

for, not to forbid that which is evil, but even to countenance and promote it, is being so far the author of it, and accessory to it in the highest degree. And shall we dare to say, or even think, that this is chargeable upon Him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look on iniquity? (Habbahuk i, 13.) God forbid.

"When God is upbraiding David, by the prophet Nathan, for his ingratitude to his Almighty benefactor, (2 Samuel, xii,) he does it in the following terms, verse 8: 'I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives unto thy bosom; and I gave thee the house of Israel and Judah, and if that had been too little, I would, moreover, have given thee such and such things.'

"Can we suppose God giving more wives than one into David's bosom, who already had more than one, if it was sin in David to take them? Can we imagine that God would thus transgress (as it were) His own commandment in one instance and so severely reprove and chastise David for breaking it in another? Is it not rather plain, from the whole transaction, that David committed mortal sin in taking another living man's wife, but not in taking the widows of the deceased Saul? And thus, therefore, though the law of God condemned the first yet did not condemn the second.

"Sixthly. When David took the wife of Uriah he was severely reprimanded by the prophet Nathan, but after Uriah's death he takes the same woman, though he had other wives before, and no fault is found with him; nor is he charged with the least flaw or insincerity in his repentance on that account. The child which was the fruit of his intercourse with Bathsheba, during her husband Uriah's life, God struck to death with His own hand. (2 Samuel, xii, 15.) Solomon, born of the same woman, begotten by the same man, in the state of plurality of wives, is acknowledged by God himself as David's lawful issue, (1 Kings, v, 5,) and as such set upon his throne. The law which positively excluded bastards, or those born out of lawful wedlock, from the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation, (Deuteronomy, xxiii, 2,) is wholly inconsistent with Solomon being employed to build God's temple, being the mouth of the people to God in prayer, and offering sacrifices in the temple at its dedication, unless David's marriage with Bathsheba was a lawful marriage; Solomon, the lawful issue of that marriage; consequently a plurality of wives is no sin, either against the primary institution of marriage or against the seventh commandment. But so far from Solomon being under any disqualification from the law above mentioned, he is appointed by God himself to build the temple. (1 Kings, viii, 19.) His prayer is heard, and the house is hallowed (chapter ix, 3) and filled with such glory that the priests could not stand to minister. (Chapter viii, 11.) Solomon, therefore, as well as Samuel, stands as demonstrable proof that a child born under the circumstances of a plurality of wives is no bastard—God himself being the judge, whose judgment is according to truth.

"A more striking instance of God's thoughts on the total difference between a plurality of wives and adultery does not meet us anywhere with more force and clearness, in any part of the sacred history, than in the account which is given us of David and Bathsheba and their issue.

"When David took Bathsheba, she was another man's wife; the child which he begat by her in that situation was begotten in adultery—and the thing which David had done displeased the Lord. (2 Samuel xi, 27.) And what was the consequence? We are told (2 Samuel, xii, 1) the Lord sent Nathan, the prophet, unto David. Nathan opened his commission with a most beautiful parable, descriptive of David's crime; this parable the prophet applies to the conviction of the delinquent, sets it home upon his conscience, brings him to repentance, and the poor penitent finds mercy—his life is spared. (Verse 13.) Yet God will vindicate the honor of His moral government, and that in the most awful manner: the murder of Uriah is to be visited upon David and his house. The sword shall never depart from thine house. (Verse 10.) The adultery with Bathsheba was to be retaliated in the most aggravated manner. 'Because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, to be thy wife, thus saith the Lord, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives and give them unto thy neighbor before thine eyes; and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of the sun; for thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.' All this was shortly fulfilled in the rebellion and incest of Absalom. (Chapter xi, 21, 22.) And this was done in the way of judgment on David for taking and defiling the wife of Uriah, and was included in the curses threatened (Deuteronomy xxxviii, 30) to the despisers of God's laws.

"As to the issue of David's adulterous commerce with Bathsheba, it is written, (2 Samuel, xii, 15,) the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. What a dreadful scourge this was unto David, who could not but read his crime in his punishment, the following verses declare, wherein we find David almost frantic with grief. However, the child's sickness was unto death, for (verse 18) on the seventh day the child died.

