

MR. EDWARD FITZGERALD'S TRANSLATIONS.

MR. EDWARD FITZGERALD is a poet whose popularity lags singularly far behind his merits, and whose apparent indifference to winning fame has been met with corresponding slowness on the part of the public in conferring it. It is often said that a man is taken for what he gives himself out to be, and although not every man who announces himself a genius is believed, yet there can be but little doubt that confident belief in one's own powers goes far in breeding the like belief in the minds of others; and it is surer still that a man who distrusts himself will find his own valuation accepted with singular readiness. An author who is anxious to make himself heard will choose with care his time of speaking, and will not be silent until he has attracted notice; but a man who throws a book out into the great stream of literary production, and leaves it to its fate, will run but little chance of finding others more zealous in his interest than he is himself, and he need not be surprised if his work is never spoken of. There is, however, one thing better than winning approbation, and that is deserving it, and this Mr. Fitzgerald certainly does.

There are many translators of verse whose merit lies not in their power of poetic expression, but in their prosaic determination to make their work complete; and too often, while they give us the actual substance of the original, the informing grace and beauty are missing. Yet this thoroughness makes the translations valuable for reference, and the reader who seeks only a conscientious rendering and a sort of inventory of the author finds what he looked for. Now all of Mr. Fitzgerald's translations have beauty of their own, and deserve to be admired and criticised on their own merits as poems, and judged not merely with regard to their mechanical accuracy. They are intended to be for us

satisfactory equivalents of certain poetry, and that, it is fair to say, is what every translator of the higher sort tries to give us, however different the means used for this end may be. Everywhere Mr. Fitzgerald seems to have considered first the poetical quality of his work, and hence the public, not being tempted by the promise of exact literalness, lets itself overlook what in fact so well repays study. The imaginative beauty of his work is a most striking trait, and while the question of the literalness of his different translations is of importance, this may be better considered by discussing them separately.

The story of his literary career is brief. What first attracted anything like marked attention was his translation of the *Rubáiyát*, or Quatrains, of Omar Khayyám.¹ This Persian poet had up to that time been almost unnoticed in the Western world, and although according to his French editor and translator, M. J. B. Nicolas, his poems, written in the eleventh century, are still popular in Teheran, there is yet other, though less direct, evidence that even in his own country he had met with neglect. Many other Persian poets have been much more famous, and their celebrity has spread even into Europe, but until Mr. Fitzgerald's translation appeared, Omar Khayyám was nearly unknown to his more recent public. In Sir Gore Ouseley's *Biographical Notices of Persian Poets*, prose renderings of half a dozen of the quatrains are given. Two are to be found in Mr. Emerson's *May Day and Other Poems*, and one first appeared in an article on *Persian Poetry*, by Mr. Emerson, in *The Atlantic Monthly* for April, 1858, since reprinted in his *Letters and Social Aims*. This article gives an account of Von Hammer's *Geschichte der Schönen Redekünste Persiens*, and contains translations of many other Persian poems from

¹ *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, the Astronomer Poet of Persia*. Translated into English Verse

London: Bernard Quaritch 1st Ed., 1859; 2d, 1868; 3d, 1872.

