

for the "going in" of the sun, in the evening, and the verb *yāsā* for its "coming out," in the morning. The Babylonian uses the same word for the "coming out" of the sun, but uses *erēbu* (from which the Hebrew derives *'ereb*, its term for evening) to denote the "going in," at sunset. With this in mind, we can understand what Ben Sira means when he says that through Joshua the sun stood, one day becoming like two. He means apparently that the day of the battle had two *comings out* of the sun, one at sunrise and the other at midday, when it came out from behind the moon; and that it had two *goings-in*, one when it went in behind the moon and the other at sunset.

This translation shows us, moreover, how Jehovah fought for Israel. It was not merely with storm and hail that the enemy was discomfited, but his very gods were compelled to hide their faces at noonday. At the prayer of Israel's leader, both of their chief deities, the sun and the moon, were darkened, or eclipsed. So, as we can well imagine would be the case, they were terrified beyond measure, thinking that the end of all things had come; and they were discomfited and smitten and turned and fled.

Herodotus tells of an eclipse of the sun which occurred during a battle between the Lydians and the Medes, that scared both of the combatants so much that they stopped fighting and made an immediate peace.<sup>3</sup> Later, after Xerxes had assembled his army for the invasion of Greece, an eclipse took place while he was still at Sardis which terrified him to such an extent, that only after a favorable interpretation of the eclipse by the Magi, who affirmed that it meant the destruction of the Greeks, would he proceed with his undertaking.<sup>4</sup> So, also, our best modern observers tell us how all nature seems terrified by an eclipse, and how they, in spite of themselves, could not suppress a feeling of dread in the presence of this appalling phenomenon.

It will be perceived that the translation suggested does

<sup>3</sup> Bk. I. 74, 103.

<sup>4</sup> Bk. VII. 37.

away with the miraculous character of the event in so far as it involves the solar system and the law of gravitation. It is true, also, that it runs counter to Jewish exegesis and to all the ancient versions, except perhaps the Greek, which is somewhat ambiguous and difficult of explanation. Notwithstanding this, I confess to a feeling of relief, as far as I myself am concerned, that I shall no longer feel myself forced by a strict exegesis to believe that the Scriptures teach that there actually occurred a miracle involving so tremendous a reversal of all the laws of gravitation. It can readily be understood how the Jewish interpreters of later times, either through ignorance, or because of their overwhelming desire to magnify their own importance in the scheme of the universe, should have embraced the opportunity that the ambiguous terms of this purely scientific account afforded them to enhance the magnitude of the divine interference in their behalf. But for us today there lies in this passage the more useful lesson of faith in God as the answerer of prayer. How stupendous was the faith of Joshua as shown in his prayer! How immediate and complete was God's answer to that prayer! He who knew beforehand what Joshua would ask, had made all preparations to grant his request. For His are hearts and stars, and darkness and light, and faith and love and victory, excelling in their lasting glory all the transient miracles of standing suns. Lastly, mark that the inspired writer says that it was the extraordinary answer to the prayer of a man that made that day at Gibeon to be unlike every other day before or since. In following his interpretation of its significance, let us rest content.

I would suggest the following translation:

"Be eclipsed, O sun, in Gibeon,  
And thou moon in the valley of Ajalon!

And the sun was eclipsed and the moon turned back, while the nation was avenged on its enemies. Is it not written upon the book of Jashar?