

OUR CAPTIOUS CRITIC.

AT THE OLYMPIC.



THE BOSS OF THE SHOW

It is really with some apprehension that I sit me down to pen a critical notice of a drama having for one of its authors Mr. Robert Buchanan. Poets are proverbially a thin-skinned race, but the one in question appears to have added the national to the poetic irritability of cuticle, and, unless the work of a late Duke of Argyll is fitly represented in his case by some mental factor, must lead a very uncomfortable existence. Perhaps, however, the virulent outbursts against unknown foes in which he from time to time indulges afford him similar relief to that obtained in a purely physical sense from the posts erected in bygone times by the nobleman referred to. He seems bent upon discovering spite in criticism, cabals amongst theatrical audiences, conspiracy in expression of disapproval, and evil in everything—save his own plays. Bearing in mind the readiness with which on several occasions he has assailed all and sundry who failed to do homage to his capacity as a dramatic author, I own that criticising one of his productions is about as pleasant a pastime as playing handball with a hedgehog. Yet, nevertheless, I feel bound, in the discharge of my duty, and at the risk of drawing down upon myself the wrath of this most touchy of his tribe, to deal honestly and capiously with the "New and Realistic Drama of English Life," entitled, *Alone in London*, conjointly written by Mr. Robert Buchanan and Miss Harriett Jay, and now being performed at the Olympic Theatre.



MR. WILKINSON

My criticism at the outset deals with the title, and takes the form of inquiry as to who is supposed to be alone in London. Presumably the heroine; yet this is hardly the case, as not only does her husband persist in inflicting upon her a companionship which she could, no doubt, very well dispense with, but she further enjoys the advantage of an extensive circle of friends and acquaintances, ranging from bankers down to banjo-players. She may echo the Reverend Robert Spalding's dislike of the great metropolis, but certainly not on the ground of enforced solitude. As regards the definition of the piece as new and realistic, I cannot help holding that the novelty in it appears to bear about the same proportion as bread to saek in the case of Falstaff (if a simile as old as some of Mr. Buchanan's novel incidents may be admitted), whilst its realism is in many places more than questionable. As a melodrama its cardinal fault is the lack of a sympathetic hero. The gentler sex are the great patrons of this form of dramatic entertainment, and they naturally desire such a figure upon the stage. This reasoning may appear sentimental, but experience has shown it to be sound. On somewhat identical grounds the fact of the heroine being married may be objected to as an element of non-success. There is never so much interest aroused by the misfortunes of a matron upon the stage as those of a maiden. A lesson we are all taught in real life is never to interfere between man and wife, and the effect of this lesson clings to us even when attempts are made to enlist our sympathies on behalf of a woman ill-used by her husband in a realistic drama of English life—realistic enough, by the way, in this one particular.



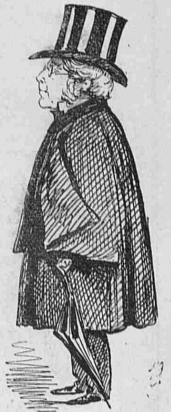
To descend to details, I find myself perplexed at the very outset of the play by chronological and meteorological problems. The opening scene represents a keeper's lodge in Suffolk. The time of year is apparently the prime of summer. The trees are in full foliage, not a leaf has faded or fallen, and the garden is aglow with bright-hued flowers. Yet one of the characters alludes to a recent bitter night, whilst another speaks of its being fine harvest weather, and as a climax two more go shooting with a brace of pointers—real, live, tail-wagging pointers—in a wood. What do they expect to find, even with the problematical aid of a brace of pointers, in a full-foliated wood in the height of summer? Yet, stay. Are they the cockney victims of the mentally afflicted under-keeper who is discovered industriously and insanely sandpapering the browning off his gun-barrel when the curtain rises? A truly bright notion.



THE REV. MR. JENKINSON

The first act shows us a fairly realistic cellar in Drury Lane, changing to a view of Westminster Bridge, with its vehicular traffic judiciously stopped in consideration of the impossibility of its being represented on the Olympic stage. Its pedestrian traffic, however, continues, but fluctuates in as marked a fashion as the price of manure in the story. People either flock by in crowds or abstain from coming by at all, whilst the fact of two of the characters being allowed to indulge in a breakdown without attracting any onlookers is puzzling to anyone who has

which common sense would suggest the avoidance of. Next comes the great sensational view of the Thames by moonlight, followed by that of the Old Sluice House and Flood Gates. Here we get the much-vaunted stupendous mechanical effects, and corresponding violation of the laws of probability and dynamics. I cannot understand how the flood gates could be opened with such startling speed and facility any more than I can reconcile attempted realism with the fact of their opening in the wrong direction. Nor can I fathom why John Biddlecombe, instead of bringing his boat alongside the drowning heroine and trying to get her into it, should be moved by a morbid desire to emulate and imitate Miles-na-Coppaleen in abandoning that ark of refuge, and taking a sensational header into such a swirl as no swimmer could stem.



