

THE

TRANSLATION OF CERTAIN PSALMS

INTO ENGLISH VERSE.

BY THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE FRANCIS LORD VERULAM, VISCOUNT ST. ALBAN.

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TO HIS VERY GOOD FRIEND, MR. GEORGE HERBERT.

THE pains * that it pleased you to take about some of my writings, I cannot forget; which did put me in mind to dedicate to you this poor exercise of my sickness. Besides, it being my manner for dedications, to choose those that I hold most fit for the argument, I thought, that in respect of divinity and poesy met, whereof the one is the matter, the other the style of this little writing, I could not make better choice: so, with signification of my love and acknowledgment, I ever rest

Your affectionate Friend,

FR. ST. ALBAN.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST PSALM.

Who never gave to wicked reed
A yielding and attentive ear;
Who never sinners' paths did tread,
Nor sat him down in scorner's chair;
But maketh it his whole delight
On law of God to meditate;
And therein spendeth day and night:
That man is in a happy state.

He shall be like the fruitful tree,
Planted along a running spring,
Which, in due season, constantly
A goodly yield of fruit doth bring:
Whose leaves continue always green,
And are no prey to winter's power:
So shall that man not once be seen
Surprised with an evil hour.

With wicked men it is not so,
Their lot is of another kind:
All as the chaff, which to and fro
Is tossed at mercy of the wind.
And when he shall in judgment plead,
A casting sentence bide he must:
So shall he not lift up his head
In the assembly of the just.

For why? the Lord hath special eye
To be the godly's stay at call:
And hath given over, righteously,
The wicked man to take his fall.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE XIIth PSALM.

HELP, Lord, for godly men have took their flight,
And left the earth to be the wicked's den:
Not one that standeth fast to truth and right,
But fears, or seeks to please, the eyes of men.
When one with other falls in talk apart, [proof,
Their meaning goeth not with their words, in
But fair they flatter, with a cloven heart,
By pleasing words, to work their own behoof.

But God cut off the lips, that are all set
To trap the harmless soul, that peace hath vowed;
And pierce the tongues, that seek to counterfeit
The confidence of truth, by lying loud:
Yet so they think to reign, and work their will
By subtle speech, which enters every where;
And say: Our tongues are ours, to help us still;
What need we any higher power to fear?

Now for the bitter sighing of the poor,
The Lord hath said, I will no more forbear
The wicked's kingdom to invade and scour,
And set at large the men restrained in fear.

* Of translating part of the Advancement of Learning in Latin.

And sure the word of God is pure and fine,
And in the trial never loseth weight;
Like noble gold, which, since it left the mine,
Hath seven times passed through the fiery strait.

And now thou wilt not first thy word forsake,
Nor yet the righteous man that leans thereto;
But wilt his safe protection undertake,
In spite of all their force and wiles can do.
And time it is, O Lord, thou didst draw nigh;
The wicked daily do enlarge their bands;
And that which makes them follow ill a vie,
Rule is betaken to unworthy hands.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE XCth PSALM.

O LORD, thou art our home, to whom we fly,
And so hast always been from age to age:
Before the hills did intercept the eye,
Or that the frame was up of earthly stage,
One God thou wert, and art, and still shalt be;
The line of time, it doth not measure thee.

Both death and life obey thy holy lore,
And visit in their turns, as they are sent;
A thousand years with thee they are no more
Than yesterday, which, ere it is, is spent:
Or as a watch by night, that course doth keep,
And goes, and comes, unware to them that sleep.

Thou carry'st man away as with a tide: [high:
Then down swim all his thoughts that mounted
Much like a mocking dream, that will not bide,
But flies before the sight of waking eye;
Or as the grass, that cannot term obtain,
To see the summer come about again.

At morning, fair it musters on the ground;
At even it is cut down, and laid along;
And though it spared were, and favour found,
The weather would perform the mower's wrong:
Thus hast thou hanged our life on brittle pins,
To let us know it will not bear our sins.

Thou bury'st not within oblivion's tomb
Our trespasses, but enterest them aright;
Ev'n those that are conceived in darkness' womb,
To thee appear as done at broad day-light.
As a tale told, which sometimes men attend,
And sometimes not, our life steals to an end.

The life of man is threescore years and ten,
Or, if that he be strong, perhaps fourscore;
Yet all things are but labour to him then,
New sorrows still come on, pleasures no more.
Why should there be such turmoil and such strife,
To spin in length this feeble line of life?

But who considers duly of thine ire?
Or doth the thoughts thereof wisely embrace?
For thou, O God, art a consuming fire:
Frail man, how can he stand before thy face?
If thy displeasure thou dost not refrain,
A moment brings all back to dust again.

