

THE
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ART. I.—A LAY DIACONATE.

THE proposal to establish a lay diaconate as an integral element of our Church organisation, has now for many years been put forward as one of the necessities of the time, and yet, for some reason or other, those in authority appear never to have given the subject any serious attention, or even to have paid it the respect of a thoughtful discussion. It seems, indeed, to have been regarded thus far as one of the crotchets which are brought out to be aired from time to time by unpractical enthusiasts, and are then laid aside to be reproduced for inspection on some future occasion. Some twenty-five years ago, or more, when vice-principal of Lampeter College, the present Bishop of Winchester issued a pamphlet on the subject, now, we understand, out of print, but though his lordship's episcopal position and experience have given him special facilities for an attempt to realise his earlier proposals, we are unaware of his having made it. The permanent diaconate in connection with lay-work in the Church was one of the topics before the Church Congress at Swansea last autumn, and some excellent papers were read, and equally pertinent speeches made by clergymen and laymen well qualified to deal with the subject; but there, apparently, the matter has ended. So far as our own knowledge extends, the clergy in their ruri-decanal gatherings have never been asked to give their opinion upon it, nor has it engaged the attention of the Diocesan Synods. Convocation has busied itself with a host of questions of far less practical importance, which have now passed away, and in all probability will never be heard of again; but no motion has been made or committee appointed to bring to the test of a candid and careful consideration a suggestion which, if it were carried out, many

Churchmen believe would be of incalculable advantage to the Church.

Taking a wide outlook over the field of ecclesiastical politics, and having regard to the probable eventualities of the next twenty years, we are satisfied that the Church of England will only be able to hold her own as the Church of the nation, and to occupy the new ground ever opening before her in consequence of the constant increase of population, by the adoption of vigorous measures for economising her resources, for utilising the strength which is now wasted in the exceedingly small rural parishes which form so great a proportion of the benefices, especially in the southern province, and for largely recruiting the ranks of the ministry. Whether our bishops care to face it or not, the fact is too palpably real to the incumbents of large and poor parishes to be evaded or ignored, that the Church is undermanned. The work she professes to have at heart, and for the doing of which she is primarily responsible so long as she claims to be the National Church of the land, is but half done, for the simple reason that she has not the staff for doing it, and if she could command the men, she has not the means to pay them.

Proposals to reduce the expenses of University education, and the institution of diocesan bursaries for this purpose, useful as they are in their way, do not really touch the question before us. For that question is not at all as to the qualifications which shall be insisted on by the bishops for holy orders, and whether or not a university education and degree shall continue to be regarded as essential or desirable in candidates for the ministry. The question is as to the payment of curates *when* they are ordained, and the admitted impossibility of doing this in many parishes where, nevertheless, further assistance in public as well as pastoral duties is absolutely required for heavily tasked and infirm incumbents. We do not forget what large assistance is given by the Church Pastoral Aid and Curates' Aid Societies. But (1) The grants which come from these sources now only suffice for half, or, at the most, two-thirds of the curate's salary, and the balance has to be provided out of local resources by the incumbent. (2) The aid afforded by these grants often meets but a part of the need, owing to the size of the parish. (3) The societies have always before them a large number of deserving and urgently necessitous cases, which they are entirely unable to take up. (4) A considerable proportion of the grants are as a rule unoccupied, owing to the difficulty experienced by incumbents in getting suitable curates; a difficulty sometimes arising from the scarcity of men, and sometimes from the unprepossessing character of the locality, and of the work to be done in it. The question, therefore, which has to be confronted is not only how to increase the number of candidates for the full

ministry, but whether some means are not feasible for enlisting in a more formal and authoritative way than is now done the spare strength and time, especially on Sunday, of godly laymen in directly ministerial work.

