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ART. VI.—THE CONVOCATIONS ON LAY READERS
AND THE DIACONATE.

THE need for an extension of the Ministry in the Church, beyond its present limits of supply must now be taken as indisputable. The Bishops of both Provinces have by resolution in Convocation described it as "overwhelming." Such an utterance on their part must be felt as decisive, when it is considered that this is a question in which their own peculiar responsibilities are primarily involved ; that their survey of the field of action is at once more general and more detailed than that which other men are obliged to take ; and lastly, that new movements in this direction involve debates and anxieties for them, which they would be thankful to avoid ; so that, if they could see that things are fairly well, their natural bias would be to let well alone. It may be added, that the entire debates which have brought out these expressions and proceeded upon these convictions were highly honourable to the Bishops, as representing the frank admission of facts, the serious consideration of the times, the calm judgment in deliberation, and the paternal solicitude for the salvation of souls, which are proper to the stewards of God.

The attention of the Church has thus been called to the subject in the most satisfactory way ; with the advantage of closing the preliminary question, and carrying us beyond the argument that "Something must be done," into the definite inquiry, "What shall it be?"

The Resolutions of the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury have now been long enough before the Church to give time for reflection ; and it is to be hoped that results of such reflection will be contributed from many quarters, so that probable consequences may be better foreseen, and final action determined. This is sufficient apology for the observations now to be offered.

The House approached the whole subject on the lines laid down by the Report of its Committee, which, treating the enlargement of the Diaconate, and the organization of Lay ministrations as alternative schemes, set aside the former, and confined its recommendations to the latter, as expressed in the Resolutions given below.¹

¹ "1. That no person be admitted to the office of Reader who has not been confirmed and is not a communicant in the Church of England, and that the Bishop should satisfy himself of his personal fitness, knowledge of Scripture, and soundness in the faith ; that the Reader should also be required to sign a declaration expressive of his acceptance of the doctrines of the Church of England, and of obedience to the incumbent of the parish and to the properly constituted authorities.

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Yet the Diaconate had its place in the debate, though not in the Resolutions, and the Bishop of Winchester expressed great regret that the subject had been "shelved." It occurred to him, however, that what had been put on a shelf might be taken off it, and he lost no time in proposing a Resolution in favour of an Extended Diaconate, which was carried unanimously, and has since been verbally adopted by the Convocation of York,¹ which afterwards added one on the other subject, declaring "that every encouragement and facility should be given to the spiritual ministrations of lay members of the Church, subject only to such restrictions as the laws of this Church and Realm impose." Thus a second advantage has been secured for our present consideration of the whole subject; since the effect of the Resolutions taken together is to present the two schemes, not in competition, but in combination, not for alternative choice, but for simultaneous adoption. There is obvious gain in this; first, because the desired object (extension of ministrations) will be more fully attained by two methods than by one; secondly, because the two methods are not really alternative for the Church as a whole, however they may be so for any particular parish; thirdly, because this combination has a modifying effect upon each of them, which each of them certainly needs. It is naturally to be expected that, if lay

"2. The Reader may expound the Holy Scriptures and give addresses, may read such parts of the Morning and Evening Prayer as may be read by a Layman, may conduct such other service as is approved by the Bishop in unconsecrated places, and generally act, under the incumbent, in visiting the sick, and in other duties. The Reader may, if thereto licensed by the Bishop, conduct in consecrated buildings, so far as not contrary to the laws of this Church and Realm, such services as shall be approved by the Bishop, not being the appointed services for the day, and may also publicly catechise.

"3. That the Lay Reader be admitted to his office by the delivery of a copy of the New Testament to him by the Bishop.

"4. That this House recommends that steps be taken in each Diocese to bring the subject of Lay Readers before the laity of the Church in such manner as may be approved by the Bishop."

