A RAID AMONG THE RHYMERS. 

TOLERATION is an excellent virtue; but some things and people the most Job-like among us cannot ‘stand.’ There are certain phenomena which the natural theologian finds it difficult to reconcile with his theory of a righteous government of the world. Dr. Cunningham, Mr. Spurgeon, Martin Tupper, the winter of 1859, our friend Jones’s African sherry at eighteen shillings a dozen, sharks, locusts, fleas, and Professor Blackie’s Lyric Poems, are facts as unaccountable as they are intolerable.

A Professor, more especially of the Humanities, was in the classic period of University history a grave and solemn functionary who stalked about his college quadrangle in canonicals, and who, if he wrote nonsense verses at times, wrote them at least in a dead language. Professor Blackie, to do him justice, occasionally employs unknown tongues (we do not allude specially to his Latin versions); but in every other respect he differs as widely as possible from his predecessor. Of course we speak of the poet; the man, we make no doubt, is quite the contrary. But when mounted on his Pegasus, Mr. Blackie irresistibly reminds us of Tam O’Shanter during his memorable ride. Quer scraps of old ballads, odds and ends of tunes he had heard from ‘Souter Johnny,’ which chimed in not unfitly with the tearing gallop of Meg towards ‘the keystone of the brig,’ and the confused rush of the witches through the midnight air, rattled no doubt about Tam’s drunken brain. We venture to assert—though on internal evidence alone—that one of these fragmentary reminiscences closely resembled the following passage, which we quote verbatim from page 49 of the Lyric Poems—

Some praise the fair Queen Mary, and some the good Queen Bess, 
And some the wise Aspasia, beloved by Pericles; 
But o’er all the world’s brave women, there’s one that bears the rule, 
The valiant Jenny Geddes, that flung the three-legged stool. 

With a row-dow—at them now!—Jenny fling the stool!

Burns says of his hero, in an invaluable couplet, 
Tam skelpt on through mud and mire, Despising wind, and rain, and fire.

Despising rhyme and reason, art and design, the Professor in like manner has ‘skelpt on through mud and mire’ from the beginning to the end of his ride. Seeing how rapidly the machine works, and how abundant the supply of raw material is, we acknowledge with thankfulness the comparative lightness of the infliction. Mr. Blackie has been merciful. He publishes a volume of poems on the average once a year. We have no doubt that he can write just such another once a week.

Mr. Blackie is very severe upon people who are ‘critical.’ He is quite justified in being so; for he cannot expect any mercy from them, and it is always well to have the first word. But a book like this frequently contrives to escape criticism. The author manifests such a cheerful audacity in venturing to attire in classic raiment his obstreperous and burlesque muse, that the critic (who is really a very good-natured fellow at bottom) cannot be seriously angry, and is inclined to leave the world to find out the imposition for itself—if it can. And there is unquestionably a good deal of mettle and ‘go’ in his performance. In every page a passion is torn to tatters. The writer is always indignant and vituperative. He industriously invokes Heaven and the reluctant Muse, and he swears like a trooper. ‘Inspire my heart,’ he implores, on one occasion,

*Lyric Poems. By John Stuart Blackie, Professor of Greek in the University of Edinburgh. Sutherland and Knox, Edinburgh. 1860.
Inspire my heart with flooding emotion!
Fill me with thoughts as rich as the leafy tree, which redundant
Shakes her tresses around, and waves her beauty before me!
Teach me to praise thee with skill, that whose hears may adore thee,
Hail! beautiful orb, the plastic eye of creation!

On another:
May the God who sways the heart,
Wean more from each false glaring art,
And still some modest truth impart,
Through thy revealing!

Though these fervent petitions have not yet been answered, we do not say that they are improper or uncalled for; but Mr. Blackie's habit of swearing, is more objectionable. We cannot see the propriety of enforcing every article of his combustible Confession of Faith with the emphatic curse—

And who denies this creed
Is damned indeed;

and there is no reason, to say the least, why he should utter in the circumstances such a terrific imprecation as is contained in the lyric on Elliland. Most people addicted to swearing devote their 'eyes to destruction; Mr. Blackie, it will be seen, selects another organ:—

Fair Elliland! thou dearest spot
To each true-hearted stalwart Scot,
When I forget thy small white cot

And winding river,
Skeer from my thought may Memory blot
All trace for ever!

Our glens, you deem, are pleasant hunting-ground
For London brewers and ducal debauchees;
And our fair lochs and mountains a rare show
To salve blear eyes, sick with a six months' view
Of peevish faces in a hot saloon!

It is, we presume, to repel this invasion of 'London brewers and ducal debauchees,' and to rescue the virtue of his 'fair lochs' from the contamination of the 'bleared-eyed,' that the campaign is to be undertaken. Mr. Blackie, however, does not confine his pugnacity exclusively to his own people. Other matters besides the kilt and the philabeg require a helping hand. Some one, it seems, has been attacking the world, and the Celt is again in arms.

Beautiful world!
Though bigots condemn thee,
My tongue finds no words
For the graces that gem thee!

The Professor is moreover excessively combative. He appears to suppose that everybody is engaged all day long in attacking his neighbour (the truth being that the majority of us are tolerably quiet and easy-going mortals), and he forthwith buckles on his armour, and does battle for the Innocents. He is particularly impressed with the conviction that the English nation entertains an intense and diabolical hostility to the Scot; and to judge from his confessions, a civil war, in which the Professor is to hold a high command in the northern army, appears to be imminent:

For we'll make a stand for Scotland yet,
The Wallace and the Bruce,
Though frosty wits may sneer at home,
And cockneys pour abuse!

