

Goethe's 'Tasso' in England

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necessitating the removal of houses on the bank, has exposed the opening of the Via di Monte Brianzo, has also narrowed the road itself and disguised its historical importance. At the junction of the bridge and of the road still stands the ancient Albergo dell' Orso, where Dante is said to have stayed. One ancient window remains on the outside wall of the building, and the interior is said to be practically as it was in Dante's time. Along the road to Monte Brianzo were the shops of the Florentine bankers and goldsmiths, where the Florentine pilgrims congregated¹. It would therefore be reasonable to suppose that to a Florentine Monte Brianzo would be 'Il Monte.' The hill was levelled about 1870 when many new buildings were erected there.

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GOETHE'S 'TASSO' IN ENGLAND.

On page 225, note 1, of the present volume of the *Modern Language Review*, I printed a letter from William Taylor to Henry Crabb Robinson concerning Goethe's *Iphigenie*. By an unfortunate oversight on my part, this letter was there described as unpublished; whereas it was actually edited by J. M. Carré in his article in the *Revue Germanique*, vol. VIII, no. 1, p. 36.

In this same article M. Carré refers to a fragmentary translation of Goethe's *Tasso* made by Crabb Robinson during his first stay in Germany, and to which allusion is made in the published *Diary*. M. Carré was fortunate enough to discover this translation in a bundle of loose papers amongst the Crabb Robinson documents in the Dr Williams' Library. I take the opportunity of giving a more detailed account of the fragment in question.

The allusion in the printed *Diary*², which is taken from a letter to his brother, Thomas, dated November 14, 1802, is as follows: 'After, perhaps, an unsuccessful attempt to pen a few English iambics in a

¹ See Rodolfo Lanciani, *The Golden Days of the Renaissance in Rome*, where he says that the year 1300 is 'usually called the Giubileo di Dante, because the divine poet is said to have visited Rome on that occasion, and to have met there Immanuel ben Salomo, from whom he learned the few Hebrew words which appear in the "Divina Commedia".' Lanciani also favours the tradition that Dante lodged in the Albergo dell' Orso.

² *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, edited by T. Sadler, 1872, vol. I, p. 64.

translation of Goethe's *Tasso*, I shall read in bed some fairy tale, poem, or other light work.'

The translation did not apparently progress very far. All that has been preserved are Act I, Scene 1, in its entirety, and eighteen lines of Scene 2, and it appears probable that this is all that was ever completed. At least the MS. in the Dr Williams' Library is the original sketch, as is shown by the numerous variants and corrections. Further it breaks off suddenly, although there are still several blank sheets available. One can only conclude that, as in the case of his translation of the *Die Piccolomini*, he grew weary of the magnitude of the task he had set himself. He may easily have been discouraged by the ill-success of his translation of Anton Wall's *Amatonda*¹, which, in spite of the good wishes of Coleridge and Lamb, 'fell dead from the press.' Robinson goes on to tell us how the failure of this literary venture 'made me willing to devote myself honestly to the Law, and so saved me from the mortification that follows a *little* literary success'. Henceforth he restricted his endeavours to encouraging others to attempt what he felt was beyond his powers. And again, the appearance of Des Vœux' *Tasso* in 1827 rendered superfluous his own undertaking.

On the whole, it cannot be said that the discontinuation of Robinson's *Tasso* translation is much to be deplored. Keen as was his appreciation of literature, his poetic abilities were not of a very high order. The chief, perhaps the only merit of his version, is its fidelity to the original text. The deviations from the actual letter of the original are so few, that in the 245 lines of the translation I can only point out three insignificant examples². This fidelity is such as to impair the value of the translation; it reads occasionally very wooden, almost un-English. The following quotation will sufficiently illustrate this tendency and must also serve as a sample of the translation:

1. 58. Sehr leicht zerstreut der Zufall, was er sammelt.
Ein edler Mensch zieht edle Menschen an
Und weiß sie fest zuhalten, wie ihr tut.
What Chance unites, Chance can destroy again.
A noble Soul draws noble Souls to it
And binds them fast, as you have ever done.

¹ *Amatonda. A Tale from the German of Anton Wall.* London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1811.

² *Diary*, 1872 ed. i, p. 187.

³ L. 7 'We here resemble happy village girls' ('Wir scheinen recht beglückte Schäferinnen'); l. 21 'At times like these, to come to our retreat' ('In diesen Tagen schon aufs Land gebracht'); l. 42 'Do not, Princess, / In an hour of Bliss remind me that that / Bliss so soon will end' ('Erinnere mich in diesen holden Stunden, / O Fürstin, nicht, wie bald ich scheiden soll').

To you and to your Brother, Minds are bound
 Worthy of your's. And you still emulate
 Your glorious Ancestors. Here first the light
 Of Science and free thinking¹ spread abroad,
 Whilst the thick night of Barbarism hung
 Over the world besides. When but a Child,
 The Names Hippolitus and Hercules
 Of Esta rung² full in my Ear. I heard
 My father often speak of Ferrara
 With Rome and Florence: I have often longed
 To be there, and my wish is here fulfill'd.
 Petrarch was welcom'd and was honour'd here,
 And Ariosto found his Modells here.
 There is not a great Name in Italy
 Which has not been a guest here in this house.
 And it is advantageous to receive
 A Genius as guest, for he returns
 Your hospitable gift by one more rich.
 The spot in which a good man has reposed,
 Is sanctified to Ages far remote,
 And after Centuries past his Word, his Deeds,
 For his Descendants all resound again³.

Robinson's *Tasso* translation, although easily on a level, if not superior to that of Des Vœux, cannot for a moment compare with that of the accomplished translator Miss A. Swanwick⁴. The latter so fulfils the ideals of a translation, that it faithfully reproduces the text of the original, and yet reads like an original. Robinson's translation was successful only on the former count. Its interest to us to-day is purely historical. It is yet a further testimony of Robinson's untiring activity in the cause of German literature in England⁵ and for that reason deserves a place, however humble, in any history of Anglo-German literary relations in the early nineteenth century.

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¹ Variant: of lib'ral thought ('Der Wissenschaft, des freien Denkens').

² MS. wrung.

³ Variant: revive.

⁴ I have in mind the revised edition of 1875. (*The Dramatic Works of Goethe*, vol. VIII, Bohn's Library.)

⁵ Crabb Robinson was indefatigable in this respect. J. M. Carré in the *Archiv für neuere Sprachen* 1913-14, p. 425 publishes evidence of Robinson's interest in Whewell's translation of *Hermann and Dorothea*. Intending translators turned for information, as a matter of course, to Robinson, as the chief English authority on Germany and the Germans.