Hilaire Belloc

ON TRANSLATION

The art of translation is a subsidiary art, and derivative. On this account it has never been granted the dignity of original work, and has suffered too much in the general judgement of letters. This natural underestimation of its value has had the bad practical effect of lowering the standard demanded, and in some periods has almost destroyed the art altogether. The corresponding misunderstanding of its character has added to its degradation: neither its importance nor its difficulty has been grasped.

Writing men work in part for fame. Nearly all of those with any pretensions to write well-that is, to write as writing should be -take fame for a large part of their incentive; some, perhaps among the greatest, have the attainment of fame for their whole motive. If, therefore, in any department of writing it be impossible to attain fame, that department will presumably be neglected.

That insufficient fame should attach to translation is as inevitable as it is unjust. But though it be inevitable in kind we can modify it in degree and do some justice to the translator, as well as promote the end of great translation, by considering what that achievement of good translation is.

In the first place good translation is exceptionally hard of attainment (and the talent and instruction for arriving at it are correspondingly rare) because it demands what may be called a "dual control". The translator is working in two mediums, which two he has to be keeping abreast during every moment of his work, which both have to be present before him in equal weight and yet-what is a subtle point, but an essential one-present before him in two different ways. He has to be at the same time understanding that which he translates and producing, or as I should say actually creating, the translation in which it is to appear.

He has obviously to know both the tongue into which he translates and the tongue from which he translates, but he has also to possess a sort of shadowy tongue, the wraith of a composite language, a mysterious idiom which combines the two, acts as a bridge, and permits him to pass continuously from one to the other. Further, he must write well in the tongue into which he translates, for a translation is a bit of writing like any other and varies like any other in vernacular excellence. It is not enough that he should fully understand that which he is translating; he must also erect the new form in such a fashion that it shall be good in itself, so that anyone reading it and not knowing it to be a translation should be as satisfied as though he were reading a good original.

Again, when I say that a translator must “know” each of the two languages involved, that word “know” signifies much more than a supposed precise meaning attaching to each term in each tongue; for not only is there no such possible exactitude of definition, but in one tongue the connotation even of a simple word simply representing a concrete object will be different from the connotation of the corresponding word in another

tongue. Its historical and social connections will be different; its effect upon the rhythm of the sentence and therefore upon the emotion produced will be different-all that!

No wonder that we call translation a difficult art! No wonder that translators even of moderate value are rare, and translators of excellence as rare as poets! And with all that, I repeat, they are forbidden their full reward.

But the social importance of translation has always been great and, as I shall hope to show, is today greater than ever. The moment one society has intercourse by commerce, policy, or arms with a society of another idiom, translation is an imperative activity; you cannot carry on without it. It commands the value of treaties and of commercial contracts and of military capitulations. In a wider field, it is a condition of order between nations and therefore of peace. In a still wider field, it is the condition without which a common culture cannot exist.

And here I would particularly call attention to translation as a function of religion, in the very nature of the case, translation been an essential to the maintenance of religion among men, and since the religion of a community, that is, its sanctified customs in morals and action, is the determinant of that community, translation lies at the very roots of society.

For religion has about it two characters which thus compel the presence of translation. In the first place it is, or professes to be, emancipated from time, dealing with immortalities. But living languages are mortal. Therefore this original pronouncement of a religion becomes archaic (it is a part of their strength), and needs rendering into the speech men know in each succeeding age, lest the guide should fall dumb and his lantern be extinguished. In the second place Religion is of its nature universal and its application to various societies demands the rendering of its fundamental doctrines into the idiom of each in such fashion that all the renderings shall make for unity of thought, corresponding with the thought of the original.

Of such historical importance has this special function of translation been that, during the last five centuries at least, the main impetus of all translation has proceeded from it; and nearly all the great translations known to us, from the Septuagint and the Vulgate to the early English and Bohemian Bibles, to the renderings of Calvin's Institute and the innumerable vernacular explanations of Latin forms in the Roman Communion, have issued from this source. It was, we may say, through religious translation, that English prose, in particular, was discovered: and largely by those translations that the modern English character was made.

As with religion, so with the external forms of culture, so with doubt, so with information. The translator is the purveyor of them all.

Now in this point of culture it is that translation acquires its special importance today. For the characteristic of our time is a singular disunion within that which is and must be essentially *one:* which had a common origin and which must have common fate: which used to be called Christendom, and is still called Europe: though the term now implies today extension over seas. This disunion proceeds from the long absence of a common philosophy, that is from the disruption of what was a common religion; and it is

expressed in the department of language in a peculiar fashion which all do not appreciate but which is of profound effect upon the life of all.

And this disunion is complex: for the disunion in language between the modern groups of our common civilization is not even coincident with those groups. One social group has one official language, generally known to its citizens as a whole: thus the Italians have Tuscan, the Spaniards Castilian. A neighbour has another official tongue; and the two tongues are often so alien one to the other that in passing from one to the other you pass into a different world, as from the world of Trent to the world of Innsbruck. Yet you cannot say of any one such group that its political personality is coincident with its language: County Clare talks English and the Masurians Polish. Because groups of languages are thus not coincident with national feeling, the tendency to create new divisions is enhanced. Were Englishmen, for instance, familiar with good translations of what was once the universal tongue of Irishmen, they would the better know the Irish mind.

