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## Putting the Bible In and Taking Christianity Out.

A Critical Examination of the Dominant Ideas Concerning Religious Teaching in Public Schools.

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The question concerning the study of the Bible in the public school becomes more acute and also more complex every day. The vexed problem seems to defy every attempt at solving it and is like the Gordian knot, which puzzled the minds of men till it. was cut by the sword of Alexander. The advocates of religious teaching in the public school, after much useless deliberation, seem to be inclined to follow the method of the great conqueror by forcing the Bible into the public school, whether this agrees with the Constitution or not, and whether it pleases or displeases the voters. While we are not in possession of accurate and extensive statistics on this score, the reports that have reached our desk show that at least a fair beginning has been made in the attempt to embody Bible-study as a part of the curriculum of the public schools, and if the movement should gain in momentum, it may not be long before the Bible will be a regular and indispensable text-book in the public schools of our country. Weary of fruitless discussions, the friends of the Bible have quit talking and have begun to act. Such is the course of the movement as delineated in reports covering practically all the States of the Union.

An interesting feature of the movement seems to be that the advocates of religious education in the public school are serious and zealous Protestant Christians. People not connected with the Christian Church, or such as are opposed to it, have, upon the whole, remained strangely indifferent, whereas the movement has progressed most rapidly in circles in which Fundamentalism is

strongest. This fact must be carefully taken into consideration when one wishes to analyze the movement of putting the Bible into the public school. The person who takes up the matter for study must bear in mind that he is dealing with men and women of deep religious convictions, of earnest zeal on behalf of the Lord's kingdom, with such as are deeply interested in propagating the Word of God. Hence the Bible-into-the-public-school movement is essentially a *religious* and, in particular, a Protestant movement.

Now, the writer wishes to state that he is in cordial sympathy with every attempt to disseminate Bible-truths. He desires to say that he loves the Bible more than any other book, and that he regards the teaching of the Bible as one of the holiest obligations which Christians have, and that, were it possible, he would have a copy or copies of the Bible placed wherever people might be inclined to use it - in every home, every school, every hotel, every court-room, every railroad station, etc. Again, the writer believes that Scripture interprets itself, and that no intelligent, unbiased reader will be left unprofited by the perusal of the Holy Scriptures. He admits, furthermore, that a straightforward, honest reading of the Bible, with due respect for its holy contents and without any interpretation on the part of the individual teacher, will be of real benefit to those who listen to the Word. In short, the writer desires to state that he is willing to go to the uttermost to meet the advocates of the Bible-into-the-school movement and give them the benefit of every doubt, holding that the Bible, wherever it is given a chance, will accomplish that good of which it is the means and agency. Let this be clearly understood from the start.

Moreover, the writer would not oppose the introduction of Bible-study into the school curriculum because of *mechanical difficulties*. By mechanical difficulties he means such as arise from the fact that in our country different versions of the Bible are in use. Of course, these difficulties must not be minimized. Sometimes they seem to be almost insurmountable. The question as to which version should be used in certain communities will no doubt cause these communities some trouble. Supposing a community to be about equally composed of Roman Catholics and Protestants, what version should be chosen to suit both parties, considering the fact that their opinions on the value of the different versions vary so widely? Or suppose that there is a Mormon or a Christian Science element, would it not be fair to them to introduce, together with the Bible, those interpretations which they regard as essential toward understanding the Bible, as, for instance, Mrs. Eddy's Key to the Scriptures, or the Book of Mormon? Again, take the situation as it will, no doubt, arise where Fundamentalists and Liberalists are equally represented in a community. 'To the Fundamentalist the shorter Bible of the modernist, which omits those passages that give expression to, and constitute, the core of Christianity, can never be satisfactory. The Fundamentalist is deeply convinced that the Bible which is to be read in the public school should be that Bible which commonly goes as the Bible and which sets forth the whole divine counsel of salvation. Or, considering a different situation: There are people who for good and fair reasons object to the use of the various revised versions and advocate the study of the Authorized Version. How are their divergent demands to be satisfied? In short, if the Bible is to be read in the public school, it must accommodate all pupils of all creeds; it must satisfy the various religious elements represented in that school, and as such it must be a Bible that is not the Bible now in common use in the Christian Church. However, let us suppose that the community would agree on the study of an acceptable version. Even then the difficulties will not all have been eliminated; for who will determine the passages that should be read and that are agreeable to the heterogeneous elements represented in that school? Thus we see that the mechanical difficulties in the way of the study of the Bible in the public school are great indeed. Nevertheless, even this impediment the writer would be inclined to pass up: If the question under consideration would concern only Bible-reading, the problem in question might, after all, be solved.

