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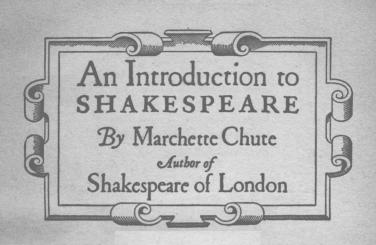
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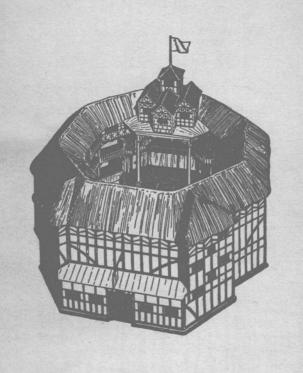
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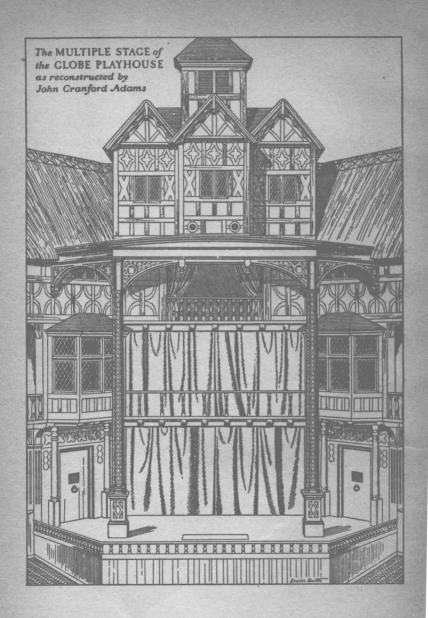
### By the Same Author

Rhymes About the City
Rhymes About the Country
The Innocent Wayfaring
Geoffrey Chaucer of England
Shakespeare of London
The Search for God

#### A Note about the Artist

Irwin Smith, who has drawn the frontispiece and the decoration for the half-title, gained his knowledge of the Globe Playhouse through four years of collaboration with Dr. John Cranford Adams, author of The Globe Playhouse: Its Design and Equipment. After the publication of his book in 1942, Dr. Adams began the construction of a scale-model of the Globe, and for four years Mr. Smith worked with him in bringing the model to completion. The finished model is now on exhibition at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, where it is attracting the attention of Shakespearean scholars and the lay public alike. It is upon this model that Mr. Smith's two drawings are based. Mr. Smith is currently working on a series of measured drawings of the Globe at the request of the Folger Shakespeare Library.



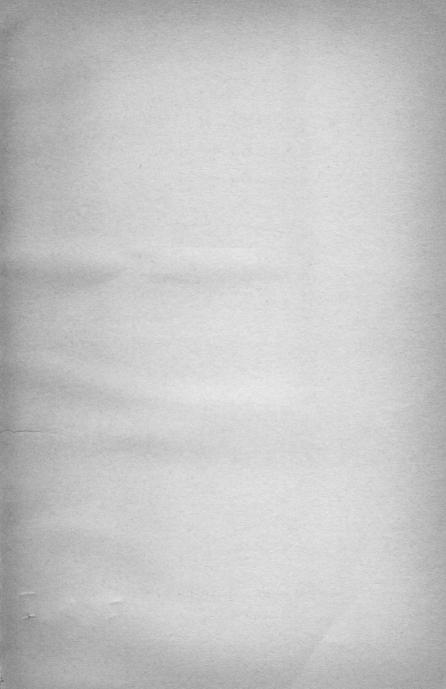


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For M.G.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO SHAKESPEARE

### Chapter 1

William Shakespeare was about four years old he had a chance to see his first play.

There had once been a yearly pageant in Stratford on St. George's Day, with a dragon that snorted fire made of real gunpowder. But the

dragon had been put away six years before Shakespeare was born, and there had been very little makebelieve in Stratford until the day the actors arrived.

The acting company came on horseback, bringing a wagon for their costumes and their swords, their feathers and their drums. They went first to the mayor, to ask his permission to put on plays in Stratford, and the mayor for that year happened to be Mr. John Shakespeare, William's father. The mayor not only gave his permission but also arranged for a payment of nine shillings out of the town funds so that the first show could be seen by everyone without charge.

