
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

The Pilgrim's Progress.

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Mr. Worldly Wiseman.

WE have already seen how impossible it is for anyone to take a serious step in life without the intrusion of others with their advice. Obstinate and Pliable began this interference, now Worldly Wiseman takes it up where they have left it. Christian, it seems, has yet to learn that some men are enemies of the soul. Like a child he takes it for granted that all are helpers or pilgrims. This seems a chance meeting; for while some enemies seek us out, most cross our path casually. Yet it is no chance meeting after all. The spirit of the world comes very often in hours of violent reaction after despondency. Compare in Goethe's *Faust* the fact that it is the *erdgeist* that comes to Faust first after the *weltschmerz*.

The type, and indeed the name, are familiar in English literature. (Cf. Kerr Bain, ii., note L.) He is perhaps usually associated with the commercial point of view. It is significant that it was commerce that first opposed Christianity as we read of it in the Acts (16^{19} 19^{24}). It has been stated that the first protest on record was made by sellers of hay at Ephesus, whose business depended upon the supply of beasts for heathen sacrifice. Every age has its own type of Worldly Wiseman. Perhaps the most conspicuous example is that eighteenth-century exponent of the 'paying virtues,' the diligent apprentice who becomes the wealthy merchant—of whose gospel Dick Whittington is so popular an exponent. In the nineteenth century Stevenson borrows from Bunyan the idea and the name, and actually continues the conversation of Worldly Wiseman in *An Apology for Idlers*. One of the most pronounced types in modern writings is to be found in the *Biglow Papers*, and their frank confession, 'I don't believe in principle, but oh, I do in interest.'

Here again, as in the case of Pliable, we are in the company of an apparent gentleman. He is not vulgarly loud nor unduly confidential. He introduces himself patronizingly, and his friendliness is that of the superior person. There is no more trying patronage than that of the shrewd self-made man whose first conviction is that he has conquered the world and understands life. The reason for that conviction is that he has learned the art of falling on his feet—an art generally manageable with some attention. So his 'good fellow' is a dangerous beginning. Cowper has warned us of 'the man who hails you Tom or Jack, and proves by thumping on your back, how much he feels your merit,' and Polonius gave excellent advice to Laertes on this matter.

When he goes on to speak of the 'burdened manner,' we begin to wonder whether he is the perfect gentleman he takes himself to be. There is a lack of sympathy here which betrays the inherent coarseness of grain. Emphasis upon surface absurdities is a rude appeal to shame; and the earnest soul, more sensitive in virtue of his finer and deeper nature, is ever at a disadvantage in the company of the ready and complacent manners of the finished man of the world. The burden, as has been aptly said, was a fact before it was a manner, but Worldly Wiseman is not the man to realize that.

There is a deadly cleverness in the question about Christian's wife and family. It is noteworthy that the three chief references to his home occur not in the first but in the second edition of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan has been accused of making his hero a selfish religionist deserting his home to save his soul. It is enough to answer that the conditions of allegory necessitate this form. In real life he would be winning their bread all the time, and the estrangement of pilgrimage would be but in heart and interests. The deeper question remains, whether such severing of earthly ties is involved in the Christian ideal. The Parsifal of Wolfram mourns, through long wanderings in search of the Holy Grail, his severance from wife and children; but the heathen knight in the same romance helps the solution of the problem by announcing that he will become a Christian on condition that his wife and child are elect with him. It is that assurance that confirms him in the conviction that God claims him as his knight, and he gladly replies, 'I believe in the God of my love.'

Maguire tells that Archbishop Leighton's sister said to him, '*You* may serve God very well who have no family to occupy your thoughts, nor children to call off your attention from religion'; to which he answered, 'And Enoch walked with God, and begat sons and daughters.' The fact is that a man in Christian's case feels himself not fit for love. Christian could neither give it nor receive it rightly, and he left them only in the hope of gaining them eventually in a love that was worth the name. George MacDonald, with bitter truth, has compared the godless loves of the world to the manna that was kept to the second day.

When Christian replies that he will accept Worldly Wiseman's counsel *if it be good*, he evidently thinks himself a shrewd and experienced person. He remembers how he refused Obstinate's advice, but here he is dealing with a different man. The advice he gets is subtler than it looks. 'Get rid of thy burden and enjoy God's blessings.' The obvious reply is that that is just what Christian is seeking to do. Yet there is deep subtlety in both parts of the advice. The first is wrong because it makes getting rid of the burden the main direct object. There are worse things than that burden; but Worldly Wiseman does not know what conscience is, nor revere its rights. The second is wrong, because it suggests that Worldly Wiseman has a religion too—an equally real one, and far more comfortable. His creed is that of 'God's good gifts.' No one is more bitter than he against atheism, which he regards as a kind of anarchy, a disturbing unconventionality. His comfort depends on the conventionality of his view of all highest and deepest things. God must be remote—the 'Providence,' which one of George Eliot's characters speaks of as 'them that's above.' In this view there is no trace of that conscience which keeps Christian in torment with the sense that he has forfeited God's good gifts.

