

Lessing in England

Author(s): Sydney H. Kenwood

Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Apr., 1914), pp. 197-212

Published by: [Modern Humanities Research Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3713000>

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## LESSING IN ENGLAND.

It is no easy task to estimate the influence of Lessing on a literature which knew him almost entirely by indirect means. Once the comparatively few translations of his works have been carefully studied, once the few indications of their influence have been traced, there remains only the method of laborious search through the works (for the most part un-indexed) of those who might possibly have known Lessing at first-hand. There were not many such in the eighteenth century, and but few more in the early part of the nineteenth; whence it comes that the number of English books quoted gives a most inadequate idea of the multitude actually consulted. It is evident that a compilation of all the English references to Lessing would require a space of more than one life-time, and in the opinion of the present writer the utility and even the interest of such a work would be questionable. The following pages claim to be only a record of discoveries indicating the more or less intelligent interest aroused by Lessing in England and America; and if high admiration for the great German has brought about the inclusion of much which cannot definitely be said to further this aim, yet a sincere effort has been made to avoid those purely subjective 'discoveries' to which German criticism is so prone.

### I.

#### TRANSLATIONS OF LESSING.

##### (a) *Fables, Epigrams, Poems and Minor Dramas.*

The first of Lessing's works to appear in English was the *Fables*, well translated by John Richardson of Eworth, in 1773. The version attracted the attention of at least one critic of the day; for in the *Monthly Review's* notice of *Laocoon* the following passage occurs: 'Mr Lessing is well-known in the republic of letters, by several works, and particularly by his very ingenious *Fables*.' It is of course possible that the reviewer, who (though in his notice '*Mablerer*' stands for '*Mahlerey*' and *umlaut* is ignored) evidently had some small knowledge of German,

knew the work in the original language; but from the fact that the *Fables* alone are cited as one of the 'several works' it seems reasonable to conclude that the reviewer had read Richardson's translation. It is, however, certain that the work was a comparative failure in its English form<sup>1</sup>. Other translations (the first together with the treatises on the Fable and on the Epigram in the only extant English version) appeared in 1825, in 1845, and in 1860. A German and English edition, London, 1829, 12°, remains to be mentioned.

William Taylor of Norwich, to whom fuller attention will be devoted later, translates twenty-five of the Epigrams and includes four of the Fables from Richardson's edition in his *Historic Survey*. The same work also contains a rimed version of *Der Adler und die Eule*. *Die Schwalbe* occurs in the *Weekly Magazine*, II, 82.

Of other poems, *An eine kleine Schöne* was translated in the *Weekly Magazine* of Philadelphia in May 1798. *Die Namen* appeared in Harley's version in the *Portfolio* (Philadelphia) for January, 1803, III, 25. S. T. Coleridge's original effort was given to Cottle and is to be found in the latter's *Reminiscences* (1847), p. 288. It runs thus:

#### MY LOVE.

I asked my love, one happy day,  
What I should call her in my lay.  
By what sweet name from Rome or Greece:  
Iphigenia, Clelia, Chloris,  
Laura, Lesbia, or Doris,  
Dorimene or Lucrece?  
'Ah!' replied my gentle fair,  
'Beloved! what are names but air?  
Take whatever suits the line:  
Call me Clelia, call me Chloris,  
Laura, Lesbia, or Doris,  
Only, only, call me thine.'

The same poem appeared as *Names* in the 1835 edition of Coleridge's works, with alterations. It was given to Cottle as a translation from Lessing: and the debt is further acknowledged in *Biographia Literaria*. The fact that Coleridge indicated the authorship of this one piece, and announced five epigrams which accompanied it (*On a bad Reader of his own Verses*, two *On Liars*, one *On observing a Lady licking her Lap-dog*, one *On a Writer of Fugitive Verse*) as translations from the German, would seem to be the chief ground for the following statement by Brandl, p. 263: 'Er...lieferte eine lange Reihe von gereimten Sprüchen

<sup>1</sup> As it was published at York, the London reviews have no mention of it. See also a notice of Lessing in Richardson's preface to Wieland's *Agathon*, p. iv. London, 1778. 8vo.

(bei Pickering<sup>1</sup>, II, 161—178), welche sich bei näherem Zusehen fast alle auf Lessing zurückführen lassen, wie er selbst gegen Cottle (S. 287) andeutete.' Goedeke has 'durch S. T. Coleridge, vgl. Brandl'—an unusually vague reference for Goedeke. Perhaps the compilers of the invaluable *Grundriss* lacked enthusiasm for Brandl's 'Zurückführung.'

Five epigrams are translated by G. H. Lewes in his notice of Lessing in the *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. LXXXII (1845), pp. 451—70. Three are to be found in the *Philosophical Repository* of Philadelphia, Vol. v (1805), p. 128.

