

same name, — which is simply a bad climax. With the infinite blunders and bad uses of figurative poetry we are not concerned, as the aim of our study is to find out all that is peculiar to the style of good poets.

## PART III.

### METRE.

#### CHAPTER VI.

THE science of verse is the most difficult part of Poetics, and yet it is the most important; for metrical form is “the sole condition . . . absolutely demanded by poetry.” The chief difficulty lies in the great confusion of opinion about the essential laws and tests of verse. There is no fixed use of terms, no full agreement even on some of the simplest elements of the science. We must therefore proceed carefully, accepting only the more generally admitted facts, and refusing to follow those sweeping changes of recent writers, which are in so many cases merely destructive of old theory without offering solid basis for new rules.

#### § I. RHYTHM.

A *Syllable* is a body of sound brought out with an independent, single, and unbroken breath (Sievers). This syllable may be *long* or *short*, according to the time it fills: compare the syllables in *merrily* with the syllables in *corkscrew*. Further, a syllable may be *heavy* or *light* (also called *accented* or *unaccented*) according as it receives more or less force or *stress* of

tone: compare the two syllables of *streamer*. Lastly, a syllable may have increased or diminished *height* of tone,—*pitch*: *cf.* the so-called “rising inflection” at the end of a question. Now, in spoken language, there are infinite degrees of length, of stress, of pitch. If phonetic spelling come to be firmly established, we shall also have a phonetic versification to note these degrees. But while some new systems have been advocated (*e.g.*, Ellis’s plan for a new metrical terminology; or see a report, in the *Academy*, Jan. 10, 1885, of a paper read before the Philological Society in London: it advocates a “phonetic notation, providing signs for all the significant sounds, as well as for at least three degrees of stress and five of length”) none has been established. Our conventional versification recognizes only accented and unaccented, long and short syllables.

It is a well-known property of human speech that it keeps up a ceaseless change between accented and unaccented syllables. A long succession of accented syllables becomes unbearably monotonous; a long succession of unaccented syllables is, in effect, impossible. Now when the ear detects at regular intervals a recurrence of accented syllables, varying with unaccented, it perceives *Rhythm*. Measured intervals of time are the basis of all verse, and their *regularity* marks off poetry from prose; so that Time is thus the chief element in Poetry, as it is in Music and in Dancing. From the idea of measuring these time-intervals, we derive the name *Metre*; *Rhythm* means pretty much the same thing,—“a flowing,” an even, measured motion. This rhythm is found everywhere in nature: the beat of the

heart, the ebb and flow of the sea, the alternation of day and night. Rhythm is not artificial, not an invention;<sup>1</sup> it lies at the heart of things, and in rhythm the noblest emotions find their noblest expression. Rhythm, or metre, made itself known very early in the history of our race. Just as one who walks briskly in a cheerful mood, involuntarily marks his steps with a song, whistling, humming, or the like, so at the primitive religious rites of our ancestors the usual solemn dance<sup>2</sup> was accompanied by a song. As the dancing lines swayed back and forth, they marked their steps by chanted words,—a syllable for each step: the words were rude enough at first, but little by little gained in precision and meaning (*cf.* p. 9). Two steps, right and left, made a unit; for with the third, the first motion was repeated. We may thus assume the double beat of left-right as metrical unit: *cf.* the term “foot.” Westphal has shown that the original Indo-European metre consisted of a measured chant accompanying a dance of eight steps forward and eight backward; the whole making one verse, divided into halves (*cf.* the classic *Cæsura*) by the pause and return. We shall see below that in *Germanic*<sup>3</sup> poetry these half-verses were firmly bound together by *Rime*. The alternation of

<sup>1</sup> Hence much of the talk about “barbarous metre” and “apt numbers” is absurd so far as it assumes to treat rhythm as a constantly increasing accomplishment of civilized man. “Any *Volkslied*,” writes in a private letter one of our leading English scholars, “any *Volkslied* shows as good an ear as any Pindaric ode by Gray or whomever else.”

<sup>2</sup> This dance was regular; it was developed from the *march* and consisted of steps, not of irregular leaps.

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps necessary to insist on the meaning of this term: it includes High and Low German, Gothic, Norse, Anglo-Saxon, etc.

stronger right and weaker left gave the accented and the unaccented beat (= syllable) of the foot. With the end of the *verse* (*verso*), the dancers *turned* again to repeat their forward-and-back. [For further particulars, see Westphal, *Metrik der Griechen*, Vol. II.; or Scherer, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, 2d ed. p. 623.]

