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President of the Ulster Medical Society

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Presidential Opening Address Ulster Medical Society

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, – For upwards of forty years I have lived the busy life of a general practitioner attached to a small hospital in a provincial town. This demanded all my attention and most of my energies, but somehow within the last few years, I have been pitchforked into the arena of medical politics, and in that field great honours have been bestowed upon me. The very greatest of these – the position to which you, Sir, have installed me to-night

It is a great honour for any medical man to be elected President of this Society and immeasurably greater when that person is a humble general practitioner like myself. Some time ago a B.M.A. Committee put the G.P. under the microscope, and in their published report they say of him that “Only a superman could possess all the desirable qualities of the ideal general practitioner. He should have inexhaustible tact, wisdom, patience, discretion and imperturbability. He needs to be gentle, yet firm in speech and action, and his manner must inspire confidence and trust. He should have a kindly, humane approach to his patients, and however pressed for time, he should make each patient feel that his illness is of real concern to him.”

Formidable as is the list of qualities here cited, there is a very important one not as yet mentioned, viz., the making of speeches, to me the most terrifying of them all.

The little boy who was asked to explain the origin of speeches (species), and who answered that it was something that came down from the apes, was perhaps not so far wrong, though it resulted from either faulty hearing or a mistaken conception of Darwin’s evolutionary hypothesis. But, however the custom arose of inflicting a speech on an incoming president, it is a barbarous one and one that falls not infrequently on the medical practitioner.

As this is a learned and scientific Society, it is generally assumed that the President will have something to hand on, usually in his own speciality or



in some branch of medicine or medical practice in which he takes a particular interest; and it is here, ladies and gentlemen, that as President, I have my first lapse from the standards of my distinguished predecessors.

I am now approaching the working end of a busy life, and looking back over those years, I have tried to focus on something that gave me great help or great pleasure, and might equally well do the same for others; and with your permission and indulgence, I will leave work altogether in the background and talk to you for a short time on one of my hobbies, and ask you to spend an evening with “Gilbert and Sullivan.”

It is reasonably certain that there are in this audience a great many Gilbert and Sullivan fans who, like myself, find pleasure, enjoyment, and mental relaxation in the works of these great artists, to them I need not apologise. But to those others, doubtless higher minded and more deeply learned in drama and music, and who might reasonably be anticipating a learned discussion, I do most humbly apologise for reducing this meeting to a dissertation on musical comedy and a Gilbert and Sullivan concert, and ask

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you to bear with me for a short time and

“Winnow all my folly, folly, folly and you’ll find
A grain or two of truth among the chaff.

Oh, winnow all my folly, folly, folly and you’ll find
A grain or two of truth among the chaff.”

Who were they, these paladins of light opera who had all the world singing their praises? Two Victorian gentlemen of conflicting temperaments. They are still names to conjure with and are a theatrical trade mark for witty lyrics and sparkling melodies. Each of them had a distant connection with the art of medicine, in that Gilbert was the son of a Naval surgeon, and Sullivan, for the greater part of his life, suffered from renal calculus.

Which was the greater man, or greater artist? That question could lead to endless debate and no real comparison, for each was a master of his own art and each was vitally necessary to the other. Gilbert was certainly the more dominating personality and probably the better brain. He had written many plays before meeting Sullivan, but few of these had more than a limited success, and none have survived the interval of fifty years, with perhaps the exception of “Pygmalion and Galatea” and, of course, “The Bab Ballads.”

Sullivan, the finer artist, would, on the other hand, still be remembered for his compositions outside the partnership. But together they undoubtedly attained to the pinnacle of their success and have given us a series of comic operas which are as fresh and enjoyable to-day as they were some fifty years ago.

With the time at my disposal it will not be possible to do more than merely scratch the surface of their works and display the more obvious of the gems that they contain. The operas are classics, and like the classics in literature they will, I believe, live for ever. The English stage has nothing quite like them, and a curious thing, which to my mind stamps them with genius, is that they are as topical to-day in their allusions as ever they were.

