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## MONTHLY LETTER

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

Los Angeles, Oct. 1, 1935.

Dear Friend:

One of the greatest problems in modern mystical philosophy is to free the popular mind from the conceit that a little metaphysical speculation relieves the individual from all responsibility and duties of the temporal state. Self improvement is one of the first duties of man, for only through ages of Self improvement can we achieve to that state of wisdom we so greatly desire. The practice of mysticism is not a substitute for improvement nor does it bestow upon us any knowledge or skill in those exact arts and sciences, the mastery of which is necessary to our spiritual security.

Some will say that a mastery of material arts can have little meaning to the spiritual man, for, like other aspects of illusionary existence, these arts must finally be dissipated by the light of perfect reason. It is unquestionably true that all human institutions are so full of ignorance and imperfection that, in terms of ultimates, they are of but passing moment, yet the mastery of these arts and sciences is of greater account than may first appear. The first merit of learning is discipline. The integrity by which an individual remains faithful to a certain line of effort is itself a vital factor in soul growth. You may well say that they do not speak Greek in heaven, so why should we learn it on earth? The answer to this is that it is not the Greek which is learned but the ability to learn Greek and the strength and specialization of faculties that is important. In the same way we study many things here that are of no use hereafter. They are neces-

sary here and excellence in them is a vital factor in our well-being hereafter.

To the mystic material knowledge may seem to be a mass of trifles. But, as Michaelangelo said, "trifles make perfection and perfection is no trifle." The thousands of experiences of our material existence may seem in themselves insignificant but together they make up the perfection of action, and this perfection is the foundation of our divine existence. Let all serious thinkers remember that material existence, with its confusions and discords, is part of the divine plan, and being part of the plan, is evidently necessary to those creatures which are evolving through it. If we were not supposed to master the physical world, we would not be placed here nor does philosophy allow that being here our first impulse should be to escape. Rather we should realize that only those who are faithful unto little things shall be made master over greater things. If we cannot live in this small part of the universe, how can we become citizens of a greater world with vaster and more numerous complexities.

As an excuse for lack of knowledge and lack of incentive to learn, a certain class of metaphysicians affirm, upon the authority of the Bible, that if they seek first the kingdom of heaven, all else will be added unto them. Or possibly they will quote the celebrated words, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Let us analyze these two over-worked phrases a little more critically. What did the old prophet mean when he said, "seek ye

first the kingdom of heaven?" Did he mean to sit around mumbling platitudes? Do men achieve righteousness by merely affirming their desires or striving to psychologize themselves into that state of mind that "God owes them a living?" Is it reasonable to say that the advice of the prophet has been intelligently followed by people whose quest for truth consists of listening to a few talks on divine prosperity? We can scarcely conceive such to be the case. Rather it would seem that the Biblical advice implies the dedication of the life to a quest of truth and the understanding of those spiritual laws which together constitute the kingdom of heaven. Nor is it at all probable that the reward promised was to be regarded as a material remuneration. He who achieves truth achieves all that is real and truth is its own reward. Truth and real estate are not the same thing nor is that science which is dedicated to the perfection of the human soul to be confused with those arts and crafts which have as their foundation a system of remuneration suitable for the perpetuation of physical society.

As to the opening words of the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd," this is an affirmation of the fact that the human will acknowledges the supremacy of divine will and follows after truth as the sheep follow the shepherd. The 23rd Psalm is not an economic formula, it is a hymn of praise in which a grateful and enlightened soul pays homage to that sovereign truth which supports it through all the emergencies of life. The Psalmist says "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," which is equivalent to saying, "I have given myself to truth—what other thing can I desire?"

To interpret the Scriptures as signifying that a few months study of metaphysics entitles the individual to rest forever on divine bounty is to depart entirely from every sound system of religion, philosophy or sociology that has ever existed.

This letter is a continuation of last month's question. Our problem is concerned with religious and philosophical orientation. Each person brings with him into the present life a considerable background in spiritual experience. We are born the sum of what we have previously accomplished. The ideals and codes of action intrinsic to us bear witness

to thousands of years of thought and idealism. To discover where we stand in the spiritual life of the universe it is necessary that we analyze what we believe, for our most secret beliefs and convictions concerning God, nature and life are the true measure of our soul power.

