

pearance on earth, as had been predicted by the prophet Malachi. In answer to a question to that effect, he denied that he was the prophet Elijah himself, and gave no satisfaction to any intimation of his being the personage Malachi really intended. The Lord, however, told the people expressly that if they would receive it, St. John the Baptist was the Elias that was to come. But it is not without reason that many eminent men have believed that a more literal fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy is yet in the dim and distant future; and that Elijah the prophet will himself personally appear before the second advent of Messiah. Inasmuch as the Lord has shown that a sufficient fulfilment of the prophecy has already taken place, we can only point to a more literal fulfilment as, at the most, a probability.

St. John the Baptist's preaching was of a character to prepare the men of that day for a reception of Christ. But his mission was not to that age only. The subject of his preaching, Repentance, is that which, in every age, is essential to a reception of Christ as a Saviour. And thus he answered in his mission to the declaration he made, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord';" and when they asked him if he were not Elijah himself, nor the Christ, neither that prophet, why he should presume to administer a baptism which might seem to initiate into a new religion, he explained that his baptism was the merest symbol of that repentance which was necessary for all men; that it differed thus in its very essence from a Christian sacrament, which is a means of grace; that he was to be followed by One Who would succeed him in the order of human life, but Who has existed when he had no existence. The Holy Ghost had taught him Who Jesus was. His business from that moment forward was to forget himself, to point to the Lamb of God, Who should take away the sin of the world; and when, at a later date, some of John's disciples complained that Jesus baptised, and that all men were flocking to him, the Baptist answered that this was it should be. He was not the bridegroom of the Church of the future. He was the Bridegroom's friend, whose business it was to make all things ready for the bridal procession, to rejoice in the joy of another, and to disappear when he had fulfilled his mission; and so it was a simple announcement of a fact, when he said,—"He must increase, but I must decrease." When the sun arose the morning star had done its work of ushering in the day.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

THERE is no reason for doubting that the 25th day of December was the day of Christ's nativity. There is the fact that about a hundred years after the death of St. John, this was the received date of the Incarnation of the Redeemer of the world. And then, also, the appearance of the angels to the shepherds who were watching their flocks by night, near the town of Bethlehem, points to the same season of the year; for had the event taken place earlier in the autumn, or the summer, the shepherds with their flocks would have been further from the town than they evidently were, and had it taken place further on in the winter, the flocks would not have been in the fields at night.

It is also most fitting that the season marked out by angels in the way which St. Luke describes in his Gospel, such as had not been heard on earth since the creation, should also be observed as

a time of festive gladness by the Church throughout the world. Christ may be said to have instituted the festival when He sanctified the day by then first revealing His human nature to the eyes of mankind. The holy angels recognized its separation forever as a day of days, when they proclaimed the glory that was then offered to God in the Highest Heaven by the restoration of perfect manhood in the Virgin-born Jesus; and the peace that was brought among men of upright intention on earth, through the reunion of their nature to God. The entire universe has since proclaimed it as the single point of history in which every age, every country, every man that ever lived, has an interest. All the pages of inspiration point to the birth of our Lord as the central point on which everything there recorded turns. A multitude of important changes has taken place on every part of the earth's extended surface. Kings, empires, and vast regions have flourished and passed away; but as far as we are concerned in the present day, it is extremely difficult to discover in what way we are, in any respect, affected by the result, although past generations were influenced by these events to a large extent. But the astonishing event which we commemorate on Christmas Day is one the interest of which is universal and unfading. We are as much concerned in it as were the shepherds of Bethlehem, and infinitely more so than the shepherds themselves were aware of; and it will be of as much importance to the last generation of men that shall live on earth as it is to ourselves. In the birth of Christ, earth was reunited to heaven, and both were made one kingdom of the Divinity as they were at the first creation. In that event, One appeared, Who as His own single person was God, belonging to Heaven, and Man, belonging to Earth. The event has formed the centre of human history: the point of time to which all the past ages look forward and to which all succeeding ages look back. Beyond the immediate influence of the Church, therefore, Christmas gladness is reflected in the world around. Unity and fellowship, happiness and peace belong especially to this happy season, and are universally recognized in connection with it.

