

HOW DID THE JEWS BAPTIZE ?

I AM glad that what I wrote on the subject of Jewish Baptisms has led Mr Abrahams to supplement the evidence usually given for believing that the ancient practice was that of submersion. The various points that he raises are of great interest and suggest further comments.

I am grateful for having my attention called to Wilhelm Brandt's *Die jüdischen Baptismen*, which had not been published when I originally prepared my paper. I see that he argues, as I do, that the process was from aspersion to washing, then to washing the whole body, and so on to submersion; though he gives reasons for supposing that the final stage had been reached sooner than I had been inclined to believe. He seems to hold, however, that except in the case of the niddah this was gradually given up after the fall of Jerusalem, while the custom of submersion of women proselytes described in T. B. Yebamoth 47 b, only represents a local usage of the end of the first century which spread in later times (pp. 52, 59).

That even so this evolution was little more than theoretical is, he suggests, proved by the deficiency of water in Palestine. But, as Mr Abrahams points out, authorities differ on this point. Palestine is well supplied with springs, and it is an important point that in modern Jerusalem no difficulty is found in obtaining the water required in the Rabbinic ritual for the frequent submersions of women, though the five thousand Christian converts mentioned in Acts can hardly have followed the Jewish custom (if such it was) of submerging the whole body.

Whether the springs outside Jerusalem referred to would offer facilities for submersion I am not quite so sure. In this connexion the following passage from Mr E. B. Fairfield's *Letters on Baptism* is of interest. The author had been a Baptist minister for more than twenty-five years when he was asked by a Baptist publishing house to prepare a book supporting the views of his denomination, with the result that (to use his own words) he found 'tower after tower of his Baptist fort tumbling down'. Describing his journey in Palestine he writes:—

'As it was the month of March, and as the "latter rain" had just ceased, it would be a favourable time for finding suitable conveniences for immersion, if such there were. Yet, aside from the Mediterranean and the Sea of Galilee, I found only one or two places where immersion would have been practicable. It was not oftener than once in four days, on an average, that we could have baptized the eunuch, in that

method, had we fallen in with him and had he so required' . . . 'And the Jordan was not one of these places. As we stood upon the banks of the furious, foaming, dashing river, and the words "what will ye do in the swellings thereof?" naturally occurred to me, I replied inwardly, "I do not know, but certainly not undertake to baptize anybody by immersion unless I wished literally to bury him by baptism into death." I would as soon have thought of performing immersion in the Niagara, half a mile above the cataract, as at the fords of Jordan in the month of March.'

These words, written by one who had had experience of the difficulty of administering baptism by submersion, are, I think, of special weight.

Mr Abrahams has conclusively proved that the woman proselyte was (at times at least) submerged, and when I wrote that there was no direction 'clearly enjoining submersion' I did not wish to deny that it could have been practised. Indeed, if she had to crouch down in the water up to the neck, and if the whole body had to be wetted, the obvious method would be to dip her head under. But this implies, surely, that the male proselyte was *not* submerged, but stood in water which would have come about to the thighs while the water flowed over him from a fountain or was poured all over him either by himself or others. It still seems to me at least arguable that in the case of the women the command was given for the sake of decency and not for the supposed necessity of submersion.

The proselyte, we read, bathes and ascends, but it is surely forcing the words to say 'i.e. submerges himself in the bath and then comes out of it'. In any bath other than an artificially raised one the level of the water must be below the level of the floor. Were the water only an inch deep a man stepping into it would 'go down and come up' (cp. Brandt, p. 46). This is a common expression which is constantly used of Christian baptism; that it does not imply submersion is evident, e.g. from Gregory of Nyssa *The Great Catechism* chap. 35:—

'But the descent into the water and the trine immersion of the person in it involves another mystery—I mean this arriving at life by having, instead of earth, water poured on him—by having the water thrice poured on us and ascending up again from the water we enact that saving burial and resurrection which took place on the third day.

Ἡ δὲ εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ κάθοδος, καὶ τὸ εἰς τρις ἐν αὐτῷ γενέσθαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἕτερον ἐμπεριέχει μυστήριον—ἀντὶ γῆς τὸ ὕδωρ ἐπιχεάμενος—τὸ ὕδωρ τρις ἐπιχεάμενοι καὶ πάλιν ἀναβάντες ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος.

Again, does the fact that 'in a large number of the Rabbinic references to *ṭebilah* there is mention made of the head with such insistency' really point conclusively to total immersion. It might be argued equally well that it points to affusion by emphasizing the fact that it

is the head that matters. Thus in the *Didache*, which is thought by many to be largely Jewish in origin, it is specially emphasized that baptism by affusion on the head alone is valid if there is not enough water at hand (as I interpret the passage) to pour over the whole body.

Ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἔχησ ὕδωρ ζῶν, εἰς ἄλλο ὕδωρ βάπτισον· εἰ δ' οὐ δύνασαι ἐν ψυχρῷ, ἐν θερμῷ.

Ἐὰν δὲ ἀμφοτέρα μὴ ἔχησ, ἔκχεον εἰς τὴν κεφαλὴν τρεῖς ὕδωρ εἰς ὄνομα Πατρὸς καὶ Υἱοῦ καὶ ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Indeed, in later times the Eunomaeans laid such stress on the baptism of the head that they forbade the water being allowed to touch any other part of the body at all (Theodoret *Haeret. Fabul.* ix 3, Epiphanius *Haer.* 76, quoted in Bingham's *Antiquities* bk. xi chap. 11 § 4), and the idea of the all-importance of the head survived to, or was revived in, the middle ages when St Thomas Aquinas wrote (*Summa* iii, Qu. lxvi, de Bapt. Art. 7):—

'Si totum corpus non possit perfundi propter aquae paucitatem, vel propter aliquam causam, oportet caput perfundere, in quo manifestatur principium animalis vitae.'