Again, in order to meet the friends of the Bible, since their motive seems to be so noble and good, the writer would not oppose the study of the Bible in the public school merely because of the *unconstitutionality* of such an act. He himself is convinced that the study of the Bible in the public school is unconstitutional, and he agrees with those who oppose Bible-reading in the public school on this ground, believing that they have the manifest purport of the Constitution in their favor. If "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," then, certainly, a book so essentially religious and Christian as the Bible ought not to be made a part of the public school curriculum. Introducing into the public school the Bible, and thus a distinctively religious and Christian text-book, seems, in the writer's mind, to constitute a clear violation of the

fundamental principle upon which our democracy is based, to wit, the separation of Church and State, which would open the way to innumerable troubles and disturbances. If the Bible is studied in the public school, every Jew might for just reasons, that is, for reasons of conscience, object to the study of the New Testament, and so may the atheist, the modernist, the Turk, and everybody else who rejects the New Testament and takes issue with its teachings. Their claims "that, if any government would place the Bible into its schools as a text-book, it would teach and subsidize the religion of the Bible with funds raised by the people of different creeds, and that it would make the Christian religion the established religion of the land," are so well taken that they must stand as valid before any bar and be considered reasonable and sound by every sanely reasoning jury. However, even this difficulty the writer would consider to be secondary. By eliminating passages that offend, there remains the possibility of introducing into the public school a shortened Bible that might satisfy the various religious elements represented in it. However, that would not be the Bible, and it is the Bible which our good Christian friends who are now advocating religious instruction in the public school want to see placed into the schools supported and maintained by the people of our country.

There is a definite reason why these people insist upon having the Bible in the public school. Not for the sake of its literary value or even for the sake of its moral value, but for the sake of its distinctively religious and Christian value they demand that the Bible become a part of the State school curriculum. There was perhaps some sense, after all, in the ruling of the California court according to which the King James Version is a sectarian book. Of couse, in a proper sense the Bible is not a sectarian book. It is the book which God has given to the world, the universal appeal of the universal Creator to men living in all parts of the world. However, that California court no doubt had reasons for classifying the Authorized Version as it did. We believe that the men who wrote the decision saw more deeply than the letter of their decision would suggest. It seems obvious that they knew that not Bible-reading per se, but the question of religious and Christian education was the real issue of the struggle. Advocates of the Bible in the public school did not recommend the Bible as a book of universal value, but as a distinctively Christian and religious book. This being the case, that California court cannot be blamed for its decision. The real issue, then, pertained to *religion* and to the religion of only a *small part of the citizens* of California, namely, of those who believe that their religious views are set forth in the Bible. Thus the issue was sectarian, and the Bible was to be put into the public school for sectarian purposes.

That not the Bible per se, but its religious principles, tenets, and ideals should really be placed into the school, people who head the movement are not reluctant to declare. In Dominant Ideas Bishop Core of London declares: "Education is the process of training the faculties, especially of the young, to enable them intelligently to live their life and correspond with their opportunities. And, plainly, if we believe in God, the most important function of education is to train the young to correspond with the purpose of God, so far as we know that. And further, if we believe in Christ as the Revealer of God and the Redeemer of men, the most important function is to train them to understand how Christ would have them think and live. This is religious education. It should color and give character to the whole of education." (p. 53.)

This quotation fairly represents the opinion of a vast number of Christian people in our country and other countries who deeply feel the need of greater religious education. They witness with horror that infidelity is becoming ever more rampant, that vice is on the increase, and that the foundations of democracy are shattered by lack of good morals and high Christian ideals. This thought is stressed by Prof. Walter Scott Athearn in his book *A National System of Education:* "The task of religious education is to motivate conduct in terms of a religious ideal of life. The facts and experiences of life must be interfused with religious meaning. In a democracy the common facts, attitudes, and ideals given as a basis of common action must be surcharged with religious interpretation. Spiritual significance and God-consciousness must attach to the entire content of the secular curriculum. Unless the curriculum of the church-school can pick up the curriculum of the public school and shoot it full of religious meaning, the Church cannot guarantee that the conduct of the citizens of the future will be religiously motivated." (p. 30.)

