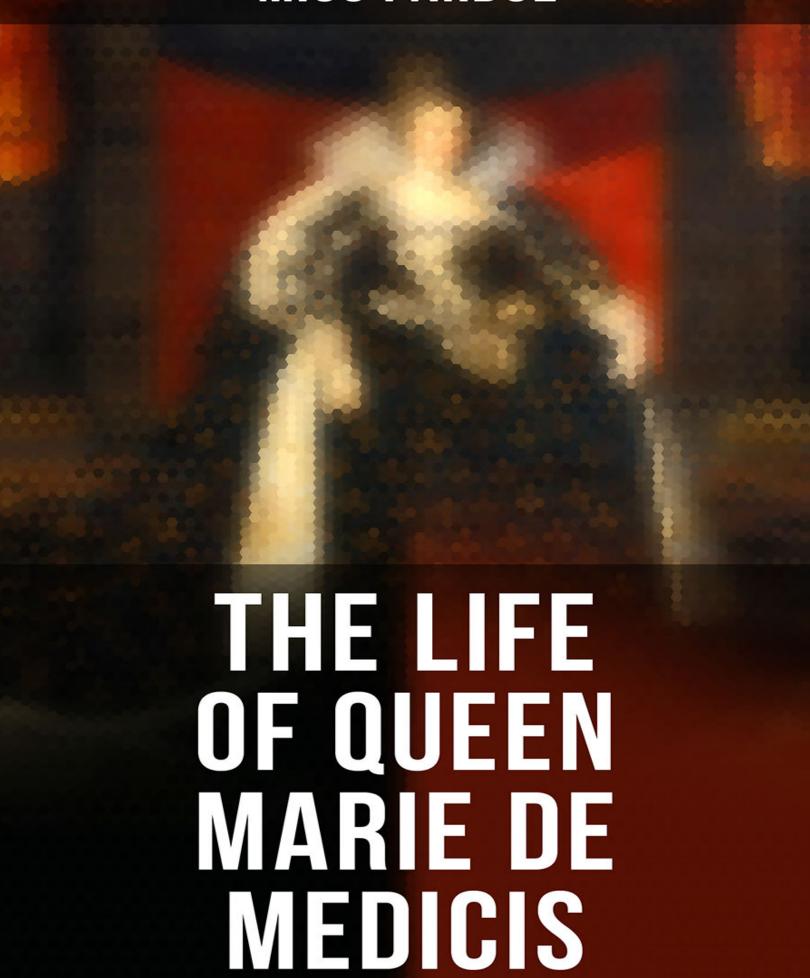
MISS PARDOE



Miss Pardoe

The Life of Queen Marie de Medicis

Biography of the Queen of France (Complete Edition)

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However celebrated he was destined to become as a sovereign, Henri IV of France was nevertheless fated to be singularly unfortunate as a husband. Immediately after the death of his mother, the high-hearted Jeanne d'Albret, whom he succeeded on the throne of Navarre, political considerations induced him to give his hand to Marguerite, the daughter of Henri II and Catherine de Medicis, a Princess whose surpassing beauty and rare accomplishments were the theme and marvel of all the European courts, and whose alliance was an object of ambition to many of the sovereign princes of Christendom.

Marguerite de Valois was born on the 14th of May 1552, and became the wife of Henry of Navarre on the 18th of August 1572, when she was in the full bloom of youth and loveliness; nor can there be any doubt that she was one of

the most extraordinary women of her time; for while her grace and wit dazzled the less observant by their brilliancy, the depth of her erudition, her love of literature and the arts, and the solidity of her judgment, no less astonished those who were capable of appreciating the more valuable gifts which had been lavished upon her by nature. A dark shadow rested, however, upon the surface of this glorious picture. Marguerite possessed no moral self-government; her passions were at once the bane and the reproach of her existence; and while yet a mere girl her levity had already afforded ample subject for the comments of the courtiers.



HENRI DE LORRAINE.

Fortunately, in the rapid sketch which we are compelled to give of her career, it is unnecessary that we should do more than glance at the licentiousness of her private conduct; our business is simply to trace such an outline of her varying fortunes as may suffice to render intelligible the position of Henri IV at the period of his second marriage.

