

Some Experiences of a Woman Minister.

A NEWSPAPER placard asserted to me as I walked through Oxford Street, that "War gives woman her chance". If that be true, then it is tragic that only in this awful failure of man's control of the civilisation he devised is a chance given to half of humanity—and that the better half, not only in romance but in statistics—to create the best kind of society. It should be "the Church gives woman her chance".

A few years ago, the more forward looking religious communities of our land opened their ministry to women. I hear still Dr. G. Pearce Gould, with the dignity of his years, breaking the conservatism of centuries, speak in public, and with enthusiasm, of the new era, which he himself was helping to usher in. Dr. Charles Brown, my own minister, whom I first heard preach at the age of four—I confess I do not remember his sermon—was so much in agreement with this advance that he risked giving an unqualified approval and recommendation that a girl should be admitted to a Baptist Theological College.

From the very beginning I have been impressed by the chivalrous kindness of the men of our ministry, starting with the men of Regent's Park College, who received me as one of themselves, and passing to the many Fraternalists who have welcomed me as a brother beloved—I almost mis-spelt the word *brother* and wrote *bother*, which I must have seemed to them at the start.

It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to stress the fact that there has always been a ministry of women. Well over three thousand years ago, in one of the world's most impressive and conservative religions, there flourished Katebet, famous priestess of Amen Ra, in Thebes; and many other ancient religions had a place for the priesthood of women.

In the Old Testament, women like Miriam and Deborah, Jael and Esther stand out as leaders inspired in that national religion. In the Gospels women disciples shared the journeys and teaching of Jesus; they stood by Him when the men left Him to His fate; they were the first to grasp the news of His resurrection; and through them some of His loveliest actions and deepest sayings have come down to us. The glad tidings of the early church used inspired preachers, men and women, in its joyful spread. In one house were five preachers, Philip and his

daughters; what a household it must have been! While Priscilla was not only a preacher, but perhaps professor, teaching the clever Apollos, and even, as Harnack suggested, writing the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Among the Christian martyrs women ever had a place, and who can read the stories of Perpetua and Felicitas without knowing that this new religion had indeed transcended all barriers, even that of sex? In Europe there are records of great women church leaders. The *Catholic Encyclopaedia* tells of how "The Abbesses of Huelgas . . . issued faculties to hear confessions, to say Mass, to preach. They nominated parish priests, appointed chaplains, granted letters dismissary, took cognizance of first instances in all causes, Ecclesiastical, criminal and relating to benefices, imposed censures through their ecclesiastical judges, confirmed the abbesses of their subject houses, drew up constitutions, visited monasteries, in a word, they possessed a full ecclesiastical jurisdiction". There was Catherine of Sienna, theologian, statesman, peacemaker; Theresa, mystic, teacher, administrator; Catherine of Genoa, who contradicted Paul that women was made for man, and showed how she was made for God. Some of the Fathers could not find words bad enough with which to speak of a woman—she was worse than infidel; so that some were honoured in life, whilst most had to wait for death to win their renown. In our own land the Abbess Hilda held high administrative offices, influencing the social and religious life of a large district; and Julian of Norwich stands almost alone in her sane piety and rich spiritual gifts. The great convents were the centre of education for women and for men; they had training in music, art, literature and languages, and when they were closed in the sixteenth century, education became closed to women.

Protestantism, in essence, enshrines the sacredness and dignity of the human soul, and as it swept over Northern Europe it brought new hope to women. It involved their spiritual emancipation, and stressed their relationship to God, quite apart from their relationship to man; and as His children, recognised that they were able to know Him and declare His will. Women were not slow to use this freedom in God's service. Among the Anabaptists, who through their teaching suffered martyrdom (the one right never denied to women), the largest part of the company were women. Joan of Kent, who was burnt at Smithfield in 1550, was a theologian of no mean reputation, being condemned for a heterodox view of the incarnation, on which she sustained a long debate with learned theologians.

In Holland, there was a group of women preachers. The *Brownists Conventicle*, 1641, says, "And in this our thanksgiving, let us remember all the blessed pastors . . . as also our she-fellow

labourers, our holy and good blessed women, who are not only able to talk on any text, but search into the deep sense of the Scripture, and preach both in their families and elsewhere."