What Professor Athearn here points out is a truth which has been stated again and again, even *ad nauseam*, in our church periodicals. Only we have expressed it in simpler terms and have pointed out the way in which "the facts and experiences of life

must be interfused with religious meaning." Professor Athearn advocates a well-regulated system of church-schools under the management of an interdenominational committee or board to cooperate with the public school. The proposition shows how deeply Christian people everywhere feel the want of Christian education. This is forcibly brought out in another paragraph by the same author: "The national public school system must be supplemented by a unified system of religious education which will guarantee the spiritual homogeneity of our democracy. Unless such a system of religious education can be created, there is great danger that our system of secular schools will become *naturalistic and materialistic* in theory and practise, and that the direction of social development will be determined by a secular state rather than by the spiritual forces represented by the Church." (p. 31.)

That the point maintained by Professor Athearn is well taken cannot be doubted. Of course, Professor Athearn would not ask the State to teach religion, for "the Church cannot ask the State to teach religion." (p. 30.) However, that is precisely what at least many of those who demand that the Bible be studied in the public school desire. They are convinced of the grave danger "that our system of secular schools will become naturalistic and materialistic in theory and practise." And in order to oppose the naturalizing and materializing tendencies of the non-religious State schools, they advocate not only the study of the Bible, but also the inculcation of its tenets and principles. This thought is stressed in the St. Louis Christian Advocate (August 2, 1922), where we read: "Religious education is coming to be regarded as a community enterprise in the sense that the religious nurture of childhood and youth is a matter of public concern. In this view religious instruction should become an integral part of all education. The Church is not alone in its awakening to the need of a more adequate program of religious education. The public school is also becoming conscious of this need. This institution cannot provide the program, but it can cooperate with the Church in such a way as to make the program possible. It is already doing this. In the recognition of this great common task of uniting religion and education the Church and the school become united as to ends, and separate, but cooperative, as to functions. Under this plan, the separation of Church and State need not result longer in the separation of religion and education."

Everywhere in this citation the language is carefully chosen, and the terms are judiciously weighed in order not to reveal too clearly the real issue, to wit, the blending of education in the public schools with the religion of the Christian churches. Nevertheless, the real issue cannot be concealed. What Christian people have in view by advocating the introduction of the Bible in the public school is manifestly more than the mere reading of the Bible or the inculcation of moral principles necessary for good citizenship. The real objective is *religious and, specifically, Christian training.* That this is in fact the issue becomes manifest wherever the question is publicly discussed between parties that oppose and such as favor the Bible in the public school. In a recent issue between a Lutheran pastor and the W. C. T. U. the following reasons were adduced by the latter why the Bible should be taught in the public school:—

1. "The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. It is health to the soul and a river of pleasure." Let the reader carefully and critically study these words. If the Bible is to be introduced into the public schools because it contains the mind of God, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, the happiness of believers, health to the soul; if it is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, and the Christian's charter, then it can serve no other purpose in the public school than to teach the Christian religion, the doctrines of sin and grace, of repentance and salvation. In other words, the Bible should be in the public school for the sake of the Christian religion.

2. "The fundamentals of all just laws are found in the Word of God. The reading of the Bible is an aid in the development of the moral nature and of good citizenship, our supreme duty to the youth of this land of God. There is nothing in the Constitution against our course. If there were, there is something greater than the Constitution, and we should have to amend that ancient and honorable document to fit our needs." Let the reader note that in this paragraph the Bible is called the Word of God, and that our country is called this land of God. The writer of this paragraph evidently has no adequate conception of the principle of Separation of Church and State. This is made sufficiently clear by the statement: "There is nothing in the Constitution against our course. If there were, there is something greater than the Constitution. We would have to amend that ancient and honorable document to fit our needs." Surely the attitude of these people not only toward religious education, but also toward the Federal Constitution is worth considering.

