

CHAPTER II.

STRUCTURE OF VERSE.

625. A poem in verse is composed of lines, feet, and syllables. These are **essentials**; but there are often **accidental** modifications, some of which belong to one poem, some or all to another, but all of which tend to increase the melody and the harmony of the composition. Thus *syllables* are arranged into *feet*, feet into *cæsural members*, cæsural members into *lines* or *verses*, verses into *groups* or stanzas, stanzas into *pieces of poetry*.

To understand fully the part which these have respectively in the construction of numbers, let us study each in particular; and first the essentials—syllables, feet, and lines.

ARTICLE I. THE SYLLABLE.

626. Every **syllable** in a sentence may be viewed in two ways—either with regard to the relative amount of *time* occupied in pronouncing it, or with regard to the relative *force* with which it is pronounced. For the slightest attention to speech will show that some syllables take more time for utterance than others, and that some are uttered more forcibly than others.

Relatively, therefore, some syllables are long and some are short, and the relative time passed in uttering the syllable is called the syllable's **quantity**. Relatively, also, some are forcibly, some are feebly uttered, and the relative force exerted in its pronunciation is called the syllable's

accentuation. On its quantity and its accentuation the adaptation of a syllable for poetic purposes mainly depends.

§ 1. Accentuation.

627. **Accentuation** is the chief source of rhythmical effect in English verse. It is better adapted to the genius of our tongue than quantity; for the accent is in general determined, whilst the quantity is not.

628. **Accent** is the peculiar stress laid upon a syllable to distinguish it from others; example, *obduracy*, *enlighten*, *reserve*. As accent requires a greater force of sound in uttering the syllable or letter on which it falls, a line in which syllables with the accent and syllables without it alternate affords in reading a pleasing cadence.

Every word of two syllables has an accent on one of them; this is called the **primary** accent. Words of three syllables or more have frequently an additional accent, called the **secondary**, less forcible, however, than the primary.

629. **Monosyllables** have no accent upon them, since the object of the accent is to distinguish a syllable or syllables of the same word. They may, however, receive an emphasis upon them when they are the words most important to the sense. In this case emphasis has the force of accent. In the subjoined lines emphasis and primary and secondary accent are exemplified. The emphatic words are italicized, the accents are marked thus ' " :

Boys will antic'-ipa"te, lav'-ish and dis'-sipa"te
All that your bu'-sy pate hoar'-ded with care.

§ 2. Quantity.

630. The time occupied by each syllable in modern languages is determined in a great degree by the usage of the

ancient tongues, from which the modern are derived. The ancients invented and perfected the system of quantity. It is expedient, therefore, in explaining **quantity** to refer to this principle as the ancients understood and employed it. In the Latin and Greek, with the poetry of which we are most conversant, every syllable was heard; none were slurred over or lost to the ear. To prevent a disagreeable drawl in speech the sound of the vowel was sometimes uttered briefly, sometimes prolonged. The quantity of every vocal sound was governed by fixed rules, according to the nature or position of the vowel. By a certain admixture of brief and protracted sounds a musical result was obtained and time was kept. A couple of lines will illustrate it:*

Insōnūērē cāvae, gēm̄tumq̄e dēderē cāv̄ernae.—*Virgil.*

Sēd fūgt̄ īntērēā, fūgt̄ īrrēpārāblē tēmp̄us.—*Id.*

631. The **proportion of a long syllable to a short one** was that of two to one; that is, the long syllable occupied in pronunciation twice the time of a short one. Thus in the second line the first sound, *sēd*, is protracted as long as it takes to pronounce the two following in *fūgt̄*. Had every syllable been long the result would have been a sluggish, heavy monotony, repugnant to the fine musical ear of the Greek and Roman. Had every one been short its frisky, precipitate steps would have ill-comported with the dignity and the majestic sonorousness of the ancient tongues. But by an ingenious blending of the two quantities the metrical effect was most happy.

