

# 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.

'How,' said the youths,  
 'Shall our memory banish  
 Conflict, Pain, and Peril?'  
 'Sleep!' said the maidens.

'How,' said the youths,  
 'Shall we win women  
 Without magic potions?'  
 'Love!' said the maidens.



#### HARNESSING THE TIDES

*LeMatin* announces that a new effort to harness the tides will be made under the auspices of the French government. A report on the subject has been submitted to M. le Trocquer, Minister of Public Works, by a committee which has been engaged in a study of the problem for two years past, and the minister has decided to act on their recommendations by experiment.

The experimental station is to be set up at Aber-Vrach Bay in Brittany, where a dam 150 metres in length will be constructed and the water thus enclosed will be used to set in motion powerful turbine engines. It is estimated that 4800 horsepower can be obtained by this means.

An Italian engineer, Anton Mario Concetti has been demonstrating a 'wave motor,' by which he hopes to harness the billows for commercial use. Italian naval and military officers were present at some of the tests, held in the Adriatic. The machine is designed for use on those parts of the coast where experience shows that the waves remain fairly constant for a large part of the year.



#### THE TERCENTENARY OF THE FIRST FOLIO

CALLING attention to the fact that the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death occurred in 1916, when England was in the midst of the war, and no notice could be taken of the occasion, Mr. George Sampson, writing in the *London Observer*, suggests that

the same anniversary of the First Folio, which falls in 1923, should be celebrated instead.

In 1923 [he writes], we shall have passed exactly three hundred years since the publication of *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, in 1623, the volume that first showed mankind not, indeed, what quality of poet Shakespeare was, but what quantity of poet Shakespeare was. He came bodily into this world in 1564 and left it in 1616; but in a very real sense Shakespeare was born in 1623, and has lived ever since.

In celebrating the anniversary year of the First Folio, the anti-Shakespeareans, the Baconians, the Derbyians, the disciples of Delia, Donnelly, Durning-Lawrence, and Looney, can all join in such amity as is possible with such convictions. Righteousness and truth, in the persons of J. M. Robertson and G. G. Greenwood, can safely kiss each other in 1923. Shakespeare may never have lived, or may have been another person with the same name, or the same person with another name, or a syndicate of all of them; but (as some are apt to forget) the works are not a pretense, or an hallucination, or a supposition, or a cypher; they really exist, they are frequently annotated, they are sometimes read, they are occasionally performed; and they have a value beyond that of a hunting-ground for cryptograms. Someone may have proved conclusively that there never was a William Shakespeare; but no one has ever yet proved that there never was a First Folio.

What form shall our celebration take? I want to make a suggestion, and I make it now because we ought to set about our preparations in good time. The Folio brought together for the first time an astonishing cycle of plays drawing their matter from our national history. *King John*, *Richard II*, the two plays of *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, the three plays of *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *Henry VIII* — ten in all. Is there — I ask, not in rhetoric, but in ignorance — is there in all the literature of the world a parallel to this great series of dramatic chronicles? My suggestion, then, for a fitting celebration of the First Folio, is a performance of the ten historical plays therein contained — the

whole of them as they are: pseudo-Shakespeare, early Shakespeare, mature Shakespeare, and parti-Shakespeare. It is a great but not impossible adventure, and it would be the most becoming act of homage we have ever paid to our greatest man.

How could it be done? Certainly not in the beaten way of commerce. I suggest that the learned societies, — the British Academy, the Royal Society of Literature, the English Association, etc., — the many Shakespeare leagues and associations, and the various play-producing bodies, and so forth, should appoint a joint committee and pool their intellectual and artistic resources. The performances would have to be subscription performances of the kind familiar to those of us who used to be enthusiastic Wagnerians in the nineties; and there should be no difficulty in compiling a list of guarantors to guard against possible loss. I think the Old Vic itself would be a capital and appropriate place for the performances. Drury Lane and Covent Garden might also be considered. No attempt at the disastrously expensive and time-wasting Irvingesque or Beerbohmian mounting should be made. . . . The first difficulty is to get a start made. I suggest that our greatest living dramatist should take the matter in hand. Let Mr. Bernard Shaw, as a member of the Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature, move for the appointment of a joint committee to discuss ways and means, and let him depute to someone like Mr. William Archer the managing directorship, if he does not care to assume it himself. But whatever the machinery, let us have the complete cycle of chronicle plays.

