

NOTICE.

Competitors for the prize offered by us in our November issue, must send in their poems before the 20th January. The successful poem will be published in February's issue instead of January's, as at first intended.

Contributions.

(We are not responsible for any opinions expressed in this column.—Ed.)

THE GROUND-TONE OF "MEASURE FOR MEASURE."

BY R. W. HOODLE.

(Continued from December issue.)

It must be apparent to the most careless reader that the moral questions suggested by the play before us are the most striking point about it. The verse is rugged and unfinished except in solitary passages. The plot is fuller than usual of inconsistencies. The easy pardons of the guilty deputy and the part played by Mariana do violence to our sense of the dignity of woman and of human justice. On the other hand we are confronted with a series of characters suggesting, and personifying different aspects of life and its meaning, ranging from Claudio, who clings to life with a feverish longing, to Barnardine, "a man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep." Let us begin with this lowest type. He is described as "careless, reckless, and fearless of what's past, present or to come; insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal," and again as one that has a stubborn soul.

"That apprehends no further than this world
And squar'st thy life according."

Barnardine is by birth "a Bohemian," and a Bohemian he is in the modern meaning of the term, and one of the lowest type. A higher type we have in Lucio, the man of pleasure, who never thinks of death, and lives solely to enjoy himself; yet Lucio is not without a sense of right within him, forcing him to reverence the beauty of holiness embodied in Isabella. She and Angelo seem to typify the different ideals of the Catholic and the Puritan respectively, as viewed with Shakespeare's eyes. On more than one occasion Shakespeare classes Puritan and Papist together as when the clown in *All's Well That Ends Well*, tells us that "young Charbon the puritan, and old Poyssam the papist, howsome'er their hearts are severed in religion, their heads are both one, they may joul horns together, like any deer i' the herd." Both alike do violence to the present life; Isabella through dwelling on the life to come, Angelo by repressing within him the instincts of humanity. These two types of spiritual life are happily struck off by Francis Newman in a passage in his work on "The Soul," though without reference to the play before us. "The self-complacent man," (here we have Angelo) "measures his present attainments with some arbitrary finite standard, (which is pronounced to be adequate,) and admires or approves himself as a result of the comparison. The standard assumed may be the conventional routine, which in a particular religious society is held to characterize Piety; or may be a sort of average, struck from the apparent goodness of man in general, or may be an invention of his own; but in all cases the standard is finite, and is already reached by him. But the sacred happiness of the heart"—and here we have Isabella—"which knows it is known of God, is not derived from approving its own attainments, but from the very acting of its insatiable desires, and from its sympathy with the Source of life and joy. Its outcry is after perfection. It longs after God's own holiness; for this it would give Earth and Heaven. It no sooner effects one conquest than it aspires after another. If God would offer to make it at once and wholly perfect, it would eagerly catch at the offer." Thus Isabella finds the rules of her convent wanting in strictness. She aspires after a higher state of holiness. I need not say how thoroughly I agree with Hallam in calling the Duke's intention to marry Isabella "a little too commonplace, one of Shakespeare's hasty half-thoughts." This is one of the many incidents in which this play is unsatisfactory. Shakespeare was doubtless led to this consummation by the dramatic requirements of marrying off his chief characters.

There is something on the other hand to be said for his treatment of Angelo's character. "Some rise by sin" says the wise Escalus; Angelo could only be saved from his depths of self-satisfaction and complacency by the commission of a great crime. Let me again illustrate from Francis Newman's noble work. "Just as in Political, so too in Spiritual conflict, any great abuse of power by one party is apt to damage its cause, and irritate the opponents into vehement exertion; hence many a tyrant and many a dynasty has been ejected in consequence of some wanton and atrocious deed. Exactly in the same way is the paradox to be explained, (which is a fact, whether people choose to be scandalised at it or not) that the commission of some unusually great sin has been known to lead to a change of the whole character for the better; in fact, to a marked spiritual conversion. It needs no great insight into the soul to understand the principle of such things. A man of impulsive passion and moderately strong will, is perhaps ordinarily correct enough to satisfy his conscience; and if now and then carried a little beyond bounds, he yet manages to

keep up a good opinion of himself. But if his passions on some day run out to fearful riot, his self-complacency is mortified, his conscience is deeply stirred, his soul (for the first time perhaps,) is called into activity: a general insurrection of the whole man takes place against the tyrannous usurpers." It was then but natural for Angelo, when he was found out, and when he at the same time had found himself out, to wish for death. He was disgraced before the world and abased in his own esteem. Let us be charitable to him; he may have learned his lesson and may eventually be moulded out of his faults into a better man.

