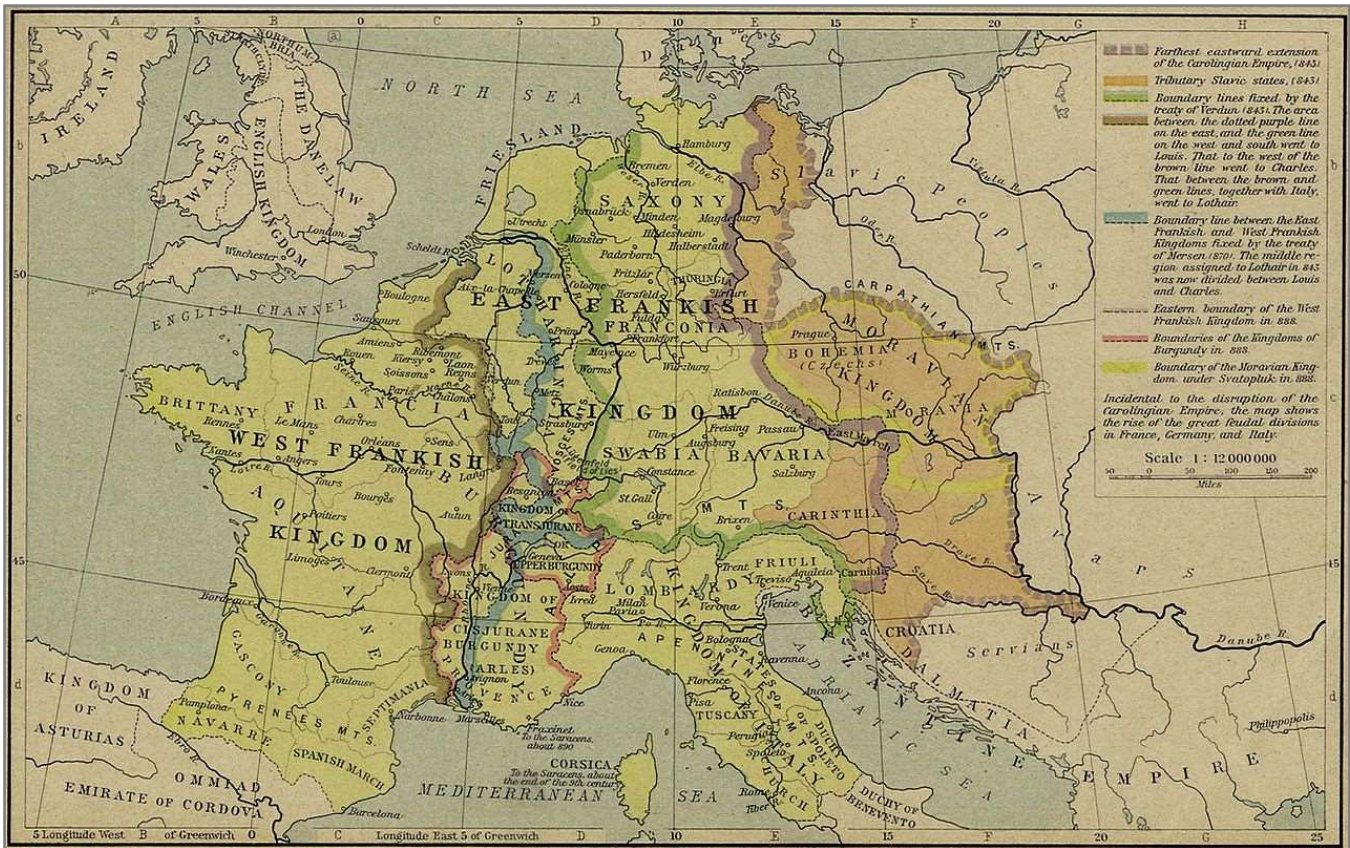


# The Artios Home Companion Series

## Unit 6: The Carolingian Kings

### Teacher Overview

WE WILL NOW turn to study the rise of Charlemagne in Western Europe. Through sometimes brutal measures, this Frankish emperor succeeded for a time in reuniting the old Western Roman Empire, and his accomplishments briefly restored it to its former glory.



The parting of the Carolingian Empire by the Treaty of Verdun in 843

### Reading and Suggested Assignments

In this unit, students will:

- Complete three lessons in which they will learn about the **Carolingian Dynasty** and **Charlemagne**, journaling and answering discussion questions as they read.
- Define vocabulary words.
- Watch the videos found on their **HCS Class pages** for this unit.
- Choose to do one of the following:
  - Write a biographical report on **Charlemagne**.
  - Create a display reflecting the various aspects and achievements of Charlemagne's life.
- Visit their **HCS Class pages** to check for additional resources.

## Leading Ideas

### People's characters will be reflected in their words and actions.

*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.*

– Proverbs 23:7 (KJV)

### There is power in the spoken word to do evil or to do good.

*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*

– Matthew 12:34

### The rise and fall of nations and leaders is determined by God.

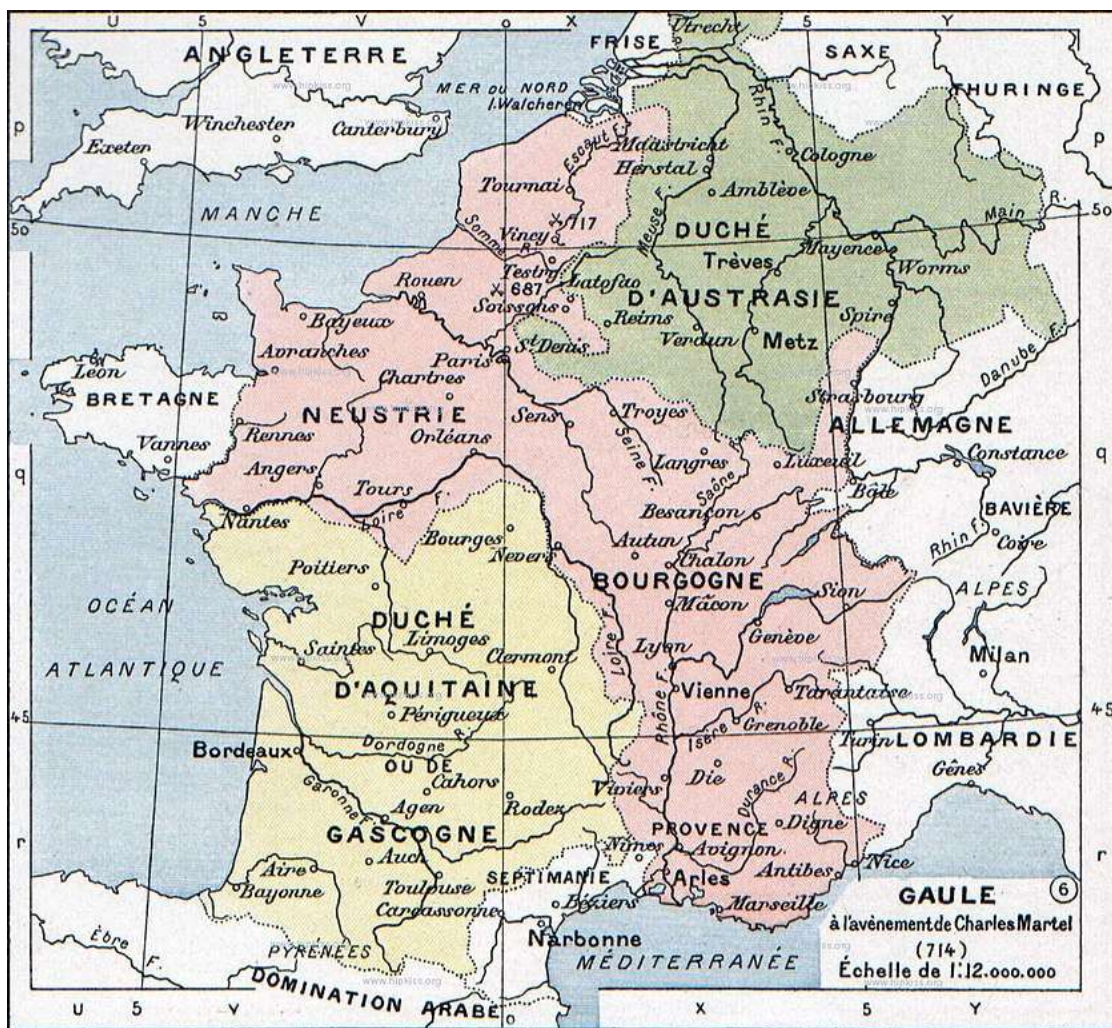
*The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*

