

Macduff : Fife's Lion-Hearted Thane.

LET your memories wander backwards over the span of centuries to the reign of Duncan I.—that is, to the year 1033 A.D., or thereabouts. It was then that the Danish marauders descended upon the coast of Fife and committed great ravages there, until they were driven back to their ships by Macbeth, a son of the Thane of Glamis, and Banco, the Thane of Fochaber, who had been despatched against them, Duncan himself being too old, and his sons too young and inexperienced to conduct hostilities. After his victories Macbeth returns home ; and, as he marches at the head of his victorious troops through the Harmuir, a gloomy, blasted wilderness near Forres, he is stopped by three witches with this strange, three-fold, prophetic greeting :—

“All hail, Macbeth ! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis !
 All hail, Macbeth ! hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor !
 All hail, Macbeth ! thou shalt be king hereafter !”

The wondrous news surprises him. Before long Finlack, his father, dies, and the first part of the witches' prophecy is fulfilled. Soon after, too, a messenger comes from King Duncan, thanking him for his gallant services against the Norwegian vikings and creating him Thane of Cawdor, the former thane having been put to death for his disloyalty. So the second sorceress also spoke the truth. But titles make him ambitious, and his ambition is fired and fanned by a terribly ambitious wife, who goes so far as to counsel—nay, compel him to murder his sovereign and usurp the throne. For this

purpose the good king and his sons and many of the nobles are invited to Macbeth's castle, near Inverness, where a great feast is prepared to welcome them.

Then was committed one of the blackest and direst crimes that have ever darkened the pages of history, or made fiction horrible. "Come," says Lady Macbeth to herself,

"Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here ;
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, topful
Of direst cruelty ! make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose !"

And into her lord, the great Glamis, the worthy Cawdor, she instils this vixenish advice :—

"Your face, my thane, is as a book, where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time
Look like the time ; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue ; look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under it."

The twain plan the deed. They "mock the time with fairest show," and Duncan, fatigued with his day's journey, yet immeasurably contented—good man that he is—retires to rest. With wine and wassail they drench the king's chamberlains ; and, nerved with fresh draughts of liquid flame, perpetrate the horrid deed—a deed whose memory years will never, never erase. What a rough, unruly night it is ! The very heavens seem frightened ; the castle itself is feverish and trembles. Macbeth, the inhuman monster, starts at every sound, and, as he gazes on his bloodstained hands, groans appallingly :—

"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."

Morning dawns—the day after the storm—but men are scarcely prepared to witness such a wreckage. At the outer gate of the castle there is heard a loud and prolonged knock—knock—knocking. It is Macduff, the lion-hearted Thane of Fife, who knocks. A parley with the drunken porter, and he and Lennox enter. In a trice he is conducted to the monarch's bedchamber ; in a trice returns horror-stricken, crying :—

“ Confusion now hath made his masterpiece !
 Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
 The Lord's anointed temple, and stole hence
 The life o' the building. . . Awake ! awake !—
 Ring the alarum bell !—Murder ! and treason !
 Banco, and Donalbain ! Malcolm ! awake !
 Shake off this drowsy sleep, death's counterfeit,
 And look on death itself !—Up, up, and see
 The great doom's image.”

The traitress, Lady Macbeth, is carried out in a pretended faint. Malcolm and Donaldbane, Duncan's sons, suspect their host and, remembering that

There's daggers in men's smiles ;
 The near in blood, the nearer bloody,

flee—the former to Cumberland and the latter to the Hebrides. Suspicion, of course, rests on the fugitives, and Macduff, with the others, for a while believes them guilty of the parricide ; but he, too, soon sees the smiling daggers. Macbeth usurps the throne, obtains his heart's wish, and in pompous pageantry proceeds to Scone to be crowned. After the coronation ceremony he repairs to his Castle of Dunsinane among the Sidlaw Hills, and there lives a despotic, Czar-like life. And so the third witch's prophecy has come true.

With a view of ingratiating himself as far as he can into the good graces of his subjects, he gives a great feast to the nobles. Banco, the Thane of Fochaber and Macbeth's comrade-in-arms in the late king's army, is absent from the banquet. By the sovereign's orders he has been murdered, and in the banqueting-

hall appears his ghost, whose marrowless bones and glaring eyes unnerve the king, a circumstance at which the courtiers and nobles greatly marvel. Macduff's place, too, is vacant, for he has purposely denied his person at the feast. This is how it came about. Macbeth had begun to feel his insecurity, and so had ordered all his Thanes and vassals to send oxen to cart stones and wood for the fortification of his stronghold. One day, while the festivities were going on at the castle, the king crept out to see how the work was progressing, and observed one pair of oxen scarcely fit to drag their heavy loads.

