

"THE HIGHER CRITICISM AND THE PULPIT."

REV. DR. THOS. C. HALL, FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO.

THE literary criticism of the Bible no longer alarms devout scholarship, and the number of Christian hearts discovering both help and freedom from acceptance of its methods, daily increases. The duty of the pulpit toward recent scientific hypothesis, intended to link together the facts ascertained, needs careful thought on the part of every preacher. It will no longer be for edification to treat, for instance, the Book of Jonah as if no Christian man dare doubt its purely historical character, when even well instructed boys know that devoutest Christian teachers hold opposite opinions. Nor will it be for the furtherance of righteousness to maintain and plead ignorance of these "new-fangled" theories on the ground that they are not proved and are only theories. For, in the first instance intelligence will suggest that a qualified religious teacher ought not to be ignorant about lines so confessedly germane to his topic; and the same intelligence will think farther and allege that the traditional opinions are also only theories, and perhaps discredited theories at that. It is the business of any religious teacher to master, so far as time and strength permit him, the facts relating to authorship, date, composition, etc., of the sacred books. It must, however, be also quite self-evident that the ordinary preacher cannot in the nature of things be a specialist and independent worker in the fields of the literary criticism of the Old and New Testaments. The most that is within the reach of the ordinary hard-working pastor, is some acquaintance with the best studies he can find by men, to whom time and capacity permit deeper research than is open to him. It should also be quite evident that the ordinary congregation will have even less time for the study of literary details, and will be even less interested than the preacher in new and more complete hypotheses intended to explain the problems raised in history, archaeology and kindred branches by the Bible. It may be timely now and then to instruct in the geography, archaeology and tongues of the Bible, but that is neither the chief work of the pulpit nor yet the best place for such instruction. As preachers, we should know what specialists are doing in explaining the acknowledged scientific problems of the Bible literature. It is not difficult to so far master the recent work in outline, that whether we accept the conclusions or no, we will not hopelessly blunder when speaking about them. We will not then class Kuenen and Robertson Smith together as holding like views, as a recent critic does; nor allude to "Dillmann and the rest of the Tuebingen school," as the writer lately heard an ignorant but popular preacher do.