

BY-PATHS OF COMMERCE: THE TRANSLATOR AND REVIVER.

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IN all large towns there are trades and occupations the very existence of which is practically unknown to the general public. Some are created by the presence of a foreign element in the population, and the sign "Solomons, Baker of Passover Cake," tells us as surely that we are in the midst of a Jewish community, as that of "Dealer in German Sausages" proclaims the neighbourhood of a colony from the Fatherland. Some, however, of the most remarkable amongst such industries are the natural outcome of wide-spread poverty. They endeavour to supply the wants of our poor at prices duly accommodated to the scantiness of their resources, whilst still leaving a desirable margin for profit. Amongst such traders, and amongst the very smallest and least opulent of them, are the translators and revivers, who with little skill and less capital contrive to make a living for themselves by ministering to the bodily wants of their equally impecunious brethren.

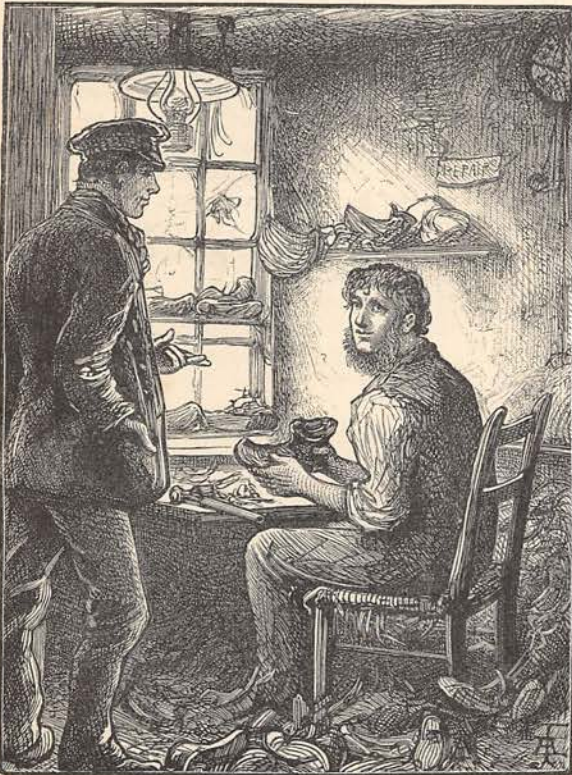
Obviously the word translator in this connection has a meaning quite technical and distinct from its customary usage. But we cannot better acquaint ourselves with its full import than by visiting an unusually well-to-do member of the profession. We approach

the street in which Ray dwells through something like a desert. On one side stretches an open space covered with the remains of demolished habitations. In the distance a few on the borders of the clearing rise gaunt and desolate, showing in strips of tattered wall-papers, the ends of decaying rafters, and ruined fire-places, the point at which the devastation has been stayed. The side of the street yet untouched shows many dwellings in every respect as dilapidated as those recently removed, the rents of which have of course received an impetus from the razing of dwellings recently carried on around.

In the wall of one appears a tablet commemorating the builders of the street, who, in order to keep their memory green with posterity, bestowed upon it both their names. Many changes have taken place since their new street first arose in 1688, but, within the last century at all events, their namesake has become synonymous with the abode of all that is vile and murderous. The old French weavers, who once upon a time found refuge in its houses, have long since passed away. Their names thickly stud the registers of the church hard by, and some may still be read on the mouldering tombs beneath the graveyard trees. But their descendants are English in all save name, and have long since left this ill-famed street to the burglar, the pickpocket, the beggar, and the broken-down of either sex. Ray we must include under the latter title, for no man who was not bankrupt either in pocket or reputation would choose to live amid his surroundings.

Stand at his door and look around. The roadway is narrow, for demolition has not yet penetrated so far; the side-paths are proportionately contracted; a waggon of hay could barely pass down the street without brushing with its fragrant load the filthy walls on either side. The houses opposite are, you at once see, common lodging-houses. Around their doors are clustered some of the lodgers—young men with pale faces and loosely-knit frames, old men encrusted with dirt, and women: lavish of bare arms and expansive white aprons.

