

I

THE FIRST YEAR

MARY STUART WAS born in the coldest of winters. Snow blanketed the ground, and the narrow pathways and rough winding tracks between England and Scotland were completely blocked. The cattle that roamed the Lowlands and the valleys of the border region during the summer months were crouching in their low stone byres. The River Tweed, often a raging torrent as it flowed out to the sea at Berwick-on-Tweed on the eastern side of the border, was frozen over. Whereas it normally took a rider five or six days to carry important dispatches from Edinburgh to London, the news of Mary's birth took four days to reach Alnwick in Northumberland, only a few miles south of Berwick.

The new baby was the only daughter and sole surviving heir of James V of Scotland and his second Queen, Mary of Guise. She was born at Linlithgow Palace, some seventeen miles west of Edinburgh, on Friday, 8 December 1542.

The deep frost scarcely troubled the occupants of the Queen's suite on the second floor of the north-west tower of the palace. Recent construction works had transformed Linlithgow into a luxurious residence. James V had lavish tastes and sought to introduce the latest Renaissance styles. The windows of the palace were glazed, the ceilings painted, the stonework and woodwork intricately carved with crowns and thistles. In the great hall and throughout the dozen or so rooms of the royal apartments, logs blazed in the fireplaces. The finest Flemish tapestries and hangings of rich arras and cloth of gold covered the stone walls to keep out draughts.

Linlithgow, along with Falkland in Fife, was a favourite lodging of Mary of Guise. She had helped to redesign both palaces like French châteaux. This

was hardly surprising, because she was herself French, being the widowed Duchess of Longueville, the eldest daughter of Claude, Duke of Guise, and his wife Antoinette of Bourbon. The Guises were one of the most powerful noble families in France. Their patrimonial seat was at Joinville in the Champagne region, their estates scattered across the most strategically important areas of northern and eastern France.

The family of her first husband, Louis d'Orléans, Duke of Longueville, owned significant estates in the Loire region, so Mary of Guise knew all about Renaissance palaces. She compared Linlithgow for its elegance and picturesque setting to the châteaux of the Loire, where the French royal family lived when not near Paris. Like Chenonceaux, the jewel of the Loire, Linlithgow was a pleasure palace partly surrounded by water. The outer walls stood on a semi-circular knoll extending into the loch on the north side, overlooking St Michael's parish church and the town of Linlithgow to the south.

Mary Stuart was born at a turning point in history. Only two weeks before, on 24 November, her father's forces had been routed by the English at the battle of Solway Moss. To the Scots, England was the 'auld enemy'. Relations between the two neighbours had smouldered since Edward I had claimed the feudal overlordship of Scotland and tried to annex the country in the 1290s. The Scots sought French and papal support, and fostered a hardy patriotism in defence of their kingdom's independence. A score of English invasions after 1296 ushered in a period of hostility that lasted for five or more generations.

Border skirmishes were the norm. Outright war was the exception, not least because the two countries were so unequally matched. England was so much richer and more powerful than its northern neighbour. Its population was around 3.5 million when Scotland's was barely 850,000. The only Scottish town of any size was Edinburgh, where some thirteen thousand people lived. This was at most a fifth of London's population. It was far easier to raise taxation and levy troops in England than in Scotland, since the machinery of government was more centralized and the chain of command more efficient. A set-piece battle would almost inevitably end in a crushing defeat for the Scots.

There were also regional inequalities within Scotland itself. Between a third and a half of the population lived in the border region and the

Highlands, while the rest occupied the more prosperous and cosmopolitan Lowlands. The King was advised by the Lords in Parliament, but although the Scottish Parliament was supposed to represent the whole country, it tended to stereotype highlanders and borderers as chancers and criminals. The Highland clans stood aloof from the rest of the country, and as a rule the highlanders and lowlanders had a tacit agreement to ignore one another. Many highlanders spoke Gaelic rather than Lowland Scots, exacerbating cultural differences. The language of the lowlanders was in fact much closer to northern English than to anything spoken by highlanders.

The politics of Scotland were tribal: blood ties and kin culture were predominant. Behind the feudal lord lay the more ancient status of chief of a clan or kindred. Loyalty to kin placed the Scottish Lords at the head of networks sometimes covering entire regions and shaping the structures of power at every level. The monarchy itself relied on these structures and on what it could redistribute from the patronage of the Church.

