

ENGAGED

AN ENTIRELY ORIGINAL FARCICAL
COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

Engaged

*An Entirely Original Farcical
Comedy in Three Acts*

W.S. GILBERT

with notes and an introduction by

Andrew Crowther

SECRETARY OF THE

W.S. GILBERT SOCIETY



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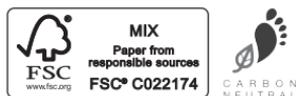
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CONTENTS

W.S. Gilbert	
<i>A Brief Introduction</i>	VII
Introduction	
<i>W.S. Gilbert and Engaged</i>	XI
<i>Engaged</i>	1
Act I	7
Act II	37
Act III	65
Note on the Text	89
Notes	91
A Glossary of Stage Scots	96
‘The Two Obadiahs’	99

W. S. GILBERT

A Brief Introduction

William Schwenck Gilbert was born in London on the 18th of November 1836. He was educated at the Western Grammar School, Brompton, and King's College, London. He had intended to go on to complete his education at Oxford, but in the event he was not able to do so, probably for financial reasons. From 1857 to 1862 he was employed by the Education Office as an Assistant Clerk (Third Class) – a job he hated – and he also practised as a barrister between 1863 and about 1867, without much success. He married Lucy Agnes Turner in 1867, their marriage lasting for the rest of his life.

In 1861, a new comic journal called *Fun* appeared, founded in direct imitation of *Punch*. Gilbert began contributing to *Fun* shortly after its first appearance, and for ten years he was one of its most prolific contributors, providing whimsical and comic material of various sorts, including jokes, cartoons, satirical squibs, parody reviews, stories and comic poems. His riotously

funny *Bab Ballads*, for a long time considered classic, were first published in *Fun*.

However, his ambition was always to write for the stage. His first acknowledged play, a burlesque called *Dulcamara, or, The Little Duck and the Great Quack*, was a great success when it was produced in 1866. He quickly made a name for himself as a bold and original voice in the theatre, writing all kinds of plays from burlesques and farces to serious dramas. In 1872, an article in *The Era* praised him on the grounds that ‘more than all others in our day, he has given us... plays which add to our wealth of dramatic literature; plays which must live.’

In 1871, at the behest of theatrical manager John Hollingshead, Gilbert wrote the libretto for *Thespis*, his first collaboration with composer Arthur Sullivan. It was an ephemeral Christmas entertainment, not expected to have a life beyond its first production, and it was received as such. It was the success of their second comic opera, *Trial by Jury* (1875), that led impresario Richard D’Oyly Carte to consider the commercial possibilities of a longer-term collaboration of Gilbert with Sullivan. Two years later, D’Oyly Carte formed an opera company which, over the next twelve years, would produce ten Gilbert and Sullivan operas, including *HMS Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Iolanthe*, *The Mikado*, *The Yeomen of the Guard* and *The Gondoliers*. During this time, Gilbert’s focus turned more and more towards the Sullivan operas and away from other work.

Over the years, Gilbert’s relationship with Sullivan became increasingly strained, due partly to Gilbert’s own abrasive personality, and partly to Sullivan’s desire

to focus on more serious work. In 1890, an explosive business row between Gilbert, D'Oyly Carte and Sullivan fractured the collaboration, though this was later uneasily patched up, leading to two further operas in 1893 and 1896, *Utopia Limited* and *The Grand Duke*.

In 1890 Gilbert moved from his house in Harrington Gardens, South Kensington, to Grim's Dyke, a large country house at Harrow Weald, where he lived for the remainder of his life. In 1897 he went into semi-retirement from the stage, while occasionally writing further plays when the mood came over him. In 1907 he became the first person to be knighted for his achievements as a dramatic author. He died on the 29th of May 1911, suffering from heart failure, having dived into a lake in the grounds of Grim's Dyke, trying to come to the assistance of a young woman who had got into difficulties and called for help.

ANDREW CROWTHER

INTRODUCTION

W.S. Gilbert and

ENGAGED

William Schwenck Gilbert was one of the celebrities of the age. The critic William Archer felt able to declare in his 1882 book *English Dramatists of To-Day*: ‘Mr Gladstone is not, Lord Beaconsfield [Benjamin Disraeli] was not, more famous. They have only made the laws of a people – Mr Gilbert has written the songs, and, better still, invented the popular catch-words not of one but two great nations.’ This was written in the midst of Gilbert’s career, with his most successful work, *The Mikado*, still before him. A few years later, in 1887, Gilbert was able to assert to Sir Arthur Sullivan without too much hyperbole that they were ‘as much an institution as Westminster Abbey.’

