NOTICES OF BOOKS.

We can say for this poem what has been true of very few poems: its interest carried us on, and we read it through in an autumn-day's ramble through the glowing glades of the Kentish highlands. When we add that the poem extends over seventeen books, and contains 10,526 lines, it will be felt that this is no mean recommendation.

Mr. Morris has told the old story of the Argo with much spirit and power: in English heroics, not of the Topan kind, but those which frequently break away from the yoke of couplets, and almost simulate blank verse, such as we meet in the “Endymion” of Keats. Mr. Morris rather prefers breaking the couplet to keeping it; and not unfrequently ends a strain with the first line of a pair, beginning the next with the second. This is a capital form for the heroic narrative. It avoids the constant temptation to epigrammatic turn and antithetical counterpartise which the strict couplets bring: while at the same time it has more ring, and satisfies the ear better, than plain blank verse. And it had need to possess some powers of sustaining a long story; for Mr. Morris’s poem, as we have seen, is of no ordinary length.

His powers of description are considerable, and display themselves rather in objective word-painting, than in the action of the mind in combining or assimilating the things described. We will give a few of the most favourable specimens:

"So was it as the Centaur said; for soon
The woods grew dark, as though they knew no noon;
The thunder growled about the high brown hills,
And the thin, wasted, shining summer vills
Grew joyful with the coming of the rain.
And doubtfully was shifting every vane
On the town spires, with changing gusts of wind;
Till come the storm-blast, furious and blind.

Twist gorges of the mountains, and drove back
The light sea breezes; then waxed the heavens black,
Until the lightning leapt from cloud to cloud,
With clattering thunder, and the piled-up crowd
Began to turn from steely blue to grey,
And toward the east the thunder drew away,
Leaving the north-wind blowing steadily
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The rain-clouds from Olympus; while the sea
Seemed mingled with the low clouds and the rain:
And one might think that never now again
The sunny grass would make a pleasant bed
For tired limbs, and dreamy, languid head
Of sandalled nymphs, forewarned with the chase.
Meanwhile, within a pleasant lighted place,
Stretched upon warm skins, did the contour lie,
And nigh him Jason, listening eagerly
The tale he told him, asking, now and then,
Strange questions of the race of vanished men:
Nor were the wine-cups idle; till at last
Desire of sleep over their bodies passed,
And in their dreamless rest the wind in vain
Howled round about, with washing of the rain."

The description of the gathering of heroes to man the good ship is very
spirited and well sustained, far better than the same in that dull old twaddler,
Valerius Flaccus.

The departure of the heroes as related by Mr. Morris, does not suffer by
comparison with the fine description of the same in Apollonius Rhodius, who
somewhat mars it by the long parturient interview between Alcidia and her son.

But our short notice must hurry on, and come to the crucial test, the
passage of the Symplegades. We may be pardoned for appealing to our readers' attention some noble lines in ballded metre relating this perilous adventure
which appeared in the present volume of this journal, p. 251. But we do not
mention them to disregarde Mr. Morris, who has acquitted himself right well,
as the following extracts will testify.

First, of the approach to the dread "concurrent" rocks:

"And so, with sail and sail, in no long space
They reached the narrow ealing of the sea,
Where the wind shifted, blowing gustily
From side to side, so that their flapping sail
But little in the tunnel could avail;
And now at last did they begin to hear
The pounding of the rocks; but nothing clear
They saw them; for the storming clouds of spray,
Cist by cist meeting hammers every way,
Quite hid the polished bases from their sight;
Unless perchance the eyes of Lynceus might
Just now and then behold the deep blue, shine
Betwixt the scattering of the silver brine;
But sometimes twist the clouds the sun would pass
And show the high rocks glittering like glass,
Quivering, as far beneath the charmed-up waves
We were and moving on the drenchèd cave,
Wherein none dwelt, no, not the giant's brood,
Who fed the green sea, with that lustful blood,
Nor were sea devils even nurtured there,
Nor dared the sea-worm use them for its lair."

