

TRANSLATING *THINE BE THE GLORY* INTO CORNISH

Dr Ken George

Along with over 40 others, I recently logged in to an on-line Cornish language service for Low Sunday, conducted using Zoom. After some initial difficulties, the service proceeded in a reverent manner, and I was pleased to have participated.

I was concerned, however, on receiving the order of service, that the translation of the Easter hymn *Thine be the glory* was almost unsingable, because it did not scan properly, i.e. stressed syllables in Cornish coincided with unstressed notes, and vice versa.

On the next page is shown:

- (a) the text in English;
- (b) the translation into Cornish;
- (c) a back-translation into English.

On comparing (c) and (a), it is evident that the Cornish translation is very close to the English. The translator is to be commended for getting it so close. It has been done, however, at the expense of scansion, and it does not rhyme at all. It looks like the priority was to follow the English as closely as possible. I have argued for many years, however, that when a hymn is translated for actual performance, then the natural stress-pattern of the language should fit that of the tune, so that it can be sung without difficulty. To achieve this usually means that the translation is not so close in meaning to the original.

Looking in detail at the Cornish translation, I have marked in red most of the places where a Cornish unstressed syllable wrongly coincides with a stressed beat in the music. Line 4 of verse 2, and lines 2, 3 and 4 of verse 3 correctly have 11 syllables, but it is not all clear how they can be fitted to the music. The direct way requires that the words *tryghoryon* and *Yordan* be split over two phrases of the music, which does not seem right.

Each verse of the English text contains two pairs of stressed (masculine) rhymes (marked by **bold underlining**), and one pair of internal feminine rhymes in the first two lines (marked by **bold**). A translation for performance ought to take account of this rhyming scheme.

THINE BE THE GLORY

English text

Thine be the **glory**, risen conquering **Son**,
Endless is the **victory** though o'er death hast **won**
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone **away**,
Kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body **lay**.

Lo, Jesus **meets us**, risen from the **tomb**
Lovingly he **greet**s us, scatters fear and **gloom**
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph **sing**
For her Lord now liveth, death has lost its **sting**.

No more we **doubt thee**, glorious Prince of **Life**,
Life is nought without **thee**, aid us in our **strife**;
Make us more than conquerors
 through thy deathless **love**;
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home **above**.

Translation into Cornish used in 2020

Dhis re bo glori, **dasserghys**, trygh Mab;
Dibenn yw an trygh, y waynsys dres mern**ans**;
Eledh yn dillas splann a way**as** an men,
Gwitha an dillas bedh mayth **esa** dha gorf.

Yesu a' **gan** met, drehev**ys** a'n bedh;
Gans sergh ev a'gan dynnergh, pellhe more**edh**;
Kan**es** an Eglos hymnys trygh yn low**en**,
Rag Yesu yw bew, kellys yw bros mernans.

Ny'th toutyn **namoy**, gloryus pryns bew**nans**;
Gweres ni Arlodh, ni yw kellys heb**os**;
Gwra ni moy es tryghoryon dre dha sergh meur;
Dro ni salow dre Yordan dhe'th tre a-vann.

Back translation of Cornish into English

To thee be glory, risen, victory Son
Endless is the victory thou won over death
Angels in bright raiment moved the stone,
Kept the grave-clothes where thy body was.

Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb,
With affection he greets us,
Let the church sing hymns of victory happily
For Jesus is alive, lost is death's sting.

We doubt thee no more, glorious Prince of life,
Aid us, Lord, we are lost without thee;
Make us more than conquerors
 through thy great affection
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

It is unfair of me to criticize someone else's translation without trying to produce one of my own. After a first attempt, I realized how difficult this particular hymn is to translate. I looked up its origin, and found that the English text is a (part-) translation from French. The hymn was composed by a Swiss, Edmond Budry (1885), and the English version is by Richard Hoyle (1923). Might I get on better with a Cornish version by translating the French?

The original French words are shown on the next page. The first feature to notice is that the metrics are not 11.11.11.11, as in the English version, but 6.5.6.5.D. The words have been laid out accordingly, in short lines. They scan and rhyme beautifully, and are very singable. All of the lines have rhyming words. The six-syllable lines have feminine rhymes, all using schwa for the unstressed syllable as in many French hymns; and the five-syllable lines have masculine rhymes. This means that there are far fewer words than in the English version.

The second column on the next page (in green) is a literal translation of the French, and the third column gives the familiar words in English, but arranged in short lines. So far as the rhyme-scheme is concerned, Richard Hoyle has found suitable words for all the masculine rhymes, but only half of the feminine ones. Because of their pronunciation, **glory** and **victory** are really only eye-rhymes, while their French cognates **gloire** and **victoire** are proper rhymes.

What is of greater interest, however, is the great departure which the "translation" makes in meaning. The words in green in the English text are indeed translated from the French, but the blue words are not. Hoyle starts off fairly closely to the French in the first verse, but needs to put in more words to satisfy the length of the lines, so he adds **conquering Son**, which does not appear in the original. The fifth line, **Kept the folded grave-clothes**, is a complete addition, but what a splendid one! Then in verses 2 and 3, the translator moves right away from the French, and ends up by producing lyrics which have their own considerable merit. The lines **death has lost its sting** and **Bring us safe through Jordan** are superb, but they are Hoyle's own composition, not translation. On examining the hymns as a whole, one discerns a different approach to the Easter story: the French version is more concerned with the author's personal relationship with his Saviour, whereas the English one emphasizes that Christ has triumphed to save us all.

