

## MR. ROLFE'S KING JOHN.\*

THIS is the sixteenth of this series of Shakespeare's plays; and in careful editing, in the exercise of a scholarly and conservative judgment in the text, in copious and useful annotation, in the excellent selection of critical and æsthetic comments, in accurate proof-reading and a full index, and in the taste and beauty of the publishers' work, the present volume is no whit behind its predecessors. The editor's work improves as the edition advances. The later plays are enriched with many bright character-comments, and clever exegetical annotations, from Cassell's edition, edited by the veteran Shakespearians, C. and M. C. Clarke; and, moreover, Mr. Rolfe has made advantageous use of the critical edition of the play by Mr. F. G. Fleay, recently published in the "Collins Series"; an excellent and elaborate work.

Of the beautiful and interesting historical play itself, here is not the place to speak. It was first printed in the 1623 folio, and presents but very few special difficulties in the text; the two principal puzzles being, one in Constance's speech (ii. i. 184):

That he's not only plagued for her sin,

etc., and the other in Pandulph's sophistical harangue to King Philip (iii. i. 280):

But thou hast sworn against religion,

etc. Here Mr. Rolfe, wisely, I think, abstains from offering any new conjectural emendations of the text; he selects what in his judgment seem to be the best readings and the best expositions, and appends in the notes some of the others, so that the student, if not satisfied, may choose for himself. In the latter passage, it has always been my opinion that the only trouble was in the punctuation; that a period had dropped out, in the folio text, after the word "unsure"; and that "thou art unsure" was an independent sentence, to be read with a strong accent on "un," "unsure" being in antithesis to "surety" of the preceding line. However, it would be a tame world if we all thought alike. We should then have no "Variorum" editions of Shakespeare or Milton. The old Latin adage,

*"Quot homines, tot sententiæ,"* is true;  
Our minds do differ, as our faces do;  
Did all the critics one opinion hold,  
One half the "Shakespeares" would not be sold.

For this reason I am always pained to observe, in the prefaces, any depreciatory remarks on the editions of other scholars. Mr. Rolfe's editions, and Mr. Hudson's editions, are both excellent, both scholarly,

both admirable. Although differing in their points of view regarding the best means of obtaining the greatest utility, both are useful, and both are doing "yeoman's service," as well for young as for more advanced students; and in both will the most accomplished Shakespearian find much that is original, instructive, and refreshing. There is room and verge enough not only for these, but for the "Clarendon," the "Rugby," the "Collins," and the "Hunter" series of the plays of Shakespeare; where we can have

Many for many virtues excellent;  
None but for some, and yet all different;

and, for myself, I should be the last to regret seeing thrice as many more "series," if put forth with the same masterly care, the same reverence for the great poet, and the same intelligent labor to make his imperishable works "known and understood of all men." To all such editions we bid a hearty God-speed!

JOSEPH CROSBY.

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\* Shakespeare's History of the Life and Death of King John. Edited, with notes, by William J. Rolfe, A. M. Harper & Brothers. 70c.