¹ Resolution on the Diaconate—Canterbury and York: "That this House is of opinion that, in view of the overwhelming need of increase in the number of the ministry, and the impossibility of providing sufficient endowments for the purpose, it is expedient to ordain to the office of Deacon men possessing other means of living, who are willing to aid the clergy gratuitously, provided that they be tried and examined according to the Preface of the Ordinal, and in particular be found to possess a competent knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, of the Book of Common Prayer, and of theology in general; provided also that they be in no case admitted to the priesthood unless they can pass all the examinations which are required in the case of other candidates for that office; and that they shall have devoted their whole time to spiritual labour for not less than four years, unless they are graduates before they present themselves for their examinations."

ministration is the only form of extension, laymen will be pressed into work and offices which are the proper provinces of the clergy ; and that, if an enlarged Diaconate is the only method, there will be a temptation to seek ordination for men to whom it would be better to assign temporary work as Lay Readers or Preachers. For these reasons it appears desirable that an extension of the ministrations of the Church should be upon both lines at once. But when the double basis is adopted, then the real questions arise ; those, I mean, which affect the character of the ordained ministry, in respect both of its relative position and of its intrinsic quality. These questions will turn on the following points : (1) The limitations of Lay ministrations ; (2) The conditions for admission to the Diaconate ; (3) The protection to the character of the Presbyterate.

The extension of Lay ministration carries with it the question of its limitation, and here, at present, the only distinct subject of hesitation and debate is the proposal that "the Reader, if thereto licensed by the Bishop, may conduct in consecrated buildings, so far as is not contrary to the laws of this Church and Realm, such services as may be approved by the Bishop, not being the appointed services for the day, and may also publicly catechise." On this clause the Bishops were equally divided, and it was carried by the vote of the President, and it has no place in the Resolutions at York. The legal question I pass over. Opinion cannot settle that, except as opinion may procure modifications of law. Opinion is concerned, not with what is legal, but with what is desirable.

It is to be borne in mind that a building is consecrated, not simply for worship, or preaching, or the gathering of members of the Church, in whatever number, but for the (*λειτουργία*) public service of the Church as such in its constituted and corporate character. This is the character which differentiates the consecrated buildings from other places used for religious purposes. Is the present proposal an infringement of this character ? Not necessarily ; since constituted authority would be present in the Bishop's license and his sanction of the service used, and in the call and deputation of the man by the Presbyter in charge of the congregation. But it is precisely in this last particular that careful securities would be needed. The Presbyter is, according to the New Testament, president and ruler in the congregation ; its bishop or overseer, pastor of the flock, steward in the household, to whom it appertains "to take care of the Church of God." He might reasonably, as such, call and depute other persons to fulfil, under his supervision, some ministrations in the congregation beyond what are now permitted. But if so, for the sake of the unity and

constitution of the Church, his relation to all that is done in it should always be made clear by his personal presidency or his express delegation of the duty.

We have, however, to consider what in fact may happen, and there is truth in the Archbishop of York's words, that though "he should like to see an enlargement of the power "of preaching given, he thought there was a danger in this "respect. At present they had to deal, not only with people "conversant with ecclesiastical law, but with the general im- "pressions that people of common sense would form; and the "result of putting a very zealous Layman alongside of an "average Curate would be to obliterate the respect that was "at present felt for Holy Orders, partly, no doubt, on account "of their exclusive nature; and by-and-by the congregation "might begin to think that it did not matter whether a man "were ordained or not." Forecasts also of other confusions consequent on the relaxation in question have been heard in Convocation, and others which have not been heard there will readily occur to those who know something of the varieties of feeling in congregations, and of the caprices of individual clergymen, and who have observed how little power supposed restrictions have against the frequent disposition when the inch is given to take the ell. This permission would be in fact a new departure, including some self-propelling power. Yet, if due securities can be found, it is capable of useful results, and in particular cases would provide valuable aid.

The Bishop of Lichfield feels about it so strongly that he has acted on his own conviction of the need, by giving these licenses in his Diocese, without inquiring as to the law, and means to continue to do so, whatever other Bishops may decide. The opportunities of judgment which he has may justify the action which he takes; but to obtain general acceptance for this permission, as a rule of the Church, requires a stronger case to be shown for it than has been yet presented.

This is the only definite point in regard to Lay ministrations on which difference of opinion has arisen. The encouragement of them has been the common aim in both Convocations, and the increase of them is certainly the best hope for the Church.

