

tinctively Christian position is clearly seen by those who have been brought up in other religions. An interesting illustration of this was given some time ago in India. A Hindu Society was formed which had for its object to appropriate all that was good in Christianity without burdening itself with the rest. Among other things which it appropriated, with the omission of only two words, was the answer given in the Westminster Shorter Catechism to the question, What is repentance unto life? Here is the answer: 'Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.' The words the Hindus left out were *in Christ*; instead of 'apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,' they read simply, 'apprehension of the mercy of God.' But they knew that this was not compromising. They were acute enough to see that in the words they left out the whole *Christianity* of the definition lay; they felt that here was the barb of the hook, and as they had no intention of being caught, they broke it off.—JAMES DENNEY.

I HAVE a friend in Scotland, a convert, I daresay you will be glad to hear, of Mr. Moody during his first visit to us in 1874, who has himself been wonderfully blessed by God as an evangelist and carer for souls. He is a fishing-tackle maker and an enthusiastic fisherman, and told me once of losing his bait in a mysterious way without catching anything. The explanation was that by some accident or other the barb had been broken from the hook. It was my friend himself who made the application of this, when he said that this was exactly what happened when people preached the love of God to men, but left out of their gospel the essential truth that it is Christ on the cross, the Substitute

for sinners, in whom that love is revealed. In other words, the condemnation of our sins in Christ upon His cross is the barb on the hook. If you leave that out of your gospel, I do not deny that your bait will be taken; men are pleased rather than not to think that God regards them with goodwill; your bait will be taken, but you will not catch men.—JAMES DENNEY.

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## The Synoptic Problem.

BY PRINCIPAL THE REV. DAVID BROWN, D.D., ABERDEEN.

IN the pages of this and other periodicals I find from time to time articles on this subject. But when I have read them—no matter by whomsoever written—I am no wiser than before. This makes me almost weary of the title, and I have scarcely patience to glance at what is written on it. Yet it is a problem, and one of the deepest interest, if only it could be solved—which I believe it never will nor can be; because the facts which could alone explain the difficulties of the question are totally unknown and irrecoverably lost. That the first three Evangelists tell the same story of Christ's life, though in a different order and with omissions in one or two of them which are supplied in the other or others, is manifest on the face of them;

and this gave rise to the Ammonian Sections and the Eusebian Canons, among the earliest students of the Gospel history. But, what is more remarkable, on examining the Greek text of these, the *Synoptic* Gospels, it will be seen that some events are recorded in almost identical terms in two and in some cases in all the three Gospels, and this for a great number of verses. Thus, in Mark xiii. 13-32, there is such a close verbal resemblance for twenty verses together, with the corresponding portions of Matthew, that the text of both might pass for one and the same text. And, what is more, some uncommon words occur in two of the Gospels in recording the same event.

Such startling facts have long engaged the

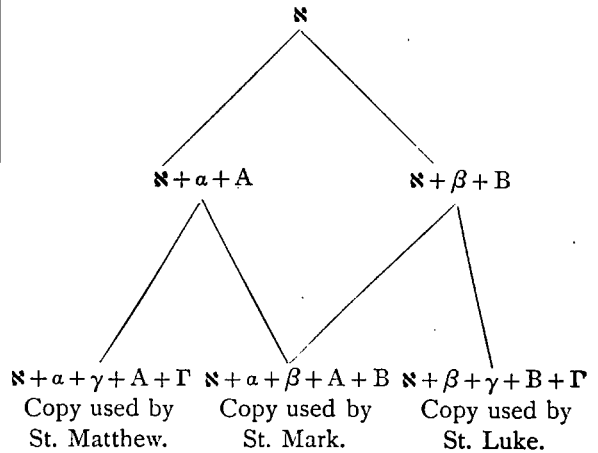
attention of critics, both in this country and on the Continent—in this country by such as Townsend and Owen. But it was reserved for the German critics to make it the subject of special study and a *problem* to be solved.

In the year 1750, J. D. Michaelis, the most learned Oriental scholar of his day, issued his *Introduction to the New Testament*, which was translated into English (in a 4to volume), and which I read very long ago; but, so far as I remember, it contained very little on this problem. But in successive editions this was greatly enlarged, until in 1788 the *final* edition was published, containing his latest additions and corrections; and in the year 1823 Herbert Marsh, afterwards Bishop of Peterborough, published a translation of this great work. Mr. Marsh had spent some years in Germany prosecuting his own studies in theology. Among other subjects of New Testament criticism the Synoptic problem attracted his special attention. Every article and monograph he carefully read on this subject, taking notes of the grounds on which each theory was supported. But finding none of these satisfactory, he determined to study the subject for himself. This issued in an elaborate dissertation on the origin of our first three Gospels, extending to nearly three hundred pages. He first states the problem to be solved: Either the succeeding Evangelists copied from the preceding one or two, or all three copied from a common document. On the former supposition, we must hold that one of the three copied from the other two, or that these two copied from the other. This could be done in six different ways—six ways of shuffling the cards, so to speak. Each of these has had its advocates. But since we have no evidence of the *time* when each of the Gospels was published, all arguments founded on this are manifestly precarious. The first critic who proposed a common document was *Leclerc*. But it was taken no notice of for more than sixty years, when Michaelis revived it, yet but partially, in the third edition of his *Introduction* (1777), for in his fourth edition he changed his opinion. He supposed that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew (or Aramaic), and that his Greek translator used the same Greek document as Mark and Luke used; and that this would explain the *verbal harmony*, while the divergences might be explained by supposing that some of the many pre-existing narratives of the life of Christ, referred to in Luke's preface (i. 1, etc.), were made use of.

