

OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC.

"THE SHOPWALKER."

If the dialogue of a stage piece is funny, then action in the story may sometimes be dispensed with; or, again, if the

THE SHOPWALKER



incident is lively, a want of brilliancy in the talk may sometimes be excused. But when a play lacks at once both sparkle and movement, it may be generally regarded as having very little interest indeed. *The Shopwalker* of Robert Buchanan and

Craven, or Tom Taylor. The conclusion must be the same in each case—and it may be extended to the musical drama too—that there has been a great falling off of late years not only in the matters of stage construction and characterisation, but in that of literary finish. I do not ask that the dialogue of a play should show the author's labours on the face of it, but I do think that I have a right to feel between the lines the presence of the thought which with good playwrights comes without great effort, and with inferior ones comes now and then if enough trouble is taken. I cannot regard *The Shopwalker* as worthy of Mr. Buchanan and his coadjutor either in respect of its story, which is so conventional in its bases, or in its working out, which is slow and only ceases to be conventional when it becomes unnatural. The early course of the plot is strain



MR S. WARDEN AS THE PROUD EARL

woman and tells the electors "go hang" secures his return—the voters are so much struck by his independence. The fall of the curtain leaves him an M.P. about to marry the faithful shop-girl. Mr. Weedon Grossmith makes his audience laugh I must confess, but his performance is not a great one as Tomkins. It does not sufficiently stand out from other performances of his; it wants resource and concentration; it is not subtle enough, and is not individual enough as a character. Miss Palfrey as the heroine has to be gentle, patient, and nice; she is all this, but the part is not one in which she can make her talents obvious. Miss Nina Boucicault, as her younger sister in the middle teens, has a bright and effective character which she quite realises. Mr. David James has excellent points as the rascally Scotchman. Mr. Sydney Warden is the well-meaning earl; Mr. Volpe is Mr. Hubbard, Tomkins's master in the shop, and Mr. Sydney Brough makes as much, I dare say, as may be of Captain Dudley, Tomkins's favoured rival. It is a poor part with something of priggery about it. Miss Annie Hill does very well as Dorothy Hubbard, the shop-girl who likes Tomkins



MISS MAY PALFREY

Charles Marlowe is a production which comes into the category last indicated; it is not brightly written, and there is not enough go in the plot to carry us along by itself. Compare *The Shopwalker*, which in style represents much of our dramatic

enough upon one's faith unless one is romantic; but the *finale*—the acceptance by the proud earl and his proud daughter of all the mortgages upon all the family estates as a free gift from the generous suitor of their horror, is simple burlesque. A very brief *résumé* will suffice to recall the plot, which belongs to a familiar type of fiction from which the only departures are in details. A young counter-jumper at Dorking has ideas like Horatio Sparkins, which he expresses somewhat in the tone of Mr. Guppy. Disregarding the soft glances of his master's gentle heiress, he loves from a distance the Lady Evelyn, Lord Doverdale's beautiful daughter. The death of an uncle in America makes him suddenly a millionaire, and by the encouragement of the earl's worldly sister he finds himself a guest in the home



MR DAVID JAMES

of the young lady of his apparently hopeless admiration. His vulgarity from ignorance, not from intention—for in his own sphere he is supposed to be rather an exemplary young man—is the source of what fun there is. It is nice mild fun of its kind, and gets the laugh which, in our superiority, we have always ready for the ambitious parvenu. The aunt encourages Tomkins—that is his name, which we have heard before—the earl endures him with dignity; the heroine suffers him; only the piquant younger sister, the lady Mabel, thinks it necessary now and then to give him a piece of her mind. Unfortunately he



MISS M A VICTOR

when he is poor and marries him after all when he is rich. Miss M. Talbot is the worldly Lady Munroe, the earl's sister; and Miss M. A. Victor, in utterly ridiculous costumes, is a very amusing Mrs. Tomkins—who might have been Mrs. Jarley of

has entrusted his interests to an unscrupulous lawyer's clerk, a Scotchman called McCollop, and the schemes of this plotting manager of his affairs, while for a time furthering the hopes of the harmless millionaire, ultimately cause their destruction—at least the destruction of the hopes nearest his heart. Tomkins has bought up the mortgages on the Doverdale estate with a view to present them to his noble bride if he can win her, but if not to give them to the earl for her sweet sake. McCollop persuades the lady that the earl will be ruined by the mortgagee if she does not marry him, and she to save her father, as she supposes, professes an attachment for Tomkins which she does not feel. When Tomkins discovers that this marriage would be a sacrifice, he not only releases Lady Evelyn, but offers her, and she accepts, the bonds on Doverdale for thousands upon thousands. They form in fact her dowry, facilitating her union with one Captain Dudley, her cousin, whom because of his poverty her friends have kept at a distance hitherto. The good and comic Tomkins has a good and comic mother of whom he is very fond, and of whom his enemies make fun when he stands as Conservative candidate for Dorking. The downright way in which he sticks by this dotting old



MR WEEDON GROSSMITH

work of to-day, with any comedy that comes to mind of H. J. Byron or Robertson. Go further, if you please, and compare an Adelphi drama up to date with one of the plays of Boucicault,



MR SIDNEY BROUGH

the waxworks.—We may talk as we please, but whenever we get near to fun and character in modern comedy we do not find ourselves far away from Dickens.