Today, his main claim to fame is as the wordsmith of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, but he was also – indeed, as he would have argued, first and foremost – a dramatist in his own right. He wrote over seventy

works for the stage, of which the fourteen comic operas with Sullivan form only a small minority. He wrote comedies, farces, 'issue' dramas and tragedies, as well as comic opera libretti for other composers.

Archer called Gilbert 'the most striking individuality, the most original character our theatre of today can boast... in all his work we feel that there is an "awakened" intellect, a thinking brain behind it.' In an age of fast, disposable drama designed for a largely unthinking audience, this characteristic was something of a novelty.

What makes the best of Gilbert's works remain alive to us today is that sense of an ever-lively 'thinking brain' which startles us still with its sharp and merciless humour. In none of his works is it sharper or more merciless than in *Engaged*.

Gilbert's mentor as a dramatist was his older contemporary T.W. (Tom) Robertson (1829–71). In the 1860s, they were colleagues at the comic paper *Fun*. They would attend the first nights of the latest London plays together, discussing and dissecting the pieces afterwards, and they divided between them the responsibility of writing their often scathing reviews for the *Illustrated Times*. It was Robertson who taught Gilbert the importance of directing (or, in the Victorian term, 'stage-managing') one's own plays, and, more vitally, taught him how to do it.

Robertson's plays, if they are remembered today at all, have a reputation for sweet sentimentality; but there is also in them an undertone of critical wit. For example, his 1870 play *M.P.* concludes with the

INTRODUCTION

characters speculating what the titular initials might stand for: their suggestions include ‘Most Perfidious’ and ‘Mouth-Patriotism’. Robertson’s humour was known to be harsher and more sardonic in person than he let show in his plays. Gilbert’s first ‘serious’ play, *An Old Score* (1869), was clearly indebted to Robertson, though it went much further in its social criticism than Robertson ever dared.

The titles of Robertson’s plays – *Society*, *Caste*, *Progress*, *School*, *M.P.*, *War* – suggest an almost didactic intent, though any such intent was never more than intermittently apparent in the plays themselves. The title of Gilbert’s *Engaged* recalls Robertson; and perhaps Gilbert was also recalling Robertson’s cynical attitude to society during the writing of this, his masterpiece of non-musical drama.

Engaged is, first and foremost, a very funny play, full of crazy situations and barbed wit. At a more ‘serious’ level, it can be read as a deliberate act of disruption. It takes the conventions of mid-Victorian drama and upends them. In every scene, there is a sense of something awry. The stock figures – noble hero, innocent heroine, evil villain, virtuous peasant, ‘good old man’ – all find themselves exhibiting strangely changed characteristics and taking on each other’s roles, maintaining their usual rhetoric but with altered meanings. The supposed hero, Cheviot Hill, is a mean, lecherous and bad-tempered cad. Belvawney, costumed in the black cloak of a melodramatic villain and bearing a villain’s long moustache and dark glasses, turns out to be the nearest thing to a

hero that the play can offer. The baby-talking heroine keeps herself surprisingly well informed about stocks and shares; and as for the Good Old Man, he appears to have no redeeming features whatsoever. Every character, even Belvawney, is ultimately shown to be motivated by sheer selfishness and greed. As the French critic Augustin Filon said twenty years later in his book *The English Stage* (1897): ‘So cruel a farce had never been seen... The spectators laughed, but the jest was too bitter for their palate. It was at once too unreal and too true.’

The play certainly divided opinion. Its first performance on the 3rd of October 1877 was greeted with ‘an outburst of cheers and dissatisfaction’, according to a review in *The Echo* on the 10th of October.

