

## TORU DUTT.



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IN the year 1876, there was issued from the Saptahiksambad Press, at Bhowanipore, a volume entitled "A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields, by Toru Dutt." It contained in all one hundred and sixty-six poems, original compositions in English, or almost literal translations from the foremost of modern French poets, including Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Béranger, Leconte de Lisle, Théophile Gautier, François Coppée, and Sully-Prudhomme—all notable for their brilliancy of word-painting and intricacy of form. A few copies of the book found their way to England, and were most kindly received. In 1878, a second edition appeared, containing forty-three additional poems and a prefatory memoir; whence it became known that the writer, who had been able to reproduce in one foreign tongue the best work of the most celebrated poets of still another foreign nation, was a Hindu girl, without a drop of European blood in her veins, who had died at the age of twenty-one, leaving indubitable proof of application and originality which, as one of the foremost of English reviewers recently remarked, would not have been surpassed by George Sand or George Eliot, had they been removed from us at a similar age.

Toru Dutt was the youngest of three children of the Baboo Govin Chunder Dutt, for many years an honorary magistrate and justice of the peace in Calcutta—a gentleman

of unusual culture and erudition. Of these three children, the eldest—a son, Abju—died in 1865, at the age of fourteen; the second, Aru, in 1874, at the age of twenty. Toru was born March 4, 1856. In 1869, the two sisters visited Europe in company with their father, remaining abroad for four years. With the exception of a few months in a French *pension*, the girls never attended school. Under their father's care, however, both became remarkable scholars, Toru acquiring a perfect mastery of French and English, a thorough knowledge of German, and, after her return to Calcutta, so great a familiarity with Sanskrit that she was enabled to make a number of translations in English blank verse from the "Vishnu Purana." While in England, the sisters attended the lectures for women at Cambridge University, and mingled to some extent in society.

"Not the least remarkable trait of Toru's mind," writes the Baboo, "was her wonderful memory. She could repeat by heart almost every piece she translated, and, whenever there was a hitch, it was only necessary to repeat a line or two of the translation to set her right, and draw out of her lips the original poem in its entirety. I have already said she read much. She read rapidly, too; but she never slurred over a difficulty when she was reading. Dictionaries, lexicons, and encyclopedias of all kinds were consulted until it was solved, and a note was taken afterward; the consequence was that explanations of hard words and phrases fixed themselves in her mind, and, whenever we had a dispute about the signification of any expression or sentence in Sanskrit, or French, or German, in seven or eight cases out of ten she would prove to be right. Sometimes I was so sure of my ground that I would say, 'Well, let us lay a wager.' The wager was ordinarily a rupee. But, when the authorities were consulted, she was almost always the winner. It was curious and very pleasant for me to watch her when she lost. First a bright smile, then thin fingers patting my grizzled cheek, then, perhaps, some quotation from Mrs. Barrett-Browning, her favorite poet, like this:

'Ah, my gossip, you are older, and more learned, and a man.'

or some similar pleasantry."

Toru's first venture in print was an exhaustive and learned essay on the writings

of Leconte de Lisle, which appeared in the "Bengal Magazine," in 1874, when she was only eighteen. At the same time she began the study of Sanskrit, following it with her customary energy until 1876, when her declining health would no longer permit of steady application. In the meantime, she had been composing either original or translated poetry in her native tongue in English, in French, and in German. Shortly after the publication of the "Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields," Toru fell ill. The same deadly disease which had carried off her sister—consumption—now fastened upon her. Gradually all literary work was given up. In the early spring of 1877 she was upon her death-bed; occasionally rallying, she sank lower and lower until, on the 30th of August, she passed away in her twenty-second year, "a firm believer in Christianity."

From the portrait of Toru accompanying this article (the copy of a photograph taken at the age of seventeen), the reader will observe that she must have possessed much personal beauty. The delicately rounded contour of the face, pure features, liquid black eyes, and heavy tresses of raven hair, were enough to distinguish their possessor, aside from their intellectual expression. It is a pleasant picture which the Baboo gives of the home circle when the two sisters, Aru and Toru, were its life and charm. In the performance of all the household duties which were incumbent upon them, both were exemplary. Fond of music and versed in the art, instrumental and vocal, their leisure moments were passed at the piano.

The "Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields" was, on the whole, the most important of the works of Toru Dutt. She left, besides, a novel in French, entitled "Le Journal de Mlle. D'Arvers," which was published in Paris early in 1879, edited, with a biographical and critical study of the author, by Mlle. Clarisse Bader, whose work upon "La Femme dans l'Inde Antique" had attracted Toru's attention and led to a brief correspondence. Toru also left eight chapters of an unfinished English romance entitled "Bianca; or, The Young Spanish Maiden," which is of interest only as being Toru's first venture in English prose. The language throughout is notable for its purity and grace, a few idiomatic errors alone marking the author as a foreigner. A number of original English poems were also found among Miss Dutt's manuscripts.

