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METRE.

The dactylic hexameter. This was the most ancient as well as the most dignified form of verse among the Greeks and Romans. It was cultivated at an early period, far beyond the beginnings of authentic history, as we find it in its most perfect shape in the poems of Homer and Hesiod, and the responses of the Delphic oracle. Ennius is said to have discarded the rude Saturnian metre of his predecessors, and to have introduced the hexameter among the Romans. Vergil is generally considered as the model of this kind of verse among the Latins.

The dactylic hexameter consists, as its name implies of six feet, the first four of which may be dactyls or spondees; the fifth is usually dactyl, and the sixth invariably a spondee. The following is the scheme:

No. of dactyls and spondecs.

(1) For the comparative number of dactyls and spondees in the first four places no definite rule can be given. Generally speaking, the line is more smooth when the arrangement is varied to avoid monotony. A succession of dactyls may be used for various reasons, e.g., quick motion, op. B. I. 90.

Intonu ere poli, et creb ris micat ignibus aether, where the quick flashes of lightning and the instant peals of thunder fall in quick succession.

So in B. I. 150:

Jāmquě fác es ēt sāxā vo lānt fūror ārmā mīn istrāt: where the quick succession of brands and stones follow.

On the other hand a succession of spondees may be employed to describe a laboured effort: cp. B. I. 118.

Adpar ent ra ri nant es in gurgite vasto.

Here the slow spondees mark the struggling motions of the crew amid the waves.

So also a dignified gait may be imitated by successive spondees: B. I. 46.

Ast ego quae di vum ince do re gina Jov isque.