

You owe this strange intelligence? or why 76
 Upon this blasted heath you stop our way 77
 With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge you. 78
[Witches vanish.]

Banquo. The earth hath bubbles as the water has, 79
 And these are of them. Whither are they vanish'd? 80

Macbeth. Into the air; and what seem'd corporal 81
 Melted as breath into the wind. Would they had stay'd! 82

Banquo. Were such things here as we do speak about? 83
 Or have we eaten on the insane root 84
 That takes the reason prisoner? 85

Macbeth. Your children shall be kings. 86
Banquo. You shall be king.

Macbeth. And thane of Cawdor too; went it not so? 87

Banquo. To the selfsame tune and words. Who's here? 88

Enter ROSS and ANGUS

Cawdor. These words are more than clear, they are most emphatic, used indeed to render the possibility of being king utterly absurd. Let those who say Cawdor was guilty explain these words away: they will find it is a question not of a new hypothesis against an old one but of a new hypothesis, not in itself improbable, against none whatever. No one will believe that Cawdor was a rebel-prisoner through Macbeth's exertions and that Macbeth was unaware of the fact. Johnson and Daniel reject that view as absurd. In an ancient battle such a thing would be absolutely impossible.

83. In order to understand Banquo this scene should be read over and over with Banquo alone in view. Two things will then appear most clearly (1) That Banquo makes a vacillating struggle between the free path of a virtuous contempt for the witches and their alluring predictions, and the safe path of curiosity and hope in regard to these predictions: (2) That Macbeth watches Banquo closely and whenever he fears Banquo is about to mention Cawdor, he dangles the witches promise before his eyes and binds him to a guilty silence, as appears in the following note.

86-87. In line 86 Banquo tells Macbeth he fears his reason has been taken prisoner: Macbeth replies with apparent irrelevance "your children shall be kings." Banquo rejoins "you shall be king" showing that his mind is again fixed for the time upon the predictions: then Macbeth says in effect "If I am ever to be king and if your children are to rule, I must first be thane of Cawdor." Banquo does not refer to Cawdor when Ross and Angus come in, though he has every reason to enquire how that Thane has fallen.