

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

ART. VI.—HOMER'S ODYSSEY IN ENGLISH PROSE  
AND VERSE.

1. *The Odyssey of Homer done into English Prose.* By G. H. BUTCHER, M.A., and A. LANG, M.A. Macmillan and Co.
2. *The Odyssey of Homer in English Blank Verse.* By WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT. 2 vols. Osgood: Boston.

DR. BENTLEY, the prince of English classical critics, gave the world no inappropriate distinction between the Iliad of Homer and his Odyssey, when he laid it down that "Homer composed the Iliad for men and the Odyssey for women." All that is most heroic in the heart of man is stirred to its lowest depths by the Iliad of Homer as by no other poem, as the poet sings of the shock of battle, the horrors of the ghastly field of fight, and the glory and the rapture of triumphant and heroic patriotism. But it is in the Odyssey that we see mirrored, as in no other poem of classical antiquity, a reflection of conjugal and filial affection in its strength and beauty, as well as of the surpassing loveliness of maiden love, pure as the sunbeam, and ardent as its warmth. All the leading heroes and heroines in this marvellous poem, as well as all its incidents, are more or less made subordinate and subservient by the poet to his consummate design to ennoble the domestic virtues, as the truest and purest source of human happiness. In the Odyssey, therefore, even more than in the Iliad, are found the best exemplifications of the commendation of Homer by Horace and St. Basil, that he was a better teacher of morality than the professors and philosophers of morality. As we come to measure the magnitude of the family life and the family affections which fill up a large portion of the Odyssey, we shall all the more fully appreciate Bentley's description of it as "a lady's book," and Fénelon's practical insight into its character, when he based upon it the adventures of Telemachus and gave to the world the most popular of all French text-books in girls' schools. The charming picture of Ulysses, the hero of the story, who is tossed so long from sea to sea, and from temptation to temptation, but whose "heart untravelled" always turns to his true wife, Penelope, and yearns for the old home in Ithaca, is only equalled by the charming portraiture of that truest of true wives, whose all-enduring love no temptation can lure away, no distance of place or time can diminish. Add to this the blooming youth of Telemachus, their son, and his unflinching devotion to his parents, the faithful domestic Eumceus, "faithful alone among the faithless found," and further

the dog Argos, who knows his returning master even when disguised in a beggar's garb, after so many years' absence and dies of very joy at the welcome sight, and we have a perfect picture of domestic affection and fidelity, painted by a master-hand in colours as fresh and as powerfully appealing at the present hour to the human heart as when it was painted more than two thousand years ago.

The two translations of the *Odyssey* before us are to our mind the most worthy of all recent reproductions of the great original in prose and verse, and typical as they are, they naturally force upon us the comparison between the choice of prose and verse as the most adequate form of presentation of Homeric poetry to the English ear. The prose version by Messrs. Butcher and Lang, two of the most eminent Oxford scholars of our day, is avowedly made on the model of the archaic simple style of the Authorised Version of our English Bible. The contention of these translators is that the verse translation either adds to Homer or takes from Homer, while, as prose translators, they profess to give Homer as he is, "without modern ornament, with nothing added or omitted." While we accord to Messrs. Butcher and Lang the praise of having written by far the truest and most faithful prose rendering of the *Odyssey* in English, we must at the same time take leave to say, that we cannot endorse their theory of translation, which lays it down that prose is the most fitting vehicle for the Homeric poetry, and further we must say that their own version does not secure to the English reader Homer without addition or subtraction. They have given us the story without the song, or rather, we may say, the song without its accompanying music and its appropriate tune. The manner of the *Odyssey* is more essentially its poetry than its matter, and any attempt to present the *Odyssey* in an unpoetical form without metre or rhyme is sure to reduce its poetry to prose, and to present it as Ulysses presented himself to the Suitors, disguised, if not disgraced, in the tattered garb of a beggar. The American poet, Mr. Bryant, on the contrary, with a true instinct of a poet, has rendered the *Odyssey* into English blank verse, half Miltonic and half Shakspearian, the noblest form of presentation ever used by our greatest poets, and one we hold to be the most capable of reproducing the marvellous music and the majestic movement of the grand old hexameters of Homer.

