

I must not leave my readers without an opportunity to study another striking and very famous dactylic experiment. It is "The Skylark" of the Ettrick Shepherd:—

"Bird of the wilderness,
Blithesome and cumberless,
Sweet be thy matin o'er moorland and lea!
Emblem of happiness,
Blest be thy dwelling-place,
O to abide in the desert with thee!
Wild is thy lay and loud,
Far in the downy cloud,
Love gives it to energy, love gave it birth.
Where on thy dewy wing,
Where art thou journeying?
Thy lay is in heaven, thy love is on earth."

Now that is a passage to be read, marked, learned and inwardly digested. It is full of instruction. Note first of all the enormous superiority of the first six lines to the last. Poor Hogg's dactyls drive heavily as he gets deeper into his stanza. "Dwelling-place" is not an Ariel, but "downy cloud" is a fat boy in Pickwick of a dactyl.

You see Hogg was introducing the effect of a rhyme on the last, instead of on the first (and appropriate) syllable of the dactyl. Wilderness is not followed by Builder Ness—as the ear—with excellent right—expected. We have wilderness and cumberless. Once Hogg managed the thing pretty well, and then he got into difficulties.

Something may be said for the effect if it be aimed at consistently from the first, as by Scott in—

"Where shall the lover rest
Whom the fates sever?
where one might fairly scan the line—
"Where shall the lover rest"
four accents instead of two.
But Hogg trips off airily with his—
"Bird of the wilderness"—

dactyls pure and simple—and then plunges into bogland, never to emerge.

Also notice, as a horrid blemish, the anapaestic catch and stumble in the last line. Nothing more unmetrical ever was written. The reason why the thing hurts the ear, like a snowball with a stone in it, or a German band in a fog, is this: the two unaccented syllables of the line before (the -ying of journeying) are carried forward by the ear. The last accent in a certain musical sense is really the end of every line. Consequently we have this result—
"-ying thy lay."

It is a result not to be tolerated. In English verse three successive unaccented syllables are an abomination.

But now to get back to that point of importance from which we have been compelled to recede.

Dactyls change into anapaests as readily as chameleons turn colour.

Take those lines of Byron's, and put either one or two short syllables at the opening of each—

"Oh war! riots and chiefs! If the shaft or
the sword
Should have pierced me in lead in the
host of the Lord."||

Where are your dactyls now, eh?

Make the same experiment with the first quotation from "The Bridge of Sighs," only throwing the four short lines into two long ones:—

"And still for all slips of hers,
One of Eve's family:
Oh, wipe those poor lips of hers,
O'er the soft claim in my."

Truly in this case the experiment does not come off so well. At the end of each line there are two unaccented syllables left out in the cold, and there is therefore the effect of three unaccented syllables (as for example, *ly oh*), in the following line. But remember that this poem of Hood's is *sui generis*. In all our poetry there is nothing like it. And even in this one instance, which does in part tell against my theory, you feel, do you not, that the general swing of the verse is anapaestic?

I would not have my readers think that there are no separable metrical qualities in anapaestic and dactylic verse. There are. Written consistently, the latter has a more delicate, more flexible, more sensitive flow. It is less rapid and less strong than its more popular brother. Hood's wonderful poem would have lost half its pathos had it clattered into anapaests.

None the less, my assertion is not to be gainsaid—a syllable prefixed and your dactyls are anapaests. And as ordinarily written the change does constantly take place.

Of late there certainly has been a tendency to work in dactylic measures. Mr. Swinburne in particular has conducted some interesting experiments to a success impossible in almost any other hands. But this phenomenon hardly proves more than an increasing difficulty in impressing individuality upon the well-worn ways of verse, and a consequent increasing impulse to force a way into bypaths and bohereens. Possibly dactylic forms may establish a temporary settlement in English poetry, but they will always be pressed, and finally they will be oppressed, by the sturdy native measures. Dilettantism may grow all kinds of exotics under glass, but these things will never thrive in the open. Poetic, like any other force, will follow the line of least resistance; and that line is indicated by the ordinary collocation of words. Our talk—our careless writing—shows the step of the language, and that step, beyond all doubt, is iambic. A sudden stress of emotion will often drive the prose-writer into unconscious blank verse. Did it ever drive a man into dactyls?

Here is some of Mr. Swinburne's long-drawn music:—

"Over two shadowless waters, I adrift as a
pinnacle in peril,
Hangs as in heavy suspense, charged
with irresolute light,
Softly the soul of the sunset, I upholden
awhile in the steady
Waves and wastes of the land, half
repossessed by the light."

Exquisite, but not *kindly* English verse; and, moreover, if read with its natural pauses, it is as anapaestic as dactylic in its flow.

And for a last example of anapaestic forms, please study these rollicking bits of Ingoldsby Legends:—

(I.)
"Whereas a dead gentleman, surname un-
known,
Has been recently found at his Highness's
banquet,
Rather shabbily dressed in an *amice*, or gown,
In appearance resembling a second-hand
blanket;

(II.)
It seems he had taken
A light breakfast—bacon,*
An egg—with a little broil'd haddock—at
most
A round and a half of some hot butter'd
toast,
With a slice of cold sirloin from yesterday's
roast.

And then—let me see!—
He had two—perhaps, three
Cups (with sugar and cream) of strong
gunpowder tea,
With a spoonful in each of some choice
eau de vie—
Which with nine out of ten would perhaps
disagree.

In fact, I and my son
Mix black with our 'Hyson,'
Neither having the nerves of a bull or a
bison,
And both hating brandy like what some
call 'pison.'

No matter for that—
He had call'd for his hat,
With the brim that I've said was so broad
and so flat,
And his 'specs' with the tortoise-shell rim,
and his cane
With the crutch-handled top which he used
to sustain
His steps in his walks, and to poke in the
shrubs,
And the grass, when unearthing his worms
and his grubs—
Thus arm'd he set out on a ramble—alack!
He set out, poor dear soul!—but he never
came back!"

Is it not easy and agile? Nobody ever
managed this verse like Barham.

* Harsh. Metrically this is better:—"A breakfast
of bacon."

VARIETIES.

A WORD TO THE WISE.—Want of prudence is too frequently the want of virtue; nor is there on earth a more powerful advocate for vice than poverty.

THE BEST OF FORTUNES.—A Greek maiden being asked what fortune she would bring her husband, replied, "I will bring him what gold cannot purchase—a heart unspotted and virtue without a stain—my inheritance from parents who had these and nothing else to leave me."

NOBILITY.—We cannot always be doing noble deeds, but we can always do the most commonplace acts nobly. It is this pure intention which turns the most menial work into gold.

FOND OF FICTION.

"Do you enjoy novel-reading, Miss Belinda?"

"Oh, very much; one can associate with people in fiction that one wouldn't dare to speak to in real life."

NOTHING NEW.—"Everything," says Goethe, "that is worth thinking has already been thought; we must only try to think it again."

SOME PEOPLE.—The goodness of some people is like some kinds of fish—you must pick out a good many bones before you get anything worth having.

GOOD BY COMPULSION.—There is no virtue in doing right simply because we have to.