## Letter to the Editor of Locomotive Firemen's Magazine from T.P. O'Rourke in Pocatello, Idaho and a Reply by Eugene V. Debs, June 1890.

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Editor Firemen's Magazine: —

In the March issue, page 238. Bro. Frank Walton indignantly asks: "When did the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen become an institution for the suppression of the opinions of its members?"

Softly, Bro. Walton, the editor of the *Magazine* is not the Brotherhood. It is not the Brotherhood that is suppressing opinions but the very amiable editor aforementioned that is industriously laboring to pervert those opinions and heap odium on their advocates. Doubtless the editor would like to have the public believe that his rabid mouthings are the prevailing sentiments of the Order, and that all those who disagree with him are vain croakers seeking to destroy the Brotherhood. Time, the great rectifier of all things, will dissipate this illusion and teach the editor that he is no more entitled to speak for the Order than you or Bro. Carter or Bro. Burns or Bro. Cross.

You might have asked with consistency: "When was the editor of the *Magazine* exalted to the position of infallible High Priest and Supreme Grand oracle of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen; whose dictum we are bound to accept as an article of faith, and whom profane scribblers must not question or criticize under penalty of condemnation for attacking the Brotherhood?"

It is a wonder to me that this shining oracle who has been given so much credit for astuteness cannot recognize the fact that he has sacrificed the dignity of his position by the policy he has been pursuing and exposed himself to the contempt of all fair-minded men.

The Toronto Convention censured the associate editor for coming over into the correspondence department under a nom deplume and sarcastically dissecting the communication of a brother who had assailed him and others. If a convention classed this simple epistle as "undignified." and censured the writer, what term will be invented to properly designate the foot notes of the chief editor. It remains to be seen if it makes any material difference "whose ox is gored."

Since the controversy over chancing the name of the Organization sprung up in the Magazine the editor has shown himself possessed of traits of characters large number of his acquaintances had considered foreign to his nature, lie has shown that he is intolerant, unscrupulous and vindictive. He has shown that he is capable of taking every unfair advantage of his opponents, distorting, perverting, and mutilating their correspondence with his foot notes and interpretations, and dragging the writers down from the highway of legitimate argument into the gutter, that he may be mear them with mud and slime and thereby render them contemptible. He has dug up from the recesses of an imagination pregnant of such rotten material, charges of conspiracy, envy, disappointed ambition, and jealousy to impugn their motives and lessen their influence. He has denounced as "infirmities," which, in the sense he used the term, means idiots, or imbeciles, those brave boys who had the courage to stand forth and declare against changing the name of the Order. There was a time, and not so very long ago either, when the editor himself was opposed to any change of name: now the necessity for change of name has become a mania with him.

I was at one time favorable to a change, but times, circumstances, feeling, and policy have changed since then, and I now consider that any change of name would be injudicious and inexpedient. I fail to see where we have anything to gain by setting up a rival organization to the B of LE, and undermining or endeavoring to undermine that magnificent organization. The engineers have altered their policy, altered their laws and declared in favor of Federation. Almost everything we contended for has been accorded us: almost everything we have hoped for in the way of closer union and harmony of action is about to be realized through a reasonable system of Federation. Then why continue a profitless strife, or by changing the name of the Order, renew hostilities with the B of LE? If the editor of the *Magazine* and P. M. Arthur have any old scores to settle let them be settled outside of the Brotherhoods. In the name of common sense and

common decency do not drag the Brotherhoods into any more disgraceful brawls.

I have taken part In past fights with the B of LE because I considered they had done the firemen a grievous wrong, but while my pen was engaged in strife, my heart longed for peace. I was ever anxious that the engineers might see the error of their way and treat firemen as they deserve to be treated, *viz.*: as men and equals. This they have shown a disposition to do since the Denver Convention and are taking steps to come to a better understanding with us; under these circumstances 1 consider any man who would advocate or endeavor to bring about a change in the policy of either Order, is not the friend of either, but the enemy of both. This much I say at the risk of a footnote that will relegate me to the ranks of the "infirmities," but as Bros. Carter, Cross, Burns, etc., are there before me 1 have no fault to find with the company.

