

SECTION III

It was the rude barbarians of Germany who introduced the sentiment of personal independence, the love of individual liberty, into European civilization. — GUIZOT.

CONQUEST OF GAUL BY THE FRANKS — THE MEROVINGIAN KINGS¹ (481-752) — BEGINNING OF THE CAROLINGIAN LINE (752-768)

14. Invasion of Gaul by the Germans. — For more than a century before Rome was forced to give up her hold on the province of Gaul, the Germans had been making raids across the Rhine and pillaging small districts in the vicinity of the river. When the emperors were no longer able to repel these attacks, they changed their policy and encouraged the settlement in Gaul of those tribes with whom they had formed alliances, or from whom they hired volunteers to recruit their armies.

In this way the Burgundians were allowed, if not indeed invited, to take possession of a district in the Rhone valley, which afterward got its name of Burgundy from them; so also the Visigoths settled in the southwest, where they made the city of Toulouse their capital.² These tribes were not only partially civilized through their contact with Roman power, but they even called themselves Christians; though,

¹ For a list of the Merovingian kings, but few of whom were sole kings of the Franks, see Genealogical Table in the Appendix.

² The Visigoths (western Goths) and the Burgundians were both Germanic peoples. For their settlements, see Map No. III, page 22.

as they followed the teachings of one Arius,¹ who denied the commonly accepted view of the divinity of Christ, the orthodox Catholics — that is, the great body of the Church — considered them heretics. These newcomers did not directly drive out the inhabitants of the regions where they settled; for they came, they said, not as enemies, but as “guests.” But as they invariably took the best of every cultivated estate for themselves, leaving the original owners barely enough to subsist on, the latter found it hard to discover any practical difference between such “guests” and downright robbers.

Still, notwithstanding this policy of conciliation, the Roman government did not succeed in checking the raids of the North Germans. On the banks of the lower Rhine there was a people who proudly called themselves Franks, or Free Men, to mark their independence. It is doubtful if Cæsar himself could have conquered them. They were virtually of the same stock as those Angles and Saxons that had already begun the conquest of Britain,² and that have since colonized a large part of the globe.

These fierce tribes could not be kept back from the fair southern lands which they coveted for themselves and for their cattle. Their invasions grew more and more formidable, and it was evident that the time was coming when they would not be content to plunder the country and then go back to their native forests, but when they would seize it as a permanent possession.

15. The Huns; Battle of Châlons. — But before this occurred the Gauls were to engage in a death struggle with a different race. In the fifth century the Huns, a ferocious and hideously repulsive people, had begun to ravage Europe. Their home appears to have been in the plains of Tartary. Their

¹ Arius: he was a deacon of Alexandria, Egypt. He held that Christ was not equal in all respects to God the Father, but subordinate to Him. Arius was excommunicated for heresy.

² See The Leading Facts of English History in this series.

god, it was said, was a naked sword. Their chief, Attila,¹ had earned the double title of "The Dread of the World" and "The Scourge of God." Before the terror of his coming even the Franks trembled. Attila carried all before him, and compelled the Romans, who had exacted tribute from so many tribes and nations, to pay tribute to him. Finally, this formidable chieftain, followed by upwards of a million warriors, crossed the Rhine and burst into Gaul. It was a critical moment for Europe. If the invaders were not driven back, it seemed probable that all progress, intellectual or moral, would be seriously checked, if not indeed absolutely obliterated, by a horde of savages that even at the present day continue to remain barbarians and heathens.²

Roused to temporary unity by the imminence of the peril, Gauls, Romans, Visigoths, Burgundians, and Franks joined their forces, and at the decisive battle of Châlons (451),³ Attila and his hosts, who had threatened to set up an empire of desolation, were utterly defeated; but so desperate was the fight that the ghosts of the slain were believed to have kept up the battle in the air.⁴ The result was that the future was secured to those races of western Europe which have never since ceased their forward and upward march in civilization.

