

SHAKESPEARE'S MACBETH

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Shakespeare's Macbeth by William Shakespeare & Charles W. French

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & CHARLES W. FRENCH

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE'S
MACBETH

EDITED WITH NOTES AND AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF THE PLAY

MACBETH is the only one of Shakespeare's plays which is based upon episodes in Scottish history. While it is not in any sense an historical drama, the materials which form the groundwork of the plot were taken from Holinshed's Chronicles, to which Shakespeare went for the themes of no less than ten of his plays. While Macbeth is to be studied mainly for its tragic interest and its moral lessons, it will be interesting for the student to compare the bare historic materials with the rich life history into which the artist-poet has elaborated them. For this purpose the more important passages from Holinshed which Shakespeare made use of are given below.

Duncan, king of Scotland, who is introduced to us in the first act, succeeded his grandfather, Malcolm II., in 1031. The historic time embraced in the play begins in 1040, when Duncan was slain, and ends with

Macbeth's defeat by Siward, on July 27, 1054. The historic Macbeth, however, escaped from the battle and was killed in August, 1057.

ACT I, SCENE II¹

"After Malcolme succeeded his nephue Duncane the sonne of his daughter Beatrice: for Malcome had two daughters, the one which was this Beatrice, being given in marriage with one Abbanath Crinen, a man of great nobilitie, and thane of the Iles and west parts of Scotland, bare of that marriage the foresaid Duncane; the other, called Doada, was married unto Sinell, the thane of Glamis, by whom she had issue one Makbeth a valiant gentleman, and one that if he had not beene somewhat cruell of nature, might have beene thought most worthy the government of a realme. On the other part, Duncane was so soft and gentle of nature, that the people wished the inclinations and maners of these two cousins to have beene so tempered and interchangeblie bestowed betwixt them, that where the one had too much of clemencie, and the other of crueltie, the meane vertex betwixt these two extremities might have reigned by indiffer-

¹In the following pages the selections, all of which are taken from Holinshed's Chronicles, are arranged by acts and scenes in regular order.

ent partition in them both, so should Duncane have proved a courtly king, and Makbeth an excellent capteine. The beginning of Duncane's reign was verie quiet and peaceable, without anie notable trouble; but after it was perceived how negligent he was in punishing offenders, manie misruled persons tooke occasion thereof to trouble the peace and quiet state of the commonwealth by seditious commotions which first had their beginnings in this wise.

"Banquo, thane of Lochquhaber, of whom the house of the Stewards is descended, the which by order of linage hath now for a long time inioied the crowne of Scotland, even till these our daies, as begathered the finances due to the king, and further punished somewhat sharpelie such as were notorious offenders, being assailed by a number of rebels inhabiting in that countrie, and spoiled of the monie and all other things, had much adoo to get awaie with his life, after he had received sundrie grievous wounds amongst them. Yet escaping their hands, after hee was somewhat recovered of his hurts, and was able to ride, he repaired to the court, where making his complaint to the king in most earnest wise, he purchased at length that the offenders were sent for by a sergeant at armes, to appeare to make answer unto such matters as should be laid to their charge: but they augmenting their mischievous act with a more wicked deed, after they had misused