

A B R I E F

# A T T E M P T

To set the PROHIBITIONS in  
the xviii<sup>th</sup> and xx<sup>th</sup> Chapters of  
the Book of *Leviticus* in  
a PROPER LIGHT.

W H E R E I N

An A N S W E R to the two follow-  
ing Questions is more especial-  
ly attended to, *viz.*

- I. Whether it be right for a Man, after  
the Death of his Wife, to marry her  
Sister ?
- II. Supposing the Marriage to be wrong,  
whether they, continuing to cohabit,  
may be admitted to Church Privileges ?

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By JAMES FINLEY, V. D. M.

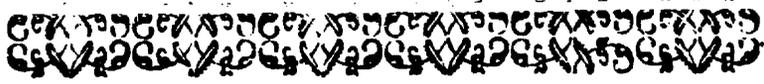
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*Abstain from all Appearance of Evil, 1 Thes. v. 22.  
That every one of you should know how to possess his Vessel  
in Sanctification and Honor ; not in the Lusts of Concupiscence,  
even as the Gentiles which know not God, 1 Thes. iv. 4. 5.*

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W I L M I N G T O N,

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T H E

# P R E F A C E.


*S*ome of late have taken upon them  
*A* to dispute the propriety of christian  
 Churches and States adopting the pro-  
 hibitions in the writings of Moses re-  
 specting marriages as a Rule for New Testament  
 Churches; while others who have not the effron-  
 tery to reject these prohibitions, yet alledge they  
 are to be restricted entirely to the persons named.  
 I, apprehending that both these opinions were  
 very wrong; and that in proportion as they pre-  
 vailed would have consequences injurious to both  
 Church and State, thought it my duty to publish  
 the following pages, in order to vindicate the just  
 Sentiments of our worthy Fore-fathers, and in-  
 form my fellow christians of what may prove to  
 be only an introduction to still more dangerous at-  
 tempts; that being forewarned they may use their  
 endeavours to prevent the evil. I shall only far-  
 ther observe, that altho' I am not at all doubtful  
 with regard to the Truth of what I have written;  
 yet, believing myself and all mankind to be fallible,  
 I shou'd, and I hope ever will, consider myself as  
 obliged to the person who convinces me of a mistake  
 in judgment in any particular.

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## Brief ATTEMPT, &c.

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QUESTION I. *Whether it be right for a man, after the death of his wife, to marry her sister?*

**A** QUESTION of the like nature, viz. “Whether it was agreeable to the law of God for a man to marry his brother’s wife?” was once proposed to the principal universities of Europe, who all answered in the negative; as did also many very learned men, who were applied to for their judgment.\* And this very question now to be considered has been different times disputed in Germany by both clergy-men and lawyers, who generally condemned such marriages. And we also must highly condemn them, if we admit only of two things; First, That the prohibitions in the book of Leviticus do belong to us, as well as to the Israelites. Secondly, That the case in question comes under those prohibitions. By denying either of these we would contradict the sentiments of by far the majority of the most pious and learned men, the confessions of the Protestant churches in general, and of the Presbyterian church in particular. But not resting on the sentiments of men, I shall endeavour to prove the above particulars by scriptural arguments.

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\* See Neal’s history of the Puritans, vol. I. in the case of king Henry the viii<sup>th</sup>, and other histories upon that period.

ments. And as to the first, I am fully persuaded that the aforesaid prohibitions of carnal intercourse, and consequently of marriage with persons within the degrees mentioned, were not designed for the Israelites alone, but belong to us also, for the following reasons, viz.

