how to write flowing musical prose, but the solution has recently been discovered, and is now at the service of the public.

Turn to the first volume of the "Switzers" by Mr. Hepworth Dixon—near to the beginning of the book—and, having read a passage of *lovely* prose, as it stands, write it out, also as it stands, taking care merely to begin a fresh line whenever the rhythm pauses in its measured beat.

Let us take an example. "At Dusk," the writer says,

"You see a cottage on a shelf of rock,
"A hut in which the shepherd churns his milk;
"A bit of soil in which he grows his herbs,
"A patch of grass on which his heifers browse,
"A simple cross at which his urchins pray.
"At dead of night a tremor passes through
"The mountain side; a slip of earth takes place;
"A cry which no one hears rings up to heaven."

It is to be hoped that after the difficulty has thus been reduced to a mere matter of writing poor blank verse—a difficulty which every schoolboy has overcome—we shall have no more "Carlylese" or rugged English.—R. H.

An Introduction to the History of our Poets Laureate.

By the Editor.

CHAPTER II.

From very ancient records it appears that not only the old Scandinavian nations had royal bards, but that the Irish and Welsh kings were constantly attended by their poets. By some rules dating from 940, it is shown that the bards of the Welsh kings were domestic officers, to each of whom the king allowed a horse and a woollen robe, and the queen a linen garment. Amongst other curious fees and immunities attached to the office of royal bard mention is made of the following:—The Governor of the Castle was privileged to sit next to him in the hall, on the three principal feast days, and to place the harp in his hand, and on those days the poet was to receive the steward's robe as a fee. If the queen desired it, he was to sing a song in her chamber; he was to have an ox or a cow, from the booty taken from the enemy. When the king's army was in array, he was to sing the song of the British Kings. When invested with the office the king was to present him with a harp, or some authorities say a chess board, each of these articles being valued at the sum of 120 pence, and the queen was to give a ring of gold. When the king rode out of the Castle, five bards were to accompany him; if the poet asked a favour, or gratuity of the king he was fined an ode, or a poem; if of a nobleman or chief, three; if of a vassal *he was to sing him to sleep*—Rejoice ye shades of Eusden and of Pye!

The Welsh bards were early connected with the Irish, and so late as the eleventh century continued to receive instruction from them. The Welsh bards were placed under certain rules and restrictions by Gryffith ap Conan, King of Wales in 1078.

Whoever even slightly injured a bard, was fined six cows and 120 pence, and the murderer of one of these highly respected individuals was punished by the infliction of the enormous fine of 120 cows. It is easy therefore to understand the horror and indignation which their wholesale slaughter by a murderous English king, must have caused to the Cambrian people.

Many of the regulations for the Irish poets were of a similar character, and all point strongly to the high favour in which they were held, it was considered an act of sacrilege to seize their estates, even in times of the greatest national distress, and to kill a bard was the most heinous of crimes. In those parts of Britain, most subject to Roman rule, many of the old national customs fell into disuse, and soon became obsolete. But in those districts where the Celtic character prevailed, the bards retained much of their old ascendancy, long after the order of the Druids was extinct. The Welsh, favoured by the inaccessibility of their country, were able to preserve many customs, which Englishmen and Scotchmen, constantly invaded and harassed by various foreign powers, were unable to retain; their bardic festivities were observed by the Welsh until a comparatively late period, whilst their language, one of the oldest and

purest in Europe, survives to the present time.

Concerning Ossian, it is impossible to enter into the controversy which Macpherson's translation created, but there can be little doubt, that these poems were the composition of Scottish bards, orally preserved, handed down by tradition, and dating from a very early period.

In Warton's recondite History of English poetry, an account is given of our earliest Poets Laureate, and no apology is necessary for the insertion of extracts from the best authority (himself a Laureate) who has written on the subject.