632. In the **English** language the force of quantity in the arrangement of sounds is readily felt, though not so

* The bar, or *makron* (—), denotes a long syllable; the curve, or *breve* (˘), a short syllable.

easily managed as in the classics. Compare, for instance, the following lines as to the time employed in uttering them:

1. Dark clouds rise, loud peals rend heaven.
2. An infinitesimal.

The two have the same number of syllables, but the former occupies at least twice the time of the latter. Combine long and short sounds, and the metrical result or the melodious flow of the verse is at once perceived:

Īn hōpe ānd fēar, ĩn tōil ānd pāin,
Thē wēarȳ dāy hāve mōriāls pāst;
Nōw drēams ōf bliss bē yōurs tō reīgn,
Ānd āll yōur spēlls ārōund thēm cāst.

—*Mrs. Hemans.*

633. But in English the quantity, or relative time of utterance, is **by no means determinate** or constant. In the example just given many of the words may be prolonged or hurried rapidly over; *day* and *have* in the second line, *your* and *them* in the last, may be uttered in a manner to change the quantity which the verse requires. Sometimes, in fact, the syllable is so precipitately passed over as to occupy no appreciable portion of time; whilst long syllables occupy times so unequal in utterance as to defy every effort to obtain a strict equality or uniformity in respect to quantity. Thus in

“Graves of the good,”

the word *good* is long, and is equal to the two words *of the*; whilst the three words *of the good* are pronounced in as short a space of time as the single monosyllable *graves*, thus rendering the quantity of the word *graves* equal to that of four short syllables.

634. The majority of syllables in our vocabulary may be uttered with greater or less rapidity or prolongation. And the rhythm of a poem founded on quantity alone (could accent be disregarded, as in the classics) would be left to the mercy of the reader. From these remarks it is evident that quantity, with us, is **not the leading principle** of metrical strains. It is a principle, however, and cannot be neglected without injury to melody. The contrary opinion and usage have rendered the expression of the most beautiful thoughts harsh and unpleasant. For although, in general, English quantity is uncertain, there are, notwithstanding, some syllables of fixed length, and they cannot be pronounced as short; others are short, and they cannot be made long in utterance unless by a particular emphasis, *e.g.*:

The waves surge high and their chasms yawn deep.

635. A common error in dealing with quantity is occasioned by confounding the words *long* and *short*, as used by orthoëpists to denote the peculiar sound of a vowel, with the same words used by prosodians in denoting the time of the entire syllable. Many consider the syllable short because the vowel has the short sound; but very often when the vowel is short the syllable is long, and sometimes when the vowel has the long sound the syllable is short. The quantity of a syllable depends upon the manner of uttering it. Thus in *fār*, *fēr̄n*, *bird*, *cōme*, *fūr*, the vowel is short, but the pronunciation is retarded by the consonants connected with it; hence the syllable is long.

636. Comprehensive **rules for the regulation of quantity** cannot be given. The following items are taken from Kerl:

1. A syllable having a long vowel or diphthongal sound,

especially when closed by one or more consonant sounds, is long; as, *āry*, *wārm*, *proūd*, *flash̄ed*; *roūnd* us *roars* the tempest *loūder*.

2. A syllable having a short vowel sound, but closed or followed by consonants in such a way as to retard pronunciation, is generally long; as,

When *Ajāx* strives some *rock's* vast weight to *throw*.

3. A syllable ending in a short vowel sound is short; *e.g.*,

Thē, *ā*, *tō*, *sālār̄y*, *chā-rī-t̄y*.

4. A syllable next to an accented syllable of the same word is often made short by the greater stress on the accented syllable; *e.g.*, *hōmewārd*, *pūnīshment*.

5. An unimportant monosyllable ending in a single consonant, preceded by a single short vowel, and joined immediately to the more important word to which it relates, is short: *ex.*, *āt* war.

6. A few words in the language may be pronounced either as one syllable or as two; *ex.*, *our*, *flower*, *heaven*, *lyre*.

