

# *Theology* on the *Web*.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



*Buy me a coffee*

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

THE

# CHURCHMAN

---

SEPTEMBER, 1886.

---

ART. I.—HOW IS POLYGAMY TO BE DEALT WITH BY THE RISING CHRISTIAN PROTESTANT CHURCHES OF BRITISH INDIA AND AFRICA?

A LETTER was read from the Bishop of Zululand in the Upper House of Convocation during the summer of 1886, requesting guidance on the question of baptizing persons living in Polygamy. It was determined that communications should be made to those Churches of the Anglican Communion, in which questions relating to Polygamy had been found of pressing importance, and that the ancient ecclesiastical law relating to the subject should be ascertained. At the annual meeting of the S.P.G., the Primate again alluded to the subject, and notified, that it would be discussed in the Pan-Anglican Synod, which would D.V. meet in 1888 at Lambeth.

It may be deemed not inexpedient to recall what has been written on the subject, and to consider it as God-fearing men, and yet not afraid to look firmly in the face the facts recorded in past history, and the circumstances of the days in which we live. We should show that we are neither slaves to precedents, nor desirous of needless change, nor contemptuous of Holy Writ wisely and widely interpreted.

In the Table of Literature on the subject, which I place at the close of this paper, ancient memories will be awakened, and the opinions of men now at rest will be cited. There is still room for discussion, when we find that a quarter of a century ago Archbishop Whately, Bishop Colenso, Bishop Cotton, Bishop Milman were on one side, and Bishop Cotterell, Bishop Daniel Wilson, and Mr. Henry Venn were on the other. Different missionaries have acted and made utterances in different manners. Such of the laity, as have spoken, have as a rule upheld the sanctity of contracts made *bond fide*—the contract of the union of the sexes, which is the most sacred, if not always the most holy, of contracts—and repudiated the

idea of a Polygamist purchasing admission into the Church of Christ at the expense of the comfort, the rights, the respectability, and possibly the morals, of his wives. We read in the "Report of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Panjab Church Council" (p. 59), that both Bishop Milman and Robinson, of Calcutta, sanctioned the baptism of Polygamists: we may well draw our breath here; but we read how in South Africa Polygamists were allowed to select one wife and enter the Church, and that the others were sometimes allowed to live not far from him, sometimes allowed to depart, sometimes married off to others: we may well feel a feeling of shame here, for these poor women had souls to be saved also.

What is Polygamy? Its real meaning is the status of a man, who has a plurality of wives, and of a woman, who has a plurality of husbands. The legal test of the word "husband" and "wife" is that the civil law recognises the status and the rights flowing therefrom, and that the children are legitimate. We have both Polygyny and Polyandry in India, thoroughly recognised in the courts of law. Be it remembered, that we guaranteed to the people of India toleration of their religion, and their own laws as regards marriage and inheritance, and no wise ruler would venture to meddle with them. And here I at once lay down another principle: whatever theologians or short-sighted missionaries may say, Polygamy is not a crime. The rulers of India put down with a high hand atrocious crimes. When we annexed the Panjab in 1846, I was with Lord Lawrence, and we summoned the landowners, and told them, that they must not burn their widows, or kill their daughters, or bury alive their lepers. We knew very well, that the greater part were idolaters, and all of them possible Polygamists, and some Polyandrists; but that was no affair of ours. Polygamy and Polyandry may be highly objectionable, but their position ranges with profligacy, intoxication, gambling, and other habits condemned by the moralist, yet extensively practised in Christian countries.

According to Dr. Hunter, Polyandry is found in the Himalayan valleys and in Travancore, at each end of India; one woman has several husbands, generally brothers. In their great heroic poem, the "Mahabharate," the heroine, Draupadi, marries five brothers and lives happily. So entirely is Polyandry a feature of the custom of some tribes, that General Dalton mentions that, at the request of a father, he directed search to be made for a runaway daughter, who was brought in by the police with her two lovers, with whom she had eloped. In the Panjab, among the Jat families, too poor to bear the expense of the marriage of all the males, the wife of the eldest son has to accept his brothers as joint husbands.

