

Collier 1836 J. Payne Collier, New particulars regarding the works of Shakespeare (London, 1836) -- extracts relating to Macbeth.

6

When I was at Oxford, six or seven years ago, <1> looking for materials for the "History of Dramatic Poetry and the Stage," I heard of the existence, in the Bodleian library, of a Manuscript containing notes on the performance of some of Shakespeare's plays, written by a person who saw them acted during the life-time of the poet. These would have been a great prize to me, and I made long and repeated searches for them, but without success. The fact is, that I was accidentally put upon a wrong scent; and, had I been upon a right one, in that immense receptacle of rarities, I might easily have failed in making the wished-for discovery. The MSS. were not then as well arranged as at present, and even now, without previous and correct information, the most eager hunt might sometimes be ineffectual. Not long since a gentleman of my acquaintance, <2> of peculiar acquirements, was employed to make a catalogue of the Ashmolean MSS. only, <3> and he, very unexpectedly, found among them the notes I had anxiously sought in a different direction. He instantly forwarded a copy of them to me.

They are contained in the Ashmolean volume, No. 208, and bear the following title: -- "The Booke of Plaies and Notes therof, per Formans, for common Pollicie," and they were written by Dr. Simon For-

7

man, the celebrated Physician and Astrologer, who lived in Lambeth, the same parish in which Elias Ashmole afterwards resided. Forman was implicated in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, but he died in 1611, before the trial, the register of his burial in Lambeth churchyard being dated on the 12th of September, in that year. The last date in his "Book of Plays" is the 15th of May, 1611, so

8

that he was a frequenter of the theatres until a short period before his sudden decease in a boat on the Thames. ...

The words "for common policy" in the title of Forman's "Notes" mean that he made these remarks upon plays he saw represented, because they afforded a useful lesson of prudence or "policy" for the "common" affairs of life. I do not understand how it happens that the dates of his "Notes" are so irregular, but he begins with the 30th of April, 1611,

goes on to the 15th of May, in the same year, and ends with the 20th of April, 1610. I shall take

9

them in the order in which he has placed them. The first entry is entitled,

"In Richard 2. at the Globe,
1611, the 30 of Aprill, Thursday." <4>

At first sight one would suppose that this heading referred to Shakespeare's Richard the Second, the earliest edition of which was printed in 1597; but it is clear, from the account Forman gives of the plot, that it was a different play, ...

.
.
.

16

I now come to the notes and observations, "for common policy" made by Forman on three of Shakespeare's undoubted productions, and the first is The

17

Winter's Tale, of which he witnessed the performance "at the Globe, 1611, the 15th of May, Wednesday."

.
.
.

22

Forman does not state at what date, nor where, he saw Cymbeline, but it must have been about the same time, and probably at the same theatre.

.
.
.

23

On the 20th of April, 1610, <5> which happened on a Saturday, the astrological Doctor was present at the Globe at the performance of Macbeth, the production of which on the stage Malone fixed in 1606. This may be the right conjecture, and Forman may have seen the tragedy for the first time four years after it was originally brought out; but it is by no

24

means impossible that 1610 was its earliest season, and it is likely that in April that season had only just commenced at the Globe, which was open to the weather: the King's Players acted at the covered theatre in the Blackfriars during the winter. Malone's reasoning to establish that Macbeth was written and acted in 1606, is very inconclusive, and much of it would apply just as well to 1610. At the close of his dissertation, (Shakesp. by Boswell, ii., 440), he assigns grounds to show that Cymbeline and Macbeth were written about the same time, yet, when settling the date, he makes an interval of three years between them. In Forman's MS. the account of the one immediately follows that of the other, if any speculation can be founded upon that circumstance. His description of the plot of Macbeth is more particular and remarkable than perhaps any of the others he has given: he says: <6>

"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, <7> and saluted Macbeth, saying three times unto him, Hail, Macbeth, King of Codor, for thou shalt be a King, but shalt beget no Kings, &c. Then, said Banquo, What all to Macbeth and nothing to me? Yes, said the Nymphs, Hail to thee, Banquo; thou shalt beget Kings, yet be no King. And so they departed, and came to the Court of Scotland to Duncan King of Scots, and it was in the days of Edward the Confessor. And Duncan bad them both kindly welcome, and made Macbeth forthwith Prince of Northumberland; and sent him home to his own Castle, and appointed Macbeth to provide for him, for he would sup with him the next day at night, and did so.

