

## "FIRST-NIGHT PHOBIA" ATTACKS W. S. GILBERT

"SWEET are the uses of advertisement." The immediate origin of the story of Gilbert and Sullivan's opera, "The Yeomen of the Guard" is credited to a poster that caught the eye of Gilbert one day as he stood waiting in the Uxbridge Railway Station. The advertisements of the Tower Furnishing Company pictures a beef-eater; the beef-eater it was that acted for "The Yeomen" as the Japanese sword had acted for "The Mikado." Here was the scene, perhaps a touch of the plot, for his next piece. The choice of the opera's name, in fact, had

long hovered between "The Tower" and "The Beef-eaters." Better counsels prevailed, and within three weeks of its production (October 3, 1888), the dignified title, which for forty-six years has graced this lovely opera, was finally decided upon.

Everyone knows the anecdote about the old lady, who, after being taken to see "Hamlet," complained that it was not up to much because it was made up out of quotations. Surely it must have been the same old lady who, whilst being shown over the Tower of London paid an unconscious compliment to Gilbert and Sullivan by exclaiming, "How beautiful it all is—it's just like the opera."

Jessie Bond has left us an unforgettable picture of that memorable

first night—a behind-the-curtain picture not often revealed to the public. Gilbert was unusually nervous: his first-night phobia took a most uncommon oscillatory form. A comic opera opening with a lone person on the stage! Miss Bond (as Phoebe Meryll) was already at her spinning wheel, ready for the first song. "When Maiden Loves."

Enter Gilbert, a moment before the curtain is to rise.

"Is everything right, Jessie?"

Everything is right. Exit Gilbert.

In a moment he is back. "Are you sure you're all right, Jessie?"

"Yes, yes!" stammers Jessie. "I'm quite all right."

Gilbert kisses her and indulges in a dance which the king of his later "Utopia" would not characterise as being quite expressive of "unruffled cheerfulness."

He vanishes. He reappears. He inquires anew. He executed yet another dance—perhaps a Ruddigorean one this time, of his own invention. Again he kisses his Phoebe, until she demands that he go. At first, like his Pirates, he "don't go."

But at last he goes—he goes—off to the Embankment, no doubt, there to pace the promenade until the ordeal of the premiere is over; he returns for the final curtain call, when, with his illustrious partner, Sullivan, who has conducted, he will face a rapturously happy audience.

## Radio Round the World

GERMANY has now 37,000 licensed radio retailers and 750 wholesalers. The manufacturers have been prohibited from producing new models of loudspeakers or receivers during the period February 1 to July 31. This is so that sales may not be prejudiced at the Leipzig Spring Fair.

MR. VAL GIELGUD, the B.B.C. director of drama, asked listeners to write to him, and he has written an article about the 12,726 letters he received from professors, brigadier-generals, deep-sea fishermen, the blind, and including letters from France, Germany, Sweden and Holland. Forty per cent. ran to four or more pages.

The demand was for more comedy and less tragedy, and there was a notable preference for adapted stage-plays (Galsworthy, Ibsen, Eden Philpotts and Shakespeare were specified again and again) as opposed to plays written specially for broadcasting. The more popular of the authors of plays for radio were L. du Garde Peach and Philip Wade; Guthrie and Sieveking, who began the radio play in England as a kind of "modernistic" experiment, got it in the neck. It was vigorously denied that radio plays were too long. To the demand for "good comedy," Gielgud replied: "Good comedy, unfortunately, is not a synthetic product, nor, as a matter of fact, is it easy to find ordinary stage comedy which can be adapted for microphone purposes, while the established comic author has usually too good a market elsewhere to write original humorous plays for broadcasting," which is something of an admission.

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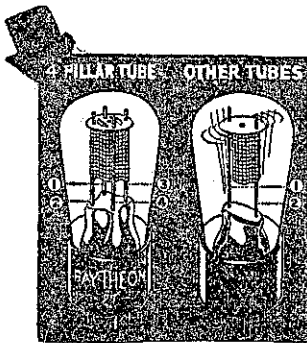


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