

# The Bab Ballads

The Bab Ballads by W. S. Gilbert is a witty collection of humorous poems and illustrations that blend absurdity, clever wordplay, and social satire, foreshadowing his famous operatic collaborations with Arthur Sullivan.

## Ballad: Captain Reece

In the spirited ballad "Captain Reece," readers are introduced to the exemplary CAPTAIN REECE, the beloved commander of THE MANTELPIECE. Renowned for his unparalleled dedication to his crew's well-being, CAPTAIN REECE ensures that his men are the epitome of comfort and joy at sea. From dancing madly to entertain them during low spirits to narrating humorous tales from his childhood, he consistently goes above and beyond to uplift his crew.

The captain's care extends to providing each man with luxurious accommodations that include feather beds, warm slippers, hot-water cans, and even personal valets shared among four. To quench their thirst, seltzogenes are readily available, complemented by cream ices on particularly warm days. The crew is further indulged with currant wine, ginger pops, and the latest reads from MISTER MUDIE'S library, ensuring their time at sea is both comfortable and intellectually stimulating.

One evening, CAPTAIN REECE invites his crew to express any desires they might have, promising to do his utmost to fulfill them, considering his own comfort as "NIL." William Lee, the captain's coxswain, takes this opportunity to suggest that closer bonds would form if CAPTAIN REECE would consider marrying off his daughter, ten female cousins, a niece, six sisters, and possibly an aunt or two to the unmarried members of the crew. In a surprising twist, Lee also shyly proposes that for his part, he would be delighted to marry CAPTAIN REECE's "enchanted" daughter.

The ballad humorously chronicles CAPTAIN REECE's exceptional commitment to his crew's happiness, even to the point of contemplating matrimonial arrangements to foster a more "friendly-like" atmosphere aboard THE MANTELPIECE. This lighthearted tale offers a delightful glimpse into maritime camaraderie, dedication, and CAPTAIN REECE's boundless generosity, encapsulating the spirited relationship between a captain and his loyal crew.

## Ballad: The Rival Curates

Be sure of provocation: Wait till he calls you 'snob,'  
Or something else as naughty - Then you can do the job,  
And welcome back to Spiffon!"

Thus on his foes he set His minions most observant,  
'Twas a most curious bet, Yet, made in all good fervent.  
But when they reached the spot, They found, instead of strife,  
A scene that spoke of what's More beautiful in life.

HOPLEY, with flute in hand, Played melodies enticing;  
Around him, o'er the land, Creatures their joy voicing.  
His curate's garb aside, He wore a smile so thrilling  
That they, o'ercome by pride, Found their own wrath unwilling.

They joined his gentle throng, And soon, forgetful of mission, With flute and dove and song, Lost in a sweet submission. They returned to HOOPER's land, Their tale of peace declaring, And HOOPER, staff in hand, Wondered at their sharing.

"Let HOPLEY live in peace, His flute and doves around him. Our rivalry shall cease, In harmony, we've found him." Thus, Spiffton-extra-Soooper And Assesmilk-cum-Worter, United by a fluter, Ended their silly quarter.

HOOPER and HOPLEY then, Decided competition Brought woes to gentle men, And forged a new tradition. No more through sexton or beadle, Would conflict's dark cloud hover; They'd spread, instead, good weevil And lead as brothers cover.

In unity, they stood, In clerical attire, Spreading their vision good, With hope to inspire. The Rival Curates tale Ends not with strife or sorrow, But with a peaceful gale, And hope for a bright tomorrow.

## **Ballad: Sir Macklin**

Sir Macklin is a tale from "The Bab Ballads" focusing on the stern, moralizing efforts of Sir Macklin, a priest determined to correct the wayward paths of three young men: Tom, Bob, and Billy. These youths, known for their vain and carefree dispositions, habitually spent their Sundays strolling and chatting in various parks and gardens, blatantly ignoring the Sabbath law and the principles of decency and restraint that Sir Macklin vehemently espoused.

Sir Macklin, described as a priest of severe demeanor and rigorous in debate, found it deeply distressing that these young men were so easily led astray, indulging in sinful pursuits instead of observing the Sabbath sacredly. Driven by a mission to enlighten them with the truth that venturing outside for leisure on a Sunday was a grave sin, he decided to lecture them comprehensively, employing meticulous arguments and a structured approach reminiscent of a sermon.

The ballad humorously outlines Sir Macklin's methodical breakdown of his sermon, starting with the sinful temptations of Kensington, then proceeding through the Gardens, Hyde, Park, and St. James's, each a location synonymous with the youths' heedless frolicking. Sir Macklin aimed to demonstrate that the moral failings associated with each place were collectively indicative of a broader, more pervasive problem of moral decay that afflicted not just the few but all of society.

In his conviction, Sir Macklin deployed every rhetorical strategy at his disposal. He presented his case from every conceivable angle — arguing passionately, logically, and even in circles if necessary — to convince his audience of their misguidance. The youths, perhaps impressed, intimidated, or simply worn down by his relentless discourse, could not oppose him. Their reactions, as described towards the end of the ballad, might be seen as a mixture of awe and bewilderment at the depth of Sir Macklin's fervor and the complexity of his arguments.

Through Sir Macklin's character and his painstakingly detailed condemnation of Sabbath-breaking, the ballad employs irony and exaggeration to critique the often dogmatic and moralistic tendencies of societal figures who, like Sir Macklin, attempt to impose their rigid views of righteousness upon others. The reaction of Tom, Bob, and Billy, raising their hands in agony — possibly over the sermon's length and Sir Macklin's relentless arguments rather than any genuine conviction — adds a layer of humor to the narrative, showcasing the gap between the preacher's earnestness and the youths' actual acceptance of his message.

## **Ballad: Baines Carew, Gentleman**

In the realm of tender-hearted attorneys, none shone as brightly as Baines Carew, a man whose soul was as sensitive as his legal mind was sharp. Whenever tales of distress reached his ears from clients, his heart would swell with empathy, to the point where accepting payments became a struggle, burdened by his overwhelming compassion.

Such sensitivity often came at a personal cost. The duties of his profession, such as foreclosing mortgages, suing, and even the act of distraining for unpaid rent, inflicted upon him a deep emotional turmoil. Despite the mandatory nature of these tasks, each action carried with it a weight of sorrow, a testament to Carew's profound connection to the human condition.

The costs Carew could bill his clients for never truly compensated for the emotional investments he made into each case. Yet, within the bounds of professionalism, he endeavored to signify his sympathies through monetary sums, albeit knowing no figure could encapsulate the magnitude of his compassion.

Among his clientele, Captain Bagg emerged as a figure of particular concern. Bagg, burdened by a marriage that once promised joy but had since devolved into torment, sought Carew's counsel for a separation from his wife. Her relentless jests had transformed from endearing to unbearable, prompting Bagg to pursue relief under the advice of his empathetic attorney.

Bagg's plight moved Carew deeply, eliciting tears and shock at the notion of dissolving what appeared to be an illustrious union. The situation was indeed grave: a sane woman tormenting her husband by treating him as a pet, a 'Dicky bird', forced to mimic its chirpings and perch upon a stick. Such was the absurdity that Bagg endured, a testament to a matrimonial bond frayed by unkindness and jest.

This ballad, with its blend of humor and sorrow, sketches the portrait of an attorney whose heart bleeds for the woes of his clients, encapsulating the tragicomedy of life and the peculiar trials faced within the chambers of law and marriage alike.

