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BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

AND

THEOLOGICAL REVIEW.

NO. IX.

FEBRUARY, 1846.

ARTICLE I.

SYNOPTICAL STUDY OF THE GOSPELS, AND RECENT LITERATURE PERTAINING TO IT.

[With special reference to Dr. Robinson's New Harmony of the Greek Gospels.[1]]

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STRICTLY speaking, a distinction should be made between a Synopsis of the Gospels, a Harmony of the Gospels, and a Life of Christ. A Synopsis of the Gospels contents itself with ascertaining what passages or sections in the different Evangelists are probably parallel to each other, that is, have reference to the same occurrences or subjects; but it makes no attempt to arrange them in their chronological order. In this case, the credibility of the sacred historians may be denied, and the endeavor to synchronize their accounts discarded as futile, because what they wrote rests in fact upon no historical basis; or their credibility may be admitted, and yet our means for ascertaining the exact order of events may be considered as so deficient as to render all labor for this purpose of no avail.

A Harmony of the Gospels aims at something more positive than this. It proposes to discover not only what narratives in the different Evangelists correspond to each other, but in what order the events and instructions recorded took place or were delivered; and how the scriptural text should be arranged so as to exhibit

[1] *A Harmony of the Four Gospels in Greek, according to the text of Hahn. Newly arranged, with explanatory notes, by Edward Robinson, D. D. LL. D. Boston: published by Crocker and Brewster, 1845.*

this result. In other words, a Harmony assumes, first, that the narratives of the Evangelists, though diverse to some extent in style and contents, yet constitute essentially the same history; secondly, that they are composed according to no uniform method, but upon a plan in each case more or less dissimilar; and, thirdly, that they contain at the same time various chronological data which enable us to combine their histories into a connected and consistent whole.

A History of the Saviour coincides with a Harmony, so far as the latter extends, but embraces more. The Harmonist is expected to confine himself to the materials which the Evangelists have furnished. Having formed his judgment as to the place which these should occupy in his arrangement, he has accomplished his work. The Biographer moves in a wider sphere. His object is to reproduce as nearly as possible the entire, original history.. The imagination has here an important office to discharge, as well as the judgment. In a Life of Christ, the writer is at liberty to expand the simple hints and statements of the Evangelists into greater fulness of representation. He is to spread around us the external scenery, amid which the Saviour lived and moved. The actions of life always owe much of their significancy to that which is transient and momentary at the time of their performance. The skilful Biographer seeks to restore these effaced lines. He is to unfold allusions, trace back events to their causes, ascend from single incidents to a general comprehension of character; and, in a word, having before him merely specimens, as it were, of the things which were transacted, he strives out of these parts to re-construct the whole. The well known Life of Christ by Hess is distinguished for much of this picturesque power. It is in general correct also in point of theological sentiment, and pervaded by a glow of earnest Christian feeling. Its defects are, that too frequent digressions from the direct path of the narrative occur in it, that it is often too diffuse even in treating of appropriate topics, and has less critical precision than the present times demand.

The character of the Gospels, as constituting in the main parallel accounts of the life, death and resurrection of the Saviour, is now very universally acknowledged. Yet there have been periods in the church when this relation of the Evangelists to each other was overlooked or denied; and men of considerable reputation have arisen at different times, who have contended strenuously against such a view. One of the best known representa-

tives of this class of men was Osiander, who published a Harmony of the Gospels,[1] so called, in 1537, a work which was several times reprinted, and which, in the Lutheran church at least, for a period of some duration, controlled the opinions of theologians on this subject. He maintained that each of the Gospels forms a complete and distinct history. According to him, the Evangelists have all pursued in their narratives the exact order of time from beginning to end. Hence in every instance of a deviation in their method, they record different actions or discourses. The incidents related may be precisely the same in their character and in the attendant circumstances; but if they are introduced by the writers in a varied connection, they could not have been the same in fact; they must have been repeated on different occasions. His notion was a legitimate deduction undoubtedly from the false views which he and many of his contemporaries entertained respecting the nature of inspiration. If the Evangelists were inspired, and wrote consequently what was true, he argued, they must have given to us the precise words of Christ, when they profess to record his discourses. It is not sufficient that they agree in substance of meaning. The slightest verbal difference destroys their identity, and makes it necessary to expand the history so as to provide for them a separate place and time. From the same source sprang the idea that all the occurrences which the Gospels relate, must be different, if stated in a different order. It would be a violation of truth, it was alleged, to introduce them in any other than the succession in which they actually took place; and historians who are inspired, must conform of course to the truth. In two instances only was Osiander untrue to his principle. The passages which relate to the plucking of the ears of corn, and to the healing of the withered hand, have a different position assigned to them by the Evangelists; and yet he explained them as referring to the same transactions. His followers, however, as Molinaeus[2], Codmann[3] and others, perceived the inconsistences into which he had fallen; and, to save their system from such a virtual abandonment, they maintained that

[1] Its title was—Harmoniae Evang. libri 4, Gr. et Lat. — — item elenchus Harmoniae: adnotationum liber unus. Basel, 1537.

[2] Collatio et unio quatuor Evv. eorum serie et ordine absque ulla confusione, permistione, vel transpositione servato, cum exacta textus illibati recognitione. Par 1565. 4.

