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MONTHLY LETTER

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

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QUESTION—If it is the purpose of the Occult Sciences to perfect the individual in the philosophic virtues, why are so many people interested in Metaphysical Subjects so lacking in the rudiments of discrimination and poise?

ANSWER—No branch of learning can flourish in an atmosphere of inadequate scholarship... The popular mind is not erudite. This is particularly true of the metaphysical mind in America today. The present generation is not distinguished by any high development of acumen. Education is regarded as a sort of drudgery, a necessary evil, by the majority. Nearly all of the standards of knowledge have been compromised, with the result that superficiality is the keynote of the hour... Broadmindedness is a virtue if the mind possesses the capacity to be broad. It is not broadminded however to be merely scattered. It is virtuous to acknowledge the probability of the presence of good in all things but it is beyond the capacity of even the wisest to attempt to practice "the good in all things."

The last thirty years have greatly altered the standards of living and thinking. The cultural standards of the last century have passed away. Simplicity has given place to complexity in every department of living. Life becomes increasingly difficult with each passing year. The capacities of the individual are challenged. Each person must live a larger, fuller life if he is to survive.

The changes that have been wrought in the present century do not necessarily reflect the status of the majority of humankind. Our present involved and fast-moving tempo arose from the genius and ingenuity of less than a hundred men whose inventions and discoveries changed the whole course of life of some two billion of their fellow-creatures. The majority became the heirs of the minority, but it cannot be truthfully said that the majority sensed or understood the momentous consequences of the changes taking place.

Most people are living in a world entirely too vast and too involved to be intelligently analyzed. It is a dangerous thing to live in a system that we cannot live up to, but of course it is impossible to live up to a social pattern beyond the capacity of the intellect. Superstitions always arise from the failure of understanding. It is evident to all serious thinkers that the present generation is superstition-ridden. You will remember that on one occasion Lord Bacon affirmed that unbelief is the grossest superstition of all.

The rapid development along industrial and economic lines has focussed man's attention almost entirely upon material problems. The result has been a general collapse of the spiritual standards of the race. It is true that man must always worship something but he no longer feels the need of venerating the gods abiding beyond the firmament.

Fascinated by his own ingenuity man turns his veneration upon his own handiwork and in the end so completely loses perspective that he imagines his own handiwork to be nobler than the creative plan which framed the universe.

Of course materiality did not begin in the twentieth century but it certainly received its greatest impetus in the last thirty years. Never before in known history has the whole race so completely objectified; never before have all classes of humanity been so completely dedicated to the perpetuation of physical standards. To summarize this thought, twentieth century metaphysics is, to say the least, in an uncongenial atmosphere. It is like a small tender plant in a bed of weeds. Up to the depression of 1929 "successful" men and women were amassing fortunes and piling up estates for heirs to squander. Wealth became the emblem of integrity. Life was an experience in high finance, a game played with dollars upon a checkerboard of years. There seemed to be a popular superstition to the effect that men could build a pyramid of profits that would reach the heavens. Then like the Tower of Babel the whole structure collapsed and nothing but confusion remained. The year 1929 will long be remembered as the year of the great disillusionment.

Now to go back to the dawn of civilization. The occult sciences emerge from the night of time as the foundation of all knowledge and all culture. For thousands of years the Wisdom Teachings dominated all codes of human action and relationship. Inordinate human ambition was held in check by the powerful hierophants of the sacred Mysteries. All the evils we now suffer from existed in these remote times but they were held in check so that they could never dominate the general course of action. There has always been perversion but while the Mystery Schools remained, perversion could never frame the laws of nations or dominate the policies of rulers. Religion was the moderator of extremes. It curbed excesses and demanded standards of conduct from the great as well as the lowly.

Education was the instrument by which ancient religion maintained its policies. No man could attain to a position of leadership or authority without passing through the institutions of spiritual educa-

tion. Rulership by the informed is certain to be more adequate and enlightened than rulership by the uninformed. No man without reverence for the gods, veneration for life and understanding of nature could reach an estate where he exercised influence over the destinies of others.

A considerable percentage of rulers have always been corrupt as individuals and tyrants frequently usurped the thrones of the weak, but the integrity of the mass of humanity was not greatly affected until materialism dominated the policies of empire. Materiality is the root of confusion, discord and dissension, and materiality increased to the degree that usurpation destroyed the power of the religious hierarchies in the state.

