

WHAT DOES "THE SUN STOOD STILL" MEAN?

In the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* for April, 1902, I published an article on "Lost Meanings of Hebrew Roots," in which I attempted to show that the signification of certain roots, which are more or less common in Assyrio-Babylonian, and whose meaning is perfectly clear from the inscriptions, was still known at the time when the Greek translation was made, but that in later times this signification ceased to be recognized by the Hebrews themselves; so that already in the Targums and in the Syriac and Latin primary versions it is no longer to be found. I believe that I can now go a step further and say that I have found in the Babylonian a new meaning for a whole passage;—a meaning whose existence seems to have passed out of the knowledge of the Hebrews even before the time that the Greek version was made.

While reading through the lists of synonyms in a syllabary contained in the Cuneiform Texts, volume XIX, 19,¹ I found one in which the words *atalû*, *adîru*, and *da'amû*, are given. Now, it is well known that *atalû* is the ordinary word in the astronomical tablets for "eclipse" and that the verb *adâru* means "to be dark." Recalling that the radicals *dm* are the root of the verbs occurring in Joshua X. 12, 13, I immediately turned up the passage and at once recognized that it would make good sense to render the form *dôm* in Joshua's prayer by "become dark," or "be eclipsed." This led me to a further study of the works of Epping, Kugler, Thompson, Weidner, and Virolleaud, on the astronomy of the Babylonians, and I was delighted to find not only that the root *dm* is of not infrequent occurrence, but also that two other significant words of the Joshua passage are technical terms in the astronomical science of the Babylonians. The most important of these terms, next to *dm*, is the technical use of *âmad* "to stand." It occurs fre-

¹ Cf. p. 50, I, 1 (4).

quently on the tablets to denote the point, or place, in the heavens at which a star ceases to go in one direction and begins its return journey to its starting-point. To the naked eye, a star seems to "stand still" for a time before starting on its return passage, just as a runner in a race up and down a lane would stand still as he was turning to run back to the starting-point. In a second sense, the verb is used for the "staying" of a star in a constellation, or house, of the zodiac. The other technical word is the *h^ašî* (Bab. *isî*) of verse 13, translated "midst" in the English version. While not denying that this word may and often does mean "midst," in Hebrew, as, for example, in "midnight (*h^ašî hallaylâ*), it seems that in Babylonian in the two places where it is used in the astronomical tablets, it has the sense more usual in Hebrew of "half," being employed in the one case to denote the half of a cloud and in the other the half of the moon. According to this interpretation, it would mean in Joshua the period from midday to sunset, or ninety degrees.

I further found that in many places in Virolleaud's tablets treating especially of the sun and moon, both are said to be darkened together, the word for darkening being *dm*. Proceeding from these data, I translated the passage in Joshua and saw that the whole situation was cleared up, except where it states, according to the common version, that the sun did not go in for "about a whole day." Having long ago come to the conclusion that this phrase does not mean what the English version implies, I made a new investigation of all the places where the preposition *kaf* (here rendered "about") and the word *tāmûm* "whole," as well as its root *tāman*, are employed in the Old Testament. The result of the investigation² was to confirm my opinion that the phrase should be translated "as on a completed (or ordinary) day." It must be borne in mind by those who read my translation, that the verb *bô* is used in Hebrew

² Cf. p. 53, V.