

# **THE PIONEER.**

**MARCH, 1843.**

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## **EMBELLISHMENTS.**

**ORESTES SUPPLICATING APOLLO FOR PURIFICATION.** From Flaxman; by J. Cheney.  
**DICKENS AND THE ARTIST IN BOOTS.** By D. C. Johnston.

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

<b>A VISION,</b> . . . . .	<b>97</b>	<b>SONNETS,</b> . . . . .	<b>127</b>
<b>A LAMENT.</b> By W. W. STORY,	: 100	<b>THE ARMENIAN'S DAUGHTER,</b> . . . . .	<b>128</b>
<b>NOTES UPON ENGLISH VERSE.</b> By EDGAR		<b>THE STREET.</b> By JAMES R. LOWELL,	<b>131</b>
<b>ALLAN POE,</b> . . . . .	<b>102</b>	<b>JOHN FLAXMAN.</b> By W. W. STORY,	<b>132</b>
<b>THE MAIDEN'S DEATH.</b> By ELIZABETH			
<b>B. BARRETT,</b> . . . . .	<b>112</b>		
<b>THE BIRTH-MARK.</b> By NATHANIEL HAW-			
<b>THORNE,</b> . . . . .	<b>113</b>		
<b>A LOVE THOUGHT,</b> . . . . .	<b>119</b>		
<b>THE SHADOW OF THE OBELISK.</b> By T. W.			
<b>PARSONS,</b> . . . . .	<b>120</b>		
<b>DREAM-LOVE.</b> By I. B. WRIGHT,	. 121		

### **LITERARY NOTICES.**

<b>1. The Neighbors,</b> . . . . .	<b>141</b>
<b>2. Life and Writings of Ebenezer Porter</b>	
<b>Mason,</b> . . . . .	<b>142</b>
<b>3. Mesopotamia and Assyria, from the</b>	
<b>Earliest Ages to the Present Time,</b> . . . . .	<b>142</b>
<b>LETTERS FROM GERMANY. No. I,</b> . . . . .	<b>143</b>

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 NOTES UPON ENGLISH VERSE.
 

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 BY EDGAR A. POE.
 

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WHILE much has been written upon the structure of the Greek and Latin rhythms, and even of the Hebrew, little attempt has been made at examining that of any of the modern tongues. As regards the English, comparatively *nothing* has been done. It may be said, indeed, that we are without a treatise upon our own versification. In our ordinary grammars, and in our works upon rhetoric in general, may be found occasional chapters, it is true, which have the heading, "versification;" but these chapters are, in all instances, exceedingly meagre. They pretend to nothing like analysis; they propose nothing resembling system; they make no effort even at rule, properly so called; every thing depends upon "authority." They are confined, in fact, to mere exemplification of the supposed varieties of English *feet* and English *lines*; although in no work within my knowledge are these feet correctly given, or these lines detailed in their proper extent. Yet what has been mentioned, is all—if we except the occasional introduction of some inessential pedagogue-ism, such as this, borrowed from the Greek prosodies:

"When a syllable is wanting, the verse is said to be *catalectic*; when the measure is exact, the line is *acatalectic*; when there is a redundant syllable, it forms *hypermeter*."

Whether a line be termed catalectic or acatalectic, is really a point of secondary importance; and it is even possible that the student may be able to decide, promptly, when the *a* should be employed and when omitted, yet be incognizant, at the same time, of much that is worth knowing, in respect to the structure of verse.

But, in fact, few questions of equal importance, have received so little attention as the *rationale* of rhythm in general. The Greek and the Latin prosodies have their *rules*, but nothing more. The philosophy of these rules, is untouched. No one has thought of reducing rule, in general, to its lowest terms—to its ultimate expression—in law. I have long thought that it is only by an analysis such as is here suggested, with disregard, for the time, of the mere conventionalities and unwarranted assumptions which disgrace our treatises on the ancient rhythms, that we shall be able to arrive, if ever, at any intelligible view of these rhythms, themselves. Quantity is a point in the investigation of which the lumber of mere learning may be dispensed with, if ever in any. Its appreciation is universal. It appertains to no region, nor race, nor æra in especial. To melody and to harmony the Greeks hearkened with ears precisely similar to those which we employ, for similar purposes, at present; and a

pendulum at Athens would have vibrated much after the same fashion as does a pendulum in the city of Penn.

But while a full and unpedantic discussion of metre in general, is much needed, the purpose of this article extends no farther than to some practical observations on the English rhythms ; and I am led to these observations solely by the hope of supplying, to some extent, the singular deficiency of our ordinary treatises on the topic.

A leading defect in each of these treatises is the confining of the subject to mere *versification*, while metre, or rhythm, in general, is the real question at issue. Nor am I aware of a single one of our grammars which even rightly defines the term "versification" itself. "Versification," says a work now before me,\* perhaps the very best of its kind, and of which the accuracy is far more than usual, "is the art of arranging words into lines of correspondent length, so as to produce harmony by the regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity." The commencement of this definition might apply, indeed, to the *art of versification*, but not to versification itself. Versification is not the *art* of arranging, &c., but the actual arranging—a distinction too obvious to need comment. The error, here, is exactly analogous with one which has been too long permitted to disgrace the initial page of every one of our school grammars. I allude to the definition of English grammar itself. "English Grammar," it is said "is the art of speaking and writing the English language correctly." This phrasology, or something essentially similar, is employed, I believe, by Bacon, Miller, Fisk, Greenleaf, Ingersoll, Kirkland, Cooper, Flint, Pue, Comly and many others. These gentlemen, it is presumed, adopted it without examination from Murray, who derived it from Lily (whose work was "*quam solam Regia Majestas in omnibus scholis docendam præcipit*") and who appropriated it, without acknowledgment, but with some unimportant modification, from the Latin grammar of Leoniceus. But it may be readily demonstrated that this definition, so complacently received, is not, and cannot be, a proper definition of English grammar. A definition is that which so describes its object, as to distinguish it from all others. It is no definition of any one thing, if its terms are applicable to any one other. But if it be demanded—"What is the *design*, the *end*, the *aim*, of English grammar?" our obvious and sole answer must be, "the art of speaking and writing the English language correctly;" and this answer embodies the precise words which are employed as the definition of grammar itself. But the object to be obtained by any means, is, assuredly, not the means. English grammar, and the end contemplated by English grammar, are two matters very distinct; nor can the one be any more reasonably regarded as the other, than a fishing-hook as a fish. The definition,

therefore, which is applicable in the latter instance, *cannot*, in the former, be true. Grammar, in general, is the analysis of language; English grammar of the English.

