

OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC

"DICK SHERIDAN."

MR. BUCHANAN, I believe, does not think much of the last century. This is, of course, very bad for the last century, but what was a poor century to do? It tried to be learned, it attempted to be witty, it wanted to be humorous. Certainly its intentions were good. It gave us Johnson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Goldsmith, Horace Walpole, Charles Lamb,



Theodore Hook, as well as the author of *The School for Scandal*. How was it to know that Mr. Buchanan was coming after, and Mr. T. P. O'Connor, and the lamented Poet Close? And, whatever any one may say to the contrary, there is unhappily a literary glamour over the eighteenth century, of which, until the new journalism has been able to dispel it, the new dramatist who would be successful is bound to take note. In short, a play dealing with the life of Sheridan should be sparkling, pointed,



gay, even to recklessness, and, before all, it should be a comedy. Mr. Buchanan has given us a melodrama rather than a comedy, and we gain nothing by this broader—and easier—treatment. On the contrary, we lose much; we lose in the plot which, though founded upon fact, Adelpheis itself down into the groove of a hundred other plots; we lose in the dialogue, which is of an everyday kind; and we lose in the character, especially in



that of Sheridan himself. The dash, brilliancy, good humour, want of moral discrimination—in fact, the Irishisms, to which he owed his triumphs and his troubles—have no opportunity of displaying themselves. The whole time of Mr. Buchanan's Sheridan is taken up in the making of sentimental love and the combating of persistent villainy. In real life he was much like his own Charles Surface; at the Comedy Theatre he is not unlike the traditional sailor hero of the Brothers Gatti. This is why I do not think that *Dick Sheridan* will live as long as *The School for Scandal*, although it pleases those who like it. There is no doubt, at all events, that the *mise en scène*, which reproduces a picturesque period, is very effective, and that as the heroine Miss Emery is most sympathetic. It is not necessary to speak at length of the plot, which deals largely with the story of Sheridan's elopement and marriage with his first wife, Miss Linley. The play opens at Bath, where a certain Lady Miller, with the spitefulness at least of Mrs. Candour, is in love with Sheridan, and says unkind things of the young singer to whom he is devoted. He has rivals in the wicked Captain Matthews and the elderly dilettante Lord Dazzleton. Mr. Linley insists that his daughter shall marry the latter, and she resolves to run away. On the strength of a scandalous newspaper para-



MR LEWIS WALLER

graph, which Matthews suggests that Sheridan has written, Miss Linley consents that the villain shall—as a guardian—be the companion of her flight. But Matthews' scheme is discovered by Dr. O'Leary, a former tutor of Sheridan, now a sheriff's officer, and the hero and heroine escape in the chaise which the captain has engaged. They are wedded in France, but the marriage is concealed, and the lady returns to her friends until Sheridan shall be financially in a position to claim her. The husband pledges his clothes and writes *The Rivals*; Garrick likes the comedy, and so does Dazzleton until he recognises the author, when his position enables him to render it impossible at *Drury Lane*. But it is accepted at *Covent Garden*; the wife risks everything to bring the news. In the meantime she is still persecuted by Matthews, who by making Sir Lucius



MR EDMUND MAURICE

O'Trigger drunk, damns the piece on the first night. Sheridan, hopeless, offers his wife her release, which she refuses, and, driven to desperation by the pretensions of would-be husbands whom old Linley patronises, she openly proclaims her love for the unsuccessful author. The finical Dazzleton who, despite his vanity, is a good fellow, is afterwards disarmed by her appeals; a new actor—it was Clinch—plays Sir Lucius, and Sheridan's fame is made. Matthews, who has bought up the debts of Sheridan in order to get rid of him by imprisonment, is paid off by Dazzleton, and Sheridan, who fights a duel with the captain, pays him off too. So we leave Sheridan with the prospect of prosperity before him, and a happy married life; neither of which advantages unfortunately he quite knew how to realise. In certain parts of his performance the Sheridan of Mr. H. B. Irving is better than in others. In the more serious parts he gives indications of power; in the lighter ones he did

not strike me particularly. It is only fair to him to say, however, that in order to have done so he must have brought to them an interest which would not have been their own. What interest there may be in any of the personages of *Dick Sheridan* apart



MR CYRIL MAUDE

from Miss Linley is very small. It is fortunate that Miss Emery looks so charming and acts so well. Her work is not without difficulties. The diplomatic villainy of Matthews, the finical devotion of Dazzleton, the paternal sternness of old Linley, even the love-making of the hero himself—as the author has presented them—are not of the vigorous dramatic kind that draws forth responsive fire. The success of Miss Emery is a victory over her surroundings. Mr. Lewis Waller, as Matthews, gives a consistent and clever performance of this transparent rascal, whose shallowness he almost succeeds in overcoming. Mr. Edmund Maurice is equally clever and equally consistent as the



MR BRANDON THOMAS

heavy father, who should have been given more reason than Mr. Buchanan gives for the alliances which he approves and the marriages which he opposes. Is it anxiety for his daughter's welfare which inspires him, or the desire to live upon her earnings? One does not know, and the impression is unfortunate. Mr. Maude is not so consequent as his colleagues in his treatment of Dazzleton. He makes his lordship begin like a dancing master and finish like a Chesterfield. I am sure that there was never in nature such a transition from Pierrot to Mœcenas. The strangest compound of all is that of O'Leary, LL.D., Irish tutor, Sheriff's officer, and body servant to Sheridan. Mr. Brandon Thomas fills this multiform part as roundly as may be and as Irishly as is possible. Mr. Will Dennis comes in as David Garrick, and Mr. Byron as Abednego, a money lender. It is rather a Joe Millerish episode the scene in which Sheridan very shabbily gets the better of the Jew, but Mr. Byron elicits fresh laughter for it. Miss Vane is the malicious and jealous Lady Miller, and Miss Lena Ashwell the outspoken Lady Pamela Stirrup, in love with the horsey Sir Harry Chase—played sufficiently by Mr. Sydney Brough. Miss Pattie Browne is Mistress Lappet, Miss Linley's woman, who wishes to marry the Irish tutor and takes care to let him know it. I have seen something like it in *opéra bouffe*.



MR BYRON