Two Sources on Charlemagne

Einhard


Einhard wrote in imitation of the Roman biographer Suetonius (c.69-after 122 CE)

3. Charlemagne's Accession

Pepin, however, was raised by decree of the Roman pontiff, from the rank of Mayor of the Palace to that of King, and ruled alone over the Franks for fifteen years or more [752-768]. He died of dropsy [Sept. 24, 768] in Paris at the close of the Aquitanian War, which he had waged with William, Duke of Aquitania, for nine successive years, and left his two sons, Charles and Carloman, upon whim, by the grace of God, the succession devolved.

The Franks, in a general assembly of the people, made them both kings [Oct 9, 786] on condition that they should divide the whole kingdom equally between them, Charles to take and rule the part that had to belonged to their father, Pepin, and Carloman the part which their uncle, Carloman had governed. The conditions were accepted, and each entered into the possession of the share of the kingdom that fell to him by this arrangement; but peace was only maintained between them with the greatest difficulty, because many of Carloman's party kept trying to disturb their good understanding, and there were some even who plotted to involve them in a war with each other. The event, however, which showed the danger to have been rather imaginary than real, for at Carloman's death his widow [Gerberga] fled to Italy with her sons and her principal adherents, and without reason, despite her husband's brother put herself and her children under the protection of Desiderius, King of the Lombards. Carloman had succumbed to disease after ruling two years [in fact more than three] in common with his brother and at his death Charles was unanimously elected King of the Franks.

9. Spanish Expedition

In the midst of this vigorous and almost uninterrupted struggle with the Saxons, he covered the frontier by garrisons at the proper points, and marched over the Pyrenees into Spain at the head of all the forces that he could muster. All the towns and castles that he attacked surrendered, and up to the time of his homeward march he sustained no loss whatever; but on his return through the Pyrenees he had cause to rue the treachery of the Gascons. That region is well adapted for ambushes by reason of the thick forests that cover it; and as the army was advancing in the long line of march necessitated by the narrowness of the road, the Gascons, who lay in ambush [778] on the top of a very high mountain, attacked the rear of the baggage train and the rear guard in charge of it, and hurled them down to the very bottom of the valley [at Roncevalles, later celebrated in the Song of Roland]. In the struggle that ensued they cut them off to a man; they then plundered the baggage, and dispersed with all speed in every direction under cover of
approaching night. The lightness of their armor and the nature of the battle ground stood the
Gascons in good stead on this occasion, whereas the Franks fought at a disadvantage in every
respect, because of the weight of their armor and the unevenness of the ground. Eggihard, the
King's steward; Anselm, Count Palatine; and Roland, Governor of the March of Brittany, with
very many others, fell in this engagement. This ill turn could not be avenged for the nonce,
because the enemy scattered so widely after carrying out their plan that not the least clue could
be had to their whereabouts.

16. Foreign Relations

He added to the glory of his reign by gaining the good will of several kings and nations; so close,
indeed, was the alliance that he contracted with Alfonso [II 791-842] King of Galicia and
Asturias, that the latter, when sending letters or ambassadors to Charles, invariably styled
himself his man. His munificence won the kings of the Scots also to pay such deference to his
wishes that they never gave him any other title than lord or themselves than subjects and slaves:
there are letters from them extant in which these feelings in his regard are expressed. His
relations with Aaron [ie Harun Al-Rashid, 786-809], King of the Persians, who ruled over almost
the whole of the East, India excepted, were so friendly that this prince preferred his favor to that
of all the kings and potentates of the earth, and considered that to him alone marks of honor and
munificence were due. Accordingly, when the ambassadors sent by Charles to visit the most holy
sepulcher and place of resurrection of our Lord and Savior presented themselves before him with
gifts, and made known their master's wishes, he not only granted what was asked, but gave
possession of that holy and blessed spot. When they returned, he dispatched his ambassadors
with them, and sent magnificent gifts, besides stuffs, perfumes, and other rich products of the
Eastern lands. A few years before this, Charles had asked him for an elephant, and he sent the
only one that he had. The Emperors of Constantinople, Nicephorus [I 802-811], Michael [I, 811-
813], and Leo [V, 813-820], made advances to Charles, and sought friendship and alliance with
him by several embassies; and even when the Greeks suspected him of designing to wrest the
empire from them, because of his assumption of the title Emperor, they made a close alliance
with him, that he might have no cause of offense. In fact, the power of the Franks was always
viewed by the Greeks and Romans with a jealous eye, whence the Greek proverb "Have the
Frank for your friend, but not for your neighbor."