Other modifications continued to be advocated, till, in 1794, Eichhorn, in the fifth volume of his *Universal Library of Oriental Literature*, contended that only one document was used, but that there were various editions of it, and that this would explain both the verbal harmony and the divergences.

Marsh at length comes to his own theory. To prepare the way for this, he first gives examples of *verbal harmony* in all the Synoptists in forty-two sections, occupying about seventy pages. Next follow examples of verbal agreement, in sections common to Matthew and Mark. Then passages common to Matthew and Luke. Lastly, passages peculiar to each of the three Gospels.

*Result.*—Then follow a complicated series of letters—Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, which need not be produced here, and then the following diagram representing these facts:—



How many German critics have accepted this solution of the Synoptic problem I do not know, but in this country, so far as I am aware, it seems absolutely unknown. In fact, among the many recent attempts to solve the problem, to which I referred at the outset, this solution of Bishop Marsh is never referred to, and seems to be unknown.

But what is more surprising, Mr. Rushbrooke in his elaborate work, in three parts 4to, called *Synopticon*, reproducing the theory of Mr. Edwin A. Abbott in his article 'Gospels' (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th edition), gives, in parallel columns, the same three divisions of the text as Bishop Marsh, only in different *colours*, instead of Marsh's letters, and tells us that this is done *for the first time*, showing

that he is not well up in the literature of his subject.

From these facts, it will be seen, I think, that this Synoptic problem has occupied the attention and close study of critics for a whole century, and at this date we are no nearer a solution in which there is a general acquiescence; the best proof of which is that, every now and then, as I

said at the outset, we are getting new solutions, or rather old ones, the writers of them not knowing that their theory is old.

Am I not right, then, in saying that the problem never will nor can be solved, because the facts which, if known, would explain everything are irrecoverably lost?

## Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

BY THE REV. R. C. FORD, M.A., GRIMSBY.

### Resurrection and Life.

'I am the resurrection and the life.'—JOHN xi. 25.

THREE times Christ raised the dead. Once from a deathbed; once from the bier; and once from the tomb. In this third instance death touched a personal friend. This is another of Christ's most precious utterances spoken to single individuals. All our needs are but varieties of our greatest need, which is Christ. In what way did Christ's words satisfy Martha's need? and how do they satisfy ours? These words revealed—

I. CHRIST'S SUBLIME CONFIDENCE OF HIS OWN POWER.—They are words of eternal life. They claim to do what only God can do. Jehoram exclaimed, 'Am I God to kill and to make alive.' Paul said it was not incredible that *God* should raise the dead. This is one of the great 'I am's' of Christ. All the titles He thus assumes reveal His power. 'Vine,' 'Bread of Life,' 'Light of the World.' It is a kingly utterance, and has more meaning than the empty boasts of earthly kings. (Louis XIV. said, 'I am the State,' '*L'Etat c'est moi.*')

II. THAT RESURRECTION AND LIFE ARE INSEPARABLE FROM CHRIST.—This means more than that Christ was He who first taught it. The fact itself would not have been but for Christ. 'The Son quickeneth whom He will.' 'In Christ shall all be made alive.'

III. THAT CHRIST IS THE EXAMPLE OF RESURRECTION AND LIFE.—This truth Martha could not realise then, nor would she until Christ was raised from the dead. Death is the separation of spirit and body: resurrection is the reuniting of

the same. The particles of which the body is composed are not necessarily the same; it is the spirit which gives them their form and appearance. The resurrection life is bodily life as well as spiritual. When Christ was raised, He said, 'A spirit (only) hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have.' But identity remains so that the risen body is recognisable, 'Behold Me that it is I Myself.' Yet the body possesses new powers. 'It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.' 'Flesh *and blood* cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor doth corruption inherit incorruption.'

IV. THAT THE CHRISTIAN HAS IN CHRIST A PRESENT REALISATION OF RESURRECTION AND LIFE.—On earth Christ's life was eternal. He had uninterrupted fellowship with the Father; He did the Father's will; He was full of peace and joy, such as the world could neither give nor take away. By fellowship with Him Christ imparts that life to His disciples. That life is in the bud now, and needs the sunshine of heaven to bring it to perfection and full beauty. There must be resurrection because there is life. Dead trees do not blossom when spring returns. At death the river of life flows underground, and is hidden, though its flow is not interrupted. Christ here brought it to the surface again for a time.

IV. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS POSSESSION TO THE CHRISTIAN.—(1) Death becomes insignificant. 'To none is death so little of a change as to those whose life has been one long unbroken confidence in God' (F. W. Faber). (2) We know that our friends are not lost to us. Lazarus is still 'our friend' though 'he sleepeth.' Cemetery is but Greek for 'sleeping-place.'