One tribe is mentioned by the Mahometan writers in 1008 A.D. as practising Polyandry. In South India the custom has a different and more primitive development, for the sister's son always succeeds to a man's property; and according to Dr. Hunter the women of certain tribes live promiscuously without the form of marriage. The successor to the throne is restricted to the issue of a certain number of princesses, who are kept like queen-bees. Polygamy is lawful throughout India, both to Hindu and Mahometan, but the practice is quite the exception, as it is expensive. Moreover, India is under a rule of law, and has been so for centuries. A marriage is only lawful with certain persons, and must be ratified in a certain way and at a considerable expense. This causes a great restriction of the privilege, and, as a fact, none but the rich avail themselves of it. Very good feeling is often shown. A rich banker came to see me, and told me of his sorrow, that he had no son to perform the funeral rites over him. I suggested to him a second wife, but he would not hear of anything, which would vex his wife. On one occasion I heard in my office, that my head man of business had had two babies born at the same time from different mothers; when alone, I asked him about it, as it appeared to me to be disreputable, and he said that it was not his fault, that his parents had married him to his two wives; that they were both good women, and he had no power to cast either off. I remember a young Rajpút noble marrying the two daughters of a Rajpút neighbour, who added a niece as well to the bargain. The Maharaja Duleep Singh, so well known in England, is the issue of a polygamous father, who left a great many widows. Sheer Ali, the unfortunate ruler of Afghanistan in the last war, was the issue of a polygamous connection. I remember the Maharaja of Puteala, a Polygamist, in his desire to have a son, ordering a wife to be looked for of his own caste, who belonged to a family, where the women always had large families, and his plan succeeded. Nothing is more mistaken than to suppose that sensuality, in India at least, has anything to do with the matter. We read how the high-priest Jehoiada gave King Joash two wives when he was quite a child. As a rule, the bridegroom has never seen the bride before the marriage. The marriage vow is preserved faithfully by the woman at least, and by a very great majority of the men. We quite know that Monogamy does not put a stop to gross sensuality. My object is to show, that it is raising a false issue to exaggerate the foulness of Polygamy. It exists, respected by the law; but, if left alone, will gradually die out under the influence of enlightenment, education, and general softening of manners.

Leaving India, let us consider Polygamy in South Africa.

Sir Theophilus Shepstone, Hon. Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal, on March 26th, 1861, expressed the following opinions at Pietermaritzburg :

I. Native law recognises every woman as a wife, whose position as such has been consented to by the two families concerned, and when such consent has been ratified or carried out by a formal marriage ceremony.

II. For a marriage to be valid, there must be a consideration on both sides, the two families being the contracting parties, and this must be measured by the rank and condition of these families.

III. The suitor must make over cattle to the amount settled, and the girl on her marriage must be accompanied by cattle and ornaments as may be due to her rank. In some cases she brings nearly as much as her husband has paid.

IV. The marriage ceremonies differs with different tribes; but the essence of it is friendship betwixt the families, promise to protect and cherish wife, on part of husband; promise of obedience and good behaviour on part of wife; and a further recognition of the new relations with each other which can always be pleaded in any subsequent dispute.

V. The cattle are taken beforehand to the girl's family, but the girl can refuse them, and does often refuse them, and send them back; and the meaning of this is known.

VI. Her friends may press and threaten her; but a girl, if determined, is sure of victory. In case of personal violence the English magistrate would interfere and protect her, and maintain her right of free choice, and punish violence.

VII. In every stage of the proceedings before and after marriage will be found the exact counterparts and analogies of the higher form of marriage elsewhere, but in their native form peculiar to the state of culture.

VIII. The wife is not a slave, or sold as such. The parent of the girl never loses his right to protect his child. The cattle given at the marriage is a guarantee for their good treatment.

IX. She has, of course, to work, and help to maintain her family. If idle, she is punished. But public opinion has the same effect among women here as elsewhere.

X. A widow may continue with her children, or leave them and marry again. The husband's heirs may claim something, but they cannot control her free action.

XI. If she runs away from her husband, and her friends refuse to give her up, the matter comes before the magistrate, who settles it as best he can.

XII. When separation takes place before children are born, it often happens that all property is mutually restored. Such

cases often come before the magistrate, who, if cruelty and oppression of the woman be proved, would not order the cattle to be given back to the husband.

Sir Theophilus admits the evil of Polygamy, but gross exaggeration of that evil will not help the matter. There are many evils also in monogamic marriages. He states distinctly, that in any case of oppression by father of his daughter, or husband of his wife, the magistrate will interfere.

