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Ford Hall Forum

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Ford Hall Folks

VOL. I. No. 3.

January 12, 1913.

Price Ten Cents.

WAS IT CURIOSITY LARGELY?

Our first issue made a remarkable record—it paid for itself and had a balance left over of \$1.85, together with a number of unsold copies, some of which may yet be sold. Are you going to keep a complete file of this paper from the very first issue? Then make sure that you have a copy of these early issues; they will be very scarce a little later.

It is certainly gratifying to us all to have the first number of *Ford Hall Folks* so generously welcomed; so far, very good: But the real test will come on the second, and third, and fourth issues. Was it curiosity that led a good many to buy that first number and is that curiosity now satisfied? Or on the other hand, are there a good many who did not see the first copy, and perhaps did not know about it, who will be eager to buy one as soon as the matter is brought to their attention? Our success hangs on the answer to these two questions. You can help answer the second one by calling the attention of your friends and neighbors among the Ford Hall folks to the fact that a weekly paper is being published.

Subscriptions are coming in from various directions. That is a healthy sign. What about getting in touch with those hundreds of people who want to come to Ford Hall but who cannot brave the crowds or wait in line? Scores of them would be glad to subscribe if they knew what we are doing. Can't you reach some of them and tell them about it?

Surely those who heard Mrs. Spencer will want the copy of her address herein contained and many who missed hearing her will be eager to get a copy, too. It was different from

anything we have ever had before and was immensely appreciated.

Young London, our business manager, is taking hold of the work in splendid fashion. Help him on every chance you get.

NEXT WEEK'S SPEAKER.

We shall have a red-letter night next Sunday for then Dr. Yamei Kin of China addresses us on "The Awakening of China," with particular reference, we may assume, to the extraordinary Women-Movement that is now so strong there. Dr. Kin is a fount of first-hand information concerning every phase of life in this new Republic of the east.

THE PRAYER.

(Preceding Mrs. Spencer's Address.)

We give thanks for the capacity and the desire to learn with which Thou hast endowed us. We rejoice in the blessings that the Public School has brought into our lives. We pray for an open mind and an attentive spirit that we may learn each day the lessons of life that Thou wouldst teach us. Help us to cherish our public school system, to guard it against every danger that threatens, and to welcome every change that will make it a more efficient servant of all the people.

It is with glad hearts that we recognize that this great function of giving a fundamental education to all the people rests upon the divine principle of requiring from every citizen according to his ability and giving to every child according to its need. With such a glorious foundation on which to build, help us to go on in the same spirit, not resting content until every child graduating from our public schools has received the best equipment for a life and for a living that it was possible for that child to receive. Amen.

ARE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEMOCRATIC?

(Address of Mrs. Anna Garlin Spencer
at the Ford Hall Meetings,
January 5, 1913.)

Mr. Chairman and Friends: I thought when Mr. Coleman was going to name the institutions from which he took his direction for these Ford Hall meetings that he would name our own Cooper Union in New York; but he did not so I will say that I sometimes tell our Cooper Union friends, whom I have the pleasure of meeting every winter and sometimes more than once, that they have a Cooper Union in Boston. When I say that the Cooper Union people all feel very happy because they think their Cooper Union is about the best thing there is.

I have been asked by your director and leader to speak tonight on the subject of the public school and I venture to put my title in the form of a question—"Is the public school of America democratic?"

We must begin our discussion with reminding ourselves that every special era in human development has had its own appropriate form of education. Whenever a set of people in savage life, or in civilized life have set about instructing youth they have tried to realize and to perpetuate the ideals they have accepted. Every era has sought to express itself and perpetuate itself in the education of youth. You know the great example of many churches who have said "Give us the children until they are ten or twelve years of age and we will know that our church will remain permanent."

We have today what we call a new education and it is new in its perception of what education should be; and in so far as it is new it is democratic and our object tonight will be to see whether we realize the ideals of this new education. There are five points that I think we must discuss together—five points of the most profound change in educational conceptions and ideals which mark this which we have properly called the new education.

