

Translations From the Sanskrit Epics

ORIGINAL POEMS. *Together With Translations From the Sanskrit.* By Arthur William Ryder, with an introduction by George Rapall Noyes. Berkeley: University of California Press. \$2.50. 186 pp.

PROFESSOR RYDER was known during his lifetime as one of the truly great teachers who stubbornly refused to bow his knee to the general academic worship of scholarship. Publish so-called "scholarly articles" he would not! He was an authority on Sanskrit literature but to him this literature was alive. He wanted it to live for others. Therefore he spent his life translating into excellent English verse and prose whatever most particularly delighted him. He was a poet in his own right and his own verse, given

here, is well turned and of its kind excellent. Most of it is wit and philosophical reflection. But undoubtedly Professor Ryder is greatest as a translator. I must take Sanskrit scholars' statements for the poet's correctness in rendering the meaning. What interests me is that this is living English verse, modern in language and idiom and seldom padded. The epigrams of the Hindu poet Bhartrihari are become excellent English epigrams on the theme of love. Apparently the ways of man's feeling and thinking have not greatly altered:

Your nature is a thing you cannot beat;

It serves a guide in everything you do:

Give a dog all the meat that he can eat

You can't prevent his gnawing at a shoe.

Professor Ryder's translations from the Sanskrit epics and long narrative poems of vision and observation present clearly and usually beautifully their meanings. It is not easy to make understandable to modern readers very old ideas and religious symbols, but the poet has succeeded in indicating always how like our own ways of feeling and thinking are those of the ancients. In reading his translations one has the sense of immediate recognition that one has in reading the great moderns.

Professor Noyes introduces the works of Professor Ryder with a biography which is a brief but penetrating account of the man's character and of his slightly eccentric but amusing way of leading his own life.

EDA LOU WALTON.