to this City of the Horizon."

His new city, with its temple to the Formless One being at last inhabitable, Akhnaton took up his residence there in the eighth year of his reign. Accompanied by his nobles, bearing the records of the Empire, and followed by a considerable concourse of people, Akhnaton went forth to officially dedicate his new capital. With his queen and their three children, the young King established himself in a palace ornamented with carvings which represented the symbols of his faith. It was in the freer and more refined atmosphere of Khut-en-Aton that the Pharaoh actually established his religion. The spiritual ministry of Akhnaton commenced in his twenty-second year. Here, in the shadow of great stone temples, was born the doctrine of the True Aton, the Universal God, a doctrine of such profundity that it has moved scholars to say that Akhnaton was the first enlightened man of recorded history.

Charles F. Potter, in his HISTORY OF RELIGION, writes: "He (Akhnaton) was also the first pacifist, the first realist, the first monotheist, the first democrat, the first heretic, the first humanitarian, the first internationalist, and the first person known to attempt to found a religion. He was born out of due time, several thousand years too soon."

Abounding in virtues unusual to his time, inspired by motives incomprehensible to his contemporaries, Akhnaton suffered as all idealists must suf-

fer. From the eighth to thirteenth years of his reign, Akhnaton seems to have been principally concerned with the perfection of his doctrine in the city which he had built. Budge describes him as living a strange life of religious and artistic propaganda. The Empire flourished under his benevolent direction. Also during this period his mother died, and his fourth daughter was born. Tiy, the Queen Mother, seems to have exercised a powerful influence over her son's political attitudes. She was a modifying and restraining force, and very possibly remained to her death in the faith of Amon. His respect for his mother held Akhnaton's religious enthusiasm within certain bounds, but with her passing this restraint was removed.

By his twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth years, Akhnaton must have realized he had not much longer to live in this world. His constitution always delicate, was growing constantly weaker under the strain of his over-active mind. The Pharaoh therefore changed his program. He was no longer content with his own city dedicated to the True God. He began a powerful campaign to spread his religion among the cities and provinces of his Empire. In the early period of his religion he described God as "the Heat which is in the Aton." His unfolding consciousness brought a fuller realization, and he gave a new definition: "the Effulgency which comes from the Aton." The change indicates definitely a deepening spiritual understanding, and an increasing grasp of the mystical factors of a great theology.

Soon after the death of Queen Tiy, Akhnaton issued an edict that the name of Amon should be erased from every inscription in Egypt. So complete and thorough was the work of his agents, that scarcely a statuette remained in which the hated name was not defaced. Even the tomb of Queen Tiy was broken into and the cartouches upon her mummy-case destroyed. The names of kings which included some form of the word Amon were obliterated, and all who carried a name embodying the hated word were forced by law to assume some other title. This extreme action could only have resulted from extreme persecution and from the

Pharaoh's realization that only by the most drastic steps could his reformation be accomplished before his own life ended.

Akhnaton was about twenty-six years old when his fifth daughter was born. True to the traditions of the dynasty, Akhnaton desired a son to carry on his work, but in the fourteenth year of his reign a sixth daughter was born, and the following year a seventh daughter completed his family, and thus the Pharaoh died without a male heir.

Much has been made of Akhnaton's domesticity. Certainly no other Pharaoh is so often depicted in the informal domestic relationships. In carvings Akhnaton is frequently shown with his arm about his beautiful wife Nefertiti, a pose entirely strange to Egyptian art. The couple are often shown surrounded by their children, or playing with them.

In the fifteenth year of his reign, Akhnaton began the construction of his tomb, but the work was never finished, and his body was finally placed in the vault of his mother where it was discovered in 1907.

The last two years of Akhnaton's reign may be regarded as the period of discouragement. The faith he had founded was not strong enough to withstand the ever present priesthood of Amon. Only a few of the most intelligent Egyptians could understand what he was trying to teach. The world was not ready for the rule of love. Added to his other perplexities were the clouds of war. It was the Hittite invasion of Syria that prepared the way for the end. Conspirators arose, the vassal countries that looked to Egypt for protection sent messengers in vain. The governors of provinces pled for help against the invaders and traitors, but Akhnaton would not send arms. To the dreamer-king, Aton was the One Father of all men and this ever-living God would not sanction war and pillage. The Pharaoh stood firm, but his firmness was of no avail. His cities were conquered. Little by little his revenues ceased, for his governors no longer had provinces to tax. In two short years the magnificent Empire of Thutmosis III was bankrupt.

