A slightly different view would be to take δόξα still as a divine title, but as denoting Godhead or the Divine Essence rather than the third person of the Holy Trinity. Godet was near this view, but came short of it when he wrote "the sum of God's attributes." I prefer my former suggestion, however, but with some little hesitation.

GEORGE FARMER.

Hartlip Vicarage, Sittingbourne.

The Gospels and Modern Criticism.

BY THE REV. J. J. HALCOMBE, M.A., CAMBRIDGE.

"There is some mistake about this."

"Deil a bit on my side o' the wa'. I never deal in mistakes, they aye bring mischances."

THE reader will recall the scene between the Antiquary and Edie Ochiltree. For the hundredth time the former has rehearsed the learned arguments by which he demonstrated that the device on an old stone must be a "sacrificing vessel," and that the accompanying letters, "A.D.L.L.," certainly stood for *Agricola Dicavit Libens Lubens*. Whilst coming up in time to hear the end of the story, old Edie tells how he had himself helped to put the stone in position, and explains the connexion between the device and the letters by the more prosaic but natural rendering, Aiken Drum's Lang Ladle.

The moral, that everyone who substitutes the license of conjecture for the limitations of evidence is only putting a rod in pickle for his own back, is as universally recognised as it is generally ignored!

Manifestly the story would not have been true to nature had it represented that such evidence as the above produced the slightest apparent tendency to conviction in the mind of the learned author of "The Vestiges of Ancient Fortifications lately discovered at the Kaim of Kinprunes."

In like manner, to suppose that mere evidence of fact would produce any immediate effect upon so highly imaginative a theorist as Mr. Wright would clearly be unreasonable.

But it is none the less curious to observe the state of mental and logical confusion into which the conflicting claims of evidence and theory can throw even an accomplished disputant.

Witness, for instance, Mr. Wright's main verdict. He says: "It is easy to construct a system. If you carefully analyse and arrange the facts, leaving nothing out of consideration, and exaggerating nothing, *it will be impossible to refute you.* The question is whether your system is natural, self-evident, and capable of asserting its own truth, or a mass of improbabilities strung together in defiance of law and habit and ascertained fact."

Mr. Wright might be quoting a *bon mot* culled from the answers of some luckless examinee. To all intents and purposes he gravely asserts the following propositions:—

1. That an analysis of the internal evidence of the Gospels may be at once correct and exhaustive, and yet may represent a system which is not only wrong, but which the very correctness and exhaustiveness of the analysis makes it *impossible to refute.*

2. That the final appeal in the case of the very unusual facts presented by the Gospels must necessarily lie, not to analysis but to the mere subjective considerations of what this or that person may hold to be the probabilities of the case.

3. That an investigator may properly be defined as "a person who grovels amongst facts, and spends his time in the easy but profitless task of analysing and arranging them."

Clearly, if the first part of Mr. Wright's verdict be correct, the difficulties suggested in the second part cannot possibly have any existence save in his own imagination.

Mr. Wright is evidently possessed with two overwhelmingly strong but demonstrably erroneous ideas:—

1. He holds that if the evidence appears to prove that either of the Evangelists has written "in a way in which no man has ever written before or since," he is fully entitled to reject such evidence as certainly wrong, even though certainly irrefutable. In other words, he holds that the unusual must necessarily be regarded as incredible.

But he forgets—

(*a*) That when the unusual is of perpetual recurrence—and this the analysis which he accepts proves to be the case—the more unusual it is, the greater the certainty that it must be the result of design; and

(*b*) That, inasmuch as all the Gospel phenomena are intensely abnormal, to seek the explanation of such abnormal effects in anything like normal causes must be a mere midsummer madness.

2. Again, certain difficult and much disputed Gospel narratives so occupy the foreground of Mr. Wright's consciousness, that his range of vision is practically limited to them. He forgets that these narratives cannot even be intelligently discussed until a previous question has been decided, viz. Whether the Evangelists did or did not write with special reference to each other's records?

Thus the very evidence on which Mr. Wright most concentrates his attention not only bears an infinitesimally small proportion even to a single branch of the evidences which he ignores, but is of a kind which makes it absolutely necessary that it should, in the first instance, be as much as possible excluded from view.

I will now consider a few of Mr. Wright's difficulties in the form of objection and answer:—

Objection 1.—Though modern critics are "numerous and hold widely divergent views," Mr. Halcombe "groups them together and condemns them without distinction."

Answer.—That the Synoptic theory as universally held by modern critics, however little intended as such, is unquestionably in the nature of an accusation against the authority of the Gospels no one will deny.

But from time immemorial, when the witness of accusers has not "agreed together," the presumption has been held to be, *not* that one of them must be correct, but that all must be incorrect.

Objection 2.—"Mr. Halcombe claims to have settled the Gospel difficulties by putting St. John first, retaining the other Gospels in the common order, but *dissecting* and *reconstructing* St. Luke. He is satisfied that he has succeeded, and *points out in proof* that anyone, after mastering his "constructive principles," could tell at first sight from which Gospel any particular section came, without any previous knowledge of the Gospels."

Answer.—*The sole foundation* for the statement about St. Luke, to which such prominence is given, is that I have pointed out that, whereas the beginning of the Capernaum epoch of parabolic teaching is described in the first verses of the eighth chapter of St. Luke, the middle and end of that teaching is recorded in Luke xi. 14–xiii. 21, and that if this fact be recognised the one difficulty left by Professor Birk's harmony (see below) disappears.