The audience’s divided response to the play was also reflected in the critical reaction, which has been summarised by Michael R. Booth in his compilation of ‘Criticism of *Engaged*’ in *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century, III: Comedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). Much of the criticism was remarkably vitriolic, to the extent that one can only surmise a touched nerve. The review in the *Figaro* on the 10th of October 1877 was perhaps the most extreme example:

To tell the story of *Engaged* is more than can be expected of anyone who assisted at its first representation. One does not care to relate the details of a rough passage across the Channel, if one is not proof against seasickness. The recapitulation of the symptoms of nausea is neither pleasant to

INTRODUCTION

the sufferer, nor edifying to his audience. Let our readers conceive a play in three acts, during which every character only opens his or her mouth to ridicule, in the coarsest manner, every feeling that is generally held in respect by any decent man or woman... From beginning to end of this nauseous play not one of the characters ever says a single word or does a single action that is not inseparable from the lowest moral degradation; while, much to the delight of that portion of the audience who believe that to scoff at what is pure and noble is the surest sign of intellectual pre-eminence, speeches in which the language ordinarily employed by true feeling is used for the purpose of deriding every virtue which any honest man reverences, even if he does not possess, are tediously reiterated by actresses whom one would wish to associate only with what is pure and modest... To answer that 'all this is a burlesque' seems to us but a poor defence; the characters are dressed in the ordinary costume of the present day; the language, as we have said, is precisely that which would be employed in serious drama; there are few if any of those amusing exaggerations which, in true burlesque, dispel, almost before it has time to form, any idea that the speaker is really in earnest. We do not believe that, except among the most repulsive comedies of the seventeenth century, or in the very lowest specimens of French farce, can there be found anything to equal in its heartlessness Mr Gilbert's latest original work.

It's worth noting here that, in the Victorian age, burlesque was different from what we might understand by the term today. It was a kind of theatrical parody, usually in rhymed verse and dotted with songs using the popular tunes current at the time. The humour was of the broadest kind, composed mainly of puns and slapstick.

Other reviews of *Engaged* were almost as scathing, calling it a 'snarling mockery' (*Hornet*, 10th October 1877) and 'a premeditated insult' (*Theatre*, 16th October 1877).

Elsewhere, the critics were more complimentary, though agreeing in regard to its shocking nature. *The Daily Telegraph* (6th October 1877) proclaimed: '[Gilbert] strips off the outward covering concealing our imperfections, and makes us stand shivering. The failings we are aware of, the thoughts we scarcely dare utter are proclaimed to the world and diagnosed by this merciless surgeon.' *The Evening Standard* of the 5th of October 1877 affirmed the play to be 'in many respects one of the most remarkable pieces the stage has produced for many years... *Engaged* satirises with ruthless and scathing sarcasm the selfishness which is so often hidden under the loftiest sentiment...' *The Athenaeum* (13th October 1877) stated with what might be called modified rapture: 'The experiment has rarely, if ever before, been made of supplying a drama in three acts in which there is not a single human being who does not proclaim himself absolutely detestable. In the present instance it has been made, and it is a success.'

However, 'Our Captious Critic' of *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* of the 20th of October 1877 was somewhat bemused by the whole brouhaha:

INTRODUCTION

It seldom falls to the lot of a comic drama to evoke such diverse critical opinions as have generally been passed upon W.S. Gilbert's new and original piece *Engaged*, at the Haymarket Theatre. The fact that this farcical comedy has had the effect of initiating a certain kind of playgoer into the strongest expressions of condemnation, and of arousing in another kind of spectator the liveliest admiration and eulogy is the surest proof that it is an unique and remarkable production.

For my own part I will say at once that I consider *Engaged* the cleverest comic work that has proceeded from Mr Gilbert's brilliant pen. Having begun by this admission, I must also confess that I have been altogether puzzled by the serious denunciations which have been levelled by critics against what they call the 'heartless cynicism' of one of the most humorous, whimsically incongruous, utterly comical burlesques it has ever been my lot to see or read. Indeed, when some of the critics of *Engaged* deduced from its three acts of grotesque drollery awful evidences of a mind diseased, a lacerated heart, more bitterly sceptical of human good than Dean Swift's *sæva indignatio*,¹ more terrible than his against the human race,

¹ *Dean Swift's sæva indignatio*: 'Savage indignation' (Latin); a reference to the epitaph of Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), which he wrote for himself: 'Here lies the body of Jonathan Swift, Doctor of Sacred Theology, Dean of this Cathedral, where savage indignation can no longer injure the heart. Go forth, voyager, and copy, if you can, this vigorous (to the best of his ability) champion of liberty'.

I protest I am fairly mystified. I went and saw the piece a second time, thinking that perchance upon my first visit I might not have sufficiently studied it to apprehend fully the import of its conception and its dialogue. But my impressions remained the same. I had an extra chuckle or so, perhaps, over one or two touches of grave banter that had previously escaped my notice. But after careful consideration of the whole case I was quite unable to regard *Engaged* as anything more serious than a whimsical, satirical, exquisitely humorous extravaganza.

