

Mary Stuart

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Chapter 1

Some royal names are predestined to misfortune: in France, there is the name "Henry". Henry I was poisoned, Henry II was killed in a tournament, Henry III and Henry IV were assassinated. As to Henry V, for whom the past is so fatal already, God alone knows what the future has in store for him.

In Scotland, the unlucky name is "Stuart". Robert I, founder of the race, died at twenty-eight of a lingering illness. Robert II, the most fortunate of the family, was obliged to pass a part of his life, not merely in retirement, but also in the dark, on account of inflammation of the eyes, which made them blood-red. Robert III succumbed to grief, the death of one son and the captivity of other. James I was stabbed by Graham in the abbey of the Black Monks of Perth. James II was killed at the siege of Roxburgh, by a splinter from a burst cannon. James III was assassinated by an unknown hand in a mill, where he had taken refuge during the battle of Sauchie. James IV, wounded by two arrows and a blow from a halberd, fell amidst his nobles on the battlefield of Flodden. James V died of grief at the loss of his two sons, and of remorse for the execution of Hamilton. James VI, destined to unite on his head the two crowns of Scotland and England, son of a father who had been assassinated, led a melancholy and timorous existence, between the scaffold of his mother, Mary Stuart, and that of his son, Charles I. Charles II spent a portion of his life in exile. James II died in it. The Chevalier Saint-George, after having been proclaimed King of Scotland as James VIII, and of England and Ireland as James III, was forced to flee, without having been able to give his arms even the lustre of a defeat. His son, Charles Edward, after the skirmish at Derby and the battle of Culloden, hunted from mountain to mountain, pursued from rock to rock, swimming from shore to shore, picked up half naked by a French vessel, betook himself to Florence to die there, without the European courts having ever consented to recognise him as a sovereign. Finally, his brother, Henry Benedict, the last heir of the Stuarts, having lived on a pension of three thousand pounds sterling, granted him by George III, died completely forgotten, bequeathing to the House of Hanover all the crown jewels which James II had carried off when he passed over to the Continent in 1688--a tardy but complete recognition of the legitimacy of the family which had succeeded his. In the midst of this unlucky race, Mary Stuart was the favourite of misfortune. As Brantome has said of her, "Whoever desires to write about this illustrious queen of Scotland has, in her, two very, large subjects, the one her life, the other her death," Brantome had known her on one of the most mournful occasions of her life--at the moment when she was quitting France for Scotland.

It was on the 9th of August, 1561, after having lost her mother and her husband in the same year, that Mary Stuart, Dowager of France and Queen of Scotland at nineteen, escorted by her uncles, Cardinals Guise and Lorraine, by the Duke and Duchess of Guise, by the Duc d'Aumale and M. de Nemours, arrived at Calais, where two galleys were waiting to take her to Scotland, one commanded by M. de Mevillon and the other by Captain Albize. She remained six days in the town. At last, on the 15th of the month, after the saddest adieus to her family, accompanied by Messieurs d'Aumale, d'Elboeuf, and Damville, with many

nobles, among whom were Brantome and Chatelard, she embarked in M. Mevillon's galley, which was immediately ordered to put out to sea, which it did with the aid of oars, there not being sufficient wind to make use of the sails.

Mary Stuart was then in the full bloom of her beauty, beauty even more brilliant in its mourning garb--a beauty so wonderful that it shed around her a charm which no one whom she wished to please could escape, and which was fatal to almost everyone. About this time, too, someone made her the subject of a song, which, as even her rivals confessed, contained no more than the truth. It was, so it was said, by M. de Maison-Fleur, a cavalier equally accomplished in arms and letters: Here it is:--

"In robes of whiteness, lo,
Full sad and mournfully,
Went pacing to and fro
Beauty's divinity;
A shaft in hand she bore
From Cupid's cruel store,
And he, who fluttered round,
Bore, o'er his blindfold eyes
And o'er his head uncrowned,
A veil of mournful guise,
Whereon the words were wrought:
'You perish or are caught.'"

