

THE PERSECUTION OF MARY STEWART  
by Sir Edward Parry (SCRIBNER'S. \$5.00)

PERHAPS the supreme tragedy of Mary Queen of Scots lies in the fact that her persecution did not end when she laid her head upon the block. That persecution has continued for more than three centuries. Indeed despite the fact that religious hatreds have paled through these centuries there are today millions who still believe that Mary murdered her husband because of her love for Bothwell, and was all in all the evil genius of her country. John Knox is still a name to conjure with among evangelical Protestants and Froude is an historian who had an extraordinary influence. That Knox had been proved one of the most unconscionable liars who ever blackened the memory of a woman, and that his action in the assassination of Cardinal Beaton made him a murderer as well did not seem to have had the slightest effect on Froude, who went on repeating the age-old calumnies and constantly referring to Mary's villainous half-brother as "the stainless Moray". And British anti-Catholic bias, worked upon by Froude's effective style, responded so effectively that even an anti-Puritan like Swinburne became infected with the belief that Mary was little more than a harlot. Of course the truth was far otherwise, and it is in the interest of this truth that Sir Edward Parry, one of England's most distinguished jurists, has set forth the evidence in the case.

Sir Edward Parry's book might well be entitled "The Case of Mary Stewart *vs.* Moray, Maitland, and Morton", the trio of villains which Sir Edward dubs "The Syndicate". And of course, there was always in the background the extraordinary figure of Cecil, Mary's implacable enemy—though, unlike the Syndicate, he was her enemy for patriotic and not personal reasons. It is true

that Moray, Maitland, and Morton were Protestants, but unlike Knox in that their Protestantism was only a cloak for their ambitions. They wished to rule Scotland and were in England's pay. It was they who murdered Rizzio and Darnley, using Bothwell as their tool. And when at last Mary became the prisoner of Elizabeth they were speedily at each other's throats. Then for once the gods were just—these precious heroes all came to violent deaths. Beside these villains what a beautiful figure Mary becomes! For Mary Stewart summed up in her lovely form much that was best in the Renaissance. She was a Catholic, but she was without bigotry and wished to tolerate all religions—and for that she won the hatred of the fanatic Knox. She was a woman who wished to govern her country for the good of her countrymen—and for that she won the enmity of her own half-brother, of the bloody Morton, and the tricky Maitland. Worst of all she was heir to the throne of England: and because she was a Catholic, that was intolerable to Cecil.

Sir Edward Parry is not a Catholic, but he is a lover of the truth, and he shows most conclusively the perjuries which ended in Mary's imprisonment and death. And he shows also that Mary, though a Catholic, was far from popular with the more extreme members of her Church. Had she become Queen of England it is very doubtful whether Cecil's fears of a Protestant persecution would have been realized. Mary Stewart was a woman far in advance of her time. Thrown into an utterly impossible situation, into a court in which there was no one she could trust, harassed by the fanatical Knox, with a jealous Elizabeth and a hostile Cecil across the border, she is at once a pathetic and a singularly heroic figure. At last history is admitting her to her own.

GRENVILLE VERNON

---

## THE NEW NOVELS

---

SOME books demand a second reading almost at once; *Friends and Relations* by Elizabeth Bowen does. (Dial Press. \$2.00.) If one turns back from the end to go through it again not a moment will have been wasted and a humility at first devastating but eventually wholesome will be the result. Before many pages have been reread it becomes apparent that Miss Bowen has not been over-subtle; it is we who have been dull. If we had been willing at the outset to take every word she has put down at face value the whole story would have been there for us, unmistakable, honestly foreshadowed within the first chapter. In rather sullen self-defense we can only plead that for years we have been victimized by novelists even duller than we, so bewildered by crowds of details that mean nothing, clues trailing into thin air, circumstances and conversations spun out for no better reason than that the author felt desperately that *something* must be done to make us believe the tale could have been true, that when Miss Bowen offers us a novel we victimize her in turn, scampering over what we fear may be padding, wary of being deluded again by a false clue, only to find that she meant exactly what she was saying, in every well written sentence.

The story is made from the consequences of a light woman's taking a lover. You are not asked to believe that if Lady Elfrida had for once in her trivial life foregone the thing she wanted all the lives bound up with hers would have been perfect. The author only asks you to believe, offering almost irrefut-

able proof in every case, that several people could have been better and happier if the mistake had not been made. With a sure and delicate feeling for personal responsibility, Miss Bowen has completely skirted the temptation to make Elfrida the universal scapegoat for all the errors and unhappiness that her other characters are called on to endure. "To explain" does not equal "to absolve" anywhere in this author's sensitive vocabulary. Nor does she, to prove her case, bring lives and homes crashing down in ruins. Starting with normally courageous people she leaves them making a great deal out of marriages that should never have been undertaken, getting much from relations which must always be incomplete.

To tell even this much of the story is to do the book a grave disservice. No synopsis can give any idea of the poignance without bathos or the wit without cynicism of *Friends and Relations*. I think I laughed outright oftener in reading it than in reading any current "humorous" book. This wit is as fundamental and as moving as many of Miss Bowen's less celebrated but even more valuable qualities. It arises, as in actual living, not in spite of but because of the gravity of the issue, at the moment when the warding-off, the feint, the sidestep, is the only alternative to facing the intolerable truth.

Perhaps the most triumphant piece of artistry in the novel is the character of Theodora. Miss Bowen will not allow you to hate Elfrida, nor her pitifully charming, tiresomely