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**The Henriade**

**Voltaire**

**London, 1762**

The Henriade. Canto the Second.

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THE  
HENRIADE.  
CANTO the SECOND.



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THE ARGUMENT.

Henry the great relates to queen Elizabeth the history of the civil wars of France. He traces them from their origin, and enters into a detail of the massacres committed on St. Bartholomew's day.

C

THE ARGUMENT

...the great extent to which the power of  
the king was of France. It was then from that  
... and was into a state of the ...  
... on St. Bartholomew's day

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THE  
HENRIADE.  
CANTO the SECOND.

IN France, great sov'reign, to increase the curse,  
Our ills are risen from a sacred source.  
Religion, raging with inhuman zeal,  
Arms ev'ry hand, and points the fatal steel.  
To me however it will least belong 5  
To prove the Romans, or Geneva wrong.  
Whatever names divine the parties claim,  
In mad imposture they are both the same.  
If in the strifes, which Europe's sons divide,  
Murder, and treason mark the erring side; 10  
Since both alike in blood their hands imbrue,  
Their crimes are equal, and their blindness too.

---

Line 6. Several Historians have described Henry IV. as wavering between the two religions; here he is described as he was, a man of honour, seriously endeavouring to inform himself, the friend of truth, the enemy of persecution, and detesting guilt wheresoever it appeared.

For me, whose business is to guard the state,  
 I leave to heav'n their vengeance, and their fate.  
 My hand ne'er trespass'd on the rights divine ;  
 Or e'er profan'd the incense of the shrine.  
 Perish each statesman cruel, and unkind,  
 Who reigns despotic o'er the human mind ;  
 Who stains with blood religion's sacred word,  
 And kills, or gains new converts by his sword.  
 Presuming rashly that a gracious God  
 Approves, the sacrifice of human blood.  
 Oh wou'd that God, whose laws I wish to know,  
 On Valois' court such sentiments bestow !  
 The Guises falsely plead religion's cause,  
 No scruple checks them, and no conscience awes.  
 At me those leaders, insolent and proud,  
 Direct their fury, and ensnare the crowd.  
 These eyes have seen our citizens engage  
 In mutual murders, with a zealous rage :  
 For vain disputes have seen their pious care  
 Deal all around the horrid flames of war.

---

Line 25. Francis duke of Guise, commonly at that time called  
 the Great duke of Guise, was the father of Balafre. It was he  
 who with the cardinal his brother, laid the foundations of the  
 league. He had several great private qualities, which however we  
 must take care not to dignify with the name of virtues.

You know the madness of those vulgar minds  
 Which faction warms, and superstition blinds ;  
 When, proudly arming in a cause divine, 35  
 No pow'r their head-strong passion can confine.  
 Er'ft in these happy realms yourself beheld  
 The rising evil, and it's danger quell'd :  
 The troubl'd scene assum'd a milder form ;  
 Your virtuous cares subdued the gath'ring storm. 40  
 No reign more pleasing cou'd I wish to see,  
 Your laws are flourishing, your city free.  
 Far other paths did Medicis pursue,  
 Far less belov'd, less merciful than you.  
 Mov'd by these tales of misery, and woe, 45  
 More of her conduct shou'd you seek to know,  
 Myself her real character will tell,  
 Nor ought exaggerate, nor ought conceal.  
 Many have tried, but few cou'd ever impart  
 The secret counsels of so deep a heart. 50  
 Full twenty years within the palace bred  
 Much to my cost, I saw the tempest spread.

The king expiring in the bloom of life  
 Left a free course to his ambitious wife.

Form'd by her cares to empire, either son  
 Alike she hated when he reign'd alone.  
 Her hands, the source from whence confusion flow'd  
 The seeds of jealousy, and discord sow'd.  
 Her deep designs, no wild effect of chance,  
 To Condè Guise oppos'd, and France to France.  
 By turns defending enemies, and friends,  
 And rivals aiding for her private ends.  
 False to her sect, and superstition's slave,  
 She sought each pleasure which ambition gave.  
 Scarce did one virtuous grace adorn her mind,  
 Deform'd with all the vices of her kind.  
 Forgive the freedom of an honest heart ;  
 You reign a stranger to your sex's art.

