Sound Metric

It has been a long-standing reproach against our classical students that they have done almost nothing in original research outside of the restricted and desiccated field of lexicographical and syntactical studies; and for this, if for no other reason, Professor Goodell's contribution* to the Yale Bicentennial Publications would be a notable addition to American scholarship. Fortunately the work has stronger claims to approbation than this purely relative one; it treats one of the most difficult subjects of investigation in a manner which combines at once learning and common sense. There is nothing more melancholy than the long list of books on metric written by men who have had no natural ear for rhythm and no refined sense for literary values. For,

*Chapters on Greek Metric. *By Thomas Dwight Goodell.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

whether in the study of classic or modern verse, the final arbiter must be the innate rhythmical sense and, what is often nearly akin to it, common sense. Any real success in this field is therefore doubly welcome.

The problem which vexed classical writers on metric was akin to the modern problem, but not quite the same. No classical authority ever proceeded so far in absurdity as to deny the necessary connection between rhythm and quantity. He was preserved from this error by the fact that accent played a very small part in pointing off metrical time groups, and that consequently he had nothing to distract his mind from observing and analyzing time relations. His problem was a more delicate one, as Professor Goodell has shown in his chapter on "Rhythmicus or Metricus." In its simplest terms it is briefly this: The general effect of verse is that of a simple and regular metrical scheme, as if, for example, the dialog portions of a tragedy were in a fixed measure with a long syllable always following a short of half its time length. But if almost any single line is regarded more attentively, it will be found that the rhythm is by no means without variation, that the metrical scheme is, in fact, a mere approximate designation of the actual fluctuating rhythm. Each foot may vary within itself (the short syllable being lengthened and the long syllable correspondingly shortened, or otherwise), and, to a somewhat less extent, one foot may encroach on the time of another. Now ancient Greek scholars divided into two distinct and often hostile schools, according as they paid heed to the general impression of regularity or to the particular variations of quantity. The former were called *metrici*, the latter *rhythmici*, and both were in a measure right. Probably almost all poets while actually composing have in mind a regular metrical scheme from which any variation seems to them at the moment as an irregularity. Goethe even tells us, in one of his Roman Elegies, how he counted out the meter on his fingers during the process of composition. And it is necessary, in order that we may keep within the bounds of true rhythm, that such a metrical scheme be before us. On the other hand, the actual rhythm of a verse is commonly, as has been said, only an approximation to this fixed scheme, so that the *rhythmici* were justified in regarding as mere pedantry the schemes of the *metrici*, according to which every long syllable was twice the length of a short.

Now, in modern metrical studies, the question has shifted. The *metrici* are quite vanquished; no one thinks that a verse has the regular schematic rhythm indicated by its name, and certainly there is no fixed relation between long and short syllables in English. On the contrary the perception of the variation of quantity in rhythm has gone so far as to raise the question whether quantity performs any function whatsoever in modern scansion. The question is, of course, an absurdity, for rhythm without time is a contradiction in terms. Those who care to hear the whole subject discussed in a manner at once scholarlike and refined cannot do better than turn to Professor Goodell's above mentioned chapter and to the succeeding chapter on "Rhythm and Language."

We have written of the book as of interest to the general student of literature, and such it is in large part,—a wholesome corrective to much that is foolishly and ignorantly written on the subject. The more technical parts of the treatise we must here pass over, with only a word of praise for the sanity and clearness with which Professor Goodell discusses such slippery questions as logaœdic and dactylo-epitritic verse.