"Whose oxen are these?" he demanded in angry tones.

"They belong to the Thane of Fife, sire," was the reply.

"Then," cried Macbeth, and his words were full of potent hatred, "since the Thane of Fife sends such worthless cattle to do my work, I will make him drag the burdens himself."



"NO, COUSIN, I'LL TO FIFE."

When the threat reached the ears of Macduff, he needed no second warning to tell him what to do. Then it was, in answer

to Rosse's inquiry as to whether he was to stay to the feast that he gave voice to those memorable words:—"No, cousin, I'll to Fife." Snatching from the table a loaf of bread and hastily calling his retainers together, he galloped back to his own sheriffdom of Fife. The story goes that when he arrived at the ferry over the Firth of Tay near Dundee, he had nothing wherewith to pay the boatmen except the loaf of bread, so for a long time afterwards the place was styled the Ferry of the Loaf.

All this time Malcolm Caenmohr, or Great Head, has been spending the years of his exilement at the court of Edward the Confessor, who had received him with open arms. News is brought to the king that Macduff is fled to England—

. . . to pray the holy king, on his aid
 To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward;
 That by the help of these, we may again
 Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights;
 Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives;
 Do faithful homage, and receive fresh honours,—
 All which we pine for now.

But ere the long-wished-for succour comes, deeds of the most blood-curdling atrocity are to be enacted. To a dark cave, where the witches are dancing round their charm-brewing cauldron, goes the tyrant, to learn his fate from the weird sisterhood. Out of the hell-broth pot the apparition of an armed head rises and exclaims:—

"Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! beware Macduff!
 Beware the Thane of Fife!"

One's not enough; a minute after another rises, and then another, a crowned child, bearing in its hand a tree-branch, ascends and foretells that

Macbeth will never vanquished be, until
 Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
 Shall come against him.

Thus soothed and encouraged, he sets out upon his arrant and heaven-provoking purpose ; to crown his thoughts with acts—and bloody acts to be ; to surprise the Castle of Macduff,

Seize upon Fife ; give to the edge o' the sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace his line.

He hied him to Cupar, where, on what is now the Schoolhill, stood the proud fortalice—the home, it is supposed, of the Thane of Fife. Emissaries are sent on in advance to secure, if possible, the Maarmor of the Kingdom. Once more we see the “shag-eared villains” ; once more the glittering steel is raised to strike—the guiltless blood is shed—young Macduff lies bleeding in his father's hall, while his hapless mother flees to the strong Castle of Kennoway, which looks out upon the Firth of Forth. Here she finds, with her faithful followers, a temporary retreat. And, while the heroic woman defends the fortress, Macduff is safely lodged in one of the numerous caves which pierce the coast of Fife. In time, at a moment when the vigilance of the pursuers is relaxed, the fishermen of Earlsferry, seizing the opportunity and regardless of the consequences, ferry him over to the other side.

Meanwhile Lady Macduff is eagerly scanning the waters, and, as she beholds the skiff urged through the waves by willing hands, goes to the castle wall and defiantly taunts the king who is standing below. “Do you see yon white sail upon the sea ?” she asks. “Yonder goes Macduff to the court of England. You will never see him again, cruel tyrant, till he comes back with young Prince Malcolm to pull you down from the throne and put you to death.”

Baffled in his attempts to capture the stronghold or its inmates the king returned home to Dunsinane, feeling assured that, sooner or later, the whole Macduffian race would be extinguished. Evidently the brave lady had intended to follow her noble husband, for tradition relates that she and her two

children were at last foully murdered within the walls of Dunninmarle Castle, near Culross, which marked the western confines of the Thane's territory.

And now, while Scotland weeps and bleeds, while wound follows wound, while vice struts rampant through the land, and the diabolical Macbeth, who smacks of every sin that has a name, plays the monstrous tyrant, what is Malcolm, the rightful heir to the throne, doing? What is Macduff doing? Malcolm, not much! Yet that little effort Macduff is fanning into a flame. He shakes the procrastinating prince to a sense of his duty; urges him—upbraids him—taunts him—goads him to action. Southwards, with lightning speed, rides Rosse and informs his cousin that his castle has been surprised, his wife and children slaughtered.

The heart of Macduff melts at the sad news; his grief is so great that he cannot speak. When once his sorrow can find words he groans:—

“ All my pretty ones.

