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HIGHER CRITICISM---ITS USES AND ITS ABUSES

During the early part of this century there was much discussion in Christian circles about the Higher Criticism. Many Bible students declared that it would destroy Christian faith and undermine the churches. Others insisted that it provided a valuable step forward, asking "Why should we be afraid of scientific fact? How could Christian faith be harmed by treating the Bible in the same way that other books are treated?" These arguments were carried on extensively for a number of years. Today there is little debate directly on the subject, but its effects are felt in many areas, even if not always realized.

At the beginning of a recent series of discussions with students from more than a score of colleges and universities I asked how many of them were concerned with problems related to Higher Criticism and very few answered in the affirmative. Yet as the discussion proceeded it was soon evident that most of them had serious problems directly stemming from this source.

Today most evangelicals tend to believe that Higher Criticism is ridiculous and unworthy of attention. On the other hand, most courses in religion in secular institutions and most of the teaching about the Bible in the older theological seminaries assume that the "assured results of criticism" are so completely proven that there is little need to discuss their validity.

The phrase "higher criticism" occurred frequently in secular critical writings from the eighteenth century to the early part of the twentieth century. The term did not imply that it was superior to what was known as "lower criticism," but simply that it dealt with a different aspect of literary study. Lower criticism, which involved efforts to determine the