

XIX.—*On the Site of Macbeth's Castle at Inverness.*

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[Read to the Society, 28th January 1828.]

I HAVE been induced to commence this paper, in the hope of rectifying a very prevalent notion, that the stronghold which guarded the passage of the river *Ness*, at the Town of that name, was the one Shakspeare had in view when depicting the murder of the 'gracious Duncan':—And I have the more sedulously turned my attention to the subject, since, in the Archives of this Society, there is a manuscript by Colonel Grahame, professing to treat exclusively of 'Macbeth's Castle.' This communication is valuable, in so far as it shews what was the actual appearance, some years ago, of an interesting monument of antiquity. In reality, however, the Colonel's labours have been lavished on the more modern 'Castle of Inverness;' whilst a late writer (*a*), in a work peculiarly attentive to the accuracy of detail, has also fallen into the common mistake of confounding into one structure the strength of the Scottish Usurper with the acropolis of the Highland capital. This popular error I slightly alluded to on a former occasion (*b*); and I shall now endeavour to display the same more circumstantially.

The town of Inverness is situated on a plain, at a short distance from the junction of the river *Ness* with the *Murray*

(*a*) Chambers' History of the Rebellion in 1745.

(*b*) Historical Account of the Family of Fraser, p. 19.

Frith. The range of mountains extending northwards from *Loch-Ness* gradually falls in elevation as it approaches the town, which is environed on the south by a rising ground of inconsiderable height. At its western extremity, this ridge towers abruptly over the river, which, half-a-mile further down, terminates its course. From this precipitous brow, a line of low lying hills runs eastward, immediately above the high road, broken occasionally by small lateral glens. The first of these occurs about four furlongs to the eastward of Inverness, at the foot of the 'Crown Hill,' which forms the eastern, as the mount above the river does the western, point of the whole eminence; and it is through part of the latter that the approach to Fort-Augustus, now called 'Castle Street,' has been cut.

From its commanding position over the narrow strait which separates Inverness from Ross, this eminence must at all times have been an object of great importance; and appears, from the remotest era, to have been crowned by a fortress.

In the year of Christ 565, Brudi II. son of Meilochon, held the sceptre of all the Picts (*a*). His capital stood on the banks of the *Ness*; and thither Columba directed his steps from Iona, across the hills of Drum-Albyn. The Pictish Monarch, and most of the northern Picts, were converted to Christianity by the Saint; and the observations of the latter's biographer, Adomnan, seem to fix the court of the royal convert to have been on the height above the present town of Inverness, then graced also by the presence of a Scandinavian chief of Orkney (*b*).

Supposing King Brudi's mansion to have adorned the hill in question, we have no means of ascertaining its exact site, whether toward the *western* or *eastern* slope. That, in after times, *each* of these promontories was surmounted by a *balium*, or strength, is beyond a doubt; and it is from inattention to particulars that

(*a*) Pinkerton's Inquiry into the History of Scotland, i. 282, 298.

(*b*) Caledonia, i. 262. Hibbert's Shetland, p. 109.

so many have jumbled 'Macbeth's Castle' with the 'Castle of Inverness.'

The learned world have cause to lament that, when Dr Jamieson published his improved edition of Sletzer's *Theatrum Scotiæ*, he was content to avail himself of the assurances of Chalmers, in place of pushing those enquiries which his extensive researches into the history of our country so eminently qualified him to follow out. It is not without apprehension I venture to approach a subject which so profound a scholar left in its original darkness.

That Macbeth was Maormor of Ross by birth, and succeeded to that of Moray by marriage, cannot be gainsaid (*a*). In his latter capacity, that ample region from the Spey to the Beaully, and extending westwards to Argyll, fell under his domain. No spot could be more favourably chosen for the government of either principality than Inverness, dignified, as it had formerly been, by being the abode of royalty. The difference of our historians, in an important point of Macbeth's life, has, nevertheless, gone far to shake the truth of the great part he acted altogether.

