

**THE PLACE OF
WOMEN IN
THE CHURCH**

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The place of women in the church by H. L. Goudge

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H. L. GOUDGE

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INTRODUCTION

THE place of Women in the Church is no subject of mere academical interest. It has become increasingly prominent of recent years. To go no further back than 1908, much was said about it in the Papers of the Pan-Anglican Congress. It was maintained by one writer that it was difficult to find any decided rule by which the question what should be considered women's work can be determined " unless we are prepared to admit that a woman should be free to do any work for which she can show herself capable." No reference being made to the principles or traditions of the Church.

Similar uncertainties existed on the status of a Deaconess in the Church. One writer maintained that the order :

" is a Holy Order, a part of the ministry of the Church ; those therefore who are admitted to it cannot be dispensed from it as from a vow, but they receive character which is lifelong. . . . A Deaconess having thus secured her ministry feels that a special grace having been thereby bestowed upon her for her work, she is asked to offer to God her full life. It would outrage her conscience if she married or was otherwise untrue to the requirements of her office."

The Bishops were accordingly called upon by the

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writer, herself a Deaconess, to remember "the indelible character" of the Ordination conferred.

On the other hand the Canons of the General Convention of New York rule that "such appointment shall be vacated by marriage." Upon this regulation an American Deaconess observes, in the same series of Papers :

"There are those who hold that the Deaconess is, by the laying on of hands, introduced into the lowest order of the Threefold Ministry. The difficulties which confront those who hold this theory are twofold. First, the Deaconess is not commissioned to exercise the full work of the Deacon as defined in the Ordinal ; secondly, the Deaconess forfeits her office if she marries, while to the Deacon marriage makes no difference.

"The more generally accepted theory regarding the authority conferred is that the Deaconess is introduced by the laying on of hands into an Order of the Church which was created in the primitive age for women, which Order, although it gives her a place among the ministers of the Church, is not to be confounded with the Threefold Ministry."

These are illustrations of the diversity of opinion on the Ministry of Women. They imply diverse principles of a far-reaching kind on the nature of ordination and the intention of the Church.

The place of women in the Church came into discussion at the meeting of the Representative Church Council in July, 1914.

On the morning of July 10, the Bishop of Southwell moved Clause *b* as follows :

"(b) That if a Diocesan Conference so decides, women may sit as lay representatives on the Ruridecanal Conferences and on the Diocesan Conference of the diocese."

The matter was debated at some length. Opinions