## **Ballad: At A Pantomime. By A Bilious One**

In the dim confines of a damp dressing room within the grand Theatre Royal, World, an actor, his face shrouded by a flowing wig and his jaws adorned with a lengthy beard, prepares for his seasonal performance in the cherished pantomime, "HARLEQUIN LIFE AND DEATH." Draped in a gown designed to exaggerate his frail form, he stands ready, urging for the limelight to shine upon the stage, transforming him into the embodiment of jolly Old Christmas.

As the curtain rises, the darkness of the stage symbolizes the waning moments of the year, with Time personified by a quack heralding the end and the Old Year on the brink of expiration. With a sudden flourish, Time unveils the figure of Old Christmas, igniting delight in the hearts of watching children, their laughter and applause filling the air, charmed by the façade of joy and festivity.

Yet, amidst the revelry, a sadder truth lingers for those of advanced years who watch from the shadows, their faces etched with the knowledge of many a bygone season. These seasoned souls see beyond the spectacle, recognizing the recurring ghoul of Christmas not as a bearer of joy, but as a herald of hardship. They recount the cold embrace of winters past, marked by scarcity, the sting of poverty, the ache of illnesses, and the weight of insurmountable bills - the reality veiled beneath the veneer of holiday cheer.

Through this ballad, the contrast between the naiveté of youth, with their unblemished rapture for the holiday season, and the jaded eyes of the elder, schooled in the harsh lessons of life, is starkly drawn. It paints a vivid tableau of a festive season where the joy is as much a performance as the actors on the stage, a time that, for some, brings laughter and gifts, and for others, a reminder of the enduring struggles that lie beyond the pantomime's end.

## **Ballad: The Sensation Captain**

"The Sensation Captain," a ballad from "The Bab Ballads," tells the quirky tale of Captain Parklebury Todd, a Navy officer renowned for his bravery, wisdom, and a peculiar love for creating sensations and surprises. Unlike the typical valorous traits of noble captains, Todd's unique folly lies in his penchant for startling others, especially with unexpected 'booms' and disguises, driven by an innocent fascination with mystique and the element of surprise.

Todd's life, dominated by this singular obsession, also encompasses his love for a lady. His expressive ardor initially captivates the lady, but as years pass, her enchantment gives way to boredom, highlighted by a lack of dramatic response when Todd receives his sailing orders. Instead of despair, she bids him goodbye with laughter in her eyes, a reaction that secretly disappoints him. Before departing, Todd leaves her a sentimental gift—a ribbon bearing a double-tooth token, a humble yet meaningful emblem of his affection.

Driven by his love for dramatics, Todd hatches a plan to test his beloved's loyalty and feelings by feigning his own death. He orchestrates the delivery of this false news, anticipating a dramatic response. Contrary to his expectations, the lady, identified as Angelina, demonstrates remarkable composure and pragmatism. Her stoic reaction to Todd's 'death' is followed by a practical decision to marry a "comfortable farmer," Bassanio Tyler, highlighting her desire for stability over sensational love.

This ballad encapsulates Todd's ironic tragedy: a man who lived for sensations fails to elicit a grand emotional spectacle from the woman he loves. Instead of mourning, Angelina plans for her future, embodying resilience and forward-thinking. The narrative weaves humor and irony, portraying Todd's eccentric heroism and the unpredictability of love, ultimately underscoring the notion that not all seek dramatic gestures but rather, comfort and reliability.

## **Ballad: The Ghost, The Gallant, The Gael, And The Goblin**

In the suburban outskirts, where the land was yet untamed, an unlikely duo wandered: an elderly ghost, embodying the essence of a bygone era, and an influential goblin, bursting with the vigor of youth and mischief. Their spectral and fantastical nature set them apart, one echoing the grandeur of tragic tales, the other a figure straight from a comedy's liveliest scenes. Amidst their stroll, aimed at aiding digestion with light exercise, they stumbled upon a debate that would stir the tranquil air: which among them held superiority in the art of haunting, the ghost with his somber gravitas or the goblin with his lively antics?

This debate, initially a jest, soon escalated into a serious contest of skills, prompting them to seek out a human upon whom they could test their respective powers. Determined to settle the matter, they agreed on a format: the goblin would leverage his quaint and grotesque nature against the ghost's imposing and statuesque form. The goblin eyed a suitable candidate, a seemingly indomitable Englishman, exhibiting both finesse and fearless demeanor, outside a tailor's shop.

The goblin, confident in his ability to instill fear, unveiled himself to the Englishman in a spectacular and horrifying display, yet the man's reaction was nothing short of extraordinary. Instead of exhibiting terror, he afforded the goblin nothing but an amused, albeit vacant, smile, impervious to the scare tactics employed regardless of their duration or intensity. The goblin's efforts proved futile, as days turned into weeks without a hint of fear from their chosen subject.

The ghost, witnessing the goblin's unsuccessful endeavor, proposed a new challenge involving a rugged Highland man, believing that a different approach might yield the desired result. The narrative thus shifts, emphasizing not only the contrasting methodologies of the ghost and the goblin but also underlining the resilience and diverse reactions of humans when faced with the supernatural. Through this whimsical contest,

the ballad contemplates the nature of fear, courage, and the unfathomable depths of the human spirit, all within the spectral playground of the ghost and the goblin's making.

## **Ballad: Sir Guy The Crusader**

In the spirited ballad titled "Sir Guy The Crusader," we are introduced to Sir Guy, a valiant and muscular knight celebrated as a crusader. Dedicated to fighting and invasion, he was a favorite of Dickey de Lion and stood as a symbol of valor and determination. Within this tale of chivalry and love, we encounter Lenore, a stunning Saracen maiden with a remarkable beauty that captivated all. Despite her allure, Lenore faced domestic strife, under the harsh rule of her father, a bagman from Aden, and the odd burden of her mother's antics, a burlesque performer.

Lenore, a devoted coryphée, led ballets in amber and red, enchanting audiences and dazzling the cityfolk, although her familial troubles weighed heavily on her. Her father's strict discipline, involving physical punishments and minimal sustenance, contrasted sharply with her public persona, revealing a life of hardship and inconsistency with her on-stage grace.

When Sir Guy laid eyes on Lenore, he was instantly enamored, driven to madness by her beauty. His admiration led him to regularly attend her performances, dreaming of a life together. Approaching her home with intentions of proposing marriage, Sir Guy witnessed the harsh realities of Lenore's life - her father's cruel treatment and her mother's peculiar form of discipline.

Moved by her plight and fueled by his own sense of justice and affection, Sir Guy confronts Lenore's father, decrying his treatment of her. His intervention, however, is met with resistance, as Lenore's father dismisses him with disdain. This encounter reveals not only the cultural and moral divide between Sir Guy and Lenore's family but also underscores the knight's unwavering commitment to his values of honor, love, and protection.

In the face of rejection and acknowledging the challenges that lie ahead, Sir Guy resolves to leave for London, albeit with a heavy heart, unable to take Lenore with him but carrying the burden of his unfulfilled love and the unresolved injustice. Thus, Sir Guy's story is a captivating blend of romance, chivalry, and the stark realities of love across cultural divides, illustrated vividly through the unique characters and vibrant settings of the ballad.

