

of these used by Shakespeare existed prior to the composition and production of his works, and it is quite probable that, when he went to the Globe Theatre and assumed its management and proceeded to write plays, that he found there a number of manuscripts, some of which may have already been performed, and whose titles have come down to us, but the manuscripts of which have been either destroyed or have not come down to us. It seems likely that Shakespeare may have got much of his material from such a source, and that many of the inaccuracies in his plays may have been simply copied from these old manuscripts in the same manner that has been heretofore pointed out with reference to his faithful copying of inaccuracies in the *Salic Law* which he found in *Holinshed's Chronicles*.

Another source from which Shakespeare probably derived a considerable amount of his legal knowledge was through his faculty for absorbing all matters of moment. Prior to the reign of Henry VIII. the greater part of learning was confined to the keeping of the monasteries, and when they were despoiled under the reign of that monarch, their priests were scattered over the length and breadth of the land, and many of them naturally gravitated to the metropolis as the centre of population. These monks being thrown upon their own resources naturally tried to earn their own living, and so turned to teaching and the diffusion of knowledge, which, theretofore, had been kept within their own possession. About the time Shakespeare is credited with coming up to London, this diffusion of knowledge was at its zenith, and many legal treatises were first published—among which may be mentioned *Plowden's Commentaries* or *Reports*, *Marwood's Forest Law* in 1568, *Compton's*