

*To the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Ontario :*

MR. LOAN,—Often as the season for confirmation comes round, serious doubts arise as to the baptismal qualification of certain candidates for that solemn rite. Persons present themselves of whom, as touching their baptism, it is impossible to say that "all has been well done and according to due order," inasmuch as the agency, by which it was alleged to be administered, was *not* a "lawful" one; and no *inherent* or *derived* right existed in the agent, to "*sign and seal for Christ*."

With some, if such there be, who regard Baptism as little more than a *ceremony*, as simply a passport to external Church fellowship, these doubts may not be oppressive; but to those who regard it purely as a *Sacrament*—a deeply solemn covenant act, involving spiritual issues, and obligations binding on both contracting parties,—the burden of doubt is *very grievous* indeed.

Both reason and conscience forbid the belief, on their part, that indefiniteness as to the truth involved, or absolute license as to the means of realizing that truth, can possibly characterize the economy of Christ. On the contrary, they firmly hold that the dispensation of "the manifold wisdom of God,"—and surely the sacraments find place here!—has been given to "the Church" (Eph. ii. 9, 10) and that, apart from this divinely instituted organization and ministry, they have no warrant for assuming that God will co-operate with man in rendering available the wonders of His grace.

The question then arises, has the "Church" in her *full corporate* capacity ever given authority for the practice of lay-baptism? Can any *General Council* of the Church, *i.e.*, which is properly received as such, be quoted as justifying it?—or any Ecclesiastical action, prior to that taken, on a wrong basis, by the Church of Rome, be pleaded in vindication of the theory, "all men, aye, or women, may baptize?" If not, on what grounds are such unauthorized acts recognized? In how far can we honestly be parties to the supposition, that grace—as yet unreceived in the divinely appointed way—can be recognized and strengthened in the subsequent ordinance of confirmation. *Men usually confirm that which exists*, not that, the existence of which they doubt.

The rebaptization of heretics in early days, and, in one instance, the occurrence of a lay-baptism, (A.D. 305), have served, with many, to encourage a laxity of thought as to this subject. It will be the purpose of these letters fairly to discuss the merits of these exceptional cases, and—so far as may be—to set forth the present position of the Church of England on this important matter.