## **Ballad: The Periwinkle Girl**

In the whimsical "Ballad: The Periwinkle Girl" from *\*The Bab Ballads\**, the narrator playfully critiques the rush to judgment and the follies of youth through a tale that intertwines love, status, and the humble winkle. The protagonist starts by reflecting on his youthful disdain for winkles, based on the notion that they offer none of the pleasures of flirting, dancing, or smoking. This perspective shifts dramatically upon the introduction of Mary, a charming seller of winkles whose beauty and allure make the winkles almost come alive under her gaze. It's through Mary that the narrative explores notions of societal standing and the absurdity of linking worth to material wealth.

Mary, adored by all from commoners to noblemen, becomes the center of affection for two Dukes, Duke Bailey and Duke Humphy, and an Earl. Their standing and worth are humorously depicted through their financial stability and the extravagance of their attire--Duke Bailey owns golden boots and silver underclothing, indicating immense wealth, while Duke Humphy's attire, though costly, signifies a slightly lesser status with silver boots and pewter underclothing. The Earl, conversely, is scorned by Mary for his lower status, highlighted by his leather shoes and cambric underclothing. Mary's rejection of the Earl, despite

two dukes vying for her hand, satirizes the social hierarchy and the value placed on material possessions.

The ballad concludes with Mary's derision towards the Earl's proposal, showcasing not only her high standards but also the absurd importance placed on outward symbols of wealth and status. Through this, the narrator illustrates the folly of jumping to conclusions and the value judgements made based on appearances and social standing, all wrapped in the light-hearted, humorous style characteristic of \*The Bab Ballads\*. The tale serves as a critique of societal values and the youthful error of mistaking what truly matters, all while maintaining a playful tone and rhythmic charm.

## **Ballad: Ben Allah Achmet; - Or, The Fatal Tum**

In the quaint county of Sussex, notably in the town of Hooe, lived three uniquely contrasting characters whose lives intertwined in a tale of unrequited love and peculiar malady. The first of these characters was Effendi Khan Backsheesh Pasha Ben Allah Achmet, a Turkish gentleman of considerable note, who found himself smitten with the charm and grace of a local damsel, Emily MacPherson. Despite the grand allure of his Eastern heritage and the opulence that adorned his life, Ben Allah Achmet found himself in an emotional quagmire, yearning for a love that seemed ever so elusive, primarily due to the presence of a rival for Emily's affection.

This rival was none other than Doctor Brown, a man of science and healing, whose affections for Emily were no less fervent than those of the Turkish Pasha. Doctor Brown, with his seductive blend of knowledge and compassion, found himself in a silent battle with Achmet, neither aware of the other's existence nor their shared object of affection. Unlike the classic tales of love and rivalry, their competition was unbeknownst to the other, a testament to the isolated orbits in which they revolved around the unwitting Emily.

The twist in this narrative tapestry comes when Ben Allah Achmet is struck by a mysterious and debilitating ailment, one that cast him into a pit of pain and despair, manifesting physically through his "little tummy." In his hour of need, he sought the expertise of Doctor Brown, oblivious to the doctor's connection to his beloved Emily. Doctor Brown's arrival brought about a peculiar consultation, marked by an amusing reluctance from the Turk to divulge the specifics of his condition, attributing it to a bashfulness that seemed out of place amidst his suffering.

This ballad intricately weaves themes of love, jealousy, and the comedic interplay of cultural differences against the backdrop of a small Sussex town. The characters, though strangers to each other, are bound by their individual desires and circumstances, leading to a narrative laced with irony and humor. The story of Ben Allah Achmet, Doctor Brown, and Emily MacPherson serves as a charming vignette, exploring the complexities of human emotion and the absurdities of fate.

## **Ballad: Thomson Green And Harriet Hale (To be sung to the Air of "An 'Orrible Tale.")**

In the whimsical ballad of Thomson Green and Harriet Hale, a tale unfolds that is as amusing as it is implausible, best captured by the recurring sentiment, "Twaddle twaddle twaddle twaddle twaddle twum!" Thomson Green, an auctioneer with an annual income of three hundred pounds, happens upon Harriet Hale, a pianoforte instructor of some repute, in the charming confines of Regent's Park. Their initial encounter, marked by Green's offhand admiration for the day's beauty, sparks a romance that swiftly evolves from casual conversation to courtship.

Green, evidently smitten, wastes little time in declaring his affections to Harriet's father, boldly proclaiming his love for Harriet and her reciprocated feelings. The couple's engagement is promptly announced, leading to a quiet but joyous wedding at St. Mary Abbot's Church. The newlyweds then embark on a honeymoon to a quaint cottage in Shanklin, Isle of Wight, only to surprise everyone by returning within a month to settle in a "gentlemanly residence" in Canonbury Square.

The narrative takes a peculiar turn as it delves into the couple's daily existence, characterized by a lifestyle deemed "weird and reckless" for its time. The Green's dining preferences alone - a routine that consists of a joint of meat, a pudding, and a modest portion of cheese - serves as a testament to their unconventional nature. Through a blend of humor and exaggeration, the story of Thomson Green and Harriet Hale invites readers to marvel at the oddities of love and life, all while maintaining a playful skepticism towards the tale's veracity.

## **Ballad: The Story Of Prince Agib**

In "The Story of Prince Agib," the tale unfolds with a vibrant invocation to musical instruments, setting the stage for a narrative about Agib, the Prince of Tartary. Agib, depicted as a musically gifted youth, indulges in composing ballet music and playing a variety of instruments, showcasing his artistic versatility. His life takes an unexpected turn during a harsh winter when two starving Tartar minstrels, referred to as the "Ouaitis," arrive at his gates. Moved by their plight, Agib welcomes them warmly, offering food, drinks, and other luxuries. In gratitude, the minstrels perform a sonata and a song for the Prince, an event that unknowingly heralds a turning point in Agib's life.

The narrative takes a darker turn as the storyteller admits to eavesdropping on this private concert, revealing a sense of foreboding about the event. The minstrels' performance, described with humorous exaggeration regarding its emotional impact, leads to Agib's overly generous response, showering them with gifts and money. However, the atmosphere of the story shifts as the narrator hints at the ominous consequences of this encounter, conveying a sense of dread and mystery about the minstrels' visit. Through this tale, the ballad not only explores themes of hospitality and generosity but also introduces a subtle commentary on the unforeseen repercussions of seemingly benign actions, all wrapped in a layer of whimsical and musical narrative.

Employing a melodic and humorous style, the ballad narrates Prince Agib's encounter with the minstrels in a manner that blends light-heartedness with a hint of underlying darkness. The playful language and rhythmic verses contribute to a narrative that captures the spirit of Tartaric culture, while also weaving in a sense of intrigue and caution about the impact of our actions on our fate.

## **Ballad: Babette's Love**

Babette was a charming fisher girl from Boulogne, known for her beauty and innocence, spending her days in the Halle or catching shrimp. Her heart is set on marrying an able mariner named Bill, who works for the General Steam-Boat Navigation Company and spends his off-hours dreamily overlooking the port, thoughts possibly adrift to his distant home in Chelsea.

Jacot, a customs officer smitten with Babette, confesses his love, only to be rejected as she finds him undesirably thin and declares her affection for the sailor, Bill. Despite Jacot's distress, expressed in a mix of French exasperations, Babette's resolve remains firm, her dreams tethered to her mariner.

