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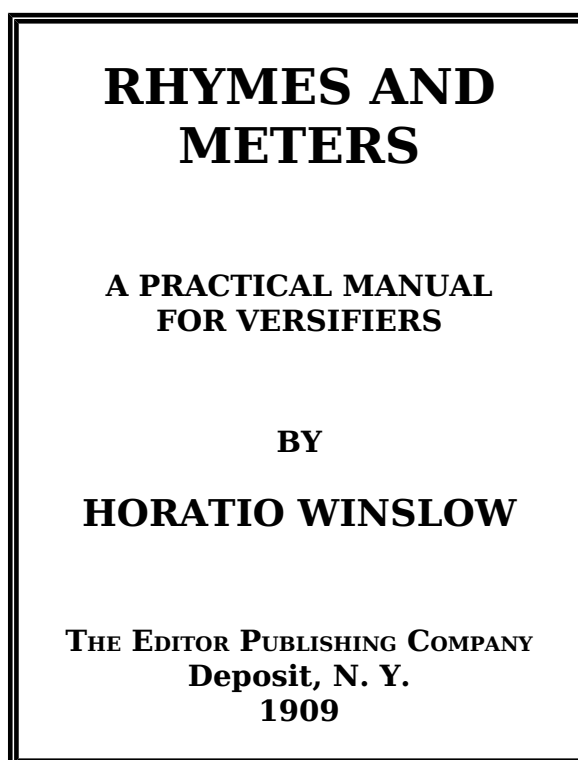
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## PREFACE

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**T**HROUGHOUT the following pages "verse" stands for any kind of metrical composition as distinguished from prose. It is not used as a synonym for "poetry." Though most poetry is

in verse form, most verse is not poetry. The ability to write verse can be acquired; only a poet can write poetry. At the same time, even a poet must learn to handle his verse with some degree of skill or his work is apt to fall very flat, and the mere verse writer who cannot rhyme correctly and fit his lines together in meter had much better stick to prose.

This book has been compiled with one end in view: to arrange in a convenient and inexpensive form the fundamentals of verse—enough for the student who takes up verse as a literary exercise or for the older verse writer who has fallen into a rut or who is a bit shaky on theory. It is even hoped that there may be a word of help for some embryo poet.

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In construction the plan has been to suggest rather than to explain in detail and as far as possible to help the reader to help himself. No verse has been quoted except where the illustration of a point made it necessary. With the increasing number of libraries it ought to be an easy matter for any one to refer to most of the lesser verse writers as well as all the standard poets.

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## I

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## VERSE MAKING IN GENERAL

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## CHAPTER I

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## VERSE MAKING IN GENERAL

IT is scarcely necessary to write a defense of verse making. As a literary exercise it has been recommended and practiced by every well-known English writer and as a literary asset it has been of practical value at one time or another to most of the authors of to-day. Indirectly it helps one's prose and is an essential to the understanding of the greatest literature.

The fact that courses in "Poetics" have been established at all the large universities shows the interest which verse making has aroused in America. In England the ability to write metrical verse has long been considered one of the component parts of the education of a university man.

Looked at from the purely practical side, even though not a single line be sold, verse making has its value. It strengthens the vocabulary; teaches niceness in the choice of words; invigorates the imagination and disciplines the mind far more than a dozen times the amount of prose.

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But, though careful verse is much more difficult to write than careful prose, slipshod verse is not worth the ink that shapes it. In taking up verse writing the student must solemnly resolve on one thing: to consider no composition complete until it proves up—until the rhymes and meter are perfect. This "perfection" is not as unattainable as it sounds, for the laws of rhyme and meter are as fixed as the laws of the Medes and the Persians. Any one may not be able to write artistic verse, but any one can write true verse, and the only way to make a course in verse writing count is to live up to all the rules; to banish all ideas of "poetic license"; to write and rewrite till the composition is as near perfect as lies in one, and finally to lay aside and rewrite again.

After the line scans and the rhymes are proved should come the effort to put the thought clearly. It is often hard to say what one means in prose. It is harder in verse. In fact, one of the greatest difficulties any verse maker can overcome is the tendency to be obscure in his meaning.

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With the surmounting of this obstacle comes simplicity of diction; to present the thought without superfluous words; to avoid the threadbare phrases and to put the idea in a new way and yet in plain speech. How far the verse maker will go in clearness and simplicity depends largely on his natural good taste and discrimination. The better he is able to appreciate the work of others the better his own will become, and this appreciation, though it cannot be created, can be cultivated as well as good manners. To-day more than ever before good reading is one of the prime essentials to good writing.

Stevenson has recommended imitation as a road to originality and few have disagreed with him on this point. It is undoubtedly easier to write a sonnet if one is familiar with Wordsworth or to write a ballade if one has read Dobson. At the same time to be of value the imitation must be done broadly and systematically. The artist does not learn to draw by copying Gibson heads nor the verse maker to write by diluting Kipling. An imitation should always be made with the idea of reproducing some one quality which the imitator wishes to develop in himself; the verse maker should copy not one style but many, and aim at methods rather than mannerisms.

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For a first step in imitation it is well to select a subject akin to the original and follow the author's construction and trend of thought as closely as possible. For instance, there is a sonnet on Milton—write a companion sonnet on Shakespeare or Dante. Match stanzas to Washington with similar stanzas to Lincoln or Cromwell or any other character who can be treated in the same general manner. Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" suggests other elegies in other churchyards.

One may even parody a poem—not broadly, line for line in the American fashion—but in the more delicate Calverley way, which applies the spirit and meter of the poem to a lighter

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subject. One must imitate before one can originate, but haphazard imitation leads nowhere.

In conclusion it may be said that verse making is no mystic art hidden from the many. It is to be acquired by any one who is willing to work at it steadily and consistently. First, a start in the right direction, and then practice—practice—practice.

Nothing “dashed off” or “turned out,” but every composition saved from the wastebasket made—

Correct in construction,  
Clear in thought,  
Simple in diction.

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## II

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### METER

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#### CHAPTER II

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#### METER

**A** METRICAL composition is divided into lines, each line containing a definite number of syllables. These syllables are grouped by twos and threes into “feet” which, by their makeup, determine the meter or movement of the line.

Meter in English verse is built up through accent alone, but, though this principle differs entirely from that of the ancients, who depended on the length of the syllable, we still cling to the names with which they distinguished the different feet. It will be discovered that by combining accented and unaccented syllables into groups of two, three and four an immense variety of feet can be produced. In fact the Roman poets made use of about thirty. In English verse we disregard the four-syllabled foot altogether and make use only of the two and three syllabled.

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Those commonly accepted are:

Iambus	—	Dactyl	—
Trochee	—	Anapest	—
Spondee	— —	Amphimacer	— —
Amphibrach		—	

The dash stands for the accented syllable.

An idea of the use of these meters in verse may be gained from the following examples:

#### IAMBIC

— | — | — | — | —  
“From low | to high | doth dis | solu | tion | climb  
— | — | — | — | —  
And sink | from high | to low | along | a scale.”

