MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, AND THE MURDER OF LORD DARNLEY

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RANDOM HOUSE

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This book is dedicated to the memory of

JOYCE MASTERTON
and
DAVID KNOWLES,
two great Scots

God will never permit such a mischief to remain hidden.

—WRITTEN BY THE SCOTTISH PRIVY COUNCIL TO CATHERINE DE MEDICI, QUEEN OF FRANCE, ON THE MORNING AFTER DARNLEY'S MURDER

Praise for *Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Murder of Lord Darnley*

"All the elements of a juicy murder mystery are within these pages, including love affairs, politic intrigue, and the imprisonment and eventual beheading of Mary Stuart by her suspicious cousi Elizabeth I of England." —*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

"Recommended . . . Weir skillfully analyzes the politics and religious tensions of the time..... Sh adeptly makes her case." —*Library Journal*

"Entertaining popular history that will satisfy fans of Weir's previous bestsellers." —*Publishe Weekly*

"Weir goes to great lengths to isolate the clues and marshal them into a convincing indictment. N stone is left unturned in her investigation, and . . . her book is as dramatic as witnessing firsthand th most riveting court case." —*Booklist (*boxed and starred review)

Acclaim for *Eleanor of Aquitaine*

"An alluringly candid portrait of this most public yet elusive of medieval women." —*The Bosto Globe*

"Evocative . . . A rich tapestry of a bygone age and a judicious assessment of her subject's plac within it." —*Newsday*

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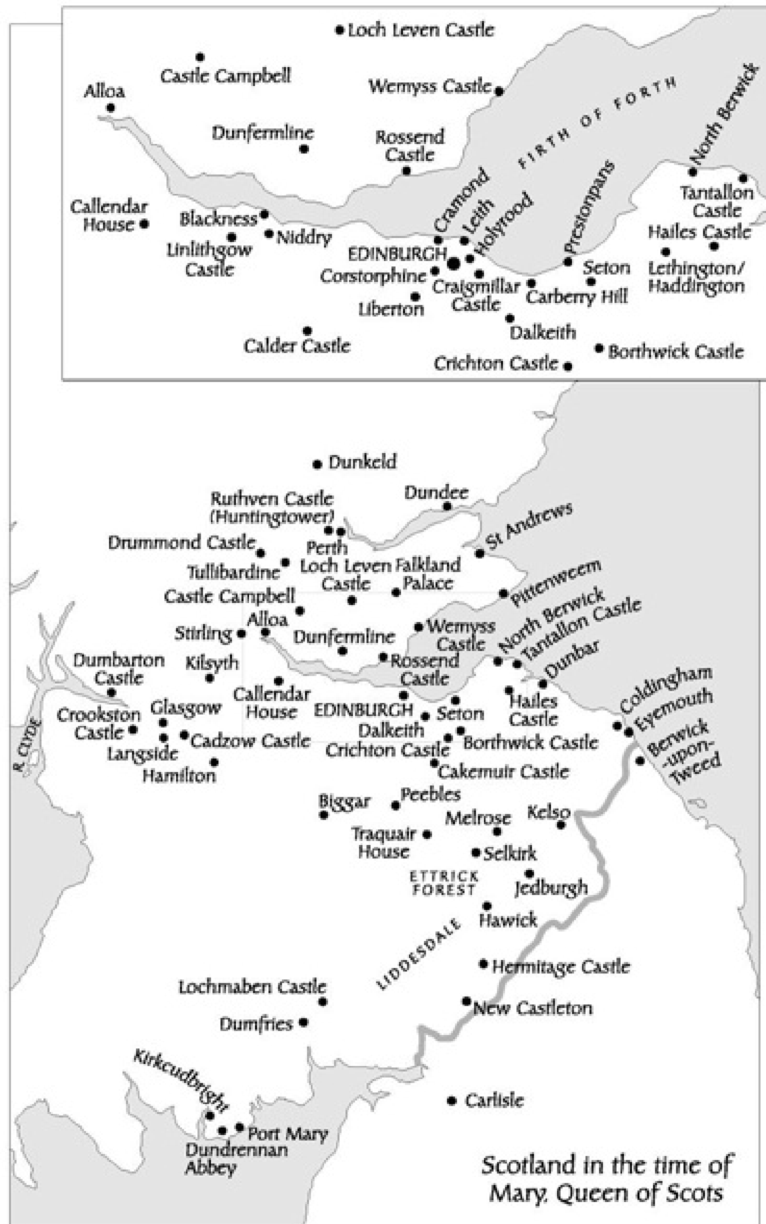

Scotland in the time of Mary, Queen of Scots

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: THE SCOTTISH LORDS

1. THE PROTESTANT LORDS

ARGYLL, Archibald Campbell, 5th Earl of (d. 1573). An epileptic, he succeeded to the earldom i 1558. Active in the Reformation Parliament of 1560, but rebuked by John Knox for his religiou tolerance. A prominent member of the Privy Council and the most powerful magnate in the Wester Highlands. Married to Jean Stewart, natural daughter of James V (divorced 1564).

ARRAN, James Hamilton, Earl of (1537/8–1609). Chatelherault’s heir and a fanatical Protestan Suitor to both Elizabeth I and Queen Mary.

BOTHWELL, James Hepburn, 4th Earl of (c. 1535/6–78). A zealous Protestant but no friend to th Lords of the Congregation. One of the greatest nobels of the period, with a strong power base in Ea Lothian and the Borders.

