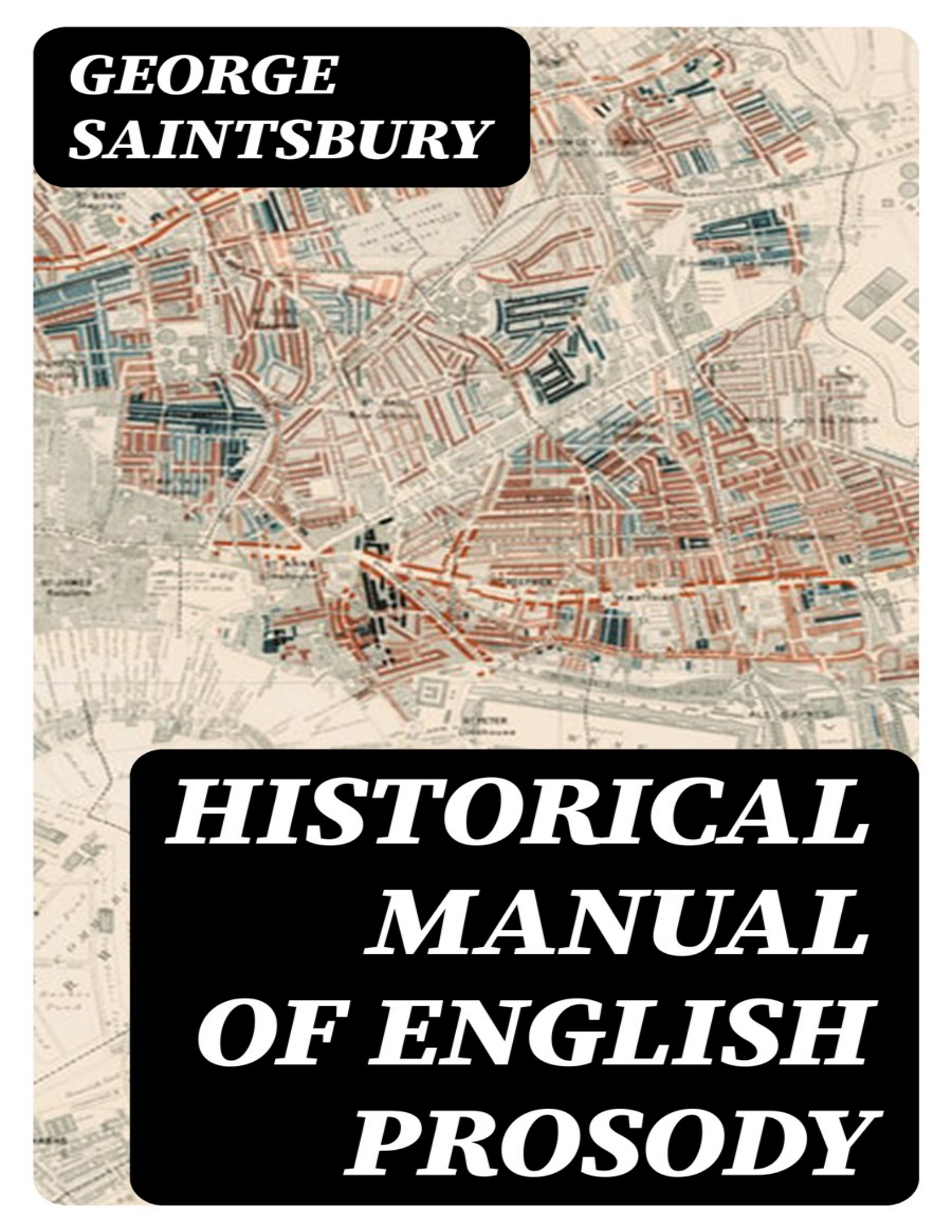


A detailed historical map of London, showing the city's layout with streets, buildings, and landmarks. The map is color-coded with red and blue lines, and various areas are labeled. The map is the background of the entire image.

***GEORGE
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***HISTORICAL
MANUAL
OF ENGLISH
PROSODY***

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A detailed historical map of London, showing the city's layout with streets, buildings, and landmarks. The map is color-coded with red and blue lines, likely representing different types of roads or districts. The map is oriented with North at the top.

