

about books ; and how great the temptation is to the scholarly teacher to delay his pupils on the threshold with matters of biographical, textual, linguistic criticism, until the student has hardly time left him to get to the very heart of his author. Does not a similar danger threaten the present attitude of the public mind to the Bible ? If the course of present day thinking occupies so large a portion of our thoughts with discussions *about* the sacred writings—discussions, no doubt, of the utmost importance and value—is it not at least desirable that some counter influence should be sought that will keep us face to face with the writings themselves, and saturate us with their words and thoughts ? Now, the literary study here contemplated is just of the nature required ; it takes its stand upon a literary interpretation which is independent of questions of authority, and which would remain the same whether the strictest inspirationist or the most uncompromising iconoclast should triumph in the end. Let our topic be the “*Plagues of Egypt.*” To most people this is a theme full of controversial associations ; it raises the grand question of miracles, while every form of critical discussion is concentrated upon the Pentateuch. But the purely literary student, as such, has no concern with these disputes. He is interested in noting three accounts of these plagues of Egypt, illustrating three different literary styles. In Exodus there is a description of these incidents which may be called epic. The successive physical convulsions pass before us like a moving panorama, and against this ever-darkening background are coming more and more into relief two heroic figures—Pharaoh with the hardening heart, and Moses the wonder-working deliverer—until the whole finds a double climax in Pharaoh with his hosts overthrown in the Red Sea, and Moses leading the delivered Israelites in a song of triumph. In the Psalms we again come upon the plagues of Egypt, but now the description is lyric ; each incident appears artistically diminished until it is no more than a link in a chain of providence ; each plague is told in a clause, with only the lyric rhythm to convey the march of events. A third account is found in the Book of Wisdom. Here the reverent curiosity of a later age has ventured to read into the reticence of the earlier narrative a whole array of terrible details. Where Exodus spoke of a “*darkness that might be felt,*” the author of Wisdom imagines all that the imprisoned Egyptians felt in the overpowering dark : the strange apparitions, the sad visions with heavy countenance, the sound of falling noises, the dread of the very air which could on no side be avoided, and themselves to themselves more dreadful than the darkness. Thus on this one topic we have three literary styles—the epic, the lyric, and the picturesque—perfectly illustrated ; and no more possibility of controversy in the whole than if we were listening to Handel’s oratorio of “*Israel in Egypt.*”

The limits of our article admit only the briefest possible survey of topics for such literary study. One is to be found in the structure of biblical style, more especially such questions of structure as are discussed in Dr.