

Adams William Davenport

**A Book of Burlesque: Sketches
of English Stage Travestie and
Parody**



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Willam Davenport Adams

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PREFACE

In the pages that follow, I make no attempt to supply a consecutive and comprehensive history of English stage travestie. This would have been impossible within the limits assigned to me. My object has been simply to furnish an introduction to such a history, supplemented by sketches of the various groups into which English stage burlesques naturally fall, with such extracts as might serve to exhibit the respective methods of individual travestie-writers. My business has been with the literary rather than the histrionic side of burlesque – with the witty and humorous, rather than the purely theatrical, features of the subject with which I had to deal. At the same time, I hope that the details I have been able to give concerning dates, and "casts," and so on, may be useful to at least a large section of my readers.

I ought to say that, while I have endeavoured to mention all the most representative burlesques of which our stage history keeps record, I have intentionally left outside of my scheme all "extravaganzas," "bouffoneries musicales," and other such miscellaneous varieties of comic literature, – confining myself to definite and deliberate travesties of subjects previously existent.

I have to thank more than one kind friend for information and material supplied, and more than one living writer of burlesque for the opportunity of consulting his "prompt books" and thus quoting from unpublished work.

Davenport Adams, jun.

Note. – Those who desire to extend their acquaintance with the literature of English stage burlesque may be recommended to turn first to the travesties published by Mr. French, which include those by Planché, and many by the Brouchs, H. J. Byron, Talfourd, F. C. Burnand, etc. Mr. Gilbert's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" is to be found in his volume entitled "Foggerty's Fairy, and Other Stories." A large proportion of the burlesques discussed, quoted, or mentioned in the following chapters are out of print, and to be seen only at the British Museum, on the second-hand bookstalls, or on the shelves of private collectors.

[We beg to acknowledge the courtesy of MM. Waléry, Limited, in permitting us to avail ourselves of their photographs of Messrs. Burnand and Gilbert; and of Mr. Bassano for the same permission in regard to that of Mr. G. R. Sims.— Ed. W. L.]

I

THE BEGINNINGS OF BURLESQUE

Who shall say when the spirit of burlesque first made its appearance on our stage? There were traces of it, we may be sure, in the Mysteries and Moralities of pre-Elizabethan days; the monkish dramatists were not devoid of humour, and the first lay playwrights had a rough sense of ridicule. The "Vice" which figured in so many of our rude old dramas had in him an element of satire, and the pictures drawn of his Satanic Majesty were conscious or unconscious caricatures of the popular conception of the Evil One.

In all these cases, however, the burlesque was general. It was of the nature of travestie, and of the vaguest sort. Of particular parody one finds but few signs in the Elizabethan drama. There is a little of it in Shakespeare, where he pokes fun at the turgidity of contemporary tragedy or at the obscurity of contemporary Euphuism. The Pyramus and Thisbe episode is less burlesque than satire. It is an *exposé* of the absurdities of the amateur performer, for whom Shakespeare, as a professional actor, could have only an amused contempt.

"The Bard" parodied, but he did not burlesque. That was left to the initiative of the gifted literary Dioscuri, Beaumont and Fletcher. "The Knight of the Burning Pestle," which saw the light in 1611, is not wholly a travestie, but it contains a travestie within itself. In the main it is a dramatic exposition of a love story, the scene of which is laid in the middle-class life of the time. Ralph, the Knight of the Burning Pestle, is by no means the hero of the tale; rather is he an excrescence upon it. A grocer and his wife sit on the stage, and suggest to the actors that Ralph, their apprentice, shall take part in the performance. They want a play in which a grocer shall do "admirable things," and Ralph is bound to do them. The apprentice, it would seem, is an amateur actor – he "hath played before," and so finds no difficulty in adapting himself to the situation. When he enters, it is "like a grocer in his shop, with two prentices, reading 'Palmerin of England.'" This gives us the key to the satire. Ralph is to burlesque the romances of chivalry, which were then so common in England, as elsewhere. "Palmerin of England" had been "translated out of French" by Anthony Munday and assistants, and published between 1580 and 1602. Ralph starts with a quotation from it, and then goes on to say: —

Certainly those knights are much to be commended who, neglecting their possessions, wander with a squire and a dwarf through the deserts to relieve poor ladies... There are no such courteous and fair well-spoken knights in this age.

He whom Palmerin would have called "Fair Sir," and she whom Rosiclear would have called "Right beauteous Damsel," are now spoken of opprobriously. But why should not Ralph be the means of wiping out this reproach? —

Why should I not pursue this course, both for the credit of myself and our company? For amongst all the worthy books of achievements, I do not call to mind that I yet read of a grocer-errant: I will be the said knight. Have you heard of any that hath wandered unfurnished of his squire and dwarf? Thy elder prentice Tim shall be my trusty squire, and little George my dwarf. Hence, my blue apron! Yet, in remembrance of my former trade, upon my shield shall be portrayed a burning pestle, and I will be called the Knight of the Burning Pestle. My beloved squire, and George my dwarf, I charge you that henceforth you never call me by any other name but "the right courteous and valiant Knight of the Burning Pestle"; and that you never call any female by the name of a woman or wench, but "fair lady," if she

have her desires; if not, "distressed damsel"; that you call all forests and heaths "deserts," and all horses "palfreys."

After this, Ralph reappears at various points in the action. He interposes, Quixote-like, in the aforesaid love-affair, and gets belaboured by the favoured lover for his pains. Later, he puts up at an inn, and, about to leave, is surprised when the tapster draws his attention to the fact that the reckoning is not paid: —

Ralph. Right courteous Knight, who for the order's sake
Which thou hast ta'en, hang'st out the holy Bell,
As I this flaming pestle bear about,
We render thanks to your puissant self,
Your beauteous lady, and your gentle squires,
For thus refreshing of our wearied limbs,
Stiffen'd with hard achievements in wild desert.

Tapster. Sir, there is twelve shillings to pay.

Ralph. Thou merry squire Tapstero, thanks to thee
For comforting our souls with double jug:
And if adventurous fortune prick thee forth,
Thou jovial squire, to follow feats of arms,
Take heed thou tender ev'ry lady's cause,
Ev'ry true knight, and ev'ry damsel fair,
But spill the blood of treacherous Saracens,
And false enchanters that with magic spells
Have done to death full many a noble knight.

Host. Thou valiant Knight of the Burning Pestle, give ear to me: there is twelve shillings to pay, and as I am a true knight, I will not bate a penny...

Ralph. Sir knight, this mirth of yours becomes you well;
But, to requite this liberal courtesy,
If any of your squires will follow arms,
He shall receive from my heroic hand
A knighthood, by the virtue of this pestle.

The host, however, insists upon receiving his twelve shillings, and the grocer's wife, in great fear lest harm shall befall her Ralph, requests her husband to pay the money. In a subsequent scene, Ralph conquers the giant Barbaroso, and releases his captives. By-and-by he goes into Moldavia, where he touches the heart of the king's daughter, but tells her that he has already pledged his troth to Susan, "a cobbler's maid in Malte Street," whom he vowed never to forsake. At the end of the play he comes on to explain, at length, that he is dead, taking the opportunity to recount his various performances.

The fun is never very brilliant; and the "Knight of the Pestle," albeit by writers so distinguished, is not, for the present-day Englishman, particularly exhilarating reading. One can imagine, however, how droll it seemed to our ancestors, with whom it remained popular for over half a century, surviving till the time of Mistress Eleanor Gwynne, who once spoke the prologue to it.

Our first burlesque, then, was a satire upon exaggerated fiction. Our second was a satire upon extravagant plays. It is possible that "The Rehearsal" was represented before "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" left the boards. Begun in 1663, and ready for production before 1665, it was first performed in 1671. It is ascribed to George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; but probably there were several hands engaged in it. It was the outcome of the boredom and the laughter caused by the wildness and bombast of the Restoration plays. There were some things in the stage of that day which the wits could not abide: —

Here brisk insipid rogues, for wit, let fall
Sometimes dull sense; but oft'ner none at all.
There, strutting heroes, with a grim-fac'd train,
Shall brave the gods, in King Cambyzes' vein.
For (changing rules, of late, as if man writ
In spite of reason, nature, art, and wit)
Our poets make us laugh at tragedy,
And with their comedies they make us cry.

So runs the prologue to "The Rehearsal," which was destined to strike the first blow at the mechanical dramas that had succeeded the masterpieces of the Shakespearian period. Bayes, the playwright whose tragedy is supposed to be "rehearsed," is usually accepted as a skit upon Dryden, whose dress, speech, and manner were openly mimicked by Lacy, the interpreter of the part. But there is reason to believe that Davenant first sat for the portrait, and in the end Bayes became a sort of incarnated parody of all the Restoration playwrights. This preposterous play travesties a whole school of dramatic writing. Dramas by Dryden, Davenant, James and Henry Howard, Mrs. Behn, and Sir William Killigrew and others, are directly satirised in certain passages; but in the main the satire is general. For instance, in one place fun is made of the prevalence of similes in the dramas aimed at. Prince Prettyman, in the rehearsed play, falls asleep, and Chloris, coming in, finds him in that situation: —

Bayes. Now, here she must make a simile.

Smith (one of the spectators). Where's the necessity of that, Mr. Bayes?

Bayes. Because she's surpris'd. That's a general rule: you must ever make a simile when you are surpris'd; 't is the new way of writing.

Elsewhere it is confusion of metaphor, very common among the second-rate "tragedians," that is derided. Says the physician in the play: —

All these threat'ning storms, which, like impregnant clouds, do hover
o'er our heads (when once they are grasped but by the eye of reason),
melt into fruitful showers of blessings on the people.

Bayes. Pray mark that allegory. Is not that good?

Johnson (another spectator). Yes, that grasping of a storm with the eye is admirable.