***HISTORICAL
MANUAL
OF ENGLISH
PROSODY***

George Saintsbury

Historical Manual of English Prosody

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

BOOK I INTRODUCTORY AND DOGMATIC

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER II SYSTEMS OF ENGLISH PROSODY—THE
ACCENTUAL OR STRESS

CHAPTER III SYSTEMS OF ENGLISH PROSODY—THE
SYLLABIC

CHAPTER IV SYSTEMS OF ENGLISH PROSODY—THE FOOT

CHAPTER V RULES OF THE FOOT SYSTEM

§ A. Feet

§ B. Constitution of Feet

§ C. Equivalence and Substitution

§ D. Pause

§ E. Line-Combination

§ F. Rhyme

§ G. Miscellaneous

CHAPTER VI CONTINUOUS ILLUSTRATIONS OF ENGLISH
SCANSION ACCORDING TO THE FOOT SYSTEM

I. Old English Period Scansion only dimly visible.

II. Late Old English with Nisus towards Metre ("Grave" Poem.
Guest's text, spelling, and accentuation; the usual marks for
the latter being substituted for his dividing bars, and foot
division added in dots.)

III. Transition Period Metre struggling to assert itself in a
New Way. Part of the verses of St. Godric.

IV. Early Middle English Period Attempt at merely Syllabic
Uniformity with Unbroken Iambic Run and no Rhyme. Orm.

V. Early Middle English Period Conflict or Indecision between Accentual Rhythm and Metrical Scheme. Layamon.

VI. Early Middle English Period The Appearance and Development of the "Fourteener."

VII. Early Middle English Period The Plain and Equivalenced Octosyllable.

VIII. Early Middle English Period The Romance-Six or "Rime Couée."

IX. Early Middle English Period Miscellaneous Stanzas.

X. Early Middle English Period Appearance of the Decasyllable.

XI. Later Middle English Period The Alliterative Revival—Pure.

XII. Later Middle English Period The Alliterative Revival—Mixed.

XIII. Later Middle English Period Potentially Metrical Lines in Langland (see) .

XIV. Later Middle English Period Scansions from Chaucer.

XV. Later Middle English Period Variations from Strict Iambic Norm in Gower.

XVI. Transition Period Examples of Break-down in Literary Verse.

XVII. Transition Period Examples of True Prosody in Ballad, Carols, etc.

XVIII. Transition Period Examples of Skeltonic and other Doggerel.

XIX. Transition Period Examples from the Scottish Poets.

XX. Early Elizabethan Period Examples of Reformed Metre from Wyatt, Surrey, and other Poets before Spenser.

XXI. Spenser at Different Periods

XXII. Examples of the Development of Blank Verse

XXIII. Examples of Elizabethan Lyric

[XXIV. Early Continuous Anapæsts](#)
[XXV. The Enjambed Heroic Couplet \(1580-1660\).](#)
[XXVI. The Stopped Heroic Couplet \(1580-1660\).](#)
[XXVII. Various Forms of Octosyllable-Heptasyllable \(late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century\).](#)
[XXVIII. "Common," "Long," and "In Memoriam" Measure \(Seventeenth Century\).](#)
[XXIX. Improved Anapæstic Measures \(Dryden, Anon., Prior\).](#)
[XXX. " Pindarics " \(Seventeenth Century\).](#)
[XXXI. The Heroic Couplet from Dryden to Crabbe](#)
[XXXII. Eighteenth-Century Blank Verse](#)
[XXXIII. The Regularised Pindaric Ode](#)
[XXXIV. Lighter Eighteenth-Century Lyric](#)
[XXXV. The Revival of Equivalence \(Chatterton and Blake\).](#)
[XXXVI. Rhymeless Attempts \(Collins to Shelley\).](#)
[XXXVII. The Revived Ballad \(Percy to Coleridge\).](#)
[XXXVIII](#)
[XXXIX. Nineteenth-Century Couplet \(Leigh Hunt to Mr. Swinburne\).](#)
[XL. Nineteenth-Century Blank Verse \(Wordsworth to Mr. Swinburne\).](#)
[XLI. The Non-Equivalenced Octosyllable of Keats and Morris](#)
[XLII. The Continuous Alexandrine \(Drayton and Browning\).](#)
[XLIII](#)
[XLV. Long Metres of Tennyson, Browning, Morris, and Swinburne](#)
[XLVI. The Later Sonnet](#)
[XLVII. The Various Attempts at "Hexameters" in English](#)
[XLVIII. Minor Imitations of Classical Metres](#)
[XLIX. Imitations of Artificial French Forms](#)