The "Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields" is a remarkable book. If the reader will imagine an American or English woman, not out of her teens, selecting something like two hundred of the best German poems of the age, and reproducing them in French with absolute

fidelity to the originals, and at the same time expressing herself in a pure and idiomatic style, he will have some idea of this collection. The interest of the poems does not arise from the fact that they are faithful translations. They are not *trans-lations* at all, as we ordinarily understand the term, but rather *trans-mutations*. The supreme test of a translation is in considering it as an original composition. The translations of Toru Dutt certainly endure such rigid examination, and there are several which defy the reader to detect, from any inherent quality, that they were not purely spontaneous productions. There are serious faults at times, but these faults arise from no awkwardness in reproducing the thought of the original author. The errors are in versification—a superfluous syllable, an uneven line, an arbitrary quantity, or an inverted phraseology; but a rugged grace of diction and spirited rhythm are uniformly characteristic of her work. Of the following poems, the first is the opening stanzas in a translation of an idyl by M. Arsène Houssaye, and the other a translation of one of Heinrich Heine's poems:

The rural sounds of eve were softly blending—  
The fountain's murmur like a magic rhyme,  
The bellow of the cattle homeward wending,  
The distant steeple's melancholy chime;

The peasant's shouts that charm from distance borrow,  
The greenfinch whirring in its amorous flight,  
The cricket's chirp, the night-bird's song of sorrow,  
The laugh of girls who beat the linen white.

The breeze scarce stirred the reeds beside the river,  
The swallows saw their figures as they flew  
In that clear mirror for a moment quiver,  
Before they vanished in the clouds from view.

And school-boys, wilder than the winging swallows,  
Far from the master with his look severe,  
Bounded like fawns, to gather weeds, marsh-mallows,  
And primrose blossoms to the young heart dear.

THE MESSAGE. (HEINRICH HEINE.)

To horse, my squire! To horse, and quick  
Be winged like the hurricane!  
Fly to the château on the plain,  
And bring me news, for I am sick.

Glide 'mid the steeds, and ask a groom,  
After some talk, this simple thing:  
Of the two daughters of our king  
Who is to wed, and when, and whom?

And if he tell thee 'tis the brown,  
Come shortly back and let me know;  
But if the blonde, ride soft and slow,—  
The moonlight's pleasant on the down.

And as thou comest, faithful squire,  
Get me a rope from shop or store.  
And gently enter through this door,  
And speak no word, but swift retire.

A number of poems in this volume are by Toru's sister Aru; none of them involves the difficult meters which make the work of the former so much more notable, but they show a remarkable facility.

In the two hundred and more poems included in the "Sheaf," Victor Hugo is represented by thirty-one, the Comte de Gramont by seventeen, Joséphin Soulayr by fourteen—and in all there are about one hundred authors. This includes nearly every form of versification, from the graceful Alexandrine of Soulayr to the Hugoesque meters of the author of "Les Châtiments"; from the sonnet of De Gramont to a sextine by the same author,—a form of verse which has been attempted in English only by two or three other writers.

In the notes which fill the concluding fifty pages of the volume, Toru has displayed a great deal of learning with rare critical ability. She has an epigrammatic way of summing up an author in a few words, as where she calls Victor de Laprade "a spiritual athlete," or remarks of Brizeux that his poems "want the Virgilian charm." Truly, the "Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields" is an extraordinary book; it may be said, without overstepping the limits of honest criticism, that no work within reach of the English reader affords so complete a survey of the French poets of the modern romantic school.

"Le Journal de Mlle. D'Arvers" was written by Toru partly in fulfillment of an agreement with her sister Aru, who was to illustrate the volume, she possessing considerable skill with her pencil; unhappily, her death prevented the consummation of the contract. The manuscript of this romance, written in French, was consigned by Toru to her father's hands while she was upon her death-bed. It was, as previously stated, published in Paris a few years ago, and immediately attracted wide attention. While dealing entirely with French characters, the romance is English in sentiment and is essentially a poem in prose. It appeals to the highest and tenderest emotions of our nature; it is permeated throughout with the influence of divine love, and certainly no one whose heart is touched by such influences will lay it aside without a tribute to the memory of Toru Dutt.

After the above was written a number of original and hitherto unpublished poems by Toru Dutt, from which we select two, were received from the Baboo, who kindly forwarded them at the request of the editor of this magazine: \*

## FRANCE.

1870.

Not dead—oh, no—she cannot die!  
Only a swoon, from loss of blood!  
Levite England passes her by—  
Help, Samaritan! None is nigh;  
Who shall stanch me this sanguine flood?

'Range the brown hair—it blinds her eyne;  
Dash cold water over her face!  
Drowned in her blood, she makes no sign,  
Give her a draught of generous wine!  
None heed, none hear, to do this grace.

Head of the human column, thus  
Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?  
Thought, Freedom, Truth, quenched ominous,  
Whence then shall Hope arise for us,  
Plunged in the darkness all again?

No! She stirs! There's a fire in her glance—  
'Ware, oh, 'ware of that broken sword!  
What, dare ye for an hour's mischance  
Gather around her jeering France  
Attila's own exultant horde!

Lo, she stands up,—stands up e'en now,  
Strong once more for the battle fray.  
Gleams bright the star that from her brow  
Lightens the world. Bow, nations, bow—  
Let her again lead on the way.

## SONNET.—THE LOTUS.

Love came to Flora asking for a flower  
That would of flowers be undisputed queen;  
The lily and the rose long, long had been  
Rivals for that high honor. Bards of power  
Had sung their claims. "The rose can never tower  
Like the pale lily, with her Juno mien."  
"But is the lily lovelier?" Thus, between  
Flower factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.  
"Give me a flower delicious as the rose,  
And stately as the lily in her pride—"  
"But of what color?" "Rose-red," Love first chose,  
Then prayed: "No, lily-white, or both provide."  
And Flora gave the lotus, "rose-red" dyed  
And "lily-white," the queenliest flower that blows.

\* Since this article was put in type, we have received a luxurious little volume of one hundred and thirty-nine pages, containing the original poems by Toru Dutt, and entitled "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan" (London: Kegan Paul, French & Co.). It also contains an interesting introductory memoir by Mr. Edmund W. Gosse.