

## CHAPTER VII.—METRES OF ENGLISH VERSE.

### § I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

HAVING considered the elements which make up our versification, it remains to treat English Metres themselves. The task is not easy. There is an infinite amount of contradiction about the very foundations of our verse. Mr. Ruskin asserts that stress "may be considered as identical with quantity" (preface to his *Eng. Prosody*). Mr. Henry Sweet, while granting that accent tends to lengthen a short syllable, and lack of accent tends to shorten a long syllable, says emphatically that quantity can *not* "be identified with stress." The union of quantity and accent is only a *tendency*; and Schipper's statement (quoted on p. 138) may be accepted as true. In all cases, we should base a metrical rule on observed facts; not, as the late Mr. Lanier did in his *Science of English Verse*, force a theory on all possible facts, whether carefully analyzed and tested, or not. Thus, there is much justice in Mr. Ruskin's statement that "the measures of verse . . . have for second and more important function that of assisting and in part compelling clearness of utterance, thus enforcing with noble emphasis, noble words, and making them, by their audible symmetry, not only emphatic but memorable"; but it is only a statement, an observation, — nothing upon which we may found any rule. The

only method that can lead to good in the study of English verse is to make the study historical and analytical. Every conclusion must be based on a careful study of facts.

Then we have this difficult matter of nomenclature. Certain names for "feet" in classical metres — iamb, trochee, anapest, dactyl — were long ago applied to English verse. But every one knows, or ought to know, that the classical iamb or dactyl is very different from the iamb or dactyl of modern poetry. Is it right, then, to apply to verse based on accents a term which properly applies only to verse based on quantity? The answers vary. Some say we may so apply the terms, bearing always in mind the difference of the two systems of verse. Others propose to drop the old terms, and substitute the "*rising*" foot of two or of three syllables (iamb, anapest), and the "*falling*" foot of two or of three syllables (trochee, dactyl). Still another class propose that we give up any distinction between iamb and trochee, or rising and falling, and in all cases *begin the first foot of the verse with the first stress-syllable*. The character of the verse will then be regulated (1) by the number of metrical stresses: as 3-accent verse, 5-accent, etc.; (2) by the presence or absence of a syllable or syllables before the first stress; and (3) by the number and distribution of unaccented syllables or of pauses. — In marking the feet of a verse, some writers use upright lines to denote the relative stress: thus, iamb ||, trochee ||, anapest ||, dactyl ||. The old system is, however, retained by many:  $\cup \rightarrow$ ,  $- \cup$ ,  $\cup \cup \rightarrow$ ,  $- \cup \cup$ .

Of these three answers, the advantage would lie with the last, were it not that it lacks precision when we

apply it to actual verse. If we retain the old names, we are able by a single word to give the general character of the verse. We may venture the decision that while it is productive of little good to insist on precise terms for the *separate feet*, we are justified in applying these old names to *the general movement of the whole verse*. We need not waste our time in establishing such results as Mr. Spedding's distinction of "*quantity*" as a dactyl, and "*quiddity*" as a tribrach. But we shall find it profitable and, in the present state of things, necessary, to speak of iambic or trochaic or anapestic or dactylic verse; — though in regard to the last Mr. Swinburne tells us (*Studies in Song*, p. 68) that "dactylic . . . forms of verse are unnatural and abhorrent" to the English language. Our chief concern, therefore, will be for the metrical scheme underlying the verse. No one can read Pope, or even Shakspeare and Milton, without being conscious of such a definite metrical scheme. In the so-called "heroic" verse used by these poets, the reader feels that the general scheme is a regular alternation of light and heavy syllables, opening with light and ending with heavy, this last stress being the fifth from the beginning. Remembering that quantity has only a general and "regulative" office here, and that accent is "the grave governour of numbers," there is no harm in calling this scheme iambic. The use of such a metrical scheme depends on the regularity of the verse. For long poems, and for those which follow Pope's advice about "smooth numbers," terms like iambic or dactylic apply very well. But a great mass of lyric verse is difficult to bring under definite metrical systems; for these poems, our only test

is to count the accents, and note the number and distribution of light syllables. In Milton's *L'Allegro*, out of 142 regular verses, 86 have the iambic, 56 the trochaic movement. But it is all practically the same metre. A trochaic movement, by the way, is not simply a verse which begins with an accented syllable. Such a verse is

"Scátter the réar of dárkness thín,"

but it is iambic. There is trochaic movement in

"Stóutly strúts his dámes befóre."