With the fire of Robert Burns,
And the faith of stout John Knox,
We'll be more than a match
For the smooth English folks!

The casus belli is nowhere very distinctly set forth, but incidental allusions are not wanting:

Bright world! brave world!
Though witlings may blame thee,
Wonderful excellence
Only could frame thee!

The world is no doubt profoundly indebted to the Professor; and we hope may contrive in the end, with his aid, to outwit its enemies—

whoever or whatever they are.

In an age of classification, Mr. Blackie's poems would be divided into the narrative, the historical, the political, and the amatory. It is difficult to say in which capacity he appears to most advantage. Some readers may prefer the historical student, others the political moralist; for our own part we
think he is most at home when, in his own words,
Free, with savage delight, by modes and fashions uncumbered,
Nourishing thoughts as light as the gull
that floats o'er the billow,

he brandishes his claymore at the Saxon and shouts the slogan of his race.

The narrative poems are remarkable for their consummate simplicity. They betray none of that artifice which blemishes so many of the works of our great poets. The simplicity indeed is so unadorned, that it is not always easy to perceive in what respect the Professor's poetry differs from prose.

In some cases, of course, the difficulty is not felt:—

John Frazer was a pious man,
Who dwelt in lone Dalquhairn,
Where huge hills feed the founts of Ken,
'Twixt Snughar and Carsphairn.

Whether pursuing the stag to his haunt on the lone, rock-girdled
Mountain tarn, or regaling the eye with grandeur of high-piled
Peak on peak, and feasting the ear with music of waters
Rushing adown birch-glen, where the trout in the amber caldron
Shoots as swift as a fresh young thought from the brain of the thinker,

we are tempted to ask—are not these errata of the printer? Has not the devil willfully and maliciously translated very decent prose into loose, jolting, broken-winded, and flabby verse? How much more natural and spirited than—

When he came home, and sheathed his sword,
By an uncle's death he was made the lord
Of a magnificent Highland estate,
Worth some five or six thousand a-year,
Where he lives on his property,—

is the passage as it stood originally:—

'When he came home and sheathed his sword, by an uncle's death he was made the lord of a magnificent Highland estate, worth some five or six thousand a-year, where he lives on his property, &c.' Seeing, then, that Professor Blackie's narrative has all the simplicity of prose, we advise him to eschew henceforth the form of verse. He need not scruple to do so. No principle is involved. It is a mere matter of punctuation.

Mr. Blackie's political and historical views are extremely decided. He advocates (so far as we can make out) an evangelical democracy,—a combination of John Knox and the working classes. The Scottish reformer, it appears, was 'no gentleman,' and the Professor is thankful that Heaven has not made him one either.

I am no gentleman, not I!
No, no, no!

Our stout John Knox was none—and why
Should I be so?
I am no gentleman, not I!
No, no, no!
And thank the blessed God on high,
Who made me so!

But Mr. Blackie's historical Christianity leads him a little further than this. He is distinctly of opinion (and at last in avowed, if
not sober prose) that it is the duty of the patriot to assassinate his tyrant.

The talk about law and legitimate authority in such cases may amuse the shallow and console the coward; but it has no meaning to the consistent thinker. Those who talk with a pious horror of assassination (!) ought to bear in mind, that when wolves in sheep's clothing exercise open force over the sheep, there is nothing for the faithful shepherd but to use secret force, when opportunity offers. The magistrate has no right to bear the sword in support of injustice; nor do cardinals enjoy any sacred privilege to dye their stockings purple in the blood of just men.

We are not required to pronounce any verdict on Mr. Blackie's vindication of 'natural justice.' He is quite entitled to advocate assassination, if he likes; but at the same time we would warn him, in a spirit of friendliness, to keep out of the way of her Majesty's Attorney-General.

It is, however, as an amatory poet that Mr. Blackie is best known. He is the Scottish Ana-creon. Even among the bleak morasses and mountains of the north, Cupid wings his shaft, and the Great Reformer himself twice appeared before 'the hymeneal altar.' There is no reason, therefore, why Mr. Blackie should not perpetuate the charms of the fair and famous women who have graced, or who still grace, his native land. Athens may boast its Aspasia; but was not Mrs. Janet Geddes a house-holder in the Canongate? And if it be indeed true, as Mr. Kirkpatrick Sharp has profanely asserted, that that stanch upholder of Presbyterian discipline was herself its object, and that the stool with which she demolished prelacy was one other than the 'cutty-stool,' or stool of repentance, which she had been condemned to occupy for a breach of 'the minor moralities' —why, the Greek heroine was, as our poet puts it, 'beloved by Pericles,' being upon the whole, we may presume, little better than she should be. Mr. Blackie's amatory fervour becomes sometimes, however, rather demonstrative. Most of the lyrics with which he dilutes his passion are addressed to a lady whom he euphoniously names 'Janet.'

I know a lass I will not name,
For in this evil planet
A thousand tongues my praise would blame,
So I'll just call her JANET.
A lass of such fine witching grace,
That, but my sails are furled,
I'd chase her at a rattling pace
For love o'er half the world:
This dainty Janet!

