

## הַסְּעָפִים, 1 Kings xviii. 21.

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THE term הַסְּעָפִים has occasioned commentators no little difficulty. The rendering of the Septuagint, *kyvatai*, 'knee-joints,' is clearly a mere guess,<sup>1</sup> which is interesting only as showing that the difficulty was recognized by ancient as well as by modern scholars. Somewhat more scientific is the rendering of the Targum, 'divisions, parties':

עד אימתי אתן עלינן לתרין סלעין

How long will ye be divided into two parties?

With the substantives סְעִיף, 'cleft' (of a rock), סְעָפוֹת, 'branches' (Ez. 31<sup>6, 8</sup>), and סְעָפִים (Ps. 119<sup>113</sup>), 'sectaries,' one seems justified in assigning to the stem סָעַף the sense of 'divide'; but the obstacles against accepting the interpretation of the Targum, which in one form or another is followed by most modern scholars, are serious. In the first place the metaphor is neither clear nor exact. The stem סָפַח signifies to 'leap,' or 'limp'<sup>2</sup> like a lame person. With a verb of this nature, the preposition עַל can only mean 'over.' A phrase like "leaping over two divisions" is most unintelligible and certainly cannot convey the idea of being divided into two camps (as the Targum has it), or of being of 'diverse opinions,' as many modern scholars,<sup>3</sup> following Böttcher, assume. To 'leap over divisions' can at best mean to set aside all differences.

Secondly, in the passage in question, we should expect the metaphor employed to stand in some connection with a religious rite,<sup>4</sup> all the more so because only a few verses further on (vs.<sup>26</sup>)<sup>5</sup> a 'leap-

<sup>1</sup> And so regarded long ago by Schleusner.

<sup>2</sup> See Toy in this JOURNAL, xvi. 179.

<sup>3</sup> See Thenius in the *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum alten Testament*, ad loc.

<sup>4</sup> So Toy, *loc. cit.*, p. 178, also suggests, without, however, offering any further explanation.

<sup>5</sup> וְסָפַחוּ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

ing over' the altar is directly referred to, as a rite observed by the priests of Baal.

On the other hand, from the context it is clear that the phrase used by Elijah can only have been employed by him in the sense of "halting between two opinions," a parallel to the famous New Testament saying,<sup>6</sup> "No man can serve two masters. . . . Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

Klostermann<sup>7</sup> recognizing the textual difficulty, proposes a slight emendation which at once throws light upon the metaphor. Instead of הַסְעִיף he reads הַסְעִיפִים, 'thresholds.' Curiously enough, after making this happy emendation, he fails to see the force of it and renders, "How long will ye pass by the two thresholds?" The Piel of the verb הָסַפּ can never mean "to pass by." It is Klostermann who 'passes by' what in view of Trumbull's *Threshold Covenant* is perfectly obvious. Dr. Trumbull furnishes abundant illustrations in his suggestive work<sup>8</sup> of the significance attached to the 'leaping over the threshold' of a sanctuary among the Semites. How common the rite was may be concluded from Zeph. i.<sup>9</sup>, where punishment is threatened against "every one who leaps over the threshold." Dr. Trumbull in commenting on this passage properly calls attention to the Targum, which paraphrases, "those that walk in the custom of the Philistines." The full force of the passage 1 S. 5<sup>5</sup>, where the origin of the custom of the Philistines in not stepping on the threshold of Dagon's sanctuary is given, is brought out by the Septuagint, which adds to the Massoretic text the words, "because leaping they leap over it."<sup>9</sup>

'To leap over the threshold' is equivalent to entering a sanctuary, and the employment of the expression by Elijah suggests that this custom was once in vogue among Hebrews as well as among Philis-

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 6<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> In Strack and Zöckler's *Kurzer Kommentar zu den Heiligen Schriften*, ad loc.

<sup>8</sup> pp. 116 seq.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase betrays the Hebrew original of the addition. Kohler, who has some suggestive remarks on the custom of 'leaping' over a threshold or altar (*American Journal of Theology* i. 803), professes to see a reference to the rite in 2 S. 5<sup>6-8</sup>, but this is not tenable. We should expect in that case הַסְעִיפִים. Moreover, Kohler's manner of disposing of הַסְעִיפִים is unsatisfactory. The combination of הַסְעִיפִים with הַסְעִיפִים is too common to warrant any suspicion as to the correctness of the text. The whole phrase beginning with לֹא תִבָּא seems to be a kind of popular saying, the application of which to David is pointed out by the repetition at the end of the eighth verse.

tines. 'To leap over two thresholds' is therefore to make the attempt of worshipping in two sanctuaries. Viewed in this light, Elijah's words bring out forcibly the stinging rebuke intended. 'How long,' he says, 'will ye worship Yahwe and Baal? If Yahwe is God, follow Him, and if Baal is god, follow him; but ye cannot leap over two thresholds. Ye cannot enter Baal's sanctuary one day and Yahwe's the next, ye cannot serve two masters. Choose between Yahwe and Baal.'

This interpretation fulfils all the required conditions. The metaphor is clear, and the custom which underlies the metaphor is closely allied to the rite referred to in vs.<sup>23</sup>.

The ordinary place for the altar, both in simple and in more elaborate sanctuaries, was at the entrance.<sup>10</sup> To 'leap over the altar' (vs.<sup>23</sup>) was accordingly a rite that might be called a natural corollary to the custom of 'leaping over the threshold' (vs.<sup>18</sup>) of a sanctuary, and the connection between the two becomes all the more obvious if it be borne in mind that the altar and the sanctuary were practically identical in primitive forms of worship. The stone upon which Jacob sleeps is both an altar and a sanctuary.<sup>11</sup>

These various considerations, I venture to think, justify the proposed slight emendation of the text which, I may add, occurred to me quite independently of Klostermann.

<sup>10</sup> See Trumbull, *ib.* pp. 120-121.

<sup>11</sup> Gen. 28<sup>22</sup>: "This stone . . . shall be a sanctuary"; cf. 35<sup>7</sup>.