16. Conquest of Northern Gaul by Clovis the Frank. — The danger over, the Franks, who had settled on the left bank of the Rhine, again began to push farther and farther into northern Gaul. In 481 Clovis,⁵ a Frank of fifteen, was left,

¹ Attila (ät'il-ä).

² These people are still the dread of the Chinese empire, and have been ever since the third century B.C., when that nation built the great Chinese wall to prevent their incursions.

³ Châlons (shä-lôn'): on the Marne, about ninety miles northeast of Paris. See Map No. IV, page 27. The exact location of the battle is not settled.

⁴ See Kaulbach's fine picture of this battle.

⁵ Clovis (klō'vis): a softened form of the German name Hlodowig or Chlodwig.



by his father's death, chief of a small body of fighting men. Rome had now fallen, though a remnant of Roman power still nominally existed in the district of Soissons,¹ in the upper part of the valley of the Seine. Clovis led his warriors against the city in 486, overthrew the Roman governor and seized his palace for his residence.

By this victory he practically made himself master of all Gaul north of the Loire except the peninsula of Brittany, whose chiefs later formed an alliance with him. Clovis afterwards established himself at Paris, which thus became the capital of the land of the western Franks, or Francia.²

17. Conversion and Baptism of Clovis. — Clovis found a powerful ally in the Catholic Church. Beset as the Church then was by barbarians on the one hand, and by Arians³ on the other, she was anxious to find some great chief who would be her ally and champion. Clovis was a pagan, but in the eyes of the bishops of Gaul that was far better than being an Arian, like the Burgundians and the Visigoths, since experience had proved that it was easier to convert a hundred German heathen than a single Christian heretic. Priest and monk then both fervently prayed that the conqueror of northern Gaul might be won over to support the faith of Christ; but a gentler and more persuasive influence than theirs finally brought the Frankish warrior into the fold. He had married Clotilda, an orthodox Catholic princess, who earnestly besought him to be baptized, both for her sake and for his own.

He was already half gained over, when an accident occurred which completed the work. Clovis had engaged in battle near Strasburg with a band of Germans who were bent on conquering and settling the territory which he had gained; for

¹ Soissons (swās-sōn'): about sixty miles northeast of Paris.

² Francia (the country of the Franks): sometimes called Western Francia to distinguish it from the eastern or German Francia (or Franconia), which lay east of the Rhine.

³ Arians, see Paragraph 14.

barbarian robbed barbarian in those days just as Frank robbed Gaul. The struggle was long and doubtful. At last Clovis, fearing that he would be defeated, cried out for help to the God of the Christians, solemnly vowing that if He would grant him the victory, he would believe and be baptized. The battle turned in his favor, and he drove the enemy back, deciding the fact that no more Germans were to be permitted to settle in Gaul.

Clotilda now urged the king to fulfill his vow. He assented, and on the following Christmas the Bishop of Reims¹ received him at the entrance of the cathedral of that city. As the barbarian chief walked slowly up the church, he looked round in awe on the white-robed priests, the painted hangings, and the lighted candles of the altar. "Is not this the kingdom of heaven which you promised me?" he asked. "No," replied the bishop, "but it leads to it. Bow thy head, O Sicambrian,² and hereafter adore the cross thou hast burned, and burn the idols thou hast adored." Clovis knelt before the font, received the rite of baptism, and the same day three thousand of his warriors followed his example. It was a significant event, since all German converts up to this time had adopted Arianism. Clovis and his comrades were the first German Catholics.

18. Clovis conquers the Burgundians and the Visigoths; Sole Chief over the Franks. — The new convert was full of zeal. He looked toward the southeast, and he saw that the Burgundians occupied the fertile Rhone valley; he looked toward the southwest, and he saw the kingdom of the Visigoths. Then he said, "It is a shame to let such heretics³ own so much of the best land." The good bishops held the same opinion, and urged Clovis to enter upon new fields of conquest.

