

## WELSH VERSIFICATION.

THE following summary of the laws of Welsh versification is offered to the notice of those who may wish, when reading Welsh poetry, to understand the broad principles of its structure. More it does not pretend to be. At the same time the writer, while generalising as far as he saw practicable the confusing multiplicity of definitions given by almost all writers on the subject (all in Welsh, so far as he knows), has attempted to embrace all really salient points.

The word *verse* in the following pages is used to designate one metrical line only.

1. The structure of verses is, in Welsh, founded on *assonance* (*cynghanedd*), *rhyme* (*odli*), and the number of syllables in each verse (*cyhydedd*).

2. Sometimes short pieces of poetry have also each verse beginning with the same word (*cymmeriad geiriol*), or with the same letter (*cymmeriad llythyrenol*). In the latter are included all successions of verses which begin with a vowel. This characteristic, though formerly much used, is now but rarely employed, and needs, therefore, no illustration.

3. *Assonance* (*cynghanedd*) consists in the recurrence, in one part of a verse, of one or more consonants (*cynghanedd groes*) or syllables (*cynghanedd sain*), which also occur in a preceding part of the same verse. Such recurring letters are here termed the *assonants* of those which precede, and to which they answer.

4. A consonantal assonance (*cynghanedd groes*) consists of one or more consonants in the latter part of a verse recurring in the same *order* as the same consonants in the first part, but affected by different vowels. No intruding consonant is allowed between any two assonants.

*E. g.*, “Y diafol, arglwydd dufwg,  
<sub>1 2 1 2</sub>  
 Ti, du ei drem, tad y drwg.”  
<sub>1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4</sub>

In the first verse of this couplet there are but two assonants, while in the second there are four.

(a) It is not necessary that all the consonants in the first part should have assonants in the second. Even one will suffice, the other intervening consonants, if there be any, being simply passed over unnoticed, as in the first verse of the above couplet.

(b) In this assonance, the first consonant in the verse, except *n*, which may or may not have its assonant, must have an assonant in the second part.

(c) The most perfect form of the consonantal assonance is that in which the two parts of the verse can be interchanged without violating either sense or assonance.

*E. g.*, “Diwres dwyrain dros deirawr”;  
<sub>1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5</sub>  
 Or “Dros deirawr diwres dwyrain.”

5. A syllabic assonance (*cynghanedd sain*) consists in the rhyming of any syllable except the last in the second part, with a syllable in the first part of a verse.

*E. g.*, (a) “Wylw wrth rodio yr ydyf.”  
<sub>1 2 1 2</sub>  
 (b) “Ni chewch ddyben o’ch penyd,  
 Diffaith a fu’ch gwaith i gyd.”

In addition to the syllabic assonance there are also in the verse generally one or more consonantal assonances, which are not, however, subject to the same restrictions as a proper consonantal assonance.

(c) “Gwynfyd i’r diwyd a’r da.”  
<sub>1 2 3 1 2 3</sub>

6. (a) The letter *h*, when it stands alone, is sometimes regarded as a simple aspirate. It does not then necessarily interfere with or take part in any assonance.

*E. g.*, “Ceir gwybod cyn darfod dydd,  
 Heb hirfaes, pwy a orfydd.”  
<sub>1 2 3 1 2 3</sub>

(b) One consonant can be an assonant to two like consonants, or *vice versa*, when the latter immediately follow one another.

*E. g.*, “Er cof fyth o’r cyfreithwyr.”  
 “Y mae, os hwn ym mai sydd,  
 Lle i nodi trwth lluniedydd.”

See also the first and fourth verses of § (12.)

(c) The consonants *b, d, dd, f, g, l*, when they come next to *p, t, th, ff* (ph) *c, ll* respectively, are, as it were, absorbed into the latter, which alone rule the assonance.

*E. g.*, “A’th ddawn yn ffrwd o’th enau.”  
 “Ond teg addef hyn i ti.”

See also the fifth verse in § (12.)

(d) The *tenues c, p, t*, sometimes have their *mediae g, b, d* for their respective assonants.

*E. g.*, “Ac yn ei fedd gwyn ei fyd.”  
 “Mae ’n amgenach ei hachau,  
 Hŷn ac uwch oedd nag ach Iau.”  
 “Gnwd tew, eginhad daear.”

(e) Commonly, though not always, the letter *w* at the end of such words as *galw, hoyw*, etc., and sometimes also in the middle of compound words is elided, as in the following hepta-syllabic verses:—

“Canaf ei chlod hoywglod hi.”  
 “Anghenfil gwelw ddielwig,  
 Pen isel ddelw dduddel ddig.”

7. The number of syllables admissible in a verse (*cyhydedd*) may be any number from four to ten, according to the arrangement of Simwnt Fychan.

8. In some metres we have the following peculiarity. At the end of a deca-syllabic verse, and forming a part of it, one or more words, which must not, however, contain more than four syllables, are used as a passing link (*geiriau cyrch*) to connect it with the following verse, which must consist of six, nine, or ten syllables. When written or printed, such link-words are separated by a hyphen from those which precede. The syllable

next to the link-word must rhyme with the adjacent verses.

