

VERS DE SOCIÉTÉ IN FOREIGN TONGUES

By Brander Matthews

“FAMILIAR verse” is the apt term Cowper preferred to describe the lyric of mingled sentiment and playfulness which is more generally and more carelessly called *vers de société*. The lyric of this sort is less emotional, or at least less expansive, than the regular lyric; and it seeks to veil the depth of its feeling behind a debonair assumption of gaiety. Familiar verse is in poetry closely akin to what in prose is known as the eighteenth-century essay; Prior and Gay were early representatives of the one, as Steele and Addison were the creators of the other. Familiar verse is a far better designation than *vers de société* for two reasons: first, because the use of a French phrase might seem to imply that these witty and graceful poems are more abundant in French literature than in English—which is not so; and second, because, however light and bright these lyrics may be, they are not mere society-verses, with only the glitter and the emptiness of the fashionable parade. They are not the idle amusement of those

Who tread with jaded step the weary mill—
Grind at the wheel, and call it “pleasure”
still;

Gay without mirth, fatigued without employ,
Slaves to the joyless phantom of a joy.

No doubt, the true *vers de société* must have polish and finish and the well-bred ease of the man of the world; but they ought also to carry a suggestion at least of the more serious aspects of life. They should not be frothily frivolous or coldly cynical, any more than they should broadly comic or boisterously funny. They are at lib-

erty to hint at hidden tears, even when they seem to be wreathed in smiles. They have no right to parade mere cleverness; and they must shun all affectation as they must avoid all self-consciousness. They should appear to possess a colloquial carelessness which is ever shrinking from the commonplace, and which has succeeded in concealing every trace of the labor of the literary artist by which alone they have attained their seemingly spontaneous perfection.

“Familiar verse” is, perhaps, somewhat more exact than the term once employed by Mr. Stedman—“patrician rhymes”—which is a designation possibly a little chilly for these airy lyrics. To fall fully within the definition, so the late Frederick Locker-Lampson asserted, a poem must be brief and brilliant; and the late Tom Hood added that it ought also to be buoyant. Brevity, brilliancy, buoyancy—these are qualities we cannot fail to find in the best of Locker-Lampson’s own verses, in Praed’s, in Prior’s—and also in Holmes’s, in Bret Harte’s and in Mr. Stedman’s.

Brevity it must have, first of all; and Locker-Lampson excludes the “Rape of the Lock,” “on account of its length, which renders it much too important,” although it “would otherwise be one of the finest specimens of *vers de société* in any language.” Here it is permissible to echo the opinion of Poe, who held that a poem could scarcely exceed one hundred lines in length under penalty of losing its unity of impression. But, on the other hand, the poem of this species must not be excessively condensed, or else it is not im-

portant enough. A couplet does not give room to turn round in. Gay's

Life is a jest, and all things show it;
I said so once, and now I know it.

and Pope's

I am his Highness's dog at Kew,
Pray, sir, tell me—whose dog are you?

have rather the sharp snap of the epigram than the gentler flow of genuine *vers de société*. And so, certain of the slighter pieces in the Greek anthology, lovely as they are and exquisite, lack the modest amplitude fairly to be expected from a poem which claims admission into this charmed circle.

Brilliant it must be also; and this requirement excludes "Sally in Our Alley," for example, because it is "too homely and too entirely simple and natural," and it keeps out "John Gilpin" as well, because it is too frankly comic in its intent, too boldly funny. But the brilliancy must not be excessive; and the diffused glow of the incandescent lamp is better than the sputtering glare of the arc light. If the brilliancy is attained by too violent and too obvious an effort, the light lyric is likely to harden into artificiality; and this is a danger that even Praed does not always escape. His "Chaunt of the Brazen Head" has a luster that is almost metallic; the sparkle is undeniable, but in time the insistent antithesis reveals itself as mechanical, at least, not to call it either tricky or tiresome.

