

Bach *St Matthew Passion* (Novello edition ed. N. Jenkins)

*“The first translation of the *St. Matthew Passion*:
Helen Johnston’s lasting legacy”*

*A talk given by Neil Jenkins on the 150th anniversary
of the work’s 1st performance in England*

Today I should like to consider the very first translation of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* into English, by Helen Johnston, and see what are the strengths and weaknesses of this brave attempt to make it possible to sing Bach’s masterpiece in our native language.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE TRANSLATION

The translation was prepared for Sterndale Bennett’s performance one hundred and fifty years ago, on April 6th 1854. This was only some 25 years after Mendelssohn’s ground-breaking performance of the rediscovered work on 12 March 1829, in Berlin.

So, Johnston was working at an interesting time, when the piece which we now view as a masterpiece was performed infrequently and inadequately, and Bach’s reputation as a great choral composer was still being reestablished. It is remarkable that she was able to produce something which has proved so durable, when there were so few guidelines for her to follow in approaching such an undertaking. Translations of Oratorios into English were few at this period, and were mostly supervised by the composer. Haydn had proved himself unequal to the task with his *Creation* and *Seasons*, even though they were inspired by the Handel oratorios that he had heard in London in the 1790s. He left the preparation of good, singable, English texts to Baron van Swieten - the author of the original German text; the mess that he, with a faulty command of English, made of the translation of these two masterworks was corrected with varying degrees of success by subsequent publishers. Mendelssohn’s command of the English language meant that he was able to supervise more satisfactory English versions of *The Hymn of Praise* [Lobgesang, 1840] and even composed *Elijah* simultaneously in Julius Schubring’s German and in William Bartholomew’s English translation (1846).

see: Preface to Mendelssohn *Elijah* ed. Michael Pilkington, [Novello, 1991]

So, apart from popular oratorios such as these, the only models available to Helen Johnston when she set about her task would have been translations of Hymns (particularly from the Lutheran canon), and the rather different requirements of Opera. The works of Mozart and Rossini were being performed in English translation at Covent Garden and The King’s Theatre; but the translations of these were in the safe, professional, hands of such theatrical versifiers as Edward Fitzball, T. Holcroft, S.J. Arnold and J.R. Planché.

see: *A History of English Opera*, Eric Walter White, [Faber and Faber, 1983]

That Helen Johnston could come from nowhere and make such a creditable effort with her first translation is remarkable. But, although she could hit the mark on the one hand with a powerful verse that conveyed the same intent as the original German text, she could also fail, on the other, to come up with anything memorable at all, as can be shown by a comparison between two of her texts.

Firstly let us consider her translation of Chorale no. 53. This is her exact text from the published Sterndale Bennett edition [Novello, 1862]: **EXAMPLE 1**

Commit thy ways to Jesus,	<i>Befiehl du deine Wege</i>
Thy burdens and thy cares;	<i>Und was dein Herze kränkt</i>
He from them all releases,	<i>Der allertreusten Pflege</i>
He all thy sorrow shares.	<i>Des, der den Himmel lenkt;</i>

Who gives the winds their courses,	<i>Der Wolken, Luft und Winden</i>
And bounds the ocean's shore,	<i>Gibt Wege, Lauf und Bahn,</i>
Will suffer not temptation	<i>Der wird auch Wege finden,</i>
To rise beyond thy pow'r.	<i>Da dein Fuß gehen kann.</i>

The style of this is rooted in sturdy English hymnology, allied to a Shakespearian sense of elision (where the subject of lines 5-8 is "He who gives the winds their courses...") To see from where she derived this unusual syntax, compare Shakespeare *Othello* III iii :

*"Who steals my purse steals trash;
'tis something, nothing;
'twas mine, 'tis his,
and has been slave to thousands ..."*

Later editors balked at the complicated structure of lines 5-8 and endeavoured to make it more readily comprehensible;

EXAMPLE 1 (second half)

Elgar/Atkins (Novello, 1911 revised 1938)

Commit thy ways to Jesus,	
Thy burdens and thy cares;	<i>these four lines are as in</i>
He from them all releases,	<i>the original translation</i>
He all thy sorrow shares.	

