

# PROTESTANT MINISTERS' ARGUMENTS FROM THE BIBLE IN FAVOR OF PATRIARCHAL MARRIAGE.

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 'Thelyphthora,' 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 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

\* 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 note, 2 vols.; "A commentary on the articles of Church of England;" "Thoughts on Executive Justice;" and "Letters to Dr. Priestly." He died in 1790.

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. i. and ii. 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 case with regard to Joseph, see Gen. 49: 22-26; to Samuel, see 1 Sam. 3: 15. It was expressly commanded that a bastard, or son of a woman who was with child by whoredom, should not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to his tenth generation (Deut. 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. i. and ii. 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."

"4thly. But there is a passage (Deut. 21: 15) which is express to the point, and amounts to a demonstration of God's allowance of a plurality of wives. 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, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath; for he is the beginning of his strength, and the right of the first-born is his. On the footing of this law, the marriage of both women is equally lawful. God calls them both wives, and He cannot be mistaken; if He calls them so, they certainly were so. If the second wife bore the first son, that son was to inherit before a son born afterwards of the first wife. Here the issue is expressly deemed legitimate, and inheritable to the double portion of the first-born; which could not be, if the second marriage were not deemed as lawful and valid as the first."

"5thly. To say that a plurality of wives is sinful, is to make God the author of sin; for, not to forbid that which is evil, but even to countenance

\* 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 Laban's family, or in Jacob's family, or in Jewish history. Bilhah and Zilpah are called Jacob's wives (Gen. 37: 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.

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 to think, that this is chargeable upon Him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look on iniquity? (Hab. 1: 13) God forbid.

"When God is upbraiding David, by the prophet Nathan, for his ingratitude to his Almighty benefactor (2 Sam. xii. he does it in the following terms:—ver. 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 it did not condemn the second?"

"6thly. 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 Sam. 12: 15). Solomon, born of the same woman, begotten by the same man, in a state of a plurality of wives, is acknowledged by God himself as David's lawful issue (1 Kings 5: 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, (Deut. 23: 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 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 8: 19.) His prayer is heard, and the house is hallowed (chap. 9: 3.) and filled with such glory, that the priests could not stand to minister (chap. 8: 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 Sam. 11: 27.) And what was the consequence? We are told, 2 Sam. 12: 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, ver. 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, ver. 10. The adultery with Bathsheba was to be retaliated in the most aggravated manner. Because thou hast despised me, and has 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, chap. 16, 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 (Deut. 28: 30) to the despisers of God's laws.

"As to the issue of David's adulterous commerce with Bathsheba, it is written, 2 Sam. 12: 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, ver. 18, on the seventh day the child died.

"Now, let us take a view of David's act of taking a plurality of wives, when after Uriah's death, he added Bathsheba to his other wives (ver. 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 recompence,) and the Lord loved him. Again we find Nathan the prophet, who had been sent on the former occasion, sent also on this, but with very different message. And He (the Lord) sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and he called his name Jediah (Dilectus Domini—Beloved of the Lord,) because of the Lord,—i. e., because of the favor God had towards him (ver. 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."

"7thly. 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 obeyed. Their commission in these respects, we find recorded in Isa. 58: 1, 'Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy 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 3: 18. When I say to the wicked, 'Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him no 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 the commissions very unfaithfully towards God and the people, as well as more 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 prime 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 proved them sharply and plainly in defiling their neighbor's wives, as Jer. 5: 8; 29: 23, in which fifth chapter not only find the prophet bearing testimony against adultery, but against whoredom and fornication (ver. 7.) that they assembled themselves in troops in the harlot's houses. Not a word against polygamy. How is it possible, in any reason, to think this, if a sin, should never be mentioned as such by God, by Moses, any one of the prophets?"

"Lastly. In the Old Testament plural marriage was not only allowed

\* Some have considered Malachi 2: 14, as a denunciation of a plurality of wives. But a careful comparison of these verses with the 11th verse and with the state of the Jews at that time, as described in Ezra 9 and 10 chapters, and Nehemiah 13: 23-31, will show that the prophet had then no reference to a plurality of wives, but was reproving the Jews for "having married the daughters of a strange god;" that is, heathen wives, which were strictly forbidden by the laws of Moses. Deut. 7: 3. Exodus 34: 16.—D. O. A.

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