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DASENT, MORRIS, AND PROBLEMS OF  
TRANSLATION

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TRANSLATION is one of the most difficult tasks that a writer can take upon himself, and the problems with which he is confronted far transcend linguistic comprehension. One of the main obstacles that seems to have prevented the growth of a body of doctrine on the subject, a theory and criticism of translation, is that the difficulties vary profoundly according to the manifold combinations of source- and object-languages involved. In translating contemporary languages, for example, it matters a great deal whether we are concerned with languages remote genetically, spatially, and culturally (as English and a Polynesian or American-Indian language), or languages closely related, whose speakers are neighbours, sharing to some extent a single culture (as for example the languages in Belgium, or Switzerland, or South Africa, or Wales). At the one extreme, we are dealing with languages whose structures differ so much that to use King Alfred's expression, translation "word be worde" is quite impossible, and "andgit of andgite" possible only if we deal in large sense-units.<sup>1</sup> Here is a problem extensively handled in the writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf and others. And often, on top of this, we lack the cultural correlates to make translation possible, and we resort to the more or less arbitrary use of technical terms, defined in footnotes which must needs

<sup>1</sup> "In this case, intire words resemble single letters in other words: that is, they have no meaning in themselves, but the phrase composed out of them is the least significant part into which the sentence it helps to form can be divided; as, in general, single words are the least significant parts of a sentence." Joseph Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language and Universal Grammar* (Warrington 1762), p. 231; Priestley discusses several important aspects of translation in this book, especially on pp. 227-34.

describe the unfamiliar institution in question. Even at the other extreme — English and Welsh, or Flemish and French — we are deceived if we imagine that we are concerned merely with a single set of referents for which there are exactly equivalent labels available in the two languages; the cultural difficulty may trouble us less, but it is still there, since it is probable that there is never an absolute identity of culture where there is not identity of language.<sup>2</sup> The French and the English peoples have been close neighbours (and sometimes rather more) for a millennium and a half, yet we had no word that could translate General de Gaulle's "*Rassemblement du Peuple Français*."

Translating the languages of past ages presents the same problems but in a considerably aggravated form, since in estimating all meanings we are restricted to sitting mutely before a relatively small — and certainly finite — body of writings instead of enjoying a two-way traffic with the infinity of readily available data that we have in a contemporary, living language. This erects what is at times an unassailable barrier to gauging the niceness of flavour imparted by a word's rarity or familiarity, its literary, venerable, or colloquial associations, and to determining the nature and significance of unfamiliar habits and institutions. Indeed, even when we have gained an adequate working knowledge of both language and culture of ancient Greece or saga-age Iceland or medieval England, we are left with the incommunicability of the culture as an unsolved problem. Chaucer's grammatical forms can easily be replaced by forms which will be understood by present-day English speakers, but what shall we do with such things as pardoners and summoners and reeves? Even clerks are not what they were. And if we latinise or euphemize four-letter words which once amused rather than shocked, are we translating accurately?

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. Sapir, "Language and Environment," *American Anthropologist* xiv. 226-42, and references in E. H. Lenneberg, "Cognition in Ethnolinguistics," *Language* xxix. 463 ff.

But this phrase "translating accurately" brings us to the heart of the problem. What, after all, is accuracy in translation?

Both Dasent and Morris reckoned themselves to be accurate translators: they were so reckoned by their contemporaries, and no one would want to change that verdict to-day. Yet the difference between the work of these two excellent translators is profound, and it reveals a difference of approach to the art of translating which is just as profound and which is the subject of the present paper. Let me refresh your memory of the contrasting styles of Dasent and Morris by presenting a brief excerpt not from the early but from the mature work of each. First, from the famous translation of *Njála*, on which Dasent tells us he worked on and off for 18 years:—

"Shew me to Njal's sons," said the Earl, "and I will force them to tell me the truth."

Then he was told that they had put out of the harbour.

"Then there is no help for it," says the Earl, "but still there were two water-casks alongside of Thrain's ship, and in them a man may well have been hid, and if Thrain has hidden him, there he must be; and now we will go a second time to see Thrain."

Thrain sees that the Earl means to put off again and said, — "However wroth the Earl was last time, now he will be half as wroth again, and now the life of every man on board the ship lies at stake."

They all gave their words to hide the matter, for they were all sore afraid. Then they took some sacks out of the lading, and put Hrapp down into the hold in their stead, and other sacks that were light were laid over him.

