CHAPTER VII.

FRANCIS II., CHARLES IX., HENRY III., AND HENRY IV

THE history of France, from the death of Francis I. to the accession of Henry IV. is virtually the history of religious contentions and persecutions, and of those civil wars which grew out of them. The Huguenotic contest, then, is a great historical subject, and will be presented in connection with the history of France, until the death of Henry IV., the greatest of the French monarchs, and long the illustrious head of the Protestant party.

The reform doctrines first began to spread in France during the reign of Francis I. As early as 1523, he became a persecutor, and burned many at the stake, among whom the descendants of the Waldenses were the most numerous. In 1540, sentence was pronounced against them by the parliament of Aix. Their doctrines were the same in substance as those of the Swiss reformers.

While this persecution was raging, John Calvin fled from France to Ferrara, from which city he proceeded to Geneva. This was in the year 1536, when his theological career commenced by the publication of his Institutes, which were dedicated to Francis I., one of the most masterly theological works ever written, although compended from the writings of Augustine. The Institutes of Calvin, the great text-book of the Swiss and French reformers, were distasteful to the French king, and he gave fresh order for the persecution of the Protestants. Notwithstanding the hostility of Francis, the new doctrines spread, and were embraced by some of the most distinguished of the French nobility. The violence of persecution was not much arrested during the reign of Henry II., and, through the influence of the Cardinal of Lorraine, the inquisition was established in the kingdom.

The wife of Henry II. was the celebrated Catharine de Medicis; and she was bitterly opposed to the reform doctrines, and incited her husband to the most cruel atrocities. Francis II. continued the persecution, and his mother, Catharine, became virtually the ruler of the nation

The power of the queen mother was much increased when Francis II. died, and when his brother, Charles IX., a boy of nine years of age, succeeded to the French crown. She exercised her power by the most unsparing religious persecution recorded in the history of modern Europe. There had been some hope that Protestantism would be established in France; but it did not succeed, owing to the violence of the persecution. It made, however, a desperate struggle before it was overcome.

At the head of the Catholic party were the queen regent, the Cardinal of Lorraine, the Duke of Guise, his brother, and the Constable Montmorency. They had the support of the priesthood, of the Spaniards, and a great majority of the nation.

The Protestants were headed by the King of Navarre, father of Henry IV., the Prince of Condé, his brother, and Admiral Coligny; and they had the sympathy of the university, the parliaments, and the Protestants of Germany and England.

Between these parties a struggle lasted for forty years, with various success. Persecution provoked resistance, but resistance did not lead to liberty. Civil war in France did not secure the object sought. Still the Protestants had hope, and, as they could always assemble a large army, they maintained their ground. Their conduct was not marked by the religious earnestness which characterized the Puritans, or by the same strength of religious principle. Moreover, political motives were mingled with religious. The contest was a struggle for the ascendency of rival chiefs, as well as for the establishment of reformed doctrines. The Bourbons hated the Guises, and the Guises resolved to destroy the Bourbons. In the course of their rivalry and warfare, the Duke of Guise was assassinated, and the King of Navarre, as well as the Prince of Condé, were killed.

Charles IX. was fourteen years of age when the young king of Navarre,—at that time sixteen years of age,—and his cousin, the Prince of Condé, became the acknowledged heads of the Protestant party. Their education was learned in the camp and the field of battle.

Charles IX., under the influence of his hateful mother, finding that civil war only destroyed the resources of the country, without weakening the Protestants, made peace, but formed a plan for

their extermination by treachery. In order to cover his designs he gave his sister, Margaret de Valois, in marriage to the King of Navarre, first prince of the blood, then nineteen years of age. Admiral Coligny was invited to Paris, and treated with distinguished courtesy.

It was during the festivities which succeeded the marriage of the King of Navarre that Coligny was murdered, and the signal for the horrid slaughter of St. Bartholomew was given. At midnight, August 23, 1572, the great bell at the Hotel de Ville began to toll; torches were placed in the windows, chains were drawn across the streets, and armed bodies collected around the hotels. The doors of the houses were broken open, and neither age, condition, nor sex was spared, of such as were not distinguished by a white cross in the hat. The massacre at Paris was followed by one equally brutal in the provinces. Seventy thousand people were slain in cold blood. The King of Navarre and the Prince of Condé only escaped in consequence of their relationship with the king, and by renouncing the Protestant religion.

Most of the European courts expressed their detestation of this foulest crime in the history of religious bigotry; but the pope went in grand procession to his cathedral, and ordered a *Te Deum* to be sung in commemoration of an event which steeped his cause in infamy to the end of time.