Or, we could imagine a quicker rhythm, in which there should be *two* syllables to each step: one syllable light, with the lifting of the foot; the other heavy, as the foot struck the ground again: *cf.* the classic terms (inconsistently used) *arsis* and *thesis*. One thing is certain: in this combination of song and dance we see the origin of rhythm as applied to connected words. Thus, rhythm is the harmonious repetition of certain fixed sound-relations: time being the basis, just as in dancing or music.

This brings another question:—what relation is there between the rhythm of music and the rhythm of poetry? The further back we go, the more closely music and poetry are connected. For modern times, we may state the difference thus: Music has for distinctive characteristic, *melody*,—the variations of pitch, of “high” and “low” notes, but speech has, in effect, no such fixed variations; that is, they furnish no special, definite mark to speech, except in questions, surprise, etc. But speech has *quality*,—what the Germans call *tone-color*. Infinite variety is imparted to speech by the combinations of different vocal effects,—the full or thin vowels, the diphthongs, the consonants. This tone-tint is to poetry what melody is to music: common to both poetry and music is *rhythm*.

Our business, therefore, is to consider verse in its

rhythm and in the quality of its tones. Rhythm has two branches: *time* and *stress*, or *quantity* and *accent*. Both are familiar to music, but time more especially. Hence, *that poetry which depends, for metrical effect, chiefly upon detailed time-relations (quantity) will come nearer to music than the poetry which depends chiefly on stress-relations (intensity, accent)*.

## § 2. QUANTITY.

Quantity deals with the relative length of a syllable; that is, with the time required to utter it. The Greeks adopted quantity as principle of their metre, and based their verse upon the relation of long and short syllables. A syllable was long which contained a long vowel or a diphthong, or a final consonant coming before another consonant in the next syllable; a long syllable was equal to two short ones. For such poetry, the term “metre” is very appropriate: the verse was really *measured*. In the Germanic languages, and in nearly all modern poetry, *accent* is made the principle of verse: we *weigh* our syllables, we ask how much *force*, not how much time, they require. Meanwhile, we do not utterly refuse to recognize quantity as an element of verse, nor was classic poetry unfamiliar with accent. In the latter, an “ictus,” or stress, fell upon the long syllable; in modern verse, while the main principle is the alternation of heavy and light syllables, we nevertheless admit quantity as a “regulative” element. It is a secondary factor of verse.

First, as to the principle of quantity in classic verse. Take the famous line of Vergil:—

“Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum,”—



of tone as compared with the other. In words of more than two syllables, there is generally a secondary accent: *i.e.*, one of the remaining syllables receives less tone, indeed, than the accented syllable, but more than the rest: *cf.* *shépherd, shépherdèss, shépherdèsses*. Of course, there can be a third accent, if the word have syllables enough; for, as said above, speech tends to alternate accented with unaccented.

Of the same nature as the word-accent are, further, the *syntactical* and the *rhetorical* accent, which concern relations of words in a sentence. The accent lifts certain words into prominence, leaving others without special stress of tone, and without the added distinctness of articulation which often accompanies accent.

These two accents—of the word and of the sentence—are of great importance in modern verse; but in the classic metres, which had more of a musical character than our own, they exercised less influence. Especially is this the case with word-accent; and this we must look at more closely, in order to see what difference there is between ancient and modern languages in their methods of selecting, in a given word, the syllable to be accented. This applies, of course, to prose as well as to poetry. (1) *The Grammatical Accent*.—This is the principle in Sanskrit, and, to a certain extent, in Greek. Taking a given word, we find its accented syllable shifting with different grammatical forms of the word. In Sanskrit this word-accent is not even confined, as it is in Greek, to the last three syllables. Thus we have a *Movable Accent*. (2) *The Rhythmical Accent*.—The word-accent tends to fall upon a *long* syllable, as in the Latin. In Greek, the accent was

indifferent to the quantity of the syllable on which it fell: thus the Greek *chémaira* became Latin *chimæra*. (3) *The Logical Accent*.—A brilliant piece of research by Carl Verner has proved the existence of a movable accent in the oldest forms of the Germanic languages. This has left its mark in a few sound-changes with which we are not here concerned. But it is certain that at a very early period, before the date of any Germanic literature known to us, *this movable accent was given up, and the word-accent became a fixed one*. It chose and clung to a certain syllable, and this was *the syllable which gave meaning to the word*. Hence the term “logical accent.” In all original English words, and in many words derived from foreign sources, we bring out with additional stress the syllable which bears the real weight of the word, the root-syllable. Instead of the shifting Greek accent which changed from a nominative to a genitive of the same word (*ánthrōpos: anthrōpou*), we have such persistence as *sheep, shepherd, shepherdess, shepherdesses*.

