

ART. VII.—“SUN, STAND STILL.”¹

THE miracle of Joshua has been a cause of ridicule and a stumbling-block even to believers.

Bishop Colenso affirmed “that the miracle of Joshua is the most striking instance of Scripture and science being at variance.” I can scarcely believe that he ever carefully examined the Hebrew words. An evangelical Dean of sincere piety pronounced the miracle as, in our Bible, worse than the fables of Hindoo or Mahomedan. I wrote to him, and pointed out that the Hebrew did not sanction the idea of the sun standing still, and the consequent destruction of the universe. It is sad that men of position and accounted learned should magnify the difficulties of God’s Word, instead of fairly meeting them in the original Hebrew. I have read the Hebrew Bible for sixty years, and when in Birmingham gave lectures to different young men’s classes and at different institutions, so I took up astronomy, geology, and all science that threw light on the Word of God. One day, talking to Dr. M’Cann, lecturer to the Christian Evidence Society, he said he had never seen any explanation such as I gave to scientific difficulties, and urged me to print my views. Fourteen years ago I therefore printed the little work “Hebrew Bible and Science,” and though I have spared no expense nor trouble to bring out the truth and testify to the inspiration of Scripture, yet I have been amazed to find great ignorance on the subject of this miracle and kindred difficulties. Truth is simple and only needs plain statement. I ask you, my readers, to observe that the word *dōm* never means “stand still.” In Hab. ii. 19, “the *dumb* stone”; nine times “keep silence,” as Ps. xxx. 12; five times at least “be still,” as Ps. iv. 2; also Ps. cxxxi. 2, “quiet one’s self”; and 1 Sam. xiv. 9, “tarry”; Ps. lxii. 5, “wait”; and Ps. xxxvii. 7, “rest.” Thirty times, at least, these renderings occur, but *never*

circumstances.” There is no difficulty whatever; for (1) it is Hezekiah, not Isaiah, who concludes that there will be “peace” in his days. It is an inference, not a prophecy. And (2) Hezekiah simply infers that he and his will not be the victims of the Assyrian invasion which threatened him at that period. It is unfortunate that the youth of this age should be fed on the husks of explanations which do not explain, but only explain away, instead of learning, like their forefathers, to receive with respect the utterances of men inspired by the Divine Spirit to foretell things to come.

¹ Within reasonable limits, the pages of the *CHURCHMAN* are open to the discussion of doubtful questions, and are not confined to the statement of only one view of such questions. In deference, accordingly, to a much-respected contributor, this alternative view of the miracle of Joshua is presented, in reference to some articles lately published in these pages.

"stand still," except in this unfortunate passage. If any readers will try to apply "stand still" to any of the above texts, the same absurdity will be found as in the application to the sun of "stand still" "Stand still" may properly apply to a restless child, but is utterly misplaced as addressed to the great orb of day. Take one other passage (Ps. lxxxiii. 1): "Keep not Thou silence, O God," which implies, "come forth, speak"; but "stand still" would be a direct contradiction. The words "stand still," therefore, are *utterly unwarranted and misleading*.

The next word to which I direct you is the most important in the sentence, "midst," Hebrew "Chetse," and it is literally "half." So Taylor, in his "Hebrew Concordance," renders the verb "to divide, or part in two." In only three or four cases it is rendered "midst," and they would be better "half." The verb and the noun occur when Solomon (1 Kings iii. 25) said, "*Divide* the living child in two, and give *half* to the one and *half* to the other." Would "give a midst to the one and midst to the other" speak sense or nonsense? In *one hundred and ten* instances this word has the true meaning of "half," and "midst" is wrong; and would be as ridiculous if applied to those one hundred and ten cases as it is: "Sun, stand still; and the sun stands in *the midst of the heavens*."

By the proper meaning of these two words, we are *perfectly sure* that the passage should be rendered: "Sun, rest, or wait, or tarry, in *the half of the heavens*." Now, the *half* of the heavens must be the *visible horizon*. The ancients *half* of the stars and classed them in constellations, and therefore were acquainted with the whole circle of the heavens; the *half* must therefore imply a division into two. So the word "half" refers to the portion of the heavens visible to Joshua; and "tarry or wait" is an injunction to the sun to tarry or wait in the half. So we read: "The sun tarried in the half of the heaven, and *hasted* not to go down."