Though the picture of 'this dainty Janet,' flying 'at a rattling pace' from the embraces of a Professor of the Greek Language and Literature, belongs perhaps rather to the ridiculous than to the licentious, yet we would respectfully submit to Mr. Blackie the propriety of toning down a few of the more suggestive expressions. Having said this much, it is only due to him, and to his publishers, to add that the great majority of the love-pieces are entirely unobjectionable, and that no one of his heroines is unduly enticing.

Fanny MacMurdoch, Fanny MacMurdoch,
Blithe and blooming Fanny MacMurdoch,
My heart was glad, and my heart was sad,
When first I looked on Fanny MacMurdoch.

The most prudish critic cannot affirm that these or similar observa-

* 'Margaret Geddes,' says Mr. Sharp, 'replete with holy zeal, which her preceding Sabbath's rebuke for fornication had doubtless much inflamed, discharged the stool on which she was sitting at his head.'—Memorials of the Viscount of Dundee.
tions are calculated to arouse any improper feelings in Miss MacMurdoch's bosom.

We have already alluded to the felicity with which Mr. Blackie employs unknown tongues. The melody of the lines—

Unerreichter! Unbekannter! Unvergleichbarer! Unbenannter!

will recommend the idyll in which they occur to many readers; but is not his interpretation of the cricket's song even happier?

As I came up from Marathon,
To high Pentelicum,
I heard a cricket on a tree
Singing just so,
Birry-birr-wurr-wurr-wurr!

Then spake to me that airy thing,
'Thou mortal toiling low,
Who hath not heard, both beast and bird,
That man was born to woo?
Birry-birr-wurr-wurr-wurr!
The truth I tell to thee,
I sing because I'm not a man,
But a cricket on a tree!
Birry-birr-wurr-wurr-wurr!
Cricket on a tree!
Burr-wurr-birr-wurr—
What could more happy be?'

We would recommend Mr. Blackie (seeing how well he has succeeded in this instance) to extend his adaptations. Something might be made of the common goose, and the billy-goat is susceptible of brilliant combinations. A duet between the Professor and a donkey of some standing would offer, we venture to believe, peculiar attractions.

But we must part with Mr. Blackie, and in bidding him farewell, can we do so more affectionately than in his own words?

The age is full of talkers. Thou
Be silent for a season.

Another volume of poems that we are forced to condemn, lies beside us. But it is with very different feelings, and in a much more serious spirit, that we indicate our disagreement with Mrs. Barrett Browning. She is a true poet; she has been endowed with a powerful and truthful imagination. We cannot under any circumstances compare the flippancies of a fluent scribe, with the Fack-like caprice of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming.

If, then, we protest against the poetry and the politics of her new work,* we do so 'against the grain,' and only because we believe that grave literary and political sins have been committed by one to whom our literature owes much.

We do not indeed object to the subject she has chosen. We can see no reason why the minstrel should not be permitted to touch the political controversies which agitate his contemporaries. The moment of repose which the sculptor seizes is not the only attitude the poet can render. Whatever enlists the emotions or stirs the blood, may contribute material to his art. And some of the truest poetry has been written by men who fought with their swords all day, and 'sang the song at night.'

Of late years many excellent political poems have been composed; those by the late Mr. Henry Lushington, to whom the laureate dedicated The Princess, (a man of fine culture, and devoted to freedom), being among the best we know. His last little volume, La Nation Boutiquière, and the Joint Compositions, in which he was assisted by one whose nervous intellect and masculine style still strengthen and adorn our somewhat emasculated criticism,—merit more notice than they have obtained. A word upon them in passing.

La Nation Boutiquière is a book in which a clear and consistent political conviction is strongly expressed. Barbaric Russia threatened civilized and Christian Europe as Macedonia threatened Greece. To repel the barbarian was an urgent duty which every Athenian owed to the land of his birth and to the civilization in whose foremost ranks he stood. To arouse this conviction among Englishmen as 'the greatest of patriots, states-

1860.]

Mr. Lushington’s Political Poems. 819

men, and orators, aroused it among his countrymen, was the object of the poems, and of the preface—a preface which is more fervid, vivid, and struck with more authentic fire than the poems themselves. It is the argument of a great oration, and it glows with all the fervour of speech. This indeed is characteristic of all Mr. Lushington’s prose writings, which are the writings not of a critic, but of a man gifted with the faculty of the poet and the temperament of the orator. The address To King Victor Emmanuel conveys a fair idea of the manner in which political subjects are treated in this volume, and is besides interesting at the present time, when the fruits of a heroic life and policy are being gathered in.

Aye, let the Jesuits lie
Pointing the moral of thy house’s woes—
Th’ well the base be gladdened, when their foes,
The brave and gentle, die.

Aye, let them count the lives,
The dear ones, stricken sudden at thy side—
The mother and the brother and the bride—
‘Lo, now our corner thrives!’

Yet onward, as before,
Victor Emmanuel! stricken not in wrath—
Task nobler has none living; plain the path
And upward; ask no more.

For full heroic strain
Of temper, level with heroic act,
Perchance but this a genial nature lacked—
The steeling touch of pain.
Be all the hour desires;
Soldier, inheritor of soldier blood,
0 king, baptized to Freedom, in the flood
Of fatal battle fires,
Where ’mid the thousands slain
For Italy, her martyrs, not her last,
From sire to son the crown of Piedmont past,
Heirloom of noble pain.

Fearless abroad, at home
Be resolute in truth, in boldness wise;
And scornful, teach thy people to despise
The unholy threats of Rome.
Thy polestar be yon shrine—
Where high Superga from the champaign springs
A vanquished exile sleeps, ’mid victor kings
Most honoured of his line.