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Line 55. Catharine of Medicis quarrel'd with her son Charles IX. towards the latter end of his life, and afterwards with Henry III. She had so openly expressed her dislike of the government of Francis II. that she was suspected, though unjustly, having hastened the death of that king.

Line 60. In the memoirs of the League is contained a letter from Catharine of Medicis to the prince of Condé, in which she returns him her thanks for having taken arms against the court.

Line 63. When she believed that the battle of Dreux was lost and the protestants had gained the victory, " Well then, " cried, we will say our prayers in French".

Line 63. She was so weak as to believe in Magick, witness the Talifinans which were found upon her after her death.

Augu

August Eliza, blest with ev'ry charm  
 That thought can fancy, or that heav'n can  
 form, 70

To win affection, or to guard a state,  
 Lives a bright pattern to the good, and great.  
 With love, and wonder all your deeds are seen,  
 And Europe ranks you with her greatest men.

Francis the second, in youth's early pride, 75  
 By fate untimely join'd his fire, and died.

Guise he ador'd, no more his years had shewn,  
 Nor vice, nor virtue mark'd him for their own.

Charles, younger still, the regal name obtain'd,  
 But fear evinc'd, 'twas Medicis that reign'd. 80

One taught by artful policy to bring  
 Eternal childhood on the rising king.

A hundred battles spoke her new command,  
 And discord's flames were kindled by her hand.

Two rival parties she with rage inspir'd, 85  
 Their arms directed, and their bosoms fir'd.

Dreux first beheld their banners wave in air,  
 Ill-fated theatre of horrid war!

---

Line 87. The battle of Dreux was the first pitched battle between the catholic and protestant parties. It happened in 1562.

Old Montmorenci near the royal tomb  
 Met from a warrior's arm a warrior's doom.  
 At Orleans Guise resign'd his latest breath,  
 A stern assassin gave the stroke of death.  
 My father still unwilling slave at court,  
 Was fortune's bubble, and the queen's support;  
 Wrought his own fate, in battle firmly stood,  
 And died for those who thirsted for his blood.  
 Condé vouchsaf'd a parent's aid to lend,  
 My surest guardian, and my truest friend.

Line 89. Anne de Montmorenci, a man remarkable for his  
 obstinacy, and the most unfortunate general of his time, was taken  
 prisoner at Pavia and at Dreux, beaten at St. Quintin by Philip II.  
 and was at length mortally wounded at the battle of St. Denis by  
 an Englishman named Stuart, the same person who had taken him  
 prisoner at Dreux.

Line 91. This is the same Francis de Guise who is mentioned  
 afterwards, famous for the defence of Metz against Charles V.  
 He was besieging the Protestants in Orleans in 1563, when  
 Poltrot-de-meré shot him in the back with a pistol loaded with  
 three poisoned balls. He was forty-four years old when he died.

Line 93. Anthony of Bourbon, king of Navarre, the father of  
 Henry IV. was of a weak and unsettled temper. He quitted the  
 Protestant religion in which he was born, just when his wife re-  
 nounced the Catholic. He never knew with certainty what party  
 or what religion he belonged to. He was killed at the siege of  
 Bonen, where he assisted the Guises, who were his oppressors,  
 against the Protestants whom he loved. He died in 1562, of the  
 same age with Francis de Guise.

Line 97. The prince of Condé who is here meant, was brother  
 of the king of Navarre and uncle of Henry IV. He was a long  
 time chief of the Protestants, and a great enemy of the Guises.

Nurs'd in his camp, beneath the laurel's shade,  
 Amidst surrounding heros was I bred. 100

Like him disdain'g indolence, and sloth,  
 Arms were the toys, and play-things of my youth.

O plains of Jarnac! O unhappy day  
 That took my guardian, and my friend away!

