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OF
SHAKESPEARE

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THE WORKS
OF
SHAKESPEARE

EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES
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INTRODUCTION

Macbeth was first published in the Folio of 1623. It is there already divided into scenes as well as acts. In other respects it is carelessly edited, and the text is among the worst printed in the entire series. In addition, the 'perfect' and 'absolute' copy of Shakespeare's work, which the editors of the Folio professed to print, is open to grave suspicion of having been severely revised, cut down, and interpolated after it left his hands. Much, finally, of what is unmistakably Shakespearean has rather the qualities of bold blocking out than of finished workmanship. Verses otherwise stamped with genius jostle rudely with every canon of metre, and the magnificent and inexhaustible poetry forces its way through daring anomalies of speech; while the supreme dramatic energy is focussed upon the two or three principal characters, with an exclusive intensity more characteristic of Æschylus than of the myriad-minded author of world-dramas like *Lear* and *Hamlet*. Under conditions so complex as these, the textual criticism of Macbeth is inevitably beset with problems which our knowledge does not suffice to solve.

The theory of a post-Shakespearean revision of *Macbeth* starts from a slender but definite basis of fact. Middleton's *The Witch* contains two songs referred to in the stage directions of *Macbeth* (viz.

'Come away, come away,' iii. 5., and 'Black spirits and white, iv. i.), and afterwards introduced in Davenant's recast of his godfather's work. *The Witch* was most likely written some years after Macbeth; it was certainly old when *Macbeth* was printed. The coincidence can be accounted for on several hypotheses, as Mr. Bullen has shown; but the presumption decidedly is that the songs, simply referred to by their first lines in *Macbeth*, as familiar, were drawn from the play where they are quoted in full. This presumption gives a certain *locus standi* to theories of more extensive interpolation, which have been freely advanced with very various degrees of critical competency. The more revolutionary proposals of Messrs. Clark and Wright /1 have found support only from Mr. Fleay, who has since withdrawn it./2 Besides a large part of the witch scenes, which might be plausibly assigned to the author of *The Witch*, and the porter scene, which had been

rejected by Coleridge, they condemned the 'serjeant scene' (i. 2.), the king's-evil scene (iv. 3. 140-159), the relation of young Siward's death and crowning of Malcolm (v. 8. 35-75), and a variety of rhyming tags. The only serious allegation against the serjeant scene is that it relates the treason of Cawdor, which in the following scene is still unknown to Macbeth (i. 3. 72), and doubtful to Angus (i. 3. iii). But this 'discrepancy' is of the kind that arises when explanatory links drop out; it points rather to compression than to interpolation, and cannot for a moment avail against the profusion of Shakespearean touches scattered through both. That the porter scene, too, is in conception and execution altogether

/1 Edition of *Macbeth*, Introduction (Clar. Press Series).

/2 In the *Life and Work of Shakespeare*, p. 238, Mr. Fleay rejects only iii. 5. and iv. 1. 39-43.

Shakespearean few recent critics doubt; for us, as for De Quincey,/1 the stage resolves the hesitation of the study; and the lofty morning-hymn which Schiller provided for the German people in place of these less edifying reflexions has disappeared even from the German stage./2 The question thus reduces itself to the witch scenes. It must be allowed that there are here striking discrepancies of tone. In part, however, this means merely that in the witches, being a Shakespearean fusion of beings very unlike in legendary character, now the more poetic and now the grosser traits are dominant. But this does not hold of the strangely incongruous figure of Hecate. The leader and controller of the witches in Middleton's play had naturally no place in the legend of Macbeth. She is introduced for the first time in iii. 5. to ask the reason of her exclusion; but to the end she is a palpable intruder in the witches' cavern. With her entrance the northern scenery is suddenly brought into relation with classic myth; they are to meet her, no more on the blasted heath, but at the pit of Acheron; while the language, released from the weird horror or grossness of the other witch scenes, trips along in courtly rococo elegance, with graceful artifices of fancy suggestive of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*. Her conceptions of en-

chantment belong to the world of Oberon; she proposes to beguile Macbeth with the distillations of a vaporous drop that hangs upon a corner of the

/1 *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth.* Cf. Prof. Hales' full discussion of the whole question: *The Porter in Macbeth* (N. Shaksp. Soc. Transactions, 1874).

