

# The Spider and the Stone



By Glen Craney

Reviewed by D. Andrew McChesney

When I was a child, my father sometimes told me a story about Scotland's Black Douglas. In essence, English mothers would admonish their children to eat their oatmeal, lest the Black Douglas get them. Supposedly, one time Douglas appeared, quickly stated he would not harm the child, but would be grateful for the oatmeal. Thus I was aware of this legendary historical figure, but not at all familiar with him. Having read Mr. Craney's "novel of Scotland's Black Douglas," I am much more aware of him and events during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries in that part of the world.

In many ways, this book is a pseudo-biography of James Douglas. It details his early confrontations with England's King Edward I, also known as Longshanks, his possible unrequited love for Isabelle MacDuff, his sometimes rocky friendship with Robert the Bruce, and his life as a cross border raider. The story also might be a micro history of England, Scotland, France, and the Roman Catholic Church at that time. Most importantly it is an exciting and gripping story about a fight for freedom and the dedication of two people for one another.

This book also details a society and class system that was much different than exists in that part of the world today. Life in general was much harsher, with cruelty being the usual thing. Those in charge or command had much greater power and often did not separate personal ambition from regional or national interests. Also included are the Knights Templar, the Culdee Church, and a foretelling of the United States of America.

I found it to be an entertaining, interesting and engrossing book to read, and I am looking forward to reading more of Mr. Craney's works.