

Ballad: Lost Mr. Blake

In the ballad "Lost Mr. Blake" from *The Bab Ballads*, we meet Mr. Blake, a notorious sinner far removed from the norms of respectable Christianity. His weekly routines flaunt conventional piety, including indulging in tobacco and alcohol on Sundays. Despite his disregard for ecclesiastical propriety, such as mocking the disputes over clerical vestments and showing disdain for charity that does not involve direct giving, Blake lives by a code uniquely his own, ignoring societal and religious expectations.

Remarkably, the widowed Mrs. Biggs, a paragon of virtue, respectability, and thrift, becomes the object of Blake's affections. Contrary to societal norms, she reciprocates, driven by a mission to reform the "poor benighted soul" despite his substantial wealth and less-than-respectable lifestyle. Their courtship and subsequent marriage offer a curious study of contrasts and compromises, as Blake engages with her practices in church attendance and charitable giving, albeit through his skewed lens of commitment and sarcasm.

Mr. Blake's strategy for engaging with Mrs. Biggs' religious fervor involves a meticulous plan to attend multiple services across different churches each week, turning her devout practice into a near-endless ecclesiastical marathon. Additionally, he cleverly manipulates their charitable donations to reflect their social standing, yet ensures these are deducted from their household and personal expenses, highlighting the tension between charity and personal luxury in their domestic economy.

This ballad portrays a satirical narrative that juxtaposes religious devotion with worldly cynicism through the unlikely relationship between Mr. Blake and Mrs. Biggs. The story dances around themes of morality, social expectations, and the complex interplay between genuine faith and the performance of piety. Through its witty verse and caricatured characters, "Lost Mr. Blake" offers a humorous yet insightful commentary on Victorian society, its values, and the often blurred lines between the sacred and the

profane.



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