**The last letter of Mary Queen of Scots, 1587**

At 2 am on Wednesday 8 February 1587, Mary, Queen of Scots wrote what is believed to be her last letter. Her execution on the block at Fotheringhay Castle was a mere six hours away. It was written in French and is addressed to Henri III of France, brother of her first husband, Francois (Francis) II, who had died of an ear infection in 1560 at the age of 16.

The letter was in the archives of the Scots College in Paris until the French Revolution, when it passed into the hands of the Chevalier d`Hervilly, and subsequently became the property of Messieurs Feuillet de Conches and B Fillon. Eventually it became part of the celebrated collection of autographs formed by the great 19th-century collector Alfred Morrison.

In 1917 the last letter of Mary Queen of Scots was bought from Morrison’s widow by 26 subscribers and presented to the Scottish nation through the National Art Collections Fund in 1923. It was held by the Advocates Library until 1925, when it was presented to the National Library of Scotland on its foundation.

**English translation:**

Queen of Scotland   
8 Feb. 1587

Sire, my brother-in-law, having by God's will, for my sins I think, thrown myself into the power of the Queen my cousin, at whose hands I have suffered much for almost twenty years, I have finally been condemned to death by her and her Estates. I have asked for my papers, which they have taken away, in order that I might make my will, but I have been unable to recover anything of use to me, or even get leave either to make my will freely or to have my body conveyed after my death, as I would wish, to your kingdom where I had the honour to be queen, your sister and old ally.

Tonight, after dinner, I have been advised of my sentence: I am to be executed like a criminal at eight in the morning. I have not had time to give you a full account of everything that has happened, but if you will listen to my doctor and my other unfortunate servants, you will learn the truth, and how, thanks be to God, I scorn death and vow that I meet it innocent of any crime, even if I were their subject. The Catholic faith and the assertion of my God-given right to the English crown are the two issues on which I am condemned, and yet I am not allowed to say that it is for the Catholic religion that I die, but for fear of interference with theirs. The proof of this is that they have taken away my chaplain, and although he is in the building, I have not been able to get permission for him to come and hear my confession and give me the Last Sacrament, while they have been most insistent that I receive the consolation and instruction of their minister, brought here for that purpose. The bearer of this letter and his companions, most of them your subjects, will testify to my conduct at my last hour. It remains for me to beg Your Most Christian Majesty, my brother-in-law and old ally, who have always protested your love for me, to give proof now of your goodness on all these points: firstly by charity, in paying my unfortunate servants the wages due them - this is a burden on my conscience that only you can relieve: further, by having prayers offered to God for a queen who has borne the title Most Christian, and who dies a Catholic, stripped of all her possessions. As for my son, I commend him to you in so far as he deserves, for I cannot answer for him. I have taken the liberty of sending you two precious stones, talismans against illness, trusting that you will enjoy good health and a long and happy life. Accept them from your loving sister-in-law, who, as she dies, bears witness of her warm feeling for you. Again I commend my servants to you. Give instructions, if it please you, that for my soul's sake part of what you owe me should be paid, and that for the sake of Jesus Christ, to whom I shall pray for you tomorrow as I die, I be left enough to found a memorial mass and give the customary alms.

This Wednesday, two hours after midnight.   
Your very loving and most true sister,   Mary R

To the most Christian king, my brother-in-law and old ally