

in marriage were equally repugnant to God's law: and, under the sanctifying power of a higher, a more enlightened, and a holier dispensation, we might be sure that those prohibitory indications which could be proved to exist in the Old Testament had multiplied and raised themselves to complete and indubitable prohibition in the Christian Church. But in considering this question there was another ground to be taken. It was true that our blessed Lord had indicated to us that the true state of marriage was the ancient and primitive one, wherein God made man, both male and female, that they twain might be one flesh. But they might be permitted to take a lower ground, and look upon the question in its social aspect. He was quite sure that, regarding the subject from this point of view, he should be well representing the true feeling of every person in that room and hundreds of thousands who were not present, when he said that such a change as was sought to be introduced would be regarded with the greatest displeasure and alarm by the great majority of families in this country, as imperilling every domestic tie, and introducing confusion and suspicion where there ought only to be order, confidence, and love. For what was it that was proposed by this bill—whether it was in the House of Commons already he did not know, but which, at all events, was impending? It was in effect to declare that that person who in all countries, and from all time, had hitherto been known as the "sister-in-law," should no longer be a sister—that was to say that when a man was married the sister of his wife was to be no longer a sister, nor received into the house in that character. And for whose benefit, or at whose desire, was this change in the law proposed?—and this was an important question for consideration in a matter of such great social importance. The proposers of this change were driven to a variety of expedients to maintain their case. First they took the Scriptural ground, and when that failed they turned to the social ground, and contended that, because the habits and inclinations of certain people led them to contract such marriages, or to wish to contract them, therefore the law should be altered in order that these illegal acts might be stamped with the character of legality. But who were these persons? Not a majority, but an infinitesimally small minority. It was for the sake of this small and inconsiderable minority that the feelings of the vast majority were to be outraged, as well as the law of England, which had grown up for centuries, which had been confirmed by a recent enactment, and which was not only the law of England but the law of the primitive Church, uniformly acknowledged by the Churches of the east and of the west from the foundation of christianity until it was tampered with by dispensations from the corrupt Church of Rome. It was said that when once the bond of marriage was dissolved between a man and his wife by death, the man was at liberty to marry the woman who was nearest in relationship to his deceased wife—viz., her sister. The dissolution of the bond here assumed was that caused by the death of the wife; but he would wish the meeting to consider whether there were not other ways by which the bond of marriage might be dissolved? We had seen a great change in the law introduced of late by the action of the Divorce Court. Without passing any opinion on the expediency or in expediency of that change, he would simply remark that divorces seemed now much more easy of attainment than they formerly were, and it was possible to obtain the dissolution of the marriage bond in cases in which it could not under the previous law of divorce have been even expected. This being so, he would ask the promoters of the proposed bill whether the man whose marriage was dissolved by the action of the Divorce Court was to be equally at liberty to marry his wife's sister with the man whose marriage was dissolved by the death of his wife? Because, if so, the result to which the law, if passed, might be followed out would be that a man might be married to two sisters both living at the same time. But it was not for him to dwell longer on such a subject. It must be patent to all that such an alteration of the marriage law as was now demanded must be fraught with incalculable mischief to society, and was opposed to every consideration of social, religious, and moral feeling. He trusted the measure would not pass, but the people of England must stand forward and back up that portion of the Legislature which had hitherto shown itself sensible of the popular feeling in regard to this question. It ought not to be left to a contest between Lords and Commons. The House of Lords had done their duty honestly and faithfully; but with a certain section of the House of Commons the question had become a clap-trap cry, and was employed as a sort of test of House of Commons liberalism. It was for the people to show the House of Commons they were strong in dissenting to this measure, and if they, by their sympathy and co-operation, backed up the association and backed up the House of Peers, he thought that, although they could not calculate upon all sections being of one mind on the subject, they might safely calculate upon such a change of feeling in the House of Commons as would set at rest for ever this important question. (Cheers.)

VIC-CHANCELLOR SIR W. PAGE WOOD had been requested to move the following resolution, it having been thought right by the committee that after the Chairman's able exposition, a layman should be the first to give practical effect to the objects of the meeting. The resolution was—

"That this meeting is convinced that any alteration of the marriage law which should permit marriage with a wife's sister or any other person

within the degrees now prohibited, would be fraught with grave danger and injury to religion, morality, and family life."