Fordun, who flourished about 1380, is the first who details the means by which Macbeth obtained the crown (*b*). Speaking of Duncan:—'Hic autem pius Rex occisus est scelere generis occisorum tam avi quam proavi, quorum præcipuus erat MACHABEDA, filius Finele, a quo latenter apud Bothgofuane (*c*) vulneratus ad mortem, et apud *Elgin* delatus, occubuit, et in insula *Iona* sepultus est.' Boece, who gave his *History and Chronicles of Scotland* to the world in 1526, omits entirely all mention of *Bothgofuane*; stating that Macbeth was instigated by his wife to murder Duncan at *Inverness*; and that the King was buried at *Elgin*, but afterwards removed to *Icolmkill* (*d*). The *Chronicon Elegiacum*, (*e*) says:—

(*a*) *Caledonia*, i. 405.      (*b*) *Lib. iv. c. 49.*      (*c*) *Lochgosnane*, editio Hearnii.  
 (*d*) *Lib. xii. c. 3.*      (*e*) *Pinkerton's Enquiry*, App. vol. ii. p. 333.

'A Finleg natus percussit eum Macabeta;  
 'Vulnere lethali Rex apud *Elgin* obit.'

Adding:—

'Hos in pace viros tenet insula *Iona* sepultos,  
 'In tumulo Regum Judicis usque diem.'

Buchanan (*a*) joins in placing the murder at Inverness; Hollinshed follows; and Shakspeare closes the array (*b*).

The difficulty consists, not in the King's death at Elgin, and subsequent removal to Iona; but in assigning to Bothgofuane, or to Inverness, the infamy of the attempt upon his life.

The event which threw Duncan in the way of his murderer was produced by the refusal of Torfin, Jarl of Caithness, to render tribute to the Scottish Crown. In his progress to chastise that rebel, his Majesty was obliged to traverse the territories of Gruoch, and her husband Macbeth. The latter, who was allied to the royal family, (being a son of Doada, daughter of Malcolm II.) saw in this circumstance a fitting opportunity of gratifying ambition, by the removal of a man who filled a throne, to which his claim was novel (*c*). The rights of hospitality had not, however, lost their force; and a *Smith's* dwelling, (so Lord Hailes (*d*) translates *Bothgouanan*)—not his Castle of Inverness—was chosen by Macbeth for the murder of his sovereign. There is nothing to imply that this hovel was beside Elgin, (not Inverness.) What is there in the *Chronicon Elegiacum* to sanction Mr Pinkerton's reading, that Duncan was slain near Elgin? It is his *death* alone which is fixed '*apud Elgin*':—where the 'mortal stroke' was given, is not stated. By laying the scene in the palace, to which suspicion of treachery could least attach, Shakspeare added to the horror of the action, but departed not from the main features of the tragedy; and the subsequent transfer of Duncan to

(*a*) *Book vii.*      (*b*) See Malone's *Shakspeare*, iv. 266, 267.  
 (*c*) *Pinkerton's Enquiry*, ii. 196.      (*d*) *Annals*, i. 1.

Elgin has nothing in it to startle us. Possibly, some shrine stood there, at which the dying Monarch wished to pay his last vows—a request his foeman (as believing it, in the spirit of the age, conducive to his soul's repose) might not refuse; possibly, the assassins fled, impressed with the belief of having slain their victim; thereby affording his attendants an opportunity of escaping the more readily from the territories of Moray. Elgin was the last town, it will be remembered, on the confines of that province.

Whether it be an illusion (as Mr Chalmers (*a*) has so dogmatically stated it to be) or not, to talk of the walls of Macbeth's Castle at Inverness, 'where he never had a castle nor a residence,' we are now to consider.

The Statistical Account of Inverness says, (*b*) that the 'Thane of Calder's Castle' was built on the *eastern* extremity of the hill which covers the town; and that it was *razed to the ground* by Malcolm, in detestation of his father's murderer. 'The remembrance of the theatre of MACBETH'S ambitious villainy is preserved, however, in the old charter names of the lands (*c*) which belonged to it. The castle *near the river*, on the *western* extremity of the hill, was destroyed in the Rebellion of 1745. An ancient family, the Cuthberts of Castlehill, derive their designation from the site of *Macbeth's* Castle.'

It is much to be regretted that the compilers of these particulars did not amass all the traditionary tales current respecting this *eastern* fortress at the period they wrote. These are now

(*a*) Caledonia, i. 405.

