

been recorded by later writers, except where his authority was needed to sanction some false or questionable interpretation; but the impression thus produced is most unjust to his reputation. In spite of his very patent faults, which it costs nothing to denounce, a very considerable part of what is valuable in subsequent commentaries, whether ancient or modern, is due to him. A deep thinker, an accurate grammarian, a most laborious worker, and a most earnest Christian, he not only laid the foundation, but to a very great extent built up the fabric of Biblical interpretation." ¹

W. SANDAY.

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

THIRD PAPER.

IN former papers I have attempted to state and to illustrate the sense, and the New Testament use, of the aorist and perfect tenses of the Greek language. I shall now discuss the rendering and exposition of these tenses by some of the best known English commentators.

Of these, Dr. Ellicott merits our first attention. It is hardly too much to say that his commentaries have created an era in English theology. By directing our attention to the consecutive study of Holy Scripture and to the study of its grammatical details as the only safe stepping-stones to "the difficult heights of exegetical and dogmatical theology," by limiting our attention for a time to one short portion of Scripture, and by discussing carefully the meaning, inflexion, and

¹ *Galatians*, p. 223 (2nd ed.)

connection of almost every word, he has done more perhaps than any other living Englishman to lay a broad and deep foundation for the science of theology.

With Dr. Ellicott's treatment of the aorist the present papers are in general agreement. Indeed, it is but honest to say that the researches of which they are an embodiment were in part suggested by remarks about the aorist scattered through his commentaries; and that whatever of value these papers contain is due, directly or indirectly, to him. But the obligations of all English students of the New Testament to Dr. Ellicott are so great, and so universally admitted, that we have almost ceased to acknowledge them.

Under Galatians v. 24 he says, "Though this ethical crucifixion is here designated as an act of the past, it really is and must be a continuing act as well. This, however, the aorist with its usual and proper force leaves unnoticed; it simply specifies, in the form of a general truth, the act as belonging to the past, without affirming or denying any reference to the present." He accepts the rendering of the Authorised Version, "They have crucified," with the remark, "Here again it seems desirable to preserve the perfect in translation, as the *English* aorist tends to refer the crucifixion too exclusively to the past." Under Galatians v. 4, which he translates, "Ye have been done away," &c., he says, "Here idiom seems to require the English perfect: the purely aoristic translation, 'Ye were done away with from Christ,' stands in too marked a contrast with the following present, and to the English reader too completely transfers the action to what is purely past." Similarly, under 1 Thessalonians ii. 16, which he translates, "The wrath is come," he

says, " This certainly seems one of those cases in which our English aorist does not convey the full force of the Greek, but remands the event too unequivocally to the past. While the Greek *ἔφθασε* states the fact, but is simply silent as to 'quam late pateat id quod actum est,' the English 'came' seems to express it, and to imply too distinctly that the event plainly belongs with all its issues to the past." Again, under Ephesians iii. 5 (Notes on Translation), he says, " In English the aorist has no connection with present time, and therefore cannot here properly be connected with *νῦν*; in Greek this is possible, from the greater temporal latitude of the tense." So, under 1 Timothy i. 20 (Notes on Translation): " There are cases where the idiom of our language may seem positively violated by an aoristic translation, especially where *νῦν* or *ἤδη* is found with the aorist; these are, however, cases in which we do not rashly say that the aorist is used for the perfect, but in which we only recognize an idiomatic power in the Greek aorist which does not exist in our English past tense."

Under Galatians iii. 18 he says, " With the present use of the perfect, implying the duration of the *χάρις*, contrast Philippians ii. 9, *ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ ὄνομα*, where the action is represented as a simple historical fact." The perfect *γεγέννηται*, in Galatians iv. 23, he has translated, for reasons given in my last paper, by the English preterite: " He who was of the bond-maid was born after the flesh." Similarly, he translates the perfect in 1 Timothy ii. 14: " The woman ¹ fell into transgression."

It is therefore quite clear that in pointing out the

¹ Γέγονεν.

difference between the Greek and English tenses I have only followed in the steps of Dr. Ellicott.

