

OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC

"THE CHARLATAN."

By brains and hard work Mr. Tree has attained that enviable position for an actor, in which, whatever he thinks fit to under-



MR BEERBOHM TREE

take, the public holds it necessary to go to see him. It is possible, therefore, that *The Charlatan* will have more or less success at the Haymarket, though it may not add very much to Mr. Tree's reputation as an artist, or do great things for his



MRS BEERBOHM TREE

treasury. Mr. Buchanan's piece as a whole wants grip, and the leading character wants purpose and consistency; the performance from first to last is a laboured effort of clever writing and clever acting to atone for entire lack of dramatic interest. One follows the dialogue with attention, and the incident with curiosity,



MR FRED TERRY

but there is not a moment's human sympathy with anybody or anything concerned. This is owing not so much to the circumstance that either theosophy, or hypnotism, or somnambulism, is in itself incompatible with an effective play, but to Mr. Buchanan's confusing combinations. The hero is a fraud or not a fraud just as the situation may require it. His theosophy is sheer imposture, but his hypnotism is a dangerous fact, and the trouble with the audience who would keep pace with him is to know where the one ends and the other begins. But even were that possible, who could feel any concern in his love story? He comes from his native India—he is half a Parsee—to follow up a young girl whom he has met abroad. He has magnetised, or mesmerised, or terrorised, her into some sort of psychic attachment; but she has been able, having heard evil accounts of him, to hold him aloof. Still, she thinks of him in his absence, and is thinking of him as he arrives.



MR FRED KERR



MISS LILY HANBURY

The heroine, a weak-headed little fool, already under the influence of a half-bred impostor who ought to be horse-whipped—what possible dramatic or healthy interest could possibly come of a love story with such characters and such a beginning as this? That the dialogue is capital I have already said. It is made more effective by coming from the right people at the right time. Mr. Buchanan has given us several well-contrasted personages, and some of them have freshness. The most original is the Hon. Mervyn Darrell, a dilettante professor of individualism, with platitudes of paradox in burlesque of Oscar Wilde. His flirtation—it is not real love-making though it results in an engagement—with his cousin, Lady Carlotta Deepdale—who laughs at the superstitions which absorb her family—lightens the play considerably. Two situations stand out in the representation. One of them is more novel than the other, at least in a serious piece if not at the Cabinet of Mystery. The heroine is anxious about her father, who left her two years ago to travel in Thibet. The Charlatan, in order to strengthen his influence over her, and to impress the credulous Earl of Wanborough, with whom she resides, produces a luminous spirit likeness of the absent one in the darkened white gallery of Wanborough Castle. This is pure trickery, as he afterwards confesses, although for the while Lord Dewsbury, who has every reason to be angry, gets into sad disgrace for prematurely denouncing him as an impostor. Lord Dewsbury, who, by the way, seems to be the only honest man in the play who is not a fool, has been engaged to the heroine for some time before the adventurer appears on the scene, and the doings of the silly girl and the scheming rascal more than once make him very angry. The other scene which leaves an impression, is rather an old device. It depends for its effect entirely upon the coming of the heroine at dead of night to the hero's apartments in her night-dress. I do not like heroines in their night-dresses in strange gentlemen's rooms. However they may get there, either by mesmerism or not, whether asleep or



MR NUTCOMBE GOULD

awake, they cannot be the same heroine to me afterwards. I do not know myself enough of the occult sciences to explain the subtleties of the process by which Isabella Arlington is mesmerised from a distance while she sleeps, and still sleeps when she is mesmerised. But this is how it seems to be, and she comes creeping along the battlements on a cold night at Philip Woodville's bidding. In the somnambulist state, or hypnotic trance, or whatever it may be, she frankly avows her love for him, which either shame or discretion has induced her to conceal when wide awake—and the effect is remarkable. The adventurer, who has summoned her that she may be compromised, renounces all wickedness at once, resolves to confess his former fraud and then to go away for ever. But in what way does he make confession? He might have done it in a letter after his departure. It was the easiest thing in the world to order the unconscious lady back to her bed still unconscious, and no one but himself need ever have been the wiser. Instead of that, however, professing admiration for her purity the while, he orders his victim to awake, compels her to realise all the horror of her position, and then makes confession and declares his passion. It is only after that—some one is knocking at the door—that he helps her to escape—and she forgives him! It seems to me that the time and circumstances of his confession are more cruel even than the fraud and malice which preceded it. It is Isabella's turn to confess next day, and Lord Dewsbury very wisely renounces his claims; he is well rid of her. The last scene is a sentimental parting with Philip, in which tokens are exchanged, and there is a likelihood that some day he will come back to her. Mr. Tree, clever artist as he is, cannot move me in such a plot. All his elaboration, and all his power of expression, are brought to bear, but there is none of the conviction which we get with him in a part with grit and scope in it. I never saw him before in one in which the mechanism so often showed through. Mrs. Tree, intelligent, graceful, pretty, and careful, too, cannot hope to enlist real feeling for such a heroine. The deluded earl of Mr. Nutcombe Gould is an excellent old man, though nothing can make him anything better than the author has left him, an unemphatic old goose at the same time. The Lord Dewsbury of Mr. Terry is manly and vigorous as far as the flaccidity of his surroundings will permit. It is a mystery how he became engaged at all, and how he troubles an atom about the girl after the first act. Mr. Fred Kerr as Darrell, the Bunthorne-like individualist too lazy to be sincere about anything, is consistently good, and Miss Lily Hanbury as the spirited Lady Carlotta is bright. Mr. Charles Allen is a capital Dean Darnley—no piece nowadays is complete without a parson; and Mr. Holman Clark is excellent in the small part of Professor Marrables, a man of science. Mrs. Brooke as the Dean's wife makes the most of her slight opportunities, and Miss Irene Vanbrugh does the same as Olive Darnley, the clergyman's literary and scientific daughter. There is a Russian adventuress, with designs upon the earl, who



MR HOLMAN CLARK



MR CHARLES ALLEN

first works with the Charlatan and afterwards denounces him. The part is played by Miss Gertrude Kingston intelligently, but rather stiffly, an effect which perhaps the foreign accent helps to bring about.



MISS GERTRUDE KINGSTON