

A Monthly Letter – July 1, 1934

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

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Dear Friend:

Aristotle opens his celebrated treatise ON METAPHYSICS with the statement: “All men naturally desire to know.” The 3rd and 4th branches of Metaphysics are concerned with the substance and nature of KNOWLEDGE and the relationship between things known and that abstract state of knowing which we term TRUTH.

In his famous work THE NEW ATLANTIS, Sir Francis Bacon describes a philosophic empire, ruled over by enlightened men, which is some day to be established upon the earth. In the midst of this empire is the City of Wisdom, and in the midst of this city a university of the arts and sciences named SOLOMON’S HOUSE. The master of this House thus describes the true purpose of knowledge: “The end of our foundation is the knowledge of Causes, and the secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.”

Lord Bacon was the father of modern science and his definition of knowledge reveals a clear perception of spiritual values. He tells us that the end of all science is the knowledge of causes, that we may perceive not only things themselves but the reasons for them. Our quest for reasons must inevitably lead us to philosophy, especially that branch which we call Metaphysics. The causes and reasons behind all natural phenomena exist in the invisible and subjective part of nature — the divine part. It is here that we must search for them if we are to become truly wise.

Knowledge enlarges the bounds of human empire because it is an occult maxim that man’s own nature extends to the circumference of his understanding. As we grow in knowledge we truly enlarge ourselves, becoming in fact part of everything that we know. We flow outward along the radiations of our appreciation until at last, according to the old Mysteries, we know everything and become a part of everything.

THE PRAYER OF SOCRATES

“Beloved Pan, and all ye diviner Ones about this place, grant that I may be good in the inner nature, and that what I have of external things may be accordant with those within. May I deem the wise man truly rich, and let me have only such an amount of material wealth as a provident man may possess and wisely use.”

Lord Bacon describes the reward which knowledge bestows by his statement that through the enlargement of it we are finally able to accomplish all things that are possible. By “possible” he means consistent with the laws of being. Among possible things must be included the final perfection of man himself and the releasing through his organisms all of the spiritual, intellectual and physical powers which are latent within him.

The word knowledge has several meanings, measured by the understanding of the individual who uses it. The word knowledge may either infer a broad spiritual perception or it may signify little more than accumulated prejudices. For the sake of definition we may say that knowledge may be either formal or relative. Formal or absolute knowledge exists only in the Divine Nature itself and is alone discoverable by the inner perceptions of an enlightened soul. This is because the soul itself, being part of the Divine Nature, partakes subjectively of divine knowledge. Relative knowledge is based on tradition, observation and experimentation and is concerned chiefly with the elements and conditions of the temporal state. All so-called scientific knowledge, under our present system of education, must be relative. All knowledge derived from books must be relative, for relative knowledge comes from without — absolute knowledge from within.

We must now distinguish between KNOWLEDGE and TRUTH, for, since the confusion of tongues, words have lost caste. Truth is an inclusive term, while knowledge suggests a fragmentary condition. Thus we say, “there are many forms of knowledge,” as for example the seven liberal arts and sciences, but, philosophically speaking, we can never say there are many forms of truth, for truth infers a fundamental, unchanging, unconditioned reality — the fact per se. One of the old philosophers has said that truth is a divine light, invisible to mortal eyes, but all-penetrating. Matter is a prism. The light of truth, striking this prism, breaks into a spectrum — a spectrum of intellectual colors. These colors considered separately are the departments of knowledge. Thus knowledge is truth conditioned and broken up, but all real knowledge contains within it some element of truth. Some part of the whole is in all of the parts, even as some part of God is in every part of nature.

Man is capable of containing knowledge or of accumulating it, storing up in himself facts out of experience. But no man is capable of containing truth in himself, of collecting it or storing it up. To create a definition:

The individual absorbs knowledge, but Truth absorbs the individual.

The alchemists called truth Mercury because it was a common solvent which bound all things together. It recognizes no boundaries or divisions but penetrates all existence so universally that it can never be captured or limited by any organism.

The rational principle in man ascends by a seven-runged ladder from the darkness of its material condition to the luminance of its spiritual state. Speaking in terms of knowledge, the seven rungs of this ladder represent seven sequential steps in the apprehension of fact. The lowest step is perception which is possessed by even the most primitive types who abide in the unquestioned acceptance of things seen. From perception the intellect rises to examination, from examination to reflection. What we call education today is merely the racial inheritance of things seen, examined, and reflected upon. From reflection the reasoning part (commonly termed the mind) rises to knowledge, which is a synthesis of the three former processes. From knowledge it rises to understanding; from understanding to wisdom; and from wisdom it ascends finally to Truth.

Knowledge, being the 4th step in the unfoldment of reason, occupies a middle distance between the three inferior and the three superior parts. It therefore was regarded by the ancient philosophers as symbolical of the Sun which, in the old geocentric systems of astrology, moved upon the 4th orbit of the world, dividing the planetary family into three inferior and three superior bodies.

According to the same doctrine, knowledge was peculiarly associated with man in that the human creation occupied the 4th round of the creative process.

Knowledge, like man, then, occupies a neutral position between the inferior and superior worlds. Below knowledge lies instinct and the physical perceptions. Above knowledge rises intuition and the spiritual perceptions. Thus, knowledge unites the two worlds — the divine and the animal. Conversely, knowledge also divides them.

Knowledge is an instrument by the possession and proper use of which an enlightened individual can come gradually to perceive the invisible forces at work behind the visible elements of life. Knowledge, illumined by spiritual purpose, lifts the soul to understanding. Knowledge, unillumined and undirected, depresses the soul into a sphere of criticism and skepticism, an evil state into which, alas, most of our educational institutions have fallen.