§ 3. Influence of quantity and accent.

637. We have spoken of **quantity and accent as distinct principles** of metrical numbers. It must not be imagined that to use or not use them is left to the free choice of the writer. A poem cannot be written without the influence of both acting upon the melody. When both are duly consulted the effect is most pleasing; for variety is obtained, not in the duration of sound alone, but also in the stress of voice. If one, however, of these two predominates, a particular emotion is excited. It is noticed that greater attention to quantity affects the sentiment and the tenderer feelings of the soul. Attention to accent affects the sterner

qualities of the mind. A line made from quantity is often more beautiful; a line made from accentuation is stronger, sterner. The very words *beauty* and *strength* exemplify the theory: the word *beauty* being composed mostly of vowels, which lengthen the sound; the word *strength* being composed of seven consonants, which sharpen the sound in the same way as an accent.

638. Here are two **examples** in which the influence of **quantity** is most sensible:

“ There is a calm for those who weep,
A rest for weary pilgrims found;
They softly lie and sweetly sleep
Low in the ground.

“ The storm that wrecks the winter's sky
No more disturbs their deep repose
Than summer evening's latest sigh
That shuts the rose.”—*Montgomery*.

639. Here is a strain more rapid, but rich with quantity:

“ This world is all a fleeting show,
For man's illusion given;
The smiles of joy, the tears of woe—
Deceitful shine, deceitful flow:
There's nothing true but Heaven.

“ And false the light on glory's plume
As fading hues of even;
And Love, and Hope, and Beauty's bloom
Are flowers gathered for the tomb:
There's nothing bright but Heaven.

“ Poor wanderers of a stormy day,
From wave to wave we're driven;
And Fancy's flash and Reason's ray
Serve but to light the troubled day:
There's nothing calm but Heaven.”—*Moore*.

640. The following piece is not given as an example of

good taste. It is quoted to illustrate the different effect produced when **accent** is more attended to:

“ In their ragged regimentals
Stood the old Continentals,
Yielding not;
When the grenadiers were lunging,
And like hail fell the plunging
Cannon-shot;
When the files
Of the isles

From the smoky heights encampment bore the banner of the rampant
‘ Unicorn,’
And grummer, grummer, grummer rolled the roll of the drummer
Through the morn,” etc.

—*Knickerbocker*.

641. In the following it will be seen that **emphasis on monosyllables** excites emotions similar to those aroused by heavy accentuation:

“ Though the *rock* of my *last* hope is shivered,
And its fragments are *sunk* in the *wave*;
Though I *feel* that my *soul* is delivered
To *pain*, it shall not be its *slave*.
There is many a pang to pursue me—
They may *crush*, but they *shall* not contemn;
They may torture, but *shall* not subdue me;
’Tis of thee that I think, not of *them*.”—*Byron*.

642. *Note*.—After these observations on quantity and accent we shall, for greater convenience, in future apply the term *long* to syllables either accented or of a prolonged sound; the term *short* to syllables neither accented nor prolonged in utterance. The *macron* and *breve* will indicate the long and short syllable.

ARTICLE II. THE FOOT.

643. We have said that long and short syllables combined in certain proportions produce a rhythm or cadence sensible to the most obtuse ear. This rhythm is the measured tread or musical beat of the expression, like the regular pulsations of the blood or like the tread of a procession stepping in unison. A full beat is produced by a group of syllables called a **foot**; it is also known by the name of *metre* or *measure* (*μετρον*—*mensura*, measure). Thus in the line,

Slōwly thē | mīst ȳn thē | mēādōw wās | crēēping,

we perceive the pulsation or beat four times, produced by as many groups of syllables; hence there are four feet in the line.