ALONE IN LONDON

In the multitude of counsellors there may be safety, but in the multiplicity of characters there is hard work—for the critic. I am inclined to give the first place in my notice of the said characters to Miss Harriett Jay; not on account of any startling histrionic ability displayed by her, but because as one of the joint authors of the piece she has asserted a right to parade it in an irritatingly aggressive fashion. It was really most forbearing of her not to turn up with her basket of chickweed in the drawing-room of The Lilaes, or invest her stock-money in obtaining an entrance to the Inventions. She falls short in her impersonation of Tom Chickweed in a fashion as signal as it is painful, remaining obviously from first to last a woman in boy's clothes, and utterly failing to catch the peculiar intonation of the London street boy, an intonation as marked as the brogue of the Irishman or the burr of the Northumbrian. Her attempts at the pathetic can hardly be regarded as successful, though, on the other hand, her spasmodic and marionette-like exerts are really conducive to merriment. The wearisome pratings of Mrs. Juliet Anderson in the character of the orange woman, Mrs. Moloney, are sufficiently realistic to justify the anger they excited on the part of the villain, Richard Redcliffe.

*Per contra*, however, Miss Amy Roselle shows skill and discretion in her rendering of the heroine, Annie Meadows, playing carefully and quietly in the earlier part of the piece, and rising to a forcible, yet unexaggerated, display of well-phrased emotion later on. Miss Nellie Palmer is wise enough to sacrifice grace to realism and beauty to truth, and so imparts the necessary unpicturesqueness to the part of Liz Jenkinson, and Miss Grace Marsden is duly colourless as Ruth Clifden. Miss Maria Bushling plays one of those stage infants that help to render melodrama repulsive with some ability.

Mr. Leonard Boyne acts the part of John Biddlecombe with intelligence and unexaggeration, both in the lighter and the tenderer passages. But his dialect, whilst forcible enough in all conscience, is vague—decidedly vague, and hardly East Anglian. Nor do I think the "best clothes" of a well-to-do Suffolk miller would include the most wonderfully cut pair of corduroys I ever saw off a dandy coster. He would hardly go to church in them; nor can I fancy, in these days of enlightenment, that he would disport himself at the Inventions in equally startling attire, including a top-coat that looks as if it had been dipped into a mustard-pot. Mr. Herbert Standing, a clever and capable actor, is thoroughly at home in the part of Richard Redcliffe, for which a certain native hardness of manner decidedly recommends him. The only point of his impersonation I feel inclined to cavil at is his tucking up his cuffs prior to an intended assault on his wife in the third act. Mr. Percy Bell begins very well as Jenkinson, but by force of circumstances is rendered wearisome as the piece progresses. Mr. Gilbert Farquhar plays carefully as the preposterously benevolent old banker, Mr. Burnaby, whose habit of bestowing odd five pound notes on distressed young women in the streets is certainly not one advisable to be copied in these parlous times. Mr. Clarence J. Hagne is adequately innane as his son Walter Burnaby, and Mr. Dalton Summers is cleverly realistic in his impersonation of Dick Johnson.



THE ADDRESS



MISS AMY ROSELLE

frequented the locality depicted. A detective, too, is summoned when wanted with a celerity truly wonderful to those acquainted with the difficulty of obtaining the services of even an ordinary policeman in a hurry. Of course, as a stage detective, it is his duty to produce a pair of handcuffs, and clasp them round his prisoner's wrists, a proceeding which I think would call a smile to the features of several acquaintances of mine, sometimes to be met with in the vicinity of Scotland Yard. The two scenes into which the second act is divided represent respectively the exterior and interior of The Lilaes at Thames Ditton, the latter scene being mainly remarkable for the non-appearance in it of Miss Harriett



THE VILLAIN OF THE PLAY

Jay. The third act comprises many scenes and much sensation. First we get a view of the interior of the Inventions Exhibition, with the inevitable spasmodically fluctuating crowd, who all come on and sit down or rise up and go off with overwhelming unanimity. Then we have a view of the exterior, followed by one of the inside of a dwelling in that much maligned neighbourhood, Rotherhithe. Here we are favoured with the stock stage effect of an important paper being used as a pipelight, thereby exposing it gratuitously to the danger of recognition,



MR. BIDDLECOMBE

MR. WILLIAM HOLLAND, of the Covent Garden Circus Company, Limited, was the stage manager of the Lord Mayor's Show, and the means of introducing into the pageant the trades identified with the City Companies of which the Lord Mayor is a member.