

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1923.

"THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD."

By W. S. GILBERT and ARTHUR SULLIVAN.

Chelmsford Operatic Society, Jan. 30, 31, Feb. 1, 2, 3.

SIR E. CHOLMONDELEY	MR. E. K. GAMBLE
COL. FAIRFAX	MR. L. G. HAYWARD
SERGT. MERYLL	MR. O. L. BOCKING
LEONARD MERYLL	MR. O. H. SMITH
JACK POINT	MR. E. T. PARFITT
WILFRED SHADBOLT	MR. B. J. SHOORIDGE
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	MRS. C. L. BOCKING
PHOEBE MERYLL	MISS E. G. ROWBOTHAM
DAME CARRUTHERS	MISS PEGGY GREEN
KATE (her niece)	MISS L. H. FISHER

The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society have already been very successful with their production of three of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas — Pinafore, the Gondoliers, and Iolanthe. They have now chosen the Yeomen of the Guard for representation, and crowded houses are witnessing that beautiful work at the County Theatre, Chelmsford, this week. Musically, the Yeomen of the Guard takes first rank among the Savoy operas; if it is not so universally popular as the Mikado or Pinafore, and although it is classed as light opera, it more nearly approaches the classical standard of grand opera than almost any other work in which Gilbert and Sullivan collaborated.

The producer and stage manager is Mr. Fredk. Hobbs, who was for eight years a leading principal in the No. 1 D'Oyly Carte company, and the musical director is Mr. Ronald Biggs, who is the music master at Radley College. Mr. E. G. Brown is the assistant stage and scenery manager. The Society's Executive Committee consists of Mrs. A. B. Barnes and Miss Peggy Green, and Messrs. L. S. Bragg, E. G. Brown, Ralph Catt, and L. Hey, with Mr. P. Buchard as chairman. They have worked untiringly in the interests of the Society, as has the capable and energetic secretary, Mr. E. J. Shooridge.

The leading characters are in very good hands. Miss Rowbotham is excellent as Phoebe, who, in love with Colonel Fairfax, under sentence of death, plots to save him, only to find, when successful, that another maiden possesses his heart. Mrs. Bocking, as Elsie Maynard, the strolling singer, married blindfolded to the Colonel just before the time for his execution, is also very attractive. Admirable in the first act, which leaves her a disconsolate widow, the bride of an hour, she is even better later on, when, after the Colonel's escape, she falls in love with her husband without knowing who he is. A large part of the performance comes to the share of Miss Rowbotham and Mrs. Bocking, who are artistic alike in singing and acting. They are, indeed, charming, and nobody can wonder why their respective swains are enamoured with them. Miss Peggy Green, as Dame Carruthers, is a delectable old dame, and really does not deserve the face that Sergeant Meryll makes at her when he takes her for better or worse. Miss Green seems to us to improve every time we see her, and she has set a high standard from the first. Miss Fisher, too, plays the part of Kate in a way that is very pleasing. We should not like to be required to select for the palm of merit from among the four lady characters; it would be a real embarrassment of choice.

Mr. Hayward is a fine Colonel Fairfax; the role of the brave man and lover fits him exactly, and he sings his music well. Equally capable is Mr. Bocking as Sergt. Meryll, of the Yeomen of the Guard; his performance is very effective. Mr. Parfitt and Mr. Shooridge, in the respective parts of Jack Point and Wilfred Shadbolt, are

among the outstanding successes. The unhappy jester finds a telling representative in Mr. Parfitt, and Mr. Shooridge is extremely amusing as the head gaoler and assistant tormentor. The duet in which one agrees to learn from the other, and "tell a tale of cock and bull" is received with shouts of delight. Mr. Gamble is a commanding Lieutenant of the Tower; he makes up well, and plays well. The minor parts are quite adequately filled by Messrs. C. H. Smith, E. W. Alston, V. C. Spurgeon, B. J. Myall, H. Underhill, and N. Knight.

The dresses and staging are beautiful throughout. The chorus is as good as a chorus needs to be, and that is high praise where Savoy opera is concerned. The favourite numbers are much appreciated, and there are frequent recalls. "Is life a boon?" "I have a song to sing, O," "Were I thy bride," "Oh, a private buffoon is a light-hearted loon," have not lost any of their charm, while the unaccompanied quartet, "Strange Adventure," is perhaps the most beautiful thing of all. It is very well sung, too, by Miss Fisher and Miss Green, Mr. Hayward and Mr. Bocking.

We saw this opera when it was first produced thirty-five years ago, with Geraldine Ulmar and George Grossmith in the cast, and we think Jessie Bond. In comparing amateur with professional work, it is necessary to take into account the attention that is paid on the professional stage to elocution and voice production, and the wide range of talent from which the producer can there select. We have wondered once or twice if the principals' lines can be well heard at the back of the County Theatre. But allowing for this, which is an almost inevitable handicap with the amateur, our opinion is that the Chelmsford representations this week are quite worthy of the high standard set up by the original Savoy company. Chelmsford should be proud of its operatic society.

Very special praise is deserved by Mr. Hobbs, the producer, and Mr. Biggs, the musical director, who must feel proud of the artistic finish in which their combined efforts have resulted. The performances are in aid of the Chelmsford Hospital, and on this ground, as well as out of simple justice to the ladies and gentlemen who have worked so hard to achieve success, they deserve all the public support that they receive.

In addition to the characters set out in the cast, the choruses of yeomen, citizens, etc., are sustained by Mesdames A. B. Barnes and R. Catt, the Misses B. Baker, E. M. Bradridge; L. M. Bradridge, C. Cannon, U. Cannon, A. E. Chisnell, M. V. Chisnell, Q. Fewell, D. Hall, E. F. Jaggs, K. Last, C. Marks, M. E. Marshall, E. S. Myall, E. M. Sayers, K. Savigear, M. Savigear, Messrs. B. C. Afford, C. Beazley, E. Catt, E. G. Coulter, W. H. Hall, H. Jackson, R. Jackson, C. C. Last, A. J. Nokes, A. W. Ward, and H. E. White, with Messrs. R. K. Kingdon and R. G. Morrish as assistant headsmen and soldiers. The leader of the orchestra is Miss Grace Powell, and the other members of it, whose work naturally is vital to the success of the performance, are Mesdames F. Cole, W. T. Heigham, P. Samms, C. Price-Smith, and Miss G. Metcalfe, Messrs. F. Appleton, A. V. T. Beeton, L. Bragg, F. Cole, J. Ford, J. W. Hazeltine, L. Hey, E. Joyce, G. Lee jun., J. H. Le Feuvre, A. McCormack, H. M. Mann, G. Morley, E. Newcombe, A. Pitts, W. Reed, T. Sheekey, V. F. Waldau, E. Wright, and H. Wright. All these do well, and their playing throughout can be justly spoken of in terms of high praise.

Mr. C. Coe is responsible for the refreshment arrangements for the entire cast and orchestra for the week. The refreshments are very generously supplied gratuitously by well-known Chelmsford firms so that there is no charge to the Society in that respect. Mr. T. Sorrell, the stage carpenter, and Mr. C. West, electrician, also render very important services. In addition to the evening performances, there is to be a matinée on Saturday at 2.45 p.m.