But to return to versification, as defined in our extract above. "It is the art," says this extract, "of arranging words into lines of *correspondent length*." But not so. A single moment's reflection will suffice to assure us that a correspondence in the *length* of lines is by no means essential. Pindaric odes are, surely, instances of versification; yet these compositions are noted for extreme *diversity* in the length of their lines.

The arrangement is, moreover, said to be for the purpose of producing "*harmony* by the regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity." But *harmony* is not the sole aim. In the construction of a verse its *melody* should not be left out of view; and this is a point which all our prosodies have most unaccountably forborne to touch. A few concise *reasoned* rules upon this topic should form a portion of all systems of rhythm.

"So as to produce harmony by the *regular alternation*," &c. Here again I must dissent. A *regular* alternation, as described, forms no part of the principle of metre. The arrangement of spondees and dactyls, for example, in the Greek hexameter, is an arrangement which may be termed *at random*. At least it is arbitrary. Without interference with the line as a whole, a dactyl may be substituted for a spondee, or a spondee for a dactyl, at any point other than the ultimate and penultimate feet, of which the former is always a spondee, the latter nearly always a dactyl. Here it is evident that we have no "*regular alternation of long and short syllables*." But, not to dwell upon the hexameter, instances from other metres may be adduced without number, in which an admixture of various kinds of feet is the law of the verse, and not merely a license or variation of the law. Such instances I shall take occasion to quote in the course of this article.

"So as to produce harmony by the *regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity*." In other words, by the alternation of long and short syllables; for, in rhythm, all syllables are necessarily either short or long. But our grammarian is, undoubtedly, wrong again. Not only do I deny the necessity of any *regularity* in the succession of feet, and by consequence, of syllables, but dispute the essentiality of any alternation, regular or irregular, of syllables long and short. Our author, be it observed, is now engaged in a definition of versification in general, not of English versification in especial. But the Greek and Latin metres abound in the spondee and the pyrrhic; the former consisting of two long syllables, the latter of two short: and there are innumerable instances of the immediate succession of many spondees, or of many pyrrhics. The mere existence of either of these feet, however, is sufficient to overthrow the definition; for there

\* The "English Grammar" of Gould Brown.

is no *difference* in the syllables of either the one or the other. But among some hexameters attempted by Professor Longfellow, in a translation of Tegnér's "Children of the Lord's Supper," we find the following verses :

Clear was the Heaven and blue, and May with her  
cap crowned with roses,  
Stood in her holiday dress in the fields, and the wind  
and the brooklet  
Murmured gladness and peace, God's peace, with lips  
rosy tinted.

By scanning, these lines are thus divided :

Cléar wás thē | héavēn ānd | blúe ānd | Máy wíth  
hēr | cáp crōwn'd wíth | rōsēs,  
Stóod ín hēr | hólídáy | dréss ín thē | fíelds ānd thē |  
wínd ānd thē | bróoklēt  
Múrmúr'd | gládnéss ānd | pēace Gód's | pēace wíth |  
líps rósý | úntéd.

In the last of these examples, we perceive that *five* long syllables meet. Here, again, is a passage from Silius Italicus :

Fallis te mensas inter quod credis inermem  
Tot bellis quæsitâ viro, tot cædibus armat  
Majestas eterna ducem : si admoveris ora  
Cannas et Trebium ante oculos Trasymenaque busta,  
Et Pauli stare ingentem miraberis umbram.

These Hexameters, with the proper elisions, are thus scanned :

Fállis | tē mēn- | sās ín- | tēr quod | crēdis ín- | ér-  
mēm  
Tót hēl- | líis quæ- | sitā ví- | ró tót | cædíbus ārmát  
Májēs- | tās ē- | tērnā dū- | cēm s' ād- | móvērís | órā  
Cánnās | ét Trē- | b' ānt' ócū lós Trasy- | mēnáquē |  
bústā  
Et Páu- | lí stá- | r' íngēn- | tēm mí- | rábōrís | úm-  
brám.

It will be seen that, in the first and last of these lines, we have only two short syllables in thirteen, with an immediate or uninterrupted succession of no less than *nine* long syllables. But how are we to reconcile all this with a definition of versification, which describes it as "the art of arranging words into lines of correspondent length, so as to produce harmony by the *regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity*?"

It might be urged, however, that our prosodist's *intention* was to speak of the English metres alone, and that by omitting all mention of the spondee and pyrrhic, he has virtually avowed their exclusion from our rhythms. A grammarian is never excusable on the ground of "good intentions." We demand from him, if from any one, rigorous precision of style. But let us grant the design. Let us admit that our author, and that all writers upon English prosody, have, in defining versification at large, intended merely a definition of the English. All reject the pyrrhic and the spondee. All admit the iambus, which consists of a short syllable followed by a long ; the trochee, which is the converse of the iambus ; the dactyl, which is formed of one long syllable followed by two short ; and the anapæst, two short syllables suc-

ceeded by a long. The pyrrhic is properly rejected ; and it may well be questioned, whether any foot so equivocal as one consisting of *two short* syllables, had ever more than a chimerical existence, even in the ancient rhythms ; but I shall show, hereafter, that there is no cause for dismissal of the spondee. In the meantime, the acknowledged dactyl and anapæst are sufficient to establish our proposition in regard to the "alternation," &c., without reference to feet which are assumed to exist in the Greek and Latin metres alone : for an anapæst and a dactyl may meet in the same line ; when, of course, we shall have an uninterrupted succession, either of four long, or of four short syllables. The meeting of these two feet, to be sure, is an accident not contemplated in the definition now discussed : for this definition, in insisting upon "a *regular alternation* of syllables differing in quantity," insists upon a *regular* succession of feet ; but an example will fully sustain our hypothesis.