In questing about in life for religious and philosophical systems to inspire and stimulate our present actions we must naturally align ourselves with such modern institutions as are consistent with the spiritual program which we have lived through many lives. It is the natural instinct on the part of man to do this, which results in the perpetuation of numerous sects and cults all devoted to the same general program but differing in minor details of attitude and method. As growth depends upon an intelligent program, the wise person, discovering in himself that which he needs, next dedicates his thought to the accomplishment of that which is necessary.

Mankind lives and learns along lines of least resistance. In most cases the line of least resistance is the line of greatest proficiency. We are most familiar with those things which we have most often done. If we have dedicated many lives to the study of a certain philosophy or to the living of a certain code, it is easier for us to continue in that philosophy or code than to branch out into some new or unexplored field of thought or action.

Every human being consciously or unconsciously lives according to the structure of belief built up within his subjective self through the numerous lives that have preceded his present incarnation. Therefore it follows that if we can analyze correctly what we believe, we shall discover at the same time what we are, and also the quality of the force which motivates our thought and action. We are what we believe. This does not mean that we are greatly influenced by the sectarian attachments of this present incarnation nor are we to confuse names with truth. In each life we call our belief something different but it is the belief itself and not the name we give to it which must be considered if we are to arrive at the facts concerning our spiritual state.

The psychologist, probing into the subconscious mind for motives and complexes, realizes the sig-

nificance of those subtle impulses which seem to come from nowhere but are really founded upon ages of assimilated experiences. Every student of the sacred sciences would do well to make a simple psychoanalysis of his own spiritual background. He can take a valuable step in this direction by sitting down quietly and examining his innermost convictions concerning certain great realities of life. Each person who has thought at all on abstract matters has arrived at conclusions, at least to a certain measure, satisfactory and sufficient to his own needs.

Suppose then in connection with this month's letter that you sit down quietly and answer the following questions according to your deepest and most complete convictions. Do not derive your answers from some creed in which you are now interested or with which you have affiliated yourself during this life. Write down the answers that come to you out of your heart of hearts, and then examine the answers critically and impersonally, with the realization that you are examining the summary of many lives of hoping, dreaming and experiencing.

Give your most perfect understanding of:

1. The nature of God.
2. The nature of Nature.
3. The nature of Man.
4. The nature of Soul.
5. The nature of Universal Purpose.
6. The nature of Universal Ultimate.

The way in which each of these is answered will reveal major trends of belief. The great schools of philosophy which have arisen among the empires of antiquity were distinguished from one another principally by the answers which they formulated to these six questions. In many cases the differences between the schools were more apparent than real. While a few of those most highly proficient in the doctrines sensed the universal concord, the laity of these various religious and philosophical orders were divided by their various opinions even as is true today among the sects of Christendom.

Each of our questions is susceptible of at least three answers and these answers clearly reveal the religious and racial background.

The first question as to the nature of God must naturally be answered from the viewpoint of the patriarchist, the matriarchist or the impersonalist. If we bestow upon God masculine or positive attributes as is common throughout Christendom and Israel, we are patriarchists. This attitude can be refined until the personal elements very largely disappear and our patriarchy becomes an abstract philosophical concept. We see deity in the aspect of a father and all creations appear as the children or progeny of this parent. The Romans, Persians, Chinese, some of the Greeks, the Nordic peoples, and the Judeastic cults are the backgrounds of the patriarchist idea.

Among several mystic cults we have the worship of deity as mother. In the matriarchal system the tender, maternal emotions are bestowed upon divinity instead of the sterner masculine virtues. The father punishes his wayward children but the mother forgives them and intercedes for them. Matriarchy was at one time dominating the religions of the Egyptians and is generally accepted by many sects of Orientals, especially the Vedantists. With the development of the more sensitive virtues of mankind, female divinities or "saktis" become more prominent in religious systems. The matriarchy is a more advanced philosophical concept than a patriarchy to the same degree that compassion and forgiveness are higher impulses than vengeance and retribution.

