

was an answer to those who said this prohibition, if it existed at all, was only a Jewish institution, and not binding upon others. The chapter of Leviticus begins in this solemn manner:—"After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do; neither shall ye walk in their ordinances; ye shall do my judgments and keep mine ordinances to walk therein; I am the Lord your God." And it concludes—"For all these abominations have the men of the land done which were before you, and the land is defiled. That the land spue not you out also when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you." Looking, then, at this exordium and to this conclusion, can we say any thing other than a Divine Lawgiver pronouncing His blessing on those who obey His law, and His curse on those who reject it? In the enumeration of forbidden unions, there occur a number of specific cases, many of these being cases of relationship by marriage, and not by blood only; and the first opening of the whole legislation, as we find it in the sixth verse of the chapter, is in effect—"None of you shall marry any that is near of kin to you." It then proceeds, to mention more cases of affinity than of relationship by blood. This is a clear explanation of what is meant by the words "any that is near of kin." Then it mentions specific cases, and says the brother shall not marry his deceased brother's wife. That is explicitly stated, and there are numerous other cases mentioned. It is true that at that part the case of the wife's sister is not otherwise provided for, and then it is asked, "Are you justified in the inference that the wife's sister is included in the prohibition, that being the converse case?" Why, the affinity is the same, and the relationship is as near. But here is a conclusive argument. In this code, if you interpret it otherwise than by implying the converse case, there is no prohibition of the father marrying his own daughter; the prohibition is only against the son marrying his mother. The conclusion, then, for our interpretation is self-evident; for if not, there is no prohibition against the father marrying his daughter. But then, say our opponents, pointing to the 18th verse, "here is a verse which throws all into doubt and difficulty." My answer to that is, in the first place, "To override a proposition so self-evident, you must have a very clear verse and a very clear interpretation of that verse," and it is not too much to say that that verse which is said to give inferentially the right to marry the wife's sister rather leads to the opposite conclusion. It is, "Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister to vex her, beside the other in her lifetime," and it is argued that the words "in her lifetime" give an implied permission to marry the sister after the wife's death. But if the meaning of this verse were clear and plain, I altogether deny the assumption. I deny that you can derive, as against a clear and direct prohibition, an inference from an exception not introduced as such and following that prohibition, but words introduced in a subsequent and a new commandment. Then comes the question as to the interpretation. Now, strong evidence tends to show us that the true interpretation, is "a wife to another wife." That is the interpretation given in the marginal notes of the Bible. The translators put an interpretation in the way of marginal note, when it appears to be reasonable and probable, although they have adopted the words of the text; and in all cases in which they so illustrate the meaning they say you are to pause and exercise your judgment and discretion as to what is in the text. As to the meaning of the passage, "a wife to her sister," I will just refer to a statement contained in an admirable answer to Dr. McCaul's pamphlet, from the pen of Dr. Hessey, published by this society, in which these words, "the wife to her sister" are shewn to be the Hebrew expression commonly used for adding one thing to another; so much so that the words "the wife to her sister" and "the brother to his brother" as meaning two things of the same kind, the one added to the other, occur in the Bible no less than forty-one times, in thirty-two of which they are actually translated as one thing added to another, and of the other nine in only one instance are they translated as in this particular verse. I merely want to show you that that is a verse of very doubtful interpretation, for according to all principles of construction of law—according to every code of interpretation that I know of, you cannot get of an explicit enactment by the interpretation of a subsequent passage of doubtful explanation. Now, we stand upon that ground, and I think it is a ground very firm and solid. But, I ask, how has it been interpreted. Dr. McCaul tells you that all the Jews—the orthodox Jews, the Talmudists—interpreted it in a way in which all those who wish these unions to take place contend for. It is rather singular that we, in these days, should be called upon as christians to follow the Jewish Rabbis in our interpretation of Scripture, seeing that their interpretation is what was so decidedly denounced by our Lord in His sermon upon the mount. The object of this prohibition was to conduce to the purity of life. The Jewish Talmudists liked narrowing the law away, whilst we are told by our Lord to extend it. The Jewish Talmudists wished to find an indirect sanction for polygamy. But, on the other hand, another set of Jews, the Karaites, who were strict interpreters, interpreted it as a prohibition of polygamy. Now, as to the Church's interpretation, Dr. McCaul says that nobody ever heard of any prohibition about the fourth century. He is right. There was no prohibition until the time of Constantius, about the middle of the fourth century. They were not prohibited before the letter of St. Basil.