After the death of Francis II, when internal commotion had succeeded to the feigned and hollow reconciliation

which had taken place between Charles IX and Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise,[2] Marguerite and her younger brother, the Duc d'Alençon, were removed to the castle of Amboise for greater security; and she remained in that palace-fortress from her tenth year until 1564, when she returned to Court, and thenceforward became one of the brightest ornaments of the royal circle. Henri de Guise was not long ere he declared himself her ardent admirer, and the manner in which the Princess received and encouraged his attentions left no doubt that the affection was reciprocal. So convinced, indeed, were those about her person of the fact, that M. du Gast, the favourite of the King her brother, earnestly entreated His Majesty no longer to confide to the Princess, as he had hitherto done, all the secrets of the state, as they could not, he averred, fail, under existing circumstances, to be communicated to M. de Guise; and Charles IX so fully appreciated the value of this advice, that he hastened to urge the same caution upon the Queenmother. This sudden distrust and coldness on the part of her royal relatives was peculiarly irritating to Marguerite; nor was her mortification lessened by the fact that the Duc de Guise, first alarmed, and ultimately disgusted, by her unblushing irregularities, withdrew his pretensions to her hand; and, sacrificing his ambition to a sense of self-respect, selected as his wife Catherine de Clèves. Princesse de Portien.[3]

At this period Marguerite de Valois began to divide her existence between the most exaggerated devotional observances and the most sensual and degrading pleasures. Humbly kneeling before the altar, she would assist at several masses during the day; but at twilight she cast off every restraint, and careless of what was due, alike to her sex and to her rank, she plunged into the grossest dissipation; and after having played the guest at a riotous banquet, she might be seen sharing in the disgraceful orgies of a masquerade.[4] A short time after the marriage of the Duc de Guise, the hand of the Princess was demanded by Don Sebastian, King of Portugal; but the Queen-mother, who witnessed with alarm the increasing power of the Protestant party, and the utter impossibility of inspiring confidence in their leaders save by some bold and subtle stroke of policy, resolved to profit by the presence of the Huguenot King of Navarre, in order to overcome the distrust which not even the edict of 1570 had sufficed to remove; and to renew the project which had been already mooted during the lifetime of Jeanne d'Albret, of giving Marguerite in marriage to the young Prince, her son.

The consciousness that she was sacrificing her daughter by thus bestowing her hand upon the sovereign of a petty kingdom might perhaps have deterred Catherine, had she not already decided upon the means by which the bonds of so unequal an alliance might be rent assunder; and it is even possible that the hatred which she bore to the reformed faith would in itself have sufficed to render such an union impossible, had not the crafty and compunctionless spirit by which she was animated inspired her with a method which would more than expiate the temporary sin. It is at all events certain that having summoned Henry of Navarre to her presence, she unhesitatingly, and with many professions of regard for

himself, informed him of the overtures of the Portuguese monarch, assuring him at the same time, that although the King of Spain was opposed to the alliance from motives of personal interest, it was one which would prove highly gratifying to Gregory XIII; but adding that both Charles IX and herself were so anxious to perform the promise which they had made to his mother, and to prove their good faith to his own person, that they were willing to refuse the crown of Portugal and to accept that of Navarre for the Princess.

Henry of Béarn hesitated. He was aware that the chiefs of the Protestant party, especially the Admiral de Coligny, whom he regarded as a father, were desirous that he should become the husband of Elizabeth of England. Past experience had rendered them suspicious of the French, while an alliance with the English promised them a strong and abiding protection. Nor was Henry himself more disposed to espouse Marguerite de Valois, as her early reputation for gallantry offended his sense of self-respect, while a strong attachment elsewhere rendered him insensible to her personal attractions. As a matter of ambition, the alliance was beyond his hopes, and brought him one step nearer to that throne which, by some extraordinary prescience, both he and his friends anticipated that he was destined one day to ascend;[5] but he could not forget that there were dark suspicions attached to the strange and sudden death of a mother to whom he had been devoted; and he felt doubly repugnant to receive a wife from the very hands which were secretly accused of having abridged his passage to the sovereignty of Navarre. Like Marguerite herself, moreover, he was not heart-whole;

