

THE ART OF TRANSLATION

By FREDERIC HARRISON

AMONG the intellectual advances of our age none is more important than the sense of a high literary standard in the art of translation. We all now recognize the critical part which translation has to play in general literature. For all but men of wide learning, much of the great literature of the world is known only by translation. Take the supreme case of the Bible, of which the authorized version formed the master type of the English language. To the millions the power of the Old Testament is due to the sublime effect of a unique translation from the Hebrew: and to me the New Testament in English is grander than in the Greek—itself being largely a translation of other tongues. See how many immortal works are known to the general reader only by translation: Homer, Plutarch, “Don Quixote”, Montaigne, even to many “Gil Blas” and “Faust”. But for adequate translations these would be sealed books to the multitude. It is then of supreme importance to maintain the true laws of translation. And the chief of these laws are: one, exact rendering of the full meaning; two, some echo of the original form; three, clarity, grace, and vigor in the new version.

Now all through the eighteenth century, almost down to living memory in the nineteenth century, famous translations were produced in defiance of the first two canons of translation, aiming only at clarity, grace, and vigor in literary English, neglecting the meaning of their author, and substituting a totally different rhythm of their own. The most brilliant example of this was Pope’s “Iliad”. The

life and ring of these heroic couplets have carried the substance of the immortal epic over the world, but they were utterly careless of the Greek words, and alien to the glorious roll of Homer's hexameter. Even more alien to the stately pathos of Virgil and the subtle melody of the "Aeneid", was Dryden's version. The success of both started off translators in the same style—Dr. Francis' Horace, Rowe's Lucian, Gifford's Juvenal, Hoole's "Ariosto" and his Tasso — "Translations by Several Bards", it was called—Potter's "Attic Dramatists", Melmoth's Cicero, and the like. The aim was to produce "an elegant version," to imitate the point and cadence of Pope and Dryden, the flow of Addison's or Johnson's prose. They made what musicians call "variations" of popular themes. The exact sense of the original, the harmony of its form, was no business of theirs.

All this time the great scholars, many in Germany and Holland, occupied themselves in collating texts, explaining the meaning of the classics, usually in Latin and with ponderous comments. They were not troubled about fine versions, and seemed afraid of being thought readable. At last in 1791 Cowper's "Iliad" and "Odyssey" showed what could be done in blank verse to render the meaning of Homer. Cary, in blank verse, opened to English readers the idea of Dante's great poem, which, if faithful in sense, conveyed little indeed of the profound music of the Italian. Then Shelley and Coleridge proved how the meter of Milton could give us adequate translations of such poets as Calderon, Goethe, and Schiller. In the middle of the nineteenth century our chief scholars undertook the most exact rendering of the classics in pure and graceful English, which was at once nobly faithful to the original and retained at least its dignity and life. George Long, H. A. J. Munro, John Conington, Professor Jowett, Sir Richard Jebb, Andrew Lang, Verrall, Rogers, Morshead, Bywater, Gilbert Murray, Dr. Way, J. W. Mackail, Professor Fowler, have given us in prose and even in verse, the sense if not the majesty of the great books of old.

In prose literature we may almost claim for them a complete success. Herodotus, Aristotle, Thucydides, Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius, Lucian, are now revealed to the mere English reader in their full sense and range—even Plato, in all but his incommunicable charm. For the poems of the ancients we can make no such high claim. The first and the third law of translation have been achieved—yes! exact meaning, clarity, and vigor. But alas! where is the supreme form of the original, the music, the mystery of word, the unforgotten vision, the inimitable phrase of the true seer? As Shelley told us: “It is impossible to represent in another language the melody of the versification; even the volatile strength and delicacy of the ideas escape in the crucible of translation.” Now Shelley wrote this as a note to his verse rendering of the opening of Goethe’s “Faust”—one of the most beautiful bits of translation of poetry in our language. If Shelley could not achieve the problem, no one else could. Dante had said much the same long before. Still, translation of poetry has to be. If the melody of the original cannot be transferred, some “echo of its form” must be caught, for even perfect prose of any sublime poem will always strike us as cold—wanting in something.

