

THE APOSTOLIC RITE OF CONFIRMATION.

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF SPRINGFIELD.

The laying on of hands by Christ's chief minister, the Bishop, is the complement of Holy Baptism. It was recognized as of vital importance by all the Apostles, who had stood around our Lord, and heard *His last command on earth*, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (St. Matt. xxviii, 19, 20.) These Apostles, when they heard that Samaria had received the word of God, sent two of their number, St. Peter and St. John, to lay their hands on the heads of those whom St. Philip, the inspired deacon, had baptized. St. Philip was pre-eminently under the control of the Blessed Spirit. The Holy Ghost directed his footsteps, transported him from one place to another, and gave him the power of working miracles; yet he deemed it to be necessary that more should be done for his converts than he, a deacon, could do, and hence he invoked the assistance of those above him in office, the Apostles. They, in their collective capacity, agreed with St. Philip, that it was necessary that his word should be supplemented by their official presence, and acts, and accordingly we read, (Acts viii: 14) "Now when the Apostles, which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John." Let us face the facts; an inspired deacon, who was especially the child of the Holy Ghost, and who could work miracles, preaches the Gospel in Samaria, thirty miles north of Jerusalem, wins converts, and baptizes them. One would suppose that such a minister as St. Philip could do all that was requisite for the salvation of his flock; but so he did not think, nor did the assembled Apostles. They felt, St. Philip and the Apostles, that something more was needed, and hence, when there were no canals, or railroads, or telegraphs, or penny posts, the inspired deacon sends a message the best way he could to the Apostles at Jerusalem, thirty miles away; and they send back in response two of their number, the very chiefest of their body, St. Peter and St. John, who make this journey of thirty miles, along a rugged and dangerous road to impart a spiritual gift, which the inspired and miracle working deacon could not bestow. No conclusion save one can be drawn from these facts, namely, that St. Philip, the deacon, and all the Apostles thought it a matter of supreme importance that those who had been baptized should receive the imposition or laying on of hands from Christ's chief ministers, the Bishops, in the Church of God.

Two other questions ought to be asked by every one who believes in the Bible. First, Did St. Philip in baptizing his converts, or St. Peter and St. John in confirming them, give a spiritual benefit of and from themselves, or was it from God? Of course it was from God, and hence the gift came not because the person administering baptism was St. Philip, or because the persons administering confirmation were St. Peter and St. John, but because the one held an office from God which empowered him to baptize, and the others an office from the same source, which empowered them to confirm; that is, the offices bring the blessings, not the men, who happen to hold those offices. The same offices are with us now, here, and they are capable of conveying, and do convey to those qualified to receive them, the same benefits and privileges which they imparted when St. Philip and St. Peter and St. John held

them. The offices do not rise and fall in value and power with the varying talents and accomplishments and circumstances of those who hold them.

The second question which every thoughtful person should press upon himself, is this: If ever external rights and sacraments were unnecessary, was it not when inspired men were living on earth? was it not when the Apostles, who could work miracles, and by the power of the Holy Ghost could discern the spirits of men and read their hearts, were here? Was it not just at that time and under those circumstances that Holy Baptism and Confirmation, and the Lord's Supper, could be dispensed with? Would not the Apostles' instructions and sermons, falling as they did from inspired lips, be a substitute for all external rites and sacraments? And yet of all times in the history of the Christian Church, the times when the Apostles were on earth, were those when the Bishops, Priests and Deacons were most careful to administer these means of grace, and the people most eager to receive them. Can we suppose, if we profess and call ourselves Christians, that the inspired Apostles and their associates and subordinates made long and perilous journeys to perform useless rites, and take part in mere ceremonies? We have the mind of Christ in the teaching and conduct of the Apostles; and they taught both by precept and example that the sacraments and means of grace are of supreme importance; hence their converts, we read, continued steadfastly in the doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers; hence the inspired deacon baptizes the eunuch and the Samaritans, hence St. Peter and St. John made a long and tedious journey to confirm, hence Saul of Tarsus, after he was called from Heaven by the Lord Jesus in person, was commanded to be baptized and wash away his sins.

