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PREFATORY NOTE.

THESE essays on the various aspects of the Anglo-American Bible revision now going on, are issued by the American Revision Committee as an explanatory statement to the friends and patrons of the cause, with the distinct understanding that suggestions and statements in regard to any particular changes to be made, express only the individual opinions of the writer, but not the final conclusions of the two Committees, who have not yet finished their work.

PHILIP SCHAFF,

NEW YORK, *March, 1879.*

In behalf of the Committee.

THE GREEK VERB IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

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No revision can present to the English reader all the exact shades of meaning expressed by the voices, moods, and tenses of the Greek verb. This must be admitted at the outset. Yet in many cases greater accuracy can be secured. It is doubtful whether the true theory of the Greek tenses was accepted at the time the Authorized Version was made. It is certain that a great deal of ignorance still exists on this subject, even among those claiming some scholarship. If there be one point clearly established, it is that in Greek a writer used the aorist tense to express an action conceived of by him as momentary rather than continuous. Yet a long article in one of our prominent Reviews states that the aorist refers to past time of indefinite duration. This blunder arose from the fact that the name *aorist* means indefinite. But the indefiniteness of the tense consists mainly in its indefinite relation to other tenses, and not in its indefinite duration. Hence, the Greeks might express an action the most definite logically by this grammatically "indefinite" tense. This example of misapprehension may serve as preface to some remarks on the difficulty of reproducing the shades of thought expressed by the Greek verb.

I. The Greek verb has three voices, while the English has only two. It has one more mood than the English, but this one is of rare occurrence in the New Testament. The great difficulty lies in the fact that it not only has tenses for which the English forms

furnish no exact equivalent, but tenses are carried into moods, and exist in participial forms altogether unknown to our grammar. It may be said that a Greek author had nearly twice as many forms at his command as we have, each having its distinctive use. This, of itself, presents a difficulty to the translator.

II. The difficulty is enhanced by another fact. The distinctions of the Greek verb, especially of the tenses, are not precisely identical with those of the English verb. A literal translation of a tense in the former language into one bearing the same name in the latter might be very inaccurate. The same is true of Greek and Latin, German and English. It is rare that two languages, even when they have the same number of tenses, present thereby the same distinctions. Just here, one who speaks a foreign language quite well, betrays himself most frequently before those "to the manner born." The Latin has fewer tenses than the Greek, and these not exactly equivalent to the corresponding Greek ones. Hence, the translators of the Authorized Version, like all the scholars of that period, frequently lost sight of the distinctions of the less familiar language, and used those of the Latin, which might, in the case of most of them, be called their second mother-tongue.

It will not be necessary to set forth in detail here the theory of the Greek tenses. Suffice it to say, that while the distinctions of past, present, and future appear in the indicative mood, there is combined with these a distinction of action, whether as continuous or momentary. In the non-indicative moods, the latter distinction is the preponderant one, often the sole one; as, for example, in the imperatives, present and aorist. The participles pre-

sent the same distinction, but they are often only condensed statements of what might be expressed by the indicative. Hence, it is often difficult to determine whether an aorist participle is better translated by our English past or present participle, *i. e.*, whether it expresses an action antecedent to or synchronous with the leading verb. A mechanical student of Greek grammar has no difficulty here; as a school-boy he learned that $\tau\acute{\upsilon}\psi\alpha\varsigma$ meant "having struck," and so he regards all instances as equivalent to the English perfect participle. The most convenient distinction of tenses is that between the aorist and imperfect indicative—the former pointing to a past act viewed as momentary, the latter to a continued past action. But in the use of the imperfect there is generally a reference to some other action, up to which this "imperfect" action continued. Hence, the tense may express only the beginning of an action which was at once interrupted, or, on the other hand, may refer to an habitual or long-continued action. The perfect tense has no equivalent in English, since it refers to what took place in the past, and continues either as part of the same action, or as a result of it, up to the present time of the speaker or writer. Here we may use the English perfect or present, as seems most appropriate; but neither of them expresses all that is indicated by the Greek.

These distinctions are carried over into subjunctive, participial, and infinitive forms, and any one who bestows a moment's thought will see how difficult it is for us, with our English forms, to express such shades of thought. Then it will happen that, there being no exact English equivalent, two English forms will be equally accurate or inaccurate.

It will appear that it is no easy task to make a faithful translation, and also that there is little danger of any such excellence in the revision as will supersede the study of the Greek Testament.

III. It may be useful to note some examples where improvement seems both desirable and possible, as well as some where it is impossible. These might be indefinitely multiplied.

