

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING INNOVATIONS.

BY KNOXIAN.

"That is an innovation," says our conservative friend, when any change is proposed, and he generally says it with the air of a man who feels certain he has settled the matter. Well, supposing it is. Your first baby was an innovation. Webster defines an innovation to be "Change made by the introduction of something new." Every law, custom, rite and practice in existence was an innovation when first introduced. The very customs that extremely conservative people cling to so tenaciously were at one time innovations. That which they fight for now because it is old, was fought against years ago by the same kind of people because it was new. The innovations of one century become the good old things of the next. It is a little perplexing that the same class of people should denounce a change when made and not very long afterwards fight for the thing changed. Such a procedure would almost lead one to believe that the merits of the question are not taken into account and that mere age is the only thing considered. Now a custom is not necessarily good, simply because it is old. Drinking customs are old. Profane swearing is an old custom. It is a long time since men began to cheat. Lying began soon after the creation. Sin in a hundred forms is old. Satan is old. An old custom is not necessarily good any more than an old man is necessarily good. Some old men are terribly wicked.

Every man that ever did anything conspicuously good for God or humanity might be charged with introducing innovations. The Priests of Baal might have accused Elijah for introducing innovations on Mount Carmel. The fire test was certainly a new thing. Daniel figured as an innovator in Babylon. Every prophet or priest or king that broke up a system of idolatry might have been charged with innovation. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost was a decided innovation. No preacher in Jerusalem ever delivered a sermon like that before. The Twelve introduced an innovation when they asked the Church to elect deacons. The cry against the founders of Christianity everywhere and always was that they were overturning established rites and customs. That cry was put in a condensed form when they were charged with turning the world upside down. Turning the world upside down is an extensive and rather startling innovation.

Martin Luther was an innovator. So was John Knox. So was John Wesley. Dr. George Leslie Mackay introduced some innovations in Formosa.

Now we think we hear some good man say: "Oh there is no analogy between these cases and the case of a man who wishes to make changes in these modern times." Well, we admit the comparison does not go on all fours, but we do most emphatically assert that it is good in one particular: it shows that to shout "innovation" proves nothing in regard to any given question. Any proposed change should be considered on its merits and merely to say "innovation" is to say nothing.

The utter emptiness of the cry about innovations may be seen in another way. Railways are innovations, steamboats are innovations, telegraph lines are innovations, printing presses and reaping machines are innovations, coal oil lamps are innovations, the electric light is an innovation, daily newspapers are an innovation, improvements of all kinds are innovations when introduced. We live among innovations, work with innovations, make money out of innovations, enjoy innovations, and would feel that many of the comforts of life were withdrawn if the innovations were removed and we were forced back to the old state of things. Of course people who are pinched a little by any improvement are apt to cry out against the innovation. The proprietor of a line of stage coaches never likes to hear the whistle of the locomotive. A manufacturer of tallow candles is of course opposed to gas, and the gas companies are not in love with the electric light. A man who sells whiskey thinks the Scott Act a most outrageous innovation. Riel may come to the conclusion one of these days that the Gatling gun is a very dangerous Yankee innovation. He may even conclude that firing fifteen hundred shots a minute at him is *ultra vires, unconstitutional, incompetent, an interference with his rights, and a lot of other things*. But Riel is not the right

man to judge of such matters. When the material improvements mentioned were introduced somebody always shouted "innovation," which proves, not that needless and useless changes are good, but the mere cry of "innovation," in and of itself, is no reason why a proposed change should not be made.

Over against the very conservative people who contend against any change, no matter what its merits, there is another class, equally unreasonable and far more dangerous—the class who want to change everything. They fight against everything old just as the others fight against everything new, and with just as little reason. They never look at an old institution without feeling a burning desire to pull it down. They clamour everlastingly for change, just for the sake of change. They are uneasy, restless and dangerous. It gives them great delight to prove that their fathers were fools and their grandfathers asses,—propositions the truth of which we might almost infer from the character of the progeny. It grieves these people very much that we can't have a new sun every day and a new moon every night. They want a new Bible, and new standards, and a new church, a new way of salvation, and a new minister, and new elders and new managers, and new Sabbath school officers, and if they would tell the truth most of them want a new God. This last mentioned want is probably the parent of all the other wants. If they ever get to heaven, which is rather doubtful, unless greatly changed, they won't be there any time until they begin to clamour for changes. As between these people and the people who oppose every change there is not much to choose. Probably the people who cry "innovation" are the safer of the two. The right course lies between these extremes. A proposed change should be examined on its merits. The main question is not: "Is it old or is it new?" but "Is it on the whole the best thing to do now and here?" What a world of trouble would be saved if everybody kept this very elementary question before his mind!

MARRIAGE AFFINITY.