Gilbert did not make a habit of commenting on his own works, except in very practical terms. However, in the case of *Engaged*, there was one particular issue which, he felt, did call for clarification.

As has been mentioned, Gilbert directed the productions of his own plays, in order to ensure that his artistic intent was to some degree conveyed in performance. However, despite all his efforts, he did not always succeed. George Honey, who created the role of Cheviot Hill, played the part in a spirit of broad humour, to Gilbert's fury. 'Honey is simply damnable – self-conscious and extravagant,' he complained in a letter to the actor E.A. Sothorn. And so it was that, nine days after the première, Gilbert wrote a short note to be published in the Samuel French acting edition of the play:

INTRODUCTION

It is absolutely essential to the success of this piece that it should be played with the most perfect earnestness and gravity throughout. There should be no exaggeration in costume, make-up or demeanour; and the characters, one and all, should appear to believe, throughout, in the perfect sincerity of their words and actions. Directly the actors show that they are conscious of the absurdity of their utterances the piece begins to drag.

And it is surely no coincidence that the note on costumes also published in the Samuel French edition, and in all likelihood written by Gilbert, stated against Cheviot Hill's name: 'All extravagance of costume in this part should be carefully avoided.'

This insistence on an absence of exaggeration in comic acting was fundamental to Gilbert's method, and there are numerous anecdotes to show that he brought it to his productions of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. For instance, George Grossmith, creator of many of the patter roles (a staple of comic opera characterised by fast, tongue-twisting text), quoted Gilbert in his 1888 memoir *A Society Clown* as saying: 'I don't want you to *tell* the audience you're the funny man. They'll find it out, if you are, quickly enough.' However, the principle was especially vital in the case of *Engaged*. The play's tone is very finely balanced, and it does not take much to upset that balance in performance.

Towards the end of the following year, 1878, Gilbert wrote a short but powerful essay called 'A Hornpipe

in Fetters' for *The Era Almanack* (*The Era* being the weekly paper of the theatrical profession). In it, he argued that there were multiple restrictions on what a British dramatist could write – not through any formal censorship, but because of the increasingly puritanical tastes of the critics who establish the 'dramatic common law'. It was due to them that, for instance, 'no married man... may be in love with anybody but his wife, and, in like manner, no single lady may see any charm in a married man.' But this was not Gilbert's only complaint:

It has recently been discovered by many dramatic critics that satire and cynicism are misplaced in comedy, and that the propriety of repartee is to be estimated by the standard of conversation in a refined drawing room. It is fortunate for Sheridan that this ukase [decree] had not been pronounced when he wrote *The School for Scandal*; and it is particularly fortunate for M. Victorien Sardou and other French dramatic authors of today that this particular fetter is intended only for the discomfiture of dramatic malefactors of British origin.

While Gilbert was careful to keep his point general and did not mention *Engaged* in particular, it is hard to avoid the feeling that the example of his play was in his mind as he wrote those words.

The original production of *Engaged* lasted for 110 performances – a fairly good run for the time. There were major London revivals in 1881, starring

INTRODUCTION

H.J. Byron as Cheviot Hill, and, in 1886, with a young Herbert Beerbohm Tree in that role.

It seems likely that that Oscar Wilde, rising to fame in London throughout the 1880s, saw *Engaged* during this time, and it is almost certain that he would have read it when it was published in Gilbert's collection *Original Plays: Second Series* in 1881. As many have noted over the years, Wilde's 1895 masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest* shows traces of a fruitful study of *Engaged* – not only in some of the details (the donning of mock-mourning, the argument over finger-food, 'Bunburying' versus 'Belvawneying'), but also in tone, which in each case shows a curious coolness of utterance, a strange separation between statement and sincerity. Bernard Shaw, reviewing the first production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in *The Saturday Review*, was only one of several critics who noticed a similarity with Gilbert, referring disparagingly to 'a scene between the two girls in the second act quite in the literary style of Mr Gilbert, and almost inhuman enough to have been conceived by him.'

