

# 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

worlds away from Shakespeare. 'Oh, what a rash and bloody deed is this!' '*Quelle action furieuse et sanglante!*'— Is it a satisfying substitution?

It is embarrassing to confess — in a magazine consisting largely of translations — that even the best translations are not very adequate. But veracity has a way of being embarrassing.

The counsel of perfection is this: Learn all the languages yourself. Read Russian and perhaps (after you have learned what verbal 'aspect' is, and how a verb can have gender) you will comprehend the mind of Lenin. Master the intricacies of ideogram and kana and you may come to a closer understanding of the Japanese mentality. But by the time you have delved into all the grammars in all the world, your span of life will be very nearly spun, and all your languages will avail you nothing.

There is no help for it. Translations we must have, and all we can ask of the translator is that he know both his languages and the subject with which he deals. Let him do his work honestly. Let him labor over the turn of a phrase, and substitute idioms as best he can. In the end he will give us something worth having; and if he is very good — or if the original is very bad — we may have something better than the original.

The translator's craft is useful though it be humble. Nor is it always humble. The great and near-great mingle in bewildering array among the English translators — Chapman, Marlowe, Coleridge, George Eliot (still writing as Marian Evans when she made her superb version of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*), William Morris, Longfellow, Bryant, Lang, Leaf, Teixeira de Mattos and Murray. Let us assert it defiantly — in the teeth of all the professors: there has been great writing, even in translation.

#### SHERLOCK HOLMES, HIS AUTHOR, AND THE FAIRIES

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S latest explorations in the realms of the supernatural, as presented in his latest book, *The Coming of the Fairies*, have not met with unalloyed approval in England. Of all the critics, however, Mr. Maurice Hewlett had the happiest inspiration. He did not trouble to puzzle his own brains over the problem, but took the whole difficulty straight to Mr. Sherlock Holmes himself. How he found his way to that well-known address, 22-b Baker Street, Mr. Hewlett does not say, but he found Sherlock at home and ready to talk.

Their conversation is recorded in the *London Outlook*: —

'Holmes,' I said, 'I am worried about Doyle. You know him well?'

He raised his sharply cut brows. 'Doyle?' he said. 'Poor Doyle! Yes, I have known him for years — since childhood, in fact. We were intimate for a long time together; but I had more sympathy, I fancy, with his brother.'

He startled me — but that was his way. 'His brother!' I faltered; 'now I never knew until this moment —'

He gave me one glance over the bowl of his pipe and the flame of his vesta, then in full activity. Presently, emitting a cloud of tobacco smoke — 'Oh, yes, his brother was my close ally — I may say my bosom friend. But the change of name may have misled you. Well — there were good reasons for that.'

I think then I may have had an inkling of the truth. If I had, I was careful to control myself. 'What is the name, Holmes?'

Holmes pulled at his meerschaum. 'He calls himself Watson,' he said.

It was marvelous — or with anybody else it would have been marvelous, that a man should foreshadow the answer to an inquiry not yet put to him — but I knew my Holmes! I let the astounding revelation go unnoticed.

'Holmes,' I said, 'I should be obliged if

you would run your eye over this little book of Doyle's. I am afraid all is not well with him.' Holmes put out a hand for the book, which, when he had it, he did not at once look at.

'Light, very light,' he said, weighing it in his experienced hand. 'But Doyle has prepared me for insubstantial things lately. What would you have? A sanguine temperament, a warm heart, an instinct for adventure and relish for melodrama — those qualities combined with an invalid headpiece! But — well, let us look at the little work.' He glanced at the title, and took a quick breath.

'Ha!' he said. 'Now I know where we are. You observe the title? An arrant *petitio principii*. It asserts what the text is intended to prove.' He laid the book upon his knee. 'Watson,' he said, 'is at the bottom of this. He always was a dunce. But it is too bad of him.'

'Is it possible?' I cried, really taken aback. 'Is there a partnership?'

'I would not go so far as that,' said Holmes dreamily. 'It is possible that Doyle — a most good-natured fellow — wrote the book. The title is clearly his brother's, and I suspect we shall find his suggestion between every two lines of the text — if text it can be called.'

He turned over a few pages, barely glancing at the photographs. A faint smile hovered over his sensitive lips, and sharpened the facial lines. 'At his old tricks, I see. Here we have it. Watson is writing a "theosophical work," it seems — that is, Doyle is writing it on Watson's suggestion. Then comes this Cottingley stunt, and "Gardner" goes down there to investigate. *Gardner!* A transparent pseudonym for *Pardner*. Watson goes to Cottingley, and swallows it whole. And Doyle lends himself! A foolish business — a foolish business!'

