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# VERSE TRANSLATIONS

FROM THE GERMAN:

INCLUDING

**Bürger's Lenore, Schiller's Song of the Bell,**

AND OTHER POEMS.



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JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE English admirers of German poetry cannot help requiring that translations of their favourite poems should unite several very various merits. The relation of the two languages and of their literature naturally suggests this expectation: for the languages have the same original stock, the same rhythm, in a great measure the same familiar constructions; and the modern German poets have caught their style and manner (except in their hexameters and elegiacs) from the same models as the English. No translation of a German poem into English quite satisfies us, which does not present to us all that the original contains, and no more, with a similar character of style, a similar movement of versification, and along with all this, a freedom of expression as complete as if it were not a translation, but an original.

These are severe requirements, and it is not hoped that they are attained in the following attempts: but that we cannot help looking for such translations, is a reason why new attempts of this kind may be received

with indulgence, though there may already exist in the language very meritorious translations of the same poems. It is, however, right to state that the attempts now printed were written principally before the author had seen other translations of the same poems, and in all cases without any reference to or recollection of the other translations.

I have added a few Notes, mainly referring to the history of the poems; they are in a great measure borrowed from Hoffmeister's *Life of Schiller*, and other sources.

I have inserted in the Notes several extracts from the poems here translated, in order that the German reader who does not happen to recollect the original poem, may have the opportunity of immediately seeing the degree of fidelity which the translations attain.

APRIL 23, 1847.

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## LEONORE.

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FROM heavy dreams, sprung from her bed

Leonore at break of day—

“Oh, Wilhelm! art thou false or dead?

Thou bid'st so long away.”

He went with Frederick's battle-might

To Prague, into that dreadful fight;

And news came none how he had fared,

Struck by a soldier's fate, or spared.

The Kaiser's Consort and the King,

With weary battling worn,

To thoughts of rest their hearts did bring,—

Bade times of peace return.

The hosts, with song and joyous hum,

With blare of trump and beat of drum,

Crowned with green boughs so gay,

Stream'd to their homes away.

And all abroad, all far and near,

On every road and lane,

Rushed old and young with cries of cheer,

To greet the homeward train.

B

“Thank God!”—the wives, the children cried;  
“Welcome!”—sobb’d many a happy bride:  
But ah! for hapless Leonore  
Nor kiss nor bliss was there in store.

Along the marching line she sought  
For every name she knew,  
Yet none was there who tidings brought  
Of all that moving crew.  
And when the fruitless task was o’er,  
In wo her raven hair she tore,  
And flung her earthwards there  
With gestures of despair.

Then to her ran her mother pale;  
“Have mercy, God!” she cried,—  
“My darling child, what dost thou ail?”  
And strain’d her to her side.  
“Oh mother, mother, wo is wo!  
The world and all it holds may go!  
God has no mercy, none—  
All that I prize is gone.”

“O help, God! help, nor quit us quite:  
Child, straightway say thy prayer;  
What God does, that is always right:  
O God, in mercy spare!”  
“O mother, idly argue ye;  
He has not rightly done by me:  
What would my prayer avail?  
It cures not what I ail.”



“O God, my child! He helps *his* child—

Our Father there in heav’n;  
And grief to soothe, however wild,  
His sacrament is given.”

“Mother, no sacrament can heal  
The bitter sorrow that I feel;  
No sacrament can gain  
The dead to life again.”

“But, child, what if thy Wilhelm now  
In far off Hungary  
Have cast aside his plighted vow  
For a new wedding tie?  
Then let, child,—let his false heart go;  
He never will be happy so:  
When soul and body part  
He’ll rue his perjur’d heart.”

“O mother, mother, wo is wo,  
And lost is lost for ever!  
By death comes peace, and only so;  
O born had I been never!  
Go out, go out, my bootless light!  
Die, sink in black and endless night!  
God has no mercy, none—  
All that I prize is gone.”

“O help, God! spare her—judge her not!  
Mild on thy daughter look!  
She utters wild she knows not what:  
Write it not in thy book.

O child, forget thy earthly love,  
And think on God and bliss above;  
And Heav'n shall crown thy vows  
With that celestial spouse."

"O mother, what is bliss above?  
O mother, what is hell?  
'Tis bliss to be with him I love,  
To want him is my hell.  
Go out, go out, my bootless light!  
Die, sink in black and endless night!  
Without him, all below—  
And all above—is wo."