(*b*) Vol. ix. p. 633.

(*c*) In an especial manner, in that of 'Auld Castlehill.' When writing, in the autumn of 1826, 'Notices of the Clans' for the Inverness Courier, I had occasion to inspect a beautiful deed, dated at Inverness, in the feast of the Epiphany of the Holy Cross, A. D. 1362, by which 'Robertus de Chesholme, miles, dominus ejusdem,' granted to the altars of the Holy Cross at Inverness, for the safety of his soul, and those of his ancestors and successors, six acres of arable land within the lands of 'the *Old Castle* of Inverness.' These acres are to this day called Diriebught, (*i. e.* the Poor's Lands) and run immediately under the supposed site of Macbeth's Castle, at the base of the Crown Hill.

vague and unsatisfactory; and I find, on inquiry, that they merely give a general support to the above statement.

There are, however, circumstances which materially aid the supposition of Macbeth's Castle having occupied the situation thus assigned to it; and of its having been a distinct structure from that vulgarly styled 'the Castle of Inverness.'

I. In an old M.S. in the Archives of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, relative to the above mentioned family of Cuthbert, which bears date on the back 1635, I find this passage: '—In all their charters and old wryts, they are called Cuthbert's of the *Alde* Castlehill; this castle *now* in being, being *then* the *new* castle; and it was founded by King Eugenius the Second. There is yett some vestiges of their *old* castle to be seen.' Again, the *eastern* extremity of the hill which shields Inverness has from time out of mind been known as 'the Crown.' To have obtained this appellation of 'the Crown' (*a*), a royal seat must at one time have graced the mount, built or repaired by none more likely than by that King, whose authority was here, perhaps, first acknowledged; and traditionary lore stamps the conjecture, by embodying it with the history of Macbeth. Immediately opposite to 'the Crown,' on a similar eminence, and separated from it by a small valley, is a farm belonging to a gentleman of the name of Welsh. That part of the ascent to this farm next Viewfield, from the Great Highland Road, is called 'Banquo's Brae.' The whole of the vicinity is rich in wild imagery. From the mouth of the valley of Diriebught to King's Mills, thence by the road to Viewfield, and down the gorge of Aultmuniack to the mail-road along the sea shore, we compass a district celebrated in the annals of *diablerie*. It was in this last glen, on the borders of the rivulet Aultmuniack, (or witches' burn,) that withered

(*a*) 'The lands and barony of *Auld Castlehill*, commonly called the *CROWN*, occur in the register of sasines for Inverness-shire, 25th November 1805. By the same record, sasine was given to the Honourable Colonel Archibald Fraser of Lovat, 8th February 1806, of the 'lands and barony of Auld Castlehill, commonly called the *CROWN*, and long rig immediately around the *Crown*, called the *AULD*, or *MACBETH'S* Castlehill.'

beldames joined in their unhallowed rites; and it was upon the small croft at the eastern extremity of Aultmuniack vale, that the last witch was burnt in the commencement of the 18th century (*a*). George Cuthbert of Castlehill, sheriff-depute of Inverness-shire, under the too renowned Simon Lord Lovat, a notorious persecutor of these victims to a degraded belief, met his death in the year 1748, at the western extremity of Aultmuniack, by a fall from his horse. A smiddy now stands upon the spot; remarkable also, as being, in the traditionary belief of the country people, 'the pit, or grave of King Duncan,' and so named, *Slochd-dunache*. With the characteristic weakness of popular superstition, Mr Cuthbert's death was, and is, looked upon as the retributive act of those 'weird sisters,' whose compatriots had suffered by his command.

II. The town of Inverness is said to have anciently stood a little to the south of this 'Crown Hill,' about a mile from its present site in the plain; and tradition still points out, near *Kings-mills*, the *locale* of the burgh-cross. These mills may have been attached to the royal granary; whilst the object of the towns-people by building there was to obtain protection from the fortress (*b*). When it was demolished, their security ceased; and hence the reason why the town took a *westerly* direction

(*a*) The latest instance, according to general belief, of an execution for witchcraft, occurred at Dornoch, in Sutherlandshire, in the year 1727, when the sheriff-depute condemned a mother and daughter to the stake. The latter escaped; but the old woman suffered death in a pitch barrel. Birt, who narrates the incident in his *Letters from the North of Scotland*, gives one to understand, however, that '*several others* have undergone the same fate, within the compass of no great number of years, in this county of 'Sutherland.' A gentleman of property in Ross-shire has repeatedly told me that his grand-father, who died in November 1800, at the age of 90 years, used to mention to him his having seen, when a youth, an old feeble man burnt on the Schoolhill of Aberdeen, as a wizard. He was pinioned down into a chair; and so placed upon the pile which consumed him. In all probability he was the last sufferer for the 'black art' in Scotland.