He considers, that it is wrong to teach a heathen, as a duty enjoined by Christ's religion, that *he must injure others to benefit himself*—that he must commit an unlawful act, involving oppression and injustice, and a reckless sacrifice of the interests of others, to further his own. These women are wives according to their law, or custom having force of law; and their *consciences*—their self-respect—should not be destroyed by inducing them to believe, that they are something less—in fact, dishonoured prostitutes; their children should not be bastardized, who by the law are legitimate, and have rights as such. These women are admitted to be *faithful* wives, because they consider themselves wives. Why subvert this notion and, in fact, encourage licentiousness? A wife at present has within her reach full means of protection, because she has the legal rights of a wife to plead. If deprived of these, her moral sense and her legal rights disappear. It may be expedient to legislate so as to discourage and extinguish Polygamy eventually, but any other course is neither politic nor just.

In India the wives are all equal; but we gather from Sir T. Shepstone, that one Zulu wife ranks above another. But it rarely happens that the first wife, according to date, enjoys the highest rank; nor does the issue of the first wife succeed as of right to a chieftainship: this point is of importance, as will appear below. In South Africa no system of concubinage is known, nor in India: this fact must also be borne in mind. In South Africa, as in India among Hindus, a man cannot marry any female, with whom he is in the remotest degree connected in blood. In South Africa the suitor has seen the girl, who is apparently an adult, and has a veto on the arrangement; in India the bride is generally a child, and has no voice in the matter. In India, with the Hindu female, divorce or re-marriage as a widow is impossible. With the Mahometan there is no difficulty, as the woman can even divorce her husband, and can, as a widow, re-marry. Change of religion from the Hindu and Mahometan point of view dissolve the contract of marriage; but a Christian does not obtain his liberty to re-marry in that way.

But there is a third class of circumstances which presents

itself. In British India law absolutely rules, the "law of the person," enforced by British Courts. In the colonies of Natal and the Cape, law, to a certain extent, prevails, but of a rougher character; but on the West Coast of Africa there exists no law, or custom having the force of law, and there is no Executive to enforce it, if it did exist. Polygamy is made more odious by the existence of slavery and the slave-trade; and it is obvious, that sensuality is the motive here, and that, in fact, marriage scarcely exists. The connection of the Arab and the negro chief with the women of his harem is simply that of wholesale concubinage. If the phenomena presented are more distressing, they are simpler. The male convert in such cases can be dealt with very summarily, as a reformed profligate; the poor women have no conjugal duties to render, but have to be rescued, as best may be, from a life of infamy.

Beyond India and Africa there are other regions where Polygamy prevails, but it is in these two countries, that the opposing forces of Polygamy and Christianity come into collision.

The environment of the chosen people at Hebron and Shechem, in Egypt, and in Canaan, was so totally different, that it is difficult to imagine anything more unreasonable, than to seek for analogies there wherewith to solve this problem of the nineteenth century in India and Africa. If Polygamy prevailed in the Old Testament times, it was obviously of a totally different character from the secluded Indian *zunána*, the Zulu kraal, and the Yariba harem. In the first case the woman does nothing, absolutely nothing; in the last two she works like a day labourer, and helps to support herself, her children, and her husband or master by daily toil. The wives of the Hebrew Polygamist appeared in public, were admitted to the place of worship, were treated with honour and deference; and in the case of Hannah and Bathsheba, an eighth wife, their issue was the recipient of the highest honour from the Almighty. There were harlots in those days, and there were concubines; but these were wives, and the priests did not think them unworthy of their notice. They had even a higher status than is conceded by law to the wives of the Indian and African Polygamist; and in some cases, though not all—in the case of the mother of Solomon certainly—Polygamy was the result of sensuality, and yet went unpunished under a system of government controlled by a powerful priesthood, and stimulated and awed by inspired prophets, who never wearied in describing the sins and back-slidings of the nation (Ezekiel iii. 18), but never spake one word against this great domestic weakness. I mention these facts to justify the English Government of India and South Africa in the policy of forbearance, which they have adopted

towards Polygamy, as in past years they did to slavery, until the latter died out of itself, and this will be the fate of Polygamy also.

My own view is that, subsequent to the Babylonish Captivity, Polygamy did not exist; the only instance on record is that of Herod the Great, mentioned by Josephus. The unlimited power of divorce, and no doubt profligacy, had taken its place. The world had advanced. Successive Polygamy had taken the place of *concurrent* Polygamy in the Western world. In Greece and Rome Polygamy was unknown. We only read of one wife of Pilate. Esther is the last Hebrew maiden on record, who fell so low as to be one of the many wives of a sensual tyrant—a heathen, to whom her law forbade her to be united. Her contemporary, the Roman Virginia, preferred death to shame. If it be conceded that Polygamy had ceased to exist many centuries before the time of our Lord and His Apostles, we are spared much useless discussion about inapplicable texts, which could not be meant to cover circumstances, which never existed. In the elder world cannibalism, human sacrifices, and Polygamy had existed, but as far as regards the nations dwelling within the area of the Roman Empire, they had died out. There is an abundance of abominable crime alluded to by St. Paul, but it was beyond his experience and imagination, that a man should err in these three particulars. It seems impossible, that he should have overlooked them in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans had they existed.

