

to consider the pressing wants of the growing population; and I find in one of the earliest reports made by a joint committee, a copy of which was laid on the table of the Lower House, that the main remedy suggested was the increase of the Diaconate. The committee say—

“We are of opinion that this need might in some measure be supplied, if the Bishops should be willing, in such cases as to them might seem meet, to admit to the order of Deacons literate persons and those who had not attained the same proficiency in the classical languages as is now required in candidates for the office of Deacon.”

The recommendation was followed by several qualifications. No action took place upon that report, and in the year 1858, when the subject was again considered by the Lower House, a representation was made to the Upper House, in which it is stated—

“With regard to Deacons, it has been suggested by our committee whether the Diaconate might not be extended in such a manner as to mark most distinctly the difference between that order and the Priesthood, and thus to give increased efficiency to both by a better adjustment of their several duties, as defined in the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer. The subject is of such grave importance that we have appointed a committee to consider and report thereon to this house; and it has been commended to the consideration of the same committee whether it might not be expedient to revive the ancient order of ‘Readers,’ as was designed by Archbishop Parker immediately after the Restoration.”

A committee was thereupon appointed, and the report which is alluded to in the petition was made. That committee took into consideration the subject of the Diaconate, and the expediency and possibility of extending it so as to meet the growing wants of the population. After pointing out the various difficulties in the way of such extension, the committee say—

“From these and other considerations we are of opinion that, whatever increase may take place in the number of persons admitted to the Diaconate, a new agency is also required, which may be supplemental to it, and disturb as little as possible our present ecclesiastical system.

“Our attention has therefore been directed, in the next place, and according to our instructions, to the expediency of reviving the ancient order of Readers. We find that this office, which can be traced back to the third century, or even to an earlier period, was partially restored, at least in name, for a short time, immediately after the Reformation. The purpose of its restoration was to secure parishes from being entirely destitute of religious teaching, there being a want at that time of persons duly qualified, in respect of learning, for admission into holy orders. That want, indeed, no longer exists. But a class of persons is now needed to assist incumbents of populous and scattered parishes in house-to-house visitation, in catechising, and in performing such religious services as may be assigned to them by competent ecclesiastical authority.

“Various terms have been suggested as indicative of the nature of the office which the present necessities of the church require. But, whatever name may be assigned to the office, we think that its duties should be adjusted that it may include persons of all ranks and classes of society; the time of some being given wholly to the work; of others, only in part; some receiving stipends, and others rendering gratuitous services; that those admitted to it should be subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction, receiving their commission, on the nomination of the incumbent, from the Bishop of the diocese, after due examination as to their moral character, their religious knowledge,

and their efficiency, with the solemnity of a public service in the church, and by an instrument under the Episcopal hand and seal; and that they should be in all respects under the control and direction of the incumbent in whose parish they are employed. We further think that they should be at liberty at any time whatever to resign the commission so received from the bishop, and that the bishop, on the other hand should have the authority to revoke such commission on the ground of erroneous teaching or immoral conduct.

“We make this recommendation with a full conviction of the pressing wants of the Church of England, and of the need of a greatly multiplied agency to enable her to fulfil the purposes of her high and holy calling. Nor would we conclude, without the earnest prayer that, whether by these or by some other means, an “effectual door” may be opened for the piety and zeal of those who seek, by a definite mission from the Church, and in hearty communion with her, to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of their fellow-creatures.”

