

**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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*William*

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.

**Historic Basis of the Action.**

The story of Macbeth, as it lived in tradition, had been told by Holinshed, whose *Chronicles* first appeared in 1577, and by George Buchanan, the learned preceptor of James the First, who has been termed the Scotch Livy, and whose *History of Scotland* came forth in 1582. The main features of the story, so far as it is adopted by the Poet, are the same in both these writers, save that Buchanan represents Macbeth to have merely dreamed of meeting the Weird Sisters, and of being hailed by them successively as Thane of Angus, Thane of Murray, and as King. Holinshed was Shakespeare's usual authority in matters of British history. In the present case the Poet shows no traces of obligation to Buchanan, unless, which is barely possible, he may have taken a hint from the historian, where the latter, speaking of Macbeth's reign, says, "Certain of our writers here relate many idle things which I omit, as being fitter for Milesian fables or *for the theatre* than for sober history." A passage which, as showing the author's care for the truth of what he wrote, perhaps should make us wary of trusting too much in later writers, who would have us believe that, a war of factions breaking out, Duncan was killed in battle, and Macbeth took the crown by just and lawful title. And it is considerable that both Hume and Lingard acquiesce in the old account which represents Macbeth to have murdered Duncan, and usurped the throne.

According to the history, Malcolm, King of Scotland, had two daughters, Beatrice and Doda, severally married to Abanath Crinen and to Sinel, Thanes of the Isles and of Glamis, by whom each had a son named Duncan and Macbeth. The former succeeded his grandfather in the king-

dom ; and, he being of a soft and gentle disposition, his reign was at first very quiet and peaceable, but afterwards, by reason of his slackness, was greatly harassed with troubles and seditions, wherein his cousin, who was of a valiant and warlike spirit, did great service to the State.

Instead of giving at length the wordy narration of Holinshed, I must, for economy of space, condense the main particulars of the historic matter. After narrating the victory of the Scottish generals over the rebels and invaders, the chronicler proceeds in substance as follows : —

Macbeth and Banquo were on their way to Forres, where the King then lay ; and, as they were passing through the fields alone, three women in strange and wild attire suddenly met them ; and, while they were rapt with wonder at the sight, the first said, " All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis " ; the second, " Hail, Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor " ; the third, " Hail, Macbeth, that hereafter shalt be King." Then said Banquo, " What manner of women are you, that to my fellow here, besides high offices, ye assign the kingdom, but promise nothing to me ? " " Yes," said the first, " we promise greater things to thee : for he shall reign indeed, but shall have no issue to succeed him ; whereas thou indeed shalt not reign, but from thee shall spring a long line of kings." Then the women immediately vanished. At first the men thought this was but a fantastical illusion, insomuch that Banquo would call Macbeth king in jest, and Macbeth in like sort would call him father of many kings. But afterwards the women were believed to be the Weird Sisters ; because, the Thane of Cawdor being condemned for treason, his lands and titles were given to Macbeth. Whereupon Banquo said to him jestingly, " Now, Macbeth, thou hast what two of the Sisters promised ; there remaineth only what the other said