(a) When the decasyllabic verse is followed by one of six syllables, there must be in the beginning of the latter one or more assonants to a letter or letters in the link-word.

*E. g.*, “Dy eiriau, Ion clan, clywais—<sub>1</sub> yn addo<sub>2</sub>

Noddi pawb a'th ymgais.”  
<sub>1 2</sub>

(b) In either of the other two cases the last syllable of the link-word must rhyme with a syllable in the middle of the following verse :—

*E. g.*, “Troi esgarant traws a gwrol—a wnaeth  
Yn nawdd a phenaeth iawn ddiffynol.”  
“Bro'ch tadau, a bri'ch tudwedd,—a harddoch,  
Ymae, wŷr, ynoch emau o rinwedd.”

9. There is also another and a peculiar method of rhyming (*proestio*) made use of in some metres. The last letter in each verse is the same ; but in each it is affected by a different vowel sound.

“Yn iach oll awen a chân  
Yn iach les o hanes hen,  
A'i felus gaino o flas gwin ;  
Yn iach i mi mwyach ym Mon  
Fyth o'i ôl gael y fath un :  
Yn iach bob sarllach a swm,  
Un naws a dail einioes dyn.”

10. These laws apply only to the stricter Welsh metres, commonly known as “the Four-and-twenty”. Besides these, there are, as in other languages, looser metres in which the strict laws of assonance are entirely or in part discarded, such as those used in psalmody and hymnody, in ballads and songs, etc.

11. The Four-and-twenty metres are different combinations of the seven admissible verses spoken of in § (7), each combination having of course its own peculiar laws. If the assonances, rhymes, and link-words be carefully attended to, there will be but little difficulty in perceiving the broad scheme of each metre.

From A.D. 1451 to 1819, all competitors for the chief

bardic prize at the National Eistedfodd were compelled to make use of all these metres in each poem, as they were arranged by Dafydd ap Edmwnd. In the latter-year the restriction was withdrawn. Only two of them are here presented to the reader; but they are the two most commonly used—viz., the *Cywydd* and *Englyn*.

12. *Cywydd*. There are three kinds of this metre. The first consists of a couplet of rhyming verses of four syllables each, one of which ends with a monosyllable, and the other with a word of two or more syllables. One of the verses also consists of two dis-syllabic words. The second kind is made up of couplets of hepta-syllabic verses, which are subject to the same laws as the first. The third kind is also hepta-syllabic, but has the last syllable of the first verse rhyming with a syllable in the middle of the second. The kind here described as second is that most commonly used, and poems written in this metre are subject to no restriction as to length.

*E. g.*, (a) “Mae bro mwy bri | Or, “Ni bu neb wr  
Eto iti.” | Rhwyddach rhoddwr”

(b) “O f’ einioes, ni chaf fwyniant  
Heb Fôn, er na thôn na thant,  
Nid oes trysor a ddorwn,  
Na byd da ’n y bywyd hwn,  
Na dail llwyn na dillynion,  
Na byw hwy, oni bai hon.”

(c) “Yn ein plith o enau ’n plant,  
Dy ogoniant, deg wiwner.”

This metre, in one or other of its forms, enters largely into the structure of the rest.

13. *Englyn*. There are several kinds also of this metre. That most commonly used is the following :—

“Awenawg wr o Wynedd—a yrwyd  
O hiraeth i’r llygredd,  
Ar arall dir i orwedd;  
Dyma fan fechan ei fedd.”

Each stanza consists of two couplets. The first verse has ten and the second six syllables, as described in § (8) (a). The second couplet is hepta-syllabic, and is

of the second kind described in § (12); it must also rhyme with the preceding verses. If the syllabic assonance be used in the first verse, the assonant must occur in the fifth syllable.

A second form of this metre is given by interchanging the positions of the two couplets above described, while a third consists of a quartett of hepta-syllabic verses, which rhyme in the manner described in § (9). The other metres have their own special laws. What has been said, however, is sufficient to illustrate the application of the stated laws to Welsh versification. Those who should wish to prosecute the study further, must have recourse to more elaborate works.

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### THE DATE OF LLANTHONY ABBEY.

THERE are two important descriptions of Llanthony Abbey in the *Archæologia Cambrensis*. One of them will be found in the first volume of the first series of that Journal, by the Rev. George Roberts, at that time of Monmouth. The other appeared ten years later, in the first volume of the third series, by Mr. E. A. Freeman. Mr. Roberts has entered more largely into the history of the Abbey, which he has worked out at considerable length, with so great success, that it may be reckoned among the most valuable of the articles in the whole collection. Mr. Freeman, on the other hand, has given a remarkably lucid and exhaustive architectural history of the remains of the church and other buildings of the monastery, and a no less valuable contribution to the Journal. He has not, however, entered into the general history of the foundation, while, on the other hand, Mr. Roberts has appended some architectural descriptions, the inaccuracy of which is pointed out by Mr. Freeman. Mr. Roberts infers that the church now remaining is the original one, and that the architectural details confirm his view. He