

**THE LAWS OF VERSE; OR, PRINCIPLES OF  
VERSIFICATION EXEMPLIFIED IN METRICAL  
TRANSLATIONS, TOGETHER WITH AN  
ANNOTATED REPRINT OF THE INAUGURAL  
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE  
MATHEMATICAL AND PHYSICAL SECTION OF  
THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION AT EXETER**

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The Laws of Verse; Or, Principles of Versification Exemplified in Metrical Translations,  
Together with an Annotated Reprint of the Inaugural Presidential Address to the Mathematical  
and Physical Section of the British Association at Exeter by J. J. Sylvester

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**J. J. SYLVESTER**

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BY

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1870.

TO

MATTHEW ARNOLD, ESQ., D.C.L.

SOMEWHAT PROFESSOR OF POETRY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

*A CONSUMMATE MASTER OF THE ART,*

IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF

MUCH VALUABLE CRITICISM AND GENEROUS ENCOURAGEMENT

RECEIVED AT HIS HANDS,

§ Dedicate

THIS ATTEMPT TO DISPLAY AND EXEMPLIFY

THE LAWS OF VERSE.

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· Non ante volgatas per artes  
Verba loquor socianda chordis.

Hor. *Car.* iv. 9.

By methods ne'er promulged before,  
Fit speech o'er lyric chords I pour.

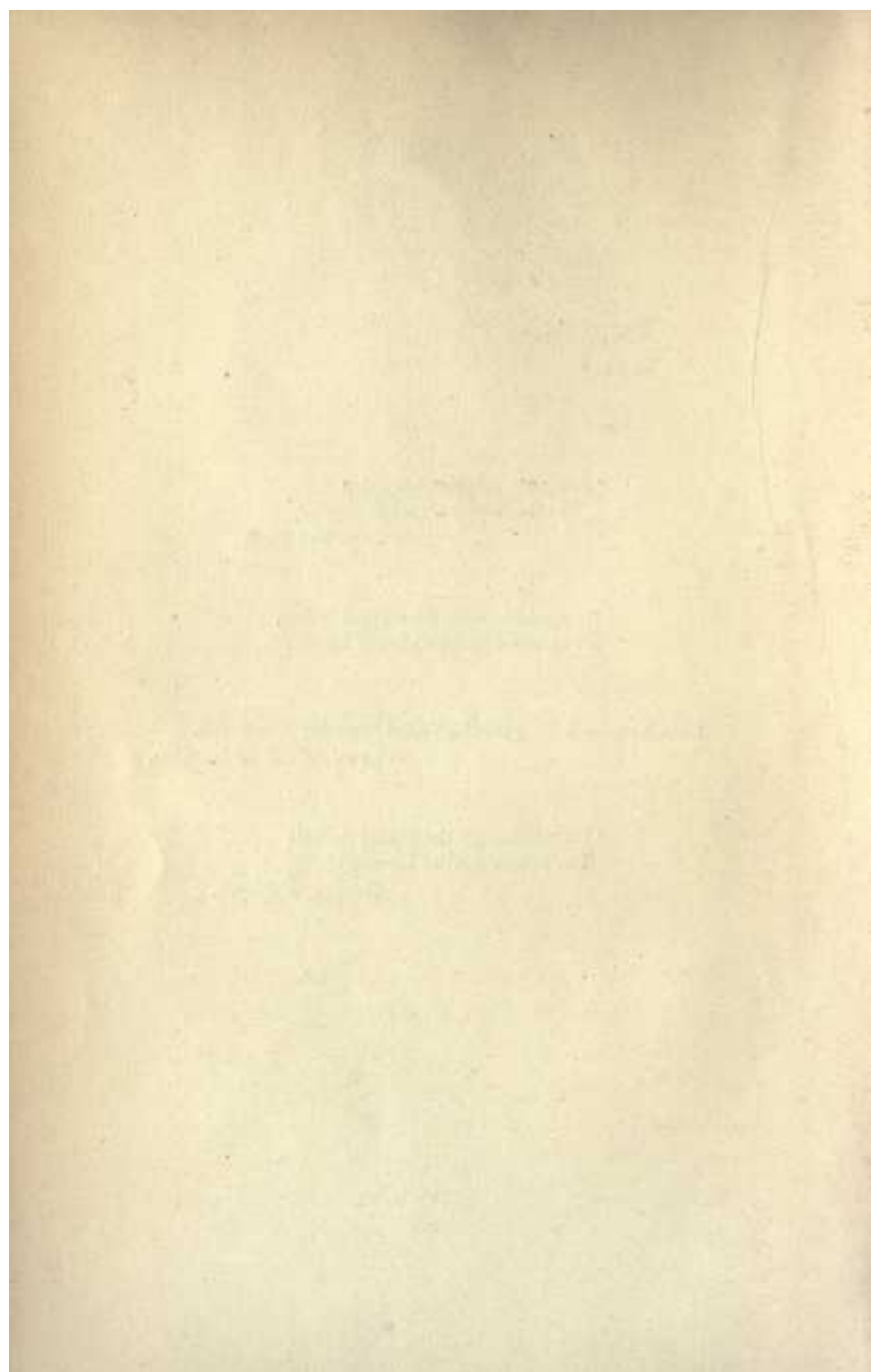
Παλαιά παροιμία ὅτι χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ ἴσταν ὅση ἔχει μαθεῖν.

