

## MISCELLANEOUS.

## MORALITY BY REGULATION.

IN ANSWER TO C. E. SPARKS.

One of the characteristics of fanaticism is exaggeration. Without knowing it I should not hesitate to say that the author of the article "Religious Education in the Public Schools," is also an enthusiastic Prohibitionist. In his article he displays many of the peculiar earmarks of that amiable body. For instance, the Prohibitionists say a person who drinks is of the scum of the earth. Yet all the great men in American history from Washington to the present were drinking men excepting, of course, such very great men as Rutherford B. Hayes and the distinguished ex-secretary of state from Nebraska.

In line with the Prohibitionists' attitude let me quote from his article as follows: "Some have thought it possible to teach morals apart from religion. Such attempts have proven failures. Now it is almost universally recognized that there is such a vital relation between morals and religion that the two cannot be separated."

Here is a typical exaggeration born of a fanatical turn of mind. Could Mr. Sparks furnish any proof of the failures? Have we any reason to be ashamed of the morality of the American people? Do we not measure up to the highest national standard? Yet we have never taught religious morality in our schools. Such a crass and sweeping condemnation is the height of arrogance and a gratuitous insult to American civilization.

This is like the Prohibitionists' claim that we are a besotted nation and although we have developed the highest civilization the world has ever known, and in a little over a hundred years, the United States has become the richest, the most powerful, the most influential and best Christianized nation in the world. Can a besotted, rum-drinking, beer-guzzling, whiskey-boozing nation do what we have done and are doing right now in this war? But the voice of history means no more to the Prohibitionist than it does to Mr. Sparks.

His religious morality is the panacea for all national ills, just as prohibition is the cure-all for every national disorder from prisons to alms-houses.

Another characteristic of the fanatic is the *a priori* assumption of all facts necessary to prove the subject under consideration. Thus Mr. Sparks, to prove his theory, at least four times in his interesting article reiterates the assertion in variant forms that "the people are demanding in no uncertain terms that it (the public school) perform the work (religious teaching) that has been entrusted to it." The author assumes, because he is of that mind himself, that all other persons whose opinions amount to anything, agree with him that religious training should be a part of public school teaching. He takes for granted since he is himself cock sure right, that the rest of the people are of the same mind. As he thinks so the world thinks, as the world should think in order to fall in with him and his ideas, so it is promptly assumed it does think. As a matter of fact the number of persons who want religious training in public schools is still a safe minority, and the proof of this is that religious

training in public schools is not yet an accomplished fact. The clamor of this minority is not heard, and if heard it is borne with as a nuisance but no heed is given to it.

The Prohibitionist is going to bring on the millennium ahead of God's purpose. By Mr. Sparks's methods all men and women will live "lives of spotless purity, being honest and truthful in all their relations with their fellow-men, and being clean and honorable in thought as well as in word and deed." One cannot say much more about the Son of God, and few men not of the Sparks's order of the *genus homo* ever expect to attain such absolute perfection.

The author speaks of the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount as all sufficient for the purpose of religious teaching in public schools. The content of the Decalogue is incorporated in every one of the seven world religions extant to-day, and the Sermon on the Mount would not be acceptable either to the Jew or the free thinking Gentile. Moreover, I must take issue with the assumption that the Bible is the fountain head of all moral law and that, therefore, Bible morality should be taught in public schools. There are stories in the Bible which are not fit for young minds to read, and which it must embarrass the male teacher to teach a mixed class of young men and young women. There are aspects of the moral law in the Bible which if applied and followed to-day would make of us a nation of liars, murderers, thieves, polygamists and adulterers.

As a tax-payer I should strenuously object to have any of my money spent on Bible-made morality. Of course, this is only a personal view point and need not be heeded, for it will not influence Mr. Sparks or those who think as he does.

He speaks truly when he says "the jealousy of the religious bodies toward each other has a tendency to arouse suspicion toward any proposal emanating from one of them." This is a sad arraignment of the morality to be gleaned from religious bodies who, drawing their own morality from the same Bible, look upon each other's special brand with suspicion. It is just this jealousy that kept God out of the Constitution of the United States.

If these religious bodies grow jealous of each other as soon as their conflicting moralities come in contact with each other what kind of religious morality shall we get in the public schools? If these religious bodies cannot agree as to the real simon-pure morality how will the authorities arrive at a satisfactory selection? The author opposes sectarian morality but approves religious morality. What is the difference between the two? Is not religious morality *ipso facto* sectarian? If he means by morality that general line of conduct which when followed will produce the greatest good to the greatest number, and called by the nineteenth century moralists the utilitarian, than I have no objection to its introduction into our schools. That kind of morality is known as ethics and may well be taught in schools or homes with profit to both teacher and pupil.

What the author and his co-religionists want and dare not openly demand is an hour a day devoted to Bible study and to catechism just as is done in the public schools of Germany. Nothing labelled "made in Germany" is likely to be very popular to-day, however unjust such a sweeping condemnation may be in fact.

One of the principles which helped to make this nation great is the separation of Church and State. In this European nations have slowly but surely

joined in the procession, and whenever the change was made liberty thrived and civilization advanced. Let us not be lured into a fool's paradise. Religious training in public schools is not any more the great panacea for all shortcomings than prohibition is the solution of all our problems in criminology.

