

"DOES THE BIBLE SANCTION POLY-GAMY?"

Discussion between Professor Orson Pratt and Dr. J. P. Newman, Chaplain of the U. S. Senate.

First Day.

AT two o'clock yesterday afternoon Professor Pratt and Dr. Newman, with their friends and the umpires, met in the stand of the New Tabernacle; the two former gentlemen prepared for the discussion of the question "Does the Bible sanction Polygamy?" An audience of three or four thousand—at least half of which was of the gentler sex assembled to hear the discussion. At a few minutes past two, the audience was called to order by Judge C. M. Hawley, the umpire of Dr. Newman on the Negative, he (fortunately we presume) being absent from his district at this juncture—and Elder John Taylor offered the opening prayer. The same umpire, who somehow or other had got the idea that he was the master of ceremonies on the occasion and that he would relieve the umpire of the Affirmative side from all his duties, then introduced Professor Pratt to the audience, which, as the Professor was so well known and the umpire almost unknown, created a slight titter, which, however, speedily subsided, and the assemblage listened quietly to the

ARGUMENT OF PROFESSOR ORSON PRATT.

I appear before this audience to discuss a subject that is certainly important to us, and no doubt is interesting to the country at large, namely: the subject of plurality of wives, or, as the question is stated: "Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy?" I would state, by way of apology to the audience, that I have been unaccustomed, nearly all my life, to debates. It is something new to me. I do not recollect of ever having held more than one or two debates, in the course of my life, on any subject. I think the last one was some thirty years ago, in the city of Edinburgh. But, I feel great pleasure this afternoon in appearing before this audience for the purpose of examining the question under discussion. I shall simply read what is stated in the Bible, and make such remarks as I may consider proper upon the occasion.

I will call your attention to a passage which will be found in Deuteronomy the 21st Chapter, from the 15th to the 17th verse:

"If a man have two wives, one beloved and another hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the first-born be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved first-born before the son of the hated, which is indeed the first-born: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the first-born, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath; for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the first-born is his."

Here is a law, in the words of the Great Law-giver himself, the Lord who spake to Moses; and it certainly must be a sanction of a plurality of wives, for it is given to regulate inheritances in families of that description, as well as in families wherein the first wife may have been divorced, or may be dead; wives contemporary and wives that are successive. It refers to both classes; and inasmuch as plurality of wives is no where condemned in the law of God, we have a right to believe from this law that plurality of wives is just as legal and proper as that of the marriage of a single wife. This is the ground we are forced to take until we can find some law, some evidence, some testimony to the contrary. They are acknowledged as wives in this passage, at least—"If a man have two wives." It is well known that the house of Israel at that time practiced both monogamy and polygamy. They were not exclusively monogamists; neither were they exclusively polygamists. There were monogamic families existing in Israel in those days, and therefore in the Lord giving this He referred not only to successive wives where a man had married after the death of his first wife, or if the first wife had been divorced for some legal cause, but to wives who were contemporary, as there were many families in Israel, which can be proved if necessary, that were polygamists. I might here refer, to the existence of this

principle concerning the rights of the first-born in monogamic and polygamic families prior to the date of this law. This seems to have been given to regulate a question that had a prior existence, I will refer, before I proceed from this passage, to the monogamic family of Isaac, wherein we have the declaration that Esau and Jacob, being twins, had a dispute, or at least an ill-feeling, on the part of Esau, because Jacob at a certain time had purchased the right of the first-born—that is his birth-right. The first-born, though twins and perhaps a few moments intervening between the first and second, or only a short time, had rights, and those rights were respected and honored centuries before the days of Moses. This was a monogamic family, so far as we are informed; for if Isaac had more than one wife, the Bible does not inform us. We come to Jacob who was a polygamist, and whose first-born son pertained to the father and not to the mother. There were not four first-born sons to Jacob who were entitled to the rights of the first-born, but only one. The first-born to Jacob was Reuben, and he would have retained the birth-right had he not transgressed the law of heaven. Because of transgression he lost that privilege. It was taken from him and given to Joseph, or rather to the two sons of Joseph, as you will find recorded in the fifth chapter of 1st Chronicles. Here then the rights of the first-born were acknowledged, in both polygamic and monogamic families, before the law under consideration was given. The house of Israel was not only founded in polygamy; but the two wives of Jacob and the two hand maidens that were also called his wives, were the women with whom he begat the twelve sons from whom the twelve tribes of Israel sprang; and polygamy having existed and originated as it were with Israel or Jacob, in that nation, was continued among them from generation to generation down until the coming of Christ; and these laws therefore were intended to regulate an institution already in existence. If the law is limited to monogamic families only, it will devolve upon my learned opponent to bring forth evidence to establish this point.