<i>He</i> gives the winds their courses,	<i>changes in bold type</i>
And bounds the ocean's shore,	
<i>He</i> suffers not temptation	<i>changes in bold type</i>
To rise beyond thy pow'r.	

Elgar/Atkins lose some of the felicity of Johnston's original by turning the complete sentence, with sub-clause, which runs through lines 5-8 into two rather banal sentences

linked by an inappropriate comma. Because I personally feel that anyone who can read and understand Shakespeare and the King James Bible - two of the great cornerstones of our English language - will have no difficulty in understanding the Helen Johnston original, I have returned once more to her exact version in my recent edition for the New Novello Choral Edition (1997).

But now, **secondly**, let us consider some verse where she was not successful. Here is her translation of a notoriously tricky Bass aria, full of cross-rhythms and displaced stresses:

EXAMPLE 2

No. 29 Bass Aria

What though trials wait me here,
Tho' affliction prove severe,
Christ endur'd what I must bear.

If his grace my strength sustain,
Welcome sorrow, shame and pain,
Peace shall flow from ev'ry loss,
Endless glory from the cross.

Christ the Lord,
By heav'nly hosts ador'd,
From the realms of glory came,
Endur'd the cross, despised the shame.

When I suffer shame or loss,
Then I'll think on Jesus' cross.

'Picander'

*Gerne will ich mich bequemen,
Kreuz und Becher anzunehmen,
Trink ich doch dem Heiland nach.*

repeat of above 3 lines

*Denn sein mund,
Der mit milch und honig fließet,
Hat den grund
Und des Leidens herbe schmach
Durch den ersten Trunk versüßet.*

repeat of above 5 lines

The problems inherent in this translation are the reason that Helen Johnston's translation is only intermittently good. There is a sense of desperation in her need to translate a repeat of the German text of both sections with new verse. She ignores the original rhyme-scheme, and replaces it with a new one of her own devising. She alters note-lengths freely, and ignores the cross-rhythms that Bach's tied notation implies. It would be worth hearing both versions.

1ST MUSICAL EXAMPLE (Bass solo) No. 29

- a) in original version (German text)
- b) in Sterndale Bennett/Johnston version

In some other places Johnston's translation nearly works, and is worth preserving, especially if it can be made to fit underneath the German text more accurately. Such an aria is the ever-famous "*Jesus, Saviour, I am thine*" no. 19. This has been preserved in later editions, such as Stanford's (1910) and Elgar/Atkins (1911 revised 1938) completely unchanged. It has been sung by every soprano who has ever sung the work in English.

And yet, as it will be seen, it is curiously inaccurate.

EXAMPLE 3

<u>Johnston</u>	<u>'Picander'</u>
Jesus, Saviour, I am thine, (7)	<i>Ich will dir mein Herze schenken,</i> (8)
Come and dwell my heart within. (7)	<i>Senke dich, mein Heil, <u>hinein</u>.</i> (7)
All things else I count but loss , (7)	<i>Ich will mich in dir versenken;</i> (8)
Glory only in thy cross . (7)	<i>Ist dir gleich die Welt zu <u>klein</u>.</i> (7)
Dearer than the world <u>beside</u> (7)	<i>Ei, so sollst du mir <u>allein</u></i> (7)
Is the Saviour who hath <u>died</u> . (7)	<i>Mehr als Welt und Himmel <u>sein</u>.</i> (7)

The first thing to note is the change in rhyme-scheme. Bach's poet, Christian Friedrich Henrici, known by the pen name of 'Picander', has supplied a verse rhyming ABABBB. Johnston provides an unsuccessful half-rhyme in lines 1& 2, A [A], followed by BBCC. She also alters the 8 syllables of lines 1 & 3 into 7 syllables. This occurs frequently throughout her translation and one can see why. The German language is much fuller of trochaic endings than English. A quick glance at a hymnal will show that most English verse-lines end with a single syllable (*When I survey the wond'rous cross, Immortal, invisible, God only wise* etc). One has to hunt quite hard to find a good example set to an English tune with a trochee at the end of the line. Although there are several trochaic texts in the English Hymnal (e.g. 280: *Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness*, 407: *Lord, thy word abideth*, 85: *Jesu, meek and lowly*) these are all set to German melodies. The obvious inference is that German hymn-texts were largely written in such a metre.

