

**THE LIFE AND DEATH
OF KING JOHN. EDITED
BY IVOR B. JOHN**

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The life and death of King John. Edited by Ivor B. John by William Shakespeare

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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OF KING JOHN. EDITED
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THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE
GENERAL EDITOR: W. J. CRAIG

THE LIFE AND DEATH
or
KING JOHN



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THE WORKS
OF
SHAKESPEARE

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
KING JOHN

EDITED BY
IVOR B. JOHN



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INTRODUCTION

THE reign of King John seems to have had considerable attraction for English dramatic writers. Some time before 1563, and probably not earlier than 1548, John Bale, Bishop of Ossory (*b.* 1495, *d.* 1563), had seized upon the subject as a weapon with which to attack the Papists. While still preserving the form and methods of the Morality play, the zealous bishop introduced into his *Kyng Johan* a certain amount of the historical element; for we find King John represented as the champion of Protestantism endeavouring to aid "Ynglond" in shaking off the chains of Papacy. For this he is excommunicated and the country is laid under an interdict, while invasion is threatened by the French, Spaniards and Northmen in aid of the Papal cause. To save his country from these accumulated horrors John submits to the Pope, but is poisoned by "Dyssymulacyon," otherwise "Simon of Swinsett," and dies a Protestant martyr.

With the exception of the King the characters of this play are little better than the personified abstractions of the Morality, who occupy their time in religious and political discussions while the action is at a standstill. Dramatic propriety of any kind is entirely wanting throughout.

Though ineffably tedious to read at the present day,