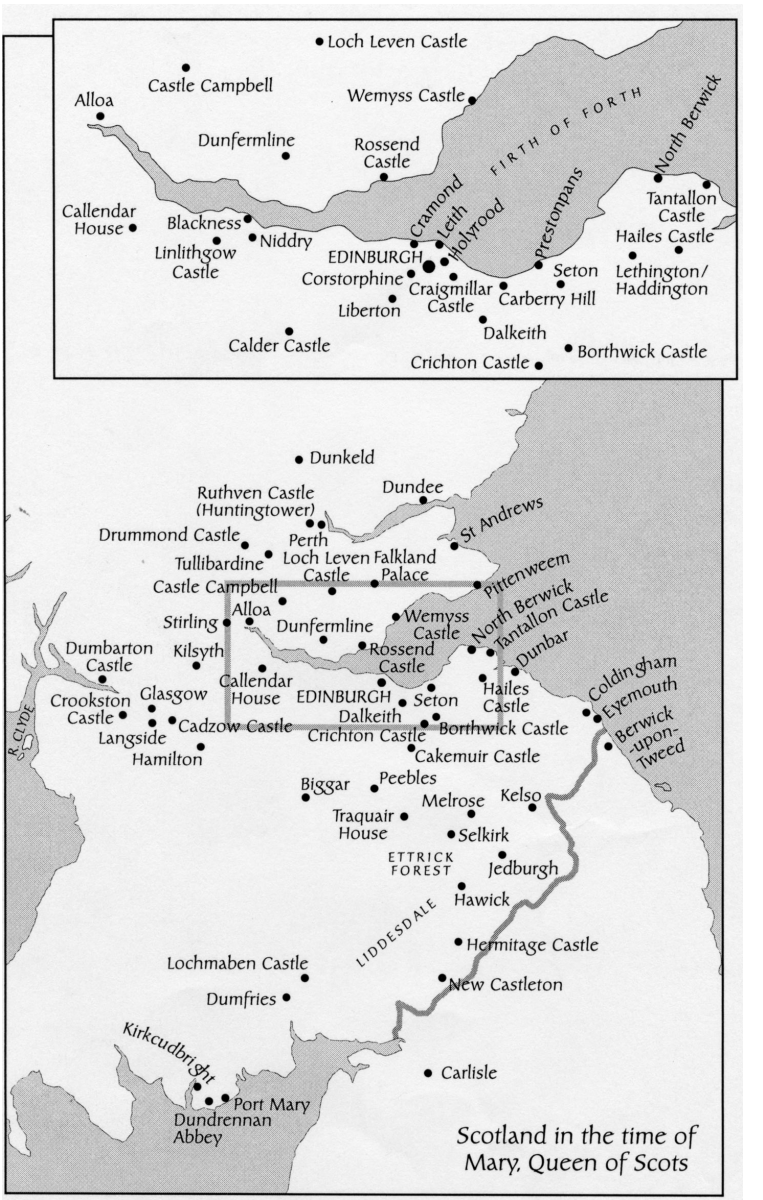
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Castle Campbell
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Wemyss Castle
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North Berwick
Dunfermline
Rossend Castle
Cramond
Leith
Holyrood
Prestonpans
Tantallon Castle
Callendar House
Blackness
Niddry
Linlithgow Castle
EDINBURGH
Hailes Castle
Seton
Lethington/ Haddington
Corstorphine
Craigmillar Castle
Carberry Hill
Liberton
Dalkeith
Calder Castle
Borthwick Castle
Crichton Castle
Dunkeld
Ruthven Castle (Huntingtower)
Dundee
St Andrews
Drummond Castle
Perth
Tullibardine
Loch Leven Castle
Falkland Palace
Pittenweem
Castle Campbell
Alloa
Stirling
Dunfermline
Wemyss Castle
North Berwick
Tantallon Castle
Dumbarton Castle
Kilsyth
Rossend Castle
Dunbar
Callendar House
Hailes Castle
Coldingham
Eyemouth
Crookston Castle
Glasgow
EDINBURGH
Seton
Dalkeith
Berwick -upon- Tweed
Cadzow Castle
Crichton Castle
Borthwick Castle
Langside
Hamilton
Cakemuir Castle
R. CLYDE
Biggar
Peebles
Melrose
Kelso
Traquair House
Selkirk
ETTRICK FOREST
Jedburgh
Hawick
LIDDESDALE
Hermitage Castle
Lochmaben Castle
New Castleton
Dumfries
Kirkcudbright
Carlisle
Port Mary
Dundrennan Abbey
Scotland in the time of Mary, Queen of Scots

Contents

Illustrations

First Section

Mary Queen of Scots: reproduced by permission of The Blairs Museum Trust (photo: Mike Davidson)

Mary & Francis II: from Catherine de' Medici's Book of Hours, Bibliothèque nationale de France

James Stewart, Earl of Moray: portrait by Hans Eworth, 1561, Darnaway Castle Collection (photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd.)

John Knox: wood engraving from Beza's Icones, 1580, after Adrian Vanson; Scottish National Portrait Gallery (photo: Antonia Reeve Photography)

Called Sir William Maitland of Lethington: Flemish School, Mid-16th century, in the collection at Lennoxlove House, Haddington

James Douglas, Earl of Morton: attributed to Arnold van Brounckhorst, 1577, Scottish National Portrait Gallery

Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley: artist unknown, c. 1566, Scottish National Portrait Gallery

Medal struck to commemorate the marriage of Mary & Darnley, 1565: The British Museum

Mary & Darnley: artist unknown, mid-16th century, The National Trust, Hardwick Hall

David Rizzio: artist unknown, late 17th or early 18th century, The British Museum

Holyrood Palace: The Royal Collection © 2002, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (photo: John Freeman)

Mary's bedchamber in Holyrood Palace: The Royal Collection © 2002, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (photo: Antonia Reeve)

The Murder of Rizzio: painting by Sir William Allan, 1833, The National Gallery of Scotland

The Old Palace in Edinburgh Castle: The Edinburgh Photographic Library

The birth chamber of James VI: © Crown Copyright reserved, Historic Scotland

Second Section

James Hepburn, 5th Earl of Bothwell: artist unknown, 1566, Scottish National Portrait Gallery

Jean Gordon, Countess of Bothwell: artist unknown, 1566, Scottish National Portrait Gallery

Hermitage Castle: Scotland in Focus/M. Moar

Mary, Queen of Scots' House, Jedburgh (Stockscotland)

Mary, Queen of Scots and Darnley at Jedburgh: painting by Alfred W. Elmore, 1877, courtesy of Astley House – Fine Art

Craigmillar Castle: Scotland in Focus/M. Moar

The Murder Scene at Kirk O'Field: drawing made the morning after Darnley's murder; Public Record Office Image Library (SP52/13)

The Darnley Memorial Picture: painting by Livinius de Vogelaare, 1568, The Royal Collection © 2002, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (photo: A. C. Cooper)

Mermaid placard: Public Record Office Image Library (SP52/13 no.60)

Dunbar Castle: Scotland in Focus/M. Moar

Borthwick Castle: Scotland in Focus/M. Moar

Meeting of the Lords with Mary, Queen of Scots at Carberry Hill, 1567; artist unknown, Public Record Office Image Library (SP52/13)

Lochleven Castle: Scotland in Focus/Willbir

George Buchanan: artist unknown, 1581, Scottish National Portrait Gallery

William Cecil: by or after Arnold van Brounckhorst, c. 1560–70, by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London

Elizabeth I: artist unknown, c. 1560, by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London

'The Queen Mary Casket', in the collection at Lennoxlove House, Haddington

Dramatis Personae
The Scottish Lords

1. The Protestant Lords

ARGYLL, Archibald Campbell, 5th Earl of (d. 1573). An epileptic, he succeeded to the earldom in 1558. Active in the Reformation Parliament of 1560, but rebuked by John Knox for his religious tolerance. A prominent member of the Privy Council and the most powerful magnate in the Western 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 Protestant. 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 the Lords of the Congregation. One of the greatest nobles of the period, with a strong power base in East Lothian and the Borders.

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

CHATELHERAULT, James Hamilton, Duke of, previously Earl of Arran (c. 1516–75). Head of the House of Hamilton and heir apparent to the Queen. Regent of Scotland during Queen Mary's minority, 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 a reputation for recklessness and brutality.

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

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

HERRIES, John Maxwell, 4th Lord (c. 1512–83). An early adherent of the Lords of the Congregation 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 was 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 political pragmatism, but he eventually identified himself with the Protestant cause. He was one of the chief nobles of Scotland, but had been exiled in 1543 for furthering English interests in that country. He 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 of the first Lords to join the reformers.

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

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

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

MORAY, James Stewart, Earl of (c. 1531–70). The Queen's half-brother, being the son of James V by Margaret Erskine, sister of the Earl of Mar.

He came to prominence in 1560 as one of the leaders of the Lords of the Congregation, and was to play a central part in the politics of the reign.

MORTON, James Douglas, 4th Earl of (c. 1516–81). Chancellor of Scotland from 1562, and head of 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 the Congregation. His friend John Knox married his daughter.

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

RUTHVEN, Patrick, 3rd Lord (c. 1520–66). Although a fanatical Protestant and one of the Lords of 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 three 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 of the Privy Council, he had a reputation for violence. Briefly imprisoned for murder in 1563. Chiefly concerned with local politics in the far north.

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

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

HUNTLY, George Gordon, 4th Earl of (c. 1510/14–62). Chancellor of Scotland from 1546. His mother was a natural daughter of James IV. One of the leading Catholic nobles, he had a strong power base in the

north-east. His fleeting flirtation with the Lords of the Congregation in 1560 dealt a fatal blow to the Catholic cause in Scotland.

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

Prologue: Kirk o'Field, Edinburgh, 10 February 1567

Few souls were abroad in Edinburgh after midnight on 9 February 1567. Not only was it bitterly cold with a light frosting of snow, but in an age of candles and rushlights, people tended to go to bed earlier than they do now. Anyone found on the streets at the dead of night was likely to be challenged by the watch.

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

We now know, of course, that all was not quiet at Kirk o'Field on that night, and that the area was in fact the scene of a great deal of conspiratorial activity throughout the evening of the 9th and the small hours of the 10th. Who these conspirators were has been a matter of furious historical debate for four centuries, but what is certain is that, at two o'clock on the morning of 10 February, the Old Provost's Lodging was blasted into rubble by a mighty explosion that reverberated across the city of Edinburgh, awakened most of its inhabitants, and sparked one of the greatest murder mysteries in history. For the 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 centuries ever since.

For over four hundred years, controversy has raged over who murdered Darnley and how he died. Many thought then, and still think now, that Queen Mary was an accessory before the fact to the murder of her husband, for she certainly had sufficient motives for getting rid of him. Yet so did several other people, including most of the Scottish nobility. And Darnley himself, incredible as it may seem, was not above suspicion.

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

Alison Weir,
Scottish Borders,
28 July 2002

Introduction: The Controversy and the Sources

The murder of Lord Darnley is the most celebrated mystery in Scottish history; it has been endlessly recounted by numerous historians and writers, and the question that has most exercised all 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, there are other suspects. However, most writers focus upon Mary because she was a young and beautiful queen, whose life had already been touched by tragedy, murder and intrigue. Her character is an enigma that has never been solved, and during the four centuries in which she has been the subject of 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 historical perceptions of her over the centuries. After the murder, which led to her enforced abdication and her long imprisonment in England, she became a contentious figure. Scottish Calvinists saw her as an adulteress and murderess, and for political reasons vigorously painted her as such, while Mary's Catholic and loyalist supporters regarded her as a wronged heroine. As memories of the murder faded, and she became the hope of the Counter-Reformation and the focus for Catholic plots against Elizabeth I, Mary herself consciously fostered a pious image, which culminated in her calculated and dramatic appearance as a martyr for her faith at her execution in 1587. English Protestants, it should 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 which most of her biographers have portrayed her; this image has, to a great extent, swept away darker contemporary

perceptions of her, and as time passed it helped to enshrine her in romance and legend. Back in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, observers were more preoccupied with Mary's religious and dynastic significance.

