

# THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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## I.

### PRESENT HINDRANCES TO MISSIONS AND THEIR REMEDIES.

**T**HE cause of Foreign Missions is manifestly growing in favor with its friends, and possibly in disfavor with its enemies and critics. The number of its friends is steadily increasing from year to year. They are greatly reinforced from the ranks of the young. The prayers of Christian mothers who have been enlisted in the work of Foreign Missions for the last twenty-five years have been answered, not only on the mission fields, but in the enlarged knowledge and quickened interest of their own sons and daughters here at home. Students' Volunteer Movements, Inter-Seminary Missionary Conventions, and Christian Endeavor Societies are the results. And very naturally under such circumstances an increased interest is taken by many pastors and churches; and the preaching of an earnest missionary sermon, or the holding of a missionary congress in Synod or Presbytery, is a much more frequent occurrence than formerly. Theological instruction in our seminaries has never before placed so much emphasis on the work of Foreign Missions.

But on the other hand there is also an increase in the forces opposed to Foreign Missions. The enemies of the cause are multiplied; they are more outspoken; they are more inventive of objections; they are more bitter; and this, perhaps, for the reason that the work of missions has assumed greater proportions, and by its success has challenged increased attention among intelligent men and women of all classes. The secular magazines and newspapers have found it worth while to discuss the subject—its progress—its economics—its diplomatic bearings—the burden and bother of it

## VI.

### THE BAPTISM OF POLYGAMISTS IN NON-CHRISTIAN LANDS.

AT the regular meeting of the Synod of India, held in Ludhiana, November, 1894, among the most important questions which came before Synod was this: Whether in the case of a Mohammedan or Hindu with more than one wife, applying for baptism, he should in all cases, as a condition of baptism, be required to put away all his wives but one? After a very thorough discussion, lasting between two and three sessions of the Synod, it was resolved, by a vote of 36 to 10, to request the General Assembly "*in view of the exceedingly difficult complications which often occur in the case of polygamists who desire to be received into the Church, to leave the ultimate decision of all such cases in India, to the Synod of India.*" The memorialists add: "*It is the almost unanimous opinion of the members of Synod that, under some circumstances, converts who have more than one wife, together with their entire families, should be baptized.*" Not only is it thus the fact that more than four-fifths of the members of the Synod of India believe that it may sometimes be our duty, under the conditions of society in India, to baptize a polygamist without requiring him first to put away all his wives but one; but when the missionary ladies present during the sessions of Synod, desirous of ascertaining the state of opinion among themselves on this subject, took a vote thereupon, of these thirty-six ladies, many of them intimately familiar with the interior of zenana life for years, all feeling no less hatred of polygamous marriage than their sisters in America, *all but three* signified their agreement with the majority of Synod; of which minority of three, two had been only a few days in India and were therefore without any experience touching the practical questions involved. Nor is this large majority of our missionaries singular in their belief on this subject. When some years ago the question was debated in the Panjab Missionary Conference, in which a large number of missionaries and eminent Christian laymen of all denominations took part, ten out of twelve of the speakers expressed the same opinion as that held by more than four-fifths of the Synod of India to-day. So the Rev. Dr. James J. Lucas, of Saharanpur,

says that the brethren who maintain the lawfulness of not requiring a polygamist to put away any of his wives as a prerequisite to baptism, "are not even in a minority in the missionary body in India."\* A few years ago the Madura Mission voted in favor of baptizing such, provided they had contracted their marriages in ignorance and there was no equitable way of securing a separation. Their action was disapproved by the American Board; but it none the less illustrates again what is the judgment of a large part of those who, living in India, are in most intimate relation to the living facts, and who are thus far better qualified to form a right decision than can be the wisest men at home.

It may properly be added that among those who thus believe have been found many of the most able and devoted missionaries, and many of the most outspoken and uncompromising Christian statesmen with whom God has ever blessed India. Thus, among names familiar to the Church in America, might be mentioned the Rev. Levi Janvier, murdered many years ago in the Panjab; the late venerable Rev. John Newton, than whom we have rarely met a man of more profoundly Christian spirit or more deeply instructed in the Scriptures; the Rev. C. W. Forman, D.D., for over forty years at the head of our educational mission work in Lahore, lately deceased; that missionary patriarch, the late Rev. J. H. Morrison, D.D., in 1863 Moderator of the O. S. General Assembly, to whom the world chiefly owes the origination of the Annual Week of Prayer, who, to the writer's knowledge, some years ago baptized a polygamist, one Kành Dàs, whose two wives lived with him for a long time thereafter; the late Rev. Golok Nath, one of our earliest and most experienced native pastors: of the Missions of the American Board, that singularly spiritual man, the Rev. George Bowen, who so long lived his uniquely ascetic and self-denying life in Bombay: to which might be added the names of many others in various missions, whose judgment would command no less profound respect. Or we might name many well-known Christian members of the India civil and military services, such as R. N. Cust, Esq., B.C.S., LL.D., formerly Commissioner of the Panjab; Major McLeod Innes, V.C., and the late Sir Donald McLeod, formerly Lieutenant Governor of the Panjab, and many more.