(*b*) See Dr Hibbert's *Shetland*, p. 256, for the connexion between the ancient *burgh* and the adjacent village, which in time acquired the same appellation.

under the walls of the *New Castle*. If Malcolm Cean-Mhor was the founder of this second strength, (as he is commonly reputed to have been) it is probable that the charter he granted to the town was dated in the same year in which the fortifications were commenced.

*Lastly*, About the year 1802-3, whilst some labourers were trenching a portion of the adjacent farm of the late Bailie Wilson, on the eastern side of the Crown Hill, contiguous to Dickson's nursery grounds, they met with a quantity of rubbish and the foundation of walls supposed to have belonged to the ancient castle. Mr Wilson removed the stones, and partially built with them a cottage in the valley below the hill. One of the stones, remarkable for carved decorations, was given to the Honourable Colonel Archibald Fraser of Lovat; but every attempt to learn what became of it after his death has proved unsuccessful. I may also mention, that traces of what has been an approach to a place of consequence are still discernible. This approach enters the lands of Diriebught from the present mail-road from Fort George; and, running through the valley, gradually ascends the bank of the Crown Hill; and, the level attained, strikes again towards the eastern point, where it terminates. Here the 'pleasant seat' is rumoured to have stood, facing the sea; and singularly correct with respect to the relative points of the compass will be found the poet's disposal of the portal 'at the south entry.' I remember, when a boy, to have heard that a draw-well which existed at this spot had been filled up in the memory of persons then, or shortly before, living; but such individuals as might have enabled me to check the accuracy of this tale are unhappily dead. Dr Johnson, in his *Tour to the Western Isles*, observes, that the walls of 'Macbeth's Castle' were at that time standing; but it is clear that both the Doctor, and the Commentator who re-echoes him, (*a*) spoke of the remains of the western peel, described by Colonel Grahame.

(*a*) Stevens on Shakspeare, vol. vii. p. 367.

The extreme accuracy with which Shakspeare has followed the minutiae of Macbeth's career has given rise to the opinion that he himself visited those scenes which are immortalized by his pen. The daring *Gruoch*, the daughter of Bodhe, (a) and wife of Macbeth—

————— 'from the crown to th' toe, top full  
Of direst cruelty,'

was no fictitious personage. Boece tells us it was by her 'persuasion' that her Lord was tempted to crime. Her wrongs 'unsexed' her (b). Guthrie (c) first threw out the probability of Shakspeare's having been in Scotland, and Sir John Sinclair followed (d). It is certain that companies of English comedians traversed this country towards the end of the 16th century. On the 23d June 1589, (e) a troop of players applied to the church-consistory of Perth for a license; and 'the minister and elders gave license to play, with condition that no swearing, banning, nor onie scurrility be spoken.' In the year following, King James desired Queen Elizabeth to send him a company of comedians. She complied with his request; and James gave them a license to act in his capital, and before his court, to the great horror, and in the face of a fanatical faction of church zealots. This very company visited *Aberdeen*, if not *Inverness*; and it is by no means improbable that Shakspeare was, by her Majesty's command, of the party. A passage in Mr Kennedy's *Annals of Aberdeen* corroborates this conjecture:—'In the year 1601, James made an application to Queen Elizabeth for *her* company of comedians, to be sent down to Scotland, which was readily complied with. And, after they had tired his Majesty and the people of Edinburgh with their entertainments, the King ordered them to repair to *Aberdeen*, to amuse the citizens with the exhibition of 'their plays, comedies, and stage plays.' They were

(a) Chartulary of Dunfermline.

(b) Statistical Account, vol. xx. p. 244.

(c) Caledonia, i.

