

IOLANTHE

Christmas 1955

It is always a little disillusioning to have to live with something that is growing. What can they do with that? Why isn't there more rehearsal? Why all this practice? Make boys walk round the stage in circles?—What for? And so while the thing itself grows to a whole the looker-on is too much intent on its separate parts to believe the whole will ever be. How much more reassuring, how much easier to keep the illusion then if we go off to see somebody else put on a Gilbert and Sullivan—anybody else so long as we have not been in on it, been part of, as it were, its birth. This is even more applicable to the newcomer, for he has no standard of previous years to guide him, no previous opera to which he can look back and say, "Ah! yes, all these bits lead to that whole."

The school-audience then has its own difficulties when it comes along in Opera Week. Because of what it has seen (and heard) it cannot come with an open mind. The producer and conductor and the cast have their difficulties, too, of course. And this year they were even more burdened by the change of conductor after rehearsals had started. Mr. Ingate willingly stood in for Mr. Piner for yet another year, even though he would be leaving the School at Christmas, after Mr. Piner had become severely ill. This was not all! The chosen opera "Iolanthe" had been done by the School once before, six years previously. There would be the inevitable comparisons.

And so there were. It seemed well agreed that there were not the fine voices that the School had possessed for its first "Iolanthe" (or even for last year's "Ruddigore"), but the frequent repetition of "Not as good as last year" and "Not as good as last time," became rather boring and appeared even unreal. Still, it is true that good voices were lacking. C. R. S. Wood as Iolanthe, D. B. Neesol as Mountarat, W. P. Hodge (Phyllis) and G. R. Williams as the Lord Chancellor (occasionally) sang pleasingly enough and the other principals were adequate. With so much formalised movement and such little opportunity to show personality this is a serious blemish in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. Nash well deserved his popularity as the soldier, but how much that madrigal in Act 2 needs a really strong bass! Even more important than quality of voice is the need to hear all the words. Gilbert means every one to count and if we do not hear them we are left looking at what amount to painted dolls on a cardboard set. Phyllis and the Lord Chancellor were praiseworthy here; Strephon (D. R. A. Friend) and the Queen of Fairies (G. H. Duffell) were not always incisive enough.

But, of course, it is the whole that matters. As long as we hear the well-loved music and see the wit, the nonsense and the pathos re-enact themselves on the stage, that is all we ask. There is

so much colour in "Iolanthe"; it is so gay. And though there were some rough edges in the chorus of Fairies, yet the boy-girls were so happy about it all, so splendidly mischievous in their wings that they made us happy too. The Peers, again perhaps a little unsure of themselves on the stage, sang their booms so pompously, so lustily that we were willing to accept them in their pretence. Chief praise must go to Williams' Lord Chancellor. He made special use of his height in cavorting about the stage. The opera does need a Chancellor who will demand our attention and this Williams certainly did do. It was a pity the business in his encores was not more varied.

But the whole thing sparkled so joyously. Mr. Grant's set gave the proper feeling of depth and enchantment, helped considerably by the lighting. Mr. Ingate conducted eloquently a hard-working orchestra, and to Mr. Hills it was sufficient praise that it worked, that it was a whole.

A.D.

SCHOOL HOUSE

At the end of the Summer term Mr. Howard left us for Istanbul and Mr. Runswick took over as Housemaster. He has proved very popular, especially since he brightened one small corner of the boarding house with some rather daring coats of paint, and we hope his stay will be an enjoyable one. Sainsbury and Draper also left in July, Sainsbury to go to Cambridge and Draper to become an industrial geographer.

In the sporting field, Smithers and Wright have played regularly for the 1st XV, while Todd and Jones have been regular members of the 2nd XV. Cross-Country has been unusually popular in the House, with Hall, new to us from Truro, at the beginning of the school year, and S. Williams running for the School 1st team, and Tettmar and G. Williams in the 2nd team. Owen and Clark have played occasionally for the Colts Rugby team, while amongst the new boys, Rugsley and Smyth have run for the Junior Cross-Country team.

The Scouts, although without an official scoutmaster, have continued to hold regular meetings and have again done well in District competitions by retaining the Graeffe Cup and only losing the Hughes Trophy by 1 point, after holding it for four years.

Most of the more senior members of the House have recently completed their mock exams. We wish them luck for the actual thing in the Summer.

R. C. TODD.