

lets put up some on supplementary  
Aeneid page

## THE AENEIDS OF VERGIL

1875

### 34. Unsigned review, *Athenaeum*

13 November 1875, no. 2507, 635-7

This appreciative review is entitled 'A New Translation of the *Aeneid*'.

We have never seen any attempt made to account for the fact that while, for some time past, every two or three years' interval has seen a new translation of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, there should have been published, so far as we know, within anything like recent times, only two translations of the *Aeneid*. Of these, that by Mr. Rickards was the praiseworthy effort of a man occupied in other business to find a 'humane' employment for his leisure hours, and probably gained but few readers beyond the circle of the author's friends, if, indeed, it ever reached any other than a private circulation; it was, if we remember right, in ten-syllable couplets. The second, on the other hand, as the work of a scholar by profession, and one who had given much attention to Vergil in particular, was looked for with some interest, all the more so as the author, after balancing the claims of various metres to represent the Vergilian hexameter, and deciding, perhaps with reason, that the heroic couplet challenged too close a comparison with the sonorous verse of Dryden, while blank verse was an instrument only to be wielded by a consummate poet, selected the metre rendered familiar by Scott as giving 'the best chance of imparting to his work that rapidity of utterance which is indispensably necessary to a long narrative poem.' The experiment can hardly be said to have succeeded, and Prof. Conington's translation is, we fear, by this time almost forgotten, except by those whom his eminence as a scholar induced at the time to possess themselves of the book. In reading his Preface, however,

one thing strikes us as remarkable, namely, that among the metres which he discusses that one should be entirely omitted which has the oldest claim of all to represent the epic hexameter. It is more strange, too, that it should not have suggested itself to him in the course of his work. When we read such a passage as the following—

King Anius, king and priest in one,  
With bay-crowned tresses hoar,  
Hastes to accost us, and is known  
Anchises' friend of yore.  
We grasp his friendly hand in proof  
Of welcome, and approach his roof.  
The sacred temple I adored.  
Of immemorial stone:  
'O grant us, Thymbra's gracious lord,  
A mansion of our own.'

we see at once that the metre of the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' is, after all, merely a modification of the true English heroic metre known as common measure, and consisting of alternate eight and six-syllable lines, or, more accurately, couplets of fourteen-syllable lines. This, as all the world knows, is the metre which George Chapman, the father of English translation in verse, used in that noble attempt to render the *Iliad* into English, which, with all its defects, has yet more vitality than any of its successors, and bids fair to make the name of its author outlast, as a translator of Homer, all subsequent ones, from Pope to Lord Derby. Such being the case, it seems curious that no one, as far as we know, before Mr. Morris should have bethought him of the possibility of employing the same metre in rendering the *Aeneid*. We can only say that the experiment has been fully justified by the results: Whether for elegance of verse or accuracy of translation, Mr. Morris's *Aeneids of Virgil* (the plural form is apparently suggested by Chapman's *Iliads*) must be pronounced the most satisfactory attempt that has yet been made to present the greatest of Roman poets to English readers. Let our readers judge, for Christopher North's opinion that the secret of reviewing was plentiful quotation certainly holds in the case of a long poem; still more when that poem is a translation, which must be estimated from a double point of view. We will first give Mr. Morris's version of a beautiful and well-known bit of description in the first Book:—

There goes a long firth of the sea, made haven by an isle,  
Against whose sides thrust out abroad each wave the main doth send

Is broken, and must cleave itself through hollow lights to wend  
 Huge rocks on this hand and on that, twin horns of cliff, cast dread  
 On very heaven; and far and wide beneath each mighty head  
 Hushed are the harmless waters; lo, the flickering wood above  
 And wavering shadow cast adown by darksome hanging grove:  
 In face whereof a cliff there is of rocks o'erhung made meet  
 With benches of the living stone, and springs of water sweet,  
 The house of nymphs: a riding there may way-worn ships be bold  
 To lie without the hawser's strain or anchor's hooked hold.

