

THE FIFTH EARL OF ARGYLL AND MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

When Mary, Queen of Scots' name is linked to that of a man most people think immediately of high romance and passion, or even murder and rape, with a large dollop of tragedy thrown in. Three husbands had come and gone by the time Mary was twenty-five and during her long dreary single years in an English prison there was still continuous intrigue and speculation about a fourth. But the tragedy and Victorian-style melodrama of her marriages to Francis II, who died as a teenager in 1560, Darnley, who was murdered in 1567, and Bothwell, who fled Scotland in 1568, went mad in a Danish prison and died in 1578, have overshadowed the less-highly charged relationships she had with the Scottish nobles of her court. One of the most important of these was the affectionate friendship with her brother-in-law, the fifth earl of Argyll.

Archibald Campbell, the 5th earl was not much older than Mary herself. He was probably born in 1538 so would have been only four years old in the dramatic year of 1542. It witnessed the birth of Mary on 8 December and, within a week, the death of her father, James V [1513-42], which made her ruler of Scotland. A regency was established with Mary as titular queen, but the main struggle for power was between those Scots who favoured the alliance with France and those who wanted friendship with England. The key issue was whether the young Queen would marry a French or an English prince. Although in the 1540s any wedding lay a long way in the future, both countries desperately wanted to win Mary's hand because the marriage of a royal heiress brought with it control over her kingdom. These dynastic alliances offered the simplest and most successful method for European rulers to expand their territories and power in the early modern period. Even though Scotland was a small state on Europe's periphery, for centuries it had played a crucial role in the bitter rivalry between the English and the French. When they lost the diplomatic contest, the English tried to use military might to break the 'auld alliance' between France and Scotland, England's two traditional enemies. They invaded Scotland in what became known as the 'Rough Wooing' because it was an attempt to force Mary's marriage

to Edward VI, the son and heir of Henry VIII, England's King. The Francophiles who dominated Scottish politics decided that, as a safety measure during the fighting, Mary should go to France. There she was brought up in the royal household side-by-side with her future husband Francis, son and heir to the French King, Henri II.

If young Archibald had seen Mary before she was whisked off to France neither of them would have remembered much of the meeting. The Queen of Scots grew up at the French court with little direct knowledge of her own nobles or her native country. During his adolescent years Archibald would have assumed, like most of his countrymen, that Mary would remain in France and when old enough she would marry the Dauphin. At some point in the relatively distant future when Henri II died, Francis and Mary would become King and Queen of France and she would spend the rest of her days in that country at her husband's side. The first part of that prediction came true at Easter 1558 with Mary's spectacular wedding to Francis in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris. The next stage came much quicker than anyone had anticipated when in the following year Henri II received a lance in his eye during a joust and died after six weeks of excruciating pain. In July 1559 the teenagers found themselves King and Queen of France. Eighteen months later came a second unexpected tragedy with the death of Francis II from an ear infection which turned septic. Mary, who had nursed her husband in his final days, was left in the awkward position of being the second Dowager Queen at the French court. Encouraged by her none-too-sympathetic mother-in-law, the other Dowager, Catherine de Medici, the young widow decided to return to her native country. In Scotland Mary would be able to rule personally over her own kingdom.

It must have been with very mixed emotions that the 5th earl and the other Scottish nobles heard the news of Francis II's death and of Mary's proposed return. During her stay in France Scotland's government had been directed by two Regents, initially by the 5th earl's uncle, James Hamilton, 2nd earl of Arran and later Duke of Châtellherault, and secondly from 1554 by Mary of Guise, the mother of Mary, Queen of Scots. Throughout the 1550s

domestic affairs were increasingly dominated by religious issues. The Protestants within Scotland had been gathering strength and were beginning to challenge the authority of the Catholic Church. By 1559 this had developed into a direct confrontation not only with the Church but also with the authority of the Regent, Mary of Guise. The 'Lords of the Congregation', as they called themselves, led a full-scale rebellion against the royal government. They were fighting with the twin aims of establishing Protestantism and expelling the French influence imported through Mary's marriage to the Dauphin.

