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THE
CHURCHMAN

FEBRUARY, 1882.

ART. I.—REVISION OF OUR DIACONATE.

“**I**T is evident unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the Apostles’ time there have been these orders of ministers in Christ’s Church—Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.” So it is expressed in the Preface to the Form of Ordination; which Form is appointed, “to the end that these Orders may be continued and reverently esteemed in the Church of England.” They have been continued, and are reverently esteemed; but their existing forms, proportions and relations to each other may at any time be reconsidered.

The ministry of the Church of England certainly consists of bishops, priests, and deacons, but after the following sort: a general body of presbyters, headed by a very small number of bishops, and edged by an extremely narrow fringe of an annually renewed and annually vanishing diaconate.

The proportion of the episcopate to the presbyterate is much below what was common at first, and is now usual elsewhere, and is far from satisfying theoretical requirements; but it fits in with the constitutional conditions and historical circumstances of the English Church; and, by making authority less capable of frequent and ubiquitous interference, it gives room for that large liberty of individual action which our presbyterate happily enjoys.

The question which I am raising bears upon the opposite end of our ecclesiastical system—namely, on the rank which bears a title, not of government, but of service. If I could, on the whole, defend our existing system of the episcopate, I cannot equally uphold that of the diaconate.

We can only just be said to possess an order of deacons at all. Our parishes do not possess it as part of their system, but

only here and there by accident, for the first year in which a young curate comes ; and then the distinction of order, though essentially great, is not superficially apparent. He cannot take a living, does not read the Absolution, or consecrate in the Holy Communion, but in general these are the only obvious tokens of difference. More often than not he is put to full ministerial work at once, and in all respects but those mentioned does the same things the first year as a deacon which he will do the next year as a priest. Thus, in the parish system and usual ministry of the Church, the order of deacons has no real place, and exists only as a transient and scarcely distinguishable accident in a comparatively few places at a time ; and thus the theory of the ministry is rather preserved in form than realized in fact.

There are constitutional theories which may wisely be left in that condition. I submit that this is not such a case, and that some approaches should now be made to a more systematic realization of the idea.

The diaconate has a double character. It is assistant service —it is probationary preparation. For the first purpose, on our present plan, it provides inadequately ; for the second, it is worked imperfectly. If these assertions are true, there ought to be a movement for the revision of our system ; and there are tokens in many quarters that such a movement will be made. The inadequacy of our diaconate for that assistant service in the church which its name implies, cannot be remedied by any such revision of our present system as would leave the office confined to a small number of men, young in years, and holding it for a short time. It would be necessary to augment the number and prolong the time of service, and open the office to men of various classes of society, creating a body not in its nature transitional to another office, yet supplying in its more spiritual and capable members fit candidates for the higher ministry. But practically the order of deacons cannot be thus transformed. The increase of its work as assistant service cannot be successfully sought by an extension of the order itself, but rather by supplementary additions to it. We must now treat it as being only, what in fact it is, *a probationary preparation for the priesthood*, and aim at its improvement in this character. It needs improvement in this character ; for, in respect both of probation and of preparation, its present provisions are defective.

I. In respect of *probation*, what tests does our system include ; and with what testing effect are they applied ? The tests are : (1.) The testimony of three beneficed clergymen, given collectively in a form supplied to them. (2.) The more searching inquiries which the bishop may privately make. (3.) The

examination for priest's orders. Similar tests having been applied on admission to deacon's orders, a man accepted at the first stage is not very likely to be rejected at the second. When he is so it is generally from failure in the examination, on account of insufficient study in the interval. And then it is only postponement for another trial. In one diocese I have seen it gracefully expressed, "He is invited to return to his studies." Final rejection is rare, and indeed, under the present system, can only be justified by the strongest reasons; seeing that the deacon has already been separated from secular callings, and if he does not become a presbyter, the prospect in his adopted calling is gone. The door behind him closed after him as he passed through it, and now the door before him is shut in his face. For the same reason it is only one man here and there who of his own choice remains a deacon for life. Perhaps no one ever has that intention, and only does so from some unexpected change in health or circumstances. If very few men are denied full orders, as having shown themselves in their Diaconate unfit for their work, perhaps still fewer draw back as having found that they had no vocation for it. Thus, whatever may have been done for this end before, the year of the Diaconate is a probation only in a very modified sense; if it be a means of sifting, it is a sieve which is gently shaken and which lets very little through.