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the specific and general resemblances, Wilde's play has a completely different atmosphere and tone to Gilbert's: light, airy and somehow weightless, where *Engaged*, in spite of all its frivolity, has something serious and even angry behind it. It is a deliberate challenge to the materialistic values of its time:

SYMPERSON: This is a pretty business! Done out of a thousand a year, and by my own daughter! What a terrible thing is this incessant craving after money! Upon my word, some people seem to think that they're sent into the world for no other purpose but to acquire wealth, and, by Jove, they'll sacrifice their nearest and dearest relations to get it.

The difference between the two plays can also be seen their contrasting fates: *The Importance of Being Earnest* quickly emerged as an evergreen favourite of audiences, while *Engaged* has always been seen as a 'problem'. For much of the twentieth century, *Engaged* lay neglected, if not quite ignored, and almost untouched by the professional theatre. Like Gilbert's other non-musical works, its reputation has been eclipsed by the worldwide success of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. The general verdict of the public and the critics may be summarised by William Archer's 1882 observation that 'Mr Sullivan's music appears to have the power of soothing [Gilbert's] savage breast, and sweetening the gall and bitterness which flavour such a play as *Engaged*.'

A notable exception to the neglect of *Engaged* was the National Theatre's 1975 production of the play with a stellar case including Jonathan Pryce, David Egan and Pauline Collins. More recently, there have been major productions at the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond upon Thames (2002), the Lucille Lortel Theatre in New York (2004), the Pitlochry Festival Theatre in Scotland (2004) and the Royal George Theatre in Ontario, as

INTRODUCTION

part of the annual Shaw Festival (2016). These and other stagings have helped to demonstrate to modern audiences the play's brilliance in the theatre as well as on the page.

But in the end, after all the debates about the play's morality, truth, cynicism, ability to hold the stage and so on, the essence of its value remains in its sheer gleeful *funniness*, as William Archer recognised when he called it 'a repulsive, vulgar and – extremely amusing play.'

ANDREW CROWTHER

ENGAGED

*An entirely original farcical
comedy in three acts*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CHEVIOT HILL,* *a young man of property*
BELVAWNEY, *his friend*
MR SYMPERSON
ANGUS MACALISTER,* *a Lowland peasant lad*
MAJOR MCGILLICUDDY
BELINDA TREHERNE, 'MISS TREHERNE'
MINNIE, SYMPERSON'S *daughter*
MRS MACFARLANE, *a Lowland widow*
MAGGIE, *her daughter, a Lowland lassie*
PARKER, MINNIE'S *maid*

COSTUMES

CHEVIOT HILL, *suit of dittos.**
All extravagance of costume in this part
should be carefully avoided.
BELVAWNEY, *black frock coat and trousers, black tie,*
simple black cloak, long black wig and moustache,
pale face, green spectacles.
MR SYMPERSON, *morning dress.*
ANGUS MACALISTER, *Scotch peasant, short coat,*
*knee breeches, woollen stockings, glengarry,**
plaid over shoulder.

MAJOR MCGILLICUDDY, *frock coat, white waistcoat,
grey trousers, wedding favour.*

BELINDA TREHERNE, *aesthetic walking dress
in Act I; deep black in Act II;
morning dress in Act III.*

MINNIE, *wedding dress in Act II;
morning dress in Act III.*

MRS MACFARLANE, *Scotch peasant woman, short
jacket, ankle homespun petticoat, white nightcap.*

MAGGIE, *Scotch peasant girl, short skirt,
grey stockings, snood.**

PARKER, *as a ladies' maid.*

SETTING

ACT I

*Garden of a cottage near Gretna**
(*on the border between England and Scotland*).

ACTS II AND III

Drawing room in SYMPERSON'S house in London.

*Three months' interval is supposed to elapse
between acts I and II.*

*Three days' interval is supposed to elapse
between acts II and III.*

NOTE

It is absolutely essential to the success of this piece that it should be played with the most perfect earnestness and gravity throughout. There should be no exaggeration in costume, make-up or demeanour; and the characters, one and all, should appear to believe, throughout, in the perfect sincerity of their words and actions. Directly the actors show that they are conscious of the absurdity of their utterances the piece begins to drag.

W.S. GILBERT.
24, The Boltons*
12th October, 1877

ACT I

SCENE

Garden of a humble but picturesque cottage near Gretna, on the border between England and Scotland. The whole scene is suggestive of rustic prosperity and content. MAGGIE MACFARLANE, a pretty country girl, is discovered spinning at a wheel, and singing as she spins. ANGUS MACALISTER, a good-looking peasant lad, appears on at back, and creeps softly down to MAGGIE as she sings and spins, and places his hands over her eyes.