When considering this passage, I felt that the word "hasted" was significant, for if we say, "the boy does not hasten," we imply that he is *moving*. Now, this word occurs in Prov. xxviii. 20: "He that *hasteth* to be rich"; again, Prov. xix. 2, "he that *hasteth* with his feet sinneth." So the word implies great effort and speed; therefore we may read: "The sun is not hastening, or making haste, to set"—language most appropriate in Eastern countries, where there is little or no twilight, and the sun dips down below the horizon suddenly and darkness supervenes. That the sun did not thus hastily set implies that he *continued in motion and in sight*.

Further, the words "about a whole day" are not suffi-

ciently exact. “About” in the Hebrew is “as,” and is not a mere comparison, but marks out the definite period such as makes up a whole day; just like, “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten”—*i.e.*, the glory which *really pertained* to the only begotten. So Patrick and Lowth, on Josh. x., remark: “It may simply be translated a *whole day*, the particle *Caph* signifying nothing of similitude, but the very *thing itself*.” The words “as a whole day” mean the exact and definite time such as makes up a *whole day*. Now, the word “whole”—*saumim*—stands for a full and perfect number of anything; so (1 Sam. xvi. 11), “Are thy children complete” (Hebrew, “whole”), or, “Are the whole here?” When considering this passage, its peculiar force and definite meaning, it struck me at once that there must be some means of measuring this definite period; that if the earth was not moving, there could be no measure of time; if the clock of the world was “standing still,” it would be folly to speak of an exact or complete day.

To sum up, the word “tarry,” the word “half,” the word “hasten,” and the word “whole,” give four reasons which *cannot be controverted*. Taken separately they exclude the idea that the earth stood still, and taken together they become a link in a chain which *cannot be broken*; they expose the carelessness and rashness of Bishop Colenso and other objectors. The whole passage may therefore be translated in some such words as the following: “Then Joshua is speaking to Jehovah, and says before the eyes of Israel, Sun [or sunlight], over Gibeon tarry: and moon in the valley of Ajalon: and the sun is tarrying, and the moon stayed till the nation is avenged of its enemies. Is not this written in the book of the upright, and the sun is tarrying in the half of the heavens, and it does not hasten to set for a whole day, and there has not been as this day before it or after it.” More fully the Hebrew runs: “There hath not been as the day, *this day*, before the day and after it—*i.e.*, this day—at the Lord’s hearkening to the voice of a man.” God granted the marvellous extension of daylight to the prayer of Joshua.

Common-sense tells us that Joshua saw sunlight diminishing, so “sun, tarry over Gibeon,” would mean, “continue thy light.” If the sun were setting, its rays would fall on Gibeon in the East, and, continuing above the horizon, would be visible the night through, and pass on into the following day. Two days forming one day, “there hath not been as this day before or after in Israel.”

An Archdeacon wrote to me: “Now you must show scientific men how the sun’s light was continued.” I laughed. Explain a miracle! However, I turned to the “Gallery of

Nature and Art," and (vol. iv., p. 521) I read: "February 5, 1674. M. Hevelius, near Marienburg, wrote: 'Under the sun, near the horizon, there appeared a mock sun of the same size to sense as the true sun. The spurious sun grew clearer and clearer, and put on the genuine solar light.'" I can't give all the account, only enough for me to ask: "If Almighty God in Nature has granted continuance of light by mock suns, are we to limit His Divine power for continuing the rays of light of the true sun?" The examination of the Hebrew discloses the folly of anticipating the utter destruction of the universe, and that it concerns merely the rays of light, and not universal ruin!

Was it a worthy occasion for the exercise of Divine power? Undoubtedly! It was a crisis in the history of the world. If Israel had been vanquished and annihilated in that battle, what of God's promises to Abraham, of Israel's future, of the Christian dispensation? Besides, Baal, the sun—the god of the heathens—fighting for Israel must have disconcerted the heathen armies, and Joshua's decisive victory may have prevented innumerable battles and further destruction of life, so then in wisdom and compassion was granted the continuance of that long double day.

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ART. VIII.—SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR HEBRAISTS.

IT is well known that Hebrew, like Latin and Greek and French, has two forms for the negative particle. The one we may call the objective, the other the subjective, negative. It is on the force of these negatives respectively, and their appropriate rendering in English, that I want to offer, as the fruit of careful study, a few hints. I would offer them with all becoming modesty. Yet I would add that the habitual adherence to the principles involved has, in my own case, led to results which have been interesting and profitable.

Before going farther, it will be needful to remind readers of another well-known fact, the bearing of which will presently be seen. It is this: The Hebrew language admits no such thing as a direct *negative imperative*. What, then, is its practice? To express cautions or prohibitions by means of the future tense. (With Peter Mason, who is, perhaps, the greatest of living Hebraists, I retain that name; and, indeed, the fact just stated is one of the facts which manifestly