Unless translation, then, be proceeding continually and over a very wide range of interests, the unity of our civilization is distorted and its energies become self-destructive; but unless that work of translation is not only widely done but well done, it may actually do more harm than good.

When men were more fully conscious of our cultural unity in the west they clung to the tradition of Latin, which died hard. It is possible that this tradition will be revived, but for the moment it has lost its efficacy and we are like a group of individuals without a common bond of comprehension, with power of speech yet artificially dumb. We need translation today in Europe more than ever we needed it before. We need it materially in the satisfaction of common life, for discovery is common to all our culture and is not of one province. We need it spiritually, in the spreading and comparison of separate cultural efforts more than ever it was needed before, at any rate of recent centuries.

So much for the weight of my subject. So much for presenting the truth that translation is of very grave moment to us today. Now let us examine the nature of translation as a task, the rules which should guide it, the departments into which it falls, and conclude with the perils under which today it lies.

One may divide the task of translation into two departments, corresponding to two ends or functions. The one I would arbitrarily call that of instruction-translation used in order to convey in one tongue facts determined in another tongue; the other I would arbitrarily call literary-the translation into one tongue of spiritual effect determined in another tongue. A segregated example of the first is the translation of a textbook; a segregated example of the second is the translation of a great story or a great poem.

But here it must be remarked that the second is but a particular case of the first. In what I have called the “translation of instruction” we are primarily concerned with exactitude of rendering; we are “literal”, our business is so to render the original that in its new form the writer of the original should have no quarrel with it but admit it to be the precise rendering of what he had written. The second, or literary form, demands the same qualities of exactitude and the same conscientious effort at rendering the original,

but adds to these something indefinable which corresponds to what we call in pictorial art colour. The first sort of translation corresponds to draughtsmanship, which is no less necessary to a coloured than to an uncoloured picture; the second corresponds to the copying of a painting in which the draughtsmanship must be exactly rendered, but also the sensuous effect, harmony and contrast of hues.

Translation falls, like every literary activity, into the two main forms of prose and verse; nor is discussion of the boundary between these much to the purpose. More important is it to recognize the diversity of origin which differentiates the two. For prose appeals through the reason, verse through the emotions: the one to the Intelligent the other to the Appetitive in Man.

And this is true even in the department of persuasion (whereby men are governed). For when you would persuade by the use of the reason, the more strictly prosaic your prose the more thorough your achievement. But when you would persuade by the emotions, which is the commoner and easier way but the less enduring in its results, you must inevitably-though you believe yourself to be writing prose-bring in that admixture of something other which is the property of the poet. And before you know where you are your prose has taken on the colours of rhetoric.

This is true even of narrative, where narrative is intended to work upon the heart rather than the head. All great emotional narrative, however sober in appearance, is essentially rhetorical at heart. I admit this little digression with a useful purpose, which is to show how there must be two attitudes towards translation, corresponding to the two media with which we are dealing; for when we are translating prose, or when we are translating verse and its penumbra of rhetoric, we must use a separate fashion for each.

Because the matter to be translated is thus diverse at its origin, and branches out into further diversities within each group, therefore the rules which we seek to establish for right translation are general and particular: the general rules applying to all translation, the particular to translation of particular kinds.

Of general rules there would seem to be three, two positive and fairly obvious; one negative, not so immediately evident, and therefore more often transgressed.

The two positive rules are:

(1) That the translation should be into the language of the translator.

(2) But that the translated language must be possessed as perfectly as possible by the translator-*short of confusion in his mind.*

The third or negative rule I take to be as follows:

(3) The translator must be emancipated from mechanical restriction, of which the two chief forms are:

(a) The restriction of space.

(b) The restriction of form.

Let me develop these brief sentences.

First, as to translation being at its best in the language of the translator:

The end of translation is the production of a work in a certain language. If I translate *The Song of Roland* into English my object is to produce an English epic-whether in verse or in rhetoric may be later discussed. If a man translate a German statistical summary into French he has the object of producing a French statistical summary. The importance of this rule increases with the subtlety or the spiritual magnitude or the high individuality of the work to be translated. It is better that a German statistical table should be rendered into French by a Frenchman, but it is essential that a Frenchman and not an Englishman or a German should attempt a French rendering of Shakespeare's plays.

There enters into this the admitted truth that what is not wholly conscious in us decides the larger part of our action. We possess our native tongue in an intimate fashion which permits us to use it coincidently with thought. All men who pride themselves upon facility and exactitude in a particular idiom know the peril of thinking in terms of another idiom, lest the purity of their text be modified and its value therefore lessened. The French writer who became famous under the assumed name of Anatole France refused to learn any foreign living tongue (though it was to his advantage that he knew the classics) lest his style in French should suffer: at least, that was the excuse he gave for his ignorance, and it may well have been a true one. Obviously the translator cannot enjoy privileged ignorance of this kind; he must know something of another tongue or he could not translate at all. But it seems equally obvious that unless there is one medium which is native to him and in which he writes well, he cannot translate save into that medium; for only in a man's own language can a man write generously and continuously, in a manner worthy of his powers, and make a permanent thing.

