

# *Vita Karoli Magni: The Life of Charlemagne*

Einhard

ca. 817 to 833

Source: A.J. Grant, trans., *Early Lives of Charlemagne by Einhard and the Monk of St Gall* (London: Moring, 1905), 1–56. Digitized and adapted by Andrew Dunning.

## *The Prologue of Walafrid<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Walafridus Strabo was abbot of a Frankish monastery from 842 to 849.

The following account of that most glorious Emperor Charles was written, as is well known, by Einhard, who amongst all the palace officials of that time had the highest praise not only for learning but also for his generally high character; and, as he was himself present at nearly all the events that he describes, his account has the further advantage of the strictest accuracy.

He was born in eastern Frankland, in the district that is called Moingewi, and it was in the monastery of Fulda, in the school of Saint Boniface the Martyr, that his boyhood received its first training. Thence he was sent by Baugolf, the abbot of the monastery, to the palace of Charles, rather on account of his remarkable talents and intelligence, which even then gave bright promise of his wisdom that was to be so famous in later days, than because of any advantage of birth. Now, Charles was beyond all kings most eager in making search for wise men and in giving them such entertainment that they might pursue philosophy in all comfort. Whereby, with the help of God, he rendered his kingdom, which, when God committed it to him, was dark and almost wholly blind (if I may use such an expression), radiant with the blaze of fresh learning, hitherto unknown to our barbarism. But now once more men's interests are turning in an opposite direction, and the light of wisdom is less loved, and in most men is dying out.

And so this little man – for he was mean of stature – gained so much glory at the Court of the wisdom-loving Charles by reason of his knowledge and high character that among all the ministers of his royal Majesty there was scarce anyone at that time with whom that most powerful and wise King discussed his private affairs more willingly. And, indeed, he deserved such favour, for not only in the time of Charles, but even more remarkably in the reign of the Emperor Lewis,<sup>2</sup> when the commonwealth of the Franks was shaken with many and various troubles, and in some parts was falling into ruin, he so wonderfully and providentially balanced his conduct, and, with the protection of God, kept such a watch over himself, that his reputation for cleverness, which many had envied and many had mocked

<sup>2</sup> The Emperor Lewis I (Lewis the Pious, 814–840) was the son and successor of Charles the Great.

at, did not untimely desert him nor plunge him into irremediable dangers.

This I have said that all men may read his words without doubt-  
 45 ing, and may know that, while he has given great glory to his great leader, he has also provided the curious reader with the most unsullied truth.

I, Strabo, have inserted the headings and the decorations<sup>3</sup> as  
 seemed well to my own judgement that he who seeks for any point  
 50 may the more easily find what he desires.

*Here ends the Prologue*

<sup>3</sup> Neither the headings nor the decorations (*incisiones*) are given in the present translation.

### *The Life of the Emperor Charles Written by Einhard*

Having made up my mind to write an account of the life and conversation, and to a large extent of the actions of my lord and patron  
 55 King Charles, of great and deservedly glorious memory, I have compressed my task within the narrowest possible limits. My aim has been on the one hand to insert everything of which I have been able to find an account; and on the other to avoid offending the fastidious by telling each new incident at wearisome length. Above all, I have  
 60 tried to avoid offending in this new book those who look down upon even the monuments of antiquity written by learned and eloquent men.

There are, I do not doubt, many men of learning and leisure who feel that the life of the present day must not be utterly neglected,  
 65 and that the doings of our own time should not be devoted to silence and forgetfulness as wholly unworthy of record; who, therefore, have such love of fame that they would rather chronicle the great deeds of others in writings, however poor, than, by abstaining from writing, allow their name and reputation to perish from the memory  
 70 of mankind.<sup>4</sup> But, even so, I have felt that I ought not to hold my hand from the composition of this book, for I knew that no one could write of these events more truthfully than I could, since I was myself an actor in them, and, being present, knew them from the testimony of my own eyes; while I could not certainly know whether anyone  
 75 else would write them or no. I thought it better, therefore, to join with others in committing this story to writing for the benefit of posterity rather than to allow the shades of oblivion to blot out the life of this King, the noblest and greatest of his age, and his famous deeds, which the men of later times will scarcely be able to imitate.

80 Another reason, and not, I think, a foolish one, occurred to me, which even by itself would have been strong enough to persuade me to write – the care, I mean, that was taken with my upbringing, and the unbroken friendship which I enjoyed with the King himself

<sup>4</sup> That is, though there are many who would be ready to write Charles's life, Einhard thinks that he has peculiar qualifications for the task which make it obligatory on him to do so.

and his children from the time when first I began to live at his Court.

85 For in this way he has so bound me to himself, and has made me his debtor both in life and death, that I should most justly be considered and condemned as ungrateful if I were to forget all the benefits that he conferred upon me and were to pass over in silence the great and glorious deeds of a man who was so kind to me; if I were to  
90 allow his life to remain as unchronicled and unpraised, as if he had never lived, when that life deserves not merely the efforts of my poor talents, which are insignificant, small and almost non-existent, but all the eloquence of a Cicero.

So here you have a book containing the life of that great and glorious man. There is nothing for you to wonder at or admire except his  
95 deeds; unless, indeed, it be that I, a barbarian, and little versed in the Roman tongue,<sup>5</sup> have imagined that I could write Latin inoffensively and usefully, and have become so swollen with impudence as to despise Cicero's words when, speaking about Latin writers in the first  
100 book of the Tusculans, he says: "If a man commits his thoughts to paper when he can neither arrange them well nor write them agreeably, nor furnish pleasure of any kind to the reader, he is recklessly misusing both his leisure and his paper." The great orator's opinion would, perhaps, have deterred me from writing if I had not fortified  
105 myself with the reflection that I ought to risk the condemnation of men, and bring my poor talents into peril by writing, rather than spare my reputation and neglect this great man's memory.

*The Preface ends: the Book begins*

<sup>5</sup> The Latin of Einhard's Life is much superior to the general monkish Latin of his period.

110 The race of the Merovings from which the Franks were accustomed to choose their kings is reckoned as lasting to King Hilderich,<sup>6</sup> who, by the order of Stephen, the Roman Pontiff,<sup>7</sup> was deposed, tonsured, and sent into a monastery. But this race, though it may be regarded as finishing with him, had long since lost all power, and  
115 no longer possessed anything of importance except the empty royal title. For the wealth and power of the kingdom was in the hands of the Prefects of the Court, who were called Mayors of the Palace, and exercised entire sovereignty. The King, contented with the mere royal title, with long hair and flowing beard, used to sit upon the throne  
120 and act the part of a ruler, listening to ambassadors, whencesoever they came, and giving them at their departure, as though of his own power, answers which he had been instructed or commanded to give. But this was the only function that he performed, for besides the empty royal title and the precarious life income which the Prefect  
125 of the Court allowed him at his pleasure he had nothing of his own except one estate with a very small revenue, on which he had his

<sup>6</sup> This is King Childeric III, who was deposed in 751 by a National Council, with the approval of the Pope. Pippin the Short was then elected king, and crowned by Boniface. With Childeric the Merovingian dynasty ends, and gives place to the curiously-named Carolingian, of which Charlemagne was the greatest representative.

<sup>7</sup> Einhard here makes a mistake. The Pope was not Stephen, who held the Papal See from 752 to 757, but Zacharias, who was Pope from 741 to 752. Einhard's mistake is, perhaps, due to the fact that the decision of Zacharias was confirmed by his successor.

house, and from which he drew the few servants who performed such services as were necessary and made him a show of deference. Wherever he had to go he travelled in a waggon, drawn in rustic style by a pair of oxen, and driven by a cowherd.<sup>8</sup> In this fashion he used to go to the palace and to the general meetings of the people, which were held yearly for the affairs of the kingdom; in this fashion he returned home. But the Prefect of the Court looked after the administration of the kingdom and all that had to be done or arranged at home or abroad.

2. When Hilderich was deposed Pippin, the father of King Charles, was performing the duties of Mayor of the Palace as if by hereditary right. For his father Charles,<sup>9</sup> who put down the tyrants who were claiming dominion for themselves through all Frankland, and so crushed the Saracens, when they were attempting to conquer Gaul, in two great battles (the one in Aquitania, near the city of Poitiers, the other near Narbonne, on the river Birra), that he forced them to return into Spain – his father Charles had nobly administered the same office, and had inherited it from his father Pippin.<sup>10</sup> For the people did not usually give this honour except to such as were distinguished for the renown of their family and the extent of their wealth.