1st, Because the reason given in the scriptures, and particularly in the books of Moses, against such carnal intercourse, is such as did not respect that people alone, but equally concerns others. It is taken from the intrinsic baseness of such intercourse and marriage in the present state of things, or condition of the world. Some actions were to be accounted wrong purely because God had forbidden them, as eating the forbidden fruit. Other actions are simply and absolutely wrong, and no circumstances will justify them; such is the hating of God. And other actions are improper and wrong in the present state of things. Their baseness arises not barely from the divine prohibition; but also from our situation, or the condition of the things we are versant about; they become dangerous as things are circumstanced in a degenerate world. Now, if that which renders an action base equally respects all, the prohibition of that action must also refer to all. But such is the case with respect to the prohibited intercourse. *Being very near of kin* is that which renders it singularly odious; and for which God calls it *wickedness, an unclean and wicked thing*; and in one instance *confusion*; by which an intrinsic baseness seems to be held out: And kindred being the same in all nations, the crime must also be the same. Agreeable hereto, the scriptures elsewhere assure us, that being very near related, greatly aggravates the sin of carnal intimacy. Thus in Amos iii. 7. where God, in representing the great degeneracy of Israel, gives this as a glaring evidence of it, that *A man and his father would go into the same maid*. Had one been guilty with one woman, and the other with another, it had been bad; but for such near relations to lie with the same woman was extremely wicked. Thus also in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chap. v. 1. the apostle says, *It was reported there was such fornication among them as was not so much as named*

named among the Gentiles, that a man should have his father's wife. Her being so nearly related to him was what rendered it peculiarly shocking. We find, that as early as Abraham's time the marriage of a sister was thought a case so absurd that it could scarcely happen : Hence Abraham concluded that, if he called Sarah his sister, none would suspect her to be his wife. And, if we may be allowed to add an instance from human history, we may find that in later times the heathens abhorred such marriages. We are informed that when a certain woman among the Romans married her daughter's husband, (the daughter being put away) Cicero called it " An incredible wickedness, such as he had never heard of in all his life besides." It would seem that the light of nature taught them that such marriages were abominable. And I suppose there are few among us who would not own it to be quite base for some of those prohibited in the writings of Moses to marry ; and that, if such marriages were made, they ought to be dissolved ; and that purely for this reason, That such were too nearly related. It is absurd for any to alledge that the prohibited marriages are not simply and absolutely evil ; and that therefore they may be tolerated. It is enough to us that God represents them as evil in the present state of things ; and therefore forbids them. There are comparatively but few things simply evil. Killing a man is not so. It often becomes a duty ; but knowingly and deliberately to kill an innocent man is a great evil, it is murder. The profanation of the sabbath by laborious work was deemed a great crime, and strictly forbidden ; yet we are told that the *priests in the temple profaned the sabbath and were blameless*. Circumstances alter the very nature of cases, so as to make a fact a great crime, a less crime, or no crime at all, according as it is circumstanced. Thus it was necessary for Adam's children to intermarry, God having for wise reasons so ordered that they had none besides to join with, and yet commanded them to multiply. But this necessity being soon removed, so that all might have a choice among more remote relations, the tolerating marriages afterwards among those very

nearly related would not have been proper; yea, it would have had bad consequences in our degenerate world. For,

1st, It would have encouraged fallen men greatly addicted to lust; and likely increasing in their propensity to it as they multiplied; I say, it would have encouraged them in criminal acts, which the familiarity and necessary intercourse among such near relations, especially in early life, pave the way to, by affording a variety of opportunities.

2d, It would have led to many instances whereby the order of nature would have been subverted, and the reverence and respect due from an inferior by nature to a superior destroyed; since an aunt, who by nature is a superior, in case of marriage, would be subjected to a nephew who is an inferior, and be obliged to reverence and obey him.

3dly, As an extensive love and friendly intercourse among mankind are what God requires, and are of great importance to the welfare of men; and as we see these are generally in proportion to our connections and interests, therefore marriages by which our connections and interests are enlarged ought to be widely extended; but the allowing of persons very nearly related to marry would lead to the restricting and limiting our connections to a very narrow circle; so that every family would in a sort become a little world, disjoined from the rest of mankind through the want of a proper regard; which would be a very great evil. These may be some of the reasons why in the present state of things the wise Governor of the world accounts carnal intercourse and marriages among near relations an evil thing, and forbids them. And some think that in his providence he has also wrought in the nature of man an aversion to such kind of marriages, so that he shrinks from them, until nature be overpowered by the sophistical arguings of evil men, the devil and a corrupt heart, and he be left to *wile affections*.

