

AN ECCLESIASTICAL CAMOUFLAGE.

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IT is evident unto all men diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient Authors that from the Apostles' time there have been three Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church : Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. . . . And therefore to the intent that these Orders may be continued and reverently used and esteemed in the Church of England . . ." So we read in the Preface to the Church's Ordinal, which was drawn up a few months after the First Prayer Book of Edward VI ; and a visitor to this country from another planet, with this Preface in his hand, would expect to find the three orders of the ministry prevailing and utilized with advantage throughout the Church of England. But what would he actually discover ? That the third order of the ministry existed only in somewhere about five per cent. of our parishes. Of course he would conclude that these must be the most favoured and best equipped portion of the Church. What, then, would be his amazement to learn that they only had deacons as assistant ministers because they could not get, or could not afford to pay, priests ; that they looked forward to the deacons becoming priests at as early a date as possible, and felt that it would be a misfortune to the parish if this did not take place. Surely he would exclaim, and be justified in exclaiming, that the diaconate in the Church of England was a farce and a camouflage.

In Presbyterian churches the elders, and in other non-episcopal churches the deacons, constitute a real diaconate. But in the Church of England a deacon has no distinctive functions which differentiate him from a priest. He is a sort of half-fledged, or probationary priest, performing some, but not allowed to perform all, of the functions of the priesthood. He is addressed by the same title and is expected to wear the same garb as a priest. By statute law, dating from the reign of Henry VIII, but founded, no doubt, upon earlier canon law, he is subject to the same civil disabilities, as to not engaging in trade or business and otherwise, as a priest. Deacons and priests are mixed together promiscuously, in alphabetical order, in all lists of the clergy, whether diocesan or general. Deacons, in short, are distinguished from priests, not by what they may do or ought to do, but only by what they may not do

We have, for generations, been so accustomed to this state of things that we have, most of us, failed to realize its incongruity and the practical injury which it has inflicted upon the Church, and, through the Church, upon the religious life of the nation. But the defect in our organization has not altogether escaped notice. As early as the sixteenth century, Thomas Becon, sometime Chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer, and Prebendary of Canterbury, in his *Catechism or Familiar Talk between Father and Son*, wrote: "Would to God that even in the reformed Churches the office of a deacon were restored unto the right use; that our Churches might go right up and not halt in any condition." About the same time the Puritan, Thomas Cartwright, made the absence of a proper diaconate one of his grounds of objection to the Church of England. All that Archbishop Whitgift could reply was: "It is not necessary that every one which is a deacon should be preferred to the ministry. . . . It is not necessary that whosoever is deacon should after be minister, no more than it is that a bachelor of art should be a master of art, or a bachelor of divinity a doctor; for there may be just causes to stay them from proceeding any further."

In recent times such thoughtful and practical men as Dr. Arnold and Dean Hook have taken the same view. Dr. Arnold, in a letter to a young man on his ordination as a deacon, wrote: "You are entering on an office extinct in all but name. If it could be revived in power, it would be one of the greatest blessings that could be conferred on the Church." "Extinct in all but name." There was no exaggeration in these words. The earliest deacons, as we learn from Acts vi., had definite and distinct functions assigned to them, and stood to the Apostles, then the only other ministers in the Church, in the numerical proportion of seven to twelve. In writing to the Church at Philippi, St. Paul addressed his letter to all the saints which were there with the bishops and deacons. We cannot suppose that there was any startling disparity of number between these last and the bishops, who, of course, were ministers of the same grade as those called presbyters in the Asiatic churches of St. Paul's time. And we know that in sub-Apostolic times no Christian congregation was deemed to be complete, nor any Eucharist to be validly celebrated, without the presence of at least one deacon in addition to one or more presbyters or priests. Nothing could be

more glaring than the contrast between that state of things and what has been in existence in the Church of England. Equally glaring, however, is the difference in the deacon's functions, which in old times were entirely distinct from those of the priest, but in the Church of England are, so far as they go, identical with his; the only difference being that a deacon in our Church cannot perform one or two important acts which are the sole prerogative of the priest.