BOYD, Robert, 5th Lord (c. 1517–90). A supporter of the Lords of the Congregation, and a member o the Privy Council.

CHATELHERAULT, James Hamilton, Duke of, previously Earl of Arran (c. 1516–75). Head of th House of Hamilton and heir apparent to the Queen. Regent of Scotland during Queen Mary’s minorit and head of the Protestant Lords of the Congregation in 1560. Unstable in religion.

CRAWFORD, David Lindsay, 10th Earl of (1524–74). He was loyal to Queen Mary, but had reputation for recklessness and brutality.

FLEMING, John, 5th Lord (c. 1536–72). His mother was Margaret Stewart, a natural daughter James IV, and his sister was Mary Fleming, one of the four Maries. He was one of the Queen’s mos loyal partisans.

GLENCAIRN, Alexander Cunningham, 4th Earl of (c. 1510–74). An ardent reformist and member o the Lords of the Congregation. Religious zeal, rather than self-interest, dictated his actions. A membe of the Privy Council.

HERRIES, John Maxwell, 4th Lord (c. 1512–83). An early adherent of the Lords of the Congregatio and a friend of John Knox. He later became an active supporter of the Queen.

HUNTLY, George Gordon, 5th Earl of (c. 1535–76). Unlike his father, the 4th Earl (see below), he w a Protestant. A devoted supporter of the Queen and ally of the Earl of Bothwell.

LENNOX, Matthew Stuart, 4th Earl of (1516–71). His religious persuasions were a matter of politic pragmatism, but he eventually identified himself with the Protestant cause. He was one of the chi

nobles of Scotland, but had been exiled in 1543 for furthering English interests in that country. H
~~married Lady Margaret Douglas, niece of Henry VIII of England; Lord Darnley was their eldest~~ son.

LINDSAY, Patrick, 5th Lord (1521–89). A fanatical but violent adherent of John Knox, he was one o
the first Lords to join the reformers.

LIVINGSTON, William, 6th Lord (c. 1528–92). A staunch supporter of the Queen, who stayed at h
seat, Callendar House near Falkirk, on several occasions. His sister was Mary Livingston, one of th
four Maries.

MAITLAND, Sir William, of Lethington (c. 1528–73). Secretary of State from 1558, and one of th
Lords of the Congregation. He married Mary Fleming, one of the four Maries. A subtle, brilliant ar
devious politician and diplomat.

MAR, John Erskine, 1st Earl of Mar (c. 1510–72). Trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood, he lat
embraced the reformed faith. He became a member of the Privy Council and the Governor
Edinburgh Castle.

MORAY, James Stewart, Earl of (c. 1531–70). The Queen's half-brother, being the son of James V b
Margaret Erskine, sister of the Earl of Mar. He came to prominence in 1560 as one of the leaders o
the Lords of the Congregation, and was to play a cental part in the politics of the reign.

MORTON, James Douglas, 4th Earl of (c. 1516–81). Chancellor of Scotland from 1562, and head o
the powerful House of Douglas. One of the most zealous of the Lords of the Congregation.

OCHILTREE, Andrew Stewart, 2nd Baron (c. 1520–97). A fervent supporter of the Lords of th
Congregation. His friend John Knox married his daughter.

ROTHES, Andrew Leslie, 5th Earl of (c. 1530–1611). One of the foremost Lords of the Congregatio
A member of the Privy Council.

RUTHVEN, Patrick, 3rd Lord (c. 1520–66). Although a fanatical Protestant and one of the Lords o
the Congregation, he had an evil reputation as a sorcerer. He was a member of the Privy Council.

2. THE CATHOLIC LORDS

ATHOLL, John Stewart, 4th Earl of (d. 1579). Leader of the Catholic nobility, and one of only thre
Lords who opposed the Protestant Reformation. Member of Queen Mary's Privy Council.

CAITHNESS, George Sinclair, 4th Earl of (c. 1520–82). Although a devout Catholic and a member o
the Privy Council, he had a reputation for violence. Briefly imprisoned for murder in 1563. Chief
concerned with local politics in the far north.

EGLINTON, Hugh Montgomerie, 3rd Earl of (c. 1531–85). Although a Catholic, he supported th
Lords of the Congregation. He was a staunch supporter of Queen Mary and upheld her right to he

Mass.

HOME, Alexander, 5th Baron (c. 1528–75). A member of the Privy Council. Preferring to remai neutral in matters of religion, he refused to join the Lords of the Congregation and, later, to atter Mass with the Queen.

HUNTLY, George Gordon, 4th Earl of (c. 1510/14–62). Chancellor of Scotland from 1546. His mothe was a natural daughter of James IV. One of the leading Catholic nobles, he had a strong power base i the north-east. His fleeting flirtation with the Lords of the Congregation in 1560 dealt a fatal blow the Catholic cause in Scotland.

SETON, George, 5th Lord (c. 1532–85). Always a devoted supporter of Mary, he was a member of th Privy Council and Master of the Queen’s Household. He remained a staunch Catholic. His sister wa Mary Seton, one of the four Maries.

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTROVERSY AND THE SOURCES

THE MURDER OF LORD DARNLEY is the most celebrated mystery in Scottish history; it has bee endlessly recounted by numerous historians and writers, and the question that has most exercised a of them is this: was Mary, Queen of Scots the instigator of, or a party to, the murder of her husband That is the question that I aim to answer in this book.

