

THE SATURDAY READER.

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"THE TWO WIVES OF THE KING."

TRANSLATED FOR THE SATURDAY READER FROM THE FRENCH OF PAUL FEVAL.

HOMERIC TRANSLATIONS.

IN the present number of the *Saturday Reader*, we hasten to fulfill a promise lately made—namely, to lay before the friends who peruse our pages, some specimens of Homeric translations, done into ballad shape by the late Dr. Maginn, and which productions first saw the light, some nineteen or twenty years ago, in the columns of *Fraser's Magazine*. But before we proceed to the immediate accomplishment of our task, we shall have to make some necessary preliminary observations; and these observations we may liken to so many acclivities, up which we should desire the reader to accompany us, if he wish to enjoy, to its full extent, the beauty of the landscape that lies beyond, smiling in perpetual summer loveliness.

Some years after Maginn's death, his Homeric Ballads were collected into a volume and published in London. The work was edited anonymously by a gentleman, an excellent Greek scholar, who had acted under Dr. Maginn, as a sort of sub-editor of *Fraser*. This gentleman says: "Dr. Maginn may be esteemed the first who consciously realized to himself the truth that Greek ballads can be really represented in English only by a similar measure. This is his great praise, and will continue after the success of his translation shall have been ratified by other workmen in the same field. . . . It is a sufficient condemnation of the various specimens of hexameter translation which have been published of late years to say, that they answer to nothing in English. A really successful version of Homer, when made, will appear in some form already existing in our literature. Such an attempt is in no way superseded by the present publication, which will rather serve it as a prelude and harbinger. On the other hand, no triumph of subsequent translations can detract from the merit of a work by which the ground was first broken up—a work which, like *The Lays of Ancient Rome*, its natural associate in the public mind, though its junior in point of time, aims at resolving, into their constituent elements, whether primary or not, the records of a nation's antiquity."

Another excellent judge, and Greek scholar, speaks of these translations as follows: "For antique dignity and faithfulness they are unsurpassed by any versions in our language, and will carry his name down to all time with that of Pope. . . . One is a translation—the other a paraphrase. Those who wish to know *what* and *how* Homer wrote, must meet Maginn—those who seek to be delighted with the *Iliad* must peruse Pope. . . . The writings on which Maginn appears to have bestowed most care, were the Homeric Ballads."

We shall now proceed from the prosaic to the

poetic part of our task. In order to test the fidelity of the translations, we shall, in some cases append a strictly literal rendering, as given by Theodore Alois Buckley, B.A. This rendering is in prose, and we can assure our readers is an exact transcript of the original; but of course, the melody of Homer, and the graces of versification, have been sacrificed—a proceeding which was unavoidable.

THE ARMING OF ACHILLES.

[Achilles arms himself to proceed to the field in order to avenge the death of his beloved friend, Patroclus, slain by Hector, the principal defender of Troy.]

I.

As snow-flakes are driven through the wintry heaven
When Boreas fiercely blows,
So thick and so fast, helms beaming bright,
And bossy shields, and corsets tight,
And ash-spears ready for the fight,
Out from the ships arose.

II.

And their brilliant beam, in dazzling stream,
Skyward ascending soared,
And the sheen which their armour shed around
Lit with a laugh the kindling ground,
While their trampling feet raised a thunder sound,
As they closed about their lord.

III.

His teeth he gnashed, and his eye-balls flashed
Like the flame of a burning brand;
His soul with grief and rage was fraught;
And wrapping his heart in vengeful thought,
He harnessed himself in the armour wrought,
And given by Hephestus* hand.

IV.

First, with the grasp of a silver clasp,
His greaves did he buckle on;
Then he armed his breast with a bright cuirass,
Flung round his shoulders his sword of brass,
Uplifted his shield, a ponderous mass,
Like the moon from afar it shone.

V.

As when sailors, who keep on the storm-vexed deep
Their way with unwilling oar,
The blaze of a distant fire espy
From some lonely fold on the mountains high,
When forced by the blast their course they fly,
Driven away from their native shore;

VI.

So to heaven shot the light from the buckler bright
That guarded Achilles' breast.
Next lifted he up to sheath his head,
His helmet of strength fit for combat dread,
Around, like a star was its lustre shed
Beneath the horse-hair crest.

VII.

