

# The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

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## CONTRIBUTORS' BULLETIN - February 1971

Dear Friends:

The December 1970 issue of the Readers' Digest contained a condensation of a delightful book by Helene Hanff entitled 84, Charing Cross Road. The book is composed of a series of letters written by a young lady in the United States to the English booksellers Marks & Co., located at 84, Charing Cross Road, London, England. Helene Hanff was an ardent book collector of extremely limited means and from her contact with the members of the staff of Marks & Co., there developed an interesting, in fact an amazing, correspondence which commenced in 1949 and continued to 1969.

My personal association with Marks & Co. began when I was in London in 1935 and fully substantiates Helene Hanff's experience. We have little acquaintance in this country with the traditional English bookseller. He is usually a picturesque person, living in the rarified atmosphere of higher learning. With a few exceptions, the great English bookdealers function in very modest establishments, with no pretense of grandeur. From the ground floor front of an old brownstone structure, a book firm carries on a world-wide business and is known and loved by collectors everywhere. I made some very fine discoveries at Marks & Co. and found the staff ever willing to seek out elusive volumes and manuscripts. Days could be spent browsing through their incredible stock, for the limitations of which they were most apologetic. I visited London at a time when the world was still suffering from the great depression. This may have accounted for the modest prices at which rare books were offered. It was a general policy, however, to be satisfied with a fair profit and depend upon good-will and a spotless reputation for slow but consistent growth.

Another fine English bookstore was Maggs Bros. Their surroundings were more palatial and they specialized in rare and unique items. Their store was a miniature museum and the customer was exposed to such treasures as Egyptian writings on papyrus, Babylonian seals and cylinders, illuminated medieval missals, and Persian manuscripts with beautiful miniature illustrations. It is a tragedy indeed that the store was seriously damaged during the bombings of London in World War II.

Another cozy and rewarding bookstore was presided over by an elderly gentleman, Mr. John Watkins, with whose firm we still do business. He was much interested in esoteric subjects, and there were always early Rosicrucian items, rare alchemical volumes, and an assortment of classics in the fields of astrology, comparative religion, symbolism and Theosophy. It was a ritual to have tea with Mr. Watkins in his inner sanctum, and from him I learned much about the picturesque personalities which made up England's intellectual world.

It seems discreet not to mention the name of the next bookseller I visited. The humorous incident, while delightful and typical of trade practices of that day, might bring embarrassment to the heirs and assigns of the person involved. Having bought my books from a certain publishing company, I had their name and address on my list of places to be visited. I had taken it for granted that I would find a busy and efficient establishment, but when I arrived it was one small and disorderly room, presided over by a portly lady past middle age. The stock consisted of two or three shelves of well-known titles and I was invited to browse and purchase at my leisure. After making a selection, I asked for a statement and reached for my wallet. English currency is considerably larger than the American banknote. It is printed on white paper in neat black engraving, and is protected by a complicated watermark. The larger bills are often autographed by various owners, and it is not as easy to change them as one would suppose. I handed the lady a rather large bill, from which I would receive several pounds in change. A look of utter dismay appeared on the face of management. When I inquired concerning the difficulty, she assured me that the banknote was not counterfeit, but she did not have the change. Gradually her dilemma became more obvious. She would have to go down to the bank and it was unthinkable to leave me alone in the store. When I offered to go with her, this was equally impractical because it meant closing the establishment. To my suggestion that I simply sit on the front steps until she returned she was completely negative. In the first place it was not courteous and still more important, there was no precedent for such a situation.

The only answer was to plan a campaign which would enable both of us to save face. It was finally decided that I would leave with her both the money and the books. During her lunch hour she would cash the banknote and at closing time she would bring the books to my hotel. In order to simplify the delivery, I posted myself in the lobby at the right hour. A few minutes later she appeared on the scene riding a bicycle with my precious volumes strapped to the handlebars. While such practices continue, there will always be an England.

We have recently received a gift of Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Persian antiquities. Most of the items are small, but there are several outstanding pieces of museum quality. Many of these artifacts of long ago remind us of how little the world has actually changed. We have become more sophisticated, but we cling tenaciously to old ways and ancient customs. Among our newly acquired treasures are several which have to do with cosmetics. The lady of twenty-five centuries ago curled and dyed her hair, used her equivalent of eyebrow pencils and mascara and babied her skin with a variety of natural oils, lotions and bleaches. For soap she favored olive oil and used a scraper to cleanse the skin. Perfumes were manufactured as early as 6000 B.C. and priceless vials and bottles were fashioned to contain them.

