

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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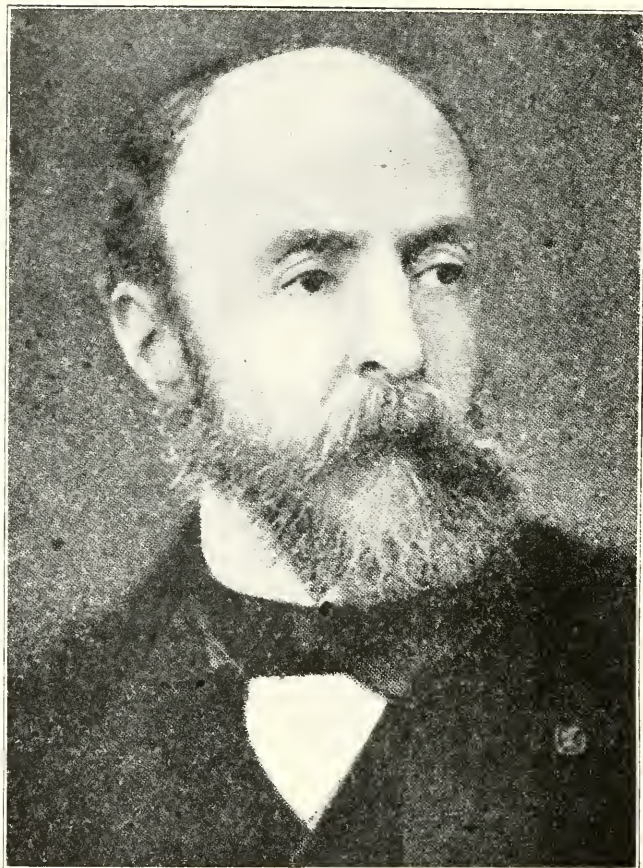
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EUGENE FROMENTIN.

(From the *Magazine of Art*, Cassell and Co., London, 1895.)

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## THE FETISH OF ORGANIZATION.

BY GUY BOGART.

**B**IRTH, growth and death—the inevitable law of nature—applies with relentless and unvarying force. Organizations are not exempt from its workings.

From Protista to Primates, from atomic to astral, from individual to universal the law operates impartially. Although it is the custom to bury the dead bodies of even the most faithful and the greatest of the servants of humanity when clothed in tangible flesh and blood, humanity has tended to worship and to serve the social projection of the group even after the life has departed. Nay, it is not until an organization has been long past its prime and is tottering in senescence that the people in general hold it in greatest and most slavish reverence.

Last year I spaded my back yard. The fact that the Underwood proved more attractive than the spade and the growing of thoughts more alluring than the raising of vegetables is only an incident. There was joy in the use of the spade and hoe—in the fact that it was recreation and that the tools were not using me. They were only tools and did not own me.

How about our organizations? Are we using them, or do we merely "belong" to them? Personally I "belong" to no organization except those into which I was born, and I am working to make them serve the race. For all are only tools which grow duller with use, become broken and unfit for further service, and are soon old-fashioned and inadequate to meet the newer needs of progress.

Because there is danger of fetishism in group-activities is no argument for their discontinuance, but this danger makes an understanding of the basic nature of organization essential to our in-

telligent cooperation as world citizens. Organization is essential to progress. The physical body is the most highly correlative activity we know. Yet we must not forget the end in our enthusiasm for the means; for every help becomes a hindrance when misapplied or when a newer tool is required. There is a marked human tendency to worship organization more than progress. Humanity has ever created masters instead of servants. The pathway of history, indeed, is strewn with golden calves and misspent generations in the wilderness of institutions.

By all this we see a trace of the old barbarism of the race. The barbarian has one distinguishing feature (whether living in Zulu-land or Greenwich village). He is essentially a fetish-worshiper. While in every age the esoteric circle has broken through the darkness of form into the liberty of truth portrayed by the symbolism, the masses have ever bowed, as they do to-day, along with their "practical" leaders, before fetishes.

As a race the Aryan has not advanced beyond the stage of fetishism. Let us not laugh at the man who carried a potato in his pocket to ward off rheumatism, or at our darker brother who sees in the left posterior appendage of Br'er Rabbit a propitious omen.

The advancing waves of "new thought" and "free thinking" have toppled from their lofty pedestals the creeds and dogmas that enslaved the mind of the past. We must pause, however, to ask if we are really free or if we have but transferred our allegiance to a new set of idols. Perhaps *you* have not done so, but since such a course is both a racial and an individual tendency, we must be sure that our version of tolerance is merely a willingness for the rest of the world to share our particular beliefs.

And may I pause to say with emphasis that neither you nor I nor any other person or group has corraled Truth and put a universal trade-mark upon it. . . . Thomas Paine's remark that if you do not agree with me it proves only one thing, that I do not agree with you, must be applied to ourselves as well as to the other fellow.

Candidly, now, does your organization serve you or do you serve your organization?