Teach us, O Lord, to number well our days,
Thereby our hearts to wisdom to apply;
For that which guides man best in all his ways,
Is meditation of mortality.

This bubble light, this vapour of our breath,
Teach us to consecrate to hour of death.

Return unto us, Lord, and balance now,
With days of joy, our days of misery;
Help us right soon, our knees to thee we bow,
Depending wholly on thy clemency; [voice,
Then shall thy servants both with heart and
All the days of their life in thee rejoice.

Begin thy work, O Lord, in this our age,
Show it unto thy servants that now live;
But to our children raise it many a stage,
That all the world to thee may glory give.
Our handy-work likewise, as fruitful tree,
Let it, O Lord, blessed, not blasted be.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE CIVth PSALM.

FATHER and King of powers, both high and low,
Whose sounding fame all creatures serve to blow;
My soul shall with the rest strike up thy praise,
And carol of thy works and wondrous ways.
But who can blaze thy beauties, Lord, aright?
They turn the brittle beams of mortal sight.
Upon thy head thou wearest a glorious crown,
All set with virtues, polished with renown:
Thence round about a silver veil doth fall
Of crystal light, mother of colours all.
The compass heaven, smooth without grain, or fold,
All set with spangs of glittering stars untold,
And striped with golden beams of power unpent,
Is raised up for a removing tent.
Vaulted and arched are his chamber beams
Upon the seas, the waters, and the streams:
The clouds as chariots swift do scour the sky;
The stormy winds upon their wings do fly.
His angels spirits are that wait his will,
As flames of fire his anger they fulfil.
In the beginning, with a mighty hand,
He made the earth by counterpoise to stand,
Never to move, but to be fixed still;
Yet hath no pillars but his sacred will.
This earth, as with a veil, once covered was,
The waters over-flowed all the mass:
But upon his rebuke away they fled,
And then the hills began to show their head;
The vales their hollow bosoms opened plain,
The streams ran trembling down the vales again:
And that the earth no more might drowned be,
He set the sea his bounds of liberty;
And though his waves resound, and beat the shore,
Yet it is bridled by his holy lore.
Then did the rivers seek their proper places,
And found their heads, their issues, and their races;
The springs do feed the rivers all the way,
And so the tribute to the sea repay:
Running along through many a pleasant field,
Much fruitfulness unto the earth they yield:

That know the beasts and cattle feeding by,
 Which for to slake their thirst do thither hie.
 Nay, desert grounds the streams do not forsake,
 But through the unknown ways their journey take:
 The asses wild, that hide in wilderness,
 Do thither come, their thirst for to refresh.
 The shady trees along their banks do spring,
 In which the birds do build, and sit, and sing;
 Stroking the gentle air with pleasant notes,
 Plaining, or chirping through their warbling throats.
 The higher grounds, where waters cannot rise,
 By rain and dews are watered from the skies;
 Causing the earth put forth the grass for beasts,
 And garden herbs, served at the greatest feasts;
 And bread, that is all viands' firmament,
 And gives a firm and solid nourishment;
 And wine, man's spirits for to recreate;
 And oil, his face for to exhilarate.
 The sappy cedars, tall like stately towers,
 High-flying birds do harbour in their bowers:
 The holy storks, that are the travellers,
 Choose for to dwell and build within the firs;
 The climbing goats hang on steep mountains' side;
 The digging conies in the rocks do bide.
 The moon, so constant in inconstancy,
 Doth rule the monthly seasons orderly;
 The sun, eye of the world, doth know his race,
 And when to show, and when to hide his face.
 Thou makest darkness, that it may be night,
 When as the savage beasts, that fly the light,
 As conscious of man's hatred, leave their den,
 And range abroad, secured from sight of men.
 Then do the forests ring of lions roaring,
 That ask their meat of God, their strength restoring;
 But when the day appears, they back do fly,
 And in their dens again do lurking lie.
 Then man goes forth to labour in the field,
 Whereby his grounds more rich increase may yield.
 O Lord, thy providence sufficeth all;
 Thy goodness, not restrained, by general
 Over thy creatures: the whole earth doth flow
 With thy great largess poured forth here below.
 Nor is it earth alone exalts thy name,
 But seas and streams likewise do spread the same.
 The rolling seas unto the lot doth fall
 Of beasts innumerable, great and small;
 There do the stately ships plow up the floods,
 The greater navies look like walking woods;
 The fishes there far voyages do make,
 To divers shores their journey they do take.
 There hast thou set the great leviathan,
 That makes the seas to seeche like boiling pan.
 All these do ask of thee their meat to live,
 Which in due season thou to them dost give.
 Ope thou thy hand, and then they have good fare;
 Shut thou thy hand, and then they troubled are.
 All life and spirit from thy breath proceed,
 Thy word doth all things generate and feed.
 If thou withdrawest it, then they cease to be,
 And straight return to dust and vanity;
 But when thy breath thou dost send forth again,
 Then all things do renew and spring again;
 So that the earth, but lately desolate,
 Doth now return unto the former state.