\* He says: "I sent to more than sixty missionaries, representatives of different missions, the following question: Would you under any circumstances baptize a convert with more than one wife, allowing him to retain his wives? and to this question came back an answer in the affirmative from the great majority. In fact, missionaries of seven societies answered that they would baptize such candidates, if convinced of their sincerity. Some of these have baptized such converts, while others have been deterred by the rules of their missionary societies."

Surely, in the presence of such facts as these, it will be admitted that there must be weighty facts and considerations, which, not strangely, are unknown or little familiar in this connection, to most in America. To set these forth, so far as possible in a brief space, is the object of the present paper.

Let it be understood, first of all, that both parties among us in this question are assumed to be agreed on these fundamental principles of the Presbyterian Church, namely :

1. That not the Church, but Christ alone, has the right, as sole Head of the Church, to prescribe the conditions of Church membership.\*

2. That these are, simply and only, a credible profession of faith, love and obedience to Christ.†

3. That to add to or take from these conditions of membership prescribed by Christ in His Word, is *unlawful*.‡

4. That the one test of the credibility of a Christian profession, as laid down in the Word, is obedience to the commands of Christ.

In the practical application of this test, two things have to be considered, viz., What, in any case, does Christ's law command? and, secondly, Is this so clear from the Word, that if the candidate fail to see it, this debars us from believing in the genuineness of his profession of discipleship? There are many things which we may think, and perhaps rightly, to be forbidden by Christian principle, but which are yet not universally prohibited, or are even explicitly left to be determined by the individual conscience according to circumstances of time and place. For instance, a large and increasing number of Christians are persuaded that total abstinence from wine and all that can intoxicate, as a beverage, under existing social conditions, is a common Christian duty; basing this judgment on the apostle's words, Rom. xiv. 21. Nevertheless, since the apostle places this along with the eating of flesh, in the category of things *per se* indifferent, and expressly forbids Christians to judge one another in such matters,§ we are not at liberty, with some, to declare such abstinence a universal law of Christ, and refuse Church membership to a man who will not take the pledge.

In deciding whether a man's profession of faith is "credible,"

\* Form of Government, i, 7; Hodge, *What is Presbyterian Law?* p. 121.

† "We have ever admitted to our communion all those who, in the judgment of charity, were the sincere disciples of Christ, merely upon their making profession of faith, love and obedience."—Pastoral Letter of the General Assembly, O. S., 1839.

‡ The Assembly of 1842, O. S., declared: "We cannot sanction the adoption of any new terms of communion."—Moore's *Digest* (1886), p. 409. So again, the O. S. Assembly, 1864, and N. S. Assembly, 1860, *ib*, p. 677.

§ Rom. xiv. 4, 10, 13; Col. ii. 16, 20-23.

we must also in justice consider the clearness with which any duty is revealed and the degree of the man's knowledge. For it is quite possible that Christ may have commanded somewhat, which, because it is not very clearly set forth, through imperfect understanding of His Word, he may not recognize as commanded. To deny such a person Church membership, even though we rightly deem the duty important, would yet be contrary to New Testament law, because even though he is violating some command of Christ, yet since he does this through ignorance, it does not affect the credibility of his profession of loyalty to Christ. A good illustration of this principle is afforded in the case of the American Baptists, who refuse to commune with those who have not been immersed, on the ground that, since Christ commanded immersion, therefore those who decline to obey this command should not be received as church members. But, with the English Baptists, we do not recognize the justice of this position; because, whereas a large number of Christians do not so understand Christ's command, therefore their refusal to be immersed cannot cast doubt on the sincerity of their professed allegiance to Christ.

After these preliminaries, we may now say that the main question between the majority and the protesting minority of the Synod of India (and those who respectively agree with one or the other), is not whether it is ever lawful for a professing Christian, whether in a Christian or non-Christian land, to contract a polygamous marriage. On this point, the whole Synod of India emphatically agrees with the Church in the United States. The polygamy of the Mormons, for example, since polygamy is clearly forbidden to Christians, such as they profess themselves to be, is such a bar to the credibility of their profession of faith, that such a one, in his polygamous condition, could not possibly be received to Church membership. In India, no less surely than in the United States, if a Church member, his first wife still living, should, without previous divorce for such cause as Christ's law allows, marry another, the offense would be promptly met with excommunication. But the crucial question is this: Whether, in the very different case of an applicant for baptism in a non-Christian country like India, who, previous to conversion and ignorant of Christ's law, in full accord with both civil and religious law as known to him, with as good conscience as Abraham or David, had assumed polygamous relations, the law of Christ requires him at once to put away all wives but one? and whether this requirement, for a man in his position, is also so clear that if he refuse to do this, his refusal makes it impossible for us to regard his profession of faith and love to Christ as credible? If so, we must undoubtedly deny him baptism. But what if the case be otherwise?

