

THE WORKS
OF
SHAKESPEARE

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

EDITED BY
HENRY CUNINGHAM



METHUEN AND CO.
36 ESSEX STREET: STRAND
LONDON

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

PREFATORY NOTE

vii

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.

INTRODUCTION

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS was first printed in the Folio of 1623, wherein at folio 85 it stands fifth in the "Catalogue of the severall Comedies Histories and Tragedies contained in this Volume." It may have been printed from Shakespeare's own manuscript, *i.e.*, if it be reasonable, and I think in this case it is reasonable, to assume its preservation during the generation which had elapsed from the production of the play, *viz.*, in or about the winter of 1591-2. Perhaps we may for once assume the truth of Heminge and Condell's statement "To the great Variety of Readers" of the Folio, that they had "scarse received from him a blot in *his papers*."

In the Folio the play is divided into acts, but not into scenes, although "Scaena Prima" duly figures at the beginning of each act, with the exception, for no apparent reason, of the second; and the play is not furnished at the end with "the names of the actors," as in the case of *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Measure for Measure*, three of the four preceding "Comedies." We are left to conjecture the reason, which was probably sheer carelessness, if not too rapid work, on the part of the printers, and the want of any proper supervision; since there is ample room for the names on folio 100, the concluding page of the play. The *dramatis personæ*, however, were first added by Rowe in 1709.

The text, like that of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, has reached us in a state of comparative excellence, disfigured in places, however, by obvious omissions, corruptions and misprints; notably in the passages II. i. 109-113; II. ii. 190; IV. ii. 33; IV. iii. 13 and IV. iii. 73, 74. Some original—and imperative—emendations I have not hesitated to make; particularly, amongst others, *pelf* for the first *help* in I. i. 151; we talk with *fairies* in II. ii. 190; *swear it* in V. i. 26; *heavy* in V. i. 79; and the arrangement in two lines of the last three lines of the play, as the latter are printed in the Folio. These lines are, distinctly, “comic trimeters” or “fourteeners” or “rime dogerel,” as Chaucer called this metre; and the obvious and remarkable blunder of arranging them in *three* lines beyond doubt originated in the careless printing of the Folio, and has been, strangely enough, perpetuated, in most sheepish fashion, by every subsequent editor for close on two hundred years, *viz.*, since the first edition of Rowe in 1709.

The emendations of the present text, original or adopted, seem to fall, roughly speaking, into three classes; original emendations of the editor being distinguished by an asterisk, and the reasons for change being discussed in the notes.

(a) Instances of words or phrases having dropped out of the text:—

- * I. i. 61. We came aboard [*and put to sea, but scarce*].
- II. i. 112. And so no man that hath a name.
- * II. ii. 190. We talk with *fairies*, goblins, *elves* and sprites.
- * IV. i. 98. You sent me for a rope's end, *sir*, as soon.
- IV. ii. 29. Sweet *mistress*, now make haste.
- IV. ii. 33. A devil in an everlasting garment hath him *by the heel*.
- IV. iii. 13. What! have you got *rid* of the picture of old Adam.

- * iv. iii. 73. A rush, a hair, a drop of blood, [*a kiss,*
 A coll,] a pin, a nut, a cherry-stone.
- * iv. iv. 89. *And* God and the rope-maker bear me witness.
- * v. i. 26. These ears of mine, thou know'st, did hear thee *swear it*.
 v. i. 46. And much *much* different from the man he was.
- * v. i. 79. But moody, *heavy* and dull melancholy.
- * v. i. 235. *He did consent and* by the way we met.

(b) Instances of words wrongly introduced into the text :—

- * ii. ii. 118. Unless I spake, *or* look'd, *or* touch'd, or carved to thee.
- iii. i. 1. Good Signior Angelo, you must excuse us *all*.
- * iv. i. 87. And then, *Sir*, she bears away.
- * iv. ii. 4. Look'd he *or* red ? *or* pale ? or sad or merrily ?
 v. i. 174. My master preaches patience to him *and* the while.

(c) Instances of corruptions, metatheses of letters, faulty metrical arrangement of words or lines :—

- * i. i. 150. Therefore, merchant, I'll limit thee this day,
 To seek thy *help* by beneficial help.
- * iv. i. 69. Well, officer, arrest him at my suit. *I do* ;
 And charge you in the duke's name to obey me.
- * iv. ii. 56. If *an* hour meet a sergeant.
- * v. i. 424-5. Nay then thus : we . . . before another. (Two lines.)

