

**SHAKESPEARE'S LEGAL
ACQUIREMENTS
CONSIDERED**

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Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements Considered by John Lord Campbell

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JOHN LORD CAMPBELL

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BY
JOHN LORD CAMPBELL, LL.D., F.R.S.E.

IN
A LETTER TO J. PAYNE COLLIER, Esq., F.S.A.

"Thou art clerkly, thou art clerkly!"

Merry Wives of Windsor.

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P R E F A C E .

WHEN my old and valued friend, Mr. Payne Collier, received the following Letter, which I wrote with a view to assist him in his Shakespearian lucubrations, he forthwith, in terms which I should like to copy if they were not so complimentary, strongly recommended me to print and publish it in my own name,—intimating that I might thus have “the glory of placing a *stone* on the lofty CAIRN of our immortal bard.” If he had said a “*pebble*,” the word would have been more appropriate. But the hope of making any addition, even if infinitesimally small, to this great national monument, is enough to induce me to follow my friend’s advice, although I am aware that by the attempt I shall be exposed to some peril. In



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pointing out Shakespeare's frequent use of law-phrases, and the strict propriety with which he always applies them, the CHIEF JUSTICE may be likened to the COBBLER, who, when shown the masterpiece of a great painter, representing the Pope surrounded by an interesting historical group, could not be prevailed upon to notice any beauty in the painting, except the skilful structure of a slipper worn by his Holiness.

Nevertheless I may meet with kinder critics, and some may think it right to countenance any effort to bring about a "fusion of Law and Literature," which, like "Law and Equity," have too long been kept apart in England.

STRATHEDEN HOUSE, Jan. 1, 1859.

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CALIFORNIA

SHAKESPEARE'S

LEGAL ACQUIREMENTS CONSIDERED.

To *J. Payne Collier, Esq.,*
Riverside, Maidenhead, Berks.

HARTRIGG, JEDBURGH, N. B.
September 15th, 1858.

MY DEAR MR. PAYNE COLLIER,

Knowing that I take great delight in Shakespeare's plays, and that I have paid some attention to the common law of this realm, and recollecting that both in my 'Lives of the Chancellors,' and in my 'Lives of the Chief Justices,' I have glanced at the subject of Shakespeare's legal acquirements, you demand rather peremptorily my opinion upon the question keenly agitated of late years; whether Shakespeare was a clerk in an at-

torney's office at Stratford before he joined the players in London?

From your indefatigable researches and your critical acumen, which have thrown so much new light upon the career of our unrivalled dramatist, I say, with entire sincerity, that there is no one so well qualified as yourself to speak authoritatively in this controversy, and I observe that in both the editions of your 'Life of Shakespeare' you are strongly inclined to the belief that the author of 'Hamlet' was employed some years in engrossing deeds, serving writs, and making out bills of costs.

However, as you seem to consider it still an open question, and as I have a little leisure during this long vacation, I cannot refuse to communicate to you my sentiments upon the subject, and I shall be happy if, from my professional knowledge and experience, I can afford you any information or throw out any hints which may be useful to you hereafter. I myself, at any rate, must derive some benefit from the task, as it will for a while drive from my mind the recollection of the wrang-