/2 Schiller's adaptation of *Macbeth* appeared at Weimar in 1800. It is open to, and has received, severe criticism; but many of its defects spring from excessive regard for the immature taste of his public rather than from his own, and his version contributed enormously to domesticate Shakespeare in Germany.

moon; and the wild, withered hags about the cauldron remind her of elves and fairies in a ring. Of her enchantments nothing more is heard. The apparitions that fatally palter with Macbeth are raised by no lunar dewdrop, but by the less ethereal ingredients of the cauldron; and Hecate's naïve applause (iv. i. 39-43) does not disguise her complete insignificance and superfluity. To these two passages of extremely doubtful authenticity may probably be added the farewell speech of the First Witch in the same scene (iv. i. 125-132), whose good-natured desire to 'cheer up his sprites' is so oddly out of keeping with their character as demoniac contrivers of harm, and with the 'horrible sight' they have just disclosed to 'grieve his heart.' It may be noted, too, that all three passages (i.e. iii. 5., iv. i. 39-43, and 125-132), are composed in iambic verse, the rest of the witch scenes being all trochaic./1

Putting aside these passages (about forty lines) *Macbeth* can be assigned with some assurance to 1606. The unmistakable allusions to James (the 'two-fold balls and treble sceptres,' iv. i. 119-122, and the touching for the king's evil, a treasured prerogative of his, iv. 3. 140-159) were of course written after his accession, and would lose point had his accession not been comparatively recent. The choice of subject implied, in effect, a double com-

pliment to the king. Academic ingenuity had already brought the prophecies of the weird sisters into relation with the demonological descendant of Banquo; his entry into Oxford in 1605 having been celebrated in prophetic verses addressed to him by

/1 Cf. the excellent discussion of the supposed interpolations by Mr. E. K. Chambers in his edition of the play for the Warwick Series (Appendices E, F, G), to which I owe some suggestions.

three students in the character of Witches./1 The Porter, again, in his quality of Clown, founds allusive jests on topics of 1606: the phenomenally abundant harvest (ii. 3. 5), and the Jesuit Garnet's defence of equivocation at his trial in the spring (iv. 3. 10). On the other hand, the play was already familiar in 1607, for Middleton's *The Puritan* contains an evident reference to Banquo's ghost: 'Instead of a jester we 'll have a ghost in a white sheet sit at the upper end of the table.' It is also significant that Warner in 1606 inserted a *Historie of Macbeth* in a new edition of his popular repertory of English history, *Albion's England*. An unquestionable later limit is furnished by Dr. Simon Forman's account of the performance of *Macbeth* which he witnessed at the Globe in 1610. The curious naïveté of his report of the plot persuaded the older editors that the play must have been new. It was doubtless new to him.

No earlier handling of the story of Macbeth can be clearly made out. A ballad on 'Macdobeth' was entered in 1596 in the Stationers' Register, and Kempe, four years later, contemptuously referred to 'the miserable story of Mac-doel, or Mac-dobeth, or Macsomewhat' (*Nine Days' Wonder*, 1600). Whatever may lurk under these ambiguous allusions, it is clear that Shakespeare drew his materials substantially from Holinshed's *Chronicle of England and Scotland*, the long-familiar source of his English Histories and of *King Lear*. Even as told by Holinshed, the story is very great, and Shakespeare, in the very maturity of his art, found little to change or to add. In this, as in most other points of technique, *Macbeth* stands at the opposite pole to *King Lear*. No

/1 James's *Demonologie*, an elaborate refutation of free-thinking in matters of witchcraft, and especially of the sceptic Reginald Scot, appeared in 1599.