L. Later Rhymelessness

LI. Some "Unusual" Metres and Disputed Scansions

BOOK II HISTORICAL SKETCH OF ENGLISH PROSODY

CHAPTER I FROM THE ORIGINS TO CHAUCER—THE
CONSTITUTION OF ENGLISH VERSE

CHAPTER II FROM CHAUCER TO SPENSER—
DISORGANISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

CHAPTER III FROM SHAKESPEARE TO MILTON—THE CLOSE
OF THE FORMATIVE PERIOD

CHAPTER IV HALT AND RETROSPECT—CONTINUATION ON
HEROIC VERSE AND ITS COMPANIONS FROM DRYDEN TO
CRABBE

CHAPTER V THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL—ITS PRECURSORS AND
FIRST GREAT STAGE

CHAPTER VI THE LAST STAGE—TENNYSON TO SWINBURNE

CHAPTER VII RECAPITULATION OR SUMMARY VIEW OF
STAGES OF ENGLISH PROSODY

I. Old English Period

II. Before or very soon after 1200 Earliest Middle English
Period.

III. Middle and Later Thirteenth Century Second Early Middle
English Period.

IV. Earlier Fourteenth Century Central Period of Middle
English.

V. Later Fourteenth Century Crowning Period of Middle
English.

VI. Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries The Decadence
of Middle English Prosody.

VII. Mid-Sixteenth Century The Recovery of Rhythm.

VIII. Late Sixteenth Century The Perfecting of Metre and of
Poetical Diction.

IX. Early Seventeenth Century The further Development of Lyric, Stanza, and Blank Verse. Insurgence and Division of the Couplet.

X. Mid-Seventeenth Century Milton.

XI. The Later Seventeenth Century Dryden.

XII. The Eighteenth Century

XIII. The Early Nineteenth Century and the Romantic Revival

XIV. The Later Nineteenth Century

BOOK III HISTORICAL SURVEY OF VIEWS ON PROSODY

CHAPTER I BEFORE 1700

CHAPTER II FROM BYSSHE TO GUEST

CHAPTER III LATER NINETEENTH-CENTURY PROSODISTS

BOOK IV AUXILIARY APPARATUS

CHAPTER I GLOSSARY

CHAPTER II REASONED LIST OF POETS WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO THEIR PROSODIC QUALITY AND INFLUENCE

CHAPTER III ORIGINS OF LINES AND STANZAS

A. Lines

B. Stanzas, etc.

CHAPTER IV BIBLIOGRAPHY

INDEX

PREFACE

[Table of Contents](#)

The reception of the first two volumes of a larger work (since completed) on English Prosody suggested, to the author and to the publishers, that there might be room for a more compressed dealing with the subject, possessing more introductory character, and attempting the functions of a manual as well as those of a history. It did not, however, seem that the matter could be satisfactorily treated in extremely brief form, as a primer or elementary school-book. The subject is one not very well suited for elementary instruction; and in endeavouring to shape it for that use there is a particular danger of too positive and peremptory statement in reference to matters of the most contentious kind. Catechetical instruction has to be categorical; if you set hypotheses, or alternative systems, before young scholars, they are apt either to distrust the whole thing or to become hopelessly muddled. And the opposite danger—of unhesitating adoption of positive statements on doubtful points—must have been found to be only too real by any one who has had to do with education. Schoolboys cannot be too early, or too plentifully, or too variously supplied with good *examples* of verse; but they should be thoroughly familiar with the practice before they come to the principles.

To the Senior Forms of the higher Secondary Schools, on the other hand, and to students in those Universities which admit English literature as a subject, this function of it is quite suitable and well adapted, and it is for their use that this volume is planned (as well as for that of the general

reader who may hardly feel inclined to tackle three large octavos). An effort will be made to include everything that is vital to a clear understanding of the subject; while opportunity will, it is hoped, be found for insertion of some information, both of a historical and of a practical kind, which did not seem so germane to the larger *History*. It has been a main object with me in preparing this book, while reducing prosodic theory to the necessary minimum, but keeping that, to "load every rift" with prosodic fact; and I could almost recommend the student to devote himself to the Contents and the Index, illustrated by the Glossary, all of which have been made exceptionally full, before attacking the text.