The first is the change in the ideal of what we wish to accomplish by education. All the old civilizations wished to perpetuate themselves by repetition. They selected certain things in life, certain characters, certain situations, certain sets of circumstances and set them up as if a barrier to keep back change. You have had a very radical and fine illustration in the opening address on the new way of creating mu-

sical expression from all the people that shows the great, almost incalculable distance we have moved from that old idea that education is a copy of the past. We had something introduced into our thinking less than a hundred years ago that changed that idea—we began to understand that mankind is not a static, but a dynamic in its life—that we are not to conceive one generation as copying the preceding but as being superior to the preceding, doing something new, something for its own spiritual advancement; and so the old idea of copying even the best of the men and women that ever lived has given place to the development of independent and individual power. We are making mistakes in our administration of it and some very crude mistakes and some very foolish mistakes, and we are sometimes getting an atmosphere in which the child thinks today something far different than does his father and mother and that it must be better because it is different. Moreover, we are not yet over the first awkwardness of a beginning in a new field. But we have come to feel that this idealism in education, this idealism of progress rather than of copy of the past is particularly the ideal for us and it is true that it belongs to our era and our civilization in a peculiar sense. To be sure Aristotle, that most modern mind of antiquity, anticipated our idealism in education when he said, "Every human mind craves truth, and the mind grows as the body grows by having suitable nourishment and not by being placed upon the rack." But then Aristotle talked to a world in which it was still believed that you must spiritually super-impose upon youth an absolute model, and that education meant learning to copy and to copy accurately.

Then again we have had an incalculable change in our educational ideals and in the scope of education and of the educational system. All the educations of the past were class education—the formal schooling was, until very lately, reserved only for those people on the top of life's opportunity who had leisure and chance, who were the favored, as we say, of fortune; but now we have entered upon a new era and we call it Democracy. What does Democracy mean in the educational field? It means that every human being is a potential citizen and therefore it is fair that every human being should have an adequate education.

from all the people great, almost incalculable we have moved from education is a copy had something intro- ducing less than a to that changed that to understand that static, but a dynamic are not to conceive copying the preced- superior to the pre- something new, some- n spiritual advance- old idea of copying the men and women s given place to the de- pendent and individ- are making mistakes ation of it and some takes and some very and we are sometimes sphere in which the by something far dif- his father and mother be better because it is over, we are not yet backwardness of a begin- ld. But we have come idealism in education, progress rather than of st is particularly the it is true that it be- and our civilization in To be sure Aristotle; in mind of antiquity, idealism in education every human mind d the mind grows as by having suitable not by being placed But then Aristotle in which it was still you must spiritually on youth an absolute education meant learn- to copy accurately. have had an incalcul- our educational ideals of education and of stem. All the educa- were class education— ling was, until very ly for those people e's opportunity who nance, who were the of fortune; but now upon a new era and acy. What does De- be educational field? cy human being is a and therefore it is fair being should have tion.

But we have so changed in our conception of what education should be in scope that the old kind of educational function has entirely gone by. I remember not so very long ago, however, hearing a man who was upon a public platform on an educational topic say the important thing in education is how we shall train the leaders of the race and then a voice from the rear spoke up and said, "How do we know who are going to be the leaders of the race?" (Applause.) The reverend gentleman had no reply but somebody else on the platform said: "Liberation of power in the mass to develop every human being into a personality will show us and that is the only thing that will show us." (Applause.) So, so far as our ideal of education is concerned, in its scope it is democratic. Thus we have had a tremendous change in our educational ideals leading to a great change in our educational practice.

The content of education, too, has been immeasurably enlarged. Look up the college catalogues of 100 or 150 years ago and see how few were the subjects supposed to comprise liberal culture. Now take up one of our recent college catalogues or even our high school year-books and see how almost infinitely enlarged is the area of human knowledge. For that we are indebted to that great iconoclast and eye-opener, Modern Science, that shows us that it is not enough to know what some people thought and put in a book about certain subjects, but that we must know what kind of a universe we are living in and the relation of things below us. What can be done by the projection of education into what were unknown fields even a hundred years ago is so stupendous that we are almost paralyzed. And that affects our public school in a remarkable and often in a tragic manner.

