

ARTICLE IV.

MORE TRANSLATIONS OF GERMAN POETRY.

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THE interest in my former article¹ leads me to believe that some further samples of German lyrical poetry will be welcome. I give first some pieces from Heine. The rendering of Heine into English verse is proverbially difficult. But, indeed, the translation of the lyrics generally is not easy. One meets with versions which, as metrical paraphrases, are repulsively bald, even when correct. The principle enunciated by the late J. A. Symonds seems well worth remembering in this connection: "A good translation should resemble a plaster-cast, the English being *plaque* upon the original, so as to reproduce the exact form." And yet, while there is much to be said for this general principle, I incline to agree with those who think there is something better than either exact reproduction of form, or absurdly literal transcripts of matter. That better thing is, to throw one's self into the mind, the spirit, of the original, so that its aroma may be caught and preserved. The delicacy, the grace, the fragrance, we must, if possible, retain, even where the genius of our language may at times require a somewhat different thought-mold from the language that is being translated. More than the meter or verse-form of the original is the faithful presentation of the poet's meaning, mind, and spirit. So far back as Horace, we can find some appreciation of these things, for, says the "Ars Poetica,"—

¹"Verse Translations from Modern German Poetry," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. lix. (1902), pp. 162-168.

"Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus
Interpres."

The German lyrics seem to be nowise lacking in richness of musical harmony; their note is often full and lofty; and bewitching assonances abound. The simplicity of many of them is exquisite, and the lyrical effect and charm are all their own. Full they are of that fragrant heat which makes lyrical poetry so dear to men. The instances are not few in which we must claim for them to be inspired lyrics, perfect in sentiment, in expression, and in poetic form. Tenderness, geniality, sweetness, fire, strength, and superb musical utterance, are among the qualities they discover.

Heine's "Spring Song" is simply exquisite—a genuine production of the heart. I give it thus:—

"Softly sounding in my soul
Are all sweet chimes meeting,
Ring thou forth, sweet song of Spring,
Ring out far thy greeting.
"Ring out where in yonder house
Flowers are fair and fleeting,
If you see a little rose,
Say I send her greeting."

A famous poem is Heine's "Lotus-Flower," which I render as follows, though such renderings can never be to one's own satisfaction:—

"The lotus-flower grows weary,
Before the sun's proud might,
With drooping head—so dreary—
She dreams of shady night.
"The moon, whose love availeth,
Doth wake her with his light,
And she to him unveileth
Her face—a goodly sight.
"She blooms and glows and gleameth—
Looks fondly to the height;
She breathes and weeps and trembleth
For love and love's own plight."

How finely, in his little poem "To my Heart," Heine anticipates a favorite note of Browning, when he sings that all exists for love :—

"O heart, my heart, be not oppress,
No fate of thine need thee appal,
Thy spring-time shall enrich thee all—
Thy winter leave thee only blest.

"How much remains thy woe above!
How fair the world doth still abide!
O heart of mine, whate'er betide,
Think all, yea, all's for thee to love."

Nothing, of all that Heine wrote, redounded more to his credit than the two sonnets "To my Mother." Of the first of these I now subjoin a rendering :—

"My head I have been wont right high to bear,
My spirit hath been rather stiff and tough,
The gaze of even a king were not enough
To make me any look of trouble wear.
Yet, mother dear, I openly will tell—
Though spirit proud doth greatly me inflate,
Yet in thy presence, trusty, loved, sedate,
Full oft fear holds me, in its mighty spell.
Is it thy spirit, which subdues me quite,—
Thy spirit bold, which, piercing things outright,
Flares out, and soars aloft to heaven's height?
Torments me now the thought of grief that fell
And caused thy heart for deeds of mine to swell—
Thy faithful heart, which did me love so well."

Geibel's poem on "The Two Angels" is remarkable for the beauty of its imagery and its realistic charm :—

"Knowest thou, O heart, those sister-angels twain
That with swift wings came down from regions higher;
Friendship, peace bringing in her Lily train,
Love who, with rosy flame, doth aye inspire?

"Dark are the locks of Love, fiery her eye,
Fair as the Spring, when buds begin to heave:
Friendship is fair, her blooms of softer dye,
And mild and still as any summer eve.

- "Love is a rushing sea, where on the crest
 So billowy the waves in thousands rise :
 Friendship a mountain lake, within whose breast
 Are mirrored deep and clear the azure skies.
- "Love hath her entrance like a lightning gleam,
 Friendship creeps on like moonlight but begun.
 Love, to acquire and hold, hath for her dream :
 Friendship to offer, but to ask from none.
- "Thrice blest, thrice highly to be praised, the heart
 Wherein these sister-angels both reside,
 And where the Rose's glow doth never part
 From the soft-scented and pure Lily's side."

Freiligrath's piece on "Love's Durance" is a most touching and purely lyrical poem. If Edmund Spenser gave us a "Hymn of Heavenly Love" rising on "golden wings" unto "heaven's heights," Freiligrath has given us a Hymn of Human Love of the most moving and beautiful character. I give it thus:—

- "Oh, love as long as love thou canst !
 Oh, love as long as love thou mayst !
 The hour will come, the hour will come,
 When, at the grave, grief must be faced.
- "See that thy heart doth ever glow—
 Doth love enclose and love enshrine,
 As long as e'er some other heart
 In love responsive beats with thine !
- "Whoso to thee unlocks his soul,
 Him shalt thou love with all thy might !
 His ev'ry hour thou shalt make glad,
 Let no dark cloud on him alight.
- "Oh, guard right well the tongue's wild speech,
 The fateful word is lightly said !
 God knows, by it was meant no ill ;
 Thy friend yet weeps and bows his head.
- "Oh, love as long as love thou canst !
 Oh, love as long as love thou mayst !
 The hour will come, the hour will come,
 When, at the grave, grief must be faced.

