

THE DYNASTS

OF the success of Mr. Hardy's new volume there can be no doubt whatever. It has what Stevenson once declared to be the first quality of a good book ; "it lets itself be read." The philosopher, the historian, the theologian, the lover of poetry will have a great deal more to say than this ; but they will all agree here with the ordinary reader. Be as critical or as uncritical as you please, as learned or unlearned ; you will not easily be separated from the book until you have finished it.

It is well for us all that this is so, and it is well for Mr. Hardy too : for if we may quote Stevenson again, to conjure with great names is, in the event of failure, to double the disgrace ; and Mr. Hardy has certainly conjured with great names. His subject is "the vast international tragedy" of Napoleon's career ; his hero the English nation. Born and bred among the memories of that gigantic contest, where they still echo faintly among the Wessex downs, and provoked (how we warm to him for the confession !) "by the slight regard paid to English influence and action throughout the struggle by those Continental writers who had dealt imaginatively with" it, he set out, as he tells us in his preface, about six years back, to "re-embody the features of this influence in their true proportion." Of his Titanic undertaking one-third only has yet been accomplished, but we are allowed to see the skeletons of the second and third part upon the stocks, and may hope that