

# **THE ART OF VERSE MAKING**

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The Art of Verse Making by Modeste Hannis Jordan

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**MODESTE HANNIS JORDAN**

**THE ART OF  
VERSE MAKING**



The Art  
*of Verse Making*

BY

MODESTE HANNIS JORDAN

*(Editor The Writer's Bulletin)*

WITH INTRODUCTION BY CLINTON SCOLLARD



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CALIFORNIA

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TO THE  
ASSOCIATION

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*Where are the Poets, unto whom belong  
The Olympian heights; whose singing shafts were  
sent*

*Straight to the mark, and not from bows half-bent,  
But with the utmost tension of the thong?*

*Where are the stately argosies of song,  
Whose rushing keels made music as they went  
Sailing in search of some new continent,  
With all sails set, and steady winds and strong?*

*Perhaps there lives some dreamy boy, untaught  
In schools, some graduate of the field or street,  
Who shall become a master of the art;  
An admiral sailing the high seas of thought  
Fearless and first, and steering with his fleet  
For lands not yet laid down in any chart.*

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.



## Art and the Poet.

By CLINTON SCOLLARD.

**B**EFORE the vision of every artist, high or low, if he be truly in love with his art, there glimmers ever the beacon-star of perfect achievement. With the sculptor, it is the example of a Phidias or Praxitiles; with the painter, the canvas of a Raphael or Murillo or Rembrandt; with the musician, the harmonies of a Beethoven or Bach; with the poet, the scope of a Homer, a Dante, or a Shakespeare. In a greater or lesser degree, in so far as in him lies, every devotee of art would follow such exemplars. How, he will ask himself, if he be really enamored of the high desire, can I attain nearest to the shining goal? Not only must I possess the dream, but I must also have the power to express it.

Little would it have been to Michael Angelo to have conceived his David had his hand lacked the magic to limn the vital form; naught would it have been to Titian to see in his imagination all the rich splendors that his

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brush portrayed had he not been endowed with the skill to make them visible; the melodies which stirred the soul of Liszt would have been futile had he not been given the faculty of making them audible; and all the Miltonic panorama of heaven and hell would have been as nothing had the blind shaper of this astonishing vision not been gifted with the grace of words.

Of all definitions of poetry there is none more simple nor more adequate than that of Poe, who calls it "the rhythmic creation of beauty." You may add to this, if you will, but here you have the core of truth. In considering poetry we are prone sometimes to confuse art with artificiality, or to confound it with technique. It has nothing whatever to do with the former, while the latter is but one of its potential parts. Thomas Bailey Aldrich wrote, in one of his most telling poems—

"Let Art be all in all," one time I said,  
And straightway stirred the hypercritical  
gall;  
I said not, "Let *technique* be all in all,  
But *Art*—a wider meaning."

•

Art, then, concerns not only the ability to make beauty audible or visible, but has to do with the inscrutable soul of beauty itself. Declares the author just quoted—

The poet who breathes no soul into his lute  
Falls short of Art; 'twere better he were mute!

And he goes on—

Who lacks the art to shape his thought, I hold,  
Were little poorer if he lacked the thought!

And finally—

Disparage not the magic touch that gives  
The formless thought the grace whereby it  
lives.

Have we not here the crux of the whole matter? Sculptor, painter, musician, poet—all reach their highest attainment when to the loftiest conception they add its most perfect presentation. In lesser forms of art the same dictum must hold good. Barring his limitations, the minor poet may be as true an artist as the major. We should hesitate to compare Lovelace with Shakespere, yet there is as