and thus he clung to the freedom of an unmarried life, and would fain have declined the honour which was pressed upon him; but the wily Catherine, who instantly perceived his embarrassment, bade him carefully consider the position in which he stood, and the fearful responsibility which attached to his decision. Charles IX, in bestowing upon him the hand of his sister, gave to the Protestants the most decided and unequivocal proof of his sincerity. It was evident, she said, that despite the edict which assured protection to the Huguenot party, they still misdoubted the good-faith of the monarch; but when he had also overlooked, or rather disregarded, the difference of faith so thoroughly as to give a Princess of France in marriage to one of their princes, they would no longer have a pretext for discontent, and the immediate pacification of the kingdom must be the necessary consequence of such a concession. The ultimate issue of so unequal a conflict could not, as she asserted, be for one moment doubtful; but the struggle might be a bloody one, and he would do well to remember that the blood thus spilt would be upon his own head.

Henry then sought, as his mother had previously done, to create a difficulty by alleging that the difference of faith between himself and the Princess must tend to affect the validity of their marriage; but the wily Italian met this objection by reminding him that Charles IX had publicly declared that "rather than that the alliance should not take place, he would permit his sister to dispense with all the rites and ceremonies of both religions."

It is well known that the motive of the French King in thus urging, or rather insisting upon, a marriage greatly beneath

the pretensions of the Princess, was simply to attract to Court all the Huguenot leaders, who, placing little faith in the conciliatory edict, had resolutely abstained from appearing in the capital; but Catherine alluded so slightly to this fact that it awoke no misgivings in the mind of the young monarch.

Thus adjured, Henry of Navarre yielded; nor did the Princess on her part offer any violent opposition to the marriage. She objected, it is true, her religious scruples, and her attachment to her own creed; but her arguments were soon overruled, the hand of the King of Portugal was courteously declined, Philip of Spain was assured that his representations had decided the French Court, and immediate preparations were made for the unhappy union, whose date was to be written in blood. The double ceremony, exacted by the difference of faith in the contracting parties, was performed, as we have said, on the 18th of August 1572, the public betrothal having taken place on the preceding day at the Louvre; and it was accompanied by all the splendour of which it was susceptible. The marriage-service was performed by the Cardinal de Bourbon, on a platform erected in front of the metropolitan church of Notre-Dame; whence, at its conclusion, the bridal train descended by a temporary gallery to the interior of the Cathedral, and proceeded to the altar, where Henry, relinquishing the hand of his new-made wife, left her to assist at the customary mass, and meanwhile paced to and fro along the cloisters in conversation with the venerable Gaspard de Coligny and

others of his confidential friends, the whole of whom were sanguine in their anticipations of a bright and happy future.

At the conclusion of the mass the King of Navarre rejoined his bride, and taking her hand, conducted her to the episcopal palace, where, according to an ancient custom, the marriage-banquet awaited them.[6] The square of the Parvis Notre-Dame was crowded with eager spectators, and the heart of the Queen-mother beat high with exultation as she glanced at the retinue of the bridegroom, and recognised in his suite all the Huguenot leaders who had hitherto refused to pass the gates of the capital.

Save her own, however, all eyes were rivetted upon Marguerite; and many were the devout Catholics who murmured beneath their breath at the policy which had determined the monarch to bestow a Princess of such beauty and genius upon a heretic. In truth, nothing could be more regal or more dazzling than the appearance of the youthful bride, who wore, as Queen of Navarre, a richlyjewelled crown, beneath which her long and luxuriant dark hair fell in waving masses over an ermine cape (or *couet*) clasped from the throat to the waist with large diamonds; while her voluminous train of violet-coloured velvet, three ells in length, was borne by four princesses.[7] And thus in royal state she moved along, surrounded and followed by all the nobility and chivalry of France, amid the acclamations of an admiring and excited people, having just pledged herself to one whose feelings were as little interested in the compact as her own.

The bridal festivities lasted throughout three entire days; and never had such an excess of luxury and magnificence been displayed at the French Court. Towards the Protestants, the bearing both of Charles IX and his mother was so courteous, frank, and conciliating, that the most distrustful gradually threw off their misgivings, and vied with the Catholic nobles both in gallantry and splendour; and meanwhile Catherine, the King, the Duc d'Anjou, and the Guises were busied in organizing the frightful tragedy of St. Bartholomew!

