

W. S. Gilbert (1836-1911)

7 *The Story of Prince Agib*

Strike the concertina's melancholy string!
Blow the spirit-stirring harp like anything!
 Let the piano's martial blast
 Rouse the Echoes of the Past,
For of AGIB, PRINCE of TARTARY, I sing! 5

Of AGIB, who, amid Tartaric scenes,
Wrote a lot of ballet music in his teens:
 His gentle spirit rolls
 In the melody of souls —
Which is pretty, but I don't know what it means. 10

Of AGIB, who could readily, at sight,
Strum a march upon the loud Theodolite.
 He would diligently play
 On the Zoetrope all day,
And blow the gay Pantehnicon all night. 15

One winter — I am shaky in my dates —
Came two starving Tartar minstrels to his gates;
 Oh, ALLAH be obeyed,
 How infernally they played!
I remember that they called themselves the "Oüaits." 20

Oh! that day of sorrow, misery, and rage,
I shall carry to the Catacombs of Age,
 Photographically lined
 On the tablet of my mind,
When a yesterday has faded from its page! 25

Alas! PRINCE AGIB went and asked them in;
Gave them beer, and eggs, and sweets, and scent, and tin.
 And when (as snobs would say)
 They had "put it all away,"
He requested them to tune up and begin. 30

Though its icy horror chill you to the core,
I will tell you what I never told before, —
 The consequences true
 Of that awful interview,
For I listened at the keyhole in the door! 35

They played him a sonata — let me see!
“*Medulla oblongata*” — key of G.
 Then they began to sing
 That extremely lovely thing,
“*Scherzando! ma non troppo, ppp.*” 40

He gave them money, more than they could count,
Scent from a most ingenious little fount,
 More beer, in little kegs,
 Many dozen hard-boiled eggs,
And goodies to a fabulous amount. 45

Now follows the dim horror of my tale,
And I feel I’m growing gradually pale,
 For, even at this day,
 Though its sting has passed away,
When I venture to remember it, I quail! 50

The elder of the brothers gave a squeal,
All-overish it made me for to feel;
 “Oh, PRINCE,” he says, says he,
 “*If a Prince indeed you be,*
I’ve a mystery I’m going to reveal! 55

“Oh, listen, if you’d shun a horrid death,
To what the gent who’s speaking to you saith:
 No ‘Oüaits’ in truth are we,
 As you fancy that we be,
For (ter-remble!) I am ALECK — this is BETH!” 60

Said AGIB, “Oh! accursed of your kind,
I have heard that ye are men of evil mind!”
 BETH gave a dreadful shriek —
 But before he’d time to speak

I was mercilessly collared from behind. 65

In number ten or twelve, or even more,
They fastened me full length upon the floor.
 On my face extended flat,
 I was walloped with a cat
For listening at the keyhole of a door. 70

Oh! the horror of that agonizing thrill!
(I can feel the place in frosty weather still).
 For a week from ten to four
 I was fastened to the floor,
While a mercenary wopped me with a will. 75

They branded me and broke me on a wheel,
And they left me in a hospital to heal;
 And, upon my solemn word,
 I have never, never heard
What those Tartars had determined to reveal[.] 80

But that day of sorrow, misery, and rage,
I shall carry to the Catacombs of Age,
 Photographically lined
 On the tablet of my mind,
When a yesterday has faded from its page. 85

1868

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