The editor has recently assumed a new role, viz.: defender of the Brotherhood. Now, let us look at him a while in this guise. First, it must be necessary to show that the Brotherhood is assailed else this belt- appointed champion would have nothing to defend. This he does by extracting from letters of correspondents obscure sentences which taken from the text of the communication and made standalone, he interprets for the benefit of his readers — poor, benighted readers — and construes them into attacks upon the Order. Then he waxes eloquent in its defense and proceeds to annihilate the assailants; but, Great Scott! the weapon he uses for this purpose: a sword of fire? No. The mitten of the pugilist? Well, no, though he has the vocabulary of the prize ring at his tongue's end. What is it then? A slop bucket filled with filth! A weapon no man of decency would wield, as it is impossible to use it without the user becoming more befouled than his adversaries.

He says Bro. Burns attacks the Brotherhood because he stated that at a specified period the Order lost dignity and began to decay on account of the antics of the editor of the *Magazine*, and then he tells us that the Order was never more prosperous and presumably dignified. Well a stranger would have to wade through several *Magazines* to discover traces of dignity in the editorial footnotes. Several authorities are quoted to prove the Brotherhood is in a prosperous condition, a condition of affairs we all desire to see continue: but the editor evidently forgets that in a foot note to a communication from Bro. Cross in the *Magazine*, October 1889, he asserts that the Brotherhood was rapidly losing in membership the past two years; and that the loss was greatest in the last year, etc. Now, behold the consistency of this

self-appointed champion. When he makes the assertion that the Order is losing members by the wholesale, we are expected to take it as a true statement of affairs, and doubtless it is, as he has the records and ought to know what he is talking about. But presto, let Bro. Burns make the same assertion and he is denounced as an enemy of the Brotherhood, and a lot of outsiders who cannot know of our internal affairs, are quoted to prove Bro. Burns a falsifier.

Again he waxed wrathful at Bros. Cross and Carter and denounced them as "infirmities" because they persisted in pursuing a line of argument contrary to the editor's hobbies. T. P. O'Rourke comes forward in the March issue and savs those who believe the Brotherhood is depending on the good health or longevity of life of any one man in n for existence were possessed of a childish fancy, and lo! he has attacked the Brotherhood and passed judgment on the mental calibre of the entire membership, although in the same paragraph he states that: "The Brotherhood can live, prosper, and advance guided by the aggregated average of its own intelligence," and "that it has that in itself which lights its course." Surely it takes a wide stretch of imagination to say that this is an attack on the intelligence of the Order. The editor can call Bros. Cross. Carter, etc., "infirmities" with Impunity, but. T.P., be careful, you rascal! Again the champion. The GBA of the UP system addressed a communication to the Grand Lodge about Federation, not intended for publication. The editor gave it to the world with his comments and a row originated. It evidently began to dawn upon the mind of the editor after a while that he had made an egregious ass of himself in this connection, and he began to look for means to justify his action. Yes, now he has it, a conspiracy, a dark, designing conspiracy, and it Is made use of to justify the havoc made with the slop bucket.

The editor would have made an excellent detective; it is a pity he hasn't been afforded an opportunity to display his talents in that line. What a valuable man he would have been to Stone, Crocker. Paul Morton & Co. The GBA of the UP system did not meet in Denver in October as the editor asserts, but in September, as the Constitution declares they should, and the editor knew such to be the case when he penned this assertion, but then It was necessary to prove his theory of conspiracy.

There was no conspiracy and the editor knows it; the GBA of the UP did not meet in Denver in October and the editor knows it; the Union meeting held in Denver in October was not the GBA of the UP, nor did that Union meeting arrogate to itself any powers or authority to act for the Brotherhood in presenting a plan of Federation to the B of LE Convention, and it presented no such plan: this is also known to the editor. Then why lie about it simply to uphold the plea of conspiracy.

Beneath the surface of all this rant and raving about the UP system we can discover without the aid of a microscope a feeling of vindictive hate on the part of the editor, which had become engendered in him long previous to this present quarrel. Reading between the lines we find underlying It all a savage attack on an individual whom the editor dares not name or openly assail. All this rant about defending the Brotherhood is the veriest hypocrisy; all this talk about conspiracy is the veriest subterfuge; the whole mass of stuff that has been hashed up to us in the *Magazine* from first to last about this matter was for no other object than to crush this same individual. It was not the generous effort of an honest man striving to defend a principle or decry a wrong, but the vindictive pursuit of an enemy.