Conversely, the English hymns which have trochaic lines use them in conjunction with single syllable rhymes in metres based on 8787. Obvious examples are:

Love divine, all loves <i>excelling</i> ,	Praise my soul, the King of <i>Heaven</i> ;
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,	To his feet thy tribute bring.
Fix in us thy humble <i>dwelling</i> ,	Ransomed, healed, restored, <i>forgiven</i> ,
All thy faithful mercies crown.	Who like me his praise should sing?

So, it is hard to mirror the German rhyme-scheme exactly, without falling back on a few well-used double-syllabled words (viz: '*dwelling*' above) or participles ('*excelling*'). But Johnston compounds her fault by not setting her text under the German in those places where it will actually fit rather well. Today we are all too aware of Bach's wonderful rhythmic invention, and of the importance of the 'hemiola' in temporarily displacing the rhythm. This must have sounded awkward in the 1850s - perhaps even wrong. One has to assume that either Sterndale Bennett or Johnston thought that they were improving Bach when they destroyed the inherent hemiolas in the middle section of the aria "*Jesus, Saviour*" by the repositioning of the text.

Before we hear this aria sung, let us also look at the disappearing act that has happened in Johnston's 5th line. Bach's rhyme word '*allein*' is present in bar 46 [see example] but

Johnston's 'beside' has disappeared. Bach has naughtily tacked on the first word of line 6 - 'mehr' - to his setting of the 5th line, and this has thrown Johnston. As a compromise, consider what can be done when Johnston's rhyme word is reinstated, (even though the omission of the first word of line 6 is almost inevitable). It is so much more satisfactory for the flow of the music to preserve the rhyme. N.B. In order to make her text fit I have preserved everything apart from the beginning of line 4, where the insertion of some further syllables allows Bach's notation to be heard very nearly as he wrote it:

All things else I count but loss, (7)	<i>Ich will mich in dir versenken;</i> (8)
And I glory in thy cross. (7)	<i>Ist dir gleich die Welt zu <u>klein</u>.</i> (7)
Dearer than the world beside (7)	<i>Ei, so sollst du mir <u>allein</u></i> (7)
Is the Saviour who hath died. (7)	<i>Mehr als Welt und Himmel <u>sein</u>.</i> (7)

2nd MUSICAL EXAMPLE (Soprano solo) No. 19 middle section

- in Sterndale Bennett/Johnston version (also re-used by Elgar/Atkins)
- in Jenkins revision of " " , showing original hemiolas.

TRANSLATORS AFTER JOHNSTON: TROUTBECK AND STANFORD

Every subsequent translator has been aware of the work of his predecessor, and has stated the need to improve on the existing translation(s). As a better understanding of Bach's style developed each one found something inadequate in the versions currently available to them, either in the translation of the poetic text, the chorales, or the biblical text. For the task of such a translation is threefold:

to translate the chorales as memorable hymns, that can be sung by a large body of voices
 to translate the arias and non-biblical choruses in a way that preserves the feeling and meaning of the original, but gives the singers good clean vowels to sing on
 to translate the biblical text in a way that preserves the Gospel story in a language not far removed from that of the accepted text.