Of the early comedies, *Der Freygeist* and *Der Schatz* were translated by the Rev. J. J. Holroyd and published in 1838. His version formed a basis for the second and last appearance of these works in English—in Bohn's Library (1878). Of Holroyd's translation the editor (Ernest Bell) says in his preface: 'though it rendered the spirit of the original very successfully, [it] did not pretend to be literally accurate, and, with a view to obtaining greater literalness...considerable alterations have been introduced.' The collection included besides *Der Freygeist* and *Der Schatz*, *Damon*, *Der junge Gelehrte*, *Die Juden* and *Die alte Jungfer*. Bell's desire for 'literalness' leads him to tolerate passages that are quite un-English: 'my so tender love' (*Damon*, sc. iv), 'you are such a dried fool, such a stockfish' (*Gelehrte*, Act II, sc. xi), 'such a little book will surely let itself be read' (*ibid.* Act II, sc. iv), 'by mistrustfully suddenly withdrawing myself' (*ibid.* Act III, sc. ix), are a few examples. In *Die Juden*, sc. II, the humour of Krumm's 'von einer sehr gefährlichen Gefahr' is lost in the English 'from a very great danger.' The translation is not always even literally correct: in the *Freygeist*, Act IV, sc. iii, 'schmachtend' is 'solid' and 'Sammelplatz' is 'fountain.'

*Damon*, *Der junge Gelehrte*, *Die Juden* and *Die alte Jungfer* appeared in Bohn's Library for the first and last time in English. William Taylor gives in his *Historic Survey* a delightfully fresh and 'English' translation of an extract from Act II, sc. xi of *Der junge Gelehrte*, an example of what might have been substituted for the bald version in Bohn: but it is difficult to see what good purpose can be served by labour expended on so mediocre a work. With the exception of *Der Freygeist* (which has always seemed to the present writer to be a greatly underrated comedy) the early plays of Lessing may be consigned to not unmerited oblivion.

<sup>1</sup> William Pickering published the *Poetical and Dramatic Works* of Coleridge, London, 1877. Re-issued by Macmillan in 1880.

Writing to Southey, June 23, 1799 (Robberds, I, p. 286), William Taylor asks: 'To what Spanish poet is Lessing indebted for the annexed six lines? He gives them as a translation. I suspect their originality':

Yesterday I loved,  
To-day I grieve,  
To-morrow I die:  
Yet shall I think,  
Both to-day and to-morrow,  
Gladly of yesterday.

In the *Foreign Quarterly Review* for 1840 (Vol. xxv, pp. 233—53) will be found a capital rendering of the epigram on Voltaire, together with three others and four fables. Seven epigrams are included (pp. 346—7) in W. Davenport Adams' collection (undated, London), called *English Epigrams*.

(b) *Miss Sara Sampson, Minna von Barnhelm, and Emilia Galotti.*

*Sara* did not, as stated in the preface to *Lessing's Dramatic Works*, London, 1878, Vol. II, appear for the first time in English in Bohn's Library. An American translation, 'by a citizen of Philadelphia,' was published in that city in 1789<sup>1</sup>. The version in Bohn is the last: and though fairly translated it does not seem to have aroused any great interest. *Sara* has never appeared on the English stage, where its Germanized English *dramatis personae* would probably make it ridiculous. It was known to Henry Mackenzie<sup>2</sup>, in a French translation. He finds *Sara* too weak and *Marwood* too vicious, while *Sir William* is 'insipidly drawn, and awkwardly introduced.' He thinks the use of a predictive dream (here and in *L'esprit fort*) faulty, since it anticipates the conclusion.

*Minna* was translated into English for the first time by Major James Johnstone in 1786. The preface shows some knowledge of the state of literature in Germany. The style of the translation is remarkably good, though many liberties are taken and are thus excused in the dedication to the Queen: 'I own, this play and Lessing's are materially different; but I have endeavoured to make it what he would have done, had he written at the present moment and for an English audience.' The comedy was produced on July 24 at the Haymarket Theatre. Major von Tellheim is promoted to be Colonel Holberg: *Minna* appears as

<sup>1</sup> See W. Todd's admirable study, *Lessing in England*, Heidelberg, 1912, pp. 18, 60.

<sup>2</sup> *An Account of the German Theatre*, in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, II (1788), pp. 154 f.

Caroline, Countess of Bruchsal : and Riccaut becomes Bellair, 'a French officer.' The prologue contained the lines :

Lessing, a German bard of high renown,  
Long on the Continent has charmed the town :  
His play's as much applauded at Vienna  
As here the *School for Scandal* or *Duenna*.