If indeed it be granted that, as repeatedly affirmed by our General Assemblies, a credible profession of faith, love and obedience is the sole condition of admission to the Church which the law of Christ permits us to exact, then this is really the question basal to this whole discussion. If a polygamist convert from Hinduism or Mohammedanism insist on retaining all his wives, is this so indubitably contrary to what the law of Christ requires from one in his position, that it makes it impossible to believe in the sincerity of his profession of faith and loyalty to Christ? That this is not the case, is clear at once from the fact that such a difference of opinion obtains, even among those who are best qualified by high Christian character and by their position to judge in the matter. Instead of its being so luminously clear that no sincere Christian can doubt it, that Christ's law requires such a man to put away all wives but one, a very large proportion of Christian men in India, missionaries and others, believe that in many cases it requires him to retain them. Surely when so many of the ripest Christians and most experienced missionaries thus believe, we cannot insist that the polygamist's duty to put away all his wives is so clear that, except he do this, we cannot believe him to be a sincere disciple of Christ.

Why his duty is not clear can easily be shown. First arises the question of the *validity* of the polygamous marriage, contracted before his conversion. Many seem to imagine that because such a marriage would not be valid in Great Britain or America, nor even for a Christian in British India, therefore the polygamous marriages of Hindus, Mohammedans and other non-Christian people can have no validity. But this is far enough from being self-evident. Was not the marriage of Jacob to Rachel as truly valid as his marriage to Leah? But if such marriages were valid then, in a time of little light, how can we well avoid the inference that similar marriages, contracted in modern non-Christian lands and with even less moral light, may also be no less valid? Or is it reasonable to assume that all such marriages, although valid until Christ came, have been invalid ever since He came, even for those who scarcely know that He came; so that a large part of all the marriages outside Christendom have for eighteen hundred years been only fornications, and their offspring illegitimate? In fact, the validity of such marriages is so clear that in India, at least, it is practically undisputed. That is valid which effects the end. The end of marriage is to establish certain legal and moral obligations from the husband to the wife—chiefly support, protection, love and cohabitation. Even Dr. Lucas admits that the Hindu polygamist is “under legal and moral obligations” to all his wives; and although he will not bap-

tize him, he counsels him not to cast them off until legally released.\* The able Christian jurists who have given British India the present system of civil law, all emphatically affirm the validity of Hindu and Mohammedan polygamous marriages; and on repeated occasions have categorically denied that such can be nullified by conversion to Christianity. Thus that eminent legal authority, Sir Henry Maine, in the Legislative Council of the Governor-General of India said: "To apply the rule of monogamy to the polygamist convert to Christianity is obviously impossible, for he might have had five or six wives before conversion, who would not have been less his wives after conversion."† In the Panjab Missionary Conference of 1863, R. N. Cust, Esq., LL.B., B.C.S., said: "Both polygamy and divorce turn on the law of contracts. Contracts, again, turn on the civil law of the country. . . . If a man has in good faith, and according to the custom of his country, married a plurality of wives, he cannot be called upon to put away any of them when he becomes a Christian. The Church must receive him as he is."‡ On the same occasion the late Sir Donald McLeod, some time Lieutenant Governor of the Panjab, a man no less eminent for his Christian character than for his ability as a statesman, expressed himself thus:§ "I am very decidedly of the opinion that where a convert may, previous to his conversion, have married more wives than one, the fact of his conversion should not be allowed in any way to absolve him from the relationship into which he has entered. In addition to his liability to maintain his wives, he is bound to admit to the enjoyment of all conjugal rights any or all of them who may desire to live with him."|| If such a judgment from Christian jurists surprise

\* Pamphlet, page 27. But if the two wives of a converted Hindu wish to remain with him, then a "legal divorce" is not possible. Moreover, the British Government will enforce the claim of both, if suit be entered, for not only domicile and support, but for cohabitation as well. See opinion of Mr. Golok Nath, given in two footnotes below.

† Speech of March 31, 1866, when moving the Christian Converts' Dissolution of Marriage Act.

‡ Report of the Panjab Missionary Conference, p. 243. § *Ib.*, p. 249.

|| Since the above was written I have received a communication from C. Golok Nath, Esq., B.A., member of the Chief Court Bar, Lahore, and Lecturer on Law in the (Government) Panjab University, who, in answer to my inquiries, assures me that the law in India to-day is in full accord with the above opinions. He says explicitly: "The conversion of a Hindu or Mohammedan polygamist could certainly not so change his legal status as to render invalid all but one of the several marriages contracted by him before his conversion. The law does not allow a Hindu or Mohammedan polygamist convert to Christianity to choose one from his wives and dismiss the rest. If the wives elect to remain with him no divorce is allowed. Hindu law"—which is held to apply in such cases—"does not recognize divorce." In fact, in translating the Old Testament into Hindi, my attention has been repeatedly called to the fact that for "divorce" there is not even a word in that language! Such, then, is the legal situation which missionaries and polygamist converts have to face in India.

any one, he should consider what would be the effect of a refusal by the British Government to recognize the validity of polygamous marriages among its Hindu and Mohammedan subjects. To do this would be to declare that millions, living loyally and in good conscience with two or more wives, were legally guilty of adultery and liable to its penalties, their children illegitimate and therefore incapable of inheriting their parents' property. Surely a very little reflection must make it clear that not only would a law to this effect be utterly incapable of enforcement, but the refusal would be felt as such a judicial outrage that it might easily issue in evils far worse than polygamy, with such a sanguinary revolt of an enraged people as would cause men to forget the fearful days of 1857.

