

THE BALLAD SINGER.

(Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.)

A summer nightfall—a still blue sky,
Growing gray down the shadowy street,
Where toil-worn figures are hurrying by,
And the murmurous rhythm of restless feet
Floats with the wind and the waning night
Away from the great town's glitter and light
In at the open casement here;
Where the breeze in the curtains softly stirs,
And under the wainscot a lone cricket chirps
With ceaseless monotone always near!

But the distant murmur of square and street
Is lost as a voice divides the air,
Falling in tones that are sad and sweet,
From a singer close under the lamp-light there;
A girl—whom a thin worn shawl half conceals,
But enough of a figure and face reveals
To show she is slender and fragile, and fair.
Her dark timid eyes, fringed curv'd, have fail'd
At the crowd's eager gaze. The face itself veil'd
By the dusky gold of her loosen'd hair.

A boy—her brother—is gloomily leaning
Within the shadow, his face tear-stain'd
Answering her glance, with his own sad moaning
Shaken with sorrow—a grief unfeign'd.
Ah! what lavish measure of silver or gold
For the memory his heart now for ever must hold
Could atone! But was it a scarlet sin
For her, that the Dives in that rich land
Had never vouchsafed them a generous hand
Till hunger had driven her food to win?

A faltering sweetness her voice was filling
Just now in the words "You'll forget Kathleen!"
And anon with a passionate impulse thrilling
In "Come back to Erin, my own Mavourneen."
And a few heaven-guided have dropp'd as they pass'd.
Their slender dote in her palm unask'd;
But the night wanes chill, and the narrow street
Grows silent, till they alone are left,
And the faint voice trembling with tears unwept
Is more than ever strange and sweet.

But the pulse in St. Martin's square gray tower
Has throbb'd out ten, and the pale, sad stars
Grown paler and sadder hour by hour.
Tremble aghast its blacken'd bars.
As the last stroke falls, clinging side by side,
Where the gloom gathers deepest, two figures glide!
God help them! The baptismal dews of peace
Fall not for such; nor any rest.
But dull, and warped, and pain oppress
Their shadow'd lives to life's surcease.

G. H. M.

Montreal, 1870.

A STORY OF WEALTH.

BY W. S. GILBERT.

CHAPTER I.

THE AGED PILGRIMS.

I AM sorry to have to begin a tale, which is really not intended to be objectionably squalid, in a public house. It is an unpromising opening, and one that is calculated to alienate the good opinion of a large section of readers, but I am not sure but that, after all, it has some artistic merit. It may be taken to stand to the coming chapters, in the relation that the opening scene in a pantomime does to the impossible glories that are to follow: it serves as a foil to them, and their effect is heightened by contrast with the dismal horrors which have preceded them. Please be good enough to suppose, for the moment, that the "Jolly Super" theatrical house of call is The Abode of the Demon Alcohol, and that the pretty but supercilious barmaid is a carnal embodiment of his familiar, the malignant Djinn; raise the curtain to the air of "The Roast Beef of Old England," encourage the fiction that the conversation is spoken through the levelling medium of a pantomime mask, and all will be well. I promise you that there are bright fairies, pretty shepherdesses, princes with black hair, and big-headed monarchs, waiting at the wing for their cue to come on; and you must not quarrel with me if I avail myself of my privilege to delay their appearance until the progress of the plot demands it.

The "Jolly Super" is a dingy public-house in the immediate neighbourhood of the Theatre Royal Parnassus, and derives its main support from the custom of the "Parnassus" company, and that of their friends and admirers. Its name would suggest that the establishment appeals exclusively to the sympathies of the humbler members of the theatrical profession, but this not, in point of fact, the case; indeed, a standing rule of the house, tacitly acquiesced in by all concerned, makes it a breach of etiquette for any member of a dramatic company to enter the private bar, unless his theatrical status entitle him to avail himself of the green-room of his theatre—a privilege accorded at the Parnassus to those members only whose salary amounted to a minimum of thirty shillings a week.

