

**AMELIA, TAMERTON
CHURCH-TOWER, ETC. WITH
PREFATORY STUDY ON
ENGLISH METRICAL LAW**

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Amelia, Tamerton Church-Tower, Etc. With Prefatory Study on English Metrical Law by
Coventry Patmore

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PREFATORY STUDY

ON

ENGLISH METRICAL LAW.

PREFATORY STUDY
ON
ENGLISH METRICAL LAW.*

THE adoption, by Surrey and his immediate successors, of certain foreign metres into our poetry, and the unprecedented attempt of that accomplished writer to establish "blank verse" as a narrative vehicle, first aroused conscious and scientific interest in the subject of the mechanism of English verse. From that time to this, the nature of modern verse has been a favourite problem of enthusiasts who love to dive in deep waters for diving's sake. A vast mass of nondescript matter

* This Essay appeared, almost as it now stands, in vol. xxvii. of the *North British Review*.

has been brought up from the recesses visited, but no one has succeeded in rendering any sufficient account of this secret of the intellectual deep. I have made it my business to ascertain whether any of the musical grammarians, whose science is, in great part, a mere abstraction of the laws of metre, have supplied the deficiencies of the prosodians. The sum total of my inquiries in both fields of criticism, musical and poetical, amounts to this, that upon few other subjects has so much been written with so little tangible result. Without for a moment questioning the value of certain portions of the writings of Puttenham, Gascoigne, Campion, Webbe, Daniel Crowe, Foster, Mitford, Guest, and others, it must be confessed that no one of these writers renders anything like a full and philosophical account of the subject; and that, with the exception of Daniel, the admirable author of the "Civil Wars," and Mitford, none has treated the question, even on the superficial ground in most cases assumed, with the combined ability and competence of information from which alone any

important fruit can be looked for in such investigations. George Puttenham's "Art of English Poesy" is by very much the most bulky and laborious of the early metrical essays; but at least nine-tenths of this book consist of as unprofitable writing as ever spoilt paper. His chapter on the arrangement of rhymes to form staves is worthy of the poetical student's attention; and there is in the outset of his work an explicit acknowledgment of the fact, so often lost sight of by his successors, that English verse is not properly measurable by the rules of Latin and Greek verse. Indeed, the early poetical critics commonly manifest a much clearer discernment of the main importance of rhyme and accentual stress, in English verse, than is to be found among later writers. Their views are, for the most part, far from being expressed with that positiveness and appearance of system characterising the school of critics which received its data from Pope and his compeers; but they are, upon the whole, considerably more in accordance with the true spirit of English verse, as it appears in its