Buoyancy is the third requisite; and this is not so easy to define as the others. Yet its necessity is plain enough when we note how heavy certain metrical efforts may be, although they achieve brevity and even a superficial brilliance. They lack the final ease and the careless felicity; they are not wholly free from an awkwardness that is not unfairly to be termed lumbering. For example, buoyancy is just what is lacking in the rhyming episode of John Wilson Croker, "To Miss Peel, on her Marriage"—quatrains which Locker-Lampson held in sufficient esteem to include in his carefully chosen "Lyra Elegantiarum," and which Mr. Swin-

burne despondingly dismissed as "twenty villainous lines."

Just as comedy is ever in danger of declining into farce—a mishap that has almost befallen "The Rivals," for example—or else of stiffening into the serious drama—a turning aside that is visible in "Froufrou"—so, in like manner, has familiar verse ever to avoid breadth of humor on the one side and depth of feeling on the other. It must eschew, not merely coarseness or vulgarity, but even free and hearty laughter; and it must refrain from dealing not only with the soul-plumbing abysses of the tragic but even with the ground-swell of any sweeping emotion. It must keep on the crest of the waves, midway between the utter triviality of the murmuring shallows and the silent profundity of the depths that are dumb.

Perhaps this is one reason why so few of these brevet-poems have been the work of the greater wits or of the greater poets; familiar verse is too serious to carry all the fun of the jesters, and too slight to convey the more solemn message of the major bards. Rather has it been the casual recreation of true lyrists not in the front rank, or else it has been the sudden excursion of those not reckoned among the songsters, often men of the world for once achieving in verse a seeming spontaneity, like that which gives zest to delightful conversation.

Perhaps, again, this is a reason why *vers de société* can be found flourishing most luxuriantly when the man of the world is himself most abundant, and when he has helped to set up an ideal of sparkling nimbleness in the give-and-take of social encounter. "When society ceases to be simple, it becomes skeptical," and, when it "becomes refined, it begins to dread the exhibition of strong feeling." So wrote one of the reviewers of Locker-Lampson's collection. "In such an atmosphere, emotion takes refuge in jest, and passion hides itself in skepticism of passion." And the reviewer added that there is a delicious piquancy in the poets who represent this social mood,

and who are put in a class apart by "the way they play bo-peep with their feelings."

In the stately sentences of his time, the elder Disraeli declared that, in the production of *vers de société*, "genius will not always be sufficient to impart that grace of amenity which seems peculiar to those who are accustomed to elegant society. These productions are more the effusions of taste than genius, and it is not sufficient that the poet is inspired by the Muse, he must also suffer his concise page to be polished by the hand of the Graces." Locker-Lampson maintained that "the tone should not be pitched high; it should be idiomatic, and rather in the conversational key; the rhythm should be crisp and sparkling, and the rhyme frequent and never forced, while the entire poem should be marked by tasteful moderation, high finish, and completeness; for, however trivial the subject-matter may be, indeed rather in proportion to its triviality, subordination to the rules of composition and perfection of execution should be strictly enforced." And Mr. Austin Dobson, drawing up "Twelve Good Rules" for the writer of familiar verse, advised him to be "colloquial but not commonplace," to be as witty as he liked, to be "serious by accident," and to be "pathetic with the greatest discretion."

II

THOSE who may search Greek literature for frequent examples of familiar verse are doomed to disappointment; and even in the lovely lyrics of the "Anthology," so human, so sad, so perfect in precision of phrase, we fail to find the lightness, the playfulness, the gaiety of true *vers de société*. We note brevity nearly always, brilliancy sometimes, and even buoyancy occasionally; we mark a lapidary concision that only Landor, of all the moderns, was ever able to achieve; but we feel that the tone is a little too grave and a little too austere. Perhaps the Greek spirit was too simple and too lofty to stoop

to the pleasantry and prettiness of familiar verse. Perhaps the satiric reaction against excessive romanticism, which sustains so much modern *vers de société*, was not possible before the birth of romance itself. Perhaps, indeed, the banter and the gently satiric playfulness of *vers de société* were not to be expected in a race which, no matter how gifted it might be lyrically, kept woman in social inferiority, and denied her the social privileges that give to modern society its charm and its variety.