The captain of the Panther, a man of strict morals, hears of Bill's romance with Babette and is dismayed that one of his sailors might indulge in such distractions, particularly on foreign soil. Reflecting on the situation with sorrow and a sense of moral disappointment, he confronts Bill, acknowledging the sailor's unintended

charm and the affection he's kindled in Babette.

With a sense of duty and perhaps a touch of paternal influence, the captain instructs Bill to make an honest woman of Babette, offering his blessings for their union. This development, stemming from an innocent crush and leading to a mandated rectification of a sailor's unwitting entanglement, encapsulates the intertwined themes of love, duty, and social propriety.

The ballad closes on a note of impending marriage, arranged with a blend of coercion and blessing, drawing together the lives of a local fisher girl, an honorable sailor, and the watchful eyes of authority figures, encapsulating the societal norms and expectations of love and marriage within their community.

## **Ballad: The Reverend Micah Sowls**

In "The Bab Ballads," the ballad titled "The Reverend Micah Sowls" presents a comedic and critical look at the hypocrisy often associated with moralizing figures of authority, specifically targeting the clergy. The poem begins with an energetic and almost aggressive description of the Reverend Micah Sowls, a clergyman who passionately condemns the stage (theatre) as a domain of evil and immorality, urging his congregation to avoid it at all costs. His fervor is heightened by the presence of his bishop in the audience, suggesting that Micah's zeal is partly motivated by a desire for personal advancement within the church hierarchy.

As the poem unfolds, Sowls's intense sermon is revealed to be secondhand, purchased from London, which undercuts the sincerity of his passion. After the service, the bishop engages with Sowls, inquiring if he has ever personally visited a theatre to validate his harsh critiques. Sowls admits he has never attended a play, basing his condemnation solely on what he has "often heard and read." The bishop confesses his own attendance at theatres, especially those that feature plays by Shakespeare, challenging Sowls's preconceptions by implying that not all theatrical productions are morally corrupting.

The interaction concludes with the bishop recommending that Sowls attend a theatre showing Shakespeare's works, playfully undermining Sowls's earlier zeal with a practical suggestion that invites him to experience and judge the matter firsthand. The bishop's parting is marked by a sense of subtle triumph, anticipating the possibility of Sowls's transformation or at the very least, hoping to expand his narrow views.

This ballad, through its humorous and satirical tone, critiques the tendency to denounce or demonize cultural institutions without firsthand experience or understanding, highlighting the danger of blind zealotry and the importance of personal engagement and critical thought. It uses the characterization of Reverend Sowls and his interaction with the bishop to explore themes of hypocrisy, ignorance, and the complexities of moral judgment.

## **Ballad: The Phantom Curate. A Fable**

In "The Phantom Curate. A Fable," we are introduced to a bishop, albeit without revealing the location of his diocese, who significantly burdens his clergy with conventional expectations, rigorously limiting their freedoms and scrutinizing their actions for any hint of unintentional sin. Despite his upright intentions and dedication to setting examples, his strict approach towards ensuring his priests avoid even harmless pleasures underlines his adherence to maintaining appearances rather than fostering genuine goodness. This bishop, who himself indulges in the ordinary amusements of society, finds his principles challenged by the recurring presence of a curate at various social and entertainment events which the clergy is forbidden to enjoy.

This silent rebuke starts at a pantomime, where the bishop, amidst his laughter at the unsophisticated humor, spots the curate in the audience, unsettling his peace of mind. The incident repeats on Christmas Eve, when



the bishop is dancing to entertain his children; he halts mid-frolic upon noticing the curate dancing with a young lady. The bishop's discomfort escalates further when, after succumbing to public demand to sing due to his renowned vocal talent, he discovers the curate joining in the performance, directly challenging the bishop's authority and stance on clerical participation in such activities.

The narrative reaches a crescendo with the bishop encountering the curate once more at a public performance of a Punch and Judy show. His amusement turns to dismay as he hears the curate laughing heartily at the scenes of comical violence, symbolizing the curate's persistent challenge to the bishop's strictures on enjoying simple, human pleasures.

The tale weaves through these encounters to deliver a fable on the complexities of moral leadership, the tension between public virtue and private enjoyment, and the inevitable contradictions that arise when rigid ideals are imposed on the naturally diverse inclinations of human character.

## **Ballad: The Troubadour**

In the ballad "The Troubadour" from *\*The Bab Ballads\**, a narrative unfolds outside a castle, where a dedicated troubadour plays his music. Within the castle's dismal dungeon, a maiden, trapped and despairing, hears his songs and responds, her heart heavy with sorrow. Despite not knowing her face or name, the troubadour vows not to rest until she is freed, motivated simply by her sad plight.

Encouraged by his resolve, the maiden halts her tears and wails, singing gratefully in response to his determination. The troubadour, seizing his opportunity, boldly sounds his clarion. This catches the attention of a warden, who, upon opening the gate, is confronted with the troubadour's demand to speak with the master of the castle regarding the unjust imprisonment of the maidens within, particularly emphasizing the one on the second floor.

The warden, moved to tears by the troubadour's demand but bound by duty, can only lament the frequency of such requests. Undeterred, the troubadour barges past him to confront Sir Hugh de Peckham Rye directly. Upon meeting, the troubadour, with a blend of respect and audacity, kneels before Sir Hugh only to stand and challenge him, demanding the release of the maidens. He focuses specifically on the maiden held on the second floor, threatening Sir Hugh with a duel should he refuse.

This ballad captures the essence of romantic chivalry and the enduring power of love and music. Its verse weaves a tale of heroism, despair transformed by hope, and the unwavering determination of a single individual against the injustices of a powerful foe. Through this act of daring, the troubadour embodies the quintessential hero who, armed with little more than a musical instrument and a tailor's sword, stands against tyranny for the sake of love and freedom.

## **THE AIR OF THE "WHISTLING OYSTER.")**

In "The Bab Ballads," a humorous chapter titled "THE AIR OF THE 'WHISTLING OYSTER,'" narrates the unusual story of an elderly prophet, aged seventy-three, and his young, beautiful bride of just eighteen. Despite the vast age gap and the peculiarity of their union, the couple surprisingly had a child—a boy whose early penchant for adult indulgences astounded everyone. From the moment of his birth, the child was not only born with a metaphorical pipe in his mouth and a glass in his eye, symbolizing an unnaturally mature demeanor, but also exhibited behaviors far beyond his years, showing disdain for infantile things and expressing himself in a manner strikingly old for his age.

The boy, described as a "horribly fast little cad," rejected typical childhood pleasures and attire, preferring instead the company and activities of far older individuals. His advanced disposition and shocking precocity proved to be a challenge for his parents and nurse, leading to their eventual distancing. His father attempted to connect with him through traditional nursery tales like "Little Bo-P," only to be met with skepticism and ridicule from his son, who surprisingly had the wit and attitude of a grown man, critiquing his father's stories and even calling him a "shocking ole fox."

The chapter wittily explores themes of incongruity between appearance and age, the unexpected outcomes in relationships of significant age differences, and the humorous yet distressing consequences of having a child who behaves more like a seasoned adult than an innocent infant. The lyrical, playful language and the absurdity of the child's precocity serve to both entertain and subtly critique societal norms regarding age, maturity, and family dynamics.