The circumstantial evidence against Mary is weighty, but it is not conclusive. Furthermore, the are other suspects. However, most writers focus upon Mary because she was a young and beautif queen, whose life had already been touched by tragedy, murder and intrigue. Her character is a enigma that has never been solved, and during the four centuries in which she has been the subject intense scholarly and popular scrutiny, every aspect of her life has become controversial.

Any study of Mary's possible role in Darnley's murder must take into account changing historic perceptions of her over the centuries. After the murder, which led to her enforced abdication and he long imprisonment in England, she became a contentious figure. Scottish Calvinists saw her as a adulteress and murderess, and for political reasons vigorously painted her as such, while Mary Catholic and loyalist supporters regarded her as a wronged heroine. As memories of the murder fade and she became the hope of the Counter-Reformation and the focus for Catholic plots again Elizabeth I, Mary herself consciously fostered a pious image, which culminated in her calculated an dramatic appearance as a martyr for her faith at her execution in 1587. English Protestants, it shou be remembered, found her an altogether more sinister figure, and not without reason.

Yet Mary's dignified courage as she faced the block has had a profound effect on the way in whic most of her biographers have portrayed her; this image has, to a great extent, swept away dark contemporary perceptions of her, and as time passed it helped to enshrine her in romance and legen Back in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, observers were more preoccupied wi Mary's religious and dynastic significance.

Predictably, most Catholic writers saw Mary as a Catholic martyr. Yet after the accession of he son, James VI of Scotland, to the throne of England in 1603, even Protestant historians began to fin praise for her, mindful, no doubt, of King James I's determination to rehabilitate the memories of bo his parents. Mary, it was now agreed, had been unfortunate rather than immoral.

It was not until the eighteenth century—when much of the contemporary source material becam available for the first time—that Mary was seen as a woman who allowed her emotions to rule her ac and was therefore responsible to a degree for her own destruction. Historians such as David Hume an William Robertson criticised her for succumbing to overt and unwise passions. This view gave rise t a trend, which continued into the nineteenth century, for portraying Mary as the frivolous victim of licentious upbringing at the French court, whose unrestrained sexual intrigues brought about h downfall. Religion was still a factor: the eminent but prejudiced Victorian historian, James Anthon Froude, was grimly censorious of the Catholic Mary, and shamelessly massaged the facts in order t show her in the worst possible light. At the turn of the century, the controversy over Mary involvement in Darnley's murder was kept alive by a spirited debate between the historians T. Henderson and Andrew Lang.

During the twentieth century, historians were kinder to the Queen of Scots. Thanks to the ongoin

reappraisal of contemporary evidence, new theories about Darnley's murder were put forward, an
Mary came to be viewed in a more sympathetic light. After Antonia Fraser published what has becom
the standard biography of the Queen in 1969, most historians have concluded that Mary was a
innocent and much wronged victim of the unscrupulous men around her. A virtually lone voice is tha
of the historian Jenny Wormald, who believes that Mary was an abject failure as both a queen and
woman, and that she was an accomplice in Darnley's murder.

Anyone writing about Mary, Queen of Scots today has to penetrate beyond the several stereotypic
images that have evolved throughout the centuries—the adulteress and murderess, the *femme fatal*
the romantic tragic heroine, the religious martyr and the foolish victim of her own passions—to loo
for the real Mary and attempt to establish some estimation of her true character in order to determi
whether or not she was capable of murder.

Central to the issue of Mary's guilt, seemingly, are the controversial Casket Letters. If genuin
they go a long way towards proving her involvement in Darnley's murder, but many have argued th
they are forgeries or genuine letters that have been deliberately altered by Mary's enemies. It shoul
be said, however, that Mary's guilt or innocence can be determined by other evidence than the Cask
Letters, and that their importance has been somewhat overstated.

As an English historian married for thirty years to a native of Edinburgh, I have long been entranc
by Scottish history, and I have visited, on many occasions, most of the places mentioned in this boo
It had long been my intention, following on from the success of *The Princes in the Tower*, to wri
about another historical mystery, and I was delighted to be given the opportunity to take a fresh loo
at one of Scotland's most celebrated crimes.

I make no apologies for the long build-up to Darnley's murder in this book. It is essential
establish the characters, motives and relationships between the various protagonists, and also
examine the sequence of events leading to Darnley's violent death, in order to arrive at a fu
understanding of what took place at Kirk o'Field. It is equally important to trace the course of th
relationship between Mary and Darnley, and also to examine the history of Mary's policy on religio
because that may well shed light upon the murder.

Nor do I apologise for the length of the text. Every aspect of this case is controversial, and for an
study to be credible and exhaustive, each piece of evidence that has a bearing on the conclusion nee
to be fully examined and re-evaluated. There is, also, a large cast of suspects whose actions need to b
tracked.

Above all, it is vital to become familiar with the bias in contemporary source material, because th
is as relevant to solving the mystery of Kirk o'Field as the deeds of those who were there on th
fateful night. The chief problem facing the historian is that most of the evidence about Mary com
from hostile later sources that were composed with the specific purpose of proving her guilt, such
propaganda written by the zealous Protestant scholar George Buchanan and by Darnley's father, th
Earl of Lennox.