The wars within the British Isles resumed under Henry VIII, who acceded to the English throne in 1509. Henry was a strong leader. He saw himself as an English patriot and also as a military strategist. His ambition was to resume the Hundred Years War against France, and to win conquests there. Of his royal predecessors, those he admired most were the Black Prince and Henry V, whose glorious victories in France brought them lands and reputation. Repeatedly, the efforts of his councillors were bedevilled by his chivalric dreams. But war was the 'sport of kings'; and if Henry sought to conquer French territory, he had to deal first with Scotland, France's 'auld ally' and England's back door.

A popular rhyme quipped: 'Who that intendeth France to win, with Scotland let him begin.' Henry was fond of quoting it, and he put its lessons into practice.

Typically, the defeat of the Scots at Solway Moss was less the result of a full-scale English invasion than of a border skirmish that went tragically wrong. The disaster stemmed less from Henry VIII's aggression than from James V's decision to launch a counter-attack on an epic scale without choosing the ground or the moment carefully enough.

In reaction to the incursions of English forces led by the Duke of Norfolk, James sent an army to pillage the disputed territory to the north and east of Carlisle known as the 'Debatable Land'. His troops forded the

River Esk at low tide. When they returned, it was high tide and they were caught between the river and a bog. Forced to retreat by a smaller, but better-disciplined English battalion, the Scots were snared. Around twelve hundred were taken prisoner, including twenty-three of the most important nobles and lairds, who were dispatched as hostages to London, where they were put in the Tower.

James V felt the defeat as a deep psychological blow. He had been militarily and personally humiliated, his loss of face the greater in that he had been ensconced safely at a distance and was not leading his troops. Cowardice was not the issue. James was a brave warrior, but he misjudged the risks. The result was a disintegration of his forces. It was a more damaging loss to his reputation than that suffered thirty years before by his father, James IV, whose own army had been cut to pieces at Flodden Field by the father of this very same English commander. The political effects of both defeats – a long royal minority – were identical. But in 1513, at least the Scots had been scythed down in hand-to-hand combat during a set-piece battle. They died honourably rather than like rats in a trap.

James V rode to Linlithgow to see his wife begin her confinement, but almost instantly left for Edinburgh and then for Falkland, where he took to his bed. It is unlikely that he loved his wife, since he took so many mistresses. But he minded greatly about his baby, and his sudden departure tells us more about his mental state than about his family ties. He went to pieces when told that his heir was not a boy. His two infant sons had died the previous year and now his thoughts turned to Marjorie Bruce, King Robert I's daughter and the founder of the Stuart dynasty. He exclaimed: 'The devil go with it! It will end as it began. It came from a woman, and it will end in a woman.' Or as a more colloquial source says, 'It came with a lass, and it will pass with a lass.'

James died at midnight on 14 December. He was aged only thirty, but had suffered recurrent illnesses. A life of sexual dissipation, leading to 'pox' and endemic 'fevers', and a serious hunting accident had weakened his immune system. His last symptoms, a 'marvellous vomit' and 'a great lax', suggest dysentery as the cause of death, perhaps the result of drinking contaminated water. Other possible causes were 'pestilence' or cholera caught from the Earl of Atholl, with whom James had been carousing and who had himself just died.

James V died of natural causes, unlike his father, who had perished at Flodden in the murkiest of circumstances. Although seemingly killed by the English in the battle, it is just as likely that he was murdered in the closing stages of the fight by one of his rebellious Lords.

His son had succeeded him at the age of seventeen months. Now history had repeated itself. His granddaughter, Mary Stuart, was Queen at the age of six days.

She was baptized as soon as it was safe to take her into the cold outside air. She travelled the short distance from the south-side gateway to Linlithgow Palace into St Michael's church in the arms of her nurse, Janet Sinclair. She was named Mary after her mother, but also because her birthday was the day celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church as the day the Virgin Mary had been conceived.

After baptism at the font, Mary was anointed with chrism and wrapped in a robe of white taffeta of Genoa that had been specially made for the occasion. Almost certainly (for such was the practice with royal children) she was then brought to the high altar and confirmed, although she did not take the sacrament at mass until she was nine years old. A report reached Henry VIII that she was 'a very weak child and not like to live'. This was wide of the mark, and what shortly became a more insidious threat to her security and peaceful succession would be dispelled by her mother's courage.