Are you still in the fetish-worshipping stage, bowing in slavery to your own faiths, philosophical systems, declarations of principles and constitutions, attaching a superstitious and unwarranted importance to these "scraps of paper"? Or are you employing these useful and necessary tools *as tools* for the construction of a universal brotherhood of cooperation and love?

What is the general process of group-formation such as we are discussing? Human society has moved forward with much the irregular progression of the ameba. This one-celled little soul responds to its environments by pushing fingerlike processes from any part of its body to surround whatever food is closest to its microcosm. If the object is not proper for nourishment the pseudopodia are withdrawn, but if the speck of contact is good for food the entire body slowly advances to the limit set by the pseudopodia and the mass digests the old food and proceeds to "organize" it while the pioneer feelers are again projected.

Mankind, too, has advanced irregularly through the leadership of little minorities—thinkers and mystics, poet-prophets—who pushed out from the mediocre majority to surround some tiny morsel in the infinite ocean of truth. In this "absorbing" pursuit, too many find satiety and insist that their tiny mote of truth is the open sesame for all time to the portals of emancipation.

Every organization contains within itself an inherent tendency to become static, whereas society is ever dynamic. Here is a source of much of the difficulty of coordinated social effort. Even as we grasp (relatively) truth in the light of to-day's experience, new events demand a readjustment of our estimate—a readjustment which a too-cumbersome machine (organization), creeds and constitutions tend to render difficult, if not impossible.

Discard our organizations, then? By no means—just study them and own them. The conception of institutionalism as a fetish is fundamental if we would advance from institutionalism to a wise and limited use of institutions. Our present slavery just shows how far humanity is from the goal of democracy. I have no desire to pretend that we are capable of supporting a democracy now, but it is well to have some idea of the preliminary conceptions necessary to work intelligently toward that far-distant goal of the race.

We know the organization of our own bodies only when we live unwisely. Rheumatism will make you painfully aware of the Amalgamated Association of Bones and of the Meat Trust. If you were intelligent you would never know these organized federations of your physical being. So in society. We are in a very rheumatic stage of development.

"Where two or three are gathered in my name." That is sufficient organization because the "two or three" are connected with the Divine Logos, the dynamic force of the universe. But where men and women are gathered together in the name of some group, they are getting their power from a storage-battery. Too

soon the original power of the Logos is exhausted. That is why we have revivals, reorganizations, house-cleanings and revolutions—when the spiritual urge drives men back to the Logos to recharge the batteries.

Some men have learned to put aside storage-batteries (organizations) and contact directly the live wire of the I Am That I Am. These are pioneer souls. They are message-bearers from the Most High. Such connection as theirs is not for the masses—not yet, not for those who “see through a glass darkly.” These are still attached to their storage-batteries and would prefer a dead battery to a live wire. That is why so many of the live-wire connections have been in prison all through the ages, as they are to-day. The majority of people are afraid of freedom. They are like the household with drawn curtains, dimly lighted by candles and the inmates refusing to open to the sunlight flooding the world outside.

Again, then, if I were able to connect all of you with the Divine Logos, I would not do away with all organization. But most of the institutionalism as we know it to-day will automatically drop away with understanding. What remains will not be felt any more than a healthy person feels the complex organization of his various bodies.

I speak as one who has worked through many organizations and sensed at once the power and the dangers thereof. I see an advance gleam of truth—either from the inner light or from the flaming torch of some seeker. By uniting with similarly-sighted individuals a machine—a tool—is formed through which to nurse the flame to greater light and propagate the gleam. We have taken a cross-section of the stream of evolution, studied it and examined many details in the laboratory of our organization, forgetful that all the while the stream is flowing onward and gathering new meaning all the way.

In consternation we cry for evolution and revolution to work themselves out in accordance with our blueprints and specifications. That is, the other fellow has done so through the ages. “My” group has “The Truth.” I wonder, after all, if it may not be just a wee bit possible that you and I may not stumble into the common pitfall? We want evolution to work without, instead of reversing the process. There is ever a tendency to forget that “the bird of time is on the wing,” and with varying brands of “truth” salt we set out to decorate the tail of the fleeting social bird.

Organization, from the earliest development of mankind, has tended after the first warm enthusiasm to attach importance to



itself *per se*, to rest on the laurels of past achievement. The members tend to drop the scientific attitude for the orthodox. Within human limitations no other fate is possible for an organization. The movement is ever forward; the organization, after the high-water mark of achievement, is ever backward.

Death, new births, death, birth. The cycles go ever round as far as the individual is concerned. The individual dies (only to return for further development); the species (also advancing with a distinctive group-soul) is perpetuated through the ages. Eons see the species disappear; life continues. The organization exists only to aid (for its little hour) the ever-upward movement of society.

Nor is one cause alone the corner-stone of evolution, nor one institution the projection of the infinite.

