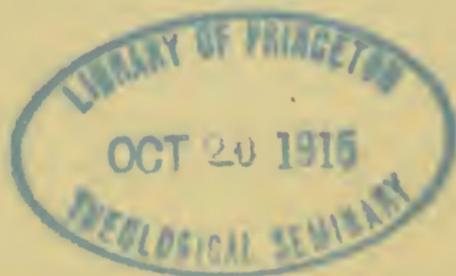


The
Synoptic
Problem

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THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

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To
Marcus D. Buell
AN AUTHORITY IN THIS FIELD

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FOREWORD

THIS little book is an attempt to boil down into briefest compass the result of the reading of many thousands of pages on this subject. It is written for the benefit of those who cannot take the time to master the voluminous literature in this field, but who would like to have some notion as to what it is all about. The intelligent layman and the busy pastor may find some of their questions answered in these pages, and if enough interest should be roused to lead to the reading of any of the books mentioned in the brief bibliography at the close, the time thus given will be found to be well spent. We have compiled these facts from many sources. We have had the original Greek before us at every point. Some of the translations we have made for ourselves.

The Bible is the most interesting of all the books. Its problems attract us as well as its promises. It piques our curiosity and stimulates our intellect, as well as warms our heart and ministers to our spiritual life. We are interested in all the facts concerning it. Some of them are set forth here. It will do us good to know the facts, and we are free to draw our own conclusions from them. All the facts we have found have helped us rather than hindered us in the proper appreciation and reverence of the Book. We are confident that with all others who love the truth even as they love the God of truth it will be just as it has been with ourselves.

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

I. DEFINITIONS

It will be well to define our terms first of all:

1. The Gospels are the four narratives of the life of Christ found in our New Testament.

2. The synoptic Gospels are the first three Gospels as distinguished from the fourth. They are given this title because they present the same general view of the life of Christ. According to the composition of the Greek word *σύνοψις* they "view" that life "together." They resemble each other sufficiently to form a related group. The fourth Gospel is so peculiar that it cannot be put into this group. Expressed in homely phrase, the synoptic Gospels are like birds of

a feather which flock together; the fourth Gospel is like an eagle which flies alone.

3. The problem of the synoptic Gospels is furnished in the fact that while they remarkably resemble each other in general, they strangely differ with each other in particulars. Written in parallel columns they are seen to present curiously intermingled phenomena of apparent originality and seeming plagiarism. At various points each appears to be independent, while in other places all appear to be interdependent. Their narratives of incidents and discourses now approach each other, now coalesce, now separate. They are now identical and now different. Their relationship is sometimes clear and sometimes obscure. It is like a series of dissolving pictures in which one unexpectedly replaces the other: and it is difficult to define the beginning or the end of any of them. There must be some reason

for these things. There must be some explanation for these shifting phenomena.

Why are there these parallelisms and these divergences? Why are the Synoptics so like each other and yet so unlike? The problem of the synoptic Gospels is to find a satisfactory and a sufficient answer to these questions. It is the most difficult problem of present-day New Testament criticism. Possibly as much has been written about it as about any other problem in the history of literature, but it has not been solved as yet. It is the great enigma of the beginning of our New Testament canon, as the Apocalypse is the great enigma of its close. All of the solutions of the synoptic problem thus far offered are largely guesses in the dark. None of them is absolutely satisfactory. None of them may be more than partly right.

In some places the Synoptics are identical in their statements; in other

places they are like each other; in still other places they differ with each other; in a few instances they contradict each other. These are the facts. What theory of their origin will account for these facts? That is our problem. We will look at it a little more closely now.

II. RESEMBLANCES

The resemblances in the Synoptics consist:

1. In absolute identity of language. This is never very extensive, but it is sufficiently striking when it occurs. (1) In one quotation from the Old Testament, found in all the synoptists, the identity of language reaches in the original through fifteen consecutive words. Here Matthew and Mark agree in saying, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit upon my right hand, until I may place thy enemies under thy feet," and Luke agrees with

them for fifteen words, but diverges from them in the end in order to agree with the Septuagint which reads, "until I may place thy enemies as the footstool of thy feet" (Matt. 22. 44; Mark 12. 36; Luke 20. 42, 43). Another striking instance of agreement between the three synoptists through fourteen consecutive words is in the quotation from Isaiah, "A voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," and it is remarkable that in this case they all agree in misquoting the Septuagint which reads, "Make straight the paths of our God," and this is the correct rendering of the Hebrew original (Matt. 3. 3; Mark 1. 3; Luke 3. 4).

(2) In one case in the narrative portion of the synoptists absolute identity, including the order of the words in the original Greek, extends through the twelve words, "the five loaves, and the two fishes, having looked up to heaven,

he blessed" (Matt. 14. 19; Mark 6. 41; Luke 9. 16). In no case in the narratives does such agreement extend through more than twelve words, and it seldom goes beyond four or six words.

(3) In reporting the sayings of Jesus the synoptists will sometimes agree in as many as eight successive words, but there are not half a dozen instances where absolute agreement is maintained through five consecutive words! If they all quoted from the Old Testament the same text and the same passage, and if they all quoted correctly, we would have an absolute agreement at these points. Such absolute agreement is never found through more than fifteen words. If they all reported the same words of Jesus, and reported them exactly, we would have perfect agreement in these portions of their narratives. Such agreement never occurs extending through more than eight consecutive

words. This is a strange fact. How can we account for these resemblances in absolute identity of phraseology, extending for a short measure only and then ceasing suddenly and for no apparent good reason?

2. There are certain very peculiar words found in our New Testament. Possibly the most puzzling of them all is the word translated "daily" in the so-called Lord's Prayer, in the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." No one has ever been certain that that word was rightly translated. No one is sure of its meaning to-day. Scholarship has always been divided on the question. No sufficient data exist upon the basis of which one may come to any final conclusion. The word is not found in ancient literature before the time of the New Testament. It occurs in only this one connection in the New Testament. It is never found in later literature, except in quotations from this source. The

Greek and Latin fathers never could agree upon its meaning, and modern scholars have no reason to agree which they had not.

Now, if such a rare and absolutely unique expression as this were found in only one of our synoptists, we might think that he had coined it for his own use; but, strangely enough, this strange word is found in both Matthew and Luke. How can we account for that fact? Did Jesus use some Aramaic term which had been translated into this unusual and uncouth Greek expression by some one not well acquainted with the language, and did both Matthew and Luke repeat this oral or written translation? At many other points we come upon peculiarities of language which are common to two or to three of the synoptists, and suggest a common source and raise the same question.