In England, there is an account of a woman preaching in the Queen's Chapel at Somerset House in July, 1653, whose sermon was two hours long. The Baptists were leaders in this matter, and at Coleman Street, the principal General Baptist Church in London, was Mrs. Attaway, the "mistress of all the she-preachers in Coleman Street". One of these was Elizabeth Hooton, who became a convert of George Fox, and was the first of the Quaker women who endured great hardship for the Gospel. She visited the gaols, and hearing of the persecutions of the "Friends" in America, went to Boston to help them. Margaret Fell became the official mouthpiece of the Quakers and shared in the preaching and imprisonment of other Quaker women. She cites the "Magnificat" as a sermon put into the *Book of Common Prayer*. Mary Fisher went to the University of Cambridge and was flogged for her denunciation; she went to New England, the first missionary of the Society, but was sent back for witchcraft. She then set out to preach to the Grand Turk, alone, knowing no language but her own, having no map, and on foot went five hundred miles through Europe. She accomplished her purpose; and only on this mission to an infidel did she return unharmed. Barbara Blangdone, a governess, became a missionary to Western England and Ireland, and her journeyings are a story of peril and hunger joyfully endured.

The Methodists at the beginning used their gifted women as preachers. Wesley hesitated over this, for there were many in the movement who disapproved, but he said, "God owns women in the conversion of sinners, and who am I that I should withstand God?" Mary Bosanquet was the leader of the women preachers, and gave her life and fortune to that work, both in London and Leeds.

Of modern religious movements, the Salvation Army owes most of its success to the able and devoted work of Catherine Booth. Although she had the care of a large family and was never in good health, she preached for twenty-five years constantly. In practice—if not in theory—all Missionary Societies throw open to women the full and varied ministry that has been considered the special prerogative of men.

If then, I seem to underline some difficulties that I have found that are special to a woman, you will understand that they have generally been in our backward communities, and by that I do not necessarily mean our poorest or least known churches!

When people ask about my ministry, it is nearly always in terms of difficulty. The male tradition is hard to break, for,

although our churches are built on Scripture, and sing "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy", they never really believe it. And how Paul's unlucky saying is turned to account in the argument, although it is forgotten that his "I suffer not a woman to speak" would effectively close the lips of many in church meetings, the very ones who are the first to uphold Paul's viewpoint when applied to preaching!

Dr. Glover likes this saying. Talking with him at the Baptist Union Meetings, he pretended great astonishment at my being in the Pastoral Session, and asked what Paul would say.

"I'm not sure," I replied, "but I will ask him when I meet him—that is, if I ever get to heaven."

"Perhaps it will be better for the peace of heaven if you do not."

"Please do not be so optimistic . . ." I said.

A vicar who was ready enough to come to my Anniversary tea, but would not come to the service, excused himself by saying that he was not sure Paul would have been there had he been invited! Or, as so often happens, in a Portsmouth church, after a service, and a long time answering those who were asking about the way of life, a youth demanded pugnaciously "what right had I to preach." O Paul, Paul, what prejudices are laid to thy charge!

Often I hear murmurings that women cannot do things properly (even if they have never had the chance of trying). We are so made that we fear the strange, and this is especially true of religious practices when they are different from the usual custom. It is easy to overlook the fact that there are greater differences between the ministries of the different types of men, than between my ministry and that of some of my brethren.

But of course difficulties do exist.

In preaching, there are difficulties common to us all; that of the choice of texts; dealing with subjects to meet special needs; of learning to expound the simple Gospel without complexity; or that of preaching Peace, while Mrs. Brown and her neighbours scrap. I was delighted when, leaving after I had taken a service, I was bidden "Goodnight" at the door by a short-sighted but loyal deacon, who said, "You should come next Sunday and hear our own minister." Or again, in London, when, having changed into hat and coat, a talkative man at the door asked, "Did you like the preacher?" When I admitted, naively, that I did rather, his long-winded disagreement made me hotter and hotter every moment!

One friend told me that she came out of curiosity to a service, and decided that it "was alright when you got used to the difference!"

On those Sundays when we exchange pulpits, a wise Fraternal Secretary has avoided sending me to a church where there was great opposition to a woman minister, but that is rare. I have three times preached in the Parish Church of the town in which I was working.

Size is awkward—especially where there are high reading desks. At one Yorkshire anniversary, I crawled under a scaffolding to the pulpit, and then, forgetting that I was standing on a small box, I stepped back, and disappeared in the middle of the sermon!

I have rarely tried highbrow sermons. An old lady thanked me, on one such occasion, for saying the very opposite to what I had said; and at a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon, the secretary announced, after I had spoken, "Next week we are having a most welcome change in the form of a musical service." Just occasionally, there comes a sentence that cheers. One man called me "Miss Campbell," and another said that he "forgot it was a woman preaching."