The strain of these troublous times destroyed

what little health remained to the Pharaoh. With the collapse of his Empire, Akhnaton died. His end appears to have been sudden, for modern scientists who have examined the mummy are of the opinion that the end was due to a stroke. The body was no longer able to bear the worry and sorrow of a broken heart.

On the front of his coffin he is called "Akhnaton, the Beautiful Child of the Living Aton, whose name shall live forever and ever." How strangely sad, how strangely beautiful, is the prayer to the One Universal Father which was found inscribed on golden foil beneath the feet of the mummified body of Akhnaton:

"I breathe the sweet breath which comes forth from Thy mouth. I behold Thy beauty every day. It is my desire that I may hear Thy sweet voice, even the North wind, that my limbs may be rejuvenated with life through love of Thee. Give me Thy hands, holding Thy spirit, that I may receive it and may be lifted by it. Call Thou upon my name unto eternity, and it shall never fail."

Thus passed from this life a soul too fragile to bear the shocks of flesh. With Akhnaton passed also the faith he had founded, the city he had built, and the dream of peace which had filled his heart. Great Amon reigned again, supreme and plumed with power. More than three thousand years have passed since Akhnaton wrestled with the gods of Egypt. The homage of the modern world, a little wiser in the mysteries of spirit, may be best expressed in the words of Professor Breasted: "There died with him such a spirit as the world had never seen before."

Another modern student of the philosophy of Akhnaton, Mrs. Julia Ellsworth Ford, concisely states the great Pharaoh's position in the evolution of civilization in her interesting article AKHNATON: PHARAOH AND PROPHET:

"Akhnaton thus emerges as one of the most remarkable characters that have ever been born into the world. He was a prophet, a teacher of truth and sincerity, a seer, a philosopher, a reformer, a great poet, an architect, a lover of music. He was

a brave and fearless rejector of dogma, tradition, superstition,—it is amazing the way he threw them off like dead leaves to the wind. Although a king, he believed in democracy and made friends of people of peasant origin. In all history and romance, there is no man who loved a woman more devotedly than Akhnaton loved Nefertiti. His position as ruler, his religion, his honors—all he shared equally with her—"my great wife, Nefertiti," as he called her. For the first time in history, three thousand years ago, a government was run on the principle of Love. It was not his principles, but the lack of principle in his enemies that destroyed him."

THE RELIGIOUS TEACHING OF AKHNATON

The second millenium B. C. there was a period of extreme religious obscuratation. The ancient world had not recovered from the collapse of the Atlantean culture. The great social institutions of prehistoric times no longer guided the course of empire. Humanity was adjusting itself to a new vision and new codes of living. The Mystery Schools still flourished but the number of adepts was small and the Secret Doctrine could only be given to people in fables, symbols and moral teachings of a simple nature. Most of the nations had their own gods, and an entirely national or tribal outlook in religious matters. The gods of Egypt were the guardians of the Egyptians but had no place in their hearts for other races. India still paid homāge to its ancient tribal deities, worshipping spirits of fire and air. The Jew propitiated his own peculiar god as the Lord of Israel and protector of his tribe. The Golden Age of philosophy had not come to Greece, and it was to be more than seven hundred years before Buddha was to release India from the misinterpretations of the Brahmins, and Pythagoras was to lift the Greeks to a first place among philosophic nations.

It was against the concept of a tribal god that Akhnaton hurled the strength of his inner conviction. He stood in the midst of images and altars

raised to patron deities and tribal tutelaries. This enlightened Pharaoh raised his voice in a glorious hymn of praise to the one secret and eternal Spirit that ruled all men. To him there were no longer gods of Karnak, gods of Luxor, gods of Thebes. To him there was no longer Jehovah, Adonis or Amon-Ra. There was one God, and, though His names were many, His essence was indivisible.

Picture a twenty-year-old boy, born to luxury and power, limited by the frailty of his body and the overwhelming strength of the tradition in which he lived. Perceiving clearly and surely a spiritual truth that was to change the whole life of the world, imagine the courage that it took to stand out against the gods of his fathers and to defy the priestcrafts that had ruled unquestioned for ages. The world has produced no braver spirit than Akhnaton the Beautiful Child of Aton.

As High Priest of Ra-Horakhti, Akhnaton had often gazed into the face of the Sun-God. It was from meditating upon the cosmic significance of the sun that the young mystic came suddenly to understand the true meanings of light and good and truth. The Pharaoh realized that the sun did not shine only upon Egypt, nor did its light and heat protect only the cities where it was honored. Its rays shone beyond the mountains and beyond the deserts. Its light cheered the barbarians and sustained even the enemies of Egypt. Nor did it minister only to human beings. Under its benevolent rays all nature flourished. Flowers opened to its light, many colored insects fluttered in its beams, and all the world was gladdened and rendered fertile by the luminous love of the solar orb.

