

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

SERMON ON CONFIRMATION.

DELIVERED IN FORT MARRY CHURCH, HALIFAX, BY REV. DR. BURNS, SABBATH EVENING, APRIL 10TH, 1881.

"Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."—Mark vii. 7.

(Concluded.)

THE WALDENSES AND CULDEES.

When the stream got polluted in its old channel, it preserved its pristine purity amid the hills and valleys of Piedmont. The Waldenses, improperly claimed on the other side, testified against this and a host of kindred innovations. "Christ, the pattern of all His Church," says an ancient Waldensian work, Sir Samuel Morland's History, page 142, "was not confirmed in His own person, and it has not been instituted by Him, but rests solely on the tradition of the fathers, and no grace has been promised to those who receive it." "And therefore such a sacrament was introduced to seduce the people, and that, by such means they might be drawn more earnestly to believe the ceremonies and the necessity of bishops."

So with the Culdees, the primitive Presbyterians of Scotland, who hung out from their observatory at Iona the lamp of truth, like the Waldensian "*Lux in tenebris*," a light shining in darkness. Their form of Church government was substantially our own. So also with Ireland in that good old time when she was truly the island of the saints.

SCOTO-IRISH PRIMITIVE POLITY.

William, of Malmesbury, remarks: "The character of the Irish bishops in early times may assist us in judging of the rank of those who were ordained at Iona, especially as Columba, who was not a bishop, but an abbot and presbyter, is designated not only Primate of the Scots and Picts, but 'Primate of all the Irish bishops.' These were 300 in number, until A.D. 1152, and were just missionary pastors, exercising their functions at large as they had opportunity. 'That bishops in Ireland,' (says Toland), and the same applies to Scotland, 'did in the fifth and sixth centuries signify a distinct order of men by whom alone presbyters could be ordained, and without which ordination their ministry was invalid'—this I absolutely deny, as I do that those bishops were diocesan bishops, when nothing is plainer than that most of them had no bishopric at all in our modern sense. The Iona College was presided over by an abbot, who was a presbyter, and twelve presbyter associates; and the Church partly throughout Scotland, and in Ireland too, for five or six centuries thereafter, till its ill-fated transfer by Henry II. to the Pope, was essentially Presbyterian. In that early period the rite of confirmation was unknown in both those countries. 'It has been inferred' (says Dr Jamieson in his historical account of the Culdees (page 106), 'from the language of Bernard, that confirmation was quite in disuse, if at all ever known, among the Irish Culdees, for in his life of Malachy, he says that he anew instituted the sacrament of confirmation.' In the purest periods and places of the Church's history we can find no trace of it. When we come down to Reformation times we find the leaders of that great movement testifying against this and kindred innovations. What was the Reformation but primitive Christianity revived. It broke in upon the stagnation of that dead sea on whose banks world and Church alike had slumbered, and snatching the silver trumpet of the Gospel from the monastic walls to which it was chained, by giving no uncertain sound, it awoke both from the sleep of centuries.

William Tyndal, the translator of the first printed edition of the English Bible—when Luther, thirty-seven years old, was thundering at Worms, and the John-like Melancthon at twenty-three stood bravely by his side; when Zwingle, at thirty-six, was witnessing a good confession in Switzerland; when John Knox was fifteen and John Calvin only eleven—Tyndal, who was strangled at the age of fifty-three, in 1536, says of confirmation, when performed merely by the imposition of hands without any of the Popish ceremonies: "After that the bishops had left preaching then fayned they this *domme ceremonie of confirmation*, to have somewhat at the least whereby they might *raigne* over their dioceses." With reference to Peter and John, in Acts viii., putting their hands on the "Samaritans," he denies that it will establish it. "God had made the apostles a promise that He would

with such miracles confirm their preaching, and move others to the faith. The apostles therefore believed, and prayed God to fulfil His promise, and God for His truth's sake, even so did."

CALVIN STRONGLY AGAINST CONFIRMATION.

Calvin strongly testified against the rite of confirmation, though the bishop's representative, by separating certain sentences from their connection and confounding the present with the primitive idea of it—tries to make him out as favouring it. But what follows the parts quoted: "It was the Lord's will that those visible and wonderful graces of the Holy Spirit, which He then poured out upon His people should be administered and dispensed by His apostles with imposition of hands. If the ministry which was then executed by the apostles were still continued in the Church, imposition of hands ought also to be still observed, but since *such grace is no longer conferred, of what use is the imposition of hands?* It is true that the people of God still enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit, whose guidance and directions are indispensable to the existence of the Church. But *those miraculous powers and manifest operations which were distributed by imposition of hands have ceased; and it was right that they should continue but for a time.* For it was necessary that the first preaching of the Gospel, and the kingdom of Christ at its commencement, should be illustrated and magnified by miracles never seen or heard before; the subsequent cessation of which does not argue the Lord's desertion of His Church, but is equivalent to a declaration from Him that the magnificence of His reign and the dignity of His Word had been sufficiently manifested. In what respect then will these impostors affirm that they imitate the apostles? They should have effected by imposition of hands that the evident power of the Spirit might immediately shew itself. This they do not practice. *Why, then, do they boast that they are countenanced by the imposition of the hands which we find was used by the apostles, but for a totally different purpose?* This is just as reasonable as for any one to affirm that affiliation with which the Lord breathed upon His disciples to be a sacrament by which the Holy Spirit is conferred. But though the Lord did this once, He has never directed it to be done by us. In the same manner the apostles practised imposition of hands during that period in which the Lord was pleased to dispense the visible graces of the Holy Spirit in compliance with their prayers, not in order that persons, in succeeding times, might counterfeit a vain, senseless sign as a mere piece of mimicry, destitute of any reality?" (Institutes, book iv., chap. 19, sections 6 and 7.)