A patriot’s renown,
A people’s tears, the laurel of the brave,
These, Virtue gave him;—Fortune took
or gave
The Lombard’s iron crown.

A Liberator’s name
He left thee. When that columned crest
shall see
The black train grow from out the gates
for thee,
Leave to thy son the same.

So, where from fringing snow
Slope sunward the Riviera’s olive woods,
Or where past walls of Alps that feed his
flocks,
Sweeps through his plains the Po,
May Genoa, Turin, stand
Twin headstones of the corner; mighty
rocks
Set in the desert, shading Freedom’s flocks
Amid a weary land.

The Joint Compositions—terse and vivid, written in true and pure English, and in which much manly feeling and sound political philosophy are condensed into single couplets—are special favourites with us. Most of the descriptions in A Rural Ride are excellent, and the honest twists, the odd antipathies, the homespun prejudices of Cobbett’s mind are treated with a hearty and humorous kindliness very pleasant to behold. The scene at the University, when the news spreads that ‘starving stalwart men’ are marching on the town,

At dawn we heard—that night by six
Nor love nor money purchased sticks,
Quick ranged in numbered bands
We watched each post and passage strait,
From Jesus to the towered gate,
Where sceptred Edward stands,
is drawn with great spirit; and the picture of the Coronation—
The pomp’s of England’s royal prime,
The splendour of the olden time,
is remarkable at once for richness of colouring and simplicity of expression.

For round the glittering multitude
Rose in their plumèd and jewelled pride;
And the old walls were glorified
With colours, as a changing wood
Tints a steep mountain-side,
When autumn’s cloudless noontide fills
With light the hollows of the hills.

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Below in full heraldic state
The noblest blood of England sat—
The quarters won in modern war;
Wherever earth has lands or seas,
At Camperdown or Trafalgar,
From India to the Pyrenees,
Were mixed with shields that gleamed of yore
At Neville’s Cross, or Azincourt.

With rolling thunders deep and sweet
The organ hailed her entering feet.
Like some strong river bearing free
Its waters through an inland sea,
The clear continuous music ried
With the thick crash of human sound
That shook the peopled walls around;
And, when the tumult died,
Floved with full stream of melody,
Slow sinking in the silence known
To deep-hushed multitudes alone.

I saw her from the Primate’s hand
Receive the emblems of command,
Of justice, and of guardian love;
The orb, the sword, and mystic dove,
In ritual order meet: and then
Strange thoughts did every mind divide,
Of holy awe and human pride:
Even here, and thus, the crown was set
On Saxon brows, ere England yet
Throned in that chair Plantagenet,
The leading name of men.

Our readers must understand that we are not criticising Mr. Lushington, and that we have only used his poems to illustrate the proposition, that very good poetry may be made out of our current politics. Mrs. Browning indeed has failed, but we think not undeservedly; for, as with Hero, ‘treason is in her thought’—treason to a cause which the poet is bound to cherish. Poetry is the handmaid of freedom. Through her the feelings of the oppressed have found in all ages an outlet and a vindication. It has roused the slave to seek redress; it has written its epitaph when, as sometimes happens in this world, freedom has failed and victory remains with the despot. ‘The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,’ and too often the poet can only ‘table his protest,’ leaving his great wrong enrobed in words of immortal scorn or sorrow to be righted at the judgment-seat.

Wrecked all thy hopes, 0 friend—
Hopes for thyself, thine Italy, thine own;
High gifts defeated of their due renown,
Long toil—and this the end.

What to the dead avail
The chance success, the blundering praise
Of fame?
Oh, rather trust, somewhere the noble aim
Is crowned, though here it fail.

These are the truths, superior to sense, ‘unseen and eternal,’ that poetry no less than theology has to vindicate; and it is base and unnatural therefore when the poet, except as a captive in fetters, follows the despot in his triumph.

There are some things in this world that it is best to witness in silence. We may rejoice that good has come out of evil; but it is not safe to erect ‘the doing of evil that good may come’ into a creed. We are glad that Italy has been freed. We are glad that the Goth has been driven out. Our sympathies are with the historic peoples who should inherit the freedom as well as the intellectual and artistic trophies of the Republics. To us it is not unmemorable that Victor Emmanuel rests—

By unfamilier Arno, and the dome
Of Brunelleschi.

But though we are content to accept with thankfulness the end, the less that is said about the means the better. In God’s name, do not allow triumphant success to dazzle us out of our senses—out of our sense of truth, out of our sense of right. Italian freedom has a peculiar sacredness in our eyes, but it is because we desire to see it firmly built up, that we feel no triumph when we learn that its foundations have been laid by the unclean hands of the tyrant. The emancipation of Italy is insecure while it rests on the enslavement of Europe. Mrs. Browning may vindicate the reign of fraud and force, if she think fit; but she must be told that this is the first—let it be the only—occasion, when ‘the deathless fire on the altar’ has been devoted to so base a use. If our voice can penetrate to where ‘Arno woos us to the fair white walls,’ we would beseech Mrs. Browning to retrace her steps. Freedom—we say it sorrowfully enough—cannot afford at present to lose any of her old
allies. Not the Birmingham democrat alone, but too many of us who have to work that we may eat, and who have in consequence little leisure to spend upon any subject that does not directly concern our own handicraft, are ready to say, 'Perish Savoy!' but the poet at least, breathing as he does 'a purer ether and serener air,' may be true to the old alliance, can afford to choose the better part.

