

firmation, and encouraging them to look forward to it as a new birthday, their own Pentecost. Children thus taught will not require much intellectual training during the months immediately before their confirmation, and the time usually devoted to classes on the Ten Commandments would be more profitably spent in training in the art of devotion. Unhappily for the Church and her children, the educational methods of the day do not favour right training in religion. In the public schools of high social rank Church teaching is often as worthless as it is in the average Sunday-school of the "lower orders." School Boards are intentionally non-Catholic, and in too many cases utterly secular in tone and practice. But what of our National Schools? Are they always satisfactory as schools of the Catholic religion? We fear not. We hear of clergy who never enter their own schools for the purpose of religious teaching; of others, happily few in number, who led by spurious charity and unfaithfulness to their ordination vows, suppress distinctive teaching out of regard for the children of Dissenting parents; of a few who are indifferent whether the school teachers are Churchmen or not by conviction, so long as they occasionally attend the parish church; and with these facts before us, supplied by persons who can be trusted to speak the truth, we have grave reason for doubting the worth of the religious instruction in certain districts. From the day-schools, however, ought to come a continual supply of well-taught candidates for confirmation, and as a rule the children should be confirmed before leaving school. At the present time we speak to lads and girls, the lads especially, about their confirmation just at the time they are busily occupied with the prospect of going out to work, if they have not already gone. It is too late then; the strength they require to face the new world of action and passion ought to have been in possession and matured some time before. We have no right to send untrained soldiers to face the enemy; it is too late to begin their equipment when they have reached the field of battle. The right method, and that contemplated even by our Prayer Book, is to give the children every possible advantage before the age of independence. We have already shown that early confirmation is in accordance with the mind of the Church in her best days, that by Canon Law the latest age for the majority is twelve years, and that twelve may safely be taken as the "competent" age ordered in the Book of Common Prayer. And there is every reason for believing that confirmation at eleven or twelve would prove more fertile for good than the later age has been for the last 100 years. The Church requires a certain amount of head knowledge, and of course moral and spiritual training as well, but she does not demand that the unconfirmed shall give such evidence of holiness as can only rightly be expected of those who have received the gift of the Holy Ghost. But popular sentiment, encouraged by faulty teaching, has fastened upon the evidence theory, and completely inverted the right sequence of spiritual progression. "Fitness" in the common mind is the equivalent of spiritual goodness. Now goodness, being a fruit of the Spirit, can only succeed the reception of the enabling power, but it is illogically expected to be already developed, before the gift is received, and those who need grace the most are deprived of it, or told that they are unfit, until they become what they can never be without that grace. Once men are convinced of the actuality of God's grace, and recognize that the sacraments are the ordinary means by which it is