This office, then, was handed down from his father and his grandfather to Pippin, the father of King Charles, and to his brother Carloman. He exercised it for some years conjointly with his brother Carloman on terms of the greatest harmony, still in nominal subordination to the above-mentioned King Hilderich. But then his brother Carloman, for some unknown cause, but probably fired with love of the contemplative life, abandoned the toilsome administration of a temporal kingdom and retired to Rome in search of peace. There he changed his dress, and, becoming a monk in the monastery upon Mount Soracte, built near the church of the blessed Silvester, enjoyed for some years the quiet that he desired, with many brethren, who joined themselves to him for the same purpose. But as many of the nobles of Frankland came on pilgrimage to Rome to perform their vows, and, unwilling to pass by one who had once been their lord, interrupted the peace that he most desired by frequent visits, he was compelled to change his abode. For, seeing that the number of his visitors interfered with his purpose, he left Mount Soracte and retired to the monastery of Saint Benedict, situated in the camp of Mount Cassino, in the province of Samnium. There he occupied what remained to him of this temporal life in religious exercises.

3. But Pippin, after he was made King instead of Mayor of the Palace by the authority of the Roman Pontiff, exercised sole rule over the Franks for fifteen years, or rather more.<sup>11</sup> Then, after finishing the

<sup>8</sup> Mr Carless Davis remarks on this passage: "Einhard errs in representing this as an indignity. Religious usage demanded that the king of the race should make his progresses in this primitive vehicle. The Merovingians were a national priesthood. Here also we have the explanation of their flowing locks and beard. The touch of steel – a metal unknown to the Frankish nation in its infancy – would have profaned their persons. Similarly the priesthood of ancient Rome were forbidden to remove the hair from their faces except with bronze tweezers." ("Life of Charlemagne," p. 28.)

<sup>9</sup> This is Charles Martel – Charles the Hammer – who "reigned" as Mayor of the Palace from 715 to 741. His great victory (variously known as the Battle of Poitiers, or the Battle of Tours, though the former is the more accurate title) was fought in 732, and is regarded as the "Salamis of Western Europe."

<sup>10</sup> Pippin, father of Charles Martel, and grandfather of Pippin the Short, was Mayor of the Palace from 687 to 714.

<sup>11</sup> Pippin's reign really lasted for rather more than sixteen years – from 751 to 768.

Aquitanian war, which he had undertaken against Waifar, Duke of Aquitania, and had carried on for nine consecutive years, he died at Paris of the dropsy, and left behind him two sons, Charles and Carloman, to whom by divine will the succession of the kingdom came.

175 For the Franks called a solemn public assembly, and elected both of them to be kings, on the understanding that they should equally divide the whole kingdom, but that Charles should receive for his special administration that part which his father Pippin had held, while Carloman received the territories ruled by their uncle Carloman.<sup>12</sup> The conditions were accepted, and each received the share of the kingdom that was allotted to him. Harmony was maintained between the two brothers, though not without difficulty; for many partisans of Carloman tried to break their alliance, and some even hoped to engage them in war. But the course of events proved that  
185 the danger to Charles was imaginary rather than real. For, upon the death of Carloman, his wife with her sons and some of the leading nobles fled to Italy, and, for no obvious reason, passed over her husband's brother, and placed herself and her children under the protection of Desiderius, King of the Lombards. Carloman, after ruling the  
190 kingdom for two years conjointly with Charles, died of disease, and Charles, upon the death of Carloman,<sup>13</sup> was made sole king with the consent of all the Franks.

4. It would be foolish of me to say anything about his birth and infancy,<sup>14</sup> or even about his boyhood, for I can find nothing about  
195 these matters in writing, nor does anyone survive who claims to have personal knowledge of them. I have decided, therefore, to pass on to describe and illustrate his acts and his habits and the other divisions of his life without lingering over the unknown. I shall describe first his exploits both at home and abroad, then his habits and interests,  
200 and lastly the administration of the kingdom and the end of his reign, omitting nothing that demands or deserves to be recorded.

*Part I: His Exploits at Home and Abroad*

5. Of all the wars that he waged that in Aquitania, begun, but not finished, by his father, was the first that he undertook, because it  
205 seemed easy of accomplishment. His brother was still alive, and was called upon for assistance, and, though he failed to provide the help that he promised, Charles prosecuted the enterprise that he had undertaken with the utmost energy, and would not desist or slacken in his task before, by perseverance and continuous effort, he  
210 had completely reached the end after which he strove. For he forced Hunold,<sup>15</sup> who after the death of Waifar had attempted to occupy Aquitania and renew the almost finished war, to abandon Aquitania

<sup>12</sup> This statement, as is clear from other sources, does not correspond with the facts. Charles took Austrasia, and the greater part of Neustria, with the lands lying between the Loire and the Garonne. Burgundy, Provence, Alsace, Alemannia, and the south-eastern part of Aquitaine fell to Carloman.

<sup>13</sup> Carloman died in December 771. His death removed from the path of Charles one of the most serious obstacles. The custom of the Frankish monarchy was equal inheritance of all the sons. It was this which contributed so much to the disruption of the Frankish power on the death of Charles; but for the death of Carloman the "Empire" would never have been founded, or founded only after bitter civil war. Einhard again makes a mistake in dates. The two brothers had administered the realm in common for more than three years.

<sup>14</sup> This reticence of Einhard's about his hero's early life, about which it would have been quite easy to procure information, has seemed to many to lend colour to a report that Charles was born before the Church had sanctioned the marriage of his parents.

<sup>15</sup> Hunold was the father of Waifar, and had for twenty years lived as a monk in the Island of Rhé, but upon the death of his son he left his monastic retreat in the hope of re-establishing the fortunes of his family in Aquitaine.

and retire into Gascony. Even there he did not allow him to remain, but crossed the Garonne, and sent ambassadors to Lupus, Duke of the Gascons, ordering him to surrender the fugitive, and threatening him with war unless he did so at once. Lupus, more wisely, not only surrendered Hunold but also submitted himself and the province over which he presided to the power of Charles.

6. When the Aquitanian trouble was settled and the war finished, when, too, his partner in the kingdom had withdrawn from the world's affairs, he undertook a war against the Lombards, being moved thereto by the entreaties and the prayers of Hadrian, Bishop of the City of Rome. Now, this war, too, had been undertaken by his father at the supplication of Pope Stephen, under circumstances of great difficulty, inasmuch as certain of the chiefs of the Franks, whose advice he was accustomed to ask, so strongly resisted his wishes that they openly declared that they would leave their King to return home. But now Charles undertook the war against King Haistulf, and most swiftly brought it to an end. For, though his reasons for undertaking the war were similar to, and, indeed, the same as those of his father, he plainly fought it out with a very different energy, and brought it to a different end. For Pippin, after a siege of a few days at Pavia, forced King Haistulf to give hostages, and restore to the Romans the towns and fortresses that he had taken from them, and to give a solemn promise that he would not attempt to regain what he had surrendered. But King Charles, when once he had begun the war, did not stop until he had received the surrender of King Desiderius, whom he had worn down after a long siege; until he had forced his son Adalgis, in whom the hopes of his people seemed to be centred, to fly not only from his kingdom but from Italy; until he had restored to the Romans all that had been taken from them; until he had crushed Hruodgausus, Prefect of the Duchy of Friuli, who was attempting a revolution; until, in fine, he had brought all Italy under his rule, and placed his son Pippin as king over the conquered country. I should describe here the difficulties of the passage of the Alps and the vast toil with which the Franks found their way through the pathless mountain ridges, the rocks that soared to heaven, and the sharply-pointed cliffs, if it were not that my purpose in the present work is rather to describe Charles's manner of life than to chronicle the events of the wars that he waged. The sum of this war was the conquest of Italy, the transportation and perpetual exile of King Desiderius, the expulsion of his son Adalgis from Italy, power taken from the kings of the Lombards and restored to Hadrian, the Ruler of the Roman Church.