James V's death was to set in motion a complex chain of events in which political, religious, and factional manoeuvres relentlessly combined. England and France were competing to assert a hegemony over Scotland, which became a pawn in the struggle between the two larger countries and their ruling dynasties. As a child, Mary played no role herself in these intrigues, but all of them were about her. The aim of each and every plot was either to secure physically the person of the infant Queen or else to marry her into the English or French royal family as a guarantee of future influence. Such machinations helped to shape the dynastic legacy Mary would inherit as she grew older, and all combined to set the agenda she would bravely confront when she reached her age of majority.

Throughout Mary's formative years, her mother was her example. In Scotland for less than five years when her daughter was born, Mary of Guise was politically astute, though on a steep learning curve. She quickly

turned her mind to politics, keeping the obsequies for her late husband to a minimum.

She was unusually tall with auburn hair and delicate features. Her manner was regal, her cheek bones high, her eyebrows raised and arched, her forehead elevated. Her lips were slightly compressed, her nose tending to appear aquiline when viewed from the side. Her deportment was confident and dignified; she was intelligent and attentive, generous to friends and supporters, with easy yet polished manners, affable to equals and inferiors alike.

These were all consummate Guise qualities: James V's widow quickly won admiring hearts in Scotland. She was popular with the ordinary people, and was able to inspire fervent loyalty. All these same qualities would later be visible in her daughter, who came to resemble her mother closely in looks and personality.

Mary of Guise learnt her political skills from her family. Comparative *arrivistes*, the Guises had risen at the French court through a combination of shrewd marriages and military prowess. Closely linked in Francis I's reign to the triumvirate comprising Anne de Montmorency, Constable of France, the Dauphin Henry, heir to the throne, and his beautiful and sophisticated mistress Diane de Poitiers, they were equally influential in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Duke Claude's brother, Jean, was a pluralist who managed to accumulate nine bishoprics and six abbeys. His pickings included the cardinal-archbishopric of Rheims, the most important diocese in France as it was at the great gothic cathedral of Rheims that the kings of France were crowned. Moreover, the Guises kept it in the family by having it bestowed before Jean's death on Claude's second son, Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine, who took possession of it at the age of fourteen.

In all, Claude had ten surviving children, each of whom held a significant position in State or Church. When Mary of Guise married James V, she began fifty years of her family's involvement at the hub of Scottish, French, and English affairs. This was because diplomatic alliances were sealed by marriage pacts in the sixteenth century. International politics centred around families, children, and the succession to hereditary rights, and in dynastic circles such concerns took precedence over religious affiliations.

Mary of Guise understood her own role perfectly. She set out to protect

her daughter's birthright and safeguard the traditional 'auld alliance' between France and Scotland. She was used to the call of duty. The most eligible widow in France at the age of twenty-one, she was selected by Francis I to succeed his own daughter Madeleine, James V's first wife, who fell victim to a viral infection within weeks of landing at the port of Leith. She had been reluctant to leave France, but honour required her to do so. She was not unaccustomed to misfortune. Three of her five children died in infancy: one son by her first husband (another boy, Francis, survived until 1551) and both her sons by James.

After her wedding in Scotland, Mary of Guise regularly wrote to her own mother, Antoinette of Bourbon, a matriarchal figure of whom it was said even the French King was in awe. Her letters show that she quickly adjusted to her new life. She tolerated her husband's infidelities – he sired seven and probably nine illegitimate children – and spent her time supervising building works at the royal palaces and laying out the gardens, where she grew an exotic range of ornamental fruit trees from cuttings sent from France. At Falkland Palace, where her stylish improvements to the façade may still be seen, she personally inspected the work, climbing a ladder to take a closer look before authorizing payment to the stonemasons. She had her own French domestic staff, as it was unthinkable that her intimate servants could be Scots: the French frequently made ribald jokes about the vulgarity of the Scots behind their backs. Her servants adored her, and after James V's death several of his own domestic staff tried to negotiate a transfer to her employment as she paid higher wages than anyone else.

