

THE LIFE OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

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The Life of Mary, Queen of Scots by Alphonse de Lamartine

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ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE

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THE LIFE
OF
MARY, QUEEN of SCOTS.

BY
ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE,

AUTHOR OF "THE HISTORY OF THE GIRON-
DISTS," "FIOR D'ALIZA," ETC.

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MARY STUART, QUEEN OF SCOTS.

I.

If another Homer were to arise, and if the poet were to seek another Helen for the subject of a modern epic of war, religion, and love, he would beyond all find her in Mary Stuart, the most beautiful, the weakest, the most attractive and most attracted of women, raising around her, by her irresistible fascinations, a whirlwind of love, ambition, and jealousy, in which her lovers became, each in his turn, the motive, the instrument, and the victim of a crime; leaving, like the Greek Helen, the arms of a murdered husband for those of his murderer; sowing the seeds of internecine, religious, and foreign war at every step, and closing by a saintly death the life of a Clytemnestra; leaving behind her indistinct memories exaggerated equally by Protestant and Catholic parties, the former interested in condemning her for all, the latter in absolving her from all, as if the same factions who had fought for her during her life had resolved to continue the combat after her death! Such was Mary Stuart.

That which a new Homer has not yet done in poetry, a sympathetic historian, M. Dargand, enlightened by the researches of other learned writers, has recently achieved in his history of the Queen of Scots. It is from the extremely interesting documents collected by M. Dargand that we shall now recompose—though frequently in a different spirit—that fair figure, and give a rapid sketch of a great picture.

II.

MARY STUART was the only daughter of James V., King of Scotland, [and of Marie de Lorraine, daughter of the Duke of Guise. She

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was born in Scotland on the 7th December, 1542. Her father was one of those adventurous, romantic, gallant, and poetic characters who leave behind them popular traditions of bravery and of licentiousness in the imagination of their country, like Francis I. and Henry IV. of France. Her mother possessed that genius, at once grave, ambitious, and sectarian, which distinguished the princes of the House of Guise, those true Maccabees of Popery on this side the Alps.

James V. died young, prophesying a mournful destiny for his daughter, yet in her cradle. This prophecy was suggested by his misgivings regarding the fate of a child, delivered up, during a long minority, to the contentions of a small kingdom torn by feudal and priestly factions and coveted by a neighbor so powerful as England. Protestantism and Catholicism had already embittered their dissensions with the fanaticism of two hostile religions defying each other face to face. The dying king had, after long hesitation, adopted the Catholic policy and proscribed the Puritans. M. Dargand sees in this policy of James V. the cause of the ruin of Scotland and of the misfortunes of Mary, and at first sight we were tempted to think as he does. After a closer view, however, and on a consideration of the general political situation of Europe, and more particularly of Scotland, perhaps the Catholic party adopted by the king might have been safest for that country, if, indeed, Scotland could have been saved by state measures. It was not the Catholicism of Mary Stuart that proved fatal to Scotland; it was her youth, her levity, her loves, and her faults.

III.

WHERE, in fact, lay the true and permanent danger for Scotland? In the neighborhood, the ambition, and the power of England. Had Scotland at once become Protestant, as England had been since the time of Henry VIII., one of the greatest obstacles to her absorption by

England would have disappeared with the difference of religion. Catholicism was therefore esteemed a part of Scottish patriotism, and to destroy it would have been to tear their native country from the hearts of the Catholic portion of the people.

Moreover, Scotland, ceaselessly menaced by the domination or invasion of England, stood in need of powerful foreign alliances in Europe to aid her in preserving her independence and to furnish her with that moral and material support necessary to counterbalance the gold and the arms of the English. What were these continental alliances? France, Italy, the Pope, Spain. Scotland lived by such imposing protection; there lay her friendships, her vessels, her gold, her diplomacy, her auxiliary armies. Now all those powers—Italy, Spain, France, the House of Austria, the House of Lorraine—had adopted the Catholic cause with fanaticism, as opposed to the new religion. The Inquisition reigned at Madrid, the St. Bartholomew already cast its shadow over France, the Guises, uncles of Mary, were the very *core* of that league which attempted to proscribe Henry IV. on suspicion of heresy. Community of religion, therefore, could alone and at once interest the Pope, Italy, Austria, France, and Lorraine, to maintain with a strong hand the independence of Scotland. The day she ceased to become part of the great Catholic system established on the continent she fell, having no ally left save her mortal and natural enemy—England. Looking at the political rather than the religious aspect of affairs under James V., an alliance with Protestantism was an alliance with death. M. Dargaud's reproach of the dying king, therefore, may be an error engendered by his uncompromising predilection (which is also ours) for the cause of religious liberty. But religious liberty in Scotland at that time had no existence in either camp; parties attacked each other with equal ferocity, and Knox, the deadly foe of the Catholics, was not less intolerant than Cardinal Beaton, who proscribed the Puritans. Kings had only a

choice of blood, for the fanatics of each communion equally demanded that it should be shed. For Scotland, then, the question was purely a diplomatic one. In confiding his daughter to Catholic Europe, James V. may have acted the part of a far-seeing parent and king. If fortune betrayed his policy and his tenderness, it was the fault of his heir and not of his testament.