– Proverbs 21:1

### God's Word is the supreme source of God's revelation to man.

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

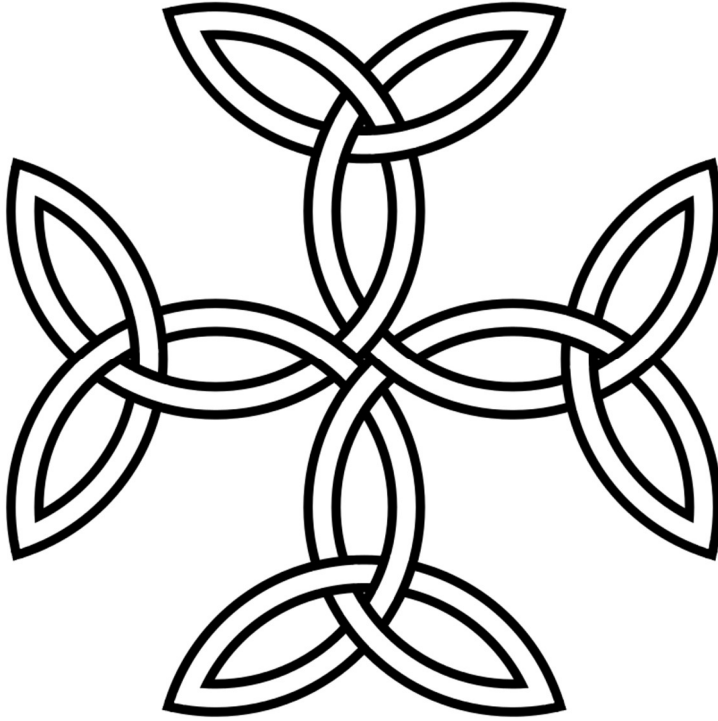
– 2 Timothy 3:16-17



The Frankish kingdoms at the time of the death of Pepin of Heristal. Aquitaine (yellow) was outside Arnulfing authority and Neustria and Burgundy (pink) were united in opposition to further Arnulfing dominance of the highest offices. Only Austrasia (green) supported an Arnulfing mayor, first Theudoald then Charles. The German duchies to the east of the Rhine were de facto outside of Frankish suzerainty at this time.

## Lesson One

# History Overview and Assignments Founding of the Carolingian Dynasty



A cross composed of four interlaced triquetras—this is called a “Carolingian Cross,” by Rudolf Koch.

### Important Date

732 Battle of Tours

### Key People, Places, and Events

Merovingian Dynasty  
Pepin II, “of Herstal”  
Charles “the Hammer” Martel  
Battle of Tours  
Pepin III, “the Short”  
Waiofar  
Childeric III  
Carolingian Dynasty  
Stephen II  
Gregory III  
Donation of Pepin  
Papal States

### Vocabulary

epoch  
peremptorily  
exarchate

## Reading and Suggested Assignments

- Review the vocabulary then read the article: *Pepin the Short Usurps the Frankish Crown*.
- Narrate about today’s reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion question and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading. Write each word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Watch the videos found on your **HCS Class pages** for this lesson.
- Begin taking notes to prepare for one of the following projects:
  - Write a biographical report on **Charlemagne**.
  - Create a display reflecting the various aspects and achievements of his life.
- Be sure to visit your **HCS Class pages** to check for additional resources.

## Discussion Questions

1. How did the mayors of the palace rise to ruling power in Gaul?
2. What did Clovis, Charles Martel, Pepin the Short, and Charlemagne each contribute to the growth of the Frankish power?

Adapted for High School from the book:

## *Great Events by Famous Historians*

by John Rudd

### *Founding of the Carolingian Dynasty Pepin the Short Usurps the Frankish Crown*

(Article by Francois P.G. Guizot)

#### **Pepin II of Herstal**

The **Merovingian Dynasty**, the first of the Frankish kings in Gaul, had been founded by the greatest of their kings, Clovis, who in 486 overthrew the Gallo-Roman rule. After his death in 511 his kingdom was divided among four sons, who were mere youths ranging from twelve to eighteen years of age.

The young princes extended the conquests of their father until they had secured from the emperor Justinian title to the whole of Gaul. The last survivor of the brother-kings was Chlothar I. Under his rule the whole Frankish empire had been united into one; but upon his death it was again divided among sons. This division cut the kingdom into three separate sovereignties.



Statue of Charles Martel

The reign of these brothers was one of horrible cruelty and bloodshed. Chlothar II, son of one of the brothers named Chilperic, survived them and brought the monarchy under one scepter. But power slipped fast from this royal representative of the Merovingian race, and their immoral, lazy descendants became known as *rois fainéants*, or

“do-nothing” kings. Meanwhile, the “mayor of the palace” (*major-domus*) began to exercise an authority which in time resulted in supremacy. When **Pepin II**, also called **Pepin “of Herstal,”** the greatest territorial lord of Austrasia, took upon himself the office of major-domus, he compelled the Merovingian king, after the Battle of Tertry in 687, to invest him with mayoral powers in the three Frankish states: Neustria, Austrasia, and Burgundy. This being accomplished Pepin was practically dictator, and the Merovingian kings, though allowed to remain on the throne, were simply figureheads from that time forth.

#### **Charles Martel**

**Charles “the Hammer” Martel** was a son worthy of Pepin of Herstal. His most notable achievement as major-domus was the defeat of the Saracen invaders at the **Battle of Tours in A.D. 732**, which ended the advance of Islam through Western Europe.

Charles Martel died on October 22, 741, aged fifty-two years, and his last act was the least wise of his life. He had spent it entirely in two great works: the reestablishment, throughout the whole of Gaul, of the Franco-Gallo-Roman Empire, and the driving back, from the frontiers of his empire, of the Germans in the north and the Arabs in the south.

Charles Martel then endangered these results by falling back into the pattern of those Merovingian kings whose shadow he had allowed to remain on the throne, by dividing between his two legitimate sons, **Pepin III** (called “**the Short**”) and Carloman, this sole dominion which he had with so much toil reconstituted and defended. They both, at their father’s death, took only the title of mayor of the palace, and, perhaps, of duke. The last but one of the Merovingians, Thierry IV, had died in 737. For four years there had been no king at all.

Immediately after the death of Charles Martel, the consequences of dividing his empire became manifest. In the North, the Saxons, the Bavarians, and the Alemanni renewed their insurrections. In

the South, the Arabs of Septimania recovered their hopes of effecting an invasion; and Aquitaine made a fresh attempt to break away from Frankish sovereignty and win independence. Charles Martel had also left a younger son, Grifo, whose legitimacy had been disputed, but who was not slow to commence a rivalry against his brothers.

Everywhere there burst out that reactionary movement which arises against grand and difficult works when the strong hand that undertook them is no longer present to maintain them, but this movement was of short duration and to little purpose. Brought up in the schooling and fear of their father, his two elder sons, Pepin III and Carloman, remained united in spite of the division of dominions, and labored together successfully to keep down the Saxons and Bavarians in the North and the Arabs and Aquitanians in the South, supplying lack of unity by union, and pursuing with one accord the constant aim of Charles Martel—abroad, the security and grandeur of the Frankish dominion, and at home, the cohesion of all its parts and the efficacy of its government.

Events came to the aid of this wise conduct. Five years after the death of Charles Martel, in 746 in fact, Carloman, already weary of the burden of power and seized with a fit of religious zeal, abdicated his share of sovereignty, left his dominions to his brother Pepin, had his hair shorn by the hands of Pope Zachary, and withdrew into Italy to the monastery of Monte Cassino. The preceding year, in 745, Hunald I, Duke of Aquitaine, with more patriotic and equally pious views, also abdicated in favor of his son **Waiofar**, whom he thought more capable than himself of winning the independence of Aquitaine, and went and shut himself up in a monastery in the Isle of Rhé, where the tomb of his father Eudes was.

Then, in the course of various attempts at conspiracy and insurrection, the Frankish princes' young brother Grifo was killed in combat while crossing the Alps. The furious internal dissensions among the Arabs of Spain, and their incessant wars with the Berbers, did not allow them to pursue any great enterprise in Gaul. As a result of all these circumstances, Pepin III found himself, in 747, sole master of the heritage of Clovis, and with the sole charge of pursuing, in state and church, his father's work, which was the unity and grandeur of Christian France.

Pepin, less enterprising than his father but judicious and capable of discerning what was necessary, was well fitted to consolidate the lands.

Like his father, he did not take the title of king. Together with his brother Carloman, he went to seek, heaven knows in what obscure asylum, a forgotten Merovingian son of Childeric II, the last but one of the sluggard kings, and made him king, the last of his line, with the title of **Childeric III**, taking for himself only the title of mayor of the palace.



*The Last of the Merovingians*, by Evariste-Vital Luminais depicting the cutting of Childeric's hair

But at the end of ten years, when he saw himself alone at the head of the Frankish dominion, Pepin considered the moment ripe for putting an end to this fiction. In 751 he sent a message to Pope Zachary at Rome, "on the subject of the kings then existing among the Franks, and who bore only the name of king without enjoying a tittle of royal authority."

This marked an important turning point in the history of popes and rulers, where the Church was assumed to have the authority to assign kingship.

The **Carolingian Dynasty**, named for Pepin's father Charles Martel, now officially began.

Two years after Pepin's coronation, in July of 754, Pope **Stephen II** anointed him afresh with the holy oil in the Church of St. Denis in France, in appreciation for receiving assurance of Pepin's support against the Lombards. He also conferred the same honor on the King's two sons, Charles and Carloman. The new Gallo-Frankish kingship and the papacy, in the name of their common faith and common interests, thus contracted an intimate alliance. The young Charles would later become Charlemagne.

