

question are well known, but the public are still in the dark in regard to those of Mr. Laurier. Perhaps, under the circumstances, the Liberal leader was under no obligation to cast a firebrand into the ranks by declaring his position. Though he has intimated that his mind is made up in regard to the question, and that when the occasion demands he is quite ready to declare his views and abide by the consequences, it is noteworthy that in no public utterance has he given us the means of knowing what that view is. As we have before pointed out, his declaration on the floor of Parliament was hypothetical, and he has not now given, so far as we are aware, any clue to his opinion on the crucial question, whether the schools of Manitoba, as at present established, are or are not Protestant schools.

To the independent onlooker, while the tariff issue is incomparably the most important in its bearing upon the material welfare and progress of the Dominion, the most interesting feature of the political situation is that both the great parties are alike in danger of shipwreck on the same rock. The leaders of both are no doubt wishing with equal fervour that the decision of the Supreme Court may remove the Manitoba question from the sphere of practical politics. Should the decision be that the Government has the right to pass remedial legislation, the Government stands pledged to a course which must almost surely rend the party in twain. But the same decision would confront the Opposition with the horns of a dilemma, either of which must prove fatal to unity and co-operation. The outcome will be awaited with anxiety, though the chances are probably largely against a verdict which would lead to so embarrassing a result.

### THE ANTIGONE AT VASSAR COLLEGE.

Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N. Y., possesses many advantages that are of intrinsic and permanent interest; situated in pretty scenery, on the banks of the Hudson, and opposite the Catskill Mountains; neither in the heart of a large city, nor in the depth of the country; but two miles outside a little county town; surrounded with its own wide acres, which leave room for the addition of block after block of red brick buildings (the older ones already venerable with luxuriant all-pervading creepers) as occasion arises for new dormitories or a gymnasium or a museum or a picture gallery; and yet which retain, after all additions, such generous amplitude of park and pasture land as to reduce the buildings to the proportions of a country house half hidden in the estate which surrounds it; with these and all the other advantages which nature and money can give it, Vassar College is calculated to excite the envy of the Canadian who desires for his undergraduate womenkind some better abode than a city boarding-house, some greater seclusion than mixed lectures. Here, as so often in the United States, private vices have become public benefits: the

sins of the fathers have not been visited, except in blessing, upon the children, and the money which the old Englishman, Matthew Vassar, amassed from the traffic in strong drink has gone to so educate the women at least of succeeding generations, that the enmity of life and the tendency to strong drink ought in their case to be sensibly diminished.

However, it is not the intrinsic and permanent interests of Vassar College which just now claim attention, but a transient and special interest.

A month ago its women students played Sophocles' *Antigone*, in the original, to the music of Mendelssohn.

Of the last named part of the performance little need be said: the magnificent music of Mendelssohn's *Antigone* is familiar to many people in Toronto, and was heard to the best advantage in the performance of *Antigone* at Toronto University in 1882, when it was rendered by a chorus of half a hundred and more masculine voices.

The chorus of Vassar girls was neither fifty in number nor masculine in voice; and while they made the most of their parts and were full of action and movement and animation, and were more intimately associated with the actors than the Toronto chorus, none of whom, not even the fifteen in costume, stood upon the same stage with the actors; yet inevitably their singing was overpowered by the orchestra and the vocal music was drowned by the instrumental. As a concert, therefore, the performance was necessarily defective.

But, no doubt, it was not as a concert that the performance was attended: the interest in Greek across the line is strong enough to make a Greek drama popular on its purely dramatic merits; and Vassar was not compelled to do, what University College here (perhaps fortunately) is compelled to do, that is, render Mendelssohn not less adequately than Sophocles.

As has been already stated, even the Vassar chorus excelled on its dramatic side. It was ranged on the main stage, always prominent and always more or less in motion. Its songs were sung to the accompaniment of Delsartean movements, varied and graceful, and sufficiently slow for dignity and it illustrated the words by gestures and mimicry which were bold without becoming grotesque; if only the staff which each Theban elder bore had not proclaimed so palpably the paucity of the modern walking-stick, no sense of incongruity and burlesque would have crossed the mind even of the scoffer.

But it was naturally in the heroine, her sister and the Queen that the performance of May 26th gained by comparison with ours. Women that are women are more satisfactory, even if inferior actors, than the men that became women in Toronto, or the women that became men in Poughkeepsie; nor indeed were the Vassar *Antigone*, *Ismene* and *Eurydice* inferior actors; they were decidedly good, even if *Antigone* inclined to be too cold and statuesque, *Ismene* to overact emotion and *Eurydice* to too much pantomime.

To illustrate these criticisms a little in detail: the rapid alternations of feeling in *Antigone* between bitterness and affection in her treatment of *Ismene*—the rapid passage from the ill-tempered scorn and sarcasm in which her misery vents itself to remorseful gentleness, when *Ismene* answers all this scorn only with more

urgent entreaty and affection—these things have perplexed the commentators, whose renderings disagree, and appear to have perplexed not less the Vassar *Antigone*; whose acting sometimes left both her meaning and her feelings ambiguous; but an ambiguous translation of the Greek is the worst of all translations; in such matters *pecca fortiter* is a sound maxim: interpret definitely, even wrongly, rather than not at all.

So, in the same way, even in the controversy with *Creon* *Antigone* plainly covers the whole field of expression between mere abusive challenges, laconic scorn, earnest pleading, and even in one or, perhaps, two lines, passionate sentiment. Under the last of these heads the line,

I cannot join in hating but in love, which to a modern audience, and especially to Christian sentiment, requires all possible emphasis, in order to redeem the other harshness of the Greek princess' character, received not even the emphasis which was its bare due. The Vassar *Antigone* hardly unbent even in the utterance of that supreme line.

Quite consistent with this coldness of manner and tone, and much more justifiable, was the treatment of the famous line which expresses affection, indignation and pity on *Haemon's* behalf. The best MSS. give this line to *Ismene*; modern sentiment and even *Jebb's* scholarship insist on giving it to *Antigone*. The question is, would *Antigone's* pride permit her to express affection for her executioner's son, in that executioner's presence?

The Vassar *Antigone* could not condescend so far, and left the line, accordingly, to *Ismene*; nor am I disposed in this matter to criticize; it has always appeared to me to be one of those places where modern feeling is a misleading clue. On the other hand, in the similar difficulty farther on in the play, where *Antigone* defends herself with sophistry which is flat nonsense to modern ears, and where *Jebb* as before lends his scholarship to the support of modern feeling and proclaims the passage spurious—*Antigone* says she would not have deiled the laws for a dead husband's sake or a dead son's, but only a dead brother's; because she could never get another brother (but husbands and children are as thick as blackberries)—in this dilemma the Vassar *Antigone* declined to submit to the enunciation of absurdities, however Greek, and played for the approbation of modern sentiment. She had her reward, and made her exit more effective; but one felt a small voice whispering "It is magnificent, but it is not Greek." Aristotle quotes the spurious passage and does not detect a forger's hand. Moreover, it is borrowed from Herodotus, and Herodotus and Sophocles can be shown to have been kindred spirits. Apropos of the exit of *Antigone*, the difficulty of reconciling the unconscionable time which she takes in going to prison—with the presence of *Creon* on rhetoric—with the presence of *Creon* on the stage and the principles of dramatic propriety and realism, was very noticeable, even more noticeable than it need have been. *Creon* might perhaps have been abstracted for a time from the stage; at least *Antigone* might have placed the length of the stage between her first and last farewells, and so found opportunity for motion; whereas she remained for some moments almost motionless, close to the