## **PART II.**

In this whimsical and adventurous chapter of "The Bab Ballads," the narrator embarks on an eccentric quest to discover the author of the charming and elusive cracker mottoes that captivate his Elvira. His journey takes him to celebrated poets—Henry Wadsworth, Alfred Poet Close, and Mister Martin Tupper—in hopes that one of them might be the creator of these witty verses. Each poet, however, denies involvement with the cracker mottoes, and Tupper responds with a cryptic message, illustrating the narrator's folly in pursuing such a trivial quest.

Undeterred and driven by his quest for knowledge, the narrator travels the globe, wandering through Patagonia, China, and Norway, demonstrating his relentless pursuit of truth, however frivolous the objective may seem. Eventually, weariness overtakes him, leading to a fateful encounter at a pastry cook's shop—a place adorned with blooms and offering comfort in the form of mock turtle soup.

The pastry cook, a figure of joviality and contentment, reveals himself as the unsuspected author of the cracker mottoes. This revelation comes after the narrator inquires about the source of the cook's happiness, wondering if it stems from virtue or the effects of sherry. The cook's cheerful disposition is attributed to his love for his craft—be it baking or penning mottoes for crackers, blending creativity with culinary skills.

Finally, the narrator's exhaustive search concludes in a moment of jubilation and absurdity, as he joyously flings turtle soup around, celebrating the unearthing of the cracker mottoes' author. This chapter not only follows a ludicrous quest across continents but also celebrates the joy found in unexpected places and pursuits, encapsulated in a narrative that combines humor, persistence, and the delight of discovery.

## **Ballad: The Three Kings Of Chickeraboo**

In the whimsical ballad titled "The Three Kings of Chickeraboo" from "The Bab Ballads," we are transported to the imaginary land of Chickeraboo, where reside three individuals—PACIFICO, BANG-BANG, and POPCHOP. On a particularly sweltering day, they whimsically decide to declare themselves kings, albeit in a modest manner. PACIFICO is adept at playing the "bones," BANG-BANG excels in banjo music, and POPCHOP is known for his remarkable "flap" dance moves. United by a clever scheme, they decide to establish their make-believe kingdoms by the sea, using three barrels to mark their respective realms.

Their rationale is both humorous and sly, predicated on the assumption that the might of Great Britain's navy, with its global patrol and discovery of new lands and monarchs, would inadvertently legitimize their newfound royal statuses. They surmise that proximity to Britain, or merely the declaration of their kingly stature, would suffice for recognition, without undue scrutiny into the legitimacy or nature of their kingship.

The narrative then shifts to a British naval vessel, commanded by the intrepid REAR-ADMIRAL BAILEY PIP. This ship, a formidable force on the seas, is on its routine voyage of discovery when it coincidentally stumbles upon the would-be domains of our three protagonists. REAR-ADMIRAL PIP, through his spyglass, observes the islands and their self-proclaimed sovereigns, finding the situation exceedingly peculiar yet intriguing.

Moved by a blend of duty and curiosity, REAR-ADMIRAL PIP orders the lowering of his gig to approach the islands and pay his respects. The scene is both comedic and picturesque, showcasing the dramatic encounter between the high seas' disciplined explorers and the fanciful, self-appointed monarchs of Chickeraboo. This ballad, with its satirical tone and playful exploration of sovereignty, authenticity, and the allure of recognition, portrays the amusing lengths to which individuals might go to attain a semblance of power and prestige, however ephemeral or illusory it may be.

## **Ballad: The Yarn Of The "Nancy Bell"**

In "The Yarn of the Nancy Bell," narrated by an ancient sailor found between Deal and Ramsgate, unfolds a gruesome tale of survival at sea. The elderly naval figure, with his unkempt hair and lengthy beard, chants a peculiar song of being the sole survivor of the Nancy Bell, claiming to embody every role aboard from captain to cook, and even the crew of the captain's gig. His wild gestures and frayed appearance suggest a man touched by hardship and madness, a notion that does little to quell the listener's apprehension.

The tale begins with the Nancy Bell's voyage to the Indian Sea, where disaster strikes upon a reef, leading to the drowning of most aboard. Out of seventy-seven souls, only ten initially survive, including the captain, the cook, the mate, a midshipmite, a bo'sun, and the crew of the captain's gig. Stricken by hunger after a month without food or drink, the survivors resort to casting lots, resulting in the grim decision to consume the captain. The sequence of cannibalism continues, sparing only the narrator and the cook, who recounts how they survived by consuming those drawn by lots, including the mates and the bo'sun, who curiously resembled a pig.

The sailor's narrative, delivered in a mix of horror and matter-of-factness, paints a vivid picture of desperation and survival instincts prevailing over the bonds among shipmates. Despite the eerie and macabre storyline, the ballad maintains a rhythmic and lyrical quality, encapsulating the maritime disaster's tragic essence and the incomprehensible decisions forced upon those lost at sea. Through the lone survivor's recounting, the ballad captures the bleak and ferocious sides of human nature when faced with the primal urge for survival amidst the unforgiving nature of the sea.

## **Ballad: The Force Of Argument**

The ballad "The Force of Argument" tells the story of Lord B., a nobleman who sought the representation of the borough of Turniptopville-by-the-Sea. He was a man of significant stature, both physically and socially, entering the local scene with ambitions to charm and to lead. Within this setting, he immersed himself in the social dances and the communal gatherings, exerting his presence among the local gentry and the common folk alike.

At the heart of this tale lie two young women, Ann Pond and Mary Morell, each vying for the attention of Lord B. with markedly different strategies. Ann was bold and direct, using her vivaciousness and overt emotional expressions to captivate Lord B., whereas Mary opted for a subtler approach, marked by shyness, coyness, and the strategic use of her feminine allure to draw him in.

Amid these competing affections, the fathers of Ann and Mary, both men of humble origin yet successful in their agrarian pursuits, express their concerns to Lord B. Their straightforward, candid discourse highlights their awareness of the nobleman's influence and intentions, prompting a discussion about the prospects he envisions with their daughters.

Lord B.'s response is articulated through a display of wordplay and erudition, employing logical structures like 'Barbara' and 'Celarent' from the syllogistic argumentation framework to ostensibly clarify his intentions. This cryptic defense serves both to evade a direct answer and to underline his wit and intellectual superiority. Through this interaction, the ballad playfully critiques the social dynamics of courtship and marriage negotiations, the disparities between social classes, and the use of sophistry in circumventing straightforward communication.

Reflecting the complexity of human interactions and the intricacy of societal norms, "The Force of Argument" mirrors the oft-comedic, sometimes farcical nature of navigating social aspirations and personal relations. Through the vibrant characters of Lord B., Ann Pond, Mary Morell, and their fathers, the ballad encapsulates a narrative rich with satire, social commentary, and the timeless dance of courtship, all woven into the daily life of Turniptopville-by-the-Sea.

## **Ballad: Ellen McJones Aberdeen**

They gathered around PATTISON CORBY TORBAY, And played him some tunes in the traditional way. They started with jigs, then to reels they did switch, But PATTISON's mood did not improve one bit.

"This is torture," he cried, "not a joyous refrain! Oh, cease your wild playing, it's hurting my brain!" But CLONGLOCKETTY swore by the thistle so sharp, He'd not cease his playing till dawn lit the harp.

And so through the night, till the early morn broke, The Highlands resounded with pibroch and smoke. The birds and the creatures were stirred from their sleep, Wondering why such a din the glen did keep.

