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

By John Anderson, Esq., Writer to His Majesty's Signet, Assistant Secretary.

[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 Scotish 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 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) Chambers' History of the Rebellion in 1745.
(b) Historical Account of the Family of Fraser, p. 19.
ON THE SITE OF MACBETH'S CASTLE.

236

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

The learned world have cause to lament that, when Dr Jameson published his improved edition of Sletzer's Theatrum Scotise, 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 Boss 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 Beauly, 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 Hex occisus est scelere generis occisi, 'Vulnere lethal! Rex apud Elgin obit.'

Adding:

A Finleg natus percussit eum Macabeta;
Vulnere lethal! Rex apud Elgin obit.

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 Bothgoon or Bothgoeuan, 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 Scotch Crown. In his progress to chastise that rebel, his Majesty was obliged to traverse the territories of Gruch, 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 Bothgoonan)—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) Caledonia, i 405.  (b) Lib. iv. c. 49.  (c) Lochgoona, editio Hearnii.
(d) Lib. xii. c. 33.  (e) Pinkerton's Esquire, App. vol. ii. p. 333.
ON THE SITE OF MACBETH’S CASTLE.

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 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 Auld Castlehill; this castle now in being, being then the new castle; and it was founded by King Eugenius the Second. There is yet 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) 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. 1635, 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.

(1) ‘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.”
ON THE SITE OF MACBETH'S CASTLE.

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 Castleshill, 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 traditional belief of the country people, 'the pit, or grave of King Duncan,' and so named, Slochd-dunasche. 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 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.


H h 2
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 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 22 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 Home; 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-

nicon Elegiaeum 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 Dunsinnae 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 custo-
dier 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 pis-
carria sub muro dicti castri, et eidem pertinens.' 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 Godman, 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 residing there has informed me) a carved stone bearing an inscrip-
tion commemorative of the era 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.

XX.—Original Letter containing some account of the
Parliament which met at Edinburgh the 26th June
1678, and of the Seizure of Sir Patrick Hume of
Polwarth, Baronet.

COMMUNICATED BY WILLIAM WARING HAY, ESQ. F.S.A. SCOT.

Edr. July 8. 1678.

Sir,—It's like you may think strange I have not written sooner:
the great interruption of letters has been my hinderance. To give
you a plaine account of our Convention of Estates here, I must
tell you, that the Kinges Commissioner had all things so well or-
dered before our Countreymen came downe from London, that
they became unnecessary members: many of the peers being at
his devotion, upon pensions, court benefits & expectations, he
did them engaged to be present; of the other side many being
excluded by a test, or declaration against the Covenant, the ho-
est party now weak among the noblemen; as for the gentlemen
who represent the shires he had taken so great pains, that he
had prevailed to get a few shires to elect according to his humor,
& all the others he was sure to have double elections in them
even though 4 should elect 2 of their number as they did in
some shires; the burrowes he ordered paitly by largesses paitly
by threatenings, to choose such as he pleased: And thus the Con-
vention, so constitute, met the 26 of June the day appointed.
The honest party being very weak in the house by the gen-
tlemen's being for the most part out by double elections, which
wer to be tryed by the house before they could be admitted:
The other easily caried, debate what they could against it, to have
the naminge of the Comity for deciding electiones referred to
the Commissioner: & this was in effect the carrying of the whole
affaire, for that Committee, without regard of justice or reason,