

NOTES ON SOME HEBREW PASSAGES.

1 Kings xviii 21.

עֲדֹמְתֵי אַתֶּם בְּפִסְחִים עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַסַּעֲפִים

THIS passage is involved in some obscurity. The meaning of פִּסְחִים can hardly be other than 'limp' or 'go lame'; but the sense attached to סַעֲפִים cannot be regarded as much better than guess-work. A.V., R.V. 'How long halt ye between two opinions?' adopt the rendering of the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible, which is also found in Matthew's Bible with the variant 'Why?' for 'How long?' The rendering 'halt (i. e. walk hesitatingly) *between*' is of course illegitimate for על פִּסְחִים, which can only mean 'halt upon'. Coverdale, in rendering more correctly 'How long halte ye on both the sides?' depends on Luther, 'Wie lange hinket ihr auf beiden Seiten?' and this translation—whether by accident or design—preserves an ambiguity as to the meaning of סַעֲפִים (sides of a controversy or sides of the body). Wycliffe renders 'How long halt ye into two parties?' in accordance with Vulg. 'Usque quo claudicatis in duas partes?' The interpretation of סַעֲפִים as 'parties' or 'opinions' is also found in Targ. and Pesh., where it extends itself to a paraphrastic rendering of פִּסְחִים:—איִמְתֵי אַתּוֹן: 'How long are ye divided into two divisions?' It depends, we may presume, upon the fact that there is a word קַעֲיָה meaning 'cleft' of a rock (Judg. xv 8, 11, Isa. ii 21, lvii 5), and another קַעֲיָה meaning 'branch' (Isa. xvii 6, xxvii 10; cf. Ezek. xxxi 6, 8) which is inferred to be so called as *divided* from the main trunk; and if, as some have thought, שְׁעָפִים ('disquieting?') thoughts' (Job iv 13, xx 2; שְׁרַעֲפִים Ps. xciv 19, cxxxix 23) is connected, a possible deduction, in view of what follows ('if the Lord be God, &c.') is that the term denotes *divergent opinions* which tear the mind asunder. Yet, though the sense intended by the whole phrase (doubt as to which of two conclusions is correct) seems clear from the context, the method of expressing it by an incomplete metaphor—פִּסְחִים = 'limp', metaphorical; סַעֲפִים = 'opinions' or 'parties', literal—is surely very un-Hebraic. We should expect the metaphor to be completely carried out; and in this respect LXX shews a sound sense in its interpretation of סַעֲפִים as *a part of the legs*, 'the hams', Ἔως τότε ὑμεῖς χωλανεῖτε ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρας ταῖς ἰγνύαις; It may be doubted, however, whether the rendering of סַעֲפִים by ἰγνύαι can be philologically sustained, unless the idea is that of the two divisions into

which the lower part of the body is *cleft* (somewhat upon the analogy of Babylonian *puridu* 'the fork' of the body). But at any rate the fem. *שתי* is strongly in favour of the view that the obscure term really denotes *some part of the body which forms a pair*.

The suggestion has not, I believe, been put forward that סעפים may be identical with Babylonian *šepē* (plural) or *šepā* (dual), 'feet'. The *ē* in *šepu* would naturally indicate a medial guttural in a West Semitic equivalent; cf. with medial *ע*, *bēlu* = בעל 'lord', *tēmu* = טעם 'taste, behaviour, &c.'; with medial *ח*, *rēmu* = רחם 'compassion', *tēnu* = טחן 'to grind', *rēku* = רחק 'to be distant'. Bab. *š* = Heb. *ס* is seen in *šammu* = (סם), plur. סמים, *šipru* = ספר, *šenu* = סאון, *šaknu* = סגן, *šigaru* = סיגר—all or most of which terms in Hebrew are probably loan-words from Babylonian. The sense 'Why limp ye upon both feet?' seems to be exactly what we require. If סעפים = *šepā*, it is probable that the vocalization is incorrect; and the form may originally have been סעפיים. It may perhaps be objected to this suggestion that we do not usually find synonyms employed to denote parts of the body; but at any rate we have מטתנים and חלצים, both 'loins', while גדים and כפיים as in usage practical synonyms.

