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PREFACE

The headmaster of one of our foremost public schools told me not long since that he had been asked what canons he thought it most essential to observe in translating from English into Latin. His answer was that in the first place the Latin must be idiomatic, in the second it must flow, and in the third it must keep as near as it could to the English from which it was being translated.

I said, "Then you hold that if either the Latin or the English must perforce give place, it is the English that should yield rather than the Latin?"

This, he replied, was his opinion; and surely the very sound canons above given apply to all translation. The genius of the language into which a translation is being made is the first thing to be considered; if the original was readable, the translation must be so also, or however good it may be as a construe, it is not a translation.

It follows that a translation should depart hardly at all from the modes of speech current in the translator's own times, inasmuch as nothing is readable, for long, which affects any other diction than that of the age in which it is written. We know the charm of the Elizabethan translations, but he who would attempt one that shall vie with these must eschew all Elizabethanisms that are not good Victorianisms also.

For the charm of the Elizabethans does not lie in their Elizabethanisms; these are but as the mosses and lichens which Time will grow upon our Victorian literature as surely as he has grown them upon the Elizabethan—upon such of it, at least, as has not been jerry-built. Shakespeare tells us that it is Time's glory to stamp the seal of time on aged things. No doubt; but he will have no hands stamp it save his own; he will rot an artificial

ruin, but he will not glorify it; if he is to hallow any work it must be frankly secular when he deigns to take it in hand—by this I mean honestly after the manner of its own age and country. The Elizabethans probably knew this too well to know that they knew it, but whether they knew it or no they did not lard a crib with Chaucerisms and think that they were translating. They aimed fearlessly and without taint of affectation at making a dead author living to a generation other than his own. To do this they transfused their blood into his cold veins, and quickened him with their own livingness.

Then the life is theirs not his? In part no doubt it is so; but if they have loved him well enough, his life will have entered into them and possessed them. They will have given him of their life, and he will have paid them in their own coin. If, however, the mouth of the ox who treads out the corn may not be muzzled, and if there is to be a certain give and take between a dead author and his translator, it follows that a translator should be allowed greater liberty when the work he is translating belongs to an age and country widely remote from his own. For a poem's prosperity is like a jest's—it is in the ear of him that hears it. It takes two people to say a thing—a sayee as well as a sayer—and by parity of reasoning a poem's original audience and environment are integral parts of the poem itself. Poem and audience are as ego and nonego; they blend into one another. Change either, and some corresponding change, spiritual rather than literal, will be necessary in the other, if the original harmony between them is to be preserved.

Happily in the cases both of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* we can see clearly enough that the audiences did not differ so widely from ourselves as we might expect after an interval of some three thousand years. But they differ, especially in the case of the *Iliad*, and the difference necessitates a greater amount of freedom on the part of a translator than would be tolerable if it did not exist.

Freedom of another kind is further involved in the initial liberty of rendering in prose a work that was composed in verse. Prose differs from verse much as singing from speaking or dancing from walking, and what is right in the one is often wrong in the other. Prose, for example, does not permit that iteration of epithet and title, sometimes due merely to the requirements of meter, and sometimes otiose, which abounds in the *Iliad* without in any way disfiguring it. We look, indeed, for the iteration and enjoy it. We are never weary of being told that Juno is white-armed, Minerva gray-eyed, and Agamemnon king of men; but had Homer written in prose he would not have told us these things so often. Therefore, though frequently allowing common forms epithets and titles to recur, I have not less frequently suppressed them.

Lest, however, the reader should imagine that I have departed from the letter of the *Iliad* more than I have, I will give the first fifty lines or so of the best prose translation that has yet been made—I mean that of Messrs. Leaf, Lang, and Myers, to which throughout my work I have been greatly indebted. Often have they saved me from error, and rarely have I found occasion to differ from them as to the meaning of a passage. I do not believe that I have translated a single paragraph without reference to them, but this said, a comparison of their opening paragraphs with my own will show the kind of way in which I differ from them as to the manner in which Homer should be translated.

Their translation (here, by Dr. Leaf) opens thus:

Sing, goddess, the wrath of Achilles Peleus' son,
the ruinous wrath that brought on the Achaians woes
innumerable, and hurled down into Hades many strong
souls of heroes, and gave their bodies to be a prey to dogs
and all winged fowls; and so the counsel of Zeus wrought
out its accomplishment from the day when strife first
parted Atreides king of men and noble Achilles.