Pepin, after he had been proclaimed king, directed all his efforts toward the two countries which, after his father's example, he longed to reunite to the Gallo-Frankish monarchy, that is, the

regions of Septimania, still occupied by the Arabs, and Aquitaine, the independence of which was stoutly defended by its duke, Hunald's son Waiofar.

The conquest of Septimania was more tedious than difficult. The residents of its capital, Narbonne, were tired of suffering for the defense of their oppressors, so they entered into secret negotiations with the chiefs of Pepin's army. In the end, they opened the gates of the town. In 759, then, after forty years of Saracen rule, Narbonne came definitively under that of the Franks, who guaranteed to the inhabitants free enjoyment of their Gothic or Roman law and of their local institutions. It even appears that, in the province of Spain, the Arab chief named Suleiman submitted to Pepin both himself and the country under him. This was an important event, indeed, in the reign of Pepin, for here was the point at which Islam, recently aggressive and victorious in Southern Europe, began to feel definitively beaten and to recoil before Christianity.

The conquest of Aquitaine and Vasconia was much more keenly disputed, however. Duke Waiofar was as able in negotiation as in war; at one time he seemed to accept the peaceful overtures of Pepin, at another he found allies who caused Pepin much embarrassment and peril. The population of Aquitaine hated the Franks; and the war, which for their duke was a question of independent sovereignty, was for themselves a question of passionate national feeling.

Pepin, who was by nature more humane and even more generous in war than his predecessors had usually been, was nevertheless provoked in this struggle against the Duke of Aquitaine to ravage without mercy the countries he scoured, and to treat the vanquished with great harshness. It was only after nine years' war and seven campaigns full of ups and downs that he succeeded, not in conquering his enemy in a decisive battle, but in gaining over some servants who betrayed their master.

In the month of July 759, "Duke Waiofar was slain by his own folk, by the King's advice," says historian Frédégaire; and the conquest of all southern Gaul carried the extent and power of the Gallo-Frankish monarchy farther and higher than it had ever yet been, even under Clovis.

In 753 Pepin had made an expedition against the Britons of Armorica, had taken Vannes and "subjugated," add certain chroniclers, "the whole of Brittany." In point of fact, the region of Brittany was no more subjugated by Pepin than by his predecessors; all that can be said is that the Franks

resumed under him an aggressive attitude toward the Britons, as if to vindicate a right of sovereignty.

But at this **epoch** Pepin was also engaged in another matter which did not allow him to scatter his forces about.



A statue of Pepin III, "the Short," in Wurzburg  
(By 12345678, CC BY-SA 3.0 de,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18877281>)

In 741 Pope **Gregory III** had asked aid of the Franks against the Lombards who were threatening Rome. While fully entertaining the Pope's wishes, Charles Martel had been in no hurry to interfere in the quarrel. Twelve years later, in 753, Pope Stephen, in his turn threatened by another king of the Lombards, after vain attempts to obtain guarantees of peace, traveled to Paris and renewed to Pepin the entreaties of Zachary.

It was difficult for Pepin to turn a deaf ear; it was Pope Zachary who had declared that he ought to be made king; Pope Stephen showed readiness to anoint him a second time, himself and his sons; and it was the eldest of these sons, Charles, scarcely twelve years old, whom Pepin, on learning the near arrival of the Pope, had sent to meet him, giving brilliancy to his reception.

Stephen passed the winter at St. Denis and gained the favor of the people as well as that of the King. The Lombard king **peremptorily** refused to listen to the remonstrances of Pepin, who called upon him to evacuate the towns in the **exarchate** of Ravenna, and to leave the Pope unmolested in the environs of Rome as well as in Rome itself.

At the end of the summer Pepin and his army descended into Italy by Mount Cenis, the Lombards trying in vain to stop them as they emerged into the

Susa Valley. The Lombard king, beaten and soon shut up in Pavia, promised all that was demanded of him. Pepin and his warriors, laden with booty, returned to France, leaving at Rome the Pope, who adjured them to remain a while in Italy, for to a certainty, he said, the Lombard king would not keep his promises.

The Pope was right. As soon as the Franks had gone, the Lombards resumed occupying the places in the exarchate and assaulting the neighborhood of Rome.

The Pope, in despair and doubtful of his helpers' return, conceived the idea of sending to the King, the chiefs, and the people of the Franks, a letter written, he claimed, by Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, to announce to them that, if they came in haste, he would aid them as if he were alive according to the flesh among them, that they would conquer all their enemies and make themselves sure of eternal life! The plan was perfectly successful: the Franks once more crossed the Alps with enthusiasm, once more succeeded in beating the Lombards, and once more shut up in Pavia their king, who was eager to purchase peace at any price. He obtained it on two principal conditions:

1. that he would not again make a hostile attack on Roman territory, or wage war against the Pope or people of Rome and

2. that he would henceforth recognize the sovereignty of the Franks, pay them tribute, and cede forthwith to Pepin the towns and all the lands belonging to the jurisdiction of the Roman Empire which were at that time occupied by the Lombards.

By virtue of these conditions Ravenna, Rimini, Pesaro, that is to say, the Romagna, the duchy of Urbino, and a portion of the Marches of Ancona, were at once given up to Pepin, who, regarding them as his own direct conquest, the fruit of victory, disposed of them forthwith to the popes. This was the famous **Donation of Pepin**, which comprised pretty nearly what later formed the **Papal States**, and which founded the temporal independence of the papacy, the guarantee of its independence in the exercise of the spiritual power.

At the head of the Franks as mayor of the palace from 741, and as king from 752, Pepin had completed in France and extended in Italy the work which his father Charles Martel had begun and carried on, from 714 to 741, in state and church. He left France reunited and placed at the head of Christian Europe.

He died at the monastery of St. Denis, September 18, 768, leaving his kingdom and his dynasty thus ready to the hands of his son, whom history has dubbed Charlemagne.



Painting depicting Abbot Fulrad giving Pepin's written guarantee to Pope Stephen II (artist and date unknown)  
The donation of Pepin the Short to Pope Stephen II (or treaty of Quierzy), in 754, created the Papal States.

## Lesson Two

# History Overview and Assignments

## The Rise of Charlemagne



Statue of Charlemagne in Liège, Belgium, by Louis Jéhotte (1867)

### Reading and Suggested Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *The Rise of Charlemagne*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Watch the videos found on your **HCS Class pages** for this lesson.
- Continue taking notes for your unit project. Be sure to be as detailed as possible in your narration so that you have adequate notes from which to write a biographical report or create a display reflecting the aspects and achievements of the life of **Charlemagne**.
- Be sure to visit your **HCS Class pages** to check for additional resources.

### Key People, Places, and Events

Charlemagne  
Alcuin  
Louis "the Pious"

Louis "the German"  
Charles "the Bald"

Lothair I  
Charles "the Fat"

Hugh Capet  
Capetian Dynasty

### Discussion Questions

1. In what did the special greatness of Charlemagne consist?
2. In what major way did Charlemagne vary from Scripture in spreading Christianity?
3. Compare the extent of the territory ruled over by Charlemagne with that of the Eastern Empire in his day.
4. Why was the papacy friendlier to the Franks than to the other Germans?
5. Why was the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor so significant?
6. Compare the German ideas of law with modern ideas.
7. Why were officers such as the *missi dominici* needed to control local officials?
8. Why was Charlemagne's care for education important?
9. Did Charlemagne's view of succession and inheritance more nearly resemble Germanic chieftains or Roman emperors? In what way?

## *New Medieval and Modern History*

by Samuel Bannister Harding and Albert Bushnell Hart

### *The Rise of Charlemagne*

With the accession of Charles the Great, known as **Charlemagne**, after the death of his father Pepin the Short in 768, we come to one of the outstanding figures of world history. In the history of the Middle Ages, Charlemagne is as important as Caesar is in ancient history, or Napoleon in modern history, or George Washington in the history of the United States. His reign is noteworthy both for its military conquests and for its peaceful achievements. The latter are the more important, but we will turn first to his conquests.

A list of the peoples against whom he waged war during the forty-six years that he ruled shows the wide area covered by his military operations. It includes the Aquitanians and Britons of southern and western Gaul; the Saracens in Spain and the Mediterranean islands; the Lombards in Italy; the German Thuringians, Bavarians, and Saxons; their neighbors the Danes; and the Avars, Slavs, and Greeks of Eastern Europe. In all, Charlemagne sent forth more than fifty military expeditions, at least half of which he commanded in person.

Against several of these peoples, repeated expeditions were necessary. Of all his enemies the most stubborn were the pagan Saxons, who dwelt in the trackless forests and swamps bordering on the North Sea. The task of conquering this people required for its completion eighteen separate expeditions, distributed over thirty years, and reportedly included the execution of 4,500 of rebels, possibly in a single day, in Verden. The most troublesome tribes were transported to other parts of the kingdom. Throughout Saxony fortresses were established and bishoprics founded (around which grew up the first towns), and Christianity was forced upon the land at the point of the sword. Opposition was at last crushed, and within a few generations the Saxons became the most powerful nation in the Frankish realm.

