

# THE MYTH OF "BLOODY MARY"

A BIOGRAPHY OF QUEEN MARY I OF ENGLAND

LINDA PORTER



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MYTH *of*  
“BLOODY MARY”

*A Biography of  
Queen Mary I of England*



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 ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN  NEW YORK

*To the memory of my beloved parents,  
Kenneth and Kathleen Ford*

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# Prologue

4 July 1553

It is past midnight at the royal manor of Hunsdon and the rolling countryside where Essex meets Hertfordshire is hidden by the brief darkness of a midsummer's night. Yet there is activity; quiet, unobtrusive, but deliberate. A knot of people is gathering, ready to mount the horses that have been taken with great care from the stables, so that their hoofs hardly make a sound. The party is a small one, perhaps no more than four or five. In their midst is a thin woman, not beautiful but with a commanding presence, whose distinctive red hair is hidden under the hood of her cloak. Despite the warmth of the night, she prefers, indeed requires, to be hidden by her garments. She and her advisers have thought of a plausible story to cover her departure. They have put it about that her doctor himself is ill with the plague. Still, they would prefer her to be well away from Hunsdon before her absence is noted. This rural corner of eastern England is both the source of her wealth and her support but, in these unpredictable times, no one is to be entirely trusted. The fewer people, even in her own household, who know what she is contemplating, the better.

Once astride her horse—and she has been a fine rider since early childhood—she does not immediately move. For a few seconds, she looks back over the events of her dramatic life. She has lost so much and now stands to lose even more. Once she was a princess, carefully raised to be a queen. She had felt secure in the affection of both her parents and confident that she would be able, when the time came, to fulfil the role of monarch. Then her world, a tranquil place of learning and music and privilege, came crashing down. Her father could not rid himself of the desire for a son and, as his anxieties preyed on him, so did the wiles of that woman whose name she could scarcely speak: Anne Boleyn. After six years of belaboured argument and spirited opposition, her mother, Katherine of Aragon, was cast aside and she, the true heir of England, bastardised. In the ferment, her father cut his allegiance to the pope in Rome and let heresy into his kingdom. There followed three years of absolute misery, during which she had known very little but persecution, ill health and fear. It ended with her capitulation to her father's wishes, but her conscience could never accept what her pen had signed.

Over time, she had been rehabilitated, even restored to the succession, but her illegitimacy remained. Her father's death left her a wealthy and independent woman. She was still denied the title of princess but she was her brother Edward's heir, by statute law and their father's will. But the arguments over religion began to threaten her security once more. The young king's councillors, those men with long beards in London, dared to tell her that she could not hear mass in her own house. She defied them and, in so doing, became a figurehead for opposition. She had known the price, even considered fleeing the country to be with her Habsburg relatives, but she was, at heart, an Englishwoman. And so she stayed, not realising that her brother, too, would turn against her.

All of this darts through her mind as she contemplates her situation. It is clear that the young king is dying and that she faces a period of great danger. The succession has been changed illegally in favour of her cousin, Jane Grey, but, in reality, to serve the ends of the duke of Northumberland. She has known him for 15 years, sensed his frustrated ambition when he lost position at the time of her father's divorce from Anne of Cleves, and watched apprehensively as luck and cunning helped him manoeuvre his way to supreme power. They have clashed openly, in front of the privy council. She knows his true feelings. He will keep her away from the throne that is rightfully hers if he can. She

accepts that her liberty—and probably her life—is forfeit if he captures her. Whatever the future holds, she must now shape it herself, with the help of her loyal servants and the people who make up her affinity. They are not the great dukes and nobles of England but men of the lesser aristocracy. Like her, they support the old religion, the one true faith in which she has lived and will die.

So she sits and prays for guidance, to the God her mother's family has worshipped for centuries, and England itself did only six short years ago. And then it comes to her with absolute certainty that she will prevail. All the doubts and fears evaporate in that one moment of divine conviction. This time, at last, the Lord is with her. Besides, she has always loved a wager and there could be no greater gamble than the one she is now taking. She turns, smiling in the shadows, to the gentleman beside her and nods. Then she spurs her horse to the north.

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# **PART ONE**

## ***The Tudor Rose 1516–1528***

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## Chapter One

### **Daughter of England, Child of Spain**

**‘God send and give good life and long ... unto the excellent Princess Mary’.**

Proclamation at Mary’s christening, 20 February 1516

She was the child who survived. The midwinter baby born in the small hours of Monday, 18 February 1516, was bonny enough to dispel any immediate fears for her survival. After a difficult labour Katherine of Aragon, queen consort of England, must have dared to hope that her prayers for a healthy child had, at last, been answered. Katherine did not know that news of her father’s death had arrived in London only two days earlier; it was deliberately kept from her so that she could approach her delivery calmly.

In the seven years preceding the arrival of this daughter, Katherine had not produced the heir that either her father, Ferdinand of Aragon, or her husband expected of her. She had endured four miscarriages, one stillbirth and the death of an infant son who was not quite two months old. Seven years was a long time for England, a country so notoriously plagued by political upheaval and civil war, to be without an heir. This catalogue of failure had hit hard at the pride of Henry VIII’s Spanish wife. Her deep religious faith and the determination she inherited from her parents, Ferdinand and his formidable wife, Isabella of Castile, had taught Katherine how to endure. Nor was Henry her first husband; that had been the doomed Arthur, Prince of Wales, Henry VIII’s elder brother, who had left her a young widow in 1502. But in 1516 all the suffering of the past evaporated, at least temporarily, in the joyful realisation that she and Henry were, at last, parents.

The king’s undoubted relief was evident. And any regrets about the baby’s sex were disguised as optimism for the future. ‘We are still young,’ Henry told the Venetian ambassador, whose mingled congratulations and commiserations on the birth of a daughter evidently pricked him.<sup>1</sup> He expressed his confidence that, with God’s will, sons would follow. But, at 31, Katherine was nearly six years older than her husband, and her gynaecological history was discouraging. What she privately thought of her chances we do not know but it was evident from the outset that she saw her daughter as England’s heir.

Katherine and Henry were well matched intellectually. They had both received the benefits of a good education by the leading humanists of Europe, at a time when learning was considered an essential part of the preparation for leadership among royal families. Both were the children of royal houses that had teetered before establishing themselves and there was a distant bond of consanguinity, going back to the marriage of John of Gaunt with Constance of Castile. They had known each other since Henry was ten and Katherine 15, when he had escorted her down the aisle at her first wedding. But, in 1516, the fact that Katherine had been his dead brother’s wife was never mentioned.

Physically and temperamentally, however, the couple were completely different. Katherine had



been a personable young woman, petite and slim. But years of pregnancies had now given her a figure that could optimistically be described as matronly. Her husband's French rival, Francis I, ungallant, described her as old and deformed, by which he meant that she was fat. After the birth of her daughter she grew even fatter. On state occasions, resplendent in cloth of gold or silver and weighed down by expensive stones, she certainly had all the trappings of a queen, even if she did resemble a stone jewellery chest. She had always been a pious woman and still kept Spanish priests in her household. No one minded. Londoners, in particular, loved Katherine and her devotion to religion in her daily life was greatly admired.

