Margaret Tudor was every bit as vain, fickle and treacherous as her younger brother Henry VIII. At the age of thirteen she partnered James IV of Scotland in the ‘marriage of the Thistle and the Rose’ (1503). Widowed by the disaster of Flodden she remarried within the year. Appropriately her pet-name for her second husband, Archibald Douglas 6th Earl of Angus, was ‘Anguish’ since much of it he brought her. During the same month of 1526 in which she divorced Angus she married Henry Stewart, later Lord Methven. Even King Henry, no innocent himself in such matters, found her behaviour scandalous and immoral.

Margaret’s main historical significance is that of dynastic lynchpin. She mothered six royal children only one of whom, James V, survived infancy. By Angus she had a daughter, Lady Margaret, who later married the Earl of Lennox. Queen Margaret was thus the grandmother of both Mary Queen of Scots and Henry Darnley whose own ill-starred union produced the future James VI who succeeded Elizabeth to bring about the personal union in 1603.

Professor Patricia Buchanan set herself no easy task in seeking to portray her subject as ‘an imperfect but very human individual, and to describe the many phases of her stormy career!’ Unfortunately the author has a somewhat superficial grasp of Scottish History particularly of the highly complex years during the minority of James V. Also she is somewhat bedazzled by the Tudor court in England to which its Scottish counterpart is unfavourably and misleadingly compared. Many of the queen’s faults, it turns out, are to be ascribed, implicitly or explicitly, to the barbaric environment in which she found herself; Scotland warped her personality. In parts of this study the reader is asked to believe that everybody is out of step except ‘our Margaret’. Undoubtedly her Scottish contemporaries were a devious crew but most of them pale into insignificance when compared to those who found berths in the Tudor Ship of State.

A more serious criticism is the total absence of references in the text while the bibliography is, in general, somewhat dated. Worse, in what purports to be a serious study emanating from a respected academic press, is the presence of passages purely fictitious. Thus as James IV introduced Margaret to Linlithgow Palace ‘he briefly told her the history of the building’ (p. 43). Later ‘her heart swelled with maternal pride as she observed (James V’s) vigorous efforts to suppress crime and restore law and order to his realm’ (p. 239). There are dozens of similar statements throughout this biography and while both of those cited may be true, there is absolutely no historical evidence to support them. The result, alas, is Harlequin History.

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