Sing tō mī | Isabēlle !

is the opening line of a little ballad, now before me, which proceeds in the same rhythm — a peculiarly beautiful one. The meeting of four short syllables is the consequence of a dactyl succeeded by an anapæst. But more than this : there can be no difficulty in specifying English lines composed entirely of a regular succession of syllables *all of the same quantity*. "The March" of Arthur Cleveland Coxe, for example, thus commences :

*March ! march ! march !*  
Making sounds as they tread,  
Ho ! ho ! how they step  
Going down to the dead.

The line italicised is formed of three *cæsuras*. The *cæsura* is a perfect foot, consisting of a single long syllable, and has been causelessly neglected by all writers upon English prosody.

It has thus been made evident that there is not a *single point* of the definition in question, which does not involve an error. And for anything more intelligible or more satisfactory than this definition, we shall look in vain in any published treatise upon the subject. But so general and so total a failure can be referred only to some radical misconception. That by the term "versification" our prosodists *intend* rhythm, or metre, in general, cannot be doubted ; for the making of a single verse, is versification ; yet from no single verse of a poem can be gathered any idea of its general rhythm. For the full appreciation of this rhythm, there is required a collation of each verse, if not with every one other in the poem, at least with every one of its immediate predecessors. *No line is independent*. It was a keen sense of this principle which enabled Pope so far to surpass his contemporaries, many of whom he properly styled "couplet-makers ;" alluding, no doubt, to their practice of breaking up poems into distinct yet monotonous musical impressions of two lines

each; and it was a keener sense of this principle than even Pope possessed, which enabled Milton to surpass even Pope in the adjusting or balancing of his harmonies through paragraphs of greater length than the latter ever ventured to attempt.

The word "verse" is derived (through *versus*) from the Latin *verto*, *I turn*, and has reference to the turning at the end of the line and commencing anew with a capital letter. It can be nothing but this derivation which has led to the error of our writers upon prosody. It is this which has seduced them into regarding the *line* itself — the *versus* or turning — as an essential, or principle, of metre; and hence the term "versification" has been employed as sufficiently general, or inclusive, for treatises upon rhythm in general. Hence, also, the precise catalogue of a few varieties of English *lines*, when these varieties are, in fact, almost without limit.

I shall dismiss entirely, from the consideration of the principle of *rhythm*, the idea of versification, or the construction of verse. In so doing we shall avoid a world of confusion. Verse is, indeed, an afterthought, or an embellishment, or an improvement, rather than an element of rhythm; and this is the fact which, perhaps, more than any thing else, has induced the easy admission, into the realms of Poesy, of such works as the "Télémaque" of Fénelon. In the elaborate modulation of their sentences they fulfil the idea of metre; and their arrangement, or rather their division, into lines (which could be readily effected), would do little more than present this idea in a popularly intelligible dress.

Holding these things in view, the prosodist who rightly examines that which constitutes the external, or most immediately recognisable, form of Poetry, will commence with the definition of *Rhythm*. Now rhythm, from the Greek *ῥυθμός*, *number*, is a term which, in its present application, very nearly conveys its own idea. No more proper word could be employed to present the conception intended; for rhythm, in prosody, is, in its last analysis, identical with *time* in music. For this reason I have used, throughout this article, as synonymous with rhythm, the word metre from *μετρον*, *mesura*. Either the one or the other may be defined as *the arrangement of words into two or more consecutive, equal, pulsations of time*. These pulsations are *feet*. Two feet, at least, are requisite to constitute a *rhythm*; just as, in mathematics, two units are necessary to form *number*. The syllables of which the foot consists, when the foot is not a syllable in itself, are subdivisions of the pulsations. No equality is demanded in these subdivisions. It is only required that, so far as regards two consecutive feet at least, the sum of the times of the syllables in one, shall be equal to the sum of the times of the syllables in the other. Beyond two pulsations there is no *necessity* for equality of time. All beyond is arbitrary or conventional. A third and fourth pul-

sation may embody half, or double, or any proportion of the time occupied in the two first.

I have already said that all syllables, in metre, are either long or short. Our usual prosodies maintain that a long syllable is equal, in its time, to two short; this, however, is but an approach to the truth. It should be here observed that the quantity of an English syllable has no dependence upon the sound of its vowel or diphthong, but chiefly upon *accentuation*. Monosyllables are exceedingly variable, and, for the most part, may be either long or short, to suit the demand of the rhythm. In polysyllables, the accented ones are always long, while those which immediately precede or succeed them, are always short. *Emphasis* will render any short syllable long.

Rhythm being thus understood, the prosodist should proceed to define *versification* as the making of verses, and *verse* as *the arbitrary or conventional isolation of rhythms into masses of greater or less extent*.

Let us now exemplify what has been said. We will take the words,

I ùm mōnàrch,

with the accentuation which belongs to them in the well known line

I ùm mōnàrch òf àll I sàrvēy.

Of the three first words, by themselves, with the accentuation as here given, we can form no metre or rhythm. We cannot divide them into "two or more equal pulsations of time" — that is to say, into two metrical feet. If we divide them thus:

I ùm | mōnàrch

the time of the latter division is to that of the former as three to two; and a glance will suffice to show that no nearer approach to equal division, is practicable. The words as they stand, therefore, are purely *prose*. But, by placing an emphasis upon the pronoun, we double its length, and the whole is resolved into rhythm; for

I am monarch

is readily divided into two equal pulsations, thus:

I ùm | mōnàrch.