The third or impersonalistic attitude views deity as principle alone entirely too transcendent to be limited by any concept of polarity. God is defined as mind, consciousness, spirit, truth, virtue, law, or even as in the Socratic philosophies as undefinable, any effort at definition being regarded as a defilement. This attitude is Confucian, Buddhistic, Socratic and esoterically speaking Platonic.

The other five questions are susceptible of similar analysis. Nature was accepted as a god by the Greeks, Hindus and Chinese and as a lifeless and inert vehicle of manifestation by the exoteric Christians and Jews, and as a demon or adversary opposing the laws of spirit by the Gnostics, some sects of the Egyptians and the Zoroastrians.

Man is regarded as a spiritual emanation of di-

vinity itself by the Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews. He is regarded as a personification of the principle of universal intellect or the embodiment of Divine Mind by the philosophers of the classical periods, and as the progeny or child of the earth who must be rescued from inglorious extinction through special dispensations by the Gnostics and several of the religious cults of northern Asia. This attitude also appears among several of the modern Christian cults.

The human soul is derived from the Universal Soul or life of the world by the Platonists and most of the other schools of Greek philosophy. The soul is confused with God or spirit by the Christians who bestow upon it a certain substantial fabric of its own. The old esoteric doctrines taught that the soul was the experience body of man built up from the accumulated wisdom gained by living. The old Egyptians also concurred with this, for they taught that continuity of consciousness after death resulted in the perfection of the soul body in which the spirit functioned after the decease of its physical form.

The purpose for existence is one of the most important issues of religious disagreement. One school declares the purpose of existence to be the perfection of God; another school the perfection of man; and a third the perfection of the world or nature. The Greeks believed that deity achieved its own perfection through the unfoldment of itself in its progeny. Christendom centralizes all its dogma about the premise that the purpose of existence is the salvation of the human soul. There are a number of groups of the millennial type who look forward to the establishment of heaven upon earth and a Golden Age in which perfection will reign forever in the mundane sphere. Exoterically speaking, the Zoroastrians are representative of this group.

Concerning the question of ultimates. One school acknowledges that at the end of effort there is some final state in which all things exist together in the fulfillment of all hope and aspiration. This may be termed the ultimate doctrine. Then there are the evolutionists who posit growth as eternal and that all natures are unfolding forever

and that throughout an immeasurable and limitless eternity there is measureless and limitless unfoldment. This group acknowledges no beginning and no end. Then the third hypothesis is the absorptionist doctrine which has always dominated the highest philosophical systems. This is to the effect that evolution or growth is finally consummated by the reabsorption of all finite life into the infinite Principle from which it had its beginning. This doctrine is particularly prominent in Buddhism where Nirvana represents the return of all individual existence into its Universal Cause. Heaven is the end of the ultimatism, growth is the end of the evolutionist, and Nirvana is the end of the absorptionist.

In addition to these primary questions there are others which also need to be examined in order to discover the fundamental premises upon which your philosophy of life has been built up. One of the most important of these is the matter of sin. If you refuse to acknowledge the existence of sin through a process of positive denial you are an absolutist. If you believe in the forgiveness of sin through divine intercession, you are an atone-ist. If you believe in the unreality of sin, you are probably a Buddhist. If you accept the fundamental existence of sin, you are an anthropomorphist. If you regard sin as synonymous with ignorance to be overcome through the unfoldment of personal integrity, you are then a Platonist and a philosopher.

If you believe in the merit of motive over action, you are an idealist. If you believe that action is the measure of motive, you are a realist. If you believe in the virtue of humility, you are a renunciationist. If you believe in the supremacy of will-power over universal law, you have been imbibing the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. If you believe in the salvation of special classes or types, your background has been among faiths with a strong sacerdotal class or caste as among the Brahmins or Egyptians.

If you believe in a god apart from nature, you are a theist or deist. If you believe that deity is absorbed in its own creation, ruling it from within through attributes and various media, you are a Pantheist. Deism is very strong with the Moham-

medans, and Pantheism was universal to the Greeks.

If you believe that perfection is a state of perfect individualism and that you as you will go on forever, to become A god, you are a personalist. If your concept is final identity with and absorption into a greater, all-wise Universal Principle, you are an impersonalist. Most Western philosophy is personalistic, and most Eastern philosophy is impersonalistic. This is really the main point of difference between the two schools.

