

In the conversations at Dairen, the Chita Government was pursuing a political idea. Before everything else it counted on the prestige of carrying on an official negotiation with a great power, a negotiation which it would be possible to regard as a kind of recognition affirming the authority of Chita with regard to the rebellion against this order. The Tokyo Government, on the other hand, seems not to have sketched out any definite programme for negotiations in advance. M. Matsushima, the Japanese plenipotentiary, declared that it was before everything else a matter of getting together.

The main purpose for Japan is to make certain what basis exists for making agreement with the other party, and it is clear that the diplomatic conversations will be of varied

importance according as to whether or not these agreements are worthy of confidence.

None the less the mere fact of the Dairen meeting is already highly significant. It proves that, contrary to general opinion, Japan is not systematically hostile to the new Siberian State. It was thought at Tokyo that a resumption of relations could not fail to aid in the reëstablishment of order in the Far East, and care was taken to forget the suspicious origin of Krasnostchikov's power. No doubt this prudence is not thrown away. The Dairen Conference at the same time that it improves present economic conditions in Eastern Siberia, will perhaps serve to measure the distance which is still to be covered in order to reach an agreement with Chita.

THE REVOLUTIONARY SATIRE OF W. S. GILBERT

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FEW have thought that the gray gentleman with side whiskers and 'a little place at Harrow,' the barrister J. P. and property owner, was anything but a supporter of things as they be.

Quite possibly he thought he was that. His life may have appeared to himself as it appeared to others, to be the embodiment of comfortable conservatism. Yet he did more to cut away the props of the old world, to prepare the minds of the unthinking mass for change, than any who deliberately preached against the established order. If Gilbert had been a professed revolutionary, he would have

had as little influence as Bernard Shaw. Just because he seemed so safe and so ordinary, his shafts of ridicule knocked over the conventions at which they were aimed. Had he set out to break idols, he would have been laughed at. Because people laughed with him, they fancied he was one of themselves and let him undermine their faith in much that they held sacred. His influence in hastening that revolution in thought and manners of which the late nineteenth century, in its more reflective hours, saw the shadow on its path has sharpened the point of the saying of Fletcher

of Saltoun — that he cared not who made laws for the people so long as he might make their songs.

In the earliest of what we call the Savoy Operas (though it was produced before the Savoy Theatre had been built) Gilbert turned his satire against his own profession, the Law. The Judge's song in *Trial by Jury* was more than a joke; it was satire with a sting in it. The briefless barrister who

Was, as most young barristers are,
An impecunious party, —

and who engaged himself to marry
a rich attorney's elderly, ugly daughter, —

was certainly not a fantastic invention. Whether there existed one who wriggled out of his engagement as soon as the rich attorney had helped him to a position by supplying him with briefs, we do not know; but at all events the possibility of a Judge trying a breach of promise suit after he had made himself liable to an action of the same kind was not unimaginable.

Even more severe was the irony in the song from *Iolanthe*, in which the Lord Chancellor related how he had made up his mind to give his clients value for their money.

Ere I go into Court I will read my brief through,
(Said I to myself, said I),
And I'll never take work I'm unable to do,
(Said I to myself, said I),
My learned profession I'll never disgrace
By taking a fee with a grin on my face
When I have n't been there to attend to the case
(Said I to myself, said I).

The Judge clowning on the Bench and the Lord Chancellor doing a skirt dance were not mere figures of good-humored fun; they were ridiculed with an undercurrent of — perhaps contempt is too strong a term — with, shall we say, a 'something of bitterness,' which made them as real as the Romans against whom Juvenal shot his arrows of barbed wit.

Next came the first of Gilbert's onslaughts upon politicians. Everyone laughed at Sir Joseph Porter who began as a lad by

serving a term
As office boy in an attorney's firm

and who

polished up the handle of the big front door
with such assiduity that he started
on the road to become First Lord of
the Admiralty. Before he reached that
eminence he engaged in trade.

I grew so rich that I was sent
By a pocket borough into Parliament.
I always voted at my Party's call
And I never thought of thinking for myself at all.

To-day it is a commonplace that Members of Parliament are obliged to vote as they are told: when *Pinafore* was produced few knew how obedient they had to be to Party discipline. Gilbert's verses, aided by Sullivan's delicious music, sank into many minds which would have been impervious to the fierce denunciation of a Jeremiah or the lamentations of an Ezekiel. He helped to create that distrust of politicians which has been going ever since. He made people see the humbug of 'official opinions' by making his 'ruler of the Queen's Navee' express (officially) such smug and insincere sentiments as

Happiness in marriage is not inconsistent with
discrepancy in rank.
Love is a platform on which all ranks may meet.

Thus he parodied the well-sounding generalities which form the greater part of political utterances. Thus he sowed seeds of that disbelief in Parliament as an organ of progress which is so widespread to-day.