For Homer, as many poets claim to be his translator as cities claimed to be his birthplace. Pope caught some ring of the battle hymns, but he sang them in a modern tune of his own invention. Cowper—as poet, the absolute antithesis of Homer—in a modest and scholarly version, gave us the sense of the “Iliad”, but nothing of its majesty and fire. Then George Chapman, poet and scholar, made a splendid attempt to do the impossible in a version which revealed the Hellenic world to John Keats, we know, but which, by its unwieldy seven-foot rhyming couplets reduced the “Iliad” to what was hardly English verse—and certainly was not Homer’s hexameter. He felt this, for his “Odyssey” was in the five-foot couplets, like Pope’s, and was more like English verse, but not more like Homer’s. I can read Cowper’s “Odyssey”; and there is much beauty in Philip Worsley’s

version of the "Odyssey" in Spenserian stanza. All attempts to put the "Iliad" into any form of stanza, or any form of rhyme, or into dactyls, or hexameters, much less into any ballad meter, are in my opinion utterly futile. If we want a translation in verse—and we do want it—I prefer Lord Derby's "Iliad" in Miltonic blank verse. It has accuracy, dignity, vigor. The Stanley, at least, was a chieftain, a ruler of men, an orator.

Ancient poetry can be turned in our blank verse; but rhyme is abhorrent to Greek and Latin; and it is the inevitable snare in all our attempts to translate either. The glory, the value, of the classical tongues is in the precision, subtlety, and parsimonious use of words. An English sentence must use twice as many words as the equivalent Latin; and nearly as many against the Greek. Now, the exigency of rhyme compels a translator to resort to expletives which are not in the text he is copying. Hence, phrases steal in, which dilute and confuse the sense. Whatever the poverty of our blank verse, it is free from the seductions of rhyme. Again, the structure of our tongue, with crowded consonants, crashing vocables, and paucity of vowel endings, makes imitation of the ancient meters hopeless. The first line of the "Iliad" has only five words. In English there must be ten. The first line of the "Aeneid" has eight words. In English there will be fifteen. The "Iliad" and the "Aeneid" are composed entirely of dactyls and spondees. In English there are no true dactyls nor spondees. An English dactylic hexameter is too long, too jumpy, too much of a ballad for a grand epic. For Homer especially there are excellent prose versions, in the rather antique spirit of Malory and Browne, the "Iliad" by Andrew Lang, Leaf, and Myers; the "Odyssey," by S. H. Bekker and Andrew Lang. The true Homer is embedded there.

The Greek dramatists fare better in translation than Homer; for their dialogues are mainly in iambic meter, and iambic is the natural meter for English verse. A long succession of poets and scholars has given us versions of Attic

tragedies and comedies. Dean Milman, Robert Browning, Professor Lewis Campbell, E. D. A. Morshead, Professor Gilbert Murray, Miss Anna Swanwick, Sir George Young, Dr. A. S. Way, have translated in verse Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. J. H. Frere, T. Mitchell, B. B. Rogers, Professor Gilbert Murray, have made brilliant versions of Aristophanes. In prose, the great tragedies have been admirably rendered by Sir Richard Jebb, Dr. Verrall, and many others. To my mind, Dean Milman's "Agamemnon," Miss Anna Swanwick's Aeschylus, and that of Mr. Morshead, are the most like poetry in English. Browning's experiments in "Agamemnon" and Euripides would sound horribly queer to a Greek, and the Agamemnon of Fitzgerald is an unforgivable paraphrase. With all the scholarship and versatility of Professor Murray, I cannot allow the use of rhyme in the iambic dialogue of Greek tragedy. Rhyme fatally obscures and dilutes the sense and is alien to the Pheidian majesty of Aeschylus. The Aristophanes of B. B. Rogers is an astonishing triumph of the power of English verse to render the dazzling life and riotous wit of the greatest of all comic poets known to man.

