Job XXVI 12—13 and the Babylonian Story of Creation.

By *Samuel Daiches.*

Verses 12 and 13 of the 26th chapter of Job form a part of the description given by Job in that chapter of God's unlimited power. The explanation of these two verses is not simple. The ancient versions show that the difficulties were felt already then, and their renderings of these verses are not entirely satisfactory. Neither are the various attempts at interpretation made by the modern commentators to be considered satisfactory.¹⁾ The main difficulty lies in v. 13^a. What is the meaning of בְּרוּחוֹ יִשְׁפָּרָה? Almost all modern commentators take שְׁפָרָה to mean "brightness" and translate 13^a: "By his breath the heavens (became) brightness (= bright)". What this passage, according to this interpretation, describes is (in the words of DRIVER²⁾) "how, after a storm the wind, — God's 'breath' (as Isa. XL 7) —, clearing away the clouds, brightens the sky".³⁾ But this explanation does not fit in at all. Neither v. 12 nor any preceding verse in this chapter speaks of a darkened sky nor does v. 13^b contain any allusion to it. How should then v. 13^a all at once speak of "bright-

1) See for the various explanations of these verses especially DILLMANN, *Hiob*, 4th ed. (1891), p. 227 f. and BUDDE, *Das Buch Hiob* (1896), pp. 146—148.

2) See DRIVER, *The Book of Job in the Revised Version* (Oxford 1906), p. 75 note m.

3) See also DILLMANN, l. c., and others.

Zeitschr. f. Assyriologie, XXV.

ening the sky"? Another objection to this translation is the fact that there is no other passage in the O. T. where שִׁפְרָה occurs in the sense of "brightness".

Now it seems to me that with the help of the Babylonian Story of Creation one may be able to give an entirely satisfactory explanation of the two verses.¹⁾ In the fourth tablet of creation²⁾ it is related how Marduk overpowered Tiāmat and "cut off her life" (ll. 101—104) and how he then "smashed her skull" and "cut through the channels of her blood" (ll. 130—131). We then read how "he split her up like a flat fish into two halves" (l. 137) and how he made the heaven out of one half of her body (l. 138). All this, I believe, is also contained in Job XXVI 12—13. V. 12^a refers to God's conquering the (raging) sea, יָם probably standing here for חָהוּם (as Ps. LXXXIX 10).³⁾ רָגַע must therefore mean here "he stirred", "he conquered".⁴⁾ V. 12^b tells us of the slaying of the Tiāmat.⁵⁾ We have therefore in v. 12 the fight of God with the sea and the sea-monster and the destruction of the latter.

Now what follows in the Babylonian legend upon the slaying of the Tiāmat? The creation of the heaven. The

1) GUNKEL, *Schöpfung und Chaos* pp. 36—37, already attempted an explanation of these verses from this point of view, but only partly succeeded (see below, note 4 and p. 3, note 1 and p. 4).

2) See ZIMMERN in GUNKEL's *Schöpfung und Chaos* p. 410 ff.; DELITZSCH, *Das babylonische Welterschöpfungsepos* p. 103 ff.; JENSEN, KB VI 1, p. 20 ff.; KING, *The Seven Tablets of Creation* p. 58 ff.; UNGNAD in GRESSMANN's *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder*, Bd. 1, p. 15 ff.

3) Here, no doubt, the sea (otherwise personified by the "dragon", the sea-monster) not personified; the sea was before the creation God's enemy. See for the conquering of the sea before the creation GUNKEL, l. c. p. 91 ff., especially pp. 95—97.

4) Against GUNKEL, l. c. p. 36 note 2; see against GUNKEL, l. c., also BUDDE, l. c. p. 147. Cf., by the way, רָגַע with *šudluḫū* used in the creation tablet l. 48. Both verbs have practically the same meaning. And as upon *kirbiš* Tiāmat *šudluḫū* (l. 48) follows later (l. 102) *kirbiša ubattiḫa* so follows here רָגַע upon מַחֵץ.