We shall speak a little later of the methods of our schools, but I must say this to you; that we have had pressing upon us from the kindergarten through the elementary school a wholly new scope and breadth of education and have had pressing down to the high school another great congeries of studies that seem to be absolutely necessary for the student to know something about; and in the elementary school the two things have come together like a lumberman's jam. Something has got to give way, we cannot have a shorter school day,

more vacations and more holidays, and longer summer vacations; we cannot keep on cutting off at every end our time of study and then pour in an infinitely increased content of education. The teachers are getting nervous prostration by wholesale trying to do the impossible—putting a gallon into a pint; and the children are following, too, in their wild rush for knowledge—as was fully illustrated by the little girls abrupt change from Sabbath evening peace to Monday morning hurry (referring to the demonstration of musical composition by children given earlier in the evenings). In the midst of it all we are caught in this widening content of education, and in the effort to apply it not only to people whose ancestors browsed around in a library, but to those whose ancestors never had any formal schooling; and in our effort to apply this multiplied form of content to all the people with all the historic backgrounds that are mixed in our great population we are struggling with that which absolutely requires the next change and that is a change in method. We have achieved a wonderful change in method in some respects. We have found that if you are going to develop individual power and improve the generations by conscious effort as they march along; if you are going to take within your scope of education all faculties and qualities and conditions and sorts of human beings; if you are going to increase your content beyond the wildest dreams of any educator of the Eighteenth Century, then you must have a different method. You can not simply set children to repeat and memorize, to do the mere things that mean the saying over and over and over again of something enough to make it so that it cannot be forgotten, but we have got to have something that attracts the attention and holds the power of acquisition immediately, and so we have come into an era of demonstration. We have pushed the laboratory from the post-graduate course in the university down into the elementary school and we are pushing it more and more, and now somebody says that we are going to get (I believe it is Mr. Edison) our education quick, on the run, by the moving picture that is going to pour into us as we stop for a minute between sandwiches all that we need to know.

Well, we may laugh if we will, but somehow we have got to grip the at-

tion of the child more quickly than the old content of education required—we have got to hold more vital relationship with that system to keep the child's attention. The method must be one of demonstration—every child must know that he knows. We cannot trust in this enormous business of education to any sort of acceptance and tradition.

When only a few people at the top of life received formal schooling; when it was not considered necessary for manual workers to read and write; when all the commonwealth of thought was shut away for the benefit of a select few; then education might be a matter of home provision or of church supervision; but the fact that it has become so enormously extended in its scope of content emphasizes the fact that no institution is strong enough, and religious enough, and able enough to reach all the people except the State. So the State is standardizing education as well as providing it. I have no brief for the public school against the private school, but I believe the private school is valuable almost entirely as a place to try out improvements in education. There are certain things so delicate and difficult and expensive in working out these problems of education that we cannot ask the taxpayer to understand in the first place that they are necessary, and in the second place consent to the expense involved; and so private schools may be great experiment stations in education. I am sorry to say they are not all that. They sometimes are very backward, making little eddies in social progress—they keep people feeling they are better than other people when they are not; but they may be of great help in assisting our public education, understanding that their limit is to show the State how to do it.

Now, let us go over our points again and see if they are really as democratic in realization as they are in ideal.

First: The purpose of education—the liberation of power. The father of our new education has said so wisely "Education is not learning this or that, but finding out what each child was meant to become." We have not got anywhere near that in our public school education. We still put the children in the hopper and they move along from one place to the other, and we give about three times as many children to each teacher as any teach-

er can properly take care of; and the lower down we go in the school and the younger the child and the more disastrous this treatment therefore, is, the more we crowd the school-rooms and the less we supply the proper teaching material. But in spite of that we are keeping on, and it is clear now that what is wanted is to set this pyramid of education that we have inverted on its true foundation. The younger the child the more extravagantly we should supply it with its educational food and surroundings and the elder the child the better he can afford to be crowded and pushed along. Not that I want to hinder the older ones, but if we have got to sacrifice anywhere we must not sacrifice with the younger children as we are so prone to do at the present time.

Then as to scope: We say grandly when we are having our Fourth of July orations, and at other times of self-complacency, that the American Public Schools stand for the open door for every age, yet if we refer to statistics we find that average children of the United States have five years and a fraction of schooling for ten months each with twenty days in a month. The Sage Foundation has just brought out a book containing a very careful study of this whole situation. . . .

