

THE PROBLEM OF EURIPEDES

AN EVENING WITH THE CLASSICS.

The Euripidean drama is a subject that is dear to the classic student. The traits of the Athenian dramatist, and his treatment of the traditional religious beliefs, have always made his works a study of interest. It was the problem of Euripides that was chosen as the subject of a discourse at the University last night, when Professor H. Darnley Naylor commenced a series of three lectures dealing with Dr. Verrall's theories on the same subject. Professor Naylor is an attractive lecturer, and the large number of auditors who assembled in the Prince of Wales Theatre appreciated the bright form he adopted in presenting his statements. The lecturer first gave a concise biography of the early dramatist, showing how his career was co-extensive with the meteoric splendor of ancient Athens. In the early days, the lecturer explained, the drama was the essential and not the actor, as was the case in the present time. Even Shakespeare was not always respected to-day, for they had read of Miss Terry or Mr. Irving "creating" a character.

The ancient drama (literally a doing) arose from choruses sung with action in honor of Dionysus, and in which the adventures of the god were celebrated. The leader would answer, in a kind of recitative, questions put by the rest. Thus arose the actor or "answerer." Aeschylus introduced a second "answerer," and drama in the modern sense began. Sophocles increased the actors to three, and improved the scenic effects. His characters were heroes, and the religious atmosphere was as marked as ever. Sophocles used to say, "I paint men as they should be; Euripides paints them as they are." Euripides was a realist. Thus "by representing gods he made men disbelieve in their existence." Realism and gods could not stand together; either divinity was degraded or the play became a fantasy. "The Tempest," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" should be compared. By accepting Jerome's wonderful stranger in the way intended by the author they lost the sense of the real. If the realism could be received how then could they regard the wondrous stranger? That was why the play to many was an offence and even a blasphemy. Haigh's view that Euripides was not the enemy of the Olympic religion might be rejected. Euripides desired to rebuild and purify the beliefs; he was a monotheist. He was a poet with a mission which often hampered and sometimes spoiled his art.

Advertisement
10/6/14

WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION.

The newly-formed South Australian branch of the Workers' Educational Association is losing no time in setting about its beneficent work. To-day a deputation will wait on the Government with a request for a grant of £1,000 towards the establishment of the tutorial classes, which is one of the principal features of the movement. It is almost a sufficient justification for the request that what is proposed is merely to bring South Australia into line with some of the neighboring States, not to speak of other States of the Empire, and the mother country itself in the matter of meeting the desire among intelligent workers for a fuller education when youth has passed. Students, who may be of either sex and all ages, will undergo a three years' course of training conducted by teachers with the rank, at least, of a University professor or lecturer. In Australia the movement is a novel one, though in Great Britain it has been flourishing during the past ten years to an extent which may be gauged by the mere statement that upwards of 2,000 trade unions and educational societies have given it their adhesion, as well as thousands of individuals of all parties

and creeds. That it will prosper as largely in the Commonwealth may confidently be expected from the sympathy it commands and the ready assistance forthcoming from all quarters.