Religion and ambition, duty and pleasure, were now all on his side. He summoned his eager Franks and compelled the

¹ Reims (rēmz) : a city one hundred miles north-northeast of Paris.

² Sicambrian : a name by which the Gauls designated the Franks.

³ See Paragraph 14.

Burgundians to pay him tribute. Eventually the Burgundian power was wholly broken, and these Arians became good Catholics. Then he attacked the Visigoths, and after a series of battles left them nothing north of the Pyrenees that they could call their own except a narrow strip of coast on the Mediterranean.¹

The Pope of Rome² now conferred on Clovis the title of Most Christian King and Eldest Son of the Church. Possibly this action was a little hasty, for the victorious leader showed that he was determined to keep and perpetuate his power no matter what it might cost. To accomplish this, Clovis proceeded to perpetrate a series of crafty murders by which he got rid of all rivals and made sure of transmitting his sovereignty to his sons. He thus established the Merovingian monarchy, a name derived from Merovæus,³ an ancestor of Clovis who had fought at the memorable battle of Châlons.⁴

Clovis, however, should not be regarded as king over a well-defined realm, but rather as sole chief of the Franks, who had spread themselves over most of Gaul except Burgundy and Brittany. His name marks an epoch, since he was the first of the barbarians to obtain such extended sway, and he first gave his protection to the Christian Church. In fighting as he did for the unity of religious authority and for the establishment of a fixed and hereditary government, he did his age great service.

19. Division of the Kingdom of Clovis; Struggle for Power; Brunhilda vs. Fredegonda. — The death of Clovis and the division of his power among his four sons, who held Metz, Orléans,⁵ Paris, and Soissons as their respective capitals, brought

¹ Septimania : a region extending from the Rhone to the Pyrenees. See Map No. IV, page 27.

² The title of Pope was then held by bishops generally; it was not limited exclusively to the Bishop of Rome until much later.

³ Merovæus : the softened form of the German Merowig.

⁴ See Paragraph 15.

⁵ Orléans (ōr-lā-ōn').

constant strife and bloodshed, since each was trying to get the sole mastery. The sign of freedom and of independent power among the Franks was their long flowing hair. Especially was this the badge of royalty. Originally only defeated warriors, slaves, and monks cut off their hair,—the former to show that they were captives or dependents, the latter to signify that they were servants of the Church and had withdrawn from the world. One of the sons of Clovis having been killed in battle, his kingdom fell to his three children, who were to be brought up by their grandmother, Clotilda. But two uncles coveted their possessions. They managed to get the lads into their power, and then sent a pair of shears and a dagger to Clotilda, asking which she preferred: to have the young princes clipped and sent to a monastery, or stabbed and buried. The proud-spirited woman sent back word that she would rather see them dead than shorn. Upon receiving this answer, one of the uncles, Clotaire, killed two of the boys; the third escaped. Clotaire thus got possession of the whole four kingdoms. But his four sons divided them after his death, and the strife began again. Eventually the eastern kingdom, which had Metz for its capital, came to be called Austrasia,¹ while those having Paris and Soissons as capitals united to form a western kingdom called Neustria,² which became the nucleus of modern France.

Austrasia and Neustria, urged on by their respective queens,³ entered upon a long and desperate war with each other. The conflict was marked by the utmost cruelty, and the names of Brunhilda of Austrasia and Fredegonda of Neustria, both women, or rather tigresses, of surpassing beauty, still remain synonyms for ferocious depravity, though the first certainly was not without redeeming qualities.

¹ Austrasia: eastern. ² Neustria: not eastern, *i.e.*, western.

³ As the Franks did not permit women to reign, Brunhilda and Fredegonda, queen consorts, were not rulers in name, though they were such in fact.