Predictably, most Catholic writers saw Mary as a Catholic martyr. Yet after the accession of her son, James VI of Scotland, to the throne of England in 1603, even Protestant historians began to find praise for her, mindful, no doubt, of King James I's determination to rehabilitate the memories of both 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 became available for the first time – that Mary was seen as a woman who allowed her emotions to rule her acts and was therefore responsible to a degree for her own destruction. Historians such as David Hume and William Robertson criticised her for succumbing to overt and unwise passions. This view gave rise to a trend, which continued into the nineteenth century, for portraying Mary as the frivolous victim of a licentious upbringing at the French court, whose unrestrained sexual intrigues brought about her downfall. Religion was still a factor: the eminent but prejudiced Victorian historian, James Anthony Froude, was grimly censorious of the Catholic Mary, and shamelessly massaged the facts in order to show her in the worst possible light. At the turn of the century, the controversy over Mary's involvement in Darnley's murder was kept alive by a spirited debate between the historians T.F. Henderson and Andrew Lang.

During the twentieth century, historians were kinder to the Queen of Scots. Thanks to the ongoing reappraisal of contemporary evidence, new theories about Darnley's murder were put forward, and Mary came to be viewed in a more sympathetic light. After Antonia Fraser published what has become the standard biography of the Queen in 1969, most historians have concluded that Mary was an innocent and much wronged victim of the unscrupulous men around her. A virtually lone voice is that of the historian Jenny Wormald, who believes that Mary was an abject failure as both a queen and a 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 stereotypical images that have evolved throughout the centuries – the adulteress and murderess, the *femme fatale*, the romantic tragic heroine, the religious martyr and the foolish victim of her own passions – to look for the real Mary and attempt to establish some estimation of her true character in order to determine whether or not she was capable of murder.

Central to the issue of Mary's guilt, seemingly, are the controversial

Casket Letters. If genuine, they go a long way towards proving her involvement in Darnley's murder, but many have argued that they are forgeries or genuine letters that have been deliberately altered by Mary's enemies. It should be said, however, that Mary's guilt or innocence can be determined by other evidence than the Casket 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 entranced by Scottish history, and I have visited, on many occasions, most of the places mentioned in this book. It had long been my intention, following on from the success of *The Princess in the Tower*, to write about another historical mystery, and I was delighted to be given the opportunity to take a fresh look 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 to establish the characters, motives and relationships between the various protagonists, and also to examine the sequence of events leading to Darnley's violent death, in order to arrive at a full understanding of what took place at Kirk o'Field. It is equally important to trace the course of the relationship between Mary and Darnley, and also to examine the history of Mary's policy on religion, 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 any study to be credible and exhaustive, each piece of evidence that has a bearing on the conclusion needs to be fully examined and re-evaluated. There is, also, a large cast of suspects whose actions need to be tracked.

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

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

The memoirs of Mary's third husband, the Earl of Bothwell, which were written in 1568 whilst he was a prisoner in exile in Denmark, have very little to say about Darnley's murder. Bothwell was widely believed to have been the man who plotted Darnley's death, so it is unlikely that he would have revealed anything incriminating, especially in a work that was written 'to enable the King of Denmark 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 diplomatic reports and letters, circumstantial evidence, and a source known as the *Diurnal of Occurrents*, a diary of events written by an anonymous observer living in Edinburgh, which is generally accurate, if biased against Mary. Where I have used prejudiced contemporary sources, I have done so with caution.

1

The Three Crowns

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

At only six days old, the infant Mary became Queen of Scots. Scotland was used to royal minorities, for every one of its monarchs since 1406 had succeeded as a child. As a result, the nobility had grown in strength and autonomy, having become used to long periods without royal interference during which they enjoyed the unfettered exercise of power. These minorities had also bred rivalries and 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 of twelve. Arran, then twenty-seven, was a Protestant, and head of the powerful Hamilton clan, whose lands straddled Clydesdale and central Scotland. An English envoy described the Hamiltons as a good looking race, but vicious, faithless and inept.[5] Arran's claim to the succession was not undisputed, because there was uncertainty as to whether his parents had been lawfully married; hence his overriding purpose in life was to establish the legality of his

claim. Self-interest and the advancement of his House dictated his political policies, but his indolence, instability and lack of decisiveness lost 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-old son and heir, Prince Edward, to the little Queen of Scots, and thereby unite England and Scotland under Tudor rule. Arran, eager to secure the support of the English King for his claims, was willing to co-operate, and on 1 July 1543 a treaty was concluded at Greenwich, which provided for the marriage of Mary and Edward. Mary was to go to England when she was ten, and be married the following year.

But the Catholic party in Scotland, led by Marie de Guise and Cardinal David Beaton, were opposed to the treaty. They removed Mary from Arran's care, took her to Stirling Castle, and had her crowned there, in the Chapel Royal, on 9 September. In December, a Catholic-dominated Parliament repudiated 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 savage campaign that followed became known as the 'rough wooing': in the course of it, scores of towns, villages and abbeys in the south-east were mercilessly sacked and burned, leaving vast swathes of devastation. Even the city of Edinburgh did not escape Henry's fury: he had ordered his commanders to sack, 'burn and subvert it, and put every man, woman and child to the sword'.[6] Far from bringing 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 of Mary, Queen of Scots. Matthew Stuart, 4th Earl of Lennox, whose power base was centred upon Glasgow, had been born in 1516 at Dumbarton, and had succeeded to his earldom at the age of ten, after the murder of his father by Arran's bastard half-brother. This was cause enough for bad blood between Lennox and Arran, but they were also bitter rivals for the succession. Like Arran, Lennox was descended from Mary, daughter of James II, but only in the female line; unlike Arran, he had been born in undisputed wedlock. With such contentious issues dividing them, there could be no friendship between the Lennox Stuarts and the Hamiltons.

In 1531, Lennox had gone to France, where he joined the royal guard, became a naturalised subject of the French King and changed the spelling of his surname from Stewart to Stuart. Twelve years later, to Arran's consternation, he returned to Scotland and began paying court to Marie de Guise. Like most women, she found him handsome, charming and gallant: he was 'a strong man of personage, well-proportioned with lusty and manly visage, and carried himself erect and stately, wherefore he was very

pleasant in the sight of gentlewomen'.[7] A well-educated man, he spoke fluent French and was skilled at playing the lute. The Queen Dowager and Cardinal Beaton believed Lennox to be an ardent Francophile who would support them against the ambitions of Arran. But Lennox was unreliable, treacherous and driven by self-interest, and when Marie refused to marry him, he defected to the English in search of better prospects. In return for his support against the Scots, Henry VIII bestowed 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 was the daughter of Henry VIII's elder sister, Margaret Tudor (widow of James IV and grandmother of Mary, Queen of Scots) by her second husband, Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus; Margaret was therefore near in blood to the English throne, and a marriage between her and Lennox could only reinforce the dynastic claims of both parties. Yet although their union was politically advantageous, it was also a love match on both sides: he was said to be 'far in love',[8] and in his letters, he addressed his wife as 'mine own sweet Madge' or 'my Meg', told her she was his 'chiefest comfort', and signed himself 'Your own Matthieu and most loving husband'. Margaret was a devout Catholic, so Lennox, who had been reared in the old faith but recently converted to Protestantism, now tempered his spiritual views to please his wife and King Henry; religion was ever a matter of expediency with him.

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

In 1545, Lennox led an English army into Scotland in the hope of taking Dumbarton Castle for Henry VIII. It was during this campaign that he ordered the slaughter of eleven child hostages whose Scottish fathers had been forced into his ranks and then defected;[9] this earned him undying notoriety and a perpetually haunted conscience. His offensive ended in failure, and on 1 October the Scottish Parliament attainted him for treason and confiscated all his estates and titles, some of which were given to Arran. Lennox was now the most hated man in Scotland. For the next nineteen years, he remained an exile in England, living on the bounty of Henry VIII. The Lennoxes' chief seat was Temple Newsham in Yorkshire, and they owned another house nearby at Settrington. When

in London, they resided at the former royal manor of Hackney. Lennox never abandoned hope of regaining his lost lands and asserting his dynastic claims, his ambitions having been sharpened by his grand 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 decades now, the Catholic Church in Scotland had been morally lax and corrupt, and there had been calls for its reform. Now, religious affiliations became identified with political issues, and two noble factions emerged: the Catholics, who favoured the 'auld alliance' with France, and a growing number of Protestants, who wanted closer relations with England, whose King, although a Catholic, had severed 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 Cardinal Beaton in 1546. In reprisal, Wishart's followers brutally murdered Cardinal Beaton, then held out for a year in St Andrews Castle before the arrival of a French fleet forced them to surrender. Among those taken prisoner was the reformist preacher John Knox, who would one day become one of the 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 became a Protestant state. The Lord Protector, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, was determined to carry on the war against Scotland, and ordered another invasion. On 10 September 1547, the Scots under Arran suffered a devastating defeat at the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh, which enabled the English to occupy south-eastern Scotland. On the day after the battle, the Scots hastily moved their little Queen 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 King Henry II of France for her marriage to Henry's eldest son, the Dauphin Francis. Mary's maternal uncles, Francis, Duke of Guise and Charles de Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine, were rising men at the French court, and they, foreseeing great advantages to themselves through the marriage of their niece to the heir to the French throne, added their persuasions to Arran's. Henry was more than amenable, as he realised that the match was of far greater benefit to France than Scotland, for it would ultimately bring Scotland under French control, since a wife, even a crowned queen, was always subject to her husband. Given the situation they were in, the Scots had little choice in the matter:

whether they married Mary to a French or an English prince, they would be under threat of interference by a foreign power. In the circumstances, it seemed safer to ally with an old friend than a hostile enemy, and in February 1548, the Scottish Parliament gave its consent to the marriage. In return, the French promised to send troops to help expel the English garrisons from Scotland. At the end of the month, 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 strategic town of Haddington in East Lothian, and there, on 7 July, a treaty was signed formally providing for the marriage of Mary to the Dauphin, with provisions for safeguarding Scotland's future political autonomy.

Arran was now a spent force, although he was to remain Regent for six more years. Real power in Scotland now lay in the hands of the Queen Dowager, who was determined to protect her daughter's interests and preserve her Catholic kingdom intact. In order to ensure Arran's support, she persuaded the French King to grant him the dukedom of Chatelherault, and promoted his bastard half-brother, 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 the most able and opportunist politician of all the Hamiltons, and a liberal conservative in religion. Wily and self-seeking, like all his family, 'he spent the least part of his time in spiritual contemplations'[10] and led 'a life somewhat dissolute'[11] with a 'harlot' called Grizzel Sempill, who bore him at least three children, and was the widow of the Provost of Edinburgh. For his sins, Hamilton contracted syphilis, and in 1566 underwent an expensive course of mercury treatment. Marie de Guise ignored the scandals of the Archbishop's private life; she hoped he would be the saviour of the Catholic Church in Scotland.

On 7 August 1548, the five-year-old Mary said goodbye to her mother and her kingdom, and sailed to France. Amongst her attendants were four well-born girls of similar age to her own, all called Mary, who were to be her special companions, and to whom she became especially close: vivacious Mary 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 ever seen'.[12] From the first, he treated her as his own daughter, and placed her in the household of his children by his Florentine Queen, Catherine de' Medici. Mary was to grow up in luxurious royal châteaux such as Blois, Chambord and Fontainebleau, surrounded by the

art and culture of the Renaissance and the sophisticated, glittering life of the court, where she was petted and pampered by all who came into contact with her, and particularly by her magnificent Guise uncles, who hoped for 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 its promiscuity and corruption. Her own governess bore the King a bastard child. 'Here, it is not the men who solicit the women, but the women the men,' observed the Queen of Navarre disapprovingly.[13] The court was ruled by the King's mistress, the elegant and cultivated Diane de Poitiers, who was nineteen years his senior yet still beautiful. An affronted Queen Catherine was relegated to the sidelines while Diane was given responsibility for arranging the education of the royal children. From Diane, Mary learned to regard Catherine with contempt, and consequently the Queen 'had a great misliking' of her daughter-in-law.[14]

The moral laxity of the court is reflected in two paintings that apparently show a teenaged Mary, the future Queen of France, in the nude. Two figures in the erotic allegorical work *The Bath of Diana*, attributed to Francis Clouet (now in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Rouen) are thought to be portraits of Mary, and she is almost certainly the bare-breasted sitter wearing a ruff and headdress in the portrait 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 her portrait was superimposed on the body of a nude model, but the portrayal of her in such poses belies 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 died of syphilis, and its effects were now tragically apparent in them. Of the ten children born to Henry II and Catherine de' Medici, Francis was sickly and feeble, Charles suffered from hallucinations, Henry became a homosexual cross-dresser, and Marguerite a nymphomaniac who had an incestuous affair with her brother Hercule.

