

in it. He duly submitted the matter to the attorney-general for his opinion, and it is this opinion which makes all the trouble. But more anon!

Bible in the Schools.

To the editor—Correspondence from Salem, published in the Oregonian, November 27, under the heading, "Bible in Schools," brought Attorney-General Blackburn's opinion that reading of the Bible and saying the Lord's prayer in public schools is permissible, and pupils failing to take part in the worship may be expelled if the board of directors does not object.

With the greatest deference to the learned judge, I cannot help saying that his opinion on this question is opposed to logic, contradictory to the broad and Liberal laws of our state constitution, and inconsistent with studies on Christianity and other religions in general.

The question at issue arose from a fact, as stated in that correspondence, contained in the following: A teacher in one of the schools of Washington County (either from jealousy to piety or to shortening the time of tuition) has been each morning reading a chapter from the Bible and repeating the Lord's prayer, compelling the pupils to stand up and repeat or listen to the same. Her passionate ardor for Bible reading and mania for saying prayers brought her so far that she did not even hesitate to expel pupils because they would not share her priestly exercises. The solons of the board (except the chairman) approved her action. After some appeals, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, J. H. Ackerman, submitted the question to Attorney-General Blackburn, who rendered the quoted opinion, based on the following questions:

1. Has a teacher the right to use part of the school time in reading to her pupils as a school exercise a chapter from the Bible, with or without comment on said chapter.

2. Has the teacher the right to require her pupils to repeat the Lord's prayer, or to require said pupils to stand while said prayer is being repeated as a school exercise?

3. May a pupil be expelled from a school for refusal to repeat the Lord's prayer, or to stand while said prayer is being repeated as a part of the school exercise?

Taking to account Mr. Blackburn's arguments, I cannot help saying that they are too feeble to stand criticism. Now for facts:

1. Rule 43 of the school laws (quoted by Mr. B.) authorizing teachers to control the studies of their pupils, subjects the same control and studies to the course prescribed by the State Board of Education, and as neither religious instruction nor the Bible are entered in that course, it follows that neither the teacher nor the county directors may introduce such an inno-

vation. The reason is obvious, because otherwise the schools of the various places in the state would vary in their programmes of education and cause detriment to the education of those pupils who happen, for one or another reason, to change their residence from one place to another. Changing the uniform and general system of common schools is prohibited by section 3, article 3, state constitution. Such an innovation is an unlawful action of the teacher, who usurps the right of the State Board, producing a course of studies of his own, and no doubt such a teacher has no right to waste any part of school time in reading textbooks chosen by his or her own caprice. How Mr. B. could not see this point in the rule quoted by him is more than I understand.

2. Subdivision 12, of section 31, of the said rules quoted by Mr. B. provides among other things: "Boards of directors shall have entire control of the public schools of their district, and the teachers employed therein, to establish rules," etc., but neither this, nor any other section or clause gives any Board of Directors of a county school any right to introduce any other textbooks than those prescribed by the State Board. Such an innovation is unlawful, hence for disobedience to such unlawful requirements the pupils cannot be excluded from school.

3. The matter in issue involves the following questions:

Whether the Bible is a non-sectarian book?

Whether the saying of the Lord's prayer, or other prayers in public schools is admissible?

Whether the reading of the Bible in public schools is constitutional?

The first question according to Mr. Blackburn's opinion is decided affirmatively. He goes even further and considers the Lord's prayer non-sectarian. With pathos he exclaims: "But the reading of the Bible, and the repeating of the Lord's prayer in the public schools have nothing in them of a sectarian nature." I beg leave to differ with him and state that the Bible is a purely sectarian book. Here are the reasons: Every populated place in the Union contains people of various religious convictions.

King James' version of the scriptures is held by the Roman Catholic church incorrect as a translation and incomplete. Instead, they adopted the Douay and Rheims version, commonly known as "Douay version." The reading of the Bible they allow only to their authorized teachers. Many consider Martin Luther's version the most correct. The Jews, the owners of the Old Testament in the original, claim all translations incorrect and misrepresented for certain purposes, reject the divinity of Jesus and the veracity of the facts told in the

New Testament. Consequently, no version of the Bible is common to all, but is the cause of religious strife, and opposition, hence sectarian.

