

**SONNETS FROM VENICE;
TRANSLATED FROM
THE GERMAN OF PLATEN**

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Sonnets from Venice; Translated from the German of Platen by August Platen & Reginald B. Cooke

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AUGUST PLATEN & REGINALD B. COOKE

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF

PLATEN —*Platen, Heinrich von*—

BY

REGINALD B. COOKE

MADISON, WISCONSIN

1914

Foreword

It is customary to consider August Platen the greatest of Teutonic sonneteers, or to admit that his elder contemporary Rückert is in this form his only peer. In his *Geschichte des Sonettes in der deutschen Dichtung*, Welti declares that Platen brought the German sonnet to such perfection that he has been the model for all subsequent poets of his country who adopted this form. The characteristics of Platen as a sonneteer are those usually thought of in association with the Latin rather than the Teutonic mind, elegance, precision, and the highest quality of refinement both in language and thought. As a master of diction he has had few equals in any literature, while the objective and passionless nature of his thought led Goethe to remark that Platen had but one lack, namely love.

Of the one hundred and seven sonnets which appear in the complete editions of Platen's works, the seventeen constituting the *Sonette aus Venedig* not merely

form the longest series, but contain the best of Platen's work. Robertson calls them without qualification "the finest collection of sonnets in the German tongue." Of these sonnets the first fourteen (in the order as given here) were written during a two months' stay in Venice in 1824, being completed in November; and in his *Tagebuch* for the twenty-seventh of February of the year following Goethe records: "Venetian sonnets of Count Platen, found praiseworthy." They were first printed at Erlangen in the latter year. The last three sonnets were added at a somewhat later date.

It is believed that no English translation of these sonnets has hitherto appeared, with the exception of a rendering of the fifth by C. T. Brooks, to be found in Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature*. This, it may be well to add, in view of a certain degree of similarity which the translation here given bears to it in regard to the choice of rhymes, was unknown to the present translator until his translations were completed.

In the structure of the translations the originals

have been imitated as closely as possible. With a single exception the break at the conclusion of the octave, universal with Platen, has been preserved. The rhyme-scheme is throughout identical, though it would of course have been in vain to attempt to retain in our monosyllabic tongue the feminine rhymes which, with such wonderful effect, Platen employs almost exclusively. The attempt has been to make the translations relatively literal, and it is hoped that the secondary endeavor for values of expression has nowhere seriously interfered with faithfulness to the original. The objectivity and detailed character of Platen's work has not rendered the task in this respect an easier one. May the reader be in some measure led to a realization of Platen's own wish, as expressed in sending Goethe a copy of the poems, "to bring again the picture of that memorable city before your mind." Such a picture is assuredly afforded by the words of Platen, if not by their present rendering.

University of Wisconsin.

R. B. C.

To any German friend whom the stars lure
To this foam-sprinkled City of the Isles
Be this small volume a remembrancer,
When he by the Laguna's banks beguiles
—While he lies dreaming in his gondola—
The happy hours, midst Love's and Beauty's smiles,
And, putting it aside, may softly say
A feeling heart before him open lay.

21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
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