[3] Laurent. Codmann, Harmonia Evangelistarum Nürnb. 1568. This was designed for the use of schools.

these two incidents also must be supposed to have occurred repeatedly during the lifetime of Christ.

In the Reformed church, Calvin[1] who viewed this subject in a much more intelligent light, prevented by his example the very extensive adoption of such false principles. In the Lutheran church likewise, more just opinions gradually made their appearance, till at length Chemnitz[2] at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and especially Bengel[3] somewhat later, effected a permanent reformation in the condition of this study. The merits of these two men in bringing about this result were different. The service which Chemnitz performed, was negative rather than positive. He exposed several of the most important errors of those who had preceded him in this field of inquiry; he pointed out some of the obstacles to success, and led the way to a freer and more rational treatment of the subject. He recognized indeed in his Harmony most of the fundamental principles to which the assent of critics is now accorded; but with him they were happy conjectures rather than established principles, and, as applied by him, were connected with many erroneous results. In his attempt to settle the chronology of the Gospels, he was particularly unfortunate. He proposed to himself here more than is possible to be accomplished. Not content with those general divisions of time, which the Evangelists seem to have indicated with sufficient clearness, he endeavored to fix, for the most part, even the month and day of each occurrence. He has shown in his efforts to carry out this design no ordinary industry and ingenuity; but, from the nature of the case, has been unable to win any very sure ground for many of the conclusions which he was compelled to admit, in filling up a system of such minute computation. The arrangement which Bengel adopted for harmonizing the Gospels, may not be, in the aggregate, more certain than that of Chemnitz; but it exhibits a more careful study into the actual

[1] J. Calvin, Harmonia ex tribus Evangelistis composita, adjuncta seorsum Johan. Genev. 1553, fol.

[2] Mart. Chemnitz Harmonia quatuor Evangelistarum, etc. The immense work which passes under this title, is the production of several hands. It was commenced by Chemnitz, but only the first volume, extending as far as John 11: 47, was completed by him. It was afterwards continued by Leyser and Gerhard. The first part by Chemnitz was published after his death by Leyser in 1593, who followed it by a second volume from himself in 1603, and by a third in 1608. Gerhard added a fourth and final volume in 1626.

[3] J. A. Bengel, Richtige Harmonia der vier Evangelisten, etc. Tub. 1736, 1757, 1766.

structure of the Gospels, and a more consistent adherence to the rules which he professed to follow. He may be considered as having effectually put to flight what still remained of that dogma of Osiander and the older theologians, that the only species of history to which the influence of inspiration can be extended, is that which pursues the chronological order of narration. Bengel, on the contrary, allowed himself to transpose freely the contents of the Gospels. He perceived that there were certain sections common to all of them, and sustaining a certain fixed relation to each other. The position of these he regarded as established; but felt at liberty to adjust the rest, as the plan which he had formed seemed to him to require.

The English Harmonists appear to have emancipated themselves more readily from this false idea respecting a strict historical method in each of the Evangelists, or rather they do not seem at any period to have been much under the influence of it. The earliest of them who have any name as critics, so far as we know, assumed in this respect the true position. Lightfoot, Cartwright, Lardner, Newcome, Doddridge, Carpenter and others differ not a little in their judgment on subordinate questions of arrangement; but they all agree, that some transposition is necessary, in order to bring the Evangelists into harmony with each other. They may suppose that some one of them has adhered to the order of time more exactly than the others, and may vary, in placing at the foundation of their Harmonies Luke or Matthew or John, according to their several preferences of one to another as the surest historical guide. But none of them suppose, merely because the Evangelists narrate those events in a different order, that our Saviour healed the mother-in-law of Peter two or three times—that he cured two women of an issue of blood—that he twice stilled a tempest on the sea, and that the mother and relations of Christ sought to speak with him through the crowd on three different occasions.

It is unquestionably true, as we learn from the account of the same narrator, that several incidents of the same character took place more than once during the life of the Saviour. Thus we can readily believe that the Scribes and Pharisees may frequently have demanded miracles of Jesus as a proof of his Messiahship; and accordingly we find that Matthew speaks of such a demand as having been repeated at different times.[1] It is also

[1] See Matt. 12: 38. 16: 1 sq.

conceivable that an individual should be called in the course of his life to perform the same action a second or third time, under the same or very similar circumstances. The expulsion of the money-changers from the temple as related by John[1] apparently in the beginning of our Lord's ministry, and by Matthew, Mark and Luke towards the close of it, is probably an example of this nature. We remark this simply as showing, that while a diversity in the order of narration does not require us to regard events which are similar, as different; so, on the other hand, the mere similarity does not necessarily prove that such events are the same. In deciding on such cases, the Harmonist must bring to his aid other considerations.

One of the chief difficulties, in the construction of a Harmony of the Gospels, consists in arranging that portion of them, which relates to the public life and ministry of the Saviour. Of the early part of his history a few particulars only are communicated; but these, as well as those which belong to the last scenes of it, are related by the Evangelists in nearly the same order; or, they are of such a nature that their position and succession determine themselves. It is otherwise with the intermediate portions. Here the indications of time are often wholly wanting. Those which occur[2] are frequently indefinite, and so establish nothing with certainty. But little insight, in many instances, can be gained into the order of events from a consideration of their internal connection. They stand often isolated and alone; they do not pertain to the same series; they are not related to each other as factor and product, and the inquirer is cut off from all calculations of this nature. It is impossible that the decisions of Harmonists should not be marked here by some diversity. The judgment of individuals will vary. A probable, consistent combination is all that, in many of these instances, can be reasonably expected.

