

Cox and Box

[Comic operetta, in one act and seven tableaux; text by Burnand. First produced at the Adelphi Theatre, London, 1867.]

PERSONAGES.

James John Cox, a journeyman hatter. John James Box, a journeyman printer. Sergt. Bouncer, late of the Hampshire Yeomanry.

The scene is laid in London; time, the present.

"Cox and Box" is of interest because it is the germ from which sprang the long list of Sullivan's charming comic operas. Burnand, the author of the libretto, has told the story of how they came to write this little operetta. They had been to a private performance of Offenbach's "Les deux Aveugles," and, Burnand wishing to present something of the same kind to a party of his own friends, the notion suddenly occurred to him of turning Morton's well-known farce of "Box and Cox" into an opera. Sullivan took to the plan enthusiastically. Burnand reversed the title to "Cox and Box," and turned Mrs. Bouncer into Sergeant Bouncer, so as to admit of a martial air. They had but three weeks before them, but at the end of that time the work was finished, Sullivan setting the music with almost incredible rapidity. It made such a great hit that it was decided to give it publicly, and at the last moment the composer wrote an overture for it.

The story is the familiar old one which as "Box and Cox" was for so many years and still is such a favorite on the stage. It turns upon the funny experiences of Cox, the hatter, and Box, the printer, who are occupying the same room, the one by night and the other by day, unbeknown to each other, and for which Sergeant Bouncer gets double rent. At last they meet in the room which each one claims as his own. After a ludicrous dispute they gradually become reconciled to each other, but another dispute ensues when Cox finds that the

widow Penelope Ann, whom he is about to marry, has been deserted by Box, the latter pretending to have committed suicide to get rid of her. Cox insists upon restoring Box to the arms of his intended, but Box declines his generous offer. Then they agree to decide by lot which shall have her, but each tries to cheat the other. The situation resolves itself satisfactorily when a letter comes to Cox from Penelope Ann, announcing that she has decided to marry Knox. They give three cheers for Knox, and Bouncer closes the scene with a joyous rataplan in which all three join.

The situations are extremely humorous throughout, and the action moves briskly. Though Sullivan wrote the music in great haste, it is in perfect keeping with the fun of the farce and keeps up its interest to the end. The principal numbers are Bouncer's rataplan song, "Yes, in those Merry Days," and his duet with Cox, "Stay, Bouncer, stay"; Cox's joyous song, "My Master is punctual always in Business," with its dance at the end of each stanza; the characteristic serenade, "The Buttercup dwells in the Lowly Mead" (Cox) and "The Floweret shines on the Minaret Fair" (Box); Box's solemn description of his pretended suicide, "Listen! I solemnly walked to the Cliff"; and the finale by the jolly triumvirate with the "rataplan."