#### TROCHAIC

— | — | — | —  
“Tell us, | Master, | of thy | wisdom  
— | — | — | —  
Ere the | chains of | darkness | bind thee.”

#### DACTYLLIC

— | —  
“Take her up | tenderly

— | —  
Lift her with | care.”

#### ANAPESTIC

— | — | — |  
“If he talks | of his bak | ing or brew | ing  
— | — | —  
If he comes | to you rid | ing a cob.”

A line of spondees is rarely found in our English because a succession of accented syllables is almost impossible with us and the amphimacer and amphibrach are seldom more than secondary feet in a dactylic or anapestic line. Where more than one combination of syllables is used the line takes its name from the foot predominating.

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As to number, the feet in a single line are practically unlimited though one rarely comes across a line containing more than eight. Lines of three and four are more common. Indeed, in some lyrical poems we have lines made up of a single syllable.

The classic names for lines of varying length are perhaps necessary. The line of two feet is a dimeter; three—trimeter; four—tetrameter; five—pentameter; six—hexameter; seven—heptameter and eight—octameter. Thus Pope’s Iliad is written in iambic pentameter, in lines made up of five iambs; and Longfellow’s Hiawatha is trochaic tetrameter, each line containing four trochees.

It will be noticed that many lines lack the syllable or two necessary to complete the last foot. For instance:

[Pg 22]

— | — | — | —  
“Airly | Beacon | Airly | Beacon,  
— | — | — | —  
O the | pleasant | sight to | see.”

and

— | — | —  
“Ah but things | more than po | lite.”

This privilege of ending in the middle of a foot is in no way a poetic license but lends a flexibility to the use of all meters which would otherwise be woefully lacking.

Again we find, especially in dactylic and anapestic lines, a trochee or spondee thrown in to vary the movement. In this anapestic line the meter is varied by a spondee:

— | — — | — | —  
“Not a drum | *was heard* | not a fun | eral note.”

This insertion of a foot is always allowable if it helps the proper movement of the line and if it is put in voluntarily. With a beginner whose ear is none too well trained it is better to try only pure lines—lines made up of but one kind of foot. In this way the false extra syllable or foot is sooner found out and corrected.

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A first-class exercise is to write verse without rhyme or very much reason, whose only virtue shall be lines of exact length with meter regular to the verge of singsongness. As an exercise, too, it is helpful to take a dozen lines or more of good verse and break them up into feet. The greatest poets are not necessarily the best for this purpose, owing to the irregularity of much of their work. It is better for the beginner to steer clear of Browning and try the simpler and more regular constructions of Dobson and Praed.

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## RHYME

### CHAPTER III

#### RHYME

THE rhyme most commonly used in verse is the single rhyme—the rhyme of one syllable. A single rhyme is perfect when the rhymed syllables are accented; when the vowel sounds and the following consonant sounds are identical and when the preceding consonant sounds are different.

“Less” rhymes with “mess” and “caress” but not with “unless,” because in this last case the preceding consonant sounds are the same. It will rhyme with “bless” because the “b” and “l” are so joined that the combined sound differs from the simple “l” of “less.” “Less” does not rhyme with “best” because the “t” makes the concluding consonant sounds unlike. Nor does it rhyme with “abbess” because the accent in this word falls on the first syllable.

A double or triple rhyme follows in construction the rules laid down for the single rhyme. The accents must be alike; the preceding consonants must differ and the vowels and the remaining syllables of the words be identical. “Double” goes perfectly with “trouble” and “bubble,” while “charity,” “clarity” and “rarity” all rhyme. [Pg 28]

The spelling of a word does not affect its rhyming use. It is rhymed as it is pronounced. “Move” and “prove” do not rhyme with “love”—all the poets in Christendom to the contrary. Neither does “come” rhyme with “home.” The pronunciation is all in all and that must be decided not by local usage but by some standard authority.

There are, however, certain words which have one pronunciation in prose and another in poetry. For instance, “said,” “again” and “wind.” It is permissible to take advantage of this special pronunciation and rhyme them with “raid,” “lain” and “blind.”

To be strict is better than to be lax in pronunciation and it is absolutely necessary to rise above provincialism. “Maria” is not a rhyming companion for “fire” except in dialect verse, though this pairing sounds natural enough in some localities. [Pg 29]

In a piece of verse it is best not to have the same vowel sounds too close to one another in adjacent rhyming words. Lines ending “fain,” “made,” “pain,” “laid” would, of course, be correct, but the similar vowel sounds cause a lack of variety. An arrangement such as “through,” “made,” “drew,” “laid” would be better.

Nothing disgusts the reader of verse more than an imperfect rhyme. If one is anxious to write well he should make it his business to see that every rhyme is absolutely right before a manuscript leaves his hands. Whatever sins may be original with a versifier at least he has no excuse for an unmetrical line or an untrue rhyme.

To acquire facility in rhyming it is necessary to write much and to try all styles of endings from the single rhyme to the triple. As good practice as any will be found in the use of the French forms described in [Chapter VII](#). [Pg 30]

But above all one must avoid the rhyming dictionary. When the verse maker once gets the habit of referring to its pages there is more hope for the amateur popular song writer than for him. Better to think half an hour and get the right word one’s self than to tread the primrose path of the rhyming dictionary. It has one use, nevertheless, which is perhaps allowable. There are certain words, such as “chimney,” “scarf,” “crimson,” “window,” “widow,” and others which have no rhyme. To ascertain whether a word belongs to this class or not the dictionary is useful, though still a trifle dangerous.

Verse makers will rejoice to hear that “month,” once a prominent figure in this non-rhyming company, has fallen from the ranks. A new variety of butterfly has been named the “monolunth.”

## STANZA FORMS

## STANZA FORMS

**R**OUGHLY speaking, the stanza in verse corresponds to the paragraph in prose. It is a fixed division of the composition containing a certain number of lines arranged in a certain rhyming order. Very often each stanza contains a distinct and rounded thought, such as is found in a paragraph, though this plan of construction is not universally followed by any means. In sharp dramatic verse one must use a simple stanza form built so that each thought ends with the last word of the last line. But when the movement is languid the meter and stanza form may be more intricate and it is sometimes best to let the thought flow from one stanza to another without even the jerk of the period. The effect to be produced is everything and should determine not only the stanza to be used but the details of the treatment as well. The great poet can bend any meter or stanza form to his use, as witness Thomas Hood with his galloping stanzas in the "Bridge of Sighs," but an ordinary mortal must produce his effects more obviously. The greater skill one has the greater liberties one can take in his choice of materials, just as a clever after-dinner speaker may say many things which from a less tactful person would be deemed offensive. Thomas Hood can write his dirges in dactyls with triple rhymes, but we must model ours on Gray's "Elegy" or "In Memoriam."

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Still the variety of stanzas is so large that one should be able to fit almost any verse mood without the necessity of inventing a new form or turning an old one out of its beaten track. There are little dimeter couplets like Herrick's:

"There thou shalt be  
High priest to me."

