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A SERVICEABLE LIFE

A Sermon by Rev. Harris E. Kirk.

Text.—Matthew v: 15: "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."

The grace of God has endowed human life with great possibilities. From the beginning Christ endeavored to impress the disciples with this fact. "Ye are the light of the world." The Christian is of primary importance to the world. He is important for what he has: the gospel; and for what he is: a typical product of that gospel. He is not the creator of the light: he transmits it to the world. God gives him the light; it is his duty to make it serviceable. The function of light is to give light; the function of a Christian is service.

Serviceableness turns upon two things quite distinct in essence, though often confused in thought: I mean power and influence. A man's power is determined by his character, by what he is essentially; his influence is determined by his reputation, by what men think he is, or can do in the world. Sometimes a man's reputation is in excess of his merit, and while his influence is great his power is small. On the other hand, a man of character may be of small reputation. His power is eventually felt in the far reach of history, but his influence over his contemporaries is limited to the few that understand him. To

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GRAMMATICAL INTERPRETATION: ITS PRIMARY PROBLEMS AND PRODUCTS

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A brief survey of the present and former connotation of the term "grammar" will be the best preparation for a correct understanding of the nature of the subject-matter and the scope of Grammatical Interpretation. A statement from Professor Sayce, of Oxford, and one from the German scholar Maetzner will sufficiently indicate the meaning of the word in present usage. Says the former, "What grammar really deals with are all those contrivances whereby the relations of words and sentences are pointed out. Sometimes it is position, sometimes phonetic symbolization, sometimes composition, sometimes flexion, sometimes the use of auxiliaries, that enables the speaker to combine his words together so that they will be intelligible to another."[1] By "composition" Sayce means "word-building." Maetzner's statement is important because it brings into prominence a point passed over by Sayce. He says, "Grammar, or the doctrine of language, treats of the laws of speech, and in the first place of the word as its fundamental constituent, with respect to its matter and its form—in prosody, or the doctrine of sounds, and in morphology, or the doctrine of forms; and then of the combinations of words in speech—in syntax, etc."[2] The emphasis put upon "the word," as the "fundamental constituent" in language, and so in grammar, is the point to be noted here.

These two statements alone are sufficient to remind us that the term "grammar," even in our present day usage, has a wider connotation than we are apt to give it. And when we turn from modern to ancient usage, we find its connotation to be wider still. Sayce tells us that Dionysius Thrax, in the treatise that he prepared for Roman lads in the time of Pompey, "defines grammar

[1] Ency. Brit., art. Grammar.
[2] Cited in Standard Dict., sub., Grammar.

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as a practical acquaintance with the language of literary men," and that he divides it "into six parts—accentuation and phonology, explanation of figurative expressions, definition, etymology, general rules of flexion, and critical canons."[3] With this ancient definition we have, of course, no concern, except in so far as it reminds us of the breadth of meaning once attached to the word "grammar," and still reflected in the adjective "grammatical," when the latter is used in the phrase "Grammatical Interpretation." According to this older usage, "grammar" included, "not only composition or 'word-building,' syntax and accidence," as in Sayce's definition, and prosody, as added by Maetzner, but also much that we now refer to lexicology, that is the systematic study of words in their derivation, definition, and usage, and in addition much that we now embrace under the head of rhetoric, not to mention just here some other matters.

In the light of what has just been said both the nature of the subject-matter with which it is concerned, and the scope of Grammatical Interpretation at once become obvious. It may be said, in a word, to take account of all of the symbols of every kind by which men convey thought through writing, together with all combinations and modifications of these symbols, however effected, and whether explicit or implicit. Because these symbols are largely what we call "words," Grammatical Interpretation is largely concerned with words. It takes account of their derivation and of the development of their meaning through usage; it takes account of their inflectional changes, and of their syntactical construction; it takes account of the subtle changes wrought in their significance by the character of the composition in which they are employed, and also of such as are effected through the influence of metre and of rhetoric. But Grammatical Interpretation does not limit its attention exclusively to words. For words are not the only symbols by which men body forth or modify their thoughts in writing. To say nothing of the great variety of typographical

[3]Ency. Brit., ut sup.