ELLEN McJONES ABERDEEN stood by McCLAN, Her heart all aflame for the piper man. "Oh, ANGUS," she whispered, "your music's divine, It calls to my soul with a voice that's benign!"

The piper, enchanted by ELLEN's fair speech, Decided right then the Sassenach to teach That the music of Scotland's both hearty and deep, Capable of waking those long in their sleep.

With dawn rising pink over hillside and stream, PATTISON CORBY admitted his scheme: "I see now," he said, with remorse in his eyes, "The pipes sing of Scotland's clear skies and her cries."

He packed up his gear, and he left on the morn, His sports and his sneers at the pipes now forlorn. He'd learnt that the music, so wild and so strong, Was the heartbeat of Scotland, vibrant and long.

And CLONGLOCKETTY, with his ELLEN so fair, Continued to play with nary a care. For their love and the pipes in the Highlands did blend, A melody sweet that would never end.

The moral, dear reader, is clear to discern: Respect for tradition one must always earn. For the music of Scotland, with all its might, Binds the heart of its people, in joy and in plight.

## **Ballad: Lorenzo De Lardy**

"The Bab Ballads" presents a humorous and whimsical tale in the ballad of "Lorenzo De Lardy." Dalilah De Dardy, wealthy but aging, falls deeply for the charming and handsome Lorenzo De Lardy, a prestigious lord

serving in Her Majesty's Guards. Despite Lorenzo's good looks and charm, attracting many a maiden's gaze, he is plagued by financial woes, primarily owing to considerable debts. His financial desperation leads him to frequent escapes to Paris, seeking respite and perhaps fortune in the city's allure.

During one such Parisian sojourn, Lorenzo becomes infatuated with Alice Eulalie Coraline Euphrosine Colombina Therese Juliette Stephanie Celestine Charlotte Russe de la Sauce Mayonnaise, a captivating waitress at a modestly priced restaurant in the glamorous Palais Royal. Despite their interactions limited by language barriers—with Lorenzo's French summarized by simple expressions and Alice's English comprising amusing misinterpretations—their attraction is unmistakable. Lorenzo's admiration is expressed through his tender gestures and the few French words he knows, indicative of his earnest affection, albeit humorously underscoring the couple's communication challenges.

This budding romance, however, is threatened by a jealous waiter, previously enamored with Mademoiselle de la Sauce Mayonnaise. His envy is palpable, as he dreams of eliminating his rival, Lorenzo, driven by his love for Therese and perhaps a desire to claim her affections for himself. This subplot adds a layer of conflict and humor, as the waiter's dramatic despair contrasts comically with the light-hearted love story unfolding.

Overall, this chapter from "The Bab Ballads" satirizes societal norms and romantic entanglements with playful language and absurdly named characters, encapsulating a humorous exploration of love, jealousy, and the peculiarities of human interaction, all set against the vibrant backdrop of Parisian culture and class disparities. The narrative charms with its old-world whimsy, blending the ridiculous with the relatable in a ballad of love, debt, and desire.

## **Ballad: The Bishop Of Rum-Ti-Foo**

In "The Bishop of Rum-Ti-Foo," a whimsical narrative unfurls about a Bishop named Peter, who is appointed to the exotic isle of Rum-ti-Foo. This charming ballad, peppered with humor and a light-hearted tone, encapsulates the Bishop's adventures and his earnest attempts to assimilate with the natives of Rum-ti-Foo. These locals, numbered at twenty-three, express their culture through the vibrant beats of the tum-tum and a peculiar culinary preference for scalps marinated in rum. Bishop Peter, in his well-meaning endeavor to bond with his flock, indulges in their unique customs, winning their affection.

As time unfolds, Bishop Peter decides to return to London, leaving his Rum-ti-Foo congregants lamenting his departure. They implore him to stay, showcasing their attachment to him, which is deeply rooted in the kindness and camaraderie he extended towards them. Upon his return to London, a serendipitous encounter with a street performer dancing with unabashed fervor presents itself to Bishop Peter. This sight fills him with a blend of amusement and inspiration, seeing in the dancer's movements an opportunity to bring a piece of new joy back to Rum-ti-Foo.

The Bishop's determination to learn this enthralling dance signifies his dedication to his role not just as a spiritual guide but as a harbinger of joy to his flock. Under the tutelage of the lively street performer, Bishop Peter diligently practices the dance, envisioning the smiles it would bring to the faces of the Rum-ti-Foo natives. This endeavor portrays Bishop Peter's genuine affection and respect for the culture of Rum-ti-Foo, as he eagerly adopts what he believes will endear him further to his people.

"The Bishop of Rum-Ti-Foo" is not just a tale of a Bishop's eccentric adventure but a heartfelt narrative that underscores the beauty of cultural exchange and the depths of human connections that can transcend geographical and cultural barriers. Through the Bishop's willingness to engage with and celebrate the customs of Rum-ti-Foo, the ballad delivers a poignant message about the universal bonds of community, love, and joy.

## **Ballad: A Discontented Sugar Broker**

In "A Discontented Sugar Broker" from \*The Bab Ballads\*, we are introduced to a prominent figure in the East India broking scene, whose identity remains undisclosed out of respect for privacy. This individual enjoys considerable success in his profession, evidenced by his financial stability, a dedicated spouse, a team consisting of a manager, a few boys, six clerks, and seven porters, and a home free from creditors. Despite this outward prosperity, he harbors a personal dissatisfaction stemming from his considerable girth, which he describes as a significant burden that detracts from his otherwise fortunate existence.

Determined to address his discontent, the broker embarks on a unique regimen to combat his corpulence. He commits to dancing his way from home in the Fulham Road area through Brompton to his workplace in the City, regardless of the weather or the condition of the streets. This unusual method of commuting not only draws the attention and ridicule of bystanding children, nannies, and clerks but also becomes a spectacle that challenges conventional behaviors expected from someone of his stature and profession.

The broker's decision to dance to work is a direct response to his weight, a matter he considers his sole misfortune amidst an otherwise enviable life. Despite the curiosity and bemusement of onlookers and the inability of his acquaintances to comprehend his motivation, he persists in his endeavor. His actions underscore a personal battle against his physical appearance, prioritizing his well-being over societal expectations and the perplexity of his peers.

This chapter whimsically explores themes of personal satisfaction, societal perceptions, and the lengths to which individuals will go to address personal insecurities or discomforts. It juxtaposes the broker's financial and professional success against his personal dissatisfaction with his weight, offering commentary on the complex nature of happiness and contentment. Through the broker's unorthodox solution to his problem, the narrative also critiques societal norms and the judgment faced by those who deviate from expected behaviors.

## **Ballad: Thomas Winterbottom Hance**

In "The Bab Ballads," the ballad "Thomas Winterbottom Hance" tells the playful tale of an unmatched swordsman in Merry England, Thomas Winterbottom Hance, celebrated for his extraordinary ability to cleave objects like silk handkerchiefs and legs of mutton cleanly in two with his saber, without any strain. His daily practice in Dover draws the ire of Monsieur Pierre from across the channel in Calais. Pierre, proclaiming himself the bravest in France, is irritated and vexed by Hance's saber skills, mocking the ease with which Hance slices through inanimate objects which, he notes disdainfully, cannot fight back.

