THE FIRST SIX BOOKS OF THE ILIAD OF HOMER, TRANSLATED INTO FOURTEEN-SYLLABLE VERSE; DESIGNED AS A READING-BOOK FOR COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649584116

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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EDWARD SIMMS

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Trieste

In Memoriam.

I owe it to the memory of a dear departed brother, Mr. Charles S. Simms, of Manchester, to state, on the forefront of this work, that he was the first to suggest to me the metre of this Translation as the best the English language offers for such a purpose. Indeed he did much more. He himself translated the First Book of the Iliad into this fourteen-syllable metre, and published his Translation in a quarto pamphlet at Manchester in the year 1866. It is a singularly accurate version by one, to whom the mastery of the Greek language was not the attainment of youth, but was acquired in after-life, as a recreation and solace, amidst the active occupations of a busy commercial career. Its chief defect is a frequent sacrifice of the English to the Greek idiom, arising from a too-anxious desire for a very exact rendering of the original.

His version of the First Book is the basis of the one now offered, in which I have been solicitous to retain, amidst all the alterations, the substance and features of my dear brother's work.

"His saltem accumulem donis."

E. S.

Larkbere House,
January 25th, 1873.

PREFACE.

ALL the critics of antiquity, both Greek and Latin, unite in extolling the consummate skill exhibited by Homer in his mode of commencing the Iliad and the Odyssey. "In this respect," says Aristotle, "does Homer wonderfully stand forth before and above all others, in that he attempts not to describe the circumstances of the entire war in their order from beginning to end, but brings in the events, which precede the action of his poem, in episodes from time to time." *

"This law of epic poetry," observes Quintilian, "I say not that Homer maintained, but himself invented and enacted." † Horace, the famous Roman lyric poet and critic, has made this law of the epic proem renowned in his "De Arte Poeticà," vv. 136–150; and all great poets, since his time, have studiously observed the same.

But it may be advisable for the sake of the ordinary English reader, for whom this translation is specially undertaken, and who probably is not familiar with the traditions of early Grecian history, to briefly narrate those particulars of it, which belong more immediately to the "war of Troy."

Like that of most other European countries, the early history of Greece is made up of feuds, and commotions, and

* Arist. Poetic., c. 23. † Institut., Book x., c. 1.

fightings between rival tribes or clans. From the earliest times Greece appears to have been divided into numerous principalities, which were constantly at war with each other. At first there was little agriculture. Cattle formed the principal wealth. Numerous flocks of sheep and goats, and large herds of horses, oxen, and swine, were spread over the country. For these possessions there was no safety but in the valour of their owners. It was considered, on all sides, the height of glory, and a legitimate mode of acquiring wealth, to take these by force. Women were especially an object of plunder in these forays and petty wars.

It was the same on sea as on land. The sacking of towns on the sea-coast was then an honourable pursuit. The testimony of Thucydides, the most sagacious and accurate of the ancient Greek historians, is very clear and precise on this point.*

Gradually, strangers from the coasts of the lesser Asia lying over against Greece,—from Mysia, Lydia, and Caria, and also emigrants from Phœnicia and Egypt, from time to time settled in the country, and introduced the arts of more civilized life. Amongst these was Pelops, son of Tantalos, a king of Phrygia. He possessed great wealth, and had at his command a large number of ships, whereby he exercised a ruling influence over the islands and throughout the whole of the neighbouring countries. He seems to have held a monarchical sway over a large portion of the peninsula now called "the Morea," but anciently the Peloponnesos, *i. e.* "Isle of Pelops"; so called after his name.

* De Bello Pelop., Book i., c. 5.

Pelops was succeeded by his son Atreus, and Atreus by his brother Thyestes, who, at his death, restored the sceptre to Agamemnon, son of Atreus. Agamemnon and his brother Menelāos married Clytemnestra and Helen, the daughters of Tyndaros, king of Sparta. On the death of Tyndaros, and of his sons Castor and Polydeuces, Menelāos assumed the rule of Sparta.

