

Although the admiral was only wounded, the mere fact that he had been attacked in this way, in such a place, roused keen indignation among the Huguenots assembled in Paris. When the king heard of it, he flung down his tennis racket, petulantly crying, "Am I never to have peace?" Then he went to visit the wounded admiral, and expressed great sympathy.

It may be that this very visit precipitated matters, for Catherine and her most devoted followers now began to plot a great Huguenot massacre. Some of those who were approached in regard to it were in favor of getting rid of all the Huguenot leaders at any cost, but others were too honorable to subscribe to any such measure; one man, for instance, boldly declared: "God forbid that I should give my assent to any design so perfidious—one so fatal to the honor of France and to the repute of my king!"



Charles IX of France.



LIX. The Massacre of the Huguenots.

CHARLES IX was one of those who opposed a Huguenot massacre, obstinately refusing at first to sign the decree his mother presented. But his was a weak and credulous nature, so at the end of a very few days, wearied by Catherine's importunities, and convinced besides by her false statements that the Huguenots were really plotting against his life, he suddenly seized the pen, and signed the order for the massacre, exclaiming hysterically: "By God's death, since you will kill the admiral, kill them all! Kill all the Huguenots in France, so that none may be left to reproach me. By God's death, kill them all!"

Having thus wrung from her weak and bewildered son the permission she desired, Catherine entrusted to Guise and certain other influential Catholics, the charge of murdering the Huguenot wedding guests who were still tarrying in Paris. It was settled that the massacre should take place on St. Bar-thol'o-mew's Day, and that the bells of the famous old church near the Louvre should ring out the signal for the attack at two o'clock in the morning. The houses where the principal Huguenot noblemen lodged were

all marked in advance, and the conspirators agreed to recognize each other, even in the darkness, by means of a white sleeve or badge which all were to wear on the left arm.

At first the plan had been to sacrifice only a few of the leaders, but the lists gradually grew longer and longer, so that by the time the signal bell pealed forth, a general massacre had been arranged. Most of the prominent Huguenots in Paris, and many of their followers, were slain, for they were taken by surprise in the night, and thus unable to offer any defense; besides, the gates of the city were closed and guarded so that none could escape.

The duke of Guise, without troubling himself about lesser victims, proceeded immediately to the house of Admiral Coligny. After posting men to prevent any attempt at escape, he sent guards upstairs to murder his aged political rival.



Admiral Coligny.

Breaking into Coligny's sleeping room, these assassins found him there, calm and composed, although at the first alarm he had bidden his servants escape by way of the roofs, saying: "For a long time past I have kept myself in readiness for death. As for you, save yourselves if you can!"

When the door was broken open, the guard abruptly inquired, "Are you Coligny?"

"Yes, I am he, young man, and you ought to respect my gray hairs," replied the admiral, adding philosophically, "but you will not shorten my life much!" The murderer, having thus ascertained that this was really the victim he

sought, dealt Coligny a mortal blow, and had barely done so, when he heard his master call out impatiently from below, "Is it done? Show me some proof." Although the breath had not yet left the admiral's body, the assassin hurled him out of the window, at the duke's feet, where some one wiped the blood away from the dead man's face, to enable the duke to make quite sure that the right person had been dispatched. Standing there, gazing at his victim, the duke of Guise touched the corpse with his foot, crying in a tone of wonder, "Gracious, I didn't know he was so tall!"—the word for "tall" and "great" being the same in French. Then, turning to his followers, he boldly exclaimed: "Courage, companions, we have begun well. On to the others!"

It is said that Charles IX, hearing the bells peal out their terrible signal, was seized with sudden repentance, and sent a messenger off in great haste to stay the duke's hand. But the order did not arrive till after Coligny was murdered, so Guise coolly sent back word, "Tell the king it is too late!"

Meantime, other murderers were at work also. Not only were more than two thousand Huguenots slain, but a few Catholics as well; for the great disorder made a good opportunity for wreaking private revenge. Even in the Louvre, the massacre went on, the Huguenots there being led down into the palace yard, and only Henry of Navarre and young Condé were allowed the alternative of "Mass or the Bastille (bas-teel'!)" In the new queen of Navarre's bedroom a few Huguenots were murdered, some frantic followers of the bridegroom having tried to take refuge there from the foes so hotly pursuing them.



Henry, Duke of Guise.

When the day dawned, Charles IX himself is said to have gone out on a balcony of the Louvre, where, armed with a crossbow, he shot at the fugitives who were vainly trying to gain the bridge and flee across the river. We are also told that Catherine and her maids paraded the streets, gazing complacently at their victims.

Besides Henry of Navarre and the Prince of Condé, the king spared his Huguenot nurse, and his physician Paré, because he was much attached to them both, and depended upon them for comfort in many ways.



LX. The Death of Charles IX.

THE massacre of St. Bartholomew (August 24, 1572) was, as we have seen, aimed mainly against the aristocratic Huguenots, the leaders of their political party, for it was intended to carry out Alba's advice, which was: "Take the big fish and let the small fry go. One salmon is worth more than a thousand frogs." The massacre was not confined to Paris, however, as orders for similar murders were sent to various provinces. In some places these commands were obeyed without question; in others, the governors bluntly refused to conform, and even two executioners declared that, while they were