The glorious majesty of God above
 Shall ever reign in mercy and in love;
 God shall rejoice all his fair works to see,
 For as they come from him all perfect be.
 The earth shall quake, if aught his wrath provoke;
 Let him but touch the mountains they shall smoke.
 As long as life doth last I hymns will sing,
 With cheerful voice, to the eternal King;
 As long as I have being, I will praise
 The works of God, and all his wondrous ways.
 I know that he my words will not despise,
 Thanksgiving is to him a sacrifice.
 But as for sinners they shall be destroyed
 From off the earth, their places shall be void.
 Let all his works praise him with one accord;
 O praise the Lord, my soul; praise ye the Lord!

THE TRANSLATION OF THE CXXVth PSALM.

WHEN God returned us graciously
 Unto our native land,
 We seemed as in a dream to be,
 And in a maze to stand.

The heathen likewise they could say:
 The God, that these men serve,
 Hath done great things for them this day,
 Their nation to preserve.

'Tis true; God hath poured out his grace
 On us abundantly,
 For which we yield him psalms and praise.
 And thanks with jubile.

O Lord, turn our captivity,
 As winds, that blow at south,
 Do pour the tides with violence
 Back to the rivers' mouth.

Who sows in tears shall reap in joy,
 The Lord doth so ordain;
 So that his seed be pure and good,
 His harvest shall be gain.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE CXXXVth PSALM.

WHEN as we sat, all sad and desolate,
 By Babylon upon the river's side,
 Eased from the tasks, which in our captive state
 We were enforced daily to abide,
 Our harps we had brought with us to the field,
 Some solace to our heavy souls to yield.

But soon we found we failed of our account,
 For when our minds some freedom did obtain,
 Straightways the memory of Sion Mount
 Did cause afresh our wounds to bleed again;
 So that with present griefs, and future fears,
 Our eyes burst forth into a stream of tears.

As for our harps, since sorrow struck them dumb,
 We hanged them on the willow-trees were near;

Yet did our cruel masters to us come,
 Asking of us some Hebrew songs to hear :
 Taunting us rather in our misery,
 Than much delighting in our melody.

Alas, said we, who can once force or frame
 His grieved and oppressed heart to sing
 The praises of Jehovah's glorious name,
 In banishment, under a foreign king ?
 In Sion is his seat and dwelling-place,
 Thence doth he show the brightness of his face.

Jerusalem, where God his throne hath set,
 Shall any hour absent thee from my mind ?
 Then let my right-hand quite her skill forget,
 Then let my voice and words no passage find ;
 Nay, if I do not thee prefer in all,
 That in the compass of my thoughts can fall.

Remember thou, O Lord, the cruel cry
 Of Edom's children, which did ring and sound,
 Inciting the Chaldean's cruelty,
 "Down with it, down with it, even unto the ground."
 In that good day repay it unto them,
 When thou shalt visit thy Jerusalem.

And thou, O Babylon, shalt have thy turn
 By just revenge, and happy shall he be,
 That thy proud walls and towers shall waste and burn,
 And as thou didst by us, so do by thee.

Yea, happy he, that takes thy children's bones,
 And dasheth them against the pavement stones.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE CXLIXth PSALM.

O SING a new song to our God above,
 Avoid profane ones, 'tis for holy quire :
 Let Israel sing songs of holy love
 To him that made them, with their hearts on fire :
 Let Sion's sons lift up their voice and sing
 Carols and anthems to their heavenly King.

Let not your voice alone his praise forth tell,
 But move withal, and praise him in the dance ;
 Cymbals and harps, let them be tuned well,
 'Tis he that doth the poor's estate advance :
 Do this not only on the solemn days,
 But on your secret beds your spirits raise.

O let the saints bear in their mouth his praise,
 And a two-edged sword drawn in their hand,
 Therewith for to revenge the former days
 Upon all nations that their zeal withstand ;
 To bind their kings in chains of iron strong,
 And manacle their nobles for their wrong.

Expect the time, for 'tis decreed in heaven,
 Such honour shall unto his saints be given.