That Henry no longer found her attractive is not surprising. But he respected her and she was still a force in politics, especially foreign affairs. In the first years of his reign she guided him through the turbulent waters of international diplomacy, with the dual aim of supporting Spanish interests and shaping her young husband as a serious force in Europe. She was an effective and energetic regent during the Franco-Scottish wars of 1513. Henry probably knew what he owed her, though he may not have acknowledged it. Yet apart from a commitment to their regal responsibilities, they never had much in common. Henry's main pastime was sport. A tall and imposing figure at this stage of his life, Henry was a prince in his prime, handsome, gallant, a king to admire and revere. Katherine adored him and would do so until the day she died. He gave every appearance (and the appearance may have been misleading) of preferring the field and the joust to government. His personal favourites were bear-like men of little brain, such as Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk, who had daringly married Henry's sister, Mary, without royal permission. He got away with it, and they continued to wrestle and ride in the lists, to hunt and backslap and enjoy the physicality of life. And while Henry was pursuing boar and deer in southern England, Katherine visited shrines, made offerings and prayed. Religious tourism was common in the early 16th century and it was one of the queen's major recreations. It also made her visible and popular.

Henry was an extrovert who loved music and public display. Katherine dutifully sat beside him and looked gracious, but her mind was increasingly elsewhere. Until 1516 she had played the role of consort with great aplomb, but her body had let her down. She could conceive easily but not bear healthy children. If she thought God was displeased, she kept her fears to herself and she turned, more and more, to religion. On that winter's day in the red-brick palace of Greenwich, it seemed that her devotions had finally been rewarded. It is easy to imagine that she felt that, at last, she had succeeded.

The little princess was named Mary, after her aunt, the beautiful and feisty star of Henry's court. Katherine and her sister-in-law were on very good terms and would remain so, but the queen was no doubt pleased at the choice of name for religious as well as family reasons. The child, small but pretty, already showed signs that she had inherited the red-gold hair of both her parents and the clear Tudor complexion. Few royal children can have been so longed for and so privileged. Her grandparents had been the foremost monarchs in Europe and her father was the epitome of a Renaissance prince. At the very least, she could expect to make an impressive marriage in Europe. If no son was born to Henry and Katherine, her future would be even grander. She would rule England's first sovereign queen.

This was a glorious prospect, but not necessarily an enviable one. Mary was born into a turbulent Europe, where even the great flowering of art, literature, music and thought that characterised the Renaissance could not disguise the harsh nature of political realities. The balance of power might change but warfare was not just endemic, it was a prized way of life for the aristocracy. Europeans faced an existence that, for most, was indeed brutal and short. Recurring bouts of pestilence swept over the continent, decimating populations often weakened by famine. In 1485, the year of the accession of Mary's grandfather, Henry VII, England suffered its first outbreak of the sweating sickness, a type of virulent influenza that tended to be more prevalent in the warmer months. It struck

swiftly and with frightening effect, killing seemingly healthy people in the space of 24 hours. By the time of Mary's birth the sweat, as it was known, was well established as an annual hazard. Just as deadly as the spectre of disease were the vagaries of the weather. Drought and flood ruined harvests, bringing further misery, and even the rich and high born, with more mobility and better diets, could not be sure of survival. Henry VIII spent every summer evading sickness by moving around the south of England, keeping well clear of London. His success in this respect did not make him less of a hypochondriac.<sup>2</sup>

In a Europe where life was so uncertain, the needs of the dead naturally occupied the minds of those who survived. The existence of God and the survival of the soul coloured the daily lives of everyone from king to poorest peasant. Prayer was the means by which the living could intercede for departed loved ones, shortening their time in purgatory and eventually freeing them, it was hoped, from the torments of hell. These abstractions were absolute certainties for 16th-century people, for whom religion was as much a part of everyday existence as breathing and sleeping. But by the second decade of the century, there were many concerns about the role of the religious establishment that governed the earthly structure of religion. One minor aspect that would shortly acquire an unexpected significance was irritation at the idea that the soul could be speeded to its repose by the purchase of indulgences. This appealed to the gullible or just the plain lazy—prayer and Church ceremonial took up a lot of time—and it appealed to the Church's accountants even more. Everywhere, the power of the Church was evident and resented. The early 16th-century popes ran an enormously wealthy—and equally worldly—business enterprise. The Vatican was a byword for double-dealing, promiscuity and greed. Even the most devout sadly recognised that Rome was full of bankers and whores. As world leaders, the popes stood shoulder to shoulder with the kings of Europe and were determined, wherever possible, to profit from the conflicts that they so happily embraced.

But these failings and uncertainties were nothing new and they did not dent the enthusiasm of the rich and powerful in Europe for the good things of the Renaissance. When Mary was born the early artists were beginning to pass. Botticelli had died in 1510 and Leonardo, a refugee from his native Tuscany, died in France when Mary was three. Michelangelo, on the other hand, was at the height of his powers, having completed the Sistine Chapel in 1512. Desiderius Erasmus, the greatest of the humanist thinkers, was thriving in northern Europe, patronised by Mary's father and his fellow monarchs. In the year before Mary's birth, Thomas More wrote his discourse on the ideal political state, *Utopia*, ensuring that the credentials of the English as contributors to the new ideas would be taken seriously. Universities throughout the continent thrived. Yet amid this ferment, fundamental questions about the nature of the relationship between the Church and the state, as well as the Church and the individual, had yet to find an effective outlet. Their first serious expression came from an unlikely source, when Mary was just one year old. An Augustinian monk in Germany, besieged by self-doubt and irritated by a friar from a rival order who was flagrantly selling indulgences on his doorstep, decided to raise an academic debate about the obnoxious practice of buying one's way out of sin. His name was Martin Luther. He would change the world, and, with it, the course of Mary's life.

The country into which Mary was born was regarded with varying amounts of condescension by its mainland European neighbours. The barbarity, duplicity and sheer effrontery of the English were often remarked upon. 'Pink, white and quarrelsome' was the splendid description of one group of disgusted Spanish visitors. England was not generally liked or respected in Europe. Ferdinand and Isabella considered it suitable only for their youngest daughter; they were not entirely convinced by the new dynasty's hold on power. When Mary was born, the Tudors had been ruling for only 30 years and Henry VIII's perception that his inheritance was not stable was real and alarming. England throughout

Mary's lifetime was a dangerous, violent place, its political life characterised by faction and intrigue. Ambition could as easily bring death as power, and in this heated atmosphere men seldom kept their feelings in check. Tudor England was emotionally raw. It was not uncommon for blows to be exchanged in council meetings and Henry VIII himself apparently subjected his ministers to physical abuse. Cardinal Wolsey was known for his bad language; on one occasion he harassed a papal delegation who had come to see him and threatened them physically. Grown men wept readily, sometimes, no doubt, out of fear for their own survival. Ambassadors from France and Spain residing in London agreed on very little, but they both knew that you could not trust an English politician, no matter how much you paid him—and both countries often paid generously. The principled English politician seemed to be a contradiction in terms. Even worse were the general populace, a load of xenophobic drunks who would cut your throat sooner than offer you board and lodging.

