

**THE ODES AND EPODES,
TRANSLATED LITERALLY
AND RHYTHMICALLY**

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The Odes and Epodes, translated literally and rhythmically by Horace & W. Sewell

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HORACE & W. SEWELL

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THE
ODES AND EPODES
OF
HORACE,

TRANSLATED
LITERALLY AND RHYTHMICALLY.

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P R E F A C E.

I HOPE the object of this translation will not be misunderstood. It is one thing to attempt the transfusion of a poet's mind, spirit, and grace from one language into another, so that those who cannot read the original, may form some notion of his beauties; another to construe him literally and grammatically, word for word, as boys are required to do in our classical schools, and at the Universities. I have had no thought of attempting a translation of the former kind. But as the tutor of a college, engaged in that which must ever form the best foundation of all high mental culture,—instruction in classical literature, and also as deeply interested in a still earlier stage of education, I have tried from time to time to aid those placed under my care in uniting two conditions of translation, with the failure of either of which in students very serious evils must follow: first, accuracy,—strict, literal, word-for-word accuracy, and secondly, as much attention as possible to the language of poetry. I believe the former exercise is a most healthy discipline for the mind, which cannot be too carefully enforced. But if prosecuted without the latter, it must destroy all the charm which ought to attend the study of great authors, prevent all improvement in English while we are studying Latin and Greek, and corrupt instead of refining the taste of the young. This is not the place to enter into the theory of such suggestions. But as a tutor in the University of Oxford, may I venture to suggest to heads, both of our public and private schools,

the observations which have impressed on my own mind so strongly the importance of introducing into classical education the practice of translation at once literal and rhythmical.

1. Of the value of strict accuracy, and minute attention to grammatical construction, it is not unnecessary to speak. The University of Oxford still requires it. But a long experience as a tutor compels me to fear that it is decaying in our schools. It is a fact which I can vouch for, from my own experience, that in by far the largest number of young men who enter the University, there is scarcely any such habit. Tenses are substituted for tenses, cases for cases, words carelessly disturbed from their order, conjunctions confounded, prepositions omitted or inserted at will, particles treated as nonentities, all the nice discriminations of suffixes neglected; and nearly the first year of the University course is required for going over this elementary ground, and correcting something of the carelessness which has been permitted or encouraged at school.

The explanation of this evil is to be found, not in the negligence or incompetence of masters. Far from it. For it prevails in schools where the teachers are of the highest attainments, and most sedulously devoted to their work. But it is attributable to the consciousness of the sad effects which flow from accustoming a boy to view the great models of classical poetry through the medium of his own bare prosaic translation, and of allowing him to travestie them in bad English. To escape from this into a free and elegant translation, he is indulged in grammatical liberties. And thus the habit of accuracy is sacrificed, and a slovenly scholarship overlooked and even encouraged. To reconcile the two things, strict accuracy and something of a poetical character, is very difficult indeed at the spur of the moment. For my own classes I found it necessary to make such translations

beforehand. And I have hoped they might be useful to other masters.

2. It is scarcely necessary to explain why such translations of classical poetry should be rhythmical. Without rhythm poetical phraseology becomes bombast ; and the unadorned language which the simplicity of the best ancient writers so frequently requires, when stripped of the rhythm of the original, loses all its charm. Moreover, the habit of composing in rhythm forms the ear to a delicate perception of its power and laws, even in writing prose. The value of rhythm even in a sermon, even to the uneducated, is very great. It acts like music, wakens feelings, supports attention, prevents fatigue, pleases and soothes the ear to listen favourably, and assists memory, especially among the poor, to a degree which will perhaps be best understood by supposing our Bible and Liturgy to be stripped of the exquisite rhythm in which they are now clothed, and then comparing the effect of it even upon uneducated minds.