3. Sometimes a narrative is told in the same method by the three synop-

tists, when that method is not one which would naturally occur to three independent writers. Take the account of the healing of the paralytic at Capernaum for an example. The synoptists all tell us how Jesus turned upon the scribes on that occasion, and how in the midst of his address to them he suddenly halted in the middle of a sentence and commanded the paralytic to rise and go home. At the same point they all insert the same parenthesis, "Then saith he to the sick of the palsy," "He saith to the sick of the palsy," "He said unto him that was palsied" (Matt. 9. 6; Mark 2. 11; Luke 5. 24). It is remarkable that the three should insert the parenthesis at exactly the same place in the broken narrative. That one writer should independently choose this method of telling the story would be possible. That two should agree in it independently would seem improbable. That three should do so is next to impossible.

In the account of the cure of the Gerasene demoniac there is a similar parenthesis, thrown in to explain what has gone before. First we have the demoniac's plea, "I adjure thee by God, torment me not," and then the reason for that adjuration is appended: "For he said unto him, Come forth, thou unclean spirit, out of the man." In Mark and in Luke we have the same inverted order; first the remonstrance and then the command (Mark 5. 7, 8; Luke 8. 28, 29). The natural order of narration would have been to give the command first and the resulting remonstrance afterward. That one should choose to invert the order would seem strange. That two should agree in doing it independently would seem most improbable. Other such instances might be given. They all go to prove that these stories, for some reason or another, had taken a stereotyped form, which is reproduced by each narrator.

4. In the main the synoptists follow the same order of events. They resemble each other in the chronological arrangement of their material. Sometimes we have a series of events in one of them, leading up to a crisis in the career of Jesus, and then suddenly we seem to lose the thread of the narrative; and we turn to another of the synoptists to see what happened next, only to find that he has failed us at the very same point. Then we turn to the third, sure that one at least will tell us what we so much would like to know, and we find that the same period of silence intervenes in his narrative at exactly the same juncture of events. Then, after a certain interval of days and months, the three will take up the story again at exactly the same point. That is what we mean by saying that the synoptists in general have the same order. That order would seem to be fixed in the Gospel according to Mark. Fre-

quently when Matthew diverges from the order of Mark, Luke will be found to agree with Mark; and, on the other hand, when Luke diverges from Mark's order at any point, Matthew frequently will follow Mark in that place. Matthew and Luke never agree in transposing the order of Mark.

5. What has just been said leads us to the next statement. The synoptists strangely agree in the selection of their material. The life of Jesus was the most interesting and the most remarkable life ever known to the race. It was only thirty-three years in length; but out of those superlatively important years our Gospels possibly give us incidents from only forty days. There must have been many other days just as full of interest and excitement as those which they recorded. Out of the multitudes of the days why have they decided to tell us about only forty of them? If one had chosen these forty days for

his record, why did not another choose forty other days just as wonderful, and the third enrich our knowledge with the account of still new and equally marvelous material? It is a strange fact that they should choose, for the most part, to tell us about the same things. They all mention the fact that there were numberless unrecorded miracles, and yet each of the synoptists tells about much the same list of miracles that is to be found in the others. When we turn from the synoptists to John we find a new list of miracles there and we see at once that these new miracles were just as important, or, possibly in some cases, even more important than any to be found in the synoptists. The greatest of all the miracles, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, is found in the fourth Gospel alone. No one of our synoptists has mentioned it.

The closing statement in the fourth Gospel is to the effect that there are

also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, it might be supposed that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written. There was an abundance of material known to the eyewitnesses of the ministry of the Lord which is now lost forever. Why did not our synop-
tists do as the author of the fourth Gospel did, and each of them give us an original and fresh putting of the life of Jesus, with fresh material chosen from this inexhaustible abundance of supply, instead of telling the same story over in much the same way?

We know so little of what Jesus did. We should like to know so much more. We know so little of what Jesus said. We would esteem every added word that we could be assured fell from his lips as an invaluable treasure. Yet all the recorded sayings of Jesus could be spoken in six hours. What a meager measure of the words of life

that is! Six hours of golden speech, and over all the rest of the life a pall of perfect silence! We have learned to content ourselves with what we have, and yet why did our synoptists choose to give us so much material common to all when each of them might have added so much that would have been peculiar to them and made us so much the richer in our possession of the facts concerning the life and the truths enunciated in the teachings of Jesus?

The synoptists resemble each other, sometimes in absolute identity of expression, sometimes in peculiarities of language, sometimes in the method followed in an individual narration, in general in the order of their chronicles, and in the selection of their facts. What reason is there for these likenesses? Evidently, the individuality of each of these evangelists has been overruled by some external norm to produce these conformities to one

model and these uniformities of result.

III. DIFFERENCES

To get the synoptic problem clearly before us we must also look at the differences between them. It would be comparatively easy to account for their resemblances on the ground of the influence of an external and controlling norm, but the problem becomes more complicated when we take their differences into consideration. The question at once arises, If there were any such controlling norm as their resemblances would indicate, why has it not controlled more completely? What reason can be suggested for such divergences as we shall now consider?

1. They differ in the transposition of sentences and paragraphs in the account both of incidents and of sayings in the life of Jesus. For example, Matthew gives the order of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness as,

first, the turning of stones into bread; and, second, the casting of himself down from the pinnacle of the temple; and, third, the worshiping of Satan for the kingdoms of the world. Luke gives us the same story of the temptations, but he puts the third of Matthew's list second, and the second he puts last. There is no apparent reason for such a transposition. If this narrative were intended to be taken as a literal narrative of facts, then, of course, both Matthew and Luke could not be correct in their order of the events.

In Matthew's narrative Jesus prophesies that the men of Nineveh shall condemn the men of his generation and then goes on to say the same thing of the queen of the south. Luke repeats these sayings, but reverses their order. In the account of the Last Supper Mark and Matthew tell about the giving of the bread and then the giving of the cup to the

disciples. Luke introduces a giving of the cup before the breaking of the bread, and connects with it some of the language assigned by the other synoptists to the cup given after the Supper. These seem to be strange and unexpected and unaccountable divergences. Can anyone give any sufficient and satisfactory explanation of them?

2. There are strange omissions in each of the synoptists. If they were following a common source, how are we to account for them? We are told that Luke was a Gentile, and that he took every opportunity to emphasize any portion of the teaching of Jesus which made clear the fact that his gospel was a gospel for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. If that be true, how does it happen that Mark tells us that Jesus taught the people in the temple, saying, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the Gentiles" (Mark

11. 17), and Luke repeats the saying, "My house shall be a house of prayer," but omits the significant phrase "for all the Gentiles"? (Luke 19. 46.) We would have supposed that Luke would be sure to put that in, yet he omits it.