Now comes the Earl, just as they were done stowing Hrapp away. Thrain greeted the Earl well. The Earl was rather slow to return it, and they saw that the Earl was very wroth.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> G. W. Dasent, *The Story of Burnt Njal* (Edinburgh 1861) II. 30. The corresponding Icelandic is as follows:

Jarl mælti: "Vísu mér til Njálssona — ok skal ek nauðga þeim til, at þeir

Beside this let us place the following excerpt from Morris's noble version of *Eyrbyggja Saga*, published thirty years later than *Njal* but showing no essential features different from the *Grettis Saga* which belongs to the same decade as the work of Dasent already quoted:

"That may be," said Arnkel, "but we will have a ransacking here."

"That shall be as ye will," said Katla, and bade her cook-maid bear light before them and unlock the meat bower, "that is the only locked chamber in the stead."

Now they saw, how Katla span yarn from her rock, and they searched through the house and found not Odd; and thereafter they fared away.

But when they were come a short space from the garth, Arnkel stood still and said:

"Whether now has Katla cast a hood over our heads, and was Odd her son there whereas we saw but a rock?"

"She is not unlike to have so done," said Thorarin, "so let us fare back." And that they did.

But when it was seen from Holt that they turned back, then said Katla to her women:

"Ye shall still sit in your seats, but I will go with Odd out into the fore-chamber." So when they were come through the chamber door, she went into the porch against the outer door, and combed Odd her son, and sheared his hair.<sup>4</sup>

segi mér hit sanna." Þá var honum sagt, at þeir höfðu út látit. "Ekki má þat þá," segir jarl, "enn vatnkeröld tvau váru þar við skipit Þráins, ok má þar maðr vel hafa fólgið í. Ok ef Þráinn hefir fólgið hann, þá mun hann þar í hafa verið. Ok munu vér nú fara í annat sinn at finna Þráin." Þráinn sér þetta, at jarl ætlar enn út, ok mælti: "Svá reiðr sem jarl var næstum, þá mun hann nú vera hálfu reiðari — ok liggir nú við líf allra manna þeira er á skipinu eru." Þeir hétu allir at leynd; því at hver var um sik mjök hræddr. Þeir tóku sekka nakkvara ór búlkunum, enn létu Hrapp koma þar í staðinn — fóru nú aðrir sekka á hann ofan, þeir er létu váru. Nú kemr jarl, er þeir höfðu um Hrapp búit. Þráinn kvaddi vel jarl. Jarl tók kveðju hans ok ekki skjótt. Sá þeir at jarl var allmjök reiðr. (*Njáls Saga*, ed. Vald. Ásmundarson, Reykjavík 1894, pp. 206 f.).

<sup>4</sup> W. Morris, E. Magnússon, *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers* (London 1892) 45 f. The corresponding Icelandic is as follows:

"Vera má þat," segir Arnkell, "enn rannsaka viljum vér hér." "Þat skal sem yðr líkar," segir Katla, ok bað matselju bera ljós fyrir þeim ok lúka upp buri; þat eitt er hús læst á bænum. Þeir sá, at Katla spann garn af rokki. Nú leita þeir um húsín ok finna eigi Odd, ok fóru brott eftir þat. Ok er



I should like to draw your attention to some points in these excerpts which are characteristic of the two great translators we are considering and which may clarify what I have to say later. In the first passage, the adjective *wroth* strikes us today as perhaps old-fashioned, but in Dasent's time it was not so tinged with archaism and was commonly encountered in popular novels; in his time, too, the past participle *hid* was still in free variation with the analogical formation *hidden*, and so would not be obtrusive to his readers. On the other hand, the use of *sore* in the expression *sore afraid* was already thoroughly archaic in the mid-nineteenth century. One should take note, perhaps, of the good nautical terms *lading* for "cargo" and the verb *stow away* for placing goods in position aboard ship; and one might notice too the use of such idioms as "there is no help for it" and "to give one's word," simply because of their thoroughly familiar character. The most striking feature of Dasent's style, indeed, is that there is little that is striking in it; above all, we note that no syntactical expression here differs from the normal English of educated nineteenth-century usage.

