INTRODUCTION

§ 1. UNSEEN TRANSLATION

The object of any general examination in French is to ascertain how much French the candidate knows and how well he knows it. Looked at broadly, the only questions he can be asked, and must be asked, are four in number: 1. 'How well can you *speak* French?' 2. 'And *write* it?' 3. 'How well can you understand it when *spoken*?' 4. 'And when *written*?' Questions 1 and 3 are put in Dictation and Oral. Question 2 is put in Composition. Question 4 is put in Translation, and with it alone we are here concerned.

It takes the form of one or more passages, usually Unseen, printed under the legend 'Translate into English'. This imperative denotes an order which must be obeyed without question or delay, under penalty of failure in the examination. But now there can be no harm in inquiring into the reasons for the order.

The examiners are evidently anxious to test the candidate's power of understanding French when written (or printed). For that purpose what means are at their disposal? They might say, 'Read this passage and then give us the gist of it. Tell us in a general sort of way what it is about, what is described in it, what happens in the narrative, etc.' They might say, 'Make a paraphrase of it' or, 'Write an Essay on it'. If they took any of these courses they would certainly test the power of ready or rapid or rough or general comprehension of a French passage—a very useful accomplishment and one which has its own place in language-learning. But

they would have the greatest difficulty in valuing the answers, whether given in English or in French, orally or in writing. And they would not have tested the power of *exact* and *full* comprehension—a more necessary and a far finer thing than facility in rough-and-ready approximations. The only known practical method of testing this exact and full comprehension is by translation. That is why the examiners say 'Translate into English', meaning thereby 'Say to us in English *exactly* what the French author says in French. Do not add to it, nor subtract from it, nor embellish it nor spoil it, but write what the author would presumably have written had he been an Englishman'.

For another reason translation into English appears —and always will appear—in French examinations. It is an invaluable means of learning French—*and* English. By compelling us to look closely at the French, it draws our attention to difficulties of meaning which remain unnoticed even in careful reading. Things which appeared easy become difficult when we really have to understand them. Thus we come to realize that we do not know French nearly so well as we had imagined.

And soon we make another discovery, equally unpleasant, but equally good for us. We do not know English nearly so well as we should. For even when we do grasp the French author's idea, we often find ourselves unable to express it in natural English. Then, if not before, we see what light the study of a foreign language throws upon our own, and understand at last the full force of a line slightly adapted to the present purpose: 'What does he know of English who only English knows?'

Translation from French is not an easy exercise.

Examination candidates in the past thought it was. That is one reason, perhaps the chief reason, why they did it so badly, so much worse than they need have done. Mistakes due to ignorance are good honest mistakes. But at least one-half of the errors hitherto made in Unseen translation from French the candidates could easily have avoided, and would themselves have corrected, had they been given a second chance. These were silly mistakes, mistakes of candidates who would not make the necessary effort, who did not utilize to the full their own knowledge of French and of English, who sometimes knew every word, every construction, of a French passage and yet made nonsense of it. Many were nevertheless so well pleased with what they had done that they left the Examination Hall half-an-hour before the end of the time allowed. Why? Because when they read the instruction 'Translate into English' they did not really understand either what was meant by 'Translate' or what was meant by 'English'.

What these two words mean it is the aim of this book to show. The Introduction, containing more necessary facts than can be mastered at one reading, should be first read without the detailed lists, then read in full, re-read and gradually assimilated. The better it is known, the less difficulty will be found with the Passages for Translation. The Model Lessons can be taken as the reader proceeds through the book. In translating the Passages, there will be further opportunity for revising the Introduction until the facts stated therein become familiar. They will not only help the reader to pass his examination, but—what is much more important, since examinations are only a means and not an end in themselves—they will help him to understand French.

§ 2. FOR THOSE WHO, HAVING EYES, SEE NOT

Translation is a threefold process: 1. Understanding the foreign words; 2. Seeing what is described; 3. Describing in English what has been seen. The youthful translator is only too apt to get no further than process 1. He substitutes an English word for each foreign one. He does not *translate*.

To take a very simple instance, how does he 'translate' *un petit chat*? He recognizes the foreign words at a glance, says to himself *un* = a, *petit* = little, *chat* = cat, writes down 'a little cat', and thinks no more about it. He has seen nothing—nothing except three French words and three English words. If he had seen what was described, he would have seen a kitten. That is what a French reader sees in the words *un petit chat*. No doubt the correct translation could have been arrived at by other means. Anyone who had learned *un petit chat* as a complete phrase, equivalent to 'kitten', would have avoided error here. But he would have learned something not quite true, because in a few cases, let us say one in a thousand, *un petit chat* may mean a fully grown but undersized cat. When an effort is made to *see* what is described, it becomes clear from the circumstances whether 'a kitten' or 'a small cat' is intended.

