

W. S. GILBERT AND HIS GRANDFATHER.

Illustrated Interviews.

No. IV.—MR. W. S. GILBERT.



From a Photo. by]

GRÆME'S DYKE.

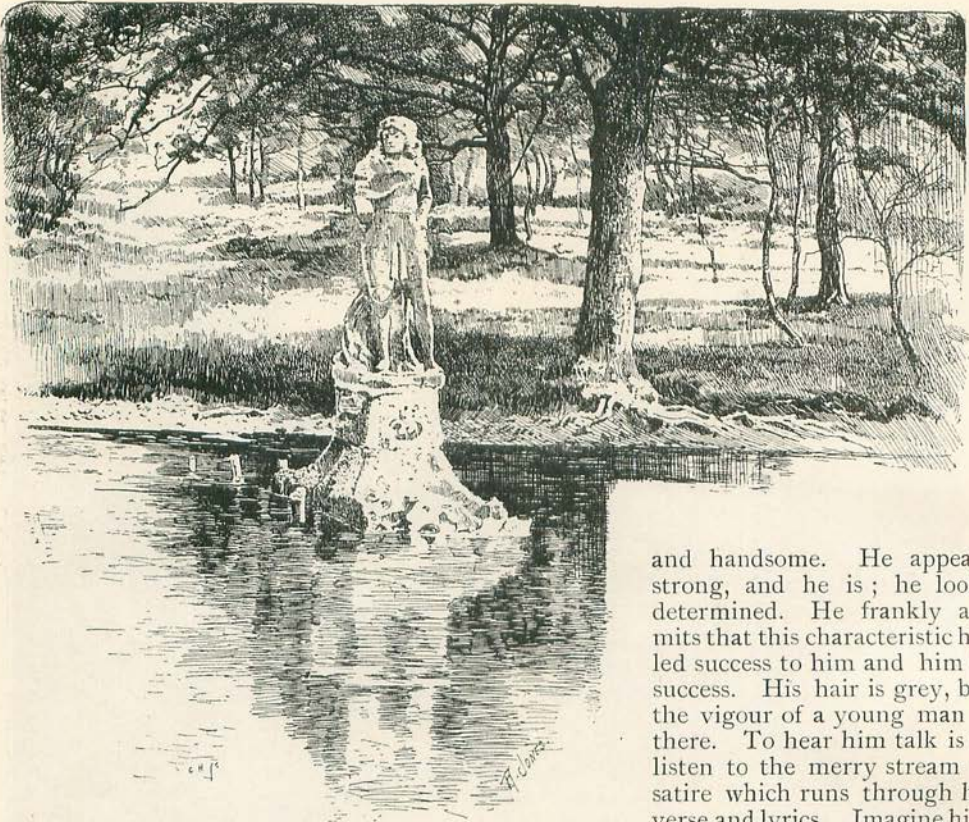
[Elliott & Fry.



MR. GILBERT lives in a little land of his own. There is nothing wanting to complete his miniature kingdom at Græme's Dyke, Harrow Weald. With a hundred and ten acres at his disposal, the most brilliant writer of irresistible satire of the day has laid down a healthy two miles of paths, which wend their way through banks of moss and ferns, avenues of chestnut trees and secluded valleys. You turn out of one pathway only to enter a diminutive forest; again, and you are standing by the rushes and water weeds by the side of the old Dyke, which has run its course for two thousand years and more, spanned by rustic bridges; and in one part, near the bathing house, is a statue of Charles II., which originally stood years ago in Soho-square. You may wander along a walk of roses and sweetbrier, or admire the view from the observatory, where the owner enjoys his astronomical watchings. From

another spot Windsor Castle is visible. Mr. Gilbert is a man of many minds. The verse of comic opera does not prevent him from watching the interests of his thoroughbred Jerseys—for there is a perfect home farm on the Gilbertian land. The hayricks look rich, the horses, the fowls, and the pigs seem "at home," and the pigeons—I am assured by Mr. Gilbert that he is using the utmost efforts to induce his feathered friends to adopt as their permanent address the fine and lofty house he has erected for them. The roofs of the vineries are heavy with great bunches, the peaches and nectarines are fast assuming an appearance calling for a hasty "bite"; flowers, flowers are everywhere, and the bee-hives, green little wooden dwellings, with the bees crowding in and out, are pointed out by their owner as looking very much like small country theatres doing a "tremendous booking."

