

K.R. NORMAN (tr.): The elders' verses. II. Therīgāthā.
(Pali Text Society. Translation Series, No. 40.) xci,
199 pp. + erratum slip. London: Pali Text Society, 1971.

This is the companion volume to Mr. Norman's translation of the Therāgāthā, Elders' Verses I, which has been properly extolled in this journal by Professor Jaini (vol. XXXIII, 1970, 637-8). Pali teachers will long commend these twin volumes to their students as a model of meticulous scholarship. Mrs. Rhys Davids' translations of the same texts, Psalms of the Early Buddhists (1913 and 1909) were last reprinted by the PTS, in one volume, in 1964. ^{The} Elders' Verses admirably succeeds in superseding the older version as an exposition of the text; yet the contents of the two versions, roughly equal in bulk, are so different that one will be using both. Mrs. Rhys Davids devoted her long introductions to the contents of the texts, and set her (verse) translations of the verses within substantial extracts from Dhammapāla's commentary to explain their setting; her work is thus accessible to the non-specialist. By contrast, this new (prose) translation presents the verses by themselves. The stories surrounding them, which greatly enhance their interest, are often mentioned in the notes, but rarely given in full; Dhammapāla is constantly quoted, but mainly his comments on the text, not his introductory matter, and the fact that he is generally left untranslated consigns him firmly to the learned apparatus. This learned apparatus occupies four fifths of the book, and is superb. Much of the introduction concerns metrics, a subject which also figures prominently in the notes. These notes are a mine of philological information, rendered the more useful by several indices. The list of readings which deviate from Pischel's PTS edition of the text includes those proposed by Alsdorf in his re-edition of the āryā stanzas in the second edition (1966, 238-50).

As an edition of the text this will be hard to beat. Occasionally, however, one would welcome more exegesis. The editor rarely gives his interpretation of an obscure passage unless the difficulty is linguistic; for example, his version of the oracular verses 127-130 gives me no clue as to what he takes them to mean. This is too modest. Mrs. Rhys Davids' translation is often free, and sometimes even inaccurate, but she does present an interpretation. There is here a crucial divergence in theory of translation. Mr. Norman explains in EV I (p.xxxii) that he has aimed at "a literal, almost word-for-word, translation". He explains that he has followed PTS policy: that it is "the task of a translator to find synonyms in English for all the synonyms in Pali, so that as far as possible each different Pali word, or meaning, was translated by a different English word". (The principle of one-to-one correspondence between two sets of lexemes rests, perhaps, on the fallacy that meaning is conveyed by individual words rather than by sentences; it is doubtful whether it is serviceable for translations between closely related languages, let alone between Pali and English. It is also obscure to me why it would be "misleading" to translate some Pali words, e.g. deva, but not others. Does this imply that all the words which are translated, such as nibbuta "quenched" (the example Mr. Norman gives in his paragraph) are fully intelligible apart from their cultural context?) Mr. Norman is to be congratulated on producing grammatical and generally intelligible English; indeed, probably no one working within the straitjacket of this dogma could do better. But the result is rather less than a translation in the full sense; it is useful as a crib, but conveys little to someone ignorant of Pali idiom and Buddhist terminology.

But the book as a whole is far, far more than a translation. Mr. Norman has again made innumerable contributions to the study of the Pali language. Inevitably there are controversial points. We have space for only a very few. Mr. Norman postulates cases of a phenomenon which (following the Critical Pali Dictionary) he calls

"split compounds". For example, on v.147 he writes, "It seems, therefore, that we are to take Anñjanam vanam as a split compound, or as an example of the lengthening of a syllable by nasalization m[etri]c[ausa]"; but one could just take the two words as being in apposition, as constantly happens with proper names: "the wood (called) Anñjana". Then on v.149 he writes of the phrase amatam padam, "I assume that it is a noun here, rather than an adjective. We have, than, a tatpuruṣa compound 'state of the undying' which has been split m.c." But amata is (as he knows) a perfectly good adjective (see PD s.v. and PTC I, 230), e.g. amatāya dhātuyā cittam upasamharati (MN I, 436, sic); so why the complication? The inexpert tagging together of stock phrases, typical of oral literature, has resulted in several present participles appearing in the masculine singular where strictly there should be a feminine or a plural; Mr. Norman mentions the possibility of a simple sollecism, but sometimes (vv. 26, 159) gives equal weight to the hypothesis of a much more complicated irregularity, suggesting that they may be namul absolutive forms with shortened vowels. In a similar vein, he translates assa in v.128 as an Eastern form of yassa; this seems not only unnecessary but implausible, as the correlative would be tam not nam.

Dr. Johnson sensibly criticized a translator for getting the Latin from the meaning, not the meaning from the Latin. By adhering more strictly to the rules of Pali grammar than the nuns did Mr. Norman sometimes carries the Johnsonian policy too far. In v.11 an ex-housewife celebrates her release "from three crooked things: mortar, pestle, and a crooked husband". As instrumental and ablative coincide in the plural, there is no difficulty with the "three crooked things"; but when they are listed in the singular they are in the instrumental instead of the ablative, which would be regular but would not scan. The same sentiment occurs in v.23 without grammatical ambiguity; nevertheless, Mr. Norman rejects the obvious meaning and translates "release by means of . . .", though this makes no sense. Similarly, at v.104 a stock description of the process of Enlightenment includes the sentence: pubbenivāsam jānāmi

yattha me vusitam pure. Mr. Norman correctly translates: "I know my former habitation, where I lived before". But elsewhere he always translates the first pāda, "I know that I have lived before", and argues in his note on v.63 that because nivāsam is in the singular it cannot mean "births". Not only is the linguistic argument weak, since it disregards the possibility that this is an idiom; more important, to know that one has lived before is of course common to all Buddhists; it is the recollection of the details that marks spiritual progress. So previous translators were right.

Mr. Norman translates v.50d, khalu tāya vanam gatā, as "gone to the forest for that purpose indeed". But does the fact that the dative can express purpose allow the deduction that tāya can do so by itself? That would surely be unique. Moreover, khalu stresses what it follows, not what it precedes. As Mr. Norman says, the verse is probably corrupt; but rather than tāya I would suspect khalu, which is odd as first word in a pāda. Something like akhilatāya would fit. In v.124 Mr. Norman emends to give a whole sentence pabbājehi anagāriyam, which sounds odd: I suggest ayācim pabbajjam anagāriyam. In both vv.18 and 163 I would read vasum piyam and translate, "leaving my son, my dear treasure". Vasuppiyam, "dear as treasure", is also possible. In v.37 and elsewhere citte avasavattini is a locative absolute, "my mind not being under control", so emendation is otiose.

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