

Notes on New Testament Passages.

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I. ON THE AORIST εὐδόκησα IN MARK i. 11 AND PARALLELS.

THIS aorist Burton classifies as "an Inceptive Aorist referring to some indefinite, imagined point of past time at which God is represented as becoming well pleased with Jesus. But since this point is not thought of as definitely fixed, English idiom requires a Perfect tense. It may be described, therefore, as an Inceptive Aorist equivalent to an English Perfect, and may be rendered, *I have become well pleased*. This, however, can only be a vivid way of saying *I am well pleased*. If, then, this view is correct, the rendering of the English versions is a free but substantially correct paraphrase. A true Perfect would affirm the present state of pleasure, and imply the past becoming pleased. The aorist affirms the becoming pleased and leaves the present pleasure to be suggested."¹

No one doubts that Professor Burton thoroughly understands the aorist tense, and accurately defines the elusive limit where it ceases to be an Aorist and becomes a Present or a Perfect. But understanding of the tense, even by an eminent grammarian, is apt to be more or less affected by his understanding of the sense, and in the present instance, sense and tense stand in relations of reciprocal determination.

If the sense be simply 'a vivid *I am well pleased*,' and the English versions really give "a substantially correct paraphrase," this use of the Aorist will doubtless not be unexampled in the New Testament; the repeated ἠκούσατε of the Sermon on the Mount would perhaps be a parallel. Though, I confess, "the act of becoming well pleased" strikes me as rather a difficult kind of "act" to conceive of as distinct from simple choosing. When we attempt to thus distinguish it we approach dangerously near a denial of the canon of Winer:

¹ *New Testament Moods and Tenses*, 55 c.

“There is no passage in the New Testament where the Aorist can be shown with certainty to stand for the Perfect.”² Yet I judge it to be one of the merits of Professor Burton’s rightly admired book to have shown that the New Testament writers do not confuse, but still clearly and accurately maintain the distinctions of the Greek tenses.

Admittedly, then, if the sense will permit, we should hold to the primary significance of the Aorist, and not shade off toward that of Present or Perfect where no occasion exists. My contention is that, in the present instance, no such occasion does exist; but that if we take lexicon and concordance as our authorities for the sense, instead of the English versions, we shall get quite a different idea of it; one which, instead of leading to a tense-construction unusual if not actually strained, makes the distinction between a true Perfect and a true Aorist which Professor Burton so happily expresses, exactly fit the case.

Wherever used of God throughout the New Testament the verb *εὐδοκεῖν* seems to denote his sovereign, inscrutable decree, his divine *placuit, sic volo, sic jubeo*. That which is otherwise unaccountable is declared to be “the good pleasure of God.” The substantive *εὐδοκία* is the equivalent of the Hebrew *רצון* in the Old Testament generally. Specifically in the passage on which that of Mt. 3¹⁷ is based (Is. 42¹⁻⁴, *רצונו נשׁוּב*), this stem is used. Cf. Gal. 1¹⁵. *Εὐδοκεῖν* is used in Lk. 12³² of the sovereign, unconstrained grace of God in giving the kingdom to the little flock who have no merit to deserve it. “It pleased the Father to give you the kingdom,” *εὐδόκησεν ὁ πατήρ ἡμῖν δοῦναι τὴν βασιλείαν*. In 1 Cor. 1²¹ it is used of the inscrutably wise decree of God, which is incomprehensible to human wisdom. In Gal. 1¹⁵ it denotes Paul’s humanly unpreconceivable call to preach the gospel. Colossians 1¹⁹ seems to me to contain a reference to the very event under consideration, *ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι*, and obviously refers to an *act*, not a *condition*. The other passages in which *εὐδοκεῖν* occurs in the New Testament either have men for the subject (though even in these cases generally with the sense of a free act of the sovereign will; so Rom. 15^{26f.}, the unconstrained gift of the churches in Macedonia and Achaia; 2 Cor. 5⁸ 12¹⁰, 1 Thess. 2⁸ 3¹, 2 Thess. 2¹², unconstrained choice), or are quotations, and so not directly available. Under this head, however, we ought perhaps to note as a possible exception in 1 Cor. 10⁵, *οὐκ ἐν τοῖς πλείοσιν αὐτῶν εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεός*.

The substantive, when used with reference to God in the New Testament, denotes always the sovereign fiat of God, the gracious

² § 40 a.

divine decree, the *act* of choice, not the *condition* of satisfaction. So Mt. 11²⁶ and parallels: οὕτως ἐγένετο εὐδοκία ἔμπροσθέν σου; Eph. 1^{5,9}, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, and κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ; Phil. 2¹³, ὁ Θεὸς ἐνεργῶν . . . ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας. There is but one possible exception, and that is the doubtful clause ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας (or εὐδοκία) of Lk. 2¹⁴, where I take the sense to be 'the men of God's gracious *choice*.'

