

CHAPTER VI

THE AUTHORISED VERSION AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE ORNATE STYLE

The coming of harvest—The Authorised Version of the Bible—The sixtieth chapter of the book of *Isaiah*—A.V., Septuagint, and Vulgate scanned—Discussion of each—Earlier English versions for comparison: Coverdale—The “Bishops’”—Remarks on them—Geneva and Douay—A New Testament example, the Charity passage of *I. Cor.*: atrocities of the Revisers—The older versions here—Results of scrutiny—Observation on use of synonyms—Individual writers—Raleigh—Greville—Donne—The palmiest days—Bacon (?)—Burton—Beauties and faults—Milton—Disputes about his prose, and their causes—Close connection of Milton’s style with oratory—Some of its faults—Partial foot-analysis—Taylor: the general high estimate of him—Examples—Rhythmical characteristics—Browne: Coleridge’s charge against him—Special character of his charm, and special treatment of it required—The finale of *Urn Burial*—Interim observation on overture—The close of the *Garden of Cyrus*—Short passages from *Religio Medici*—From the *Hydriotaphia*—From the *Garden of Cyrus*—The *Letter to a Friend*—And *Christian Morals*. Others perforce omitted.

THE processes and processions of the two harmonies The coming of harvest. march generally in parallel lines; but these parallels are often, like the bars of the instrument of that name, not longitudinally coincident and co-extensive. Just as the period of rhythmical pupillage which has sometimes been very unjustly dismissed as one of mere doggerel, and which extended from Wyatt to Gascoigne, prepared the way for the outburst of pure and finished poetry which followed the *Shepherd’s Kalendar*, so the livelier, longer, more abundant and more various period of prose exercise

which we have surveyed in the last chapter led up, not merely to the single, precocious, and to a certain extent isolated, masterpiece of Hooker, but to an immense development a very little later.

It was almost inevitable that this development should disclose a certain parting of the ways. As soon as a deliberately ornate style comes into existence, there will be many who cannot reach it, and some, perhaps, who would not if they could. Now rhythm is the chief and the most difficult form or constituent of ornateness; and it must therefore be among the first to be abandoned, failed in, or not aimed at. We shall have something, nay much, to say of the "plain-stylists" of the earlier seventeenth century, but we must first attack its chief glories—perhaps the principal documents (at least until the nineteenth century) of our present quest. And let us "begin with Jove," as was bidden of old.

One of the highest points¹ of English prose is probably reached in the Authorised Version of the sixtieth chapter of *Isaiah*. So utterly magnificent is the rendering that even those dolefullest of creatures—the very Ziim and Ochim and Iim of the fauna of our literature—the Revisers of 1870-1885, hardly dared to touch it at all.² To compare it with the same passage in other languages is a liberal education in despising and discarding the idle predominance of "the subject." The subject is the same in all, and the magnificence of the imagery can hardly be obscured by any. Of the Hebrew I cannot unfortunately speak, for at the time when I knew a very little Hebrew I knew nothing about literary criticism; and now, when I know perhaps a little about literary criticism, I have entirely lost my Hebrew. But I can read it with some

¹ For the analysis of another, the "Love" passage of the *Canticles*, I may refer to the book cited in *Preface*. In its quarter of a century of life it has had the good fortune to please good wits, I believe, including even some who dislike the division of words.

² With their irremediable and essential folly of pottering and meticulous blot-making (for it is "mendation" not "emendation"), they have, however, pluralised "peoples," where the *s* is not an improvement, and substituted "nations" for "the Gentiles," thereby, if not hamstringing, certainly not enhancing, the beauty of the rhythm. The two later verses blazed vision even into *their* blindness, and they left them alone.

The Authorised Version of the Bible.

The sixtieth chapter of the book of *Isaiah*.

critical competence in Greek and in Latin, in French and in German; and I can form some idea of what its rhetorical value is in Italian and in Spanish. That any one of the modern languages (even Luther's German) can vie with ours I can hardly imagine any one, who can appreciate both the sound and the meaning of English, maintaining for a moment. With the Septuagint and the Vulgate it is different, for the Greek of the one has not quite lost the glory of the most glorious of all languages, and has in places even acquired a certain additional uncanny witchery from its eastern associations; while as for the Vulgate Latin "there is no mistake about *that*." But we can meet and beat them both. Let us take the overture and the crowning passage in the three, also taking (though with all due ceremony of apology) the liberty of dividing and quantifying all.

Arise, | shine ; | for thy light | is come, | and the glory | of the Lord | is risen | upon thee. || For, behold, | the darkness | shall cover | the earth, | and gross | darkness | the people ; | but the Lord | shall arise | upon thee, | and his glory | shall be seen | upon thee. || And the Gentiles | shall come | to thy light, | and kings | to the brightness | of thy rising. |

A.V., Septuagint, and Vulgate scanned.

The sun | shall be no more | thy light | by day ; | neither | for brightness | shall the moon | give light unto thee : | but the Lord | shall be to thee | an everlasting light, | and thy God | thy glory. || Thy sun | shall no more | go down ; | neither | shall thy moon | withdraw herself : | for the Lord | shall be | thine everlasting light, | and the days | of thy mourning | shall be ended. |

Φωτίζον | φωτίζον | Ἱεροσαλήμ, | ἡκεῖ γάρ | σου τὸ φῶς, | καὶ ἡ δόξα | κυρίου | ἐπὶ σὲ | ἀνατέταλκεν. | Ἴδου | σκοτός | καλύψει γῆν, | καὶ γνόφος | ἐπ' ἔθνη, | ἐπὶ δὲ σὲ | φανήσεται | κύριος, | καὶ ἡ δόξα | αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σὲ | ὀφθήσεται. | καὶ πορεύσονται | βασιλεῖς | τῷ φωτί σου, | καὶ ἔθνη | τῇ λαμ|πρότητί σου.