In Mark we read, "The gospel must first be preached unto all the Gentiles" (Mark 13. 10), and in Matthew we read the same statement: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the Gentiles" (Matt. 24. 14). Then we turn to Luke and we find that he gives the same discourse of Jesus concerning the last things, and Luke's account parallels that of Mark and Matthew at almost every point, and yet, strangely enough, when we come to this statement concerning the preaching of the gospel to all of the Gentiles we find that Luke omits it. We would have thought that there was no saying in that discourse which

Luke would have been so eager to record as that one. How can we explain such an omission? In Mark 7. 31 we are told that Jesus made a journey through the Gentile cities of Decapolis, and Mark gives some account of the things that happened there. Luke omits all mention of this journey and of these things. How strange that is! He must have been interested in these happenings in a very special degree. Why does he make no mention of them, Gentile as he probably was?

Compare what Matthew calls the Sermon on the Mount with what Luke calls the Sermon on the Plain. They seem to be the same discourse. Yet Matthew says that Jesus *went up* into the *mountain* and *sat down* to preach that sermon (Matt. 5. 1), and Luke says that Jesus *came down* and *stood on a level place* while he talked (Luke 6. 17). In Matthew the sermon begins with eight beatitudes. In

Luke there are but four, corresponding to Matthew's first, second, fourth, and eighth; and the first three of these seem to be so materially changed that we can scarcely recognize their spiritual character. Then Luke adds four woes corresponding to his four beatitudes, which have no parallel in Matthew. What seems to be a single discourse in Matthew we find to be scattered in fragments throughout Luke's narrative from the sixth to the sixteenth chapters. Following the order of the discourse in Matthew, we find the corresponding sayings in Luke first in the sixth chapter, then in the sixteenth, then in the twelfth, then in the sixth, then in the eleventh, then in the twelfth, then in the eleventh, then in the sixteenth, then in the twelfth, then in the sixth, then in the eleventh, then in the sixth, then in the thirteenth, then in the sixth, then in the thirteenth, then in the sixth again. Has Luke given us the proper setting for

these several fragments of discourse, or did Jesus repeat himself and gather up into one discourse what he had said on several other occasions? Shall we trust Matthew alone, or Luke alone, or both?

3. A third difference is in the insertion of long narratives. The best example is to be found in what is usually called "the greater insertion" in Luke. In the middle of his narrative Luke has given us a large section, 9. 45 to 18. 30, the most of the material in which is peculiar to him. The other Gospels pass over these events in silence, and yet some of them are among the most remarkable in our Lord's ministry. Altogether, about three fifths of the contents of Luke are not to be found in the other Gospels. Stroud made a mathematical presentation of the facts in his familiar table. If the contents of the several Gospels be represented by 100, then Mark has 7 peculiarities and 93

coincidences. Matthew has 42 peculiarities and 58 coincidences. Luke has 59 peculiarities and 41 coincidences. This table shows that in Mark there is very little which is not paralleled in the other Gospels, while more than half of the contents of Matthew is repeated in the other Synoptics, and more than two fifths of the contents of Luke. Nevertheless, it remains true that in each of the Gospels there are insertions of narratives and discourses not to be found in the others.

4. There are puzzling differences in the report of the same incident or the same saying. In the storm on the lake the disciples wake Jesus with a cry of terror. Mark reports it, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4. 38.) Matthew records that they said, "Save, Lord, we perish" (Matt. 8. 25), and Luke changes the speech again, recording it, "Master, master, we perish" (Luke 8. 24). These are not important differences.

We note them simply as examples of the slight changes in the narratives found on every page. In the saying of Jesus, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle," we find one word for "eye" in Mark and another in Matthew and Luke; and we find one word for "needle" in Luke and another in Matthew and Mark. In Matthew and Mark we read that Herod said to others, "This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead." In Luke we read that others said this to Herod. In the account of the crucifixion Mark says that one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to Jesus to drink, saying, "Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to take him down" (Mark 15. 36). In Matthew we find the same account, but this speech, "Let be: let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him," is put into the mouth of the bystanders (Matt. 27. 49). Examples of such

differences could be multiplied indefinitely.

5. Sometimes statements are made by one of the synoptists which would lead us to mistaken conclusions if another of the synoptists did not set us right in the matter. For example, if we had only Matthew's account of the birth and infancy of Jesus, we would suppose that Joseph and Mary went to Nazareth only after the return from Egypt and in consequence of a divine warning in a dream. However, from Luke we learn that Nazareth was the home city of the parents of Jesus, that they left it and went to Bethlehem only for the census, and that after the presentation in the temple they returned to Nazareth again. If we had Luke's account of the resurrection appearances of Jesus, and no other, we would have supposed that all of these were in the neighborhood of Jerusalem; but Matthew tells us plainly of an appearance in Galilee as well.

6. The synoptists sometimes contradict each other. In Luke 3. 3 we read that John the Baptist came into all the region round about Jordan. In Matt. 3. 5 the statement is that all the region round about Jordan went out unto John. In Mark 6. 8, 9 Jesus expressly permits the twelve to carry staves and to go shod with sandals. In Matt. 10. 10 Jesus just as expressly prohibits these things to the twelve. It is evidently the same discourse, and it is seemingly impossible for both evangelists to be correct. Jesus either permitted or prohibited these things. He could not have done both at one and the same time. Mark tells us that Herodias desired to kill John, but she could not because Herod feared him. Matthew says that Herod desired to kill John and did not, because he feared the multitude. These statements are not necessarily contradictory, although they are apparently so.

Matthew and Mark both say that the transfiguration took place six days after the events just recorded by them. Luke explicitly says that it took place eight days after these things. Matthew says that Jesus commanded his disciples to pray after the manner which he records in his Sermon on the Mount. Luke records this prayer upon another occasion and not at all after that manner. He omits two of the petitions found in Matthew and changes two of the others. Matthew would have us pray after one manner, Luke would have us pray differently; and, as a matter of fact, most of us repeat the prayer in a manner different from that prescribed by either of them.

In Mark Jairus tells Jesus that his daughter is at the point of death (Mark 5. 23). In Matthew Jairus says that she is already dead (Matt. 9. 18). In Matt. 8. 5 we read that the centurion himself came to Jesus.

In Luke 7. 3 we read that he sent unto Jesus some of the Jews. Matthew seems to put the profaning of the Sabbath by plucking and eating ears of corn and by curing the man with the withered hand on the same Sabbath. Luke explicitly says that the miracle of the cure was performed on another Sabbath. In Mark Peter's denial follows the trial before the Sanhedrin, while in Luke it precedes it. Mark says that the women came to the tomb when the Sabbath was past. Matthew says that they came late on the Sabbath. Luke says that they came on the first day of the week, at early dawn.