And there is the three-line stanza in many forms, of which this from Landor is an example:

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"Children, keep up that harmless play,  
Your kindred angels plainly say  
By God's authority ye may."

And the four-line stanza—its name is legion.

The whole question resolves itself into the suitability of the form to the matter. The vehicle which carries the thought best is the one to be selected. The more appropriate the construction of the poem—the rhymes, the meter and the stanza—the better it will carry out the writer's intention. Instead of hampering his thought it will assist it.

As a means of becoming acquainted with the wide resources which wait the verse maker, the student should copy and imitate every stanza form not familiar to him. In this way he will learn for himself why the Spenserian stanza used by Keats in his "Eve of St. Agnes" is good for one sort of narrative and why the ballad stanza used by Coleridge in his "Ancient Mariner" is good for another; why one sort of stanza sings merrily and why another is fitted for funeral hymns. Best of all, he will learn that he does not have to choose among "long meter," "short meter" and "Hallelujah meter," but that an almost indefinite field lies open for him.

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Also he will discover that it is not necessary to create a new stanza form in order to write a great poem. The sonnet, at which every poet has thrummed, still waits for a new master, and the "Recessional," perhaps the greatest poem of the last quarter century, was written in one of the simplest and oldest of stanzas.

## V

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## SUBTLITIES OF VERSIFICATION

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## CHAPTER V

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## SUBTLITIES OF VERSIFICATION

**T**HE more one writes the better he becomes acquainted with what might be called "the tricks of the trade." These "tricks," "helps," or "devices" can be explained only in a general way. Most of them each verse maker must learn for himself, but there are some broader strokes which can be more easily traced and pointed out and which are governed by fixed rules.

Perhaps the most noticeable of these is alliteration. By alliteration is meant the succession of two or more words whose initial sounds are identical or very similar.

“The *rich, ripe rose* as with incense streams”

is a good example.

Through alliteration certain effects are produced which would otherwise be impossible. Instances will occur to every reader. To quote only one example:

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“When dandelions fleck the green  
And robins’ songs *throb through* the trees.”

In these two lines by William Allen White, the two “th”s, though out of place in most verse, here express the “throbbing” idea perfectly.

Alliteration at the beginning of accented syllables is very useful in humorous verse, helping along the rhythm and binding the lines together.

The use of onomatopoeic words, words whose sound signifies the sense, is so common that we seldom give it a thought. We have the “splash” of water; the “bang” of a gun; the “crackle” of branches and so on indefinitely. In verse this idea is carried a step farther. Lines are constructed not only with the purpose of conveying a given idea, as in prose, but with the additional end of strengthening this idea and impressing it on the mind of the reader through the choice and arrangement of the words.

“Up a *high hill* he *heaves* a *huge* round stone.”

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In this the successive “h” sounds suggest the hard breathing and labor of the ascent.

Browning imitates the sound of galloping in the meter of his ride from Ghent to Aix.

“I sprang to the stirrup and Joris and he,  
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three.”

Tennyson is full of such turns as this:

“Where lay the bones of ancient men,  
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang,  
*Shrill, chill*, with flakes of foam.”

The two words certainly give a most wonderful impression of the shriek of the cold sea-wind.

Instances of this sort might be added indefinitely but these are enough to give the general idea. As a rule the best use of any device of this purpose is served when it is not too apparent; when it produces the effect without calling attention to the means.

In a certain sort of languishing verse of the mystical type an effect of quaintness and dreaminess is produced by emphasizing the last syllables of words whose accent by right falls on a previous syllable. This is done by pairing them with pronounced rhymes. For instance, “tears” rhymes with “barriers,” “her” with “well-water” and so on. It must be understood that, as an attempt to rhyme, this sort of thing is not to be countenanced, but it is perfectly allowable when it is used to obtain a certain effect.

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Take this stanza from Whitman’s “Song of the Broad-Axe,” one of the few specimens we have of his attempts at rhyme and meter. It is a true barbaric chant whose full-mouthed syllables reproduce in little the blows of the axe.

“Weapon shapely, naked, wan,  
Head from the mother’s bowels drawn,  
Wooded flesh and metal bone, limb only one and lip only one,  
Gray blue leaf by red-heat grown, helve produced from a little  
seed sown,  
Resting the grass amid and upon,  
To be leaned and to lean on.”

Though our English verse largely disregards the quantity or length of a syllable, in some lines this must be considered as well as accent. A light meter and stanza may very easily be spoiled by the introduction of a too-strong word. For instance, “gnarled,” “strength,” “thrust,” and so on are very much longer than “may,” “well,” “the,” “for,” and many other of the one-syllabled words. When a line scans correctly but “somehow sounds wrong,” in nine cases out of ten the fault can be traced to a long syllable that should have been short or a short syllable that should have been long.

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# THE QUATRAIN AND SONNET

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## CHAPTER VI

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### THE QUATRAIN AND SONNET

#### *The Quatrain*

**I**N the seventeenth century the quatrain was a favorite tool of the old English writers who wished to embody a stinging epigram or epitaph in verse. The works of Robert Herrick contain several, most of them, unfortunately, not fit for print. Nor was he the only unblushing exponent of the questionable quatrain.

But times have changed and like everything else the quatrain has grown respectable. From the disuse and misuse into which it had fallen the modern magazine editor rescued it and by creating a market revived the art of quatrain making. To-day sometimes the four lines are descriptive; again they contain a kindly or clever epigram, or perhaps an unexpected twist at the end that makes for a joke.

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The average quatrain is in iambic pentameter with alternate lines rhyming. Sometimes the first and fourth lines rhyme and the second and third, and occasionally one sees a detached Omaric stanza. It all depends upon the thought and the way it is to be expressed. One thing is certain, that the quatrain because of its very brevity demands more care and polishing than a longer piece of verse. The thought must not only be concise and clearly expressed but the four lines must contain nothing else.

The following example by Frank Dempster Sherman not only describes this form of verse but is an excellent quatrain in itself:

“Hark at the lips of this pink whorl of shell  
And you shall hear the ocean’s surge and roar:  
So in the quatrain’s measure, written well  
A thousand lines shall all be sung in four.”

#### *The Sonnet*

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It is the ambition of many a versifier to be known as a maker of sonnets. Doubtless this love for the form is prompted not only by its possibilities but even more by its traditions. Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Rossetti, to mention only a few of the celebrated names, were masters of the sonnet, though it must be said that the version used by the earlier English writers was not the one we know to-day. Shakespeare’s seventy-third sonnet may serve as a fair example of the arrangement of the lines in the early Elizabethan period, though even in his day the present rhyming order was passing gradually into use.

“That time of year thou may’st in me behold  
When yellow leaves or few or none do hang  
Upon the boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou see’st the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death’s second self that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou see’st the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death bed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.  
This thou perceivest which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.”

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This fourteen lines, as an examination will discover, might be written in three four-line stanzas with an additional two lines as an epigrammatic envoy. In fact it can scarcely be called a sonnet at all, and the last two lines come out with such force as to offend the ear accustomed to the more modern form.