By the end of the third century of the Christian era the great metaphysical institutions of antiquity had almost entirely died out in European civilization. A perverse theology, which had lost the keys to its own mysteries, conspired with a corrupt political structure to bring about the enslavement of the minds and bodies of peoples and classes. With the exception of small groups of comparatively isolated thinkers Western civilization was without an adequate mystical tradition for nearly 1600 years. During these long centuries of theological and political corruption religion degenerated from a spiritual force to an ecclesiastical bigotry. Theological history through the Dark Ages consists principally of reformations and inquisitions, and emerges into the light of modern times as a cycle of conscientious objections. Of course 1600 years of theological corruption could scarcely end in anything but agnosticism and atheism. In the end the thinking part of humanity rejected the only God they knew and began interpreting the universe from a mechanistic standpoint.

The 19th century brought the harvest. Science overthrew the dogmas of the church, and emerging triumphantly from two centuries of speculation, assumed the patriarchal role, promising to lead bewildered humanity into the Promised Land.

The fathers of science differed from their modern representatives in one important particular. They were mostly devout men rebelling not against religion as a spiritual necessity but theology as a

material limitation. Science plays a very interesting part that is generally overlooked. It is through science that the Mystery Teaching came back to Europe and America.

The pioneers of science, having emancipated their minds from bondage to ecclesiastical authority, were free to explore not only the wonders of the universe, but the thoughts and beliefs of other thinkers of other times and beliefs. Religiously a pagan was a heretic but science was not impressed by theological pronouncements. The result was that such names as Plato, Aristotle, and Euclid were restored to the consciousness of the race. Copernicus and Galileo, Newton and Kepler, Bacon and Descartes acknowledged their indebtedness to the ancients. Nor was it possible to long study the sciences of antiquity without becoming aware of the philosophies of antiquity. Science and philosophy must flourish together for it is not possible to be deeply informed in one without an equal understanding of the other. Geographers looked back to Ptolemy; historians honored Herodotus; medicine recognized Hippocrates; philosophy paid homage to Plato; and natural science became definitely Aristotelian.

The scientific mind in the 17th and 18th century was both hungry and alert. Intellect, long in bondage to blind faith and adamant dogma, rejoiced in the experience of freedom. There was an avid quest for every kind of knowledge. Nor were laymen alone in their desire to learn. The church itself became more alert. Science was first tolerated then embraced. Theology did not realize that the scientific attitude must finally bring down to a common ruin the arbitrary tenets of orthodoxy.

In the church itself appeared such men as Kircher, Melancthon, Roger Bacon and Raymond Lully. These men combined a proper piety with an inquisitive reason. A man cannot escape the modifying influence of his own thinking. One cannot study great matters without growing a little. Ignorance was the fad of the Dark Ages. Scholarship became the fad of a more enlightened time. For centuries it was regarded as inelegant to be capable of reading and writing, and princes avoided education as they would the plague. By the close

of the 18th century most aristocratic families had private museums and libraries, and a nobleman who did not retain a curator for his collection was utterly declassé.

As early as the beginning of the 17th century the mystical opinions of the ancients made a successful bid for popular favor. Several sects sprang up, essentially pagan in character. The magical arts revived, and Egyptian mysticism and the theurgical arts of the Neo-Platonists came to be regarded with ever-increasing favor. Theology stormed and pronounced, driving the heretical sects into secrecy where they continued to flourish on the fringe of respectability.

The loose ends of the mystical tradition were finally brought together under the name of Freemasonry but in the 17th and 18th centuries many strange rites and curious rituals passed under that name. In France, Germany and England, particularly in France, Freemasonry, in its earlier forms, was a strange composite of partly digested fragments of Hindu, Egyptian, Persian, Greek and Jewish metaphysical speculations. The furore lasted for a full two hundred years, but by the beginning of the 19th century the excitement had pretty well died down. Freemasonry had integrated into a fraternal order which no longer emphasized its kinship with the mystical tradition. The democratic psychology was dominating the popular mind. Men were experimenting with the feeling of being free and equal and their first instinct was towards becoming equal to the great and the wealthy. The urge to power and prosperity became the sustaining impulse. The obscure was forgotten, the evident was exploited, and European and American Civilization settled down to the development of the competitive instinct.