(II) *VERSE-ACCENT*.—We have seen that verse is now marked off by the regular recurrence of a stress or accent falling on certain syllables; and that even in classic metres a stress fell upon the long syllables. We naturally ask how this verse-accent agrees with the word-accent just described. Looking, first, at the different ways in which we could make verses, we find the simplest plan to be a mere counting of syllables, with absolute ignoring of word-accent. Each syllable would be a verse-accent. Thus, if we slowly count off “one—two—three—four,” then repeat the words with the same slowness, accenting each like the rest, we shall

have a metrical result. Fragments of verse said to be based on this bare syllable-counting are found in the Old-Persian, the language of the *Avesta*. But such a system tends to pass into something else; for the impulse to pairs (as in the ticking of a clock), and to alternation of strong and weak tones, is inherent in language.

Or, again, we may have a regular system of verse in which (as in the pairs of steps in the primitive dance noticed above) certain syllables are accented for metrical reasons, and others are left without accent. The metre will thus be regarded at the sacrifice of the word-accent. As a *license* of verse, this is common enough in our modern poetry; but does not extend beyond isolated words. We have two kinds of this license: the "Hovering Accent" and the "Wrenched Accent." In the former, word-accent and verse-accent simply divide the stress between them: the accent "hovers" over both, — as in: —

"That through the gréen còrnfièld did páss." — Shakspeare.

The "wrenched accent" throws the stress on an inflexional syllable: —

"For the stárs and the wínds are únto hér  
As ráiment, as sóngs of the hárp-playér." — Swinburne.

So, too, the *portér* and *countrée* of the ballads. Of this license Puttenham speaks (*Arte of English Poesie*) in a chapter headed: "How the good maker (*sc.* poët) will not wrench his word to helpe his rime, either by falsifying his accent, or by untrue orthographie." Gascoigne (*Notes of Instruction*) lays down the same law, and observes it carefully in his *Steele Glas*; and it is quite

clear that we cannot extend this license to a whole verse; no harmonious system can result from a mere ignoring of one kind of accent to suit another. Some other metrical element must come in. This new element is furnished in the shape of *quantity*. Suppose, now, we do push word-accent out of the question, but make a rule that the verse-accent, the ictus, must fall exclusively upon those syllables which have a stated quantity — the "long" syllables. This is the rule of Greek and Latin metre. But in this scheme we need not ignore the word-accent: for the Greek word-accent was an *increase of pitch*, an added *height* of tone, not added stress. "In the Indian, in the Greek, and in the Roman verse, there was no conflict between the ictus, by which the verse was measured, and the accent of the words which made up the verse" (Scherer).<sup>1</sup> The fact that our Germanic race, and, later, most modern languages, made stress of tone necessary for the word-accent, renders it now impossible to distinguish a word-accent by height of tone (pitch) and give the stress to a neighbor-syllable. But the Greek combined musical and metrical effects where we cannot. As was hinted above, the recitation of the Greek minstrel must have been a sort of chant: the speech was more musical on account of its pitch; the metre was more musical on account of its time-relations.

But early in the history of the Germanic races, stress-accent for words pushed into the foreground. They gave up the fixed relations of quantity, as well as the

<sup>1</sup> So, too, Westphal. It is only fair to state that some writers on metre oppose this view, and contend that the Greek verse simply ignored word-accent.

pitch-accent. They *weighed* their syllables. Their verse depended on the contrast of heavy and light, not long and short. Accent became, as Daniel puts it in his *Defense of Ryme* (1603), "the chief lord and grave governour of numbers." This choice of accent rather than quantity lay, thinks Scherer, in the passionate and vehement nature of our Germanic race. Our ancestors were disposed to extremes, and lacked the quiet, artistic sense that adopted the placid rhythm of Greek verse. The German could not *linger* on his verse-accent; he put into it all the strength of which he was capable; and he helped his voice by strokes on some loud instrument, the strokes being timed by verse-accents. Now, we remember how the Germanic *word-accent* was chosen: it had to rest on the root-syllable. Perhaps this word-accent was once, as in Greek, a variation of pitch, not a stress; but early in the history of the race, *stress* was adopted as sole mark of the word-accent. But here is a conflict. The same word might have on one syllable the verse-accent, on another syllable the word-accent; and both were marked by stress, by strength of tone. This was intolerable. Hence a rule which became the fundamental principle of all Germanic verse: THE WORD-ACCENT AND THE VERSE-ACCENT MUST FALL ON ONE AND THE SAME SYLLABLE; AND THIS COMMON ACCENT CONSISTS IN STRESS OF TONE.