The sonnet by Keats, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” is an excellent illustration of the change in the rhyming system and emphasis.

“Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne:  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene

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Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.”

The first eight lines rhyme: a, b, b, a, a, b, b, a; the last six: c, d, c, d, c, d. Thus the sonnet halts only at one place, the interval between the eighth and the sixth lines, where the rest is welcome, while the emphasis, instead of coming out so brazenly at the end, reaches its climax in the next to the last line, dying away gradually. The order of the eight lines in the modern sonnet is almost invariably unchanged, but the sestet is varied as the movement of the thought dictates.

As to sonnet construction little can be said here or, if one wished to go into detail, so much could be said that it would fill this volume a dozen times. Keats, Wordsworth and Rossetti, to say nothing of a dozen or more modern sonneteers, are safe models to follow. One trifling suggestion seems in order. There are so many really good sonnets now that a second-rate production is a drug on the market. Except as an exercise it is altogether superfluous. A first-class sonnet must be grounded first on an idea and then rewritten and worked over until the idea has found a fit setting. Commonplaceness either in the idea or its expression is alike fatal.

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## VII

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### THE BALLADE AND OTHER FRENCH FORMS

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#### CHAPTER VII

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#### THE BALLADE AND OTHER FRENCH FORMS

THE Anglo Saxons were a hard-drinking race whose bards chanted interminable battle songs to tables of uncritical, mead-filled heroes. As a result the English language grew up without many of the finer points of verse and bare especially of all fixed forms. It was this latter lack which Austin Dobson sought to supply by imitating in English the ballade, triolet, villanelle and other verse arrangements at that time used only by the French and not very generally among them.

##### *The Ballade*

Of these the ballade is the best known, and Dobson's "Ballade of the Pompadour's Fan" is subjoined as one of the most popular and most easily imitated.

[Pg 56]

“Chicken skin, delicate, white,  
Painted by Carlo Van Loo,  
Loves in a riot of light,  
Roses and vaporous blue;  
Hark to the dainty frou-frou!  
Picture above if you can  
Eyes that would melt like the dew—  
This was the Pompadour's fan!

“See how they rise at the sight,  
Thronging the Œil de Bœuf through,  
Courtiers as butterflies bright,  
Beauties that Fragonard drew;  
Talon rouge, falbala, queue,  
Cardinal Duke,—to a man,  
Eager to sigh or to sue,—  
This was the Pompadour's fan.

“Ah, but things more than polite  
Hung on this toy, voyez vous!  
Matters of state and of might,  
Things that great ministers do.  
Things that maybe overthrew  
Those in whose brains they began;

Here was the sign and the cue,—  
This was the Pompadour's fan.

ENVOY

"Where are the secrets it knew?  
Weavings of plot and of plan?  
But where is the Pompadour, too?  
This was the Pompadour's fan."

It will be noticed that there are but three rhyming sounds, also that the last line of the first stanza is repeated as the last line of the other two and the envoy. The lines rhyme together a, b, a, b, a, b, c, b, c, in each stanza and in the envoy b, c, b, c. The most frequent rhyme occurs fourteen times; the next six and the "c" rhyme five. With the exception of the refrain there is no repetition of rhymes in the proper ballade. Even Dobson's use of "cue" and "queue" is, in the strictest sense, an error.

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With its difficult rhymes the ballade is an excellent school in which to learn smooth-flowing verse. If one is able to write a simple and natural ballade the ordinary stanza forms will appear ridiculously easy.

But the ballade has two bugbears: the first the refrain which refuses to come in naturally, and the second the envoy which insists on appearing as a disjointed after thought. The refrain in a good ballade makes its bow each time with a slight change in the significance and comes in not because it has been predestined for the end of the stanza, but because it is the only combination of words possible to round out the eight lines.

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The envoy contains the gist of the whole matter and at the same time must be written to be read not as an appendix but as a component part of the ballade. It must always come out with a ring that leaves the spirit of the verse stamped on the reader's mind.

For overcoming these two bugbears—practice will conquer the most recalcitrant refrain and one may often circumvent an envoy by writing it first. When the sound chosen for the most frequent rhyme has but some sixteen or seventeen companion words an envoy written in the beginning will save much pondering later. It is easier to fit the unused rhymes into an eight-line stanza than into a four-line envoy, especially when the four lines are called on to sum up the thought of the whole production and give a clever turn to it as well.

*The Rondeau*

[Pg 59]

"'In teacup times!' The style of dress  
Would suit your beauty, I confess.  
Belinda-like the patch you'd wear;  
I picture you with powdered hair,—  
You'd made a splendid shepherdess!

"And I, no doubt, could well express  
Sir Plume's complete conceitedness,—  
Could poise a clouded cane with care  
'In teacup times.'

"The parts would fit precisely—yes:  
We should achieve a huge success!  
You should disdain and I despair  
With quite the true Augustan air;  
But ... could I love you more or less,—  
'In teacup times?'"

The rondeau's difficulties lie in its two-rhyme limitation and the handling of the refrain. This refrain either rounds the stanzas beautifully or else plays dog in the manger with the sense. In the common form of the rondeau it is made up of the first four syllables of the first line and is repeated after the eighth and thirteenth lines.

A simpler form of the rondeau devised or at least introduced by Austin Dobson is to be found in the "May Book." This gives an idea of the rondeau's possibilities as a medium for more serious verse.

[Pg 60]

"IN ANGEL COURT

"In Angel Court the sunless air  
Grows faint and sick; to left and right,  
The cowering houses shrink from sight,  
Huddling and hopeless, eyeless, bare.

"Misnamed, you say, for surely rare  
Must be the Angel shapes that light  
In Angel Court.

“Nay, the Eternities are there.  
Death by the doorway stands to smite;  
Life in its garrets leaps to light;  
And Love has climbed the crumbling stair  
In Angel Court.”

Villon has varied the rondeau so as to use for a refrain a single syllable. This form, though not so flexible as the others, has its use and is very apt for obtaining certain effects.

### *The Triolet*

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In the matter of triolets Austin Dobson is again an authority, though his experiments in this form are scarcely as successful as his ballades and rondeaus.

“TO ROSE”

AUSTIN DOBSON

“In the school of Coquettes  
Madam Rose is a scholar:  
O, they fish with all nets  
In the school of Coquettes!  
When her brooch she forgets  
’Tis to show her new collar:  
In the school of Coquettes  
Madam Rose is a scholar.”

Here the first line is also the fourth and the seventh, while the second is duplicated in the last. This is another of the two-rhyme forms.

The triolet seems simple enough, and, for that matter, a certain kind of triolet can be written by the ream. But to put the eight lines together in such a way that the refrain comes in freshly each time, is often a day’s work. In a much lighter vein it is permissible to pun in the repeated lines so that the last repetition comes in with a different meaning.