Baker (II, p. 164<sup>1</sup>) says: 'This play, which is simple and pleasing, is taken from the German of Lessing: the language is spirited, with a happy mixture of humour and sentiment. It was well acted, and ran nine nights.' The same authority (I, 410) states that the translation appeared in July 1786, and ascribes it to Johnstone. Oulton<sup>2</sup> (I, 152) remarks: 'July 24. The Disbanded Officer: or Countess of Bruchsal, a Comedy, taken from the German, and ascribed to Major Johnson. Very well received.' J. L. Haney<sup>3</sup> says that the play ran for eleven nights; but he does not name his authority. The *European Magazine* has the following notice: '24th of July. A new comedy, called The Disbanded Officer, or, The Countess of Bruchsal, was performed at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket. [Here follows the cast: the parts of 'Colonel Holberg' and 'Caroline, Countess of Bruchsal' were assigned to Mr Palmer and Miss Farren, to whom the critic says 'the author owes great obligations'.] The scene lies in a hotel at Berlin. The fable of this comedy, which is taken from the German, is simple and pleasing, though the whole part of the Frenchman might have been omitted without injury to the piece.' The *European Magazine* says that the comedy was played four times in July, five times in August, and once in September. The *Critical Review* and the *Monthly Review* gave long and favourable notices, with selections from the text: the *English Review* was not so friendly; evidently *Minna* was too popular for its fancy. 'Though Lessing,' it says, 'has probably little claim to the elevated rank that has been assigned him by his injudicious admirers, he is not, we think, entirely destitute of merit...We are ourselves acquainted with some of his performances which we do not recollect with disgust.' It would be interesting to know which of his 'performances' were thought good enough to be damned with such faint praise; perhaps the criticism has the same intent and value as Polonius' 'That's good; mobbed queen is good.' Colman, the reviewer is disposed to think, about represents Lessing's merits as a dramatist.

<sup>1</sup> *Biographia Dramatica*, by D. E. Baker, London, 3rd ed., 1812.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of the Theatres of London*, by W. C. Oulton, 2 vols. London, 1796.

<sup>3</sup> *Americana Germanica*, IV (1902), pp. 142 f.

<sup>4</sup> Johnstone is probably meant; if not, the critic's ignorance of the date of Lessing's death need surprise nobody.

After the performance in September 1786, *The Disbanded Officer* disappeared from the London stage: but the *Theatrical Register* of York records its production in that city. Some slight alterations were introduced; 'a Boy' is among the *dramatis personae* and the names are somewhat altered. The notice runs: 'This piece, though here and there interspers'd with a few flashes of the comic kind, cannot be consider'd as any extraordinary production. 'Tis true there is something of generosity in Warmans (Werner), which pleases the imagination: especially when the gloomy situation of Colonel Holberg is consider'd. The stratagems of the Baroness are sometimes worthy of attention, as well as those of her fair servant Lisetta: nor can less notice be paid to the blunt, tho' faithful services of Rohlf.' It is comforting to think that London criticism, bad as it was, rarely sank quite so low as this.

Genest<sup>2</sup> (vi, pp. 413 f.), after a sketch of the plot, proceeds: 'The plot of this comedy is too slight for five acts, but on the whole it is a pretty good play. It was adapted to the English stage by Johnstone from the German of Lessing. A regular translation of Lessing's play was published in 1799 as *The School for Honour*.'

This second translation is good in point of style and admirably printed. It is anonymous, and, according to the *Biographia Dramatica*, it was never acted, though the original was to be preferred to most of Kotzebue's and Iffland's pieces.

The next translation was by Fanny Holcroft in 1806, under the guidance of her father, Thos. Holcroft. There are some, though few, omissions: these are justified by the father in his introduction (p. 260). 'Passion,' says he, 'is here verbose: it almost wearies, yet the translation has been freely curtailed by my daughter and myself.' He perceives, it seems, like critics of a later day, a fundamental difference between the two nations: the one loving to dwell for long upon a single emotional picture, the other Athenian in its taste for constant change. Holcroft does not point this difference: but it is the cause of most that he censures as faulty in his somewhat long introduction, which is well worth reading.

The other versions of *Minna* are by Holroyd, Wrangmore, Bell and Maxwell. A translation by Robert Harvey, *Love and Honour*, was apparently never printed. Taylor says it was 'elegantly translated under the title of "Love and Honour," by the late Robert Harvey, Esq., of Catton, near Norwich.' For another version, remarkable only for

<sup>1</sup> Just; the spelling also of Genest. The London cast had 'Rolf.'

<sup>2</sup> *Some Account of the English Stage*, etc., by John Genest, 10 vols. Bath, 1882.



shameless baldness and constant errors, see *Democratic Review*, XXIV (New York, 1849), pp. 176, 225, 345, 436, 535, XXV, p. 56.

