

## OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC.

## "SWEET NANCY."

No sooner is one new piece of Mr. Buchanan's noticed, than there is another new piece of his to be seen. For my own part I should not be sorry if there were a wider gap now and then between these successive examples of the adapter's industry.

I think that in that case we should probably get better work from him, and work more likely to make a lasting impression. As it is, I should hardly like to have to say beforehand how much of the drama of this prolific author is destined to give satisfaction to future ages. Some day or other, at all events, there will be a reaction among playgoers in favour of pieces stronger, truer, and more in earnest—either for tears or laughter—than those which are held good enough at present; and when that time comes I do not know indeed how much of Mr. Buchanan may be there. There is no doubt that Miss Broughton's novel of "Nancy" is a book with many excellent

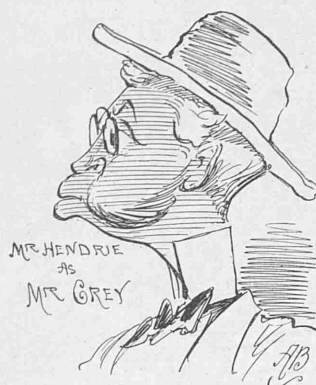


qualities; not the least attractive of these is its admirable portraiture of character. The six spirited children with their individualities; the patient mother; the selfish father, at home a bully and to the world so debonnaire; the middle-aged suitor and future husband, generous and tender throughout; the youthful lover, handsome and false, but without courage, except what comes of temper and vanity—all these are well drawn. Whether, however, the plot as it is carried out, after the heroine of nineteen has wedded her admirer of forty-seven, is equally convincing, I beg leave to doubt. Indeed, I am perfectly certain that no wife, young or old, after twelve months of marriage to a man whom she "likes" and respects as Nancy does Sir Roger Tempest—more especially no wife so frank



and intelligent as Nancy has shown herself to be—would allow her loyalty to be placed in doubt, rather than confess that she has spurned another man's advances. Yet this is what—forgetting the self-assertive pride of female innocence, and the confidences which the bride of a year may reasonably be allowed—Miss Broughton compels Nancy to do. In her husband's absence she has been addressed by a younger man, who she believed was devoted to her sister. She has rejected him with contempt, shedding tears at his depravity. Her husband has heard of these tears, and is persuaded that they are of regret for the love which she has refused. But Nancy lies over and over again rather than give him the true version; and when at length she does tell him the facts, her only excuse for the falsehood and the misery which it has caused is, "I was so deadly, deadly ashamed." In his adaptation, Mr. Buchanan slightly strengthens Nancy's reasons for concealment, by making her anxious that Barbara, the jilted sister,

shall not know of the young man's baseness. But the adapter does not get over the difficulty that, although Barbara's feelings have to be spared, it is only by straining human nature that the husband is not told. On the whole, the play and the novel seem to me to have the same weakness—improbability at the very centre of dramatic action. One or two of the characters have suffered by the transfer to the stage. The



most notable instance is that of the father, Mr. Grey. Not to blame Mr. Buchanan for the rendering of the part which Mr. Hendrie gives us—and his acting does not err on the side of subtlety—the new Mr. Grey wants tone in both his phases. His moroseness lacks distinction and his suavity lacks delicacy. The part of Frank Musgrave, the lover, also has lost some of its original freshness, as well as Mr. Grey. Musgrave seems, upon the stage, little better than an everyday scamp. The bringing him in at the last moment—storyteller and deceiver as he has proved to be—to put Nancy and her husband right by a full confession, is another departure from the original. It is a concession to the conventional, too. But I do not admire the resource. It always seems to me, when the assistance of the villain is needed to wind up a drama, that the author has got into a fix, and does not know what else to do. In the play, Barbara, the forlorn sister, lives on to get the better of her disappointment. It will be remembered that in the novel she dies of a fever caught from her brother Algernon, when he is deserted by the frivolous Mrs.