As a matter of fact the non-episcopal Churches are, in this respect, in closer harmony with the early Church than are the Churches of the Anglican Communion. The office of elder, in the Presbyterian churches, may be compared to that of deacon in the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic ages. The title, of course, makes no difference. *Je ne dispute jamais du nom, said Pascal, pourvu qu'on m'avertisse du sens qu'on lui donne.* And it is one of the curiosities of language that in the Presbyterian churches, which derive their name from the fact of their having no grade of ministry higher than what corresponds to that of presbyters in the episcopal churches, the persons occupying this grade are never styled presbyters or elders, but always ministers; while the title of elders is given to a subordinate body of officials, of whom there are several in every congregation, and who rather resemble the ancient deacons. In other non-episcopal Churches, the name as well as the office of deacon is found, with duties somewhat analogous to those of the deacons of old time.

Are we in the Church of England to rest content with the state of things prevailing among ourselves, and if not, how can it be improved? Two remedies for the mischief which it entails have been put forward during the last forty years, one of which has proved practically abortive, while the other has been put in practice on a large scale, but is at best only a palliative and not a remedy for the defect. In 1884 the Upper House of the York Convocation resolved 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 was expedient to ordain to the office of deacon men possessing other means of living who were willing to aid the clergy gratuitously. The resolution went on to lay down certain conditions as to their subsequent ordination to the priesthood, and rules on the subject were afterwards drawn up by the bishops of

the Northern Province. But the proposal has fallen absolutely flat, having had no result beyond the ordination of one or two individuals very shortly after it was put forward. On the other hand there has in the meantime sprung into existence a large number of unpaid lay readers whose functions are defined by regulations put forth by the English bishops in 1905. Their functions, as prescribed by these regulations, include, under certain conditions, taking a limited part in the services and giving addresses in consecrated buildings as well as in mission churches and parish rooms. In many parishes it would have been impossible during the Great War to have kept up the regular worship of the Church without the assistance of these lay readers. But there is a growing feeling that something more is required ; and it found a voice in the Lower House of the Canterbury Convocation in July, 1919, when that House, on the motion of Canon Garbett, who has since become Bishop of Southwark, resolved that they would welcome the extension of the diaconate in the Church of England to include men who might not feel called upon to go on to the office of priesthood, and requested the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a Committee of both Houses to report on the subject. Their Report was presented to the House on February 23 of this year, and, while its consideration in detail was postponed, the House resolved that they would welcome the fuller recognition of the diaconate as an office of the ministry not necessarily leading to the priesthood. It may, therefore, not be amiss to consider the matter independently and to note what the suggested reform would involve, what form it might take, what steps would be necessary for its accomplishment, and what objections and obstacles would have to be met in carrying it out.

In the first place we must make up our minds as to what we want. Shall we be content with such an increase of the diaconate as shall furnish us with an additional number of assistant curates of that order of the ministry, who shall be assigned to parishes where their help is most needed, and be moved from one parish to another, according to circumstances, like other assistant curates, differing only from them in not necessarily proceeding to take priests' orders or looking forward to becoming beneficed? Or do we desire a radical reform of the diaconate, which, while retaining it as a step to the priesthood for those who have a calling to that higher grade, will open it to individuals who, without abandoning

their secular avocations, or the place of residence which that avocation or some other personal reason leads them to select, are willing to serve the Church gratuitously in their own parish and neighbourhood in those duties which are at present attached to the order of deacons as well as in other functions of a more secular character? The one proceeding would involve no change in the law of the Church or in the status of deacons; the other could not be accomplished without a modification of both. The former might possibly not achieve much greater practical results than the action of the bishops in the Northern Province in 1884, to which reference has been already made. But the latter would undoubtedly have important effects both direct and indirect—direct, in substantially increasing the number of individuals qualified to lead public worship, and indirect, in materially altering the relations between clergy and laity. It is here that objections to the proposal will inevitably be made. Is it right in principle or expedient in practice that any order of the clergy should be at liberty to gain their livelihood by engaging in a secular profession or in trade or business, and that there should be deacons leading a life half clerical and half lay, and thus open to the comparison which old Thomas Fuller, in his quaint way, drew respecting parish clerks? Having regard to the semi-ecclesiastical and semi-temporal character of their office, he likened them to bats, half bird and half beast; though he incorrectly considered that there was more in them of the former character than the latter, that their clerical wings predominated over the lay or mouse part of them.