But all "trochaic" means here is that the light syllable of the first foot is dropped.

There is technically a change of movement from trochaic to iambic in the couplet, —

"Sometime walking, not unseen,  
By hedge-row elms, on hillocks green; —

but it is a very slight change. *Cf.* for shorter lyric work, William Blake's *Tiger*. — We conclude that the use of such terms as iambic or trochaic is, for these short lyric verses, of doubtful advantage. The unit of a modern verse is a stress-syllable together with one or two (rarely three) unaccented syllables. From two to (say) eight of these units may be combined to form a verse. Verses of more than eight "groups," or "bars," or "feet," cannot easily be recognized by the ear; four and five are popular numbers. Now, when each of these feet contains the same number of *unaccented* syllables (it must have one, and only one, rhythmically *accented* syllable), the verse is regular. When the number varies, the verse is irregular. The poem (*L'Allegro*) just cited is regular; the movement is a

regular alternation of light and heavy. So with blank verse, as a general rule. But there is a great mass of irregular verse: take, *e.g.*, Swinburne's Chorus from *Atalanta in Calydon*:—

“When the hóunds of Spring are on Winter's tráces,  
The móther of mónth's in méadow or pláin  
Fills the sháadows and windy pláces  
With lísp of léaves and rípple of ráin.”

No one will deny that there are both melody and vigor in this. No exact foot is adopted as unit; the verse is irregular in the number of light syllables; but there is an undoubted anapestic movement. There are four accents to each verse, and in the third verse the first “foot” has no light syllable at all.

We may now go on to the consideration of our metres in detail. But first let us try to sum up, from what has been said, the substance of English metrical principles. A verse of our poetry must be looked at from three points of view.—

I. THE METRICAL SCHEME.—The poet decides—consciously or unconsciously matters not—that he will base his verse on a certain scheme, will give it a certain movement. It makes no difference whether or not other schemes now and then are suggested. He plans his verse as an architect plans a building,—with a general idea of the style and effect intended. The majority of his verses will convey the impression of a definite scheme. This scheme he may follow with great fidelity, or with great license; but he *cannot in any case follow it absolutely*. First, he will intentionally deviate from it, in order to give variety to his verse. If his scheme is iambic, he will now and then begin

with a heavy syllable, or take a similar license, such as slipping in extra syllables. *Secondly*, he involuntarily deviates from the scheme by reason of the laws of language itself. So we come to

II. THE ACCENT AND QUALITY OF WORDS.—The poet's heavy syllables cannot be all equally heavy, the light cannot be all equally light. Mr. Sweet gives the proportion of stress for the different syllables of “impenetrability” thus: im-pe-ne-tra-bi-li-ty. We are not here concerned with the finer gradations of stress, but recognize only three: *primary*, *secondary*, and *unaccented* syllables,—or, as Ellis terms them, *strong*, *mean*, and *weak*. But verse is constantly forced to accept a mean accent, now as strong, now as weak; and so the strict metrical scheme is violated. Here we see how little reliance can be put upon “feet” in and for themselves. In the ballad “High upon Highlands and low upon Tay,” *High upon* is a so-called dactyl; read “High upon a golden throne,” and *on* is a metrically strong syllable equal to *High*.<sup>1</sup> Again, the *quality* (and also the quantity) of words can vary infinitely; the same metrical scheme may be filled with thin and short, or with full and long sounds.—We have already noted the occasional direct conflict of word-accent and verse-accent (*cf.* p. 142).

III. ACCENT AND QUALITY IN THE SENTENCE.—As with syllables of words, so with words of a sentence. “It is a mistake,” says Mr. Ellis, “to suppose that there are commonly or regularly, five stresses, one to each measure” (he is speaking of Chaucer's verse of five

<sup>1</sup> In the first case: high up-on; in the second case: high up-on.

measures); and this is correct, if we take the point of view of the syntactical or rhetorical accent. In reading verse, we often run lightly over four or five syllables in order to accent a prominent word with special force. A great many of Pope's and Dryden's verses have, rhetorically speaking, only four accents, as:—"Which Jews might kiss, and Infidels adore." Often there are only two or three real stress-syllables. Mr. Ellis (*Early Eng. Pron.* i. p. 334) marks the stress on the syllables of the six opening lines of Byron's *Corsair*, as follows, the relative amount of stress being denoted by the figures 0, 1, 2:—

<sup>1</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
 "O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea,  
<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
 Our thoughts as boundless and our souls as free,  
<sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
 Far as the breeze can bear, the billows foam,  
<sup>0</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
 Survey our empire, and behold our home!  
<sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
 These are our realms, no limits to their sway,—  
<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>0</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
 Our flag the sceptre all who meet obey."

