W. S. GILBERT
A MID-VICTORIAN ARISTOPHANES
BY EDITH HAMILTON

& THE ENGLISH ARISTOPHANES
BY WALTER SICHEL

& A CLASSIC IN HUMOUR
BY MAX BEERBOHM

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Included herein are two lengthy essays which seek to relate the Victorian comic playwright W. S. Gilbert to the Greek comic poet Aristophanes. Aristophanes lived from about 450 BC to 385 BC, mostly under the shadow of the Peloponnesian War between Greece and Sparta, which eventually led to the downfall of Greece. He was the most celebrated writer of what is known as Old Comedy and the only one whose plays have survived in more than fragmentary form. Aristophanes is credited with writing at least forty plays, of which eleven have survived to the present.

One critic states that "Savoy opera captures some of Aristophanes' mingling of topsy-turvy fantasy and tripping rhythm. But in sheer poetic invention Aristophanes' lacks a real successor." This critic considers Aristophanes a master satirist, but the two authors, Edith Hamilton and Walter Sichel make a distinction between satire and irony. They claim that the plays of Aristophanes and Gilbert were displays of masterful irony; further they claim that in this genre Gilbert is on the same high level as Aristophanes.

As Sichel writes, "Both Aristophanes and Gilbert were pure ironists. Direct satire maps out the country which it invades, but irony is always on the confines of ambiguous territory. As we survey its inhabitants they seem to be in perpetual somersaults — and yet they are always standing on their feet." AND "That is Gilbert's irony. Everywhere it seizes on the impasses of existence and the strange contrasts of the commonplace. He saw them in all the conventions around him, and still more in the sham defiance of those conventions."

Edith Hamilton's *W. S. Gilbert A Mid-Victorian Aristophanes* is from the October 1927 issue of *Theatre Arts Monthly* and Walter Sichel's *The English Aristophanes* is from the October 1911 issue of *The Fortnightly Review* and reprinted in the December 1911 issue of *The Living Age*. Hamilton's essay is presented first. Though later in time, it presents a better introduction to the general public about the plays of Aristophanes.

In conclusion, Max Beerbohm presents a critique of the Bab Ballads in which he further illustrates the singular gifts of W. S. Gilbert. This is from the May 1905 issue of *The Saturday Review*.

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W. S. GILBERT A MID-VICTORIAN ARISTOPHANES BY EDITH HAMILTON

"True Comedy," said Voltaire, "is the speaking picture of the Follies and Foibles of a Nation." He was thinking of Aristophanes [about 450 BC - 385 BC], and no better description could be given of the Old Athenian Comedy. His words are, however, not all-inclusive; indeed they serve to point the difference between the comedy of Athens and the comedy of sixteenth-century England. The *Zeitgeist* [culture and taste] of those periods of splendor and magnificent vigour was in many points, the most important points, alike. Athenian and Elizabethan comedy, too, have much in common; the resemblance between Aristophanes and certain of the comedy parts of Shakespeare jumps to the eye. The spirit of [both] their times is in them. There is the same tremendous energy and verve and vitality; the same swinging, swashbuckling spirit; the same exuberant, effervescing flow of language; the same rollicking, uproarious fun. Falstaff is a character out of Aristophanes raised to the *nth* power; [Shakespeare's] Poins, Ancient Pistol, Mistress Quickly, might have come straight out of any of his [Aristophanes'] plays.

But this likeness, vivid though it is, is on the surface only. If one goes deeper it disappears. In so far as each man was a product of his time he resembled the other, but in their essential genius they were unlike. To read Aristophanes is in some sort like reading an Athenian comic paper. All the life of Athens is there: the politics of the day and the politicians; the war party and the anti-war party; pacifism, votes for women, free trade, fiscal reform, complaining tax payers, educational theories, the current philosophical and literary talk, — everything in short that interested the average citizen of that day was food for his mockery. To all such matters Shakespeare was completely indifferent. The mode of the moment, the purely passing show, was of no concern whatever to him. Aristophanes was the "speaking picture of the Follies and Foibles of his Nation." Shakespeare lived in an undated world.

The great age of Greek drama was nearing its close when Aristophanes began to write. Of the Old Comedy, as it is called, we have little; none of the plays of Aristophanes' often successful rivals, and only eleven of the many he himself wrote, but the genre is clearly to be seen in those eleven. There were but three actors. A chorus divided the action by song and dance (there was no curtain) and often took part in the dialogue. About half way through, the plot, a very loose matter at best, came practically to an end, and the chorus made a long address to the audience, which aired the author's opinions and often had nothing to do with the play. After that would follow scenes more or less connected. A dull picture this, of a brilliantly entertaining reality. Nobody and nothing escaped the ridicule of the Old Comedy.

The gods came in for their share; so did the institutions dearest to the Athenians; so did the most popular and powerful individuals, often by name. The freedom of speech is staggering to our ideas. Athens was fighting a bitter war [Peloponnesian War against Sparta, 431 BC - 404 BC] which was ultimately to crush her and to end the glory that was Greece, but Aristophanes was free to say exactly what he pleased. If an American had produced a play, after we entered the war [WWI], which represented General Pershing and Admiral Sims as wanting to desert; which denounced the war, praised the Germans, glorified the peace party, ridiculed Uncle Sam, that play would have had a short life, but that is just what Aristophanes did in play after play, and the Athenians, pro- and anti-war alike, thronged the theatre. The fundamental thing to the Athenian was a man's right to say what he chose.

The best known of Aristophanes' plays are the *Birds*, where Athens is shown up in contrast to the Utopian city the birds build in the clouds; the *Frogs*, a parody of popular writers; the *Clouds*, which makes fun of Socrates and the intelligentsia who "walk on air and contemplate the sun"; and three plays about women, the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the *Lysistrata*, and the *Ecclesiazusae*, in which the women take hold of literature, the war and the state, to the great betterment of all.

To find the writer most like Aristophanes one must go to an age as unlike his as Shakespeare's was like. The turbulent democracy that gave birth to the Old Comedy, and the England over whose manners and customs Queen Victoria ruled supreme, had nothing in common and yet the mid-Victorian Gilbert of *Pinafore* fame saw eye to eye with Aristophanes as no other writer has done. The case with Shakespeare is reversed. The differences between Aristophanes and Gilbert are superficial; they are due to the differences of their time. In their essential genius they are alike.

The unknown is always magnificent. Aristophanes wears the halo of Greece, and is at the same time softly dimmed by the dust of centuries of scholarly elucidation. A comparison therefore with an author familiar and beloved and never really thought about wears a look of irreverence, — also of ignorance. Dear nonsensical Gilbert, and the magnificent Aristophanes, poet, political reformer, social uplifter, philosophical thinker, and a dozen other titles to immortality, — how is it possible to compare them? The only basis for true comparison, Plato says, is the excellency that is peculiar to each thing. Was Aristophanes really a great lyric poet? Was he really bent on reforming politics or ending democracy? Such considerations are beside the point. Shakespeare's glory would not be enhanced if Hamlet's soliloquy was understood as a warning against suicide, or if it could be proved that he was attacking the social evil in *Pericles*.

The peculiar excellency of comedy is its excellent fooling, and Aristophanes' claim to immortality is based upon one title [category] only, he was a master maker of comedy, he could fool excellently. Here Gilbert stands side by side with him. He, too, could write the most admirable nonsense. There has never been better fooling than his, and a comparison with him carries nothing derogatory to the great Athenian.

Striking resemblances, both general and particular, emerge from such a comparison. The two men fooled in the same way; they looked at life with the same eyes. In Gilbert's pages Victorian England lives in miniature just as Athens in Aristophanes'. Those sweet pretty girls, those smart young dragoons, those match-making mammas; those genial exponents of the value of a title, a safe income, a political pull; that curious union of sentimental thinking and stoutly practical acting; that intimate savor of England in the eighteen-eighties; — who has ever given is so perfectly as he? He was one of the cleverest of caricaturists, but the freedom Aristophanes enjoyed was not his, and his deft, clear-cut pictures of dishonesty and sham and ignorance in high places are very discreet and always nameless. Essentially, however, he strikes with the same weapon as his Greek predecessor. He, too, ridicules the things dearest to his countrymen: the aristocracy in *Iolanthe*; army training in the *Pirates*; English society in *Utopia Limited*; the law courts in *Trial by Jury*; the smart young intelligentsia with Oscar Wilde at their head in *Patience*; the new woman in *Princess Ida*, and so on through all his thirteen plays. It is never cruel, this ridicule, as Aristophanes' sometimes is, but this difference is the inevitable result of the enormous difference between the two men's environment. The Athenian was watching cold and hunger and bitter defeat draw ever nearer to Athens. The Englishman wrote in the safest and most comfortable world mankind has ever known. But underneath that difference their fundamental point of view was the same. They were topical writers, both of them, given over to the matters of the moment, and yet Aristophanes has been laughed with for two thousand years, and Gilbert has survived a half century of such shattering change, his England seems almost as far away from us. They saw beneath the surface of the passing show. They wrote of the purely ephemeral and in their hands it became a picture not of the "Follies and Foibles" of a day and a nation, but of those that exist in all nations and all ages and belong to the permanent stuff of human nature.

Of the two, Aristophanes has the bigger canvas, leagues to Gilbert's inches, but the yard-stick is not a measure of art, and the quality of their comedy is the same. Grace, gaiety, lightness, charm, quintessential qualities of the Comic Spirit, mark them both.

It is noteworthy that they resemble each other even in matters of technique which is wont to vary so greatly from age to age. In both men the fooling is the point, [the point is] not the plot. In that subtle, individual thing, the use of metre, they are strikingly alike. The metre of a comic song is as important as its matter. No one understood that more clearly than Gilbert:

All children who are up in dates, and floor you with 'em flat,
All persons who in shaking hands, shake hands with you like *that*.