Some scholars did write in Mary's defence, notably John Leslie, Bishop of Ross, who defended h
against her Scottish accusers, and the intelligent and able Claude Nau, who became Mary's Secreta
in 1575 and wrote his *Memorials* of her reign in Scotland three years later. Nau's informant wa
probably Mary herself: no one else in her entourage at that time could have had such an intima
knowledge of the details of her life in the 1560s; Nau's work is therefore the closest to an offici
account that we have.

The memoirs of Mary's third husband, the Earl of Bothwell, which were written in 1568 whilst h
was a prisoner in exile in Denmark, have very little to say about Darnley's murder. Bothwell wa

widely believed to have been the man who plotted Darnley's death, so it is unlikely that he would hav
revealed anything incriminating, especially in a work that was written "to enable the King of Denma
to get a better and clearer idea of the wickedness and treason of those who are accusing me." [1]

In the circumstances, I have preferred to rely on strictly contemporary sources such as diplomat
reports and letters, circumstantial evidence, and a source known as the *Diurnal of Occurrents*, a dia
of events written by an anonymous observer living in Edinburgh, which is generally accurate, if biase
against Mary. Where I have used prejudiced contemporary sources, I have done so with caution.

PROLOGUE: KIRK O’FIELD, EDINBURGH, 10 FEBRUARY 156

FEW SOULS WERE ABROAD IN Edinburgh after midnight on 9 February 1567. Not only was bitterly cold with a light frosting of snow, but in an age of candles and rushlights, people tended to g to bed earlier than they do now. Anyone found on the streets at the dead of night was likely to b challenged by the watch.

To the south of the city lay a quadrangle of collegiate buildings attached to the adjacent ruined Ki of St. Mary in the Fields. Here, all appeared to be quiet. An hour or so before midnight, Queen Ma and her retinue had departed from the quadrangle, bound for Holyrood Palace, leaving behind, in h temporary residence, the Old Provost’s Lodging, Mary’s convalescent consort, King Henry, bett known to history as Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley. Darnley had retired for the night as soon as Mary lef he wanted to be up early the next morning. The only sign of life at Kirk o’Field, we are told, was single light burning in the window of the imposing Duke’s House, which belonged to the powerf Hamilton family.

We now know, of course, that all was not quiet at Kirk o’Field on that night, and that the area was fact the scene of a great deal of conspiratorial activity throughout the evening of the 9th and the sma hours of the 10th. Who these conspirators were has been a matter of furious historical debate for fo centuries, but what is certain is that, at two o’clock on the morning of 10 February, the Old Provost Lodging was blasted into rubble by a mighty explosion that reverberated across the city of Edinburg awakened most of its inhabitants, and sparked one of the greatest murder mysteries in history. For th chief victim was no less a personage than the King himself.

The reverberations from that explosion were keenly felt by those implicated—rightly or wrongly- in the plot during the months and years that followed, and they have been echoing down the centuri ever since. For over four hundred years, controversy has raged over who murdered Darnley and ho he died. Many thought then, and still think now, that Queen Mary was an accessory before the fact the murder of her husband, for she certainly had sufficient motives for getting rid of him. Yet so di several other people, including most of the Scottish nobility. And Darnley himself, incredible as may seem, was not above suspicion.

The question of Mary’s guilt is crucial, and continues to provoke heated debate. It is tim therefore, for a fresh, objective reappraisal of the mystery of Kirk o’Field. Despite the conflicti nature of the contemporary evidence and the obscuration of centuries of theory, romantic myth suppositions, speculation, prejudice and uninformed opinion, I believe that it is indeed possible unravel what actually happened on that long-ago night in Edinburgh, and to point the finger at wh was responsible.

ALISON WEIR
Scottish Borders
28 July 2002

1

THE THREE CROWNS

TO EVERYONE'S DISMAY, [1] THE BABY born to James V of Scotland and his second wife, Mar de Guise, on 8 December 1542 [2] at Linlithgow Palace was a girl. After the deaths of two infant sons 1541, her father had hoped for another boy to succeed him, because Scotland needed a man's stron hand to rule it. For James V was already mortally ill, and following a crushing defeat by the English the Battle of Solway Moss on 24 November, he had taken to his bed at Falkland Palace. When new was brought to him of the birth of his daughter, he turned his face to the wall and, recalling that th crown had descended to the Stewart dynasty through Marjorie, daughter of King Robert the Bruc muttered, "It came from a woman, and it will end in a woman." [3] Soon afterwards he died, "wherefo there was great mourning in Scotland." [4]

At only six days old, the infant Mary became Queen of Scots. Scotland was used to royal minoritie for every one of its monarchs since 1406 had succeeded as a child. As a result, the nobility had grow in strength and autonomy, having become used to long periods without royal interference durin which they enjoyed the unfettered exercise of power. These minorities had also bred rivalries an factions, as different families struggled for power.

In March 1543, Parliament appointed Mary's cousin and next heir, James Hamilton, Earl of Arran as Second Person and Governor of the Realm until the Queen attained her majority at the age twelve. Arran, then twenty-seven, was a Protestant, and head of the powerful Hamilton clan, whos lands straddled Clydesdale and central Scotland. An English envoy described the Hamiltons as a goo looking race, but vicious, faithless and inept. [5] Arran's claim to the succession was not undispute because there was uncertainty as to whether his parents had been lawfully married; hence h overriding purpose in life was to establish the legality of his claim. Self-interest and the advanceme of his House dictated his political policies, but his indolence, instability and lack of decisiveness lo him the support of many nobles.