G.A.Macfarren, writing in his Preface to Sterndale Bennett's edition, saw the problem facing the translator of the Biblical text, but thought that Johnston had arrived at an acceptable compromise:

"... A task of singular, I might almost say unparalleled difficulty was that of the translator who had to adapt an English rendering of the text to the notes which Bach set to the Lutheran version of the Gospel. It is the especial excellence of this setting, that in it every word is given with such vocal inflection as draws forth its nicest and fullest meaning. In substituting English words for the original, it was of course desirable to take the authorised English version of Scripture as the standard, in order that, so far as possible, the familiar story should be related in the very syllables in which our familiarity with it was involved, and which command from us a kindred if not equal respect to that we owe to the story they embody. To follow this version implicitly was incompatible however with fidelity to the musical accentuation, to the emphasis this lays upon

particular expressions, nay to the composer's great purpose of making his music all that is aimed at in the highest style of elocution, whose merit should consist, not in its melodious beauty, but in its exalted declamation of the words and its equivalent enforcement of their meaning. Much consideration is due to the writer who had to steer through the perplexing strait between the desirability of adhering to our biblical version and the necessity for copiously altering it...."

In fact, Johnston is as erratic in her approach to the Biblical text as she is in the Chorales and Arias that we have examined. After 32 years it was definitely time for someone else to have a go. It was the Rev. John Troutbeck, minor canon of Westminster Abbey, who took up the challenge in his 1894 edition for Novello. He had cut his teeth on hymnals and psalters, and progressed to oratorios by Beethoven and Weber. After the success of his *St. Matthew Passion* translation there was no stopping him, and he turned to Mozart opera (*Il Seraglio* and *Così fan Tutte*) as well as to the later oratorios of Brahms, Liszt, Dvorak and Gounod.

In his Preface Troutbeck states:

"32 years have elapsed since the publication of the first English edition, and faithful to its original as that edition may have been, it has been felt that closer adherence to the accepted standard text is attainable, and, as far as it is at all practicable, should be attained. With this view the present edition is issued. The chorales, choruses, and solos have been newly and independently translated from the original German words, and the adaptation of the narrative of the Evangelist, a task rendered perhaps somewhat less difficult by the aid of the Revised Version of the New Testament, has been carefully reconsidered, and rearranged so as to preserve unaltered, as far as may be, the musical text of the original..."

In fact, Troutbeck is better at setting the English to Luther's German version, as will be shown. He also produces some fine Aria translations: - no. 47 "*Have mercy, Lord, on me*" as we all know it - is completely his, as is the Chorale "*O Lord, who dares to smite thee*". Large portions of arias nos. 18, 25, 26, 33, 57, 61, 66, 67, 69, 70, 75 and 76 retain most of his verse.

But within a few years there was more editorial activity, and Charles Villiers Stanford produced an edition in 1910 [for Stainer and Bell] which ignored Troutbeck, and improved on Johnston where the translation was thought to be weak.

The final chorus, which had begun: "In tears of grief we here recline,
Murm'ring to thee in the tomb."
was much improved by the new text: "*We bow our heads in tears and sorrow,
And cry to thee in thy still grave.*"

In his Preface Stanford states "...This edition has been prepared to preserve, as far as possible, the translation of Miss Helen Johnston. The recitatives have been considerably revised in order to reproduce, as far as the English version will allow, the

declamation of Bach; and one or two of the lyrical portions have been altered the better to suggest the original German verses, and to conform to the composer's characteristic word-painting".

So let us now look at a portion of the recitative, and see how Johnston, Troutbeck and Stanford differed in their attempt at fitting the English to it. Since German often has more syllables, the overriding problem is whether to fill up with make-weight words, or to leave great gaps in Bach's notation. Over the years successive editors came to realise that it was increasingly important to respect Bach's notation, and to be more flexible with Holy Writ. But it was not always so.

3rd MUSICAL EXAMPLE FROM RECITATIVE NO. 54

From this it can be seen that Troutbeck is a great improvement on Johnston, and manages to fill up the gaps with judicious, though spurious, quasi-biblical text. There is nothing jarring about it, and the flow of Bach's notation is preserved. Stanford, using Johnston as his basis, adopts Troutbeck's plan in order to fill out the missing text in the penultimate bar.

Let us hear the Bach, followed by Johnston and then Troutbeck.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE NO. 54 excerpt TENOR and BASS, SOPRANO (Chorus)

TRANSLATORS AFTER JOHNSTON: ELGAR AND ATKINS

One year after Stanford's edition appeared there was yet another offering, the third to date, from Novello. This was the famous collaboration between Sir Edward Elgar and Sir Ivor Atkins [1911]. They enjoyed the ability to look and learn from the other two published Novello translations, as they make clear in the Preface:

"Two translations were placed at our disposal by the publishers - those of Miss Johnston and Dr. Troutbeck. This edition aims at retaining all that is best in both."