19 Private Life (continued) [Charles and the Education of His Children]

The plan that he adopted for his children's education was, first of all, to have both boys and girls
instructed in the liberal arts, to which he also turned his own attention. As soon as their years
admitted, in accordance with the custom of the Franks, the boys had to learn horsemanship, and
to practise war and the chase, and the girls to familiarize themselves with cloth-making, and to
handle distaff and spindle, that they might not grow indolent through idleness, and he fostered in
them every virtuous sentiment. He only lost three of all his children before his death, two sons
and one daughter, Charles, who was the eldest, Pepin, whom he had made King of Italy, and
Hruodrud, his oldest daughter. whom he had betrothed to Constantine [VI, 780-802], Emperor of
the Greeks. Pepin left one son, named Bernard, and five daughters, Adelaide, Atula, Guntrada,
Berthaid and Theoderada. The King gave a striking proof of his fatherly affection at the time of
Pepin's death [810]: he appointed the grandson to succeed Pepin, and had the granddaughters
brought up with his own daughters. When his sons and his daughter died, he was not so calm as
might have been expected from his remarkably strong mind, for his affections were no less
strong, and moved him to tears. Again, when he was told of the death of Hadrian [796], the
Roman Pontiff, whom he had loved most of all his friends, he wept as much as if he had lost a
brother, or a very dear son. He was by nature most ready to contract friendships, and not only
made friends easily, but clung to them persistently, and cherished most fondly those with whom
he had formed such ties. He was so careful of the training of his sons and daughters that he never
took his meals without them when he was at home, and never made a journey without them; his
sons would ride at his side, and his daughters follow him, while a number of his body-guard,
detailed for their protection, brought up the rear. Strange to say, although they were very
handsome women, and he loved them very dearly, he was never willing to marry any of them to
a man of their own nation or to a foreigner, but kept them all at home until his death, saying that
he could not dispense with their society. Hence, though other-wise happy, he experienced the
malignity of fortune as far as they were concerned; yet he concealed his knowledge of the rumors
current in regard to them, and of the suspicions entertained of their honor.

21. Charlemagne's Treatment of Foreigners

He liked foreigners, and was at great pains to take them under his protection. There were often so
many of them, both in the palace and the kingdom, that they might reasonably have been
considered a nuisance; but he, with his broad humanity, was very little disturbed by such
annoyances, because he felt himself compensated for these great inconveniences by the praises
of his generosity and the reward of high renown.

22. Personal Appearance

Charles was large and strong, and of lofty stature, though not disproportionately tall (his height is
well known to have been seven times the length of his foot); 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.
Thus his appearance was always stately and dignified, whether he was standing or sitting;
although his neck was thick and somewhat short, and his belly rather prominent; but the
symmetry of the rest of his body concealed these defects. His gait was firm, his whole carriage
manly, and his voice clear, but not so strong as his size led one to expect. His health was
excellent, except during the four years preceding his death, when he was subject to frequent
fevers; at the last he even limped a little with one foot. Even in those years he consulted rather
his own inclinations than the advice of physicians, who were almost hateful to him, because they
wanted him to give up roasts, to which he was accustomed, and to eat boiled meat instead. In
accordance with the national custom, he took frequent exercise on horseback and in the chase,
accomplishments in which scarcely any people in the world can equal the Franks. He enjoyed the
exhalations from natural warm springs, and often practised swimming, in which he was such an
adept that none could surpass him; and hence it was that he built his palace at Aix-la-Chapelle,
and lived there constantly during his latter years until his death. He used not only to invite his
sons to his bath, but his nobles and friends, and now and then a troop of his retinue or body
guard, so that a hundred or more persons sometimes bathed with him.
23. Dress

He used to wear the national, that is to say, the Frank, dress-next his skin a linen shirt and linen breeches, and above these a tunic fringed with silk; while hose fastened by bands covered his lower limbs, and shoes his feet, and he protected his shoulders and chest in winter by a close-fitting coat of otter or marten skins. Over all he flung a blue cloak, and he always had a sword girt about him, usually one with a gold or silver hilt and belt; he sometimes carried a jewelled sword, but only on great feast-days or at the reception of ambassadors from foreign nations. He despised foreign costumes, however handsome, and never allowed himself to be robed in them, except twice in Rome, when he donned the Roman tunic, chlamys, and shoes; the first time at the request of Pope Hadrian, the second to gratify Leo, Hadrian's successor. On great feast-days he made use of embroidered clothes, and shoes bedecked with precious stones; his cloak was fastened by a golden buckle, and he appeared crowned with a diadem of gold and gems: but on other days his dress varied little from the common dress of the people.