More significant than the Saxon wars were the wars with the Lombards. In spite of the two expeditions of wars by Pepin the Short, the power of the Lombards continued to be a menace to the papacy. The Lombard king, moreover, harbored pretensions to a share in Charlemagne's kingdom.

Consequently when the Pope appealed to Charlemagne for aid against the Lombards, Charlemagne marched to his assistance. In the year 774 he overthrew the Lombard king and took for himself the title King of the Lombards. The year before, he had renewed his father's gift to the Pope of the rule over Ravenna and other parts of Italy. The conquest of Lombardy and this donation were two of the most important acts of Charlemagne's reign. They brought the King of the Franks into closer relations with the papacy, strengthened the temporal power of the popes, and prepared the way for the revival of the Western Empire under the rule of Charlemagne.

#### **Charlemagne Crowned Emperor**

The lands over which Charlemagne ruled in 800 included what are now France, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, more than half of Germany and Italy, and parts of Austria. Over the "eternal city" of Rome itself he exercised supreme authority by virtue of the title "Patrician of the Romans."

The extent of Charlemagne's power made him already in fact, though not in name, the Emperor of the West. The ruler at Constantinople at this time was a woman, the Empress Irene, who had just deposed her own son, put out his eyes, and seized the power for herself. The West refused to recognize her rule and looked on the throne of the empire as vacant. What was more natural than that it should be given to the King of the Franks, the real ruler of the West? Charlemagne was quite prepared for this step, but by whom should the imperial crown be conferred?

Whatever solution Charlemagne had in mind, the circumstances of the coronation were not of his arranging. The close of the year 800 found him in the city of Rome. At the solemn celebration of Christmas in the old Church of St. Peter's, as Charlemagne knelt in prayer at the altar, Pope Leo II placed a crown upon his head, while the people cried, "To Carolus Augustus, Crowned by God, mighty pacific Emperor, be life and victory."

The coronation of Charlemagne, in the language of noted English historian James Bryce, "is not only

the central event of the Middle Ages, it is also one of those very few events which, taking them singly, it may be said that if they had not happened, the history of the world would have been different.”

The leading ideas of the old Roman Empire were those of unity, order, and centralization; but powerful tendencies had been at work since its fall in the West to produce separation, disorder, and anarchy. Charlemagne, by the brilliance of his genius and the splendor of his victories, was able to revive the only institution which could give even a semblance of political union to Western Europe, and check these destructive tendencies. He alone of Medieval rulers held the commanding position to accomplish this; and his work was done barely in time. A few score years more of decay would have made the task practically impossible.

“When the hero was gone,” says Bryce, “the returning wave of anarchy and barbarism swept up violent as ever, yet it could not wholly obliterate the past.” Charlemagne’s opportune revival of the empire had implanted too deeply the ideal of European unity to permit of its ever after being wholly lost.

In dealing with the complex and difficult problems of his great empire, Charlemagne showed as remarkable genius for governing as he displayed in waging war. To each of its peoples—Franks, Burgundians, Romans, Lombards, Goths, Bavarians, Saxons—he left its own law, making only such changes by his decrees, or “capitularies,” as the good of the state and of society demanded. This was in keeping with the early German idea of Law. To these barbarians the “law” of each individual was an inheritance from the past of his race, and was as much a part of him as the breath that he drew. Wherever he went, the German expected to be tried by the law of his own race, and not by that of the people among whom he lived.

In considering the institutions of Charlemagne’s empire, it must be remembered that the government of the Roman Empire had perished in the period of the invasions, and that cruder and simpler forms of government had taken its place. Taxes paid to the state were one of the things that had disappeared with the fall of the Roman Empire. So Charlemagne’s needs were supplied, like those of most Medieval rulers, chiefly from the proceeds of his own estates, called *villae*, for which elaborate regulations were made.

The Emperor usually traveled from villa to villa

with his entourage, to consume the produce arising on each estate. On the other hand, public officers, military service, and the like were unpaid, and the financial needs of the state were therefore less than now. Charlemagne’s government was far from being as free and orderly as the governments under which European nations live today. Yet when we consider the difficulties of the time and compare his government with that of his successors, we wonder, not that he did not accomplish more, but that amid such conditions he was able to accomplish so much.

Under the Merovingians the Frankish kingdom had been divided into local districts, each ruled by an officer called a “counts” (later “count”), who was appointed by the King. These counts were retained by Charlemagne as the chief officers of his local government. In their hands was placed the military leadership of the districts, together with the administration of justice. The counts—as was natural in a rude and barbarous time, when supervision was slight and means of communication difficult—often abused their powers and were guilty of great oppression. To supervise their work Charlemagne sent out each year royal commissioners (called *missi dominici*), whose special function it was to link the local to the central government. The *missi dominici* inspected the national militia, heard complaints against the counts, enforced justice, and guarded the interests of the King. Usually they were sent out two by two—a noble and a churchman.

### Fields of May

Twice a year, in early summer and in the fall or winter, Charlemagne summoned the principal men of his empire to consult with him concerning its affairs. To the summer meeting, called the “Field of May,” came all freemen capable of bearing arms. The meeting was often followed by a military expedition, in which each warrior supplied his own arms and equipment, and served at his own expense.

### Church and State

In one respect Charlemagne enjoyed much greater power than was possessed by Medieval rulers after him. In his assemblies he dealt not only with affairs which concerned the state, but also with those which concerned the Church, instead of leaving these to be decided, as was later the rule, by the assemblies and courts of the Church itself. Church and state were thus to a considerable extent united. Whenever Charlemagne believed that priests or bishops were

not performing their duties properly, he did not hesitate to correct them and to pass laws deciding the most important church questions.

### Education and Arts Under Charlemagne

Charlemagne's work for education and the arts constitutes one of the most important features of his reign. When he came to the throne, the literatures of ancient Greece and Rome had almost disappeared from the knowledge of men in Western Europe, and even the writings of the Church scarcely survived. The only "books" were parchment volumes written by hand. Charlemagne himself learned to speak and read Latin in addition to his native German, and to understand Greek, though not to speak it. He never mastered the art of writing as was then used, though he kept waxed tablets always by him to practice it.

Charlemagne's chief means to improve education and learning was the Palace School—a kind of learned society composed of the chief scholars and courtiers about the Emperor. This school played an important part in a real revival of learning and literature. Its head was an English monk named **Alcuin**. He was invited to the Emperor's court from his monastery at York, which was then the most learned center in Western Europe.

Other learned men came from Italy, Spain, and other lands; some were grammarians, some poets, some theologians. Charlemagne discussed with them astronomy, shipbuilding, history, the text of the Scriptures, theology, moral philosophy, and many other subjects.

For the younger members of the royal family and court, there was more formal instruction. The Palace School may thus be regarded as a sort of high school, as well as a literary and debating club.

Charlemagne's care for education did not stop with his own court. In his capitularies we read such commands as these: "Let schools be established in which boys may learn to read. Correct carefully the Psalms, the signs in writing, the songs, the calendar, the grammar, in each monastery or bishopric, and the Catholic books; because often men desire to pray to God properly, but they pray badly because of the incorrect books. And do not permit mere boys to corrupt them in reading or writing. If there is need of writing the Gospel, Psalter, and Missal, let men of mature age do the writing with diligence."

Charlemagne also planned canals, built bridges, and restored churches, which were crumbling into ruin. But his work in this direction did little to check

the artistic decay of the times. From the old residence of the emperors at Ravenna, a hundred marble columns were taken for Charlemagne's palace and chapel at Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle). Thither also were transported pictures, mosaics, and precious sculptures. Charlemagne thus set a poor example for the ages which followed. He encouraged a robbery of the ancient monuments, which caused more destruction among them that was caused by all the ravages of time and war.

The ten years following Charlemagne's coronation as emperor were mainly spent at his capital, Aachen. His fame abroad was at its height. To his court came envoys from the renowned Harun al-Rashid ("Aaron the Just"), caliph of Bagdad, whose present of an enormous elephant excited the liveliest interest among the curious Franks.

In arranging for succession after his death, Charlemagne followed the old Germanic practice of dividing the kingdom among his three sons, whom he established as sub-kings over portions of his realm. One of the chief differences in the position of the monarch, as conceived by the Roman emperors vs. by the barbarian kings, was that the Roman emperors in theory held their power as a trust in the name and interest of the state—that is, of all—while the Germanic kings regarded the royal power as private property, to which ordinary rules of inheritance could be applied.

Charlemagne's arrangement, however, broke down, owing to the fact that his two older sons died before he did. Then Charlemagne placed the imperial crown on the head of his third son, Louis, and recognized him as his successor. There was apparently no thought of the Pope conferring the crown, as had been done at Charlemagne's own unexpected coronation.

Four months later, in January, 814, the old emperor died of a fever, being upward of seventy years of age.

