

The Craze for Sport

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The Apostle Paul, in his Second Epistle to Timothy, foretells that in the last days perilous times shall come, and describes very vividly what was to constitute the peril of these times, notably, the base character of the men who should then flourish.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God: having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

This is a dark picture, but it embodies an accurate description of many persons, young and old, in the days in which we live. And it is to be feared that, unless a remarkable change for the better soon takes place, the description will rapidly apply to people on a much more extensive scale than it as yet does. The spirit of materialism and ungodliness is fast spreading throughout the land. Even those, who are comparatively blind to the apostasy of the age, see this. One of the features of the Apostle's inspired account is that men shall be *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God* and of this characteristic, we have abundant illustration in the craze for sport which is so common at the present moment. This craze is becoming appalling in its extent and effects. A few words on the general subject is our intention in this article.

It may be granted, to begin with, that some physical recreation is useful to young and old. Our Shorter Catechism, in its treatment of the Fourth Commandment, recognises worldly "recreations," as well as worldly "employments," and allows them to be lawful on ordinary week days. At the same time, experience teaches us that care must be exercised as to the kind and the measure of these recreations. The true Christian will endeavour to regulate such matters in a way that, whilst his recreations will be beneficial to his body, they will not be hurtful to his soul.

He will seek to be guided by the Word and Spirit of God in everything that he does, and thus to be preserved from the paths in which destroyers go. It is

impossible to give an exact classification of recreation under the heads of good and bad, and we shall not attempt the task. Some things, for example, that may be harmless enough in themselves, are often very hurtful from the associations that attend them. We would recommend our young people to put such questions as these to themselves when thinking of taking up with some form of entertainment or other that may be questionable, "Shall I be benefitted in the highest sense by what I am about to do? Am I likely to suffer any injury in my soul? While the recreation is innocent in itself, is the society into which I will be led fitted to do me good or evil? Might I not find something else to attend to in which I would get all the benefit, and none of the injury, that this particular entertainment is fitted to convey?" Not merely pleasurable sensations, that may only gratify the flesh, but real benefit to body and mind together ought to be the great determining consideration in such matters. A wise thinker has said that "the mind is the standard of the man," and the moral health of the mind ought to have a place of entire pre-eminence over the mere animal health of the body. It is a thing to be carefully noted that when persons come to be concerned for the first time about the weighty matters of the soul and eternity, they instinctively renounce those worldly games and amusements in which they formerly delighted. They see some of them to be positively injurious to their spiritual welfare, and others to be traps and snares through the carnality of the heart and the manner in which they are apt to engross the affections. Thus, serious persons who have begun to live for God in this present evil world, generally reduce their recreations to the simplest and most innocent forms. They are afraid of carnal entanglements and of grieving the Spirit of God from their souls by worldly conformity.

We now go on to observe that the love of pleasure and sport in the present day has risen to a passion. Thousands of young men in our large cities think and speak of hardly anything else from one week's end to another but some particular game in which they are interested. Every spare moment during their lawful business is taken up with the discussion of this game. Football, for example, has become a terrible craze. Thousands are seen flocking away on a Saturday to some particular match, as if it were a thing of the highest moment, and these not mere boys who might be excused for wishing to see a ball kicked here and there, but men who have reached manhood, many of them with wives and families. When the plays of childhood are an engrossing passion with men of mature years, it bespeaks a form of madness. All this craze for sport on the football field is also mixed up with an extensive system of betting.

The love of money, says the inspired Apostle, is the root of all evil; and the love of money leads multitudes into ways of folly and ungodliness. So much money is put at stake as to which club will win the match, and thus there is winning and losing. The passion to make gain by any means, good or bad, sets careless souls on fire about trifles light as air, lighter than vanity,

It appears to us also that our educational authorities nowadays are giving too much place to sport in their school programmes. Football and other games are made well-nigh compulsory in some institutions. While a measure of physical training and exercise is entirely beneficial, there is a danger of giving too much scope to the fleshly propensities of human nature, and of feeding the general passion for amusement which is rising to such a height in the present day. The clergy are not altogether without blame in this matter. Numbers of them encourage this passion by their personal presence at games and by organising clubs in connection with their congregations. The sacred and secular are thus confounded to the decided detriment of the former. The Church by such methods will not spiritualise the world, but the world will canalise the Church. Again, does it not show that the craze for sport has gone very far when ministers of the Gospel, met at General Assemblies for transacting professedly the solemn business of the Church of God on earth, form themselves into golfing teams and play golf matches? This took place at Edinburgh for at least two summers past between ministers of the Established Church and the United Free Church. We have no hesitation in asserting that such frivolous men ought never to have entered the office of the holy ministry; they are only a disgrace to their profession. When the professing Church acts in this way, what can be expected of the careless world?

We conclude our remarks by noticing a very gross illustration of the craze for sport which is occupying the attention of the public at the time we write - a professional boxing match about to take place in London between an Englishman named Wells and a negro named Johnson. Boxing is so fleshly an exercise that no person, naming the name of Christ, should have to do with it in any form. It becomes, therefore, obnoxious in the highest degree when it is obtruded upon the eye of Christian civilisation, as a contest between representatives of two races, fitted to inflame passions and breed hostility. The love for such brutish combats is to be seen in the large sums of money expended in connection with them. Thousands of pounds have been spent in preparation, in the present case, and the promoter of the fight expects £5,000 as gate money from the spectators. Several ministers in London, headed by Dr.

F. B. Meyer, have spoken out against this degrading exhibition, and efforts are being made to get the Government to stop the affair, efforts which we sincerely trust will be successful.

Materialism, as we have stated already, is clearly making headway in our country. The Churches have been, and still are, pandering to the flesh. They expect to gain the world to Christ by ministering to the desire for sensuous pleasure, by gratifying the carnal propensities of the people. Such was not the way of Christ Himself or His Apostles. It is to be greatly feared, therefore, that the true Christ is a stranger among them, and that it is an imaginary Saviour they have set up in His place.