

University of Notre Dame
Religious Bulletin
October 26, 1932

A Letter.

"Dear Father: Would you mind commenting on this letter from a young lady, a co-ed at a western university? She is not "the one," only an acquaintance, but I am not sure just what comments, if any, should be made to these remarks, which are a response to my discussion of the religious life at Notre Dame. I think the things said are of common enough interest to warrant a discussion in the Bulletin:

"I was very much interested in your religious side, which heretofore hadn't even been hinted at. For a long period, pseudo-sophistication convinced me there was no anything. I couldn't have told you whether I was an atheist, infidel, or agnostic. Religion or its absence didn't enter my mind. I governed my actions according to my own scruples, which were, fortunately I think, many and strict - yet I was godless. Then I began to feel a void, one which my own investigations could not satisfactorily fill. The void made me cynical, foolishly enough.

"Laddy (a boy friend) is very religious, and he has made me believe, because his very belief is well-founded and religious rather than sectarian. It is a security which I hope to obtain; already I feel the gap being filled. So I should say you are fortunate to have a substantial belief. It makes one worthy of those higher things - makes him just a bit distinguished in his accomplishments."

"I am not astounded, just doubtful. - A Dumb Senior."

There is room here for honest doubt. There are poses, both conscious and unconscious poses. We can suspect them here - conscious or unconscious. There was the freshman pose of agnosticism. There was the sophomore pose of cynicism. We might give credit for some real thought as the basis of the junior-senior "reform," but the "makes him just a bit distinguished in his accomplishments" sounds very shallow. A person capable of a remark like that hasn't the remotest notion of the meaning of religion.

Don't be too hard on the girl. A Protestant going into the agnostic atmosphere of a secular university has a tough time of it. In "Pageant of Life," Owen Francis Dudley states the problem as it confronted a mother: "Cyril would be off to London after the holidays; Bernard for Oxford or Cambridge in a year. They were going out from a comparatively sheltered life. To what? Her Puritanical upbringing had served her badly in a respect; she confessed it honestly to herself. They were going out into a world beyond her ken. She had known a rigid narrow home-life, and, after marriage, the respectable life of a country town. Of the world into which Cyril and Bernard would shortly be plunged she knew next to nothing. They were going out unequipped. Her inexperience was responsible for it, to an extent. Thornton had brought it home to her just now. He might be a Roman Catholic, but somehow he was equipped for life."

If you want to help the girl (perhaps you can), the most effective way, after prayer, is to tell her frankly that she doesn't know the score. She doesn't suspect what religion is - supernatural religion. While natural religion goes up from the heart, supernatural religion comes down from heaven. It is not a question of our picking and choosing a few convenient doctrines, and some practices that give us thrills, but of our accepting with our minds and hearts, and carrying out in every detail of our lives, the truths that God has told us about Himself and our relations with Him. -- That is what she doesn't know - doesn't even suspect - and what you are in a position to tell her. Owen Francis Dudley may help you to do it. Tell her to read the three volumes of fiction first, and then come back to "Will Men be Like Gods?"