Aristophanes understood it [metre] too as none better [*The Birds*]:

I'm swelling within like a cake full of yeast. I must talk or I'll blow into pieces.
Get out of my way. Don't stop me, I say. Boy, bring me my togs and a topper.

This jolly line [metre] is a favorite with him, but he uses an endless variety. Examples will be found in the passages translated. The effect of them is essentially that of Gilbert's.

A device of pure nonsense in Gilbert, which seems peculiarly his own, and which he uses, for example, in the second act of *Patience*, is the appeal to something utterly irrelevant that proves irresistible:

Grosvenor. (wildly) But you would not do it — I am sure you would not.
(Throwing himself at Bunthorne's knees, and clinging to him.)
Oh, reflect, reflect! You had a mother once.
Bunthorne. Never!
Grosvenor. Then you had an aunt! (Bunthorne deeply affected.) Ah! I see you had! By the memory of that aunt, I implore you.

He uses exactly the same device in the second act of *The Pirates*.

(A struggle ensues between Pirates and Police. The Police are overcome, the Pirates standing over them with drawn swords.)
Sergeant. To gain a brief advantage you've contrived,
But your proud triumph will not be long-lived.
On your allegiance we've a stronger claim —
We charge you yield, in Queen Victoria's name!
King. (baffled) You do?
Police. We do!
We charge you yield, in Queen Victoria's name!
(Pirates kneel, Police stand over them triumphantly.)
King. We yield at once, with humbled mien,
Because, with all our faults, we love our Queen.
(Police, holding Pirates by the collar, take out handkerchiefs and weep.)

Precisely the same nonsensical device is used by Aristophanes. In the *Acharnians* the magic appeal before which all opposition melts is, not to an aunt or the Queen, God bless her, but to a scuttle of coal, as it might have been last year in England. Fuel was scarce in Athens just then: war was raging. The scene is a street in Athens. A man, Dikaeopolis by name, has said something in favor of Sparta, Athens' enemy. The crowd is furious:

Dikaeopolis. This I know, the men of Sparta, whom we're cursing all day long,
Aren't the only ones to blame for everything that's going wrong.
Crowd. Spartans not to blame, you traitor? Do you dare tell such a lie?
At him! At him, all good people. Stone him, burn him. He shall die.
Dikaeopolis. Won't you hear me, my dear fellows?
Crowd. Never, never. Not a word.
Dikaeopolis. Then, I'll turn on you, you villains. Would you kill a man unheard?
I've a hostage for my safety, one that's very dear to you.
I will slaughter him before you. (Goes into house at back of stage.)
Crowd. What is it he's gone to do? How he threatens.
You don't think he's got a child of ours in there?
Dikaeopolis. (from behind stage) I've got something.
Now you scoundrels, tremble, for I will not spare.
Look well at my hostage. This will test your mettle, every soul.
(He comes out, lugging something behind him.)
Which among you has true feeling for — a scuttle full of coal.
Crowd. Heaven save us! Oh, don't touch it!
We'll give in. Say what you please.

In the *Lysistrata*, occurs the following:

First Speaker. For through man's heart there runs in flood
A natural and a noble taste for blood.
Second Speaker. To form a ring and fight —
Third Speaker. To cut off heads at sight —
All. It is our right.

Matter and manner are perfectly Gilbert's. Anyone not knowing the author would inevitably assign it to him, to the *Princess Ida*, perhaps along with:

We are warriors three, Sons of Gama Rex.
Like most sons are we, Masculine in sex.
Bold and fierce and strong, ha! ha! For a war we burn.
With its right or wrong, ha! ha! We have no concern.

Aristophanes was amused by grand talk that covered empty content. The first scene in *Thesmophoriazusae* is a street in Athens. Two elderly men enter, one with the lofty air that befits a Poet and Philosopher; the other an ordinary, cheerful old fellow — he speaks first.

Mnesilochus. Might I, before I've lost my wind entirely,
Be told where you are taking me, Euripides?
Euripides. (solemnly) You may not hear the things which presently you are to see.
Mnesilochus. What's that? Say it again. I'm not to hear — ?
Euripides. What you shall surely see.
Mnesilochus. And not to see — ?
Euripides. The things you must needs hear.
Mnesilochus. Oh how you talk. Of course you're very clever.
You mean I must not either hear or see?
Euripides. They two are twain and by their nature diverse,
Each one from other.
Mnesilochus. Hearing from seeing, eh?
Euripides. Even so. By nature diverse.
Mnesilochus. What's that — diverse?
Euripides. Their elemental parts are separate.
Mnesilochus. Oh, what it is to talk to learned people.

Gilbert was amused by the same thing. In the second act of the *Princess Ida* the first scene is the hall of the Women's University. The principal has been addressing the faculty and students, and as she finishes asks:

Who lectures in the Hall of Arts to-day?
Lady Blanche. I, madam, on Abstract Philosophy.
There I propose considering, at length,
Three points — The IS, the MIGHT BE, and the MUST.
Whether the IS, from being actual fact,
Is more important than the vague MIGHT BE,
Or the MIGHT BE, from taking wider scope,
Is for that reason greater than the IS:
And lastly, how the IS and MIGHT BE stand
Compared with the inevitable MUST!
Princess. The subject's deep.

Every kind of sham is dear to Aristophanes but especially the Literary sham. He is forever making fun of him. In the *Birds*, Peisthetaerus, an Athenian, is helping the birds found their new city in the clouds, which is called Cloud-cuckoo-town. To it flock the quacks and the cranks. A priest has just been chased off the stage when enter a Poet, singing:

O Cloud-cuckoo-town! Muse, do thou crown
With song her fair name, Hymning her fame.

Peisthetaerus. What sort of thing is this? I say,
Who in the world are you, now, pray?

Poet. A warbler of a song, Very sweet and very strong,
Slave of the Muse am I, Eager and nimble and spry,
— As Homer says.

Peisthetaerus. Does the Muse let her servants wear
That sort of long, untidy hair?

Poet. Oh, we who teach the art, Of the drama, whole or part,
Servants of the Muse must try, To be eager and nimble and spry.
— As Homer says.

Peisthetaerus. That nimbleness, no doubt is why
You're all in rags. You are too spry.

Poet. Oh, I've been making lovely, lovely lays,
Old and new-fashioned too, in sweetest praise
Of your Cloud-cuckoo-town, And won't you see
If you have something you can give to me?

In the *Thesmophoriazusae* Euripides and Mnesilochus are walking along the street:

Euripides. That house is where great Agathon is living, The tragic poet.

Mnesilochus. Agathon? Don't know him.

Euripides. Why, he's the Agathon —

Mnesilochus. (interrupting) A big dark fellow, eh?

Euripides. Oh, no, by no means. Haven't you ever seen him?
But let us step aside. His servant's coming.
He's got some myrtles and a pan of coals.
He's going to pray for help in composition.

Servant. Let sacred silence rule us here,
Ye people all, lock up your lips,
For the Muses are revelling there within,
The Queens of poetry making.
Let the air be still and forget to blow,
And the gray sea wave make never a sound.

Mnesilochus. Stuff and nonsense.
Euripides. *Will* you be quiet.
Servant. (scandalized) What's this I hear?
Mnesilochus. Oh, just as you said. It's the air that's forgetting to blow.
Servant. He's making a play. First the keel he will lay
With neatly joined words all new.
Then the bottom he'll round. And chisel the sound,
And fasten the verses with glue.
A maxim he'll take. And an epithet make,
And call by new names what is old,
He'll form it like wax, And fill in the cracks,
And cast it at last in a mold.
(Enter Agathon. He has on a silk dress and his hair is in a net.)
Mnesilochus. Who are you? Were you born a man? No, you're a woman surely.
Agathon. Know, sir, I choose my dress to suit my writing.
A poet molds himself upon his poems,
And when he writes of women he assumes
A woman's dress and takes on woman's habits.
But when he sings of men a manly bearing is his therewith.
What we are not by nature
We take unto ourselves through imitation.

Gilbert enjoyed the sham artist quite as much. In *Patience* Act I, Scene I, the officers of the Dragoons are on the stage:

Colonel. Yes, and here are the ladies.
Duke. But who is the gentleman with the long hair?
(Bunthorne enters, followed by the Ladies, two by two.)
Bunthorne. (aside) Though my book I seem to scan, In a rapt ecstatic way,
Like a literary man, Who despises female clay,
I hear plainly all they say, Twenty love-sick maidens they!
Bunthorne. (alone) Am I alone, And unobserved? I am!
Then let me own, I'm an aesthetic sham!
This air severe is but a mere veneer!
This costume chaste is but good taste misplaced!

Both writers make the same kind of jokes about military matters and the like. In the *Knights* the two generals introduced were among the most famous of their time:

Demosthenes. How goes it, poor old chap?
Nicias. Badly. Like you.
Demosthenes. Let's sing a doleful ditty and then weep
(Both sing, break down, and sob.)
Demosthenes. No use in whimpering. We'd do better far
To dry our tears and find some good way out.
Nicias. What way? You tell me.
Demosthenes. No. Do you tell me. If you won't speak I'll fight you.
Nicias. No not I. You say it first and then I'll say it after.
Demosthenes. Oh, speak for me and say what's in my heart.
Nicias. My courage fails. If only I could say it
Neatly and sweetly like Euripides.
Well then say SERT, like that and say it smartly.
Demosthenes. All right. Here goes. SERT.
Nicias. Good. Have courage now. Say first SERT and then DE
Repeating fast the two words, very fast.
Demosthenes. Ah, yes. I get you; SERT DE, DE SERT, DESERT.
Nicias. You have it. Well, doesn't it sound nice?
Demosthenes. It's heavenly. But — but —
Nicias. What's that?
Demosthenes. They flog deserters.

Gilbert's jokes, of course, were in a lighter vein. There is the Duke of Plaza-Toro:

In enterprise of martial kind,
When there was any fighting,
He led his regiment from behind —
He found it less exciting.
But when away his regiment ran,
His place was at the fore, O —
That celebrated,
Cultivated,
Underrated
Nobleman,
The Duke of Plaza-Toro!