"Now let us take a view of David's act in taking a plurality of wives, when, after

Uriah's death, he added Bathsheba to his other wives. (Verses 24, 25.) And David comforted Bathsheba, his wife, and went in unto her and lay with her, and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon, (that maketh peace and reconciliation or recompense,) and the Lord loved him. Again we find Nathan, who had been sent on the former occasion, sent also on this, but with a very different message. And He (the Lord) sent by the hand of Nathan, the prophet, and he called his name Jedediah, (Dilectus Domini—Beloved of the Lord) because of the Lord—i. e., because of the favor God had towards him. (Verse 24.)

"Let any read onward through the whole history of Solomon; let them consider the instances of God's peculiar favor towards him already mentioned, and the many others that are to be found in the account we have of him; let them compare God's dealings with the unhappy issue of David's adultery and this happy offspring of Bathsheba, one of his many wives, and if the allowance and approbation of the latter doth not as clearly appear as the condemnation and punishment of the former, surely all distinction and difference must be at an end, and the Scripture itself lose the force of its own evidence.

"Seventhly. I have mentioned the law being explained by the prophets. These were extraordinary messengers, whom God raised up and sent forth under a special commission, not only to foretell things to come, but to preach to the people, to hold forth the law, to point out their defections from it, and to call them to repentance, under the severest terms of God's displeasure unless they obey. Their commission in these respects we find recorded in Isaiah lviii, 1: 'Cry aloud, spare not, lift up the voice like a trumpet; show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.' This commission was to be faithfully executed at the peril of the prophet's own destruction, as appears from the solemn charge given to Ezekiel, chapter iii, 18: 'When I say to the wicked, thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand.'

"These prophets executed their commissions very unfaithfully towards God and the people, as well as most dangerously for themselves, if a plurality of wives was sin against God's law, for it was the common practice of the whole nation, from the prince on the throne to the lowest of the people; and yet neither Isaiah, Jeremiah, nor any of the prophets, bore the least testimony against it. They reprov'd them sharply and plainly for defiling their neighbors' wives, as Jeremiah, v, 8; xxix, 23, in which fifth chapter we not only find the prophet bearing testimony against adultery but against whoredom and fornication, (verse 7,) for that they assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. Not a word against polygamy. How is it possible, in any reason, to think that this, if a sin, should never be mentioned as such by God, by Moses, or any of the prophets?

"Lastly. In the Old Testament, plural marriage was not only allowed in all cases, but in some commanded. Here, for example, is the law, (Deut. xxv, 5-10): '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 first-born that she beareth shall succeed in the name of the brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel,' etc.

"This law must certainly be looked upon as an exception from the general law, (Leviticus xviii, 16,) and the reason of it appears in the law itself, namely: 'To preserve inheritances in the families to which they belonged.'

"* * * "As there was no law against plurality of wives, there was nothing to exempt a married man from the obligation of marrying his brother's widow. * * * For let us suppose that not only the surviving brother, but all the near kinsmen, to whom the marriage of the widow and the redemption of the inheritance belonged were married men—if that exempted them from the obligation of this law—as they could not redeem the inheritance unless they married the widow, (Ruth iv, 5)—the widow be tempted to marry a stranger—to put herself and the inheritance into his hands—and the whole reason assigned for the law itself, that of raising up seed to the deceased, to preserve the inheritance in his family, that his name be not put out of Israel—fall to the ground. For which weighty reasons, as there was evidently no law against a plurality of wives, there could be no exemption of a man from the positive duty of this law because he was married. As we say, 'Ubi cadit ratio, ibi idem jus.'

"I will now hasten to the examination of a notion, which I fear is too common among us, and on which what is usually said and thought on the subject of a plurality of wives is for the most part built; I mean that of representing Christ as appearing in the world as 'a new lawgiver, who was to introduce a more pure and perfect system of morality than that of the law which was given by Moses.' This horrible blasphemy against the holiness and perfection of God's law, as well as against the truth of Christ, who declared that He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it—this utter contra-

diction both of the law and Gospel—was the foundation on which the heretic, Socinus, built all his other abominable errors.

