

person who uses it—What do you mean by the law of nature!—do you mean the law written by the finger of God on our common nature? because, if you do, if you are going to quote that, you must prove that it agrees with His written law, for no two laws of the Almighty Legislator can thwart one another, and if I can show you that the written law says there was an abomination in all men, then the law of nature written by God in man's heart must say the same. But what is it that people commonly mean when they talk of the law of nature? I have uniformly found that it means their own predispositions—that the conclusion to which they have come is right. It means nothing more. Men are always this way arguing—always selecting parts of God's law which go against their own particular inclinations and temptations, and endeavouring to wear that law down until it suits their own case, by introducing licenses and private dispensations. This is the meaning of the "law of nature." It must be God's rule written in the heart of man if it is to mean any thing of truth. And then I say of this law that, in the words of the resolution, "it is dangerous to religion to alter the law of marriage," as abundantly confirmed by every argument that can be used. But there is another argument which I consider most important. One special ground which I have for wholly detesting the nature of the argument by which the advocates for a change of the law seek to maintain their opinion is this, that it is continually slipping back from the Christian standing-place into the old Jewish bondage. That is a grave charge to bring, but I can establish it in a single word. Amongst the newest arguments advanced by the most able, learned, and I believe religious advocates of the change, stands this, in monstrous prominence—"Yes, this is all very well, but you are not to deal with the two sexes as upon an equality; you must deal with the man in one way, and a woman in another." I say that that whole argument is a detestable piece of miserable sophistry. (Cheers.) What! stand up in a Christian community—amongst men whom Christ has made free—amongst those who have been taught the perfect equality of man and woman in the regenerate Church of Christ—and whisper to us that we are to go back to those miserable, half heathen, half Jewish fables, all of which are based in truth if you search it out—to tell us that woman is created for man's use and pleasure and not as a sharer with him of regeneration and of eternal salvation. (Cheers.) I can hardly conceive any set of arguments more fatal in truth to all real religion, in its power and in its purity amongst us, than those which have been introduced, not by accident, but of necessity, in order to support this despicable question. Then I may take the ground that this is fraught with danger to our religion, and I agree with the Vice-Chancellor in thinking that it is fraught with the greatest danger to our morals also. And for this plain reason—that I know nothing more certain to sap the morals of any country than to lower down the requirements of law to the invitations of appetite. It is a universal principle—once admit that your law is to forbid not what God has forbidden, but what man is able to observe, and you sap the very foundation of all moral power. And in this case indubitably what has been said already is perfectly true. Even if you grant this wretched relaxation, could you stop there? Does any man believe you could? Do the advocates of the change themselves even tell you so? This is the deceit commonly used in almost every question which involves downhill progress. You are told, "Concede this one thing, and all will be peace." But surely in vain the net is spread. It is openly stated by the men who want you to take this step, that instead of being the final step, it is only the beginning of a series. Why, only in the last debate in the House of Commons on the subject, a great statesman stood up and openly declared that if the alteration of the law which he advocated took place, it would be impossible to stop short, and that the change must go on to a still greater extent. Oh! what a lamentable utterance for a British statesman! How deplorable an exhibition of a man floating upon the placid edge of the mighty catarract which in a moment is going to whirl him into depths which he cannot fathom! What an instance of human weakness is the man who gives up the moral principle for an external cry, and then tells you he does not know how far it may carry him! And he is right. This is no theory, it is a certainty. It is the result of existing fact. It is a frightful fact, that at this moment, in this highly favoured land, there might be found advocates for legalising unions in the very closest blood relationship, even more in number, if the violation of the law is to be received as an argument for its alteration. I was rejoiced to hear the argument of the Vice-Chancellor. I was rejoiced to hear him say that when the advocates for the change contend that this is a poor man's question, they simply tell us great untruth as could be stated. He tells us that he has made an investigation in a certain district with which he is acquainted in this metropolis. I felt it my duty to make an inquiry in my diocese through the parochial clergy of three large counties, and I found that there was scarcely throughout the whole of those three counties a poor man's case, but that the people who desired the change were the lazy, the wealthy, and the somewhat sensual middle class. The result of the inquiry was that in no sense was it a poor man's question. But I also found one person after another saying, "We lament that the breaches of the moral law, which it is pretended would be prevented by this alteration, are more in number in cases of near blood relationship, than they are in the marriage of a sister to a deceased wife. Look at what you are to come to. The law of the church, based upon the unchanged word of God, is