24. Habits

Charles was temperate in eating, and particularly so in drinking, for he abominated drunkenness in anybody, much more in himself and those of his household; but he could not easily abstain from food, and often complained that fasts injured his health. He very rarely gave entertainments, only on great feast-days, and then to large numbers of people. His meals ordinarily consisted of four courses, not counting the roast, which his huntsmen used to bring in on the spit; he was more fond of this than of any other dish. While at table, he listened to reading or music. The subjects of the readings were the stories and deeds of olden time: he was fond, too, of St. Augustine's books, and especially of the one entitled "The City of God."

He was so moderate in the use of wine and all sorts of drink that he rarely allowed himself more than three cups in the course of a meal. In summer after the midday meal, he would eat some fruit, drain a single cup, put off his clothes and shoes, just as he did for the night, and rest for two or three hours. He was in the habit of awaking and rising from bed four or five times during the night. While he was dressing and putting on his shoes, he not only gave audience to his friends, but if the Count of the Palace told him of any suit in which his judgment was necessary, he had the parties brought before him forthwith, took cognizance of the case, and gave his decision, just as if he were sitting on the Judgment-seat. This was not the only business that he transacted at this time, but he performed any duty of the day whatever, whether he had to attend to the matter himself, or to give commands concerning it to his officers.

25. Studies

Charles had the gift of ready and fluent speech, and could express whatever he had to say with the utmost clearness. He was not satisfied with command of his native language merely, but gave attention to the study of foreign ones, and in particular was such a master of Latin that he could speak it as well as his native tongue; but he could understand Greek better than he could speak it. He was so eloquent, indeed, that he might have passed for a teacher of eloquence. He most zealously cultivated the liberal arts, held those who taught them in great esteem, and conferred great honors upon them. He took lessons in grammar of the deacon Peter of Pisa, at that time an
aged man. Another deacon, Albin of Britain, surnamed Alcuin, a man of Saxon extraction, who was the greatest scholar of the day, was his teacher in other branches of learning. The King spent much time and labour with him studying rhetoric, dialectics, and especially astronomy; he learned to reckon, and used to investigate the motions of the heavenly bodies most curiously, with an intelligent scrutiny. He also tried to write, and used to keep tablets and blanks in bed under his pillow, that at leisure hours he might accustom his hand to form the letters; however, as he did not begin his efforts in due season, but late in life, they met with ill success.

26. Piety

He cherished with the greatest fervor and devotion the principles of the Christian religion, which had been instilled into him from infancy. Hence it was that he built the beautiful basilica at Aix-la-Chapelle, which he adorned with gold and silver and lamps, and with rails and doors of solid brass. He had the columns and marbles for this structure brought from Rome and Ravenna, for he could not find such as were suitable elsewhere. He was a constant worshipper at this church as long as his health permitted, going morning and evening, even after nightfall, besides attending mass; and he took care that all the services there conducted should be administered with the utmost possible propriety, very often warning the sextons not to let any improper or unclean thing be brought into the building or remain in it. He provided it with a great number of sacred vessels of gold and silver and with such a quantity of clerical robes that not even the doorkeepers who fill the humblest office in the church were obliged to wear their everyday clothes when in the exercise of their duties. He was at great pains to improve the church reading and psalmody, for he was well skilled in both although he neither read in public nor sang, except in a low tone and with others.

Notker the Stammerer, the Monk of St Gall


This highly anecdotal account was written by the Monk of St. Gall (usually identified with Notker Balbulus, or "the Stammerer", d. 912). It was composed for Charles the Fat in 883-4, and covers many subjects other than Charlemagne.