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

Mary was brought up as a devout Catholic, and received a Renaissance

education alongside her future husband and his siblings. She was taught sophisticated literary skills and elegant calligraphy. In an age of developing diplomacy, there was great emphasis on languages. French became Mary's first language, and would remain so for the rest of her life; she did retain enough of her native Scots to be able to converse in it as an adult, although she never became proficient at writing it.[18] She also gained 'a useful knowledge'[19] of Spanish, Italian, Latin and Greek, but did not begin to learn English until 1568. Mary brought back 240 books from France to replace the royal library at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh that had been destroyed by the English in 1544, and these were in a wide variety of languages, including Latin and Greek; there were books on history, music, geography, astronomy and theology, a selection of the works of antiquity, and a large number of romances and poetry books in French and Italian, the latter being Mary's preferred reading. The great poet Pierre de Ronsard himself 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 sake. Although not an intellectual like her cousin, the future Elizabeth I of England, she read a great deal for pleasure, and 'there was hardly any branch of human knowledge of which she could not talk well'.[20]

Mary was also taught the traditional feminine accomplishments: many surviving examples of her work testify to her skilled needlework and embroidery, and she was also good at drawing. Dancing became one of her favourite pastimes, and she learned to carry herself with perfect grace and agility in the ballets and masques in which she took part at the French court. She sang beautifully and played the lute, cittern, harp and virginals 'reasonably well for a queen'.[21] Mary was early on introduced to the pleasures of hunting, hawking and other outdoor pursuits, including archery, pell-mell (croquet) and later, in Scotland, golf; she became an expert and fearless horsewoman, and was never happier than when in the saddle. She also loved fine clothing, dogs, tame birds, long walks, puppet plays from Italy, 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 people. Mary herself began to adopt the French spelling of her surname, Stuart, and always signed herself 'Marie'. There is little evidence that she received any formal training in political skills, for everyone, herself included, expected her to remain in France. Scotland would be governed by others on her behalf, so there was no necessity for her to be trained specifically for the duties of a queen regnant. Mary's Guise uncles were there to advise if she needed any guidance in matters of state,

but she was also growing up in a court where intrigue and brutality were commonplace, and she must have learned something of the Machiavellian nature of Renaissance politics, the manipulation of political factions 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 was concluded between the two kingdoms. In 1553, Edward VI died, and was succeeded by his Catholic half-sister, Mary I, who was to spend her reign re-establishing the Church of Rome in England and devoutly burning Protestants. In 1554, Marie de Guise finally replaced Chatelherault as Regent of Scotland, and immediately revived the Auld Alliance with France, in the hope of stemming the swelling tide of Protestantism in Scotland. The Queen Dowager strengthened her position by relying on French advisers and French troops, for whom her daughter's subjects were expected to pay, but this only served to alienate the proud and independent Scots, who feared that their country was in danger 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 associated with an injured sense of national identity, born out of resentment against unwelcome French interference. That year, five leading Protestant nobles banded together and, calling themselves the Lords of the Congregation of Jesus Christ, allied with militant reformist preachers and signed a bond, 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 powerful and influential bastard half-brother, the sternly Calvinist Lord James Stewart, joined them with a large following and publicly proclaimed that the Lords of Scotland would embrace the Protestant faith and restore Scotland's independence.

Lord James Stewart, who was to play a momentous and often enigmatic role in Mary's life, had 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 Sir Robert Douglas of Lochleven. James had petitioned the Pope to have the marriage annulled, so that he could marry his mistress, but in vain. In adulthood, Lord James himself tried unsuccessfully to have his parents' union legalised retrospectively.

Lord James's bastardy was evidently a matter of great bitterness and resentment to him, for it prevented him from wearing the crown of Scotland, a role for which he was eminently suited, both by nature and by ability. He looked like a Stuart king, being tall and dark with a distinctly

regal bearing and a commanding presence. Having to give place to his half-sister, a Catholic ruler, and a female at that, cannot have been easy for one who was ambitious, strong-willed, clever and capable, and his jealousy certainly had a profound bearing on the future relations between himself and Mary, which were amicable, and often affectionate, so long as she deferred to his wisdom and judgement. For James was not interested in the outward show of royalty, but in the actual exercise of sovereign power.

Many, then and since, among them Mary herself, have claimed that Lord James never ceased from scheming to seize the Scottish throne, and certainly his record over the coming years would appear to suggest that this was his ultimate aim. Had that been the case, however, it is surprising that he did not 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 on principle, or a treacherous villain who cleverly managed to cover his tracks and find unarguably sound pretexts for his actions: indeed, in nearly every instance, his behaviour can be interpreted in both lights. He was a man 'whose peculiar art was to appear to do nothing whilst, in truth, he did all'.[22] Whenever there was trouble or scandal, he was always absent. And although it was said of him that he 'dealt, according to his nature, rudely, homely and bluntly',[23] he was ruthless, devious, subtle, and cautious in the extreme.

There can be little doubt of the sincerity and consistency of Lord James's stern Calvinist convictions, nor that in his private life he was a model of austere rectitude. No personal scandal ever attached to his name, and he was reputed to be honest, which virtues earned him great popularity with the middle classes. Yet when it came to material things he was greedy, and through steady advancement, the acquisition of ecclesiastical property, and the bounty of his sister, he managed to make himself the richest man in Scotland.

One Protestant lord who refused to join the Lords of the Congregation was the mighty James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell, who was perhaps the Queen Regent's most staunch supporter and who could not be shifted from his loyalty to the Crown.

Bothwell, whose destiny was to be fatally linked to Mary's, had been born around 1535 and succeeded his father to the earldom and the hereditary office of Lord High Admiral in 1556. The Hepburn territory was centred upon the fertile and rich region of East Lothian, and the family's chief seat was Crichton Castle, eight miles south of Edinburgh. James had been educated in the household of his promiscuous uncle,

Patrick Hepburn, Bishop of Moray, at Spynie near Inverness, and in the university schools of Paris. He was a cultivated, literate man, interested in science and warfare, and spoke fluent French and some Latin and Greek.

In 1557, Bothwell had commanded a military force that raided the English border, and for much of his life he would play a major role in suppressing lawlessness in the Scottish Borders. He mortally hated the English and, unlike almost all the rest of the Scottish nobility, would never accept bribes 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 his own conceit, proud, vicious and vainglorious above measure, one who would attempt anything out of ambition'.[25] His enemies said he was 'false and untrue as the devil',[26] the 'sink of all horrible sins'.[27] Although he was 'all his lifetime a faithful servant of the Crown, a man valiant above all others', he was also 'audacious, inconstant and changeable'.[28]

Bothwell was certainly a volatile, violent and turbulent man, but hardly the 'monstrous beast' or 'bag of vice'[29] he was made out to be by his foes. Sir Henry Percy, a respected English adversary, was impressed with Bothwell when he met him, and declared he was 'very wise, and not the man he 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 dark cropped hair and a moustache. His later enemy, George Buchanan, described him as looking 'like an ape in purple', and his language was of a similar lurid colour.[32] Yet women found him irresistible, and his private life was constantly the subject of scandal, for he had an insatiable appetite for sex and a very amoral attitude towards marriage. In 1559, aged twenty-four, he had an affair with his neighbour at Branxholm, Janet Beaton, the Lady of Buccleuch, who was nineteen years his senior, had been married three times, and had seven children. She was also reputed to have resorted to sorcery to preserve her beauty. There is some evidence that she and Bothwell went through some sort of handfasting ceremony, but there is no evidence that they were ever married. After their affair ended, they remained friends.

Bothwell himself was frequently accused by his enemies of practising witchcraft in order to achieve his ambitions, and was said to have become acquainted with the black arts whilst a student in Paris. He was also accused, again mainly by his enemies, of sodomy with men. Mary's apologist, John Leslie, Bishop of Ross, called him vicious and dissolute in his habits, while a hostile English observer wrote, 'He was a fit man

to be minister to a shamful act, be it either against God or man.'[33] Neither accusation is very explicit. But Bothwell's former servant, Paris, later confessed, 'I knew his very terrible vices, especially one in which I am said to be so good a minister. I told him it would be his ruin.' He recalled Bothwell reminding him, 'You covered my dishonour when you were in my service abroad.'[34] Paris's confession was extracted under the threat of torture by men who needed to destroy Bothwell's reputation, so little reliance may be based upon it. Nor can we trust the testimony of Dandie Pringle, a servant dismissed by Bothwell for trying to poison him, who told the English Governor of Berwick that the Earl was 'as naughty a man as liveth, and much given to that vile and detestable vice of sodomy'.[35] A scurrilous ballad by Robert Sempill, written after Bothwell's fall, also accused Bothwell of 'beastly buggery',[36] but may be dismissed as sheer character assassination by an extremist propagandist. However, given the consistency of the accusations, and the variety of people making them, there is at least a possibility that there was some truth in them.

On 4 April 1558, as the time approached for her marriage to the Dauphin, Mary, probably on the advice of the Guises, signed a secret treaty with Henry II, pledging that, if she died without issue, Scotland would become subject to the French Crown. This amounted to a betrayal of her kingdom and her Scottish heirs, and is proof that she retained little affection for, or pride in, the land of her birth, and that, thanks to the influences around her, she had come to regard it as a mere appendage of France.

Three weeks later, on 24 April, Mary and Francis were married in a magnificent ceremony at Notre-Dame in Paris. The bride was fifteen, the bridegroom fourteen. Although the Venetian ambassador reported that the marriage was consummated on the wedding night,[37] there is some doubt about this. Francis apparently suffered from undescended testicles, and was said to be sexually immature. However, in the late summer of 1559, Mary appeared at court in the floating tunic of a pregnant woman, obviously believing herself to be with child. In the autumn, she was ill, and nothing more is heard of the hoped-for heir to the throne. The Spanish ambassador commented that, if Mary did bear a child, 'it will certainly not be the King's'.[38]

In England, on 17 November 1558, Mary I died, to the great relief of most of her subjects, and was succeeded by her twenty-five-year-old half-sister, Elizabeth I. Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII by his second wife, Anne Boleyn, whom he had married in defiance of the Pope, who refused to annual Henry's first marriage to Katherine of Aragon, mother of Mary I. It was chiefly for this reason that Henry had broken with

Rome, but in the eyes of Catholic Europe, Elizabeth was a bastard and unfit to inherit the throne, and the true successor to Mary I was Mary, Queen of Scots.

The Act of Succession of 1544 and Henry VIII's Will of 1546 laid down that the crown of England was to descend to Edward VI and his heirs, then to Mary I and her heirs, and lastly to Elizabeth I and her heirs. Both Edward and Mary had died childless, and Elizabeth was as yet unmarried, much to the consternation of her advisers. Failing these lines, the throne was to pass to the heirs of Henry VIII's younger sister Mary, and then to anyone else the King might designate. The descendants of his older sister Margaret had been passed over, because Margaret Tudor had relinquished her claim to the English throne on her marriage to James IV in 1503, and because Henry VIII was hoping to annex Scotland to England through the marriage of Mary to Prince Edward.