parallel from modern romance (like the Gloucester story from the *Arcadia*) crosses and complicates the ancient legendary theme: Macbeth and his wife fill the entire field without reflexion or counterpart. It is clear, nevertheless, that Shakespeare, though he may have thought the story as historical as that of the Richards or Henries, no longer approached it as history. Macbeth's career, and to some extent his character, are modelled on those of another Scottish assassin, Donwald, whose treacherous murder of King Duff Holinshed had described in vivid detail some twenty pages before, while of Duncan's murder he recorded merely the bare fact. Donwald, an officer of the king, enjoying his absolute trust, entertained him in the castle of Fores, of which he had charge. His wife incited him to use his opportunity, 'and shewed him the means whereby he might soonest accomplish it.'/1 Donwald himself 'abhorred the act greatly in heart,' but yields to his wife's urgency. Duff on retiring sends a present to his host; the grooms in the king's chamber, plied with meat and drink by his wife's care, sleep heavily, and fall victims, next morning, to Donwald's 'pious rage.' Fearful portents ensue: the sun is darkened; birds and beasts run counter to their common instincts. All these details Shakespeare has transferred to the story of Duncan, and they add greatly to its tragic force. Holinshed's Macbeth is only his victim's 'kinsman and his subject'; Shakespeare's violates a yet stronger instinct as 'his host,'

/1 Stone's *Holinshed*, p. 26 f. It is interesting to note that Milton included both 'Macbeth' and 'Duff and Donwald' in his list of subjects for a tragedy. It is clear that he would have kept the two stories wholly distinct. In a valuable and suggestive paper Prof. Hales has indicated the lines on which the poet of *Paradise Lost* would probably have treated the

'who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife himself.' Holinshed's Macbeth plans and executes the murder with matter-of-fact promptitude, without a trace of hesitation or compunction; Shakespeare's Macbeth, like Donwald, has accesses of deep reluctance, in which his wife's resolute energy turns the scale. Holinshed's Lady Macbeth urges her husband 'to attempt the thing,' but has no part in its execution. Thus the elements of the relation between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and of the hesitations and 'infirmity' which chiefly make him a tragic figure at all, are suggested by Holinshed's Donwald, not by his Macbeth. Much even of the political background of the murder belongs rather to the story of Duff. Holinshed's Macbeth acts with the complicity of 'his trusty friends,' -- Banquo among the rest, -- and 'upon confidence of their promised aid.' Shakespeare's Macbeth, like Donwald, has no political confederates, can count upon no sympathy if his part in the 'deep damnation' of the king's 'taking off' is discovered, and precipitates discovery by overacting his feigned grief./1 Even Donwald has the aid of trusty servants: Shakespeare sends husband and wife unaided to their work amid the cry of owls and the prayers of startled sleepers. Finally, Shakespeare has deprived Macbeth of the shadow of political justification which his prototype in Holinshed might plead for his crime. Holinshed's Duncan is a gentle weakling, whom the rebel Macdonwald openly taunts as a 'faint-hearted milksop, more meet to govern a sect of idle monks in some cloister than to have the

/1 Donwald, as already stated, slays the chamberlains. And such, Holinshed proceeds, 'was his over-earnest diligence in the severe inquisition and trial of the offenders herein, that some of the lords began to mislike the matter, and to smell for the shrewd tokens that he should not be altogether clear himself.' Cf. Lennox's ironical account of Macbeth's 'grief' (iii. 6.).

rule of such valiant and hardy men of war as the Scots were.' He is helplessly dependent upon his great captains, Macbeth and Banquho, and holds his kingdom only by their aid; while Macbeth, having got rid of him, gives Scotland for ten years the blessing of a strong, just rule. Shakespeare's Duncan has all the graces of this type without its defects, bearing his faculties 'meekly,' but 'clear in his great office'; and Macbeth, valiant and loyal soldier as he appears at the outset, is hurried from his first act of 'foul play,' without an instant's pause, and with ever-increasing velocity, down the abyss of crime.