Seriously, however, when we remember that St. Paul sometimes earned his livelihood by tent-making and that the clergy and even the bishops in the early Church frequently followed a secular calling, it is obvious that there is no objection in principle to deacons being so engaged. The restraint upon the clergy in reference to it was doubtless introduced in order that they might devote their whole time to their clerical duties; and it was rigidly enforced in later times for the purpose of maintaining the separation of the clergy from the laity which it was the object of ecclesiastical policy in the Middle Ages to emphasize. The present law on the subject as regards the clergy of the Church of England is contained in the Pluralities Act, 1838. The provisions of this Act replaced a previous statute of Henry VIII, which, again, was framed in accordance

with previous ordinances of the canon law. The restrictions on our clergy are, however, confined to those who are holding any ecclesiastical office or are licensed to perform any ecclesiastical duties, and are subject to certain not unimportant exceptions. They may act as schoolmasters and take pupils, and do any kind of literary work. They may, under certain limitations, engage in farming, and hold shares in companies, and may even act as directors of fire or life insurance offices. These exceptions clearly show that, with us, the prohibition on the clergy engaging in secular pursuits is considered to be not a matter of principle but, as it really is, a matter of expediency; and the question therefore is whether it is expedient that the prohibition should be abolished in the case of deacons. It may be objected that the abolition would tend to lower their status as well as incidentally that of the higher order of the ministry, and to confuse not only the deacons but the whole body of the clergy with the laity. It would, no doubt, draw a sharper line between the diaconate and the priesthood than at present exists; but no sharper, it is submitted, than the difference between the two orders warrants or than can be justified by authoritative statements. We are accustomed to speak of the clergy of both orders as ministers. But it will be noticed that Archbishop Whitgift, in his reply to Cartwright, quoted above, speaks of a deacon as only advanced to the ministry when he is ordained priest. Canons 32 and 76 of 1603 in like manner distinguish between a deacon and a minister; and the former speaks of the office of deacon being a step or degree to the ministry, although elsewhere in the Canons the words "ministers" and "ministry" appear to include both orders. But in the Prayer Book "minister" seems to be used interchangeably with priest. This is evidently the case in the form of Absolution, since the power there stated to be given to God's ministers is not exercisable by deacons. The force of the distinction thus drawn is not impaired by the fact that it is etymologically incorrect, since "minister" is the Latin equivalent of the Greek word "deacon." We noticed the same disregard for etymology among the Presbyterians whose ministers and elders represent respectively the presbyters and deacons of early Christian times. A careful study of the Anglican Ordinal will disclose further justification for differentiating the two orders in the manner proposed. In The Form and Manner of Making of Deacons there is

nothing which prohibits them from engaging in secular business, provided that they do not neglect their ecclesiastical duties. But in *The Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests*, the candidates are told that they ought to forsake and set aside, as much as possible, all worldly cares and studies and give themselves wholly to their office, drawing all their cares and studies that way. These words not only indicate that a priest is not to engage in secular and material pursuits, but also imply that he has not been expected entirely to refrain from doing so during his diaconate. Canon 75 of 1603 prescribes that ecclesiastical persons shall not give themselves to any base or servile labour; but with this qualification—which is unmeaning in the present day, when we have learnt to regard all labour as honourable—the only existing restrictions on deacons of the Church of England earning their livelihood by secular means appear to be those in the Pluralities Act of 1838 which apply equally to them and to priests; and it is submitted that these might be repealed as to deacons without any violation of ecclesiastical principle.

If it is objected that this different treatment of the two orders would tend to degrade the office of deacon, it may be replied that it would equally tend to enhance the dignity of the priesthood. But a more serious objection may perhaps be put forward; namely, that it would establish two classes of deacons, the one acting as at present in the capacity of assistant curates and receiving payment as such, leading an exclusively clerical life and looking forward to speedy elevation to the priesthood, and the other having no cure of souls, but merely, as is the case at present with some unattached clergymen, licensed by the Bishop to officiate, rendering their services gratuitously and carrying on their secular pursuits concurrently with their ecclesiastical duties. This would no doubt be the case, and the distinction between the two classes would naturally be emphasized by the deacons of the one class continuing to be styled "reverend" and to wear the clerical garb, while those of the other class would naturally retain their addresses as laymen and their lay attire when not discharging their ecclesiastical functions. This distinction, however, would not be more incongruous nor more unworkable in practice than the difference which now exists between paid lay readers who devote their whole time to Church work, and diocesan and parochial readers who are engaged

in secular pursuits, but give voluntary assistance in Divine service and in other ways under the Regulations issued by the Bishops in 1905.