When the French is more difficult than in the above phrase, the translator is apt to peer at each word instead of trying to get a little away from it and take a general view of its surroundings. To look at the French sentence as a whole would repay him better. He must in fact form a mental picture. In order to translate *Le vaincu rentrait chez lui l'oreille basse* it is not enough

to know that *oreille* = ear, and *basse* = low. We must try to *see* the home-coming of the vanquished one. Then we realize that he was what we call 'crest-fallen' or 'chop-fallen'.

§ 3. FOR THOSE WHO, HAVING EARS, HEAR NOT

Here is another sentence, from another story: *Il ôte d'abord devant lui sa casquette*. Those who deal not in mental pictures but only in words write down 'He takes off at first before him his cap'. Those who not only see but *hear* picture up the circumstances, and then ask themselves how these circumstances would naturally be described in English, and say naturally, 'He first takes off his cap to him'. Every time *le lion rugit* appears in a First School Certificate Examination large numbers of the candidates state that 'the lion blushed'. Have they tried to *see* him blush? Do they not *hear* any difference between *rugir*, = to roar, and *rougir*, = to blush?

We must represent to ourselves the whole situation, sound as well as sight. The sound of *crier* varies according to circumstances. It is not the same in *les hommes criaient* as in *les femmes criaient*, or as in *les bébés criaient*. Yet in each case nine School Certificate candidates out of ten say 'cried'. Either they do not know that *crier* means also 'to shout' and 'to scream' and 'to yell', and merely 'to call out', or else they do not think. There is a great difference between *L'enfant ne* criait *plus* and *Allons! faites donner la Garde*, cria-*t-il*, and there are cases where such a difference must be shown in translation. Again, the word *grincer* means variously 'to creak', 'grate', 'grind', 'rasp'; everything depends

on what makes the sound—a door, a file, etc. If in translating *le bruit de la plume* we only listened to the sound we are making ourselves we should certainly erase 'the *noise* of the pen' or 'the *sound* of the pen', and write 'the *scratching* (or 'the *scraping*') of the pen'.

§ 4. ON ACQUIRING THE NECESSARY STOCK OF WORDS

The translator, as has just been shown, must not be the slave of French words. He must be the master of as many as he can, must know at least their usual meanings. Vocabulary is his initial difficulty. It will not be his main difficulty, far from it. Errors in construction are much more deadly. It is possible to know the meaning of all the words in a passage and yet completely miss the sense of the whole. But individual words are the material of which the sentence is composed and the translator must know the meaning of ordinary French words. He requires a minimum stock of these before he can begin translation at all. It should be a constantly growing stock, increased by every means in his power.

For purposes of translation, word-lore can be acquired much more rapidly than for purposes of composition. The words have only to be recognized. They require only passive knowledge. They need not be part of our active vocabulary. To be able to recognize the French for, say, 'The Field of the Cloth of Gold' when we see it in print is very much easier than to be able to supply it ourselves, viz. *Le Camp du Drap d'Or*. In translation, many of the difficulties attending composition are non-existent. The thorny problems of spelling, gender, verbal forms, Mood, Tense, agreement of Par-

ticiples, Adjectives, etc., choice and order of words, have all been settled for us by the French writer. We have only to recognize his words, not to select or to use French words ourselves. So far as translation into English is concerned, it is thus with a comparatively light heart that the learner proceeds on his way, picking up words in the course of reading.

§ 5. EVERYDAY WORDS: COMMON WORDS: RARE WORDS

The vocabulary of French falls, for the purposes of translation, into three classes: 1. Elementary everyday words. These are of limited number, but they recur at every moment. They include, besides names of ordinary things and ordinary ideas, those essential parts of speech which, like Prepositions and Conjunctions, indicate the relationship between things or between ideas. They are all of prime necessity. Without them one cannot grasp the sense of any French passage. Until they have been learned it is useless to begin translation and therefore they are not treated in this book.

2. Common words, almost certain to occur in any French text, even in the very simplest. They are those learned in the ordinary course of reading during the first three or four years of French. Any which the reader may happen to have missed will be learned before he has gone far in this book. The less common are given in the Vocabularies to the passages.