If our friends consider such a testimony from Calvin as this favourable to confirmation, they are most welcome to it. But, seriously, in view of such an extract from his Institutes as this—and much more might be given did time allow—it is hardly fair to include this truly great man, who is properly described "as one of the founders of Presbyterianism, and deservedly standing at the head of all Presbyterian divines, as an advocate of the rite of confirmation."

Melancthon, in his "Apology for the Confession of Augsburg," vol. 1. of his works, folio 95, says in the name of the Lutheran Churches: "*Confirmatio et extrema unctio sunt ritus accepti a patribus*" (Confirmation and extreme unction are rites accepted by the fathers). But he, in common with the Reformers (and with them we agree), much preferred the grandfathers—Christ and His apostles. Therefore, in drawing up the Saxon Confession he says, fol. 129, "*Idcirco non servantur in nostris Ecclesiis*" (Therefore, they are not observed in our Churches).

CRANMER AND OTHER LEADING BISHOPS AGAINST THIS CLAIM.

Archbishop Cranmer distinctly denies that confirmation is commanded in the Word of God, or receives any sanction there. To every leal-hearted Protestant in the Church of England (and God be thanked there are very many such), Cranmer's memory must ever be fresh and fragrant, for, in defence of the great fundamental principles of the faith once delivered to the saints, he gave his body to be burned. When presiding over an important Commission, attended by divers doctors and bishops, this primate of England was asked "Whether confirmation be instituted by Christ?" he answered:

Firstly—"There is no place in Scripture that declareth this sacrament to be instituted by Christ."

Secondly—"These Acts referring to the passages

we have already considered in proof of the divine authority of confirmation were done by a 'special gift,' given to the apostles for the confirmation of God's truth at that time."

Thirdly—"The said special gift doth not now remain with the successors of the apostles."

Bishops Bilson, Jewell and others, of the highest reputation in the Church of England, utterly deny that confirmation is commanded in Scripture, and the applicability to the subject of the passages cited. Bishop Bilson declares that "the laying on of the hands on the Samaritans in Acts viii., was, in order to the bestowal of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of tongues, and that these gifts were imparted to qualify them for preaching the Gospel to those by whom those languages were spoken." Is it necessary to add how incapable are bishops now to confer any such wonderful qualifications on those whom they confirm?"

Bishop Jewell declares in his "Treatise of the Sacraments" (page 264), "Confirmation was not ordained by Christ." Dr. Edmunds, Master of St. Peter House, in Cambridge, says (in the first volume of "Strype's Memorials," pp. 88, 235, 238), "Confirmation is not a sacrament of the new law instituted by Christ, by any expressed word in the Scripture, but only by the 'tradition of the fathers.' 'Confirmation hath no promise of any invisible grace by Christ,' by any expressed word in the Holy Scripture. 'There be no promises of grace made by Christ to them that receive confirmation.'"

Archbishop Usher, a truly illustrious name in the Episcopal annals, would apply "the laying on of hands," in Heb. vi. 2, rather to "ordination to the ministry," which he deems far more deserving of a place among the principles of the doctrine of Christ than the rite of confirmation.

DR. OWEN AGAINST IT.

Strange that the great giant of the Puritan era, Dr. John Owen, should be mentioned by the bishop's representative, as supporting the rite of confirmation in his exposition of the Hebrew passage, when in the third volume of his Commentary on that epistle, at the 198th page, he thus writes:

"Some suppose that by the imposition of hands that rite in the Church which was afterwards called confirmation was intended. For, whereas there were two sorts of persons that were baptized, namely, those that were adult at the first hearing of the Gospel, and the infant children of believers who were admitted to be members of the Church. The first sort were instructed in the principles mentioned before they were admitted to baptism, by the profession whereof they laid the foundation of their own personal right thereunto. But the other being received as a part and branches of a family, whereupon the blessing of Abraham was come, and to whom the promise of the covenant was extended, being thereupon baptized in their infancy, were to be instructed in them as they grew up to years of understanding. Afterwards, when they were established in the knowledge of these necessary truths, and had resolved on personal obedience to the Gospel, they were offered to the fellowship of the faithful. And herein giving the same account of their faith and repentance, which others had none before they were baptized, they were admitted into the communion of the Church, the elders of the Church laying their hands on them in token of their acceptance, and praying for their confirmation in the faith. Hence the same doctrines became previously necessary to both these rites, before baptism to them that were adults, and towards them that were baptized in infancy, before the imposition of hands. And I do acknowledge that this was the state of things in the apostolic churches, and that it ought to be so in all others. Persons baptized in their infancy ought to be instructed in the fundamental principles of religion, and make profession of their own faith and repentance before they are admitted into the society of the Church. But that in those first days of the first churches, persons were ordinarily after baptism admitted into their societies by imposition of hands, is nowhere intimated in the Scriptures, and 'the whole business of confirmation is of a much later date, so that it cannot be here intended, for it must have respect to and express somewhat that was then in common use.'"

TRACTARIAN TESTIMONY.

Surely if this be commendation, they are welcome to it, too. Even Tractarians themselves do not con-