Yes, at this moment, Mary Stuart, in her deep mourning of white, was more lovely than ever; for great tears were trickling down her cheeks, as, weaving a handkerchief, standing on the quarterdeck, she who was so grieved to set out, bowed farewell to those who were so grieved to remain.

At last, in half an hour's time, the harbour was left behind; the vessel was out at sea. Suddenly, Mary heard loud cries behind her: a boat coming in under press of sail, through her pilot's ignorance had struck upon a rock in such a manner that it was split open, and after having trembled and groaned for a moment like someone wounded, began to be swallowed up, amid the terrified screams of all the crew. Mary, horror-stricken, pale, dumb, and motionless, watched her gradually sink, while her unfortunate crew, as the keel disappeared, climbed into the yards and shrouds, to delay their death-agony a few minutes; finally, keel, yards, masts, all were engulfed in the ocean's gaping jaws. For a moment there remained some black specks, which in turn disappeared one after another; then wave followed upon wave, and the spectators of this horrible tragedy, seeing the sea calm and solitary as if nothing had happened, asked themselves if it was not a vision that had appeared to them and vanished.

"Alas!" cried Mary, falling on a seat and leaning both arms on the vessel's stern, "what a sad omen for such a sad voyage!" Then, once more fixing on the receding harbour her eyes, dried for a moment by terror, and beginning to moisten anew, "Adieu, France!" she murmured, "adieu, France!" and for five hours she remained thus, weeping and murmuring, "Adieu, France! adieu, France!"

Darkness fell while she was still lamenting; and then, as the view was blotted out and she was summoned to supper, "It is indeed now, dear France," said she, rising, "that I really lose you, since jealous night heaps mourning upon mourning, casting a black veil before my sight. Adieu then, one last time, dear France; for never shall I see you more."

With these words, she went below, saying that she was the very opposite of Dido, who, after the departure of Aeneas, had done nothing but look at the waves, while she, Mary, could not take her eyes off the land. Then everyone gathered round her to try to divert and console her. But she, growing sadder, and not being able to respond, so overcome was she with tears, could hardly eat; and, having had a bed got ready on the stern deck, she sent for the steersman, and ordered him if he still saw land at daybreak, to come and wake her immediately. On this point Mary was favoured; for the wind having dropped, when daybreak came the vessel was still within sight of France.

It was a great joy when, awakened by the steersman, who had not forgotten the order he had received, Mary raised herself on her couch, and through the window that she had had opened, saw once more the beloved shore. But at five o'clock in the morning, the wind having freshened, the vessel rapidly drew farther away, so that soon the land completely disappeared. Then Mary fell back upon her bed, pale as death, murmuring yet once again--"Adieu, France! I shall see thee no more."

Indeed, the happiest years of her life had just passed away in this France that she so much regretted. Born amid the first religious troubles, near the bedside of her dying father, the cradle mourning was to stretch for her to the grave, and her stay in France had been a ray of sunshine in her night. Slandered from her birth, the report was so generally spread abroad that she was malformed, and that she could not live to grow up, that one day her mother, Mary of Guise, tired of these false rumours, undressed her and showed her naked to the English ambassador, who had come, on the part of Henry VIII, to ask her in marriage for the Prince of Wales, himself only five years old. Crowned at nine months by Cardinal Beaton, archbishop of St. Andrews, she was immediately hidden by her mother, who was afraid of treacherous dealing in the King of England, in Stirling Castle. Two years later, not finding even this fortress safe enough, she removed her to an island in the middle of the Lake of Menteith, where a priory, the only building in the place, provided an asylum for the royal child and for four young girls born in the same year as herself, having like her the sweet name which is an anagram of the word "aimer," and who, quitting her neither in her good nor in her evil fortune, were called the "Queen's Marys". They were Mary Livingston, Mary Fleming, Mary Seyton, and Mary Beaton. Mary stayed in this priory till Parliament, having approved her marriage with the French dauphin, son of Henry II, she was taken to Dumbarton Castle, to await the moment of departure. There she was entrusted to M. de Breze, sent by Henry II to fetch her. Having set out in the French galleys anchored at the mouth of the Clyde, Mary, after having been hotly pursued by the English fleet, entered Brest harbour, 15th August, 1548, one year after the death of Francis! Besides the queen's four Marys, the vessels also brought to France three of her natural brothers, among whom was the Prior of St. Andrews, James

