

KNOTS UNTIED *of the* LATIN PSALTER

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*Si quid novisti rectius istis
candidus imperti : si non, his utere mecum.*

HORACE *Ep. I, vi, 68, 69.*

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INTRODUCTION

THE Latinity of the Vulgate Psalter, whether in the Roman or in the Gallican form, is an interesting study of a language in liturgical use from the second century to the present day. Besides the popular element, it embodies many strange constructions, words and phrases puzzling to, if not jarring upon, those who are accustomed only to the classical idiom ; nevertheless it is a highly musical language, its resonance and its cadences delight our ears—"cantabiles mihi erant justificationes tuae" (Ps. 118, 54). It is a literal translation of the Septuagint, itself a literal translation of the Hebrew ; the construction of many sentences, the choice and meaning of many words, are determined and explained by the Greek. After this two-fold translation, it is still a Hebrew book in thought, in outlook, in swift and frequent change of standpoint, in outward form. In no other book of the Latin Bible do so many Hebrew idioms arrest one's attention ; we live and move in an oriental climate of thought. The strange tenses of the Vulgate, especially the Imperfect, where we should expect to find the Future, should at least remind us that the Hebrew people looked at things in their own vivid and interesting way, that they saw themselves not only going to do something, but keeping at it and looking back upon it, as if it were already accomplished.

Like the Septuagint—the traditional Jewish interpretation—the Vulgate Psalter, in many instances, is widely different from the modern Hebrew, which cannot be regarded as always right. Hence the importances attached, in more recent years, to these two versions. There are several obscurities in the Latin and in the Greek ; it is well to remember that, in such passages, the original text is often uncertain or obscure, and that a probable meaning is the most that can be expected. While the Hebraist is free to exercise his learning and ingenuity in the reconstruction of the text, in the liturgical use the clergy must obviously interpret the Vulgate as it stands ; it is the Church's Authorized Version. A knowledge of the Hebrew language and of Hebrew life is invaluable, but the primary need of the clergy is to understand the version which they must use daily in the Liturgy : "Trowest thou that thou understandest the things which thou readest" (Acts 8, 30). It is sufficient to have a meaning and an application founded on the text and suggested

by the liturgical use of the passage ; it is naivety, if not great impudence, to say that it has no meaning at all.

The object of the following study is to give a vocabulary of words and phrases which have a peculiar meaning, and to give a rendering, which the Latin can bear, of obscure or difficult passages. Words are sometimes inserted in parenthesis in order to convey the meaning suggested in the translation. What the Hebrew means or what the text should mean is one thing ; what the Latin can mean, or does mean, is quite another problem with which this study is alone concerned : “ *Psallam spiritu, psallam et mente* ” (1 Cor. 14, 15). With the Latin word or phrase is given the reference, according to the Vulgate numbering,¹ to enable the reader to form his own judgment. No apology is offered for choosing and giving one interpretation where there is an alternative. The author will have accomplished much if he succeeds in convincing both old and young that they are not adequately equipped for the devout and intelligent use of the Latin Psalter without some special preliminary study, a study which obviously should be done in the seminary. Even its simplicity is sometimes a snare ; St. Jerome pungently remarked : “ *adtrita frons interpretatur saepe quod nescit* ” (Epis. 52, 8).

¹ The Vulgate numbering here used, differs from that of the Hebrew, and of the Authorized and Revised English Versions ; it unites Psalm ix and x, and cxiv and cxv, and divides cxlvi and cxlvii. Hence, as a rule, it is one behind the Hebrew. It should also be noticed that the verses of the Vulgate are often numbered differently.

Words and Phrases with Peculiar Meanings

a with the Ablative	-	because of ; 37, 6 ; 38, 12 ; 43, 17 ; 101, 6.
a saeculo	-	from everlasting, 24, 6, etc.
a solis ortu usque ad occasum		from East to West (<i>i.e.</i> everywhere), 49, 1 ; 106, 3 ; 112, 3 ; <i>cf.</i> Mal. 1, 11.
ab homine usque ad pecus		both man and beast, 134, 8 ; <i>cf.</i> Gen. 7, 23.
ab intus	-	intrinsecus (Jerome), 44, 14.
abire	-	to depart this life, 38, 14 ; <i>cf.</i> Gen. 15, 2 : vadere.
abundans	-	prolific, 143, 13.
abusio	-	abuse, 30, 19.
ad dexteram	-	the position of a defender, 141, 5.
accipere	-	to take to oneself, 48, 16.
accipere tempus	-	to choose, or reach the appointed time, 74, 3.
adeps	-	(1) fat, rich food, 62, 6 ; (2) a heart without feeling or pity, 16, 10 ; (3) adeps frumenti, the best wheat, 80, 17 ; 147, 3 (147, 14).
adhaerere post	-	to cleave to, 62, 9.
adinventiones	-	"inventions," doings, 98, 8 ; 105, 39 ; 27, 4.
adjicere super	-	to increase, 113, 14.
Adonái	-	'Lord' ; substituted by the Jews, in reading, for Jahweh (Jehovah), the 'ineffable name' ; Judith 16, 16.
adorare de ipso	-	to pray for him, 71, 15.
aemulari in	-	to vie with, 36, 1.
aequitates	-	equity, 16, 2.
africum	-	S.W. wind, 77, 26.
alieni	-	foreigners, idolators, 18, 14.
alienigenae	-	the Philistines, 59, 10 ; 82, 8.
alleluia	-	laudate Dominum (praise the Lord), 146, 1, etc.
altitudines montium	-	the mountain peaks, 94, 4.
ambulare in latitudine	-	to walk at large, 118, 45.
anima	-	(1) the persons denoted, 3, 3 ; 10, 2 ; 16, 9 ; 24, 13 ; 104, 18 etc. (2) one's life, 48, 9 ; 6, 5 ; 118, 109, (3) desire, 34, 25 ; 77, 18, (4) fury, 40, 3 ; <i>cf.</i> Gen. 12, 5 and Exod. 1, 5 where animae = "souls," persons.