The young Queen of Navarre had scrupulously been left in ignorance of a plot which involved the life of her bridegroom as well as those of his co-religionists; nor was she aware of the catastrophe which had been organised until Paris was already one vast shambles. Startled from her sleep at the dead of night, and hurriedly informed of the nature of the frightful cries that had broken her rest, she at once sprang from her bed, and throwing on a mantle, forced her way to the closet of her royal brother, where, sinking on her knees, she earnestly implored the lives of Henry's Protestant attendants; but for a time Charles was obdurate; nor was it until after he had reluctantly yielded to her prayers that she recognised, with an involuntary cry of joy, the figure of her husband, who stood in the deep bay of a window with his cousin, M. de Condé.[8]

By one of those caprices to which he was subject, the King had refused to sacrifice either of these Princes; and he had accordingly summoned them to his presence, where he had offered them the alternative of an instant abjuration of their heresy. Shrieks and groans already resounded on all sides; the groans of strong men, struck down unarmed and defenceless, and the shrieks of women struggling with their murderers; while through all, and above all, boomed out the deep-toned bells of the metropolitan churches--one long burial-peal; and amid this ghastly diapason it was the pleasure of the tiger-hearted Charles to accept the reluctant and informal recantation of his two horror-stricken victims; after which he compelled them without remorse to the agony of seeing their friends and followers butchered before their eyes.

Enraged by what they denounced as the weak and impolitic clemency of the King, in having thus shielded two of the most powerful leaders of the adverse faction, Catherine de Medicis and the Guises, having first wreaked their vengeance upon the corpse of the brave and veteran de Coligny, which they induced the King to dishonour himself by subjecting to the most ignominious treatment, next endeavoured to alienate Marguerite from her husband, and to induce her to solicit a divorce. It had formed no part of the Oueen-mother's intention that the Princess should remain fettered by the bonds which she had herself wreathed about her; nor could she brook that after having accomplished a coup-de-main which had excited the indignation of half of Europe, Henry of Navarre should be indebted for an impunity which counteracted all her views to the alliance which he had formed with her own family. Marguerite, however, resolutely refused to lend herself to this new treachery, declaring that as her husband had abjured his heresy, she had no plea to advance in

justification of so flagrant an act of perfidy; nor could the expostulations of her mother produce any change in her resolve.



THE EVE OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEU.

It is probable that the perfect freedom of action for which she was indebted to the indifference of her young bridegroom had great influence in prompting this reply, and that the crown which had so recently been placed upon her brow had at the same time flattered her ambition; while the frightful carnage of which she had just been a witness might well cause her to shrink from the probable repetition of so hideous a catastrophe. Be her motives what they might, however, neither threats nor entreaties could shake the resolution of the Princess; and she was supported in her opposition by her favourite brother, the Duc d'Alençon, who had secretly attached himself to the cause of the Protestant Princes.

This was another source of uneasiness to the Oueenmother, who apprehended, from the pertinacity with which Marguerite clung to her husband, that she would exert all her influence to effect an understanding between the two brothers-in-law which could not fail to prove fatal to the interests of the Duc d'Anjou, who, in the event of the decease of Charles IX, was the rightful heir to the throne. Nor was that decease a mere matter of idle speculation, for the health of the King, always feeble and uncertain, had failed more than ever since the fatal night of the 24th of August; and he had even confessed to Ambroise Paré,[9] his body-surgeon, that his dreams were haunted by the spectres of his victims, and that he consequently shrank from the sleep which was so essential to his existence. The Duc d'Anjou meanwhile was absent at the siege of Rochelle, while his brother, d'Alençon, was about the person of the dying monarch, and had made himself eminently popular among the citizens of Paris. The crisis was an alarming one; but it was still destined to appear even more perilous, for, to the consternation of Catherine, intelligence at this period reached the Court that the Polish nation had elected the Duc d'Anjou as their King, and that their ambassadors were about to visit France in order to tender him the crown. In vain did she represent to Charles the impolicy of suffering a warlike prince like Henri d'Anjou to abandon his country for a foreign throne, and urge him to replace the elder by the younger brother, alleging that so long as the Polish people could see a prince of the blood-royal of France at the head of their nation, they would care little whether he were called Henry or Francis; the King refused to countenance such a

substitution. He had long been jealous of the military renown of the Duc d'Anjou; while he was also perfectly aware of the anxiety with which both the Queen-mother and the Prince himself looked forward to his own death, in order that Henry might succeed him; and he consequently issued a command that the sovereign-elect should immediately repair to Paris to receive at the hands of the foreign delegates the crown which they were about to offer to him.