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HORACE MOULE AND THOMAS HARDY

WE reprint this week a poem by Horace Moule, which is communicated to the *London Mercury* by Thomas Hardy. In sending the verses, Mr. Hardy wrote to the Mercury: —

This fine poem was originally published in *Once a Week* in the summer of 1862, having been written after a short visit to the International Exhibition of that year, in which was hung a picture by Gérôme of the interior of the Coliseum during the Empire. The poem has never been reprinted.

The author of the verses was born at Fordington Vicarage, Dorchester, in 1832, died unmarried at Queen's College, Cambridge, 1873, and was buried at Fordington. He was Hulsean prize man at the University, an accomplished Greek scholar and musician, and had early showed every promise of becoming a distinguished English poet. But the fates said otherwise. As a prose writer he was for many years on the staff of the old *Literary Gazette*, and on that of the *Saturday Review* in the eighties under Cook and Harwood as editors. He was also an occasional reviewer in the *Quarterlies* of that date.

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SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND THE WAR

THE *Zoological Record* is an annual volume published in London, which lists all the papers on zoölogical subjects printed at any time during the year, together with brief summaries of the most important ones, and exhaustive indexes by subjects, authors, and species. Its immense importance to research workers in zoölogy, who wish to inform themselves of previous work on any particular subject, may be imagined.

When the *Record* was founded in 1864, its first number appeared as a fair-sized volume about the size of the average novel. From that date until 1913 it grew gradually, so that to-day a complete shelf of the *Record* looks like a graph representing the development of research throughout the world. It is a very gradual increase, so gradual that two consecutive volumes invariably appear the same size, whereas two volumes taken ten years apart show a marked difference. The

*Zoölogical Record*, 1913, is as big as *Who's Who*.

With the 1914 volume comes the change. Half the year was over, to be sure, before the war broke out; but its results are immediately apparent. The *Zoölogical Record*, 1914, is nearly the same as the *Zoölogical Record*, 1864. Students had been called to the colors; professors had been set to more 'practical' tasks than scientific research; and the scientific journals — which the world over are likely to rest on precarious financial foundations — suspended publication right and left. Monographs that represented years of work were left to lie in manuscript, while the scholars gave up their peaceful task of studying life for the warlike one of taking it.

Through the war years the *Record* managed to keep on appearing. After the war it began to increase in size again — but very slowly; and the last volume, that for 1920, is little more than half the size of the *Zoölogical Record* in 1913, the last year of peace.



#### THE HUMORS OF WAR

A FORMER officer of the British Field Artillery, Mr. E. A. Dixon, writing in the *Army Quarterly*, a technical military review, gives a very lively and essentially untechnical account of the beginnings of the great German retreat.

Mr. Dixon was captured in July, 1918, and — if we may judge from his article — used his eyes to extremely good purpose as a prisoner.

This is his description of the endeavor of the German army to increase its scanty supply of transport: —

The Germans utilized any sort of French vehicle they could find — cabs, wagonettes, phaetons, and even family coaches and other relics of bygone generations. Great interest was taken in any new find, and any old cart brought to the dump, almost dropping to pieces, was inspected by parties of German officers with as much solemnity as if they were judging fat stock at a Royal Show. Then the cart would be repaired and put on the road. A weird collection of vehicles, therefore, was in use for carrying stores, ammunition, and so forth.

It was a pleasing sight, on the evacuation of the dump, to see the very fat O. C., complete with Iron Crosses and gas mask, being stuffed into a patched-up governess cart, and to note his dignified bearing in these trying circumstances. At a later date, on the outskirts of Laon, an old cab — at which even on a wet night thirty years ago one would not have taken a second glance — came down the road piled up at the back with paper suit-cases, parcels, a chair, several buckets, and so forth, while on the top was one henroost with birds complete! The 'fare' was a much decorated German General, no doubt regretfully leaving a comfortable billet. Even in the hour of retreat nothing could ruffle his majestic demeanor.

## BOOKS ABROAD

**Swann's Way**, by Marcel Proust. Translated by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff. London: Chatto and Windus, 1922. 2 vols. 15s. New York: Holt, \$5.00.

['Affable Hawk' in the *New Statesman*]

*Swann's Way*, by Marcel Proust, translated by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff, is a translation of the first part of M. Proust's continuous novel, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, which some people consider the finest novel of the twentieth century. M. Proust is a difficult writer, and this translation, which is a very good one, will be a boon to many who have been compelled to talk about the work of M. Proust on the strength of having read from thirty to a hundred of his pages.

Imagine an English author who registers assimilations as small and fine as those of Henry James,—many of which through their unfamiliarity require a long exposure to make a clear impression on the imagination,—and who conveys them in sentences as slow in unfolding as many-petaled flowers, and you will form some notion why M. Proust's novels cannot be read quickly. A great proportion of English readers to whom he might give exquisite pleasure become discouraged by the slowness of their progress with this voluminously minute author. He is, therefore, precisely the kind of author it is worth while to translate, though he is at the same time a fine enough writer to be hard to translate.