The benefits which such a modification of the diaconate would confer on the Church of England and on the cause of religion generally, are admirably stated in a little *brochure* entitled *A Plea for a Proper Diaconate*, by the Rev. E. W. J. McConnell, published early in 1919 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. It would, of course, supply ministrations which have now to be omitted owing to the lack of clergy, or which cannot be performed without overtaxing the strength of the existing staff; but this would be only one of its results. Two or three or more deacons in a parish, according to its size and circumstances, locally connected with it and its other parishioners as fellow-residents or carrying on their secular occupation in it, would form a bond of union between the incumbent and the body of parishioners, and would remove that tendency to estrangement between the clergy and the laity which has unfortunately developed of late years in some parishes. Their ordination as deacons would not only add weight and dignity and energy to their own efforts in every kind of Church work which they undertook, but would bring home to the whole body of the laity, with whom they remained associated in everyday life, the positive duty of all Church-people whether ordained or unordained to be active members of the body of Christ. On a change of incumbency in the parish they would remain the connecting link between the old and the new *régime*, and both then and also on other occasions would be able to smooth and explain away any friction which might arise from alterations or innovations in conducting the worship or affairs of the parish.

The Southwark Diocesan Conference has already pronounced in favour of the change. In 1918 they appointed a Committee to consider the subject and in November, 1919, in accordance with the Report of that Committee they resolved: "That this Conference would welcome the formal and canonical restoration of the permanent diaconate and the recognition of the principle that a deacon is not precluded from engaging in business or professional work." And a further cogent, if not conclusive, argument for what would, in fact, be a revival in our Church of the early diaconate is furnished by the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference of

1920 on the subject of a Diaconate of Women. The Bishops there assembled resolved that the time had come when, in the interests of the Church, the Diaconate of Women should be restored formally and canonically and should be recognized throughout the Anglican Communion; that the office of a Deaconess should follow the lines of the primitive rather than of the modern Diaconate of Men; and that the Book of Common Prayer should contain a Form of Making of Deaconesses, in which provision should be made for (a) Prayer by the Bishop and the laying-on of his hands; (b) A form of authority to execute the office of a deaconess in the Church of God; and (c) Delivery of the New Testament by the Bishop to the candidate. It was further resolved that, in addition to her natural ordinary duties, there might be entrusted to a deaconess the functions of (i) Preparing candidates for Baptism and Confirmation; (ii) Assisting at Holy Baptism and administering it in cases of necessity; (iii) Praying with and giving counsel to women desiring such help in difficulties and perplexities, and (iv) (with the approval of the Bishop and of the Parish Priest and under conditions laid down by the Bishop) Reading in Church Morning and Evening Prayer and the Litany, except the portions assigned to the Priest only and also (as the Bishops decided by 117 votes to 81) Leading in prayer in Church and, under the Bishop's licence, Instructing and Exhorting the congregation in Church. If these resolutions are carried into effect and a general permanent diaconate of women is established in accordance with them, it will render the existing restricted and merely transitional diaconate of men still more anomalous. If the interests of the Church require, as the Bishops recognize that they do, the restoration of the primitive order of deaconesses, they require, no less urgently, the revival of the order of deacons on primitive lines.

Granted, however, that the diaconate ought to be transformed, from the camouflage that it now is, into a reality, and that all these advantages would accrue from this being done, is such a step practicable? How is it to be effected? As has been already pointed out, the sole legal obstacle to it is contained in the restrictive provisions of the Pluralities Act of 1838 as to the clergy engaging in business. If these were repealed as to deacons, there would be nothing to prevent the Bishops from ordaining as deacons men who were earning their own livelihood and did not intend to proceed

to the priesthood. This repeal is one of the reforms which the Church might itself initiate under the Enabling Act. The mention of that Act suggests another advantage which would be secured by the modification of the diaconate. The Act confers powers on the National Church Assembly consisting of the two Houses of Convocation and a House of Laity of each of the two provinces of Canterbury and York. Unless and until the Lower Houses of Convocation are reformed as to their composition and the representation of the clergy in them so as to include deacons, these latter have no place in the constitution of the Assembly. But if their status is modified in the manner suggested, they will naturally be associated with the laity and might be included with them in the organization of the various representative bodies of the Church—parochial Church Councils, ruridecanal and diocesan conferences and the House of Laity of the National Assembly itself. This might be a satisfactory solution of the question as to what should be their standing in connexion with these various bodies. It would fill up the *lacuna* in respect of deacons which at present exists in the constitution of these bodies.

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