The English public was first introduced to Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* by Henry Maty in his *New Review*, IX (1786), which contained a selection of scenes connected by a condensed story of the plot. The translation is very creditable. Oulton says (II, 167): 'October 28 [1794] Emilia Galotti, a Tragedy, which had been long in agitation. It was translated by several from the German; one person (a miniature-painter) insinuated that the present translator (whose name was concealed<sup>1</sup>) availed himself of a copy, which he had shewn him; at any rate the tragedy, from a ludicrous circumstance of a picture, was *laughed* at, and consequently perished.' The *European Magazine* for November, 1794, remarks: 'Emilia Galotti, a Tragedy translated from Lessing, was acted the first time at Drury Lane. [Here follows cast: Mrs Siddons was 'Countess Orsina.'] This Play...exhibits in a strong and forcible manner the horrors arising from the unrestrained exercise of power, as well as the unrestrained indulgence of the passions. The subject is not, however, well chosen, though in many parts the spectator was interested very powerfully in the fate of the different characters, which in all parts were well performed.' Cumberland wrote the prologue: it was a comparison between the poor staging of Shakespeare's day and his own; while Colman supplied the epilogue, which expressed delight that the events of the piece could not happen in England, and that the King of England had too many children himself to wish to ruin other men's daughters. The *Gentleman's Magazine* notes that the play was thrice repeated, on Oct. 30 and on Nov. 1 and 4 [1794]: but the careful Genest (VII, pp. 180 f.) says: 'Oct. 28. Never acted [i.e. a novelty], Emilia Galotti [here follows cast with descriptive additions in the manner of Genest]. This play was translated from the German. It was acted only three times, but it deserved a better fate. Mrs Siddons had only one scene, but that was completely in her line of acting. Emilia Galotti was not printed at this time, but a translation of Lessing's play, by Thompson, was published in 1800.' He thought it 'an interesting play'; but 'the catastrophe might perhaps be altered for the better. As it now stands, it rather excites disgust than pity. Emilia's case is not so desperate as that of Virginia.'

It is difficult to account for the failure of *Emilia* in London. It was produced as the first novelty of the season at a great theatre, the cast was brilliant, and two of the foremost dramatists of the day had a share

<sup>1</sup> Goedeke gives it as Berrington.



in presenting it. Genest, indeed, in the passage above quoted, put his finger on the weak spot in the tragedy. But the weakness seems to have escaped earlier critics, and cannot be adduced as a cause for failure<sup>1</sup>.

Next to Thompson comes Fanny Holcroft once more with a translation of *Emilia* in 1805. This was reprinted at Philadelphia in 1810. The preface is interesting. The following is an extract: 'The chief defect in this tragedy is that it is written in an explanatory, colloquial and prosaic style: but this is what may be almost called the mortal sin of German literature: it has never yet attained that laconic indication of the passions, which is best calculated to express their rapid, confused and desperate course. In other respects Emilia Galotti is a masterpiece ...[it] only requires a master to lop away its superfluities, preserve its beauties, and link them in quick and poetical succession, to render it perhaps the finest modern tragedy known to the stage<sup>2</sup>.'

A wretched translation is to be found in the *Democratic Review*, Vol. XXII. Other versions will be found noticed in the list of translations appended to this article.

(c) *Nathan der Weise*.

R. E. Raspe, a German exile who, says Lounsbury<sup>3</sup>, 'had left his country for his country's good,' won the praises of the *Monthly Review* for his *Tabby in Elysium* of Zachariä and its censure for his *Nathan the Wise*, both of which appeared in 1781. The *Monthly* thus gently chides Raspe through Lessing. 'One design of this drama is to shew, what surely no person was ever silly or illiberal enough to doubt of, or deny, that men of virtue and principle are to be found among the professors of every religion. Another object which the author has in view is, to insinuate that the Christian, the Jew and the Mahomedan have each of them equal reason to believe their own religion *the true one*. The inference from this is, that as all cannot be true, it is most probable that all are false. So much for the philosophic candour, which, according to the Preface, breathes through the whole of this composition. Considered merely as a drama, whatever may be the author's reputation in Germany, it is unworthy of notice. We are sorry to see the time, and

<sup>1</sup> W. Davenport Adams, *A Dictionary of the Drama*, London, 1904, I, p. 459, says that it was produced at St James' Theatre, London, in 1852, with Henry Devrient as Appiani.

<sup>2</sup> A. H. Japp (*German Life and Literature*, London, 1880) refers to a production of *Emilia* at the Surrey Theatre, London, 'some years ago.'

<sup>3</sup> *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, New York, 1901, p. 87.

the very respectable talents of Mr Raspe employed to so little advantage, either to the public or himself.'

Like most of the *Monthly Review's* notices the above, with all its lack of insight, cannot be censured as ignorant or insincere. After all, the doctrines it thinks it sees in *Nathan* might be expected to spring to the sight of any ordinary person who should read it for the first time<sup>1</sup>; and though the condemnation of the drama as a drama is absurdly extravagant, yet even here there is a grain of truth. *Nathan* has never been acted in English, and its production on a stage which is almost purely a commercial institution is well-nigh unthinkable. The work, as I hope to show, has been valued fairly highly in our country as a didactic poem; but as a drama it has never appealed to Englishmen, and one may almost safely prophesy that it never will.