Technically, the infant Mary was Queen of Scots from the moment her father died. In practice, this was a fiction. A governor or regent would have to be appointed to rule until she was declared to be 'of age' and able to govern herself. What was uppermost in everyone's mind was who exactly would be chosen, since a long royal minority was an invitation to noble infighting. This especially applied to Scotland, where the monarchy was so much weaker than in England or France, and the crown relied on the kinship networks of the Lords to help maintain law and order.

The most binding way to appoint a regent was in the will of the dying ruler. Although James V had not done this – probably because he did not know his death was close at hand – his 'last will and testament' was

manufactured on his behalf. It was conveniently framed by David Beaton, Cardinal-Archbishop of St Andrews, the magnate who had exercised the greatest influence on the living King and who was determined to keep himself in power.

Beaton led the pro-French faction and was a staunch opponent of the Protestant Reformation. He sought to claim the posts of 'tutors testamentary' to Mary and 'Governors of the kingdom' for himself and three of his allies. His aim was to pre-empt the claim of the strongest alternative candidate, James Hamilton, Earl of Arran, who was pro-English and heir apparent to the crown should Mary die. Arran, for his part, loudly proclaimed that Beaton had forged the will, saying that as James V had lapsed into semi-consciousness, he had 'caused him to subscribe a blank paper' on which it was to be inscribed.

The nobles voted for Arran as Governor, but he was hardly the ideal candidate. The best thing ever said about him is that he was a survivor. Weak, vacillating, and cowardly, he was also exceptionally greedy. His legitimacy was questioned by Beaton, but as the grandson of James II's eldest daughter, he had a right by blood to the regency.

Although Mary of Guise did not challenge his appointment, she was wary of Arran. She knew that his policy was less the protection of the infant Queen than advancement for himself and his family, hitting the mark when she described him as 'a simple and the most inconstant man in the world, for whatsoever he determineth today, he changeth tomorrow'.

Arran spent six weeks moving into his new palaces and surrounding himself with his friends and relations, to whom he awarded pensions. In an attempt at reconciliation, he nominated Beaton to the Chancellorship, one of the greatest offices of state; but, proving the accuracy of the Dowager Queen's assessment, changed his mind two weeks later and threw him into prison.

The new Governor was steeped in Scottish tradition. He was well aware of the role played by violence in society and politics. He quickly seized all of James V's castles except Stirling, which was part of Mary of Guise's dowry and still her property. Then, as soon as he felt sufficiently confident, he began to pay attention to Henry VIII's efforts to influence Scottish affairs.

Henry was determined to outwit and outmanoeuvre France. He wanted

Arran to nurture a pro-English faction in Scotland that would displace French influence there. He meant to use the hostages taken at Solway Moss to these ends. Henry was about to declare war on France. He had already agreed with his main European ally, Charles V, King of Spain as well as Holy Roman Emperor, that they would join forces in a co-ordinated attack, seeking to partition France between them.

Henry had an ambitious dynastic plan. He wanted to rule the whole of the British Isles. Naturally he seized his opportunity as soon as James V died leaving a baby as Queen. From the beginning of his reign, he had reiterated Edward I's claim to the feudal overlordship of Scotland. It was a formula he had learnt by heart. Later, when he quarrelled with the Pope and broke finally with Rome in order to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, he evolved a theory of 'imperial' kingship, designed to justify his title of Supreme Head of the English Church, but in which he also envisaged himself as 'King' and 'Emperor' of the whole of the British Isles.

According to Henry's version of law and history, Scotland, despite being an independent state and sovereign realm, would become a satellite of England, a jewel within the orb of Henry's 'imperial' crown. It was the beginning of the Tudor claim to an 'Anglo-British' empire that, while Mary was still a child, was to provoke the French counter-claim to a 'Franco-British' one.

Henry first released the twenty-three Scots hostages from the Tower, then invited them to admire his recently completed palace at Hampton Court. They were to join him there as his guests for the sumptuous Christmas revels.

Before allowing them to leave, Henry bound them to support his dynastic plan. All were expected to sign articles obliging them to send their infant Queen to England. Mary was to be 'kept' there, to be brought up by Henry until she could be married to Prince Edward, then a boy of five, his son and heir by his marriage to Jane Seymour. In addition, ten of the most important hostages agreed to uphold Henry's immediate claim to the throne of Scotland should Mary unexpectedly die.