If you believe in the efficacy of ritualism and hierarchy, you are a ceremonialist and you have come up through religious systems containing pagantry and elaborate priestcrafts. If your attitude towards religion is one of extreme simplicity and you regard all outward religious show as vain, then your background has been among faiths devoted to the teaching of the mystic presence or inner communion and you are an anti-institutionalist.

In your quest for knowledge if you are satisfied with the understanding of the material world, you are a materialist. If you demand a knowledge of the superphysical causes behind form, you are a transcendentalist. If in transcendentalism you desire to understand the universal mystery through the rationale of knowing, you are an occultist. If your insight is based upon inspiration and feeling, you are a mystic. If your conversion is influenced by the senses and their reflexes, you are a psychic. The most prominent of the materialistic groups are the rationalists. The most prominent of the occult groups are the Brahmins. The most familiar of the mystical religions is Christianity, and the most prominent of the psychical sects is Spiritualism.

Having examined yourself in an effort to discover the fundamental premises upon which your spiritual life is established, it is then possible to determine with some accuracy that which is logically the next step in your growth and development. This will be the subject of next month's letter.

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QUESTION—What place have insects in the scheme of evolution? Are they a legitimate life stream?

ANSWER—In the old teachings we learn that in-

sect life is the survival of some of the earliest organisms which existed upon the earth. They are stragglers that were unable to keep up with the life waves to which they belonged. They have consequently gone through a certain retrogression and will not be able to continue their unfoldment until the development of a new life wave. They might, therefore, be regarded as minute negative centers of life, exceedingly responsive to the mental impulses of higher organisms. The destructive tendencies in insect life are not really inherent to the insect but are communicated to it by higher organisms. Thus insect pests, bacterial epidemics etc. are always aggravated by waves of destructiveness in human behavior. Thus insects are instruments of Karma and their viciousness is due to the viciousness in human thought and emotional impulses in the animal kingdom. There is an old tradition to the effect that when man achieves to the Golden Age, disease, sin and death will cease and the micro-organisms which now carry disease and torment men will cease their activities. The story of the insect is concealed under the allegory of Pandora and her box.

QUESTION—Why is it that child prodigies in the majority of cases are "burned out" by the time they mature? Why do they not go on developing?

ANSWER—The phenomenon which we call a prodigy in most cases is the result of the unbalance of the endocrine system. The pineal gland controls the flow of mental energy from the ego to the physical brain. Improper function of this gland may produce the appearance of premature development and maturity. Usually however the physical body is incapable of sustaining the strain of premature activity, and the abnormal condition finally results in the brain or the body breaking down. Children from the fifth to fifteenth year are in the growing periods. During this time a considerable part of the vital reserve of the body must be expended in building bone, flesh, nerve and muscle. If during this period glandular unbalance throws a heavy mental or emotional strain upon the body the vital resources are divided. This results in the final weakening of both the mental and physical pro-

cesses. Most parents think children are clever if they seem old beyond their years, but the efficiency of the mature individual depends to a great measure upon the normalcy of the childhood and adolescent periods.

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QUESTION—Please give your interpretation of the Holy Ghost.

ANSWER—All the great Wisdom Religions of the world agree that the great Causal Energy which we term God manifests throughout creation as a triune or triform energy. Among the Brahmins the Supreme Deity is represented with three faces and its aspects are designated Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. In Greece the triad consists of Phanes, Chronos and Zeus, and in Christendom the divine attributes are called the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. These three manifestations represent God as spirit the Father, God as soul or mind the Son, and God as body or activity the Holy Ghost. In the esoteric system of the Gnostics the Holy Ghost was the vast active principle which ensouls the material creation. It was termed the Demiurgus and is the source of those natural laws by which the economy of physical function is preserved. The Holy Ghost of Christendom corresponds very closely with that which the pagans termed Nature, a term which even now is popularly personified so that we say Mother Nature, regarding Nature as the common parent of all material forms. In Egypt Mother Nature is represented by Isis who carries in her arms Horus the Christ-child, to signify that soul or mind arises from or is born through the experiences of natural existence. This is the interpretation of the state that Christ, the Messianic soul, is conceived of the Holy Ghost, or arises from the mystery of nature. The word ghost is from *gast* or a breath. Holy Ghost means sacred breath. This is a symbolical term referring to the breath of life in all things. When the Creative Process formed the world, as described in Genesis, it sent forth Its breath into Its creations and when they received the breath of life these creatures became living things.