To return to Raspe. The *Critical Review*, a journal more full-blooded and more ignorant than the *Monthly*, referred to the work as 'a heap of unintelligible jargon, very badly translated from the German original, written it seems by G. E. Lessling<sup>2</sup>. The translator informs us in his preface that the author of this drama *stands* very high in the opinion of his countrymen, *because* he *stands* foremost among the late reformers, to whom Germany is indebted for its present *golden age* of literature. The reader will here please observe that this German author, in the elegant language of his translator Mr Raspe, *stands* because he *stands*: we wish he may not *fall*, because he *falls* infinitely beneath all criticism: and can only say that if this is the golden age of German literature, it appears, at least by this specimen, to put on a very leaden appearance.' With regard to this notice, it will be observed that it contains nothing to show that Raspe had been read further than his preface, the 'elegant language' of which was quite probably taken as sufficient ground for denouncing the whole work as worthless, and as meet subject for a despicably feeble jest.

No one, English, German, or American, seems to have found a good word to say for poor Raspe. Erich Schmidt (*Lessing*, II, p. 412) mentions his 'schlechte Prosa'; Danzel (Beilage zu S. 213, S. 29) and Düntzer (*Erläuterungen*, S. 25) have non-committal notices; Herzfeld (*William Taylor von Norwich*, Halle, 1897) says: 'Zum Teil lag wieder die Schuld [dass Nathan keinen Beifall fand] an der schlechten Übersetzung (in

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*, Chap. I, drew greatly similar conclusions from a superficial comparison of the three religions.

<sup>2</sup> Lounsbury ridicules the *Critical's* insolent criticism 'of a great writer whose name it was not even able to spell correctly': but he should have done even the *Critical Review* the justice of reporting it correctly. It says 'G. E.,' not 'G. T. Lessling,' as he has it.

Prosa 1781 erschienen)......Sie ist höchst ungenau, vergreift sich vollständig im Ton und lässt Stellen, die grössere Schwierigkeiten bieten, einfach aus.' All this is true; and yet Raspe's translation is a greatly more creditable performance than the more ambitious efforts of Reich and 'E. S. H.,' about which we shall have something to say later<sup>1</sup>.

We now come once more to the great name of William Taylor of Norwich, one of the few 'Vermittler' of Lessing's genius who were at once scholars and poets. Taylor tells us that his translation<sup>2</sup> of *Nathan* was 'from the entire work; it was undertaken in March 1790, when questions of toleration were much afloat, and was printed the following year for distribution among the translator's acquaintance. In 1805 a second edition was published by Sir Richard Phillips in London. This reprint varies little from the preceding, but has undergone several corrections.'

It is ungracious to criticise so fine a piece of work as Taylor's *Nathan* by calling attention to a few obvious mistranslations and obscurities and bold retentions of the German idiom. Lessing's own noble mind would have disdained such a method: one feels that here he would have refrained from analysis and have been content to regard the work as a philosopher does the world<sup>3</sup>. But Taylor's mistakes have been copied; and, as I hope to show, at least one subsequent version of *Nathan* owes its chief merit to a partial avoidance of his faults. It is therefore necessary to point out that 'so zieh' ich in die Gabel' (Act II, Sc. i) does not mean 'I take the pawn' any more than 'I castle' (Willis) or 'I withdraw into this corner' (E. S. H.), and that therefore Herzfeld's 'Hier [in der Schachspielszene] sind die Schwierigkeiten, welche der.....Dialog, sowie die technischen Ausdrücke.....bereiten, glänzend überwunden' is an overstatement. 'Delk' (Act II, sc. ix) is not 'staff,' but Boylan and Wood have it so, no doubt on Taylor's authority; nor is 'Unterschleif' 'deficits' (Act II, Sc. ii), a mistake copied by Wood, Corbett, Boylan and Jacks, while E. S. H. characteristically omits the word altogether. Willis, Reich and Maxwell translate correctly 'embezzlement.' A passage from the fourth *Litteraturbrief*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A remark of Lounsbury's (*Shakespeare as Dramatic Artist*, p. 87) makes it clear that he did not know Raspe's version.

<sup>2</sup> It occupies the end of Vol. I of the *Historic Survey*; for re-issues of his *Nathan* see list of translations.

<sup>3</sup> *Litteraturbriefe*, xvi.

<sup>4</sup> 'Am wenigsten aber sind sie [die Übersetzer] vermögend, ihrem Originale nachzudenken. Denn wären sie hierzu nicht ganz unfähig, so würden sie es fast immer aus der Folge der Gedanken abnehmen können, wo sie jene mangelhafte Kenntnis der Sprache zu Fehlern verleitet hat.'

exactly expresses one's opinion of such blind following of the accidentally and momentarily blind.

