When, more than ten years ago, we were all of us reading the 'Lovers of Gudrun', and were dazzled by the strange new brilliancy of the unsetting sun of the North, many must have said that it would be a good day for English literature if the 'double might of hand' that had drawn Jason and Medea as unerringly as it had drawn Kiartan and Gudrun would turn to the one complete epic of Greece, and tell us, once for all, of the wanderings of Odysseus. It was something of disappointment, or at least of hope deferred, when Mr. Morris gave us the more elaborated, yet far less perfect, Aeneid. Sigurd, it is true, quenched all regrets for a time. If stronger or nobler poetry than its final portion has been written during the present century, I admit myself unable to name it. And now an instalment, at all events, of the long-desired Odyssey is in our hands; it is not to be thought of that it should remain an instalment. If the charm of writing it be, as it must be, even greater than the charm of reading it, Mr. Morris can surely not pause, still less desist; to do so would argue him more, or less, than human.

There is not, to my mind, any true criticism in mincing matters, in qualifying the good as abstractedly imperfect, or the bad as containing the potentiality of goodness. If to be reminded in every line of the Homeric method and fluency of narration; if to have the figures of

**THE ODYSSEY OF HOMER**

1887–8

50. E. D. A. Morshead, two reviews, *Academy*

April 1887, xxxi, 299 and March 1888, xxxii, 143–4

Morshead (1850–1912) was a classical scholar and translator who taught at Winchester. Each review is of one volume of the translation.
Odysseus, and Nausicaa, and Alcinous, acting and speaking with the same straightforward simplicity as they use in the original; if to find on every page lines that recall Homer at his best, and Mr. Morris’s best work elsewhere; if to feel everywhere the sunlight ‘of that old-world morn’—if, I repeat, the presence of these merits makes a good translation of Homer, then I think this is not only the best verse translation of any part of Homer that I have ever seen, but one of the best literary efforts, in this kind, that we possess. I do not say that it is faultless—there are tricks or mannerisms in it which recur somewhat artificially, not leaving on the mind quite the same effect as the recurrent phrases of Homer. And the question of the true metre for translating Homer, like the question of free will, ‘finds no end, in wandering mazes lost.’ But here is half the Odyssey, translated line for line, without serious omission or expansion, in the metre, and by the poet, of Sigurd.

But in opinions about poetry ‘the mind of a man,’ as Homer would say, ‘fleets hither and thither, and ponders in divers ways.’ It is high time to desist from giving judgments, and to show Mr. Morris’s work, so far as may be possible, by extracts—with this proviso, that one of the special charms of his work inevitably evaporates in such a process—the charm of its consecutiveness. Everyone knows that of Homer, and especially of the Odyssey, this is the unique merit—that we pass from book to book, from the narrative about Odysseus to the narrative of Odysseus, with ‘a free onward impulse.’ Alone, perhaps, among epics, the Odyssey leaves us wishing there was more of it. Unless I am much mistaken, readers of this translation, apart from any knowledge of the original will feel the same.

Let us see Telemachus set forth upon his voyage (bk. ii., ll. 420–8) 'mid the sounds of ‘wind, wave, and bark.’

But Grey-eyed Athene sped them a happy wind and fair,
The north-west piping keenly across the wine-dark sea.
But Telemachus bade his fellows, and egged them busily,
To gear their tackling duly, and they hearkened and so did;
For into the mid-swift’s hollow the pine-tree mast they slid
When up aloft they had raised it; then with forestays it they stayed,
And hauled the white sails upward with ox-hide ropes well laid.
With the wind the mid-sail bellied and the purple wave began
To roar out aloud round the keel, as forth the good ship ran.

This has the very breath of the sea—the second line is pure Homer; the little thing one would wish altered is a word of which Mr. Morris is extremely fond—‘egged’—which rather suggests surreptitious encour-

...
of the bodiless dead come throning around him. It is perhaps the most powerful and pathetic scene in the whole of Homer, and it shows Mr. Morris at his best, if, as I think, his sympathy is deepest with the early wistful gaze of man into the spirit-world. If selection were to be made, perhaps the prophecy of Tiresias's spirit (xi., ll. 100-137), and the subsequent converse of Odysseus with Anticlea, would bear off the palm. But it must suffice to say so, and leave readers of the Academy to verify or disprove.