7. When this war was ended the Saxon war,<sup>16</sup> which seemed dropped for a time, was taken up again. Never was there a war more

<sup>16</sup> The Saxon war – the greatest task of Charles's whole reign – lasted with some intermissions for more than thirty years (from 772 to 804).

prolonged nor more cruel than this, nor one that required greater efforts on the part of the Frankish peoples. For the Saxons, like most of the races that inhabit Germany, are by nature fierce, devoted to the worship of demons and hostile to our religion, and they think it no dishonour to confound and transgress the laws of God and man.[<sup>17</sup>]

There were reasons, too, which might at any time cause a disturbance of the peace. For our boundaries and theirs touch almost everywhere on the open plain, except where in a few places large forests or ranges of mountains are interposed to separate the territories of the two nations by a definite frontier; so that on both sides murder, robbery, and arson were of constant occurrence. The Franks were so irritated by these things that they thought it was time no longer to be satisfied with retaliation but to declare open war against them.

So war was declared, and was fought for thirty years continuously with the greatest fierceness on both sides, but with heavier loss to the Saxons than the Franks. The end might have been reached sooner had it not been for the perfidy of the Saxons. It is hard to say how often they admitted themselves beaten and surrendered as suppliants to King Charles; how often they promised to obey his orders, gave without delay the required hostages, and received the ambassadors that were sent to them. Sometimes they were so cowed and broken that they promised to abandon the worship of devils and willingly to submit themselves to the Christian religion.[<sup>18</sup>] But though sometimes ready to bow to his commands they were always eager to break their promise, so that it is impossible to say which course seemed to come more natural to them, for from the beginning of the war there was scarcely a year in which they did not both promise and fail to perform.

But the high courage of the King and the constancy of his mind, which remained unshaken by prosperity and adversity, could not be conquered by their changes nor forced by weariness to desist from his undertakings. He never allowed those who offended in this way to go unpunished, but either led an army himself, or sent one under the command of his counts, to chastise their perfidy and inflict a suitable penalty. So that at last, when all who had resisted had been defeated and brought under his power, he took ten thousand of the inhabitants of both banks of the Elbe, with their wives and children, and planted them in many groups in various parts of Germany and Gaul. And at last the war, protracted through so many years, was finished on conditions proposed by the King and accepted by them; they were to abandon the worship of devils, to turn from their national ceremonies, to receive the sacraments of the Christian faith and religion, and then, joined to the Franks, to make one people with them.

8. In this war, despite its prolongation through so many years, he did not himself meet the enemy in battle more than twice – once near the mountain called Osning, in the district of Detmold, and again at the river Hasa<sup>17</sup> – and both these battles were fought in one month, with an interval of only a few days. In these two battles the enemy were so beaten and cowed that they never again ventured to challenge the King nor to resist his attack unless they were protected by some advantage of ground.

<sup>17</sup> The river Hasa is near Osnabrück.

In this war many men of noble birth and high office fell on the side both of the Franks and Saxons. But at last it came to an end in the thirty-third year, though in the meanwhile so many and such serious wars broke out against the Franks in all parts of the world, and were carried on with such skill by the King, that an observer may reasonably doubt whether his endurance of toil or his good fortune deserves the greater admiration. For the war in Italy began two years before the Saxon war, and though it was prosecuted without intermission no enterprise in any part of the world was dropped, nor was there anywhere a truce in any struggle, however difficult. For this King, the wisest and most high-minded of all who in that age ruled over the nations of the world, never refused to undertake or prosecute any enterprise because of the labour involved, nor withdrew from it through fear of its danger. He understood the true character of each task that he undertook or carried through, and thus was neither broken by adversity nor misled by the false flatteries of good fortune.

9. Whilst the war with the Saxons was being prosecuted constantly and almost continuously he placed garrisons at suitable places on the frontier, and attacked Spain with the largest military expedition that he could collect. He crossed the Pyrenees, received the surrender of all the towns and fortresses that he attacked, and returned with his army safe and sound, except for a reverse which he experienced through the treason of the Gascons on his return through the passes of the Pyrenees. For while his army was marching in a long line, suiting their formation to the character of the ground and the defiles, the Gascons placed an ambushade on the top of the mountain – where the density and extent of the woods in the neighbourhood rendered it highly suitable for such a purpose – and then rushing down into the valley beneath threw into disorder the last part of the baggage train and also the rearguard which acted as a protection to those in advance. In the battle which followed the Gascons slew their opponents to the last man. Then they seized upon the baggage, and under cover of the night, which was already falling, they scattered with the utmost rapidity in different directions. The Gascons were assisted in this feat by the lightness of their armour and the character of the



345 ground where the affair took place. In this battle Eggihard, the surveyor of the royal table; Anselm, the Count of the Palace; and Roland, Prefect of the Breton frontier, were killed along with very many others.<sup>18</sup> Nor could this assault be punished at once, for when the deed had been done the enemy so completely disappeared that they left  
350 behind them not so much as a rumour of their whereabouts.

10. He conquered the Bretons, too, who dwelt in the extreme west of France by the shores of the ocean. They had been disobedient, and he, therefore, sent against them an expedition, by which they were compelled to give hostages and promise that they would henceforth  
355 obey his orders.

Then later he himself entered Italy with an army, and, passing through Rome, came to Capua, a city of Campania. There he pitched his camp, and threatened the men of Beneventum<sup>19</sup> with war unless they surrendered. But Aragis, Duke of that people, prevented this  
360 war by sending his sons Rumold and Grimold to meet the King with a large sum of money. He asked the King to receive his children as hostages, and promised that he and his people would obey all the commands of the King, except only that he would not come himself into the King's presence. Charles, considering rather the advantage  
365 of the people than their Duke's obstinacy, received the hostages who were offered him, and as a great favour consented to forego a personal interview. He kept the younger of the two children as a hostage and sent back the elder one to his father. Then he sent ambassadors to require and receive oaths of fidelity from the Beneventans and  
370 from Aragis, and so came back to Rome. There he spent some days in the veneration of the holy places, and then returned to Gaul.

11. Then the Bavarian war broke out suddenly, and was swiftly ended. It was caused by the pride and folly of Tassilo,<sup>20</sup> Duke of Bavaria; for upon the instigation of his wife, who thought that she  
375 might revenge through her husband the banishment of her father Desiderius, King of the Lombards, he made an alliance with the Huns, the eastern neighbours of the Bavarians, and not only refused obedience to King Charles but even dared to challenge him in war. The high courage of the King could not bear his overweening insolence, and he forthwith called a general levy for an attack on Bavaria,  
380 and came in person with a great army to the river Lech, which separates Bavaria from Germany. He pitched his camp upon the banks of the river, and determined to make trial of the mind of the Duke before he entered the province. But Duke Tassilo saw no profit either for himself or his people in stubbornness, and threw himself  
385 upon the King's mercy. He gave the hostages who were demanded, his own son Theodo among the number, and further promised upon oath that no one should ever persuade him again to fall away from

<sup>18</sup> This is the famous defeat of Roncesvalles, where later legends affirmed that "Charlemagne with all his peerage fell at Fontarabia," and where Roland wound his horn, whose sound is still heard in the verse of Milton. By a strange chance this incident becomes one of the most famous in the cycle of medieval Charlemagne legends; and Roland, evermore transfigured from the historical warden of the Breton march, becomes, after long wanderings, the Orlando of the "Orlando Furioso" of Ariosto. But the historical Roland seems mentioned here, and here only.

<sup>19</sup> The Duchy of Beneventum embraced a large part of the Italian peninsula south of Rome. It had been for a long time connected, in loose feudal dependence, with the Lombard monarchy of North Italy, and, since that had been overwhelmed and annexed by Charles, was now regarded as a dependency of the Carolingian monarchy.

<sup>20</sup> Tassilo, Duke of Bavaria, had offended Charles by claiming independent sovereignty and refusing to recognise Charles in any way as his overlord. From the beginning of Charles's reign there had been friction between them, but for some time a hollow truce had existed. War came in 787, in spite of the efforts of the Papacy at mediation, and ended swiftly, as described in the text, owing to the overwhelming strength of the armies brought against Tassilo by Charles. But the past of Bavaria was too great to allow its Duke to accept the position of inferiority, and in the next year Tassilo was deposed, tonsured, and imprisoned in a monastery.

his allegiance to the King. And thus a war which seemed likely to grow into a very great one came to a most swift ending. But Tassilo was subsequently summoned into the King's presence, and was not allowed to return, and the province that he ruled was for the future committed to the administration not of dukes but of counts.<sup>21</sup>

12. When these troubles had been settled he waged war against the Slavs, whom we are accustomed to call Wilzi, but who properly – that is, in their own tongue – are called Welatabi. Here the Saxons fought along with the other allied nations who followed the King's standards, though their loyalty was feigned and far from sincere. The cause of the war was that the Wilzi<sup>22</sup> were constantly invading and attacking the Abodriti, the former allies of the Franks, and refused to obey the King's commands to desist from their attacks. There is a gulf<sup>23</sup> stretching from the western sea towards the East, of undiscovered length, but nowhere more than a hundred miles in breadth, and often much narrower. Many nations occupy the shores of this sea. The Danes and the Swedes, whom we call the Northmen, hold its northern shore and all the islands in it. The Slavs and the Aisti and various other nations inhabit the eastern shore, amongst whom the chief are these Welatabi against whom then the King waged war. He so broke and subdued them in a single campaign, conducted by himself, that they thought it no longer wise to refuse to obey his commands.