Did you say all?—O hell-kite!—all?

At one fell swoop?

Did Heaven look on,

And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff,

They were all struck for thee! naught that I am,

Not for their own demerits, but for mine,

Fell slaughter on their souls: Heaven rest them now!

O, gentle Heaven,

Cut short all intermission; front to front,

Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;

Within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape,

Heaven forgive him too!”

Soldiers, to arms! The avenging sword unsheath! Scotlandwards they hasten with a formidable force, the English king assisting with ten thousand men under the command of the good Earl Siward. Dunsinane at length appears in view. Inside the castle the queen-tyrant keeps her nightly vigils; she is a somnambulist—a mad somnambulist now—and anon and

anon rehearses the bloody deeds of the past. Great, too, are the preparations which the usurper is making in his madness and fury.

Those he commands, move only to command,
 Nothing in love ; now he feels his title
 Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
 Upon a dwarfish thief.

Happy would he be, yet happy is not. Did not the witches prophesy that he was safe till Birnam Wood came to Dunsinane Hill? Did not the spirits say that woman-born man was powerless against him? Avaunt, then, black fears, avaunt! Begone, however, they will not! and in despair he mutters:—

“ My way of life
 Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf.”

By this time Malcolm's army has reached Birnam Wood. The good Macduff commands the soldiers each to bear before him the branch of a tree to overshadow their force—thereby unwittingly fulfilling the witches' prophecy, and exhorts them to don “ industrious soldiership.” In the morning the sentinel on the height of Dunsinane descries in the distance such a sight as he has never seen before. He hastens to his lord and exclaims:—

“ As I did stand my watch upon the hill,
 I look'd toward Birnam, and anon, methought
 The wood began to move.”

Much marvels Macbeth at the leafy spectacle; and then he suddenly remembers the prophecy he had heard long years ago of the coming of Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill. Surely it is coming now. Nearer, ever nearer, it approaches over the wide valley—“ a moving grove.” Down drop the branchy screens, and the besiegers are ready to acquit themselves like heroes. The trumpets peal forth a ringing blast of clamorous, murderous resolution and defiance. The tyrant buckles on his

harness and prepares him for the fight, convinced that all, or nearly all, is over. Nobly struggle the combatants ; the castle yields at last. Hither and thither rushes the avenging Macduff, seeking his enemy. Soon he espies him, and in a tone of angry thunder cries :—

“ Then yield thee, coward,
And live to be the show and gaze o' the time ;
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
Painted upon a pole ; and underwrit,
Here you may see the tyrant !”

And in reply the fiendish wretch exclaims :—

“ Before my body
I throw my warlike shield : lay on, Macduff !”

The vials of wrath are opened, and with frantic fury the combat deepens. Vigorously ply the swords ; blow for blow is given ; fiercer and fiercer grows the strife ; fast and furious fall the strokes ; harder, ever harder sounds the claymore's clang ; no quarter's asked, none given. They strike—they lunge—they shout—they tear—they reel—they fall—now one, the other : down, down, down goes Macduff—he is up again, wildly and more wildly wielding the willing sword upon the embattered shield ; down goes Macbeth, the fiend-butcher, the arch-monster, to rise no more. He has met a felon's doom, and paid the penalty of his infernal crimes. His face in death expresses what his passions were—demonish, blood-thirsty, and destructive. While he lies weltering in his blood, and the “ life flutters convulsed in his quivering limbs,” Macduff, with frenzied eagerness and exulting rage, cuts off his head and bears it in triumph to his sovereign, shouting, “ Hail ! King of Scotland, hail !” And Malcolm, in the first flush of victory, replies :—

“ My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be Earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honour named.”

After Caenmohr had got securely settled down in his kingdom, he did not forget his true-hearted knights. Macduff became his favourite noble; honours and privileges—he scorned mercenariness and asked no pension or grants of land—were heaped upon him, and these, when he died, were bequeathed to his successors. Among these peculiar privileges was the right of placing the sovereign on the coronation chair, the command of the van of the king's army, and the atonement with money for manslaughter. In a narrow glen in the Ochil Hills stand the remains of Macduff's Cross, a cruciform sanctuary, which was but one of the immunities the Earls of Fife exercised within their sheriffdom. To it and its precincts a homicide—were he only a Macduff—could flee to escape the wrath of the avenger of blood; once inside the sanctuary he was safe from molestation.

But to come to hard facts. Many people would have us believe that Macduff was a mythical personage. Not a bit of it! Thanks to the genius of the prince of English dramatists all the world knows him, though the play of *Macbeth*, from which the story has been mainly drawn, contains many by-truths.