In November 1558 Archibald succeeded his father as the chief of Clan Campbell and became the fifth earl of Argyll. Within early modern Scottish politics Argyll was in a unique position being both a territorial Lowland magnate and a Gaelic chief and having at his command the power and resources from both Highland and Lowland systems. He owned vast landed estates in Argyll and the Western Highlands as well as property in a number of Lowland shires. With land came control over the surrounding region and over the people and resources under his sway. Alongside his territorial power was the enormous strength he derived from being chief of a numerous and widely dispersed clan. By the mid-sixteenth century the main Campbell cadets of Loudon, Glenorchy, Cawdor and the Angus branches had already established themselves outside the Campbell heartland of Argyll. This gave the clan a significant presence in Ayrshire and a corridor of influence which ran from the west to the east coasts of Scotland and to the Moray Firth in the north. The main strength of the clan remained concentrated in the Western and Central Highlands and ensured that the 5th earl was the most powerful Gaelic chief of his generation, dominating the Highlands and Islands. This meant that he could raise about 5,000 fighting men from his clansmen and dependants, a larger force than the Scottish crown could routinely muster. Such military might made the 5th earl Scotland's single most powerful noble and gave him great influence within the wider world of the British Isles.

On his accession at the age of twenty the 5th earl had already acquired considerable experience in managing the family's estates, running the clan and leading his kinsmen on the

battlefield. He was a very tall man and handsome, or 'lovely of face', as a later family history described him. Unlike his red-headed father his hair was brown, which provided his Gaelic nickname 'Gilleasbuig Doun' [Brown-haired Archibald]. Unfortunately, no pictures or portraits of him survive and his tomb at Kilmun does not have an effigy, which was probably intentional because he was not a vain man. Throughout his life he remained a convinced and committed Protestant and he played a crucial role in the establishment of the Protestant Kirk within the Highlands. The 5th earl was also a firm supporter of the Scottish monarchy, though not always of the personal actions of the ruler. This led him to follow a difficult political path during his career trying to balance the sometimes conflicting loyalties to his kin, clan, and friends with those to his religion and country and to his Queen.

At the end of 1558 the 5th earl, seeking to fulfil his father's death-bed injunction, became even more heavily involved in advancing the Protestant cause within Scotland. Argyll and his closest friend Lord James Stewart, the illegitimate son of James V, were the main leaders of the Lords of the Congregation. Thanks to military assistance from the Queen Elizabeth I's England, they were victorious. The Treaty of Edinburgh which brought the war to an end in July 1560 left Scotland free to establish a new Protestant Kirk and ensured that Argyll and Lord James would play prominent roles in the government of their country. Although Mary, Queen of Scots, accepted the peace she could hardly have been pleased that a rebellion had succeeded against her mother's authority and that of the Roman Catholic church, to which she remained faithful.

In the spring of 1561 the 5th earl was contemplating with some trepidation Mary's reaction to him on her return, since he had led that successful rebellion. His fellow leader, Lord James Stewart, visited his half-sister before she left France to persuade her to accept the changes to Scotland's government and religion which the previous year had brought. As well as providing his full backing for this official mission, Argyll felt the need to send a more personal message to Mary. He chose his younger brother, Colin Campbell of Boquhan [the future 6th earl], to travel to France with a letter and, as was customary in the sixteenth

century, with additional verbal messages for the Queen. The 5th earl wanted to convince Mary that, despite appearances during the Reformation crisis and the reports which had been made about him, he remained her loyal subject. He wrote that he wished 'to assure your grace of the earnest and great affection I bear and ever have borne to the advancement and wele of your highness service unto the which not onlie my goodis bot als my lyff salbe ever maist ready according to my boundyng dewtie'.