In one place, Smith, the aforesaid onlooker, complains that, amid all the talk, the plot stands still; to which Bayes replies, "Why, what the devil is the plot good for but to bring in fine things?" At another juncture we have the first hint of a bit of persiflage which Sheridan afterwards imitated in "The Critic." It has reference to the portentous reticence of some of the dialogue in Restoration plays. An usher and a physician are on the stage: —

Phys. If Lorenzo should prove false (which none but the great gods can tell) you then perhaps would find that — (*whispers*).

Usher. Alone, do you say?

Phys. No, attended with the noble — (*whispers*).

Usher. Who, he in grey?

Phys. Yes, and at the head of — (*whispers*).

Usher. Then, sir, most certain 'twill in time appear,
These are the reasons that have induc'd 'em to't;
First, he — (*whispers*).
Secondly, they — (*whispers*).
Thirdly, and lastly, both he and they — (*whispers*).

[Exeunt whispering]

"Well, sir," says Smith to Bayes, "but pray, why all this whispering?" "Why, sir," replies the dramatist, "because they are supposed to be politicians, and matters of state ought not to be divulg'd."

In its direct travestie "The Rehearsal" is often very happy. Dryden had claimed for his tragedies that they were written by "th' exactest rules"; so Bayes exhibits to his friends Smith and Johnson what he calls his "Book of Drama Commonplaces, the mother of many plays," containing "certain helps that we men of art have found it convenient to make use of." "I do here aver," he says, "that no man yet the sun e'er shone upon has parts sufficient to furnish out a stage, except it were by the help of these my rules." Davenant, in his "Love and Honour," had portrayed a mental and spiritual struggle between those potent forces. Bayes, accordingly, is made to introduce a scene in which Prince Volscius, sitting down to pull on his boots, wonders whether he ought or ought not to perform that operation: —

My legs, the emblem of my various thought,
Show to what sad distraction I am brought.
Sometimes, with stubborn Honour, like this boot,
My mind is guarded, and resolv'd to do't:
Sometimes, again, that very mind, by Love
Disarmèd, like this other leg does prove.
Shall I to Honour or to Love give way?
Go on, cries Honour; tender Love says, Nay;
Honour aloud commands, Pluck both boots on;
But softer Love does whisper, Put on none.

In the end, he "goes out hopping, with one boot on, and t'other off." Again, there was a passage in the drama called "The Villain," in which the host supplied his guests with a collation out of his clothes – a capon from his helmet, cream out of his scabbard, and so on. In like manner, Pallas, in Mr. Bayes's tragedy, furnishes forth the two usurping kings: —

Lo, from this conquering lance
Does flow the purest wine of France:
And to appease your hunger, I
Have in my helmet brought a pie;
Lastly, to bear a part with these,
Behold a buckler made of cheese.

Of the direct parody in the burlesque a few instances will suffice. Almanzor, in "The Conquest of Granada," becomes the Drawcansir of Mr. Bayes's work; and while the former ejaculates —

He who dares love, and for that love must die,
And, knowing this, dares yet love on, am I, —

the latter caps it with —

He that dares drink, and for that drink dares die,
And knowing this, dares yet drink on, am I.

Again, while Almanzor says to his rival in love —

Thou dar'st not marry her, while I'm in sight;
With a bent brow, thy priest and thee I'll fright, —

Drawcansir, snatching the bowls of wine from the usurpers, cries —

Whoe'er to gulp one drop of this dare think,
I'll stare away his very power to drink.

The simile of the boar and the sow has often been quoted; it seems to have been always a favourite with our playgoing ancestors. In "The Conquest of Granada" we read: —

So two kind turtles, when a storm is nigh,
Look up, and see it gathering in the sky...
Perch'd on some dropping branch, they sit alone,
And coo and hearken to each other's moan.

Mr. Bayes imitated this in what he called "one of the most delicate, dainty similes in the world, egad": —

So boar and sow, when any storm is nigh,
Snuff up, and smell it gath'ring in the sky...
Pensive in mud they wallow all alone,
And snort and gruntle to each other's moan.

The example set by Buckingham in "The Rehearsal" was followed, more than half a century later, by Henry Fielding, in "The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great." This was brought out in 1730, in two acts, and was so immediately and largely successful that the author was induced to expand its two acts into three. It was afterwards published, with elaborate notes, setting forth a number of "parallel passages" from Dryden downwards, and with a preface, in which the supposed editor, H. Scriblerus Secundus, gravely assigned the origin of the "tragedy" to the age of Elizabeth. Apropos of parallel passages, the editor says: —

Whether this sameness of thought and expression [on the part of the authors quoted] . . . proceeded from an agreement in their way of thinking, or whether they have borrowed from our author, I leave the reader to determine. I shall adventure to affirm this of the Sentiments of our author, that they are generally the most familiar which I have ever met with, and at the same time delivered with the highest dignity of phrase; which brings me to speak of his diction. Here I shall only beg one postulatum – viz., that the greatest perfection of the language of a tragedy is, that it is not to be understood; which granted (as I think it must be), it will necessarily follow that the only ways to avoid this is by being too high or too low for the understanding, which will comprehend everything within its reach.

The editor goes on to say that "our author excelleth" in both these styles. "He is very rarely within sight through the whole play, either rising higher than the eye of your understanding can soar, or sinking lower than it careth to stoop."

Fielding does not adopt in "Tom Thumb" the machinery of "The Rehearsal." "Tom Thumb" is a burlesque tragedy, standing by itself, and intended for representation in the serious spirit which should animate all true burlesque. Tom Thumb is "a little hero, with a great soul," who, as a reward for his victories over the race of giants, demands in marriage the hand of Huncamunca, the daughter of King Arthur. As he observes: —

I ask not kingdoms, I can conquer those;
I ask not money, money I've enough;
For what I've done, and what I mean to do,
For giants slain, and giants yet unborn
Which I will slay – if this be call'd a debt,
Take my receipt in full: I ask but this —
To sun myself in Huncamunca's eyes.

"Prodigious bold request," remarks the King; but he decides, nevertheless, to give Huncamunca to Tom Thumb. Unhappily, Lord Grizzle is enamoured of the princess, and, in revenge, leads an insurrection against the Court. He is, however, conquered by the little hero, who is about to be wedded to his charmer, when, alas! as he is marching in triumph through the streets, he is swallowed by "a cow, of larger than the usual size." Queen Dollallolla, who is in love with Tom, slays with her own hand the messenger who brought the news. Thereupon, Cleora, who is in love with the messenger, kills the Queen. Huncamunca, by way of reprisal, kills Cleora. A certain Doodle kills Huncamunca; one Mustacha kills Doodle; the King kills Mustacha, and then kills himself, exclaiming —

So when the child, whom nurse from danger guards,
Sends Jack for mustard with a pack of cards,
Kings, queens and knaves throw one another down,

Till the whole pack lies scatter'd and o'erthrown;
So all our pack upon the floor is cast,
And all I boast is – that I fall the last.

We have here a happy satire upon the sanguinary conclusions given to the tragedies of the seventeenth century. Great pains, too, are taken, throughout the "tragedy," to travestie that *bête noire* of the humourists, the dragged-in simile, to which not even "The Rehearsal" had given the *coup de grâce*. The ghost of Tom Thumb's father is made to say —

So have I seen the bees in clusters swarm,
So have I seen the stars in frosty nights,
So have I seen the sand in windy days,
So have I seen the ghost on Pluto's shore,
So have I seen the flowers in spring arise,
So have I seen the leaves in autumn fall,
So have I seen the fruits in summer smile,
So have I seen the snow in winter frown.

Whereupon the king says, "D – n all thou hast seen!" Grizzle, when on the point of expiring, cries —

Some kinder sprite knocks softly at my soul,
And gently whispers it to haste away.
I come, I come, most willingly I come.
So, when some city wife, for country air,
To Hampstead or to Highgate does repair,
Her to make haste her husband does implore,
And cries, "My dear, the coach is at the door":
With equal wish, desirous to be gone,
She gets into the coach, and then she cries, "Drive on!"

Some of the mock similes in "Tom Thumb" are among the most familiar things in literature. We all remember the lines —

So, when two dogs are fighting in the streets,
When a third dog one of the two dogs meets,
With angry teeth he bites him to the bone,
And this dog smarts for what that dog has done.

And these —

So, when the Cheshire cheese a maggot breeds,
Another and another still succeeds;
By thousands and ten thousands they increase,
Till one continued maggot fills the rotten cheese.

The burlesque contained within the pages of "Tom Thumb" covers a considerable field. Dryden is once more very freely satirised, some nine or ten of his plays being held up to ridicule. But much attention is at the same time paid to dramas which saw the light after the production of

"The Rehearsal." Thus, there are allusions to the "Mithridates," "Nero," and "Brutus" of Nathaniel Lee, which belong to 1674-1679; to the "Marius" of Otway (1680); to the "Anna Bullen," "Earl of Essex," "Mary Queen of Scots," and "Cyrus the Great" of Banks (1680-1696); to the "Persian Princess" of Theobald (1711), to Addison's "Cato" (1713), to Young's "Busiris" and "The Revenge," and even to Thomson's "Sophonisba," which had come out only in the year preceding that in which "Tom Thumb" was performed. "O Sophonisba, Sophonisba O" (which had already been parodied in the form of "O Jemmy Thomson, Jemmy Thomson O") is here laughed at in "O Huncamunca, Huncamunca O!" In "Cyrus the Great" the virtuous Panthea remarks to one lover —

For two I must confess are gods to me,
Which is my Abradatus first, and thee.

