

Patience; or, Bunthorne's Bride

[Comic opera, in two acts; text by Gilbert. First produced at the Opéra Comique, London, April 23, 1881.]

PERSONAGES.

Col. Calverley, } Major Murgatroyd, } Lieutenant the Duke of
Dunstable, } officers of Dragoon Guards. Reginald Bunthorne, a
fleshly poet. Archibald Grosvenor, an idyllic poet. Mr. Bunthorne's
Solicitor. Lady Angela, } Lady Saphir, } Lady Ella, } Lady Jane, }
rapturous maidens. Patience, a dairy-maid.

[Guards, æsthetic maidens.]

The scene is laid at Castle Bunthorne; time, the last century.

The opera of "Patience" is a pungent satire upon the fleshly school of poetry as represented by Oscar Wilde and his imitators, as well as upon the fad for æsthetic culture which raged so violently a quarter of a century ago. Bunthorne, in one of his soliloquies, aptly expresses the hollowness of the sham,--

"I am not fond of uttering platitudes
In stained-glass attitudes; In
short, my mediævalism's affectation
Born of a morbid love of
admiration."

In these four lines Gilbert pricked the æsthetic bubble, and nothing did so much to end the fad of lank, languorous maidens, and long haired, sunflowered male æsthetes, as Gilbert's well-directed shafts of ridicule in this opera.

The story of the opera tells of the struggle for supremacy over female hearts between an æsthetic (Bunthorne) and an idyllic poet (Grosvenor). In the opening scene lovesick maidens in clinging

gowns, playing mandolins, sing plaintively of their love for Bunthorne. Patience, a healthy milkmaid, comes upon the scene, and makes fun of them, and asks them why they sit and sob and sigh. She announces to them that the Dragoon Guards will soon arrive, but although they doted upon Dragoons the year before they spurn them now and go to the door of Bunthorne to carol to him. The Guards duly arrive, and are hardly settled down when Bunthorne passes by in the act of composing a poem, followed by the twenty lovesick maidens. After finishing his poem he reads it to them, and they go off together, without paying any attention to the Dragoons, who declare they have been insulted and leave in a rage. Bunthorne, when alone, confesses to himself he is a sham, and at the close of his confession Patience comes in. He at once makes love to her, but only frightens her. She then confers with Lady Angela, who explains love to her, and tells her it is her duty to love some one. Patience declares she will not go to bed until she has fallen in love with some one, when Grosvenor, the idyllic poet and "apostle of simplicity," enters. He and Patience had been playmates in early childhood, and she promptly falls in love with him, though he is indifferent. In the closing scene Bunthorne, twined with garlands, is led in by the maidens, and puts himself up as a prize in a lottery; but the drawing is interrupted by Patience, who snatches away the papers and offers herself as a bride to Bunthorne, who promptly accepts her. The maidens then make advances to the Dragoons, but when Grosvenor appears they all declare their love for him. Bunthorne recognizes him as a dangerous rival, and threatens "he shall meet a hideous doom."

The opening of the second act reveals Jane, an antique charmer, sitting by a sheet of water mourning because the fickle maidens have deserted Bunthorne, and because he has taken up with "a puling milkmaid," while she alone is faithful to him. In the next scene Grosvenor enters with the maidens, of whom he is tired. They soon leave him in low spirits, when Patience appears and tells him she loves him, but can never be his, for it is her duty to love Bunthorne. The latter next appears, followed by the antique Jane, who clings to

him in spite of his efforts to get rid of her. He accuses Patience of loving Grosvenor, and goes off with Jane in a wildly jealous mood. In the next scene the Dragoons, to win favor with the maidens, transform themselves into a group of aesthetes. Bunthorne and Grosvenor finally meet, and Bunthorne taxes his rival with monopolizing the attentions of the young ladies. Grosvenor replies that he cannot help it, but would be glad of any suggestion that would lead to his being less attractive. Bunthorne tells him he must change his conversation, cut his hair, and have a back parting, and wear a commonplace costume. Grosvenor at first protests, but yields when threatened with Bunthorne's curse. In the finale, when it is discovered that Grosvenor has become a commonplace young man, the maidens decide that if "Archibald the All-Right" has discarded aestheticism, it is right for them to do so. Patience takes the same view of the case, and leaves Bunthorne for Grosvenor. The maidens find suitors among the Dragoons, and even the antique Jane takes up with the Duke, and Bunthorne is left alone with his lily, nobody's bride.

The most popular musical numbers in the opera are the Colonel's song, "If you want a Receipt for that Popular Mystery"; Bunthorne's "wild, weird, fleshly" song, "What Time the Poet hath hymned," also his song, "If you're anxious for to shine"; the romantic duet of Patience and Grosvenor, "Prithee, Pretty Maiden"; the sextette, "I hear the Soft Note of the Echoing Voice"; Jane's song, "Silvered is the Raven Hair"; Patience's ballad, "Love is a Plaintive Song"; Grosvenor's fable of the magnet and the churn; the rollicking duet of Bunthorne and Grosvenor, "When I go out of Door," and the "prettily pattering, cheerily chattering" chorus in the finale of the last act.