

THE OWL

BY EDEN PHILLPOTS

[*Pixies' Plot*]

AN owl alighted in the yew
Beside a poet's little house;
The hour was nearly half-past two,
And, as he ate his juicy mouse,
A cuckoo clock made cheerful chime
Within and shouted out the time.

'O gracious God!' the owl began,
And rolled his round eyes at the
moon.
'What a black piece of work is man—
Well might we miss cuckoo in June.
How mad, misguided, inhumane
To keep a cuckoo upon a chain!'

A CREED

BY ADRIAN BURY

[*New Witness*]

'Tis not for me to solve
God's strange and secret laws:
How the round worlds revolve
And what gigantic cause
Keeps the cold moon in place
And the hot sun alight,
Or why each starry face
Beatifies the night.
I do not care how much
Remains to me unknown,
So long as I may touch
To Beauty's lips my own.

FIRES

BY JOSEPH CAMPBELL

[*The Nation and the Athenæum*]

THE little fires that Nature lights —
The scilla's lamp, the daffodil —
She quenches, when of stormy nights
Her anger whips the hill.

The fires she lifts against the cloud —
The irised bow, the bearing tree —
She batters down with curses loud,
Nor cares that death should be.

The fires she kindles in the soul —
The poet's mood, the rebel's
thought —
She cannot master, for their coal
In other mines is wrought.

CATHEDRAL INTERIOR

BY HAROLD ACTON

[*Spectator*]

THE pear-shaped saffron candle-flames
Leap in the velvet-bosomed dark,
The priest speaks gently of God's
claims
To wistful folk with coughs that
bark.

Here all is hushed and rabbit-still,
The bull-necked columns, numb with
gout
Of countless ages by God's will
Cast crêpe-like shadows long and
stout.

Two narrow slits of colored glass
Are pierced by spears of mellow
light.
The only light allowed to pass
Into this consecrated night.

Behind a candelabra droops
A crucifix of burnished gold,
A ray of dancing sunbeams swoops
Across the cobwebbed arches old.

Here may the sick, the bleeding one
Nurture his wounds and calm his
fears.
Here when their joy in life is done
Poor, crumbling men gulp salty
tears.

And knotted fingers counting beads,
And prayers half-whispered never
cease.
Man slumbers; only heaven heeds,
Here in this hollow womb of peace.

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

THE DIFFICULT ART OF TRANSLATION

IN comparative hardness the ways of the translator and the transgressor are about equal. There are, in fact, those who decline to see a difference between the two, and propose to cast them both into limbo together. Among these stern censors of literary morals is Doctor J. B. Postgate, who has written a book on *Translation and Translations* in which he lays down rules for the guidance of practitioners of this most difficult of the arts, and holds up some horrible examples of bad translation to spur their (potentially) erring footsteps.

Among the most horrible of Doctor Postgate's examples is Professor Gilbert Murray. His translations of the Greek dramatists, it would appear, do not at all accord with the Postgatian rules. (But does this reflect on Professor Murray or on Doctor Postgate?)

Having warned us of the awful fate that befalls the bad translator (he may, it appears, become as bad as Professor Murray—a fate that some of us would n't mind a bit), Doctor Postgate raises several very interesting questions. Shall we be 'accurate' at all costs—and probably end by distorting the writer's meaning? Or shall we strive for literary finish—and say the same thing as the writer in a way the writer would have trouble recognizing? Shall we try to improve the author we are translating? Or shall we—when he writes bad French, Greek, or Russian—dutifully render him into bad English and prepare betimes for the outcry of our constant readers?

Truly, it is no light matter, this craft of coaxing another man's thought to change its clothing and yet appear

the same. For if our clothes are a part of our personalities—as any metaphysician can demonstrate—how much more is the same idea different in English, in Russian, in French, or in the staid old languages of Greece and Rome. Perhaps if Doctor Postgate were to try to translate the Greek dramatists to satisfy a theatrical producer (but alas! what theatrical producer wants them translated?) he might be a little less stern in his demands. As well expect a man to feel the same and act the same and *be* the same in a Japanese kimono, a Russian peasant's blouse, the redingote of the boulevards, or a business suit, as require ideas to be identically the same in different languages.

Languages have an irritating array of gaps. What one expresses in a word or a phrase, another can eventually make clear in a course of lectures. 'Nitschevo!' says a Russian when you apologize for treading on his toe, or when the Bolsheviki confiscate his estate and drive him into exile. Perhaps, with an intensive study of Russian fatalism, history, character, and philosophy, you may eventually squeeze what he means into English—but you will not do it in one word. And what, pray, is the English equivalent of the French *donc*? There was a story with an untranslatable title in *La Revue Bleue* the other day—and the untranslatable title was very easy French. *Le Prisonnier de Lui-Même*—a child knows what it means. But let no one be so naïve as to fancy that he has translated it when he calls it 'The Prisoner of Himself,' or 'His Own Prisoner,' or anything so obvious. The French versions of *Hamlet* are excellent French, but they are