

Baptism.

Infant Baptism.

The second great doctrine of the Church of England is the doctrine of Baptism. The church administers baptism to infants on the ground "that the baptism of young children" is "most agreeable with the institution of Christ."* It is administered by a priest or deacon either by immersing the child in water (a mode seldom adopted in this country) or by pouring water upon it, and repeating the divine words: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Baptism is administered according to the directions or rubrics of the Prayer Book during public service, but "upon a great and reasonable cause," such as sickness, it may be administered within the house or home of the child. As a child cannot speak for itself it is represented, if a boy, by two godfathers and one godmother; if a girl, by two godmothers and one godfather. These godparents, or spiritual guardians, were originally intended as a provision against the negligence of parents, or as persons conscientiously responsible for the child's spiritual education in case of the parents' death; but of late years the parents themselves have largely assumed the office, and much may be said in favor of such a usage, although it was never originally so intended. These godparents in the baptismal service speak as if the child spake, and there is great beauty in this method. It teaches that the church regards the infant from its birth as an individual soul, with the seeds of responsibility to God and man within it, and therefore through its ministers it addresses the child as if it were a conscious being, so that when it comes to years of understanding and is directed back by its teachers to its baptism it learns that the church ever recognized its individuality, and that when it could not speak for itself, the church caused others to speak in its place and stead. The question as to whether a layman may in case of extreme necessity administer baptism to a dying infant has been twice decided by the Ecclesiastical Courts of England during this century in the affirmative; and any person realizing the announcement of the Catechism that baptism is "generally necessary to salvation" and the circumstances of the vast country in which we live may well feel happy that such decisions have been given.

Lay Baptism.

The position of Childhood in the Church.

The fundamental thought that underlies the baptism of infants in the Church of England is, the value of the state of infancy in the sight of God. The church begins with the infant, for infancy begins with the existence of an individual soul, and the infant is received into the family of God on earth—the church—as a child of God. As Samuel was given to God; as our Lord himself was presented to God as an infant: so every

* 27 Article.