

OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC.

“JOSEPH'S SWEETHEART”

At one point of Mr. Buchanan's career I hoped better things from him than *Joseph's Sweetheart*. But I begin to think now that for a new Sheridan or a new Beaumarchais we shall after all have to look elsewhere. As Mr. Buchanan has become more of a playwright he has become less of a dramatist. The latter

is the prouder *métier*; the former is the easier one; and any literary mechanic with a knowledge of stage resources and a memory for stage traditions may aspire to glory in this sense. *Joseph's Sweetheart*, which stands forth at the Vaudeville with all the forms and pretensions of old comedy, would at the Britannia or the Elephant and Castle pass for old melodrama without the alteration of a line. I admit the powder and patches and the picturesque comedy costumes which Mr. Buchanan's personages wear. But on the stage, as away from

it, dress is not everything. Nor will the name of Fielding without Fielding's spirit give the charm of classical comedy to the transportine in masquerade. It is hard to see why Fielding is brought into question. The playwright talks of having utilised some of his characters. Except Mrs. Slipslop, who has already been utilised *ad nauseam*, none of them are revived here in the flesh and blood of the original. Joseph himself, Lady Booby, Parson Adams, I should scarcely have known again in their new relations but for their names. I have no doubt myself what Fielding—writing a satire—meant us to understand by the unconquerable virtue of Joseph Andrews. Tempted by two old women and a girl of no reputation, he was constant to the charming heroine because there was very little inducement by comparison to lead him astray. Mr. Buchanan, perhaps rightly for the interest of his play, makes Lady Booby younger and more attractive than we realise her from the book, and at once emphasises an unalterable devotion of Joseph to Fanny Goodwill. The rivalry of a wealthy and presentable widow to the modest graces of a fortuneless maiden is not a novel starting point certainly, but there was no reason why the complications arising out of such a position should not be more or less away from the commonplace. I can forgive Mr. Buchanan for not following Fielding after having modified his premises, but I have no sympathy whatever for the dramatic platitude which he has given us out of his own head, or other where. How often before have we seen the foppish peer who abducts village damsels; the



chivalrous humble lover who arrives a minute too late; the highly respectable baronet who sighs for his long-lost only son; the wandering poacher-gipsy who has stolen the missing boy; the crowd of fierce yokels who hunt the wicked gipsy to the good parson's gate; the good parson who saves the wicked gipsy and earns his gratitude for ever and a day! We have all these well-worn elements in *Joseph's Sweetheart*, and many more of the same ingenuous kind. The incident in which Lady Booby, failing to win the heart of Joseph Andrews, accuses him in her anger of an attempt upon her honour, goes back, if I remember rightly, to the time of Mrs. Potiphar. The one in which Lady Booby visits her rival a prisoner in the hands of her confederate, Lord Fellamar, exults at her misery, and rejects her piteous appeals for mercy, is scarcely less familiar. The same may be said of the episodes in Ranelagh-gardens, from

the spectacle of the parson among the sirens, recalling *Fascination*, to the sword fight, after the rescue, *à la Capulet* and Montague. I did not notice anything in the dialogue—which is not Fielding's except on occasions—to atone for the traditional method of the treatment. There is a good deal of talk about wicked peers, but that is rather an antiquated theme, and I should not have thought it worth mentioning but that, like other prophets of his school, Mr. Buchanan cannot help combating his own teachings. His hero, who suffers so much from the crimes of the great, which the virtuous in this play



denounce so often and so vehemently, is rewarded in the end by being able to identify himself with this very aristocracy, and seems to be not a little proud of it too. The plot of *Joseph's Sweetheart* has already been told. Failing in her designs upon her footman, Lady Booby prevails upon Lord Fellamar to abduct the charm-

ing Fanny Goodwill, who stands in her way. His lordship does this with the help of his scamp of a chaplain, Llewellyn-ap-Griffith, and bears the maiden to London. Here in his town



house he makes love to his prisoner, who appeals in vain to him and Lady Booby visiting her place of confinement. Meanwhile Lord Fellamar beats Griffith with his cane for some



offence or other, and makes an enemy of him forthwith. The angry Welshman, by way of revenge, promises to rescue the damsel. On his advice she pretends to yield somewhat to her



persecutor's entreaties, and so he is prevailed upon to take her to Ranelagh. The chaplain looks up his friends, and after Fanny, in terror at the surroundings of the place, has implored help in



vain from all the gentlemen and all the ladies there, she is saved *in extremis* by Joseph, Parson Adams, and the Welsh contingent. The piece pleases the popular portion of the house, and has plenty of action and business in its second-hand way. The love

scene, which is much helped by the pretty cottage, in the second act, is pleasing, although the vicar's numerous children who eat porridge, and the naughty-boy-Jack-like get-up of Mr. Conway as a sympathetic rustic, are not without a sugges-



tion of pantomime. Mr. Conway makes a very good Joseph (of Mr. Buchanan), and must be congratulated upon his vigorous constitution. It is not everybody who, twenty-four hours after a sword thrust, which nearly kills him, would be again whole and hearty, and able to do doughty deeds in London town. Perhaps, however, he wore the parson's sermons down his back the first time, as when he fights the duel with Fellamar afterwards he wears them over his heart. Rather a shabby advantage for so honest a hero to take, but Mr. Buchanan, not the actor, is to blame. The melancholy farewell which Joseph bids everybody whom he can button-hole when he is about to start for the combat is also eminently unheroic. As Fanny Goodwill, Miss Kate Rorke is excellent throughout. In the love passages with Joseph she is capital, and in the sudden change when, a prisoner, she is compelled to pretend to be relaxing with regard to Fellamar, she deals very gracefully with a somewhat unpleasant situation. The Adams of the play is not a difficult part, and Mr. Thorne makes it sufficiently interesting. The parson's anxiety to publish his sermons is overdone, and his Virgil is not always literal. However, while the old gentleman would be perhaps a bit prosy but for the extravagance of the situations in which he is found, still, as it is, Mr. Thorne manages to secure a good many laughs without excessive straining for them. The Lady Booby of the play suffers from a want of thoroughness in her passion for the hero, and from an over vindictiveness in her persecution of Joseph and Fanny. I think that Miss Vane does her best with what the author gave her to do, but I have liked her better in many other characters. Mr. William Rignold is Sir George Wilson, the sad and respectable father of the lost Joseph. He compounds a felony,



though, with the miscreant gipsy in order to get back the missing young man. Mr. F. Thorne is the Llewellyn-ap-Griffith, with a Welsh accent which may be correct if the actor says so. It is long since I was in Wales. Mr. Cyril Maude is the puffed and gilded Lord Fellamar, the fop of a well-known type. Mr. Mr. J. S. Blythe is the hunted outcast gipsy—Jim, who stole Joseph, and identifies him later when required. Parson Adams gives Jim the coat off his back before the audience; but Jim returns it to the parson quietly behind the scenes. Miss Eliza Johnstone is the Mrs. Slipslop, who dwells upon her irritating malapropisms with quite sufficient self-consciousness, and Miss Gladys Homfreys looks a matronly Mrs. Adams.