

The elder of these two, Mr. James as he was commonly called, was rather a mysterious personage to the village, and to such neighbours as they had. He was often in town, and when at home, although extremely pleasant and courteous, never talked about himself and seemed to be only very moderately interested in the estate and the country-life generally. This, coupled with the fact that he would presumably succeed his father, gave rise to a good deal of gossip, and even some suspicion.

His younger brother Hubert was very different ; passionately attached to sport and to outdoor occupations, a fearless rider, and in every way a kindly, frank lad of about eighteen years old. The fifth member of the family, Lady Maxwell's sister, Mistress Margaret Torridon, was a quiet-faced old lady, seldom seen abroad, and round whom, as round her eldest nephew, hung a certain air of mystery.

The difficulties of this Catholic family were considerable. Sir Nicholas' religious sympathies were, of course, wholly with the spiritual side of Spain, and all that that involved, while his intense love of England gave him a horror of the Southern Empire that the sturdiest patriot might have envied. And so with his attitude towards Mary Stuart and her French background. While his whole soul rose in loathing against the crime of Darnley's murder, to which many of her enemies proclaimed her accessory, it was kindled at the thought that in her or her child, lately crowned as James VI. of Scotland, lay the hope of a future Catholic succession ; and this religious sympathy was impassioned by the memory of an interview a few years ago, when he had kissed that gracious white hand, and looked into those alluring eyes, and, kneeling, stammered out in broken French his loyalty and his hopes. Whether it was by her devilish craft as her enemies said, or her serene and limpid innocence as her friends said, or by a maddening compound of the two, as later students have said—at least she had made the heart and confidence of old Sir Nicholas her own.

But there were troubles more practical than these mental struggles ; it was a misery, beyond describing, to this old man and his wife to see the church, where once they had worshipped and received the sacraments, given over to