

**THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
KING JOHN, WITH AN
INTRODUCTION AND
NOTES**

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The Life and Death of King John, With an Introduction and Notes by William Shakespeare & K. Deighton

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & K. DEIGHTON

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SHAKESPEARE

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BY

K. DEIGHTON

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	vii
KING JOHN,	1
NOTES,	83
INDEX TO NOTES,	184

2 L⁷ 1/2 3

INTRODUCTION.

INTERNAL evidence as to structure of verse, tone of thought, style of composition, as well as allusions, real or supposed, to contemporary events, have all been appealed to in the endeavour to fix the date at which *King John* was written; but all we know is that it is first mentioned by Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, published in 1598. Date of Composition.

Apart from history, the play is founded on an earlier one, by an unknown writer, entitled *The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England, with the discoverie of King Richard Cordelions base sonne* (vulgarly called, *The Bastard Fauconbridge*): also the death of King John at Swinstead Abbey, etc., which was first printed in 1591. Source.

The play opens at Northampton, with the demand made by the King of France, through his ambassador, that John should relinquish, in favour of Arthur, the throne of England and Ireland, as well as the French fiefs of Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine. This demand is accompanied by the threat of war in case of refusal, a threat which John meets with haughty defiance and preparation for the invasion of France. On the departure of the ambassador, we are introduced to a quarrel between two brothers, the reputed sons of Sir Robert Faulconbridge, the younger of whom claims his father's Outline of the Play.
Act I.

estate on the ground that his brother was an illegitimate son of his mother by Richard Cœur-de-lion. On their being brought before the King to have their dispute decided, both John and his mother, ^{Elinor} remark upon the strong likeness which the younger brother bears to Richard; and he, on being asked by the latter whether he is willing to forsake his fortune and follow her, joyfully assents, having apparently been long convinced of his true parentage. He is then knighted by John as Sir Richard Faulconbridge, in place of his baptismal name Philip. Almost immediately afterwards his mother, who had heard of the quarrel between the brothers, and angrily followed them to assert her good name, is brought to confess that she had been seduced by Richard during her husband's absence in Germany, and that her • eldest son was the result of the intrigue.

Act II. At the beginning of the second Act, Philip, King of France, with his son, Lewis, and the Archduke of Austria, is preparing to besiege the city of Angiers, which refuses to acknowledge Arthur's right, when John appears on the scene with an English army. After mutual recriminations, each king appeals to the citizens of the place to admit his claim, John for himself, Philip on behalf of Arthur. On their refusal, an indecisive engagement takes place between the two armies, at the close of which the Bastard suggests that, uniting their powers, the two kings should first bring the city into submission, and then continue the contest to decide to which of them the city shall belong. The suggestion is approved; but while preparations are being made to carry the agreement into effect, one of the chief citizens proposes a settlement of the quarrel by the marriage of

Blanch, niece to John, with Lewis, the Dauphin. To this proposal Philip and John assent, the latter agreeing to bestow Anjou, Touraine, Maine, and Poitiers upon Blanch, as a dowry, while, as a sop to Constance and his own conscience, he proposes to create Arthur Duke of Bretagne and Earl of Richmond, and to make over to him the city of Angiers. The Act then closes with preparations for the wedding.

The third Act introduces Salisbury bearing to Constance the tidings of the agreement that had been entered into; and upon the entrance of the two Kings, Elinor, etc., a fierce contest of words takes place between the mother and the grandmother of Arthur, the former bitterly reproaching Philip and Austria for having abandoned her son's cause. While these recriminations are going on, Pandolph, the Pope's legate, appears upon the scene, demanding of John his reason for refusing to acknowledge Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury. The King, defying the Pope, is at once excommunicated by the legate, while Philip is bidden, on pain of the Church's curse, to break off all league with him, and to show his obedience to the Pope by making war upon the "arch-heretic." Philip reluctantly obeys, and the first Scene ends with preparation on both sides for the conflict. The second Scene merely brings in the Bastard, bearing the head of the Archduke whom he had killed; and John, who in the engagement had taken Arthur captive, making him over to the custody of Hubert de Burgh, a Norman knight devoted to the King. In the third Scene the Bastard is commissioned by John to return to England and wring from the clergy their hoarded treasures in order to meet the expenses of

the war. On his departure, the king breaks with Hubert as to Arthur's murder, which with little demur Hubert undertakes to bring about. The fourth Scene is mainly taken up with Constance's lamentations for her son, now torn from her, and with Pandulph's persuasion of Lewis to invade England.

Act IV. With the fourth Act we come to the Scene between Hubert and Arthur, whose eyes the former is preparing to have burnt out in order to render impossible his coming to the throne. Arthur's pleadings, however, soften Hubert's heart, and he renounces his project. In the second Scene John, newly re-crowned, is urged by Pembroke and Salisbury to give Arthur his liberty, and has scarcely promised to do so, when Hubert, entering, tells him privately of Arthur's death. On his announcing these tidings to the lords, they throw off their allegiance and quit his presence. A messenger then appears with news of the French invasion under Lewis, and immediately afterwards the Bastard returns to report the result of his commission to plunder the abbeys, bringing with him a hermit whom he had arrested for prophesying that before Ascension Day the King would yield up his crown. John, having ordered the hermit to be taken to prison, and to be put to death on the day to which his prophecy referred, gives the Bastard the task of trying to reconcile the revolted peers. On his departure, Hubert enters; and, telling the King that Arthur is still alive, is ordered to communicate the fact to the peers with all possible speed. The third Scene opens with Arthur's death in his attempted escape from prison. The peers in consultation about joining Lewis, are met by the Bastard, who calls upon them to return to the

King. He has hardly delivered his message, when they come upon Arthur's dead body outside the castle walls; and Hubert, entering, is accused by them of the deed. An angry colloquy ensues, at the end of which Hubert is ordered to take up Arthur's body for burial, and the Bastard proceeds to rejoin the King.

By this time John, frightened out of his obstinacy by Act V. the menacing attitude of his subjects, determines to make submission to the Pope, and yields up his crown, which is then returned to him by the legate. The Bastard enters with news that the nobles refuse to return, and that the people are welcoming the Dauphin. At the King's entreaty, Pandulph goes off with the object of persuading Lewis to make peace, while John, utterly unnerved, leaves the Bastard to make preparations for the defence of the country. The second Scene describes the compact between the revolted lords and the Dauphin, and the legate's unsuccessful endeavour to persuade the latter to return to France. In the third Scene, John enters from the field of battle, prostrate with fever, and is borne off in a litter to Swinstead Abbey. In the fourth Scene, another part of the field is shown, in which the French lord, Melun, persuades Salisbury, Pembroke, and Bigot, to abandon Lewis, whose intention is to put them to death at the close of the battle, and to return to the King. In the fifth, the Dauphin, boasting of his success in the battle, is informed of the falling off of these lords, and of the wreck of his expected reinforcements on the Goodwin Sands. Meanwhile the King has been poisoned by a monk, and Hubert, in the death scene, seeks out the Bastard to inform him of this fact. Together they hasten to Swinstead, when, in the seventh