

I.

MARY STUART AND ROSCOFF. BY THE HON. LORD GUTHRIE,
F.S.A. Scot.

I once read a paper in this Society titled "Did John Knox live in the so-called John Knox's House in Edinburgh?" To-night I propose to discuss, "Did Mary Stuart land at Roscoff in 1548; and did she erect there the still existing but ruinous Chapel, called locally sometimes La Chapelle de Marie Stuart, and sometimes La Chapelle de St Ninian?"

Bishop Lesley, the historian, "my most faithful servant," as Queen Mary called him, says it was at Brest, on the west coast of Brittany, that the little Queen of five years old landed on 15th August 1548; and his assertion is accepted by Hill Burton and Fraser Tytler. Henry II. the King of France, whose ship brought Mary and her suite from Scotland, writes thus from Turin on 24th August 1548, nine days after her landing:—"I have received certain news of the arrival in good health of my daughter, the Queen of Scotland, *in the haven of Roscoff*, near Léon, in my Duchy of Brittany." This account is preferred to Lesley's by Sir John Skelton and Father Stevenson.

But both these statements are at second-hand. Fortunately, we have the evidence of De Brézé, the very man who was sent by Henry II. to bring Mary from Scotland, and who accompanied her to France. His statements, recorded at the time, without any conceivable motive for misrepresentation, are contained in two letters, both written on 18th August 1548, three days after the landing, the one to Scotland, to Mary's mother, Mary of Lorraine, the other to Mary's uncle, the Duc d'Aumale, Francis of Guise. It was from De Brézé also, no doubt, that Henry II. at Turin got his information. De Brézé's first duty on landing would be to send the good news to his master.

The strange thing is that De Brézé in his two letters seems to make contradictory statements, both negating Brest, but the one (to Mary's

mother) stating St Pol de Léon as the landing-place, and the other (to her uncle) naming Roscoff. The letter to the Duc d'Aumale, preserved in the Paris Bibliothèque, was quoted in a recent article by "Lorna" in the *British Weekly*. Lorna's article was headed, "Did Mary Stuart land at Roscoff?—a note on Lord Guthrie's article in the *Scotsman*," and the passage quoted by her from De Brézé's letter to the Duc d'Aumale runs as follows:—"When the galleys had arrived in this port of Roscoff, I did not fail, three or four days after the landing of the little Queen of Scots, to send them to Rouen, to await the King's instructions." This letter is dated "De Rossegoufe, xviii. Aôut, 1548."

The original of De Brézé's other letter, namely, the one to Mary's mother, is among the Balcarres papers in the Advocates' Library; and through the kindness of Mr Dickson, the keeper of the Advocates' Library, I have had a slide made of it, which I shall show to-night. Mr William Moir Bryce made its contents known in an interesting article titled "Mary Stuart's Voyage to France in 1548," published in the *English Historical Review* for January 1907. Curiously enough, the writers before Mr Bryce and Lorna do not seem to have known either of De Brézé's letters; while Mr Bryce, founding on De Brézé's letter in the Advocates' Library, seems to have been unaware of the other one in the Paris Bibliothèque; and Lorna, arguing from the latter document, ignores the Edinburgh epistle.

Modernising the old French spelling, the letter in the Advocates' Library says: "La reine, votre fille, a été moins malade sur la mer que personne de sa compagnie, de sorte qu'elle se moquait de ceux qui l'étaient. Nous fîmes notre descente en ce lieu de Saint Pol de Léon le quinzième de ce mois d'Aôut, ayant demeuré dixhuit jours sur la mer avec grandes tourmentes." Mr Bryce thus translates this passage, with its curious reference to the high health and boisterous spirits of the child:—"The Queen, your daughter, has been less ill upon the sea than any one of her company, so that she made fun of those that were. We landed here at St Pol de Léon on the fifteenth of this month of August, after a stormy passage of eighteen days on the sea." Mr Bryce, in his

acute discussion of this letter, says, "It seems scarcely probable that they landed at Roscoff, and thence crossed the promontory to St Pol, some five miles distant."

I am not satisfied that Mr Bryce's translation is right, and here the geographical question comes in, which I illustrate by the map forming one of my slides. St Pol de Léon was a cathedral city of importance, and Roscoff, a fishing village four miles away, was its seaport, standing geographically in the relation of Leith to Edinburgh. Strictly speaking, nobody could land, in the sense of disembark, at St Pol, any more than at Edinburgh, for St Pol is a mile distant from the sea at its nearest point. I suggest for the translation of "nous fimes notre descente en ce lieu de St Pol de Léon,"—we *arrived* in this place of St Pol de Léon. If that translation be possible, then the situation is clear. Mary, in her royal galley, with some or all of the other French galleys which accompanied her from Dumbarton, having safely rounded Land's End, made for Roscoff. Before starting from Scotland, she and her mother—or, during the stormy passage, she and her companions—may have vowed a chapel to St Ninian on landing, if the Saint protected them from the perils of Neptune and Henry VIII. They landed happily at Roscoff, and, getting ashore there, the vow was not afterwards forgotten. From Roscoff, which in those days could have had no accommodation for so large and brave a company, they rode by a straight, flat path to St Pol de Léon, where they rested, and thence proceeded to Morlaix, in accordance with the French King's orders. Or, it may be that, when Mary and her four Maries, and her Scotch and French lords, landed at Roscoff, their galleys, with the servants and luggage, held on for Pempoul, the little jetty a mile from St Pol, thus shortening the distance for the luggage to be carried inland to St Pol.

