

The Office of Lay Reader.

II.

SOME REMINISCENCES.

I SHOULD like to supplement Mr. Kelk's interesting article last month with a few additional particulars of the history of the Lay Helpers' Association, and the Lay Readers, in the Diocese of London. The Lay Helpers' Association was formed originally with the object of getting West End men to go and work in East End slums. This was in 1867. The Rev. J. Moorhouse, Vicar of Paddington, afterwards Bishop of Melbourne and subsequently of Manchester, was the first Clerical Secretary, and Mr. Charles B. P. Bosanquet, an Oxford man then lately called to the Bar, and Secretary of the Charity Organization Society, was the first Lay Secretary. They came to Islington among other places, where I then lived, and held a meeting at Canonbury Tower, then occupied by the old Church of England Young Men's Society (one of the bodies eventually absorbed in the present C.E.M.S.); and their message was, Come and help us to work in the East End. The reply of us Islingtonians was, We here are a combination of West End and East End, and we have slums to work in which are as bad as White-chapel and Bethnal Green. I also personally urged that a Diocesan Lay Helpers' Association ought to include all the Lay Helpers in the diocese, and claimed that we had a right already to be enrolled, without going East. The Central Committee eventually adopted my suggestion, and a small body of a hundred men quickly developed into a great organization numbering thousands.

Presently the Committee was enlarged, and I became one of the new members. We used to meet at London House, and quite a lot of good work was done. Laymen in every parish realized their corporate union; the annual Holy Communion services at St. Paul's were attended by hundreds, and greatly valued; and the annual meetings were addressed by the most distinguished clergymen and laymen in London. When, in the seventies, Mr. Moorhouse went to Melbourne and Mr. Bosanquet had to succeed his father at his country seat, Rock Hall, Northumberland, we got a fine leadership from Mr. Randolph Robinson, one of the most

influential laymen in the diocese, as chairman, and Mr. Everard Ford, who is now so well known as Colonel of the Church Lads' Brigade, as Secretary.

This organization of voluntary lay help led on to the new institution of Parochial Lay Readers, with definite commission from the Bishop for spiritual and evangelistic work under the parochial clergy, not in church, but in mission-halls and the open air. Such ministrations, of course, did not actually need any formal commission; and Bishop Jackson used carefully to explain, when he admitted readers to their office in the chapel of Fulham Palace, that he had no power to sanction anything not already legal, and that whatever was already legal they could do, if they pleased, without him. In point of fact, a great many laymen were actually doing all such work without presuming to ask the Bishop for his sanction. Nevertheless, the commission he gave was accepted by many workers of experience, applied for by new aspirants, and valued by all.

Then, in 1883, came the London Diocesan Conference,¹ of which I was elected a member. Among the prominent members were two working-men of strong High Church views, Mr. Charles Powell and Mr. G. Thomas, who threw themselves into its work with enthusiasm, and particularly into the question of lay ministrations. A special committee was appointed to consider this whole subject, of which Mr. Thomas was Secretary; and among its members were the (so-called) Bishop of Bedford (Walsham How, really Suffragan Bishop for East London), W. Walsh (afterwards Bishop of Dover), Canon Capel Cure, Prebendaries Harry Jones and Webb-Peploe, Mr. Kirkpatrick of Kilburn, Sir Emilius Bayley, Mr. George Spottis-

¹ London was the last diocese in England, except Worcester, to establish a Diocesan Conference. Bishop Jackson did not want one; and this is not surprising when we remember that they were only introduced by Bishop Harold Browne at Ely in 1864, and Bishop Selwyn at Lichfield in 1868. Moreover, even Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, the chief leader in most Church developments in mid-Victorian days, would not have one—saying that if the Conference failed the laity would blame the bishop, and if it succeeded they would say, "What fine fellows we are!" At last, in 1882, Bishop Jackson yielded, and the London Conference met in February, 1883. One of its first duties was to elect three representatives on the Central Council of Diocesan Conferences. The High Churchmen nominated Sir Richard (afterwards Viscount) Cross, the Hon. C. L. Wood (now Viscount Halifax), and Mr. J. A. Shaw Stewart; and the Evangelicals put forward Sir John Kennaway and myself, intending to give their third vote to Cross. The voting was, Cross, 109; Shaw Stewart, 109; Stock, 104; Kennaway, 98, Wood, 75.

woode (then Chairman of the Lay Helpers' Association), and several other laymen, including myself. The importance of this committee historically arises from the fact that its Report to the Conference was the origin of Bishop Temple's scheme for Diocesan Lay Readers. It recommended that the Bishop should give his commission to a few selected men to preach in churches. The Conference, however, after two debates in successive years, carefully limited this suggestion to addresses at "extra" services.