But if any ask, Does not the law of Christ, at least, plainly teach that the validity of a polygamous marriage, however it be admitted before, must lapse *ipso facto* when the polygamist becomes a Christian? This is, indeed, precisely the practical question which a polygamist convert to Christianity in India has to face, viz.: Is he by the mere fact of his conversion absolved from a contract of marriage which by general consent has been binding on him up to that time? But how can we assert, as we must, even on the principles of New Testament ethics, that it is the duty of the Government of India, for the present, and in order to avoid far worse wrongs, to maintain the abiding validity of non-Christian polygamous marriages, and yet teach a Hindu or Mohammedan convert that it is his immediate duty to deny that validity, defy the law and repudiate all his wives but one? Where in the whole New Testament are the words which make this his unmistakable duty?

How, then, can we say that such a convert's duty is so evident, that, except he do this, as at present required by the General Assembly's deliverance of 1875, we cannot believe that he is really a Christian? Be it noted well, that on this point the Synod of India unanimously agrees with Dr. Lucas, who repeatedly admits in his pamphlets that such a man, despite his refusal to put away his wives, may be a true Christian.\* His refusal to put away his wives, all thus agree, does not necessarily prejudice the genuineness of his profession of loyalty to Christ. By what right then, if satisfied that he is a true disciple, can we refuse to baptize him?

\* So, also, the Rev. J. H. Messmore, of the American Methodist Mission, although believing that a polygamist should not be baptized without putting away all his wives but one, urges that "it is possible for a polygamist to be out and out converted to God and yet fail to see it to be his duty to give up polygamy." I have never met a man in India who thought differently. The missionaries in Persia, also, appear, on this point, to agree with us in India. In their resolution at the Hamadan Conference of 1894, they explicitly admit that, while it is not best to baptize a polygamist, "otherwise we may treat him as a Christian."

But a further question arises. It must be admitted, as a principle of New Testament no less than of Old Testament ethics, that, when duty is uncertain, and especially when the moral evil resulting from the immediate and unconditional abolition of a wrong will probably be greater than those attending its temporary toleration, it may be duty, in the final interest of the highest righteousness, to tolerate the wrong for a time. Thus divorce for many causes and polygamy were both, not sanctioned, but tolerated of old in the best of Christ's servants. Nor did the principle cease to be of binding force, under analogous conditions, in the new dispensation. The application may be modified, but the principle holds good. Paul expressly reaffirms it in a church of converts from heathenism, saying that while he was "in readiness to avenge all disobedience," this was only "when their obedience should be fulfilled."\* The same principle evidently determined his dealing with slavery. Slavery surely is not right; it is irreconcilable with the "Golden Rule;" ancient Roman slavery, especially, was an unutterable wrong. Yet Paul nowhere commands a converted master to liberate his slave, as a condition of Church membership; he even directs the runaway slave, Philemon, to return to his master. Nor is it hard to see the reason of this temporary toleration. For to have insisted on the instant dissolution of this relation as a condition of Church membership would probably have led in the end to civil commotion and servile war, bringing in evils far worse than anything in the relation of a Christian master and a Christian slave. The principle of the temporary toleration of evil, under the conditions indicated, therefore holds in this dispensation. We believe that it clearly applies often to the case of polygamist applicants for baptism.

For, first of all, while we admit the wrong of the polygamous relation, yet duty is exceedingly uncertain. For, which of his wives shall such a polygamist keep? The General Assembly has ruled that he must turn off all but the first. This may seem, to those who have not thought through the matter, a simple and self-evident answer, since, according to the New Testament law for Christians, the first is certainly the only lawful wife. But this is so far from clear that, even in the Synod's protesting minority, we do not know of one who is sure of this. Dr. Lucas says explicitly: "I do not understand that the Scriptures teach which of the two wives is the true one;"† and argues against the validity of the first marriage, because, contracted in infancy or childhood, the element of consent was

\* 2 Cor. x. 6.

† Pamphlet, pp. 23, 24, where he also cites Rev. Dr. Charles Hodge as also in doubt on this point. See also the Answer to Rev. Charles W. Forman, D.D., p. 11.

wanting. But against this stands the fact that Scripture nowhere even hints that the consent of the parties is essential to the validity of a marriage. From the earliest antiquity outside of Christendom, all has turned on the agreement of the parents. Only Christianity has brought in a change, and even so not universally. To declare the invalidity of a first marriage, in a non-Christian land, on this ground, is to affirm that most marriages in human history have been invalid. Although the whole influence of the Government of India is rightly used to discourage child marriage, yet meanwhile it steadily asserts the validity of such first marriages until public sentiment shall be educated up to the point of prohibiting them. But if the Church go beyond this, and insist that *only* this child marriage shall be held valid, she thereby gives her moral support in so far to the atrocious system of child marriage.

