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## THE VISIBLE EFFECTS OF AGNOSTICISM IN EDUCATION.

(Brooklyn Catholic Review.)

FOR well-nigh forty years now agnosticism has been making its way in gaining control of the education given by our public schools. Of course the familiar term for this shutting out of religion as a factor in the education of children is "non-sectarianism," but agnosticism more nearly describes the idea. The term Agnostic, from the Latin, was adopted first by Mr Huxley to describe the man who, while not denying God or the supernatural, yet refused to acknowledge, because the arguments for and against served only to keep his mind in a state of balance. Christians maintain that Agnosticism is practically Atheism, for not to acknowledge God is to all intents and purposes a denial of His existence. At first, it is to be presumed, the omission of religious teaching from the courses of the public schools produced no widespread evil effects, for the reason that in that early day the parents of most of the children in those schools believed in some form of religion and took care that the lack of religion as an element in the every day schooling was made up for by supplementary instruction, either at home or in Sunday schools. But as time went on and religious indifference spread among masses of the people, whether native-born or immigrants, this religious supplementary instruction has become less and less in proportion until, within recent years, it safe to say that a very large proportion of the children of the public schools have been growing up to maturity without any religious training whatever.

In some parts of the country this progress of Agnosticism has been more rapid than in others, but everywhere evidences of it can be seen in the opinions and conduct of the new generation of Americans. There are everywhere evidences of the decay of morals that always follows a decline of religion and a consequent slackening of the restraints of conscience. There is fast growing among Americans an easy-going cynicism suspiciously like the so-called *fin de siècle* spirit supposed to characterise the irreligious element in France. The pursuit of wealth and of pleasure are the two prevalent aims of life, and now that the "non-sectarian," or Agnostic, scheme of education has left a large proportion of the new generation without religious or moral principles, the instability of marriage and the want of confidence in men's integrity in the handling of other people's money has become almost universal.

Disregard of the Christian view of the obligations of marriage and the notion that it is only a fool that will not take and keep all that he can safely grasp, whether it is rightly his, or not, are the growing evil of our country to-day. Only the other day, the London

correspondent of one of our daily papers gave as the result of his inquiries as to the cause of the European lack of confidence in American securities the prevalent belief in Europe that with us there is no punishment for railway thieves. We have all seen, in fact, the rise of many fortunes founded wholly on dishonest transactions on a large scale.

Almost every American city can point to certain prominent citizens walking abroad and looked up to with a sort of respect, who, nevertheless, ought to be shut up in prison. Everyone feels that these men have been thieves, that their earnings have been unjustly accumulated out of the property of others. Still there is no indignation, no public sense of shame. Men who are still honest greet the thief and are glad to be recognised in return by him.

The standing joke has been that most of these big thieves are "church members." Whenever a bank-clerk becomes a defaulter, if he happens to have been connected, in no matter how vague a manner, with a church, much is made of that fact. As to this fact there are some remarks to make. And, first of all, the man who is a thief at heart, will not hesitate to "steal the livery of Heaven" if necessary to help him in his course of theft. He will first steal, if it seems to him as the result of his circumstances of birth and surroundings, all that is necessary to help him along in his dishonest course—that is only the means to his end. And then he will go on to accomplish his main purpose, which is the dishonest appropriation of the property of others. Most of the big railroad thieves referred to in the London correspondent's letter belong to the past generation, and, of course, their operations are carried on along the old lines. But the standing joke, referred to above, is, in fact, nearly worn out. It will not be long till we shall see the new order of thieves on a large scale, those who do not think it necessary to make religion a cover for their wickedness.

It is not too much to assert that we who now live will soon see a reaction in popular sentiment from all this. The day is not far distant when the American people will cry out for a system of education that will truly educate the children committed to it, not merely in the art of counting money, but also in the more important science of crediting money to its rightful owners. There is bound to come a time soon when the American people will demand that religion be restored to its place as an integral factor for the education of the children in the schools supported at the expense of the State.

The Emperor and Empress of Austria have just been visiting the ex-Empress Eugenie at Cap Martin, and driving out with her. As a further honour the ex-Empress has also been waited upon by Mr and Mrs Gladstone.

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