How many educators, however, come before an audience with any clear ideal of this most fundamental of all questions in education; what is the ideal education for children, all children up to the age of 14? That is the problem in American education as it is in education everywhere. What shall we do to develop most perfectly not only one kind of a child but every kind of child in the early years of life? And right here I want to say a word about industrial training. I believe in industrial education. I believe in it with all my heart; I believe in it for every child; but not industrial training that sharpens to an economical choice the little child's life. I would keep the whirr of the factory wheels away from the elementary schools. I would keep the idea of specialization away from elementary education. I would try and devise with all the wisdom we can bring to bear upon it an education that shall fit all children to be whole persons. Emerson said, you know: "We want not thinkers, but men thinking." If that be true, and I believe it is, it is a thousand times more true that we want not workers but men and women working.

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Now, what are the great forms of industry on which civilization rests? They are two. They are getting the raw material of food and physical comfort from the soil and they are converting that raw material of food and physical comfort into the home and its life. We call these Farming and Domestic Science for want of better names, but they are the fundamental processes of race activity and they are the things that all little children, normal little children, love to do. I don't mean Farming as a science that they teach in college; I do not mean Domestic Science where they take four years to train a girl for some highly paid position as dietician or that sort of thing. I mean the simple, homely arts, that is, the farming and the home making of the race which it has built its civilization upon.

I believe that industrial training in the elementary school should take in only those things that have made for race development. Every school should have its garden and its place where the little girl, before she gets to high school, may learn the art of taking the raw material and converting it into food. So my industrial training would be away from the factory, away from indoors—out of doors,—and don't let's wait till the children are incipiently tuberculous before we open the door and let the air in. Let us have the outdoor school and the industrial activity very early in the game. I deplore any tendency that brings the idea of the machine-dominated life to the mind of the child. We should give the child the things that belong to the education of the race. Not until then shall we be truly democratic. When I hear people talk about education for those who are going to be laborers I am a little disturbed if it means that differentiation is to begin so low down that there is but little period in the school where all the children will feel themselves equal.

Then we come from that to the matter of method and here I have a very serious word to say. My friends who are parents and interested in the schools, do you ever stop to think what it is we want in our industrial changes and in our progress toward the democratizing of industry?

Now, then, Where are you going to generate your cooperative spirit if in your public schools the competitive spirit is developed by every type of ingenious appeal to the child? You will not have cooperative people when they grow up if you check the natural ten-

dency of the child to help a comrade who is hesitating for a word and you put your child down and punish him and give him discredits of various amounts because he has spoken up and helped a little child that he loved to say the lesson right. You have planted poison in the child's life. (Applause.) If every appeal you make to the child is for independent achievement no matter what happens to the other fellow you are not training people for cooperative activities—you are training them for the factory system of life with the boss ahead and everybody struggling and never mind what becomes of the other fellow. (Applause.) If we do not help the children in our elementary and high schools to see that the greatest achievements are the achievements that all make together we can never have a cooperative commonwealth, no matter who brings the story to you.

Now in the last few minutes that I have, and they are very few, I want to say to you what not all of you will care to know even though you are used to Ford Hall meetings. I believe that one of the most undemocratic things in the professedly democratic public school of America is its present method of administration. I believe that we have in more ways than one factory-ized our methods. You see we are in the influence, the tremendous influence of that kind of business efficiency which is supposed to inhere in having a boss on the top and little bosses in between and other little bosses, and then a lot of somebodies down at the bottom doing the work. (Applause.) Now we have, unconsciously I am sure, let the factory kind of living creep into our schools. We used to get along pretty well when we were all neighbors together in a small town and public opinion was expressed on the back door step and at the front door and in the church sewing circle, and we behaved ourselves very well; but it is far different in a great city where we do not know our next-door neighbor and we are in a very complex situation in all our social relationships.

In regard to school administration I have come to certain convictions and one of them I share with you which is, that there are two kinds of people that ought to be on the School Board—whose influence ought to be in every school. In the first place there ought to be some fathers and mothers on the Board. Then there ought to be some people who are pro-

fessional and some people who are business people, and some people who are wage-earners, and some people of the different classes in life. There isn't a class of people that is not interested in the school. It is also apparent that if we want to do the best for our children we ought to have a class of educational experts as well—people who know something about education, direct education.