Sullivan’s music has a sweet simplicity and a pure quality of melody. It is whimsical, sad, joyous, haunting, all in turn; and so it is with Gilbert’s lyrics. He took our national characteristics, even our national institutions, and pilloried them with the joy of laughter, with witticism and good natured ridicule. Gilbert’s lyrics are as mirrors for all of us to see ourselves as we really are, and having seen, exercise that truly British virtue of being able to laugh at our own vanities and weaknesses.

The plot of many of the operas can be found in one or other of “The Bab Ballads.” To quote from one,

“My Dream”: –

“The other night from cares exempt
I slept, and what d’you think I dreamt,
I dreamt that somehow I had come
To dwell in topsy-turveydom.”

Most of Gilbert’s plots were written in topsy-turveydom. A comic opera world where sailors talk in poetry and kings run on little errands for their ministers of state. Babies are being constantly mixed up or kidnapped, an adventure which really did happen to Gilbert during a visit to Italy at the age of three. He was ransomed for the equivalent of £25.

The scenes of many of his plays are really Victorian England, and many of his characters actual people, thinly disguised. He liked to poke fun at self-made men. For example, the judge in “Trial by Jury,” who starts as an impecunious party and marries a rich attorney’s elderly ugly daughter.

Or a dry dig at the Army and Navy. The Duke of Plaza Toro in “The Gondoliers,” who ‘led his regiment from behind, he found it less exciting.’ And Sir Joseph Porter, in “Pinafore,” says, ‘stick close to your desks, and never go to sea, and you all may be the rulers of the Queen’s Navee.’ The House of Lords gets its touch in “Iolanthe,” and the Law with its ‘highly susceptible Chancellor.’

If Gilbert was the brains of the Savoy Operas, Sullivan, a more human individual, was the heart. He could take a lyric of Gilbert’s, which seemed only mock serious, and give it beauty and appeal. Much of Sullivan’s serious work is forgotten, he wrote and composed innumerable songs and many hymns, of which the most famous and popular is that militant marching tune, “Onward, Christian Soldiers.”

His famous ballad, “The Lost Chord,” written at the bedside of his dying brother, is still popular, and it is an interesting fact that this composition leapt into further fame as the first phonograph record to be made in England. The singer was Sullivan’s lady friend, Mrs. Ronalds. He dedicated the ballad to her and at her request the manuscript was buried with her. Sullivan was a bachelor, but was she the dark lady of his sonnets?

Sullivan also left us one symphony, which he tells us was composed during a visit to Ireland whilst travelling by jaunting car from Holywood to Belfast. It has been called his Irish Symphony.

Gilbert and Sullivan met and were introduced in 1871. They were both already well-known men. Gilbert was one of the most popular of contemporary dramatists, and Sullivan had already arrived as a composer, notably with his incidental music to “The Tempest” as well as songs and hymns.

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The first result of their collaboration was the production of "Thespis," or "The Gods Grown Old." Strangely enough it was a failure and ran for only a short time. A quotation from it may explain a good deal of Gilbert's philosophy of life: –

"Well, well, it's the way of the world,
And will be through all it's futurity,
Though noodles are baroned and earled,
There's nothing for clever obscurity."

And this may also account for the paucity of honours, political or otherwise, that have been bestowed on the medical profession.

Their second effort, "Trial by Jury," was written and produced as a curtain raiser and replaced an airy trifle called "Cryptoconchoidsyphonostomata." It was an immediate success and made such a sensation that it quickly became the main attraction. You all know the story of this delightful dramatic cantata, a parody on a breach of promise trial, and how it ended when the judge announced to the Court: –

"Put your briefs upon the shelf,
I will marry her myself."

And this just after the defendant had vowed: –

"And this I am willing to say,
If it will appease their sorrow,
I'll marry one lady to-day
And I'll marry the other to-morrow."

There is no dialogue, and the play is a musical treat from the raising to the lowering of the curtain.

This success made professional friends of men so dissimilar and was the absolute foundation of all their after successes, and the forerunner of the many years of collaboration in the Savoy Operas.

However, they each continued with their more serious work, and D'Oyley Carte enters the scene as the producer and manager for their further joint efforts. In 1877 their first full length opera, "The Sorcerer," was produced. This and "Trial by Jury" are the only two operas that were not embellished with an alternative title.

"The Sorcerer" was quite a success, but somehow leaves less to be remembered than the other operas and contains fewer catch phrases. The music is delightful but did not become universally popular.

