

He who runs may read

At the meeting of the Johns Hopkins University Philological Association on November 16, 1917 Professor Miller presented a brief communication on the favorite dictum of Samuel Johnson with reference to Oliver Goldsmith, *Nihil quod tetigit non ornavit*, which is often quoted in the barbarous form *Nihil tetigit quod non ornavit*, even by scholars like Dean Stanley and Professor Jebb who was acknowledged to be one of the most brilliant classical scholars of his time (JHUC, No. 306, p. 10; AJP 38, 460). The glossary of foreign words and phrases appended to the *New Standard Dictionary* gives the correct form under *nullum*. We generally substitute *nihil*; in Johnson's inscription on Goldsmith's cenotaph in Westminster Abbey *nullum* refers to *genus* in the preceding clause.

Another familiar quotation which is always cited in an incorrect form is *he who runs may read*. We find it not only in the daily papers, but also in the works of the masters of English literature; e. g. Swinburne says in his *Shakespeare: In Macbeth* there is some ground for the general baseless and delusive opinion of self-complacent sciolism that he who runs may read.

The new Oxford dictionary, vol. 8 (1914) p. 897^c, e states that this quotation is an alteration of Hab. 2 2^b where AV and RV have *that he may run that readeth it*; but it is derived from the Genevan Bible of 1560 where we find in the margin: *that he that runneth may read it*. This Calvinistic version was the most popular Bible in England for more than 75 years. The translation given in AV is more correct than Luther's rendering *Schreibe das Gesicht und male es auf eine Tafel, dass es lesen könne wer vorüberläuft*. The LXX has *Γράψον ὄρουσιν καὶ σαφῶς εἰς πυξίον, ὅπως διώκη ὁ ἀναγιώσκων αὐτά*, and the Vulgate: *Scribe visum, et explana eum super tabulas, ut precurrat qui legerit eam*. The real meaning of the line is: Write plainly on a large tablet that it may be read runningly, i. e. without pause and hesitation. In German you say *grläufig lesen* or *gelläufig sprechen* for *to speak fluently*, lit. *currently*, French *couramment*. *Currency* was formerly used for *fluency*, readiness of utterance.

The prediction which Habbakuk is to write on a large tablet, so that it may be easily read, although it may take some time before it is fulfilled, is:

- 2 5 The proud tyrant¹ will not crush you,²
 though he open his jaws like Sheol:³
 6 All will utter against him
 railing rimes, lampoons, and pasquins.⁴
 4 Lo, his greed is reckless within him,
 but the righteous will survive despite their firmness.⁵
- 1 10 They'll make a mock of the great king,⁶
 all princes⁷ are a scoff unto them;
 They'll laugh every stronghold to scorn,⁸
 they'll throw up siege-works, and take it.
 11 Then they'll sweep by as the wind, and pass on,
 they'll destroy them, sacrificing to God.

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¹ King Demetrius of Syria (162—150) who was a nephew of Antiochus Epiphanes and a friend of the historian Polybius.

² Read *ἰὸνέκκα*, and *kî* for the following *āšēr*.

³ Cf. Tennyson's *They that had fought so well came through the jaws of Death, back from the mouth of Hell*.

⁴ Lit. *verses, songs, and poems*.

⁵ In resisting the edicts of Antiochus Epiphanes that Jewish rites should cease, and heathen customs be observed under pain of death (JHUC, No. 325, p. 47). The Syrian tyrant regarded the constancy of the faithful Jews as rebellious obstinacy. Cf. Luke 21 19: *ἐν τῇ ὑπομονῇ ὑμῶν κτήσασθε τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν* which does not mean *In your patience possess ye your souls*, but *Despite your steadfastness ye will win your lives*. See also Matt. 10 22 24 13; Mark 13 13; Dan. 12 12.

⁶ The King of Syria.

⁷ The Syrian generals sent against the Maccabees, especially Bacchides and Nicanor.

⁸ Read *ἡἰἰimmém ἡἰ-izbâh lclôhâi*. Cf. JHUC, No. 325, p. 48.