From the ancient title of *versificator* it appears the holder of the office originally wrote in Latin, and this is certainly the case with Guliemus Peregrinus, royal poet to Richard I., whom he accompanied to the Crusades. He sung the achievements of the lion-hearted monarch in a Latin poem, which he dedicated to Herbert, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Stephen Turnham a warrior in the expedition. He lived about the year 1200, and Robert Baston (who died in 1310) held the same appointment under Edward II., who carried him to witness the siege of Stirling Castle, upon which operation Baston composed a poem in Latin hexameter verse. But being unfortunately captured by the Scotch, they compelled him to write a *panegyric* on Robert Bruce, which he performed in similar language and metre.

With regard to the Poet Laureate of the kings of England, an officer of the court remaining under that title to this day, he is undoubtedly the same that was styled the *King's Versifier*, and to whom one hundred shillings were paid as his annual stipend in the year 1251.

But when or how that title commenced, and whether this officer was ever solemnly crowned with laurel at his first investiture, even the researches of the learned Selden have left undetermined.

The first mention of the King's poet, under the appellation of Laureate is in the reign of Edward IV. to whom John Kay was appointed Poet Laureate.

It is extraordinary that he should have left no pieces of poetry to prove his pretensions in some degree to this office, with which he is said to have been invested by the king, on his return from Italy. The only composition he has transmitted to posterity, is a prose translation of a Latin history, (written by the Vice-chancellor of the Knights of Malta,) of the *Siege of Rhodes*, printed in London 1506. In the dedication, addressed to King Edward, he styles himself *hys humble poete laureate*. Of this work only two copies are known to exist, one of which is in the British Museum.

Great confusion has entered into this subject., on account of the degrees in grammar, which included rhetoric and versification anciently taken in our universities, particularly at Oxford; on which occasion, a wreath of laurel was presented to the new graduate, who was afterwards usually styled *poeta laureatus*.

These scholastic laureations, however, seem to have given rise to the appellation in question.

Warton gives some instances of the recipients of this title at Oxford, and amongst other less known names, cites John Skelton, who was laureated about 1489 and in the year 1493 was permitted to wear his laurel at Cambridge.

"Nay Skelton wore the laurel wreath,
And passed in scholes ye knoe."

Robert Whittington was honoured with the laurel in 1512, and was the last instance of a *rhetorical* degree at Oxford. He wrote some panegyrics on Henry and Cardinal Wolsey.

And as a proof that this officer was a Latin scholar, is the fact that all the pieces written by Andrew Bernard, in the character of Poet Laureate, are in Latin, although he held the office as late as the reign of Henry VII.

Warton is of opinion that it was not customary for the royal laureates to write in English, till the reformation had begun to diminish the veneration for the Latin tongue, and a better sense of things had taught us to cultivate our native language.

Hallam says, that in England, all letters, even of a private nature, were written in Latin till the beginning of the reign of Edward I, soon after 1270, when a sudden change brought in the use of French.

This was not simply a fashion, but was

rendered necessary by the great diversity of dialect and spelling that existed; an historian writing in 1380 says:—"Hit semeth a grete wonder that Englyssmen have so grete dyverste in their owin langage in sowne, and in spekyin of it, which is all in one ilonde." And men of different counties were often unable to converse together so late as the reign of Elizabeth.

In Italy and Germany the honor of laureation was usually conferred by the State, or some University. The form of creation of three Poets Laureate by the Chancellor of the University of Strasbourg, in 1621, was as follows:—

"I create you, being placed in a chair of state, crowned with laurel and ivy, and wearing a ring of gold, and the same do pronounce and constitute, POETS LAUREATE, in the name of the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen."

Having thus briefly sketched the origin of the office, we have next to give some biographical outlines of its holders. In so doing it will form no part of our plan to enter into detailed criticisms of their works, confining ourselves more particularly to the events which marked their tenure of office, and the literary attacks they were subjected to, illustrated by numerous satirical epigrams, and lampoons never hitherto collected.

"Ev'n now, confess'd to my adoring eyes,
In awful ranks thy gifted sons arise.
Tuning to Knightly tale his British reeds,
Thy genuine bards immortal Chaucer leads:
His hoary head o'erlooks the gazing quire,
And beams on all around celestial fire."

FROM THE TRIUMPH OF ISIS.

(To be continued.)

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