Since these days the uttermost ends of the world have been reached, and we find traces of these three giants in America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. We find nearly all the crimes described by the Apostles, and these in addition. Civilization may have trodden down the two former in China, Japan, and India, but the third remains. Elsewhere all three are rampant. This leads to another reflection. We cannot conceal from ourselves, that all mankind is not on the same level of culture and privileges and responsibilities. Europe and European colonies are far ahead of Asia, Asia is ahead of Africa, and Africa of America and Oceania. It is idle to apply the same methods of government, to require the same standard of morals, to enforce the same discipline, upon tribes just emerging from savagery, in the lowest records of culture, left out in the cold for long centuries, never visited by prophet or evangelist, never elevated by certain hopes of a future heaven, never awed by certain prospects of everlasting damnation. And yet some missionaries would try to introduce *per saltum* ordinances and standards, which they could scarcely be able to enforce in the British Islands, into the African kraal

or the Indian village. Let them set before their flock the highest—the very highest—standard, but be merciful in the application of it for the first or second generations.

All other sins and offences against the law of God and human nature seem to come to an end with the committal and the punishment, the repentance and the pardon. In Oceania we have excellent Christians, who once were cannibals. The sorcerer-priest, the official murderer of the human sacrifice, has been admitted as a communicant; the profligate, the drunkard, the adulterer, the atheist, the blasphemer, the persecutor of martyred Christians—all find that there is pardon; but the curse of the unhappy Polygamist is, by the nature of the case, a continuing one; he cannot get rid of it until his own death, or that of his unhappy wives. And yet Polygamy, though it clearly existed, is not condemned in the Decalogue. The few words, "Thou shalt have but one wife," would have settled the matter absolutely and for ever. To our nineteenth-century ideas the sin of theft, which is condemned in the Decalogue, is as nothing compared to that of Polygamy. As time went on, and the thoughts of men widened with the progress of the suns, no prophet denounced this canker-worm of domestic purity, causing rivalry among women occupying the same house, hatred among the children of the same father. The misfortunes of the lives of David and Solomon could be so clearly traced to Polygamy, that the conscience of the nation would have accepted the prohibition, as indeed it did after the Captivity. It cannot be said, as regards Israel, as it can truly be said with regard to the people of India, that the position of the ruling power was so delicate and precarious that it dared not run the risk of intruding into family customs, for Ezra and Nehemiah plainly compelled the people to put away their alien wives. A word from Moses and Joshua would have nipped Polygamy in the bud; and David's conduct would have been as unjustifiable in taking eight wives one thousand years before the Christian era, as Herod's was in taking nine wives at the time of the birth of our Lord. On the contrary, special favour attached itself to Rachel, Hannah, and Bath-sheba, and their issue, Joseph, Samuel, and Solomon, all begotten by polygamous fathers. The missionary must, therefore, maintain some restraint upon himself in his wholesale abuse of Polygamy, or cease to read the Old Testament to his congregation. We have it on the authority of one distinguished traveller, that a woman in West Africa would disdain to marry a man, who had only one wife. We have it on the authority of a missionary, that after the birth of a child the wife withdraws herself absolutely from the society of her husband for three years, that she may suckle her offspring.

Everything assumes a weird and awful form in Africa. A well-known traveller a few years ago tells us of a chief, who, in addition to his well-stocked harem, claimed a right to every woman in his kingdom on whom his fancy fell ; and among the number of his harem were his sisters, his stepmothers, his cousins, his aunts, and his own children. The Polygamy of India, which excludes everyone within the limits of consanguinity and affinity, and limits the number to four at the same time, all of the same caste as the husband, seems quite a decent and orderly custom, compared to the frightful excesses of the Africans in regions, which have not yet come under European law.