Stuart, who was later to abjure the Catholic faith, and with the title of Regent, and under the name of the Earl of Murray, to become so fatal to poor Mary. From Brest, Mary went to St. Germain-en-Laye, where Henry II, who had just ascended the throne, overwhelmed her with caresses, and then sent her to a convent where the heiresses of the noblest French houses were brought up. There Mary's happy qualities developed. Born with a woman's heart and a man's head, Mary not only acquired all the accomplishments which constituted the education of a future queen, but also that real knowledge which is the object of the truly learned.

Thus, at fourteen, in the Louvre, before Henry II, Catherine de Medici, and the whole court, she delivered a discourse in Latin of her own composition, in which she maintained that it becomes women to cultivate letters, and that it is unjust and tyrannical to deprive flowery of their perfumes, by banishing young girls from all but domestic cares. One can imagine in what manner a future queen, sustaining such a thesis, was likely to be welcomed in the most lettered and pedantic court in Europe. Between the literature of Rabelais and Marot verging on their decline, and that of Ronsard and Montaigne reaching their zenith, Mary became a queen of poetry, only too happy never to have to wear another crown than that which Ronsard, Dubellay, Maison-Fleur, and Brantome placed daily on her head. But she was predestined. In the midst of those fetes which a waning chivalry was trying to revive came the fatal joust of Tournelles: Henry II, struck by a splinter of a lance for want of a visor, slept before his time with his ancestors, and Mary Stuart ascended the throne of France, where, from mourning for Henry, she passed to that for her mother, and from mourning for her mother to that for her husband. Mary felt this last loss both as woman and as poet; her heart burst forth into bitter tears and plaintive harmonies. Here are some lines that she composed at this time:--

"Into my song of woe,
Sung to a low sad air,
My cruel grief I throw,
For loss beyond compare;
In bitter sighs and tears
Go by my fairest years.
Was ever grief like mine
Imposed by destiny?
Did ever lady pine,
In high estate, like me,
Of whom both heart and eye
Within the coffin lie?
Who, in the tender spring
And blossom of my youth,
Taste all the sorrowing
Of life's extremest ruth,
And take delight in nought
Save in regretful thought.

All that was sweet and gay
Is now a pain to see;
The sunniness of day
Is black as night to me;
All that was my delight
Is hidden from my sight.
My heart and eye, indeed,
One face, one image know,
The which this mornful weed
On my sad face doth show,
Dyed with the violet's tone
That is the lover's own.
Tormented by my ill,
I go from place to place,
But wander as I will
My woes can nought efface;
My most of bad and good
I find in solitude.
But wheresoe'er I stay,
In meadow or in copse,
Whether at break of day
Or when the twilight drops,
My heart goes sighing on,
Desiring one that's gone.
If sometimes to the skies
My weary gaze I lift,
His gently shining eyes
Look from the cloudy drift,
Or stooping o'er the wave
I see him in the grave.
Or when my bed I seek,
And-sleep begins to steal,
Again I hear him speak,
Again his touch I feel;
In work or leisure, he
Is ever near to me.
No other thing I see,
However fair displayed,
By which my heart will be
A tributary made,
Not having the perfection
Of that, my lost affection.
Here make an end, my verse,
Of this thy sad lament,
Whose burden shall rehearse
Pure love of true intent,

Which separation's stress
Will never render less."