13. The greatest of all his wars, next to the Saxon war, followed this one – that, namely, which he undertook against the Huns and the Avars.<sup>24</sup> He prosecuted this with more vigour than the rest and with a far greater military preparation. However, he conducted in person only one expedition into Pannonia, the province then occupied by the Avars; the management of the rest he left to his son Pippin, and the governors of the provinces, and in some cases to his counts and lieutenants. These carried on the war with the greatest energy, and finished it after eight years of fighting. How many battles were fought there and how much blood was shed is still shown by the deserted and uninhabited condition of Pannonia, and the district in which stood the palace of the Kagan<sup>25</sup> is so desolate that there is not so much as a trace of human habitation. All the nobles of the Huns were killed in this war, all their glory passed away; their money and all the treasures that they had collected for so long were carried away. Nor can the memory of man recall any war waged against the Franks by which they were so much enriched and their wealth so increased.<sup>26</sup> Up to this time they were regarded almost as a poor people, but now so much gold and silver were found in the palace, such precious spoils were seized by them in their battles, that it might fairly be held that the Franks had righteously taken from the Huns what they un-

<sup>21</sup> It was part of Charles's general policy to displace the dukes of his realm, with their undefined and dangerous powers, and to administer his dominions by a large number of counts, who were to begin with quite dependent officials executing the orders of the King over a limited area. "Count" was not yet the great title of nobility which it became later.

<sup>22</sup> The Wiltzes lived on the shores of the Baltic between the Elbe and the Oder.

<sup>23</sup> This "gulf" of Einhard's presents geographical difficulties. The direction indicated and the approximate measurements suggested make it impossible to apply his words to the whole of the Baltic Gulf. The south-eastern part of the Baltic will correspond fairly well to the description.

<sup>24</sup> The war against the Avars was due to the alliance which had existed between them and Tassilo, Duke of Bavaria. The Avars, though allied in race to the ancient Huns and the modern Magyars, were, nevertheless, a distinct people.

<sup>25</sup> The "Monk of St Gall", *De Carolo Magno* 2.1 gives an interesting description of the vast concentric earthworks by which the power of the Kagan was defended.

<sup>26</sup> The vast treasure of the Avars had an important influence on the course of Charles's career. This great influx of the precious metals into Germany depreciated the value of the coinage and raised the price of commodities.

righteously had taken from other nations. Only two of the nobles of the Franks were killed in this war. Eric, the Duke of Friuli, was caught in an ambushade laid by the townsmen of Tharsatica,<sup>27</sup> a maritime town of Liburnia. And Gerold, the Governor of Bavaria, when he was marshalling his army to fight with the Huns in Pannonia, was killed by an unknown hand, along with two others, who accompanied him as he rode along the line encouraging the soldiers by name. For the rest, the war was almost bloodless so far as the Franks were concerned, and most fortunate in its result although so difficult and protracted.

14. After this the Saxon war ended in a settlement as lasting as the struggle had been protracted. The wars with Bohemia and Luneburg which followed were soon over; both of them were swiftly settled under the command of the younger Charles.

The last war of all that Charles undertook was against those Northmen,<sup>28</sup> who are called Danes, who first came as pirates, and then ravaged the coasts of Gaul and Germany with a greater naval force. Their King, Godofrid, was puffed up with the vain confidence that he would make himself master of all Germany. He looked upon Frisia and Saxony as his own provinces. He had already reduced his neighbours the Abodriti to obedience, and had forced them to pay him tribute. Now he boasted that he would soon come to Aix, the seat of the King's Court, with a mighty force. His boast, however idle, found some to believe it; it was thought that he would certainly have made some such attempt if he had not been prevented by a sudden death. For he was killed by one of his own followers, and so ended both his life and the war that he had begun.

15. These, then, are the wars which this mighty King waged during the course of forty-seven years – for his reign extended over that period – in different parts of the world with the utmost skill and success. By these wars he so nobly increased the kingdom of the Franks, which was great and strong when he inherited it from his father Pip-pin, that the additions he made almost doubled it.<sup>29</sup> For before his time the power of the Frankish kingdom extended only over that part of Gaul which is bounded by the Rhine, the Loire, and the Balearic Sea;<sup>30</sup> and that part of Germany which is inhabited by the so-called eastern Franks, and which is bounded by Saxony, the Danube, the Rhine, and the river Saal, which stream separates the Thuringians and the Sorabs; and, further, over the Alamanni and the Bavarians. But Charles, by the wars that have been mentioned, conquered and made tributary the following countries: – First, Aquitania and Gascony, and the whole Pyrenean range, and the country of Spain as far as the Ebro, which, rising in Navarre and passing through the most fertile territory of Spain, falls into the Balearic Sea, beneath the walls

<sup>27</sup> This is Tersatz, a town of Istria.

<sup>28</sup> These Northmen (or Danes, as they are usually called when they appear in English history) proved themselves the most terrible enemies of civilisation during the next century. "The Monk of St Gall" makes Charles prophesy the ruin that would come eventually on his Empire from these northern sea-rovers. The attacks of the Northmen were among the most direct causes of the subsequent disruption of the Empire of Charles.

<sup>29</sup> This is an exaggeration of Einhard's. Charles did, indeed, greatly extend the Frankish dominions; but he strengthened them still more decisively by the improvements which he introduced into the internal order and administration.

<sup>30</sup> The Balearic Sea is the western Mediterranean.

of the city of Tortosa; next, all Italy from Augusta Praetoria as far as lower Calabria, where are the frontiers of the Greeks and Beneventans, a thousand miles and more in length; next, Saxony, which is  
 480 a considerable portion of Germany, and is reckoned to be twice as broad and about as long as that part of Germany which is inhabited by the Franks; then both provinces of Pannonia and Dacia, on one side of the river Danube, and Histria and Liburnia and Dalmatia, with the exception of the maritime cities which he left to the Emperor  
 485 of Constantinople on account of their friendship and the treaty made between them; lastly, all the barbarous and fierce nations lying between the Rhine, the Vistula, the Ocean, and the Danube, who speak much the same language, but in character and dress are very unlike. The chief of these last are the Welatabi, the Sorabi, the Abodriti, and  
 490 the Bohemians; against these he waged war, but the others, and by far the larger number, surrendered without a struggle.

16. The friendship, too, which he established with certain kings and peoples increased the glory of his reign.

Aldefonsus, King of Gallaecia and Asturica, was joined in so close  
 495 an alliance with him that whenever he sent letters or ambassadors to Charles he gave instructions that he should be called "the man" of the Frankish King.<sup>31</sup>

Further, his rich gifts had so attached the kings of the Scots to his favour that they always called him their lord and themselves his  
 500 submissive servants. Letters are still in existence sent by them to Charles in which those feelings towards him are clearly shown.

With Aaron,<sup>32</sup> the King of the Persians, who ruled over all the East, with the exception of India, he entertained so harmonious a friendship that the Persian King valued his favour before the friend-  
 505 ship of all the kings and princes in the world, and held that it alone deserved to be cultivated with presents and titles. When, therefore, the ambassadors of Charles, whom he had sent with offerings to the most holy sepulchre of our Lord and Saviour and to the place of His resurrection, came to the Persian King and proclaimed the kindly  
 510 feelings of their master, he not only granted them all they asked but also allowed that sacred place of our salvation to be reckoned as part of the possessions of the Frankish King.<sup>33</sup> He further sent ambassadors of his own along with those of Charles upon the return journey, and forwarded immense presents to Charles – robes and  
 515 spices, and the other rich products of the East – and a few years earlier he had sent him at his request an elephant,<sup>34</sup> which was then the only one he had.