The chronology of the plays is one of the most difficult and at the same time one of the most important subjects of Shakespearian study. Whilst it is difficult if not impossible to fix the date of composition, or production, of *The Errors* with absolute precision, it is still possible to arrive at conclusions which may be called fairly satisfactory ; at anyrate that in respect of date *The Errors* was one of the earliest, if not the very earliest, of the Comedies, and that it was probably untouched by the author after its first production. The evidence, on the whole, points to the winter of the year 1591-2

as being the most probable date. *The Errors* stands second in the list of Shakespeare's plays mentioned by Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, or *Wit's Treasurie*, completed for the press about June and entered on the Stationers' Register in September, 1598. He writes as follows: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and Tragedy among the Latines, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his *Gëtleme of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love Labors Lost*, his *Love Labours Wonne*, his *Midsummers Night Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice*; for tragedy, his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*." Meres here gives us the true title of the play, which is simply *The Errors*. The play then was clearly in existence before 1598. Further, it is highly probable that "his *Errors*," referred to by Meres, is identical with the "Comedy of Errors" mentioned in a somewhat rare book called *Gesta Grayorum; or the History of Henry, Prince of Purpoole*; printed by Nichols in *Progresses of Queen Elizabeth*, iii. 362 (ed. 1823). "Prince Henry" was Henry Helmes, a gentleman of Norfolk, the Lord of Misrule at Gray's Inn during the revels of 1594, and his full style is quaintly given as "The High and Mighty Prince Henry, Prince of Purpoole, Arch Duke of Stapulia and Bernardia, Duke of High and Nether Holborn, Marquis of St. Giles and Tottenham, Count Palatine of Bloomesbury and Clerkenwell, Great Lord of the Cantons of Islington, Kentish Town, Paddington and Knights-Bridge, Knight of the Most Heroical Order of the Helmet, and Sovereign of the same: who reigned and died

A.D. 1594."¹ This volume contains a contemporary account of the performance of *The Errors*. The particular references are as follows: "Besides the daily Revels and such like Sports, which were usual, there were intended divers Grand nights for the Entertainment of strangers." On the second grand night, 28th December, the players came over from Shoreditch to entertain the guests, but the spectators were too numerous to allow of proper space for the performance. The guests from the Temple retired "discontented and displeased. After their departure the throngs and tumults did somewhat cease, although so much of them continued as was able to disorder and confound any good Inventions whatsoever. In regard whereof, as also for that the sports intended were especially for the gracing the *Templarrians*, it was thought good not to offer anything of Account saving Dancing and Revelling with Gentlewomen; and after such sports, a *Comedy of Errors* (like to Plautus his *Menechmus*) was played by the Players; so that night was begun and continued to the end, in nothing but Confusion and Errors; whereupon it was ever afterwards called *The Night of Errors*." The expression "played by the Players" must have reference to a performance by the Chamberlain's servants, which was on the 28th December, the "servants" most probably including Shakespeare himself; and it is somewhat singular, as Fleay points out, in his *Life and Works of Shakespeare*, p. 125, that this performance should also have been given apparently by the same company as that which we know played before the Queen at Greenwich

¹ See *Gray's Inn, its History and Associations*, by W. R. Douthwaite, 1886.

on the same date and possibly in the same piece. It would undoubtedly, at anyrate from the business point of view, be so much more convenient for the company *not* to change the piece, that we may fairly regard Fleay's supposition as correct. "It may be assumed from the whole scope of the narrative [in the *Gesta Grayorum*] that the Comedy of Errors was not presented as a new piece. It was obviously put on as a makeshift," remarks Elton in his *William Shakespeare, his Family and Friends*, 1904, p. 198. But while put on as a makeshift, it was also obviously essential that the makeshift should be suitable to the occasion and to the audience. No piece could be selected for an audience of lawyers, scholars and university "wits" more suitable than a clever and recent piece like *The Errors*, founded as it was on a "classical" model, and preserving the unities and many of the situations of the Plautine play. If this be so, the first production of *The Errors* was clearly anterior to 1594; and the date 1591-2 is in great measure confirmed by one of the most important "internal" tests, *viz.*, the allusion in III. ii. 125, first pointed out by Theobald, to the civil war which was then raging in France. Dromio of Syracuse, describing the "wondrous fat" kitchen-wench to his master Antipholus of Syracuse, and replying to the latter's question in what part of her body he had found France, says, "In her forehead, armed and reverted, making war against her *heir*." Here the play upon *heir* and *hair* is obvious. Theobald illustrates one side of this with an historical fact. In 1589, Henry III. of France had appointed Henry of Navarre as his successor; and in 1593 the latter was acknowledged King of France as Henry IV.