Their next play was "H.M.S. Pinafore," or "The Lass that Loved a Sailor." It is a satire, and gibes at the system that makes a civilian the head of the Navy and at a patriotism that rejoices in platitudes and cliches. "Pinafore" took America by storm and, of course, was pirated there, there being no copyright between the two countries. Consequently, Gilbert, Sullivan and D'Oyley Carte determined to produce their next effort

in America and so establish a right of way, as it were.

Neither Gilbert nor Sullivan felt unduly flattered when, in an after-dinner speech, an American judge hoped they would both be brought before him on a charge of being drunk and disorderly, so that he might repay the pleasure "Pinafore" had given him by letting them off.

"Pinafore" created the catch phrase "What, never?", with its answer "Well, hardly ever," which caused a Teutonic sufferer to exclaim, "Dot Pinafore expression vos a noosance, auf you tole a feller sometings he speaks nodings but von blame English. . . He say, vot hardly, sometime, nefer. Vot kind of language is dose?"

Even the late lamented Kaiser William III, when Sullivan was presented to him, sang, "He polished up the handle of the big front door."

The partnership was now going well, with three successful productions and their next effort, called "The Pirates of Penzance," or "The Slave of Duty," was first produced in New York to secure American copyright, whilst a token performance was given in a small theatre in Paigton, Devon, before being produced in London.

Throughout, the words are deliciously Gilbertian with contradictory humours and amazing perplexities. The most preposterous things are uttered by the characters in the most serious way and the maddest folly is clothed with a gravity that makes it ridiculous and laughable. Here again Gilbert pokes fun at the "nouveau riche," when General Stanley mourns his fate at the tombs of his ancestors, purchased less than a year ago.

The opening chorus is taken almost entirely from "Thespis," and my musical friends inform me that in that delightful solo, "Poor Wandering One," Sullivan has copied from or followed the lead of Verdi in "La Traviata." The best fun comes in the second act when the police and pirates do wordy battle and the Sergeant sings, "When a Felon's Not Engaged in his Employment," and also, "When the Foeman Bares his Steel." If "Pinafore" took New York by storm, "The Pirates" swept them off their feet, but at home there were criticisms, especially when the Pirate King remarks, "I don't think much of our profession, but contrasted with respectability, it is comparatively honest," and the skit, "I am the very model of a modern Major General" was not welcomed in certain quarters.

Their next production, "Patience," or "Bunthorne's Bride," satirises the aesthetic craze of 1880, when everything and everybody, according to these false amateurs of art, were either "too-too," or

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“utterly too-too” or “quite too utter,” and it was considered the smart thing

“To walk down Piccadilly,
With a poppy or a lily
In your mediaeval hand.”

Gilbert plays upon the axiom that nothing is certain except the improbable. The dialogue is witty all through and the lyrics are some of the very best he ever wrote.

Sullivan wrote a particularly happy score for “Patience,” and Gilbert himself maintained that its popularity was mainly due to the delightful music. It teams with golden numbers, and the best known perhaps are “The Heavy Dragoon,” “When I First Put this Uniform On,” “The Most Intense Young Man,” “Love is a Plaintive Song,” and the duet, “Prithee, Pretty Maiden.”

Musically the gem of the opera is the unaccompanied sextet, “I Hear the Soft Note of the Echoing Voice.” I hope you will listen to it shortly.

“Patience” was ‘ the first opera produced in the Savoy Theatre, which had just been specially built for the Gilbert and Sullivan productions, and was followed by “Iolanthe,” or “The Peer and the Peri,” which has been described as that very pretty yet somewhat cynical, politically speaking, fairy opera.

The plot is taken from the “Bab Ballads,” a fairy marries a mortal and the offspring partakes of the natures of both.

In creating the Lord Chancellor, Gilbert used all his legal knowledge, and of his gibes at bench and bar it may be safely said: –

“The joke is good extremely
And justifies the mirth.”

