

The Massacre of St Bartholomew

Extracted from Foxe's Book of Martyrs

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AFTER a long series of troubles, the Papists, seeing that the Protestants had so increased in number that nothing effectual could be done against them by open force, began to devise how they could entrap them by subtlety.

A marriage was arranged between the young Prince Henry of Navarre (afterwards Henry IV of France), and the King's sister, Margaret, to which all the chief Protestants of France were to be invited.

Accordingly, they began with the mother of Prince Henry, Jeanne d'Albert, Queen of Navarre, One of the staunchest adherents of the Protestant cause, who, allured by fair words, consented to come to Paris, but shortly after her arrival fell sick and died within five days, not without suspicion of poison.

Notwithstanding this, the marriage still proceeded. Admiral Coligny, the leader of the Huguenots (French Protestants), with many of the Protestant chiefs, were induced to proceed to Paris, and were received with great solemnity. The marriage took place on the 18th of August, 1572, and solemnised by the Cardinal of Bourbon.

Four days after, the Admiral was shot at while coming from the council chamber, and wounded in both his arms. He still remained in Paris, although his friends advised him to flee.

The 24th of the same month was fixed by King Charles I for the commencement of this horrible massacre. At two o'clock in the morning the bell of St. Germain's L'Auxerrois tolled, at which signal the Duke of Guise led his followers to the slaughter of the Protestants. Soldiers had been appointed in different places of the city to be ready at the command of the King; and upon the watchword being given they burst out to the slaughter, beginning with the Admiral himself, who, being wounded, was cast out of the window into the street, where his head being struck off, was embalmed and sent to the Pope.

The savage people then cut off his arms, and drew his mangled body three days through the streets of Paris, after which they took him to the place of execution, and there hanged him by the heels, to the scorn of the populace. The martyrdom of this virtuous man had no sooner taken place than the

troops, with rage and violence, ran about slaying all the Protestants they knew or could find within the city gates.

This continued many days, but the greatest slaughter was in the first three days, in which were said to be murdered above 10,000 men and women. Old and young, of all sorts and conditions. The bodies of the dead were carried in carts and thrown into the river, which, with other whole streams in certain parts of the city, was reddened with the blood of the slain.

The brutal deeds of this period were not confined within the walls of Paris, but extended to other cities and quarters of the realm, especially at Lyons, Orleans, Toulouse, and Rouen, where the cruelties were, if possible, even greater than in the capital.

When intelligence of the massacre was received at Rome, the greatest rejoicings took place, and a medal was struck by order of the Pope to commemorate the event. A jubilee was also published and cannon fired from the castle of St. Angelo. To the person who brought the news the Cardinal of Lorraine gave 1,000 crowns. Similar rejoicings were also made all over France for this imagined overthrow of the faithful.

The enemies of the Truth glutted with slaughter, began everywhere to triumph in the fallacious opinion that they were the sole lords of men's consciences; and truly it might appear to human reason that in allowing this destruction of His people God had abandoned the earth to the ravages of His enemy. But He had decreed otherwise, and thousands who had not bowed the knee to Baal were called forth to glory and virtue.

At Poitiers 2,000 persons were murdered on the first day, and the licence to massacre continued several days after.

At Meldis 200 were cast into prison and then brought out as sheep to the slaughter, and pitilessly cut to pieces.

At Orleans 1,000 men, women and children were slain.

At Lyons 800 perished most miserably.

In the Archbishop's house at Lyons 300 persons were slain and the monks would not suffer their bodies to be buried.

At Toulouse, from which city the Protestants had been extirpated before, 200 were slain.

At Bordeaux a monk named Augerius caused 264 persons to be slaughtered, some of whom were senators.

Blois had opened its gates to the Duke of Guise, but was given up by him to rapine and slaughter. The houses were despoiled and many of the Protestants who remained were slain or drowned in the Loire.

These examples were followed by other cities, towns and villages. It is reported that more than 30,000 innocent persons were destroyed during these fearful massacres.

The year following Charles IX of France died, the tyrant who had been instrumental in these calamities. He was only in the 28th year of his life, and his death was dreadful. When lying on his bed the blood gushed from various parts of his body. At length, after violent convulsions and the utterance of the most horrific blasphemies, it issued in such quantities from his mouth that he expired.