The rule that the translated language must be possessed as perfectly as possible may seem so obvious as not to be worth setting down: but I think that if we consider certain of its implications we shall see that it needs to be both stated and considered.

In the first place let us note that this second rule is somewhat less important than the first.

It is true that misconceptions of the original language will mar a translation, and it is even true that in particular cases where the essence of the subject turns perhaps upon a single phrase an error may destroy the value of the whole. But normally the original language is sufficiently possessed by the translator for his task, or he would not have undertaken it; and normally one or two *errors* in the brute meaning of the original will do no more than put blemishes upon a translation. But if the translator wields his *own* instrument badly, is not a good writer in his *own* language, then the translation *must* be bad throughout, however, well the original may be known. One might put it in another way by saying that occasional errors in the meaning of the original will generally have no more than a mechanical effect, while an insufficient use of the language into which the translation is made is of organic importance, affecting the very tissue of a work and affecting it throughout.

The possession of a foreign idiom must extend to much more than the possession of what are called literal meanings; and here let me digress upon an essential point which

would alone be matter for more than one lecture such as this. *There are, properly speaking, no such things as identical equivalents;* it is a point we came across at the beginning of these remarks and I would like to deal with it here more thoroughly.

The reason there are no such things as exact equivalents between two terms in two different languages lies in two characters of the Word. First each word, however simply used, is used with multiplicity of meaning. Secondly, the history of a word, its use in the prose and verse of the language to which it belongs, its sound-value in that language, its connection in the mind of the cultured reader of that language with its use in certain masterpieces and remembered phrases, and in general all the atmosphere of its being, make it one thing in one language from what it is in another even where the use being made of it is similar. To take one of the simplest examples: the word “terre” in French, the word “land” in English.

The word “terre” in French may be variously translated by the words Land, Soil, Ground, Earth-to give only four of its distinct meanings. Thus of sailors at sea, making a landfall, *“C'est bien la terre”* means “It is certainly land”. *“Cest de la bonne terre”* means “It is good soil”. The fine sharp musical phrase, *“Les Rois de la terre”* in the *Marseillaise* means “The Kings of all the earth” and *“Il mit pied à terre”* means “He put foot to ground”. In the plural *“ses terres” used* of a magnate means not “his lands” but “his land” or “his estate”-and so on.

The difficulty is a familiar one. The ambiguities produced by it are difficulties against which even the most elementary translator is on his guard. But what must also be remarked and what is equally important when one is attempting the rendering of any great matter-great through its literary form or its message-is the atmosphere of the word. The word *“terre”* in French is a long and powerful syllable, becoming two syllables on occasion. It can be given a mystical value to which the English word “earth” alone corresponds and no other of its supposed equivalents. It is a more profound word in a peasant society than in an urban society. There is more still; it connotes very vaguely but quite certainly in one language one type of landscape, in another another. And there is more, it has been used by the poets and the great prose writers in different ways in the two languages, and this historical difference marks its effect whenever it is used.

In the same way certain words are common or even touch upon the ludicrous in one language whose apparent literal equivalent has no such atmosphere about it. There is the classic instance of the word “handkerchief” in *Othello,* which, translated by the French word *“mouchoir”,* interrupted the tragedy with loud laughter. Or again, the simplest word may suggest abuse or anger or repulsion in one tongue and not in another. One may say that the word *“vache”* means “cow”, but the very sound of that long vowel *“vache”* has led to its use as a term of odium peculiarly violent and comic only on account of its violence. There is an old and excellent French joke about a Parisian lady who saw a charming little calf and said, *“Que malheur que ça devient vache*!” One cannot translate that by saying “How sad that it should grow into a cow”, because cow suggests something absurd but certainly not something fierce and angry; it is not an opprobrious term. Now so much does this word *“vache”* have this other connotation in

French that it is the common popular insult to a policeman and is a motive for imprisonment. It is one of the favourite challenges thrown down by young and eager revolutionaries to ordered society.

Next note that there are, in the more modern developments of European languages, and especially in those which have a great mass of colloquial literature, a number of terms for which there is certainly no equivalent at all, even approximate. The English word “cad” has grown up almost within my memory. Men somewhat senior to me could tell me of a time in their own youth when it had nothing of the signification it has now. It is the peculiar product of an aristocratic society, and you can no more translate the word “cad” into French than you can translate the word “gentleman” into French, at least not by a single word. Nor, for that matter, can you translate the word “scholar”; nor can you translate into English the French word *goujat*, or the French word *frondeur*.

I should exceed the limits allowed me if I were to dilate further upon this theme, for it is almost inexhaustible. Everywhere it leads on to the conclusion that the thorough possession of the original language is essential to the translator, and the more perfect his possession of it *with the one reservation I made* the better for his task. Let me give an example of how a single error may vitiate a whole piece of important rendering. As everybody knows, Rousseau's *Social Contract,* one of the greatest as well as one of the most effective books ever written, turns upon the conception of the General Will, and upon the author's rightness or wrongness in characterizing the General Will the value or falsity of his thesis depends. Now early in that great essay occurs the phrase, *“La volonté générale est toujours droite”*. I remember an occasion when during the attempted translation of the work an Englishman was about to publish the phrase under the form, “The general will is always right”: a phrase which is not only patently nonsensical and would put Rousseau out of court at once, but is also at issue with what goes before and what comes after. *“La volonté générale est toujours droite”* means, “The general will is always direct"; a very sound remark which has been put in another form by the moderns who say, *“Le peuple est toujours* simpliste”. And there again, what is the English for *“simpliste”?* You need a whole phrase to translate it.

