

ON MARRIAGE WITH A DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER.

it, similar, in fact, to that which is indicated in the marginal note in our English Bibles. This note suggests, as an alternative translation, "one wife to another," instead of, "a wife to her sister"; reference being subjoined to the passage in 1 Samuel i. 2-6, concerning Elkanah's two wives, Hannah and Peninnah, of whom we read that the one provoked the other, and caused her to fret. Thus, by the revised translation—which is amply warranted, not only in itself, but by its agreement with Hebrew idioms in corresponding passages—this verse is found to embody a declaration of the mind and purpose of God against polygamy. It is true that Jewish practice did not conform to this rule: it is also true that, during the Mosaic, as also under the Patriarchal dispensation, God permitted a departure from it; but "from the beginning it was not so."

When Christ came, He lifted up a higher moral standard. This He did, not by introducing a new law, but by leading His disciples back to the old. He showed that because of the hardness of men's hearts, Moses had been allowed to sanction certain deviations from God's holy and perfect law; but this was only by sufferance, and for a time. Christ, as the Revealer of the Father's mind and will, then proceeded to point out the true law of marriage, at its original institution, in these words:—"At the beginning," God created man "male and female;" and "for this cause shall a man . . . cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh." (Matt. xix. 4-6.)

Since this reiteration by our Lord of the primary law of marriage, polygamy has been prohibited in all Christian nations, and may no longer be practised, either by Jew or Gentile, wherever Christian law prevails. In this very passage of St. Matthew's Gospel we have the clue whereby we may determine upon the propriety, or otherwise, of marriage with a deceased wife's sister.

Christ asserts a man and his wife to be

"one flesh." This is obviously a spiritual and not a physical truth, for in respect to their material substance their duality remains. But their union in marriage is effected by a spiritual action of the personal will, ratified by the law of God, which is so real and permanent that they are declared to have been "joined together" by God Himself, and may not, therefore, be "put asunder" by man's authority.*

The words in Genesis, as explained and enforced by Christ, are obviously the basis—not only of the injunctions against marriages within the prohibited degrees in the book of Leviticus—but likewise of all Christian legislation on the subject. Such alliances are expressly forbidden because it is "wickedness" for a man "to approach to any that is *near of flesh* to him to uncover their nakedness." We are, therefore, bound to believe that within whatever degree it is unlawful for a man to marry his blood relations, within the same degree he is forbidden to marry the relations of his deceased wife: and that within the same limits, a woman, by parity of reason, is forbidden to marry the relations of her husband. This, indeed, is the well understood conclusion of Christian antiquity; and the law as interpreted by Christian courts of justice, in various able judgments within the present century.

One further objection, however, must be noticed. It has been contended that the moral code, set forth in Leviticus, was designed merely for Jews, and is not binding

* We remember seeing in the lay press, the answer to a question propounded to Professor Owen, the well known physiologist, which has seemed to some to show that the expression "one flesh" has a physical as well as a spiritual meaning. The question asked him was whether a woman is so indelibly imbued with the characteristics of her husband that her offspring by a second husband are influenced thereby. The answer of Mr. Owen is said to have been as follows:—

"The interchange between the maternal and foetal circulations in placental mammals impresses so much of the male's nature upon the female as the mixed product, the foetus, can impart. The evidence of this is shown by the reappearance of more or less of the father's character in subsequent offspring of other male parentage. Observations of this fact may have suggested the high value set on the virginity of a wife by various ancient races of mankind. After a woman has conceived she and her husband literally become one flesh (as the Bible asserts they do), and in the course of years they resemble each other in some slight degree." We are not prepared to say that the prohibitions in Leviticus warrant the assertion that this view explains all the difficulties of the subject, but it is at least an interesting addition to the learning on this much vexed question.—*Eds. C. L. J.*