PARSON AS PLAYWRIGHT.

The Rev. Forbes Phillips is a parson with leanings towards the stage. He coquetted with the theatre when he induced Mrs Brown Potter to recite religious poems in his church at Gorleston; and Mrs Potter, who is one of the few really distinguished reciters of the English stage, put on a picture-hat and a spiritual gown, and fairly knocked the Gorleston congregation. Mr Phillips then mentioned a play that he had got up his sleeve, and Mrs Potter agreed to produce it at Yarmouth. Once more the natives thundered their applause. So Mrs Potter told Mr Phillips that if ever she had a season of her own in town she would put up his play, which is called, without any reason that I have been able to make out (says a well-known London critic), "For Church or Stage." If there had been a mark of interrogation after the title I should have understood that the reverend dramatist was in doubt as to whether his play was most fitted for representation in a play-house or a house of prayer, and in that case I should have suggested an addition to the title of the words "or the Rectorial Study," and should have experienced no compunction in advising him to adopt the last alternative. Mr Phillips appears to have thought that his play formed a rather daring contribution to the literature of sex drama; he anticipated that the production would cause a row; he even gave us to believe that it contained a moral. I have been trying to discover that moral, and if there is one I think it must be that a decent cocette is better than a weak and sensuous clergyman of the Established Church. I can quite believe it, but the fact doesn't affect me in the least. If the lesson he intended to convey had been that a parson can write a better play than a cocotte I should have felt more interest in his arguments. The mere fact that Noel Faber was a parson may cause a flutter in clerical circles—though I much doubt if it will—but it will not affect the play-going public, and it won't help the chances of the play. Mrs York—she is only Mrs by courtesy, and an actress to the extent of being an honorary member of the profession—falls in love with the much-married Noel Faber. Her love for him, so she declares, makes her a much better woman than ever she expected to be. It has the opposite effect on the parson, who leaves his wife and family to stop with her in her private apartments at the Savoy Hotel. But he is so undecided between going the "whole hog" with Mrs York and returning to his waiting family, that his inamorata recognises what a two-pany-halfpenny sort of sinner she has to deal with, and dismisses him. She does it very nicely. She says, "Go! before an unbeautiful finish comes to our love." And he goes. And the play ends. No row!

"THE FLUTE OF PAN."

Are we not making Royalty on the stage a little too cheap? The tendency to ridicule which was noticeable when the "pomp and circumstance" of a Court was elaborately reproduced in "The Flute of Pan," at the Shaftesbury Theatre, on Saturday, suggested that, after Captain Marshall and others have done so much to knock down the reverent admiration that hangs about regal ceremony, it is not easy to set it up again. "John Oliver Hobbes" is not at her best in "The Flute of Pan." It is a backboneless, "talky" play, in which the two principal characters are tepidly moved by a cheaply constructed misunderstanding, in which the dialogue is dotted with many pretentious and puzzling epigrams, and in which the comedy business has rather an unsavoury twang.

Boris, Earl of Feldershey, is an eccentric nobleman who has adopted a certain physician's advice to live on sixpence a day and earn it. In the first act he is at work in his studio, where he has painted a picture celebrating the power of simple nature. His cousin, Princess Margaret, the reigning sovereign of Siguria, visits him; and, referring to her former refusal of her addresses, cancels it and invites him to become her consort and repress certain threatened rebellions in her domains. He consents, but, on their very wedding day, he conceives a jealous suspicion. A certain Baverstock, an Englishman who is on a diplomatic mission to the court of Siguria, is carrying on an intrigue with the wife of the Master of the Horse, Count Rixensart, a lady who, under the mask of idiotic simplicity, conceals a most "coming-on" disposition, and throws herself at the head of every man she meets. Thus, when Boris, like Fritz, in "The Grand Duchess," is hurried off to fight for his country on his very wedding-day, he takes ill-feeling with him; and, when he returns victorious, he is still unsatisfied. He asks the Princess what Baverstock is doing at the Court, but, as this is a State secret, she refuses to tell him. Ultimately, she decides to abdicate, and, in the presence of her whole Court, divests herself of the signs of her royalty. This scene is mounted and dressed with very costly elaboration. In the last act, the obvious explanation and reconciliation take place. Boris had returned to his studio; and there he is found by the Princess, who convinces him that he had no cause for jealousy, and no reason to resent her silence, which was caused by one of the sternest duties of her position.

