Mary Of Scotland

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(The immediate interest in Helen Hayes’ performance of Mary of Scotland makes the appearance of this paper particularly timely and valuable).

To be a legend in one’s own country is an honor which comes to very few women, but to be a subject of controversy for three centuries was the fate of Mary, Queen of Scotland. Was she the violent, over-indulgent woman who while in love with another man could calmly plan to murder her husband? Was she ambitious and so greedy for power that she over-reached herself? Was she so steeped in the pageantry of the Roman church that she could tolerate no other religion? Or, was she brave and energetic, pursued by disaster? Whatever the motive behind her actions, historians have found much to say on this subject. As Elizabeth says in Mary of Scotland,

"Child, child, are you gulled
By what men write in histories, this or that
And never true? I am careful of my name
As you are, for this day and longer.
It’s not what happens
That matters, no, not what happens that’s true,
But what men believe to have happened."

“What men believe to have happened” to Mary of Scotland is varied. There are some who believe that had modern methods of detection been applied to the various crimes laid at her door, she would have been clearly vindicated. There are others who see her only as a murderess and wanton. Which was she? Against the wild chaos of Scotland she played her part and left the novelist, the historian, and the playwright her heroic vitality and spirit to do with as they saw fit.

To understand clearly the background and setting of the drama which Queen Mary lived, it is necessary to know Scotland in its political and religious aspects, its relation with England and England’s queen, Elizabeth.

Mary became Queen of Scotland amidst a religious conflict which seethed over all Europe. England and France both were eager to gain an alliance with Scotland, England being Protestant while France was definitely Roman Catholic. Scotland, like Gaul, was divided—in two parts, Protestant and Catholic. The Protestant movement seemed to strike a responsive spark in the breasts of the Scottish people as there was something in it of the harsh mountains and moors of their country. Perhaps without John Knox, its fiery, fanatic leader, Calvinism would have spread over the land, as it was popular not only with the middle-class but with the hard-living, hard-riding noblemen as well; but with him to guide it, it soon became a widespread fear in the hearts of the Roman adherents.

Into these mad, fantastic religious controversies came the young Queen, fresh from the pageantries and artificials of French court life.

Scotland was likewise seething politically. The government was in the hands of a few nobles who were regents while the young queen was under age. So “armed neutrality” might have been said to be the form of government.

When Mary was but a baby, an alliance had been sought with Prince Edward, afterwards Edward VI of England. This did not materialize for Mary of Guise (Mary’s mother) had other plans which would further her own ambitions towards the throne.
of France. No alliance with Protestant England was to unite the two countries. Instead, the little queen was sent to France to be grounded in the Roman Catholic faith and educated for the exalted position of Queen of France, and Scotland, and perhaps of England also.

During the ten years that Mary lived in France, English ambassadors were sent to try to prevent the inevitable marriage of the Queen of Scotland to the heir to the French throne. At one time, so the story goes, an attempt was made to poison the young queen, a fitting example of the malevolent forces which tried to stem Mary's career. In spite of all the efforts of the opposing faction, and due to the tireless work and innumerable promises of Mary Guise, Mary Stuart was married to Francis, Daulphin of France, in 1558.

Meanwhile in England, the reign of Mary Tudor had come to a bloody end and Elizabeth became Queen, thus bringing again the old question of her legitimacy. According to the Roman church, Henry VIII could not divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Ann Boleyn. If Elizabeth was not the lawful daughter of the much-married Henry, then Mary, daughter of James VI of Scotland, and great-grand-daughter of Henry VII of England, was the next in line.

When the Queen of Scots proudly had the arms of England embroidered on her banners with the heraldic symbols of Scotland and France, there were many who thought it was rightfully there. Thus, Mary at the very beginning of her career won the enmity of Elizabeth who carefully, step by step, planned her ultimate downfall.

The King of France died and Francis and Mary became King and Queen of France with all the pageantry of medieval splendor. This splendor was short-lived as fourteen months later Francis died of a septic ear following an injury he received in a tournament. Mary, realizing that she was an unwelcome guest in France, and after an unsuccessful attempt to marry the Spanish heir, found no alternative but to go home to Scotland.

As she watched the receding shores of France, she must have reviewed her life of gaiety, the pomp and extravagance of the court, and must have hoped that life would not be too hard in the harsh, cold country which she called her own. When Mary asked Elizabeth for a passport to cross England, was it to attract Catholic followers to her picturesque procession? When Elizabeth refused it, was this an acknowledgment that Mary was her rival?

