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BIBLE TEACHING IN THE SOUTH

Recently in a senior class of the high school in Charlotte, N. C., the teacher took up the Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson and called upon one of the students to read the short biographical sketch of the American philosopher. After the reading, one of the boys rose and demanded that the Essays be withdrawn: "It says that Emerson was a Unitarian. He was not a Christian and we shouldn't read anything by a man who was not saved." The teacher laughed it off and proceeded with the lesson. The next morning eleven pupils took their places beside the teacher's desk. They were dead serious. They had asked their Bible teacher about it and she had confirmed their fears. Mr. Emerson was not "saved"; in fact he was burning in hell at this very moment.

This is not an isolated case by any means. The teaching of religion outside the home and organized church has created many

new and highly serious problems. It has reached the stage where some of the clergymen who had hitherto supported the program are now beginning to question its consequences, not for the "minorities," but for themselves.

I'd like to explain briefly how it works in the South. The several local Protestant churches make up a fund out of which they pay the Bible teacher in the public schools. A committee of laymen

representing the churches supervises this fund and the selection of the teachers. Usually these instructors are the Sunday School teachers in their respective churches, but they must also meet the qualifications of the public school system.

It should be made clear that the Baptists do not participate in this religious program. In fact they openly oppose the system, at least at the level of their clergy. Their protests are usually answered effectively by the supervising committee: "Your church is against our program, but the majority of the children 'electing' Bible study are Baptists." This is true, of course, since the Baptists are by far the largest Protestant denomination in the South.

But even this idea of "electing" the subject is open to question. Upon admission to the high school each student is given a card for the signature of either of his parents: "Do you want your child to take Bible study as one of his elective studies?" The card must be returned with either "Yes" or "No" and the parents do not have a chance to weigh the value of the instruction at the end of the semester. The returned card holds for the entire high school course, unless "they make an official protest," which is unlikely even for confirmed individuals.

However, what is not elective, even in the high schools, is the daily devotional in every "home room" class, in the form of a prayer prepared by the Bible teacher, (St. James version). Every Monday morning the "outside" Bible instructor provides each "home room" teacher with a set of five devotionals for the week, scriptural passages from the Gospels. This procedure (in the "home room") is widely ex- (Continued on Page 17)

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