Compared with Greek and Latin metres, our verse gains in intensity and force, loses in grace and flexibility. This is especially true of our earliest verse, before the influence of the classics had added so much grace and freedom, and, at the same time, regularity,

to our rhythm. The Greek verse sped swiftly and lightly, like an Olympian athlete; the early Germanic verse had the clanging tread of a warrior in mail.

As to the agreement of the verse-accent with the *rhetorical* or the *syntactical* accent, there is no fixed rule. The agreement may lie on the surface, as in Pope's or Dryden's verse, where a rhetorical effect is always evident:—

"When music softens or when dancing fires."

But in other verse there is not the same effort to bring out a rhetorical accent; *cf.* Keats:—

"His eyes from the dead leaves, or one small pulse."

In general, the metrical stress and the syntactical accent must agree; for otherwise an intolerable emphasis would be thrown upon the unimportant words.

We may here note that traces of accentual verse are found in the oldest Latin literature. Latin poetry of the classical period took its metres from the Greek; but in the so-called Saturnian Verse we have undoubted accentual rhythm, and also *rime*, which, indeed, is a natural product of the accentual system.

#### § 4. PAUSES.

The foundation of rhythm is a regular succession of equal time-intervals. In English verse these are marked off by accented syllables. A *group* of such "bars" or "feet" may be marked off by a regular stop in the sense; another group follows, repeating the conditions of the first,—and so on. But this would be intolerably monotonous. Variety is obtained not only by license

in the distribution of heavy and light syllables, but also by the use of *pauses*. There are two kinds of pause: the *compensating* and the *rhythmical*. The compensating pause takes the place of a syllable. While in general the rule holds that modern verse regularly varies accented with unaccented syllables, *i.e.*, gives at least one light to every heavy syllable, there are cases where the accent is preceded or followed by a pause in place of the light syllable. This omission of the unaccented syllable may be *regular*,—as in the already quoted “Break, break, break,” where the pauses are very evident; or it may be somewhat irregular, as in the lines quoted by Ruskin (*Prosody*, p. 34):—

“Till’ said’ to Tweed’:  
 Though’ ye rin’ wi’ speed’,  
 And I’ rin’ slaw’,  
 Whar ye’ droon’ ae’ man  
 I’ droon’ twa’.”

The metrical effect, say of the first line, would be the same if we read: “The Till, it said to Tweed.”—Or the omission may be isolated and quite irregular. *Cf.* the witches’ song in *Macbeth*:—

“Tóad, that únder cold stóne,  
 Dáys and níghts hast thírty-óne,” etc.

“Lét your ódour dríve hénce  
 Áll mists that dázzle sénse.”—Fletcher.

Guest condemns this license between syllables of one word—as “sún-beám,” “moón-light” (Spenser). It may be said in general terms of this compensating pause that the spirit of our modern verse is against its isolated use, but allows it when it is employed with regularity. Compare expressions like “Aúld láng

sýne,” or Cowper’s “Toll’ for’ the brave’.” Dramatic verse is very familiar with this pause. Dowden speaks of the dramatic pause “expressing surprise or sudden emotion, or accompanying a change of speakers, and leaving a gap in the verse,—a gap through which we feel the wind of passion and of song.” One famous line in *Measure for Measure* goes so far as to let the pause compensate for a (technically) heavy syllable:—

“Merciful heaven!  
 Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt,  
 Splitt’st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,  
 Than the soft myrtle. But man, proud man,” etc.

Certain editors have even proclaimed this verse corrupt because hopelessly unrhythmical. Scanned by the fingers, it *is* unrhythmical. But let any one read it carefully aloud, give due weight to the (technically light) syllable “soft” (which is naturally emphatic as opposed to “unwedgeable and gnarled”), and also to the decided pause after “myrtle,”—and the line will be musical enough.

*The Rhythmical Pause.*—Here there is no dropped syllable in the case. It is simply a pause in the verse which generally, but not always, corresponds to a pause in the sense. The compensating pause allowed the omission of a syllable: the rhythmical pause frequently is followed by an extra syllable. Of course, the end of the verse furnishes the chief rhythmical pause. When the sense also pauses here, the verse is called “end-stopt” (the technical term used by Shakspeare scholars): when the sense does not so pause, the verse is called “run-on.” But there is another pause after either the accented or the unaccented syllable, commonly about