"It was then," says Brantorne, "that it was delightful to see her; for the whiteness of her countenance and of her veil contended together; but finally the artificial white yielded, and the snow-like pallor of her face vanquished the other. For it was thus," he adds, "that from the moment she became a widow, I always saw her with her pale hue, as long as I had the honour of seeing her in France, and Scotland, where she had to go in eighteen months' time, to her very great regret, after her widowhood, to pacify her kingdom, greatly divided by religious troubles. Alas! she had neither the wish nor the will for it, and I have often heard her say so, with a fear of this journey like death; for she preferred a hundred times to dwell in France as a dowager queen, and to content herself with Touraine and Poitou for her jointure, than to go and reign over there in her wild country; but her uncles, at least some of them, not all, advised her, and even urged her to it, and deeply repented their error."

Mary was obedient, as we have seen, and she began her journey under such auspices that when she lost sight of land she was like to die. Then it was that the poetry of her soul found expression in these famous lines:

"Farewell, delightful land of France,
My motherland,
The best beloved!

Foster-nurse of my young years!
Farewell, France, and farewell my happy days!
The ship that separates our loves
Has borne away but half of me;
One part is left thee and is throe,
And I confide it to thy tenderness,
That thou may'st hold in mind the other part."

[Translator's note.-It has not been found possible to make a rhymed version of these lines without sacrificing the simplicity which is their chief charm.]

This part of herself that Mary left in France was the body of the young king, who had taken with him all poor Mary's happiness into his tomb.

Mary had but one hope remaining, that the sight of the English fleet would compel her little squadron to turn back; but she had to fulfil her destiny. This same day, a fog, a very unusual occurrence in summer-time, extended all over the Channel, and caused her to escape the fleet; for it was such a dense fog that one could not see from stern to mast. It lasted the whole of Sunday, the day after the departure, and did not lift till the following day, Monday, at eight o'clock in the morning. The little flotilla, which all this time had been sailing haphazard, had got among so many reefs that if the fog had lasted some minutes longer the galley would certainly have grounded on some rock, and would have perished like the vessel that had been seen engulfed on leaving port. But, thanks to the fog's clearing, the pilot recognised the Scottish coast, and, steering his four boats with great skill through ail the dangers, on the 20th August he put in at Leith, where no preparation had been made for the queen's reception. Nevertheless, scarcely had she arrived there than the chief persons of the town met together and came

to felicitate her. Meanwhile, they hastily collected some wretched nags, with harness all falling in pieces, to conduct the queen to Edinburgh.

At sight of this, Mary could not help weeping again; for she thought of the splendid palfreys and hackneys of her French knights and ladies, and at this first view Scotland appeared to her in all its poverty. Next day it was to appear to her in all its wildness.

After having passed one night at Holyrood Palace, "during which," says Brantome, "five to six hundred rascals from the town, instead of letting her sleep, came to give her a wild morning greeting on wretched fiddles and little rebecks," she expressed a wish to hear mass. Unfortunately, the people of Edinburgh belonged almost entirely to the Reformed religion; so that, furious at the queen's giving such a proof of papistry at her first appearance, they entered the church by force, armed with knives, sticks and stones, with the intention of putting to death the poor priest, her chaplain. He left the altar, and took refuge near the queen, while Mary's brother, the Prior of St. Andrews, who was more inclined from this time forward to be a soldier than an ecclesiastic, seized a sword, and, placing himself between the people and the queen, declared that he would kill with his own hand the first man who should take another step. This firmness, combined with the queen's imposing and dignified air, checked the zeal of the Reformers.

As we have said, Mary had arrived in the midst of all the heat of the first religious wars. A zealous Catholic, like all her family on the maternal side, she inspired the Huguenots with the gravest fears: besides, a rumour had got about that Mary, instead of landing at Leith, as she had been obliged by the fog, was to land at Aberdeen. There, it was said, she would have found the Earl of Huntly, one of the peers who had remained loyal to the Catholic faith, and who, next to the family of Hamilton, was, the nearest and most powerful ally of the royal house. Seconded by him and by twenty thousand soldiers from the north, she would then have marched upon Edinburgh, and have re-established the Catholic faith throughout Scotland. Events were not slow to prove that this accusation was false.

