

**'THE TROUBLESOME REIGN OF
KING JOHN': BEING THE
ORIGINAL OF SHAKESPEARE'S
'LIFE AND DEATH OF KING JOHN'**

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'The Troublesome reign of King John': being the original of Shakespeare's 'Life and death of King John' by F. J. Furnivall & John Munro

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THOMAS FULLER ON SHAKESPEARE

HE was an eminent instance of the truth of that Rule, *Poeta non fit, sed nascitur*; one is not *made*, but *born* a Poet. Indeed, his Learning was very little, so that, as Cornish diamonds are not polished by any Lapidary, but are pointed and smoothed even as they are taken out of the Earth, so nature itself was all the art which was used upon him.

Many were the wit-combats betwixt him and Ben Jonson; which two I behold like a Spanish great Gallion and an English man of War: Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in Learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man of War, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his Wit and Invention.

*The History of the Worthies of England:
Warwicksbire: 1662: p. 126.*



INTRODUCTION

Authorship.—The publisher of the 2nd Quarto of this play, in 1611, John Helme, put on its title-page that it was "Written by W. Sh." The publisher of the 3rd Quarto in 1622 altered this into "Written by W. Shakespeare."

The Editor of the 1764 reprint of the 2nd, or 1611, Quarto calls it in his Preface, "the first work probably of the great man whose name it bears [W. Sh.], and whose genuine performance it most unquestionably is." He adds, "'Tis somewhat remarkable that the several editors of *Shakespeare* should have so totally unnoticed this work, as not to have told their readers that it contains nothing to be met with in any of their several editions. *Theobald* and *Warburton* have given us the title in their several lists of his Writings, but make no mention of this particular . . . thus far is indisputable, that this is his earliest publication, and the only one of the year in which it was published" (sign. A 2 bk.).

"The present work will be found to contain many speeches worthy of its author; and there is much singular humour in those of the bastard; particularly in the ballad-metre dialogue betwixt him and the friar" (sign. A 3).¹

Malone attributed *The Troublesome Reign* to Marlowe, and on his authority the British Museum Catalogue has entered it under Marlowe, after a line drawn between it and his genuine works, as "Written by W. Sh[akspere. Attributed by Malone to Christopher Marlowe]." Of which Mr. Fleay's version is, "Yet in the British Museum Catalogue Marlowe is given as the probable author." This and like entries are made, says Mr. Barwick, only for the convenience of readers, who, seeing Malone's statement, would naturally turn to "Marlowe" for the play.

This practical joke of attributing the play to Shakspeare was modified by Pope, who, "in one of his Notes," as Steevens says, "affirms the old Play to have been written by Shakespeare and Rowley;"² and in 1878 it was

¹ The little volume "Miscellaneous Pieces of Antient English Poesie." [See below, p. xiv.]

² *The troublesome reign of K. John was written in two parts by W. Shakespeare and W. Rowley, and printed in 1611.*—Pope, *Works of Shakspear*, iii, 115 n. A.D. 1723.

transformed by Mr. Fleay into the statement that only "the platform or plot of the play" was due to Shakspeare (*K. John*, p. 11), while Greene, Peele and Lodge wrote it (*ib.* p. 34).¹

These guesses we need not trouble about. Nothing is known of the plotter or author, or authors, of the play, and no convincing arguments with regard to them have been brought forward. It is enough for us to know that Shakspeare cared enough for *The Troublesome Reign* to remodel it into his *King John*, and that he did

¹ [Sir Sidney Lee in his introduction to *Leir* (Shakespeare Classics), p. xxxiii, draws attention to the similarity between the "bluff breezy-tempered" Mumford of that play and the Bastard of *King John*. The comparison is a singularly happy one. With the theory of identity of authorship in *Leir* and *Lochnie* I can only disagree absolutely; but the Mumford-Bastard link is only one of a number between *Leir* and *The Troublesome Reign*. Both plays exhibit the same admixture of religion and ribaldry. Both possess singular verbs in plural cases. The verse in each case has the same characteristics of flat pedestrianism and classical allusions in tragic circumstances. The murderer in each play is provided with a letter which he shows to his victims, and the victims prevail upon the murderer with arguments on "everlasting torments" in "grisly hell." The Bastard-Limoges wrangle is equivalent to the Mumford-Cambria wrangle; and the same interludes of farce in prose are provided. Ragan, like Constance, is desirous "with these nails" to "scratch out her [enemy's] hateful eyes." A perusal of the plays is very persuasive that the same author wrote them.—J. M.]