Different readers, as Ellis remarks, may vary in some details of stress; but the proportion here given will be preserved in the main by every one. The pause, as we easily feel, tends to divide the verse into two, sometimes three groups, each of which is dominated by a chief accent: note especially lines 2 and 4, which resemble the favorite "balance" of Pope and Dryden. Now, the strict metrical scheme calls for 02, 02, 02, 02; to this the last line comes nearest. But the nature of spoken words is such that this scheme can never be exactly and perfectly realized. When we say that a verse has five accents, we mean that the metrical

scheme calls for five stress-syllables; but we do not expect the concrete verse to show five strictly equal stresses. We do demand, however, that the concrete verse shall give us the *general effect* of five stress-syllables, shall make us feel the uniform metrical scheme underlying the rhythm.

Here, then, are three sets of claims. IT IS THE BUSINESS OF THE POET TO MAKE AN EQUATION OF THESE CLAIMS, THE METRICAL SCHEME HAVING THE PREFERENCE; and in proportion as this is done with such art that we feel no conflict, no clash, by so much does the poet's handicraft approach perfection.

## § 2. ANGLO-SAXON METRES.

English Metres fall into three groups or periods. The first period is the *Anglo-Saxon*. It embraces the interval from the Germanic conquest of Britain in the Fifth Century, to the Norman conquest in the Eleventh Century. This latter date is not exact. Not only did the old metres still flourish under the early Norman kings, but they were used as late as the Sixteenth Century. Still, the actual period when our poetry knew no other metrical rules than those of the old Germanic verse ended with the conquest. The high-water mark of this old poetry is seen in *Beowulf*, in certain of the "Cædmon" poems, and in the graceful verses of the poet Cynewulf. The second period is that of *Transition*, and ends with the New Learning and the Italian influences of the reign of Henry VIII. Chaucer is the one great name of this period. The third and *Modern* period begins with the Earl of Surrey and with Wyatt, and reaches its greatest height in Shakspeare and Milton.

The characteristics of the metre of this our own period are regularity and harmony, a stricter ordering of light and heavy syllables, proportion, symmetry, ease. The main characteristic of the earliest period in our metre is strength, — a sort of breathless vigor: the accented syllables are the chief consideration, and they are emphasized not only by their weight, but also by the use of beginning-rime. For the period of transition, we have mingled characteristics of both the other periods, which must be described in detail. In naming Chaucer as its greatest poet, we must bear in mind that he stands much nearer to our own period than to the Anglo-Saxon. His versification is smooth and vigorous; it is the language, not the metre, which makes him seem so removed from modern verse. But the metres before Chaucer, and, to some extent, after him, were not of the modern kind. He is the greatest name in the English poetry of his period, but he is not its most faithful representative. He stands above it.

*The Anglo-Saxon Verse*, at its best — say, as in *Beowulf* — consists of two half-verses, which may be said to correspond to the forward-and-back of the old dance. These two half-verses are firmly bound together by *beginning-rime*. It is, therefore, a mistake to print them in separate lines, as was done by the first editors. In each half-verse there are *two strongly accented syllables*: that is, — a reduction from the old dance-steps, — four to each verse.<sup>1</sup> *The first accented syllable of the*

<sup>1</sup> So Rieger, in his excellent article: "Alt- und Angelsächsische Verskunst," Ztsft. für deutsche Philologie, VII. 1 ff., on which the above rules are based. It is fair to state that some prominent scholars — e.g., Ten Brink — oppose this particular statement, and insist on *four* accents to each half-verse, — eight in all.