The summons was obeyed. The ambassadors, who duly arrived, were magnificently received; Henri d'Anjou was declared King of Poland; and, finally, he found himself compelled to depart for his own kingdom. Unfortunately for Marguerite, she had not sufficient self-control to conceal the joy with which she saw the immediate succession to the French throne thus transferred to her favourite brother; and her evident delight so exasperated the Queen-mother, that she communicated to Charles the suspicions which she herself entertained of the treachery of the Princess; but the King, worn down by both physical and mental suffering, treated her warnings with indifference, and she was consequently compelled to await with patience the progress of events.

The death of the French monarch, which shortly afterwards took place, and the accession of Henri d'Anjou, whom a timely warning had enabled to abandon the crown of Poland for that of France, for a time diverted the attention of Catherine from the suspected machinations of her daughter, when, as if to convince her of her injustice, she suddenly received secret intelligence from the young Queen of Navarre, that the Duc d'Alençon had entered into a new

league with the Bourbon Princes. It is difficult to account for the motive which led Marguerite to make this revelation, when her extraordinary affection for her brother, and the anxiety which she had universally exhibited for the safety of her husband, are remembered; thus much, however, is certain, that she did not betray the conspiracy (which had been revealed to her by a Lutheran gentleman whom she had saved during the massacre of St. Bartholomew) until she had exacted a pledge that the lives of all who were involved in it should be spared. In her anxiety to secure the secret, the Queen-mother, on her side, gave a solemn promise to that effect, and she redeemed her word; while from the immediate precautions which she caused to be taken the plot was necessarily annihilated.

The Princess had, however, by the knowledge which she thus displayed of the movements of the Huguenot party, only increased the suspicions both of the Queen-mother and her son; and the Court of France became ere long so distasteful to Henry of Navarre, from the constant affronts to which he was subjected, and the undisguised *surveillance* which fettered all his movements, that he resolved to effect his escape from Paris, an example in which he was imitated by the Duc d'Alençon and the Prince de Condé, the former of whom retired to Champagne, and the latter to one of his estates, and with both of whom he shortly afterwards entered into a formidable league.

Henri III, exasperated by the departure of the three Princes, declared his determination to revenge the affront upon Marguerite, who had not been enabled to accompany her husband; but the representations of the Queen-mother induced him to forego this ungenerous project, and he was driven to satiate his thirst for vengeance upon her favourite attendant, Mademoiselle de Torigni,[10] of whose services he had already deprived her, on the pretext that so young a Princess should not be permitted to retain about her person such persons as were likely to exert an undue influence over her mind, and to possess themselves of her secrets. In the first paroxysm of his rage, he even sentenced this lady to be drowned; nor is it doubtful that this iniquitous and unfounded sentence would have been really carried into effect, had not the unfortunate woman succeeded in making her escape through the agency of two individuals who were about to rejoin the Duc d'Alençon, and who conducted her safely to Champagne.[11]

One of the first acts of Henry of Navarre on reaching his own dominions had been to protest against the enforced abjuration to which he was compelled on the fatal night of St. Bartholomew, and to evince his sincerity by resuming the practices of the reformed faith, a recantation which so exasperated the French King that he made Marguerite a close prisoner in her own apartments, under the pretext that she was leagued with the enemies of the state against the church and throne of her ancestors. Nor would he listen to her entreaties that she might be permitted to follow her husband, declaring that "she should not live with a heretic"; and thus her days passed on in a gloomy and cheerless monotony, ill suited to her excitable temperament and splendid tastes. Meanwhile, the Duc d'Alençon, weary of his voluntary exile, and hopeless of any successful result to the disaffection in which he had so long indulged, became

anxious to effect a reconciliation with the King; and for this purpose he addressed himself to Marguerite, to whom he explained the conditions upon which he was willing to return to his allegiance, giving her full power to treat in his name. Henri III, who, on his side, was no less desirous to detach his brother from the Protestant cause, acceded to all his demands, among which was the immediate liberation of the Princess; and thus she at length found herself enabled to quit her regal prison and to rejoin her royal husband at Béarn.

