

**THE PROMPT-BOOK.
SHAKESPEARE'S
COMEDY OF THE
MERCHANT OF VENICE**

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The Prompt-Book. Shakespeare's Comedy of the Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare
& William Winter & Edwin Booth

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & WILLIAM WINTER & EDWIN BOOTH

**THE PROMPT-BOOK.
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MERCHANT OF VENICE**

The Prompt-Book.

Edited by
William Winter.



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The Prompt-Book.

Edited by William Winter.

William
Shakespeare's Comedy

of

The Merchant of Venice

As Presented by

Edwin Booth.

+

"A stage, where every man must play a part,
And make a sad one."

"If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feud for the ancient grudge I bear him."

"A kinder gentleman treads not the earth."

"I will have the heart of him if he forfeit."

"Never did I know
A creature that did bear the shape of man
So keen and greedy to confound a man."

"We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy."

"You take my life,
When you do take the means whereby I live,
I pray you give me leave to go from hence."

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Preface.



TO the reverential student of Shakespeare this version of "The Merchant of Venice" will seem little better than a mutilation. While, however, much has been omitted, nothing has been introduced. If the piece does not go as far as might be desired, it is, at least, faithful to Shakespeare, as far as it goes. The object sought has been the construction of an acting copy, suitable for the use of leading tragedians, in which the position of chief prominence is assigned to the character of Shylock. "The Merchant of Venice"—aside from some aspects of the treatment of the Jew—is pure comedy; and, when given entire, it should be acted by a company of excellent comedians. The part of Shylock would naturally fall to the "character" actor in such a company; but it would not largely overshadow its companion parts—supposing every portion of the piece to receive competent and careful treatment. When, on the other hand, this play is acted chiefly for the purpose of illustrating Shylock, a judicious compression of the scenes is found not only expedient but highly desirable. Such a compression—with this view, and for this reason—has been attempted here. It will be found, though, that the story, while told with brevity, has not been impaired in substance. The incidents of the bond and the caskets are duly displayed, and the poet's great skill in combining them is suitably exhibited. This version is in four acts, and it can be represented in two hours and a quarter.

"The Merchant of Venice" is mentioned by Meres [1598], and it was first published in 1600. The sources to which it

is thought that Shakespeare resorted for the main incidents of its plot are: a collection of tales called "*Il Pecorone*," written by Ser Giovanni, a notary of Florence, about 1378, and first published in 1558, at Milan; and the popular collection of stories called the "*Gesta Romanorum*." The *Ballad of Gernutus*, which embodies the incident of the bond, — and which may be found in Percy's "*Reliques*," and in several modern collections of old poetry — was also, probably, extant in Shakespeare's day, and known to him. It is conjectured, too, that an earlier play, mentioned by Stephen Gosson [1579] as "shewn at the Bull," and as "representing the greedyness of worldly choosers, and the bloody minds of usurers," may have dealt with some of the old materials which served Shakespeare for his comedy. The savage, relentless Jew is one of the most ancient persons of fiction. "The story of the caskets," says Dowden, "is first found in the mediæval Greek romance of 'Barlaam and Josaphat,' by Joannes Damascenus (about 800); in another form it is told by the English poet Gower, and the Italian novelist Boccaccio." These matters are solely or chiefly interesting as tending to direct study upon the wonderful genius with which Shakespeare transfigured all that he touched. His originality is not that of the maker of themes and bald facts, but that of the shaper and interpreter. "In the management of the plot," says Hallam, "which is sufficiently complex without the slightest confusion or incoherence, I do not conceive that it has been surpassed in the annals of any theatre." "The union of the two actions in one event," says Dr. Johnson, "is, in this drama, eminently happy. Dryden was much pleased with his own address in connecting the two plots of his '*Spanish Friar*,' which yet, I believe, the critic will find excelled by this play."

The supremacy of Shakespeare as the poet of nature is conspicuously seen in any comparison between "*The Merchant of Venice*" and its popular predecessor on the old London stage, "*The Rich Jew of Malta*," by Christopher Marlowe [1594]. *The Jew* in Marlowe's piece, a thoroughly diabolical character, was acted by Alleyn, the founder of Dulwich College — still standing, with his tomb

in the middle of its hall of paintings—on the Surrey side of the Thames. An alteration of "The Merchant of Venice," made by Lord Lansdowne, and first acted at Lincoln's Inn Fields, was published in 1701; and this held the stage till 1741, when Macklin effected his restoration of Shylock. Lord Lansdowne's piece begins with a prologue, in which the ghosts of Shakespeare and Dryden rise, crowned with laurel; and its second act contains a musical masque, called Peleus and Thetis. A banquet scene is also introduced, in which the Jew, seated at a separate table, drinks to his Money as his Only Mistress. Shylock, which in that version was acted by Thomas Doggett [—1721], was made a comic character, and wore a red wig. Macklin's great performance reinstated the part as one of tragical conception, and had the effect of banishing Lansdowne's distortion forever from the stage. John Philip Kemble made an acting copy of "The Merchant of Venice," in 1795. The original representative of Shylock was Burbage—who dressed it in a red wig and a false nose. Shylock has been greatly acted by Henderson, George Frederick Cooke, Edmund Kean, and Junius Brutus Booth. Of Kean in Shylock—in which part, at Drury Lane, he made his first great hit [January 26th, 1814], Douglas Jerrold used to say that he impressed his audience "like a chapter of Genesis." "The elder Booth's Shylock," says Gould, "was the representative Hebrew," "a type of the religion of the law," and instinct with "the might of a people whom neither time, nor scorn, nor political oppression could subdue." Bogumil Dawison, on the German stage, was famous as the Jew; and the Shylock of James W. Wallack, likewise, is memorable among the most affecting personations that have graced the stage in this century.

W. W.

New-York, October 30th, 1878.



"She was a form of life and light
That seen became a part of sight,
And rose, where'er I turned mine eye,
The morning-star of memory."—BYRON.

"Sweet pain of love, bind thou with fetters fleet
The heart that on the dew of hope must pine."—GOETHE.

"O happy hour! and happier hours
Await them. Many a merry face
Salutes them,—maidens of the place,
That pelt us in the porch with flowers."—TENNYSON.

"Will thou go on with me?
The moon is bright, the sea is calm,
And I know well the ocean paths * * *
Thou wilt go on with me!"—SOUTHEY.

"The hunted fox, the tortured wild-cat, loves its young—the despised and
persecuted race of Abraham love their children * * * When the day
comes, and I ask my own, then what hear I but damned Jew, and the curse
of Egypt on your tribe."—SCOTT.

"He hath his armour on—
I am his sword, shield, helm; I but enclose
Myself, and my own heart, and heart's blood, when
I thus encompass him * * *
Each for the other thus,
And in that other for his dearer self."
BANIM—IN "DAMON AND PYTHIAS."

"And at the last ten thousand crowns
They offered him to save:
Gernutus said, 'I will no gold,
My forfeit I will have.'"
THE BALLAD OF GERNUTUS.

"Gentle deed
Makes gentle bleed."
OLD SCOTTISH PROVERB.

"Anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. * * *
I was sure that he could not live, after that he was fallen."—II. SAMUEL,
i. 9-10.