the German version. It was here that Mr. Emerson said: "Ferideddin Attar and Omar Chiam promise to rise in Western estimation;" and certainly half of his prophecy has come true. In his valuable volume which appeared in Vienna, in 1818, Von Hammer translated twenty-five of the quatrains of Khayyám, which are prefaced by a brief notice, biographical and critical, of the poet. He there regrets that his limited space does not permit him to give the translation of the whole three hundred — not two hundred, as Mr. Fitzgerald says in the preface of his version — contained in his MS. of Omar Khayyám, "for nearly all," he says, "are of the same merit as these." Like Mr. Fitzgerald, he preserves the fine-sounding measure of the original. In his short introduction he speaks of Khayyám as the poet of the freethinkers and scoffers at religion, as the Voltaire of Persian poetry, a view which is directly opposed to that of M. Nicolas, who sees the mystical expression of devotion in everything that most shocks the German scholar. The question is one that concerns a good deal of Persian poetry, for Hafiz was forbidden the rites of burial, and at a later period the reading of his poems was prohibited on account of his great exaltation of material joys, until it was ingeniously suggested by an admirer that what seemed erotic and bacchanalian was really only symbolical of a diviner glow, when they were again received into favor. Omar Khayyám has been attacked for the same fault and defended in the same way, but any one who reads the mystical poems of the most prominent Sufi poets, such as Ferideddin Attar and Jelaleddin, in translation at least, cannot fail to observe the great difference between their transparent allegory on the one hand, and on the other the candid avowal of want of faith in Khayyám's poems, or the open, unblushing sensuality of some of those of Hafiz. To confuse the two would seem as impossible as the inability to distinguish a German student's *Commersbuch* from a collection of psalm tunes. Hence nothing sounds stranger than the attempts of M. Nicolas to read

in Khayyám's most despairing lines protestations of orthodoxy, or even of the wavering orthodoxy of the Sufis, who, while they maintained an outward semblance of belief in Islamism, really held to the hope of reaching by self-abnegation a sort of pantheistic absorption into the deity. This tendency to pantheism existed in many Oriental religions, and notably in Brahmanism, for instance, as is expressed in Mr. Emerson's famous poem, *Brahma*, which is itself almost a literal translation from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Moreover the Sufis held, with a fervor that would have delighted the heart of Schopenhauer, that the world was but illusion. Their poets, it is true, used many expressions with mystical meaning, various forms of material joy standing for the rapturous contemplation of divinity, as in the *Song of Solomon*, and the whole trouble of the interpreters is to know how much is literal and how much figurative.

Injustice would be done Mr. Fitzgerald's impressive version of Khayyám if the idea were given that it is made up of nothing but scoffing and jeering at religion, and smoothly worded blasphemy. Noisy unbelief and sneering at holy things are common enough and need no discussion here; they indicate the absence of thought, the willful determination not to think, while these quatrains are of importance because they express the despair of a man, a thinker, who is unable rather than unwilling to believe, who cannot reconcile what he is told of the goodness of God with the misery of the universe, with man's fatal proclivity to sin and the certainty of punishment for wickedness: —

"What! out of senseless nothing to provoke
A conscious something to resent the yoke
Of unpermitted pleasure, under pain
Of everlasting penalties if broke!"

His determination to grasp present joys in despair of getting any satisfactory explanation of all these puzzling questions is very different from crude delight in sensuality, and it would be a great mistake to regard Khayyám as nothing but a careless epicurean, whose only interest was his own physical well-being.

He was in earnest, and he struck that note of wonder and regret which so many hopeless, skeptical souls have felt in all countries and at all times. Omar expresses a feeling that is as old as the world, —

“Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,”

and is sure to awaken a responsive thrill in the heart of man, or at any rate of that portion of mankind more given to thought and dreamy speculation than to action. His life, however, was not one of repining; he was an eminent mathematician; indeed, to many scholars he is best known as a distinguished man of science who wrote verses as a recreation; and he composed a treatise on algebra which was edited and translated — in his twenty-fourth year, by the way — by the celebrated scholar, Franz Wœpcke,¹ a brief but touching memorial of whom is to be found in Taine's *Nouveaux Essais d'Histoire et de Critique*. This algebraic treatise was famous among the Moors in Spain three centuries after it was written, and three centuries more did not diminish its reputation. Its especial value, according to Wœpcke, lay in the method it indicated of constructing equations of the third degree, which was a step in advance of what had been done by Greek mathematicians. In it Khayyám bemoaned that the times were unfavorable for science, that the number of its followers was diminished, and that “the majority of those who have the appearance of scientific men hide the truth under falsehood, and confine themselves to imposture and to scientific ostentation. If they meet a man distinguished for honesty and the love of truth, who tries to get rid of pretense and deceit, they make him the object of their scorn and sneers. It is God whom we constantly implore, and he is our refuge.” Perhaps he was here complaining of the persecution which he suffered on account of his religious opinions, for in an old MS., translated by Wœpcke, it is stated that he was much