It came forcibly to Akhnaton's mind that the sun symbolized not only the glory of God and the magnificence of the celestial power, but also the infinite tenderness and intimacy of life. The deity did not rule from a chariot in the heavens but flowed into all the earth, nursing tiny shoots in the ground, and painting flowers with numerous resplendent hues. It was a far cry from the great stone faces gazing down in aloofness from the shadows of the temples to the God of Akhnaton whose

ever-present life gave strength to the wing of the bird and patient industry to the little creatures of the earth. Akhnaton found the spirit that dwells in the innermost and rules the furthestmost. He bowed in adoration before the truth he had discovered and offered himself as a living sacrifice to the ever-living, ever-flowing sun.

As a symbol for his religion Akhnaton chose the shining face of Aton—the solar disc. The effulgency of the Aton he represented by rays flowing in all directions from the solar face. Each of the rays ended in a human hand, to represent the active power of the light; and in some cases these hands held the crux ansata, the symbol of the giving of life. The whole figure represented the hand of God in all things. "Give me Thy hands!" cried Akhnaton in his religious ecstasy. The young mystic walked with God, hand in hand with the ever-living light. Having realized inwardly that God was life and love and light, Akhnaton could find no place in the universe for ignorance and hate and evil.

It is the opinion of some Egyptologists that Akhnaton was the first human being who realized the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man. When he refused to send armies against the Hittites, he made the supreme sacrifice of his Empire and his life, fully convinced that a God of love desired that men should live together in peace. In his heart was the peace of the Aton, the spiritual sun. As Pharaoh of Egypt he was the personification of the Aton, the high priest of Universal Truth. It was therefore his duty to perform the works of the Aton and to be a manifestation before men of the virtues resplendent in the sun. This seems to be the root of the Messianic doctrine. Akhnaton chose to bear witness, to come as one crying in the wilderness—"prepare the way of the Lord, and make His paths straight."

Akhnaton therefore made another great discovery. He discovered the secret of the living of the Aton. Recognizing the presence of the Universal Father in himself, he strove to live as the personification of the light. His own heart was the brilliant

face of the sun. His every thought and action must give life, like the innumerable hands which he figured on the rays of the Aton. In this way Akhnaton achieved the mystical at-one-ment. He not only recognized truth but he applied it, making himself personally responsible for his part in the shining of the Aton.

There is a very subtle aspect to Akhnaton's philosophy of God. Amon-Ra was a heavenly king whose will all men must obey. Egypt bowed before the law which descended from heavenly rulers seated upon their great thrones in space. Akhnaton rejected the divine despotism. He did not bend to the dictates of super-mundane Pharaohs. The laws of Aton flowed through the king. He lived in them and they in him. Not obedience but understanding was his creed, for we fear what we obey but we love what we understand. Akhnaton lifted up his heart in love to Aton and found at-one-ment with that universal love which enfolds all things in its mighty presence. In the dim past Akhnaton stands, enfolded in the Aton, luminous with the ageless light, lifted by his understanding into the very presence of the Ever-Shining One.

Akhnaton was too great for his own day, and, although thirty-three hundred years have passed, he is too great even for this modern world. Even Christianity has not accomplished fulfillment of Akhnaton's dream. The tribal God survives, and in the twentieth century is still the jealous Father of the world. Only a few mystics have pierced the veil and found the Real. Jew and Gentile, Mohammedan and Brahmin, have not yet found the common denominator, and millions of earnest Christians worship a God of whims and tyrannies, a petty despot in the heavens. How many centuries yet must pass before men can discover the God of peace who loves all His children, and how many centuries must pass before His children will have the wisdom and courage to sacrifice life, wealth and power to the spirit of love that pervades every atom of the world?

It is impossible in the meager records that survive to outline the complete system of Aton-ism.