And, in a like spirit, Huncamunca, after wedding Tom Thumb, is quite willing to wed Grizzle:

My ample heart for more than one has room:
A maid like me Heaven form'd at least for two.
I married him, and now I'll marry you, —

thereby reminding us of the obliging defendant in Mr. Gilbert's "Trial by Jury," who is ready to "marry this lady to-day, and marry the other to-morrow." In the third act of "Cato" is a simile which Fielding parodies thus – putting it into the mouth of Grizzle: —

So have I seen, in some dark winter's day,
A sudden storm rush down the sky's highway,
Sweep through the streets with terrible ding-dong,
Gush thro' the spouts, and wash whole crowds along,
The crowded shops the thronging vermin screen,
Together cram the dirty and the clean,
And not one shoe-boy in the street is seen.

Finally, we have this equally well-known passage, suggested by the remark of Lee's Mithridates that he "would be drunk with death": —

Doodle. My liege, I a petition have here got.

King. Petition me no petitions, sir, to-day;
Let other hours be set apart for business.
To-day it is our pleasure to be drunk,
And this our queen shall be as drunk as we.

It was the fate of "Tom Thumb" to be transformed – so far as it was possible to transform it – into a burlesque of Italian opera as well as of conventional drama. "Set to music after the Italian manner," it was brought out in 1733 as "The Opera of Operas," and had considerable vogue in the new guise thus given to it. It had been preceded in 1727 by Gay's "Beggar's Opera"; but that famous work was a social and political satire rather than a travestie of the exotic lyrical drama. It may be regarded as a species of prototype of the burletta or ballad opera of later days. Not even the

transformed "Tom Thumb"¹ could be called an effective *reductio ad absurdum* of the Italian opera of those days. For that the public had to wait a short time longer.

Meanwhile, four years after the production of "Tom Thumb" came the "Chrononhotonthologos" of Henry Carey, author of "Sally in our Alley." This also is a burlesque tragedy, but the travestie is purely general. No individual play is directly satirised; the satire is aimed at a whole class of dramas – the same class as that which had suggested the composition of "Tom Thumb."

Carey says, in his prologue: —

To-night our comic muse the buskin wears,
And gives herself no small romantic airs;
Struts in heroics, and in pompous verse
Does the minutest incidents rehearse;
In ridicule's strict retrospect displays
The poetasters of these modern days,
Who with big bellowing bombast rend our ears,
Which, stript of sound, quite void of sense appears;
Or else their fiddle-faddle numbers flow,
Serenely dull, elaborately low.

"Chrononhotonthologos" is a short piece, in one act and seven scenes. It is described in its sub-title as "the most tragical tragedy that ever was tragedised by any company of tragedians," and it bears out the description tolerably well. When the curtain rises, there enter two courtiers of Queerummania – Rigdum-Funnidos and Aldiborontiphoscophornio. Says the latter to the former:

—

Aldiborontiphoscophornio!
Where left you Chrononhotonthologos?

Chrononhotonthologos is the king, and we learn that he is in his tent, in a kind of waking slumber. Presently he enters, very much put out that he should be so inclined to doze, and very angry, consequently, with the God of Sleep. Says he: —

Sport not with Chrononhotonthologos,
Thou idle slumb'rer, thou detested Somnus;

and "exits in a huff." Whereupon the two courtiers, who have retired, re-enter: —

Rigdum. The King is in a most cursed passion! Pray who is the Mr.
Somnus he's so angry withal?

Aldi. The son of Chaos and of Erebus,
Incestuous pair! brother of Mors relentless,
Whose speckled robe, and wings of blackest hue,
Astonish all mankind with hideous glare:
Himself, with sable plumes, to men benevolent

¹ "Tom Thumb" was performed in 1740, with Yates as the ghost and Woodward as Noodle, Glumdalca (the giantess) being represented by a man. In 1745 Yates played Grizzle, Tom being enacted by a lady. The burlesque was seen at Covent Garden in 1828.

Brings downy slumbers and refreshing sleep.

Rigdum. This gentleman may come of a very good family, for aught I know; but I would not be in his place for the world.

Aldi. But lo! the king his footsteps this way bending,
His cogitative faculties immers'd
In cogibundity of cogitation.

Thereupon the king re-enters, followed almost immediately by the captain of the guard, who informs him that "th' antipodean pow'rs from realms below have burst the entrails of the earth" and threaten the safety of the kingdom. "This world is too incopious to contain them; armies on armies march in form stupendous" – "tier on tier, high pil'd from earth to heaven." The king, however, is not alarmed. He bids Bombardinian, his general, draw his legions forth, and orders the priests to prepare their temples for rites of triumph: —

Let the singing singers,
With vocal voices, most vociferous,
In sweet vociferation, out-vociferise
Ev'n sound itself.

Happily the Antipodeans (who walk upon their hands) are badly beaten, and all run away except their king, with whom, alas! Fadladinida, the wife of Chrononhotonthologos, promptly falls in love. As she herself says to her favourite maiden: —

Oh, my Tatlanthe! Have you seen his face,
His air, his shape, his mien, his ev'ry grace?
In what a charming attitude he stands,
How prettily he foots it with his hands!
Well, to his arms – no, to his legs – I fly,
For I must have him, if I live or die.

Meanwhile, Bombardinian has invited the King to drink wine with him in his tent. The King accepts, but, not content with liquor, asks for something more substantial: —

Hold, Bombardinian, I esteem it fit,
With so much wine, to eat a little bit.

The cook suggests "some nice cold pork in the pantry," and is instantly slain by the irate monarch, who, deeming that Bombardinian is "braving" him, strikes him. Whereupon the General: —

A blow! shall Bombardinian take a blow?
Blush! blush, thou sun! start back, thou rapid ocean!
Hills! vales! seas! mountains! all commixing crumble,
And into chaos pulverise the world;
For Bombardinian has receiv'd a blow,
And Chrononhotonthologos must die.

[They fight. He kills the king

Ha! what have I done?
Go, call a coach, and let a coach be call'd;
And let the man that calls it be the caller;
And, in his calling, let him nothing call,
But coach, coach, coach! Oh, for a coach, ye gods!

[Exit, raving

The doctor, pronouncing the king dead, is killed by the General, who then kills himself. The Queen mourns her widowhood, and Tatlanthe proposes that she should wed Rigdum-Funnidos. To this, however, Aldiborontiphoscophornio objects; and so, to save discussion, the Queen will give no preference to either: —

To make the matter easy,
I'll have you both; and that, I hope, will please ye.

Produced in 1734, "Chrononhotonthologos" was performed at intervals until 1815, when it was seen at Drury Lane, with Oxberry in the title-part and Dowton as the General. After that it remained out of the theatrical repertory until 1880, when Mr. John Hollingshead revived it, for one representation, at the Gaiety.² It is a slight piece of work, but contains some elements of comicality. It will always be esteemed by literary students, if only because the names of Rigdum-Funnidos and Aldiborontiphoscophornio struck the fancy of Sir Walter Scott, who bestowed them, in fun, upon the brothers Constable, the publishers. "Aldiborontiphoscophornio" is surely the perfection of mock-tragedy nomenclature.

It is to Carey that we owe, not only "Chrononhotonthologos," but the first really effective burlesque of Italian opera. In 1737 there was brought out at the Haymarket "The Dragon of Wantley," a "burlesque opera," of which Carey had written the dialogue and songs, and for which John Frederick Lampe had composed the music. Its object, according to the author, was "to display in English the beauty of nonsense, so prevailing in the Italian operas." The story was founded on the old ballad, with which, however, liberties were taken. In the first act, the natives of "that part of Yorkshire near Rotherham" are shown in much excitement, due to the ravages of the dragon, which has just entered the Squire's residence and consumed all the coffee, toast, and butter that was set out for breakfast. Says one Gubbins: —

This Dragon very modish, sure, and nice is:
What shall we do in this disastrous crisis?

To which his daughter Margery replies: —

A thought, to quell him, comes into my Head;
No Way more proper, than to kill him dead.

² The parts of Chrononhotonthologos, Bombardinian, Rigdum-Funnidos, Aldiborontiphoscophornio, Fadladinida, and Tatlanthe were then taken by Messrs. Murray, Shine, Soutar, Squire, Mrs. Leigh, and Miss Bella Howard respectively.

Not far hence lives "a valiant knight," named Moore, of Moore Hall, who may be trusted to destroy the dragon. Moore accordingly is approached, surrenders to the charms of Margery, and undertakes to do the deed. Meanwhile, Mauxalinda, an old flame of Moore's, becomes jealous of Margery, and seeks to slay her with a bodkin – a fate from which Moore happily rescues her. Mauxalinda is then threatened with quarter sessions; but she cries —

O give me not up to the Law,
I'd much rather beg upon Crutches;
Once in a Sollicitor's Paw,
You never get out of his Clutches.

Moore thereupon prepares to start for the Dragon's den:

But first I'll drink, to make me strong and mighty,
Six quarts of ale, and one of Aqua Vitæ.

Duly encountering the monster, Moore kills him (say the stage directions) with a kick in the rear, the Dragon crying "Oh, oh, oh! the Devil take your toe!" After that, Gubbins declares: —

The Loves of this brave Knight, and my fair Daughter,
In Roratorios shall be sung hereafter.
Begin your Songs of Joy; begin, begin,
And rend the Welkin with harmonious Din.

Thereupon there is this general chorus: —

Sing, sing, and rorio
An Oratorio,
To gallant Morio,
Of Moore Hall.
To Margereenia
Of Roth'ram Greenia,
Beauty's bright Queenia,
Bellow and bawl.

"The music," says the chronicler, "was made as grand and pompous as possible, to heighten the contrast between that and the words" – thus anticipating the comic method which has been utilised with so much success by Mr. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan.