The beauty of Helen was so famous, that all the princes of the country sought her in marriage. Finally they agreed to leave the selection to herself, and entered into an engagement to aid and protect the husband of her choice, should they be called upon to do so. Helen was married to Menelāos.

On the opposite shore of the Ægæan Sea, in Mysia, near the entrance of the narrow strait which there divides European from Asiatic Turkey—now called "the Dardanelles," but anciently "the Hellespontos," the rival kingdom of Troy was placed, extremely wealthy, and comprising a considerable tract of country. It was founded, according to the tradition of the place, by Dardanos: he was succeeded by his son Erichthonios, Erichthonios by Tros, Tros by Ilos, Ilos by Laomedon, and Laomedon by Priam, who had a large family of sons and daughters, of whom the most notable were Hector and Paris (or Alexandros, as he is sometimes called by Homer). The latter built ships, and sailed to the coast of Peloponnesos. Thence he went up to Sparta, where he was hospitably received by Menelāos: but, in his absence, he seduced his wife Helen, and carried her off to Troy. To avenge this insult and wrong,

Agamemnon and Menelāos collected an armament of nearly twelve hundred ships, and upwards of a hundred thousand men, with all the chieftains of the country; and, after a siege of ten years, took and destroyed the city of Troy.

This is the first great struggle on record between European and Asiatic powers. This was the greatest expedition that ever sailed from the shores of Greece; and it exhausted the resources of the country, and was (as all war ever is) the spring of innumerable ills.

The subject-matter of this grand Homeric poem is the events which happened in the tenth and last year of the Trojan war. For the readier information of the reader, these will be found summarized in the several arguments prefixed to each book.

In this present attempt to present Homer to the English reader, the metre chosen for the purpose is the one known as "the fourteen-syllable rhymed couplet." George Chapman, one of "the sturdy race of our old translators," who flourished in and adorned the Elizabethan period of our literature, is the first translator of Homer, who essayed to render the rapid flow of thought and expression of the great Original in this metre; and his version fails, not in respect of the measure itself, but owing (as I consider) to the translator's want of care in the rhythm of his verses, and in his fantastical diction, so utterly un-Homeric.

The inherent unfitness of the ten-syllabled epic couplet, adopted by Pope and Sotheby, and the yet greater unsuitableness of Miltonic blank verse, adopted in the translations of Cowper, Wright, Brandreth, and the late Lord Derby,

have, I consider, been sufficiently shown by Mr. Matthew Arnold, late Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford, in his lectures given at Oxford, "On Translating Homer." His condemnation of the ten-syllable verse appears to rest mainly on the fact, that it is fitted rather for didactic and satiric subjects than for heroic ones. And doubtless there is a quiet decorum and staidness in its rhythm, which ill serve to represent Homer's flowing rapidity. Besides which, maintaining, as he does, the unfitness of a *rhymed* metre for rendering Homer, he objects to it also on that ground. While of *blank* verse he says, "If blank verse is used in translating Homer, it must be a blank verse of which English poetry, naturally swayed much by Milton's treatment of this metre, offers at present hardly any examples."

Mr. Arnold, indeed, by an eliminating process of argument, seems to arrive at the conclusion, that the unrhymed English hexameter is the only suitable measure, which our language offers for the purpose of representing the strong smooth river-like flow of the Homeric verse. But this is a measure certainly not yet naturalized, and it is very questionable whether it ever will be naturalized, in our language. Short and choice portions of the Iliad may be pleasingly and aptly represented in this measure, but it never will sustain the attention and interest of the reader through a long poem, such as the Iliad, of fifteen thousand lines.

After well weighing all that has been said respecting the metres of translation, I feel assured that no measure which we possess, if rightly handled, is so suitable for the purpose, and so likely, if wrought with sufficient skill and judgment,