ANGUS: Wha is it?

MAGGIE: Oh, Angus, ye frightened me sae!

(He releases her.)

And see there – the flax is a’ knotted and scribbled –
and I’ll do naething wi’ it!

ANGUS: Meg! My Meg! My ain bonnie Meg!

MAGGIE: Angus, why, lad, what’s wrang wi’ ee? Thou
hast teardrops in thy bonnie blue een.

ANGUS: Dinna heed them, Meg. It comes fra glowerin’ at
thy bright beauty. Glowerin’ at thee is like glowerin’
at the noonday sun!

MAGGIE: Angus, thou’rt talking fulishly. I’m but a puir
brown hillside lassie. I dinna like to hear sic things

ENGAGED

from a straight honest lad like thee. It's the way the dandy tounfolk speak to me, and it does na come rightly from the lips of a simple man.

ANGUS: Forgive me, Meg, for I speak honestly to ye. Angus Macalister is not the man to deal in squeaming compliments. Meg, I love thee dearly, as thou well knowest. I'm but a puir lad, and I've little but twa braw arms and a straight hairt to live by, but I've saved a wee bit siller – I've a braw housie and a scrap-pie of gude garden land – and it's a' for thee, lassie, if thou'll gie me thy true and tender little hairt!

MAGGIE: Angus, I'll be fair and straight wi' ee. Thou askest me for my hairt. Why, Angus, thou'rt tall, and fair, and brave. Thou'st a gude, honest face, and a gude, honest hairt, which is mair precious than a' the gold on earth! No man has a word to say against Angus Macalister – no, nor any woman, neither. Thou hast strong arms to work wi', and a strong hairt to help thee work. And wha am I that I should say that a' these blessings are not enough for me? If thou, gude, brave, honest man, will be troubled wi' sic a puir little humble mousie as Maggie Macfarlane, why, she'll just be the proudest and happiest lassie in a' Dumfries!*

ANGUS: My ain darling!

(They embrace. Enter MRS MACFARLANE from cottage.)

MRS MACFARLANE: Why, Angus, Maggie, what's a' this!

ANGUS: Mistress Macfarlane, dinna be fasht wi' me; dinna think worse o' me than I deserve. I've loved

ACT I

your lass honestly these fifteen years, but I never plucked up the hairt to tell her so until noo; and when she answered fairly, it wasna in human nature to do aught else but hold her to my hairt and place one kiss on her bonnie cheek.

MRS MACFARLANE: Angus, say nae mair. My hairt is sair at losing my only bairn; but I'm nae fash't wi' ee. Thou'rt a gude lad, and it's been the hope of my widowed auld heart to see you twain one. Thou'lt treat her kindly – I ken that weel. Thou'rt a prosperous, kirk-going man, and my Mag should be a happy lass indeed. Bless thee, Angus, bless thee!

ANGUS (*wiping his eyes*): Dinna heed the water in my ee – it will come when I'm ower glad. Yes, I'm a fairly prosperous man. What wi' farmin' a bit land, and gillieing* odd times, and a bit o' poachin' now and again; and what wi' my illicit whusky still – and throwin' trains off the line, that the poor distracted passengers may come to my cot,* I've mair ways than one of making an honest living – and I'll work them a' nicht and day for my bonnie Meg!

MRS MACFARLANE: D'ye ken, Angus, I sometimes think that thou'rt losing some o' thine auld skill at upsetting railway trains. Thou hast not done sic a thing these sax weeks, and the cottage stands sairly in need of sic chance custom as the poor delayed passengers may bring.

MAGGIE: Nay, Mither, thou wrangest him. Even noo, this very day, has he not placed twa bonnie braw sleepers across the up-line, ready for the express from Glaisgie, which is due in twa minutes or so?

ENGAGED

MRS MACFARLANE: Gude lad! Gude thoughtfu' lad! But I hope the unfortunate passengers will na' be much hurt, puir unconscious bodies!

ANGUS: Fear nought, Mither. Lang experience has taught me to do my work deftly. The train will run off the line, and the traffic will just be blocked for half a day, but I'll warrant ye that, wi' a' this, nae mon, woman or child amang them will get sae much as a bruised head or a broken nose.

MAGGIE: My ain tender-hearted Angus! He wadna hurt sae much as a blatherin' buzzin' bluebottle flee!