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Though intended for the delicately humorous the triolet is sober-going enough to carry a thread of sentiment. Nothing could be daintier or more suggestively pathetic than these lines by H. C. Bunner:

“A pitcher of mignonette,  
In a tenement’s highest casement:  
Queer sort of a flower-pot—yet  
That pitcher of mignonette  
Is a garden in heaven set  
To the little sick child in the basement—  
The pitcher of mignonette,  
In the tenement’s highest casement.”

### *The Rondel*

“READY FOR THE RIDE”

H. C. BUNNER

“Through the fresh fairness of the Spring to ride,  
As in the old days when he rode with her,  
With joy of Love that had fond Hope to bride  
One year ago had made her pulses stir.

[Pg 63]

“Now shall no wish with any day recur  
(For Love and Death part year and year full wide),  
Through the fresh fairness of the Spring to ride,  
As in the old days when he rode with her.

“No ghost there lingers of the smile that died  
On the sweet pale lip where his kisses were  
... Yet still she turns her delicate head aside,  
If she may hear him come with jingling spur  
Through the fresh fairness of the Spring to ride,  
As in the old days when he rode with her.”

This variant of the rondeau contains fourteen lines of which the first two are twice repeated as refrains. But two rhymes are employed.

### *The Villanelle*

"A VILLANELLE AT VERONA"

AUSTIN DOBSON,

In the *Century Magazine*

"A voice in the scented night,  
A step where the rose trees blow,—  
O Love and O Love's delight!

[Pg 64]

"Cold star at the blue vault's height,  
What is it that shakes you so?  
A voice in the scented night.

"She comes in her beauty bright,  
She comes in her young love's glow,  
O Love and O Love's delight!

"She bends from her casement white,  
And she hears it hushed and low,  
A voice in the scented night.

"And he climbs by that stairway slight  
Her passionate Romeo:  
O Love and O Love's delight!

"And it stirs us still in spite  
Of its 'ever so long ago,'  
That voice in the scented night;  
O Love and O Love's delight!"

The second lines of each stanza rhyme and the first and third lines of the first stanza are alternated as refrains.

The sestina has six six-line stanzas and an envoy: in the stanzas the final words of each line remain the same throughout, though the order is changed. In the three-line envoy the six words must appear again and in an established order. The sestina is a trifle too long to quote, but one of the best and sanest examples is to be found in Kipling's *Seven Seas*—"The Sestina of the Tramp Royal." Swinburne's sestinas though "poetic" are very cloudy in meaning.

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The pantoum, another involved arrangement, is made up of four-line stanzas in which the second and fourth lines of the first verse are used as the first and third lines of the second verse, and so on *ad infinitum* until the weary author ends by repeating the first and third lines of the whole production as the second from the last and the last of the concluding stanza.

There is great good for the beginner in writing these French forms even if he takes up the work only as an exercise. Their construction is so certain and fixed that an error is glaring. Though it may be brow-wrinkling to build a ballade, it is a simple matter to see its faults.

There is also value in these forms for the advanced student. They embody suggestions for new stanza forms and fresh verse in general. The use of the ballade variant may be found in Kipling. When varied the triolet may give exactly the right ring for some idea which refuses to fit itself into the conventional molds. When one has served his apprenticeship he may arrange and rearrange as he sees fit, bending the stanza to his purpose. Of the forms he is not the slave but the master.

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VIII

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THE SONG

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CHAPTER VIII

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THE SONG

A VARIETY of verse which has great vogue now and which has so developed as to be considered almost as individual as the rondeau or sonnet is the modern "song."

Formerly the "song" was written to music or at least written that it might be set to music, but now it must sing itself. It may dress in sober iambs if it pleases, but there must be a lilt and go to the words to suggest music. Among the best examples of this form open to the reader are the songs of Robert Burns. Though written to fit old Scotch airs the words themselves suggest a melody to any one with the slightest ear for music. For instance:

"My luve is like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June:  
My luve is like the melodie  
That's sweetly played in tune.

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"As fair thou art, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luve am I:  
And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry.

"Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt in the sun:  
I will luve thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o' life shall run.

"And fare thee weel, my only luve!  
And fare thee weel awhile:  
And I will come again, my luve,  
Tho' it were ten thousand mile."

Though not the author of much printed verse Robert Louis Stevenson has written more than one singing stanza:

"Bright is the ring of words  
When the right man rings them,  
Fair is the fall of songs  
When the singer sings them.  
Still they are carolled and said—  
On wings they are carried—  
After the singer is dead  
And the maker buried."

Going to the works of W. E. Henley we find much very singable verse. In the quoted example he has used in the chorus the suggestion of an old Scotch stanza:

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"Oh Falmouth is a fine town with ships in the bay,  
And I wish from my heart it's there I was to-day:  
I wish from my heart I was far away from here,  
Sitting in my parlor and talking to my dear.  
For it's home, dearie, home—it's home I want to be,  
Our topsails are hoisted and we'll away to sea.  
Oh, the oak and the ash and the bonnie birken tree,  
They're all growing green in the old countree."

Austin Dobson in a longer poem makes use of the following stanza:

"Across the grass I see her pass;  
She comes with tripping pace,—  
A maid I know, the March winds blow  
Her hair across her face;—  
With a hey, Dolly! ho Dolly!  
Dolly shall be mine,  
Before the spray is white with May  
Or blooms the eglantine."

In all of Kipling the singing quality is dominant. He is to be marked especially because in his songs he has combined the old meters so as to give the effect of absolute novelty. The Scotch poets of Burns' time and before, offer many excellent chances for imitation and study. Shakespeare's occasional songs are always true. A seldom quoted poem of Lord Byron's is full of melody:

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"So we'll go no more a roving  
So late into the night,  
Though the heart be still as loving,  
And the moon be still as bright.

"For the sword outwears its sheath,  
And the soul wears out the breast,  
And the heart must pause to breathe,  
And love itself have rest.

"Though the night was made for loving

And the day returns too soon,  
Yet we'll go no more a roving  
By the light of the moon."

Just exactly where the singing quality of a song lies it is hard to tell. It is not altogether in the open vowels or the meter or the flow of thought, though dependent on all three. It is impossible to formulate any rule for the construction of the song except the general laws of good taste. The only plan is to try and try again until the result contains something of the singing quality. Very often it is helpful to fit the words to some air imaginary or otherwise which runs in the head. The song may be long or short, tell little or a great deal. In practice, as a rule, it is less than twenty-four lines in length and expresses a single thought or emotion. Its only two essentials are that it be graceful and that it sing.

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## IX

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### TYPES OF MODERN VERSE

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#### CHAPTER IX

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#### TYPES OF MODERN VERSE

##### *Vers de Société*

**V**ERS DE SOCIÉTÉ, "society verse," is a development of the last century; almost, one might say, of the last twenty-five years. In that time there has been composed a great volume of this sort of verse upon which a number of the minor poets have based their claims to remembrance. It is difficult to define *vers de société*; in fact, the only way it can be described is through examples. Its characteristics are a gracefulness of thought and style, a fluency in expression, a vein of delicate humor or sentiment and a subject which falls within the limits of "polite conversation." It sparkles or should sparkle with clever turns of thought and at times even descends to a sort of punning. No attempt is made to reach the sublime, but serious *vers de société* is often written and is the more effective because of its contrasted setting. The ballade, rondeau and triolet are favorite expressions of this style of verse, for in general its writers seek difficult stanza forms with rhymes natural but never hackneyed.