"Christ most solemnly declared that heaven and earth could sooner pass than one jot or tittle pass from the law. Think not, said He, that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. So far from abrogating the law, or rule of life, which had been delivered by the hand of Moses, or setting up a new law in opposition to it—He came into the world to be subject to it in all things, and so to fulfil the whole righteousness of it. (Mat. iii, 15.) To magnify and make it honorable, (Isaiah xlii, 21,) even by His obedience unto death. Speaking in the spirit of prophecy, (Psalms xl, 8,) He says: 'Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart.' And in His public ministry, how uniformly doth He speak the same thing?

"If we attend to our Saviour's preaching, and especially to that heavenly discourse delivered from the Mount, we shall find Him a most zealous advocate for the law of God, as delivered by Moses. We shall find Him stripping it of the false glosses, by which the Jewish rabbis had obscured or perverted its meaning, and restoring it to that purity and spirituality by which it reacheth even to the thoughts and intents of the heart. For instance, when He is about to enter upon a faithful exposition of the moral law, lest His hearers should imagine that what He was about to say was contrary to the law of the Old Testament, being so different from the teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees, He prefaces His discourse with those remarkable words, (Matthew xvii, 17-20): 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil; for verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law till all be fulfilled.'

"Let us take a near and more critical view of those passages of the gospels in which Christ is supposed to condemn the plurality of wives as adultery. The first which I shall take notice of as introductory to the rest, is Matthew v, 31, 32: 'It hath been said, whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery, and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery.'

"The next Scripture to be further considered is Matthew xix, 9: 'I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife (except it be for fornication,) and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marieth her which is put away committeth adultery.'

"Christ was surrounded at this time by a great multitude of people, who, in principle, as living under the law of the Old Testament, were polygamists, and, doubtless, numbers of them were so in practice. Many there must have been among this great multitude of Jews who had either married two wives together, or, having one, took another to her and cohabited with both. Had our Lord intended to have condemned such practices, he would scarcely have made use of words which did not describe their situation, but of words that did. It is very plain that he that putteth away his wife by giving her a bill of divorcement could have nothing to do with the man who took two wives together, or one to another, and cohabited alike with both. But we are apt to construe Scripture by supposing persons, to whom particular things are said, were in the circumstances then in which we are now; but it was far otherwise; they had no municipal laws against plurality of wives as we have. So far from it, their whole law (as has been abundantly proved) allowed it. Which said law, and every part thereof, was, at the time Christ spake what is recorded in Matthew xix, 9, in as full force and efficacy as at the moment after Moses had delivered it to the people. He, therefore, could no more state a plurality of wives as adultery by the law of Israel than I can state it as high treason by the laws of England.

"Can it be imagined that Christ, so remarkable for His precision, so thoroughly accurate in all He said on every other point, should use so little in this as not to make himself understood by His hearers? Nay; that he should observe so little precision as not to describe an offence which we are to suppose Him to condemn. The most flagrant instances, the most obvious and palpable denigrations of a plurality of wives, cannot be understood from what He says. He that putteth away his wife by bill of divorcement, and marieth another, does not describe a man's taking two wives together and cohabiting with both; nor a man's having a wife and taking another to her and cohabiting with both. Such was the Old Testament plurality of wives—not the putting away one in order to take another.

"Now, if a plurality of wives were unlawful and, of course, null and void before God, then was not Christ legally descended of the house and lineage of David, but from a spurious issue, not only in the instances above mentioned, but also in others which might be mentioned. So that when Christ is supposed to condemn a plurality of wives as adultery, contrary to the institution of marriage, and to the seventh commandment, He must at the same time be supposed to defeat His own title to the character of the Messiah, concerning whom God had sworn to David, that of the fruit

of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on His throne. (See Acts ii, 30, with Psalms cxxii, 11.)