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#### TRANSLATIONS OF ANDREYEV

Two new stories by Leonid Andreyev — new, at least, to English readers — have been published in translation in England, *His Excellency the Governor*, and *And it Came to Pass that the King Was Dead*. Both are pleas for government by love, and for the recognition by all mankind of the folly of violence. The first is the longer of the two stories. In a moment of outraged dignity,

enraged by vanity, thinking not of consequences, Peter Iljitch, the Governor, orders the soldiers to fire on a crowd of strikers. Forty-seven are killed, with nine women and three children. Peter is an ordinary, brave, kind-hearted old man. The story is simply the story of his remorse, a remorse in no degree intensified by the knowledge that he is going to be assassinated. We are shown Peter in meditation, reading his morning letters, listening to his fatuous son, his uncomprehending wife, and all the time eating his heart out at the gradual realization of what he has done. Revenge has been the subject of many tales; but we know no story which better exhibits its unreasoning, rumor-winged flight, its strange, mesmeric power over men, or its one unflinching characteristic of never satisfying what it seeks to satisfy. By the simplest means Andreyev shows the black and echoing gulf into which the law of revenge leads the spirit of man.

*And It Came to Pass that the King Was Dead* is the brief account of the execution of a king. No particular king is specified, for it is not the author's purpose to write history, but to show the growth of the mob-spirit and the spirit of regicide, in which, none the less, some of the old reverence for the victim still persists, as the people surge forward to 'touch the knife, breathe in the fumes of the royal blood, and dip the arms to the elbow.' It is a vivid picture, painfully so, indeed, and quite in the characteristic vein of Leonid Andreyev.

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#### THE POPULARITY OF PAPINI'S 'STORIA DI CRISTO'

WHEN Vallecchi, the publisher of Florence, sold 20,000 copies of Giovanni Papini's *La Storia di Cristo* within ten days of publication, a cynic remarked, 'Anche Papini ha venduto Cristo.'

The gibe is hardly so well justified as is the stir that the book has made throughout Italy.

There are no scientific novelties, no psychological pseudo-profundities. The author, here at least, makes no pretension to depth of thought. Sin is compared to manure, and there is a dissertation on carnal love which suggests an absent-minded lapse on Papini's part into his old manner, mood, and method. Because, or in spite of, these qualities, the book seems to have appealed to all classes. Literary dilettantes, the curious, the scornful, and the devout, have all read it, and the *Storia* is proclaimed, even from the pulpit, one that every Catholic should own.

Perhaps the reason is that Papini's latest book is, as he himself declares, 'un libro di battaglia,' and there are many in Italy to-day who feel themselves to be undergoing a spiritual crisis. It is a human book. 'Who touches this book, touches a man,' is very true of *La Storia de Cristo*, and the note of passionate sincerity gives it its success.



#### SUN-WORSHIP AT KARNAK DISPROVED

THE theory of the late Sir Norman Lockyer and other Egyptologists, that the great Temple at Karnak was used in sun-worship, has been definitely disproved by the mathematical calculations of Mr. Richards of the Survey of Egypt. Sir Norman held that, when the temple was built, some thousands of years ago, the sun shone straight down its axis, and that this temple, like a great many others, was constructed for the purpose of obtaining an exact observation of the solstice, the

day of the sun's most northerly setting.

Mr. Richards's calculations show that the relative positions of the earth and sun have been such that the rays could never have fallen, as Sir Norman believed, at any time since 6000 B.C., and that it last set along this axis between 10,000 and 11,000 B.C.

It was at one time the hope of Egyptologists that calculations such as Mr. Richards has now made would establish definitely the date of the temple's construction by showing when the sun fell along its axis. At Karnak the point on the horizon cut by the setting sun is gradually shifting southward; but this change is so slow that in the last 4000 years the point has altered by an amount about equal to the sun's (apparent) diameter.

Similar theories have been put forward with regard to the ruins at Stonehenge, in England, where archaeologists now regard these views as unsatisfactory. The data available for making the necessary observations there are much less exact than at Karnak, and there seems little hope of determining the age of Stonehenge by astronomical means, particularly as a comparatively slight movement of the observer's head would neutralize the total change in the sun's emergence for the last 4000 years.



#### BOOKS MENTIONED

L. ANDREYEV. *His Excellency the Governor*. Daniel. 3s. 6d. net. *And it Came to Pass that the King Was Dead*. Daniel 2s. 6d. net.

GIOVANNI PAPINI. *Le Memoire d'Ididio: La Storia di Cristo*. Vallecchi. London: Truslove and Hanson.