

**THE ELEMENTS OF
ENGLISH
VERSIFICATION**

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The Elements of English Versification by James Wilson Bright & Raymond Durbin Miller

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JAMES WILSON BRIGHT & RAYMOND DURBIN MILLER

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PREFACE

In the preparation of this text-book the immediate needs of the student have been kept in mind. Nothing has been assumed on his part, except a mind disposed to learn the plain truth of elementary facts. Of course this disposition of mind must usually be awakened to the required pitch of interest by the teacher, who, as in the case of any other subject he may teach, should be prepared to interpret and supplement an exposition of the elements of versification. But a text-book should help the teacher in his task of arousing and sustaining the student's interest. In most instances such help consists both in a clear analysis and concrete illustration of subject-matter and in a plan of presentation that is adapted to the orderly stages of the student's progress. It is hoped that some share of the teacher's approval won by these merits of a text-book may be bestowed upon the treatise herewith submitted.

The exclusion of controversial matter from books on versification is not so much the practice that it may be said to be usually expected. On the contrary, the avoidance of controversy on some points of the subject is likely to occasion in some minds an inclination to suspect either evasion of difficulties or unwarranted reliance on individual judgment. But the beginner, in acquiring an introductory knowledge of the facts and principles of a science, should not be disturbed by such premature demands on his attention as would be made by an attempted consideration of

conflicting opinions. Obviously enough this consideration should determine the prevailing method, from which no deviations should be made without special justification. In the present instance this method has been followed without any deviations, in the belief that none are made necessary by the purpose of the book.

As to concise statements and restricted illustrations, the attempt has been to make these suggestive of what is to be supplied in the way of explanation and amplification. The teacher should thus be led to expound the fuller import of the principles and conventionalities of the art and to illustrate the more complete range of their application. But for the purpose of elementary instruction — and this is the principal purpose to be served — the book is intended to be in itself as adequate as possible. All that is set forth in it should be thoroughly learned in connection with introductory courses in literature.

It has been difficult to refrain from an historical presentation of many aspects of the subject. The more mature student will, however, be able to detect indications of what may be gained by surveying the whole course of poetic forms in English. From these hints he should also be able to infer the method by which trustworthy conclusions are reached, and derive for himself a scientific interest in the historical observation of the phenomena.

Still more difficult has it been to withhold comments on the æsthetic function of the forms and conventionalities of the art. The ultimate aim is, after all, to assist the learner in the appreciation of the best poetry; but in helping him to acquire an introductory knowledge of the underlying technicalities of the more external side of

poetry, no slight degree of conscious restraint must be exercised to keep from expressing judgments that concern the combined effect of technical skill and poetic genius.

It is hardly necessary to add a word on the obvious intention to teach very largely by illustrative examples. This concreteness of method, involving much varied repetition, will, it is believed, be vindicated in the result of clear and permanent perceptions in the mind of the learner. These pages of illustrative examples necessarily give a disproportionate space to exceptional phenomena. What is usual and almost invariable can generally be stated briefly and be sufficiently illustrated in few examples; whereas variations from the rule or special features of practice cannot always be very concisely stated and may require detailed illustration. This disproportion in the visual impressions of the subject-matter must therefore be justified by inherent necessity.

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