But the passage most like the one quoted from Aristophanes is the marching song of the Police in the *Pirates*, Act II:

Mabel. Go, ye heroes, go to glory,
Though you die in combat gory,
Ye shall live in song and story.
Go to immortality!

Police. Though to us it's evident, Tarantara! tarantara!
These attentions are well meant, Tarantara!
Such expressions don't appear, Tarantara! tarantara!
Calculated men to cheer, Tarantara!
Who are going to meet their fate
In a highly nervous state, Tarantara!

Politicians in Athens and in London seem very much the same. In the *Plutus* a slave, Carion, meets one. He asks:

Carion. You're a good man, a patriot?
Politician. Oh, yes. If ever there was one.
Carion. And as I guess, a farmer?
Politician. I? Lord save us. I'm not mad.
Carion. A merchant then?
Politician. Ah, sometimes I have had to take that trade up — as an alibi.
Carion. You've some profession surely.
Politician. No, not I.
Carion. How do you make a living?
Politician. Well, they're several answers to that. I'm Supervisor General
Of all things here, public and private too.
Carion. A great profession that. What did you do to qualify for it?
Politician. I WANTED it.

So Gilbert in the song of the duke and duchess in the *Gondoliers*:

To help unhappy commoners, and add to their enjoyment,
Affords a man of noble rank congenial employment;
Of our attempts we offer you examples illustrative:
The work is light, and, I may add, it's most remunerative.
Small titles and orders, For Mayors and Recorders
I get — and they're highly delighted.
M. P.'s baronetted, Sham Colonels gazetted,
And second-rate Aldermen knighted.

In the *Knights* an oracle has just foretold that Athens will be ruled some day by a sausage seller. At that moment one enters and is greeted with enthusiasm:

Demosthenes. Dear Sausage-seller rise, our Saviour and the State's.
Sausage-seller. What's that you say?
Demosthenes. Oh happy man and rich. Nothing today, tomorrow everything.
O Lord of Athens, blest through you.
Sausage-seller. I see, sir, that you must have your joke.
But as for me, I've got to wash the guts and sell my sausage.
Demosthenes. But you are going to be our greatest man.
Sausage-seller. Oh, I'm not fit for that.
Demosthenes. What's that? Not fit?
Is some good action weighing on your conscience?
Don't tell me that you come of honest folk?
Sausage-seller. Oh, dear me, no sir. Bad 'uns, out and out.
Demosthenes. You lucky man. Oh, what a start you've got for public life.
Sausage-seller. But I don't know a thing except my letters.
Demosthenes. Ah, the pity is that you know anything.

A parallel passage is Sir Joseph's song in *Pinafore*:

I grew so rich that I was sent
By a pocket borough into Parliament.
I always voted at my party's call,
And I never thought of thinking for myself at all.
I thought so little, they rewarded me
By making me the Ruler of the Queen's Navee!

The woman joke, of course, is well to the fore with both men. It is ever with us. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. [More the change, more the same thing.] Any number of passages might be selected. In the *Princess Ida* the new woman is described:

As for fashion, they foreswear it, So they say — so they say;
And the circle — they will square it, Some fine day — some fine day;
Each newly-joined aspirant, To the clan — to the clan —
Must repudiate the tyrant, Known as Man — known as Man.
They mock at him and flout him. For they do not care about him,
And they're "going to do without him," If they can — if they can!

The song of the duchess in the *Gondoliers* is even more in Aristophanes' vein:

On the day when I was wedded, To your admirable sire,
I acknowledge that I dreaded, An explosion of his ire.
I was always very wary, For his fury was ecstatic —--
His refined vocabulary, Most unpleasantly emphatic.
Giving him the very best, and getting back the very worst —
That is how I tried to tame your great progenitor — at first!

But I found that a reliance, On my threatening appearance,
And a resolute defiance, Of marital interference,
Was the only thing required, For to make his temper supple,
And you couldn't have desired, A more reciprocating couple.
So with double-shotted guns and colours nailed unto the mast,
I tamed your insignificant progenitor — at last!

Aristophanes' ladies are of quite the same kind. They form the chorus of the *Thesmophoriazusae*, and they begin their address to the audience as follows:

We now come forward and appeal to you to hear how the men all flout us,
And the foolish abuse and the scandals let loose the silly things tell about us.
They say all evil proceeds from us, war, battles, and murder even,
We're a tiresome, troublesome, quarrelsome lot, disturbers of earth and heaven.
Now, we ask you to put your minds on this; if we're really the plague of your lives
Then tell us, please, why you're all so keen to get us to be your wives?
Pray, why do you like us to be at home, all ready to smile and greet you,
And storm and sulk if your poor little wife isn't always there to meet you?
If we're such a nuisance and pest, then why — we venture to put the question —
Don't you rather rejoice when we're out of the way — a reasonable suggestion.
If we stay the night at the house of a friend, — I mean, the house of a lady,
You hunt for us everywhere like mad and hint at something shady.
Do you like to look at a plague and a pest? It seems you do, for you stare
And ogle and give us killing looks if you see us anywhere.
And if we think proper to blush and withdraw, as a lady no doubt should be doing,
You will try to follow us all the more, and never give over pursuing.
But we can show you up as well,
The ways of a man we all can tell.
Your heart's in your stomach, every one,
And you'll DO anyone if you're not first DONE.
We know what the jokes are you love to make,
And how you each fancy yourself a rake.

Parallels such as these could be given indefinitely. The world moves slowly. Aristophanes in Athens, fifth century, B.C., Gilbert nineteenth century England, saw the same things and saw the same humour in them. Some things, however, were seen by the Athenian which the Englishman was constrained not to see, and this fact constitutes the chief point of difference between them. What a gulf between the Old Comedy, so riotous and so Rabelaisian, and the decorous operettas that would never raise a blush on the cheek of Anthony Trollope's most lady-like heroine. A gulf indeed, but it is the gulf between the two periods. England's awful arbiter of morals, the formidable Queen in her prime, was the audience that counted in Gilbert's day, and it may be stated with certainty that Aristophanes himself would have abjured indecency and obscenity in that presence. Equally certainly if he had lived in the age, *par example*, of gentility, he would have tempered his vigour, checked his swiftness, moderated his exuberance. Gilbert is an Aristophanes plentifully watered down, a steady and stolid-y, jolly Bank-holiday, every day Aristophanes, a mid-Victorian Aristophanes.

The question is irresistibly suggested, if Gilbert had lived in those free-thinking, free-acting, free-speaking days of Athens, "so different from the home life of our own dear Queen," would he too [as in *Utopia Limited*] have needed a Lord High Chamberlain

> to purge his native stage beyond a question
> of "risky" situation and indelicate suggestion.

There are indications that this [Gilbert's use of indecency] is a possibility, even a probability, had he not been held down by the laws the Victorian patrons of the drama gave. He could not but submit to these limitations, and only rarely, by a slip as it were, is a hint given of what he might have done, had there not always been before him the fear of that terrible pronunciamento [of Queen Victoria]: WE ARE NOT AMUSED.

THE ENGLISH ARISTOPHANES BY WALTER SICHEL

When a new voice makes a new world dance to a new tune we acknowledge a genius. Sometimes he does so in a way that may be pursued: he founds a school which expands. So, after many colloquial experiments, Montaigne's essay in essays blossomed into the present cosmopolitan novel which barely permits its forefather to recognize himself. But sometimes his enchantment is limited to his own originality, which no copyist can develop. He has achieved all that was possible in his peculiar sphere: he is a phenomenon. Such was Aristophanes; such, in his measure, Sir William Gilbert — both, in whatever respects incomparable with each other, wholly incomparable with anyone else; both, poet-ironists and creators of fresh provinces; both, inverters of what is termed the real, and realizers of the world's inversions.

Gilbert has left us, but his works will not easily pass away so long as poetic humor and prose-fairyland hold their own, so long as "superior persons" are kept at a respectful distance. His dramatic humoresques have already become literature, and in both aspects they are signal. Our English Aristophanes was eminently a stylist and constructor. He was a master of the comic and lyric stage in nearly all their departments. His rhymes and his rhythms harmonize even the most extravagant of his capers and caprices, and, while they dance hand and foot with them, they restrain their antics almost severely. He is the most critical of creators, the most creative of critics in an atmosphere which he may be said to have rediscovered. For that atmosphere, despite the centuries, is, after all, the atmosphere of Aristophanes. Their world is one not of nonsense but of sense upside down. It laughs thought into us. And though it is in both cases a sphere as light as down, it is not ethereal, but a borderland between empyrean and the too solid earth. Its welkin rings with everyday laughter, and the mirage of a masquerade contracts the countenances with the visors. Truth smiles from the bottom of a most sparkling fountain, the spray of which is hued with rainbow ironies. With all the magic of its background, the victory of whim is short-lived. It is the triumph of hypothesis, resembling one of those systems that proceed logically from paradox; inconsequence turns consequent, while fantasy lends wings to the logic of the illogical like *Pirates of Penzance's*:

> How quaint the ways of paradox,
> At common sense she gaily mocks.

Both Aristophanes and Gilbert were pure ironists. Direct satire maps out the country which it invades, but irony is always on the confines of ambiguous territory. As we survey its inhabitants they seem to be in perpetual somersaults — and yet they are always standing on their feet. Here, however, Gilbert parts company with the great Greek who mocked at loftier foibles with an irony often gigantic. It is true that his English counterpart has depth, and even a "philosophy" — a very English outlook on life and love rendered in very English lyrics, the philosophy of cultivated common sense. But in Aristophanes the poetical side overpowers the practical, and in him there is a fine, fierce frenzy of the ludicrous which Gilbert lacks. Gilbert joined a mathematical precision to a very strong dash of the muse; there was *par excellence* Euclid in his Aristophanes. The featness and neatness of craftsmanship possessed him. Aristophanes probably thought of himself as before all things a shrewd man of the world, and, in like manner, Gilbert may have regarded himself as mainly a poet. A poet he [Gilbert] was by instinct, with a charming lyrical gift, and, throughout, a topsy-turvy pathos which transforms tears to laughter. But his very restrictions accentuate the originality of his works. Combined in their varied fullness they find no parallel in our language. Compared with kindred whimsies they stand out supreme, while in metrical grace and fantastic flexibility Aristophanes himself does not surpass him.