Now, after having raised a tempest in a teapot, and the pot having exploded and wounded our worthy editor, he comes before the footlights and exhibiting his wounds, cries for the sympathies of his audience. Lo! the champion has become a bleeding and torn martyr, and he resorts to the same old silly subterfuge he has so often found effective in the past, and threatens to resign.

So much for the general features of the controversy. Now to my own end of it:

In the March issue I made the assertion that none but Grand Officers were appointed at Philadelphia to revise the Constitution. The editor very graciously points out my error and I stand corrected. I was not parent at the Philadelphia Convention, but my recollection of w hat transpired at Minneapolis led me to believe that there were none but Grand Officers on that committee. There was no intentional falsifying. With that one exception I am prepared to stand by all my communication contained, and my purpose is not to malign the Order and make it odious, out to give it a healthier vision, that it may see men and circumstances in their true characters: that it may learn to be thoroughly selfreliant and independent of leaders, or would-be leaders. I have a firm and abiding faith in the intelligence of the vast mass of the rank and file of the Order, and am always willing to abide by the expressed will of the majority; but no fear of abuse or lying misrepresentation shall silence my pen or make me bow the knee before any clique or coterie who have impudently set themselves up as a supreme power in open defiance of the expressed wish of the majority. That Conventions have delegated their functions to the Grand Office is a fact which must be apparent to the casual observer, else whence originated the Federation of the Supreme?

Instead of my error about the Philadelphia committee knocking the bottom out of my argument it does not even make a pin hole in it. Because the action of the Atlanta convention fully justifies all my premises and conclusions. The results of that action furnishes the best evidence of the evils of such a course.

It is scarcely necessary to go outride the pages of the *Magazine* to prove that "hero worship" is encouraged and fostered. Here we see the "faithful" lauded to the skies, patted on the back, and praised for being good boys. Those who agree with the editor and his hobbies are held up as models of perfection progressive, broad-gauged, whole-souled, intelligent, know what they are talking about, every word weighs a ton," and so on ad nauseam. Here also we see those brave boys who have had the hardihood to stand out against the editor and his hobbies denounced in the vilest language—language that would bring a blush to the cheek of Biddy Moriarity or a Billingsgate fishwoman. Here are a few of the choice epithets: "infirmities, cowards, sycophants, croakers, spotters, informers, insects, enemies of the Brotherhood," etc., etc.

Does any sane man imagine for a moment that there is any other purpose behind all this than a de- sire to pose as a sir Anthony Absolute, to be recognized as the great "I Am," and reverenced accordingly? Is not one class entitled to just as much consideration as the other, and should they be not allowed to express their opinions in the *Magazine* without being besmeared with filth by the editorial yahoo that presides over it? I do not desire at the present writing to go any deeper into this hero worshipping business. out that we have it I hold to be an incontrovertible fact.

He says I represent a type of men who have no faith in human nature and who are held in check only by fear of chains and prison bars. Past experience has taught us the necessity of keeping a watchful eye on the Grand Office; we have had Grand Officers who proved to be far below the standard we had rated them at: we may have like Grand Officers again. I do not infer theft when I speak of "honesty" and "efficiency." There are men who are honest in financial transactions and yet rotten to the core in other respects. We have had a few examples of misconduct in the past that have somewhat shaken our faith in "inborn integrity;" is it necessary to cite them?

I hold the Grand Officers to be the paid employes of the Order, and it is only simply good business policy to see to it that they render service in a manner satisfactory to their employers.

There is no sentiment in it. and there should not be any. All your talk about "inborn integrity" and the rest, is simple rot.

At the close of his tirade against me he says that if I should persist in refusing to obey the Grand Master in the contingency of a strike of the federated Orders, I would be expelled. He has suddenly discovered a little authority somewhere, Lord knows where, to enforce the laws of the Supreme. In the December *Magazine* he declares his impotency to compel the UP firemen to honor the Supreme with their obedience. If there is no power to compel obedience from the men on the UP system, where does the power come from to chastise a single refractory individual? Will you please inform us? Even a footnote will serve for this. When next you append your comments to my correspondence, please don't undress me as brother so frequently while literally tearing out my heart; I hate such hypocrisy.