Taylor's refined taste, scholarship and poetic feeling would, in a man of less originality, have made a translator second to none; but that priceless individuality which, had he chosen, might have won him the fame of a great author, proved a fatal bar to outstanding eminence as an interpreter of others. No person with any worthy knowledge of Lessing's works can say, on reading Taylor's *Nathan*, that the poem is as it would have been had Lessing been an Englishman. In fact, the coupling of that great name with the wayward quaintness, the vague playfulness, the affected spellings and the original idiom of Taylor is almost laughable. Yet this must be the ultimate test of translation; and under that test Taylor's *Nathan* fails<sup>1</sup>.

R. Dillon Boylan, in collaboration with H. G. Bohn<sup>2</sup>, produced the next translation. It owes much to Taylor—even some of its mistakes, as we have already seen. Sometimes there is mere copying, as in Act III, sc. x, 'it vibrates not responsive.' Yet Boylan or Bohn, or both, have on the whole improved on Taylor; the latter's peculiarities are generally avoided without injury to the Shakespearean flavour of the poem.

About the next translation, that of Reich, it is difficult to speak seriously. 'Es gehört wirklich eine rare Stirne dazu, in einer fremden Sprache, die man nicht vollkommen versteht, Verse zu machen.' Reich's 'rare Stirne' makes 'es sei denn, dass' 'it be then that' (Act I, sc. ii), perpetrates the Teutonic impossibility 'that our dear Lord Himself has been a Jew' (Act IV, sc. vii) and absurdities like 'Well, Knight? You turn your face off?' (Act III, sc. ii). 'You startle?' (Ihr stutzt?—Act V, sc. viii). 'I will not be refined' ('Ich will nicht fein sein'—Act IV, sc. i). There is hardly a page without some offence to English idiom: one even doubts sometimes if Reich really understood the original. The first and other examples above would seem to cast such a doubt.

<sup>1</sup> There is here, perhaps, some small danger of misunderstanding. The present writer yields to none in his admiration for Taylor, and finds his style, quaint as it is, extremely fresh and delightful. Yet no worse translator for Lessing can be conceived than a man mystic and imaginative, prolific indeed in ideas, yet diffuse and apparently incapable of ordered and long continued thought. His affectations and neologisms are severely censured by G. E. Griffiths in a letter to Taylor dated Feb. 16, 1799 (Robberds, I, pp. 195—202), and by Southey (*ibid.*, I, p. 452). Taylor vigorously defended himself (*ibid.*, I, p. 228, and *Monthly Magazine*, xii, 'Counterplaint'). Some of Griffiths' objections are absurd: e.g., he censures 'rehabilitated' as 'not English.' He was a son of Dr R. Griffiths, editor of the *Monthly Magazine*, for which Taylor wrote. In Robberds (I, pp. 209—11) will be found also Dr Aikin's gentle reproaches. For a delightful example of Taylor's original style see Robberds, I, p. 417.

<sup>2</sup> So says Lowndes, *Bibliographical Manual*, 2nd ed., London, 1864.

<sup>3</sup> *Litteraturbriefe*, 39.

Willis, being an Englishman, naturally was more successful than Reich; but he was sometimes even less intelligent. What, for instance, shall we say of a translator who could thus render Recha's outburst 'Wem eignet Gott?' etc. (Act III, sc. i):

Who may compare with God? What God were he  
Whom man might measure him withal?

There is no excuse for such a blunder. Willis translated several medical works from the German<sup>1</sup>. Let us hope he killed no trustful readers by such sheer misinterpretations of the original. There are occasional sins against taste, too: the Templar's 'Kaufe nichts' (Act I, sc. vi) was meant to be a rude and blunt rebuff; and 'I am no buyer—I lack nothing' is just simply not a translation. Again, in Act v, sc. vi Willis interpolates a metrical version of: 'Der aus Büchern erworbene Reichtum fremder Erfahrung heisst Gelehrsamkeit. Eigene Erfahrung ist Weisheit. Das kleinste Kapital von dieser ist mehr wert als Millionen von jener'<sup>2</sup> without apparent excuse. He occasionally falls into the baldest literalism; e.g., Act II, sc. ix: 'gleichwohl galt es keine taube Nuss,' 'and yet the stake was no such hollow nut.' Willis evidently chose Byron as his model rather than Shakespeare. Yet Lessing's verses go better into a Shakespearean mould than into any other. Boylan and Maxwell both appreciated this fact, and as a result produced more successful versions.