However, in this controversy we have noted another paragraph, which reveals the intentions of those who advocate Bible-study in the public school. We read: "The original intent of the formers was to prevent a state church, not to prevent Christianity. Common sense teaches us that they had no thought of placing infidelity on an equal footing with Christianity. The real object was not to countenance, much less to advance, Mohammedanism or Judaism or infidelity by prostrating Christianity, but to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects and to prevent any national ecclesiastical establishment. A law excluding the Bible from the public schools would conflict with that clause of the Constitution which declares that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion."

These paragraphs confirm the correctness of our contention that the purpose of introducing the Bible into the public schools is none other than to teach the Christian religion in the public school. To this we object most vigorously, and this our objection we sustain for two reasons.

1. We are convinced that the teaching of the Christian religion in the public school abrogates the principle of separation of Church and State and destroys the fundamental principles of our democracy.

2. We believe that Christianity and the Christian Church will be the greater sufferer by having the Christian religion taught in the public schools.

The first point we would impress upon our *fellow-citizens*, the second upon our *fellow-Christians*.

Let us consider the first argument. If the Bible is put into the public school for the sake of inculcating Christian tenets and principles, then the Constitution of the United States of America is reduced to a scrap of paper. The truth of this requires little elucidation. If the State is to teach the religion of the Bible, then, first of all, it is necessary that the State declare itself in favor of the religion of the Bible or of the Christian religion. In other words, the State would have to establish the Christian religion as the favored or preferred religion. However, as soon as this is done, the principle of religious freedom which lies at the foundation of our democracy, is eliminated, and the United States of America will have gone back at least four centuries, to a time when a certain religion was the favored religion of the State and was forced upon men by means of sword and fagot. The harm done would be incalculable. Strife and dissension would be sure to follow, not only between Protestants and Catholics, but also between Christian and non-Christian elements. However, even if these disturbances would not result, the injury to the cause of democracy would be great indeed. Even if the indifferent, irreligious elements of our country would not protest against the inculcation of Christian principles upon their children, this, never-theless, would constitute a violation of conscience and an assault upon the fundamental principle of religious freedom, in consequence of which the State would gain nothing and Christianity lose all. For every attempt to force Christianity upon people who refuse to receive it willingly has invariably resulted in utter failure. Wherever the Christian religion was forced upon men, it has only increased man's hatred against Christ. The Christian religion can win only by suasion, and it was therefore a wise rule which the divine Master gave when He ordained that the religion of the Bible should be brought to man not by the State, but by the Church. Those Christians who demand that the public school should teach Christianity frustrate the very purpose which they have in view. Instead of helping the cause both of the Church and the State, they hurt both immeasurably.

In all this, however, the *Church* would be the greater loser. We believe that we have made clear the point that any attempt on the part of the State to Christianize our country would result only in dechristianizing it. That certainly is serious enough. However, we also contend that by putting the Bible into the public school, Christianity will have to be put out of the Christian churches and out of the hearts of the Christian children who attend the public school. This rather paradoxical statement is certainly true. That Christianity, or the religion of the Bible, cannot be taught in the public school, with its various heterogeneous elements, as it is taught in the Christian churches requires no proof. If the Bible and the religion of the Bible is taught in a school, it must first of all be so modified as to suit the various parties representing

that school. The religion taught in the public school must be modified to suit, in the first place, *non-Christian people*, and secondly, *Christian people* who are at variance with one another. After the Christianity taught in the public school has been modified to such an extent as to satisfy not only the intellectual unbeliever, the pagan modernist, the skeptic, the rationalist, and the outspoken atheist, but also the Catholic, the Lutheran, the Baptist, and the Adventist, very little of true Christianity will be left. Let us consider these points more carefully.