It seems appropriate, then, to treat the French and the English versions as separate works; to translate the English one into Cornish, but to keep an eye on the French.

À TOI LA GLOIRE

French original

À toi la **gloire**,
O Ressuscité!
À toi la victoire
pour l'éternité!
Brillant de lumière,
l'ange est descendu,
Il roule la pierre
du tombeau vaincu.

Vois-le paraître:
C'est lui, c'est Jésus,
Ton Sauveur, ton Maître,
Oh! ne doute plus!
Sois dans l'allégresse,
peuple du Seigneur,
Et redis sans cesse:
Le Christ est vainqueur!

Craindrais-je encore?
Il vit à jamais,
Celui que j'adore,
le Prince de paix;
Il est ma victoire,
mon puissant soutien,
Ma vie et ma gloire:
non, je ne crains rien!

Literal translation into English

To Thee the glory
O resurrected (one)
To Thee the victory
for eternity!
Shining with light
the angel has come down
He rolls the stone
of the defeated tomb.

See Him appear:
it is He, it is Jesus,
Thy Saviour, Thy Master,
Oh! doubt no more!
Be joyful,
people of the Saviour,
and repeat without ceasing:
Christ is victor!

Do I still fear?
He lives for ever,
He whom I adore,
the Prince of Peace;
He is my victory,
my mighty support,
my life and my glory,
no, I fear nothing.

English version by Hoyle

Thine be the **glory**,
risen conquering **Son**
Endless is the **victory**
thou o'er death hast **won**.
Angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone **away**,
Kept the folded grave-clothes
where his body **lay**.

Lo, Jesus **meets us**,
risen from the **tomb**;
Lovingly he **greet**s us,
scatters fear and **gloom**;
Let the church with gladness
hymns of triumph **sing**,
For her Lord now liveth,
death has lost its **sting**:

No more we **doubt thee**,
glorious Prince of **Life**;
Life is nought without **thee**,
aid us in our **strife**;
Make us more than conquerors
through thy deathless **love**;
Bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home **above**.

My translation into Cornish is presented on the next page.

THINE BE THE GLORY

English text

Thine be the **glory**, risen conquering **Son**,
Endless is the **victory** though o'er death hast **won**
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone **away**,
Kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body **lay**.

Lo, Jesus **meets us**, risen from the **tomb**
Lovingly he **greet**s us, scatters fear and **gloom**
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph **sing**
For her Lord now liveth, death has lost its **sting**.

No more we **doubt thee**, glorious Prince of **Life**,
Life is nought without **thee**, aid us in our **strife**;
Make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love;
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home **above**.

Translation into Cornish by Ken George

Mab re dhassorghas, re bo glori **dhis**,
neb a fethas ankow; trygh a bes pup-**prys**.
Eledh oll kannwiskys 'rolyas 'mes an **men**,
hag yn le dha gorf-jy, plegys gwisk hep**ken**.

Yesu a-ragon, sevys 'mes an **bedh**,
yn kuv a'gan dynnergh, skattra own ha **meth**;
gwres an eglos lowen gormel trygh dre **gan**,
rag y few hy Arloedh, ankow gallas **gwann**.

Namoy ny'th toutyn, Prynys a vewnans **splann**,
gwra-jy agan gweres, hebos ny dal **mann**;
gwra ni gordryghoryon dre'th kerensa-**jy**;
dro ni saw dre Yordan bys dhe'th annedh-**sy**.

Back translation of Cornish into English

Son who has risen, may there be glory to thee
who conquered death, victory will last for ever.
Angels all clad in bright white rolled away the stone,
and in place of thy body, folded clothes only.

Jesus before us, meets us, risen from the tomb,
kindly he greets us, scatters fear and shame;
Let the glad church praise victory through song,
For her Lord lives, death has become weak.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life,
Do thou aid us, without thee nothing counts;
Make us super-conquerors through thy love;
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home.

Appraisal of the translation

Without resorting to the original French, I have managed to produce a translation which scans, and rhymes at the end of every 11-syllable line. No attempt has been made to include internal rhymes. Half of the rhymes (**men** ≡ hep**ken**, **splann** ≡ **mann**, **jy** ≡ **sy**) are congruent; the other half (**dhis** ≈ **prys**, **bedh** ≈ **meth**, **gan** ≈ **gwann**) are near-perfect, and reflect commonly used near-perfect rhymes in the texts.

The translation is still very close to the English. Extra words, not found in the English, are shown in blue. Conversely, a few words in the English do not appear in the Cornish translation: “in our strife” (verse 3, line 2), “deathless” (verse 3, line 3) and “above” (verse 4, line 4) are missing; and “grave-clothes” is represented by just *gwisk* ‘clothes’ (a useful monosyllable instead of the disyllabic *dillas*). The word ‘death’ is translated by *ankow* ‘death as a concept’ rather than *mernans* ‘death as an event’. It is a pity not to use *bros* for ‘sting’, but I could not get that to rhyme.

By a little tweaking, I have produced a translation which is easily singable. I hope that it will be used in future services.

Ken George
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