This use of the verb and substantive in all the New Testament seems to me to establish at least a probability in favor of giving to εὐδόκησα in Mk. 1¹¹ and parallels the sense, not of a *condition* of satisfaction, but a free *act* of favor, an unconstrained *choice*. If so, it is perhaps possible with Burton to call it an "inceptive aorist, equivalent to an English perfect," or, better, with Plummer on the passage in Luke, to call it a "timeless aorist." But to say that is scarcely more than to say, It is a regular aorist, it refers to a definite event at an undetermined moment of past time. Certainly it should be translated by an English perfect. But the rendering of the English versions, "I am well pleased," can hardly be regarded as adequate to this sense. To say *I have chosen* is much more than "a vivid way of saying *I am well pleased*." Nor can we be satisfied to say with Professor Gould³: "The aor. εὐδόκησα, *I came to take pleasure*, denotes the historical process by which God came to take pleasure in Jesus during his earthly life, not the eternal delight of the Father in the Son. . . . It accords with Luke's statement, that Jesus grew in favor with God and man (Lk. 2⁵²)."

The natural sense, commended by grammar, lexicon, and internal evidence alike, is simply 'my choice hath fallen upon thee.' How long ago is not the point; it may be just now, it may be in years past,—the Aorist means it is an act consummated, it fell. The sense is: It has been my gracious sovereign pleasure to choose thee for my Son, the Beloved.

The whole utterance is a condensed paraphrase of the passage which would seem more than any other in Scripture to have expressed to Jesus' mind the loftiest and purest conception of the Messiah's office, and which we may therefore naturally consider to have framed to him the language of the Baptismal Vision. The conception is as wide as the poles from John the Baptist's notion of the Messiah, to whom Weiss and Beyschlag would strangely attribute this vision; but it is just what we might expect of Jesus. The few words bring up the whole figure of that Beloved Servant, or child of

³ *Commentary on Mark*, ad loc.

Jehovah, who is meek and gentle and conquers by speaking the truth in love. The affinity in the language of our texts of the LXX is not so apparent, but notice that which, as quoted in Mt. 12, doubtless comes nearest to the form in which the passage was familiar to Jesus himself :

Ἰδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου ὃν ἤρέτισα
 ὁ ἀγαπητός μου ὃν εὐδόκησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου·
 [cf. ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός· ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα]
 θῆσω τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ' αὐτόν,
 καὶ κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπαγγελεῖ.
 Οὐκ ἐρίσει οὐδὲ κραυγάζει,
 οὐδὲ ἀκούσει τις ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ.
 κάλαμον συντετριμμένον οὐ κατεάξει,
 καὶ λίνον τυφόμενον οὐ σβέσει,
 ἕως ἂν ἐκβάλῃ εἰς νίκος τὴν κρίσιν.
 καὶ τῷ ὄνματι αὐτοῦ ἔθνη ἐλπιούσιν.

But I do not rest my rendering of εὐδόκησα by *I have chosen*, instead of *I have come to take pleasure or am well pleased*, on the testimony of grammar, lexicon, and concordance only ; nor even on these *plus* the strong internal probability, based on the overwhelming effect of the words on the mind of the recipient, that they conveyed some startling announcement. It seems to me that we have something to learn also from the six practically parallel passages of the New Testament ; for as such we may surely reckon, besides the synoptic parallels in Mt. 3¹⁷ and Lk. 3²², the three accounts of the ⲓⲛⲁⲓⲛ at the Transfiguration (Mt. 17⁵ Mk. 9⁷ Lk. 9³⁵) and the reference to the same in 2 Pet. 1¹⁷. The utterance is abbreviated indeed in the Transfiguration story, but 2 Pet. 1¹⁷ is evidence that the meaning was taken to be the same, and we may fairly consider them parallels. Now among these seven there are two variants. 2 Pet. 1¹⁷ has instead of ἐν σοί, εἰς ὃν εὐδόκησα. Certainly the accusative with εἰς is not less favorable than ἐν with the dative to the sense 'on thee my choice hath fallen.' Again, Lk. 9³⁵ has in all critical texts not ὁ ἀγαπητός, but ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος, 'my chosen,' which, if the author was really trying to give the same sense as in the previous case, is certainly significant of what that intended sense must have been, and points to Is. 42¹⁻⁴ as the true underlying passage.

II. ON GAL. iii. 16.

Meyer, Lightfoot, and modern commentators generally seem to me to violate a primary canon of exegesis in their interpretation of