Morris's language on the other hand contains much that is remarkable to us and much that must have been remarkable to his contemporaries too; for example, the rare technical sense of *ransack*, the rarer of the two preterite forms of *spin*, the obsolete and poetical use of *fare* in the sense of "go," the archaic *rock* for "distaff," the fairly rare *garth*. Perhaps more notable than these is *whereas* in the sense of "where" which is a favourite form with Morris but with few other writers in recent centuries, and we should add here the use of *bower* which

peir kómu skamt frá garðinum, nam Arnkell staðar ok mælti: "Hvart mun Katla eigi hafa heðni veift um höfuð oss? Ok hefir þar verit Oddr son hennar er oss sýndist roklrinn." "Eigi er hon ólíkleg til," segir Þórarin, "ok förum aftr." Þeir gerðu svá. Ok er sást ór Holti, at þeir hurfu aftr, þá mælti Katla við konur: "Enn skulu þér sitja í rúmum yörum, enn vit Oddr munum fram ganga." Enn er þau koma fram um dyrr, gekk hon í öndina gegnt útídyrum ok kembir þar Oddi syni sínum, ok skerr hár hans. (*Eyrbyggja Saga*, ed. Vald. Ásmundarson, Reykjavík 1895, pp. 40 f.).

is clearly a translation-loan, and the expression *not unlike* to which is likewise a close imitation of the Icelandic. Above all, we have *whether* introducing a direct question; this idiom, which fell into disuse in the sixteenth century, was never a common feature of English, but was in any case characterised by a different word-order from that used by Morris here. Morris's use of *whether* with inversion of subject and verb is again directly modelled on the Icelandic idiom.<sup>5</sup>

Enough has been said to show some of the most obvious areas in which the translation styles of Dasent and Morris differ from each other. It has been common to sum up, even to explain, these contrastive styles in terms of archaism and romanticism. Exponents of the two main traditions of translation which sprang severally from Dasent and Morris have regarded themselves — and have been regarded by others — as using on the one hand English that is contemporary, natural and prosaic, or on the other hand English that is evocatively archaic, romantic and poetical.<sup>6</sup> But this is to oversimplify the difference of approach. In any case, it is not strictly accurate to contrast Dasent and Morris as respectively contemporary and archaic in style. Dasent is praised by a reviewer in 1866 for his "old-world diction" which is one of the factors contributing to make his style for the sagas "very near perfection"<sup>7</sup> and, while most contemporaries notice with approval or disapproval Morris's "archaism" and "quaintness", Sir Edmund Gosse is to be found praising him for his "pure, simple and idiomatic English".<sup>8</sup> Certainly, although Dasent

<sup>5</sup> Other examples could be cited from the excerpt presented, and even more striking ones from elsewhere in *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*; cf. "door-doom" (*duradóm*), "overtrue is that" (*of satt er þat*), "then shall we take that for sooth" (*þá munum vér þat fyrir satt hafsa*), p. 34, "handsel me now the land" (*handsala mér nú landís*), "that shall not be before every penny is first yolden" (*eigi skal þat fyrr enn hverr penningr er fyrir goldinn*), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Richard Beck, MLN xlv. 485, who praises the "fluent and idiomatic English" of Halldór Hermannson, *Íslendingabók*, in contrast to the "artificial and antiquated language" of Vigfússon and Powell, *Origines Islandicae*.

<sup>7</sup> *Spectator*, 14 April 1866.

<sup>8</sup> *Academy*, 17 July 1875, pp. 54-5.

speaks of withstanding the temptation to use old words and expressions,<sup>9</sup> he does not in fact eschew them. Forms like "sore afraid" (which we have noticed above) and "this was noised about" occur on every page, and they have pleased successive generations of readers, as they pleased his contemporaries, with the air of sobriety and dignity that they impart through their almost Biblical ring. By contrast, many of the most striking and unfamiliar words in Morris are not, properly speaking, archaisms at all: they are rather cases of the re-introduction, with new pronunciations and often with new meanings and into new environments, of words or word-elements from a past so distant that they are virtually new words to the modern reader. One did not call the word *biologie* an archaism when Jean Lamarck coined it in 1815, for all that it was made up of elements of great antiquity, and such native formations as William Barnes's *hearsomeness* for "obedience," or *forstoneing* for "fossil" were just as "new" as the word *telephone* which was coined at about the same time.

