

**DIOMEDE: FROM
THE ILIAD
OF HOMER**

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Diomedes: from the Iliad of Homer by William R. Smith

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WILLIAM R. SMITH

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THE ILIAD OF HOMER.

BY

WILLIAM R. SMITH.

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1869.

NOTE PRELIMINARY.

DIOMEDE, the Poem herewith presented, is a translation of Homer's 5th Iliad, and takes its name from the chief hero of that particular book. The book contains nearly all the elements of a complete narrative poem, and was, in ancient times, sung separately; as was, indeed, nearly all the actions of the Iliad: for it was not until the days of Lycurgus, that any effort was made to collect and digest the rhapsodies (as the detached parts were called); and not until the days of Pisistratus that the digest was completed into legitimate singleness.

It would be interesting to recall, in detail, the manner in which these glorious poems were reclaimed and consolidated from fugitive fragments; but that task must be postponed for the present; while I shall tax the reader with

A Brief Account of some of Homer's English Translators.

In 1581 ten books of the Iliad were translated out of the French, by Arthur Hall. This is the first, and is done into the Alexandrian verse of Sternhold. I see nowhere any expression of its merits.

GEORGE CHAPMAN, in 1598, translated seven books of the Iliad into English verse. This attracted much attention, and was soon followed by the whole Iliad done by the same author. Its versification is peculiar, long, and sometimes irregular lines rhyming, full of sonorousness and grandeur; but bombastical, quaint, conceited and sometimes whimsical. It nevertheless afforded the English world a good look into that marvelous store-house of beauty and sublimity. Pope referred to this work as one which "Homer might have written in his youth before he arrived at the age of discretion," a very happy illustration, and conveying to the translator an extravagant compli-

ment. Chapman is still and deservedly a great favorite with many readers of Homer.

John Ogilby, in 1650, translated the Iliad into English heroics; having learned Greek at the age of fifty-four years! The versification is clumsy and rugged, but generally accurate as to meaning; and sometimes rising into excellence. This translation is said to have been a great favorite with Pope when at school.

Thomas Hobbes translated the Iliad, in 1677, in alternate rhyme. The critics of the day place it below mediocrity.

We now approach that period, when the greatest wits and poets in England felt an ambition to try their hands on Homer. Dryden translated the first book, and the "Parting of Hector and Andromache" from the sixth book. Pope acknowledged his excellence. Sir John Denham translated "Sarpedon's speech to Glaucus." Later, Congreve, to whom Pope dedicated his translation of the Iliad, tried his hand on "Priam's lamentation and petition to Achilles for the dead body of Hector," and "The lamentations of Hecuba, Andromache and Helen, over the dead body of Hector." All these efforts were master-pieces in their way; and promoted the growing enthusiasm for Homer. Pope announced his translation; and printed some specimens.

It is said that Addison translated the first book, intending to compete with Pope; but being too timid to risk an open conflict, he procured Tickle to publish and to assume the authorship.¹ The translation known as Tickle's is superior to Pope's as a classical production, and in the accuracy of thought and epithet; but it is deficient in the essential elements of a successful hit; too minutely pruned of the luxuriance in which Pope so audaciously rioted. It shows inferiority in the construction of the versification, reaching Pope's commonplaces, but seldom completely arousing the acutest sense of admiration, as Pope often does with some of his be-

¹This story is not generally credited.

witching verses. It might well be the work of Addison, who as a poet was always elegant but never great. Addison is said to have pronounced it better than Pope's. It was evidently put forward as a rival, and is said to have given Pope great annoyance; but he soon swept it out of the way.

Of all the translators of Homer, Pope achieved the most signal triumph. Whatever may be said as to the superiority of blank verse, as the medium of repeating Homer, it will be readily admitted that the English world was never thoroughly aroused to the marvellous beauties of Homer until the publication of Pope's fascinating couplet translation. It is true that blank verse affords all the facilities of poetic expression, while the fancy is unfettered; but to translate literally is to accept the fetter. Many a Greek word carries along with it, in its sonorous sweep incorporate, the meaning of an adverb or adjective: hence the English language is inadequate to repeat Homer literally. All the prose translations are cold and lifeless. A school-boy may be delighted with Buckley's Homer; but it palls upon the sensitive nerves of the poet. One of the great offices of poetry is to captivate the illiterate: how can that be done by the cold chisel of prose that cuts out the eyes and whittles away the wings of an ancient statue?

That Pope falls into the bombastic way, at times, may be admitted. The subjects invite it; the original is not without it. But this is merely a rhetorical fault. When the subject is all intensesness, excitement, fury and extravagance, it is difficult to judge between well made fustian and the permissible hyperbole. Whoever attempts to produce Hector in English, without high sounding phrases, descriptive of heroic attitudes, approaching to what the world calls bombast, will certainly fail. There are many translators of single books who excel Pope in almost every particular; in classic beauty, accuracy, and as reflecting the true Homeric idea. Travers, in the first and sixth books, may well challenge a general superiority; but in every book of Pope's Iliad there are a few passages surpassing all competition. It may be said, at the same time, that Pope's best lines are interpolations; showing at least one advantage in favor of the

heroic couplet: the striving after a corresponding termination sometimes brings out a splendid and perfectly appropriate thought.