**Book I: Concerning the Piety of Charles and His Care of the Church**

After the omnipotent ruler of the world, who orders alike the fate of kingdoms and the course of time, had broken the feet of iron and clay in one noble statue, to wit the Romans, he raised by the hands of the illustrious Charles the golden head of another, not less admirable, among the Franks. Now it happened, when he had begun to reign alone in the western parts of the world, and the pursuit of learning had been almost forgotten throughout all his realm, and the worship of the true Godhead was faint and weak, that two Scots came from Ireland to the coast of Gaul along with certain traders of Britain. These Scotchmen were unrivalled for their skill in sacred and secular learning: and day by day, when the crowd gathered round them for traffic, they
exhibited no wares for sale, but cried out and said, [60]"Ho, everyone that desires wisdom, let him draw near and take it at our hands; for it is wisdom that we have for sale."

Now they declared that they had wisdom for sale because they said that the people cared not for what was given freely but only for what was sold, hoping that thus they might be incited to purchase wisdom along with other wares; and also perhaps hoping that by this announcement they themselves might become a wonder and a marvel to men: which indeed turned out to be the case. For so long did they make their proclamation that in the end those who wondered at these men, or perhaps thought them insane, brought the matter to the ears of King Charles, who always loved and sought after wisdom. Wherefore he ordered them to come with all speed into his presence and asked them whether it were true, as fame reported of them, that they had brought wisdom with them. They answered, "We both possess it and are ready to give it, in the name of God, to those who seek it worthily." Again he asked them what price they asked for it; and they answered, "We ask no price, O king; but we ask only for a fit place for teaching and quick minds to teach; and besides food to eat and raiment to put on, for without these we cannot accomplish our pilgrimage."

[61] This answer filled the king with a great joy, and first he kept both of them with him for a short time. But soon, when he must needs go to war, he made one of them named Clement reside in Gaul, and to him he sent many boys both of noble, middle and humble birth, and he ordered as much food to be given them as they required, and he set aside for them buildings suitable for study. But he sent the second scholar into Italy and gave him the monastery of Saint Augustine near Pavia, that all who wished might gather there to learn from him.

2. But when Albinus (Alcuin), an Englishman, heard that the most religious Emperor Charles gladly entertained wise men, he entered into a ship and came to him. Now Albinus was skilled in all learning beyond all others of our times, for he was the disciple of that most learned priest Bede, who next to Saint Gregory was the most skillful interpreter of the scriptures. And Charles received Albinus kindly and kept him at his side to the end of his life, except when he marched with his armies to his vast wars: nay, Charles would even call himself Albinus's disciple; and Albinus he would call his master. He appointed him to rule over the abbey of Saint Martin, near to the city of Tours: so that, when he himself was absent, Albinus might rest there and teach those who had recourse to him. And his teaching bore such fruit among his pupils that the modern Gauls or Franks came to equal the ancient Romans or Athenians.

3. Then when Charles came back, after a long absence, crowned with victory, into Gaul, he ordered the boys whom he had entrusted to Clement to come before him and present to him letters and verses of their own composition. Now the boys of middle or low birth presented him with writings garnished with the sweet savours of wisdom beyond all that he could have hoped, while those of the children of noble parents were silly and tasteless. Then the most wise Charles, imitating the judgment of the eternal Judge, gathered together those who had done well upon his right hand and addressed them in these words: "My children, you have found much favour with me because you have tried with all your strength to carry out my orders and win advantage for yourselves. Wherefore now study to attain to perfection; and I will give you bishoprics and splendid monasteries, and you shall be always honourable in my eyes." Then he turned severely to those who were gathered on his left, and, smiting their consciences with the fire of his eyes, he
flung at them in scorn these terrible words, which seemed thunder rather than human speech: "You nobles, you sons of my chiefs, you superfine dandies, you have trusted to your birth and your possessions and have set at naught my orders to your own advancement: you have neglected the pursuit of learning and you have given yourselves over to luxury and sport, to idleness and profitless pastimes." Then solemnly he raised his august head and his unconquered right hand to the heavens and thus thundered against them, "By the King of Heaven, I take no account of your noble birth and your fine looks, though others may admire you for them. Know this for certain, that unless you make up for your former sloth by vigorous study, you will never get any favour from Charles."

