

PREFACE

THE aim of this work is to collect all the material (save the writings of Dryden) necessary for a thorough study of the development of English criticism in the seventeenth century, and to make this development more intelligible by annotation and comment. The collection begins where Professor Gregory Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays* left off; and Professor Ker's edition of the *Essays of Dryden* would make the inclusion of these a work of supererogation. The omission of the chief critic of the century may suggest an obvious analogy to *Hamlet* without the protagonist who gives it its name. But the attention of scholars has been centred too exclusively on this highly significant figure; he has overshadowed a considerable number of men whose work cannot be ignored without a loss of historical perspective. Their presence in this collection gives each an added significance in the chain of English criticism, and the new light which is shed on its history by their collocation would justify their editor against the charge that he has edited three volumes of Nobody 'On Nothing', even if Bacon and Jonson and Milton did not bear them company. The Restoration and the Revolution of 1688 disappear as cataclysms turning the domain of criticism and literary taste