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1578

Maria Stuart

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Short Life of Mary Stuart

Flora Kimmich

Mary Stuart was born on 8 December 1542 to King James V of Scotland, nephew of Henry Tudor by his mother, and his French wife Mary, of the powerful House of Guise. Six days later James died and the new-born princess became Queen of Scotland. Thereupon began the jousting about her figure that was to accompany her all her life and lead to her death.

She was removed from this unrest to the House of Guise in France, where she was brought up as a royal princess from age five, betrothed to the Dauphin, and at age sixteen married to him. A year later the Dauphin became King Francis II, and in December 1560 he died. He was succeeded by ten-year-old Charles IX; their mother, Catherine de' Medici, acted as regent. Mary returned to Scotland.

Five years later Mary was married to her cousin Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, descended, like Mary, from Henry Tudor's sister, and new unrest broke out among the factions in Scotland. Darnley proved a difficult husband; he demanded the crown matrimonial, which Mary refused; the marriage, which had produced a son, James, was known to be strained. In February 1567 an explosion destroyed a house where Darnley was staying, and Darnley was found dead in the garden. The corpse bore no marks. Suspicion fell on many, most firmly on James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, who was tried and swiftly acquitted, whereupon he undertook to marry Mary. In April 1567 Mary, returning from a visit to her son, was abducted by Bothwell and, some said, raped. In May they were married.

The marriage created a scandal and gave rise to new unrest. Mary was forced to abdicate in favor of her son; Bothwell was driven into exile.

Thereafter Mary was shifted from one place of confinement to another, first in Scotland, then in England, where she had sought refuge. When the play opens she has been moved from Earl Shrewsbury's liberal custody to stricter detention under Sir Amias Paulet.