There are many who doubt if it be safe to be buried by a woman. A family—members of my own church—asked the Vicar to take the graveside service, and I that in the house! Yet a woman can understand what is wanted to comfort and sustain at this most touching service. Recently, an air raid commenced as we were at the graveside; most of those following went to shelter, but as a few bravely remained, we carried on amid the booming of guns.

When discussing baptisms, the most frequent question to me is "are you able?" I remember how a respected minister, when I had my first baptismal service, advised me to ask a senior Minister in the town to conduct it. I did not take his advice! We are not so weak, you know—the sports record of a modern women's college would compare well with that of a theological college; and it is always the strength required that worries these critics. I had at one such service four hefty Yorkshiremen, each of whom was over six feet—one too tall for the baptistry. My biggest trouble is the size boots I have to wear. If it is as uncomfortable to have big feet, as it is for me to wear a man's size goloshes, I pity you. I always leave the rubber boot behind when I try to walk!

At first it was an ordeal to face the boring of twelve pairs of eyes at deacons' meetings. It has been said that grave deacons would object to a woman as chairman—yet some modern business houses not only have women as directors, but as chairman of their Boards. It is even whispered that those towns with women Mayors have discovered that Council business is expedited. I am very cheered that my deacons' wives say that their husbands

have never been home so early from deacons' meetings before!

What a blessing to a minister is a good secretary! I have been fortunate in all my churches.

What a boon are women on the diaconate, if they are the right ones! It has taken me two years to get them—and mine are not old, but vigorous and capable—but it was a struggle to make them take *full* duties with the men, although now that they have taken office, they are ready to help in any way I suggest.

Of course, there are some whose main concern is the kind of frocks a woman will wear, or her hats. Having seen some minister's ties, I think there is little need for worry!

At a town in Surrey, where I was taking an anniversary, my hostess came to meet me. She expected someone tall, elderly, with glasses, wearing widow's weeds. As no such person appeared, she went home and left me on the platform!

It was Dr. A. Maude Royden who insisted on my hair being shingled. Some time afterwards, while preaching at Abergavenny, one old lady came to me and said how glad she was I had not cut my hair!

Hats, too, were a difficulty, and against my minister's advice I did not wear one. You men do not wear your hair as the Apostles, nor dress as they. Why should I? Paul would probably allow no hats if he saw the queer designs to-day that perch at absurd angles, and their special function is not to hide the hair, and hiding the hair was Paul's chief anxiety. Miss Royden, asked by a bishop whether she would wear a hat in one church, replied, "God is not so much concerned as to whether I wear a hat, but rather what is under the hat."

Will a uniform be advisable? One brave man offered to design a dog collar for me; the very thought of one appals me! I find a gown useful for the pulpit. There is one church I shall never enter again. They were so violently shocked at my gown that they denounced me as tending towards Rome!

I hurry over men who occasionally pester me with abominable letters. It is charitable to hope they are mentally deficient, and subjects for those who deal in the new psychology. There are some awkward moments that men never have to face. Recently, after a service, a man approached me in the vestry; he was a clown in a circus. After some while, he proposed, suggesting a double act would be a great success! I was too sorry for the poor horse that would have to carry my weight in the equestrian act, to accept! I am old enough to know that some men act remarkably like clowns, even when it is not their job in life, and this man was at least sincere.

Naturally, I get more romantic stories told me than the men; at least, I hope so! And I certainly get more rosy views of what

men can do, as seen by themselves. Really, I like them to express their dreams and hopes. They are usually trustworthy, and the expression of their thoughts helps them to fulfil them.

One of my worst enemies is loneliness. Especially in those long months hoping for work, with constant disappointments. Yet because that has been so heavy, the gracious and chivalrous way that ministers and their wives have opened their homes to me has been my chief delight. I look forward to Fraternal, and have been in some good ones. Our Yorkshire one was excellent, and the annual Retreat a splendid fellowship. I have the most generous friends and homes in all parts of the country and have received unforgettable kindnesses. There are men who have helped by believing in my mission in the darkest days, and given encouragement when I have despaired of myself. I think that ministers and their wives are the best people on the earth. I entertain the Fraternal in my turn. Recently, while setting up housekeeping, I had three chairs and four cups to stretch among thirteen men!

It is to me a never ending astonishment that women are their own worst enemies. So many churches think of them in terms of washing-up and tea-making—estimable occupations in themselves, and I think highly of those men who undertake such duties at home, and wish they would do them sometimes for the church. The manliest men do them; Scouts, Rovers, those who tramp and climb, the army, navy and airmen, and they are proud to do them. Why these jobs should be looked on as the special, and often the only duty of women puzzles me.