For Greek lyric poetry I can find no possible verse translation, unless it be Calverley's Theocritus. But Pindar has been admirably translated in prose by Ernest Myers; and so Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus have been equally well given by Andrew Lang. So, too, the lovely lines of the Anthology have been translated in prose by J. W. Mackail. When we come to Sappho, translation is useless, except to help us read the fragments in Greek. The beautiful little book of H. T. Wharton, 1885—"Sappho: Memoir, Text, Renderings, Prose Translation," has more than thirty translations in verse by famous persons from Catullus to Mr. Gladstone. None of them will do. The literal prose is bald and lifeless; the verse is mere modern prettiness, more than doubling the words used, and losing all the passion and fire. Greek lyrical poetry, above all Sappho's hymns and wails, can only be felt in their native tongue. As Shelley tells us—"the

volatile strength and delicacy of the ideas escape in the crucible of translations."

And all this is evident when we come to the Latin epic and lyrics. Dryden's "Aeneid" offends against all canons of translation even more than Pope's "Iliad." It is not correct: is alien to Virgil's form: and what vigor it has, is wholly without grace. In his huge dedication Dryden discusses rhythm and boasts about his system of scansion; but he is blind to the infinite refinement of Virgil's art, and he is deaf to the exquisite pathos of the inimitable verse. How the Mantuan would shudder as he joins Homer in the Elysian groves, could he hear the sing-song of Dryden's cheap treble rhymes! Nor is Christopher Pipp's version much better. Then a great scholar, Professor John Conington, having made a valuable prose translation of the "Aeneid," must needs turn it into the short ballad meter of Scott's "Marmion"—an outrage to the stately "andante" of Marot. So, Lord Bowen, a brilliant scholar, did six "Aeneids" in a dactylic catalectic hexameter of his own invention. Dactyls are impossible in English verse, as Tennyson told us:—

"Barbarous experiment, barbarous hexameter."

The only possible verse translation of the "Aeneid" is Miltonic blank verse—as was true of the "Iliad." And this has been excellently achieved by Mr. Charles J. Billson who has given a version of the entire "Aeneid" in blank verse, exactly line for line with the text on the opposite page (2 vols. 4to 1906). The book from its size and cost may not be widely known. But to my mind, it is the type of what a verse translation of an epic should be. And in this meter we have Tennyson's magnificent rendering of the "Iliad" VIII. 542-561.

Munro's "Lucretius" is the pride of Cambridge scholarship, and his careful prose translation has opened to all who care to seek it the mystical agnosticism of the ancient world. A good version in blank verse has recently appeared by Sir

Robert Allison. Robinson Ellis' life work on Catullus has been again the pride of Oxford scholarship, but his attempt at verse translation is a melancholy mistake. Roman lyrics are as untranslatable as the Greek—perhaps even more so, owing to the severe conciseness of the Latin tongue. There are good translations of them in prose; but I cannot find any real success in verse. A prose version of a lyric is like hearing a thrilling song strummed over a piano. Blank verse kills the lyric quality altogether. And modern rhyme causes constant dilution and variations. Of all lyrics this is most conspicuous in the Odes of Horace. These depend for their charm on the simplicity, brevity, precision of phrase—the “*curiosa felicitas*”—the “*concinnitas*” of the apt—the only word. A line of Horace has to be expanded into two lines of English—five words become ten or twelve—and still the exact connotation is exhaled. Mr. S. A. Courtauld has published the Odes with metrical versions on the opposite page from some fifty authors. They are all diffuse, or obscure, or unmusical—anything indeed but Horace, in spite of their ingenuity and care. Oddly enough, where famous poets, even Milton and Dryden, quite misrepresent or embroider Horace, Calverley, Conington, Lord Ravensworth, and Whyte Melville, if they cannot hit the bull's-eye, make a close mark in an “outer.” As good as any is Mr. Courtauld's own version of Ode I. 9.—“*Vides ut alta stat nive cardidum.*”

“See! where Socrates' lofty brow
Is mantled o'er with glistening snow;
How with the weight the forests bow,
And clogged with ice the rivers flow.”

