

to be guided by the principle—Doth not nature itself teach you? There is a sort of instinctive feeling of repugnance among near relations to anything like conjugal connexion, which one can scarcely help regarding as implanted by our Creator for wise and benevolent purposes. In some cases indeed these seem to be wanting; but monsters are well known to exist in the world, and exceptions go to the confirmation of general rules. Again there are clearly certain physiological reasons against persons near of kin entering into the marriage relation. All scientific men are perfectly agreed about this; and the matter is well enough understood by those practically engaged in the rearing of the lower animals. In so far as the legitimacy of these considerations is admitted, they will tend to the formation of public opinion, but it would be plainly impossible to found on them any thing approaching to the exactness of a law. In how many cases, however, relating to what is moral and spiritual, have we only general principles for our guide? What law is there as to the precise degree of knowledge or of piety that is necessary to entitle one to membership in the Church? These hints are submitted with the utmost diffidence, but I hold strongly the opinion that whatever be the rule for the Church, she is under no obligation to regulate her discipline by the law of the land. May I be allowed to add that I conceive no limitations to the right of marrying ought to be acknowledged, without satisfactory reasons being produced in support of them. The *onus probandi* lies on the person who seeks to fix the boundaries. Mere cohabitation ought to be held as *prima facie* evidence of legitimate marriage, till the contrary be shown.

It is sometimes argued that the civil enactments of the country, on this subject ought not to be disregarded, because there is no necessity for persons within the forbidden degrees, entering into such alliance. If that merely mean that there are other unmarried men and women in the world, and that probably one of them might be obtained for a partner, it is doubtless true; but in my opinion, not much to the purpose. A man may conscientiously believe that he ought to marry. He may know a woman whom he considers beyond all others a suitable wife for him, and he may cherish a most passionate love for her. She may have corresponding views and feelings towards him. Now supposing that there is nothing in the way, but some arbitrary regulation of the government—that there is no ground for supposing that any moral considerations interfere, or that the will of God is in opposition—supposing in fact that marriage would be justifiable in another country, where the law is different, is there not in such a case a high christian expediency, amounting really to duty, that the parties should marry? The chief difficulty seems to be of a prudential kind, particularly a regard to the position of one's offspring. That, however, would be mitigated were respectable and pious people to acknowledge the marriage as genuine, notwithstanding its being disowned by the State.