By a "lay" or "permanent diaconate" is usually understood a distinct order of persons, who should be ordained by the bishop, and be licensed and authorised to discharge specified public functions as assistant ministers, while still permitted to continue in their ordinary secular occupations. It is earnestly contended on behalf of such an order, that the strain involved in the efficient maintenance of services on the Lord's Day in churches and licensed mission rooms would be materially lessened at little or no extra cost to the incumbent. We have, it is true, a diaconate actually in existence, as an essential part of our ecclesiastical organisation, but the members of it are exclusively dedicated to the ministry; they are prohibited from following any so-called secular occupation, though, in common with presbyters, they may be authors, editors, librarians, secretaries, school teachers or lecturers, and receive payment for service in these capacities, the canons of the Church notwithstanding. The diaconate, as it now exists, is, moreover, only a preliminary and preparatory step to full orders, the instances being very rare indeed in which a deacon does not go on in due course to the higher grade. But the difference between the deacon and the priest or presbyter, however great it may be in theory, is really very slight in practice. With the exception of two or three things in the public services of the Church, the deacon discharges precisely the same functions as his senior. In truth, there is an odd mixture of strictness and laxity in our rubrical customs. The deacon is supposed to be prohibited from reading the Absolution at the commencement of the Church service, by the rubric "to be pronounced by the priest alone," as if it were to be read "by a priest alone," and as if the "alone" referred to one order of the ministry as distinguished from the other, and not, as is really the case, to the officiating minister as distinguished from the people, who are called upon to join him in the preceding Confession and the following Lord's Prayer. The late Archbishop of Canterbury was not likely to take a lax view of the matter; but yet, in reply to a question on the subject, he frankly admitted, in presence of other analogous rubrics, where "priest" is found, that the only reason for a deacon not reading this Absolution was custom. Other parts of the service are permitted to a deacon, which, as Dr. Hook, another High Church authority, states in his "Church Dictionary," must be reserved to the priest, if the rubrics were strictly adhered to—*e.g.*, the versicles before the Psalms, and after the Lord's Prayer which follows the Creed, the latter part of the Litany beginning

at the Lord's Prayer, the whole of the Communion office, including the Creed and Confession. The permission to a deacon to baptize is only available in the absence of the priest. The services for the Solemnization of Matrimony, the Burial of the Dead, the Churching of Women, and for Ash-Wednesday, are all outside the diaconal function, if the rubrics be observed. Yet we doubt if, among the extremest of sacerdotalists, these rubrics are ever adhered to. In practice, the only thing in which the deacon is distinguished from the presbyter is in the customary abstention from reading "the Absolution," and from one or two functions in the administration of the Lord's Supper, such as the consecration of the elements and the distribution of the bread. As regards the care of souls, teaching, preaching, and pastoral visitation, there is no real practical difference whatever.

Nor is this all. For while the arrangements in our ecclesiastical organization are so sacredly stereotyped that not a few among us would consider any attempt to modify or change them as savouring of revolution or sacrilege, agencies have been called into existence within the Church, to which have been entrusted without scruple, and with the cognizance and concurrence of our highest authorities, the most solemn duties a man can undertake. Thus the custom has grown up, without let or hindrance, for laymen to conduct services in Church mission rooms which differ but little from the ordinary services of the Church. These laymen offer prayers, they read the Word of God, they expound it, and preach it—in truth, they do well nigh all that the clergy are doing in the parish church at the same hour, except administer the sacraments. It will scarcely, moreover, be questioned that of all the functions which a Christian teacher can discharge, there is none more difficult or delicate, none which requires more Christian experience, a deeper knowledge of God and His word, or a more earnest piety, than that of dealing privately and singly with individual souls. Yet this is a function which is widely discharged every day by men who have never had bishop's hands laid on them even in ordination to the diaconate. Thousands of souls pass into the unseen world every year from the dense masses of our metropolitan and urban population—many of them born again of the Holy Ghost and heirs of eternal life—with no other personal and private training for heaven than that of a scripture reader, a City missionary, or other evangelist. Here, therefore, except in the actual clerical office, and the power to minister in the congregation, the only distinction perceptible between the ordained deacon and the unordained evangelist is that the latter may be a man of years and of matured Christian experience, while the former has possibly emerged but three or four years ago from

his teens, and has yet to learn the very alphabet of ministerial duty. Outside the church walls we have busily at work a lay-diaconate in everything but the name, and the formal authority of ordination.