From "The Dragon of Wantley," which, as might be expected, had a very considerable vogue, we come to "The Critic, or a Tragedy Rehearsed" – the last, and not the least, of Sheridan's dramatic works, produced in Drury Lane in 1779. Of so familiar a piece, what is there to be said? Is it not played with tolerable frequency at "benefits," for the sake of the "exceptional casts" it can supply? Have not all middle-aged playgoers seen and admired the younger Mathews as Sir Fretful Plagiary and Mr. Puff? Assuredly there are certain features of "The Critic" which everybody remembers. Everybody remembers Sir Fretful's famous lines on the plagiarists, who "serve your best thoughts as gypsies do stolen children – disfigure them to make 'em pass for their own"; as well as his special addendum about the "dexterous" writer who "might take out some of the best things in my tragedy and put them into his own comedy." Everybody remembers, too, Mr. Puffs no less famous catalogue

of the varieties of *réclame*; his remark that "the number of those who undergo the fatigue of judging for themselves is very small indeed"; his explanation of the fact that he and Shakespeare had made use of the same thought; Lord Burleigh's shake of the head, which meant so much, and has become proverbial; the Spanish fleet, which could not be seen because it was not yet in sight; Tilburina, "mad in white satin" – and the like. It must be recollected, however, that "The Critic" as played and "The Critic" as written and printed are two very different things. In the acting version, the earlier scenes between Puff and Dangle and Sneer, as well as the latter portion of the "tragedy rehearsed," are very much compressed – no doubt with advantage to the public, for, clever as "The Critic" is as a whole, certain portions of it are out of date, and would not "go" well with a modern audience.

In glancing through the printed version, one is struck anew by the similarity that "The Critic" bears to "The Rehearsal," not only in form, but in detail. In both cases a dramatic author rehearses a tragedy in the presence of a couple of friends, who interject comments upon the performance. But the likeness does not end here – possibly because the theatrical world of 1779 was, in all essentials, very like the theatrical world of 1671. Bayes, in "The Rehearsal," says that he has "appointed two or three dozen" of his friends "to be ready in the pit" (at the *première* of his piece), "who, I'm sure, will clap." And so Sneer, in "The Critic," expects that he will not be able to get into Drury Lane on the first night of Puff's play, "for on the first night of a piece they always fill the house with orders to support it." Again, Bayes says that

Let a man write never so well, there are, nowadays, a sort of persons they call critics, that, egad, have no more wit in them than so many hobby-horses; but they'll laugh at you, sir, and find fault, and censure things that, egad, I'm sure they are not able to do themselves.

In a similar spirit Sir Fretful stigmatises the newspapers as "the most villainous – licentious – abominable – infernal – Not that I ever read them – no. I make it a rule never to look into a newspaper."

In one respect Sheridan's work is quite unlike the Duke of Buckingham's. It contains no direct travestie or parody of any kind. The burlesque is "at large" throughout. The satire embodied in the dialogue between Puff and his friends reflects upon all old-fashioned playwriting of the "tragic" sort. Puff opens the second scene of his "Spanish Armada" with a clock striking four, which, besides recording the time, not only "begets an awful attention in the audience," but "saves a description of the rising sun, and a great deal about gilding the eastern hemisphere." He makes his characters tell one another what they know already, because, although they know it, the audience do not. He hears the stage cannon go off three times instead of once, and complains, "Give these fellows a good thing, and they never know when to have done with it." "Where they do agree on the stage," he says, in another hackneyed passage, "their unanimity is wonderful." In the rehearsed tragedy itself the travestie is general, not particular. Here Sheridan satirises a different class of tragedy from that which Buckingham dealt with. As the prologue (not by Sheridan, however) says: —

In those gay days of wickedness and wit,
When Villiers criticised what Dryden writ,
The tragic queen, to please a tasteless crowd,
Had learn'd to bellow, rant, and roar so loud,
That frighten'd Nature, her best friend before,
The blustering beldam's company forswore.

The later "tragedy" took another tone: —

The frantic hero's wild delirium past,

Now insipidity succeeds bombast;
So slow Melpomene's cold numbers creep,
Here dulness seems her drowsy court to keep.

Dulness, then, is what Sheridan is chiefly girding at, but he has a keen eye also for the unconscious banalities of the *genre* he is dealing with. How truly comic, for instance, is the prayer to Mars offered up by Leicester and his companions! —

Behold thy votaries submissive beg
That thou wilt deign to grant them all they ask;
Assist them to accomplish all their ends,
And sanctify whatever means they use
To gain them.

How delicious, too, in their absolute nonsense, are the lines given to the distraught Tilburina!

The wind whistles — the moon rises — see,
They have killed my squirrel in his cage;
Is this a grasshopper? — Ha! no; it is my
Whiskerandos — you shall not keep him —
I know you have him in your pocket —
An oyster may be cross'd in love! — who says
A whale's a bird? — Ha! did you call, my love? —
He's here! he's there! — He's everywhere!
Ah me! he's nowhere!

For the rest, the text of the tragedy, as printed, is very dissimilar from the text as played. In representation, most of the fun is got out of intentional perversion of certain words or phrases. Thus, "martial symmetry" becomes "martial cemetery";

The famed Armada, by the Pope baptised,

becomes

The famed Armada, by the Pope capsised;

"friendship's closing line" is turned into "friendship's clothes-line"; "My gentle Nora" into "My gentle Snorer"; "Cupid's baby woes" into "Cupid's baby clothes"; "matchless excellence" into "matchless impudence," and so on. This is sorry stuff; and those who desire to appreciate Sheridan's travestie of the tragedy of his day must read "The Critic" in its published shape.

The next notable attempt at the burlesque of conventional tragedy was a return to the methods of "Chrononhotonthologos." In "Bombastes Furioso" (first played in 1816³) all satirical machinery was discarded; all that the author — William Barnes Rhodes — sought to do was to travestie his originals in a brief and telling story. "Bombastes" is not now so often performed as it used to be; but not so very long ago it was turned into a comic opera, under the title of "Artaxominous the Great,"

³ The elder Mathews was Artaxominous; Liston, Bombardinian; and Miss H. Kelly, Distaffina. A few years later Munden played Bombardinian, and Farren, Fusbos.

and its humours are fairly well known to the public. Some of these the world will not willingly let die. One still thinks with amusement of the "army" of Bombastes, consisting of "one Drummer, one Fifer, and two Soldiers, all very materially differing in size"; of the General's exhortation to his troops —

Begone, brave army, and don't kick up a row;

and of the boastful challenge of the General, so promptly accepted by Artaxominous —

Who dares this pair of boots displace
Must meet Bombastes face to face.

And the piece bears re-perusal wonderfully well. Its literary merit is assuredly not less than that of "Chrononhotonthologos": it is perhaps even greater. The opening colloquy between the King and Fusbos is genuinely diverting, embodying as it does one of those mock similes so dear to the satirists of old-fashioned tragedy. The King admits to Fusbos that he is "but middling — that is, *so so!*" It is not, however, either the mulligrubs or the blue-devils that disturb him: —

King. Last night, when undisturb'd by state affairs,
Moist'ning our clay, and puffing off our cares,
Oft the replenish'd goblet did we drain,
And drank and smok'd, and smok'd and drank again!
Such was the case, our very actions such,
Until at length we got a drop too much.

Fusbos. So when some donkey on the Blackheath road,
Falls, overpower'd, beneath his sandy load,
The driver's curse unheeded swells the air,
Since none can carry more than they can bear.

By-and-by the King confides to Fusbos that his heart is not wholly faithful to Queen Griskinissa — that he is also hopelessly in love with Distaffina, the acknowledged sweetheart of Bombastes. Under the circumstances he asks for Fusbos' advice: —

Shall I my Griskinissa's charms forego,
Compel her to give up the regal chair,
And place the rosy Distaffina there?
In such a case, what course can I pursue?
I love my queen, and Distaffina too.

Fusbos. And would a king his general supplant?
I can't advise, upon my soul I can't.

King. So when two feasts, whereat there's nought to pay,
Fall unpropitious on the self-same day,
The anxious Cit each invitation views,
And ponders which to take and which refuse:
From this or that to keep away is loth,
And sighs to think he cannot dine at both.

These, however, are not the best known of the mock similes in "Bombastes." For those we have to look to the scene in which the King, observing his General's abovementioned challenge, reviles Bombastes and knocks down his boots. Then we have the familiar lines: —

Bomb. So have I heard on Afric's burning shore
A hungry lion give a grievous roar;
The grievous roar echo'd along the shore.

King. So have I heard on Afric's burning shore
Another lion give a grievous roar,
And the first lion thought the last a bore.

Next comes the fight between the monarch and the warrior; the King is killed, and then Fusbos kills Bombastes. Finally, the two deceased (despite the assertion of Fusbos that they are "dead as herrings – herrings that are red") come to life again, and all ends happily.

Of ordinary parody there is little in the piece, and what there is can scarcely be said to be of the best. There is a suggestion, in one ditty, of "Hope told a flattering Tale." But better than this is the song suggested by "My Lodging is on the Cold Ground," which is happy both intrinsically and as an imitation. Fusbos is the singer: —

My lodging is in Leather Lane,
A parlour that's next to the sky;
'Tis exposed to the wind and the rain,
But the wind and the rain I defy:
Such love warms the coldest of spots,
As I feel for Scrubinda the fair;
Oh, she lives by the scouring of pots,
In Dyot Street, Bloomsbury Square.

Oh, were I a quart, pint, or gill,
To be scrubb'd by her delicate hands,
Let others possess what they will
Of learning, and houses, and lands;
My parlour that's next to the sky
I'd quit, her blest mansion to share;
So happy to live and to die
In Dyot Street, Bloomsbury Square.

And oh, would this damsel be mine,
No other provision I'd seek;
On a look I could breakfast and dine,
And feast on a smile for a week.
But ah! should she false-hearted prove,
Suspended, I'll dangle in air;
A victim to delicate love,
In Dyot Street, Bloomsbury Square.