It is to be hoped that Mr. Scott-Moncrieff will continue 'Remembrance of Things Past,' for he has surpassed all expectations as a translator, and that a translation of *À L'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleur* will follow *Du Côté de chez Swann* quickly. There are difficulties in the path of the translator of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. M. Proust is never indecent, but he ignores taboos. Then English readers, no longer compelled to crawl like insects along M. Proust's sentences, will perhaps finish his books, which fewer have done than might be supposed from the frequency and confidence with which his novels are discussed. Being in a position to judge of his works as wholes, they can dip into the originals to taste the full flavor of his style.

**Preludes, 1921-1922**, by John Drinkwater.

London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1922. 3s. 6d.

**Pixies' Plot**, by Eden Phillpotts. London:

Grant Richards, 1922. 3s. 6d.

[*Morning Post*]

AS MR. JOHN DRINKWATER rings his challenge in the greatest lists of poetry, he cannot be sur-

prised if some of his judges declare him beaten. If he fought in one of the lesser tournaments of that fine art, he might be more successful. In these *Preludes* he treats of love, a mighty theme. Such poetry must burn with the brilliance of a giant blaze, not smoulder through the days like autumn fires. We find none of this in these poems. There is no passion swirling to a height, and falling back again quiescent. There is no moment of poise when the poem breaks into a poet's star and shimmers down to earth. 'Lake Winter,' a tale of illicit love with its tragic ending, should have this spontaneity. Instead, we have a long speech from Zell, the woman, on the need for desire in true love.

'David and Jonathan' is no whit better. The Bible tells us that they loved as brothers. Mr. Drinkwater makes a philosophic argument the basis of their love. David, a mere boy, ratifies the covenant of their affection in many lines, when we think he would have been sleeping after his fight with Goliath. 'Burning Bush' is a poem on the love of nature that comes to the poet in the hours before his birth, but there are no flashes of observation that seal a line with the impression of some object keenly, vividly felt.

We know that Mr. Eden Phillpotts has written of the deepest and most tragic happenings of man. In his poetry, apparently, he seeks relaxation. 'Pixies' Plot' and the other poems are culled from the garden of his experience and lightly plucked. There are legends pleasantly told, as in 'Jill Bassett' and 'The Seven Maidens,' and a very happy picture of the sun as fox and the moon and stars as hounds and huntress in 'The Hunting.' 'To Anthea's Bosom' has a touch of Elizabethan conceit. These are pleasant poems, although they contain nothing that Mr. Phillpotts has not done better in his novels.

[The title poem appeared in the *Living Age* for January 7. and another poem this week.]

**Many Voices**, by E. Nesbit. London: Hutchinson, 1922. 4s. 6d.

[*New Statesman*]

You will feel, as you turn the pages of this elegantly attired volume, that there is much in it which you have heard before. The poems do not present any new philosophy, any new attitude, or even any new rhythms. Nevertheless, if you are heartily sick of immature irony and dandified egoism and everything else which the twentieth century means when it uses the word 'youth'—if you are bored by the modern poetry of self-revelation, this book will refresh you. It is always sincere, and the level of achievement never sinks

low enough to exasperate you. One is not likely to forget 'licked with gold' as a description of buttercups; and if the first stanza of 'At Parting' were only equal to the second, the poem would be comparable to a Cavalier lyric in the close-bit brevity of its devotion, and we should say that it had taken Lucasta nearly three centuries to write her answer to Lovelace.

['E. Nesbit' is the pen name of Mrs. Hubert Bland. Her poem, 'At Parting,' appears on A Page of Verse in this issue.]

**Outspoken Essays. Second Series, by W. R. Inge.** London: Longmans, 1922. 6s.

[*Times Literary Supplement*]

THE Dean of St. Paul's is a national institution, whom Englishmen do not admire the less because he cloaks his fundamental sympathy with them under so stiff a mantle of disdain. Whom the Lord loves he chastens: the Dean, who chastens us, we love; and his asperity and acerbity do not impose upon us. The Englishman, in spite of many crimes of character, of which he will be newly conscious as he sets down Dean Inge's new volume, has yet this virtue, that he is sensitive to atmospheres. He cannot, therefore, go far with Dean Inge without recognizing in him an unusually tender-hearted man, who protects himself, as many others have learned to do, by loudly and severely proclaiming his discontents. It is not generally an agreeable expedient, and it is seldom a very helpful one; but in Dean Inge's hands it is both helpful and agreeable, far more so, we can imagine, to his readers than to himself: helpful, because his severity is directed by the keenest perspicacity, and agreeable, because it is often when he is most violent that he shows most wit.