But why were they not prohibited before amongst christians? Because such things were not thought of. Show me an instance of any such union being recognised by any christian Church until the dispensation given by Pope Alexander VI. to the King of Portugal, and then I will admit that you bring something like an argument to bear upon the question. You cannot show me an instance of any such union down to the period I have mentioned. But I can show you this—that the moment such union was talked of or mooted in the christian Church, the immediate answer was, "It is against all our customs." These are the words of the first letter on the subject. St. Basil, in the year 350, says—"We have no such customs here; it is polluted, it is incestuous." Therefore, I say that from the very first moment it was broached, you have the voice of the Church against it. It was prohibited by the christian Church as a thing incestuous, and contrary to the law of God. How did it come about that the Romish Church allowed dispensations for these marriages? Simply from the growing corruption of that Church. She added fresh prohibitions to the word of God in this as in many other instances, and then took upon herself to dispense, but it was a long time before she ventured to dispense with this portion of God's word. After a time, growing bold, and finding pecuniary advantage in the payment exacted for these dispensations—and the amount of payment was always measured by the degree of incest—then she granted dispensations, and the number of these marriages increased. We have an instance in the days of Louis Quatorze, that 20,000 livres was paid to the Church for permission to marry deceased wife's sister. We are told, however, that the Jewish Rabbis and the Roman Catholic Church interpret these things differently from our own Church; therefore, our own Church must be entirely wrong. I feel that I have dwelt longer on this question than I ought to do, and my concluding observation on that point shall be this:—With regard to this particular matter of dispensation for marrying a deceased wife's sister, the first that was granted was that which I have already alluded to—the dispensation granted by Alexander Borgia towards the close of the fifteenth century to the King of Portugal—a dispensation granted by a man who lived with his own sister—that Pope whose very name is an abomination in the ears of every christian man. But the Church of England was firm, and at the time of her Reformation, casting aside all the traditions and human fictions which had been mingled with God's law, adhered to the Scriptures; and in her 99th Canon has laid down the prohibited degrees taken from Leviticus, including especially the degree now under consideration in the converse case of the brother marrying the brother's wife. But is the Church of England singular in this? Some persons may not be willing to adopt our Church's view of the question. But how does the Presbyterian Church of Scotland decide? In the year 1613 the Assembly of Westminster—an assembly of divines who well weighed the Scriptures—indeed, there never was a time when the Scriptures were more seriously and anxiously examined than at the time of the great rebellion or great revolution—which ever it may be called, and what was the resolution to which they come? "A man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own, nor a woman of her husband's kindred, nearer in blood than she may of her own." That is the interpretation of the Kirk of Scotland on this 6th section, which says you shall marry none that are near of kin. That is the exact view which has been adopted by the Church of England. The Kirk of Scotland and the people of Scotland have been faithful to that teaching, and are so determined on the point, that if you will follow their example, the bill is gone. In every bill that has yet been introduced they have been obliged to exempt Scotland, and I ask you to rouse yourselves, to show the same front as the people of Scotland have done, and say, "We are not less religious than our forefathers—we are not less pious than our Scottish brethren." If the bill had passed, we should have been in this predicament—that a Scotchman coming to England might here marry his wife's sister, and going back to Scotland, he would have been a single man, in the eye of the Scotch law, and might have married whom he liked. So much for the religious part of the question. I now take up the second branch of the subject, and proceed to the morality of the question. It is a grave and serious matter, and I know it is an unpleasant question to discuss. Our adversaries have relied upon this, and have thought we would not venture upon holding a public meeting to discuss a question the details of which might offend the natural delicacy of female ears. But it is a question in which the female part of the population are especially interested, and I trust we shall be able so to deal with it as to give offence to no one present. As to the morality of the case, the strong ground of our opponents, as they think, is this. The prohibition is not in God's law at all; and, further, a large portion of them say that the whole of that chapter of Leviticus has nothing to do with us as Christians, but relates only to the Jews. That is one proposition. The next proposition they maintain is this. Marriage is in itself a thing so sacred and favoured by the Almighty, that unless you have an express prohibition in God's law man has no right to prohibit it. Put these two propositions together, and what is the result? General intercourse is free. A man may marry his daughter, he may marry his sister, or any one else, because there is no revealed prohibition. Can that be? There is a moral instinct—there is a moral law—