So through her brain, through heart and vein,  
Despair ran raging high;  
She chid and strove with Providence,  
And in His face did fly.  
She wrung her hands, she beat her breast,  
Until the sun was gone to rest,  
And all the starry eyes  
Lookt from the solemn skies.

And hark without! 'tis trot, trot, trot;  
A horse-hoof clatters there,  
And rattling off the horseman got,  
Just at the outer stair.  
And hark! and hark! the entrance-bell  
Rings ting, ting, ting,—she knows it well;  
And through the door's thick boards  
Come plain and clear the words:

“Holla! holla! my love, undo!

What! are you wake or sleeping?  
Do you love me as I love you?

And are you glad or weeping?”  
“Ah! Wilhelm, thou! so late at night:  
O, I have watcht and wept outright,  
Tortured beyond my strength:  
Whence comest thou at length?”

“We saddle hard on midnight’s sound,  
And from Bohemia’s plain  
I started late, and I am bound  
To take thee back again.”

“Ah, Wilhelm! first come hither in;  
The wind whirrs through the hawthorn keen;  
My arms with loving fold  
Shall warm thee from the cold.”

“Let keen wind through the hawthorn whirr—  
Whirr, child! as whirr it may,  
My charger paws, and clanks my spur,  
And here I may not stay.  
Come, busk and bind, and spring behind,—  
Here on my steed good room you’ll find:  
A hundred miles to-night I fly,  
To reach the bed where we must lie.”

“What, still a hundred miles to run  
Before our bed is found?  
And hark! the eleven already gone,  
I hear the lingering sound.”

“Tut! look abroad—the moon shines bright;  
We and the dead ride fast by night,  
I bet my life our bed is won  
Before to-day is past and gone.”

“But say, where is thy chamber, say,  
And what is the make of thy bed?”  
“Small, still, and cool,—far, far away,—  
Six boards, and a foot and a head.”  
“Will it hold me?” “Room, room, thou’lt find.  
Come, busk and bind, and spring behind;  
The guests our coming wait,  
And open is the gate.”

She has girt her close, and up she hied  
Upon that steed behind,  
And about her darling trooper’s side  
Her white arms she did wind:  
And away, and away! with tramp and clang,  
In a headlong gallop along they sprang;  
And horse and rider blew,  
And sparks and splinters flew.

To the right and the left, as she might see,  
All fast as they could go,  
Flew back road-side and hedge and tree,  
And each bridge rang hollow below.  
“Do you fear, my dear? the moon shines bright:  
Hurrah! the dead ride fast by night:  
Dost fear the dead?—not thou!”  
“No—but name them gently now.”

But what is the noise of metal and voice,  
And of ravens over head?  
'Tis the bell's ding dong; 'tis the funeral song—  
    “To the dead we give the dead.”  
And now the burial train past by,  
And bier and coffin they bore on high:  
    The song was not like men,  
    But the croakers of the fen.

“Ye can bury your dead with your wonted rite,  
    When the midnight hour is o'er;  
But I bear my young wife home to-night,  
    Come on to my chamber-door;  
Come, Sexton, come; come, Choir, along,  
And tune your throats to my bridal song:  
    Sir Priest, let' the blessing be said,  
    When we lay us down in our bed.”

Still'd was the song—the bier was gone,  
    And round the black train wheels;  
And all came hurrying, hurrying on,  
    Close to the horse's heels:  
And away, and away! with tramp and clang,  
In headlong gallop they onward sprang;  
    And horse and rider blew,  
    And sparks and splinters flew.

On the left and right, to the dazzled sight,  
    Flew hill and dale and flood,—  
Flew right and left, and left and right,  
    Village and town and wood.

"Dost fear, my dear? the moon shines bright :  
Hurrah! the dead ride fast by night :

Dost fear the dead?—not thou!"

"Ah, name them gently now!"

But see, see there!—'tis the place of doom,

And round the grisly wheel

A rabble rout in the moonlight loom,

And in airy circles reel.

"Thou rabble rout that there I see!

Come, wheel about and follow me :

Dance us a dance at our wedding,

When we come to the time of the bedding."

And whish, whish, whish,—the rabble rout

Come rustling close behind,

As when the dry leaves rustle about,

Whirl'd by the wintry wind.

And away, and away, with the clattering steed,

In headlong gallop along they speed ;

And horse and rider blew,

And sparks and splinters flew.

And all that lay in the moonlight blue,

Just seen, was instant far ;

And over head fast backward flew

The vault and every star.

"Dost fear, my dear? the moon shines bright :

Hurrah! the dead ride fast by night :

Dost fear the dead?—not thou!"

