"THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD."

PERFORMANCE BY CHELMSFORD AMATEURS.

The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society undertook their fourth production of Gilbert and Sullivan opera at the County Theatre during the week. This time "The Yeomen of the Guard" was selected for performance, and in undertaking it for the opening of its third season the Society certainly indicated a desire for progress and gave evidence of the fact that it is endeavouring to build up an assured position.

For the present performances, which began on Tuesday and are being continued each evening this week, with, in addition, a matinee to-morrow (Saturday), the personnel of the cast differed in several respects from that which has represented the Society on previous occasions, and there were one or two who have taken prominent parts hitherto and achieved popular success whose absence could not but be missed. But on the whole it may be said that the new players justified their inclusion. At the same time the experience gained by those actors and actresses who have appeared in former productions was a considerable asset, imparting a degree of cohesence of the utmost value.

THE CAST.

The full cast was as follows:—

Sir Rachard Cholmondeley (Lieutenant of the Tower) ..... Mr. E. K. Gamble
Colonel Fairfax (under sentence of death), Mr. L. C. Hayward
Sergeant Meryll (of the Yeomen of the Guard) ..... Mr. C. L. Booking
Leonard Meryll (his son) ... Mr. C. H. Smith
Jack Point (a Strolling Jester) Mr. E. T. Parfitt
Wilfred Shadbolt (Head Jailor and Assistant Tormentor) ..... Mr. R. J. Shoobridge
The Headsman ..... Mr. E. W. Alston
First Yeoman ..... Mr. V. C. Spurgeon
Second Yeoman ..... Mr. B. J. Myall
First Citizen ..... Mr. H. Underhill
Second Citizen ..... Mr. N. Knight
Elsie Maynard (a Strolling Singer), Mrs. C. L. Booking
Phoebe Meryll (Sergt. Meryll's Daughter), Miss R. G. Rowbotham
Dame Carruthers (Housekeeper to the Tower) ..... Miss Peggy Green
Kate (her niece) ..... Miss I. H. Fisher

Chorus of Yeomen of the Guard, Citizens, etc.:—Mrs. A. B. Barnes, Mrs. Ralph Catt, Misses B. Baker, E. M. Bradridge, L. N. Bradridge, U. Cannon, C. Cannon, A. E.

Point, strolling singers, provides the solution, and Elsie is led away blindfolded to the tragic wedding. Jack Point, who is in love with Elsie, takes a post under the Lieutenant as a jester, and Phoebe having successfully "borrowed" Wilfred's keys the Colonel is presented to the Yeomen as Leonard Meryll and enthusiastically welcomed—particularly so by Phoebe. On this scene the tolling of the bell of St. Peter's announces the hour of execution, and the escape of the prisoner carries the finale to an exciting climax.

In the second act Dame Carruthers and the citizens are seen chiding the Yeomen on the escape of the prisoner. The jester offers to teach Wilfred Shadbolt (who envies Point his occupation) the arts of a jester's calling if he will declare that he saw Fairfax trying to escape and shot him through the head. The Colonel, meanwhile free but tied to an unknown bride, learns her identity and is not ill-pleased. He is making her closer acquaintance, when a shot is heard, followed by the "convincing detail of Point's and Wilfred's story." An effort on the former's part to renew his attentions to Elsie is frustrated by Fairfax, and Phoebe inadvertently reveals to Wilfred the identity of the supposed Leonard Meryll and has to pacify him with a promise of marriage.

At this juncture the real Leonard Meryll arrives with news of the Colonel's reprieve. The mutual congratulations of the conspirators, however, are overheard by Dame Carruthers, who, having long cherished a middle-aged affection for Sergt. Meryll, gains a not very enthusiastic husband by threatening to expose them. Then comes the happy finale uniting Fairfax and Elsie, suddenly turned to tragedy by the appearance of the broken-hearted jester, who, after a pathetic attempt to sing a verse of "I have a song to sing O," falls insensible at Elsie's feet.

ABOUT THE PLAYERS.

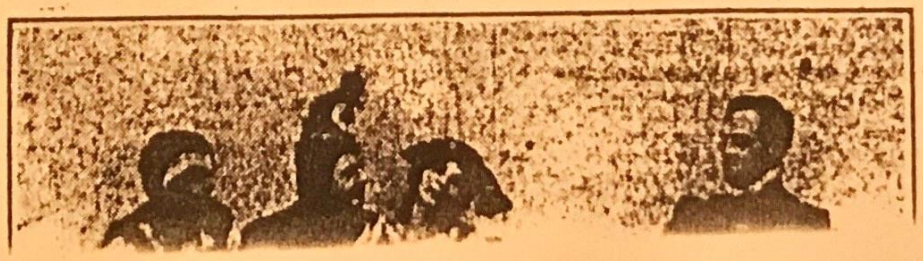
There was a full "house" at the opening performance on Tuesday. Miss Peggy Green, in the role of Dame Carruthers, displayed that dignity and self-possession which have marked her previous stage appearances. She was encored for her song in the first act, descriptive of the history of the Tower; and later, when discovering the conspiracy and exacting an unwilling promise of marriage from Sergt. Meryll as the price of her silence, exploited the possibilities of the situation to the full extent. Miss Rowbotham, a new-comer to the Society's ranks, in the role of Phoebe, scored a distinct success. She made a charming and dainty maiden, acted with grace and vivacity, and was equally successful in her declarations of love for a brave man whom she could not wed, and her diplomatic wooing of the sour-visaged jailor, with whom perforce she had at last to be content. Miss Rowbotham certainly justified her selection for a principal part, and will doubtless be heard of again in future productions. Mrs. C. L. Booking, who made her debut last season, was given the part of Elsie Maynard, the strolling singer, and handled it extremely well. In excellent voice, and displaying an intelligent perception of the dramatic possibilities of the role, she got through her difficult task most commendably. Her song, "'Tis done! I am a bride," for which she was deservedly encored, was sung with true emotional effect; and in the bridal scene at the close of the play she was perhaps at her best.