(d) Statistical Account, vol. xviii. p. 522.

(e) History of Scotland, viii. p. 358.

' recommended by his special letter, addressed to the Magistrates, and were under the management of Lawrence Fletcher, who, with the celebrated *William Shakspeare*, and others of their company, obtained the first license to perform plays in Britain. It was granted by King James within two months after he had ascended the throne of England (a). The company of players who came to *Aberdeen* performed several times in the town; and were presented by the magistrates with 32 merks for their services, besides being entertained with a supper on one of the nights of performance. At the same time, the freedom of the town was conferred upon Lawrence Fletcher, the manager, and *each* of his company (b).'

Several passages of his works seem to demonstrate that Shakspeare had acquired a knowledge of the ballads and traditions of Scotland, by a personal acquaintance with the country. The fine old song in *Othello*, Act ii. of 'Tak' your auld cloak about thee,' is evidently Scottish (c).

With the exception of the foul act which won him a diadem, Macbeth is by no means deserving of the opprobrium cast upon his memory. Actuated by a spirit of piety or remorse, he visited Rome; but the passage from Simeon of Durham and Roger Hoveden, on which the incident rests, meets an assailant in Sir David Dalrymple, and a defender in Mr Pinkerton. The Chro-

(a) The license alluded to by Mr Kennedy was granted to *W. Shakspeare*, and the players, his fellows, in 1603, 'to use and exercise the art and faculty of playing comedies, tragedies, histories, interludes, morals, pastorals, stage plaies, and such like.' See Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, i. p. 261.

(b) Council Register, vol. xl. p. 210, 229. Mr Kennedy, in saying *each* of the comedians, has gone, it would appear, beyond his authority. Mr William Robison, advocate, Aberdeen, was kind enough to consult the Council Register at my request. He writes:—'I have searched the Council Register at the places you mention, but am sorry I cannot find Shakspeare's name. The minute, p. 210, mentions no names, and refers to a gratuity ordered to be paid by the Dean of Guild to the players then in Aberdeen. I send you prefixed a copy of the minute, p. 229.' In this last document, the only entry respecting *any* player admitted a burghess is 'Lawrence Fletcher, comediane, serviture to His Matie.'

(c) Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, i. 320.

nicon Elegiacum says of Macbeth:—‘ In cujus regno fertile tempus erat ;’ and Winton:—‘ All his tyme wes gret plente.’ He died at Lunfanan, Aberdeenshire, after a reign of seventeen years (a). The events at Dunsinnane are but the creations of the Poet.

It may be proper to say a few words, before I close, on the Castle of Inverness. It often received the sovereign within its gates. Thither James I. of Scotland summoned the Highland Barons to a Parliament, and to the unusual spectacle of feudal ferocity made subservient to the laws. The unfortunate Mary met insult and defiance at this very citadel from the adherents of Huntly ; and the forces of the Pretender besieged, and blew it up in 1746 (b). Alexander, Earl of Huntly, Lord Gordon and Baidzenach, was created sheriff of Inverness, and custodian of ‘ the Castle ’ thereof, by King James IV. By royal charter, dated 16th January 1508, several lands are allocated to the support of the Castle ; among others are the lands of Little Hilltown, Meikle Hilltown, and Castletown, ‘ cum piscaria sub muro dicti castri, et eidem pertinent.’ Geographical truth can only apply these words to the river Ness, which washed the walls of the more modern tower, since the elder strength is at a distance from any fishing station.

The family of Gordon are still hereditary keepers of the Castle grounds. The summit where the Castle stood has been levelled, and a portion of wall behind Castle Street is the only relic of the fortress.

(a) Reg. St And. ap. Hailes’ Annals, i. p. 3.

(b) In 1746, a Mr Godsman, factor to the Duke of Gordon at Inverness, completed the work of destruction which the Highlanders had begun, by removing the walls to build dykes. He took away, much to the chagrin of the gentlemen of the town (as a venerable lady resident there has informed me) a carved stone bearing an inscription commemorative of the æra when the Castle was erected. My informant, when a little girl at school, was often promised a reward by her father if she could discover this stone in any of the dykes ; and many were the anxious and fruitless researches she made in consequence. She never learnt that it was found.