Mary therefore had no right to the succession under English law, but Henry II ignored this minor detail, and on the day of Elizabeth's accession had Francis and Mary proclaimed King and Queen of England, on the grounds that Elizabeth was a baseborn usurper; the English royal arms were quartered with those of France and Scotland on their shields, and they began styling themselves King and Queen of England, Ireland and Scotland in official documents, much to Elizabeth's fury and alarm, for she feared that Henry might try to enforce Mary's claim by mounting a military offensive against her. There were already French troops on her back doorstep in Scotland.

After the horrors of 'Bloody Mary's' reign, however, the majority of Elizabeth's subjects would never have meekly accepted another Roman Catholic ruler, particularly one who was a member of the French royal House, and a Guise at that. Many were of the opinion that a foreigner born outside the realm could not legally inherit the throne, since aliens could not inherit property in England. In the event, Henry II had no immediate intention of making war on Elizabeth, but the real damage caused by his actions was to become apparent in the longer term, for from now on the acquisition of the English crown would be Mary's chief mission in life, more important to her by far than her own kingdom. Mary's pretensions were to permanently sour her relations with Elizabeth, and underpinned all the dealings between them, creating a dangerous climate of resentment and distrust.

Nor were Elizabeth's fears allayed when, in November 1558, the Scottish Parliament agreed that Mary might bestow the Crown Matrimonial on Francis; this effectively made him her heir, in the event of her dying childless, and meant that Scotland might well come under French rule one day.

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On 30 June 1559, Henry II was fatally injured when a lance pierced his eye and throat during a tournament held to celebrate the marriage of his daughter Elisabeth to Philip II of Spain. After lingering in agony for ten days, he died on 10 July. Francis and Mary were now King and Queen of France, but Francis's accession signalled a bitter power struggle between the Guises and the Queen Mother, Catherine de' Medici, for political supremacy. Mary, of course, sided with her uncles, thereby incurring the further displeasure of her mother-in-law.

Francis II was crowned at Rheims Cathedral on 18 September 1559; as an anointed monarch in her own right, Mary was a mere observer of the ceremony. Marie de Guise was represented at the coronation by the Earl of Bothwell. Another guest was 'a young gentleman who has no beard',[39] Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, the twelve-year-old son of the Earl and Countess of Lennox, who had come to offer his parents' congratulations to Francis and Mary on their accession, and also to present a letter petitioning Mary to restore Lennox's lands in Scotland. Although she and Francis received Darnley 'with great distinction',[40] she refused Lennox's request, but sent his son home with a gift of 1,000 crowns.

When Bothwell returned to Scotland after the coronation, the land was in turmoil. The Queen Regent was now involved in a bitter conflict with the Lords of the Congregation; although she had been cautiously supportive of their calls for reform of the Church, she was appalled by the escalating violence and iconoclasm of their movement, and when they began inciting riots and vandalising and desecrating churches and abbeys, she called in French troops to stop them. But this unpopular move only served to strengthen the Lords' resistance, which gathered momentum when the charismatic reformer John Knox returned from exile in May 1559 and allied with Lord James and his Protestant colleagues. Knox's arrival brought more leading nobles over to the Congregation, and his fiery brand of preaching inspired much popular support for the new religion.

During his exile, Knox, a former Catholic priest, had become chaplain to Edward VI. When Mary I succeeded, he fled to Geneva, where he embraced the extreme Protestant views of the Swiss reformer, John Calvin. In 1558, he published a notorious tract against the Catholic Queens, Mary I and Marie de Guise, entitled *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. In it, he argued that it was against natural and divine law for a woman to hold dominion over men. He was a shrewd, witty man of stern convictions, single-minded and bigoted, 'one who neither feared nor flattered any flesh'.[41] He loathed any form of frivolity, and severely castigated anyone who indulged in

fornication, yet in his fifties he married in succession two sixteen-year-old girls, one of them the daughter of the fervently Calvinist Andrew Stewart, Lord Ochiltree. Knox became Minister of St Giles' Kirk, the foremost church in Edinburgh, and was given a fine house on the High Street, probably the one still identified as his today, which dates from c. 1490.

The Queen Regent appointed Bothwell her Lieutenant-General, 'with special responsibility for affairs of war'.[42] Elizabeth I, who had already established the Protestant Church of England, was now secretly supporting the Lords of the Congregation, most of whom were in the pay of the English government. In October, Bothwell intercepted 6,000 crowns that the English had sent to aid the Scottish rebels, and gave them to Marie de Guise. For this, he earned the undying enmity of Lord James, Chatelherault and most of the other Protestant nobles.

In February 1560, the Lords and the English concluded the Treaty of Berwick, whereby Elizabeth agreed to send troops to overthrow the Catholic Regent and drive out the French. In April, an English army laid siege to Leith, which was then held by French troops for Marie de Guise. Later that month, the Lords overthrew the ailing Regent. In her place, Scotland was to be governed on behalf of its absent Queen by a Protestant Great Council comprising Chatelherault, his son, James Hamilton, Earl of Arran, and Lord James: Chatelherault was merely a figurehead – the real power lay with James and Knox. On 11 June, Marie de Guise died of dropsy. When the news reached France, Mary was prostrated with grief for the beloved mother she had not seen for ten years.[43]

Hostilities now ceased, and the Treaty of Leith brought to an end the ancient alliance between Scotland and France. On 6 July, a treaty signed at Edinburgh paved the way for closer and more lasting bonds between Scotland and England. Under its terms, all foreign troops were to leave Scotland, foreigners were to be barred from holding any government office, and the English undertook not to interfere in Scottish affairs; in return, the grateful Scots, on behalf of Queen Mary, recognised Elizabeth as Queen of England, and promised that Mary would renounce her claims to the English throne and succession. The Treaty of Edinburgh was negotiated without Mary's consent, its terms were odious to her, and she would consistently refuse to ratify it, much to Elizabeth's mortification.

In August, the Scottish Parliament met and, in defiance of its lawful sovereign, and without her assent, passed the legislation that would establish the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. Such legislation was undoubtedly illegal, for Mary refused to ratify it, but it had been enacted in response to popular demand. In an Act opposed by only three peers,

without a murmur of protest from Archbishop Hamilton, the Catholic faith was outlawed and the celebration of Mass made a capital offence. When she heard, Mary angrily expressed her disapproval to the English ambassador in Paris: 'My subjects of Scotland do their duty in nothing. I am their sovereign, but they take me not so. They must be taught to know their duties.'[44] There was talk in Scotland at this time of deposing Mary and replacing her with Lord James, but it came to nothing.

Bothwell, meanwhile, had gone to Denmark, having been sent to Europe to raise support for the late Regent. In Copenhagen, a Norwegian admiral, Christopher Throndssen, offered him the hand of his daughter Anna, with a dowry of 40,000 silver dollars. When Bothwell moved on to Germany and Flanders, Anna went with him and sold her jewellery to finance his travels, for he had spent most of his money in supporting the Regent. Anna and her family later insisted that a marriage had taken place, but this may have been to save face, for there is no record of it, nor of the impecunious Bothwell receiving the dowry, and Anna never styled herself Countess of Bothwell. It seems more likely that she attached herself to Bothwell on the promise of marriage, but that he lost interest in making such a commitment. Anna may have been the mother of his only known bastard, William, to whom Bothwell's mother later willed all her possessions.

The death of Marie de Guise robbed Bothwell of political and financial support in Scotland. He therefore left Anna in Flanders and went to the French court to seek service with Queen Mary and perhaps the restitution of some of the funds he had outlaid. Mary did grant Bothwell an audience, but its outcome is unknown. In the autumn, he rejoined Anna in Flanders.

That November, Francis II fell seriously ill with a virulent inflammation of the middle ear that spread to his brain and caused an abscess.[45] His sufferings were terrible and prolonged, and on 5 December he passed away, aged not quite seventeen. After a post-mortem examination, his physician declared that much of the young King's brain had been destroyed by the abscess. Mary, who had nursed Francis devotedly, was inconsolable at his death;[46] for the third time in less than eighteen months, she was facing the loss of someone dear to her. Again, she donned the *deuil blanc*, the white mourning of French queens, then disappeared into her black shrouded chamber for the customary forty days of seclusion imposed on royal widows.

The throne now passed to Francis's younger brother, the ten-year-old Charles IX, but the reign of the Guises was effectively over; Mary, the instrument of their greatness, was now a childless Queen Dowager, and no longer of great political importance at the French court. Real power

now lay in the hands of the hostile Queen Mother, who presently made it perfectly clear that Mary was no longer welcome in France. It was at this point that Mary began to think seriously about returning to her own kingdom.

2

'The Most Beautiful in Europe'

Mary had two options open to her: she could make a second marriage with a foreign power, or she could return to Scotland. At first, she barely considered the latter. Her priority was to recover the prestige she felt she had lost through widowhood by marrying a great Catholic king, or a king's son. At eighteen, with her crown and her rich French dowry, she rivalled Elizabeth I as the best match in Europe.

After Mary's period of mourning officially ended in January 1561, she began seriously to consider marriage with Don Carlos, heir to Philip II of Spain. At that time, France and Spain were the two most powerful nations in Christendom, so Don Carlos was a great prize. But Catherine de' Medici, whose daughter Elisabeth had recently married Philip, had no wish to see her eclipsed by Mary, or the influence of the Guises reaching into Spain. She also vehemently opposed their suggestion, put forward as a means of keeping Mary in France, that the Queen of Scots marry her late husband's brother, Charles IX. Instead, the Queen Mother urged Mary to go back to her own kingdom and take up the reins of government there.

Some people thought that Mary should consider an advantageous dynastic marriage nearer home. There were two possible candidates. One was Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, the fourteen-year-old son of the Earl and Countess of Lennox. Darnley's ambitious parents wasted no time in sending him to France in February 1561 to offer condolences on the death of Francis II and privately to press his suit.[1] Naturally, they took care to keep the true purpose of his visit a secret from Queen Elizabeth, because Darnley had a strong claim to the English throne, and it did not take much to arouse her suspicions. The Catholic Lennoxes had been in high favour with Mary I, and the Countess had then gone out of her way to make life difficult for Elizabeth when the latter was in disgrace; on

Elizabeth's accession, it had been made clear to the Lennoxes that they were no longer welcome at court. The Queen feared their ambition, and had spies planted in their household to keep a watch on their movements. In happy ignorance, Lady Lennox was now writing to several Catholic nobles in Scotland in an effort to enlist support for Darnley's marriage to Queen Mary.

Elizabeth would never have approved such a marriage, for Darnley, like Mary, was too near her throne for comfort. The Spanish ambassador in England, Alvaro de Quadra, had told Philip II that, should Elizabeth die, the English Catholics would raise Darnley to royal estate as Henry IX. Yet there were obstacles in the way of him succeeding. His mother had been excluded from the Act of Succession and from Henry VIII's Will, not only because she was a Roman Catholic, but also because there were doubts as to her legitimacy, her parents' marriage having been declared invalid. Nevertheless, she and Darnley, whose claim to the English succession came through her, had both been born in England, and many therefore considered that their line had a better right than Mary Stuart to succeed Elizabeth. Darnley had also inherited rights to the Scottish succession through his father. Marriage to Mary could only reinforce his claims to both kingdoms, and would also boost the Scottish Queen's ambitions in England.

In the event, Mary was not interested in marrying Darnley. She had set her sights on the far greater match with Don Carlos.

The second candidate for Mary's hand was James Hamilton, Earl of Arran, who was five years her senior and had, in 1560, unsuccessfully proposed to Elizabeth I. As Chatelherault's heir, Arran had a strong claim to the Scottish succession, but he did not appeal to Mary as a prospective husband because he was an extreme Protestant and had been one of the most militant leaders of the Reformation. Many Scots, including Knox, were in favour of a marriage between Arran and Mary, but Mary turned him down, with ultimately tragic results.

