

II — WHICH GOD AND WHY SCHOOLS?

HARVEY MAITLAND WATTS

AS fatuous as the professed intention of William Jennings Bryan to “put God into the Constitution” is the more vicious folly which, — in the name of fundamentalist and evangelical sectarianism, — now aims to turn the public schools of this country into organizations for the promotion of racial and religious differences. The scheme may be succinctly summed up as a project for “putting God into the schools on Wednesday afternoons”. Carrying on an extensive campaign through various evangelical organizations and supported by certain judicial opinions of no more merit than the utterances of the Tennessee Supreme Court in the *Scopes* case, a group of sectarian propagandists are making a great to-do about the so called sacred right of home and Church to inculcate religious principles in the young. These rights none dispute or deny. But the question at issue is whether the religious gentlemen are justified in disregarding the preponderant rights they already have to the child’s time when they come forward with their plea for an additional concession from the all-too-limited time now allotted to the public schools.

The propagandists have tried to conceal from the public the very pregnant fact that the parents and the Church seem to have failed signally in teaching religious principles to the child during the superabundant time these institutions now have at their disposal; and they propose to place on the schools the responsibility for what they claim is a desperate situation. They have made up their minds to force the public schools to bear the burden of those sacred duties which naturally fall to the home, and the Church, — duties which, it appears, the religious enthusiasts prefer to talk about rather than exercise.

This issue is now before the American public and it cannot be stated too emphatically. Though the judicial opinions rendered in the so called *White Plains* (New York) case settled nothing, they all point to one thing. By the most astounding perversion of fact and argument, this new crusade against the integrity of the public schools has not only refused to charge the derelictions of parents

and Church against these real offenders, but has laid the blame at the doors of the unoffending schools themselves. Thus, while the public schools are exercising their primary and wholesome function of giving secular instruction during the very small amount of time in which they control the child, they are being so maligned, misrepresented, and attacked that they are left almost without defenders. A nation-wide animosity is thereby being aroused against the schools, simply because they are not usurping the Church's function of nurturing the child in the religious beliefs of their parents.

On all sides this failure of the home and the Church to set up the restraints of religion about the modern child is admitted. But the remedy proposed, — instead of seeking to increase their control, instead of attempting to raise the efficiency of the natural guardians of religion, — aims on the contrary to relieve them of all responsibility. The plan of attack is both naive and ingenious. First, the propagandists attack the schools as irreligious and godless. And then they propose to filch certain school hours for sectarian religious instruction. The plan, — which varies somewhat in different parts of the country, and which is not "sweeping the country like wildfire", as its proponents claimed it would, — may be briefly stated as follows: "Inside the school hours" but "outside of the school structures" the children are to be officially segregated, labeled, and "released" for religious instruction in such sectarian centres as the religious organizations may determine.

Back of all this movement is the greatest fallacy, the falsest assumption, that has ever been presented for the judgment of the American people. Unfortunately, it is a fallacy that has been given specious endorsement by such judicial decisions as those of the White Plains case. These decisions by no means got at the real issue but were more like obiter dicta, dealing with the rights and duties of parents, — which no one disputes, least of all the poor, overworked school teachers. The fallacy need only be stated clearly to expose its fundamental absurdity. It is that the home and the Church combined cannot teach religion to the child save on Wednesday afternoons, preferably between the mystical and sacred hours of two and three o'clock! It does not require an undue modicum of brain to see that this proposal is not based upon

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any of the necessities of the case, but is part and parcel of a much larger and more vicious propaganda which looks to forcing sectarianism into the public schools as a part of the regular curriculum. Indeed, in this movement the Protestant denominations have abandoned the old cry of "Hands off the public schools!" in which they once joined so enthusiastically. This new conspiracy against the schools, — clothed, of course in the fine verbal livery of heaven, — is headed by fanatics of the Bryan stripe, and aims at nothing less than using the established discipline and trained personnel of the public schools in an unblushing effort to entrench sectarian and racial differences in the receptive and unquestioning minds of school children. All this through highly officered religious organizations which now make open boast of the millions of men and the millions of money behind them.