In this same century science developed its sophistication. Scientists began to regard themselves as a race apart. By the middle of the 19th century nearly all of the departments of science were suffering from an infallibility complex. To the scientist, wise in his own conceits, all that was not science was superstition. Both mysticism and the orthodox church fell under the general disapproval of the scientifically minded. Agnosticism was the new fad. Unfortunately the fads of the schooled become the law of the unthinking. The whole race grew

proud of its unbeliefs. Science viewed itself as a spirit of emancipation. It resolved to save mankind from all the evils of beliefs, either good or bad, and establish humanity upon the solid rock of skepticism.

Darwin and Huxley were the demigods of the new era and their solemn pronouncements on everything in general became the gospel of the proletariat. By this time science viewed ancient authority as a poor relation and excommunicated the illustrious ancients from its honor roll. Like a selfmade man, science became ashamed of its own origin.

But extremes of thought are seldom comfortable codes to live by. It soon became evident that materialism was unsafe as a social program. The atheist generally has a hard time getting along with himself and a still harder time getting along with fellow atheists. Remove ideals and principles and nothing remains but exploitation, or at least a definite impulse in that direction. Before the 19th century was fifty years old man's sense of proportion restored the mystical equation. The occult returned in the only form possible under the circumstances—spiritualism. To the self-satisfied materialist, smug in his unbeliefs, psychical phenomena presented itself as a thorn in the flesh. Spiritualism struck at the very crux of the realist theory—the continuity of consciousness after death. Spiritualism divided the ranks of science almost immediately and there is no other department of occultism with which so many eminent scientists have aligned themselves. Furthermore the principle underlying spiritualism was a principle which all normally minded human beings wanted to believe. We must clearly distinguish between spiritualism as a philosophical premise and spiritualism as a group of people sitting in the dark with a medium waiting for a table to tilt. Spiritualism as a philosophy is a demonstration of the continuity of consciousness after death. The idea of course raised general objection and was persecuted by the materialist on one side and the theologian on the other. But evidence is stronger than argument and spiritualism, though badly shaken in its early years, survived. It was the opening wedge and through the breach thus made the occult doctrines flooded back into the popular consciousness.

In the last half of the 19th century idealism restated itself among most classes of people. Of course scientists and the institutions which they dominate have held out to the bitter end. The death blow to material science was struck when scientists were forced to acknowledge psychology and came face to face with the factor of the subconscious mind.

In America the mystical renaissance flowed through three widely divergent personalities. Albert Pike revised the higher degrees of Freemasonry, restoring a considerable part of the occult tradition concealed for centuries in its symbolism. Mary Baker Eddy caused the largest schism in the Christian church since the Protestant Reformation, and Madame Helena Blavatsky gave the Ancient Wisdom back to the modern world between the covers of the Secret Doctrine. The close of the 19th century found organized groups of mystics, metaphysicians and new thoughtists functioning in almost every important community of the civilized world. Great credit should go to those who pioneered in the field of metaphysics in the last century. They struggled against terrific odds of prejudice and selfishness, but they brought about a condition of free thought which we all enjoy in religious and philosophical matters today.

The opening years of the 20th century moved in a slow and even tempo. Men lived very much as they had but the intensity of recent years had not touched the average life. The period of the World War must be regarded as the turning point in the psychology of the century. This upheaval destroyed many of the standards and most of the illusions of previous years. There was a definite stimulus to all branches of metaphysical thought after the war. Spiritualism was the comfort of many who had lost dear ones in the catastrophe. Those of deeper mind, not interested merely in phenomena, sought for a philosophy of life which would explain so great a disaster without involving the integrity of divine law. Popular metaphysics as we know it today was distinctly an aftermath of the World War. Hundreds of thousands of bereaved persons searching for comfort and understanding and the courage to build a new world out of the chaos presented an opportunity for exploitation too great for the com-

mercally-minded citizenry to resist. It is at this point then that we must concern ourselves with pseudo-metaphysics, a calamity in itself and a menace to thousands of sincere but inadequately informed persons.