In each of the following lines there are two feet:

Wāving hēr | gōīdēn vēil
Ovēr thē | silēnt dāle.—*Holmes.*

There are four beats in the following:

Even in | the ves | per's heaven | ly tone
They seemed | to hear | a dy | ing groan,
And bade | the pas | sing knell | to toll
For wel | fare of | a part | ing soul.—*Walter Scott.*

The next contains three and a half beats alternating with three:

“ Ā sīgh | o'er thē dāys | of mȳ chīld | hōōd,
Ā tēār | fōr thē beāū | tīfūl pās̄t;
Nō trūst | ȳn thē hōpes | of thē fū | tūre,
Nō hōpes | of ā jōy | thāt wīll lās̄t.
ȳ līve | ēncīr | clēd bȳ phān | tōms,
Ānd clīng | tō ā lōve | thāt mūst flēē;
ȳ ne'er | wās sō sād | ānd sō lōne | lȳ,
Oh! lōne | lȳ ās lōne | lȳ cān bē.

“ ‘Pōor wāif, | whāt nēēd | of rēpīn | ȳng?’
Sārd ā vōice | frōm thē cā | verns below:
‘If thē hēārts | thōu hāst lōved | āre tōō nār | rōw
Tō ēmbrāce | thēē nōw | in thy woe,
Lōōk ūp | tō Hīm | whōse āffēc | tīōn
ȳs brōād | ānd ȳmmēnsē | ās thē sēā,
Ānd thȳ sōūl, | sō dēspon | dent ānd lōne | lȳ,
Shālł bē hāp | pȳ ās hāp | pȳ cān bē.’”

—*Lesperance.*

644. *Note.*—After reading these various exercises the student will more easily understand why a group of syllables is called a **foot**. Some ascribe it to the fact that it is the standard of metrical measure. Others say it is because it corresponds to the beat in music, which was indicated by raising and dropping the foot. It is more probable because the voice trips along the verse, making a foot or step in each group.

§ I. Combinations of syllables into feet.

645. A foot may be composed of two syllables or of three.

1. **Two syllables.** A foot of two long syllables (—) is called a *spondee*—so called because at the *σπονδαί*, or libations in ancient times, slow, solemn melodies were used, chiefly in this metre.

2. A foot of two short syllables (˘˘) is called a *pyrrhic*—much used in the *πυρρίχη*, or war-song.

3. A foot of one long and one short syllable (—˘) is called a *trochee*—from *τρέχειν*, to run.

4. A foot with the first syllable short and the second long (˘—) is an *iambus*—*ἰαμβος*, the peculiar measure used in the earliest satires; *ἰάπτειν*, to satirize.

646. Feet of **three syllables** may arise from eight various combinations;

1. The *Molossus*—from the name of an old author; as, *sea-beat strand*.
2. The *Tribrach*—*τρῆς*, three; *βραχύς*, short; as, *is to the*.
3. The *Bacchic*—used in hymns to Bacchus; as, *till daylight*.
4. The *Antibacchic*—*ἀντί*, opposed to, viz., the Bacchic; as, *sweet echo*.
5. The *Amphimacer*—*ἀμφί*, on both sides; *μακρόν*, a long; as, *dawning star*.
6. The *Amphibrach*—*ἀμφί*, on both sides; *βραχύς*, a short; as, *re-membrance*.
7. The *Dactylic*—*δάκτυλος*, a finger, having a long joint and two short joints; as, *Purify*.
8. The *Anapest*—*ἀνά*, back; *παίω*, strike—i.e., dactyl struck back; as, *Intèrdict*.

647. Sometimes **one single syllable** is so emphasized as to occupy the time of a foot. To do justice to the piece the sound must be prolonged. Of this kind are lines in Hood's "Song of the Shirt" and numbers of pieces written in imitation. Whenever used, such a syllable is indicative of deep feeling, strong passion, or solemn thought.

" 'Halt!'—the dust-brown ranks stood fast;
'Fire!'—out blazed the rifle's blast."—Whittier.

§ 2. Principal and secondary feet.