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Now since envy always rages among the envious so it is customary and regular with the Romans to oppose or rather to fight against all strong Popes, who are from time to time raised to the apostolic see. Whence it came to pass that certain of the Romans, themselves blinded with envy, charged the above-mentioned Pope Leo of holy memory with a deadly crime and tried to blind him. But they were frightened and held back by some divine impulse, and after trying in vain to gouge out his eyes, they slashed them across the middle with knives. The Pope had news of this carried secretly by his servants to Michael, Emperor of Constantinople; but he refused all assistance saying: "The Pope has an independent kingdom and one higher than mine; so he must act his own revenge upon his enemies." Thereupon the holy Leo invited the unconquered Charles to come to Rome; following in this the ordinance of God, that, as Charles was already in very deed ruler and emperor over many nations, so also by the authority of the apostolic see he might have now the name of Emperor, Caesar and Augustus. Now Charles, being always ready to march and in warlike array, though he knew nothing at all of the cause of the summons, came at once with his attendants and his vassals; himself the head of the world he came to the city that had once been the head of the world. And when the abandoned people heard of his sudden coming, at once, as sparrows hide themselves when they hear the voice of their master, so they fled and hid in various hiding-places, cellars, and dens. Nowhere howsoever under heaven could they escape from his energy and penetration; and soon they were captured and brought in chains to the Cathedral of St. Peter. Then the undaunted Father Leo took the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and held it over his head, and then in the presence of Charles and his knights, in presence also of his persecutors, he swore in the following words: -- "So on the day of the great judgment may I partake in the promises, as I am innocent of the charge that is falsely laid against me." Then many of the prisoners asked to be allowed to swear upon the tomb of St. Peter that they also were innocent of the charge laid against them. But the Pope knew their falseness and said to Charles: "Do not, I pray you, unconquered servant of God, give assent to their cunning; for well they know that Saint Peter is always ready to forgive. But seek among the tombs of the martyrs the stone upon which is written the name of St. Pancras, that boy of thirteen years; and if they will swear to you in his name you may know that you have them fast." it was done as the Pope ordered. And when many people drew near to take the oath upon this tomb, straightway some fell back dead and some were seized by the devil and went mad. Then the terrible Charles said to his servants: "Take care that none of them escapes." Then he condemned all who had been taken prisoner either to some kind of death or to perpetual imprisonment.
As Charles stayed in Rome for a few days, the bishop of the apostolic see called together all who [90] would come from the neighbouring districts and then, in their presence and in the presence of all the knights of the unconquered Charles, he declared him to be Emperor and Defender of the Roman Church. Now Charles had no guess of what was coming; and, though he could not refuse what seemed to have been divinely preordained for him, nevertheless he received his new title with no show of thankfulness. For first he thought that the Greeks would be fired by greater envy than ever and would plan some harm against the kingdom of the Franks; or at least would take greater precautions against a possible sudden attack of Charles to subdue their kingdom, and add it to his own empire. And further the magnanimous Charles recalled how ambassadors from the King of Constantinople had come to him and had told him that their master wished to be his loyal friend; and that, if they became nearer neighbours, he had determined to treat him as his son and relieve the poverty of Charles from his resources: and how, upon hearing this, Charles was unable to contain any longer the fiery ardour of his heart and had exclaimed: "Oh, would that pool were not between us; for then we would either divide between us the wealth of the east, or we would hold it in common."

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Book II: Concerning the Wars and Military Exploits of Charles

5. But occupations such as these did not prevent the high-souled emperor from sending frequent messengers, carrying letters and presents, to the kings of the most distant regions; and they sent him in turn whatever honours their lands could bestow. From the theatre of the Saxon war he sent messengers to the King of Constantinople; who asked them whether the kingdom of "his son Charles" was at peace or was being invaded by neighbouring peoples. Then the leader of the embassy made answer that [110] peace reigned everywhere, except only that a certain race called the Saxons were disturbing the territories of the Franks by frequent raids. Whereupon the sluggish and unwarlike Greek king answered: "Pooh! why should my son take so much trouble about a petty enemy that possesses neither fame nor valour? I will give you the Saxon race and all that belong to it." When the envoy on his return gave this message to the most warlike Charles, he smiled and said: "The king would have shown greater kindness to you if he had given you a leg-wrap for your long journey."

