

## RELIGION AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS \*

It is a very real pleasure for me that I am able to speak to-night on such a subject in answer to a request made by such men as those who asked me to come, and it is always a pleasure to me to speak to a Massachusetts audience, for I can say with all sincerity that a man who addresses the people of your State is justified in feeling that he will meet a prompt and hearty response to any appeal on behalf of honesty, of fair play, of decent government, and of whole-hearted Americanism.

What I mean to dwell upon especially is the American side of the public-school question. There is no need for me to argue before an audience like this in favor of the public schools. There is no need to say a word to the men and women of Massachusetts in behalf of a free system of non-sectarian education by the State, a system which guarantees an education to every boy and girl, without any more regard being paid to creed than to birthplace.

The public schools are the nurseries from which spring the future masters of the commonwealth; and, in making up the estimate of any State's real greatness, the efficiency of its public-school system and the extent to which it is successful in reaching all the children in the State count for a hundredfold more than railroads and manufactories, than shipping or farms, than anything which is symbolic of mere material prosperity,

\* Speech in Boston, Mass., November, 1893. *Boston Herald*, November (?), 1893.

great though the importance of this mere material prosperity undoubtedly also is. Napoleon, in speaking of his soldiers, is reported to have said that in warfare the moral is to the physical as ten to one; and what is true in the army is no less true in civil life.

It is of the utmost importance that our people shall be well housed, well clothed, and well fed; but all this shall avail nothing if they have not well-trained minds and a sturdy and convinced morality, while if only they possess these last two attributes, if only they possess character and common sense, there is no fear whatsoever that they will lack those material things which they can "earn" by the labor of their hands.

Because we are unqualifiedly and without reservation against any system of denominational schools maintained by the adherents of any creed with the help of State aid, therefore we as strenuously insist that the public schools shall be free from sectarian influences, and, above all, free from any attitude of hostility to the adherents of any particular creed; and we denounce as the worst foes of the public schools those who, under the pretense of friendship for them, stir up hostility toward them by seeking to discriminate in their name against those people who hold a given religious belief. Exactly as we welcome to them alike the children of Jew and Gentile, of Catholic and Protestant, so we insist that in their management no one creed shall have any special jurisdiction, but the professors of all creeds be treated alike, in order that every American citizen, without regard to what his own private religious belief may be, shall feel that he has as much voice as any other man, whether of his own faith or of some different faith, in the management of the schools to which his children go.

In other words, our plea is simply that in your treatment of the common school you act as every man should act in American public life, as a whole. We have a right to demand that every man, native born or foreign born, shall in American public life act merely as an American. To quote a phrase I have used more than once before, we don't wish any hyphenated Americans; we do not wish you to act as Irish-Americans or British-Americans or native-Americans; but as Americans pure and simple.

Permit me to give you a small illustration out of my own recent experience. The other day, in choosing a civil-service board in a northwestern post-office, I was in doubt as to which of two equally good men to take for a certain vacancy. Then I was informed, through some self-constituted spokesman of the town, that one of these men was a Protestant and one a Catholic, and that the latter must not be appointed, as the town was controlled by an organization which objected to any but Protestants holding such positions. That settled it; my doubts were resolved at once; and I immediately appointed the Catholic, exactly as, had the situation been reversed, and similar objection been raised against the Protestant, I would have appointed him. As far as the sphere of my official action extends I can guarantee that any manifestation of such feeling will be checked in short order.

The Know-nothing Movement in every form is entirely repugnant to true Americanism and this is, perhaps, especially the case when it is directed not merely against American citizens of foreign origin, but also against even native-born Americans of a different creed. We Americans give to men of all races equal and exact justice. That has been our boast as a nation ever since the day when the Puritan of Massachusetts and the

Catholic of Maryland sat in the same hall and signed the same Declaration of Independence. On the roll of honor where we have engraved the names of the nation's statesmen and soldiers, patriots and commonwealth-builders, no distinction is known of creed or of race origin, nor even of birthplace. What man with a particle of patriotic spirit would be capable of paying heed to the fact that Albert Gallatin, the secretary of the treasury, came from Switzerland, any more than of paying heed to the fact that Carl Schurz, the secretary of the interior, came from Germany? What man who reveres our flag and holds precious its honor and glory cares whether the soldiers who followed Sherman in his great march to the sea followed a Protestant, or the soldiers who were rallied by Sheridan after his great ride from Winchester were rallied by a Catholic?

What man is so small-souled as to bear in mind the creed of either in dwelling on his priceless services to the "nation redeemed and the race delivered"? or, indeed, to bear in mind of either man anything save that he was one of the iron leaders who, under the guidance of sad, patient, mighty Abraham Lincoln, fought to a finish the terrible Civil War, and in so doing wrought out the destiny of a continent, and bore evermore to the front the banner of the freedom of mankind.