Our disagreement with Mrs. Browning is vital. Her estimate of the present position of European politics and political freedom is in our opinion unpardonably false. She tells us that the Emperor of the French is a great and virtuous ruler.

We, poets of the people, who take part
With elemental justice, natural right,
Join in our echoes also, nor refrain.
We meet thee, O Napoleon, at this height
At last, and find thee great enough to praise.

Sublime deliverer!—after many days
Found worthy of the deed thou art come to do—
Emperor
Evermore.

A 'sublime Deliverer,' she is convinced, must be from his position more fitted to aid freedom than any legitimate monarch.

Autocrat! let them scoff,
Who fail to comprehend
That a ruler incarnate of
The people, must transcend
All common klieg-born kings.
The people's blood runs through him,
Dilates from head to foot,
Creates him absolute,
And from this great beginning
Evokes a greater end
To justify and renew him—
Emperor
Evermore.

The 'sublime Deliverer' imagines 'a great Deed'—the liberation of Italy.

A great man (who was crowned one day)
Imagined a great Deed;
He shaped it out of cloud and clay,
He touched it finely till the seed
Possessed the flower; from heart and brain
He fed it with large thoughts humane,
To help a people's need.

So he goes to war to work out his great Deed, backed by a people who have the same cause at heart.

On she passed to a Frenchman, his arm carried off by a ball;
Kneeling, 'O more than my brother! how shall I thank thee for all?
Each of the heroes around us has fought for his land and line,
But thou hast fought for a stranger, in hate of a wrong not thine.
Happy are all free peoples, too strong to be dispossessed.
But blessed are those among nations, who dare to be strong for the rest.'

And then Mrs. Browning, 'viewing her England o'er Alp and sea,' 'cries aloud in her poet-passion' because Englishmen remain mercenary, and selfish, and sceptical of the exalted virtue of sublime Deliverers,—a nation of shopkeepers, who do not go to war for an idea, but who 'keep their powder dry' notwithstanding.

Now, in the first place, is not this a monstrous caricature of history? The Emperor was perfectly disinterested when he undertook the Italian war! His unselfish attachment to Italy—

Beautiful Italy! golden amber,
Warm with the kisses of lovers and traitor—
forced him to quarrel with Austria!
He did not mean to add Savoy to France, nor to rectify 'the frontiers of the Empire!' And the French trooper eagerly joined the campaign, because he felt a brotherly love for the enslaved Italians, and not because an unquenchable thirst for military glory consumes the grandsons of the veterans who desolated Europe! Credat Judaeus.

But the political faith which Mrs. Browning professes is even more dangerously false. We say nothing of Napoleon's title to the throne; vows were made to be broken, and 'sublime Deliverers' cannot be tied by the oaths which bind meaner mortals; but surely the failure of a great people to work out their freedom is a spectacle that ought not to be regarded with indecent exultation by any free man or woman. Apart altogether, however, from such considerations,—Is the Emperor Louis Napoleon a fact for which we must fervently thank Heaven? Even on Mrs. Browning's own showing, we answer—No. She sneers at those who hold that the public law of nations ought not to be disregarded, cannot be disregarded, even in a good cause, without great evil and peril; and she rejoices that a ruler has been at last discovered who, untouched by fear or remorse, can break through the fine-spun cobwebs, the gossamer chains, of ancient treaties. He holds that, consenting or dissident, *Nations must move with the time*:

Assumes that guilt with a precedent
Doubles the guilt of the crime;
Denies that a slave's bond,
Or a treaty signed by knaves,
Gives an irreplaceable claim
To abolishing men into slaves.

Is Mrs. Browning serious? Is not this the argument that has ever proved most fatal to freedom? The man who believes that his self-will is the *suprema lex*, and who, because he considers them unjust or unrighteous, refuses to recognise the obligations of law, has been in all ages of the world the surest ally of tyranny, the most dangerous enemy to liberty. We thought that by this time, and by our own nation at least, the doctrine, that freedom has nothing to hope for, and everything to fear, from such a man, had become axiomatic. The sense of utter insecurity which at the present moment paralyses Europe—paralyses her commerce, her industry, her arts, and the whole intricate mechanism of her life—might convince the most incredulous, might convince Mrs. Browning herself, how mischievous to steady progress this disturbing element invariably proves.

The bitterness with which Mrs. Browning speaks of her own country, is to us (who believe that the attitude of England has been upon the whole wise and honourable, prudent and resolute) the most painful feature in her book. We think that she has utterly misjudged us; but instead of attempting to vindicate ourselves, let us ask Mrs. Browning a single question. She denounces in strong words the sins of English Governments: she laments the miseries which the English people suffer.

*Evermore*

My heart is sore
For my own land's sins; for little feet
Of children bleeding along the street:
For parked up honours that gainsay
The right of way:
For almsgiving through a door that is
Not open enough for two friends to kiss.
For love of freedom which abates
Beyond the Straits;
For patriot virtue starved to vice on
Self-praise, self-interest, and suspicion.
For an oligarchic parliament
And bribes well meant. &c.

She has not used stronger language to describe the misrule of the Grand-Dukes; and it is that misrule which in her opinion justified foreign intervention. Now, suppose her hero should tear another treaty to tatters, should 'shape another great Deed,' should feel it his duty to enfranchise another misgoverned nation, should think of liberating *Us*—would

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* The coup d'état of 1851 supplies, we suppose, an illustration of a 'dissident nation' moving with the time.
she not be bound again to celebrate
the Deliverer! Cannong, antici-
pating Mrs. Browning, has pitifully
described the cosmopolitan polit-
cian:—

A steady patriot of the world alone,
The friend of every country—but his
own.

