

THE

DRAMATIC ART OF SHAKESPEARE.

THE keenest French critic of our literature, M. Taine, declares that its colouring is almost always sober, and at times even gloomy. The English, he says, have an irresistible tendency to sermonize, and where he expected to find an utter abandonment to momentary pleasure, or at least a dash of thoughtless levity, he discerns the pulse of playful seriousness throbbing. Although quaint shrewd humour pervades much of the best English thought, humour which M. Taine does not fully appreciate, still in his brilliant sketch the author divines the essence of the books he criticises. It is the characteristic of good English writing to be true. By "true" I mean that there underlies the outward form a spirit of earnestness which the writer intends to awaken in those who read thoughtfully. The desire to find out the right and to do it, the wrong and to undo it, is strongly implanted in the sterling English mind; so strongly that what by others was intended to be shallow and ephemeral is often made in English mouths the means of teaching the highest truths. Nowhere is this spirit of earnestness more clearly expressed than in Shakespeare's plays through the medium of Dramatic Art.

By way of preface to the subject of which my lecture to-day mainly treats I intend very briefly to exemplify that high sense of duty which we may claim as peculiarly our own. In so doing I shall have gained my point if I help to convince you that precious metal, which will soon make rich the honest worker, lies hid beneath the wide field of English literature.