blamed during his life-time for his skeptical views, although he was acknowledged to be without equal in astronomy and philosophy. It also says that after his death the Sufis interpreted his poems according to their own tenets, and that he was the object of their discussion both at home and abroad. As for his skill in astronomy, it is known that he was one of eight men who were chosen to reform the calendar, and who, according to Gibbon's testimony, corroborated by that of others, established “a computation of time which surpasses the Julian, and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style.” In spite of the poet's dictum the sane astronomer may be undevout, but in Omar's poetry we find what is possibly the best expression of the earnestness which fails to become devoutness and turns into despair, which is one of the most touching sights in the world, and is the counterbalancing evil of intellectual power with refinement and cultivation, just as narrow arrogance is that of moderate culture, and superstition that of ignorant devotion.

Omar Khayyám — Khayyám means tent-maker, and was probably chosen in lieu of a finer-sounding name like Firdusi, “the celestial,” or Hafiz, “the preserver,” as a modest indication of his father's occupation — lived in the latter half of our eleventh century and the first quarter of our twelfth. He with two of his school-mates agreed that if one should rise to power he should not fail to aid the other two. One, Nizam-ul-Mulk, became vizier, and according to his promise gave the other, Hasan Ben Sabbáh, a place in his government, which kindness was rewarded with treachery, while Omar asked only for a modest competence that he might devote himself wholly to his studies; this was granted him, and thus he passed his life in congenial work at Naishapur, where he was born and died. Another patron of his was Abou Tahir, whose praise is found in the beginning of his algebraic treatise. “His presence,” he says, “dilates my chest, his society heightens my glory; my cause grows in borrowing from his splendor, and my force is augmented by his munifi-

¹ *L'Algèbre d'Omar Alkhayyâmi*. Publiée, traduite, et accompagnée d'extraits de manuscrits inédits. Par F. Wœpcke. Paris: Duprat. 1851. 8vo

cence and kindness." To return to Mr. Fitzgerald, he has certainly done his part justice. As has been said, he has preserved the impressive metre of the original, of which an example has been given in the quatrain above quoted, where the first two lines rhyme, and the third introduces a change which the ear awaits in the fourth, where the original rhyme is repeated again with singular solemnity, as when the regular measure of tolling is interrupted, and the bell, turning over on itself, comes down with a more powerful note.

It is not, however, as a miracle of verbal ingenuity that his work demands praise, but rather on account of his skill in giving us a poetical equivalent of the Persian original. He selected of the *Rubáiyát* a little less than a quarter of the whole number, giving, as he says in his preface, a smaller proportion of those in praise of wine, but otherwise representing fairly the Persian poem. Any one pushing too far the question of the exactness of the translation would be brought to a stand-still, not merely by Mr. Fitzgerald's constant practice of giving the spirit rather than the letter of the original, but also by the great discordance of the various MSS. Von Hammer, for instance, gives some verses which are not to be found in M. Nicolas' collection, and Mr. Fitzgerald some which are to be found in Von Hammer, but not in the French edition, and others which can be found in neither. Some also that Sir Gore Ouseley translated do not appear in any of the other collections. This only confirms the statement that it is for its poetical value especially that Mr. Fitzgerald's version is to be read. He has added to English literature what is remarkable for being one of the most beautiful as well as one of the earlier of the utterances of resignation in the world, — of a man who has vainly striven to convince himself that there is a better one: —

"Myself when young did eagerly frequent
 Doctor and saint, and heard great argument
 About it and about: but evermore
 Came out by the same door where in I went.

"Earth could not answer; nor the seas that mourn
 In flowing purple, of their Lord forlorn:

Nor rolling heaven, with all his signs reveal'd
 And hidden by the sleeve of night and morn."

