

In My Opinion

Education and Emotionalism

There are many encouraging signs in biological education today. Some of these encouraging signs emerge from the confrontation of a changing curriculum with current regulations and mores.

The two chief examples are the increase in the teaching of evolution and the increase in the use of live plants and animals in high school biology classrooms. Both of these welcome advances have involved a number of stress situations of which the great majority are being decided in favor of good education.

The evolution issue has received the more widespread publicity. A group in Arizona, that wished to prevent the schools from using modern biology textbooks with a full treatment of evolution, attempted to have an initiative referendum placed on the ballot for the State elections. The sponsors of the referendum, however, were unable to garner sufficient signatures from Arizona citizens to satisfy the minimum legal requirement for a referendum ballot. The Arizona Council of Churches and the Arizona Academy of Sciences deserve considerable credit for clarifying the issues involved.

A bitter contest developed in Texas regarding the adoption of similar biology books and highly emotional debate ensued in the State's press, radio, and television. After extensive public hearings, the State Textbook Commission approved placing on the State list the new modern biology books with a full coverage of evolution. The Texas State Science Teachers' Association and the Texas Academy of Sciences, as well as faculty members from the University of Texas, are especially to be commended for the support they gave to the improvement of biological education in Texas.

Brief flurries occurred also in Carmel, Indiana, and Orlando, Florida. In the former city, despite pressure from partisans, the Board of Education adopted the modern textbooks without a dissenting vote and in Orlando, the local newspaper columns were filled with letters from concerned high school

students favoring the teaching of evolution in the high school.

Three states, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas, have laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution in the public schools and, at the present writing, the law in Arkansas is being contested. A Little Rock, Arkansas teacher and the Arkansas Education Association are challenging the constitutionality of the law on the single point that the State law is unconstitutional because it abridges the teachers' freedom of speech which is guaranteed by the United States Constitution. The court has ruled that matters of religion and science are extraneous to the test and is planning to draft its decision solely on the Constitutional issue of free speech. Its decision is being awaited with interest.

With regard to the use of live animals in the high school biology classroom laboratory, a most interesting case has come to trial in a local court in New Jersey. Here a biology student had injected chickens with a sarcoma virus and his School Board was charged by the SPCA with permitting unnecessary cruelty. The case was wide-ranging and involved a variety of expert witnesses. The decision was in favor of the defense and in rendering that decision, the court paid an unusual tribute to teachers. The concluding statement of the presiding judge was: "SPCA further argues that the result, if defendant board (i.e., East Orange Board of Education) were successful, would be that the science teacher would determine when the experiment was justified balancing his evaluation of the pain and cruelty against the educational value to be derived. This indeed would place an awesome responsibility in the hands of the teacher, but then again the minds of our children are also placed in his hands. For the reasons expressed there will be judgment entered for defendants."

All of these recent events are indeed heartening and should provide support and encouragement for cautious teachers in conservative communities. The direction the winds are blowing seems abundantly clear. The winds are lifting away the fog of emotionalism that has been beclouding our educational enterprise.

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