In the note of these verbal messages [which is only found among the Argyll manuscripts at Inveraray], Colin was instructed to relay to Mary an interesting extra declaration, specifically relating to the Queen's remarriage. The 5th earl assured Mary that if anyone should put pressure upon her with regard to her remarriage or anything else, 'further then became subjectes to suit thair souverane' then he would maintain her 'just liberty' with his life and with the lives of all his dependants. This promise of complete service extended to any case which 'may stand with the glorye of God, wele of your highness realme and naturall people thair of'. This deep sense of loyalty to the crown was one of the hallmarks of Argyll's whole career. Once he had met the Queen, the 5th earl also developed a personal affection for her which supplemented his respect for her royal position. This did not mean that he blindly supported all of Mary's policies. Indeed, he found himself in rebellion against her once more in 1565 and opposed her at Carberry in 1567. Nevertheless, the 5th earl felt that he was honour-bound to uphold the dignity of the royal office which he believed underpinned the stability of the whole kingdom. In a world bound together by vertical ties of loyalty, Argyll was willing to give his loyalty to the Queen in exactly the same way as he expected to receive loyalty from his kin and members of his clan.

When the nineteen-year-old Mary finally returned to Scotland in July 1561 she became acquainted with many of her nobility including the 5th earl for the first time. There is no indication of what those initial impressions were like. With the Queen's ship arriving earlier than expected at the port of Leith, the 5th earl and a number of the other nobles were stranded in their regions and were not able to greet her in person when she came ashore.

Shortly afterwards they all assembled at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh and Mary quickly appointed Argyll and Lord James to her Council, which directed the government. This was a firm indication that she would not make radical changes but would continue their political and religious policies. Although the Queen retained her Catholic faith and kept her private Mass, at first she had no difficulty accepting and working with her Protestant advisers.

On a personal level she quickly set about gathering a circle of family and close friends about her. The 5th earl was part of this intimate royal circle because he was married to another of James V's illegitimate children, Jean Stewart, Mary's half-sister. The Queen seems to have taken a considerable liking to him, probably finding him easier to approach than her elder brother, the stern Lord James. The fact that they were not of the same religious persuasion made no difference at all to their personal friendship. Argyll's great height and good looks made it easier for the Queen to be relaxed in his company. Mary was six feet tall, which even among the better-fed elite was well above average height, and made her like a giantess to the rest of the population. She usually found herself looking down upon the men at her court. She, therefore, took particular notice of the long legs, height and handsome features of Darnley, her second husband, and it was remarked upon at the time that his stature and bearing were one of his few attractions.

Mary's affection and concern for Argyll were clearly revealed in 1563 during an episode which reveals the Queen in the improbable role of a marriage guidance counsellor. For some years the 5th earl and his wife had been experiencing marital difficulties. The Countess of Argyll, who had been brought up at the Scottish court, much preferred the relative glamour and comfort of its life to travelling through the Highlands in more primitive conditions with her husband. When Mary had returned to Scotland her sister Jean became one of her principal companions, alongside the more famous ladies in waiting, the Four Maries who had been with her since childhood. Jean took this opportunity to stay permanently at the Queen's side and effect a virtual separation from the 5th earl who spent his life moving between the court and Argyll. This put the Queen in the difficult position of

being on warm terms with both the countess and the 5th earl and able to see the fault on each side whilst trying to bring them back together. In one of the most unexpected alliances of her reign, Mary, Queen of Scots, enlisted the fiery Protestant preacher, John Knox, to help in her marriage guidance plans. This was not Knox's first attempt to reconcile the 5th earl and his wife. He had been involved in a previous reconciliation which had taken place before Mary's return to Scotland. The Queen discussed the latest marital crisis with Knox and they worked out a strategy. He was to deal with the earl whilst Mary tackled the countess. Knox's approach to marriage guidance was hardly conciliatory instead it followed his preaching style of bold denunciation. The 5th earl received a merciless rebuke from the minister written on 7 May 1563. In his letter he criticised Argyll in the strongest terms for living apart from his wife, refusing to sleep with her and, by implication, taking a mistress. Despite its very sharp tone, the 5th earl accepted Knox's criticisms and remained on friendly terms with the preacher.

Although Mary was working to save his marriage, she did not want the 5th earl to find out that she had spoken to Knox about the matter because, as she told the preacher, 'I would be very sorry to offend him in that or any other thing'. Instead she sought to influence the countess by warning her that royal patronage and favour would be withdrawn if, after a new reconciliation, 'she behave not herself so as she ought to do'. In addition to her barely-concealed threats Mary devised a subtle plan to bring Archibald and Lady Jean back together. The Queen decided to go on a progress to the Western Highlands that summer. This ensured that she would automatically take the royal court to visit the most important magnate in that area, the earl of Argyll. Both as his wife and as Mary's friend, the countess would be expected to be the Queen's principal hostess. This plan made it impossible for the earl and the countess to avoid being in Inveraray together to entertain Mary throughout her visit.