## T. P. O'Rourke.

The foregoing communication from Bro. O'Rourke was mailed to us from Pocatello, Idaho.

Referring to the closing paragraph of the communication, we deem it altogether proper to address the writer as "Brother O'Rourke." The great Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen made it possible for T.P. O'Rourke to be addressed by that title, and as we have "a firm and abiding faith in the intelligence of the vast mass of the rank and file of the Order," we shall be governed by its edicts, even in such inconsequential matters, and in the severities of debate. Brother O'Rourke should know that a man can be a gentleman.

Brother O'Rourke starts out with the intimation that the "amiable editor" of the *Magazine* is engaged in suppressing somebody's opinions. Certainly if somebody's opinions nave been suppressed by the "amiable editor," that somebody can be named. Who is he? Name him. Let the Brotherhood know whose opinions have been suppressed. No such somebody exists. He cannot be named. Instead of suppressing opinions the "amiable editor" has labored assiduously to put expressions of opinions, often involving personal attacks and insults, into presentable shape, has corrected orthography and syntax, and in this labor of love, the enemies or the editor are not exceptions.

The trouble with Brother O'Rourke is not that opinions have been "suppressed," but that they have been published — to quote Brother O'Rourke, opinions have been exposed "to the full effulgence of God's glorious sunlight." Opinions have been printed in the *Maga*-

zine just as they were expressed, just as they were coined, not a word nor a crotchet, nor an insult, eliminated; the good, the bad, the indifferent, all; everything has appeared. Hence, any charge, and all charges relating to the suppression of opinions, are simply deliberate falsehoods.

When opinions have been expressed by correspondents calculated to prove injurious to the welfare of the Brotherhood, the "amiable editor" has pointed out the errors, criticized the opinions, "for the good of the Order," as Brother O'Rourke on one occasion said: "These correspondents know very well, if they know anything, that Brother Debs, instead of trying to widen the breach, has put forth even effort to effect a reconciliation." In saying this, Brother O'Rourke was truthful; he made no mistake, and the policy of the *Magazine* which he so highly commended, has been adhered to right along, without variableness or a shadow of turning.

The talk about "distorting, perverting and mutilating" correspondence evinces a purpose to be studiously untruthful. It is in keeping with the false charge of "suppressing opinions." In all conscience, Brother O'Rourke is bound by every consideration of propriety, to confine himself to his own communications, rather than like a Don Quixote go roaming about in search of other cripples and lame ducks and force upon them a defense, which must be regarded in the nature of a calamity.

Moreover, it is supreme folly to make such charges, because the pages of the *Magazine*, when communications and criticisms, stand side by side supply irrefutable proof of their falsity. To correct errors, to crush falsehood, to overthrow subterfuges and coverts, to counteract malign influences, to expose conspiracies and defeat them, becomes a duty which, however unpleasant cannot be ignored, and that the unfortunates, under such dispensations, exhibit anguish, is quite natural, but when they seek to defend their folly, they are certain to secure contempt rather than condolence.

Brother O'Rourke admits that he has taken part in the "fight with the B of LE," and while he, metaphorically, was in the thickest of the fight, his "heart longed for peace," and since in his "fight with the engineers," his tongue and pen did not keep time with his "heart," he may now have heart and soul yearning for "peace," while his tongue bears testimony of implacable hate towards the "amiable editor."

When Brother O'Rourke, as he says, was in the fight with the B of LE he suggested such generous words as, " Messrs. Engineers,

when you cease your mean, underhanded system of persecution towards our Order," etc., and Brother O'Rourke was also of the opinion that "there are times when patience ceases to be a virtue and resistance to oppression becomes, not only necessary but a sacred and patriotic duty." Manifestly Brother O'Rourke believed while "Messrs. Engineers were indulging in mean, underhanded persecution towards our Order" that "resistance" becomes a "sacred and patriotic duty" but when men in "our Order" express opinions calculated to debase and degrade "our Order," Brother O'Rourke's devotion to the welfare of "our Order," oozes out at his finger ends, and he would have others join the spineless coterie and chime in with their flatulent sycophancy.