I have said that the possession of the original tongue as perfectly as possible *subject to certain qualification* was obviously an advantage. That qualification it will be remembered was, “short of confusion”.

Too great a familiarity with a foreign idiom may render a man confused between that foreign idiom and his own. It may make him at times run the two together in his mind, diluting and marring each with the properties of the other. When this happens you get very bad translation indeed; and we all must have noticed that it does happen over and over again nowadays in the writings of those rare scholars who are really steeped in a foreign idiom, or at any rate in its spirit if not its vocabulary. There is a certain degree of familiarity with German which makes an Englishman, especially in the theological field, incomprehensible. There is a certain degree of familiarity with French which makes the English sentence professing to translate a French one unnatural and slightly ridiculous. Such confusion must be avoided in translation even at the price of some less perfect

knowledge of the original language, lest being steeped in the foreign tongue one falls in one's own tongue into unusual order, odd neologisms, and metaphorical phrases the force of which are a commonplace to the foreigner but with us a grotesque novelty.

In this connection it may well be asked whether a bilingual person has ever been known to make a good translation. I can recall no case and to this I ascribe what is surely true, and if true, lamentable-that we have no sufficient rendering of the Welsh classics into English. For that there is such a thing as Welsh classical stuff, and that Welsh rhetoric and historical tradition have been so finely put as to move Welshmen profoundly we can all testify. But the trouble is that the Englishman born who knows Welsh well is sadly to seek, and while there have been scholarly men who thought in Welsh but talked in English familiarly, they were not apt for the task precisely because they did not think in English. It is other with the effect of some ancient Irish matter, which has been the better translated because the translator was spiritually in deep sympathy with the Irish tongue but had from childhood been trained to use English.

We may ask ourselves, however, whether an occasional touch of the foreign atmosphere in the translation of a foreign thing be of advantage or no: whether a slight Gallicism here and there in the rendering of a French essay is to the advantage of the English version, and vice versa, an Anglicism in some such work as the admirable modern translation of the works of Kipling into French.

It is perhaps a matter of taste, but for my part I should reply in the negative. I should say that any hint of foreignness in the translated version is a blemish; I should keep to my canon that the translated thing should read like a first-class native thing. And here, by the way, let me give an example which covers all the ground, showing both what a translation should be in its excellence and how little fame a good translation earns for the genius capable of it-I mean that work which I am afraid not one man in a thousand has heard of, the anonymous *Devil on Two Sticks,* the translated *Asmodée of* Lesage.

What fortunes the book has had I know not; possibly the translator (presumably obscure) will be known to those with more scholarship than I. In the two editions which I have, one of them a first edition, no name of a translator appears. It is one of the best books, not only in the language as an English book but as a translation, and it shows what wages one may expect who undertakes this trade. The wages of literature anyhow are pretty bad; they come next, I think, in order of disappointment to the wages of sin: but of all literary wages as paid in fame the very lowest are the wages of the translator; and I suppose that is why translation has today almost been given up in despair.

I gave for my third rule a negative one: translation must be emancipated from mechanical troubles, of which the two chief are:

(a) Space.

(b) The set form of the original.

The attempt to keep the scale of the translation exactly parallel to the scale of the original is fatal. Nearly always must a translation be of greater length than the original. Nor is the reason hard to find. Unless you could get a more or less satisfactory equivalent-and we have seen how hard *that* is-you are compelled to expand. In each

idiomatic term a whole phrase is packed, and the term must be unpacked if we would put its meaning into our own tongue, where there is no general close-corresponding single term by which to express it.

This is particularly true of translation from almost any other language into English, for English has less inflection than the generality of languages. We have to express continually by relatives and the addition of adverbs ideas which are contained within the very structure of the foreign word. The cases in which there is any direct necessity, or at least serious advantage, in attempting to maintain the scale of the original, are rare. In those cases it may perhaps be inevitable or advantageous to torture the translation somewhat and fit it into its unnatural mould of a precise limit in length, but the translation is always the worse for it.

This negative rule applies with particular strength to verse. What difficulties lie in the translation of verse I shall discuss later, but in connection with the particular point with which we are now dealing it is especially to be remarked that a desperate effort at translating one line by one line or one page by one page will ruin the result. To show what I mean I will delay my example until I come to talk of the translation of verse, and will there quote Mr. G. K. Chesterton's remarkable translation of Du Bellay's famous sonnet, *Heureux qui comme Ulysse*.

As of space, so of set form. You need not translate the sonnet by a sonnet, nor even the chapter by a chapter, still less the paragraph by a paragraph. In each, for the true rendering of the spirit, you need a native form in the place of a foreign one. For example, Victor Hugo suffers very much in English translation by the preservation of the short paragraph which was natural to the French fiction of his time, and has always been unnatural to ours. He becomes grotesque in English where in French he is sublime, not only by the rendering of his short paragraph into a medium unsuited to it, but by the rendering of the very brief epigrammatic sentence or question into an idiom where it is unnatural. The same is particularly true of Michelet, whose glorious rhythms can be and are rendered puerile by insufficient translation. Thus, of the great Girondin's singing, *“Quelle était cette voix?”*-*“C'était la RévoIution même”***,** I would not translate, “What was that voice?” “It was the Revolution itself.” That seems to me, in English, grotesque. I prefer, “One might have said, on hearing such a voice, that one had heard the Revolution itself in song”.