Such a being affords, no doubt, a
very pleasing object to angelic con-
templation; but is, we fancy, upon
the whole, rather 'too much of a
good thing' for this present-evil
world.

Mrs. Browning's book being in-
tended for a political manifesto, it
is perhaps unnecessary to add that
as poetry it is a complete failure.
There are one or two passages that
recal the cunning hand and the
sweet voice of the accomplished
poetess; and the piece entitled An
August Voice—Una voce augusta
—in which the Emperor sarcasti-
cally recommends the Tuscans to
take back their Grand-Duke, is
bitter and powerful; though it is
strange that Mrs. Browning's keen
moral perception should not teach
her that such an argument in the
mouth of the man who negotiated
the treaty of Villafranca is the
very apotheosis of bad faith.

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
'Twas weak that he fled from the Pitti:
But consider how little he shook
At thought of bombarding your city!
And balancing that with this,
The Christian rule is plain for us;
Or the Holy Father's Swiss
Have shot his Perugians in vain for us.
You'll call back the Grand Duke.
* * * * * * *

You'll take back your Grand Duke?
Observe, there's no one to force it,—
Unless the Madonna, St. Luke
Drew for you, chose to endorse it.
I charge you by great St. Martino
And prodigies quickened by wrong,
Remember your dead on Ticino;
Be worthy, be constant, be strong.
Bah!—call back the Grand Duke!

But, on the whole, the poetry is
the weakest, most inchoate, most
unmusical, and most ineffective
that we have met with for a long
time. We are sorry to be obliged
to use this language: had we not a
real and most honest admiration
for Mrs. Browning's gifts we would
willingly hold our peace; but the
disease is malignant, a sharp re-
medy is needed, and it is best to
speak out plainly.

Another poet waits on the thresh-
hold: let us introduce him to our
readers, and have done. His little
volume has been unrecognised by
the critics, and yet we think that
it rings like true metal. It is as
much the duty of criticism—and
to us at all times a much more
pleasant duty—to approve unpre-
tending merit as to laugh at folly
and rebuke presumption. The De-
fence of Guenevere, and Other Poems,*
by William Morris, deserves for
several reasons an attentive and
candid examination.

Mr. Morris is the poet of pre-
Raphaelitism. 'To my friend,
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, painter,'
he dedicates his book; and it is
not fanciful to say that there is a
striking family likeness between
the works of the poet and those of
the painter. Both artists draw
their inspiration from the fount of
the Morte d'Arthur. They are
thoroughly familiar with the figures
of England's chivalry, and with the
forms of its heroic life. Instead
of Palmerston and Napoleon,
Arthur and Lancelot and Galahad
are the names in all men's mouths.

Guenevere is the standard to which the beauty of all other women is unconsciously referred. We hear of 'bastides' and 'villaynes,' of the 'camaille' and the 'ceinture,' and the 'basnet,' and the 'salade,' more than enough perhaps; but at the same time, we see that these are not the mere stage properties in a fantastic mumming, an Eglington tournament; that the employment of antique words and habits is not formal or antiquarian only, but denotes a living insight into the thought and heart of the dead people whose life they shaped. Then they are both colorists of a high order. Mr. Rossetti excels all his contemporaries, is excelled by none perhaps since Titian, in the oriental richness, the vivid splendour, the intense glow which he can bring out of colours that, in the hands of other men, remain dingy and ineffective, and produce no vivid impression. It is always, in like manner, the colour of an object which first attracts Mr. Morris's eye. He falls in love with the golden hair of his heroines, before he marks whether they are tall or short, ugly or beautiful. The green and gold and purple and scarlet which Mr. Rossetti uses are reproduced in his poems. Take this, for instance:—

Midways of a walled garden,
In the happy poplar land,
Did an ancient castle stand,
With an old knight for a warden.

Many scarlet bricks there were
In its wall, and old grey stone;
Over which red apples shone
At the right time of the year.

On the bricks the green moss grew,
Yellow lichen on the stone,
Over which red apples shone:
Little war that castle knew.

Deep green water fill'd the moat,
Each side had a red-brick lip,
Green and mossy with the drip
Of dew and rain: there was a boat

Of carven wood, with hangings green
About the stern; it was great bliss
For lovers to sit there and kiss
In the hot summer noons, not seen.

The painted drawbridge over it
Went up and down with gilded chains,
'Twas pleasant in the summer rains
Within the bridge-house there to sit.

There were five swans that ne'er did eat
The water-weeds, for ladies came
Each day, and young knights did the same,
And gave them cakes and bread for meat.

They had a house of painted wood,
A red roof gold-spiked over it,
Wherein upon their eggs to sit
Week after week; no drop of blood

Drawn from men's bodies by sword-blows,
Came ever there, or any tear;
Most certainly from year to year
'Twas pleasant as a Provence rose.

There it must be granted that Mr. Morris displays a good deal of the harshness and ungainliness which some of these painters appear rather to seek after. Probably the inducement to this is the same in either case: with the painter, contempt for the mere fine-lady-
like elegancies of form; with the poet, contempt for the mere Long-
fellow-like effeminacies of rhyme.