A second reason why I think those prohibitions in Leviticus belong to us as well as to the Israelites is, because

because such intercourse is highly blamed in the Canaanites, chapter xviii. 24. 25. where, after the prohibitions, it is added, *Desire not yourselves in any of these things; for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you, and the land is defiled; therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it; and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.* I know some have supposed that this blame only respected idolatry, bestiality, and sodomy mentioned immediately before. But, besides, that this general declaration, *In all these things the nations are defiled,* seems to refer to all the foregoing particulars, according to a known rule of interpreting scripture, "That a word or phrase is to be taken in a large sense, unless there are evident reasons for restricting it:" Besides this, I say, we find in the xxth chapter, where we have a repetition of the same things, the order is changed as if with a design to prevent such a supposition, and these very unnatural acts are placed among the first things forbidden, and the prohibited marriages close the catalogue, particularly this under consideration; and then follows God's caution against all, and his abhorring the nations of Canaan on account of them, ver. 22. 23. Now as such marriages were criminal in other nations, and before the laws of Moses were given, this shews plainly that the prohibitions were not to be restricted to the Israelites, but concern all others. The nations of Canaan might have known by the light of nature, or instructions handed down from the ancient patriarchs, that such marriages, as well as the other things blamed, were displeasing to God: But a corrupt nature, that likes not restraints, led them to disregard these; and so it would have led Israel, and us also; God therefore, in order to revive and perpetuate the knowledge of his will herein, allows the prohibitions to be recorded.

A third reason is that, if those prohibitions do not belong to us as well as to the Israelites, then we are left without any certain rule with regard to the marriage of our relations. In the law of Moses we are forbidden to approach to any that are near of kin; and particularly told where to stop; but we are not elsewhere in the scriptures forbid-

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den to marry an aunt, a sister, a daughter, a grandmother, &c. if we chuse it; and some have chosen the like. We have no certain rule to direct us but the scriptures; they are represented as a compleat directory to the man of God. But, I say, laying aside the prohibitions in the writings of Moses, we are left without such a directory respecting the persons we may or may not marry. Can we think the blessed God has left his church so much without rule in one of the first institutions ever he gave to mankind? for marriage is such; left all at this day to follow the dictates of nature; which the learned as well as illiterate differ so widely about? for these dictates are greatly misunderstood in our lapsed state; and as much disregarded as misunderstood; left them to herd like the beasts of the field with nearly whom they please, if they but marry one who is not another man's wife? *O genera, O mores!* Men of a strange mind indeed! and as strange morals!—With regard to those who reject the prohibitions in the book of Leviticus, and yet grant that some of the marriages there prohibited are quite base; and if made ought to be dissolved purely because the persons are too near of kin, such justly deserve to be despised; for they tell us we ought to stop, but give us no direction where. They would have us to leave a sure directory, and follow a Will-with-a-wisp. For they leave us either to follow our own will, while we know not what we ought to do, or the will of other corrupt creatures; one of whom tells us one thing, and another the direct contrary. As the arguments I have offered appear to me to prove sufficiently that the aforesaid prohibitions in Leviticus belong to us as well as to the Israelites, I shall henceforth take it for granted, that we are bound by, and ought to pay the strictest regard to every one of them. I now proceed,

