

or argument that appeals to the understanding, poetry is the product of the imagination, and appeals first of all to the imagination. It aims to set a picture before the mind for its contemplation, and best fulfils its purpose when the impression created by that picture is so deep and clear as to stir emotion or arouse to action.

In order to reach the imagination the poet constantly substitutes the material for the spiritual, the concrete for the abstract, the particular for the general. If we would get at his real meaning, therefore, we must translate his language into its prose equivalents, discounting everything that is superadded for the sake of effect. It has to be borne in mind that the picture is only a means to an end. It is not intended to be taken as literally true, and, indeed, may have only the slenderest basis in actual fact.

When, for instance, Deborah sings her song of victory over the Canaanites and says that

The stars in their courses fought against Sisera

no one supposes this to have been literally true. It is intended to suggest that the powers of heaven were hostile to the Canaanites and gave the victory to Israel. Possibly there may have been something in the wind or weather on the day of battle to furnish a peg on which to hang the statement and give it additional force for the popular mind. But it would be equally true in its main intention whether there was any such fact or not.

So on a larger scale we must read such a composition as the one hundred and fourth Psalm—a poem of creation. There can be no doubt that the main truths set forth there are the creative power and the providential government of God. Picture after picture is given to make these points clear. But it would be the supremest folly to seek in these pictures a scientific account of the mode of creation at the beginning, or of the method of God's government to-day. Here and there of course we get a touch which is literally as well as metaphorically true. These touches are there, however, not because they are true, but because they give greater verisimilitude to the picture. They hold it, as it were, down