

## THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK ON CONFIRMATION.

In an address to the clergy of his diocese delivered lately, the Archbishop of York goes at some length into the subject of Confirmation and the Confirmation service. In the first place he observes that:—

There are in reality only two essential parts of this holy ordinance; first the prayer for the gift of the Holy Ghost; and, secondly the laying on of hands as the appointed means by which the gift is bestowed. The question and answer, whatever fitness they may have as a preliminary, do not form a part of the service itself. I need scarcely remind you that they were only added at the last revision of the Prayer-book, and had no place in the earlier service-books of the English Church. But the Prayer and the manual act have never been omitted; without them there would be no confirmation.

The Archbishop proceeds to dwell on the testimony of Scripture to the Apostolic origin of the rite, and more especially on the estimate formed of its purpose and effect by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The opening verses of the sixth chapter of that Epistle showed that it was held to stand in the closest relation to the sacrament of baptism as regarded its place and function in the spiritual life. To examine and define the precise character of the special blessing bestowed in each of these ordinances might well prove a task beyond the bounds of our spiritual intelligence.

Yet we may safely gather from holy scripture, as interpreted by the "ancient authors" and by our own branch of the Catholic Church, that while in the regeneration of Holy Baptism there is vouchsafed to us the true beginning of a new spiritual life, so there must be also of necessity a bestowal of spiritual power and capacity, without which such life would be inconceivable; and that, besides the "death unto sin and the new birth unto righteousness," there is a real gift of the Holy Spirit whereby we are made "the children of grace."

But according to the characteristic law of "grace for grace" in the spiritual kingdom, it may be that the baptismal gift has for one of its special objects the endowment of the soul with the capacity for receiving in due season, through the laying on of hands, the full gift of the Holy Ghost; just as this gift may be the necessary preparation for opening the gates of the heart, that the King of Glory may come in by the Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

It is enough for us, however, and it is essential, to know and believe from the teaching of the Word of God that "through laying on of hands the Holy Ghost is given." It is this truth above all else that we must impress upon our children in preparing them for their confirmation. It is because of this great fact of the spiritual life that we can thereafter make to them our most solemn appeal, as St. Paul did to the Corinthians—"What! know ye not that

your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?"

From Scripture little is to be learned as to the time of life at which children of the Church were brought to be confirmed, and it is evident from other sources that the custom of the Church has greatly varied in the earliest times:—

At some periods and in some portions of the Church it appears to have followed immediately upon baptism even in the case of little children, as it does in the Greek Church at the present day. But the whole Western Church for some centuries past has separated the two ordinances by a period of years, varying in number and hardly ever definitely fixed. One of the greatest Italian bishops, Cardinal Borromeo, in the sixteenth century, during his own Episcopate, raised the age from seven to twelve.

We can hardly doubt, His Grace continues, that the Church of England has acted wisely in separating by an interval of time the ordinance of confirmation from the sacrament of baptism.

The gift [in baptism] of a new life and the imparting of spiritual power, as well as the remission of sin, which make up together the process of regeneration, may well be bestowed as a free gift of grace upon an unconscious infant and received by the child to its soul's health and salvation. But the Divine Person of the Holy Ghost awaits a welcome in the individual heart, and requires that we should be at least, a willing people in the day of His power. . . . At what particular period of life this surrender of the will may be most fitly made, and the desire of the heart most truly expressed, is a question depending in some measure upon the circumstances and disposition of individual children. But giving due weight to the considerations specified in the rubrics of the Church it may be approximately fixed at such time as the character of the children is usually being formed. Probably the age of twelve would most nearly coincide with this stage of child-life in the case of girls, and a slightly greater age in the case of boys. There is no reason why, in special cases, even younger children should not be confirmed where there has been an exceptionally early development of the faculties and of the religious idea. But in all such instances I must ask to be informed before the children are presented to be confirmed.

Regarding the words of the English service the Archbishop remarks that the special prayer of the office, following the opening versicles, is almost of primitive antiquity:—

It is found in the Pontifical of my great predecessor Egbert, Archbishop of York in the eighth century, and has therefore been in use in this diocese for nearly 1,200 years.

Originally:—

The candidates were directed to testify their concurrence in its several petitions by saying "Amen" after each of its concluding sections—an arrangement so helpful to them in maintaining their interest in the momentous supplication, that I have adopted it as

you will see, in the most recent forms published for use in this diocese, which I must ask you to procure for the use of your candidates at all future confirmations.

Referring, finally, to the external forms used in the office, the Archbishop says:—

Previous to the sixteenth century, the laying on of hands, was accompanied with the anointing with oil and by renewing on the forehead of the candidate the form of the Cross which was signed upon it in the hour of Holy Baptism. So ancient was this usage that in the earlier centuries the service itself was known by the name of "unction." The title of "confirmation" is of much more recent origin. St. Basil, in the fourth century, speaks of the anointing of the Apostolic tradition; and our own learned and cautious Bishop Pearson regards it as having come to us either from the Apostles themselves or from the Apostolic times. There seemed, however, to be some reason for its discontinuance, and even in the prayer-book of 1549 the anointing or chrism had disappeared, although the sign of the Cross was still retained. In the latter revisions this also has been dropped. But even in the seventeenth century, it was held by persons in authority to be still admissible, and was probably still used by individual Bishops at their discretion. It is difficult to believe that the Revisers of the Prayer-book could have considered it objectionable in itself while still retaining it in the baptismal service. But however appropriate in their significance such ceremonies may have been, they were, at the most, only helpful adjuncts to the service, and in no way essential to its validity; for which two things only were absolutely requisite according to Apostolic example, the Prayer of the Holy Spirit and the laying-on of hands.

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