2dly, To shew that the case of a man's marrying his wife's sister comes under the said prohibitions. I know there are some who disregard all the arguments offered, unless you shew them in so many words that God forbids a man to marry his wife's sister. Such gentlemen surely

surely should not content themselves with inferences from scripture in other weighty matters. Where have they express scripture for Infant-Baptism, the First-day-Sabbath, and diverse other things I might mention, which they strenuously hold? But as it appears from the articles, canons and laws of the different protestant churches and states, that these churches and states concluded that the said prohibitions ought to be understood as extending to degrees, *i. e.* to all who are equally near of kin, and not restricted to the persons named, so that such as are as near of kin as those expressly mentioned are equally forbidden; therefore, if this judgment of protestants be right, it will follow that a wife's sister is included under these prohibitions, and therefore not to be married; because she is as nearly related as a brother's wife, who is expressly forbidden. But these are very sufficient reasons for understanding those prohibitions as referring to degrees, *i. e.* to all who are as nearly related as those mentioned. For consider,

1st, The reason of the prohibition taken from the intrinsick baseness of marrying those very nearly related. It, as I have observed, is called *iniquity, wickedness, a wicked and unclean thing*; and in one instance *confusion*. If it was so wicked for some to marry purely because they were too near of kin, and therefore forbidden; it must be equally wrong for others who are as near, altho' not mentioned; because there is the same reason against the last as against the first. I cannot reconcile a man's being forbidden his brother's wife because too near, with his being allowed his wife's sister who is equally near, while there is no reason given for making a difference. Nor can I think that even among the Jews themselves it was quite innocent for persons equally near of kin with those forbidden to marry. If no reason had been given for the prohibition, the sovereign will of God should then be taken for a rule; but where there is a reason given, it ought to operate alike where the cases are similar. I must therefore conclude that the wife's sister, altho' not mentioned, is equally intended in the prohibition with the brother's wife who is, even as Eve who was included  
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in the prohibition of eating the forbidden fruit, altho' not expressly mentioned; because there was the same reason why she should abstain from it as there was why her husband should. I therefore upon the whole conclude that the prohibitions respect degrees, and not barely the persons mentioned.

2dly, Consider the doom of such offenders. Against some the wrath of God was to be publickly denounced, Deut. xxvii. 20.—22. 23. Of some it was said they should die childless; of others that they should bear their iniquity. Some were to be put to death; and others even burned with fire. The Canaanites were disinherited, and cut off from the world for such conduct. And with respect to all in general, it is said in Leviticus xviii. 29. that *Whoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them, shall be cut off from among their people; i. e. deprived of the privileges of the Church of God here; which seems to be the least that can be meant.* Some think it signifies being deprived of both civil and religious privileges; such persons being unfit for membership in church or state. Were the crimes deemed so detestable, and the doom made so heavy on those expressly mentioned, and others, whose condition was quite similar, to be treated as innocent? This seems inadmissible according to God's dealings with men in other cases; or according to the rules of equity among men. It is a general maxim in law, and what natural equity teaches, "That the law should be considered as having a like respect to those who are in the like situation.\*" But, according to our opponents, a man may not marry his grand-daughter, because that is mentioned in the prohibitions; but a woman may marry her grand-son, because that is not mentioned; which seems very absurd arguing, the relation being the same; and more apparent reason against what is not expressly forbidden than against what is; for the grand-mother is the grand-son's superior by nature, and by marriage is made his inferior, and brought into subjection to him; where-

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\* *Ubi eadem ratio, ibi eadem quoque fit legis dispositio.*

whereby the order of nature is subverted. Wherefore I conclude that the prohibitions respect degrees, and not barely the persons named; or that whosoever are expressly forbidden; others who are as nearly related are as really forbidden, although not expressly mentioned. And since a man may not marry his brother's wife, because she is too near of kin, and therefore forbidden; neither may he marry his wife's sister, because she is equally near, and therefore must be understood to be forbidden also. The crime appears equally as bad in the one as in the other; and no consequences can follow marrying the one that may not equally follow marrying the other.

