

different tests of an idyll be applied, Solomon himself becomes the shepherd lover ; the incidents shadowed forth are that Solomon, visiting his estates in Lebanon, had surprised a fair Shulammitte keeping her brother's vineyards, that when she fled from him he visited her disguised as a shepherd and won her love, that he came in royal state and claimed her as his bride, and they are espoused and dwelling together in the royal palace before the idyll opens. Thus the very story underlying the poem comes out quite differently according as one or another technical classification of the work is accepted. The Bible is full of opportunities for comparison of literary form, with the literary grasp that such comparison develops. There can be few better exercises in lyric criticism than a minute comparison of Deborah's Song with the prose narrative of the same events in the preceding chapter. Similarly to compare the account of the procession that escorted the ark to Jerusalem, as given in Samuel and in Chronicles, is a great aid toward distinguishing the two types of history, that which leans to epic narrative, and the scientific history that makes selection of details upon some principle—in the case of Chronicles, with a view to their bearing upon the priestly service. It is specially important to study the dramatic element in Scripture, because the assistance to the eye which the proper printing of dialogue gives to every other book seems denied to the Bible. The dramatic form invades some of the most familiar and sacred portions of Isaiah and the other prophets, and yet is scarcely suspected by the ordinary reader. Or, to take the simplest of examples, Psalm CXVIII. is one of those which can only be appreciated when it is recognized as a ritual psalm in which three parties unite ; the first portion consisting of alternations between the soloist—representing a worshipper recently delivered from sickness—and his chorus of friends, sung as they approach the temple, while at verse 20 the temple gate opens and discloses a chorus of priests, whose words of reception (in verses 20, 26) make the third element of the dialogue.

It is another obvious line of literary study that the matter of biblical literature should be read in the light of contemporary history. It is a good exercise to analyze the allusions, imagery, etc., of a writer for the purpose of creating the surroundings amid which he wrote : given the Book of Job to describe the land of Uz, or from the books of Ezekiel and Daniel to study the character of those prophets' places of exile. It is still more important to read continuously some portion of sacred history, and side by side with this the poetry belonging to or bearing upon this epoch ; the student may puzzle this out for himself, or find the combination ready to hand in the grand work of Stanley upon the History of the Jewish Church. True, this department of work overlaps the field of controversial questions with their opposing conclusions. But the paradox may be ventured, that it is better to read poetry in the wrong historic setting than to fall into a habit of looking for no historic framework at all.

A few practical considerations may be added. It may be laid down that