Nor were the syntactical constructions or word-order patterns in Morris so much archaic as entirely unfamiliar to the nineteenth-century reader; moreover, they are more directed to simulating the original from which Morris was translating than recapturing arrangements popular in an earlier form of English. The same is true of the so-called archaism in those who have pursued the Morris tradition. The impressively artistic volume prepared by the Chiswick Press which contains Robert Proctor's version of *Laxdœla Saga*<sup>10</sup> begins: "Ketill Flatneb hight a man," using a word-order which had never been common in English even at the time when *hight* was a common enough form; but it is, of course, as close a translation as is conceivable of the Icelandic "Ketill flatnefr hét maðr", — every word being replaced

<sup>9</sup> Cf. footnote to p. xv, Vol. I of *Burnt Njal*.

<sup>10</sup> *The Story of the Laxdalers*, London 1903.

by a cognate form which is either English now or has been, sometime, somewhere. On the same page, Proctor tells us that Ketill "summoned a thing" and "thus hove up his tale." Similarly, although E. R. Eddison's defence of archaisms is spirited enough to be an apologia,<sup>11</sup> what strikes us most in his able and challenging work is not so much archaisms as neologisms in the shape of unfamiliar foreign idioms dressed in English garb. For example, "Sought they then to Thorfinn's at eventime, and gat there all good welcome." And again, "Parted they with things in such case. Fared Arinbiorn home and said unto Egil his errand's ending . . . Egil became all frowning: seemed to himself to have lost much fee there, and nowise rightfully." As Dr. Edith Batho says of this translation, Norse English cannot in itself be any more desirable than the Latinate English that Eddison condemns in some of his predecessors; it may in fact be less comprehensible than it, so far as the general reading public is concerned. Because English and Icelandic are "akin in word, syntax, and idiom", she says, we are in danger of regarding them as identical: "Fared they back" may be close to normal Icelandic syntax but it is not normal English syntax and can only give an ordinary English reader the improper impression that the sagas are mannered.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Batho's reference here to "Norse English" is thus far more apt than the criticism of another reviewer who spoke of Eddison's using an archaic "dialect . . . going back even beyond the age of Biblical English."<sup>13</sup> The point is that Eddison's "dialect" does not go back to an English earlier or later than "the age of Biblical English": whether consciously or not, Eddison was composing in a new English idiom, based closely upon Icelandic.

The mention of the Bible reminds us that the Authorised Version likewise contains much that is neither the

<sup>11</sup> *Egil's Saga* (Cambridge 1930), pp. 239-41.

<sup>12</sup> *MLR* xxvii. 231-2.

<sup>13</sup> *New Statesman* xxxvi (1930), p. 364.

English of 1611 nor that of an earlier period, but a synthetic blend of archaism and imitation of foreign idiom, with a fair seasoning of what the translators themselves felt was a form of English appropriate to be the vehicle of the Word of God. Dr. E. V. Rieu reminds us, in an important essay, that the starkness and reality of the Greek are to some extent lost in the Authorised Version which was reproducing to a marked extent the older English of Coverdale and Tyndale: it was therefore "already old-fashioned when it was written." But, he says, it is far from being simply archaic. "Unlike the Greek, it was not firmly based on the normal speech of its own or any other period." As an example, Dr. Rieu cites St. Luke 17.8 where the Greek has a colloquial and not particularly polite demand which may be translated as "Get something ready for my supper": the Authorised Version reads, "Make ready wherewith I may sup." While conceding that the words of the AV here "follow the Greek with some exactitude," Dr. Rieu says "I contend that no Englishman alive in 1611 or at any other date would have used such an expression.<sup>14</sup> The beauty of the Authorised Version as against that of other translations is not in question: it is simply a matter of a different approach to translating, and it is to some extent paralleled in the different approaches of Dasent and Morris to translating the sagas.

But so far we have been considering only the different realisations of these contrasting approaches and not the approaches themselves. Earlier, we mentioned that it is commonly held that Morris's approach contrasted with Dasent's in being romantic. But although Morris's work bears abundant signs linguistically of that glorification of things medieval and "Gothick" which characterised the English romantic movement, romanticism alone is not sufficient to mark him off from Dasent. Like Morris, Dasent too had a passionate regard for the literature,

<sup>14</sup> *The Four Gospels* (London 1952), pp. x-xi.

culture, and institutions of the medieval North: indeed, he had an unreasoning love for them which to some extent denied him the facility of critical appraisal. One need mention in this connexion only his free and romantic handling of the *Jómsvíkingasaga*<sup>15</sup> which matched other mid-Victorian novels in more ways than in running to three volumes, and which only a foster-parent's devotion could have induced him to call a "very amusing story". In his address to the reader, he is very far from being the prosy and uninspired writer that Eddison took him to be,<sup>16</sup> inviting the reader as he does to escape with him from humdrum nineteenth-century existence — "for I will not call it life" — and to come "far far away" into the Scandinavian North of the tenth century. A romantic regard for Old Scandinavia will not readily distinguish Morris from Dasent.

