

Gladstone's Horace.*

THAT Mr. Gladstone should have devoted some of his spare time to the literary relaxation of translating Horace is a thing which should not surprise us. The study of the classics has always been a favorite change of work to that wonderfully active mind, which finds in change, whether political or literary, its most soothing form of rest; and in his day, more than in the present, a gentleman's education was not considered complete without some knowledge of composition in verse. But if, with his great command of English, Mr. Gladstone has done what almost any educated man might do, that is no reason why he should publish it. As the work of one in the evening of a long life—full of harder work than falls to most men's lot—as the work of one whom all must respect and admire, even if they do not love him politically—as the work of Gladstone's leisure moments, this translation might be read without criticism; but he himself apparently means it to be taken seriously, as in some measure supplying a demand for a New Translation of Horace. That there is still room for a good version of the fascinating Roman for English readers none will deny, least of all those who have read and tried to translate him, but Mr. Gladstone can hardly be said to fill it. At times he does rise near the Horatian level, particularly in some of the political odes, in Book III., and especially in Ode V., which contains the speech of Regulus to the Senate—an ode which he calls, and with good reason, the loftiest of all.

Full well he knew he must abide
The savage captor's torturing wrath,
Yet none the less he thrust aside
Obstructing kin, and all that barred his path;

As though from client's wrangling care
Some ended suit had set him free,
For his Venafran farm, or where
Tarentum Sparta-born salutes the sea.

This is excellent; the metre and rhythm just suit the measured dignity of the original, and the characteristically Horatian anticlimax of the concluding stanza, which ends the ode, not with the rushing fortissimo, but with the gentle and serene andante, of a great purpose moving smoothly to its goal.

A good principle is laid down in the Preface, that compression rather than expansion should be the aim of a translator, and that he should keep close to the Latin so as to preserve the sense and point of the author; and this he has carried out conscientiously throughout, but in avoiding this Scylla he falls at times into the Charybdis of leaving his version so literal as to need a reference to the Latin to elucidate it. "A public care" (II. 8) for instance, does not represent to us what Horace means by "publica cura," nor does "Which, Venus! holds by thy decree the fifth part of thy nectar's bliss" seem an adequate translation of "quae Venus quinta parte sui nectaris imbuat." In I. 9, "Vides ut alta stet nive candidum Soracte," where the picturesque word in the phrase is the emphatic "stet," it was a pity to "compress" it entirely out with "Behold Soracte white with snow," which is decidedly cheap, while Horace's word fixes the impression of strong relief against the sky which a snow-covered hill gives one.

Again in I. 14, apart from the uncouthness of the rhythm, one is puzzled to discover the meaning of

Thy gods, no more than sails entire
From whom yet once thy need might aid require;

until, looking at the book, one finds the meaning to be

Non tibi sunt integra lintea
Non Di, quos iterum pressa voces malo,

Literally, "Thy sails are not undamaged, nor are thy images of Gods—Gods meant for thee to call upon again when in distress." To quote one more instance of the same theory, any one knows that "partem solido demere de die" (I. 1, 20) means to waste part of the business hours of the day—lasting in Rome from 8 a.m. to 12 or 1—but "hours stolen from the day's entire" by no means suggests the same, except to one who is quite familiar with the Latin; and this very familiarity makes it often difficult to break quite away

from the original and represent it by words which convey the same idea to modern ears. At the same time the compression is sometimes quite tersely done, as, for instance, in III., 6, where the last stanza is packed by Horace as closely as possible, making it difficult to translate as neatly:

Damnosa quid non imminuit dies? etc.

Age cankers all things; so our grandsires' time
Bequeathed us one more ripe in crime;
Our sires did worse again beget,
And we shall yield the basest yet.

You would hardly think that the author of this would be content with turning the famous "dulce est desipere in loco" into "'tis well to rave, in time and place!" This kind of "raving" produces the figure of speech known as Bathos.

This perhaps is hardly the place to notice such minor details as slips in translation in single words; but they sometimes mar the sense, as in I. 14-16:

Tu, nisi ventis
debis ludibrium cave

Where "debis" evidently means, "are doomed, without hope to be wrecked" (in which case warning is useless)—to translate, therefore, "unless thou *dare* to be the sport of winds, beware," is quite unwarrantable. A more remarkable mistranslation occurs in I. xxv.:

Once it creaked on easy hinges,
Less and little now;
Yet I pine through endless nights, and,
Lydia, sleepest thou?

Here it appears that Lydia's door, in spite of its easy hinges, had before this been given to creaking, but had gradually stopped creaking, oiled, perhaps, by the virtuous Lydia, who now slept in peace. As a matter of fact the word "audis" is left out of the English, which should run "less and less now you hear the words 'Lydia' . . ." And it does seem a pity to have taken Bentley's conjecture "bruma" for "pluma" in IV. 10. But these are trifles. The main question to be asked with regard to the translation (except at school is, "Does it convey to the reader the feeling of the original in any one degree? Has the English writer caught the poet's inspiration and reproduced it in his own language?" Horace has many moods—tender, pathetic, lofty, playful, chatty. Mr. Gladstone varies his metres slightly, but they nearly all seem to suggest hymn-tunes, and generally "Melcombe" at that. Did he, we wonder, like naughty Burns, take a tune first and write the song to it? Here is a dainty playful ode, II. 8. The hymn-tune is "Troyte No. 1."

Thy mother's ashes; night's dumb sky;
The gods that never chill nor die;
Whole heaven; it answer, if on all,
Thou falsely call.

Venus, nay Nymph's untainted smile;
And cruel cupid, glad the while,
Heats, on his whetstone, red with gore,
His arrowy store.

Here "glad the while" is, of course, padding for the rhyme; the rest is correct enough—gets all the words in—but it is dull, dead, dull.

I. 24, is one of the most pathetic odes of Horace, a consolation to Virgil on the death of his friend Quintilius; it becomes:

What bounds can Shame, can Moderation set,
For one so dear, to yearning and regret?
Lead thou the dirge, for Jove, Melpomene,
Gave lyre and song to thee.

This is "elegant" and might have come from the pen of the "ingenious Mr. Pope" had not the fourth line been too short, but pathos or any kind of emotion it simply lacks. Once more, I. vii. is an ode with a rhythm like the gallop of a horse, and words, particularly, towards the end, to make any heart beat faster in sympathy with the Viking-spirit of Teucer driven out into unknown seas; by changing the dactylic rhythm to iambic the lilt is entirely lost, though the lines correspond in lengths, while the words are calm and not otherwise than depressing.

Let sires be sires; if Fortune kindly show,
O friends and partners, on we go.
Who shall despair where Teucer rules and guides?
For sure Apollo's word provides

*"The Odes of Horace," translated into English. By W. E. Gladstone. New York: Scribners' Sons.