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MONTHLY LETTER

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

London, Mar. 1, 1935.

Dear Friend:

Esthetics is the sixth department of philosophy and may be defined as that branch of learning which is devoted to an examination of the substance of the beautiful and the effect of beauty upon the spiritual, intellectual and moral life of man. Under the general term esthetics are included the several arts devoted to the theory and practice of beauty cultivated by the ancients.

Beauty is the most civilizing force in nature. The theory of esthetics leads to the appreciation of beauty; the practice of esthetics leads to the interpretation of beauty. Under the theory of esthetics, therefore, are considered standards of symmetry and proportion, relations of value and form, and the harmonies of quality, sound, color, and such other media as are appropriate to the interpretation of beauty. Under the practice of esthetics are considered the several disciplines of interpretation by which beauty is released through skill, or, as it is more commonly termed, technique.

The departments of esthetic expression are generally termed the arts. Art differs from science in that art arises from the impulses of the soul and science from the reasonings of the intellect. We

may say that to do a thing skillfully is science, and when science and art contribute equally to the accomplishment of any desired end. Art adorns science and glorifies religion. Art perfects nature. A great artist is a high priest in the temple of the universe.

In ancient times esthetics included the art of music, vocal and instrumental; the art of drama, sacred and profane; the art of sculpture, architectural and impressionistic; the art of painting, drawing and coloring; the art of the dance, artistic and gymnastic; the art of decoration, including adornment, design, et cetera; the art of oratory, from which later evolved poetry and literature; and lastly, the sacred arts, including all the esthetics of veneration. Together these constituted one supreme art—the art of living.

In Egypt the priests evolved what is termed the Hermetic art which descended to medieval Europe as alchemy. According to Arthur Dee the Great Work of the Hermetic philosophers was to perfect nature through art. It is the refining influence of beauty and idealism that is gradually transforming animal man into a divine being. Esthetics is the

"My son, some Kings are commonplace, and not all laborers are worthy of their hire. But this I say to you; that if you are in league with gods to learn life and to live it, neither kings nor commoners can possibly prevent you, though they try their utmost. You shall find help unexpectedly, from strangers who, it may be know not why."

—TSIANG SAMDUP.

mysterious tincture of the alchemical philosophers by which the base elements of life are transmuted into the gold of truth and beauty. Esthetics is also the Universal Medicine, for only beauty and nobility can bring health to the human soul which is sickened with the evils of the world.

An individual or community which does not appreciate and practice beauty cannot long survive. The whole philosophy of esthetics can be summed up in the simple statement attributed to the great prophet of Islam, Mohammed:

"If I had two coats I would sell one of them and buy white hyacinths for my soul."

Civilization complicates all issues, and under the intensiveness of our modern culture even the simplest values become involved in a confusion of opinions. We have lost the power to enjoy beauty. The arts have become confused and for the most part discordant. They no longer minister to our common need; rather, they torment us with their complexities and discomfort our souls with their asymmetries. When false standards are set up the intrinsic fineness of things is sacrificed. Generally speaking, modern esthetics is corrupt. Artists are failing art, and for that reason art is failing man.

The first principle of art is beauty. It must be beautiful to be art. Technique and skill can exist apart from art, but technique and skill are not art in themselves. They are merely the means by which art is released into tangible expression. The beginning and end of art is always beauty.

What, then, is beauty?

The noblest speculations on this subject are contained in the celebrated treatise of Plotinus ON THE BEAUTIFUL. From this great Neo-Platonist we learn that beauty is essentially perfect order—in things and of things. Beauty is a certain virtue present in all bodies, in all forms, and in all substances. Beauty is the true being which animates all living creatures. It is the dynamic pattern, the esthetic framework by which the world is supported. Beauty is that peculiar fitness by which perfected natures are distinguished from imperfect natures, and perfect forms from imperfect forms. According to Plotinus, there is a certain divine consistency which is more evident in some structures than in other

structures. Beginnings move naturally towards certain ends; forces unfold through forms; wisdom blossoms in space; the Divine Will, projecting itself into matter, becomes a symmetrical geometric pattern in which all the elements of beauty are perfectly present.