As it was with our statesmen and soldiers, so it is with our writers, and I can appeal to your own city for the truth of this. Not Lowell himself paid a finer tribute to the Puritan founders of this commonwealth than did John Boyle O'Reilly. Every American who cherishes with pride the deeds of Meade's army in its struggle through the three grim July days at Gettysburg must also, if his soul is capable of being thrilled by poems which ring like music notes, prize Bret Harte's

strong, homely ballad of John Burns, and prize also James Jeffrey Roche's ode on the anniversary of the battle.\*

Moreover, exactly as all Americans have a common right to be proud of American statesmen and soldiers and writers, utterly regardless of what their religious convictions may have been, so long as they did all that in them lay for America, so all Americans, without distinction of faith, have a right to be proud of those great men who stand as the exponents of the different creeds on American soil, who stand as the leaders in our religious thought. The country is better, every man in it, Protestant or Catholic, is better, because of the life of Bishop Brooks; and in the same way, every true American, Catholic or Protestant, should be glad that there lives in the United States so stout a champion of Americanism as Archbishop Ireland—the only bishop, by the way, in existence, who is entitled to wear that badge of nobility, the button of the Loyal Legion.

What I have said about Americanism in connection with our whole political life applies with peculiar force to the public schools. We should set our faces like a rock against any attempt to allow State aid to be given to any sectarian system of education; and on the other hand, we should set our faces like a rock against any attempt to exclude any set of men from their full and proper share in the government of the public schools because of their religion. There should, of course, be frank and vigorous condemnation of any attempt to put in control of the public schools men hostile to them, just as there should be of any attempt to coerce chil-

\* To the man or boy who would like to read one of the best poems ever written to commemorate the feat of an American war-vessel, I would cordially recommend Mr. Roche's ballad of "The General Armstrong, Privateer," telling of the fight she waged all the night through with the boats of the British squadron at Fayal.

dren from being sent to them; but remember to be just in your condemnation, and to condemn individuals and not classes unless the classes really deserve it.

There are Lutherans and Episcopalians who are hostile to the public schools as well as Catholics; and there are plenty of others who vie with one another in eager and intelligent support of the schools. Only yesterday I was reading an account of a very interesting ceremony in Father Corrigan's Catholic church in Hoboken. In his address Father Corrigan emphasized the fact that a very large section of his church in America favored the public schools, and insisted that to abandon that position would be the greatest calamity that could befall the church in America; and the draping of our national flag and the singing of the national anthem were the most prominent features in the exercises. Certainly it would be difficult to wish for more thoroughgoing Americanism than this.

I am a pretty good party man, and do not leave my party on any issue, unless I think that I really ought to, yet I should most certainly refuse to support a school ticket made up by any party if it was made up avowedly in the interests of the professors of one creed—whether it was my own creed or not—and with the purpose of discriminating against those who hold a different religious belief. If I found that Catholics were attempting to establish Catholic control over the public schools, I should certainly fight them for all that was in me, and if I found that Protestants were trying to do the same thing, I should fight them every whit as hard.

One of the very greatest benefits arising from the public schools is that Catholics and Protestants, Americans of every origin and faith, brought up in them,

inevitably in after-life have kindlier feelings toward their old school-fellows of different creeds, and look at them with a wiser and manlier charity, than could possibly be the case had they never had a chance to mingle together in their youth; thus the possibility for the growth on American soil of the savage sectarian hatreds of Europe is minimized. But this kindly feeling can never exist if one side has legitimate cause for the belief that it is being discriminated against by the other, and especially if, in the name of toleration, intolerance comes to the fore.

The bigots who advocate and try to bring about such discrimination are really playing into the hands of the upholders of sectarian schools.

When I was in the New York legislature, on two or three different occasions, bills were introduced appropriating money to Roman Catholic institutions, and I opposed them on the broad ground that it was against the American idea to give money for any sectarian purpose, and though I was denounced, of course, by certain bigots for my attitude, yet I received the hearty and cordial support of the bulk of my many Catholic friends and associates, social and political, and of all those for whose opinion I most cared; and there were Catholic votes cast as mine were in the New York legislature.

So if there were any tendency to try to control the public schools in a Know-nothing spirit, to try to discriminate against Catholics, whether as trustees or as teachers, because they were Catholics, any desire not to give them, when it was deserved, the same ample and cordial recognition that good trustees and teachers ought to have, then I am sure that I can appeal to every right-thinking American, whatever his religion, to stand up against so utterly un-American a doctrine, and to

do his best to see that full justice is done to the Catholic, as much as to the Protestant.

Exactly as in our public schools the lessons should be conducted in no language but in English, neither in German, French, Spanish, or any other, exactly as the children should be taught to speak United States and to think United States, and to be United States, so we have a right to demand that the voters, in settling about the public schools, should vote as Americans merely, and should realize that it is utterly abhorrent to and unworthy of real Americanism to discriminate for or against any American because of his birthplace or because of his creed.