Mark tells us that as Jesus went out from Jericho the blind beggar, Bartimæus, was healed. Matthew says that as they went out from Jericho two blind men were healed. Luke says that as Jesus drew nigh unto Jericho a certain blind man was healed, and from his account we conclude that it

was the man whom Mark called Bar-timæus. Why does Matthew say there were two blind men, while Mark and Luke mention only one? Why do Mark and Matthew locate the healing at the time of leaving Jericho, while Luke puts it at the time of entering the city? This list of apparent and real contradictions might be increased. However, none of the other cases are of any greater importance than these we have instanced; and all will agree that particulars like these are not essential to the conception of the life and work of Christ. The important fact in the last example, for instance, is the fact of the healing and not the exact spot at which it took place.

We have now seen that the synop-tists follow the same general order of narration, repeat each other in much or most of their material, sometimes follow the same strange method of telling their story, sometimes repro-duce certain peculiarities of language,

and sometimes are not merely parallel but absolutely identical in their expressions. On the other hand, we have seen that they do not always follow the same order in their narratives, and each of them adds to the narratives of the others, and each of them omits portions of the narratives of the others, and each of them transposes the narratives of the others, and they give different accounts of the same event or the same saying, and they apparently and really contradict each other at certain minor points. How are we to explain these strange phenomena? That is the problem.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Let us say, first of all, that Jesus is not directly responsible for the record found in our Synoptics or for the form in which that record has been made. He never interested himself in such things. He himself never wrote anything while he was upon

the earth, as far as we know, except upon one occasion when he wrote with his finger in the dust upon the temple floor something or other of great moment to those who were looking on; but we can only guess what it was, and we know that that writing was obliterated and lost long ago. Jesus never dictated anything to anyone for later publication. We do not know that anyone ever thought of taking notes of any of his sayings or doings while he was still with them. We read in one place that his disciples remembered that he had said certain things only after his resurrection from the dead. Evidently, they had no written notes from which to refresh their memories of these things.

We do not gather from our records that Jesus ever took any special pains to impress any particular phraseology upon the minds of his followers. Possibly the formulation of the so-called Lord's Prayer might stand as a single

example of that sort; and we have seen how in that case we have very different versions handed down to us. Then, if Jesus never dictated anything, nor wrote anything, nor taught anything with patient repetitions until he was sure that the disciples had it committed with verbal exactness which would insure absolute integrity in its preservation, it would seem that he was not convinced of the necessity of any such thing, and was willing that the record of his life and words should be left to the chances of imperfect remembrance and something less than infallible accuracy of preservation. At any rate, his evident negligence to provide any written memorials in his lifetime will clear him of all responsibility for our synoptic Gospels in the exact form in which we have them to-day. They were produced after his death. The responsibility for them must lie in other hands.

2. Let us say, in the second place,

that the Holy Spirit is not responsible for the exact form in which any one of our Synoptics appears. The doctrine of literal verbal inspiration must surely go to pieces in any candid mind before the parallel columns of Rushbrooke's Synopticon, or Wright's Synopsis of the Gospels in Greek, or Thompson's The Synoptic Gospels. The minute and meaningless variations in these parallel columns would convict any man of irreverence and irrationality if he could be proven to be individually responsible for all of them. The purposelessness and the frivolity of these almost numberless and wholly insignificant changes from one tense to another, and from one mood to another, and from one number to another, and from one case to another would be just as apparent if the responsibility for them was thrown back upon the Holy Spirit. We find one order of words in one synoptist, and we find another order of the same

words in another synoptist. No possible reason can be assigned for the change in the order. The meaning is not changed; the emphasis is not changed. It seems to be a purely arbitrary choice on the part of each writer. That is an explanation of the change; but if a single personality were made responsible for both forms, we would at once challenge the sense or the use of it. We have too much reverence for the Holy Spirit to say he is responsible for these textual, verbal, literal, minute, and unimportant and arbitrary changes.

3. We conclude, then, in the third place, that these phenomena both of resemblance and of divergence in the synoptists must rest, in the last analysis, upon the responsibility and the personality of the individual authors or compilers. In the Royal Art Museum in Berlin there is a picture of Matthew writing his Gospel. He is represented as an old man with a

flowing beard, seated at a desk upon which there is a roll. Behind him stands an angel who reaches over his shoulder and guides his pen. There is a look of intense surprise on Matthew's face, as he sees what his own hand guided by the angel has written. The picture represents a once common conception of inspiration; the arbitrary, mechanical guidance of a pen rather than the inspiration of a man. God guides no man's pen as the mechanical instrument of his will. He moves some man's heart, and the man, heart-stirred, moves his own pen with active brain and willing hand. God does not send messages through human telephones. His words are not repeated by human phonographs. His messengers are not impassive instruments, but active, able, free-will agents, called, and responsive to the call.

Holy men of old were moved by the Holy Spirit not as the primitive chaos was moved by that same Spirit, not

arbitrarily but voluntarily. The evolution and the realization of God's designs in them were conditioned by their human intelligence and by their human receptivity. God's inspiration always took on the stamp of the individuality, of the human personality which appropriated it. God's messengers who dwelt among men have been men like other men. His greatest message was sent through his Son as a man. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Jesus were not abnormally appropriated to the proclamation of God's will. They were not moved *in spite of themselves* by the Holy Spirit, and they were not moved *out of themselves*. The Holy Spirit moved *them*, and in their own personalities they worked out the designs of God. Human individuality is apparent on every page of our New Testament, and nowhere more so than in the pages of the synoptists. These men differed in mental equipment and literary style,

and in personal prejudices and preferences, and in spiritual insight, and in sources of information; and these differences appear in their books, while the essential purpose is the same in all.

Having concluded that the phenomena which constitute the synoptic problem must find their ultimate explanation in the individualities of the authors or compilers of the synoptic Gospels, we are still far from having disposed of our difficulties. The next question is, How does it happen that these individuals have composed or compiled Gospels in which these strange resemblances and differences exist?

V. AIDS

1. *Luke's Preface.* Matthew and Mark have told us nothing at all about the method of their procedure in writing their books. Luke, however, has written a preface to his narrative, in which he makes some

statements concerning the sources of information upon which he has drawn in its composition. He was not an eyewitness of the events in the gospel history. He does not say that any special revelation had been given him concerning these things. He does not write at the direction of any heavenly voice or at the dictation of any supernatural visitant. He does not assert that he had any direct or peculiar inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He is anxious to authenticate his narrative and to establish its trustworthiness, and he gives to Theophilus the best reasons he has for believing that he has written the certain truth. What does he say?