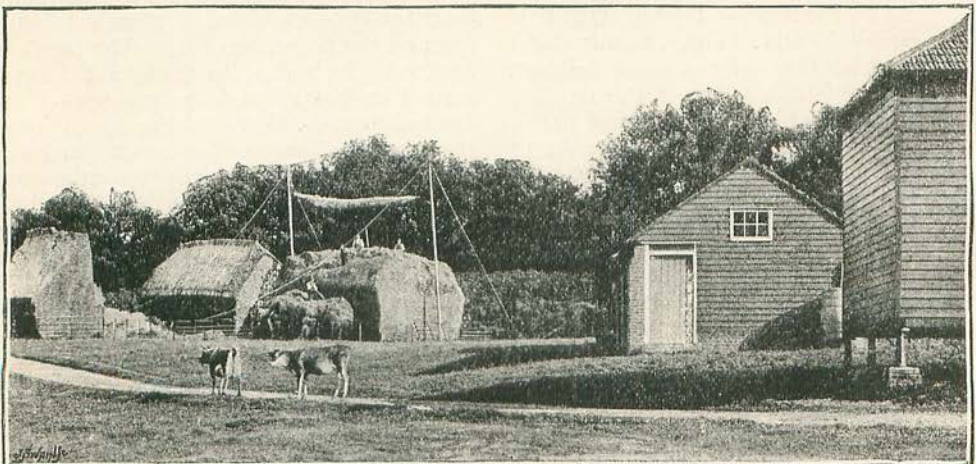
The house was built for Mr. Goodall, R.A., from designs by Mr. Norman Shaw,



IN THE GROUNDS.

R.A., and is from every aspect architecturally very fine. Many portions of it are entirely covered with ivy—the entrance porch is surrounded by the clinging tendrils. Here I met Mr. Gilbert. He is tall, stalwart,

and handsome. He appears strong, and he is; he looks determined. He frankly admits that this characteristic has led success to him and him to success. His hair is grey, but the vigour of a young man is there. To hear him talk is to listen to the merry stream of satire which runs through his verse and lyrics. Imagine him declaring that he considers the butcher boy in the gallery the king of the theatre—the blue-smocked youth who, by incessant whistling and repeated requests to “speak up,” revels in upsetting the managerial apple cart. Then try and realise Mr. Gilbert assuring



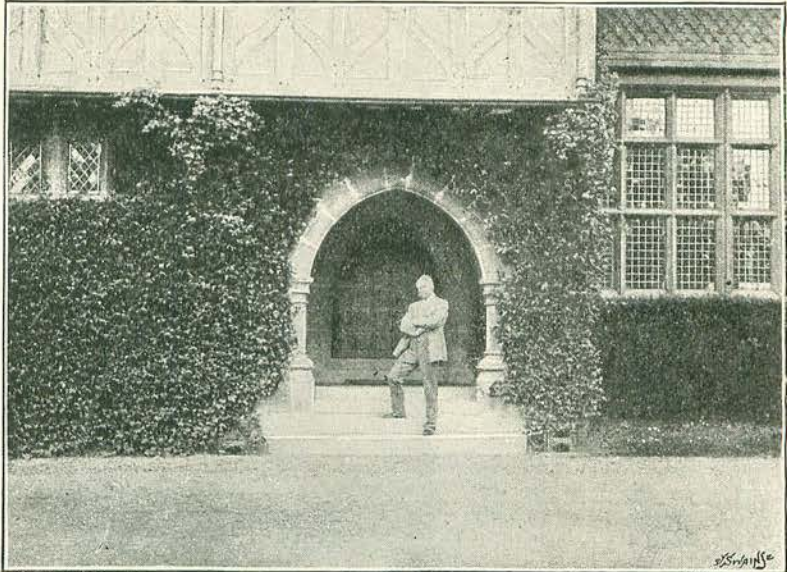
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THE FARM.

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one that what he writes is nothing more nor less than "rump steak and onions!"—a palatable concoction of satisfying and seasoning ingredients which is good enough to please the man of refinement in the stalls, and not too refined for the butcher boy in the gallery. "H.M.S. Pinafore," "The Pirates," "The Mikado," and the lily-loving *Bunthorne* and aesthetically inclined young maidens in

"Patience" rump steak and onions! He has not—save at rehearsals—seen one of his own plays acted for seventeen years. Report says that, on "first nights," he wanders about muffled up, with his hat over his eyes, along the Thames Embankment, casting occasional glances in the direction of the water, and mentally measuring the height of Waterloo Bridge. Nothing of the kind. He goes to his club and smokes a cigar, and looks in at the theatre about eleven to see if there is "a call"; and he is seldom disappointed in the object of his visit. He is quite content to look in at the



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AT THE PORCH.