The actors put on their first show in the town hall, which was easy to change into a theatre. The main room was long and narrow, and a scaffold could be set up at one end of it with rows of benches below. At right angles to it was a smaller room, which the actors could use for changing their costumes. They had a great many costumes, because there were usually only six men in a company and the plays called for as many as twenty characters. An actor could change himself from a

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tinker to a Roman senator in as much time as it took him to slip out of a leather jerkin and into a colored robe, and he had a whole collection of beards to help his disguises. The beard was tied on with strings hidden under his hat, and if the actor was appearing in a bedroom scene and had no excuse for wearing a hat, the strings of his beard could be hidden under his nightcap.

The benches in the main hall filled quickly, since there was no way to reserve seats and everyone wanted to see the show. In Bristol once, when the actors gave a show at the town hall, so many people tried to get in that they broke the iron bar on the door. The children of Stratford could not expect seats of their own, since there was hardly room enough for the grown-ups, but they were allowed to stand between their fathers' legs where they could see and hear very well.

When a trumpet blew, everyone knew that the play was ready to begin. The actors could not dim the lights and raise a curtain, since they had no stage lights and no curtain on their raised wooden scaffold. Instead, a single actor strode onstage; and, since there were no printed programs, he announced to the audience what the play was going to be about.

This actor was called the Prologue and he looked very stately in his glittering robes. His speech was in rhyme, for verse was much more popular than prose on the Elizabethan stage. The actors liked it, because it was easy to memorize, and the audiences liked it because it was so musical. A small company of actors did not have room to carry many musical instruments, except drums and trumpets, and the strong, rhythmical effects that the audiences loved came to them mostly through the verse. It could hardly be called poetry, since the men who wrote the plays were not poets. But the rhymed

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speeches sounded very effective when some impressively bearded actor boomed them forth to the awed listeners on the benches below.

The audience expected more than poetry in their plays. They also expected violent, realistic action. In a play called Horestes, for instance, a savage battle takes place outside the city walls, and the playwright makes clear in his stage directions that he expected the actors to stage a real fight. "Go and make your lively battle and let it be long, ere you can win the city." Except for the battle itself, the scene onstage would not have looked very realistic, since the city walls were portable ones, put up in full view of the interested audience, and the ancient Greeks were dressed in ordinary Elizabethan doublets. But no one in the audience objected to this as long as the play was exciting.

The only kind of realism the audience wanted was in the action itself, and if the action called for a head to be cut off they expected to see it happen. In a play called A New Tragical Comedy of Appius and Virginia, the heroine's head is cut off in full view of the audience. This was done through sleight-of-hand, with a bladder of animal blood and a carved property head, and the actors had to be very clever to make the substitution with the small boys in the audience watching alertly from the front benches. On the other hand, the author of this same play wanted to convince the audience that Virginia's death would always be remembered, and so an actor named Memory comes onstage carrying a small, portable tomb. The audience had no difficulty in accepting a realistic beheading in the same play with a symbolical Memory, any more than they objected to the fact that Memory, although she was supposed to be a woman, was played by a man. The

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plays of Shakespeare's boyhood were an extraordinary mixture of violent action and jokes, of blood and trumpets and moral maxims, and the playwright put in anything whatever that he thought might be effective.

The moral maxims were an important part of the show, since if each play had not taught a lesson of some kind the careful parents of Stratford would not have wished their children to go to the theatre. The Elizabethans had moral maxims everywhere, even printed across their wall decorations and in the children's school books, and each play was expected to teach a lesson. For instance, a play called The Cradle of Security told about a king who spent his time frolicking with beautiful ladies named Pride and Luxury until at last he was turned into a pig. A small boy in Gloucester saw the play when he was about Shakespeare's age and was so excited by the transformation scene that when he was a grown man he could still remember the color of the actors' costumes and the fact that it took three wires to fasten the pig mask over the king's head.

The plays in England had once been church plays, shown in the streets of the towns to act out stories from the Bible, and it was discovered very early that a small devil made a good comic character. This little devil came to be called the Vice, and he turns up under various names in the plays of this period. In one he is called Ambidexter, in another Inclination, and in another he is called Haphazard, but in each case he is the same character, a lively mischief-maker who gets the other members of the cast into as many difficulties as he can. The playwright did not want the small boys in the audience to go home with the monkey-like pranks of the Vice running through their heads and so he would close the play with moral