

**SHAKESPEARE'S  
COMEDY OF THE  
MERCHANT OF VENICE**

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Shakespeare's Comedy of the Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare & William J. Rolfe

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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & WILLIAM J. ROLFE**

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MERCHANT OF VENICE**





**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.**

*After Faed.*

SHAKESPEARE'S  
COMEDY OF  
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

EDITED, WITH NOTES

BY

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MERCHANT OF VENICE.

K. P. 21

To Mr. J. C. Rolfe  
Author, I. A. O.

To

**Horace Howard Furness**

"THE DEAREST FRIEND TO ME, THE kindest MAN,  
THE BEST-COMDITION'D AND UNWEARIED SPIRIT  
IN DOING COURTESIES"

THIS BOOK AND THE EDITION OF SHAKESPEARE  
WHICH IT INTRODUCES  
ARE GRATEFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY  
DEDICATED

W. J. R.



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## PREFACE

My edition of *The Merchant of Venice* was first published in 1870. It was the initial volume of the complete edition of Shakespeare's plays and poems, in forty volumes, which was finished in 1883.

As I stated in the original preface, the book was planned and nearly completed more than three years earlier, but was laid aside for other work and not taken up again until the summer of 1870. Meanwhile the notes had been used with classes in school and out of school, and received such revision as was suggested by that experience and by further study of Shakespeare.

When I began to prepare the book, Shakespeare was just coming to be studied in the secondary schools. Only a few annotated editions of single plays had been published in England, and none, so far as I am aware, in this country. Helps for the school study of Shakespeare were few and expensive. The Cowden-Clarke *Concordance* cost ten or twelve dollars. The first volume of Dr. Furness's "New Variorum" edition (*Romeo and Juliet*) was published in 1871, but the second (*Macbeth*, the first of the plays commonly read in schools) not until 1873. Critical commentaries on Shakespeare were, as a rule, to be had only in costly English editions. High school libraries were few and small, and public libraries, except in the larger cities, contained but little Shakespearian literature. Few teachers in secondary schools throughout the country were better equipped than I was, some fifteen years earlier, when

the only *Shakespeare* I had was a one-volume edition without notes, and my pupils had to use such editions as they found at home or among their friends.

In editing this play, therefore, it was my aim, as I said in the preface, to furnish "a pure *text* and the *notes* needed for its thorough elucidation and illustration." Having in mind the needs of the teacher as well as the student, I preferred, in these notes, to err, if at all, on the side of fullness. The book was favourably received, but the publishers were surprised, as I was, when the demand for similar editions of all the plays generally read in schools and colleges was followed by a call from the reading public for the rest of Shakespeare's works in the same form.

The changes made now in revising the book have been mainly due to the changes that have taken place in the educational situation during the past thirty-five years. For instance, I have omitted the greater part of the notes on *textual variations*. This play, with most of the others read in schools, is now among the twelve plays that Dr. Furness has edited. No teacher can afford to do without his encyclopedic volumes, in which all the readings and notes of the early editions and of the standard modern editions are epitomized, together with large extracts from the best commentaries and much admirable criticism by Dr. Furness himself. The textual readings, however, are for the average teacher the least important part of the material in that monumental edition. The text of Shakespeare is now virtually settled. Many emendations have been proposed in recent years, but those that have been generally accepted could be counted on the fingers of one hand, with possibly a finger or two to spare. Scattered *cruces*, due to the corruption of the earlier editions, still remain to perplex the critics, who will probably quarrel