5) Here the sea personified as a "dragon".

same, I should like to suggest, is the case in the passage in Job. V. 13^a tells us of the creation of the heaven.¹⁾ And the act of creating is expressed by the word שִׁפְרָה. I hold that שִׁפְרָה here is not a noun and does not mean “brightness”, but is a verb and means “she spread out”. Rashi already explains שִׁפְרָה by אִיהָל “he spread out like a tent” and refers to שִׁפְרוּרו (שִׁפְרִירו) in Jer. XLIII 11; cf. also Ibn-Ezra ad loc.²⁾ שִׁפֵּר has therefore the same meaning as that underlying the word שִׁפְרוּר (שִׁפְרִיר) and as the Assyrian *šuparruru*.³⁾ What, however, about the ה? It seems that it was the ה that led all modern commentators to assume that שִׁפְרָה is a noun. This difficulty is, I think, easily solved through the following assumption: the subject in v. 13^a is יְיָ of 13^b. יְיָ of 13^b also refers to 13^a. The translation of 13^a would therefore be: “By his spirit he (lit.: his hand) spread out the heaven”. And this fits exceedingly well to the Babylonian words *šamā-ma ušallil* (l. 138), the literal translation of which is “he spread out the heaven”.⁴⁾ שִׁפְרָה is thus almost a verbal translation of *ušallil*. כִּרְחוֹ corresponds (in the sense) to *ibannā niklāti* of l. 136. וּכְחוּבְנָתוֹ (כִּרְחוֹ) and כִּבְחוֹ express in two words all the power and wisdom employed

1) GUNKEL's rendering “Die Riegel des Himmels schauern vor ihm” (l. c. p. 36) and the assumed allusion to creation tablet IV ll. 139–140 is, apart from the difficulties referred to by BUDDÉ (l. c. p. 147), made impossible through the fact that the most important act of creating the heaven would have been left out in our passage. 13^b would also be difficult even according to GUNKEL's rendering (l. c.); see BUDDÉ, l. c. p. 148.

2) And the פ should receive a dageš. Cf. for the possibility of a missing dageš in the פ Ibn-Ezra ad loc.

3) For שִׁפְרוּר = *šuparruru* see already DELITZSCH, *Prolegomena eines neuen hebräisch-aramäischen Wörterbuches zum Alten Testament* p. 126. This root is also used in tablet IV l. 95 (*ušparirma bēlum šaparašu* “The lord spread out his net”).

4) Not “(he established) as a covering for heaven” (KING, l. c. p. 77; see also p. 3 note 14), nor “und deckte (damit) den Himmel” (UNGAD, l. c. p. 19). See also JENSEN, l. c. p. 343.

by God during the struggle. In the Babylonian story we have long descriptions of Marduk's strength and cleverness (cf. ll. 49 ff. and ll. 95 ff.).

Now what does 13^b refer to? The meaning of חָלַלָהּ is uncertain, and so is the meaning of נָחַשׁ פָּרַח. The usual translation is: "His hand has pierced the swift serpent".¹⁾ GUNKEL translates: "Seine Hand schändete die gewundene Schlange".²⁾ All commentators agree, however, in assuming that v. 13^b speaks again of the conquest of the dragon (whether it is identical with רָחַב of 12^b or not; see for the latter view GUNKEL, l. c. p. 37). This seems to me impossible. If this were so, then v. 13^b would be no parallel to 13^a, and it should have had its place immediately after 12^b. Again, why the repetition? V. 12 said everything. I therefore believe that 13^b, like 13^a, speaks of creation. חָלַלָהּ would then be Po'el of חוּל "to bring forth" and would mean here "it (his hand) has brought forth, has created". It is interesting to note that most of the Jewish commentators also render חָלַלָהּ by "created".³⁾ What is נָחַשׁ בָּרַח? It may be mentioned that the Jewish commentators felt that נָחַשׁ בָּרַח here does not signify the dragon which is signified by רָחַב.⁴⁾ I believe that נָחַשׁ בָּרַח here stands for "the sea", not in the sense of sea-monster, not as an enemy of God, but as a personification of the Ocean, as a part of the Universe created by God. The Ocean was thought by the Babylonians as well as by the Israelites as encircling the earth.⁵⁾ The sea was therefore also thought of as "an encircling serpent". Cf. also נָחַשׁ עֲקֻלָּחוֹן

1) See DRIVER, l. c., DILLMANN, l. c., BUDDE, l. c. and other commentators.