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As an exercise its making is both profitable and difficult. On trial, it will be found no easy matter to write line after line of every-day English into balanced verse that is not commonplace, but once well done it is a much easier task to find a market.

Calverley's "Fly Leaves" approach the classic of *vers de société*. Austin Dobson has worked in a more serious vein. Praed has written some delightfully easy specimens of the style, while in America John G. Saxe, Oliver Wendell Holmes and a number of contemporary writers are responsible for an extensive output ranking well up with England's.

##### *The Dramatic Interlude*

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The serious drama in verse nowadays is a drug on the market as far as selling power is concerned, unless we except the plays of Stephen Phillips. There is, however, a sort of dramatic interlude which is not only marketable but much more easily and pleasantly written; a composition on the general order of Dobson's "Proverbs in Porcelain." A study of the "Proverbs" will go further for an understanding of the subject than pages of explanation.

They are written in iambic tetrameter which is kept from singsongness by the action of the dialogue. The characters seldom end their speeches at the end of the line but rather in the middle, and the line is filled out by the first words of the next speaker.

These little play fragments, built in the form of a delicate comedy, are not long enough to exhaust either writer or reader and are even to be met with now and then in our modern magazines. Their value for the verse maker lies in the premium which they put upon ease and naturalness of expression, though in addition they present a novel exercise to the student who is tired of writing his narratives in conventional verse. The "Proverbs" are suggested not as models to copy absolutely but rather as the base of variations which the verse maker may devise to suit his theme.

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### *Nonsense Verse*

Nonsense verse in its present development is a fairly modern growth. It began with the limerick which first reached the public under the kindly patronage of Mother Goose:

“There was an old man of Bombay,  
Who pulled at a pipe made of clay,  
But a long-legged snipe  
Flew away with the pipe  
Which vexed that old man of Bombay.”

With this as a beginning the limerick has spread far and wide. It has secured a place in modern nonsense verse corresponding to that of the sonnet in more serious efforts. There are even limerick fiends who pride themselves on their writing of limericks and others whose collections of the form total up in the thousands. [Pg 81]

It is very seldom that one sees a limerick now with the first and last lines identical. As a rule the last line differs from the first and ends in a new rhyme. The following taken from *Life* represents the apotheosis of the limerick:

“A German from over the Rhine  
When asked at what hour he would dine,  
Replied, ‘At Five, Seven,  
Eight, Ten and Eleven,  
Four, Six and a Quarter to Nine!’”

Edward Lear, an English writer, began the popularization of the limerick in his nonsense books about 1850 and since his time it has been experimented with by many of the cleverest writers now before the public.

But nonsense verse is not confined to this one form. Passing from the work of Lear we come to Lewis Carroll’s verse in “Alice in Wonderland.” Nothing of its kind better than “Jabberwocky” has ever been written, and it would be a bold verse maker who would try to improve on “The Walrus and the Carpenter,” or any of the other “Alice poems.” [Pg 82]

In a different way, though perhaps as amusing, is the Gelett Burgess style of nonsense verse typified in his noble quatrain to the Purple Cow:

“I never saw a purple cow,  
I never hope to see one;  
But this I’ll tell you anyhow  
I’d rather see than be one.”

Some years ago the college humorous publications originated a bloodthirsty conceit which touched the doings of Little Willie:

“Little Willie yesterday  
When the baby went to play  
Filled him full of kerosene.  
Gee! but isn’t Willie mean!”

Since then the murderous adventures of “Little Willie” have been countless.

They are all cannibalistic but rather catchy.

The awful thing about nonsense verse is the very fine line that divides a masterpiece from utter drivel. Nonsense verse is very good or very bad. When it plays along the edges it is very pleasing but when it oversteps it becomes rot. [Pg 83]

### *The Humorous Ballad*

A step higher in the ladder is the Humorous Ballad. The “Comic Ballad” we have had with us from the days of Robin Hood, but W. S. Gilbert in his “Bab Ballads” reached heights before his time unsuspected. By the use of catchy stanzas and unusual rhymes he made the type a thing of art. Most readers are familiar with the “Yarn of the Nancy Bell,” in which the solitary sailor sings:

“Oh, I am the cook and the captain bold  
And the mate of the Nancy brig;  
And the bos’n tight and the midshipmite  
And the crew of the captain’s gig.”

Since the publication of the “Bab Ballads” a great deal of verse has been produced along the same general lines. Mr. Wallace Irwin’s “Nautical Ballads of a Landsman” are the most notable additions of recent years. [Pg 84]



## VERSE TRANSLATION

### CHAPTER X

#### VERSE TRANSLATION

**A** WORKING knowledge of some foreign language—say French or German—is often very profitable to the verse maker. With a dictionary and a couple of text books he can make very good translations of the poetry of the language—work which may not bring a money return but which as an exercise is both interesting and valuable. The process is not complicated, though a good verse translation may be made as hard a task as any falling to the lot of the literary worker.

Take a poem that strikes the fancy; read it and reread till every word is clear and then shape the translation into a stanza and meter as near the original as possible. If there are four three-line stanzas in the original, build the translation into four three-line stanzas as closely line for line as the ease of the verse will permit. In translating from the German the original meter can be followed accent for accent, though this is impossible with the French, whose syllables are without emphasis, and would scarcely be advisable with any of the more complicated Latin meters.

At first it is a good idea to make the English verse rigorously exact in its meaning—to study every word until the verse not only rhymes and runs with some degree of naturalness, but also is a correct rendering of the cold facts. This is not so hard as it seems if one sits down and thinks the right word out, and it gives opportunity for an excellent overhauling of the vocabulary.

Any one who has had a high-school course in Latin can experiment with Virgil, turning it either into couplets like Pope's Iliad or into the more appropriate meter used by Longfellow in his Evangeline. With a dictionary and a literal translation it is easy enough to puzzle out Horace, who is more modern in his thought and who is, in a way, the ancestor of our present *vers-de-société* writers. There is also this advantage in the translation of Horace: One finds a chance to compare his translation with the work of many others, for Horace has been more widely translated than any other poet unless we except the Biblical writers. The fame of Father Prout rests largely on his renderings of Horace. Austin Dobson has translated several of the odes into the French forms and many other poets have turned their hand to the task.

Among the Germans, Heine is a favorite with English translators, though many of his songs from their shortness and delicacy are hard to express properly. Goethe and Schiller have also been much translated and any collection of German poetry will show a dozen poems with which one has become familiar through the English versions.

Among the French it is difficult to specify any particular authors, as they have not been so widely translated as the Germans. Alfred de Musset, Théophile Gautier and Paul Verlaine are, perhaps, as well known as any other of the more modern writers.