Yes! quite good! were it not that English needs twenty-five words to express what Latin can put in seventeen words. And then, the snare of rhyme! “Brow” and “snow” are too near in sound to make different rhymes. And “flow” is hardly right for “*constiterint*.”

Mr. Courtauld adopts the excellent plan of printing the original on the opposite page, as Mr. Billson does with the “*Aeneid*,” and as Sir Richard Jebb has done for his

Sophocles, and Mr. B. B. Rogers did for his Aristophanes. This is the practice also of the very valuable collection known as the Loeb Classical Library, which already presents in handy 12mo. volumes a series of Greek and Latin authors in verse and prose with translation and original on opposite pages. In these neat manuals they whose ancient learning has gone rusty, and they with whom it was never quite bright, may renew, or improve, their familiarity with the immortal works of old. And there is a recent book by Mr. J. T. Sheppard, who arranged the Cambridge acting version of the *Oresteia*, I mean his new "*Oedipus Tyrannus*." It has the Greek on one page, an exact translation on the opposite page—the iambics in blank verse, and critical notes to explain what in English drama would be ample stage directions, and divisions of acts and scenes. This seems to me the type of what is wanted to illustrate the Attic tragedies. And it is the plan long ago used by B. B. Rogers in his Aristophanes to which his whole life was devoted.

We turn now to the modern languages, of course, first to Italian, for this was far the earliest of the modern languages to assume a final and organic structure. Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio wrote a finished poetry and prose, when English, French, and Spanish were beginning to crystallize. For Dante an enormous amount of labor has been expended, and many lives have been devoted to illustrate, explain, and translate him. In prose versions a great success has been achieved. In 1849 John Carlyle, brother of Thomas, published a fine prose version of the "*Inferno*." Since then Mr. A. J. Butler has turned the entire *Divine Comedy* into pure and vigorous English. And Mr. W. Warren Vernon has published and republished in six closely-knit volumes the three cantos with literal translation in sectional "readings," and abundant historical and literary comments. The prose, too, of Abbé Lamennais in archaic French will be of great use to those who are beginning to study Italian.

It is impossible to notice all the verse translations. Cary, Pollock, Longfellow, and many more, in blank verse or in

couplets, do something to give the sense and the profound rapture of the poet. But with Dante, as with Homer, it is the grand music of the form which is the mark of the supreme poet. And the form of Dante's great poem is more intricate and more subtle than that of the "Iliad." Those who have studied the terza rima with its treble rhymes, the involution of the tercets, the concatenation and development of the idea where the rhyme sounds like an echo, of "the linked sweetness long drawn out," "the hidden soul of harmony"—they well know how impossible it is to reproduce that in another language. Again, Italian offers such contrasts to English—one with its musical words, ending in vowel sounds, its shrinking from a net of consonants, from doubled and trebled letters, and harsh discords, the other, with all its power and life, proudly disdaining languorous cadences. All this defies the transfusion of the "morbidezza" of Italian into the masculine and organ-note of our tongue. For that reason I hold all attempts to imitate the rhyme or to resort to the meter of the original to be futile. Cayley, Plumptre, Wright and others, have used immense ingenuity and labor in pursuing a phantom. Dr. Shadwell tried the short stanza of Marvell's "Horatian Ode"—one pair of rhymed eight-syllable lines, and one pair of rhymed six-syllable lines. Alas! short uneven lines, rhymed couplets, are far away from Dante's majestic epic march. What English can match—"Lo di che han detto ai dolci amici addio"—or again—"Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro"? None, I trow!

When we come to the Italian lyrists, they have exercised a masterful influence on our poetry from the fourteenth century until our own day. Dante and his cycle, his predecessors and his followers, Petrarch, Filicaja, Manzoni, and Leopardi, have been the models of our sonneteers. Dante and those before and after him invented the sonnet; Petrarch perfected it and settled its canons. A full account of these and of this influence may be read in W. Courthope's great "History of English Poetry" (6 vols., 8mo., 1895-1910). Wyatt, Surrey, and the Tudor poets passionately



