

and at the same time the harmless Huguenots are set before us in the light of peaceable citizens, only desirous of permission to practise the religion which they professed—innocent victims involved in sudden ruin by the fell, persecuting spirit and treacherous intolerance of Rome. And yet why should we complain of Voltaire, or Froude, or Dean Stanley, or the many other apostles of the Protestant tradition of England, when we find Lord Acton, and writers of his school, who, though professing the Catholic faith, yet seek to give the stamp of history to such calumnies, and to fan the flame of popular fanaticism against the Holy See, by accusing it of guilty complicity in this dreadful massacre?

You will not expect, however, that in this short paper I would analyse, much less refute in detail, all the calumnies that have been uttered, and the misstatements that have been made on the subject of this St. Bartholomew's bloody festival. The task which I assume is a much simpler one—to present a brief but truthful narrative of the leading facts connected with that terrible day, and in doing so I will endeavor to arrange my remarks under the three following heads:—

First—The principal events connected with the massacre.

Second—The causes of that widespread discontent which prompted so many persons throughout France to deeds of violence against the Huguenots.

Third—In fine, a few of the chief questions which have arisen regarding this festival of St. Bartholomew.

I.

During the first months of the year 1572 the policy of the French King and Court was wholly favorable to the Huguenots. The leaders of the party were summoned to the capital: many of the highest offices of State were entrusted to them, and every civil or religious privilege that they contended for was readily accorded them. In a most special manner dignities and honors were conferred on the Admiral Coligny, who was their ablest champion as well in council as in the field; and, to crown all, the King, Charles IX., offered his sister in marriage to the young Prince Henry of Navarre, on whom the Huguenots had now centred all their hopes of securing for themselves one day the great prize of the diadem of France. This marriage, being contrary to the disciplinary laws of the Catholic Church, met with a stern and uncompromising opposition from the Holy See. Charles, however, persisted in his design, and in defiance of the most solemn repeated prohibitions, the marriage was celebrated in Paris with extraordinary pomp on August 18, 1572.*

Walsingham was at this time English Ambassador at the French Court. In his dispatches he gives free expression to the feelings of delight with which he witnessed this happy course of events, so favorable to the Huguenots, who were the open friends and secret allies of England. He does not, however, merely record the favors and privileges accorded to his friends; he further attests that the King, being solely intent on enjoying the silly amusements of the Court, was wholly guided by the counsels of Coligny; and he even ventures to express a hope that ere long they would witness "the King's revolt from Papistry."†

Catherine de Medici, the Queen Mother, was not one who would acquiesce without a struggle in the paramount influence thus acquired by the Huguenot leaders. She had long been their friend and patron, but now that they would seek to undermine her power, and set aside her authority, she became at once their most determined and most unscrupulous enemy.‡ Charles

* White, *Massacre of St. Bartholomew*, page 358.

† See extracts from these dispatches in Sir James Mackintosh's *History of England*, iii., 220.

‡ The policy pursued by Catherine whilst Queen Regent of France, during the minority of Charles, is thus faithfully described by Hume:—"She had formed a plan of administration more subtle than judicious, and balancing the Catholics with the Huguenots, the Duke of Guise with the Prince of Conde, she endeavored to render herself necessary to both, and to establish her own dominion on their constrained obedience."—*History of England*, chapter xxxviii.

IX., her son, being only in his tenth year on his accession to the throne of France, in 1560, Catherine, with the approval of the Council of State, assumed the authority, though without the title, of Regent; and even after the King had attained his majority, she continued with supreme and undisputed power to rule the kingdom. The Guises were at first her only rivals, and as they were the recognised leaders of the Catholic Party, it became to her a matter of supreme political interest to foster the restless followers of the reformed tenets; and though she publicly avowed her resolve to administer justice with even balance to all the contending parties, she never failed, when an opportunity presented itself, to throw her protecting mantle over the Huguenots, and to sustain them by all the influence which she could command. Catherine, from her childhood, had imbibed the notorious principles of Machiavellian policy, which then held sway in the Court of Florence, and these were her only guide in the government of France. It will, therefore, not surprise us to learn that for a time the project was seriously entertained by her of adopting the reformed tenets as the national religion,* for thus it was hoped that the Catholic Party would be inexorably crushed, and that Protestant alliances would be secured for France against the growing power and encroachments of Spain.† Catherine, moreover, allowed sermons to be preached by the Huguenot ministers in the halls of the palace, and she took care that the young King would sometimes assist at these instructions.‡ Her daughter, Margaret of Valois, does not hesitate to write in her *Memoirs* that the whole Court was "infected with heresy," and that her brother, the Duke of Anjou, "had not escaped the unhappy influence, for he often used to throw her prayer-book into the fire, and give her Huguenot hymns instead."§ Many French writers are of opinion that Catherine herself "was affected with the venom of Calvinism,"** but Mr. White, after a profound investigation as to her character and government, concludes that she had but little of any religion, and that she believed "more in witchcraft and astrology than in God."†† The Spanish Ambassador, writing to his Court, in 1570, says that in Catherine's Royal Council of State "five out of the eight members were atheists or Huguenots."‡‡ The King himself was weak and vacillating, and wholly intent on the pursuits of pleasure. He was, moreover, impulsive in his anger; and a writer whom none will accuse of partiality to the Catholic cause does not hesitate to style him "a furious madman."§§

Now, however, that the growing influence of Coligny awakened suspicions and alarm in the mind of Catherine, and made her fear lest she would lose her hold of the royal power, she vowed the destruction of

* Capefigue, *Histoire de France*, tom. iii., chapters 38 and 41.

† Charles IX. hated Spain. In his confidential correspondence with Noailles, May 11, 1572, we read: "All my thoughts are bent on opposing the grandeur of Spain, and seeing how I can most dexterously do it."

‡ Letter of the Nunzio Santa-Croce, November 15, 1561, inserted in *Actes Eccles. civiles et Synodales*, tom. i. The famous Calvinist, Duplessis-Mornay, says of some of his brother ministers that *se faisoient faire la presche en la chambre de la royne mere du roy pendant son dîner, estant aydés à ce faire par ces femmes de chambre, qui estoient secretement de la religion.*—Cantù, *Storia Universale*, vol. viii., page 412. "Elle leur donne à entendre qu'elle veut faire instruire le roi son fils en leur religion."—*Discours Merveilleux*, page xxi.

§ *Memoires de Marguerite de Valois*, page 27, seq.

** *Laboureur*, vol. i., page 167.

†† White, *Massacre*, page 167. Ranke writes that Catherine "adopted the policy of the Huguenots because she had hopes that by their aid her youngest son, the Duke of Alençon, would mount the throne of England."—*Hist. de la Papauté*, iii., 83.

‡‡ *Simanca's Archives*.—Bouille, ii., page 454.

§§ *History of the United Netherlands*, by John Lothrop Motley (London, 1867), vol. i., page 43.