

that it was the custom of the church that this rite should be administered by the successors of the apostles, with the imposition of hands, and with prayer for the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Confirmation was therefore apostolic and universal, a note of the church, a mark of primitive catholicity. Said a learned Presbyterian divine, while working his way back into the historic church: "I could not find in antiquity any beginning to this 'laying-on-of-hands,' but at the hands of the apostles."

Considering the primitive character, the apostolic authority, the scriptural evidence, the testimony of the fathers, and the universal practice of the church, to say nothing of the intrinsic grace and practical utility of the solemn act which would give to every child of the church the paternal benediction of an apostle—which binds the font to the altar—it seems to me that no church can claim to have continued in the fellowship of the apostles or to have retained all the marks of catholicity, unless it has kept this "venerable blessing," this apostolic rite.

The Holy Eastern Church and the Roman Church have retained it. How is it with our own Church, the Catholic Church of the English speaking race? I answer, on this point as on all the essentials of the catholic religion—"the principles of the doctrine of Christ"—our church has "continued steadfastly in the fellowship of the apostles," and holy confirmation is administered among us in its most primitive form.

The venerable Bede tells us how, in the Church of England, St. Cuthbert, the Bishop of Lindisfarne, in the seventh century, used to go all over his diocese, bountifully distributing counsels of salvation, "and laying his hands on the baptized that they might receive the grace of the Holy Ghost." There is still extant a beautiful service of confirmation, which was used in our church's grand old diocese of York some twelve hundred years ago.

The prayer in our present confirmation office, beginning: Almighty and everlasting God who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants," has come down to us by the constant use of the church from remote antiquity, probably from apostolic times. It was used in England as far back as we have records of the services; it was used by St. Ambrose in the ancient cathedral of Milan, in the year 375, more than fifteen centuries ago, and still earlier; it is found also in the confirmation offices of the Greek Church.

I know not what words the apostles used at the precise moment of the imposition of hands; but they can hardly have used words much more appropriate than the sentence which the Anglican church puts in the mouth of the confirming bishop:

"Defend, O Lord, this thy child with thy heavenly grace; that he may continue thine forever, and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto thy everlasting kingdom. Amen."

Indeed, the mere witnessing of the sacred joyous service of confirmation, in which the venerable father in God, lays his hands on the children of the church and blesses them in God's name, has been the means of bringing back many a wandering christian to his own true home.

While there is nothing in the nature of confirmation to prevent its being properly administered to a little child immediately after baptism (as is the usual custom in the Greek church), the whole Western Church has thought good to order that none shall be confirmed but such as understand the rudiments of christian faith and duty, and are old enough to "renew the solemn promise and vow" that was made at their baptism. No age is specified, but any ordinary child, properly brought up, ought to be desirous of confirmation, and certainly sufficiently instructed, when from ten to fifteen years of age. It is at least the design of the church that children, made members thereof in infancy by Holy Baptism, shall be brought up as children, not as strangers; and that as soon as they come to years of discretion, they shall "be brought to the bishop to be confirmed by him," and then be admitted to the table of the Lord. This is not "joining the church;" that was done fully and once for all in holy baptism, wherein the person is "regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's

Church." Dissenters, therefore, who desire to conform to the church, ought not to feel aggrieved when they are asked to be confirmed. The ordeal called "joining the church," to which they may have submitted when they became communicants of their respective denominations, is not confirmation, nor indeed even analogous thereto. So that to thoughtful christians who have been brought up in nonconformity to the historic catholic church, confirmation, instead of being in any sense an obstacle, ought to be looked upon as one of the chief inducements for returning to the church, in order to obtain a grace and a blessing to which as baptized christians they were justly entitled, but of which they have been deprived by the insufficiency of the bishopless systems of Protestant dissent.

So keenly is "the conscious want of a connecting link between baptism and communion" felt by those who have lost the apostolic rite on confirmation, that most continental Protestants (notably the great body of Lutherans), have retained the outward form of confirmation even though they have no ministry empowered to administer it. "I sincerely wish," said Calvin, "that we retained this custom of the laying-on-of-hands, which was practiced among the ancients." The Presbyterians and the Baptists in this country have officially declared their belief in it; though, of course, they do not have it, and cannot have it without bishops. Had confirmation, however, even as an empty form and without the apostolic ministry been retained among our dissenting brethren, I am very sure that the heresy which denies baptism to little children would never have made such havoc as it has in the religious life of this age. It is largely for want of confirmation, that baptism has so often been transferred, with deplorable results, from infancy to adult age, in order to have some rite or ceremony of preparation for First Communion.

