



***HORACE***

***THE ODES  
AND CARMEN  
SAECULARE  
OF HORACE***



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**Horace**

# **The Odes and Carmen Saeculare of Horace**

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# PREFACE.

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I scarcely know what excuse I can offer for making public this attempt to "translate the untranslatable." No one can be more convinced than I am that a really successful translator must be himself an original poet; and where the author translated happens to be one whose special characteristic is incommunicable grace of expression, the demand on the translator's powers would seem to be indefinitely increased. Yet the time appears to be gone by when men of great original gifts could find satisfaction in reproducing the thoughts and words of others; and the work, if done at all, must now be done by writers of inferior pretension. Among these, however, there are still degrees; and the experience which I have gained since I first adventured as a poetical translator has made me doubt whether I may not be ill-advised in resuming the experiment under any circumstances. Still, an experiment of this kind may have an advantage of its own, even when it is unsuccessful; it may serve as a piece of embodied criticism, showing what the experimenter conceived to be the conditions of success, and may thus, to borrow Horace's

own metaphor of the whetstone, impart to others a quality which it is itself without. Perhaps I may be allowed, for a few moments, to combine precept with example, and imitate my distinguished friend and colleague, Professor Arnold, in offering some counsels to the future translator of Horace's Odes, referring, at the same time, by way of illustration, to my own attempt.

The first thing at which, as it seems to me, a Horatian translator ought to aim, is some kind of metrical conformity to his original. Without this we are in danger of losing not only the metrical, but the general effect of the Latin; we express ourselves in a different compass, and the character of the expression is altered accordingly. For instance, one of Horace's leading features is his occasional sententiousness. It is this, perhaps more than anything else, that has made him a storehouse of quotations. He condenses a general truth in a few words, and thus makes his wisdom portable. "Non, si male nunc, et olim sic erit;" "Nihil est ab omni parte beatum;" "Omnes eodem cogimur,"—these and similar expressions remain in the memory when other features of Horace's style, equally characteristic, but less obvious, are forgotten. It is almost impossible for a translator to do justice to this sententious brevity unless the stanza in which he writes is in some sort analogous to the metre of Horace. If he chooses a longer and more diffuse measure, he will be apt to spoil the proverb by expansion; not to mention that much will often depend on the very position of the sentence in the stanza. Perhaps, in order to preserve these external peculiarities, it may be necessary to recast the expression, to substitute, in fact, one form of proverb for another; but

this is far preferable to retaining the words in a diluted form, and so losing what gives them their character, I cannot doubt, then, that it is necessary in translating an Ode of Horace to choose some analogous metre; as little can I doubt that a translator of the Odes should appropriate to each Ode some particular metre as its own. It may be true that Horace himself does not invariably suit his metre to his subject; the solemn Alcaic is used for a poem in dispraise of serious thought and praise of wine; the Asclepiad stanza in which Quintilius is lamented is employed to describe the loves of Maecenas and Licymnia. But though this consideration may influence us in our choice of an English metre, it is no reason for not adhering to the one which we may have chosen. If we translate an Alcaic and a Sapphic Ode into the same English measure, because the feeling in both appears to be the same, we are sure to sacrifice some important characteristic of the original in the case of one or the other, perhaps of both. It is better to try to make an English metre more flexible than to use two different English metres to represent two different aspects of one measure in Latin. I am sorry to say that I have myself deviated from this rule occasionally, under circumstances which I shall soon have to explain; but though I may perhaps succeed in showing that my offences have not been serious, I believe the rule itself to be one of universal application, always honoured in the observance, if not always equally dishonoured in the breach.

The question, what metres should be selected, is of course one of very great difficulty. I can only explain what my own practice has been, with some of the reasons which

have influenced me in particular cases. Perhaps we may take Milton's celebrated translation of the Ode to Pyrrha as a starting point. There can be no doubt that to an English reader the metre chosen does give much of the effect of the original; yet the resemblance depends rather on the length of the respective lines than on any similarity in the cadences. But it is evident that he chose the iambic movement as the ordinary movement of English poetry; and it is evident, I think, that in translating Horace we shall be right in doing the same, as a general rule. Anapaestic and other rhythms may be beautiful and appropriate in themselves, but they cannot be manipulated so easily; the stanzas with which they are associated bear no resemblance, as stanzas, to the stanzas of Horace's Odes. I have then followed Milton in appropriating the measure in question to the Latin metre, technically called the fourth Asclepiad, at the same time that I have substituted rhyme for blank verse, believing rhyme to be an inferior artist's only chance of giving pleasure. There still remains a question about the distribution of the rhymes, which here, as in most other cases, I have chosen to make alternate. Successive rhymes have their advantages, but they do not give the effect of interlinking, which is so natural in a stanza; the quatrain is reduced to two couplets, and its unity is gone. From the fourth to the third Asclepiad the step is easy. Taking an English iambic line of ten syllables to represent the longer lines of the Latin, an English iambic line of six syllables to represent the shorter, we see that the metre of Horace's "Scriberis Vario" finds its representative in the metre of Mr. Tennyson's "Dream of Fair Women." My

experience would lead me to believe the English metre to be quite capable, in really skilful hands, of preserving the effect of the Latin, though, as I have said above, the Latin measure is employed by Horace both for a threnody and for a love-song.