The Emperors of Constantinople, Nicephorus, Michael, and Leo, too, made overtures of friendship and alliance with him, and sent  
 520 many ambassadors. At first Charles was regarded with much sus-

<sup>31</sup> "Non aliter quam proprium suum." Feudalism in any strict sense of the word was not yet established; but Alfonso was, in effect, "commending" himself to a feudal superior.

<sup>32</sup> The spelling of the original is retained; but the "Aaron" of Einhard is the great Caliph Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, whose actions play so large a part in fiction as well as in history.

<sup>33</sup> It is strange, in view of the friendly relations of Charles with the Muslim ruler of the East, that later legend so persistently represented Charles as a Crusader. The height of unreality is reached when, as in Ariosto, we find Charlemagne relieving the city of Paris, which is being besieged by Muslims.

<sup>34</sup> This elephant caused a great sensation in Europe. His arrival, life, and death are carefully noted by the chroniclers.

picion by them, because he had taken the imperial title, and thus seemed to aim at taking from them their empire; but in the end a very definite treaty was made between them, and every occasion of quarrel on either side thereby avoided. For the Romans and the  
 525 Greeks always suspected the Frankish power; hence there is a well-known Greek proverb: “the Frank is a good friend but a bad neighbour.”

17. Though he was so successful in widening the boundaries of his kingdom and subduing the foreign nations he, nevertheless, put on  
 530 foot many works for the decoration and convenience of his kingdom, and carried some to completion. The great church dedicated to Mary, the holy Mother of God, at Aix, and the bridge, five hundred feet in length, over the great river Rhine near Mainz, may fairly be regarded as the chief of his works. But the bridge was burnt down a year before his death, and though he had determined to rebuild it of stone  
 535 instead of wood it was not restored, because his death so speedily followed. He began also to build palaces of splendid workmanship – one not far from the city of Mainz, near a town called Ingelheim; another at Nimeguen, on the river Waal, which flows along the south  
 540 of the Batavian island. And he gave special orders to the bishops and priests who had charge of sacred buildings that any throughout his realm which had fallen into ruin through age should be restored, and he instructed his agents to see that his orders were carried out.

He built a fleet, too, for the war against the Northmen, constructing ships for this purpose near those rivers which flow out of Gaul  
 545 and Germany into the northern ocean. And because the Northmen laid waste the coasts of Gaul and Germany by their constant attacks he planted forts and garrisons in all harbours and at the mouths of all navigable rivers, and prevented in this way the passage of the  
 550 enemy.<sup>35</sup> He took the same measures in the South, on the shore of Narbonne and Septimania, and also along all the coasts of Italy as far as Rome, to hold in check the Moors, who had lately begun to make piratical excursions. And by reason of these precautions Italy suffered no serious harm from the Moors, nor Gaul and Germany  
 555 from the Northmen, in the days of Charles; except that Centumcellae, a city of Etruria, was betrayed into the hands of the Moors and plundered, and in Frisia certain islands lying close to Germany were ravaged by the Northmen.

<sup>35</sup> The exact meaning of the original is far from clear (*ne qua hostis exire potuisset*). The ingress rather than the egress is what Charles must have wished to prevent, but there seems no doubt about the reading.

## *Part II: Private Life and Character of Charlemagne*

18. I have shown, then, how Charles protected and expanded his  
 560 kingdom and also what splendour he gave to it. I shall now go on to speak of his mental endowments, of his steadiness of purpose under

whatever circumstances of prosperity or adversity, and of all that concerns his private and domestic life.

565 As long as, after the death of his father, he shared the kingdom with his brother he bore so patiently the quarrelling and restlessness of the latter as never even to be provoked to wrath by him. Then, having married at his mother's bidding the daughter of Desiderius, King of the Lombards, he divorced her, for some unknown reason,<sup>36</sup>  
570 a year later. He took in marriage Hildigard,<sup>37</sup> of the Suabian race, a woman of the highest nobility, and by her he had three sons – viz. Charles and Pippin and Ludovicus, and three daughters – Hrotrud and Bertha and Gisla. He had also three other daughters – Theoderada and Hiltrud and Hruodhaid. Two of these were the children of his wife Fastrada,<sup>38</sup> a woman of the eastern Franks or Germans; the  
575 third was the daughter of a concubine, whose name has escaped my memory. On the death of Fastrada he married Liutgard, of the Alemannic race, by whom he had no children. After her death he had four concubines – namely, Madelgarda, who bore him a daughter of the name of Ruothild; Gersuinda, of Saxon origin, by whom he had  
580 a daughter of the name of Adolthrud; Regina, who bore him Drogot and Hugo; and Adallinda, who was the mother of Theoderic.

His mother Bertrada lived with him to old age in great honour. He treated her with the utmost reverence, so that no quarrel of any kind  
585 ever arose between them – except in the matter of the divorce of the daughter of King Desiderius, whom he had married at her bidding. Bertrada died after the death of Hildigard, having lived to see three grandsons and as many granddaughters in her son's house. Charles had his mother buried with great honour in the same great church of  
590 St Denys in which his father lay.

He had only one sister, Gisla, who from childhood was dedicated to the religious life. He treated her with the same affectionate respect as his mother. She died a few years before Charles's own death in the monastery in which she had passed her life.

595 19. In educating his children he determined to train them, both sons and daughters, in those liberal studies to which he himself paid great attention. Further, he made his sons, as soon as their age permitted it, learn to ride like true Franks, and practise the use of arms and hunting. He ordered his daughters to learn wool work  
600 and devote attention to the spindle and distaff, for the avoidance of idleness and lethargy, and to be trained to the adoption of high principles.

He lost two sons and one daughter before his death – namely, Charles, his eldest; Pippin, whom he made King of Italy; and Hruotrud,<sup>39</sup>  
605 his eldest daughter, who had been betrothed to Constantine, the Emperor of the Greeks. Pippin left one son, Bernard, and five daughters

<sup>36</sup> "The Monk of St Gall" says that the cause of this repudiation was the constant illness of his wife, and her incapacity to bear him children.

<sup>37</sup> This Hildigard was only thirteen years of age at the time of her marriage with Charles. Besides the children mentioned by Einhard she bore to Charles three others – Lothaire, Adelais, and Hildigard.

<sup>38</sup> Fastrada is regarded by Einhard elsewhere as the evil influence on Charles's life, urging him against the natural bent of his character to acts of cruelty and violence. Dr Hodgkin, however, points out that the most cruel act of his reign – the massacre of 4500 Saxons – took place before his marriage with Fastrada.

<sup>39</sup> Hruotrud was betrothed to the Eastern Emperor in 781, during the residence of Charles at Rome, but nineteen years before he had assumed the imperial title; the marriage contract later ruptured, probably the result of religious difference and political jealousies. Both Frankish and Greek chroniclers are anxious to maintain that the repudiation came from their side.

– Adalheid, Atula, Gundrada, Berthaid, and Theoderada. In his treatment of them Charles gave the strongest proof of his family affection, for upon the death of his son he appointed his grandson Bernard to  
 610 succeed him, and had his granddaughters brought up with his own daughters.

He bore the deaths of his two sons and of his daughters with less patience than might have been expected from his usual stoutness of heart, for his domestic affection, a quality for which he was  
 615 as remarkable as for courage, forced him to shed tears. Moreover, when the death of Hadrian, the Roman Pontiff, whom he reckoned as the chief of his friends, was announced to him, he wept for him as though he had lost a brother or a very dear son. For he showed a very fine disposition in his friendships: he embraced them readily  
 620 and maintained them faithfully, and he treated with the utmost respect all whom he had admitted into the circle of his friends.

He had such care of the upbringing of his sons and daughters that he never dined without them when he was at home, and never travelled without them. His sons rode along with him, and his daughters  
 625 followed in the rear. Some of his guards, chosen for this very purpose, watched the end of the line of march where his daughters travelled. They were very beautiful, and much beloved by their father, and, therefore, it is strange that he would give them in marriage to no one, either among his own people or of a foreign state. But up to  
 630 his death he kept them all at home, saying that he could not forego their society. And hence the good fortune that followed him in all other respects was here broken by the touch of scandal and failure.<sup>40</sup> He shut his eyes, however, to everything, and acted as though no suspicion of anything amiss had reached him, or as if the rumour of it  
 635 had been discredited.