6. I must not conceal the wise answer which the same envoy gave during his embassy to Greece. He came with his companions to one of the royal towns in the autumn; the party was divided for entertainment, and the envoy of whom I speak was quartered on a certain bishop. This bishop was given up to fasting and prayer, and left the envoy to perish of almost continuous hunger: but, with the first smile of spring, he presented the envoy to the king. The king asked him his opinion of the bishop. Then the envoy sighed from the very bottom of his heart and said: "That bishop of yours reaches the highest point of holiness that can be attained to without God." The king was amazed [111] and said: "What! can a man be holy without God?" Then said the envoy: "It is written, 'God is love,' and in that grace he is entirely lacking."

Thereupon the King of Constantinople invited him to his banquet and placed him among his nobles. Now these had a law that no guest at the king's table, whether a native or a foreigner, should turn over any animal or part of an animal: he must eat only the upper part of whatever
was placed before him. Now, a river fish, covered with spice, was brought and placed on the dish before him. He knew nothing of the custom and turned the fish over whereupon all the nobles rose up and cried: "Master, you are dishonoured, as no king ever was before you." Then the king groaned and said to our envoy: "I cannot resist them: you must be put to death at once: but ask me any other favour you like and I will grant it." He thought awhile and then in the hearing of all pronounced these words: "I pray you, lord emperor, that in accordance with your promise you will grant me one small petition." And the king said: "Ask what you will, and you shall have it: except only that I may not give you your life, for that is against the laws of the Greeks." Then said the envoy: "With my dying breath I ask one favour; let everyone who saw me turn that fish over [112] be deprived of his eyes." The king was amazed at the stipulation, and swore, by Christ, that he had seen nothing, but had only trusted the word of others. Then the queen began to excuse herself: "By the beneficent Mother of God, the Holy Mary, I noticed nothing." Then the other nobles, in their desire to escape from the danger, swore, one by the keeper of the keys of heaven, and another by the apostle of the Gentiles, and all the rest by the virtue of the angels and the companies of the saints, that they were beyond the reach of the stipulation. And so the clever Frank bet the empty-headed Greeks in their own land and came home safe and sound.

A few years later the unwearied Charles sent to Greece a certain bishop remarkable both for his physical and mental gifts, and with him the most noble duke Hugo. After a long delay they were at last brought into the presence of the king and then sent about to all manner of places. But at last they got their dismissal and returned, after paying heavily for their journey by sea and land.

Soon afterwards the Greek king sent his envoy to the most glorious Charles. It so happened that the bishop and the duke whom I have mentioned were just then with the emperor. When it was announced that the envoys were coming they advised the most [113] wise Charles to have them led round through mountains and deserts, so that they should only come into the emperor's presence when their clothes had been worn and wasted, and their money was entirely spent.

This was done; and when at last they arrived, the bishop and his comrade bade the count of the stables to take his seat on a high throne in the midst of his underlings, so that it was impossible to believe him anyone lower than the emperor. When the envoys saw him they fell upon the ground and wanted to worship him. But they were prevented by the ministers and forced to go farther. Then they saw the count of the palace presiding over a gathering of the nobles and again they thought it was the emperor and flung themselves to earth. But those who were present drove them forward with blows and said: "That is not the emperor." Next they saw the master of the royal table surrounded by his noble band of servants; and again they fell to the ground thinking that it was the emperor. Driven thence they found the chamberlains of the emperor and their chief in council together; and then they did not doubt but that they were in the presence of the first of living men. But this man too denied that he was what they took him for; and yet he promised [114] that he would use his influence with the nobles of the palace, so that if possible the envoys might come into the presence of the most August emperor. Then there came servants from the imperial presence to introduce them with full honours. Now Charles, the most gracious of kings, was standing by an open window leaning upon Bishop Heitto, for that was the name of the bishop who had been sent to Constantinople. The emperor was clad in gems and gold an glittered like the sun at its rising: and round about him stood, as it were the chivalry of heaven, three young men, his sons, who have since been made partners in the kingdom; his daughters and
their mother decorated with wisdom and beauty as well as with pearls; leaders of the Church, unsurpassed in dignity and virtue; abbots distinguished for their high birth and their sanctity; nobles, like Joshua when he appeared in the camp of Gilgal; and an army like that which drove back the Syrians and Assyrians out of Samaria. So that if David had been there he might well have sung: "Kings of the earth and all people; princes and all judges of the earth; both young men and maidens; old men and children let them praise the name of the Lord." Then the envoys of the Greeks were astonished; their spirit left them and their courage failed; [115] speechless and lifeless they fell upon the ground. But the most kindly emperor raised them, and tried to cheer them with encouraging words. At last life returned to them; but when they saw Heitto, whom they had once despised and rejected, now in so great honour, again they grovelled on the ground in terror; until the king swore to them by the King of Heaven that he would do them no harm. They took heart at this promise and began to act with a little more confidence; and so home they went and never came back again.

