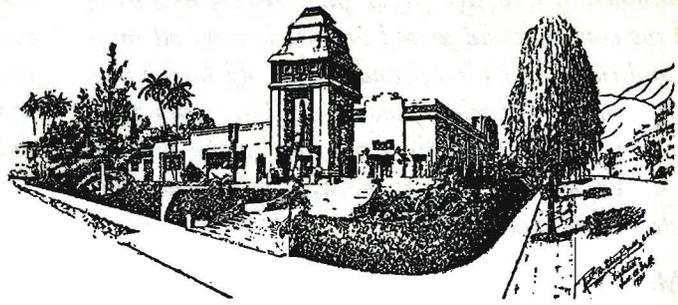


A



MONTHLY LETTER

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

June 15, 1936.

CONFUCIUS

Dear Friend:

Shuh-liang-Heih was a doughty warrior whose ancestry went back to the Imperial family of Shang. His exploits of great strength and courage have become part of the heroic tradition in China. As Shuh-liang-Heih felt the weight of years descending upon him he became gravely conscious of the misfortune in his domestic life. There would be no son to perform the ancestral rites to his memory. His wife had given him nine daughters and this tragedy so preyed upon the mind of the aged soldier that he decided to divorce his unfortunate spouse and take a new wife in his closing years.

With due ceremony and the full practice of the elegancies of the day, he approached the ancient and illustrious family of Yen where three marriageable daughters of exceptional virtue and beauty were awaiting husbands. It was a delicate matter due to the great discrepancy in age. The Lord of Yen, with a gesture most unusual to the gravity of Chinese etiquette, discussed the problem frankly with the three young women. He pointed out the deplorable disaster which oppressed the soul of Shuh-liang-Heih; he assured his daughters that the old warrior was of most excellent ancestry, and desired of them that they should come to their own decision as to desirability of such a match.

The youngest daughter, Ching-tsai, realizing that her father desired the alliance, immediately offered herself. Thus it came to pass that Shuh-liang-Heih in his seventieth year took to wife the seventeen year old daughter of the house of Yen.

Ching-tsai was fully aware of the real purpose of the marriage, and being of deeply religious spirit besought the gods and genii for their aid that a son might be born to venerate his father's memory. There was a sacred mountain not far distant and to this holy place she made frequent pilgrimage. It was on one of these pious journeys that a curious vision came to Ching-tsai. Five ancient and mysterious sages appeared to the expectant mother as in a dream, leading in their midst a strange animal. The creature was about the size and shape of a small cow, some say a lion, but it was covered with scales like a dragon and carried a single horn in the middle of its forehead. The Ki-lin is a metaphysical and symbolical animal which only appeared when some great enlightenment was to be conferred upon mankind. In its mouth the Ki-lin carried a tablet of jade which it dropped at the feet of Ching-tsai. Upon the tablet were the words: "A child as pure as crystal shall be born when the Chou are on their decline. He will be a king, but without any

dominions." The five sages then spoke, declaring that the coming child would be wise beyond all mortals and that all of his descendants would honor him as their most illustrious ancestor. The sages then bade the mother tie a piece of cloth to the horn of the sacred animal, which she did, whereupon the whole vision disappeared.

Many miraculous circumstances attended the birth of the predestined child. All through the night two dragons crouched on the roof of Shuh-liang-Heih's house. Heavenly musicians filled the air with sacred chantings, and five mysterious old men kept entering and leaving the birth chamber. The celestial choir kept chanting, "All heaven rejoices at the birth of this holy child." And so in the fall months of the year B. C. 551 a little son was born to Ching-tsai. According to the Chinese tradition "on the body of the infant were forty-nine marks of his future greatness and on his breast were visible the words, 'he will point out, he will act, he will decide, he will accomplish the times.'" The five old men were supposed to be Fu-hi, and the four patriarch-emperors. Together they are called the Ti. Thus, in a land of mystery, amidst circumstances exceeding strange, there came into the world the philosopher K'ung-fu-tsu (words Latinized into Confucius), the Perfect Sage, the Ancient and Illustrious Teacher, the Superior Man, posthumously created Duke of Ne, and the uncrowned Emperor of China.

