

**THE WORKS OF
SHAKESPEARE. THE
COMEDY OF ERRORS**

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The works of Shakespeare. The comedy of errors by William Shakespeare & Henry Cuningham

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & HENRY CUNINGHAM

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THE COMEDY OF ERRORS
EDITED BY
HENRY CUNINGHAM



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PREFATORY NOTE

"A CAREFUL study of the text of *Romeo and Juliet* will show how little we can rely upon having the true text, as Shakespeare wrote it, in those plays for which the Folio is our earliest authority." So wrote the Cambridge Editors in 1865, and the remark remains no less true and forcible at the present day in its applicability to *The Errors* as to the other plays for which the Folio is our earliest and only authority. The immense importance of a correct text of Shakespeare is the Editor's justification for the effort to arrive, as nearly as may be, at the goal of a true text in this edition of *The Comedy of Errors*. But the enormous and almost insuperable difficulties in the way of ascertaining Shakespeare's own text can be appreciated only by the life student of his works and of Elizabethan literature, and all allowances must in that respect be made for the defects of the present edition, defects of which the Editor is painfully conscious. At any rate he has attempted no mean standard of attainment. An Editor who is incapable of advancing our knowledge either in the critical or exegetical department of Shakespearian study had better hold his peace. He has no justification for adding yet another "edition" to the never-ending stream. The public presumably demands its reprints, and it gets its reprints—of a sort—and, knowing no better,

is probably satisfied. It is one comfort that Shakespeare sells at the present day, and that possibly he is read; but whether he is loved and studied as he ought to be is quite another question.

In the present edition the Editor has consciously left no difficulty, either of text or explanation, unfaced; and the views he has expressed, except of course where previous commentators are quoted, are his own.

The Introduction deals with many necessary and important points, particularly as to the text, the date, the sources of the play, and Shakespeare's knowledge of Latin. The interesting version of the *Menaecmi* of Plautus, published in 1595 by "W. W." (William Warner) is, for purposes of comparison with Shakespeare's *Errors*, reprinted in Appendix II.

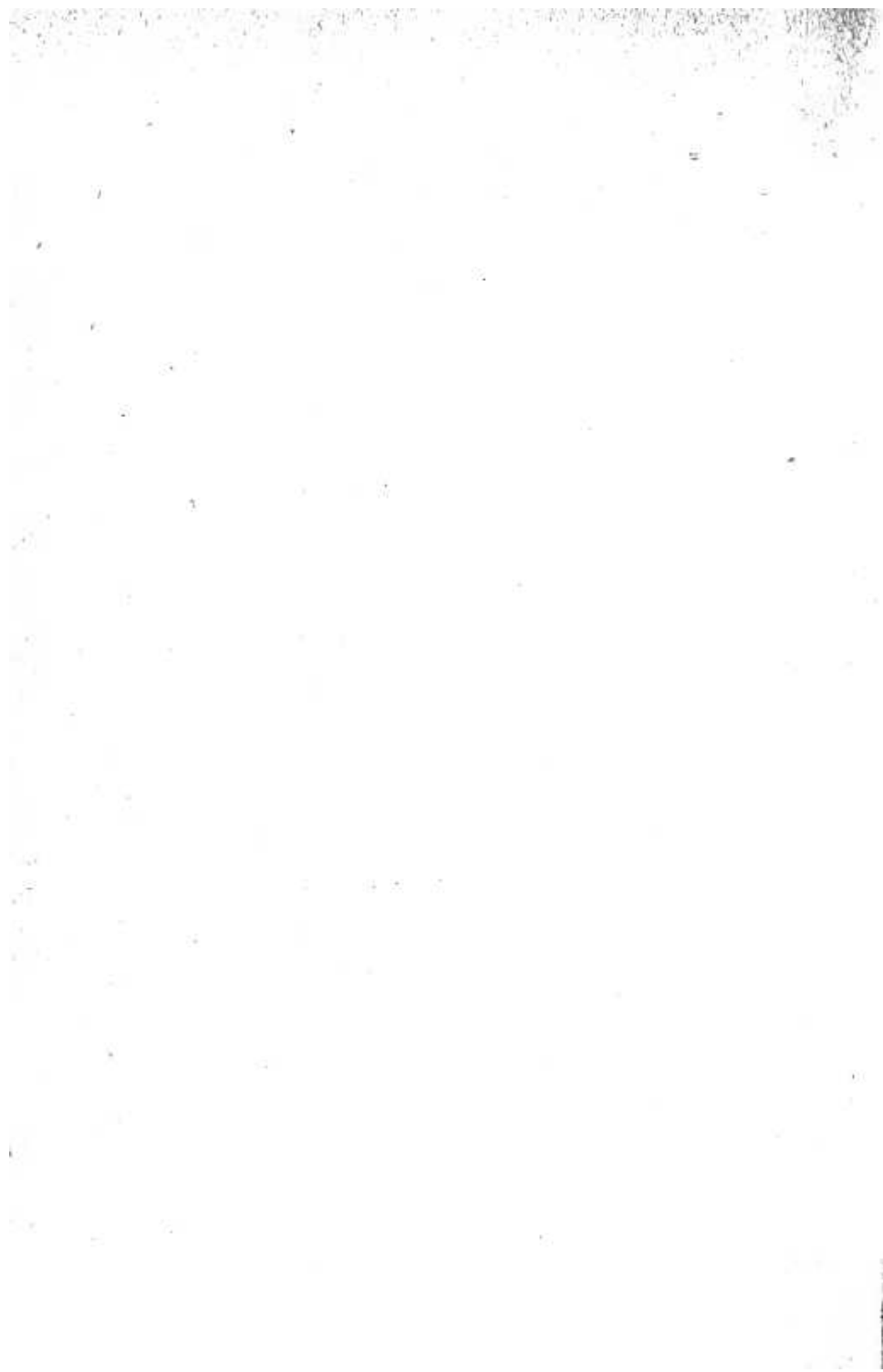
A somewhat unusual feature in the Introduction is the considerable space which has been devoted to the question of Shakespeare's legal acquirements. In 1904 Mr. Sidney Lee published a volume entitled *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century*, in which he devotes a few pages to the question of Shakespeare's "use of law terms." He there states (*inter alia*) that "the only just conclusion to be drawn by Shakespeare's biographer from his employment of law terms is that the great dramatist in this feature, as in numerous other features, of his work, was merely proving the readiness with which he identified himself with the popular literary habits of his day." In the Editor's opinion nothing can be further from the facts and probabilities of the case than most of Mr. Lee's assumptions; and it will be found that this is also the opinion of many eminent scholars, lawyers and commentators, beginning with Malone, who was himself a lawyer as well as

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a very eminent Shakespearian scholar. No one but a trained lawyer, who is also a lifelong student of the great dramatist, for example, Mr. William Lowes Rushton, the author of *Shakespeare a Lawyer* and other works, who is, fortunately still with us, is really competent to discuss the subject; and it is to be feared that in this matter Mr. Sidney Lee has heedlessly rushed in where lawyers fear to tread. But perhaps his remarks were intended primarily for transatlantic consumption only.

August, 1907.



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