25

"And Macbeth contrived to kill Duncan, and through the persuasion of his wife did that night murder the King in his own Castle, being his guest. And there were many prodigies seen that night and the day before. And when Macbeth had murdered the King, the blood on his hands could not be washed off by any means, nor from his wife's hands, which handled the bloody daggers in hiding them, by which means they became both much amazed and affronted.

"The murder being known, Duncan's two sons fled, the one to England, the [other to] Wales, to save themselves: they being fled, were supposed guilty of the murder of their father, which was nothing so.

"Then was Macbeth crowned King, and then he for fear of Banquo, his old companion, that he should beget kings but be no king himself, he contrived the death of Banquo, and caused him to be murdered on the way that he rode. The night, being at supper with his noblemen whom he had bid to a feast, (to the which also Banquo should have come), he began to speak of noble Banquo, and to wish that he were there. And as he thus did, standing up to drink a carouse to him, the ghost of Banquo came and sat down in his chair be-

hind him. And he, turning about to sit down again, saw the ghost of Banquo, which fronted him, so that he fell in a great passion of fear and fury, uttering many words about his murder, by which, when they heard that Banquo was murdered, they suspected Macbeth.

"Then Macduff fled to England to the King's son, and so they raised an army and came into Scotland, and at Dunston Anyse overthrew Macbeth. In the mean time, while Macduff was in England, Macbeth slew Macduff's wife and children, and after in the battle Macduff slew Macbeth.

"Observe, also, how Macbeth's Queen did rise in the night in her sleep and walk, and talked and confessed all, and the Doctor noted her words."

Macbeth is another of the plays not printed until it appeared in the folio of 1623 ; and besides mis-spelling some of the names, as Mackbet, Mackdove, Dunston

26

Anyse, &c., Forman's memory seems to have failed him upon particular points: thus, he makes the "Fairies or Nymphs" (vice Witches), hail Macbeth as "King of Codor," instead of Thane of Cawdor, and old Duncan subsequently creates him "Prince of Northumberland./*" After the murder, Forman states that neither Macbeth nor his wife could wash the blood from their hands, by reason of which they were both "amazed and affronted." If this were a mob-accordant incident in the play in 1610, it was among the omissions made by the player-editors when it was published in 1623.

Such is the information derived from the manuscript of Forman respecting, as I apprehend, the old play of Richard the Second, and three of Shakespeare's undoubted productions, written by him after he ceased to be an actor, and not many years before he relinquished all connection with the stage.

/* Duncan creates his eldest son, Malcolm, Prince of Cumberland, ...

<1> It is a known fact that Collier was working in the Bodleian Library on 26-8 Jan 1830 (Hunt 1947:199). The book that he speaks of was published in 1831.

<2> William Henry Black (1808-1872), antiquary (ODNB). He began work in 1831, and the catalogue commenced being printed in 1835 (Hunt 1947:200). It was eventually issued, in an incomplete state (no preface, no index), in 1845. This is the entry for the Book of Plays:

* 12. "The Booke of Plaies and Notes therof per Formans for common pollicie." 200.

This book was begun a few months before his death, and contains notes of only four plays which he witnessed; namely -- "In Richard the 2 at the glob 1611 the 30 of Aprill. 201. "In

the Winters Talle at the glob 1611 the 15 of maye." 201b-2.
"Of Cinobalin King of England." 206. "In Mackbeth at the
glob 1610 the 20 of Aprill." 207-7b. (Black 1845:169)

<3> Collier seems to have supposed that the Ashmolean
manuscripts were part of the Bodleian Library. In fact, at the
time, they were a separate collection, housed in the Ashmolean
Museum (Macray 1868:286-7, Hunt 1947:199).

<4> But 30 Apr 1611 was a Tuesday.

<5> But 20 Apr 1610 was a Friday. The discrepancy, I think,
was first pointed out by Manly (1896).