I think we must conclude that the measure advocated in this petition is one to which the mind of the clergy, as far as they are represented—and I believe they are fairly represented in the Lower House—has gradually been approaching, and that the time has arrived when we may at least give the subject our serious consideration. Two points are presented to our consideration—first, the great and increasing population of the country compared with the agency provided for its spiritual welfare; and, secondly, the presumed existence of a body of pious and God-fearing men, who, although employed in their own vocations, have the time and the desire to employ that time for the glory of God and the welfare of their fellow-creatures. On each of these points I will venture to say a few words. It is scarcely possible to contemplate the rapidity with which our population is increasing without any serious thoughts. In the year 1801 the population of England and Wales was about 9,000,000; in 1851 it had reached 18,000,000; and in 1861 it exceeded 20,000,000. It is obvious, then, that if the provision for the spiritual wants of the population in 1801 was assumed to be sufficient, double that provision must have been necessary when the century was half gone, and a still larger number must now be required. Or, to take the matter in another point of view, allowing one clergyman to every 2,000 souls, the increased population in 1851, required 4,500 additional clergymen, and for the increase in the following ten years, 1,000 more would be necessary. If the statement be true that the population is increasing at the rate of 60,000 annually, 300 additional clergymen are required every year. I am afraid that no large deduction from this calculation can be made on the ground that the population will increase *pro rata* in parishes where the clergyman has the power of ministering to them, because it is well known that there is a tendency in the increasing population to converge upon large towns, which are the centres of manufacture, mining, and commerce; so that the increase of the population does really represent the increase of the spiritual wants of the people to an extent sufficiently accurate to make the question very important. Now, has the increase in the number of the clergy at all corresponded with the increase of the population? Certainly not; nor is it likely to do so. We have neither the money nor the men. The sum required for 5,500 additional clergymen, at 200*l.* a year each, would be 1,100,000*l.* The augmentation available for the support of the parochial clergy, in the hands of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, amounts to about 100,000*l.* a year. We trust that a considerable increase will result

from the better management of the church property. In the mean time the population is increasing in a much more rapid ratio. But, even supposing we had the means, it is not at all clear that we have the men. We have not the data for determining the proportion which the candidates now bear to the number at the beginning of the century. But in our remote dioceses we find a difficulty in obtaining proper candidates for orders, probably from their being absorbed in the southern and more favoured dioceses. Then the question recurs—What is to be done? Are we to reduce the standard of qualification for those who offer themselves as candidates for holy orders? I believe none of us would be prepared to recommend any such step. We know that the qualification at present with respect to learning and attainments is by no means too high, and could not be reduced without impairing the efficiency of those who enter into holy orders. Another means which has been suggested of meeting the difficulty is, a large increase of the diaconate. Then we have the scripture-readers, to whom the church owes a great deal; but there is this drawback, that a scripture-reader costs as much as a curate, and therefore the supply must be limited. The petitioners point out another important class who desire to employ their leisure time for the benefit of their fellow-creatures. It is from that class that the Wesleyan Methodists obtain many of their most able helpers, and I have met many persons who would have been ready to assist us if we had been able to receive their assistance. The question raised by the report of the Lower House, and the petition is, whether such men could not be authorised, commissioned, and set apart to perform certain duties under the superintendence of the incumbent, such as visiting the sick and other charitable offices. I am aware that the committee will have to encounter considerable difficulties. They will have to determine whether such an agency could be established without sanctioning the irregular efforts which are so frequently made, and which, while doing so much good, occasionally do some harm. Another question which will arise is the name to be given to these agents, for a name might be adopted which would carry with it such an association of prejudices as would destroy the best considered scheme that was ever devised. The committee will have to consider the mode of granting the authority and of withdrawing it—whether by a licence of the bishop or otherwise—and whether the parties should be allowed to perform any offices in the church. Supposing it to be possible and desirable to authorise such an agency as this, it must be considered as supplemental to, and not superseding, those which already exist. It may be necessary to have a more extended diaconate, to employ more scripture-readers, to increase the number of district visitors, and those who come forward voluntarily to assist the clergy in their schools. But the question is, whether beyond this there is not a large amount of religious zeal in our land which can be turned and directed to great good. The tide of population, as we all know, is rapidly swelling, and it is worthy of consideration whether some aid may not be obtained—whether some assistance may not be given for the purpose of supplying the wants of that growing population.

THE BISHOP OF WINCHESTER—There is nothing in the resolution as to whether the services of the persons employed should be gratuitous or not.

THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN—That is purposely left indefinite.

THE BISHOP OF WINCHESTER—I wish to remind the house of the state in which the case stood many years ago. Twenty years ago, soon after the late Bishop Howley succeeded to the see of