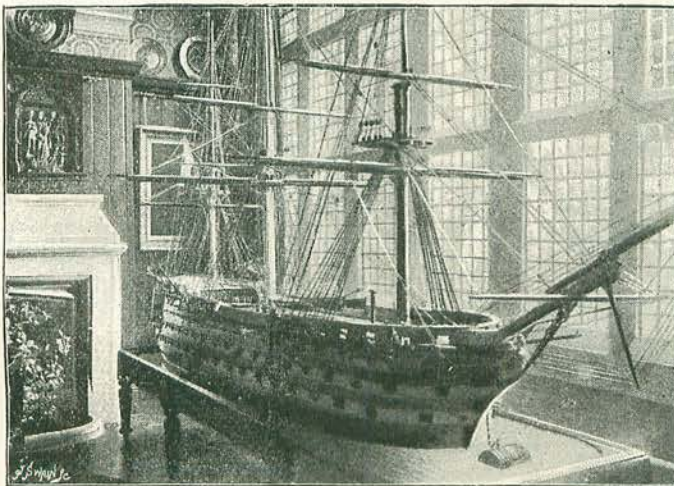
[Elliott & Fry.

theatre and see that everything is safe for the curtain to rise, goes away, and returns at the finish. He is wise in believing that the presence of the author at such a time upsets the players, and deteriorates the action.

We are in the entrance hall. Over the mantelpiece is a fine specimen of fourteenth century alabaster. By the window is a model of a man-of-war, sixteen feet in length. It is perfect in every detail, and a portion of it was specially constructed as a model of the set of the scene in "H.M.S. Pinafore." Mr. Gilbert—who is an enthusiastic yachtsman—had the remaining forepart built when it was no longer wanted for theatrical purposes. The parrot in the corner is considered to be the finest talker in England. It can whistle a hornpipe, and, if put to the test, could probably rattle off one of its master's patter songs.

"The other parrot, who is a novice," points out Mr. Gilbert, "belongs to Dr. Playfair. He is reading up with my bird, who takes pupils."

Passing up the oaken staircase, the solidity of which is relieved by many a grand palm, a peep into



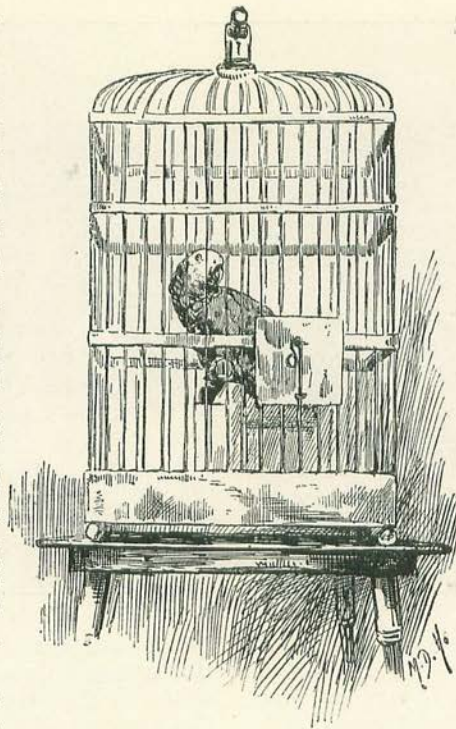
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MODEL OF "H.M.S. PINAFORE" IN THE ENTRANCE HALL.

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the billiard-room reveals on one side of the wall photos of all the characters which have from time to time appeared in his operas. Over a long oak bookcase is a run of photos unique of their kind, including those of J. S. Clarke, Mrs. Stirling, Buckstone, Compton, Chipendale, Herman Vezin, Henry J. Byron, and Irving and Hare, taken seventeen years ago. A little statuette of Thackeray, by Boehm, is near at hand, and here is another of the dramatist's great friend, T. W. Robertson, the writer of "Caste," "School," "Society," and other plays inseparable from his name.

The drawing-room was Mr. Goodall's studio. It is a magnificent apartment, rich in old china,



"THE FINEST TALKER IN ENGLAND."