"We will leave the minstrel de-
artment to others," they say—a little too decidedly perhaps. It is
t heir delight to contend with rude
forms and harsh associations, and
to contrast their native pith and
vigour with the elegant and
polished feebleness of their rivals.
This frame of mind may be slightly
irrational, but is not altogether
incomprehensible; and from what-
ever cause—whether from their
absolute conscientiousness, or from
the thorough hold which they take
of the character they are rendering,
or the intense expression they im-
press upon it—the result, notwith-
standing the occasional quaintness
and uncoarseness, is certainly effec-
tive. The gentle and tender and
sweet simplicity of some of Millais'
girl-figures, for instance, delights
the eye and the heart as the Port-
trait of a Lady by a fashionable artist
never does.

Mr. Morris also is sometimes
awkward, and often involved and
obsolete. Yet it is so obvious that
his object is, not merely to say
pretty or fine things, but to follow
and depict the windings of passion,
to relate the actual words spoken
by people who suffered great wrong
or sorrow, and to do this by a
conscientious study of the subtle
human emotions which they felt—

it is so obvious, we say, that this is
his object, and he is upon the
whole so successful, that we cease
to regard the ungracefulness of the
form. His obscurity arises from
an intelligible cause. Most of his
poems are soliloquies. To pre-
serve the dramatic effect of a soli-
loquy, a previous acquaintance
with the circumstances must be
presumed. The details require

to be inferred. The speaker would
become unnaturally prosy were
he to give a minute narrative of
his antecedents. He cannot be
permitted to rehearse his autobi-
graphy. He must plunge abruptly
into the heart of the story. Mr.
Morris has perceived this necessity;
and the consequence is, that we
sometimes finish one of his poems
without knowing exactly who or
what it is about. Still even in
these cases parts of the picture are
sure to be rendered vividly; as in
a photograph, where, though the
edges may be blurred and blotted,
some feature starts out with life-
like distinctness.

We hope Mr. Morris will not
misunderstand us. The poet who
aspires to write the songs of a
nation must use the plain words
that plain people can read. There
is no reason why he should not do
so,—no law of art, rightly under-
stood or applied, can ever require
him to be obscure, or mystical, or
affected. Mr. Morris is obscure,
mystical, and affected; and he may
take our word for it, that the
sooner he learns to speak clearly,
simply, and in a natural tone of
voice, the sooner will he command
attention, and—deserve to com-
mand it.

We like best the poems which
reproduce the scenery and figures
of the Morte d'Arthur. The chief
of these are devoted to the Queen.
Arthur is dead, and the evil days
have come. It is beside the stake
to which she has been condemned
that The Defence of Guenever
is spoken. But even in her fall
she remains a most royal lady,
and she flings back with strong
scorn and passionate haughti-
ness the ill words with which
Sir Gauwaine has bespattered
her.

"Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have happen'd these long years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie!

"All I have said is truth, by Christ's dear tears."
She would not speak another word, but stood
Turn'd sideways; listening, like a man who hears

His brother's trumpet sounding through the wood
Of his foes' lanes. She lean'd eagerly,
And gave a slight spring sometimes, as she could
A Raid among the Rhymers.

At last hear something really; joyfully
Her cheek grew crimson, as the headlong speed
Of the room charger drew all men to see,
The Knight who came was Launcelot at good need.

By Arthur’s Tomb the lovers meet
again for a last interview. Years
have passed away, and the radiant
beauty of Guenevere does not burn
now as it did once. She is living
in retirement with the nuns of
Glastonbury, and her lord, King
Arthur, lies outside, ‘by the thorn-
tree wherefrom St. Joseph in the
days past preached.’ Launcelot,
sad and troubled, has been riding
all day across the Wiltshire downs,
drawn along by one unforgotten
face, and knowing only
that where
The Glastonbury gilded towers shine
A lady dwelt, whose name was Guenevere.

Recollections of the old time crowd thickly upon him as he rides,
And she would let me wind
Her hair around my neck, so that it fell
Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight
With many unnamed colours, till the bell
Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight

Through all my ways of being; like the stroke
Wherewith God threw all men upon the face
When he took Enoch, and when Enoch woke
With a changed body in the happy place.

Once, I remember, as I sat beside,
She turn’d a little, and laid back her head,
And slept upon my breast; I almost died
In those night-watches with my love and dread.

There lily-like she bowed her head and slept,
And I breathed low, and did not dare to move,
But sat and quiver’d inwardly, thoughts crept,
And frightened me with pulses of my love.

* * * * *

I did not sleep long, feeling that in sleep
I did some loved one wrong, so that the sun
Had only just arisen from the deep
Still land of colours, when before me one

Stood whom I knew, but scarcely dared to touch,
She seemed to have changed so in the night;
Moreover she held scarlet lilies, such
As Maiden Margaret bears upon the light

Of the great church walls, nathless did I walk
Through the fresh wet woods, and the wheat that morn,
Touching her hair and hand and mouth, and talk
Of love we held, nigh hid among the corn.

And as he rides through the lonely night, and the vision dims, a
passionate longing seizes him,— if he might but touch
That Guenevere at once!

He reaches the thorn-tree in the
early dawn, and sick and faint
lays his head upon a tomb, ‘not
knowing it was Arthur’s.’ Guene-

vere, too, had been yearning all
night for the appointed meeting,
until with the day a sudden re-

morse has seized her,—

the thing grew drear
In morning twilight, when the grey downs bare
Grew into lumps of sin to Guenevere.
She prays to the Lord Christ in her agony, and when her maid summons her—'By the tomb he waiteth for you, lady'—she goes to meet him, white but resolute. The interview that follows is intensely pathetic. She has vowed to Christ that this unrighteous love shall be put away:

'I am very sorry for my sin;
Moreover, Christ, I cannot bear that hell;
I am most fain to love you, and to win
A place in heaven some time.'

