

THE MOST FAMOUS TRAGEDY.

PROFESSOR HENDERSON ON "HAMLET."

A CAPITAL LECTURE.

Evidence is better than argument. Those who had attended the delightful "Hamlet" lectures at the University by Professor Henderson, and particularly those who had been unable to secure tickets, did not doubt the wisdom of securing a bigger building than the Prince of Wales Theatre. The initial announcement regarding the extension course sent enterprising and eager students of Shakspearean drama after seats. It was not long before all the accommodation had been secured, and the persistent demand had to be checked by big-lettered advertisements in the newspapers. Professor Henderson has become the people's lecturer. His name is a guarantee of large, contented, and instructed audiences. He has done excellent work in the direction of popularizing the University and making it clear that the atmosphere of the institution is not necessarily severely classical and exclusive. The gathering at the Adelaide Town Hall on Tuesday night, when the third and final discourse on "Hamlet" was delivered proved that a public wish was being met. The crowd, the interest manifested throughout, and the sustained applause which expressed hearty approval of his auditors, constituted a splendid request to Professor Henderson to always engage a capacious building for his extension lectures. Among those present were His Excellency the Governor and Lady Le Hunte, the Chief Justice and Lady Way, the Chief Secretary (Hon. A. A. Kirkpatrick), and the Vice-Chancellor (Dr. Barlow).

—One Ruling Idea.—

The teaching and character of Hamlet were combined in a beautifully lucid address. It was a model of intellectual reasoning and fine penetrative study. Professor Henderson began by saying that in the drama every character must speak for himself or herself. Nothing should be uttered by any of them except that which served to elucidate. The author must not obtrude himself, the personae must stand on their own feet. How then could they speak of the teaching of "Hamlet?" The answer was that the lyrical poet taught directly, the dramatic poet indirectly. When they spoke of the teaching of "Hamlet" they did not refer to what was said by this character or that, but to the scheme of thought on which the play was founded. In every Shakspearean drama there was, as Goethe had said, one ruling idea, and in "Hamlet" it was, if their interpretation be correct, the necessity in human nature for preserving a balance between inward contemplation and impression to outward things. Hamlet by "thinking too precisely on the event" brought direful consequences, not only to himself, but to those associated with him. It was to that tragic quality that Shakspeare specially directed attention.

Man is distinguished from the brute animals in proportion as thought prevails over sense; but, in the healthy processes of the mind a balance is constantly maintained between the impressions from outside objects and the inward operations of the intellect; for if there be an overbalance in the contemplative faculty, man thereby becomes the creature of mere meditation, and loses his natural power of action.—Coleridge.

—The Creature of Meditation.—

The intimate connection between balance or equipoise and health or sanity has been carefully elucidated by some of the greatest thinkers of the eighteenth century. It was the idea underlying Goldsmith's poem, "The Traveller," which was really a criticism on the state of society in European countries. He tried to show there how one virtue or quality being developed at the expense of others led inevitably to degeneration. So in his political philosophy Burke was dominated by the same fundamental consideration. Introspection, especially in the form of melancholy brooding, was dangerous. In-

dulged to excess it was bound to induce a state of inward strain. The healing power which John Stuart Mill and Mathew Arnold and a thousand others found in Wordsworth was not for Hamlet. He had lost all interest in Nature. There was no appeal from the outward world sufficiently strong to take him outside himself. The result was that he became the creature of meditation, and lost the natural power of action. He knew he was no statesman, and he told them so with a cry of despair.

The time is out of joint, oh cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right.

—True Men of Action.—

There were some natures which seemed to find satisfaction and content in the love of contemplation for its own sake. They were content to find out the truth and feel but little impulse to realize it in act. There were others who spent little time in thought and were prone to act on the spur of the moment. They were not well balanced natures. Their leaning side was indiscretion and rashness. With them action might easily outpace reason. Between the two extremes were the true men of action—those who made up their minds after due deliberation and proceeded to put it into effect. Hamlet would act if they did not give him time to think; if they did, then thinking, speculation, and introspection carried him away. Hamlet needed force in the core of his breeding. That force was weak within him by nature. He made it weaker by introspection. Instead of strengthening it by exercise, by practice, he neglected it and passed off into morbid speculation. Man had become a quintessence of dust, and the world "a foul and pestilential congregation of vapours." If that force had been strong enough Hamlet would have been able to control his thought or to have kept it within bounds. He could not, and hence the tragedy.