Besides the Parnassus company, the "Jolly Super" is much affected by members of a neighbouring Literary Club, known to themselves and to the publishing world as the "Aged Pilgrims." The "Aged Pilgrims" are (as their name implies) a collection of young and middle-aged dramatic authors, novelists, reviewers, magazine writers, actors, "entertainers," and literary barristers. As a rule, the "Aged Pilgrims" are appreciated by the publishing world alone, and utterly unknown to the rest of society. They are, for the most part, clever fellows, but their cleverness is expended, mainly, upon anonymous magazine articles and daily newspaper work; so, if it should happen that any members of the "Aged Pilgrims" whom I may have occasion to introduce to you in the course of this story are not already known to you by name, you must not entertain a poor opinion of them on that account. You read all the novels that Mr. Mudie sends you, you know the peculiarities of their several authors, and you therefore suppose that you are acquainted with the name of every literary man, of any talent, in England. But you never were more mistaken in the whole course of your existence. Who, do you suppose, writes the leading articles and reviews in the morning and weekly papers and in the monthly magazines? Men, my good friends, of whom, twenty chances to one, you have never heard, unless you are behind the scenes in these matters. Men with clear logical brains, and great literary ability; keen satirists, pleasant humourists, but men whose names, with, perhaps, half-a-dozen exceptions, are totally unknown to you. They are men who have devoted themselves to anonymous literature; and to the world at large they are as distinct from their writings as the Punch-and-Judy man is

ning with your hot rolls; you read the leaders from beginning to end, but you would as soon think of setting yourself the task of finding out the names of the men who wrote them as of seeking an introduction to a peripatetic showman, because you have derived some whimsical amusement from his wooden dolls. So I warn you beforehand, that if you expect to find many notabilities among the "Aged Pilgrims," you will be disappointed. But take my word for it that they are mostly clever fellows, that they may all be termed good fellows, if you have no objection to place a liberal construction on the words; and that whenever an "Aged Pilgrim" falls sick, and is thereby prevented from earning his weekly income, he has no occasion to appeal to his brother Pilgrims for assistance, for assistance is volunteered with a liberality which only those who know how hardly the dole of a literary hack is earned can appreciate. I am bound, in justice, to admit that, good fellows as they are, they have for the most part a reprehensible yearning for bar-parlours, long clays, and spittoons; but you must bear in mind that I prayed you to understand the term "good fellow" in its most liberal sense.

Of these "good fellows" one of the best was Ralph Warren—a tall, fair-haired young fellow, with a clever but not a strictly handsome face; indeed, if the truth must be spoken, his appearance spoke much too plainly of extremely irregular hours, and extremely regular brandies-and-soda, to justify any very complimentary remarks on that score. I am sorry to add that his clothes were rather mildewy, and his boots a trifle lopsided; his linen, however, was clean, and so were his face and hands. I hardly know how to reconcile the term "gentlemanly" with this rather unpromising description, but there certainly was an air of easy frankness about Ralph Warren—a genial gentlemanly *bonhomie*, combined with a suggestion of quiet, conscious power, that induced you to forget his sordidness and his sodas-and-brandy, and to dub him "gentleman" before you had enjoyed five minutes of his conversation.

In point of fact, Warren was a gentleman by birth and education. His father, Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. Guy Warren, was the second son of Lord Singleton, an extremely wealthy but eccentric nobleman, who quarrelled on principle with every member of his family, except his heir-apparent or presumptive for the time being. Lord Singleton had turned Ralph's father into the world at the age of sixteen, with an ensign's commission in a marching regiment and a hundred a year, coming to an unavowed determination to avail himself of the earliest opportunity that should arise of quarrelling with this unfortunate young officer, and of forbidding him the house, as a natural consequence. The opportunity soon arose. Guy "went wrong" in the matter of debts before he had been six months with his regiment; his father paid the score without a murmur; intimated to Guy that he would not be cheerfully received at Singleton any more; and, indeed, determined to hold no further converse with him at any time, unless it should unfortunately happen that his elder brother, Spencer, were to die childless, in which case Guy, as the heir for the time being, would come in for all the gratifying consideration which, until the occurrence of that unlikely contingency, would be the hereditary right of his fortunate elder brother. At the same time Lord Singleton did not disguise from himself the bare possibility of such a complication taking place, and so, with the view of keeping Guy well before his eyes, so that he might be able to lay his hands upon him whenever he might happen to want him, he privately advanced that young officer's interests at the Horse Guards, and, indeed, went so far on one occasion as to pay the purchase-money for his captain's commission.