### Charlemagne's Appearance and Character

Few men have left a deeper impression on their times, and around few have clustered so many legends. Because many important personages of the Middle Ages are but dim shadowy figures to us, owing to the scantiness of our means of information, the account of Charlemagne's personality and habits, given by his secretary and biographer Einhard, is of peculiar interest: "*Charles was large and strong,*

*and of lofty stature, though not disproportionately tall. The upper part of his head was round, his eyes very large and animated, nose a little long, hair fair, and face laughing and merry. His appearance was always stately and dignified, whether he was standing or sitting. He took frequent exercise on horseback and in the chase. He enjoyed natural warm springs, and often practiced swimming, in which he was such an adept that none could surpass him. Thence it was that he built his palace at Aix-la-Chapelle, and lived there constantly during his latter years until his death. He used to wear the national, that is to say the Frankish, dress—next to his skin a linen shirt and linen breeches, and above these a tunic fringed with silk; while hose fastened by bands covered his legs, and shoes his feet, and he protected his shoulders and chest in winter by a close-fitting cloak of otter or marten skins. Over all he flung a blue cloak, and he always had a sword girt about him.”*

### **The Dissolution of Charlemagne’s Empire**

The power which Charlemagne built up declined rapidly after his death. Civil wars and rebellions distracted the reign of his well-meaning but weak successor, **Louis “the Pious”** (814-840). Louis’ death was followed by a terrible battle between his three sons at Fontenay (841). A treaty of partition was then arranged between the brothers at Verdun in 843. One brother, **Louis “the German,”** received the eastern third of the empire, beyond the rivers Aar and Rhine.

The youngest, **Charles “the Bald,”** received the western third, lying west of the Rhone and Scheldt. The eldest brother, **Lothair I,** received the middle strip, with Italy and the title of emperor. This sweeping partition was the first step in marking out territories in which were to arise great European states. Louis’ division included the districts in which were spoken various German dialects, and

corresponds roughly to modern Germany. In Charles’s portion a corrupted Latin prevailed, the forerunner of the French speech, and this region grew in time to be modern France. The middle strip had neither unity of race nor a common language. Its parts, therefore, together with Italy, became for ten centuries the object of conquests and the seat of European wars.

The history of the later descendants of Charlemagne makes a confused but uninteresting story. The incompetent rulers in the various parts of his empire quarreled among themselves until they rapidly became extinct. In Italy the Carolingian line of rulers ended in 875; in Germany it lasted until 911. Only once was the Frankish empire reunited under a single ruler. This was under the incompetent **Charles “the Fat,”** one of the grandsons of Louis the Pious, who for three brief years (884-887), ruled over the whole of Charlemagne’s realm. His deposition and death mark the final breakup of the unity of the Carolingian lands.

In France for a hundred years longer some semblance of power remained to the Carolingians. Three times within that period, however, they were set aside and rulers of another house—the Robertians, so called from an ancestor, Robert “the Strong”—were put in their place. In 987, the last of the French Carolingians in the direct line died, leaving no children. On the ground that the throne was not hereditary but elective, an assembly of nobles then rejected the claim of the uncle of this king, and chose as ruler a Robertian named **Hugh Capet.**

Thus in France also the power of the great house from which had sprung Charles Martel, Pepin, and Charlemagne, came to an end. The future of France was left in the lands of its third set of rulers, the **Capetian Dynasty,** members of which ruled there until the abolition of the monarchy by the French Revolution in 1792.

### **Important Dates**

768-814	Reign of Charlemagne
800	Charlemagne crowned emperor at Rome
843	Partition of Verdun
875	End of the Carolingian line in Italy
884-887	Charlemagne’s empire reunited under Charles the Fat
911	End of the Carolingian line in Germany
987	End of the Carolingian line in France; Hugh Capet becomes king

## Lesson Three

# History Overview and Assignments Charlemagne the Man



Charlemagne, by Theodorich of Prague (1360)

### Key People, Places, and Events

Saxons  
Massacre of Verden  
Norman Vikings  
Avars  
Roland  
Battle of Roncesvalles Pass

Signature of Charlemagne

### Reading and Suggested Assignments

- Review the vocabulary then read the article: *Charlemagne: Revival of Western Empire*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading. Write the words and their definitions in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Watch the videos found on your **HCS Class pages** for this lesson.
- Continue taking notes for your end-of-unit project. Then, using the narration, additional notes, and time line entries compiled from this unit's reading, complete one of the following:
  - Write an essay on **Charlemagne** of at least five paragraphs.
  - Create a display detailing at least ten aspects and achievements his life.
- Be sure to visit your **HCS Class pages** to check for additional resources.

### Vocabulary

dissolution  
precocity  
inundation

subjugation  
morass  
imperialism

approbation  
fiat  
cant

despotism  
aggrandizement  
jurisprudence

ameliorate  
rapacious  
encroachment

## Discussion Questions

1. For what qualities was Charlemagne distinguished as a young man?
2. In what ways did his reign provide a striking contrast to those of previous Merovingian kings?
3. The author of this article presents his own philosophical opinions on several occasions. What assertion does he make regarding what he refers to as “needless” and “lasting” conquests in light of the moral government of God? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
4. In modern hindsight, what do you think of the following statement with respect to the history of Muslim conquests throughout the world? *“In seeking to invade Spain, Charlemagne warred against a race from whom Europe had nothing more to fear.”*
5. Briefly summarize the author’s assertions with regard to the historical relationship between imperialism and Christianity.
6. Toward what form of government does the author feel civilization has progressed slowly but markedly? In what ways does he assert that Christianity has influenced and even guided this progress?



*Coronation of Charlemagne, by Friedrich Kaulbach (1861)*

## *Beacon Lights of History: The Middle Ages*

by John Lord

### *Charlemagne: Revival of Western Empire*

The most illustrious monarch of the Middle Ages was doubtless Charlemagne. Certainly he was the first great statesman, hero, and organizer that looms up to view after the **dissolution** of the Roman Empire. Therefore I present him as one with whom is associated an epoch in civilization.

To Charlemagne we date the first memorable step which Europe took out of the anarchies of the Merovingian age. His dream was to revive the empire that had fallen. He was the first to labor, with giant strength, to restore what vice and violence had destroyed. He did not fully succeed in realizing the great ends to which he aspired, but his aspirations were lofty. It was not in the power of any man to civilize semi-barbarians in a single reign; but if he attempted impossibilities he did not live in vain, since he bequeathed some permanent conquests and some great traditions. He left a great legacy to civilization.

He did not rise, like Clovis, from the condition of a chieftain of a tribe of barbarians; nor, like the founder of his family, from a position of mayor of the palace or minister of the Merovingian kings. His early life was spent amid the turmoils and dangers of war camps, and as a young man he was distinguished for **precocity** of talent, manly comeliness, and gigantic physical strength.

He was an example of chivalry, before chivalry arose. He was born to greatness, and early came into a great inheritance. At the age of twenty-six, in the year 768, he became the monarch of the greater part of modern France, and of those provinces which border on the Rhine. By unwearied activities this inheritance, greater than that of any of the Merovingian kings, was not only kept together and preserved, but was increased by successive conquests, until no empire of such size had ever been ruled by any one man in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire.

His reign affords a striking contrast to that of all his predecessors of the Merovingian Dynasty, which reigned from the immediate destruction of the Roman Empire. The Merovingian princes, with the exception of Clovis and a few others, were mere barbarians, although converted to a nominal

Christianity. Some of them were cruel and brutal monsters, and others were idiots.

It is difficult to conceive a more dreary and dismal state of society than existed in France, and in fact over all Europe, when Charlemagne began to reign. The Roman Empire was in ruins, except in the East, where the Greek emperors reigned at Constantinople. The western provinces were ruled by independent barbaric kings. There was no central authority, although there was an attempt of the popes to revive it, a spiritual rather than a temporal power.

The barbaric chieftains yielded a partial homage to this spiritual power, and it was some check on their rapacity of violence. It is mournful to think that so little of the ancient civilization remained in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The shadows of a dark and long night of superstition and ignorance had spread over Europe. Law was silenced by the sword. Justinian's glorious legacy was already forgotten. There was no literature, no philosophy, no poetry, no history, and no art. Even the clergy had become ignorant, superstitious, and idle.

The architecture of the age expressed the sentiments of the age, and was heavy, gloomy, and monotonous. Rome itself, repeatedly sacked, was a heap of ruins. No reconstruction had taken place. Gardens and villas were as desolate as the ruined palaces, which were the abodes of owls and spiders. The immortal creations of the chisel were used to prop up crumbling walls.

Literature shared the general desolation. The valued manuscripts of classical ages were mutilated, erased, or burned. The descendants of ancient patrician families were in bondage to barbarians. Assassination was common, and was unavenged by law. Every man was his own avenger of crime, and his bloody weapons were his only law.

Nor were there seen among the barbaric chieftains the virtues of ancient pagan Rome and Greece, for Christianity was nominal. War was universal; for the barbarians, having no longer the Romans to fight, fought among themselves. There were incessant incursions of different tribes passing from one country to another, in search of plunder

and pillage. There was no security of life or property, and therefore no ambition for acquisition.

