



# Shakespeare and his Legal Problems

*George W. Keeton*

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## **Shakespeare and his Legal Problems** George W. Keeton

In this fascinating study, Keeton addresses general themes, such as the law of debt and the development of the common law (as demonstrated by Shylock), as well as specific topics like the trial of Hermione and the divorce of Queen Katherine. "This is a book for which there has been a real need for many years, and lawyers as well as laymen are greatly indebted to Mr. Keeton for this admirable treatment of his subject. For we should understand at the outset that Mr. Keeton's job might well have been done in a miserable fashion; and, in general, that the borderline subjects between law and literature have quite often been handled with a low grade of workmanship. For to write of the law as it is found in Shakespeare's plays, one must be a Shakespearian scholar, a trained lawyer, and a legal historian; and most important of all, one should handle this vast field of learning efficiently but not too ponderously. With all his learning Mr. Keeton never makes his erudition oppressive, and with all the mastery with which the subject is handled, he treats everything lightly and easily, so that the reader is hardly conscious of the wealth which he receives.": Paul L. Sayre, *Iowa Law Review* 17 (1931-1932) 146-47. "Although I do not think that any notice by me is required, yet I cannot but commend this little book to all who may incline to learn something of the law as Shakespeare knew it, and are curious regarding the use he made of legal procedure in his plays. For my own part I have found especially interesting and profitable, Mr. Keeton's examination of the cause of Shylock and Antonio, his explanation of the various arguments employed by Portia, and his conjectures concerning the absence of other contentions who relevance, at a first glance, may appear sufficient to have justified their submission to the judgement of the Doge. As it is, the speech of Portia would perhaps more closely resemble the addresses to which juries are privileged to listen did it contain more false points than it does." --From the preface by the Rt. Hon. Lord Darling "Mr. Keeton's studies will be found instructive and interesting in various degrees by readers who know their Shakespeare but are not learned in the law, by lawyers who want an occasion for improving their knowledge of Shakespeare and sharpening their wits, and by Shakespearean students of all sorts. It is no great matter whether they agree with all his conclusions or not, for at any rate he knows what he is talking about and will make them think." --Sir Frederick Pollock, *Law Quarterly Review* 46 (1930) 522

George W. Keeton was a barrister of Gray's Inn, where he was the Bacon Scholar, Foundation Scholar in Law of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and Senior Lecturer in Law at the Victoria University of Manchester. A remarkably prolific author, he published notable works on charities, equity, legal history, trusts and international law.

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