In general I should say that, apart from these two mechanical restrictions of space and set form, all mechanical restrictions should be avoided in translation. The translator should be emancipated from them under the same spirit which emancipates the writer in any other form from mechanical restraint. By which I do not mean that having chosen a form you must not maintain that form; having sat down to write a translation as a sonnet you must not run to fifteen lines; having sat down to write an epitaph, you must not produce a little biography. All creative work must be fitted to a frame. But what I mean is that creative work adjusted to a scale not native to itself but borrowed from some other thing is marred, and so is translation marred when the translator erroneously believes it must be perpetually referred to the shape and scale of the original.

So much for the three general rules which, as they appear to me, should govern the business of translation.

In the second part of Mr. Belloc's study, to appear next month, he will take up the two departments of prose and verse and give the particular rules for each.

ON TRANSLATION

PART TWO

EDITOR'S NOTE:-In the first part of his paper, published last month, Mr. Belloc dwelt on the importance of translation as a social force, particularly in the matter of spiritual unity among nations, and took up the general rules governing translation in both prose and verse. Among other points he insisted that the translation should always be made into the language of the translator, and that the translator should be emancipated from mechanical restrictions as to length and as to form. He now, in conclusion, takes up the rules governing the two principal divisions of literature.

Now what particular rules attach to the two particular departments of prose and verse?

In the translation of prose I find these special points:-

(I) The translator should, I think, not plod on, sentence by sentence, still less word by word, but always "block out" his work. When I say "block out" I mean that he should read over his material at large to grasp it as a whole in the original before he undertakes the translation, and after that, when the translation is under way, he should take it at least section by section, paragraph by paragraph, and ask himself before each what the whole sense is which he has to render, what the effect of the unit as a whole may be, before reproducing it in another tongue.

In connection with this occurs a necessary warning upon the use of the dictionary. However well a man may possess the original tongue from which he is translating into his own, there will arise-unless he be completely bilingual, which I have called a drawback to translation-occasions when it is necessary to verify the exact meaning of a particular word, and for that service the dictionary is essential. It is equally necessary that the best book of reference, of which there is not usually more than one, be used. But to rely upon the dictionary continuously is fatal. It argues either an insufficient knowledge of the original, or an insufficient confidence in oneself, which, for translation as for any other creative work, is an evil. If you are fairly certain from your experience that a particular meaning is intended do not fear to give that meaning although the dictionary has it not; for remember that all dictionaries are made by translators and that every translator is like yourself, an imperfect being. Your own experience, when you are sure of it, is a sufficient guide.

(2)

It is of high importance to render idiom by idiom; and idioms of their nature demand translation into another form from that of the original. The Greek exclamation, "By the

Dog!" is in literal English merely comic. An Englishman does not ejaculate, "By the Dog!" as a natural emphasis and ornament to conversation, although the worship of the dog is a religion which the Englishman holds and the Greek did not. I should propose here a transposition of letters, and I suggest that the harmless phrase, "By God!" is much nearer to "By the Dog!" than anything else you could get. It is the same thing with the idiom of the question, both rhetorical and definitive, and with the idiom of the historic present.

Thus in translation from French into English we must remember that the French use of the question not for purposes of inquiry but for the regulation of the prose is not native to the English tongue, and the same is true of the French historic present. Whole pages of French matter will be written in the historic present which, if they reappear in an English form, should be thrown into the past. The most sober of French historians will continue in paragraph after paragraph to represent in action in the historic present, and the prose will follow quite naturally. The effect in the original will not be strained. Put the same into English and you get at once in exaggerated effect. So with the question, rhetorical or definitive. The ample use of the rhetorical question is native to ordinary French prose, not to English. It is also native to French prose to define a proposition by putting the data of it first into question form. It is not native to English to do this. It is rather native to English to put the data into statement form. Thus for a French phrase such as *"Que demanda-t-il? Demanda-t-il une solution financière ou une solution politique? Il demanda bien une solution financière, mais une solution financière subordonnée à la solution politique"*, I should not write in English, "Yet what was his aim? Was he considering a financial or a political solution?" et cetera. I should rather say, "The solution he was seeking was essentially political, and in so far as there was a financial element in it, this was subordinate to his political aim".

In this same connection of idiom you have a multitude of points, of which I will select only this: the sentence without a verb. It is native to French idiom; it is not native to English. The sentence without a verb can be, and sometimes should be, used in English, but rarely and with great discretion. It is forceful only because it is unusual; in French it is ubiquitous.