So she rakes up the old passion relentlessly, though it tears her heart. Fearlessly she speaks bitter words to the man whom even yet she cannot help loving. She stabs him with a white face and a quivering hand. She has resolved to be strong and harsh and repellant, and even his piteous reproaches do not move her:

'Lo you her thin hand,
That on the carven stone cannot keep still,
Because she loves me against God's command,

Has often been quite wet with tear on tear,
Tears Launcelot keeps somewhere, surely not
In his own heart, perhaps in Heaven, where
He will not be these ages.'

But his tender humility and unresisting hopelessness all but vanish her at last.

'They bite me—bite me, Lord God!—I shall go mad,
Or else die kissing him; he is so pale
He thinks me mad already, O bad! bad!
Let me lie down a little while and wail.'

'No longer so; rise up, I pray you, love,
And slay me really, then we shall be healed
Perchance, in the after time by God above.'

Then, as if stung by an adder, she which is assailing her, stabs him starts up to her feet, and in a yet more cruelly. By the banner passion of terror at the weakness of Arthur—

Banner of Arthur, with black-bended shield,
Sinister-wise across the fair gold ground,—

she will tell him how he has broken his knightly vows, how disloyal he has been to his lord:

'Banner, and sword, and shield, you dare not pray to die,
Lest you meet Arthur in the other world,
And, knowing who you are, he pass you by,
Taking short turns that he may watch you curl'd,

Body and face and limbs in agony,
Lest he weep presently and go away,
Saying, 'I loved him once,' with a sad sigh.
Now I have slain him, Lord, let me go too, I pray. [LAUNCELOT falls.]

Alas! alas! I know not what to do;
If I run fast it is perchance that I
May fall and stun myself, much better so.
'Never, never again! not even when I die.'

LAUNCELOT, on awaking.

'I stretched my hands towards her and fell down,
How long I lay in swoon I cannot tell;
My head and hands were bleeding from the stone,
When I rose up, also I heard a bell.'
The space we have devoted to what we cannot help thinking a really fine poem, prevents us from noticing the others at any length. The moral elevation of Sir Galahad, the dramatic energy and life of Sir Peter Harpdon’s End, and the weird music of Rapunzel, and many of the lyrics, attest the versatility of Mr. Morris’s powers. We should have liked to have said something of these, especially of Sir Galahad—the virgin knight who, in obedience to a divine command, goes forth to seek the Sangreal,—

O servant of the high God, Galahad!
Rise and be arm’d, the Sangreal is gone forth
Through the great forest, and you must be had
Unto the sea that lieth on the north.

But we prefer to conclude with a lyric; and we select one which, in its vivid simplicity, recals some of the old Border ballads:

THE SAILING OF THE SWORD.
Across the empty garden beds,
When the Sword went out to sea,
I scarcely saw my sisters’ heads
Bared each beside a tree,
I could not see the castle heads,
When the Sword went out to sea.

Alice wore a scarlet gown,
When the Sword went out to sea;
But Ursula’s was russet brown;
For the mist we could not see
The scarlet roofs of the good town,
When the Sword went out to sea.

Green holly in Alice’s hand,
When the Sword went out to sea;
With sere oak-leaves did Ursula stand;
O! yet alas for me!
I did but bear a peel’d white wand,
When the Sword went out to sea.

0, russet brown and scarlet bright,
When the Sword went out to sea,
My sisters wore; I wore but white;
Red, brown, and white, are three;
Three damozels: each had a knight,
When the Sword went out to sea.
Sir Robert shouted loud, and said,
When the Sword went out to sea,
‘Alice, while I see thy head,
What shall I bring for thee?’
‘0, my sweet lord, a ruby red;’
The Sword went out to sea.

Sir Miles said, while the sails hung down,
When the Sword went out to sea,
‘Oh, Ursula! while I see the town,
What shall I bring for thee?’
‘Dear knight, bring back a falcon brown;’
The Sword went out to sea.

But my Roland, no word he said
When the Sword went out to sea;
But only turned away his head,—
A quick shriek came from me;
‘Come back, dear lord, to your wight maiden;’
The Sword went out to sea.
The hot sun bit the garden-beds,
When the Sword came back from sea;
Beneath an apple tree our heads
Stretched out toward the sea;
Grey gleam’d the thirsty castle-heads,
When the Sword came back from sea.

Lord Robert brought a ruby red,
When the Sword came back from sea;
He kissed Alice on the head;
‘I am come back to thee;’
’Tis time, sweet love, that we were wed,
Now the Sword is back from sea!’

Sir Miles he bore a falcon brown
When the Sword came back from sea;
His arms went round tall Ursula’s gown—
‘What joy, O love, but thee?
Let us be wed in the good town,
Now the Sword is back from sea!’

My heart grew sick, no more afraid,
When the Sword came back from sea;
Upon the deck a tall white maid
Sat on Lord Roland’s knee;
His chin was press’d upon her head,
When the Sword came back from sea.

If Mr. Morris be a fair representative of our younger poets, we may look forward with hope to the future. For something consistently good may be expected by and bye from men who, resisting the sensuous seductions of poetry, are willing to expend upon their work moral seriousness and intellectual effort.

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