

perceptible in the vaster scheme. He can draw the broad conclusions for which we have been waiting. He knows that the movement has passed from demands for shorter hours and increased wages to the wider problems of control. He knows that any synthesis, like that of the Whitley Councils, which is based upon the mere amelioration of the present system is already condemned. He knows that the stage is set for an ultimate political control of the state by the labor party. So long as these factors are definitely discernible the future of British labor is very largely the future of representative government, at least for Western civilization. That is why a book which so skillfully analyzes the forces as work is a public document of the first importance.

H. J. L.

Baudelaire Translated

The Flowers of Evil, translated from the French of Charles Pierre Baudelaire. New York: Brentano's.

TO the American public Baudelaire is little more than a name, in spite of the several attempts which have been made to introduce this poet to the English speaking peoples. A new edition of *The Flowers of Evil* has just come out of the Brentano press, with a lengthy introductory preface by Mr. James Huneker. It is doubtful however whether Baudelaire's popularity will be increased thereby: this translation does not evidence any of the qualities which were lacking in the others and presents all the faults which were to be found in its predecessors.

It seems that all the translators of Baudelaire start from the same false point of view: they try to adapt this very Latin writer to the Anglo-Saxon mind; they dress him up—or rather they try to conceal what they take to be his deformities under conventional draperies. Each sentence seems to be an apology for the French text, which is so smoothed, so toned down, so trimmed and polished, that it is difficult to recognize the real Baudelaire in his new garb.

Anyone who attempts to translate Baudelaire ought to have constantly in mind this statement of Barbey d'Aurevilly, who besides being a good critic was at the same time a personal friend of Baudelaire: "Each poem (in *Les Fleurs du Mal*) has a value d'ensemble et de situation which it loses when considered separately. The poems lose also—especially in their moral effect—when they are not read in the order in which the poet has placed them."

The anonymous author of the translation we are considering took the liberty to select fifty out of the hundred and fifty poems contained in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and to place them in an order which no principle seems to have guided except arbitrariness. The grouping of the poems is not preserved, and the sub-titles of these groups are suppressed as well as the dedications.

As to the text itself, some examples will show through what *bain de vertu* Baudelaire was passed before he was considered presentable to the candid eyes of his American readers.

One of Baudelaire's most famous poems is entitled: *Une Charogne*—an ugly word, I confess, and an ugly suggestion. Yet, such was the choice of the poet. It was meant as a challenge, taken as a challenge, and it made quite a sensation when it appeared. Later, it was this poem and a few others like it which became, so to speak, the banner of the Baudelairean School. With all this

history attached to the poem, it is evident that a translator had no choice but to carry out Baudelaire's intention and to use the corresponding English word "carion" which Shakespeare never hesitated to use as often as he needed it. However the translator thought better of it and promoted the "charogne" to a "corpse," thereby losing the whole point.

A number of expressions are to be found *ennobled* in this way. All we are allowed for the French "volupté" is "pleasure" or "delight." A "libertin" is kindly called a "sot," and an odor characterized as "fétide" by the author is made "stale" by the translator. The most pitiful of these euphemisms is that of the word "courtisane" which—of all banalities—is rendered as "woman frail." Poor Baudelaire!

It is clear that in the mind of Baudelaire's translator, the American public is so sensitive that they cannot stand the sight of such improper terms as "libertine" and "courtesan." I think that he is wrong, but I can understand his scruples in a certain measure. Where I cannot follow him at all, however, is when he applies his policy to terms which are by no means improper, but which, according to his conception, are what he would probably call unpoetical. This conception is not a new one. In fact it flourished several centuries ago.

One may imagine with what anger and disgust Baudelaire would read the so-called translation of his works, were he living in 1919. In fact, to anyone who knows the real Baudelaire at all, nothing can be more incongruous than to see him disguised in the antique veils and the foppery of a bygone age. One could as well imagine Racine's *Bérénice* on the moving picture screen, or Mark Twain transposed in classical style. In this translation, Baudelaire is spared none of the rhetoric, of the conventional phrases, of the commonplaces of old-fashioned poetry: "eves of gold, azure skies, sweet souls and bodies fair, faint bosoms and languid brows" abound at every page. The noble "couch" takes invariably the place of the plebeian "bed"; the hardworking "ox" is simply put aside and the aristocratic "deer" cavorts in its place. The *Mendiant* Rousse has her red hair turned to brown, and we are sorry for her.

A stanza taken from this last poem will give a good idea of the general difference of style between the original and the translation:

Baudelaire says to his red-haired beggar-girl:

Que pour te déshabiller
Tes bras se fassent prier
Et chassent à coups mutins
Les doigts lutins.

Our translator says to his brown beggar-maid:

Let your white arms uncovered shine
Polished and smooth and half divine
And let your elfish fingers chase
With riotous grace.

The comparison hardly needs a commentary. It will be noticed that the second line is entirely the invention of the translator—a line which we could well do without. It will be noticed also that the meaning of the last two lines is quite misunderstood. The change may be due to a lack of imagination or to a fear of impropriety, but the fact remains that Baudelaire never meant to speak of the girl's fingers but of his own.