Mary's Spanish inheritance, on the other hand, though no less violent in some ways, placed her at the centre of the struggle for power in Europe. In understanding Mary herself, this part of her background is often misconstrued. Generations of English historians have been mightily displeased with the fact that Mary was half Spanish, as if this 'impurity' of blood, in contrast to the wholly English credentials of her half-sister, Elizabeth, was some sort of birth defect. Yet, in 16th-century Europe, where dynastic marriages were a vital part of the struggle for power, such a descent would have been viewed as an asset, not a liability. The English kings were unusual in marrying their own countrywomen. This 15th-century habit was a result of a combination of civil war and personal inclinations which had kept them out of the European marriage market, and out of European influence during the long period between 1445, when Henry VI married Margaret of Anjou, and 1501, when Prince Arthur married Katherine of Aragon. In later life, Mary would find her Spanish ancestry a source of both solace and pride, and she would look to the power of her mother's family to give England a role in Europe that she believed would enhance, rather than detract from, its influence.

Ferdinand and Isabella, Mary's grandparents, were, it has been said, the first 'power couple' of early modern Europe.<sup>3</sup> Theirs was certainly an effective, if sometimes fraught, alliance. Isabella was a warrior queen, equally ruthless in the pursuit of power and of religious certainty. She saw off the stronger claims of her niece to the throne of Castile with as much single-mindedness as she undertook campaigning in the south of Spain against the Moors. Her alliance with Ferdinand was political expedient to both of them but does seem to have been characterised by passion, despite Ferdinand's infidelity. Isabella was a woman of great mental strength and physical determination. The inconvenience of successive pregnancies and a growing family did not stop her spending long months with her armies, much of the time on horseback. She was a woman untroubled by doubt and her narrowly focused vision did not permit her to recognise the damage done to Spanish culture by the destruction of its rich Moorish and Jewish heritage. In an intolerant age, Isabella was a true heir of the Crusaders, and fiercely proud of her achievements. Her portraits show a reserved but determined almost ascetic woman. It is not hard to imagine her in a nun's habit, but Isabella's service to the Lord was offered outside the cloister, on the battlefields of Spain. Her calmness is evident in her face. She knew that God had given her victory.

Nor does she ever seem to have questioned the ability of herself, a mere woman, to rule. Why should she? Political reality meant that her husband's need of her was actually greater than her need of him. This does not mean, of course, that she would ever have considered ruling alone and unmarried. Marriage was the destiny ordained by the God she served for all women, even queens who ruled in their own right. Her example was not lost on her own family, even if it did not find much of an echo in other European countries. And the growth of that family allowed the achievements of Isabella and her husband to reach beyond Iberia, so that two generations later their descendants would be the masters not just of Europe, but of the new worlds opened up by explorers they had supported. When Isabella

eldest daughter, the lovely but mentally unstable Juana, married Philip the Fair of Burgundy, two of Europe's most powerful ruling houses were united. The Habsburg family ruled much of Europe from the Low Countries in the north to the tip of the Iberian peninsula, and laid claim to most of South America. Isabella's grandson, Charles V, invested with the ancient title of Charlemagne, Holy Roman Emperor, was hated by Rome and feared by the encircled French. He was Mary's first cousin and a powerful presence in her life.

The daughter of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, was, nevertheless, brought up as an entire English princess. This emphasis began with her christening at the church of the Observant Friars at Greenwich, just two days after her birth. Following tradition, neither Henry nor Katherine was present at the ceremony, but the flower of the English nobility certainly was. Not since the marriage of Katherine and her first husband had so many of the great names of the aristocracy gathered together for a public event. It was not, however, a family occasion, like a modern christening, but an affair of state. Henry wanted to display his own continuing power in an impressive setting, and he also wanted to remind any of his great lords who might feel disgruntled that he was the heir of both York and Lancaster. Acting as one of Mary's godmothers was her great-aunt, Princess Katherine of York, the only surviving child of Edward IV. At 37, she was a young great-aunt, though already a widow. She had married Sir William Courtenay and become countess of Devon, where she lived in considerable style near Tiverton. How dutiful a godmother she was we do not really know, though the 1517/18 accounts show that she gave her god-daughter a golden spoon.<sup>4</sup> Mary was 11 when Katherine died in 1527. But Katherine's grandson, Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon, was closely linked to Mary at several points of her life and was considered more than once as a possible husband.

The Howard family, who had fought alongside Richard III at Bosworth Field but who were thereafter to serve the Tudors in a relationship that became increasingly strained under Henry VIII, also figured prominently at Mary's christening. The duchess of Norfolk was another of Mary's godmothers and her daughter-in-law, the countess of Surrey, carried the baby into the church. The christening was immediately followed, as was the custom, by confirmation, and this required a third godmother. The lady chosen was Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury, the daughter of George, duke of Clarence—Shakespeare's 'fast, fleeting, perjured Clarence', memorably drowned in a butt of malmsey according to the playwright—and, as Mary's future lady governess, she would play perhaps the most important role of any woman in Mary's early life.

So Mary was christened surrounded by the mightiest of her father's subjects, those whom she could expect to command directly as his heir. To reinforce the significance of her birth, her godfather was Henry's chief minister, the immensely capable and gifted Cardinal Wolsey. The French king Francis I, who had recently inherited the throne, was pointedly not asked. No one could have failed to miss the point that Henry so effectively made in choosing his daughter's godparents.

Four knights of the realm held the canopy over the well-wrapped baby as she entered the church. One of them, in an irony that became apparent only with the passage of time, was Sir Thomas Boleyn, a career diplomat of talent and ambition, who had sent his own daughter, Anne, to learn how to be a great lady in the courts of Burgundy and France.

The way to the church had been cleaned, gravelled and covered with rushes and the ceremony was carried out with all the pomp and circumstance required. Sixteenth-century London was surprisingly capable of producing spectacle at very short notice and it did not let Mary down at her christening. Once the ceremony was complete, the little princess was returned to her mother in the Queen's Chamber at Greenwich Palace, Katherine presumably having made a sufficient recovery from the birth 48 hours earlier to be up and about, at least for a while. We do not know when Henry first saw her

daughter, though both parents were undoubtedly pleased with her. Henry was reported to have boasted that she never cried. In his presence, she probably never did. Mary was an attractive baby, and there was genuine parental affection. But she did not stay with them long.

From these very early days, Mary would live close to, but separate from, her parents. As a baby she seems to have stayed very near to them, and to have passed Christmas with them at Greenwich, but babies and all their paraphernalia did not figure in the day-to-day lives of 16th-century monarchs. There is evidence that Henry and Katherine, in particular, took more interest than other monarchs might have done in Mary's development, but the notion that Katherine raised her daughter herself is at odds with the role of a queen consort, and Katherine had been a very diligent practitioner of this role during her years of childlessness.

So, in the first two years of her life, Mary was cared for by a wet-nurse, Katherine Pole (later Lady Brooke), wife of one of the king's gentlemen ushers, a team of four rockers, no doubt intended to soothe her when she was lying in her magnificent cradle, and the highly necessary person of a laundress, to deal with all the washing that a small child generates. In the feeding, changing and daily routine of her daughter's life, Katherine took no part. We can imagine that every effort was made by Mary's first lady governess, Elizabeth Denton, to have the baby as presentable and quiet as possible when Queen Katherine came to see her. By 1518, Elizabeth Denton's role had reverted to Lady Margaret Bryan, who subsequently fulfilled the same role for both of Henry's much younger children when they were in the early stages of infancy.

