

Decline of religion during the 1920s

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### WOMAN LOSING GOD AT COLLEGE

**T**HE AVERAGE MAN is only a brother-in-law to the Church, as an ancient jest has it; but he is liable to lose even this distant relationship, we are told, since he can no longer rely on the prayers of the woman through whom he effected it. The reason given for this new peril of the times is that the praying woman is becoming more and more infrequent. The model wife and mother of yesterday is assuming and carrying the sins and frivolities of her husband, father and brother. Yet time was, writes Mary Briarly, author of "In His Own Image," in *Scribner's Magazine*, when the average man could sit down complacently in the midst of his sins assured that the prayers of a pious wife or mother "might be depended on to bail him out of purgatory if he went too far. Now he begins to fear that the lady's utmost praying voltage may be needed to clear her." Moreover, if we are to believe the newspapers, says the writer, "unless the tide of feminine turpitude can be stemmed, man may have to look out for himself and for the spiritual well-being of his offspring, but faces a none too remote possibility that his wife will require an occasional 'remittance of grace' from his personal account." In accounting for this "curve downward" in her sex, the writer holds that it is due to the present system of education. Woman is learning the same things that are taught to her brother—scientific theories destructive of the faith she imbibed at home. The girl once content with a finishing-school diploma tied with a neat ribbon now "not only aspires to degrees but insists upon taking some portion of her work seriously—in fact, uses her brain to relate vagrant academic theories to life. And even as the man, she is becoming agnostic and atheistic. Partly because science has disproved some theological dogma, more because the whole trend of college training is toward disbelief." The modern university, we are told, "knows but one god, the scientific spirit," and teaches that "evolution is a fact and God a possibility."

These conclusions were reached by the writer during a study of the psychological effects of certain tendencies in modern university training. Mary Briarly, we are told in a biographical note, is the pseudonym of an author living in Salt Lake City, the wife of a well-known judge. She first began studying the educational problem in the interests of her three children, the youngest of whom has completed her sophomore year in college, and has helped to verify some of her mother's data. Science, continues the writer, is striving to explain all spiritual cravings, love, reverence, friendship—all human tenderness—in terms of physical reaction, so that "every human longing, from the desire for immortality to the mother's love for her child, has been classed as either self-preservation or sex. Judged by its effect on the undergraduate student, the modern college course is an almost continuous propaganda for materialism. Here and there some professor who still believes he has a soul tries to reconcile Darwinism with a Creator, or mechanistic psychology with immortality. But the usual academic dictum is that the relating of these theories to religion and character must be left to the individual." And the consequence:

"The majority of college graduates take the easy course of leaving such problems unsolved. They begin life strongly tinged with materialism, not knowing what they believe as to the existence of God or as to what moral teachings are really obligatory. And despite the popular depreciation of the modern home, statistics would reveal that a large percentage of these students entered college with a more or less definite religious creed of some kind, and with very definite moral ideals—whether they lived up to them or not. . . .

"Since the war we have been doing some thinking, and even tho we resent Elinor Glyn's and Margot Asquith's strictures on our society, we are not satisfied with it ourselves or we should not be asking for blue laws to regulate conduct. We are so dissatisfied that everybody is blaming everybody else. We inveigh bitterly against the churches and the homes. The women are not doing their duty—they are giving too much time to outside interests—they are degenerating! Women smoking! Women drinking! Women preferring adventure and amusement to caring for families! The flapper—the short skirt—the lack of corsets; how the press and public speakers harp on these things! And they do not seem to realize that they are using an obsolete vocabulary in their denunciations. What have moral ideals to do with a materialistic universe?"

And can man justly complain at this result of present-day education? Youth, it is asserted, has been taught that adaptation to environment is man's highest law, and woman is being instructed that "there is no god to protect her, that no righteousness on her part can help her, she must control environment or be controlled according to Nature's law." And in a last analysis, says the writer, "this is merely the law of the jungle energized by human intelligence." As she views it, then, it is a case of man's materialistic concepts overriding woman's religious and emotional instincts, leaving her to "follow her primitive impulses armored with the full panoply of science." Adaptation to environment has become the keynote of living. Conscience has been taught to be a delusion, and obligation to God is being replaced by "a species of noblesse oblige. . . . The church is a refining agency, the family the most practical method of caring for children so far devised, no existing human institution is conceded any quality of permanence. For better or worse, education is discarding both authority and the spiritual." And, to what end?

"Have not the decisions of the scientists of one century as often been reversed by the discovery of some new element or force as the conclusions of the philosophers? Does science claim to be alone inerrant in a world of fallible and partial knowledge? Is it just possible that the university has usurped the arrogance of the old theologies in parceling out what portions of universal truth shall be credited? Is there any scientific or academic necessity for the spirit of negation that dominates our universities to-day?"

"The modern woman and the modern home are being blamed for fostering a godlessness and lowering moral ideas which are the direct outcome of the materialistic philosophies current in all our institutions of higher learning, philosophies which are partly the result of a narrow application of the theory of evolution, but are more directly a graft from the German materialism which came to a head in Nietzsche and the imperialists. A materialism which is as inevitably the death of all moral principle as it is of religion. If materialistic philosophy is true, why blame the women of America for putting it to practical use? If it is wholly or partly false, why teach it, either directly or by suggestion, in our colleges and universities?"

Others are trying to solve this problem. Dr. Charles W. Eliot, President Emeritus of Harvard University, wonders, we are told, if some agreement can not be reached among all religions represented in this country under which the fundamental ethical principles of order, love, and justice could be introduced into every American school. "Religion being the motive power of civilization and these principles being its foundation," it seems reasonable to the Indianapolis *Star* that they should be formally taught. And if the different sects are unable to get together on the fundamentals, "which are laws of conduct that even radicals may accept," then, declares *The Star*, "it speaks ill for the sincerity of their religion."