In making translations with a view to the artistic side the result is apt to differ from the exercise which aims only at accuracy. For practice one should render line for line as nearly as possible. When one can do this it is allowable to take more liberties and reproduce the poem, not line for line as it stands, but rather as the author might have written it had he composed in English; to preserve the meter and general arrangement but to sacrifice details when necessary to the spirit of the poem. When the two qualities can be combined and a poem is translated in such a way that the lines correspond and yet do not crowd out the poetry the result is a masterpiece. But such things very rarely happen and require not only hard work but a flash of inspiration and good luck as well.

Very often a poem can be imitated from its mother tongue. A stanza or two may be expanded into a ballade in English containing an elaboration of the original thought. It is perfectly allowable to offer a composition of this sort for sale provided the source is acknowledged.

## CHAPTER XI

### ABOUT READING

**T**O write good verse one must read good verse. The world has spun too long for a man to succeed who depends wholly on his own ideas; he must profit by the work of others. The more poetry and the more kinds of poetry the verse maker reads the broader his knowledge of the subject becomes. First it touches his vocabulary, then his rhymes and meters and lastly his methods.

Though all good literature is helpful in this way, the book which gives the most enjoyment is very apt to bring the most profit. But it should not be forgotten that many authors are unpopular because of a hasty first impression. A rainy day and a disagreeable companion will spoil the effect of the prettiest scenery in the world, and a bad dinner and a headache may turn a masterpiece into a lasting abomination. Any poet whose work has lived must possess some quality which is worth appreciating if not acquiring. Given a fair trial without prejudice he will speak for himself.

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It is not in the compass of this chapter to list the "Poets Who Should Be Reverenced." It is better for the verse maker to experiment and select his patron saints for himself. Yet attention may be called to certain accepted masters with whose work even the beginner should be familiar.

At the head of the list stands the Bible. The beauty and simplicity of its speech fully explain how this book has inspired generation after generation of poets. Job, Isaiah, the Psalms and the writings of Solomon are in themselves a treasury of phrase and suggestion.

Shakespeare is to be read for the poetry of his lines and picturesque word-grouping if for nothing else. For that matter, the songs of all the Elizabethan dramatists are worthy of study and restudy. They have a lilt and a lightness which make them live even now when so many literary fashions have passed away.

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The old English ballads, to be found in Percy's *Reliques*, Allingham's *Ballad Book* and most collections of English Literature, are a help toward understanding the construction of a spirited narrative poem. Kipling's "Ballad of East and West" shows how effectively this sort of treatment can be applied to a modern theme.

Robert Herrick is worth while for the grace and delicacy of his poems; with him might be classed the better efforts of Lovelace and Sir John Suckling.

Milton's "Paradise Lost" is perhaps the best example we have of continuous blank verse. It should be read but not imitated, at least not imitated too much. It is hard to distinguish good blank verse from bad and it is so easy to write the bad.

Dryden's "Alexander's Feast" deserves a perpetual bookmark for the remarkable success with which the trend of emotion is interpreted by the rhythm. "The Bells," by Edgar Allan Poe, is another example of this treatment and is held by some critics to be equally good.

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Pope's verse and that of his age generally is too cleverly artificial to be of much use to a modern, though his mastery of the epigrammatic couplet might be profitably noted.

As an exemplification of finished workmanship Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" stands alone.

Robert Burns, for the swing of his songs and the flavor of his words, should be read continually. Much of his Scotch vocabulary might be used, judiciously, in English verse.

In the "Eve of St. Agnes," Keats has revealed possibilities in the Spenserian stanza of which Spenser himself was not aware, and the "Ode to a Nightingale" and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" have a classic beauty which can be recognized though not successfully copied.

Of the more modern poets Browning's strange, uncouth phrasing is full of power; Tennyson's mastery is shown in his exquisite choice of words, and Swinburne's meters and rhymes are worth close application.

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And so one might go on for a dozen pages and still have an incomplete list. It is not what one reads but how one reads. The books wait on the shelves and through reading and through reading only can one cultivate that most necessary though indefinable quality—Good Taste.

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# HINTS FOR BEGINNERS

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## CHAPTER XII

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### HINTS FOR BEGINNERS

FOR one whose verse runs easily and whose occasional sales are an encouragement, this last chapter is perhaps unnecessary. Yet there may come times in routine, monotonous production when even he loses in interest, and with this loss his work falls off in quality. It is only through interest and desire that anything has ever been accomplished, and if these are not sustained the work must stay at a low level. Even the seasoned writer must look forward to his work if he wishes to improve.

For the beginner whose airy verse does not trip but rather lumbers, who is unable to write anything worthy of sale and whose ideas refuse to be crowded into the right number of feet, it might be an excellent thing occasionally to drop all thought of pentameters and amphibrachs and go back to the old-fashioned rhymed alphabet.

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“A is for Ant  
That lives in the ground,  
B is for Bear—  
A terror when found——”

and so on through the twenty-six harmless letters. It is an exercise in ingenuity if nothing else and if the writer has any skill at drawing it could be converted into a delightful gift for a five-year-old. Lear, the author of the Nonsense books, did not think it beneath his dignity to write six of these alphabets in varying stanza forms.

A little harder, but still not too hard, is the limerick, examples of which are given in [Chapter IX](#). As a gift, a series of illustrated limericks on people you know would have the merit of novelty at least.

To see one's productions in print is always an incentive to better work. The type is cheering even when its legibility reveals several faults unnoticed in manuscript. Most small newspapers are glad to publish fairly good verse when the poet is willing to let it go for nothing. Be sure that rhyme and meter are correct and then send it in and let the General Public stand from under.

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If it is a lack of verse ideas that bothers you, try a drama. Write it in blank verse and crowd the action with incidental songs. This is not for publication, of course; not even to show your dearest friend, but just for practice. Put in a troubadour if you like, or anything else a romantic imagination may suggest, and let them sing themselves hoarse in every scene. In this prosaic century you might not be able to write a stirring love song, but if you become thoroughly identified with the characters, your troubadour or your fair lady would be bound to get off something creditable. The plot of the drama is a thing of no consequence; it may have as much or as little as you choose. Write the scenes as the mood strikes you and when you have lost interest think of it only as an exercise.

Tennyson's "Maud" shows how a narrative poem may be treated in a series of lyrics and suggests imitation. The German poets, as well as some English writers, have song cycles, a series of poems all bearing on one central theme. A pedestrian trip; the life of a bird couple; the coming of winter, and innumerable other subjects lie close at hand suitable for such treatment. Henley's city types and hospital sketches lead the way for similar verses of things familiar to you.

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Very often a line from a piece of prose or verse sticks in the memory. Utilize the line by making it the refrain of a ballade or the ending of some similar verse form. Browning composed his "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," around that single line taken from a song in "King Lear." It is possible to go even further and with a stanza—say from some Elizabethan song—construct about it the completed poem. Rossetti has done this with one of Ophelia's songs in "Hamlet."