At this point, English stage burlesque suddenly takes a new departure, combining, with satire of the contemporary native "boards," satire not less keen of certain products of the foreign muse. The incident came about in this way: – Just before the close of the eighteenth century, the English book-market had been flooded with translations of certain German plays, including Schiller's "Robbers" and "Cabal and Love," Goethe's "Stella," and Kotzebue's "Misanthropy and Repentance" ("The Stranger") and "Count Benyowsky." Canning, Ellis, and Frere, who were then bringing out *The Anti-Jacobin*, were struck by the absurdities contained within these dramas, and accordingly composed and printed (in June 1798) that well-known skit, "The Rovers, or the Double Arrangement." In this the plays chiefly parodied are "Stella," "The Stranger," and "Count Benyowsky." By "Stella" was suggested not only "the double arrangement" (by which Matilda and Cecilia share the affections of their lover Casimere), but the famous scene in which the two women, before they know they are rivals, become, on the instant, bosom friends. Both admit that they are in love, and then —

Cecilia. Your countenance grows animated, my dear madam.

Matilda. And yours is glowing with illumination.

Cecilia. I had long been looking out for a congenial spirit! My heart was withered, but the beams of yours have rekindled it.

Matilda. A sudden thought strikes me: let us swear an eternal friendship.

Cecilia. Let us agree to live together!

Matilda. Willingly.

Cecilia. Let us embrace. (*They embrace.*)

"The Rovers," however, would hardly come within the scope of the present volume, were it not that, in 1811, at the Haymarket, there was produced, by Colman junior, a piece called "The Quadrupeds of Quedlinburgh, or the Rovers of Weimar," in which the adapter made use of the squib in *The Anti-Jacobin*. Colman's aim in this work was to ridicule not only the German plays, including Kotzebue's "Spaniards in Peru" ("Pizarro"), which had lately been brought before the English playgoer, but also the prevailing fancy for bringing animals upon the stage. At Astley's horses had figured both in "Blue Beard" and in "Timour the Tartar," and dogs had previously been seen in "The Caravan." To this, as well as to the unhealthy importations from Germany, allusion was made in the prologue: —

To lull the soul by spurious strokes of art,
To warp the genius and mislead the heart,
To make mankind revere wives gone astray,

(a hit at "The Stranger"),

Love pious sons who rob on the highway,
For this the foreign muses trod our stage,
Commanding German schools to be the rage...

Your taste, recovered half from foreign quacks,
Takes airings now on English horses' backs;
While every modern bard may raise his name,
If not on lasting praise, on stable fame.

"The Quadrupeds of Quedlinburgh" was not printed, and one does not know to what extent Colman took advantage of the text of "The Rovers." It is certain, however, that Casimere, Matilda, and Cecilia, as well as Rogero (a creation of the original parodists), all appeared in the burlesque, being enacted respectively by Munden, Mrs. Glover, Mrs. Gibbs, and Liston, Elliston taking the rôle of Bartholomew Bathos, a lineal descendant (no doubt) of Bayes and Puff. We read that, in addition to the travestie supplied by *The Anti-Jacobin*, fun was poked at the sentimental sentinel in "Pizarro," and the last scene of "Timour the Tartar" was closely imitated. The piece was acted thirty-nine times, and must therefore have been what, in those days, was accounted a success.

We come now to a travestie of the old-fashioned tragedy which helps to connect the Old burlesque with the New, inasmuch as it was the production of James Robinson Planché. Of his "Amoroso, King of Little Britain: a serio-comick bombastick operatick interlude," played at Drury Lane in 1818, Planché was not particularly proud. He was very young when he wrote it; he wrote it for amateur performance; and it got on to the stage of Drury Lane without his knowledge and consent. Harley, the comedian, appears to have seen or read the little trifle, and to have recommended it to the manager of "the national theatre." He himself represented Amoroso; Knight was Roastando (a cook); Smith was Blusterbus (a yeoman of the guard); Mrs. Bland was Coquetinda (the Queen of Little Britain), and Mrs. Orger was Mollidusta (a chambermaid). The piece was much applauded, and had the distinction of being quoted in the *Times*. It opens with the King being awakened by his courtiers, to whom he angrily exclaims: —

Leave at what time you please your truckle beds —
But if you break my rest I'll break your heads.

I swear I'm quite disordered with this rout.
Ahem! My lords and gentlemen — get out!

The *Times* applied the last line to a Parliamentary incident which had just occurred; and Planché admits that he was flattered by the compliment. But he would not include "Amoroso" in the testimonial edition of his burlesques and extravaganzas, — mainly, I imagine, because the piece is so obviously an imitation of "Bombastes Furioso," which it by no means equals in literary distinction.

The plot is simplicity itself. Amoroso is in love with Mollidusta, Mollidusta with Blusterbus, and the Queen with Roastando. "The King sees Roastando and the Queen salute: he discharges Roastando. The Queen sees the King and Mollidusta together: she stabs Mollidusta. The King stabs the Queen, Roastando stabs the King, the King stabs Roastando." In the end, all come to life again. In the course of the play the King thus declares his passion to Mollidusta: —

When gooseberries grow on the stem of a daisy,
And plum-puddings roll on the tide to the shore,
And julep is made from the curls of a jazey,
Oh, then, Mollidusta, I'll love thee no more.

When steamboats no more on the Thames shall be going,
And a cast-iron bridge reach Vauxhall from the Nore,
And the Grand Junction waterworks cease to be flowing,

Oh, then, Mollidusta, I'll love thee no more.

Amoroso also sings the following pseudo-sentimental ditty: —

Love's like a mutton-chop,
Soon it grows cold,
All its attractions hop
Ere it grows old.
Love's like the colic sure,
Both painful to endure,
Brandy's for both a cure.
So I've been told!

When for some fair the swain
Burns with desire,
In Hymen's fatal chain
Eager to try her,
He weds soon as he can,
And jumps (unhappy man!)
Out of the frying-pan
Into the fire.

Not to be outdone by the other lovers, the Queen and Roastando warble a duet, in which they confess their feelings for each other: —

She. This morning I to Covent Garden went,
To purchase cabbages was my intent,
But, my thoughts dwelling on Roastando's looks,
Instead of cabbages I asked for cooks!

He. Last night, neglecting fricassés for stews,
On Coquetinda's charms I paused to muse,
And, 'stead of charcoal, did my man desire
To put some Coquetinda on the fire.

Three months after "Amoroso" had been seen at Drury Lane, there was produced at the English Opera House a "serio-comic-bombastic-operatic interlude," written by George Daniel, and called "Doctor Bolus" — yet another burlesque of the old-fashioned drama, owing quite as much to "Bombastes Furioso" as did "Amoroso." In this piece the King, Artipadiades (Harley), is in love with Poggylina, a maid of honour, while the Queen, Katalinda (Miss Kelly), is enamoured of General Scaramoucho (Chatterley). The General revolts, and is defeated by the King. His amour is discovered, and, while the Queen is poisoned with one of Bolus's "infallible" pills, the General is stabbed by Artipadiades. The Queen, however, revives, and is thereupon stabbed by the King, who also stabs himself. But, in the end, as in "Amoroso," all the dead people are resuscitated. There are some gleams of humour in the dialogue, but not many. Bolus was played by John Wilkinson.

II THE "PALMY" DAYS

After the production of "Amoroso," Planché remained silent, so far as travestie was concerned, till 1831, when he began in earnest his successful career as a burlesque writer. In the interval a new votary of travestie appeared in the person of Fox Cooper, of whose "Elbow Shakers" and "Ion" I shall have something to say by-and-by. Moncrieff and Buckstone, too, followed the example of T. Dibdin, in dealing more or less humorously with the subject of "Don Giovanni," while Buckstone also essayed to do the same with that of "Billy Taylor." None of these effusions, however, were burlesques in the ordinary acceptation of the word; and 1831, therefore, may still be taken as the starting-point of the new theatrical era, of which Planché was the herald.

This era may be said to divide naturally into fairly balanced parts, the first extending from 1831 to 1865, the period covered by Planché's activity in the work; the second from 1865 to 1885, by which time Mr. Edward Terry and Miss Kate Vaughan had retired from the Gaiety. Within the former moiety are comprised the labours of four men who for many years shared with Planché the throne of stage travestie. Need I say that I mean Gilbert Abbott a'Beckett (with whom Mark Lemon so frequently collaborated), Francis Talfourd, and the Brothers Brough? Planché's "Olympic Revels" (1831) was followed by A'Beckett's "Son of the Sun" in 1834, by Talfourd's "Macbeth" in 1847, and by the Brothers Brough's "Enchanted Isle" in 1848. The "Joan of Arc" of William Brough was seen in 1869; its writer had been producing burlesque for over twenty years. Talfourd's career as a dramatist was comparatively brief. Beginning in 1847, it ended in 1860, but was brilliant while it lasted.

Modern burlesque was fortunate indeed in its founders – all of them men of education and refinement, all of them men of letters as well as playwrights. To the literary merit of their products it is unnecessary to bear more than the briefest testimony, for it is everywhere, and by everybody, acknowledged. In the writings of these four men theatrical burlesque was seen at its best. They came fresh to the task, and made the most of their opportunities. They set themselves really to travestie and to parody, and were careful to present, amid their wildest comicalities, a definite, intelligible story. They dropped naturally into the decasyllabic couplet, and made free use of the pun; but in neither case did they become mechanical or strained. The verse of Planché and A'Beckett is smoothness itself, and they do not descend to word-torturing. Talfourd and the Broughs took more licence in this latter respect, but they never sank into drivel. Above all, not one of these five masters of burlesque permitted themselves to be vulgar either in general treatment or in verbal detail. They were nice in their choice of subjects, and, like Mr. W. S. Gilbert in the case of "The Princess," perverted them respectfully. One finds no horseplay in the fun of these genuine humourists. All their effects are made legitimately, and in decent fashion.