The princess's household seems to have been a functioning unit within days of her birth. As well as the nursery staff and the lady governess there was a treasurer to manage finances, a chaplain and a gentlewoman. Mary's expenses soon began to grow. In the six months between October 1517 and March 1518 they stood at £421.12s 1d. By 1519/20 they had risen to £1,100, about £400,000 today. Not until her father's death in 1547 would Mary actually have any income of her own, but she grew up as the focus of a substantial business unit, whose members had considerable responsibilities as well as privileges.

But it was also something more than a royal institution in its own right. Mary's household was, in a very real sense, her family. Katherine of Aragon conceived once more after Mary's birth, in 1518, but the child was another girl and we do not even know whether it was born dead or succumbed shortly after birth. From this point onwards, it was an accepted fact that Mary was her father's only legitimate child, and, therefore, his heir. The chagrin Katherine must have felt when Henry's mistress, Elizabeth Blount, gave birth to a son in 1519 did not cause her to fear for her daughter. Later, young Henry Fitzroy's position in respect of his half-sister was less clear-cut, though never in Katherine's mind.

Mary grew up surrounded by a staff who may well have had some degree of self-interest in maintaining their employment but who seemed to have held her in genuine affection. This early ability to inspire loyalty and love in those who served her remained a constant throughout Mary's life and she was always solicitous of her servants' welfare. Although she was a little girl in an adult world, her life was not necessarily devoid of amusement. A later fixture in Mary's life was her fool, Jane Cooper, one of the few female examples we have of a role that was generally given to men. The two seem to have had a close relationship, with Mary meeting Jane's expenses for haircuts and illness. Fools were not just entertainers, they were something of an emotional safety valve. It is probable that as a child Mary enjoyed the antics of her father's court jesters, even if there was no fool officially attached to her household.

There are no records of Mary having contact with other children or being educated with them, unlike her siblings Elizabeth and Edward two decades later. This is not conclusive proof that she grew up in complete isolation, and it is possible that she knew the daughters of her aunt Mary. Her earliest relationship, if it can be called that, with another child came in 1517, when she was named

godmother for her cousin, Frances Brandon, daughter of Mary Tudor and Charles Brandon. As young women in their teens, the cousins spent considerable amounts of time in each other's company. It may be that they saw each other occasionally when younger. Fate would strain their relationship to the limits, but not, finally, undermine it.

Mary's life was always peripatetic; she had no fixed abode. From her earliest days she moved from palace to palace, more in the summer than the winter, frequently close to her parents but not often staying with them. Most of her summer residences as a very small child were in the western Home Counties, where her father loved to hunt. In general, things were arranged so that Katherine could visit easily whenever she chose. But it was not her mother who saw the baby Mary from early childhood into womanhood. That responsibility lay with the countess of Salisbury, who was the main direct influence on the princess in the formative years of her life. It was a close and affectionate relationship that Mary never forgot, even when anguish and then death parted her from the woman who had raised her.

The countess had assumed the role of lady governess by May 1520, when Mary was four years old. Her appointment seems to have been at the express wish of the queen, who counted Margaret Pole among her closest friends. Margaret's son, Reginald, a key figure in Mary's reign, claimed that Katherine had been so keen for Margaret to take on the role of lady governess that she had been willing to go to his mother's house in person with Henry to implore her to take on the burden.<sup>6</sup> That does not seem to have been necessary. Margaret Pole knew her duty and was devoted to the queen. They had known each other since Katherine first came to England. Margaret's late husband, Richard Pole, had been Prince Arthur's Lord Chamberlain, and she had accompanied him to Wales during the brief five-month marriage of Katherine and her first husband. There a bond seems to have been forged between the two women, despite the fact that Katherine spoke little English and was 11 years younger than Margaret. Arthur's premature death at Ludlow parted them, but they continued to correspond until Henry VIII's accession rescued Katherine from penurious widowhood and made her the queen consort she had always expected to be. Margaret had also known financial distress during this period (her husband died in 1504), but her loyalty and friendship were not forgotten. She came to court with her eldest son to attend Katherine's coronation and was soon appointed one of the queen's chief attendants. In 1512, possibly at his wife's behest, Henry VIII granted Margaret's petition for restoration of the earldom of Salisbury and she became a countess in her own right.<sup>7</sup> This made her one of the most influential and powerful women in England. Her estates covered 17 counties as well as land in Wales, the Isle of Wight and Calais. It has been estimated that this placed her among the top five wealthiest nobles in early 16th-century England. She had four main residences in the south of England, one of which, Bisham in Berkshire, was sometimes used as a summer residence for Mary when she was a baby. Margaret's London house, Le Herber, stood on the site of what is now Cannon Street station.

Mary's lady governess was one of the foremost women of the realm, an entirely fitting choice for a difficult task. But, as the daughter of the disgraced duke of Clarence, she had grown up in perilous times, well aware of the dangers of proximity to the throne. The countess had much experience, even if it was indirect, of violence and intrigue. Her father was murdered on the orders of his brother, Edward IV, in 1478. He had also fallen out with his younger brother, the future Richard III. His demise left the five-year-old Margaret and her younger brother, the earl of Warwick, as the orphaned children of a traitor. Edward IV made them his wards but their future hung in the balance when he died. The countess certainly presented a threat to Richard III, because they could not be declared illegitimate like Edward's own sons. The children may well have escaped a similar fate to that which befell the prince

in the Tower of London. Instead, they were sent north to Yorkshire. Henry VII placed Margaret and her brother in his mother's household on his accession and they returned to court. Margaret was married probably the following year to Richard Pole. She was a very young bride but the marriage seems to have been happy and gave Margaret security and stability, both of which had been lacking in her life until then. Her approach to the job of bringing up Princess Mary demonstrated how much she valued those aspects of her life. She certainly fared better than her brother, who was put in the Tower of London and later executed when he tried to escape with the pretender Perkin Warbeck.

When the countess of Salisbury entered Mary's life she was 47 years old and still an imposing woman. 'Tall, thin and elegant, she boasted the auburn hair of the Plantagenets and the pale skin which accompanied such colouring.'<sup>8</sup> She had five children of her own, including one daughter Ursula, and she was intelligent, virtuous and pious. No stain attached to her person or behaviour and she had the considerable advantage of knowing the court and its etiquette inside out. A better choice for Mary's welfare or role as a princess could not have been made.

Her influence appears to have been quickly established. On 13 June 1520, the Lords of the Council wrote to Henry, who was in France with Katherine to attend that ostentatious display of pomp and upmanship between himself and Francis I known as the Field of Cloth of Gold, that Mary was 'daily exercising herself in virtuous pastimes and occupations ...'<sup>9</sup> This was, of course, to be expected. No parent, and certainly not a king, wants to hear that his child is misbehaving, and playtime was probably not a 16th-century concept. But this does not mean that Mary was always treated as a miniature adult. The pattern of her year changed with the seasons, but the main excitement came at Christmas. Then the countess of Salisbury and other members of the princess's entourage made sure that there was plenty to entertain a little girl.

The household accounts give us a glimpse of the type of Christmas that Mary experienced. It is a far cry from the Germanic Christmases that were introduced into Victorian England and seems closer to a medieval celebration. But it was lively and very visual. The content did not differ greatly over time but Mary may well have found such familiarity enjoyable as she grew older. In 1521 there was a Lord of Misrule, a kind of master of ceremonies, to lead Mary's festive entertainment. He was one of Mary's valets, John Thurgoode. Three boars, 'furious and fell', were purchased for the proceedings and the highlight was the ceremonial introduction of the boar's head, 'crown'd with gay garlands and with rosemary, smok'd on the Christmas board'. The boar's head was an impressive sight, and painters and decorators were brought in to gild and decorate it.

