

# **THE TRAGIC MARY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649287789

The Tragic Mary by Michael Field

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**MICHAEL FIELD**

**THE  
TRAGIC MARY**



## The Tragic Mary

φρόνημα μὲν πύξμου γαλάνας,  
ἀκασκὰ ἴσ' Ἐργαλμα πλούτου,  
μαλθακὸν ἱμαμάτων θέλος,  
διξιδόμεν ἱερωτὸς ἄθους'

ÆSCHYLUS : *Agamemnon*

She sees what seed long sown, ripened of late,  
Bears this fierce crop ; and she discerns her fate  
From origin to agony, and on  
As far as the wave washes long and wan  
Off one disastrous impulse : for of waves  
Our life is, and our deeds are pregnant graves  
Blown rolling to the sunset from the dawn.

GEORGE MEREDITH : *Ballads of Tragic Life*

CALIFORNIA

# The Tragic Mary

BY

MICHAEL FIELD

LONDON

GEORGE BELL AND SONS, YORK STREET

COVENT GARDEN

1890

*All rights reserved*

English Alphabet

CHISWICK PRESS :- C. WHITTINGHAM AND CO., TOOKS COURT,  
CHANCERY LANE.

## P R E F A C E

BEAUTIFUL for situation, happy in the way the light visits her, noble in natural outline, and favoured even in the rise and declivity of her streets, it is nevertheless as the repository of her Queen's tragedy that Edinburgh fascinates us to herself. She is to us what Troy would be could we move now among her streets and palaces, could we learn where Helen stood forth upon the walls, or pace the rooms that Helen made beautiful by habitation. In the apartments of Holyrood we can touch the very silks that Queen Mary handled; the mirror of scolloped edge, graved with alternate doves and quatrefoils, that without contradiction reflected her features, still hangs in her chamber: the flushed tatters of her curtains are before us. And beholding these things we are seized with a passionate desire of access, an eagerness of approach: we cannot pause to wonder, or debate, or condemn; an impulse transports us: we are started on an inevitable quest.

The woman who appeared to certain of her contemporaries to be a princess lacking in no virtue save discretion, and to others a creature full of guile, inconstancy, and



## *Preface*

malevolence, can but expose the mysteries of her nature, leaving us to resolve them. Of absolute knowledge we have nothing; her tragedy, clear-cut in detail, is vague in determination. We know, indeed, that within the compass of her destiny great passions held their course, and great crimes reached their consummation; but we are ignorant to whom to assign the temptation or the guilt. A few hard facts are before us, a murder, an abduction, a marriage; with regard to none of these events can Mary Stuart's will be known. Her portraits cannot aid us even to firm conjecture: the most genuine are the least open in evidence. The face is softly pale; the lower lip is sucked in as one may see a running water caught under by its own little waves; the eyes are oval, languid, full of sensitive reticence; the ample brows disinterested rather than frank, touched with an universal clearness and perfection. We could wish that the crayon of Holbein might have given expression, the self-betrayal of personality, to this woman's rare, unemphatic beauty, and have brought out in each subtle crease of the flesh, by its shadows and smiles, such experience as could not travel to the lips or eyes, and was doomed to remain unrecorded when the artist was Janet, Achesoun, Oudry, or Primavera.

The extremes of antithetical judgment passed on the character of Mary Stuart are presented in the writings of one man, George Buchanan, who celebrated her virtues with his Latin muse, and afterwards transformed them into notorious vices in the reckless pages of his prose

## *Preface.*

*Detectio.* He acted the part toward his queen of Stésichorus toward Helen of Troy, save that the Doric poet, under Heaven's threat, exchanged abuse for praise, the foul accusations for the palinode. Between such devious versions of the same author a latitude pliant and shadowy is left for the psychologist and historian. The wife of Darnley and of Bothwell will be various to various natures throughout the ages: for like Helen she never grows old; her allure consists only with an immortal being, her peerless value is that of a daughter of the gods. It is therefore possible for a dramatist to transcribe his sense of the facts of her life, to justify the vision of her as it has come to himself, and yet be reverently conscious of the splendid and passionate qualities of a former presentment. To a great poet of our time she has appeared in majesty of intellect, conscious of the burthen of her own beauty, and devoting every power of spirit and sense to the reception or excitement of desire. The Mary Stuart who is now in process of canonisation has not yet been delineated; it is possible to dream of her, a creature perfect in action and forbearance from the day of her first communion to her bowing down upon the block. Neither of these ideals (one an incomparable achievement) can be deformed by my rendering of the great Marian legend. My impressions from contact with a personality the facets of which present perpetual change have not been embarrassed or irrelevant, for they have grown from a vision almost to a conviction as I have explored and wrought.

## *Preface.*

The Queen herself lies sculptured in Westminster Abbey, waiting with the serenity of patience a judgment other than that of men. Yet we are not permitted to withhold our human verdicts, if she is to live as a presence in our midst. We may believe that Clytæmnestra-like she was a woman of haughty counsels and blood-stained career, or that her fame and nobleness were dragged down under a ring-net of conspiracies and detraction, or again that laxity of protest was the basis of her whole tragedy. These beliefs are but conjectures, and the real woman of magical nature must remain undiscovered and triumphant :

*kind be time or cruel,  
Jewel, from each facet flash your laugh at time. -*

M. F.

May, 1890.