If my translation be not permissible, then I suggest that De Brézé, who had already stated to the French King and to Mary's uncle that the landing was at Roscoff, was no more inconsistent in assigning to Mary's mother St Pol as the landing-place, than George IV. would have been if, after mentioning in a letter, written from Leith on arrival there,

that he had landed at Leith, he had afterwards, dating from Holyrood, ignored Leith, and stated that he landed at Edinburgh.

As to Bishop Lesley's statement that the landing was at Brest, I suggest that, after clearing Cornwall, one or more of the convoy may have made south for Brest, while the royal galley, with the others, held east for Roscoff.

Turning from documents to Roscoff itself, we find, *first*, that the situation and size of the chapel are suggestive of a memorial chapel, built in commemoration of a safe landing; *second*, that the chapel goes locally by the name of the Chapel of Mary Stuart; *third*, that they show an adjoining ancient house, with a quaint garden, as the house and garden of Mary Stuart; *fourth*, that in the parish church at Roscoff they cherish, among their chief treasures, a silver statue of the Virgin and an amber rosary, of rare and beautiful workmanship, which are said to have been the gifts of the Queen of Scots to the Chapel before it was wrecked at the Revolution, and to have been removed at that time to the parish church; and *fifth*, most important of all the evidence, either documentary or topical, the Chapel is known locally not only as La Chapelle de Marie Stuart, but also as *La Chapelle de St Ninian*. If you ask the Roscoff people who St Ninian was, they will tell you the name has often puzzled them. Not only so; I have had letters from French antiquaries in other parts of Brittany, asking me where this Saint hailed from, for they could not find his name in any list of French saints! No wonder. We in Scotland all know St Ninian, or St Ringan, as the founder of Whithorn in Galloway, a favourite pilgrimage church of the Royal Stuarts, Mary's ancestors, and as one of Scotland's earliest and greatest Evangelists. But, so far as I can find, the little ruined Chapel of Mary Stuart at Roscoff is the only separate building dedicated to St Ninian in the whole Continent of Europe. I say, separate building, because Dr Neilson has referred me to an Act of the Scots Privy Council in 1441, by which provision is made for a tax to help in decorating St Ninian's Chapel in the Carmelite Church at Bruges in Belgium, and for the better sustentation of the Scotch priest ministering to

Scotch merchants and sailors worshipping in that chapel; and Bishop Dowden saw in the museum at Copenhagen an altarpiece which was said to have belonged to a chapel dedicated to St Ninian at Elsinore.

I ought to add, that the authority of the poet Du Bellay, another contemporary of Mary's, has been claimed for Roscoff. The historian De Ruble quotes a passage from a poem of Du Bellay, in which the poet is made to say, "Là, à Roscoff, étant rafraichie quelques jours." This argument was adduced by "Lorna" in the *British Weekly*. But Miss Stoddart has, since writing that article, examined the original text of Du Bellay in several editions in the British Museum, and she has discovered that the words "à Roscoff" are not in the original, but have been inserted into De Ruble's professed verbatim quotation!

My subject has taught me three lessons: *First*, whatever you may do in the regions of religion and morals, never dogmatise about facts, even the simplest facts. "Always, beloved brethren," in Oliver Cromwell's famous phrase to the General Assembly, "always think it possible you may be mistaken." *Second*, mix antiquarian research with geography—study the map. And *third*, always check your quotations by reference to the original!

In such ancient matters, I doubt the possibility of absolute certainty, and therefore the propriety of ever characterising your opponent's view as impossible, still less as absurd. But, for practical purposes, the evidence, documentary and topical, seems to make it reasonably certain that the Chapel of St Ninian at Roscoff is entitled to claim our interest and help on two grounds: *first*, as the building erected by Mary and her relatives to commemorate her safe landing in Roscoff on 15th August 1548; and *second*, as the only building of any kind now extant anywhere which was erected by her during her chequered life in Scotland, France, or England.

Lord Guthrie then showed a number of lantern slides from photographs taken by his daughter, exhibiting the present deplorable state of the roofless building, the exterior on two sides being used as an advertis-

ing stance and the interior as a wood-shed, but still retaining two beautiful traceried windows. He explained that he is in communication with the Mayor of Roscoff, who, while entirely sympathetic with the proposal to restore the Chapel, is unable to promise any pecuniary help from the Commune of Roscoff, which is not a wealthy one. Lord Guthrie also explained that negotiations were in progress, through the Franco-Scottish Society, with the French Ambassador in London and the French Government, with the view of seeing whether, if the Chapel were restored by funds raised in this country, the French Government would take it over as a historical monument and maintain it in future.