But I venture to question the propriety of the phrase "English aorist." It seems to me to be a mere imitation of the name given by the Greeks to their own tense. And the use of it tends to hide the great difference between that tense and our preterite, a difference which Dr. Ellicott is careful to maintain. As we have seen, the English language possesses no tense of unlimited past time. In other words, there is no "English aorist." Nor do I see why, after correctly rendering one aorist in Galatians v. 4, "Ye have been done away," he renders another, "Ye are fallen from grace." This latter rendering, which he adopts also in Galatians ii. 17, Ephesians ii. 13, 1 Thessalonians ii. 16 seems to me most undesirable. As combining the past participle "fallen" with the present indicative "ye are," it is a very good equivalent for the Greek perfect, for which it should be reserved: whereas the form "ye have fallen" directs our attention, as the aorist does, simply to the event of falling. I also think that the objection to Chrysostom's exposition of the aorist in Galatians iv. 12, as being "grammatically precarious," hardly agrees with Dr. Ellicott's own exposition of the aorist as quoted above. With these trifling exceptions, his treatment of the aorist commands my full assent.

We now turn to another prince of commentators, one fully equal on the whole to the foregoing—Dr. Lightfoot. In spite, however, of the great and admitted excellence of his expositions, I cannot but think that his treatment of the aorist is not altogether successful.

He expounds Philippians iii. 12, "Not as though by

my conversion I did at once attain ;” a rendering peculiar, I believe, to him, and by no means correct. For it implies that the aorist limits St. Paul’s reference to some definite time in the past and to a somewhat sudden event. Of these limitations, the former certainly belongs to the English preterite ; but both are entirely foreign to the Greek “unlimited” tense. The words *οὐκ ἔλαβον* cover St. Paul’s entire past life to the moment of writing ; and simply declare, without any limitation whatever, that up to this moment he had not attained, whether suddenly or gradually, to Christ’s purpose concerning him. The passage is admirably rendered by Ellicott and Alford : “Not that I have already attained (obtained, Alf.), or am already made perfect.” Nor can I admit, with Dr. Lightfoot, that the Authorised Version of Galatians i. 13, “Ye have heard,” gives a wrong meaning. For only by the context can the aorist *ἠκούσατε* be limited to the time when St. Paul was himself among the Galatians, or to any other definite time : and in the context no hint of such limitation is given. But a limitation of time is implied in the rendering I have quoted.

Under Colossians i. 21 we read, “Here, as frequently, *νῦν* (*νυνὶ*) admits an aorist, because it denotes not ‘at the present *moment*,’ but ‘in the present *dispensation*, the present order of things.’” But that the aorist with *νῦν* may be used in reference to the moment just gone by, we have proof in Matthew xxvi. 65 : “Now ye have heard the blasphemy.” Compare Matthew v. 28, “Hath already committed adultery ;” Matthew ix. 18, “My daughter has just died, *ἄρτι ἐτελεύτησεν* : Matthew xxvii. 19, “Many things I have suffered to-day in a dream because of him ;” Luke ii. 11 : “There hath

been born for you to-day a Saviour." The passage in question Dr. Lightfoot correctly renders, "But now ye have been reconciled;" thus admitting, in agreement with my first paper, that the aorist does not correspond exactly with our preterite.

Under Galatians v. 4, Dr. Lightfoot says, "The aorists represent the consequences as instantaneous: 'Ye are *then and there* shut out from Christ.'" As an exposition this is, I believe, fairly correct; but the rendering of Dr. Ellicott is better: "Ye have been done away with from Christ." The sense of *then and there* would have been conveyed equally by the perfect; as in Romans xiv. 23, "He that doubteth, if he eat, is condemned;" and in John iii. 18, "He that believeth not is already judged." A conditional proposition with a present tense in the protasis and an aorist or perfect in the apodosis, asserts that as soon as the course of action denoted by the present tense begins, the event noted by the aorist or perfect has already taken place. St. Paul says that they who are at work justifying themselves are (although their effort after justification can never succeed) already removed from all connection with Christ. The renderings "Ye are shut out," "are driven forth," needlessly set aside the distinction between the aorist and the perfect; a distinction which Dr. Lightfoot is properly very anxious to maintain. His exposition of "crucify," in Galatians v. 24, seems to me similarly objectionable. The instructive aorist in Philippians iv. 11 is passed over in silence. That in Chapter iii. 16 is translated by the preterite; but no exposition is given. Of this last passage I cannot conceive any correct rendering but that of Ellicott and Alford: "Whereunto we have attained."

