

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF LITERATURE.¹

IN this course of lectures, which has been designed to promote within our university circle a more intelligent and profound interest in literature, the most difficult task has been left to the last. This task, as I understand it, is to sketch in outline those features of human nature to which the student and reader of literature must look in explanation of its origin and development, and to which all really good literature makes its successful appeal. But consider how difficult such a task must prove to be ! for, on the one hand, I must aim to take into account, as a whole, man's product of prose and poetry ; and, on the other hand, I must search for the source and the laws of this product, and of the judgment passed upon the product, in the entire nature of man.

It will doubtless result in saving time and thought, if a few minutes are taken at first to remove certain not infrequent misunderstandings touching the subject. It is not a universal conviction, perhaps it is not even a popular impression, that there *is* any discoverable philosophical basis for literature. Probably a majority of those writers to-day who wish to have their work reckoned with as belonging to literature, concern themselves little enough with the foundations in truth and in reality, on which they are trying to build. Occasionally, too, really good writers have expressed themselves with scanty respect for the analytic study of the principles of literary art and literary criticism. But in general this has not been the case. The masters, both in the

¹ One of a course of lectures delivered before the students of Yale University.