Even the duration of the period which the public ministry of Christ embraced, is involved in doubt. This question, in the absence of other means, for removing the uncertainty, depends chiefly on the question how many passover-festivals are mentioned by the Evangelists, as included in this period. It is certain that the first three of them speak of only one; whereas John takes notice of three (2: 13. 6: 4. 13: 1), not improbably four (5: 1),

[1] See John 2: 14 sq.; and Matt. 21: 12 sq., Mark 11: 15 sq., Luke 19: 45 sq.

[2] Such as τότε, ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις, πάλιν, μετὰ ταῦτα, ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν, etc.

and as some say, even five. It is not the diversity in this point between the synoptists and John, which occasions the difficulty; for the former, in specifying one passover, neither affirm nor deny anything in regard to others; but the language of John, particularly in Ch. 5: 1, is not free from ambiguity, and his meaning becomes, therefore, a question of interpretation.[1] It is obvious that a Harmony must derive one of its most distinguishing features, from the view which is entertained on this disputed point. Here we find those who have taken up this inquiry, arranged in different classes. Sir Isaac Newton, Stillingfleet, Scaliger, Macnight and others suppose that there were five passovers during the public life of Christ. But this extreme extension of the term of his ministry is now very generally abandoned. Grotius, Lightfoot, Le Clerc, Newcome, Doddridge, Hengstenberg, etc., support the quadri-paschal theory. The weight of critical opinion, at the present time, inclines probably in that direction. We have advocates, again, of a tri-paschal scheme in Lardner, Lamy, Benson, Bengel and others. This opinion, both in consequence of the arguments which commend it and the authority given to it by the support of so eminent a name as that of Bengel, has enjoyed extensive credit, and has still a wide reception. A few, finally, would extend this reduction of the time still further. They would restrict the ministry of Christ to a single year. Some of the early Christian Fathers were favorable to this view; and, among recent writers, Dr. Lant Carpenter, continues to defend it in his Apostolical Harmony of the Gospels.[2]

It seemed not irrelevant to allude, thus briefly, to this disagree-

[1] The language in John 5: 1 is ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Tholuck has stated the ambiguity of this expression thus: "According to a decided majority of witnesses ἑορτή is to be read without the article. So Griesbach, Lachmann. If the article be genuine, the reference must be to the principal festival, that is, the passover. If it be not genuine, the passover can be meant, but equally well also, another festival. Since the Genitive τῶν Ἰουδαίων is of itself sufficiently definitive, the article in connection with ἑορτή could be omitted. See Winer, p. 118. It is wanting even in Matt. 27: 15. Mark 15: 16, where the passover is nevertheless intended, without such a Genitive. If the Evangelist means here the passover, he then speaks in his Gospel of four such festivals, and the period during which Christ publicly taught is to be extended beyond three years." See his Comm. zum Evang. Johannis, 6te Ausg. p. 141. 1844. —The note of Dr. Robinson on this passage (Harmony, § 36.) contains all that is important to the investigation. He himself adopts the opinion that it refers to the passover. So also many of the ablest critics both in former and recent times.

[2] London, 1838, second edition.

ment of our highest critical authorities. We are thus apprised of some of the difficulties which are inherent in a subject of this kind, and prepared to judge of the labors which are undertaken for the removal of them by a more reasonable standard. It would be setting up an impracticable demand, to require that those who engage in such investigations, should propose to us no conclusion which they are not able to support by arguments to which nothing can be opposed.

One of the first things which strikes the mind of the reader on taking up a Harmony of the Greek Gospels, is the singular resemblance which these compositions bear to each other in many passages. Each of the Evangelists has indeed a character of individuality. The style of each is peculiar; the mental traits which they severally exhibit, are diverse. Each one has to some extent his own method of arrangement, and has some narrations which the others do not contain. But notwithstanding this diversity, they still discover, particularly the first three of them, a remarkable similarity. This extends not only to an occasional agreement in the order, but to a striking coincidence often in the language itself of the narration. Sometimes the expressions are identical; sometimes the words are the same, with a slight change merely in the position; and again, without being precisely the same, they are so nearly alike that it is impossible to view the agreement as accidental.[1] This phenomenon has engaged naturally the attention of critics; and has given rise to more discussion perhaps than any other similar problem, connected with the study of the Gospels. The question how we are to explain this relation of the Evangelists to each other has been considered by theologians as a legitimate topic of inquiry, and has been variously answered. It cannot be said that any very certain results have as yet been gained here; but a brief survey of the course of thought, which the endeavor to obtain them has developed, may not be uninteresting.

[1] Any good Harmony will at once illustrate to the eye the frequency and nature of this accordance. De Wette has collected, and presented the passages in a form very convenient for inspection in his Einl. in das N. Testament § 79. Guerike has also enumerated the most important of them in his Historisch-kritische Einleitung, etc., p. 214. For readiness of reference, the following may be specified. Comp. Matth. 3: 11 with Mark 1: 8 and Luke 3: 16; Matth. 8: 2, 3 with Mark 1: 40, 41, and Luke 5: 12, 13; Matth. 8: 15 with Mark 1: 31 and Luke 4: 39; Matth. 9: 5, 6 with Mark 2: 9, 10 and Luke 5: 23, 24; Matth. 9: 12 with Mark 2: 17 and Luke 5: 31; Matth. 9: 15 with Mark 2: 20 and Luke 5: 35; Matth. 9: 22 with Mark 5: 34 and Luke 8: 48; Matth. 16: 28 with Mark 9: 1, and Luke 9: 27, etc.