Psalm xxxii 9.

אל־תִּהְיֶה בְּסוּם כְּפָרָד אִין הָבִין
בְּמַתְגַּן וְרָסוֹן עֲרִיֹן לְבָלוֹם
בַּל יִקְרַב אֵלָיָד

The difficulty of this passage is well known. I have no fresh suggestion to make as to the meaning of עֲרִיֹן, which I must assume (in default of a better explanation) to mean 'youthful age' (cf. Ps. ciii 5, עֲרִיֹד || נְעוּרֵיכִי). I now wish to point out that the clauses are certainly wrongly divided. The Psalm as a whole is not particularly well preserved, but we can have no difficulty in detecting that its original rhythm is that which we usually associate with the *hīmā* (though it is by no means confined to dirges), viz. a scheme of 3 + 2 rhythmical beats. Reading בְּרָסוֹן וְרָסוֹן, and יִקְרַב יִקְרַב, we may divide the verse as follows:—

אל־תִּהְיֶה בְּסוּם כְּפָרָד
אִין הָבִין בְּמַתְגַּן
בְּרָסוֹן עֲרִיֹן לְבָלוֹם
בַּל יִקְרַב אֵלָיָד

'Be not like to horse or mule
which understands not bridle:
With halter must his youth be curbed;
he will not come nigh thee.'

Thus we see that the reference is not to horses and mules as a whole, but to *unbroken* horses and mules. Those who have had any experience of bridling young half-broken horses, or of attempting to mount them when bridled, will recognize the justice of the statement 'he will not come nigh thee'.

Though I hit upon this division of the verse independently, I cannot claim priority in it. It goes back to Schnurrer (*Dissert. philol. crit.* 1790, p. 139), and is quoted from him by Rosenmüller.

Psalm xlv 7 a.

בְּסֵאֲךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וְעַד

I see no reason why כִּסֵּאֲךָ אֱלֹהִים should not mean 'Thy throne is God', this standing for 'Thy throne is God's (throne)'. We have an exact parallel for such a construction in the Babylonian Creation-Epic iv 4, 6, where the gods, in praise of Marduk as their champion against Tiāmat, exclaim,

šimatka la šanan seḡarka (ilu) Anu

'Thy destiny is unequalled, thy command is Anu'.

Here 'thy command is Anu' clearly means 'thy command is Anu's (command)'.

Psalm lviii 9 a.

כִּמּוֹ שֶׁבִלְוִל תִּמָּס יְהִיָּה

It is needless to enlarge upon the difficulties of this passage—the *ἀπ. λεγ.* שְׁבִלְוִל, supposed to mean 'snail' (borrowed in this sense in N. Heb., and in Jewish Aram. תְּבִלְלָא, but otherwise unsubstantiated), the curious תִּמָּס (from מָסַם), and the forced sense demanded, 'goes into melting' or 'goes as a melting thing', i. e. 'melts as it goes'.

A trifling alteration of the consonants gives the reading כִּמּוֹ שֶׁבִלְתִּמָּס יְהִיָּה 'Like a stream which trickles away and disappears'. This I take to be a marginal gloss upon *v.* 8 מִמֵּי יְהִיָּה כִּמּוֹ לָמוּ. Let them melt away like water that runneth apace'.

Job xxxviii 14.

תִּתְהַפֵּף כְּחֹמֶר חוֹתָם

וַיִּתְיַצְבוּ כִּמּוֹ לְבוֹשׁ

This passage occurs in a description of the phenomena produced on the earth by the sunrise. Its meaning has been well summarized by Dr Driver: 'As the clay takes shape under the seal, so the earth, formless in the darkness, receives shape and form in the light; and the

things upon it stand out each in its proper colour and relief, like a garment in folds'. It is hardly possible, however, to accept **וְהָיָה כְּבִגְדֵי**, R.V. 'And all things stand forth' being forced and cumbrous. We may emend **וְהָיָה כְּבִגְדֵי**, which seems to be the reading presupposed by Vulg. 'et stabit'. The sense then is

'It is changed like day under the seal,
And stands forth like a garment'.