The second question, "whether the saying in public schools of the Lord's prayer, or any other prayer, is admissible," to my opinion, must be decided in the negative. It is not admissible. Because every sect has prayers composed by its pious men, and those who reject the divinity of Christ will most decidedly object to say or revere his prayer. Compulsion to read this prayer interferes with the right of conscience, expressed in sections 2 and 3, article 1, Constitution of Oregon.

The solution of the third question, "Whether the reading of the Bible in public schools is constitutional," necessitates the definition of the phrase, "reading the Bible." "Worship," according to Webster, Worcester, the Imperial and the Bible Dictionaries, means reverence to him whom people accept as God, consisting in prayer and reading his holy word: hence, "reading the Bible" is part of worship. The learned Supreme Judge J. Lyon (76 Wis., 194), says: "Reading the Bible in the schools, although unaccompanied by any comment on the part of the teacher, is 'instruction.' . . . Some of the most valuable instructions a person can receive may be derived from reading alone, without any extrinsic aid by way of comment or exposition." Hence the reading of the Bible in the public schools is twofold unconstitutional. First, it turns the public schools from a secular into a religious or theological institution; second, it interferes with the right of conscience. Sections 2, 3 and 5, article 1, Constitution of Oregon, read:

All men shall be secured in the natural right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences. No law in any case whatever shall control the free exercise and enjoyment of religious opinions, or interfere with the rights of conscience. No money shall be drawn from the treasury for the benefit of any religious or theological institution, nor shall any money be appropriated for the payment of any religious services, in either house of the Legislative Assembly.

And it requires no argument whatever, that for the maintenance of such schools no money shall be drawn from the treasury,

Speaking of the above quoted sections of the State Constitution, Mr. Blackburn says:

These sections are provisions in what is usually termed the "Bill of Rights" of the constitution of the state, and whether their adoption by the constitutional convention, and their subsequent ratification by the electors, were acts of wisdom is not a question which can now be considered. They are part and parcel of the organic law, and must be enforced in strict accordance with

the letter and spirit, wherever they are applicable to the question.

In his first sentence he questions the wisdom of our lawmakers over whom the spirit of liberality hovered, and methinks that he would gladly return to the times of intolerance, when Jews and other nations who did not believe in the veracity of the New Testament were driven by force to hear Christian sermons, their children torn away and converted (maybe by such pious maiden religious teachers); and, therefore, he postpones the consideration of the wisdom of our lawmakers to a time unknown. In my humble opinion, they were men of wisdom, tolerance, and true citizens. I beg to quote no less an authority than Judge J. Orton (76 Wis., 219). In a question of Bible reading in public schools, he says:

"Religion as a system of belief cannot be taught without giving offence to those who have their own peculiar views of religion, no more than it can be without offence to the different sects of religion. How can religion, in this sense, be taught in the common schools without taxing the people for or on account of it. The only subject, purpose or use for taxation in this State must be exclusively secular. There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrels, fights, malignant opposition, persecution and war and evil in the state as religion. Let it once enter into our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed; let it once enter into our common schools, they would be destroyed. Those who made our Constitution saw this, and used the most apt and comprehensive language in it to prevent such a catastrophe."

The same may be said of our lawmakers.

In the second sentence of Mr. Blackburn's above quoted paragraph he acknowledges the binding power of those sections of our Constitution. He is right, but how could he arrive at a conclusion which is just the opposite of those laws, I cannot comprehend. Maybe he was misled by several decisions that uphold his view, as 38 Me., 376; 12 Allen (Mass.) 127, and others: but those decisions can have no application to the broad and liberal Constitution of Oregon.

REV. DR. N. MOSESSEHN.

Mrs. Josephine K. Henry is the first woman now in the Liberal move and she deserves recognition. Captain and Mrs. Henry conduct a seminary at Versailles, Ky. She made a telling speech at the Ingersoll memorial, that endeared her to the hearts of all true reformers, as she showed that she was all right on the labor question and on the woman question. She asked, "How can men be free, born of slave mothers?"—[Freethought Ideal.]

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