

# The Edmunds Resolution

## THE EDMUNDS RESOLUTION.

MUCH has been said, but none too much, about the Blair resolution to amend the Constitution of the United States so as to "establish and maintain" the teaching of "the principles of the Christian religion," or "of Christianity" in all the public schools in the Union. This, however, is not the only effort that has been made, or that is now being made, in this direction. There is being urged also what is known as the Edmunds resolution, so called because it was framed by Senator Edmunds, of Vermont. There is a large and influential element working in favor of the Edmunds resolution; and both these elements can easily be brought together in support of either, or any other measure of the same nature, according to the probability of their adoption.

These forces are being organized; public opinion is being moulded, and political influence is being courted. The people therefore cannot be too wide-awake, nor too prompt in opposing the movement.

We propose now to discuss the Edmunds resolution, with the arguments made in favor of it, but it will be of interest to trace the matter from the first step taken. April 19, 1870, Hon. S. S. Burdette, of Missouri, proposed an amendment to the United States Constitution upon this subject, reading as follows:—

"SECTION 1. No State or municipal corporation within any

4

State of the United States shall levy or collect any tax for the support or aid of any sectarian, denominational, or religious school or educational establishment; nor shall the legislature of any State, or the corporate authorities of any municipality within any State, appropriate any money or make any donation from the public fund or property of such State or municipality for the support or aid of any sectarian, religious, or denominational schools or educational establishments.

"SEC. 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

It will be seen at a glance that this only prohibits State aid to denominational or religious schools or establishments. It does not prohibit sectarian, religious, or denominational instruction in the public schools. It thus missed the mark so widely that it seems not to have been taken any notice of after its introduction.

It was not long, however, before another step was taken. December 19, 1871, Hon. William M. Stewart, United States senator from Nevada, proposed an amendment to the national Constitution, reading as follows:—

"SECTION. 1. There shall be maintained in each State and Territory a system of free common schools, but neither the United States nor any State, Territory, county, or municipal corporation,

shall aid in the support of any schools wherein the peculiar tenets of any denomination are taught.

"SEC. 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

This proposition seems to have excited some public discussion. It was strongly disapproved by many on the ground that such a measure was "both unnecessary and misleading"—unnecessary because no danger could arise in any State from such action; and mischievous because it would only tend to provoke a controversy which was uncalled for. Nothing seems to have come of Mr. Stewart's proposition except the discussion referred to.

Nothing more was done for four years, or

5

until December 14, 1875, when Hon. James G. Blaine, then a member of the House of Representatives, proposed an amendment, as follows:—

### **ARTICLE XVI.**

"No State shall make any law respecting an establishment of a religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; and no money raised by taxation in any State for the support of public schools, or derived from any public fund therefor, shall ever be under the control of any religious sect, nor shall any money so raised or land so devoted be divided between religious sects or denominations."

August 4, 1876, Mr. Blaine's resolution was reported back from the Judiciary Committee with two slight additions, one, of the words "or denomination" following the word "sect" in the second clause, and the other a sentence at the end, saying, "This article shall not vest, enlarge, or diminish legislative power in Congress."

It will be seen that Mr. Blaine's resolution goes a step further than either of the ones which preceded it, in that it embodies in its first clause the substance of the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States, prohibiting any State making any law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. As for the rest of his resolution, it is in substance the same as the other two, simply saying that no public money raised by taxation or derived from public funds for the support of public schools should ever be under the control of any religious sect or divided amongst religious sects or denominations.

This resolution was adopted by the House of Representatives after brief debate, by vote of 180 yeas to 7 nays, with 98 not voting. The resolution then went to the Senate, and, August 7, was referred to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, with several substitutes which had been offered for it. Two days later, August 9, Senator

6

Edmunds, of the Judiciary Committee, reported back the joint resolution with an amendment which was in fact a substitute, reading as follows:—

## ARTICLE XVI.

"No State shall make any law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, and no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office of public trust under any State. No public property, and no public revenue of, nor any loan of credit by or under, the authority of the United States, or any State, Territory, district, or municipal corporation, shall be appropriated to, or made, or used for, the support of any school, educational or other institution, under the control of any religious, or anti-religious, organization, or wherein the particular creed or tenets of any religious or anti-religious sect, organization, or denomination, shall be taught. And so such particular creed or tenet shall be read or taught in any school or institution supported in whole or in part by such revenue or loan of credit; and no such appropriation or loan of credit shall be made to any religious or anti-religious sect, organization, or denomination, or promote its interests or tenets. This article shall not be construed to prohibit the reading of the Bible in any school or institution; and it shall not have the effect to impair rights of property already vested.

"SEC. 2. Congress shall have power, by appropriate legislation, to provide for the prevention or punishment of violations of this article."

