

"God" in the School.

It is clear that the virus of supernaturalism in all its forms is the most insidious one the social reformer has to contend against; and it seems to us impossible successfully to combat it until the training of the children is conducted without any reference whatever to theological ideas. "God" and all its connotations should be rigidly excluded from all text books, until at least a clear and scientific definition of the word has been agreed upon by the educational authorities. The French have set a good example in this matter. It may be said that there is no reason why "god," "heaven," "hell," and other theological fictions should not be referred to in the school lessons, if accompanied by rational interpretations; and we do not know that we should object to this if the understanding were honestly carried out. While, however, teachers refuse to answer the children's very natural questions in regard to such matters, on the ground that they are too "sacred" for discussion, they should not be introduced at all. Everything put before a child should be made the subject of rational explanation, not mere ex-cathedra declaration. This is the only way in which a child's mind can be opened and its brain be developed into a useful working instrument.

To arrive at some clear notion of the way in which this question of "god" might be treated in the school, suppose this passage from the Hindu Vedas were read:

"1. There is one living and true god; everlasting; without parts or passions; of infinite power, wisdom and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things.

"2. He is one, and he is beyond description.

"3. His glory is so great there can be no image of him.

"4. He is the incomprehensible spirit, who illuminates all and delights all; from whom all proceed, by whom they live after they are born, and to whom all must return.

"5. No vision can comprehend him, no language can describe him, no intellectual power can comprehend him."

Taking a passage like this, a teacher might give his class a quarter of an hour's very useful lesson, embodying some valuable instruction in philosophy and science. He might show how very closely the ancient Hindu ideas correspond with the more modern formulations of them in the Christian creeds. Then he could analyze the different sections. He could ask, What is meant by "living"? and then the meaning of "without parts or passions". And then he could ask how "infinite wisdom and goodness" could co-exist with a vast amount of folly and evil. And then

he could tell the children how it is, "god" being "beyond description", there are so many descriptions of him; and also explain how it is, "god" being, according to the best authorities, utterly unknown and inscrutable, some men pretend to know so much about his "will". These passages from some ancient writings might assist him:

Plato.—"God is the father of the universe, the creator of nature, the sovereign beauty, the supreme good, the ruling mind, which controls all things and permeates all things. He made the heavens, the earth, and the gods. He is the original life and force of all things, in the ethereal regions, upon the earth, and under the earth. He is being, unity, good."

Job.—"Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. But he knoweth the way I take.

Lao-Tsze.—"The reason which can be reasoned is not the eternal reason. The name which can be named is not the eternal name. Would you go before it, you cannot see its face; would you go behind it, you cannot see its back. If you look at it, there is nothing to fill the eye; if you listen to it, there is nothing to fill the ear. But if you use it, it is inexhaustible. Great reason is all-pervading; in love it nourisheth all things."—[Secular Thought.

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