2) See GUNKEL, l. c. p. 36, also p. 31 note 4; see against this BUDDE, l. c. p. 148.

3) See Rashi, RLBG ad loc.

4) See Rashi ad loc.; Ibn-Ezra quotes the view that נָחַשׁ בָּרַח refers to a planet; see also RLBG ad loc.

5) See JENSEN, *Kosmologie* p. 250 f. and GUNKEL, l. c. p. 46.

(Is. XXVII, 1) and see GUNKEL, l. c. pp. 46—47, where he also suggests that בָּרַח in נָחַשׁ בָּרַח is related to בָּרִיחַ "bar". 13^b would then say that God created the sea.

Now does this harmonize with the Babylonian story? The last few lines of tablet IV are unfortunately not quite clear. JENSEN (KB VI 1, pp. 344—345) and ZIMMERN (KAT³ p. 496) regard it as very probable that these lines speak of the creation of the earth. KING (l. c. p. XLIX) assumes that these lines speak of the foundation of the heaven. Both interpretations are unsatisfactory. The creation of the heaven was already mentioned in l. 138.¹⁾ But neither do the lines that follow contain anything about the creation of the earth. Nothing is mentioned about the earth before l. 143, and ll. 143—146 do not speak any more about creation (see below).²⁾ It seems to me that l. 142 speaks of the creation of the sea. L. 142 reads: *uštamḫir miḫrat apsī šubat uNudimmud*. For the different conceptions of this line see ZIMMERN in GUNKEL's *Schöpfung und Chaos* p. 414, DELITZSCH, *Weltschöpfungsepos* p. 108 and p. 147 f., JENSEN, l. c. p. 31 and p. 344, KING, l. c. p. 77, and UNGNAD, l. c. p. 19. I would like to give the following translation for this line: "he placed (in the sense of "established") the corresponding part (i. e. the part corresponding to the first half of the Tīamat, out of which he made the heaven) of the sea, the dwelling-place of Nudimmud (Ea)". For *uštamḫir* as meaning "established" cf. DELITZSCH, l. c.; also KING, l. c. But it would be rather curious if *šubat* should be the immediate object of *uštamḫir* (see DELITZSCH, l. c. p. 99 note 1; also KING, l. c.) and *miḫrat apsī* should stand, without any connection, between verb and object. I therefore regard *miḫrat* as the immediate object of *uštamḫir* and as having the meaning of "the corresponding part,

1) See above p. 3.

2) UNGNAD's remark (l. c. p. 19) "Ešarra ist wohl der babylonische Olymp" is no explanation either. Of l. 141 f. UNGNAD says "Nicht ganz klar".

the corresponding half" (not "angesichts" — DELITZSCH — nor "over against" — KING).¹⁾ The sense thus gained would be an excellent one: He created out of the other half (of Tiāmat) the sea, which is the dwelling-place of Nudimmud. L. 142 therefore tells us of the creation of the sea.

But is it probable that the creation of the earth should not be mentioned while the creation of the sea is spoken of? Indeed, it is not only probable, but it is just what should have been expected after a comparison with the Biblical account of creation. In the Biblical account, too, no mention is made of a special creation of the earth. Gen. I 6—8 the creation of the heaven is related. Gen. I 9—10 tell us of the creation of the sea. It is expressed by the words יקוהמים מהחם השמים אל מקום אחר. And as a result of this, as a result of the division of the waters and of the establishment of the heaven and the sea, the dry land appeared. Note ותראה היבשה in v. 9! We thus find in the Biblical account the creation of heaven and sea expressly told; but not that of the earth. As soon as heaven and sea were established, the earth was eo ipso there. The same seems to be the case in the Babylonian Story of Creation. Marduk divided the Tiāmat (= the Waters). Out of one half he made the heaven, and out of the other half the sea. As a result of this the earth appeared. The creation of heaven and sea implied the creation of the earth. That this explanation of this passage in the Babylonian Creation Story is correct, is also shown, I believe, by the last four lines of tablet IV. According to the usual interpretations (see ZIMMERN, DELITZSCH, JENSEN, KING, UNGNAD) these four lines do not give much