2. The extension of the Diaconate, as being part of the ordained ministry, affects the character of that ministry more nearly. It has been for some time largely and earnestly advocated, and it now comes before us with the concurrence of the Bishops of both provinces, though we can scarcely say recommendation, on the part of some of them. The Church will accept it in outline, and will be sensible of a certain gain, not only from the added number, but rather from the more

distinct character which the Order will thus receive; for the Diaconate, which has seemed half a fiction, will acquire greater definiteness and reality. But the whole effect will depend on the *measure* of extension and on the recognised *conditions of admission*. These questions are very loosely determined in the Resolution, and their safe settlement will require some of that knowledge of the world which makes men able to anticipate what will really happen. There would not be anything like the same cause for anxiety if the office were one which a man, when he had exercised it for a time, could properly lay aside. But whatever reasons might make that desirable, the history and habit and fixed ideas of the Church preclude it. The Deacon is "in Holy Orders," has received the character for life, and will still be distinguished by style and title as a member of the clerical body.

With regard to the measure of extension and conditions of admission very different ideas are broached. Some are of the widest character; and it is curious to hear them from so prudent a person as the Bishop of Winchester. "He had a "strong feeling in favour of the higher grades of the clergy "being educated gentlemen, yet he believed that the Church "could not embrace the whole population in its arms, unless "its ministry could be derived from various grades of society. "His strong impression was that the ministry should be drawn, "not only from the gentry and highly educated, but from other "classes, as, for instance, farmers and the tradesman class; and "he should not be at all sorry to see a certain number enlisted "even from the class of operatives. They wanted to keep the "upper grade of the clergy educated, refined, and intelligent; "but there was no reason why they should not enlist into the "lower grades of the clergy men who were not so refined and "educated, but who might possibly afterwards attain to a fit- "ness for the higher positions." The reason at present, which the Bishop cannot see, is that there are not these distinct grades among the clergy which is here supposed, and they must be created on purpose; and apparently the only way to do that is by the permanent Diaconate, which in fact his plan supposes. His last words, however, open a door of escape for some selected persons, to which, he may depend upon it, the crowd of their companions will quickly press. Perhaps we may come to this arrangement some day; but in "practical politics" the "permanent Diaconate" is set aside, and only the "extended Diaconate" is proposed, to which men may be admitted "who have other means of living, and are willing to aid the clergy gratuitously," with prospect of possible advance to the Priesthood on examination passed, after four years of such service. The first condition is vague; but since every man has *some* other

means of living, it may be construed as "independent means," or such as are derived from some kindred occupation—for instance, that of teaching. The second condition is insecure, since circumstances may soon make it desirable that the aid should not be altogether gratuitous. These conditions, however, can be reasonably interpreted, and the provision would, doubtless, in some localities bring in a certain amount of welcome and much-needed assistance for the services of the Church. But many of us will concur in the Bishop of Durham's anticipation, that such gains will be few on the whole, and will be far from meeting the need; and some cases will be unwise exchanges for lay-service rendered before with a power of example which will after ordination be no longer quite the same.

3. But in all changes that may be made, the subject of practical anxiety will be the maintenance of the standard of culture and attainment in the ordained ministry of the Church. While modifications of our system are taking shape, careful attention must be given to prevent the securities on this side from being impaired; for, indeed, they are none too strong at present.

The lowering of the average standard in the Diaconate must, of course, be accepted as a necessary part of the scheme. An infusion of men of a different educational training from that hitherto required must lower that average in proportion to their numbers, whatever compensating advantages they may bring. And when the inclusion of this element comes to be, not the occasional exception which it has been, but on the basis of a recognised plan, that involves the lowering not of the average approximation to the standard, but of the standard itself which is required. There is the alternative of continuing the present level of examination for the present class of deacons proceeding to the priesthood, with a lower level, or various lower levels, for others. But this would be found to create practical difficulties, and would be at variance with the desired object of giving to the Diaconate a more definite character and a more distinct place in our system. No! all deacons, *as deacons*, should stand on the same footing of admission, duties and rights, and in that case the present test of intellectual qualification will remain only in the examination for priests' orders. According to the resolutions the same test remains also for deacons of the other class, who may apply for such advancement after the four years' service. It seems to be thought that, in this way, the existing security will be adequately maintained. But let us consider what will actually happen. The ordinary candidate, who comes with his University degree, or Theological College certificate, or such qualifi-