At first glance, it would seem as though more than one lyric of Anacreon, at least, and perhaps of Theocritus also, ought to fall well within the most rigid definition of familiar verse. But there is scarcely a single poem of Anacreon's which really approaches the type we are seeking. The world for which he wrote reveals itself as very narrow; and he is found to be devoid of "catholicity of human interest," as Tom Hood asserted. His verses are a little lacking in tenderness of sentiment; and, as Professor Jebb says, Anacreon's "sensuousness is tempered merely by intellectual charm"—and this is not what we require in social verse.

Theocritus, also, exquisite as are his vignettes of Alexandrian life, perfect as they are in tone and feeling, clear cut as an intaglio and delightful as a Tanagra figurine—Theocritus is at once too idyllic and too realistic. His verses are without certain of the characteristics which are imperative in true *vers de société*. They are at once a little too homely and a little too poetic. If a selection from Greek literature were absolutely imperative, probably a copy of verses combining brevity, brilliancy and buoyancy could be found more easily among the scanty lyrics of Agathias or of Antipater than amid the larger store of Theocritus or of Anacreon.

Perhaps it is the more prominent position of woman in Rome which makes a search in Latin literature a more certain pleasure. Yet the world in which Catullus lived, that "tenderest of Ro-

man poets nineteen hundred years ago," while it was externally most luxurious, had an underlying rudeness and an ill-concealed coarseness. And Catullus himself, with all his nimble wit, his scholarly touch, his instinctive certainty of taste, was consumed by too fierce a flame of passion to be satisfied often with the leisurely interweaving of jest and earnest which we look for in the songster of society. Infrequently does he allow himself the courtly grace of true familiar verse—in his "Dedication for a Volume of Lyrics," in his "Invitation to Dinner" and in his "Morning Call," so sympathetically paraphrased by Landor.

Half a generation later, we come to Horace, a perfect master of the lighter lyric. He has the wide knowledge of a man of the world and the consummate ease of an accomplished craftsman in verse. He can achieve both the "curious felicity" and the "art that hides itself." And his tone, so Walter Bagehot insisted, "is that of prime ministers; the easy philosophy is that of courts and parliaments. . . . He is but the extreme and perfect type of a whole class of writers, some of whom exist in every literary age, and who give expression to what we may call the poetry of equanimity—that is, the world's view of itself, its self-satisfaction, its conviction that you must hear what comes, not hope for much, think *some* evil, never be excited, admire little, and then you will be at peace." Perhaps this view of Horace's philosophy is a little too disenchanting; but Bagehot here suggested why Horace was likely to be one of the masters of familiar verse; and it is the Roman poet's catholicity of human interest, even more than his exquisite naturalness, which makes his lines sometimes so startlingly modern. It was easy for Thackeray to find London equivalents for the Latin "*Persicos odi*," and for Molière earlier, and Mr. Austin Dobson later, to imitate "*Donec gratus*." But there is little need to cite further, for no poet has tempted more adapters and translators—not always, indeed, to his profit, and often, in fact,

to their undoing, since it is only by an inspiration as happy as the original that any modern may hope to equal the sureness of stroke characteristic of a poet who shunned the remote adjective, and who was ever content with the vocabulary of every day.