Ray belongs to a higher social order, seeing that he and his family have an entire room to themselves; moreover this room is honourably distinguished from many in its neighbourhood by the possession of a window-blind, as well as the remains of a dust-embrowned curtain. One step down lands us at once in his workshop and home. Just within the door a staircase winds upwards, compelling all visitors to the rooms above to violate the privacy of Ray's apartment. An attempt has been made to carve a workshop out of the one room by erecting a small screen of wood, embellished with a few lithographed portraits of public characters, some illustrations from weekly papers, and a few pictorial adver-



A TRANSLATOR.

tishments. Against this background our translator's figure appears. He is seated upon a ridiculously small stool, and surrounded by boots of all sizes and shapes, but all in an advanced state of decay. Shreds of leather, new and old, endless scraps of uncertain nature, a small paraffin lamp, and a few tools, complete his surroundings, the combined aroma of which prevails against even the pungent odours of the street outside. At the back of the room the figure of Mrs. Ray is dimly outlined amidst the bedstead, the table, and the usual accessories of such houses.

From Ray's domestic surroundings we gather that the translator's work is in some way intimately connected with boots. Will he have the kindness to explain the trade a little more particularly to us? He will. But, by way of preliminary, he wishes us to understand that he is really a boot-maker by trade, and that it is only in recent years, since machinery has been employed for so many purposes in the trade, that he has been reduced to the condition of a mere mending and patching cobbler, combined with that of the translator. The occupation of the latter is as follows:—He buys in "the Lane"—*i.e.*, Petticoat Lane, as inclusive of Wentworth Street, not the modern Middlesex Street only—half a dozen pairs of boots, a specimen of which is exhibited at the end of a grimy fist. Some are in bad repair; others are mere bundles of leather shreds. You would consider them unworthy of rescue from the gutter; but Ray understands better than we do the possibilities of each, and in what to our inexperienced eye is an utter wreck he sees the frame-work of a presentable boot. Of the six pairs perhaps two will be quite beyond repair; they must therefore be cut to pieces, that their constituent parts may supply patches for the more promising material. A judicious darn here, a patch there, an exchange of soles in a third case, and a plentiful application of blacking over all, will give to four of the pairs a reasonably attractive appearance. With these in his hand he will probably repair to "the Lane" on the following Sunday. There, amidst the seething crowd, he will not lack buyers; but should the prices fall short of his expectations, he will, if there is enough money at home to carry on the household for a day or two, make a round with his stock amongst the poorer second-hand shops in all parts of the metropolis. A pair of boots which originally cost him twopence may, after passing through his experienced hands, produce ninepence or a shilling. Perhaps he may trudge about all day and not effect a single sale; at other times success may crown his venture before he has gone a mile from home.

In an adjacent court dwells another translator. To reach his room we have to ascend a narrow winding staircase, apparently constructed for the use of only under-sized adults, and therefore bristling with dangers to the hats and coats of more bulky visitors. Hillpot



A REVIVER.

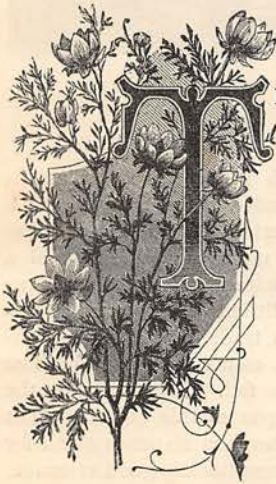
is at home, occupied much in the same way as his neighbour Ray, but surrounded by fewer tools, and a still smaller stock of material. There is a pale but cheerful-looking lad lying upon the old bed, and a pair of home-made crutches lean against the wall near his hand. Hillpot has but little to add to our recently-acquired knowledge of his trade, save that a neighbouring shop, kept by an astute Jewess, is his last resort when other buyers fail. Dealing with the proprietress is, however, open to this objection, that she never gives more or less than sixpence a pair for boots. They may be an exceptionally good selection, but that is her one and only price.