3. Rare words. They are by far the most numerous, because by 'rare' we mean here those which pupils cannot reasonably be expected to have learned in three or four years. These are given in the Vocabularies or discussed in the Notes to passages, because the

purpose of this book is not to test knowledge of vocabulary, but **to teach how to translate.**

Such words are not always names of rare things, nor do they always express uncommon ideas. But it is quite possible to read a great deal of French at school without coming across them. They are not necessarily rare to a French boy or girl or even to a French baby. The word *dodo* (m.), = bed, is extremely familiar to everyone in France and in Navarre and in the French dominions beyond the seas, from the age of six months or under. But in literary texts it is very rare. To breathe the air of France for many months without learning the word *goudron* (m.), = tar, would be difficult. But of twelve hundred Higher Certificate candidates in 1926 only a few knew *goudron*, because it was beyond their school reading.

§ 6. HOW TO ASCERTAIN THE MEANING OF 'RARE' WORDS

Now in any examination some 'rare' words will occur in the passage set for Unseen Translation. The fewer there are, the more credit due to the person who set it. A badly chosen passage is one containing a large number of words which candidates cannot possibly know and have no means of guessing, or one of which the sense depends entirely on a single difficult key-word. A good passage is one, interesting and complete in itself, containing few words which are unfamiliar, but constructions which have to be thought out and sentences which test intelligence. To translate it properly calls for the exercise of judgment and taste. If it contains one or two words which only the better candidates know, this is only fair. It is a legitimate

method of rewarding merit and encouraging pupils to learn as many words as possible. In the search for such passages an examiner may read book after book in vain, because literary treatment of any subject nearly always demands some departure from the commonplace and the use of some words which in an examination sense are 'rare'. Such words are learned by wide reading, especially of anthologies, where the frequent change of author and subject necessarily makes the vocabulary extensive and varied. But reading can be supplemented very profitably by translating carefully the passages in this book.

§ 7. SPELLINGS AND GENDER

Before tackling 'rare' words we must make sure of the words we do know and, in particular, take care not to confuse them with others which look somewhat like them. Words similar in spelling are often confused, sometimes with disastrous consequences. Such are: *le besoin* = need, *la besogne* = work; *baiser* = to kiss, *baisser* = to lower; *embraser* = to set on fire, *embrasser* = to embrace; *poison* = poison, *poisson* = fish; *rougir* = to blush, *rugir* = to roar; *le sort* = fate, *la sorte* = the sort; *la veille* = the night before, *la vieille* = the old woman. When two words have the same spelling the context shows which one is intended: otherwise *les fils* might just as well be translated by 'the threads' as by 'the sons', since the difference in pronunciation does not appear; *je suis* is either 'I follow' or else 'I am', according to the context: *D'un œil triste je* suis *au loin son blanc sillage* must mean 'With a sad eye *I follow* afar her white wake'. Similarly *je vis* means 'I live' and 'I saw'.

In some such cases difference of gender makes the error inexcusable. The most notable are perhaps *le manche* = the handle, *la manche* = the sleeve (which is easily remembered from *La Manche*, the sleeve-shaped 'English Channel'); *le mort* = the dead man, *la mort* = death; *le poste* = the situation, *la poste* = the post-office; *un tour* = a turn, a trick, *une tour* = a tower; *le vase* = the vase, vessel, *la vase* = mud, slime; *le voile* = the veil, *la voile* = the sail. An accent indicates the distinction between *une tache* = a stain, and *une tâche* = a task (so *tacher* = to spot, and *tâcher* = to try).

Failure to note the conjugation adds considerably to the offence; e.g. confusion of *jouer*, = to play, with *jouir*, = to enjoy, or *bâti*, = built, with *battu*, = beaten.

Other, less deadly, errors are the confusion of *définitif* with *défini*: *définitif* means not 'definite' but 'final', and is used of something against which there is no appeal; and the failure to distinguish *la justice*, = justice, from *la justesse*, = exactness; *part* from *parti* and *partie*: *une part* = a share—*Que chacun de vous se contente de* sa part, 'Let each one of you be content with his share', *une partie* = a part, *un parti* = a party, often a political one, e.g. *le parti conservateur*.

§ 8. INTELLIGENT GUESSING

When a candidate meets an unfamiliar word, ought he to leave a blank? To do so is a confession of despair, not to be made till all possible avenues of escape have been explored. By what means can he hope to find out the meaning? By applying reason, that is, by intelligent guessing. If he understands the passage as a whole and applies his knowledge to a small part of it which he does *not* understand, he will often arrive at the correct meaning, or at a very close approximation, for