

ACT I. SCENE III.

19

But how of Cawdor? the thane of Cawdor lives, 72
A prosperous gentleman; and to be king 73
Stands not within the prospect of belief, 74
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence 75

72-73. "*The thane of Cawdor lives, a prosperous gentleman.*" Macbeth means by this that Cawdor is probably where he and Banquo left him, in the Scotch camp, and probably in command of a division of Duncan's forces. It is simply incredible that these words are used (in Banquo's presence) of an imprisoned rebel who had turned traitor on the field after being in the absolute confidence of the king. Better with Swinburne declare the scene corrupt or repudiate it with the Cambridge editors than merely call this speech incongruous. If this speech is corrupt the whole scene is corrupt, for the speech agrees most perfectly with the context: the words "*The thane of Cawdor lives, a prosperous gentleman*" are shaded down to "*The thane of Cawdor lives, why do you dress me in borrowed robes?*" when Ross salutes Macbeth as Cawdor; will any reader believe that this significant shading down of terms is the result of corrupt readings? What method there must be in the corrupting of the two scenes when they are perfectly coherent from line to line, and from speech to speech, but incongruous when compared as scenes.

But in reality there is no incongruity whatever. Macbeth and Banquo are influenced by the witches' predictions, both desire every word of these predictions to come true: both know Cawdor innocent: but Macbeth *must* succeed Cawdor if the witches are to speak truth: Ross comes with news that Cawdor has given place to Macbeth: this trebles the desire of Macbeth and Banquo that Cawdor may be out of the way: *after this has taken effect* Angus tells them that Cawdor has been guilty of treason, at least Angus has heard so; now was it in the nature of Macbeth or of Banquo to stand up for Cawdor? If Macbeth and Banquo are not ailed in a guilty silence why do they not press Ross for an explanation of the downfall of so prominent a noble as the prosperous Cawdor? *Is it possible that Macbeth will not particularly inquire concerning one whose rank and title he succeeds to? Would not an honest man have questioned Ross far enough to allay the expressed doubts of Angus as to how Cawdor had been a rebel?*

To suppose Cawdor an innocent man, traduced and ruined by Ross, partly to curry favour with Macbeth, who coveted his neighbour's rank and influence (Cawdor Castle is fifteen miles from Inverness) partly from a natural malignity not unlike Iago's, and partly no doubt from personal jealousies such as occur in every army—to suppose this most probable if not certain hypothesis, supported by a hundred arguments, is to banish every difficulty in this otherwise hopeless scene: to reject this view is to leave Scenes 2 and 3 in a confusion really much worse than annotators have admitted, in as much as the true meaning of many lines has been overlooked; and the very reason of the presence of Angus in the two scenes and indeed the very reason for existence of most of Scene 2 are entirely lost.

75. It does not, Macbeth says, stand within the prospect of belief to be