Elizabeth won this first scrimmage in her long battle with Mary which, although under cover most of the time, was none the less deadly. When Mary had left Scotland, it had been a land of monarchy, but when she returned, she found it a religious republic. A year before her return the Roman Catholic religion had been abolished; all churches had been destroyed and the priests driven from the country. We find the Roman Catholic Queen returning to a Protestant country, but she trusted her own personal charm and mental gifts to see her through the conflict. She filled her court with Protestant advisers and adopted a policy of peaceful arbitration. She hoped to win the respect of her people and so have more power to change that which she disapproved and to force reforms upon them.

Mary, at this time, wished the strength of a foreign power to aid in her governing. All such plans were useless as Catherine of Merci (mother of Francis II) and Elizabeth were combined against such alliances. Mary had no choice but to ally herself with an Englishman of Elizabeth's choosing.

There was Lord Darnley, connected with both her houses, and there
was the Scotch noble, Bothwell. Advised by Riccio, her Italian secretary, Mary decided that the Lord Darnley was the most desirable of all her suitors. He had charm, a claim to the English throne, and was a Roman Catholic. The Queen hoped by this marriage to ally all the Roman Catholics in England and Scotland and also strengthen her claim to the throne.

In July, 1565, Mary was married to Lord Darnley. Elizabeth was seemingly furious because Mary had disregarded her wishes, although it is believed that Elizabeth had worked toward this end, realizing that the only thing Mary would gain by this marriage was a weakling husband who would be a great hindrance to her ambitions.7

Again Elizabeth scored, for it was not many weeks after the marriage until the Queen realized her grave mistake. Darnley was weak, self-willed, and very jealous of Mary. Moray, the Queen's half-brother, and Maitland, leaders of the Lords of the Congregation8 who had been banished from the court when they protested against the marriage, were most anxious to avenge themselves. They whispered into the willing-ears of Darnley tales about his wife and her Italian secretary, Riccio. Darnley, already envious of the position that Riccio held as chief adviser of the Queen, disliked the little Italian all the more and, with the aid of the Protestant nobles, planned and carried out the murder of the Italian.

The Queen was seated at supper with her ladies when the murder took place. Helpless in the grip of the burly Scotchmen, the little Italian sought protection behind the Queen's person. Dragged out and murdered, Riccio left a story behind him that is the source of many discussions. Was he Mary's lover? Was Mary's feeling toward Riccio only friendship and gratitude for his understanding? Whatever it might be, Lord Darnley only succeeded in hastening the Queen's doom, for then Mary was held prisoner in Holyrood. Scotland's Queen was in a plight known only to heroines of romance. Baffled and grieved by the gruesome murder, she mastered herself, swore vengeance,9 and looked around for a way of escape.

Realizing that Darnley was only an instrument in the hands of more powerful leaders, she also knew that the next thing to do was to win him to her cause, for she was soon to give to the world an heir to the Scottish throne.

It was an easy task to impress Darnley that he had been in the wrong, and together they fled to Dunbar Castle, where Bothwell and Huntley joined her forces. After the birth of her son, Mary severed all civilities with Darnley. The breach between them became more apparent when Darnley, realizing his position, was always in a rage. It was during this time that scandalous tales were told about Mary and Bothwell which have no authenticity whatsoever.10

Since Riccio's death Mary had appointed Maitland as her adviser. Months went by and this weakling husband of Mary's stood in the way of her political success. A group of her councilors with Maitland as spokesman proposed the plan of being rid of Darnley. But Mary instantly insisted "that nothing should be done whereby any spot might be laid to her honour and conscience."11

When Darnley was reported to be ill in Glasgow, Mary went immediately to attend him and bring him back to Edinburgh. Mary had no idea how set her councilors were in their decision to be rid of Darnley.

Since the place he was staying was considered unhealthful, Mary wished to move Darnley to Craignillar Castle, but Darnley expressed the desire to be moved to Kirk O'Field. Although many critics and contemporaries write about the unworthiness of this
house, and its deserted locality as being a most desirable place for the destruction of Darnley, it can be said that Darnley never made any complaints and he liked the seclusion of the place, for smallpox had left its mark.1

There is also the story that while on the journey Mary corresponded with Bothwell and Maitland who advised her to move Darnley to Kirk O'Field where they would have everything in readiness.

Some of Mary's historians 13 claim that she was aware of the plot to murder her husband and that a celebration was planned to take her away so that she might not be implicated; others say that she was innocent of all knowledge and went to the party only because she wished to honor one who had been of service to her.14

At two o'clock in the morning an explosion occurred which awakened the whole countryside. Kirk O'Field had been entirely demolished. The bodies of Darnley and his servant were found some distance from the house. Such was the outcome of the bond which had been signed by Bothwell, Huntley and Belfour at Craig-nillar Castle.

