

THE BAB BALLADS

W. S. Gilbert



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THE INDEPENDENT BEE
TO THE TERRESTRIAL GLOBE
ETIQUETTE[12]
THE DISCONCERTED TENOR
BEN ALLAH ACHMET;
THE PLAYED-OUT HUMORIST
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The Bab Ballads

W. S. Gilbert

CAPTAIN REECE



Of all the ships upon the blue
No ship contained a better crew
Than that of worthy Captain Reece,
Commanding of *The Mantelpiece* .
He was adored by all his men,
For worthy Captain Reece, R.N.,
Did all that lay within him to
Promote the comfort of his crew.
If ever they were dull or sad,
Their captain danced to them like mad,
Or told, to make the time pass by.
Droll legends of his infancy.



A feather bed had every man,
Warm slippers and hot-water can,
Brown Windsor from the captain's store,
A valet, too, to every four.
Did they with thirst in summer burn?
Lo, seltzogenes at every turn,
And on all very sultry days
Cream ices handed round on trays.
Then currant wine and ginger pops
Stood handily on all the "tops";
And, also, with amusement rife,
A "Zoetrope, or Wheel of Life."
New volumes came across the sea
From Mister Mudie's libraree;
The Times and *Saturday Review*
Beguiled the leisure of the crew.
Kind-hearted Captain Reece, R.N.,
Was quite devoted to his men;
In point of fact, good Captain Reece
Beatified *The Mantelpiece* .
One summer eve, at half-past ten,
He said (addressing all his men):
"Come, tell me, please, what I can do
To please and gratify my crew?
"By any reasonable plan
I'll make you happy, if I can;
My own convenience count as *nil* ;
It is my duty, and I will."
Then up and answered William Lee
(The kindly captain's coxswain he,
A nervous, shy, low-spoken man),
He cleared his throat and thus began:
"You have a daughter, Captain Reece,
Ten female cousins and a niece,
A ma, if what I'm told is true,

Six sisters, and an aunt or two.
"Now, somehow, sir, it seems to me,
More friendly-like we all should be
If you united of 'em to
Unmarried members of the crew.
"If you'd ameliorate our life,
Let each select from them a wife;
And as for nervous me, old pal,
Give me your own enchanting gal!"
Good Captain Reece, that worthy man,
Debated on his coxswain's plan:
"I quite agree," he said, "O Bill;
It is my duty, and I will.
"My daughter, that enchanting gurl,
Has just been promised to an earl,
And all my other familiee,
To peers of various degree.
"But what are dukes and viscounts to
The happiness of all my crew?
The word I gave you I'll fulfil;
It is my duty, and I will.
"As you desire it shall befall,
I'll settle thousands on you all,
And I shall be, despite my hoard,
The only bachelor on board."
The boatswain of *The Mantelpiece* ,
He blushed and spoke to Captain Reece.
"I beg your honour's leave," he said,
"If you would wish to go and wed,
"I have a widowed mother who
Would be the very thing for you—
She long has loved you from afar,
She washes for you, Captain R."
The captain saw the dame that day—
Addressed her in his playful way—

"And did it want a wedding ring?
It was a tempting ickle sing!



"Well, well, the chaplain I will seek,
We'll all be married this day week—
At yonder church upon the hill;
It is my duty, and I will!"
The sisters, cousins, aunts, and niece,
And widowed ma of Captain Reece,
Attended there as they were bid;
It was their duty, and they did.

THE DARNED MOUNSEER



I shipped, d'ye see, in a Revenue sloop,
And, off Cape Finisteere,
A merchantman we see,
A Frenchman, going free,
So we made for the bold Mounseer,
D'ye see?
We made for the bold Mounseer!
But she proved to be a Frigate—and she up with her ports,
And fires with a thirty-two!
It come uncommon near,
But we answered with a cheer,
Which paralysed the Parley-voo,
D'ye see?
Which paralysed the Parley-voo!
Then our Captain he up and he says, says he,
"That chap we need not fear,—
We can take her, if we like,
She is sartin for to strike,

For she's only a darned Mounseer,
D'ye see?
She's only a darned Mounseer!
But to fight a French fal-lal—it's like hittin' of a gal—
It's a lubberly thing for to do;
For we, with all our faults,
Why, we're sturdy British salts,
While she's but a Parley-voo,
D'ye see?
A miserable Parley-voo!"
So we up with our helm, and we scuds before the breeze,
As we gives a compassionating cheer;
Froggee answers with a shout
As he sees us go about,
Which was grateful of the poor Mounseer,
D'ye see?
Which was grateful of the poor Mounseer!
And I'll wager in their joy they kissed each other's cheek
(Which is what them furriners do),
And they blessed their lucky stars
We were hardy British tars
Who had pity on a poor Parley-voo,
D'ye see?
Who had pity on a poor Parley-voo!

