

**SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDY OF  
THE MERRY WIVES OF  
WINDSOR. EDITED WITH  
NOTES BY WILLIAM J. ROLFE**

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Shakespeare's Comedy of the Merry Wives of Windsor. Edited with Notes by William J. Rolfe  
by William Shakespeare & William J. Rolfe

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WINDSOR FOREST

SHAKESPEARE'S  
COMEDY OF THE  
MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

EDITED, WITH NOTES

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS play, originally edited by me in 1882, is now thoroughly revised on the same general plan as the earlier volumes in the new series.

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ANNE PAGE AND SLENDER

("I pray you, sir, walk in.")



PART OF WINDSOR CASTLE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

### THE HISTORY OF THE PLAY

The earliest edition of *The Merry Wives* was a quarto printed in 1602, with the following title-page:—

“ A | Most pleasaunt and | excellent conceited Co-  
| medie, of Syr *John Falstaffe*, and the | merrie Wiues  
of *Windsor*. | Entermixed with sundrie | variable and  
pleasing humors of Syr *Hugh* | the Welch Knight,  
Iustice *Shallow*, and his | wise Cousin M. *Slender*. |  
With the swaggering vaine of Auncient | *Pistoll*, and  
Corporall *Nym*. | By *William Shakespeare*. | As it hath

bene diuers times Acted by the right Honorable | my  
 Lord Chamberlaines servants Both before her | Mai-  
 estie, and else-where. | LONDON | Printed by T. C. for  
 Arthur Iohnson; and are to be sold at | his shop in  
 Powles Churchyard, at the signe of the | Flower de  
 Leuse and the Crowne. | 1602."

A second quarto was published in 1619. These editions appear to be a pirated version of the play as first written, probably in 1599.

This early sketch was afterward revised and enlarged to about twice the original length; and this is the form in which it appears in the folio of 1623. Internal evidence shows that this revision was made after James came to the throne, and probably about 1605. In i. 1. 110 "king" is substituted for the "council" of the quarto. "These knights will hack," in ii. 1. 50, is supposed to allude to the 237 knights created by James in 1603. "When the court lay at Windsor," in ii. 2. 62, may refer to July, 1603; the court was usually held at Greenwich in the winter. The mention of "coach after coach," in ii. 2. 66, is not likely to have been made much before coaches came into general use, which, according to Howe's *Continuation of Stowe's Chronicle*, was in 1605. "Outrun on Cotsall," i. 1. 89, appears to allude to the reviving of the Cotswold games about 1603.

The entry in the *Accounts of the Revels*, according to which the play was acted at Whitehall on Sunday, Nov. 4, 1604, is now known to be a forgery, but there is