Thurgoode was paid 40 shillings (around £700) for the costumes and entertainments he devised for Christmas. These involved a considerable number of players and props and a lot of activity and noise. There were two tabourets, a man who played the Friar and one who played the Shipman, a stock of visors, coat-armour, gold foil and coney-skins and tails for mummers. It is not clear precisely how these were used but there appear to have been a succession of tableaux or short plays. As well as the Shipman and the Friar, Thurgoode ordered four dozen 'clattering staves', two dozen morris pikes, 100 crossbows, gunpowder, four gunners, ten dozen bells, a hobby horse and enough straw 'to cover twelve men in a disguising'. Finally, in what seems to a modern reader a distressingly heartless role, there was 'a man to kill a calf behind a cloth'.<sup>10</sup>

There is every reason to suppose that Mary liked these raucous interludes. She loved such entertainments when she grew up and they figured significantly at her own court. She probably found them, as did her contemporaries, amusing and diverting. Her father was an inveterate japester who loved the old chivalric tradition of surprise and disguise. It is not hard to imagine the young princess laughing out loud at the comic antics played before her. So much of her life as a child seems to the modern eye to have been serious and dutiful, but it was not without times of relief and pleasure. Mus

became an early and abiding pastime and her delight in it was something she shared with her father. ~~may have been the earliest part of her education, and her precocious enthusiasm was noted when she~~ was just two years old. On one of her visits to court she heard the Venetian organist, Dionysius Memo, playing for her father's guests and ran after him calling, 'Priest, priest!', not because she was interested in his religious role but to encourage him to play more.<sup>11</sup> Henry was proudly indulgent of this slight lapse in his child's otherwise dignified behaviour. Her taste he could not fault, since it had been Henry himself who brought Memo, the organist of St Mark's, to England not long after Mary's birth. Memo would give concerts after dinner, sometimes lasting up to four hours, 'to the incredible admiration and pleasure of everybody'. It seems likely that he was Mary's first music teacher. No young princess could have had finer.

The combination of lighter pastimes with an orderly existence would not in any way have deflected the countess of Salisbury's prime objective, which was to prepare her charge for the life of an English princess and a European queen. For even if there were, in the future, to be a male heir to Henry VIII, Mary's potential on the European marriage market was scarcely diminished. Henry always wanted a son, but now he had a daughter he was determined to use her as a diplomatic tool, early and often. That was not heartless, it was just good international relations. Accustomed to command from the moment she acquired speech, Mary found out not long afterwards that there would always be a string of suitors for her hand and that her appearances at court would often coincide with some new marriage negotiation. By the time she became queen, there had been so many suitors and betrothals that it seems unlikely that she could have kept track of them all herself.

The first of these came before Margaret Pole was part of her life. At the age of two and a half, Mary was betrothed to the dauphin of France and went through a form of marriage ceremony at Greenwich with her future husband's proxy, the French admiral, Bonnivet. Wearing cloth of gold and a bejewelled black velvet cap, she behaved impeccably during a long ceremony in which the bishop of Durham preached about marriage for the edification of the adults present. Henry may have been serious at the time but the power games of mainland Europe made it improbable that his daughter would ever be delivered to France. She was not expected until the dauphin was 14 and could consummate the marriage. As shrewd a participant in the ebb and flow of diplomacy as Henry VIII would at least have suspected that the path ahead was not straight. But, for the time being, it looked like a glorious match, even if Katherine of Aragon privately preferred one of her own relatives as a husband for Mary.

The first sign that all was not well with this Anglo-French union came when Mary failed to accompany her parents to the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520. The meeting had been postponed from 1519, when Mary was expected to attend, but when it finally took place, she was not there. Her absence may have been regretted by Francis I's plain but intelligent wife, Queen Claude. As Mary's prospective mother-in-law she had already sent a jewelled cross worth six thousand ducats and a portrait of her son, the dauphin, but she was not rewarded with a sight of his child bride. There could have been any number of reasons for this, of course. There was tension between Queen Katherine and Cardinal Wolsey, a deterioration of what was often a difficult relationship. Perhaps Katherine did not want her daughter, still so young, caught up in this, or maybe she and Henry felt that a camp, no matter how luxurious, was not the right place for their child to be introduced to her in-laws and the devious world of diplomacy. We shall never know whether Henry would have shown off a son, if there had been one. As it was, Mary was spared any awkwardness and Henry did not have to face any potentially difficult questions about the succession.

The king of France, however, was not to be so easily deterred. Before Henry had even returned



England, Francis sent three of his gentlemen to see the princess. No doubt he wanted to make sure that she was in good health and did not have some physical or mental defect that had been concealed. The coming was unexpected and their reception demonstrates how much importance was attached to the occasion and how the political and social establishment rallied round the princess. 'Notwithstanding the short warning', they were banqueted by the mayor of London, shown the major sights of the capital and entertained by the duke of Norfolk.

The countess of Salisbury would have explained to Mary who the gentlemen were and what was expected of her during their visit, perhaps even rehearsing the princess in what to do and say. Mary handled the situation with great aplomb for one so young, surrounded as she was by all the great and the good of England who were not accompanying her father to France. 'There were with her diverse lords spiritual and temporal; and, in the Presence chamber, besides the lady governess ... the duchess of Norfolk, her three daughters' and several other titled ladies. The princess was a credit to herself, her parents and the probably anxious Margaret Pole. Her behaviour and demeanour were completely appropriate to the occasion. She entertained her visitors graciously on 2 July at Richmond, 'with the most goodly countenance, proper communication and pleasant pastime in playing at the virginals'. The French deputation left suitably impressed by their royal hostess, after further generous hospitality: 'goodly cheer was made unto them ... strawberries, wafers, wine and yprocas [a kind of cordial] in plenty'. Yet by the time the year 1520 was out Henry, concerned by the implications of French aggression against Katherine's nephew, the emperor Charles V, was already considering a new match for Mary. The prospective bridegroom was Charles himself.

Charles was 16 years older than Mary and would have to wait another six years before she could reside with him, and perhaps two beyond that before they could cohabit as man and wife. Still, it was a wonderful opportunity for the English princess. Her marriage prospects had become even grander, and no one remarked on the irony of her first suitor having been a toddler and her second a man old enough to be her father. Royal marriages had nothing to do with sentiment and only rarely with suitability. The negotiations, the hammering out of carefully considered clauses, the tactical advantages, however brief, that might accrue to the parties, these were the aspects that mattered. They certainly exercised the minds of Henry and Wolsey on the English side and Charles and his advisers across the Channel. But it was not just Henry's underlying doubts about relations with France which made him think about other options for his daughter. In his instructions for the treaty negotiations Henry pointed out: 'it is to be considered that she [Mary] is now our sole heir; and may succeed to the crown'.<sup>13</sup> This made his daughter a very valuable bargaining tool: 'We ought to receive from the emperor as large a sum as we should give with her if she were not our heir.' It also shows that Henry did not balk at an alliance that would surely have major dynastic implications for England if Mary did become queen in her own right. It was never suggested that Mary should marry an Englishman. She was only six years old but she already knew that her destiny was to marry a foreign prince.