I would now make two observations, and answer some objections, before I conclude this particular. And 1st, I observe that the proximity, or nearness of kin, seems equally to refer to affinity as consanguinity; so that "a man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own; nor the woman of her husband's kindred nearer in blood than of her own".|| This has been, and yet is, the general opinion of protestants, and I think agreeable to the scriptures; for there we find that man and wife being accounted but one flesh, the same degrees of affinity are forbidden as of consanguinity, and as remote. Thus, in Lev. xviii. 7. a man is forbidden to uncover the nakedness of his mother by blood; and ver. 8. of his step-mother by marriage. Ver. 9. of his sister by blood; and ver. 16. of his brother's wife, who is his sister by marriage. Ver. 10. he is forbidden his grand-daughter by blood; and ver. 17. his grand-daughter by marriage. He is forbidden ver. 12. 13. to uncover the nakedness of his aunt by blood; and ver. 14. of his uncle's wife, who is his aunt by marriage, or affinity.

2dly, I observe that the crime of carnally associating with those too near of kin has usually, and I think justly, been reckoned a breach of the seventh command, and

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|| See the Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. xxiv. sect. 4.

called *incest*, because within the prohibited degrees. But altho' I contend not about the name, yet it would be very wrong to diminish the crime, even in our thoughts, which we should have in abhorrence; since God calls it *an unclean and wicked thing*, and forbade the Jews to defile themselves therein, and equally forbids us, as I have shewn.

As to the objections made against this christian doctrine I am vindicating, I say christian doctrine, for it is not the opinion of Protestants alone, the Roman Catholics extend it farther than we do, and perhaps farther than they ought. We are willing to be limited by the degrees mentioned in the scriptures; they go much farther. I say as to the objections made against this doctrine, 'There are some who will tell you in their lax way that death dissolves every relation among men, so that a man may marry any (at least of his wife's) relations. A sentiment contrary to the opinion of all christian nations we are acquainted with; who agree, that however the relation may cease among the dead it remains among the living. These will also tell you, that nearness of kin is a strong argument for such persons to marry: For, say they, "none are so likely to take special care of our affairs, particularly of our children, " as near relations." I lately heard a gentleman assert in a publick company that, "for this reason, if his wife " was dead, he would chuse to marry her sister rather " than any other woman; for who, said he, would be " so likely to take care of my first wife's children as her sister, or their aunt." One might properly reply that, according to this reasoning, a man should chuse rather to marry a mother, or grand-mother; for such would be still nearer of kin; and whatsoever children he had, or would have, would be all hers: And as women are generally fond of grand-children, she would be most likely to take special care of all. But this arguing is false; it is contrary to numberless facts; it is deistical. Deists speak in the same manner, and alledge that the scriptures are not of God, nor fit for a rule, because, say they, they prohibit what reason urges us to. But as

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my design is not to refute deists; and as I have already spoken of the propriety of the prohibitions we are treating of in the present state of things, I shall therefore leave the objection with the author of it to be more carefully digested, and proceed to consider others that have more seeming weight with them. And

1st, Some alledge that as such marriages as that under consideration were made by the best of men before the law was given by Moses, and that without apparent blame; therefore they ought not to be thought criminal in their nature. I grant that such marriages were then made by good men, and that it does not appear the Almighty expressly faulted them at the time; but it no more follows that their conduct herein was blameless, than that polygamy and concubinage were so; for little appears to have been said against them for a long time; so little that even pious men seem to have thought them right; whereas one of the later prophets, and the apostles, assure us they were even contrary to the design of marriage. God in former times winked at the ignorance of mankind, and left them in some measure to follow their own notions and inclinations; not that we might plead their conduct as a good precedent; but, doubtless, in order to discover the depravity of man, and the insufficiency of nature's light, altho' highly extolled, to direct and sway him in his fallen state; yea, to shew us into what extravagancies the best would run when left to that light, even with the additional helps then afforded, and to make us thankful for a better guide.

