

THE TEMPLE OF JUSTICE IN ENGLAND—SHAKESPEARE AS A LAWYER.

same case. Observe again the oldest inhabitant in the boundary case mumbling the corner of a slab of seed-cake, and recounting how he "guv them 'ere lawyers as good as they sent." Watch the groom in the running-down action flirting with the highly confidential maid in the divorce suit. See the good-natured young man in the "light and air" proceedings, exhibiting his model to an apoplectic baby under pretence of its being a kind of glorified doll's house, and confess that here is the making of many books.

Of the gigantic honey-combs of offices set apart for chief clerks, registrars, masters and others, we have now no space to speak. They consist of almost countless rooms and corridors of appalling length, some of which are yet unexplored. There is, moreover, a sense of mystery about them, heightened by dreadful rumours to the effect that adventurous messengers, wandering down these dismal alleys and blazing the walls as they go, have come upon the bleaching skeletons of solicitors, who, losing all clue to the bright and cheerful outer world, have perished miserably of cold and hunger, starved to death in their own anthill.

Sed jam age, carpe viam et eusceptum pre-fice munus. Acceleremus. Gentle reader, come ye out into the light; for, though it be a little trying to the eyes at first, it will never do for us to stop here and learn to love darkness rather than light. *Discite iustitiam moniti.*

Some who are superstitious above all things have asked us what is the best day on which to go to law? We answer unhesitatingly, the first fine Monday in every alternate month which happens to fall on a Saint's day, and contemporaneously with a full moon, provided always that no sittings are going on, or vacations, or holidays and that such Monday does not fall on a day on which the British Museum, or National Gallery, or Sir John Soane's Museum is closed.—*Verb. sap.—Pump Court.*

SHAKESPEARE AS A LAWYER.

SOME years ago an article appeared in one of our leading magazines, the main purport of which was to prove that Shakespeare had gained his knowledge of law by serving as an attorney's clerk. However improbable and unacceptable such a conclusion may appear, the writer's argument looks comparatively sensible, when set side by side with the egregious fallacies propounded by certain doctors of divinity to prove that Shakespeare was a believer in this or that particular form of faith or grace.

Shakespeare, like his old friend Jack Falstaff, knew so many wonderful things "by instinct:" he worked so much away from himself, and in a world of so much mental activity, that it is idle and futile to endeavour to learn or deduce anything of his own life and personality from his works, which reflect only the lives and personalities of others. Still, his acquaintance with and knowledge of old English law and the legal life of his time are oftentimes so minute and so accurate that, if he were not Shakespeare, one might safely conclude that he must have had a wider experience of the ins and outs of court than an ordinary man would be likely to acquire in the ordinary run of life.

The gravedigger's scene in Hamlet affords a notable instance of Shakespeare's wonderful felicity in adapting to his work whatever came to his hand. The discussion which the clowns hold on the right of Ophelia to be "buried in Christian burial" is really a burlesque of an actual trial which took place just half a century before Hamlet was written.

On the accession of Mary Tudor, Sir James Hales, a puisne Judge of the Common Pleas, was indicted for having taken part in the plot to exclude Mary from the crown by placing Lady Jane Grey on the throne. However, he was shortly afterwards pardoned and released, but not before he had been frightened sufficiently to drive him out of his mind. After his release he attempted suicide by stabbing himself with a penknife; but this proving unsuccessful, he took the more effectual course of walking into a river. At the "crown's" inquest a verdict of *felo de se* was returned, and, according to the custom of the time, his body was to be buried