We will next refer to a passage which will be found in Exodus 21st chapter, 10 verse: (I suppose there are some gentlemen keeping time.) It may be well to read the three preceding verses commencing with the 7th: "And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed; to sell her into a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her. And if he hath betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. If he take him another wife, her food, her raiment and her duty of marriage shall he not diminish." Also the following verse, the 11th: "And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money." I think from the nature of this passage that it certainly does have reference to two lawful wives. It may be that objection will be taken to the word "wife"—"another wife"—from the fact that it is in Italics, and was so placed by the translators of King James, according to the best judgment they could form, taking into consideration the text. I do not intend at present, to dwell at any great length upon this passage, merely declaring, that this does sanction plurality of wives, so far as my judgment and opinion is concerned, and so far as the literal reading of the scriptures exhibit, it does sanction the taking of another wife, while the first is still living. If this word "wife" could be translated "woman" that perhaps might alter the case, providing it can be proved that it should be so from the original, which may be referred to on this point, and it may not. We have the privilege, I believe, of taking the Bible according to King James' translation or of referring to the original, providing we can find any original. But so far as the original is concerned, from which this was translated, it is not in existence. The last information we have of the original manuscripts from which this was translated, they were made in the form of kites and used for amusement, instead of being preserved. With regard to a great many other manuscripts, they may perhaps agree with the original of King James' translation, or they may not. We have testimony and evidence in the Encyclopedia Metropolitana that the original manuscripts contain a vast number of readings, differing materially one from the other. We have this statement from some of

the best informed men, that in several instances it has been stated that there are 30,000 different readings of these old original manuscripts from which the Bible has been translated. Men might dispute over these readings all the day, of their lives and there would be a difference of opinion, there are so many of them. This, then, is another law, regulating, in my estimation, polygamy.

I will now refer to another law on the subject of polygamy, in the 25th chapter of Deuteronomy—I do not recollect the verse, but I will soon find it—it commences at the 5th verse. "If brethren dwell together"—Now, it is well enough in reading this to refer to the margin, as we have the privilege of appealing to it, so you will find in the margin the words "next kinsman," or "brethren." "If brethren—or next kinsmen—dwell together—

"If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her.

"And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel.

"And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.

"Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her;

"Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house.

"And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed."

It may be asked, What has this to do with polygamy? I answer that as the law is general, it is binding upon brethren and upon all near kinsmen dwelling together. Not unmarried brethren, or unmarried kinsmen, but the married and unmarried. The law is general. If it can be proved from the original, or from any source whatever, that the law is not general, then the point will have to be given up. But if that cannot be proven, then here is a law that not only sanctions polygamy, but commands it; and if we can find one law where a command is given, then plurality of wives would be established on a permanent footing, equal in legality to that of monogamy. This law of God absolutely does command all persons, whether married or unmarried, it makes no difference—brethren dwelling together, or near kinsmen dwelling together—which shows that it is not unmarried persons living in the same house that is meant, but persons living together in the same neighborhood, in the same country in Israel; as it is well known that Israel in ancient days did so dwell together; and the law was binding upon them. This was calculated to make a vast number of polygamists in Israel from that day until the coming of Christ. And the Christian religion must have admitted these polygamists into the Church, because they would have been condemned if they had not observed this law. There was a penalty attached to it, and they could not be justified and refuse to obey it. Hence there must have been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of polygamists in Israel, when Jesus came, who were living in obedience to this law and who would have been condemned if they had disobeyed it. When the gospel was preached to them, if they could not have been admitted into the Christian Church without divorcing their wives, God would have been doing them wrong, for if they, through their obedience to God's law, should have been cut off from the gospel, would it not have been both inconsistent and unjust? But as there is no law either in the Old or New Testament against polygamy, and as we here find polygamy commanded, we must come to the conclusion that it is a legal form of marriage. We cannot come to any other conclusion; for it stands on a par with the monogamic form of marriage; consequently, wherever we find either righteous men or wicked men, whatever may be their practices in the course of their lives, it does not affect the legality of their marriage with one wife or with two wives.