QUESTION—Can peace in the outer life be attained without attaining peace within?

ANSWER—To the average person peace means happiness. The term actually signifies stillness, and is the dying out of the contentions, frictions and irritations which ignorance and intemperance consistently set up in the human consciousness. There is a wonderful phrase in the Arabian Nights' Entertainment: "Happiness must be earned." In these few words is set forth the philosophical formula for well-being. In the same way peace must be earned. It is the purpose of each evolving soul to perfect within its own nature a condition of well-being sufficient to assure tranquillity and security. Peace is not in the world—it is in the soul. The contentions of outer existence cease when the soul becomes one with truth. Only when the inner life is established in wisdom can the outer life be at peace with its world.

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QUESTION—Do you recommend fasting as a means of advancing spiritually?

ANSWER—According to the opinion of H. G. Wells, Gautama Buddha was one of the three greatest men who have ever lived upon the earth. Buddha's experience in fasting therefore should be of interest and significance to all students of philosophy. When Buddha set forth on his quest for enlightenment he followed the Brahmin disciple of his time, giving himself over to extreme austerities of the flesh. He performed elaborate fastings for the purification of his soul until, at last, dying from starvation, he sank down exhausted by the side of the Indian road. His years of self-sacrifice and suffering had failed utterly to bring him the illumination that he sought. Realizing his failure Buddha ate a hearty meal, and gave up the penitent path of starvation. It was only after he had restored the health and normalcy of his physical body that illumination came to him. It is true that fasting will stimulate the psychical powers by breaking down body resistance, but the way to true wisdom is not through psychism but through the normalizing and perfecting of every part of the nature. In matters of food the Socratic axiom is admirable: "In all things not too much." Moderation and not absti-

nence is normalcy. The theory of starving to death for the glory of God belongs to the old era of superstitions. The philosopher of today realizes that the law of life is not fulfilled through misery and suffering, but that the universal plan is perfected by the health, happiness and well-being of all creatures.

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QUESTION—Does it harm one to attend spiritualistic meetings?

ANSWER—In answering this question it is not my desire to discredit the sincerity of spiritualists but rather to point out certain hazards which believing people, enthused with an idea, are apt to overlook. A spiritualistic seance is a negative vortex of psychical forces. Such a vortex draws into itself decarnate entities of various kinds and also numerous larvae or elementals of the astral world. The average medium has no power to control the entities which impinge themselves upon the plexus of the sympathetic nervous system. In the seance both the medium and the sitters are helpless victims of such malefic entities as may care to attack them. Therefore there is constant danger in seances that the sitters will take away with them elemental beings which have attached themselves to various parts of the aura. These elementals may later attack the physical resistance by sapping the etheric body. When this condition has gone on for a time and resistance has been greatly lowered, the elemental or malicious decarnate entity may obsess the living person and finally drive the ego out of its body. While such a condition is an extreme case, it is a hazard which every person must be prepared to face who encourages any form of negative psychism or permits themselves to take part in seances. The miseries caused by the ouija board, the fallacies of automatic writing, and the general hazard of psychic phenomena has ruined more lives than a few.

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QUESTION—What is the proper philosophical attitude towards politics? Should Occult Students take an active part in political reforms and social programs?

ANSWER—Political science had its origin in the

complex of social problems arising in national and racial civilization. Laws are rules of contact and relationship founded upon necessity and intended to sustain individual and collective integrity. As the majority of human beings are neither wholly wise nor wholly honest, grievous evils have arisen. Ambitious men have perverted the interpretations of law to their own profit and, having achieved positions of power and authority, have made other laws for their own advantage at the expense of the public good. There is scarcely a time to be found in history when the political systems of so-called civilized nations were not corrupt. Yet in the face of this general perversion it still remains evident that laws are necessary, that government is necessary. The individual must be protected against the schemes of his neighbors and the corruptions within himself.