They were happy, too, in the good influence they exercised. The list of their colleagues during the period named is notable. One meets early with the names of Charles Selby and W. H. Oxberry. Then come those of Albert Smith, Kenny, and Shirley Brooks, Leicester Buckingham, and Andrew Halliday, by whom much excellent work was achieved in the 'forties and 'fifties. Of lesser note, in this particular department of endeavour, were Leman Rede, Stirling Coyne, and Tom Taylor, who were more distinguished in other fields. Selby and Oxberry had the knack of writing for the stage which so often results from experience in acting. Smith, Brooks, Buckingham, Halliday, Rede, Coyne, and Taylor, were men whose literary skill, acquired in other quarters, was of eminent service to the comic stage. Especially is it to be regretted that the genial and witty author of "Sooner or Later" did not devote more of his time and talent to the service of burlesque, of the qualities and possibilities of which he had so keen a sense.

But to turn now to the second moiety of the period above named – that extending from 1865 to 1885. We find that this, too, has had the good fortune to be dominated by some burlesque writers of very special capacity – to wit, Mr. F. C. Burnand, the late H. J. Byron, Mr. W. S. Gilbert, and Mr. Robert Reece. Mr. Burnand has been bringing out burlesques ever since 1855, when he wrote "Villikins and his Dinah" for the Cambridge A.D.C. His first London production was his "Dido," seen at the St. James's in 1860. His metropolitan career, therefore, has covered more than thirty years. Byron began at the Strand in 1858, and ended at the Gaiety in 1879. Mr. Gilbert's labours as a producer of travestie in the ordinary sense started early in the 'sixties with "Dr. Dulcamara," and closed in 1870 with "The Princess."⁴ Mr. Reece opened in 1865 with "Prometheus"; and work in which he had a part was witnessed so recently as 1886.

Mr. Gilbert soon found that his true *métier* lay outside the bounds of ordinary burlesque, and his "Princess" was the stepping-stone to "The Palace of Truth," and, in due course, to "H.M.S. *Pinafore*" and its successors. His travesties of "L'Elisir d'Amore," "La Fille du Régiment," "The Bohemian Girl," "Norma," and "Robert le Diable," had, however, what all the best specimens of English stage burlesque have had – a literary quality and an entire absence of coarseness or suggestiveness; and no doubt they had, at the time, their due effect upon the public taste. Meanwhile, the premier burlesque writers of the past thirty years are Mr. Burnand, Byron, and Mr. Reece, whose productions have been as notable for their multiplicity and variety as for their technical excellence. All three, like the ablest of their predecessors, have written extravaganza as well as travestie; and, in travestie, they have gone far afield, essaying and succeeding in all subjects and all styles. They, too, have favoured, in the main, the decasyllabic couplet and the pun, bringing both of them to all the comic perfection of which they were capable. The pun, in particular, has reached its highest phase in the writings of these consummate jugglers with words.

Mr. H. B. Farnie had a considerable vogue in burlesque from 1870 to 1885, but never displayed the neatness or the spontaneity of the writers above mentioned. He was fluent, but that was all. Mr. Alfred Thompson at one time did good things in this direction, and so did Mr. Conway Edwardes. Mr. G. A. Sala composed one burlesque, but has not been induced to give it a successor. Mr. Herman Merivale has been content to write two: that he has not written more is to be regretted. Among other recent writers of travestie may be named – Mr. Gilbert Arthur a'Beckett, Mr. Harry Paulton, Mr. F. W. Green, Mr. Arthur Matthison, Mr. Savile Clarke, Mr. W. Younge, Mr. Edward Rose, Mr. Alfred Murray, Mr. Albert Chevalier, Mr. George Dance, Mr. G. P. Hawtreys, Mr. Horace Lennard, Mr. Geoffrey Thorn, and Mr. Cecil Raleigh. In the provinces great successes have been made by Mr. J. McArdle and Mr. Wilton Jones. Of Messrs. Sims and Pettitt, Stephens and Yardley, "Richard Henry," and "A. C. Torr" and H. Mills, I shall have something to say when I come to consider "The New Burlesque," of which they have been the principal producers. If, within the last twenty years or so, travestie has been confined to a smaller number of theatres than before, and if it has been proportionately "depressed," that has been owing, chiefly, to the popularity of comic opera and farcical comedy, into the composition and exposition of which has been thrown, of necessity, very much of the talent which otherwise would have been devoted to the writing and acting of burlesque.

On the whole, the days between 1831 and 1885 were, for burlesque, "palmy" days indeed. They produced not only many admirable writers of the *genre*, but many admirable actors thereof. Planché was generous in his praise of the artists who helped so greatly to make his pieces "go"; and he did well to be so, for never, I suppose, was a comic writer so fortunate in his interpreters. During his first years at the Olympic he had the aid of the incomparable Vestris, of Rebecca Isaacs, of Miss Murray, of Mrs. Macnamara, of Mrs. Honey, of John Brougham, of James Bland,

⁴ In the preparation of "The Happy Land" (1873) Mr. Gilbert had only a share, the scenario being his, but nearly all the writing being done by Mr. Gilbert Arthur a'Beckett.

of James Vining, and of Charles James Mathews, – all in the first rank of their art. At Covent Garden, from 1840 to 1843, the company included, at different times, not only Mme. Vestris, Mrs. Macnamara, Brougham, Bland, and Vining, but Harley, Wm. Harrison, Morris Barnett, Selby, Miss Fairbrother, Miss Priscilla Horton, Mrs. C. Jones, and Mrs. Alfred Wigan. At the Haymarket, during the three years following, Planché had his ideas carried out, not only by Bland and Miss Horton, and during one year by Mme. Vestris and Charles Mathews, but also by Caulfield, Widdicomb, Tilbury, Brindal, Braid, Julia Bennett, Miss Reynolds, and Mrs. L. S. Buckingham. Continuously lucky in this respect, Planché enjoyed – from 1847 to 1853, at the Lyceum – the services of Miss Fitzwilliam, Julia St. George, Miss Oliver, John Reeve, Robert Roxby, Basil Baker, and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matthews, in addition to Vestris and Mathews and many others of the artists named above. Finally, and best, when Planché brought out, at the Olympic, his "Yellow Dwarf," his "Discreet Princess," and his "Young and Handsome," his chief comedian was the "great little Robson," the fame of whose tragi-comic outbursts still lingers among us, and who had for his successive supporters Horace Wigan, Emery, James Rogers, Julia St. George, Miss Maskell (Mrs. Walter Baynham), and Miss Swanborough.

What, meanwhile, had been the *personnel* at the other houses of burlesque? At the Strand in the 'thirties, the great favourites were W. J. Hammond, H. Hall, Mitchell, Oxberry, G. Cooke, Miss Daly, Miss Horton. At the Fitzroy one finds Miss Chaplin and W. Rogers; at the Victoria, Rogers and Mitchell; at the St. James's, Hall and Mme. Sala; at Sadler's Wells, Rogers and C. H. Pitt; at the Queen's, T. F. Matthews and Mrs. Selby; and at the Adelphi, O Smith, John Reeve, and Mrs. Stirling. Early in the 'forties we see Wright and Paul Bedford moving from the Princess's to the Adelphi, where Miss Chaplin and Miss Woolgar are also located. At the Strand we find Wigan, Hammond, and R. Romer. Later, we come across Keeley in burlesque at the Haymarket, along with Bland, Miss Reynolds, and Miss Horton. The second half of the century opens brilliantly at the Strand, where Reeve, Rogers, Romer, and Maskell are the male comedians, with Miss Marshall, Miss Romer, Miss Maskell, and Mrs. Horsman as their helpmates. Was not that a truly strong company? And was not the Adelphi fortunate, about the same time, in the possession of Miss Woolgar, Miss Mary Keeley, Keeley himself, and Paul Bedford? At the Haymarket were Buckstone and Mrs. Caulfield. Some of these may be names only to the uninstructed reader; but to the theatrical student they all convey a world of meaning, conjuring up a multitude of delightful associations.

When we come to 1856 we reach a landmark in the history of burlesque acting. William Brough's "Perdita" is "put up" by Charles Dillon at the Lyceum, and in the cast of it we find not only Miss Woolgar and the author, but that very youthful actress Marie Wilton, and that rising young comedian J. L. Toole. Here, then, is the beginning of the modern *régime*. Robson and Julia St. George are still playing at the Olympic; but the "palmy" days of the Strand Theatre are about to flash upon us. Marie Wilton stays for another year at the Lyceum, but in 1858 she is comfortably lodged at the little playhouse across the way, together with Bland and Poynter and Mrs. Selby, and Johnny Clarke, H. J. Turner, and Miss Ternan. In 1859 Charlotte Saunders is playing a mock Romeo to Marie Wilton's mock Juliet, and Eleanor Bufton and Maria Simpson and "Jimmy" Rogers are also members of the troupe – the one troupe which can regard itself as the legitimate successor to the Vestris-Mathews "combinations." In the year following, a new star arises at the Lyceum in the person of Lydia Thompson; at the St. James's are Nelly Moore and Cecilia Ranoe and Charles Young; at the Haymarket are Chippendale, Compton, and C. Coghlan. A few months more, and the name of Kate Terry appears on the burlesque bill at the St. James's. Fanny Josepchs and E. Danvers have been added to the Strand establishment, which shortly welcomes Fanny Hughes and Ada Swanborough, Polly Marshall and George Honey.