With no immediate prospect of the great foreign marriage alliance she desired, Mary decided to return to Scotland. Although the Lords of the Congregation had formally invited her to do so, both they, and Queen Elizabeth, would have been happier to see her stay in France; Knox feared that her arrival would signal a religious counter-revolution, while another leading Protestant, William Maitland, foresaw 'wonderful tragedies'.[2]

In March, Lord James went to France to see Mary and negotiate the conditions for a smooth transfer of power; he was determined to ensure that the arrival of a Catholic queen would not make too many difficulties for the Protestant establishment. Mary made it clear that she would come in a spirit of reconciliation. She would not interfere with the newly

founded Protestant Church, but insisted on her right to hear Mass in the privacy of the royal chapels. This seemed a fair compromise, and Lord James promised 'to serve her faithfully to the utmost of his power, and returned again to Scotland to prepare the hearts of her subjects against her home-coming'.[3]

Soon afterwards, George Gordon, the Catholic Earl of Huntly, sent John Leslie, Bishop of Ross to France to urge Mary to accept Huntly's armed backing and restore the Catholic faith in Scotland by force. Wisely, she declined. Huntly, it turned out, had betrayed his faith by joining the Lords of the Congregation and profiting from the spoils of the Reformation. There was no guarantee that he would not turn his coat again.

In the spring of 1560, the Earl of Bothwell returned to Scotland on the Queen's business, apparently taking Anna Throndssen with him as his mistress. Mary was grateful to him for his unswerving loyalty to her mother, and as he was high in her favour, his enemies in Scotland dared not touch him.

By the summer, Mary was well advanced in preparations for her return, but because she had refused to ratify the Treaty of Edinburgh, Elizabeth declined to issue her with a safe-conduct to journey through England. When she changed her mind, it was too late, and Mary had already put to sea, having sailed from Calais on 14 August. Bothwell, as Lord High Admiral of Scotland, was in command of the fleet that came to fetch her. Over 200 years later, painters of the romantic era would frequently depict Mary being borne off in a ship, gazing wistfully back at France, yet while she certainly retained a lasting affection for the land in which she had grown up, it is clear that she was now determined to look to the future.

At six o'clock on the misty morning of 19 August 1561,[4] Mary's ship docked at the port of Leith, and she set foot in her kingdom for the first time in thirteen years. She was not expected for another few days, and was obliged to take shelter in the house of a local merchant until Lord James and other nobles came to receive her and escort her to Edinburgh. Here, she was warmly welcomed by eager crowds, who cheered as she rode up the High Street (now known as the Royal Mile) to Edinburgh Castle, and later, as she presided over a banquet there, lit bonfires in her honour.

Not everyone was in raptures at her arrival. Knox wrote gloomily: 'The very face of Heaven did manifestly speak what comfort was brought into this country with her, to wit, sorrow, dolour, darkness and all impiety. The sun was not seen to shine two days before, nor two days after. That forewarning gave God unto us; but, alas, the most part were blind.' Generally, however, the people of Scotland, including many members of the Protestant establishment, welcomed their Queen. 'Her Majesty returning was gladly

welcomed by the whole subjects,' wrote the courtier and diplomat Sir James Melville. 'For at first, following the counsel of her friends, she behaved herself humanely to them all.' Many were impressed by her beauty, charm and dignity, or felt compassion for her as a young widow. It seemed that she was going to be a success.

Mary would certainly have found Scotland very different from France. It was a much poorer, and more sparsely populated, land, inhabited by about only 5–700,000 people. Its often turbulent nobles were drably dressed[5] compared to their French counterparts, and seemed to be constantly forming rival factions, or engaging in the complicated family feuds that arose from intensive intermarrying or clan warfare. Mostly motivated by self-interest, they ruled their feudalities like independent princes, and resented any interference from the monarch or from central government. Although many still lived in strongly fortified castles, the influence of the French Renaissance, which had featured increasingly in the architecture of the royal palaces since the reign of James IV (1488–1513), was now evident in the houses of the nobility, whose tastes, thanks to the Auld Alliance, were essentially French.

Next in rank below the Lords came the gentry, or lairds, who held their lands directly from the Crown, then the articulate and often outspoken burgesses of the urban merchant class, and finally, at the bottom of the pyramid, the peasantry. Most of Mary's subjects lived in remote villages or farming communities, in rustic hovels. Few received much in the way of education but, thanks to the vision of John Knox, the Reformation Parliament had provided for the foundation of a system of schooling that was to endure for several centuries.

The Scots were a proud and tenacious people. Foreign visitors praised them as courageous warriors, but also found them to be uncouth and lawless, hostile to strangers and inordinately quarrelsome. Their way of life was seen as primitive. The weather was often cold and wet, and the roads, where they existed, were atrocious. The people were ignorant and superstitious, and there was a widespread belief in witchcraft. It appeared that all classes valued money more than honour. However, Scotland was in many respects a civilised land: it boasted three universities, and had thriving trade and cultural links with other countries.

Although Catholics were in the majority, most of the Lords were Protestant, and the city of Edinburgh itself was slowly becoming a bastion of Calvinism. Edinburgh then had a population that has been variously estimated as numbering between 10,000 and 40,000; most were crowded into cramped accommodation in tall tenement blocks in alleyways known as closes or wynds, on either side of the High Street, the impressive wide thoroughfare that led down from Edinburgh Castle, which stood on its

high rock at the top, to Holyrood Palace at the bottom, which lay in the shadow of the extinct volcano known as Arthur's Seat. A defensive wall 21 feet high, built in 1450 and replaced in 1513 after the Scots were defeated by the English at the Battle of Flodden, encircled the city, and had eight fortified gateways; one, the crenellated Netherbow Port, straddled the High Street. Below it was the Canongate, along which the former canons of Holyrood Abbey had walked into the city. At night, the city and the wall were patrolled by the 32-strong town watch.

The Flodden Wall, which was not demolished until the eighteenth century, was responsible for the overcrowding in the city. Instead of moving outwards, the citizens preferred to stay safe inside its bounds, and simply kept adding extra levels to their tenement blocks, some of which were fifteen storeys high. Sanitation was non-existent, and the closes were awash with sewage. The Scots might take pride in the High Street itself, but one visitor likened it to 'an ivory comb whose teeth on both sides are very foul, though the space between them is clean and sightly'.[6] Well-to-do citizens preferred to live in the Canongate, near Holyrood Palace, or below the High Street in the Cowgate, then a select burgh. Another visitor wrote, 'There is nothing humble or rustic, but all is magnificent.'[7]

Edinburgh was Scotland's capital, its greatest city, and a prosperous, busy market centre. It was also the political hub of the realm, for the Privy Council, Parliament and the Court of Session (the central civil court) met regularly in the new Tolbooth on the High Street, which also served as a prison, and the law courts were situated nearby. Below the castle, on the site now occupied by Princes Street Gardens, lay the Nor' Loch, an artificial lake created by James II as part of a defensive system; this was not drained until the eighteenth century, when the Georgian New Town was built. Until then, Edinburgh was centred upon the High Street and the few surrounding streets. The principal church was the imposing St Giles with its distinctive crown spire, which stood on the High Street and had enjoyed collegiate status since the fifteenth century, but had recently been stripped of all the trappings of the old faith. Nearby stood the turreted Mercat Cross, where proclamations were made and criminals executed.

When she arrived in Edinburgh, Mary took up residence in Holyrood Palace, which was to be her chief abode, and is still the official Scottish residence of the sovereign. The adjoining former Augustinian abbey of the Holy Rude had been founded by David I in 1128, and by the end of the fifteenth century, after Edinburgh became the capital, its guest house had become a favoured royal residence. In 1500–3, James IV built a royal palace next door to the cloisters to welcome his English bride, Margaret Tudor. Very little remains of this now, because between 1528 and 1536, their son, James V, employed French architects and craftsmen

to transform Holyrood into a Renaissance showpiece with a donjon and an elegant west façade. In 1544, during the 'rough wooing', the abbey was partially destroyed by the English, and when Mary moved into the damaged palace in 1561, she had to spend some of her French dower on restoration work. At that time, Holyrood Palace was commonly referred to as 'the Abbey'.

In Mary's day, the royal apartments were housed in the massive rectangular fortified north-west tower built by James V, which was accessed by a stairway leading to an iron drawbridge on the first floor. The walls were thick and the windows small, so the rooms were quite dark. Mary occupied the second-floor chambers that had been assigned to the Queens of Scotland; the empty King's apartments were on the floor below, and were of similar layout. A spiral stair in the north-east turret gave access to all floors, while a privy staircase (now blocked) in the north wall led up from the King's bedchamber to the Queen's.

Mary had a suite of four pine-panelled rooms, which still survive today, although they are not as lofty, since the ceilings on the floor below were raised in the seventeenth century. These rooms comprised a large outer, or presence, chamber, hung with black velvet, where the Queen received ambassadors and dignitaries, a bedchamber and, in the turrets that led off it, two small closets, each no more than 12 feet square. One, with crimson and green hangings, was used as a dining chamber, the other as a stool chamber or dressing room. These rooms were hung with tapestries and hangings brought from France, and lit with silver and gilt chandeliers, and there was a four-poster bed in the bedchamber. The floors were either tiled or covered with rush matting, and the shuttered windows had armorial glass and were protected by iron grilles painted red. The ribbed, oak-panelled ceiling in the presence chamber was decorated with shields bearing the arms of Mary, Francis II, James V and Marie de Guise. Some of the most dramatic events of Mary's life were to take place within these rooms.

Adjoining the tower was a quadrangular range of buildings that housed the beautiful chapel royal, the damaged great hall, and Mary's library. Around a series of lesser courts were ranged the new Council Chamber, where ceremonial events normally took place, the Governor's Tower, the armoury, the mint, a forge, kitchens and other service quarters. The abbey and palace were surrounded by pleasant gardens, an orchard, a lion house, and a deer park in which Mary could exercise her passion for hunting. During her reign, the nave of the ruined abbey was converted into the parish church of the Canongate.[8]

Within the palace grounds still stands a small structure known as Queen Mary's Bath House; this was the only building erected by Mary during

her reign in Scotland. Legend has it that she bathed there in white wine in order to preserve her complexion, but the real history of the Bath House is obscure.

We have no way of knowing what Mary thought of her kingdom as she beheld it anew after her long absence. Some historians have speculated that she compared Scotland with France and found it wanting. She did try to establish a French-style court at Holyrood, which was hardly surprising, as she had known nothing else and other precedents had been forgotten: it was nearly twenty years since a Stuart sovereign had held court in Scotland.

Under Mary, Holyrood became the scene of courtly entertainments and glittering ceremonials, and a magnet for the nobility. The Queen had grand tastes and, like most Renaissance monarchs, realised the importance of a display of magnificence, which she funded from her private income. She patronised poets and musicians, and her *valets de chambre* were all expected to display some musical ability on the lute, viola or trumpet. John Knox was horrified to learn that Mary and her ladies danced at royal balls and banquets, and warned that the palace would turn into a brothel if this devilish practice were allowed to continue; the Queen's abominable way of life, he thundered, was 'offensive in the sight of God'. The Protestant David Calderwood later wrote that, although Mary showed a grave demeanour in Council, 'when she, her fiddlers and other dancing companions got into the house alone, there might be seen unseemly skipping, notwithstanding that she was wearing the deuil blanc. Her common speech in secret was that she saw nothing in Scotland but gravity, which she could not agree well with, for she was brought up in joyousity'. Yet Mary did have a more serious side, and set time aside regularly to read Latin with the respected humanist scholar, George Buchanan, who at this time was one of her most fervent admirers.

The Queen's household numbered about 250 persons, mostly French with a few Italians. From 1563, the Master of the Household was George, 5th Lord Seton, the brother of Mary Seton and a leading Catholic noble. Educated in France, he had attended Mary's wedding in 1558, was made a Privy Councillor in 1561, and would remain loyal to her for the rest of his life, often to his own disadvantage.