So much has been published recently on the subject that it is almost superfluous to repeat what the movement has in view, especially as its aims are set out elsewhere in our columns by the secretary, Mr. Kroemer. But to borrow a phrase from an article in the latest issue of "The Round Table," it may be said to have as its fundamental end "nothing less than the restoration of education to its rightful place among the great spiritual forces of the community." It used to be thought that all that was wanted could be supplied by "Home university" libraries, and the various popular handbooks which are pouring in endless profusion from the publishing houses of Europe and America, supplemented, perhaps, by University extension lectures. But though much can be done, and has been done, by these means, something more methodical and systematic is needed if working men and women are to be placed in something like the same position in the matter of culture as they would occupy had the necessity for the immediate earning of a livelihood or other cause not debarred them from a University career. No doubt, a good deal of knowledge may be obtained by the individual through his own exertions; in fact many of the cleverest minds have never felt the deprivation of a University training. They have acquired in one or more directions a mass of knowledge which might shame a University graduate; but in their case the acquisitive faculty is inherent and part of the mental outfit which distinguishes the clever from the mediocre. For the mass of people the royal road to learning lies, as "The Round Table" points out, through co-operative effort. Just as thousands would sooner spend two hours hearing some one read a lecture rather than read it, or something as valuable, for themselves, so the gregarious instinct makes itself felt at all ages in the academic sphere. And this applies with peculiar appositeness to the manual worker who is used to companionship in his ordinary labor. The professional classes, as a rule, toil alone; but with the others the natural instinct of mankind for association is fostered by the factory and the workshop, which may explain the eager readiness of thousands of workers to join groups, or classes, under the Workers' Educational Association—a class for this subject or a class for that, as the student may desire. Through his class, or classes, the student is brought into intimate contact with all that science, history, philosophy, or literature can teach, and as his training is systematic and the ground prepared for every fresh stage of progress, he is able to escape from the mental confusion and possibility of blundering which are the peculiar snare of the self-taught. Through association he may compare notes with his fellows, and gain new points of view; and it is a common experience for a teacher to learn in this way from his pupils as much as they have taught him. In a community where "democracy is king," it is very desirable that the sovereign should have a larger outlook, a sense for history, and a certain imaginative power of regarding life and the world. There will then be a disposition to think and act not in the interest of one class, but of all classes, and, at the same time, students will be laying the foundation for a better utilisation of their leisure than they have now either inclination or capacity for. Towards the achievement of objects so invaluable from the standpoint of the entire community it is impossible for a start to be made too soon.

"THE PROBLEM OF EURIPIDES."

LECTURE BY PROFESSOR DARNLEY NAYLOR.

Philosophy was a strong characteristic of the ancient Greeks. Many of their philosophers, or thinkers, however, were not philosophic. They were malcontents. They sought to alter things, instead of accepting them as they were. Among the revolutionaries was Euripides, the poet and dramatist, and contemporary of Sophocles and Aeschylus. At the Adelaide University on Tuesday evening the first of three lectures on Euripides was delivered by Professor H. Darnley Naylor, of the Chair of Classics. The professor announced his intention of dealing first with the Greek dramatist's life, and later with his art. Euripides, according to the Parian marble, was born 485 B.C., and although he began writing in his eighteenth year, it was not till 456 that his plays were accepted. His first victory was in 441 B.C. and he succeeded in winning the prize only four times. Yet while so unhonoured during his lifetime, Euripides' writings, after his death, became more popular than those of either Sophocles or Aeschylus. His unpopularity during his life was probably due to his innovations as an artist, and his attitude towards the conventional religion of his day. He was the friend of Anaxagoras, Protagoras, and Socrates, all notorious freethinkers, and their influence with him was manifest. The words put into the mouths of his characters were full of scathing contempt for the mythological stories. But he was not merely destructive. Although he scoffed at belief in the gods, he desired to rebuild and purify. He was a monotheist. He believed that there was a single controlling and purifying power which directed the world's affairs. He sought to lift his fellow-men out of the mire of heathenism, by pointing out to them that whatever else was doubtful it was sure that the world was ruled by righteousness. He tried to show the Athenians how their religious stories about the gods had come to be told. He was a poet with a mission, which often trammelled his art and sometimes spoilt it, and certainly hampered his progress in life. In his dramas he covered the whole range of humanity. Sophocles was an idealist, but Euripides was a realist. His characters were those of every phase of everyday life, even of those of slaves and children. But he gave his characters archaic names, and by representing gods he made men disbelieve in their existence. What, it might be asked, was the result of the attacks made by the poet on the religious beliefs of his time? Realism and gods could not stand together. Either divinity was degraded, or the play became a fantasy. What was thought of him by other thinkers was made clear by Aristophanes, who accused him of realism and impiety. In fact he was tried at Athens for impiety, although the result was not known. But he had left his mark on thought for all time. The next lecture by Professor Naylor will be on Euripides' drama "Iphigenia in Tauris."