

**A RHYMED  
HARMONY OF  
THE GOSPELS**

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A Rhymed Harmony of the Gospels by Francis Barham

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# RHYMED HARMONY

OF THE

## GOSPELS.

BY FRANCIS BARHAM.

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*Printed both in Phonetic and in the customary spelling, as a Transition Book  
from Phonetic Reading to the reading of books as now commonly printed.*

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## PREFACE.

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The superiority of the Bible over all other books has been fully proved. Its transcendent merits are acknowledged by all fair judges. This being premised, we proceed to the purpose of the present work.

It is generally agreed among scholars, that the original Old and New Testaments were composed, partly in prose, and partly in poetry or verse. Kennicott, Louth, Jebb, Boothroyd, Boys, and other authors, have established this fact. So curiously are these two forms of composition blended and intermingled in the Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek Bibles, that it is sometimes difficult to discover to which class certain stichs or lines (in which they were first written,) most properly belong. Even the translators of the Scriptures in ancient or modern languages, retain so much of the parallelism, or correspondence of clauses, which distinguished Oriental poetry, that the reader continually feels that they still savor of poetic composition, especially in those passages where the grandeur of the images and the beauty of the sentiments are peculiarly conspicuous.

The great majority of the translations of the Bible are very properly prose translations, which attempt to give the sense of the original literally word for word, and sometimes partially observe the correspondency of clauses. But beside these, many poetical or versicle renderings have been given of certain books of the Bible, in different ages and nations. Among these, we may notice several poetical versions, or paraphrases of Scripture, by the Oriental, Greek, and Latin Fathers, as Ephraim, Gregory, Nonnius, Cyprian, Hilary, Juvencus, and the pious poets of the mediæval ages.

At present we must confine our attention to the productions of this nature in our own land and language. Poetical versions of the Scripture were early favorites with the British and Anglo-Saxon races. Not to mention attempts of this kind among our Keltic and Saxon ancestors, on which a curious essay might be written, we may cite some of the poetic versions of more recent periods. In Queen Elizabeth's days, good old Hunnis translated *Genesis* into verse. Others attempted other books.

For instance, *Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, Isaiah*, the *Lamentations*, and the *Acts of the Apostles*, have all been versified by Sandys, Sternhold, Hopkins, Tye, Blackmore, Merrick, Tate, Scott, Young, Butt, and others; while Fellowes, Samuel Wesley (the father of John Wesley), and Boys, have given poetical versions of other parts of the Old and New Testaments.

As far as I am aware, the Gospels, though the most interesting and important parts of the Bible, have not yet appeared in English verse, and I therefore set myself to supply a poetical rendering of them. In so doing, I followed throughout Townsend's Harmony of the Gospels, contained in his admirable edition of the Bible in chronological and historical arrangements. This mainly agrees with all the best Harmonies of the Gospels, and enables us to read the sacred record of our Lord's life, words, and actions, in regular unbroken order, satisfying to the intelligence.

If I am not mistaken, the Gospel record not only abounds in the Divinest Wisdom, but the most exquisite poetry; and furnishes an inexhaustible store of the purest sentiments and images.

In order to render the Gospel history more attractive, I have composed this poetic paraphrase of it in that antique ballad verse, which seems most pleasing to the majority of the English. It is in this that most of the Psalms of David have been already rendered, from Sternhold downwards. Into this verse Chapman translated the Epical ballads of Homer, with brilliant success. It appears to be less formal and wearisome than many other kinds of English verse. It possesses a certain sprightliness and vivacity of spirit, and a venerable quaintness of style, which make it a general favorite, especially with those who are fond of mediæval ballad poetry, and ancestral chant and song.

I have therefore purposely and studiously emulated the antique style of Sternhold, Chapman, and other old national balladists; because I see that the Bible, as an ancient Oriental book, can be best presented to the sympathies of the people in that sort of venerable verse in which they have been accustomed to sing their national Psalms and Hymns. I believe that if they can relish much of the Old Testament in this verse, they will still more relish much of the New Testament therein, being more interesting and important. It is now first presented in the same attire, not only sanctioned but sanctified by long usage. Many of the attempts to render Scripture in what is called classical verse, have been very unsatisfactory, as Merrick and others have proved. I have therefore steadfastly abstained from all those classical elegancies and refinements, which appear to me incongruous with the Hebrew, Syrian, and Hellenistic phraseology, and



which I have been accustomed to develop in other poems, wherein Grecian and Roman learning might be more properly exhibited.

Whatever the fate of this devotional exercise may be, I do not despair that a period may arrive when certain varieties of evangelic poetry (which in its very nature is holiest and best,) will once more become popular. True religion is so much akin to refined sentiment and natural imagery, that they ought to be conjoined in many forms of poetical composition, such as the general community can relish.

This rhymed paraphrase of the Gospels is very complete. I believe it includes almost every text in the Gospel Harmony, in the order of the Harmony, with the exception of the genealogies, and certain minute particulars that could not appropriately be introduced in verse.

In forming this poetic paraphrase, I have consulted, during several years, the best editions of the original New Testament, the best translations of it in ancient and modern languages, as well as its principal critics and commentators; and I trust it will be found a faithful and lucid interpretation of the sacred text, throwing light on many of its obscurities, and removing some of its difficulties.

This work may therefore be considered a new experiment in biblical literature. It forms a GOSPEL EPIC, in our old national ballad verse, so prized by the English for its quaint simplicity, pathos, and power. My principal aim is to impress the Divine truths of the Gospel on the minds of the lovers of poetry, and make its leading doctrines and facts familiar as household words, by the aid of rhythm and rhyme. I would do the same service to the Gospel of Christ that so many have already done to the Psalms of David. Though the Gospels are, thank God, so generally known to the people, I do not despair of interesting many hearts by this novel and poetic mode of illustrating their beauties.

