

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS,
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VOL. XIV. (NO. 1)

JANUARY, 1900.

NO. 524

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The Open Court Publishing Company

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

Single copies, 10 cents (6d.). Annually, \$1.00. In the U. P. U., 5s. 6d.

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THE MONIST.

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Philosophy of Science.

PUBLISHED BY

THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY, CHICAGO, ILL.

MONON BUILDING, 324 DEARBORN STREET. POST-OFFICE DRAWER F.

Annually \$2.00 (9s. 6d.). Single Copies, 50 cents (2s. 6d.).

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LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Paternoster House, Charing Cross Road	2s. 6d.	9s. 6d.
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NEW YORK: Lemcke & Buechner, 812 Broadway	50 cents	\$2.00.

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324 Dearborn St.,





C. C. Bonney

The Open Court, January, 1900.

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THE PRINCIPLES OF THE OPEN COURT.

BY THE HON. C. C. BONNEY.

President of the World's Congresses of 1893.

IF *The Open Court* can be made a high meeting-place for Orthodox, Liberal, Oriental, and Scientist, where, with mutual respect and affection, they may present their views of the great questions of Life and Immortality, with absolute freedom from all attempts at coercion or persecution, immense good can surely be accomplished, and the Magazine could not fail to obtain a very large circulation. I have been so deeply impressed during the last few months with the importance of this mission that I have finally felt impelled to try to put in form its principles.

1. *The Open Court* stands for Liberty of Thought, Freedom of Conscience, the earnest pursuit of Truth and loyalty to the Truth under all circumstances.

2. The Truth itself is eternal, immutable and divine; but in its various manifestations it appears differently to different individuals, according to their different mental characteristics, environment and education. Hence arise varieties in Science, Religion and other matters.

3. By the Science of Religion we mean the arrangement, study and application of religious truths according to scientific methods; for in this way errors may most readily be detected and rejected and true doctrines seen, formulated and applied to life.

4. By the Religion of Science we mean that even scientific truth should be regarded as sacred, since it is an emanation from the Deity Himself; and that this scientific truth should be reverently regarded, studied and applied to life by all Religious leaders according to their knowledge and opportunities.

5. By the Religious Parliament Idea we mean the application of the Golden Rule to the things of religion; and that differences of opinion and belief should be made the grounds for friendly conference and comparison for mutual benefit; while all controversy and persecution on account of such differences should be resolutely suppressed.

6. We hold that differences of knowledge, opinion, belief and resulting lines of conduct should not be made causes of strife, but should excite sympathy and effort to be sincerely helpful.

7. We hold the obvious truth that every one must be helped, if at all, in the state in which he is, and that nothing intended to be helpful to him can be received unless it be adapted to his present actual condition.

The unlearned person who believes in the apparent truth of the rising and setting of the Sun is entitled to even more gentle and considerate treatment than he whose scientific training enables him to understand the real truth that the earth turns her face to and from the Sun. He who is color-blind to the delicate tints of the rainbow, and he who has no ear for the finer notes of music, calls for sympathy and aid, not abuse and persecution. And yet abuse and persecution in such cases would be no more reprehensible and abhorrent to the sense of justice than would be abuse and persecution because a fellow-being is unable to perceive a scientific truth or a religious truth which may be perfectly clear to other minds differently endowed and better cultivated.

8. We hold that a large allowance should always be made for the imperfections of language and the difficulties of expressing with precision the ideas which there is a desire to communicate. It is a true maxim "That no one ever means exactly what he says, because, from the imperfections of language, no one can ever say exactly what he means." This maxim applies with great force to the different religious denominations, and the terms used in their respective creeds.

9. The supreme object of *The Open Court* is to spread the light of Science and Religious Truth throughout the world, and to bring those who hold different convictions into harmonious relations in which they may be helpful to each other. Asking respect for our own convictions, and a willingness to hear and consider our views, we stand ready to accord the like treatment to all those whose views may differ from our own; thus doing to others as we would have them do to us, according to the mandate of the Golden Rule.

10. Finally we hold that while Truth, as we have said above,

is Eternal, Immutable and Divine, its manifestations have ever varied and must continue to vary, not only from age to age, but from day to day. The mighty movement of the material universe through space only corresponds to the like tremendous upward movement of Humanity, in its wonderful evolution and development. Hence arises the impossibility of framing any creed, Scientific or Religious, which shall bind and hold the truth for future ages. The creeds, like the doctrines of Constitutional Law, must expand to meet the new emergencies which continually arise.

11. We do not regard differences of opinion and belief in Science or in Religion as unimportant. On the contrary, we hold that the convictions of Truth and Duty on which the soul rests as the result of its struggles to overcome difficulties and reach the light, are among its most precious possessions. No matter how widely we may differ from those convictions, we are bound by the highest considerations to regard them with kindness and respect.

12. The interchange of religious views should be characterised by perfect frankness and sincerity, coupled with an earnest effort to avoid giving offense. In this way only can progress be made.

In order that the expressions used in this Declaration of Principles may be understood at their true value, the writer feels that he ought to state in this connexion that he holds highly orthodox views of the great doctrines of the Christian religion. As an ultra and ardent Christian he extends the love and sympathy of the Golden Rule to Brahmin and Buddhist, Parsee and Confucian, Jew and Liberal, and to all forms of the Christian faith. In the name of the Infinite tolerance of God he appeals to them all to unite against the infinite intolerance of man to secure throughout the world the abolition of religious persecution in all its forms, and the establishment of a universal reign of religious liberty; to the end that man may everywhere "act in freedom according to reason." This is the doctrine of the World's Parliament of Religions.

Fraternal conference on differences of opinion and belief is the crucible in which the dross of error is best separated from the pure metal of Truth.

How then may the Truth be made triumphant throughout the world? By love and service. There is no other way. Always the Truth is saying to the soul "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me." But the Truth does not enter unbidden. It waits for the soul to open the door and bid it welcome. Thus the soul can "Know the Truth, and the Truth will make it free." And in this freedom the soul will realise the truth of the paradox that the more absolute its submission to the Truth, the more perfect will be its sense of liberty.