The authoress of the piece may congratulate herself on the care and liberality which were devoted to the production of her work. Everyone concerned in the performance on Saturday night worked hard and well; and the fullest justice was done both to the dialogue and the situations. Miss Olga Nethersole's Princess Margaret of Siguria had the very valuable quality of queenliness. The spirit of regal artificiality was very skilfully introduced, and, in her dealings both with her lover and her Court, Her Royal Highness bore herself nobly and graciously. Unfortunately, there was no strong dramatic scene to employ Miss Nethersole's fullest capacity; but she made the most of her materials, and, whenever there was the least chance of scoring, she was earnest, emotional, and expressive. It is rather uphill work, however, to go on "queening it," through three acts; and it is a still greater test to an actress's aplomb and verve for her to be obliged, by the necessity of her part to march solemnly and silently in, bearing the sceptre in one hand and the orb in the other. It was a warm tribute to Miss Nethersole's command over herself and her audience that, at this difficult point, she never flinched, and by her perfect serenity repressed the giggles of the unthinking and the jibes of the sarcastic. Her treatment of the love scenes between the Princess and the Earl was tactful, considerate, and clever,; and she bore the burden of her part with an ease and authority that showed the practised and experienced artist. It was to be regretted that so earnest and powerful an actress had not more opportunities of distinction than were given her in the character of Princess Margaret. Mr Herbert Waring did all that was possible with the role of Boris, Earl of Feldershey, and sustained it with a stern directness and a virile energy which were much appreciated. He hit off the brusque obstinacy of the painter-warrior very spiritedly; and at times, by his bold and emphatic embodiment, infused serious interest into the performance.

The supporting artists were more generously provided for by the authoress, and consequently had less to complain 'of. Miss Annie Hughes endeavoured, by an assumption of artlessness, and by developing the comedy of the role, to obscure the decided unpleasantness of the cynically-drawn character of the Countess Bertha Rixensart; Miss Kate Phillips had some rather "trying" costumes to wear, and not many good lines to speak as the Baroness d'Albreuse; and Miss Adeline Bourne played carefully as that rather ill-defined personage Madame Von Rauser. Mr C. W. Somerset suggested with skill and confidence the impish amorosity and senile conceit of the Prince Adolph of Nymwegen; and Mr Dawson Milward's fine style and polish, tall figure, and well modulated voice made his Count Rixensart a most natural and "convincing" embodiment. Mr W. T. Lovell was quite thrown away on the part of Harry Baverstock, and this fine actor is much to be commiserated on the poorness of his chance. It need hardly be said that he acted unimpeachably; but he is capable of much better things, and we hope to see him soon entrusted with a task more worthy of his powers. Mr Farren depicted Count Marche with great sharpness and firmness, and Mr Berte Thomas was excellent as Captain Bernstein. The Councillors and the domestics had sound and suitable representatives, the tall and handsome ladies who were engaged to embody the ladies of the Court doing their work creditably and carefully. The mounting was dazzling and sumptuous. Mr W. T. Hemsley's scenes made grand backgrounds for the stage pictures formed by the grouping of the grandees of both sexes in their costly costumes; and Miss Nethersole's robes and jewels were beautiful and brilliant.

At the conclusion, when she and the principal members of her company had been called again and again the audience endeavoured in vain to entice the authoress upon the stage; Mrs Craigie, with her accustomed tact and good taste, wisely refraining from putting in an appearance.—("Era," November 19.)

"LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST," AT THE COURT.

The production of such a little known play as "Love's Labour's Lost," at the Court, by Mr Charles Fry and his company of players was an interesting event, not only to the many young people that might have been seen in all parts of the theatre, but even to the hardened theatregoer. The play, which, Dr. Herford tells us, was produced in 1598, was revised later by Shakespeare for performance before Queen Elizabeth as a part of the Christmas festivities at Whitehall. Soon after the accession of James the First, the play, which had pleased Elizabeth, was resorted to by Shakespeare's company to entertain the new queen. In this connection Sir Walter Cape in 1604, writing to Lord Cranborne, says:—"I have been hunting all this morning for players, jugglers, and such kind of creatures," but "they are hard to find. Burbage says there is no new plays that the queen hath not seen, but they have revived an old one called "Love's Labour Lost," which for wit and mirth he says will please her exceedingly." Notwithstanding the favour shown to the play in Court circles it entirely disappeared from the stage. The one person introduced into the play who will in any way compare with the productions of Shakespeare's after years is Biron. Coleridge saw in him the original Benedict. This part on Saturday was played by Mr Charles Fry, who cleverly assumed the lightsome disposition and the true spirit of amusing raillery that make the character such a grateful one to play. "Now step I forth to whip hypocrisy," says Biron in one of his best speeches and Mr Fry suggested with no little cleverness the mental superiority of the French courtier and soldier, and played the part with the necessary distinction. The fanastical com-