The Queen was excited by the prospect of visiting the Argyll region for the first time. She loved dressing up and wanted the whole progress to be conducted in Highland attire. For

her own outfit she was given a 'mervileus fayer' Highland costume by Lady Agnes Campbell, the 5th earl's young aunt, and the wife of his friend and ally James MacDonald of Dunivaig, chief of the southern branch of Clan Donald. The rest of the court and anyone else travelling with the royal party were expected to follow the Queen's lead. This put one member of the royal entourage, Thomas Randolph, the English ambassador, on the spot. He was horrified at the prospect of donning a saffron shirt and Highland plaid [Highland dress for men in the sixteenth century]. In the end a diplomatic expedient was found to rescue him: he persuaded his superior to recall him temporarily to London to avoid such a fate!

Randolph missed a highly successful progress. Mary had great fun playing the Highland lady and she relished the excellent hunting to be had in the Cowal peninsula in southern Argyll. She was entertained lavishly at Inveraray Castle where she stayed from 22-25 July 1563. But she also enjoyed stopping at more humble places, such as the residence of Ewir Campbell of Strachur at Drippis [Invernoaden] at the north end of Loch Eck in Cowal. Whilst there Mary was involved in the more serious side of a royal progress. In the sixteenth century a monarch's rule remained a personal rather than an institutional matter and it was vital for the Queen and her government to travel to the different parts of her realm so that she could exercise her rule directly and be seen by her subjects. In her own bedroom at Drippis at 10 a.m on 27 July 1563 Mary received from Ewir Campbell on his bended knee the resignation of his lands which she then regranted in a royal charter to Ewir's son, Charles. Even the progress' hidden agenda, reuniting the 5th earl and his wife, seems to have been successful, at least in the short term. The couple managed to stay together for several more years. The reconciliation was evident in the decoration of the impressive Carnasserie castle, which was built for the 5th earl in the late 1560s by John Carswell, Superintendent of Argyll. Above its fine doorway is a carving in false relief of their arms, with Archibald's distinctive Campbell gyronny on the left and Jean's royal lion of Scotland on the right. Unfortunately, their happiness was not permanent. Another marital crisis came, a further period of separation and alienation followed, and finally Archibald and Jean were divorced in 1573.

Shared memories of the happy summer days of 1563 were soon overlaid by hostile feelings between Mary and the 5th earl. These were triggered by the return to Scotland in the autumn of 1564, after a long exile in England, of Matthew Stewart, 4th earl of Lennox. He was followed in the new year by his son, Henry, Lord Darnley. The Lennox Stewarts were regional rivals of the 5th earl and their presence in Scotland was not welcomed by the Campbells. To make matters considerably worse, it rapidly became clear that Mary intended to marry Darnley, thus making him King of Scotland. Argyll and his friend Lord James, now earl of Moray, regarded the Darnley marriage as a threat to Scotland's Protestant Kirk and to the friendship with England which had together formed the cornerstones of their policy since the Queen's return. Consequently, they bitterly opposed the marriage and were forced into open rebellion on the issue. Mary, having rushed through her wedding to Darnley, turned on the rebel lords. In the aptly named 'Chase-about Raid' she drove Moray around the country and eventually across the English border into exile. The 5th earl escaped such a fate because he was able to withdraw to his impregnable Argyll power-base where the royal forces were afraid to follow. The Queen was furious with the 5th earl and it was reported that she hated him more than anyone else in the world.