The foregoing criticisms are, I cannot but feel, somewhat unfair. For Dr. Lightfoot does not profess, as does Dr. Ellicott, to elucidate the grammar of St. Paul's Epistles. I have referred to him not to find fault, but simply to illustrate the subject in hand. And I cannot forbear to express my warm thanks for the very learned, able, and accurate commentaries with which he has enriched the Church of Christ.

Dr. Vaughan's very excellent notes on the Epistle to the Romans are not free from similar defects. He translates Romans iii. 23, "For all sinned;" and adds, "The aorist gathers up as it were the sins of the world into one act." Now it is true that, by using one word to recall centuries of sin, St. Paul does gather together the actions of these centuries into one mental landscape. But this gathering up is by no means implied in the use of the aorist instead of the perfect. The aorist speaks of the past sins of mankind simply as matter of fact. The perfect, which would have been equally in place to sum up a long course of sin, as in 1 John i. 10, would have also reminded us of the abiding result of it. This was needless in Romans iii. 23: for the result is expressed in the following words. The aorist, like our preterite, is constantly used with words expressive of long duration, even duration continuing to the present; as in Luke xiii. 16, "Whom Satan has bound, lo, eighteen years;" Mark x. 20, "All these things I have kept from my youth." Similarly, under Romans iii. 27, Dr. Vaughan says, "The tense expresses *excluded by one decisive act.*" But to suppose that the aorist, when not accompanied by mention of time, implies or suggests a single decisive act, is to put a limitation upon the "unlimited" tense. Dr. Vaughan

does not tell his readers how to translate and expound the aorist in Romans iii. 12, 17 ; viii. 36 ; xi. 1, 3, 30, 31 ; xiii. 12.

The late lamented Dean Alford recognises, in his very useful commentary and in his translation of the New Testament, the difference between the Greek and English past tenses, by translating the aorist, in passages too numerous to quote, by the English perfect. And occasionally he is compelled to render the Greek perfect into English by the preterite. So Matthew xiii. 46, "Went and sold (perfect) all that he had ;" Chapter xxv. 6, "At midnight there was a cry made ;" 2 Corinthians ii. 13, "I had no rest for my spirit ;" Chapter xii. 9, "He said to me." The force of the perfect in these passages I have explained in a former paper.¹ Dr. Alford seldom attempts to justify his rendering of the Greek tenses. But it is in most cases indisputably correct, and supports the position which in these papers I have taken up.

Dr. Alford betrays, however, an occasional desire to limit the "unlimited" tense, in order to force it to keep company with the English preterite. In Romans xi. 1-4 he renders correctly, "They have killed thy prophets, they have digged down thine altars ;" "I have reserved to myself," &c. But, instead of "I have been left"—or, indeed, he might have said, "I was left"—he renders another aorist "I am left," thus giving to it nearly the full sense of the Greek perfect. Yet, while dealing thus freely or loosely with the aorist in Verses 3 and 4, he translates it mechanically by preterites in Verses 1 and 2 ; although by doing so he limits St. Paul's question and denial to the time of

¹ See p. 302.

Isaiah, whereas it is quite evident that they cover the entire past time up to the moment of writing.¹ In another similar case, 2 Corinthians iii. 14, his rendering of the aorist, "Their understandings were hardened," is, I believe, incorrect, not grammatically, but exegetically. This is one of the passages in which we can determine only from the context whether the aorist is better rendered into English by the preterite or the perfect. For only from the context can we decide whether the hearts referred to were those of the contemporaries of Moses or of St. Paul. To me the latter seems the correct reference. I therefore translate, "Their minds have been hardened;" the indefiniteness of the English perfect leaving the reader's mind at liberty to revert to the unbelieving Jews with whom St. Paul had so much to do. Again, both in his commentary and his revised translation, Dr. Alford renders Revelation xix. 6, "The Lord God reigneth," thus overlooking the correct sense of the aorist as marking the commencement of Christ's reign.² He properly notes, however, "the inadequacy of our past tenses to reproduce the Greek ones."