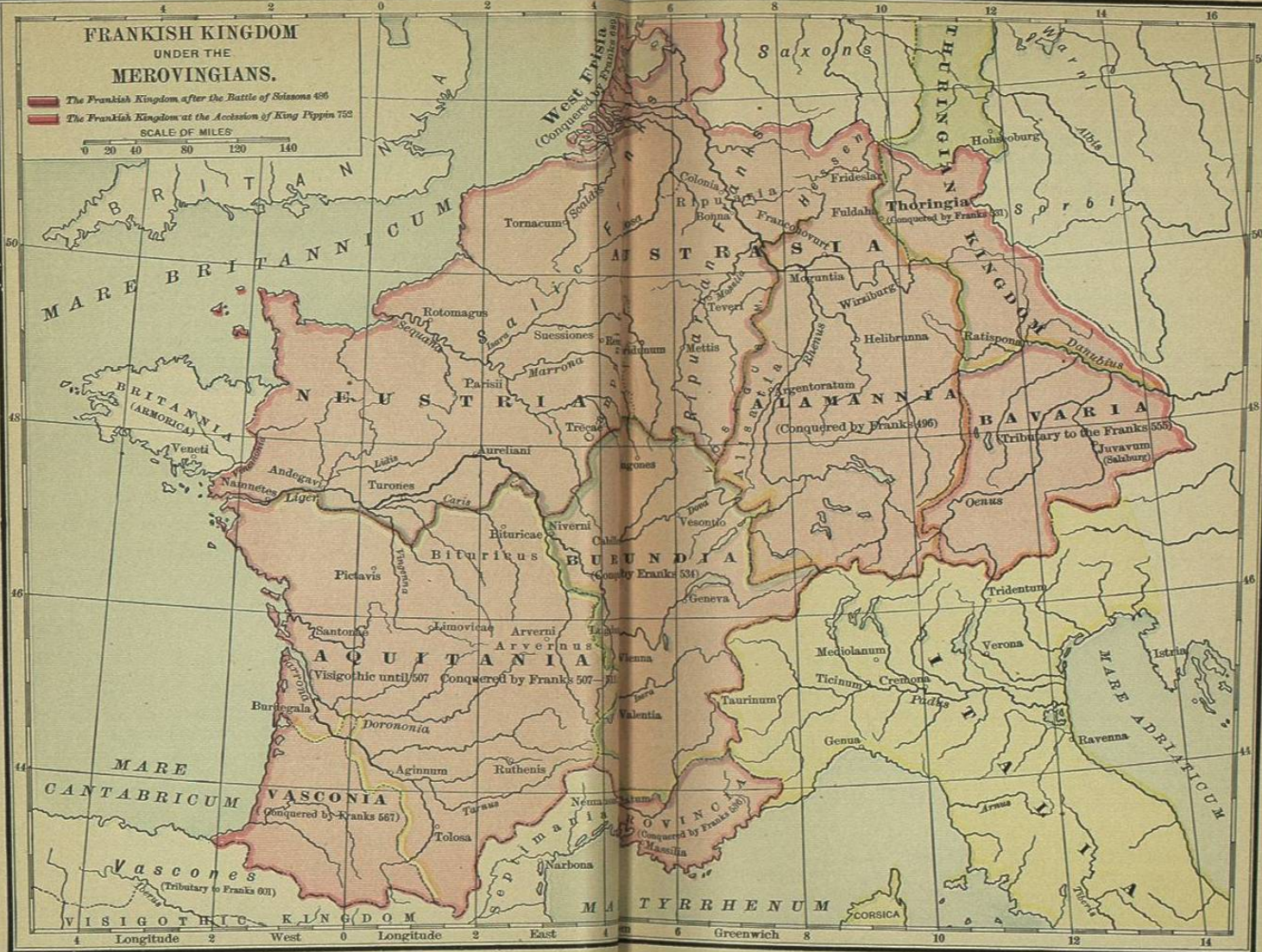
FRANKISH KINGDOM UNDER THE MEROVINGIANS.