*second half-verse is the rime-giver: with it MUST rime one, and MAY rime both, of the accented syllables of the first half-verse: but the last accented syllable of the verse must not rime with the rime-giver.* Alternate rimes, however, were allowed. The following table gives the allowed rime-combinations: —

<i>a : a    a : x</i>	Beowulf wæs breme	blæd wide sprang.	18
<i>a : b    a : b</i>	thær æt hythe stod	hringed stefna.	33
<i>a : b    b : a</i>	tha wæron monige	the his mæg writhon.	2983
<i>a : x    a : x</i>	Beowulf mathelode	bearn Ecgtheowes.	1474
<i>x : a    a : x</i>	hi hine þa ætbæron	to brimes farothe.	28

As to the quality of the rime: (1) all vowels rime with one another, on account of the smooth breathing (*spiritus lenis*); (2) a consonant rimes with itself alone; further, *sp*-, *sc*-, *st*-, are treated as single consonants: *sp*- does not rime with *st*- or *sc*-, etc. (3) Unaccented syllables do not count as rime-bearers; thus in

"hean huses      hu him Hring-Dene" (116),

*hu him* are unaccented, and their *h* has nothing to do with the rime of the accented syllables.

These unaccented syllables may (1) *be omitted between the accented syllables*, as in the line last quoted: *hean hús*- are each accented; so with *Hring-Den*-. But *no half-verse may be entirely without an unaccented syllable*. Further, unaccented syllables may (2) *be added to the verse*, within reasonable limits. The favorite place for adding unaccented syllables is the beginning of the second half-verse: in

"manna ængum      thara the hit mid mundum bewand" (1462)

there are five such light syllables before the rime-giver.

The rules for the words on whose root-syllables the

verse-accent shall fall, are too detailed to be given here. In general it may be said that the accent falls on the important words — nouns, emphatic pronouns, and the like; and that an emphatic word cannot be unaccented.

The accented syllables were (in recitation) further marked by a stroke on some loud instrument. The importance of marking these four accents, the carelessness about unaccented syllables, are the chief characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon verse. The presence of such unaccented syllables and the consequent need to hurry over them so as to come to the strong ones, gave a sort of irregular but powerful leap to the rhythm. It is all weight, force, — no stately, even, measured pace, as in Greek epic verse. Our old metre inclines, like our ancestors themselves, to violence. It is at its best in describing the din of war, the uncertain swaying of warriors in battle; — a verse cadenced by the crashing blows of sword and axe. But we do not move forward. As was pointed out when we spoke of the parallelisms and repetitions of the Anglo-Saxon diction (p. 86), there is an eternal leaping back and forth, but there is little actual advance. As Scherer says, the Germanic nature was fond of raining its blows on the same spot. Often, however, the verse has an admirable effect, — as in the description of the launching of Beowulf's boat (211–218).

Our early verse was at its best in the Eighth and the Ninth Century. Then it began to decline. In *Byrhtnoth* (993) the verse is here and there corrupt, though still full of life and vigor. End-rime increases, whereas in the older verse it had been confined to short forms like "frôd and gôd." Now the two half-verses began to use end-rime as a new connecting-link. The *Rime*

*Song*, one of the poems preserved in the Exeter codex (Tenth Century), uses end-rime not only thus in the half-verses, but it also often binds whole verses together:—

“gold gearwade, gim hwearfade,  
sinc searwade, sib nearwade.”

Confusion sets in. Poems are written now in the old verse, now with end-rime alone, now with a mixture of both systems. Finally, two distinct tendencies emerge from the confusion.<sup>1</sup> One is conservative, and restores the old rules, which had fallen into neglect. A poem about *King Edward*, written in 1065, is correct in the old fashion, and has no trace of end-rime. The other tendency is progressive. Out of the old long-verse it makes two short verses connected by end-rime, — the short couplet. A *geographical difference* is now apparent. In the south, where Norman influences abound, there is a disposition to count the syllables and make the verse metrical as well as rhythmical — if we may so distinguish these terms. In the north, the old verse keeps upper hand. Although in this latter case the strict rules of rime and accent-position are somewhat relaxed, the poets are careful to avoid end-rime, and sometimes use beginning-rime to excess, thus breaking the old restrictions. But as late as Chaucer's time, the poet who wrote about *Piers the Plowman* is practically free from end-rime, and also correct in his use of beginning-rime: occasionally a line occurs (Skeat) like

“Tyle he had sylver for his sawes and his selynge,”

but the verse is fairly regular, and always vigorous. It is a sort of Indian Summer for the old Germanic metre.