PLATO, *Socrat.* in *Cratylus*.

· Untwisting all the chains that tie  
The hidden soul of harmony.

MILTON, *L'Allegro*.





## PREFACE.

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THE technical or material part of versification (the art of rhythmical composition), like that of any other of the fine arts, is capable of being reduced to rules and referred to fixed principles.

I wish the title of LAWS OF VERSE, OR PRINCIPLES OF VERSIFICATION EXEMPLIFIED, to be understood in the sense of an attempt to illustrate this proposition by examples. This is not a treatise on Prosody, neither is it a discourse *de arte Poeticâ*. Moreover I do not profess to lay down a systematic body of doctrine on the Art of Versification, but merely to indicate, in the way of cursory comment, chiefly contained in notes to the text, the existence of such a doctrine, and the possibility of moulding it into a certain definite organic form. In poetry we have sound, thought, and words (i. e. thought clothed in sound); accordingly the subject falls naturally into three great divisions, the cogitative, the expressional, and the technical; to which we may give the respective names of Pneumatic, Linguistic, and Rhythmic. It is only with

Rhythm that I profess to deal. This again branches off into three principal branches—Metric, Chromatic, and Synectic.

Metric is concerned with Accent, Quantity, and Suspensions; the latter including the theories of Pauses, Rests, and Synthesis or Syllabic Groupings. I touch very briefly on this branch, accepting, in regard to it, the doctrine of Edgar Poe, given in his essay on the 'Rationale of Versification,' rendered, as I think, more complete by my introduction into it of the theory of the silent syllable or rest.

Metric is concerned with the discontinuous, Synectic with the continuous, aspect of the Art. Between the two lies Chromatic, which comprises the study of the qualities, affinities, and colorific properties of sound.\* Into this part of the subject, except so far as occasionally glancing

\* I notice that in Mr. Tom Hood's 'Rules of Rhyme' certain of the principles of Chromatic have been incidentally discussed and gone into (as regards the powers of initial consonants) in some detail. Chromatic may be studied with respect to Matter, Mode, and Relation. Its matter may be consonantal, vocal, or diphthongal; its mode may be taken with reference to congruity, opposition, and transition or modulation. As to relation, it may be regarded as a co-ordinate factor of Synectic or of Expression, or *per se*, i.e. with regard to the purely sensuous impression; which last, again, will bring under view the position as initial, terminal, or medial. This is a mere hasty and superficial view of the subject: in things of the fancy a little play of fancy may be permitted.