The Sapphic and the Alcaic involve more difficult questions. Here, however, as in the Asclepiad, I believe we must be guided, to some extent, by external similarity. We must choose the iambic movement as being most congenial to English; we must avoid the ten-syllable iambic as already appropriated to the longer Asclepiad line. This leads me to conclude that the staple of each stanza should be the eight-syllable iambic, a measure more familiar to English lyric poetry than any other, and as such well adapted to represent the most familiar lyric measures of Horace. With regard to the Sapphic, it seems desirable that it should be represented by a measure of which the three first lines are eight-syllable iambs, the fourth some shorter variety. Of this stanza there are at least two kinds for which something might be said. It might be constructed so that the three first lines should rhyme with each other, the fourth being otherwise dealt with; or it might be framed on the plan of alternate rhymes, the fourth line still being shorter than the rest. Of the former kind two or three specimens are to be found in Francis' translation of Horace. In these the fourth line consists of but three syllables, the two last of which rhyme with the two last syllables of the fourth line of the next succeeding stanza, as for instance:—

You shoot; she whets her tusks to bite;  
While he who sits to judge the fight  
Treads on the palm with foot so white,  
Disdainful,  
And sweetly floating in the air  
Wanton he spreads his fragrant hair,  
Like Ganymede or Nireus fair,  
And vainful.

It would be possible, no doubt, to produce verses better adapted to recommend the measure than these stanzas, which are, however, the best that can be quoted from Francis; it might be possible, too, to suggest some improvement in the structure of the fourth line. But, however managed, this stanza would, I think, be open to two serious objections; the difficulty of finding three suitable rhymes for each stanza, and the difficulty of disposing of the fourth line, which, if made to rhyme with the fourth line of the next stanza, produces an awkwardness in the case of those Odes which consist of an odd number of stanzas (a large proportion of the whole amount), if left unrhymed, creates an obviously disagreeable effect. We come then to the other alternative, the stanza with alternate rhymes. Here the question is about the fourth line, which may either consist of six syllables, like Coleridge's Fragment, "O leave the lily on its stem," or of four, as in Pope's youthful "Ode on Solitude," these types being further varied by the addition of an extra syllable to form a double rhyme. Of these the four-syllable type seems to me the one to be preferred, as giving the effect of the Adonic better than if it had been two syllables longer. The double rhyme has, I think, an

advantage over the single, were it not for its greater difficulty. Much as English lyric poetry owes to double rhymes, a regular supply of them is not easy to procure; some of them are apt to be cumbrous, such as words in-ATION; others, such as the participial-ING (DYING, FLYING, &c.), spoil the language of poetry, leading to the employment of participles where participles are not wanted, and of verbal substantives that exist nowhere else. My first intention was to adopt the double rhyme in this measure, and I accordingly executed three Odes on that plan (Book I. Odes 22, 38; Book II. Ode 16); afterwards I abandoned it, and contented myself with the single rhyme. On the whole, I certainly think this measure answers sufficiently well to the Latin Sapphic; but I have felt its brevity painfully in almost every Ode that I have attempted, being constantly obliged to omit some part of the Latin which I would gladly have preserved. The great number of monosyllables in English is of course a reason for acquiescing in lines shorter than the corresponding lines in Latin; but even in English polysyllables are often necessary, and still oftener desirable on grounds of harmony; and an allowance of twenty-eight syllables of English for thirty-eight of Latin is, after all, rather short.

For the place of the Alcaic there are various candidates. Mr. Tennyson has recently invented a measure which, if not intended to reproduce the Alcaic, was doubtless suggested by it, that which appears in his poem of "The Daisy," and, in a slightly different form, in the "Lines to Mr. Maurice." The two last lines of the latter form of the stanza are indeed evidently copied from the Alcaic, with the simple omission of