Despite the age gap, Charles was not necessarily an unsuitable husband for Mary. After all, he was her family. He was her first cousin and papal dispensation was necessary for marriages with such close relations, but that was no more than a minor bureaucratic hurdle. It was precisely because Charles was her nephew that Katherine of Aragon, quietly triumphant at the disappearance of the French match, wanted him also as her son-in-law.

Charles was a tall, lanky, rather serious young man, not at all prepossessing physically. He was not a storybook prince in this respect. If Mary expected him to rival her father in appearance, she must have been very disappointed. The emperor's prominent chin was the precursor of the famous Habsburg jaw that came to disfigure his descendants by the end of the 18th century. His father and mother had

brought together Spain and the Low Countries, a union that was to prove as unhappy as their own marriage. When Charles's father, the inveterate womaniser Philip of Burgundy, died young, he left the Spanish wife he had never loved a disconsolate widow. She lived on for another 30 years but never wanted to govern. They called her Juana la Loca (Juana the Mad), but her main problem seems to have been chronic depression. In 1519 Charles's grandfather, Maximilian I, died and the young prince inherited Austria and Germany, as well as the ancient title of Holy Roman Emperor. It was a heavy mantle to bear. The problems that came with these vast territories, so soon to be the prey of social and religious unrest, were innumerable and, ultimately, insoluble. Charles's life was already dedicated to ceaseless hard work and the merry-go-round of diplomacy and war. Henry VIII's task as king of part of a small island must have seemed easy in comparison.

In 1522, as any dutiful fiancé should, Charles came to visit England. The treaty of Bruges, in which he and Mary were affianced and Henry promised him support in his continental struggles, had been signed the year before. Charles may have wanted to reinforce Henry's commitment by putting in a personal appearance. Perhaps he was at least curious to see his young cousin, though neither he nor Henry privately thought that there was much likelihood of her ever becoming his wife. We do not know how Mary felt. The idea of marriage can mean little to a six-year-old, especially one brought up in an atmosphere as rarefied as Mary experienced. She would have associated her parents' marriage with being at court for great occasions, with the reverence they received and the power they evidently enjoyed. But since she had known only privilege herself, this may all have seemed perfectly natural. No doubt the importance of what was being arranged for her would have been explained in general terms and emphasis laid on the way she was to behave when she met the emperor. It has been suggested that Katherine may have put romantic ideas into her head about Charles and fed childish fantasies about the thrilling prospects of the imperial bridegroom who awaited her. But who knows what Mary's fantasies were? The pony and goshawk she was given about the same time may well have been more attractive preoccupations. Katherine was not an excitable woman by nature and though she would have wished—expected, indeed—for Mary to behave with all the aplomb that a carefully prepared little princess could muster, reminding her daughter of her dignity and underlining her importance and not the same as encouraging the child to think she was in love.

The visit was a great success at the time and both Mary and Charles played their parts perfectly. Henry had already had favourable reports on Mary's musical and dancing skills from his ambassador, who was invited to inspect the prospective bride's abilities in these courtly pursuits. On this occasion Mary played the spinet and performed a French dance, the galliard.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps when Charles arrived she wore some of the jewellery that had been specially made for her, an impressive brooch with the name *Charles* on it, or another with *The Emperour* picked out in lettering. We do not know whether she danced in person for her cousin, but it seems probable that her parents would not have missed the opportunity for Mary to impress.

Although she was never to see him again, Charles stayed in Mary's mind. He was a charming and gracious guest and his visit was one of the great state occasions of the early 16th century. On his arrival by boat at Greenwich Palace on 2 June 1522, he was greeted by Queen Katherine and her ladies-in-waiting and, of course, the Princess Mary. All her life she remembered his kindness to her, which seems to have been natural and not in any way forced. What else does a six-year-old princess expect in a husband? Admiration for the way she carries out the set-pieces expected of a great lady? Compliments leading to evident parental approval of her deportment? Later, she would see him as a father-figure, constant in times of unpredictable and unwelcome change, beset by danger. They had met when she believed her future was to be his bride, and both her parents talked of her as the heir to the throne. It was a happy time.

England took to Charles as well. He was the first—and, as it turned out, last—Holy Roman Emperor

ever to visit and Londoners, who always loved a spectacle, warmed to him when he entered their city with Henry, accompanied by great pageantry and rejoicing. The emperor himself reported that he was 'met with a magnificent reception from a great company of knights and gentlemen, with solemn and costly pageants, to the great joy of all the people'. Records of the preparations made for two days of jousting, on 4 and 5 June 1522, are further evidence of Tudor England's impressive ability to entertain lavishly. For the decorative backdrop to the jousts, 46 yards of cloth of gold of damask, 11 yards of cloth of silver and 26 yards of russet velvet were ordered. One William Mortimer was hired to embroider the russet velvet with 'knights on horseback, riding upon mountains of gold, with broken spears in their hands and ladies coming out of clouds, casting darts at the knights ...'.<sup>15</sup> Charles was equally well received as he toured southern England on a month-long hunting trip. When he left on 1 July, Mary's thoughts may have turned to making the trip across the North Sea to Brussels herself in a few years to come, as Europe's empress and England's queen. But it was not to be. Both Charles and Henry knew the harsh realities of diplomacy; the benefits of the treaty of Bruges were tangible but temporary. Charles needed a bride nearer his own age and readily available. A man with his responsibilities could not wait for years and years, no matter how sweet his little cousin was. So he married the handsome Isabella of Portugal, and she soon produced the male heir that his aunt had conspicuously failed to provide for England. There would be plenty of other suitors for Mary's hand.

Perhaps she was disappointed. Or perhaps she never viewed it as anything other than a play in which she was the leading actress for a while. During this period of raised expectations Mary was without Margaret Pole, temporarily removed as lady governess because her daughter's father-in-law, the duke of Buckingham, had crossed Wolsey and been accused of conspiring against Henry. He was executed and Margaret, through association, found herself, not for the first time, mistrusted.<sup>16</sup> The affair, the first in Henry's reign when he moved against a great subject, blew over without permanent damage to Margaret. By 1525 she was back in charge of Mary's daily life and ready to support her in the next phase of her preparation for queenship. Henry, with an eye to the future, thought it was time that his daughter got some practical experience of government. He had decided to send her off to the Welsh Marches, where generations of princes of Wales had gone before her to play their part in the royal family and to finish their education. If Mary's childhood was not yet over, it was definitely entering a different and more serious phase.

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## Chapter Two

### **The Education of a Princess**

**‘She is very handsome and admirable by reason of her great and uncommon mental endowments.’**

The French envoy, Turenne, reports on Mary in February 1527

At an early age, Mary had already been given a lesson in the harsh realities of English politics and one that had a direct bearing on her own life. To be near to her father was as dangerous as it was glorious, though it is unlikely that she realised this at such a young age. No doubt any questions she may have raised about the replacement of her lady governess would have been met with easy answers and, even if there were new relationships to be forged, her world, the world of England's heiress, continued as before. By the time the countess of Salisbury returned, the formal approach to Mary's education was established. It did not encourage idle speculation about over-mighty subjects, and Margaret Pole herself could be relied upon to keep quiet about the real reasons for her absence. Failure to do otherwise would have put her in great peril.