Again, as bearing on the polygamist's duty, it should be noted that, in the great majority of cases among the Hindus, the second marriage is contracted because of the first wife having no children. So that when the General Assembly requires the polygamist convert to put away all wives but the first, it requires him not only to signalize his conversion by violating a contract held valid alike by his Christian rulers and a large part of his Christian brethren, but to do this in such a way as shall inflict the greatest amount possible of cruel injustice and suffering, by turning out of his house that wife who is the mother of his children (who will naturally in most cases have to go with her), and denying to her conjugal rights of protection and cohabitation which he had pledged her. The wrong involved is aggravated under the conditions of life in India, in that it will commonly be practically impossible for the wife turned off, whichever she be, to escape the suspicion of being an unchaste woman; and she will inevitably be placed in a position where, with good name beclouded and no lawful protector, she will be under the strongest temptation to live an immoral life. No doubt polygamy is wrong; but, then, is not breach of faith and such injustice and cruelty to an innocent woman and her children also wrong? If there is a law against polygamy, is there not a law also against these things even more explicit and indubitable? In the case supposed both cannot be kept. Which shall the man be instructed to break?

The General Assembly of 1875 appears to have imagined that the injustice was done away by enjoining a man to "make suitable provision for her support that is put away, and for her children, if she have any." But this utterly fails to meet the case. For the breach of faith required remains, since the marriage contract, both according to Scripture and the law of all Christian lands as well as of

India, binds the husband not only to support, but equally to protection and cohabitation.\* But by the deliverance of 1875, all missionaries in non-Christian lands are directed by the General Assembly to instruct the convert that in order to baptism he must keep the compact as regards the first particular, but break it as regards the others. Moreover the moral end sought will, even so, not be gained. The wife put away may live in a separate house and at a distance; but then polygamists sometimes keep different wives in different homes, and it will not be easy to persuade a Hindu or Mohammedan community, especially if the man still continue to give her money, as required by the Assembly's law, that cohabitation really ceases.

It needs also to be remembered that, besides support, among the most important duties of a Christian father to his children is bringing them up in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." But how can he do this if he has turned them out of his house, and under conditions which must alienate them from him, and which forbid him to go near them—if, at least, the public is to believe in the reality of the wife's separation?

Is it not plainly quite possible that the principle of temporary toleration of an admitted wrong in order to avoid greater wrong may thus apply in this case? To most of us in India it seems clear that it does so apply. And so the Synod of India is compelled to say in substance: However much we may regret the temporary presence of polygamy in a transitional state of the Church, yet, according to the law of our own Church which declares a credible profession of faith and love to Christ to be the sole Scriptural condition of Church membership, and much more according to the teaching of New Testament as bearing on duty in such a case, we think that, if we see good reason to believe that the Lord has received a polygamist convert, we ourselves also are bound, without insisting on aught beyond this credible profession of faith, to receive and baptize him. But it is said, in reply, that although we may believe such a man a true disciple, yet we should not admit him to the Church, lest his presence in the Church should cause one of Christ's little ones to stumble. To this we answer that not only does this introduce a new and unscriptural condition of Church membership, but it is equally true that, by refusing such a converted polygamist the sacraments of the Church, we shall cause him and his most certainly to stumble by denying him important means of grace, and also by putting him

\* According to British law in India, "a Hindu wife or wives can claim full restitution of *all* marital rights (including cohabitation, domicile and support) from the husband who has become a convert to Christianity." Letter of C. Golok Nath, Esq., B.A., Lecturer on Law to the Panjab University.

under the strongest pressure to violate his conscience by casting off a wife whom he believes himself morally bound to retain. Still it is urged, as by Dr. Lucas, that we ought to keep the polygamist out, although a true Christian, "for the sake of the Church." But we insist again that to keep a man who is believed to be a true Christian out of the Church for such a reason would be contrary to the law of our own Church, as also to the New Testament law, in that it adds to a credible profession of faith in Christ something else—namely, "the interest of the body as a whole,"—as a condition of Church membership. Moreover, the principle that an undoubted Christian may be rightly refused membership for years, perhaps forever, for the good of the Church, is not only foreign to the New Testament, but, if admitted, would set the door wide open to the exercise of intolerable ecclesiastical tyranny. A very large part of earnest Christians in America and elsewhere believe that dancing, card-playing and theatre-going by Church members are seriously hurtful to the Church. Shall we then make abstinence from all these a condition of membership? Against these practices our General Assembly has often testified, but has none the less steadily refused to say that more was to be required as a condition of Church membership than a credible profession of faith. Polygamy is doubtless a much more serious thing than these, but, nevertheless, the whole Synod of India, as also apparently our missionaries in Persia, believe that the refusal of a polygamist convert to give up any of the wives he had married in his days of ignorance is not incompatible with the genuineness of his profession of discipleship to Christ.