What seems to him the only refuge is the enjoyment of the pleasures he sees about him: —

"Come, fill the cup, and in the fire of spring
 Your winter garment of repentance fling:
 The bird of time has but a little way
 To flutter, — and the bird is on the wing.

"Here with a little bread beneath the bough,
 A flask of wine, a book of verse, — and thou
 Beside me singing in the wilderness, —
 Oh, wilderness were paradise enow."

Those who are familiar with the poem will recall the rest of it, and those who are not can easily lay their hands upon it. They will find among other things what is in another but somewhat similar way expressed by Horace, the advice to take the world as it is, a saying which is trite enough, but one that will always find listeners when put in an eloquent or really poetical form. It is hardly necessary to comment further on the beauty of Mr. Fitzgerald's rendering; that has been so often done — though hardly often enough for the worth of the book — that there is at present no urgent need of repeating what has been better said by others. Its history has been a singular one: the first edition appeared in 1859; consequently Miss Thackeray's putting a quotation from this version into the lips of one of the characters of *Old Kensington* before the time of the Crimean War is, it will be noticed, an anachronism, although a pardonable one; the second in 1868, and the third in 1872. From the first almost nothing was said about the book, but yet there must have been some demand for it within the first nine years to warrant the appearance of a second edition. However this may be, there was no public recognition of its merits until a warm and admiring notice appeared in the *North American Review* for October, 1869, and since that time it has slowly worked its way into favor in this country, although by no means as yet into popularity, while in England, where it was published, recognition of its worth has been even tardier. An article appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* soon afterwards, deriving its inspiration from that in the *North American*, and there was a

long and laudatory notice in the Contemporary Review for March, 1876, from the pen of Mr. Schütz - Wilson. The first edition contained seventy-five quatrains; the second, one hundred and ten; the third, one hundred and one. The changes in the later editions, which are generally slight, may, on the whole, be considered improvements, and when the third is compared with the first edition they will be found to be decidedly for the better.

This was not Mr. Fitzgerald's first translation from the Persian, although it is decidedly the most important. In 1856 he published a translation of Jámi's *Salámán and Absal*,¹ which is a short poem of less than fifty pages. It is the second of the collection called the *Heft Aurang*, or *Seven Thrones*, which was made up of Jámi's romantic poems. This one tells in a somewhat mystical way the story of a prodigal son, and although it contains many beautiful lines, it is so marked by the unfamiliar expressions and ways of thought of the Orientals that it somewhat repels the chance reader, while the main interest of the volume being its singularity there is nothing to make him overlook these external faults, if faults is not too harsh a word for what are only geographical differences of taste. Omar Khayyám had qualities which have made him a classic, while Jámi, in this poem, at least, comes nowhere near his level.

This is a fair specimen of one of the interludes. Sulayman and Balkis are Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, respectively:—

“ Once upon the throne together
Telling one another secrets,
Sat Sulayman and Balkis;
The hearts of both were turned to truth,
Unsollied by deception.
First the king of faith, Sulayman,
Spoke: ‘ However just and wise
Reported, none of all the many
Suitors to my palace thronging
But afar I scrutinize;
And he who comes not empty-handed
Grows to honor in mine eyes.’
After this Balkis a secret
From her hidden bosom utter'd,

Saying, ‘ Never night or morning
Comely youth before me passes
Whom I look not longing after.’ ”