He [Gilbert] was more of a poet than many solemn pretenders to the name. But he was not mainly a poet, even allowing for the restrictions of his scope. The critic in him predominated, and checked or ridiculed the flight. Yet he could abandon himself, and in his modern fantasies there was room for the pathos which Aristophanes wholly missed. Gilbert's irony has its own soft leaven, and sometimes displays it.
Lines like *Broken Hearts'*:

> Proud as a war-horse — fair as the dawn of day —
> Staunch as a woman — tender as a man!

and (of sleep) like *Pygmalion and Galatea's*:

> 'Twas but a dream!
> Once every day this death occurs to us,
> Till thou and I and all who dwell on earth
> Shall sleep to wake no more.

and the noble retort of the sculptor to the insolent art-patron's lackey:

> I am an artist and a gentleman.
> He should not reckon Art among his slaves,
> She rules the world — so let him wait on her.

are not readily forgotten.

Out of airy and fairy nothings he raised a local habitation and a name which are distinctively his own. But as distinctively they are local. He is an *English* Aristophanes, just as Fielding would have loved to have been in his *Tom Thumb* — an English Aristophanes with all the limits involved in the remoteness and the insularity, like *Pinafore's*:

For he himself has said it
And it's greatly to his credit
That he is an Englishman.
and In spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations,
He remains an Englishman.

Gilbert, like Aristophanes, was an artist to the core. His feeling for symmetry and proportion was native and needed no emphasis. In one faculty, indeed, he may be said to have excelled Aristophanes himself — in concentration. Not only is Gilbert's phrasing terse and trenchant, but his lyrical comedies are of the kind that leave an impression of length without ever being long — intaglios reduced from statues, or, to vary the metaphor, miniatures with the quality of pictures. They are his own *Bab Ballads* dramatized, acted epigrams. Rarely do they exceed some forty pages of print; indeed, *Pinafore* falls short of thirty pages, while the *Sorcerer* and the *Pirates of Penzance* occupy little over that amount. Yet how spacious these are in the hearing, how their plot distends, how excellently they read! Their facets gleam in the setting of the study as effectively as they do under the lime-lights. He is lambent [creating light].

This art of condensation concerns the very gestures of the persons that emphasize the fantastic world which surrounds them. Their topsy-turvydom is written in italics, yet it is never mis-shapen. It is, in fact, *character* — the character of inversion. The inversion is often a toy inversion, but their character is no toy and it breeds familiarity. The persons are humanized elfs or elfinized mortals with momentary motives and glimpses of actions that, none the less, lend us the feeling of protracted acquaintance. They pass from mouth to mouth, and memory to memory, till they become types and proverbs. That is surely a mark of creative genius. They are normal in their abnormality. Their very child's play is grown-up, and though the artist only draws fleeting profiles, the beholder takes away with him the genuine expressiveness of life at full length. They are never perversions; they are versions, and lively versions. Fantasies in shadow-land, they are not phantoms; and so it happens that inside all their gossamer vagaries their solid substance begets human intimacy attracting general welcome, and workaday acceptance.

That is why they in no sense resemble some of those bizarre and bloodless ephemerals who serve a newer satire as pegs for passing paradox, and are debarred from stature and the vitality of quotation. Gilbert's characters, it must be insisted, breathe. They are no marionettes to be danced on the wires of a dramatic essayist. Nor are they ever morbid. Their madness is sane, and their follies are sympathetic. Still less are they merely intellectual figments. They feel as well as think. And so Gilbert's works form a sort of *scherzo serioso* relating him, however gaily, to the tragicomedy of existence. Two characteristics in this connection he shares with Sheridan and with Thackeray. He is a sentimentalist tilting at sentiment, and he has what is hardly found outside English literature — the true schoolboy's love of fun. Three specimens may suffice.
The first is paralleled by the *Mountebanks'*:

> In a river, in a meadder
> Took a header, and a deader
> Was Ophelia.

It comes from the "doesn't matter" patter in *Ruddigore*:

> If I had been so lucky as to have a steady brother
> Who could talk to me as we are talking now to one another —
> Who could give me good advice when he discovered I was erring
> (Which is just the very favor which on you I am conferring),
> My story would have made a rather interesting idyll,
> And I might have lived and died a very decent *indiwiddle*.

The second occurs in the poetical *Princess Ida*:

> For adder-like his sting lay in his tongue;
> His "sting" is present, though his "stung" is past.

The third is a prose-quip on the lips of *Foggerty*:

> Miss Spiff, you will not insist on your bond. You will be merciful! You will not dash the cup — the — dash it, the *jug* of happiness from my lips.

And this, too, is paralleled in *Tom Cobb* by Matilda's retort to her lover's boast of "I'm a qualified practitioner! I've passed the College of Surgeons." — *"So have I, dear, often."*
Such verbal horseplays are not of Gilbert's higher or subtler satire, with its lights and shadows, but romping fun is always its rough foundation — the quarry of its statues. These practical jokes impart elasticity and freedom; wit and his humor spring out of them, and they, like his common sense and humanity, find expression even in his most sardonic touches and pervade what I cannot help regarding as his ironic masterpiece, the unlyrical *Engaged*.

This quality is the more remarkable when we consider to what grace it is allied. It would be difficult to beat Pygmalion's compliment to his wife Cynisca — a compliment truly poetical:

Why, here's ingratitude, to slander Time,
Who in his hurried course has passed thee by!
Or is it that Cynisca won't allow
That Time could pass her by, and never pause
To print a kiss upon so fair a face?

Gilbert is best known by his operettas, but some of his chief creations are the satires without songs given before his genius won a wider popularity through the marriage of his muse to Sullivan's entrancing music. Who now reads or sees *Charity*? Yet it is well worth reading, and might be revived with advantage on the stage. It handles what would now be termed a problem with insight, exposing the subterfuges of false philanthropy and transfiguring the loving kindness of an erring heroine. The tramp, "Ruth Tredgett" — the simple objective of both — reveals herself seriously, and in one of her sentences she strikes the very keynote of all Gilbert's future work:

"We meet in a strange way after so many years," exclaims the hypocrite "Smalley," encountering his former victim. "Yes," she answers, "we do meet in a strange way. Seems to me it's something of a topsy-turvy way. But it's a topsy-turvy world, ain't it?"

There we get Gilbert's whole gay-grave faculty — the inverting power which deals breezily with the cant of coincidence. That note had, of course, been struck in his *Bab Ballads*, but Gilbert came to see that there was more than farce in it, and that the quaint pathos which he had singled out in his ballad of the poor ballet-girl was universal. That is his irony. Everywhere it seizes on the *impasses* of existence and the strange contrasts of the commonplace. He saw them in all the conventions around him, and still more in the sham defiance of those conventions. A straight line was a straight line, and his ingenuity reveled in devising comical retributions for such as persisted in calling it crooked. Solemn shams and pompous incapacity were his butts, but everywhere he put these old laughingstocks into new positions, till their futility became piteous, and everywhere he descried a sort of romance, and weird glamour, in the familiar. Give him a garret and a broken-down *beau*, and he would at once evolve trains of circumstance outvying Aladdin's palace. Or give him a stingy philanderer and the Scotch marriage laws — the Nemesis of Greek tragedy is in sight. Give him a stray "bobby," and at once, in a ruined chapel by moonlight, which does *not* contain the tombs of the "modern major-general's ancestors"— a whole chorus of heroic constables will assure us that:

When the coster's finished jumping on his mother
He loves to lie a-basking in the sun.
Ah, take one consideration with another,
The policeman's life is not a happy one.

Give him a buccaneer, and a sea-faring syndicate that disdains to plunder an "orphan" and has transformed a nursemaid into "a piratical maid of all work," will be as picturesque or prosaic as you please. Give him a stalwart sentry, and he turns into a stammering philosopher, perpending under the moon why:

> Every child that's born alive is either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative.

Or let him deal with a modern squire, or a modern faddist, or a modern altruist, or the would-be "wicked" baronet — and with all the worn machinery of shepherds and shepherdesses joined to intensified types of melodrama, he would upset the modern scene and outdo the *Castle of Otranto*. The romance or poetry might be derided, but they were there, and there in the neighborhood of chignons and frock-coats. Dairymaids and countesses, knights of industry and knights of empire, faddists and financiers, all jostle on each other, while pirates and gondoliers are reduced to proportions which fit alike the clerk and the diplomatist. The medley tingles with color and suggestion, yet all is real, though all is fancy. Imagination runs riot among the commonest crockery of the obvious; out of a cheap squib shoots a gorgeous variety of display. And the converse process is quite as prominent. An Arabian Nights Entertainment soon sinks to the level of a modern newspaper. The spells even of Fortunatus' cap only bore and bewilder their wearers. The magician turns out to be nothing more than "the resident Djinn, number seventy, Simmery Axe," who dances incantations over a tea-pot; and could anyone else but Gilbert have set a stiff Lord Chancellor leaping a refined *can-can* in his robes, or, on the other hand, have romanticised him into the lover of a fairy who is also his ward? Here the two processes meet. But everywhere plain commercial principles, with punctuality and dispatch, animate all the winged ministers of air. And nowhere does anyone seem what he is, or is anybody what he seems. Fact *is* stranger than fiction if only we look round and into as well as at it. Jack Point in the *Yeomen of the Guard* is surely Gilbert himself:

> Oh sir, a pretty wit, I warrant you — a pretty, pretty wit!
> I've jest and joke, and quip and crank; For lowly folk, and men of rank.
> I ply my craft, and I know no fear; I aim my shaft, at prince or peer.
> At peer or prince — at prince or peer, I aim my shaft and know no fear.
> I've wisdom from the East and from the West, That's subject to no academic rule;
> You may find it in the jeering of a jest, Or distil it from the folly of a fool.
> 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 philosophic 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.