One explanation is, that the Evangelists made use of each other; that is, the Gospel first written, whichever it was, was consulted by those who wrote afterwards. This is the oldest opinion; and has been held with various modifications, according to the order in which it is supposed that the Gospels appeared. Thus some critics have maintained that Matthew was the oldest, that Mark depended upon Matthew and Luke upon both. So Grotius, Mill, Wetstein, Hug. Another opinion makes Matthew the oldest as before, but Luke a follower of Matthew, and Mark a compiler from both. Griesbach advanced this hypothesis, and brought it for a time into extensive favor. It was adopted by Schleiermacher, De Wette,[1] Saunier and others. Storr, on the contrary, held that Mark was the original Evangelist, and that Matthew and Luke derived their materials, in part, from him. This view of the priority of Mark, though with a somewhat different idea respecting the nature of the dependence of the other Evangelists upon him, has been revived by some of the most recent writers.[2] According to Büsching, again, in the Preface to his Harmony, Luke formed the foundation of Matthew, and Luke and Matthew together, the foundation of Mark. Vogel, finally, makes Luke the source of Mark, while Matthew is said to have had the assistance of the other two.

The idea, it will be perceived, of a mutual use of the Evangelists on the part of each other, is common to the several opinions which have now been enumerated; but they differ entirely in respect to the order in which the Gospels are said to have been produced, and in respect to the relation consequently, in which they stand to each other as original or secondary. Almost every possible combination of the order, in which the Gospels could be arranged, has been proposed as the real one. This confusion of opinion has of itself excited, in many minds, serious doubts as to the correctness of the principle on which the explanation is based. It has been thought that if the fact alleged were true, some distinct trace of it would have remained in the structure of the Gospels, enabling critics to fix with some unanimity upon the writer whose production gave character to that of the others. The priority of the particular Gospel which exercised so determining an influence upon the rest, might be expected to have indica-

[1] De Wette has now returned to this opinion after a temporary rejection of it.

[2] C. G. Wilke, Der Urevangelist. Dresd. 1838, and C. H Weisse, Die Evangelische Geschichte, etc. Leips. Th. I. 1838.

ted itself by marks which could be readily discerned, and thus to have removed all occasion for that uncertainty in which the point is now seen to be involved. Nor is the circumstance that the Evangelists themselves say nothing of such a dependence, without its weight. Perhaps it could not be affirmed that had the sacred writers placed this reliance upon each other, they would certainly have made some allusion to it; but it may at least be said, that it would have been more natural for them to have done this, than to have refrained from such reference. At all events, any such application of the theory before us as would make the Evangelists mere compilers from each other, cannot be sustained. It is perfectly at variance with the facts in the case. Though they agree in the manner that has been described, they yet differ still more. The parts which they possess in common, are inconsiderable, compared with those which are peculiar to each. John, it will be admitted of course, has his own distinctive character; and the other Evangelists exhibit, confessedly, important variations in style and arrangement. Not only so, but the contents also of the latter are different. It would be impossible to combine any two of them so as to produce our present history of Christ. This could never be said of any writing which is a mere compilation; for such a writing adds nothing to the amount of our knowledge. Nor will it escape recollection here that Luke has made a declaration at the beginning of his Gospel, which must have some bearing on this question. Whatever dispute there may be in respect to the precise meaning of certain words in this introduction, it cannot be denied that the writer claims for himself, in emphatic terms, a character of general independence and originality. No fair construction of his language allows us to infer from it less than this. It seems to us most natural to understand him as saying that he follows no previously existing accounts which had been written by others, but that he derives his information from oral and personal sources, and can produce his eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses as vouchers for what he has to communicate. That he should have merely transcribed the bulk of his materials from Matthew or Mark or any one else, without increasing thereby the amount of testimony to their truth, would certainly be inconsistent with the very least which he can be supposed to have asserted in the terms to which we refer. The inference plainly is, that whatever may be true of the other writers of the Gospels, Luke certainly has not given us in his history a mere digest from other records. His own testimony sets aside as false that particular

modification of the theory under remark, which represents this as virtually the character of his Gospel.

A second mode of accounting for the similarity, which appears in the Evangelists, has been that of the supposition of an original written history which they all followed; a history extant at the time when they wrote, but which has now perished. The germ of this idea may be found in the writings of Le Clerc and Semler, but it received its more systematic form from subsequent writers, as Eichhorn, Herder, Marsh and others. According to the first of these, there was an original Aramaean Gospel which contained all the portions that are common to Matthew, Mark and Luke. But it sometimes happens, that two of the Evangelists relate circumstances which are not related by the third, and sometimes that a single one of them gives us narratives which the others omit. To explain this, he adopts the fiction of a repeated revision of what he calls the original Gospel. This he supposed to have passed through various forms corresponding to the traits which impart to our present Gospels their individual character as well as their common resemblance. Thus there was one revision which Matthew and Luke used together; and from this they derived what is common to both. There was another which Matthew alone employed, and another still which Luke alone employed; and these respectively were the sources of the portions which are found in only one of them. Again, these last two revisions were combined into another, and in this form served as the foundation of Mark.[1] By such a tissue of purely arbitrary suppositions, Eichhorn could explain how the Gospels, though independent translations from the Aramaean original, could agree in certain common narratives and turns of thought; but by a strange oversight he had provided no explanation for the more remarkable fact, that they agree so often in the Greek expressions which they employ. On account of this deficiency, Bishop Marsh, in his translation of Michaelis, proposed a modification of the theory of Eichhorn. He assumed, as in the other case, an Aramaean original, but one that was far less complete. Its progress to greater fulness he supposed to take place in the Greek language itself.