20. He had by a concubine a son called Pippin – whom I purposely did not mention along with the others – handsome, indeed, but deformed. When Charles, after the beginning of the war against the Huns, was wintering in Bavaria, this Pippin pretended illness,  
 640 and formed a conspiracy against his father with some of the leaders of the Franks, who had seduced him by a vain promise of the kingdom.<sup>41</sup> When the design had been detected and the conspirators punished Pippin was tonsured and sent to the monastery of Prumia, there to practise the religious life, to which in the end he was of his  
 645 own will inclined.

Another dangerous conspiracy had been formed against him in Germany at an earlier date. The plotters were some of them blinded and some of them maimed, and all subsequently transported into exile. Not more than three lost their lives, and these resisted capture  
 650 with drawn swords, and in defending themselves killed some of their

<sup>40</sup> If scandal is to be believed, the Court of Charles, in spite of his devotion to the Church and his anxiety to maintain a high standard of morals, was the scene of much licence and disorder.

<sup>41</sup> This conspiracy of Pippin took place in the years 785 and 786.

opponents. Hence, as they could not be restrained in any other way, they were cut down.

The cruelty of Queen Fastrada is believed to be the cause and origin of these conspiracies. Both were caused by the belief that, upon the persuasion of his cruel wife, he had swerved widely from his natural kindness and customary leniency. Otherwise his whole life long he so won the love and favour of all men both at home and abroad that never was the slightest charge of unjust severity brought against him by anyone.

21. He had a great love for foreigners, and took such pains to entertain them that their numbers were justly reckoned to be a burden not only to the palace but to the kingdom at large. But, with his usual loftiness of spirit, he took little note of such charges, for he found in the reputation of generosity and in the good fame that followed such actions a compensation even for grave inconveniences.

22. His body was large and strong; his stature tall but not ungainly, for the measure of his height was seven times the length of his own feet. The top of his head was round; his eyes were very large and piercing. His nose was rather larger than is usual; he had beautiful white hair; and his expression was brisk and cheerful; so that, whether sitting or standing, his appearance was dignified and impressive. Although his neck was rather thick and short and he was somewhat corpulent this was not noticed owing to the good proportions of the rest of his body. His step was firm and the whole carriage of his body manly; his voice was clear, but hardly so strong as you would have expected. He had good health, but for four years before his death was frequently attacked by fevers, and at last was lame of one foot. Even then he followed his own opinion rather than the advice of his doctors, whom he almost hated, because they advised him to give up the roast meat to which he was accustomed, and eat boiled instead. He constantly took exercise both by riding and hunting. This was a national habit; for there is hardly any race on the earth that can be placed on equality with the Franks in this respect. He took delight in the vapour of naturally hot waters, and constantly practised swimming, in which he was so proficient that no one could be fairly regarded as his superior. Partly for this reason he built his palace at Aix, and lived there continuously during the last years of his life up to the time of his death. He used to invite not only his sons to the bath but also his nobles and friends, and at times even a great number of his followers and bodyguards.

23. He wore the national – that is to say, the Frankish dress. His shirts and drawers were of linen, then came a tunic with a silken fringe, and hose. His legs were cross-gartered and his feet enclosed in shoes. In winter-time he defended his shoulders and chest with a



695 jerkin made of the skins of otters and ermine. He was clad in a blue  
 cloak, and always wore a sword, with the hilt and belt of either gold  
 or silver. Occasionally, too, he used a jewelled sword, but this was  
 only on the great festivals or when he received ambassadors from  
 foreign nations. He disliked foreign garments, however beautiful,  
 700 and would never consent to wear them, except once at Rome on the  
 request of Pope Hadrian, and once again upon the entreaty of his  
 successor, Pope Leo, when he wore a long tunic and cloak, and put  
 on shoes made after the Roman fashion. On festal days he walked  
 in procession in a garment of gold cloth, with jewelled boots and a  
 705 golden girdle to his cloak, and distinguished further by a diadem of  
 gold and precious stones. But on other days his dress differed little  
 from that of the common people.

24. He was temperate in eating and drinking, but especially so in  
 drinking; for he had a fierce hatred of drunkenness in any man, and  
 710 especially in himself or in his friends. He could not abstain so easily  
 from food, and used often to complain that fasting was injurious to  
 his health. He rarely gave large banquets, and only on the high fes-  
 tivals, but then he invited a large number of guests. His daily meal  
 was served in four courses only, exclusive of the roast, which the  
 715 hunters used to bring in on spits, and which he ate with more plea-  
 sure than any other food. During the meal there was either singing  
 or a reader for him to listen to. Histories and the great deeds of men  
 of old were read to him. He took delight also in the books of Saint  
 Augustine, and especially in those which are entitled the City of God.  
 720 He was so temperate in the use of wine and drink of any kind that he  
 rarely drank oftener than thrice during dinner.

In summer, after his midday meal, he took some fruit and a single  
 draught, and then, taking off his clothes and boots, just as he was  
 accustomed to do at night, he would rest for two or three hours. At  
 725 night he slept so lightly that he would wake, and even rise, four or  
 five times during the night.

When he was putting on his boots and clothes he not only admit-  
 ted his friends, but if the Count of the Palace told him there was any  
 dispute which could not be settled without his decision he would  
 730 have the litigants at once brought in, and hear the case, and pro-  
 nounce on it just as if he were sitting on the tribunal. He would,  
 moreover, at the same time transact any business that had to be done  
 that day or give any orders to his servants.<sup>42</sup>

25. In speech he was fluent and ready, and could express with  
 735 the greatest clearness whatever he wished. He was not merely con-  
 tent with his native tongue but took the trouble to learn foreign lan-  
 guages. He learnt Latin so well that he could speak it as well as his  
 native tongue; but he could understand Greek better than he could

<sup>42</sup> We have here the natural and simple beginnings of the ceremony that afterwards reached such great proportions in the *lever* and *coucher* of the French kings.

740 speak it.<sup>43</sup> His fluency of speech was so great that he even seemed sometimes a little garrulous.

He paid the greatest attention to the liberal arts, and showed the greatest respect and bestowed high honours upon those who taught them. For his lessons in grammar he listened to the instruction of Deacon Peter of Pisa, an old man; but for all other subjects Albinus, 745 called Alcuin,<sup>44</sup> also a deacon, was his teacher – a man from Britain, of the Saxon race, and the most learned man of his time. Charles spent much time and labour in learning rhetoric and dialectic, and especially astronomy, from Alcuin. He learnt, too, the art of reckoning, and with close application scrutinised most carefully the course 750 of the stars. He tried also to learn to write, and for this purpose used to carry with him and keep under the pillow of his couch tablets and writing-sheets that he might in his spare moments accustom himself to the formation of letters. But he made little advance in this strange task, which was begun too late in life.<sup>45</sup>

755 26. He paid the most devout and pious regard to the Christian religion, in which he had been brought up from infancy. And, therefore, he built the great and most beautiful church at Aix, and decorated it with gold and silver and candelabras and with wicket-gates and doors of solid brass. And, since he could not procure marble columns 760 elsewhere for the building of it, he had them brought from Rome and Ravenna. As long as his health permitted it he used diligently to attend the church both in the morning and evening, and during the night, and at the time of the Sacrifice. He took the greatest care to have all the services of the church performed with the utmost dig- 765 nity, and constantly warned the keepers of the building not to allow anything improper or dirty either to be brought into or to remain in the building. He provided so great a quantity of gold and silver vessels, and so large a supply of priestly vestments, that at the religious services not even the doorkeepers, who form the lowest ecclesiastical 770 order, had to officiate in their ordinary dress. He carefully reformed the manner of reading and singing; for he was thoroughly instructed in both, though he never read publicly himself, nor sang except in a low voice, and with the rest of the congregation.

27. He was most devout in relieving the poor and in those free 775 gifts which the Greeks call alms. For he gave it his attention not only in his own country and in his own kingdom, but he also used to send money across the sea to Syria, to Egypt, to Africa – to Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Carthage – in compassion for the poverty of any Christians whose miserable condition in those countries came to his 780 ears. It was for this reason chiefly that he cultivated the friendship of kings beyond the sea, hoping thereby to win for the Christians living beneath their sway some succour and relief.

<sup>43</sup> This reference to Greek at the Court of Charlemagne is interesting in view of the exaggerated views sometimes held on the disappearance of Greek in the Middle Ages.

<sup>44</sup> This is Alcuin of York, one of the greatest of Englishmen; undoubtedly, as Einhard says, the most learned man of his time. His letters form a valuable source of information for the inner life of Charlemagne and his Court.