Having regard to these indisputable facts, it becomes an important question whether the Church cannot yet further strengthen her cords and lengthen her stakes, by the establishment of a new order of duly-qualified ministers, who, while still, as we have said, engaged in their private secular calling, should give their services to the Church, and have authority, under due restrictions, even to assist in the public ministrations of the sanctuary. How many a clergyman now working single-handed in his parish, would welcome, in such a capacity, the aid of a godly parishioner, as affording him the opportunity of adding to his Church services. We have called the proposed permanent diaconate a new order, because, so far as we are aware, the advocates of the change deprecate any interference with the existing organization, and only suggest the addition to it. As Canon Garbett stated in his paper at the Swansea Congress: "The existing diaconate, as a transition office, most useful, wise, and healthy, should continue as it is. No one wishes to touch it. Nor would a subordinate branch of the diaconate do otherwise than increase its dignity and usefulness."¹

The Right Hon. H. C. Raikes, late M.P. for Chester, put the matter distinctly in his address at Swansea:—

Such a diaconate would, of course, be placed under the control of the Bishop and the Archdeacons. Such an agency is absolutely necessary in London, Liverpool, Leeds, and Birmingham, and other places where the populations are large, and no where is it more needed than in the Principality of Wales. We have heard a great deal of the difficulties which beset the Church in Wales. We have heard a great deal of the immense area of her parishes, and the poverty of her endowments and the bilingual difficulty. See what the Nonconformists have done; and where can we find a better field for a perpetual diaconate than Wales? Who are the men that find their way into the remote districts? Why not recruit them for this work? Why not employ them in places where we can utilize their knowledge of the habits and language of the Welsh people? Why should we not in every extensive parish have mission-rooms, with services conducted by evangelists of this class? The Church of Wales has its special difficulties, it has much to right in the past, and the future looks stormy and full of doubt; but she has yet in her reach the opportunity of putting in force this experiment of the perpetual diaconate. We are told we want educated clergy, and men who are masters of both languages. We are told we are to have great

¹ Report of Church Congress at Swansea, 1879, p. 487.

reforms; but time is required and the material has to be found. But there are in the country men scattered broadcast, who may be made into a body of Welsh Evangelists, to carry the Gospel into every corner of the land, and that without any great endowments.—*Report of Church Congress, 1879, p. 494.*

What, then, are the hindrances and objections? We know of none that present any insuperable obstacle to the adoption of the proposal. There is nothing intrinsically incongruous in the combination of daily labour in a secular pursuit, professional or otherwise, with direct ministerial functions. There are, no doubt, ample reasons why clergymen, the incumbents and curates of parishes, should not be occupied with engagements of a commercial, or otherwise purely secular character; but these reasons have no real foundation in the nature of things, or in anything essential in the ministerial office. They operate not as of necessary consequence, but from considerations of policy and the highest expediency. But we search in vain for any enactment or custom in the Apostolic and Primitive Church which can be construed in disfavour of this lower diaconate. As a matter of fact, we do know that even St. Paul, when circumstances called for it, betook himself to secular labour. It is true that we have exhortations to Christian congregations to give due support to the ministry; but these exhortations are not founded on any essential inconsistency and inherent sinfulness in the combination of secular work and ministerial functions, but solely on the reasonableness of the claim that they whose lives were spent in preaching the gospel should be spared the necessity of toiling for their maintenance, and share the worldly blessings of those among whom they ministered in the Lord. Neander states it to be probable that at first those who held offices in the Church continued to exercise their former trades and occupations for the support of themselves and their families. We find, too, in the history of the Church of the first three or four centuries, that, while there is a good deal of information scattered up and down its pages as to the position of deacons relative to the other orders of the ministry, the duties they were called to discharge, both in their extent and limitations, and even the vestments they were authorised to wear in the public services of the Church, there is nothing to indicate the existence of any absolute rule or law forbidding them to be occupied in secular work. It is also a fact that many persons filled the inferior office of deacon for their lifetime without ever passing into the ranks of the priesthood.