Where they differ in their approach to the sagas is over what a translation should be. Dasent sought to make his translation only as literal "as the idioms of the two languages would permit." As a general rule, he says, he "has withstood the temptation to use Old English words" and has been determined to avoid expressions "which are not still in every-day use," though he admits to some lapses from such rigorous principles, namely, *busk*, *boun*, and *redes*.<sup>17</sup> He has learnt a great deal in the eighteen years during which he has been working on *Burnt Njal*, and in the nineteen years since he read Carl Säve's lengthy review<sup>18</sup> which took him severely to task for the artificial and antiquarian diction in his translation of the *Prose or Younger Edda* published in Stockholm in 1842.<sup>19</sup> He is now of the opinion that "The duty of a

<sup>15</sup> *The Vikings of the Baltic*, London 1875.

<sup>16</sup> *Egil's Saga*, p. 232.

<sup>17</sup> *Burnt Njal* I. xiv-xv.

<sup>18</sup> In *Frey* (Uppsala), 1842, pp. 389-97. For this and other references to review literature, I am indebted to Halldór Hermannsson's invaluable bibliographies in *Islandica*.

<sup>19</sup> "Almickle in himself is Utgard's Loki, though he deals much with sleight and cunning spells, but it may be seen that he is great in himself, in that he has thanes who have mickle might" (p. 66).

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translator is not to convey the sense of his original in such a way that the idioms and wording of one tongue are sacrificed to those of the other, but to find out the words and idioms of his own language which answer most fully and fairly to those of the language from which he is translating, and so to make the one as perfect a reflection as is possible of the forms and thoughts of the other."<sup>20</sup> As a statement of principle, it is not of course very helpful to talk of making "the one as perfect a reflection as is possible of the forms and thoughts of the other", but read in the context of his actual work, Dasent's aim is perfectly clear despite the fact it was by no means always realised. Such an aim was expressed more succinctly and scientifically by Dr. E. V. Rieu in a lecture on his own principles of translation, read before the London Mediaeval Society some years ago, when he talked of "the principle of equivalent effect."<sup>21</sup> Dasent sought to make his translation have upon English-speaking readers the same effect as the sagas had, not upon Icelanders of the nineteenth century, but upon Icelanders of the age at which they were written. Some question-begging is of course involved here, but this would be less obvious in Dasent's time than in our own, after a generation of controversy over the dating, historicity, and mode of transmission of the sagas. For Dasent's purposes, he had simply to achieve an effect equivalent to that upon an age when language, morals, and culture had changed little if at all from the age in which the events

<sup>20</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup> A full definition of this approach is now printed in *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Literature* (London 1953) I. 555, where it is stated that "that translation is the best which comes nearest to creating in its audience the same impression as was made by the original on its contemporaries." Similarly, in "The Problem of Translation" (*Literature and Life: Addresses to the English Association*, London 1948), Sir H. Idris Bell says that a translator's aim should be to "produce on readers in his own tongue an effect corresponding as nearly as may be with that received by readers of the original" (p. 23). At the same time, commenting upon Dryden's claim "to make Virgil speak such English as he would have himself spoken, if he had been born in England and in this present age," he points out that this cannot be pressed too far; Virgil as a seventeenth-century citizen of England is in fact an impossible concept, since his writings will have him no other than a Roman of the Augustan Age (pp. 25-6).

narrated had taken place.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, he does not attempt to introduce such idiom of fashionable contemporary colloquy as we might today if we were applying the principle of equivalent effect to a translation of Jean Anouilh: he was a writer too sensitive to lapse into the incongruities that would be presented if Gunnar, armed with bow and arrow in the defence of his life, were to talk in idiom inextricably associated in the nineteenth-century reader's mind with the Siege of Delhi, factory acts, or steam trains. He therefore seeks his equivalence of effect in English words and idiom which are as far as possible timeless and unobtrusive, bearing no outstanding associations with institutions antique or contemporary.<sup>23</sup> His success is shown in a small way by his consequent ability to mark off a proverb (having presumably a distinctive, antique effect on a mediæval reader) from the main text by couching it in quaint and gnomic form utterly different from his style elsewhere: "Bare is back without brother behind it."

