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ON A FREE WILL OFFERING BASIS



GREETINGS:

**M**y esteemed Grandmother had certain doubts and reservations relating to theology. Her husband, rather late in life, became a born-again Christian, which circumstance in no way improved his disposition. After his conversion, my Grandfather neglected his business, brought nondescript characters into his home, and tried desperately but unsuccessfully to regenerate his associates. In spite of these unhappy memories, Grandmother felt that it was her personal responsibility to see that I was exposed to some type of religious instruction. She took me to a local church and, before we left home, she tied a ten-cent piece into the corner of my handkerchief. When the collection plate was passed, it was my duty to contribute my dime toward the maintenance of the minister and his family. Thus from an early age I learned the meaning of a "free will offering."

When I began public speaking, I maintained the policy of the free will offering and experience soon taught me that the average contribution would be ten cents. In my early twenties when I was lecturing at Trinity Auditorium, now the Embassy Auditorium, we had comparatively large audiences. After estimating the number in attendance, I would tell those who helped take the collection what the amount would be. If there were a thousand persons present, the free will offering would be a hundred dollars, and I was seldom more than a dollar out in my calculation. Of course, I did not include washers, tokens, and occasional foreign coins in my estimation.

I remember one Sunday morning when something slightly unusual occurred. In the front row center, there was always an elderly gentleman of portly build who had a kindly face and a scraggly, white Van Dyke beard. He also favored a white sailor hat which he took off however during services. One morning after our meeting was over he lingered behind and finally approached me rather sheepishly. He said that he had intended to put a ten-cent piece in the collection plate, but by mistake he had deposited a quarter. He wondered if I would be willing to give him the fifteen cents change. I assured him that it would be my pleasure.

While still taking the free will offering, I was taken ill in New York City and returned home wearing a beard. I was still wearing it my first few Sundays in Los Angeles. On the second Sunday, there were several razor blades in the collection plate. I took the hint. About the same time there was a

local minister with a sense of humor who got up in the pulpit one Sunday morning and said that some of his members had accused him of running a ten-cent church, but were only giving him five cents to do it with. I also had the actual experience of having members of my audience take money out of the plate as it passed by them. It became obvious that the free will offering would never be very profitable, but I continued the practice for another reason. The doctrine of peace, power, and plenty was in the air, and a number of glib personalities were demanding exorbitant fees for their secret instruction. There was usually a series of free lectures followed by a twenty-five dollar or fifty dollar course which would bestow a dynamic personality.

Commercialization of this kind, especially tied to religion, worried and even frightened me. A glamour-struck public, lacking discrimination, took lessons in opulent thinking with negligible results. According to one instruction you should press your chest out against your top vest button, and in this posture success was inevitable. In the early twenties I published small editions of three books--"Initiates of the Flame," "The Lost Keys of Masonry," and "The Ways of the Lonely Ones." Determined to prevent the taint of commercialization, these volumes were distributed on a free-will-offering basis, but again the procedure was rather discouraging. One gentleman I remember picked up six copies of "The Initiates of the Flame" and donated ten cents for the lot. As the cost of the books had to be underwritten by the ten-cent collection at our lectures, the end was inevitable.

In 1921 it seemed to me that something should be done to restore the wisdom of the past for the benefit of those seeking a better understanding of the Universal Plan. Although I was without financial resources, I consulted with a number of friends. They assumed that the volume I contemplated would be produced as cheaply as possible as the market was likely to be composed of the poor of both purse and spirit. To me this did not seem reasonable. Why should the benefactors of mankind be represented in six-penny editions of their works while numerous infamous reprobates came out in handsome folio bound in vellum? A firm decision had to be made. It soon became evident that the book I contemplated could not be financed by free will offering.

Reluctantly I reorganized my economic program by placing a moderate price upon my books. No one seemed to be offended and some even suggested that I should have done it in the beginning. Fortunately, my large book on symbolical philosophy was published in 1928, and a considerable part of the cost was met before the great depression. The merchants of prosperity faded away and there was an immediate improvement on the level of religious thinking. There was considerable talk on ethics, integrities, and a fair deal, and those inclined to be honorable were better appreciated.

Gradually, the public mind invited us to give a greater attention to philosophy and comparative religion. The Philosophical Research Society was incorporated and, as a policy, it was decided that there should be no membership fees and that the library would be open to the public without charge. I have consoled myself that we are not charging for our teachings but only for the facilities necessary to their dissemination. I remember an old motion picture in which a wealthy man who patronized an expensive restaurant wanted fresh strawberries out of season. A few days later the maitre d' with an elaborate gesture placed a dish of magnificent strawberries in front of his valued customer. The guest, delighted, wanted to know the cost of the berries. The maitre d', with great

earnestness, replied that there was no charge for the strawberries--they were on the house. The only charge would be the sixty dollars air freight for bringing them in from North Africa.

Even now after sixty years, I sincerely wish that spiritual education could be entirely free from economic involvements. In ancient times the sanctuaries of learning were maintained by the state. In fact, religion, philosophy, science, medicine, and law were all socialized. The emphasis was upon the right of every citizen to those essential services necessary to his health and security. As a reward for these services, the citizens were loyal to their leaders and cooperated cheerfully and willingly with their administrators. Today, many projects of social interest are supported by either private or public funds, but those great spiritual teachings and philosophical beliefs which are the principal foundations of an enduring way of life are usually neglected. To advance the cause of an eternal wisdom, I was forced to render unto Caesar that which was necessary to the survival of my endeavors.

Reluctantly and regretfully, we asked a donation of one dollar for our Sunday morning activity. A friend asked me not long ago why we do not increase the admission which has been the same for more than twenty years. I can only take solace in the fact that our present stipend is really not for me; it is a gesture of benevolence for the tax department, the utilities, and the general maintenance of the establishment. I like to feel that, personally, I am still working on the free will offering basis.

Always most sincerely,

*Manly P. Hall*

SPECIAL FIRE SALE

A small fire in the basement of our auditorium due to vandalism resulted in water and smoke damage to some of the books stored there. A number of copies of The Celtic Druids by Godfrey Higgins (full cloth binding) and Buddhism and Psychotherapy (softbound) by Manly P. Hall were slightly damaged and we are offering this limited supply first to our friends at half-price. All copies are complete; there may be a few water stains or scorching, but in most instances the defects are hardly noticeable.

The Celtic Druids                      \$20.00    (Normally \$40.00)

Buddhism & Psychotherapy        3.50    (Normally \$ 6.95)

To obtain the books by mail, send your order to the Philosophical Research Society, Inc., 3910 Los Feliz Blvd., Dept. C. Los Angeles, CA 90027, adding 6% of the total cost of the order to cover shipping and handling, with a \$ .75 minimum. California residents, please add 6% sales tax.