█ The Frankish Kingdom after the Battle of Soissons 486

█ The Frankish Kingdom at the Accession of King Pepin 752

SCALE OF MILES

0 20 40 80 120 140



Longitude West 0 Longitude East 4 Greenwich 8 10 12 14 16

As St. Gregory of Tours¹ was walking with the Bishop of Albi near the Neustrian palace, he asked, "Do you see anything above that roof?" "Yes," answered his companion; "I see the royal standard." "Nothing else?" "No," said the bishop; "do you?" "Truly," replied Gregory, "I see the sword of divine justice suspended over that wicked house." The vision was true. Austrasia subdued Neustria, and all of the queen's plans came to naught; but on the other hand, the Austrasian queen met with a horrible and shameful death at the hands of her rival's son.

Beneath this personal war there was the war of races; for while Neustria was largely Roman or Roman Celt, Austrasia, owing to its situation on the eastern frontier, was mainly German or Frank in its population. By its triumph Austrasia secured the predominance to the Franks, and their influence became supreme for more than two centuries.

20. Dagobert; the Sluggard Kings; Power of the Church.—

In 628 Dagobert showed himself a worthy successor of his ancestor Clovis. In him the Merovingian kings reached their greatest power. He reigned not only over Austrasia and Neustria, and over nearly all the people of Gaul from the Pyrenees to the Rhine, but beyond the Rhine on the east to the forests of central Germany. At his death, ten years later, the decline set in. His successors rapidly degenerated until they became a puny, short-lived, sad-faced race. Their power slipped from their nerveless grasp, and a class of officials known as Mayors of the Palace, who had originally been stewards or managers of the royal household,² got possession of the government.

These long-haired, effeminate drones, or Sluggard Kings, as they were called,³ did not inhabit the old Roman cities

¹ Tours (tūr): in the province of Touraine.

² The Mayors of the Palace originated in Austrasia.

³ Les Rois Fainéants: literally, the Do-Nothing Kings.

of Gaul, but moved slowly about in covered carts drawn by oxen, from one of their immense farms to another. They stayed at each, feasting and carousing until the provisions were exhausted, when they languidly mounted their ox carts and went on to the next. In name they were sovereigns, in reality they were puppets whom none respected; the real rulers were the mayors and the priests who coöperated with them.

After the battle of Testry in 687, between Pepin,¹ Mayor of Austrasia (grandson of the first of that name), and the Neustrians, a new order of things begins, and the vigorous Frankish rulers, represented by the victorious Pepin and his successors, prepare the way for the establishment of the great empire of Charlemagne, by securing the entire control to the Germanic element.²

We have spoken of the power of the priesthood.³ It was fortunate for society that the Church had such influence in that barbarous age. For then the priest and the monk together established the outward order and the inward life of the world. They, indeed, often had far greater authority than chief or king. The cathedral and the monastery were centers of power for good. There the ignorant were taught, the helpless protected, the poor sheltered, the starving fed. The monasteries also served as the hotels of the day, and hospitality to travelers was a chief duty.⁴

The Church, too, knew no distinction of rank or class. A slave might become a priest, a priest a bishop, a bishop pope. Especially was this influence of the Church of value when there was no uniform law or supreme civil authority, and when invasions and civil wars were forever filling the world with violence, bloodshed, and desolation.

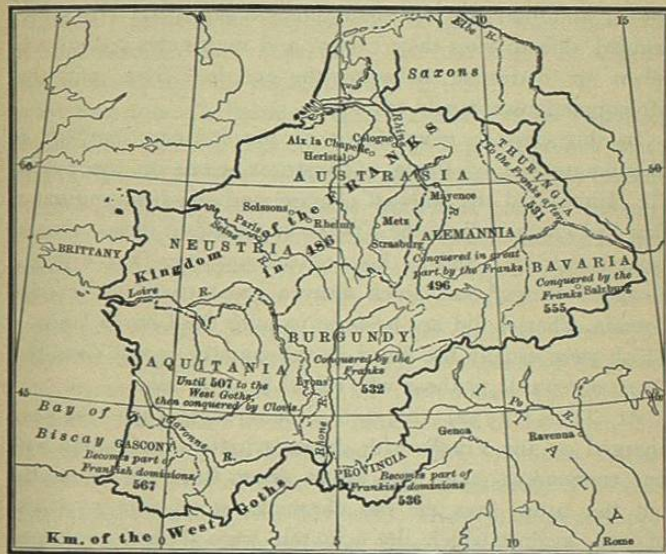
¹ Pepin (pép'in).

