

'HOW DID THE JEWS BAPTIZE?'

STUDENTS will be grateful to the Rev. C. F. Rogers for his admirable survey of the evidence on this subject. His essay in the April number of the JOURNAL is a fine example of archaeological exactitude.

Nevertheless, it does not seem to me that he has proved his thesis. There are two distinct aspects of the question. The one is: Are the Rabbinic statements decisive as to the practice of submersion in the first century? The other is: Do the Rabbinic statements actually imply baptism by submersion at all? W. Brandt (*Die jüdischen Baptismen*, Giessen, 1910), who (unlike Mr Rogers) has no doubt that the second question must be answered affirmatively, questions whether bathing by immersion can have been prevalent in Palestine before the loss of independence (p. 32). He argues partly from the alleged paucity of water in the country (p. 34). But against this it may be urged, that abundance or defect of water in a country is *comparative*. Those who have spent much time in Palestine do not express themselves so absolutely, and my own briefer experience agrees with that of the authorities I am about to quote. 'The water supply of Palestine is fairly abundant' (Conder *Dictionary of the Bible* iii 642); 'Palestine is not exceptionally deficient in water . . . the country is not badly supplied with springs' (Socin *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 3539); 'It must not be thought that Palestine is a waterless country. . . . There are few spots from which a spring of some sort is not accessible' (R. A. S. Macalister, art. *Palestine* in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* ed. 11). The rain-water, too, was carefully stored, and any hole, or cavity, or pond, was eligible for ritual bathing. But we are not left to conjecture. During recent decades, when the Jewish population of Jerusalem has grown probably to equal or to exceed that of the Temple epoch, and when the water supply has been worse and not better organized than in the earlier period, there has never been the slightest difficulty in finding the water required by the Rabbinic ritual for the frequent submersions of women. As the persons to be 'bathed' ordinarily washed their bodies first, the water in which they were immersed remained clean, and could be used again and again. Moreover, in many cases in which *tebilah* or ritual-bathing was required, the act could be postponed until a visit to the Temple was contemplated.

But Mr Rogers's main contention concerns the Rabbinic evidence

itself; he doubts whether the Mishnaic and Talmudic evidence really implies a practice of total submersion, which he seems inclined to defer to the Middle Ages. But what else but total immersion is conveyed by the statement in T. B. Yebamoth 47 b? We are told that the male proselyte receives certain brief instruction from two learned men, that he bathes and ascends (מביל ועלה, i. e. surely submerges himself in the bath and then comes up out of it), and is then accounted an Israelite. The only difference in the case of the female proselyte was that she received the instruction while crouching up to her neck in water. (I should add that the practice of total submersion does not imply necessarily that the person stood upright in the water, though this may have been the older practice. The woman, at all events, in later times was not allowed to stand so—she crouched in the water and dipped her head under. This is specially laid down in the Shulhan 'Arukh, Yoreh Dea' ch. cxcviii § 35, and has some Talmudic authority, T. B. Niddah 67 a.) To return to the ceremony of baptizing a female proselyte as described in Yebamoth: 'Women place her (משיכות) in the water up to her neck, and two learned men, standing outside, instruct her briefly.' Obviously, then, the woman was placed in a bath, and possibly was held up and supported (this may be the force of the Hebrew), for while she was undergoing the catechism she could not hold her head *under* the water! (This too is the explanation of the passage from Mishnah Berakhoth ii §§ 4, 5 cited by Mr Rogers.)

Yet, if one thing is certain, it is that in every act of ritual *ṭebilah*—and if so, undoubtedly in the case of the *ṭebilah* of a proselyte—the woman was required to cover her head and hair with water. This was the regular, monthly, case with the *niddah* (menstrual woman). The evidence of this is overwhelming. Take, e.g., the Mishnaic passage (Sabbath vi § 1). The Mishnah is discussing the ornaments which a woman may or may not carry on the Sabbath, and it ordains: 'A woman shall not walk abroad [on the Sabbath] with woollen, linen, or leathern bands on her head, and she shall not bathe ritually (ולא תטביל) with them [on week-days] until she unties them.' Her head and hair had thus to be so *entirely* covered with water that she had to remove even a hair-band. Thus from Yebamoth we know that the proselyte was placed in water up to her neck, and from other sources that the head and hair of the *niddah* had to be totally covered with water. The inference from these facts that total submersion was required is surely a just one. What else is possible?

The passage from the Mishnah Sabbath is reinforced by several more direct statements to the same effect. In fact, in a large number of the Rabbinic references to *ṭebilah* there is mention made of the *head* with such insistency as to point conclusively to total submersion. It is

advisable at this point to explain what was meant by ḥaṣiṣah (חֲצִיִּצָה)—literally ‘intervention’, ‘separation’, or ‘intervening or separating object’. In the act of ṭebilah there was to be no ḥaṣiṣah between the water and the body. In the Mishnah Miqwaoth ix we have a list of those ‘interventions’ which render the ṭebilah nugatory; among them (§§ 1, 2) are several kinds of head-gear. Thus the head must have been submerged. Equally, or even more, emphatic is the Mishnah (Miqwaoth viii § 5) where the cases are treated of the niddah who, for instance, ‘descends and bathes’, and ‘puts her hair in her mouth’—so that the water did not reach that part of her hair which she so retained;—and again (loc. cit.) of the niddah who, during ṭebilah, ‘presses her lips too tightly together’ (קְרִיצָה שִׁפְחוּתִיה) —so that the water is *absolutely* kept from her mouth—in these cases the ṭebilah is quite ineffective (כִּאִילוּ לֹא מְבַלָּה). In these cases, be it noted, ‘she descends and bathes’ (יֵרֵדָה וּמְבַלָּה), so that there is no room for supposing that some one poured water over her. Similarly with the *eyes*. R. Joḥanan says (T. B. Niddah 66 a), that if the bathing woman opened her eyes too widely or closed them too tightly the ṭebilah was useless. There is, in fact, no need to go beyond these prescriptions against ḥaṣiṣah to acquire the conviction that the ṭebilah contemplated by the Mishnah is an act of total submersion. Nor can it be assumed that these prescriptions were *theoretical* only. Actual incidents are recorded which shew that the laws of ḥaṣiṣah were practically applied. Thus (T. B. Niddah 66 b): ‘It happened with the female slave of Rabbi (the compiler of the Mishnah) that she bathed and ascended (מְבַלָּה וְעֹלָתָה), and there was found a bone between (חֲצִיִּצָה) her teeth, and Rabbi compelled her to undergo a further ṭebilah.’

It is impossible to explain these facts on the theory that the water was merely poured over the body. Such affusion was expressly forbidden. Water from a vessel (מֵיִם שְׂאוּבִים) was not only not to be used for ṭebilah, but it even ‘made unclean’ if it fell over the head and the greater part of the body of a person, who had already undergone ṭebilah in a spring or other lawful liquid. This rule occurs specifically in the Mishnah Zabim v § 12 with reference to eating teruma, and the rule was very old. From the discussion in T. B. Sabbath 13 b onwards it is seen to be part of the famous difference between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, and belongs at latest to the end of the first century A. D. It may well be much older, for the passage is dated by good authorities at 50 A. D. (Lerner *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, 1885, pp. 113 sq.). According to T. B. Sabbath 15 b the rule against ‘drawn water’ is older still, being earlier than the Christian era. L. Katzenelson (*Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, 1900, pp. 433 sq.) plausibly argues that the rule as to total