The purpose of this note is not merely to advocate this trifling emendation, but to call attention to an analogy which may well have been in the writer's mind. In the Babylonian Creation-Epic (iv 19 ff) the gods set a test of power to Marduk, the god of light and creator, by placing a garment before him:—

'“Speak with thy mouth; let the garment perish;
Once more command it, and let the garment be whole”.
Then he spake with his mouth; the garment perished:
Once more he commanded, and the garment was created'.

If we are right in tracing a connexion between this passage and the simile employed in Job, the Biblical passage throws light upon the inner meaning of the Babylonian. It would seem to be a figure of the alternate obscuring and revealing of earth's surface at sunset and sunrise, produced by the movements of the god of light. That the author of Job was acquainted with the Creation-Epic (i 113 ff) is not obscurely hinted by his allusion to 'the helpers of Rahab' in ch. ix 13, i. e. the monstrous brood of Tiāmat which she produced to aid her in her conflict with the gods.

Ecclesiasticus iv 26 b.

Hebrew	וְאַל תַּעֲמֹד לְפָנַי שְׁבָלֵת
Greek	<i>καὶ μὴ βιάζου ῥόδν ποταμοῦ</i>

What is the meaning of the obscure precept 'Stand not against a stream' in the midst of a context (*vs.* 20-28) which inculcates the right moral and mental attitude of the 'wise', especially in regard to speech? Since the temptation in human intercourse is to 'go with the stream', advice not to stand against it is surely peculiarly misplaced. The solution of the difficulty is so obvious that it may already have been made, though I find no allusion to it in Dr Oesterley's commentary (*Camb. Bib.*). The Syriac reads **וְאַל תַּעֲמֹד לְפָנַי שְׁבָלֵת**, which suggests that in place of **שְׁבָלֵת** we should read **שְׁבָלֵת**. Thus the sense intended is 'Stand not in the presence of folly', i. e. 'do not acquiesce in foolish talk and action' (for 'stand' in this sense cf. Ps. i 1). This suits the connexion with *v.* 27, **אַל תַּחֲזֵק לְנַכְלֵי נַפְשְׁךָ**, *καὶ μὴ ὑποστρώσης σταντὸν ἀνθρώπων μωρῶν*. (**שְׁבָלֵת** (סְבָלֵת) is a favourite word in Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiasticus v 10.

הִיָּה קָמוּךְ עַל דְּעָתֶךָ
וְאַחֲרָיִהי דְּבַרְךָ

Here the Greek and Syriac offer a text identical with the Hebrew. 'Let thy speech be one' can only be explained as meaning 'Be consistent in speech'. The connexion with *vs.* 11-13 suggests, however, that the thought of the writer is that, while mental apprehension should be swift and sure, speech should be *considered and deliberate*. The simple correction of אָחֵר for אַחֲרָיִהי makes the couplet run—

'Be steadfast (i. e. well-assured) in thy understanding,
And afterward let thy speech be'.

The meaning is—'Do not speak till you are well-assured of what you have to say'.

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PSALM LXXXV 9.

THE recent discussion in this JOURNAL of the Hebrew text of the passage above referred to has reminded me that about half a century ago I sent to the late Professor Weir, of Glasgow, a conjectural emendation of the last clause of the verse, and that in some extracts from that scholar's note-books, published in the *Expositor* a few years back, I had the surprise of finding my conjecture recorded, with my name and address appended.

My proposal was to read וְאֵל־יְשׁוּבוּ לְכַסְלָהּ instead of וְאֵל יִשְׂרָיִל לֵב קָלָהּ. This was of course suggested by the rendering of the LXX, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐπιστρέφοντας πρὸς αὐτὸν καρδίαν. It is evident that the Greek translator read לֵב; and if this reading be correct the acceptance of 'Selah' seems inevitable, in spite of the absence of διάψαλμα in the Greek; the LXX and the Masoretic text do not always agree with regard to the insertion of this word. It appears to me that one strong argument in favour of the originality of the reading לֵב is that in the older Hebrew alphabet there is very little resemblance between the letters ב and כ, which in the later square character are almost indistinguishable. As the MS which the Greek translator had before him was presumably written in the