He says that he writes of his own accord, and the only credential he presents is that of painstaking investigation of all the sources of information at his command. He certifies, however, that the result of this investigation is, in his judgment, a fuller,

more accurate, and more orderly account of the life of Jesus than any of which he knew. He divides the chief sources of the facts he has written into documentary material and oral testimony. There had been many attempts at narrative of which in their manuscript form he was able to avail himself and upon which he felt he had been able to improve. There were also many eyewitnesses still living whom he was able to interview and who delivered to him their first-hand information concerning many things. Upon the basis of his documents and the careful recording of apostolic tradition as given to himself, Luke assures Theophilus that he may rely upon the certainty of the things he here finds recorded. Luke has thus given all the human elements that make for his trustworthiness. It goes without saying that he also received the spiritual illumination common to all writers of the Sacred Scriptures. This is all of

the gratuitous information furnished us in the synoptic Gospels concerning their composition. If we learn anything more, it must be by the study of their internal characteristics and peculiarities.

2. *Minute Research.* An immense amount of work has been done in this field. As a single example we might cite the Seminar formed in the University of Oxford for the study of the synoptic problem. It met nine times a year for sixteen years. In 1910 the results of the patient and united efforts of these scholars were published in the volume entitled *Studies in the Synoptic Problem*. Other volumes, like Sir J. C. Hawkins's *Horæ Synopticæ*, are marvels of minute research, and represent a lifetime of labor. It would seem safe to say that every possible scrap of evidence has been accumulated through the successive generations of ungrudging drudgery at the task.

Possibly the minute pedantry of the ancient rabbis has been more nearly reproduced in the study of the synoptic problem than in any other part of our Scriptures. Those ancient scribes and masters of the law knew how many verses and how many words and how many letters there were in every book of their Bible. They knew how many times certain words occurred at the beginning of a verse and how many times at the end of a verse. They knew all the petty phenomena as well as the weightier matters in the law. The same thing has come to be true of the three synoptic Gospels. They have been subjected to microscopic investigation. Every last detail has been considered in its bearing upon the solution of their relationship.

We have sometimes thought that the erudition displayed in the study of the synoptic problem is like that of the scholastics of the Dark Ages. Milman says of these, "Latin Chris-

tianity raised up those vast monuments of theology which amaze and appall the mind with the enormous accumulation of intellectual industry, ingenuity, and toil, but of which the sole result to posterity is this barren amazement." An amazing amount of scholarship has been expended upon the synoptic problem in the last two centuries, and he would be a very hopeful man who would think that the final word on the question was within sight or hearing to-day. Eminently learned and ingenious men have had their say about it. They have been eminently critical too. Their investigations have rivaled those of the schoolmen in their painstaking minuteness. They have been thorough in their research and have accumulated and assorted vast quantities of facts. Many of them have been very assured in the announcement of their results. They have held opposing and mutually destructive theories, and they

have fought, bled, and died in their behalf. Each generation has quietly buried the combatants of the preceding generation, and in many cases their theories have been quietly laid to rest with them. Probably some of these theories are dead beyond all hope of a resurrection.

We think that some things are pretty generally agreed upon in our day, yet there are very strenuous advocates of rival hypotheses still in the field. No man who volunteers to settle the whole question for us can command the universal suffrage of scholars. Frequently he represents no one but himself. Any new discovery of manuscripts may revolutionize the whole aspect of things at any time. Under such circumstances no one can prophesy with any degree of assurance what the verdict of the next generation or the next century will be.

VI. THEORIES

At present the problem of the synoptic Gospels has resolved itself into the problem of the sources from which the synoptists draw the material for their books. The two main sources are those suggested in that preface to the Gospel according to Luke, oral testimony, and written documents; and the two most active differing schools of thought on the subject to-day are, first, the one which pins its faith largely, if not wholly, upon the oral tradition as accounting for the resemblances and the differences in the synoptic Gospels, and, second, the one which pins its faith largely, if not wholly, upon a single original document, or a series of such, as an adequate explanation for all the puzzling features which the Synoptics present.

1. *Oral Tradition.* Gieseler, Westcott, and Wright have been the protagonists for the oral tradition theory.

It is not always easy to assign the critics to one school rather than another, since each is apt to hold an attitude more or less mediating or more or less independent, but possibly Credner, Lachmann, Lange, Ebrard, Thiersch, Alford, Renan, Farrar, Schaff, Wendt, Godet, Gould, and Weiss might be classed together here.

(1) *Authoritative Teaching.* These critics do not rule out the use of all documents, of course, but they maintain that before any documents came into existence the general form of the gospel narrative had become fixed in a cycle of authoritative oral teaching. The apostles were the chief authorities for the facts of the life of Jesus at first. They did not immediately set about the writing of books. They did begin their preaching at once, and in the beginning they confined themselves largely to the telling of the historical facts in the life of the Redeemer. As they went from place to place by dint

of repetition the order of the narrative tended to become fixed, and even the form in which particular incidents were repeated would gradually establish itself in the minds and on the tongues of both the hearers and the speakers. At the same time slightly different forms of reminiscence might go back to different apostles for their original authority.

(2) *Oriental Memory.* In addition to this unquestioned fact that the preaching of the gospel must have preceded the writing of any Gospels, we are asked to remember that the Oriental memory was trained to a much higher degree than we are apt to conceive possible here in the West. It was the habit in the schools of the rabbis for the disciples to retain all of the teaching imparted to them without the aid of text-books or notes. They were expected to attend closely, to remember fully, and to repeat accurately. The traditions were handed

down from generation to generation in that way. It has also been suggested that there were catechetical schools among the Christians from a very early day, and that systematic instruction was imparted to all converts in such schools. It is stated in Luke's preface that Theophilus had been instructed in this catechetical fashion. If there were several such schools and a slightly different tradition were preserved, and reproduced in each, that would go far to help toward the explanation of the synoptic phenomena.

(3) *Fragments of Writing.* Remembering that the preaching of the apostles was largely historical in the beginning, and that they were the chief authorities for the account of the words and the works of the Lord, and remembering the Oriental retentiveness of memory which would tend to fix the form, not only of the story as told, but as repeated by others, we have the basis for a belief that a par-

ticular selection of incidents and sayings and a particular form for their presentation would establish itself in Christian circles before anyone would attempt to put any of these things into writing. Such attempts would surely be made in time. In all probability some of the briefer sayings would be written first, then some collection of these sayings would be made, then some account of the miracles would be committed to writing, then the longer discourses, and last among these the eschatological prophecies. These fragments would then be united by some hand or by several hands into the first attempts at a continuous sketch of the life of Jesus. The best of these would be used by our evangelists.

