



VOL. XXXII.

DECEMBER 1st, 1904.

No. 4

MOUNET—SULLY'S "HAMLET."

IN a letter dated October 10th, Mr. W. L. Grant, who is now studying at the University of Paris, gives his impression of the great French tragedian, Mounet-Sully in "Hamlet," comparing him with Forbes Robertson. He writes:—

"The version given is that of Alexandre Dumas, père, and P. Meurice written in 1874, after Victor Hugo and the Romanticists had conquered the old regard for the unities. It follows Shakespeare closely, though of course shortening it a little for stage purposes. At the same time the French tragedian has this advantage over the English, that the play began at eight, and went on with very brief pauses till after midnight, a length up to which an English audience is not yet educated. On the other hand, the French version is of course inferior as literature to the English. It is wholly—save for the snatches of song sung by Ophelia, etc.—in rhymed Alexandrines, a medium at its best inferior to blank verse; nor have the authors, bound still by French stage traditions, dared to take the sublime liberty of Shakespeare, and to mingle prose with their verse. Even the grave-diggers talk in Alexandrines. The medium is thus not only less flexible, but

even in the higher passages cannot rise to the same heights. Compare,—

'Unhousel'd, disappointed, unan-
el'd'

with

'Et pécheur, je mourus sans prêtre,
sans prière,

Sans extrême onction, sans regard
en arrière.'

and

'A little more than kin, and less
than kind'

with

'Un peu plus que cousin

Un peu moins pue fils.'

"Still, the translation is good, and he was helped by the magnificent staging. The Theatre Français is, as you know, given a large subsidy by the Republic, and spares no expense. The characters were frankly dressed as French gentlemen of the time of Henry IV. or Louis XIII., *i.e.*, of the time of Shakespeare. The halls were like those of an early French chateau, with one or two white marble statues in niches. I must say that this seems to me the best solution of the difficulty. It is impossible to tell when Shakespeare thought Hamlet lived, if indeed he ever bothered his head about the matter. It is impossible to synchronise a play in which, on the one hand, England is represented as tributary to