In the first place, the religion taught in the public school must be made to agree with the opinions of men who are outspoken This is a truth which Bishop Core of London has unbelievers. repeatedly pointed out in his book Dominant Ideas concerning ~ Religious Teaching in Provided [Public] Schools. He points out that the problem of religious teaching in the public school cannot be separated from the intellectual conditions of the country. What does Bishop Core mean by this statement? As he himself explains, the meaning is that Christianity taught in the public school must coincide with the status of intellectual culture found in the country. Now, we are fairly well acquainted with the nature of the intellectual culture, not only of our country, but of the entire world. Intellectuals - and we would not be wrong in numbering among them Voltaire, Tom Payne, Charles Darwin, Bob Ingersoll, Professor Kent, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Mr. Steinmetz, Dr. Grant, Rabbi Hirsch-have at all times taken offense at certain tenets of the Christian religion, and they have made it clear that they have completely broken away from these tenets of traditional Christianity. Now, if the problem of religious teaching in the public school cannot be separated from the intellectual conditions in our country, then it stands to reason that the Christianity to be introduced into the public school to satisfy the demand of unbelieving intellectuals must be very markedly modified. In other words, the fundamental tenets of the Christian religion, the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ, of the vicarious atonement, of salvation by grace through faith, of the eternal damnation of the wicked, etc., must be eliminated and set aside. In order to teach Christianity in the public schools, which at present are under the dominion of evolution and agnosticism, every distinctive teaching of Christianity must be culled out. Thus under the name of Christianity, naturalism or paganism would have to be taught in the public school; and children attending the public school would be dechristianized and reared as enemies of the Christian Church. Nothing else can be expected. By putting into the public school an eviscerated, emasculated, Christless Christianity, which meets with the demands of modern intellectualism or unbelief, true Christianity would be put out of the hearts of the children and out of the Church of their parents. Let Christian people who urge this movement to place the Bible into the public school contemplate this.

Again, the religion of the Bible would have to be modified so as to suit the various denominations into which the Christian Church is divided. The necessity of this is stressed by Dr. Core in the book from which we have quoted before. He writes: "We have reached a time when the divisions in the Church, the divisions between the Church and the division of opinion inside the Church, have become nothing less than a positive scandal to the healthy and righteous conscience of mankind. The fact is they have become a positive offense to the conscience of men."

In order to remedy this evil, Dr. Core suggests the following: "I believe that there is actually nothing which is more worthy of doing than to concentrate or bring together all those who believe that only in Christ is the world's salvation . . . and diligently to free the tradition of faith from accretions and corruptions and unreasonablenesses, so that, unimpeded and unimpaired, it may speak itself out through the times of confusion and afterwards may be able to ring with a clear voice and to maintain its clear grip on the people. I am inclined to believe that as regards the religious teaching in provided [public] schools we could arrive at an understanding which would greatly improve it. The new principle would be to base the religious teaching in provided schools upon agreement between the different bodies. I think you would get in such interdenominational control a basis for religious teaching which, though it would not give churchmen all they desire, would give us something immensely better, on the whole, and more tolerable in principle than our present undenominationalism." (p. 61.)

Dr. Core closes his remarks with the following summary of his views: "It would in my judgment be a very great gain if they could become interdenominational and be controlled by the free judgment of an interdenominational council, which, so far as common consent would be arrived at, the real religious feeling of the district would be given the direction of the religious teaching.

On this basis I think we could hope to get in the provided schools a kind of religious instruction which, while it would inevitably fall short of what instructed churchmen want, would give us a basis on which further teaching in church and Sunday-school could be built."

The same idea is suggested by Professor Athearn, who says: "It is becoming increasingly apparent that the present emergency in our religious life demands the sympathetic cooperation of all denominational and interdenominational agencies." (A National System of Education, p. 31.)

Mrs. W. D. Young, W. C. T. U. Superintendent of Public Schools of Arkansas, advocates this very principle when she says: "We call upon every citizen, organization, and political party of this State to think on these things, to use all diligence to correct these great wrongs, and to act and *cooperate in a united*, *nonsectarian manner* to remove all barriers now existing to the reading of the Bible in our State public schools."

Did Dr. Core, Professor Athearn, and Mrs. Young visualize the difficulties in the way of such cooperation? Did they really ponder the harm that would accrue to Christianity if this measure would be carried out? If everything denominational must be removed from the Christianity to be taught in the public school, what would be left of it? On what points of doctrine would the various denominations represented by the interdenominational council agree? What else would remain but a flabby, worthless product, which is not Christianity, but a monstrum, with a Christian coating of meaningless words. Again, how would the teaching of such a Christianity react upon the Christian belief of the children that belong to the various Christian churches? Would it not destroy their creed? Would it not take true Christianity out of their hearts? In the end, the Christian interdenominational board would do the very thing which modern intellectualists are doing, namely, take out of Christianity that which makes it a distinct and the only true and saving religion.

