MORRIS'S DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE.

_The Defence of Guenevere, and other Poems._ By William Morris. London: Bell and Daldy, 1858.

This volume has been looked for with interest in many quarters for more reasons than one, and will, we augur, receive at the hands of a no small number of readers an impartial criticism. It is, we believe, the first complete poetical work of a painter of the Pre-Raphaelite school, whose canvas has often been covered with well-conceived and cleverly executed conceptions, which together with those of his confrères, are no doubt laying the firm foundation for an honest and bona fide English school: one that shall be above the artificial prettinesses of modern exhibitions, and shall be worthy of the name of art. As such we cordially welcome it.

Some six years ago divers painters and poets of this character, who were then scarcely known even by name, issued a few numbers of a monthly serial, which was first called _The Germ_, and was afterwards changed into _Art and Poetry_. It was carefully illustrated by some very clever and spirited etchings, and contained many poems and papers of more than average originality and interest. Only four or five numbers were issued, and those excited no great attention, beyond the circle of the persons who brought them into existence. But for all this, the various papers on art, and many of the poems, are not now unknown in a much more extended field. By degrees they deservedly gained some attention, and we believe it is now absolutely impossible to obtain any copies of this interesting publication. Mr. Dante G. Rossetti, the Poet Laureate, and Mr. Thomas Woolner, the Sculptor, were three of the original contributors of poetry and essays; and Messrs. James Collinson and Ford Madox Brown were amongst those who furnished illustrative etchings. Whether the author of the volume before us was a contributor to, or supporter of, _The Germ_, we have no means of knowing; but it is quite evident that he belongs to the same school, and draws his inspirations from the same sources. Moreover, it is known that he was one of the main contributors to the clever _Oxford and Cambridge Magazine_, which lived a short but happy life of a twelvemonth last year; for some of the poems in the volume before us have already appeared in that serial.

The subjects of the principal poems in the book are drawn from the ancient romances, properly so called, which recount the history and marvels of the great King Arthur, and the wonderful deeds of valour and knightly prowess of his followers. Mr. Tennyson and Sir Bulwer Lytton, the one in his charming poems "Sir Galahad" and "The Lady of Shallott," and the other in his long and ela-
borate, but sometimes tiresome "King Arthur," have been before Mr. Morris in collecting subjects; but neither have so gathered materials together, or made use of them afterwards as in any degree to interfere with or circumscribe Mr. Morris's choice. And while our author has been weaving the golden threads of his verses into harmonious wholes, and making people anxious to have the chance of appreciating the result, his pencil, and those of his fellow art-workers, have been adorning the new Library and Debating Room of the Oxford Union Society, with a series of most effective and powerfully conceived illustrations of the same good people and age, which have deservedly attracted no inconsiderable attention. The Chronicles of Froissart likewise have not been unstudied by the poet, who displays a most remarkable and praiseworthy knowledge of the details of the middle ages, as well as of the temper and habit of mind of those who flourished then.

In the "Defence of Guenevere," there is evidence enough both of the originality, force of expression, and power of composition which the author possesses; but there are divers quaint expressions, an apparent attempt at obscurity and difficult writing, and the almost invariable practice of never ending a sentence at the ordinary close of a stanza. While we quite admit that a needless limitation of this sort is unwisely adopted, we cannot at the same time acquit the author of something like pedantry in adopting the exact antithesis. As to the obscurity of passages, we wish to ask what may be the author's meaning of a "head . . . . being soothed away from its white chattering?" (p. 16). In truth it is obvious as well from this poem, as from the major part of the volume, that the writer has pertinaciously intended to give his readers as much trouble as possible in their attempts to find out his meaning. If they think his book worth studying, they shall study it for some considerable time before they can break the crust of unintelligibility, and then they will be more likely to retain what they read, and increase in admiration of that which they admire.