He believed that he should have the entire concurrence of the whole of that vast assembly in the general proposition here set forth, whatever might be the individual views entertained upon any one branch of the question. There was no one there present, he apprehended, who did not see that there was great danger to religion, to morality, and to all the best interests of family life, if the measure contemplated, and which had been so pertinaciously put forward for two or three sessions, should ever acquire the force of law. And what was it that the advocates of this alteration of the marriage law were attempting? It was to uproot and set at nought the deep feelings and religious convictions of a vast majority of the people of England: to overturn the moral instincts of others who would not even admit the religious view in which many of us and most of us happily in England were accustomed to regard the question: and, further, to revolutionise and destroy family ties by breaking down social relations which had existed from the very commencement of society. It was no light occasion, then, upon which they were now met together, and the numbers he saw before him convinced him that the people at large were beginning at length to understand and appreciate the importance of the question and the magnitude of the danger. He believed that was only because those who desired to maintain the law—the vast majority of the population—had been too languid in their opposition to these repeated attempts to change it, that a measure so pregnant with mischief of every kind could ever have been passed by a majority of the House of Commons. But he did not believe, in spite of its having twice passed the House of Commons, the people of England were in favour of any such alteration. He once had the honour of raising his voice in the House of Commons against this fatal measure, and he was happy to say that on that occasion he was supported by men of all religious views and of every shade of political opinion. In that debate he heard the indignant eloquence of Mr. Stuel, then a Roman Catholic member of the house, denouncing the measure, and the able advocacy of Mr. Roebuck, who could not, any more than himself, be regarded as entertaining high Conservative principles, brought to bear against it. But this was a matter in which every Englishman and Englishwoman should be Conservative, for the question at issue was whether we should hold religious feelings intact, and whether we were to maintain those social views which formed the basis of domestic purity in their full integrity. After having read almost every pamphlet which had been written, and heard very many of the speeches which had been made upon the subject, it appeared to him that there were certain propositions which were incontestable. They were these—that the Church of England had ever held, and still held, that these marriages were contrary to God's law, and that the Church of England, in so holding, only followed the truth as laid down by the whole body of the Catholic Church from the time of its first foundation "on the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ being the Corner-stone." Further, that the law of England had been uniform in holding, as the Church held, that all such marriages were contrary to the law of God: for in express terms it was so enacted in the Act of Henry VIII., and he contended that those who wished to overturn that which had been sanctioned by the law from the first institution of society—and he now addressed those more especially who disregarded the authority of the Church—that which had been sanctioned uniformly by law and by custom, had a great burden cast upon them, of proving that they were justified in making such a proposition. His resolution declared that to alter the law for the purpose of "permitting marriage with a wife's sister, or any other person within the degrees now prohibited, was fraught with great danger and injury to religion, morality, and family life." As he hoped to be followed by men high in the Church—by his right rev. friend the Bishop of Oxford, by the right rev. prelate the Bishop of St. David's, and others, his comments upon the religious part of the question should be very brief. But, said, the right hon. and learned Judge, we are met here to claim not only your sympathy, upon which I shall make some demand before I conclude, but to claim also the best exercise of your reason upon this momentous subject. I want to show that we are not afraid to discuss it, be the adversary who he may, on grounds of the most deliberate reasoning, apart altogether from the religious ground, and as if every thing connected with it were an open proposition. And at a time when it is discussed, whether man derives his being from a sponge or an anemone, it may be advisable, in dealing with such a question, to go back to first principles. I am prepared to argue, therefore, with him who holds, as I hold, that the Scripture is the word of God—with him who holds with me that the Church has rightfully expounded Scripture—I am prepared, also, to argue with him who holds neither of those propositions, and with also who says that our social system on this question is to be argued on first principles. As regards what the Scripture says upon the subject of these marriages, I will be very brief. But we rest our case on this fact, that there is recorded in God's Word a list of unions which are denounced as abominable—not merely abominable according to the Jewish law, which was not then given, but about to be given, but abominable on the part even of the Canaanites and the Egyptians, who had never any revealed law, and yet were guilty of these abominations. That