

Math Allusions & Overtones in G&S

#44 of Gottschalk's Gestalts

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of the Organization & Exposition  
of Mathematics  
by Walter Gottschalk

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500 Angell St #414

Providence RI 02906

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GG44-2

□ passages in G & S  
that are relevant to  
mathematics or mathematicians

To be said and sung  
And chanted and swung.

□ bioline  
William Schwenck Gilbert  
1836-1911  
English  
parodist, playwright, poet;  
librettist of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas

□ bioline  
Arthur Seymour Sullivan  
1842-1900  
English  
composer;  
composer of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas

□ HMS Pinafore (1878)

- What, never?

No, never!

What, never?

Well, hardly ever!

- Things are seldom what they seem,  
Skim milk masquerades as cream.

...

Very true,  
So they do.

...

So they be,  
Frequentlee.

...

Yes, I know,  
That is so.

...

Frequentlee,  
I agree.

□ The Pirates of Penzance (1879)

• I'm very well acquainted too with matters mathematical,  
I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical,  
About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o'news -  
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse.

...

I'm very good at integral and differential calculus,  
I know the scientific names of beings animalculous;  
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,  
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.

...

I quote in elegiacs all the crimes of Heliogabalus,  
In conics I can floor peculiarities parabolous.

• A most ingenious paradox!  
We've quips and quibbles heard in flocks,  
But none to beat this paradox!

...

How quaint the ways of Paradox!  
At common sense she gaily mocks!

...

A paradox, a paradox,  
A most ingenious paradox!

□ Patience (1881)

- If you're anxious for to shine in the high aesthetic line  
as a man of culture rare,  
You must get up all the germs of the transcendental terms,  
and plant them everywhere.  
You must lie upon the daisies and discourse in novel phrases  
of your complicated state of mind,  
The meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter of a  
transcendental kind.  
And everyone will say,  
As you walk your mystic way,  
'If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for me,  
Why, what a very singularly deep young man this deep young  
man must be!'

- Do you know what it is to yearn for the Indefinable,  
and yet to be brought face to face daily,  
with the Multiplication Table? [spoken]

□ Iolanthe (1882)

- Here's a pretty kettle of fish!

□ The Mikado (1885)

• And I expect you'll all agree  
That he was right to so decree.  
And I am right,  
And you are right,  
And all is right as right can be!

...

And you'll allow as I expect,  
That he was right to so object.  
And I am right,  
And you are right,  
And everything is quite correct!

...

And we are right, I think you'll say  
To argue in this kind of way;  
And I am right,  
And you are right,  
And all is right - too-looral-lay!

• Here's a pretty state of things!  
Here's a pretty how-de-do!

• And there he plays extravagant matches  
In fitless finger-stalls  
On a cloth untrue,  
With a twisted cue  
And elliptical billiard balls!

□ The Yeoman of the Guard (1888)

• I can teach you with a quip, if I've a mind;  
I can trick you into learning with a laugh;  
Oh, winnow all my folly, and you'll find  
A grain or two of truth among the chaff!

...

When they're offered to the world in merry guise,  
Unpleasant truths are swallowed with a will -  
For he who'd make his fellow-creatures wise  
Should always gild the philosophic pill!

□ The Gondoliers (1889)

• Of that there is no manner of doubt -  
No probable, possible shadow of doubt -  
No possible doubt whatever.

...

Search in and out and round about,  
And you'll discover never  
A tale so free from every doubt -  
All probable, possible shadow of doubt -  
All possible doubt whatever!



□ The 'Bab' Ballads (1866-1871) [not set to music]

from Story of Prince Agib

- Which is pretty, but I don't know what it means.