SECTION X

We judge not; we only relate. — DARGAUD.

PERIOD OF THE CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS WARS (1559–1610)

FRANCIS II,[1] 1559–1560. HENRY III,[1] 1574–1589.
CHARLES IX,[1] 1560–1574. HENRY IV,[2] 1589–1610.

108. Accession of Francis II; Power of the Guises. — The death of Henry II was a serious misfortune to France, since it left the realm without a competent head. Francis II, who succeeded to the crown, was but a boy of fifteen, and in feeble health. The situation was critical. The country was divided between two mutually hostile religious parties both eager for power. The greater part belonged to the old Church, but a strong minority, including many influential men, were Calvinists.

The young king gladly left the management of state affairs to his wife's two ambitious uncles, the Duke of Guise, who had just distinguished himself by taking Calais, and his brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine, both of whom were ardent and extreme Catholics. The queen,[3] young, gay, and frivolous, asked nothing more of her uncles than that they should furnish her plenty of money for her pleasures. Thus the Guises became virtually masters of the kingdom.

109. The Bourbons and Montmorencies. — Their monopoly of power excited distrust and hatred. All their movements

[1] House of Valois. [2] House of Bourbon.
[3] On the marriage of Francis II, see Paragraph 106.

were jealously watched by the Bourbon family, whose leaders were Antoine, King of Navarre,[1] and his brother, Prince de Condé.[2] They had espoused the Calvinist[3] or Huguenot cause, as it now began to be called,[4] but rather, it would seem, from motives of policy than from any deep religious convictions. The Bourbons were the descendants of St. Louis,[5] and the next heirs to the French crown in case the young king and his brothers died without leaving a successor. But the shadow of the treason of the Duke of Bourbon in the reign of Francis I.[6] rested on the family, and neither Antoine nor Condé dared to openly demand a part in the government.

The Bourbons were by no means alone in their hatred of the Guises. The Montmorencies, with many other old families among the moderate Catholics, shared this feeling. They saw with secret indignation that a little band of foreigners — a Scotch queen,[7] an Italian queen mother,[8] and the Guises of

[1] King of Navarre: a title derived from his marriage with Jeanne d'Albret (dăl-brā'), queen, in her own right, of the petty kingdom of Navarre on the borders of the Pyrenees. [2] Condé (kŏn-dā'). [3] See Paragraph 103.

[4] Huguenots: a word of uncertain origin, at one time supposed to be derived from the German-Swiss *Eidgenossen* or "oath-comrades." It was used in France as a nickname or term of reproach.

[5] Genealogical table showing the origin of the Bourbon family and their claim to the crown.

Louis IX (St. Louis)
(1226–1270)

Philip III (1270–1285), from whom descended the three brothers, Francis II (1559–1560), Charles IX (1560–1574), Henry III (1574–1589).

Robert, Count of Clermont, sixth son of St. Louis. He married Beatrice de Bourbon (1272). By her he had a son Louis, Duke of Bourbon. Antoine de Bourbon (king of Navarre) and his brother, Prince de Condé, were descendants. In case Francis II and his brothers died without leaving male issue, Antoine and Condé were the next legal heirs to the crown of France. Antoine's son Henry became king (Henry IV) in 1589, thus establishing the house of Bourbon.

[6] See Paragraph 100.
[7] Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. [8] Catherine de' Medici.

Lorraine [1] — now ruled France, while they, the representatives of the old native nobility, were utterly excluded. For this reason they were ready to side for the time with the Bourbons, even though the latter were Protestants, — or pretended to be, — in order that by their combined effort they might drag the obnoxious Guises from power.

110. Coligny and the Huguenot Party. — Meanwhile, the real leader of the Huguenots was Admiral Coligny,[2] who believed in the Reformation with all his "heart, soul, and strength." He was one of the truest and bravest men of the age, and he was convinced that if extreme partisans like the Guises were to hold supreme sway, then nothing but the most decided measures could save the Protestants from a war of persecution that might easily become one of extermination.