The King of England at that time was Henry VIII, and he was resolved to marry his five-year-o son and heir, Prince Edward, to the little Queen of Scots, and thereby unite England and Scotlan under Tudor rule. Arran, eager to secure the support of the English King for his claims, was willing co-operate, and on 1 July 1543 a treaty was concluded at Greenwich, which provided for the marria of Mary and Edward. Mary was to go to England when she was ten, and be married the following yea

But the Catholic party in Scotland, led by Marie de Guise and Cardinal David Beaton, were oppose to the treaty. They removed Mary from Arran's care, took her to Stirling Castle, and had her crowne there, in the Chapel Royal, on 9 September. In December, a Catholic-dominated Parliament repudiate Mary's betrothal and renewed the ancient alliance between Scotland and France, England's enemy.

Henry VIII was incensed, and in 1544 retaliated by sending an army to Scotland. The savag campaign that followed became known as the "rough wooing": in the course of it, scores of town villages and abbeys in the south-east were mercilessly sacked and burned, leaving vast swathes devastation. Even the city of Edinburgh did not escape Henry's fury: he had ordered his commande

to sack, “burn and subvert it, and put every man, woman and child to the sword.” [6] Far from bringin
the Scots to heel, the barbarity of the English only strengthened them in their resolve.

In 1543, there had returned to Scotland a man who was to play a prominent role in the drama Mary, Queen of Scots. Matthew Stuart, 4th Earl of Lennox, whose power base was centred upo Glasgow, had been born in 1516 at Dumbarton, and had succeeded to his earldom at the age of te after the murder of his father by Arran’s bastard half-brother. This was cause enough for bad bloo between Lennox and Arran, but they were also bitter rivals for the succession. Like Arran, Lennox wa descended from Mary, daughter of James II, but only in the female line; unlike Arran, he had bee born in undisputed wedlock. With such contentious issues dividing them, there could be no friendsh between the Lennox Stuarts and the Hamiltons.

In 1531, Lennox had gone to France, where he joined the royal guard, became a naturalised subje of the French King and changed the spelling of his surname from Stewart to Stuart. Twelve years late to Arran’s consternation, he returned to Scotland and began paying court to Marie de Guise. Like mo women, she found him handsome, charming and gallant: he was “a strong man of personage, wel proportioned with lusty and manly visage, and carried himself erect and stately, wherefore he wa very pleasant in the sight of gentlewomen.” [7] A well-educated man, he spoke fluent French and wa skilled at playing the lute. The Queen Dowager and Cardinal Beaton believed Lennox to be an arde Francophile who would support them against the ambitions of Arran. But Lennox was unreliabl treacherous and driven by self-interest, and when Marie refused to marry him, he defected to th English in search of better prospects. In return for his support against the Scots, Henry VIII bestow on him the hand of his niece, Lady Margaret Douglas.

The wedding took place in July 1544 at St. James’s Palace in London. Born in 1515, Margaret wa the daughter of Henry VIII’s elder sister, Margaret Tudor (widow of James IV and grandmother o Mary, Queen of Scots) by her second husband, Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus; Margaret wa therefore near in blood to the English throne, and a marriage between her and Lennox could on reinforce the dynastic claims of both parties. Yet although their union was politically advantageous, was also a love match on both sides: he was said to be “far in love,” [8] and in his letters, he addresse his wife as “mine own sweet Madge” or “my Meg,” told her she was his “chiefest comfort,” an signed himself “Your own Matthieu and most loving husband.” Margaret was a devout Catholic, s Lennox, who had been reared in the old faith but recently converted to Protestantism, now tempere his spiritual views to please his wife and King Henry; religion was ever a matter of expediency wi him.

Margaret Douglas was a formidable woman. Beautiful, intelligent, domineering and relentless ambitious, she had an alarming talent for dangerous intrigue. She had spent much of her youth at th English court and become a great favourite of her uncle the King, but incurred his anger when sh twice, in 1536 and 1541, became involved with unsuitable men; on each occasion Henry sent her for spell in the Tower, a place with which she was to be become all too familiar during the course of h turbulent life. There can be no doubt that Margaret Douglas became the driving force in the Lennoxe marriage.

In 1545, Lennox led an English army into Scotland in the hope of taking Dumbarton Castle f Henry VIII. It was during this campaign that he ordered the slaughter of eleven child hostages who Scottish fathers had been forced into his ranks and then defected; [9] this earned him undying notorie and a perpetually haunted conscience. His offensive ended in failure, and on 1 October the Scottis Parliament attainted him for treason and confiscated all his estates and titles, some of which we

given to Arran. Lennox was now the most hated man in Scotland. For the next nineteen years, h
~~remained an exile in England, living on the bounty of Henry VIII. The Lennoxes' chief seat~~ wa
Temple Newsham in Yorkshire, and they owned another house nearby at Settrington. When in Londo
they resided at the former royal manor of Hackney. Lennox never abandoned hope of regaining h
lost lands and asserting his dynastic claims, his ambitions having been sharpened by his gran
marriage and the birth of eight children, who inherited the royal blood of both Scotland and England.