"The lawlessness of a plurality of wives must of course be established, or the whole of Christianity must fall to the ground, and Christ not be He that was to come, but we must look for another. (Matthew xi, 3.)

"In none of St. Paul's epistles, nor in the seven awful epistles which St. John was commanded to write to the seven churches in Asia, is a plurality of wives found among the crimes for which they were re-proved. Every other species of commerce between the sexes is distinctly and often mentioned; this not once, except on the woman's side, as Romans vii, 3; but had it been sinful and against the law on the man's side, it is inconceivable that it should not have been mentioned on both sides equally.

"Grotius observes, 'Among the Pagans few nations were content with one wife,' and we do not find the apostle making this any bar to church membership. It can hardly be supposed that if a plurality of wives were sinful—that is to say, an offense against the law of God—the great apostle should be so liberal and so particular, in his epistle to the Corinthians, in the condemnation of every other species of illicit commerce between the sexes, and yet omit this in the black catalogue, (chapter vi, 9, &c.) or that he should not be as zealous for the honor of the law of marriage, or of the seventh commandment, which was evidently to maintain it, as Ezra was for that positive law of Deuteronomy vii, 3, against the marrying with heathens. Ezra made the Jews put away the wives which they had illegally taken, and even the very children which they had by them; how is it that Paul, if a plurality of wives was sinful, did not make the Gentile and the Jewish converts put away every wife but the first, and annul every other contract?

"No man could have a fairer opportunity to bear his testimony against a national sin than the Baptist had; for it is said, (Matthew iii, 5): 'Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and among the number who were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins (verse 6,) there were many harlots.' (Chapter xxi, 32.) So that it is evident he did not spare to inveigh most sharply against the sin of fleshly uncleanness; had a plurality of wives been of this kind, he doubtless would have preached against it, which, if he had, some trace would most probably have been left of it, as there is of his preaching against the sin of whoredom, by the harlots being said to have believed on him: which they certainly would not have done any more than the Scribes and Pharisees, (Matthew xxi, 32,) if the preacher had not awakened them to a deep and real sense of their guilt, by setting forth the heinousness of their sin. He exerted his eloquence also against public aggressions, such as the extortion of the public officers of the revenue—the publicans—tax-gatherers—likewise against the oppressive methods used by the soldiery, who made it a custom either to take people's goods by violence, or to defraud them of their property, by extorting it under the terror of false accusation. These were public grievances, against which the Baptist bore such open testimony, that the soldiers and publicans came to him, saying: 'What shall we do?' This being the case, is it conceivable that a man of the Baptist's character, who was so zealous for the honor of the law as to reprove even a king to his face for adultery, should suffer, if a plurality of wives be adultery, a whole nation, as it were, of public adulterers, to stand before him, and not bear the least testimony against them? I do not say this is a conclusive, but is surely a strong presumptive argument, that in the Baptist's view of the matter, a plurality of wives, whoredom and adultery were by no means the same thing.

"While this system of a plurality of wives was revered and observed, we read of no adultery, whoredom and common prostitution of women among the daughters of Israel; no brothels, street walking, venereal diseases; no child-murder and those other appendages of female ruin which are too horrid to particularize. Nor were these things possible, which, since the revocation of the Divine system and the establishment of human systems are become inevitable. The supposing our blessed Savior came to destroy the Divine law, or alter it with respect to marriage, is to suppose Him laying a foundation for the misery and destruction of the weaker sex."

Rev. Messrs. Conybeare and Howson, clergymen of the Church of England, joint authors of "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul," published near the middle of the present century, in their commentary upon the passage in the epistle to Timothy, relative to the one wife of a bishop, say:

"In the corrupt facility of divorce allowed both by the Greek and Roman law, it was very common for man and wife to separate and marry other parties during the life of one another. Thus a man might have three or four living wives, or rather women who had all successively been his wives. * * * A similar code is [now] unhappily to be found in Mauritius; there * * * it is not uncommon to meet in society three or four women who have all been the wives of the same man. * * * We believe it is this kind of successive polygamy, rather than simultaneous polygamy, which is here spoken of as disqualifying for the Presbyterate. So Beza."