

MACBETH.

THE play begins with the appearance of the "Three Weird Women" on the dark moorland near Forres, which the wild weather and fire have blasted, and over which, as Macbeth and Banquo enter, a storm is passing with thunder, lightning and rain. The day has been fair before their coming, now it is foul, and in the foul weather are those who have made it to suit their wicked work.

Thus we are brought into the dark atmosphere of the play, as dark without as it is within the souls of the characters. Night and tempest pervade the play. Duncan dies in a storm. Banquo perishes in the night, in the night his ghost arises. Lady Macbeth walks with her conscience by night and dies before the dawn. Macbeth and she slay their guest in the night, and cry to the night at every dark deed they do to hide their guilt and to assist it.

Only one other element of imagination is stronger in the play — that which drenches it with blood. Every scene is crimson with it; it is like the garments in Isaiah's battle, rolled in blood. Macbeth's imagination incardadines with blood the multitudinous seas. No Arabian perfume will sweeten away from Lady Macbeth's hands the smell of Duncan's blood. Tempest and terror, blasted lightning, and everywhere the scent and sight of blood are the outward image of the inward life in the "Weird Sisters," and the murderers.

The dreadful darkness of the play, spiritual and physical, is deepened at the beginning by the supernatural prophecies which contain in them the slaughter of the King. Macbeth's soul is at one with the tempest and the blasted heath, and the supernatural cry. To Banquo the day is the ordinary Highland day, and the witches are not supernatural. He is the same when he leaves the heath as when he entered it. Macbeth is not. There is that now in his soul which drives him as hunger drives the beast of prey. He carries it with him through his interview with the King, where its urging is quickened by the King appointing his son her to the crown, where its temptation is kindled into action by Duncan's saying that he will stay the night at Inverness. The opportunity has come. He rides in front of the king with murder in his heart.

"Stars, hide your fires,

"Let not light see my black and deep desires."

Into that grey world of the supernatural which some are