August 11 this substitute was accepted for the House resolution by a vote of 27 to 15. August 14 the substitute was brought to vote upon its adoption. The vote stood 28 yeas to 16 nays. But as it requires a majority of two-thirds to adopt such a resolution, and as the vote fell two short of being two-thirds, the resolution was lost.

This is the Edmunds amendment, and this is its history. And that was the last effort to amend the Constitution until May 25, 1888, when Senator Blair introduced his amendment the first time, and re-introduced it December 9, 1889.

A careful examination of the Edmunds resolution demonstrate that it is an excellent illustration of "how not

7

to say it." If it be intended to prohibit religious instruction in the public schools, it misses it. If it be intended to prohibit sectarian instruction in the public schools, it misses that. Because—

1. The second clause only prohibits the appropriation of public money for the support of schools which are under the control of any religious or anti-religious sect, organization, or denomination. In other words, this clause prohibits the appropriation of any public money to parochial or denominational schools. But this would allow the teaching of religion in the public schools, and at the public expense. This is further proved by the last sentence of section 1, which distinctly allows the reading of the Bible in any school or institution, and the intention of those who ask that the Bible may be read in the schools is distinctly and solely

for the purpose of having religion, that is, "broad, general religion," but not sectarian, taught in the schools.

Secondly, the third sentence proposes that no "particular creed or tenets shall be read or taught in any school or institution supported in whole or part by such revenue or loan of credit," that is, in any public school. Yet the section expressly grants the reading of the Bible in any school or institution. Now every sect or denomination that makes any pretension to Christianity gets its peculiar tenets from the Bible. Then, if a certain sect derives from the Bible its peculiar tenet, and the Bible is read in the public schools, assuredly that does grant the reading of that particular tenet, and the resolution distinctly allows what it pretends to prohibit.

For instance, there are two denominations in this country, which together would probably be called a sect. They are the Seventh-day Adventists and the Seventh-

8

day Baptists. It is a distinct and peculiar tenet of these denominations that the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord. This tenet is derived from the plain reading of one of the most familiar portions of the Scriptures, the ten commandments, the fourth of which distinctly says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." Now how is the Bible to be read in the schools without allowing that particular tenet to be read? Shall that particular tenet be skipped in the reading of the Bible? If not, to allow the reading of the Bible will assuredly allow the reading of that particular tenet, yet the reading of any particular tenet is forbidden by the article! The article therefore contradicts itself.

Again, that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. How shall the Bible be read without reading that peculiar tenet, the reading of which does violence to the religious convictions of the Jew or the Unitarian, who, with the unbeliever, is taxed equally with all others for the support of the schools, and who has equal rights in all things, in school as well as out, with all others under the government. This supreme principle of Christianity is therefore a peculiar tenet, and to allow the reading of the Bible in the public schools, as this resolution expressly does, is to allow the reading, of a peculiar tenet, which the resolution expressly prohibits.

Once more. It is a peculiar tenet of the Roman Catholic faith that the Virgin Mary is so intimately connected with the divine plan of salvation as to be so entirely a part of that plan as properly to be an object of adoration. Accordingly, to the Roman Catholic the Bible reads, in the third chapter of Genesis and fifteenth verse: "I will

9

put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie wait for her heel." The reading of this passage would be declared by every Protestant in Christendom to be the reading of a particular tenet.

But it will be said at once, by every Protestant especially, that that is not the way the Bible reads, that that is the Catholic Bible, and that it is corrupt. Oh! ah! to be sure. There is more than one kind of a Bible, then! But the Edmunds

Resolution does not make any such distinction as that. It simply says: "This article shall not be construed to prohibit the reading of the Bible in any school or institution." It does not say that this article shall not be construed to prohibit the reading of King James' Version of the Bible. It simply says the Bible, and that would leave the question as to what is the Bible, to be decided by the majority in a school district, a county, or a State. If the majority are Roman Catholics, then the article could not be construed to prohibit the reading of the Roman Catholic Bible in the public schools. But to allow the reading of the Roman Catholic Bible in the public schools would be to allow the reading of that particular tenet of the Roman Catholic faith which is forbidden by this same article.

If the Protestants were in the majority, then King James' Version of the Bible would be the one to be read, which, as we have shown, would be but to allow the reading of the peculiar tenets of the Protestant denominations and Christianity as a whole, which the article professes to intend to prohibit.

This list of particular tenets might be traced through all the denominations; but what we have here given is

10

sufficient to illustrate the point that we make that the Edmunds Resolution is not only vague and uncertain, but that it is plainly self-contradictory.