Let us now take, for the sake of comparing these rival methods of reproducing Homer, the beautiful scene in the sixth *Odyssey*, which describes the abode of the gods and the appeal of the gentle and guileless Nausicaa to her father.

MR. WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

—Olympus! where the gods have made,  
So saith tradition, their eternal seat,

The tempest shakes it not, nor is it drenched  
 By showers, and there the snow doth never fall.  
 The calm clear ether is without a cloud;  
 And in the golden light, that lies on all,  
 Day after day the blessed gods rejoice.  
 Thither the blue-eyed goddess, having given  
 Her message to the sleeping maid, withdrew.

Soon the bright morning came. Nausicaa rose,  
 Clad royally, as marvelling at her dream  
 She hastened to the palace to declare  
 Her purpose to her father and the queen.  
 She found them both within. Her mother sat  
 Beside the hearth with her attendant maids,  
 And turned the distaff headed with a fleece  
 Dyed in sea purple. On the threshold stood  
 Her father going forth to meet the chiefs  
 Of the Phœacians in a council there;  
 Their noblest asked his presence. Then the maid,  
 Approaching her beloved father, spake:—

“I pray, dear father, give command to make  
 A chariot ready for me, with high sides  
 And sturdy wheels, to bear to the river brink,  
 There to be cleansed, the costly robes that now  
 Lie soiled. Thee likewise it doth well beseem  
 At councils to appear in vestments fresh  
 And stainless. Thou hast also in these halls  
 Five sons, two wedded, three in boyhood's bloom,  
 And ever in the dance they need attire  
 New from the wash. All this must I provide.”

She ended, for she shrunk from saying aught  
 Of her own hopeful marriage. He perceived  
 Her thought and said: “Mules I deny thee not,  
 My daughter, nor aught else. Go, then; my groom  
 Shall make a carriage ready with high sides  
 And sturdy wheels, and a broad back above.

MESSRS. BUTCHER AND LANG.

Olympus, where they say is the seat of God, that standeth fast for ever, not by wind is it shaken, nor ever wet with rain, nor doth the snow come nigh thereto, but real clear air is spread about it cloudless, and the white light floats over it. Therein the blessed gods are glad for all their days. Anon came the throned morning, and awakened Nausicaa of the fair robes, who, strange to say, marvelled on the dream, and went through the halls to tell her parents, her father and her mother dear. And she found them within, her mother sitting by the hearth with the women, her handmaid spinning yarn of the purple stain, but her father she met as he was going forth to the renowned kings in their council, whither the noble Phœacians bade him. Standing close by her dear father, she spoke, saying, “Father dear, could'st thou not lend me a high waggon with strong wheels, that I may take

goodly raiment to the river to wash, so much as I have lying soiled? Yea, and it is seemly that thou thyself, when among the princes at council, should have fresh raiment to wear. Also, there are five dear sons of thine in the halls, two married and three trusty bachelors, and these are always eager for new-washen garments, wherein to go to the dances, for all these things have I taken thought." This she said because she was ashamed to speak of glad marriage to her father; but he saw all, and said, "Neither the mules nor aught else do I grudge thee, child, for thy will, and the thralls shall get thee ready a high waggon, with good wheels, and fitted with an upper frame.