And his songs, “The Law is the True Embodiment of Everything that’s Excellent,” and “When I Went to the Bar as a Very Young Man,” are probably more widely known than any other songs in the English language, whilst the Nightmare Song is Gilbert’s supreme achievement as a patter song. Private Willis, Grenadier Guards, pokes nightly fun at our present political system: –

“When in that House M.P.’s divide,
If they’ve a brain and cerebellum too.
They’ve got to leave that brain outside
And vote just as their leaders tell ‘em to.”

And the legal conundrum:

“I wouldn’t say a word that could be
construed as injurious,
But to find a mother younger than her son is
rather curious
And that’s the kind of mother that is usually
spurious.”

The music is some of the prettiest and quaintest that Sullivan ever composed. For example, that charming duet, “None Shall Part Us,” the delightful ballad, “In Babyhood,” and the dignity and majesty of the Peers entrance and chorus.

About this time the Suffragist movement and the question of Votes for Women was being vigorously pursued. Gilbert was a firm opponent and satirises it in his next play, “Princess Ida,” or “Castle Adamant.”

He maintained that if women chained themselves to the Houses of Parliament, men should do likewise to the railings of the Queen Charlotte Maternity Home and demand beds for men.

The dialogue of “Princess Ida” -bristled with smart remarks and was well peppered with pungent puns.

King Gama says of the Princess: –

“She’s so particular
She’ll scarcely suffer Dr. Watt’s hymns,
And all the animals she owns are hers.”

Whilst another character remarks that the cock-crowing, at which the ladies of the University rise every morning, is “done by an accomplished hen.”

It had only a mediocre success, and yet it contains many of Sullivan’s charming melodies, catchy, tuneful and quaint. There is a delightful trio in the first act: –

“Expressive glances shall be our lances
And pops of sillery our light artillery.”

“The Disagreeable Man” is capital fun, ending with “And I Can’t Think Why.” The soldiers sing:–

“Politics we bar
They are not our bent,
On the whole we are
Not intelligent.”

By the way, it was in this piece that the late Sir Henry Lytton made his first appearance as a Savoyard.

“Princess Ida,” when revived in 1922, was received with thunders of applause, and one wonders why so charming a piece should have almost failed when first produced. The humours of Gilbert are very patently exploited, especially in the first two acts, while the characters of King Gama and his loutish sons are a sheer revelation of delight.

Their next production proved the most popular and the most successful of the series. I need scarcely say that it was “The Mikado,” or “The Town of Titipu.”

It is one of the few Savoy Operas, the origin of which cannot be traced back to the Bab Ballads. It was produced in 1885 and its original run was for 672 performances.

The arresting quality about “The Mikado,” the

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cleverest comic opera of its particular kind ever written, is that the story commences directly the curtain rises, and the plot, although Gilbertian, carries through to the end of the fable.

The lyrics are certainly the most delightful – semi-serious or wholly extravagant – that even Gilbert himself ever penned, whilst the music is all sparkle from beginning to end, from Nanki-Poo's first song, "A Wandering Minstrel I," to the finale: –

"The threatened clouds have passed away
And brightly shines each dawning day,
And though the, night may come too soon,
We've years and years of afternoon."

In addition to the antics of Ko-ko, the Lord High Executioner, it introduces that well-born pluralist character, Pooh-bah, which is really a play on British politics.

"A Pooh-Bah paid for his services.
I . . . a salaried minion.

But I do it. It revolts me. . . . But I do it."

Its best known songs are Yum Yum's solo, "The Sun and I," the immortal "Tit Willow," and "The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring." The "Three Little Maids from School" is, or are, a sheer joy.

Gilbert has once again his grim joke about punishment; "boiling oil and molten lead – something humorous but lingering" – and this appears also in the song,

"To sit in solemn silence in a dull, dark dock,
Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp
shock."

Extracts from the Mikado's song, "My Object All Sublime," are not unknown in this room, and I am still adding to my little list of those who never would be missed.

The last literary work of Gilbert's life was the re-writing of the story of "The Mikado" for children, in which there is a new and delightful version of the little list song.

Gilbert was asked why in writing this opera he did not use any of the distinctive class titles of old Japan. He replied that when he found that the aristocracy of old Japan were called Samurais, the obvious rhyming phrase had decided him to keep clear of historical accuracy.

