

Translator's Preface

It was in the summer of 1947, during the second of my now annual long visits to Sweden, that Professor Olivecrona asked me whether I would care to try my hand at translating into English a selection, to be chosen by him, of Hägerström's writings on the philosophy of law. It appeared that Englishmen who know something of Swedish and something of philosophy are far from common, and that I, who happen to combine those two qualifications, could be of real help. I have received so much kindness and hospitality from my many friends in Sweden, and in particular from Professor Olivecrona and certain members of his family, that it would have been a pleasure to accede to this suggestion even if the writings to be translated had not greatly interested me. But from what I had read of Hägerström's work, and still more from what I had seen and heard of the influence which he exercised in Sweden, it was plain to me that he must have been a thinker of immense erudition and remarkable originality, whose writings most certainly ought to be made available to English and American scholars. I therefore gladly consented, subject to the condition, which was readily granted, that I might take my own time over the job.

I see in my diary that I began the translation on October 12th. 1947 and completed it on May 31st. 1950. The work was done mainly after dinner on winter evenings in Cambridge, with long interruptions during the summer months. When a piece was finished I would send two copies of it to Professor Olivecrona. He would compare the translation carefully with the original, mark any words or sentences which seemed to him questionable, and then return the marked copy to me for final discussion. When the whole work was in print I had an opportunity to go through the first proofs personally with Professor Olivecrona in Lund at the end of August

1951. His knowledge of law and of what Hägerström is likely to have had in mind in certain passages which were obscure to me, together with his remarkable mastery of English phraseology and idiom, should ensure that no serious mistakes now remain.

None of the essays by Hägerström which are here translated are easy reading in the original, and some of them are decidedly difficult. This depends partly, no doubt, upon the complexities of the subject and the novelty and subtlety of some of Hägerström's ideas. But it depends also to a large extent on the ponderous and involved sentences in which those ideas are expressed. This stylistic defect is not characteristic of the Swedish language, but it is highly characteristic of those German philosophers and jurists in whose writings Hägerström had steeped himself. Certain English philosophers of the late XIXth century, in particular Bernard Bosanquet, who were subjected to similar influences, wrote a kind of English which closely resembles Hägerström's Swedish at its worst. As I was at one time fairly familiar with this Hegelianised English, the peculiarities of Hägerström's literary style presented less difficulty than they might otherwise have done.

Nevertheless, it has sometimes been hard to understand Hägerström's meaning, and it has very often been difficult to express it in tolerable English without addition, omission, or modification. The main practical problem, which has recurred again and again, was to break up a single sentence, which would be intolerably long and complex in English, into a series of distinct sentences so interconnected as to exhibit the links which bound together the various clauses in the original sentence. I hope that I have attained at least accuracy and intelligibility; I know that I have not attained any high degree of elegance. I could have easily secured greater elegance in many passages by making minor omissions or modifications. But I did not feel justified in playing tricks with the text, and I have always sacrificed elegance to literalness where I did not see how to combine the two.

On the whole I have enjoyed wrestling with these difficulties, and I am sure that the work of translating has helped me to understand and appreciate the original. If the result should serve to make

Hägerström's ideas familiar and intelligible to scholars who would otherwise have remained in ignorance of them, I shall be well satisfied.

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