Mary soon found an even greater object for her anger in the person of her new husband, Darnley. She had discovered too late that he was an arrogant fool who could not wait to get his hands on political power. To limit the damage his overbearing behaviour was already doing, she refused to grant him the crown matrimonial which would have given him the powers as well as the title of King. Darnley regarded his wife's refusal as a monstrous insult. During the 'Chase-about Raid' the Queen had turned for counsel to a new group of nobles who were associated with Lennox and Darnley or with James Hepburn, 4th earl of Bothwell who had also returned from exile. However, as she became exasperated by the King Mary had increasingly sought advice from non-noble sources who were based in her own household. She had come to rely in particular upon David Riccio, an Italian musician who was now acting as one of her secretaries. It took little persuasion to convince Darnley

that all the blame for his treatment lay with the Queen's close advisers. Riccio was singled out as the root cause of the King's woes and, so the jealous husband was led to believe, as Mary's lover.

As is well-known, Darnley let the conspirators into the Queen's private apartments on 9 March 1566 whilst she was having a private supper with a few close friends including Riccio. The murderers burst into the room and dragged Riccio away though he clung to the Queen for protection. He was stabbed to death and a knife was held against Mary, who was nearly six-months pregnant, to prevent her going to his aid. One of those in the intimate circle of those dining with the Queen was the Countess of Argyll. Without her quick thinking in catching the candles when the dinner table was overturned during the seizure of Riccio, there would probably have been a serious fire at Holyrood to add to the murder. Later that night Mary was able to separate the gullible Darnley from his fellow conspirators and escape with him. The earl of Morton and Lord Ruthven who had led the murderers took all the condemnation for the deed and were forced to flee into exile.

The shock of the Riccio murder changed Mary's attitude towards the 5th earl who had been safely in Argyll at the time. Either sincerely or tactically, the Queen abandoned the hatred she was said to have harboured for him. At the end of March 1566 she wrote him a most conciliatory letter signing herself 'your richt gud sister'. In a postscript in her own hand she told Argyll that whatever he might have heard to the contrary, she retained her 'gud mynd' towards him and spoke of rewards to come. Mary kept her word and the 5th earl was soon back at court fully restored to royal favour and once more taking his leading place in the running of the country. As a further sign of her new trust the 5th earl was given the chamber in Edinburgh castle next to Mary's own room during her confinement at the birth of her son, the future James VI, on 19 June 1566.

At James' baptism it was the countess who found herself the centre of attention. She had been chosen by Queen Elizabeth to act as proxy godmother for the English monarch.

However, receiving this honour placed Lady Jean in trouble with the Kirk. The countess was later rebuked by the General Assembly of the Kirk for participating in Catholic worship, since the christening had been performed according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. For precisely that reason the 5th earl had remained outside the Chapel Royal at Stirling during the actual baptismal ceremony. This did not prevent him from taking a prominent part, resplendently dressed in red, in the subsequent celebrations and feasting.

As one of those closest to Mary both politically and personally, Argyll was aware that Darnley's capricious behaviour was creating a very serious problem. He wanted to find a solution and discussed the possibility of a divorce with other leading nobles and with the Queen herself. It is impossible to establish whether he was involved in a conspiracy to murder Darnley. He was certainly one of the nobles who came with Mary to visit the sick Darnley at his house at Kirk o' Field in Edinburgh on 9 February 1567, the night of the murder. What happened when the royal party left the house will never be fully known; the house was blown up and the King was found in the garden, untouched by the blast but strangled and nearly naked. It was assumed by most contemporaries that the earl of Bothwell was implicated in Darnley's death, however it had actually been achieved. In the immediate aftermath of the murder Argyll felt that it was his duty to remain in the capital, running ordinary government business and bringing a sense of normality after the crisis.

One of the 5th earl's posts was that of Justice-General of Scotland, the highest criminal law officer in the land. This meant that he faced the difficult and delicate task of presiding at the trial in April 1567 which acquitted the earl of Bothwell on the charge of murdering the King. Argyll did not much care for Bothwell, though at first he was prepared to co-operate with his plans. The 5th earl might even have grudgingly accepted Bothwell's scheme to get a divorce for himself and marry Mary in the future. However, Argyll was horrified at the way in which Bothwell forced the issue by abducting the Queen and possibly raping her. Such behaviour could not be countenanced and at the beginning of May 1567 the 5th earl left court and gathered a group of nobles who vowed to free the Queen. They refused outright

to recognise Mary's subsequent marriage to Bothwell on 15 May. Argyll failed to be moved even by the special personal appeal which she sent via his friend, Robert, Lord Boyd. Mary begged the 5th earl to be reconciled to her third husband and promised her steadfast friendship and sincere goodwill as freely as he had enjoyed it in the past. It was too late for such blandishments. Argyll and most of the Scottish nobility were determined that Mary should be separated from Bothwell and they were prepared to use force. Alongside the other confederate lords the 5th earl took his troops to confront the royal couple at Carberry Hill near Musselburgh on 15 June 1567.