II. *As to preparation.*—"The preparations of the heart are from the Lord:" if for any work, above all for this. But I am writing of methods and circumstances. The deacon is surely an apprentice. Apprenticeship includes practice, supervision, instruction.

Of practice there is usually enough—too much indeed, too little graduated, and prematurely imposed. This is natural, since a rector, paying for the benefit to his parish out of his own resources, seeks a curate, not that the man may be trained, but that the work may be done. The young man arrives; and, generally speaking, either from the exigencies of the parish, or from the failing health of his rector, has to begin at once with an amount of preaching and teaching for which no former habit has qualified him; and this perhaps combined with such constant occupation in other ways as leaves scanty time for his sermons and none for his other studies. No doubt by working, men learn to work, and by preaching, they learn to preach; but by premature pressure they acquire a loose habit, and learn to do it ill.

Supervision and instruction in the year of the diaconate, are as it may happen. They may be real and effective, but often the curate is wanted because the incumbent is old, or ill, or so sharply occupied with his own necessary work as to leave little

power of attending to anything else. Nor are all clergymen who have curates particularly fitted to teach them, whether in reading, in preaching, or in dealing with souls; and if they are so fitted, they often do not do it, as my inquiries have led me to believe. There being no other responsible supervision or systematic regulation for the term of apprenticeship, I conclude that in this respect our system is itself deficient.

There is much to be said on the other side of inquiries made and influences used before deacons' orders are conferred, and of assistances given and securities obtained afterwards; but it will still remain true that if the diaconate be a period of probation and preparation, that theory is so imperfectly realized as to suggest a revision of our system.

Now, how can probation be made more real, and preparation better secured?

For probation a main condition is a reasonable facility for deciding in either of two ways, after a sufficient trial has been given. A probationer whom there are *very* urgent reasons for perpetuating is scarcely a probationer at all; and this is the case now. Shall it be provided that a deacon at the close of his year may drop his commission, and return unblamed to secular life? There is much to be said for this, but, in my opinion, it would not, in fact, be admitted: it is too great a departure from the principle and practice of the Church in regard to Holy Orders. The same result may be secured in another way. Let the time preliminary to Priests' Orders be extended through two stages instead of one, by a revival of the order of sub-deacons. Some have objected to this order as being Romish; if it were, I should not suggest it. But I do not date Romanism from the third century, at which time this order first appears. It belonged originally to the Minor Orders, and not to the Majores Ordines, or "Holy Orders," into whose ranks it was raised in mediæval times. Practically employed in the elaborate hierurgical ceremonial, from which (thank God) we are delivered, this ministry seemed to be wanted no more. But it is wanted now for larger and nobler purposes than it served then. Evangelistic, pastoral, and didactic work is thickening upon us, and new exigencies may be near. The ordained ministry needs, and will need, fresh ranks behind it for relief and support. But, even if revived on no larger scale, this grade would give us what we are now seeking, a preliminary experience before an irrevocable step. Being ἀχειροτόνητοι, commissioned without imposition of hands, taking no title of Reverend, not licensed to preach in the Church, not assisting in administration of Sacraments, yet giving themselves to other ministerial work, the sub-deacons would make practical trial of their vocation, with the door still open behind them for return to secular life, if so minded or so advised.

Thus the probation, *after* experience, which now scarcely exists, would become a recognized and necessary reality.

Preparation would gain as well as probation by this extension of time and succession of stages. But for this object there is now needed, and would then be more needed, some authorized regulation and supervision. To inquire into life and work, to encourage the development of ministerial capacity, to secure ample time for study, and give stimulus to its prosecution, to watch, to charge, and to counsel, these are things which, in so solemn an apprenticeship, ought not to be left to chance ; they claim an authorized and responsible superintendence. The incumbent, too, needs some one to whom he can have right to refer, and the bishop needs some one through whom he can inquire. This officer exists. Deacon and sub-deacon are the proper charge of the archdeacon. His title suggests it ; his position fits him for it ; but (what is more to the point) the Prayer Book invests him with it. In the service for "the making of deacons," it is ordered that—

The Archdeacon, or his deputy, shall present the candidates, saying :—"Reverend Father in God, I present unto you these persons present to be admitted Deacons."

"Take heed," says the Bishop, "that the persons whom ye present unto us be apt and meet, for their learning and godly conversation, to exercise their Ministry duly, to the honour of God, and the edifying of his Church."

"I have inquired of them," the Archdeacon shall answer, "and also examined them, and think them so to be."