The human mind, itself composed of the Divine Nature, and imbued at least subjectively with the principle of esthetics, accepts the proportions of nature as a certain artistic canon, thinking and estimating in terms of this canon. The intellect carries what may be termed a certain expectancy towards proportion, rhythm and normalcy. The intellect, therefore, experiences a definite disappointment if the expectancy is not fulfilled. We interpret this disappointment as displeasure or esthetic offense. If, on the other hand, the expectancy is fulfilled there is a satisfaction which we interpret as pleasure.

For example, a gently curving line presumes the continuance of that curve or its development into some logical form. If a sudden angle is interposed there is a definite shock to the esthetic sensibilities. A broken arch is a disappointment. It is true that a broken line is more powerful than a continuous one, because of the blow which it administers to the subjective awareness. But strength is not always beauty. The purpose of art is not merely to attract attention or to force comment. The true purpose of art is to satisfy soul hunger. So, the broken arch does not express the highest form of art and is not truly beautiful.

As another example, the mental expectancy of man may be focussed upon a massive column, finely proportioned, and giving the definite impression that it is intended to support a great weight. If this pillar is caused to support some small and inconsequential structure, the esthetic consciousness is again offended. Everything must have a purpose, and a column which has no purpose sufficient to justify its existence is not truly beautiful. As Socrates has so wisely observed, a thing must be necessary to be beautiful. Nature has devised nothing which does not serve some purpose. This is the highest form of art. The universe, which is a perfect example of utility, is also the most beautiful of all structures cognizable by man. In esthetics that

which is impossible, improbable or deformed offends. And in character that which is ignoble offends. That which offends cannot be beautiful. The grotesque may teach a lesson but it cannot serve as a direct inspiration to consciousness.

This brings up another question. Why is man offended by that which is not beautiful? According to Socrates, there exists within every human being a divine nature composed of the three qualities of unity, beauty and utility. The human soul, according to this old sage, is a perfectly symmetrical divine body containing within itself every element of beauty. Thus every man, regardless of the depravity of his outer life or the immaturity of his esthetic appreciation, possesses to some measure what may be termed an instinct towards the appreciation of beauty. That which is unbeautiful offends the soul because it offends the truth which abides in the soul. This offense against the symmetry of the inner Self causes the reaction of displeasure which is felt when in the presence of an asymmetrical structure.

We may then ask—is there an absolute standard of beauty? Is the human soul capable of recognizing ultimate perfection in the esthetic arts, or does man's sense of beauty grow up with his experience and evolution? If we examine the arts of the various nations, ancient and modern, we must acknowledge that esthetics is subject to the law of evolution. The human being is growing up to the appreciation of beauty even as he is evolving to a fuller comprehension of all abstract values. Genius has existed in every age and each civilization has produced a few exceptional individuals who have possessed a high measure of esthetic vision. As time goes on an ever greater percentage of persons will sense the subtle values which dignify life. The arts will finally flourish and in the Golden Age, which men have dreamed of since the beginning, we shall dwell together not only in peace but in a world made beautiful.

To the philosopher Divinity itself is the absolute standard of all perfection. One philosopher said, "Only God is good." And in another age another philosopher said, "Only God is beautiful." By the term God we must understand the all-knowing, all-animating Spirit of the world by whose wisdom uni-

versal law is maintained. The beauties of nature and of man, therefore, are really the beauty of God in nature and God in man. The word God means good and good infers perfection in all the virtues. To the ancients virtue inferred obedience. "The beginning of wisdom is to revere the gods through obedience," declared the Platonic doctrine. To be good, therefore, is not a platitudinous injunction. It means to fulfill the law, and to fulfill the law means, according to the Socratic philosophers, to do that which is necessary and beautiful.

Esthetics graces action by overcoming all excess and intemperance. Esthetics is the living of the principle of beauty and results in living beautifully. For this reason living is called an art. Scientists would have us believe that living is a science, and commercialists that living is a trade. But to the degree that men live well, they live according to esthetic standards. Esthetics as action is moderation—the Golden Mean, the temperate zone of the wise. Esthetics as morality is virtue—victory over inordinate emotions and desires. Esthetics as thought is wisdom, by which all exaggerations of attitudes are brought to a common order. Esthetics as form is symmetry, in which there is no disproportion of parts. Esthetics as civilization is concord and the dwelling together in cooperation and peace. Esthetics is rhythm, harmony and melody. In every course of action it is that desirable and happy state in which there is no discord or inconsistency.

