

W. S. GILBERT



**THE BAB
BALLADS**

W. S. Gilbert

The Bab Ballads

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CAPTAIN REECE

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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 RIVAL CURATES

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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 croquêt 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 Assesmilk-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 croquêt, 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 croquêt? 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.

ONLY A DANCING GIRL

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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!

GENERAL JOHN