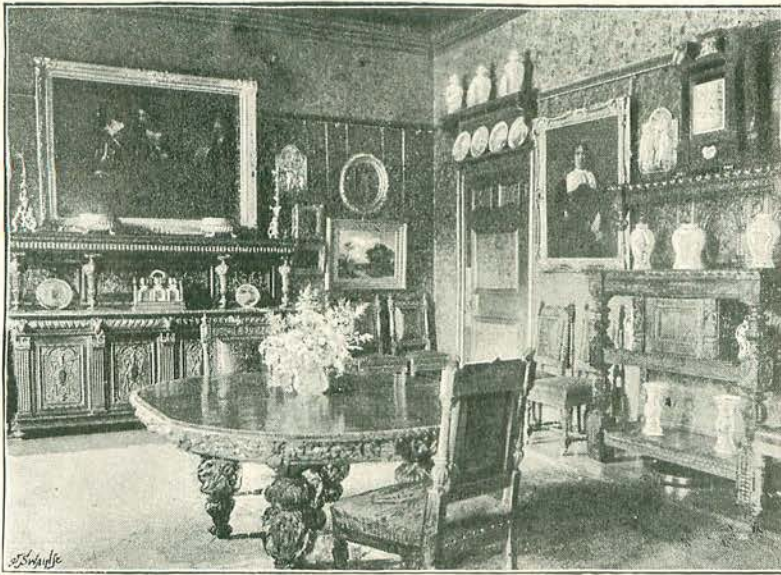
great vases 200 years old, antique cabinets, and treasured knick-knacks innumerable—for the present owner is a great lover of curios, and is an inveterate "hunter"—and exquisitely furnished. The fire-places are crowded with ferns and flowers. Near the corner, where Mr. Goodall was one time wont to sit and paint sunsets, is a curious old musical clock which plays twelve airs. It is 150 years old. Mr. Gilbert sets the hands going, and to a musical tick—tick—tick a regiment of cavalry pass over the bridge, boats row along the water, and ducks swim about. Frank Holl's picture of the dramatist is here, and several by Duncan, the famous water-colour painter, whose brush was



From a Photo, by]

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

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THE DINING-ROOM.

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only responsible for a single example in oils, possessed by Mr. Gilbert; others by Boughton, Mr. and Mrs. Perugini, and Adrian Stokes. Here is, also, an early example of Tenniel. It was bought unfinished. Mr. Gilbert met the artist one day, and described it to him. He remembered it, though drawn half a century ago. Tenniel took it back, and finished his work only a few months ago. This little satinwood cabinet came from Carlton House, and there is a curious story regarding the manufacture of a fine Japanese cabinet of 200 years ago. In those days whenever a child was born to a wealthy Jap an order was given for a cabinet to be made. It took fifteen years to manufacture, so fine was the workmanship, and it was presented to the child on his fifteenth birthday.

Under a glass case are a pair of marble hands

joined together, by Boehm. They are those of Mrs. Crutchley, who danced in the recent Guards' burlesque at Chelsea, modelled when she was eight years old. Mr. Gilbert handles a fifteenth century carved ivory tankard. It is five inches in diameter, and carved out of a solid tusk. Unfortunately it is broken. When Miss Julia Neilson was making her first appearance in "Comedy and Tragedy," a tankard was wanted. It had been overlooked at the theatre. Mr. Gilbert was present, rushed off in a cab to Kensington, where he was then living, and got back in time. Miss Neilson so entered into her part (and small blame to her) that, quite forgetting the valuable goblet she had in her hand, she brought it down with a bang on the table with this result.

The dining-room contains some fine



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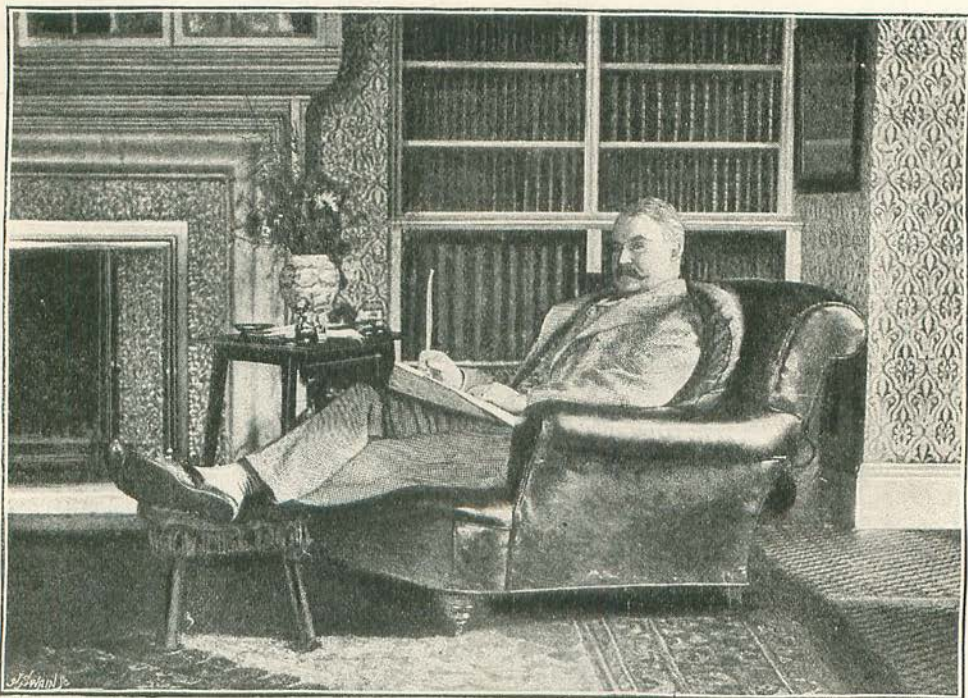
THE LIBRARY.

