



Two Queens in One Isle

Alison Plowden

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The relationship between Queen Elizabeth I of England and her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots is a complex one, they were united by blood but divided by religion. Championed by continental and underground English Catholics as the rightful Queen of England, Mary was nevertheless given protection by her cousin after she was deposed amid outrage at her immoral behaviour. Rumours of Papist plots revolving around Mary abounded and Elizabeth was put under extreme pressure to be rid of this dangerous threat to her sovereignty and to the Protestant church in England, but it was only after much reluctance and procrastination that Elizabeth finally signed Mary's long-drafted death warrant.

Two Queens in One Isle Details

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J S says

Interesting book, written in a significantly less dry style than most history books. Only flaw is that occasionally the author gives a statement of opinion without pointing to actual facts.

Neeuqdrazil says

I really enjoyed this. It's an older book (originally published in 1984, I think?) but it doesn't show its age at all.

Plowden does a very good job of looking at Mary, and Elizabeth, (focusing more on Mary), and how their interactions, and Mary's eventual execution (spoilers!) were practically pre-ordained from the time that Mary started quartering her arms as Queen of France with the arms of England.

This is a relatively easy read - it's presented chronologically, and is pretty straightforward history - just telling an interesting story.

The sources are not listed specifically by mention (there are a lot of uncited quotes), but the sources at the back are pretty thorough - not by quote, but overall by chapter.

Kristine says

Good easy read for non fiction.

Amy Clayton says

Definitely on the drier side, like others have said, it reads a little bit like a textbook. I learned a few new things but overall not the best. If you're looking for a book on Mary and Elizabeth, Jane Dunn's book is far easier to read.

Lou says

I adore reading about the relationship between Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I. This was brilliant.

Denise says

Two queens...two cousins. One the queen of England and a Protestant. The other the queen of Scotland and a Catholic. A detailed, well-researched book showing the emotional and mental character of each and how one queen's quest for power came up against the other queen's need to keep that power. Excellent read!

Elizabeth says

Well considered and researched, informative read.

Sarah Gwinn says

You will feel sorry for both the queens

At times is hard to read with the Latin and French words. The author's translation of old world English made me lose my place a few times. it was filled with intrigue and murderous plots. Mary queen of Scots with down right miserable and you want to admire Elizabeth. Even to the end Mary was as stubborn as they come. It is true her only real duty was to produce an heir.

Catherine says

A very factual book, that did tell me things I did not know. It could have been written in a slightly more engaging way - not too dissimilar to some school text books.

Cheryl says

I've read a number of books about Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Tudor because I find them fascinating foils of each other and different representations of women in power in a male dominated sphere. I think the thing that struck me the most about their story this time was something that was not even really called out in the book, namely that Mary spent almost 19 years as a prisoner in England. Interestingly, this woman who was considered a legitimate threat to Elizabeth's crown spent more of her life being kept in England than anywhere else. This book was a fairly condensed, mostly factual look at Mary and Elizabeth, but not as interesting as some others I have read like Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens by Jane Dunn. My biggest complaint was that sometimes what was actually being said was hard to understand because I felt the actual sentences were sometimes poorly written. If you are familiar with the story of these two women I don't think the book really covers any new ground, otherwise it's a fairly concise look at the history and relationship.

C.S. Burrough says

Alison Plowden's history of these cousin queens, Protestant Elizabeth I of England and Catholic Mary of Scots, is enthralling.

It is near impossible, after reading material such as this, to side with one queen or the other. Each was arguably at fault and justified in her treatment of the other. Mary came off the worst to lioness Bess.

The backstory is that the teenaged Mary, when queen consort of France, had once claimed the so called 'illegitimate' Elizabeth's throne as her own and was considered the legitimate sovereign of England by many English Catholics.

Mary became widowed young in France, returning to Scotland where she had not lived since her infancy. She was not embraced for long by her Protestant Scottish subjects or Lords who had other plans for Scotland's rulership than allowing a woman and Catholic reign.

After the suspicious murder of Mary's despised second husband, Elizabeth's cousin Darnley, abruptly followed by her remarriage to Darnley's suspected assassin, Bothwell, Mary was overthrown and imprisoned. After several failed attempts she escaped, fleeing south to England, seeking Elizabeth's support and protection. Dishevelled, Mary was taken aback when, rather than being led to the anticipated hospitality of Elizabeth's court, she was taken into 'protective custody' by English officials.

Mary expected Elizabeth to help her regain her throne, but wily Elizabeth characteristically prevaricated, instead holding Mary 'temporarily' captive. This was officially for Mary's protection while Elizabeth ordered inquiries into the conduct of Mary's rebels. She also, however, ordered inquiries into Mary's alleged complicity in Darnley's murder plot, ostensibly so as to clear Mary's name in making way for her proposed reinstatement to Scottish rulership.

Without direct royal heirs and seeing the younger, more beautiful and fecund Mary as a threat if released, the perpetually unmarried Elizabeth kept Mary confined in English castles and manor houses for almost nineteen years.

After understandably conspiring towards her liberty, at whatever cost, desperate and isolated Mary was made a figurehead for numerous Catholic conspiracies to dethrone Elizabeth. Deemed by Elizabeth's councillors too dangerous to live, Mary was entrapped. On somewhat trumped up charges, she was convicted for plotting Elizabeth's assassination. Executed, Mary became martyred throughout Catholic Christendom.

Mary's unprecedented royal execution was one official rationale behind Catholic Phillip II of Spain's failed invasion of England with his Armada. Elizabeth was branded a heretic by the pope, who sanctioned Phillip's Armada, calling for Elizabeth's dethronement. With the English Channel's stormy weather on Elizabeth's side, the English fleet, under vice admiral Francis Drake, famously saw them off.

The two queens are adjacently entombed in Westminster Abbey, Mary's being the grander piece commissioned by her son, King James VI & I of Scotland and England, who had Mary reinterred from her original, less salubrious resting place of Elizabeth's approval.

Ultimately, everyone makes up their own mind over which was the heroine and which the villainess - there's a little of each in both queens.

A fascinating and informative read.

Christine Cazeneuve says

I liked it but had to look up a lot of words because it was in the old english without explanation - was a bit frustrating. There were a few new things I learned but the majority I already knew from other books I have read.

Margaret says

Very interesting book on the complex relationship between Elizabeth 1, and Mary, Queen of Scots.

Written back in 1999 it may be difficult to get hold off, but well worth the effort.

I like Alison Plowden as she doesn't take sides, but merely reports all the facts, as known then, without bias.

Highly recommended.