THE RIVAL CURATES



List while the poet trolls
Of Mr. Clayton Hooper,
Who had a cure of souls
At Spiffton-extra-Soooper.
He lived on curds and whey,
And daily sang their praises,
And then he'd go and play
With buttercups and daisies.
Wild croquet Hooper banned,
And all the sports of Mammon,
He warred with cribbage, and
He exorcised backgammon.
His helmet was a glance
That spoke of holy gladness;
A saintly smile his lance,
His shield a tear of sadness.
His Vicar smiled to see

This armour on him buckled;
With pardonable glee
He blessed himself and chuckled:
"In mildness to abound
My curate's sole design is,
In all the country round
There's none so mild as mine is!"
And Hooper, disinclined
His trumpet to be blowing.
Yet didn't think you'd find
A milder curate going.
A friend arrived one day
At Spiff-ton-extra-Soo-per,
And in this shameful way
He spoke to Mr. Hooper:
"You think your famous name
For mildness can't be shaken.
That none can blot your fame—
But, Hooper, you're mistaken!
"Your mind is not as blank
As that of Hopley Porter,
Who holds a curate's rank
At Asses-milk-cum-Worter.
" He plays the airy flute,
And looks depressed and blighted,
Doves round about him 'toot,'
And lambkins dance delighted.



" He labours more than you
At worsted work, and frames it;
In old maids' albums, too,
Sticks seaweed—yes, and names it!"
The tempter said his say,
Which pierced him like a needle—
He summoned straight away
His sexton and his beadle.
These men were men who could
Hold liberal opinions:
On Sundays they were good—
On week-days they were minions.
"To Hopley Porter go,
Your fare I will afford you—
Deal him a deadly blow,
And blessings shall reward you.
"But stay—I do not like
Undue assassination,
And so, before you strike,
Make this communication:



"I'll give him this one chance—
If he'll more gaily bear him,
Play croquet, smoke, and dance,
I willingly will spare him."
They went, those minions true,
To Assesmilk-cum-Worter,
And told their errand to
The Reverend Hopley Porter.
"What?" said that reverend gent,

"Dance through my hours of leisure?
Smoke?—bathe myself with scent?—
Play croquet? Oh, with pleasure!
"Wear all my hair in curl?
Stand at my door, and wink—so—
At every passing girl?
My brothers, I should think so!



"For years I've longed for some
Excuse for this revulsion:
Now that excuse has come—
I do it on compulsion!!!"
He smoked and winked away—
This Reverend Hopley Porter—
The deuce there was to pay
At Assesmilk-cum-Worter.
And Hooper holds his ground,
In mildness daily growing—
They think him, all around,
The mildest curate going.

THE ENGLISHMAN



He is an Englishman!
For he himself has said it,
And it's greatly to his credit,
That he is an Englishman!
For he might have been a Roosian,
A French, or Turk, or Proosian,
Or perhaps Itali-an!
But in spite of all temptations,
To belong to other nations,
He remains an Englishman!
Hurrah!
For the true-born Englishman!

ONLY A DANCING GIRL



Only a dancing girl,
With an unromantic style,
With borrowed colour and curl,
With fixed mechanical smile,
With many a hackneyed wile,
With ungrammatical lips,
And corns that mar her trips!
Hung from the "flies" in air,
She acts a palpable lie;
She's as little a fairy there
As unpoetical I!
I hear you asking, Why—
Why in the world I sing
This tawdry, tinselled thing?
No airy fairy she,
As she hangs in arsenic green,
From a highly impossible tree,
In a highly impossible scene
(Herself not over clean).

For fays don't suffer, I'm told,
From bunions, coughs, or cold.
And stately dames that bring
Their daughters there to see,
Pronounce the "dancing thing"
No better than she should be.
With her skirt at her shameful knee,
And her painted, tainted phiz:
Ah, matron, which of us is?
(And, in sooth, it oft occurs
That while these matrons sigh,
Their dresses are lower than hers,
And sometimes half as high;
And their hair is hair they buy.
And they use their glasses, too,
In a way she'd blush to do.)
But change her gold and green
For a coarse merino gown,
And see her upon the scene
Of her home, when coaxing down
Her drunken father's frown,
In his squalid cheerless den:
She's a fairy truly, then!

THE DISAGREEABLE MAN



If you give me your attention, I will tell you what I am:
I'm a genuine philanthropist—all other kinds are sham.
Each little fault of temper and each social defect
In my erring fellow-creatures, I endeavour to correct.
To all their little weaknesses I open people's eyes,
And little plans to snub the self-sufficient I devise;
I love my fellow-creatures—I do all the good I can—
Yet everybody says I'm such a disagreeable man!
And I can't think why!
To compliments inflated I've a withering reply,
And vanity I always do my best to mortify;
A charitable action I can skilfully dissect;
And interested motives I'm delighted to detect.
I know everybody's income and what everybody earns,
And I carefully compare it with the income-tax returns;
But to benefit humanity however much I plan,
Yet everybody says I'm such a disagreeable man!
And I can't think why!



