

Ruddygore; or, The Witch's Curse

[Comic opera, in two acts; text by Gilbert. First produced at the Savoy Theatre, London, January 22, 1887.]

PERSONAGES.

Robin Oakapple, a young farmer. Richard Dauntless, his foster brother and man-o'-war's man. Sir Despard Murgatroyd, the wicked Baronet. Old Adam Goodheart, Robin's faithful servant. Rose Maybud, a village maiden. Mad Margaret. Dame Hannah, Rose's aunt. Zorah, } Ruth, } professional bridesmaids. Six Murgatroyd Ghosts. Sir Roderic Murgatroyd, twenty-first Baronet.

[Officers, ancestors, and professional bridesmaids.]

The scene is laid in Cornwall; time, early in the last century.

Although "Ruddygore," a satire upon the old English melodramas, has not been as successful as some of the other Sullivan operas, it is as entertaining as any in the series, while the story, with its grotesque dramatic features, is peculiarly Gilbertian in its humor. The first act opens in Cornwall. Sir Rupert Murgatroyd, the first of the baronets, employed his leisure in persecuting witches and committing other crimes. The chorus of "the legend," sung by Hannah, an old spinster, prophesies that each Murgatroyd will die "with sinning cloyed." To avoid this fate, the last inheritor of the title, Sir Ruthven, secludes himself under the name of Robin Oakapple, in the Cornish village of Rederring, and his younger brother, Despard, believing him to be dead, succeeds to the title. Robin, who is shy and modest, is in love with Rose, a foundling, who is very discreet. The love-making lags, and meanwhile Richard, his foster brother, a man-o'-war's man, returns from sea, and so commiserates Robin that he offers to plead his case with Rose. Instead of that he pleads his own case, and is accepted by her, much to the disappointment of Robin, who supports

Richard's claim, however. Robin's younger brother, Sir Despard, next appears, and hears from Richard of the existence of the brother whom he had thought dead. He thereupon claims Robin as his elder brother, and Rose shows her preference for Sir Despard, who is also claimed by Mad Margaret, a village maiden, whom he had mistreated when he was under the influence of the Murgatroyd curse.

The second act opens in the picture gallery of Ruddygore Castle. Robin and Adam, his faithful servant, are in the gallery, the former as Sir Ruthven, and Adam as Gideon Crawle, a new name he has taken. The new Sir Ruthven is under the curse, and asks his servant to suggest some daily crime for him to commit. The strong scene of the act is the coming to life of the various baronets whose portraits hang upon the walls, and their announcement that Robin will die in fearful agony unless he abducts some lady, it matters not whom. In the dénouement it is revealed that a Ruddygore baron can only die through refusing to commit the daily crime, but that such a refusal is tantamount to suicide. Hence none of the ancestors ought to have died at all, and they come back to life greatly to the delight of the professional bridesmaids, and Rose and Robin are at last united.

The principal numbers in the first act are the weird legend, "Sir Rupert Murgatroyd, his Leisure and his Riches," sung by Hannah; Richard's breezy sea song, "I shipped, d' ye see, in a Revenue Sloop"; the very tuneful chorus of the bridesmaids, "Hail the Bridegroom, hail the Bride"; Mad Margaret's whimsical song, "Cheerily carols the Lark"; the melodious chorus of the bucks and blades, "When thoroughly tired of being admired"; Sir Despard's song, with its alternating choral refrains, "Oh, why am I moody and sad"; the madrigal, "Where the Buds are blossoming," written in the early English style, and supported by the chorus; and the charming gavotte leading to the finale, which contains some admirable duet and trio numbers. The leading numbers of the second act are the opening duet for Robin and Adam, "I once was as meek as a New-born Lamb," with a most melodramatic "Ha ha," followed by another charming duet for

Richard and Rose, with choral refrain, "Happily coupled are we"; the weird song of Sir Roderic, "When the Night Wind howls in the Chimney Cows," which is finely artistic in construction; the patter trio for Robin, Despard, and Margaret, "My Eyes are fully open to my Awful Situation"; Hannah's pretty ballad, "There grew a Little Flower"; and the brilliant finale, beginning with Robin's number, "Having been a Wicked Baronet a Week."