

with news of the death of Ophelia, which, indirectly at least, due to Hamlet, induces him to consent to the king's plot.

"The scene in the last act where they fight, and exchange rapiers, was managed with great ingenuity. I remember when I first read the play how improbable such an exchange appeared to me. Nor did Forbes Robertson make it at all life-like. What is done at the Theatre Français is this: In the bout Hamlet is wounded, presses his hand to his side, and withdrawing it, sees the blood. In sudden rage he rushes on Laertes, and in the ensuing bout disarms him, the weapon falling at some distance, near the feet of Hamlet's second, Horatio. Hamlet, suddenly growing cool, presents his own rapier to Laertes, and with elaborate courtesy insists on his taking it. Laertes finally does so, and Hamlet takes that which his second has picked up. This may mean one of two things:—Either Hamlet suddenly recollects that this is his friend, and wishes an act of courtesy, or—what is more likely—feeling himself wounded, and suspecting treachery, he sees his chance of paying back Laertes in his own coin. In either interpretation, it gets very skilfully over a difficult piece of business.

"So far I have said hardly anything of Hamlet himself. Mounet-Sully is the greatest living tragedian of what is probably the greatest theatre in the world. He represents Hamlet as a man of about thirty. His hair and beard were brown, tinged with auburn, and if I may say so without irreverence, his face when in repose looked strikingly like the German engravings of Christ.

"To Forbes Robertson, Hamlet is the melancholy dreamer, spectator of life, rather than actor in it. This side of him is so prominently put forward that it overshadows every other, and the result is that his moments of action, as in his sudden leaping into the grave of Ophelia, come on one almost with a shock. This dreamy, philosophic side was not lacking in the French tragedian. I have heard nothing more magnificent than his giving of the speech, 'To be or not to be.' When he reached 'Dormir, dormir, rêver peut être!' there seemed to come a catch in the breath of the whole audience. But he was also a Hamlet, the prey to and the medium of expression for the most violent emotions. To them he yielded to an extent almost repugnant to our colder, northern temperament. When he first sees the ghost, he leaps forward, with hands outstretched, and his cry of 'Père,' lengthened out into a wail of P-e-e-r-r-r-e!' When the ghost tells him of his uncle's guilt, he falls first on his knees, and then on his face, where he lies with his face hidden, his whole frame throbbing with emotion. When the ghost finally says 'Souviens—toi!' and disappears, Hamlet with a shuddering moan, rolls over on his back, clutches wildly at his throat and heart, and faints. So in the scene with his mother, 'Look on this picture and on that,' in which the ghost appears again, he distinctly tore the passion to tatters, raving and sobbing inarticulately.

"Nor can he be called a ranter, for I have seen him also in Victor Hugo's 'Hernani,' a part giving great temptations to a ranter, but which Mounet-Sully played with a reserve and a dig-