Behind her mourning drapes Mary tried to assemble her jumbled thoughts. She knew she would be blamed, for had she not brought Darnley to the very house? She had been an innocent decoy. She knew she would be seen only as the scarlet woman of the Roman faith, the murderess, the light-minded creature who adored music and dancing.15

The Queen received letters from the archbishop of Glasgow and from Elizabeth, advising her to find the guilty persons and deal with them mercilessly, in order to stop talk implicating her.

The Catholic following was much weakened by all this. These trials and tribulations were looked upon as the revenge for Riccio's death.

Rumor had already accused Bothwell of the crime. If Bothwell had committed this crime, he would have to be brought to justice, but if he were sentenced, who would be left to fight for her? Mary knew all the other lords as traitors who only stood for her cause when it was to their advantage. The investigation of the crime was left to Darnley's father, the Earl of Lennox, who, half crazy with grief, thought only of vengeance. Bothwell and his followers were named and a day was set for the trial. On the appointed day, Bothwell and his armed men appeared in town with such an array of force that Lennox was fearful for his life and stayed at home. So great was the Lord Bothwell's power that a mock trial was enacted in which he was declared not guilty.

That night Bothwell gave a banquet. Of all the lords invited, none dared refuse! When they were all loose-witted from too much wine, Bothwell produced a document for them to sign stating that they and their families would stand by his cause, and that they consented to a marriage between the Queen and himself.

Moray the ambitious looked upon these proceedings with much interest for he knew if Bothwell married the Queen, the people would rise up against Bothwell and in doing so dethrone her.

One day while Mary was riding with a group of nobles, she was surrounded by a troop of Bothwell's men and taken prisoner to Dunbar Castle. There he forced her to believe that together they could rule Scotland successfully. The document with the lords' signatures helped his cause.16

Even though Mary's name was never cleared of her connection with the Darnley plot, she was to add more to her tragic story by marrying Bothwell, the man who was the acknowledged murderer of her hus-
band. Meville, a Scottish noble, presented the Queen with letters from her people warning her against such a marriage. In spite of these numerous warnings Mary was married by a Protestant minister to the Earl of Bothwell after he had obtained a divorce from his wife.

The forced marriage after the forced visit to Dunbar Castle has opened many suppositions. Was it all done with the consent of Mary in order to account to the people for her hasty marriage?17

If Mary and Bothwell were the lovers that history proclaims them, they were only granted a very short time of happiness, for immediately after the ceremony the Scottish nobles made it very apparent that they were against Bothwell. Mary and Bothwell were now absolute rulers but they had no one to rule but their servants. They tried to raise forces against Maitland and his followers, but they soon learned that the Protestant ceremony had been the means of diminishing Mary’s Catholic following to a very small number.

Bothwell’s army was defeated and Mary was taken prisoner. Bothwell fled northward, sailed to Norway, revisited an old love, Ann Thorssen, settled in Copenhagen and sat down to write his memoirs.18

Mary was imprisoned at Lockleven, the gloomy castle-stronghold of the Douglas family. Many times Moray came to see her in order to persuade her to sign a bond abdicating her throne to her youthful son, James. She finally consented with reservations in her own mind to change all this when free, and signed the bond. Her son was crowned King of Scotland, but still Mary remained in prison.

In April, 1568, with the help of George and Willie Douglas, Mary escaped from Lochleven and again attempted to mobilize an army to fight against Maitland and Moray, in order to gain back her kingdom.

Although Mary’s army was greater in numbers, the lack of good leadership caused her to lose the battle which took place shortly after her escape. The only alternative left was to flee from Scotland. Mary decided to go to her “dear” cousin Elizabeth for help. Elizabeth had written many comforting letters offering help and friendship while Mary was imprisoned at Lochleven.

On May 16, 1568, Mary landed at Cumberland with her little party, George and Willie Douglas. When Elizabeth received word of Mary’s arrival her first impulse was to welcome her as was her due, as Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, in her own right; but Sir William Cecil, Elizabeth’s head councilor, realizing the danger of Mary’s presence in England, vetoed this plan. In order to cover up her lack of welcome, Elizabeth wrote to Mary explaining that she, Mary, could not be accepted in court until her name was cleared of the charge involving her in the murder of Lord Darnley.

