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W. Millicent

THE MOST FAMOUS TRAGEDY.

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION LECTURES AT MILLICENT.

PROFESSOR HENDERSON ON "HAMLET."

The series of three lectures on the Shakspearian drama, "Hamlet," delivered by Professor Henderson, of the Adelaide University, was concluded at Millicent on Saturday night, before a very small but wholly appreciative audience. Mr E. J. Harris, who presided throughout the course, indulged in a few scathing remarks about the lack of interest aroused by the treat so easily enjoyed. The lectures dealt with the language, the character, and the teaching of "Hamlet." Everybody has heard of "Hamlet." It might not be the best of the great tragedies, but the authorities of centuries agree that it the most famous. The play has an appealing, universal interest, and the master minds of many nations have given it study. They have been fascinated by the dramatic fervour pervading the whole piece, the subtlety and triumphant skill of the emotional passages, the exquisite harmony and propriety of the style. Shakspeare stamped his genius indelibly on "Hamlet." Probably no character so majestically illustrates the creative gift of the poet, or shows what a magnificent literary structure the supreme English dramatist could raise. Karl Elze has affirmed that "Hamlet" has had a far greater influence on the history of literature in France and Germany than in England! "No one of mortal mould," says Furness, "save Him, 'Whose blessed feet were nailed for our advantage to the bitter cross,' ever trod this earth commanding such absorbing interest as this 'Hamlet,' the mere creation of a poet's brain. No syllable that he whispers, no word let fall by anyone near him but is caught and pondered as no words ever have been, except of Holy Writ. Upon no throne built by mortal hands has ever 'beat so fierce a light' as upon that airy fabric reared at Elsinore." In Adelaide, as much interest attached to the course of lectures delivered by Professor Henderson as would mark the arrival of a popular theatrical company, and he was listened to night after night by crowds who were always too numerous to be seated comfortably in metropolitan halls. Yet in Millicent the highest attendance record approximated not quite 80 persons! Illuminating studies like these stimulate interest by revealing unrivalled beauties of language and emphasizing the genius and artistic power of the great poet-artist. People want to hear about Shakspeare from the lips of a cultured student, and it is surprising that the announcement of a rare and entertaining treat of the order under notice should have been vouchsafed a response so paltry.

LANGUAGE OF "HAMLET."

On Thursday night, Professor Henderson gave an impressive discourse. His theme was "The language of Hamlet," and his technical examination of the character was nevertheless charming in its brilliant lucidity and dramatic power. The eloquent phrasing and graphic presentation of the passages stirred the audience to an appreciation that culminated in prolonged applause at the termination of the lecture. Opening with a reference to the great popularity of the work, Professor Henderson said Coleridge had given a reason for that. "This character must have some connection with the fundamental laws of our nature, and this has made him the darling of every country in which the literature of England has been fostered." Humanity as typified in Hamlet was not found in any other Shakspearian character. French critics had come to the conclusion that "Hamlet" was Shakspeare. What finer tribute to the humanity of "Hamlet" than to identify him with Shakspeare, who

his feet, what did he do? He retired into private life, and they heard very little about him for the next 21 months. He was offered the Crown, but refused it. Was this what they called sordid ambition? Cromwell had said that, had his country not called him, he would rather have tended his sheep on the hillside, and he believed these were the true sentiments of the man. But England demanded still more of him. Dissentions occurred among the members of the Long Parliament—or what was left of it—and Cromwell was forced to dissolve it, which he did in a dramatic manner, turning the members out with his soldiers, and locking the doors after them. Englishmen could hardly forgive Cromwell for this act, because it brought contempt on the Parliamentary system of government, but it had to be remembered that the Long Parliament, when dissolved, was only a remnant, and that it stood in the way of the election of a new legislative body. Cromwell then assumed the office of Protector of the realm. Want of time prohibited Professor Henderson from reviewing Cromwell's foreign and colonial policy, which raised England so high in the estimation of the other European nations, and compelled their respect, and he summed up his subject with a fine resume of the character of the man. That character had excited the greatest controversy for and against. To some he was a hateful rebel, an ambitious tyrant, to others a dissembling hypocrite. To Carlyle he was a hero; to Mr. Frith and Mr. Gardiner he was no faultless hero, no saint, but a true, brave man, who tried to do his duty under circumstances of great difficulty. We based our estimate of the man on his mind. That mind was essentially practical, for Cromwell possessed the ability to select from the ideas offered to him those that could be made to work. Instances of this were given. Cromwell was moved by something deeper than his religious beliefs—and that was spiritual experience. He granted all men toleration in religious matters, and this brought him into conflict with his Parliament. He was willing to grant freedom of thought on religious matters to the Roman Catholics, and he conducted negotiations with Cardinal Mazarin, of France, on this subject. Cromwell's religious life was governed by what he called "providences," which "hung so together," and he consistently refused to cast his lines of policy too far ahead for fear that they should cut the lines of Providence. He believed that that which was gained by free will was more valuable than that which was gained by force, and he never looked upon individual suffering without remorse. His own servants had told posterity that. In short, whatever Cromwell's outward bearing might have been, the root of the matter, as he would say himself, was this—at the basis of the man's character was sympathy. There was nothing clearer than this—that Cromwell was a representative Englishman: that if they condemned Cromwell they condemned the English people. In the firm hold he maintained on his faith he represented one side of the national character, while the activities of his life represented the other and practical side of the Englishman. Cromwell, like Milton, was a representative Englishman to the core.

