

A

HANDBOOK OF POETICS

FOR

Students of English Verse.

BY

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PREFACE.

THIS book is published in the belief that many teachers have felt the lack of a concise and systematic statement of the principles of poetry. Such text-books are taught with good result in German schools, and are intended to simplify, not to complicate, the study of literature. The greater part of the literature taught in our schools and colleges is in verse; but, in too many cases, the scholar studies poems without having acquired any definite and compact knowledge of the science of poetry. This "Handbook of Poetics" is meant to aid the teacher in laying so necessary a foundation.

The author has tried to take a judicious position between exploded systems on one hand, and, on the other, those promising but not yet established theories of the latest writers on Poetics—especially in the matter of Versification—which, brilliant and often enticing, have nevertheless failed so far to win general assent. Effort has been made to be accurate without being pedantic, and to avoid the bareness of the primer as well as the too abundant detail of the treatise.

Whether this effort has been successful or not, must be tried by a practical test,—by the judgment, not—as King James puts it—of “ignorants obdurde,” nor of “curious folks,” nor even of “learned men, quha thinks thame onelie wyis,” but rather of “the docile bairns of knowledge.”

The *examples* are by no means intended to be exhaustive. Many obvious ones, as the Olney Hymns or the Dunciad or the Epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke, are omitted for the same reason which Cato gave for the absence of his statue from the forum. The pupil should collect his own examples as far as he can; and every scrap of verse which he reads should be subjected to a close analysis as regards its meaning, its style, its rhythm. This study of the science of poetry is altogether distinct from the art of rhetoric: the two should be carefully held apart.

Of the many books consulted, Wackernagel's Lectures on *Poetik*, and the works on Metre by Child, Schipper, Ellis, and Ten Brink, may be named as especially helpful. The article on “Poetry” in the last volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* did not come to hand in time to be of use even in the revision of the proof-sheets.

F. B. G.

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE belief that this little manual would be of use in the study of English poetry has been strengthened by the welcome it has received from many of our best scholars. In this second edition only such corrections are made in the text as seem needed for the clear statement of facts. Attention must here be called, however, to a slight inaccuracy in the first paragraph on p. 11: the myths about Beowulf arose, it is true, before the fifth century; but the legendary and historical basis of the epic of *Beowulf* belongs to the end of the sixth century (cf. Wülker, *Grundriss zur Gesch. der Ags. Litt.* p. 306). As the paragraph is worded it does not seem to agree with what is said on p. 13. — Again, in speaking of *The Owl and the Nightingale* (p. 32), I have unaccountably forgotten to mention that sort of poem known as *Flyting*, of which the piece in question is the first specimen found in English verse, though it is not strictly identical with later *Flytings*, — such as that between Dunbar and Kennedy. Both forms, however, are undoubtedly borrowed from the old French