

THE CRITICAL METHOD

It is often stated that we must be ready to apply the same methods of literary and historical criticism to the Bible that we do to other books. This makes it all the more important that we recognize that the methods of the higher criticism, as currently applied to the Bible, represent certain common attitudes and activities of a century ago which are now very largely abandoned, so far as all other literature is concerned.

Certain tendencies developed particularly in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century. These tendencies were for a time strongly resisted in England, although a number of prominent writers and thinkers gave them their support. In the latter part of the century they swept through England and America, and became very influential in the English-speaking world. The present century has seen a great withdrawal from these factors; in fact, the majority of literary critics have tended almost to an extreme in the opposite direction. The sort of historical criticism, or higher criticism, that is now applied to the Bible, if applied in almost any other literature today, would be quite out of harmony with present methods of thought. In order to examine this situation, we shall briefly look at four factors that have entered into the higher criticism of the Bible as presently taught. Of these four factors three were common in reference to other books during the past century. The fourth one developed in relation to the Bible during the past century, and is hardly to be duplicated in relation to other literature. ~~All four of them are quite out of harmony with present literary and historical attitudes.~~ (duplication = see 6th line above)

represent attitudes which had their day and then largely disappeared, but which still survive in form in the Documentary theory of the Pentateuch.