

H. M. S. Pinafore; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor

[Comic opera, in two acts; text by Gilbert. First produced at the Opéra Comique, London, May 28, 1878.]

PERSONAGES.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., First Lord of the Admiralty. Capt. Corcoran, commanding "H. M. S. Pinafore." Ralph Rackstraw, able seaman. Dick Deadeye, able seaman. Bill Bobstay, boatswain's mate. Bob Becket, carpenter's man. Tom Tucker, midshipmite. Sergeant of Marines. Josephine, the Captain's daughter. Hebe, Sir Joseph's first cousin. Little Buttercup, a bumboat woman.

[First Lord's sisters, his cousins, his aunts, sailors, marines, etc.]

The scene is laid on the quarterdeck of "H. M. S. Pinafore"; time, the present.

Although "Pinafore," when it was first produced in London, was received so coolly that it was decided to take it off the boards, yet eventually, with the exception of "The Beggar's Opera," it proved to be the most popular opera ever produced in England; while in the United States it was for years the rage, and is still a prime favorite. The first scene introduces the leading characters on the deck of "H. M. S. Pinafore" in the harbor of Portsmouth. Little Buttercup, a bumboat woman, "the rosiest, the roundest, and the reddest beauty in all Spithead," comes on board and has an interview with Dick Deadeye, the villain of the story, and Ralph Rackstraw, "the smartest lad in all the fleet," who is in love with Josephine, Captain Corcoran's daughter. The Captain comes on deck in a melancholy mood because Josephine has shown herself indifferent to Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., who is to ask for her hand that afternoon. She confesses to her father that she loves a common sailor, but will carry her love to the grave without letting him know of it. Sir Joseph comes on board with a long retinue

of sisters, cousins, and aunts, who chant his praises. After attending to some minor details, he has a fruitless interview with the Captain and Josephine. She declares she cannot love him. Shortly afterwards she meets Ralph, who declares his love for her, but she haughtily rejects him. When he draws his pistol and declares he will shoot himself, she acknowledges her love, and they plan to steal ashore at night and be married. Dick Deadeye overhears the plot and threatens to thwart it.

The second act opens at night. Captain Corcoran is discovered sadly complaining to the moon, and wondering why everything is at "sixes and sevens." Little Buttercup sympathizes with him, and is about to become affectionate, when he informs her he can only be her friend. She grows enraged, and warns him there is a change in store for him. Sir Joseph enters, and informs the Captain he is much disappointed at the way Josephine has acted. The Captain replies that she is probably dazzled by his rank, and that if he will reason with her and convince her that "love levels all ranks," everything will be right. Sir Joseph does so, but only pleads his rival's cause. She tells him she has hesitated, but now she hesitates no longer. Sir Joseph and the Captain are rejoicing over her apparent change of heart, when Dick Deadeye reveals the plot to elope that night. The Captain confronts them as they are stealthily leaving the vessel, and insists upon knowing what Josephine is about to do. Ralph steps forward and declares his love, whereupon the Captain grows furious and lets slip an oath. He is overheard by Sir Joseph, who orders him to his cabin "with celerity." He then inquires of Ralph what he has done to make the Captain profane. He replies it was his acknowledgment of love for Josephine, whereupon, in a towering rage, Sir Joseph orders his imprisonment in the ship's dungeon. He then remonstrates with Josephine, whereupon Little Buttercup reveals her secret. Years before, when she was practising baby-farming, she nursed two babies, one of "low condition," the other "a regular patrician," and she "mixed those children up and not a creature knew it." "The well-born babe was Ralph, your Captain was the other." Sir Joseph orders the two before him, gives Ralph the command of "H. M. S. Pinafore," and Corcoran

Ralph's place. As his marriage with Josephine is now impossible, he gives her to Ralph, and Captain Corcoran, now a common seaman, unites his fortunes with those of Little Buttercup.

It is one of the principal charms of this delightful work that it is entirely free from coarseness and vulgarity. The wit is always delicate, though the satire is keen. Words and music rarely go so well together as in this opera. As a prominent English critic said of "Trial by Jury," "it seems, as in the great Wagnerian operas, as though poem and music had proceeded simultaneously from one and the same brain." The chorus plays a very important part in it, and in the most solemnly ludicrous manner repeats the assertions of the principals in the third person. All its numbers might be styled the leading ones, but those which have become most popular are the song, "I'm called Little Buttercup"; Josephine's sentimental song, "Sorry her Lot who loves too well," one of the few serious numbers in the opera; Sir Joseph Porter's song, "I am the Monarch of the Sea," with its irresistible choral refrain, "And so are his Sisters and his Cousins and his Aunts, his Sisters and his Cousins, whom he reckons by the Dozens," leading up to the satirical song, "When I was a Lad, I served a Term"; the stirring trio, "A British Tar is a Soaring Soul"; Captain Corcoran's sentimental ditty, "Fair Moon, to thee I sing"; Josephine's scena, "The Hours creep on apace," with its mock heroic recitative; Dick Deadeye's delightful song, "The Merry Maiden and the Tar"; the pretty octette and chorus, "Farewell, my own"; Little Buttercup's legend, "A many Years ago, when I was young and charming"; and the choral finale, "Then give three Cheers and one Cheer more."