While styles changed more slowly than in our speed ridden time, it is often possible to date objects by their ornamentations. Especially useful are the hairstyles of both men and women. The old Greeks favored a Vandyke beard for gentlemen of quality, but Alexander the Great required that all his soldiers be clean shaven and short haired as a military precaution. Hemlines rose and fell in the Valley of the Euphrates. Bargain sales were well attended, taxes were high and tempers were short. Old Greek winecups were of two types, the smaller for drinking and the larger for mixing. In the days of Plato and Aristotle, fashion and prudence required that all wine served at banquets should be diluted with twice its volume of water. The doctor's little black bag, which was familiar until recent years and is still seen occasionally, had its Egyptian equivalent. The physician carried

a curiously shaped case containing rows of pottery or glass vials from which he could dispense needed remedies, which included stomatics and tranquilizers. During the heyday of Rome, physicians usually carried with them antidotes for fashionable poisons.

Lamps were an essential part of home furnishings and have been found in large numbers and of many shapes and styles. They were often buried with the dead to provide light for the dangerous journey through the regions of the afterlife. Some of these clay lamps bear early Christian symbols and were carried by the secret worshippers to their chapels in the catacombs under Rome. Similar lamps were common throughout Southern Europe and the Near East. They were fed with oil and had a snout-like projection in which the wick rested. As light from such a source was feeble at best, these lamps were often arranged in groups or on stands resembling candelabra. The lamps with multiple wicks also gained popularity, and one in the present collection has twenty wicks which can be burned simultaneously.

Jewelry was popular in the Mediterranean area long before the beginning of the Christian era. Earrings, necklaces, arm bands, bracelets and anklets are among excavated relics. Some of these are of gold or silver, but many are of bronze and other alloys. Countless materials were used in the making of beads, and many necklaces have survived in wearable condition. Charms and amulets were fashionable wherever life was insecure. These guarded the living person, protecting him from both illness and conspiracy, and they were interred with the dead to insure a safe journey to the Blessed Regions. A symbol that has remained almost unchanged for nearly 8000 years is the cross, examples of which are found among the decorations of ancient pottery and used as pendants and talismans.

Libraries are more ancient than we realize, and among the Babylonians records were kept on clay tablets. If it was especially important, the tablet might be enclosed in a clay cover, which was also fired to give it additional strength. Excavated Babylonian tablets indicate nearly every type of transaction known today. There were mortgages, promissory notes, short-time loans, historical documents, legal codes, sale of livestock and prayers to the various divinities. Generations come and go, but the common needs of human beings survive from generation to generation.

You will note that on the last page of this letter we are listing four Oriental Mandala paintings, for those interested in this type of sacred art. Pictures of this kind in full color are difficult to secure and we hope that you will find these reproductions useful and inspiring.

We are starting the New Year with a firm faith in the love and wisdom of God, the integrity of universal law and the essential goodness of the human soul. With your continued inspiration and assistance, we will be of service to many seeking a better way of life, through the years that lie ahead.

Always sincerely and gratefully yours,





No. 1.



No. 2.



No. 3.

FULL COLOR REPRODUCTIONS OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION PICTURES

Selected from rare originals in the Library of P.R.S., these pictures are most attractive and of major symbolical importance. Each print has a brief descriptive caption, is approximately 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide and 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ " high, and is printed on heavy weight paper 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide and 18" high.

No. 1. The Taima Mandara. A beautiful picture showing the Buddha Amida enthroned in the Western Paradise, accompanied by Bodhisattvas and attendants. Japan, Edo Period.

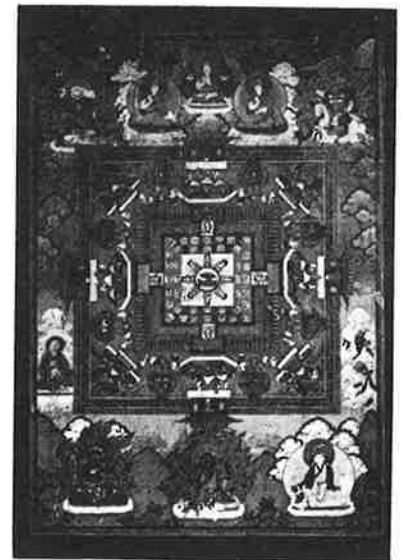
No. 2. Kokuzo Mandara. A symbolic representation of the etheric matrix within which the material world exists. The five manifestations of Kokuzo are associated with vows held in the mind during meditation. Japan, Edo Period.

No. 3. The Eye of Buddha Mandara. The supreme meditation Buddha Mahavairocana is presented in the feminine form of Locani, seated in a red lotus flower, accompanied by many deities. Japan, Edo Period.

No. 4. The Manjusri Mandala. A Tibetan meditation picture with the universe presented in the form of a square, with gates in the center of each of its sides. Probably 18th Century.

These reproductions in full color are suitable for framing and may be purchased separately for \$1.50 each, or \$5.00 for the complete set of four. If ordering the separate pictures, please order by number, as indicated in this announcement. The pictures will be mailed in tubes. Residents of California please include prevailing sales tax.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY, 3910 Los Feliz Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90027.



No. 4.