Dr. John A. Perkins, President  
University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware.

My dear Dr. Perkins:

It was very thoughtful of you to write me on December 12 with regard to Owen Sypherd's passing and I appreciate very much the information which you have given me.

As you know, Owen was a very modest man in many ways and when I asked him in the early part of last year what he was doing with the book on "Curses", he told me about the correspondence he had had with Knopf. I talked with Knopf, with Owen's permission, while I was in New York in May or June of last year, and Knopf told me that he and his readers in the office found it a very interesting and scholarly book and would like to publish it but it was simply impossible for a publisher to publish too many books of purely scholarly nature and which did not make any money or which might lose money for the firm. He said that they were still prepared to publish the book if the cost was guaranteed, but that he wished Owen to send the manuscript back so that they could look at it again to determine what the cost would be in view of the higher price of getting out a book. I advised Owen to do this and Owen did it, and he had a letter from Knopf in which Knopf reiterated his desire to publish the book but that it would have to be on the basis of a guaranty, as the circulation would be so limited. The fact that the circulation was going to be so limited had nothing to do, of course, with the value of the book because so many of these really scholarly books have only a very limited circulation among libraries and scholars.

I had told Owen that it was my intention to talk with a number of his friends and to join with them in paying the cost of publication. Owen and I had been talking about this just before his passing.

I have had a letter from Rodney Sharp, who is an old friend and who had great friendship and respect for Owen, about his proposed trip to Mexico in January of this year. I had another letter from Rodney a few weeks ago in which he said that he had changed his plans and that he was not coming to Mexico now but that he would be going to Honolulu. In my letter to him I had casually mentioned Owen's passing and the book on "Curses", and Rodney apparently was interested enough to write you about it, for he tells me in his letter to me of December 12 that you were looking into the matter to see whether there would be sufficient interest in the book to merit its publication.

Because of Rodney's interest in the matter, I wrote to him at some length about the matter a few days ago and I'm taking the liberty of sending you a copy of my letter to Rodney, as in it I give the substance of most of the conversations I had with Owen and with Alfred Knopf in New York about the matter. As an asset to the estate of Owen, of course the book has no value because there would be very little coming in the way of royalties to the estate on the book. My own feeling has
been, and it was Owen's, that judging from past experience in this field, and that of publishers, that an issue of about 3,000 copies would cover the available demand. My means are limited but I would still be prepared to participate with a number of Owen's friends in helping to pay for the cost of the publication of the book. I think it would be too bad if it is not published for, while the subject matter is interesting only to certain English scholars, it is a really scholarly work which does credit to him and to the University. Owen had really quite a reputation among English scholars in our colleges and universities, as over the years he had done some useful things in his writing - although of course it was never remunerative writing as that sort of work never is.

You may be sure that when I go North I shall be very glad to go to Newark to have the pleasure of spending a few hours with you and Mrs. Perkins. I hear from all of my friends what a splendid work you are doing in the University. I have a very deep interest in it which goes back to 1900. I hope some time to be able to tell you my thoughts about the desirability of establishing in the University a School of Foreign Relations, as I think the University is ideally situated in many ways for such a school and there are many circumstances which make Delaware, that is, the University of Delaware, an ideal place for such a school. Proximity to Washington is one of the very real advantages because scholars have to consult many of the original documents in the archives of the State Department and other departments in Washington. I will not burden this letter with the thoughts that I have in this connection, but the next time that I see you I will take the liberty of telling you why I think this is one of the ways in which the University can further enlarge its usefulness and influence, which have been so rapidly growing over the years.

Now that I have no active business obligations of any kind, I make my trips to the United States less frequent and it is not likely that Mrs. Messersmith and I will be going North until the late spring or early summer. If we do go North we shall be spending some days in Wilmington, and we shall have much pleasure in running over to see you. I do hope that you and Mrs. Perkins will keep very much in mind the attractions of Mexico as a place for a holiday any time of the year, and that we will be very happy to have you make a visit with us in our house in Cuernavaca, where we spend at least half of our time.

If you see any developments in the matter of the manuscript of Owen's book and any way in which I could be helpful in getting it into print, I will be very glad to have you let me know.

With very good wishes to you and Mrs. Perkins, believe me

Cordially and faithfully yours,

George S. Messersmith