

## THE MOST FAMOUS TRAGEDY.

PROFESSOR HENDERSON ON  
"HAMLET."

### A BRILLIANT DISCOURSE.

It is we who are Hamlet. This play has a prophetic truth which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others; whoever has borne about him the clouded brow of reflection, and thought himself "too much i' the sun;" whoever has seen the golden lamp of day dimmed by envious mists rising in his own breast, and could find in the world before him only a dull blank with nothing left remarkable in it; whoever has known the "pangs of despised love, the insolence of office, or the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes;" he who has felt his mind sink within him, and sadness cling to his heart like a malady; who has had his hopes blighted and his youth staggered by the apparition of strange things; who cannot be well at ease while he sees evil hovering near him like a spectre; whose powers of action have been eaten up by thought—he to whom the universe seems infinite and himself nothing; whose bitterness of soul makes him careless of consequences, and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock representation of them—this is the true Hamlet.

The illuminating quotation from Hazlitt makes an appropriate text for the trio of lectures which Professor Henderson is to give on "Hamlet and the Shakespearean drama." Everybody has heard of "Hamlet." It might not be the best of the great tragedies, but the authorities of centuries agree that it is 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. Shakespeare 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 any one 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."

#### —A Cultured Audience.—

Professor Henderson is always sure of a large and cultured crowd when he lectures. There was not a vacant seat at the University on Tuesday evening when the Hamlet series was inaugurated, and a repetition of them, or a bigger building which will obviate disappointment, would meet a sincere public wish. 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. It was agreed that the professor had never been heard to greater advantage, since the effort demanded great analytical ability and expression.

#### —The Popularity of Hamlet.—

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 Shakespearean character. French critics had come to the conclusion that Hamlet was Shakespeare. What finer tribute to the humanity of Hamlet than to identify him with Shakespeare, who understood so well the heights and depths of

human life? As far back as 1844 F. Schlegel 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 Shakespeare is eternal."

#### —Hamlet and the English Language.—

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 Shakespeare, 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.

#### —Artistic Power.—

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:—

Put, 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 idealized, but an artistic power was shown in idealizing 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.

#### Or again:—

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes,  
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrate,  
The bird of dawning singeth all night long;  
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,  
The nights are wholesome; then no planets  
strike,  
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,  
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

What a life must this man have lived, who could so idealize so commonplace a theme.

#### —The Importance of "Atmosphere."—

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 springtime 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 had been placed in a land of clouds and long nights under a grey sky. The question of atmosphere was 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 was necessary in lyrical poetry it was 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 was uppermost. In that Shakespeare 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 they got 'the

tranquil air of evening' and the 'sweet sadness of churchyard.'" In conclusion Professor Henderson contrasted the great scenes of "Fratricide punished" and "Hamlet," and showed how in the latter Shakespeare 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."

Register 12<sup>th</sup> June

Professor David Starr Jordan, M.S., Ph.D., M.D., LL.D., who will deliver two lectures in Adelaide this week, has been President of Leland Stanford Junior University since 1891. He was born on January 19, 1851, at Gainesville, Wyoming County, New York. He was educated at Cornell University, and afterwards studied at Harvard University, in Paris, and elsewhere. He is a college professor and a naturalist, and was instructor in the Cornell University from 1870-72, and in Agassiz's Summer School at Penikese in 1873. He was a Professor of Biology in the Butler University during 1876 to 1879, of Zoology in the University of Indiana from 1879-1885, was President of the University of Indiana for a term extending over 1885-1891, assistant to the United States Fish Commission in 1879-1890, Commissioner in Charge of Fishery Investigations of the Pacific Coast in 1880, of Fur Seals in Behring Sea, 1896-97, of the U.S. Fish Commission investigations in Hawaii 1901, Samoa 1902, Alaska 1903, and Japan 1906, and was President of the California Academy of Sciences in 1896-98 and 1900-2. His publications include:—"Synopsis of Fisheries of North America," 1883; "Fishes of North and Middle America," 4 vols., 1898; "The Fur Sea of Behring Sea," 4 vols., 1898; "Manual of Vertebrates: A Guide to the Study of Fishes;" "Science Sketches;" "Care and Culture of Men;" "Matka and Kotik;" "The Innumerable Company;" "Footnotes to Evolution;" "The Book of Knight and Barbara;" "Imperial Democracy;" "Animal Forms, Animal Life, and Evolution;" "The Voice of the Scholar;" "The Blood of the Nation;" "The Call of the Twentieth Century;" "The Philosophy of Despair;" "Standeth God Within the Shadow;" "The Strength of Being Clean;" besides some 300 scientific papers and articles in magazines.