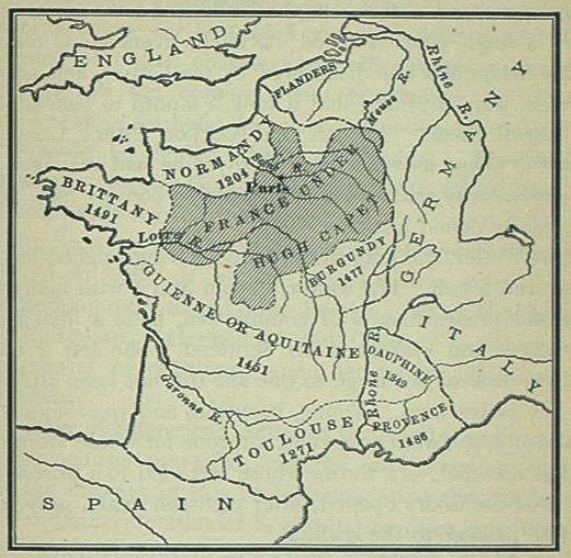
He had the entire support not only of the sincere Calvinists, who were ready to give their lives for their religion, but he was also favored by an influential body of the lesser nobility and gentry who were on the lookout for spoils.

In Germany not a few princes had found it to their political advantage to turn Protestants. In England, Henry VIII, when he declared himself independent of the pope, had seized hundreds of rich estates belonging to the monasteries, and had divided them among his favorites.[3] So in France there were needy and avaricious families eager to see the old Church broken up, that they might get their share of its possessions. Every great movement is sure to draw to itself a certain proportion of such followers; and so long as Protestantism held out the hope or possibility of being a highly profitable faith, these unworthy adherents were ready to fight its battles.

It was evident that the two great religious parties would not continue to remain quiet. Persecution on the one side,

[1] Lorraine, Germany, part of which — *e.g.*, Verdun, Toul, and Metz — had only recently been conquered by the late Henry II. [2] Coligny (ko-leen'ye).
[3] See The Leading Facts of English History in this series.

resistance on the other, mingled with the political animosity of both, were preparing the way for an explosion. Those who wished well to their country saw with terror that civil war was at hand. Even so moderate a man as Montaigne, who sided with neither party, did not hesitate to say later that France would



Map showing the Growth of France from the Close of the Tenth Century to the Close of the Fifteenth

The shaded portion shows the part of France directly ruled by Hugh Capet. The dates mark the time when the great provinces or dukedoms — *e.g.*, Aquitaine, etc. — became possessions of the crown.

never enjoy any real peace until either the Duke of Guise or the chief of the Huguenot party was got rid of.

111. The Conspiracy of Amboise; Return of Mary to Scotland. — But before coming to open conflict those who were opposed to the Guises and the court, embracing a large number of Huguenots, resolved to make an effort to get Francis

into their own hands. If successful, they could dictate such changes as they thought best. Their plot was to surprise the court then at the castle of Amboise,[1] seize the king and queen, and kill or otherwise dispose of those who had the control of the government. Calvin, who had received some intimation of the proposed action, emphatically condemned it, saying that if a single drop of blood was shed, rivers would follow.

The conspiracy was discovered by the Guises, and so many prisoners were captured that it took a month to behead, hang, and drown them. Though the Bourbon Prince Condé was really the prime mover in the plot, yet he had managed matters so shrewdly that it was impossible to convict him, and he successfully defied justice.

Shortly after, the king died (1560), having reigned less than a year and a half. His widow, Queen Mary, with many bitter tears and presentiments of coming evil, bade a final farewell to France, and embarked for Scotland. She left a country that was dear to her to go to one she did not love, although it was her native land. Young, beautiful, and passionately fond of pleasure, she went to ascend a throne for whose stern duties she was unequal, — a throne whose steps led to a prison, and a prison whose doors opened, after eighteen years, only to give her free passage to the scaffold.[2]

112. Regency of Catherine de' Medici; Conciliation of Parties; L'Hôpital's Advice. — As the late king left no children, his brother Charles now became heir to the crown. But as this prince was not yet eleven, and therefore would not be legally of age for three years,[3] his mother, the crafty Catherine de' Medici, became his and his brothers' guardian and the real ruler of France.