It may be said that it would be the office of Congress, or of the Supreme Court of the United States, to decide what is meant in the article by the term, the Bible. Then that would be only to have Congress or the Supreme Court settle by law a religious question, and to fix a standard of religion for the nation which would be inevitably the establishment of a national religion. For "wherever there is a system of religious instruction endowed and patronized by law with a preference given to it by the State over all other systems, and a preference given to its teachers over the teachers of all other forms of belief," *that* is a religious establishment. And that is precisely and inevitably the result of the State's undertaking to define what the Bible is.

This, again, shows that the Edmunds Resolution, although not strictly self-contradictory in its letter, is so in its spirit, because it prohibits any State from making any law respecting an establishment of religion. And as our national Constitution already prohibits the same to the national Legislature, it is properly to be presumed that the spirit of this resolution is intended to be in harmony with the first amendment. But, as we have seen, although it forbids the State to do such a thing, it inevitably involves the nation in the doing of that very thing.

There is one more point in this: Whether it be left to majorities in the school districts, the counties, or the States, or whether it be decided by Congress or the Supreme Court, what Bible may be used in the schools, another most important question is involved. Suppose it should be decided according to the evident intent in

11

all this work, that King James Version, or the Protestant Bible, is the one that is meant, and that that shall be used in the schools, then every teacher would be required to read the Protestant version of the Bible as the standard of religion and as the word of God. But then no Catholic nor Jew, nor one who does not

believe the Bible to be the foundation of true religion, could be a teacher in the public schools. All these would be disqualified, and that would be, to all intents and purposes, the establishment of a religious test as a qualification for the office of school-teacher. But that would not only be contradictory to the sixth article of the Constitution as it is, but it would again make this proposed article self-contradictory, because its second clause says that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under any State."

These are the merits of the Edmunds Resolution, proposing an amendment to the United States Constitution. Are the people ready for it?

Joseph Cook, of the Boston Monday lectureship, is the leading advocate of the Edmunds resolution. The topic of the Boston Monday lectures for 1889 is papal domination in American schools. This discussion is professedly in the interests of the public schools, but it is in fact only in the interests of Protestantism instead of Catholicism in the public schools. It is professedly against a union of Church and State, but it is in fact only against a union of Roman Catholicism and the State, while it just as certainly favors a union of Protestantism and the State. It is professedly in favor of American institutions, as against the domination of the Catholic Church; but it is in fact *against* American institutions and in favor of Protestant domination in civil affairs.

12

This will more fully appear as we proceed. Of the amendment Mr. Cook says:—

"It covered almost precisely the ground now occupied by Senator Blair's proposed amendment, but as its language was perhaps somewhat more cautious, and as it came so near passing, I quote Senator Edmunds proposal as a summary of the highest educational demand of the hour."

He says it contains four great points:—

1. "It prohibits the establishment of a State church in any State of the Union." This is true, but, as we have shown, it leads inevitably to the establishment of a State religion by the *Nation*.

2. "It forbids the sectarian use of public-school funds by any State or municipality." But it does not forbid a *religious* use of public funds by any State or municipality.

3. "It prevents the formation of sectarian public schools." But it does not prevent the formation of *religious* public schools.

4. "Nevertheless, it guards against the exclusion of the Bible from public schools, and so does not establish instruction on a purely secular basis." But it does establish instruction upon a purely religious basis. And all this is the very thing that no government has a right to do. The State that undertakes to teach religion in order to inculcate principles of good citizenship, will fail to secure either religion or good citizenship.

Of the prospects of the Edmunds resolution, he says:—

"If the Boston election of last December had occurred a few weeks before this vote in Congress, the necessary two-thirds, as I believe, would have been obtained, and the Edmunds amendment might now have been a part of the law of the land. We must launch

this reform when the waves are running high. There are many sandbars, but I believe that to-day in Congress there would be a chance for the passage of the Edmunds proposal. Senator Blair's bill covers substantially

13

the same ground and a little more. I should not be sorry to see it passed, but I think it would be more difficult to pass it than it would have been to pass the Edmunds bill."

If this prospect is correctly outlined, and if it be so nearly a practical scheme, which, as a matter of fact, we believe it is, then it is high time that the people of this Nation were awaking to the fact, and, as far as possible, making it an impracticable scheme. It is probable that the Blair Amendment would be more difficult to pass, because its true intent is more plainly revealed.

Mr. Cook indorses the Edmunds resolution because, he says, "It prevents a sectarian division of the school funds." But we should like to know why it would be any more unjust to divide the school funds amongst the sects than it would be to devote the whole of the school fund bodily to the benefit of those sects which, united, call themselves the majority, and proclaim themselves to be the "evangelicals," even though they include the Mormons in their evangelicalism. <sup>11</sup> For this is just what Mr. Cook's scheme amounts to, and to us it would seem to be just as proper to divide the money amongst the different sects, as it would to devote the whole of it to one. Not that we believe for a moment that it should be so divided, nor that it should be so devoted, because the State must have nothing at all to do with the question of religion, whether in the schools or out of the schools, but if public money is to be used for teaching religion, then the only fair way to do is to divide the public money amongst the different denominations according to their respective populations.