the last syllable of the last line of the original. Still, as a whole, I doubt whether this form would be as suitable, at least for a dignified Ode, as the other, where the initial iambic in the last line, substituted for a trochee, makes the movement different. I was deterred, however, from attempting either, partly by a doubt whether either had been sufficiently naturalized in English to be safely practised by an unskilful hand, partly by the obvious difficulty of having to provide three rhymes per stanza, against which the occurrence of one line in each without a rhyme at all was but a poor set-off. A second metre which occurred to me is that of Andrew Marvel's Horatian Ode, a variety of which is found twice in Mr. Keble's *Christian Year*. Here two lines of eight syllables are followed by two of six, the difference between the types being that in Marvel's Ode the rhymes are successive, in Mr. Keble's alternate. The external correspondence between this and the Alcaic is considerable; but the brevity of the English measure struck me at once as a fatal obstacle, and I did not try to encounter it. A third possibility is the stanza of "In Memoriam," which has been adopted by the clever author of "Poems and Translations, by C. S. C.," in his version of "Justum et tenacem." I think it very probable that this will be found eventually to be the best representation of the Alcaic in English, especially as it appears to afford facilities for that linking of stanza to stanza which one who wishes to adhere closely to the logical and rhythmical structure of the Latin soon learns to desire. But I have not adopted it; and I believe there is good reason for not doing so. With all its advantages, it has the patent disadvantage of having been brought into notice by a



poet who is influencing the present generation as only a great living poet can. A great writer now, an inferior writer hereafter, may be able to handle it with some degree of independence; but the majority of those who use it at present are sure in adopting Mr. Tennyson's metre to adopt his manner. It is no reproach to "C. S. C." that his Ode reminds us of Mr. Tennyson; it is a praise to him that the recollection is a pleasant one. But Mr. Tennyson's manner is not the manner of Horace, and it is the manner of a contemporary; the expression—a most powerful and beautiful expression—of influences to which a translator of an ancient classic feels himself to be too much subjected already. What is wanted is a metre which shall have other associations than those of the nineteenth century, which shall be the growth of various periods of English poetry, and so be independent of any. Such a metre is that which I have been led to choose, the eight-syllable iambic with alternate rhymes. It is one of the commonest metres in the language, and for that reason it is adapted to more than one class of subjects, to the gay as well as to the grave. But I am mistaken if it is not peculiarly suited to express that concentrated grandeur, that majestic combination of high eloquence with high poetry, which make the early Alcaic Odes of Horace's Third Book what they are to us. The main difficulty is in accommodating its structure to that of the Latin, of varying the pauses, and of linking stanza to stanza. It is a difficulty before which I have felt myself almost powerless, and I have in consequence been driven to the natural expedient of weakness, compromise, sometimes evading it, sometimes coping with it unsuccessfully. In other

respects I may be allowed to say that I have found the metre pleasanter to handle than any of the others that I have attempted, except, perhaps, that of "The Dream of Fair Women." The proportion of syllables in each stanza of English to each stanza of Latin is not much greater than in the case of the Sapphic, thirty-two against forty-one; yet, except in a few passages, chiefly those containing proper names, I have had no disagreeable sense of confinement. I believe the reason of this to be that the Latin Alcaic generally contains fewer words in proportion than the Latin Sapphic, the former being favourable to long words, the latter to short ones, as may be seen by contrasting such lines as "Dissentientis conditionibus" with such as "Dona praesentis rape laetus horae ac." This, no doubt, shows that there is an inconvenience in applying the same English iambic measure to two metres which differ so greatly in their practical result; but so far as I can see at present, the evil appears to be one of those which it is wiser to submit to than to attempt to cure.

The problem of finding English representatives for the other Horatian metres, if a more difficult, is a less important one. The most pressing case is that of the metre known as the second Asclepiad, the "Sic te diva potens Cypri." With this, I fear, I shall be thought to have dealt rather capriciously, having rendered it by four different measures, three of them, however, varieties of the same general type. It so happens that the first Ode which I translated was the celebrated Amoebean Poem, the dialogue between Horace and Lydia. I had had at that time not the most distant notion of translating the whole of the Odes, or even any

considerable number of them, so that in choosing a metre I thought simply of the requirements of the Ode in question, not of those of the rest of its class. Indeed, I may say that it was the thought of the metre which led me to try if I could translate the Ode. Having accomplished my attempt, I turned to another Ode of the same class, the scarcely less celebrated "Quem tu, Melpomene." For this I took a different metre, which happens to be identical with that of a solitary Ode in the Second Book, "Non ebur neque aureum," being guided still by my feeling about the individual Ode, not by any more general considerations. I did not attempt a third until I had proceeded sufficiently far in my undertaking to see that I should probably continue to the end. Then I had to consider the question of a uniform metre to answer to the Latin. Both of those which I had already tried were rendered impracticable by a double rhyme, which, however manageable in one or two Odes, is unmanageable, as I have before intimated, in the case of a large number. The former of the two measures, divested of the double rhyme, would, I think, lose most of its attractiveness; the latter suffers much less from the privation: the latter accordingly I chose. The trochaic character of the first line seems to me to give it an advantage over any metre composed of pure iambics, if it were only that it discriminates it from those alternate ten-syllable and eight-syllable iambics into which it would be natural to render many of the Epodes. At the same time, it did not appear worth while to rewrite the two Odes already translated, merely for the sake of uniformity, as the principle of correspondence to the Latin, the alternation of longer and shorter lines, is really the same in all three