The supereminent merit of the Gospel, as respects its theology, morality, history, etc., has been frequently noted. But it has not hitherto been sufficiently honored for its poetical excellences. Yet, when truly and impartially investigated, it appears to deserve no limited admiration from the lovers of poetry. A Harmony of the Gospels is the grandest Epic in the world. What Epic has ever treated of so magnificent a theme as the manifestation of God in the form of man, to redeem mankind? In tracing the history of the Messiah through its successive stages, the Gospel epic exhibits the noblest unity of design, and the noblest variety of wonderful incidents. It is indeed the Epic of epics. Its very fragments have given birth to the finest poems, which have distinguished the names of Milton, Klopstock, and other religious bards.

This poetical paraphrase may prove serviceable by supplying teachers and learners with a rhymed version of all the passages they wish to impress on the memory. It likewise furnishes a great many hymns for singing, as the ballad measure suits many of our best hymn tunes.

Though my work lays claim to fidelity rather than to brilliancy, it has cost me more prolonged labor than some will readily imagine. I trust this humble tribute to the Redeemer of Mankind will not prove vain and worthless. I have striven to make it faithful, without being pedantic; animated, without being extravagant; simple, without being puerile; and quaint, without being fantastic. May it kindle and increase the sympathy of youth and age for the Holy Scriptures! May it interest the solitary student, and the social circle, in the glorious themes of Revelation; and so enrich the memory with the Divine oracles, that the Christian life may be more manifest among us!

In order to assimilate to the Epic form this poetical paraphrase of the Gospel Harmony, it is divided into twelve books.

With one word on the orthographic dress in which it appears, I conclude, and commend the reader to the gracious words that depict the life of the Incarnate God.

I am gratified to know that my fellow-citizen Mr Isaac Pitman, who has labored more than a quarter of a century for the reformation of our *accidental* style of spelling, and in the dissemination of an admirable system of Phonetic Shorthand, has undertaken to present this work to the world, both in the old spelling and in the new, so that children who learn to read in either style may, from this book, gain a knowledge of the other. As to the merits of the two styles of spelling, I agree entirely with what that great scholar the Bishop of St David's says of the common orthography:—"I look upon the established system, if an accidental custom may be so called, as a mass of anomalies, the growth of ignorance and chance, equally repugnant to good taste and to common sense. But I am aware that the public clings to these anomalies with a tenacity proportioned to their absurdity, and is jealous of all encroachment on ground consecrated by prescription to the free play of blind caprice." As the constant dropping of water wears away stones, so, I trust, will the constant dropping of the waters of truth, as developed in phonetic and orthographic science, wear away this stone of stumbling and rock of offence that bars the way to the temple of knowledge.

P.S.—I was much assisted in preparing this work for the press by my very pious and amiable wife Gertrude Foster Barham, recently deceased, whom I hope to meet in heaven. I have also to acknowledge the kind and careful revision of the work, and the improvement of numerous lines, by my friend Mr Isaac Pitman. F. B.

Bath, 23rd December, 1869.

# RHYMED HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS.

## BOOK I.

The history of Jesus Christ,  
Our blessed, only Lord,  
His Gospel, or Glad Tidings, here  
We from the first record.

### SECTION 1.

*General Preface.—Luke 1. 1-4.*

As many men have heretofore  
Endeavored to relate  
The wondrous mysteries of our faith  
In Christ, the Lord, most great;  
Delivered to eye-witnesses,  
And ministers of Him  
Who is the very Word of God,  
Worshipped by cherubim;  
It seemed good to me, also  
In these things well informed,  
To write them down in order, thus,  
That many hearts be warmed  
With clearer knowledge of these truths,  
Divinest, purest, best,  
Of all that man on earth can learn  
And cherish in his breast.

### SECTION 2.

*The divinity, humanity, and office of Christ.*  
—John 1. 1-18.

In the beginning was the Word,  
The *Logos*, Truth divine,  
That was with God, and that was God,  
And all good did enshrine;  
And all [things by this Word were  
made,  
Without Him nought could be,  
For He possessed the power and might  
Of sovereign Deity.

## BÜK I.

As histori ov Jesus Krjst,  
er blessed, onli Lord,  
His Gospel, or Glad Tidings, hir  
wi from de ferst rakurd.

### SEKŞON 1.

*Jeneral Prefes.—Luk 1. 1-4.*

Az meni men hav hirtafer  
endeverd tu relat  
de wondrous misteriz ov er fet  
in Krjst, de Lord, most grät;  
delivered tu f-witacæz,  
and ministræz ov Him  
hu iz de veri Word ov God,  
worşipt bi gerubim;  
it kimed gud tu mi, olser  
in diz tingz wel informd,  
tu rjt dem dæn in order, đps,  
dat meni harte bi wormd  
wid klirer nolej ov diz truitz,  
divjnæst, purest, best,  
ov ol dat man on erf kan lern  
and qerij in hiz brest.

### SEKŞON 2.

*De divinitæ, humanitæ, and ofis ov Krjst.*  
—Jon 1. 1-18.

In de beginij woz de Word,  
de *Logos*, Truät divjn,  
dat woz wid God, and dat woz God,  
and ol gud did enşrin;  
and ol tingz bi dis Word wer  
med,  
widst Him not kud bi,  
for Hi pozest de pser and mjt  
ov sovren Diiti.