Some of Baudelaire's most beautiful lines are rendered so meagrely that they make no impression at all.

In a refinement of mystic cruelty, the poet dreams of transforming the woman he loves into the Madone des Sept Douleurs, and to plunge seven sharp knives in her heart:

Je les planterai tous dans ton Coeur pantelant,
Dans ton Coeur sanglotant, dans ton Coeur ruisselant.

All that appears in the translation is:

"I'll plunge them all within thy panting heart."

This magnificent line:

"Mes yeux, mes larges yeux aux clarté éternelles . . ."

is thus massacred by the translator:

"The mirror of my luminous eyes."

There might be a good excuse for these deficiencies: the translation is written in verse, as the passages quoted show. The question of the advisability of ever putting in verse the poetry of another language is too important to be discussed and decided here. However many critics take the position today that Gilbert Murray's translation of *Medea* or Leconte de Lisle's translation of *De Natura Rerum* are more the work of these writers than of Euripides or Lucretius; and the reader who would want to know the real Euripides would do much better if he took the translation of a good hellenist whose only aim is to render with exactitude the Greek text and to preserve the beauty of the poetry in beautiful prose. When Baudelaire translated *The Raven*, he did not try to transpose the English rhythm in some French rhythm which could in no way be the same. His prose is so close to Poe's lines however, that no translation in French verse could give a better idea of the original. Stéphane Mallarmé did not attempt a verse translation either when he put this same poem in French.

But granted that a certain difference may be attributed to the difficulties of rhythm and rhyme in the volume which we are considering, there is no excuse possible for another kind of mistake which is by no means of rare occurrence in the book.

These mistakes are a proof that much is due to the ignorance of the translator. In the poem entitled: *L'Irréparable*, Baudelaire speaks of remorse which, he says, feeds on us like the caterpillar on the oak:

"Comme du chêne la chenille."

The apparent similarity of the words *chêne* and *chenille* misled the unfortunate translator and made him believe that there was a connection between them. Not taking the trouble to look in a dictionary and relieve his ignorance, he produced this pearl:

"As the acorn in the oak."

Time has come when the American public can no longer be made such a fool of. Things of this sort cannot be allowed to pass.

Here is another example of this astounding ignorance:

In the *Danse Macabre*, which recalls so vividly the frescoes of Orcagna in the Pisan Campo Santo, Baudelaire describes the dancing girl—the dressed up skeleton—with her silks and laces, her "souliers pomponnés," and the frill around her neck:

"La ruche qui se joue au bord des clavicules."

The whole picture is a gloomy contrast between the elegance and daintiness of the costume and the weird horror of the skeleton which it covers. It is evident that the trans-

lator ignored this sense of the word "ruche" (frill) and he makes the line read:

"The swarms that hum about her collar-bones"

—the word "ruche" meaning also "hive." The result is nonsense and shows that the translator did not catch the idea of the description. Such blunders might be forgiven to a high school student of French, not to the man who has the boldness to undertake such a piece of work with such a scant knowledge of French. It is an unprecedented example of bluff.

A few Poems in Prose complete the book—but in spite of their being in prose, the same tendency to tone down the text, the same general negligence are found in this second part.

A word must be added concerning Mr. Huneker's preface. We do not do Mr. Huneker the injury to suppose that he had anything to do with this paltry translation, or any intention to cover it with his name. The fact that he has allowed his name to be used in connection with it, proves on the contrary that he has not even read the book or at least compared it with the original. However, he has missed the opportunity which offered itself to give to the American public the study of Baudelaire which is so much needed, although his anecdotes are very entertainingly told.

A good psychological analysis of Baudelaire's strange mind will doubtless be written some day. But it must be the work of a man whose mind is open, receptive, sympathetic, and devoid of prejudice, and who has a thorough knowledge of the man's life and work. If such a study accompanies a faithful translation of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, it may happen that Baudelaire will finally be acclimated to this country. But it is not quite sure. M. CARRET.

A Woman's Efficiency

A Year as a Government Agent, by Vira B. Whitehouse. New York: Harper & Brothers.

INTO the mess of rival propaganda that was Switzerland in December, 1917, the Committee on Public Information sent Mrs. Norman Whitehouse to add news from the United States. She has now published an account of her adventure that is notable for several grave virtues. Its vices are gay little demons that are only amusing. But its virtues are serious. For one thing it is good testimony to the power of directness in dealing. Now and then, sitting comfortably uninvolved, one instinctively softens an outline, when she describes the circuitous ways expected of her. But the fear that this instinct comes out of our ordinary inertia, flutters about as a troublesome gnat. Her manner, as a rule, keeps one from meddling. Besides which, she publishes an invincible appendix of letters and cablegrams from Washington.

Having proved her power to do "hard, unpicturesque work at an office desk" in the recently won suffrage campaign in New York, Mrs. Whitehouse felt qualified to accept as her way of service the disseminating of accurate news of the United States as an Associated Power, of our army and navy as they were developing, and of our general social conditions. This information she was to receive from Washington, authentic, straight information. She was to have a diplomatic passport and special recommendation to our Embassy in Paris and our Legation in Berne. She sailed without the diplomatic passport, un-