² See Paragraph 19.

³ See Paragraphs 11, 17, and 18.

⁴ See Emerton's Introduction to the Middle Ages, and his Mediæval History on this whole period.

21. Charles Martel; Battle of Tours. — Never was this power more needed than during the latter part of the Merovingian dynasty. In the eighth century the Saracens, or followers of Mohammed, had set out with the determination of conquering all nations. They had already subdued Egypt,



The Frankish Kingdom of the Merovingians

The heavy eastern boundary of Brittany indicates the virtual independence of that province at this period.

northern Africa, and Spain. They now planned the subjugation of France, Germany, Italy, and Constantinople, that they might unite them into one vast empire. As the Roman Empire had been ravaged by the northern barbarians, so now Europe was threatened by the Saracens. Many trembled lest every Bible should be destroyed, every church leveled, every cross

trampled under foot, and lest all men should be forced to bow in adoration before the Koran and the crescent.¹

But the truth was that the Mohammedans gave those whom they conquered the choice of conversion, death, or tribute.

In 732 the Saracens crossed the Pyrenees and raided the country in all directions, pillaging and burning many rich towns, and carrying off thousands of captives. No power seemed able to stop their career, and multitudes gave themselves up to despair, believing the end had come, and that Mohammedanism would triumph.

In this crisis a new Mayor of the Palace, Charles,² an illegitimate son of Pepin of Austrasia, came to the rescue. He represented the stalwart courage and steadfast endurance that had characterized the Franks in their best days. But he lacked warriors; and as his predecessors, together with the Sluggard Kings,³ had given away a great part of the royal domain, Charles did not hesitate to seize the Church lands — which were usually the finest in the country — and distribute them as rewards to those who would fight for him.

At Tours⁴ (732) the two armies met. The Saracens charged on the Franks with drawn scimiters, as though with one tremendous blow they would sweep them off the earth; but the latter, says the old chronicle, stood firm as a wall of iron, against which the scimiters were dashed to pieces. All one autumn day the attack was renewed again and again. But the desperate assaults were vain; they could neither break

¹ The crescent: according to a legend, a Mohammedan ruler saw in a vision a new moon which kept increasing until its horns met and formed a perfect circle. He interpreted this to mean that the religion taught by Mohammed in the Koran would eventually encircle the globe. Henceforth the crescent became the emblem and standard of the Saracens, with the motto, "Until it shall fill the earth." On the Saracen conquests and policy, see Myers' excellent *Medieval and Modern History*.

² Or, in German, Karl.

³ See Paragraph 20.

⁴ Tours (tōor): on the Loire. Some authorities represent the battle as taking place at Poitiers (pwā-tī-ā'), southwest of Tours, on a branch of the Loire.

down the wall nor cut it through. Meanwhile Charles beat down the enemy with his ponderous battle hammer with such fearful slaughter that to those who fought by his side he seemed endowed with the might of that old German war god who smote his foes with a similar weapon forged from a thunderbolt.

Charles gained the battle, and so fairly won that title of honor which ever after gave him the name of Charles Martel, or Charles the Sledge-Hammer.¹

He had done Christendom a service never to be forgotten. As the power of the Huns had been broken at Châlons nearly three centuries before,² so the brave Frank had now crushed the Saracens, and saved Europe from that yoke of bondage which holds the Christian population of Turkey enslaved to-day. Thus it was the glory of France that the two great Asiatic invasions of the west were both overcome on her soil.

