

of the word. The religious spirit and deep faith in God, capable of the greatest sacrifices for His sake, are to be seen in every word. As for the particular events described, they are completed and corroborated by the works of Polybius, Appian, Diodorus of Sicily, Livy and Justin, not to speak of Josephus Flavius and many discovered fragments of Greek literature, as well as coins of kings described in the book. It must be recognized that of the many sources for Jewish history in our possession this one is the most 'reliable',<sup>1</sup> 'a first-rate source'. 'One of the greatest periods of Jewish history has found a great historian'; his work 'deserves to become a part of the Bible'.<sup>2</sup> It is also till now almost the only first-hand source we know for the history of the Seleucids, furnishing ample and detailed information about the conditions existing in their empire, and using exact terminology in matters concerning the state, its administration, taxes, army, and court, such descriptions being almost all confirmed by Greek authors. This is why the First Book of Maccabees is reckoned among the sources and documents relating to the history of Judea as well as to that of the Empire of the Seleucids. Since, besides all this, its author was present, so to say, at the very establishment of Judaism no wonder that in his book we find at the same time means for understanding the ideas current among the Jews in Palestine at the time of Our Lord.

FELIX GRYGLEWICZ.

*Niegowonice, Poland.*

## THE NEW LATIN TRANSLATION OF THE PSALMS

THE sudden appearance of this translation in 1945 was a most joyful surprise. Many priests who had long used the old psalter and loved it for its venerable antiquity and for many personal links formed in the course of years, must yet have keenly felt its imperfections and often wondered how many centuries were still to elapse before a new translation would be used in the Divine Office. The news that an excellent new translation was actually published seemed almost too good to be true.

For it is an excellent translation, executed not only with scholarship and taste but with an anxious and devoted care which has taken thought for many little needs besides the main purposes of the work. For example several changes, which seem always to be decided improvements, have been made in the way psalms are divided in the Breviary—this is done in Pss 37, 54 and 108 at least. Again the translators have relieved us from the old danger of confusion between *exaltare* and *exultare* by

<sup>1</sup> E. Schürer, *op.cit.* II, 580.

<sup>2</sup> H. Fuchs, *Makkabäerbücher*, *Judisches Lexicon* III, 1338.

excluding the first word altogether ; and thanks to a more even division of the verse in Ps. 42, 3 the priest at the beginning of Mass need no longer try to say thirteen words at a breath. Further, immense thought has been given to questions of sound and euphony.

A translation should endeavour, first, to render the meaning of the original faithfully and clearly, and secondly to do so in a language whose quality is as near as possible to that of the original. The second object is less important but far more difficult than the first. The new psalter is translated from the Hebrew text, whereas the Vulgate psalter is translated from a Greek translation of the Hebrew. As the Greek translation was made a thousand years before the date of our oldest manuscript of the Hebrew psalms, its Hebrew original may well have been better in some places than our present Hebrew text, and the translation may have preserved the true meaning. This possibility has always been considered by the present translators and in some places they have followed the Greek in preference to the Hebrew, e.g. in 109, 3 the Hebrew seems to mean : 'From the womb of the dawn comes the dew of thy youth', while the Greek has : 'From the womb before the dawn have I begotten thee'. The new psalter follows mainly the Greek but adds a mention of dew from the Hebrew : 'Before the dawn have I begotten thee as the dew'. Apart from a few such passages, however, not much can be said for the Greek translation. Its authors not seldom misunderstood the Hebrew, they very frequently mistranslated the Hebrew tenses, they were often so literal as to be very obscure to anybody but well-instructed Jews, and their style (the homely colloquial Greek of their age) often spoils the poetic grandeur of the original. All these faults were reproduced in the Latin of the Vulgate psalter. A translation directly from the Hebrew is therefore bound to give us a meaning much nearer to that of the psalmists than one from the Greek, though we shall never recover the complete sense of the authors, for the Hebrew text itself is full of difficulties, owing partly to our ignorance and partly to the errors of copyists.

In comparing the old and the new psalters I shall avoid quoting from the Douay version, which in the psalms is often much nearer to the Hebrew than to the Vulgate Latin. I shall therefore give my own translation for both texts. Nothing perhaps shows so clearly the superiority of the new version as its handling of tenses. The Hebrew tense-system is radically different from those of European languages, modern or classical. In Hebrew the determination of the time (past, present or future) to which the tense refers, depends, not on the form of the tense, but on a consideration of the surrounding words, and requires an intimate familiarity with the language. The Greek translators had insufficient familiarity and often blundered, generally by writing a past tense when they should have written a present or future, but the con-

trary error is also found. Hence that curious mixture of tenses which bewilders an attentive reader of the Vulgate psalter. This has now been effectively remedied. If we examine Ps. 62 in the Vg. we shall find eight past tenses; in the new psalter there is only one, and the whole psalm is seen clearly to refer to the present and future. Much the same is true of Ps. 121. A still worse error is the rendering of a wish or conditional sentence as a past fact, e.g., 54, 6-8.