The work, like the larger one of which it is not so much an abstract as a parallel with a different purpose, cannot hope to content those who think that prosody should be, like mathematics or music, a science, immutable, peremptory, abstract in the other sense. It will not content those who think—in pursuance or independently of such an opinion—that it should discard appreciation of the actual poetry, on which, from my point of view, it is solely based. It will, from another point, leave dissatisfied those who decline the attempt to reduce this poetry to some general but elastic laws, and who concentrate themselves on the immediate musical or rhetorical values (as they seem to them) of individual poems, or passages, or even (as is not uncommon) lines. Nor will it provide, what some seem to desire, a tabular analysis of every verse-form in the language, for reasons explained in the proper place (*v. inf.* p. [336](#) note). But, from past experience, it seems that it may

find some public ready for it; and it is perhaps not wholly fatuous to hope that it may help to create a larger.[\[1\]](#)

GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

EDINBURGH,
All Souls' Day,
1910.

Footnote

[Table of Contents](#)

[\[1\]](#) *Note to Second Edition. Christmas 1913.*—The opportunity of this second edition[\[2\]](#) has been taken to read the text carefully, and to correct a certain number of errors of pen and press, connected more especially with division of feet and quantification of syllables. How difficult it is to avoid errors here, nobody who has not tried the matter on an extensive scale can well conceive. Few more substantial alterations have been found necessary; but I may mention here an addition to the evidence of distinct, if clumsy, anapæstic metre in the mid.-sixteenth century, which I had not noticed when writing this book, or my larger one. It is a translation of the 149th Psalm, contributed to the "Old Version" (1561-2) by John Pulleyne, Student of Christchurch, Archdeacon of Colchester, and Prebendary of St. Paul's. It may be found in the Parker Society's *Select Poems*, and begins:

Sing unto the Lord with hearty accord
A new joyful song;
His praises resound, in every ground
His saints all among.

[\[2\]](#) And of a third.—BATH, *Sept.* 1919.

BOOK I

INTRODUCTORY AND DOGMATIC

[Table of Contents](#)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

[Table of Contents](#)

Prosody, or the study of the constitution of verse, was, not so long ago, made familiar, in so far as it concerned Latin, to all persons educated above the very lowest degree, by the presence of a tractate on the subject as a conclusion to the Latin Grammar. The same persons were further obliged to a more than theoretical knowledge of it, in so far as it concerned that language, by the once universal, now (as some think) most unwisely disused habit of composing Latin verses. The great majority of English poets, from at least the sixteenth century, if not earlier, until far into the nineteenth, had actually composed such verses; and even more had learnt the rules of them, long before attempting in English the work which has given them their fame. It is sometimes held that this fact—which as a fact is undeniable—has had an undue influence on the way in which English prosody has been regarded; that it must have exercised an enormous influence on the way in which English poetry has been produced may be denied, but hardly by any one who really considers the fact itself, and who is capable of drawing an inference.

It was, however, a very considerable time before any attempt was regularly made to construct a similar scientific or artistic analysis for English verse itself. Although efforts were made early to adjust that verse to the complete forms of Latin—and of Greek, which is in some respects prosodically nearer than Latin to English,—although such

attempts have been constantly repeated and are being continued now,—it has always been impossible for any intelligent person to make them without finding curious, sometimes rather indefinite, but extremely palpable differences and difficulties in the way. The differences especially have sometimes been exaggerated and more often mistaken, and it is partly owing to this fact that, up to the present moment, no authoritative body of doctrine on the subject of English prosody can be said to exist. It is believed by the present writer that such a body of doctrine ought to be and can be framed—with the constant proviso and warning that it will be doctrine subject, not to the practically invariable uniformity of Science, but to the wide variations of Art,—not to the absolute compulsion of the universal, but to the comparative freedom of the individual and particular. The inquiries and considerations upon which this doctrine is based will be found, at full, in the larger work referred to in the Preface. In the first Book, here, will be set forth the leading systems or principles which have actually underlain, and do underlie, the conflicting views and the discordant terminology of the subject, and this will be followed by perhaps the most valuable part, if any be valuable, of the whole—a series of selected passages, scanned and commented, from the very beginning to the very end of English poetry. In the second, a survey will be given of that actual history of the actual poetry which ought to be, but has very seldom been, the basis of every discussion on prosody. In the third a brief conspectus will be supplied of the actual opinions which have been held on this subject by those who have handled it in English. The fourth

will give, in the first place, a Glossary of Terms, which appears to be very much needed; in the second, a list of poets who have specially influenced the course of prosody, with reasoned remarks on their connection with it; in the third, a selected list of important metres with their origins and affiliations; any further matter which may seem necessary following, with a short Bibliography to conclude. The object of the whole is not merely to inculcate what seems to the author to be the best if not the only adequate general system of English prosody, but to provide the student with ample materials for forming his own judgment on this difficult, long debated, often mistaken, but always, if duly handled, profitable and delectable matter.