I have no wish to fortify myself by the opinions of others. As stated above, I regard all the cases quoted in the Old Testament as inapplicable to Christianity in the nineteenth century, and the pages of the New Testament as silent ; but the words, "Male and female created He them," "In the beginning it was not so," seem to govern the whole matter, and to forbid imperatively the admission of Polygamy in any form into the Christian Church. The equality of members of the two sexes that are born is beyond doubt : the superior fecundity of a monogamous population is a fact capable of proof. If once Polygamists are admitted into the Church, even for the lifetime of existing Polygamists, a new lease of life will be given to the institution. The Native Churches are rapidly becoming independent, and it may please some lax Christians to assert a right for a Church to be polygamous. Nor is this fear without foundation, as is evidenced by the letter of a Native Pastor at Abeokuta in Yariba-land, West Africa, 1883 :

The Polygamists had gained ground, and had trodden down the communicant members of the community : I have since begun to effect separation between the two. The Polygamists dislike this, and complain against me bitterly, that I virtually separate them from my congregation, because they are sinners. They would persecute the communicants, whenever they have an opportunity. They used to be members of my local Church Committee, so as to be consulted before anything is done by me in the Church, and whatever they do not sanction they would not have me to do. What makes it worse is that they are the more enlightened of the congregation. The *young* Polygamists have a company, which meets once a month for feasting, and on this occasion Monogamy is a subject of scandal and reproach. Some young male communicants had joined them before I came to this station ; up till now I have not been able to disconnect them, although they do not seem to join them in heart and mind.

It is stated elsewhere that West African converts fall back into Polygamy.

But in avoiding Scylla do not let us run into Charybdis. The King of Congo professed lately to the missionaries at San Salvador that he was in great trouble about his wives, and

anxious to know what he should do. The missionaries made the prudent reply, that they could not advise him to put them away, as *this could only be productive of greater evils*. This is the whole gist of the matter: let us think it out upon the facts recorded, and not on the opinions on those facts.

Some missionaries would receive the Polygamist on the condition of his retaining one wife only: but which wife? the one, who was the first married to him, perhaps old, childless, neglected, and a hopeless heathen; or the mother of the largest number of his children, or the one to whom his fancy turns, or the one who is ready to become a Christian, or the chief wife, as there is a certain gradation of rank among them. In the event of the chosen wife dying, may he choose another from his reserve-wives? We enter here into a succession of hopeless dilemmas, to which no satisfactory solution can be found. Some bolder spirits would suggest that all the previous marriages were worthless, and the new Christian should, like a snake, come out of his old skin and abandon all, "wife, children, for His sake," and be united by Christian matrimony to a Christian woman. I should not have ventured to have suggested such a shocking device, if I had not read of it as proposed. But natural affection may be too strong for him, and a missionary from Be-Chuána-land writes that in ten years he never had a case of a Polygamist being converted, but he had known one instance of a man putting away a second wife, and becoming a Catechumen; but she came back to him, and he received her, and left the faith.

But we must lift up this subject to a higher level. The missionary sometimes argues, that the African wife is a mere beast of burden and a slave, and at another time an object of sensual lust. She can scarcely be both at the same time. It is sometimes urged, that she is not a wife at all, but only a concubine. The Be-Chuána missionary above quoted goes so far as to say, that the women, who were put away, would not consider themselves injured, and that it was quite a common thing for a woman to have been united to five or six husbands in succession. Such a state of things could not happen in India, and, if the last statement be true, the reply is that the man with such connections is *not a Polygamist* any more than any profligate European deserves that name. But such is not the case ever in India, and only exceptionally in Africa. We must treat these women as *wives* and mothers of legitimate children, and as faithful wives. It scarcely seems consistent with the tenets of our holy religion to try and save the soul of a man at the expense of the feelings, and morals, and comforts, and rights of his rejected, or perhaps worn out, wives. They in honour gave all that hard fortune had endowed them

with—their person and their youth—to this man, called him husband, bore to him children, who inherit his tribal position, his name, and such portions of his goods as fall to them. It is a prodigious breach of faith to make a clean sweep or partial sweep of all his responsibilities: if they are old and childless, it is a bad beginning of a higher life, that they should be cast out for no offence of their own, deprived of all solace and protection; if they are young, it is terrible to read such words as these from the pen of a living Bishop, "She will easily get another husband from her father's home." It would have been better to discontinue the use of the words "husband and wife" altogether, and talk of the Africans as brute-beasts. We all know what an illicit connection is, and what a natural child is in Europe and in India: if by a process of inquiry it is found, that any or all of these women were the divorced wives of other men, or were unfaithful wives, or within the lawful limitations of kindred and affinity, or actually married to some other man, let their names be struck off the list of his wives; perhaps some of them may run away, or disappear, or die, or it may be proved that they were the wives of his brother, or the servants of the house, and thus by a judicial process it may come out that, the man is a Monogamist after all. But if we are to trust Sir Theophilus Shepstone, and the common report of the country, these women are wives in South Africa, and they most assuredly are so in India. Whether Hindu or Mahometan, let the missionaries recollect that they contracted to each other in good faith, and that no wrong ought to be done to the wives, for all have a claim on their husband, not only for maintenance and protection, but what St. Paul describes (as rendered in the Revised Version) as "her due." If condemned to live apart they may wax wanton, and be tempted; and it is their husband then who causes them to commit adultery.

