

Billee Taylor

[Nautical comic opera, in two acts; text by Stephens. First produced in London in 1880]

PERSONAGES.

Felix Flapper, R. N., Captain of "H. M. S. Thunderbomb." Sir Mincing Lane, knight. Billee Taylor. Ben Barnacle. Christopher Crab, tutor. Phoebe Farleigh, a charity girl. Arabella Lane, heiress. Eliza Dabsey. Susan. Jane Scraggs.

[Villagers, peasants, sailors, press gang, etc.]

The scene is laid in Southampton, England; time, the year 1805.

The story of "Billee Taylor" is based upon an old English marine ballad of the same name. The first act opens at the inn of the Royal George in Southampton, where the villagers have gathered to celebrate the wedding of Billee Taylor and Phoebe Farleigh, a charity girl. The heiress, Arabella Lane, is also in love with Billee, and has offered him her hand, which he has rejected. Her father, Sir Mincing Lane, is going to give the villagers a feast upon the occasion of Billee's wedding, and invites his friend, Captain Flapper, to attend. The captain accepts, falls in love with Phoebe at sight, and vows Billee shall not marry her. Crab, the tutor, is also in love with Phoebe. In Captain Flapper's crew is Bill Barnacle, who went to sea "on account of Eliza," who had been unfaithful to him, and he is ordered by the press gang to carry Billee away, which he does during the wedding festivities.

The second act opens at Portsmouth, two years supposedly having elapsed. All the charity girls, among them Phoebe, disguised as sailors, followed Billee to sea, who in the mean time has risen to a lieutenancy. Arabella forces her attentions upon him and he is inclined

to yield. At this juncture Phoebe, still seeking her lover, turns up as a common sailor answering to the name of Richard Carr. Captain Flapper in her presence mentions that he is in love with her, also that Billee is about to marry Arabella. Sir Mincing Lane, now a commander of volunteers, endeavors to persuade some of the sailors to join him, and Phoebe offers herself as a recruit, but is claimed as a messmate by Barnacle, which leads to a quarrel. Crab then incites Phoebe to revenge herself upon her recreant lover, and she fires at him, but the shot hits Crab. She is arrested and is about to be executed, but is released when she declares herself a woman. In the end Billee is disgraced, but marries Arabella. Barnacle secures his Eliza. Phoebe marries the captain, and is made full lieutenant of the "Thunderbomb."

"Billee Taylor" is essentially a ballad opera. The best of the ballads are "The Virtuous Gardener," in which Billee describes the ethical pleasures of gardening; "The Two Rivers," sung by Phoebe, Susan, and chorus; "The Self-made Knight," by Sir Mincing Lane, which resembles Sir Joseph Porter's song in the first act of "Pinafore" ("When I was a Lad I served a Term"); Phoebe's sentimental song, "The Guileless Orphan"; Barnacle's well-known song, "All on account of Eliza"; Crab's humorous ditty, "The Poor Wicked Man"; Angelina's sentimental "Ballad of the Billow"; and Captain Flapper's disquisition on love in the interrogative song, "Do you know why the Rabbits are caught in the Snares?"