Next comes the turn of the little Royalty. We are in 1863, and Mr. Burnand's "Ixion" is announced, with Jenny Wilmore in the title-part, David James as Mercury, Felix Rogers as Minerva, Mrs. Charles Selby as the Queen, and Ada Cavendish as Venus. Here, again, is a landmark, not to

be left unnoted; here we have to record the first of many triumphs to come. Next year both David James and Thomas Thorne are in the troupe at the Strand, where they are destined to remain till they open the Vaudeville in 1870. In the year next again, the burlesque company at the Olympic is seen to include a young actress of the name of Ellen Farren, one day to become the chief tender of the "sacred lamp"; along with her are Amy Sheridan, Louisa Moore, Patti Josephs, and Mrs. Stephens. Meanwhile, the Royalty has been running neck and neck with the Strand, and growing greatly in public favour. By 1866 it is ripe for another success – the most remarkable ever achieved on the burlesque boards – secured by the "Black-eyed Susan" of Mr. Burnand, with Fred Dewar as Captain Crosstree, Mr. Charles Wyndham as a Deal smuggler, Miss Oliver as Susan, Miss Nellie Bromley as Dolly Mayflower, and E. Danvers as Dame Hatley. After this one notes the addition to the Strand troupe, first, of Miss Eliza Johnstone, Miss Elise Holt, and Miss Weathersby; and next, of Miss Lydia Thompson. At the New Queen's in 1868, Miss Kate Santley and Miss Henrietta Hodson are playing burlesque with W. H. Stephens and "Lal" Brough. In the same year the Gaiety Theatre is opened, by Mr. John Hollingshead with a new burlesque by Mr. W. S. Gilbert – "Robert the Devil," in which the leading character is undertaken by Miss Ellen Farren.

From this date onwards it is not necessary to do more than indicate a few salient points in connection with burlesque acting in this country. The opening of the Gaiety was the first step towards the expansion of the Old burlesque into the New. In the following year Mr. Edward Terry entered on an engagement at the Strand – an engagement which lasted till 1877, and did as much for the progress of stage travestie as did that of Miss Farren at the other house. In 1869 there was burlesque at the Globe, with Edward Marshall and Miss Maggie Brennan, and at the St. James's with Mrs. John Wood in "La Belle Sauvage."⁵ In 1870 Harry Paulton went to the Strand; and at the Royalty were Rachel Sanger, Arthur Wood, and Alfred Bishop. In 1871 there was burlesque at the Court, with Mlle. D'Anka, Miss Oliver, Miss Kate Bishop and Mr. Righton. At the Vaudeville, next year, Miss Nelly Power and Miss Marie Rhodes were supporting Messrs. James and Thorne; while at the Royalty were Miss Emma Chambers, Miss Kate Phillips, and Miss Harriett Coveney.

In 1873 Mr. E. W. Royce goes to the Gaiety, and Miss Lottie Venne is seen at the Court in "The Happy Land." At the Folly, next year, Mr. Edouin takes the fancy of the town as the Heathen Chinee in Mr. Farnie's "Blue Beard;" Belmore, Mr. Odell, and Mr. Leonard Boyne all essay to burlesque Mr. Irving as Hamlet; and Miss Pattie Laverne plays the hero in Mr. Burnand's "Ixion Re-Wheeled." A "Robinson Crusoe," by Mr. Farnie, at the Folly in 1876, brings to the front a droll Will Atkins in the form of Mr. George Barrett.

In 1877, at the Gaiety, Edward Terry joins Miss Farren and Mr. Royce, and in 1878 Selina Dolaro and G. W. Anson are playing at the Folly in "Another Drink," while Alma Stanley and Charles Groves are playing in "Venus" at the Royalty. Miss Kate Vaughan, at the Gaiety, is already beginning to revolutionise stage dancing, making it at once graceful and decorous. At the Royalty, in 1880, are Miss Kate Lawler and Mr. Frank Wyatt; at the Gaiety are Mr. Dallas and Miss Gilchrist. In 1882, Mr. Toole, who has not been seen in burlesque for some time, takes part in a skit on rural melodrama. A year later Mr. Harry Monkhouse figures at the Gaiety; Mr. E. D. Ward and Miss Marie Linden first show, at Toole's, their talent for travestie; and Miss Laura Linden does the same thing at the Strand. In 1884 Mr. Willie Edouin and Miss Alice Atherton make, in "The Babes," their first joint success in London; and Mr. Edward Terry and Miss Kate Vaughan appear at the Gaiety for the last time in burlesque.

It is from this point that we may date the foundation of the New Burlesque, to which I shall return in my last chapter. In the chapters that immediately follow we shall be able to see how numerous were the topics essayed by burlesque writers in the "palmy" days, and also with how

⁵ An adaptation of John Brougham's American burlesque, "Pocohontas." Into this was introduced a travestie of the Bancroft's garden scene in "School." Mr. Lionel Brough played Captain John Smith.

much wit and humour those writers were able, for the most part, to charge the stories that they told and the pictures that they presented.

III

"CLASSICAL" BURLESQUE

Planché was not only the founder of modern burlesque: he was the originator, in particular, of that form of travestie which is commonly described as "classical" – which deals with the characteristics and adventures of the gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, of the Greek and Latin mythology and fable. It is true that comic pieces on classical subjects had been played in England before Planché brought out, at the Olympic, his "Olympic Revels"⁶ (January 1831). But these pieces were not burlesques in the present-century sense of the word. Take, for example, the "Midas" of Kane O'Hara, which, produced in 1762, remained popular for so many years, and will always be remembered as including the once famous ditty: —

Pray, goody, please to moderate the rancour of your tongue:
Why flash those sparks of fury from your eyes?
Remember, where the judgment's weak the prejudice is strong,
A stranger why will you despise?

The gods and goddesses are presented in "Midas" in a light more or less ludicrous, and the dialogue, songs, and choruses are flavoured with contemporary allusion, more or less humorous. But the form given to the work is that of the old-fashioned burletta. Indeed, the chief merit of "Midas," from a historical point of view, lies in the fact that it was its successful revival, with Mme. Vestris as Apollo, which, coupled with the publication of Colman junior's story, "The Sun-Poker," suggested to Planché the composition of his first "classical" burlesque. This had for subject the story of Prometheus and Pandora, and was remarkable, not only for the smooth flow of its versification and the general refinement of its tone, but also for the accuracy and consistency of the costumes, which were throughout "classical," and therefore in strong contrast to the haphazard, incongruous attire in which "classical" characters had hitherto been exhibited on the comic boards.

Prometheus and Pandora, I may note, figured later – in 1865 – as the leading personages in Mr. Reece's "Prometheus, or the Man on the Rock,"⁷ in which the writer differed from his predecessor in admitting into his dialogue a large infusion of the punning element. In this direction Mr. Reece has always been proficient. Here are a few specimens of his work, picked out at random: —

"Those steeds of yours will burn my house some day.
Fine animals."

"That leader came from Sestos;
Stands *fire* well, and so he counts *as best 'os*."

"What! don't you think me handsome?"

"Not very.
You've got *red hair*!"

"Well, that's *hair-red*-itary."

⁶ In "Olympic Revels," as in some other pieces, Planché had the valuable assistance of Charles Dance.

⁷ Byron also wrote a burlesque in which Prometheus figures – "Pandora's Box," seen at the Prince of Wales's in 1866.

"Why, darn your impudence!"

"There, stop your clatter.
With all your *darning* you'll not *mend* the matter."

"A couch that's made 'midst buttercups, he's shy on;
The verdant sward how could a *dandy lie on*?"

"You jeer at Pallas 'cos she's strict and staid.
With all your *railing* you'll need *Pallas' aid*!"

Planché's "Olympic Revels" proved so brilliantly successful that he was encouraged to follow it up, at the end of the year, with a companion composition – "Olympic Devils, or Orpheus and Eurydice." In this work, James Bland, the son of the lady who "created" Planché's Coquetinda, made his first appearance in burlesque, and among the female Bacchantes who took part in the groupings was a clever young girl, named Leonora Pincott, who was destined one day to be a great public favourite as "Mrs. Alfred Wigan." In "Olympic Devils" Planché's style is seen to excellent effect. Note, as an instance, the remarks addressed by Minos, Lord *Low* Chancellor, to the Fates: —

I vow you Fates are most industrious spinsters!
Miss Clotho there – man's destiny beginning —
Life's thread at tea, like a tee-totum spinning.
And then Miss Lachesis that same thread measures,
Taking great pains, but giving little pleasures.
Last comes Miss Atropos, her part fulfilling,
And cuts poor mortals off without a shilling.
The saddest sister of the fatal three,
Daughter, indeed, of *shear* necessity!
Plying her awful task with due decorum,
A never-ceasing game of "snip-snap-snorum"!
For help, alas! man pleads to her in vain —
Her motto's "Cut and *never* come again."

Elsewhere Orpheus says to Eurydice: —

I am a lunatic for lack of thee!
Mad as a March hare – oh, *ma chère amie*!

But Planché had a higher wit than that of punning. His satire and sarcasm have an agreeable, because not too pungent, cynicism – as in such little scraps of song as this (following upon the scene in which Orpheus, hearing that his wife is flirting with Pluto, cannot resist looking back at her and thus consigning her again to Pluto's tender mercies): —

Orpheus. I have looked back – in your snare I am caught, sir —
Pluto, thou'st cut a fond pair to the core!
Oh, have I come all this way to be taught, sir,
That folks who would thrive must keep looking before?

Euryd. You have looked back – in the snare you are caught, sir —
They who cheat him, faith, have none to cheat more!
A man of the world – have you yet to be taught, sir,
When your wife flirts behind you, to look straight before?

In after years H. J. Byron wrote two burlesques on the legend of Orpheus and his wife, both of them produced at the Strand Theatre,⁸ and it is notable that when Planché made, in 1865, at the Haymarket, his last appearance as a writer of extravaganza, it fell to his lot to treat once more of Orpheus and his surroundings.⁹

Planché's third classical burlesque was "The Paphian Bower, or Venus and Adonis," in which Benjamin Webster was seen for the first time in this class of histrionic work. Mme. Vestris, of course, was Venus, and in the course of the piece had to sing this eminently clever parody of "Sally in our Alley": —

Of all the swains that are so smart,
I dearly love Adonis;
And pit-a-pat will go my heart,
Till he bone of my bone is.
No buckskin'd beau of Melton Mow-
bray rides so capitally.
Oh, he's the darling of my heart,
And he hunts in our valley!