<sup>45</sup> This passage has been closely scrutinized and commented on. Do Einhard's words imply that Charlemagne could not write at all? This seems a very improbable interpretation of them. *Parum successit* would rather mean that "he made but little headway." It may well be that the King was able to write roughly and in an ordinary way but failed to acquire the elegant and delicate calligraphy that was aimed at by the scribes of the time.

Beyond all other sacred and venerable places he loved the church of the holy Apostle Peter at Rome, and he poured into its treasury  
 785 great wealth in silver and gold and precious stones. He sent innumerable gifts to the Pope; and during the whole course of his reign he strove with all his might (and, indeed, no object was nearer to his heart than this) to restore to the city of Rome her ancient authority, and not merely to defend the church of Saint Peter but to decorate  
 790 and enrich it out of his resources above all other churches. But although he valued Rome so much, still, during all the forty-seven years that he reigned, he only went there four times to pay his vows and offer up his prayers.

28. But such were not the only objects of his last visit;<sup>46</sup> for the  
 795 Romans had grievously outraged Pope Leo, had torn out his eyes and cut off his tongue, and thus forced him to throw himself upon the protection of the King. He therefore came to Rome to restore the condition of the church, which was terribly disturbed, and spent the whole of the winter there. It was then that he received the title of  
 800 Emperor and Augustus, which he so disliked at first that he affirmed that he would not have entered the church on that day – though it was the chief festival of the church – if he could have foreseen the design of the Pope. But when he had taken the title he bore very quietly the hostility that it caused and the indignation of the Roman  
 805 emperors.<sup>47</sup> He conquered their ill-feeling by his magnanimity, in which, doubtless, he far excelled them, and sent frequent embassies to them, and called them his brothers.

29. When he had taken the imperial title he noticed many defects in the legal systems of his people; for the Franks have two legal systems,<sup>48</sup> differing in many points very widely from one another, and he, therefore, determined to add what was lacking, to reconcile the differences, and to amend anything that was wrong or wrongly expressed. He completed nothing of all his designs beyond adding a few capitularies, and those unfinished. But he gave orders that the  
 815 laws and rules of all nations comprised within his dominions which were not already written out should be collected and committed to writing.

He also wrote out the barbarous and ancient songs, in which the acts of the kings and their wars were sung, and committed them to  
 820 memory. He also began a grammar of his native language.<sup>49</sup>

He gave the months names in his own tongue, for before his time they were called by the Franks partly by Latin and partly by barbarous names. He also gave names to the twelve winds, whereas before not more than four, and perhaps not so many, had names of  
 825 their own. Of the months, he called January Winter-month, February Mud-month, March Spring-month, April Easter-month, May

<sup>46</sup> Einhard passes very lightly over these epoch-making events of Christmas Day in the year 800, when the imperial title was again assumed by a ruler of the West, and the Medieval Empire was launched with all its vast consequences, both for the theory and practice of the Middle Ages.

Charlemagne's expressed regret for what occurred (of which we hear from other sources) has been variously interpreted. It can hardly refer to the imperial title altogether; for this certainly was not unexpected, nor was it due merely to the decision of the Pope. Charles had himself decided to adopt it: it was the coping-stone to all his policy and his whole career, for in power Charles was Emperor before the consecration of that famous Christmas Day. The regret expressed by Charles more probably refers to the method in which the title was bestowed: it came to him too much as a grant from the Papacy, too little as the result of his own power and will. His heart may well have foreboded something of the long struggle between Empire and Papacy, which agitated the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, which caused so much bloodshed on both sides of the Alps, and which in the end ruined the power of both Emperor and Pope: for this struggle had its roots in the indefinite basis of the imperial title. The regrets of Charlemagne are probably in close relation to the wars of Henry IV, of Frederick Barbarossa, and of Frederick II. Had the Papacy the right to give or to withhold the imperial title? That was the great underlying problem of the imperial position.

<sup>47</sup> The Roman Emperors are the Emperors at Constantinople.

<sup>48</sup> That is to say, the legal systems of the Salian and Riparian Franks.

<sup>49</sup> These disappeared under Charles's son and successor Lewis the Pious, whose biographer tells us that Lewis "rejected the national poems, which he had learnt in his youth, and would not have them read or recited or taught."

Joy-month, June Plough-month, July Hay-month, August Harvest-month, September Wind-month, October Vintage-month, November Autumn-month, December Holy-month.<sup>50</sup> The following are the names which he gave to the winds: – The Subsolanus (east) he called East Wind; the Eurus (east by south) East-South Wind; the Euroauster (south by east) South-East Wind; the Auster (south) South Wind; the Austro-Afric (south by west) South-West Wind; the Afric (west by south) West-South Wind; the Zephyr (west) West Wind; the Corus (west by north) West-North Wind; the Circius (north by west) North-West Wind; the Septentrion (north) North Wind; the Aquilon (north by east) North-East Wind; the Vulturnus (east by north) East-North Wind.

<sup>50</sup> Their names (in the original) are as follows: – Wintarmanoth, Hornung, Lentzinmanoth, Ostarmanoth, Winne-manoth, Brachmanoth, Hewimanoth, Aranmanoth, Witumanoth, Windume-manoth, Herbistmanoth, Heiligmanoth.

30. At the very end of his life, when already he was feeling the pressure of old age and sickness, he summoned his own son Lewis, King of Aquitania, the only surviving son of Hildigard, and then solemnly called together the Frankish nobles of his whole kingdom; and then, with the consent of all, made Lewis partner in the whole kingdom and heir to the imperial title. After that, putting the diadem on his head, he ordered them to salute him “Imperator” and Augustus. This decision of his was received by all present with the greatest favour, for it seemed to them a divine inspiration for the welfare of the realm. It added to his dignity at home and increased the terror of his name abroad.

He then sent his son back to Aquitania, and himself, though broken with old age, proceeded to hunt, as his custom was, not far from the palace of Aix, and after spending the rest of the autumn in this pursuit he came back to Aix about the beginning of November. Whilst he was spending the winter there he was attacked by a sharp fever, and took to his bed. Then, following his usual habit, he determined to abstain from food, thinking that by such self-discipline he would be able either to cure or alleviate the disease. But the fever was complicated by a pain in the side which the Greeks call pleurisy; and, as Charles still persisted in fasting, and only very rarely drank something to sustain his strength, seven days after he had taken to his bed he received holy communion, and died, in the seventy-second year of his life and in the forty-seventh year of his reign, on the fifth day before the Kalends of February, at the third hour of the day.

31. His body was washed and treated with the usual ceremonies, and then, amidst the greatest grief of the whole people, taken to the church and buried. At first there was some doubt as to where he should rest, since he had given no instructions during his lifetime. But at length all were agreed that he could be buried nowhere more honourably than in the great church which he had built at his own expense in the same town, for the love of our Lord God Jesus Christ

and the honour of His holy and ever-virgin Mother. There he was buried on the same day on which he died.<sup>51</sup> A gilded arch was raised above the tomb, with his statue, and an inscription. The inscription ran as follows: –

875      “Beneath this tomb lies the body of Charles, the great and orthodox  
Emperor, who nobly expanded the kingdom of the Franks and reigned  
prosperously for forty-seven years. He departed this life, more than  
seventy years of age, in the eight hundred and fourteenth year of our  
880      Lord, in the seventh indiction, on the fifth day before the Kalends of  
February.”

32. There were many prodigies to show that his end drew near, and he as well as others understood the meaning of their warnings. During all the three last years of his life there were constant eclipses of sun and moon, and a black-coloured spot appeared in the sun  
885      for the space of seven days. The gallery which he had built, of great size and strength, between the palace and the church, suddenly, on Ascension Day, fell in ruins down even to the foundations. Also, the wooden bridge over the Rhine near Mainz, which he had built with wonderful skill, and the labour of ten years, so that it seemed  
890      as though it would last for ever, was accidentally set on fire, and in three hours burnt so far that not a plank remained except those that were covered by the water. Further, when he was making his last expedition in Saxony against Godofrid, King of the Danes, as he was moving out of camp and beginning his march before sunrise, he sud-  
895      denly saw a meteor rush across the heavens with a great blaze and pass from right to left through the clear sky. Whilst all were wondering what this sign meant, suddenly the horse that he was riding fell head foremost, and threw him so violently to the ground that the girdle of his cloak was broken, and his sword belt slipped from it.  
900      When his attendants ran up to help him they found him disarmed and disrobed. His javelin, too, which he was holding in his hand at the time of his fall, fell twenty paces and more away from him. Moreover, the palace at Aix was frequently shaken, and in houses where he lived there was a constant creaking in the fretted ceilings.  
905      The church in which he was afterwards buried was struck by lightning, and the golden apple that adorned the summit of the roof was thrown down by a thunder-stroke, and fell upon the Bishop’s house, which adjoined the church. In the same church an inscription was written on the edge of the circular space which ran round the inside  
910      of the church between the upper and lower arches, saying by whom the sacred edifice had been built. And in the last line occurred the words: “Carolus Princeps.” Some noticed that in the very year in which Charles died, and a few months before his death, the letters of the word “princeps” were so destroyed as to be quite invisible. But

<sup>51</sup> This curt and definite statement of Einhard disposes at once of the well-known story of Otto III’s visit to Charlemagne’s grave in the year 1000, and his remarkable discovery there. But the story is so famous that it may be given in the words of the chronicler of Novalesse, who is our chief authority for it.