Through the esthetic impulse in the human soul man is impelled to the perfection of the arts. He seeks to beautify his body, his home, his community and his world. But art involves not only appreciation but also discipline. Discipline is the development of the skill to interpret, and also, the development of the value-sense, the power to discriminate. In music discipline is the training of the voice or the hand and the ear. In sculpture the faculties of form and perception must be developed, and a certain technique of procedure mastered. Drama and the dance demand the disciplining of the emotional faculties and perfect control of the physical body, also to some degree adornment. Appropriate disciplines are also necessary in the sacred arts and oratory.

It should be remembered, however, that discip-

line does not confer art; it merely supports and rationalizes artistic impulse. Discipline comes to nothing, and all training is ineffectual, unless technique is vitalized by soul power. Esthetics is a universal principle which men can partake of in varying degrees, according to their development. Artists are not made by discipline, but genius can go to seed for lack of order and technical direction.

We must try to understand the evolution of esthetic appreciation, for without appreciation there can be no interpretation and art is interpretation. Two forces are constantly at work in the molding of human character. The early Church called these two forces good and evil, or God and the devil. Philosophy, which impersonalizes all universal principles, interprets these contending forces as inner impulse and outer circumstance. There is a constant conflict between man and his world, between the individual and the mass.

The two irreconcilable opposites in civilization today are truth and the majority.

This brings us to one of the major issues of esthetic philosophy: idealism versus realism. The idealist affirms that all things are essentially good and that a divine wisdom, essentially beautiful in its workings, is present throughout nature. All life is moving towards unity, beauty and virtue. The realist, on the other hand, maintains that nothing is really any better than it seems to be. Realism as a doctrine is the most disillusioning of all codes. Realism is established upon the testimony of unrefined sense perceptions, while idealism is established upon a sympathetic and enlightened recognition of the true values which lie beneath appearances.

What then, asks the modern artist, is the highest expression of art? Is it the effort to depict a beauty which is often not apparent or the attempt to copy asymmetry which is usually painfully evident? This argument brings up still another issue. When considering esthetics as art, how shall we define an artist? Is he a creator or a copyist? Is he a depic- tor or an interpreter? Is he an educator or merely a technician? Should he portray what he sees or what he feels? If he portrays what he sees, with what kind of eyes does he see? If he portrays

what he feels, with what kind of a soul does he feel? Is art merely design, a distribution of masses, or a clever combination of light and shadow? These questions are seldom satisfactorily answered in the schools of modern art.

There is a great division in modern opinion as to whether or not art should serve as a medium for the communication of ideas. In other words, should painting, sculpture, music or the dance tell a story or does its excellence depend upon its meaninglessness? The modern tendency in art is to depart from all preachment and interpretation. To the average critic a picture is worthless if it tells a story. To the true esthetician modern art is therefore for the most part unsatisfying because it contributes nothing to the intellectual or spiritual values of life. In a recent exhibition a place of honor was awarded to a painting which represented a side of beef hanging in a butcher's window. A small canvas of a badly drawn orange on a cracked plate was also regarded as exceptional. Fried eggs are also regarded as an enchanting form of still life, while paintings resembling Spanish omelettes are labeled as creative realizations of sunsets.

Such productions not only lack interest, they actually lack technical merit. The creators of these so-called pictures have never mastered the technique of draughtsmanship, and for the most part have no fundamental knowledge of color. Even these shortcomings might be forgiven, however, if the artist really possessed an idea. There is something glorious in even an imperfect effort to do something that is noble and beautiful. We are all imperfectly striving towards noble and beautiful ends. The greatest shortcoming of the average modern artist is lack of an idea. They break the ancient Chinese axiom that nothing should be done without an adequate reason.

There is good modern art but it is comparatively rare due to the present superficial attitudes which dominate racial culture. All modern artists to the contrary notwithstanding, there is no satisfying art which does not tell a story, create a beautiful mood, or reveal a high inspirational quality in the soul of the artist.