Though the time argument is unanswerable, neither the propagandists nor the few courts which have sustained them pay any attention to it. Public school authorities have stated that there is plenty of time for religious instruction outside of school hours. But their opinions are passed over in contempt. The advocates of the plan are bent on mustering the schools and their discipline into the contending armies of the Lord; and they have learned that the best way to effect their ends is to paint the dire necessities of the situation and clamor that the schools are responsible for it. Various leaders are quoted, indicting the schools as a menace to our civilization. It is the order of the day to proclaim that "the ignoring of religions by the public schools transgresses the principles of religious freedom", — a ludicrous *lucus a non lucendo* argument if there ever was one! Consistency, however, is not the hobgoblin of the little minds engaged in this attack on the schools. Their tirades are only a smoke-screen to hide their yearning to control the schools.

The Wednesday afternoon sectarian diversion is merely a step in a much wider series of proposals that is revolutionary and wholly unconstitutional in its character. In Illinois the Attorney-General has decided that "releases" on Wednesday afternoon are sectarian and clearly unconstitutional, since they demand the cooperation of school authorities in setting up sectarian distinctions. He also called attention to the fact that the segregation of children according to the denominations of their parents put

a stigma on the non-segregated children of non-church-going parents, which was entirely foreign to American principles. In New York also, in the Mount Vernon case, "releases" for Wednesday afternoon were refused by Judge Seeger; and while they were allowed in the White Plains case by Judge Staley and affirmed by the Appellate Court, the court evaded the time argument and the constitutional argument.

Along with the agitation for God in the schools goes a demand for a wider use of the Bible as a religious exercise whose character is plainly sectarian, dogmatic, and superstitious. Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, in his recent endorsement of an hysterical fourteen-year-old girl evangelist, held that there would be no improvement in morals or religion in the United States "until we have religion in all the schools". The Reverend Mr. Sheldon, of old time evangelistic notoriety in Kansas, is convinced that religion must be taught in the public schools, but for the present he magnanimously holds off because he doesn't believe we yet have the proper teachers. Besides, he is not at all sure precisely what kind of religion can be taught. This phase of the situation is possibly the most paradoxical. At a time when the Protestant denominations are sharply divided over what they believe, they boldly assume a uniform attitude in their sinister effort to turn plastic children into self-conscious, squabbling sectaries!

The Protestant Churches are as busily engaged in crying "godless" at the public schools as the Roman Catholic Church ever was. And, logically enough, they are now asking Roman Catholic endorsement for this Wednesday afternoon movement. But neither of the great divisions of Christianity really meets the fact that all this hue and cry about godless schools is absolutely untrue. Even if the schools *are* chiefly engaged in their proper business of secular instruction, the home and Church need only exercise their loudly advertised prerogatives and thereby make the pupils turned over to the "secular arm" both religious and God-loving. The innocents would then be beyond all possible contamination from the unreligious exercises of learning that two and two make four and that a plural verb must follow a plural subject. The school authorities would be delighted to receive well-behaved children whose religious enthusiasm would be reflected in their morals and conduct. But mush and maudlinism have

ruled otherwise, and the Reverend Dr. William B. Miller, General Secretary of the New York Federation of Churches, recently asserted "that if any of the Revolutionary red blood is left in our veins, we should not let our children be robbed of their birthright of religion." He did not point out that the secular schools are in no wise interfering with the right of the Church to safeguard this birthright. Nor did he point out that daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly, the home and the Church have more than enough time, — if they care to use it, — to teach any child all the religion he can be expected to understand or live up to.

A striking example of what the propagandists are attempting was the syndicated article in the magazine sections of several Sunday newspapers last February, headed "God in the Schools". On the front page was a large illustration showing the child receiving instructions at its mother's knee in the most old-fashioned manner. Another large illustration represented a youth, presumably at college, surrounded by alembics and presumably on the edge of despair through the study of science. The burden of the article was given over to quotations from cardinals and bishops and Dr. Cadman in a misleading effort to suggest that it was through religion in the public schools, and that alone, that the country could be saved.

No, the propagandists are intent on getting Wednesday afternoons and are indifferent to all their other opportunities. In violation of all sound American principles, they assert that "the responsibility of the State for religion is just as basic as the principle of the separation of the Church and State". Of course, they are not all agreed as to how they are going to handle the Wednesday afternoon idea, or even the bigger idea of putting religion into the schools regularly. The Reverend Dr. Clarence E. MacCartney, of Philadelphia, — who is proud to admit that he is the most extreme of all the Bryanites in the Presbyterian Church and is the most fundamental of all obscurantist Fundamentalists, — recently told the assembled superintendents of schools of the country that he appealed to them because other formative influences had failed to do anything for the modern child. His confession ran thus: "When we take into consideration the fall of the family altar, the abandonment of moral and religious instruction in the home, and the lowering of standards in the home, the

ghastly ravages of divorce, leaving its evil trail in one home out of seven, we begin to understand something of the gravity of the task now laid upon the shoulders of the teacher and the principal."

