

MARY STUART, A TRAGEDY

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Mary Stuart, a Tragedy by Adolphus Bernays & Friedrich von Schiller

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ADOLPHUS BERNAYS & FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

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BY

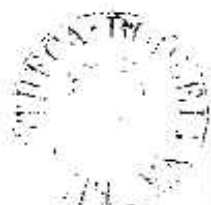
FREDERIC VON SCHILLER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY

ADOLPHUS BERNAYS PH. DR.

PROFESSOR OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, IN
KING'S AND IN QUEEN'S COLLEGES, LONDON, ETC.



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INTRODUCTION.

THERE is scarcely an event in history on which opinions have so much differed, as on the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. While some have extolled it as an act of perfect justice, and a master-stroke of a bold policy; others have painted it as a daring violation of all law, a solemn mockery of justice, prompted by bigotry and carried out by jealousy. It has been the same with the characters of the two queens, Mary and Elizabeth. Representatives of two antagonistic religious principles, each of which, in its time, still entertained the expectation of subduing and extirpating the other, it may be anticipated that each party did its utmost to hide the faults and extol the virtues of its favourite, and so to distort and falsify actions and facts that none but the *synx-eye* of an adversary can pretend to penetrate their truth. Often, too, a false candour on the part of later Protestant writers, and a natural pity for beauty, grace and elegance, trodden down by barbarous violence, and brought to an ignominious death by scarcely any right but that of strength, have made admissions which, instead of throwing light on a confused and bewildering subject, have only added to its obscurity.

So much seems to be clear, that Mary, brought up a bigoted, uncompromising papist, and sent to rule over a turbulent people equally bigoted and uncompromising in its protestantism, and that protestantism not settled and established, but still struggling for existence, would have been expelled from the Scottish throne, even if she had been an angel of light. But such she certainly was not. Her partiality for Rizzio, her share in the murder of Darnley, and her marrying the murderer exposed her to the just indignation of her people, and drove her an exile to the British soil.

Whether it was right to detain her there a prisoner, is a question too wide to be discussed here. Enough that she could never acknowledge such a right, and felt herself justified in striving by all means brought within her reach, to escape this captivity. Probably she was not very scrupulous in the choice of these means; and, if she did not instigate plots for the deposition or the assassination of Elizabeth, she was not over-anxious to discountenance or to denounce them when brought to her knowledge. On the other hand, it seemed impossible to release her without supplying the adverse party with a rallying point, from which they might hurl Elizabeth from her throne, and again overthrow the dearly-won protestant constitution. We need, therefore, not wonder that those who by their position were called upon to defend the latter, had at last recourse to the only remedy likely to secure the triumph of their principles, as well as their personal safety.

Still we feel shocked at the illegalities and violence of their proceedings, although they were not worse than those

employed in all state-trials of the period ; and still more by the hollowness and hypocrisy of Elizabeth herself who, while enjoying the fruits of these proceedings, was anxious to throw their odium and punishment upon those who had served her but too faithfully.

Schiller, naturally anxious to excite the strongest sympathy for his heroine, has laboured to render this view as prominent as possible. He fully admits the crimes of Mary's youth, but guards against our disgust of the perpetrator, by exhibiting her deep penitence and contrition in connection with her profound humiliation and intense sufferings which reach their climax in her execution. This he represents as entirely unmerited ; and in so doing, he does not scruple to heighten the odium which this transaction has brought on the memory of Elizabeth.

For this end, he has taken the greatest liberty with history ; he has altered and transposed facts, created new personages, changed characters, and attributed to individuals sentiments and actions unsupported by any record, too numerous to be here stated, and too palpable to be over-looked by the reader of history.

Many have accused him of a leaning to Romanism in this play. But this seems to be hardly fair ; as he could not well present Mary's character and situation without a full display of Romanist feelings as their prime mover. The laudations of Roman art and popish ceremonial which he puts into the mouth of the fictitious Mortimer, serve to explain the man and his deeds. He is a half-mad enthusiast, who plunges into Romanism to escape the moral trammels of his protestant education ; and who adopts nothing of his

new creed, save that daring jesuitical licentiousness, which, by means of confession and absolution, is to free him from all the restraints for which religion is mainly designed.

Mary's confession and reception of the communion on the boards, intended partly for stage effect and partly to leave no moral doubt on the mind of the spectator of her innocence of the crime for which she was executed, is a contrivance as clumsy as it is offensive. Even Göthe condemned it; and, as far as I know, it is always omitted in the performance.

There are also several mistakes as to titles and localities which it would be needless to point out to an English reader.

Yet with all these draw-backs, and with all the neglect of the historical back-ground which might have so greatly heightened the interest and instruction of the play, it is the creation of genius, and will ever rank among the master-pieces of German literature, as a painting of an eminently tragic situation, and of a sublime triumph of mind over matter, of the human will over brute force and violence.

Personen.

Elisabeth, Königin von England.
Maria Stuart, Königin von Schottland, Gefangene in England.
Robert Dudley, Graf von Leicester.
Georg Talbot, Graf von Shrewsbury.
Wilhelm Cecil, Baron von Burleigh, Schatzkammermeister.
Graf von Kent.
Wilhelm Davison, Staatssecretär.
Amias Paulet, Ritter,¹ Hüter der Maria.
Mortimer, sein Neffe.
Graf Aubespine, französischer Gesandter.
Graf Bellievre, außerordentlicher Botschafter von Frankreich.
D Kelly, Mortimers Freund.
Drugon Drury,² zweiter Hüter der Maria.
Melvil, ihr Haushofmeister.
Hanna Kennedy, ihre Amme.
Margaretha Lutz,³ ihre Kammerfrau.
Scherif der Gesellschaft.
Officier der Leibwache.
Französische und englische Heeren.
Arabanten.
Hofdiener der Königin von England.
Diener und Dienerinnen der Königin von Schottland.

¹ Sir Amias Paulet.

² Sir Drus Drury.

³ Wife of Carlo, one of her late secretaries.