1 Amboise (ŏn-bwäz′): on the Loire, near Tours.

2 See The Leading Facts of English History in this series; and see, too, Noel Paton's striking portrait of the unfortunate Mary, in John Skelton's Essays.

3 In France at this period the heir to the throne became of age at fourteen. See Larousse's Dictionnaire Universel, "Majorité."

She began by conciliating all parties. Had she adhered firmly to that wise policy, she might perhaps have saved the country. But her object was to gratify her own inordinate ambition. Human life never had any value in her eyes, and if she sought peace, it was to gain time that her own power might become effectually established.

Catherine chose for her chief counselor Michel de l'Hôpital,[1] a man of heroic character, as able as he was upright. He clearly saw the coming crisis, but hoped to avert it. Though a zealous Catholic, he could not endure that the Protestants should be denied liberty of worship. Blameless in soul himself, fearing God, and loving his fellow-men, he pleaded earnestly for religious toleration.

"What need is there," he demanded of the Guises, "of flames and torture? If we are armed with a good life, we require nothing more to put down heresy. Let us banish these words, 'Lutheran,' 'Huguenot,' and 'Papist,' — names only of parties and of seditions, — and let us all cling to that of 'Christian.'"

113. Edict of Toleration; Action of the Jesuits. — For a time this noble counsel prevailed, and the government no longer cut out the tongues of the Protestants, "that they might not protest." Catherine allowed L'Hôpital to issue an edict permitting the Huguenots to hold their meetings unmolested in the country districts, though forbidding them to assemble in the walled towns, where party feeling ran high, and bloodshed would probably ensue if such liberty were granted.

Furthermore, all laws against heresy were now suspended; on the other hand, the Huguenots were prohibited from interfering in any way with the Catholic worship, as they not infrequently did in those parts of France where they were strongest.

But unfortunately the times were not favorable to these liberal measures. To check the spread of the Reformation,

1 Michel de l'Hôpital (mē-shăl′ dẹh lō-pe-tăl′).

the society of Jesuits or soldiers of Christ had been organized. Their zeal to maintain the Catholic Church in its integrity was quite equal to that of Luther or Calvin in behalf of Protestantism. They believed it their duty to refuse all compromise with dissenters and heretics. Whatever influence they could bring to bear on the government was therefore hostile to toleration.

The Jesuits did not stand alone. The great body of monks felt that the success of Protestantism would probably result in the same wholesale confiscation of monastic property that had taken place in England. They therefore naturally opposed any policy which seemed to favor the reformers. With them sided many able but narrow-minded theologians of the college of the Sorbonne. These last now secretly begged the assistance of Philip II of Spain.

That gloomy despot, who so hated Protestantism that he cast his own son into prison as a heretic, and kept him there till he died, did not need to be invited twice to lend his aid. He remonstrated with Catherine against her policy of toleration toward the Huguenots, and finally threatened to send an army into France to put down the "rebels," as he called them, if she persisted in granting them religious liberty. To add to the precarious condition of the Protestants, Antoine de Bourbon now deserted them, in the hope that he would thus secure the political favor of Philip.[1]

With respect to the country at large, it may be said that the Catholic clergy generally were opposed to toleration; that the Tiers État,[2] or body of the people, favored it; and that the nobility were divided.

114. Massacre at Vassy; Beginning of the Civil War (1562). — It was at this juncture, while Catherine was debating

1 The Catholics persuaded Antoine that if he joined them, Philip II of Spain would give him Sardinia as an offset for the loss of that portion of the kingdom of Navarre which Spain had seized.

2 See Paragraph 94.

whether to sustain L'Hôpital or not, that the civil war, so long impending, finally broke out.

