

**SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY OF  
MACBETH. WITH INTRODUCTION,  
AND NOTES EXPLANATORY AND  
CRITICAL: FOR USE IN SCHOOLS  
AND CLASSES**

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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & HENRY N. HUDSON**

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GLAMIS CASTLE  
(From a Photograph)

SHAKESPEARE'S  
TRAGEDY OF MACBETH.

WITH  
INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL

*FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSES.*

BY THE  
REV. HENRY N. HUDSON, LL.D.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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### History of the Play.

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH was first printed in the folio of 1623, where it stands the seventh in the division of tragedies. On the 8th of November, that year, it was registered at the Stationers' by Blount and Jaggard, as one of the plays "not formerly entered to other men."

The text of this drama has come down to us in a state far from satisfactory. Though not so badly printed as some other plays in the same volume, for instance, *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Coriolanus*, still it has a number of very troublesome passages. In several cases, the errors are of such a nature that we can hardly refer them to any other than a phonographic origin. On this point, the learned editors of the Clarendon edition observe as follows: "Probably it was printed from a transcript of the author's manuscript, which was in great part not copied from the original, but written to dictation. This is confirmed by the fact that several of the most palpable blunders are blunders of the ear, and not of the eye."

The minute and searching criticism of our time has made out, almost, if not altogether, beyond question, that considerable portions of *Macbeth* were not written by Shakespeare. I have been very slow and reluctant to admit this conclusion; but the evidence, it seems to me, is not to be with-



stood. It is, moreover, highly probable, to say the least, that few of the scenes, perhaps none, have reached us altogether in the form they received from the Poet's hand. But, as this matter is to be discussed under the heading "Shakespeare and Middleton," it need not be enlarged upon here.

The date of the composition has been variously argued and concluded. Until a recent period, there was nothing but internal evidence at hand for settling the date. Proceeding upon this, Malone and Chalmers agreed upon the year 1606 as the *probable* time of the writing. That the composition was subsequent to the union of the English and Scottish crowns, was justly inferred from what the hero says in his last interview with the Weird Sisters: "And some I see, that *twofold balls* and *treble sceptres* carry." James the First came to the throne of England in March, 1603; but the two crowns were not *formally* united, at least the union was not proclaimed, till October, 1604.

Our earliest authentic notice of *Macbeth* is from one Simon Forman, M.D., an astrologer, quack, and dealer in the arts of magic, who kept a sort of diary which he entitled *The Book of Plays and Notes thereof*. In 1836 the manuscript of this diary was discovered in the Ashmolean Museum, and a portion of its contents published. Forman gives a somewhat minute and particular account of the plot and leading incidents of the drama, as he saw it played at the Globe theatre on Saturday the 20th of April, 1610. The passage is too long for my space; but it is a very mark-worthy circumstance, that from the way it begins, and from the wording of it, we should naturally infer that what now stands as the first scene of the play, then made no part of the performance. The passage opens thus: "In Macbeth, at the Globe, 1610, the 20th of April, Saturday, there was to be observed,

first, how Macbeth and Banquo, two noblemen of Scotland, riding through a wood, there stood before them three women, fairies or nymphs, and saluted Macbeth, saying three times unto him, Hail," &c.

It is highly probable, to say the least, that the tragedy was then fresh from the Poet's hand, and was in its first course of performance. Some arguments, indeed, or seeming arguments, have been adduced, inferring the play to have been written three or four years earlier; but I can see no great force in them. On the other hand, it appears that Forman had long been an habitual frequenter of play-houses; and it seems nowise likely that one so eager in quest of novelties would either have missed the play, had it been put upon the stage before, or have made so special a notice of it, but that he then saw it for the first time. Nor have the characteristics of the work itself any thing to say against the date in question; those portions of it that have the clearest and most unquestionable impress of Shakespeare's hand being in his greatest, richest, most idiomatic style.

#### Shakespeare in Scotland.

The drama yields some cause, in the accuracy of local description and allusion, for thinking that the Poet had been in Scotland. Nor are these internal likelihoods unsustained by external arguments. Companies of English players are known to have visited Scotland several times during Shakespeare's connection with the stage. The English ambassador at the Scottish Court in 1589 wrote to Lord Treasurer Burleigh how "my Lord Bothwell showeth great kindness to our nation, using *her Majesty's players* with all courtesy." Archbishop Spottiswood, also, writing the history of the year 1599, gives the following: "In the end of the year happened

some new jars betwixt the King and the ministers of Edinburgh, because of a company of English comedians whom the King had licensed to play within the burgh. The ministers, being offended with the liberty given them, did exclaim in their sermons against stage-players; and in their sessions made an Act prohibiting people to resort to their plays, under pain of Church censures. The King, taking this to be a discharge of his license, called the sessions before the Council, and ordained them to annul their Act, and not to restrain the people from going to these comedies; which they promised, and accordingly performed." The public records of Scotland show, also, that English players were liberally rewarded by the King on several occasions in 1600 and 1601. And the registers of Aberdeen inform us that the same players were received by the public authorities of that place, under the sanction of a special letter from the King, styling them "our servants." There, too, they had a reward in cash; and the freedom of the city was conferred on "Laurence Fletcher, Comedian to his Majesty"; he being, no doubt, the leader of the company. Next, we have a patent made out by the King's order, May 7, 1603, authorizing Laurence Fletcher, William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, and others, to perform plays in any part of the kingdoms. In this instrument the players are termed "our servants," — the same style which the King had used to the authorities of Aberdeen. All which, to be sure, does not prove the Poet to have been of the number who were in Scotland; still I think that, coupled with the internal likelihoods of the play itself, it may fairly be held to warrant a belief to that effect, there being no evidence to the contrary.