The Protestants, though nearly exterminated, again rallied, and the King of Navarre and his cousin the Prince of Condé escaped, renounced the religion which had been forced on them by fear of death, and prosecuted a bloody civil war, with the firm resolution of never abandoning it until religious liberty was guarantied.

Meanwhile, Charles IX. died, as it was supposed, by poison. His last hours were wretched, and his remorse for the massacre of St. Bartholomew filled his soul with agony. He beheld spectres, and dreamed horrid dreams; his imagination constantly saw heaps of livid bodies, and his ears were assailed with imaginary groans. He became melancholy and ferocious, while his kingdom became the prey of factions and insurrections. But he was a timid and irresolute king, and was but the tool of his infamous mother, the grand patroness of assassins, against whom, on his death bed, he cautioned the king of Navarre.

He was succeeded by his brother, the King of Poland, under the title of Henry III. The persecutions of the Huguenots were renewed, and the old scenes of treachery, assassination, and war were acted over again. The cause of religion was lost sight of in the labyrinth of contentions, jealousies, and plots. Intrigues and factions were endless. Nearly all the leaders, on both sides, perished by the sword or the dagger. The Prince of Condé, the Duke of Guise, and his brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine, were assassinated. Shortly after, died the chief mover of all the troubles, Catharine de Medicis, a woman of talents and persuasive eloquence, but of most unprincipled ambition, perfidious, cruel, and dissolute. She encouraged the licentiousness of the court, and even the worst vices of her sons, that she might make them subservient to her designs. All her passions were subordinate to her calculations of policy, and every womanly virtue was suppressed by the desire of wielding a government which she usurped.

Henry III. soon followed her to the grave, being, in turn, assassinated by a religious fanatic. His death (1589) secured the throne to the king of Navarre, who took the title of Henry IV.

Henry IV., the first of the Bourbon line, was descended from Robert, the sixth son of St. Louis, who had married the daughter and heiress of John of Burgundy and Agnes of Bourbon. He was thirty-six years of age when he became king, and had passed through great experiences and many sorrows. Thus far he had contended for Protestant opinions, and was the acknowledged leader of the Protestant party in France. But a life of contention and bloodshed, and the new career opened to him as king of France, cooled his religious ardor, and he did not hesitate to accept the condition which the French nobles imposed, before they would take the oaths of allegiance. This was, that he should abjure Protestantism. "My kingdom," said he, "is well worth a mass." It will be ever laid to his reproach, by the Protestants, that he renounced his religion for worldly elevation. Nor is it easy to exculpate him on the highest principles of moral integrity. But there were many palliations for his conduct, which it is not now easy to appreciate. It is well known that the illustrious Sully, his prime minister, and, through life, a zealous Protestant, approved of his course. It was certainly clear that, without becoming a

Catholic, he never could peaceably enjoy his crown, and France would be rent, for another generation, by those civil wars which none lamented more than Henry himself. Besides, four fifths of the population were Catholics, and the Protestants could not reasonably expect to gain the ascendency. All they could expect was religious toleration, and this Henry was willing to grant. It should also be considered that the king, though he professed the reform doctrines, was never what may be called a religious man, being devoted to pleasure, and to schemes of ambition. It is true he understood and consulted the interests of his kingdom, and strove to make his subjects happy. Herein consists his excellence. As a magnanimous, liberal-minded, and enterprising man he surpassed all the French kings. But it is ridiculous to call him a religious man, or even strongly fixed in his religious opinions. "Do you," said the king to a great Protestant divine, "believe that a man may be saved by the Catholic religion?" "Undoubtedly," replied the clergyman, "if his life and heart be holy." "Then," said the king, "prudence dictates that I embrace the Catholic religion, and not yours; for, in that case, according to both Catholics and Protestants, I may be saved; but, if I embrace your religion, I shall not be saved, according to the Catholics."

But the king's conversion to Catholicism did not immediately result in the tranquillity of the distracted country. The Catholics would not believe in his sincerity, and many battles had to be fought before he was in peaceable enjoyment of his throne. But there is nothing so hateful as civil war, especially to the inhabitants of great cities; and Paris, at last, and the chief places in the kingdom, acknowledged his sway. The king of Spain, the great Catholic prelates, and the pope, finally perceived how hopeless was the struggle against a man of great military experience, with a devoted army and an enthusiastic capital on his side.

The peace of Verviens, in 1598, left the king without foreign or domestic enemies. From that period to his death, his life was devoted to the welfare of his country.