"King Arthur's Tomb" gives us the idea of a hastily composed poem. It lacks unity of purpose, precision of expression, and, as indeed do many others, finish of execution. There are one or two powerful descriptions, and an expression here and there, which will not be easily forgotten; but on the whole, we prefer to skip it over as in many ways deficient, and turn to what is in our opinion the gem of the whole book. We allude to "Sir Galahad." Were it not too long for quotation, we would gladly give it entire, as it evinces very remarkable powers, and in most respects—though very dissimilar in character—bears comparison with the well-known poem of the same title by the Laureate. Mr. Morris's Knight is a perfect picture: soul, body, heart, feelings, expression, words, and exterior thoroughly medieval, and all in perfect keeping, oneness, and harmony. We subjoin the first ten verses:—
"It is the longest night in all the year,
  Near on the day when the Lord Christ was born;
Six hours ago I came and sat down here,
    And pondered sadly wearied and forlorn.

"The winter wind that passed the chapel-door,
  Sang out a moody tune, that went right well
With mine own thoughts: I look'd down on the floor,
       Between my feet, until I heard a bell

"Sound a long way off through the forest deep,
  And toll on steadily; a drowsiness
Came on me, so that I fell half asleep,
  As I sat there not moving: less and less

"I saw the melted snow that hung in beads
  Upon my steel-shoes; less and less I saw
Between the tiles the bunches of small weeds;
      Heartless and stupid, with no touch of awe

"Upon me, half-shut eyes upon the ground,
  I thought; O! Galahad, the days go by,
Stop and cast up now that which you have found,
  So sorely you have wrought and painfully.

"Night after night your horse treads down alone
  The sere damp fern, night after night you sit
Holding the bridle like a man of stone,
     Dismal, unfriended, what thing comes of it?

"And what if Palomydes also ride,
  And over many a mountain and bare heath
Follow the questing beast with none beside?
      Is he not able still to hold his breath

"With thoughts of Iseulf? doth he not grow pale
  With weary striving, to seem best of all
To her, 'as she is best,' he saith? to fail
      Is nothing to him, he can never fall.

"For unto such a man love sorrow is
  So dear a thing unto his constant heart,
That even if he never win one kiss,
      Or touch from Iseulf, it will never part.

"And he will never know her to be worse
  Than in his happiest dreams he thinks she is:
Good knight and faithful, you have 'scaped the curse
     In wonderful wise; you have great store of bliss."—P. 47.

The following extract from a passage at p. 61, from "The Chapel in Lyoness," well represents the capacities which Mr. Morris possesses of treating a subject at the same time both objectively and subjectively. The feelings are well expressed, and
there is an absence of peculiarity, as well as a presence of rhythm, which is especially refreshing:

"All day long and every day,
Till his madness pass'd away;
I watch'd Ozana as he lay
Within the gilded screen.

"All my singing moved him not,
As I sung my heart grew hot,
With the thought of Lancelot
Far away I ween.

"So I went a little space
From out the chapel, bathed my face
In the stream that runs apace
Beside the churchyard wall.

"There I pluck'd a faint wild rose,
Hard by where the linden grows,
Sighing over silver rows
Of the lilies tall.

"I laid the flower across his mouth;
The sparkling drops seemed good for drouth;
He smiled, turn'd round toward the south,
Held up a golden tress.

"The light smote on it from the west:
He drew the covering from his breast,
Against his heart that hair he press'd;
Death-him soon will bless."—P. 62.

"Sir Peter Harpdon's End" is a dramatic fragment of some length, which, though lacking character and point, and deficient in clearness of expression, contains some thoughts of considerable originality. As a whole it reminds us considerably of Mr. Robert Browning's writings; and though not crowded with obscure classicalisms, like certain of that author's effusions, it amply atones for the absence of such, by an almost overcrowding of mediæval notions at one time upon the stage. Again, there is in many passages a mixture of common-place and something better, which makes us deeply regret the presence of the former property, and wonder why greater care has not been taken in the polishing-up and final touchings. This has been the case very evidently in a powerful description of the Lady Alice's feelings at pp. 98, 99, for which consequently we regret we have not space. It is thoroughly Pre-Raphaelite in character, and one of the best and most perfect pieces of word-painting in the volume.

"Rapunzel," is a wild and romantic production, characterised by much indistinctness. There are two or three passages, how-
ever, that deserve to be reprinted, which are given below. The first is the description—by no means unvivid—of a fight; and the second is a pretty and somewhat extravagantly fanciful song by a "Prince."

