

## OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC.

## "A SOCIETY BUTTERFLY."

WHEN one has seen *A Society Butterfly* at the Opera Comique one is inclined to congratulate the management upon the discussion which it has caused. It was a lucky thing, indeed, for



those who are financially interested in the production, that the critic did not like the play, and that the authors did not like the criticism. Certainly the fuss which has been made on one side and the other—as much fuss as though there were really something worth worrying other people about—has helped to give *A Society Butterfly* more success than I think it would have had upon its merits merely. Broadly, Messrs. Robert Buchanan and Henry Murray have treated a commonplace idea in a very indifferent manner. The sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander notion, which they seek to impress upon us anew, is a truism of which we scarcely needed to be reminded. The stage has told us all about it many a time and oft, and had the efforts of the stage been futile the penny novelette would scarcely have allowed us to remain in doubt. By one unpleasant incident in *Françillon*, Dumas contrived to vary the monotony of this class of play; and, it is true, Messrs. Buchanan and Murray cite *Françillon*. But that is simply talk; their heroine, who uses the arguments of Dumas, stops dead short at that bold writer's distressingly disagreeable consequences. It is exceedingly desirable that she should do so; nevertheless, the fact remains, that

receives whom she pleases and visits where she likes. As her husband grows more and more jealous, she becomes more and more defiant, feeding his anxieties with appearances of which he may think the worst. After rehearsing with the guardsman, Captain Belton, a scene of *Venus and Paris*—he being the Paris—she takes part in some tableaux under his management; and when her husband goes home at dead of night refuses to accompany him. She has, in fact, overheard Mr. Dudley arrange an interview for the morrow with the gay American lady, and supposes that he is still infatuated with her, when really he has broken with the siren, who has made it a condition that he shall come in person for the love letters which she is to hand him back. Mrs. Parke—the American—brings the letters to Dudley's house, and is seen by Mrs. Dudley who has not returned until the morning. She has stayed with her friend the Duchess, but the husband, who does not know this at first, supposes all sorts of things, and resolves that he and his wife must part. To avoid a scandal he will go abroad, leaving Mrs. Dudley an income; he is very much grieved for he loves her more than ever. As for her, the visit of Mrs. Parke has convinced her that her husband is not to be redeemed, and she resolves to abscond on her own account. To this end she makes overtures to Belton, but he, when she tells him that she will take no share of her husband's money, reminds her that he is a poor man and that he would rather she remained with Mr. Dudley, in which case they could more conveniently flirt on. Disgusted with the mercenary guardsman, and explanations having been given by her husband as to the American, Mrs. Dudley is now anxious for a reconciliation, and the pair fall into one another's arms. The style in which the story is told is crude and spasmodic, and the character is not artistic. It is not sufficiently clear where the wife ceases to act the frivolity which she has assumed, and where she begins to be desperate. It is impossible to believe that a woman, clever enough to act this



frivolity and loving her husband enough to avoid compromising herself the while, could seriously think of leaving her home, however uncongenial, with so shabby and unattractive a Love-lace as Belton is. Moreover neither she nor the lover ever appears to be in earnest. The Duchess of Newhaven, who advises Mr. Dudley to adopt the homœopathic method for reclaiming Mrs. Dudley, is another personage to which one takes exception. Her talk is simply tedious with its repetitions of the technicalities of the stable. Whatever she has to say



when these consequences are excluded, we have nothing left which has not already been worn threadbare in piece after piece of *The Loan of a Lover* type. The wife, Mrs. Charles Dudley, neglected by her husband, is advised by a lady friend to neglect him in order to win him back. While Mr. Dudley flirts with a fast American, Mrs. Dudley flirts with a fast guardsman. Mr. Dudley was bored with his quiet family life; Mrs. Dudley makes his home a centre of society excitement. When the house is not *en fête* she is pleasure-seeking elsewhere. Her dress is the talk of the town, her photographs are in all the shops, and her costumes are the delight of the newspapers. She

she has such a roundabout journey in order to say it that she puts to blush even the longshore stage sailor when he discourses of the sea. While the wife has a confident and virtual saviour—for the Duchess protects Mrs. Dudley from Belton at the critical point—the husband has a parallel preserver in a Dr. Coppée, who, I take it, is a French physician, and who has an accent.



Very old-fashioned functions are those which these two characters undertake. However, not to find more fault, the piece has one thing in its favour; the tableaux and variety entertainment reduce its nominal four acts to a practical three. The tableaux and the dancing, and the guests assembled, are very well put upon the stage, and go with capital effect. Besides the cloud



and serpentine dances there is a dance of a lady in the character of a butterfly, which, I suppose, Mrs. Langtry is understood to take. There is not a great deal to speak of in the acting. Mrs. Langtry performs the part of Mrs. Dudley fairly, and dresses very well. Miss Rose Leclercq makes as much as can be made of the Duchess considering that what she has to say is



so hard to say with any appearance of spontaneity; it is as rugged as a cartload of bricks upset. Mr. William Herbert as the husband is careful, and I daresay as cheerful as the part allows. The Belton of Mr. Kerr carries the coolness of this male flirt to an excess which makes it lack interest. Mr. Beaumont is agreeable enough as the good French doctor. Mr. Rose is Lord Augustus Leith, an aristocratic poet whose eyesight is weak, and Miss E. B. Sheridan is the American widow, or adventuress—who pleased me as much as anyone in the performance. Mr. Charles R. Stuart as Bangle Dudley's valet shows some idea of character.