On a Sunday morning in the spring of 1562, the Duke of Guise, while on his way to the province of Champagne, in eastern France, stopped at the village church of Vassy[1] to attend divine service. It happened that not far off stood a barn where several hundred Huguenots were holding a religious meeting, and their singing could be distinctly heard in the church.

Some of the duke's people considered this an insult to their master's doctrine, and entering the barn, sword in hand, they commanded the Protestants to be quiet. The latter paid no heed to the command, and the enraged soldiers now rushed upon them. The Protestants, who were unarmed, defended themselves with stones and other missiles. Hearing the tumult, the duke ran in to put a stop to it, and was accidentally struck in the face with a stone. Then his infuriated followers, in spite of the duke's efforts to check them, began an indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, and children, killing sixty and wounding over two hundred more.

The flames of political and religious hatred, so long repressed, now burst forth; and with brief intervals of truce, France, for the next thirty years, was drenched in the blood of its own people. It was a division of families as well as of parties, and father fought against son, and son against father.

If the extreme Catholics were eager for battle, many of the Huguenots were not a whit behind. "I speak," said the Calvinist Beza, "for a faith better skilled in suffering than in revenging wrong; but remember, sire," said he to Antoine de Bourbon after the latter's desertion of the Protestant cause, "that our religion is an anvil which has worn out many hammers."

115. Condition of the Two Parties. — The Huguenots had the advantage of two such able leaders as Coligny and Condé.

1 Vassy (väs-se′): near the source of the Seine, a little southeast of Paris.

They declared the latter Protector of the Realm and Defender of the King. In a short time they had possessed themselves of over two hundred cities and towns, including such important places as Rouen, Lyon, Tours, and Orléans.[1]

On their side, the Catholics held Paris, and had the king and the power of organized government to back them, with Philip II of Spain as an ally, who sent three thousand veteran troops to fight in their behalf.

As an offset to this help from Spain Queen Elizabeth of England promised Condé an equal force to defend Rouen. She, however, prudently stipulated for ample security for the expense of the expedition, preferring not to fight even for the support of the Protestant cause unless the Protestants would pay the bills.

116. Progress of the War in the South; Huguenots versus Catholics. — In the south of France the war was carried on by roving bands of desperadoes rather than by regularly organized armies. Both sides committed frightful atrocities. Many of the Huguenot rank and file, not content with slaying their enemies, destroyed convents, devastated cathedrals, and broke open tombs. At Orléans Condé saw one of his men hacking and mutilating a statue in the Church of the Holy Cross. Seizing a gun he aimed it at him, threatening to fire if he did not instantly stop. "General," cried the man, "just wait a bit till I've finished knocking this idol to pieces, and then kill me if you like."

On the other hand, a Catholic officer who got the nickname of the "Royalist Butcher," was accustomed to put his prisoners to death by hanging and all sorts of tortures. It was said that it was easy to tell what route he had taken, from the number of corpses he invariably left suspended from the trees along the way. These dead bodies, he jocularly said, were the fruits

[1] In all of these places the Huguenots had sympathizers, and in some the majority of the inhabitants were of that faith.

of his war farming. Neutrals, or those who sought to be such, rarely escaped. Their houses were pillaged by both armies; they themselves were treated with insult and cruelty, and might be considered highly fortunate if they got off with their lives.

117. The War in the North. — In the north the war was conducted with well-equipped armies and by regular battles and sieges. Rouen, one of the chief strongholds of the Huguenots, was taken and given up to all the horrors of pillage for an entire week. Then followed a grand execution of prisoners. During the siege the treacherous Antoine de Bourbon was killed while fighting on the Catholic side. In the next battle fortune favored the Huguenots for a time, and Catherine de' Medici was told by a messenger that her forces were beaten. "Well, if that is the case," said she, "we shall have to turn Protestants and pray to God in French."[1]

But in the end victory was on the side of the Guise or court party, Condé having been taken captive. The next year, while besieging Orléans, the Duke of Guise was assassinated by a Huguenot spy, sent to commit the murder, as his family erroneously believed, by Admiral Coligny.

