

Some Seven Men Form an Association

by W.S. Gilbert

[Editor's Note: The penultimate comic opera produced by W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan was titled Utopia Limited, or the Flowers of Progress, which debuted in 1893. It's the story of a South Pacific island, Utopia, which its sovereign, King Paramount, wishes to model on Great Britain. To that end, he hosts several British advisers, one of whom, a Mr. Goldbury, proposes that the state be organized as a "company limited" according to England's Joint Stock Companies Act of 1862. King Paramount is unfamiliar with the term, and so Mr. Goldbury proceeds to enlighten him and his people.]

SONG—Mr. Goldbury

Some seven men form an Association
(If possible, all Peers and Baronets),
They start off with a public declaration
To what extent they mean to pay their debts.
That's called their Capital; if they are wary
They will not quote it at a sum immense.
The figure's immaterial—it may vary
From eighteen million down to eighteenpence.
I should put it rather low;
The good sense of doing so
Will be evident at once to any debtor.
When it's left to you to say
What amount you mean to pay,
Why, the lower you can put it at, the better.

Chorus: When it's left to you to say, etc.

They then proceed to trade with all who'll trust 'em
Quite irrespective of their capital
(It's shady, but it's sanctified by custom);
Bank, Railway, Loan, or Panama Canal.
You can't embark on trading too tremendous—
It's strictly fair, and based on common sense—
If you succeed, your profits are stupendous—
And if you fail, pop goes your eighteenpence.



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Mr. Goldbury proposes the establishment of a Company Limited.

Make the money-spinner spin!
For you only stand to win,
And you'll never with dishonesty be twitted.
For nobody can know,
To a million or so,
To what extent your capital's committed!

Chorus: No, nobody can know, etc.

If you come to grief, and creditors are craving
(For nothing that is planned by mortal head
Is certain in this Vale of Sorrow—saving
That one's Liability is Limited),—
Do you suppose that signifies perdition?
If so, you're but a monetary dunce—
You merely file a Winding-Up Petition,
And start another Company at once!
Though a Rothschild you may be
In your own capacity,
As a Company you've come to utter sorrow—
But the Liquidators say,
"Never mind—you needn't pay,"
So you start another company to-morrow!

Chorus: But the Liquidators say, etc.