[1] The following tabular view may assist the reader in forming a conception of what is intended. 1. The original Gospel. 2. Revision of the same A, the basis of Matthew. 3. Revision B, the basis of Luke. 4. Revision C, formed out of A and B, the basis of Mark. 5. Revision D, employed by Matthew and Luke at the same time.

The first translation that was made from it, was afterwards re-wrought by various hands, sometimes with additions, sometimes with omissions; and Mark and Luke composed our Greek Gospels with the help of these preparations. The translator of Matthew's Gospel, which existed originally in the Hebrew or Aramaean, he supposed to have used the text of Mark and, in part also, that of Luke. Eichhorn himself now saw the imperfection of his plan, and in his Introduction to the New Testament, published in 1804, came forward with another phasis of it. This was far more complicated than the first, or even than that of Bishop Marsh. He here made it his object to explain the verbal agreement of the Evangelists; and for this purpose introduced a series of Greek translations, in addition to several revisions of the Aramaean original. A wide interval, according to him, separates between our present Gospels, and their first written form. They have been revised and re-revised, translated out of one dialect into another, enlarged or abridged at each new step of the process, receiving something here by contact with this document, losing something there by contact with that, till we behold them emerging at length from the chaos, under the form in which they appear before us in the New Testament.[1] It is conceivable certainly that our Gospels should have been produced in this manner; and so it is that the Iliad or Paradise Lost, should have been formed by throwing up the letters of the alphabet and having them fall so as to assume their present order; but it is not at all probable. This has now become the general conviction. Herder gave this hypothesis the sanction of his name; but neither his support nor that of other eminent scholars who may have favored it,

[1] A summary of this process, exhibiting its successive steps, affords perhaps the best demonstration of its impossibility. The following is a schedule of it. 1. An original Gospel in Aramaean. 2. A Greek translation. 3. Revision of the Aramaean Gospel, used by Matthew. 4. Greek translation of the same. 5. Revision of the Aramaean Gospel, used by Luke, not translated into Greek. 6. An amalgamation of both the Aramaean revisions, used by Mark, not translated into Greek. 7. A fourth revision of the Aramaean original, used by Matthew and Luke. 8. A Greek translation of the same, with a use of the Greek translation of the original Gospel. 9. Matthew's Hebrew Gospel, composed from No. 3 and 7. 10. Greek translation of Matthew, with a use of No. 4 and 8. 11. Mark's Gospel, which had for its basis No 6 (as an amalgamation of 3 and 5,) with a use of No. 4, but a translation by his own hand of what belonged to 5. Finally 12, Luke's Gospel, formed from No 5 and 7, with the insertion of a narration of one of the journeys. This Evangelist had the use of No. 8, but translated for himself what belonged to No. 5.

has been able to prevent it from passing away.[1] Scarcely any one at the present time adheres to it. It labors under every possible presumption of improbability. That these writings should have been brought to their present condition through a series of such revisions, could have been suggested only by the usages of modern criticism; the idea is foreign entirely to the spirit of ancient times. It is not affirmed that the literary annals of antiquity afford any parallel or the semblance of a parallel to it. Nor has the supposition any more support from testimony in relation to this particular instance, than it has from general analogy. No one in recent times pretends to have found these documents, out of which our Gospels are said to have grown. No ancient writer says that he ever saw them or heard of them. Under these circumstances, they must be considered as the mere figments of critical ingenuity; and so, in fact, they are at present almost universally considered. The objections to this hypothesis, says de Wette, are so palpable that nearly all minds now concur in its rejection; and the only wonder is that it could have found in times past so much favor as it received.

The perception of these and similar difficulties has given rise to another explanation. It is the supposition of the existence of an early tradition, transmitting for a time without written records the principal contents of the evangelical history. Gieseler was the first who proposed this view in such a form as to fix upon it the serious attention of the public.[2] It has been adopted by men of very different theological sentiments, according to the limit which is assigned to the duration of this supposed traditionary period. Strauss, for instance, not only without necessity but in violation of the clearest historical certainty, extends it to the beginning of the second century or later; and thus converts it into a means for assailing the credibility of the Evangelists; others, on the contrary, restricting it to the comparatively short interval between the crucifixion of Christ and the death of some of his first personal followers, look upon such a temporary, oral transmission as not only natural under the circumstances of the case, but consistent entirely with the strictest views of the truth and inspiration of the Scriptures. Of this latter class is Dr. Guerike; who in his recent Introduc-

[1] The scheme of Herder in its details, was somewhat different from that o Eichhorn; but it was founded upon the same general principles.