The tyrant was not slain at Dunsinane. His enemies, says the ancient historian, had scarcely cast from them their boughs when Macbeth, beholding their numbers, betook himself to flight. At Belmont, near Meikle, he rallied his shattered forces, and another fierce and determined stand was made. Once more, however, he was compelled to flee, until at length, perceiving that Macduff was hard at his heels, he leapt from his steed, crying—"Thou traitor, why follow ye me who am not appointed to be slain by any creature that is born of a woman? Come on, therefore, and receive thy reward, which thou deservest for thy pains,"—and there he lifted up his sword, thinking to have slain him. But Macduff, eluding the blow, replied—"It is true, Macbeth, and now shalt thine insatiable cruelty have an end; for I am even he that thy wizards have told thee of, who was never born of woman"; and there and then, adds the chronicler, he stepped unto him and slew him. A spot in the

neighbourhood of Loch Auchlossen, in the parish of Lumphanan, Aberdeenshire, is still pointed out as the place where the usurper met his doom, the dramatist making Dunsinane Hill the scene of the tragic event expressly, no doubt, for the sake of stagecraft.

Macduff, let us repeat, was no fictitious character manufactured in the fertile brain of a clever tragedian, but the hereditary Thane or Maarmor of Fife, being the eighth in descent from Fifus Duffus, a chieftain of great power and heroism, who lived about the middle of the ninth century and received from Kenneth II., on the anatomization of the Pictish kingdom in 843 A.D., a grant of all the lands known as Othdinia, extending from Fifeness to Clackmannan and from the Forth to the Tay. This territory, which the leader of the *Dubh* or black-complexioned people had won by his valorous deeds, has ever since gone by the name of "the kingdom of Fife."

But there are some who unconsciously speak of the Macduffan territory as a mythical kingdom. Not so. In the early days of the Scottish monarchy Fife was recognised as the very heart of the country, and Chionaidh Chruaidh—*i.e.*, Kenneth the Hardy—the founder of that monarchy, frequently alluded to its inhabitants as the men of "the kingdom." Many of MacAlpine's descendants, too, made it their headquarters during these hard-featured times. And, says Holinshed, "there remaine unto this day (A.D. 1570) tokens and old ruines of a castell situate betwixt the river of Levin and St Kenneth's Church, which—as yet appeareth—was fenced about with seven rampires and as manie ditches, wherein the posteritie of this worthis man (*i.e.*, Fifus Duffus) after his deceasse had their habitation by the space of manie hundred yeares." This I take to be the Maiden Castle which, on the supposed site of an ancient Pictish fort, crowned the summit of a round hill near Kennoway.

Eight centuries ago the county was dotted with the keeps and fortalices of the Macduffs. Besides the strongholds of Cupar, Kennoway, and Dunnimarle, already mentioned, there

was also that of Lindores, erected to secure the kingdom against the incursions of the turbulent Highlanders. Almost wholly blotted off the face of the earth during the Wars of Independence, not a vestige of it now remains. At Wemyss stands another of the Macduffan fortifications—Wemyss Castle, nowadays a magnificent and imposing edifice, partly ancient and partly modern, belonging to the Wemyss family, who trace their genealogy straight up to *Adam* Macduff's very front doorway. The Mar of Falkland, too, was one of their fortresses until it passed into the hands of the Scottish sovereigns in the reign of James I. Earlshall, among the woods of Leuchars, belonged to the Earls of Fife, and so did the lands of Denmiln, near Newburgh, before the Balfours acquired them.

The earlier Thanes appear to have resided at or near Markinch—at Dalginche, which is recognised by Major as the ancient capital of Fife, where "those accused of theft had to find surety for sisting themselves in judgment." Be this as it may, we find that the church of Markinch, commonly called the Kirk of Macduff, was donated to the priory of St Andrews during the reign of William the Lion by Eugene, the great-great-grandson of the first earl. It seems also that the lion-hearted Thane changed the place of residence from Dalginche to Cupar, which Sibbald terms "the ancientest part of their estates," and that Cupar continued to rank as the seat of the sheriffdom up to the middle of the fourteenth century. This is evident from a charter wherein Duncan, the last Macduff, gives to the laird of Wester Fernie, *officium constabularii castri nostri de Cupro in Fyfe*—the office of constabulary of our castle of Cupar in Fife.

THE FAMILY OF MACDUFF.

DUNCAN MACDUFF, THANE OF FIFE.
Created Earl, A.D. 1061.