As we have stated, Mary was much attached to the Prior of St. Andrews, a son of James V and of a noble descendant of the Earls of Mar, who had been very handsome in her youth, and who, in spite of the well-known love for her of James V, and the child who had resulted, had none the less wedded Lord Douglas of Lochleven, by whom she had had two other sons, the elder named William and the younger George, who were thus half-brothers of the regent. Now, scarcely had she reascended the throne than Mary had restored to the Prior of St. Andrews the title of Earl of Mar, that of his maternal ancestors, and as that of the Earl of Murray had lapsed since the death of the famous Thomas Randolph, Mary, in her sisterly friendship for James Stuart, hastened to add, this title to those which she had already bestowed upon him.

But here difficulties and complications arose; for the new Earl of Murray, with his character, was not a man to content himself with a barren title, while the estates which were crown property since the extinction of the male branch of the old earls, had been gradually encroached upon by powerful neighbours, among whom was the famous Earl of Huntly, whom we have already mentioned: the result was that, as the queen judged that in this quarter her orders would

probably encounter opposition, under pretext of visiting her possessions in the north, she placed herself at the head of a small army, commanded by her brother, the Earl of Mar and Murray.

The Earl of Huntly was the less duped by the apparent pretext of this expedition, in that his son, John Cordon, for some abuse of his powers, had just been condemned to a temporary imprisonment. He, notwithstanding, made every possible submission to the queen, sending messengers in advance to invite her to rest in his castle; and following up the messengers in person, to renew his invitation *viva voce*. Unfortunately, at the very moment when he was about to join the queen, the governor of Inverness, who was entirely devoted to him, was refusing to allow Mary to enter this castle, which was a royal one. It is true that Murray, aware that it does not do to hesitate in the face of such rebellions, had already had him executed for high treason.

This new act of firmness showed Huntly that the young queen was not disposed to allow the Scottish lords a resumption of the almost sovereign power humbled by her father; so that, in spite of the extremely kind reception she accorded him, as he learned while in camp that his son, having escaped from prison, had just put himself at the head of his vassals, he was afraid that he should be thought, as doubtless he was, a party to the rising, and he set out the same night to assume command of his troops, his mind made up, as Mary only had with her seven to eight thousand men, to risk a battle, giving out, however, as Buccleuch had done in his attempt to snatch James V from the hands of the Douglasses, that it was not at the queen he was aiming, but solely at the regent, who kept her under his tutelage and perverted her good intentions.

Murray, who knew that often the entire peace of a reign depends on the firmness one displays at its beginning, immediately summoned all the northern barons whose estates bordered on his, to march against Huntly. All obeyed, for the house of Cordon was already so powerful that each feared it might become still more so; but, however, it was clear that if there was hatred for the subject there was no great affection for the queen, and that the greater number came without fixed intentions and with the idea of being led by circumstances.

The two armies encountered near Aberdeen. Murray at once posted the troops he had brought from Edinburgh, and of which he was sure, on the top of rising ground, and drew up in tiers on the hill slope all his northern allies. Huntly advanced resolutely upon them, and attacked his neighbours the Highlanders, who after a short resistance retired in disorder. His men immediately threw away their lances, and, drawing their swords, crying, "Cordon, Cordon!" pursued the fugitives, and believed they had already gained the battle, when they suddenly ran right against the main body of Murray's army, which remained motionless as a rampart of iron, and which, with its long lances, had the advantage of its adversaries, who were armed only with their claymores. It was then the turn of the Cordons to draw back, seeing which, the northern clans rallied and returned to the fight, each soldier having a sprig of heather in his cap that his comrades might recognise him. This unexpected movement determined the day: the Highlanders ran down the hillside like a torrent, dragging along with them everyone who could have wished to oppose their passage. Then Murray seeing

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