[2] Gieseler, Ueber die Entstehung und frühesten Schicksale der schriftl. Evangelien, Leipz. 1818.

tion to the New Testament, avows his preference for this theory, and has there given an exposition of it, expressing the sense no doubt in which it is held generally by those who belong to the same theological school. The outline of it is as follows. It is contrary to the character of the earliest Christian age, to suppose that a history of Christ would have been written at the very beginning, certainly such a history as would naturally be presented in the discourses of those who first preached the Gospel. There was no occasion for this. The eye-witnesses of his life and actions were still present to rehearse these things in person; and, so long as they remained, there was no reason why any one should prefer a written narration, even had the Apostles themselves composed it, to the living, spoken word. The first Gospel-history, therefore, was an oral one.[1] This, whether repeated in one language or another, in Greek or Aramaean, would naturally acquire a certain uniformity of character both in the recapitulation of particular facts and in the general style of narration. As there was occasion for the constant repetition of the same events, they would readily fix themselves in the same or a similar order, in the minds both of narrators and hearers, and become clothed spontaneously, in the same or similar language. The exact words[2] often, of the Saviour, or where these were translated into another tongue, the words as nearly correspondent to them as possible, could be the more easily retained because the Jews were so much in the habit of treasuring up the identical expressions of those who instructed them, and because so much of our Saviour's teachings was of that figurative kind which was so well adapted to aid the memory.[3] In this way we can conceive that the first preachers of the Gospel, without any concert with each other or any written guide to follow, might be led to pursue in their discourses the same train of narration and to express themselves in the same language. Such oral recitals of the acts and instructions of Christ would satisfy the wants of the church for a time. But the condition of things soon changes. Some twenty years elapse after the ascension of the Saviour, and not a few of

[1] The λόγος, κήρυγμα, λόγος ἀκοῆς, etc., it is termed in the New Testament.

[2] Literally, his exact words often, as we have them in the New Testament, if we suppose with many that the Saviour may have used the Greek language at times in his intercourse with his disciples. This language was so widely diffused among all classes in Palestine at that period, that this is by no means an incredible supposition.

[3] To this it may be added that the disciples were assured by Christ that he would send them the Holy Spirit and that He "should bring all things to their remembrance."

the original eye-witnesses have been removed by death or are dispersed in foreign lands. False teachers have arisen, and corrupted the purity of the Christian faith. It thus became indispensably necessary that the apostles in addition to their preaching of the word, should authenticate in writing the doctrines which they taught, either making a record of them themselves, or having it made under their sanction by their disciples and associates in labor.. Thus were composed the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and Mark. An already existing type shaped their histories. They followed in general the course which the oral instructions of the Apostles had taken, and which the habit of repetition and association had rendered so familiar. Hence arose the frequent coincidence of their narratives in arrangement and contents, not only in reference to some particular prominent events, but throughout entire sections; and, in the record of the discourses of Christ more especially, very often in the words themselves. Such, briefly exhibited, is the theory of those who assume an original tradition as the source of the resemblance here referred to. This may be considered, perhaps, on the whole, as the present resting-place of critical opinion in relation to this point. Most of the recent critics, says Tholuck,[1] have consented to stop here, not because the explanation is certain, but because they regard it as the best which has yet been offered.

There is still, however, what may be termed a complex view of the origin of this kindred character of the Gospels, which some individuals entertain; though it may not be shared by such numbers as have maintained the other opinions. In this case, certain elements of the foregoing explanations are combined, and the peculiarity which is the subject of inquiry, is referred to their united operation, instead of being sought so exclusively in any single one of them. The elements selected for this purpose, and the degree of activity assigned to each will depend on the particular judgment of those who apply this principle to the subject; and hence we have here no inconsiderable diversity of opinion, coexisting with an essential unity. This renders it difficult to characterize this class of critics by any adequate, general representation. As a single example, however, we may take perhaps the views of Olshausen as serving to illustrate this kind of combination. The two Gospels of Matthew and Luke, he remarks,[2] appear to

[1] In manuscript notes of his lectures on the Gospels, which lie before the writer.

[2] See his Comm. ü. das N. T., etc. Band 1. § 3.

have been written in an entire independence of each other. The greater part of the former would appear to have been drawn from the writer's own experience and oral tradition; and the greater part of the latter from concise written accounts or memoranda which had been prepared by others. That which is common to both Gospels may be explained in part by supposing that the writers followed a similar form of oral communication which prevailed in the different circles of their Christian intercourse, and, in part, by supposing that in some few instances in which the agreement is more exact, they were acquainted with the same written sources of information. In this way we could account for the similarity to each other which they exhibit; and yet this would seem to have been produced without any direct connection between them. In the case of Mark, however, there may have been an immediate use of the other Gospels. He coincides to such an extent with Matthew and Luke, that the accordance cannot well be explained without supposing that he had a knowledge of their writings. His conformity to Matthew is, on the whole perhaps, more striking than to Luke; and if it would be too much to affirm that Mark wrote his Gospel with both the other Evangelists before him, yet this may be assumed not without probability as regards Matthew. Such, in few words, is the view of Olshausen. Here it will be observed, a mutual use of the Evangelists is recognized within certain limits; something is attributed to the force of tradition, and something also to the existence of written accounts, prior to the composition of our present Gospels. In the other modes of explanation, these several causes were represented as acting singly; in this instance they are united, and produce the effect whose origin is sought for by their joint operation. Others may modify the theory by assigning to the agencies in question a somewhat different relative power; but variations of this kind do not require a separate notice.