In the old Mystery dramas disciples wandering in the chambers of initiation (the sphere of experience) were always accompanied by an ancient man, sometimes called "the kindly or venerable guide." This aged person — Gurnemanz in the opera of Parsifal; Merlin in the Arthurian Cycle, etc.— represents the spiritual emotion of veneration. This power is represented as aged and kindly because it is born of suffering and experience and has travelled long on the road of life. No man who approaches the mysteries of nature without veneration can find his way through the tortuous passage-ways of scientific uncertainties.

The uninformed man fears life, the informed man comes to respect life, but only the wise man, enriched with understanding, loves and venerates life. Thus, perception, examination and reflection may lead to misgivings; knowledge may impart a certain sense of security; but understanding, wisdom and truth bestow illumined appreciation of the sublimity of existence.

Let us define understanding that we may perceive in what it differs from knowledge. To borrow a simile from the Zohar, one of the ancient cabbalists said: All things are invested with outer garments which we term bodies or forms and which are analogous to the clothing worn by man. To judge of any living thing by its form alone is equal to judging a man by his clothes alone. Knowledge permits us to examine the clothing of things but may bestow no appreciation of that which is beneath the garments. Knowledge, therefore, will teach us to say. This is a rock, this is a plant, this is a man. But this is only equal to saying: This is a hat, these are shoes that is a coat. A man is not merely his hat, coat or shoes, though to the uninformed he may appear identical with them. Nor is nature rock, plant or man. These are but words for forms. An educated man may know the proper names for these forms, thus possessing a certain form of knowledge, yet, lacking the ability to discover that which is hidden within these garments, he lacks understanding and his knowledge profits him nothing. Beneath all garments are bodies very different from the garments that conceal them. Within these bodies are souls and these souls in turn conceal principles of intellect and sense. Behind intellect and sense is spirit. He who understands this achieves wisdom; he who is ignorant of this is unworthy to be termed learned, for learning without wisdom can never achieve to Truth.

Understanding implies what Paracelsus terms "sympathy." Not the superficial emotion to which we commonly apply that term, but rather a condition of rapprochement, attunement, or at-one-ment. Understanding removes the barriers of separateness which divide one living thing from

another. This results in what is termed the “mystical communion,” for communion is “union in consciousness.”

From understanding, therefore, we ascend to wisdom. Wisdom is a condition of consciousness rather than an attitude of mind. Wisdom is that state of being in which an individual finds himself when realization has tinctured and transmuted all attitudes and opinions. A wise man is one who has experienced wisdom, wisdom in this sense being a mystical experience. Our common term “enthusiasm” meant to the ancients “wisdom.” It is derived from the Greek word “entheos” — in God. To the old mystics it was the ecstatic condition of consciousness — attunement with the great mystery of life. As Jacob Boehme, the illumined shoemaker, would have expressed it: It is the plant of the human soul bursting into flower in God.

This leads us naturally to Pilate’s eternal question — What is Truth? Again we must create a definition: Truth is God as fact. In other words, Deity is the consummation of every condition and extension of energy conceivable by man. Thus, God, in terms of time or extension, is Eternity. God, in terms of emotion, is divine love. God, in terms of morality, is absolute virtue; and God, in terms of fact, is absolute Truth. To know Truth, therefore, one must know God and to know God man must have discovered divinity in all of its manifestations and have become one with that divinity.

The search for Truth is life. The realization of Truth is illumination. The practice of Truth is virtue. Truth is the Hermetic medicine, the universal panacea, the balm of Gilead which cures all of the diseases which are caused by ignorance.

It is not given to man that in his present undeveloped condition that he shall be fully possessed by Truth. He must achieve this ultimate good by that pilgrimage which is called evolution. In India, holy men perform symbolic pilgrimages, visiting in a prescribed sequence the shrines of the various divinities that represent the various aspects of knowledge. The Greek philosopher Cebes designed a curious table or tablet which depicts the progress of the human soul. Man is depicted as ascending a mountain by a circuitous path. The top of the mountain is concealed by clouds and upon the very peak, invisible to the world below, is a glorious temple. This is the temple of wisdom and within it are luminous figures representing enlightened and perfected souls. In some old drawings the roof of this temple is supported by three columns. These columns are Integrity, Loyalty and Appreciation, according to the old Mysteries. These three columns must uphold the temple of philosophy. In the heavens above the temple itself is an immense radiant light, the only symbol by which absolute Truth may be appropriately represented.

We are all striving to ascend the mountain of knowledge. Its circuitous path, beset with many dangers and difficulties, represents the daily life of the individual. If we possess sufficient fortitude and sincerity we shall finally reach the temple concealed by clouds.

Michael Maier, the Rosicrucian adept, wrote that the House of the Holy Spirit, the most secret temple of the Rose Cross, was upon the crest of a mighty mountain, higher even than Olympus. He also explained that this House is always concealed by clouds so that the profane and unworthy may not be able to discover it. A narrow path leads through the dense mist, however, and to those who are worthy the path is revealed.

It is appropriate that wisdom should be shown as seated upon the highest parts of the world. By highest is meant the most spiritual and refined part. The prophet exclaims: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." The hearts of enlightened men are the high places of the earth. In the hearts of those who love Truth the gods dwell together.

Metaphysics not only describes the creation of the world but it also reveals the mystical anatomy of God. In the midst of the great body of the Eternal One is the luminous Heart, the everlasting House, the Universal Temple. Those who are seeking for Truth are seeking the heart of God and those who discover Truth and who are possessed by it are one with the heart of God.

Yours sincerely,

Manly P. Hall

944 West Tòth Street.

Los Angeles, Calif