IV.

His widow, Mary of Lorraine, deposed from the regency by the jealousy of the nobles, reconquered it by her ability, and allowed the cardinals—the usual supporters of thrones at that period—to govern the kingdom under her. Her daughter was sought after by all the courts of Europe, not only because of her precocious renown for genius and beauty, but also, and principally, for the purpose of acquiring, by marriage with her, a right to the Scottish crown—an acquisition strongly coveted by the wearers of other crowns. After a journey to Lorraine and France to pay a visit to her uncles, the Guises, the queen determined, by their advice, to marry her daughter to the Dauphin, son of Henry II.

Diana of Poitiers, the Aspasia of the age, had ruled Henry II. for twenty years, as much by the love she bore him as by the affection with which he regarded her; we know not, in fact, which of the two, the king or his mistress, may be said to have possessed the other, such a miracle of tenderness was the witchcraft of this passion of a young king and a woman of fifty. The Guises cultivated the friendship of Diana of Poitiers for the purpose of governing the league.

The Queen-Regent of Scotland left her child-daughter in the chateau of St. Germain, to grow up under their protection in the atmosphere of that France over which she was destined one day to reign. "Votre fille est crue, et croit tous les jours en bonté, beauté et vertu," writes the Cardinal de Lorraine, her uncle, to the

Queen, his sister, after their return to Edinburgh; "le roi passe bien son temps à deviser avec elle. . . . Elle le sait aussi bien entretenir de bons et sages propos comme ferait une femme de vingt cinq ans." "Your daughter has grown much, and continues to grow every day in goodness, beauty, and virtue.

. . . . The king passes much of his time in amusing himself with her. . . . She also knows well how to entertain him with wise converse, like that of a woman of five-and-twenty.

The learned and Italian education of the young Scottish woman developed the natural gifts she possessed. French, Italian, Greek, Latin, history, theology, poetry, music, and dancing, were all learned and studied under the wisest masters and greatest artists. In the refined and voluptuous court of the Valois, governed by a favorite, she was brought up rather as an accomplished court lady than as a future queen; and her education rather seemed to fit her for becoming the mistress than the wife of the Dauphin. The Valois were the Medici of France.

V.

THE poets of the court soon began to celebrate in their verses the marvels of her beauty and the treasures of her mind—

" En votre esprit, le ciel s'est surmonté,
Nature et art ont en votre beauté,
Mis tout le beau dont la beauté s'assemble!"

" The gods themselves excelled, in framing thy fair mind,
Nature and art in thy young form their highest powers
combined,
All beauty of the beautiful to concentrate in thee."

writes du Bellay, the Petrarch of the time.

Bonsard, who was the Virgil of the age, expresses himself, whenever he speaks of her, in such images and with such delicacy and polish of accent, as prove that his praise sprang from his love—that his heart had subjugated his genius. Mary was evidently the Beatrix of the poet

“ Au milieu du printemps entre les lis naquit
 Son corps qui de blancheur les lis mêmes vainquit,
 Et les roses, qui sont du sang d'Adonis teintes
 Furent par sa couleur de leur vermeil dépeintes,
 Amour de ses beaux traits lui composa les yeux,
 Et les graces qui sont les trois filles des cieux
 De leurs dons les plus beaux cette princesse ornèrent
 Et pour mieux la servir les cieux abandonnèrent.”

“ In fulness of the springtide, from among the lilies fair,
 Sprang forth that form of whiteness, fairer than the
 lilies there.

Though stained with Adonis' blood, the gentle summer
 rose

Lies vanquished by the ruby tint her cheeks and lips
 disclose.

Young Love himself with arrows keen hath armed her
 peerless eye,

The Graces too, those fairest three, bright daughters of
 the sky,

With all their richest, rarest gifts my princess have
 endowed,

And evermore to serve her well have left their high
 abode.”

“Notre petite reinette Ecossoise,” said Catherine de Medici herself, who looked upon her with distaste, “our little Scottish queenling has only to smile in order to turn all the heads in France?”

Neither did the child love the Italian queen, whom, in her girlish scorn for the low-born house of Medici, she called “that Florentine market-woman.” Her predilections were all in favor of Diana of Poitiers, who seems to have educated in her a daughter, a future competitor in beauty and empire. Diana cherished besides, in the young Scottish woman, a rival or possible victim of that Queen Elizabeth of England whom she detested, and whose power Mary had not yet felt. The proof of this is to be found in a curious letter written by Diana of Poitiers, and communicated in autograph to the historian we are following:

“To Madame, my good friend, Madame de Montaigne:

“I have just been told about the poor young queen, Jane Grey, beheaded, at the age of seventeen, and cannot help weeping at the sweet language of resignation she spoke at the hour of her death. For never have we seen so