

tion." The overture is as follows: "Whereas, there is reason to fear that a renewed attempt may be made to secure the passage of the Bill to legalize marriage with a deceased wife's sister, or a deceased brother's wife, at a future session of Parliament, it is hereby overtured by the Presbytery of Toronto, that, in view of the position which the Presbyterian Church, in common with the Churches in Christendom, has taken upon this subject, and of the great importance of the interests involved, the General Assembly take the whole subject into consideration and adopt such measures as in its wisdom it may deem best to avert such legislation as that recently proposed."

Now, what are our legislators to think of such diverse opinions expressed by the two largest Protestant Churches in the Dominion? Well may they despair of receiving light from such sources. It is, however, gratifying to notice that the judgments of these venerable ecclesiastical bodies do not contradict one another. The Conference says that, "there is not any reason founded on holy Scripture or natural laws prohibiting such matrimonial alliances;" while the Assembly merely takes measures to avert such legislation, "in view of the great importance of the interests involved." Hence these judgments are not contradictory. Indeed, the Methodists might use the Presbyterian argument. "The great importance of the interests involved" is a statement so general as to be legitimately used on either side of the question. It is to be noticed also that the Assembly does not say that such marriages are opposed to any scriptural, natural, or even æsthetic law, but simply that they should not be legalized in view of the great importance of the interests involved. Those opposed to legalizing such marriages did not dare to say in their overture that they are contrary to Scripture. They evidently wished to secure the support of all that are opposed to such marriages on any ground whatever. It is well known that some in opposition are influenced by prejudices for which no satisfactory reason can be given, while others are influenced by sentimental considerations, and that comparatively few are influenced by reasons founded on scripture or on natural law. In their endeavours to unite all these parties, the authors of the overture were compelled to adopt such a general statement as leaves entirely out of view the merits of the case.

Another thing which should not escape notice is that the resolution in the Methodist Conference was carried unanimously; whereas, in the Presbyterian Assembly the overture was adopted by 35 against 14. It should not be forgotten that the vote in the Assembly was taken a few hours before adjournment when nearly all the members had left, so that only forty-nine members, it is believed, were present. Hence it is reasonable to suppose that the action of the Conference will be more likely than that of the Assembly to influence our legislators. The memorial of the Conference will contain a unanimous and clear statement that, for the prohibition of the marriage to be legalized, there is no reason founded on Scripture or natural law; whereas, the memorial of the Committee will merely state that such marriages should not be legalized because we and some other Churches formerly decided against them, and because the interests involved are very great. We may well suppose that the action of our Committee will be enfeebled by the knowledge that our Church is very much divided on this subject, and by the recollection that they received their appointment and authority from only thirty-five members at the close of the Assembly.

Now, without discussing the merits of the general question at all, permit me to state a few reasons why we should not adopt any strong "measures to avert such legislation as that recently proposed."

1. That the prohibition which it is proposed to remove is practically of recent date even in England. It is well known that Archbishop Parker published a table of degrees, declaring unlawful marriage with a brother's widow, or with a deceased wife's sister, for the express purpose of supporting Queen Elizabeth's legitimacy and title. This table rests solely on the authority of the Archbishop, as it was never sanctioned by Parliament. It is said that for about three hundred years the law of marriage in England was regulated by the statute of Henry VIII—"that no reservation or prohibition, God's law except, shall trouble or impeach any marriage without the Levitical degrees"—and by the tables of degrees and the Canons; but that during this long period a man was practically permitted to marry whom he would. There was no

stringent prohibition till 1835 when a Bill was passed validating such marriages as had been contracted, but declaring that for the future they should not be voidable as before, but absolutely null and void. This severe measure was due to the bishops in the House of Lords. It seems most unreasonable and inconsistent that they should consider marriage with a deceased wife's sister unlawful and incestuous and at the same time validate all such marriages as had been contracted, and yet declare that for the future they should be for ever null and void! Thus the prohibition which it is proposed to remove is not one of high and venerable antiquity, but one practically dating no farther back than 1835.

2. That the prohibition complained of has created much—and where it now exists—increasing dissatisfaction all over the British Empire. Indeed it has recently been removed in many British Colonies. Within the last forty years—or indeed ever since the act of 1835—Bills have been passed in the British House of Commons seven times, for its removal, and resolutions looking in the same direction have been passed seventeen times, the Lords, under the influence of the bench of bishops, always strenuously and successfully opposing them. Thus the British nation has never acquiesced in the Act of 1835, and it never will. Besides, it is becoming increasingly evident that the Lords, and especially the bishops, do not fairly represent the mind of the nation. It is a mistake to suppose that the agitation connected with this question is a new thing. Deep dissatisfaction has always been felt when any attempt has been made in Britain to enforce the law as it now stands. Hence the violent speech made in the Assembly—and falsely imputed to Dr. Proudfoot—accusing our legislators of precipitancy and even immorality in proceeding to legislate on this matter, was entirely unjustifiable. There has long been a wide-spread and deep agitation in reference to this matter, which will never subside till the prohibition is removed.