The part of Jack Point, on which the success of the play largely depends, was very capably undertaken by Mr. E. T. Parfitt, who has many previous successes to his credit. His duet with Shadbolt in the second act, when he undertakes to teach the Jailor how to become a Jester, was quite a feature of the performance, and had to be twice repeated on the opening night. Mr. R. J. Shoobridge, who may be regarded as one of the pillars of the Society, on this occasion filled the part of Wilfred Shadbolt, the Head Jailor and Assistant Tormentor. Mr. Shoobridge seems to take a delight in pourtraying what may be termed an "unpopular" character. Nothing could have been better than his gloomy, forbidding personality; and when he essayed to become an entertainer he did it in such a funny way that the audience rocked with laughter. Mr. L. C. Hayward, as Colonel Fairfax, was another highly successful player. His song "Is life a boon?" was perhaps his best vocal effort. Mr. C. L. Booking, as Sergeant of the Guard, got through the manifold and somewhat exacting duties of the part very creditably; and Mr. Gamble, as the Lieutenant of the Tower, displayed an air of dignity which, even in comic opera, is looked for in a functionary of such high station. The other men's parts was all capably pourtrayed.

As on former occasions the chorus work was excellently done. The freshness of the voices and evident careful cultivation of the spirit of Gilbert and Sullivan opera were marked features. The men's chorus towards the end of the first act was remarkably well sung. The quartette, "Strange adventure," in the second act, sung unaccompanied, had to be repeated. Another concerted number, in which Phoebe, Elsie, Fairfax, and Jack Point were charmingly associated in song and dance, was vociferously encored, the lilting refrain quite taking the fancy of the audience.

A word of praise is due to the well-balanced orchestra, conducted by Mr. Ronald Biggs, music master at Radley College, for the capable manner in which they did their part. Mr. Biggs, as musical director, also did excellent work in connection with the musical training of the company. The orchestra was constituted as follows:—

1st Violins: Miss Grace Powell (leader), Miss G. Metcalfe, Mrs. W. T. Heigham, Mr. Leonard Bragg. 2nd Violins: Mrs. F. Cole, Mrs. P. Samms, Mr. V. F. Waldau. Violas: Mrs. G. Price-Smith, Mr. F. Cole. 'Cello: Mr. H. M. Mann. Flutes: Mr. H. Wright, Mr.



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Assistant Headsmen and Soldiers: Messrs. E. F. Kingdon and E. G. Morrish.

STORY OF THE OPERA.

The story of "The Yeomen of the Guard," with its alternative title, "The Merryman and his Maid," is too well known to need a detailed description. For the first act the scene is Tower Green in the Sixteenth Century. Col. Fairfax lies under sentence of death in the Tower, falsely accused of sorcery by an unscrupulous cousin who would benefit if the Colonel dies unmarried; and Wilfred Shadbolt, the head jailor, reveals to Phoebe (Sergt. Meryll's daughter, whom he jealously admires) that Fairfax is to be executed that day. Sergt. Meryll, his son Leonard, and Phoebe plot to save the Colonel's life by disguising him as Leonard Meryll, who has arrived to join the Yeomen of the Guard, leaving it to Phoebe (who loves Fairfax) to wheedle the keys from Wilfred. The unhappy Colonel meanwhile asks Sir Richard Cholmondeley to assist him in thwarting his scheming relative by finding him a wife.

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Mr. Frederick Hobbs, late of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Co., was producer and stage manager, and to his efforts no small measure of the success was due. Mr. E. G. Brown was hon. assistant stage and scenery manager. Mention should also be made of the large number of voluntary helpers who in various ways did their part to assist in making the production a success. These included the members of the Committee, namely:—Mr. P. Butchard, chairman; Mrs. A. B. Barnes, Miss Peggy Green, Messrs. L. S. Bragg, E. G. Brown, Ralph Catt, and L. Hey; with the hon. treasurer, Mr. R. G. Morrish; the hon. secretary, Mr. R. J. Shoobridge; the hon. auditor, Mr. W. J. Slipper; and the hon. accompanist, Mr. L. Hey. The following acted as programme and chocolate sellers:—Mrs. Claydon, Mrs. Perrott, Mrs. C. H. Smith, Misses E. Braber, D. Creasy, C. Gunner, M. Spalding. Stewards: Messrs. E. W. Allen, T. Arnold, W. J. Beeton, C. Coe, G. Debnam, H. Fitch, F. Jefferies, G. Pringle, L. Robinson, H. E. Ward, F. P. Ward.

After deducting working expenses, the profits of the performance will be given to the Chelmsford Hospital and Dispensary.

Photo: Spalding, Chelmsford.

FOUR OF THE PRINCIPAL PLAYERS.

Reading from left to right:—"Phoebe Meryll" (Miss R. G. Rowbotham), "Jack Point" (Mr. E. T. Parfitt), "Elsie Maynard" (Mrs. C. L. Bocking), "Col. Fairfax" (Mr. L. G. Hayward).

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