<sup>1</sup> Schipper, p. 76.

The *Brut* of Layamon (about 1200) though earlier, is far less rigid in adherence to the old rules; it breaks away frequently into rimed short verses. But after it, and before or contemporary with *Piers Plowman*, come the so-called "alliterating romances" — *William of Palerne*, *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*, *The Destruction of Troy*, and others. These were of northern, the *Brut* of south-western, origin; and the latter betrays the Norman influence of its model.

A verse or two from *Piers Plowman* will show in more modern shape than Anglo-Saxon the swing of our old metre:—

"In a somer seson · whan soft was the sonne,  
I shope me in shroudes · as I a shepe were,  
In habite as an heremite · unholy of workes,  
Went wyde in this world · wondres to here . . .  
. . . I was wery forwardred · and went me to reste  
Under a brode banke · by a bornes side,  
And as I lay and lened · and loked in the wateres,  
I slombred in a slepyng · it sweyued so merye."

*Prologue*, 1-4, 7-10.

The first line breaks the old rime-rule of Anglo-Saxon metres; the others are in the main correct.

### § 3. THE TRANSITION PERIOD.

Even so late as the beginning of the Sixteenth Century we find the great Scotch poet, Dunbar, writing his longest piece — *The Twa Maryit Weman and the Wedo* — in the old "alliterating" verse. Although his longest poem, it is the only one known to us which he wrote in this metre. Still, he preserves substantially the old rules, barring a tendency to overdo his "alliteration."

End-rime is practically excluded. But on the other hand, we find elsewhere decided changes and corruptions overmastering the Germanic verse. In the *Brut*, these changes and corruptions do not succeed in removing the main features of Anglo-Saxon metre, although in many cases end-rime breaks a long-verse into a rimed couplet which has, or has not, beginning-rime. But this exceptional couplet of Layamon becomes regular and sole principle in *King Horn*, a popular romance dating from the second quarter of the Thirteenth Century, — say about 1240. The metre of *King Horn* seems, therefore, to be the old verse banishing beginning-rime as principle and assuming end-rime to bind together the half-verses into a couplet, and giving accent to syllables previously unaccented. This change was helped by the example of the popular French eight-syllable verse (also in rimed couplets) which was introduced about this time into our southern poetry; but the two systems were as yet not identical. The *King Horn* measure is, like its parent verse, free to drop unaccented syllables, while the French verse is more regular. Later, the two systems fall together (the French predominating) in the metre of such poems as Chaucer's *House of Fame* (about 1384). — For license of dropping light syllables, *cf.*

"The sé bigán to flówe,  
And Hórn Child to rówe," etc.

But there are other corruptions of the old verse. Instead of splitting one long-verse into a short couplet, end-rime binds together two or more long-verses. Beginning-rime thus released from its old duties grows

erratic, now flooding the verse to excess, now disappearing altogether, and becoming simply an ornament.<sup>1</sup> The accented syllables, too, sometimes increase to three in each half-verse, so that the whole verse is practically an "Alexandrine." Such corrupt (that is, corrupt as far as the old rules are concerned) verse became popular in the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Century, particularly in the ballad poetry. Cf. one of Laurence Minot's political songs, written before 1350:—

"Whare er ye, Skottes of Saint Johnes tounne?  
The boste of yowre baner es betin all doune;  
When ye bosting will bede,<sup>2</sup> Sir Edward es boune<sup>3</sup>  
For to kindel<sup>4</sup> yow care and crak yowre croune."

We notice an increasing regularity in the use of unaccented syllables, as in the lyric poems of this period generally.

Most interesting and important, however, is the use of this old verse in our *early English Drama*. "The earliest popular productions of dramatic literature, like the lyric, gave a last refuge to the old national measure, although the latter was forced to share its privileges with more aristocratic guests" (Schipper). The old Moralities and Mysteries let their ordinary characters speak in this metre; while "Virginius, Appius, Conscience, Cambyses, Venus, Cupid, and such distinguished personages conversed in formal Septenary or Alexandrine (after classical models), or else in light, regular couplets" — (after the French). Among many other old plays, the already (Part I. p. 65) mentioned *Every Man* contains much of the old metre; so does our first English comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister*. But

<sup>1</sup> Schipper, p. 214.    <sup>2</sup> 'offer.'    <sup>3</sup> 'ready.'    <sup>4</sup> 'prepare.'

this brings us almost to the time of Blank Verse and the modern period; and we note even in the metre of these old plays, rough as it often is, a tendency to regularity and precision. Unaccented syllables are omitted only after the middle pause, or cæsura; and in every way the influence of the now popular French and Italian measures makes itself felt.