We are at once struck by the exceeding literalness which Mr. Morris has been able to attain. With the exception of the 'horns of cliff,' there is hardly a word in this whole passage which has not its corresponding word in the Latin. 'The flickering wood' gives no less than the *silvis coruscis* of the original, the play of the sunlight through the boughs on the top of the cliff, contrasting with the *atrum nemus* in the shaded part below the edge. While on this subject, we cannot refrain from giving our readers a French translator's rendering of the three lines 163-165. They are a good specimen of the translation, which aims at elegance, somewhat to the neglect of accuracy:—

Balancés par les vents, de bois aigrent son front;  
 A ses pieds le flot dort dans un calme profond;  
 Et des arbres touffus l'amphithéâtre sombre  
 Prolonge sur les flots la noirceur de son ombre.<sup>1</sup>

M. Delille has, indeed, rendered, though he has transposed it, the *scena* which Mr. Morris has rather shirked; but the last line, lovely as it is, introduces an idea of which there is no trace in the original.

We proceed to give another, and this time a longer, extract. We should say that we have not selected it for any special excellence, rather because it is a well-known passage, containing a vivid picture, and complete in itself:—

Far mid the sea a rock there is, facing the shore-line's foam,  
 Which beat by overtopping waves, is drowned and hidden oft,

<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from Jacques Delille's translation of the *Aeneid*, published in 1804. There are three errors in the quotation: the first line concludes, 'des bois ceignent son front', and the last line refers to 'les eaux' rather than 'les flots':

Moved by the winds, trees encircle its brow;  
 At its feet the sea sleeps in a profound calm;  
 And the dark ampitheatre of the leafy trees  
 Prolongs the darkness of its shadow upon the waves.

All translations here and in the next review are by the present editor.

What time the stormy North-west hides the sun in heaven aloft:  
 But otherwhiles it lies at peace, when nought the sea doth move,  
 And riseth up a meadow fair that sunning sea-gulls love.

[quotes next 54 lines]

We cannot give the conclusion of this famous boat-race, but the passage we have quoted is a very fair specimen of Mr. Morris's work. The flow of the verse must strike the most casual reader; and in order to see the advance in mere technical skill made by the last 280 years, it is sufficient to read aloud first a page of Chapman, and then a page of the Victorian poet. There is a fine excitement in galloping a good horse over rocks: but smooth turf is preferable for a continuance. Yet Mr. Morris's verse is not singsong or monotonous; a short inspection will show the art with which the pauses are arranged. The literalness is almost more exact here than in our former extract; the only fault that we can suggest being the rendering, twice repeated, of 'lævus' by 'lee.' The sound of the Latin may have suggested a word which is out of place in a rowing-match, though no doubt if Gyas and Cloanthus had been at Cowes it would have properly described the situation. In the second case at least, 'left-hand' might have been retained without much detriment to the verse. Some may possibly object to Mr. Morris's use of archaic words, such as 'twiyoke' here, and others in other places; but, as Mr. Conington pointed out, they are at least as defensible as Vergil's own 'faxo,' 'aulai,' or 'olli.' One word, however which occurs in this passage, reminds us to find fault. We must demur to the translator's perpetual use of 'dight' as a present. Surely it is the past tense and participle of 'to deck,' so that such a phrase as 'the feast she dights again' is a mere solecism. May we remind Mr. Morris of the good word 'busk,' with which his study of the Sagas must have made him familiar? While we are in a censorious frame, let us specify one or two other points which a second edition may correct. 'Stored' and 'broad,' is a very bad rhyme; 'fierce' and 'ears' not much better. Then 'from everywhither' is surely not English, nor, as far as we can make out, are the following: 'Her whom the Fates would ne'er be moved'; 'Rumour, of whom nought swifter is of any evil thing.' As to renderings of the Latin, we have already said that Mr. Morris seems to us to surpass, both in fidelity and accuracy, all Vergilian translators, 'quot sunt quotque fuere,'<sup>1</sup> but even he slips now and then. 'Panthus, how fares it at the worst?' 'Fearing where no fear was,' do not, we believe,