1) *miḫirtu* is usually translated by "front, opposite" (see DELITZSCH, HW p. 404, MUSS-ARNOLT, *A concise dictionary of the Assyrian language* p. 532). But its real meaning is: The part corresponding to some other part; cf. *maḥāru* "to correspond to" (see DELITZSCH, HW p. 400 and MUSS-ARNOLT, l. c. p. 525).

sense. The key to the explanation of these four lines must be sought in l. 146. This line reads: *"A-num "Bēl "E-a ma-ḥa-zi-šu-nu us-ram-ma*. Now we know that Anu was the god of heaven, Bēl the god of the earth and Ea the god of the sea. Every god must therefore have got as his dominion his part of the universe, his *maḥāzu*.¹⁾ This we are indeed told in l. 146. And in the preceding three lines we have the three *maḥāzē* of the three gods. L. 143 tells us how the lord (Marduk) measured the structure of the sea (and established this as a dwelling-place for Ea). L. 144 tells us how he established the earth (as the palace of Bēl). L. 145 tells us how he built the heaven (as the palace for Anum). Ll. 143—146, therefore, do not speak any more of creation. The creation proper is finished in l. 142. Ll. 143—146 simply add that these three parts of the universe were at once prepared as habitations for the three principal gods (143—145) and that these three gods received their respective dominions (146). It is clear now why l. 144 refers to the earth, although it was not mentioned before. The establishing of the heaven and the sea implied the coming into existence of the earth. According to this explanation the following would be the translation of these four lines:

143. "The lord (then) measured the structure of the sea;

144. "A palace like unto it²⁾ he established Ešara (the earth);

145. "(Like) the palace Ešara (was) the heaven which he built;³⁾

1) According to the usual interpretation all the three gods got the Ešara as their abode. This is inconceivable; cf. also JENSEN, l. c. p. 345.

2) Like unto the sea.

3) In the first half of l. 145 the word *tamšilatu* of l. 144 is no doubt to be supplemented. *Egalla Ešarra* might also mean "a palace like unto Ešara". Another translation of this line could be: "(Like) the palace earth which he built (was) the heaven". What this line wants to say is that the

146. "Anu, Bel, and Ea he caused to inhabit their (respective) districts."¹)

What, therefore, follows in the Babylonian Story of Creation upon the slaying of Tiamat is the creation of the heaven and the sea. And the same is the case in Job XXVI. Upon the slaying of the Rahab follows the creation of the heaven and the sea. The following would now be the translation of Job XXVI 12—13:

v. 12 "With his power he stirred (conquered) the sea,
"And by his understanding he smote Rahab.

v. 13 "By his spirit he (lit.: his hand) spread out the heaven,

"His hand created the encircling serpent (i. e. the sea)."

It is, by the way, worthy of note in how few words all this is expressed. The struggle with and the conquest of the dragon is expressed in one short verse. And the creation in another short verse.

Thus, I believe, we get the real sense of Job XXVI 12—13, and the text remains intact. This shows again how the Biblical records and the Babylonian inscriptions supplement each other.

heaven was established as a palace like the earth. Heaven, earth, and sea were three equal palaces. By the way, this interpretation of l. 145 explains *šamāmū* (nominative!).

1) The forced explanation of Ešara in l. 145 as a second object of *ušramma* in l. 146 (see JENSEN, l. c. p. 345) falls now away. The meaning of *maḥāšitunu* is also quite clear now (see the translations referred to, cf. also JENSEN, l. c.).