But the French clergy never could forgive Charles for his seizure of their property, no matter how pressing the need. The priests got their revenge for the robbery by declaring after his death that when his tomb came to be opened it was discovered to be blackened by fire, and that instead of finding the hero's body, they were startled by a hideous monster or demon which flew out. History, however, pronounces its judgment in favor of Charles, and declares that the clergy could well afford to give part of their possessions to save not only the rest, but their own existence as well.

22. Pepin and Rome; End of the Merovingians; Temporal Power of the Pope. — Twenty years after that decisive battle, Pepin the Short, a son of Charles Martel, who had succeeded him as Mayor of the Palace, determined to make himself supreme in title as well as in fact. To accomplish this successfully and peacefully he needed the aid of the Church;

¹ The martel, or rather marteau, was a heavy, two-handed war hammer, with a sharp point or edge.

² See Paragraph 15.

and as Rome was menaced by the Lombards¹ of North Italy, the Church was not sorry to get the stout arms and sharp spears of the Franks for her defense.

Pepin sent messengers to the pope, asking him who had the best right to be called king, — he who had the name only or he who had the power? The pope replied that the power and the name ought by right to go together. The next spring, 752, Archbishop Boniface, the English saint and missionary, anointed Pepin with the holy oil and placed the coveted crown on his head. Then Childéric, the last of the Sluggard Kings,² was shorn of his flowing locks, as a sign that his feeble reign and that of his imbecile family was over.³ He was shortly after put into a monastery, where he had opportunity for meditation during the rest of his life.

Pepin's coronation and Childéric's deposition and seclusion were the first instances in history in which the pope had directly exercised that authority, afterward claimed, of making and unmaking kings. In this case certainly the influence of the Church was an unmistakable advantage. It was an alliance of right with might. With it the Merovingian line ends, and the Carolingian — a name derived from Pepin's famous son — begins.⁴

Not long after Pepin's accession, the pope, becoming alarmed at the inroads of the Lombards, crossed the Alps to implore the new king's aid. The Lombards had once been heretics like the Visigoths and Burgundians;⁵ and although they now professed to be good orthodox Catholics, their

¹ The Lombards were, like the Franks, of German origin. They had invaded and settled the north of Italy, and were especially feared and hated by the Italians, since, not contented with conquest, they delighted in destruction. They were Arians, and the popes constantly styled them "the foul and horrid Lombards."

² See Paragraph 20.

³ See Paragraph 19.

⁴ Some historians derive the title Carolingian from Charles Martel, Pepin's father; but it is usually derived from his son and successor, Charles the Great.

⁵ See Paragraph 14.

actions showed that they were brigands and barbarians. They had seized a number of cities, including Ravenna, and were threatening Rome. Pepin, summoning his warriors, began a campaign against them. He speedily drove the Lombards back, recaptured the walled cities they had taken, and collecting the keys of their gates, deposited them on the altar of St. Peter's.

By this gift he made the pope master not only of Rome, but of a goodly district beside, and thus established that temporal or territorial sovereignty of the papacy which was to serve as a material foundation for its spiritual power for more than a thousand years.¹

23. Summary. — The battle of Châlons, and, later, the conquest of nearly all Gaul by the Franks under Clovis, were both important steps toward unity. The conversion of Clovis was of equal importance. It gave the Church, which was then the bulwark of civilization, the champion she needed. The degeneration of the Merovingian kings into a succession of royal Do-Nothings was followed by the rise of the Mayors of the Palace, who, under Charles Martel and Pepin, laid the foundation of a new and more vigorous dynasty. Martel's victory over the Saracens and Pepin's gift to the pope assured the Church a vast degree of power, which made itself felt for good throughout Europe.

¹ The temporal power of the pope, in the sense of his sovereignty over the papal states, was abolished in 1870, when Victor Emmanuel succeeded in annexing this territory to his own, thus consolidating the whole of Italy into one kingdom.