

THE PROBLEM
OF
"HAMLET"

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BY

J. M. ROBERTSON

Author of "Shakespeare and Chapman,"
"The Baconian Heresy," etc.



LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C. 1

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First published in 1919

Государственная
Библиотека
СССР
им. В. И. Ленина

и 34486-50

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1922.8916

PREFACE

FOR some years, as a result of a lifetime rather largely devoted to Shakespeare study, the author has been engaged on a work on "The Canon of Shakespeare," designed to deal with all the problems coming under that title. In 1905 he precluded the undertaking with a volume entitled "Did Shakespeare write TITUS ANDRONICUS?" which, rewritten and greatly expanded, he hopes shortly to reissue as a practical introduction to the study of the entire "Canon." The whole ground, it is hoped, need not be covered on the same scale; and a number of the more problematic plays have been dealt with in sections of moderate length. The complete work, however—if the author should live to complete it—will inevitably be a bulky one; and he hopes, before putting it in a final form, to have the benefit of expert criticism of at least a number of the sections.

It is proposed, accordingly, to issue some of them separately. This course has already been begun by the publication of the volume SHAKESPEARE AND CHAPMAN (1917), which sets forth the most revolutionary of the critical inferences to which the author has thus far been led, and which involves a fresh consideration of the origins of a number of the Plays. One of those there referred to has since been fully discussed in the

paper on "The Problem of THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR," published for the Shakespeare Association (Chatto & Windus). The present volume, which reviews and attempts to resolve the most interesting and the most extensive debate relating to any of them, is submitted as an illustration of what is claimed to be the proper method of investigating all, for the given purpose.

Only since my MS. was put in the hands of the printer have I received Mr. J. Dover Wilson's interesting and valuable contributions to the inquiry entitled "The Copy for 'Hamlet,' 1603, and the 'Hamlet' Transcript, 1593" (A. Moring, Ltd., 1918). Coinciding, I think, in the main with my view, that investigation opens up several correlative questions; and I have thought it well to await the further inquiry promised by Mr. Wilson before attempting to connect his results with mine.

March 1919.