His first act was the celebrated Edict of Nantes, by which the Huguenots had quiet and undisturbed residence, the free exercise of their religion, and public worship, except in the court, the army, and within five leagues of Paris. They were eligible to all

offices, civil and military; and all public prosecutions, on account of religion, were dropped. This edict also promulgated a general amnesty for political offences, and restored property and titles, as before the war; but the Protestants were prohibited from printing controversial books, and were compelled to pay tithes to the established clergy.

Henry IV., considering the obstacles with which he had to contend, was the greatest general of the age; but it is his efforts in civilization which entitle him to his epithet of *Great*.

The first thing which demanded his attention, as a civil ruler, was the settlement of the finances — ever the leading cause of troubles with the French government. These were intrusted to the care of Rosny, afterward Duke of Sully, the most able and upright of all French financiers — a man of remarkable probity and elevation of sentiment. He ever continued to be the minister and the confidant of the king, and maintained his position without subserviency or flattery, almost the only man on the records of history who could tell, with impunity, wholesome truths to an absolute monarch. So wise were his financial arrangements, that a debt of three hundred million of livres was paid off in eight years. In five years, the taxes were reduced one half, the crown lands redeemed, the arsenals stored, the fortifications rebuilt, churches erected, canals dug, and improvements made in every part of the kingdom. On the death of the king, he had in his treasury nearly fifty millions of livres. Under the direction of this able minister, the laws were enforced, robbery and vagrancy were nearly stopped, and agriculture received a great impulse. But economy was the order of the day. The king himself set an illustrious example, and even dressed in gray cloth, with a doublet of taffeta, without embroidery, dispensed with all superfluity at his table, and dismissed all useless servants.

The management and economy of the king enabled him to make great improvements, besides settling the deranged finances of the kingdom. He built innumerable churches, bridges, convents, hospitals, fortresses, and ships. Some of the finest palaces which adorn Paris were erected by him. He was also the patron of learning, the benefits of which he appreciated. He himself was well acquainted with the writings of the ancients. He was

particularly fond of the society of the learned, with whom he conversed with freedom and affability. He increased the libraries opened public schools, and invited distinguished foreigners to Paris, and rewarded them with stipends. Lipsius, Scaliger, and De Thou, were the ornaments of his court.

And his tender regard to the happiness and welfare of his subjects was as marked as his generous appreciation of literature and science. It was his ambition to be the father of his people; and his memorable saying, "Yes, I will so manage matters that the poorest peasant in my kingdom may eat meat each day in the week, and, moreover, be enabled to put a fowl in the pot on a Sunday," has alone embalmed his memory in the affections of the French nation, who, of all their monarchs, are most partial to Henry IV.

But this excellent king was also a philanthropist, and cherished the most enlightened views as to those subjects on which rests the happiness of nations. Though a warrior, the preservation of a lasting peace was the great idea of his life. He was even visionary in his projects to do good; for he imagined it was possible to convince monarchs that they ought to prefer purity, peace, and benevolence, to ambition and war. Hence, he proposed to establish a Congress of Nations, chosen from the various states of Europe, to whom all international difficulties should be referred, with power to settle them — a very desirable object, the most so conceivable; for war is the greatest of all national calamities and crimes. The scheme of the enlightened Henry, however, did not attract much attention; and, even had it been encouraged, would have been set aside in the next generation. What would such men as Frederic the Great, or Marlborough, or Louis XIV., or Napoleon have cared for such an object? But Henry, in his scheme, also had in view the regulation of such forces as the European monarchs should sustain, and this arose from his desire to preserve the "Balance of Power" — the great object of European politicians in these latter times.

But Henry was not permitted, by Providence, to prosecute his benevolent designs. He was assassinated by a man whom he had never injured — by the most unscrupulous of all misguided men — a religious bigot. The Jesuit Ravaillac, in a mood, as it is to be

hoped, bordering on madness, perpetrated the foul deed. But Henry only suffered the fate of nearly all the distinguished actors in those civil and religious contentions which desolated France for forty years. He died in 1610, at the age of fifty-seven, having reigned twenty-one years, nine of which were spent in uninterrupted warfare.

By his death the kingdom was thrown into deep and undissembled mourning. Many fell speechless in the streets when the intelligence of his assassination was known; others died from excess of grief. All felt that they had lost more than a father, and nothing was anticipated but storms and commotions.

He left no children by his wife, Margaret de Valois, who proved inconstant, and from whom he was separated. By his second wife, Mary de Medicis, he had three children, the oldest of whom was a child when he ascended the throne, by the title of Louis XIII. His daughter, Henrietta, married Charles I. of England.

