

TO FORESTALL COLLEGE ATHEISM

THEY ENTER COLLEGE AS CHRISTIANS and graduate as atheists or agnostics, say some whose sons and daughters come home with a sheepskin showing proficiency in the arts and sciences and little, or none at all, in religion. The college is repeatedly blamed for this vital lack, and is not infrequently defended of the charge of failing to establish a religious background for the student. We must frankly

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acknowledge that the reasons for the unhappy divorce between education and religion do not lie wholly in the colleges, says Dr. William Pierson Merrill in an article discussing the part religion should have in a general education. Some of the fault, he writes in the *New York Christian Advocate* (Methodist), is in the college; too frequently there are to be found, particularly in the departments of philosophy and of natural science, men and women openly and positively scornful of the Church and of the reality of religion. But that is not the most serious fact in the situation, thinks Dr. Merrill. As he sees it,

“Far more serious is the presence of a rigid adherence on the part of the Church to doctrines and traditions and points of view utterly incompatible with that scientific spirit and method which is the very groundwork of present-day instruction. When a boy or girl goes from his home church to spend from four to seven years at educational institutions, and comes back disturbed in his faith and uncertain in his beliefs, out of touch with the Church, it is not just or wise for the Church to throw the entire blame back upon the college. Why did not that church foresee the problem that boy was to face? Why did it not present the Christian religion to him in terms compatible with the truth as it would come to him in school and college? The Christian religion is capable of being stated in such a way that it can live in hearty and self-respecting fellowship with modern science. And the Church is not beginning to meet its grave responsibility for oversight of the souls of its youth, until it is going to the extreme limit of possibility in presenting the truth of Christ in terms that do not clash with the truth of modern science.”

As the twig is bent, so will the tree incline, and Dr. Merrill thus stresses the need of early training:

“We must take more seriously than we have the work of religious education in the Church. In the present confused state of religious training, with the utterly inadequate recognition of religion in our day schools, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Sunday school, slight tho its contribution may seem to be. It is one of the first responsibilities confronting every Christian, one of the first calls to which he should harken, that if he have the slightest capacity for Sunday-school teaching or leadership, he shall give himself, in the spirit of Christ, to be used and spent in that work. It is a very grave fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to get cultured, trained people to engage in this work of teaching the young. It is becoming harder every year to provide for the proper doing of this work in the Sunday schools of our affiliated churches. Christians ought to leap at such opportunities. Every one ought to be eager to get into this work of the religious training of the young.”