<sup>1</sup> As many as there are, and as many as have been.

represent 'Quo res summa loco, Panthu?'<sup>1</sup> or, 'Omnia tuta timens';<sup>2</sup> and, in Book VII., l. 467, Mr. Morris is, to make a poor joke, very much at sea. 'Unda' is no doubt the sea sometimes, but hardly when it is a brazen cauldron. The whole passage in which this occurs is indeed perhaps the weakest in the entire volume: 'furit intus' is poorly rendered by 'within comes rage to pass.' Once only, throughout the whole 10,000 lines or so, is Mr. Morris guilty of a real cacophony. In VII., 300-2, we have these grand lines:—

Absumptæ in Teucros vires cælique marisque.  
Quid Syrtes, aut Scylla mihi, quid vasta Charybdis  
Profuit?<sup>3</sup>

which are thus rendered:—

Against these Teucrians sea and sky have spent their strength for nought:  
Was Syrtes aught, or Scylla aught, or huge Charybdis aught?

We can only hope that Mr. Morris, after the manner of poets, does not regard the second of these as the best line he has ever written, and that we may not be visited with Mr. Swinburne's scathing satire for our bad taste in thinking it ugly.

No review of a translation of the *Æneid* is, we suppose, complete without a reference to its most famous passage. We will, therefore, give Mr. Morris's version of Bk. VI. 869-887, premising, however, that he hardly seems to us quite to rise to the occasion; but that is only saying that the highest poetry cannot be moved out of its own words without injury:—

Then midst the rising of his tears father Anchises spoke:  
'O son, search not the mighty woe and sorrow of thy folk!  
The Fates shall show him to the world, nor longer blossoming  
Shall give. O Gods that dwell on high, belike o'ergreat a thing  
The Roman tree should seem to you. Should this your gift endure,  
How great a wail of mighty men that Field of Fame shall pour  
On Mavor's mighty city walls: what death rites seest thou there,  
O Tiber, as thou glidest by his new wrought tomb and fair!  
No child that is of Ilian stock in Latin sires shall raise  
Such glorious hope; nor shall the land of Romulus e'er praise  
So fair and great a nursling child mid all it ever bore.

<sup>1</sup> Panthus, where is the main action?

<sup>2</sup> Fearing everything even when it was safe.

<sup>3</sup> The strength of sky and sea were spent against the Trojans. What use to me were the Syrtes, Scylla, or vast Charybdis?

Goodness, and faith of ancient days, and hand unmatched in war,  
Alas for all! No man unhurt has raised a weaponed hand  
Against him, whether he afoot had met the foeman's band,  
Or smitten spur amid the flank of eager foaming horse.  
O child of all men's ruth, if thou the bitter Fates mayst force,  
Thou art Marcellus. Reach ye hands of lily-blooms fulfilled;  
For I will scatter purple flowers, and heap such offerings spilled  
Unto the spirit of my child, and empty service do.'

One more short quotation and we have done. Mr. Morris has, to our thinking, written no finer line than that with which the whole work closes; and we give it, with the two preceding:—

Deep in that breast he driveth sword e'en as the word he saith;  
But Turnus,—waxen cold and spent, the body of him lies,  
And with a groan through dusk and dark the scornful spirit flies.

Whether any Keats of the twenty-second century will immortalize Mr. Morris by his gratitude we cannot say; but we predict that our great-great-grandchildren will consider not the least claim to remembrance possessed by the author of the *Earthly Paradise* to be that he was the translator of Vergil.

### 35. Henry Nettleship, review, *Academy*

November 1875, x, 493-4

Nettleship (1839-93) was a classical scholar; he became Professor of Latin Literature at Oxford in 1878.

