

of our neighbours, to them, without our permission being asked, we have become masters, *i.e.*, teachers and examples. They will try to learn of us, often quite unconsciously, and to imitate us. Our character, our mode of life, will and must tell on them for good or for harm. And, therefore, we should seek and strive for grace to set them a good example, that our influence may be stimulating and helpful to them. Above all, we should try so to follow Christ as that we may lead them to the perfect Example, and make them disciples of the only Master who can never mislead them. We should thus teach those who *will* copy us, whether we like it or not, that there is a far higher Pattern than ours; and teach them to look to that Pattern not so much by our words as by our deeds, not so much by homilies and exhortations as by compelling them to feel that we ourselves look to it, and are sorry and ashamed that we so often fall short of it. Our influence on them, in that case, can only do them good; for, in following us, they will be led to the feet of the great Master and Lord.

NIGER.

*THE GREEK AORIST, AS USED IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT.*

FIRST PAPER.

I PURPOSE to discuss in this paper a point of New Testament grammar; one which, uninteresting and unimportant as to some it may appear, has a wide bearing on the entire domain of theology; namely, the meaning and the correct English rendering of the GREEK AORIST. I shall also discuss the meaning and use of the Greek perfect, and its relation to the aorist.

It will be well for us, before discussing the usage of the Greek language in its representation of past time, to consider the usage of our own mother-tongue. In so doing we can hardly say that we are approaching the less known through that which is better known; for the distinction between the English preterite and perfect is much more difficult to understand than that between the past tenses in Greek. But the best method of investigating the structure of any one language is to compare it with another. And the standard of comparison which the Englishman instinctively chooses first is that language which has been to him from childhood the chief instrument of his own thought. Moreover, the peculiarities of the English preterite have been a great obstacle to many in their endeavours to understand and expound the Greek aorist. Therefore, before beginning to compare, we will examine carefully our standard of comparison.

To mark out accurately the boundary between the English preterite and perfect is no easy task. But it must be attempted. And its difficulty will be my excuse if the attempt be not in every point successful. We shall, however, be able to distinguish them so far as is needful for comparison with the much more easily understood Greek tenses.

Three cases meet us. Sometimes, to replace one tense by the other would materially alter the meaning of the sentence; at other times it would make the sentence ungrammatical or uncouth; whereas, frequently, it would affect neither the sense nor the correctness.

If a friend said to us, "Have you seen the Queen?" his question would cover our entire past life to the

present moment ; and if we replied "No," our answer would have, with an exception noted below, the same unlimited reference. But if he said, "Did you see the Queen?" we should at once think of some definite time during which we might be supposed to have special opportunities of seeing her ; and if we had lately returned from the neighbourhood of Osborne or Balmoral, and had not seen her Majesty, we should unhesitatingly say "No," even though we had frequently seen her before. Here, then, is the first distinction of the English tenses. The preterite is essentially a limited tense. It directs our attention to some point or period of past time, and bids us find out from the context, or the circumstances of the speaker, to what time it refers. The perfect tense speaks, in the above case, of past time generally, without any limitation whatever.

Again, if a man say, "I lived in London ten years," we understand at once that he does not live there now. But if he say, "I have lived in London ten years," we infer that he lives there still. We have no tense which would leave us without any suggestion about the speaker's present abode. In other words, we have in English no tense of "unlimited" past time. The preterite pushes back into the past the matter asserted, as something removed from the present ; the perfect joins the past to the present.

This second distinction of the tenses gives rise to an exception to a statement made under our former illustration. If we were waiting to see the Queen, and some one asked us, "Have you seen her Majesty?" we should reply "No," however often we had seen her in days gone by ; for we should take for granted

that he referred only to the present occasion. That we were still looking out would justify the use of the perfect tense in such a question. But if some time had elapsed, or if the Queen had been visible only at one definite past moment, as in a procession, the preterite would probably have been used.

Once more. If we omit from the words used in our second illustration the limitation, "ten years," we may correctly say, "I have lived in London," although we do not live there now. This is allowable, because the words, "I lived in London," would never be used without further specification. This affords further proof that the preterite is essentially a limited tense. We cannot use it unless we have in mind some definite time, definitely separated from the present.

We notice that of the above illustrations the first and third refer to an event necessarily of limited duration and evidently past; the second and fourth to an abiding state of indefinite duration. Similar to these last is the case of a passing event which may be indefinitely repeated. Taken together, these illustrations explain the first of the three cases mentioned above.

