

**THE TEMPLE DRAMATISTS. THE
MERRY DEVIL OF EDMONTON: A
COMEDY. EDITED WITH A
PREFACE, NOTES AND GLOSSARY
BY HUGH WALKER, M.A.**

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The Temple Dramatists. *The Merry Devil of Edmonton: A Comedy*. Edited with a Preface, Notes and Glossary by Hugh Walker, M.A. by William Shakespeare

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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THE MERRY DEVIL OF EDMONTON



The text here adopted is founded upon that of Warke and Proescholdt's edition; but the spelling has been modernised, and in some cases I have departed from their readings.

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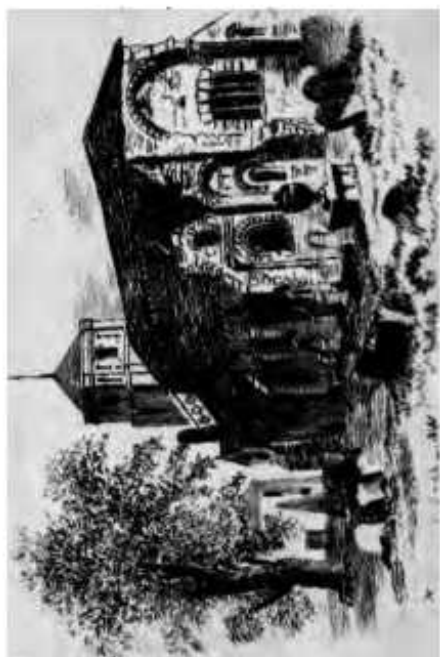
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Waltham Abbey

Shakespeare, William, parson

THE
MERRY DEVIL
OF EDMONTON
A COMEDY

*Edited with a Preface, Notes
and Glossary by*

HUGH WALKER, M.A.

J. M. DENT AND CO.

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1897

PREFACE

Editions of the Play. The first edition now known of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* was published in 1608; and as the play was only entered at Stationers' Hall in October of the previous year, we may reasonably infer that it had not before been printed. Other editions followed in 1612, 1617, 1626, 1631, and 1655. It was included in Dodsley's *Old Plays*, and has been reprinted in the subsequent editions of that collection. It also appeared in Miller's *Ancient British Drama* (1810). But by far the most scholarly and complete of modern editions is that of Warnke and Proescholdt (Halle, 1884), to whom I am largely indebted. Their edition is exhaustive as to the variations of the text and almost equally good on the bibliographical side of the introduction. The notes are less full.

Date of Composition. The first known reference to the play is contained in the *Blacke Book* by T. M., 1604. This T. M., who is supposed to have been Thomas Middleton, quotes the title, and alludes to the comedy as an amusing one: 'Give him leave to see *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, or *A Woman Kill'd with Kindness*.' There is no specific internal evidence, for the storming of St Quentin's, alluded to in i. ii. 24, is too early to be the basis of an argument. Tieck assigned it to the year 1600 because he believed it to be by Shakespeare, and thought that among Shakespeare's plays the one which had most in common with it was *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

PREFACE

The Merry Devil of Edmonton

The conjecture falls with the reason upon which it is founded, and few would now maintain the Shakespearian authorship of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. All that it seems possible to say is that it must have been written, at latest, soon after the year 1600, and that from style and tone and structure it may with greater probability be referred to an unknown date before, but not very long before, that year.

Authorship. *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* is an anonymous play, and there is no evidence of weight sufficient to enable us to decide between the various assertions and suggestions which have been made as to the authorship. Kirkman, the bookseller, ascribed it to no less a person than William Shakespeare, but Kirkman's sole authority was a volume, originally in the library of King Charles II., and afterwards in the Garrick Collection, containing *Mucedorus*, *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, and *Fair Em*, and lettered with the name of Shakespeare. *Mucedorus* and *Fair Em* have nevertheless been refused by the critics a place among the works of Shakespeare, and strong internal evidence would be needed to obtain another verdict in the case of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. Such evidence cannot be found. There are indeed traces of the influence of Shakespeare; but pleasant as *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* is, it does not seem probable that Smug and the Host and Sir John are the work of the hand that fashioned Falstaff and his group. There are comic possibilities in these characters that Shakespeare would almost certainly have made more of; and, as Charles Knight has suggested, it is not probable that he would have gone so near to duplicating his own characters as he would have done on the supposition that he created both the Host