The *Nathan* of E. S. H. is apparently the work of a lady<sup>3</sup>. It is in prose and avowedly abridged: in point of fact, it contains a great deal that is not Lessing at all. Though the book is thoroughly below serious criticism, a few extracts must be given to show reason for so short a notice here. Thus (Act v, sc. iv) 'sie ist so schlecht und recht,' etc., becomes 'Tis so monotonous: One page just like another—and so ugly!' Here is Recha's penultimate speech in Act III, sc. iii. 'Bring thy embroidery. How tastefully these golden leaves are wrought! My fingers cannot even yet compete with thine.' After which follows a correct rendering of the real speech. From a purely theatrical point of view the condensation of speeches is not always unhappily managed: e.g., Recha's account of Daja's prayer in the ruined chapel (Act v, sc. vi): but the abridgments frequently result in less than a paraphrase, entirely marring the poet's meaning: e.g., Nathan's speech in Act I, sc. i, 'ich überdenke mir,' etc.

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, art. Robert Willis; *Lancet*, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> Lachmann's Edition, xi, ii, p. 402 (from 'Selbstbetrachtungen,' etc.).

<sup>3</sup> See list of translations, which will be appended to the concluding instalment of this paper.

Victor Hugo would probably have called Andrew Wood 'l'homme à l'inversion' and thus have damned him. The following few examples will show if such were his deserts:

Then write at once  
To our old friendship of divorce a bill! (Act I, sc. iii.)

He concludes  
That God for great things must have you preserved. (Act I, sc. v.)

And if  
They in a hurry haply could a chance  
Of us successfully attacking get. (Act II, sc. i.)

Why must I the poor girl have so to risk exposed. (Act v, sc. v.)

I need  
Regarding that only to her myself  
Excuse. (Act v, sc. v.)

That she a mother let me miss so little. (Act v. sc. vi.)

Wood may be said entirely to lack real poetic sense. The best that can be said of his work is that it is fairly correct—small praise indeed for a work of art.

Corbett's translation is good and correct; but he has not the art of the unobtrusive *cheville*. His work contains some awkward inversions; e.g.,

the proper Dervish  
Would not allow one aught of him to make. (Act I, sc. iii.)

But here he shows a great advance on Wood. His expression is sometimes most unhappy: e.g.,

the greatest miracle  
Is that the real true miracles should become  
So commonplace and cannot otherwise. (Act I, sc. ii.)

Jacks is generally correct: but he is a writer of most clumsy and unmusical verse. In his preface he says that he did not feel 'bound by rigid rules of dramatic versification as long as the language flowed smoothly'—which it very rarely does. He has an irritating habit of making *enjambement* unpleasant by ending the line with an article or other unemphatic word. Examples will be found below. Besides those borrowed from Taylor two bad mistakes occur: in Act I, sc. ii, the passage: 'ein Mensch, wie die Natur sie täglich gewährt' stands as 'a man of nature's daily nourishing,' the translator having possibly read 'gewährt' as 'ernährt'; and in Act I, sc. vi, 'Sina' is 'Sinai.' Here are a few examples of the abuse mentioned above:

Contains your  
Cloister many such as you? (Act I, sc. v.)

Good brother, if I but knew the  
Inner contents of this letter. (Act I, sc. v.)

and knows a  
Secret, potent word, which makes their  
Seals unloose. (Act II, sc. iii.)

It cannot, of course, be supposed that the poetic taste which dictated such passages can be even mediocre. If a translator is not prepared to obey the 'rigid rules of versification' he has no business to write verses at all. Jacks, without a tithe of Taylor's talent, has tried to do as he did—to impress his own image and superscription on Lessing.

It is pleasant to turn at last to a worthy English *Nathan* of our own day. Maxwell is a tasteful, a reverent and a correct translator, though he is occasionally wrong. For example, Al-Hafi's 'trotz einem' in Act I, sc. iii, is not: 'just as much as e'er another,' while British lack of practice in *tutoiement* is no doubt responsible for:

come, let me hug thee, man :  
I hope at least I still may call you friend.

In Act II, sc. ii, we meet with an extraordinary paraphrase which would seem without reason or authority:

Ich nicht. Ich denke, dass ich hier sie in  
Empfang soll nehmen.  
Not I: but yet I thought they must have come  
And that belike you now had sent for me  
To take them over.

The statement in the note to p. 255 is highly arguable: but these are only trifles, and more than outweighed by the real merits of the work. Maj.-Gen. Maxwell's *Minna* has already been referred to: it is a later work than his *Nathan*, and not quite so successful. He should not spend his time on prose while our other translators find it so difficult to produce good English iambs! Let any speech of some length be compared in the versions of Reich, Willis, Jacks, Corbett and Maxwell. The result will cheer those inclined to mourn past standards and lost art.

(d) *Laokoon*.