Condé, whose kind protection I enjoy'd, 105

Thy murd'ring hand, O Montesquiou, destroy'd:

Too weak, too feeble to revenge the blow,

I saw thee deal destruction on the foe.

Young and untaught, expos'd to ev'ry ill,  
 Heav'n found some hero to protect me still; 110

Great Condé first my steps to glory train'd,  
 Next my good cause Coligny's arm sustain'd:

Coligny, gracious queen! if Europe see

A virtue worthy her regard in me,

If Rome herself confess my youthful days 115

Not unrenown'd, Coligny's be the praise.

He was slain after the battle of Jarnac by Montesquiou, captain of the guard to the Duke of Anjou, (afterwards Henry III.) The Count of Soissons son of the deceased, sought diligently after Montesquiou and his relations, that he might sacrifice them to his vengeance.

Line 112. Gaspard de Coligny, admiral of France, the son of Gaspard de Coligny, marshal of France, and of Louisa de Montmorenci, sister of the constable, born at Chattillon Feb. 16, 1516.

Vid. the following remarks.

Early I learn'd beneath his eye to bear  
 A soldier's hardships in the school of war ;  
 His great example my ambition fir'd,  
 His counsel form'd me, and his deeds inspir'd. 120  
 I saw him gray in arms, yet undismay'd,  
 The gen'ral cause reclining on his aid ;  
 Dear to his friends, respected by the foe,  
 Firm in all states, majestic tho' in woe ;  
 Expert alike in battle and retreat, 125  
 More glorious, ev'n more awful in defeat,  
 Than Gaston or Dunois in all the pride  
 Of war, with France and fortune at their side.

Ten years elaps'd of battles lost and won,  
 Still on the field our well-arm'd legions shone ; 130  
 With grief the queen her barren trophies view'd,  
 Our hardy troops, tho' vanquish'd, unsubdu'd,  
 And at one stroke, one fatal stroke ordain'd  
 To sweep the civil fury from the land.  
 Sudden new counsels in her court prevail'd, 135  
 And peace was offer'd, when the sword had fail'd.  
 Peace ! be thou witness heav'n's avenging pow'r !  
 That treach'rous olive how it blush'd with gore ;  
 Gods ! is it then so hard a task to stray,  
 And shall their monarchs teach mankind the way ? 140

True

True to his sov'reign still, devoutly true  
 Tho' he oppos'd her, to his country too,  
 Coligny siez'd the happy hour to heal  
 Her bleeding int'rests, with a patriot's zeal.

Undaunted thro' surrounding foes he press'd, 145  
 (Suspicious seldom haunt a hero's breast)

Nor staid, till in her own august abode,  
 Full in the midst before the queen we stood.

With circling arms and flowing tears she strove  
 To lavish o'er me ev'n a mother's love; 150

Coligny's friendship was her dearest choice,  
 Still to be rul'd by his unerring voice;

Wealth, pow'r, and honour at his feet she lay'd,  
 Her own's indulgence to our hopes display'd,  
 Vain flatt'ring hopes alas! and quickly fled. } 155

All were not blinded by this specious shew  
 Of cordial grace and bounty from the foe.

But Charles, still anxious to insure success,  
 More bounteous seem'd, as they believ'd him less.

Train'd up in falshood from his earliest youth, 160  
 He held eternal enmity with truth;

From infant years had treasur'd in his heart  
 The pois'nous precepts of his mother's art;

And fierce by nature, merciless and proud,  
 With ease was ripen'd to the work of blood. 165

More

More deeply still to veil the dark design,  
By nuptial bands he made his sister mine.

Oh bands accurst, and Hymen's rites profan'd,  
By heaven in anger for our curse ordain'd,  
Whose baleful torch, dire omen of our doom, 170  
Blaz'd but to lead me to a mother's tomb.

Tho' I have suffer'd let me still be just,  
Nor blame thee, Medicis, but where I must,  
Suspensions, tho' on reason firmly built, 175  
I scorn, nor need them to enhance thy guilt.

But Albret died—forgive these tears I shed,  
Due to the fond remembrance of the dead.