ANGUS: Nae, Meg, not if takin' care and thought could help the poor dumb thing! (*Wiping his eyes.*) There, see, lass (*looking off*), the train's at a standstill, and there's nae harm done. I'll just go and tell the puir distraught passengers that they may rest them here, in thy cot, gin they will, till the line is cleared again. Mither, get thy rooms ready, and put brose i' the pot, for mebbe they'll be hungry, puir souls. Farewell, Meg; I'll be back ere lang, and if I don't bring ee a full half dozen o' well-paying passengers, thou may'st just wed the redheaded exciseman! (*Exit.*)

MAGGIE: Oh, Mither, Mither, I'm ower happy! I've nae deserved sic a good fortune as to be the wife o' yon brave and honest lad!

MRS MACFARLANE: Meg, thine auld mither's hairt is sair at the thought o' losin' ye, for hitherto she's just been a' the world to ee, but now thou'lt cleave to thine Angus, and thou'lt learn to love him better than thy puir auld mither! But it mun be – it mun be!

ACT I

MAGGIE: Nay, Mither, say not that. A gude girl loves her husband wi' one love and her mither wi' anither. They are not alike, but neither is greater nor less than the ither, and they dwell together in peace and unity. That is how a gude girl loves.

MRS MACFARLANE: And thou art a gude girl, Meg?

MAGGIE: I am a varra gude girl indeed, Mither – a varra, varra gude girl!

MRS MACFARLANE: I'm richt sure o' that. Well, the puir belated passengers will be here directly, and it is our duty to provide for them sic puir hospitality as our humble roof will afford. It shall never be said o' Janie Macfarlane that she ever turned the weary traveller fainting from her door.

MAGGIE: My ain gentle-hearted mither!

(Exeunt together into cottage. Enter ANGUS with BELVAWNEY and MISS TREHERNE. She is in travelling costume, and both are much agitated and alarmed.)

ANGUS: Step in, sir – step in, and sit ye doun for a wee. I'll just send Mistress Macfarlane to ye. She's a gude auld bodie, and will see to your comforts as if she was your ain mither.

BELVAWNEY: Thank you, my worthy lad, for your kindness at this trying moment. I assure you we shall not forget it.

ANGUS: Ah, sir, wadna any mon do as muckle? A dry shelter, a bannock and a pan o' parritch is a' we can offer ye, but sic as it is ye're hairtily welcome.

BELVAWNEY: It is well – we thank you.

ANGUS: For wha wadna help the unfortunate?

ENGAGED

BELVAWNEY (*occupied with* MISS TREHERNE): Exactly — everyone would.

ANGUS: Or feed the hungry?

BELVAWNEY: No doubt.

ANGUS: It just brings the tear drop to my ee to think—

BELVAWNEY (*leading him off*): My friend, we would be alone, this maiden and I. Farewell!

(*Exit* ANGUS *into cottage.*)

Belinda — my own — my life! Compose yourself. It was in truth a weird and gruesome accident. The line is blocked, your parasol is broken and your butterscotch trampled in the dust, but no serious harm is done. Come, be cheerful. We are safe — quite safe.

MISS TREHERNE: Safe! Ah, Belvawney, my own, own Belvawney — there is, I fear, no safety for us so long as we are liable to be overtaken by that fearful Major to whom I was to have been married this morning!

BELVAWNEY: Major McGillicuddy? I confess I do not feel comfortable when I think of Major McGillicuddy.

MISS TREHERNE: You know his barbaric nature, and how madly jealous he is. If he should find that I have eloped with you, he will most surely shoot us both!

BELVAWNEY: It is an uneasy prospect. (*Suddenly*;) Belinda, do you love me?

MISS TREHERNE: With an impetuous passion that I shall carry with me to the tomb!

BELVAWNEY: Then be mine tomorrow! We are not far from Gretna, and the thing can be done without

ACT I

delay. Once married, the arm of the law will protect us from this fearful man, and we can defy him to do his worst.

MISS TREHERNE: Belvawney, all this is quite true. I love you madly, passionately; I care to live but in your heart; I breathe but for your love; yet, before I actually consent to take the irrevocable step that will place me on the pinnacle of my fondest hopes, you must give me some definite idea of your pecuniary position. I am not mercenary, Heaven knows; but business is business, and I confess I should like a little definite information about the settlements.