In March 1543, Sir Ralph Sadler was sent to Edinburgh as Henry's ambassador to negotiate a treaty. The centrepiece was to be Mary's marriage to Edward. She was less than four months old, but Henry was in earnest. Such a union could enable him to achieve his goal at a single stroke. Sadler,

who did not quite know what to expect, began by meeting Arran in the garden of the palace of Holyroodhouse at Edinburgh. He found him evasive and ill-briefed. Arran took the narrowest possible view of the negotiations. He simply wanted to know what was in it for him. He demanded bribes and rewards, and a promise that he would continue to rule as regent if Henry had his way.

After these inconclusive talks, Sadler rode to meet Mary and her mother at Linlithgow. He wanted to see Mary for himself, because Henry kept asking him about her. Her mother played along, asking a nurse to 'unwrap her out of her clothes' so she could be inspected. Sadler dandled Mary on his knee and reported, 'I assure your Majesty, it is as goodly a child as I have seen of her age, and as like to live, with the grace of God.'

Sadler then broached the topic of Mary's betrothal to Henry's son. To his amazement, Mary of Guise was positive, offering to help and even endorsing the English plan to take Mary to London for 'safe-keeping'. Her reaction was so different from Sadler's expectation, he was at first non-plussed. He suspected some 'juggling', and he was right. Mary of Guise dissembled. But she had a clear purpose, which now unfolded. Whereas Henry VIII wanted to subordinate Scotland to England through a dynastic marriage that detached the country permanently from French influence, Mary of Guise was equally determined to protect French and Guise interests there. And if Arran tried to marginalize her by negotiating with England behind her back, she would pretend to ally with England too, lulling Sadler into a false sense of security and so outflanking Arran, who would always be at a disadvantage as long as he lacked physical custody of Mary.

Mary of Guise had good reason to suspect Arran, who had severed her channels of communication with France. He had planted spies in her household and sought to intercept her letters. She did get one message through. Antoinette of Bourbon had received news of her daughter's troubles by 10 June, sending word to her sons at Francis I's court to see if any pressure could be applied to assist her.

Arran's actions, swiftly following Beaton's arrest, were meant to undermine the pro-French party. The Governor had decided to ally with Henry VIII. As if to cement his links to the English King, he issued a surprise declaration in support of Henry VIII's break with Rome and the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Arran's action was the more bizarre in that he was still

a Catholic who acknowledged the authority of the Pope. But he was increasingly on the defensive, caught between the pro-French and pro-English Lords, who were evenly divided: the moment was right for a *coup*.

In charming and beguiling Henry VIII's ambassador Sadler, Mary of Guise showed her political skill. A plan had formed in her mind. She would move Mary from Linlithgow, a pleasure palace that could not withstand a siege, to the security of her own castle of Stirling, an almost impregnable fortress at the top of a steep rock that was also near enough to the coast to restore her links to France by sea.

Already she had sent a trusted servant to Stirling with coffers packed with clothes and household goods. Larger consignments of beds and furniture followed, with further deliveries of silver plate, tableware, linen, dry foodstuffs, and kitchen utensils such as pots, pans, and roasting spits.

Arran insisted that no one was to leave Linlithgow. Mary of Guise ignored him, playing her cards brilliantly. She spun Sadler the yarn that Arran had no intention of marrying Mary in England. He would bargain with England to send Mary south to win rewards for himself and his allies, but then break his word and keep her a prisoner in Scotland, biding his time until Henry VIII was dead, when he planned to usurp the Scottish throne. Sadler was to report this to Henry, but not to disclose his sources or else she and her daughter would be in danger.

In England and France alike, plotting what might or might not happen in the future if and when the King died was a serious crime. It seemed to make his death more likely as a contingency, and was called 'imagining or encompassing' his death, a branch of the law of treason and punishable by death. Sadler had to distance himself from Arran if he was scheming in this way. Otherwise he might himself be indictable as an accomplice.

And worse was to come. Arran, the Dowager continued, planned to marry Mary to his own son. Henry VIII should take care to prevent this by ordering Arran to release Beaton, who had been maligned over the business of the forged will and who should replace Arran as Governor. Unlike his enemies, the Cardinal 'could better consider the benefit of the realm'.

