September 2015

Henry Johnson Correspondence

Henry Johnson 1855-1918

Frances R. Johnson

Henry Ernest Dunnack 1867-1938

Maine State Library

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JOHNSON, Henry.

Born at Gardiner, June 25, 1855.

Died, February, 1918.
Third
February
1 9 2 2

Dear Sir;

I am making a collection of books by Maine authors to be placed in a special section of the State Library. These books are not to be lent but are to form a permanent collection so that students and other persons may have an opportunity to study at any time. We have already made a good start in securing volumes for this collection. We have the works of Edwin Arlington Robinson, Holman Day and a great many others.

We are asking each author to autograph the book and to add any notes that may explain why the book was written if there is any particular thing in connection with the writing or publishing of it. I am familiar with your "Dante", "The Seer" and the little pamphlet on "Sacred Themes". If you will be kind enough to send us these three books properly inscribed together with your bill for the same it will be a great favor and will add very much to the items in our collection. I am not asking any one to give the library these copies of their books. Please accept my thanks for anything you may do to help us in this matter.

Very truly yours,

MAINE STATE LIBRARY

by

Librarian.

Prof. Henry Johnson,
Bowdoin College,
Brunswick, Maine.
JOHNSON, Henry.

College professor; born in Gardiner, Maine, June 25, 1855; son of Richard Elliot and Louisa Abbie (Reed) J; A. B. Bowdoin College, 1874; student at Universities of Göttingen, Leipzig and Berlin; PhD., Berlin, 1884; has studied and traveled about five years in Europe at various periods since 1875; (Litt.D., Bowdoin College, 1914); married Frances M. Robinson of Thomaston, Maine, July 26, 1881. Professor of modern languages, 1877, librarian, 1880-3 Bowdoin College, and curator Bowdoin Art Collection, Walker Art Building, since 1894. Member Dante Society, Cambridge, Mass., Modern Language Association of America, Archaeological Institute of America, Phi Beta Kappa. Editor; Schiller’s Ballads, 1888; Midsummer Night’s Dream, 1888. Author: Where Beauty is and Other Poems, 1898; The Seer, and Other Poems, 1910. Translator; Les Trophées, José-Maria de Heredia, The Sonnets, 1910; La Comedia di Dante Alighieri, 1892-1914. Died, February, 1918.

For further biographical data see also pamphlet "Henry Johnson" in Maine Collection.
Feb. 18th 1918

Mr. E. Dummer, Esq.
Librarian of State Library
Augusta.

My dear Mr. Dummer:

Some letters I have sent addressed to my late husband, Prof. Henry Johnson, should have been answered by myself earlier but illness, and inconvenience in, at the time, precluding my hand upon one of the other, induced the delay. My husband died in Feb. 1918. I am sure he would be glad to have me comply with your desire to hand their references in the State Library, and much feel...
I am forwarding to you an autographed copy of "The Divine Comedy," a work on which I do not know if David Dogberry has obtained from the Yale University Press of New Haven—I am glad he procured them. I am forwarding to the Library—of which I hope are not autographed—I have inserted some of his autographs as being one of the foremost to do.

Very sincerely yours,

[Signature]

[Copy: Henry Johnson]
Feb. 2, 1900.

My dear Mr. Sumner:

I find that enclosed letter of the 1st. in a box with other papers, quite untrailed, and am forwarding immediately.

I am so sorry for this stupid delay. I hope the package of books, which I am sure was posted, reached you in season.

Yours sincerely yours,

[Signature]

[Address: 256 Main Street, Brunswick, Maine]
Twenty-third
February, 1922

Dear Mrs. Johnson;

I received the books some days ago and this morning your letter came to hand.

I cannot tell you how grateful we are for the splendid gift of Professor Johnson's books. Fortunately we have a copy of the "Divine Comedy", so that now our set is complete.