There is no table of errata appended. It may therefore be worth while to note some little flaws. In iii., ll. 148 and 190; in iv., l. 42; in xii., l. 59—there are slips, either of pen or press. In iii., l. 324, there is a misleading disorder of the words; in iv., l. 187, there is an awkward, though perhaps inevitable, attraction of 'him' for 'he'; in l. 841 'hýthos' is rendered 'baulous,' which loses the force of the phrase; in vi., l. 24, the verb is assuredly ill-chosen; in x., l. 132, the grammar or punctuation is confusing; in xii., l. 82, 'galhys' is not exactly 'lief and dear.' A purist would perhaps find fault with the rhymes in i. 383-4; ii. 297-8; x. 171-2. The recurring use of the word 'hit' in the transitive sense of making fly, strikes one, writing apart from books of reference, as unusual; so does 'flockmeal' (x., l. 119), and 'dorsars' (vii., l. 96). Aegisthus is always Aegistheus, one hardly sees why; 'the whale-great sea' for μεγαλεγιαν παντον (iii., l. 158) is courageous, but suggests rather 'great as a whale' than 'full of great whales,' which is surely the meaning. Perhaps others besides myself will be ignorantly puzzled at 'heap up his howe' for στήμα χειφώ (ii., l. 222, &c.), till the memory of the Maes-howe by the Stones of Stennis, in Orkney, comes to their rescue. But let us end, as we began, by gratitude. There are many translations of the Odyssey, and several good ones; but time has brought us the best, from Mr. Morris.

In April, 1887, the present writer had the opportunity of expressing, in the Academy, the hope that Mr. Morris would not long 'leave half-told' the story of Odysseus. That hope has found fulfilment far sooner than, in such cases, is usual. There are few things, perhaps, on which people differ more widely than on the merits of a translation—and the reason is not far to seek. A masterpiece like the Odyssey possesses nearly every poetical merit that could be named; but it by no means follows that it presents each of those merits to each of its readers in an equal degree. We have instinctively a favourite literary quality, and we carry into our reading of a translation an unconscious desire to find in it, above all things, that quality of the original which we prefer. We do not, perhaps, adequately examine ourselves whether what we like best in the Odyssey, or any such poem, is its highest quality—so hard is it, even with the aid of Homer, to cry 'Sursum mentes!' and rise above our lower to our higher appreciation. I recognise this so fully that I am half-ashamed that I cannot express any other opinion on Mr. Morris's second volume than that which I formed about his first. Of all verse translations of Homer that I have seen this seems to me to be the best, to have most of the matter and the manner of the original. But I am fully aware that a defective appreciation of the original, in matter and manner, will vitiate one's judgment of a translation. I know that good judges find Mr. Morris's version faulty, particularly in mannerism and the coinage of compound words in English. There is nothing for it but to plead one's plea, illustrate it as far as one may by extracts from the translation, state the qualities which it seems to share most fully with the original, and leave the verdict to the jury that is always sitting—the lovers of Homer.

The Odyssey, perfect as an epic, is, if possible, more perfect as a romance or fairy-tale. It bears, I think, a much stronger mark of individual genius than the Iliad. I never have felt any intrinsic difficulty in believing that certain parts of the Iliad are by a different hand or hands, while the Odyssey seems to me so intensely one as to make the idea that it is a compilation almost visionary; the art of collaboration would have reached the miraculous stage. And this individual genius in the Odyssey seems to me pre-eminent in the art of story-telling, of romantic narrative. We may prefer the Iliad, we may challenge the Odyssey, or any other poem, to match its best passages, its most memorable lines; but few will say, I think, that tale for tale, it is told with the perfect, simple, unconscious art of the Odyssey. It is finer in episodes; not so fine or complete as a whole. If this be so, the presence of this same skill in a translator would, in my own view, cover a multitude of minor sins. It is a sine qua non, though not the only one.

Secondly, for a verse translation, some approximation to the dignity and rapidity of the Homeric measure is essential. The couplets of Pope, the Spenserian stanzas of Worsley and Conington, form the high-water mark of what can be done in those directions; but the antitheses, the forced pauses, of the one, and the festooning of the separate stanzas, by the other, cancel a quality of the original which, as probably the
translators themselves felt, even more keenly than their readers must feel can very ill be spared. Of the first of these two qualities—that of poetic power in romantic narrative pure and simple—Mr. Morris is completely master. I hazard the opinion that no English poet, since Chaucer, has possessed exactly this gift in so eminent a degree. There may be higher gifts, but this is a peculiar one that all can recognise and enjoy. It is the common quality in poems otherwise so widely different as 'The Lovers of Gudrun,' 'The Hill of Venus,' 'Bellerophon in Lycia,' and this version of the Odyssey. Anyone to whom this gift conveys a special pleasure will find it hard to make much ado about the mannerisms which undoubtedly appear in Mr. Morris's style—defects on which a surely superfuous stress has been elsewhere laid. I do not myself admire, e.g. the rendering (book xiv, l. 73) of 'Θεον κατατειλέετα τρόμου' by 'where penned were the piglings' crew'; on the other hand, the much-criticised version of book xiii., l. 388—'Τροϊκος λάµας δοκοι λαχανά κρυμάωνα' 'We loosed afortetime the shining coif of Troy,' seems to me exactly what Homer says, exactly the metaphor in which Euripides followed him, exactly a case in which Mr. Morris is both bolder and wiser than his critics. Let anyone read for himself the passages (pp. 294, 245) where these expressions occur, and judge if mannerism can be charged upon them as a whole. My strong impression is that half these 'mannerisms'—I do not say all of them—are more careful approximations to Homer's manner than some critics have discerned. As to the 'Phaeacians oar-fain' (p. 232, l. 36) for Φαείρεσσα πορεύεται what is the objection? We speak of a person as 'heart-sick,' of Carlyle as 'world-weary,' without scruple or blame; why may not the Phaeacians be 'oar-fain?' Homer calls them so by a compound, not a periphrasis. Suppose 'oar-fain' is not elsewhere used in English literature—well, somebody once used 'heart-sick,' or 'world-weary,' for the first time.