But, let us now turn to the New Testament, if perchance we may therein find any still clearer hint as to what it is the Lord's will that we should do in such cases. The majority of the Synod of India believe, with many other Christians, that in 1 Tim. iii. 2 (and parallels), we have precisely the guidance which those in non-Christian lands so greatly need in this matter. In this passage, the apostle, enumerating the qualifications of a bishop, says he must be "*μὴς ἑνὸς ἄνδρα,*" "the husband of one wife." Whatever these words mean, it is certain that they imply the possible presence in the Church of men who were not, in the sense intended, husbands each of one wife. That is, just as when the apostle says also that a bishop must not be "a lover of money," "not contentious," it is assumed that there might be some in the churches who were "lovers of money" or were "contentious," so, also, when he says that a bishop must be "the husband of one wife," it necessarily implies that there might be men in the churches who were not husbands of one wife. What then do these words mean?

The Greek Church declares that the apostle means that a bishop must be a married man. There were unmarried men in the churches, but no one of these must be made a bishop. This interpretation assumes that the numeral εἷς has here the force of the indefinite article. But, as Winer has shown, in a case like this, where ambiguity might arise, the Greek numeral is never so used.\* Some Romish theologians understand the "one wife" to denote the Church, and teach that the apostle means that a bishop must have no wife but the Church—*i.e.*, he must be a celibate!

Much more plausible is the interpretation of many eminent modern expositors, as Alford, Ellicott *et al.*, viz., that the words mean that the bishop should never have had more than one wife.† That is, while there were in the churches widowers who had married again, no one of such should be made a bishop, and, therefore, also, by necessary consequence, if the wife of a bishop die, he must not marry a second time. For this interpretation is chiefly adduced the analogy of the essentially identical phrase in chap. v. 9, that a widow who should be set apart for special church service (?) must be ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή, "the wife of one husband." Since these words can only mean that such a widow shall only have been once married, hence it is argued that, in 1 Tim. iii. 2, 12, the similar words must presumably mean the same thing. But the argument, however plausible, is inconclusive. For it will be granted that the words under discussion in neither passage contain in themselves any connotation of time; this can only, therefore, be determined from the context. In chap. v. 9 the time is fixed—not to speak of other preterites in the context—by the very word "widow." On the contrary, in chap. iii. 2, there is nothing in the context to suggest a reference to the past. Not only so, but all the other predicates following the phrase confessedly refer, not to the past, but the present status of the man who may be appointed as bishop. Hence we see not how to escape the inference that these words also must refer to the present status of the man to be appointed bishop. One must be taken who, *at the time of the choice*, is "the husband of one—*i. e.*, not more than one—wife."

Yet another interpretation has been suggested by Martensen, who thinks that "the cases in question are those of fresh marriages contracted while divorced wives were still living."‡ Dr. Lucas adopts this, saying that it is the interpretation which "satisfies" him. He explains: "Among both Jews and Greeks of Paul's day a man could

\* So also Alford *et al.* See Alford's *Greek Testament*, *sub loc. cit.*

† See Alford, *Greek Testament*, and Ellicott, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, *sub loc. cit.*

‡ *Christian Ethics (Social)*, xix, pp. 38, Ed. 1884, Edinburgh.

put away wife after wife for the most trivial causes, giving her a bill of divorcement. . . . There were those in the churches who had divorced more than one wife. . . . Hence he tells Timothy that the candidate for bishop or deacon must not be . . . a man who had divorced wife after wife, but who had been faithful to his wife.\* For this it is argued that it fits the historical situation; that it enables us also to interpret this and the words regarding the "widow," chap. v. 9, in the same way, as referring to cases of previous divorce, which, though legal, were yet immoral. Such a divorced man, it is urged, might be justly described as the husband of more than one wife, because, although according to Roman law he might have been legally divorced, yet, since in the eye of God such divorce was invalid, the second marriage was adultery. But this interpretation seems forced and unnatural, and contrary to the *usus loquendi*. To illustrate: In the United States it is the humiliating fact that in many States the divorce laws are criminally lax, so that probably in the country there are thousands of married men who have been divorced from a former wife, still living, for reasons other than the law of Christ allows. But howsoever we condemn these, is such a man ever spoken of as the husband of more than one wife? Or, if it should be said of any one, "He is the husband of more than one wife," would any one, however convinced of the criminality of many of our legal divorces, understand the words to mean that he had been unlawfully divorced and remarried, and not instead that he was a bigamist actually living with two undivorced wives?

Only one other interpretation remains to be considered. The bishop must not be a man who is living with more than one wife—*i. e.*, not a polygamist. The words then certainly imply that there might be such members in some of the churches in Timothy's charge, for office would never be forbidden to a class of men who would by no chance ever be found in the Church. Moreover, inasmuch as we know that the Church has never tolerated the second marriage of a professed Christian, the first wife still living, except after a divorce authorized by Christ's law, it follows of necessity that the polygamist Church members thus alluded to, must have contracted their polygamous marriages prior to conversion, in their Judaistic or heathen ignorance, and had been permitted to enter the Church without renouncing any of their wives. Finally, since nowhere in the New Testament is there any censure for admitting these, it follows that the putting away of all wives but one was not by the apostles made a condition of baptism; and that, therefore, to insist on this now, as a universal rule, in similar cases of converts

\* Pamphlet, as cited, Answer to Dr. Charles W. Forman, Lahore, p. 10.

from heathenism, is to add, somewhat, counter to apostolic practice, to the New Testament conditions for Church membership.