Further delays occurred, and it was not till 1891 that Bishop Temple acted on the recommendation; and then he did not accept the limitation exactly as it was meant. He made up his mind that while a sermon at the Morning Service was obligatory, being an integral part of the office of Holy Communion, a sermon at the Evening Service was not, and was therefore an "extra"; also that the obligatory Evensong ended at "the Grace," and anything after that was "extra." Consequently, the evening sermon might be preached by a layman. Many high authorities have thought that this was a straining of the law; but the practice has been continued by Bishops Creighton and Winnington-Ingram, and adopted in some other dioceses, though with certain conditions.

Temple now invited offers of service. Of those who applied, only eight were considered to be qualified, and the Bishop, looking about for others, invited four more who had not been applicants: Mr. George Spottiswoode, Mr. Everard Ford, Mr. Thomas Rutt, and myself. Then he asked the S.P.G. and C.M.S. to nominate two each for missionary sermons, and the C.E.T.S. one for temperance sermons. The S.P.G. named the Earl of Stamford and Dr. Cust, and the C.M.S. Mr. Sydney Gedge and Chancellor P. V. Smith. I forget who the C.E.T.S. nominee was. One other was added, and the eighteen were solemnly admitted to the new office in St. Paul's Cathedral, before an immense congregation, on March 21, 1891. My first sermon was on the following Ascension Day, at St. Philip's, Regent Street (since pulled down), at the invitation of Prebendary Harry Jones; and I afterwards preached in a great many leading London churches. Diocese after diocese followed, and I myself have preached in seventeen, besides two in Scotland and two in Ireland.

But at first, the restriction to Evening Service was not enforced, and I and others preached many times in the morning, though not

in the Communion Service ; Temple distinctly encouraging this, and other bishops following his example by actually asking us to do so. There was more strictness about taking part in the service, except as to reading the Lessons. In the early days, the Bishop of Marlborough (now Dean of Exeter), being Temple's Suffragan, practically guided the movement in London ; and I remember at a meeting of the new Readers, when one of them said that the scheme was a great help to his Vicar, because he read the service and the Vicar preached—the Bishop exclaimed, “ No, no, you can't do that ; but you can preach and the Vicar can read the service for you ! ” So we were rather irregular in those days ; and when the spread of the movement led the Bishops as a body to issue Regulations for general observance, our liberty was somewhat curtailed, no doubt with good reason. For one thing, it was definitely laid down that the Diocesan Readers were not an “ order ” of *the Church*, but held an “ office ” in *the diocese* ; consequently, when I went to live in Rochester Diocese, I was again solemnly “ admitted ” at a public service. But when I came to Winchester Diocese this was not required of me. For another thing, many Bishops now require the Evening Service to be *finished*, and the Lay Reader's “ sermon ” to follow separately.

Naturally, in the freer life of the Dominions, and in the mission-field, and in America, there is more liberty. In Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, India, Ceylon, Egypt, I have preached in eight cathedrals and about eighty other churches. In countries where the clergy are insufficient in number, Lay Readers have a large part of the regular pastoral work to do. At Melbourne, Bishop Goe invited me to meet a large body of his Lay Readers at his house, who had assembled from all parts of his vast diocese, and many of whom were practically in charge of outlying parishes. I had on that occasion a significant illustration how easily, and how innocently, lower and more mundane thoughts may intrude themselves at solemn times. Bishop Goe particularly begged me, in addressing the men, to emphasize as forcibly as I could the sacredness of the work in which we Lay Readers were engaged ; and I did speak, out of my heart, as earnestly as I ever spoke in my life, dwelling on our need of the Holy Spirit and our absolute dependence upon His inspiration and guidance. When I ceased, the Bishop offered a touching prayer, and then asked for any questions to be

put to me to help them in their solemn functions. There was a moment or two of silence, no one apparently desiring to break it ; but then one man broke it with this question, " Would Mr. Stock kindly show us his tippet ? " Needless to say, I wished tippet and badge at the bottom of the sea. But I had to show them !

Of course not many even of the Diocesan Readers have had such varied opportunities of service as have fallen to my lot ; while, equally of course, the Parochial Readers are confined to narrower spheres. But our Divine Master's estimate of work is very different from ours. Let us not forget the widow's " two mites, which make a farthing "—" more than they all " ! I imagine no service more acceptable than that of the Parochial Reader in an ordinary parish with no special reputation and no element of romance in its field of labour. Whether he be a salaried Reader giving his whole time to his daily round of duty, or a voluntary Reader devoting his scanty leisure hours to God's work, he has in reality almost unequalled opportunities of following in his Master's footsteps and " going about doing good." If he be loyal to the clergy of the parish, cheerfully ready at all times to do their behests, diligent in whatever may be his regularly allotted duties, anxious to be generally useful, keen in such Bible study as is possible for him, fervent in prayer, realizing that the humblest service done in the right spirit is well-pleasing to God—he will be a happy man in this life, and will assuredly win the greeting that awaits the " good and faithful servant."

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