

**THE EPISTLES OF OVIDIUS
NASO, FAITHFULLY
CONVERTED INTO A NEW
MEASURE OF ENGLISH VERSE**

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John Jump

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JOHN JUMP

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EPISTLES OF OVIDIUS NASO,

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A NEW MEASURE OF ENGLISH VERSE.

BY JOHN JUMP,

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P R E F A C E.

TRAVELLING by steam, Reader, when you come to think of it, was a lively invention ; a rapid progress. Gaslight, too, was a bright idea. Phosphoric matches again : if the tablet of your memory still retain a trace of the familiar tinder-box, phosphoric matches are a positive miracle. But the press, as Mrs. de Trepka has just observed, the page of types—what a multiplication table is that page of types ! what a propagator of thought ! what an electric flame to the mental eye ! The sixteenth century is not yet outdone in the production of wonders. Well ! all these things are stupendous in their conception, incredible at their birth, immense in their influence ; yet, reader, like everything human, they are not without their inconvenience : the medal has its reverse. One, let alone divorce of body and limbs without mutual consent, whisks you over the loveliest landscape before your retina has well seized its image, or souses you with geometrical rectitude through the very centre of a big billow instead of riding you neatly over the top of it in the old sailing fashion : another blows you out of bed or out at window, or sets a burgh ablaze before you can whistle “come hither.” And that German engine, that press, leagued

as it is with Hamiltonian systems and ragged schools, and with the *cacoethes scribendi* to boot, makes writers so swarm and works so pullulate that the life of a reader, shrunk as it has become since the reduction of the good old Methuselah standard, no longer suffices to skim over the tithe of a tithe of the exuberant production. Hence the modest excuses which preface every author's "new trespass on the attention of an "indulgent public." This work, however, claims exemption from apology as adding nothing to the mountainous mass: as merely changing the form of what exists and has existed any time these near two thousand years, still young, vigorous, beautiful, inimitable,—the charming Epistles of Ovidius Naso. Why should the Cantab and the Oxonian monopolize a delightful feast? Why not you, O general reader, be admitted to a table so invitingly served? Come in, good friend; the baked meats consist of a faithful rescript of the prettiest love-letters you ever perused, save certain correspondence perhaps which occurred between yourself and you know who. Take them then, not as our friend Lawrence says, under your protection, but into your closet, and there, if they amuse, your most devoted servant will be largely paid.

There is yet another lurking motive, reader, than the introduction of Naso for wheedling into your acquaintance: apart, too, of that vulgar spring of human activity, that six-and-eightpence which some law-grinder sees at the bottom of

every man's act and deed, and whereon the less said the sooner mended. The *alterum mobile* in question is to set before you a simple measure of English verse which you have not yet seen, and which seems peculiarly adapted to epistolary poetry.

Dryden and Pope have proved that our heroic rhyme of five feet renders well the Greek and Latin hexameter. Our lighter four-foot verse, as in Gay's fables, seems apt enough to supply the place of the pentameter, which couples so beautifully with the longer line. We have abundant examples of poems in alternate eight and six syllables, a very pleasing light measure, but I know of no complete stanza founded on a shorter line combined with the grave heroic; and yet the effect is agreeable, rendering the verse somewhat less severe than the full measure of all tens, yet less skipping than the alternate eight and six. Let us take a fine example of full-lined alternate rhymes, and divide it into its harmonic bars by points of suspension.

The curfew tolls . . . the knell of parting day;
 The lowing herds . . . wind slowly o'er the lea;
 The ploughman homeward plods . . . his weary way,
 And leaves the world . . . to darkness and to me.

Here is a rich model of deep gravity nearly in pure iambs. Reading with attention, it will be remarked that the solemn tone proceeds chiefly from the long bars of six syllables. Now let it not be deemed profanation to dissect this. Fear not the scapel be mad enough to attempt to mend that which is perfect already. Its object