CHAPTER II

SYSTEMS OF ENGLISH PROSODY—THE ACCENTUAL OR STRESS

Table of Contents

The great difficulty attending the study *Classical* of English prosody, and the cause of the *prosody* fact that no book hitherto published can be *uniform in* said to possess actual authority on the *theory*. subject, arises from the other fact that no general agreement exists, or ever has existed, on the root-principles of the matter.[3] Classical writers on metre, of whom we possess a tolerable stock, differed with each other on many minor points of opinion, and from each other in the ways in which they attacked the subject. But they were practically agreed that "quantity" (*i.e.* the difference of technical "time" in pronunciation of syllables) and "feet"—that is to say, certain regular mathematical combinations of "long" and "short" quantity—constituted metre. They had indeed accent—the later Greeks certainly and the Latins probably—which was independent of, and perhaps sometimes opposed to, quantity; but except in what we call the ante-classical times of Latin and the post-classical times of both Latin and Greek, it had nothing to do with metrical arrangement. They had different values of "long" and "short"; but these did not affect metre, nor did the fact that in both languages, but especially in Greek, a certain number of syllables were allowed to be "common"—that is to say, capable of taking the place of "long" or "short" alike. The central system of

prosodic arrangement (till the flooding of the later Empire with "barbarians" of various nationality and as various intonation and modes of speech broke it down altogether) remained the same. "Longs" and "shorts" in the various combinations and permutations possible, up to three syllables most commonly, up to four in fewer cases, and possibly up to five in still fewer, made up *lines* which experiment discovered to be harmonious, and practice adopted as such. These lines were sometimes used continuously (with or without certain internal variations of feet, considered equivalent to each other), as in modern blank verse; sometimes arranged in batches corresponding more or less to each other, as in modern couplet or stanza poetry.

On the other hand, though English *English not so*. prosodists may sometimes agree on details, translated into their different terminologies, the systems which lie at the root of these terminologies are almost irreconcilably different. Even the reduction of these systems to three types may excite protest, though it is believed that it can be made out without begging the question in favour of any one.

The discord begins as early as possible; "*Accent*" and for there are some who would maintain "*stress*." that "accentual" systems and "stress" systems ought not to be identified, or even associated. It is quite true that the words are technically used[4] with less or more extensive and intensive meaning; but definitions of each are almost always driven to adopt the other, and in prosodic systems they are practically inseparable. The

soundest distinction perhaps is that "accent" refers to the habitual stress laid on a syllable in ordinary pronunciation; "stress" to a syllable specially accented for this or that reason, logical, rhetorical, or prosodic purely.

According to this system (or systems) *English prosody* English poetry consists of syllables— *as adjusted to* accented or unaccented, stressed or *them*. unstressed—arranged on principles which, whatever they may be in themselves, have no analogy to those of classical feet. According to the more reckless and thorough-going accentualists—the view is expressed, with all but its utmost crudity, in Coleridge's celebrated Preface to *Christabel*^[5]—all you have got to do is to look to the accents. Cruder advocates still have said that "accents take the place of feet" (which is something like saying that points take the place of swords), or that unaccented syllables are "left to take care of themselves." It has also been contended that the number and the position of accents or stresses give a complete and sufficient scheme of the metre. And in some late forms of stress-prosody the regularity, actual or comparative, which used to be contended for by accentualists themselves, is entirely given up; lines in continuous and apparently identical arrangement may have two, three, four, five, or even more stresses. While yet others have gone farther still and deliberately proposed reading of verse as a prose paragraph, the natural stresses of which will give the rhythm at which the author aimed.^[6] Some again would deny the existence of any normal form of staple lines like the heroic, distributing them in "bars" of "beats" which may vary almost indefinitely.