These are the kind of people we ought to have in part on our board, but I do not believe that our board ought to be made up of them entirely. The third element should be the teachers—the people who are doing the most work with and for the children (applause). If there is anything that is undemocratic in our professedly democratic schools it is the way we put the people who are doing the actual service in education into a position of nonentity so far as the conduct of the great enterprise in which they are engaged is concerned. I believe that every grade of teacher should be represented by vote of their own peers on every School Board, and I think that contingent from the teaching force should change every year so that we might get a very wide range of first-hand knowledge and suggestions from the teaching force itself. Then the teachers themselves would know themselves to be as important as they really are. If there is a pusillanimous set of people in the United States, people who allow changes of the most disastrous kind to go on without lifting a voice of protest, it is the teachers in the public schools; and the men teachers are more cowardly even than the women (applause). They are cowardly because they have been shut out of all responsibility. It is said, you remember, that one of the great causes for the decline and fall of the Roman Empire was the fact that, after Rome subjugated Greece, she took learned Greeks for the teachers of her youth and the Greeks taught everything to Roman youth except patriotism and a sense of political responsibility; therefore, out of the soul of the Roman patriot went that fire that had preserved his nation, because in youth he was taught by those that had no responsibility. Now we have ninety per cent. of our teachers in the public school women and the great hue and cry goes out that we are feminizing education in sublime unconsciousness of the fact that, in all ages and all civilizations the world

has ever known, women have taught all the girls and all the little boys since teaching began; so it's not a new thing to have women engaged in teaching. But here in America where we have the ideal of making every citizen a great potentiality, we, in the first place, disfranchise our teachers and then we deprive men and women who are teaching of any sort of responsibility for their work. Now I say the first thing is to fill into that waiting niche of our three-sided boards of education representatives of the teachers and let the people who are doing the greatest social service that we see done be recognized. See the work that is being done by them in our public schools, poor and inadequate as it is—in that greatest of mission stations where we are taking all the things of the earth and striving to develop something that shall yet become influential citizenship! I say that to leave that class that directs a specific public responsibility out of public representation on the board of school administration is a most undemocratic mistake.

Again, we shall not be democratic in the public schools of America until our ideal of the liberation of the power of all the children is more nearly reached. We shall not be democratic in our public schools until the scope of their teaching reaches every child everywhere. We shall not be truly democratic in use of this new content of education until we develop every faculty as we heard so charmingly of the development of the musical faculty. We shall not be democratic in the use of our public school opportunity until the methods that we use—which are the very inbreeding of our life—shall be wholly co-operative and fraternal; and we shall not be democratic in our public school until we have learned to take advantage of that vital experience, that wealth of wisdom which the average public school teacher of many years experience could contribute to our Board.

* * * * *

Miss Frances Curtis and Mr. Isaac Harris, candidates for the single vacancy on the Boston School Board, had been invited to be present and to answer any questions concerning the local situation which might be addressed to them. Mr. Harris was questioned several times (Miss Curtis having withdrawn to keep another engagement).

Q. Of question Harris, ability do having t

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women have taught all the little boys; so it's not a women engaged in America where of making every potentiality, we, in the franchise our teachers give men and women of any sort of re- their work. Now I is to fill into that or three-sided boards representatives of the the people who are social service that recognized. See the g done by them in ls, poor and inade- in that greatest of where we are taking the earth and striv- something that shall ntial citizenship! I e that class that di- public responsibility presentation on the administratjoh is a e mistake.

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QUESTIONS.

Q. Of all grades of teachers the questioner would like to know, Mr. Harris, whether the greater responsibility does not rest upon the teachers having the younger scholars?

A. I do believe that the elementary teacher by receiving the child, as he does, before it possesses reasoning powers simply with its instincts developed, has by far the harder work and the much greater responsibility. I know that to be the fact, especially so in those schools in the congested districts where they have the immigrant children. I remember as an immigrant boy myself when I came here at the age of ten and the very alphabet was a mystery to me I had a good teacher who taught me by visualizing—when she wanted to give the impression to me as to what the word run meant she would run and when she wished to show what it was to jump she would jump. I myself had a little experience, when I was earning my living teaching these immigrants that came over to speak, and I can assure you that I am speaking from my own experience when I say that after a lesson with one of those immigrant men I had to go home after earning that fifty cents and lie down and rest for an hour or two.

