

Confirmation.

II.

Last month we considered the two questions: "Is Confirmation part of the doctrine of Christ?" "Is Confirmation in accordance with the will of God?" And we answered the two questions in the affirmative. We shall now consider various popular objections to Confirmation, based upon a misunderstanding of the sacred rite.

A good deal of confusion arises from the fact that the Confirmation Service has passed through several revisions, and does not distinguish, as clearly as it might do, the Confirmation proper and the preparation for Confirmation.

The popular idea of Confirmation is the candidate's renewal of the Baptismal vows. That is no integral part of Confirmation, but an edifying and useful preparation for it. Just as Godparents and the Baptismal vows are not an integral part of Baptism, but a primitive and wise safeguard—a hedge and protection around the Sacrament—so the renewal of the vows before Confirmation is not an essential part of the sacred rite, but a pledge and an assurance to the Church that the Candidates are prepared in heart and mind to receive the grace of Confirmation. We have exalted the human at the expense of the Divine; we have confused the preparation for the gift with the bestowal of the gift.

Confirmation or the Laying on of Hands upon those that are baptized, is administered throughout the whole Catholic Church at the present day. Out of the four hundred millions of Christians in the world to-day, three hundred and twenty-five millions have the Apostolic succession of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, Confirmation, and Liturgic Worship. A much larger proportion baptize infants.

Tertullian (A.D. 190), after describing the Ceremonies in use at Baptism, proceeds to say: "Next to this the hand is laid upon us, calling upon and inviting the Holy Spirit through the blessing." S. Cyprian (A.D. 250) writes: "Which custom has also descended to us, that they who are baptized may be brought to the rulers of the Church, and by our prayer, and by the Laying on of Hands, may obtain the Holy Ghost, and be consummated with the Lord's signature."

John Wesley (Wesley's Works, ix, 16, in his own edition of 1771, but not included in Benson's or Jackson's editions, after Wesley's death) says: "Catechumens, having been prepared, were baptized on Easter Eve, that they might rise again with Christ, or on the Eve of Pentecost, that they might be ready to receive the Holy Ghost. . . . When the persons were infants, their sureties or sponsors (as Tertullian calls them) answered for them. Immediately after Baptism, they were presented to the Bishop who confirmed by prayer and the imposition of hands." Again, in Wesley's "Notes on the New Testament," we have the following words, which are conclusive as to their author having held the Catholic doctrine on Confirmation; Hebrews vi, 1: "And when they believed, they were to be baptized in the baptism of Christ. The next thing was to lay hands upon them that they might receive the Holy Ghost."

Confirmation, in itself, has nothing to do with the renewal of the vows; it is "God's act, by which He confirms, perfects and increases the grace given us in Holy Baptism, by the gift of the Indwelling Presence of the Holy Ghost." How foolish, then, it is to think that Confirmation is only intended for children in point of age, when it is so clearly God's chosen way of bestowing a great spiritual gift upon all His baptized children. If we were offered some great worldly gift, should we refuse it because we had arrived at middle or old age? How then can we turn our backs upon this great spiritual blessing which God is waiting to bestow upon us?

As Confirmation itself is part of the doctrine of Christ, and has been always administered by the Bishops of the Church, and received by the faithful, it must and will always be so administered by the Church of God. But it is quite lawful for the Church or any branch of the Church to protect and guard this sacred ordinance in any way which seems fitting and useful, for as the twentieth Article says, "The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies."

"For 1200 years it was the universal custom of the Church to administer Confirmation *as soon as possible* after Baptism. This has been continued to the present day in the Eastern Branch of the Church, by means of the oil consecrated by the Bishop and sent to every Priest." In the Western

Church, the regular postponement of Confirmation until childhood (i.e., 7 to 14) did not take place till the 15th Century. Queen Elizabeth was confirmed by her Godfather, Archbishop Cranmer, immediately after her baptism when three days old, September 10th, 1553. In the Roman Branch of the Church, children are brought to Confirmation about the age of 12, and after they have made their First Communion.

There is every reason for believing that the Apostles baptized and Confirmed at the same time, and we know what S. Paul did from Acts xix. But when baptism was administered by persons other than the Apostles, then, of course, the Confirmation could not take place at the same time, as we read in Acts viii, where Philip the Deacon baptized the people of Samaria.

If Confirmation is the completion of the Sacrament of Baptism, it certainly can be administered to a child of three days' old or a man of 70, for it is God's act, not man's; it is God's gift, not man's. At the same time, there is much to be said for the practice and custom of the Church of England in separating Confirmation from Baptism, except where adult Baptism is administered just before Confirmation. Hooker (Ecol. Pol. Book v., c 66) says: "It was fit that infants should be admitted to live in the family of the Church, but because to fight in the army of God, to discharge the duties of a Christian man, to bring forth the fruits and to do the works of the Holy Ghost, their time of ability was not yet come, there could, by stay of their Confirmation, no harm ensue, but rather good."

The Church of England, then, in virtue of her right to decree rites and ceremonies, has thought fit to guard the sacred rite of Confirmation by requiring that all candidates shall give proof of their earnestness and sincerity in coming forward for Confirmation, by openly and publicly acknowledging that the Baptismal vows are binding upon them, and that they intend to live a Christian life in accordance with the tenour of those promises.

For centuries the Church of England administered Confirmation without this safeguard, which alone is sufficient to show that the renewal of the vows is *not* Confirmation. The renewal of the Baptismal Vows is an edifying act of preparation for Confirmation added to the office of the English Branch of the Church in 1661.