Countless forces act, interact and react in the ramifying maze of our social fabric. The resultant force is the measure of social development. The trouble with most institutionalized units is that they think the resultant force is due to their one factor. The rationalist is as irrational a creature as one will find anywhere. "A rationalist," it has been said, "is one who is religiously irreligious," somewhat after the nature of the Indian's tree which was so straight that it leaned the other way. Our radical groups as a rule tend likewise to adopt a faith to be defended, living in the glories of the fathers of their movements, forgetting in greater or less measure the spirit of those old leaders according to the length of time the organization has been drawing upon the storage-battery originally charged by the leaders. It is a natural and (seemingly) inevitable working of psychological laws.

Any new group in its youthful days begins work on an improved social structure. About the time the foundation is fairly under way the builders begin to pay more attention to the trade-marks on the bricks than to the nature of the structure itself. They see others on the job, under the inspiration of different philosophical fathers. Instead of cooperation and toleration, there is a tendency—attributable to the fetish of organization—for each group to build about itself a great wall, windowless and doorless, defying all others to enter. So, instead of a great social edifice constructed by divers groups working in harmony of toleration, there is danger of a large number of the one-room prisons of progress. I should perhaps not say this is a danger. It is, rather, a hindrance, perhaps a wise natural preventive against too rash action. For there are always rebels who

will not be bound by creeds, nor accept a new as better than an old orthodoxy.

Come-outism is the saving ferment of society, rescuing it from the stagnation of static organization. The builders have ever been filled with this spirit. Isaiah, Hosea and all the long line of prophets of every race illustrate the point. These rebels thundered against the ecclesiastical and political exploiters of their day. Their followers of every subsequent generation have worshiped a dead religion founded upon played-out storage-batteries of these old live wires; and in the same men who scorned the organized misrule of their day has been upheld the oppression of untold missions. It is the curse of organization wrongly understood and misapplied.

Conservatism is the price we pay for any set form. Growth can come only by change. Constitutions, forms, rules, creeds, declarations, while essential in certain stages of human development—or at least convenient in the swaddling-clothes period of racial development—are to some degree hindering forces as well. At the best, they should be elastic and relative, not binding—made for use and not for their own sake. There is nothing sacred in form and method. Results alone count.

What is a constitution  
That I should obey it?  
A constitution  
Is a crystallization of thought,  
A limitation to activity,  
A barrier to advancement.

A crystal is dead.  
Only the lifeless finds final form  
In crystallization.

The agate forests of America  
Are curiosities and objects of beauty  
To dangle as ornaments  
Or serve as paperweights.  
Once they were living trees,  
Chlorophyll-bearing, breathing—  
Feeling expressions of life,  
Until the winter of crystallization  
Brought death to their  
Powers of expression;  
And development ceased,  
Even as social growth  
Is stifled by crystallization through constitutions.

Those who have swept aside the fogysim of dying worshipers must not become lost in the same fogs of creed, even if it is "My" creed and was once revolutionary in nature. All organizations must emerge from the philosophies of the past—even if but yesterday—into the actualities of the present, with eyes set on the morrow, if they are to continue to lead the race in the battles for emancipation.

Let us cease to be fetish-worshippers. Let us cease to worry over any particular organization, group or institution, even if it is "mine." The only important matter is that there shall be organized effort—preferably by spontaneous organization—based on love. Let us never forget the end through adoration of the means.

There is scant place in the new mysticism for the doctrinaire, the lover of constitutions and fixed authority, the overorganized, the orthodox, the imitator, the "practical" man. The hope lies in the rebel, the come-outer, the dreamer, the inspired lunatic, who plunges into the great adventures of Truth free and untrammelled by creeds, constitutions and by-laws of his own or any other's making.

But we must never grow so superior that we shall look with contempt upon organizations now functioning. It took me some time to grow out of this habit. The idea has been well expressed in "Isis":

"Colored blocks are necessary in the kindergarten, primers for children, textbooks for the training of the mind in school and college; but when the mind has been trained it must then put that training into use in a practical way: in business under the head of the firm or manager; in art, under a great teacher; in spiritual things, under a Master of Wisdom.

"But remember that, because you are no longer interested in colored blocks or primers you once thought so beautiful, you are not to despise the children who still cling to them, or find fault with the teachers of the a-b-c's.

"All have their place, and the children will grow away from the blocks when they have learned their lessons, just as you have grown. The proof that you have outgrown earthly organizations will be the love and tolerance with which you treat all your brothers and sisters who still feel the need of such methods.

"To rail at organizations, especially one which has helped you to reach your present state, and those who work in them, is proof that you still need their discipline. Every uplifting movement or teaching has its place and has for followers those who need its lessons."

No organization could exist if it did not meet the requirements of some individuals. The task of the new mysticism will not be to

overthrow organizations, but to break the spirit of fetishism, which is only the chief distinguishing feature of barbarism. Our leaders must learn to live above organizations. We may safely function through as many as we please, but we are lost if we "belong" to any institutions.

A middle course between the spirit of the iconoclast and the fetish-worshiper is requisite in the difficult days of spiritual reconstruction in the new world dispensation.