During the space of five years the ill-assorted couple maintained at least a semblance of harmony, for each apparently regarded very philosophically those delicate questions which occasionally conduce to considerable discord in married life. The personal habits of Henry, combined with his sense of gratitude to his wife for her refusal to abandon him to the virulence of her mother's hatred, induced him to close his eyes to her moral delinguencies, while Marguerite, in her turn, with equal complacency, affected a like ignorance as regarded the pursuits of her husband; and thus the little Court of Pau, where they had established their residence, rendered attractive by the frank urbanity of the sovereign, and the grace and intellect of the young Queen, became as brilliant and as dissipated as even the daughter of Catherine de Medicis herself could desire. Poets sang her praise under the name of Urania;[12] flatterers sought her smiles by likening her to the goddesses of love and beauty, and she lived in a perpetual atmosphere of pleasure and adulation.

The marriage-portion of Marguerite had consisted of the two provinces of the Agénois and the Quercy, which had been ceded to her with all their royal prerogatives; but even after this accession of revenue the resources of Henry of Navarre did not exceed those of a private gentleman, amounting, in fact, only to a hundred and forty thousand livres, or about six thousand pounds yearly. The ancient kingdom of Navarre, which had once extended from the frontier of France to the banks of the Ebro, and of which Pampeluna had been the capital, shorn of its dimensions by Ferdinand the Catholic at the commencement of the sixteenth century, and incorporated with the Spanish monarchy, now consisted only of a portion of Lower Navarre, and the principality of Béarn, thus leaving to Henry little of sovereignty save the title. The duchy of Albret in Gascony, which he inherited from his great-grandfather, and that of Vendôme, his appanage as a Prince of the Blood-royal of France, consequently formed no inconsiderable portion of his territory: while the title of Governor of Guienne, which he still retained, was a merely nominal dignity whence he derived neither income nor influence; and so unpopular was he in the province that the citizens of Bordeaux refused to admit him within their gates.

Nevertheless, the young monarch who held his court alternately at Pau and at Nérac, the capital of the duchy of Albret, expended annually upon his household and establishment nearly twelve thousand pounds, and that at a period when, according to the evidence of Sully, "the whole Court could not have furnished forty thousand livres;" [13] yet so inadequately were those about him remunerated,

that Sully himself, in his joint capacity of councillor of state and chamberlain, received only two thousand annual livres, or ninety pounds sterling. This royal penury did not, however, depress the spirits of the frank and free-hearted King, who eagerly entered into every species of gaiety and amusement. Jousts, masques, and ballets succeeded each other with a rapidity which left no time for anxiety or ennui; and Marguerite has bequeathed to us in her memoirs so graphic a picture of the royal circle in 1579-80, that we cannot resist its transcription. "We passed the greater portion of our time at Nérac," she says, "where the Court was so brilliant that we had no reason to envy that of France. The sole subject of regret was that the principal number of the nobles and gentlemen were Huguenots; but the subject of religion was never mentioned; the King, my husband, accompanied by his sister,[14] attending their own devotions, while I and my suite heard mass in a chapel in the park. When the several services were concluded, we again assembled in a garden ornamented with avenues of laurels and cypresses upon the bank of the river; and in the afternoon and evening a ballet was performed." [15]

It is much to be regretted that the royal biographer follows up this pleasing picture by avowals of her own profligacy, and complacent comments upon the indulgence and generosity with which she lent herself to the vices of her husband.

The temporary calm was not, however, fated to endure. Marguerite, even while she indulged in the most unblushing licentiousness, was, as we have already stated, devoted to the observances of her religion; and on her first arrival at

Pau she had requested that a chapel might be provided in which the services of her church could be performed. This was a concession which Henry of Navarre was neither willing nor indeed able to make, the inhabitants of the city being all rigid reformers who had not yet forgiven the young monarch either his enforced renunciation of their faith or his Catholic marriage; and accordingly the Queen had been compelled to avail herself of a small oratory in the castle which would not contain more than six or eight persons; while so anxious was the King not to exasperate the good citizens, that no individual was permitted to accompany her to the chapel save the immediate members of her household, and the drawbridge was always raised until she had returned to her own apartments.