2dly, Some also alledge that the very kind of marriage under consideration was allowed of among the Israelites, and therefore conclude we ought not to blame it. Thus when it is said, *Thou shalt not take a wife to her sister to vex her all the days of her life*; they suppose this implies that a man might take a second sister after the death of the first: To which some have replied, that this was only a permission, like the liberty given them of divorcing their wives. The Israelites were so addicted to the putting away their wives on trivial occasions, or abusing them, that they would not be restrained; therefore they were

were tolerated during that dark and infantile state of the church to give them a divorce and put them away. This is the farthest can be said of it. None can alledge that it was agreeable to the institution of marriage, since Christ says otherwise. And, say they, the case was the same with regard to the marriage of two sisters. The law forbade a man's taking his brother's wife, and consequently a wife's sister; but the Israelites, perhaps from the example of Jacob, and the practice of the Egyptians, became so fond of such kind of marriages, that they would not be restrained; God therefore permits them, under this restriction; or virtually tells them, that if they would not be restrained by his prohibition, but would marry own sisters, they must not have the second in the life-time of the first to vex her. But I rather agree with others, who take the word sister in a large sense for another woman, who by marriage becomes a sister in a stricter sense; and so consider this as a prohibition of polygamy and concubinage. Many have been of this mind, and translate the words thus, *Thou shalt not take one woman to another, or to her fellow,* as the original word often signifies. † Upon the whole it appears our opponents have little to build upon from the above place. But,

3dly, They alledge that the marriage of a brother's wife is recommended in Deut. xxv. 8. &c. and suppose this shews that the prohibitions only respected the general conduct of the Israelites, but not that of others. The answer generally given is that, supposing we are there to take brethren in a strict sense for brother-germans, there were very singular reasons for the dispensation. It was not only for perpetuating the memory of the dead, who left no issue, but out of mercy to the poor widow, who otherwise must have been turned out of house and home. For according to the agrarian law among the Israelites, it would seem that, if she married out of the family of the tribe, she would lose her share

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† See Pool's Latin Synopsis on this place, where he gives diverse examples of this use of the word.

share in the inheritance, which was to remain in the family, or branch of that tribe, to prevent confusion in their estates, Num. xxxvi. 7. 8. 9. But by this allowance mercy was triumphant, and the lands kept in their proper direction. Circumstances, as I have shewn, alter the very nature of cases; but where there are no circumstances obliging to a different conduct, the general rule should carefully be observed. But, altho' the above be the answer generally given by divines, yet the following is what I can more readily acquiesce in, viz. That the word brethren there is to be understood of such near relations as according to the law might marry, and not of brother-germans; because it does not appear that ever God dispensed with his law but in cases of great importance and necessity; as to save the life of a man we may do that which otherwise we ought not to do upon the sabbath-day; but such necessity does not appear here for the brother-german's marrying his brother's widow. If she only married such a near relation as the law in Leviticus would permit, not only would the inheritance remain in the family, or branch of that tribe; but the first born might be called after the dead to keep up the remembrance of him. Besides, we have no example recorded in the scriptures after the law was given of two such brothers marrying the same woman. I grant that some of the Israelites seem to have understood the above place as a recommendation of such marriages, as appears from the words of Naomi to her daughters-in-law, Ruth i. 12. 13. and also from the supposition of the Sadducees, of seven brothers marrying the same woman successively, Mat. 22. 23. &c. But, altho' the Israelites had generally understood it so, and practised accordingly, this would not have fixed the true meaning of the place; since we find they misunderstood the scriptures in many things, and acted agreeable to their mistakes. Both good and bad among them misapprehended the important doctrines concerning the person and sufferings of Christ, and the nature of his kingdom. It may appear however from what has been said, that the above place is no help to our opponents.--I now proceed to consider the