Jupiter and the neighbours all
Make game of me and Doney;
But, notwithstanding, I with him
Contemplate matrimony.
For he can play on the *cornet*,
And sing most musically;
And not a Duke in all the land
Can beat him at "Aunt Sally."

Venus and Adonis have always been great favourites with the producers of travestie. Among those who have made them the central figures of burlesque are Mr. Burnand, whose work was brought out in 1864, and Mr. Edward Rose, whose "Venus," written in collaboration with the Mr. Augustus Harris, and first performed at the Royalty in 1879 (with Miss Nelly Bromley as the heroine), was re-written for revival, and finally taken as the foundation of a third production in 1880.

In "The Deep, Deep Sea," brought out in 1833, Planché selected as the basis of his work the story of Perseus and Andromeda. He treated it with his usual reverence for the original legend. He represented Juno and the Nereids as being angry with King Cepheus, and sending the sea-serpent to devastate his shores. James Vining played the Serpent, and his approach was announced to the monarch in the following strain: —

Mighty monarch, stir your stumps as if Old Nick were following:

⁸ In 1863 and 1871.

⁹ "Orpheus in the Haymarket." An opera buffo, founded on the French of Hector Cremieux. Performed, with music by Offenbach, by David Fisher, W. Farren, Louise Keeley, Nelly Moore, and Miss H. Lindley.

A serpent with an awful twist has landed on your shore;
Our gallant soldiers, guns and all, by regiments he's swallowing;
And munching up musicians and composers by the *score*!

Of counsel learned in the law but *brief* work he is making —
Apothecaries just as they were pills, sir, he is taking;
He snaps the parson right in two, as well as his oration;
And ere the beadle bolts the door, he bolts the congregation!

Mighty monarch, stir your stumps, for court and caravansary
Are emptied of inhabitants all crazy with affright;
The monster he is longer far than any suit in Chancery,
And beats the Court of Aldermen, by chalks, for appetite!

The Serpent, when he arrives, introduces himself to the king in an engaging fashion: —

All bones but yours will rattle when I say
I am the sea serpent from America.
Mayhap you've heard that I've been round the world;
I guess I'm round it now, mister, twice curled...
Of all the monsters through the deep that splash,
I'm "number one" to all immortal smash.
When I lie down, and would my length unroll,
There ar'n't half room enough 'twixt pole and pole.
In short, I grow so long that I've a notion
I must be measured soon for a new ocean.

The exaggeration which is so characteristic of American humour is here happily satirised. In another passage, Perseus, addressing himself to Andromeda, sings a neatly turned parody of "We met – 'twas in a Crowd": —

We met! 'twas at the ball,
Upon last Easter Monday;
I press'd you to be mine,
And you said, "Perhaps, one day."
I danced with you the whole
Of that night, and you only;
Ah, ne'er "cavalier seul"
Felt more wretched and lonely.
For when I squeezed your hand,
As we turned one another,
You frown'd and said, "Have done!
Or I'll speak to my mother!"

They called the Spanish dance,
And we flew through it fleetly —
'Twas o'er – I could not breathe,
For you'd blown me completely.
I led you to a seat

Far away from the dancers;
Quadrilles again began,
They were playing "the Lancers";
Again I squeezed your hand,
And my anguish to smother
You smiled, and said, "Dear Sir,
You may speak to my mother."

In 1861 Perseus and Andromeda reappeared upon the comic stage at the instance of William Brough, who made them the hero and heroine of a burlesque at the St. James's.

The story of Telemachus was the subject which engaged the attention of Planché immediately after he had done with Perseus. Fénelon's tale had become extremely familiar to the British schoolboy, who at that time was not thought to have "grounded" himself sufficiently in French until he had read the narrative in the original. Hence Planché's "Telemachus, or the Island of Calypso,"¹⁰ concerning which the author took credit to himself once more for having "preserved the well-known plot with the most reverential fidelity." Ten years later the same subject was treated in the "Telemachus" of Stirling Coyne, played at the Adelphi with Miss Woolgar in the title-part, Wright as Calypso (a ballet-dancer!) and Paul Bedford as the hero's Mentor or "tor-Mentor." In 1863 the story of the parents of Telemachus proved attractive to Mr. Burnand, whose "Patient Penelope" made her curtesy at the Strand, to be followed at the St. James's, two years later, by the same writer's "Ulysses."

Still tracing the course of Planché's labours in burlesque, we come next to the production, at the Haymarket in 1845, of "The Golden Fleece" – perhaps, on the whole, the most delightful of the series. In this ingenious and brilliant piece, the two parts of which were entitled respectively "Jason in Colchis" and "Medea in Corinth," Planché had taken the narrative of Apollonius Rhodius and the tragedy of Euripides, and had built upon them a composition in which he sought less to cast ridicule upon the legends selected than to travestie what he called "the *modus operandi* of the classical period, which really illustrates the old proverbial observation that there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous." He brought again upon the stage the ancient Chorus, incarnated in a single person, who explained the action of the piece as it went on, not hesitating even to interrupt it when the humorous opportunity occurred. Charles Mathews undertook the part, heralded by a jocose announcement on the "bills" to the effect that "The lessee has, regardless of expense, engaged Mr. Charles Mathews to represent the whole body of the chorus, rendering at least fifty-nine male voices entirely unnecessary." In the opening scene, the Chorus thus described his functions: —

Friends, countrymen, lovers, first listen to me:
I'm the Chorus; *whatever* you hear or you see
That you don't understand, I shall rise to explain —
It's a famous old fashion that's come up again,
And will be of great service to many fine plays
That nobody can understand nowadays;
And think what a blessing if found intervening,
When the author himself scarcely knows his own meaning.
You may reap from it, too, an advantage still further:
When an actor is bent upon marriage or murder,
To the Chorus his scheme he in confidence mentions,

¹⁰ Played at the Olympic in 1834.

'Stead of telling the pit all his secret intentions;
A wondrous improvement you all will admit,
And the secret is just as well heard by the pit.
Verbum sat.— To the wise I'll not put one more word in,
Or instead of a Chorus, they'll think me a *burden*.

Later in the piece, announcing the approach of King Æetes (Bland), the Chorus interposed with: —

Æetes comes, looking as black as thunder,
And when you hear the cause you'll say "No wonder";
For Jason, aided by Medea's spell,
Has done the trick, and done the King as well.
You'll think, perhaps, you should have seen him do it,
But 't isn't classical — you'll hear, not view it.
Whatever taxed their talents or their means,
These sly old Grecians did *behind* the scenes;
So, fired with their example, boldly we
Beg you'll suppose whate'er you wish to see.

Elsewhere occurred this famous bit of badinage between King and Chorus: —

Chorus. Be calm, great King — 'tis destiny's decree.

Æetes. How dare you talk of destiny to me!
What right have you with such advice to bore us?

Chorus. Sir, I'm the Chorus.

Æetes. Sir, you're indecorous.

In the course of the piece Mathews sang, among other things, an excellent ditty, to the tune of "The Tight Little Island": —

'Twas very ungrateful, you'll say, sir,
But, alas! of the world it's the way, sir,
When all a friend can, you have done for a man,
He'll cut you quite dead the next day, sir.

But perhaps the most successful parody in "The Golden Fleece" was that on "The Fine Old English Gentleman," assigned to Mme. Vestris as Medea. This is worth quoting in full: —

I'll tell you a sad tale of the life I've been led of late,
By the false Bœotian Boatswain, of whom I am the mate:
Who quite forgets the time when I pitied his hard fate
And he swore eternal constancy by all his gods so great;
Like a fine young Grecian gentleman,
One of the classic time!

Now he lives in a fine lodging, in the palace over there,
Whilst I and his poor children are poked in a back two-pair;
And though he knows I've scarcely got a second gown to wear,
He squanders on another woman every farthing he's got to spare,
Like a false young Grecian gentleman,
One of the classic time.

He leaves me to darn his stockings, and mope in the house all day,
Whilst he treats her to see "Antigone," with a box at the Grecian play,
Then goes off to sup with Corinthian Tom, or whoever he meets by
the way,
And staggers home in a state of beer, like (I'm quite ashamed to say)
A fine young Grecian gentleman,
One of the classic time.

Then his head aches all the next day, and he calls the children a plague
and a curse,
And makes a jest of my misery, and says, "I took him for better or
worse";
And if I venture to grumble, he talks, as a matter of course,
Of going to Modern Athens, and getting a Scotch divorce!
Like a base young Grecian gentleman,
One of the classic time.

"Medea," it will be remembered, was the title and subject of a burlesque by Robert Brough, brought out at the Olympic in 1856, with Robson in the title-part, Emery as Creon (King of Corinth), and Julia St. George as Jason. Medea ("the best of mothers, with a brute of a husband," as the sub-title has it) was one of Robson's most impressive *rôles*, being charged at more than one point (notably in the closing scene, which was played by all the characters in serious fashion) with real tragic intensity. In the lighter vein were such episodes as the duet with Jason (to the air of "Robinson Crusoe"), which I quote as illustrative of the neatness and humour with which Brough constructed such trifles: —

Medea. I have done for this man
All that tenderness can,
I have followed him half the world through, sir;
I've not seen him this year,
And the first thing I hear
Is "he's going to marry Creusa."
Going to marry Creusa,
Going to marry Creusa,
Ting a ting ting!
Ting a ting ting!
All I can say, sir, is, *do*, sir.

Jason. If you'll take my advice,
You'll pack up in a trice,
Nor of time to pack off be a loser;
For the popular wrath

Will be likely to froth
'Gainst a foe to myself or Creusa.
I am going to marry Creusa,
And, believe me, the best thing for you's a
Fast ship to bespeak,
And some desert isle seek,
Like a sort of she Robinson Cruiser.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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