

MR. WARD AND HIS MARRIAGE.—To the Editor of the *Times*—Sir—Several of the newspapers have occupied themselves of late with my private affairs, and theological comments, I am told, have in some instances been made upon the circumstance that I am engaged to be married. I have no wish to examine the question how far in these comments the liberty of the press has been carried beyond its due limits, because in truth I am glad of the opportunity, which could hardly otherwise have been afforded me, of making a short and simple statement of my views on an important theological subject. I am not unmindful of the grave evils which may be apprehended from making newspapers the vehicle of such controversy; but, on the other hand, a person who undertakes the responsibility of writing a work which treats on subjects of such extreme importance as those considered in the *Ideal of a Christian Church*, seems to lie under a positive obligation to take measures, so far as in him lies, that a cause which he considers inexpressibly important may not suffer detriment through a misapprehension which a few words from him might remove. Whereas, then, it appears that both friends and opponents have in innumerable instances conceived that there is some inconsistency between the sentiments contained in my work and the announcement that has been recently made, I trust I shall not appear egotistical, or again unduly sensitive, if I beg your permission to lay before your readers the simple views which I have long entertained on the subject of religious celibacy. First, I hold it most firmly as a truth even of natural religion that celibacy is a higher condition of life than marriage. Secondly, I most fully believe that vows of celibacy, when duly taken, are perpetually obligatory; and thirdly, I incline most strongly to the opinion, that under a really effective church system, the priests would be, if possible, wholly selected from those who have taken such vows. On the other hand, it appears to me of the utmost importance to remember, that in cases where no vocation is felt for a life of celibacy, he who leads such a life forgets a great spiritual blessing, and he who makes a resolution, much more a vow, to lead such a life, involves himself in a fearful snare. I can hardly fancy a much more serious evil than that the Catholic doctrine ‘counsels of perfection’ should be revived, while the correlative Catholic doctrine on ‘vocation’ remains dormant; and any one incurs a most serious and grave responsibility who swell a current of public opinion which should tend to deter from marriage those who have not had the opportunity of carefully considering in which direction their real call lies. These have been very long my opinions, and more than one of my friends remember my having from time expressed them.

How any one can imagine that I have ever professed any vocation to a high and ascetic life, I am utterly at a loss to conceive. At the very outset of my work I mention that my dissatisfaction with the English system arises from ‘the absence’ in it ‘of such helps as may support an erring and most sinful mind in the most ordinary path of salvation’ (p. 8) and speak of myself as having ‘no more power in understanding and sympathising with moral goodness than would be given by acting for a single day with reasonable constancy, in disregard of other inclinations and with a single eye to duty’ (p. 5); while in the preface I most earnestly draw the attention of young readers to these disclaimers (p. viii.) I suppose persons consider these to have been merely graceful expressions of humility at starting, just as some with the kindest intentions have represented me as not fully realising the various severe expressions which are to be found in my work. But I am really in the habit of saying what I mean, whether I speak of the ‘deep and burning hatred’ which I feel towards the English Reformation, or of the very unfavourable light in which I regard my own moral attainments. One newspaper I am told, supposes that I must deny the validity of the English ordinations. This is really unintelligible. The strongest ultramontane Roman Catholic would repudiate the doctrine that priests are forbidden to marry, while I need not say no Ecclesiastical law exists on the subject in our own Church; on the other hand I do not at all deny, rather I deeply feel under a pure and really effective Church system, a person so wholly destitute as I am of such a vocation would never have been admitted into priests’ orders. In that part of the Roman Church (by far the greater part), where the discipline of priestly celibacy exists nothing can exceed the care that is taken of ascertaining in each individual case whether there be such a vocation. The only remaining question is, whether such a person as myself could have any right to express a confident opinion on theological subjects; in other words, whether I do not rate too highly the value of mere intellect in such inquiries. The Quarterly Reviewer of my work thinks the very reverse—that I rate it too highly. My own opinion of course is, that I rate it neither too highly nor too lowly. I think that a writer who, like myself, makes it a matter of the most conscientious duty never to deem a religious opinion false which religious men hold, until he has satisfied himself that they hold it either as an intellectual inference from, or any intellectual analysis of, their spiritual perception, and that it is itself no part of those perceptions—I think that such a writer may conceivably bring to light truths of the very utmost value and importance, however miserably deficient his moral character. Whether I have myself