It was a classic bluff. Mary of Guise was maligning Arran based on her low opinion of his character. She knew she was in a deadly struggle for the custody of her daughter, and was determined to get Sadler's support

for her move to bring Mary safely to Stirling. Furthermore, Sadler, who by now deeply mistrusted the scheming, vacillating Arran, was taken in.

There were other reasons why Sadler was receptive to Mary of Guise. Her own mother's lobbying at the French court had paid off. Francis I had decided to intervene. He wanted to thwart Henry VIII and distract him from his plans to invade France. It was already the talk of Paris that the Duke of Guise was preparing to embark for Scotland. His commission was said to have been issued, and Sadler badly needed to know exactly what was about to happen and what the French really intended.

In the end, the Duke never arrived. Francis I revoked his commission, sending the young exiled Scottish Lord, Matthew Stuart, Earl of Lennox, in his place. This was almost as worrying to Sadler. Lennox, head of a minor branch of the Stuart family and a naturalized French subject, had the best claim to the regency if Arran were to be toppled. He landed in April at Dumbarton, his family's ancestral stronghold on the north bank of the Clyde, and went straight to see Mary of Guise.

She had become the linchpin. Whether or not Sadler was fully persuaded by her blandishments, simply to have unhindered access to her was to his advantage.

Arran strove to recover the initiative. He felt more and more beleaguered when a group of (mainly) Catholic Lords congregated around Lennox and Beaton escaped from prison. With Lennox back in Scotland, Henry VIII suspected a plot to kidnap the infant Mary and carry her off to Dumbarton. He ordered Arran to muster his forces and bring Mary into the 'safety' of Edinburgh Castle without delay.

But Arran was in a quandary. He sensed his own weakness, and by the end of April was temporarily reconciled to Lennox. Many of his allies had resisted Mary's betrothal to Henry VIII's son and heir. It was a step too far, and Lennox capitalized on this. Arran finally told Sadler that England's terms were so unreasonable, 'every man, woman and child in Scotland would liever die in one day than accept them'.

Henry VIII issued an ultimatum. If Arran refused the English dynastic plan, he would face outright war. Henry's bullying was deeply resented. On 1 July 1543, however, he was minimally rewarded by the terms of the treaty of Greenwich. Ostensibly, he got what he wanted. Mary was to stay in Scotland until she was ten, at which age she was to marry Prince Edward

in England. Her dowry, to be paid by Henry, was to amount to the considerable sum of £2000 per annum, an amount that would double automatically if she duly became Queen Consort of England.

The rest of the treaty was a compromise. Until she was married, Mary's education was to be left to the Scots, except that for her 'better care' Henry might, at his own expense, send an English nobleman with his wife or other governesses and attendants not exceeding twenty in total to live with her. This was a clause designed to ensure that Mary would speak English as her native language rather than Scots or French.

But Henry had to make concessions. He wanted a speedy settlement to free him to concentrate fully on his planned invasion of France. To achieve a quick result, he found himself accepting terms that guaranteed Scotland's independence. A key clause confirmed the country 'shall continue to be called the kingdom of Scotland and retain its ancient laws and liberties'. The Scots also insisted that if the marriage were to be childless, Mary might return home as an independent Queen. This was to be a dynastic 'union' of England and Scotland with the core stripped out.

Mary of Guise was jubilant; the loopholes in the treaty were obvious. Arran started to panic. He warned Sadler that the infant Mary had to be closely watched, being 'a little troubled with the breeding of teeth'. Not even Sadler was this credulous. Writing to Henry VIII, he attempted to fathom why Arran should suddenly want to protect Mary 'as if she were his own child'. Of course Arran's greatest fear was that she would be secretly conveyed to France and brought up there by her mother's Guise family.

The treaty of Greenwich was a dead letter from the start. Mary of Guise had no intention of honouring it; she had used the period of negotiation simply to face down Arran and Henry VIII and to win time to build a new, more comprehensive coalition. Now she revealed her true hand. She allied with the pro-French Beaton and Lennox, whose joint forces mustered at Linlithgow on 24 July. There, a bond¹ was signed to prevent Mary's removal to England and for mutual defence against the pro-English Arran.

Two days later, Arran himself arrived, but with a much smaller retinue.

1 A bond (or 'band') was a feudal contract or indenture promising loyalty, support, protection and service, usually for life.