In *Foggerty's Fairy* Gilbert started his peculiar prose-fairyland with its romance and realism alike upside down. The fairy "Rebecca," who causes the complications besetting the path of the perplexed little hero, is a practical and entirely English fay. The routine of the supernatural is represented as a business, and she is ever eager for return to the coryphean tasks in her far from gossamer world. She is, indeed, less a fairy than a glorified *figurante*. By recklessly invoking her aid to wipe out an embarrassing incident in his past, Foggerty has also accepted the condition of obliterating all the possible consequences of that incident, and so he only finds himself plunged from one hopeless dilemma into others more hopeless. Stripped of its magic, his plight really amounts to what is called a loss of memory, through which in the second act he becomes absolutely puzzled as to where or how or who he is. And the whim is worked out with an algebraical exactness, and with strict adherence to character, since the motives are always true, however feigned may be the positions and actions. Nowhere is a better example of his union of the practical and the poetical, and he was practical enough to repeat long afterwards several of his *Foggerty* lines in his *Yeomen of the Guard*. This logic of fantasy stamps his pathos also. *Sweethearts* is the most pathetic of his pieces, yet with what a cruel consequence he depicts the jilting heroine of the first act and the forgetful hero of the second. And how closely the irony treads on the heels of the pathos!

"Am I an old man, or you an old woman, because the earth contrives to hurry round the sun in three hundred and sixty-five days? Why, Saturn can't do it in thirty years. If I had been born on Saturn I should be two years old, ma'am, a public nuisance in petticoats."

So, too, in *Broken Hearts*, the next most moving of his more serious achievements. The hunchback "Mousta" is a sort of Caliban in the enchanted island where the sad and fair insurgents against love have transferred their affections to the trees and fountains. Yet he is invested with a sort of remorseless pathos that only makes him the more horrible as he becomes more pitiable. The sole pathos unmixed with irony centres round the self-effacement of the loved and lovely "Vavir." Here Gilbert feels finely, and her dying moments deserve to live. Hilda, the friend of her soul, the "sister" for whom she has sacrificed herself, stands by her side:

Vavir. (very faintly) It is too late — too late! I feel the hand
Of Death upon my heart. So let it be.
My day is spent — my tale is nearly told!
Hilda. Vavir — Vavir! Have pity on us! Gentle little soul,
Fly not to thine appointed Heaven — not yet —
Not yet — not yet! Eternity is thine;
Spare but a few brief years to us on Earth
And still Eternity remains to thee!
He loves thee — Florian loves thee well! Oh, Death
Are there no hoary men and aged women
Weeping for thee to come and comfort them?
Oh, Death — oh, Death — leave me this little flower!
Take then the fruit, but pass the blossom by!
Vavir. (very feebly) Weep not; the bitterness of death is past.
Kiss me, my sister. Florian, think of me —
I loved thee very much! Be good to her.
Dear sister, place my hand upon my dial.
Weep not for me; I have no pain indeed.
Kiss me again; my sun has set. Good night! Good night!

Once more, take the tragic irony in *Comedy and Tragedy* where a woman's heart comes to its climax in a few pages. The courtiers think that Clarice is only performing one of her parts while she betrays her agony at the deadly duel which is being fought outside:

Clarice. You look at me, but you do not move. Gentlemen, I am not acting; I am in fearful earnest. Oh! my love! my love! and I have done this! As I speak my husband is being killed.

It Is not so much the words said, but the situation and the feelings flashed on us by a few bold strokes after an elaborate prelude of artificial gaiety. And throughout his *Dan'l Druce* runs an undercurrent of the pathos that befits a transferred paraphrase of *Silas Marner*. Here, however, the pathos is less effective, as, after the first act, it is unhelped by strong dramatic moments, and its rendering is all along unpointed by the Gilbertian irony. It tends occasionally to touch on the *genre* which Gilbert so often satirized, just as Sheridan in his *Pizarro* lapsed into the conventions which his *Critic* destroyed and immortalised.

These examples of Gilbert's pathos are not often remembered, nor is the ironical pathos of his absurdities borne in mind. Instances meet us on every page; the whimsical catastrophes and derided ecstasies, the false sentiments, have usually a real appeal of their own. Recall one of his least-known and jauntiest farces — *Tom Cobb*:

"What's the use of socks to a man who's going to blow his brains out," exclaims that unfortunate medical student to the Irish "colonel"-landlord's prosaic daughter, Matilda.

"I never saw his face," says her friend Caroline of her newspaper lover, "but I have seen his soul!" "What's his soul like?" rejoins Matilda.

Caroline. Like? Like the frenzied passion of the antelope, like the wild fire of the tiger-lily. Like the pale earnestness of some love-sick thundercloud that longs to grasp the fleeting lightning in his outstretched arms.

Matilda. Was he often like that?

Caroline. Always.

Matilda. A pleasant man in furnished lodgings! And where did ye see his soul?

Caroline. He poured it in the columns of the Weybridge Watchman, the local paper of the town that gave him birth. Dainty little poems, the dew of his sweet soul, the tender frothings of his soldier brain — the huckstering men of law appraise my heart-wreck at five thousand pounds.

Here we strike the keynote of *Engaged* — a grotesque with a very tangible background where affected simplicity and maudlin avarice are worked up and out to their extremes, yet where, somehow, we feel with, while we laugh at, their tormenting *imbroglios*. How the impostures of Belvawney and his fatal eyes are brought home and made quite natural! How tragic is the falsetto of Belinda at the wedding feast! And how irresistible are the designing artlessness of Minnie, the canny tears of Maggie, and the gushing shifts of that parsimonious Lothario, Cheviot Hill!

Or, to return to *Tom Cobb*, how the high-faluting of the out-at-elbows "Effinghams" (foreshadowing *Patience*) hardly excludes a kind of compassion for them and for the son whose "life is one protracted misfit." — "My boy," says the father with distorted dignity, "sneer not at these clothes. They have been worn for many years by a very old, but very upright man. Be proud of them. No sordid thought has ever lurked behind that waistcoat. That hat has never yet been doffed to vicious wealth. Those shoes have never yet walked into the parlors of the sinful." "A blessing on him," sighs Caroline. "Is he not benevolent?" To which replies Tom, "Yes, he looks so. Why do benevolent people have such long hair? Do they say to themselves, 'I am a benevolent person, so I will let my hair grow,' or do they let it grow because they are too benevolent to cut it off?"

Irony always makes the great and the little, the masks of Comedy and of Tragedy, exchange places. But Gilbert makes them exchange and re-exchange places again and again, and with an infinite network of involution defying disentanglement. So much so that at length we can scarcely escape from the Chinese puzzle, and give credence to illusion within illusion — all mutually destructive — just as if each were an isolated matter of fact. This is why a farcical pathos is always possible to him — at the close of Ruddigore, for example, where he introduces "Hannah's" touching and teaching little ballad:

There grew a little flower 'Neath a great oak tree.
When the tempest 'gan to lower Little heeded she;
No need had she to cower, For she dreaded not its power —
She was happy in the bower Of her great oak tree!
Sing hey, lackaday! Let the tears fall free,
For the pretty little flower and the great oak tree.
When she found that he was fickle, Was that great oak tree,
She was in a pretty pickle, As she well might be —
But his gallantries were mickle, For Death followed with his sickle,
And her tears began to trickle For her great oak tree.
Said she, "He loved me never, Did that great oak tree,
But I'm neither rich nor clever, And so why should he?
But though Fate our fortunes sever To be constant I'll endeavor,
Ay, for ever and for ever, To my great oak tree."

Gilbert's irony is changeable as an April morning, and it is on his lights and shadows that we all love to dwell, yet one or two more of his less volatile turns may still engage us till we pass to his more familiar vein. Take his power of analysis. There is an excellent sample in Pygmalion and Galatea. The statue has just come to life:

Galatea. Is this the world?
Pygmalion. It is.
Galatea. This room?
Pygmalion. This room is portion of a house; the house stands in a grove;
The grove itself is one of many, many hundred groves in Athens.
Galatea. And is Athens then the world?
Pygmalion. To an Athenian — yes.
Galatea. And I am one?
Pygmalion. By birth and parentage, not by descent.
Galatea. But how came I to be?