BELVAWNEY: I often think that it is deeply to be deplored that these grovelling questions of money should alloy the tenderest and most hallowed sentiments that inspire our imperfect natures.

MISS TREHERNE: It is unfortunate, no doubt, but at the same time it is absolutely necessary.

BELVAWNEY: Belinda, I will be frank with you. My income is £1000 a year, which I hold on certain conditions. You know my friend Cheviot Hill, who is travelling to London in the same train with us, but in the third class?

MISS TREHERNE: I believe I know the man you mean.

BELVAWNEY: Cheviot, who is a young man of large property, but extremely close-fisted, is cursed with a strangely amatory disposition, as you will admit when I tell you that he has contracted a habit of proposing marriage, as a matter of course, to every woman he meets. His haughty father (who comes of a very old family – the Cheviot Hills had settled in this part of

the world centuries before the Conquest) is compelled by his health to reside in Madeira. Knowing that I exercise an all but supernatural influence over his son, and fearing that his affectionate disposition would lead him to contract an undesirable marriage, the old gentleman allows me £1000 a year so long as Cheviot shall live single, but at his death or marriage the money goes over to Cheviot's uncle Symperson, who is now travelling to town with him.

MISS TREHERNE: Then so long as your influence over him lasts, so long only will you retain your income?

BELVAWNEY: That is, I am sorry to say, the state of the case.

MISS TREHERNE (*after a pause*): Belvawney, I love you with an imperishable ardour which mocks the power of words. If I were to begin to tell you now of the force of my indomitable passion for you, the tomb would close over me before I could exhaust the entrancing subject. But, as I said before, business is business, and unless I can see some distinct probability that your income will be permanent, I shall have no alternative but to weep my heart out in all the anguish of maiden solitude – uncared for, unloved and alone! (*Exit into cottage.*)

BELVAWNEY: There goes a noble-hearted girl, indeed! Oh, for the gift of Cheviot's airy badinage – oh, for his skill in weaving a net about the hearts of women! If I could but induce her to marry me at once before the dreadful Major learns our flight! Why not? We are in Scotland. Methinks I've heard two loving hearts can wed in this strange country by

ACT I

merely making declaration to that effect. I will think out some cunning scheme to lure her into marriage unawares.

(*Enter MAGGIE from cottage.*)

MAGGIE: Will ye walk in and rest a wee, Maister Belvawney? There's a room ready for ye, kind sir, and ye're heartily welcome to it.

BELVAWNEY: It is well. Stop! Come hither, maiden.

MAGGIE: Oh, sir! You do not mean any harm towards a puir, innocent, unprotected cottage lassie?

BELVAWNEY: Harm! No, of course I don't. What do you mean?

MAGGIE: I'm but a puir humble mountain girl; but let me tell you, sir, that my character's just as dear to me as the richest and proudest lady's in the land. Before I consent to approach ye, swear to me that you mean me no harm.

BELVAWNEY: Harm? Of course I don't. Don't be a little fool. Come here.

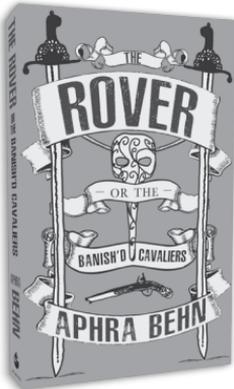
MAGGIE (*aside*): There is something in his manner that reassures me. It is not that of the airy trifler with innocent hairts. —What wad ye wi' puir harmless Maggie MacFarlane, gude sir?

BELVAWNEY: Can you tell me what constitutes a Scotch marriage?*

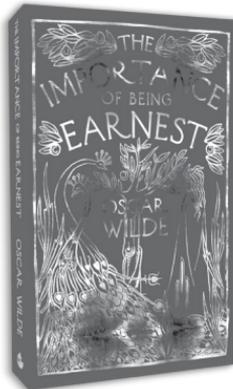
MAGGIE: Oh, sir, it's nae use asking me that; for my hairt is not my ain to give. I'm betrothed to the best and noblest lad in a' the bonnie Borderland. Oh, sir, I canna be your bride!



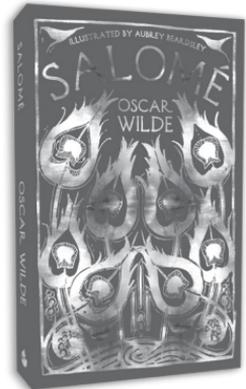
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