The four Maries had returned from France with their mistress and still attended her. Knox disapproved of them all, thinking them light of morals and frivolous. In 1562, Mary Livingston married Arthur Erskine of Blackgrange, brother to the future Earl of Mar, and left Mary's service. The beautiful Mary Beaton followed suit in 1566 when she married Alexander Ogilvy of Boyne. Both remained close to the Queen. Mary

Fleming, with her charm and sex appeal, was one of the most sought after ladies at court, while Mary Seton, the most pious and unworldly of the four, would never marry, and stayed with her mistress until 1583, when ill health forced her to retire to a convent in France.

Generally, the Scots were impressed with their Queen. She certainly cut a striking figure for, at about six feet tall, she was well above the normal height for a woman, slender, graceful, and dignified in her bearing. She had a pale complexion, frizzy auburn hair, grey or brown slanting, heavy-lidded eyes, an over-long nose inherited from her father and a 'very sweet, very lovely'[9] voice; she later acquired 'a pretty Scottish accent'.[10] Her neck was long, her bosom like marble and her hands delicate.

Ronsard, Brantôme and several other court poets lauded Mary's beauty, and a Venetian ambassador called her 'personally the most beautiful in Europe'.[11] This cannot have been mere flattery, for even her enemies praised her looks. George Buchanan wrote: 'She was graced with surpassing loveliness of form, the vigour of maturing youth, and fine qualities of mind.' Lennox called her 'a paragon', and even Knox found her features 'pleasing'. It is therefore disappointing to discover that Mary's surviving portraits (none of which date from her reign in Scotland) do not convey to modern eyes the beauty described by enthusiastic contemporaries. What portraits cannot capture are those indefinable qualities known as charm and sex appeal, and it seems likely that Mary had her full measure of both.

As a widow, Mary normally wore black or white gowns with white veils, but abandoned her weeds for state occasions. In her wardrobe at Holyrood were sixty gowns of cloth of gold or silver, purple or crimson velvet or silk, many adorned with gems or fine embroidery; there were also fourteen cloaks and thirty-three masquing costumes, and her inventories record over 180 fine pieces of jewellery. In Scotland, Mary took to wearing Highland dress, notably long embroidered cloaks of plaid, which was then just a warm material, not tartan as we know it today. She enjoyed dressing up, especially in men's clothes,[12] and going about incognito. Her hair was always beautifully dressed by Mary Seton, and she was fond of wearing wigs in different colours.

Mary was loved and respected by nearly all who served her. To her friends and servants, she was kind, generous and loyal. Ambassadors praised her virtue, her discretion, her modesty and her readiness to be ruled by good counsel.[13] She was spirited, vivacious and brave, majestic yet accessible. But she lacked prudence and common sense and was a notoriously bad judge of character, which resulted in many people taking advantage of her. Ever at the mercy of her emotions, she was highly suggestible,

self-absorbed, and subject to storms of hysterical weeping, and periods of nervous prostration that obliged her to take to her bed. 'She often weeps when there is little apparent occasion,' a contemporary observed.[14] Mary also made the mistake of allowing her heart to rule her head, which on more than one occasion led to tragedy. None of these were desirable qualities in a queen in an age that regarded female rulers as unnatural aberrations, yet in a crisis Mary could keep her wits about her and act decisively, resourcefully and courageously. She functioned best, however, when she had a strong man to lean upon, both politically and personally; unfortunately, most of the men on whom she came to depend used her to further their own ambitions.

Some historians have described Mary as a foolish, passionate woman who was entirely without moral sense, and who was selfish, wilful, reckless, irresponsible and incapable of self-sacrifice. One even called her a nymphomaniac. Her enemies would later emphasise her moral depravity: Buchanan wrote of her 'surface gloss of virtue' and Knox compared her to Jezebel. 'We call her not a whore,' he wrote, 'but she was brought up in the company of the vilest whoremongers.'

The truth of all this is hard to determine; none was more professedly jealous of her honour than Mary, yet there were undoubtedly occasions when she was constrained by circumstances or the behaviour of others to act in a way that left her open to censure. It is hard to believe that there was no alternative open to her: she was the Queen, and she almost always had powerful supporters willing to help her. Her intrigues show her to have been duplicitous and even ruthless, especially in her later machinations for the English throne; in 1561, Thomas Randolph, the English agent in Edinburgh, warned his superiors never to underestimate Mary, since he had found in her the fruit of the 'best practised cunning of France combined with the subtle brains of Scotland'.[15] Although she suffered much ill luck, it was often the result of the flaws in her character and her own poor judgement.

All her life, Mary inspired in the imaginations of the male sex a fatal fascination. Knox himself was not immune, but put it down to 'some enchantment whereby men are bewitched'. A few would be driven to take outrageous liberties, not, it seems, without imagining that they had been given some encouragement, for Mary allowed a certain familiarity in her relationships with her intimates that could easily have been misconstrued as romantic encouragement. It is unlikely that Mary was a nymphomaniac, but she may have inherited her father's promiscuous nature, whether or not she indulged it, and she was no shrinking violet. In 1562, Thomas Randolph was shocked to see one Captain Hepburn casually pass Mary a paper on which were written 'ribald verses, and under them drawn

the secret members of both men and women in as monstrous a sort as nothing could be more shamefully devised'. Randolph was appalled, not only at the Queen's lack of reaction, but at Hepburn's disrespect in showing such an insulting thing to his mistress and the implied slur on her reputation.[16]

It has also been suggested that Mary was sexually frigid, but it is more probable that any reluctance in this sphere was a response to the behaviour of the men with whom she became involved. Yet there is evidence that she did enjoy male attention, but her bad judgement in choosing a husband would ultimately lead to her downfall, for she lacked the perception to spot the defects in a man's character. During her time in Scotland, all her entanglements with men brought disaster.

Although she loved energetic outdoor pursuits, Mary's health was never robust. In 1561, Randolph described her as 'a sick, crazed woman'.[17] In youth, she had developed anaemia, which was probably the cause of her occasional fainting fits, and at sixteen she was rumoured to be consumptive. From adolescence onwards, until she was forty, she suffered episodes of pain in her side, which may have been of hysterical origin, but are more likely to have been caused by a gastric ulcer. She also suffered from intermittent depression; Randolph attributed this, and her outbursts of weeping, to sexual frustration resulting from her inability to find a suitable husband.[18] It has been suggested that Mary suffered from porphyria, a disease that later affected George III and other members of the Houses of Hanover and Windsor, and which she may have inherited from her father; this would explain many of her symptoms, such as episodic abdominal pain, vomiting, paralysis and mental disturbance, but there is not enough evidence for this diagnosis to be conclusive.

Although dignified, Mary was a most accessible and affable monarch. Like her cousin Elizabeth, she was not above exerting her feminine charm on her male advisers but, unlike Elizabeth, she lacked political experience and mature judgement. Nevertheless, her moderate and conciliatory approach soon found favour with her relieved Protestant Lords. As long as she was willing to heed the counsel of Lord James, they were happy to serve her as their mistress. In return for Mary's compliance, and the honours and rewards she heaped upon him, James ensured her security, kept the turbulent nobility in check and took her part against the disapproving Knox. His relationship with Mary was one of mutual co-operation and fraternal affection.

That Lord James was the power behind the throne during the first four years of Mary's personal rule there can be no doubt. Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, an English diplomat who was familiar with Scottish affairs,

stated that the Queen was content 'to be ruled by good counsel and wise men'. In 1561, William Cecil, Elizabeth's formidably able Secretary of State wrote, 'The Queen of Scotland is, I hear, most governed by the Lord James.' Soon afterwards, Thomas Randolph echoed, 'The Lord James is commander of the Queen.' The following year, a Jesuit reported: 'The leading men in the government acknowledge the Queen's title, but do not let her use her rights. They have many ways of acting in opposition to her. She is alone, and has not a single protector and good councillor. The men in power are taking advantage of her gentleness. She is well nigh destitute of human aid.' In 1562, Cecil informed a colleague that 'the whole government rests with the Lord James', and in 1563 another Jesuit noted, 'The Lord James rules all. The Queen's authority is nominal only.' Mary's partisan, the Bishop of Ross, later recalled that 'she had the name and calling, he [James] had the very sway and regiment'. In 1568, her supporters accused him of causing the Queen's Majesty to 'become subject to him as [if] Her Grace had been a pupil'.[19]

Mary relied heavily not only on Lord James, but also on the man whom she retained as her Secretary of State, William Maitland of Lethington.[20] Now aged about thirty-three, he was the son of Sir Richard Maitland, Laird of Lethington in Lauderdale, Keeper of the Privy Seal and a writer and poet of note. The family seat was the fifteenth-century Lethington Castle near Haddington, East Lothian; later it was extensively remodelled and in 1704 renamed Lennoxlove in honour of Frances Stewart, Duchess of Richmond and Lennox, who had once been courted by Charles II. It is now owned by the Duke of Hamilton.

William Maitland, a clever lawyer who had received a Renaissance education at St Andrews University and later at the French court, was appointed Secretary of State in 1558 by Marie de Guise, who recognised his expertise as a politician and diplomat; in 1559, he had deserted her and joined the Lords of the Congregation. Thereafter, he won over several Lords to their cause, although his motivation was political rather than religious. His ultimate aim was a peaceful union with Protestant England through Elizabeth's recognition of Mary as her heir, and his policies were all directed to that end. Consequently he collaborated closely with his opposite number in England, William Cecil, and, like Lord James, became a pensioner of the English Queen.

Astute, subtle, cunning and cultivated, Maitland was an arch-intriguer and double dealer. Elizabeth I called him 'the flower of all the wits in Scotland', but the Scots, seeing in him the pattern of a Machiavellian politician, nicknamed him 'Michael Wylie'; Buchanan referred to him as a chameleon, and even Lord James, with whom he was closely associated in the government, disliked and distrusted him. His motives were often

obscure: because he covered his traces so well, he was, and remains, something of an enigma, and it is uncertain whether in his dealings with Mary he acted out of loyalty or self-interest; he 'held the threads of all the plots'[21] and knew more than he cared to reveal about the great dramas that would unfold during her reign.

Maitland became 'the whole guider of [the Queen's] affairs. His advice is followed more than any other'.[22] In his opinion, she behaved herself 'as reasonably as we can require. If anything be amiss, the fault is rather in ourselves'.

Others were more fulsome in their praise. The courtier and diplomat, Sir James Melville, wrote: 'The Queen's Majesty, after returning to Scotland, behaved herself so princely, so honourably and discreetly that her reputation spread in all countries.' She desired 'to hold none in her company but such as were the best quality and conversation, abhorring all vices and vicious persons; and requested me to assist her in case she, being yet young, might forget herself in any unseemly gesture or misbehaviour, that I would warn her thereof. She made me familiar to all her most urgent affairs.'

Yet although Sir Thomas Craig claimed that he had often heard Mary 'discourse so appositely and rationally in all affairs which were brought before the Privy Council that she was admired by all',[23] her attendance record at such meetings was poor, and when she was present she sometimes sat there sewing while listening to debates. Most of her time was spent in the company of her largely foreign household. The evidence suggests that her role was mainly formal and ceremonial: she opened and attended Parliament, and went on many progresses throughout her realm, meeting her subjects, exerting her Stuart charm, and administering justice. Knox gained the impression that, rather than attend to state business, Mary preferred archery and hawking. In 1562, the Earl of Bothwell claimed that she 'virtually wielded no authority at all'.[24]

Had Mary been less obsessed with the English succession, she might have been more successful at restoring royal authority in Scotland. Inevitably, as she gained confidence, she came to resent the tutelage of those formidable allies, Lord James and Maitland, and the other constraints that bound her. It would only be a matter of time before she asserted her independent authority and put her own interests before those of her kingdom, and when that time came, she would reveal herself as dangerously irresponsible and entirely out of tune with the concerns and aspirations of the majority of her subjects. The result would be disaster.

