

**THE TWO
NOBLE KINSMEN**

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The Two Noble Kinsmen by John Fletcher & William Shakespeare

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JOHN FLETCHER & WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**THE TWO
NOBLE KINSMEN**



THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN.

WRITTEN BY
THE MEMORABLE WORTHIES OF THEIR TIME,

MR. JOHN FLETCHER AND
MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, } GENT.

EDITED, WITH NOTES,
BY
WILLIAM J. ROLFE, LITT. D.,
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WITH ENGRAVINGS.



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P R E F A C E.

I HAVE included *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in this edition of Shakespeare's works because, as some critics believe (see p. 10), he appears to have had some share in the composition of the play. I have nothing to add here to the discussion of that question except a few paragraphs from Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps's *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* (2d ed. 1882), which would have been included in the Introduction if I had seen them in time. He states concisely "the main external testimonies on each side of the question;" and among the "reasons for believing that the great dramatist had no share whatever in the composition" are the following:

"1. When John Waterson, in October, 1646, transferred to Humphrey Moseley his copyright interests in three plays—*The Elder Brother*, *Monsieur Thomas*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*—the undivided authorship of all of them is distinctly assigned to Fletcher in the register, the third appearing there under the title of *The Noble Kinsman*. The Fletcherian authorship of the two other dramas is undisputed; and if Waterson really believed that Shakespeare had written part of the last, there seems no reason why the name of the great dramatist should not have been given in the entry of the assignment. . . . 2. In a list of books printed for Moseley, which is inserted at the end of some copies of Shirley's *Six New Plays*, 1653, occurs 'the Two Noble Kinamen, a comedy written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, gent., in 4^o.' The same entry is met with the following year in a similar list of the works of the same publisher, these announcements singularly contrasting with his trading anxiety to use the name of Shakespeare improperly in other instances. It should be carefully recollected that Moseley was specially connected with the works of Beaumont and Fletcher, so that his evidence, valueless in a question of Shakespearian authorship, is most likely important in regard to the works of the former dramatists. . . . 5. The absence of contemporary evidence that Shakespeare and Fletcher were acquainted with each other. . . . 7. The direct evidence of Leonard Digges, about the year 1623, of Shakespeare's aversion to any kind of literary partnership, so that he even carefully avoided the then common practice of availing himself of scenes written for him by other dramatists.—8. The parallel

instance of 'the History of Cardenio by Mr. Fletcher and Shakespeare' having been entered by Moseley on the registers of the Stationers' Company in the year 1653.—9. Finally, the extreme improbability of a dramatist of Shakespeare's unrivalled power and rapidity of composition entering, at the maturest period of his reputation, into the joint-authorship of a play with a much younger writer, and of the latter having in such a case the assurance to be palpably imitating him, both characterially and verbally, in his portion of the work."

In editing the play, I have made free use, as the frequent acknowledgments in the Notes will show, of the valuable editions by Littledale and Skeat; and I have been almost entirely dependent upon them for the collation of the early texts.

The text is somewhat "expurgated," but less than in Knight's "Pictorial" edition, and much less than in Skeat's, which is intended for school use. In this country the play may be read in colleges, but is not likely to be taken up in the preparatory schools.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION TO THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN.....	9
I. THE HISTORY OF THE PLAY.....	9
II. THE SOURCES OF THE PLOT.....	24
III. CRITICAL COMMENTS ON THE PLAY.....	26
THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN.....	45
ACT I.....	47
" II.....	66
" III.....	87
" IV.....	114
" V.....	129
NOTES.....	151



JOHN FLETCHER.