The old lord, however, was much too knowing a hand to do this good deed in his own name, and so lay himself open to the supposition of being accessible to the claims of impecunious kinsmen; he did it through a confidential valet, who, in the assumed character of a benevolent money-lender, called on Guy and offered to accommodate him with the necessary amount at insignificant interest, for any period he might choose to name, on his (Guy's) personal assurance that the money should be repaid as soon as Guy should find it convenient to do so. Of course the seedy lieutenant closed with the benevolent money-lender on the spot—the loan was there and then effected, and Guy sang the worthy usurer's praises to such effect among his brother officers and their friends, that that excellent person was embarrassed with innumerable applications from these straightened gentry for the loan of fabulous sums on the same security that Guy had given for the loan of the purchase-money for his captain's commission. It is, perhaps, hardly needful to add, that Lord Singleton's valet found it necessary to decline all the proposed negotiations.

It will not surprise the worldly-minded reader to hear that the treatment that Guy experienced at the hands of his ungenial parent contributed to sour that officer's mind against his own offspring generally and against his second son, Ralph, in particular. Guy retired from the army on captain's half-pay, and although he rose on the half-pay list to a lieutenant-colonel's commission, this accession of dignity contributed in no way to increase his income. He married a young lady with five hundred a year of her own, and this, with his captain's half-pay, formed the bulk of his income. The lieutenant-colonel lived, all the year round, at a cheap watering-place, with his wife and eldest son, a hopeless cripple; and when he had procured for Ralph a clerkship in a bad Government office, he considered that he had done his duty by the boy, and left him to shift for himself in London.

Ralph's method of shifting for himself was, at first, a failure. He took cheap rooms with a brother clerk in Islington, attended at his office, and did his work in a slip-slop way during the day, dined flashily and unwholesomely at a cheap but showy eating-house afterwards, spent his evening usually at one of the theatres or at Cremorne, knocked about at cheap places of disreputable resort, went to bed at two in the morning, not tipsy, but yet having drank freely and unwholesomely, and woke up the next day with a hot head, a feverish pulse, and a mouth parched with cheap hot cigars. He got into debt with the money-lenders who infest the Government offices, and was generally admitted by all who knew him to be going directly and unmistakably to the bad.

But Ralph was not a cad by instinct. A reaction set in, and although his life was anything but a spotless one from that moment, it was an immense improvement upon what it had been. He was a smart, clever fellow, with a natural turn for epigram and satire, and he began to turn these dangerous qualities to good effect in the columns of better-class periodicals. He began humbly and anonymously in obscure journals, but he obtained a certain measure of success in these, and this success induced him to aspire to greater things. He became,

and an occasional one to most of the monthly magazines. By degrees his income from these sources increased to such an extent as to justify him in throwing up his appointment in his seedy Government office, and taking to literature as his sole means of support. He joined the "Aged Pilgrims," with whom his smart, showy, conversational powers and irrepressible good humour made him an immense favourite. He had belonged to their brotherhood for about two years at the date of his introduction to the reader. I again apologize for bringing him into notice amid the unpolluted surroundings of a theatrical house of call, but as, unfortunately, the "Jolly Super" was the place where Ralph Warren was generally to be found, as it was here that he, in company with other Aged Pilgrims, usually dined, always wrote his articles, and generally spent his evenings, it will be seen that I have an excuse for so doing. After all, he was more to be pitied than blamed. If he had had only an opportunity of making himself at home with three or four decent families of regular habits and with pretty daughters in them, he would have been as much disgusted with this Bohemian life as you yourself are. But this opportunity had never been offered to him, and so he stuck to his Bohemianism as the only form of life which was open to him.