Then for the passage itself:

"Then they for shame began to cast off fear,
And, handling well the oars, kept Argo near
The changing, little-lighted, spray-washed space
Whereunto Lynceus set his eager face,
And boosed the dove, who down the west wind flew;
Then all the others lost her, dashing through
The clouds of spray, but Lynceus noted how
She reached the open space, just as a blow
Had spent itself, and still the hollow sound
Of the last clash was booming all around;
And eagerly he noted how the dove
Stopped, mused, and hovered for awhile above
The troubled sea, then steering, darted through,
As the blue glimmering rocks together drew;

Then scarce he breathed, until a joyous shout
He gave, as he beheld her passing out
Unscathed, above the surface of the sea,
While back again the rocks drew sulpitantly.

Then back their poised oars whirled, and straight they drive
Unto the opening of the spray-scarred cave;
But Jason's eyes alone of all the crew
Beheld the sunny sea and cloudless blue,
Still narrowing, but bright from rock to rock.
Now as they neared, came the next thundering shock,
That deepened all, and with an icy cloud
Hid man from man; but Jason, shouting loud,
Still clutched the tiller; and the oars, grappled tight
By mighty hands, drove on the ship forthright
Unto the rocks, until, with blinded eyes,
They blinked one moment at those mysteries
Unseen before, the next they felt the sun
Full on their backs, and knew their deed was done;

"Then off their oars they lay, and Jason turned,
And o'er the rocks beheld how Iris burned
In fair and harmless sun-coloured flame,
And he beheld the way by which they came"—
Who open, changeless, of its spray-clouds cleared;
And though in his bewildered ears he heard
The tumult yet, that all was still he knew,
While in and out the unused sea-fowl flew
Betwixt them, and the now subsiding sea
Lapped round about their dark feet quietly."

Notices of Books.

Our notice would be incomplete without the crowning incident of the legend,—the actual grasping of the fleece itself by the aid of Mede:

"But Jason, going swiftly with good heart,
Came to the wished-for shrine built all apart
Midmost the temple, that on pillars stood
Of jasper green, and amber red as blood,
All white itself and carved cunningly
With Neptune bringing from the wavy sea
The golden shining ram to Athamas;
And the first door thereof of silver was,
Wrought over with a golden glittering sun
That seemed well-nigh alike the heavenly one.
Such art therein the cunningest of men
Had used, which little Jason heedless then,
But thrusting in the lock the smallest key
Of those he bore, it opened easily;
And in five others, neither wrought of gold,
Or carved with tales, nor lovely to behold,
He opened; but before the last he stayed
His hand, wherein the heavy key was weighed,
And pondering, in low muttered words he said:—
"The prize is reached, which yet I somewhat dread
To draw unto me; since I know indeed,
That hitherto war and toil shall be my mood.
Too late to fear, it was too late, the hour
I left the gray cliffs and the beechen bower,
So here I take hard life and deathless praise,
Who once desired sought but quiet days,
And painless life not empty of delight;
I, who shall now be quickener of the light,
Named by a great man—a far-blabbed name,
The ceaseless seeker after praise and fame.
May all be well, and on the noisy ways
Still may I find some wealth of happy days.
Therewith he throw the last door open wide,
Whose hammered iron did the marvel hide.
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And shut his dazed eyes, and stretched his hands Out towards the sea-born wonder of all lands, And buried them deep in the hark of gold, Grasping the fleece within his mighty hold.