(3)

You must, in rendering a foreign phrase, render intention by intention. A neglect of this rule leads to absurd results. The intention of a phrase in one language may be less emphatic than the form of the phrase, or it may be more emphatic. It always leans a little one way or the other, and when you are rendering a foreign phrase into your own tongue you must consider whether the usual form it takes in your own tongue exaggerates on the one side or the other. Thus a French political writer speaking of some law of which he disapproves will say: *"Voilà ce qui a perdu le pays"*. Should you translate this into "That is what destroyed the country", you quite miss the original intention. The French exaggerated phrase was not intended to say that the country was destroyed by the law; obviously it was not destroyed: it means, "was hurt", "was weakened". The corresponding English phrase would be normally too low pitched

rather than too high pitched, and one would rather say, “This law had grievous consequences for the country". Conversely, there are many French phrases which are the other way about, which say less than they mean where the English one says more. An excellent example is the journalistic and Parliamentary form, *“parfaitement incorrect”*, which does not mean “quite inexact” but rather “utterly false”. It is a very strong expression indeed, put in studiedly pale terms. When an Englishman says “you can't believe a word he says”-which is manifestly nonsense on the side of overemphasis, yet a very common phrase-a Frenchman would probably put it: *“On ne peut guère toujours le croire”*. I should not wonder if the tradition of the Duel had something to do with this under-pitching of the personal statement.

In this effort to render intention by intention it is often necessary to conform to the idiom of one's own tongue by adding some word not in the original. For instance, I would translate La Rochefoucauld's excellent remark on funerals something after this fashion: “I like a funeral, for I come away from it saying to myself, ‘I have got rid of another of them, anyhow’”. The word “anyhow” is not in the original; I think the English form needs it to express the savour of the French.

(4)

When we translate prose in these late modern times of ours, following upon so many centuries of varying use in words, we must be very much upon our guard against words of similar form in the two languages, that one from which we are translating and that one into which we are translating; and we must equally be upon our guard against taking an early meaning to be the same as the later meaning of the same word. Both dangers have a similar source. Each proceeds from the fact that with the passage of time a word changes in meaning while retaining its form. There has been no more fruitful source of historical error (not only in constitutional discussion but in what is more important, theological discussion) than this. Fustel de Coulanges did great service when he pointed out that the word “*cum*” meant quite a different thing in a Merovingian document from what it would have meant in a classical one. *“Rex cum proceribus”* did not mean, for Dagobert, “The King *together* with his magnates”- as the man familiar only with classical Latin would think it meant; it meant rather, “The King *in the presence* of his magnates”. It in no way connoted the necessity of assent by the magnates. The Merovingian king was heir to the Roman Emperors, not to tribal chiefs. Similarly, in all the mass of discussion upon the Eucharist, the *verb “repraesentare”*, given a modern meaning, not only vitiates but contradicts the earlier use; which earlier use did not connote a symbol but the exact opposite, the actual transference of the thing named.

In translation from the Teutonic languages into English the danger takes one form, in translating from the Latin languages another. A word similar in spelling, nearly identical or even actually identical, may, as we all know, have a very different meaning in English from what it has in the original German. And the danger is all the greater because, in the case of the Teutonic languages, those English words which are of Teutonic derivation are at the very core of the speech. The use of “bitter” during the war

is a good example. The odiously un-English term “bitter fighting” nearly passed into the language. But it is in translating from the Latin languages and particularly from French that the warning must be emphasized. There are hosts and regiments of words, most of them branching out from the Renaissance, others of earlier origin, but all entering directly or indirectly from Latin, which are similar or identical in spelling and which, if rendered as equivalents, make a translation wholly false.

Examples will occur to every one. One of the most obvious is the word “deception”, which in French means today a disappointment, in English a deceit. Another less known one and one most important to remember in daily work is the criss-cross of “magistrate” and “judge”. In French the former word stands for the greater office, in English the lesser one. I cannot help recalling an instance of this danger which we had immediately after the Great War. A politician

-English-speaking but not, I am glad to say, English-was roused to indignation by the presence in a French document of the *word “demande”*, which he thought equivalent to his own familiar word, “demand”: an error comparable to mistaking a salutation for a blow.

(5)

Transmute boldly: render the sense by the corresponding sense without troubling over the verbal difficulties in your way. Where such rendering of sense by corresponding sense involves considerable amplification, do not hesitate to amplify for fear of being verbose. For instance, if you come across the French word “*constater*”, which in point of fact you do in nearly all official documents with which you may have to deal, you must always replace it by a full English sentence, even so ample as, “We note without further comment”, or “We note for purposes of future reference”, or in another connection, “We desire to put on record”. In the same way there are whole French phrases which should justly be put into a shorter form in English. Take such a sentence as this: “*Il-y-avait dans cet homme je ne sais quoi de suffisance"*. The right translation of this would not be: “There was in this man I know not what of self-Sufficiency"; the right translation is rather, more briefly, “There was a touch of complacency about him”. Sometimes, even often, a whole passage must be thus transmuted, a whole paragraph thrown into a new form, if we would justly render the sense of the original; and the general rule should stand that, after having grasped as exactly as possible all that the original stands for, with the proportion between its various parts, the distinction between what is emphasized and what is left on a lower plane, we should say to ourselves, not “How shall I make this foreigner talk English?”, but “What would an Englishman have said to express this same?” *That* is translation. *That* is the very essence of the art: the resurrection of an alien thing in a native body; not the dressing of it up in native clothes but the giving to it of native flesh and blood.