Mr. Fitzgerald's translations from the Spanish demand careful consideration. The first volume² contained the following plays: *The Painter of his own Dishonor* (*El Pintor de su Deshonra*); *Keep your own Secret* (*Nadie fie su Secreto*); *Gil Perez, the Gallician* (*Luis Perez el Gallego*); *Three Judgments at a Blow* (*Las Tres Justicias en Una*); *The Mayor of Zalamea* (*El Alcalde de Zalamea*); *Beware of Smooth Water* (*Guárdate de la Agua Mansa*). In the preface he says, “ I have, while faithfully trying to retain what was fine and effective, sunk, reduced, altered, and replaced much that seemed to mar the breadth of general effect, supplying such omissions by some lines of after narrative.” The translations from Calderon into English up to that time could have been counted on the fingers of one hand, and even since then but few new competitors have entered the field, the interest in Spanish literature having been much less in England and America than on the Continent. Mr. D. F. MacCarthy has done his best to atone for this indifference by the admirable fidelity of his translations, which give the original almost *verbatim* and with wonderful smoothness, blending the rigid metrical form that Calderon used with the freedom of English in a way that can hardly be excelled. Mr. Fitzgerald's aim was avowedly different: in his opinion our familiar blank verse, occasionally enlivened by rhyming measures, would produce the same effect upon us, accustomed to that form, as would the short line and assonance upon the fellow-countrymen of Calderon. At any rate these translations, although not strictly literal, are yet sufficiently exact to be of service, and hostile criticism has been further disarmed by Mr. Fitzgerald's statement in the preface that he had “ not meddled with any of the more famous plays. . . . Such plays,” he added, “ as the *Magico Prodigioso* and

¹ *Salámán and Absal*. An Allegory. From the Persian of Jámi. London: John S. Parker & Co. 1856.

² *Six Dramas of Calderon*. Freely translated by EDWARD FITZGERALD. London: William Pickering. 1853.

the *Vida es Sueño* . . . require another translator and, I think, form of translation." Since then, however, he has translated them both, if the word translation can be rightly used of such free adaptations of the original.

A poet has abundant precedent for writing a free translation; and if he does it well enough he is sure to be forgiven for any liberties he may have taken with the text. The dangers of this form of execution are manifest: if every translator is free to alter the original at will, confusion is tolerably sure to arise, the door being opened to great latitude of opinion with regard to what changes are to be deemed poetical; and actual merit alone can or should atone for such boldness. Now Mr. Fitzgerald has made such use of these two plays of Calderon as seemed to him good, adding whole pages here, omitting scenes there, disregarding the measure of the original; in a word, re-writing them to suit our Northern taste. Calderon's marvelous facility of execution is wholly lost sight of; in place of the swiftly varied action of his plays, which is sometimes so irresponsible as to seem almost like that of an opera, we have plenty of reflection, of that description of internal struggle which forms the core of those plays we are taught when young to like the most. The *Magico Prodigioso* was translated in part by Shelley, it will be remembered, who strove for literalness, but in this version there is much not in the original. The following is an example; it is taken from the first scene in which Lucifer and Cipriano are talking together. Lucifer says:

"Trouble yourself no more with disquisition,
That by sad, slow, and unprogressive steps
Of wasted soul and body leads to nothing:
And only sure of life's short breathing-while,
And knowing that the gods who threaten us
With after-vengeance of the very crimes
They revel in themselves are nothing more
Than the mere coinage of our proper brain,
To cheat us of our scanty pleasure here
With terror of a harsh account hereafter,—
Eat, drink, be merry; crown yourselves with
flowers,
About as lasting as the heads they garland;
And, snatching what you can of life's poor feast,
When summon'd to depart, with no ill grace,
Like a too greedy guest, cling to the table
Whither the generations that succeed
Press forward, famish'd, for their turn to feed.

Nay, or before your time self-surfeited,
Wait not for Nature's signal to be gone,
But, with the potion of the spotted weed
That peradventure wild beside your door
For some such friendly purpose cheaply grows,
Anticipate too tardy Nature's call:
Ev'n as one last great Roman of them all
Dismiss'd himself betimes into the sum
Of universe; not nothing to become,—
For that can never cease that was before;
But not that sad Lucretius any more."