But keep up your interest and work for the love of working. There is drudgery in the learning of anything, but with verse one can at least make it interesting drudgery. Never give up; never be satisfied; and with all English literature to rove in, don't stick in a rut.

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Now a general summing up for the verse maker—a summing up that applies just as much to painting or modeling as it does to verse writing.

Remember always that you are your own master and that your highest development must always come from yourself. On all matters of taste you are the court of last resort to decide for the hurt or betterment of your soul. So it is necessary in the beginning to be just with yourself. If your verses are not good, throw them away or rewrite them. If they are good not only when written but after they have been laid aside for a month; if the rhymes are true and the meter perfect; if the words run naturally and clearly and embody a real idea, then you may be sure that you have something worthy of editorial consideration at least. If the idea is

old and put in the form that has endured, lo! these many generations—"love," "dove," "kiss," "bliss," very probably it will not be accepted. When it comes back from five magazines be fair enough to recognize that perhaps the fault lies with you and lay the masterpiece away for another two months. Then examine it fair-mindedly and try to see just where it falls short of perfection. But you must be you own worst or rather best critic. Admit it when you are wrong and when you are right hold your opinion against all comers.

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You must decide whether to write much verse or little. Sometimes improvement comes best with a great deal of carelessly constructed stuff. Again a smaller and more carefully regulated output is better. As a general thing, if your ear is correct and your verse comes easily, the better way is to write little and write carefully, spending your time on a few lines. If, however, your rhymes come hard and your expression is not fluent, try a larger output not so carefully revised.

Analyze and imitate.

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Make the mechanical construction correct. Two rhyming words with you should be either good or bad; you should not recognize half-way rhymes. If they are not worthy to be classed with the best, throw them out utterly. Even in your exercises do not tolerate a false rhyme or a line lacking in syllables.

Do not attempt too hard a thing at first. You will only be disappointed. Do not write a ballade until you can write a limerick. Work up gradually.

And you must not become discouraged. If you write day in and day out, you are bound to improve, though the work of Wednesday be no better than that of Tuesday or even of Saturday. Progress goes in jumps. Nine times we fail and on the tenth trial we succeed.

We cannot all be artists but we can all be good workmen. And the better we are able to handle our materials the better we shall be able, if it is in us, to produce something worth while.

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## APPENDIX

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### APPENDIX

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#### I

##### MARKET FOR VERSE

THERE is no market nowadays for the long poem except from writers of established reputation. As a rule the shorter the verse the better its chance of acceptance. Verse humorous is easier to dispose of than verse serious because there is a wider field. *Puck*, *Judge*, *Life*, *Smart Set*, *Ainslee's*, *Harper's*, *Century*, and an army of others are always willing to buy really amusing verse.

Serious verse is sold in lesser quantities, but the price is better—when the production is bought by a high-class publication. The *Atlantic Monthly* is always on the lookout for new writers and other magazines are prompt to recognize what pleases them even in the work of a newcomer. Perhaps the most standard popular forms of serious verse are the sonnet and the short love lyric.

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Many editors are glad to buy quatrains and even couplets to fill out a page when a longer form would be rejected. The well-written triolet is also sure of a hearing for this same reason.

Newspapers pay little or nothing for verse except when a special writer is put on the staff to supply a column of verse a day. Occasionally some topical stanza which agrees with the editorial policy will be accepted from an outsider. It may be pointed out here that very often the humor or appropriateness of a production will overbalance faults in the rhyme and meter. In serious verse an exception of this sort will rarely be found and a thing must stand or fall on its real merits.

There is no sure way to determine the market except by personal investigation. Read the magazines till you find out where the editor's preference lies and then try him with something of your own, written not in imitation but on the same general lines. Do not send out your verse in a hit-or-miss fashion. Separate the limericks and the love songs and send them each to their appointed editor.

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In spite of the protestations of interested publishers the reading public does not interest

itself in the volume of "collected poems." A book of this sort is rarely looked at unless it runs very much out of the ordinary or comes as the product of some well-known author.

## II

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### SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

This is not intended in any way to be an exhaustive list. It merely suggests the field which each student is bound to explore for himself.

#### TECHNIQUE OF VERSE.

The Rhymester—Tom Hood. Concise; with rhyming dictionary appendix.

Science of Verse—Sidney Lanier. Worth while for the advanced student.

—The Poetic Principle,

—Philosophy of Compensation,

—Rationale of Verse. Essays by Edgar Allan Poe; to be found in his collected works. Very interesting as showing the methods and viewpoint of a great poet.

#### COLLECTIONS OF POETRY.

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Ward's English Poets. Four volumes ranging from Chaucer to Tennyson.

Oxford Book of English Verse. One large volume containing the work of many of the living writers as well as selections from all the standard poets.

—Victorian Anthology.

—American Anthology. Both compiled by Edmund Clarence Stedman. Valuable because they contain examples of the best work of to-day's verse makers.

#### THE SONNET.

Examples of the sonnet are to be found in almost any collection of verse. The older magazines, especially the *Atlantic Monthly*, use the form continually. The best known sonnet series are:

Astrophel and Stella—Sir Philip Sidney.

Sonnets of Shakespeare.

House of Life—Rossetti.

Sonnets from the Portuguese—Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

#### FRENCH FORMS.

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Examples are to be found in the collected poems of Austin Dobson, Andrew Lang, W. E. Henley and H. C. Bunner, to mention only the more prominent. The Ballade Book, edited by Gleeson White, Ex Libris Series, contains examples of all the forms and is probably the most convenient collection to be had.

#### THE SONG.

In this connection see Burns, Moore, Tennyson, together with Scotch collections and the work of W. B. Yeats and other modern Irish writers. For rhythm and a different sort of "song" see Kipling. The Vagabondia Series by Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey are worth buying. Occasional poems, falling under this head, are to be found in almost any volume of the poets.

#### VERS DE SOCIÉTÉ.

About the best single book is a volume in the Leisure Hour Series entitled "Vers de Société." It gives an excellent idea of the field covered. Among the strongest writers of this style of verse are Austin Dobson, C. S. Calverley, Andrew Lang, W. M. Praed and H. C. Bunner. Perhaps the best known English writer of to-day is Owen Seaman, whose work appears weekly in *Punch*.

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NONSENSE VERSE.

Mother Goose.

The Burgess Nonsense Book—Gelett Burgess.

A Nonsense Anthology—Carolyn Wells.

A Parody Anthology—Carolyn Wells.

HUMOROUS BALLADS.

Bab Ballads—W. S. Gilbert.

Grimm Tales Made Gay—Guy Wetmore Carryl.

Nautical Ballads of a Landsman—Wallace Irwin.

TRANSLATIONS.

It is difficult to quote any translator in particular who is worth while. Most translators are not poets and most poets have not been translators. The book of solid translation is generally very mediocre and tiresome. Translations of the greatest foreign poets are to be found in any fair-sized public library. Longfellow, Swinburne, Rossetti, Dobson, Lang and a few others have left occasional translations which are models of the best of this work.

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