Satisfied with these particulars of the translator's art, we now turn our attention to the kindred occupation of reviving, and take our examples from the other sex. Mrs. Platt and her married daughter pursue this industry in what the neighbours call the "three-pair back" of an old house in an adjoining street. We have left the rougher element behind us, and now find respectability dwelling on the ground floors, gradually decreasing as we pass up-stairs, until extreme poverty is reached in the attics. The room is more spacious than those we have recently left, but still most dismally bare. There is a bed, of course, and the usual deal table and accompanying chair. The only other accommodation offered is the top of an old chest, which, Mrs. Platt informs us, once belonged to her husband, a ship's steward, who was "of

foreign subtraction." The nature of their occupation is at once made clear by a small pile of old clothes lying upon the ground near the married daughter, who, needle in hand, is darning a monstrous rent in an aged coat. This garment, upon which she has just commenced to exercise her healing art, is held up to the light for our inspection. It was a brown overcoat once, with a velveteen collar, but its last owner evidently had the most supreme contempt for appearances, and regarded patching or mending as ridiculous attempts to conceal his poverty from the public eye. It was the coat one sees on the back of the professional beggar, and of the men who have lost all hope, and are therefore indifferent to the multitude and diversity of their rags. And yet it was not beyond Mrs. Platt's skill. She showed a not unseemly garment folded in a corner, and shook that out for our inspection. It had, she averred, been "much the worse of the two," and now exhaled a powerful odour of what she called "armonium." But not a rent remained undarned: the cuffs had been carefully turned in, the button-holes re-sewn, and the greasy parts revived with a plentiful application of ammonia. It is true that the buttons were of various sizes and

patterns, but such a point was beneath criticism. And what was the marketable value of this garment?—Mrs. Platt put her head on one side and eyed the article critically. It might fetch eighteenpence, and it might go for a shilling. If it only reached the latter sum, then she would have been paid for her labour at the rate of twopence an hour.

We ventured to ask who buy such garments. Mrs. Platt looked unutterable amazement at our ignorance, as she replied that numbers of people purchase to themselves a complete outfit for such a sum as five shillings, and that there *are* coats to be had for sixpence. And how long will they last? That appeared to her a question conveying an imputation on her skill; she therefore answered by inquiring how long we could expect them to, and at once accepted our suggestive shrug of the shoulders as a very proper solution of the problem. Some experience of Petticoat Lane on Sunday morning enables us to accept Mrs. Platt's figures as correct, and moreover assures us that the occupation pursued by her is one followed by quite a little army of broken-down tailors, seamstresses, and others; whilst it is also very necessary to the comfort of many thousands around them.



A BOSTON (U.S.) SOCIETY.

THE Boston (U.S.) Society for the Encouragement of Study at Home, established two years before the Chautauqua society, is less widely spread, though perhaps not less useful. Its object is that of helping ladies in their studies as "distinguished from reading."

In June, 1873, some papers of an English society entitled, "Society for the Encouragement of Home Study," fell into

the hands of Miss Ticknor, the present secretary of the Boston society, who showed them to Dr. Eliot, and both desired at once to carry out the idea suggested by the title, but with an American difference.

The English society, at least at that time, confined its help to the wealthy classes; the Boston idea was to embrace all classes of women over seventeen.

It was also made as free as possible from all irksome conditions; to quote the secretary's report for 1883:—

"Instead of mere plans for work without correspondence, and the irksome requirement of presence at head-quarters at the end of each year for competitive examination and prizes, we adopted monthly correspondence, with frequent tests of results, desiring to produce intellectual habits and resources, without

competition and without even fostering the desire to reach certain points at certain moments.

"Our committee consisted of ten persons, when it began its existence in the autumn of 1873; and six of its members undertook the entire correspondence with forty-five persons, who entered as students during the first term.

"This committee was formed with only two points of method settled, namely, that there *should* be a regular correspondence, and that there *should not* be competitive examinations."

As I understand it, it is the cordial effort of a number of ladies (188 this year) to help other ladies over the stumbling-blocks that so often come in the way of home students, tripping them up perhaps and completely discouraging them at the outset of some effort to study.

When one remembers the pride and timidity of many young girls, which would prevent them asking help in something they may be supposed to know, from any of their acquaintances—the many cases in which books alone, or at least any *one* book alone, may fail to help—one can appreciate the boon of having the sympathetic guidance of one of her own sex to appeal to, one before whom she need not dread to blush, for she may never see her correspondent.

The stimulus, too, of knowing that a course of reading has been prescribed for her, that she has to make a monthly report of her progress, that she can obtain all necessary books by the payment of half a cent a day and postage, can perhaps only be appreciated by those who have known the weary dejection of desultory