648. Feet are either *principal* or *secondary*. **Principal feet** are those of which a poem may be wholly or chiefly formed. **Secondary feet** are certain measures sometimes blended in a poem with principal feet. A poem cannot be composed of secondary feet. There are only four principal feet. Two are of two syllables, the *trochee* and *iambus*; two are of three syllables, the *dactyl* and *anapest*. The various others are secondary.

649. Iambuses, trochees, anapests, and dactyls produce the greatest perceptible effect in the metrical art. Read a

line or several successive lines of iambic measures, or of trochaic, dactylic, or anapestic, and you will easily perceive that a poem in any of these measures would be agreeable. Here are some **iambuses** from "Cassandra" (the prophetess of Troy, maddened because she was unheeded):

"Go, age! and let thy withered cheek
Be wet once more with freezing tears,
And bid thy trembling sorrow speak
In accents of departed years.

"Go, child! and pour thy sinless prayer
Before the everlasting throne;
And He who sits in glory there
May stoop to hear thy silent tone.

"Ye will not hear, ye will not know;
Ye scorn the maniac's idle song;
Ye care not!—but the voice of woe
Shall thunder loud and echo long."—Holmes.

650. In the following there are numerous **trochees**:

"THE MARTYRDOM.

"Angels. Bearing lilies in our bosom,
Holy Agnes, we have flown,
Missioned from the Heaven of Heavens
Unto thee, and thee alone.
We are coming, we are flying. Lo! behold thy happy dying.

"When a Christian lies expiring,
Angel choirs with plumes outspread
Bend above his death-bed, singing
That, when Death's mild sleep is fled,
There may be no harsh transition while he greets the heavenly
vision."—Aubrey de Vere.

651. In the two examples just given quite a difference is perceptible, though the trochee which is most prominent

in the latter is but an iambus reversed ; the one is quick and lively, the other grand and stately.

In the next the **dactyl** is very frequent :

“ Leave us not—leave us not,
Say not adieu ;
Have we not been to thee
Tender and true ?
Take not thy sunny smile
Far from our hearth ;
With that sweet light will fade
Summer and mirth.
Leave us not—leave us not ;
Can thy heart roam ?
Wilt thou not pine to hear
Voices from home ? ”—*Hemans*.

652. “ The Sister of Charity ” will give us the **anapest**, or dactyl reversed. The dactyl is a quicker measure than the trochee ; and the anapest has a more majestic step than the iambus. It is not, however, so well suited to every subject :

“ She once was a lady of honor and wealth ;
Bright glowed in her features the roses of health ;
Her vesture was blended of silk and of gold,
And her motion shook perfume from every fold.
Joy revelled around her, love shone at her side,
And gay was her smile as the glance of a bride ;
And light was her step in the mirth-sounding hall
When she heard of the daughters of Vincent de Paul.

“ She felt in her spirit the summons of grace
That called her to live for her suffering race ;
And, heedless of pleasure, of comfort, of home,
Rose quickly like Mary, and answered, ‘ I come.’
She put from her person the trappings of pride,
And passed from her home with the joy of a bride ;
Nor wept at the threshold as onward she moved—
For her heart was on fire in the cause it approved.

“ Lost ever to fashion, to vanity lost,
That beauty that once was the song and the toast ;
No more in the ball-room that figure we meet,
But gliding at dusk to the wretch’s retreat.
Forgot in the halls is that high-sounding name,
For the Sister of Charity blushes at fame ;
Forgot are the claims of her riches and birth,
For she barter for Heaven the glory of earth.

“ Those feet that to music could gracefully move
Now bear her alone on the mission of love ;
Those hands that once dangled the perfume and gem
Are tending the helpless or lifted for them ;
That voice that once echoed the song of the vain
Now whispers relief to the bosom of pain ;
And the hair that was shining with diamond and pearl
Is wet with the tears of the penitent girl.

