



CONDUCTORIAL COSTUME,

Respectfully suggested to Prof. Torrington for his next appearance with the Philharmonic Society.

BRITISH HUMORISTS OF THE DAY.

MR. William Archer, the dramatic critic, in delivering judgment on Mr. Sydney Grundy's latest play, "The New Woman," has some interesting things to say of the living humorists of the old land. We quote:

Mr. Grundy has the art of so devising his dialogue as to make his characters say amusing things without being positively witty; he arranges for them such openings as they cannot possibly miss. Very seldom does one of his personages give forth an epigram, a simile, or any sort of witticism, so to speak, unprovoked; it is generally the clash of two minds that produces the scintillation. It will probably be found that the majority of Mr. Grundy's good things take the form of tolerably obvious repartees—obvious to the person making them, but showing all the more ingenuity on Mr. Grundy's part, since he did not merely avail himself of the opportunity but invented it.

Take these scraps of dialogue (quoted from rough notes) as specimens: "Lady W. 'I've only one objection to new things—they're generally so old.' Miss Vivash. 'Not the New Woman!' Lady W. 'No, she's generally middle-aged.'" Again: "Miss Vivash. 'You can't deny that Woman has arrived and Man departed?' Lady W. (looking at her) 'I don't wonder at it.'" Yet again: "Lady W. 'Were you the only competitor for the Newdigate, Gerald?' Gerald. 'Oh, no! there were a dozen or so.' Lady W. 'Dear me!' Gerald. 'Does that surprise you?' Lady W. 'I shouldn't have thought it possible that Oxford could produce eleven worse poets.'" These sayings are certainly not miraculously witty; perhaps, as you read them in cold blood, you may think them poor enough. But in their context, and delivered by skilful actors, they are extremely amusing without seeming artificial or overstrained. In other words, Mr. Grundy's wit is dramatic, not fantastic or epigrammatic; and that I take to be its chief merit. Let me illustrate my point with a few comparisons. Here is the sort of thing which we accepted as wit twenty years ago, in the "comedies" of H. J. Byron: "A. 'Look at old So-

and-So. He's eighty and looks fifty. Yet he eats only one lean chop a day. *Toujours perdrix*, as the French say.' B. 'Come you said *one* first, and now you say *two*. . . . We've established baths in the town.' A. 'Baths are excellent things. *Mens sana in corpore sano*, as the Romans say.' B. 'Oh, but we've *women's* baths, too.'" Perhaps the rising generation will scarcely believe that this is a fair specimen of Byron's dialogue; but let them read his masterpiece *Our Boys*, and they will find that this is the staple form of facetiousness of a playwright who used to be acclaimed in his day as a master of "epigram." James Albery, a writer of very different calibre, had a strain of poetic imagination in his wit that is foreign to Mr. Grundy's more matter-of-fact talent. He abounded not so much in epigrams, perhaps, as in conceits. Witness this from *Apple Blossoms*: "Tom. 'Yes, I'm rich. I wouldn't take worlds for you, though I might go out and pick a dozen on any starlight night.' Jennie. 'Ah, Tom! stars do nicely to speckle one's talk with, don't they?'" Mr. Grundy is never tempted to "speckle his talk" in this fashion. He is chary even of such definite and detachable epigrams as Albery's "He fills his place as gravel fills a well"—a saying almost worthy to become proverbial. Mr. Gilbert's style of dialogue is too well known to require description. This admirable humorist has not Mr. Grundy's knack of so adjusting and concentrating commonplace talk as to give it an air of wit. It is always by his daring and paradoxical departures from possible conversation that Mr. Gilbert makes us laugh. His literary power is no less manifest in his prose dialogue than in his verses, but it is fantastic, not truly dramatic. Take, for instance, this little passage from *Engaged*, where Cheviot Hill returns to Be-



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