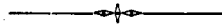


to surrender secular occupation, and this need involve no religious difficulty, unless we take up the absurd mental position that there is something inherently bad in trade and commerce.

It is as well that I should add, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that, according to my idea, the business man, if admitted to the diaconate, should not *ipso facto* have authority to preach. This privilege should only be his if he "be thereto licensed by the Bishop himself"; and he would not have any claim to be advanced to the priesthood unless he could show himself well qualified for the higher office, and be ready to withdraw himself entirely from secular work.

PAUL PETIT.



ART. III.—THE EXTENSION OF THE DIACONATE: A "READER'S" VIEW.

IT has been often said that if you define your terms you prove your position, and the very difficulty which I experience in defining the ecclesiastical oxymoron before me affords some indication of the precarious nature of the position which I am to defend or attack, for an ill-defined or nebulous proposition is almost as embarrassing to its opponents as it is to its supporters: Is the lay-diaconate an order or an office? The subject seems to be conclusive in the former direction, the epithet in the latter; but as the greater includes the less, I propose to treat it as a qualified order rather than as an extended office. It appears to me to be easier to defend from an ecclesiastical standpoint the permission to deacons of secular employments, rather than the investiture of laymen with diaconal functions. But, on the other hand, I am bound to say that, should the lay-diaconate ever be established, the average man will be apt to consider its members rather as traders who minister than as ministers who trade, and to regard that interesting hybrid, the lay-deacon, as having superadded the sacred to the secular, rather than the secular to the sacred.

And this, believe me, is no mere dialectical distinction; it goes to the very root of the matter. Πάντα ῥεῖ—there is no absolutely perfect balance either in physics, or in economics, or in morals. No man ever yet exactly and at all times reconciled conflicting duties or even competing aspirations. Your lay-deacon will always be either a good man of business and an indifferent minister, or an excellent minister and only a moderately efficient professional person.

I am, however, anticipating my argument before I have done with my definition. Permit me to hark back to that, and to say that by the lay-diaconate I understand an arrangement whereby either all deacons or some deacons shall be permitted to engage in secular occupations for reward. I pass over the question of the machinery whereby this is to be effected, merely stating by the way that, in my own opinion, there is nothing either in the statutes, or the canons, or the ordinal which in terms forbids deacons at present to exercise professions for reward.

It will be seen from this that, in theory, the lay-deacon will be a clerical person, who, though he preach the Gospel, is not enabled to live of the Gospel, but is constrained to minister to himself in earthly things by the exercise of a profession or a trade as a means of livelihood in competition with those whose sole occupation such profession or trade may be. He will be in all respects a deacon; essentially ecclesiastical, and only casually civil. He will therefore differ from the reader, who is in character essentially civil, and only occasionally performs functions which by repute are ecclesiastical.

Assuming that this is the nature of the lay-diaconate, I am bold to say that I consider the proposal eminently undesirable. I believe it to rest upon a misconception of primitive institutions; upon a misunderstanding of the tendencies of the age and of the exigencies of professional life; and, above all, upon a total misapprehension both of the functions and of the faculties of lay members of the Church of England.

I will try to make my position good under these three heads.

The lay-diaconate has amongst its ardent advocates some who appeal to antiquity in its favour. The New Testament, councils and canons are ransacked and racked to show that what is proposed is a restoration in the twentieth century of an institution which was found appropriate in the first. Indeed, one of its supporters begs the question with ingenious hardihood by speaking of "the revival of a true working diaconate;" while so sober a person as Arch-deacon Emery went so far as to affirm that what is proposed was "beyond all question following the precedent of the first three centuries."

Yet, if I understand the record rightly, the very object of the original institution of the diaconate was to prevent that which it is now proposed to effect—namely, the superadding of the secular to the sacred, or, as I should prefer to say, of the civil to the ecclesiastical. May I add, in passing, that I deeply deprecate the distinction which is drawn so frequently in discussions on this subject between functions which are

called sacred and those which are called secular, although for convenience of discussion it is sometimes necessary to employ the words as if they were antithetical ?