Mean while the dreadful hour in swift career,  
Big with the queen's vindictive wrath, drew near.

Nights gloomy mantle thrown o'er earth and  
heav'n, 180

Silent and still th'appointed sign was giv'n.

The moon's pale regent falter'd on her way,  
And sick'ning seem'd to quench her feeble ray.

Line 167. Margaret of Valois, sister of Charles IX. was married to Henry IV. in 1572, few days before the massacre.

Line 172. Jeanne d'Albret, mother of Henry IV. who was drawn to Paris with the rest of the Huguenots, died almost suddenly between the marriage of her son and the feast of St. Bartholomew, but Caillart her physician, and Desnæuds her surgeon, both zealous Protestants, who opened her body, found no marks of poison upon it.

Line 182. It was on the night between the 23d and 24th of August, being the feast of St. Bartholomew in 1572, where this bloody tragedy was executed.

Coligny slept, and largely o'er his head  
 The drowfy pow'r had all his influence shed. 185  
 Sudden unnumber'd shrieks dispell'd the charm,  
 His rallying senses felt the dread alarm;  
 He wak'd, look'd forth, and saw th'assassin throng  
 With murd'rous strides march hastily along:  
 Saw on their arms the quiv'ring torch-light play, 190  
 His palace fir'd, a nation in dismay,  
 His bleeding household stifled in the flames,  
 While all the savage host around exclaims,  
 " Let no compassion check your righteous hands,  
 "'Tis God, 'tis Medicis, 'tis Charles commands. 195  
 Now his own name shrill echoing rends the skies,  
 And now far off Teligny he descries,  
 Teligny, fam'd for ev'ry virtuous grace,  
 Whose truth had earn'd his daughter's chaste em-  
     brace, }  
 Hope of his cause, and honour of his race. } 200  
 The bleeding youth by ruffians force convey'd,  
 With outstretch'd arms demands his instant aid.

---

Line 197. The count de Teligny, ten months before, had married the daughter of the admiral. He had so much sweetness in his countenance, that they who came first to kill him relented at the sight, but others more barbarous did the business.

Helpless

Helpless, unarm'd, he saw his fate decreed,  
 Saw that his blood must unreveng'd be shed ;  
 Yet bravely anxious for renown atchiev'd,  
 Wish'd but to die the hero he had liv'd.

Already the tumultuous band explore  
 His own recess, and thunder at the door.  
 Instant he flings it wide, and meets the foe  
 With eye untroubled, and majestic brow,  
 Such as in battle with delib'rate breast,  
 Serene, he urged the slaughter, or repress'd.

Awful and sage he stood, his gracious form  
 Quell'd the loud tumult, and controul'd the storm.  
 Finish, my friends, your fatal task, he said,  
 Bathe in my freezing blood this hoary head,  
 These locks, which yet full many a boist'rous year  
 Ev'n the rough chance of war has deign'd to spare.  
 Strike, and strike deep ; be satisfied and know  
 With my last breath I can forgive the blow,  
 The mean desire of life my soul abjures,  
 Yet happier ! might I die, defending yours.

The savage band grown human at his words,  
 Clasping his knees let fall their idle swords ;

Prone on the ground his pard'ning grace implore, 225  
 And at his feet repentant sorrows pour ;  
 He in the midst, like some lov'd monarch rose,  
 Theme of his subject's praise, and idol of their vows.

When Besme, impatient for his destin'd prey,  
 Rush'd headlong in, enrag'd at their delay ; 230  
 Furious he saw the deed unfinish'd yet,  
 And each assassins trembling at his feet.  
 No change in him this scene of sorrow wrought,  
 Hard and unfeeling still, the caitiff thought,  
 Whoe'er relented at Coligny's fate, 235  
 Was the queen's foe, a rebel to the state.