Argyll had accepted that the Queen needed to be taken prisoner in order to free her from Bothwell for good. However, he was completely opposed to the idea, supported by the other confederate lords, that Mary should be forced to abdicate. A week after the bloodless confrontation at Carberry Hill, the 5th earl left the confederate lords and crossed over to the Queen's party. Her supporters were unable to prevent Mary, a prisoner in Lochleven castle, from resigning her crown on 24 July in favour of her baby son. In view of his stance Argyll would not attend the coronation of James VI on 29 July. The 5th earl's refusal to accept Mary's deposition also caused a serious breach with his long-time friend Moray who had returned from the continent in order to become Regent for the young King. As leaders of the opposing King's and Queen's parties in the civil war which split the country, the two men - close friends and allies for a decade - became deeply suspicious of one another, thrown apart by Scotland's tumultuous politics.

Whilst Mary remained in prison Regent Moray had the upper hand and the 5th earl was forced to accept the status quo. On 2 May 1568 the situation was transformed when the Queen managed to escape from Lochleven castle. She immediately appointed the 5th earl as the commander-in-chief of all the forces which had gathered at Hamilton castle to support her. They were opposed by Regent Moray and the King's party who were in Glasgow when they learnt of Mary's escape. Both sides decided that an early decisive battle would be to their advantage and on 13 May the armies fought at Langside, near Glasgow. It

was most unfortunate that at the start of the battle Argyll was taken ill when he possibly suffered a mild stroke or heart attack. This seriously disrupted the chain of command and contributed to the defeat of the Queen's army. Langside was the last occasion on which the 5th earl saw his Queen, because she fled in panic to the south-west. Then, in a disastrous and fateful decision, Mary chose to sail across the Solway to seek help in England.

Her flight placed the 5th earl and the other members of the Queen's party in an impossible situation. Whatever they were able to achieve in Scotland, it would not decide Mary's fate, which lay instead in the hands of Queen Elizabeth. In the summer of 1568 whilst the English Queen was deciding how to deal with her royal refugee, Mary remained in honourable confinement. There was an additional complication. Since Mary had a claim to the English throne through her grandmother, Henry VIII's sister, her presence in England was a domestic headache as well as an international and diplomatic problem. Queen Elizabeth, who was unmarried and had refused to name an heir, was under pressure to either reject or accept Mary's place in the English succession as well as to help a fellow monarch who was in trouble. In the end the English Queen opted for a form of judicial hearing which would examine the charge that Mary had been involved in Darnley's death. It was in this legal setting that the infamous 'Casket Letters', which were claimed to be love letters between Mary and Bothwell plotting Darnley's murder, were presented as evidence by Regent Moray. The so-called 'first trial' of Mary, Queen of Scots, made no formal judgement but the Scottish Queen remained in detention in England.

Whilst she anxiously awaited her fate, Mary was grateful that Argyll was organising her cause at home. At the end of August 1568 she wrote personally to the 5th earl thanking him for all his work on her behalf. In a postscript written in her own hand and in the idiosyncratic Scots which she used, she added the warmest of appreciations of his service. She told him, 'assur your self that ye havve dun yourself and al our frindes ne letle honour and gud in onli schauin your forduartnes and obediens to my. Y wil nocht spel tym in wourdes, but Y think mi so far adet to you that Y schal think on it al my lyf'. It was the first in a series of letters

which Mary wrote to the 5th earl who continued in his special post of her Lieutenant, or deputy, in Scotland. As well as sending orders and advice on how best to help her cause, the Queen would add personal touches to her letters, such as her signature as Argyll's 'right good sister and best frind forever'.