Q. If the lower-grade teachers have the greater responsibility of the task should we not reward them accordingly?

A. I believe this, that there is not, and I mean this seriously, that there is not gold enough in the mines of the world to sufficiently reward the conscientious teacher, but inasmuch as we must have some standards, and inasmuch as the teacher in the elementary school is usually the younger person starting in with the teaching profession I think perhaps that she should get a good salary, but not the largest salary.

Q. Does the Child Labor Law help industrial education in the school?

A. Oh, certainly. We see that we must do something for the children that would otherwise leave school not merely because of the poverty of the family, but because the children do not get what seems to them and to the parents direct preparation for their vocational work; and the Child Labor Law, well-enforced, is one of the strongest reasons why we are encouraging our vocational training.

Q. Isn't it about time that the State of Massachusetts provided higher education for our children?

A. There should be every opportunity for those who have not had the desired chance in their early life, every incentive for adult education.

Q. Should the Bible be read in the public schools, Mr. Harris?

A. They told me that before I got through here this evening I'd have to use my legal wits! I think you can all agree with the statement made by an eminent authority that if we lost all the literature in the world that has ever been written since the Bible and we had the Bible preserved we should still have a very beautiful monument of literature. Now at the same time I believe that there ought to be spiritual neutrality in our schools. A man or a woman may perhaps get far away from the moorings of their religion yet if you say one word to that very person against the religion in which he was born he will battle for the principle of that religion no matter how far he may be removed from it. Now believing as I do in the spiritual neutrality in our public schools, and believing as I do that the matter of religion should be left to the influence of the home and the church, and believing as I do that our streams can be crossed by two arches, religion and democracy—a good Jew, a good citizen, a good Catholic, a good citizen, a good Protestant, a good citizen—I would say that the teacher might propound the value of the Bible for literary purposes; but I would not have it read in the schools.

Q. What do you think, Mrs. Spencer, of the idea prevalent in Boston that the School Board should consist of two Protestants, two Catholics and a Jew?

A. I am a member of the human family and opposed to it.

Q. The speaker of the evening emphasizes the necessity of good cooperative spirit. I want to know if Mr. Harris, if he is elected, will do all he can to promote that cooperative spirit?

A. Yes. I believe firmly in everything that was said by the speaker on this point. I certainly will help it along.

Q. To what extent does Mr. Harris believe the school committee has a right to control the teachers outside of school hours?

A. A person who has risen to the position of being a school teacher ought not to be controlled by the

school committee at all after the school hours. (Applause.)

Q. Should not the teachers have a right to exercise political privileges outside the school hours?

A. (By Mrs. Spencer.) I think every human being should have a right to express his or her personality in a proper way and I think any attempt to control the teachers as a class as to their private affiliations is an infringement of personal liberty.

Q. Does the speaker of the evening think that the right meaning of democracy ought to be taught in the schools?

A. Yes, I do. What's more, my son, I think it should be lived in the schools.

Q. A little girl wants to know, why should all the children at school in the morning bow down their heads at prayer?

A. Well I should not ask the children to do that in a public school. (Applause.) I feel that some would have a training at home which would make it a helpful exercise, but others would have a training at home which would make it seem a matter of question and an act of devotion should be under conditions where all might unite. (Applause.)

Q. Does not the speaker of the evening agree that the teacher in the elementary grades having the most responsibility should have the most pay?

A. I said I wanted the present pyramid of education, which was to my thinking inverted, put on its right

foundation; and I meant economically as well as educationally.

Q. Should the girls be taught by women and the boys by men?

A. I think the girls should be taught by men and women and the boys be taught by men and women. (Applause.)

Q. Why does the speaker disbelieve in the reading of the Bible in the public schools in view of the fact that we all believe in God, and in view of the fact that the reading of the Bible in the public schools has served us so well in the past?

A. It was not I that answered that question, but the gentleman on my right (Mr. Harris). However, as in answer to the little girl's question about the exercise of prayer, I indicated that in a tax-supported school where the children are Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, believer and agnostic, all having equal rights—where the children's consciences are developed diversely on this question by their home influence they should not be confused by a requirement to engage in any act of devotion. So far as the reading of the Bible is concerned I do not think the Bible should be read as a devotional exercise; but the literary value of the Bible, of all the Bibles of all the great religions should be a part of the heritage of every child. (Applause.)

"Every time you smile when your hunch says 'snarl,' you win." Quite some philosophy, that!

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