On both Tuesday and Wednesday evenings a number of excellent lantern slides, illustrating the lectures, were thrown on a sheet by Mr. A. G. Everitt. On the conclusion of the proceedings on Wednesday night Mr. F. Davison moved, and Mr. C. L. Spehr, L.L.B., seconded, a hearty vote of thanks to Professor Henderson, and it was carried with acclamation. The Professor thanked his audience for their attentive hearing, Mr. Everitt for the use of his lantern, and Miss Pollitt, the secretary of the local University Committee, for the satisfactory way in which she had carried out the arrangements, and said that if application were made again next year no doubt the University authorities would arrange for another course.

understood so well the heights and depths of human life? As far back as 1844 Freiligrath exclaimed in his poem, "Yes, Germany is 'Hamlet.'" Hazlitt had gone further, and had declared—"It is we who are 'Hamlet.'" But behind it all was the one great problem which "Hamlet" expressed in the course of the play, and which Victor Hugo had so defined:—"The struggle between will and fate belongs not alone to the history of 'Hamlet'; it belongs to the history of us all. It is your life; it is mine; it was that of our fathers; it will be that of our sons. And hence the work of Shakspeare is eternal." One good test of the impression which "Hamlet" had made upon the public mind was the number of words and phrases and proverbs that had passed into everyday use. Household expressions and proverbial sayings had been added to the language. The propriety of the words employed by Shakspeare, and which could be described as emotional connotation, was illustrated in this way. While "Hamlet" and his friends were waiting on the platform for the ghost they were told that "the air bites shrewdly," and that it is a nipping and an eager air. "Witching"—there was something eerie, something ghost-like in the suggestion. And again:—

'Tis now the very witching time of night
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes
out
Contagion to this world.

Language of affection, of horror, of affectation was found in "Hamlet," which abounded in figures of speech, heightening effect and investing beauty. Then, too, "Hamlet" was rich in metaphor, which was the difference between a bald statement and an exquisite picture:—

But, look, the morn in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.

By way of contrast take that descriptive passage from Romeo and Juliet, where the atmosphere was so different:—

It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
No nightingale. Look, Love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.

The dawn might easily be idealised, but an artistic power was shown in idealising the commonplace. That was exquisitely done in Hamlet, where Horatio said:—

I have heard
The cock that is the trumpet of the morn
Doth, with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the God of day; and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine.

What a life must this man have lived, who could so idealize so commonplace a theme! Their subject now led them to enquire into a much more difficult and subtle matter—atmosphere. If the work was artistically done there must be harmony between the spirit and the expression of a piece. In "Romeo and Juliet" the air was warm and congenial. "You are carried off to Italy, where in the spring-time the orchards are in blossom, and lovers walk and talk by moonlight. It is the atmosphere of love. In 'Hamlet' it is different. The mystery of human life pervades it, the task of avenging crime falls to the lot of a melancholy Prince. The cloudy northern sky, the lonely sea, the sandy grave, the real and feigned madness are all chosen with a purpose. They are in harmony with the spirit of the play. The melancholy, brooding 'Hamlet' has been placed in a land of clouds and long nights under a grey sky. The question of atmosphere is one of vital importance to drama. It should be felt in every part of the piece. Everywhere there must be harmony between inward feeling and outward expression, and necessarily so with the characters themselves. If that is necessary in lyrical poetry it is far more so in dramatic, where there was such a variety in character, and each one must not only be true to himself or herself but also to the feeling that is uppermost. In that Shakspeare never failed, and it was one good test of the superiority of his genius. The atmosphere was generated by the right choice of word and detail, and the swing and movement of the line. So you get 'the tranquil air of evening' and the 'sweet sadness of the churchyard.'" In conclusion Professor Henderson contrasted the ghost scenes of "Fratricide punished" and "Hamlet," and showed how in the latter Shakspeare made the psychological preparation for the event, and gave the solemnity and dignity of situation that "fills us with the nervous tension of brave men."