Northward the croud he breaks impetuous way,  
 Firm stands the chief, unconscious of dismay,  
 Deep in his side the fierce Barbarian struck  
 The fatal steel, but with averted look, 240  
 Left at a glance that eye's resistless charm  
 Should freeze his purpose, and unnerve his arm.  
 Such was the brave Coligny's mournful end ;  
 Affront and outrage ev'n his death attend,

---

Line 229. Besme was a German, a domestic of the house of Guise. This wretch being afterwards taken by the Protestants, the Rochellers offered a price for him that they might tear him to pieces in the great square, but he was killed by a person named Bretonville.

The

The rav'ning hawk and vultur hover round 245  
 His mangled limbs, still fest'ring on the ground.  
 At the queen's feet his sacred head is thrown,  
 A conquest worthy both herself and son.  
 With brow unalter'd and serene she sate,  
 Nor seem'd t' enjoy the victim of her hate; 250  
 To veil her secret thoughts so well she knew,  
 Such presents seem'd familiar to her view.

Vain were the task and endless to recite  
 Each horrid scene of that disast'rous night;  
 Coligny's death serv'd only to presage 255  
 Our future woes, an earnest of their rage.  
 Legions of bigots, flush'd with fiery zeal  
 And frantic ardour, shake the murth'ring steel;  
 Proudly they march where heaps of slaughter rise,  
 Unfated vengeance sparkling in their eyes. 260  
 Guise in the van full many a victim paid  
 Indignant, to his father's injur'd shade;

---

Line 244. They suspended the admiral by the feet with an iron chain to the gibbet of Montfaucon. Charles IX. went, together with his court, to enjoy this horrid spectacle. One of his courtiers saying that the body of Coligny had an ill smell, the king answered like Vitellius, the body of an enemy slain smells always well.

Line 261. This was Henry duke of Guise, surnamed Balafre, who was slain at Blois: the brother of duke Francis, who was assassinated by Poltrot.

Their

245 Their leaders animate the troops aloud,  
 And chafe to madness the deluded crowd;  
 Long registers of deaths foredoom'd display, 265  
 And guide the poignard to it's destin'd prey.

250 The tumult I omit, the deaf'ning screams,  
 The blood that floated in promiscuous streams;  
 How on his father's coarse struck rudely down,  
 Convulsed with anguish fell th'expiring son; 370  
 How when the flames had split the mould'ring wall,  
 It crush'd the cradled infant in it's fall:

255 Events like these we view with less surprize,  
 For still they mark the track where human frenzy flies.  
 But stranger far, what few will e'er believe 275  
 In future ages, or yourself conceive,

260 The barb'rous rout, whose hearts with added fire,  
 Those holy savages, their priests inspire;  
 Ev'n from the carnage call upon the Lord,  
 And waving high in air the reeking sword, } 280  
 Offer aloud to God the sacrifice abhorr'd.

What num'rous heroes in that havock died!  
 Renel and brave Pardailan by his side,

---

Line 283. Anthony of Clermont-Renel, as he was saving himself in his shirt, was massacred by the son of the Baron des Adrets. and by his own cousin, Buffy d'Amboise. The marquis of Pardailan was slain at his side.

Guerchy

Guerchy and wife Lavardin, worthy well  
 A longer life and gentler fortune, fell.  
 Among the wretches, whom that night of woe  
 Plunged in the gloom of endless night below,  
 Marillac and Soubise mark'd down to death,  
 Defended stoutly their devoted breath,  
 'Till all with labour wearied and foredone,  
 Close to the Louvre's gate push'd roughly on,  
 While to their king with suppliant voice they cry,  
 Deaf to their pray'rs, he hears not, and they die.

High on the roof the royal fury stood,  
 At leisure feasting on the scenes of blood,  
 Her cruel minions watch the gloomy host,  
 And mark the spot where slaughter rages most ;  
 Brave chiefs ! triumphant only in their shame,  
 They saw their country blaze, and gloried in the  
 flame.

---

Line 284. Guerchy defended himself a long time in the street, and slew many of the assassins 'till he was overpowered by numbers ; but the marquis of Lavardin had not time to draw his sword.

Line 288. Marillac, Count Rochefoucault, was a favourite of Charles IX. and had spent part of the night with him. The king had some inclination to save him, and had himself commanded him to sleep in the Louvre ; but at length he let him depart, saying, I see plainly it is God's will that he should perish.