These equal pulsations are trochaic feet; and, from the appreciation of such equality as we recognise in them, arises the gratification of rhythm. With less than two feet there can be no comparison — thus no equality — thus no rhythm. "But no equality is demanded" (here I quote my previous words) "in the *subdivisions* of the rhythm. It is only required that the sum of the times of the syllables in the one, shall be equal to the sum of the times of the syllables

bles in the other" — as we see it above. The entire line

I am monarch of all I survey,  
is thus scanned :

I am mōn- | ārch of āll | I sūrvey.

Here are three anapæsts. The two first *suffice* to establish a rhythm ; but the third confirms it. Had the words run thus :

I am monarch of all I see,

no ear would have been materially offended ; but it is evident that, in this case, we should have thus scanned the verse :

I am mōn- | ārch of āll | I sēe ;

and the last foot, being a pure spondee, (two long syllables — equal to the one long and two short syllables of the preceding anapæsts) is, of itself, sufficient demonstration that the spondee has been improperly rejected from the English rhythms.

The two anapæsts,

I am mōn- | ārch of āll,

do not demand that, if a third foot succeed, this third foot be an anapæst, or even the equivalent in time of an anapæst. The requisitions of rhythm are fulfilled in the two ; and a novel mood of metre may now arise. A conventionality, however, founded in reason, has decided that the new metre should, in general, form the commencement of a new line, that the ear may thus, by means of the eye, be prepared for the change. The *cæsura*, whose peculiarities have never been discussed, and which I have already described as a foot consisting of a single long syllable, is frequently found interposed (especially in the ancient metres) between various rhythms in the same line. Its object, in such situations, is to allow time, or opportunity, for the lapse from one rhythm to another, or, more ordinarily, from a rhythm to a variation of the same ; as, for example, in the verses :

Mæcenas, atavis edite regibus,  
O et præsidium et dulce decus meum !  
Sunt quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum  
Collegisse juvat, metaque fervidis  
Evitata rotis, palmaque nobilis  
Terrarum Dominos, evehit ad Deos,

which are thus scanned :

Mæcē- | nās ātā- | vis | édītē | régībūs  
· et | præsidī | · et | dulcē dē- | cūs mēum  
Sunt quos | currīcū- | lō | pulvēr' o- | lymptcūm  
Collē- | gissē jū- | vat | mētāquē | fervīdīs  
r vi- | tātā rō- | tīs | pālmaqūē | nobīlīs  
Terrā- | rūm Dōmī- | nōs | ēvehīt | ad Dēos.

The general rhythm of these lines will be at once recognised as dactylic, or equivalent to dactylic. The two first pulsations, or feet, consist of a spondee and a dactyl ; each amounting to four short syllables. This order is now interrupted by a single long syllable ; (the *cæsura*

foot ;) and in the two succeeding, although the general rhythm remains undisturbed, two dactyls supply the place of the original spondee and dactyl. The *cæsura* effects the lapse from the initial rhythm to a variation of it. We should be taught to look upon the *cæsura* as a variable foot which accommodates itself to any rhythm whatever. I have designated it "as a single long syllable," because this is, apparently, its *abstract* force or value ; but, in its application, it has the force of any foot whatever. In the lines quoted just above, it has the value of a spondee or dactyl ; occupying precisely equal time. In the first verse above, we dwell upon the "ris" just so long as it would take us to pronounce the "nas ata" preceding. With this understanding of the *cæsura*, (the most important foot in the English, or in any metre, and most blindly rejected by our prosodists,) we can now proceed to an exemplification of what has been said respecting the *arbitrary* or *conventional* nature of mere versification, or the division of rhythms into verse. For this purpose let us quote the commencement of Lord Byron's "Bride of Abydos."

Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle  
Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime —  
Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle,  
Now melt into softness, now madden to crime ?  
Know ye the land of the cedar and vine,  
Where the flowers ever blossom, the beams ever shine,  
And the light wings of Zephyr, oppressed with perfume,  
Wax faint o'er the gardens of Gul in her bloom ?  
Where the citron and olive are fairest of fruit,  
And the voice of the nightingale never is mute ?  
Where the virgins are soft as the roses they twine,  
And all, save the spirit of man, is divine ?  
'Tis the land of the East — 'tis the clime of the Sun —  
Can he smile on such deeds as his children have done ?  
Oh, wild as the accents of lovers' farewell,  
Are the hearts that they bear, and the tales that they tell.

The *flow* of these remarkable lines has been the theme of universal admiration ; and not more of admiration than of surprise and embarrassment. While no one could deny their harmony, it has been found impossible to reconcile this harmony with their evident irregularity, when scanned in accordance with the rules of our Prosodies ; for these Prosodies, insisting upon their bald and incomprehensive dogmas about mere *verse*, have neglected to afford a true conception of *rhythm* ; and this conception alone can furnish the key to the riddle. Of, perhaps, a hundred persons whom I have heard discussing the passage, not one seemed to have the faintest comprehension of its true scanning. The division into *lines* forced them into continual blunders. No one thought of looking *beyond* the line, or of referring one to another. Each verse was scanned individually and independently. Thus, the puzzle was, that, while the flow was perfect, while no harshness or break could be discovered in the harmony, the lines differed so remarkably among themselves. The Grammarians had spoken of dactylic lines,

and it was easily seen that these must be dactylic. The first verse was therefore thus divided:

Know ye thē | lānd whēre thē | cýprēss ānd | mýrtlē.

The concluding foot, however, was still a mystery; but the Grammarians said something about the dactylic measure's calling for a double or triple rhyme, occasionally; and the inquirer was content to rest in the "double rhyme," without exactly perceiving what a "double rhyme" had to do with the question of an irregular foot. Quitting the first verse, the second was thus scanned:

Are ēmblēms | of dēeds thāt | āre dōne In | thēir clīme.