In the prose version we have quoted "the *white* light floats over it," is by far too prosaic a rendering of the original, which is literally the "white *splendour* (*αἴγλη*) is wont to overrun it" (*ἐπιδέδρομεν*), with which we may compare Propertius' "*percurrit luna fenestras*." Then, again, the rendering *renowned kings* leaves out of sight the real force of the original (*κλειτοῦς*), which here means "*summoned*," and as well as its structural harmony with the cognate verb which follows—the council to which the glorious Phœacians *summoned* him (*κάλεον*). With a like disregard to Homeric literal phraseology, these literal translators altogether omit the cognate expression *βουλᾶς βουλευέν*, "to counsel." Nor can, "to *speak of glad marriage*," be accepted as a literal equivalent for the Greek, which here means "to speak *out* (to her father) of marriage *in the bloom of her youth*." If we turn to other passages of this literal prose version, many errors and inadvertences will be observed which call for revision. We have, for example (I. 13 and elsewhere), "Those that live by bread," the old and altogether misleading rendering of *ἀλφισταί*, forgetful of the fact that Homer uses *σιτοφάγοι* for "bread-eating," and that the most acceptable sense of *ἀλφισταί* is the best scholars of our day is that of "gain getting," formed as the word really is for the root *αλφ*, as in *ἀλφαίνω*, to *earn*. Again and again, too, are the Homeric particles and compounds which play so important a part in the development and force of the Homeric poetry either altogether omitted or slurred slovenly over by the translators, who give us "*fair handiwork*," for "*handiwork of surpassing beauty*" (*περικαλλέα ἔργα*). The opening of the 22nd Book, which details the vengeance of Ulysses on the vile suitors of his wife, is a very swarm of inaccuracies and inadvertences on the part of these literal translators, who, for example, translate an intensive and frequentative verb in Greek, which means "ye have again and again maintained," by "ye said," and render "the *righteous retribution*" (Nemesis) of the original by "*indignation*," and give us "pale fear got hold of *the limbs* of all," for "pale fear gradually or secretly (*ὑπό*) stole upon all," where the original says nothing at all of "*limbs*."

Then for "*terrible trial*," we prefer "*awful ordeal*" as closer

to the poet, and "poured out" instead of "poured forth" for the same reason. We regret to have to point out these inaccuracies in detail, but a translation which claims public attention and challenges public criticism on the merit of literal accuracy, must be judged by the standpoint and according to the standard to which it appeals. Of Mr. Cullen Bryant's version, which makes no claim whatever to verbal accuracy, we have little to say on that score. The chief merit of the American translator lies in the simplicity of his language, the measured music of his perfect form of presentation, and the Homeric spirit which animates so much of the body of the translation. We are far from saying that in the beautiful verse of the American poet we can recognise all the characteristics of the Homeric muse, convinced as we are of the truth of Dryden's dictum that everything translated suffers except it be a Bishop; but we can truly say that there is no version of the *Odyssey* in English which possesses so many attributes of Homeric poetry as this work, although, we regret to say, it is so little known and appreciated in England.



#### ART. VII.—THE LIFE AND WORK OF ST. PAUL.

*The Life and Work of St. Paul.* By F. W. FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S.  
Cassell, Petter and Galpin.

EVERY review we have seen of this work has contained a protest against its faults of style. The complaint is thoroughly justified. In what is, and will probably continue to be, Dr. Farrar's great work, "The Life of Christ," some literary defects of the kind lay open to remark. There was too much fine writing in it; it was, if one may so term it, overwritten; the word painting was exceedingly vivid, but there was over much of it. The mind longed for some repose. The very exuberance of descriptive power wearied the sense of admiration, and the reader longed, every now and then, to be left alone to realise for himself the conditions of the scene, and fill up out of his own living experience the broad outlines of time and place and circumstance. But the fault was one of which the mass of popular readers would not be conscious. There was, moreover, nothing in the language itself to offend the most exact taste. It was ever graceful and ever natural, simple and unaffected, and betrayed no sign of effort or of a conscious straining after effect.

The same credit cannot unfortunately be given to some parts of "The Life and Work of St. Paul." Throughout, and as a rule, there is a superabundance of technical terms, familiar enough to the scholar and to the theologian, but only impressive to the general reader on the principle "*omne ignotum pro mirifico.*" There is