The ballad humorously contrasts the two men's fierce dedication to their art and the frustration it breeds in Pierre, who cannot understand Hance's passion for slicing non-retaliating materials. Amidst their personal vendettas and pursuits of mastery, both Thomas and Pierre are supported by their aging, proud mothers. Hance's mother, described as a "simple, harmless village dame," decides to travel to Dover to witness her son's saber prowess firsthand. Likewise, Pierre's fashionable, near-nonagenarian mother shares her son's disdain for Hance's actions, yet beams with pride over her son's infamous defiance.

The story encapsulates the folly of rivalry, the pride of maternal love, and the peculiar quests for excellence in provincial England and France. Through humorous jabs at national stereotypes and the eccentricities of its characters, the ballad winks at the absurdity of such feuds fueled by pride and misunderstanding. It paints a vivid picture of two families caught up in a cross-channel drama over saber skills and societal perceptions, punctuated by the mothers' pride in their sons' endeavors, however quixotic they may seem to others.

**Ballad: The wind blows towards the lee, Willow! But though I sigh  
and sob and cry, No Lady Jane for me, Willow!**

In the ballad from "The Bab Ballads," the sorrowful tale of young Joe, a sailor under the command of Captain Joyce, unfolds with a melancholy tune. Joe laments his unrequited love for Lady Jane, believing his lowly status as a sailor to be the barrier between them. Captain Joyce, frustrated with Joe's constant mourning and banjo-playing, wishes Joe had chosen a different path, perhaps less musical and more befitting a sailor.

Despite Captain Joyce's harsh methods of discipline, including a sentence of twelve months in solitary confinement and regular lashings, Joe's spirits remain anchored to Lady Jane. In a twist of fate and friendship, Joe's loyal mate, a sturdy and reliable sailor of lower rank, proposes a bold plan to unite the love-struck sailor with his noble beloved. This plan involves approaching the First Lord to plead Joe's case and request his daughter's hand on Joe's behalf—a brave act of loyalty and friendship.

The devoted friend not only plans to speak to the Lord about the unjust punishment inflicted by Captain Joyce but also to suggest a marriage between Joe and Lady Jane as a means to liberate Joe. Amidst his suffering, Joe expresses sincere gratitude and hope when his friend pledges to speak to the First Lord, showing a glimmer of hope in his otherwise dim circumstances.

This poignant ballad captures the essence of unyielding love, steadfast loyalty, and the sharp disparities of social class. Through the allegorical use of nautical life, it explores the themes of authority versus compassion, the pursuit of love against all odds, and the power of friendship in the face of adversity. The sailor's resolve to fight for love and freedom, with the help of a true friend, weaves a narrative that is as heart-wrenching as it is inspiring.

## **Ballad: Haunted**

"The earth holds here a social case, Haunted in life by too much surface."

In this chapter, we're introduced to a man haunted not by the traditional ghosts of folklore but by the specters of social obligations and faux pas. The author engages us with a portrayal of hauntings of a peculiar kind—ones that society bestows. From Black Monday and its associated dread of school days with their loathsome routines, to the haunting memories of a love lost at seventeen to an "elderly Colonel," the narrative unfolds the man's life as a series of eerie visitations from the past.

These ghosts are not of the supernatural realm but are the remnants of embarrassing, painful, and regretful moments of social missteps; from the fiasco of a first smoke leading to family disputes, a disastrously addressed judge in court, to the low points of his career with rejected manuscripts and failed investments. Each ghost represents a milestone of societal failure or embarrassment, a tapestry of the man's social and professional misadventures rather than supernatural encounters.

Reflecting a lifetime beset by these metaphorical hauntings, the author closes with a reflection on the protagonist's desire for an epitaph that acknowledges the unique burden that plagued him—not ghosts of lore, but the all-too-real specters of social expectations and missteps. Through clever wordplay and evocative imagery, the ballad delves into the notion that, for some, the most haunting experiences are those we live through in the light of day, among the judging eyes of society. The protagonist's life, marked not by spectral visions but the ghosts of social faux pas, offers a poignant commentary on the real horrors that pervade human existence—the unseen, often unspoken anxieties that follow us through life.

## **Ballad: The Folly Of Brown - By A General Agent**

In "The Folly of Brown - By A General Agent," the narrator recounts his experiences with a man named Brown, a simple farmer who unexpectedly came into a fortune of two hundred thousand. Despite this windfall, Brown's demeanor and lifestyle remain unchanged, embodying the essence of a clown – not in the theatrical sense but reflecting a lack of sophistication and education. The newfound wealth leaves Brown unfazed, his ignorance evident as he continues to live a simple life, uninterested in the luxuries or societal changes money could offer.

The narrator, a self-proclaimed general agent, sees an opportunity in Brown's naiveté and attempts to persuade him to invest his money into various companies the narrator has formed. These companies, purportedly created with the intention of aiding Brown in making sound investments, appear to serve the interests of their promoter more than their investors. Brown, however, remains steadfastly attached to his money, politely refusing the offers made by the narrator despite the latter's insistent propositions which are masked under a guise of helping Brown manage his wealth effectively.

In a display of stubborn simplicity, Brown rejects the agent's offer to take him under his wing, showing no interest in learning how to spend his fortune "wisely." The agent mockingly admires Brown's refusal, interpreting it as a lack of trust and wisdom, unable to comprehend why Brown would decline his advice and offers. Brown's rejections are consistent, portrayed with a grin that suggests a mix of contentment with his current state and skepticism towards the agent's motives.

This ballad humorously explores themes of innocence, skepticism, and the perceived relationship between wealth and wisdom. Brown's character, while ridiculed by the narrator for his unsophisticated outlook and mistrust of "philanthropy," arguably showcases a prudent wariness towards those who seek to exploit his fortune under the guise of assistance. The irony lies in the narrator's inability to recognize the wisdom in Brown's simplicity and cautious approach to his newfound wealth.

## **Ballad: King Borria Bungalee Boo**

In "King Borria Bungalee Boo" from \*The Bab Ballads\*, the story vividly narrates the peculiar and darkly humorous tale of a man-eating African king, Borria Bungalee Boo, and his four loyal subjects. The king, known for his fearsome appetite, faces a dire situation when the kingdom runs out of food, pushing him to the brink of desperation for a meal. His loyal subjects, once more numerous but reduced in number due to the king's dietary habits, are introduced with colorful names: haughty Pish-Tush-Pooh-Bah, cumbersome Doodle-Dum-Dey, despairing Alack-a-Dey-Ah, and the exemplary Tootle-Tum-Teh.

As starvation looms over them, King Boo contemplates consuming one of his subjects, particularly the 'good little Tootle-Tum-Teh', unless an alternative food source is found. Tootle-Tum-Teh suggests a solution: invading the neighboring state ruled by Queen Tippy-Wippity Tol-the-Rol-Loo, known for her and her four pretty Amazons' potential as delicious meals, thereby presenting an opportunity not only to satiate the king's hunger but also to prevent one of their own from becoming the next meal.

The narrative takes a lighter turn when it reveals the invasion plan against Queen Loo and her state, highlighting the whimsical nature of the characters and their unusual predicaments. Rather than focusing on the grim possibilities of cannibalism or brutal conquest, the tale indulges in the absurdity of the situation, where the resolution leans towards capturing and consuming adversaries as opposed to internal sacrifice.

This ballad, rich in absurd names and fantastical elements, portrays a satirical adventure steeped in dark humor. The exaggerated characters and scenarios serve as a critique of gluttony, loyalty, desperation, and the lengths to which individuals might go to satisfy their basic needs, all wrapped in the playful and rhyming verse characteristic of \*The Bab Ballads\*.