From that moment, his capitulation was assured. Sadler had already sanctioned Mary's removal to Stirling, where she was to be guarded by a group of Scottish Lords officially nominated in Parliament. Mary of Guise now contrived that her daughter was taken there under very different circumstances.

The child and her mother made their journey on the 27th. Lennox provided their bodyguards, mustering an army of 2500 cavalry and a thousand infantry to protect a baggage train extending for almost a mile. Although barely out of swaddling clothes, the young Mary travelled with all the pomp and circumstance she would one day take as her due.

Stirling, always Mary of Guise's chosen destination, would become their home for the next four years. It was an appropriate setting, as its magnificent great hall and royal apartments had been lavishly reconstructed as part of a massive royal rebuilding programme. The great hall alone could seat three hundred people for dinner.

A fortnight after their arrival, Sadler was summoned for an audience. Mary of Guise still dissembled, and yet the ambassador was unable to work out why. She said she had all along been willing to allow Mary to be taken to England for 'safe-keeping'. Only Arran's duplicity had prevented her. In fact, she hoped the better to perform her true intentions now that she had escaped from his clutches. She was 'in good plight' to deliver Mary to Henry's nominees if he still so wished.

She used this interview to win more time. Sadler, who always had a soft spot for children, was taken to see Mary, who was growing fast. She 'soon would be a woman', he said, 'if she took after her mother'. She had suffered a mild bout of chicken pox, but was fully recovered. As Sadler noted, she was 'a right fair and goodly child'.

He had been duped again. Mary's removal to Stirling was for her mother the beginning and the end of the matter. Arran, always the survivor, cut his losses and made his peace with his rivals. On 3 September, the Governor left Edinburgh, apparently to visit his sick wife, but met Beaton secretly at Falkirk. The two men embraced and rode to Stirling, where Arran disclosed the full extent of his dealings with Henry VIII and recanted his support for the Reformation.

On the 8th, Arran agreed to revise the terms of his regency, promising to share power with Beaton and to follow the advice of a council comprising representatives of the pro-French and pro-English factions and headed by

none other than Mary of Guise. The effect was to reconcile the nobles, who closed ranks against Henry VIII's aggression.

The climax ensued. Next day – by a delicious irony the thirtieth anniversary of the battle of Flodden – Mary was carried in procession from her nursery at Stirling and crowned Queen of Scots in the adjacent Chapel Royal. It was an event of the utmost significance. The coronation was the most solemn ritual known to Church and state: its symbolism was sacramental and conferred religious as well as civil legitimacy on her. In the course of the ceremony, a nine-month-old child was transformed into an anointed Queen, possessed of those sacred powers of majesty that God alone could bestow or call to account.

In the procession, Arran bore the crown, Lennox the sceptre, and the Earl of Argyll, the most powerful of all the Scottish Lords and Arran's brother-in-law, the sword of state. These regalia, known collectively as the 'honours of Scotland' and still on display at Edinburgh Castle, had been obtained by James IV and his son in their tireless efforts to trumpet their prestige. They were first used together on this day. The crown, originally worn by James V at the coronation of Mary of Guise, was far too big and heavy for a child. It was held over Mary's head by Beaton, who was dressed in the full panoply of a cardinal. He blessed her and anointed her with holy oil. She howled volubly, and kept it up while every bishop and peer present knelt in turn to recite his oath of allegiance.

By tradition at the ceremony, heralds read out the royal genealogy, a roster of titles and dignities that could take up to half an hour to recite. In view of Mary's lusty interventions, this part of the proceedings was omitted. The pro-English Lords were conspicuous by their absence, but otherwise the day passed 'with great solemnity', and was rounded off with banquets, masques, dramatic interludes, and other entertainments in the great hall, followed by 'great dancing before the Queen with great lords and French ladies'.

Mary's coronation concluded a remarkable interlude that had begun when her mother first turned her attention to Henry VIII's ambassador. It signified a complete reversal of the balance of power. The pro-English Lords had been marginalized and Arran reconciled to Beaton, who was restored to office as Chancellor. The treaty of Greenwich was all but renounced: the pro-French faction was ascendant in Scotland.

Henry VIII had played his opening hand and lost. He had also learnt an important lesson. He would never again, as he told almost anyone who would listen, trust the Scots. Under the watchful eye of her mother, Mary had ascended to her throne. And if she was now Queen, her mother was indisputably queen-maker.