And the golden thread, so thickly spread
By Hephestus the cane around,
Waved in the air, as the chief essayed,
If close to his shape were the armour laid,
If his shapely limbs in free motion played
Within its harness bound.

VIII.

With the lightsome spring of a bird's fleet wing
Buoyant they bore him on;
And next from the spear-case he went to take
His father's spear, huge, massy of make,
Which no other hand in the host could shake
Save his good right hand alone.

[Achilles having mounted his chariot proceeds to address his horse:]

XII.

"My bright bay horse,—my fleet of course,
Podargé's far-famed brood—
Yours be it your master back to bear
From the battle-field now with surer care
Leave me not as you left Patroclus there,
All weltering in his blood."

XIII.

Then out upspoke from beneath the yoke
His dapple-foot steed of bay,
Low stooped his head, and the mane around
His yoke encircling swept over the ground,
For Hector had given him vocal sound
Achilles' fate to say.

XIV.

"Once yet again from the battle plain,
Safe back we bear thee home;
But thy hour of death is hastening nigh,
All blameless are we, yet thou must die,
Slain by the hand of a godhead high,
Such is Fate's relentless doom.

XV.

"By no lack of speed, no sloth of steed,
Patroclus' arms were lost;
It was he, most glorious god of light,
The son of fair Leto, of tresses bright,
Who slew him amid the foremost fight,
And gave Hector the fame to boast.

XVI.

"By our flight as fast as Zephyrus' blast
Was thy chariot whirled along,
Yet here it is fated thy bones be laid,
By a god's strong power and a mortal's blade."
Mute was the horse when these words were said,
For the Furies chained his tongue.

XVII.

Then with angry word the swift-foot lord,
Thus spoke his prophetic horse:
"Why, Xanthus, in boding tone,
Hast thou my coming death forewarned?
Needless to tell what so well is known,
That here I lay my corse.

XVIII.

"It is fixed by Fate that I end my days
From my father's land afar;
But still ere my day of life runs out,
No war shall the Trojans lack or rout."
So said he; and, with a thundering shout,
Drove his steeds in the thickest war.

We shall now give our readers an opportunity of comparing the above with the original:

"And as when thick snow-flakes fly down from Jove, beneath the force of the cold, air-clearing Boreas; so from the ships were borne out, crowded helmets, shining brightly, and bossed shields, strong-cavitated corsets and ashén spears. But the sheen reached to heaven, and all the earth around smiled beneath the splendour of the brass; and a trampling of the feet of men arose beneath. In the midst, noble Achilles was armed, and there was a gnashing of his teeth, and his eyes shone like a blaze of fire; but intolerable grief entered his heart within him; and, enraged against the Trojans, he put on the gifts of the god, which Vulcan, toiling, had fabricated for him. First around his legs he placed the beautiful greaves, joined with silver clasps, next he put on the corset round his breast, and suspended from his shoulders, the brazen, silver-studded swords; then he seized the shield, large and solid, the sheen of which went to a great distance, as of the moon. And as when from the sea the blaze of a burning fire shines to mariners, which is lit aloft among the mountains in a solitary place; but the storm bears them against their inclination away from their friends over the fishy deep; so from the shield of Achilles, beautifully and skillfully made, the brightness reached the sky. But raising it he put the strong helmet on his head; and the helmet, crested with horse-hair, shone like a star; and the golden tufts which Vulcan had diffused thick around the cone were shaken. When noble Achilles tried himself in his arms if they would fit him, and if his fair limbs would move freely in them; but they were like wings to him, and lifted up the shepherd of the people," etc.

One of the most famous episodes in the *Iliad* is the colloquy of Glaucus and Diomedes in the Sixth Book. Dr. Maginn says, in his introduction to his translation, that we have here "the magnificently Homeric comparison of the generations of men to the generations of leaves, which was one of the greatest favourites of antiquity." The whole translation, though very beautiful, is too lengthy for our columns, but we give the first stanza as a specimen of Maginn's powers of versification. Glaucus thus addresses Diomedes:

Why do you ask, bold Tydeus' son,
Why do you ask, what race am I?
As forest leaves have come and gone,
So does the race of mankind lie!
The wind outblows, and straightway strows
The scattered leaves upon the ground;
But soon the wood blooms green in bud,
When again the spring-tide hours come round.

* Vulcan.

† Juno.

‡ Apollo.