Soubise

Oh scandal to the name of king rever'd!  
 Himself, the monarch, joins the felon herd;  
 Himself the trembling fugitives pursues,  
 And ev'n his sacred hands in blood imbrues.  
 This Valois too, whose cause I now support,  
 Who comes by me, a suppliant to your court,  
 Shar'd in his brother's guilt an impious part,  
 And roused the flames of vengeance in his heart;  
 Nor yet is Valois fierce, of savage mood,  
 Or prone by nature to delight in blood;  
 But on his youth those dire examples wrought,  
 And weakness, more than malice, was his fault.

A few there were whom vengeance sought in vain,  
 Who 'scap'd unhurt among the thousands slain.  
 Caumont! thy fortune, thy auspicious fate,  
 Ages unborn with wonder shall relate.

Soubise was so called because he had married the heiress of that family. His own name was Dupont-Quellence. He defended himself a long time, and fell covered with wounds under the queen's window. The ladies flock'd thither to see his body, naked and bloody as it was, with a savage curiosity, worthy of that abominable court.

Line 300. I have heard the last marshal of Fessé assert, that in his youth he knew an old man 90 years of age, who had been page to Charles IX. and who had often told him, that he himself loaded the carabine with which the king fired upon his Protestant subjects, the night of St. Bartholomew.

Line 314. De Caumont, who escaped the massacre, was the famous marshal de la Force, who afterwards gained such great reputation, and lived to the age of fourscore and four years.

The

The hoary fire between his sons reposed,  
 His aged eyes in needful slumber closed,  
 One bed sufficed them all; when rushing in  
 The fell destroyers mar the peaceful scene,  
 With hasty strokes their poignards plunging round, 320  
 They deal a random death at ev'ry wound.  
 But he, whose mercies o'er our fate preside,  
 Can waft with ease the threat'ning hour aside;  
 Through very zeal to slay, they spare the son,  
 And not a trace of mischief reach'd Caumont. 325  
 A hand unseen was stretch'd in his defence,  
 And screen'd from harm his infant innocence;  
 Pierced with a thousand murders, to their force  
 His father still oppos'd his bleeding corse,  
 And a whole nation's ardour to destroy 330  
 Eluding, twice gave being to his boy.

Me to sweet sleep resign'd, and balmy rest,  
 No fear alarm'd, no jealousy possess'd;  
 Deep in the Louvre at that dreadful hour,  
 Far from the din of arms I slept secure: 335  
 But oh! what scenes my waking eyes survey'd,  
 Grim death in all his horrid pomp array'd,  
 Porches and Porticos were deluged o'er,  
 With crimson streams, and stood in pools of gore;

THE HENRIADE. 45

My friends still bleeding, my domestics slain, 340

The truest, best, and dearest of my train.

Already at my bed the villains stand

Prepar'd, already lift the murth'ring hand ;

My life hangs wav'ring on a point, I wait

The final stroke, and yield me to my fate. 345

But whether rev'ence of their ancient lords,

The blood of Bourbon, check'd their daring swords ;

Whether ingenious to torment, the queen

Held Henry's life a sacrifice too mean ;

Or wisely spared it, to secure alone 350

In future storms, a shelter for her own ;

Instead of death, at once to set me free,

Chains and a dungeon were her stern decree.

Far happier was the fate Coligny shar'd,

His life alone her treach'rous arts ensnar'd, } 355

The hero's freedom still, and glory unimpar'd.

I see Eliza shares in the distress,

Though half the sad recital I suppress.

It seem'd as from the queen's malignant eye

All France had caught the signal to destroy ; 360

Swift from the capital on ev'ry side

Death o'er the kingdom stretch'd his banners wide.

Kings

6 THE HENRIADE.

Kings in their vengeance are too well obey'd;  
Whole armies blindly lend their impious aid;  
France floats in blood, and all her rivers sweep 365  
Upon their purple tides, the carnage to the deep.

312

310

322

300

King

THE