During the 1540s, the impact of the Protestant Reformation began to be felt in Scotland. For decad
now, the Catholic Church in Scotland had been morally lax and corrupt, and there had been calls fo
its reform. Now, religious affiliations became identified with political issues, and two noble factio
emerged: the Catholics, who favoured the "auld alliance" with France, and a growing number
Protestants, who wanted closer relations with England, whose King, although a Catholic, had severe
links with the Church of Rome and declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England.

Trouble began when a Protestant heretic, George Wishart, was burned on the orders of Cardin
Beaton in 1546. In reprisal, Wishart's followers brutally murdered Cardinal Beaton, then held out fo
a year in St. Andrews Castle before the arrival of a French fleet forced them to surrender. Amon
those taken prisoner was the reformist preacher John Knox, who would one day become one of th
prime movers in the Protestant Reformation. He was sentenced to two years as a galley slave.

In 1547, when Henry VIII died and was succeeded by the nine-year-old Edward VI, England becam
a Protestant state. The Lord Protector, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, was determined to carr
on the war against Scotland, and ordered another invasion. On 10 September 1547, the Scots und
Arran suffered a devastating defeat at the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh, which enabled the English
occupy south-eastern Scotland. On the day after the battle, the Scots hastily moved their little Quee
to Inchmahome Priory for safety, and appealed to the French for aid.

By January 1548, Arran, who had hoped to marry his own son to Mary, was negotiating with Kin
Henry II of France for her marriage to Henry's eldest son, the Dauphin Francis. Mary's matern
uncles, Francis, Duke of Guise and Charles de Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine, were rising men at th
French court, and they, foreseeing great advantages to themselves through the marriage of their niec
to the heir to the French throne, added their persuasions to Arran's. Henry was more than amenable, a
he realised that the match was of far greater benefit to France than Scotland, for it would ultimate
bring Scotland under French control, since a wife, even a crowned queen, was always subject to h
husband. Given the situation they were in, the Scots had little choice in the matter: whether the
married Mary to a French or an English prince, they would be under threat of interference by a foreig
power. In the circumstances, it seemed safer to ally with an old friend than a hostile enemy, and i
February 1548, the Scottish Parliament gave its consent to the marriage. In return, the Frenc
promised to send troops to help expel the English garrisons from Scotland. At the end of the mont
Mary was moved to the greater safety of Dumbarton Castle.

In June, having cut a swathe through the occupying forces, a French army recaptured the strateg
town of Haddington in East Lothian, and there, on 7 July, a treaty was signed formally providing fo
the marriage of Mary to the Dauphin, with provisions for safeguarding Scotland's future politic
autonomy.

Arran was now a spent force, although he was to remain Regent for six more years. Real power
Scotland now lay in the hands of the Queen Dowager, who was determined to protect her daughter
interests and preserve her Catholic kingdom intact. In order to ensure Arran's support, she persuade

the French King to grant him the dukedom of Chatelherault, and promoted his bastard half-brothe
John Hamilton, Abbot of Paisley to the office of Archbishop of St. Andrews and Primate of Scotland.

The new Archbishop, who was one day to be accused of involvement in Darnley’s murder, was th most able and opportunist politician of all the Hamiltons, and a liberal conservative in religion. Wi and self-seeking, like all his family, “he spent the least part of his time in spiritual contemplations” [1 and led “a life somewhat dissolute” [11] with a “harlot” called Grizzel Sempill, who bore him at lea three children, and was the widow of the Provost of Edinburgh. For his sins, Hamilton contracte syphilis, and in 1566 underwent an expensive course of mercury treatment. Marie de Guise ignore the scandals of the Archbishop’s private life; she hoped he would be the saviour of the Cathol Church in Scotland.

On 7 August 1548, the five-year-old Mary said goodbye to her mother and her kingdom, and sailed France. Amongst her attendants were four well-born girls of similar age to her own, all called Mar who were to be her special companions, and to whom she became especially close: vivacious Ma Livingston, beautiful Mary Beaton, devout Mary Seton and enchanting Mary Fleming.

When Henry II first saw Mary, he declared she was “the most perfect child that I have ev seen.” [12] From the first, he treated her as his own daughter, and placed her in the household of h children by his Florentine Queen, Catherine de’ Medici. Mary was to grow up in luxurious roy châteaux such as Blois, Chambord and Fontainebleau, surrounded by the art and culture of th Renaissance and the sophisticated, glittering life of the court, where she was petted and pampered b all who came into contact with her, and particularly by her magnificent Guise uncles, who hoped fo great things from her in the future, and who guided her in all matters.

Yet the French court was also a moral cesspit, and Mary was exposed from an early age to i promiscuity and corruption. Her own governess bore the King a bastard child. “Here, it is not the me who solicit the women, but the women the men,” observed the Queen of Navarre disapprovingl [13] The court was ruled by the King’s mistress, the elegant and cultivated Diane de Poitiers, who wa nineteen years his senior yet still beautiful. An affronted Queen Catherine was relegated to th sidelines while Diane was given responsibility for arranging the education of the royal children. Fro Diane, Mary learned to regard Catherine with contempt, and consequently the Queen “had a gre misliking” of her daughter-in-law. [14]

The moral laxity of the court is reflected in two paintings that apparently show a teenaged Mary, th future Queen of France, in the nude. Two figures in the erotic allegorical work *The Bath of Dian* attributed to Francis Clouet (now in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Rouen) are thought to be portraits o Mary, and she is almost certainly the bare-breasted sitter wearing a ruff and headdress in the portra of *A Lady at her Toilet* by an artist of the School of Fontainebleau (now in the Worcester Art Museum Massachusetts). [15] It is not known whether Mary herself posed naked for these pictures, or whether h portrait was superimposed on the body of a nude model, but the portrayal of her in such poses beli the later image she fostered of a prim and virtuous princess.