We now consider the second case. The difference between the tenses, and the essentially limited reference of the preterite, are further seen in this, that when we mention a definite time in the past, or speak of an event which is evidently and altogether past, we are compelled, or almost compelled, to use the preterite; and that, when we neither mention nor refer to any definite time, and when we speak of that which has just taken place, or use an adverb of absolute present time, we are compelled to use the perfect. We can

hardly say, "I have dined with Mr. A. yesterday;" or, "Sir Christopher Wren has built St. Paul's cathedral;" nor can we say, "I dined," without further addition, or as we are rising from the dinner-table. These are illustrations of the second case mentioned above, in which the choice between the tenses is determined, not by difference of meaning, but by the usage of the English language.

Of our third case we have an illustration when a mother says to her children with equal correctness, pointing to a broken ornament, "Who did this?" or, "Who has done this?" She may use the perfect as the tense of indefinite past time, or, since the broken ornament brings vividly to her mind the very definite event of breakage, an event indisputably past, she may use the preterite.

We see then that both preterite and perfect tenses assert that an event or events took place, gradually or suddenly, or that a state of things existed, at some point or during some period of time earlier than the present moment, thus differing from the imperfect, which asserts that at some definite point or period of past time an event was in progress; that the preterite limits the event, events, or state, to some past time mentioned or implied, while the perfect tense is unlimited in its reference to the past, except that, when the event or state is capable of extension to the present, such extension is implied unless expressly denied.

It is worthy of notice that the preterite, by referring us to a definite time at which the event took place, reminds us of the various circumstances of the event, and thus becomes conspicuously a matter-of-fact tense. On the other hand, the perfect, owing to the absence

from it of such definite reference, leaves the mind of the hearer free to consider the abiding effect of the event asserted. But it does not assert expressly the existence of such effects, and is frequently used when the effects are of no moment whatever.

Very similar, but not exactly the same, is the usage of the French language in its past tenses. These occupy unitedly the same domain of past time as do the English tenses; but the boundary line between the tenses is not exactly the same in French as in English. Now it is worthy of notice that the French tenses which correspond to our preterite and perfect respectively are called the preterites definite and indefinite. This nomenclature, which we may assume to be a correct expression of the difference between the tenses, confirms the above-asserted distinction of the English tenses.

We turn now to the Greek tenses. In treating of them I shall quote and accept the testimony of the best grammarians. Not that a study of them alone will ever reveal to us the full significance of Greek inflections. A knowledge of grammar gathered from grammars only must ever be imperfect and uncertain. It is no better than a knowledge of botany derived only from books. To master an ancient language there must be actual and unwearied intercourse with its best writers. But, as guides leading us into the presence of these, the grammars are invaluable. They also afford a convenient summary of the results obtained by modern scholarship. These results the reader will test for himself in his ordinary reading of classic and Hellenistic Greek.

I shall begin by quoting Kühner's larger grammar,

which well deserves the lavish praise bestowed upon it by Meyer in the preface to the last edition of his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. That it is a grammar of classic Greek will not lessen its usefulness to us: for, as we shall see, the classic use of the tenses is maintained accurately throughout the New Testament, except possibly once or twice in the perfect tense. Dr. Kühner says: "The aorist describes merely the past, and represents the action merely as gone by or as having taken place."¹ Again: "The aorist in itself by no means describes the momentary action; for every past action, even of the longest duration, is expressed by the aorist when it is mentioned in narration, that is, merely as having taken place."²

In other words, the aorist is, as its name implies, an "unlimited" past tense. When a Greek wished to say that an event or events had taken place, without considering whether it was a moment ago or ages ago, whether it took place at some definite time of which the speaker thinks, or without any reference whatever to time, whether it lasted for a moment or a lifetime, whether it was one act or a long series of actions, whether it continues to the present and will continue to the future, or has altogether passed away, whether or not its results abide—when a Greek wished to use a tense which would leave all these considerations out of sight, and simply state the fact that the event took place, he used the aorist. Consequently, the Greek aorist covers the whole ground jointly occupied by the English preterite and perfect. Both these tenses may be accurately rendered into Greek by the aorist. Therefore of the three above-mentioned cases of the

¹ *Greek Grammar*, sect. 386. 3.

² *Ibid.*, sect. 386. 4.

use of the English tenses, a Greek was unable to mark by the tense the distinction in Case 1, and was at liberty to use the aorist always in Case 2.

“The Greek perfect,” Dr. Kühner says, “differs from that of other languages in that it describes not merely a now-completed action, but the completed action as likewise also still continuing in its workings and results. Where this is not the case, the Greek uses the aorist.”¹ With this agrees Winer in his *Grammar of New Testament Greek* (sect. 40. 4), where he gives a good list of New Testament examples.