There is often even contempt in the church for women; they are thought not capable of even so high a service as taking the collection! Actually, many women are better at business organisation than at tea-making or knitting. My two women deacons are gems, able and alert, with a sense of humour, and ready to try anything.

So many churches are built on the sacrificial labours of women, and in these days, some are wholly sustained by them. They get the money by which the outward organisation is kept going, yet often the criticism of a woman minister comes from them. There is as yet no women's Trade Union! I know it is true that they do criticise each other, their dress, their interests, often in a snobbish way; some long for notoriety; some like men, naturally enough, and do look to them and like to hear them speak; some need that careful, sympathetic help that the new psychology offers. I can understand and sympathise with them, for I have seen the narrowness of their lives, the suppression of their powers, the waste of their energies and how they are doomed often by their very love for a church that has no place

for them. And knowing them, I work for a generation that will not suffer as they.

The *Call* to a spiritual vocation comes in the same way to a woman as it does to a man; brooding over the work that has to be done to evangelise and rebuild the world, there comes a clear call to this Christian ministry as the grandest way of salving what is best in our civilisation and in expanding the Christian world.

But the urge to use one's powers in this holy service is not enough, unless the Call be reinforced by the Call of a Church, acting first through the local community, then through the accredited organisation, and when these are recognised, then it seems fair that the whole ministry should be open. There is a tragedy in the lack of encouragement here. There are a few women who have a very strong sense of vocation and some have gifts of leadership and speech. I have received letters from some, some have come to see me from far parts of the country, yet these are lost to our church and give their gifts to other—good, but second-best—causes, as we have little room for trained women. And the church suffers.

I am frequently told that I am not on the accredited list, or that my name is not in the Handbook. There is first a list of ministers, then a small list of four women pastors, tucked away and kept most carefully distinct from the ministers. I should like to feel that the time had come when we could be definitely included in the list of ministers, as are the women of the Congregational ministry.

To a woman, the ideal church is pictured as a *family*. A group of people, very diverse in their thought and outlook, yet learning to live in amity and enlarging their interests and service to those who are near and far away. To this end, the needs of all sections of the church are considered. Our deacons meet for study as well as business, and wrestle with the great Christian tenets. The week-evening services are designed to show the great doctrines in their modern expression. We have a series of talks on the Gospel origins, followed by others on the working of the principles of the Gospels to-day, and those ably taken by men or women in office, the mayor, a water-works official, a detective, a headmaster, a surgeon, a manager of a large store, a charity organiser and a missionary.

The Young People's Fellowship have an extensive programme of study. They had a visitor from each section of the church (including the Roman Catholic) to lecture on the varied doctrines of the Church and Sacraments. Talks on botany, geology, astronomy are very popular, and bring a richer vision of the glory of God. There is training too in speaking, in pre-

paring of lessons for Sunday School teaching, and a preaching class. My study is open for the use of any who need books, and among those who have few books in their own homes the demand is great. In one morning I had enquirers searching for the distance of the nearest star, the diseases of a rabbit, the habits of magpies, splicing, and the meaning of IHS. These young people are keen missionaries. They preach at a mission church, the girls in the dockyard canteens bring a group of soldiers to church, from the town stores and the hospital new visitors regularly come to services through the work of shop girls and nurses. Two sisters persuaded their mother to have soldiers billeted with them only that they might bring them to church. On Sunday they came with three hefty sergeants who obviously had never been in a church before! And this practical missionary work is giving them a new sympathy and interest in the Baptist Missionary Society.

The women's work is mostly training for further service, too. They are keen to learn how to manage a meeting, and to speak. During Lent, they have a series of meetings in the church. Their problems they are glad to discuss; a child behaves abnormally, and it is to the minister they come; the question of dress, or colour they bring, and it is the only subject with which I feel better equipped than the men to deal! If furnishing has gone awry, or some carpentry is under discussion, the issues are brought to me for settlement! In sickness it is the minister's advice they ask first. One morning a hasty visitor came with the question, "Is my finger broken?"

A retreat for women teachers has been a most interesting experiment. A group asked me to conduct one, as they had so little time for thought and prayer, and it has grown to include many who had no church connections. Much time is also used in answering letters from strangers about problems difficult to discuss with men. After a broadcast service, letters of that kind came from every continent.

