

## LAMBETH CONFERENCE REVIEWS

### V.—THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

At last! These words express better than any others the general impression of the resolutions passed by the Lambeth Conference on the position of women in the councils and ministrations of the Church. No one can feel very proud of the attitude of the Reformed Church to women, for the last 400 years offer little or nothing as a contribution towards St. Paul's ideal. Impatient ones knocked vainly at closed doors; brilliant women, in the seventeenth century, like Mary Astell, tried to secure some opportunity for education, but a Bishop blocked the way, tossing aside her project of a college as "a Protestant nunnery." In later times Florence Nightingale made her celebrated indictment in her letter to Dean Stanley, writing that the "Church of England has for men bishoprics, archbishoprics, and a little work (good men make a great deal for themselves); for women she has—what? I had no taste for theological discoveries. I would have given her my heart, my hand, my head. She would not have them. She did not know what to do with them. She told me to go back to my crochet in my mother's drawing-room; or, if I were tired of that, to marry and look well at the head of my husband's table. 'You may go to the Sunday School if you like,' she said. But she gave me neither work to do nor education for it."

Yet still the power of God was offering instance after instance of His willingness to use women for work that the world might have well counted as unsuitable. Elizabeth Fry was to carry forward Howard's work with a force of personality and determination that practically secured the reformation of the prisons. Hannah More was in the forefront of education. Florence Nightingale was to reorganize the whole of the R.A.M.C., and to work at the sanitation of the Indian Army. Josephine Butler was called to make her solitary stand against organized vice; Sister Dora had to tackle the conditions in workhouse infirmaries; Octavia Hill became the acknowledged authority and the pioneer of housing. These were Victorian women for the most part born and bred in convention, and, so far as Church authority was concerned, still bound by convention. Ecclesiastical authority may have retained the power to bind; it had absolutely lost the power to liberate.

The religious orders returned almost secretly and without a word of welcome. They are even now dismissed in the Lambeth Committee Report with a scant reference and a quotation from Scripture. They were outside the terms of reference. Our religious communities, which have proved themselves to be the most attractive

of all religious vocations open to women, have practically always been outside the terms of reference. Bishops still refuse to profess Sisters. But Lambeth has at least desired and hoped that God, who has begun a good work, will perfect it, so that perhaps no one will any longer wish to hinder the beginning.

But, after all, in a time of opportunity we must not dwell on the past, and the way has been made very much clearer. The resolutions of the Conference are almost entirely concerned with deaconesses. The diaconissate has been more or less patronized by authority since its attempted restoration, but patronage is apt to be irresponsible, and though deaconesses were "set apart," no one was prepared to determine what was meant and what conferred by the laying on of hands. Some Bishops refused to have anything to do with the diaconissate, so that it was forced into a diocesan organization, and was not of the whole Church. The word "deaconess" became a term (vaguely used, as it still is) for any church worker, and no one protested. The reproach is now removed. The resolution that places the form and manner of making a deaconess in the Prayer Book has raised a tentative experiment from the state of uncertainty into a definite and acknowledged place in Church order. There should no longer be the hesitating hope that these women will not do much harm, but a real and ardent expectation that the power of the Holy Spirit will be poured out through new channels.

Like all Englishmen in every walk in life, our Church, clergy and laity alike, is far too apt to ask no more than to be let alone and not disturbed, but this attitude saps our spiritual vigour, that should be expecting and hoping all things. Let us, then, look forward to the real diaconissate with hope.

The privileges allotted to deaconesses are not startling, but they are granted permission to read the choir offices in church, and to preach under regulation. For the rest the work instanced has already been done by women in many if not most parishes.

The resolutions clearly state that the diaconissate is the only apostolic ministry open to women, and deaconesses are allowed no place in the administration of the Holy Communion. The Committee recommended that the deaconess might render assistance at the administration of the Holy Communion to sick persons, but it was not incorporated in the resolutions. There is some historic evidence that this was allowed in the Primitive Church, but it does not seem conclusive.