The last stage of the old Germanic rhythm, before it is lost in the modern measures of the Elizabethan age, is the so-called *Skeltonic Verse*. John Skelton (died 1529) employed it often and happily, but he did not originate it; for we find it used here and there in the old Mysteries. But it is justly associated with Skelton's name. He wields it with much power in his light humorous pieces, such as the *Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe* or *Colin Clout* (a satire on the clergy), and in his *Morality Magnyfyccence*; indeed, the reckless priest was a fitting guide and comrade for this spendthrift metre which finally dissipated the last inheritance of ancestral verse. We give a line or two from *Phyllyp Sparowe* (description of Envy)<sup>1</sup>:—

"He frowneth ever,  
He laugheth never,  
Even nor morowe;  
But other mennes sorowe  
Causeth him to grin  
And rejoice therein.  
No sleep can him catche,  
But ever doth watche," etc.

This restless movement is quite different from the couplet in *King Horn*.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guest, p. 396.



Finally, we abandon all influences or reminiscences of the old Anglo-Saxon verse, and come to what must pass as its modern representative, — the common four-accent metre, variously treated in a host of ballads and lyrics, and in such tales as Scott's or Byron's, or in Coleridge's *Christabel*, in a preface to which the poet announced his system of counting accents rather than syllables, as a new kind of verse!

*Foreign Influences.* — Schipper names three foreign metrical systems which came into our literature during this period: the Latin *Septenary*; the French *Short Couplet*; and the French *Alexandrine*. — In late Latin poetry a metre had become common which consisted of a half-verse of four accents, the last accent falling on the last syllable, joined to a half-verse of three accents with double ("feminine") ending: on account of the seven accents of the whole verse, the metre was called *Septenarius*. It was furnished with end-rime. Both in the church hymns, and in the songs of wandering "clerks" who strolled from nation to nation secure in their common language, this metre was very popular. Cf. the following opening couplet of a convivial song (cf. p. 52): —

"Méum ést propósitúm ín tabérna móri  
Ét vinúm appósitúm sítiénti óri," etc.

This measure was soon used for English verse. The *Poema Morale*, already mentioned as a sort of medieval Gray's *Elegy*, is a good example of the rimed Septenary, though the trochaic movement is dropped: —

"Ich ám nu élder thán ich wás | a wíntre ánd a lóre.  
Ich wéalde móre thán idúde | mi wít oh tó be móre.  
To lóng ich hábbe chíld ibén | a wórde ánd a dáde.  
Théih íbíe a wínter eáld | to júng ich ám on ráde."

"I am now older than I was in winters (years) and in lore (experience); I wield (control myself) more than I did, my wisdom ought to be greater. Too long I have been a child in words and deeds; old though I be in years, I am too young in counsel." — The alternation of accented and unaccented syllables is observed; there is occasional "slurring" of light syllables; the general movement is prevailingly iambic. This same metre *without rime* is used by the monk Orm in his *Ormulum*, — a sort of paraphrase and commentary for the gospels of the church year, written early in the Thirteenth Century. Orm is more regular; and is invariably iambic. This rimeless metre of Orm's "appears to have found little applause and still less imitation." The Septenary, split into two verses of four and three accents respectively, is very popular in later English in the "common metre," and in ballads; while its original form, with some modifications, is retained in the vigorous measure which Chapman chose for his translation of Homer's *Iliad*. The translators, Golding and Phaer, also employed it. We find it frequently in modern poetry, e.g., in Byron's verses (which are not to be split into "common" measure): —

"There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,  
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay:  
'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone, which fades so  
fast,  
But the tender bloom of heart is gone ere youth itself be past."

Here, however, as with Chapman, the rime is masculine.

Of indirect Latin origin, but taken directly from the French, is the *Short Riming Couplet of four accents*,