It is not pleasant to pass down from the benign rule of Augustus to the tyranny of Nero, and to contrast the constant manliness of Horace with the servility of Martial, a servility finding relief now and again in the utmost bitterness of unrestrained invective. Horace, with all his equanimity, was never indifferent to ideas—and he had an ethical code of his own; but Martial rarely revealed even a hint of moral feeling. He was cynical of necessity; and therefore is he habitually too hard and too rasping to attain the geniality which belongs to the better sort of social verse. Few of his poems are really long enough to be styled lyrics; and the vast majority are merely epigrams, with the wilful condensation and the arbitrary pointedness that have been the bane of the epigram ever since Martial set the bad example. But even though the Latin poet, as Professor Mackail asserts, made his strongest appeal "to all that was worst in Roman taste—its heavy-handedness, its admiration of verbal cleverness, its tendency toward brutality"—still, now and again it is possible to pick out a poem that falls fairly within the definition of familiar verse. There is, for example:

IN HABENTEM AMÆNAS ÆDES

Your parks are unsurpassed in noble trees;
A finer bath than yours one seldom sees;
Grand is your colonnade, and all complete
The stone mosaic underneath your feet;
Your steeds are fine; your hunting grounds
are wide,
And gleaming fountains spout on every side;
Your drawing-rooms are grand; there's nothing cheap
Except the places where you eat and sleep!
With all the space and splendor you have got,
Oh, what a charming mansion you have *not!*

III

WHEN at last we pass over the long suspension-bridge that arches the dark

gulf between the ancient world and the modern, we discover that the more direct inheritors of the Latin tradition, the Italians and the Spaniards, have neither of them contributed abundantly to this special department of lyric poetry. It may be that the Spanish language is too grandiloquent and too sonorous to be readily playful; and perhaps the Spanish character itself is either too loftily dignified or too realistically shrewd to be able often to achieve that harmonious blending of the grave and the gay which is essential in familiar verse. It is true that Lope de Vega, early master of every form of the drama and bold adventurer into every other realm of literature, has left us a few poems that might demand inclusion; and among them is an ingenious sonnet on the difficulty of making a sonnet—which was cleverly Englished by the late H. C. Bunner, and which may have suggested to Voiture his more famous rondeau. No doubt, there are a few other Spanish poets who might be enlisted as contributors to an international anthology of *vers de société*; but the fact remains that the Spanish section of any such collection would be slighter even than the Italian.

And the Italian contribution would not be very important, in spite of the national facility in improvisation—or perhaps because of this dangerous gift. In the earlier Italian Renaissance, existence seems to have been almost too strenuous for social verse. As we call the roll of the Italian poets, we may note the name of more than one master of the passionate lyric and of the scorching satire, but we find scarcely any writer who has left us verses of the requisite brevity, brilliancy and buoyancy. In Rossetti's "Dante and his Circle" there is more than one poem that seems to have this triple qualification, although, on more careful examination, the sentiment is seen to be too sincere and too frankly expressed, or else the tone is too rarely playful to warrant any liberal selection from these fascinating pages. Perhaps even from this volume a more lively little piece might, here and there, be bor-

rowed, such as Sachetti's "On a Wet Day," for instance. A little later there is Berni, whose metrical portrait of himself might fairly be compared—and not altogether to its disadvantage—with one or another of Praed's caressingly tender sketches of character. The Italians have no lack of biting epigram and of pertinent pasquinade; and they excel in broad burlesque and in laughable parody. But the mock-heroic, however clever it may be, is not the same as *vers de société*. And even in the nineteenth century, where there was a firmer social solidarity, the only name which forces itself on our attention is that of Giusti—whose idiomatic ballads have not unfairly been likened to the songs of Béranger.

The more northern languages are less likely to reward research, partly because of the prolonged rudeness of the Teutonic tongues and partly because of the more rigid seriousness of the folk that speak them. There is a true lyric grace in the songs of the Minnesingers, despite their frequent artificiality; but they again are too direct and too purely lyric. However ingenious they may be, they are without the wit and the humor which we look for in familiar verse. Even the later and far greater Goethe, who, for all his Olympian serenity, revealed at times the possession of that specific levity which is a prerequisite for the songster of society—even Goethe chose to condense his wit into the distichs of his "Xenien" rather than to commingle it with his balladry. He himself thought it strange that, with all he had done, there was no one of his poems "that would suit the Lutheran hymn-book;" and it is perhaps even stranger that scarcely any one of them would suit such an anthology as has been here suggested. Perhaps a claim might be made for his "Ergo Bibamus," which has almost briskness enough to warrant its acceptance.