When Confucius was but three years of age his father died and the young mother dedicated her life to the care and education of her mysterious little son. It is beyond question that her continual guidance and the purity of her personal life did much to mold the character of her child. Throughout life he exhibited a certain traditional gravity which is traceable directly to Ching-tsai's tradition-bound influence. Little is known concerning the boyhood of Confucius other than the traditional report that from his earliest years he exhibited extraordinary intellectual powers. He came into this life with an infinite capacity to learn and applied himself so successfully to the arts of self-improvement that at seventeen he had already entered upon a public life.

His serious and studious mind at an early age concerned itself with the political and sociological aspects of Chinese life. The unusual depth of his learning is attested by the account current throughout China that of all those who took the celebrated examinations of the Classics, Confucius alone passed all the elaborate tests with a grade of one hundred per cent. Confucius was married at the age of nineteen, but after many years separated from his wife for reasons unrecorded. One son graced their union but he died before his father.

The rise of Confucius in the political system of his day can be summed up as follows: he was first made superintendent of the Granaries of the Marquis of Lu (now Shantung). Later the pasture lands of the state also came under his control. In his fiftieth year he was elevated to the estate of Prefect. A year later he was further promoted to Chief Judge, and three years after this came to his highest political position—Vice Minister of the Earldom of Lu.

During these various periods of life the actions of Confucius were marked by a severity of mien and an uncompromising devotion to honesty. A man of his unswerving devotion to integrity could scarcely hope for high office during a period as degenerate and corrupt politically as that of the declining Chou. The Earldom of Lu flourished under his care, becoming so rich and prosperous that intriguers from other provinces, jealous and fearful, organized to destroy the growing power of the Confucian policy.

Confucius apparently never entirely recovered from the disillusionment of his political years. He saw men, intentionally corrupt, undermining the integrity of the state for their own profit. He beheld a general decadence in ethics and law. To him this decline represented the collapse of all that was fine and noble in the Chinese order of existence. As early as his twenty-second year, being then but three years in public office, Confucius began to perceive the hopelessness of coping politically with the corruption of the state. The spirit of the reformer being strongly within him, he realized that many

evils must be overcome before law itself as a regulator of human affairs could function honestly.

It may be contended that the viewpoint of Confucius was too narrow and that many of his trials were of his own making, but history records him as a rather versatile person who combined strength of



CONFUCIUS

mind with strength of body, and in the arts was a polished performer upon the lute. His ability as a charioteer is especially noted, his skill with horses bringing him much fame. Whatever he did he accomplished whole-heartedly and sincerity of effort marked his every action. His mind was thorough and orderly, yet not entirely free from a certain bitterness, especially in advancing years. He suffered, as all idealists must suffer. He was so thoroughly

equipped intellectually to help China that he was never able to understand fully why China refused his help. Whenever his program was attempted it succeeded, but it seemed as though no one wanted his program. Intrigues destroyed vision. The state was a chaos of petty evils, and philosophy found small favor in the sight of princes.

Confucius was Vice Minister of Lu but a short time when, with the certainty of a man who has thought all things through, he arose one day and closing the doors of state behind him, and leaving princes to their numerous quarrels, took up a life of wandering which extended over a period of thirteen years. This period in the life of the Master was devoted to two specific purposes. He offered himself and his advices to the various feudal states in an effort to accomplish necessary reforms. He also gathered about him disciples and followers to whom he preached his ideas and in whom he implanted doctrines and ideals that were later to change the whole civilization of Cathay.

