

# MACBETH

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649456208

Macbeth by William Shakespeare & Samuel Thurber

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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & SAMUEL THURBER**

# **MACBETH**



The Academy Series of English Classics

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*SHAKESPEARE*

M A C B E T H



EDITED BY

SAMUEL THURBER



Boston

ALLYN AND BACON

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Clayton Press  
H. W. PLINTON & CO., PRINTERS & BINDERS,  
NORWOOD, MASS., U.S.A.

01571895

## PREFACE.

THE longer I teach English literature, the clearer grows my conviction that what young students of this subject need is guidance and stimulus to self-help rather than large supplies of direct information. Hence I have always disapproved,—and I disapprove to-day more strongly than ever,—of the practice of appending to English texts full elucidations of the difficulties that may check a reader's progress. For I believe that for a reader to have his progress checked, and to find himself reduced to the necessity of thinking, investigating, comparing and remembering, is educationally a most wholesome and desirable consummation. A recitation abounding in prompt and correct answers, furnished forth from the stores of the memory, is a thing to be guarded against: its smoothness is a delusion and a snare. The matter in hand is to receive light from many sources. The pedagogic art consists in focusing upon a point as many rays as a score or two of vigorous and prepared minds can give out from their stores of discoveries and conjectures.

In accordance with these convictions I have prepared this edition of *Macbeth*. Conceding so much to custom and convenience, I have called by the name of *notes* a body of matter which I have added to the text of the play: but it will be seen that these notes are, strictly, not notes at all in the conventional sense, but rather *queries*; not giving answers, but calling for them; prompting to vigi-

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lance, rather than begetting heedlessness by making vigilance unnecessary. Long habituation to information-giving notes fosters that feeling of security which is mortals' chiefest enemy. The habit of querying and responding to queries issues in scholarship. The scholar knows how to go to work. He has begun to feel at home in literature. He has learned to carry his difficulty in his mind for a season, knowing that its solution is sure.

My notes therefore are queries; with here and there a conventional note to set forth a point I deemed too remote from the range of search possible to youth. I have printed here a considerable number of the questions I would ask, and the topics for exploration I would assign, on the play of *Macbeth*. By no means, however, would I be understood as having exhausted, — or come anywhere near exhausting, — the stock of possible class-room questioning on this play. It will be easy to think of knotty Shakespearian problems much more perplexing than any I have broached. I may say, however, that I have meant, by my queries, to indicate how far it seems to me in high schools desirable to push the discussion of Shakespearian difficulties. The scope of possible querying among the easier subjects is of course practically unlimited.

To facilitate juvenile research in Shakespeare, the first requisite is free access to the *Globe* edition of the poet's works. The school should possess Globes enough for the pupils to use without restriction, some carrying the books home at night, and others finding their chance in the study hours. The Crowell Globe Shakespeare is not a handsome book, but it is cheap. The Macmillan Globe costs twice as much and is all of twice as good.



It will be seen that I have laid emphasis on the study of Shakespeare's *rhythm*. The study of English metric has been, in secondary education, most grievously neglected. I find that an ear for rhythm, even in communities reputed highly cultivated, and especially devoted to music, is almost non-existent. Multitudes of girls play the piano: but hardly one in a hundred reads verse. Multitudes sing: but the speaking voice has run wild, and rarely betrays literary culture. This is a defect in our education which I do not perceive that our pedagogical theorists recognize or care about.

But whatever may be the case in educational theory, in literary study it is to be said that vocal expression, the faculty of surrender to verse movement, the power to modulate the voice in harmony with the artistic presentation of emotion, is an element of culture of the very first importance. Notes and queries will be of but slight avail in the teaching of the art of vocal expression. Nothing will suffice here but the skill of the teacher in opening to responsive minds the secrets of poetic meaning, and in setting the living example with his own voice.

What seemed feasible in printed note or query I have, within the limited scope of my plan, undertaken to do. The Shakespearian verse is normally iambic with five accents. Departures from this norm, except in the confessed short lines, are rare, unless the poet has an obvious dramatic purpose to subserve by a change of rhythm. Thus there has been frequent occasion for calling attention to peculiarities of the Shakespearian verse management, and, occasionally, for warning against misplacement of emphasis, or against conceiving a speech wrongly as regards its tone.

Pupils genuinely interested in a play will naturally desire to distribute roles, commit the parts to memory, and enact scenes. For this exercise opportunity should be given to the fullest possible extent. If young people are expected to resort to laboratories and perform experiments in physics and chemistry, by precisely equal rights and for similar purposes they should mount the stage and assume the Shakespearian characters. The one procedure is as serious, as genuine, as deeply related to culture, as the other. The prepossession by which we regard a chemical experiment as serious business, and a histrionic experiment as merely amusing, worthy only of an hour after the school session is over, is an unfounded prejudice which must be overcome before we can begin to have great improvement in reading in our schools.

To aid in some measure the assignment of parts, I have given at the end of the book a list of the persons of the drama, with the scenes in which they appear.

As all high school pupils study some foreign language, ancient or modern, and a few are studying Old English, I have considered it right to give, on occasion, a note or a query of a purely philological nature. Pupils like, very reasonably, to apply to any subject the knowledge they have gained in some other subject. When their Latin, their German, or their French will throw light on a Shakespearian word or phrase, they should turn aside from questions purely dramatic, to discuss a point of philology. It is strange how some Shakespearians have dreaded the study of the poet's language, as if this study threw a blight upon appreciation of his literary art. Some Latin and French being taken for granted, the best preparation for the study of Shakespeare is an acquaint-

ance with the pre-Elizabethan language and literature; and though high school pupils will seldom have this knowledge, the teacher certainly always should.

Macbeth is usually read early in the school course, and classes occupied with this tragedy will ordinarily have read only one or two other plays. Where this is the case, it will be unprofitable to undertake much comparative study of plays with plays, or to enter largely upon consideration of the development of the poet's language and versification in the successive stages of his career. These subjects are extremely interesting, but in their very nature imply the possession of more data of knowledge than the beginner can possibly command. The habit of reading without understanding, or of accepting results without having followed the processes by which the results were reached, is not to be commended.

The main thing in dealing with a play of Shakespeare in school is to induce pupils to read it forcibly and sympathetically; to enable them to perceive and appreciate the development of character in the chief personages, and to describe this development in appropriate terms; to teach them to note the collisions of passions and interests, and the effects of these collisions on human careers; to let them repeat the majestic language till it sinks indelibly into the memory; to lead them to study the poet's unapproachable diction till they come to feel, at least in some slight degree, what is the inexpressible and elusive secret of poetry itself.

SAMUEL THURBER.

*Girls' High School,*  
BOSTON, March, 1896.