For centuries Scotland had endured an uneasy relationship with her more powerful neighbour, England. From the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, the Kings of England had repeatedly asserted their unfounded

claim to be feudal overlords of Scotland, which nevertheless had its own independent monarchy. In 1290, following the extinction of the ancient royal line, Edward I of England, who had visions of uniting the two kingdoms under English rule, acted as arbitrator between the thirteen claimants to the Scottish throne, and chose one, John Balliol, who would act as his puppet. Scottish resistance led first by William Wallace and then by Robert the Bruce was fierce, and in 1314 Bruce vanquished the English at the Battle of Bannockburn and was able to establish himself firmly on the throne. In 1320, he published the Declaration of Arbroath, affirming Scotland's status as an independent sovereign state. Thereafter, his descendants, the House of Stewart – named after Walter the Steward who had married Bruce's daughter Marjorie; they were the parents of Robert II, the first Stewart king – enjoyed an undisputed succession. In the sixteenth century, however, the dynasty's future rested upon the successful resolution of the political and religious situation in Scotland.

As a young Catholic queen in a turbulent land, Mary faced challenges that would have defeated a far more experienced ruler. She did not understand the Scottish people, and to many of them she must have seemed very alien with her frivolous French ways. In an age of religious intolerance, her willingness to compromise seemed suspect, as indeed it was, for Mary was playing a dangerous double game, professing tolerance of the new faith in Scotland in order to ensure her political survival, whilst assuring the Pope that she intended to restore the Catholic faith in her realm. Although personally devout, she did little to champion the Catholic cause in Scotland during her reign. Her private attendance at Mass gave rise to much resentment, and initially there were even riots in protest against it. Lord James managed to calm the people, but the prejudiced Knox would not be appeased, believing that Mary 'plainly purposed to wreck the religion within this realm', and crossed swords with her on several occasions, during which disputes she either spiritedly defended her position or dissolved into tears.

Although for a long time she refused to confirm officially the Acts of the Reformation Parliament, on several occasions Mary issued proclamations reiterating her undertaking not to tamper with the established religion and made generous grants to the Kirk; she even received some instruction in Calvinist doctrines from George Buchanan, but none of this satisfied her critics, nor did it do anything to allay the fears of the Catholics, who had looked to her to bring about a counter-reformation.

Yet Mary still had her sights set on a great Catholic marriage. 'The marriage of our Queen was in all men's mouths,' wrote Knox. It was her duty to remarry and provide for the succession, but the question of whom she might marry was a matter of great concern, not only in Scotland, but

in England also, for Elizabeth was determined to prevent Mary from allying herself with Spain or France and giving a hostile Catholic power a foothold in mainland Britain; she warned Mary that, if she did so, she, Elizabeth, could not avoid being her enemy. But Mary had dreams of marrying Don Carlos and becoming Queen of Scotland, Spain and – with Spanish help – England. Lord James, however, was determined that she should choose a husband who was acceptable to Elizabeth, preferably one of the Protestant Kings of Sweden or Denmark. Nor were Catherine de' Medici or Mary's uncle, the Cardinal of Lorraine, keen to see Spain aggrandised by a union with Scotland. In desperation, Catherine offered her son, Charles IX, whom Mary rejected as being too young, while the Cardinal urged Mary instead to consider the Archduke Charles of Austria, who had for a long time been fruitlessly negotiating a marriage with Queen Elizabeth. But Mary eventually abandoned all ideas of this match on the grounds that the Archduke was too poor. The Lords then suggested Lord Darnley, but Mary declared 'never would she wed with that faction', and continued to pursue the idea of marrying Don Carlos, despite opposition on all sides.

Philip II, however, had reservations about the match. He knew Scotland to be unquiet, and had heard a rumour that Mary had murdered her first husband by poison. More to the point, Don Carlos himself was hopelessly unstable to the point of insanity. At only sixteen, he was morally degenerate, sadistic, severely epileptic, and unprepossessing in his person. His growth was stunted, he had a speech impediment, and he dribbled. But he was set to inherit the greatest throne in Europe, and he was fabulously wealthy. Moreover, King Philip had seen to it that his son's worst defects had remained hidden from public scrutiny. Mary believed him to be a gallant and brave prince who would help her assert her authority in Scotland, champion the Catholic cause and assert her rights in England, and during the next few years, she doggedly persisted in her attempts to bring the reluctant Philip to an agreement.

Her obduracy on this matter did not make for easy relations with her cousin Elizabeth, who was already suspicious of Mary on account of her refusal to ratify the Treaty of Edinburgh, which Mary repeatedly declared she would not do unless Elizabeth recognised her as her heir. 'The Queen my mistress,' wrote Maitland, 'is descended of the blood of England. I fear she would rather be content to hazard all than to forgo her rights.'

On a personal level, Elizabeth was jealous of Mary because of her youth, her reputed beauty and the fact that she was now a rival in the European marriage market. On the other hand, Elizabeth felt an affinity with Mary as her kinswoman and a fellow female ruler, and was willing enough to offer her friendship if only Mary would renounce her pretensions to the English crown. Elizabeth would not name a successor for fear

of being ousted from her throne; although she privately conceded that she knew of no one with a better title to the succession than Mary, she continually refused publicly to name her her heir. Instead, she advised Mary to win the love of the English by showing herself a friendly neighbour. Nevertheless, the interest that Elizabeth showed in Mary's choice of husband is proof that she realised that Mary had realistic hopes of succeeding in England; she hinted that her recognition of Mary as her heir was dependent on her approval of the man Mary married. Mary's frustration over Elizabeth's unending prevarication, and her persistence in demanding what she regarded as her rights, further soured relations between them. Yet Mary did make efforts to establish friendly relations with her cousin, with some success.

Until now, the two Queens had never met. Several times during the next few years, plans for a meeting would be made, and then scrapped for various political reasons. As it turned out, Mary and Elizabeth would never meet.

3

'Powerful Considerations'

On 6 September 1561, Mary appointed her Privy Council. Amongst its sixteen members, aside from Lord James and Maitland, were several men who would play a prominent part in her story. Bothwell was one of them. 'She was pleased to reward me personally, far more generously and graciously than I deserved,' he wrote later, of his appointment and a gift of land that the Queen had given him in recognition of his loyalty to her mother and herself.[1] That autumn, the English agent in Edinburgh, Thomas Randolph, observed a certain rapport between Mary and Bothwell, which was perhaps natural in the circumstances.

The other members of the new Privy Council were the Duke of Chatelherault, the Earls of Huntly, Argyll, Morton, Atholl, Glencairn, Errol, Montrose and Marischal, Lord Erskine, the Lord High Treasurer Robert Richardson, the Clerk Register James MacGill, and the Justice Clerk James Bellenden. Four – Huntly, Errol, Montrose and Atholl – were Catholics; most of the rest were staunch members of the Congregation.

George Gordon, 4th Earl of Huntly, was Mary's cousin, his mother having been Margaret Stewart, a bastard daughter of James IV. This powerful and wealthy magnate ruled north-eastern Scotland like an autonomous prince, and was now reappointed Chancellor, an office he had held since 1546. As the leading Catholic noble, Huntly might have led his co-religionists against the Lords of the Congregation, but instead he had briefly defected to the latter and so destroyed all hope of a Catholic revival. Not surprisingly, Mary did not trust him.

Unlike most of his colleagues, John Stewart, 4th Earl of Atholl was an honourable man with high principles, and would remain loyal to Mary until 1567, when her behaviour outraged his sense of propriety. He was no friend to Huntly, but co-operated with both Lord James and Maitland, becoming a friend of the latter. Atholl's wife, Margaret Fleming, a sister

of Mary Fleming, was reputed to be a witch and to have the power to cast spells.

Archibald Campbell, 5th Earl of Argyll, whose power base lay in the western Highlands, had been educated at the University of St Andrews and in 1557 was one of the first to join the Lords of the Congregation. An epileptic, he was married to Mary's only half-sister, Jean Stewart, the natural daughter of James V by Elizabeth Beaton, but the marriage was unhappy because of Argyll's infidelities. Nor, according to Mary, was Lady Argyll 'as circumspect in all things as she would wish her to be'.[2] The Queen even resorted to asking John Knox to 'put them in unity', but his intervention was ultimately unsuccessful, as the couple were divorced in 1573. Both the Earl and Countess stood high in Mary's favour, while Argyll's tolerance of her Catholic observances earned him a rebuke from Knox.

Another active member of the Congregation was Alexander Cunningham, 4th Earl of Glencairn, a man who was motivated more by religious fervour than by political considerations, and was loudly disapproving of Mary's private Masses.

James Douglas, 4th Earl of Morton, the head of the powerful Douglas clan, was to be implicated heavily in Darnley's murder. Now aged about forty-five, he was a cousin of Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox, with whom he was involved in a long-standing battle for the disputed earldom of Angus. Morton was a staunch Protestant and a pensioner of Queen Elizabeth. Sir James Melville called him 'witty in worldly affairs and policy', but said he had 'a crafty head'. He was illiterate, sadistic, unscrupulous and avaricious, and Mary was repelled by his uncouth and sometimes brutal manners, yet he was also an able and energetic politician. Morton's promiscuity was notorious, but his private life was tragic: his wife was insane for the last twenty-two years of their marriage, and seven of their ten children had died young.

One of the most aggressive Protestants on the Council was the brutal Patrick, 6th Lord Lindsay of the Byres, who was married to Lord James's half-sister, Euphemia Douglas. This man, who would one day become one of Mary's most virulent enemies, was a creature of Knox and 'a raging, furious, rude, ignorant man, nothing differing from a beast'.[3] It was he who had incited the mob to protest against Mary's Mass.

It is necessary to examine the tensions and rivalry between certain nobles and to recount the actions of the Earl of Bothwell and his relations with the Queen during the first three years of her reign, in order to lay the basis for an understanding of later events. Despite an outward show of friendship for the Queen's sake, there was bad blood between Bothwell and Lord James, and mutual hatred between Bothwell and the

Hamiltons. Lord James was determined to undermine Mary's confidence in Bothwell, and at his instance, Mary made the latter Lieutenant of the Borders in order to remove him from court and avoid clashes between him and the volatile Arran. Bothwell later claimed that the preferment shown him by Mary 'incensed my enemies so greatly that they employed every falsity and malicious invention to put me out of favour with the Queen'.[4]

The unstable Arran was still cherishing vain hopes of marrying the Queen. In November, a casual remark by the Earl gave rise to an alarming rumour that he was intending to abduct her from Holyrood, which caused a momentary panic at court until it was proved baseless.[5]

In December, Bothwell resolved to discredit Arran. He had learned that the puritanical Earl was secretly having an affair with the daughter of an Edinburgh merchant, Alison Craig, 'a good, handsome wench'[6] whom Bothwell himself wished to seduce. One night, Bothwell and his friends, Mary's favourite half-brother Lord John Stewart and her uncle René de Guise, Marquis d'Elbeouf, all masked, arrived at Alison Craig's house, hoping to surprise the couple *in flagrante delicto*, but Arran was not there. Not wishing to lose face, they returned the next night, drunk; when they were refused entry, they broke down the doors and ransacked the house, only to find that Arran had already escaped by a back way.[7]

On Christmas Eve, 300 armed Hamiltons, affronted by the insult to Arran, converged upon the city seeking Bothwell, who in turn raised 500 supporters, intent upon retaliation. Edinburgh was in an uproar. Meanwhile, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, outraged by Bothwell's behaviour towards one of its most stalwart supporters, had complained to the Queen. The next day, after Lord James, Argyll and Huntly had managed to disperse the armed factions, Mary reprimanded Bothwell and the other culprits, then sent Bothwell to his castle at Crichton for two weeks in the interests of keeping the peace, and said she trusted that the matter would be forgotten.[8] When the General Assembly demanded that Bothwell and his friends be tried and punished for 'this heinous crime', Mary refused, and so, wrote Knox, 'deluded the just petition of her subjects'.

Bothwell had certainly not forfeited Mary's favour. In January, she went to Crichton Castle for the wedding of his sister Janet to Lord John Stewart. Bothwell hosted the lavish celebrations,[9] while Lord James was also present. On 30 January, Mary secretly created James Earl of Moray; the vast estates that went with the earldom were, however, in the possession of the unsuspecting Earl of Huntly, and it would require a certain diplomacy, if not force, to get them back, hence the secrecy. A week later, Lord James was married by Knox to Agnes Keith, daughter of William, Earl Marischal, in

St Giles's Kirk, and on the same day Mary publicly conferred on him the earldom of Mar, which he resigned soon afterwards in favour of Lord Erskine.