After these thirteen years of teaching and preaching, of offering and being repulsed, Confucius returned at the age of sixty-seven to his own state of Lu, wiser from the experiences of his wanderings. He never resumed a political career but established a school where he taught his Utopian vision to a considerable number of disciples. Tradition tells that the total number of his scholars exceeded three thousand and of this group seventy-two so excelled in sagacity and penetration that he regarded them as actual disciples participating with him in the dream of the coming age.

Confucius lived during one of the most important transition periods in the history of human society. Contemporary with him was not only Lao-tze in China but Gautama Buddha in India, Zarathustra Spitama in Persia, and Pythagoras in Greece. Confucius was forced to stand by and watch the decay of culture, form, tradition and ceremony. Men no longer studied the Odes and the Annals. They no longer performed the rites. All that seemed beautiful and fine to Confucius was sacrificed to avarice and dissension. Confucius therefore appointed himself a perpetuator and preserver of the

ancient order of society. He re-edited, revised and reformed, compiling together what he believed to be the spirit of Chinese culture performing in this way a task more vital than he was ever to know.

About two hundred years before the Christian era the libraries of China were destroyed by Imperial edict and had it not been for Confucius the antiquity of Chinese thought would have almost entirely perished. With years already heavy upon him, his whole nature melancholy with a deep sadness, the sadness of one who understands but cannot act, Confucius wrote on, striving to preserve, trying to make some contribution that would be of permanent good to the people of China.

It was in the closing years of his life that Confucius contacted, or possibly more correctly came to understand, the oldest and strangest book in all China—the Yih-King, the Classic of Change. Even in the sixth century B. C. the authorship of the Yih-King was obscure. It emerged with China itself from the dark periods before history. Some modern scholars have even declared that the Yih-King is the oldest book in the world. Commentaries had been written to this work before Confucius, but none of them seemed entirely satisfactory to the organized mind of the Superior Man. So he prepared himself an elaborate commentary which commends him definitely to a belief in divination and magic. Possibly his interview with Lao-tze influenced this commentary, although many years had passed since Confucius had paid that memorable visit to the librarian of the Third Ministry.

Death came to Confucius while he was still engrossed in his literary endeavors. The last part of his life was divided between teaching and editing the Chronicle of the Earldom of Lu. In B. C. 479 Confucius announced, in the strange terminology to which he was so much addicted, that "the sacred mountain was about to fall, that the ridgebeam was about to break, that the sage was about to take his departure."

A short time before the passing of the Master a huntsman in the forest of Lu slew a strange monster. He brought the body of the creature into the town

to be exhibited to the amazed populace. It was an animal the size of a cow covered with scales and armed with a single horn. Upon beholding it Confucius declared that its death denoted his own passing. It was the Ki-lin, the peculiar animal of wisdom, and its destruction marked the close of the period of enlightenment.

It was soon after this that Confucius took to his couch. His last words are variously recorded, but in substance they are the same: "No wise sovereign arises. There is none in the Empire who will make me his master. My time has come to die." Another version reads: "Since no prince of this time has enough intelligence to understand me, it is better then I die, for my plans will not materialize." After these words Confucius did not speak again, but, remaining silent on his couch for six days, departed on the seventh, in his seventy-third year, surrounded by his disciples. He was buried outside of the capital city of Lu where his tomb remains to this day. Thus ended the quest of the Superior Man who spent a life-time searching for an honest ruler.

THE DOCTRINES OF CONFUCIUS

The principal source of the Confucian doctrines is THE ANALECTS, in Chinese THE LUN YU. Strictly speaking, this work was not written by the Master but is rather a collection of his opinions, interspersed with the words of other teachers and scholars, and also anecdote material. The statements directly contributed to Confucius are generally preceded by the statement "the Master said" or "the Master answered." The scope and quality of Confucius' mind may be more fully appreciated from the choice which he made from the ancient Odes and Annals in his editorial capacity of preserver and restorer.