Thus, the arrival of Marguerite in the country, which had raised the hopes of the Catholic portion of the population, by no means tended to improve their position; and for a time her co-religionists, disheartened by so signal a disappointment, made no effort to resist the orders of the King; but on the day of Pentecost, 1579, a few zealous devotees, who had by some means introduced themselves secretly into the castle, followed the Queen to her oratory, where they were arrested by Dupin the royal secretary, very roughly treated in the presence of Marguerite herself, and only released on the payment of a heavy fine.

Indignant at the disrespect which had been shown to her, the Princess at once proceeded to the apartment of her husband, where she complained with emphatic bitterness of the insolence of his favourite; and she had scarcely begun to acquaint him with the details of the affair when Dupin

entered unannounced, and in the most intemperate manner commented on her breach of good faith in having wilfully abused the forbearance of the sovereign and his Protestant subjects.

It was not without some difficulty that Henry succeeded in arresting this indecent flow of words, when, rebuking Dupin for his want of discretion and self-control, he commanded him immediately to crave the pardon of the Oueen for his ill-advised interference and the want of deference of which he had been guilty towards her royal person; but Marguerite refused to listen to any apology, and haughtily and resolutely demanded the instant dismissal of the delinquent. In vain did Henry expostulate, declaring that he could not dispense with the services of so old and devoted a servant; the Princess was inexorable, and the over-zealous secretary received orders to leave the Court. Marguerite, however, purchased this triumph dearly, as the King resented with a bitterness unusual to him the exhibition of authority in which she had indulged; and when she subsequently urged him to punish those who had acted under the orders of the exiled secretary, he boldly and positively refused to give her any further satisfaction, alleging that her want of consideration towards himself left him at equal liberty to disregard her own wishes.

Angry and irritated, Marguerite lost no time in acquainting her family with the affront which she had experienced; and Catherine de Medicis, who believed that she had now found a pretext sufficiently plausible to separate the young Queen from her husband, skilfully envenomed the already rankling wound, not only by

awakening the religious scruples of her daughter, but also by reminding her that she had been subjected to insult from a petty follower of a petty court; and, finally, she urged her to assert her dignity by an immediate return to France.

Marguerite, whom the King had not made a single effort to conciliate, obeyed without reluctance; and, in the year 1582, she left Navarre, and on her arrival in Paris took possession of her old apartments in the Louvre. She was received with great cordiality by Henri III, who trusted that her residence in France might induce her husband ere long to follow her; but he soon discovered that not even the warmth of his welcome could cause her to forget the past; and that, under his own royal roof, she was secretly intriguing with the Duc d'Alençon, who was once more in open revolt against him.

For a time, although thoroughly informed that such was the fact, his emissaries were unable to produce any tangible proof of the validity of their accusations; but at length, rendered bold by impunity, Marguerite was so imprudent (for the purpose of forwarding some despatches to the rebel Duke) as to cause the arrest of a royal courier, charged with an autograph letter of two entire sheets from the King to his favourite the Duc de Joyeuse,[16] who was then on a mission at Rome; when the unfortunate messenger, who found himself suddenly attacked by four men in masks, made so desperate an effort to save the packet with which he had been entrusted, that the *sbirri* of the Princess, who had anticipated an easy triumph, became so much exasperated that they stabbed him on the spot.

This occurrence no sooner reached the ears of Henri III, than he sent to desire the presence of his sister, when, utterly regardless of the fact that they were not alone, he so far forgot his own dignity as to overwhelm her with the coarsest and most cutting reproaches; and not satisfied with expatiating upon the treachery of which she had been guilty towards himself, he passed in review the whole of her ill-spent life, accusing her, among other enormities, of the birth of an illegitimate son,[17] and terminated his invectives by commanding her instantly "to quit Paris, and rid the Court of her presence." [18]

On the morrow Marguerite accordingly left the capital with even less state than she had entered it, for she had neither suite nor equipage, and was accompanied only by Madame de Duras and Mademoiselle de Béthune, her two favourite attendants. She was not, however, suffered to depart even thus without impediment, for she had only travelled a few leagues when, between Saint-Cler and Palaiseau, her litter was stopped by a captain of the royal guard, at the head of a troop of harquebusiers: she was compelled to remove her mask; and her companions, after having been subjected to great discourtesy, were finally conveyed as prisoners to the Abbey of Ferrières, near Montargis, where they underwent an examination, at which the King himself presided,[19] and wherein facts were elicited that were fatal to the character of their mistress. Their replies were then reduced to writing; and Marguerite, who had been detained for this express purpose, was compelled by her inexorable brother to affix her signature to the disgraceful document; when, after she had been

subjected to this new indignity, the daughter of Catherine de Medicis was at length permitted to pursue her journey; but she was compelled to do so alone, as her two attendants were forbidden to bear her company.