But it was immediately seen that *this* would not do. It was at war with the whole emphasis of the reading. It was certainly never intended by Lord Byron, or by any one in his senses, that stress should be placed upon such monosyllables as "are," "of," and "their;" nor could "their clime," when compared with "to crime" in the corresponding line below, be tortured into anything like "a double rhyme," so as to come within the category of the Grammarians. But these Grammarians were now silent. Farther they said not. The inquirer fell back, therefore, (in spite of his appreciation of the harmony of the verses, when read without scanning,) upon the idea that the "Are" in the beginning was a blunder, or excess, and, discarding it, scanned the remainder as follows:

— ēmblēms of | dēeds thāt āre | dōne In thēir | clīme.

This would have been satisfactory, but for the forced elision of the "are" and the difficulty of accounting for the odd syllable "clime." The Grammarians admitted no such foot as one of a single syllable, and besides the metre was dactylic. In despair, our inquirer turns over the pages of his Prosody, and at length is blessed by a full solution of the riddle, in the learned "observation" quoted in the commencement of this paper—"When a syllable is wanting, the verse is said to be *catalectic*; when the measure is exact, the line is *acatalectic*; when there is a redundant syllable, it forms *hypermeter*." This is enough. The verse in question is pronounced to "form hypermeter" at the tail, and to be "catalectic" at the head. A slight difficulty still remains, to be sure. Upon continuing the examination of the lines, it is discovered that what flows so harmoniously in perusal, is, upon subjection to the scanning process of the Grammarians, a mere jumble, throughout, of *catalecticism*, *acatalecticism*, and *hypermeter*.

By discarding, however, our clumsy conventional notions of mere verse, we shall see, at once, that the lines are perfect in flow only because perfect in scansion—perfect in practice only because perfect in theory. They are, in fact, a regular succession of dactylic rhythms, varied only at three points by equivalent spon-

dees, and separated into two distinct divisions by equivalent, terminating cæsuras. I must here beg the reader to notice that termination, or *pause*, is one of the chief offices, if not indeed the sole office of the cæsura. In taking upon itself the force, or time, of the pulsations which have preceded it, it produces a *fulness of close* not to be so well brought about by other means. But let us scan the passage under discussion.

Know ye thē | lānd whēre thē | cýprēss ānd | mýrtlē  
are | ēmblēms of | dēeds thāt āre | dōne In thēir |  
clīme whēre thē | rāge of thē | vāltūre thē | lōve of  
thē | tūrtlē nōw | mēlt into | sōftness nōw | mādden  
to | crime.

Know ye thē | lānd of thē | cēdār ānd | vīne whēre  
thē | flōw'rs evēr | blōssōm thē | bēams evēr | shine  
whēre thē | light wīngs of | Zēphyr op- | prēss'd with  
per- | fūme wāx | fāint o'er thē | gārdens of | Gāl In  
thēir | blōōm whēre thē | cītrōn ānd | olīve āre | fāirēst  
of | frūit ānd thē | vōice of thē | nīghtīngālē | nēvēr  
Is | mūte whēre thē | vīrgīns āre | sōft ās thē | rōsē  
they | tūrne ānd | āll sāvē thē | spīrīt of | mān Is dī-  
vīne 'tīs thē | lānd of thē | āst 'tīs thē | clīme of thē |  
Sūn cān hē | smīle on sūch | dēeds ās hīs | chīldrēn  
hāvē | dōne oh | wīld ās thē | āccētnts of | lōv'ers' fare- |  
wēll āre thē | hēārts thāt they | bēār ānd thē | tāles thāt  
thēy | tell.

By all who have ears—not over long—this will be acknowledged as the true and the sole true scansion. The harmony is perfect, and with the melody but a single fault can be found, and that of minor importance. In the dactyl formed by the words, "smile on such," "such" is too obviously a long syllable, that is to say, it too necessarily demands a long accentuation in common parlance, to justify its use as a short syllable in verse.

Can he smile on *the* deeds *that* his children have done.

would be an improvement of the melody; at the expense, however, of the sense.

Can he smile on the deeds *which* his children have done,

although more rigorously grammatical, than our line first suggested, is objectionable on the very ground which caused objection to the use of "such." The difficulty of pronouncing "which" has brought about its exclusion from poetry, among those who have keen musical perceptions:—see the last line of those just quoted.

I have italicized the cæsuras and spondees introduced. The force and office of the cæsura have been already sufficiently explained; but it may be demanded—"Why is the continuous flow of the dactylic succession interrupted by spondees? Why were not dactyls here also employed?" The answer which most readily suggests itself is, that the variation is for the purpose of relieving the monotony; but however plausible this reply, it is by no means the true one. For, in fact, there is *no* relief of the monotone effected. The spondees used are to all intents and purposes (except with mere reference to the eye) equivalent to dactyls. The

cause of their introduction is to be found in the admission of *unusually* long syllables at certain points. In the spondee "*fume war*," for example, the "*war*," which is composed of two of the most difficult consonants in the language, could not have been tortured into brevity by any mode of accentuation. Pronounce it as trippingly as we please, it will still occupy such portion of time as will render it equal to two short syllables. If employed *at all*, therefore, it could not have been employed otherwise, in its present location, than as the final syllable of a spondee. The emphasis demanded upon the "*oh*" in "*done oh*" forces it, in the same manner, into length."

That the division of the dactylic rhythms into verses, or lines, is a point purely arbitrary, or conventional, will be rendered evident by a glance at these rhythms as we have run them together, above. We might form what is termed versification thus :

Know ye the		land where the
Cypress and		myrtle are
Emblems of		deeds that are
Done in their		clime where the &c.

Or thus :

Know ye the		land where the		cypress and
Myrtle are		emblems of		deeds that are &c.

Or thus :

Know ye the		land where the		cypress and		myrtle
are						
Emblems of		deeds that are		done in their		clime
where the						&c.

Or thus :

Know ye the		land where the		cypress and		myrtle
are		emblems of				
Deeds that are		done in their		clime where the		rage
of the		vulture the				&c.