Many English writers seem to me to have failed to grasp fully the true significance of the Greek aorist as the tense of absolutely unlimited past time. They cannot divest themselves of the idea that it does somehow imply either a definite past time, or suddenness, or single occurrence. The idea of a definite time arises evidently from the definiteness of the English preterite, which we all feel to be the nearest English equivalent to the Greek aorist. The idea of single occurrence may possibly have been suggested by the

¹ See my second paper, p. 299.

² *Ibid.* p. 298.

ambiguity of the English word *once*. Of this ambiguity a proof is found in the German dictionaries, which give this one word as a rendering of two very different German words, *einst* or *einstmal*, and *einmal*. Of these, the latter denotes single occurrence; the two former, occurrence at some indefinite time in the past. Dr. Moulton, in his very accurate and valuable, or rather invaluable, translation of Winer's New Testament Grammar, has given *once* as an equivalent of *einst* or *einstmal* three times in Section xl. 4. And in the same place he has used it, properly, as a rendering of *einmal*, even in contrast to *einst*, which in this case he translates "at some past time." This only proves that the use even of the most accurate translation introduces, especially in grammatical studies, an element of uncertainty.

The late Mr. Conybeare, in the excellent free translation of St. Paul's Epistles, given in the *Life of St. Paul* by himself and Dean Howson, while justly finding fault with Dr. Alford for attributing sometimes to the Greek aorist the sense of an English preterite, himself wandered from the truth in an opposite and much more dangerous direction. He assumes silently that the Greek aorist, as used by classic writers, corresponds exactly with the English preterite, and therefore supposes that the New Testament writers deviate from the classic use. After translating correctly the aorists in 2 Corinthians vii. 2, "I have wronged no man, I have ruined no man, I have defrauded no man," he says that "there is no need to suppose these aorists used aoristically (as they would be in classic Greek), since St. Paul constantly uses the aorist for the perfect. Even those commentators who are most anxious to

force upon the Hellenistic of the New Testament the nice observance of this classical distinction are obliged sometimes to give up their consistency and translate the aorist as perfect. In fact, the aorist is continually joined with *νῦν* (e.g., Matt. xxvi. 65; John xiii. 31; Rom. xi. 31; Eph. iii. 5), which is of course decisive." Under Romans v. 5, he says, "Mr. Alford, who objects to translate *δοθέντος* in the fifth verse 'having been given,' is obliged himself inconsistently to translate *δικαιωθέντες* in the ninth verse 'having been justified,' and *ἐλάβομεν*, eleventh verse, 'we have received,' and to consent to the junction of both these aorists with *νῦν*, a junction which is conclusive as to its perfect use." But Mr. Conybeare overlooked the fact that the construction to which he twice appealed as "conclusive" and "decisive" proof that the New Testament writers neglected the classic use of the aorist is itself a classic usage. This is pointed out by Dr. Lightfoot in his note upon Colossians i. 21, where two examples are given—one from Plato, another from Isaeus. To these might be added examples from many classic writers from Homer to Plato, and from Plato to Lucian. For example: *Iliad* ii. 114, 274; iii. 439; xiii. 772; Herodotus, vii. 8; Lucian, *Dialogi Marini*, vii. 1. And, as we have seen, the collocation of *νῦν* with the aorist is in full accord with its strict classic use as the tense of unlimited past time. Certainly St. Paul's use of it differs from our use of the preterite; but he never uses the aorist where a classic writer would have used the perfect.