Let this suffice to point out the utter impossibility of teaching the religion and principles of the Bible in the public school. Both the State and the Church would be the sufferers if the plan under consideration would be carried into effect. Let all agencies that advocate the introduction of the Bible into the public school consider carefully and not act hastily. It is a comparatively easy

thing to criticize and to point out faults of existing institutions. However, it is unspeakably difficult to devise plans which would in any way improve the present arrangement of a public school entirely free from the duty of inculcating religious principles. Let them ponder what Bishop Core says: "We are living in an age in which the critical faculty far overweighs the constructive, when we can see the faults of what exists and expose them, and see and appreciate all kinds and sides of truth very much more effectively than we can build systems which can commend themselves constructively. Undoubtedly the critical faculty is overdeveloped by comparison with the constructive." These words ought certainly to go far in urging people to leave well enough alone.

If nothing better than the present arrangement can be devised to help both State and Church, why not rest content with the wisdom of our fathers, who provided in our Constitution that Church and State should remain separate. This principle has redounded to the greatest welfare of both Church and State. While the State as such is not professedly Christian, yet the Christian Church in the United States has enjoyed greater prosperity, greater opportunities for good, and greater opportunities for testifying the truth than in any other country in the world. Let us not forget this, and let us not prove ungrateful for the great blessing which we have enjoyed.

Of course, the public school will find it necessary to teach morals. However, the morals required for good citizenship can be taught better and more safely and more acceptably from the viewpoint of conscience and experience than from the Bible. If any one refuses to accept the Bible religion, he cannot help but be prejudiced against Bible morality. The Bible teaches morality from the viewpoint of responsibility to the true God and from that of endless salvation and endless retribution. People should lead moral lives, love God and their neighbor, because God is a moral Being, and because He has loved man. The moral teaching of the Bible cannot be separate from its religious teaching. If the religious teachings are not accepted, its moral principles will not be valued. However, there is a powerful force in the appeal to conscience and to the whole concentrated experience of man. People who refuse the Bible will nevertheless see the necessity of being moral, because they are so bidden by their conscience and by considerations of reward and punishment. Of course, we do

not mean that this is religious instruction. However, we contend that the instruction in religion is not a part and duty of the State. Christian children should be taught the saving truths of the Christian religion by the Church and not by the State. The State may rear them to become moral citizens by an appeal to conscience and experience; the Church should rear them to be and remain children of God by means of the Word of God, especially by means of the Gospel of our ever-blessed Redeemer.

This is the old principle of our fathers which we would advocate anew. Let the State schools confine their moral education to the inculcation of the principles of justice, truth, and love that would abundantly satisfy all non-Christian parents who send their children to the public school, but leave Christian people free to teach their children the religion of Jesus Christ. In this way the Lutherans, the Methodists, the Adventists, the Catholics, the Mormons, and everybody else would be free to instil the tenets of their own particular creed.

In conclusion we find that there is no better plan than that of our fathers, who left it to each man and to each church to decide its issues between God and himself. That course has not harmed the Christian Church, but greatly benefited it. If under this system vice, immorality, and irreligion have increased, it was essentially not the fault of the State or of the present system, which keep State and Church separate, but the fault of the Church, which failed to do her duty in providing for her children the necessary means of extensive and complete religious training. Tf the Christian Church would now unload the burden of its neglect upon the State, it would cause trouble, mingle Church and State, create disturbances among Christian and non-Christian people, eviscerate the Bible, emasculate Christianity, and in the end put true Christianity out of the Church and out of the hearts of men.

Our age is critical, but not constructive, at least so far as Christian education is concerned. 'The plan of putting the Bible into the public school in order to inculcate the principles of Christ will prove a dismal failure because it is based upon a wrong principle and is at variance with the teachings of the Bible itself, with the instructions of Christ, with the creed of the Christian Church, and with the ultimate aim of the people who are advocating it. It is this to which we wished to call attention.