In 1591 Elizabeth had sent an expedition under Sir John Norris and the Earl of Essex to Henry's aid—a step undoubtedly dictated by the popular enthusiasm in England for the Protestant cause. The jest in the play would have fallen flat after July, 1593, when peace was made; and the reference, to have any striking dramatic point, must have been penned sometime between 1589 and 1593; most probably in the autumn or winter of 1591-2, shortly after the expedition was sent, and when the event was still fresh in men's minds. Dr. Johnson emphasises the other, and ribald, side of the quibble, when he says, "Our author, in my opinion, only sports with an allusion, in which he takes too much delight, and means that his mistress had the French disease. The ideas are rather too offensive to be dilated. By a forehead *armed*, he means covered with incrustated eruptions: by *reverted*, he means having the hair turning backward." The reader may be left to judge for himself of the correctness and propriety of this explanation. The reference (III. ii. 140) to Spain sending "whole armadoes of caracks" naturally follows on the preceding reference to the civil war in France, and may well refer to the great Armada of 1588; and also tends to support an early date such as 1591-2. Shakespeare, as in the case of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* and other plays, was undoubtedly quick to discern and apply current events for his special dramatic purposes. In order, therefore, that this undoubted reference may have the necessary dramatic point, we must perforce hold that the play was written and produced shortly after the expedition of Norris and Essex in 1591. With reference to the anterior limit, 1589, it may be pointed out that

Shakespeare's use of the name Menaphon, in v. i. 367, "That most famous warrior, Duke Menaphon, your most renowned uncle," may possibly be a reminiscence of or derived from the title of Greene's *Menaphon*, which was published in 1589. Or Shakespeare may have taken the name directly from Menaphon, one of the "Persian Lords" in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*.

The popularity of Shakespeare's play was of some standing, if we may judge from another interesting reference to it in legal circles. A barrister named Manningham, describing certain revels at the Middle Temple, in a letter written in February, 1601-2, refers thus to the production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: "At our feast we had a play called Twelve Night, or what you will, much like the Comedy of Errores, or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni."

Further, internal evidence shows that, generally speaking, the play is marked by all the characteristics of Shakespeare's earliest manner. This appears from the comparatively timid and shadowy nature of his delineation of character in *The Errors* as contrasted with the firm and precise characterisation of his later period; from his partiality for rhymed verse and euphuistic conceits; and from the budding luxuriance of poetic fancy which is visible in the other earlier plays, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*.

Quatrains of alternate rhymes and rhyming couplets are introduced into *The Errors*, notably in the poetic love passages of Act III., as in other early plays just mentioned,

though to a somewhat less extent in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. These are the high water mark of his poetic achievement in *The Errors*. Such beautiful and harmonious lines as—

O, train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note,
To drown me in thy sister's flood of tears :
Sing, siren, for thyself, and I will dote :
Spread o'er the silver waves thy golden hairs, (III. ii. 45-48)

or,

No ;

It is thyself, mine own self's better part,
Mine eye's clear eye, my dear heart's dearer heart,
My food, my fortune, and my sweet hope's aim,
My sole earth's heaven, and my heaven's claim, (III. ii. 60-64)

are not far removed either in point of time or in point of excellence from the loftier and more sustained poetic pitch of the *Venus* and *Lucrece*.

On this poetic usage, Knight in vol. i. of his *Shakespeare*, p. 213, somewhat acutely remarks: "There was clearly a time in Shakespeare's poetical life when he delighted in this species of versification ; and in many of the instances in which he has employed it in the dramas we have mentioned [*Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*], the passages have somewhat of a fragmentary appearance, as if they were not originally cast in a dramatic mould, but were amongst those scattered thoughts of the young poet which had shaped themselves into verse, without a purpose beyond that of embodying his feeling of the beautiful and the harmonious. When the time arrived that he had fully dedicated himself to the great work of his life, he rarely ventured upon cultivating these

offshoots of his early versification. The doggerel was entirely rejected, the alternate rhymes no longer tempted him, by their music, to introduce a measure which is scarcely akin with the dramatic spirit—the couplet was adopted more and more sparingly—and he finally adheres to the blank verse which he may almost be said to have created—in his hands certainly the grandest as well as the sweetest form in which the highest thoughts were ever unfolded to listening humanity.”

Another characteristic of *The Errors*, and to a less degree of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, is the somewhat free use of the comic trimeter or so-called doggerel verses, the “rime dogerel” of Chaucer, already referred to, which Shakespeare almost always in *The Errors* puts in the mouths of the twin attendants, the Dromios. Roughly speaking, the trimeter occurs in this play in the following passages: II. ii. 47, 48, 202, 203; III. i. 11-83; III. ii. 146, 147; IV. i. 21; IV. ii. 29-62; V. i. 423-25; *i.e.*, something less than 100 lines in all, but still a fair proportion in a short play of less than 1800 lines. The trimeter appears to have had its origin in one of the metres of Plautus himself. It was not unknown to Chaucer, who employs what is probably a modification of it in his *Tale of Sir Thopas*; see *Canterbury Tales*, Group B, 1906-7 (4 Skeat, 197; 1 Pollard, 288):—

In bataille and in tourneyment,
His name was Sire Thopas.