Forbidding then on the one hand the admission of the Polygamist into the Church by Baptism, and resisting to the utmost on the other hand any attempt to get rid of the burden of Polygamy at the expense of his wives and children, what course do I recommend for the present necessity? We take the following narrative from *Central Africa*, the organ of the Universities Mission, March, 1886, p. 42:

On the last Sunday of 1885 Matola, a powerful chief, was solemnly admitted by Bishop Smithies to the rank of *Catechumen*. He knelt down in the full congregation, and received a cross, as a token of his admission. One stumbling-block he has in his way before he can be admitted to *Baptism*: he had in former years become a Polygamist, and it can only be hoped that God will open a way for him without injury to those who have borne him children, to come out of the state which the law of the Church in all ages seems to have determined to be a barrier to admission to the Christian Covenant.

This seems to be the happy *via media*. The man must accept, as his cross, the status, which his own conduct has induced. He is not excluded from Christian teaching, Christian worship; but it is distinctly understood by the Church, that such as he cannot be admitted into the Church. His children come at once under tuition and baptism; and for his wives the door is also open, as each of them no doubt may assert that she is the wife of one man, and not in any way excluded from Christian privileges, living after the manner of Rachel and Hannah.

Such is the opinion which I have arrived at:

1. Polygamist men are not to be admitted to Baptism, but their wives may be.

2. Polyandrists—men and women—are totally excluded; here both men and women are sinning, for the woman in cohabiting with her husband's brother commits incest.

3. No man should be encouraged to put away his lawful wives; he should be reminded that his union with them is for the term of their natural lives.

4. Polygamists may be admitted as Catechumens.

I now add some opinions of others:

In the fifth Report of the Annual Meeting of Native Church Council of the Panjab a letter was read from the Rev. T. P. Hughes, C.M.S. Missionary at Peshawar, in which this passage occurs:

In the case of polygamous marriages, the blessings of the Church could hardly be expected; but both the late (Metropolitan) Bishop Milman, and the present Bishop of the Lahore Diocese (Bishop French) have sanctioned the baptism of Polygamists.

In 1834 the Conference of Missionaries of various denominations in Calcutta, including those of the Baptist, the London, the Church Missionary Society, the Church of Scotland, and the American Presbyterian Board, after having had the whole subject frequently under discussion, and after much and serious deliberation, *unanimously agreed* on the following propositions, though there had been previously much diversity of sentiment among them on various points:

I. It is in accordance with the spirit of the Bible and the practice of the Protestant Church to consider the State as the proper fountain of legislation in all civil questions affecting Marriage and Divorce.

II. The Bible being the true standard of morals, ought to be consulted in everything which it contains on the subjects of Marriage and Divorce, and nothing determined evidently contrary to its general principles.

V. If a convert before becoming a Christian has married more wives than one, in accordance with the practice of Jewish and primitive Christian Churches, *he shall be permitted to keep all*; but such a person is not eligible to any office in the Church. In no other cases is Polygamy to be tolerated amongst Christians.

There were twenty or more who adopted the propositions without any exemption.—Calcutta *Christian Observer*, iv., p. 22.

The Calcutta missionaries a few years afterwards reviewed these propositions, and established them in a form more specifically applicable to India. With regard to Polygamy, the deliverance, which they gave was even more decided than in the original propositions :

The meeting were unanimously of opinion that although Polygamy is one of the greatest evils, and is never to be tolerated in a Christian community, when it can be regulated by the law of the Gospel, yet in the case of Polygamy antecedently to conversion, the husband is bound to retain and provide for all his wives, as such, unless *they choose to take advantage of their own law*. This last clause refers to the renunciation of Hinduism and Mahometanism by either of the married parties being regarded by both Hindus and Mahometans as entailing divorce.—Calcutta *Christian Observer*, vol. xi., p. 401.

