SUGGESTIONS TO THE STUDENT

To translate French into English means to express in grammatically correct English the thoughts that are expressed in the French text. Words, whether printed or oral, are but imperfect means to convey thoughts which are often similarly imperfect.

Remember, then, that you are translating thoughts—ideas—and thus avoid the usual error of students who think that every French word must invariably be rendered by one English word, and only one, whether it fits the sense or not. This is probably the most common cause of absurd translations.

The resemblance between some French and English words is very deceptive, and has led many a reader to take it for granted that the meaning is also the same in both languages. It is a common occurrence to hear students say: "I can get the general sense, but I can't express it"—a very evident proof either that the student does not get the exact sense of the French text, or else that he is deficient in English, or that he suffers from both of these deficiencies.

Keeping in mind the two points mentioned above, the following suggestions are offered to the earnest student:

1. Read over the whole passage at least once, if time permits. In oral sight translation, read a whole sentence, or at least as far as a punctuation mark.

2. Express the idea contained in each clause, or part of a clause, as you would express it in simple, correct English, making only such changes in word order as may be required to ensure correctness.

3. The meaning of an unknown word may often be inferred (it should not be guessed at) by reasoning out what word would probably be needed to complete the sense of the English sentence.

4. Above all, keep in mind the sense of what you are saying or writing; if it does not mean anything or is not clearly intelligible, your translation is certainly incorrect.

A FEW "DON'TS"

5. Don't say, or write, one word at a time, and then call it literal translation.

6. Don't alter at random the meaning of the original text and then call it free translation.
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7. DON'T fail to observe the tenses of the verbs; they affect the meaning.
8. DON'T guess—think!
9. DON'T be satisfied with hazy approximation; be as exact and accurate as possible.
10. DON'T give up at the first difficulty; try again and keep on trying.