118. A Temporary Peace. — Catherine now offered terms of peace. She saw that the war was exhausting her resources, and that the longer it went on, the more difficult it would be to reëstablish order and prosperity. Already some extreme Huguenots were beginning to say that kings had had their day, and that it was time that the people came into power.

The peasants, too, were getting insubordinate. In some districts they refused to pay rent, or to labor for their feudal masters, unless those who demanded it could show Bible authority in their favor. As both parties were willing to make terms, peace was accordingly declared, and some concessions were made to the Huguenots.

[1] Alluding to the fact that while the Catholics continued to use a Latin service book, the Huguenots, who had rejected it, prayed in French.

But the sheathed swords could not remain quiet in their scabbards. Though open battle had ceased, yet each side taunted and reproached the other, and assassinations were frequent.

119. Catherine's Artful Policy. — Catherine, who never hesitated to use any means to gain her ends, now changed her policy and employed all kinds of seductive pleasure to win over those she wanted. In her brilliant and profligate court she never lacked means to tempt men from duty, and if she could secure peace in this way, it would answer her purpose better than fighting in the field. So eager was she for power that she even set her own children quarreling among themselves, and tempted them into every kind of debauchery, that she might get supreme control.

But now that the power of the Guises was in great measure broken by the duke's death, she dreaded lest the Huguenot nobles should acquire a dangerous strength. While they were weak, the artful queen mother had favored them in order to hold the opposite party in check. Now she turned and began to favor the Catholics. The articles in the recent treaty of peace which granted the Protestants a certain degree of religious liberty were disregarded, and crimes committed against the reformers were allowed to pass unpunished.

Catherine, indeed, still talked smoothly of her desire for the permanent reconciliation of Catholics and Calvinists, but while she talked she quietly made ready for war.

120. Catherine's Plot; Renewal of the War; Peace of St. Germain. — The Huguenots, however, were alert and determined not to be surprised. Instead of waiting to be attacked they struck the first blow. After six months of indecisive fighting another false peace was concluded.

Then Catherine and her party devised a plot for seizing and beheading the Protestant leaders, Coligny and Condé. With these proposed victims Jeanne d'Albret, the widow of Antoine de Bourbon, was included, since she, who was a zealous Protestant, indulged the hope that her son, Henry of Navarre,[1] might sometime reign over France as a Huguenot king.

Coligny and Condé found out the plot and fled to the fortified city of La Rochelle,[2] which was strongly garrisoned by their party. Here, too, came the dauntless Jeanne, bringing her young son Henry. Like Queen Elizabeth of England she could declare with truth that, though she had a woman's body, she had a warrior's soul. To carry on the struggle she mortgaged her estates, pledged her jewels, and stood ready to give, if need be, her own life and that of her children.

In the battles which followed both armies lost heavily; Condé was shot on the Huguenot side, and, at a later date, Montmorency on that of the Catholics. Condé's death was a severe blow to the Protestants, and they were on the point of giving up the combat in the open field; but the heroic Jeanne came forward, leading her son, Prince Henry, and the young Prince Condé. "Here," said she to the troops, "are two new chiefs whom God gives you, and two orphans whom I entrust to your care." Both lived, as we shall see, to win names in history.

The Huguenots had now been beaten at all points; yet, as the reed bends to the storm and recovers when it is passed, so they recovered after every defeat. The wily Catherine de' Medici saw that, notwithstanding her successes, she was making no real progress. She therefore offered her adversaries an advantageous peace, in order to gain strength for a new and more decisive stroke. By the treaty of St. Germain[3] (1570), the Protestants received a considerable degree of religious liberty: all employments were to be open to them;

[1] Navarre: then a small independent kingdom in the southwest of France. It had once included a portion of Spanish territory.

[2] La Rochelle (lä rō-shĕll′): "the little rock," on the western coast of France. See Map No. XI, page 236.

[3] St. Germain (săn-zhĕr-măn′).