From Heine, of course, a choice would be less difficult; and at least one of his lyrics, the "Grammar of the Stars," seems to meet all the requirements of familiar verse. But, af-

fluent as Heine is in sentiment, and master as he is of both girding satire and airy persiflage, there is ever a heart-break to be heard in his verses—an unforgettable sob. The chords of his lyre are really too deep and too resonant for him to chant trifles. The “brave soldier in the war of liberation of humanity,” as he styled himself, even in his paraded mockery and in his irrepressible wit, was really too much in earnest to happen often on the happy mean which makes familiar verse a possibility.

IV

In the French language at last the seeker after *vers de société* finds not only the name, but the thing itself, the real thing; and he finds it in abundance and of the best quality. Some part of this abundance is due, no doubt, to the French tongue itself, for, as a shrewd writer has reminded us, “a language long employed by a delicate and critical society is a treasury of dexterous felicities;” it may not be what Emerson finely called “fossil poetry,” but it is “crystallized *esprit*.” Society verse might be expected to flourish most luxuriantly among a people governed by the social instinct, as the French are, and as appreciative of the social qualities. The French invented the *salon*, which is the true hothouse for familiar verse; and they have raised correspondence and conversation also to the dignity of a fine art. As we scan the history of the past three centuries, we note that in France, society and literature have met on terms that approach equality far more nearly than in any other country. The French men of letters have frequently been men of the world, even if the French men of the world have been men of letters not quite so often as the English.

Moreover, it is in prose rather than in poetry that the French have achieved their amplest triumphs. To us of the Teutonic tradition, French poetry seems to be wanting in imaginative suggestiveness; it is too clear

and too precise and too logical; it fails to attain the Miltonic ideal of simplicity, sensuousness and passion. But, whatever the reservations an English reader must make in his praise of French poetry, he need make none in his eulogy of French prose. In prose the French have commonly a perfection to which the English language can pretend only too rarely. Their prose has order and balance and harmony; it flows limpidly with a charming transparency; it is ever lucid, ever flexible, ever various; it has at once an obvious polish and an apparent ease. And to these precious qualifications for a form of poetry seemingly so unambitious as social verse must be added the possession not only of the wit and the vivacity which are acknowledged characteristics of the French, but also their ownership of something far more needful—the gift of comedy.

“For many years the French have not been more celebrated for memoirs which professedly describe a real society than they have been for the light social song which embodies its sentiments and pours forth its spirit,” said Walter Bagehot, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century. He maintained that the French mind had a genius for the poetry of society, partly because it was “unable to remove itself into the higher region of imagined forms,” and, therefore, it had “the quickest insight into the exact relation of surrounding superficial phenomena.” He held that the spirit of these lighter lyrics is ever half mirthful, and that they cannot produce a profound impression. “A gentle pleasure, half sympathy, half amusement, is that at which they aim,” he suggested, adding that “they do not please us equally in all moods of mind; sometimes they seem nothing and nonsense—like society itself.”

Perhaps it is in consequence of the prosaic element perceptible in much of their more pretentious poetry that the French themselves have not considered curiously their own familiar verse. While there are at least half-a-dozen collections of the *vers de société*

of the English language, a diligent seeking has failed to find a single similar anthology in French. A book of *ballades* there is, but the most of these are serious in tone rather than serio-comic; and the brightest of the many epigrammatic quatrains of the language have been gathered into an engaging little volume. But a selection of the best of their lighter lyrics, having brevity, brilliancy and buoyancy, has not yet been undertaken by any French critic, although he would have only the embarrassment of choosing from out a superabundance of enticing examples.

