

**A STUDY OF
ENGLISH RHYME**

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A study of English rhyme by Charles F. Richardson

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CHARLES F. RICHARDSON

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A STUDY
OF
ENGLISH RHYME

BY
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PREFACE

THIS book is the best and the worst on its theme, for there is no other.

Many volumes have been written on the principles and practice of the poetic art; but none, from Sidney's days to Saintsbury's, has been wholly devoted to the nature and history of English rhyme. The rhyming dictionaries, such as Walker's, Barnum's, or Loring's, have naturally contented themselves with vocabularies; while general treatises on poetics or poetic history have usually dismissed rhyme as a modern phonetic pleasure of uncertain origin. Furthermore, most writers on the subject, save Schipper and his followers, have ignored the relation, which ought to be obvious, between alliteration, assonance, and end-rhyme, as different forms of the same thing.

The purpose of the present work is to try to trace the evolution of English rhyme, and to correlate it with physical laws, the growth of individual or communal song, and the history of the rhyme-art in other European tongues. Collateral attention has therefore been given to alliteration in the Teutonic languages, assonance in Spanish, and end-rhyme in Latin, Provençal, Italian, French, and German; but it was manifestly impossible, in a volume of small size, to present a polyglot or comparative history of a subject of such indefinite extent. Indeed, a full record of English rhyme alone would demand, for its presentation, a library almost as extensive as the works of the poets discussed. It has therefore been my attempt to give the leading principles of the discussion, leaving applications to be followed at the reader's pleasure.

Obligation is acknowledged, in greater or less degree, to the volumes cited in the foot-notes. Hundreds of others have been examined — pamphlets and treatises of such varying value that a bibliography would mislead rather than aid the student. A word of special gratitude belongs to Professor G. Gregory Smith, whose *Elizabethan Literary Criticism* has relieved students from the search for rare originals or sometimes untrustworthy reprints. In general, however, I have relied upon first-hand reading of the poetry itself. For assistance outside my immediate field I am indebted to Louis Bell, Ph.D., of Boston; Professor Duncan C. Macdonald of Hartford Theological Seminary; Lucius Waterman, D.D., Rector of St. Thomas' Church, Hanover; my colleagues, C. N. Gould, P. O. Skinner, E. F. Langley, and A. K. Hardy, of the faculty of Dartmouth College; and Elizabeth Richardson.

The use of the colon between rhyming sounds explains itself. The ordinary *ab* scheme of indicating rhyming lines is of course followed. In a few cases the phonetic symbols of the *New English Dictionary* have been used, but only in circumstances admitting little doubt. Even contemporary speech is an uncertain or variable thing; poets in every age have shown a large margin of freedom in their rhyme-sounds; while the application of speech-symbols to the language spoken by the dead is largely guesswork. "Every writer on English verse," said *The Quarterly Review* some time since, "has his own metrical symbols, and no one appears to pay any attention to any other theorist, except in occasional intervals for depreciation." This remark applies, in good measure, to the phoneticians.

In view of the broad definition of rhyme (see page 22) which states the underlying purpose of the book, I have not confined myself to externals; still less to end-rhyme alone. The student of rhyme must always consider its ultimate result in the mind as well as its immediate effect upon the ear. Again, the book is mainly a study and record, not a lawgiver. If the history of

PREFACE

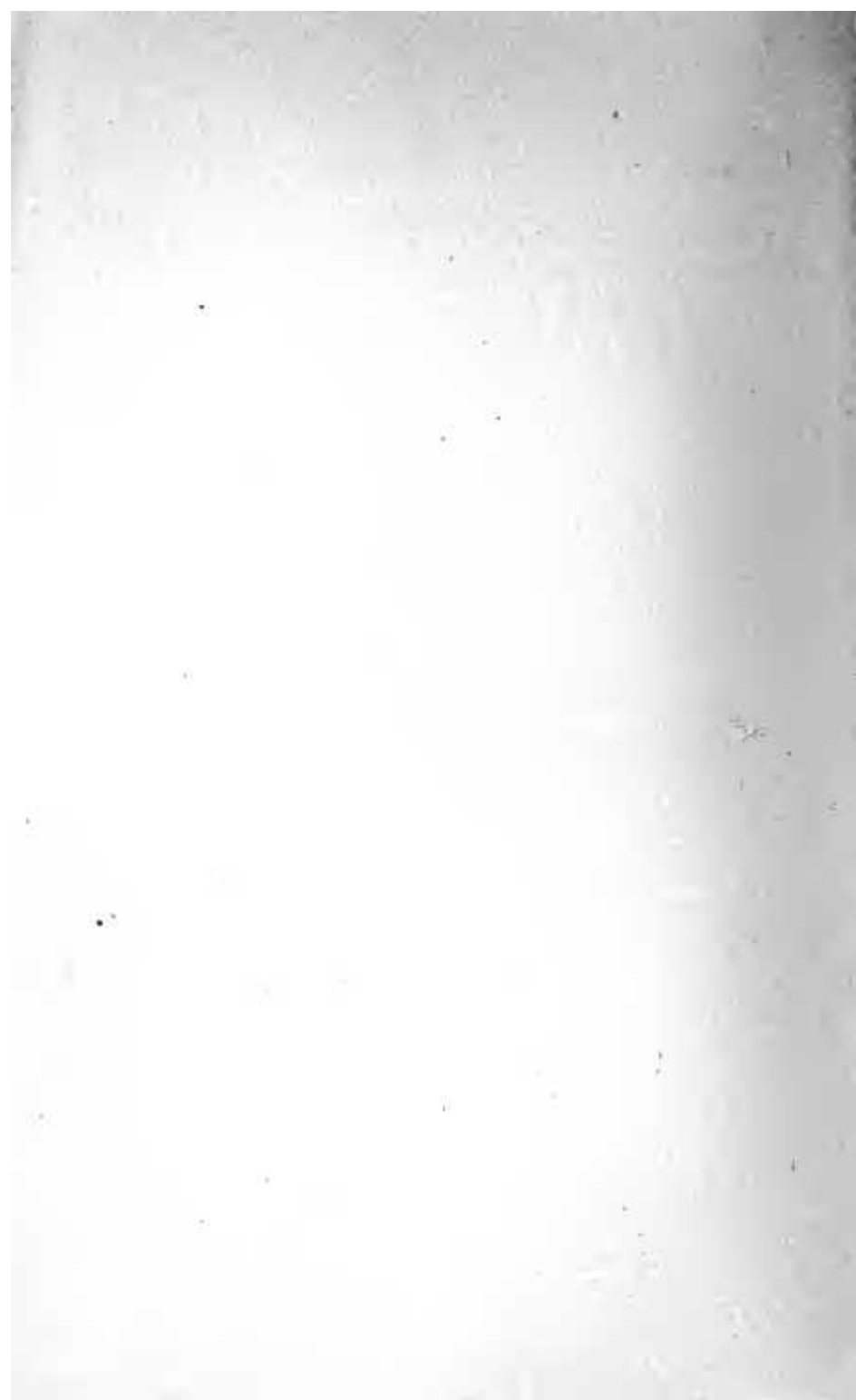
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English rhyme teaches anything, it is that taste is the final arbiter in the matter of the pleasurableness of similar sounds.

I am of course aware of the etymological reasons for the spelling "rime," employed by eminent authorities of the present day; as a matter of fact, however, good use has thus far refused to give up the illogical "rhyme," which is therefore retained in these pages. Language, after all, is a fact, not an opinion.

CHARLES F. RICHARDSON.

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE,
June 25, 1909.



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