(Continued in Supplement)

Some Philosophical Fragments

Supplement to Students Monthly Letter

Dangers of New Thought -- Metaphysics and Psychology

THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF SUPERSCIENCE

BY MANLY HALL

(Continued from Feb. Letter Supplement)

This is not written in the spirit of criticism but is a plain expression of facts as they are. Every day they come to us groping in spirit and body, floating like broken hulks on the sea of life. We are sorry for them and ask that those who are truly trying to help will join with us to help these people back to their feet again, not filling their heads with more opinions but standing them upon their feet and aiding them to think for themselves again. When man loses his conceit and becomes human again he will realize that because he is able to think is no proof that he is able to think WELL.

WHERE OUR MODERN TEACHERS COME FROM. Our modern celebrities can be generally divided into two groups when we come to the problem of source. One group are inspired. In the majority experience proves that their inspiration was a personal opinion strengthened by encouragement and conceit on the part of the individual himself. The other group are those who have taken lessons themselves from some other teacher. In the majority of cases this just proves to be the passing of opinions and acceptance of these opinions as facts by the student. How many of you would want to be operated on by a man who had only studied surgery for two weeks, and that only from someone who claimed to know. Yet we will trust our souls to one who claimed to have a vision, or who goes into trances.

Many metaphysicians are sincerely trying to help, but the ground is so fertile that there has been a great influx of spiritual carpet-baggers and metaphysical patent medicine venders who are in for all they can get out of it. One of them told me that there was a fool born every minute and if he did not get it, someone else would. The "it" of course referring to the contents of your pocketbook. THE MASS OF OCCULT STUDENTS TODAY ARE NOT ON THE PATH. They think they are but it is again only someone's opinion. Even those who are looked up to as most advanced, and "old souls" are advancing into blind alleys. Either the students did not get what the teacher said or else they did and the teacher said nothing. It is of course an open problem as to which that is. The worst part is that they go out of life with less than they came in with for they came in with an opportunity and wasted that.

THE SECOND GREAT DANGER—PSYCHOLOGY

The greatest danger of psychology is that it is true. The mind of man, groping in the darkness of limitation, found the touchstone, or at least some did, that the gods had concealed since the days of Atlantis. A science whereby man may demand of the Infinite, and the Infinite must obey, has been founded upon that discovery. But the new blessing that man grasped at was a deadly thing, BEARING UPON IT A CURSE, THE CURSE OF THE GODS. These powers belong to the gods and they bestow them upon those who are found worthy. But when man steals them from the Infinite, their new found power destroys them. Only the God man prepared after the manner of the law is fitted to grasp in his fingers those subtle forces that are now in the hands of fools. Instead then of a blessing to help us on our way, it only gives us another and more terrible way of expressing the beast within our own souls.

For ages the beast has been bound to earth by his own limitations and ignorance but now he rises armed with the powers of the gods. HEAVEN ALONE KNOWS WHAT THE END WILL BE.

This mighty power, that our forefathers never dreamed of, sank Atlantis, has destroyed all the races that have so far peopled the earth, and now like a plague it is descended upon our race to confront it with the great temptation. It is the demon at the shoulder of the master, it is the power of God himself, and how does selfish man know how to wield it. Crimes that once he hung for can now be done silently and unsuspected, things that he once labored for as an honest man he now seeks to secure through his subtle force; he strikes where those who do not know cannot retaliate. To the egotism and brutality of the beast is added now the sceptre of a demi-god. But of course in time things will right themselves and the plan go on. But if the present attitude is continued the race will dissolve itself in the swirl of occult, called by those who cannot manage them, and left like plagues upon nature's face.

The modern teachers of Psychology are unconsciously damning the race by teaching man to use the forces but not teaching how to use them wisely. They have but one legitimate use, but no one would bother them if that use was explained and the present application made impossible. These forces are to be used only as directed by the masters for the unfoldment of man himself and the development of the earth. How many of the students of Psychology are using them that way? Not enough to discuss. ALL PERSONAL USES OF SUPERPHYSICAL OR MENTAL POWER FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF PERSONAL ENDS IS CRIMINAL. And all who make use of it in such ways secure with it the curse of the gods. The curse is this, that they will destroy themselves with their attempts to satisfy their own egotism. The curse is sure, they have already hypnotized themselves with the powers they sought to exert over others, and while millions will suffer with them, they will suffer most of all.

