INTRODUCTION. ] THE THREE GOSPELS. [cm 1.   
   
 doubt that the pairs of incidents above cited from St. Matthew and St.   
 Luke are identical with each other ? What man can ever suppose that   
 the same offer would have been, not merely twice made to our Lord in   
 the same words and similarly answered by Him (for this is very possible),   
 but actually followed in both cases by a request from another disciple,   
 couched also in the very same words? The reiterated sequence of the   
 two is absolutely out of all bounds of probability :—and yet it is sup-   
 posed and maintained by one of the ablest of our modern Harmonists.   
 And this is only one specimen out of very many of the same kind,   
 notices of which may be seen in the following Commentary.   
 8. The fair Christian critic will pursue a plan different from both   
 these. With no desire to create discrepancies, but rather every desire   
 truthfully and justly to solve them, if it may be,—he will candidly   
 recognize them where they unquestionably exist. By this he loses   
 nothing, and the Evangelists lose nothing. That one great and glorious   
 portrait of our Lord should be harmoniously depicted by them,—that   
 the procession of events by which our redemption is assured to us should   
 be one and the same in all,—is surely more wonderful, and more plainly   
 the work of God’s Holy Spirit, the more entirely independent of each   
 other they must be inferred to have been. Variation in detail and   
 arrangement is to my mind the most valuable proof that they were, not   
 mere mouthpieces or organs of the Holy Spirit, as some would suicidally   
 make them, but holy men, under His inspiration. I shall treat of this   
 part of our subject more at length below (in § vi.):—I mention it now,   
 to shew that we need not be afraid to recognize real discrepancies, in the   
 spirit of fairness and truth. Christianity never was, and never can be   
 the gainer, by any concealment, warping, or avoidance of the plain truth,   
 wherever it is to be found.   
 4. On the other hand, the Christian critic will fairly discriminate   
 between real and apparent discrepancy. And in order to this, some rules   
 must be laid down by which the limits of each may be determined.   
 5. Similar incidents must not be too hastily assumed to be the same. If   
 one Evangelist had given us the feeding of the five thousand, and another   
 that of the four, we should have been strongly tempted to pronounce the   
 incidents the same, and to find a discrepancy in the accounts :—but our   
 conclusion would have been false :—for we have now both events narrated   
 by each of two Evangelists (St. Matthew and St. Mark), and formally   
 alluded to by our Lord Himeelf in connexion. (Matt. xvi. 9, 10. Mark viii.   
 19, 20.) And there are several narrations now in our Gospels, the identi-   
 fication of which must be abstained from ; e.g. the anointing of our Lord   
 by the woman who was a sinner, Luke vii. 36 ff., that at Bethany by   
 Mary the sister of Lazarus, in Matt. xxvi. 6 ff.: Mark xiv. 3 ff.: John   
 xi. 2; xii. 8 ff. In such cases we must judge fairly and according to   
 probability,—not making trifling differences in diction or narrative into   
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