

the whole of Hamlet and to have two performances in the same day in order to effect this object, seems quite at variance with such a method of treating Henry V. I can forgive him—though I observe some critics do not seem inclined to do so—for introducing a sort of ballet into the night scene in the French camp, and for concluding his third act with an ecclesiastical ceremony, since, as the said critics appear to have forgotten, Holinshed, upon whose authority Shakespeare all along relies, gives a warrant for such introductions, and even our author himself fairly indicates, that the latter took place, but I cannot forgive the excision of whole passages which contribute to the dramatic effect of the play as a whole! Apart from this protest on behalf of Shakespeare, I rejoice to say that I have almost unreserved commendation to bestow both upon the mounting and the rendering. The scenery, the properties, the accessories, and especially the costumes employed fulfilled their just functions in supporting the requisite illusion, and if there was anything in this respect that might be said to be wanting, it was only the occasional lack of great personages to augment the number of those present in the court or the council-chamber. Thus, in Scene III., Act I, of Mr. Benson's version, there are no counsellors at the table save the incriminated lords, and no peers to support Exeter, Bedford and Westmoreland, whereas a file of guards were standing behind, whose presence was unwarranted, and who should have been summoned from without, when Exeter arrests Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey. In the first scene in Act I., Mr. E. A. Warburton much distinguished himself as The Archbishop by his dignified bearing and intelligent enunciation, and Mr. Benson, himself, as the King, was a model of attention and concentrated sentiment. In fact, during the entire play, he was thoroughly in his part, and did not a little to realize the amazing beauty of Shakespeare's conception. On all sides, too, he was well supported, the comic characters of Pistol (in particular, as rendered by Mr. Oscar Ashe), Nym by Mr. H. O. Nicholson, Bardolph by Mr. Asheton Yonge, and The Boy by Miss Kitty Loftus being all admirably given, while Miss Denvil's Dame Quickly, now Pistol's wife, was cleverly embodied, though not pathetic enough in her celebrated description of Falstaff's death. Mr. Alfred Brydone's life-like portrayal of Charles VI., the king of France, was a remarkable example of character-acting, and enough in itself to secure a reputation, and this is a feather in Mr. Benson's cap, for, if I recollect aright, this gentleman has been long in his company. To say that Mr. G. R. Weir's Fluellen was a solid piece of excellent acting is only to say what might be expected from so experienced a performer, and Mr. A. M. Lang made all he could out of the not very strong part of Montjoy, the French herald. As Katherine, the French king's daughter, who is affianced to Henry in the exquisitely comic fifth Act, Mrs. Benson was absolutely charming, being the veritable ideal of Shakespeare's Princess herself, both in manner and appearance, and very cleverly playing up to her husband as the somewhat blunt though royal lover. This week she has resumed her old *role* as Titania in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which Mr. Benson, after his great success with it at the "Globe" when in London some years ago, courageously put on at the Lyceum, notwithstanding its current splendid revival by Mr. Beerbohm

Tree at "Her Majesty's." Now he is presenting Hamlet in its entirety; the first time, as far as I am aware, that such a thing has ever been done in London, and involving an afternoon, as well as an evening, performance! "Yes, we are, or ought to be, awake," as the lovers say in the "Dream," to the beauties of Shakespeare at last!

E. GILBERT HIGHTON.

A Book of the Week.

YEOMAN FLEETWOOD.*

The writing of this book may be warmly praised. It is a story of the days of the Regency, when social differences, in country neighbourhoods, were indeed sharply defined.

Yeoman Fleetwood, the hero, is the son of a *més-alliance*. His lady mother married his yeoman father, and spent the remainder of her life in an attitude of mute reproach to her excellent husband for having persuaded her to such a step. As the author says:

"His manner towards his wife was, in consequence, slightly tinged with remorse. The consideration of her absolutely penniless condition, when, in his hale middle-age, he had fallen a victim to her charms, did not seem in any way to mitigate his offence. His prevailing attitude towards her was one of atonement."

Simon, the only child of this union, is sent to Eton, but is there made to feel his social isolation. He is content to settle down to farm the land which for generations has belonged to his forefathers, as his mother says, he will never be anything but a yeoman!

The most charming part of the book, to my thinking, is the pathetic romance of his father's love for his mother: their death scene is profoundly moving, quite an achievement in the way of unforced, refined pathos.

Simon is in love, from very boyhood, and, like his father before him, he loves above his station. It is Rachel Charnock, the Squire's daughter, on whom his hopes are centred, and Rachel is one to try the patience of her wooers. She has foreign blood in her, and is a thorough paced coquette, wild and capricious, but with good qualities *au fond*.

I think that the author rather over-does Simon's solidity and gloom. The man was gently born, and had received a liberal education. One can hardly believe that such an one, handsome, young, and his own master, could have found the operations of ploughing, sowing and carrying hay to satisfy all his ideas of life, without any kind or sort of social distraction, except his half-tolerated visits to the Charnocks.

Rachel's idea of the Gretna Green marriage is quite in character. So in her behaviour afterwards, on hearing what her cousin Humphrey has to tell her. But her subsequent behaviour at Brighton is emphatically *not* natural. No girl of any modesty, let her ignorance and her recklessness be what they might, would have remained alone, at night at the Pavilion, to gamble with the Prince Regent and his boon companions. She was young and inexperienced, but this behaviour makes her either vicious or an idiot.

The little historic glimpse of Mrs. Fitzherbert, Beau Brummel, and the rest of the society of that day, is interesting, and, the preface leads one to hope, partially true to fact. We are glad that Simon conquers his happiness, but we are certainly left wondering as to

* By M. E. Francis. Longmans.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)