

# **ENGLISH POESY: AN INDUCTION**

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English Poesy: An Induction by W. Winslow Hall

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**W. WINSLOW HALL**

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## ENGLISH POESY

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AN INDUCTION

BY

W. WINSLOW HALL, M.D.



" Shall we rouse the night-owl  
in a catch that will draw  
three souls out of one weaver ? "

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To  
THE POETS THAT SHALL BE

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## PREFACE

I AM asked to write some words introducing this volume, and do so with the greatest pleasure. When the articles on which it is based appeared in a little-known periodical, I read them with deep interest, and hoped to see the substance of them put forth in a more compact and accessible form. This is done in the following pages, which deserve study by all who love English poetry. No such comprehensive attempt to analyse all the different factors whose interaction produces the complex structure of our verse has been made, to my knowledge, by any previous prosodist.

The author's catholicity is shown by the list of writers, belonging to very different schools, whom he accounts as predecessors. A conception of metre which adopts what is best in the work of these several writers must spread its net very wide. Yet this eclecticism does not lead to vagueness, and if anyone thinks that consideration of the



mere form of verse must be either loosely unscientific or repulsively technical, these pages should teach otherwise. They teach also with no uncertain voice the great truth that rhythm is essentially a matter of temporal succession, that silences as well as sounds form part of the pattern, and that no analysis which restricts itself to counting syllables or stresses can deal adequately with the facts of English verse.

It need not be assumed that I agree with every statement made in the following exposition. The "fair field full of *fighting* folk," as Prof. Saintsbury calls English Prosody, sees few alliances which are total and unreserved. Some points in Dr Winslow Hall's teaching seem to me more justly expressed, more thoroughly worked out, than others. Particularly, I should wish to guard against being held to endorse all that is said in the final chapter about Whitman's technique. Undoubtedly many of his lines are full of music, while two or three of his pieces are frankly metrical; but there are pages on pages where I can detect no semblance of metre, and throughout his work I miss that continuous rhythm which is

the hall-mark of English verse. This is saying merely what Whitman himself said, that he deliberately discards accustomed measures; if he gained something by doing so, as I quite think he did, he also lost something. A congeries of lines, each in itself rhythmical, but sharing no common movement with its neighbours, cannot produce the effect of a poem like "Paradise Lost," though it may produce fine effects of a different kind. From this conclusion I do not imagine Dr Winslow Hall will dissent, but in his text he seems somewhat inclined to remain satisfied with independent scansion of individual lines. Yet great verse is not a mere collection of heterogeneous fragments; it is a whole, of which each line is a related member.

With only some trifling reservations of this kind, I heartily commend this treatise to the consideration of readers who are interested in the technical aspects of English verse.

T. S. OMOND.

14 CALVERLEY PARK,  
TUNBRIDGE WELLS,  
*April 1911.*

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