*Vulgate*

And I said: 'Who will give me wings as of a dove, and I will fly away and be at rest? Behold, I have fled far away and have remained in the desert. I waited for him who delivered me from cowardice and the tempest.'

Elsewhere a command in the Hebrew has been translated as a simple future, e.g.: 'Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, etc', which is at least ambiguous, for the real sense is: 'Sprinkle me etc'.

It may be said that in many of these cases the old psalter has a meaning. But it is not that of the author and it would be unreasonable to prefer it. Yet in many cases the change will be very unwelcome. Old mistranslations, which from frequent use or perhaps personal memories have grown dear to many of us, will be hard to part with. Among such passages are no doubt the following:

*Vulgate*

15, 2. I said to the Lord: 'Thou art my God, because thou needest not my goods'.

15, 5. The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup; thou art he who will restore my inheritance to me.

40, 4. May the Lord bring him help on his bed of pain; thou hast made all his bed in his sickness.

129, 5-6 (Douay). My soul hath relied on his word: my soul hath hoped in the Lord. From the morning watch even until night let Israel hope in the Lord.

*New*

And I say: 'Oh that I had wings as a dove! I should fly away and be at rest; behold, I should depart far away and remain in the desert. I should hasten to find myself a shelter from the fierce wind and the tempest.'

*New*

I say to the Lord: 'Thou art my Lord. I have no good apart from thee.'

The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup; thou art he that holds my lot.

The Lord will bring him help on his bed of pain; he will take away all his weakness in his time of sickness.

I hope in the Lord: My soul hopes in his word. My soul waits for the Lord more intently than the watchmen for the dawn. More intently than the watchmen wait for the dawn, Israel waits for the Lord.

Such changes must seem disagreeable, and the more so in proportion to our knowledge and love of the old psalter. The only defence for them (surely not a slight one) is that the sacred authors never intended to convey the meaning which we cling to. Moreover the loss of these beloved mistranslations is more than counterbalanced by the immense gain in authentic meaning.

The greater clearness of the new translation is at least as marked as its greater fidelity. The errors and literalness of the old one resulted in many passages being so obscure that to the casual reader no idea is conveyed, and it is only by a sort of torture that some meaning can be found. There must be some hundreds of such verses, and in the majority of them the new psalter gives a lucid and easy version—an unavoidable minority of obscure verses remains and will perhaps always remain. At least half a dozen passages are quite startlingly illuminated (e.g., 38, 5-14; 48, 6-21; 57, 7-12; 64, 10-14; 89, 7-11, etc), but I forbear to quote any of these for fear of seeming to exaggerate the contrast between the two versions. It is better to give the sort of example which is representative not of a few cases but of dozens. Let us take the beginning of 76, the beautiful psalm of Friday Compline :

*Vulgate*

I cried with my voice to the Lord, with my voice to God, and he listened to me.

In the day of my distress I sought God, with hands (stretched out) in the night towards him, and I was not deceived.

My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God and rejoiced; and I was harassed, and my spirit fainted.

My eyes forestalled the night-watches. I was troubled and did not speak.

I thought of the days of old and my mind dwelt on the eternal years.

I pondered in my heart during the night; I was harassed and I searched my mind.

Will God cast us off for ever?  
Will he not once again be merciful?

\* \* \*

*New*

My voice goes up to God, and I cry; my voice goes up to God that he may hear me.

In the day of my distress I seek the Lord; my hand is stretched out unwearingly through the night; my soul refuses comfort.

When I remember God, I groan. When I reflect, my spirit faints.

Thou keepest my eyes sleepless. I am troubled and cannot speak.

I consider the days of old and I remember the former years.

I ponder in my heart during the night; I reflect and my mind makes search.

'Will God reject us for ever and never be merciful again?'

\* \* \*

And I said : Now I have begun.      And I said : 'This is my sorrow,  
This is a change in the hand of      that the hand of the Most High  
the Most High.                              is changed'.

The new translation here has a clear continuous sense which can be followed easily from verse to verse, whereas in the Vg. one finds it difficult to keep the thread owing to the numerous small errors. Much the same thing is true of the following passages, whose number could easily be quadrupled : 15 ; 31, 5-9 ; 43, 10-17 ; 44, 2-10 ; 61, 9-12 ; 62, 2-7 ; 103, 10-18 ; 125, 1-3 ; 126 ; 130 ; 138, 13-18.