[Elliott & Fry.

work in oak. A massive Charles I. side-board, dated 1631, was made for Sir Thomas Holt, a cavalier, who murdered his own cook in a fit of passion. He was charged "that he tooke a cleever and hytt hys cooke with the same upon ye hedde, and so clave hys hedde that one syde thereof fell uppone one of hys shoulders and the other syde on ye other shoulder." It was, however, ingeniously argued that although the indictment stated that the halves of the cook's head had fallen on either shoulder, it was not charged against him that the cook had been killed, and on this technicality Sir Thomas escaped. There are some valuable oil paintings here, too—a fine example of C. Van Everdingen. The only other work of his in England is in the messroom of the Honourable Artillery Company. There are also fine works by Giorgione, Van der Kappelle, Tintoretto, Maes, and others.

The library—where we sat together talking—has one distinctive curiosity. It opens out on to the lawn, and its white

Salvator Rosa, Rubens, Andrea del Sarto, and others, and on top of the bookcases are arranged seventy heads, representing all sorts and conditions of character typical of India. They are made of papier-mâché, and were brought home from India by Mr. Gilbert, whither he had wandered in search of new pastures for plot and fresh ideas, so that, should he ever write an Indian opera, the company engaged would find an excellent guide to making up their faces from the figures. On the table—in the centre of the room—amongst the flowers, are portraits of some of the dramatist's *protégés*, so to speak. No man is more far-seeing than he. He can single out talent, and, having found it, he encourages the possessor. No one has been asked more frequently, "Should I go on the stage?" He calls for a sample of the applicant's abilities, pronounces judgment, and those who have heard his "don't" were as wise in refraining from seeking for fame from Thespis as those who welcomed his "go" and have acted on his advice.



From a photo. by]

AT WORK.

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enamel bookcases contain close upon four thousand volumes out of a compact stock of some five thousand works scattered about the house. All round the apartment are drawings by A. Caracci, Watteau, Lancret,

Among many who made their first appearances in his pieces are Mrs. Bernard Beere, Mr. Wyatt, Miss Jessie Bond, Mr. Corney Grain, Mr. Arthur Cecil, Miss Leonora Braham, Miss Brandram, Miss Julia Neilson,

Miss Lily Hanbury, Miss Alma Murray, and Mr. George Grossmith.

"Grossmith," said Mr. Gilbert, "applied to Sir Arthur Sullivan first. Sullivan was pleased, thought him the very man for the part of *John Wellington Wells* in 'The Sorcerer,' and so did I. You see, when making an engagement, the composer tests the applicant vocally, whilst I try him histrionically. Previous to that Grossmith had done nothing, save in the way of entertainments at young men's societies and mechanics' institutes. He didn't want to offend them—what would I advise? 'Go on the stage,' I said, 'and you'll make such a success as to render yourself quite independent of them.' I think he has.

"Then in the 'Trial by Jury'—one of my early works, which I consider one of the best, and in which the *Judge* was played by Sir Arthur Sullivan's brother Fred, now dead—the foreman of the jury was played by a gentleman who only had a couple of lines to sing. But whenever he opened his mouth the audience roared. The estimable foreman of the twelve good men and true on that occasion was Mr. W. S. Penley. Just a moment."

It is post time, and on the day of my visit he had just finished the libretto of his new comic opera. He weighs the great blue envelope in his hand, and, after the servant has left the room, flings himself into his favourite chair, and suggestively remarks, "There goes something that will either bring me in twenty thousand pounds or twenty thousand pence!" And a favourite chair with Mr. Gilbert is an article of furniture not to be despised. It is of red leather, and he has used the

same size and pattern for a quarter of a century. He takes it with him wherever he goes, for he never writes at a desk. When working he sits here with a stool exactly the same height, and stretching himself on these, he writes on a pad on his lap.

I asked him if he would write me a few original verses for publication in this article. "Thank you, very much," said he, "but I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me. When I have just finished a piece I feel for a few days that I am absolutely incapable of further effort. I always feel that I am quite

'written out.' At first this impression used to distress me seriously—however I have learnt by experience to regard it as a 'bogie,' which will yield to exorcism. This, however, is quite at your service;" and he crossed to a recess by the window, and from a heap of papers took out a sheet. It was a couple of delightful verses, left over from "The Gondoliers," written in his best style, and seen by no one till this moment. *Tessa* was to have sung them in the ear of the *Grand Inquisitor*, when he commands the two kings of

Barataria—one of whom the fair *Tessa* loves—to leave their lovers and rule their kingdoms. The following are the verses, the second being given in fac-simile:—

I.