This interpretation so naturally suits the words, that, except for the ethical difficulties involved, it is not probable that any other would ever have been suggested. That it is thus natural is illustrated by the fact that all the fathers of the first few centuries thus understood this passage as a prohibition of polygamy in a bishop, Chrysostom alone even suggesting any alternative. Many of these were Greeks, and therefore presumably competent to understand their own vernacular; they were, moreover, familiar with the conditions of contemporary society, as we are not. Their consensus is, therefore, of the greatest weight.

This interpretation is not refuted by urging the infrequency of polygamy in the apostolic age. This all admit. But the argument does not depend on this, but on the question whether it was practiced at all. As to this, the testimony is so explicit that we wonder that any should have doubt. Dean Alford, who rejects the reference to polygamy in the passage discussed, yet says expressly: "The custom of polygamy was then prevalent among the Jews," a statement to which he gives contemporary testimony,\* and which is confirmed by the universal patristic interpretation of 1 Tim. iii. 2, etc. We believe that 1 Tim. iii. 2 and parallels abundantly sustain the argument above as to our duty toward polygamist applicants for baptism whom we may believe sincere.

If it be said, with the protestants of the Synod of India, that this is only an inference from this passage, we may reply that an inference may easily be of no less necessary validity than the proposition from which it is drawn. Our Lord frequently insisted upon truths only derivable by inference from Old Testament passages, and rebuked his hearers for not having drawn such inferences, no less than for denying the explicit teachings of the Word. Moreover, this argument, if granted, would prove too much. Where, *e. g.*, in the New Testament, are we formally taught the continued obligation of a seventh day of rest, or the duty of infant baptism, or the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? Surely, these are only derived from the New Testament by "inference;" are they therefore the less of binding authority?

Neither is it of force to urge that if there had been in the apostolic churches men retaining more than one wife, we should certainly have had reference to such, and special instructions for them in the epistles. We believe that we have such reference here and

\* Justin Martyr (*contra Trypho*) says: "Your teachers until now allow you each one to have four and five wives." Josephus also gives the same testimony, as also Theodoret (of both Jews and Greeks) and others of the fathers. Cf. Alford, *Greek Testament, sub loc. cit.*

in the parallel passages; the infrequency of reference is sufficiently accounted for by the admitted fact that in that age, as in modern India, polygamous unions, among both Jews and Greeks, were exceptional. And for special injunctions to polygamist husbands there was no occasion, since such duties would be precisely the same as in the case of monogamists. Or were, *e. g.*, Jacob's duties to Rachel different from his duties to Leah?

Neither do our Saviour's words in Matt. xix. 9 and parallels seem to us to touch the question. They certainly lay down a law for all who live under the light of Christ's teaching, and forever prohibit any Christian, whether in a Christian or non-Christian land, from contracting a second marriage in the lifetime of the first wife, without previous lawful divorce. But they do not touch the wholly distinct question, whether when, as in non-Christian lands, we confront conditions essentially identical with those under which God tolerated patriarchal polygamy, we are not bound to recognize the principle of temporary toleration, as applying to such when converted to Christianity, until death shall end the relation. The reasons for this have been already set forth.

In like manner, the argument of the protesting minority of the Synod of India that the admission of polygamists without separation contradicts the organic law of the Church, is sufficiently met by the fact that it is certain that the Westminster divines had not such cases before their minds when they drew up our Standards. This practical problem which now faces us in non-Christian lands was not then above the horizon. And we repeat, that on the other hand, it is perfectly certain that the organic law of the Church most distinctly forbids us to add anything as a condition of baptism to a credible profession of faith and obedience.

But the Scriptural proof of our duty in these cases, does not depend on this last-named interpretation of 1 Tim. iii. 2, 12. If we assume, instead, that of Martensen, accepted by Dr. Lucas, to be the true meaning of the passage, *viz.*, that the reference is to married men who had been unlawfully divorced from other wives still living, this, instead of nullifying our inference as to the bearing of this passage on our duty, increases its cogency. For the protesting minority of the Synod argue thus: A man living with more than one wife is an adulterer, and hence cannot, so long as this condition continue, be lawfully received to Church membership. But according to Matt. xix. 9, and parallels, a man who for any cause save adultery has put away his wife and has married another, is an adulterer. Indeed, the wrong in the latter case is distinctly more grievous than in the former. For to the wrong of taking a second wife, the unlawfully divorced man has added the repudiation of

the wife of his youth, denying to her those rights which he pledged to her in marriage. But if, according to 1 Tim. iii. 2, in such a period of transition even such a man might, nevertheless, while still living with the second woman, possibly enough have been received into the Church without rebuke, surely the example would allow, *á fortiori*, the reception of a polygamous convert, still retaining his second wife, who had at least not added wrong to wrong by thus casting off unjustly his former wife. Surely the admission of this interpretation, accepted by Dr. Lucas, logically concedes the whole argument from this passage of Scripture.