Burnouf, in his *Method for Studying the Greek Language* (section 255), says: “The principal difference between the perfect and the aorist consists in this, that the perfect expresses an action completed, but of which the effect continues to the moment when we speak; while the aorist represents the action as simply past, without indicating whether or not anything of it remains. Thus when, in speaking of him who has built a house, we say *ᾠκοδόμηκε*, we assert that the house continues still: if we say *ᾠκοδόμησε*, the matter is left in doubt. In the same way *γαγάμηκα* means *I am married*; *ἔγημα*, *I married* or *I have married*; and this may be said even when one is a widower.”

The above quotations imply clearly that the Greek perfect has no exact equivalent in English, German, or French. We cannot express, by a tense, what the Greeks expressed by their perfect. It is quite true, as we have said already, that in some cases the English perfect suggests more or less distinctly the results of the event narrated. But what our tense suggests indistinctly and casually, the Greek tense plainly and

¹ *Greek Grammar*, sect. 384. 2.

emphatically asserts. We say, "I have found it," even when the thing found is utterly worthless. But when Andrew said, "We have found the Messiah,"¹ he indicated plainly that the discovery was an era in his life. The Greek perfect = aorist + present. This is well put by Alex. Buttmann in his *New Testament Grammar* (section 137. 3), quoted by Moulton in a note to his translation of Winer's *Grammar* (section 40, 5a): "The relation of time expressed by the perfect is as if it were compounded of the relations denoted by the present and the aorist, since the action has its commencement in the past, but extends into the present, either in itself or in its effects." In other words, the Greek perfect conveys a combination of two distinct ideas, a combination which can be fully reproduced in English only by a circumlocution. This double significance is well brought out in Winer's *Grammar* (section 40. 4). Whereas the English preterite and perfect divide between them the domain of completed action, the Greek aorist covers the entire ground occupied by the two English tenses, and the Greek perfect conveys the entire sense of the aorist, and adds to it a further significance which no English tense conveys.

It is, nevertheless, true that our English preterite stands in a near relation to the Greek aorist, and the English perfect to the Greek perfect. Not unfrequently the difference between the Greek tenses may be fairly, though imperfectly, reproduced by the English tenses. For, as we have seen, our preterite suggests, by its very definiteness, the details and surroundings of the event noted. And our perfect, by its indefiniteness, leaves the mind at liberty to consider

¹ John i. 42.

the abiding effect of the event nakedly asserted. But the Greek and English tenses differ in this, that, when a Greek wished to speak of a past event simply as matter of fact, he always used the aorist, whereas we frequently use, and in some cases must use, the perfect; and that the Greek perfect is never used except to direct attention to the abiding results of the event narrated. In a word, the Greek perfect has a fuller significance, and therefore covers less ground, than our perfect; the aorist has a less definite significance, and therefore covers more ground than the English preterite. This similarity mingled with dissimilarity greatly increases the difficulty of grasping the exact significance of the Greek tenses.

From the foregoing it will appear that it lay with the writer's mode of viewing the event he narrates, and indeed frequently with his habit of mind, whether he used the aorist or perfect. For the aorist by no means implies that the consequences of the event do not remain to the present. And if the context made it sufficiently clear that the consequences continue, or if it was needless to call special attention to them, the aorist was used. Only when the consequences demanded attention was the perfect used. Nor does the Greek perfect imply that all the consequences of the past event remain. Lazarus was properly spoken of as *ὁ τεθνηκώς*,¹ even when coming from the grave. For his death, although its bands were broken, had left an abiding mark upon him. We are, therefore, not surprised to find that occasionally the sense of the perfect was but little removed from that of the aorist; and that in later times the difference

¹ John xi. 44.

became imperceptible. But although the significance of the perfect sometimes sank towards, or even sank to, the level of the aorist, the significance of the aorist never rose in the least degree towards that of the perfect. Winer well says, in his *New Testament Grammar* (section 40. 5a): "There is no passage [in the New Testament] in which it can be certainly proved that the aorist stands for the perfect." In conclusion I may add that we have no nobler monument of the thoughtfulness of the Greek mind than the Greek perfect tense.

I hope to illustrate in another paper, by examples from the New Testament, the distinction I have here attempted to set forth; and to discuss in a third paper the rendering and exposition of the Greek aorist and perfect by the best English commentators.

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WAS TITUS CIRCUMCISED?

GALATIANS II. 3-5.

WE have been led to make this question the subject of a brief discussion, by the answer given to it by Canon Farrar in his recently published work on *The Life and Work of St. Paul*. In common with many Biblical students, we hailed the announcement of this work as giving sure promise of a valuable contribution to the literature of a subject of first-class importance. We have read the work, and have not been disappointed. We have found in it a book of genuinely religious and theological, and not merely antiquarian, interest; a book not on the countries through which the Apostle