“After the passage of many years the Emperor Otto III came into the district where the body of Charles was lying duly buried. He descended into the place of burial with two bishops and Otto, Count of Lomello; the Emperor himself completed the party of four. Now, the Count gave his version of what happened much as follows: – ‘We came then to Charles. He was not lying down, as is usual with the bodies of the dead, but sat on a sort of seat, as though he were alive. He was crowned with a golden crown; he held his sceptre in his hands, and his hands were covered with gloves, through which his nails had forced a passage. Round him there was a sort of vault built, strongly made of mortar and marble. When we came to the grave we broke a hole into it and entered, and entering, were aware of a very strong odour. At once we fell upon our knees and worshipped him, and the Emperor Otto clothed him with white garments, cut his nails, and restored whatever was lacking in him. But corruption had not yet taken anything away from his limbs; only a little was lacking to the very tip of his nose. Otto had this restored in gold; he then took a single tooth from his mouth, and so built up the vault, and departed.’ ”

915 he either refused to notice or despised all these omens as though they had no connection at all with anything that concerned him.

33. He had determined to draw out wills in order to make his daughters and the sons whom his concubines had borne to him heirs to some part of his property; but he took up this design too late,  
 920 and could not carry it out. But some three years before he died he divided his treasures, his money and his robes, and all his other moveable property, in presence of his friends and ministers, and appealed to them to ratify and maintain by their support this division after his death. He also stated in a document how he wished to have  
 925 the property which he had divided disposed of. The text and purport of the document ran as follows: –

In the name of the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This is the description and division which was made by the most glorious and pious lord Charles, the august Emperor, in the eight  
 930 hundred and eleventh year from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; in the forty-third year of his reign in Frankland; in the thirty-sixth year of his reign in Italy; in the eleventh year of his Empire and in the fourth indiction: which division he made for wise and religious reasons of his treasures and of the money which on that day was found  
 935 in the treasury. Wherein his great aim was: in the first place to ensure that the distribution of alms, which Christians religiously make from their possessions, should be duly and properly made on his account from his wealth; and also that his heirs may clearly know without any possibility of doubt what ought to belong to them, and may therefore  
 940 (without contest or dissension) divide his goods among themselves in their proper proportion. Therefore with this intention and object he first divided into three parts all his property and moveable goods; which, whether consisting of gold, silver, jewels, or royal apparel, could be found on the afore-mentioned day in his treasury. Then, by a further  
 945 distribution, he divided two of those three parts into twenty-one parts, and kept the third part undivided.

The distribution of the two parts into twenty-one is to be carried out in the following way. As there are known to be twenty-one metropolitan cities in his realm, one of those twenty-one parts is to be handed over  
 950 to each metropolitan city by his heirs and friends for the purpose of almsgiving. The Archbishop who at the time of his death is ruling the metropolitan sees shall receive that part for his church and divide it among his suffragans; one-third going to his own church and two-thirds being divided among his suffragans.

Each of these divisions – which, as already mentioned, are made out of the first two-thirds, and are twenty-one in number, according to the number of the metropolitan sees – is separated from the rest and put away by itself in a repository of its own with the title of the city attached to which it is to be given. The names of the metropolitan  
 960 sees, to which this alms or largess is to be given, are Rome, Ravenna, Milan, Fréjus, Grado, Cologne, Mainz, Juvavum which is also called Salsburg, Trèves, Sens, Besançon, Lyons, Rouen, Rheims, Arles, Vienne,

Darantasia, Embrun, Bordeaux, Tours, Bourges.

965 The following disposition shall be made of the one part hitherto left  
undivided. When the first two parts have been distributed into the  
before-mentioned divisions, and have been put away under seal, this  
third part shall be employed for daily uses, as not being alienated by  
any bond or promise of the owner; and it shall be so used as long as he  
970 himself remains in the flesh or judges its employment to be necessary  
to him. But after his death or his voluntary retirement from the affairs  
of the world that part shall be divided into four subdivisions. Of these  
subdivisions one shall be added to the before-mentioned twenty-one  
parts; the second shall be taken by his sons and daughters, and by the  
sons and daughters of his sons, and shall be divided among them in  
975 just and reasonable proportion; the third shall be devoted to the use of  
the poor in the manner usual among Christians; the fourth part shall  
similarly be divided for alms and go to the support of the servants,  
both men and women, who attend to the needs of the palaces.

980 He desired further that there should be added to this third part of the  
total sum, which like the other parts consists of gold and silver, all  
vessels and utensils of brass, iron or other metals, with arms, clothes  
and all other moveable articles, whether of value or not, which are  
employed for various purposes; as for instance curtains, coverlets,  
985 tapestries, woollen-cloths, dressed-skins, harnesses, and whatever else  
is found at that date in his store chamber or wardrobe: so that in this  
way the subdivisions of that part may be larger, and the distribution of  
alms find its way to a larger number.

990 He desired that the chapel – that is, the materials for the service of  
the church, both those which he himself gave and collected and those  
which came to him by inheritance from his father – should remain  
entire and suffer no division of any kind. But if any vessel or books  
or other ornaments are found, which have certainly not been given by  
him to the aforementioned chapel, these may be bought and possessed  
by anyone who wants them, at a price fixed by a reasonable valuation.

995 He similarly determined that the books, of which he had collected a  
great quantity in his library, should be sold at a reasonable price to  
anyone who wanted them and the money handed over to the poor.  
Amongst his treasures there are three tables of silver and one of gold  
of remarkable size and weight. Concerning these he determined and  
1000 decided as follows. One of them, square in shape, containing a map of  
the city of Constantinople, shall be sent to Rome for the cathedral of  
the holy Apostle Peter, along with the other gifts which are set aside  
for that purpose. The second, round in shape, inscribed with a picture  
of the city of Rome, shall be given to the Bishopric of the Church of  
1005 Ravenna. The third, which is far superior to the others both in beauty  
of workmanship and in weight, which is made of three circles, and  
contains a map of the whole world, skilfully and minutely drawn, shall  
go to increase that third part which is to be divided among his heirs  
and given in alms.

1010 This disposition and arrangement he made and drew up in presence of  
the bishops, abbots and counts, who could then be present and whose  
names are here written out.

|      |                |             |
|------|----------------|-------------|
|      | <i>Bishops</i> | Hildibald   |
|      |                | Richolf     |
| 1015 |                | Arno        |
|      |                | Wolphar     |
|      |                | Bernoin     |
|      |                | Laidra      |
|      |                | John        |
| 1020 |                | Theodolf    |
|      |                | Jesse       |
|      |                | Heito       |
|      |                | Waltgaud    |
|      | <i>Abbots</i>  | Fridugisius |
| 1025 |                | Adalung     |
|      |                | Engilbert   |
|      |                | Irmin       |
|      | <i>Counts</i>  | Walatho     |
|      |                | Meginher    |
| 1030 |                | Otolf       |
|      |                | Stephen     |
|      |                | Unruoc      |
|      |                | Barchard    |
|      |                | Meginhard   |
| 1035 |                | Hatto       |
|      |                | Rihwin      |
|      |                | Edo         |
|      |                | Ercangar    |
|      |                | Gerold      |
| 1040 |                | Bero        |
|      |                | Hildigern   |
|      |                | Roccolf     |

His son Lewis, who by the designs of Providence succeeded him,  
inspected the aforesaid document, and carried out these arrange-  
1045 ments with the greatest devotion immediately after his death.