"Once came two knights and fought with swords below,
And while they fought I scarce could look at all,
My head swam so, after a moaning low,
Drew my eyes down, I saw against the wall

"One knight lean dead, bleeding from head and breast,
Yet seem'd it like a line of poppies red
In the golden twilight as he took his rest,
In the dusky time he scarcely seemed dead.

"But the other, on his face six paces off,
Lay moaning, and the old familiar name
He mutter'd through the grass, seem'd like a scoff
Of some lost soul remembering his past fame.

"His helm all dented lay beside him there,
The visor-bars were twisted towards the face,
The crest, which was a lady very fair,
Wrought wonderfully, was shifted from its place.

"The shower'd mail-rings on the speed-walk lay,
Perhaps my eyes were dazzled with the light
That blazed in the west, yet surely on that day
Some crimson thing had changed the grass from bright

"Pure green I love so. But the knight who died
Lay there for days after the other went;
Until one day I heard a voice that cried,
'Fair knight, I see Sir Robert we were sent

"'To carry dead or living to the king.'
So the knights came and bore him straight away
On their lance truncheons, such a batter'd thing,
His mother had not known him on that day."—P. 127.

"GUENDOLEN.

"Twixt the sunlight and the shade
Float up memories of my maid,
GOD, remember Guendolen!

"Gold or gems she did not wear,
But her yellow rippled hair,
Like a veil, hid Guendolen!

"Twixt the sunlight and the shade,
My rough hands so strangely made,
Folded Golden Guendolen;
"Hands used to grip the sword-hilt hard,  
Framed her face, while on the sward  
Tears fell down from Guendolen.

"Guendolen now speaks no word,  
Hands fold round about the sword.  
Now no more of Guendolen.

"Only 'twixt the light and shade  
Floating memories of my maid.  
Make me pray for Guendolen."—P. 131.

The following extract from "A Good Knight in Prison," is of the same character and quality, and has the merit of being somewhat shorter:

"For these vile things that hem me in,  
These Pagan beasts who live in sin,  
The sickly flowers pale and wan,  
The grim blue-bearded castellan,  
The stanchions half-worn out with rust,  
Whereto their banner vile they trust—  
Why, all these things I hold them just  
Like dragons in a missal-book,  
Wherein, whenever we may look,  
We see no horror, yea, delight  
We have, the colours are so bright;  
Likewise we note the specks of white,  
And the great plates of burnish'd gold.

"Just so this Pagan castle old,  
And everything I can see there,  
Sick-pining in the marshland air,  
I note; I will go over now,  
Like one who paints with knitted brow,  
The flowers and all things one by one,  
From the snail on the wall to the setting sun.

"Four great walls and a little one  
That leads down to the barbican,  
Which walls with many spears they man,  
When news comes to the castellan  
Of Launcelot being in the land.

"And as I sit here, close at hand  
Four spikes of sad sick sunflowers stand,  
The castellan with a long wand  
Cuts down their leaves as he goes by,  
Ponderingly, with screw'd-up eye,  
And fingers twisted in his beard—  
Nay, was it a knight's shout I heard?  
I have a hope makes me afeard:
It cannot be, but if some dream
Just for a minute made me deem
I saw among the flowers, there
My lady's face with long red hair,
Pale, ivory-colour'd dear face come,
As I was wont to see her some
Fading September afternoon,
And kiss me, saying nothing, soon
To leave me by myself again;
Could I get this by longing: vain!"—P. 151.

As we have never been able to discover why the large majority of women represented by the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers have red hair, neither can we see why "my lady" alluded to above should possess that especial adornment. It is perfectly true, in fact, that some people have red hair, but it is equally false that all are gifted in that particular. Of course there are a large number of ordinary-looking people, such as we see often painted by those who pride themselves on representing Nature as she is; but there is on the other hand a no small class of another character who would, we venture to say, be equally paintable, and would not make a picture appear common-place or quaint. Again, we doubt the wisdom of applying the terms "pale, ivory colour'd" to a face. They remind us very unpleasantly of disease and lack of health. Now although the "Good Knight" may have suffered from confinement, we are not informed that this was his lady's misfortune.

"The Gilliflower of Gold" is in many respects worthy of a careful study. It is a most clever imitation, or rather reproduction of the middle age ballad. So artistically is it managed that we might almost imagine that no modern pen had linked the words together.