After Pope there were many translators; but few of them of much note. Broome, who aided Pope by furnishing several books of the *Odyssey*, published in 1750 a translation of the tenth and eleventh books of the *Iliad*, in imitation of Milton's style. The inferiority of Broome's books in Pope's *Odyssey* is very clearly notable: he never rises above the level of a graceful versifier.

Macpherson published the *Iliad* somewhat after the manner of Ossian, which is said to have been little esteemed.

In 1789, Cowper translated the *Iliad* into blank verse. The book is pleasant reading, but not captivating. The graceful and melodious flow of Cowper's *Task* is not to be found in Cowper's *Iliad*. His failure to produce the rapture that the readers of Homer demand lies in his determination to be literal; and his constant struggle to find an English to repeat the Greek word.

Between Cowper and Derby the translators are numerous. In 1809, James Morrice rendered the *Iliad* into blank verse. In 1834 William Southby, who had previously translated the *Georgics* with great beauty. In 1854, W. G. T. Barter rendered the *Iliad* into Spenserean stanza. In 1856, the *Iliad* was rendered into *unrhymed* English by F. W. Newman. The writer knows nothing of the respective merits of any of the last named works.

Many years ago Mr. Mumford, an eminent citizen of Virginia, translated the *Iliad* into blank verse. This book has not fallen under the writer's inspection. It is said to be creditable to the translator as a classical scholar, but heavy as a poem. This being the only serious American effort to translate the whole *Iliad*, would seem to require a more enlarged notice at my hands; and I trust that this note may serve to call the attention of liberal American criticism to a work heretofore certainly neglected.

Lord Derby avoids all flourishes, with scholarly timidity. His wings grow heavy with the brow-dews of anxiety lest he should commit some fault. Exactness being his chief aim, he prunes the flowering vine too closely, so that nothing but the stem is left, sometimes withered and without odor. Hector is not always Hector in Lord

Derby's book : nevertheless, his translation is the best of its class ; executed throughout in a tone of accurate elegance, with many magnificent renderings ; sometimes enchanting to the most fervent poet, and always agreeable to the quiet scholar.

Of my own work, I have nothing to say, except that it has not been lightly or hurriedly prepared. I have bestowed upon it such pains and labor as authorize me to invite (timidly I confess) the attention of scholars. I plead guilty to an occasional paraphrase ; but the rhyming mode of rendering Homer into English makes this inevitable. It will be observed that my paraphrase is more in the expansion than in the suppression ; and in all cases the elaboration will be found authorized by history or fable.

TUSKALOOSA, ALABAMA,

June, 1869.

THE ARGUMENT.

Diomede is inspired by Minerva, and slays many of the Trojan chiefs. He is checked in his career by an arrow from the bow of Pandarus. He prays to his patron goddess who restores his strength, and exhorts him to renew the fight. She advises him to avoid a conflict with the gods, except Venus, and gives him power to distinguish between them and mortals. He renews the fight with great havoc, when Æneas and Pandarus unite to assail him. The interview between these two chiefs, and the pious and prudent conduct of Æneas. Diomede's noble speech, when advised of his danger; with a description of the Olympian steeds. He kills Pandarus and wounds Æneas. Venus interferes to protect and carry off Æneas; she is assailed and wounded by Diomede, and carried to Olympus in Mars' chariot. Description of the scene in Heaven; Dione's model speech, in which, while consoling Venus, she predicts misfortunes to Diomede. Phœbus carries off Æneas, who is cured by Latona. In the meantime Phœbus raises a phantom Æneas on the field, around which there rages a furious conflict. Mars returns to the battle, by the advice of Phœbus, and rouses the Trojans. Sarpedon's taunting speech to Hector, who renews the fight, aided by Apollo, who covers the Grecians in sudden darkness; when Æneas reappears, full armed. In the meantime the Ajaces with Diomede, Ulysses and Agamemnon arouse the Greeks. Æneas kills the Pylian twins; is confronted by Menelaus and Antilochus, and retires. Hector now appears, with Mars and Bellona assisting; Diomede's dismay, and his noble speech on that occasion. The conflict between Sarpedon and Tlepolemus. Ulysses commits great havoc amongst the Trojans, which is checked by the appearance of Hector. The Greeks recoil, under the double fury of the Trojans and the Gods. Juno and Minerva prepare to aid the Greeks. Description of the celestial machines, and the aerial voyage. Juno assumes the shape of Stentor and rebukes the Greeks. Minerva taunts Diomede; his noble response. She re-inspires him; exhorts and aids him to assail Mars. Description of this conflict, and of Mars' ascent to Olympus. The book closes, with an interview between Jupiter and Mars.

The time occupied is the portion of one day, the whole poem being descriptive of a part only of the first great battle.