- "Thou kneelest down beside the tomb,
 Thou veilest sad and streaming eyes,
 Thy friend thou ne'er again shalt see—
 Beneath the grave's dank grass he lies.
- "There criest thou,—'Oh, cast thine eyes
 On him who weeps upon thy grave;
 Forgive that e'er I did thee wrong;
 God knows, 'twas not to wound I gave!'
- "He sees thee not, nor hears thy plaint.
 Comes not unto thy fond embrace,
 The lips, that oft were pressed to thine,
 Will never say,—'I do efface.'
- "Efface he did, forgave thee all,
 Yet many were the tears that fell
 For thee and for thy thoughtless word—
 But now he sleeps, with him 'tis well!
- "Then love as long as love thou canst!
 Oh, love as long as love thou mayst!
 The hour will come, the hour will come,
 When, at the grave, grief must be faced."

Halm's romantic poem, "My Heart, I wish to ask thee," has been very popular in Germany. It runs as follows:—

- "My heart, I wish to ask thee:
 'What is thy love begun?'
 'Two souls whose thought hath coalesced,
 Two hearts whose beat is one!'
- "And tell me whence Love cometh?'
 'She comes and there is She!'
 'And say, how Love vanisheth?'
 'But that—that ne'er can be!'
- "And when grows Love the purest?'
 'When self is most forgot.'
 'And when doth Love the deepest run?'
 'When stillest is her lot.'
- "And when is Love the richest?'
 'When most her giving proves.'
 'And say, what is it that Love speaks?'
 'She does not speak—she loves.'"

Another German lyric on "The Heart" is that by Hermann Neumann, whose quaint and curious form I turn to English thus:—

“ Two chambers hath the heart,
 Where do dwell
 Both Joy and Sorrow's smart.
 “ When Joy wakes in the one,
 Then slumber
 In th' other is not done.
 “ Therefore, O Joy, pure-flaked,
 Speak softly,
 That Sorrow be not waked.”

K. E. Ebert, in his rousing poem entitled *Ermunterung*, calls men from lethargic gloom in the following strain :—

“ The lark ascends through clear resounding sky,
 There, the embodiment of song, to cry
 And beat this happy trill in heavenly air:—
 ‘ The world is fair ! ’

“ The morning ray awakes the beauteous flower,
 Unlocks its wealth of grace—a fragrant dower,
 From every opening chalice scents declare:—
 ‘ The world is fair ! ’

“ On silvery stream, on glistening brook,
 Are fleeting wavelets passing shady nook
 To lave the beach where nature's mind they share:—
 ‘ The world is fair ! ’

“ Why standest thou, O man, with face depressed
 And look'st adown into thy darksome breast,
 When might'st thou all this jubilation share:—
 ‘ The world's so fair ! ’ ”

Ferrand's poem on “The Rosebush” is instinct with the energy and pathos of life :—

“ Beneath the rose-bush sleeps the child,
 The buds burst forth in breeze so mild,
 His rest so blest, his dreams so sweet,
 In play he seems for angels meet.
 The years glide by.

“ A maid before the rose-tree stands,
 Its fragrance rises on all hands,
 Her palm she lays on swelling breast,
 And glows in wondrous happy rest.
 The years glide by.

“ Before the tree a mother bends—
 The evening breeze a rustling lends—
 She broods on joys time did efface,
 And swathes in tears her pensive face.
 The years glide by.

“ Stript of its dress the rose-tree grieves,
 The autumn's breath hath borne its leaves
 To where they fade, and, whisp'ring, fall
 On silent grave—a lonesome pall.
 The years glide by.”

Perhaps sufficient samples have now been given to show how German lyrical poetry fulfills the requirements of Horace when he says,—

“ *Nec satis est pulchra esse poemata, dulcia sunt,*”
 a dictum of the “*Ars Poetica*” which was long ago thus freely rendered,—

“ 'Tis not enough a poem's finely writ ;
 It must affect and captivate the soul.”

While the German lyrics are not wanting in the depth of sympathy with nature, the warmth of affection, the brilliancy of language and the splendor of imagery, with which they voice subjects like love, friendship, the tenderness, humor, and pathos, of life ; yet they do not lack the spiritualism of the poetic temperament, whereby they are seen, in their intensity and fire, to be pregnant with spiritual feeling and higher hope and aspiration. Such lyric verse deserves the appreciation which even the ancients taught us to render. Horace, with imaginative genius ever ready to catch fire, tells us, in one of his celebrated Odes, what manner of appreciation was theirs of old—how

“ Fruitful Tibur's shady groves
 Its pleasant springs and purling streams,
 Shall raise a lasting name,
 And set him high in sounding fame
 For Lyric verse.”

*Quae Tibur aquae fertile perfluunt,
 Et spissae nemorum comae
 Fingent Æolio carmine nobilem.*