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8. About the same time also envoys of the Persians were sent to him. They knew not where Frankland lay; but because of the fame of Rome, over which they knew that Charles had rule, they thought it a great thing when they were able to reach the coast of Italy. They explained the reason of their journey to the bishops of Campania and Tuscany, of Emilia and Liguria, of Burgundy and Gaul and to the abbots and counts of those regions; but by all they were either deceitfully handled or else [117] actually driven off; so that a whole year had gone round before, weary and footsore with their long journey, they reached Aix at last and saw Charles, the most renowned of kings by reason of his virtues. They arrived in the last week of Lent, and, on their arrival being made known to the Emperor, he postponed their presentation until Easter Eve. Then when that incomparable monarch was dressed with incomparable magnificence for the chief of festivals, he ordered the introduction of the envoys of that race that had once held the whole world in awe. But they were so terrified at the sight of the most magnificent Charles that one might think they had never seen king or emperor before. He received them however most kingly, and granted them this privilege -- that they might go wherever they had a mind to, even as one of his own children, and examine everything and ask what questions and make what inquiries they chose. They jumped with joy at this favour, and valued the privilege of clinging close to Charles, of gazing upon him, of admiring him, more than all the wealth of the east.

They went up into the ambulatory that runs round the nave of the cathedral and looked down upon the clergy and the nobles; then they [118] returned to the emperor, and, by reason of the greatness of their joy, they could not refrain from laughing aloud; and they clapped their hands and said: -- "We have seen only men of clay before: here are men of gold." Then they went to the nobles, one by one, and gazed with wonder upon arms and clothes that were strange to them; and then came back to the emperor, whom they regarded with wonder still greater. They passed that night and the next Sunday continuously in church; and, upon the most holy day itself, they were invited by the most munificent Charles to a splendid banquet, along with the nobles of Frankland and Europe. There they were so struck with amazement at the strangeness of everything that they had hardly eaten anything at the end of the banquet.

"But when the Morn, leaving Tithonus' bed,
Then Charles, who could never endure idleness and sloth, went out to the woods to hunt the bison and the urochs; and made preparations to take the Persian envoys with him. But when they saw the immense animals they were stricken with a mighty fear and turned and fled. But the undaunted hero [119] Charles, riding on a high-mettled charger, drew near to one of these animals and drawing his sword tried to cut through its neck. But he missed his aim, and the monstrous beast ripped the boot and leg-thongs of the emperor; and, slightly wounding his calf with the tip of its horn, made him limp slightly: after that, furious at the failure of its stroke, it fled to the shelter of a valley, which was thickly covered with stones and trees. Nearly all his servants wanted to take off their own hose to give to Charles, but he forbade it saying: "I mean to go in this fashion to Hildigard." Then Isambard, the son of Warin (the same Warin that persecuted your patron Saint Othmar), ran after the beast and not daring to approach him more closely, threw his lance and pierced him to the heart between the shoulder and the wind-pipe, and brought the beast yet warm to the emperor. He seemed to pay no attention to the incident; but gave the carcass to his companions and went home. But then he called the queen and showed her how his leg-coverings were torn, and said: "What does the man deserve who freed me from the enemy that did this to me?" She made answer: "He deserves the highest boon." Then the emperor told the whole story and produced the enormous [120] horns of the beast in witness of his truth: so that the empress sighed and wept and beat her breast. But when she heard that it was Isambard, who had saved him from this terrible enemy, Isambard, who was in ill favour with the emperor and who had been deprived of all his offices -- she threw herself at his feet and induced him to restore all that had been taken from him; and a largess was given to him besides.