Pygmalion. Well—let me see;
Oh — you were quarried in Pentelicus;
I modelled you in clay — my artisans
Then roughed you out in marble — I in turn
Brought my artistic skill to bear on you,
And made you what you are — in all but life —
The gods completed what I had begun,
And gave the only gift I could not give.
Galatea. Then this is life?
Pygmalion. It is.
Galatea. And not long since
I was a cold, dull stone! I recollect
That by some means I knew that I was stone;
That was the first dull gleam of consciousness.
I became conscious of a chilly self,
A cold, immovable identity,
I knew that I was stone, and knew no more!
Then by an imperceptible advance,
Came the dim evidence of outer things,
Seen — darkly and imperfectly — yet seen —
The walls surrounding me, and I alone.
That pedestal — that curtain — then a voice
That called on Galatea! At that word,
Which seemed to shake my marble to the core.
That which was dim before, came evident.
Sounds that had hummed around me indistinct,
Vague, meaningless — seemed to resolve themselves
Into a language I could understand.
My limbs grew supple, and I moved — I lived!
Lived in the ecstasy of newborn life,
Lived in a thousand tangled thoughts of hope,
Love, gratitude — thoughts that resolved themselves
Into one word, that word, Pygmalion. (kneels to him)

Pygmalion. I have no words to tell thee of my joy,
O woman — perfect in thy loveliness!
Galatea. What is that word? Am I a woman?
Pygmalion. Yes.
Galatea. Art thou a woman?
Pygmalion. No, I am a man.
Galatea. What is a man?
Pygmalion. A being strongly framed
To wait on woman, and protect her from
All ills that strength and courage can avert;
To work and toil for her that she may rest;
To weep and mourn for her, that she may laugh,
To fight and die for her, that she may live!
Galatea. (after a pause) I'm glad I am a woman.
Pygmalion. So am I. (they sit)

This is earnest enough irony, and the conclusion is very characteristic. It brings us to close quarters with Gilbert's attitude towards the sexes. I have said that he was a sentimentalist tilting against sentiment, and the statement is borne out by nearly all his stage-heroes and heroines. No one had a deeper reverence for manly manhood and womanly womanhood; none a more piercing scorn for their affectations or the reversal of their types. The whole of *Engaged* forms a satirical homily on this theme. But Gilbert also seems to have held that the theory of affinities verged perilously on nonsense. He thought that under normal conditions any normal man would suit any normal woman, and he delights in the whimsical application of this cynical common sense. "Cynical" is perhaps hardly the epithet, yet what is the cynic but the denuder of the super-imposed — the microscope of motives? Woman was made, not for competition, but marriage.

We get this starting-point in *Pygmalion* again, where the wife, Cynisca, was vowed in girlhood to virginity as "a holy nymph of Artemis." "How terrible!" exclaims Myrine:

Cynisca. It seemed not so to me;
For weeks and weeks I pondered steadfastly
Upon the nature of that serious step
Before I took it — lay awake at night,
Looking upon it from this point and that,
And I at length determined that the vow
Which to Myrine seems so terrible,
Was one that I, at all events, could keep.

Myrine. How old wast thou, Cynisca?
Cynisca. I was ten!
Well — in due course I reached eleven, still
I saw no reason to regret the step;
Twelve — thirteen — fourteen saw me still unchanged;
At fifteen it occurred to me one day
That marriage was a necessary ill
Inflicted by the gods to punish us.
And to evade it were impiety;
At sixteen the idea became more fixed;
At seventeen I was convinced of it.
Pygmalion. In the meantime she'd seen Pygmalion.

The conclusion here too is equally characteristic both in form and meaning. In the *Wicked World* again the fairy-queen Seline protests to Ethais her "strange, irrational belief" in him. "Is that so strange?" answers her knight, and this is his adorer's explanation:

Seline. Nay, my love, reflect,
I am a woman, and thou art a man;
Well, thou art comely, so in truth am I;
We meet and love each other —
And why?
Because I see in thee, or thou in me,
Astounding virtue, brilliant intellect,
Great self-denial, venerable years,
Rare scholarship, or godly talent?
No! Because, forsooth, we're comely specimens
Not of our own, but Nature's industry!

He is convinced that vanity plays a large part in love. We get Maggie in *Engaged* flattering her face in the brook; and Yum-Yum is an *ingenue* self-complacent to a marvel:

Yum-Yum. The sun, whose rays are all ablaze with ever-living glory,
Does not deny his Majesty — he scorns to tell a story.
He don't exclaim, "I blush for shame, so kindly be indulgent."
But, fierce and bold, in fiery gold, he glories all effulgent!
I mean to rule the earth. as he the sky —
We really know our worth, the sun and I!

A little "dross" is naturally an added relish. "Belinda has £500 a year; it is not much, but it would at least save me from starvation," sighs Belvawney. And at the very outset in Gilbert's buoyant *Trial by Jury* we find the unblushing avowal of the defendant accused of deceiving

> A girl confiding, vows et cetera deriding.

The confession that

> I soon got tired of third-class journeys and dinners of bread and water;
> So I fell in love with a rich attorney's elderly, ugly daughter;

And, in his previous romance, when he

> Used to mope, and sigh, and pant just like a love-sick boy,

That

> Joy incessant palls the sense and love unchanged will cloy.
> And she became a bore intense, unto her love-sick boy.
> With fitful glimmer burnt my flame, and I grew cold and coy;
> At last one morning I became another's love-sick boy.

In *Ruddigore* (which Gilbert offered to call "Kensington Gore" to such as misliked the title) we get "perhaps the only village in the world that possesses an endowed corps of professional bridesmaids who are bound to be on duty every day from ten to four," and in *The Mountebanks* we find a masquerade of jealousy (with an excellent song on it) and of exchanged lovers worthy the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *The Mikado* love stands quite on the Japanese (or British) level, while in *Pinafore* and *The Sorcerer* the same points of view are evident. Nonchalance and surprise attend all their developments; in *Patience* there are the dragoons with:

> We've been thrown over, we're aware;
> But we don't care — but we don't care.
> There's fish in the sea, no doubt of it,
> As good as ever came out of it.
> And some day we shall get our share,
> So we don't care — so we don't care.

And there is always a fixed boundary to romance:

> Young man, despair, likewise go to,
> Yum-Yum the fair, you must not woo,
> It will not do; I'm sorry for you,
> You very imperfect ablutioner.

While the selfishness of the "little fireside games" in *Engaged* — tailoring with "real cloth, you know; and if it fits it counts one to you" — almost fires the mind of Cheviot Hill. But on the whole a sturdy and wholesome affection — the sort of tender loyalty that runs right through Trollope's novels — holds Gilbert's heart even while his pleasantries play with it. Elsie's song at the end of *The Yeomen of the Guard*, which

> Is sung with the ring of the song maids sing
> Who love with a love life-long O!

Patience's two love-songs, the last the most poetical, of

> Love that will aye endure
> Though the rewards be few.

The first, that warns with sadness,

> If love is a nettle that makes you smart,
> Why do you wear it next your heart?

Teresa's dirge in *The Mountebanks*,

> My heart it is sad and a-weary my head,
> For I weep and I die for the love that is dead.

All these, with many more, attest his wholesome love of love's wholesomeness.

And, above all, that frank apotheosis of the "English Girl" in *Utopia*, which gains double point from its place on the company-promoter's lips and remains as a protest against the decadence and anemia trounced in *Patience* by

> Then a sentimental passion of a vegetable fashion
> Must excite your languid spleen,
> An attachment *à la* Plato for a bashful young potato,
> Or a not-too-French French bean.

The last stanza of this "English Girl" may well be recalled:

> Her soul is sweet as the ocean-air, for prudery knows no haven there;
> To find mock modesty, please apply
> To the conscious blush and the down-cast eye.
> Rich in the things contentment brings. In every pure enjoyment wealthy;
> Blithe as a beautiful bird she sings, for body and mind are hale and healthy.
> Her eyes they thrill with a light good will,
> Her heart is light as a floating feather
> As pure and bright as the mountain rill
> That leaps and laughs in the Highland heather.
> Go search the world and search the sea, then come you home and sing with me,
> There's no such gold and no such pearl, as a bright and beautiful English girl.

Gilbert certainly never dethroned womankind; he inclines to "the side of the angels," after all. His worst blows were reserved for man. As his Lady Psyche sings in *Princess Ida*:

> For the Maiden fair whom the monkey craved,
> Was a radiant Being with brain far-seeing —
> While a Man, however he's well-behaved,
> At best is only a monkey shaved.

Gilbert's outlook on the social and political horizon was the same. He exalted order and freedom and discipline. He abominated the greed of monopoly whether it styled itself Socialism, or Finance, or the Cabinet. He dragged down the pretenders from their thrones, and unmasked them with a quip or a moral. On every blatant bore and finicking faddist he "drew" his "snickersnee."

> He has got them on his list. They really won't be missed.

And he probes the evergreen fallacies of shallow optimism in *Utopia*:

> Society has quite forsaken all her wicked courses,
> Which empties our police courts and abolishes divorces —
> Divorce is nearly obsolete in England.
> No tolerance we show to undeserving rank or splendor,
> For the higher his position is, the greater the offender,
> That's a maxim that is prevalent in England.
> We have solved the labor question with discrimination polished.
> So poverty is obsolete and hunger is abolished —
> We are going to abolish it in England.
> Our peerage we've remodelled on an intellectual basis,
> Which certainly is rough on our hereditary races —
> We are going to remodel it in England.
> The Brewers and the Cotton Lords no longer seek admission,
> And Literary Merit meets with proper recognition —
> As Literary Merit does in England.
> It really is surprising
> What a thorough Anglicizing
> We have brought about — Utopia's quite another land;
> In her enterprising movements
> She is England — with improvements,
> Which we dutifully offer to our motherland!

As for the present posture in England of bumptious yet sensitive Socialism, listen to the true words of *Pinafore*:

Boatswain. Ah! Sir Joseph's a true gentleman, courteous and considerate to the humblest.

Ralph. True, Boatswain; but we are not the very humblest. Sir Joseph has explained our true position to us. As he says, a British seaman is any man's equal excepting his; and if Sir Joseph says that. is it not our duty to believe him?

All. Well spoke! Well spoke!

Dick. You're on a wrong tack, and so is he. He means well, but he don't know. When people have to obey other people's orders, equality's out of the question.

All. (recoiling) Horrible! Horrible!

Or hear *The Sorcerer*:

Alexis. I have addressed navvies on the advantages that would accrue to them if they married wealthy ladies of rank, and not a navvy dissented.

Aline. Noble fellows! And yet there are those who hold that the uneducated classes are not open to argument! And what do the Countesses say?

Alexis. Why, at present, it can't be denied, the aristocracy hold aloof.

Aline. The working man is the true Intelligence, after all!

Alexis. He is a noble creature when he is quite sober.