## **Ballad: Peter The Wag**

Policeman Peter, known for his playful and mischievous nature, is the central figure in this rollicking narrative. Peter, a man of law wrapped in the joys of his comical inclinations, relished leading the unsuspecting astray with his humor-laced guidance. When asked about the time, his responses were absurdly inaccurate, delighting in the confusion of the inquirer. His playful demeanor extended to the streets he patrolled, often sending people in completely wrong directions or involving himself in lighthearted interactions with citizens of every sort, from little boys to elderly ladies and even dignitaries and clergy.

Despite his antics, Peter wasn't malicious by any means. His humor and the enjoyment of a good jest stemmed from a youthful spirit rather than any darker intent. However, his continual jesting and trickery were not without consequences. The public's frustration with his pranks grew steadily, a collective discontent spreading across London, from Camberwell to Kew, Rotherhithe to Kentish Town. Yet, Peter, undeterred by the growing grumbles of disapproval, persisted with his jocular ways, feeding the simmering displeasure of the city's residents.

The turning point in Peter's tale came when his penchant for mischief led him into a predicament. One day, while too proud to seek assistance, he found himself hopelessly lost in the labyrinthine streets of Soho, close to Poland Street. This blunder became a spectacle, drawing Londoners from all corners to witness their erstwhile tormentor's comeuppance. The news of Peter's misfortune spread far and wide, attracting even those from remote areas to partake in the peculiar reversal of fortunes.

For weeks, Peter wandered the maze-like confines of Soho, his every attempt to extricate himself only deepening his entanglement. Streets such as Newport, Gerrard, Bear, Greek, Rupert, Frith, Dean, and Poland became his unwilling confines, culminating in his hapless pursuit of escape leading him into Golden Square. The irony of the situation was not lost on the onlookers: the very man who once directed countless others on fruitless journeys was now ensnared by his own inability to navigate a way out of his unintended predicament.

## **Ballad: Bob Polter**

Bob Polter was a hardworking navvy of thirty-two, known for his coarse hands and sun-tanned, rough face. Without a wife, he lived simply among his working peers, embodying the characteristics of a decent, albeit imperfect, English working man. Despite his modest indulgence in smoking and a daily pot of beer—which occasionally increased in quantity or led to convivial nights and even fights on Saturdays—Bob was fundamentally a sober, responsible laborer.

One day, while at the Nelson's Head, a transformative encounter occurred when a "holy man" reproached him, dramatically pouring Bob's beer on the floor and introducing a moral crossroads. The man emphasized the presence of good and evil spirits—Total Abstinence and Inebriety—vying for influence over Bob's life. This moment of reckoning was visually punctuated by the appearance of a grotesque, intoxicated specter, embodying the ruinous path of alcohol. This being, marked by the signs of severe alcohol abuse and neglect, tempted Bob to indulge further into his vices, asserting that a working man's life demanded the numbing relief of excessive drinking.

Bob, however, was profoundly affected by this confrontation. He experienced a visceral rejection of the monstrous figure's proposition. His immediate reaction—an utter dismissal of the fiend—reflected his intrinsic resolve and decency. He recognized the creature as an embodiment of a life he refused to lead, declaring his unwillingness to succumb to such a detrimental existence. In this moment, Bob Polter affirmed his identity not just as a laborer but as a man of principle, resistant to the ruin that alcohol could bring into his life. This ballad, marked by its vivid imagery and moral conflict, encapsulates the trials and choices that

define the human condition, highlighting the importance of integrity and self-awareness in the face of temptation.

## **Ballad: The Bishop And The 'Busman**

In "The Bishop and The 'Busman," a whimsical ballad from "The Bab Ballads," we encounter a narrative set in London, centered around a stout, zealous Bishop and a Jewish 'busman named Hash Baz Ben—who also bears the names Jedediah, Solomon, and Zabulon. The Bishop, determined to convert the 'busman to Christianity, embarks on a daily journey with him, riding the Putney bus from Fulham town, proclaiming the 'busman's Jewish identity and religious practices to the amusement and later, the annoyance, of onlookers.

Initially, the 'busman is intrigued and entertained by the Bishop's peculiar mission, viewing it as harmless fun. The Bishop's daily declarations highlight Hash Baz Ben's religious adherence, pointedly noting his avoidance of pork and his distinct physical features, emblematic of his Jewish heritage. This spectacle draws the attention of "gay young dogs," a term denoting stylish, young onlookers who delight in the Bishop's eccentric crusade, which blends public sermon with personal fixation on the 'busman.

However, the novelty wears off over seven years, transitioning from amusement to distress for Hash Baz Ben. The persistent public attention and the Bishop's relentless focus on his ethnic and religious identifiers take a toll on the 'busman, transforming him into a reluctant spectacle and a subject of widespread mockery. This unwanted fame forces him to confront his visibility and vulnerability in the public domain, leading him to question the Bishop's motivations directly.

Confronting the Bishop in his own residence, Hash Baz Ben seeks an explanation for the prolonged harassment. It is here that the ballad captures the climax of its tale, presenting a moment ripe for potential insight or tragedy. The Bishop's response is impending, and the reader is left anticipating a resolution that bridges the gap between two distinct worlds: one of unwavering religious zeal and another of cultural fidelity and personal dignity. The narrative encapsulates themes of identity, tolerance, and the quest for understanding across cultural divides, all while maintaining a light-hearted, satirical tone characteristic of the Bab Ballads.

## **Ballad: Gentle Alice Brown**

In the humorous ballad "Gentle Alice Brown" from \*The Bab Ballads\*, we follow the tale of Alice Brown, the daughter of a feared robber in a small Italian town. Unlike the grim nature of her family's profession, Alice's tale takes a whimsical turn when she finds herself enamored with a handsome young gentleman she spies from her window, a sorter in the Custom-house, who innocently passes by her home each day. Despite the initial innocence of her crush, the narrative unfurls Alice's confessions to the village priest about her involvement in a series of shockingly mischievous deeds, ranging from theft and forgery to more alarming crimes, all presented with a light-hearted, satirical tone.

The priest, rather than admonishing her severely, takes a lenient view, humorously quantifying her sins in monetary terms, highlighting the satirical critique of ecclesiastical pardon practices at the time. Alice, expressing gratitude for the priest's affordable absolution rates, reveals yet another 'sin'—her flirtatious interactions with the handsome sorter, which leads to a comically exaggerated sense of moral outrage from Father Paul, who then relays this distressing love interest to Alice's father, emphasizing the potential loss of a criminal livelihood for the family and, humorously, the priest himself.

Robber Brown's reaction to his daughter's infatuation is as outlandish as the rest of the story. He decides to confront the sorter in a bizarre mix of paternal protectiveness and professional criminality, planning to terrify him into submission and then dispatch him in a manner so grotesque that it's meant to deter any remaining

affection Alice might hold. The narrative closes on a dark yet absurd note as Mrs. Brown, Alice's mother, takes a direct hand in resolving the situation in an over-the-top conclusion that solidifies the ballad's critique of societal, familial, and moral expectations through exaggerated dark humor and whimsy. The ballad skillfully navigates between satirizing the seriousness with which society regards crimes of high and low morals while indulging in the melodramatic to elicit both reflection and laughter.