MR. EDITOR,—I am not better pleased with Dr. McKnight's exegesis of Lev. xviii. 16 than with the textual translation of Lev. xviii. 18 and the argument founded upon it. The Principal says: "Did the Mosaic law prohibit the marriage of a deceased brother's wife? It is commonly supposed that this is the meaning of Lev. xviii. 16. I believe the supposition is incorrect." And then he goes on to prove that it only prohibits sexual intercourse with a living brother's wife, or marriage with her should she be divorced, and that it does not apply to marriage with a deceased brother's wife at all. He says there are definite reasons for holding that deceased brother's wife is not referred to in the verse. I cannot accept this view of Lev. xviii. 16: "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife; it is thy brother's nakedness." The following are my reasons:

1. I feel curious to know whether Dr. McKnight would apply the same criticism to Lev. xviii. 8, "The nakedness of thy brother's wife shalt thou not uncover; it is thy father's nakedness." In the Hebrew verse 8 is identical with verse 16, *mutatis mutandis*. In other words, if the term "thy father" in the one, be applied to the term "thy brother" in the other, they shall coincide and be equal in every respect; like two lines which coincide at two points, they coincide altogether.

And should the Principal apply the same criticism to verse 8 by which he interprets verse 16, then I should feel curious to know how he would prove that the father of the miserable Corinthian who violated verse 8 was living at the time of the offence. For if he were not living at the time of the offence, was not Paul a little too rash in administering to the offender such a heavy and scathing denunciation and in ordering such severe discipline. (1 Cor. v. 1-5.)

2. I find seven prohibitory laws in a group in Lev. xviii., prefaced by solemn declarations concerning the divine authority by which they are promulgated, and followed by terrible warnings derived from the fate of the Canaanitish nations that had polluted and degraded themselves by the sins which these laws prohibit. Dr. McKnight well says that the subject "is not specially attractive." The seven laws are:

(a) The law of incest, verse 6-7; (b) the law of polygamy, verse 18, (c) the law of ceremonial separation for uncleanness, verse 19; (d) the law of adultery, verse 20; (e) the law of human sacrifices, verse 21;

(f) the law of sodomy, verse 22; (g) the law of bestiality, verse 23.

All these laws are based upon the common idea of the vileness and unnaturalness of the sins which they prohibit. These sins are very vile and odious, and, therefore, quite repugnant to the holy nature of the divine Legislator. Violations of these laws are so vile and unnatural and disgusting that even the light of nature, apart from any specific revealed legislation, ought to deter people from committing them. It is on this principle, I think, that we can realize the justice of the doom of the offending nations, whose fate was made a beacon to the children of Israel. And if the light of nature makes the breakers of these laws inexcusable, how aggravated is the sin of men who, under the full blaze of Gospel light, tamper with them?

But, besides being grounded on the common idea of vileness and repugnance to holiness, some of these laws are also based on specific grounds of their own. For instance, the specific ground of the law of incest is near kinship, or relationship within specified degrees of consanguinity and affinity; and the specific ground of the law of polygamy is vexation to the first and the lawful wife whose rights are violated by the introduction of a second wife within the family domain. Two queens cannot live in peace within the same bee-hive, neither can two women live in peace in a bigamous or polygamous state, if their minds have been enlightened by the truth of God. Ignorance, heathen environments and hardness of heart, may so far darken the intellect and crush the natural feelings of a woman that she may endeavour to content herself to live in such a state. But if she is enlightened she will be vexed; yea, more, if she is enlightened she will not tolerate it.

The 16th verse is part and parcel of the law of incest. The declaration of the ground of this law in verse 6 applies to both kinds of relationships; nor is there anything said in the body of the law, in connection with the specified degrees that come under the prohibition, to limit or modify the prohibition. Now plainly, the force of the prohibition within the consanguineous degrees is such that they constitute a bar to marriage forever. A man must never marry his sister or his daughter or his daughter's daughter. Nobody disputes this. There are also some degrees of affinity about which, I suppose, there is no dispute. A man must never marry his father's wife (verse 8); nor may a man ever marry the wife of his father's brother (verse 14); nor may a man ever marry his daughter-in-law, whether his son is living or dead. There is no limitation contended for in these cases. Now, I ask where is the warrant for suggesting or contending for a limitation of the force of the prohibition regarding a brother's wife? There is nothing in Lev. xviii. to warrant any such limitation. Dr. McKnight says that the expression, "it is thy brother's nakedness," requires the limitation of the prohibition to the lifetime of the brother. But the same reason is assigned for the prohibition in verse 14. The violation of it is the uncovering of the father's brother's nakedness; and the same reason is assigned in verse 8 also, "it is thy father's nakedness."

3. As to that part of the Doctor's argument which he founds on the levirate law, I see no force at all in it, and I think few, if any, will be influenced by it.

4. Should any one say that the term "wife" in the 16th verse indicates that the prohibition must be limited to the lifetime of her husband, he must again be referred to verse 8, where the phraseology is the same, and where no limitation must be allowed. But this is not all. It can be shown that the employment of the term "wife" here is quite in accordance with the *usus loquendi* of the Hebrew. When a woman has become the wife of a man, by Hebrew usage, she continues to be always spoken of as that man's wife. Ruth iv. 5—"Then, said Boaz, what day thou buyest the field at the hand of Naomi, thou must also buy it of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife (*esheth*) of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." Verse 10—"Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife (*esheth*) of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife." She is still called the wife of Mahlon, and will, in Hebrew usage, be the wife of Mahlon after she has also become the wife of Boaz. 1 Sam. xxvii. 3—"And David dwelt with Achish, at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David and his two wives, Abinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife." (*Esheth Nabal*.) See also Gen. xxxviii.