14

Mr. Cook calls attention to the dangers that already threaten the public-school system from political influence. He says:—

"Scores of teachers within recent years have been dropped from their position by political school boards because their opinions on temperance were a little too strong to suit the school committees. Not a few who have studied the worst cases of this kind have fallen into a sort of moral nausea over the management of schools in certain cities by corrupt committees, mere ward politicians, many of them monstrously vile men, patrons of the saloons, and of the gambling dens, and of the brothels. There are cities in this country where little local committees, not fit to manage the investment of ten dollars, have the choice of school-teachers and the power to dismiss teachers almost without reason, and who do all these things from purely political motives, and appoint their own relatives very often, practicing nepotism in its most glaring aspects. The political abuses of the common-school system are becoming a great public terror in mismanaged cities. What is the remedy for all these mischiefs?"

But how does he propose to remedy the mischiefs? Why, by simply adding a religious element to the already mischievous political strifes in connection with the public-school system. He exclaims:—

"So help me, Heaven, I see no way out of the alarming evils arising from the partisan management of common schools except by the success of the Edmunds amendment." (Applause.)

Does any sober-minded man really believe that the success of the Edmunds amendment, or any other, can stop these mischiefs? If that or the Blair amendment were adopted, then a strife upon the question of what Bible it is that shall be used, or what is sectarian instruction, and many other questions, would be added to the already deplorable political mischiefs, and the evils would be increased a thousand-fold. This result would follow just as certainly as day follows night.

This is further proved by Mr. Cook's own statement

15

that "the chief power of the Roman Catholic Church to do mischief in this country is political." Then how can it be expected to weaken that power, or to lessen the mischief, by making religious questions the essential element in politics? It is surprising to think that any thinking man can think so. Then he exhorts thus:—

"Stand up, then, for Senator Edmunds proposed constitutional amendment while yet you can pass it. Let us invoke the national power. Let us invoke it speedily, for if we do not carry an amendment like Senator Edmunds within the next twenty years, it is possible we shall never be able to carry it. The hour is critical. Remember that this amendment was once within two votes of passing in the Senate. Mr. Blaine's proposed amendment upon the same topic had the overwhelming support of the House. And now Senator Blair is advocating substantially the same proposition. The Edmunds amendment is practicable; it is a vital public necessity; but it must be passed soon or never. Therefore let us make Senator Edmunds' program our own concerning the school question. Let us join ranks. Let Protestants stand up, and all stand up, and stand together."

Then in another place he says:—

"Professor Hodge went so far as to say that our conflict on the school question with the Romanist on the one side and the secularist on the other, is of more importance to this nation than the issues connected with slavery and intemperance."

These extracts show, as plainly as need be, that this proposition to amend the Constitution of the United States upon the subject of religion in the public schools, is nothing else than a scheme to establish by constitutional amendment Protestantism as the State religion. This was shown also in the arguments made last winter of 1888-89 before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, in behalf of the Blair amendment. Every argument there made was for Protestantism instead of Catholicism in the public schools.

If the American people want to be kept free from the

despotism of a national religion, they need to be awake to the efforts that are being made to secure these amendments that have been offered and that are now advocated. Let the Constitution of the United States remain as it is upon the subject of religion. Keep religion out of the public schools; let the public schools be for the public. As surely as any such amendment shall ever be adopted as has been proposed, so surely will there be the establishment of a national religion, and the establishment of a national religion is the establishment of a national despotism.

A. T. JONES.

It will be of interest to the reader to know that this clause relating to the Bible was inserted upon the special and direct solicitation of the National Reform Association, and is in the very words proposed by that association. The following passage from page 38 of the latest manual of the association shows how it was done:—

"When Mr. Blaine introduced his school amendment to the Constitution into the House of Representatives, grave fears were entertained lest this, if passed as introduced, would be construed against the reading of the Bible in our common schools. The National Reform Association promptly sent a committee to Washington to secure the insertion of a clause in the proposed amendment to the effect that it should not be construed to prohibit the reading of the Bible in any of the common schools of the country. This very clause was introduced into the amendment when it reached the Senate; but the measure failed to carry in that body by two or three votes short of the required two-thirds majority.

<sup>1</sup> "At the hearing of a delegation before the Senate Committee, in favor of the Blair resolution, February 15, 1889, Rev. George K. Morris, D. D., of Philadelphia, counted the Mormon as evangelical."—*Notes of Hearings*, pp. 31, 32.