The parallels in the Synoptics would thus be explained by the more or less fluid, while yet more or less fixed, form of the primitive oral tradition, and the minute or more important

variations would be explained by the fact that the most credible witnesses will differ more or less in giving the account of the same matters, and the best-trained memories will be imperfect at some points, while, at the same time, having made due allowance for the differences in the oral or written sources of information open to each evangelist, we must still leave room for his personal preferences and tastes in the selection and the shaping of the material. It was the patent superiority of our synoptic Gospels to all of their predecessors which insured their preservation and supremacy in the Church while their models, or forerunners, perished.

Stated generally, this seems like a very satisfactory theory of the composition of the synoptic Gospels. It is only when we come to the application of it in detail that doubts arise in the minds of many scholars as to whether we can rely upon it as an

adequate hypothesis. If it is to be trusted at all, why does it not go farther? If retentive memories account for much, why do they not account for more? If oral tradition be supposed to fix some things, why did it not fix others? The present generation of critics seems to be swinging away from any rigid adherence to the oral tradition theory and to be concluding that the more hopeful line of research will be that of the reconstruction of original documents. Harnack is at present leading the way in this direction.

2. *Documentary Sources.* Lessing and Eichhorn made the first investigation into the *Urkunden*, or original documents, lying back of our synoptic Gospels. Eichhorn began by positing a single *Ur-evangelium*, or primitive Gospel, written in Aramaic about the time of the stoning of Stephen; but, having embarked upon the high seas of adventure along this line, he kept

discovering new sources until the very profusion and wantonness and arbitrariness of his inventions discredited the whole performance. He made a great sensation in his day, even more than Harnack has made in our day; but no one gives much heed to his conjectures now. Schleiermacher suggested the Logia, a collection of the sayings of Jesus, and a series of more or less extensive compilations of narratives, leading up to a proto-Mark and then to our Synoptics. Weisse was content to presuppose the Logia with our canonical Mark as the basis of the other two Synoptics. All of the Tübingen school were disposed to believe in a primitive Aramaic source of our Gospels, and they usually declared that our Matthew was a combination of a more liberal document with this source, and Luke was a Pauline protest supplemented from Ebionite sources, and Mark compiled his narrative from both of these. The

general positions of the Tübingen school have been relegated to the theological scrap-heap by this time, and their contributions to the discussion of the synoptic problem carry as little weight as any of them.

We will put down in a single paragraph some sample conclusions of some modern authorities as to the sources of the synoptic Gospels and the order of their composition. Holtzmann believes that there was: (1) A proto-Mark, the original form of Mark's Gospel. (2) The Logia, a collection of the sayings of Jesus. (3) Our canonical Mark. (4) Matthew. (5) Luke. He thinks that the last two were founded upon the first and the second, and used additional materials. Weiss posits the order as follows: (1) The Logia. (2) An original Gospel according to Matthew, made up of the Logia and added incidents. (3) Mark, a recollection of Peter's preaching and as much of

Matthew's discourses as would harmonize with his plans. (4) Our canonical Matthew, founded on Mark and the Logia. (5) Luke, founded on Mark, the Logia, and other sources. Zahn makes the order: (1) Matthew in Hebrew. (2) Mark. (3) Luke. (4) Matthew in Greek. Jülicher thinks that the earliest sources were our Mark and the Logia of Matthew, and that our Matthew and Luke use these two and also other sources.

Harnack has carried his researches into the history of the early Church back into the time of the composition of the Gospels, and he has chosen to use the term *Quelle* (Source) or its abbreviation, Q, instead of the old term Logia: and he thinks that Mark and Q are the two and the only two common sources for Matthew and Luke. He has undertaken to reconstruct Q with genuine German thoroughness and the usual German subjective arbitrariness. Our Wes-

leyan James Hope Moulton and our American Benjamin Wisner Bacon have shown good reason why we should hesitate to accept without question his conclusions along this line. Wellhausen and Weiss have offered pertinent objections to Harnack's generalizations, and have gone into still more minute and even microscopic investigation of supposable sources. The dominant interest at present seems to lie in work along these lines. In our judgment, the farther it is carried the less confidence it will command in both the expert and the lay mind.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

What may we conclude on the basis of the facts now presented?

1. The synoptic problem is no nearer a solution to-day than it has been at any previous time in the history of the Church. We have more facts in

hand than scholarship has been able to accumulate before this generation, but these facts only serve to increase the intricacies of the problem, and they do not seem to insure any greater unanimity of conclusion on the part of the scholarly world. Without some added discoveries of documents in Egypt or elsewhere—a rather remote possibility—there is little or no reason to think that any sufficient solution of the synoptic problem is possible. In details the history of the composition of our synoptic Gospels is likely to remain a mystery forever. However, there are some general conclusions upon which a majority of the critics may now be said to agree.

2. The oral hypothesis has much of truth in it. Oral narratives came first in order, and they would have a tendency to take a fixed form. However, this hypothesis alone can never give more than general help in the consideration of the problem. It fails

in adequacy whenever we try to apply it to the minute details of variations in the Synoptics. In the *Encyclopædia Biblica* Schmiedel brands it as an *asylum ignorantiae* and an *asylum orthodoxiae*, and his feeling is shared by most students of the subject to-day. The facts must be faced, and the facts point to written sources as well as an oral tradition.

3. If we feel ourselves forced to assume that written documents lie behind our canonical Gospels, and either that any of them borrowed from others or that they borrowed from any common sources, we must still face the facts. These seem to compel us to the conclusion that our synoptists felt free to add to or omit from or transpose or otherwise change their sources as they thought best. If this seem to anyone irreverent or impossible, we can simply appeal to the facts. The phenomena point to written sources, yet the synoptists give us different

genealogies of Jesus, different forms for the so-called Lord's Prayer, different accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, different forms of the inscription on the cross, and different reports of the same discourses. These differences are found on every page and in every part of their narratives. How far they are due to different documents or to individual preferences in dealing with the same document who will be able to decide for us?

4. The Gospel according to Mark is probably the oldest of the Synoptics, and both Matthew and Luke may have made use of it in the composition of their Gospels. If we grant this, let us suppose for a moment that our canonical Mark had not been preserved to our time, and that, nevertheless, ninety-three per cent of its contents had been incorporated into our canonical Matthew and Luke, and that modern critics had decided that Matthew and Luke must have had a

common source from which they had drawn this common material and some of the more adventurous among them had undertaken to reconstruct Mark out of Matthew and Luke, what degree of success could we expect to attend their efforts? They might attain to some general approximation to the appearance of our canonical Mark, but in multitudes of details their conjectures would differ with each other; and that any one of them would reproduce our Mark as it really is, with perfect exactness of chronology and phraseology, would be beyond the wildest reaches of possibility. Yet Harnack and others have attempted the somewhat similar task of the reconstruction of Q, and whatever conclusions they may publish to the world will be interesting and instructive and yet always unsatisfactory. Q in its entirety will no more be attainable by any critic among us than Mark would have been under the suppositions we have suggested.

