

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO ENGLISH VERSIFICATION; with a Compendious Dictionary of Rhymes; an Examination of Classical Measures, &c., &c. By Tom Hood. A New and Enlarged Edition. London: John Hogg; Toronto: James Campbell & Son. 1877.

This little volume has a superabundance of title and sub-titles, of which that on its cover, "Rules for Making English Verse," best describes it. The present edition is a reprint of "The Rules of Rhyme," by the same author published some years ago by James Hogg & Son; the only difference that we have been able to detect being the addition of Bysshe's "Rules for Making English Verse," in the appendix; which contains also so much of the introductory matter of the "Young Poet's Guide" (on which this treatise is founded) as appears to the author to contain profitable hints, though it differs somewhat from his views. The result of all this is, that the little book is somewhat of a patchwork performance, of which the appendix rather overweights the body. It would have been preferable had the author extracted the essence of this appendix and merged it into his own part of the work, especially in view of the excellence of that part. As it is, the first principles of versification are impressed on the reader a good deal on the "poll-parrot" plan; and the differences of opinion between the three "treatises" in one and the same volume are less likely to aid the novice in verse than to make him ask usefully, "who shall decide, when doctors disagree?" As we have said, the author's "Rules of Rhyme" are excellent. They are written in a pleasant, concise, and common-sense style, with here and there such touches of humour as are to be expected from the editor of *Fun*. There are as few technicalities as possible, and a clear explanation of such as are necessarily used. The intention of the book is adequately carried out, and its purpose is deserving of more sympathy than is commonly accorded it,—the teaching of the art of versification. The preface disclaims as its object that of being "a hand-book for poets, or a guide to poetry." "A poet, to paraphrase the Latin, "is created, not manufactured." But to become a *versifier* is generally esteemed by no means desirable. Certainly, to insist on versifying in print is not only undesirable, but morally reprehensible. But we fancy that a knowledge of some of the difficulties of versification would serve to restrain the ingenuous self-confidence of the "bards" of newspaper "Poet's Corners;" or would, at any rate, abate the evil they commit by infusing some metre into their mediocrity. Among persons of sound mind, however, a knowledge of versification, accurate if not profound, is really very well worth having, as it is by no means common. The most

obvious advantage of it is in the increased appreciation it necessarily gives of the metrical beauties of our poets. But, besides this, we must urge that the writing of verse, as a part of education, cannot be too highly valued as conducing to clearness of thought, conciseness of expression, choice of language, and power of building it skilfully, delicately, and, last not least, musically. It is hard to see why the cultivation of a delicate ear for language should be deemed unimportant, especially in a country where it must be acknowledged that there is a predominance of harsh voices and inelegant speaking. To quote from Mr. Hood's Preface: "Were English versification taught in our schools, I believe the boys would acquire a better understanding and appreciation of their own tongue. With such a training, a lad would shrink from a mispronunciation as he does from a false quantity in Latin or Greek. He would not fall into the slipshod way of pronouncing 'doing,' as if it were spelt 'doin,' 'again,' as if 'agen,' and 'written and spoken,' as if 'writun and spokun.' He would not make dissyllables of words like 'fire' and 'mire,' or of the trissyllable 'really'..... The purging of our pronunciation would be of general benefit. At present it is shifting and uncertain,—because it is never taught..... There being no standard set up, the pronunciation of English becomes every day more and more degraded by the mere force of the majority of uneducated vulgar. The Americanizing of our language—which seems to me a less remote and no less undesirable possibility than 'the Americanizing of our institutions,' about which we hear so much—can only be checked by some such educational system. Surely the deterioration of our language is not a minor matter, and when it can be removed by the encouragement of verse-writing at our schools, strictly and clearly taught, it seems astonishing that no effort has been made in that direction." For detailed criticism we have not left ourselves space; and the little fault-finding which might be done is not enough to burden our conscience. The Dictionary of Rhymes is well arranged, trustworthy, and sufficiently exhaustive to have met all the tests to which we have been able to put it.

BOOKS RECEIVED.

A HISTORY OF ENGLAND IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. By William Edward Hartpole Lecky. 2 Vols. New York: D. Appleton & Co.; Toronto: Hart & Rawlinson. 1878.

AN IDLE EXCURSION. By Mark Twain. Toronto: Rose-Belford Publishing Co. 1878.