Thus Shakespeare prepares the ground for his tragedy of crime by clearing away all its normal pretexts and palliations. No film of finer motive softens its essential baseness. Alone among the heroes of Shakespeare's mature tragedy, Macbeth murders with the vulgar cupidity of the common cut-throat. Vulgar cupidity is not, taken by itself, a tragic motive; and the stupendous effect of this drama has nothing in common with the pathos which springs from the interworking of a man's noble frailties with his fate, as in *Othello* or *Hamlet*. In a very marvellous way Shakespeare has contrived, without using other than mean motives as the impelling forces of the action, yet to connect it with permanent realities, to give it that 'semblance of eternity' without which great art cannot exist. The two criminal figures are lifted into tragic significance by a strange intensity of mental vision, which, while it does not preclude them from vulgar crime, makes them capable of a nowise vulgar Nemesis. Macbeth has much of the mental habitude of Hamlet. He has the feverish activity of intellect, which turns the common dust of daily incident and impulse into fiery trains of imagery and reflexion, and calls up his own past and purposed

acts in spectral visions -- a bloody dagger, a sheeted ghost -- before his eyes. In Macbeth, as in Hamlet, the mental tumult tends to retard action; his 'flighty purpose never is o'ertook unless the deed go with it.' But the tragic effect lies no longer in the visions which retard his action, but in those which revenge it. Hamlet is wrought into accesses of passion when confronted with the practical energy which he lacks,

and Macbeth, ruthless as he is, has a preternaturally acute sense of the power of pity. He foresees it 'striding the blast' and blowing 'the horrid deed in every eye, that tears shall drown the wind.' Day itself is 'pitiful,' and night shall scarf up her 'tender eye' before the murder of Banquo. The most appalling glimpses do not deter Macbeth from action any more than they prompt Hamlet to it; but they prey upon him when it is over. Here his wife's sensibility is as keen as his; and if it is less fiercely tossed into images, it is crueller and more corroding. Both loathe their power as soon as they have it; and we hear the groan involuntarily wrung from each without the other's knowledge (iii. 2.). Hers is the groan of the parched throat craving water and tasting dust: --

> Nought 's had, all 's spent,
> Where our desire is got without content:
> 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
> Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.

His expresses the delirium of mental torture, 'the affliction of these terrible dreams that shake us nightly': --

> better be with the dead,
> Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy.

Neither feels remorse, but the sense of unatoned

guilt haunts them in eerie visions of indelible blood-stains. With her the thought breaks forth only in the mental dissolution of her dreams, and in a quite simple form: 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.' With him its horror is never absent, and it utters itself in a burst of Titanic imagery: --

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.

Of this inner Nemesis Holinshed has but the faintest

suggestion. On the other hand, the supernatural interventions which precipitate Macbeth's outer doom had been for two centuries an inseparable part of his story./1 Holinshed's version employs a formidable apparatus of enchantment. Macbeth receives three warnings, on three occasions, from three distinct classes of prophetically gifted beings. Three 'fairies or weird sisters' hail him at the outset. After the death of Banquo he is warned by 'certain wizards in whose words he put great confidence (for that the prophecy had happened so right, which the three fairies or weird sisters had declared unto him) how that he ought to take heed of Macduff.' He thereupon plans Macduff's death, but desists when 'a certain witch, whom he had in great trust,' assures him that he 'should never be slain by man born of woman, nor vanquished till the wood of Birnam came to the castle of Dunsinane.' Obvious dramatic

/1 The earliest known form of the witches' prophecy is given by Wyntoun, *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, vi. 18. 17 f. (c. 1424): --

He thowcht, quhile he wes swa
sythand,
He sawe thre Wemen by gangend;
And þai Wemen þan thowcht he
Thre Werd Systrys mast lyk to be.
þe fyrst he hard say gangand by,
Lo yhondyr þe Thayne of Crombawchty.
þe toþir Woman sayd agayne,
Of Moraye yhondyre I se þe Thayne.
þe þryd þan sayd, "I se þe kyng."
Al þis he herd in hys dremyng.