On the other hand, there are some accentualists who hardly differ, in more than terminology, from the upholders of a foot-and-quantity system. They think that there is no or little time-quantity in English; that an English "long" syllable

is really an accented one only, and an English short syllable an unaccented. They would not neglect the unaccented syllables; but would keep them in batches similar to, if not actually homonymous with, feet. In fact the difference with them becomes, if not one of mere terminology, one chiefly on the previous question of the final constitution and causation of "long" and "short" syllables. Of these, and of a larger number who consciously or unconsciously approach nearer to, though they do not actually enter, the "go-as-you-please" prosody of the extreme stressmen, the majority of English prosodists has nearly always consisted. Gascoigne, our first writer on the subject, belonged to them, calling accent itself "emphasis," and applying the term "accent" only to the written or typographical symbols of it; while he laid great stress on its observance in verse. With those who adopt this system, and its terminology, the substitution of a trochee for an iamb in the heroic line is "inversion of accent," the raising or lowering of the usual pronounced value of a syllable, "wrenching of accent," and so on. And the principal argument which they advance in favour of their system against the foot-and-quantity scheme is the very large prevalence of "common" syllables in English—an undoubted fact; though the inference does not seem to follow.

The mere use of the word "unaccented" *its difficulties* for "short" and "accented" for "long" does no particular harm, though it seems to some clumsy, irrational, and not always strictly correct even from its own point of view, while it produces unnecessary difficulty in the case of feet, or "sections," with *no* accent in them—things

which most certainly exist in English poetry. But the moment that advance is made upon this mere question of words and names, far more serious mischief arises. There can be no doubt that the insistence on strict accent, alternately placed, led directly to the monotonous and snip-snap verse of the eighteenth century. In some cases it leads, logically and necessarily, to denial of such feet as those just mentioned—a denial which flies straight in the face of fact. Although it does not necessarily involve, it most frequently leads also to, the forbidding, ignoring, or shuffling off of trisyllabic feet, which are the chief glory and the chief charm of English poetry, as substituted for dissyllabic. And, further still, it leads to the most extraordinary confusion of rhythms—accentualists very commonly, if not always, maintaining that, inasmuch as there are the same number of accented syllables, it does not matter whether you scan

Whēn | thě Brī|tīsh wār|rīōr quēen |

iambically or

Whēn thě | Brītīsh | wārriōr | quēen

trochaically,

Īn thě hěx|āmětěr | rīsēs thě | fōuntāin's | sīlvěřý | cōlūmn

dactylically or

Īn | thě hěxām|ětěr rī|sēs thě fōun|tāin's sīl|věřý cōl|ūmn

anapæstically.

Further still, and almost worst of all, it leads to the enormities of fancy stress above referred to, committed by people who decline to regard as "long" syllables not accented in ordinary pronunciation.

But its greatest crime is its hopeless *and* inadequacy, poverty, and "beggarly *insufficiencies*. elementariness." At best the accentual prosodist, unless he is a quantitative one in disguise, confines himself to the mere skeleton of the lines, and neglects their delicately formed and softly coloured flesh and members. To leave unaccented syllables "as it were to take care of themselves" is to make prosody mere singsong or patter.

Finally, it may be observed that, in all accentual or stress prosodies which are not utterly loose and desultory, there is a tendency to multiply exceptions, provisos, minor classifications to suit particular cases, and the like, so that English prosody assumes the aspect, not of a combination of general order and individual freedom, but of a tangle of by-laws and partial regulations. Unnecessary when it is not mischievous, mischievous when it is strictly and logically carried out, the accentual system derives its only support from the fact above mentioned (the large number of common syllables to be found in English), from the actual existence of it in *Old* English before the language and the poetry had been modified by Romance admixture, and from an unscientific application of the true proposition that the classical and the English prosodies are *in some respects* radically different.

It will, however, of course be proper to *Examples of its*
give examples of the manner in which *application.*
accentual (or stress) scansion is worked by
its own partisans and exponents. Their common formula for
the English heroic line in its normal aspect is 5^{xa}:[\[7\]](#)

What òft | was thòught, | but nè'er | so wèll | exprèst.
If they meet with a trisyllabic foot, as in

And ma|ny an am|orous, ma|ny a hu|morous lay,

they either admit *two* unaccented syllables between the
accents, or suggest "slur" or *synalœpha* or "elision" ("man-
yan"), this last especially taking place with the definite
article "the" ("th'"). But this last process need not be
insisted on by accentualists, though it must by the next
class we shall come to.

