

BOOK REVIEWS.

MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS AND HER LATEST ENGLISH HISTORIAN. A Narrative of the Principal Events in the Life of Mary Stuart; with some remarks on Mr. Froude's History of England. By James F. Meline. New York: Hurd and Houghton.

It is the duty of those who have surrendered their judgments to Mr. Froude and who have formed their opinions of historical characters under the influence of his seductive rhetoric, to read this book. We only wish there were reason to hope that the duty would be fulfilled. It is so much more pleasant to float through pages of picturesque narrative, sweetened with mellifluous sentiment, than to inquire whether the narrative is true. There could not be a stronger proof of the general ignorance of history and the general carelessness as to historical fact than the reception given to the writings of Mr. Froude.

Unfortunately the reproach cannot be confined to the mass of readers, who have no access to original authorities and no time for critical investigation. Professed critics, writing in literary journals, have disgraced themselves as much as the most glib girl. Worse than that, Mr. Burton, in his recent history of Scotland, not only joins in the general adulation of Mr. Froude, but follows him almost blindfold. Our own estimate of Mr. Burton's trustworthiness was never very high, but in common repute he holds a respectable and even an eminent position.

The secret of Mary Stuart's character is buried in her grave and in the graves which hold so many of the secrets of those dark and tragic times. No one trained to historical investigation and sensible of the duty of measuring his judgment by the evidence will commit himself to a decisive verdict. We confess, however, that Mr. Meline has made a strong impression on our mind in Mary's favour. Above all he has, we think, completely turned the balance of evidence against the authenticity of the famous Casket Letters which form the most important element of the case against her. We may almost say that he has proved them to be forgeries. And if he has proved them to be forgeries, he has not merely relieved Mary of the weight of their testimony against her, but created a general presumption of her innocence; since, if her enemies deemed it necessary to resort to forgery, they must have been

conscious that there was no genuine evidence sufficient to support their accusations. Not only so, but their villainous conduct towards her in this instance renders it highly probable that in all other matters between her and them, respecting which historical controversy has arisen, the villainy was on their side.

But whatever may be the result of the inquiry as to the character of Mary, Queen of Scots, one thing is certain. Unless Mr. Meline can be answered, he has convicted Mr. Froude not only of inaccuracy, not only of carelessness, not only of prejudice, but of tampering with documents, perverting evidence, practising disingenuous artifices and habitually disregarding truth—of offences, in short, which if committed in the ordinary affairs of life would entail a loss of honour, and which can hardly be regarded as mere literary blemishes when committed by a writer of history.

It would be impossible for us to lay before our readers, in the form of extracts, adequate specimens of the investigation and its results. Such artists as Mr. Froude do not in general lay themselves open to palpable and overwhelming exposure by broad mis-statements and gross fabrications. They weave a pervading web of artifice and misrepresentation, the unravelling of which is a minute and intricate process, and can be appreciated only by following it throughout. Even the garbling of documents is usually managed so as to be distinctly appreciable only by those who are thoroughly aware of its bearing upon the case which it is intended to affect. One or two instances, however, may perhaps be selected. Mr. Froude, well understanding how essential are the Casket Letters to the case against Mary, labours with all the artifices of which he has a sinister command to prepossess the mind of his readers in favour of their authenticity. But not contented with this he attempts to involve Mary herself in an admission of the existence of the letters prior to the date at which they were produced, and at which, if they were forgeries, the forgery in all probability took place. He gives an elaborate account of the interview between Murray and his sister at Lochleven, founded on a letter of the English envoy, Throckmorton, who had the details from Murray himself. Throckmorton is represented by Mr. Froude as writing—"He (Murray) had forced her to see both her ignominy and her danger,