dispensed to humanity, they will, nay must, admit the folly of delaying the grace of strength until the warrior has been occupied in passionate battle for two or three years. Practically our modern method is self-condemned, and the only wonder is that the clergy have not seen the mistake more generally. From country villages a constant stream of lads and girls pours out into the towns. They leave at from fourteen to fifteen years of age, and not having been confirmed previously are lost to the Church, because new attachments in a strange place require time, and more effort than the clergy, too few for such work, are able to make. Town clergy are aware that once the children leave school it is increasingly difficult to get them to submit to instruction, and class attendance becomes irregular and fitful. There is no occasion to dwell upon this feature of the subject; the evil of delay is manifest, only men have not the courage to admit the fact, and they go on losing, and grumbling, with truly English pertinacity, over evils they might easily prevent by return to more sensible methods of parochial work. The Prayer Book orders in the plainest terms that each child confirmed is to have a god-parent present, not necessarily one of its baptismal god-parents, but one selected *ad hoc*. The order is rarely, if ever, obeyed, even by the most loyal of Churchmen; but if it were once followed in some well-known parish no doubt many others would follow suit; and the advantage of having a spiritual guardian for each neophyte at a time when a fresh term of life is beginning would be found so distinct and valuable that men would ask themselves why they had not previously complied with the Church's order. Children during the preparation might be allowed to select their own god-parents; or where a friendship between a child and some discreet senior has already sprung up, the elder might be asked to make the bond spiritually binding and thus secure Divine sanction for what might otherwise be merely secular and fanciful. Given a regular system of god-parents at confirmation, the clergy would be saved the trouble of perpetually "looking up" their young communicants, unless the god-parents died or were negligent. And many grown-up people who might otherwise be inclined to relax vigilance in their own lives would, by reminding their god-children from time to time of their duty as communicants, stir themselves up to obedience. There is now a great deal more need for god-parents at confirmation than at baptism, and the office itself would be much more inviting and interesting to those who wish to help their neighbours. Dr. Salt's well-written manual on *God-parents at Confirmation* (Kegan Paul) has a mass of information which we commend to any who care to undertake the revival of a long lost custom; and it proves conclusively that, as usual, the Church's own recommendations are far better than their modern substitutes. In all that we have said, we have dealt with confirmation as a distinct sacrament in relation chiefly to baptism; but, of course, with some reference to the Holy Eucharist, for the offering of which confirmation gives the Divine qualification. Much of the objection to early confirmation arises from the habit of expecting that the confirmed shall at once enter into full and regular communion, and we have some sympathy with those who shrink from too early an approach to the Food of Angels. But "some sympathy" only, for we are persuaded that a little more faith in the desire for goodness on the part of children would meet with its reward. Most priests have found that their most stable and regular communicants have been those who began

early and were trusted to do their best. The subject requires separate treatment, and we mention it here only to remind our readers that if early confirmation is made the rule, we may perhaps leave a decent interval for preparation for First Communion. Delayed confirmation has failed to make regular communicants of the mass of our people, and one reason is, probably, because too much has been attempted during the time for preparation. Take the work in sections, let all the elementary work lead up to the immediate spiritual preparation for the confirmation, and then undertake the Eucharistic teaching, and we may expect success: a worse failure than attends our present method can hardly be conceived or expected.—*Church Times*.

SUNDAY EVENING WITH THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.

The Archbishop of York was the preacher at St. Mary's Church, Newington, on Septuagesima Sunday night. The sermon was on behalf of the Parochial Mission Fund, which the Archbishop started twenty years ago, when vicar of the church. He took for his text the words, "[I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." On this Sunday, said the Archbishop, we begin to make ready for the Lenten season, and all the Church's teaching begins to look that way. It is, therefore, important that we should consider what is the Christian life. The words of the text tell us what St. Paul's idea of it was: (1) It is a life of progress—a race. How is progress to show itself? In a race progress is merely overtaking and completing a certain distance. Progress is growth, and the idea of growth is one which is continually set before us by Christ and His apostles. Those who wish to be real Christians must be diligent students of the Word of God. (2) The Christian life is a life of conflict, which is part of our calling. Whatever may be the mystery of evil, if we believe God's Word we cannot doubt that evil powers surround us. (3) The Christian life is a life of discipline. We have a lower as well as a higher nature, and the lower is continually trying to assert itself. Indulgence, coldness, indifference—these spring from the lower nature. We think of self-discipline rather lightly. The word fasting has an unpleasant sound. But Christ was in no doubt what we should do. "When you fast," He said. Fasting is a real duty of the Christian life. So far from being part of erroneous teaching, we know that the great saints of the Church have sought by this practice not only to fulfil the Master's commandment, but to keep their bodies under. Not only does Scripture teach us that it is a Christian duty and a help to the Christian life, but our Church, by setting aside certain seasons for fasting, takes care that it shall not be forgotten. But our Church does not tell us how we are to fast. There is absolutely no merit in it. If we think of it as such we go astray. But it is a reasonable, common-sense thing to keep control over our bodies. The end and object of self-discipline is formation of Christian character, is to help us to attain that which is the great end of life. What is that end? To go to heaven? There is something better than that. St. Paul said it was to win Christ. Heaven, to some people, is merely a lazy deliverance from the pains and difficulties of this. The end and purpose of our discipline is to win Christ and have Him every hour in our hearts as a continual inmate there.