THE MARRIAGE LAW.

THE attempt which has been made, and will undoubtedly be renewed, to introduce a change in the marriage law of this country, must be regarded by every intelligent and devout member of our Church, with deep regret and most serious apprehension. We are thankful to know that the proposed change is regarded with the same feelings by very many who do not belong to the Church of England; the sympathy and co-operation of such persons is to be highly valued, not only because reverence for the word and law of God must ever be entitled to the cordial approval of all Christian men, but also because a unity of sentiment and conviction on this vital subject, between members of different religious bodies, will go very far to silence those, who would studiously misrepresent the opposition to any changes in the table of Prohibited Degrees, as proceeding from a narrow-minded ecclesiastical clique, devoted to obsolete prejudices, and antiquated restrictions on human freedom. The fact that such misrepresentation is made, and much more the fact that it is accepted as a correct view of the case, indicates great ignorance of the course which the Church of England took on this subject at the time of the Reformation. If this course were correctly understood, it can scarcely be imagined, that very many, who profess

to be ardent admirers of the Reformation, and to entertain a profound reverence for those who took a distinguished part in it, should be, as they are, utterly indifferent, or actively hostile, to one portion, and that no important portion of the work which was at that time achieved by our Reformers. In the reign of Henry VIII, the English Church and state united to correct flagrant abuses in respect of marriage, by which the moral sense of mankind had long been outraged. The great aim of our Reformer was to make the laws of England, in this momentous point, at one with the law of God. In the attempted Reformation of the ecclesiastical laws, which was the work of Cranmer chiefly during the reign of Henry VIII, and Edward VI, we find (De Gradibus in Matrimonio prohibitis Cap. 3) the Divine law on the subject recognized as contained in the 18th and 20th chapters of Leviticus, and this law affirmed "to be binding on us and on all our posterity." It is then stated that "the precepts contained in these chapters are not peculiar to the Jewish commonwealth as certain persons dream, but have the same weight of authority, which our religion assigns to the Decalogue so that no human power can ordain anything in any wise contrary to them." Be it observed too that, in these days the "human power" which had made this presumptuous attempt, was not the civil, but the ecclesiastical power. For the document continues thus:—"Therefore the Roman pontiff is guilty of impiety in arrogating to himself this power; and they grievously wound their own consciences who seek, either from the Roman pontiff, or from any other person, such dispensations as they call them in this matter."

The Roman Catholic Church then affected to dispense with the Divine law, in certain cases, and on special grounds of expediency or policy; the state is now appealed to to grant dispensations, not special but general: not merely to exempt individuals, in particular cases, from the obligation of the Divine law, but to abrogate it, at least in some particulars, altogether. It is also worthy of note that, by a most just Nemesis, the claim which the Roman pontiff made to a dispensing power, forced those, who sustained him in this claim, when they were pressed by the argument that man cannot possibly dispense with the laws of God, to take refuge in the assertion that these laws, after all, were not divine. This is not the only instance in which ecclesiastical usurpation has sought to maintain itself at the cost of denying the authority of Divine laws.

It was not then for ecclesiastical law, as distinguished from law Divine, that the Church of England contended at the Reformation; on the contrary she sought to bring the law of the church into strict accordance with the law of God, partly by abrogating human additions to the divine law, which she justly regarded as unwarrantable restrictions of social freedom, but chiefly by utterly disallowing those immoral dispensations, by which society had been corrupted and the Church of God disgraced.

It might well have been supposed that in pursuing this righteous and noble course, and in thus returning into the plain and safe paths of obedience, the Church of England would not only have secured the sympathies of her people at the time, but would still be regarded with reverence by her children, as having carefully separated, for their sakes, between the sure work of God, and the vain traditions, by which it had been either corrupted or made of none effect.

The document from which we have quoted above proceeds to state all those points for which we now contend, and which are so recklessly assailed. 1st.,