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devices used by moderns, even the ancients, to a greater or less extent, employed signs of interpunction, accent, and other similar devices. All these come within the scope of Grammatical Interpretation.

In view of these facts, instead of grouping Rhetorical Interpretation with Logical Interpretation, as he has done, it would seem that Dr. Briggs might at once more properly and more naturally have made the former a branch of Grammatical Interpretation.

Such being the scope of Grammatical Interpretation, and such the nature of the subject-matter with which it is concerned, its function is twofold. For one thing, it has to ascertain with precision and completeness the ideas expressed in a given writing, so far as it is possible to ascertain them from a study, and mastery of the symbols used to convey those ideas. Having done this, it has also to set forth these ideas with precision and completeness so far as it is possible to set them forth, through the thought-symbols that are in use by the interpreter and those for whom he essays to interpret.

Accordingly Grammatical Interpretation may be defined to be that branch of Hermeneutics that deals with the principles that should control and the processes that should be employed in order, on the one hand, to ascertain with completeness and precision the ideas intended to be conveyed in a given writing, so far as these can be ascertained from an examination of the symbols used by its author; and in order, on the other hand, to exhibit the same in the full significance and force of these ideas, so far as it is possible to exhibit them by means of the symbols in use with the interpreter. Before inquiring what these principles and methods are, we shall do well to pause for a little upon some preliminary matters.

As has already been twice intimated, Grammatical Interpretation has its limits. What these are, whence they arise, and what results from them are all matters the consideration of which will have to be deferred for the present. Let us just here pause and examine with some care into the problems that present themselves to one engaged in Grammatical Interpretation. Whatever his ulti-

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mate, his primary problems are obviously three. For one thing, he will have to ascertain what are the symbols employed in the writing under examination; for another, he will have to determine what idea or ideas are expressed by each several symbol, and by the combinations in which they occur; and finally, it is obvious that from his own native thought-symbols he will have to select such as will adequately exhibit the significance and force of the idea or ideas bodied forth by the thought-symbols employed in the writing with which he is dealing—or that will, as far as practicable, adequately do this.

That these are the primary problems of Grammatical Interpretation will appear conclusively from a familiar concrete case. It is furnished by the decipherment of the Egyptian and Assyrian monuments. This decipherment, it need scarcely be said, was throughout a purely interpretational process. It will be recalled that those by whom the work was inaugurated not only had no grammar, lexicons, or other treatises of any kind to aid them in dealing with the etymological, syntactical and other phenomena of these languages, but that they did not, at the beginning of their labors, have even a list of the most primary symbols employed in them—not even a syllabary or an alphabet. Obviously the first step in arriving at the meaning of these ancient inscriptions was somehow to differentiate symbol from symbol; for until this had been done at least in good part, it would, of course, be impossible to ascertain the idea for which the symbol stood. And historically the decipherment of these long lost languages began with simply making a list of the most elementary symbols employed in them, determining the idea expressed by those elementary symbols, and then expressing this idea by means of symbols familiar to the decipherer. In other words, the first step logically—and in most cases, the first step historically—in interpreting a language is to work out its alphabet. And the working of this out involves first getting a list of the characters of which the alphabet is composed simply as characters; determinining the phonetic value of each; and finally expressing this phonetic value by the symbol through

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which it is expressed in the language native to the decipherer. So far back does the real work of interpretation begin. Nay, as might be shown, it begins even farther back than this. But of that at another time. Let us now note that after the alphabet, or the syllabary, comes the word list—the forerunner of the lexicon. And then, in ascending scale, the work of interpretation proceeds through the grammar and the rhetoric, on up to treatises on the characteristics and genius of the language, and its place in its own language—group, and among languages generally. And now where are we? Clearly the conclusion involved in what has just been said is this: The lexicon, the grammar, the rhetoric, and all other treatises upon a given language up to the highest are not merely aids to its interpretation, but are, each of them in its measure, actual interpretations of that language.

