

SCIENCE

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THE PROBLEM OF ORGANIZATION

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THE PROBLEM

THE contemplation of living beings has ever plunged the human mind into a state of perplexity and interrogation. So manifold are the aspects presented to us by the form and behavior of living things and so diverse are the minds which have sought to interpret the phenomena of life that we may at times feel ourselves submerged in a sea of distracting problems, uncorrelated theories and data which, while valuable, are more or less chaotic. From time to time, momentarily realizing that the particular problem which looms immediately before us, mighty and impregnable, is but one of a score or a hundred of equal importance, and that its solution would be for us as merely one sentence of a long story, we give vent to a question which at once epitomizes all of our perplexities and expresses the very heart of what we want to know. We ask, what is an organism? But this question, simple in form, yet all-inclusive, leads us nowhere. It is a blank wall offering no foothold for experimental attack. Should nature present to us no other question than this, she will ever remain a sphinx. For working purposes we must find questions which suggest a program of investigation. The following discussion states no new problem. Nor does it purport to be in any essential matter a new statement of the old problem of the organism. It is at most a restatement of the problem in terms which lay the emphasis at a point where it has been, perhaps, not so commonly put, but where for purposes of investigation I believe it may