And then there are the promises of Marco and of Giuseppe in *The Gondoliers*; they might have been proffered by the parliamentary Jacobins of today:

For everyone who feels inclined,
Some post we undertake to find
Congenial to his peace of mind. And all shall equal be.
The Chancellor in his peruke,
The Earl, the Marquis, and the Dook,
The Groom, the Butler, and the Cook. They all shall equal be.
The Aristocrat who banks with Coutts,
The Aristocrat who hunts and shoots,
The Aristocrat who cleans our boots. They all shall equal be.
Sing high, sing low, Wherever they go,
They all shall equal be.

"Don Alhambra's" famous song (one of Gilbert's very best) in *The Gondoliers* about the king who "promoted everybody" sums up the moral:

Lord Chancellors were cheap as sprats
Were plentiful as tabby-cats —
Ambassadors cropped up like hay,
Grew like asparagus in May,
The King, although no one denies
Yet he'd have acted otherwise
The end is easily foretold,
Is made of silver or of gold,
When you have nothing else to wear
For cloth of gold you cease to care —
In short, whoever you may be
When everyone is somebodee,
And Bishops in their shovel hats
In point of fact too many.
Prime Ministers and such as they
And Dukes were three a penny.
His heart was of abnormal size,
If he had been acuter.
When every blessed thing you hold
You long for simple pewter.
But cloth of gold and satins rare,
Up goes the price of shoddy.
To this conclusion you'll agree.
Then no one's anybody.

But "equality" spells monotony as well as tyranny, and the politicians who thrive on or abet it meet with a chastisement not inappropriate to the present junctures, though it was inflicted nearly a quarter of a century ago [from *Ruddigore*, no longer performed]:

Ye supple M.P.'s who go down on your knees,
Your precious identity sinking,
And vote black and white as your leaders indite
(Which saves you the trouble of thinking).
For your country's good fame, her repute, or her shame,
You don't care the snuff of a candle —
But you're paid for your game when you're told that your name
Will be graced by a Baronet's handle.
Oh! allow me to give you a word of advice —
The title's uncommonly dear at the price!

Nor does aggressive philanthropy escape the lash. Mr. Chesterton (who I doubt little would compare Gilbert with Dr. Johnson) has somewhere said that in the next revolution the gutters will run red with the blood of philanthropists. I am disposed to agree with him. In *Princess Ida* "King Gama" thus describes his amiable calling:

If you'll 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 endeavor 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!

Gilbert's "philosophy" is to make the best of what comes — plain and direct like all thoughts, however fanciful the arabesques that decorate them. As he puts it in *Ruddigore*, which, taken all for all, is perhaps the most brilliant of his extravaganzas, not excepting *Iolanthe* or *The Mikado*, Every season has its cheer, Life is lovely all the year.

Or, as he varies the theme in The Gondoliers:

Try we lifelong, we can never
Straighten out life's tangled skein:
Why should we in vain endeavor,
Guess and guess and guess again?
Life's a pudding full of plums,
Care's a canker that benumbs,
Wherefore waste our elocution
On impossible solution?
Life's a pleasant institution,
Let us take it as it comes.

Set aside the dull enigma,
We shall guess it all too soon;
Failure brings no kind of stigma —
Dance we to another tune!
String the lyre and fill the cup,
Lest on sorrow we should sup.
Hop and skip to Fancy's fiddle,
Hands across and down the middle;
Life's perhaps the only riddle
That we shrink from giving up!

"I take things as I find them, and I make the best of them — that's true philosophy", says "Clarice" in suspense to "Pauline" at the opening of *Comedy and Tragedy*. But there are deeper notes than these, and one of them — struck by "Fairfax" in the *Yeomen* — sounds with solemnity now that Gilbert has himself made his exit. It renders his own voice:

Why, sir, it is no light boon to die swiftly and surely at a given hour and in a given fashion! Truth to tell, I would gladly have my life; but if that may not be, I have the next best thing to it, which is death. Believe me, sir, my lot is not so much amiss.

This is serious; but Gilbert's gaiety is irrepressible and irresistible, breaking through every suggestion of gloom or despair. Some of his lyrics have an irresponsible flow of rarefied nonsense, quite unique, and quite apart from their extreme ingenuity of structure. They elude classification, yet a few instances will show that there is a real relationship between these poems of wandering paradox. From *Ruddigore*:

Oh, happy the blossom
That blooms on the lea,
Likewise the opossum
That sits on a tree.
But when you come across 'em,
They cannot compare
With those who are treading
The dance at a wedding,
While people are spreading
The best of good fare.

Oh, wretched the debtor
Who's signing the deed!
And wretched the letter
That no one can read!
But very much better
Their lot it must be
Than that of the person
I'm making this verse on,
Whose head there's a curse on—
Alluding to me!

The next, also from *Ruddigore*, shows the same unconnected connectedness of word-picture:

Cheerily carols the lark Over the cot,
Merrily whistles the clerk Scratching a blot.
But the lark, and the clerk, I remark Comfort me not.

Over the ripening peach Buzzes the bee,
Splash on the billowy beach Tumbles the sea.
But the peach and the beach, they are each Nothing to me.

A third belongs to the *Mikado*, and is sung by "Ko-Ko" together with the mature "Katisha," on the motif of beauty even in bloodthirstiness:

There is beauty in the bellow of the blast,
There is grandeur in the growling of the gale,
There is eloquent outpouring
When the lion is a-roaring,
And the tiger is a-lashing of his tall;
Yes, I like to see a tiger,
From the Congo or the Niger,
And especially when lashing of his tail.

There is beauty in extreme old age —
Do you fancy you are elderly enough?
Information I'm requesting
On a subject interesting;
Is a maiden all the better when she's tough?

Are you old enough to marry, do you think?
Won't you wait till you are "eighty in the shade"?
There's a fascination frantic
In a ruin that's romantic,
Do you think you are sufficiently decayed?

And Gilbert's really wonderful patter-songs, rivalling the "parabaseis" of Aristophanes, are among the most enjoyable of his fancies. That of the Lord Chancellor in *Iolanthe* beginning, "When you're lying awake, With a dismal headache" is perhaps the most exhilarating, rising with a *crescendo* of imaginary horrors and sinking into the *diminuendo* of nightmare. Many such will occur to the recollection, notably the Mikado's paean of punishments.

But there is one which has never, I believe, been published about the affable and generous railway director in *Thespis* who "tipped all the outside porters" and

Gave his friends some shooting
In his little place at Tooting.

Eventually, through a series of amusing misfortunes, he falls on evil days, and now

The shareholders are all in the Work'us,`
And he sells lights in the Regent Circus.

How good, too, is his irony even on irony; and how unexpected! To illustrate its idioms would be to requote his plays, but one song has been half forgotten and must be recalled. It comes from *Princess Ida*, and it is sung by the redoubtable "Arac":

This helmet, I suppose, Was meant to ward off blows;
It's very hot, And weighs a lot,
As many a guardsman knows, So off that helmet goes.

This tight-fitting cuirass Is but a useless mass;
It's made of steel, And weighs a deal,
A man is but an ass, Who fights in a cuirass,
So off goes that cuirass.

These things I treat the same (leg pieces) I quite forget their name,
They turn one's legs To cribbage-pegs.
Their aid I thus disclaim, Though I forget their name.

Nowhere, too, is his irony more marked than in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, where the soliloquizing Hamlet figures as the worst bore in England. Nor should the *Pirates'* disclaimer of poetry be omitted; it brings us back again to our starting-point of Gilbert's own faculty of deromanticising what he also romanticizes:

Although our dark career
Sometimes involves the crime of stealing,
We rather think that we're
Not altogether void of feeling.
Although we live by strife,
We're always sorry to begin it,
And what we ask is life
Without a touch poetic in it.

To which replies the chorus,

Hail, Poetry, thou heaven-born maid, Thou gildest e'en the pirate's trade!
Hail, flowing fount of sentiment! All hail, Divine Emollient!

This review would have no claim to the very ghost of completeness without some mention of the most poetical of his songs; songs that, as Sullivan once pointed out to the present writer, were always singable, and lend themselves far more naturally to music than the words, for example, even of Tennyson. The many from *Patience*, including the "Silver Churn," need no fresh mention, nor the "Sighing softly to the river" from the *Pirates*; nor, of course, "Titwillow" from the *Mikado*, and several ditties in *Iolanthe*; nor many another familiar strain and canzonet that rank Gilbert and Sullivan in the rounded cycle of English ballad music. But three perhaps less well-remembered songs may here be allowed citation. The first is again from *Princess Ida*, one of his two versions of the *Princess*, just as in *Gretchen* he took an old subject into his versatile hands. It has the true Restoration ring:

Whom thou has chained must wear his chain. Thou canst not set him free;
He wrestles with his bonds in vain, Who lives by loving thee.
If heart of stone for heart of fire Be all thou hast to give,
If dead to me my heart's desire, Why should I wish to live?

No word of thine — no stern command — Can teach my heart to rove;
Then rather perish by thy hand Than live without thy love!
A loveless life apart from thee Were hopeless slavery.
If kindly death will set me free, Why should I fear to die?

Thus, Hilarion's song, and the same wistfulness, this time a wavering one, attaches to the following from *Ruddigore*. Metrically and inherently it is more delicate and Herrick-like:

In a garden full of posies, Cometh one to gather flowers,
And he wanders through its bowers, Toying with the wanton roses.
Who, uprising from their beds, Hold on high their shameless heads.
With their pretty lips a-pouting, Never doubting, never doubting,
That for Cytherean posies He would gather aught but roses.

In a nest of weeds and nettles Lay a violet half-hidden,
Hoping that his glance unbidden Yet might fall upon her petals,
Though she lived alone, apart, Hope lay nestling at her heart,
But, alas, the cruel waking Set her little heart a-breaking.
For he gathered for his posies Only roses — only roses!

The last, and saddest, is "Fairfax's" farewell, which has almost an Elizabethan or Jacobean savor. It may aptly close this imperfect tribute to the great satirist-singer:

Is life a boon?
If so it must befall — That Death, whene'er he call,
Must call too soon.
Though four-score years he give, — Yet one would pray to live
Another moon!
What kind of plaint have I, — Who perish in July?
I might have had to die
Perchance in June.

