

Adver 7<sup>th</sup> Aug<sup>st</sup>

### THEATRE-GOING IN CLASSIC ATHENS.

The third and last of the season's extension lectures was given by Professor Darnley Naylor in the Prince of Wales Theatre, at the University, on Tuesday, in the presence of another large audience. The subject was "Theatre-going in Athens, B.C. 431," and in his felicitous and attractive style, the lecturer carried his audience with him to Athens on the eve of the festival of Dionysus, the god of wine, jollity, and life. He described the festivities of the occasion, when the city was en fete—statues garlanded with flowers, altars wreathed with chaplets, masses of people celebrating the day, wine galore for everybody to drink free, at his or her heart's content ("Think of it," said the professor in an aside), and all the sideshows, such as jugglers, conjurers, the ancient equivalents of Punch and Judy shows, &c., in full swing as they are to this day in modern cities. He even told how the people promptly moved on, as they do now, when the collector came round for coppers. He proceeded to describe the elaborate preparations for the four-days' theatrical performances; how that on the first day the Proagon, or "preliminary canter" of the performers in the tragedies and comedies to be acted, was held in a small theatre; the torchlight procession at night, in which the statue of the god Dionysus was carried; and how the plays of the three competitors, Sophocles, Euripides, and Euphorion, were criticised by the multitude.

Before describing the actual performance of one of these tragedies the lecturer gave an eloquent word-picture of the view from the Acropolis—the wonderfully clear atmosphere, the bright blue sky, Mount Hymettus, and the promontory of Sunium, the "marbled steep" of Byron. The ancient "play" began at 6.30 a.m., and was preceded by a host of ceremonies. The theatre of Dionysus seated 30,000, and the chief throne was occupied by the high priest of the god, specially reserved "thrones" being for other priests and representatives of religious bodies. The statue of the god Dionysus had a conspicuous place, and was referred to by Aristophanes as "the representative of dramatic criticism at Athens, because he was the one spectator who was present at every performance from first to last." The price of tickets for respectable people, who bought them, was 3d. for the day, and people who were poor (which in Athens meant not respectable) got free passes from the Government.

Glancing at the spectators, Mr. Naylor picked out Socrates, aged 40, strong of physique, but with a face like a satyr. There was a flutter among the ladies as he entered, for he was handsome and a naughty young man into the bargain. With him was Alcibiades, a pretty boy. Cleon, the tanner, an uncompromising opponent of Pericles, was "ill-favored, heavy-jawed, and self-possessed." The great millionaire, Thucydides, also took a seat ("He made his money in Thracian gold mines," added the lecturer). The members of the Legislature sat together, and the Archon (or Lord Mayor) had a special seat. The performance proceeded, and the one tragedy lasted till 12.40 p.m. It was succeeded by a comedy, and the "curtain" fell for the day at 5.30 p.m. This experience was repeated on the two following days; on the third afternoon the judges giving their awards.

The description of the actors, the play, and the audience, as well as the pagan ceremonies, were intensely interesting, and the humorous asides of the professor greatly enhanced the lecture.

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### POPULARIZING THE CLASSICS.

The apology was not needed, but Professor Darnley Naylor was modest. "I feel that a prelude of apology is required from me," he said in the course of his lecture on Tuesday night. "I have been attempting, however feebly, to popularize what has been too long the privileged possession of fusty scholiasts. To drag classics from the dust in which centuries of grammar and syntax have enveloped them, to resuscitate and revivify them, is indeed a venturesome proceeding, venturesome if attempted by the most polished of scholars, and perhaps worse than venturesome in me. Such attempts indeed, have usually been received with hesitation, not to say coldness. I am informed that Becker, while usually correct, is silly and fatuous; I bear in mind that he has written a Greek novel in English; I am asked to believe that Professor Mahaffy, though brilliant, is often untrustworthy; I know him to be par excellence the popular writer on classics. Only from a strong sense that scholarship itself—or the burlesque of it—is responsible for the thoughtless outcries of to-day against classics, have I been emboldened to make the venture of this course. I have no hesitation in saying that the classical student wastes too much time on textual criticism, and expends too little on the literature and history. He is over-prone to regard the Greeks and Romans as if they were inanimate statues, beautiful, it is true, most beautiful, but bloodless and unsympathetic. The stilted conventions of so-called scholarship are entirely to be blamed for this statuesque motion of the ancients. It has spread unchallenged among the profanum vulgus, doing damage almost irreparable. Let us put these foolish conceptions from us and remember that, although the outer garb of this world may change, the inner soul of it—which is human nature—is much the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

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### BOTANISTS ALARMED.

"There, among the glooming alleys, Progress halts on palsied feet," wailed the aged prophet of Locksley Hall, looking on the pitiable conditions of a crowded city life, the while the people "ranged with science, glorying in the time." In South Australia, at any rate, the residential conditions have not hitherto been so congested as to call forth a like lament; and to the joy of the city fathers efforts to prevent overcrowding and extend the public recreation and garden grounds are usually seconded with enthusiasm by the citizens. It is strange, then, that something like a call to halt should come from the apostles of science in its inner sanctum the meeting room of the Royal Society. These learned ladies and gentlemen, however, have read with alarm the proposal to transfer the class collection of plants at the Botanic Garden to the experimental grounds near the foreman's cottage, and lay out the class grounds with a handsome fountain, lawns, and shrubs. At the meeting of the Royal Society on Tuesday Dr. Pullen drew attention to the proposal, and said there was a danger that, if the transfer were carried out, many valuable and rare plants, especially Australian ones, might be destroyed. He hoped the society would protest against it. If in five or ten years the subject of botany were to be revived upon the syllabus of the University, the then Professor of Botany might have to wander all over the garden to get material for his students. It was resolved to forward a resolution to the Botanic Gardens Board, asking that the class garden should not be abolished, but preserved in its present site, and that, as far as possible, the natural orders and species should be represented in Australian plants.