

Dominion Churchman.

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LESSONS for SUNDAYS and HOLY-DAYS.

July 15.—EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Morning—1 Chron. xxix. 9 to 21. Acts xviii. 24 to xix. 21.

Evening—2 Chron. i. or 1 Kings iii. Matt. vii. 7.

THURSDAY, JULY 12, 1888.

MARRIAGE WITH A DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER.—The passage of the Bill authorizing marriage with a deceased wife's sister has raised a perfect hurricane of indignation in the English Church press which is also shared in by such anti-Church papers as the *London Times*, and many others. The vigour with which the action of the House of Lords is denounced, and the boldness of the condemnation passed upon the Prince of Wales, is without precedent in modern days. We give below a succession of extracts from a number of English papers, and we shall next week report briefly the speeches at a meeting called in London to protest against this Bill. We beg to call special attention to the addresses of the venerable and godly Earl of Shaftesbury, the most distinguished living member of the Low Church party, and of Prof. Milligan, an ex-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, a divine of great learning, as these two speeches utterly destroy the plea that the objection to these marriages is a mere relic of mediæval Church bigotry.

The *Scottish Guardian* says:—The division in the House of Lords, on Monday, makes it not improbable that we may soon have to face the fact that our law permits widowers to marry their sisters-in-law. And we may have to make up our minds how, as consistent Christian men, we ought to regard such a permission.

We are afraid that it can be regarded as nothing less than a flagrant violation of the principle which lies at the very foundation of the Christian conception of Marriage. Our Lord emphatically and formally enunciates, with all the stress of His Divine authority, the principle that by Marriage a man and His wife are made one—so much one, that no human power can lawfully authorize any cause of separation. If one necessary deduction from this principle is not that a man's wife's relations become his relations, her parents his parents, her brothers and sisters his brothers and sisters, and vice versa,—what deduction can be drawn from it at all?

The *Church Times* says:—That a very grave misfortune has befallen the country through the Second Reading in the Lords of the Bill for encouraging incest is an unhappy fact; and we deeply regret that it should have been due in a great measure to the pressure put by the Prince of Wales on the many young peers whom he can influence. That prelates so little endowed with abilities and learning as the Bishop of Ripon should be in favor of the Bill, is a strong argument in support of the actual law with all persons who are able to think. The cabal, whose ill-spent riches supported this Bill, would have collapsed if

it had not been for the Prince of Wales, at whose door, we repeat, the responsibility of the present crisis lies.

The proposed legislation is a plain violation of the Christian law of marriage, and no union contracted under it can ever be other than legalized incest, just as truly as the marriages of the Ptolemies with their sisters by blood were incest. The connexion between such marriages (so to speak) and frequent divorce is much closer than some of the speakers on the side of evil in the recent debate were willing to allow. For the two fundamental ideas underlying the proposed change in the law are simply these; that marriage is a purely civil contract, producing no permanent alteration in the status of those who enter into it, and that sexual passion, if entertained by any number of persons large enough to agitate loudly, is entitled to have its way. If those two principles do not lead up directly to that form of polygamy which consists in successive temporary unions, there is no force in logic. And nothing more disastrous to society can be possibly devised. Those who know what a canker is eating into domestic life in Prussia and in the United States will recognise, without wondering at, the cynical indifference to truth exhibited by those who appealed to those countries as furnishing no experiences unfavourable to the proposed change.

The *Church Review* says:—The decision of the House of Lords in favour of the legal recognition of incest is a dire misfortune, but it serves at any rate to dispel the widespread illusion that the Upper House is in any way of service to the Church. Hitherto many persons have been the victims of a lingering superstition that the interests of the Church were in some way bound up with the stability of our existing constitution. So far from that being the case, the Royal family is openly hostile, and the "Conservative instincts" of the hereditary chamber are strictly confined to the conservation of its own rights and privileges. The time may come when both the Throne and the House of Lords will find that in thus throwing contempt upon the Church and her laws they have alienated those whose support would have deserved more consideration. There can be no doubt but that the vote of Monday last will give a great impetus to that party in the Church which is resolved to have freedom at any price.