It is common, if not universal, for accentual prosodists to
hold that two accents must not come together, so that they
are troubled by that double line of Milton's where the ending
and beginning run—

Bòth stòod
Bòth tùrned,

They admit occasional "inversion of accent" (trochaic
substitution)—especially at the opening of a verse,—as in
the line which Milton begins with

Màker;

but, when they hold fast to their principles, dislike it
much in other cases, as, for instance, in

fàlls to | the gròund.

And they complain when the accent which they think necessary falls, as they call it, on one of two weak syllables, as in

And when. |

This older and simpler school, however, represented by Johnson, has been largely supplemented by another, whose members use the term "stress" or *ictus* in preference to "accent," and to a greater or less extent give up the attempt to establish normality of line at all.

Some of them[8] admit lines of four, *Its various* three, or even two stresses, as, for *sects and* instance— *supporters.*

His mìn|isters of vèn|geance and pursùit. |

Others[9] break it up into "bars" or "sections" which need not contain the same or any fixed number of "beats" or "stresses," while some again[10] seem to regard the stresses of a whole passage as supplying, like those of a prose paragraph, a sufficient rhythmical skeleton the flesh of which—the unaccented or unstressed part—is allowed to huddle itself on and shuffle itself along as it pleases.

This school has received large recent accessions; but even now the greater number of accentualists do little more than eschew the terms of quantity, and substitute for them those of accent, more or less consistently. Many of them even use the classical names and divisions of feet; and with these there need not, according to strict necessity, be any

quarrel, since their error, if it be one, only affects the constitution of prosodic material before it is verse at all, and not the actual prosodic arrangement of verse as such.

Footnote

Table of Contents

[3] Or, it may be added, on its terminology; whence it results that there is no subject on which it is so difficult to write without being constantly misunderstood. It is perhaps not surprising that some people almost deny the existence of English prosody itself, and decline at any rate to take it seriously; while others talk about it in ways which half justify the sceptics.

[4] It is inevitable, in dealing with this subject, that technicalities, historical and literary references, etc., should be plentifully employed. To explain them always in the text would mean endless and disgusting delay and repetition; to give notes of cross-reference in every case would bristle the lower part of the page unnecessarily and hideously. Not merely the Contents and Index, but the various Glossaries and Lists in the Fourth Book have been expressly arranged to supply explanation and assistance in the least troublesome and most compendious manner. But special references will be given when they seem absolutely necessary.

[5] See on this in [Book III](#).

[6] See the article in Glossary on "Musical and Rhetorical Arrangements of Verse," and [Rule 41](#), *infra*, p. 35.

[7] This formula seems due to Latham, the compiler of a well-known work on Language. The foot-division mark | has been sometimes adopted (by Guest) and defended (by Professor Skeat, who, however, does not personally employ it) as a substitute for the accent mark. For arguments against this which seem to the present writer strong, see *H. E. P.* i. 8, and iii. 276, 544-545.

[8] Of whom the most important by far is Mr. Bridges, though he has never, I think, reduced the number to two, or increased it above five. Others, however, have admitted *eight*!

[9] *E.g.* Mr. Thomson, Sir W. M'Cormick, M. Verrier.

[10] *E.g.* Mr. J. A. Symonds, Mr. Hewlett.

CHAPTER III

SYSTEMS OF ENGLISH PROSODY—THE SYLLABIC

[Table of Contents](#)

A strictly syllabic system of prosody has *History of the* hardly at any time been a sufficient key, *syllabic theory*. even in appearance, to English verse. But it has preserved a curious insistence of pretension, and the study of it is of great and informing prosodic interest. It is, of course, French in origin—French prosody, except in eccentric instances, has been from the first, and is to the present day, strictly syllabic. It is innocuous in so far as in the words "octosyllable," "decasyllable," "fourteener," and the like, the irreducible syllabic minimum (save by licence of certain metres) is conveniently indicated. In so early an example as *Orm* (v. *inf.*) we find it carried out exactly and literally. But the inherited spirit of Old English, surviving and resisting all changes and reinforcements of vocabulary, accent, and everything else, will have none of it. In the *fifteener*[\[11\]](#) itself; in its sequel and preserver, ballad measure; in octosyllabic couplet—not merely in the loose form of *Genesis and Exodus*, but to some extent even in the strict one of *The Owl and the Nightingale*; in almost all mixed modes, when once they have broken free from direct copying of French or Provençal, it is cast to the winds. It can only be introduced into Chaucer, as far as his heroic couplet is concerned, by perpetual violations of probability, document, and rhythm. Even in Gower, the principal

representative of it, and one who probably did aim at it, there are some certain, and many probable, lapses from strict observance. But in the linguistic and phonetic changes of the fifteenth century, with the consequent decadence of original literary poetry, the principle of syllabic liberty degenerates into intolerable licence, and the doggerel which resulted, after triumphing or at least existing for some generations, provoked considerable reaction in practice and a still more considerable mistake in principle.