On the second point—the suitability of the metre of Sigurd as a representation of Homer—most people have made up their opinion one way or other. I cannot deny that, for translating Homer, rhyme is a fetter as well as a grace; that all rhyming couples, in whatever metre, do break up 'the pure line's gracious flow,' the Homeric music, in some degree. The couplet, in fact, diverts our thoughts somewhat from the line or the paragraph—even Mr. Morris cannot overcome this result, though at times (to repeat an illustration from vol. i.) he touches the actual harp of Homer.

οἵρηζ’ Ζέφυρον, καλλόντες ἑπὶ οὐσίας λέπτων.¹

'The north-west piping keenly across the wine-dark sea.'

The difficulty lies in the fact that rhyme inevitably balances two lines in some degree; and Homer never balances his lines.

But it is time to fulfil the pledge made above, and to be silent while Mr. Morris shows us, in English, his idea of Homer. Let the scene be the slumber of Odysseus, in the magical bark of the Phaeacians, while she speeds him over the sea for the last time (book xiii., ll. 19–32, p. 234)

E'en then upon his eyelids did sleep and slumber speed,
Sweetest, and most unbroken, most like to death indeed;
But she, as o'er the plain the stallions' fourfold yoke
Rush, driven on together by the whiplash and the stroke,
And rear aloft and speed them, and easy way they make,
So rose her stern on the sea waves, and following on her wake
Rolled on the dark blue billow of the tumble of the sea:
So all unscathed and steady she sped, nor swift as she
Might fly the stark gerfalcon, the swiftest of all fowl,
As swiftly running onward she cleft the sea-flood's roll,
Bearing a man most like to the gods for his wisdom and guile,
Who many a sorrow had suffered, and was soul-tossed on a while
As he went through the warfare of men and the terrible deeds of the deep;
But slept there now unfeared, and forgot all woes in sleep.

As poetry and translation, this must speak for itself; but one may say, in passing, what a scene is here for an artist! The slumbering chieftain and the men of Scheria in their mystic bark, not to see Scheria again! And the voyagings and toils of Odysseus, like that other weird of which Shakspeare wrote, are thus 'rounded with a sleep.'

The warning of Odysseus to Amphimounos, to escape from the imminent doom of the WOeers (book xviii., ll. 130–50, p. 333), seems to me at once one of the gentlest and one of the most impressive things in the Odyssey; nor does it suffer in Mr. Morris's hands:

There is nought more mightless than man of all that earth doth breed, Of all that on earth breatheth and that creepeth over it. For while God giveth him valour and his limbs are lithe and fit, He saith that never hereafter the vale shall he abide;

¹ The fresh-blowing north-west wind murmuring (roaring) across the wine-dark sea.
But when the gods all-happy fashion his evil tide,
Perforce that load of sorrow his stout heart bear then;
For in such wise still is fashioned the mood of earthly men,
As the Father of Gods and of menfolk hath brought about their day.
Yea, e'en I amongst men was happy in times now passed away,
And wrought full many a folly, and gave way to my heart's desire.
... Therefore indeed let no man in unrighteous fashion live,
But hold in peace and quiet such things as God may give.
But O me! how I see of the Wooers what fearful folly they plan,
Whereas the goods they are wasting, and shaming the wife of the man,
Who not for long I tell thee from his well-loved fatherland
Will yet be aloof; nay, rather e'en now he is hard at hand.
But thou—God lead thee hence, that this man thou may'st not meet
When he hath gotten him homeward to his land the dear and sweet;
Aegistheus for Aegisthus; in vol. ii. he insists (see book

Of minor criticisms I have not many to make. In vol. i. Mr. Morris always wrote Aegistheus for Aegisthus, in vol. ii. he insists (see book

1 Using long-oars.
2 To kill a descendant of a kingly race.