

PROTESTANT MINISTERS' ARGUMENTS FROM THE BIBLE IN FAVOR OF POLYGAMY.

We make the following extracts from a work published on "India, Ancient and Modern," by David O. Allen, D. D., Missionary of the American Board, for twenty-five years in India, etc. They are published in his work in an appendix devoted to the subject of Polygamy. This subject was taken into consideration by the Calcutta Missionary Conference, composed of Missionaries from various sects of England and America, and including Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists and Congregationalists, in consequence of the application of converts in India, who had been legally married to several wives and who had given credible evidence of their personal piety, to be admitted into the church. After frequent consultations and much consideration the Conference unanimously came to the following conclusion:

"If a convert, before becoming a Christian, has married more wives than one, in accordance with the practice of the Jewish and primitive Christian churches, he shall be permitted to keep them all, but such a person is not eligible to any office in the church."

The arguments which we quote below are advanced in Dr. Allen's work as a justification of this action of the Conference of Protestant Missionaries on the subject.

"To those who have doubts in respect to the intrinsic moral lawfulness of plurality of wives as it existed among the ancient Jews, and who wish further to examine this subject, the consideration of the following extracts from a work called 'Theophthora,' published anonymously many years ago in England, is recommended. The author of this work says:

"The best and fairest, and indeed the only way, to get at the truth, on this, as on every occasion where religion is concerned, is to lay aside prejudice, from whatever quarter it may be derived, and to let the Bible speak for itself. Then we shall see that more than one wife, notwithstanding the seventh commandment, was allowed by God himself, who, however others might take it, must infallibly know His own mind, be perfectly acquainted with His own will, and thoroughly understand His own law. If He did not intend to allow a plurality of wives, but to prevent and condemn it, either by the seventh commandment, or by some other law, how is it possible that He should make laws for its regulation, any more than He should make laws for the regulation of theft or murder? How is it conceivable that He should give the least countenance to it, or so express His approbation as even to work miracles in support of it? For the making of a woman fruitful who was naturally barren must have been the effect of supernatural power. He blessed, and in a distinguished manner owned, the issue, and declared it legitimate to all intents and purposes. If this be not allowance, what is?"

"As to the first namely, His making laws for the regulation of polygamy, let us consider what is written in Exo. 21: 10. If he (i. e., the husband) take him another wife (not, in so doing, that he sins against the seventh commandment, recorded in the preceding chapter, but), her food, her raiment, (i. e., of the first wife), and her duty of marriage, he shall not diminish. Here God positively forbids a neglect, much more the divorcing or putting away of the first wife, but charges no sin in taking the second.

"2dly. When Jacob married Rachel she was barren, and so continued for many years; but God did not leave this as a punishment upon her for marrying a man who had another wife. It is said, Gen. 30: 22, that God remembered Rachel; and God hearkened unto her, and opened her womb, and she conceived and bare a son, and said, God hath taken away my reproach. Surely this passage of Scripture ought to afford a complete answer to those who bring the words of the marriage bond as cited by Christ, Math. 19: 5—'They twain shall be one flesh'—to prove polygamy sinful; and should lead us to construe them, as by this instance and many others the Lawgiver himself appears to have done; that is to say, where a woman, not betrothed to another man, unites herself in personal knowledge with the man of her choice, let that man's situation be what it may, they twain shall be one flesh. How, otherwise, do we find such a woman as Rachel united to Jacob, who had a wife then living, praying to God for a blessing on her intercourse with Jacob, and God hearkening to her, opening her womb, removing her barrenness, and thus by miracle taking away her reproach? We also find the offspring legitimate, and inheritors of the land of Canaan; a plain proof that Joseph and Benjamin were no bastards, or born out of lawful marriage? See a like palpable instance of God's miraculous blessing on polygamy in the case of Hannah, 1 Sam. 1. and 2. These instances serve also to prove that, in God's account, the second marriage is just as valid as the first, and as obligatory; and that our making it less so, is contradictory to the Divine wisdom.

"3dly. God blessed and owned the issue. How eminently this was the

* This extraordinary work, though published anonymously, was generally understood to be written by the Rev. Martin Madan, Chaplain of the Lock Hospital in London. He was a man of some musical talent; he composed the tunes 'Denmark' and 'Denbigh'; the first is commonly sung to the hymn, 'Before Jehovah's awful throne'; the latter to that commencing with 'From all that dwell below the skies.' He was also the author of a translation of Juvenal & Persius, with notes, 2 vols. A commentary on the articles of Church of England; 'Thoughts on Executive Justice'; and 'Letters to Dr. Priestley.' He died in 1790.

† If polygamy was unlawful, then Leah was the only wife of Jacob, and none but her children were legitimate. Rachel as well as Bilhah and Zilpah were merely mistresses and their children six in number were bastards, the offspring of adulterous connection. And yet there is no intimation of any such views and feelings in Leah's family, or in Jacob's family, or in Jewish history. Bilhah and Zilpah are called Jacob's wives (Gen. 35: 2). God honored the sons of Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah, equally with the sons of Leah, made them the patriarchs of seven of the tribes of the nation, and gave them equal inheritance in Canaan.—D. O. ALLEN.

It was expressly commanded that bastard, or son of a woman who was with child by whoredom, of the Lord, even to his tenth generation (Leut. 23: 2). But we find Samuel, the offspring of polygamy, ministering to the Lord in the tabernacle at Shiloh even in his very childhood, clothed with a linen ephod, before Eli the priest. See this whole history, 1 Sam. 1. and 2. Who, then, can doubt of Samuel's legitimacy, and consequently of God's allowance of, and blessing on, polygamy? If such second marriage was, in God's account, null and void, as a sin against the original law of marriage, or the seventh commandment, or any other law of God, no mark of legitimacy could have been found on the issue; for a null and void marriage is tantamount to no marriage at all; and if no marriage, no legitimacy of the issue can possibly be. Instead of such a blessing as Hannah obtained, we should have found her and her husband Elkanah charged with adultery, dragged forth, and stoned to death; for so was adultery to be punished. All this furnishes us with a conclusive proof, that the having more than one wife with which a man cohabited, was not adultery in the sight of God; or, in other words, that it never was reckoned by Him any sin against the seventh commandment, or the original marriage institution, or any other law whatsoever.

(To be continued.)

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