

**WHETSTONES FOR WITS;
OR, DOUBLE ACROSTICS,
BY VARIOUS HANDS**

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Whetstones for Wits; Or, Double Acrostics, by Various Hands by "Crack"

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"CRACK"

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QUADRUPLE MUSICAL ACROSTIC.

1. A no - tier sat weep - ing. A wea - ry watch keep - ing,
 2. Each my third while she num - ber'd. My first sweet - ly slum - ber'd,

1. At my fourth of the night, For her hus - band at sea;
 2. In her as - cend in smil'd, As she bend - ed her knee;

1. And the tem - pest was swell - ing Round the fish - or - man's dwell - ing,
 2. "Oh! bless'd be that warn - ing, My child thy sleep a - dorn - ing,

1. And she cried, "Dae - mot, dar - ling, Oh, come back to me,"
 2. For I know that the an - gels Are whis - per - ing to thee."

Ursula

W H E T S T O N E S F O R W I T S ;
O R
D O U B L E A C R O S T I C S .

B Y
V A R I O U S H A N D S .

EDITED BY
"C R A C K ."

"You have not the look of riddles about you, have you?"
Merry Wives.

L O N D O N :
H O R A C E C O X , 3 4 6 , S T R A N D , W . C .
• 1 8 7 2 .

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INTRODUCTION.

An acrostic, strictly speaking, is a poem in which the initial letters of the successive lines make up some name, word, or sentence; hence the term *acrostic*, which is derived from two Greek words, signifying the extremity of a line or verse, the required words appearing at the commencement of the verses in a perpendicular line, after the manner of Chinese writing.

Sometimes the final letters of the respective lines spell an acrostic as well as the initial ones; acrostics thus arranged are called double acrostics; and sometimes an acrostic will dip down other parts of the poem also, as in the case of triple acrostics, where the central letters form a word as well as the initials and finals.

The germ of the acrostic idea seems to exist in the abecedarian writings of the Hebrew poets. The term abecedarian is applied to compositions the parts of which are initialled in alphabetical order.

Abecedarian psalms, hymns, and lamentations occur in several parts of the Old Testament. They consist of twenty-two lines or systems of lines, or periods, or stanzas corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and as each successive line or stanza commences with one of the letters in the alphabetic series, the complete poem, of course, exhausts the entire alphabet.

Twelve of the Psalms are written on this plan. By far the most remarkable of them is the 119th, which preserves in our English version the acrostical letter as a heading to the set of verses which it rules, the first group being termed *Aleph*, the second *Beth*, and so on, through the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Some authors say that these abecedarian writings were anciently called acrostics, but this seems doubtful. Among ecclesiastical writers the term acrostic denotes the ends of psalms, or rather something added to them, like the "Gloria Patri," which the people sang by way of chorus or response to the precentor or leader of the psalm. This was called singing acrostics; and this species of psalmody, usual in the ancient church, is still employed in our services.

It is supposed, from the frequency with which abecedarian compositions are met with in Hebrew writers, that the ancient Jews were the inventors of the artifice, which was no doubt contrived to assist the memory when reciting subjects in common use, such as maxims of morality and forms of devotion; thus, St. Augustine composed a hymn of such a character, as a *memoria technica* for the common people against the errors of the Donatists.

An analysis of the length of the lines, where this alphabetical arrangement prevails, has led to the conclusion that abecedarian compositions were regulated with regard to some harmony or rhythm, with the laws of which we are not now acquainted; and hence that these poems indicate the use of some kind of metre in Hebrew poetry.

In the Greek anthology there are two epigrams, called acrostics, (the dates of which can only be conjectured), one in honour of Bacchus, and the other in praise of Apollo. Each

contains twenty-five verses, the first introducing the subject of the poem, and each of the twenty-four others consisting of four epithets applicable to the god. All the epithets in the first line begin with A, those in the second with B, and so on, reminding one of the modern game of "I love my love with an A." In fact, the poems are alliterative alphabetic acrostics four deep.

The apt and artful aid of alliteration has been sought in all ages to assist the memory, and it is especially serviceable when combined with rhythm. It is beyond the scope of this Introduction to trace the history of alliteration, except so far as it bears on the acrostic idea. Much early poetry is alliterative, especially early Saxon, Scandinavian, and German poetry. The most remarkable early Saxon poem of this kind is the well-known allegory, called *Piers Plowman*, probably written in the latter half of the fourteenth century. The poem consists of 14,696 verses, formed according to this general rule:—Each hemistich contains two accented syllables. In the first hemistich, at least both the emphatic syllables must begin with the same letter; in the second, only the first accented syllable needs begin with that letter, as for example:

A fair field full of folk
Found I there between;
Of all manner of men,
The mean and the rich;
Working and wandering
As the world asketh.

As a modern example of alliteration, combined, in this case, with acrosticism, the following on the English alphabet, from

H. Southgate's "Many Thoughts on Many Things," may here be given :

A n Austrian army, awfully arrayed,
 B oldly by battery besieged Belgrade ;
 C ossack commanders, cannonading come,
 D ealing destruction's devastating doom :
 E very endeavour engineers essay
 F or fame, for fortune, forming furious fray.
 G aunt gunners grapple, giving gaabes good :
 H eaves high his head heroic hardihood ;
 I braham, Islam, Ismael, imps in ill,
 J ostle John Jarovlitz, fem, Joe, Jack, Jill :
 K ick kindling Kutusoff, king's kinsmen kill :
 L abour low levels loftiest lunge-t lines !
 M en march 'mid moles, 'mid mounds, 'mid murderous mines.
 N ow nightfull's near, now needful nature nods,
 O pposed, opposing, overcoming odds.
 P oor peasants, partly purchased, partly pressed,
 Q uite quaking, " Quarter ! quarter ! " quickly quest.
 R eason returns, recalls redundant rage,
 S avos sinking soldiers, softens signiors sage.
 T race, Turkey, truce : truce treacherous Tartar train !
 U nwise, unjust, unmerciful Ukraines,
 V anish, vile vengeance ! vanish victory vain !
 W isdom wails war—wails warring words. What were
 X erxes, Xantippe, Ximenes, Xavier ?
 Y et Yassy's youth, ya yield your youthful yest.
 Z ealously, zanise, zealously, zeal's zest.

In contrast to the above the lipogrammatic Odyssey of Tryphiodorus, which unfortunately is not extant, may be referred to. The poem is said to have consisted of twenty-four books, from each of which the poet excluded one of the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet in turn. The first book was called *Alpha*, because there was not an Alpha in it; the second *Beta*, for a similar reason, and so forth.