So, too, with affusion it would be more necessary to insist on the removal of hair bands than with submersion, in the case of which the water would more easily soak in underneath them. At any rate the command to remove them, to prevent ḥaṣīṣah or separation, can hardly be said to exclude affusion. Obviously the passages quoted by Mr Abrahams shew that great stress was laid in the Mishna on the whole body being wetted; but do they shew more?

I wonder if the idea that foreign objects, such as the various kinds of head-gear, or the bone between the female slave's teeth, defiled the water can have been the reason for ordering their removal. This at any rate seems to have been the reason for ordering women who received Christian baptism to loose their hair. Thus in the Canons of Hippolytus, Can. 115 (tr. Haneberg in Duchesne's *Christian Worship*, Eng. ed. p. 532) we read:—

'Mulieres deponant ornamenta et aurea et cetera, solvant crinium nodos, ne cum illis descendat in aquam regenerationis quidquam peregrinum de spiritibus peregrinis.'

For similar reasons Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* bk. iii p. 106; Migne *P. G.* viii col. 657) forbade the wearing of false hair by women, lest when the priest laid his hand on their heads the blessing should be intercepted.

'Water from a vessel was not only not to be used for ṭebilah, but even "made unclean" if it fell over the head and greater part of the body of a person, who had already undergone ṭebilah in a spring or

other lawful liquid.' This may expressly forbid affusion as Mr Abrahams holds. But I am bound to say that it still seems to me that what was forbidden was drawn water as opposed to running water or even water from a 'pond, ditch, cistern or cavern'. The idea of defilement seems to me to imply this, and I can see no reason why the running water should not have descended from a spout, or in the case of the bath of forty seahs have been poured over the head of the male proselyte from some such vessel as the concha, used in Christian baptism and frequently represented in early Christian art, into which the Synod of Elvira forbade the neophytes to put money at the time of their initiation.

Similarly, the interesting passage quoted at the end of Mr Abrahams's paper about the 'wave which detaches itself (from the sea)', and which contains forty seahs, if it can be taken to prove anything, proves affusion. Till the wave breaks, it cannot be said to be separated from the mass of the sea and therefore cannot be measured; when it breaks, it comes down on the top of a man and wets him all over, but does not strictly speaking submerge him. With it may be compared the passage in Tertullian *de Bapt.* xii, where he discussed the theories of those who held that the apostles received baptism in the storm on the Sea of Galilee:—

'Alii plane satis coacte iniiciunt, tunc apostolos baptismi vicem implesse, cum in navicula fluctibus adpersi operti sunt, ipsum quoque Petrum, per mare ingredientem, satis mersum. Ut opinor autem aliud est aspergi vel intercipi violentia maris, aliud tingui disciplina religionis.'

Could he have written thus if submersion had been considered necessary in Africa in the second century?

Mr Abrahams does not mention what seems to me to be the strongest argument against my contention that the word *ṭabal* does not necessarily imply submersion, namely the fact that in Talmudic teaching a definite contrast was drawn between washing the hands by pouring water over them and by plunging them into a basin. Cp. Brandt, p. 37 ff.

But when we wash our hands in a basin do we generally put them right under, any more than Joseph's brethren did his coat in the blood in which they 'dipped' it?

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NOTE ON ΠΡΗΝΗΣ ΓΕΝΟΜΕΝΟΣ IN ACTS I 18.

PROFESSOR NESTLE contributes a note on *The Fate of the Traitor* to the April number of the *Expository Times* (p. 331). By a curious coincidence, as Dr Nestle tells us in a *postscript*, the note was written the night before he received a copy of the *J. T. S.* containing my note on Acts i 18. The Professor very courteously wrote to me privately on the subject.

In this note Dr Nestle adduces a passage which I had overlooked. It occurs in the *Acta Pilati* B (ed. Tischendorf, p. 268 n. in the first edition, p. 290 in the second). A MS which Tischendorf calls C ('i. e. Paris. Reg. nunc Nation. num. 770. exaratus anno 1315. manu Georgii sacerdotis', *Proleg.* p. lxxi) contains the story of Judas. I transcribe the pertinent words as given by Tischendorf 'εὐθὺς ἐποίησε τὴν ἀγχόνην διὰ σχοινοῦ καὶ ἐκρεμάσθη, καὶ εὐθὺς ἀπήγατο (hucusque textum exscripsit Thilo) τῇ ψυχῇ. (Sequitur οἱ δὲ τῷ σώματι. ἄλλοτε ἐλάκισε [sic], ἐπρίσθη καὶ ἐβρέμεσεν [?]: quae margini adscripta fuisse indeque in textum irrepsisse apparet.)'

As Dr Nestle points out, ἐπρίσθη is obviously for ἐπρήσθη. But what can be said of ἐβρέμεσεν? The word is clearly very corrupt. I venture to suggest that -μεσ- represents μέσος. The ἐβρ- may have arisen from ἐρρ-. I conjecture therefore that the original words were ἐπρήσθη καὶ ἐρράγη μέσος. In any case this passage from the *Acta Pilati* should be added to the passages I brought together in my previous note.

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A NOTE ON PHIL. I 21, 22.

Philippians i 21, 22.

Revisers' Text: ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστός, καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος. εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί, τοῦτό μοι καρπὸς ἔργου, καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω.

A. V.: For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

R. V.: For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if to live in the flesh—if this is the fruit of my work, then what I shall choose I wot not.

Everybody must have felt how hopelessly unsatisfactory these translations are; the R. V. even more so than the A. V. Yet the