**The Making of Australia, by Thomas Dunbabin.** ('Making of the British Empire Series.') London: Black, 1922. 10s. 6d.

[*Westminster Gazette*]

THIS book is an admirable textbook of Australian history. I notice that it is designed for the student of colonial history — a new type of student to me. Does this mean that at last the youth of this country is to be taught something of the Empire of which he is a citizen? I hope so, and that many of them will begin on Mr. Dunbabin's book.

**Voltaire, by the Right Honorable J. M. Robertson.** London: Watts, 1922. 3s. 6d.

[*Saturday Review*]

To write a small book on a great subject, neglecting no essential aspect and dwelling to excess on no favorite part, is a considerable feat

— and Mr. Robertson has performed it well in the 122 pages in which he gives a summary of the life, work, and character of the most extensive of all men of letters.

In any case, he was a very great writer, in his own sphere one of the greatest. Mr. Robertson deals thoughtfully with as much of the immense oeuvre as he can bring into focus in his little volume, which is an invaluable guide to a traveler who proposes to himself a series of excursions in that vast district. The ordinary reader can hardly hope in these busy days to master the huge product of Voltaire, but he cannot afford to leave unread *Candide* and he will be wise to skim the *Essai sur les Mœurs*. These may lead him on to *Zadig* and to the *Siècle de Louis XIV.* He will still hardly have touched the hem of the garment of the most voluminous of authors, but, if he wishes to proceed further, Mr. Robertson will help him.

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#### BOOKS ANNOUNCED

**BENSON, A. C.** *The Reed of Pan.* London: Murray. Translations from the Greek into English lyrical verse.

**CHESTERTON, G. K.** *The Man Who Knew Too Much.* London: Cassell. Just published but not yet reviewed. The hero, Horne Fisher, is given the task of solving riddles of crime. Mr. Chesterton apparently intends to follow up the success of the *Father Brown* stories.

**HOBSON, R. L.** *The Wares of the Ming Dynasty.* London: Benn Brothers. For early publication. The author is a member of the British Museum staff.

**OMAN, SIR CHARLES.** *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard.* London: Edward Arnold. A volume of essays to be published in December, described by the publishers as 'by-paths of history.' One essay deals with 'Rumor in Time of War.'

**WEBB, SIDNEY and BEATRICE.** *The Decay of Capitalist Civilization.* London: The Fabian Society. November publication.

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#### BOOKS MENTIONED

**COUDENHOVE-KALERGI, RICHARD NIKOLAUS.** *Apologie der Technik.* Leipzig: Der Neue Geist-Verlag, 1922.

**DOYLE, SIR ARTHUR CONAN.** *The Coming of the Fairies.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922. (Second Edition) 12s. 6d.

**GREBENSTCHIKOV, GEORGE.** *V Nekotorom Tsarstve.* Paris: J. Povolozky and Co., 1921.

**POSTGATE, J. P.** *Translation and Translations.* London: Bell, 1922. 6s.

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# THIS WEEK

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An interview with Zanella, the refugee President of Fiume, reveals the seamy side of Fascisti 'direct action.' Now that this party is in the saddle in Italy, such information is especially pertinent. And we all have an interest in the fate of Fiume, after its brief appearance in the international spotlight during the Paris Conference and the D'Annunzio episode.

\* \* \*

M. Lafue brings home to us the state of affairs in Poland, though perhaps with the exaggerations of his Royalist bias against Republican institutions. The air of that country is still ringing with its cries for independence, and some will question the political sagacity of a people so many of whom cannot read and will not wash. To them, and to the ardent lovers of Poland, who seek fuller understanding of her present difficulties, this article will be very welcome.

\* \* \*

We have already formed an acquaintance with Trotskii, the essayist, who continues to play this rôle in the concluding description of his Spanish travels. But a story from the pen of Giovanni Papini is new to us. An account of this former agnostic, who has recently returned to the faith of his fathers, appeared in the LIVING AGE, last year.

\* \* \*

European intrigue and diplomacy are given quite an airing, this week. "Making War and Peace" shows Austria in the position of the unsuccessful peace-maker, and much of its importance lies in the light it throws in the dark corners of diplomatic history, during the Great War.

\* \* \*

Professor Foerster characterizes as the most powerful impulse in Europe, an impetuous, undying desire to return to Asia, her great mother continent. When brought to bear on the Eastern question, this theory illuminates current and past history alike.

\* \* \*

In Germany, students have been compelled to work with their hands, to earn an education. "A Theologue in a Street-Gang" shows a very human picture of their life as laborers, among the common people.

\* \* \*

When an erstwhile supporter of the Kaiser powerfully exhorts his countrymen to support the Republic, it suggests that the present government in Berlin is beginning to take real root in the heart of the people. This, and the preceding article, convey a more definite idea of the true state of Germany than any second-hand report can furnish.



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*Georg Popoff*

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