"Shameful Death," which immediately follows, is a trifle less unintelligible, though by no means deficient in obscurity:

"There were four of us about that bed;
The mass-priest knelt at the side,
I and his mother stood at the head,
Over his feet lay the bride;
We were quite sure that he was dead,
Though his eyes were open wide.

"He did not die in the night,
He did not die in the day,
But in the morning twilight
His spirit pass'd away;
When neither sun nor moon was bright,
And the trees were merely grey.

"He was not slain with the sword,
Knight's axe, or the knightly spear,
Yet spoke he never a word
    After he came in here;
I cut away the cord
    From the neck of my brother dear.

"He did not strike one blow,
    For the recreants came behind,
In a place where the hornbeams grow,
    A path right hard to find;
For the hornbeam-boughs swing so,
    That the twilight makes it blind.

"They lighted a great torch then,
    When his arms were pinioned fast,
Sir John the Knight of the Fen,
    Sir Guy of the Dolorous Blast,
With knights threescore and ten,
    Hung brave Sir Hugh at last.

"I am threescore and ten,
    And my hair is all turn'd grey,
But I met Sir John of the Fen,
    Long ago on a summer day,
And am glad to think of the moment when
    I took his life away.

"I am threescore and ten,
    And my strength is mostly pass'd,
But long ago
    When the sky was overcast,
And the smoke roll'd over the reeds of the fen,
    Slew Guy of the Dolorous Blast.

"And now, Knights all of you,
    I pray you pray for Sir Hugh,
A good Knight and a true,
    And for Alice his wife, pray too." — P. 165.

The "Eve of Crecy," which immediately follows this, is likewise a poem of considerable beauty, and as our readers must allow, gives its author a full opportunity of displaying all those peculiar powers which he so unquestionably possesses, and knows so well how to use with advantage:—

"Gold on her head, and gold on her feet,
    And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle round my sweet;
    Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"Margaret's maids are fair to see,
    Freshly dress'd and pleasantly;
Margaret's hair falls down to her knee;
    Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.
"If I were rich I would kiss her feet,
I would kiss the place where the gold hems meet,
And the golden girdle round my sweet—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"Ah me! I have never touch'd her hand;
When the arriere-ban goes through the land,
Six basnets under my pennon stand;—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"And many an one grins under his hood;
'Sir Lambert de Bois, with all his men good,
Has neither food nor firewood;—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"If I were rich I would kiss her feet,
And the golden girdle of my sweet,
And thereabouts where the gold hems meet;—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"Yet even now it is good to think,
While my few poor varlets grumble and drink
In my desolate hall, where the fires sink,—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"Of Margaret sitting glorious there,
In glory of gold and glory of hair,
And glory of glorious face most fair;—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"Likewise to-night I make good cheer,
Because this battle draweth near:
For what have I to lose or fear?
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"For, look you, my horse is good to prance
A right fair measure in this war-dance,
Before the eyes of Philip of France;—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"And sometime it may hap, perdie,
While my new towers stand up three and three—
And my hall gets painted fair to see—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"That folks may say: 'Times change, by the rood,
For Lambert, banneret of the wood,
Has heaps of food and firewood;—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

"'And wonderful eyes, too, under the hood
Of a damsel of right noble blood.'
St. Ives, for Lambert of the wood!—
   Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite."—P. 168
MORRIS'S DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE.

One of the quaintest and most effective poems perhaps in the whole volume is that entitled "The Wind." It reminds us of no particular modern writer in an especial manner, and yet in a general way of many. Shelley, Browning, Tennyson, and Bailey, all might have written it, still we venture to doubt if any would have been more successful than our author.

A song from "Golden Wings"—one of the most wild, quaint and unintelligible poems in the book—may not lack interest to some of our readers, as serving to exemplify most effectually what we venture to designate as two of the most obvious faults of this original writer, viz., his want of precision and manifest obscurity.

"Gold wings across the sea!
Gold light from tree to tree,
Gold hair beside my knee,
I pray thee come to me
Gold wings!

"The water slips,
The red-bill'd moorhen dips.
Sweet kisses on red lips;
Alas! the red rust grips,
And the blood red dagger rips,
Yet, O Knight, come to me!