A cry of despair went up to heaven among the descendants of the old population. There was no commerce, no travel, no industries, no money, and no peace. The chastisement of the Almighty seems to have been sent on the old races and the new alike. It was a desolation greater than that predicted by Jeremiah the prophet.

Gaul was the scene of turbulence, invasions, and anarchies; of murders, of conflagrations, and of pillage by rival chieftains, who sought to divide its territories among themselves. The people were utterly trodden down.

England was the battlefield of Danes, Saxons, and Celts. The land was invaded perpetually and split up into petty Saxon kingdoms. The roads were infested with robbers, and agriculture was rude.

Most people lived in cabins, dressed themselves in skins, and fed on the coarsest food. Spain was invaded by Saracens, and the Gothic kingdoms succumbed to these fierce invaders. Italy was portioned out among different tribes, Gothic and Slavonic. But the prevailing races in Europe were Germanic.

What a commentary on the imperial government of the caesars—that empire which, with all its mechanisms and traditions, lasted scarcely four hundred years. Was there ever, in the whole history of the world, so sudden and mournful a change from civilization to barbarism—and this in spite of art, science, law, and Christianity itself? Were there no conservative forces in that imposing empire? Why did society constantly decline for four hundred years, with that civilization which was its boast and hope?

And yet men should arise in due time, after the punishment of five centuries of wretchedness and despair, to reconstruct, not from the old pagan materials of Greece and Rome, but with the fresh energies of new races, aided and inspired by the truths of the everlasting gospel. The infancy of the new races, sprung however from the same old stock, grew into vigorous youth when Charlemagne appeared. He was the morning star of European hopes and aspirations.

Let us now turn to his glorious deeds. What were the services he rendered to Europe and Christian civilization?

It was necessary that a truly great man should arise in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, if the new forces of civilization were to be organized. Nothing was lacking but their consolidation under central rule in

order to repel aggressors. And that is what Charlemagne attempted to do.

The great perils which threatened Europe were from unsubdued barbarians, who sought to replunge it into the miseries which the great invasions had inflicted three hundred years before. He therefore bent all the energies of his mind and all the resources of his kingdom to arrest these fresh waves of **inundation**. And he fought them, not for excitement, not for military fame, but because a stern necessity was laid upon him to protect his own territories and the institutions he wished to conserve.

### The Saxons

Of these barbarians there was one nation peculiarly warlike and ferocious. They were obstinately attached to their old superstitions, and had a great repugnance to Christianity. These were the **Saxons**, and they inhabited those parts of Germany which were bounded by the Rhine, the Oder, the North Sea, and the Thuringian forests. They were fond of the sea, and of daring expeditions for plunder. They were a kindred race to those Saxons who had conquered England, and had the same elements of character. They were poor and sought to live by piracy and robbery. They were very dangerous enemies, but if brought under subjection to law, and converted to Christianity, might be turned into useful allies, for they had the raw materials of a noble race.

With such a people on his borders, and every day becoming more formidable, what was Charlemagne to do? The only thing to the eye of that enlightened statesman was to conquer them, if possible, and add their territories to the Frankish Empire. There could be no lasting peace in Europe while these barbarians were left to pursue their depredations.

A vigorous warfare was imperative, for, unless subdued, a disadvantageous war would be carried on near the frontiers, until some warrior would arise among them, unite the various chieftains, and lead his followers to successful invasion.

Charlemagne knew that the difficult and unpleasant work of **subjugation** must be done by somebody, and he was unwilling to leave the work to languid successors. This work was not child's play. It took him the best part of his life to accomplish it, amid great discouragements.

Of his fifty-three expeditions, eighteen were against the Saxons. As soon as he had cut off one head of the monster, another head appeared. How

allegorical of human labor is that old fable of the Hydra! Where do man's labors cease? Charlemagne fought not only amid great difficulties, but perpetual irritations.

The Saxons cheated him; they broke their promises and their oaths. When beaten, they sued for peace; but the moment his back was turned, they broke out in new insurrections. The fame of Caesar chiefly rests on his eight campaigns in Gaul. But Caesar had the disciplined Legions of Rome to fight with. Charlemagne had no such disciplined troops. Yet he had as many difficulties to surmount as Caesar—rugged forests to penetrate, rapid rivers to cross, **morasses** to avoid, and mountains to climb. It is a very difficult thing to subdue even savages who are desperate, determined, and united.

Charlemagne fought the Saxons for thirty-three years. Though he never lost a battle, they still held out. At first he was generous and forgiving, but they could not be won by kindness. He was obliged to change his course. He is even accused of cruelty—ordering the execution of 4,500 Saxon prisoners in what became known as the **Massacre of Verden**. This massacre prompted three more years of bloody warfare.

But Charlemagne at last was successful. The Saxons were so completely subdued at the end of thirty-three years that they never molested civilized Europe again. They finally became civilized, like the once invading Celts and Goths; and they even embraced the religion of the conquerors.

They ultimately became fine people of Europe—earnest, honest, and brave. They formed great kingdoms and states, and became new barriers against fresh inundations from the North and East. The Saxons formed the nucleus of the great German Empire (or were incorporated with it) which arose in the late Middle Ages. The descendants of those Saxons were among the most industrious and useful settlers in the New World.

Charlemagne caused the young Saxons, whom he baptized and marked with the sign of the Cross, to be educated. He built monasteries and churches in the conquered territories. He encouraged missions as well as schools.

There was one mistake which Charlemagne made in reference to them, however. He forced their conversion to a nominal Christianity. He immersed them in the rivers of Saxony, whether they were willing or not, and much of their subsequent religion fell back into pagan beliefs.

## The Normans

There was another Germanic tribe at that time which greatly alarmed Charlemagne but which he did not attack, since they were not immediately dangerous. These were the **Norman Vikings**, just then beginning their ravages as pirates in open boats. They had dared to enter a port in the region of Gallia Narbonensis for purposes of plunder. Some took them for Africans, and others for British merchants. Nay, said Charlemagne, they are not merchants, but cruel enemies, and he covered his face with his iron hands and wept like a child. He did not fear these barbarians, but he wept when he foresaw the evil they would do when he was dead.

“I weep,” said he, “that they should dare almost to land on my shores, in my lifetime.” These Normans escaped him. They plundered, conquered, and founded kingdoms. But they did not replunge Europe in darkness. A barrier had been made against their inundation. The Saxon conquest was that barrier.

Moreover, the Normans eventually showed themselves to be the noblest race of barbarians which then roamed through the forests of Germany, or skirted the shores of Scandinavia. They had grand natural traits of character. They were poetic, brave, and adventurous. Once converted, they became the great allies of the Pope, and early were civilized.

To them we trace the noblest development of Gothic architecture. They became great scholars and statesmen. In after times they composed the flower of European chivalry, so it was providential that they were not subdued. To them we trace the mercantile greatness of England, for they were born sailors. They never lost their natural heroism, or love of power.

## The Avars

The next important conquest of Charlemagne was that over the **Avars**—a tribe of the Huns, of Slavonic origin. They were known as hideous barbarians who only thought of plunder. There seemed to be no end of their invasions from the time of Attila.

They were more formidable for their numbers and destructive ravages than for their military skill. There was a time, however, when they threatened the combined forces of Germany and Rome; but Europe was delivered by the repeated campaigns of Charlemagne and his son Pepin. Had the Avars conquered, civilization would have been crushed out. But the Franks were successful against them, and

from that time they were shut out from Western Europe.

### The Saracens

Charlemagne had now delivered France and Germany from external enemies. He then turned his arms against the Saracens of Spain. This was the great mistake of his life. Yet everyone makes mistakes, however great his genius. Alexander made the mistake of pushing his arms into India; and Napoleon made a great blunder in invading Russia. Needless conquests seem to be impossible in the moral government of God, who rules the fate of war. Lasting conquests are only possible when civilization seems to require them.

In seeking to invade Spain, Charlemagne warred against a race from whom Europe had nothing more to fear. His grandfather, Charles Martel, had halted the conquests of the Saracens; and they were quiet in their settlements in Spain, and had made considerable attainments in science and literature. Their schools of medicine and their arts were in advance of the rest of Europe. They were the translators of Aristotle, who reigned in the rising universities during the Middle Ages.

As this war was unnecessary, Providence seemed to rebuke Charlemagne. The defeat of his famous nephew **Roland** at the **Battle of Roncesvalles Pass** was one of the most memorable events in his military history. Prodigies of valor were wrought by Roland and his gallant Paladins. The early heroic poetry of the Middle Ages has commemorated Charlemagne and Roland's exploits here in *The Song of Roland*, the oldest surviving major work of French literature, and some writers have ascribed the origin of Medieval chivalry to the battle it describes. But the Frankish forces were signally defeated amid the passes of the Pyrenees; and it was not until after several centuries that the Gothic princes of Spain shook off the yoke of their Saracenic conquerors and drove them from Europe.