"Good sir, I wish to speak politely—
 Forgive me if my words are crude—
 I find it hard to put it rightly
 Without appearing to be rude.
 I mean to say,—you're old and wrinkled—
 It's rather blunt, but it's the truth—
 With wintry snow your hair is sprinkled:
 What *can* you know of Love and Youth?
 Indeed I wish to speak politely;
 But, pray forgive me, truth is truth:
 You're old and—pardon me—unsightly,
 What can you know of Love and Youth!"



"MY FIRST FEE."

II.

You are too aged to remember
 That withered bosom's earliest glow;
 Dead is the old romantic ember
 That warmed your life-blood years ago.
 If from our sweethearts we are parted
 (Old men know nothing of such pain)
 Two maidens will be broken-hearted
 And quite heart-broken lovers twain!
 How pray, for goodness' sake, remember
 We no desire to be uncouth;
 But we are fine & you're December—
 What can you know of love & youth!

FAC-SIMILE OF MS. OF TESSA'S SONG.

"My life? Date of birth, November 18, 1836. Birthplace, 17, Southampton-street, Strand, in the house of my grandfather, who had known Johnson, Garrick, and Reynolds, and who was the last man in London, I believe, who wore Hessian boots and a pig-tail. I went to school at Ealing, presided over by Dr. Nicholas—a pedagogue who appears more than once in Thackeray's pages as 'Dr. Tickle-us of Great Ealing School.' I was always writing plays for home performance, and at eighteen wrote a burlesque in eighteen scenes. This was offered to every manager in London, and unanimously rejected. I couldn't understand why at the time—I do now. I was intended for the Royal Artillery, and read up during the Crimean War. Of course, it came to an end just as I was prepared to go up for examination. No more officers were required, and further examinations were indefinitely postponed until I was over age. I was offered a line commission, but declined; but eventually, in 1868, I was appointed Captain of the Royal Aberdeenshire Highlanders (Militia), a post I held for sixteen years. I was clerk in the Privy Council for five miserable years, took my B.A. degree at the London University, and was called to the bar of the Inner

Temple in 1863. I was at the bar four years, and am now very deservedly raised to the Bench—but only as a Justice of the Peace.

"I was not fortunate in my clients. I well remember my first brief, which was purely honorary. I am a tolerably good French scholar, and was employed to interpret and translate the conversations and letters between attorney, leading counsel, and client—a Parisian. It was at Westminster. The Frenchman, who was a short, stout man, won his case, and he looked upon me as having done it all. He met me in the hall, and, rushing up to me, threw his arms round my neck and kissed me on both cheeks. That was my first fee.

"On another occasion I defended an old lady who was accused of picking pockets. On the conclusion of my impassioned speech for the defence, she took off a heavy boot and threw it at my head. That was my second fee. By the way, I subsequently introduced the incident into an article, 'My Maiden Brief,' which appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine*.

"I joined the Northern Circuit, and attended assizes and sessions at Liverpool and Manchester. Perhaps a dozen guinea



"MY MAIDEN SPEECH."

briefs, but nothing substantial. The circumstances attending my initial brief on circuit I am not likely to forget. I was to make my maiden speech in the prosecution of an old Irishwoman for stealing a coat. Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft and the members of the Prince of Wales's company, then on tour, were present on the Bench, and I am sorry to say, at my invitation. No sooner had I got up than the old dame, who seemed to realise that I was against her, began shouting, 'Ah, ye devil, sit down. Don't listen to him, yer honour! He's known in all the slums of Liverpool. Sit down, ye spalpeen. He's as drunk as a lord, yer honner—begging your lordship's pardon.' Whenever I attempted to resume my speech, I was flooded by the torrent of the old lady's eloquence, and I had at last to throw myself on the protection of the Recorder, who was too convulsed with laughter to interfere. Mrs. Bancroft says in her memoirs that I never got that maiden speech off, but in that she is mistaken. The old lady had three months.

"My first lines appeared in *Fun*—Henry J. Byron was the editor then. He asked me to send him a column of stuff with a half-page block every week. Well, I did not think it possible to get fresh ideas week by week; but I accepted it, and continued writing and illustrating for six years, though at the end of every seven days I always felt written out for life, just as I do now. My first play was 'Dulcamara,' produced at the St. James's Theatre by Miss Herbert. Tom Robertson and I were great chums, and he, being unable to write her

the Christmas piece, was good enough to say he knew the very man for it and recommended me. I wrote it in ten days, rehearsed it a week; it ran five months, and has been twice revived. No arrangement was made about the price to be paid, and after it had been produced Mr. Emden, Miss Herbert's acting manager, asked me how much I expected to receive for the piece. I reckoned it out as ten days' work at three guineas a

day, and replied, 'Thirty guineas.'