Whereupon a trial was held to prove whether Mary was innocent or guilty. The “Casket letters” were presented by Maitland as proof against Mary. The authenticity of these Casket Letters has been the subject of almost unexampled controversy. Numerous volumes have been written to prove they were forgeries. Many historians19 have spent years sifting the evidence and have come to the conclusion that they must have been forgeries. Their reasons are:

1. The Casket Letters were sent to England a year after their discovery and were in a Scotch translation, not the original French. A messenger was sent to England with these Scotch translations and with a message to Queen Elizabeth asking if the French originals were produced, would they be sufficient evidence against Mary? What was the reason of sending translations if the French originals could have been sent?
The hypothesis of the Scotch translations has been explained satisfactorily to some historians in this way. The Scotch nobles sent the Scotch translations to England, and if Queen Elizabeth did not regard this as condemning evidence enough, they would take the trouble to translate the letters into French and while doing so to add more incriminating touches.

(2) The similarity between the Glasgow Letter and the Crawford’s Disposition is a fact that needs explaining.

The Crawford Disposition is a written account of a conversation which had taken place between Mary and Darnley. Crawford, a servant of Darnley, was supposed to have an exact reproduction of the conversation. The Glasgow Letter was one which Mary was supposed to have written to Bothwell informing him of the same conversation. The exact similarity in phrasing is so apparent that it seems impossible for two people making a report of the same conversation to have written two such identical letters. It is believed that the two accounts were written by the same persons and that Mary’s Glasgow letter was forged and was based on the Crawford Disposition. This is Andrew Lang’s argument and solution to this intrigue.

T. F. Henderson believed that the Glasgow Letter was authentic enough in the original but incriminating evidence had been added to it, and then the Crawford Disposition was copied from it. It is known that Crawford did see the Glasgow Letter before he wrote his Disposition and probably refreshed his memory by doing so. If this be true, this fact would cancel all incriminating evidence against Mary.

(3) When Mary was imprisoned in Lochleven her followers increased in great numbers, so much so that it gave cause for the lords to question the stability of their positions. If they really possessed the Casket Letters (they were supposed to have been found a year before they were used at the trial), why did they not publish them, and put this evidence before the people of Scotland to prove Mary’s guilt? This would have stamped out the increasing number of Mary’s loyal followers.

(4) When the contents of the Casket Letters were first known, Lords Sanquhor and Tullibardina were there and heard what was said. Later their names appeared on the bond for securing Mary’s release from Lochleven; the evidence, therefore, culled against Mary from the Casket Letters could not have been so very bad.

(5) The original Glasgow Letter was never seen by anyone but the Lords and Elizabeth’s commissioner and the Council. It has never been seen since it was returned to Moray.

(6) No copy of the original French Glasgow letter has ever been published.

(7) Kirkcaldy of Grange known as the “flower of chivalry” deserted the Scottish lords and went over to the Queen’s side when he learned that the Casket Letters were to be used against her.

(8) The confession of all the retainers of Bothwell excluded Mary from any connection with the murder of Darnley. Nicholas Hubert, who was alleged to have carried the Glasgow Letter, at the time of his execution stated that he would answer to God that he never carried any such letter, and that the Queen was not a participant in the affair.

(9) There is no other writing by Mary which throws the least doubt upon her innocence of complicity in or knowledge of Darnley’s murder.

(10) Bothwell in his declaration to the King of Denmark stated on oath that the Queen was altogether innocent and knew nothing of the murder. According to Sinclair’s manuscript “History of Scotland” which was written at the time, Bothwell swore
to this effect at his death and several times before.

Last of all, it must be kept in mind that this special group of Scottish noblemen who were working against Mary were fighting for their own lives. If Mary was not silenced, she would be allowed an interview with Queen Elizabeth; then she would be able to tell how these same lords were involved in Darnley's murder and how they had sworn to the innocence of Bothwell before Mary was married to him.20

After the evidence of the letters had been presented at this trial, which English commissioners had no jurisdiction to hold over her, Mary was invited to answer. Her answer was to withdraw her commissioners. This seemed high-handed, but was really justified as her accusers had all been guilty of the crime of which she was being accused. Judgment was given in January. Nothing was proved against Mary, but the Casket forgeries had been very useful in blackening her character.21