Brother O'Rourke has ample reason for knowing that the "editor," now, as when he (O'Rourke) was championing the interests of "our Order," permits no assault upon the B of LF to go unrebuked. It is the same old "role." It is "our Order first, its rights and prerogatives, its character, standing, and welfare. As for the "weapon" we wield in defense of "our Order" Brother O'Rourke is quite at liberty to characterize it as best suits his comprehension. His figures of speech determine his character, and place him irrevocably in the ranks of vulgar parrots.

It seems to be entirely foreign to the comprehension of Brother O'Rourke, that "our Order" can lose members, without losing strength and dignity — just as some men, when they leave their country confer upon it a blessing. Neither decay nor loss of dignity occur, when the morally or intellectually infirm abandon an organization, any more than the removal of weeds and worms impede the growth of corn and other crops, and current facts relating to the growth of "our Order," we can assure Brother O'Rourke and those who fish in the same muddy waters, are, if they will have it so, highly complimentary to the "antics of the editor of the *Magazine*."

Brother O'Rourke is unfortunate in his efforts to set himself right before the world. He did refer to the members of the Brotherhood as "weak minded and unthinking," the victims of "childish fancy." It is possible that Brother O'Rourke did not mean to say that, because, in saying it, he denounced the Brotherhood as infirmities, semi-idiotic, intellectually feeble, imbeciles. Brother O'Rourke was apparently overwhelmed with the idea that "hero worship" had so permeated the Brotherhood as to make such declarations proper, but when the "amiable editor" pointed out the great impropriety of such "mouthings,"

he seeks to secure exemption from just criticisms by quoting himself as saying the Brotherhood "can live, prosper and advance by the aggregated average of its own intelligence."

It will be borne in mind that Brother O'Rourke is displeased, because the "amiable editor" has referred to opinions as "infirm," forgetful, we doubt not, that he had denounced the membership as men of "childish fancy, weak-minded and unthinking." Such is Brother O'Rourke's way of opening his mouth and putting both of his feet in it, such is the way he has of digging a hole for others, and tumbling in himself, such is his way of breaking his own neck in a halter he with great painstaking prepared for another. Caught and crippled in his own deadfall, limping and howling in search of sympathy and condolence, Brother O'Rourke excites mingled sentiments of commiseration and contempt. He drags forth a number of Brothers whom he is anxious to defend, but does not tell them if they are the " weakminded and unthinking" brothers he has stigmatized, and he does this, when he is illy able to bear with philosophic serenity, the deserved castigations he has himself received. In the great generosity of a heart, which pants for peace," he squeals for the crowd; like a dervish he is ready to howl at anybody's funeral.

Brother O'Rourke prates of the proprieties of speech while he indulges in such chaste expressions as, "lie," "slop bucket," "filth," "lying misrepresentation, "rotten imagination," "yahoo," etc.

Brother O'Rourke wants some one to read between the lines to find "an individual whom the editor dares not name or openly assail." Brother O'Rourke has reason for knowing that this individual is not himself. Tattooed by such skill as we have had leisure to bestow. Brother O'Rourke is a living example of our courage, and if Brother O'Rourke will induce the mysterious "individual," to exercise the indiscretion which characterizes himself, and write over his own signature, we will certainly take his case under consideration.

Brother O'Rourke, strange to say, feels the force of the "amiable editor's" statement, to the extent that he confesses that he made a mistake in his statement relating to the committee charged with the revision of the constitution. The statement was boldly made; it was a grave mistake, and was made to boost the flagrant charge of "hero worship" against the "weak-minded and unthinking" membership of "our Order." When the "amiable editor" corrected the mistake "for the good of the Order" he did not apply the epithet of "liar" to him, nor did he inquire of Brother O'Rourke, "why lie about it?" But that

is the way Brother O'Rourke treats the "amiable ed- itor," and then with undiluted gall, calls in question our suavity of style, when contending against men like himself, who either purposely or by mistake malign the Brotherhood. Brother O'Rourke asserts that in making the mistake "there was no intentional falsifying;" nor was any charged, and yet, the mistake was made for a purpose so flagrantly unjust, that even Brother O'Rourke deemed it advisable in his own defense to intimate that he is honest. While we sympathize with Brother O'Rourke in his painful dilemma, it is not the less unfortunate for him to practically assert that he is not a liar and take his chances for being believed. It is quite unnecessary to say that a man with the confessed infirmity of statement, which characterizes Brother O'Rourke, can expect little consideration, when he makes statements. Having made one statement which he has had to declare was not intentionally false, there is a seeming necessity for him to follow up that policy. He says the "amiable editor" has denounced somebody in the "vilest language." Why does he not quote the language? Simply because he cannot find it. The charge is groundless, fabricated, and Brother O'Rourke ought to say that "there was no intentional falsifying." It does not look that way, and still we hesitate to ask Brother O'Rourke, "why lie about it?"

