

## MÉTRES—ANCIENT AND MODERN.

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THOSE who, as editors of any of the serials to which the verse-writers of Canada send so many contributions, are able to judge of the faults most frequently met with in the compositions submitted to them for publication, have observed that the point of weakness in much of what would otherwise be creditable literary work is rather in the form than in the matter. There is a want of knowledge of the laws of metrical rhythm, of the outward and visible form in which the Divine presence of poetry is to be invoked to manifest itself. The various species and sub-species of lyrical metre, the cadences of blank verse, so multifarious in tone and *timbre*, from Milton, Young and Cowper, to Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and Browning, are left to be learned by ear, unaided by any systematic study. Now, although it is absurd to attempt to teach by rule or system that "Art of Poetry" which is born, not manufactured, yet as in the case of the sister art of music, a knowledge of the laws under which the evolution of poetical form has manifested itself, cannot but be useful to those who practice the exercise so valuable as a mental discipline of condensing thought into its most attractive form of "ordered words." And even to those who never write poetry, to those who, like the most attractive women we meet, are appreciative and receptive rather than creative, it must add to the pleasure with which they watch every fresh development of the marvellous vitality of our literature, to clearly understand

the rhythmical laws under which its movement has taken place. No treatise on this subject has as yet been written in our language; a few thoughts thereon may, it is hoped, have interest for the readers of the CANADA EDUCATIONAL MONTHLY.

Mr. Herbert Spencer has shewn in his "Essay on Progress" that music, poetry and dancing were originally parts of one and the same act of religious worship. This is proved by what is known of the Greek tragic chorus, which was at its beginning a hymn sung in honour of the God Dionysus, with a dancing accompaniment. So too the Hebrew psalms were probably sung during solemn ecclesiastical dances like that of David before the ark of God, and of which the modern "Processional hymn" among the Ritualists is a curious survival. In the conservative East the metrical form of the words sung has remained the same to this day, at least among Semitic races; the dance is still not what we understand by the word, but a solemn rhythmical movement in time to a slow and simple chant, resembling those known to us as Gregorian. Among Western nations, and to some degree among Eastern, the Aryan race, such as the Persian and Sanscrit-speaking peoples, both the dancing, the music, and the rhythmical words, have been differentiated into separate branches of art, and each of these has assumed increasingly complex forms, according to the well-known law by which all that is called Progress moves from the simple and homogeneous to