The king's decision to send his daughter to Wales does not mean that her education had been neglected or unstructured up to that point. Both parents took an evident interest in how Mary would be moulded to meet her destiny as a king's daughter. Henry liked to show her off and his attitude was part parental affection but also prudent. It was making a statement about his own power and ambitions. The greater the effect Mary had on those who met her, the more it reflected well on him. To say that Mary was brought up 'among the women' is to give a false impression of the learning she had already received. Like other European princesses, she was taught by men, following the precepts of the leading thinkers of the day. Her education was at the cutting edge of Renaissance theory, though there must have been a need to adapt it to her own abilities. But her unique situation as Henry's successor was enveloped in uncertainty. Here the theorists and tutors were in uncharted territory, for no one had ever formalised how a future queen regnant should be taught. Did her preparation need to be different from that of a male heir? The question was never directly raised, and Henry, who was privately ambivalent and touchy about the future, did not encourage such speculation. Neither did Katherine, who always believed with absolute firmness that her daughter must inherit the throne and did not want to open up a debate on the subject. She made sure that Mary would be appropriately trained for what lay ahead.

Information on Mary's early studies is fragmentary, but a considerable amount can be deduced pieced together from reports of her official appearances and the accounts of her household. As she grows older, the picture becomes clearer and a polished humanist princess emerges from the schoolroom. Even as a very small girl, she was able to acquit herself superbly in public demonstrations of her skills, and there were regular occasions of state that kept up the pressure on her to show what

king's daughter could do.

~~She clearly had an early aptitude for music and dancing and grew to be highly accomplished both. At the age of four she could play the virginals and she later learned the lute and the regal. Playing these instruments was one of her main sources of relaxation and entertainment as she grew up and the comments on her ability seem to have been more than the studied politeness of official observers. Dancing was also a vital accomplishment for royal ladies, and Mary's enjoyment of it began early. She learned to dance at least as well as any lady at her father's court. After Henry's death her brother Edward VI would criticise Mary for her unseemly devotion to this pastime at which she excelled.~~

Mary also became an accomplished linguist and had evidently learned some French by 1520, which she so impressed the French lords sent to inspect her. Again, this may have been, like the musicianship, a skill inherited from her father, who used it to communicate with the emperor and French-speaking diplomats throughout his reign. There would have been no need for such a young child to converse at any length, only to demonstrate that she could exchange pleasantries and formal greetings. As an adult she relied on her French for communication with the imperial ambassadors at a time when they were almost her sole support and, later, for speaking to her husband. She may have picked up some Spanish from those around her mother, overhearing the conversations of Katherine with people like her confessor and her ladies-in-waiting, but the numbers of those who had, long ago accompanied Katherine from Spain were dwindling, and the queen did not regularly use her native tongue any more except with her priests. Mary could, though, read Spanish; in the 1530s, when the worlds changed so dramatically and Katherine needed to be very careful in her letters to her daughter, she wrote to Mary in Spanish. The princess, however, does not seem to have spoken it well, and she did not use it in public.

We do not know who taught Mary her first French, though there were French speakers at court and she may have received initial coaching from one of them. Nor is it possible to say with precision how she acquired basic literacy in English. The notion that Katherine of Aragon sat down and taught her daughter the alphabet is fanciful. It is appealing to think of the Spanish queen and her dutiful daughter bending their heads over Mary's first attempts to form letters, but they were apart too often for Katherine to have had a sustained role as a teacher.<sup>2</sup> Her oversight of the process of Mary's education was, though, close. She followed Mary's progress keenly, and there is no doubt that her influence would have started as soon as Mary could talk and be socialised.

There is not a separate line in the princess's accounts for a schoolmaster until she went off to Wales in 1525, when Dr Richard Fetherstone is first mentioned. Probably Mary learned the basics of literacy from her chaplain, Henry Rowle. General education as well as religious instruction was one of the services performed by chaplains for aristocratic households.<sup>3</sup> At the age of nine, Mary could already write in Latin, and her first steps in this language, the prerequisite of greater learning, may well have been guided by one of the foremost English humanist scholars of his day, the royal physician, Thomas Linacre.

Linacre was a distinguished Oxford scholar who, like many of his contemporaries, had travelled widely in Italy at the end of the 15th century. He combined an interest in Greek with medicine and his translation of the Greek physician, Galen, into Latin gave him a European reputation. He took his medical degree in Padua in 1496, and two years after Mary's birth, in 1518, he and five other physicians, supported by Wolsey, petitioned the king to set up a College of Physicians in London. Katherine of Aragon had first met him during her time as princess of Wales, when he had been Prince Arthur's tutor. She seems to have supported his appointment as royal physician when Henry VIII came to the throne. His credentials as a scholar would have made him an ideal choice for introducing

princess to the study of classical and humanist Latin.

By the time Mary came to sit down with her first Latin textbooks, probably at the age of around seven, Linacre was more than 60 years old and greatly revered. He counted among his friends the three leading English humanists, More, Colet and Grocyn, and the towering European figure of Erasmus. He had already published, in English, two works on Latin grammar, and was shortly to bring out a more detailed one, in Latin, for students who had gone beyond the basics. Mary's ability in Latin was widely remarked upon by the time she was 12, so it seems that the elderly Linacre, who died in 1526, gave her a good grounding in its study.

Perhaps in his medical capacity he also advised on the importance for a child of a healthy lifestyle. Certainly, the physical side of Mary's early education was not neglected. Sixteenth-century England placed a great deal of emphasis on physical fitness, believing that it was good for moral fibre as well as warding off sickness. Despite the challenges of long clothing and the vagaries of the weather, Mary was expected to exercise regularly: '... at seasons convenient, [she is] to use moderate exercise for taking open air in gardens, sweet and wholesome places and walks which may confer unto her health, solace and comfort ...'.<sup>4</sup> She would have been able to ride before she received the present of a horse from Lord Abergavenny in 1522, and she enjoyed horses and hunting throughout her life. Her account for that year shows only one stable-boy, but her stables quickly grew, as was to be expected with an expanding household. She also kept a pack of hounds and liked coursing and hawking. Such blood sports were an essential part of aristocratic life. Mary was introduced to them early.

Though Queen Katherine's personal presence in Mary's schoolroom was irregular, she had considerable input into her curriculum. At about the same time that Linacre was putting the princess through her first Latin primer, Katherine, looking to underline her credentials as a patron of new ideas, commissioned a work on female education. The writer was the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, and his book, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, was considered radical. In his introductory letter to Katherine, Vives made a claim that ran counter to the still-prevailing negative attitude of the time towards women—he stated unequivocally that the proper education of a woman, as man's essential companion, was vital for the well-being of the state. It was an outlook shared by Katherine herself and it coloured her own attitude to the role of a queen consort. But what did it mean for Mary, when she came to succeed her father?

Many writers have seen Vives as a malign influence on Mary's entire life. In effect, he has been accused of taking an intelligent girl and denying her the chance, through his theories, of developing into an independent, confident woman. This fits well with the long-held view of Mary as a victim; at the point in time when she began the more serious part of her schooling, she was trussed into the straitjacket of Vives's ideas and emerged permanently damaged, believing that she was inferior to men and could not trust her own judgement. In this interpretation, she never stood a chance of being a successful ruler since her education had alienated her from the very qualities needed to become one. Nearly a generation later, her much younger half-sister, Elizabeth, benefiting from the new ideas that spread with the Reformation, was not so encumbered and was thus better equipped to take the reins of government.

