

Yet I alone, alone do me oppose

Against the pope, and count his friends my foes."

In John's mouth some of these utterances are an anachronism; but they were words well fitted to express the views of Henry Tudor and his courageous daughter. It is evident that, for the time at least, Shakespeare identified the cause of King John with the cause of Elizabeth,

It is the honor of England that Shakespeare has at heart throughout, John's purpose to have Arthur murdered is almost blotted from the record against him by his vigorous protest against Hubert's ready consent to his bloody suggestion. Why is this effort made to soften the impression of the king's deadly intent? Unquestionably, that we may be able to keep some sympathy with him in his struggle against foreign invasion.

All the particulars in John's history that might tell against him are softened. The surrender to the pope's legate is presented as a private treaty in the palace. Faulconbridge, the representative of genuine English spirit, genial, joyous, humorous, brave, and loyal, treats the king's submission to Rome as a needless yielding to the seeming exigencies of the moment, and is ready to make the fight with the foreigner without any abatement of the odds against the royal side. The regrets of Salisbury in following the banner of the French prince are made to further the same general design of exalting patriotism. John's despicable character is, as far as possible, divested of its harshest and ugliest lineaments, to throw into as strong a light as may be, the duty of standing by the English sovereign against the foreign invader. It was the spirit that had saved Elizabeth from the machinations of those who were perpetually plotting in behalf of Mary, Queen of Scots, and from the mighty invasion of Philip of Spain. It was the spirit that Shakespeare had imbibed in his boyhood and that we find dominant in all his historical plays. It was the spirit that inspired Spenser's great poem, and that Kingsley so well expresses in the fiery enthusiasm of the young Englishmen of Devon he brings us acquainted with in *Westward Ho!* It was the spirit that Raleigh still possessed when he set out from his prison in London Tower to rescue Eldorado from the Spaniard and the pope.

It is this that prompts in our play the use of the story that the French prince meditated destruction for his English allies in the event of success. It is this that prompts the suggestion that King John was poisoned by a monk.

While there is a touch of retribution for his many frailties in the horror of his death, I cannot but think that there is also some pity in the breast of him who put these heart-rending words into the hapless king's dying mouth:

"Poisoned—ill fare—dead, forsook, cast off:

And none of you will bid the winter come

To thrust his icy fingers in my maw,

Nor let my kingdom's rivers take their course

Through my burn'd bosom, nor intreat the north

To make his bleak winds kiss my parched lips

And comfort me with cold, I do not ask you much,

I beg cold comfort; and you are so straight

And so ingrateful, you deny me that."

The keynote to the whole play and to Shakespeare's conception of King John is contained in stout Faulconbridge's closing words:

"This England never did, nor never shall,

Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,

But when it first did help to wound itself.

Now these her princes are come home again,

Come the three corners of the world in arms,

And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,

If England to itself do rest but true."

To Shakespeare and to the Englishmen of his day there can be little doubt that, with all his faults, John Plantagenet was the prince who had contended with two foreign powers, Rome and France. To us, who know better the history of his age and the character of the man, it is perhaps natural that he should seem the incarnation of all that was vile in the blood of Fulk, the Black, the wicked count of Anjou, and

we are well prepared to give our adherence to the words with which the historian Green sums up his estimate of King John:

"The closer study of John's history clears away the charges of sloth and incapacity with which men tried to explain the greatness of his fall. The awful lesson of his life rests on the fact that the king who lost Normandy, became the vassal of the pope, and perished in a struggle of despair against English freedom, was so weak and indolent voluptuary, but the ablest and most ruthless of the Angevins."

Yet, when we come to read Shakespeare, we must be careful to remember that he and the men of his time saw him from a wholly different point of view.

The two scenes in which he is alone with Hubert, the one in which he tempts him to the murder of the young prince and the one in which he upbraids him for doing his wicked will, are among the most masterly to be found in Shakespeare. They have been often analyzed and commented on. Metaphysicians, discussing the subtleties of the human brain and will; divines, setting forth the depravity and deceitfulness of the heart of man; counsel learned in the law illustrating the devious ways of crime, have all appealed to the passages as the very witness of nature.

The terrible half-whispered monosyllable, "death," has at once the great opportunity and the despair of actors.

The common view is to regard John's upbraidings of Hubert as intended to be taken by the audience as insincere and only expressing the natural longing to have the means to win back his lords again. To my mind this is not all of Shakespeare's meaning, which is rather to mitigate the horror inspired by John's intended crime and to put him in a better light before the audience, who are not expected wholly to lose sympathy with him.

Read over the passionate words of reproach, with this idea in mind, and it will be seen that there is some warrant for it:

"It is the curse of kings to be attended

By slaves that take their humors for a warrant

To break within the bloody house of life,

And on the winking of authority

To understand a law, to know the meaning

Of dangerous majesty, when perchance it frowns

More upon humor than advised respect.

"O, when the last account 'twixt heaven and earth

Is to be made, then shall this hand and seal

Witness against us to damnation!

How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds

Make deeds ill done! Hadst not thou been by,

A fellow by the hand of nature mark'd,

Quoted and signed to a deed of shame,

This murder had not come into my mind;

But taking note of thy abhorred aspect,

Finding thee fit for bloody villainy,

Apt, liable to be employed in danger,

I faintly broke with thee of Arthur's death;

And thou, to be endeared to a king,

Made it no conscience to destroy a prince.

Hadst thou but shook thy head or made a pause

When I spake darkly what I purposed,

Or turned an eye of doubt upon my face,

As bid me tell my tale in express words,

Deep shame had struck me dumb, made me break off,

And those thy fears might have wrought fears in me:

But thou didst understand me by my signs,

And didst in signs again parley with sin;

Yea, without stop, didst let thy heart consent,

And consequently thy rude hand to act

The deed, which both our tongues hold.

So much for his accusation of Hubert, bitter, eloquent, unquestionably meant by Shakespeare to be, for the time at least, the earnest utterance of a troubled heart. Now, note the confession of remorseful feelings, that need not have been expressed but for Shakespeare's purpose that the distressed king should have some of our sympathies:

"My nobles leave me; and my state is braved,

Even at my gates, with ranks of foreign powers;

Nay, in the body of this fleshly land,

This kingdom, this confine of blood and breath,

Hostility and civil tumult reigns

Between my conscience and my cousin's death."

To which Hubert pertinently replies:

"Arm you against your other enemies,

I'll make a peace between your soul and you."

It is in consonance with this intention to represent John