In short the lines may be of *any* length which shall include a full rhythm, or two pulsations. Beyond doubt, we often see such lines as

Know ye the
Land where the &c.

and our Grammars admit such; but most improperly; for common sense would dictate that every so obvious division of a poem, as is made by verse, should include within itself all that is necessary for its own comprehension or appreciation; but here we can have no appreciation of the rhythm; which depends upon the idea of equality between two pulsations. These pseudo-verses, and those which are met in mock Pindaric Odes, and consist sometimes of but a single long syllable, can be considered as rhythmical, only in connexion with what immediately precedes; and it is this want of independent rhythm, which adapts them to the purposes of burlesque, and of this alone. Their effect is that of incongruity—the principle of mirth; for they include the blankness of prose amid the harmony of verse.

One word here in regard to *rhyme*. Its em-

ployment is quite as arbitrary as that of verse itself. Our books speak of it as "a similarity of sound between the last syllables of different lines." But how absurd such definition, in the very teeth of the admitted facts, that rhymes are often used *in the middle* of verses, and that mere *similarity* of sound is insufficient to constitute them in perfection! Rhyme may be defined as *identity of sound occurring among rhythms, between syllables or portions of syllables of equal length, at equal intervals, or at interspaces the multiples of these intervals.*

The Iambic, the Trochaic, the Anapaestic, and the Dactylic, are the usually admitted divisions of English verse. These varieties, in their purity, or perfection, are to be understood as mere indefinite successions of the feet or pulsations, respectively, from which are derived their names. Our Prosodies cite examples of only the most common divisions of the respective rhythms into lines; but profess to cite instances of *all the varieties of English verse*. These varieties are, nevertheless, unlimited, as will be readily seen from what has been said; but the books have done much, by their dogmas, in the way of prohibiting invention. A wide field is open for its display, in novel combinations of metre. The immenseness of the effect derivable from the harmonious combination of *various rhythms*, is a point strangely neglected or misunderstood. We have, in America, some few versifiers of fine ear, who succeed to admiration in the building of the ordinary established lines—the Iambic Pentameters of Sprague, for example, surpass even those of Pope—but we have had few evidences of originality in the division of the old rhythms, or in the combination of their varieties. In general, the grossest ignorance prevails, even among our finest poets, and even in respect to the commonplace harmonies upon which they are most habitually employed. If we regard at the same time accuracy of rhythm, melody, and invention, or novel combination, of metre, I should have no hesitation in saying that a young and true poetess of Kentucky, Mrs. Amelia Welby, has done more in the way of really good verse than any individual among us. I shall be pardoned, nevertheless, for quoting and commenting upon an excellently well conceived and well managed specimen of versification, which will aid in developing some of the propositions already expressed. It is the "Last Leaf" of Oliver W. Holmes.

I saw him once before  
As he pass'd by the door,  
And again  
The pavement stones resound  
As he totters o'er the ground  
With his cane.

They say that in his prime,  
Ere the pruning-knife of Time  
Cut him down,  
Not a better man was found  
By the crier on his round  
Through the town.



But now he walks the streets,  
And he looks at all he meets  
So forlorn ;  
And he shakes his feeble head  
That it seems as if he said,  
They are gone.

The mossy marbles rest  
On the lips that he has prest  
In their bloom,  
And the munes he loved to hear  
Have been carved for many a year  
On the tomb.

My grandmamma has said, --  
Poor old lady ! she is dead  
Long ago, --  
That he had a Roman nose,  
And his cheek was like a rose  
In the snow.

But now his nose is thin,  
And it rests upon his chin  
Like a staff ;  
And a crook is in his back,  
And a melancholy crack  
In his laugh.

I know it is a sin  
For me to sit and grin  
At him here ;  
But the old three-corner'd hat,  
And the breeches, and all that,  
Are so queer !

And if I should live to be  
The last leaf upon the tree  
In the spring, --  
Let them smile, as I do now,  
At the old forsaken lough  
Where I cling.

Every one will acknowledge the effective harmony of these lines ; yet the attempt to scan them, by any reference to the rules of our Prosodies, will be vain. Indeed, I am at a loss to imagine what these books could say upon the subject, that would not immediately contradict all that has been said by them upon others. Let us scan the first stanza.

I sǎw | hím ónce | bĕfóre  
As hé | pássed | bý the | dŕŕ  
    and ã | gáin  
Thĕ páve- | ment stŕnes | rĭsŕund  
As hé | tŕtters | ō'er the | grŕund  
    With his | cǎne.

This is the general scansion of the poem. We have first three iambuses. The second line shifts the rhythm into the trochaic, giving us three trochees, with a cæsura equivalent, in this case, to a trochee. The third line is a trochee and equivalent cæsura. But it must be observed, that although the cæsura is variable in value, and can thus be understood as equivalent to any pulsation which precedes it, it is insufficient to form, with any *single* pulsation, a *perfect rhythm*. The rhythm of the line "and again" is referrible, therefore, to the line preceding, and dependent thereupon. The whole would have been, more properly, written thus :

I sǎw | hím ónce | bĕfóre  
As hé | pássed | bý the | dŕŕ | and ã | gáin

Thĕ páve- | ment stŕnes | rĭsŕund  
As hé | tŕtters | ō'er the | grŕund | with his | cǎne.

The *pausing* or terminating force of the cæsura is here clearly seen. In the second line, as just remodelled, we make a pause in the trochaical rhythms, by means of "door." The "and again" has the air of a *resumption*; which in fact it is. The word "passéd" in the volume from which we extract the poem [Mr. Griswold's "Poets and Poetry of America"] has been printed, with an elision, "pass'd," and thus made one syllable ; but improperly : for each syllable requires full accentuation to form the trochee.

If we now look at the second stanza, we shall perceive that in the line,

Nŕt ã | bĕttĕr | mân wǎs | fŕund,

which, according to the construction of the first stanza, should be iambical, the author has merely continued the trochees of the preceding verse. The third stanza is constructed as the second. So also the fourth — with a variation in the line,

Have been carved for many a year ;

which is thus scanned .

Hǎve been | cǎrv'd fŕr | mânÿ ã | yĕar.