Have you been baptized? Have you been confirmed? Are you continuing steadfastly in the "breaking of bread?" If not, remember that you cannot plead that the Bible teaches you that these things are unnecessary. It may be that they are, but if so you have learned the fact from some other revelation, for so thought not the inspired deacon St. Philip, nor all the Apostles, nor St. Paul, nor our Lord, nor the Holy Ghost, as we learn from the Acts of the Holy Apostles.

PUT YOUR ARMOR ON.

One of the most impressive and touching scenes which we can ever witness in this world is that of persons presenting themselves in the Church of God to renew their baptismal vows in confirmation. By this act each one plainly says, "I feel my dependence and need of help; I acknowledge my individual responsibility; I am resolved to live by faith and not by sight; I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; and I do here, in the presence of God and before His assembled people, solemnly renew the promise and vow made at my baptism to be God's faithful soldier and servant unto my life's end." With hearts aglow with love to God and man, with earnest pleadings for grace divine, they put on the armor of God and strive to attain the higher and better life. Touching scene! Sacred moment! Human hearts and lives bound up with cords of love to the portals of the skies!

Soon, in many of our parishes, the Bishop will make his annual visitation, and then the opportunity will be given to receive the holy rite of Confirmation. Will you not consider seriously your duty in this matter? It is a call coming to you from the Author of your being to meet responsibility and avail yourself of the privileges and blessings of the gospel of

Christ. In this you have everything to gain, and if you are wise you will not put the question aside and wait for a "more convenient season." "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Plead not the excuse, so often given, "not good enough." Will you be better prepared a year hence? Before that time you may be called away from the activities of this world. Christ did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; not the whole, but the sick, who need a physician. Every day of your life you need the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. He alone can give you strength to battle successfully against the evil within and without. If you would meet the responsibility which is upon you, you must do it in the strength which God alone supplies. Yield yourself God's willing and obedient servant, and He will confirm and strengthen you by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, and you will grow in grace and knowledge, and in fitness for God's eternal kingdom and glory.—Texas Churchman.

POINTS OF UNITY.

(Contributed to the Church Record.)

It would probably surprise many Christians who are not Churchmen, to know how nearly on some points of doctrine their "Standards" conform to Church teaching. For instance, the Saybrook Platform the embodiment of Connecticut Congregationalism says of the Thirty-nine Articles:

As to what appertains to soundness of judgment in matters of faith, we esteem it sufficient that a Church acknowledge the Scriptures to be the Word of God, the perfect and only rule of faith and practice, and own either the doctrinal part of those commonly called the Articles of the Church of England, or the Confession or Catechisms shorter or longer, compiled by the Assembly at Westminster or the Confession agreed upon at Savoy, to be agreeable to the said rule.

It is not uncommon to hear the Church doctrine of the authority of the ministry and of the Absolution condemned by Presbyterians as corrupt and dangerous. Yet we read in their Confession (ch. xxx.):

The Lord Jesus, as Head and King of His Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church officers distinct from the civil magistrate. To these officers the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut the Kingdom of Heaven against the impenitent, &c.

Touching the question of baptismal regeneration, the Presbyterian Longer Catechism in the answer to question 165 says:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water. . . to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into Himself, of remission of sins by His blood, and regeneration by His Spirit; and adoption and resurrection unto everlasting life.

The word seal implies a thing accomplished. And the Presbyterian doctrine is that baptism is not a sign only, but is also a seal of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, a seal of remission of sins, a seal of adoption into Christ's family. And to this Congregationalists agree; for the Saybrook Confession (ch. xxix; 1.) says:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, of His ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, &c.

The Prayer Book says: Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ; and again: It hath pleased Thee to regenerate this