

while the number of unaccented syllables is indifferent. These half-verses are linked together by alliteration. The two accented syllables of the first half, and one of the accented syllables in the second half, begin with the same consonant, or with vowels which were generally different one from another. This is the formal rule. But to give a greater freedom there is often only one alliterative letter in the first half-verse. Here is an example of the usual form : —

And *deáw-drias*: on *dæge* weorðeð
Winde geondsáwen.

And the *dew-downfall*: at the *day-break* is
Winnowed by the wind.

This metre was continually varied, and was capable, chiefly by the addition of unaccented syllables, of many harmonious changes. The length of the lines depended on the nature of the things described, or on the rise and fall of the singer's emotion; the emphatic words in which the chief thought lay were accented and alliterated, and probably received an additional force by the beat of the hand upon the harp. All the poetry was sung, and the poet could alter, as he sang, the movement of the verse. But, however the metre was varied, it was not varied arbitrarily. It followed clear rules, and all its developments were built on the simple original type of four accents and three alliterated syllables. This was the vehicle, interspersed with some rare instances in which rhymes were employed, in which all English poetry was