Worldly Wiseman's Opinions.

Worldly Wiseman's opinions are all founded upon that lower kind of common sense which looks at life solely from the commercial standpoint. In its own province common sense is a true guide; in matters where heroism and spirituality are involved it can only betray.

1. *His opinion about Evangelist.* He protests against Christian's view of him as a great and honourable person. His standards of greatness and honour are not those of real worth and personal value, but merely of social standing and what he calls good manners. There is an element of active hatred in his attitude which makes one suspect an irritated conscience. Worldly Wiseman has had bad quarters of an hour when things that Evangelist has said have gone home. All effective evangelists may lay their account that they shall be taken by Mr. Worldly Wiseman as a personal insult and resented. It is the old story of the counsel's advice to his junior, 'No case, abuse the plaintiff's attorney.'

2. *His opinion about the Christian life* is a catalogue of sorrows, unrelieved by any faintest appreciation of the chance of heroism which they

offer. St. Paul gives a catalogue of tribulations almost identical with this, but it leads on to the triumphal shout of the last words of Romans 8. In this one-sided view we see the limits of his common sense. He speaks like a man who knows everything there is to know. This cynical knowledge of the world, in spite of its claim to omniscience, is really the most partial and shallow of views. There is another world of fact, including the whole region of spiritual help from above and lofty adventure within, about which such a man knows nothing whatever. One who knows only the world does not know half the facts even of the world itself. In regard to all the highest experiences of life 'the natural man is a born fool.'

3. *His opinion about the Bible* leads him into rudeness. This hard scorn of the worldling for all that concerns the Scriptures is a unique phenomenon. It brings out the inherent vulgarity of worldliness, to which none of the choicest souls can ever wholly lower themselves. It is to be noted, however, that it is not against the Bible that he speaks, but against the average man meddling with it. The Bible is meant to be understood, and Worldly Wiseman understands it too well to read much of it. If it has any meaning it condemns him, therefore he takes refuge in pretending not to understand it. He accordingly leaves it to those who will explain it away until no part of it means anything in particular. It is interesting to note that Mr. Foster of Bedford told John Bunyan, in his examination, that he 'was ignorant and did not understand the Scriptures; for how,' said he, 'can you understand them when you know not the original Greek?' etc. At this point Worldly Wiseman quite loses his temper. His 'hadst thou but patience to hear me,' is worthy of Sir Anthony Absolute (*The Rivals*, act I. sc. i.). The explanation must be that Christian has confronted all these opinions of his with the most provoking of all words to Worldly Wiseman—'I know.'

Worldly Wiseman's Advice.

Worldly Wiseman's advice follows. It is to go to the village of Morality, where he himself goes to church. It is suspicious that that village is so near—not quite a mile off—for there is no near cut in the matters of the soul. He who sets out in earnest to reach Morality finds himself facing the most elastic mile in all the world. He sees the village shining ahead of him, but at nightfall it is no nearer than it was at daybreak. That was the length of the mile for Christian; for Worldly Wiseman it was indeed but a short distance. Morality meant for him a very different thing from what it meant for the other. It is astonishing how different are the moral ideals of different men. A very interesting list of favourite types of ideal manhood could be culled from the works of popular authors, and whatever else might be found, there can be no question of the abundant room for varieties within such a list. Worldly Wiseman's would be little more than a set of notes of commercial expediencies and social proprieties. There is nothing in all this, however, which in any way opposes a strong emphasis upon the ethical side of Christianity. In a very real sense it is always true that character is salvation. The morality of the *Pilgrim's Progress* is severe throughout. The question is not one of morality as an alternative to conversion, but, on the contrary, of how a real and stable morality may be reached.

This view of Worldly Wiseman's morality is borne out by his two friends Legality and Civility. The letter of the law, a polite sense of propriety whose exactness is prompted not by conscience but by fashion, offers as low a standard as any worldling could desire. There is no more favourite charter for the right of free living than the habit of asking, in connexion with each deed, whether polite society will admit or forbid it. That is Civility's code. Legality's is, if anything, subtler. It asks in connexion with each detail, Can this be pronounced positively wrong? All which does not come under that category is allowable. These are both standards of conduct unsanctioned by Heaven. They are unfit for honourable men, and are dear to the heart only of pedants and bargainmongers in morality. The chances are that those who dwell in this village, and make friends of these men, will end by giving hush-money to conscience, and adopting as their whole moral code the one great commandment, Thou shalt not be found out.