"Are not my blue eyes sweet?
The west wind from the wheat
Blows cold across my feet;
Is it not time to meet
Gold wings across the sea?

"White swans on the green moat,
Small feathers left afloat
By the blue painted boat;
Swift running of the stoat;
Sweet gurgling note by note
Of sweet music.

"O gold wings,
Listen how gold hair sings,
And the Ladies' Castle rings,
Gold wings across the sea.

"I sit on a purple bed,
Outside the wall is red,
Therby the apple hangs,
And the wasp caught by the fangs,

"Dies in the autumn night,
And the bat flies till light,
And the love-crazed knight
"Kisses the long wet grass:
The weary days pass,
Gold wings across the sea!

"Gold wings across the sea!
Moonlight from tree to tree,
Sweet hair laid on my knee,
O, sweet Knight, come to me.

"Gold wings the short night slips,
The white swan's long neck drips,
I pray thee, kiss my lips,
Gold wings across the sea."—P. 210.

From the above extracts and remarks our readers will be enabled to form some tolerable opinion of the character and value of "The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems." There can be little doubt that had more pains and a greater amount of care as to detail been expended on the book, it would have had a much better chance of obtaining a permanent place in the poetical literature of the present age. As it is, there are many deficiencies which will be obvious to the great majority of readers, and only those who are resolutely determined to defend at any cost the faults and eccentricities of the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as to sing and preach their praises, will be found to overlook them or ignore their very existence in the present instance. To be less general in our criticism, what can indicate carelessness so accurately as the lack of rhythm, the barbarous rhymes, and the oftentimes bad grammar, which in so many places disfigure the verses? "Guenevere" and "her" (p. 35), and "dawn" and "corn" twice repeated, an elegant but not an original cockneyism, are amongst these; and we might point out many other instances of a similar careless neglect.

Once more, let us warn Mr. Morris not to be led by the flattery or kind opinions of friends to imagine that obscurity and profundity are convertible terms. If a writer wishes to be understood, and has anything worth saying, let him put it into language that will be intelligible to an ordinary capacity. To say but little, and that little vaguely, while more is implied, is to acknowledge on his own part a deficiency of the power or an ignorance of the art of poetry. We quite believe that much may be accomplished by the writer whose book is before us, but it will only be by a careful self-criticism, and by a resolute determination to resist the temptations alluded to. If he persist in a course, into which, possibly inexperience may have led him in the present instance, it will not only be detrimental to himself personally, but to the entire school of which he is so respectable a representative.

He has already shown himself capable of accomplishing far more than the majority of our minor poets, for his present volume
evidences the possession of very unmistakeable originality, a thorough knowledge of many details of the subjects selected, a considerable power of language, and a good use of epithets; so that while we cordially welcome him, and thank him for the result of his past labours, we earnestly trust that we may meet him at a future period, with something that may deserve more than alternations of praise and blame, and merit wholly and altogether our kindly and friendly criticism.

THE EUCHARISTIC CONTROVERSY IN SCOTLAND.

2. Statement on the same subject. By the Bishops of Moray and S. Andrew's.
3. Address to the Bishop of Edinburgh from the Clergy of the Diocese of Edinburgh.
5. Remonstrance to the Right Rev. the College of Bishops of the Church of Scotland: signed by Presbyters serving in the Scottish Church.
6. Memorial to the Right Rev. the Bishops of the Episcopal Church in Scotland: signed by Lay Members of the Episcopal Church in Scotland.
7. The Bishop of Brechin's Letter to the Earl of Wemyss.

To worship with the spirit and with the understanding also is the great effort of all earnest devotion. As we ponder in our hearts the truths of revelation, we cannot but endeavour to acquire an increasing appreciation of their reality: we must be careful indeed that we do not lower the thoughts of God to our own anticipations, and that we do not limit the infinite mystery of God to the finite grasp of our own intelligence. It is important to remember that however much of truth we get to know, we can know as yet only in part. Our understanding therefore must be elevated in the contemplation of Divine Mystery, and not as is too frequently the case, Divine Mystery lowered by the limitation of human understanding. For this reason faith is always positive rather than negative. While we assert what is contained within