While on the subject of Primitive Church custom, in regard to Church orders and practice, we may observe, as not irrelevant to the matter in hand, that though the office of teaching in the congregation was more and more confined to the bishops

and presbyters, yet even in the middle of the third century, Origen, though still a layman, was permitted to preach; and when the bishops who were responsible for it were reproved by the High Church Bishop of Alexandria for the so-called irregularity, they appealed in their defence to the practice of many bishops in the East. Even in the spurious Apostolical constitutions themselves, tinged as they are with the hierarchical spirit, there is an ordinance assigned to St. Paul, allowing any man, though a layman, who is of reputable life and skilful in expounding doctrines, to teach (Neander's "Ch. Hist.," i. § 2).

Irrespective, however, of considerations and inferences arising from primitive custom, we hold to it that every Church, and therefore the Church of England, has an inherent power for its own internal organization, and the right either to create or modify its ecclesiastical constitution, and the arrangements for carrying on and extending its operations, so long as nothing is done inconsistent with the plain teaching of God's Word. And here the action of the Apostles, as described in Acts vi., is of great worth. For that history teaches nothing if not this, that when emergencies arise in the Church which demand, as the condition of greater efficiency and wider usefulness, the creation of new agencies, it is the bounden duty of the authorities to inaugurate them. John Wesley was wise in his generation when he established an order of local preachers as a vital part of his Church system, who, under careful supervision and restriction, should aid in ministerial work, and that without any charge to the Society. But for this the Wesleyans would find it utterly impossible to maintain their position as the largest of the Nonconforming denominations.

Turning, however, to our own Church, the sole obstacles to the establishment of the proposed diaconate are, so far as we are aware, the 76th Canon, and Sections 28—31 of the 1 and 2 Vict. cap. 106. The canon ordains that "no man being admitted a deacon or minister shall from henceforth voluntarily relinquish the same, nor afterwards use himself in the course of his life as a layman, upon pain of excommunication." The Act of Parliament in like manner prohibits, except as provided, any spiritual person who holds preferment or curacy, or is licensed to *perform the duties of any ecclesiastical office whatever*, from engaging in trade, or buying and selling again for profit or gain. These enactments are, of course, conclusive, so long as they stand unrepealed. But here, as in so many other things, the power that made can unmake, and if it be considered, as would probably be the case, that these canonical and legal restrictions really cover such a subordinate order in our ecclesiastical *régime* as is implied in the permanent diaconate, there is no reason to doubt that Parliament would readily modify them, if

the Church demanded it, as a necessary and desirable thing. Anyhow, the subject is worth more attention from our bishops than they have yet given to it, and certainly any dealing with the Pluralities Acts such as was reviewed in *THE CHURCHMAN* for March, must fail in its primary intention of setting free the now wasted clerical strength, unless it be accompanied by some measures for enlisting the services of educated laymen as a permanent diaconate. To quote again Canon Garbett: "It may be acknowledged that adaptations were more easily made when the Church was young, and not hampered by traditions, than in an historical Church, which has hardened with age into one shape. But are we prepared to admit that the Church has grown stiff with years, and sunk into the decrepitude of old age? A living Church must have powers of self-adaptation, or she ceases to live."

R. ALLEN.

ART. II.—CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN.

THREE hundred and thirty years ago, a Japanese of high rank, named Anjiro, who was condemned to death, escaped in a Portuguese vessel to Goa. There he met Francis Xavier, and presently embraced the new religion which the great Jesuit missionary had come to India to preach. Xavier asked him what prospects Christianity would have in Japan, and thus records his reply:—"His people, he said, would not immediately assent to what might be said to them, but they would investigate my religion by a multitude of questions, and above all, by observing whether my conduct agreed with my words. This done, the Daimios, the nobility, and the people would flock to Christ, being a nation which always follows reason as a guide."

How far have the Japanese justified the character thus given of them? Their inquisitiveness in religious matters is testified to by every missionary. In India, the difficulty is to induce the Brahmins and the Mohammedans to listen to the preacher of the Gospel at all. In China, he will have a crowd round him, but the Chinese as a nation are "of the earth, earthy," and religion is the last thing they will readily talk about. But in Japan, even if it be allowed—and it scarcely can be allowed—that conversions are not rapid, certainly "inquirers" are numerous. Speculative their questions are, no doubt. Few can be described as "asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." But interest of a kind, there manifestly is. Anjiro's prediction that "they would investigate the new religion with a multitude of questions," is true to-day.