(6) Lastly, I would add this epigrammatic counsel: never embellish. You may indeed embellish if you are desiring to produce a work of art of your own, careless of what happens to the vile body which you are adapting, just as you may melt down some silver spoons and fashion with the material an elaborate cup. But if your object be

sincere translation never yield to the sometimes considerable temptation of making the new thing (in your own eyes) better than the old. It is a counsel of perfection, and I grant that had it always been observed some of the best work done by man would never have appeared, for some of the best work done by man has been struck out in the rendering, or at any rate after a first reading, of some foreign thing by the reader who was inspired to make something better in his own language. But that is not translation. It is as much an error in *translation* as the converse error of rendering what was noble in the original into something base.

I might here, had I the space, digress upon the very interesting question whether the translation of some dull foreign writer be not the master-test of the translator's art. I mean the translation of a dull foreigner so that his original insufficiency shall appear in the new form. There is a pleasing irony about the subject. I leave it with regret, in the hope of returning to it elsewhere.

For the translation of verse and rhetoric three main rules suggest themselves to me:

First, that translation must here be almost wholly occupied with spiritual effect; next, the consequence of this, that verse should normally be translated not into verse but into prose; and lastly, a negative rule, that one should abandon the effort to translate the untranslatable.

(I) As to spiritual effect-especially in rhetoric-there is of course no rule for obtaining it in its myriad forms, but there is the rule of making it one's supreme object; and a triumph it is to achieve that object and rarely is it achieved. Great rhetoric and verse, which in its highest form we call in modern English *poetry*, has upon the mind of man an unmistakable effect, separate in its quality of emotion from all other. It is that effect which the translator must attempt, half despairing, to reproduce: or at any rate it is that effect to which he must approach. Unless he bring in something at least of that magic he has not translated at all. A translation even of good verse, let alone of poetry, which does not convey something of the thrill, which does not grasp something of the poignancy proper to the original, is as it were the negative of translation, it is a minus quantity, it is worse than nothing. For instance:

τῷ δ′ἅμα τεσσαράκοντα μέλαιναι νῆες ἔποντο

translate this, “He was followed by forty black ships”, and you had much better have spent your time playing Patience. But translate it, “Forty dark ships followed him”, and you are some miles behind-but still in the wake-of the fleets that sailed to Troy.

(2) It is, I say, from this truth that there follows the injunction to translate *as a rule* verse into prose and not into verse. I know that the very greatest renderings of the most famous poems have commonly been themselves in verse. Yet I think that is to be regretted. Let me take an example and a justly famous one. These lines:

Τῆλε δ′ἀπὸ κρατὸς χέε δέσματα σιγαλόεντα
῞Αμπυκα, κεκπύφαλόν τ′, ἠδὲ πλεκτὴν ἀναδέσμην

Κρήδενόν θ', ὅ ῥά οἱ δῶκε χρυσέη Ἀφροδίτη
Ἤματι τῷ ὅτε μιν κορυθαίολος ἠγάγεθ' Ἕκτωρ
Ἐκ δόμον Ἠετίωνος. . . (*Iliad*, x, 467-71)

It would require scholarship which I do not possess to decide upon the exactitude of translation from the Homeric poems. But it requires no more than a sense of English, which I claim to possess, and a love of the original, which I also feel, to judge whether this be not as excellent an abbreviated rendering as was ever given. It is, in my ears at least, better than anything that has been done in verse that I ever read, in those efforts men have made to put the original hexameters into English lines.

". . . and from her head dropped the net and the wreath and the diadem which golden Aphrodite gave her on the day when Hector of the glancing helm took her from the house of Eetion [to be his bride]." I do not think this effect would have been produced in verse. Chapman does not produce it, grandeur though he has, nor Pope, the common criticism of whose obviously un-Greek method has always seemed to me beside the mark. Pope was a great poet and Chapman a great translator, but a little book which I shall treasure all my life called *Church's Stories from Homer* does the trick better than either of them.

The rule of not translating verse into verse is indeed a hard commandment. For verse inspires by its rhythm, and the temptation to reproduce the effect in rhythmical form under the air of one's own tongue is very strong. Moreover, I must admit that, especially with short things of precise form, the temptation has been yielded to with advantage, often with real success; and sometimes I think with a success which would not have been achieved in any other way. This is particularly true of epigram, as for instance the epigram of Anacreon:

Love's self is sad, love's lack is sadder still,
But love unloved, oh that's the greatest ill.

A translation rather of verse than of poetry. But no one has sufficiently put into verse what may certainly be put into solemn prose, the loveliest of the laments from the *Anthology*, Meleager's ἄκρυα σο κα νέρθε (vii. 476).

That sometimes even a whole sonnet can be retranslated into sonnet form we know from the high success of Du Bellay, some of whose greatest work was an adaptation from the Italian (and that in its turn from the Latin), and oddly enough it was Du Bellay himself who gave the opportunity for one of the finest exceptions in this line, I mean Mr. G. K. Chesterton's translation of the famous sonnet upon *Lyré*, which, as a model of what can be done in this fashion, I will take the liberty of reading to you now, first reading Du Bellay's fourteen lines and then those of his English compeer.

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage,
Ou comme cestuy là qui conquit la toison,
Et puis est retourné, plein d'usage et raison,
Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son aage!