The family likeness between Isabella and Claudio is as strongly marked as that in "Hamlet" between Polonius and Ophelia. Both at times rise into passionate eloquence. The sensibility to outward impressions that leads Isabella to a nunnery, to outdo the piety of the ordinary votary of St. Claire, causes Claudio to yield to his passions and to be ashamed of himself afterwards; to be won over by the philosophy of the Duke to acquiescence in death, and then again, when it appears inevitable, to revolt from it with shudderings and to supplicate his sister to purchase his life by her shame. One is forcibly reminded of Spenser's contemporary portrait of the Red Cross Knight, who is meant to typify the ordinary Englishman of the period, now the sworn champion of Una (or truth), now the slave of Duessa (or falsity), and who in the depths of his contrition and worked up to it by the mournful eloquence of despair is ready to put an end to his life.

If the hardened Barnardine fears not death, so neither does the philosophic Duke. Life is for him, nor youth, nor age;

But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep,
Dreaming on both.

Life has no great charms for him, "rather rejoicing to see another merry, than merry at any thing which professed to make him rejoice." We may compare with this John Stuart Mill's description of his own father: he "thought human life a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by. He would sometimes say, that if life were made what it might be, by good government and good education, it would be worth having; but he never spoke with anything like enthusiasm even of that possibility. The pleasures of the benevolent affections he placed high in the scale; and used to say, that he had never known a happy old man, except those who were able to live over again in the pleasures of the young."

Enough has been written to indicate the ground-tone of the play before us. Shakespeare gives the picture in his darkest colours; the state in everywhere corrupt.

I have seen corruption boil and bubble
Till it o'er-run the stew.

The Duke whose laxity is partly the cause of this evil state, looks on philosophically and puts the responsibility of action upon the shoulders of his strict Deputy. The young men of the play are mostly libertines, and those who are repelled by the license they see around them, take refuge in a formal austerity which withers the heart while it satisfies the conscience, or fly to "narrowing nunnery walls" to prepare for the life hereafter. For this picture, though probably overdrawn, Shakespeare had we know full warrant in the times. The later court of the Virgin Queen was only pure by comparison with the gross foulness of the court of James I. It was this state of morals that prepared the way for the excesses of Puritanism which culminated in the Commonwealth. The lesson to be learned from our play, though Shakespeare only teaches it indirectly, is one of moderation—moderation in the exercise of justice and a wise medium in all things—even in goodness. Perhaps after thinking all the characters over, the only one with which we feel full sympathy is that of Escalus, the shrewd and faithful counsellor, bred in the old school, without the philosophic *laissez faire* of the Duke or the rigorous austerity of Angelo.

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT STILL-FISHING.

II.

BY INEZ.

As the reader will remember, Browne and I were left a month ago, slowly and sadly returning to the humble roof of the poor but honest settler which had sheltered us from the dew and sacrificed us to the mosquitoes and kindred forms of animal life during the previous night. When we reached the house—and not till then did I venture a remark—I suggested that it must be about nine o'clock and consequently breakfast time, but Browne made some disrespectful reference to my ideas of time which I need not repeat and producing his regulator assured me that it was a little before six. How time does fly in the country! However by the time we had straightened out our fishing tackle, which you may imagine was no easy task, we heard the good wife's cheery call to breakfast. This kindled the poetic fire in Browne and he even broke out into song, a proceeding in which he very rarely indulges. We felt rather crushed though, when we found ourselves confronted with a dish of salt pork and great thick slices of bread which could scarcely be described as of "snowy whiteness." Hunger is proverbially the best sauce and as we had no lack of this we did pretty well, although I will confess that we did not neglect to take some crackers with us when we again started for the water. We had contracted with one of the younger branches of the family to supply us with bait and this time