

A PAGE OF VERSE

THE LAST WORD

BY ETHEL ASHTON EDWARDS

[*The Observer*]

BE friends with me; there is no time for words;

Let us forget the ill that went before:
Returns our love like Spring's returning birds.

We dare not strive upon so dread a shore.

We dare not strive with death so close at hand;

We needs must part as friends and lovers part;
Since love alone shall live in that far land,

Forget the past, and fold me to your heart.

So heart to heart we wait; the night is chill;

The gray sea rolls toward us and is dumb;

So heart to heart, though death may work his will,

We shall be one through all the life to come.

WIND

BY PETER RENNY

[*Westminster Gazette*]

THIS is a giant day.

Run out to pick a tree,
Seize a great flaring beech
And wave it overhead.

Run shouting through the fields,
Leap hedges and rivers;
Mænads will spring to meet you,
Contesting the race.

Run, — though you trail the clouds, —
Run through the roaring world.
This is a giant day.

FOUNTAINS

BY OSBERT SITWELL

[*The Spectator*]

PROUD fountains, wave your plumes,
Spread out your phoenix-wing,
Let the tired trees rejoice
Under your blossoming
(Tired trees, you whisper low).

High up, high up, above
These green and drooping sails,
A fluttering young wind
Hovers and plays — but fails
To steal a foaming feather.

Sail, like a crystal ship,
Above your sea of glass;
Then, with your quickening touch,
Transmute the things that pass
(Come down, cool wind, come down).

All humble things proclaim,
Within your magic net,
Their kinship to the Gods;
More strange and lovely yet
All lovely things become.

Dead sculptured stone assumes
The life from which it came.
The kingfisher is now
A moving tongue of flame —
A blue, live tongue of flame.

While birds, less proud of wing,
Crouch in wind-ruffled shade,
Hide shyly, then pour out
Their jealous serenade.
Close now your golden wings.

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

TRANSLATING POETRY

No one is likely to contend that poetry can ever be adequately translated. The late Professor Barrett Wendell was wont to recommend reading numerous translations of the same poem, on the ground that the composite impression left in the reader's mind would be something very like the original; but this was to be done only by those unfortunates who could not read the original.

There are so many languages in the world, however, in every one of which genuine poetry has been written, that even the best of us are sooner or later compelled to fall back on the translator. That is why it is such a pity that most translations are inadequate. Shall we render the exact sense of the writer? Then the music of the verse itself must go a-begging. Or shall we study the original rhythms with exceeding care, and do injustice to the ideas expressed? The perfect translator contrives to accomplish both, of course, but where is the perfect translator?

Of most translation Bentley's remark to Pope still holds true — 'A pretty poem, but you must n't call it Homer.' Neither must you call it Heine, or Gauthier, or Hugo, or — in these days when the world grows smaller — Sumarakov, or Lermontov, or Bashō, or Li Peh, or Kia Yi, or Tu Fu. The most famous translation in English literature (if we except the King James Bible, in which the translators frankly devoted themselves to the thought and were content to render verse in exquisitely rhythmic prose) is Fitzgerald's translation of Omar; but Fitzgerald, though he adhered to the Arabic *rubai* stanza, seldom sought to render exactly the old tent-maker's verses.

Instead, he took the thought, sometimes the thought of several, and made a poem which was almost original — certainly as original as Emerson's 'Brahma,' whole lines of which are taken bodily from the prose of the *Katha Upanishad*.

Discussion of the vexed question of translating poetry has of late been rife among English versifiers and lovers of good verse, and Miss E. Crosby Heath published not long ago, in the *Poetry Review*, a verse-translation of Hugo which is of peculiar excellence. Her experiment is based on the earlier translations of Edgar Allan Poe into unrhymed French verse made by Baudelaire, who also made very beautiful translations of some of the tales. Hugo's poem is rhymed, the translation is unrhymed; but, freed of the shackles at the line's end, Miss Heath has been able to reproduce almost exactly the rhythm of the original, retaining its lyric qualities, so that it is with a start of surprise that one realizes the absence of the rhyme:—

GUITARE (II)

'Comment,' disaient-ils,

'Avec nos nacelles,

Fuire les alquazils?'

— 'Ramez!' disaient-elles.

'Comment,' disaient-ils,

'Oublier querelles,

Misère, et perils?'

— 'Dormez!' disaient-elles.

'Comment,' disaient-ils,

'Enchanter les belles

Sans philtres subtiles?'

— 'Aimez!' disaient-elles.

TRANSLATION

'How,' said the youths,

'With our clumsy wherry,

Shall we flee from justice?'

'Row!' said the maidens.