cation as a literate as the Bishop allows, will find the first approach to the ministry made more easy by the lowering of the barriers which he has to pass. Much *preliminary* work which is now done will not be done then. Instead of being done in the time which is clear for study, it will be frequently adjourned to the time which will be occupied with practical duties; and instead of being done as a condition for the irrevocable step, it will be attempted by men who are already committed to the clerical life. Two consequences will follow. Where the test is insisted on, there will be more frequent rejections of candidates, and these under more painful circumstances. But often the test will itself give way before a natural consideration for the position in which the man will be left, the expectations with which he had entered the ministry, the good work which he has done, and his qualifications of other kinds outside the limit of the examination. The more we reduce the outwork which guards the approach, the less shall we be able to maintain a firm defence of the wall beyond. In the case of those who shall be admitted deacons under the new plan, the like considerations will work to the like result. Even men who became deacons as for permanence, will find that there are reasons important to themselves, and perhaps to the Church, for the advancing to the higher grade—and without great firmness in the Bishops the facilities of relaxation will rapidly increase. More weak and ill-prepared men than it was intended to receive will be ordained, in fact, and there will be a reduction of the educational level of the Presbyterate, as well as of the Diaconate.

Measures then must be devised to check this tendency and avert this result. No doubt the Bishops will know what to do, for it is plain that the present movement tends to create more embarrassing questions and more anxious responsibility for them, than, in the matter of ordination, they have ever had hitherto. Perhaps a remedy may be found in some system of examination outside that by their own chaplains (like the Cambridge Preliminary on a larger scale), which should have the power of giving men certificates as "Licentiates in Theology." These might serve as ordinary conditions for the short Diaconate; they would secure to the men possessing them such stipends as are now given; and would give the Bishops more definite rules of action, and also greater freedom in regard to their own examinations.

The changes proposed in these Resolutions at present rise before us with a wavering and nebulous aspect. We shall see how much will disperse as vapour into space, how much will orb into the solid form of facts; while the latter transition is taking place, so far as it may do so, there will be need of

careful foresight on the points here mentioned, and, above all, upon the last. If we live in times which call for larger activities, and for larger numbers to carry them on, we certainly do not live in times in which the ordained ministry of the Church can safely lower its standard of intellectual cultivation. In these days of advancing and extending education, it would be simply disastrous to have in the front ranks of religion a line of official leaders, whose character for educated knowledge of their subject, and what belongs to their subject, had been depreciated in public esteem.

The suggestion now made as to the kind of provision which should be included in the movement to guard it from this attendant danger, is mainly intended to draw out like suggestions from other quarters; for the purpose of this paper has not been to discuss the movement, but to call attention to some considerations incidental to it. The movement itself, inaugurated by such authority, ought to be, and, I am persuaded, will be, welcomed as a fresh token of the grace of God that is among us; and it demands our prayers that it may be prospered by His blessing, guided by His counsel, and quickened in all its course by "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

T. D. BERNARD.



ART. VII.—THE ENGLISH CHURCH IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

WE have received the following letter—comments and personal recollections—from the Reverend Canon Hulbert, Vicar of Almondbury:

An article in the *Quarterly Review* for January last, bearing the above title, endeavours to apologize for the clergy in general, and depreciate the Evangelical revival, whether accomplished by the moderately Calvinistic or by the Arminian and Wesleyan party. The writer denies compulsion on the part of the Bishops, and ultimately traces the good old orthodox clergy from the Nonjuring as well as Hanoverian sections, down to the publication of the Oxford Tracts half a century ago. In this, however, the *Quarterly* writer does injustice to many of his favourites, who were earnestly opposed to "Roman Catholic Emancipation" (in which they foresaw much that has followed in England as well as Ireland), and would have shrunk with horror from the principle of Tract XC., in which culminated that series; which at first looked on with complacency by the heads of the Church, ultimately drew forth their censure, and obliged many to their only consistent course—submission to Rome.

I am old enough to remember the state of things some sixty or seventy years ago, and the traditions of the latter part of the eighteenth century.