Huntley. The flirtation of the boy with the widow is made more of at the Lyric than in the book, and the youth is caused to quarrel with Nancy on the lady's account, adding something to the young wife's difficulties, but not a great deal. For the rest the novel and the play run nearly parallel. There are the six united children who live in awe of their father, and are kept down and kept back to such a degree that Nancy, the second daughter, wears a pinafore at nineteen. Frank and piquant, tired of repression, which results in frolicsome reaction whenever there is a chance, the heroine is devoted to her brothers and sisters, whom she helps to make the best of their uncomfortable home. Her great anxiety is to see her elder sister Barbara married to Frank Musgrave; and after Barbara—who deserves a paragon for her amiability and beauty—she would not mind being married herself. But she must have a husband generous and rich enough to forward the interest of the girls, and do great things for her comrades the boys. No such person she assumes is likely to think of her; and so when Sir Roger Tempest, who is old enough to be her father, has helped her down from the wall on which he surprises her perching, she makes him a confidant of her views. She likes the general for his good looks, his courtesy, and other sympathetic qualities, and is friends with him at once. Afterwards, when, encouraged by Mr. Grey, Sir Roger asks Nancy to marry him, she consents with little hesitation, the principal drawback which occurs to her being the chaff of the girls and boys. They are married, and the honeymoon is over. The heroine seems happy, although she misses the excitements of the old home. But there is a Mrs. Huntley whom Sir Roger has to visit on business; it is very harmless business, yet Sir Roger does not explain. Nancy is jealous, and talks of "separation." The general, called suddenly on for foreign service, answers that they must "separate" indeed. He goes off without saying where he is going, and leaves the regretful wife desperate, thinking that he has left her for good. Absolutely in a serious play a situation like this is based upon a pun! However, the husband looks in again before leaving really, and there is a proper parting when he actually goes. This is very like *Caste*. While the husband is away, Nancy, for the sake of Barbara, encourages the visits of Musgrave, who seeks to confirm the idea that the

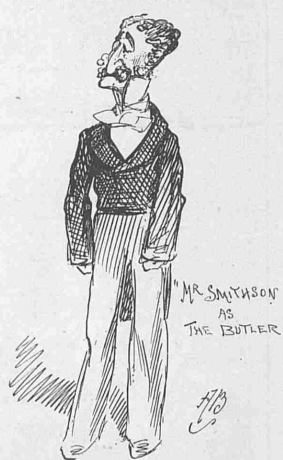


general thinks too much of Mrs. Huntley, and finally startles the young wife with a declaration of his own passion for herself. Instead of ringing the bell and ordering her adorer out of the house, Nancy weeps bitterly upon a sofa, while Musgrave continues to protest. The situation is absurd, and was far better managed in the novel, where the scene occurred in a lonely place out of doors. There is really no excuse for Lady Tempest



being discovered as she is by Mrs. Huntley and Algernon Grey in this extravagant situation, and it is not to be wondered at that they both think the worst of it. When the general comes back from the Cape, and Nancy refuses to speak out; and when Nancy learns that her husband has been at once to see Mrs. Huntley, and the general refuses to speak out, is it surprising that there should be a coolness between them? I

lost patience when this turn of affairs was reached, and was not relieved, until Mrs. Huntley having been proved a lady unworthy of Sir Roger's esteem, Frank Musgrave came in, looking ashamed of himself, and put the play away. The Frank Musgrave is Mr. Bucklaw, whose opportunities are very few. I have already said what I think of Mr. Hendrie's Mr. Grey. The gentle sister Barbara of Miss Jay is very graceful and very natural, by far I should say the best played female part in the piece.



I admit that Miss Hughes as Nancy is interesting and amusing in comedy, and shows power in the pathos, but I thought that the childishness—the tomboy idea of the part—was too much dwelt on, and got the impression on the whole of more effort than impulse. Mr. Neville is manly and gentle in the general's part. The boys and girls who run in and out in a string, like the characters in *The Wedding March*, might have been more hurtful than advantageous. But they are not at all badly played, and Mr. Esmond as the eldest son is excellent. Miss Frances Ivor is an efficient Mrs. Huntley after the mode of this style of part. There are scenes in *Sweet Nancy* at which one laughs if one feels in the humour, and some which are almost emotional. The latter have most effect when one takes them as they are without remembering how they come to be.