

form, are poetical in their thought and style of expression. Though apparently written in prose, they are, to all intents and purposes, poems, so much so, at least, that they cannot be rightly understood or appreciated unless they are treated as such. The fact that these are written in prose form, somewhat obscures their real poetical character, and makes it more difficult than it would otherwise be to draw a sharp line of distinction between the parts which are really prose and those which are really poetry, so that there is some room for difference of opinion on the matter. But the distinction in general is broad enough, and cannot be denied by any one who cares to look at the subject fairly at all. When, for example, Isaiah in his initial discourse opens with the splendid apostrophe: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord God hath spoken." We feel that we are at once in the poetical realm and that the difference between it and true poetry is only one of the arrangement of words. There is little need, however, to dwell on this at greater length as it is now pretty generally recognized as true.

What has not been sufficiently recognized, even by learned commentators and scientific theologians, is the bearing of this fact on the interpretation of all such portions of Scripture. One will search in vain through the works on Biblical Hermeneutics for any adequate treatment of the interpretation of poetry as distinguished from prose. The most that one finds are a few brief paragraphs on the treatment of certain figures of speech which might occur in any style of composition, and need not in any way affect the method of interpreting the rest. There is seldom any apparent appreciation of the radical difference between prose and poetry or of the widely different principles by which the interpreter must be governed in the exegesis of the two distinct literary forms.

What then is poetry and how is it to be interpreted?

There is probably no definition of poetry as yet suggested which is beyond criticism, but there are some outstanding features of it which cannot well be mistaken. As distinguished from prose, which is the natural expression of fact