There is a sort of echo of Omar Khayám in some of these lines, and they are surely of a kind that Calderon would never have written, there being but little resemblance in this defense of materialism, with which the evil one tries to mislead Cipriano, to the almost trivial arguments the pale devil of the original makes use of. The true-believing Spaniards who first saw Calderon's plays acted did not need to see the devil tripped up, even by a pagan, by means of a protracted discussion; a very brief argument seemed enough to dispose of him, and they were very ready to leave him to his legitimate revenge of supplying dramatic temptations to the other characters. This marks the difference between Calderon and the Northern playwrights, who would care less for quick and varied action than for the clashing of opposite, and eternally opposite, modes of thought. Instead, then, of Calderon's play we have one not intended for the stage, with part of the incidents left out and a good deal of reflection put in by a poet of another country, with different traditions and a wholly different method. The other play is a paraphrase of the *Vida es Sueño*,¹ which is certainly one of its author's masterpieces. Its plot is briefly this: the king of Poland, alarmed by prophecies of his son's future violence, has him imprisoned in a lonely tower; at length, when anxious to lay aside his power, he brings the prince forth drugged, to awaken as the ruler of the land for a day, to continue on the throne if he prove a wise monarch, to be drugged again and carried back to his prison if he act indiscreetly. Naturally enough Sigismund, the prince, does not fail to show his lack of training,

¹ *The Mighty Magician*. Such Stuff as Dreams are made of. A Drama. Taken from Calderon's *Vida es Sueño* No title-page

and has to be returned to his cell, where he is told that his brief enjoyment of power was but a dream. When a speedy revolution again sets him on the throne he is found to have learned the lesson of the uncertainty of all things, and he bids fair to become a wise ruler: here the play ends. This is certainly all improbable enough, but it is also fine. In the original there is a secondary plot not in this version, where its place is taken by a fuller development of the character of Sigismund. The vivacity is lost, but the seriousness of the play is more clearly brought out; how this is done may be seen by comparing Mr. MacCarthy's close translation with Mr. Fitzgerald's paraphrase of Sigismund's words at the end of the play. Mr. MacCarthy's, following the original, runs thus:—

“ Why this wonder, these surprises,
If my teacher was a dream,
And amid my new aspirings
I am fearful I may wake,
And once more a prisoner find me
In my cell? But I should not;
Even to dream it is sufficient.
For I thus have come to know
That at last all human blisses
Pass and vanish as a dream,
And the time that may be given me
I henceforth would turn to gain;
Asking for our faults forgiveness,
Since to generous, noble hearts
It is natural to forgive them.”

Part only of Mr. Fitzgerald's longer version may be given:—

“ A dream it was in which I thought myself,
And you that hail'd me now then hail'd me king,
In a brave palace that was all my own.

Such a dream
As this in which I may be walking now;
Dispensing solemn justice to you shadows,
Who make believe to listen; but anon,
With all your glittering arms and equipage,
King, princes, captains, warriors, plume, and steel,
Aye, ev'n with all your airy theatre,
May fit into the air you seem to rend
With acclamation, leaving me to wake
In the dark tower; or dreaming that I wake
From this that waking is; or this and that
Both waking or both dreaming; such a doubt
Confounds and clouds our mortal life about.
And, whether wake or dreaming, this I know,
How dreamwise human glories come and go;
Whose momentary tenure not to break,
Walking as one who knows he soon may wake,
So fairly carry the full cup, so well
Disorder'd insolence and passion quell,
That there be nothing after to upbraid
Dreamer or doer in the part he play'd,
Whether to-morrow's dawn shall break the spell,

Or the last trumpet of the eternal day
When dreaming with the night shall pass away.”