A revival of the opera was once banned by the Lord Chamberlain as being insulting to the Japanese, then our allies, but a Japanese envoy who saw the play states, "I saw nothing whatsoever to complain of, but only bright music, much fun and no insults." "The Mikado" is still the most popular of all the Savoy Operas with the general public.

Strangely enough, Gilbert never saw his

productions after the final dress rehearsal and, with a single exception, he never witnessed any of his operas as a member of the audience.

It was going to be difficult to keep up to the standards of "The Mikado," and naturally the theatre-going public were certain to be very critical of its successor. Realising this, great care was taken with their next opera, which was called "Ruddigore," or "The Witches Curse."

There was great exception taken to the title to begin with. The press of the day shuddered with horror and there was a proposal to change the name to "Kensington Gore," but Sullivan stood firm.

Apropos of the name, there is a good story told of Gilbert: – A friend meeting him one day soon after its production, asked how his "Bloodygore" was going. Gilbert answered, "I presume you mean Ruddigore." "It's the same thing," said the friend. "Indeed," replied Gilbert acidly, "then if I say I admire your ruddy countenance (which I do), it means I like your bloody cheek (which I don't)."

Sullivan always contended that this opera contained some of the best of his light opera compositions, and the music received a chorus of admiration. There are some delightful solos, and "Ruddigore" abounds in duets and trios like, "I am a Very Abandoned Person." The chorus of the solo, "My Boy, You May Take it from Me," applies very much to the world of to-day, and not less to the General Health Services.

"If you wish in the world to advance,
Your merits you're bound to enhance,
You must stir it and stomp it
And blow your own trumpet,
Or, trust me, you haven't a chance."

The libretto is humorous ingenious and admirably constructed, but some have criticised it as too indefinite and halting, whilst Gilbert's song, "The Darned Mounseer," created such a storm in France that he was many times challenged to mortal combat.

The idea for a new plot came to Gilbert when waiting in a railway station where he had seen the picture of a Beefeater on a poster. He called it first, "The Tower of London," then "The Tower Warden," later still "The Beefeater," and finally, "The Yeoman of the Guard," or "The Merryman and his Maid."

In this opera the achievement of the collaborators reached its highest point – it is a perfect work of art. The story is human, free from topsy-turveydom, and Gilbert has put a great deal of what he thought was his essential self into the character of Jack Point, with his jest and joke, his quip and crank.

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Phoebe Meryll is perhaps the most fascinating and human character he ever created, she opens the play with a plaintive solo, "When Maiden Loves," and later is the delightful coquette in "Were I Thy Bride." One of the most attractive items is the duet, "I Have a Song to Sing O"; this caused Sullivan endless trouble in the setting, mainly, I believe, owing to the fact that each succeeding verse has two more lines than its predecessor, and was finally settled by Gilbert humming the rhythm to Sullivan – the only known instance of Gilbert suggesting the music as well as the words. This has been described to me by a musical friend as "using a simple harmony over a drone bass," or, in technical terms, "Tonic and dominant harmonies over a tonic pedal." I wouldn't know. There are other delightful songs, such as, "Is Life a Boon?" and "When Our Gallant Norman Foes," and many duets and trios culminating with the pathetic irony of the Jester's song, "They Don't Blame You so Long as You're Funny." In the opinion of many people, "The Yeomen of the Guard" is far superior, both musically and dramatically, to all the other operas. There is a strong flavour of sad philosophy all through the play; laughter and tears mingle in reasonable proportions.

Gilbert's favourites among his operas were "The Yeomen of the Guard," "Ruddigore," and "Utopia Ltd." Both he and Sullivan considered "The Yeomen" their most finished production, and after some years of neglect the first two now stand high in public favour, although Sullivan always had a great affection for his share in "Ruddigore."

After the melodrama of "The Yeomen" comes the rollicking comedy of "The Gondoliers," or "The King of Barataria." Produced in 1889, it is almost in prophetic vein, foretelling Socialism and Republicanism, and indeed present-day rationing, where the two republicans reigning jointly as kings have to demand one extra ration, which is only granted after legal argument.

The libretto was one of the wittiest Gilbert ever wrote and the music caught its spirit to perfection. The opera is a satire on snobbery, the snobbery of a courtier for whom a Queen can do no wrong.

"And noble Lords will scrape and bow
And double themselves in two."