That which seems to have been the case with regard to the original institution of the diaconate was, of course, considerably modified in practice during the succeeding centuries, until after the fourth century we find a Church writer stating as an acknowledged fact that the diaconate was, in fact, a "third priesthood"; and it is this character which the office appears to have sustained ever since, for although we are told by those who advocate the establishment of a lay-diaconate that there are decisions of councils which permit the exercise of ordinary employments for gain by deacons in old times, I think it will be seen upon a closer investigation, in the first place, that this permission is given only in cases of extreme necessity, and under circumstances which are confessedly exceptional; and, in the second place, that the permissions thus given are certainly not in terms, and probably not in intention, confined to the diaconate, but are equally allowed to the priesthood. I venture, therefore, to submit with confidence that the proposed institution fails when tested in the direction of primitive practice.

But there are other supporters of the proposal, generally those whose views of Church order are but little influenced by considerations of antiquity, who tell us that the lay-diaconate is appropriate to our times, and is, in fact, peremptorily needed. Now, the advancement of these arguments naturally leads us into the consideration of the way in which the proposed institution is likely to work in practice. I propose therefore to ask, in the second place, with regard to the lay-diaconate, whether it is, in fact, practical.

I do not myself esteem so highly as some of my friends that somewhat cheap objection to the proposition which assumes that it is impossible that the man who works for reward during part of his time should be respected in the exercise of sacred functions. For my own part, I am content to believe that if a man is called of God, and entrusted by Him with a message or a ministry, he will exercise it not the less efficiently—nay, in all probability he will gain in experience—if, in addition to his distinctively ecclesiastical work, he mixes with those to whom he ministers in the ordinary affairs of their life. Surely this is but an extension of that principle for which the clergy so rightly contend, that he is the most effective preacher and minister who is most assiduous in his parochial visitation, for the basis of this idea is, that in the process of visiting—always laborious, frequently disappointing—the minister gains that

insight into the thoughts and the difficulties of his people which he can acquire in no other manner.

But if he whose general sphere is outside the family and business occupations of his flock recognises that by these necessarily casual and intermittent visits he gains a real advantage in his ministry, how much stronger will be the position of the man who day by day, without forgetting his own sacred office, is engaged side by side with other men, rubbing shoulders with them—nay, if you will, competing with them in their own line of life?

But I do say that the proposed institution is contrary to the general tendencies of the age, and not consistent with the real exigencies of the work which has to be accomplished. In every department of life at the present time the tendency is to specialize, and yet this proposal is simply to unite in a single person two differing, though not inconsistent, occupations. If the surgeon to be successful must nowadays devote himself to the lifelong study of some particular organ, if the engineer who hopes to be eminent must give himself wholly to some particular branch of his profession, it is no mere fashion which dictates this course, but a real necessity for that thoroughness in professional matters which can only be acquired* by arduous toil and assiduous application.

And if on *à priori* grounds the proposal seems to clash with the spirit of the age, I am sure that all the more it is based upon a misapprehension of the exigencies of the work. Here, at any rate, I speak of what I know. It is not fair upon those whom it is proposed to appoint to this office that they should be required to undergo the continual conflict between the competing calls of their double duties.

I assume, of course, that there will be competing calls, for I pass by the case of those people whom it is proposed to appoint to this office after they have given the best years of their life to acquiring a competency in trade, or have been enabled by other ways to retire from their profession—men who, if they are suitable for such an office, should surely be ordained to the regular diaconate, and who, if the whole training of their lives has left them too ill-equipped for that order, should surely not be placed in the position to which it is suggested they should be assigned.

But of course the supporters of the lay-diaconate will say it is no use urging that our proposal is not primitive, because our age is not primitive, but modern, and that it is no use saying that our proposal is not practical, because, if it is really needed, a way will be found in which it can be carried out, and so I come to the question whether the demand for the lay-diaconate is in fact as peremptory as its supporters suppose.