One innovation which helps greatly to make the meaning clear is the use of quotation marks, as may be seen in numbers of places, e.g., 10, 1-3 ; 49, 4-7 ; and 89. The literal translation of the Hebrew form of oath, so confusing in the Vg., has naturally been abandoned, e.g., 94, 11 ;

*Vulgate*

*New*

I swore in my wrath : If they      I swore in my wrath : 'They  
enter into my rest.                      shall not enter into my rest'.

With regard to the language and style of the translation, the main principles are set forth on page xxvi of the introduction to the Vatican edition : 'We have endeavoured to translate the Hebrew text . . . into an easy and straightforward language and one which follows the Latin of the better period rather than the decadent usage of later times'. We later learn that by 'the better period' they mean the classical period in the wide sense, from about 100 B.C. to about A.D. 200. The general aim then is to approach fairly nearly to the classical language. But two important reservations are made : 1. Words or phrases which denote ideas peculiar to Judaism or Christianity are kept, even though they may not be classical, e.g. *Salvator*. 2. Unclassical Hebrew idioms and various turns of expression which help to give a Hebrew atmosphere to the psalms, as distinct from that of Greece or Rome, are kept *provided* that they can be fairly easily understood.

The principles of this compromise seem perfectly reasonable and are admirably stated. They are more fully set forth in an article in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* of January 1946 by Fr Augustine Bea, chairman of the committee of translators. It remains to consider how the principles have been carried out. This portion of the translators' work is, as I have said above, by far the most difficult.

First with regard to choice of words and phraseology : a large number of unclassical words has been banished in favour of others of a more classical tone. Fr Bea on page 23 gives a good-sized list which does not claim to be exhaustive. For example *subsannare* is changed to *irridere*, *eructare* to *effundere* or *eloqui*, *morticinium* (dead body) to *corpus*, *confiteri* (in the sense of 'praise') to *celebrare*, etc. All these and indeed

all the others enumerated, are changes for the better. It is a pity that a few other words which have in most cases been removed, have been allowed to remain in one or two places. No explanation of this seems to be given. Perhaps it is thought that some arguable claim for a classical status might be made for these. E.g. *manducare*, whose regular classical sense is 'chew', has generally been changed to *comedere*, etc, but remains in 127, 2 in the sense of 'eat'. *Virtus* in the sense of 'power', though mostly changed to *potentia*, etc, is still kept in 53, 3 and 64, 7. More could no doubt be said on behalf of *modicus* (for 'small') and *pietas* ('kindness'), but they are undoubtedly somewhat ambiguous. Most unfortunately of all, the odd word *obryzum* (for 'pure gold'), which is not in the Vg. psalter at all, has been introduced into the new one in 18, 11; *Desiderabilia super aurum et obryzum multum*. As the same Hebrew word is translated *aurum purum* in 20, 4, it looks as though *obryzum* has been used in 18 because the translators shrank from repeating *aurum*. The Anglican Revisers were less sensitive: 'More to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold'. Surely such a repetition is more tolerable than this uncouth word which has no proper place in an 'easy and straightforward' language.

The translators aim at avoiding Hebrew expressions when they are difficult to understand, and in many passages this rule has led to a remarkable increase of clearness, e.g., 50, 16 where the Vg. means (literally) 'Deliver me from bloods' (*de sanguinibus*) and the new psalter reads: 'Deliver me from the penalty of blood'. But yet one cannot help feeling that some of the still remaining Hebraisms are far from self-evident. 'Horn of salvation' (*cornu salutis*) is cited as easy. It certainly means 'a strong power that saves us.' Does every reader, or at least every educated reader, understand it in that sense when he meets it? Would not many or most readers be led astray by the classical image of 'horn of abundance' where the horn is a vessel, not a weapon? Again in 15, 6 the new psalter has 'The ropes have fallen for me in a pleasant spot'. Here the rope is the measuring rope used for marking out a plot of ground, hence the meaning is: 'My share of land has been given to me in a pleasant spot'. How many readers would understand even the general sense? In a translation meant (as Fr Bea says) for practical utility rather than scientific accuracy, could not a more easily intelligible equivalent be found?

Of the new words which replace those that have been excluded, one or two seem to occur rather too often, especially *patrare* and *celebrare*. *Patrare* is certainly not nearly so common in classical Latin as it is in the new psalter. *Celebrare* is displeasing for another reason—because we cannot banish from our minds the prosaic and dull character of its derivatives in modern languages.

Let us turn now to grammar. As regards accident there was not of course much need of change. The translators have apparently decreed

that *dies* shall be always masculine—a little arbitrary perhaps, but it simplifies matters. They keep the plural *caeli* which is extremely rare and poetical in classical Latin. They also keep *altare* which seems to be unknown in classical authors, who use *ara* for the whole altar and *altaria* (plural) for the table or top of the altar.

