

PREFACE

THIS study of four of Shakespeare's plays was written for delivery as the Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto for the academic year 1948-9. Professor W. J. Alexander, who died in 1944, held the chair of English at University College Toronto from 1889 to 1926, and the lectureship was founded as a tribute to his distinction as teacher and scholar. The first series was delivered in 1929-30.

I wish to thank the Toronto authorities for honouring me by their invitation to give these lectures, and I am particularly grateful to Professor A. S. P. Woodhouse for his kindness and help in arranging the details of their delivery.

No student of Shakespeare's Problem Plays can fail to be indebted to W. W. Lawrence's *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (New York 1931). This book not only tells us things about these plays which we did not know or did not heed before, but by its vigour and charm induces us to read them with fresh eyes. As usual I have got much profit and stimulus from the relevant portions of Mark Van Doren's *Shakespeare* (New York 1939), even when I disagree (as I do immoderately over the style of *Troilus and Cressida* for instance). The brief critical remarks in Peter Alexander's *Shakespeare's Life and Art* (London 1939) have made me think and have helped me greatly. A memorable lecture by Hardin Craig on Shakespeare's bad poetry, delivered at Stratford-on-Avon in August 1947 and printed in the first volume of *Shakespeare Survey* (Cambridge 1948) has given me courage and auth-

ority to speak boldly on certain topics about which I might have been timid. For associating *Hamlet* with the three plays I mainly treat and not with *Othello* and the other later tragedies I can invoke the precedent of F. S. Boas in his *Shakespeare and his Predecessors*. It is but too easy to take E. K. Chambers's *William Shakespeare* (Oxford 1930) quite for granted: a kind of institution, used but not talked of. I make the effort not to take it for granted, and I record my debt to its constant utility.

Other debts will be acknowledged in the notes at the end of the different chapters.

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