Between 1918 and 1929 metaphysical and psychological shysters impoverished the popular purse to the tune of millions. One man who started life as an unsuccessful veterinary netted over a million a year for several years and finished up by a grand sale of non-existent real estate. His present whereabouts is somewhat obscure. Each of these shysters had disciples, many of them sincere people not knowingly a party to a fraud. They have continued on, sincerely enough, trying to teach worthless doctrines to an ignorant humanity. It will be a long time before we recover entirely from the metaphysical racketeering which flourished in the decade from 1920 to 1930. Literally hundreds of fantastic and worthless cults grew and flourished in an atmosphere of tragedy and deceit.

It must be definitely understood that the perpetrators of false doctrines were entirely without foundation in the true teachings of ancient philosophy. Several of the most successful of these pseudo teachers were entirely uneducated and unread. Success was due to showmanship and audacity. Practically all of the teachings were home-made, arising in minds totally unfit to direct the spiritual destiny of anything. One "successful teacher" founded a nation-wide program that netted a fortune upon thirty minutes' reading in the public library, and the book he read was itself the product of an imposter.

Nearly every race and accent was represented during these hectic years. Turbans, robes, whiskers and dress suits all joined in the program of super-salesmanship. "Peace, power and plenty" was the motto. The halt, the lame and the blind followed the piper. Clerks and stenographers, unhappy husbands and dissatisfied wives, the old and the young, the widows and the orphans struggled together to breathe, concentrate, affirm, meditate and eat their way to "peace, power and plenty." It was a sad story with a sad ending.

It would naturally follow that such a fantastical

spectacle brought the whole subject of metaphysics and occultism into disrepute. The psychological circus however came to an end with the depression and the places where the hoodwinked gathered knew them no more. It was evidently useless to preach prosperity where there wasn't any, and besides this a great many people were losing faith in the idea of wealth. It no longer looked like the will of heaven that all men should be opulent. A few of the more resourceful of the shysters moved into the field of dietetics, but the majority of them simply vanished away.

The metaphysical charlatan of today represents a post-graduate from the more obvious practices of years gone by. He is more subtle and more experienced, and, unfortunately for the public, he is better informed. Several very sincere groups of occultists have been promulgating their doctrines in this country for the last twenty-five years. These groups have been no part of the swindle of the 20's but have continued on their way, patiently and silently trying to educate thoughtful people in spiritual values. The sincerity of these groups deserves our admiration and respect. But for some reason, probably human nature, they have been unable to ground their followers, generally speaking, in the principle of discrimination. The result is there are many thousands of good, honest, well-meaning occultists who have studied rounds and races, reincarnation and karma, for the last forty years. It is in this field and among these classes that the more polished fakers of today are shouting their wares. It has occurred to me that the average "old student" of metaphysics has a vulnerable point in his armament as fatal as the heel of Achilles. Nearly all "old students" are waiting breathlessly for initiation or illumination and it is this weakness that leads them from the straight and narrow way to wisdom. We all long for the green pastures and we all like to think we are worthy to wander in the Elysian Fields even when we know that our worthiness is far from sufficient.

In viewing the occult problem as it is today we must admit that most of the charlatans in the field are comparatively clever people. A novice would have great difficulty in detecting the fraud. Even

experience in the general art of living will do little good. Nothing can save a prospective dupe except a thorough knowledge of occult matters. The average person is in no position to prove the authenticity of an occult organization nor is he equipped to weigh the validity of one against another. How is he to know whether the moving power behind some belief is an adept or a clever crook? To those on the inside, values are rather evident but to the layman under the glamour of some mystical belief the way of discrimination is hard.

One thing however is a help to the uninformed. The occult faker nearly always overplays his hand. His pretenses are too glamorous, his authority is too absolute, his promises are too spectacular. To sum it up, he is too, too divine! Honest men promise little and fulfill their promises, but dishonest men promise everything and deliver nothing.

Somewhere I have read an old philosopher who said, "Wise men speak of God but foolish men speak for God." This is also true when the subject is Mahatmas.

As Aristotle has said, "All men naturally desire to know," but as experience has proved, all men are not worthy to know. Most human beings are but children in matters of the spirit and like children they need conscientious and intelligent guidance. It is difficult to give this guidance at the present time because every department of spiritual thought is dominated by policies, prejudices and profits. We are in a generation dedicated to material accomplishment and those who desire to perpetuate the mystic teachings must be indeed as wise as serpents.