And the corresponding snobbery at the other end of the scale.

"To everyone who feels inclined
Some post we undertake to find,
And all shall equal be."

The story is not only Gilbertian, but absolutely improbable, and consequently, very droll and

enjoyable. The show is full of brilliant costumes, sparkling music and witty inverted wisdom turned paradox, with many seductive melodies set to enchanting lyrics.

We meet The Duke of Plaza Toro, that "celebrated, cultivated, underrated nobleman," and the Grand Inquisitor with his song, "No Possible, Probable Shadow of Doubt, No Possible Doubt Whatever." Tessa has a beautiful solo, "When a Merry Maiden Marries, Sorrow Goes and Pleasure Tarries," Marco that gem of a tenor solo, "Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes," and The Grand Inquisitor that perfect comic song, "When Everyone is Somebodee, Then No One's Anybody."

Nowhere has Gilbert summed up his own philosophy more completely than in the quintet: –

"Try we lifelong we can never
Straighten out life's tangled skein,
Life's perhaps the only riddle
That we shrink from giving up."

After the production of "The Gondoliers," in writing to thank Sullivan for the splendid work he had done, Gilbert said: "It gives one the chance of shining right through the twentieth century with a reflected light." "Don't talk of reflected light," Sullivan answered, "in such a perfect book as 'The Gondoliers,' you shine with an individual brilliancy which no other writer can hope to attain."

Sullivan tells a good story against himself. He was watching a performance one night from the back of the dress circle and unconsciously began to hum the melody of the song then being sung. An elderly musical enthusiast turned angrily to him and said, "Look here, Sir, I paid my money to hear Sullivan's music, not yours."

A serious break in the partnership occurred during the run of this play, when each sought a new collaborator for his work, but with very limited success. Happily after some time the differences were smoothed over, and in October, 1893, Gilbert and Sullivan were again together at the Savoy with the presentation of "Utopia Ltd," or "The Flowers of Progress."

This was a satire of contemporary English life: – The party system, the War Office, company promoting and the Victorian drawing-room were all subjects for excellent jokes, yet it is also full of patriotic praise and fervour. It is said that "Utopia" was modelled upon that glorious country called Great Britain, to which some add, but others do not – Ireland.

It had a good run, and was followed in 1896 by "The Grand Duke," or "The Statutory Duel," the last

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Gilbert and Sullivan Opera and the least successful of the series. It was the final flash in the pan, in fact, it was only a spark, and the most famous association in theatrical history fizzled out like a damp squib. The plot was not convincing, being described as uninteresting, ingustible and dry, but the songs and ballads were, if anything, quaint and more fantastic than ever.

The parodying of the English Court was resented in the highest quarters, and probably had something to do with the comparative failure of this opera, the last of the Mohicans in the series of Savoy successes.

I have already talked too long, but no paper of this kind would be complete without a few of Gilbert's more polite stories. It was at a dinner party in New York that one of his best known "cracks" was born: – "Oh, Mr. Gilbert," a wealthy lady gushed, "your friend Mr. Sullivan's music is really too delightful. It reminds me so much of dear Bach. Do tell me, what is Bach doing just now? Is he still composing?" "Well, no, madam," Gilbert replied. "Just now, as a matter of fact, dear Bach is by way of decomposing."

He was never fond of, nor kind to the clergy, and once staying in a provincial hotel he found himself amongst a conference of divines. One addressing him with quiet irony said: "I should think, Mr. Gilbert, you must feel slightly out of place in this company." "Yes," answered Gilbert, "I feel like a lion in a den of Daniels."

Someone took him to task for using the word "coyful." "How can anyone be full of coy?" "I don't know," replied Gilbert, "but for that matter, how can anyone be full of bash?"

To an actress who had to cry, "Stay, let me speak," but who kept on crying, "Stay, stay, let me speak," he said: "It isn't stay, stay; it's *stay* – one stay – not a pair of stays."

A well-known manager, supposed to be living with a certain actress, had cast her for a leading part and was puffing her in the press. Gilbert's comment was "The fellow is blowing his own strumpet."

Watching a rehearsal one day with Barrington, Gilbert enquired, "Where's Miss A?" Barrington pointing backstage said, "She's round behind." "I know," said Gilbert, "but where is she?"