"'Oh!' said Emden, 'we don't deal in guineas—say pounds.'

"I was quite satisfied with the price, took his cheque and gave a receipt. Then Emden quietly turned to me and said—

"'Take my advice as an old stager. *Never sell as good a piece as this for £30 again.*'

"I took his advice; I never have.

"Then I commenced to write for the Royalty and Old Queen's Theatres. 'La Vivandière' was one of these; and at various times 'An Old Score,' 'Ages Ago,' 'Randall's Thumb,' and 'Creatures of Impulse' appeared. These were followed by 'The Palace of Truth,' and 'The Wicked World.' 'Pygmalion and Galatea,' which took me six months to write, was produced in 1871. 'Sweethearts' came out in 1874, and 'Broken Hearts' two years later. I consider the two best plays I ever wrote were 'Broken Hearts' and a version of the Faust legend called 'Gretchen.' I took immense pains over my 'Gretchen,' but it only ran a fortnight. I wrote it to please myself, and not the public. It seems to be the fate of a good piece to run a couple of weeks, and a bad one a couple of years—at least, it is so with me. Here is an instance of it:—

"'The Vagabond' was produced at the Olympic, with Henry Neville and Miss Marion Terry in the cast. I was behind during the first act, and everything went swimmingly—author, actors, and audience delighted. I remained during half of the second act, when Charles Reade put his hand

on my shoulder, and exclaimed, 'Gilbert, its success is certain.' 'Ah, but,' said I, 'there's the third act to come!' 'The third act?' said Reade, who had been present at my rehearsals. 'The third act's worthy of Congreve!' That was enough for me. Off I went to my club, and returned to the theatre at eleven; as I passed through the stage-door, I heard one of the carpenters say to the hall-keeper, as he passed, "Bloomin' failure, Bill." He was quite right. The whole of the third act had been performed in dumb show! That was fourteen years ago; and yet, strange to say, only the other day I received a letter from young Mr. Wallack in New York, saying he had found the manuscript of a play called 'The Vagabond,' and, feeling sure that it would be extraordinarily successful, if produced, wanted to know what was my price for the piece. He knew nothing of its melancholy history.

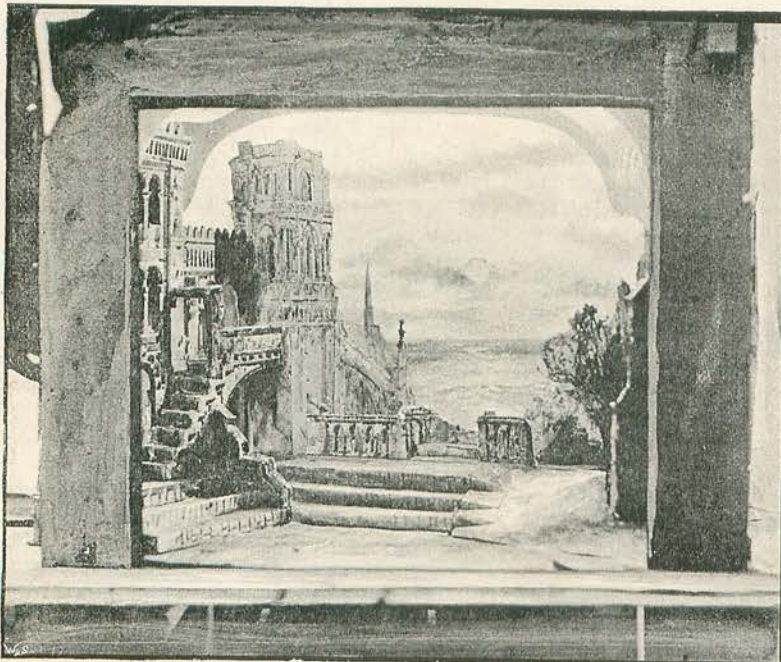
"My operatic work has been singularly successful—owing largely, of course, to the invaluable co-operation of Sir Arthur Sullivan. When Sullivan and I first determined to work together, the burlesque stage was in a very unclean state. We made up our minds to do all in our power to wipe out the grosser element, never to let an offending word escape our characters, and never allow

a man to appear as a woman or *vice versa*.