seized on the general idea of the sonnet, fourteen lines with alternate rhymes—but they did not know, or could not adopt, the strict Petrarchian formulas. These were—two quatrains of alternate rhymes in a very artful sequence, with only two rhyming sounds for the whole eight lines—then, at the end of the eighth line a certain pause, with two tercets also in artful sequence, with two, or at most three, new rhymes, but no rhymed couplet at the close. The Tudor lyrists did not attempt this most artificial and very difficult system. Shakespeare's Sonnets follow a different scheme—viz., three quatrains rhymed alternately, and concluded with a final rhymed couplet, so as to have seven different rhymes in the fourteen lines, instead of four or five. For the first time Milton wrote English sonnets in the true Petrarchian form, or very near it. Our poets have been very shy to fetter themselves with those exotic rules—Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, Swinburne have other melodies of their own. But Wordsworth, Keats, Rossetti, Sir W. Watson have perfectly mastered it.

I believe that all attempts to imitate in English the meters of Greek, Latin, or any poetry in dactylic—or any form that makes a foot to consist of three syllables, will fail, owing to the nature of our language. Our words consist of so many knotted consonants that few words of three syllables can be pronounced readily as a single foot; and even if a dactylic foot of three syllables is made up of short words—a, in, to, the—the next word often begins with thick consonants which in utterance cause a kind of stress. However little English verse regards quantity, in the Greek and Latin sense, the laws of the human tongue assert themselves in utterance, and make it difficult or unpleasing to pronounce quickly syllables in which the vowels are embedded in a fence of consonants. Who could pronounce as dactyls, tribrachs, or anapaests, such words as—pleasantness, downhearted, commandment? The best that can be done is, by slurring over long syllables, to make them serve in iambic or trochaic meters. All the great and long poems in English

are necessarily written in iambics with partial use of trochees, and even they are grandly indifferent to quantity.

Thus, on these grounds I hold that the only practical meter for English translation of great poems should be in the unrhymed blank verse which proves to be so noble an instrument in the hands of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson.

As to Spanish poetry, with its archaic system of assonance in lieu of what we call rhyme, there is no need to attempt "a version in the original meter." Calderon's glorious dramas have been well translated by D. F. McCarthy, who has turned fourteen plays in successful English. The eight dramas by Edward Fitzgerald, by his own admission, are rather paraphrases than an exact rendering of the Spanish. They are surprising examples of what paraphrase can do; and, as he says, this is rather fit for the more homely pictures of national habits than for the imaginative poetry of Calderon's greatest.

Some scenes of "The Magician" have been nobly rendered in blank verse by Shelley. Would that he had done more to make English readers know the poet who in Spain filled the parts of Shakespeare and of Milton, giving his country the national tragedy and the ideal of the national religion.

We have been fortunate indeed to have abundant translations of the great Spanish work of Cervantes, for a mastery of the difficult text of "Don Quixote" is not common. For centuries Jervis, Motteux, Smollett, made it known to the English reader. Since then J. Ormsby and Fitzmaurice-Kelly have made scholarly translations of this immortal work. It is interesting to note that our English tongue and our British sense of humor enable us to put in racy and familiar style the broad and domestic vernacular of Spanish and even of French comedy. This is true also, I think of "Gil Blas," which Smollett also translated and imitated, and which can be fairly well read in English as in French. And for many readers this is the case also for Rabelais. The

same fact strikes us in our wonderful modern translations of Aristophanes, whose plays bristle with swarms of strange phrases, wild compounds and all the slang and ribaldry of the market place. Yet a scene in Rogers' version looks to us as obvious and as irresistible as a scene with Falstaff and Bardolf.

As to French poetry, no one ought to want translations, and there are hardly any to be had. The grand tragedies of Corneille and Racine are neglected by those who have Shakespeare on the brain, and no other tragedies allowed to enter—or else by those who have never witnessed these plays on the French stage. It is only there, not in the book, that the pathos and dignity of French tragedy can be felt. And the wit, the humor and horror, the truth of Moliere as the great “*ensor morum*,” can only be judged when we listen to the supreme art of French actors in the “*maison de Moliere*.” So I will not trouble about translations of French plays. There are none of Corneille, and only one of Racine. Van Laun has translated Moliere well, but Moliere is only himself in his own house. And I do not think that any English versions are needed for the sparkling and fascinating lyrics of France — those chansons, epigrams, rondels, which might be expressed by a Russian dancer better than by an English versifier. The mighty Hugo was almost too much for Tennyson or Swinburne. But Sir George Young has made some quite successful versions of selected odes, songs, and ballads of Victor Hugo. I advise all who have valued them to go on to the original French.

