

Are these persons to be held as violators of the Seventh Commandment? Are they to be excluded from ecclesiastical fellowship, and treated as heathens and publicans?

It is evident that the State, as an irresponsible power, may make very extreme regulations. It may authorise as marriage, what would disgust and shock every man of christian principle and feeling; and suppose a father were, with State-sanction, to marry his daughter, is the Church to admit them to the privilege of membership? Or it is conceivable the State may tend to the opposite of laxness. It might enact that marriage should not be contracted between persons born in the same township, or between those bearing the same name. Supposing such regulations to be disregarded, are the parties, if in all other respects unobjectionable, to be refused christian communion?—It may be said these suppositions are extravagant. Be it so; they may still be made, for testing a principle.

I cannot but think that the Church must be guided by other considerations, than mere civil enactment. Christianity unquestionably recognises marriage. To refer to only one passage of Scripture, it is said in Hebrews xiii. 4, "Marriage is honourable in all." The question then is, what is this marriage? Or more precisely, what are the essential conditions of that relation between a man and a woman, to which the apostle applies the Greek word rendered "marriage?" Let these be complied with, and the Church ought to be satisfied. If she demand more, she is not interpreting and administering the law of God, but is making laws of her own, or more probably she is adopting the commandments of men. These views it will be observed are quite general. Should they be acknowledged as sound, the application of them will still be matter for consideration.

It is, in my apprehension, a somewhat difficult thing to ascertain precisely what is the will of the Head of the Church regarding the limits within which marriage is lawful. The rule for individuals is simple—to avoid the appearance of evil—to keep at a distance from all that is suspicious. But the question for the Church, when laying down a canon for the regulation of her procedure, is different. The eighteenth chapter of Leviticus is regarded as containing a law, indeed *the* law on the subject; and the civil enactment of the country, I believe, is based on it. The interpretation of that portion of holy writ, however, is well known to be matter of dispute among the learned; and though it were otherwise, it might still require consideration, whether this ancient Jewish statute is to be held as a rule for christians. Polygamy was tolerated in Old Testament times, and provision was made for divorce, by simply writing a bill and handing it to the repudiated wife. No one would plead for such things among ourselves. The two cases therefore seem to be different.\* The New Testament says little or nothing on the subject. Are we at liberty

\* The Jewish law of marriage, with its death-penalty, its permission of polygamy, and arbitrary divorce, is abrogated.—*Princeton Review for October, 1859, p. 755.*

The doctrine that marriage is a contract for life between one man and one woman, is peculiarly a Christian doctrine. It is not a Jewish, a Mahomedan, or Pagan doctrine. It is peculiar to Christian lands, and is purely a Christian institution.—*Id., p. 763.*