

have been equally obvious. A gigantic contradiction between the Bible and astronomy has been fabricated out of nothing, through the simple neglect of literary form.

3. One more instance may be noticed in conclusion—the return of the shadow on the sun-dial of Ahaz, as a sign to Hezekiah that his life would be prolonged (II Kings 20, Is. 38). As often represented, this would be another case of a stupendous miracle for what seems, after all, a most trivial end. But here, again, the difficulty is mainly of our own making, though the true solution is not so certain. Some would indeed regard this narrative also as based upon some poetical fragment which sought to represent the incident, as it might easily have appeared to the imagination of Hezekiah, eager to find any ground for hope of his recovery. Hezekiah's song, with which the narrative closes, in Isaiah's account, shows that we are upon the borderland of poetry, and it not unnaturally suggests such a supposition. It must be confessed, however, that the narrative, as it stands, does not lend itself very readily to such a theory. But even if we reject this altogether, there is nothing requiring us to suppose that in any way the motion of the earth was interfered with, or that the order of the great universe was, in the slightest degree, disturbed. Whether we even call it a miracle or not, will depend somewhat upon our definition of the miraculous in Providence. There is nothing said about any lengthening of the day. It seems to have been purely a local phenomenon; and though, in the absence of definite information, we cannot know certainly how the effect was produced, it might readily have been caused by a slight refraction of the light as it passed through the clouds in the upper air. Any one can produce a similar retroaction of a shadow with the aid of a mirror, and it occurs not infrequently in nature without having any special significance. The mirage, so familiar to dwellers by the sea and on the level prairie, is but another form of the same phenomenon. But whether this is the true explanation of the sign or not, it is sufficient to show that astronomy has here no sufficient reason to call in question the authenticity of the biblical story.