5. There may have been an original collection of the sayings of Jesus, the so-called Logia, and it may have been extant both in an Aramaic form and in a Greek translation. Then, if one or both of these versions were used by our synoptists the two versions would help to account for some of the verbal identities and some of the variations of translation. The exact form and extent and content of this original *Quelle*, or Source, will be open to conjecture and never can be assured with our present sources of information.

6. There may have been, and there probably were, many fragments of material used by our synoptists, the exact number and nature of which no man can determine for us now.

7. Mark may have known and used the Logia, or Q.

8. Matthew probably did not know or use the Gospel written by Luke, and Luke probably did not know or use our canonical Matthew.

9. In our synoptic Gospels we have no literally inerrant or infallible record of the details either of the teachings or the doings of Jesus. They do give us a substantially accurate and sufficient account of these things. Their purpose was practical rather than pedantic; it was religious rather than rigidly historical. They did not carefully copy texts. They were not particular about minute details. They intended to give, and they did give, a faithful and serviceable picture of the man Jesus, his words and his works. In all the great essentials of the narrative they agree. The personality they set forth is the same and is unmistakable in each of their books. They were not punctilious about little matters of time and place. They possibly had no ideal in their thought of verbal accuracy. They did have the IDEAL PERSONALITY in mind and they sought to interpret that Personality to their generation with all the aids they

could summon, and their success was such that it drove all competitors from the field; and it has satisfied the religious needs of the world from their day to our own.

We have a fourth Gospel, and we are thankful that it is so different from the synoptists that it may be considered a wholly independent attempt at the portraiture of the personality of Jesus; and it suggests how inexhaustible that personality was, and what different impressions it must have made on different men. We are thankful for all the differences there are in the synoptists, as far as these bear testimony to this same multiform impressiveness. We are thankful to believe that the substantial historicity of the synoptic narratives has not been shaken by any research, and that it has approved itself through all the Christian centuries.

VIII. THE PECULIAR VALUE OF MARK

All of the gospel writers have the same story to tell. Yet how differently they tell it! We have seen that the reason for the difference in their narratives is to be found, not in the Subject whom they portray, nor in the inspiration which they received from him and his words and his life, but in themselves. It is the same white light refracted through many prisms. It is the same white life reflected through different minds. Each writer has his individual idiosyncrasies. Each man has his personal prejudices and preferences. Each man has his particular impressions and his peculiar experiences. All of these things influence his thought and his writing.

Modern scholars are pretty well agreed that among the Synoptics Mark comes first in order of time. The second Gospel represents most nearly the primitive evangelic tradition. It gives us the most simple and direct

and living impression of the words and the works of the Lord. It has the vividness of personal portraiture. It gives us a sense of reality such as Peter's own reminiscences could not have failed to have. If the authority of the great apostle stands behind this narrative, we are not surprised to find that it has all the self-evidencing verity of life itself.

Any comparison between Matthew and Mark will bring out this characteristic of Mark very clearly. The second Gospel mentions the natural human emotions in the experience of Jesus in such descriptive phrases as Mark 3. 5, having looked round about on them with anger, being grieved; and 1. 41, having been moved with compassion; and 1. 43, having sternly charged him; and 3. 21, they said, He is beside himself; and 6. 6, he marveled; and 8. 12, having groaned in spirit; and 10. 14, he was moved with indignation; and 10. 21, having looked

upon him, he loved him; and many others like them. All of these emotional experiences of Jesus are omitted in Matthew's account. It has been suggested that a growing sense of reverence for Jesus caused Matthew to hesitate to chronicle the fact that Jesus had shown the same emotions with ordinary humanity upon these occasions. At any rate, we feel that in Mark's narrative we come closer to the real Jesus, and that we see him as he is.

Alexander Balmain Bruce would seem to be justified, therefore, in his statement: "The realism of Mark makes for its historicity. It is a guarantee of first-hand reports such as one might expect from Peter. Peter reverences his risen Lord as much as Luke or any other man; but he is one of the men who have been with Jesus, and he speaks from indelible impressions made on his eye and ear, while Luke reports at second-hand from

written accounts for the most part. . . . Mark is the archaic Gospel, written under the inspiration, not of prophecy, like Matthew, or of present reverence, like Luke, but of fondly cherished past memories. In it we get nearest to the human personality of Jesus in all its originality and power, and as colored by the time and place. And the character of Jesus loses nothing by the realistic representation. Nothing is told that needed to be hid. The homeliest facts recorded by the evangelist only increase our interest and our admiration. One who desires to see the Jesus of history truly should con well the pages of Mark first, then pass on to Matthew and Luke."

As the earliest Gospel, written when the facts were yet fresh in Peter's memory; as the Gospel resting upon Peter's authority, the authority of an eyewitness; as the Gospel which seems freest from all philosophical and theological prepossessions, the second Gos-

pel is generally recognized by modern scholarship as the most authentic and the most authoritative of the evangelical narratives. There was a time when it was the most neglected and the least valued of all the Gospels. Now it ranks before all others as an historical source and a reliable basis for all further study.

IX. THE PECULIAR VALUE OF MATTHEW

Renan said that the Gospel according to Matthew was the most important book of Christendom, the most important book which has ever been written. We find this estimate repeated in more recent authorities. Jülicher in his Introduction to the New Testament says: "Certainly, Matthew has become the most important book ever written. . . . It has exerted its important influence upon the

Church because it was written by a man who bore within himself the spirit of the growing Church universal, and who, free from all party interests, knew how to write a catholic Gospel; that is to say, a Gospel destined and fitted for all manner of believers."

It is this catholicism of spirit which has impressed a still more recent writer, and has led him to a similar conclusion concerning the relative importance of this Gospel. Von Soden in his *History of Early Christian Literature* says of it: "It points onward to the development toward catholicism; hence it became the chief Gospel, the work which took the lead in guiding this development, and in so far no book ever written is of greater historical importance." Others have spoken in equally unmeasured terms of praise of this great Gospel. Keim, in his *Jesus of Nazara*, after calling this Gospel "a grand old granitic book," says that we find in it "the simple

grandeur of monumental writing, antique history, immeasurably effective because it is nature itself, because it does not aim at being effective."