At the army he tilted with brisk persistence. The Heavy Dragoons in *Patience*, those 'popular mysteries' who were a compound of 'all the remarkable people in history,' were delightful

fooling. The major-general in *The Pirates* was drawn with a more energetic insistence on his futility. This officer was 'good at integral and differential calculus,' he was well-up in myths and could even 'write a washing bill in Babylonian Cuneiform.' But, he admitted,

My military knowledge, though I'm plucky and
adventury,
Has only been brought down to the beginning
of the century.

So he was obliged to confess that, although his store of general information was encyclopædic, he had everything to learn about his profession.

In fact when I know what is meant by mamelon
and ravelin,
When I can tell at sight a chassepot rifle from a
javelin;
When such affairs as sorties and surprises I'm
more wary at
And when I know precisely what is meant by
commissariat;
When I have learnt what progress has been
made in modern gunnery,
When I know more of tactics than a novice in
a nunnery —
In short when I've a smattering of elemental
strategy,
You'll say a better major-general has never
sat a gee!

That this indictment was not fanciful many a 'regrettable incident' in the South African War, many a pitiful blunder in the Great War, proved all too sadly and forcibly. Gilbert's attack on the education of officers was as amply justifiable as his ridicule in *The Gondoliers* of the bawling noises, the usual 'Shalloo humps' and 'Shalloo hoops' which passed for words of command in the army.

At *Pride of Birth* he frequently mocked. Aline Sangazure in *The Sorcerer*, '7037th in direct descent from Helen of Troy,' was the predecessor of Pooh Bah in *The Mikado*, who, 'traced his ancestry back to a protoplasmal, primordial atomic globule.' A duke

was to Gilbert a creature indescribably comic. One of his best creations in this line is

The highly-strung sensitive Duke,
The Duke who is doubly refined,

of *Haste to the Wedding!* This is the Duke who wonderingly inquires why he is 'the sport of every wave of sympathetic second-hand sentiment.'

Even the ghosts of Sir Rupert Murgatroyd's ancestors are as stupid as owls. When they ask their decadent descendant why he has not obeyed the family curse by committing a crime every day, he puts them off with the assurance that he has forged his own will, signed a cheque in the name of someone who has no banking account, and disinherited his son who does not yet exist.

Equally absurd to Gilbert were the honors which could be bestowed and for which he saw so violent a scrimmage among many people. The Kings in *The Gondoliers*, describing their day's work, tell how

We may make a proclamation or receive a
deputation,
Then we possibly create a peer or two;
Then we help a fellow creature on his path
With the Garter or the Thistle or the Bath.

Gilbert knew how so-called 'honors' were, even thirty years ago, bought and paid for, and he frankly expressed his contempt for the traffic long before it had become the by-word it is to-day. The Duke of Plaza Toro included among his sources of income:—

Small titles and orders
For Mayors and Recorders
I get, and they're highly delighted;
M.P.'s baronnetted,
Sham colonels gazetted,
And second-rate aldermen knighted.

His Duchess traded also upon the social weakness of silly women, and would

Present any lady
Whose conduct is shady
Or smacking of doubtful propriety;
When Virtue would squash her
I take and whitewash her
And launch her in first-rate society.

It was the ever-increasing flow of titles and official appointments which inspired his diverting vision of a state in which

Lord Chancellors were cheap as sprats,
And Bishops in their shovel hats
Were plentiful as tabby cats,
In point of fact, too many;
Ambassadors cropped up like hay,
Prime Ministers and such as they
Grew like asparagus in May,
And Dukes were three a penny.

That very phrase, 'dukes were three a penny,' did more to disestablish dukedom than all the diatribes of Mr. Lloyd George. Denunciation has not ever the deadly effect of ridicule. Gilbert had no conscious leanings toward

a new order. He would have protested that he found the old order very comfortable. But he was too clear-sighted, too thoroughly impregnated with the comic spirit, not to see that all institutions were shot through and through with humbug; and that the great ones of the earth were mostly either mountebanks or solemn frauds. If he had held them up to scorn, derided them with bitterness, lashed out at them with the impetuous indignation of a reformer, he would have been heeded by very few: and he would have created more antagonists than sympathizers. It was because he had no political or social axe to grind, because he seemed to be purely a fun-maker, that his satire sank into the mind of his age. He came just at a moment when Victorian ideals and institutions had begun to rock. He gave them a vigorous push, and it is thanks to him largely that we see them around us in ruins to-day.

W. H. DAVIES, A TRAMP POET

BY THOMAS MOULT

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A DAY is to come in the history of the Hammersmith Lyric Theatre when William Henry Davies, poet of our own age, will succeed Mr. Gay, satirist of the eighteenth century. It depends entirely on the favor of the public how soon or late that day may be; and if it is the atmosphere of vagabondage they are so loath to lose, the assurance might well be theirs that Mr. Davies's introduction to the theatre is to take

the form of an opera concerning beggars, who are just as jolly and lovable as the Lyric players have made John Gay's, though showing a few shreds more of virtue, as becomes the twentieth century, to redeem their ragged roguery. It goes without saying that Mr. Davies knows his beggars as well as Gay knew his. And in the period of waiting until his work is staged we can turn back to the *Autobiography*