The children give us endless hope. They are from poor homes and full of mischief, but the turning of those energies to fine usefulness is most worth while. We have now lost about three hundred through evacuation, and the miss to the church is enormous. A handful remain and members are taking charge of them individually, and already the results in a new understanding, good for both, are apparent.

The church should be a power in the town and we are taking a very necessary part in that. There has been a long struggle with the Education Committee, ending in the loaning of day schools for Sunday teaching in an area that has no church. With much difficulty a Free Church Council has been formed, and one

fine result was a procession of all the Sunday Schools and an open-air witness. A joint Fraternal of the clergy and ministers has been started. I have, too, that endless procession of presidencies that all have to accept, and a great number of Brotherhoods, to make up for the Sisterhoods my Brethren have to face!

Among other denominations there is a growing interest in the subject. The Congregational Church have sixteen women ministers, one London church has two men and a woman in partnership. In the Church of England is a movement for the full ministry that is growing more insistent. We have a Society for the Ministry of Women that has a splendid fellowship and keen workers. It is opening the way for women as Chaplains among the women's war groups, a much needed work. In America the International Women Preachers' Association was started in 1919, and meets yearly. Some sections of the Methodist, the Baptist and Presbyterian Churches are open to women there.

So the experiment grows, proving itself of the Spirit. The latest pioneers in the ministry are trying to revive a ministry of healing with the new knowledge that is ours, and I believe that the church will only be fully staffed and able to do its glorious work completely, when every community has a man and a woman minister and a doctor, working together.

Is it a far-off dream? Yet dreams come true! As yet our church has only admitted two women students to a theological college to be adequately trained for the most wonderful, yet most delicate and responsible work of leading souls to their Lord, and enlisting and training their lives in His holy and happy service.

Who dare prophesy concerning women's special contribution to preaching? God is so Glorious, so very far above thought and imagination, veiled in beauty, the Light and Joy of the universe; He is Life, in its unimaginable wealth and energy; Who can reveal Him? The very use of the masculine "Him" limits our thought. God is not a man. All life, the masculine and the feminine, is a tiny expression of His boundless thought and love. May there not be something of that lovely God that woman can teach? May not even womanhood itself reveal Him, who is our Mother? (Is there not a suggestion that the ancient creeds thought of the Holy Spirit as feminine?) A little child sees her first glimpse of God in her mother's face, and a mother is a Priestess all her days. She brings grace and unselfish love into the lives of grown-up children, and she bears their sins, so revealing the intimate suffering of God.

Through the ages, while men have made states, armies, laws, she has made *home*, where it is possible to be one's best and to

find the creative life. Jesus showed us God as the Homemaker, creating this world to be a Home which reveals His love in all its beauty, and a Home in the unseen world where life will find its completion in His family. Cannot a woman reveal this trait of God our Mother?

It was to a woman that Jesus said, "God is a Spirit"; cannot she always understand? A woman thinks in terms of people, not profits; creation, not destruction; a world believing in force destroys itself; it is the Eternal Mother, God, who teaches that the Kingdom must be built by Spiritual power; cannot a woman reveal this? We see Jesus in the Gospels, so amazingly womanly, so perfectly a man, with His grace, His gentleness, His quick and loving intuition; we hear His beatitudes, with their womanly virtues, and His readiness to be friends with women. Cannot a woman understand Him, or at least those qualities a man may not see? I know that God in His love cannot be completely revealed till we see Him for ourselves. But He wants all the energies of every consecrated man and woman to make Him real and alive to our world to-day.

If He calls, who dare disobey? Even a woman?

So may the bride of Christ enter into the glory of His sacred Ministry.

VIOLET HEDGER.

Calvinism.

THIS book,¹ published in the Duckworth's Theology Series, will be of interest to all readers of this journal; first of all because it is written by Dr. Dakin, and secondly, because the large majority of our churches are Calvinistic by lineage, and many of them have the five points of Calvinism mentioned in their Trust Deeds.

The treatment by Dr. Dakin is so good that one wishes it were extended, and in one way more challenging. Dr. Dakin has the disadvantage of writing a book in a series, so that not only must the other volumes be remembered, but the format and number of pages are largely determined.

The first part consists of an exposition of Calvinism as stated in the Institutes; the second part deals with his ecclesiastical system and describes the growth of Calvinism on the Continent, in Scotland, England and New England; the third part consists of a number of chapters dealing with the influence of Calvinism.

¹ *Calvinism*, by A. Dakin, B.D., D.THEOL. (Duckworth, 5s. net.)