These same Persian envoys brought the emperor an elephant, monkeys, balsam, nard, unguents of various kinds, spices, scents and many kinds of drugs: in such profusion that it seemed as if the east had been left bare that the west might be filled. They came by-and-by to stand on very familiar terms with the emperor; and one day, when they were in a specially merry mood and a little heated with strong beer, they spoke in jest as follows: -- "Sir emperor, your power is indeed great; but much less than the report of it which is spread through all the kingdoms of the east." When he heard this he concealed his deep displeasure and asked jestingly of the,: "Why do you say that, my children? How did that idea get into your head?" Then they went back to the beginning and told him everything that had happened to them in the lands beyond [121] the sea; and they said: -- "We Persians and the Medes, Armenians, Indians, Parthians, Elamites, and all the inhabitants of the east fear you much more than our own ruler Haroun. And the Macedonians and all the Greeks (how shall we express it?) they are beginning to fear your overwhelming greatness more than the waves of the Ionian Sea. And the inhabitants of all the islands through which we passed were as ready to obey you, and as much devoted to your service, as if they had been reared in your palace and loaded with your favours. But the nobles of your own kingdom, it seems to us, care very little about you except in your presence: for when we came as strangers to them, and begged them to show us some kindness for the love of you, to whom we desired to make our way, they gave no heed to us and sent us away empty-handed." Then the emperor deposed all counts and abbots, through whose territories those envoys had come, from all the offices that they held; and fined the bishops in a huge sum of money. Then he ordered the envoys to be taken back to their own country with all care and honour.
9. There came to him also envoys from the King of the Africans, bringing a Marmorian lion and a Numidian bear, with Spanish iron and Tyrian [122] purple, and other noteworthy products of those regions. The most munificent Charles knew that the king and all the inhabitants of Africa were oppressed by constant poverty; and so, not only on this occasion but all through his life, he made them presents of the wealth of Europe, corn and wine and oil, and gave them liberal support; and thus he kept them constantly loyal and obedient to himself, and received from them a considerable tribute.

Soon after the unwearied emperor sent to the emperor of the Persians horse and mules from Spain; Frisian robes, white, grey, red and blue; which in Persia, he was told, were rarely seen and highly prized. Dogs too he sent him of remarkable swiftness and fierceness, such as the King of Persia had desired, for the hunting and catching of lions and tigers. The King of Persia cast a careless eye over the other presents, but asked the envoys what wild beasts or animals these dogs were accustomed to fight with. He was told that they would pull down quickly anything they were set on to. "Well," he said, "experience will test that." Next day the shepherds were heard crying loudly as they fled from a lion. When the noise came to the palace of the king, he said to the envoys: "Now my [123] friends of Frankland, mount your horses and follow me." Then they eagerly followed after the king as though they had never known toil of weariness. When they came in sight of the lion, though he was yet at a distance, the satrap of the satraps said to them: "Now set your dogs on to the lion." They obeyed and eagerly galloped forward; the German dogs caught the Persian lion, and the envoys slew him with swords of northern metal, which had already been tempered in the blood of the Saxons.

At this sight Haroun, the bravest inheritor of that name, understood the superior might of Charles from very small indications, and thus broke out in his praise: -- "Now I know that what I heard of my brother Charles is true: how that by the frequent practice of hunting, and by the unwearied training of his body and mind, he has acquired the habit of subduing all that is beneath the heavens. How can I make worthy recompense for the honours which he has bestowed upon me? If I give him the land which was promised to Abraham and shown to Joshua, it is so far away that he could not defend it from the barbarians: or if, like the high-souled king that he is, he tried to defend it I fear that the provinces which lie upon the frontiers of the Frankish [123] kingdom would revolt from his empire. But in this way I will try to show my gratitude for his generosity. I will give that land into his power; and I will rule over it as his representative. Whenever he likes or whenever there is a good opportunity he shall send me envoys; and he will find me a faithful manager of the revenue of that province."

Thus was brought to pass what the poet spoke of as an impossibility: --

"The Parthian's eyes the Arar's stream shall greet
And Tigris' waves shall lave the German's feet":

For through the energy of the most vigorous Charles it was found not merely possible but quite easy for his envoys to go and return; and the messengers of Haroun, whether young or old, passed easily from Parthia into Germany and returned from Germany to Parthia. (And the poet's words are true, whatever interpretation the grammarians put on "the river Arar," whether they think it an affluent of the Rhone or the Rhine; for they have fallen into confusion on this point.
through their ignorance of the locality). I could call on Germany to bear witness to my words; for in the time of your glorious father Lewis the land was compelled to pay a penny for every acre of land held under the [125] law towards the redemption of Christian captives in the Holy Land; and they made their wretched appeal in the name of the dominion anciently held over that land by your great-grandfather Charles and your grandfather Lewis.