Even the royal children were tainted by the corruption of the court. Both their grandfathers had die of syphilis, and its effects were now tragically apparent in them. Of the ten children born to Henry and Catherine de’ Medici, Francis was sickly and feeble, Charles suffered from hallucinations, Henr became a homosexual cross-dresser, and Marguerite a nymphomaniac who had an incestuous affa with her brother Hercule.

Mary’s closest companion in childhood and youth was her future husband, the ugly little Dauph Francis, for whom she early on conceived a tender affection. Born in January 1544, he was weak ar sickly from birth. His growth was stunted, and he was afflicted not only by a permanently runnir nose but also, later on, by such terrible eczema that it was reported he had leprosy. [16] As a result, h was shy, moody and difficult, but he soon grew very fond of Mary, and she, in turn, referred to him a her “sweetheart and friend.” [17]

Mary was brought up as a devout Catholic, and received a Renaissance education alongside h future husband and his siblings. She was taught sophisticated literary skills and elegant calligraphy. I an age of developing diplomacy, there was great emphasis on languages. French became Mary’s fir language, and would remain so for the rest of her life; she did retain enough of her native Scots to b able to converse in it as an adult, although she never became proficient at writing it. [18] She also gaine “a useful knowledge” [19] of Spanish, Italian, Latin and Greek, but did not begin to learn English unt 1568. Mary brought back 240 books from France to replace the royal library at Holyrood Palace Edinburgh that had been destroyed by the English in 1544, and these were in a wide variety languages, including Latin and Greek; there were books on history, music, geography, astronomy ar theology, a selection of the works of antiquity, and a large number of romances and poetry books i French and Italian, the latter being Mary’s preferred reading. The great poet Pierre de Ronsard himse taught her to write quite competent courtly verse.

The young Queen was an intelligent girl with a quick mind, who enjoyed learning for its own sak Although not an intellectual like her cousin, the future Elizabeth I of England, she read a great deal f pleasure, and “there was hardly any branch of human knowledge of which she could not talk well.” [2

Mary was also taught the traditional feminine accomplishments: many surviving examples of h work testify to her skilled needlework and embroidery, and she was also good at drawing. Dancir became one of her favourite pastimes, and she learned to carry herself with perfect grace and agility the ballets and masques in which she took part at the French court. She sang beautifully and played th lute, cittern, harp and virginals “reasonably well for a queen.” [21] Mary was early on introduced to th pleasures of hunting, hawking and other outdoor pursuits, including archery, pell-mell (croquet) ar later, in Scotland, golf; she became an expert and fearless horsewoman, and was never happier tha when in the saddle. She also loved fine clothing, dogs, tame birds, long walks, puppet plays from Ital and games such as cards, dice, chess, billiards and tables (backgammon).

Henry II saw to it that the Scots in Mary’s household were gradually replaced by French peopl Mary herself began to adopt the French spelling of her surname, Stuart, and always signed herse “Marie.” There is little evidence that she received any formal training in political skills, for everyon herself included, expected her to remain in France. Scotland would be governed by others on h behalf, so there was no necessity for her to be trained specifically for the duties of a queen regnan Mary’s Guise uncles were there to advise if she needed any guidance in matters of state, but she wa also growing up in a court where intrigue and brutality were commonplace, and she must have learne something of the Machiavellian nature of Renaissance politics, the manipulation of political factio and the contemporary controversies over religion just by observing what went on around her.

In 1551, two years after the occupying English forces were finally driven out of Scotland, peace w concluded between the two kingdoms. In 1553, Edward VI died, and was succeeded by his Cathol half-sister, Mary I, who was to spend her reign re-establishing the Church of Rome in England ar

devoutly burning Protestants. In 1554, Marie de Guise finally replaced Chatelherault as Regent
Scotland, and immediately revived the Auld Alliance with France, in the hope of stemming th
swelling tide of Protestantism in Scotland. The Queen Dowager strengthened her position by relyin
on French advisers and French troops, for whom her daughter's subjects were expected to pay, but th
only served to alienate the proud and independent Scots, who feared that their country was in dang
of ending up as a satellite state of France.

By 1557, the new religion had not only grown in popularity but had also become widely associate
with an injured sense of national identity, born out of resentment against unwelcome Frenc
interference. That year, five leading Protestant nobles banded together and, calling themselves th
Lords of the Congregation of Jesus Christ, allied with militant reformist preachers and signed a bon
or covenant, undertaking to establish the new faith as the national religion of Scotland.

The Lords of the Congregation increased immeasurably in strength in 1558, when Mary's powerf
and influential bastard half-brother, the sternly Calvinist Lord James Stewart, joined them with a larg
following and publicly proclaimed that the Lords of Scotland would embrace the Protestant faith an
restore Scotland's independence.

Lord James Stewart, who was to play a momentous and often enigmatic role in Mary's life, ha
been born around 1531, and was the most able and prominent of the nine bastard children of James V
His mother was Margaret Erskine; at the time of her liaison with James V, she had been married to S
Robert Douglas of Lochleven. James had petitioned the Pope to have the marriage annulled, so that h
could marry his mistress, but in vain. In adult-hood, Lord James himself tried unsuccessfully to hav
his parents' union legalised retrospectively.