We have adverted to this topic chiefly on account of its own intrinsic interest; but it may serve at the same time as one example of the many important, critical inquiries which the synoptical study of the Gospels presents to our attention. No one who studies the Evangelists or professes to study them, without a constant and rigid comparison with each other, can either form any adequate idea of the nature and extent of the labor, or will ever acquire any other than the most superficial knowledge of this branch of biblical criticism. No distinct, well defined image of the Saviour's life

can possibly be formed in the mind without it. The single incidents which compose his history, may be recollected; but they can exist in the memory only as a confused heap, without method or vividness. It is incumbent on us to study the Gospels in this manner, as believers in their authenticity and truth. One of the first written objections to Christianity, of which we have any account, was that the Evangelists contradict each other, and thus destroy the credibility of their testimony. Porphyry, in the third century, had already taken in this respect the position which Strauss has re-assumed at the present time. We are challenged to defend our faith against this accusation. If the Gospels contain an authentic history, they must be consistent both with the truth and with one another. They are confessedly merely fragmentary records; and human knowledge when improved to the utmost is still imperfect. But, though for these reasons, we may not be able to clear the subject of all obscurity, we are bound to show that there is no necessary contradiction in the testimony of the sacred writers. We are to meet such opponents; and if their representations are partial, distorted, incorrect, we are to supply deficiencies, correct misstatements, conciliate what is falsely alleged to be inconsistent. And though in a certain class of passages, we may not be able to demonstrate what the actual state of things positively was, yet we must point out at least what it might have been, suggesting those possible conditions under which the veracity of the narrator remains unimpeachable till the contrary be established. So much as this is absolutely indispensable to a defence of the credibility of the evangelical history. Nor is this all. The study which we expend upon such an attempt to comprehend the connection of the Gospels with each other, has, in fact, much more than this apologetic value. By subjecting them to the accurate examination and comparison which such an effort requires, we are led to the discovery of numerous incidental coincidences which would otherwise have escaped attention, or at any rate have impressed us with much less force. Such undesigned coincidences form one of the strongest links in the chain of those evidences which support the truth of the Christian Scriptures. They afford one of our most conclusive arguments for showing that these writings are authentic, and that the transactions narrated in them actually *took* place.

Most of our English works which treat of the Gospels, are sadly deficient in the materials for prosecuting this mode of study.

The remark is specially true in its application to those of a more recent origin. Some of our older commentaries are constructed upon the right principle in this respect; but not being adapted to the present state of critical science, they have now lost much of their value. The later publications are wanting, for the most part, even in a proper recognition of this correspondence of the Gospels to each other. They are here treated very much as if they were held to be separate, independent histories; each is explained in its own place and by itself, or connected with the others only at those more obvious points of contact, which thrust themselves into notice. We have no commentaries illustrative of this part of the New Testament, in which pains are taken to explain real difficulties that arise from a seeming discrepancy of the writers, or to improve those occasions that offer themselves, for illustrating their fidelity from instances of striking agreement. In the exegetical literature of the Germans, this subject occupies a very different position. The Gospels, particularly the first three, are very rarely separated from each other, in their modes of study, whether it be in lectures at the universities, or in published works. Some of them, it is true, labor at this work of comparison for the purpose of discrediting, if possible, the authority of these writings, and others, in order to defend them against such attacks; but this controversy itself shows both their sense of the importance and the importance in fact, which belongs to the subject in dispute between them. In some of their commentaries, as those of Paulus, Glöckler, Olshausen, the corresponding passages of the Evangelists are brought together and explained as parts of one continued narrative; and in those of them which adhere to a separate order, constant attention is paid to the manner in which the harmony of the writers is to be made out. In that numerous class of productions called forth in defence of the Gospels against Strauss, this becomes naturally one of the principal topics of consideration. These works furnish a rich fund of material for the study of the Evangelists generally, but for this particular investigation more especially. The results of the most exact philological science, of exegetical skill and extensive historical research, have been concentrated in these writings upon this portion of the Scriptures; and have thus placed us in a situation for illustrating them, superior to that of any preceding period. Among those who have labored in this field and may be consulted by the student with most advantage, are Neander, in his Life of

Christ;[1] Hoffmann, Kuhn, and Osiander, in their work sunder the same title; Tholuck in his Credibility of the Evangelical History; Krabbe in his Lectures on the Life of Christ; Ebrard in his Critique of the Evangelical History, and Wieseler in his Chronological Synopsis of the Gospels. These works have all the common aim of establishing the true character of the Evangelists, as consistent in their statements both with one another and with the historical and political relations of the period in which they lived. It would be, of course, only in treatises professedly aiming at this, that such a topic could be handled with the fulness which it demands at the present time. It would not comport with the plan of an ordinary commentary.