Dr. MacCartney overlooked the fact that in this, at least, the schools are blameless. Every educator who knows anything, knows that the schools are doing all they can be expected to do, — and more, — to make up for the short-comings of the home and the Church. For, with a curious inconsistency, the advocates of religious instruction in the public schools at one minute denounce the schools as godless and the next minute are tearfully imploring those same schools to save the country. Dr. MacCartney was probably surprized at his own moderation when he admitted that the public schools cannot teach "the distinctive doctrines of Christianity". What he wants them to do is first to provide "definite instructions as to the existence of God; second, the same definite instructions as to the existence of immortality; third, the same definite instructions as to the existence of the moral nature of man."

But what nonsense this all becomes when one faces the fact that the public schools, — through their hygienic, sanitary, and ethical instruction, and through their welfare work, — already stand *in loco parentis* to the children, and are doing everything that the parents should do in the very homes themselves, as well as in the schoolrooms. Even now they are teaching future parents, — as well as the present parents, through the medium of their own offspring, — how to make better homes and how to become better citizens. No one can look over the school curriculums without realizing that they are making up for the deficiencies of home and Church.

Those who wish to put sectarian Scriptures and sectarian gods into the mind of the child care nothing for this work that is already done so supremely well in the public schools, — and done, too, in a relatively brief time. Even the Roman Catholic parochial schools, stimulated by criticism from within their own communion, make it very clear in their reports what a very large proportion of the time that the Roman Catholic child spends in these schools is devoted to secular studies. And all public school superintendents know that if the home and the Church did their duty by religion and by the child, the school authorities would

be left free to use their relatively small share of time for a more intensive secular education. On its face the issue raised by the Wednesday afternoon religious propagandists is not honest. The schools can not accept the stigma of moral delinquency. They must and should resist the intrusion of what is all too plainly sectarian influence, no matter how specious may be the plea that sectarianism is not the aim. It is the hidden aim and is even openly admitted as the aim by the less discreet and the more fanatical. If the school authorities do not resist this attack, — all the more odious since it comes from those who have admittedly failed to control the child in its critical periods when it is all their own to mould and form in matters of conduct and character and religion, — they will be unworthy to be called American educators. They will, indeed, be little above the egregious creatures who sing the rigmarole of the Koran in Moslem courtyards and neither know nor care for science or conduct save that approved by the shrieking brotherhood.

Taking God
into the Home

*From a drawing
by Clare Leighton*



AT FIRST SIGHT

A Novel in Four Parts — I

WALTER DE LA MARE

AT first sight any passer-by chancing to notice the gray-flanneled figure of the young man who was now making his way round the eastern horn of Galloway Crescent, might have assumed that he was blind. But this was not so. It is true the slender cane he carried in his hand was poised lightly in front of him as he stepped quietly on, but then he never tapped with it; and an occasional slight sidelong movement of his head suggested that he was making at least *some* rudimentary use of his eyes, even though they were hidden from view beneath a green silk shade attached to his head under his hat.

There was a peculiar grace in his movements, too, like that of some timid wild thing, and an almost absurd fastidiousness was apparent in his clothes. Maybe because this green shade had always shielded his face from the furies of a London sun, his lower features were unusually pale. But there was nothing positively effeminate in his looks. Wild things, after all, however timid, are not all of the weaker sex.

To residents in the Crescent, accustomed occasionally to glance out of their scrupulous windows, Cecil must long since have become a familiar sight; since the pavement between their iron balconies and their basements was part of his daily constitutional. Where old Professor Smith lived indeed, No. 24, — an old gentleman so profoundly interested in Persian literature that he had no need of "the time", — the neat parlor maid sometimes actually set her alarm clock by this young man. Busy at her dusting, her dark eye would glance down from the drawing-room to which she was all but the sole visitor, and see him gently forging his way along with a motion a little like that of a yacht on a halcyon sea. "Why, there's that young Mr. Jennings!" she would exclaim to herself, with a little thrill in her mind, and would at once run off downstairs to see if its hands, — as they always did, — actually pointed to ten minutes past eleven.

On this particular morning, however, Cecil was at least a