1. The Authorized Version, in hundreds of instances, renders the Greek *aorist* by the English perfect. This is almost always incorrect. The simple English past tense is well-nigh the exact equivalent of the aorist. In many cases, indeed, the meaning is scarcely altered by the more exact rendering, yet frequently the correction is of great moment. In Matt. i, 25, instead of "had brought forth," the Greek means "brought forth;" in ii, 2, "saw" should be substituted for "have seen." Every chapter of the Gospels probably contains an instance of this inaccuracy, which occasionally misleads. The use of "is dead" for "died" is allowable in Matt. ix, 24, and parallel passages, but in 2 Cor. v, 14, "then were all dead" leads to a misunderstanding of the passage; "then [or therefore] all died" is correct. In Rom. v, 12, "all have sinned," "have" is unnecessary and misleading. There is little need of citing other instances, for there is general agreement as to the correct English equivalent of the aorist.

2. In regard to the Greek *imperfect*, while its force is recognized by all scholars, there is great difficulty in determining when we ought to try and retain that force in English. We can say "he did this" or "he was doing this"—the former equivalent to the Greek aorist, and the latter to the Greek imperfect. Yet

the latter form is cumbrous, and if used constantly would seriously injure the style. Furthermore, even this form often fails to express the exact meaning of the Greek imperfect. In Luke v, 3, "was teaching" is more accurate than "taught," but it is not necessary to insist upon the change. In verse 7, however, "their net brake" is incorrect; the imperfect here means "began to break," though "their nets were breaking" is, perhaps, the best emendation. In verse 7, "began to sink" is the correct translation of a present infinitive, which has, in a subordinate clause, the general force of the imperfect. So in Matt. ii, 22, "was reigning" is the correct rendering of the present, according to the Greek conception of dependent tenses. In Matt. iii, 5, 6, the continued action is expressed by imperfects, but there seems no necessity for altering the English tenses, which here logically suggest this. In one class of passages the distinction between the aorist and imperfect is of importance, and yet can scarcely be reproduced. In the six accounts of the miracles of the feeding of the multitudes, the breaking of the bread is expressed by an aorist; but in four of the passages (Matt. xv, 36, correct reading Mark vi, 41, viii, 6; Luke ix, 16) the giving of it to the disciples is described by an imperfect, thus hinting that the Lord kept giving the broken bread as it multiplied in his hands. In these cases it would sound harsh to say either "kept giving" or "was giving." In Gal. i, 13, 23, 24, imperfects occur which occasion similar difficulty. Probably in more than half the cases the distinction cannot be recognized in a smooth translation.

3. The Greek *perfect* is properly a combination of the aorist and present, expressing past action with present

result. Hence, we must decide which element is predominant, and translate accordingly. In the common phrase, "as it is written," the perfect is used, and properly rendered by a present; but in Gal. ii, 20, "I am crucified with Christ," ought to be changed to "have been crucified," since the emphasis rests on the past rather than the present, both of them being included.

4. Passing to the non-indicative moods, we find that our forms do not, as a rule, express the distinctions of the Greek. The present and aorist subjunctive express respectively continued and momentary action, contingent on the leading clause, while our potential mood is not a subjunctive strictly, and by its tenses seeks to express past, present, and future time.

The imperatives are distinguished in the same way, but we must translate them all alike, leaving to the reader to determine whether the action commanded is once for all or continued. In Matt. v, 12, vi, 1, we have present imperatives, but in v, 16, 17, vi, 2, 3, we have the aorist. Further, the imperative in form is like the indicative, and it is difficult to decide which is meant. For example, John vi, 39, may mean "ye search the Scriptures" or "search the Scriptures," the context pointing to the former sense. In John xiv, 1, Matt. v, 48, and other passages, the same question arises. The infinitives present similar phenomena, but here there is opportunity for more exactness. The translation of the participles calls for great care. The present denotes continuous action, as a rule, and may be fairly rendered in English; but the combinations are such as to require skilful handling. The aorist participle has so often been incorrectly rendered by an English past participle, that this, and the corre-

sponding misapprehension of the indicative, may be termed the chief blemishes of the Authorized Version as respects the verb. The cases where an emendation, either by the use of the present participle or by a change to the indicative structure, would be desirable, may be numbered by hundreds. The perfect participle is frequently used in the Greek Testament, but its sense cannot be exactly expressed in English except by a paraphrase, as in the case of the indicative.

5. The difference between "be" and "become" is expressed in Greek by two verbs, which are usually indiscriminately rendered "be" in the Authorized Version. In Matt. v, 45, we should read "that ye may become," etc. Similar cases to the number of sixty or seventy occur.

6. The middle voice in Greek has no equivalent in English. It is reflexive, and may sometimes be expressed by adding the pronouns *himself*, *themselves*, etc.; but no rule can be laid down.

It will appear from these remarks how numerous are the questions which come before the Revisers, how difficult many of them are from their minuteness. The effort has been to present to the New Testament Company every question however minute, and to discuss at least the possibility of expressing in English the shades of meaning recognized in the Greek. In one chapter of the Gospels, containing twenty-three verses, eleven emendations can be made involving the moods and tenses, probably half that number must be passed by. It may be estimated that greater accuracy can be secured in the vast majority of cases where the Authorized Version is faulty in its treatment of the Greek verb.