In any case, it is important that no change should be made in the ministry of the sacraments, for that which is essential could not be given by hands not generally acceptable. Hitherto the deaconess has been "set apart," but the Lambeth Conference retracts somewhat from the apartness. The resolutions affirm the lifelong

character of the order, but they impose no vow of celibacy. Indeed, the Committee seemed unable to get away from the idea of marriage, and it occurs again and again with a somewhat characteristically nervous view of woman's vocation. We might point out that there are probably over two million too many women in our country, but nothing must distract our minds from the thought of marriage. It is almost inferred that the ascetic ideals of the Church were responsible for the decreasing birth-rate, but it would be a bold man who could accuse the English Church of asceticism. But there is no word to commend the gallant and scriptural adventure of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. A wise and learned priest of the Church said not long since that the strength of Rome lay in its bold claim of "all or nothing." We still hesitate a bit over leaving all. But this freedom is frankly welcomed by many, and the idea of the priest's wife as a deaconess is congenial. Others believe that Mr. and Mrs. Clergyman might prove themselves to be a little over-professional. The more dangerous point seems to be that it leaves the deaconess vulnerable as regards gossip.

A seemingly belated resolution grants the admission of women to all church councils open to laymen. But we have to remember that England is not the whole of the Anglican Communion, and this will represent a real charter to women in other parts of the Church. Duly qualified women are permitted to speak when approved by the Bishop in consecrated buildings. We have direct evidence that when a pilgrim in the Pilgrimages of Prayer was allowed to speak in church, she was able to have and to leave a direct influence in regard to churchgoing. This privilege rightly used should be of great spiritual value, but it would be a real abuse if any lay person were invited to speak without due preparation and qualification. The nave should be, after all, a useful, friendly place where meetings of many sorts might be held. The missionary meeting is badly housed in a village schoolroom, but finds its true home in the church.

Members of the Mothers' Union ought to be able to meet to pray and speak together in their spiritual home. A priest reading the Mothers' Union Prayer gets considerably entangled in the personal pronouns.

A short resolution commends the case of the salaried church-worker to the branches of the Anglican Communion which employ her. It is to be hoped that every diocese will take this to heart, the "missionary" dioceses not excepted.

The Committee say in their Report that they are conscious that there is a danger lest Churchmen should shirk their responsibilities, and leave too heavy a share in the counsels of the Church to Churchwomen. It is important that the parable of the talents be laid to heart. If any individual, or group, or nation, or race, or sex,

does not trade with its talents, they are taken away. But no one would cripple those who seek to use their gifts in order to save the face of those who refuse. But this has proved no difficulty in the State; why, then, should the Church fear? Are we not one Body?

But the whole summing-up must be of thankfulness. Some part of the long-standing reproach has at length been removed from our Church. We may regret that the Family of Christ was unable to lead the world, but followed only when the world had first acted. But perhaps *God* provokes His people to righteousness thus, and we have no reason to complain if only His righteousness is attained.

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#### VI.—WOMEN AND THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION.

THE Bishops at the Lambeth Conference have strongly upheld the rights of women in the councils and ministrations of the Church, and it becomes a question whether, in their anxiety to do justice, or something more than justice, to feminine aspirations, they have not gone wrong in their interpretation of certain passages in the Gospels and Epistles, which they hold to be pertinent to the matter in hand. "In our judgment," they say, "there is nothing to prevent our believing that the apostolic commission recorded in St. John xx. 19-23 was delivered to women as well as men." Why, then, call it the *apostolic* commission? "In the parallel history (St. Luke xxiv. 33) we read that the two who came from Emmaus 'found the eleven gathered together and them that were with them.' It seems impossible to argue that the last words (*τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς*) were meant to exclude women. . . . With Bishop Westcott and Dr. Hort we venture to think that the great commission was given to those who were representatives of the whole Church, and among those representatives we have every reason to think that women had a place."

Now it is perhaps meticulous to remark that St. Luke speaks of the Eleven, whereas, according to St. John, only ten of the Apostles were there. For we may remember that St. Paul (1 Cor. xv. 5) writes that "He was seen of Kephias, then of the Twelve." This was evidently the same meeting as St. Luke describes, because the latter tells us that those from Emmaus "found the Eleven gathered together and those with them, saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath been seen of Simon.'" The mention of Simon in one place and of Kephias in the other identifies the two accounts, and exact numbers are obviously not a strong point with these early writers. But what is noticeable in St. Paul's statement is that *only* the Twelve are mentioned, and nothing is said of any others.