

OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC.

"MISS BROWN."

Miss Brown appears to be doing fairly well at the Vaudeville. It would have come to us fresher, no doubt, had Messrs. Buchanan and Co. written their play some centuries ago. I do not know of any subject which has been more fully exploited—especially by the humourists. Actæon at Diana's hunting class was the first "Miss Brown"; for I am sure—whatever Max Müller may say—that the myth was intended to be comic. Thence—by way of mediæval cavaliers in startled nunneries,



MR. FREDERICK KERR AS CAPTAIN COURTENAY

adventurous midshipmen in trembling harems, and dashing beaux in fluttered seminaries—the joke has come down almost to our own times. One would think that it was nearly worn out and a trifle old-fashioned; but we must make the best of it, and try to forget that there were chestnuts before Bushey. Despite the success of Charley's Aunt, in which Mr. Penley's

there is more mockery than artistic reproduction of the feminine manner and bearing. But more than this is required. One wants, in fact, something so much like the real thing, that there may be at least a spice of conviction for the people in front. As it is, we have the characters on the stage professing to believe, for the two hours through, that they are dealing with a young lady, and the audience feeling all the while that such faith is entirely against all reason. It may be amusement, this kind of thing, but it certainly is not drama. There is one redeeming feature in the arrangement, that the play comes out of it harmless, and the performance avoids possible difficulties at one or two situations springing from the masquerade which now there is no need to touch upon. It will be seen from my colleague's sketch that Mr. Kerr as "Miss Brown" does not look unlike Charles II. in the character of Kerneguy, and I should not be surprised if he had modelled his clumsy girl upon Scott's clumsy youth in "Woodstock." "Miss Brown," as is generally known by this time, is the assumed character of Captain Courtenay. His wife, a ward in Chancery, having been captured and taken back to boarding school, he is introduced into the establishment as a young lady pupil, and tries to effect her release. The prim schoolmistress kisses "Miss Brown"; the boarder from the West Indies, the languishing Euphemia,

stories, and allows time for Captain Courtenay to transform himself into "Miss Brown." Very capitally Miss Gladys Homfrey plays the part of Mrs. O'Gallagher; and Mr. J. Beauchamp, always good, was never better or more genial than in his capital Irish major. Mr. Hibbertson, the guardian, or solicitor to the guardians, is played with intention—perhaps with a little



MR. FREDERICK KERR AS MISS BROWN.

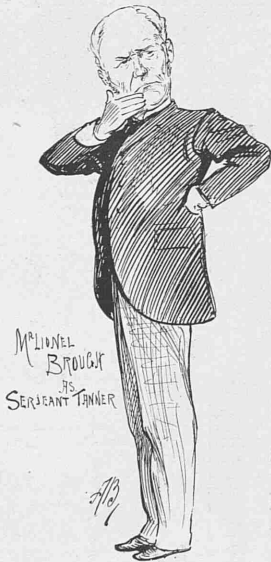
too much of it—by Mr. Gilbert Farquhar. The play, on the whole, is not quite worthy of the performance; there are places where the action hangs and the talk is not very interesting. It is what one may call a painstaking piece—a piece with plenty



MR. ROBB HARWOOD AS HERR NON MOSER

tells her of her love secrets; the detective, who has been sent to prevent a second elopement, yields to the impostor's charms. There is, however, an enemy on the watch, the sentimental German music-master. He is in love with all the girls, especially with the bride of "Miss Brown," and after the detective has been wheeled into his own handcuffs, almost prevents the second flight. The Miss Romney, the most proper of schoolmistresses, and the most easily shocked, is delightfully

funny as played by Miss M. A. Victor. The bride, Angela, of Miss Palfrey, has also all necessary life and naturalness. The West Indian girl, who comes back as a reminiscence—is it of Reynolds or Wilkie Collins?—is acted clearly and sympathetically by Miss Esmé Beringer. It is quite a small character, but she makes much of it pictorially, thanks to her reading, which certainly has not been limited to the piece. The German professor, with locks à la Paderewski, is played with good accent and good force by Mr. Robb Harwood. It is an excellent study—of the Du Maurier type. Miss Daisy Brough is Matilda Jones, the low-spirited confidant of Angela; she labours under the weight of a disappointment, but ultimately proves ready for



MISS M. A. VICTOR AS ANGELA

MISS M. A. VICTOR AS MISS ROMNEY



wonderful performance of the old lady makes illusion nearly possible, it may be taken for granted that to ask a man to dress as a woman on the modern stage is a mistake to begin with. It is like the marvellous disguises in our detective stories—marvellous only in a book; they are merely for reading about, they



MR. JOHN BEAUCHAMP AS MAJOR O'GALLAGHER

of good effort but not enough spontaneity. The authors, as I have said, having begun with the mistake of a man in a girl's dress—a resource which, except under very favourable conditions indeed, should be confined to plays of the romantic



MR. GILBERT FARQUHAR AS MR. HIBBERTSON.

period—should have dressed their "Miss Brown" as a "new woman," who, having a natural right to look awkward, would have made Mr. Kerr's performance really funny, even if he did not see more opportunities for fun than he does at present.



MISS MAY PALFREY AS ANGELA BRIGHTWELL.

would not stand for a moment if taken out of it and brought face to face. It is just the same with "Miss Brown." Not for two minutes does Mr. Kerr give one the impression that he is anything but a man in an eccentric dress. One laughs at his awkwardness, which is exaggerated, and his mimicry, in which

another venture. Miss Brough does very well. The detective is an elderly man, as dull as say Mr. Toppin. Mr. Brough gives him a rustic dialect and emphasises the stupidity. It is a capital bit of character-acting, and would pass admirably for a rural Dogberry; but I fancy that, fool or not, a sergeant of Scotland-yard would have more of the manner, if not the virtue, of being smart. Captain Courtenay has had the discreet help of his comrade Major O'Gallagher in the steps preceding his marriage, and the hearty Mrs. O'Gallagher has been an active agent in the affair. It is she who at the wedding breakfast, when the young couple are on the point of discovery, throws herself in the way of the pursuers. Facing the schoolmistress, the guardian, and the detective, she temporises and tells white