The very long quotations have been abbreviated.

Few things are more interesting than to study a poet's translation of a poet (now unhappily a rare phenomenon), and to observe how the translator in reading, as it were, the heart of his brother, breathes a new spirit into his utterances, recasts his work in another mould, and enables men to enjoy it afresh in another aspect and in the feeling of a living inspiration. And it should be added that apart from the general interest which on this ground must attach to Mr. Morris's work, he is entitled to special gratitude for having grappled with a poem which no translator but a poet is likely to handle with sustained success. The *Aeneid* (why *Aeneids* Mr. Morris should explain) is a work so complex in its texture, so full of poetical reserve, of so exquisite a workmanship, and uniting so many elements of epic majesty, romance, pathos, eloquence, that if the air of poetry be wanting to it a translation of Virgil is apt at times to flag, or to lapse into dulness and rhetoric.

The breath of poetry informs the whole work, but this must not be held to imply that Mr. Morris has not taken a strict view of his duties as a translator. He has studied the language of Virgil in all its uncommon and original turns with the care of a scholar; the number of lines in each book is, if we mistake not, accurately reproduced; the periods are ended as Virgil ended them, and his unfinished lines never finished. Mr. Morris's metre, the long ballad verse, sets the whole poem, as it were, to a national and popular music, and thus suggests a main characteristic of the *Aeneid*—a work, by the by, which has been so mercilessly dissected for scholastic purposes and (perhaps partly in consequence) has met with so much unreasonable and piecemeal criticism that it has almost come to be forgotten how genuinely Virgil was accepted, not merely by men of letters, but by the people of Rome,

as the true poetical representative of his time. And this ballad character of the *Aeneid* is not merely suggested by Mr. Morris's metre, but by his constant and most Virgilian choice (sometimes amounting to mannerism) of antiquarian language, as well as by the general liveliness and flavour of his diction. Nor does Mr. Morris ever lose sight of the incomparable grace and beauty of soul that inspired Virgil's verse—into which, indeed, as a few specimens will show immediately, he sometimes reads a new poetical feeling of his own. It may be said, indeed, that the general effect of his work is quite unique, and that, since Dryden, no Englishman has translated Virgil with such insight and sympathy. Dryden has, of course, a power and mastery of his own which enables him at times to deal with Virgil's grander efforts as perhaps no English poet but Milton (had he attempted it) could have done; and it should also be remembered that a freer play was allowed by poets in Dryden's time than in our own to the rhetorical element, which is so strong in Virgil. But in the melodious passages of meditation and enjoyment with which the *Aeneid* abounds Mr. Morris is master of the situation, as the two following specimens will show (vii. 25, viii. 86):—

Now reddened all the sea with rays, and from the heavenly plain  
The golden-hued Aurora shone amidst her rosy wain.  
Then fell the winds, and every air sank down in utter sleep,  
And now the shaven oars must strive amid the sluggish deep;  
Therewith Aeneas sees a wood rise from the water's face,  
And there it is the Tiber's flood amidst a pleasant place,  
With many a whirling eddy swift and yellowing with sand,  
Breaks into sea; and diversely above on either hand  
The fowl that love the river bank, and haunt the river bed,  
Sweetened the air with plenteous song, and through the thicket fled.  
So there Aeneas bids his folk shoreward their bows to lay,  
And joyfully he entereth in the stream's o'ershadowed way.