Dean Farrar repeats this in a paragraph of characteristic eloquence. He declares that "the book carries with it internal evidence of its own sacredness. How could the unlettered Galilæan publican have written unaided a book so 'immeasurably effective'? How could he have sketched out a Tragedy which, by the simple divineness of its theme, dwarfs the greatest of all earthly tragedies? How could he have composed a Passion-music which, from the flutelike strains of its sweet overture to the 'multitudinous chorale' of its close, accumulates with unflagging power the mightiest elements of pathos and of grandeur? Why would the world lose less from the loss of Hamlet, and the *Divina Commedia*, and the *Paradise Lost* together, than from the loss of this brief book of the despised

Galilæan? Because this book is due not to genius, but to revelation; not to art, but to truth. The words of the man are nothing, save as they are the record of the manifestation of God. The greatness of the work lay, not in the writer, but in Him of whom he wrote; and in this, that without art, without style, without rhetoric, in perfect and unconscious simplicity, he sets forth the facts as they were. He is 'immeasurably effective' because he nowhere aims at effectiveness. He thought of nothing less. Though we find in his book 'the simple grandeur of monumental writing,' he brought to his work but three intellectual endowments: the love of truth, an exquisite sensibility to the mercy of God and the misery of man, and a deep sense of that increasing purpose which runs through the ages. And thus endowed by the Holy Spirit of God, he has given us this unique history, so genuinely human, and therefore, in all its

parts, so genuinely divine: a mighty, because a simply truthful, record of the words and deeds of Him who was both God and man."

The Gospel according to Matthew is the fitting link between the Old and the New Testaments in our canon. It is the Gospel of Fulfilment. It builds upon Old Testament foundations. At every turn it introduces the Old Testament prophecies. It shows how the historical and the ritual and the legal types have all been fulfilled in Jesus. It proves that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the rightful King of the Jews. At the same time it is the Gospel of hope for the Gentiles, and its universal outlook has led the authorities from whom we have quoted to declare that it more than any other book prepared the way for the catholic, the united Jewish-Gentile Church. The systematic arrangement of its material has given us the great miracle groups and the great parable

groups and some of the great discourses of Jesus. The world could not spare the Sermon on the Mount, as Matthew alone has recorded it. We prize the birth and infancy history of the first chapters, and the parables of the tares, the hid treasure, the pearl of great price, and the ten virgins and the talents, and the two sons, and other peculiar portions of this narrative. The Gospel has been of incalculable blessing to all the nations, and it will be such to the end of time.

X. THE PECULIAR VALUE OF LUKE

In all probability Luke was a Gentile. Then the third Gospel is a Gospel for the Gentiles, written by a Gentile. Luke also wrote the book of Acts; but all the other books in our Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, were written

by Jews. Its authors were all of the Hebrew race, and they all had more or less of the Hebrew prejudice and point of view. Jesus was a Jew. All of the twelve apostles were Jews. All of the first churches were composed wholly of Jews. Even Paul, the champion of the Gentiles, was himself a Jew; and he never wholly freed himself from the results of his rabbinical training and thought. If Luke had not written his books, all of Gentile Christendom would have been dependent forever upon Jewish sources for the whole of its record of the revelation of God unto men. In the third Gospel and in the book of Acts we see how the life of Jesus and the fortunes of the early Christian Church appear from a Gentile point of view. We Gentiles will always be glad that we have one Gospel written for us by one of ourselves.

What a Gospel of grace it is throughout! In that first sermon in

the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus read for his text from the prophet Isaiah,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
 Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:
 He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
 And recovering of sight to the blind,
 To set at liberty them that are bruised,
 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

At that point we read that Jesus closed the book and gave it back to the attendant. It was a strange place to quit in his reading. He was in the middle of a sentence. He did not read the whole of the prophecy. He did not even finish the paragraph. He did not even read to a period. There was much of comfort and of good news and of blessing in the remainder of the sentence and of the paragraph and of the prophecy. Jesus stopped short at that point. Surely, it must have been with conscious intention. Surely it must have been with some good reason. We look for that

reason, and we find that the next following words were, "And to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God." When the eyes of Jesus fell upon those words he closed the book. He would not read them. His message was a message of grace and not a proclamation of vengeance. He would rather leave the sentence unfinished than to leave any doubt in any mind as to that fact. He went on to preach his good tidings, and we read that all bare him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth (4. 22).

Luke does not wonder. He seems to think that only words of grace would be natural to Jesus. He pictures the Master as the gracious Redeemer, gracious both in matter of speech and in manner of life. How gracious Jesus was to that woman who was a sinner! He was even more gracious to her than she was grateful to him. Was the grace of God ever set forth with

such pathetic impressiveness as in that pearl of all the parables, where we read that while the returning prodigal was yet a great way off his father saw him and ran to meet him, and then celebrated his return with the best robe and a fitting feast and music and dancing? The grace of the dancers was only the faintest symbol of the grace in that father's heart. No gracious act on earth can do more than typify the heavenly Father's exhaustless grace. Can we imagine the grace in the manner of Jesus and in his tone as he spoke that parable?

How gracious he was to the ten lepers, although one of them was an alien Samaritan! How gracious he was to Zacchæus, promising salvation to his house, although he had been a defrauding and despicable publican, as little and mean in his spirit as he was little and mean in his stature. How gracious he was to Mary when Martha's short temper had snapped

and she was ready to ask the Master to join her in scolding the remissness of the younger girl! Jesus was as gracious to her as her sister was indignant with her. How gracious he was to that dying thief! He made response to that thief's faith with the promise, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Bossuet comments upon this promise as follows: "To-day—what speed!—with me—what companionship!—in paradise. . . . what rest!" Jesus had consorted with all classes of people here upon the earth. He had been no respecter of persons during his ministry. He went into paradise hand in hand with a crucified thief. His graciousness will be his characteristic through all eternity to come. As it was manifest to all alike in the days of his ministry, it will be manifest to all alike forevermore.

All of these incidents to which we have referred are recorded by Luke

alone. He has eighteen parables not found in the other Gospels. Some of them—the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the Pharisee and the publican—we could ill afford to lose. Those wonderful first chapters are unparalleled too. There are narratives like that of the walk to Emmaus which are among the most precious portions of Gospel history to us. We have more information concerning the prayer life of Jesus in this Gospel than in any other, and it has more of the spirit of praise. We think that the Gospel according to John is the greatest of all the Gospels; but if we had to choose among the Synoptics, we would prefer the Gospel according to Luke. We need not make such a choice, since we have them all. Each has its peculiar value, and all together furnish us with an adequate and satisfying portrait of the Christ.

Matthew gives us the marvelous words of Jesus. Mark records the

marvelous works of Jesus. Luke reveals the secret depths of his human heart. John reveals the secret heights of his divine communion and life. Matthew pictures the king, Mark the servant, Luke the brother-man, and John the eternal Lord. Goethe said of them, "I hold the Gospels genuine through and through, for there is apparent in them the reflected glory of the majesty which went out from the person of Christ, and which is divine in its nature, as the divine only once was manifested here upon earth."

XI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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