The priests of Amon-Ra, when their power was regained, obliterated the records of the heretic King. For centuries the name of Aton was not spoken, the temple of the Disc of the Sun, with its rays and hands, fell to ruin, to be finally covered by the shifting sands of the desert. But this we do know—he was opposed to elaborate ceremonial and all the complicated machinery of the priestcraft. He worshipped Aton at its rising, the visible sun emerging from the night, the fulfillment of the eternal promise. He worshipped Aton at its setting, the symbol of light descending into the dark earth, even as Aton, descending into the darkness of all things, hides its rays in nature, to shine forth only as the works of nature:—Aton, hidden with good words, good thoughts, and good deeds, is the ever-flowing proof of the hidden Reality. Akhnaton offered prayers to the Aton, prayers that were the symbol of his own integrity yearning for the Real. In his great mystical joy the King had to sing and his very song was a ray of light, the light of the Aton singing to the Aton. He made simple offering also of fruit and flowers, and on rare occasions conformed in general to the spirit of Egyptian religion. But always he was honoring an ever-present Spirit, the absence of which was unthinkable. It was never necessary to invoke the ever-present, for the Aton, though without ears, heard all things; without eyes, saw all things; and though without lips, was ever speaking. And Its words were: beauty, harmony and life.

The spirit of the Aton brought with it the greatest art of the Egyptians. For the first time the sculpturing and painting became alive. No longer men carved only sphinxes with inscrutable eyes, or seated figures majestic but aloof. Akhnaton had found the rhythm and the flow of nature. He saw the Aton moving in the winds and bending the grain in the fields. He saw the palms sway to the breath of the Aton. He beheld in the motion of all things one Life, ever-moving. So art was for the first time linked to nature. The music in the soul of the dreamer became a music of line, and a deeply satisfying consciousness lifted Egyptian art to the level of great genius. It would be natural

that Akhnaton's understanding should affect not only technique but subject matter. The Aton gave dignity to simple things, and Akhnaton was filled with the realization of the beauty and divinity of the commonplace. He elevated therefore the normal circumstances of life to a new standard of significance. He found more of God in the home and the family, and men at their work. He felt it appropriate not to carve great images of heavenly kings with flails, shepherd's crooks and the sceptres of the three worlds. His art was the Aton moving the simple things to rightness. A deeply religious spirit shows through the sculpturing and painting of his period. The Aton is everywhere present, mingling with all things on equal terms, loving the least with the greatest, seated at the poor man's table as surely as at the feast of princes.

The inevitable result of believing in an impersonal, omnipresent, universal Father was a democratic attitude towards all classes of people. The Aton was in the slave, and made even the humblest serf a participant in divinity. If the Aton made no distinction for family or class, neither could he who served the Aton. Thus democracy came as the natural result of the correct interpretation of the universal plan. If a man correctly understands God and LIVES that understanding completely, he puts his life and world in order inevitably.

To the Egyptian mind the problem of death was always deeply significant. In the old religion the souls of those who passed on gathered into a strange universe of gods and demons, to be weighed at last upon the scales of judgment before many-eyed Osiris. Here again Akhnaton sounded a challenge to all the beliefs of men. He believed the Aton to be everywhere, and those who died departed not from It but remained in It forever. Therefore there could be no hell, for hate and suffering and doubt had no place in a universe full of love and truth. The Pharaoh believed that those who died lived in a misty world beyond. But in that world also rose the sun of truth, and the souls of the dead turned up their faces to the light, while the countless hands from the rays of the Aton lifted each and sustained each with the ever-living law.

QUOTATIONS FROM THE HYMNS OF AKHNATON

"Oh living Aton, beginning of life! Though Thou art afar, Thy rays are on earth; though Thou art on high, Thy footprints are the day."

"How manifold are all Thy works! They are hidden from before us, Oh Thou sole god whose powers no other possesseth."

"The birds flutter in the marshes, their wings uplifted in adoration to Thee."

"Thou makest the beauty of form through Thyself alone."

"Thou art in my heart; there is no other that knoweth Thee, save Thy son Akhnaton."

"For Thou art duration, beyond mere limbs; by Thee man liveth."

"The world is in Thy hand, even as Thou hast made them."

"The fish in the river rise to the surface towards Thy face, and Thy rays penetrate the great waters."

"Thou created the earth according to Thy will when Thou wast alone."

"The chick is in its egg cheeping within its shell, Thou givest it breath therein that it may live."

Yours sincerely,

MANLY P. HALL

THE FOURTH YEAR OF MANLY P. HALL'S STUDENT LETTERS

will begin with the May, 1937 issue. The new series will take up the SYMBOLISM OF THE BIBLE. The first six Letters will be devoted to the Old Testament, and the second six to the New Testament.

Those students who are interested in the esoteric doctrines concealed in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures will find this series of Letters of the greatest importance. SEND YOUR SUBSCRIPTION NOW for the new series beginning next May. Price \$1.00 for 12 Monthly Lessons.