Wyatt, Surrey, and their successors in the middle of the century and the first half of Elizabeth's reign, are pretty strict syllabically; and it was from their practice, doubtless, that Gascoigne—one of the last of the group, but our first English preceptist in prosody—conceived the idea that English has but one foot, of two syllables. Spenser's practice in the *Shepherd's Kalendar* is not wholly in accordance with this; but even he came near to observing it later, and the early blank-verse writers were painfully scrupulous in this respect.

But it was inevitable that blank verse, and especially dramatic blank verse, should break through these restraints; and in the hands of Shakespeare it soon showed that the greatest English verse simply paid no attention at all to syllabic limitations; while lyric, though rather slower, was not so very slow to indulge itself to some extent, as it was tempted by "triple-timed" music. The excesses, however, of the decayed blank verse of the First Caroline period joined with those of the enjambed couplet, though these were not strictly syllabic, to throw liberty into discredit; and the growth and popularity of the strict *closed* couplet

encouraged a fresh delusion—that English prosody *ought* to be syllabic. Dryden himself to some extent countenanced this, though he indemnified himself by the free use of the Alexandrine, or even of the fourteener, in decasyllabics. The example of Milton was for some time not imitated, and has even to this day been misunderstood. About the time of Dryden's own death, in the temporary decadence of the poetic spirit, syllabic prosody made a bold bid for absolute rule.

In the year 1702 Edward Bysshe, publishing[\[12\]](#) the first detailed and positive manual of English prosody, laid it down, without qualification or apology, that "the structure of our verses, whether blank or rhyming, consists in a certain number of syllables; not in feet composed of long or short syllables, as the verses of the Greeks and Romans." And although all Bysshe's details, which, as will be seen below, were rigidly arranged on these principles—so that he made no distinction between verse of triple time (though he grudgingly and almost tacitly admitted it) and verse of double, as such,—were not adopted by others, his doctrine was always (save in a very few instances to be duly noticed later) implicitly, and often explicitly, the doctrine of the eighteenth century. Nor has this ever lost a certain measure of support; while it is very curious that the few foreign students of English prosody who have arisen in late years are usually inclined to it.

One difficulty in it, however, could never escape its most peremptory devotees; and a shift for meeting it must have been devised at the same time as the doctrine. It was all very well to lay down that English verse *must* consist of a

certain number of syllables; but it could escape no one who had ever read a volume or even a few pages of English poetry, that it *did* consist of a very uncertain number of them. The problem was, therefore, how to get rid of the surplus where it existed. It was met by recourse to that very classical prosody which was in other respects being denied, and by the adoption of ruthless "elision" or "crushing out" of the supposed superfluities. This involved not merely elision proper—the vanishing or metrical ignoring of a vowel at the end of a word before a vowel (or an *h*) at the beginning of another, "th(/e) Almighty," "t(/o) admire." Application of a similar process to the interior of words like "vi(/o)let," "di(/a)mond," was inculcated, and in fact insisted on; and even where consonants preceded and followed a vowel of the easily slurrable kind, as in "watery," the suppression of the *e* and sometimes even of other vowels—"del(/i)cate"—was prescribed.

There may possibly be two opinions *its results*. (though it seems strange that there should be) on the æsthetic results of this proceeding. To the present writer they seem utterly hideous; while the admission of the full syllables seems melodious and satisfying. It may also be pointed out that there is a very tell-tale character about the fact that not a few prosodists who defend "elision" in principle defend it only as a metrical fiction, and even lay down positively that the elided syllables are *always* to be pronounced.[\[13\]](#) But it is far less matter of opinion—if it is even matter of opinion at all—first, that this process of mangling and monotonising English poetry is unnecessary; and, secondly, that it is inconsistent