The nearest approach to any foundation for the second statement is that I have said something remotely like what Mr. Wright attributes to me, *but only* with reference to and under the head of the evidence of subject. With many others, I hold that the colouring and idiosyncrasy of each Gospel is as recognisable as it is distinctive.

Objection 3.—The Synoptists certainly contradict each other in the matter of chronological arrangement. "The question is fundamental."

Answer.—Professor Birks has stated the actual facts of the case with admirable clearness. By figures attached to all the incidents in the Synoptic Gospels he has shown—

(*a*) That, in a limited and clearly-defined portion of the history, St. Matthew gives one order of events whilst St. Mark and St. Luke, save for one slight variation in a matter of contemporary detail, agree in giving a different order.

(*b*) That, save for one exception, the Gospels are everywhere else in what is practically the most absolute and sustained agreement.

(*c*) That the one exception to such agreement is the long portion of St. Luke, which includes the section of the history alluded to above.

If the Gospels had a publisher behind them, and if Mr. Wright made the statements which he does, wholly ignoring and misrepresenting the facts, as stated by Professor Birks, his statements would certainly recoil on his own head in the shape of the heaviest damages which an indignant jury could award.

Objection 4.—The system represents a plan of composition "unworthy of God and incredible in man." St. Mark especially is represented as a man of "preposterous humility," and "a miserable epitomiser of St. Matthew."

Answer.—These opinions are only made to appear plausible by a series of the most absurd caricatures of statements which, as I give them, are simply summaries of evidence.

I shall not attempt to follow Mr. Wright into the far regions of conjecture into which his own theories would carry us. There are simply no data which would render such a task possible. How, for instance, can we discuss the absolutely confident assumption that St. Luke was unacquainted with the story of the Syrophœnician woman, and that forsooth, because it belonged "*to the last stage of St. Peter's memoirs, which never reached the west till the Gospels were written*"?

If the gravity of the subject did not forbid such an idea, we should suppose that Mr. Wright must be preparing to turn round upon his readers, and to say that, had they possessed the smallest sense of humour, they must have seen that his whole conception of the case was merely intended as a sort of theological rival to *Alice in Wonderland*, and that his sole object was to show the absurdities into which a purely imaginative sense of fact might betray us, and so to give the *coup de grâce* to the already moribund theory of tradition.

But if to put forward such views as a jest would be inadmissible, how far more so to put them forward seriously!

Three facts are certain :—

1. Such views constitute an utterly reckless aspersion of the Gospels;

2. They are wholly inconsistent with any one of the branches of evidence which they ought to satisfy; and

3. No single sample of Gospel construction has been, or can be found, which these views could possibly account for.

It will of course be seen that Mr. Wright has not even alluded to the two main contentions which represent my case, viz. (*a*) that as all four Gospels certainly can, so they certainly ought to be examined together; and (*b*) that every separate branch of the fourfold evidences supports the positions taken.

These were the contentions which all previous critics in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES had supported, and which Mr. Wright undertook to examine and refute. Yet he simply has not touched them. The one partial exception to this general default is represented by the "verdict" quoted above.

The analysis which defies refutation is fourfold. But a correct fourfold must necessarily include a correct threefold analysis.

Just in proportion, therefore, as the threefold analysis on which Synoptic theories are based agree with the correct fourfold analysis, in that proportion will such theories be themselves correct. For instance, the most exhaustive threefold analysis which has ever been published is that of Professor Birks. So far as it goes, it is in absolute agreement with the fourfold analysis declared to be irrefutable.

Hence, so far as they go, his conclusions also are in exact agreement with those inseparable from the fourfold analysis. I say "inseparable," because a fourfold analysis is simply a statement in detail of what each of four writers has done. When this is accurately known, the evangelists, like other writers, must needs be judged by the acts for which they are proved to be responsible.

Thus the difference between Mr. Wright and myself is this: I say, that when we have once taken the trouble to ascertain with perfect accuracy what the evangelists have done, there is absolutely nothing in their conduct to which the most exacting criticism can take any reasonable exception. Their conduct may be, and undoubtedly is, intensely unusual,—*et hinc illæ lacrymæ*,—but it is none the less everywhere practically the same, and always transparently simple.

Mr. Wright virtually says: "I grant that you have shown exactly what the evangelists have done; but to me their conduct seems so preposterously unlike that of ordinary men of letters, that I have no hesitation in denying that such conduct could have been intentional. I admit, therefore, that I cannot refute your scientific proof. But I assert that even science must recognise a court of appeal in common sense."

Extraordinary as this opinion is, Mr. Wright only supports it by strong language and vague generalities. I, on the other hand, have broken up the whole of the Gospel record into samples of fourfold construction, and have exhibited in the simplest form what the writers have done (*a*) in fourteen fourfold sections of the history, and (*b*) in ten fourfold narratives. (See *What Think Ye of the Gospels?* pp. 39–87.)

To make his case good, Mr. Wright must take at least one or two of these samples,—and I freely give him his choice,—and show how they can possibly be made to justify the use of such expressions as "a mass of improbabilities strung together in defiance of law and habit and ascertained fact," or "unworthy of God and incredible in man."