But it is interesting to note that at line 2108 “*Heere the Hoost stynteth Chaucer of his Tale of Thopas*” in the following pun-gent lines:—

Min erës aken of thy drasty speche
 Now swiche a rym the diuel I biteche ! [*i.e.* commend to]
 This may wel be *rym dogerel*, quod he.

And see Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (*ante* 1589), "Such maner of Poesie is called in our vulgar *ryme dogrell*" (Arber, p. 89). The verse is a survival of the metres of the old moralities and it is used in other old plays by Shakespeare's immediate predecessors, such as *Damon and Pithias* (1564-5); *Like will to Like* (1568); *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (*ante* 1575), where it constitutes the great bulk of the dialogue; *Promos and Cassandra* (1578); *The Three Ladies of London* (1584); examples from which are quoted by Malone (see vol. 20, p. 462, of the *Variorum* of 1803). But Shakespeare seems to have used it in a rather free and irregular fashion. A reference to the "doggerel" passages in the play will show many trisyllabic feet, as well as differences between the halves of each verse, one being trochaic and the other iambic, or *vice versa*. Anapaestic feet are also not uncommon.

Further evidence of an early date appears in the frequent quibbles, the mild play upon words, and other modest quips and quaint conceits; and in certain passages suggestive of like passages in the other early plays. Examples of the latter are—II. ii. 201, where Luciana says: "If thou art changed to aught 'tis to an ass," vividly reminding us of Bottom's transformation or "translation," in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*; IV. i. 93, where Antipholus of Ephesus says to Dromio of Syracuse, "Why, thou peevish *sheep*, What *ship* of Epidamnum stays for me?" suggestive of *Love's Labour's Lost*, II. i. 219, where Maria says, "Two hot *sheeps*,

marry! *Boyet.* And wherefore not *ships?*" And Speed's pun in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I. i. 72:—

Twenty to one, then, he is *shipp'd* already,
And I have played the *sheep* in losing him.

Shakespeare was beyond doubt indebted, directly or indirectly, to the *Menaechmi* of Plautus for the general outline of his *Errors*, and, though in a much less degree, to the same Roman author's *Amphitryon*. Long before Shakespeare's time the favourite dramatic subject of mistaken identity had been utilised by many writers, in different European languages, in the various forms of translations, paraphrases and adaptations. But whether Shakespeare's debt to Plautus is direct or indirect is a matter somewhat difficult to determine. The question opens up the wider question of Shakespeare's knowledge of Latin, a subject which has recently been much discussed;¹ but which, in its general aspects, is beyond the scope of this Introduction. He may, of course, have gone direct to the original; but my opinion is distinctly against this view. I cannot believe that Shakespeare, probably owing to his early removal from the Stratford grammar school on account of his father's pecuniary embarrassments, ever obtained anything more than a very limited training in Latin at Stratford, or that he had, when engaged in active daily work in London, either the leisure or the inclination to resort to the Latin text, and a comparatively difficult Latin text at that, for his dramatic material, when, for all practical purposes, the material lay

¹ See, for example, an elaborate article by Professor Churton Collins in his *Studies in Shakespeare* (1904), Essay I., entitled "Shakespeare as a Classical Scholar."

ready to his hand in older plays and translations. "Feeding on nought but the crumbs that fall from the translator's trencher," to quote Nash's gibe in his preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, 1589, may well have its own special significance in Shakespeare's case. A painful and laborious resort to the Latin originals would have been directly contrary to all we know of his practical methods of work in the case of other plays. He was an actor in the first place. With his "fellowship in the cry of players" he was actively concerned in the management of his company's theatre; and he was a hard-working playwright, producing on an average two plays every year. And we have evidence enough to lead us to believe that he did not neglect his social advantages. It is therefore most difficult to believe that he would have wasted time over the mere acquisition of a plot or situations from a somewhat difficult Latin original. That he had abundant dramatic material in English available for all the purposes of his *Errors* is evident enough. A play now lost called "The Historie of Error" was "shown at Hampton Court on New Yere's daie at night 1576, 77, enacted by the children of Powles" (*i.e.* Pauls: see the *Variorum* of 1821, vol. iii, p. 387); and from this piece, as Malone remarks, "it is extremely probable that he was furnished with the fable of the present Comedy," as well as the designation of "Surreptus" or "Sereptus" appended to the name of *Ant. E.* in the Folio, and which is more fully referred to later on. Later, in 1582, this play recurs as the *History of Ferrar (sic)*, in the accounts of the Revels at Court, as a drama produced at Windsor; and it may well be conjectured that this "Historie of Error" was nothing but a free rendering of the *Menaechmi*