To all thoughtful non-conformists, as well as to churchmen, who have not fully grasped the meaning of confirmation, I beg to speak a serious and loving word—call it preaching, if you will:

Go back in thought to the first age of the church. Suppose you are one of those Samaritans whom St. Philip has converted. You have repented of your sins; you have professed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; you have been baptized into the church. But St. Philip tells you that two of the chief pastors of the church, the apostles Peter and John, are coming down from Jerusalem to give you their official benediction, to lay their hands on your head and to invoke the Holy Ghost upon you. With what eagerness would you seize the precious opportunity! You would hasten to the place appointed; and as soon as you saw the benignant face of St. Peter, or heard the loving voice of St. John, and realized that you were in the presence of one whom your Divine Master had commissioned as an apostolic bishop or overseer of His Church, would you not rejoice to have him lay his hands on your head and bless you in God's name? Well, that is confirmation. The bishops who visit our parishes every year, come with the same office and authority as St. Peter and St. John, when they made the first Episcopal visitation of Samaria. If you believe in God; if you desire grace and help and strength—come in faith, and as the good bishop, after the example of his predecessors, the holy apostles, lays his hands on your head and blesses you in God's name, you will be blessed indeed; you will be brought into full unity with the church; you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Reader, if you have not been confirmed, you lack something; and you know it. Don't wait to be urged. Go at once to your pastor. Tell him you want to place yourself under his instruction and spiritual direction, so as to be confirmed at the next visitation of the bishop, and become an intelligent, loyal, and devout Communicant of the Church.

AUNTY PARSONS' STORY.

I told Hezekiah—that's my man. People mostly call him Squire Parsons, but he never gets any Squiring from me. We were married—"Hezekiah and Amariah"—that's going on forty year ago, and he's just Hezekiah to me, and nothin' more.

Well, as I was saying, says I: "Hezekiah, we aren't right. I am sure of it." And he said: "Of course not. We are poor sinners, Amy; all poor sinners." And I said: "Hezekiah, this 'poor sinner' talk has gone on long enough. I suppose we are poor sinners, but I don't see any use of being mean sinners; and there's one thing I think is real mean."

It was jest after breakfast, and as he felt poorly, he hedn't gone to the shop yet, and so I had this little talk with him to sort o' chirk him up. He know what I was comin' to, for we had had the subject up before. It was our little church. He always said: "The poor people, and what should we ever do?" And I always said: "We never shall do nothin' unless we try." And so when I brought the matter up in this way, he just began bitin' his toothpick and said: "What's up now? Who's mean? Amariah, we oughtn't to speak evil one of another." Hezekiah always says "poor sinners," and doesn't seem to mind it, but when I occasionally say "mean sinners" he somehow gets uneasy. But I was started, and I meant to free my mind.

So I said, says I: "I was going to confess our sins. Dan'l confessed for all his people, and I was confessin' for all our little church."

"Truth is, says I "ours is allus called one of the 'feeble churches,' and I am tired about it. I've raised seven children, and at fourteen months old every boy and girl of 'em could run alone. And our church is fourteen years old," says I, "and it can't take a step yet without somebody to hold on by. The Board helps us, and General Jones, good man, helps us—helps too much, I think—and so we live along, but we don't seem to get along. Our people draw their rations every year as the Indians do up at the agency, and it doesn't seem sometimes as if they ever thought of doing anything else. They take it so easy," I said, "That's what worries me. I don't suppose we could pay all expenses, but we might act as if we wanted to, and as if we meant to do all we can. There's not many of us, about a hundred, I believe, and some of these is women folks, and some is jest girls and boys. And we all have to work hard and live close, but," says I, "let us show a disposition if nothin' more. Hezekiah, if there's any spirit left in us, let us show some sort of a disposition."

And Hezekiah had his toothpick in his teeth, and looked down at his boots, and rubbed his chin, as he always does when he's goin' to say something. "I think there's some of us that shows a disposition." Of course I understood that hit, but I kept right on with my argument, and I said: "Yes, and a pretty bad disposition it is. It's a disposition to let ourselves be helped when we ought to be helping ourselves. And we are growing up cripples, only we don't grow. Kiah," says I, "do you hear me?" Sometimes when I want to talk a little he jest sets his eyes, and begins to rock himself back and forth in the old arm-chair, and he was doin' that now. So I said: "Kiah, you hear?" And he said, "Some!" And then I went on. "I've got a proposition," says I. And he sort o' looked up, and said: "Hev you? Well, between a disposition and a proposition, I guess the proposition might be better."

He's awful sacrostic, sometimes. But I wasn't going to be riled, nor thrown off the track; so I jest said: "yes; do you and I get two shillin's worth a piece a week out o' that blessed little church of ours, do you think?" says I. "Cos, if we do, I want to give two shillin's a week to keep it goin', an' I thought maybe you could do as much." So he said he guessed we could stand that, and I said: "that's my proposition; and I mean to see if we cannot find somebody else that'll do the same. It'll show a disposition anyway."

"Well, I suppose you'll hev your own way," says he; "you most always do." Then I brought out my subscription paper. I had it all ready. I didn't jest know how to shape it, but I knew it was something about "the sums set opposite our names," and so I drewed it up, and took my chances. "You must head it," says I, "because you'r the warden, and I must go on next, because I am the warden's wife, and then I'll see some of the rest of the folks."