The history of dramatic art.

Professor Brander Matthews has collected into a volume, which is published by the Messrs. Scribner, a course of ten lectures on "The Development of the Drama," which he has given during the past two or three years before various audiences in England and the United States. It is not a very stout book, but it sketches the history of dramatic art in its great epochs both ancient and modern, and tells a story that has not heretofore been told, as far as we are aware, within the limits of a single volume. Other and more extensive histories of dramatic literature there are, no doubt, but as Mr. Matthews points out, they are "unduly distended" by biographical and controversial matter, and fail to give adequate attention to the shaping influences of circumstances and intellectual environment upon the development of dramatic art. Summarized, this interesting volume gives us a preliminary chapter upon "The Art of the Dramatist," two chapters on the Greek and Roman drama, one on the drama

of the Middle Ages, three upon the blossoming of the art in Spain, England, and France, respectively, one each upon the stage of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, and a final forecast of "The Future of the Drama." Throughout, the material is judiciously selected, and the treatment is fresh and suggestive. The author is mainly concerned with the technical aspects of dramatic art, and brings to bear upon his treatment an extensive knowledge of stagecraft, based upon a thorough historical study of the theatre, ancient and modern. Those who think primarily of the drama as a species of literature will wince more than once at the author's remarks about the great poets, but the criticisms which he makes of their work, although sometimes startling, may fairly be allowed if we remember that an exposition of dramatic technique rather than of literary expression is the main purpose which he has in view. By way of illustration of both the author's style and the comprehensiveness of his survey, we will close this notice of an extremely interesting book with a passage from the closing chapter.

"Thus it is that Ibsen stretches back across the centuries to clasp hands with Sophocles; and a comparison of the sustaining skeleton of the story in 'Oedipus the King' with that in 'Ghosts' will bring out the fundamental likeness of the Scandinavian dramatist to the Greek, — at least in so far as the building of their plots is concerned. Inspired in the one case by the idea of fate and in the other by the doctrine of heredity, each of them worked out a theme of overwhelming import and of weighty simplicity. Each of them in his drama dealt not so much with action in the present before the eyes of the spectator, as with the appalling and inexorable consequences of action in the past before the play began. In both dramas these deeds done long ago are not set forth in a brief exposition more or less ingeniously included in the earlier scenes: they are slowly revealed one by one in the course of the play, and each at the moment when the revelation is most harrowing."

The truth of this comparison is unassailable, however it may be scoffed at by the classicist, who is scandalized at the very idea of naming the two poets in the same breath.