The publication of the new Harmony of the Greek Gospels, for which we are indebted to Dr. Robinson, will prove a seasonable help to the prosecution of this study. Archbishop Newcome's Harmony, which has been heretofore used among us, was out of print; and the wants of the public required either that a third edition of it—two have already been disposed of—should be published, or a new work prepared. The reasons which induced the editor to decide on the latter course, appear to us decisive. A work was needed, representing the present state of biblical studies more truly than was possible for one which time has now placed so far in the past.[2] There was room also for improvement in some of the details at least of the arrangement adopted in the old work, and still more in the character of the notes attached to it. The experience of Dr. Robinson as a teacher, has enabled

[1] The last edition of Neander's work is the third and can no longer be had. A fourth is expected. The titles in German of some of the others which are probably less known to the public, are as follows:

Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet von Dr. D. F. Strauss. Geprüft für Theologen und Nicht-theologen von Wilhelm Hoffmann, Inspector des Missionshauses in Basil. 1839.

Das Leben Jesu, wissenschaftlich bearbeitet von Dr. Johannes Kuhn, Professer der katholisch-theologischen Facultät in Tübingen, 1838. Of this only one volume has been published.

Apologie des Lebens Jesu gegen den neusten Versuch, es in Mythen aufzulösen von Johann Ernst Osiander, Professor zu Maulbronn. 1837.

Vorlesungen über das Leben Jesu für Theologen und Nicht-theologen von Dr. Otto Krabbe, Prefossor, etc., am akademischen Gymnasium zu Hamburg. 1839. He is now Professor at Kiel.

Chronologische Synopse der vier Evangelien. Ein Beitrag zur Apologie der Evangelien und evangelischen Geschichte vom Standpuncte der Voraussetzungslosigkeit. Von Karl Wieseler, Licentiat, etc., in Göttingen. 1843.

[2] Newcome's Harmony appeared originally at Dublin, 1778.

him to judge wisely in reference to the points which most needed elucidation; while his familiarity with the results of the latest criticism and his personal inspection of many of the scenes of the Gospel History, have given him uncommon advantages for the execution of such a labor. The work contains the entire Greek of the four Gospels and the few verses in Acts and Corinthians, which relate to the personal history of Christ. It is based upon the chronology supposed to be intimated in John's Gospel, that is, that the ministry of the Saviour embraced four passover-festivals, or a period of three and a half years. The arrangement in its general outline is that which has approved itself to the majority of the ablest critics, as most probably the correct one. The place of the more disputed portions has been determined with independence of judgment. The decision of the author in reference to this class of passages, accords with that of others where the grounds for it are approved; otherwise, a new position is assigned to them. The parallelism proposed between John 11: 54 and Luke 13: 22, is, so far as we know, peculiar to this Harmony, and strikes us as a very happy combination. The adoption of this order simplifies very much the arrangement of several other related sections, and throws an unexpected light upon the accuracy of the sacred writers in a particular which has not been generally remarked. A body of learned and instructive notes accompanies the volume. The student will find here precisely the information which he needs on the great points which require attention in an effort to harmonise the Gospels. This information is conveyed, according to the circumstances of the case, in brief paragraphs which dispose of the questions that arise in few words, or, where the occasion calls for it, in fuller discussions which are sometimes pursued through a series of pages. Special labor has been bestowed upon a conciliation of the genealogies as found in Matthew and Luke, upon that of the alleged discrepancy between John and the other Evangelists, in respect to the time when our Saviour observed the last passover, and also upon an examination of the difficulties, connected with the manner in which the circumstances of our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection are narrated. No parts of the evangelical history, it is well known, have been exposed to such frequent assaults as these. The discussions of Dr. Robinson in relation to these topics, we regard as the most satisfactory to which the student can be referred. The difculties that exist are brought clearly into view; objections are fairly canvassed; and those results established, which vindicate

the claim of these contested portions of the Word of God to our fullest confidence. We must not omit to speak of the very convenient tables for reference with which this work is provided, and which constitute no slight addition to its value. We have one which enables the reader to turn at once to any passage of the Gospels, the place of which he may wish to find in the Harmony. We have another which presents a view of the prominent topics that are discussed in the notes, with a designation of the pages where they occur. And, finally, we have a third, which is of still greater importance, entitled *Contents and Synopsis of the Harmony.* Here all the events and transactions of the life of Christ, so far as they are related by the four Evangelists, are succinctly enumerated in the order in which they are supposed to have taken place. Each successive occurrence from the birth of the Saviour at Bethlehem to his ascension from the Mount of Olives, passes in review before us. It gives great distinctness to the representation that the locality or scene of the various events is specified, so that we accompany, as it were, the great Teacher as He moves from place to place, instructing the people and performing his mighty works. The use of this table will prove invaluable to those who wish to transfer to their minds a connected view of the Saviour's history.

In a word, this work of Dr. Robinson, confines itself to the legitimate sphere of a Harmony of the Gospels; and we do not hesitate to say that in this sphere it will be found to be all that a Harmony need or can be. The original text is printed with accuracy and elegance. It is a feast to the eyes to look upon a page of so much beauty. The arrangement is distinguished for simplicity and convenience; and, except in those instances in which a new combination of the author has introduced what we think will commend itself to most judges as an improvement, it accords with that which has been adopted by the most approved critics. The notes are a help, not an incumbrance. They are from the hand of an experienced teacher, and written with a just appreciation of the wants of the student. Several of the discussions relating to points of special difficulty may be ranked among the best examples of critical reasoning in our language. No one will ever be able to comprehend the relations of the Gospels to each other, or acquire an exact knowledge of their contents, unless he studies them with the aid of a Harmony. The present work furnishes in this respect just the facility which is needed; and we trust that among its other effects, it will serve to direct attention more strongly to the importance of this mode of study.