### The Lombards

The Lombard wars of Charlemagne are the last to which I allude. These were undertaken in defense of the Church, to rescue his ally the Pope. The Lombards belonged to the great Germanic family, but they were unfriendly to the Pope and to the Church. They stood out against the empire, which was then the chief hope of Europe and of civilization. They would have reduced the Pope to insignificance and seized his territories, without uniting Italy. So

Charlemagne, like his father Pepin, lent his powerful aid to the Roman bishop, and the Lombards were easily subdued. This conquest, although the easiest which he ever made, most flattered his pride. Lombardy was not only joined to his empire, but he received unparalleled honors from the Pope, being crowned by him Emperor of the West.

It was a proud day when, in the ancient metropolis of the world, and in the fullness of his fame, Pope Leo III placed the crown of Augustus upon Charlemagne's brow, and gave to him, amid the festivities of Christmas, his apostolic benediction.

### Imperialism

Charlemagne's dominions now extended from Catalonia to the Bohemian forests, embracing Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy, and most of Spain—the largest empire which any one man has possessed since the fall of the Roman Empire. What more natural than for Charlemagne to feel that he had restored the Western Empire? What more natural than that he should have taken the title, still claimed by the Austrian emperor, in one sense his legitimate successor—Kaiser, or Caesar? In the possession of such enormous power, he naturally dreamed of establishing a new universal military monarchy like that of the Romans—as Charles V dreamed, and Napoleon after him. But this is a dream that Providence has rebuked among all successive conquerors.

There may have been need of the universal monarchy of the caesars, so that Christianity might spread in peace and be protected by a reign of law and order. This at least is one of the platitudes of historians. Historians are fond of exalting the glories of **imperialism**, and everybody is dazzled by the splendor and power of ancient Roman emperors. They do not sufficiently consider the blasting influence of imperialism on the life of nations—how it dries up the sources of renovation, how it necessarily withers literature and philosophy, how nothing can thrive under it but pomp and material glories, how it paralyzes all virtuous impulses, how it makes slaves of its best subjects, how it fills the earth with fear, how it drains national resources to support standing armies, how it mocks all enterprises which do not receive imperial **approbation**, how everything is concentrated to reflect the glory of one man or family; how impossible, under its withering shade, is manly independence, or the free expression of opinions or healthy growth; how it buries up, under its armies, discontents and aspirations alike,

and creates nothing but machinery which must ultimately wear out and leave a world in ruins, with nothing stable to take its place.

Law and order are good things, the preservation of property is desirable, the punishment of crime is necessary; but there are other things which are valuable also. Nothing is so valuable as the preservation of national life; nothing is so healthy as scope for energies; nothing is so contemptible and degrading as universal fawning to official rule. There are no tyrants more oppressive than the tools of absolute power. See in what a state imperialism left the Roman Empire when it fell. There were no rallying forces; there was no resurrection of heroes. Vitality had fled.

There is another side to imperialism besides dreaded anarchies. Moreover, the whole progress of civilization has moved away from it. The *fiats* of eternal justice have pronounced against it, because it is antagonistic to the dignity of man and the triumphs of reason. I would not fall in with the **cant** of the dignity of man, because there is no dignity to man without aid from God Almighty through His Spirit and the message He has sent in Christianity. There is dignity in man only with the aid of a regenerating gospel.

Some people talk of the triumphs of Christianity under the Roman emperors; but see how rapidly it was corrupted by them when they sought the aid of its institutions to bolster up their power. *The power of Christianity is in its truths—in its religion, and not in its institutions. It is, and it was, and it will be through all the ages the great power of the world, against which it is vain to rebel.* And that government is really the best which unfetters its spiritual influence and encourages it; and not that government which seeks to perpetuate its corrupt and worldly institutions. The Roman emperors made Christianity an institution and obscured its truths. And perhaps that is one reason why Providence permitted their **despotism** to pass away, preferring the rude anarchy of the Germanic nations to the dead mechanism of a lifeless church and imperial rotteness. Imperialism must ever end in rotteness. And that is one reason why the heart of Christendom—the people of Europe, in its virtuous sections—has ever opposed imperialism. *The progress has been slow, but marked, toward representative governments—not the reign of the people directly (which would be unbeneficial mob rule), but of those whom they select to represent them.*

The victory (at the time of this writing) has been nearly gained in England. In France the progress has been uniform since the Revolution. Napoleon revived, or sought to revive, the imperialism of Rome. He failed. There is nothing which the French now so cordially detest, since their eyes have been opened to the character and ends of that usurper, as his imperialism. It cannot be revived any more easily than the oracles of Dodona.

The great standing warfare of modern times is constitutional authority against the absolute power of kings and emperors. And progress has been on the side of liberty everywhere, with occasional drawbacks, such as when Louis Napoleon revived the accursed despotism of his uncle, and by the same means—a standing army and promises of military glory.

Hence, in the order of Providence, Charlemagne's dream of unbounded military **aggrandizement** could not be realized. He could not revive the imperialism of Rome or Persia. No man will ever arise in Europe who can reestablish it, except for a brief period. It will be rebuked by the superintending Power, because it is fatal to the highest development of nations, because all its glories are delusory, because it sows the seeds of ruin. It produces that very egotism, materialism, and sensuality, that inglorious rest and pleasure, which, as everybody concedes, prepared the way for violence.

And hence Charlemagne's empire went to pieces as soon as he was dead. There was nothing permanent in his conquests, except those made against barbarism. He was raised up to erect barriers against fresh inroads of barbarians. His whole empire was finally split up into petty sovereignties.

In one sense he founded States, since he founded the States which sprang up from the dismemberment of his empire. The kingdoms of Germany, Italy, France, Burgundy, Lorraine, Navarre, all date to his memorable reign. But these Medieval kingdoms were feudal; the power of the kings was nominal. Government passed from imperialism into the hands of nobles.

The government of Europe in the Middle Ages was a military aristocracy, only powerful as the interests of the people were considered. Kings and princes did not make much show, except in the trappings of royalty—in gorgeous dresses of purple and gold, to suit a barbaric taste—in the insignia of power without its reality.

The true power rested among the aristocracy,

who, it must be confessed, ground down the people by a hard feudal rule, but who did not grind the souls out of them, like the imperialism of absolute monarchies, with their standing armies. Under them the feudal nobles of Europe at length recuperated.

Virtues were born everywhere—in England, in France, in Germany, in Holland—which were a savor of life unto life: loyalty, self-respect, fidelity to covenants, chivalry, sympathy with human misery, love of home, rural sports, a glorious rural life, which gave stamina to character—a material which Christianity could work upon, and kindle the latent fires of freedom and the impulses of a generous enthusiasm. It was under the fostering influences of small, independent chieftains that manly strength and organized social institutions arose once more—the reserved power of unconquerable nations.

Feudalism is despised today for its corruptions and its oppressions, but we must remember that it formed the transition between the anarchy produced by the collapse of the Roman Empire and the constitutional governments of our times. The Bourbons, indeed, reigned without grants from the people or the nobility, and what was the logical result?—a French Revolution! Would a French Revolution have been possible under the Roman caesars?

But I will not pursue this gradual development of constitutional government from the anarchies which arose out of the fall of the Roman Empire—just the reverse of what happened in the history of Rome; I will say no more of the imperialism which Charlemagne sought to restore, but I will now turn to consider briefly his direct effects in civilization, which showed his great and enlightened mind, and on which his fame in no small degree rests.

### Charlemagne's Accomplishments

Charlemagne was no insignificant legislator. His body of laws, called “the Capitularies,” may not be equal to the laws of Justinian in natural justice, but were adapted to his times and circumstances. He collected the scattered codes, so far as laws were codified, of the various Germanic nations, and modified them. He introduced a great Christian element into his **jurisprudence**. He made use of the canons of the Church. His code is more ecclesiastical even than that of Theodosius, the last great Christian emperor.

He was also a great administrator. Nothing escaped his vigilance. I do not read that he made many roads, or effected important internal

improvements. The age was too barbarous for the development of national industries—one of the main things which occupy modern statesmen and governments. But most of his acts were wise and enlightened. He rewarded merit in seeking out the right men for important posts, he established libraries and schools, he built convents and monasteries, he gave encouragement to men of great attainments, and he loved to surround himself with learned men. The scholars of all countries sought his protection and patronage, and found in him a friend.

Napoleon professed a great admiration for Charlemagne. But how differently Napoleon acted in this respect! Napoleon was jealous of literary genius. He hated literary men. He rarely invited them to his table, and was constrained in their presence. He even drove them out of the kingdom. He wanted nothing but homage—and literary genius has no sympathy with brute force, or machinery, or military exploits.

But Charlemagne, like Peter the Great, delighted in the society of all who could teach him anything. He was a reasonably learned man himself, considering his life of activity. Frustrated over the deficiencies in his own early education and that he had never learned to write well, he practiced and learned, studying logic and astronomy under Alcuin, grammar under Peter of Pisa, and mathematics under Einhard. He spoke Latin as fluently as his native German, and it is said that he understood Greek. He liked to visit schools and witness the performances of the boys; and, provided they made proficiency in their studies, he cared little for their noble birth. With wrath he reproved the idle. He promised rewards to merit and industry.