We may refer you to Cain who had but one wife, so far as we are informed. He was a monogamist. He was also a very wicked man, having killed his own brother. We find he was driven out into the land of Nod. Of course, as the Lord had not created any females

in the land of Nod, Cain must have taken his wife with him, and there was born a son to him in that land. Shall we condemn monogamy and say it was sinful because Cain was a murderer? No; that will never do. We can bring no argument of this kind to destroy monogamy, or the one wife system, and make it illegal. We come down to the days of Lamech. He was another murderer. He happened to be a polygamist; but he did not commit his murder in connection with polygamy, so far as the scriptures give any information. There is no connection between the law of polygamy and the murder he committed in slaying a young man. Does that, therefore, invalidate the marriage of two persons to Lamech? No; it stands on just as good ground as the case of Cain who was a monogamist and a murderer also.

Adam was a monogamist. But was there any law given to Adam to prevent him taking another wife? If there was such a law, it is not recorded in King James' translation. If there be such a law recorded, perhaps it is in some of the originals that differ so much from each other. It may be argued in the case of Adam that the Lord created but one woman to begin the peopling of this earth. If the Lord saw proper to create but one woman for that purpose, he had a perfect right to do so.

The idea that that has any bearing upon the posterity of Adam because the Lord did not create two women would be a very strange idea indeed. There are a great many historical facts recorded concerning the days of Adam that were not to be examples to his posterity. For instance, he was ordered to cultivate the garden of Eden—one garden. Was that any reason why his posterity should not cultivate two gardens? Would any one draw the conclusion that, because God gave a command to Adam to cultivate the garden of Eden, to dress it and keep it, that his posterity to the latest time should all have one garden each and no more? There is no expression of a law in these matters; they are simply historical facts. Again, God gave him clothing on a certain occasion, the Lord himself being the tailor,—clothing to cover the nakedness of Adam and of Eve his wife; and this clothing was made from the skins of beasts. This is a historical fact. Will any one say that all the posterity of Adam shall confine their practice in accordance with this historical fact? or that it was an expression of law from which they must not deviate? By no means. If the posterity of Adam see fit to manufacture clothing out of wool, or flax, or cotton, or any other material whatever, would any one argue in this day that they were acting in violation of the law of the Divine Creator, of a law expressed and commanded in the early ages? Why, no. We should think a man had lost all powers of reason who would argue this way. As our Delegate remarked in his speech, Adam had taken all the women in the world, or that were made for him. If there had been more, he might have taken them; there was nothing in the law to limit him. (The speaker here inquired concerning the time, and learned he had twenty-seven minutes left.)

I would like to dwell upon this longer, but I have many other passages to which I wish to draw your attention. The next passage to which I will refer you will be found in Numbers, 31st chapter, 17th and 18th verses. This chapter gives us a history of the proceedings of this mixed race of polygamists and monogamists called Israel, at a certain time. They went out to battle against the nation of Midianites; and having smote the men, they took all the women captives, as you will find in the 9th verse. Commencing at the 15th verse:

"And Moses said unto them have ye saved all the women alive?" "Behold these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord."

You will recollect the case of some Midianitish women being brought into the camp of Israel contrary to the law of God, not being wives; and Israel with them sinned and transgressed the law of heaven, and the Lord sent an awful plague into their midst for this transgression. Now, here was a large number of women saved, and Moses finding they were brought into camp, said these had caused the children of Israel to sin; and he gave command: "Now, therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known man by ly-