For the most part, the vigorous verse of Villon, that warm "voice from the slums of Paris," has too poignant a melancholy to be included, for all its bravado gaiety; and, though he tries to carry it off with a laugh, the disreputable poet fails to disguise the depth of his feeling. And yet it would be impossible to exclude the famous "Ballade of Old-Time Ladies," with its unforgettable refrain, "Where are the snows of yester-year?" A larger selection would be easier from Villon's contemporary, Charles of Orleans, long time a prisoner in England—a poet far less energetic and not so disenchanted, but possessing by birth "the manners and tone of good society." Stevenson praised his *rondels* especially for their "inimitable lightness and delicacy of touch," and declared that the royal lyrist's "lines go with a lilt and sing themselves to music of their own."

The *rondel* was the fixed form in which Charles of Orleans was most often successful, although he frequently attempted the *ballade* also. This larger form the later Clément Marot managed with assured mastery. One of the best known of his more playful poems is the *ballade à double refrain*, setting forth the duplicity of "Brother Lubin"—a poem which has been rendered into English both by Bryant and Longfellow, although neither of them held himself bound by the strict letter of the law that prescribes the limitation and the ordering of the rhymes properly to be expected in the *ballade*.

As it happens, the American poets were not happily inspired in rendering this characteristic specimen of Marot's discreet raillery and metrical agility; and in their versions we fail to find the limpid lines and the polished irony of the French poet, who was able so easily to marry the elegant with the natural—qualities rarely conjoined, even in French. And yet Locker-Lampson was able to paraphrase one of Clément Marot's lesser lyrics, "Du Rys de Madame d'Allebert," with indisputable felicity:

How fair those locks which now the light
wind stirs,

What eyes she has, and what a perfect
arm!

And yet methinks that little laugh of hers—
That little laugh is still her crowning
charm.

Where'er she passes, country-side or town,
The streets make festa, and the fields re-
joice.

Should sorrow come, as 'twill, to cast me
down

Or death, as come he must, to hush my
voice,

Her laugh would wake me, just as now it
thrills me

That little giddy laugh wherewith she
kills me.

Space fails here to select samples of familiar verse from the poems of Ronsard and Du Bellay and Desportes, or to excerpt cautiously from the later poetasters who were forever rhyming in the *ruelles* of the *Précieuses*, and who clubbed together to go on record in the celebrated "Guirlande à Julie." But Corneille and Molière and La Fontaine cannot be treated in this cavalier fashion. Taine calls La Fontaine's epistles to Madame de Sablière "little masterpieces of respectful gallantry and delicate tenderness." It is this same note of tender gallantry which strikes us in the poems which Molière and Corneille severally addressed to the handsome and alluring actress, Mademoiselle Du Parc. Corneille's stanzas are almost too elevated in tone to permit them to be termed familiar verse; and yet where they are read in the English rendering of Locker-Lampson they do not transcend the modest boundaries of this minor department of poetry.

In the eighteenth century, we come to Dufresny, with his "Morrows," a little comedy in four quatrains; to Piron, rather more inclined to the pert and pungent epigram than to the more suave and gracious song of society; and to Voltaire, the arch-wit of the age, accomplished in social verse as in every other conceivable form of literary endeavor. Perhaps it was of Voltaire that Lowell was thinking when he asserted that in French poetry only "the high polish kept out the decay." Yet it was Lowell himself who rendered into flowing English an epistle of Voltaire's to Madame Du Châtelet—stanzas in which the aging wit refers to his years, not so touchingly as Corneille had done, it is true, but with dignity, none the less.