“ Her down-bed—a pallet ; her trinkets—a bead ;
Her lustre—one taper, that serves her to read ;
Her sculpture—the crucifix nailed by her bed ;
Her paintings—one print of the thorn-crownèd head ;
Her cushion—the pavement that wearies her knees ;
Her music—the psalm, or the sigh of disease :
The delicate lady lives mortified there,
And the feast is forsaken for fasting and prayer.

“ Yet not to the service of heart and of mind
Are the cares of the Heaven-minded virgin confined :
Like Him whom she loves, to the mansions of grief
She hastes with the tidings of joy and relief ;
She strengthens the weary, she comforts the weak,
And soft is her voice in the ear of the sick ;
Where want and affliction on mortals attend,
The Sister of Charity *there* is a friend.

“ Unshrinking where pestilence scatters his breath,
Like an angel she moves ‘mid the vapors of death ;
Where rings the loud musket and flashes the sword
Unfearing she walks—for she follows her Lord.

How sweetly she bends o'er each plague-tainted face
 With looks that are lighted with holiest grace !
 How kindly she dresses each suffering limb !
 For she sees in the wounded the image of Him.

" Behold her, ye worldly ! behold her, ye vain !
 Who shrink from the pathway of virtue and pain ;
 Who yield up to pleasure your nights and your days,
 Forgetful of service, forgetful of praise.
 Ye lazy philosophers, self-seeking men ;
 Ye fireside philanthropists, great at the pen ;
 How stands in the balance your eloquence, weighed
 With the life and the deeds of that high-born maid ? "

—Gerald Griffin.

ARTICLE III. THE VERSE.

653. A **verse** is a line consisting of a certain number of feet.

Note.—The term *verse* is often improperly used to designate a number of lines. Its true meaning is a single line, composed of feet. The word is derived from *vertere*, to turn, because the pen reverts at the close of each line to begin a new one.

To **scan** a verse is to resolve it into its several divisions.

To **versify** means to make verses ; whence the art of versification is the art of making verses.

§ 1. *Species and length of the verse.*

654. Lines or verses receive their specific name from the foot which predominates in them. Thus they are called *Iambic*, *Trochaic*, *Anapestic*, or *Dactylic*, according as the iambus, trochee, anapest, or dactyl is wholly or principally employed in them. Examples have been given of each.

655. With regard to the **length of verses** the greatest variety is admitted. They may consist of one, two, three feet, or more ; they may even include in their limits seven or eight feet. Lines of less than three feet, however, are

generally found in combination with lines of greater length. They frequently have, in this conjunction, a beautiful effect. A lengthy piece composed of lines less than three feet has an unpleasant sound. Cardinal Newman seems to have understood this in his "Dream of Gerontius," where the demons speak without melody ; the angels speak melodiously. (See *Verses on Various Occasions*, p. 293, etc.)

656. The **length of a verse** is indicated by a Greek numeral compounded with the term *meter* (μέτρον, a measure or standard of measure).

A line of one foot is called a *monometer* (μόνον, one, *i.e.*, measure).

A line of two feet is called a *dimeter* (δίς, twice, *i.e.*, the measure).

A line of three feet is called a *trimeter* (τρίς, thrice).

A line of four feet is called a *tetrameter* (τέτρα, four).

In the same way *pentameters* (five feet), *hexameters* (six feet), *heptameters* (seven feet), *octometers* (eight feet), are formed respectively from πέντε, ἕξ, ἐπτά, οὐτά.

It is easy to understand from the foregoing what is an iambic monometer, an iambic dimeter, or an iambic pentameter ; also what is a trochaic monometer or dimeter, a dactylic or anapestic monometer, dimeter, trimeter, etc. The first term gives the species of verse, the second its length.

§ 2. *Acatalectic, catalectic, and hypermeter.*

657. It very often happens that verses are not exact monometers, nor exact dimeters, trimeters, etc. They are frequently longer than a dimeter and yet shorter than a trimeter, or longer than a trimeter and too short for a tetrameter, etc.

If the line consists of full round feet, neither lacking a syllable of completion nor having one too much, the line is