A writer in the Calcutta *Christian Observer*, vol. iv., pp. 91, 371, 400, commenting upon the resolutions of the missionaries, remarks : “The missionaries are of opinion that the very allowances which God, through Moses, made for the Jews in their infant state as a people, is by parity of reason to be made now for Polygamists, who from heathens become Christians.” I have already alluded above to the fact that nations are at different levels of progress, and this argument may fairly be urged in favour of the Africans, the South Sea Islanders, and North American Indians, but scarcely in favour of the Hindus, who are not in an infant state, but the heirs of an old and advanced civilization, and still less in favour of Mahometans, many of whose ancestors were Christians, and therefore Monogamists, and who appeal as their authority not to time-honoured custom, but the comparatively modern law of Mahomet. I protest against the assertion that Polygamy was ever sanctioned in a primitive Christian church.

Bishop Milman’s opinion referred to was as follows :

The very exceptional case of married life among natives of India justified him in allowing a man, lawfully married to more than one wife, to be baptized and retain his wives, and give them their conjugal due. He must not marry another, or, if one die, take another in her place : he must not hold any ecclesiastical office.—*Mission Life*, 1880, p. 227.

Bishop Douglas, of Bombay, decided against the baptism of Hindus with two wives, unless he put one away. The present Bishop of Bombay rather leans to the baptism of such a man without that requirement. Similar leanings are ascribed to the Bishop of Colombo.

It was stated that Bishop Caldwell would baptize a Polygamist *in articulo mortis* (“*Mission Life*,” 1880, p. 185). The Bishop of Melanesia (Selwyn) seemed to think that the putting away of the supernumerary wives should be

the rule, but he had difficulty in facing it. The late Primate of New Zealand (Selwyn the elder) was of the same opinion. We read in his "Life" the following story: "Are you thinking of becoming a Christian?" said the Bishop to a native chief. "Yes," said the chief. I saw the Bishop hold up two fingers, and then bend one down. The chief nodded assent. The Bishop meant that the chief must get rid of one of his wives. We do not find that he indicated which wife should be unjustly deprived of her home.

The missionaries of the Basle Society would receive Polygamists in case of extreme necessity, as when a man had children by both his wives, and all parties agree in the impossibility of separation; yet there is not one Polygamist in any of their missionary congregations in the West Coast of Africa. The missionaries of this society recognise a heathen marriage as a binding one, and declare that a Christian cannot put away his wife, though a heathen.

The Wesleyan missionaries positively refuse all Polygamists, recognising only a Christian marriage, that is to say, one performed in a Christian Church. If a heathen become a Christian, he may keep (or rather marry) his heathen wife, or he may send her away if she remarries a heathen. They direct their converts to dismiss all their wives and marry a Christian: in fact, under this rule, if a man wishes to get rid of his wives, *he has only to become a Christian*.

The Moravian missionaries had to deal with negro slaves in America. Their original rules were: (1) They would not oblige a man who, previous to his conversion, had taken more than one wife to put the others away without their consent; (2) they would not appoint such a one to be helper in the congregation; (3) they would allow no Christian to take more than one wife, and he is bound to her for life. In 1880 they modified these rules, and their present rule is, that in general an applicant for baptism is to dismiss all his wives but one, but that when this may lead to greater sin, an exception may be made under the authority of the District Mission Conference.

I wrote to my friend Dr. Schrader, of the Rhenish Missionary Society, at Barmen, in Germany, to ask for a statement of their present practice, and in his reply, July, 1886, he says:

We do not think it right, nor indicated by any clear word of God, that anyone who has taken two or more legal wives, as a heathen, should be compelled to dismiss them all except one, before he can be admitted to baptism. It seems to me to be a bad beginning of his Christian life to break legal promises which he has given formerly. Of course every Polygamist must be told that this state of affairs is not in accordance with the Gospel, and as soon as there is an opportunity to get rid of it in a legal way, he ought to do it; but I do not know if it is advisable to postpone baptism until that can be done.

The great difficulty which has been felt several times is this, that very often in churches where Polygamists have been admitted, persons who for special reasons wish to take a second wife, cannot easily understand why something that is allowed to others should be denied them. But to avoid this, all persons entering the Church should be clearly made to understand that they will never be allowed to take a second wife as long as the first is still living, and the Polygamist can hold no church office. We have had amongst our missionaries a few who have protested against this liberal praxis, as it is called ; but after much renewed discussion (for instance in our Borneo Mission lately) we have always come back upon this one opinion, which has been in use in the Rhenish Mission for a long time.

This Society labours in the Indian colonies of Holland and Borneo, as well as in South Africa.