THE ANSWER

There is but one solution to the problem and it has nothing to do with creeds or clans. It is too

late to conceal the knowledge. It is already on the lips of children. MAN MUST BE TAUGHT TO ACCEPT WITH THIS DIVINE POWER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GODS. It is only in this way that he can prevent his own destruction. If he will only mold his life into the pattern of the Masters he may yet learn to wield this awful force as they do, that it bring forth good and not evil, a feast and not a famine. But will man think? Will he sacrifice himself now in order to save himself later? We hope, but we are sorely afraid that he will not bend to the will of the Masters until he has destroyed all. Man does not know how to use these finer forces, he is playing with destruction but will allow naught to guide him or direct him. He wants what he wants and turns all the powers that he has to the attainment of his own desires. The things he wants will kill him, for they are all of the earth, earthy. He listens to none but, happy with the new found toy which he believes will make him happy, he shakes off the hand of prudence and dashes blindly over the cliff to his death.

What good does it do to warn, they only laugh. What if the handwriting is upon the wall, they will not heed until the walls begin to fall. And then they turn and pray for mercy, those who would not listen to the guidance of understanding. So Psychology will everyday become more popular, teaching man to gain what he wants, but failing to teach him that only God knows what he truly needs. If he gains what he wants it will kill him and he never seeks for what he needs. So the curse of the gods is upon him for stealing their power and not accepting their understanding.

END

STUDENTS LETTER

(Continued from A Monthly Letter)

Esthetics as theory infers a creative impulse supported by technical knowledge. Of course only a few highly evolved mortals possess the soul power to achieve greatly in the arts. Nevertheless beauty is necessary to every human being. If we cannot perform, we must at least appreciate. No one can be truly normal unless he has some esthetic appreciation. The love of the beautiful and the expression

of beauty through some art enriches the life and protects the spiritual values of man from the corroding influences of this present commercial era.

It seems in order at this point to make a few practical suggestions concerning the application of esthetic principles to the life of the average individual. Every serious student of the spiritual sciences should realize the full import of beauty as a ministering force in life. The ancient Egyptians cultivated esthetics in all of its branches as part of the state religion. The Greeks passed laws prohibiting the construction of asymmetrical buildings or the exhibition or performance of art, drama or music which did not conform to certain esthetic standards. The Greeks punished with exile and disgrace anyone who wilfully perverted any standard of beauty. The Spartans destroyed at birth all deformed infants lest deformity exhibited to the populace in their later years should corrupt the state. These various measures were dictated by a profound understanding and contributed largely to the excellence of these empires and states. We all admire the nobility and beauty which distinguished the classical systems of philosophy and religion. If we would share the wisdom of the ancients, we must rise to their esthetic standards.

The absence of art or esthetic consciousness in the average home is a greater tragedy than may at first appear. This general indifference to beauty is an important factor in the widespread decadence of culture and integrity throughout the so-called civilized world. People who are content to live in a home filled with gaudy cheapness and evidences of bad taste will find that their personal standards of life and thought are infected and corrupted by this unfitting and unlovely atmosphere. Every student of philosophy and mysticism should realize the necessity of including beauty in his budget. He should realize that art is a living force and should place it above material luxury.

As a homely but literal illustration of this point, study the average home. The rooms are filled with cheap chromos in over-gilded frames, and inexpensive trifles accumulated at holidays and bridge parties. Ten dollars would be a high price for the total collection. Few fine books ever invade the premises. Cheap editions, if any, badly printed and in

gaudy covers fill the library "shelf." Practically no good sculpture ever reaches the private home in America.

Is this condition really necessary in a country which, even during the present depression, has the highest per capita wealth of any country in the world? The excuse is that, by the time the rent is paid, the installments on the frigidaire, radio, automobile, furniture, et cetera are met, and the pressing bills of the month taken care of, there are no funds left with which to indulge an esthetic urge. The truth, however, is that there is no urge. If a true urge existed it would take precedence over creature comforts, conveniences and luxuries.

While it is undoubtedly true that many people cannot afford anything beyond the bare necessities of life, there are a great number who can afford good cars, good clothes, entertainment, a radio, and various social expenditures. All these can afford beauty. We should cease to think of art as a luxury of the rich and realize that it is also a necessity of the poor. The strength of the nation is its middle class and it is this great middle class that needs the refining, purifying influence of fine art. Beauty is a constant inspiration and an ever present help in time of trouble.

