

Register 14th May 1890.

UNIVERSITY SHAKSPEARE SOCIETY.

The opening meeting of this Society was held in the University Library on Tuesday evening. The attendance was large, ladies particularly being in strong force. The programme was well selected.

In the absence of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor the Chair was taken by Professor Boulger, who explained that the selection of pieces for recitation had been made specially with a view to illustrate the many-sidedness of Shakspeare. In fact, so far had this principle been carried that a scene from the "Two Gentlemen of Verona" had been inserted in the programme in order to illustrate a weakness of Shakspeare's, namely, his tendency to employ an extremely artificial kind of wit. Shakspeare, though born for all time, was too much the creature of his own age to escape the influence of euphuism. Far-fetched conceits, elaborate antitheses, execrable puns, showy displays of verbal fencing, light and half-mocking treatment of love—all these marked the conversation of the gallants and the dames of Elizabeth's court, and are reproduced in such plays as "The Two Gentlemen" and "Love's Labour Lost," and although Shakspeare, as may be seen in many passages, scoffed at euphuism, it is a question whether he ever emancipated himself completely from the prevalent literary vice of his time. It should not be forgotten that Shakspeare's contemporaries, especially those of the better sort, keenly relished this wordy skirmishing, and watched with interest every thrust and parry, every assault, retreat, and rally. And so a Shakspearian scholar cannot altogether neglect this kind of wit, although it is poor paste compared with the genuine diamonds that sparkle in the comedies of Congreve and Sheridan. Although the opening meeting was devoted exclusively to readings and recitations the Society was not to be regarded merely as an elocution club, and in the ensuing session a large proportion of the work would consist of critical and miscellaneous papers on Shakspearian topics. The aim of the Society was to encourage a close and scholarly study of Shakspeare's masterpieces, and so promote a love of literature. "A certain eminent prelate," continued the Professor, "is reported to have said that Australians were crude and uncultured. Well, we cannot expect the sweetness of an over-ripened medlar in a green and hardy pippin. Let us make the most of our pippin, and in course of time it may mature and become more wholesome, though less luscious than some fruit grown on other soils. Literature, it is true, does not blossom freely in young democracies, yet it is the sap of democracy which nourishes all that is great and good in literature. The greatest poets, such as Shakspeare and Burns; the greatest orators, such as Demosthenes and Mirabeau; the greatest novelists, such as Fielding and George Eliot, have been those who knew the people with its petty prejudices, its narrow views, its political impatience, its repulsive vulgarity, its contempt of intellectuality, its fickleness, its ingratitude, and who yet in spite of all this loved the people. When we have an Australian literature its heart will perhaps pulsate with a nobler throb than the nations have ever known. In the meantime let us make ourselves familiar with the best literature, even though like Shakspeare's dramas, it can be identified with no party cry, no doctrinaire illusion, no theological hatred. And let it not be thought that literature was merely a luxury; it was a necessary, if a man was to live a complete life. We must first of all, it is true, see that the masses are provided with the means of securing for themselves meat and drink and raiment and shelter. But let us do something more for them. Let us encourage them to learn something about that part of man which is not merely flesh and bone; how it lives and moves, and has its being, and what are its relations to the Great Unknown. This, literature—the record of the best that man has thought, or felt, or said, or done—can, at least in part, effect; and I do not hesitate to say that one can learn more of the natural history of the human soul from Shakspeare's dramas than from all the volumes of mental and moral philosophy which it is my duty to expound to the classes in this University."

The programme opened with the well-known Scene 5 from "Henry IV.," Act 4, Mr. Pennefather taking the part of the Dying King, Mr. Anderson that of Clarence, Mr. Henderson Warwick, and Mr. Isbister Prince Henry, all giving an intelligent rendering. This was followed by a spirited rendering of the first scene from Act 1 of "Two Gentlemen of Verona," and Dr. Boulger made a frank and lively Proteus, while Mr. Short showed that he had a fair conception of the character of Valentine, but the scene is sufficiently brief for amateurs. Wolsey's famous "Farewell to Cromwell," from Act 3 in "Henry VIII.," was given by Mr. Wybert Reeve in a finished manner that elicited

hearty applause, as might have been expected from so experienced an exponent of Shakespeare. In the second scene from Act 2 of "Macbeth," Mr. Bottrill as the Thane was very good indeed, and Miss Gollia was text perfect; but although her declamation and gesticulation were carefully studied—in fact not a bad imitation of Miss Essie Jenyns—her features are too softly moulded, and her manner too far removed from the tragical to fit her for the part. The young lady would succeed better in the character of Portia. "Much Ado About Nothing," Act 3, Scene 3, with Mr. Wybert Reeve as Dogberry, Mr. Solomon as Verges, and Mr. Anderson as the Watchman, gave the audience much satisfaction, and so did Act 4, Scene 2, of the same play, in which the students who appeared in the other scenes took part. "Hamlet," Scenes 2 from Act 2; "King John," Act 4, Scenes 1 and 2; and "A Winter's Tale," closed a very successful opening night, and it was gratifying to note the interest shown by the audience in the performances.

Quiz June 6th 1890.

"Switch on to the University. Is Mr. Tyas in? I want a few moments with that representative of culture. Good morning, Mr. Registrar. I hear there is a bit of a fuss about some of the books that are required for your annual examination." "Who are you? I can't answer questions through the telephone. It is quite contrary to University discipline."

"Oh, bother the discipline. You are a servant of the public, and, as I understand there has been a blunder perpetrated, I should like to know who is responsible for it." "Well, I am not, I can assure you. I never made a mistake in my life."

"What is that French proverb—pardon me if my pronunciation is not according to the best University style—*qui s'excuse s'accuse*. I was not blaming you. I want to find out really who is responsible." "I wish you would stick to English, not that you know a great deal about that language, but you don't murder it quite as much as what you have the impudence to call French. Now, what do you want to know? Tell me quickly, because I have no time to waste."

"So be it. There are, it seems, two books which it is necessary the students should cram—I mean study—for the November examinations. One of these is Greene's—there is a final 'e,' is there not?—"History of England," and another is Payne's "History of the Colonies." Where are those volumes?" "In the bookshops, I suppose."

"Now, you know better than that, Mr. Registrar. You know as well as I do that they are not obtainable. Whose fault is it?" "Make your complaint in writing, and please ring off."