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# THE VARSITY

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## THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS.

Note—The belated paper which follows was written for the current number of the *University Monthly*. That number, however, was already full and it is now handed over to THE VARSITY, whither it should have gone at first.

Since the last issue of this magazine the manager of "The Return of Odysseus" has been dangerously ill, and the play has been presented under trying circumstances, with a Penelope barely able to stand upon her feet and to direct, yet with resolution enough to act from her couch, when standing became impossible, and to see the thing through at all costs.

Probably those behind the scenes have found it hard to decide whether to pay their first tribute of respect to the artistic skill of the actress appearing on the boards against such odds, or to the moral force of the part played by her off the boards during the previous fortnight: the role of a woman in full health enacted by a woman in great weakness. Henceforth the story of "*Polutlas Odysseus*" will suggest also "*Polutlase Penelopeia*" rivalling her prototype in fidelity to duty, and her lord in "*Polutlemosune*"; much-endurance. In the last issue I predicted that the popular element in the production would be the dances. The prediction has been fulfilled. Even the scoffer and the cynic have confessed "that all that was like Shea's was excellent."

For this excellence of the dancing the credit is mainly due to Miss Hutchison and to Mr. R. Biggs, who, when Miss Barrows was taken ill, replaced her with untiring zeal and skill, and under her directions produced results so satisfactory that few were aware of her absence. Their organizing and executive ability, no less than their self-sacrificing devotion, will not be forgotten by anyone engaged in the performance; neither will their dancing; they danced like Phæacians. It would be affectation to deny that Miss Barrows' illness was more felt by the actors, and showed itself more in their work. By the exertions however of Dr. Barrows, whose modern Greek

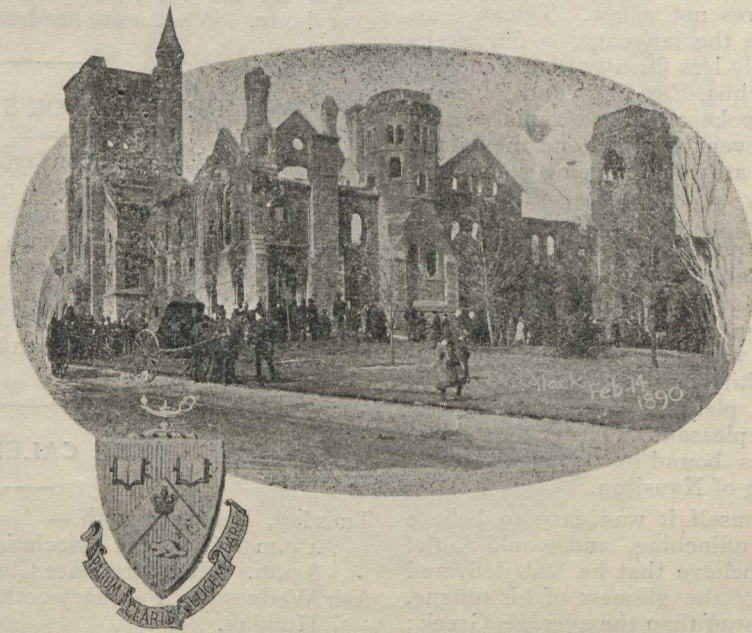
is as good as his daughter's, and whose enthusiasm for Homer is not less conspicuous, the evil was minimized, and to persons behind the scenes, aware of the obstacles encountered in this and other directions, and conscious that the stars in their course seemed to fight against the undertaking, it is a matter of surprise that so considerable a measure of success was achieved.

For after all the obstacles to success were not imaginary:

the Antigone has set up a very high standard for all subsequent Greek plays, a standard incapable of attainment by a performance which has not the advantage of Mendelssohn's beautiful music, nor yet the advantage of a regular plot and *denouement*, but is instead, avowedly, the presentation of a succession of scenes from Homeric life, strung together loosely on the framework furnished by the *Odyssey*. Most people on the other hand are like Aristotle and demand a story; especially they wanted to see the suitors killed. Few are content with pictures and with character sketches; few would now tolerate a play like the *Persæ* or

the *Prometheus* of Æschylus. The university should have begun with Homer or Æschylus twenty years ago, and passed on to Sophocles, and no inapposite comparisons would have been possible.

And then again, as the witty scoffer from Shea's reminds us, an academic exercise in an unknown language should be exhibited in a university building, whither weary pleasure-seekers with vacuous minds will not resort for amusement and where only—if they find themselves—they will expect to be bored. Even the second Antigone suffered for being in a theatre; the first Antigone—presented in the old Convocation Hall—escaped being measured by alien standards. And the moral of it all is twofold that the enemy and the unbeliever should build us a theatre at the



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