Any person who can afford the creature comforts such as are common in the average American home can afford, by careful planning, to possess at least one fine and beautiful example of esthetic art to inspire him and to become a part of his life. If the man who has been buying a new car each year will forego this luxury for a season and buy a good painting, a fine piece of sculpture, a rare book, or some object of beauty which pleases him, he will discover that the satisfying of the esthetic sense is one of the most practical ways of spending money. Possibly one of the reasons why so few people are satisfied to stay at home is because there is so little of beauty in the home to sanctify and refine the environment.

A house that is filled with numerous bric-a-brac and maudlin sentimentalities needs a thorough going-over. The ancient Mayan ceremony should be performed, which consisted of burning all personal effects at certain intervals. It is a common fault to believe that a room must be littered with a thou-

sand eyesores in order to be furnished. The wise man never forgets the dignity of space. Blank walls are much more artistic than the things which usually cover them. In a simple, uncluttered environment one fine art object will stand out—its beauty a benediction upon the whole environment. The Oriental art connoisseur, whose taste bears witness to thousands of years of civilizing culture, seldom permits himself the luxury of more than one fine painting or beautiful ceramic to even a large room, and all of his furnishings will be consistent one with the other. He will never mix his schools of art or his periods of furnishings. To do so is to irritate the soul.

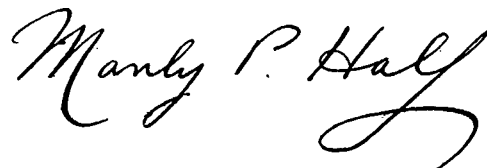
It is also painfully evident that the average person makes absolutely no effort to cultivate any of the arts in himself. The radio takes the place of music in the home. Few people are willing to train themselves in vocal or instrumental performance, or in the dance. The excuse given is that there is no financial future for such talents. No thought is given to the really important issue—the development of the esthetic nature and the personal satisfaction and improvement to be derived from the ability to perform.

The average individual does not make a constructive use of his emotional energies. The proper application of esthetic laws and principles will transmute instinct and appetite into creative impulse and artistic expression. Nearly all of the evils of human disposition arise from the repression or misapplication of emotional energy. The hates, fears, griefs and worries of mankind bear witness to undirected and untransmuted emotional energy. The disciplines of esthetics give legitimate expression to the impulsiveness of human nature. We cannot be truly dedicated to beauty and at the same time fail to develop a certain inward grace. The esthetic arts are the normal and natural channels for the manifestation of man's complicated emotional reflexes.

Nearly all human beings are in some way emotionally inhibited. These inhibitions often break out in unbeautiful action and thought. These periodic outbursts, usually attended by unfortunate consequences, can be prevented if the emotional life is allowed a beautiful and creative expression through

some one of the several esthetic arts. These arts can fill empty lives and the empty places in otherwise full lives. There are people who feel that they are alone and neglected, and view the whole existence as a more or less tragic span. These persons can enrich themselves spiritually and emotionally through the theory and practice of artistic expression.

Very truly yours,



INTERESTING NEWS ITEMS

In one of my earlier letters I called attention to my purchase of a Cabbalistic manuscript by the Comte de St.-Germain. This manuscript was from the library of Mr. Lionel Hauser which was sold at Sotheby's in London by auction last April. While in Paris I visited Mr. Hauser and discussed with him the origin of this manuscript and several other of his important papers. Mr. Hauser is the owner of an important Masonic register containing the minutes and notes of important Masonic meetings in Paris between 1775 and 1789. The Marquis de la Fayette was received into this Lodge on June 24, 1782, and among the important signatures contained in the register is the signature of Comte de St.-Germain. The date of the entry is several years later than the supposed date of the mysterious count's death. Mr. Hauser also possesses a curious Masonic token or pass-coin bearing St.-Germain's name and used by the members of his Lodge for purposes of identification. The coin is silver, about the size of a quarter dollar, and is ornamented with Masonic emblems.

We are having a complete photostatic copy made of what is probably the most important Hermetic manuscript in the Bibliotheque National. This is the celebrated Book of Abraham the Jew, magnificently illustrated with water-color miniatures on vellum, exhibiting the innermost secrets of the Hermetic art. We hope to translate and publish this work, which up to the present time has existed only in a few inaccessible manuscripts.