With this preamble established in the mind, we can now approach the direct answering of the question stated at the beginning of this letter. In fact what we have already set forth is itself a partial answer to the question.

Most metaphysically-minded people of today have turned to the occult science for solutions to vital problems of individual and collective life. The orthodox churches are incapable of satisfying the questioning type of mind. This is not a generation of blind faith and unquestioning belief. Too often however the step from orthodoxy to occultism is

like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. Popular occultism, like popular theology, is superstition ridden. If anything, the hazards of occultism are greater than the hazards of theology. Orthodoxy is one rather narrow set of beliefs that have grown familiar and somewhat comfortable from long usage. The term occultism covers a chaos of notions. A few itinerant teachers have isms andosophys of their own, hopelessly and horribly original. The sincere but uninformed seeker after truth, departing from the smugness of his old opinions, plunges into a sea of doubts. He is unequipped mentally for the task of discrimination for he has long been a sheep in a thoughtless flock. Cast upon his own resources, he is most apt to end in a state of hopeless confusion.

As we have observed in previous letters, the average man is not built for mental exercise. For years his church has done his thinking for him in religious matters. He is content with the realization that baptism has assured him salvation. The true doctrines of occultism are so diametrically opposed to such a concept that they offer small satisfaction to the lazy theologian. His natural tendency is to hunt for short cuts and easy methods in the same way that the frugal housewife goes from store to store in search of basement bargains. The housewife is always hoping that she is going to find "something for nothing" and the superficial student of metaphysics suffers from the same type of optimism.

Probably the truest slogan of this industrial era is "buyer beware." Life is beset by a tempting diversity of swindles. We have grown cautious from bitter experience. When we buy merchandise we demand products from reputable firms. When we consult a lawyer we like to know his standing and how many cases he has won. When we visit a doctor we are deeply impressed by his credentials and engage him on the basis of his experience and excellence. But all too often in our search for spiritual values we throw discrimination to the winds and waste our time on some fantastic character with soulful eyes, of whose integrity and ability, if any, we are entirely ignorant. In religion as in industry—let the buyer beware.

Another interesting point should be emphasized. Religious ignorance is the most difficult of all forms of ignorance to clear up because it is closely allied with the irrationalities of the emotional life. A bad mathematician can with practice cure his weakness; so can poor spellers or insufficient linguists, but a person suffering from religious ignorance is not only entirely oblivious of his limitations but is generally proud of them, resisting fanatically any effort to improve his state. Also if you interfere with his convictions, no matter how stupid or malicious they may be, you are trespassing upon his inalienable right to freedom of worship and belief. You can call him ignorant in any of the branches of the arts, sciences or trades and he will likely agree with you, but if you tell him that his religious viewpoints are without a semblance of sanity he will rise in righteous wrath and hate you until the end of his days.

Yet if you pin one of these zealots down and demand of him what he actually knows about philosophy, transcendentalism, mysticism, magic, metaphysics and new thought, he will probably not be able to give you even a reasonably good definition of any one of these terms. He is full of convictions but his notions hang on such a shaky framework that they would be regarded as utterly worthless in any department of accredited scholarship. Perfectly certain of everything and utterly uninformed on nearly everything, enthusiastic, well-meaning metaphysicians are a hard class of people to work with. There is a "falling sickness" in metaphysics. When you really begin to congratulate yourself that you have helped a student on to a reasonable foundation of common sense, he proceeds to fall completely and ignominiously for the next shyster that comes along. Not once, but ad infinitum. The process of trying to extricate the student from the results of his own stupidity must then begin all over again.

To take a general view of the situation. There are at least several hundred metaphysical teachers in this country. Most moderate sized communities have at least one and in large cities there may be from a dozen to fifty or more. These constitute the resident class. In most cases their followings are small and audiences are of parlor proportions. Even when these teachers are representatives of national

or international movements, they are almost certain to be promulgating some private revelation of their own. The majority of these resident metaphysicians have been pupils of some itinerant new thoughtist who passed through the community and held "most esoteric" classes for "old souls." After "the master" departs the disciple comes into his own. Mrs. Brown hangs out her shingle as a soul culturist and carries on Professor Blodgett's "work" as long as any one in the community is willing to be worked. Mrs. Brown's pupils carry on in their turn, punctuating the original teachings of Blodgett-Brown with revelations and soul experiences of their own. As soon as a class of a dozen or more is formed, politics creeps in and the order splits under several new headings and so on until in the end the whole infirmity collapses of its own weakness.