In the nineteenth century, it is possible to perceive two diverging tendencies in French *vers de société*, one of them being rather more obviously literary in its manner, and including certain of the more piquant lyrics of Hugo, Musset and Gautier, while the other is somewhat humble in its aim and seemingly simpler in its execution. To this second group belong the best of Béranger's ballads, of Gustave Nadaud's, and of Henry Münger's. Of Nadaud the one perfect example is "Carcassonne," so perfectly Englished by John R. Thompson; and of Münger probably the most characteristic—in its presentation of the actual atmosphere of that bohemia which is truly a desert country by the sea—is the lyric of "Old Loves," sympathetically translated by Mr. Andrew Lang:

OLD LOVES

Louise, have you forgotten yet
The corner of the flowery land,
The ancient garden where we met,
My hand that trembled in your hand?
Our lips found words scarce sweet enough,
As low beneath the willow-trees
We sat; have you forgotten, love?
Do you remember, love Louise?

Marie, have you forgotten yet
The loving barter that we made?
The rings we changed, the suns that set,
The woods fulfilled with sun and shade?
The fountains that were musical
By many an ancient trysting tree—
Marie, have you forgotten all?
Do you remember, love Marie?

Christine, do you remember yet
Your room with scents and roses gay?
My garret—near the sky 'twas set—
The April hours, the nights of May?
The clear, calm nights—the stars above
That whispered they were fairest seen
Through no cloud-veil? Remember, love!
Do you remember, love Christine?

Louise is dead, and, well-a-day!
Marie a sadder path has ta'en;
And pale Christine has passed away
In Southern suns to bloom again.
Alas! for one and all of us—
Marie, Louise, Christine forget;
Our bower of love is ruinous,
And I alone remember yet.

Béranger is like Horace in that he is wholly free from cynicism, and in that he is essentially genial. The French balladist is like the Latin lyrist again in that he has tempted countless English translators—mostly to their own undoing. At first glance, it may appear that poetry so easy to read as Horace's or Béranger's, so direct, so unaffected, ought to be transferable into another tongue without great difficulty. But this appearance is altogether deceptive, and those who carelessly venture upon translation soon discover that all unwillingly they have been paying the highest compliment to the skill with which the metrical artists have succeeded in concealing their consummate craftsmanship. Even Thackeray, with all his cleverness, with all his understanding of Parisian life, did not achieve the impossible feat of making a wholly satisfactory English translation of a song of Béranger's, although he twice attempted the "Roi d'Yvetot," and, although he did not fail to bring over into English not a little of the sentiment and of the sparkle of the "Grenier." Indeed, it is this ballad of Béranger's which satisfies the definition of familiar verse more completely, perhaps, than any other piece of the Epicurean songster's.

A true lyric, whether ballad or sonnet or elegy, is not addressed to the eye alone; it is ever intended to be said or sung. The songs of Béranger are real songs fitted to a tune already running in the head of the lyrist; and they have, in fact, sung themselves into being. The poems of Hugo and Gautier and Musset, even when they are most

lyrical, are rather for recitation or reading aloud; they are not intended for the actual accompaniment of music. Once, indeed, Musset gave us a lyric, which is not only singable, but which seems to insist on an alliance with music. This single song is the "Mimi Pinson," with its exquisite commingling of wit and melancholy. For the most part, the stanzas of Musset are too full of fire and ardor to be classed as familiar verse; they have too resonant a note of passion; and despite their brilliance they are of a truth too sad.

It is only occasionally, also, that a poem of Hugo's falls within the scope of this inquiry. His was too large an utterance for mere social verse; and the melody of his varied rhythms is too vibrating. His legends are epic in their breadth; and he lacks the unliterary simplicity and the vernacular terseness of familiar verse. For all his genius, he is deficient not only in wit and in humor, but even in the sense of humor; and there is some truth in Heine's joke that Victor Hugo's "muse had two left hands." And yet, if a selection from the greatest French poet of the nineteenth century is imperative, it is not impossible to pick out a few of his lyrics which have the needful airiness and grace and charm. To one of these, translated by Miss Ethel Grey, she gave the rather commonplace title, "My Pretty Neighbor."

If you've nothing, dear, to tell me,
Why, each morning passing by,
With your sudden smiles compel me,
To adore you, then repel me,
Pretty little neighbor, why?
Why, if you have naught to tell me,
Do you so my patience try?