3. That, in view of the diversity of opinion which exists in Christendom in reference to the lawfulness of marriage with a deceased wife's sister, it is unreasonable that we, or any other section of the Church, should seek, by legal enactments and penalties, to deprive many of what they consider a natural and Scriptural right, the exercise of which is felt to be indispensable to the happiness of themselves and their children. It is well known that the alliance referred to is frequently contracted by pious persons, and that too, in some cases, at the request of a dying wife; that it is not considered incestuous by any civilized community, and that, were it not out of regard to civil disadvantages and ecclesiastical discipline, such marriages would be much more frequent than they are.

In the ecclesiastical resolutions of the Assembly and the Conference, we have additional and convincing proof that the Scriptural lawfulness of such marriages may well be considered an open question, and thus not binding on the conscience of any man who believes that they are lawful.

Have we any right to ask the Parliament to enact a law to deprive many of our own brethren and of our Methodist brethren of what they consider a natural and religious right? Of course, to insist on perpetuating the existence of such a law is practically as bad. If we are convinced that the alliance is contrary to the word of God, let us convince our people of this, and subject them to discipline if they form it. This is all we can reasonably do. If we demand an Act of Parliament to enforce our views on this disputed point, why should we not have an Act to enforce our views in reference to baptism and to terms of Christian communion? If we are entitled to demand an Act of Parliament to compel our Methodist brethren to abstain from forming the alliance referred to, why may we not have an Act of Parliament to compel them to adopt our views of doctrine and polity? What would become of religious liberty in such a case? How much would we dishonour both ourselves and our principles by invoking the strong arm of the law to enforce principles which, we thus by implication admit, either cannot be successfully defended by argument, or which we are incapable of defending?

Hoping that our Committee will not involve the Church in a struggle against what is inevitable, and that they will do nothing to maintain intolerant and persecuting measures in matters of conscience, I am, with thanks, yours truly,

PRESBYTEROS.

September 8th, 1880.

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

HAP-HAZARD GIVING.

There can never be anything but a chafing uncertainty upon the benevolent work of the Church till giving is methodical, as well as generous, in the churches at large. And that it is far from being, as yet. It were just as easy for each person in the Church of Christ to determine at the beginning of a year the minimum of weekly giving to the boards of the Church as to go forward giving something or nothing as may fitfully happen. It were just as easy for each church, on the basis of such determinations, to say to the Boards the proximate amount that can be expected from it, and to do it at the beginning of the church year, having first determined to do something for each, as to leave these servants of the Church in doubt whether anything can be expected from more than half of the churches, and as to how much from any of them. The freest, most joyous giving is methodical giving; just as the truest liberty is liberty moving in the grooves of law. And not only so; the element of righteousness pervades the sphere of method, for it actually puts a purpose to do one's duty at the front, erects a place for carrying it out, and goes about it, day by day, laying by, as the first fruits of all increase for the Lord's service, what will be held as sacredly devoted to Him, and taken to His courts on the first day of the week as an act of worship.

The trouble lies primarily, it is believed, with the ministers, so many of whom do not wish to be bothered with these details of parish work, and who can always be counted upon either to actively oppose or actively let alone any plans proposed for increasing the efficiency of this arm of church work.

It is more than doubtful whether any committee of the Assembly can secure such co-operation in Presbytery and Synod as to accomplish very much in this direction. But one thing is certain: till each local church will adopt some methodical plan of giving and working, it should neither peep nor mutter at the debts and embarrassments of the Boards nor find fault with its trusted servants. By its unmethodical ways it embarrasses, where it is bound, on every principle of equity and reasonableness, to help, willingly and faithfully. Is there no way of arousing the conscience of delinquent churches in this respect?

But at any rate, let us not rest till hap-hazard giving is weeded out of our churches. And let us be generous enough not to find fault with the Boards till we have given them some reasonable fixed data of expectation; nor with the people, till we have given them the facilities for carrying out some definite plan of beneficence.

We have no doubt that some form of the weekly offering, gathering up what has been laid aside on the first day of the week and bringing it, with prayer, to the Lord's house, is not only Biblical, but practical, and all the more so for being Biblical. It will certainly reach the greatest number of givers the greatest number of times. It will best accommodate the smaller givers, and encourage them to think that the day of widows' mites and the Lord's approbation of them is not gone by. It will associate the act of giving with worship, and so help to make it a sweet and winsome thing. It will almost certainly make the income from the benevolence of the Church "more ample as well as more secure." It is said that the plan of weekly giving, adopted by all the Congregational churches of Providence, increased their gifts from three to five fold, and this through a long period of commercial depression. Their experience is not exceptional. This plan is as good and as feasible in a country village as in a city: in a Presbyterian as in a Congregational church. It puts the financial affairs of the Church on a basis of common sense and sound business principles; a consideration of itself, to commend it to the larger givers and the stronger churches, while best meeting the conditions of the smaller and weaker. Let us, then, be willing to work to a plan—to the plan that experience is endorsing as the best—till it can no longer be said that less than one-seventh of the eight and a quarter millions raised annually by the Presbyterian Church is devoted to objects outside the support of the churches; and that of the 3,269 churches only 1,111 give to all the eight objects recommended by the General Assembly.—H. C. Hayden, D.D., in N. Y. Independent.