"O name them gently now!"

"List! list! is that the cock's crow there?

Our sand is run e'en now:

Uft! uft! I scent the morning air;—

Down from the saddle, thou!

Our race is run, our work is sped,

And here we find our wedding bed:

The dead ride fast by night—

We've reacht the place aright."

Lo! an iron gate! and against its grate

With undrawn rein went they;

He toucht it with his whip, and straight

Both bolts and bars gave way.

With griding jar it entrance gave,

And the way led on o'er many a grave;

In the moonshine o'er the ground

The grave-stones gleam'd around.

Ho! see him in an instant straight

A horrid sight display,—

His harness moulders plate by plate,

Like tinder-rags, away;

Before, behind, his locks are gone,

His head's a skull of naked bone;

A skeleton in every limb,

He glares with scythe and hour-glass grim.

The steed rear'd high, and snorted out,

And breath'd with flaming breath,

And quick! 'twas vanisht into nought,

Its rider's form beneath:

A howling came upon the gale,  
And from below a dismal wail;  
    Leonore, with heart and breath,  
    Gasp'd between life and death.

And now beneath the moon's pale glance,  
    Careering round and round,  
The spectres wove their grisly dance,  
    And howl'd their dismal sound:  
"Learn patience, learn! whate'er betide,  
Blame not thy God, nor with Him chide!  
    Thou art freed from thy body's thrall,  
    On thy soul may mercy fall!"

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## NOTES.

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### LEONORE.

THERE have been several English translations of Bürger's "Lenore." The two best known, that of William Taylor and that of Sir Walter Scott, are both imitations much more than translations. In both these, the writers have been led to make very large changes in the geography of the story by the temptation of introducing the lines

"Tramp, tramp, across the land they go,  
Splash, splash, across the sea ;"

which recur in the place of Bürger's

"Und hurre, hurre, hop, hop, hop !  
Ging's fort in sausendem Galopp,  
Dass Ross und Reiter schnoben  
Und Kies und Funken stoben."

All the changes made by these writers appear to me to disguise and deform the features of Bürger's poem. In the original, the palpably supernatural is not introduced till the end. There is nothing of riding over the sea ; nor of riding a *thousand* miles "to-night," as Mr. Taylor puts it ; nor of her springing upon the horse "all in her sarke there as she lay."

F

The catastrophe of the story was, on its first narration, felt as very thrilling. It is related that when one of Bürger's original auditors, Count Stolberg, heard the stanza which begins "Lo, an iron gate!"

"Rasch auf ein eisern Gitternthor  
Ging's mit verhänglichem Zügel  
Mit schwanker Gert' ein schlag davor  
Zersprengte Schloss und Riegel.  
Die Flügel flogen klirrend auf,  
Und uber Gräber ging der lauf,  
Es blinkten Leichensteine  
Rund um in Mondenscheine ;"—

"he started from his seat in an agony of rapturous terror." But the image at the end, the skeleton with his scythe and hour-glass, appears to me too traditional, definite, and familiar, to be in unison with the stranger and vaguer forms of horror which the rest of the ballad gathers round the heroine.

Mr. Taylor has noticed an English ballad, called "The Suffolk Miracle," as bearing some resemblance to "Leonore" in its story. In this ballad, the lover, who had died though his mistress knew it not, comes to her in the middle of the night, and takes her away behind him on his horse, to her own home, from a distant place, whither she had been removed:

"When she was got her love behind,  
They pass'd as swift as any wind,  
That in two hours, or little more,  
He brought her to her father's door:

But as they did this great haste make,  
 He did complain his head did ake;  
 Her handkerchief she then took out,  
 And ty'd the same his head about;  
 And unto him she thus did say,  
 'Thou art as cold as any clay.' "

He leaves her; and she tells her friends who had brought her home, at which information they are horrified. They examine the man's grave,

"And tho' he had a month been dead,  
 The handkerchief was round his head."

But the moral of the English story is quite different from that of the German one. It is not rebellion against Providence which incurs punishment, but the separation of lovers by hard-hearted fathers: for this had been the cause of the youth's death. "Part not true love, you rich men, then."

The description in the 18th stanza—

"Sechs Bretter und zwei Brettchen,"  
*Six boards and two little boards,—*

applies to a German, though not to an English coffin.

This translation was executed long before the publication of Miss Cameron's version, which is closer than any other which I have seen. I have tried to imitate the movement of Bürger's lines more exactly than Miss Cameron's form of verse allowed her to do.