Undoubtedly the finest of Mr. Fitzgerald's translations, with the exception of that of Omar Khayyám, is the one of the Agamemnon of Æschylus,¹ which has been recently published. Even those who might object to any modification of the *Vida es Sueño*, which is often acted in the theatres of Northern Europe, would find it hard to defend the literal presentation of what is incomprehensible to us in this play. Time has hidden from us much that was once intelligible, and the corruption of the text has helped to make much uncertain; moreover it is impossible for us to divest ourselves of our later training, and to put ourselves into full sympathy with the author's and spectators' feeling. All these things tend to keep off readers from one of the greatest of the short list of great poets. Translators have struggled with this thick fog of obscurity with more or less success, and those who have not been frightened by the difficulties, who have been willing to forego complete comprehension, have had their reward in the enjoyment of the magnificent dramatic action of the play. The sudden opening, the crowded march of incidents, the terribleness of the tragedy, the sharp contrast between the joyful return of Agamemnon and his sudden murder, the brazen guilt of Clytemnestra, and the foreboding of further sin and misery with which the play ends stand out clear and immortal, unobscured by the mists of many of the choral passages, which, even when intelligible to scholars, are curiously deadened when put into literal English. In his version Mr. Fitzgerald has aimed at giving the reader the spirit rather than the letter of the darker parts of the play, and in doing this he has written a most impressive version of the Agamemnon, the greater part being a translation sufficiently close for the satisfaction of the scholar, and of sufficient poetical worth to fascinate the reader, who finds the obscurity replaced by an intelligible paraphrase. Here is a

¹ *Agamemnon, a Tragedy taken from Æschylus.*
(By the translator of Omar Khayyám.) London:
Bernard Quaritch. 1876.

fine bit of translation; it is Clytemnestra's speech: —

"Hephaistos, the lame god,
And sprightliest of mortal messengers;
Who, springing from the bed of burning Troy,
Hither, by fore-devised intelligence
Agreed upon between my lord and me,
Posted from dedicated height to height
The reach of land and sea that lies between.
And first to catch him and begin the game,
Mount Ida fired her forest-pine, and, waving,
Handed him on to the Hermæan steep
Of Lemnos; Lemnos to the summit of
Zeus-consecrated Athos lifted; whence,
As by the giant taken, so despatcht,
The torch of conquest, traversing the wide
Ægæan with a sunbeam-stretching stride,
Struck up the drowsy watchers on Makistos,
Who, flashing back the challenge, flashed it on
To those who watched on the Messapian height;
With whose quick-kindling heather heaped and
fired

The meteor-bearded messenger refresht,
Clearing Asopus at a bound, struck fire
From old Kithæron; and, so little tired
As waxing even wanton with the sport,
Over the sleeping water of Gorgopis
Sprung to the rock of Corinth; thence to the cliffs
Which stare down the Saronic Gulf, that now
Began to shiver in the creeping dawn;
Whence, for a moment on the neighboring top
Of Arachnæum lighting, one last bound
Brought him to Agamemnon's battlements."

This is exceedingly near the original, and gives its swing and hurrying movement as much better than creeping prosaic exactness does, as a fine portrait is better than wax-works. It is in the choruses that the work of excision and modification has been most marked, as here: —

"Some think the Godhead, couching at his ease
Deep in the purple heavens, serenely sees
Insult the altar of eternal right.
Fools! For though Fortune seem to misrequite,
And Retribution for a while forget,
Sooner or later she reclaims the debt
With usury that triples the amount
Of Nemesis with running Time's account."

This is a noteworthy example of the smoothing of the ruggedness of Æschylus which does so much to making this version very readable; the fine vein of poetry that runs all through it surely ought to temper the criticism of even the most enthuasiastic sticklers for literal accuracy. It is Æschylus classified and simplified that the reader finds here, and not the obscurity of a precise rendering of word for word, which itself requires a commentary before it is intelligible. Any one who takes the pains to compare

Mr. Fitzgerald's version with the original will find that the translator has been very faithful to the spirit of the play, while he has omitted what would tend to the reader's confusion. On the whole, this is more nearly literal than the rendering of Omar Khayyám.