Before looking at the implications of this statement for the Arias and Choruses, let us turn back to the recitatives, and see what these two eminent musicians were to make of the underlay of the text here. Let us compare another portion of no. 54.

4th MUSICAL EXAMPLE FROM RECITATIVE NO. 54

The most noticeable thing about the Elgar/Atkins version is their endeavour to fit as much text in as possible, even by the means of using triplets and quintuplets (quite unknown to Bach) if necessary. This is the manner in which the *St Matthew Passion* was passed down to the present generation, for - with the exception of a revision of this edition in 1938, when Ivor Atkins incorporated readings from the Revised Version (like Troutbeck) and *The English Hexapla* - this is the most recent publication of the work prior to my edition for the New Novello Choral Edition [1997].

A similar desire to add in extra notes occurs in the short recitative of 2 bars, which concludes no. 71 describing Jesus' death on the cross. Here the decision to retain the poetry of St. Matthew 27: 50 makes for a more memorable account than the earlier translators had achieved, even though they were nearer Bach's notation and the simplicity of the German.

5th MUSICAL EXAMPLE FROM RECITATIVE NO. 71

Let us hear them in chronological order.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE FROM RECITATIVE NO. 71 excerpt TENOR

The Elgar/Atkins edition held preeminence throughout the larger portion of the twentieth century. Apart from an English edition published by Breitkopf and Härtel in 1906 (of which more anon) and several American editions which failed to cross the Atlantic, there was nothing to challenge it. In the years after the Second World War the increased familiarity of performers and conductors with Bach's German text - which, following the lead taken by Dr. Paul Steinitz, was being increasingly performed - led to a ferment of disquiet with the failings of even this much revised edition. [A further revision in 1948 introduced the chorale which had originally closed Part 1 (no. 35a) in an appendix]. Performers began to make their own translations, which were soon being handed informally around. The Bach Choir of London set up a committee to revise the Recitatives, and leading Evangelists of the day, such as Eric Greene, Peter Pears, and Robert Tear, all took a hand in the slow evolution of an ideal performing version. This lengthy process reached its ultimate conclusion when Sir David Willcocks invited me to look at the unpublished Bach Choir version, together with the sub-committee's working papers - as well as all earlier translations - in order to provide a new, singable translation for the 21st century.

What I discovered was the immense damage that had been done to the integrity of the Johnston and Troutbeck translations when Elgar and Atkins sat down to view them side by side.

Because, what they did was to make a sandwich of portions of lines from each. In the process the earlier translators lost their individual voices; whilst their rhyme-schemes - unsatisfactory as they may have been - were almost completely erased.

This can best be shown by viewing an aria text as it evolved out of the two preceding versions. I have used a different type face for each, and they appear in chronological order.

EXAMPLE 4

No. 25

J. O grief! Now pants his agonising heart: it sinks within, how pale his countenance!

T. Behold, how throbs the heavy-laden breast! The spirit faints, with agony oppressed!

E/A. O grief, how throbs his heavy-laden breast! His spirit faints, how pale his weary face!

In this, the first line of the movement, the Elgar/Atkins begins with Johnston, wanders across to Troutbeck, and then back again to Johnston - as the underlining makes clear.

Further on we have:

J. The powers of darkness now assail him, while murd'rous men prepare to seize him.

T. The powers of darkness overtake him, His very friends will soon forsake him.

E/A. The powers of darkness now assail him; His chosen friends will soon forsake him.

Again, the line begins with Johnston (which Troutbeck has also cribbed) and then moves over to Troutbeck.