If you've nothing, sweet, to teach me,
Tell me why you press my hand?
I'll attend if you'll impeach me
Of my sins, or even preach me
Sermons hard to understand:
But, if you have naught to teach me,
Dear, your meaning I demand!

If you wish me, love, to leave you,
Why for ever walk my way?
Then, when gladly I receive you,
Wherefore do I seem to grieve you?
Must I then, in truth, believe you
Wish me, darling, far away?
Do you wish me, love, to leave you?
Pretty little neighbor, say!

From the treasury of "Enamels and Cameos" there is only the embarrassment of choosing, as no French poet has written poems more translucent and colloquially easy than Théophile Gautier. His is the clear serenity of temper and the unfailing certainty of stroke which reveal the master of social verse. But the French poet's invincible dexterity is the despair of the translator. How render into another language the firmly chiseled stanzas of a lyrist who was enamoured of the vocabulary, and who was ever wooing it ardently and successfully? As Mr. Henry James says, Gautier "loved words for themselves—for their look, their aroma, their color, their fantastic intimations." Locker-Lampson accomplished the almost impossible feat of finding English equivalents for Gautier's French—in the first two quatrains of "A Winter Fantasy"—but even he thought it best to end his own poem in his own way. Mr. Austin Dobson's "Ars Victrix," triumphant as it is in the transfusion of the spirit of Gautier's deepest lyric, is rather a paraphrase than a translation. And perhaps this poem, with all its ease and lightness, is a little too stately and too majestic for true familiar verse:

All passes. Art alone
Enduring stays to us;
The bust outlasts the throne—
The coin, Tiberius.

Of one of Gautier's less fortunate contemporaries, Felix d'Arvers, nothing survives save a single sonnet, perhaps imbued with too puissant a melancholy to be admitted without challenge amid poems brief and brilliant and buoyant; but Longfellow's translation, although not quite so perfect as some of his renderings of Uhland, is so excellent that it pleads for the inclusion of the solitary poem by which alone its author's name is withheld from oblivion.

Another fellow-lyrist of Gautier's, whose fate was sadder even than that of d'Arvers, was Gérard de Nerval, one of whose lyrics has had the good fortune to tempt Mr. Andrew Lang to turn it into English:

AN OLD TUNE

There is an air for which I would disown
 Mozart's, Rossini's, Weber's melodies—
 A sweet, sad air that languishes and sighs,
 And keeps its secret charm for me alone.

Whene'er I hear that music vague and old,
 Two hundred years are mist that rolls
 away;
 The thirteenth Louis reigns, and I behold
 A green land golden in the dying day.

An old, red castle, strong with stony towers,
 The windows gay with many-colored glass;
 Wide plains, and rivers flowing among
 flowers,
 That bathe the castle basement as they
 pass.

In antique weed, with dark eyes and gold
 hair,
 A lady looks forth from her window high;
 It may be that I knew and found her fair
 In some forgotten life, long time gone by.



ERE COMES THE NIGHT

AH, pain that a rose should die,
 That a lily's grace should fail;
 That dark should dim a sunset sky,
 And a rainbow's glory pale—
 And lovers say good-bye!

Alas, that Youth is fleet—
 Swifter than Age is swift—
 That dearest hopes have wingèd feet,
 And Love's a transient gift,
 As shadowy as sweet.

So kiss we while we may,
 While lips are still afire.
 For all too surely creeps a day
 When fades the dear desire
 To ashes cold and gray.

Too surely comes the night
 When the star of Love shall set,
 And the bitter snow of Time lie white,
 And the soul would best forget
 The old, beloved delight.

NANNIE BYRD TURNER.



THE NEW DISEASE

ETHEL—Have you noticed how melancholy George looks when he rides?
 LUCILLE—Yes; he is getting automobilious.



BUT for lace and lingerie woman would have little temptation to be vain—
 and man little temptation.