Lord James's bastardy was evidently a matter of great bitterness and resentment to him, for
prevented him from wearing the crown of Scotland, a role for which he was eminently suited, both b
nature and by ability. He looked like a Stuart king, being tall and dark with a distinctly regal bearin
and a commanding presence. Having to give place to his half-sister, a Catholic ruler, and a female
that, cannot have been easy for one who was ambitious, strong-willed, clever and capable, and h
jealousy certainly had a profound bearing on the future relations between himself and Mary, whic
were amicable, and often affectionate, so long as she deferred to his wisdom and judgement. F
James was not interested in the outward show of royalty, but in the actual exercise of sovereign powe

Many, then and since, among them Mary herself, have claimed that Lord James never ceased fro
scheming to seize the Scottish throne, and certainly his record over the coming years would appear
suggest that this was his ultimate aim. Had that been the case, however, it is surprising that he did n
grasp the opportunity to usurp the throne on the two occasions when he had the chance to do so.

For centuries, historians have debated whether Lord James was an upright man who acted o
principle, or a treacherous villain who cleverly managed to cover his tracks and find unarguably soun
pretexts for his actions: indeed, in nearly every instance, his behaviour can be interpreted in bo
lights. He was a man "whose peculiar art was to appear to do nothing whilst, in truth, he d
all."[22] Whenever there was trouble or scandal, he was always absent. And although it was said of hi
that he "dealt, according to his nature, rudely, homely and bluntly,"[23] he was ruthless, devious, subtl
and cautious in the extreme.

There can be little doubt of the sincerity and consistency of Lord James's stern Calvini
convictions, nor that in his private life he was a model of austere rectitude. No personal scandal ev
attached to his name, and he was reputed to be honest, which virtues earned him great popularity wi
the middle classes. Yet when it came to material things he was greedy, and through stead
advancement, the acquisition of ecclesiastical property, and the bounty of his sister, he managed t

make himself the richest man in Scotland.

One Protestant lord who refused to join the Lords of the Congregation was the mighty James Hepbur 4th Earl of Bothwell, who was perhaps the Queen Regent's most staunch supporter and who could n be shifted from his loyalty to the Crown.

Bothwell, whose destiny was to be fatally linked to Mary's, had been born around 1535 ar succeeded his father to the earldom and the hereditary office of Lord High Admiral in 1556. Th Hepburn territory was centred upon the fertile and rich region of East Lothian, and the family's chi seat was Crichton Castle, eight miles south of Edinburgh. James had been educated in the househo of his promiscuous uncle, Patrick Hepburn, Bishop of Moray, at Spynie near Inverness, and in th university schools of Paris. He was a cultivated, literate man, interested in science and warfare, ar spoke fluent French and some Latin and Greek.

In 1557, Bothwell had commanded a military force that raided the English border, and for much his life he would play a major role in suppressing lawlessness in the Scottish Borders. He mortal hated the English and, unlike almost all the rest of the Scottish nobility, would never accept bribe from them, which was commendable as he was always chronically short of money.

Contemporaries referred to Bothwell as "a splendid, rash and hazardous young man," [24] "high in h own conceit, proud, vicious and vainglorious above measure, one who would attempt anything out ambition." [25] His enemies said he was "false and untrue as the devil," [26] the "sink of all horrib sins." [27] Although he was "all his lifetime a faithful servant of the Crown, a man valiant above a others," he was also "audacious, inconstant and changeable." [28]

Bothwell was certainly a volatile, violent and turbulent man, but hardly the "monstrous beast" "bag of vice" [29] he was made out to be by his foes. Sir Henry Percy, a respected English adversar was impressed with Bothwell when he met him, and declared he was "very wise, and not the man h was reputed to be. His behaviour was both courteous and honourable." [30]

Bothwell was probably about five feet six inches tall, [31] and of strong, muscular build with da cropped hair and a moustache. His later enemy, George Buchanan, described him as looking "like a ape in purple," and his language was of a similar lurid colour. [32] Yet women found him irresistibl and his private life was constantly the subject of scandal, for he had an insatiable appetite for sex an a very amoral attitude towards marriage. In 1559, aged twenty-four, he had an affair with h neighbour at Branxholm, Janet Beaton, the Lady of Buccleuch, who was nineteen years his senior, ha been married three times, and had seven children. She was also reputed to have resorted to sorcery preserve her beauty. There is some evidence that she and Bothwell went through some sort o handfasting ceremony, but there is no evidence that they were ever married. After their affair ende they remained friends.

Bothwell himself was frequently accused by his enemies of practising witchcraft in order to achiev his ambitions, and was said to have become acquainted with the black arts whilst a student in Paris. H was also accused, again mainly by his enemies, of sodomy with men. Mary's apologist, John Lesli Bishop of Ross, called him vicious and dissolute in his habits, while a hostile English observer wrot "He was a fit man to be minister to a shamful act, be it either against God or man." [33] Neith accusation is very explicit. But Bothwell's former servant, Paris, later confessed, "I knew his ver terrible vices, especially one in which I am said to be so good a minister. I told him it would be h ruin." He recalled Bothwell reminding him, "You covered my dishonour when you were in my servic

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