<6> Tighter transcriptions of Forman's notes were provided
later by J. O. Halliwell, in his edition of Shakespeare's works
(1853-65). This is how he printed the note about Macbeth: --

"In Mackbeth at the Glod, 1610, the
20 of Aprill, Saturday, ther was to be observed firste howe
Mackbeth and Bancko, two noblemen of Scotland, ridinge
thorowe a wod, the stode befor them three women feiries or
numpes, and saluted Mackbeth, sayinge three tymes unto him,
Haille Mackbeth, king of Codon, for thou shall be a kinge, but
shall beget no kinges, &c. Then said Bancko, What! all to
Mackbeth and nothing to me? Yes, said the ninuphes, -- haille
to thee, Banko, thou shalt beget kinges, yet be no kinge; and so
they deperted and cam to the Courte of Scotland to Dunkin,
king of Scotese, and yt was in the dais of Edward the Confessor.
And Dunkin bad them both kindly wellcome, and made Mackbeth
forthwith Prince of Northumberland, and sent him hom to his
own castell, and appointed Mackbeth to provid for him, for he
wold sup with him the next dai at night, and did soe. And
Mackebeth contrived to kill Dunkin, and thorowe the persuasion
of his wife did that night murder the kinge in his own castell,
beinge his guest; and ther were many prodigies seen that night
and the dai before. And when Mackbeth had murdred the
kinge, the blod on his handes could not be washed of by any
means, nor from his wifes handes which handled the bloddi
daggers in hiding them, by which means they became both
moch amazed and affronted. The murder being knownen,
Dunkin's two sons fled, the one to England, the (other to) Walles,
to save themselves. They being fled, they were supposed guilty
of the murder of their father, which was nothing so. Then was
Mackbeth crowned kinge, and then he, for feare of Banko, his
old companion, that he should beget kinges, but be no kinge
himself, he contrived the death of Banko, and caused him to be
murdred on the way as he rode. The next night, beinge at
supper with his noblemen whom he had bid to a feaste, to the
which also Banco should have com, he began to speake of noble
Banco, and to wish that he wer there. And as he thus did,
standing up to drinck a carouse to him, the ghoste of Banco
came and sate down in his cheier behind him; and he, turninge
about to sit down again, sawe the goste of Banco, which fronted
him so, that he fell into a great passion of fear and fury,
utteringe many wordes about his murder, by which, when they
hard that Banco was murdred, they suspected Mackbet. Then
Mackdove fled to England to the kinges sonn, and soe they raised

an army, and cam into Scotland, and at Dunschenanyse overthruwe Mackbet. In the meane tyme, whille Mackdove was in England, Mackbet slewe Mackdoves wife and children, and after in the battelle Mackdove slewe Mackbet. Observe also howe Mackbetes quen did rise in the night in her slepe, and walked and talked and confessed all, and the doctor noted her wordes." (Halliwell 1865:3-4)

Halliwell had a facsimile of the first of these two pages made by the lithographer Edmund William Ashbee. I attach a reproduction of it below.

<7> What Forman is describing here is nothing that he could have seen performed on the stage. He is describing one of the woodcuts which illustrate the first edition of Holinshed's Chronicles (1577). This is it: --



Mr. Macbeth at his glod 1670 the 20
of April. He was to be observed first
for Macbeth and Banquo 2 noble men
of Scotland. Banquo was once wed for
before him 3 women for the 3 Witches
And saluted Macbeth saying. I 3 hymb
unto you. Hail Macbeth. King of Scotland
for you shall be a king but shall beget
no king. &c. You send Banquo we all
to Macbeth. And nothing to me. You
said for Banquo hail to you Banquo
you shall beget king. yet be no king
And so they departed & came to the Court
of Scotland to Duncan King of Scots
and he was in the days of Edward the
Confessor. And Duncan had from both kind
by wellborn. And made Macbeth forth
with the pursuit of Ross in Scotland. and
from him came to his own castle and ap-
pointed Macbeth to provide for him for
so word came with him the next day at
night. & did so. And Macbeth could
not kill Duncan. & Banquo's persuasi-
on of his wife did what might. Murder
for him in his own castle being his guest
And he wrought many prodigious signs that
night & the day before. And when Mac-
beth had murdered his king the blood on
his hands could not be washed off by any
means. nor from his wife's hands nor
could he see bloody daggers in front of him
any more means. He became both more ama-
zed & affrighted. The murder being known
Duncan's 2 sons fled yet on to England

The first page of Forman's notes concerning Macbeth,
lithographed by E. W. Ashbee for Halliwell's edition
(1865).