In addition to what you have already done, I wonder if you can send me a biography or tell me where I can find one. I wish to be able to supply all who may come to the State Library for information about Maine authors with all the information necessary to make a thorough study of that author.

I am sending to you under separate cover a copy of "The Maine Book" with my compliments. This book may be of interest to you.

Sincerely yours,

State Librarian

Mrs. Frances R. Johnson,
256 Main Street,
Brunswick, Maine.
A VERSE TRANSLATION OF DANTE.

The Divine Comedy, Translated by Henry Johnson. New Haven; Yale University Press, 1915, $2.50 net.

The new translation of Dante, by Prof. Henry Johnson of Bowdoin College is reviewed as follows in The Nation:

A translator of the Divine Comedy, says Professor Johnson, "must receive his first impulse from within, and must continue to the end in a kind of solitude, looking to a reward that is ideal." But with the completion of a work so excellent as this, the long solitude changes into a rich and enduring companionship. To the student of Dante, whether novice or adept, this book will bring deeper devotion, and, in some measure, fuller intelligence. The rendering, faithful and vigorous, at once interprets; and its new emphases light up many a waiting facet of doctrine or of imagery.

Mr. Johnson's translation is, like Longfellow's, in line for line blank verse. The comparison thus inevitably suggested honors both men. Both seek, first of all, absolute fidelity to the poet's thought; and both, through patient scholarship, achieve. Longfellow strives, moreover, to reproduce with the utmost possible exactness the inner form of the original. He manages nearly always to equate line with line, and he retains to a remarkable degree, sometimes throughout whole sentences, the very order of the Italian words. But the resultant phrasing, admirable as a tour de force, is not infrequently obscure.
II.

and somewhat foreign in its idiom.

For the will to be formally exact, Mr. Johnson substitutes the will to be clear; and his success in this respect affords the main distinction of his work. The phrasing, even in very difficult passages, satisfies the eye of the analytical mind—and the listening ear as well. For reading aloud, this version is better adapted, in the reviewer's opinion, than any previous verse translation of the Divine Comedy. In the classroom it carries the meaning directly and cogently; and it will yield memorable service among groups of friends.

The greater part of the task is well done; and there are many lines and tercets of notable beauty and power. Moreover, the workmanship rises when the content is most poetic, so that the finest passages are admirably rendered. Francesca's confession, for instance, the interview amid the burning tombs, the coming overseas to Purgatory, and the vision of the Cross in the fifth heaven are retold--worthily. We quote the first lines of the first passage:

And I began: "Poet, I fain would speak
With those two yonder, who go side by side,
And seem to be so light upon the wind."
And he to me: "Thou shalt observe when they draw near to us; then call them in the name
Of Love, that is their guide, and they will come."
Soon as the wind had bent their course toward us,
I lifted up my voice: "O weary souls,
Come speak with us, if it be not forbidden."

As doves, when summoned by their longing, fly
On open, steady wings to the sweet nest,
Borne onward through the air by their desire;
So left they then the throng where Dido was,
And came to us through the malignant air,
So powerful was my affection's call.

"O living creature, gracious and benign,
Who art now journeying through this dark air,
Visiting us who dyed the world blood-red,
Were now the Universal King our friend,
We would both pray to him to grant thee peace,
Because thou pitiest our wayward ill.
What pleases thee to hear, and what to speak,
That we will hear, and thereof speak to you,
IV.

While yet the wind is hushed for us, as now."
Johnson, Henry.

Shakespear's The Tragedie of Macbeth
A Midsommer's Nights Dreame
Les Trophees, Heredia, Sonnets.
On Sacred Themes
The Seer and Other Poems
Where Beauty Is.

Autographed:  Henry Johnson.
(These autographs were tipped in
the books by Mrs. Johnson, as she
presented the books to the library
after Mr. Johnson's death.)

The Seer and Other Poems. (2nd copy)
Autographed:  Dr. George T. Little
with the old-time esteem
Nov. 24, 1910.    of Henry Johnson.