Brother O'Rourke remarks that "there are men who are honest in financial transactions, and yet rotten to the core in other respects." That may be true or false. We doubt if any man could say that and prove it, unless he himself was the guilty party, and knew himself to be "honest in financial transactions, and rotten to the core in other respects." Evidently a man who has no faith in "inborn integrity" innate, "originating in or derived from the constitution of the intellect," must be the victim of that vicious vagary that all men are "inborn" rascals. Brother O'Rourke is of the opinion that "inborn integrity and the rest is simply rot." We do not doubt that Brother O'Rourke is built that way. It is safe to say that a man who has no faith in "inborn integrity," has none of it in his composition. A man who is honest because he fears the penalties of dishonesty is in no proper sense an honest man; remove the penalty, and his native scoundrelism will assert itself. He will be careless about his statements, and will confess his mistakes only when circumstances compel him to do so. As he has no faith in "inborn integrity" he has no faith in any other virtue. Inborn veracity is as much "rot" as "inborn integrity honor, truth, fidelity to obligation, everything of that nature is "rot" and it would certainly be no stretch of language to say of such a man he is "rotten to the core nor would it be in the line of exaggeration, to say, that throughout the animal kingdom or the realms of animated nature, a viler thing could be found.

Why talk about a "firm and abiding faith in the intelligence of the vast mass of the rank and file of the Order," and then kick like an army mule at everything the Order does? Why seek to embarrass the Order and place obstacles in its way? Such acts contradict professions. They disclose vicious motives, vulgar jealousies and envies which must not be permitted to go unrebuked.

We have an abiding faith in the "inborn integrity" of the Order. We do not believe the talk about "inborn integrity" being "rot." We believe there are honest men regardless of penalties and prisons and surveillance. Men who, no matter what the temptation may be, will not steal, nor make statements which are false for a malign motive. To such men the destinies of the Brotherhood must be committed if it is to exist. No greater disaster could befall it than to place its affairs in the hands of men who scout the idea of "inborn integrity." Let a man obtain control or a set of men obtain control, who regard "inborn integrity" as "rot," who are honest only because they dare not steal, and the terrors of the law would soon be forgotten and wreck would overwhelm the Brotherhood.

Brother O'Rourke says:

At the close of his tirade against me he says that if I should persist in refusing to obey the Grand Master in the contingency of a strike of the Federated Orders. I would be expelled. He has suddenly discovered a little authority somewhere. Lord knows where, to enforce the laws of the Supreme, in the December *Magazine* he declares his impotency to compel the UP firemen to honor the Supreme with their obedience. If there is no power to compel obedience from the men on the UP system, where does the power come from to chastise a single refractory individual? Will you please inform us? Even a footnote will serve for this.

Brother O'Rourke makes another mistake when he says, " lie " (the editor) has suddenly discovered a little authority," etc. The point we made, was, that the Supreme Council has no authority to debar the men on the UP system or any other system from striking if they determine so to do — but should they strike without the approval of

the Supreme Council, members of the Brotherhood would not be assessed to sustain them while the strike continued. It is in the matter of support that the authority of the Supreme Council comes into view.

Again, should the Supreme Council approve of a strike on the UP System, or any other system, and Brother O'Rourke should refuse to pay any assessment ordered to maintain the strike, he would find himself unceremoniously expelled from the Order. His notions of "allegiance" would cut no figure whatever.

This thing of boasting of incipient treason, is well calculated to lower Brother O'Rourke in the estimation of members of the Order, who have hitherto regarded his vagaries and hallucinations as of little consequence, but if he really contemplates rebellion, the Brotherhood will promptly place him where, at his leisure, he can exercise himself either in howling or kicking as may best suit his nature.

We have devoted more attention to Brother O'Rourke than his scurrilous communication warrants, and now leave him to such reflections as are suggested by the notes we herewith append. —Ed. Magazine.