

**MERCHANT OF VENICE WITH
INTRODUCTION, AND NOTE
EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL
FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND
CLASSES**

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Merchant of Venice with Introduction, and Note Explanatory and Critical for Use in Schools
and Classes by William Shakespeare & Henry N. Hudson

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & HENRY N. HUDSON

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SHAKESPEARE'S
MERCHANT OF VENICE.

WITH

INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL.

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSES.

BY THE

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GENERAL PREFACE.

ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS.

WHY should English Literature be taught in our schools? and, What is the best way of teaching it? These are the questions which I propose to discuss.

As preliminary to such discussion, it will, I think, be rightly in place to consider, briefly, what our people are aiming to prepare their children for, and what sort of an education it is the proper business of the school to give; that is to say, what form of mind and character, and what disposition of the faculties, it is meant to impress.

Now I take it that a vast majority of the pupils in our schools are not to pass their life as students or as authors. Their main business in this world is to gain an honest living for themselves and for those dependent on them. And no plan of education is just that leaves this prime consideration behind, in quest of any alleged higher aims: for there really are no higher aims; and all pretence of such is a delusion and a snare. Some men, it is true, do more than gain an honest living; but this is the *best* thing that any man does; as, on the other hand, shining intellectually is the poorest thing that any man does, or can possibly learn to do. Then too most of the pupils in our schools, ninety-nine hundredths of them at the least, are to get their living by hand-work, not by head-work; and what they need is, to have their heads

so armed and furnished as to guard their hand-work against error and loss, and to guide it to the most productive means and methods. And, for gaining an honest living by hand-work, the largest and best part of their education is not to be had in school; it must be got somewhere else, or not at all. The right place, the only right place, for learning the trade of a farmer or a mechanic is on the farm or in the shop. For instance, Mr. Edward Burnett's "Deerfoot Farm," in Southborough, Massachusetts, is, I undertake to say, a better school for learning agriculture than any "agricultural college" is likely to be. There is no practicable, nay, no possible way of acquiring the use of tools but by actually handling them, and working with them. And this rule holds equally true in all the walks of life, — holds as true of the lawyer, the physician, the merchant, as of the shoemaker, the bricklayer, the machinist, the blacksmith.

On this point, our people generally, at least a very large portion of them, have their notions all wrong side up: their ideas and expectations in the matter are literally preposterous. How the thing came to be so, it were bootless to inquire; but so it clearly is. Parents, with us, are manifestly supposing that it is the business of the school to give their children all the education needful for gaining an honest living; that their boys and girls ought to come from the school-teachers' hands fully armed and equipped for engaging, intelligently and successfully, in all sorts of work, whether of head or of hand. And they are evermore complaining and finding fault because this is not done; that their children, after all, have only learnt how to use books, if indeed they have learnt that, and know no more how to use tools, are no better fitted to make or procure food and clothes, than if they had spent so much time in stark idleness or in sleep.

But the fault is in themselves, not in the school ; their expectations on this head being altogether unreasonable, and such as the school cannot possibly answer. That, say what you please, is the plain English of the matter ; and it may as well be spoken.

I repeat that, with very few exceptions, and those mostly applicable to girls, the most and the best that the school can do, or can reasonably be expected to do, is to educate the mind and the heart : as for the education of their children's hands, parents must, yes, *must* look for this elsewhere : probably their best way is to take it into their own immediate care, and hold themselves religiously bound to attend to it. Possibly, withal, some parents, as also some who drive the trade of idealizing about education, may need to be taught, or warned, that unless the school have something ready made to its hand, unless the pupil bring to it something inside his skull, it cannot educate his mind : brains it cannot furnish ; though it is often blamed for not doing this too. And, good as vocal intelligence may be, yet, for all the practical ends, and even the dignities, of life, manual intelligence is vastly better : this it is that makes both the artist and the artisan ; and without this the former, however it may prattle and glitter, can neither plough the field nor reap the corn, neither tan the leather nor make the shoe, neither shape the brick nor build the wall, neither grind the flour nor bake the bread.

But I suspect our American parents have become somewhat absurdly, and not very innocently, ambitious of having their boys and girls all educated to be gentlemen and ladies ; which is, I take it, the same in effect as having them educated to be good for nothing ; too proud or too lazy to live by hand-work, while they are nowise qualified to live by

head-work, nor could get any to do, if they were. And so they insist on having their children taught how to do something, perhaps several things, without ever soiling their fingers by actually doing any thing. If they would, in all meekness and simplicity of heart, endeavour to educate their children to be good for something, they would be infinitely more likely to overtake the aim of their sinful and stupid ambition. The man who has been well and rightly educated to earn, and does earn, a fair living by true and solid service, he is a gentleman in the only sense in which it is not both a sin and a shame to be called by that title. Any form of honest service, however plain and humble, has manliness in it, and is therefore a higher style of gentility, and a sounder basis of self-respect, than any, even the proudest, form of mere social ornamentation. The dull boy, who cannot prate science, but can drive a cart as a cart ought to be driven, or the dull girl who cannot finger a piano, but can rightly broil a beef-steak, is, in the eye of all true taste, a far more sightly and attractive object than the most learned and accomplished good-for-nothing in the world. I have seen men calling themselves doctors, who, week after week, month after month, year after year, were going about making sham calls on bogus patients, that so they might either get themselves a practice or make men believe they had got one; and have thought that the poorest drudge, who honestly ate his bread or what little he could get, in the sweat of his face, was a prince in comparison with them. An aristocratic idler or trifler or spendthrift or clothes-frame, however strong he may smell of the school and the college, of books and of lingual culture, is no better than a vulgar illiterate loafer; nor can his smart clothes and his perfumes and his lily hands and his fashionable airs shield him from the just contempt of thoughtful men and sensible women.

Now so long as people proceed upon the notion that their children's main business in this world is to shine, and not to work, and that the school has it in special charge to fit them out at all points for a self-supporting and reputable career in life ; just so long they will continue to expect and demand of the school that which the school cannot give ; to grumble and find fault because it fails to do what they wish ; and to insist on having its methods changed till their preposterous demands are satisfied. On the other hand, the school could do its proper work much better, if people would but come down, or rather come up, to a just conception of what that work is. But it must needs fail, in a greater or less degree, to do that part of education which falls within its legitimate province, while struggling and beating about in a vain endeavour to combine this with that part which fairly lies outside of its province. For, in straining to hit the impossible, we are pretty sure to miss the possible. And all experienced teachers know right well that those parents who faithfully do their own part in the education of their children are most apt to be satisfied with what the school is doing.

It is, then, desirable that children should learn to think, but it is indispensable that they should learn to work ; and I believe it is possible for a large, perhaps the larger, portion of them to be so educated as to find pleasure in both. But the great question is, how to render the desirable thing and the indispensable thing mutually helpful and supplementary. For, surely, the two parts of education, the education of the mind and the education of the hand, though quite distinct in idea, and separate in act, are not, or need not be, at all antagonistic. On the contrary, the school can, and should, so do its part as to coöperate with and further that part which lies beyond its province. And it is both the