Here, in place of the expected trochee, we have a dactyl. Referring to the Prosodies, we learn that "by a *synæresis* [blending] of the two short syllables, an anapæst may sometimes be employed for an iambus, or a dactyl for a trochee" : — all which is true, but excessively unsatisfactory. The *rationale* of the matter is untouched. I was perhaps wrong in admitting even the *truth* of the rule. The fact is, that in cases such as this, the *synæresis* of the syllables is erroneously urged. There should be *no* blending of the two short syllables into one ; and, unquestionably, if blended, the result would be one long, to which they are equivalent ; thus the blending would be far from producing a trochee, inasmuch as it would produce *more*. The idea of the versifier here is *discord for the relief of monotone*. The time of the pulsation is purposely increased, that the ear may not be palled by the too continuous harmony. As in music, so in the rhythm of words, this principle of discord is one of the most important, and, when effectively managed, surprizes and delights by its vigorous effects. It seems to be an essential, in these variations, that they be never, *of diminution*. A *decrease* in the ordinary time of the pulsations should never be attempted ; but a fine discord is often effected by mere change of the *order* of syllables, without increase. In iambic rhythms this change is most usually seen. For example :

ch thŕu, | whǎtev- | ĕr tí- | tlĕ plĕase | thĭne ĕar,  
Dĕ an, Drǎ- | plĕr, Bĭck- | ĕrstǎff, | ōr Gŭl- | llĕvĕr,  
Whĕthĕr | thŕu chŕŕse | Cĕrvǎn- | tĕs' sĕ- | rĭŕds ãir,  
    or laugh | and shǎke | in Rǎ- | bĕlais' ĕa- | sÿ chǎir.

Here a trochee forms the first foot of the third

line. Discords of excess are observed in the concluding foot of the third verse, and in the penultimate of the fourth; where anapests take place of iambuses.

These various discords, it will be understood, are efforts for the relief of monotone. These efforts produce fluctuations in the metre; and it often happens that these fluctuations, if not subsequently counterbalanced, affect the ear displeasingly, as do unresolved discords in music. Very generally, one discord requires a counterbalance at no great interval. This is a point, however, which only a very nice ear can appreciate. Pope felt its importance, and more especially Milton. I quote an example from the latter:

But say, if our Deliverer up to Heaven  
Must re-ascend, what will betide the few  
His faithful, left among the unfaithful herd  
The enemies of truth? who then shall guide  
His people, who defend? will they not deal  
More with his followers than with him they dealt?  
Be sure they will, said the Angel.

"Said the angel" is here used as a single foot, and counterbalances the two previous discords of excess, italicized. To this practice, on the part of Milton, I especially alluded, when speaking of this poet as surpassing Pope "in the adjusting of his harmonies through paragraphs of greater length than the latter ever ventured to attempt."

Discords of excess are also employed (and even more than one in a line) with the view of equalizing the time of a verse with the real time of a preceding one, when the apparent time of this preceding does not exceed the ordinary rhythm. For example:

But such | a bulk | as no | twelve bards | could raise,  
Twelve starveling bards of these degenerate days.

If we scan the first of these lines, we find only the ordinary iambuses; but, by the use of unusually long syllables, the verse is made to labor, in accordance with the author's favorite whim, of "making the sound an echo to the sense." It will be found impossible to read aloud

But such a bulk as no twelve bards could raise

in the usual time of five iambuses. The drag of the line, therefore, is properly counterbalanced by two anapests in the succeeding; which is thus scanned:

Twelve star- | veling bards | in these | degen- | erate  
days.

Some editions of Pope read, with elision, thus:

Twelve starv'ling bards of these degen'rate days;

but this is, of course, improper. Our books, in general, are full of false elisions.

But to return to our scansion of "The Last Leaf." The fifth and six stanzas exactly re-

semble the second. The seventh differs from all the others. The second line, as well as the first, is iambic. The whole should be thus divided:

I know | It is | a sin | for me | to sit | and grin  
At him | here | but the | old three- | corner'd | hat | and  
the breeches | and all | that | are so | queer.

In saying that the whole should be thus divided, I mean only to say that this is the true grouping of the pulsations; and have no reference to the rhymes. I speak as if these latter had no existence.

The last stanza embraces still another variation. It is entirely trochaic; and involves the only absolute error to be seen in the whole versification. The rhythm requires that the first syllable of the second line should be long; but "the" is a monosyllable which can never be forced, by any accentuation, into length.

As I am now speaking of American verse, and of the dearth of invention which, in general, it betrays, some remarks on Professor Longfellow's late attempts at introducing the Greek Hexameter, will not be considered out of place. The Greek or Latin Hexameter line, consists, as its title implies, of six pulsations. These, in the four first instances, may be either dactyls or spondees, or dactyls and spondees arbitrarily intermingled. The penultimate foot, however, is always (at least nearly always) a dactyl; the ultimate always a spondee. The lines already quoted from Silius Italicus are Latin Hexameters. The first two of these lines run thus:

Fallis | té mén- | sás in | tér quod | crédis in | érmém.  
Tót bél- | lis quæ | sitá vi- | ró tót | cædihūs | ármát.

The first point which will arrest the attention of the merely English reader, is the discrepancy between this scansion and the flow of the lines in perusal. In attempting, himself, a division, he, no doubt, would have thus arranged it:

