

THE INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL COMMENTARY

A

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL
COMMENTARY

ON

GENESIS

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2. **Description of Chaos.**—It is perhaps impossible to unite the features of the description in a single picture, but the constitutive elements of the notion of chaos appear to be Confusion (תהו ובהו), Darkness, and Water (מים, תהום). The weird effect of the language is very impressive. On the syntax, see above.—*waste and void*] The exact meaning of this alliterative phrase—*Tōhū wā-Bōhū*—is difficult to make out. The words are nouns; the connotation of תהו ranges from the concrete ‘desert’ to the abstract ‘non-entity’; while בהו possibly means ‘emptiness’ (*v.z.*). The exegetical tendency has been to emphasise the latter aspect, and approximate to the Greek notion of chaos as empty

down’ (Ezk. 23⁴⁷) or ‘clear ground by hewing down trees’ (Jos. 17¹⁵, 18 [J])—a sense as remote as possible from fashion or make (Di., G-B. s.v.; We. *Prol.*⁶ 387). The Ar. *bara’a* (used chiefly of creation of animate beings) is possibly borrowed from Heb. Native philologists connect it, very unnaturally, with *bari’a*, ‘be free’; so that ‘create’ means to *liberate* (from the clay, etc.) (Lane, 178 b, c); Di.’s view is similar. Barth (*ZA*, iii. 58) has proposed to identify ברא (through mutation of liquids) with the Ass. vb. for ‘create,’ *banū*; but rejects the opinion that the latter is the common Semitic בנה ‘build’ (*KAT*³, 498¹), with which ברא alternates in Sabæan (Müller in *ZDMG*, xxxvii. 413, 415).

2. תהו ובהו] [Ἐ ἀβάτος καὶ ἀκατασκευάστος; Aq. κένωμα κ. οὐθέν; Σ. ἀργεῖν κ. ἀδιάκριτον; Θ. κενόν (or οὐθέν) καὶ οὐθέν; Ὑ *inanis et vacua*; 𐤇𐤃𐤀 וריקניא זריא (‘desolate and empty’); 𐤇𐤃𐤀 ספסות. The fragmentary Jer. Tg. has a double trans.: “And the earth was תהו ובהו, and (cf. 𐤇𐤃𐤀) *desolate* from the sons of men, and *empty* of work.” תהו occurs along with בהו in Jer. 4²³, Is. 34¹¹; תהו alone in 17 pass. besides. The meaning varies between two extremes: (a) a (trackless) *desert* (Jb. 12²⁴ [= Ps. 107⁴⁰] 6¹⁸, Dt. 32¹⁰), and (b) *unsubstantiality* (שאין לו ממש, IEz.) or ‘nonentity,’ a sense all but peculiar to II Is. (also I Sa. 12²¹, and *perhaps* Is. 29²¹), but very frequent there. The primary idea is uncertain. It is perhaps easier on the whole to suppose that the abstract sense of ‘formlessness,’ or the like, gave rise to a poetic name for desert, than that the concrete ‘desert’ passed over into the abstract ‘formlessness’; but we have no assurance that either represents the actual development of the idea. It seems not improbable that the OT usage is entirely based on the traditional description of the primæval chaos, and that the word had no definite connotation in Heb., but was used to express any conception naturally associated with the idea of chaos—‘formlessness,’ ‘confusion,’ ‘unreality,’ etc.—בהו] (never found apart from תהו) may be connected with *bahiya* = ‘be empty’; though Ar. is hardly a safe guide in the case of a word with a long history behind it. The identification with *Baau*, the mother of the first man in Phœn. mythology (see p. 49 f.), is

space (Gu.). But our safest guide is perhaps Jeremiah's vision of Chaos-come-again (4²³⁻²⁶), which is simply that of a darkened and devastated earth, from which life and order have fled. The idea here is probably similar, with this difference, that the distinction of land and sea is effaced, and the earth, which is the subj. of the sentence, must be understood as the amorphous watery mass in which the elements of the future land and sea were commingled.—*Darkness* (an almost invariable feature of ancient conceptions of chaos) *was upon the face of the Deep*] The *Deep* (תְּהוֹם) is the subterranean ocean on which the earth rests (Gn. 7¹¹ 8² 49²⁵, Am. 7⁴ etc.); which, therefore, before the earth was formed, lay bare and open to the superincumbent darkness. In the Babylonian Creation-myth the primal chaos is personified under the name *Ti'āmat*. The Heb. narrative is free from mythological associations, and it is doubtful if even a trace of personification lingers in the name תְּהוֹם. In Babylonian, *ti'āmatu* or *tāmtu* is a generic term for 'ocean'; and it is conceivable that this literal sense may be the origin of the Heb. conception of the Deep (see p. 47).—*The Spirit of God was brooding*] not, as has sometimes been supposed, a *wind* sent from God to dry

probable.—תְּהוֹם] is undoubtedly the philological equivalent of Bab. *Ti'āmat*: a connexion with Ar. *Tihāmat*, the Red Sea littoral province (Hoffmann in *ZATW*, iii. 118), is more dubious (see Lane, 320 b, c; Jensen, *KIB*, vi. 1, 560). In early Heb. the word is rare, and always (with poss. exception of Ex. 15^{5, 8}) denotes the subterranean ocean, which is the source from which earthly springs and fountains are fed (Gn. 49²⁵, Dt. 33¹³, Am. 7⁴, and so Dt. 8⁷, Gn. 7¹¹ 8² (P); cf. Hom. *Il.* xxi. 195), and is a remnant of the primal chaos (Gn. 1², Ps. 104⁶, Pr. 8²⁷). In later writings it is used of the sea (pl. seas), and even of torrents of water (Ps. 42⁸); but, the passages being poetic, there is probably always to be detected a reference to the world-ocean, either as source of springs, or as specialised in earthly oceans (see Ezk. 26¹⁹). Though the word is almost confined to poetry (except Gn. 1² 7¹¹ 8², Dt. 8⁷, Am. 7⁴), the only clear cases of personification are Gn. 49²⁵, Dt. 33¹³ (*Tēhôm* that coucheth beneath). The invariable absence of the art. (except with pl. in Ps. 106⁹, Is. 63¹³) proves that it is a proper name, but *not* that it is a personification (cf. the case of אֵלִים). On the other hand, it is noteworthy that תְּהוֹם, unlike most Heb. names of fluids, is fem., becoming occasionally masc. only in later times when its primary sense had been forgotten (cf. Albrecht, *ZATW*, xvi. 62): this might be