Chatting with a friend one day on the steps of his club, Gilbert was accosted by a stranger, "I beg your pardon, sir, do you happen to know a member of this club, with one eye, called Matthews?" "I can't say I do," answered Gilbert, adding after a grunt, "What's his other eye called?"

During the limerick craze, and he was

responsible for dozens, many of them unprintable, he wrote a verse that started a new fashion: –

"There was a young man of Tralee
Who was horribly stung by a wasp,
When they said, does it buzz,
He replied, Yes, it hurts,
It's a horrible brute of a hornet."

Once when invited to attend a concert in aid of the Soldiers' Daughters' Home, he regretted that he could not be present, but said that he would be delighted to see one of the Soldiers' Daughters home after the entertainment.

In a revival of "The Yeomen of the Guard," Gilbert complained that Workman, who played Jack Point, was caressing Elsie and Phoebe with unnecessary warmth. "Ah yes, I see," said Workman, "you would not kiss them more than once?" "Oh, indeed I would," exclaimed Gilbert, "but I must ask you not to."

His directions at rehearsals were emphatic and explicit, and having difficulty with the chorus of "The Gondoliers" when they sang "We Thank You Most Politely, Gay and Gallant Gondolieri," Gilbert explained with some force that the ladies *must* go down on the 'po,' and was very annoyed when someone sniggered.

Mr. Blackwell of Jam fame was his neighbour, and complained that some of Gilbert's servants had trespassed and done damage in his grounds. Gilbert wrote to him: "Dear Mr. Blackwell, I am exceedingly sorry that my men should have damaged your preserves."

Talking to the Editor of "Punch," Gilbert said: "I suppose you do get some good jokes sent in occasionally." "Oh, yes," said Burnand, "heaps." "Then," said Gilbert, "I wish to goodness you would use some of them."

"Actresses often paint, but they do not always draw," is another of his terse criticisms.

Gilbert was knighted in 1907, twenty-four years after Sullivan had received his title. He described it as a tin-pot, tuppence halfpenny sort of distinction, or as a commuted old age pension.

It is one of the ironies of the story of Gilbert and Sullivan that, great as was the immediate popularity of the operas, it was not until after Sullivan's death that there was a general and conscious appreciation of the gift that these two men had given to the English stage. They found it a prey to the coarsest, least refined form of burlesque, they left it an endowment of the richest wit and humour. The partnership of thirteen years had done its work, the great operas had been written. Gilbert and Sullivan

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tried other collaborators without success; they were ideal for one another, two strong personalities linked in words and music, even if they failed to agree together.

The end of the story – honours, titles, riches, the knowledge of having given to the world immortal works. And even in their passing was the quality of topsy-turveydom. The gay Sullivan, now an invalid, struggling to compose appropriate music for Kipling's "Absent-minded Beggar." And the ironic Gilbert, who once said: "I should like to die upon a summer day in my own garden," losing his life in saving a woman from drowning in a pool at his home near Harrow. What a Gilbertian contrast to the remark of Private Willis to the buxom Queen of the Fairies in "Iolanthe," when she pops the question: "Well, ma'am, I don't think much of a British soldier who wouldn't ill-convenience himself to save a female in distress."

Sullivan died on 22nd November, 1900, aged 58 years. His body was embalmed, and at the express wish of Queen Victoria, was buried in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral. A monument to his memory was erected in the Savoy Gardens, Embankment, and when Gilbert was asked to choose a quotation from one of the libretti, he suggested this couplet from the "Yeomen": –

"Is life a boon?
If so it must befall
That Death whene'er he call
Must call too soon."

The Gilbert and Sullivan Society still make a yearly pilgrimage and place wreaths on the column.

Gilbert was 75 when he died, and his remains were cremated – he had no use for the pomp and the purple – and his ashes are buried in Great Stanmore Churchyard. He is immortalised, however, by the erection of a bronze plaque placed in the Strand, opposite Charing Cross Station, close to the memorial to Sir Arthur Sullivan. The inscription is worthy of it and of him. "His foe was folly and his weapon wit."

"Fame was theirs at the end of their days,
An even greater fame is theirs to-day."