

Pilgrim's Progress Series

VANITY FAIR

Topic for September, 1910.

"Vanity Fair is one of John Bunyan's universally admitted masterpieces. The very name of the fair is one of his happiest strokes. Thackeray's famous book owes half its popularity to the happy name he borrowed from John Bunyan." (Dr. Whyte.) But the great novelist could not borrow that superb artistic skill which crowded these pages with so many characters, each perfectly sketched in the fewest possible words. Thackeray had great powers, but he could not equal this. His satire is keen, but Bunyan's is keener. His characters are interesting; Bunyan's are alive, crossing our paths every day.

This town, with its perpetual Fair, through which every pilgrim toward Zion had to pass, is just the evil world which is ever about us, from which there is no escape except that taken by Faithful—the way of ascension. We can never satisfactorily explain what we mean by "the world," yet we all know its power. It includes everything which hides or distorts the truth, which exalts material and sensual things above the spiritual, which leads us away from Christ, to lower levels of thought and endeavor. These are its leading features emphasized: (1) *Its perpetuity*; "it is no new-created business, but a thing of ancient standing." The fashions of the world may change; the spirit of the world abides. It is the same for us as for Christ at the beginning of His ministry— but He had no mind to merchandise, and therefore left the town without laying out so much as one farthing upon these vanities." (2) *Its confusion*; for it has no fixed standards of value, no satisfactory spiritual "vision" or moral judgment, good and evil being hopelessly confounded. Some of the articles on its list of merchandise are good, which means great peril for those who are not on their guard. We may be very worldly even in dealing with things which in themselves are right and necessary. (3) *It is universal*, varying only in some of its features as it manifests itself in different nations. "Here is the Britain Row, the French Row, the Italian Row, the Spanish Row, the German Row, where several sorts of vanities are to be sold."

These three characteristics of the world remind us that there has never been a pure and noble life without the very difficulties which confront us to-day. The great old saints of other days and of other lands had to pass this way; if things are confused for us they found confusion also; if giving our testimony brings loss and shame, let us not forget that millions of others have suffered in the same way. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Further, Bunyan goes on to emphasize the fact that between the Christian and "the man of the world" there should be certain marked distinctions: (1) In the manner of their dress; (2) In the tone and quality of their speech; (3) In their attitude toward the material things and the vulgar delights which mean so much to Vanity Fair. Does anyone call this antiquated Puritanism? If so, he has yet to learn the first principles of the Christian life. This is emphatically a message for our own time. In every class of society to-day, those who profess to follow Christ ought to set themselves intelligently and resolutely against pride and extravagance in dress, against the talk that is unclean and degrading, against that spirit which puts the "wares" of the world before the buying of "the truth."

But we must not begin with these points of outward distinction, or we shall, in all probability, develop into fads and cracks, mistaking secondary things for essentials. We must begin with inward principles. In what way and to what extent should my dress, my speech, my attitude, differ from that of against him that is higher than the highest." There is the principle which each one may, and must, apply to his own case. We ought to set ourselves against everything that sets us against Christ, which tends to supplant Him in our affections and purposes. Whatever leads us, however slowly, away from Christ is worldly. It may be something in dress, or in our mode of speech, or in our business life; it may be innocent things, such as a bicycle, or golf club, or cricket, or some prize at school; but if it interferes with Christ's supremacy as "higher than the highest" in our lives, then it must be resisted.

The consequences of resisting the world are much the same in every age. Christian and faithful had to suffer from some mocking, some taunting, some speaking reproachfully. . . . a great hubbub and stir in the fair."

These are ever the ways of the world toward those who dare to follow Christ. If it no longer grieves the faithful with "knives," nor hurls the "stones," nor burns at the stake, yet it still "besmears with mud," still mocks and taunts as though Christians were fanatics. Judge Hategood is not yet dead, nor his remarkable Jury discharged, while Envy, Superstition and Pickthank are still about their contemptible business of bearing false witness. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are ever in the highest company.

But look at the results! Not only did Faithful himself find that death was only a step into the chariot of the Lord, but the conduct of these two Christian men made a profound impression in Vanity Fair, and at least one of the spectators was constrained to set out on the heavenly pilgrimage. Others are watching us day by day, and we never know what issues we are helping to determine by our fidelity or carelessness.—Rev. F. Cox, in *The Guild*.

Ten Commandments from the Mother

1. Be healthy.
2. Be joyful.
3. Be beautiful.
4. Be gentle and placid.
5. Be firm without severity.
6. Do not stint with your mother's love. Tenderness is not effeminacy. Because life often is cold and hard and cruel, a sunny, bright, glad childhood is a blessing for the whole life.
7. Discipline as life disciplines. It does not scold; it does not plead; it does not fly in a passion. It simply teaches that every deed has its adequate effect.
8. Do not laugh at the little sorrows and pains of child life. Nothing wounds a child more than to find ridicule where it looked for sympathy.
9. In illness and danger, nurse, protect, cherish and cheer as much as in your power; and do not weaken your

vitality by giving way to anguish or sorrowing. What must be done should be done as well as possible.

10. Do not forget—the happiness of having a child includes the duty of endowing him with health, gladness, courage, vigor; of finally letting him live his own life freely and in his own way. Your pay you have had in advance, for your sorrowing was happiness and a sacrificing joy.—*The Purity Advocate*.

'Temperance in All Things'

Topic for Sept. 12: 1 Cor. 9. 23-27.

If you will consult the Revised Version, you will read, "Self-control in all things." This conveys the meaning of St. Paul perhaps better than the word "temperance," as ordinarily employed in popular speech. By "temperance" we are therefore to understand not merely the practice of total abstinence from intoxicants, but the habitual moderation of indulgence of any natural desire or appetite.

The body is to be a servant, never a master. Physical activities are to be used to minister to the man's welfare, never indulged for the sake of mere gratification. In proportion as the body is supreme does the soul become enslaved, and the man degenerates into a serf, instead of ruling as a king.

But Paul does not study this great art of self-control simply for his own sake. The opening verse makes this plain. All sense of selfishness in thought or desire, in plan or purpose, is lost in his supreme aim to live "for the Gospel's sake."

He would "gain the weak" by demonstrating to them the supremacy of spiritual strength. The thought of personal influence is prominent here. His own well-being of great value, but the salvation of others is uppermost in the inner realm of motive with him. Such unselfish devotion to another's good is to be our constraining principle in all things. Apply it to indulgence in any matter that may seem to us harmless, but which may affect disastrously another. Ought we to do it?

The highest good! That is the great desire of his heart for both himself and others. And that can never be realized if an lower aim govern or control us.

Then mark how he illustrates this from the daily habits of the runners of Corinth. The fleet-footed contestants in the games could not hope to win unless in the best of condition. This was ever the result of self-discipline. (Modern "Marathoners" have proven the principle sound. The craze for long-distance racing that has come over the athletic world of to-day easily verifies the statements of the Apostle. The incomparable Longboat was not always won, because he has too often been "out of condition." Shrub had seldom been beaten, because of his studied self-control and practice in the best of condition. Such self-illustrations will occur to your Leaguers.)

Paul's contention is that if in the realm of physical stamina such self-control pays, why the less is it profitable in the higher realm of spiritual being.

Hence the great lesson is that we must deny ourselves all habits that would in any degree lessen our spiritual growth, or limit our Christian usefulness.

This may be applied in various ways: The amusement question, worldly companionships, questionable books, excessive fashions in dress, lavish expenditure on any form of self-indulgence—these, and many more, may be included with the "fleshly lusts that war against the soul," and which dwarf the usefulness of the life.

Everything that enters into our life