In Goedeke (2nd ed., IV, p. 144) used to stand 'Laokoon. Ins Englische 1767 8vo.' Many have tried to guess on what authority the statement was made. Haney's conjecture<sup>1</sup>, that it was a result of the translated title in the *Monthly Review* notice, seems most reasonable. The partial translation by Thomas de Quincey in *Blackwood's Magazine* for 1826 and 1827 seems to have been the first appearance of *Laokoon*

<sup>1</sup> *Americana Germanica*, IV (1902), p. 142.



in English. Ross's version, which G. H. Lewes called 'an inestimable book to English readers',<sup>1</sup> was published in 1836, and is mentioned as rare in America by a writer in the *American Whig* for 1851. E. C. Beasley's followed in 1853. In 1874 appeared two translations the American and more correct by Ellen Frothingham, the English and more interesting by Sir R. Phillimore. We can forgive the mistakes of the latter (they have already been pointed out and censured, none too gently<sup>2</sup>) in virtue of a very useful and painstaking introduction, to which we shall have to refer at some length in the next section of this article. Miss Frothingham's work is good here and in *Nathan*, so also is that of Rönnefeldt, whom Goedeke calls 'Rönnefeldt' with unusual inexactitude for the new edition, at least.

(e) *Other Translations.*

The *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* was long in gaining a hearing in England; and even now we have only one fairly complete translation, that by Helen Zimmern, 1879. Rönnefeldt gives a selection—a mere collection of aphorisms. The work was notoriously unknown when J. Sully's essay on it appeared<sup>3</sup>; the *Cornhill*<sup>4</sup> could truthfully call this 'the only account of it in our literature.' Taylor must have been well acquainted with the book: but for some reason its greatness does not seem to have struck him. Indeed, his little-known epigram<sup>5</sup> might be held to prove a low opinion if epigrams could be thought to prove anything. Mackenzie mentions 'le dramaturgie de Hambourg,' and adds: 'His plays, accordingly, though not exactly conformable to the Aristotelian standard, approach pretty near to it in the observation of the unities. He is said to have got into a dispute with Goethe on this subject, in which, from a degree of timidity [!] in his nature, he rather yielded to his antagonist.' William Preston<sup>6</sup>, girding against the 'Gothic' elements in the German tragedy of 1802, says (p. 33), 'The German language was improving rapidly under the culture of Gessner',

<sup>1</sup> *The Inner Life of Art*, in *The Principles of Success in Literature*, Scott Library, London.

<sup>2</sup> See list of translations.

<sup>3</sup> *Sensation and Intuition*, London, 1874, pp. 312—35.

<sup>4</sup> xxxviii (1878), pp. 189—206.

<sup>5</sup> 'Lessing comments Aristotle as divines the Bible; so as to extort his own critical opinions from the oracle.' (*Monthly Magazine*, 1801 (ii), p. 224.)

<sup>6</sup> *Reflections on the Peculiarities of Style and Manner in the late German Writers*, in *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, viii (1802), pp. 15 f.

<sup>7</sup> Gessner was a great man to the eighteenth century English critic; Anne Plumptre has a phrase 'Lessing, and even Gessner.' At p. 61 of Preston's paper he is again put before Lessing. Blair (*Lectures*, iii, p. 123) calls him the most successful of the moderns in pastoral poetry.

Wieland and Lessing, and would have received the polish and perfection requisite to make it classical, had succeeding writers trod in their footsteps: but the temperate and judicious manner, the chaste simplicity, and sober graces introduced by them, and formed on a study of the antique, did not satisfy the aspiring writers of the new School.' Henry Maty, in his *New Review* for 1785 (VIII, p. 106), has evidently not seen the book if we may take his silence as proof. *Blackwood's Magazine*, XVIII (1825), p. 286, has a notice of the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*: and from then on most authoritative reviews of Lessing have at least some mention of it.

It may here be noted that the book under consideration supplies at least two of the passages by which Lessing is known to the English public in the same sense as Chaucer is known by the 'French of Paris' line from the Prologue. The passages from the *Dramaturgie* are the hackneyed and misunderstood renunciation of claims to poetic genius and the comparison between Aristotle and Euclid. Together with the 'Offer of Truth' from the *Duplik*, one or two of the *Axiomata* out of their setting, and the story of the rings from *Nathan*, they recur with nauseating persistence in the essays of those engaged to 'write up' almost unknown Lessing for some special occasion.

Of smaller works *Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet*, translated by E. C. Beasley, appeared along with the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* in 1879, its first and last appearance. The *Faust* fragment was included in Lord F. Leveson-Gower's translation of Goethe's great work. In *Macmillan's Magazine*<sup>1</sup> the seventeenth *Litteraturbrief* is in great part translated in an article on Lessing's *Faust* by T. B. Saunders. *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* was done into excellent English by the great F. W. Robertson, of Brighton, in 1858. The earlier version by Crabb Robinson is included in the list of translations.

(To be concluded.)

SYDNEY H. KENWOOD.

GRESFORD.

<sup>1</sup> LXII (1890), pp. 180—8.