Let those who cannot behave properly without the sanction of the Bible law stick to the Bible and become and stay good by the fear of hell and the lure of heaven; and let those who can be and remain law-abiding citizens by any other means have their choice of moral compulsion.

The following is of a kind with the rest of the author's extraordinary reasoning: "Knowledge of the laws of God and a reverent respect for His authority makes it necessary for the rights of others to be enforced through the agency of the policeman's club." There never was a religion known, not even that of Mohammed, in the promulgation of which so much gray matter was exhausted, so large an amount of good paper was used, and such vast stores of money were spent as there were in the one which, according to the author's tacit suggestion, represents better than any other religion the laws of God. And yet has there ever been a moment since the world tragedy on Calvary when we were able to dispense with the policeman's club? And does the author really think religious training in public schools will make of that useful weapon a mere ornament, and the policeman's job a jolly sinecure? In this we see again the twist peculiar to all forms of fanaticism. The Prohibitionist proclaims loudly that drink is the great curse of the world, that it disintegrates the human brain, degrades moral fibre and destroys the human soul. And yet what great nation from Babylon to our own did ever a prohibitionist nation create? Was there ever a nation without strong drink? It is this same sort of mind that arrogates to religious training in public schools the power to exterminate the law breaker and abolish the useful policeman's stick.

If I were suggesting an improvement for our public school system I should advocate a special course in will culture. The will is as much a function of the brain as is memory, perception, etc. We develop all these by scientifically selected studies but not a thing is done to develop and strengthen the human will. My idea of a well-regulated mental machine is this: When reason says a thing should be done the will must instantly respond by doing it. If a temptation is to be overcome because reason says it should be, the trained will immediately enters upon whatever action is necessary or stops a tendency to do in inaction. Will training is no more part of religious training than baseball is of Euclid. One does not need Bible texts to develop memory if one prefers some other instrumentality, nor does one need the Decalogue to teach the will that it is unwise and therefore wrong to steal a neighbor's property. We neglect will training entirely and substitute religion and prayer to help us overcome temptation. We are taught to pray "lead us not into temptation," thereby confessing our weak wills to resist. If our wills were in good working order and reason were functioning properly, we should not need to look for external help to keep us out of mischief. It is a confession of mental weakness to look for a God to keep us out of jail. Reason plus will are a safer combination than faith and prayer. Our religious friends want us to continue children even though we are old and gray, and as such we must continue to move about in this world and at the end of leading strings. Religious training may have been necessary before man discovered that he had the faculties of

will and reason under his hair. But now that he knows he possesses these two mighty powers for good it is only necessary to teach him how to use them and religious training will cease to be necessary.

In the last analysis a strong, well-regulated will that can master passion at command is a safer reliance than faith in prayer, for external help may not arrive until the mischief is done, and more prayer and a lot of repentance are necessary to restore the mental equilibrium. And is not a sense of forgiveness a sort of auto-hypnotism due to the anguish consequent on a wrong done? We say after shedding penitential tears and getting our hearts full of the right kind of contrition that God has forgiven us. What actually happens is that we have forgiven ourselves and by saying, "we will go forth and sin no more," get back the lost mental poise.

That may or may not be so but this much I know, I congratulate the American people that Mr. Sparks has worked out "A Tentative Plan" in such hopeless unworkableness that there is no danger of it ever being adopted by anybody with any sense of proportion left in his head.

And therein lies the great joy in Mr. Sparks's article.

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#### BOOK REVIEW.

PLATONISM. By *Paul Elmer More*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1917. Pp. 307. Price \$1.75 net.

Paul Elmer More has written a book on *Platonism*, in which he concentrates himself on the ethical significance which dominates all of Plato's discussions and may be regarded as the mainspring of his philosophy. Though our author thinks that "for the present at least, the dogmas of religion have lost their hold, while the current philosophy of the schools has become in large measure a quibbling of specialists on technical points of minor importance, or, where serious, too commonly has surrendered to that flattery of the instinctive elements of human nature which is the very negation of mental and moral discipline," he presents his views on Plato because he trusts that "only through the centralizing force of religious faith or through its equivalent in philosophy can the intellectual life regain its meaning and authority for earnest men.

He bears in mind that Plato formed the origins and the early environment of Christianity, and in this spirit he offers to the reading public his book.

He treats this subject as follows: The Three Socratic Theses; The Socratic Quest; The Platonic Quest; The Socratic Paradox; The Dualism of Plato; Psychology; The Doctrine of Ideas; Science and Cosmogony; Metaphysics; Conclusion, etc. His "aim is not so much to produce a work of history—as to write what a Greek Platonist would have called a *Protrepticus*, an invitation, that is, to the practice of philosophy," for he knows "that the current of thought runs against" him "and not with" him to-day. He would especially "touch the minds of a few of our generous college youth who drift through supposedly utilitarian courses and enter the world with no better preparation against its distractions than a vague and soon spent yearning for social service and the numbing trust in mechanical progress." In this he has our hearty commendation.