This conveniently symmetrical explanation for one of the apparent differences between the two daughters of Henry VIII has condemned Vives to be widely misunderstood and, more seriously, to be judged without reference to the context in which he produced *The Education of a Christian Woman*. Katherine of Aragon commissioned him to write the work in 1523, shortly before his arrival in England to take up a teaching post at Oxford. She may have been inclined to patronise him because he was Spanish (he was from Valencia), but it is more likely that she chose Vives because he was already

a well-established writer and thinker. After studying in Paris, he was appointed professor of the humanities at Louvain, a leading centre of study in the Low Countries. While there, he wrote a general treatise on education, *On the right method of instruction for children*, and a commentary on Augustine's *The City of God*, which he dedicated to Henry VIII. If not directly competing with her husband in her support for learning, Katherine certainly wanted to be identified with Europe's prominent thinkers. In this ambition, she was typical of most high-born women of her day. It was an outlet for their intellects and interests in a world dominated by men, and it gave them influence and, indirectly, power. But it does not necessarily follow that Katherine intended Vives's work as a precise blueprint for Mary's tutors to follow.

In the unctuous introductory letter to his treatise, Vives made it clear that he understood that the commission was more about Katherine than it was about Mary:

I dedicate this work to you, glorious Queen, just as a painter might represent your likeness with utmost skill. As you will see your physical likeness portrayed there, so in these books you will see the image of your mind, since you were both a virgin and a promised spouse and a widow and now wife (as please God you may long continue) and since you have so conducted yourself in all these various states of life that whatever you did is a model of an exemplary life to others. But you prefer that virtues be praised rather than yourself ...

Quite what Katherine made of these references to her early life in England, as well as the strange aside about her marriage, is impossible to know. It would have made uncomfortable reading in the years to come. But then Vives turned to Katherine's daughter, the beneficiary, he hoped, of his ideas: 'Your daughter Mary will read these recommendations and will reproduce them as she models herself on the example of your goodness and wisdom to be found within her own home.' A touching idea, but very much at odds with reality; Katherine and Mary had never lived together in the kind of cosy domestic bliss that Vives described. He would, of course, have known this very well, but it sounded good and related to the philosophy he developed in the writing itself. So he continued in confident vein: 'She will do this assuredly, and unless she alone belie all human expectations, must of necessity be virtuous and holy as the offspring of you and Henry VIII, such a noble and honoured pair.' Clearly, it was important to remember Henry as well, and not just for form's sake. Vives believed that the institution of marriage itself was the foundation of society. He went on to conclude: 'Therefore all women will have an example to follow in your life and actions ... and precepts and rules for the conduct of their lives. Both of these they will owe to your moral integrity'.<sup>5</sup> In these closing lines, Vives demonstrated a shrewd understanding of his royal patron. Katherine's moral integrity was the cornerstone of her being and the unwavering certainty it gave her she would pass on to Mary. The princess did not need Vives's prompting, as she grew older, to absorb its importance.

*The Education of a Christian Woman* has irritated many commentators in modern times, though the most recent edition is more generous in its editorial stance and acknowledges that Vives's insistence on the intellectual superiority of women is important. But social equality was not something that the Spaniard advocated. His emphasis on the domestic virtues desirable in women is very much in tune with his times—and, indeed, the prevailing attitudes of the next four hundred years. If this seems unrealistic as part of the education of a future queen, it is worth bearing in mind that Katherine

Aragon and her sisters had been taught to bake bread as children in Spain. Presumably they had little occasion to put their expertise into practice as adults. Mary herself told her brother's privy councillor that 'her parents had not taught her to bake and brew', but Vives would have considered this an omission; it was directly counter to his own ideas. He thought all girls should learn the art of cooking, though 'not the vulgar kind associated with low-class eating houses'. Vives envisaged something closer to a domestic goddess than an innkeeper's wife, a woman not afraid to work with her hands, fully equipped to manage a home. We should not sneer too much at his insistence on the attainment of such attributes. Running a large household in the 16th century was a formidable undertaking. The skills it called for were eminently transferable to the running of a country, even if this was not officially recognised by a patriarchal society.

Before the Renaissance, women had been seen not so much as second-class citizens as a subspecies. They were the living embodiment of the biblical Eve, an outgrowth of the male that was tainted by sin. Their weakness was explored in the French work *The Romance of the Rose*, which, despite its pretentious medieval title, saw women as defiled. The suggestion that such creatures were scarcely fit to inhabit the same world as men was challenged, not surprisingly, by women themselves, notably Christine de Pisan, in her *Book of the Ladies*, written in 1405. Once the debate was opened, the general climate of questioning which characterised the Renaissance had led to the topic recurring and male as well as female writers taking up the pen.<sup>6</sup> Some even argued that women were superior to men.

Vives upheld this view, saying that women often exceeded men in their intellectual capacity. The problem, as he and many contemporaries saw it, was not their minds, but their bodies: 'In the education of a woman the principal and, I might say, the only concern should be the preservation of chastity.' There are seven pages in *The Education of a Christian Woman* on the virtues of virginity and the overall assessment of the carnal weakness of the sex is highly pessimistic. Women were to be kept away from men at the onset of puberty: 'During that period they are more inclined to lust.' How to cope with these sudden, raging sexual appetites that consumed previously innocent girls? Vives's philosophy did not lend itself to sex education.<sup>7</sup> The best approach was through diet. Frequent fasts were beneficial and 'a light, plain and not highly seasoned diet' was recommended. One fears that girls brought up in this way, struggling with the hormonal changes of puberty, would have had little enjoyment of life, but it was not all deprivation. Water was the best drink, but a little wine or beer was permissible. The importance of sleep was also recognised: 'The sleep of a virgin should not be long but not less than what is good for her health.' It was an austere regimen and not to be relieved by the frivolity of nice clothes or any jewellery other than simple adornment. Silks and fine linens were to be worldly and cosmetics vile—rouge and white lead had no place on a Christian face. But worse than any of these was idleness of mind and body because it could easily introduce a girl to completely unacceptable pastimes such as cards and dice. The mere thought of the gaming table appalled Vives. 'What will a woman be able to learn or think about, who gives herself to gambling?' he lamented.

The princess for whom these blandishments were intended clearly did not read the distinguished humanist's writings too closely. Or perhaps she did, but could not really see herself as Vives's prototype. In truth, not much of it was relevant to her. Mary was a great lady, a future queen, leading a life of luxury and complexity beyond the imagination of ordinary people. She was expected to dress superbly and wear gorgeous jewels, to symbolise power and magnificence in a way that all her father's subjects, from the highest to the lowest in the land, would understand. She might be a weak woman as far as the theory went, but the real princess was a person apart, for whom Vives's images of simplicity had no meaning. The moral precepts (and they were important) aside, she would not have recognised this colourless, idealised figure so diligently constructed in *The Education of a Christian Woman*. Her life was privileged, comfortable and predictable. Much was expected of her and she was carefully nurtured to meet these expectations, but austerity was not something she knew as a child. Attention



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