I'm sure I'm no ascetic; I'm as pleasant as can be;
You'll always find me ready with a crushing repartee;
I've an irritating chuckle, I've a celebrated sneer,
I've an entertaining snigger, I've a fascinating leer;
To everybody's prejudice I know a thing or two;
I can tell a woman's age in half a minute—and I do—
But although I try to make myself as pleasant as I can.
Yet everybody says I'm such a disagreeable man!
And I can't think why!

GENERAL JOHN



The bravest names for fire and flames
And all that mortal durst,
Were General John and Private James,
Of the Sixty-seventy-first.
General John was a soldier tried,
A chief of warlike dons;
A haughty stride and a withering pride
Were Major-General John's.
A sneer would play on his martial phiz,
Superior birth to show;
"Pish!" was a favourite word of his,
And he often said "Ho! ho!"
Full-Private James described might be
As a man of a mournful mind;
No characteristic trait had he
Of any distinctive kind.
From the ranks, one day, cried Private James,
"Oh! Major-General John,
I've doubts of our respective names
My mournful mind upon.



"A glimmering thought occurs to me
(Its source I can't unearth),
But I've a kind of a notion we
Were cruelly changed at birth.
"I've a strange idea that each other's names
We've each of us here got on.
Such things have been," said Private James.
"They have!" sneered General John.
"My General John, I swear upon
My oath I think 'tis so——"
"Pish!" proudly sneered his General John
And he also said "Ho! ho!"
"My General John! my General John!
My General John!" quoth he,
"This aristocratical sneer upon
Your face I blush to see!
"No truly great or generous cove
Deserving of them names
Would sneer at a fixed idea that's drove
In the mind of a Private James!"



Said General John, "Upon your claims
No need your breath to waste;
If this is a joke, Full-Private James,

It's a joke of doubtful taste.
"But, being a man of doubtless worth,
If you feel certain quite
That we were probably changed at birth,
I'll venture to say you're right."
So General John as Private James
Fell in, parade upon;
And Private James, by change of names,
Was Major-General John.

THE COMING BY-AND-BY



Sad is that woman's lot who, year by year,
Sees, one by one, her beauties disappear;
As Time, grown weary of her heart-drawn sighs,
Impatiently begins to "dim her eyes"—
Herself compelled, in life's uncertain gloamings,
To wreath her wrinkled brow with well-saved
"combings"—
Reduced, with rouge, lipsalve, and pearly grey,
To "make up" for lost time, as best she may!
Silvered is the raven hair,
Spreading is the parting straight,
Mottled the complexion fair,
Halting is the youthful gait,



Hollow is the laughter free,
Spectacled the limpid eye,
Little will be left of me,
In the coming by-and-by!
Fading is the taper waist—
Shapeless grows the shapely limb,
And although securely laced,
Spreading is the figure trim!
Stouter than I used to be,
Still more corpulent grow I—
There will be too much of me
In the coming by-and-by!

TO A LITTLE MAID



BY A POLICEMAN



Come with me, little maid!
Nay, shrink not, thus afraid—
I'll harm thee not!
Fly not, my love, from me—
I have a home for thee—
A fairy grot,
Where mortal eye
Can rarely pry,
There shall thy dwelling be!
List to me, while I tell
The pleasures of that cell,
Oh, little maid!
What though its couch be rude—
Homely the only food
Within its shade?
No thought of care
Can enter there,
No vulgar swain intrude!
Come with me, little maid,
Come to the rocky shade

I love to sing;
Live with us, maiden rare—
Come, for we "want" thee there,
Thou elfin thing,
To work thy spell,
In some cool cell
In stately Pentonville!

THE HIGHLY RESPECTABLE GONDOLIER



I stole the Prince, and I brought him here,
And left him, gaily prattling
With a highly respectable Gondolier,
Who promised the Royal babe to rear,
And teach him the trade of a timoneer
With his own beloved bratling.
Both of the babes were strong and stout,
And, considering all things, clever.
Of that there is no manner of doubt—
No probable, possible shadow of doubt—
No possible doubt whatever.
Time sped, and when at the end of a year
I sought that infant cherished,
That highly respectable Gondolier
Was lying a corpse on his humble bier—
I dropped a Grand Inquisitor's tear—
That Gondolier had perished!
A taste for drink, combined with gout,
Had doubled him up for ever.
Of that there is no manner of doubt—