With Mary reduced to being a pawn in a complicated diplomatic game, Scotland remained locked in civil war. As one of the leaders of the Queen's party the 5th earl had to consider more than Mary's personal welfare and her constitutional position. The campaigning and disruption which Scotland experienced after 1568 took a great toll upon his clan. Leading Campbell kinsmen and the earl's dependants and allies gathered in a clan council on 12 August 1569. They agreed to tax all the Campbells and their associates to raise sufficient money to pay off the mortgages burdening the 5th earl's lands which he had been forced to raise to fund the fighting. In return for their financial generosity, the clan wanted the 5th earl to end his campaign against the King's party and so bring some peace and stability to his kin and friends. Argyll accepted this advice and made an agreement with Regent Moray.

This settlement lasted until Moray's assassination in January 1570 which once more plunged the country into civil strife. In the very confused politics of 1570 Argyll tried to hold the disparate groups within the Queen's party together and, at the same time, bargain with the English for the release and restoration of Mary. As the negotiations dragged on the 5th earl became increasingly disillusioned and recognised that the English were exploiting the Scottish Queen's plight in order to impose their own control over Scotland. Argyll finally came to the conclusion that Mary's cause was lost and that for the sake of long-term peace in Scotland he would have to settle his differences with the earl of Lennox, who had been elected Regent after Moray's murder.

On 13 August 1571 the 5th earl wrote to his uncle and former ally James Hamilton, Duke of Châtellherault, telling him that he had come to terms with Regent Lennox. He tried to justify his actions, pointing out that with the passing of time the young King's authority had at last

become established. There was the additional consideration that James VI was at least resident in Scotland. This contrasted sharply with Mary's position. As he commented bitterly to the Duke, she 'continewis under the power of the Quene of England, out of this realme, quhair she may not do nathing aither for this cuntrie or for hir self, but according to the pleasure of tham that now she is thrall unto'. As a result the 5th earl was prepared to accept 'all gude meanis that may quiet the troublit state of our afflictit countrie, quhilk I am constrenit to think dear unto me, seing the present calamitie thair of sa great'. He felt that he had done all that he could do for Mary and for her cause and that the time had come to recognise that the war must be ended.

It was a sombre finale to his support for Mary. Argyll had tried his hardest to defend the Queen but in the end his loyalty to the welfare of his country and to the Scottish crown as an institution overrode his personal devotion to her. She remained in prison in England and grew increasingly isolated from her friends and supporters in Scotland. Mary turned instead for help from the English Catholics and from Spain, the great Roman Catholic power in Western Europe. This drew her into a series of plots designed to free her from prison, overthrow Queen Elizabeth and place Mary on the English throne. With the discovery and exposure of the Babington plot in 1586 the English government pressurized the reluctant Elizabeth into finally taking action against her royal prisoner. The Scottish Queen was tried, found guilty of treason against Elizabeth and executed on 8 February 1587 at Fotheringhay castle in Northamptonshire.

The 5th earl did not live to see Mary's fate. After having made his own peace with Regent Lennox he worked very hard to bring the civil war in Scotland to a close and to heal the bitter divisions between the embattled factions. This was finally achieved in 1573 when Edinburgh Castle surrendered. One of those who had been sheltering inside was his own wife. Shortly after the countess had left the castle she received the final decree of the divorce from the 5th earl. It created legal history by being the first divorce in Scotland to be granted on grounds of separation and required an Act of Parliament as well as decisions in

both the civil and church courts before it was finalised. The 5th earl wasted no time. Immediately after the divorce he married Jean Cunningham, the daughter of the 5th earl of Glencairn. In the summer of 1573 Argyll must have felt that he could look now forward to a period of peace for his country and his clan and for himself a happier domestic life and the birth of his child. It was not to be. The 5th earl died suddenly on 12 September 1573 whilst he was travelling through mid-Argyll and staying at the Campbell stronghold of Barbreck. He was buried in the family chapel at Kilmun in Cowal and was succeeded by his half-brother Colin, the 6th earl. Providing a final sad postscript, the 5th earl's posthumous son died at birth in the spring of 1574.

Sources

Mary's letters to Argyll are printed in *Letters to the Argyll Family* ed. A. MacDonald [Maitland Club, 50, 1839]

Many of the 5th earl's other letters are in the Breadalbane Letters