"My first meeting with Sullivan was rather amusing. I had written a piece with Fred Clay, called 'Ages Ago,' and was rehearsing it at the Old Gallery of Illustration. At the same time I was busy on my 'Palace of Truth,' in which there is a character, one *Zoram*, who is a musical impostor. Now, I am as unmusical as any man in England. I am quite incapable of whistling an air in tune, although I have a singularly good ear for rhythm. I was bound to make *Zoram* express his musical ideas in technical language, so I took up my 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' and, turning to the word 'Harmony,' selected a suitable sentence and turned it into sounding blank verse. Curious to know whether this would pass muster with a musician, I said to Sullivan (who happened to be present at rehearsal, and to whom I had just been introduced), 'I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Sullivan, because you will be able to settle a question which has just arisen between Mr. Clay and myself. My contention is that when a musician who is master of many instruments has a musical theme to express, he can express it as perfectly upon the simple tetrachord of Mercury (in which there are, as we all know, no diatonic intervals whatever) as

upon the more elaborate disdiapason (with the familiar four tetrachords and the redundant note) which (I need not remind you) embraces in its simple consonance all the single, double, and inverted chords.'

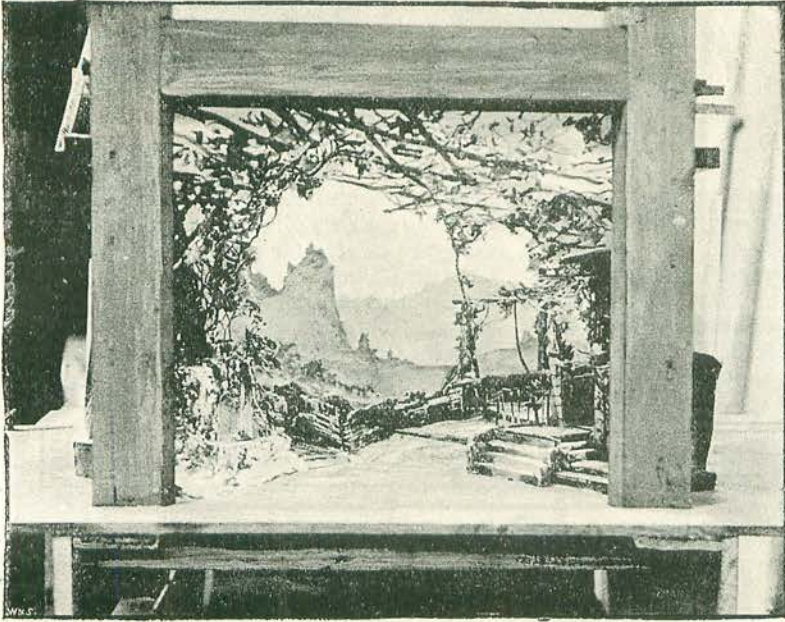
"He reflected for a moment, and asked me to oblige him by repeating my question. I did so, and he replied that it was a very nice point, and he would like to think it over before giving a definite reply. That



From a Photo. by]

MODEL STAGE OF MR. GILBERT'S NEW PLAY.—I.

[Elliott & Fry.



From a Photo. by]

MODEL STAGE OF MR. GILBERT'S NEW PLAY.—II.

[Elliott & Fry.

took place about twenty years ago, and I believe he is still engaged in hammering it out."

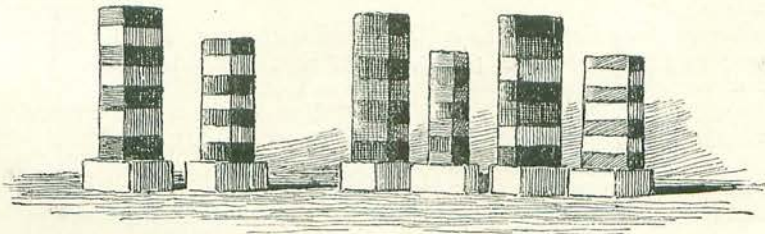
Not the least interesting part of my day with Mr. Gilbert was in having his methods of working explained. Mr. Gilbert's tact and unequalled skill as a stage manager are well known, but he explained to me a decidedly novel secret which undoubtedly greatly assists him in his perfect arrangements of *mise-en-scène*. He has an exact model of the stage made to half-inch scale, showing every entrance and exit, exactly as the scene will appear at the theatre. Those shown in the illustrations represent the two sets which will be seen at the Lyric Theatre when his new opera is produced. Little blocks of wood are made representing men and women—the men are three inches high, and the women two and a half inches. These blocks are painted

and chorister his proper place in the scene under consideration.

His subjects are often the outcome of pure accident. "The Mikado" was suggested by a huge Japanese executioner's sword which hung in his library—the identical sword which Mr. Grossmith used to carry on the stage as *Kō-Kō*. "The Yeomen of the Guard" was suggested by the beefeater who serves as an advertisement of the Tower Furnishing Company at Uxbridge Railway Station.

A rather curious and certainly unique fact in dramatic authorship, and one that is without precedent in the annals of the stage, is that Mr. Gilbert's name has appeared in the London play bills without a single break for nearly twenty-four years. On July 1 the spell was broken by the termination of his connection with the Savoy.

HARRY HOW.



"CHARACTERS."