Ralph was sitting in the club-room of the "Aged Pilgrims," on the first floor of the "Jolly Super," with half-a-dozen other members of that sociable brotherhood. They were not particularly jolly at that moment, for news had just arrived of the failure of a new speculative magazine in which they were all interested, and of the bankruptcy of the proprietor. Poor Warren was especially down in the mouth, as he had been sent down to Sheffield by the editor with instructions to remain, a fortnight, and to "do" a chatty descriptive account of all the manufactures of that cheerless city for the magazine in question. By way of rider to his instructions, he was told to make himself as jolly as circumstances would permit, and not on any account to spare any expense. He had acted fully upon these hints—he had taken pains with the articles, he had spared no expense whatever, and he was anxiously expecting a cheque for a hundred and twenty-five pounds (seventy-five pounds for the papers, and fifty for his hotel bill and travelling expenses), when the news of the collapse of the whole thing arrived. They were endeavouring to restore the balance of their equanimity with their customary panacea—brandy-and-soda; but whether it was that brandy-and-soda as a remedy did not apply to losses above five pounds, or whether the irrepressible good humour and aggravating jollity of Sam Travers (the low comedian of the Parnassus), who had that day signed an engagement for the next season at an increase of five pounds a week to his salary, operated as a damper with which it was impossible to contend, I don't know, but certainly the conversation flagged to an extent almost unknown among the "Aged Pilgrims."

"They say," said one of them, "that there won't be a penny in the pound. The whole thing is mortgaged to the paper-makers."

"Hang the paper-makers!" prayed another, while the rest chorused in "Amen!"

"Thirty pounds a month for 'Gnats and Camels,' till it ran through, I was to have had."

"Well, you'll get it off your hands in some other paper."

"Devil a bit; it was written to order—written up to some confounded blocks that the beggar bought wholesale of Flicker and Dowse before they went to smash."

"How much do you put your claim at, Ralph?"

"A hundred and twenty-five, and cheap enough, too, for a fortnight in Sheffield."

"It'll be all right, my boys," said Travers. "Never say die! Down one moment—up the next! Look at me—I began as call-boy and sub-deputy assistant property-man, at eight-and-sixpence a week, and I've just signed an engagement for five-and-thirty pounds. It'll be your turn next. Lor' bless you, it isn't half such a bad world as people think! The devil isn't half as black as he's painted!"

"Nor speculating publishers half as white as they're white-washed," said Ralph. "Oh, come in; don't stand knocking there."

The door opened, and a waiter put a letter into Ralph's hand. A lawyer's letter—blue paper and a red cross-crossed wafer. At any other time Ralph would have kept it to stick, unopened, upon his mantelpiece, where it would have remained for months, while he and his friends amused themselves with lively conjectures as to its contents. But matters were getting serious, and he opened it with a solemn face.

"13, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, Feb. 4, 1860."

"Sir,—We regret to inform you that intelligence has just reached us of the death of the Right Hon. Baron Singleton and his eldest son, the Honourable Hugh Warren, who were unfortunately drowned by the sudden capsizing of a yacht off Selsey Bill. We are instructed by your father, the present Baron Singleton, to communicate to you his desire that you should join him at Singleton without any delay."

"We are instructed that you are at liberty to draw upon us to the amount of £100 (one hundred pounds) to defray your necessary expenses."

"We have the honour to be, Sir, your very obedient servants,"

"WARDLE AND TAPP."

"To the Hon. Ralph Warren,
'The Jolly Super,' Bedfordbury."

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE WOMAN.

RALPH WARREN rose and left his companions without a word. He walked moodily downstairs, paid his score, and strolled into the street. It was some time before he could quite realize his position. The whole thing was so sudden—so wholesale—the unexpected change in his prospects was so overwhelming, that he had to repeat the contents of the letter several times to himself before he could realize them. He walked up and down Covent Garden for nearly an hour, and after he had read and re-read the astounding letter three or four dozen times, he began to realize the fact that instead of drudging wearily and obscurely at half-paid author-work, he was to be suddenly removed to an almost brilliant position, with the probable command of what appeared to him to be unlimited wealth, and an almost certain prospect of a peerage; for his elder brother, the cripple, to whom allusion has already been made, would certainly never marry, and indeed was scarcely likely to live many years.

He put his hand into his breast-pocket to open and read for the fiftieth time the communication which had so agitated