She had no sooner left Ferrières than Henri III despatched one of the valets of his wardrobe to St. Foix, where the King of Navarre was for the moment sojourning, with an autograph letter, in which he informed him that he had considered it expedient to dismiss from the service of his royal sister both Madame de Duras and Mademoiselle de Béthune, having discovered that they were leading the most dissolute and scandalous lives, and were "pernicious vermin" who could not be permitted to remain about the person of a Princess of her rank.

Thus ignominiously driven from the Court of France, Marguerite, who had no resource save in the indulgence of her husband, travelled with the greatest speed to Nérac, where he was then residing, in the hope that she might be enabled by her representations to induce him to espouse her cause against her brother; but although, in order to preserve appearances, Henry received her courteously, and even listened with exemplary patience to her impassioned relation of the indignities to which she had been subjected, the coldness of his deportment, and the stern tone in which he informed her that he would give the necessary orders for a separate residence to be prepared for her accommodation, as he could never again receive her under his own roof, or accord to her the honour and consideration due to a wife, convinced her that she had nothing more to hope from his forbearance.

Even while he thus resented his own wrongs, however, Henry of Navarre no sooner comprehended that Marguerite had been personally exposed to insults which had affected his honour as her consort, than he despatched a messenger to the French King at Lyons, "to entreat him to explain the cause of these affronts, and to advise him, as a good master, how he had better act." [20] But this somewhat servile proceeding produced no adequate result, as his envoy received only ambiguous answers, and all he could accomplish was to extort a promise from Henri III that on his return to Paris he would discuss the affair with the Queenmother and the Duc d'Alençon.

Unaware of the negotiation which was thus opened, Marguerite had, as we have said, lost all confidence in her own influence over her husband; and accordingly, without giving any intimation of her design, she left Nérac and retired to Agen, one of her dower-cities, where she established herself in the castle; but her unbridled depravity of conduct, combined with the extortions of Madame de Duras, her friend and *confidante*, by whom she had been rejoined, soon rendered her odious to the inhabitants.

In vain did she declare that the bull of excommunication which Sixtus V had recently fulminated against the King of Navarre had been the cause of her retiring from his Court, her conscience not permitting her to share the roof of a prince under the ban of the Church.[21] The Agenese, although Catholics and leagued against her husband, evinced towards herself a disaffection so threatening that her position was rapidly becoming untenable, when the city

was stormed and taken by the Maréchal de Matignon[22] in the name of Henri III.[23]

Convinced that the capture of her own person was the sole motive of this unprovoked assault, the fugitive Queen had once more recourse to flight; and her eagerness to escape the power of the French King was so great that she left the city seated on a pillion behind a gentleman of her suite named Lignerac, while Madame de Duras followed in like manner; and thus she travelled four-and-twenty leagues in the short space of two days, attended by such of the members of her little household as were enabled to keep pace with her.

The fortress of Carlat in the mountains of Auvergne offered to her, as she believed, a safe asylum; but although the Governor, who was the brother of M. de Lignerac, received her with respect, and promised her his protection, the enmity of Henri III pursued her even to this obscure place of exile.

At this period even the high spirit of Marguerite de Valois was nearly subdued, for she no longer knew in what direction to turn for safety. She had become contemptible in the eyes of her husband, she was deserted by her mother, hated by her brother, despised by her co-religionists from the licentiousness of her life, and detested by the Protestants as the cause, however innocently, of the fatal massacre of their friends and leaders. The memory of the martyred Coligny was ever accompanied by a curse on Marguerite; and thus she was an outcast from all creeds and all parties. Still, however, confident in the good faith of the Governor of Carlat, she assumed at least a semblance of