to be tempered down until it meets the appetites of a degraded sensuality. The British law, based in this case upon that law of the church, is to be lowered down professedly because people require it, and will marry illegally if you do not make it lawful so to marry. I say that this will sap the very foundation of national morality. One thing more the resolution says—that any alteration of the law of marriage which should permit marriage with a wife's sister or any other person within the degrees now prohibited would be fraught with grave danger and injury to religion, morality, and family life. Does any man deny that statement? Does any man after hearing the admirable way in which the Vice-Chancellor pressed it upon you, doubt that there are certain things (for the most part the deepest laws of our nature) which it is not safe to erect in the face of fallen man in the shape of a bare and simple prohibition, but which you must fence round with the feelings which are generated in the mind by education, by religious impressions, and by the whole tone of decent society protesting against them as an abomination. And not only this. I beseech you to consider this—are such prohibitions as this, part of an unkind denial by God of what, if granted, would be for man's happiness; or are they a merciful hedge, to include a greater amount of happiness than could in any other way be secured, and therefore given where strength is most required to maintain it and fence it round? That is the whole point of the question. Is the saying that blood relations shall not intermarry—putting every thing else aside, is the forbidding of blood relations to marry a cause of personal happiness or unhappiness in society? Does not all the sanctity of family life depend upon this prohibition? Does not the fact of its being impossible for a brother and sister-in-law to marry, spread the blessed law of holiness, like some dew from Heaven, around every tenderly shooting plant in every English house and home? If all this depends upon the prohibition, is not the issuing of that prohibition a mark of love? When it is extended to the near of kin through the wife, is it a prohibition causing unhappiness or happiness? Does not every man know that it is just the foundation of the blessedness of family life in England that these reserved cases are so strictly enforced, and that therefore the liberty within them may be so perfect and so unsuspected? Is not this the climax of all? Is it not the teaching of our blessed Lord, that marriage, however debased by the ignorance of man's heart, however lifted up again to its true level—even under the dispensation which God himself gave to the Jews, because the spirit was not to them given, and because then Christ had not given to those who believe on him the marvellous gifts it has bestowed on them—yet, from the beginning, marriage in God's institution was the union of the one man with the one woman, so that they twain might become one flesh. Is not that the principle of marriage as published by our blessed Lord? And if so, how can any man dare to say that my wife's near blood is not my near kin, without going altogether astray from the first notion of what holy matrimony is? Now see the puerility of the argument of those who advocate this change of the law. We have proved to you that God's Word prohibits these unions—we have shown that the Church, from the beginning, has prohibited them. I will add one thing, and the only thing the Vice-Chancellor omitted saying on this point. How can any man possibly account for the Emperor Constantine, in the year 355, having prohibited these marriages by the Roman law, except through the influence of the church? They were allowed by the Roman law, but within thirty years of the empire becoming Christian, the law was altered in that respect. The Roman empire at that time was increasing in its corruption. The people were becoming so decayed in morals that it needed the irruption of the northern hordes to restore them to that manhood on which morality can alone be grafted; yet in their decomposing state of morality they issued this rescript changing the marriage law, declaring that those marriages which had hitherto been allowed were henceforth unlawful; and I challenge any man to a solution of that circumstance except on the principle that the church had introduced those restraints and had published them through the imperial law. Then, I say that Scripture condemns these marriages; that the church has condemned them from the beginning; that they are contrary to religion, and dangerous to morality. I ask you to look at the cumulative force of these two arguments, as to their effect on family life. What does it depend on for its blessedness? Does it not depend upon the blessing of God on that union, which is an appointed instrument of His goodness to man, of His presence being with the wedded couple in the trials, in the sorrows, in the distresses, and in the manifold crosses and troubles of married life? And if you are now asked to introduce into your marriage law a principle which is contrary to religion and to morals, what are you doing? Bidding God's presence withdraw itself from the then unbalanced fanes. What are you doing but, so far as you can, banishing that which makes Christian matrimony blessed? And if, as I believe, it is to the purity of England's family life, above all God's other blessings, secured to us in the unfathomable reservoir of His goodness by that holy institution, that we owe that moral and religious character upon which the position and prosperity of this nation depends, I do beseech you to set a front that no man can mistake against the proposition to alter it. Yes, when we have done with arguments we may venture to address your feelings. It is the apathy of those who believe this to be contrary to God's law that makes the danger. If there was half the zeal amongst those who believe the change to be contra-