Mary was for nineteen years a prisoner in England. The ultimate unkindness of Elizabeth has been generally excused by implying that for years Mary was a menace to the peace of England. There is little doubt that while in England she did try by conspiracy to obtain her freedom, better her condition by marriage, provoke the invasion of England by a foreign power, and in many ways annoy her cousin. But it must be remembered that the English Queen had no right to keep her in confinement when Mary had taken sanctuary in her country. It has been argued that while Elizabeth was holding Mary in England, she was spending at least four thousand pounds a year on her, Mary's household.22 Mary, according to the same authority, was allowed much freedom of action; she hunted, rode after the hounds, was allowed a Catholic priest to attend her spiritual needs, and given every care possible.28 Other authorities24 contend that most of the nineteen years, Mary spent in Titbury, a draughty manor-house with little, if any sanitary provisions, and there suffered quite often with rheumatism. It is needless to go into the details of her daily life, her negotiations with foreign powers, her tireless efforts to secure her freedom. Sufficient it is to say her vitality never allowed her to give up hope for the ultimate victory of her cause. One writer describes her as "sick but proud, weak, determined, closely kept but very ambitious, struggling ceaselessly in a complicated and tenacious net."25

The Babington plot was the turning point. It is generally believed that Walsingham was aware of the details of this plot. It was intended to liberate Mary, foment a Catholic rising, and murder Elizabeth. Babington was a young enthusiast who with over-confidence and impracticable schemes ruined her. For, of course, all communications were intercepted and Mary was carried to Fotheringay Castle and three weeks later was tried for her part in the plot.

Mary conducted her own defense. She asserted her status as an independent sovereign and insisted that Elizabeth had no jurisdiction over her. She accused Walsingham of forgery; in fact, she held her accusers off. Later, when at her insistence, the commissioners met in the Star Chamber, with but one dissenting voice, Mary was judged guilty and sentenced to die.

The story of the next three months is Elizabeth's more than Mary's for one can not help but sympathize with her honest distress. For when every other devise to have Mary privately killed, failed, she signed the death warrant which ended the long duel of the two queens.

On February 8, 1587, after writing and saying farewell to many follow-
ers, and dividing her money and jewels among her ladies, Mary mounted the scaffold and at last found peace after her many struggles.

In reviewing Mary’s life calmly it is possible to draw a few conclusions which have no controversial character. Mary, given a country normal and willing to be ruled, would have made an excellent sovereign. Witness her first few years in her own kingdom, when there was peace in Scotland. She was fair and straightforward in her dealings with her subjects in the matter of religion. She devoutly believed in the Roman church, but was willing that those who found pleasure in Calvinistic beliefs be free to save their souls in this bleak way. A willful gayety made her often misunderstood by her people. Mary’s rugged Scotch spirit with her French training made her tenacious in holding on to that which was hers. One can not always admire her judgment but under conditions such as she had to endure, one can hardly condemn. She possessed a vitality which would never surrender, a spirit which would not be quenched, and which was the source of her tragedy, and the power to “trouble the ages with thoughts that will not be stilled.”

After all, beauty and queenliness and tragedy do not make a legend of themselves. Only a more than common personality filled with this heroic quality can be remembered through the ages. It seems that this abundance of personality must survive from century to century, filling men’s minds with its tragedy, and that the legend of Mary of Scotland has taken on some of Scotland’s vigor and some of its mysticism; to have become, in fact, a very part of itself.

**FOOTNOTES**

3. Henry VIII obtained his divorce from the church of England, which he created.
8. A Protestant party.
17. Shelley. The Tragedy of Mary Stuart. p.133.

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Maggie Lawns

Irvin Caplin

More than ten years ago, when I first became conscious of things about me and remembered happenings from one day to the next, tales about Maggie Lawns were fixed in my memory.

Maggie Lawns lived in a one-room shack which stood in the center of the lot later named after her. No one remembered when she first came to live there. No one knew where she came from. She never worked, and yet she always had enough money to pay the corner grocer. This was all that was known about her.

Weird stories concerning Maggie Lawns circulated in our neighborhood. Some said that she was more than two hundred years old. Others said that she was a witch and associated with the devil. Since she always paid her bills, many thought her an immortal who had come to this world disguised as the ugly old woman that she was. She was blamed for every misfortune that took place. There were many who suggested that she be driven from the neighborhood, but there were none who were willing to do the driving. She was a topic of discussion at every community gathering, from the meeting of our Rinky-Dinks to the meeting of the Women’s Sewing Society.

I was returning from a meeting of the Rinky-Dinks one summer night after an entire evening spent gossiping about Maggie Lawns. She had been pictured as the most wicked and the ugliest woman alive, and now I must pass her lot in order to reach my home.

As I neared the lot, I could see the one-room shack which was made visible by a full moon overhead. The shack was dimly lighted, and I could hear what seemed to be the meowing of a thousand cats. I lowered my