Confucius was not a mystic, although he showed no aversion to mystical speculation, and occasionally indulged in it. His mind was devoted to practical problems concerned with the social and political survival of the Chinese Empire. A devoutly religious man, he refrained from any direct effort to expound theological opinions. Under the general term "heaven" he summarized the spiritual and causal factors

which animate and direct material creatures. The decrees of Heaven are absolute and immutable. All things subsist and survive according to the ordinances of heaven. Beyond this point he seldom ventured, leaving metaphysical speculations to men more given to abstractions.

The Master clung to ancient orders of thought and action because to him they represented the Will of Heaven. Acknowledging that customs had decayed, it seemed to him that the waning of the virtues paralleled the failure of the rites and ceremonies which had been given to China by the first illumined messengers of Heaven. Confucius attributed to the universe a mental viewpoint actually and intrinsically his own. To him the reasonable and the evident and the virtuous must be the will of heaven.

The central thought of Confucianism may be summed up in the simple premise that the wisdom of the past sustains the virtue of the present, and the virtue of the present insures the well-being of the future. Like Socrates, Confucius affirmed that if it is possible to cure the disease of irrationality with which men are afflicted, the permanence of all desirable conditions is assured. Nations, being but aggregates of individuals, express collectively those attitudes which persons express individually. Divine orders of beings reveal to those who are observing certain standards of thought and action, the rites, customs and modes which have been established by the Will of Heaven in all the departments of nature. If men will heed the examples which the universe sets forth, they can bring into manifestation that perfection which exists everywhere as a potentiality.

Confucius felt himself called to the task of accomplishing a practical reconstruction of human standards of ethics. He dreamed of the Golden Age or ideal state, a day when all evil and dissension should pass away, and truth become supreme. Of this dream the Master said: "When the Great Principle prevails the whole world becomes a republic; they elect men of talent, virtue and ability; they talk about sincere agreement and cultivate universal peace. * * * A competent provision is secured for the aged until their death; employment

for the middle ages, and the means of growing up for the young. Each man has his own rights and each woman her individuality safe-guarded." This one vision places Confucius among the great idealists of the world. Men of this later age dream as he dreamed and the dream still waits fulfillment.

The Confucian dream of the New Age is entirely consistent with the Platonic ideal of rulership by the philosophic elect. The first step towards the achievement of this glorious state was, according to Confucius, the development of the Superior Man, one in whom the knowledge of virtue is perfect and who lives in harmony with that knowledge. We therefore find set forth in the words attributed to Confucius those qualities which are necessary to the achievement of a collective state of security. The Master said: "The Superior Man seeks in himself, whereas ordinary men seek in others for truth. The object of the Superior Man is truth—truth achieved through consistency with the highest standards of the common good and a strict application of the Principle." In another place Confucius said: "The practice of right living is deemed the highest practice."

In affairs of the state Confucius maintained that in all things the wise must rule and the unlearned obey. However he also desired to universalize educational opportunity so that ignorance would become a matter of choice rather than of necessity. One of the disciples of the Master said that if he were made Prime Minister of China he could insure the country peace sufficient for a thousand years by means of the Confucian code.

Confucius accepted the continuity of life after death, saying: "that the bones and flesh should return to earth is what is appointed, but the soul in its energy can go everywhere." He discouraged, however, intercourse between men and spirits, saying that it was an unrighteous act to weary the departed.

In his own day Confucius was regarded as a man of very conservative viewpoints because he believed in the perpetuation of the niceties and gentilities of human relationship. He warned against intimacies and all actions which had a disparaging effect upon

the opinions and conducts of man. He realized that the failure of little courtesies and small elegancies and the beauties of human relationship presaged the end of civilization. To Confucius progress was measured by the intrinsic fineness which distinguished the Superior Man. The Master himself was a man of extremely simple tastes, who utterly disliked ostentation and the false assumption of grandeur in any of its forms, who delighted in little formalities which bespoke courtesy and grace. Ritual and tradition as roots of hypocrisy he abhorred, but he envisioned the Superior Man as possessing a gentle, natural dignity, preserving respect and honor. The life of Confucius exemplified his belief in the magnificence of little things. Michael Angelo sounded a Confucian keynote when he said: "Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." The failure of little things, of subtle forces, of beautiful traditions, must inevitably bring great enterprises down to ruin.

