

adopted as the title of the whole, which from beginning to end is a series of contrasts—contrasts of character, contrasts of motive, contrasts of action. A decorative or over-literary faculty, or one less intrinsically dramatic than Mrs. Burnett's, would have found this element a burden, and worked out by such hands, it would have taken on strained or incongruous effects; her sprightly style, however, feels not a feather's weight of it, and in the whole story we failed to find a single forced situation. As to a true poet rhyme is not a clumsy contrivance of prosody, but a suggestive aid to the fancy, so to the true dramatic faculty, contrasts present helps rather than difficulties. This is evident in "A Fair Barbarian," which shows not only more palpably than any of her previous works, wherein the author's strength lies, but exhibits anew the superiority of the dramatic method, as method, over the descriptive or contemplative. Mrs. Burnett conceives her characters, not as historic facts more or less interesting because they exist in the knowledge of readers, but as related vital forces, owing their chief interest to their interdependence on and modification one of another. It is the difference between descriptive and physical geography. Add to this imaginative power an extraordinary sensibility to what is called "character," and great ingenuity in advancing the plot by most piquant and yet not unnatural situations, and the result is a story of unusual significance and fascination.

The creation of Octavia Bassett is likely to be judged by the reader according to his own experience, and consequently there will be many opinions of her faithfulness as an American type. Of the consistency of the portrait we think there can hardly be a difference of opinion: throughout a trying variety of incident, she remains the same willful, high-spirited, over-dressed, crude, good-natured, self-possessed, and altogether feminine nature with which we started. The same may be said of Lucia, the charming foil to Octavia; of the timid little aunt; of the Rev. Arthur Poppleton, the sparrowy curate, and even of Lady Theobald—perhaps the most hackneyed type in English fiction. These are all newly imagined and buoyantly sustained, and are drawn with admirable proportion and fine verbal precision. Upon Francis Barold, only, a few more words might have been bestowed with advantage—for, if we are to judge from the warm contentions of readers, the data upon which a full estimate of the relations of Octavia and Barold is to be formed, are not immediately evident, or, being evident, are not conclusive. Many of Octavia's sex regard the manner of the rejection as thoroughly justifiable, while others are inclined to quote the old rhyme:

"Perhaps it was well you rejected my love;
But why did you kick me down-stairs?"

"A Fair Barbarian," by Mrs. Burnett.*

THE caption of one of the chapters of this story—"Contrast"—might, not inappropriately, have been

* *A Fair Barbarian*. By Frances Hodgson Burnett. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co.

Upon the one side it is pleaded that a proposition of marriage is the highest compliment a man can pay: upon the other it is retorted that it may become the deepest of insults, and resort is had anew to the proof-texts. The humiliation of Barold is of course permissible only upon the theory that earlier in the book he discovers his selfishness and snobbery not

only to the reader but to Octavia. Some persons require close reading between the lines to discover this fact, and to any one who overlooks the following passage-at-arms it must have somewhat the aspect of a mental reservation of the author's:

"Is Lady Theobald very fond of you?" Octavia had asked, in the course of this visit.

"It is very kind of her if she is," he replied, with languid irony.

"Isn't she fond enough of you to do anything you ask her?" Octavia inquired.

"Really, I think not," he replied. "Imagine the degree of affection it requires! I am not fond enough of any one to do anything they ask me."

Octavia bestowed a long look upon him.

"Well," she remarked, after a pause, "I believe you are not. I should think so."

Barold colored very faintly.

"I say," he said, "is that an imputation, or something of that character? It sounds like it, you know."

Octavia did not reply directly. She laughed a little.

Barold's snobbishness to Octavia is more a matter of tone than of words, and Mrs. Burnett has, accordingly, treated it subtly; but, in view of Barold's respectful conduct toward her in the early part of the book, a little more emphasis might have been given to the above incident. No doubt many would have welcomed a relenting touch of generosity in Octavia at the last, but we are inclined to think Mrs. Burnett has been truer to the demands of the situation in rejecting this sentimental touch. Indeed, she might have omitted "Jack" entirely, and cleared Octavia of the imputation of disloyalty, but this would have involved a more refined type than the author set out to describe, and would have weakened the force of the climax. Mr. Barold himself would be surprised to learn that Mrs. Belasys turned out to be——but this must be left to Mrs. Burnett, who, if she chooses to follow her farther, will doubtless be accompanied by as large and eager an audience as that which has enjoyed this fine piece of literary comedy.