"Which when Medusa saw, her gown of grey She caught up from the ground, and drew away Her beard from off the rugged leg, And while from her soft strain she never ceased, In the dull folds she hid her sight from sight, And there, as bending 'neath the hurrying bright, Jason drew nigh, joyful, yet still afraid, She met him, and her wide grey mantle laid Over the fleece, whispering; 'Make no delay; He sleeps, he never slept by night or day Till now; nor will his charmed sleep be long. Light-foot am I, and sure thine arms are strong; Haste, then! No word! nor turn about to gaze At me, as he who in the shadowy ways Turned round to see once more the twice-lost face." Then swiftly did they leave the dreadful place, Turning no look behind, and reached the street, That with familiar look and kind did greet Those wanderers, mazed with marvels and with fear. And so, unchallenged, did they draw a near The long white quays, and at the street's end now Beheld the ships made standing row by row, Stark black against the stars: then cautiously Poised Jason forth, ere they took heart to try The open garth place; but thought he saw Except the night-wind twiching the loose straw From half-unloaded keels, and thought he heard But the strange twittering of a caged green bird Within one Indian ship, and from the hill A distant howling: yea, all was so still; Somewhat they doubted, ruthless forth they passed, And Argos painted sides they reached at last.

We had marked some matters for adverse criticism, and proceed to note them. Surely the following is an example of the pure-narratio carried a little too far:—

"So there they built Iolcos, that each day Drew great, until all these were passed away, With many another, and Cretothens the king Had they, and left his crown and everything To Jason, his own son by fair Tyro; Whom, in unhappy days and long ago, A god had loved, whose son was Calais. And so, within a while, it came to pass;" &c.

We have observed in several places an arrangement of words which is hardly legitimate:—

"Moreover did they note About the wharves fall many a ship and boat."

The rule seems to be that the auxiliary verb and its subject may only be transposed.

1. In interrogative clauses: "Did they note?"
2. In negative clauses: "Nor did they note;" or,
3. When, for special emphasis, the object is prefixed to the whole verbal term: "This did they note."

In purely copulative clauses, such as that cited, the transposition is inadmissible.

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The following need only be cited to be condemned:—

"Yet ere thou enterst the door, behold That ancient temple of the Far Distant, And know that thy desire hungeth there, Against the gold wall of the utmost shine, Guarded by seven locks, whose keys are these What thou hast done what else thou hast to do, And thou mayst well be bold to come therto."

"Dartor" and "there" as rhymes, "desi-or" for "desire," "so-yon," and the same mediocrity of the last couplet, are all unworthy of Mr. Morris's ear and ability.

We have noticed elsewhere in the poem this divagation of monosyllables. It is combined with another fault in book x. 566-7:—

"And so drew Argo up, with hale and how, On to the grass, turned half to mire now."

We have again, in book xvi. 22,—

"While o'er her head the flickering fire hung."

Several other cases occur in the course of the poem; the worst of all being—

"Nor send one coin (so-in) of your store for this." (Book xvi. 346.)

In book xvi. 344 we have "to clad" used as a verb:—

"And also in of falls to clad them soft."

In book xxiii. 187 we are told "the queen grew wrath." By usage, at least, "wret" is the adjective—"wrath" the substantive. So also in p. 20, line 410; see Errata.

We are disposed to allow very large liberty as to rhyming syllables in this narrative, copulet-breaking, heroic measure; but we submit that book xiv. 520-1,—

"Many a green-necked bird they saw aight Within the slim-leaved, thorny Pomegranate, passes even the widest limit of license.

Nor, again, must even the finest measure be allowed a character super grammatical, as in the following:—

"In his heart I see He watcheth his great felicity, Like fools for whom fair heaven is not enough, And long (i.e. who long) to stumble over forest rough With chance of death."

We mention these blinishments in no captious spirit, for we really admire Mr. Morris's poem.


Mr. Bright, of University College, has done good service in giving us this pleasant memorial of his lamented friend. The few chapters here given are all that Professor Shirley lived to write of a projected manual of ancient church history. They are very simple and interesting, and are interspersed, as indeed they could hardly fail to be, with many suggestive and original remarks. We own we are surprised to find Dr. Shirley advocating the reading Ἐλευθερίας in Acts xi. 20; and his theory that St. Peter founded, in A.D. 44 or 45, a church of Jewish believers at Rome,—"the greatest of Gentile churches" not