In spite of his courtly consciousness, Confucius was neither arrogant nor self-sufficient. If his words produced meritorious results he took no credit to himself. If he failed he did not accept the blame, stating repeatedly that success and failure are according to the Will of Heaven. On one occasion he was told that men did not understand him and he replied that it was no affliction not to be understood by men, but rather an affliction not to understand men.

In THE ANALECTS he sums up the course of his own life: "When I attained the age of fifteen, I became bent upon study. At thirty I was a confirmed student. At forty, nought could move me from my course. At fifty, I comprehended the Will and decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ears were attuned to them. At seventy, I could follow my heart's desire without over stepping the lines of rectitude.

To the degree that Lao-tze depreciated all human knowledge, Confucius admired and cultivated the arts and sciences. He sought union with Universal Truth, not in the ascetic's way of inward silence, but by the scholar's path of self-improvement. Taoism teaches that by achieving the One

we know all. Confucianism teaches that by knowing all we discover the One. The Confucian path may be summarized in the words of the Master himself:

"Concentrate the mind upon the Good Way. Maintain firm hold upon virtue. Rely upon philanthropy. Find recreation in the arts. And never withhold instruction from any man."

CONFUCIAN DISCIPLINES

Confucius did not promulgate metaphysical disciplines among his disciples. It does not appear that he either indulged in or taught the meditative and contemplative practices that had been introduced to the Chinese mind by teachers and pilgrims from India. Confucius was too thoroughly Chinese to borrow the philosophies of other people. The fragments that have descended from the original Confucian school indicate that virtue and knowledge were the fundamentals of the master's teachings. Virtue was interpreted Socratically as right conduct, and knowledge, much in the thought of Lord Bacon, as the achievement of all things knowable. Virtue and knowledge reacted upon each other. Virtue increased the capacity for knowledge, and knowledge supplied the elements from which the standard of virtue was compounded. Live well, study diligently, and apply all knowledge to its useful ends. This, in substance, was the Confucian concept of right and truth.

The disciples of the master imposed certain disciplines upon themselves. They moderated the extremes of their emotions, reformed the excesses of their outward lives, and cleansed the mind of its inconstancies and its inconsistencies. They further cultivated gravity of deportment and faithfulness in small matters. They detached their minds from thoughts of rewards, being satisfied to labor and to learn without other reward than the improvement that they wrought within themselves.

The Confucian philosophy is particularly applicable to our modern world because of the intensely practical emphasis that pervades and dominates the

entire system. With wisdom the end and virtue the means, the course of life was clarified and the mind freed from the distress of conflicting opinions of schoolmen and the obstinate absurdities of theologians.

Confucius was not deceived by any vain optimism within himself. As a youth he dreamed greatly but as a mature man he realized that hundreds of thousands of years must pass before virtue and wisdom will rule the human race. He taught not a glamorous doctrine suitable for immature and inconstant mortals. Rather he set down certain immutable truths which men might accept or reject at will. Neither acceptance nor rejection could in any way affect the intrinsic nature of the facts themselves. Men live not merely to barter and exchange for a little time, or to spend their years in idle or unfruitful courses, but rather to accomplish virtue and achieve wisdom. Man is truly human to the degree that he is truly good and truly wise. Not wealth nor power, nor authority, nor high birth are the proper objects of admiration. Only the wise man is truly admirable, only the virtuous man is worthy of respect.