This is the manner in which Elgar and Atkins proceeded in their translation. In order to see how the rhyme-scheme is affected let us consider a longer passage: **EXAMPLE 5**

SOPRANO ARIOSO No. 18

Johnston

Although mine eyes with tears o'erflow,
Because my Saviour leaves me now,
My heart rejoices in his Testament,
His flesh, and blood, most precious gift!
To me bequeathes he in his hand.
As he his own did love while here he sojourn'd,
Though now he reigns in Heaven,
He loves them still unto the end.

Troutbeck

*Although both heart and eyes o'erflow,
Since Jesus now must from me go,
Yet doth his Testament the soul uplift,
His flesh, and blood, O precious gift,
Bequeathed by Him, our heavenly friend.
As He while in the world did love his own,
By him of old foreknown,
He loves them still unto the end.*

Elgar/Atkins

Although *our* eyes with tears o'erflow,
Since Jesus now must from us go,
His gracious promise doth the soul uplift,
His flesh, and blood, O precious gift,
He leaves us for our soul's refreshment.
As He while in the world did love his own,
So now with love unchanging,
He loves them still unto the end.

First, notice how both Johnston and Troutbeck try to preserve a rhyme-scheme.

Troutbeck's is better than Johnston's, and even preserves Picander's original German AABBCDDC pattern. Then, by comparing the typeface of the Elgar/Atkins lines it is possible to detect which author provided which line. Interestingly Troutbeck plagiarises Johnston twice (lines 4 & 8) and Elgar/Atkins follow suit. Elsewhere there is one further Johnston line (line 1), two from Troutbeck (lines 2 & 6) and three original lines (lines 3, 5 & 7). The rhyme-scheme, after a good start with AABB disintegrates completely. Most noticeably Johnston's final rhyme-word 'end' (which had half-rhymed with 'hand') is improved by Troutbeck to make a good rhyme with 'friend'. Despite adopting the complete line themselves, Elgar and Atkins close the text lamely with no rhyme at all.

Occasionally they improve on a rhyme by a lucky stroke. Aria no. 10 is a case in point. Whereas 'Picander' rhymes the opening two lines, Johnston gives us none:

EXAMPLE 6

<u>Johnston</u>	<u>'Picander'</u>
Grief for sin	<i>Buß und Reu</i>
Rends the guilty heart in vain.	<i>knirscht das Sündenherz entzwei.</i>

Probably through the suggestion of a regular performer of the aria, who had had years to think about the unsatisfactory nature of this lack of rhyme, Elgar/Atkins are able to give us a simple improvement:

Grief for **sin**
Rends the guilty heart **within**.

The meaning is not identical to the German : 'rends the guilty heart in twain' is the Stanford improvement on Johnston, and is completely accurate; and yet it, too, fails in the same way as her original.

The translation proceeds in this hybrid manner, throwing up further interesting examples of cross-fertilisation. For example, in the favourite Aria with Chorus from Part 1 no. 26 "*I would beside my Lord be watching*" we have the interesting situation where the tenor soloist sings words principally by Troutbeck (*I would beside my Lord be watching* etc) and the chorus replies with Johnston's refrain "*And so our sins will fall asleep*".

OTHER TRANSLATORS AFTER JOHNSTON: AVELING AND JENKINS

And so successive editors and translators have played around with variants of all these original texts. I myself found much to admire in them. In my Preface I say:

"...My concern has been to restore the rhyme-scheme where possible and to make sure that each of Bach's syllables has an English syllable of similar stress. Wherever possible .. I have tried to keep to the translation of either Johnston or Troutbeck within an individual movement. When they are good they are very good. For example, numbers 19, 31, 48, 53 and 70 are the work of Helen Johnston who was particularly good at translating the chorales; whilst numbers 28, 33, 44, 47 and 74 are by John Troutbeck who

had a way with telling phrases in the arias. In many other places the work is principally by one or the other, with only minor modifications having been made. Where neither Johnston or Troutbeck sound right to our ... ears I have also taken note of Claude Aveling's work: in this I am following in the footsteps of the Bach Choir, whose text for its annual performances contain several variants from his 1906 version"...