We conclude, then, that not only the various ethical and practical considerations above set forth, but this crucial passage in 1 Tim. iii. 2, 12, with its parallels, fully justifies the position of the large majority of the Synod of India, that according to New Testament principles it may, under some circumstances in a non-Christian land, be duty to receive a polygamist convert to the Church by baptism, without requiring him first to dismiss all his wives but one.

Two or three objections remain to be noted. The protesting minority of the Synod urge that if polygamists are thus received, "the testimony of the Church against polygamy will be neutralized." But even were this true, is it then nothing that by requiring a man to cast off a wife and children held his lawful family by the laws of the land, and to expose her to cruel suspicion, shame, hardship and temptation, the testimony of the Church against injustice and cruelty should be weakened? But we see no reason to share this apprehension. All agree that 1 Tim. iii. 2, 12, requires us to keep the polygamist under this perpetual stigma of condemnation, that under no circumstances can he hold even the lowest office in the Church. Besides this, we tell him that if he add to his wives, he will at once be excommunicated. How then will our testimony against polygamy be "neutralized?"

Again, it is urged that, if the Synod of India be allowed the ultimate decision of such cases within its bounds, there is danger that we may soon have in India communities of polygamous Christians. We believe this danger to be chiefly imaginary. Polygamists are a small minority of the entire population, therefore very few relatively are likely to apply for baptism. Even in such cases, the hatred of one—or more—of the convert's wives to Christianity will often be such that she will prefer to abandon her husband, at whatever cost of hardship, in which case (and this case only) British law in India will allow him to take out a divorce. Again, the few who will enter the Church with more than one wife, will abide under a lifelong stigma of dishonor, as ineligible to any office; and no Christian will be allowed to contract a polygamous marriage any

more than in America ; this being prohibited alike by ecclesiastical and by the British civil law. And at most, the presence of a few polygamists in the Church would be a temporary evil, incident, as in apostolic times, to a transitional condition.

If it be asked, Would not the action asked of General Assembly by the Synod of India be inconsistent with its previous deliverances regarding polygamy in Utah? we answer : No, because the situation in India is radically different from that which prevailed in Utah. Mormons claim to be, *par excellence*, the Church of Jesus Christ; hence we must apply to them rigidly the law of Jesus Christ. The social conditions also are totally different. No separation in Utah could have inflicted such suffering and dishonor on the woman dismissed, as in India. Besides, when in Utah the polygamous relation was assumed, both parties knew their relation to be in defiance of the law of the land, and therefore legally null and void ; and accepted voluntarily all the risk of its compulsory termination. Beyond the mere fact that the Church has had to deal with polygamy in Utah as in India, there is no parallelism in the two cases.

Finally, the question arises, How far must the principle argued in this paper be held to apply in other non-Christian lands? We have not the knowledge to answer dogmatically. Questions at once arise which can only be properly answered by missionaries of experience in such various countries. Polygamous marriages in India are recognized by the law of the land as in every sense valid. But in much of Africa, for instance, is there such a thing as marriage, in any true sense? Anything more, practically, than lawless concubinage? We should doubt it. Again, where Mohammedan law prevails, conditions are altered and new questions arise. Mohammedan law decrees that the apostasy of husband or wife from Islam *ipso facto* dissolves all marriage compacts ; hence, *legally*, the polygamist convert to Christianity is free from all his wives. Whether he is therefore *morally* free, in case any or all of his wives elect to stay with him, is quite another question. We should gravely doubt it. The Synod of India is profoundly sensible of the grave embarrassment and mischief which is sure to arise, if such complicated and perplexing questions, demanding in order to any certainty of a right decision the most thorough intimacy with the whole social and ethical environment, are settled in a distant land, where, with the most righteous intentions, it is simply impossible that men should be in a position to give with any certainty a wise and righteous decision, which shall be equally applicable to the very diverse conditions of the various mission fields. I am sure that the Synod of India, for this reason, would utterly deprecate the enunciation of any law by the

General Assembly on this or any other matter of internal discipline, peculiar to any foreign mission field, which should bind alike all her missionaries, irrespective of the very diverse conditions of the various peoples among which they labor. But on this one point we feel exceedingly clear. In any land, for any consideration of supposed prudence and care for the purity of the Church, to add an iota to the one Scriptural condition of Church membership, laid down in our Standards and reaffirmed by our General Assemblies, namely, a credible profession of faith and loyalty to Jesus Christ, is both directly opposed to the principle of the supreme Headship of Christ in His own Church, as to the clear teaching of the New Testament, and is morally sure, in the end, to bring in evils often worse than those which some, with mistaken prudence, by added restrictions, would seek to avoid.

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