The Confucian discipline is consequently the accomplishment of self-improvement, the dedication of the life throughout all its years to noble motive and high purpose. From childhood on nobility must be cultivated. Nobility is gentleness, unselfishness, prudence, tolerance, temperance, and most of all a constant fixing of the mind upon the attributes of true greatness. In low office a man must be faithful, in high office he must be just, in all his transactions he must be honest, and in all things throughout his days he must value his honor above all gain and his character above compromise.

This might not sound like a metaphysical discipline, yet the achievement of the Confucian code is by no means easy. Men may pray for a few moments each day or meditate for a little time upon some high resolve. But to live well all of the time simply because right living is man's first duty to himself and others—this tests the courage and devotion of even the strongest. What a noble world this would be if all men were honest; yet honesty,

so small a word and so simple a matter, is difficult beyond words. Peace is easier than war, honesty simpler than intrigue, wisdom more natural than ignorance, but the world chooses the less noble course and only a few among men practice those simple virtues which are the very essence of human relationship.

To Confucius the fundamental facts of life were evident. He lived them more nobly than most men. He taught them with a devotion that has brought him the respect of the whole world. Confucius belongs not to Cathay but to all of mankind. His message, continuing through the centuries, descends after twenty-five hundred years as real and as practical as it was in his own day. Would that Confucius could live today and preach honesty and honor to the men of this generation which needs him as sorely as did ancient China. But if he stood upon the street corners of our cities he would suffer again the ill fortunes that he met before. A few would follow him as of old, but even today it is unlikely that there would be governors who would listen, or princes to make him their minister, or a king to harken to his doctrines. Honesty and honor have little place today in the course of empire. Yet sometime, in a future better than the present, the world will remember the Superior Man who gave to China the life of wisdom.

After the passing of Confucius the principal exponent of his doctrine was the philosopher Mencius who was born B. C. 372 and died about B. C. 289. Like Confucius, Mencius lived a quiet and obscure life. Centuries after his death he was canonized with Confucius and in the popular veneration of China holds a position second only to his master as an exponent of the doctrines of virtue and wisdom.

QUOTATIONS

A few extracts from THE ANALECTS are representative of the profundity and nobility of Confucius' mind.

"Do not unto any man that which thou wouldst not he should do unto you."

"People despotically governed and kept in order by punishments may avoid infraction of the law, but they will lose their moral sense."

"The people can be made to follow a certain path, but they cannot be made to know the reason why."

"If a country had none but good rulers for a hundred years, crime might be stamped out and the death-penalty abolished."

"The higher type of man is one who acts before he speaks, and professes only what he practices."

"A man without charity in his heart—what has he to do with ceremonies? A man without charity in his heart—what has he to do with music."

"Is not he a sage who neither anticipates deceit nor suspects bad faith in others, yet is prompt to detect them when they appear?"

When a man asked Confucius concerning the principle of returning good for evil, the master replied: "What, then, is to be the return for good? Rather should you return justice for injustice and good for good."

"My function is to indicate rather than to originate."

"If I am walking with two other men, each of them will serve as my teacher. I will pick out the

good points of the one and imitate them, and the bad points of the other and correct them in myself."

"To divine wisdom and perfect virtue I can lay no claim. All that can be said of me is that I never falter in the course which I pursue and am unwearying in my instruction of others."

"I used to spend whole days without food and whole nights without sleep in order to meditate. But I made no progress. Study, I found, was better."

"Study without thought is vain; thought without study is perilous."

"Having heard the True Way in the morning, what matters it if one should come to die at night?"

"The scholar who is bent on studying the principles of virtue, yet is ashamed of bad clothes and coarse food, is not yet fit to receive instruction."

"Virtue cannot live in solitude: neighbors are sure to grow up around it."

"It is bootless to discuss accomplished facts, to protest against things past remedy, to find fault with things bygone."

"It is not easy to find a man who, after three years of self-cultivation, has not reached happiness."

"Two classes of men never change: the wisest of the wise and the dullest of the dull."

Sincerely yours,

MANLY P. HALL