We are told that the number of men who are offering themselves for the service of the Church in its regular ministry is yearly diminishing. But this is not the peculiar accident of the sacred ministry alone; it is that which is happening in many other occupations to-day. The cry of the farmer is the same, that labour is dear and bad, because the labourers are yearly fewer, as the young men drift from the country to the great towns. That which is the remedy for the farmer is in its measure, I am convinced, the remedy for the parson—to make the most of the men that he has by organization and by machinery, by adapting his resources to the claims that are made upon him—to use a popular proverb, “By cutting his coat according to his cloth.”

For what is it, after all, that the lay-deacon is intended to do which no person at present in existence can effect? He is to read prayers in church; he is (not necessarily, I note) to preach; he is to be an almoner, an adviser, a financial officer in the parish; he is to assist in that part of the administration of the Holy Communion which may, I think, without irreverence be called mechanical.

Now, the great majority of these things are things which can be perfectly well done by the laity as they are. We are often told that one of the difficulties of the parish priest is the prevailing idea that a man must attend to his business and his pleasure, and leave religion to the parson, who is paid to attend to it. And yet, if I may be bold to say so to those who exercise that high office, this misconception gains colour from the sharp line of demarcation which is too often drawn by the clergy between their own work and their own functions and those of their lay brethren.

I say nothing with regard to the conduct of services in church, though it has always been mysterious to me why, if, as a layman, I am permitted to do that which is greater—I mean to read the Word of God in the ears of the people—I should not equally be permitted to do that which is less, namely, to read equally in their audience the Book of Common Prayer, a book which, however scriptural and however excellent, is yet human, as contrasted with that which is Divine.

But, apart from this, I am sure that with organization the faculties of the laity could be largely developed, and this, not only from that side which is commonly called secular, but also and more especially from the side of those things which are indeed most sacred. The serving of tables is of course laymen's work, the administration of alms, the ordering of all those material and mechanical practicalities which at present absorb so much of the clergyman's time and often try his temper so severely. But while all are acknowledging more and more

that in this department the laity can be used, I think we are slow to recognise the faculties of the laity in purely spiritual work, and being slow to recognise, the Church has failed to afford to the laity definite training in this particular direction. By spiritual work I do not in the least mean the preaching of sermons. A sermon is an excellent thing in its way, and I cannot for myself see why, if a man, with the necessary spiritual qualifications, has in the exercise of his profession acquired the art of lucid exposition, or is naturally endowed with that most dangerous gift of eloquence, he should not, under proper restrictions and in convenient places, be allowed to preach, by whatever name his service may be called.

But, after all, the best of sermons is but moderately efficient compared with half an hour's conversation man to man. I venture to say that any man who desires to do real work for the extension of the kingdom would rather have an opportunity of half an hour's uninterrupted conversation with any man whom he desires to win, than be afforded the opportunity of preaching him a sermon of the same length. Of course, I know you get more people within the sound of your voice on the occasion of sermons, but the power which is exercised over a large area is inevitably less effective than the same power concentrated on a single point.

I can only, in conclusion, summarize what I want to say by asking, with regard to the proposal of the lay-diaconate, three questions: (1) Whether it is in reality primitive? (2) whether it is in execution practicable? and (3) whether, having regard to things as they are, the call for it is, in fact, peremptory?

G. A. KING.

(London Diocesan Reader.)



ART. IV.—MESSAGES FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

IV.—*Hebrews vii.*

THERE is a symmetrical dignity all its own in the seventh chapter of the Hebrews. I recollect listening, now nearly fourteen years ago, to a characteristic exposition of it by Canon Hoare, in a well-known drawing-room at Cromer—a "Bible Reading" full alike of mental stimulus and spiritual force. He said, among other things, that the chapter might be described as a sermon, divided under three headings, on Ps. cx. 4. This division and its significance he proceeded to develop. The chapter opens with a preamble, a statement of the unique phenomena which surround the name and person