While then, we are in the habit of looking upon our lexicons, grammars and the like as aids to interpretation, it would be better, for more reasons than one, if we took them for what they really are—that is, interpretations of Hebrew, Greek and other languages. They are simply the primary products of Grammatical Interpretation—nothing more and nothing less. And, as already intimated, there would be practical advantage from bearing this in mind. The Oxford Lexicon, for instance, is an interpretation of certain of the symbols in use among the Hebrews for expressing their ideas. It has so much of authority, and of finality as belongs to interpretations put upon the particular class of symbols with which it deals by Drs. Brown, Driver and Briggs, or the scholars cited by them. If these scholars, or any of them, possess all knowledge so that they understand all the mysteries of Hebrew vocabulary, then the renderings given in this, perhaps, best of all available Hebrew lexicons will be invested with final and absolute authority. But if not, then the interpretations given, even in this lexicon, will have to take their place along with the interpretations of the same symbols given elsewhere—say in the American Revised Version. If an advancing knowledge of Hebrew will call for yet another Revised Version, it will also call for a revised lexicon—or, as we say, a new edition

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of the lexicon. It is only as a student gets a firm, practical hold of the truth that a lexicon is a "translation"—embryonic, it is true, inchoate, it is true, but still a "translation," nothing more and nothing less—we say, it is only as this fact finds firm lodgment in the mind of a student that he will cease to make the fetish of his lexicon that every honest school-boy is apt to make of his. When he wakes up to this fact, it will begin to dawn upon him that it is just as possible to make "a pony" of the "translation" that he calls a "lexicon," as it is to make a "pony" of the "translation" that he calls a "translation." In other words, he will discover that it is the use to which he puts it that constitutes the "translation" a "pony," and that when he puts what he calls his lexicon" to the same use, he does not vary the result, though he may hide it from his own eyes. Then, and not till then, will he begin to make a rational and effective use both of what he calls his "translation" and of what he calls his "lexicon"; a use that is determined, not by mere names, but by facts. He will find that he can use his "translation" to advantage as a "lexicon," and his "lexicon" as a "translation"—each in its own sphere, and according to its own proper nature. But to be able to use either to any really good purpose, he must wake up to the fact that both are, as we have said, but interpretations—that is, more or less successful attempts to body forth under English symbols, let us say, ideas that were originally bodied forth by means of Hebrew symbols, let us say, and to do this with precision and completeness. The word "attempt" is used advisedly, though the justification for using cannot be introduced here.

What is true of the lexicon, is true also of the grammar. Like the former, the latter is not merely an aid to interpretation, it is itself an interpretation. And as in the case of the former, so here it will be much to the student's advantage to bear this fact in mind. Unless he does the nomenclature of his syntax, for instance, is likely to be little more than so much jargon to him. It is not a matter of indifference whether we call יקרא a "mood," or a "tense," or decline to call it either, and designate

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it by some other name. These terms, "mood" and "tense," represent very different ideas, and the vital question is which, if either of these ideas, did ירקא stand for in Hebrew thinking? What the intelligent student is concerned to do is, of course, to learn Hebrew (or Greek, or whatever the language in hand may be); but if neither the term "mood" nor the term "tense" reproduces the point of view embodied in the Hebrew ירקא then obviously one is learning no Hebrew in applying these terms to the word ירקא What the grammarian had to do before he could possibly write his grammar, is what the student has to do before he can use the grammar to the best advantage. But obviously the grammarian had somehow to get hold of the point of view embodied in this or that Hebrew symbol, before he could by any possibility represent its significance by our English symbols. Well, just so, paradoxical as it may appear, the student has somehow or somehow to get the point of view embodied in the Hebrew symbol, if he is to profit to the fullest by the efforts of the grammarian to reproduce that point of view through English symbols. The work of the grammarian may assist him to do this, but it cannot absolve the student from the necessity of this independent work upon his own part, nor can it do this work for him. Any real appropriation of the work of the grammarian, implies upon the part of the student his own independent acts of comparison, verification and appreciation.

But we need carry our discussion no further. What has been said of the lexicon and the grammar is true also, of course, of the rhetoric and treatises on the characteristics and genius of a language. They are all what may be called primary products of Grammatical Interpretation. Grouping them all together they constitute what might be appropriately styled General Grammatical Interpretation; it being the common peculiarity of such discussions that they have to do, not with this or that particular writing, written in a given language, but with the language as a whole.

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