Although most politicians are insincere, political science itself is useful and necessary at this stage in human development. It is natural therefore that wise men should desire to correct the evident defects in political systems that mankind may enjoy the protection of honest and efficient codes and statutes. I cannot see how it is possible for a philosopher to ignore the evident need for political reform. At the same time it is painfully apparent that the wise, being utterly in the minority, can accomplish little by attacking and decrying existing evils.

Nearly all of the great World Teachers realized that the majority of mankind were not sufficiently evolved to solve their vital problems with philosophy alone. The majority benefited most through the correction of the social and economic ills which oppressed them. Buddha bitterly attacked the political theocracy of India, striking at the very soul of political privilege when he attacked the caste system. Socrates paid with his life for his bitter denunciation of the Athenian policy of privileges and the delinquency of legislators. Confucius devoted his life to the reformation of the philosophies and political institutions of China. Zarathustra first converted the king to his doctrine that he might begin his reformations with the state. Moses and Aaron defied the Pharaoh of Egypt and Judaism arose on a

foundation of social reforms fully equal in significance with the religious purposes. Six of the Seven Sophists of Greece were legislators and political reformists, as were also Pythagoras and Plato. It is generally acknowledged that Jesus was a reformer of Jewish social and political law, and Mohammed fearlessly attacked the whole legislative theory of Arabia, denouncing the privileges of the Meccans and established a doctrine that not only dominates Arabia but encroaches upon every social and political aspect of Islamic life.

It is the duty of the philosopher to labor unselfishly and devotedly for the promulgation of truth and wisdom and justice, and he must perforce withdraw his support from any individual or institution which functions inconsistently with reasonable standards of integrity. On the other hand political corruptions, like ignorance of which they are a part, cannot actually be remedied by legislation but must be finally corrected by the improvement of human nature itself. Therefore the philosopher may say— I cannot make a man honest but if I can dispel ignorance he will become honest himself. Philosophy always approaches the political problem from an educational viewpoint. If we can make enough people see the reality of those great laws of life which circumscribe all mundane affairs they will live better as individuals, and the integrity of the individual is the cornerstone of social and political well-being.

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QUESTION—What should be the attitude of the Occult Student towards Surgery?

ANSWER—Persons of all beliefs approach surgery with a common dread. The common sense of the individual warns him that the human body is an extremely delicate mechanism which seldom fully recovers from major surgery. The physical man is a masterpiece of natural economy. All the organs and parts of the body have a particular duty to perform and removal of any organ or part is bound

to influence the vibratory and chemical balance of the whole structure. Several ancient peoples, most notably the Greeks, held all surgery and dissection in disfavor, declaring it to be a sacrilege against the gods and the human soul to mutilate its house either in life or after death. It is for this reason that the Greeks never achieved any high proficiency in anatomy but did accomplish much in clinical medicine. The clinics of Hippocrates contained hundreds of patients under constant observation but the physicians gathered there possessed only the most rudimentary knowledge of the organs of the body, their location and general structure. Of late years surgery has become more or less of a medical fad and prominent surgeons have grown wealthy off of the exorbitant fees which they charge for even the most minor operations. The average sick person, having little knowledge of his own functions, is intimidated into surgery through high pressure business methods. On the other hand there are many people living lives of comparative comfort and efficiency who would be dead had not surgery rescued them from some physical extremity.

Philosophically speaking, it seems to me that the matter can be summarized something thus: the purpose of life is experience. Under normal conditions the perpetuation of life offers opportunity for growth and usefulness. It is the duty of the individual, therefore, to perpetuate life as long as there is any reasonable probability of the restoration of comparative health. To fail in this respect and perhaps to die rather than to use the scientific means available to prolong life would not be regarded as a philosophical virtue, but is technically speaking suicide. Philosophy will permit therefore the use of surgery when other means have failed and surgery is the last recourse. Philosophy would invite each truth seeker to live as nearly as possible in harmony with the laws of health but in an emergency would regard the perpetuation of life as more important than anti-surgical prejudices.

Yours very sincerely,

*Manly P. Hall*