In February, at Bothwell's instigation, and through the mediation of John Knox, Arran and Bothwell were reconciled at Chatelherault's newly built mansion at Kirk o'Field, south of Edinburgh.[10] But Arran was becoming increasingly eccentric. In March, he went to the Queen and accused Bothwell and himself of treasonably plotting to kidnap her and carry her off to Dumbarton Castle so that Arran could, as Bothwell allegedly suggested, use 'her person at your pleasure until she agree to whatsoever thing you desire'; then they would murder Lord James and Maitland and seize control of the government. According to Bothwell, Lord James had put Arran up to making these accusations[11] and, as a result of what Bothwell termed 'these false suggestions', was able to order them both 'into close arrest in the prison of Edinburgh Castle' without benefit of trial.[12] Thomas Randolph, however, reported that Bothwell was 'found guilty on his own confession in some points'.[13]

For some time, anxious doubts had been expressed about Arran's sanity. Randolph had noticed that he was 'drowned in dreams and feedeth himself with fantasies'.[14] Now, 'he began to rave and speak of devils, witches and such like, fearing that all men about came to kill him'.[15] Clearly, he was no longer responsible for his actions, and it is impossible to tell whether or not his accusations against Bothwell were based on truth or were simply the product of a deranged mind. It should be remembered, however, that five years later Bothwell did in fact abduct the Queen and carry her off to one of his castles, and it may be that in 1562, despite his protestations of innocence, he was indeed plotting a similar thing, with a view to overthrowing Lord James.

Chatelherault came to Mary, weeping at the disgrace of his son, but although she received him 'with all gentleness',[16] he was made to surrender Dumbarton Castle. After being declared insane and chained in a dark cell for four years, Arran was released from prison and committed into his mother's care. Utterly mad, he spent forty-seven years in confinement, dying in 1609.

As soon as the Earl of Lennox learned of Mary's return to her kingdom, he sent a messenger to her with a plea for the restitution of his Scottish estates and permission to return to Scotland. In December, Queen Elizabeth got wind of this and other questionable activities from her spies in Yorkshire[17] and, alarmed to hear that the Lennoxes were plotting to marry their son Darnley to Mary, placed the whole family under house arrest in London. In February 1562, the English ports were closed in case

Darnley tried to escape,[18] but in April he gave his gaolers the slip; Randolph reported a rumour that he had gone to France.[19] In consequence of this, Lennox was sent to the Tower and his wife and younger son Charles placed under house arrest at Sheen, Surrey. Lennox was interrogated several times by the Privy Council, and in May Cecil drew up a list of fifteen articles against the Countess, but there was little that could be proved against them. Meanwhile, the Council was trying in vain to establish Lady Lennox's illegitimacy.

In June, Lennox made a humble submission to the Queen, but Elizabeth was not inclined to mercy. The following month, his wife appealed to Cecil for his release, as he was 'in close prison' and had 'a disease which solitariness is most against'.[20] Lennox perhaps suffered from claustrophobia, or, it has been suggested, from depression or terrors arising from a guilty conscience over his savage treatment of his young hostages in 1544. Cecil ignored the letter.

In December 1561, disappointed that Mary had not sent any representatives to the Catholic Council of Trent, Pope Pius IV intimated that he thought she would do little for the faith unless pressure was put upon her. That very month, she approved an Act of Parliament for financing the Protestant Kirk out of former Catholic revenues. In June 1562, when a Papal Nuncio, the Jesuit Father Nicholas de Gouda, arrived secretly in Scotland with proposals from the Pope, Mary rejected them all. In Randolph's opinion, she had no intention of oversetting the reformed religion, and this seemed to be confirmed by the action she took against Huntly, the leading Catholic peer, who might have been her ally in any counter-reformation.

In August, Mary embarked on what was ostensibly a progress to the Highlands, but in fact turned out to be a military campaign to destroy the might of the Gordons. This was thought by some to be at the instigation of Lord James, who was proclaimed Earl of Moray that August and was intent on reclaiming the Moray estates, but Mary herself was a prime mover in the matter, and not without provocation, Huntly's son, Sir John Gordon, had been imprisoned for brawling in Edinburgh, and the Huntly clan were determined to avenge the insult. Moreover, Lord John, who had since escaped, was now threatening to abduct the Queen and force her to marry him. After Mary had been refused entry to Inverness Castle, Huntly surrendered, but soon afterwards broke into open rebellion. At the Battle of Corrichie, near Aberdeen, on 28 October, the Gordons were defeated by an army led by the new Earl of Moray: Huntly dropped dead on the battlefield, from either a heart attack or a stroke, and Sir John was later beheaded; the Queen, watching at Moray's insistence, screamed and

fainted when the executioner bungled his work. She was also present when Huntly's embalmed corpse was tried and condemned for treason before Parliament in 1563 in Edinburgh. The Huntly estates were then declared forfeit, and the late Earl's heir, Lord George Gordon, who had played no part in the rebellion, was tried for treason and condemned to death, but Mary defied Moray and refused to sign the warrant, so Gordon was imprisoned at Dunbar instead. Morton was made Lord Chancellor in place of Huntly.

The fall of the Gordons left the Protestant party all the more powerful. Moray had now eliminated or neutralised several of his enemies. Yet Bothwell remained a thorn in his side. At the end of August, Bothwell had escaped from his prison in Edinburgh Castle by prising loose a bar from his window and climbing down the castle rock;[21] then he had made for Hermitage Castle, one of his strongholds in the Borders. From there, he wrote to Mary to 'find out what the Queen's real thoughts and intentions were towards me',[22] but Randolph reported in September, 'Anything he can do or say can little prevail. Her purpose is to put him out of the country.'[23] Bothwell, however, 'discovered that she knew well enough that I had been accused only through motives of personal hatred and envy, but that, for the time being, she was quite unable to give me any help or assistance. But she sent a message to say that I was to do the best I could for myself'.[24]

Moray demanded that Bothwell surrender himself on pain of indictment for treason, but Bothwell deemed it prudent to leave Scotland. 'I decided to take ship to France, but a tempest drove me to England.' Washed up on the Northumbrian coast, he remained in hiding until 7 January, when he was taken prisoner and confined in Tynemouth Castle. It was at this time that Moray and Maitland – and Randolph – began to be concerned about Mary's dealings with Bothwell. On 22 January, Randolph reported that the Lords 'suspect the Queen to be more favourable to Lord Bothwell than there be good cause', and that they did not want him to return to Scotland. It was probably with their connivance that, in February 1563, on Queen Elizabeth's orders, he was sent to London, where he was imprisoned in the Tower. At the end of May, he was released on parole, but not immediately allowed to leave England.[25] At this time, Anna Throndssen was granted a safe-conduct by the Scottish government to return to Norway.

By December 1563, Bothwell was in Northumberland, a free man. From now on, he would loyally work for Mary in secret, for it was too dangerous for him to do so openly: he had numerous enemies in Scotland. According to Randolph, Bothwell secretly visited Mary at Dunbar in February 1564, then rode to London carrying letters for her. During 1564,

Randolph reported several more secret meetings with Mary in Scotland. All of this implies that Mary was beginning to find Moray's tutelage irksome, and that she was seeking new counsellors. There is no suggestion in any of Randolph's reports, or elsewhere, that she was emotionally involved with Bothwell at this time, or considering him as a future husband.

In November 1562, Lennox had been released from the Tower and allowed to join his wife at Sheen, on condition that he undertook never to 'enter into any private bond or practice with any state without the Queen's licence'.[26] Lady Lennox was also required to promise that she would never again attempt to marry Lord Darnley to the Queen of Scots. Soon afterwards, the Earl and Countess, and in particular Lord Darnley, who had returned from wherever he had been hiding, were back in favour at court, where Elizabeth could keep an eye on them. Alvaro de Quadra reported to Philip II: 'Many people think that, if the Queen of Scots does marry a person unacceptable to this Queen, the latter will declare as her successor the son of Lady Margaret, whom she now keeps in the palace and shows such favour to as to make this appear probable.'[27] Darnley's new status at court is evident from the fact that, in June 1564, he was deputed to receive the new Spanish ambassador, Guzman de Silva, and conduct him to his first audience with the Queen.[28]

Meanwhile, there had been a major court scandal in Scotland. Pierre de Boscotel de Chastelard, a gallant French aristocrat and descendant of the Chevalier Bayard, was an accomplished musician and poet who had come from France in Mary's entourage in 1561, but soon afterwards returned in the company of his patron, the son of the Constable of France. Late in 1562, he made his way back to Scotland and, when he passed through London, let it be known that he was going north 'to see his lady love'.[29]

That lady was Mary herself, for whom Chastelard had apparently conceived a rash and inordinate affection, and she received him with such warmth that he believed his feelings were reciprocated. Thereafter he was often at court; the Queen obviously enjoyed his company and danced with him during the New Year festivities. Soon he was addressing passionate love sonnets to her. The English agent, Thomas Randolph, who was hostile to Mary and had an appetite for scurrilous gossip, claimed afterwards that she permitted too great a degree of familiarity with 'so unworthy a creature and abject a varlet',[30] and Knox, who later wrote an account of the affair, disapproved, relating how 'Chastelard was so familiar in the Queen's cabinet that scarcely could any of the nobility have access to her'. She 'would lie upon Chastelard's shoulder, and sometimes privily she would steal a kiss of his neck. And this was honest enough, for it was the gentle entreatment

of a stranger.' Nevertheless, it was highly unusual conduct in a queen.

Some writers have argued that Mary's unwise encouragement of Chastelard's attentions was merely part of the ritual game of courtly love, which was accepted behaviour at the French court, but not understood in Scotland. However, when virtuous matrons accepted the homage and addresses of an admirer, they did not normally permit such physical intimacy, and it appears that, by her indiscreet and imprudent dealings with Chastelard, Mary was indeed in danger of compromising her much-vaunted honour.

One evening early in 1563, Chastelard went beyond the bounds of decorum when he secreted himself under the Queen's bed at Holyrood. After he was discovered by her grooms, he was soundly reprimanded and banished from Scotland on Mary's orders.

Undeterred and unhindered, Chastelard followed the Queen on a progress into Fife, where, at Rossend Castle near Burntisland, he again forced his way into her bedchamber while two of her ladies were about to disrobe her, then tried to embrace her; he later claimed he had come to beg forgiveness, but others, including the Queen herself, believed he intended to rape her. Moray, hearing her cries for help, rushed into the room and laid hold of Chastelard. This time, since her honour had been so outrageously compromised and her security threatened, the Queen was in no mood to be merciful, but when she cried, 'Thrust your dagger into the villain!' Moray wisely refused, insisting that Chastelard be publicly tried and condemned to death.[31] Mary wondered fearfully if Moray would let Chastelard speak in his defence, to which her half-brother coldly replied, 'I shall do, Madam, what in me lieth to save your honour.'[32]

On 22 February, after the Queen had refused several pleas for a pardon, Chastelard was beheaded in the market-place at St Andrews. Mary, against her will, was forced by Moray to be present. The condemned man refused any spiritual comfort on the scaffold, but instead recited Ronsard's 'Ode to Death',[33] then, looking directly at the Queen, he cried out, 'O cruel dame!' Knox, anxious to emphasise the scandalous nature of the affair, pointed out that 'dame' in this context meant 'mistress', and commented, 'What that complaint imported, lovers may divine.' Knox also recounted how Chastelard 'begged licence to write to France the cause of his death, which was for having been found in a very suspicious position. And so received he the reward of his dancing, for he lacked his head, that his tongue should not utter the secrets of our Queen.'

In March, however, Maitland informed de Quadra that Chastelard had confessed he had been sent by Mary's Protestant enemies in France to 'sully the honour of the Queen' and so wreck her chances of marrying