It would be wrong to deny that many of these little metaphysical groups are devoutly sincere. They struggle on from year to year trying to support by their own sincerity an idea that is absolutely not worth supporting. Occasionally there is a brilliant exception but for the most part the subject matter is platitude and mediocrity.

In addition to the resident metaphysician there is the ever ebbing and flowing tide of itinerants. One of the most famous of these wandering new thoughtists who gained international publicity once observed that they passed through the major cities of this country just often enough to "pick the lemons when they were ripe." These constitute the real metaphysical racketeers, but their tribe is waning under the pressure of hard times.

A metaphysical center in a flourishing community is little short of a bedlam. When the procession of visiting speakers is supplemented by the local would-bes, you have doctrines that are hair-raising to say the least. It is amazing how much nonsense can be crammed between four walls, and how many sincere people wander about in a daze trying to orient themselves in a chemistry of yogi breathing, prosperity platitudes and realization circles. Is it any wonder then that our metaphysicians have a somewhat vague and impractical air about them? Most of them are sinking for the third time in an ocean of conflicting beliefs.

It is to wonder how metaphysics has flourished in this country for so long without any definite organization taking place within it. The government has elaborate mechanism to prevent the capitalization of fraud, but law is wary against becoming involved in religious problems. One popular psychologist, pressed by the government to explain the disappearance of a large amount of funds, drew himself up and taking an air of martyred innocence declared that the whole matter was between himself and his God. Metaphysical students in this country must certainly number into the millions, yet no effort whatsoever has been made to standardize occult and metaphysical teaching upon any basis of integrity. Small groups have tried but their efforts were insufficient in the face of a prevailing chaos. The old Mystery Schools have disappeared from the view of the profane. The average student has no idea whatsoever as to what the original Schools actually taught and therefore cannot clearly and legally refute false doctrines.

Of course the average shyster is too clever to acknowledge himself as the source of his doctrine. He speaks glibly and passingly of Himalayan brothers, Egyptian secrets, and then palms off any absurdity which he believes might prove profitable to himself. Overwhelmed by the emotional inference of high authority, innocent people are rapidly involved in teachings that can never prove anything but detrimental.

This exposition is not intended as an attack upon occultism but rather upon the abuses which are practiced under the name. The genuine occult tradition is the oldest, deepest and most complete revelation of divine mysteries that has been given to the race. In every generation a few sincere and enlightened thinkers, realizing the significance of this doctrine as a world-redeeming force, have sought to restore the Ancient Wisdom for the betterment of humanity. The Western descent of adepts is rather clearly defined. To mention a few illustrious names we have Roger Bacon, Giordano

Bruno, Basil Valentine, Paracelsus, Sir Francis Bacon, St. Germain and Helena Blavatsky. Anyone familiar with the teachings of these occultists can easily understand that there is little in common between them and the pseudometaphysicians who plague the present generation. Yet very few people know Paracelsus, other than as a name, if they know that. Totally unacquainted with the bona fide teachings, the uninformed student is easily deceived by inferior and irrelevant revelations.

Some one may ask where do false teachings come from? There are only two answers. Self-deceit or fraud. Hallucinations have all too frequently given rise to religious doctrines in this troubled world. Mediumship, psychical experiences, ill-digested reading and a vivid imagination may cause a perfectly sincere person to believe that he is the one and only possessor of universal truth. Or he may be the sincere dupe of the fraud of another. Fraud has innumerable origins, all stimulated by the hope of profits. A mysterious manner and a ready tongue work wonders with the ignorant.

Of course if a doctrine is false and lacks the elements of truth and integrity, it cannot convey these elements to the student. The thousands of impractical, wool-gathering, inconsistent people who give new thought a bad name are mostly victims of fraud whose lives have been unbalanced by attempting to live or even believe doctrines intrinsically false. True occultism never made anyone impractical, but pseudo-occultism or the incapacity to understand and appreciate occult facts—these will lead to a disordered life.

(To be continued next month.)

Sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall

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