In a former number of this magazine,¹ Dr. Reynolds has expounded the word *ἡγήνησμαι* in 2 Timothy iv. 7

¹ Vol. x. p. 452.

to mean, "I have fought it in the past, and am doing it still." It is true that, in such cases as 2 Corinthians i. 9, the Greek perfect, like the aorist in Luke i. 46, John xvii. 25, 26, and elsewhere, denotes an event or state which continues to the present. But that it does not necessarily convey this sense is evident from the examples quoted in these papers. And that this is not the sense St. Paul wishes to convey in this passage is proved by the words immediately following—τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα. For he cannot mean to say, "I have finished the course, and am finishing it still." In this verse the Apostle places himself in thought, as Christ did in John xvii. 11, 12, in the moment of dissolution, and looks back upon life as actually ended. And in doing so, he chooses the perfect in order to direct our attention to the results of a conflict which, to his thought, is already over. He says, "I have fought the fight and finished the course, and the results of the conflict and the race continue."

So far I have spoken only of New Testament Greek. But all that I have said is true also of classic Greek. Side by side of every one of the many examples quoted above might be placed examples from the best classic writers. I will therefore supplement my references to New Testament commentators by a reference to Canon Farrar's very interesting and instructive *Brief Greek Syntax*, which deals chiefly with classic Greek.

With so learned and so admirable a book as this it may seem both ungrateful and presumptuous to find fault. But I must point out what seems to me to be a defect in Dr. Farrar's treatment of the aorist and perfect tenses. On page 125 he says, "Whatever dif-

ference there is in English between 'I dined (*e.g.*, ten years ago at Rome) and 'I have dined' (this evening), the same difference exists in Greek between ἐδέειπνῆσα = 'I dined,' and δεδέειπνηκα = 'I have dined.'" The words in brackets, added by Dr. Farrar to his English equivalents of the Greek tenses, sufficiently disprove his statement. As we have seen, a Greek might, on rising from table, say correctly, -ἐδέειπνῆσα, without further addition ;¹ whereas δεδέειπνηκα would imply, whether spoken immediately after dinner or hours after, that he still felt the effects of his dinner. But an Englishman could not, when rising from table, say, "I dined," without further addition ; nor would the words "I have dined" convey the significance of the Greek perfect. Dr. Farrar says, "*Very rarely indeed* we are compelled by the English idiom to introduce a present-perfect in rendering the aorist," and refers properly to the difference between the aorist and the imperfect, as used in the Greek Testament. But he neither explains nor mentions the large number of passages quoted above in which the aorist cannot, or cannot correctly, be rendered by an English preterite.

To some persons our long discussion of a Greek tense will seem to be little better than learned trifling. But the careful student of Holy Scripture will judge otherwise. No one who earnestly desires to learn all he can from the Bible, and who, with this aim in view, strives to follow the train of thought of its writers, will count any labour superfluous which enables him to understand more exactly and fully the meaning of their words. The sense which lies on the surface of Scripture is often very far from the correct one. And

¹ Comp. Mark v. 35 ; Rev. xviii. 2.

our chief aid in discovering the true sense is accurate grammatical analysis. Much oftener than is commonly supposed have grammatical mistakes given rise to errors in doctrine. And still more frequently have the clearer views obtained by grammatical study borne fruit in the spiritual life of the student.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

THE READING AND RENDERING OF
COLOSSIANS II. 18.

WE must now read, it appears, *which he hath seen*, instead of *which he hath not seen*, in Colossians ii. 18. For on this point our leading textual critics are all but agreed; and, indeed, the evidence is abundant and decisive. If we are bound to accept what our documents actually do say, instead of determining what they ought to say, then we must believe that St. Paul wrote ἠέώρακεν (or έώρακεν) έμβατεύων. But this gives us a clause difficult in the extreme to interpret. Clearly it will not do to read, *Intruding into the things which he hath seen*. Some other meaning must be found for έμβατεύων. And, on any rendering of this clause, it must be readjusted in its now completely altered sense to the context of the sentence to which it belongs. So perplexing is the problem thus presented, that Bishop Lightfoot, in his noble Commentary on *Colossians and Philemon*, fairly gives it up. "The combination," he writes, "is so harsh and incongruous as to be barely possible; and there was perhaps some corruption in the text prior to all existing authorities." He therefore 'cuts the Gordian knot' by proposing the learned