In the matter of syntax extensive changes have been made. Indirect speech which was nearly always rendered by clauses beginning with *quod*, *quia*, etc, has been regularly put into the accusative and infinitive construction. Prohibitions have been altered to conform to classical practice, and the unclassical use of *non* with the subjunctive has been changed. In these three instances the reform seems to be complete. But other changes of the same nature have been made in such a way as to leave a minority of cases of the old usage—an inconsistency for which I have not yet seen any explanation. For instance, verbs of speaking are generally followed by the dative of person, instead of the *ad* which is so common in the old psalter. Yet in Ps. 2 we have 'Loquitur ad eos' and 'Dominus dixit ad me'. The accusative which in the Vg. Psalter often follows verbs like *recordor*, *obliviscor*, *benedico*, etc, has generally been changed, yet a few cases are left, e.g., 44, 11. Past indicatives with *cum* have usually been changed to subjunctive, yet the indicative remains at least in 38, 4 and 115, 1. This happens to be quite Ciceronian but can that be the reason?

The various Hebraic constructions which were often literally translated in the Vg. Psalter have been largely brought into line with Latin idiom. Thus the infinitive absolute which was usually translated by a participle, a clumsy method, has in 39, 2 been rendered by a repetition of the verb:

<i>Vulgate</i>	<i>New</i>
Waiting I have waited for the Lord:	I have hoped, I have hoped in the Lord.

This is undoubtedly an immense improvement. Again the Hebrew idiom of saying 'not everyone' meaning 'none' was literally translated into very misleading Latin in the Vg. Thus 147, 10 reads: 'He has not dealt thus with every nation'. The new psalter gives the true meaning: 'He has not dealt thus with *any* nation'. Yet, strange to say, these two kinds of Hebraism are still literally translated in several places in the new psalter, e.g. the first sort in 125, 6 and the second in 24, 3.

These inconsistencies in diction, grammar, and style are very puzzling. It is certain that not a single one of them is due to carelessness. They are all deliberate, whatever the reason may be. The meticulous care which has been lavished on the translation is evident on every page, and there can be no question of any oversight. This care is nowhere so manifest as in matters of euphony. In 39, 4 the Vg. reads: 'Videbunt multi et timebunt, et sperabunt in Domino'. The new translation has: 'Videbunt multi et *verebuntur*, et sperabunt in Domino'. No doubt there is a shade

of difference between *timere* and *vereri* but it is hardly likely that the translators were worrying about that. Probably they disliked the series of three words ending in -bunt, and the change is meant to provide a variation. The same motive will very likely explain many other changes, such as the transposition of *stulti* and *insipientes* in 93, 8, and the substitution of *gratia* for *misericordia* whenever the word is immediately followed by *fidelitas*. This sensitiveness to sounds of words is probably the cause of a multitude of small alterations, which, as they produce little or no difference in the sense, have perhaps caused greater irritation than the more radical changes.

In this last particular the laudable zeal of the translators (part and parcel undoubtedly of the 'zeal of Thy house') does seem to have carried them a little too far. But as regards the subject of the Latin in general, our only wish is that they had been even more zealous, more thoroughgoing in carrying out the sound principles which they themselves had adopted as their own.

W. REES.

*St Mary's, Cadogan St, London.*

## A NOTE ON 'LIPS-CHOROS' IN ACTS 27, 12

IN the January issue of SCRIPTURE (pp. 144-6), Fr C. Lattey, S.J., following K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury (*The Beginnings of Christianity*, Vol. V, pp. 33 8-44), considers the two Greek words *lips* and *choros* in Acts xxvii, 12, rendered in DV 'southwest' and 'northwest' respectively, to be two different names, a Greek and a Latin one, for the same wind.

In support of this explanation I wish to point out that the juxtaposition of two words of a different origin but having the same meaning is not an unusual phenomenon in languages which had to bear the impact of foreign languages. There are scores of examples in the Book of Common Prayer: thus 'pray and beseech', 'acknowledge and confess', 'vanquish and overcome', 'trust and confidence', etc. All these doublets are made up of a Saxon and a Latin element and testify to the Norman influence over the English language. I can quote further examples from Maltese. Thus we say: *emmini u ikkredini* 'believe me', the first being Arabo-Maltese, the other the Italian *credimi*: *skond il-fehma u l-intenzjoni* corresponding to Ital. *secondo l'intenzione*, *intenzione* being the Italian equivalent of the Semitico-Maltese *fehma*: in the act of contrition we say *re'ixtek u offendejtek* 'I have offended thee'. Other parallels are: *mungbell* 'volcano', which is made up of Latin *mon(s)* or Italian *mon(te)* and Arabo-Maltese *gebel* (jebel) 'mountain'; *marsaskala*, the name of a small bay in the eastern coast of the island made up of Arabo-Maltese *marsa* 'harbour' and Latin *scala* with the same meaning.