If German poetry is not read in the original by so many and read as easily as the poetry of France, on the other hand, German poetry and prose go into our tongue more readily and naturally than do French or Italian. Goethe and Schiller are at home with us. There is an army of translators of “*Faust*”; Miss Anne Swanwick, Bayard Taylor, Sir Theodore Martin, and others—all with the dialogues and soliloquies successful—but hardly so with Goethe's inimitable lyrics. Miss Swanwick and others have translated

in verse Goethe's other dramas. I have recently seen on the stage the "Iphigenia in Tauris" of Euripides in the rhymed version by Professor Gilbert Murray, and comparing it with Goethe's "Iphigenia," also translated by Miss Swanwick, it struck me that Goethe's drama, with a different plot, was a poem of a far higher range, with a more noble ideal of woman and of man, than the play of Euripides, which withal would make a more interesting melodrama when powerfully presented on the stage to those who could enter into the extravagant and inhuman mythology of the Hellenic Pantheon. Schiller's dramas have been well translated also. Indeed I find Coleridge's version of "Wallenstein" better reading than Schiller's German. The prose of Schiller or of Goethe may go in English perfectly well.

Heine's lyrics are to my mind as little fit for poetic version in English as Goethe's—even less so; for Heine has not only a rare gift of the "cantabile," but a rich vein of that verve which is wanting in German "geist." Selected poems have been rendered as well as possible by Sir Theodore Martin and others. Heine's prose can be read with enjoyment in English prose—much as we can read "Wilhelm Meister" in Carlyle.

In concluding these brief notes on translation I would only say that the prose of all languages can be—and has been—translated with entire success in English prose. The greater poetry of Greece and Rome, of Italy, of Spain, of Germany, can be—and has been—translated in blank verse with all but the incommunicable music of the original. Translations "in the original meters" are always doomed to disappointment from the stubborn quality of our tongue. And the haunting lyrics of Attic tragedy, of Sappho, of Horace, of Catullus, of Dante, of Petrarch, of the old French songsters, of Heine and Goethe, are really untranslatable, inasmuch as "the volatile strength and delicacy of the ideas escape in the crucible of translation." So says the greatest of all our translators—Shelley himself.

AUSTRIA'S SITUATION

By DR. MAXIMILIAN SCHIFF

WHEN we speak of Austria to-day, we must bear in mind that German Austria, or the Republic of Austria, comprises only that portion of the German-Austrian Alpine region which has remained unaffected by the claims of Italy and Jugoslavia. The new Austria has not, and does not wish to have any political connection with the Empire of the Hapsburgs; but, contrary to reason and justice, this state of six million, two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants has been declared, along with Hungary, joint heir of the old divided empire of fifty-two million souls, and has had forced upon it a legacy heavily burdened with political and financial debts.

In reality, the political heirs of Austria-Hungary are to be found elsewhere. The Czechoslovakian Republic has inherited the internal hatreds and quarrels which poisoned the political life of former Austria, and it reproduces with its mixed compositions of Czechs, Germans, Slovaks, Magyars, Ukrainians, and Poles, the heterogeneous condition which existed before the disintegration of the Empire. Hungary, under the régime of ex-Admiral Horthi, has fallen heir to the old creed of reactionism; the Poles have carried into their new state, as a legacy from their forefathers, the antagonism that existed between Austria-Hungary and Russia; and Jugoslavia perpetuates the traditional friction which characterized the relations between Italy and the Hapsburg Empire.

The Republic of Austria is free from militarism, and it does not enslave peoples of diverse nationalities awaiting an hour of deliverance. The expenses of the Austrian stand-