A language from which we are translating may hold such a fascination for us that we want to reproduce its every verb, compound, and syntactical arrangement with an image which is as faithful as the camera of our own linguistic stock can photograph it: we want our reader to taste the same sequence of exotic semantic delights in his interpretation of our translation as we ourselves taste in the original. The word "exotic" is crucial here. There is a difference between knowing a language so

<sup>22</sup> If his basic assumption is that an old text was intended to have an archaic flavour and antiquarian interest for contemporary readers, the translator's task is naturally immensely complicated: cf. Professor J. R. R. Tolkien in *Beowulf . . . (A Translation . . .)* by J. R. Clark Hall (London 1940), pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that Dasent's style, for all its fame, was more timeless and unobtrusive than that of any other nineteenth-century translator. The history sagas have for the most part been consistently approached with far less self-consciousness and striving after special effect than the more popular and "literary" family sagas; if "timelessness" is taken as an indication of equivalence of effect, the laurels should no doubt go to Jón Hjaltalín and Gilbert Goudie for *The Orkneyinga Saga* (Edinburgh 1873). It is significant that the aim of this volume was to present an annotated historical source-book and not a piece of literature.



well that it is perfectly comprehensible and knowing a language as a native speaker of it. In the former case we can still feel an exotic experience in the order, for example, in which words impinge on our consciousness: in the latter, they are blurred into an unanalysable cliché. "Ketill flatnefr hét maðr" can be "Ketil Flatneb hight a man" to a Proctor, a Morris,<sup>24</sup> or an Eddison,<sup>25</sup> but not to a Halldór Hermannsson,<sup>26</sup> and we find Stéfan Einarsson saying of Eddison's *Egil's Saga*, "to me the language of the translation looked a bit more old-fashioned as English than the language of the original is as Icelandic."<sup>27</sup> It is as though a translation of the Canterbury Tales were to seem to us less familiar and idiomatic than Chaucer's own words.

This then is where Morris's approach, as I see it, differs from Dasent's. So far from trying to make his translation convey to his readers an equivalent effect to that conveyed by the sagas to medieval Icelanders, he seeks a transmission of his own experience. He wants to make us share the acute pleasure which the forms and arrangements of the Icelandic have upon him. His readers must be made to share the magic experience of a remote literature, dealing with a remote culture in a remote language; they must read the sagas with just that extra concentration and care that Morris himself had to use; they must find them couched in a language which would be as intelligible to them as Icelandic was to him but which would have the same areas of unfamiliarity too. As one nineteenth-century critic put it admiringly if unflatteringly, Morris's "quaint" English "has just the right outlandish flavour."<sup>28</sup> To Morris, as to Eddison, it was a translator's task to tell his readers "something

<sup>24</sup> "Ketil Flatneb was hight a famous hersir" (*Ketill flatnefr hét einn ágætr hersir*), *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> "S. and H. hight two brethren" (*S. ok H. hétu bræðr tveir*) *Egil's Saga* 32; cf. "Biorgolf was named a man" (*Biörgólfr hét maðr*), *ibid.* 9.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Book of the Icelanders* (*Islandica* xx, 1930), pp. v-vi.

<sup>27</sup> MLN xlvi. 487.

<sup>28</sup> G. A. Simcox, *Academy*, 13 August, 1870.

about" the original, to show them not "his judgement" but "his original."<sup>29</sup>

For this reason, it is not strictly to the point to say, as some present-day critics have said, that Morris's translations are difficult to read *nowadays* "because of the obsolescent language."<sup>30</sup> Morris's work can scarcely be more difficult to read now than it was in the nineteenth century nor his language be more obsolescent. Since his forms are not tied as consciously to the nineteenth century as even Dasent's were, it could even be argued that his translations have dated less. At any rate, "easy reading" was less Morris's aim than the poetic transmission of his own experience.

We would not wish to grade these two great translators, and we could not if we wished. Their public and their disciples and their disciples' public have amply demonstrated their recognition and appreciation of both approaches to translation: Dasent's sensitive attempt at equivalence of effect, Morris's equally sensitive attempt at transmitting the experience of a scholar-poet reading the literature of a people and an age that he loved.

<sup>29</sup> *Egil's Saga*, p. 238.

<sup>30</sup> Stanton A. Coblentz, *New York Times*, 1 February, 1931.