3. There is another use for which I have employed such translations myself, and which I would venture without presumption to suggest to others. We all know how many years it takes to acquire a command over Latin and Greek, while a residence of a few months in a foreign country will make us tolerable masters of its language. The reason is, that in the former case we spend our time in translating Latin into English, in the latter case we are constantly employed in translating English, or what is the same, our own thoughts, into French or German. Constant composition is essential to the mastery of a language, even to a practical grammatical acquaintance with it. And composition is the most wearying and troublesome part of a schoolmaster's duty. The necessity of perpetual correction, which involves on his own part perpetual composition also,—the absence of any certain standard of excellence, or correctness,—the hopelessness of reaching any

great perfection,—the weariness of reading over innumerable dull exercises, and that after the labour of teaching, in the hours of relaxation,—all this tends to make the practice of composition by the pupil dreaded by the master, and neglected in the school. And yet without it how is a dead language to be learnt any more than a living one? There is a mode of meeting this great practical difficulty which I venture to suggest from experience. It is, first, that when boys are learning and have learned their grammar, they should be exercised in this, not by reading Horace or Virgil, but in detached words, separate phrases, taken out of their context; in which the context can be of no use to suggest a guess; and nothing can lead to a knowledge of the meaning but the grammatical formation. This would fix their attention upon the grammatical rules. And it would also prevent the distaste which is now too commonly acquired even for the highest poetry of the ancients by the associations of dry grammar. We do not (ought not at least to) allow the Holy Scripture to be profaned by making it an exercise in syntax. For the same reason, though in an infinitely lower degree, we should save the great classical writers from being rendered distasteful, by the same process, to those in whom it is our main object to inspire love and admiration for them. Anatomical lectures are not to be illustrated upon living human beings.

The next thing should be to provide for classes, not Virgil for instance, or Homer, but as accurate and at the same time as poetical a translation of them as can be procured; accuracy—strict word-for-word accuracy—being the most essential condition. And then the master, with the original in his hand, should lead them on to write Virgil and write Homer. Every lesson will thus be a lesson in composition; a lesson in grammar, which they cannot but learn when compelled to practise; at the same time an exercise of thought; at the same

time an opportunity of acquiring a vast amount of synonyms and forms of expression suggested by the whole class, with the certainty of selecting the best. And the master will be relieved from difficulty by possessing the key in his own hand; will be able to exercise his boys in discriminating and choosing between seemingly similar phraseology; and their attention will be kept up, their interest of creation maintained, and their memory assisted, by writing down the sentences as fast as they are formed. When in this way boys have composed themselves, as it were, the great compositions of antiquity (in which they will soon acquire an extraordinary facility), they may then be led to read them, not merely construing them literally into English, which I think should rarely be required except upon paper, when they have time to study their work carefully and arrange their language rhythmically; but reading them off (which is most important) in the original language, and then with the book closed giving an account of the meaning of each sentence as it was read. The value of this exercise is very great, from the attention, forethought, and constructive power which the architecture, as it were, of the Greek and Latin languages requires, by suspending important words to the last, and so compelling the mind to keep every member of the sentence before the eye till the close is reached. Lastly, in a more advanced stage, at the University, the pupil should be able to take up at once a Greek passage, be examined in the higher points of grammatical construction, read it off fluently into elegant English, and then pass to the higher questions of philosophical criticism—a point which, in the present state of grammatical scholarship, when the student arrives at the University, it is scarcely possible to touch on. The tutors in our colleges have to teach the first laws of grammar. And there is often little time to pass beyond.

My own recollections of a school where this plan was par-

tially in use, satisfy me of its great importance. And to assist in its more general introduction, by providing translations which may thus be used by boys, while the original is in the hands of the master, has been the chief motive of the translations I have hitherto attempted, and of the form selected; the combination, namely, of the literal with the rhythmical.

I will add one word on the employment of rhyme in such translations, when they are to be made by the pupil himself. It is, of course, an additional fetter, and one which at first will seem to render the task almost insurmountable. But it possesses two great advantages. First, it compels the translator to accumulate and compare a great variety of forms of expressions, synonyms, and kindred phrases, before he can succeed; and this process, even if unsuccessful, at least enables him to accumulate a very copious magazine of language, and to familiarize himself to its whole variety of combination. Especially it will interest him in reading English copiously, for the sake of the language. Secondly, it offers—what is often very much wanted by boys, indeed by us all—a work, and an interesting work, something like a puzzle, on which the mind can employ itself in vacant moments, when it cannot trust to the healthiness of its own spontaneous day-dreams, and cannot draw actively on its own imagination. Those who have to direct the thoughts of the young can best understand the value of such an employment and (as it soon will become) of such an amusement, at times when other external materials for active occupation are removed.

These suggestions are the best apology for the present effort. They will account, I hope, for certain laxities in rhymes—for a few expletives marked in brackets, where the rhyme absolutely required it—for some harsh involutions which will present difficulties of meaning to those who have not the original before them—for the occasional use of pleo-