The same direction is given when the deacons are to be ordained priests ; where the duty is assigned to "the archdeacon, or, in his absence, one appointed in his stead."

There are good reasons why the bishop should often appoint others to conduct the final examination, and then there is a fitness in their appearing as deputies of the archdeacon for presentation of the candidates ; but if they relieve him of the last part of his charge they have not relieved him of it all ; and, if the changes now advocated should take effect, that which is now a duty in theory would then be a duty in fact. It would not overburden the office. Much of its charge over buildings being now assigned to the rural deans, it is left more free for the higher charge over *men*. Worth, honour, and grace would be added to the waning importance of this ancient office by a duty of such spiritual interest, and by a service of such value to the Church, as would arise from the relation of counsellor and guardian to her ministers in the opening stage of their work.

To this provision for securing a longer experience before attaining priest's orders, there should be added, I think, a further

provision, that no man should be qualified for institution to an incumbency or independent cure, till he had been in priest's orders for one year at the least. Thus three years of advancing ministerial experience would be assured (instead of the one which is now possible) before so weighty a charge could be assumed. It would be better still if this last period of assistant work were made not one year but two. Besides the immediate reasons in regard to age and experience, there is the additional advantage that the restricting the chances of promotion for younger men is, as far as it goes, an enlarging of those chances for the older.

To the scheme of revision now sketched there is a very practical objection, of which I am fully sensible. It lies, as usual, in the department of money. The young man in his first year of ministerial work would not, as sub-deacon, receive above half the stipend which a deacon may expect. This objection would, of course, cease to apply if he could be admitted to this order at the age of twenty-two. That, however, appears to me undesirable; and I can only remind the objector that in many other professions men have to wait longer than a year before they receive more than nominal pay, or, indeed, any income whatever. But, whatever consideration should be given to objections against a suggested change, consideration should also be given to the reasons for it, and I submit that there are good reasons why things should not remain precisely as they are.

Beyond the subject treated in this paper, there lies a larger question—that of broadening the basis of the ministry by the formation of a recognized order of lay Helpers, co-deacons, or by whatever other name they might be designated. This question, however, is here only named, in order to preclude the idea that any such changes as have been now suggested are proposed as adequate to the needs of the case upon the whole. Reasons for the larger addition to our platform are numerous and urgent; but it is not the object of this paper to set them forth.

At present, attention is concentrated on ecclesiastical courts and debates on ceremonies; and controversy grows passionate about the administration, interpretation, or revision of laws and rubrics. Prosecutions are instituted; men go to prison, and will not come out; synods are gathered; bishops charge, admonish, and are defied; meetings and newspapers are wearisome with clamour. Perhaps one can scarcely hope to be attended to, who quietly expresses a conviction that the measures which would most benefit the Church are not in the region of government, but in the region of service; that not by her courts and decrees,

but by the practical arrangements of her ministry, she will best encounter the growing emergencies of the times in which we live, and still more of the times which are at hand; provided always that her conscious dependence is not on these methods, or any methods at all, but on the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ, "from whom the whole body, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God"

T. D. BERNARD.

ART. II.—BRITISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO FOREIGN MISSIONS.

FEW fruits of the Church's spiritual life afford a truer indication of its growth and activity than the measure of support which it renders to foreign missions from year to year. No enterprise of Christian philanthropy can be more fully at one with the mind of Christ; none so entirely free from the influence of mundane interests.

If, then, we can ascertain, year by year, what is the aggregate sum contributed for foreign missions, we obtain, as the late Bishop Wilberforce once said, a pulse-like index to the spiritual health of Christ's visible Body, the Church. Like the pulse in the human frame, however, it is affected from time to time by the fluctuating influences of external circumstances, utterly apart from the normal condition of the body itself.

When we bear in mind the extreme depression which has been felt in agriculture and commerce during recent years, we naturally expect to find its influence affecting the pecuniary support given to mission work. It is therefore cheering to learn that, although individual Societies have suffered from this depression, yet the aggregate contributions to foreign mission work have not been lessened. On the contrary, for the financial year 1880 (which, with many societies, includes the first quarter of 1881), British contributions to foreign missions reached a *maximum*¹ never before attained. Their total was one million,

¹ SUMMARY FOR TEN YEARS.

Total British Contributions in 1871 for Foreign Missions	£855,742
1872	882,886
1873	1,032,176
1874	1,009,199
1875	1,048,408
1876	1,048,472
1877	1,100,793
1878	1,071,944
1879	1,086,678
1880	1,108,950