**THE** QUESTION proposed in the beginning, viz. That supposing the marriage to be wrong, whether they, continuing to cohabit, may be admitted to church privileges? Were I in the sentiments of those who admit persons to the special privileges of the church without regard had to their doctrines or practices, I would say they ought to be admitted: But as I join with the body of the protestant churches in a contrary sentiment, and refer to them in my writing, I must say they ought not, without repentance and a change of conduct. Yet here I must allow that the consequences of separation would likely be very grievous to the parties; and that if they could be indulged in living together without necessarily involving themselves and those who indulged them in farther guilt, it ought to be granted; according to that old maxim, viz. "That a thing being done which yet ought not to have been done may be allowed to stand good".\* This maxim is worthy of attention in various cases; as in that of rash promises in temporal affairs. An upright man should not change in these, altho' he had sworn to his hurt. Or as in the case of the marriage of the godly with the prophane, or even with infidels; of which the apostle speaks: For there is danger of making these cases worse, much worse by a revocation. Where no evil can be prevented, but the matter made worse, the maxim is good: But then the case is not so here; it is vastly different, and the remedy is worse than the disease. The crime of a godly person's marrying even an infidel lies in the marriage of such an one, not in cohabiting afterwards; but the crime here lies in both; and it seems the dispensing with the marriage would be allowing the persons to go on in a series of transgressions. For consider it is not barely the marriage that is forbidden, but *uncovering the nakedness of* such an one. The prohibition is, *Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife*, and consequently not of thy wife's siller; therefore, not only is the marriage virtually forbidden, but every instance of carnal

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\* *Quod fieri nun debet, factum valet.*

carnal intercourse either before or after the marriage. If one had been guilty once, we should say that he ought to repent and do so no more : But by our deeming such a marriage valid, we would allow the persons to proceed in one act after another; each of which is forbidden : And by admitting such to sealing ordinances, without their repenting of and forsaking the sin, we would contemn the injunction, Lev. xviii. 29. which is added to the prohibitions we are speaking of, and runs thus, *Whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the Souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people.* Altho' God says this, yet we would admit them into the bosom of his church; yes, to his own altar, with their moral uncleanness upon them; and like the degenerate priests of old, *prophane God's holy things, putting no difference between the holy and prophane,* Ezekiel xxii. 26. We would encourage them in impenitence, when we should urge them to repentance : And what God calls an unclean thing, we would call clean; as if the unjustifiable marriage had purged it. This would be to make use of an ordinance of God to patronize a constant scene of wickedness, and prostitute to the basest purposes what was designed for the best ends. If any say that, " Altho' it would not be right to countenance such marriages in general, and without distinction admit to church privileges, yet, as general rules admit of exceptions, so, the allowing special privileges to some who marry as above on account of certain circumstances, would be no violation of the general rule : " I answer, that, as in this case, there cannot, we suppose, be such singular circumstances among us as would justify a marriage of that kind, so the admitting such without a change of conduct, would be equal to judging that any man might marry two sisters successively, and be received to special privileges in the church notwithstanding; and therefore a condemning of the general rule. Nor do I see how such as do can justify the conduct, unless by proving that they really have a power of dispensing with the best rules.

Should any protestant state countenance such marriages,

ages, they might expect this would encourage persons to multiply them. It would encourage in criminal acts which the connection and necessary intimacy between those nearly related pave the way to. It would open a door for men of libertine principles, and dissolute practices: And in short, lay open a gap, which the present and perhaps the next generation would not be able to stop. And need I add, that it would expose them to the divine displeasure, from which they might dread being dealt with as the degenerate Canaanites were. Or should any denomination of protestants favour such marriages, they might not only expect the above consequences, but farther, they would give great offence to other churches, as well as to those of a tender conscience among themselves; would be obliged to receive into communion those rejected by other societies; and thus make the breach wider, expose themselves to contempt, and perhaps promote divisions in their own body.

But altho' some individuals in a society should attempt to patronize that kind of marriage I have been mainly arguing against, as has been the case, I cannot yet think that the body of the pious and judicious of any church in this land would, upon due deliberation, concur. For supposing a man's marrying his first wife's sister were not so evidently contrary to the scriptures as it is; yet, even upon that supposition, can any in reason imagine that men of true wisdom, piety and prudence, would deliberately plead for what cannot be supported by the word of God? what would be productive of many evils in church and state, should it prevail? for what is reprobated by most, if not all denominations of christians? what every one knows to be of ill report; and multitudes believe to be quite base.