Though great advances were made in France during this reign, it was still far from that state of civilization which it attained a century afterwards. It contained about fifteen million of inhabitants, and Paris about one hundred and fifty thousand. The nobles were numerous and powerful, and engrossed the wealth of the nation. The people were not exactly slaves, but were reduced to great dependence were uneducated, degraded, and enjoyed but few political or social privileges. They were oppressed by the government, by the nobles, and by the clergy.

The highest official dignitary was the constable, the second the keeper of the seals, the third the chamberlain, then the six or eight marshals, then the secretary of state, then gentlemen of the household, and military commanders. The king was nearly absolute. The parliament was a judicial tribunal, which did not enact laws, but which registered the edicts of the king.

Commerce and manufactures were extremely limited, and far from flourishing; and the arts were in an infant state. Architecture, the only art in which half-civilized nations have excelled, was the most advanced, and was displayed in the churches and royal palaces. Paris was crowded with uncomfortable houses, and the narrow streets were favorable to tumult as well as pestilence. Tapestry was the most common, and the most expensive of the

arts, and the hangings, in a single room, often reached a sum which would be equal, in these times, to one hundred thousand dollars. The floors of the palaces were spread with Turkey carpets. Chairs were used only in kings' palaces, and carriages were but just introduced, and were clumsy and awkward. Mules were chiefly used in travelling, the horses being reserved for war. Dress, especially of females, was gorgeous and extravagant; false hair, masks, trailed petticoats, and cork heels ten inches high, were some of the peculiarities. The French then, as now, were fond of the pleasures of the table, and the hour for dinner was eleven o'clock. Morals were extremely low, and gaming was a universal passion, in which Henry IV. himself extravagantly indulged. The advice of Catharine de Medicis to her son Charles IX. showed her knowledge of the French character, even as it exists now: "Twice a week give public assemblies, for the specific secret of the French government is, to keep the people always cheerful; for they are so restless you must occupy them during peace, either with business or amusement, or else they will involve you in trouble."

Such was France, at the death of Henry IV., 1610, one of the largest and most powerful of the European kingdoms, though far from the greatness it was destined afterwards to attain.

A more powerful monarchy, at this period, was Spain. As this kingdom was then in the zenith of its power and glory, we will take a brief survey of it during the reign of Philip II., the successor of Charles V., a person to whom we have often referred. With his reign are closely connected the struggles of the Hollanders to secure their civil and religious independence. The Low Countries were provinces of Spain, and therefore to be considered in connection with Spanish history.

REFERENCES. — For a knowledge of France during the reign of Henry IV., see James's History of Henry IV.; James's Life of Condé; History of the Huguenots. Rankin's and Crowe's Histories of France are the best in English, but far inferior to Sismondi's, Millot's, and Lacretelle's. Sully's Memoirs throw considerable light on this period, and Dumas's Margaret de Valois may be read with profit.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHILIP II. AND THE AUSTRIAN PRINCES OF SPAIN.

SPAIN cannot be said to have been a powerful state until the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella; when the crowns of Castile and Arragon were united, and when the discoveries of Columbus added a new world to their extensive territories. Nor, during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, was the power of the crown as absolute as during the sway of the Austrian princes. The nobles were animated by a bold and free spirit, and the clergy dared to resist the encroachments of royalty, and even the usurpations of Rome. Charles V. succeeded in suppressing the power of the nobles, and all insurrections of the people, and laid the foundation for the power of his gloomy son, Philip II. With Philip commenced the grandeur of the Spanish monarchy. By him, also, were sown the seeds of its subsequent decay. Under him, the inquisition was disgraced by ten thousand enormities, Holland was overrun by the Duke of Alva, and America conquered by Cortes and Pizarro. It was he who built the gorgeous palaces of Spain, and who, with his Invincible Armada, meditated the conquest of England. The wealth of the Indies flowed into the royal treasury, and also enriched all orders and classes. Silver and gold became as plenty at Madrid as in old times at Jerusalem under the reign of Solomon. But Philip was a different prince from Solomon. His talents and attainments were respectable, but he had a jealous and selfish disposition, and exerted all the energies of his mind, and all the resources of his kingdom, to crush the Protestant religion and the liberties of Europe.

Among the first acts of his reign was the effort to extinguish Protestantism in the Netherlands, an assemblage of seigniories, under various titles, subject to his authority. The opinions of Luther and Calvin made great progress in this country, and Philip, in order to repress them, created new bishops, and established the Inquisition. The people protested, and these protests were considered as rebellious.