The most marked feature of his reign, other than his wars, was his sympathy with the clergy. Here, too, he differed from Napoleon and Frederic II. In his time the clergy were the most influential people of the empire and the most enlightened; but at that time the great contest of the Middle Ages between spiritual and temporal authority had not begun. Ambrose, indeed, had rebuked Theodosius; and Leo had laid the cornerstone of the papacy by instituting a divine right to his decrees. But a Hildebrand or an á Becket had not arisen to usurp the prerogatives of their monarchs. Least of all did popes then dream of subjecting the temporal powers and raising the spiritual over them, so as to lead to issues with kings. That was a later development in the history of the papacy.

The popes of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries sought to heal disorder, punish turbulent chieftains, sustain

law and order, and establish a tribunal of justice to which the discontented might appeal. They sought to conserve the peace of the world. They sought to rule the Church rather than the world. They aimed at a theocratic ministry—to be the ambassadors of God Almighty—to allay strife and division.

The clergy were the friends of order and law, and they were the natural guardians of learning. They were kind masters to the slaves—for slavery still prevailed. That was an evil with which the clergy did not grapple; they would **ameliorate** it, but did not seek to remove it. Yet they shielded the unfortunate and the persecuted and the poor; they gave the only consolation which an iron age afforded. The Church was gloomy, ascetic, and austere, like the cathedrals of that time. Monks buried themselves in crypts; they sang mournful songs; they saw nothing but poverty and misery. But they were not cold and hard and cruel, like baronial lords. Secular lords were **rapacious**, ground down the people, and mocked and trampled upon them; but the clergy were on the whole hospitable, gentle, and affectionate. They sympathized with the common people, from whom they chiefly sprang. They had their vices, but those vices were not half as revolting as those of barons and knights.

Intellectually, the clergy were at all times the superiors of these secular lords. They loved the peaceful virtues which were generated in the consecrated convent. The passions of nobles urged them on to perpetual pillage, injustice, and cruelty. The clergy quarreled only among themselves. Their vices were those of envy, and perhaps of gluttony; but they were not public robbers.

They were the best farmers of their times; they cultivated lands and made them attractive by fruits and flowers. They were generally industrious; every convent was a beehive in which various kinds of manufactures were produced.

The monks aspired even to be artists. They illuminated manuscripts, as well as copied them; they made tapestries and beautiful vestments. They were a peaceful and useful set of men, at this period outside their spiritual functions; they built grand churches; they were exceedingly hospitable. Every monastery was an inn as well as a beehive, to which all travelers resorted, and where no pay was exacted. It was a retreat for the unfortunate, which no one dared assail. And it was vocal with songs and anthems.

The clergy were not only thus general benefactors in an age of turbulence and crime, in

spite of all their narrowness and spiritual pride, but they lent a helping hand to the peasantry. The Church was democratic and enabled the poor to rise according to their merits, while nobles combined to crush them or keep them in an ignoble sphere. In the Church, the son of a murdered peasant could rise according to his merits; but if he followed a warrior to the battlefield instead, no virtues, no talents, no bravery could elevate him; he would always be a peasant, a low-born menial. If he entered a monastery he might pass from office to office until as a mitred abbot he would become the master of ten thousand acres, the counselor of kings, the equal of that proud baron in whose service his father spent his abject life.

And that is the reason why Charlemagne befriended the Church and elevated it, because its influence was civilizing. He sought to establish among the clergy a counterbalancing power to that of nobles. Who can doubt that the influence of the Church was better than that of nobles in the Middle Ages? If it ground down society by a spiritual yoke, that yoke was necessary, for the rude Middle Ages could be ruled only by fear. What fear more potent than the destruction of the soul in a future life! It was by this weapon—excommunication—that Europe was governed. We may abhor it, but it was the great idea of Medieval Europe, which no one could resist, and which kept society from dissolution.

Charlemagne may have erred in his granting of power to the clergy, in view of the subsequent **encroachments** of the popes. But he never anticipated the future quarrels between his successors and the popes, for the popes were not then formidable as the antagonists of kings. I believe his policy was the best for Europe, on the whole. The infancy of the Gothic races was long, dark, dreary, and unfortunate, but it prepared them for the civilization which they scorned.

Such were the services which this great sovereign rendered to his times and to Europe. With him dawned the new civilization. He brought back souvenirs of Rome and the Empire. Not for himself did he live, but for the welfare of the nations he governed. It was his example which Alfred the Great later sought to imitate in Britain. Though a warrior, he saw something greater than the warrior's excellence.

### Charlemagne's Character

It is said that Charlemagne was eloquent, like Julius Caesar. He was simple in dress, and only on

rare occasions did he indulge in parade. He was temperate in eating and drinking, as all the famous warriors have been. He absolutely abhorred drunkenness, the great vice of the northern nations. During meals he listened to the lays of minstrels or the readings of his secretaries. He took unwearied pains with the education of his daughters, and he was so fond of them that they even accompanied him in his military expeditions.

His whole appearance was manly, cheerful, and dignified. His countenance reflected a childlike serenity. He was one of the few men, like David, who was not spoiled by war and flatteries. Though gentle, he was subject to fits of anger, like Theodosius; but he did not pretend anger, like Napoleon, for theatrical effect. His greatness and his simplicity, his humanity and his religious faith, are typical of the Germanic race.

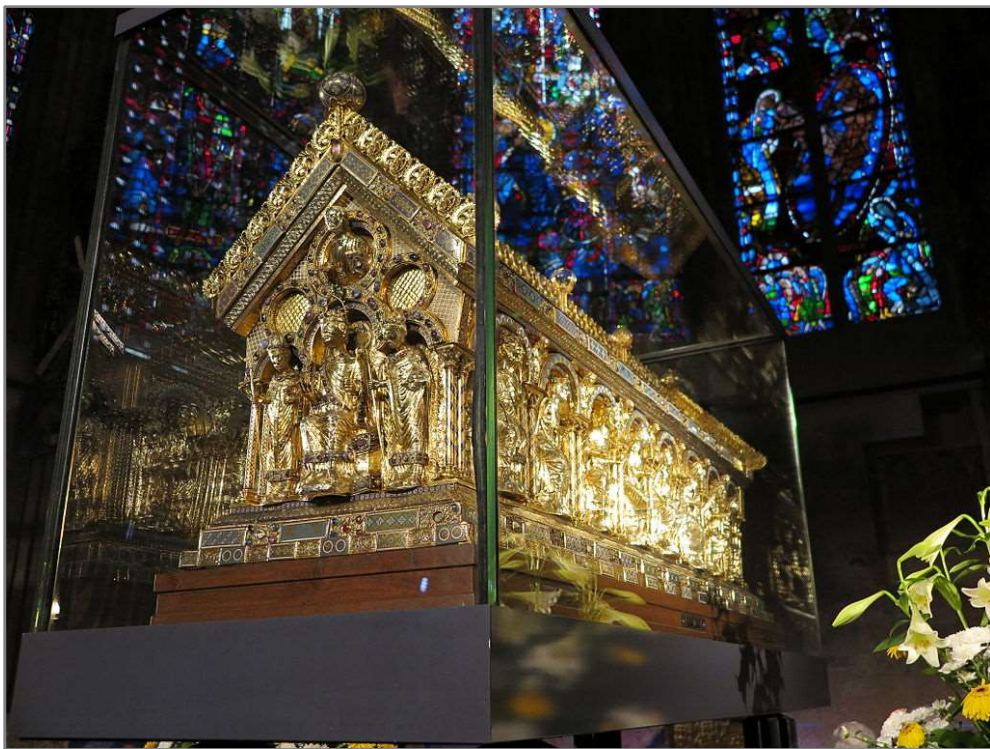
*Despite his Christian ways, Charlemagne sadly did not hold much regard for the sanctity of marriage, marrying and divorcing many times and bearing illegitimate children with a number of concubines.*

### Charlemagne's Death

Charlemagne died in A.D. 814, after a reign of half a century, lamented by his own subjects and to be admired by succeeding generations. Historian Henry Hallam, though not eloquent generally, has

pronounced his most beautiful eulogy, written in the disgraces and miseries of succeeding times: "He stands alone like a rock in the ocean, like a beacon on a waste. His scepter was the bow of Ulysses, not to be bent by a weaker hand. In the dark ages of European history, his reign affords a solitary resting-place between two dark periods of turbulence and ignominy, deriving the advantage of contrast both from that of the preceding dynasty and of a posterity for whom he had founded an empire which they were unworthy and unequal to maintain."

To such a tribute I can add nothing. Charlemagne's greatness consists in this, that, born amidst barbarism, he was yet the friend of civilization and understood its elemental principles. He struggled forty-seven years to establish them, failing only because his successors and subjects were not prepared for them, and could not learn them until the severe experience of ten centuries, amidst disasters and storms, should prove the value of the "old basal walls and pillars," and show that no structure could adequately shelter the European nations which was not established by the beautiful union of German vigor with Christian art, by the combined richness of native genius with those immortal treasures which had escaped the wreck of the classic world.



Frederick II's gold and silver casket for Charlemagne, the Karlsschrein