Fallis te | mensas | inter quod | credis in | ermém,

and, not until he had counted the feet, would he have been aware of the deficiency of one. Now the discrepancy in question is not observable in English metres; where the scansion coincides with the reading, so far as the rhythm is concerned — that is to say, if we pay no attention to the sense of the passage. But these facts indicate a radical difference in the genius of the two languages, as regards their capacities for modulation. In truth, from the character of its terminations (most frequently in *um*, *am*, *i*, *o*, *os*, &c.) as well as from the paucity of the monosyllabic articles and pronouns so prevalent in the Saxon, the Latin is a far more stately tongue than our own. It is essentially spondaic; the English is as essentially dactylic. The long syllable is the spirit of the Roman (and Greek) verse; the short syllable is the essence of ours. In casting the eye, for example,

over the lines of Silius here quoted, we will not fail to perceive the great preponderance of the spondee; \* and, in examining the so-called Hexameters, just above, by Professor Longfellow, we shall, in the same manner, see the predominance of the dactyl. English Hexameters are always about *one-third longer to the eye* than Latin or Greek ones. Now it follows from what has been here explained, that English Hexameters are radically different from Latin ones: for it is the predominant foot, or pulsation, which gives the tone to the verse, or *establishes its rhythm*. Latin Hexameters are spondaic rhythms, varied by equivalent dactyls. English Hexameters are dactylic rhythms varied, *rarely*, by equivalent spondees. Not that we *cannot* have English Hexameter, in every respect correspondent to the Latin; but that such can be constructed only by a minuteness of labor, and with a forced or far-fetched appearance, which are at war with their employment to any extent. In building them we must search for *spondaic words*, which, in English, are rare indeed; or, in their default, we must construct spondees of long monosyllables, although the majority of our monosyllables are short. I quote, here, an unintentional instance of a perfect English Hexameter formed upon the model of the Greek:

Man is a complex, compound, compost, yet is he God-born,

This line is thus scanned:

Mān is ā | cōmplēx | cōmpōund | cōmpōst | yēt is hē | Gōd-bōrn.

I say that this is "a perfect English Hexameter formed upon the model of the Greek," because, while its rhythm is plainly spondaic varied by dactyls, and thus is essentially Greek, (or Latin,) it yet preserves, as all English verse should preserve, a concordance between its scansion and reading-flow. Such lines, of course, cannot be composed without a degree of difficulty which must effect their exclusion, for all practical purposes, from our tongue.

But let us examine some of the supposed Hexameters of Professor Longfellow.

Also thē | chūrch with | in wās ā- | dōrn'd fōr | this wās  
thē | sēasōn  
In which thē | yōung thēir | pārents' | hōpe ānd thē |  
lōv'd ones of | hēavēn  
Should at thē | fōot of thē | āltār rē- | nōw thē | vōws  
of thēir | bāptism.  
Thērefōre ēach | nōok ānd | cōrnēr wās | swēpt ānd |  
clēan'd ānd thē | dūst wās  
Blōwn frōm thē | wālls ānd | cēiling ānd | frōm thē |  
ōil-paintēd | bēnchēs.

We here find that, although the preponderance of the dactyl is not great, apparently, yet this preponderance *would be excessive*, were it not for the forced lengthening of syllables too unimportant to sustain an accent in the ordinary

\* Even the regular dactyl in the penultimate foot is often displaced by a spondee, in Latin Hexameters.

perusal. In the first line, the "for," in "dorn'd for," and the "son" in "season," have no right to be long. In the second, the same objection applies to "their" in "young their," and the "en" in "heaven." In the third, it applies to the "the" in "new the"; in the fourth to the "and" in "scept and," and the "was" in "dust was"; in the fifth to the "and" in "walls and," the "from" and "the" in "from the," and the "es" in "benches." "Baptism" is the only admissible spondee in the whole composition.

The truth is, that nothing less than the deservedly high reputation of Professor Longfellow, could have sufficed to give currency to his lines as to Greek Hexameters. In general, they are neither one thing nor another. Some few of them are dactylic verses — English dactylics. But do away with the division into lines, and the most astute critic would never have suspected them of anything more than prose. Let us try the experiment upon the extract just above:

"Also, the church within was adorned; for this was the season in which the young, their parents' hope, and the loved ones of heaven, should, at the feet of the altar, renew the vows of their baptism. Therefore, each nook and corner was swept and cleaned, and the dust was blown from the walls and ceiling, and from the oil-painted benches."

This is excellent prose; but no species of manipulation can torture it into anything better than very indifferent verso.

Whatever defects may be found in the *harmony* of our poets, their errors of *melody* are still more conspicuous. Here the field is, comparatively, one of little extent. The versifier, who is at all aware of the nature of the rhythms with which he is engaged, can scarcely err, in melody, unless through carelessness, or affectation. The rules for his guidance are simple and few. He should employ his syllables, as nearly as possible, with the accentuation due in prose reading. His short syllables should never be encumbered with many consonants, and especially, never with those difficult of pronunciation. His long syllables should depend as much as possible upon full vowels or diphthongal sounds for length. His periods, or equivalent pauses, should not be so placed as to interrupt a rhythm. Farther than this, little need be said. It is, therefore, justly matter for surprise, when we meet, amid the iambs of so fine a versifier as Mr. Bryant, for example, such lines as

Languished in *the* damp shade and died afar from men,  
or, still worse, as

Kind influence. Lo their orbs burn more bright:

in the latter of which we can preserve the metre only by drawing out "influence" into three strongly-marked syllables, shortening the long monosyllable "Lo," and lengthening the short one "their."

In turning over a poem by Alfred B. Street, my attention is arrested by these lines :

His sin- | ðoũs páth, | hÿ blá- | z'rs, wóund |  
 Among | trũnks group'd | In mÿ- | riáds róund.

Every reader will here perceive the impossibility of pronouncing "trunks" as a short syllable. The difficulty arises from the number of harsh consonants by which the vowel, *u*, is surrounded. There is a rule, in Latin prosody, that a vowel *before two* consonants is long. We moderns have not only no such rule, but profess inability to comprehend its *rationale*. If, nevertheless, from the natural limit to man's power of syllabification, a vowel *before two* consonants is inevitably long, how shall we properly understand as short, one which is *embedded*

*among nine?* Yet Mr. Street is one of our finest versifiers, and his error is but one of a class in which all his brethren most pertinaciously indulge.

But I must bring this paper to a close. It will not be supposed that my object has been a *treatise* upon verse. A world more than I have room to say might be said. I have endeavored to deal with principles while seeming busy with details. A right application of these principles will clear up much obscurity in our common acceptance of rhythm; but, throughout, it has been my design not so much thoroughly to investigate the topic, as to dwell upon those salient points of it which have been either totally neglected, or inefficiently discussed.