economy forbade this lavish distribution of the rôle of 'metaphysical aid'; and Shakespeare has blended the characteristics of all three in his weird-sister witches, who should be women 'but that their beards forbid me to interpret that they are so'; who tread the earth but seem not like its inhabitants; vanish like bubbles of the air, and speak a language which admits the extremes of sublimity and grossness,/1 of mystic suggestion and realistic detail, the wild elemental poetry of wind and storm, and the recondite lore of the foul and noisome potencies of matter. The hideous imaginings of popular and

academic demonology, so busily promoted by the king, are drawn upon without reserve; but we see them through an enchanted atmosphere. It is clear that these beings, who so vitally moulded the fate of the traditional Macbeth, were not, for Shakespeare, like the dagger and the ghost, mere creations of his feverish brain, embodied symbols of his ambitious dreams. It is equally clear that for Shakespeare here, as elsewhere, the problem of fate and metaphysical influence lies in the mind of man. The witches' 'All hail!' on the blasted heath is as real for Banquo as for Macbeth, but they effect nothing with this honest and clear-headed Scot, who 'neither begs nor fears their favours nor their hate,' and is content to await the good fortune which, 'if the devil spoke true,' will come of itself without his stir. Banquo has been compared with Horatio, as the 'unimaginative, limited, but upright man of affairs,' to whom the witches and ghosts are significantly 'dumb' which 'speak' with such momentous effect to a Hamlet

/1 All attempts to suggest that Shakespeare distinguished, like Holinshed, between the 'weird sisters' and the 'witches' break down before the unquestionable fact that the 'witches' are repeatedly called the weird sisters (iii. 4. 133, v. 1. 136).

and a Macbeth. The contrast between the man whose dangerously acute sensibilities invoke his tragic fate, and the sagacious man of action who is his truest ally or his deadliest foe, recurs continually in the tragedies: in Lear and Kent, Coriolanus and Menenius; in Othello and Iago, Antony and Cæsar. In all of these the 'limitations' of the man of action are more salient than in Banquo, for whose ideal portraiture Shakespeare had, as we have seen, no warrant in Holinshed. Macbeth, the king by foul play, is no match in 'royalty of nature' for the ancestor of kings; his genius is rebuked under him, 'as it is said Mark Antony's was by Cæsar'; and the stimuli of evil suggestion which win Macbeth so lightly to his own harm, are foiled less by Banquo's want of imaginative sensibility than by his clear insight, wisdom, and valour. Macbeth's ready yielding is partly confusion of mind and partly want of nerve; Banquo's 'wisdom'

would have fortified him in the thought which he grasps for one lucid moment: 'If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, without my stir.' Banquo's 'dauntless temper' would have held him firm when Duncan's nomination of an heir appeared to cut off all ways but 'the shortest' to the crown. Banquo reads at the outset the riddle of the unearthly intervention which Macbeth himself only divines in the last paroxysm of desperation at the close. 'To win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths,' strikes the note of equivocation which sounds throughout the play and reaches its tragic climax in Macbeth's shrieking curse upon 'these juggling fiends . . . that palter with us in a double sense,' -- its grotesque anticlimax in the porter's grim jest at the equivocators who knock at hell-gate since they 'could not equivocate to heaven.' The witches' cry as they sweep away into the stormlit gloom, 'Fair

is foul, and foul is fair,' is a fit opening formula for such a play. Even where no supernatural cunning is concerned, the style shows an unusual inclination to the Sophoclean irony of innocent phrases covering sinister depths of meaning; -- as in Ross's 'And, for an earnest of a greater honour, he bade me, from him, call thee thane of Cawdor,' and Lady Macbeth's famous 'He that 's coming must be provided for.' The entire atmosphere of *Macbeth*, as of no other tragedy, is oppressive with the sense of something subtly malignant as well as inexorably revengeful in the forces that rule the world; of a tragic irony in the ultimate scheme of things. But if we are permitted to read Shakespeare's mind in the ethical atmosphere of his work, we must allow that the oppression it suggests is not despair. Macbeth is allured, not compelled, to his crime; the 'supernatural soliciting' is not a 'divine thrusting on'; he is not fate-ridden, nor irresponsible, nor the helpless sport of irresistible powers./1 He is no symbol of the destiny of man; and his desperate dismissal of life as 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,' expresses only the inevitable intellectual anarchy of one who has listened to a tale full of pitfalls for the intelligence and subtle underlying meanings, and interpreted it with the naïve simplicity of a child.

/1 Cf. the strikingly-put, but I think overstated, remarks of

Prof. Barrett Wendell, *W. Shakspere*, p. 305.