—Not a Strenuous Idealist.—

This was the point. Hamlet was an idealist, but he was not a strenuous idealist. He could see the difference between beauty and ugliness, but he had too little of that spirit which impelled a man to transform one into the other.

"He must perish," says Mr. Stedefeld, "because he will not see that evil, the passions of men, and the tortures of this life, are only instruments of Divine Providence to stimulate the moral energy of good. He will not see that every rational being is called upon to reconcile the ideal with the real on this earth."

—A Difference.—

There was a difference between the idealism of the merely contemplative nature and the strenuous idealism of the man who was ever striving to lift himself above him-

self, and transform evil into good. The difference was only bridged by that force which Hamlet lacked. Hamlet's nature was noble and refined, and in many respects great, but he failed of the highest. In his "Happy Warrior" Wordsworth speaks of that quality which was our human nature's highest dower, the quality by which we receive disaster of its evil and receive the good; by which we turn darkness into light and evil into good. It was transformation and transmutation.

—The Moral System.—

And this was the lesson which Great Nature taught them if they would only take the trouble to observe. They could see it every time the light touched the edges of the dark threatening clouds with silver and gold. They could see it when the rainbows flashed from the broken and whirling spray dashed up from the rocks. They could see it when the little plant pushed its way through the dark and sometimes loathsome soil till it became a flower of loveliest hues. Nay, the more loathsome and repulsive the soil the brighter and more gorgeous, sometimes, the flower that bloomed. And they saw it, too, in history. The Puritans were persecuted for their religious convictions; out of that suffering came one of the most precious possessions of the British people—liberty of conscience. Some of them were driven into exile because they would not deny their convictions; they settled in America, and out of that wandering arose a mighty nation—the United States. The fate of Ophelia, a beautiful, artless, and innocent girl, who suffered so nobly, of Cordelia and Desdemona, made the conclusion obvious that tragedies might arise involving the direst consequences to those who had, and but little, and in the process of their development innocent beings might suffer horrible torments. King

Claudius, a villain and a murderer, got a crown and the woman he loved. What they had to recognize was that in many, and perhaps most, of the world's tragedies, as of Shakspearean tragedies, "the weight of the tragic fault does not necessarily depend upon the magnitude of the moral transgression." Such was the fate of men and women in Shakspeare's little world. Was that little world a reflex of the bigger world of actual experience? Yes, and few who had studied the lives of Christ and Socrates would care to deny it. It was an interesting question whether there was something radically wrong with the moral system on which the world was based. Let them consider what would happen if the alternative system prevailed. Supposing that instead of innocent suffering in the world as they knew it, there was a system by which every good action would get immediate reward. How would they like to live in such a world as that? How would they like to feel for instance, that when a friend did them a kindness he did so knowing he would profit by it? How would they like to feel that when their mother lavished kindness upon them their love was supplemented by the conviction that she would surely profit by it? No. Under such a system life would be reduced to the level of a business transaction. Virtue would disappear; bravery, honour, self-sacrifice. Man must do right for right alone, not only right in hope of reward. Man was made in the image of God, and the true end of man was the realization of Godlike faculties. "Sometimes virtue starves while vice is fed," said Pope. "What then? Is the reward of virtue bread?" No; it was something higher. It was self-realization—the realization of the best and noblest qualities in human nature. In that sense Cordelia, Desdemona, and Ophelia had their reward. They lost fortune, happiness, and life itself, but they remained true to themselves. The dark clouds gathered, the thunder roared, the lightning flashed and the storm broke upon them; but when the night had gone and the sun rose in a clear sky they might see Ophelia, Cordelia, and Desdemona standing on the topmost peaks of human work. "He that loseth his life for My sake for the sake of right and truth shall find it." They found it in self-realization.