This book ends the short list of Mr. Fitzgerald's contributions to this branch of literature. In all of them, or at least in the *Rubáiyát* of Khayyám, in the volume containing the *Magico Prodigioso* and the *Vida es Sueño*, and in the *Agamemnon*, we find the problem of the translation of some difficult, obscure, or unfamiliar poetry treated in the same way, that is, by throwing overboard whatever would clog the movement of the poem and preserving the animating beauty of the original, and, as has been shown, adding at times what the original lacked. The experiment is always a bold one, for he who undertakes it must silence the clamor of the sticklers for verbal accuracy by the generous supply of what shall be really poetical. It is unnecessary to say that Mr. Fitzgerald has succeeded well; he has enriched English literature without making that of Persia, Spain, or Greece any poorer. He has shown the highest sort of poetical comprehension of, and literary sympathy with, the work of great writers. By thus slipping in between exact translators and original poets he has, to be sure, missed popularity, but he has won, though tardily, an honorable place among the real poets of the present day. There are many of these who trick themselves out in the cast-off raiment of past ages, some putting themselves to much trouble in order to acquire Chaucer's simplicity, others going back to the past to exhume forgotten subjects and methods, just as fashionable young women ransack dusty trunks in the garret for brocades and fineries they were brought up to laugh at. Mr. Fitzgerald's method is different: he redelivers a poetic message in a poetic way, and what strikes the reader most forcibly is the genuineness and manliness of his work. There is reason to hope that his fine poetry will be read when some of the verse makers of the present day shall

be wholly forgotten, but he deserves attention at the time when it is most the fashion to praise the others. What he has written is good enough and simple enough to endure the damaging approval of those who affect the admiration of a thing because it is not widely known,

as well as the indifference of those who disregard it for the same reason. Mr. Fitzgerald's audience, small as it is, is found almost entirely in this country, and it is to be hoped that the recent publication of the Agamemnon will tend to enlarge it.

Thomas Sergeant Perry.

THE CONTRIBUTORS' CLUB.

It seems to me that it is time for some one to come out and face popular adulation with the unpalatable remark that Mr. Edward Payson Hammond's *Sketches of Palestine*¹ is an overrated book. I make and record that remark now. I do it without passion; I am not influenced by envy or spite. I believe that the present frenzy of admiration for this work has diseased the public mind and greatly impaired the value of its verdict. I believe that the same cause has produced the same effect with the professional critics. This frenzy will not last, but will run its course and die, like all that have gone before it; and I feel sure that when that day comes the world will say, as I say now, It is an overrated book.

Understand me, I do not claim that it is *greatly* overrated. I do not go so far as that, — except as regards a few passages here and there. These few have certainly been greatly overrated, and I think I can show it. In truth, I can subscribe to much that the Rev. Robert Knox, D. D., says of the poem and its author, in the introduction. I can say with him that "I have read the work with intense interest, and" — under certain limitations — "with profit." I can say with him that the reading the work "very often compels the reader to realize and confess that he is in the presence of a man of power;" and that

"the creations of the author's imagination indicate poetic genius of a high order." I admit with him that the author "possesses a rich and fervid imagination." I go all these lengths cheerfully and willingly; and yet I still say, as before, the book is overrated; Edward Payson Hammond has been placed too high on the roll of the poets. Let me make a few quotations.

The opening lines of the poem have been intemperately lauded, both here and abroad: they describe the wedding of Edward Payson Hammond and the bridal journey to Niagara. The adulation of these lines, which follow, has been still more intemperate: —

"Then they landed at Niagara.
There they heard their Master calling,
'Go and work within my vineyard,
And my presence shall go with thee.'
Quickly they obeyed the summons.
On the lovely banks of Erie,
With the godly Mr. Howland,
There they gathered in the harvest,
Working with the Holy Spirit,
Winning souls to Christ, their master."

Mark how far an incautious partiality can carry a man! Speaking of the above passage, Mr. Hallet, the highest critical authority in England, says, "There is nothing in Shakespeare like this." The lines are certainly fine, but they hardly warrant such strong language. There is one defect which has escaped every one's notice: that is, the absence of any expressed opinion as to Niagara. It seems Knox, D. D., Pastor Linen Hall Presbyterian Church, Belfast, Ireland. Boston: Henry Hoyt.

¹ *Sketches of Palestine*. Descriptive of the Visit of the Rev. EDWARD PAYSON HAMMOND, M. A., to the Holy Land. With Introduction by the Rev. ROBERT