The *London Guardian* says:—Never was a serious unsettlement of a time-honoured law, outraging the strong religious convictions of vast numbers of our people, and trenching on fundamental social principles, without any pretence of logic or any premise of formality, accepted on so slight an attempt to show either reason or necessity. On the side of innovation—the legalizing such marriages—there was literally no solid argument. On the other side the speech of Lord Cairns remains unanswered because unanswerable—full of calm, irresistible reasoning, of powerful appeal to the moral and religious interests at stake, of refutation of the arguments from unreal or questionable hardships, of a just scorn of the plea that because a law is broken it ought to be repealed, of dignified emphasis on the conscientious objections of Christians, and especially of the ministers of the Church, to this tampering with the old and sacred marriage law. But where were the other speakers of the Episcopal bench? Ought they to have been afraid of the cries of "Divide," from those who wanted to get back to their dinners, after unsettling "with a light heart" the old law of Christendom? If there were (as indeed was the case) no arguments from the other side to overthrow, and little or nothing to add to what had been so well said by Lord Cairns and Lord Coleridge, still this was surely an occasion on which the fathers of the Church were bound to justify their place in the House of Peers by solemn and authoritative protest. It was the special duty of the Bishops to protest against this huddling up of so momentous a question. For

what do they sit in the House of Lords if it be not to repel unfair and unreasonable attempts to sneer away theological argument and ecclesiastical authority, as if they were matters fit only for a supercilious jest? The second reading, however, is carried by a narrow majority. What is to be done now?

The *London Times* says:—It may be very readily conceded that on one side, as on the other, a great many arguments have been put forth which do not bear critical examination. But the strongest of all arguments against the proposed change is that it deals in a superficial and wanton manner with a subject which lies at the very root of the whole social system. The law of marriage ought to be hedged about with all the sanctions that the most careful and serious treatment can give. The Bill to which the House of Lords gave its assent on Monday night is as far as possible from satisfying these reasonable conditions. It is notoriously the fruit of an agitation got up and kept up by a few wealthy persons, who have no other end in view than accommodating the law to their personal convenience. The proposed change is profoundly distasteful simply because it is a reckless and, we might almost say, impudent manipulation of the law upon a peculiarly delicate and solemn subject, in the interest of a small number of wealthy people cynically indifferent to everything beyond their own desires.

The *English Churchman* says:—Whatever may be the ultimate destiny of the Bill, there can be no question that the Church and the country owe much to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his clear and eloquent vindication of the doctrine of the Church on the marriage question, and for his determined opposition to the Bill. We are bound as Christians, as the Archbishop put it, "to look upon a Scriptural command as a moral one." Now this "Scriptural command," which ought to be our moral guide, the Archbishop finds not only in the controverted text of Leviticus, but, what is more to the point and purpose amongst Christians, in the words of our blessed Lord, "when He said that man and wife were one flesh, and when He applied it to the relaxations and corrupt practices of the Jewish people." To any fair-minded member of the Christian Church, the words of Christ here ought to be conclusive of the whole matter, as they appear to the Archbishop, although we regret that he did not go into a fuller exposition of them. Looking to the context as well as the text, it is abundantly clear that our Lord confirms the Levitical law respecting marriage—"wherefore they are no more twain but one flesh"—i. e., because it is written in the law, therefore they are no more twain. Again, our Lord affirms that this law was "from the beginning," and before Moses law, "and I say unto you." It is further noticeable that our Lord allows only one act of a woman, adultery, to cancel the inviolable bond of marriage, just because it is done in the very flesh which has by marriage been made "one flesh" out of twain, in the sight of God, and her adultery is to be punished by death, because she has sacrilegiously contaminated that "one flesh," which has been dedicated to God by holy matrimony. In our Lord's sight marriage is the holy union of two bloods, so that "the twain are made one flesh," and their previously divided being is ended and lost in their new existence as corporate beings before God. If so, then surely the wife's sister is the husband's sister. With respect to the argument of expediency, we contend that it should not be for a single moment considered, when and where the teaching of the Bible and the Church is so clearly laid down. But even if any consideration be given to such a plea, it is best answered in the words of St. Basil:—"Make not, O man, thy young children's aunt into their stepmother, nor arm against thy young children her who ought to stand to them in affection and duty instead of their mother; arm her not, I say, with implacable jealousies."