Quand revoiray-je, helas, de mon petit village
Fumer la cheminee: et en quelle saison
Revoiray-je le clos de ma pauvre maison,
Qui m'est une province, et beaucoup d'avantage?

Plus me plaist le sejour qu'ont basty mes ayeux,
Que des palais Romains le front audacieux:
Plus que le marbre dur me plaist l'ardoise fine,

Plus mon Loyre Gaulois que le Tybre Latin,
Plus mon petit Lyré que le mont Palatin,
Et plus que I'air marin la doulceur Angevine.

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Happy, who like Ulysses or that lord
That raped the fleece, returning full and sage,
With usage and the world's wide reason stored,
With his own kin can wait the end of age.
When shall I see, when shall I see, God knows!
My little village smoke; or pass the door,
The old dear door of that unhappy house
That is to me a kingdom and much more?
Mightier to me the house my fathers made
Than your audacious heads, O Halls of Rome!
More than immortal marbles undecayed,
The thin sad slates that cover up my home;
More than your Tiber is my Loire to me,
Than Palatine my little Lyré there;
And more than all the winds of all the sea
The quiet kindness of the Angevin air.

If I may introduce the personal note I will admit that in that translation of *The Song of Roland* which I fear I shall not live to complete but which I most desire to accomplish as a task, and which of course I have undertaken in prose, I could not forbid myself the admission of verse here and there, so powerfully was I possessed by the lyric form of the original. Thus I cannot but translate:

Hauts sont li puys et tenebreuses et grants
Et dans li vals sont les eaues courants.

High are the hills, and huge, and dim with cloud,
Down in the deeps the living streams are loud.

And again:

Ami Roland, prud'homme, jouvente bele.
Roland, my friend, young gentleman and brave.

No, one cannot kill the desire to tender verse by verse. But one must not let it run away with one, and one must preserve the canon that in general and especially for the longer flights and more especially for the epics, verse should be rendered into prose.

(3) I added, “Do not try to translate the untranslatable”. The negative commandment is perhaps the hardest of all. Were it too much impressed upon men no good flash of poetic translation would ever be struck out. But it is true that if you find a thing quite untranslatable, if you discover your effort to be wholly unworthy of the ordinal, it is far better for two good reasons to burn it than to let it stand. The two good reasons are, first, that by publishing it you traduce the poet; and second, that you commit that unforgivable crime of making a fool of yourself. I defy any man to translate into English verse or prose the perfection of Gauthier:

. . . et par la petitesse
De ses mains, elle était Andalouse, et contesse.

I would conclude with a certain unhappy warning for what threatens translation as a whole in our time. I would not like to end without that warning, because it is very much needed and the evil in connection with which I make it is increasing every day.

Translation-of a sort-swarms today on a scale unknown to the past. Our popular press is filled with renderings of things said and written by men of other speech, and though we do not sufficiently translate foreign books into English, at least, not the best foreign books, yet of this work also there is a very great deal. That is because the time in which we live is one in which all men read -whether for their good or their ill let others determine.

Now the time in which we live is not only one in which this mass of translation is continually going on, but also one in which it is worse done than ever it was done before. It is worse done today than it was yesterday, and it looks as though it would be worse done tomorrow even than it is today. The bad results of such a state of affairs are manifest. In our own particular province which is but one of many, the province of the English-speaking world, bad translation not only cuts us off from our peers and fellows in a common civilization but what is worse, ministers to isolated pride. For who shall believe that there is great work done in any other tongue than his own if whatever appears in a foreign tongue is put before him inadequately?

The cause of this rapid deterioration in translation is not only the huge inflation of reading which today we suffer or enjoy, but also what is in the very blood of our time, the commercial spirit: the motive of gain. And coupled with this the vast increase of what may be called the “intellectual proletariat”, of whom we may say that their intellectual quality is relative, but their proletarian quality positive and certain.

Under this combination arises a state of affairs where thousands think they know enough of a foreign tongue to translate into their own, and where those thousands are equally confident that, because they can write in one sense, they can write in another. Everyone is taught to write, and most think that the setting down of words on paper is a sufficient definition of the art of writing. Hence a sort of translation can be had for next to nothing. Hence does the owner of a newspaper-and even the editor thereof, who is commonly a better educated man-accept almost anything by way of translation; hence does the publisher make out his costs for a translation upon a lower scale than he would ever allow for even the meanest of original work. There are places called Translation Bureaux where you can take any piece of French, German, Russian, or Japanese (but not, I am glad to say, Latin), and get an English rendering of it neatly type-written in a few hours. And the spirit of the translation bureau is upon the whole trade. There is only one remedy, and like the remedy for every department of our modern disease, it must be slight in its effect and probably fail if it be attempted; that remedy is to create a social consciousness of what translation means; to aim-at least in important cases at real translation, and with that object to pay translation at better rates and to give that other half of the writer's wages, which is fame, to the translator as welt as to the original writer.

Failing this, you have to depend upon the chance labour of love, such as the late Scott Moncrieff’s work or the excerpts recently published by Mr. Maurice Baring. Now the proportion that such work, done from enthusiasm and with the enjoyment of leisure, bears to what might be and ought to be done is almost negligible. We must pay translation better and we must praise it more; or pay the penalty of further isolation and of further self-sufficiency-at the end of which is the death of our culture. For no province of Europe can stand alone.

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