The Conclusion of Baird's History of the Huguenots.*

In his two volumes on "The Huguenots and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes," Professor Baird has drawn up a severe indictment of France for her dealings with the Huguenots during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is no sin of the Gallican church or of the Bourbon monarchy which is not adequately stated and the degree of its enormity marked by an appropriate adjective. The conclusion is inevitable that the French clergy were largely engaged in the despicable business of hounding Louis XIV. on to the destruction of thousands of his most loyal and industrious subjects, and that by yielding to their solicitations he proved himself to be an ignoble, if not a stupid, tyrant. This has long been the Protestant, and, with certain modifications, the general view of the matter. Professor Baird has, however, elaborated it in greater detail and with more ample scholarship. The story which he tells is at times sombre, and even a little dreary, as all recitals of hapless struggle against injustice, oppression, and hypocrisy must be. It is not until the period of the Camisard War and the Church of the Desert is reached that one is reminded of his books on the brighter fortunes of the Huguenot movement in the sixteenth century.

Professor Baird would have made these calamitous chapters of French history more intelligible had he looked at them in a more philosophic spirit and less as the special advocate of the Huguenot party. Even the bigotry which in our eyes cursed the later administration of the Great King was not as mean as an unsympathetic chronicle would make it appear. Its principal consequence was the persecution of the Huguenots, and this was neither wholly Louis's work nor the work of his clergy. Sainte-Beuve told at least a part of the truth when, long ago, he declared that the King was insensibly urged on to this terrible blunder by a complicity almost universal. It is idle to deny this when we know that an overwhelming majority of the French people believed that the Calvinistic heresy not merely imperilled the eternal salvation of those who cherished it, but also endangered by its contagion every community in France. Had the religious leaders of France acquiesced in the schism legalized by the Edict of Nantes, their conduct would have seemed to us incredible, or at least very puzzling. The seventeenth century produced few such untimely prophets of forbearance. In the Palatinate, a near neighbor of France, twice within sixty years the inhabitants had been forced to embrace the doctrines of Luther, and twice to give them up for those of Calvin, in obedience to that holy principle of the Religious Peace of Augsburg, *cujus regio, ejus religio*. England was driving the "Papists" to despair and Gunpowder plots by her Recusancy laws, the most genial of which provided that Catholics who refused to go to church should pay a fine of £20 a month. Necessitous Protestant gentlemen of a sensitive piety found some temporal advantage in this particular statute,— as, for example, Lord Hay, who received from the government a grant of all he could get over £240 from one of the Recusants. In comparison with her neighbors, France was until past the middle of the century a land of "sweetness and light." What the King and his ecclesiastical councillors did after 1656 is not surprising, although it may fill the modern man with anger and disgust. But if he be a historian he sacrifices the true interests of his readers when he leaves the bench and assumes the role of prosecuting attorney to plead against one culprit after another, not forgetting men like Bossuet and Fénelon.

*The Huguenots and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. By Henry M. Baird, Professor in the University of the City of New York. Two volumes. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

The Edict of Nantes had been a glorious achievement in spite of the fact that it did not embody a policy of toleration of the modern sort, but was rather the recognition of privileges, half religious and half political, won in battle. It was not a stable peace, and consequently, although it was ostensibly "irrevocable" and needed no confirming, Louis XIII. and Louis XIV. repeatedly confirmed it. One of these confirmations, which occurred in 1629 and has been called the Edict of Grace, came nearer to a true toleration than did the Edict of Nantes itself, for it was granted after the political defeat of the Huguenots and the fall of La Rochelle, the last of their great strongholds — when, therefore, no serious threat of insurrection held the government to its pledges. From this time to 1656, and perhaps a few years later, the Huguenots throve, protected by the wise statesmanship of Richelieu and Mazarin. Their constant troubles before 1629 were quite as much due to the abnormal position — like a state within a state — which the original Edict had given them, as to any hostile intentions on the part of the Regent or Louis XIII. The possession of one hundred and fifty fortified places was, indeed, less a guarantee of the good faith of the government than an evidence of its weakness, the result of the disastrous civil wars, when feudalism sought to rebuild its fortresses and when the mediæval spirit of local independence threatened the disintegration of France. But the royal power was to triumph, and with its triumph the exceptional position of the Huguenots shared the fate of the new feudalism. If we forget the political aspect of the affair, it is hard to understand why the Huguenot leaders enlisted Catholic soldiers, who were certainly strange partners in the defense of liberty of conscience for heretics; or why that "unfortunate convocation," to use Professor Baird's phrase, the Assembly of La Rochelle in 1621, carried its factiousness so far as to give its adherents an organization which might easily have passed for that of a new Protestant state modelled after the Dutch Republic. Up to 1629 the situation is so complex, therefore, that the issue is not clearly between oppressor and oppressed, and the story must be read with divided sympathies.

It was a great misfortune that the Edict of Nantes proved to be only a little more irrevocable than the "perpetual and irrevocable" edict of Queen Jeanne d'Albret in 1563, granting toleration in Béarn to Catholics, which "perpetual" edict lasted eight years. For two decades before 1685, when the Revocation came, the spirit of the great edict had been disobeyed, its letter misinterpreted, and its object thwarted by the wholesale destruction of churches, by the "conversion fund," the suppression of Huguenot representation on the bench, and by the infamous Dragonnades. Indeed, Louis XIV. seems to have thought that the formal Revocation was simply the fitting conclusion to a noble work of Christian reunion, already practically complete.

Professor Baird has one or two interesting passages describing the exemplary morals of the murderous Camisards. "No quarrels, enmity, calumny, or thieving was heard among us," says one of their leaders, Cavalier. "All swearing, cursing, and obscene words were quite banished out of our society. Happy time! had it lasted forever." But it is not strange, perhaps, considering the horrible cruelties that were practiced upon them, that their experience made the *naïve* combination of these minor virtues with the most pitiless butcheries.

It would have been not out of place had Professor Baird given us a fuller description of the fortunes of the Church of the Desert and its pastors during the storms of the Revolution. In what he writes, however, about the Triumph of Atheism, he falls into the error of saying that the Convention ordered the suppression of all religious worship. The day before Gobel's abdication, the Convention had, it is true, voted that communes could suppress their parishes if they desired, subject to the approval of the departments in which they were situated. Nine days later it added the provision that the suppressed churches or their income be used for hospitals or for public instruction. It never went so far as to separate church from state, or to render worship illegal.

Even if Professor Baird's attitude toward the French clergy in urging the Revocation be open to just criticism, the careful scholarship and ripe learning, of which all his pages give evidence, make these volumes a fitting conclusion to the great work on Huguenot history to which he has devoted the thirty best years of his life.

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