This Aveling translation is the one contained in the Breitkopf and Härtel edition mentioned earlier. The particular aria which interested me in this version was the Tenor Aria no. 41 which none of the earlier editions did well. The Bach Choir had a good translation which I, as the soloist, often sang; and yet noone could remember where they had got it from. Well, Aveling, as I discovered, was the source. The reason that some of the arias were not well translated by Johnston or Troutbeck seems to have been that - in early performances - some numbers were traditionally omitted. They still often are. No. 41 calls for an athletic 'cello soloist, and 66 requires a viola da gamba which was not available in the 19th century. Early performances simply omitted the 'problem' movements. For the sake of completeness they were included in the published editions, but very few singers must have performed them. Consequently there was no feed-back from the performers on how they could be improved. These are the unsingable texts Johnston and Troutbeck provide for no. 41:

EXAMPLE 7

(Perhaps we can hear a portion of Johnston's version if there is time):

<u>Johnston</u>	<u>Troutbeck</u>
Rejoice! Rejoice!	<i>Be still, be still,</i>
If ye be reproachéd for the name of Christ,	<i>Yea, if lying lips assail thee.</i>
Happy are ye!	<i>Let them seek to work thee ill,</i>
That when his glory shall be reveal'd,	<i>Bring thee shame</i>
Ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.	<i>Wait and trust thy Saviour's name,</i>
	<i>His defence will never fail thee.</i>

Singers never liked the Elgar/Atkins translations either. Despite the fact that the 1938 revision included a new text for nos. 40 & 41 by the English tenor Steuart Wilson which was a definite improvement from the singer's point of view, they, like their predecessors, had all the wrong vowels on the (frequent) high notes. Here they are:

<u>Elgar/Atkins 1911</u> [basically Johnston, with 1 revision]	<u>Elgar/Atkins 1938</u> [from Steuart Wilson]
Be strong! Endure!	<i>Endure! Endure!</i>
If ye be reproachéd for the name of Christ,	<i>Even lying tongues and taunting.</i>
Happy are ye!	<i>Suffer thou, in faith secure,</i>
That when his glory shall be reveal'd,	<i>Scourge and rod.</i>
Ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.	<i>Wait till justice of our God</i>
	<i>Smite their hearts with sword avenging.</i>

Claude Aveling now appears as the source for Steuart Wilson's lines. Although the source is not identified by Novello as coming from the Breitkopf and Härtel edition, this is his 1906 translation and its Bach Choir derivative:

Claude Aveling 1906
1970s] [Breitkopf and Härtel]

Endure! Endure!
Yea, though lying tongues **upbraid thee.**
Suffer thou, in faith secure,
Scourge and rod.
Yea, a just and loving God
Rightly shall to vengeance **aid thee.**

The Bach Choir [unpublished,
[basically Aveling, with 1 revision]

“
“
“
“
Yea, a great and living God
“

In conclusion let me state that no edition, from 1862 until my own of 1997, is without its faults. Each new edition has sought to improve on the former, and very frequently succeeds. In the matter of translating the Biblical text we are probably as near as we will ever be to a good match with Bach’s original setting. This has been won by countless years of effort on the part of present-day performers, who have all been allowed their say, and have handed on their improved versions to others - and, ultimately - to me.

With regard to the Chorales: in those movements where Johnston and Troutbeck were perceived to be weak Elgar and Atkins did a very good service by bringing in excellent pre-existing translations of Lutheran Hymns from the Hymnologies of Frances Cox, Catherine Winkworth and James Alexander. In the case of chorale no.63, “*O sacred head surrounded*”, they were able to use Sir Henry Baker’s magnificent text, which he had written for the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* [1861].

The poetic text of ‘Picander’ will never be as good in English as it is in German. Many hands have been involved in continually shaping and reshaping this. The process will carry on. But always there will be a strong underpinning of that first translation, the one by the pioneer Helen Johnston, which we remember today, one hundred and fifty years after its first performance, and which is so strongly represented (often unacknowledged) in all later editions. As long as singers continue to sing “*Commit thy ways to Jesus*” and “*Jesus, Saviour, I am thine*” they will be honouring the durability of her pioneering translation.

Neil Jenkins