[second passage omitted]

Much of the chill dread of the opening of Virgil's *Inferno* is preserved in the following beautiful passage (vi. 268):—

All dim amid the lonely night on through the dusk they went,  
On through the empty house of Dis, the land of nought at all,  
E'en as beneath the doubtful moon, when niggard light doth fall  
Upon some way amid the woods, when God hath hidden heaven,

[quotes next 18 lines]

But it is a pity that a translator who, as a rule, cultivates the most scholarly accuracy should repeat a conventional blunder which mars so much of the beauty of the passage, and render *faucibus Orci* 'the jaws of hell.' If we are not mistaken, *fauces* means not the jaws but the throat, metaphorically (as in a house) any close passage, and here, the narrow entrance to Orcus. The idea of hell as a monster with jaws was as foreign to Virgil as to the whole of the Greek and Roman mythology, in which the imagery of the underworld is mostly drawn from houses and cities. And there is another point here to which it may be of interest to draw attention. Does *consanguineus Leti sopor*<sup>1</sup> mean sleep or lethargy, as has been suggested by an ingenious critic? We incline to think the latter; partly, because sleep has no proper place among the *terribiles visu formae*,<sup>2</sup> partly, also, because the lines under consideration contain an interesting reminiscence of Lucretius, iii. 459, seqq., where disease, sorrow, grief, fear and lethargy are mentioned together:—

His accedit uti videamus, corpus ut ipsum  
Suscipere immanis morbos durumque dolorem,  
Sic animum curas acris luctumque metumque

\* \* \* \* \*

Interdumque gravi lethargo fertur in altum  
Aeternumque soporem oculis nutuque cadenti.<sup>3</sup>

The argument might not be worth pressing were it not that the sixth Aeneid shows other marked traces of Virgil's study of Lucretius' third book.

Let us now try Mr. Morris in another vein, that of invective. The following is his rendering of Dido's great speech (iv. 365):—

Traitor, no goddess brought thee forth, nor Dardanus was first  
Of thine ill race, but Caucasus on spiky crags accurst  
Begot thee, and Hyrcanian dugs of tigers suckled thee.  
Why hide it now, why hold me back, lest greater evil be?

[quotes next 18 lines]

And this of Drances' eloquence (xi., 342):—

A matter dark to none, and which no voice of mine doth need,  
Thou counsellest on, sweet king; for all confess in very deed

<sup>1</sup> Sleep, the brother of Death.

<sup>2</sup> Shapes terrifying to behold.

<sup>3</sup> Then follows this, that as the body falls victim to terrible diseases and harsh pain, so the mind falls victim to biting cares, grief and fear . . . Sometimes, in a heavy lethargy, it is carried off into a deep and eternal sleep, when the eyes and head fall nodding.

They wot whereto our fortune drives, but fear their speech doth hide;  
Let him give liberty of speech, and sink his windy pride  
Because of whose unhappy fate and evil life and will—  
Yea, I will speak, despite his threats to smite me and to kill,  
So many days of dukes are done, and all the city lies  
O'erwhelmed with grief, the while his luck round camps of Troy he tries,  
Trusting to flight, and scaring Heaven with clashing of his sword.  
One gift, meseems, thou shouldest add, most gracious king and lord,  
Unto the many gifts thou biddest bear to the Dardan folk,  
Nor bow thyself to violence, nor lie beneath its yoke.

In these passages and in some others of the same character Mr. Morris's genius is, we think, less successful in reproducing the spirit and animation of the original; the English halts where the Latin is a continuous stream of rapid movement. And in one or two places in the last passage something is lost by inaccurate translation. *Unhappy fate* is too modern and vague to be an equivalent for the distinct Roman conception of *auspicium infaustum*, which rather means *unhappy forecasting* or *foresight*, and so *unhappy leadership*; and surely *lumina ducum* does not mean *the days* or *lives of leaders*, but the light which they shed; this, at least, would seem the more poetical idea. We mention these small points only after some consideration, and because we have found Mr. Morris, as a rule, as careful in his renderings as he is scrupulous and delicate in his handling of metre and rhythm. More than once, indeed, we have found that an expression apparently inaccurate was, on second thoughts, justified by a consideration of the whole poetical conditions of the passage.

We conclude these remarks by the expression of a hope that it may be found possible to publish this book in a cheaper form. A translation of such beauty should be accessible to the large number of people whose circumstances have put the original Latin and Greek classics out of their reach, and to whom works of this kind would open a new world of ideas.