With regard to Africa, let me quote the opinion of Mr. Buckley Wood, an experienced missionary of the C.M.S. in Yariba-land, in Western Africa : "No one who knows Africa and Polygamy in Africa can ever doubt that the C.M.S. is perfectly right in not for an hour allowing such an abominable custom to exist."

Thus we have the direct contrary practice in force in different portions of the mission field.

I have already stated that the status of "wife" should be defined, and in each case ascertained ; and that the concubine, the wife of another man, the divorced wife, the slave girl, the person within the limits of blood or affinity, cannot be deemed *wives*, and that the man is in such cases a profligate, but *not* a Polygamist. It seems so simple ; but I read in a missionary periodical, June, 1886, the following :

A convert proved the sincerity of his faith by making quite a sacrifice. An uncle died leaving two wives ; these, according to native custom, fell by law of inheritance to the nephew. He was betrothed to another girl, whom he has since married. He was told that if he continued to commit Polygamy he could not be admitted to the Church ; to put away his two wives, *his aunts by marriage*, was a great sacrifice ; but this convert was not long in deciding, and the two wives were put away.

Can anything reflect more on the common-sense of a missionary than this ? Can he not see that, under no law, human or divine, could it have been right for a man to take as his wife the widow of the brother of his father or his mother ? It is rank incest. Every Hindu and Mahometan would protest against such a thing. The wife of an uncle is to a man as his own mother. They were not *wives*, and the man was not a Polygamist, but guilty of incest. If each case be carefully inquired into, many a so-called Polygamist will be found to be only a debauched profligate, and not a very promising material for a Christian convert, except after a long probation.

## LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT OF POLYGAMY IN CONNECTION WITH CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

1. Dr. Colenso, Bishop of Natal, Remarks on Proper Treatment of cases of Polygamy. Pamphlet. Pietermaritzburg, 1855.
2. Reply to the same remarks by an American Missionary (Lewis Grout, of the American Board of Foreign Missions). Pamphlet. Pietermaritzburg, 1855.
3. Dr. Colenso's Reply to an American Missionary. Pamphlet. Pietermaritzburg, 1856.
4. An Answer to Bishop Colenso's Letter on the Polygamy Question, by an American Missionary (H. A. Wilder). Pietermaritzburg, 1856.
5. Apology for the Toleration of Polygamy in Converts from Heathenism, by a Protestant Dissenter. 1856.
6. Bishop Colenso's Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury on the Polygamy Question. Pietermaritzburg, March 1, 1861.
7. Review of Bishop Colenso's Remarks. Durban, 1855.
8. Letter of Canon Callaway. Pamphlet. Durban, 1862.
9. Pamphlet by the Rev. W. H. Fowle, 1856.
10. Polygamy among Candidates for Baptism, by Bishop Cotterill, of Grahamstown, 1861.
11. Minute by Bishop Cotterill at Conference of Bishops in Capetown, 1861. *Colonial Church Chronicle*, p. 309. 1861.
12. Two Sermons by H. Callaway. Pietermaritzburg, 1866.
13. Government Regulations. Pietermaritzburg, 1869.
14. Minute by Rev. Henry Venn, Secretary to Church Missionary Society. Pamphlet. London, Jan. 1857.
15. Report of Lahore Missionary Conference, 1862-63. Published at Lodianna, North India, 1863. An assembly of Clergy, Missionaries, and State officials.
16. Minute of Views of Bishop Daniel Wilson, of Calcutta, drawn from his "Life," vol. i, p. 363. Appendix to above.
17. Conference of Missionaries held by Bishop of Bombay. *Mission Life*, p. 185, 1880.
18. Letter of Dr. Smythies, Bishop of Equatorial Africa, pp. 79, 80. Central Africa, June 1, 1886.
19. Polygamy in the Himalaya. Dr. Stulpnagel. Indian *Evangelical Review*, Oct. 1877.
20. Polygamy in Relation to Christian Baptism, by Professor Cheyne. Oxford. *Mission Life*, 1880, p. 145.
21. Missionary in Be-Chuána-land. *Mission Life*.
22. Life of Bishop Selwyn, of New Zealand.
23. Brown's History of Missions, iii., pp. 365, 558.
24. Calcutta *Christian Observer*, iv., pp. 91, 371, 400.
25. Letters to the Primate, by Douglas, Bishop of Zululand, on the subject of Polygamy, 1886.

ROBERT N. CUST.

July, 1886.



## ART. II.—WORDSWORTH AND NATURE.

THE Wordsworth Society, which was established some six years ago, has lately come to an end. It has attained the object for which it was originally formed, and there is therefore no reason why it should continue to exist. The