Is life a thorn?
Then count it not a whit! — Man is well done with it:
Soon as he's born,
He should all means essay — To put the plague away;
And I, war-worn,
Poor, captured fugitive, — My life most gladly give —
I might have had to live
Another morn!

After these let none with any sense of song dare to deny that Gilbert was a minstrel born. I have sought to dwell on the strong fibre — the web and woof which the shuttle of his nimble ironies compounded. The tissue is firm beneath its glitter; there is purpose in his paradox. Gilbert has left England more than a legacy of pure and lasting laughter, though this is much indeed. He has bequeathed an inheritance of melody as well as of mirth, of thought, and criticism, as well as of whim and fantasy. These are not evanescent, and "another morn" will dawn on them, though it is always hard to prophesy the permanence of words wedded to music. But as literature the librettos will endure. The great Englishman, like the greater Greek, will long outlive the surroundings that his irony brought into such sharp yet such joyous relief. Posterity is a careless fellow, but his debt of gratitude is assured.

A CLASSIC IN HUMOUR BY MAX BEERBOHM

I have been ranging to and fro through a new edition of the *Bab Ballads*. It is some years since I possessed any edition but Mr. Gilbert's own meagre and miserable selection of fifty. So I have joy in the recapture of many half-remembered masterpieces.

This joy is chastened in several ways. Messrs. Macmillan and Co. seem to have conspired with their printers and binders to test, once and for all, the strength of the reading public. To have packed so much leaden weight into a mere octavo is a really marvellous achievement. It is an achievement that I regret. I regret, too, that Mr. Gilbert has interspersed his Savoy lyrics throughout the volume. These have, certainly, points of kinship with the Bab Ballads. They have a spiritual affinity, but in manner and method they are very different. They do not blend here, they interrupt. *Songs of a Savoyard* was like the *Fifty Bab Ballads*, an inadequate selection, and I am glad to find here many lyrics that were not there. But they ought to be published in a separate volume. They well deserve it. Of course one misses the tunes; but one is more than consoled by perception of those exquisite little qualities which the tunes obscured. It makes so very little difference whether a song that is sung be sense or twaddle, and good sense or bad. It is so very hard to distinguish through music the quality of the words. If you knew Shakespeare's songs only through the settings sung on the stage, you would guess but dimly at the beauty of them. To appreciate them, you must read them.

Mr. Gilbert is not a poet, as we understand the term; but there never was a more delicious versifier; and to verses music is as fatal as to poems. So let the lyrics of Mr. Gilbert be read as widely as may be. But let them not be wedged into the Bab Ballads. And let the next edition of the *Bab Ballads* be purged also of its author's new and revised illustrations. These are amusing drawings. But they are not the old drawings. That fact alone suffices to condemn them. Our vision of all the strange persons who figure in the Bab Ballads has been formed, once and for all, by their author's own first vision of them. It is too late to change our vision. Any attempt at change we regard as a foolish violence — almost as an act of sacrilege. We should resent these new illustrations even if they were better than the old. And this they are not. In comparison with the old, they are tame and indefinite. They lack that splendid precision and concision which the old ones had in virtue of being cut directly on the block. Freedom to draw in pen and ink for process-reproduction has taken half the strength and fun out of Mr. Gilbert's technique. And, being conceptions made after long lapse of years, these drawings are not nearly so close in spirit as were the old ones to their subjects. "I have always felt", says Mr. Gilbert in his preface, "that many of the original illustrations to the Bab Ballads erred gravely in the direction of unnecessary extravagance." So did the Bab Ballads. That is why the first drawings were so exactly right for them. To make these new drawings equally right, Mr. Gilbert ought to have rewritten the poems. I am glad that his innate love for logic did not drive him to this double vandalism.

With all its faults, this new edition is for me a treasure. The instinct of every human being is to share his joys; and I should like everyone to delight as I do in the Bab Ballads. 1 dare say my wish is granted in so far as my elders and my coevals are concerned. But I have my doubts about my juniors. The fashion in humour changes so subtly and so quickly. Of course, there are many acknowledged classics in humour. But they do not have on us just that effect which it is the prime aim of humour. They do not make us laugh outright. We revel respectfully in *The Sentimental Journey*, for example, or in the Essays of Elia, or in the adventures of Don Quixote or Pantagruel. We are wreathed by them in fond smiles. But I do not think we can conscientiously say that we ever laugh outright at any passage in them. I do not think anyone has ever overheard us laughing thus. It would seem that to appreciate thoroughly a work of humour, however fine, we must be born in the very era in which it was written, or very soon after.

The Bab Ballads were written, I fancy, in the 'sixties. But when I was a child they were still in their heyday. I heard many of them recited (recitations were in vogue then) by the late Mr. Arthur Cecil, Mr. Brandon Thomas, Mr. Tree, and other actors. It was a matter of course, in those days, that everyone possessed a copy of the *Bab Ballads* and often quoted from them. My elders and my coevals still have this piety. But in that growing class of vast and hirsute personages who, on closer acquaintance, prove to me irrefutably that they were in their bassinettes when I was in the full stress of existence at school, I encounter many to whom the Bab Ballads are but a name. Shocked by their loss, I urge them to buy a copy forthwith. In deference to my advancing years, they do so. And subsequently they thank me. But their tone has not the ring of rapture that I had hoped to hear, and I am conscious of a gulf between us. They share fully with me my delight in such later humourists as Mr. Wilde, or Mr. Shaw, or Mr. Chesterton. They profess, considerately, to have as keen a joy as I in Mr. Gilbert. But they quote, with seeming relish, the pointless passages, and force me to undertake the quite futile task of exposition.

To expound the magic of the Bab Ballads is very like breaking a butterfly on a wheel, and has the disadvantage of being a far less easy operation — of being, indeed, an impossible operation. Magic would not be magic if it did not defy analysis. Those readers who do not of their own accord revel in the Bab Ballads will not acquire through a demonstration, however painful, the power to revel. The only real use of the demonstration is to exercise the brain of the demonstrator. What then, I ask myself — you need not listen — is the especial quality that distinguishes the Bab Ballads as a whole? That quality is, I think, the sheer silliness of them.

I had almost said the sheer madness of them. But madness precludes deliberation. A clever man cannot, by taking thought, become mad. But he may become silly. "Madness" was a tempting word, because it implies a kind of largeness and wildness, whereas "silliness" implies something rather little and tame; and the silliness of the Bab Ballads is on a truly large and a wild scale. So soon as he had determined to be silly, Mr. Gilbert let himself go — took the bit between his teeth, and charged wildly forward. That is the main difference between the Bab Ballads and the Savoy operas. In those operas one feels always a cold and calculating method throughout the silliness — a keen logical faculty presenting a more or less serious criticism of life. The Bab Ballads are in the manner of a riot. In some of them, of course — the famous "Etiquette" for example — one finds the industrious satirist at work. But the great majority of them, and those that I love best, are mere high-spirited inventions or distortions, with no critical significance whatsoever. Consider such masterpieces as "Annie Protheroe" or "Gregory Parable LL.D." or "The Bishop and the Busman". There is no satire on capital punishment in the first of these, simply a fantasia on the private life of "a gentle executioner, whose name was Gilbert Clay":

> And, if it rained, the little maid would stop at home and look
> At his favourable notices, all pasted in a book,
> And then her cheek would flush — her swimming eyes would dance with joy
> In a glow of admiration at the prowess of her boy.

The story of the little maid's rescue of her former lover from the headsman's block is a joy for ever. But it cannot be twisted into any semblance of satire. It is a triumph of sheer silliness. The same criticism applies to "Gregory Parable LL.D.":

> "no man alive could him nonplus with vocative of filius"

and to all the best of the other ballads. I admire the ingenuity of the stories; but it is always a rollicking ingenuity, without one taint of reason in it.

If I took these ballads and made of their plots mere précis, in ordinary prose, the result would be, for me, extremely good to read. But a good third of their fun depends on Mr. Gilbert's casual embroideries, as in the verse quoted from "Annie Protheroe", and on the eccentricities of his vocabulary.

I enjoy the story of Babette's love for a very stout English sailor who leant gracefully against posts on the quay of Boulogne. But how impoverished that story would be if we had not Mr. Gilbert's own description of the captain's view of the situation!

He wept to think a tar of his
Should lean so gracefully on posts,
He sighed and sobbed to think of this,
On foreign, French, and friendly coasts.
"It's human nature, p'raps — if so,
Oh isn't human nature low?"
He called his Bill, who pulled his curl,
He said, "My Bill, I understand
You've captivated some young gurl
On this here French and foreign land.
Her tender heart your beauties jog —
They do, you know they do, you dog.
You have a graceful way, I learn,
Of leaning airily on posts,
By which you've been and caused to burn
A tender flame on these here coasts.
A fisher gurl, I much regret,
Her age, sixteen—her name Babette."

When I analyse the delightfulness of this passage, I find that it consists mainly in the sudden changes of tone in the Captain's manner — his ranging between extreme vulgarity and gentility, and between sternness and jocularity. Note, too, the cunning repetition of "French and friendly." All the Bab Ballads abound in such tricks, and much of the fun depends on them. But, artist though Mr. Gilbert is, his art is always natural and spontaneous. He is never academic. Had he been a don at one of the Universities, he would have polished and polished his verses till half the fun had been polished out of them. He would have been a mere Calverley. Humour must be spontaneous; else it is deadly. And the artistic expression of humour must, likewise, be spontaneous, to a certain degree. It is well for Mr. Gilbert, and for me, that when he wrought the Ballads he was in the thick of the rough-and-tumble Bohemian journalism of the 'sixties. Art was too strongly innate in him to be killed by that atmosphere. Elsewhere it would have become over-refined for the purpose of these Ballads.