

**HISTORICAL TALES.
VOL. III. THE ROMANCE
OF REALITY. FRENCH**

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Historical Tales. Vol. III. The Romance of Reality. French by Charles Morris

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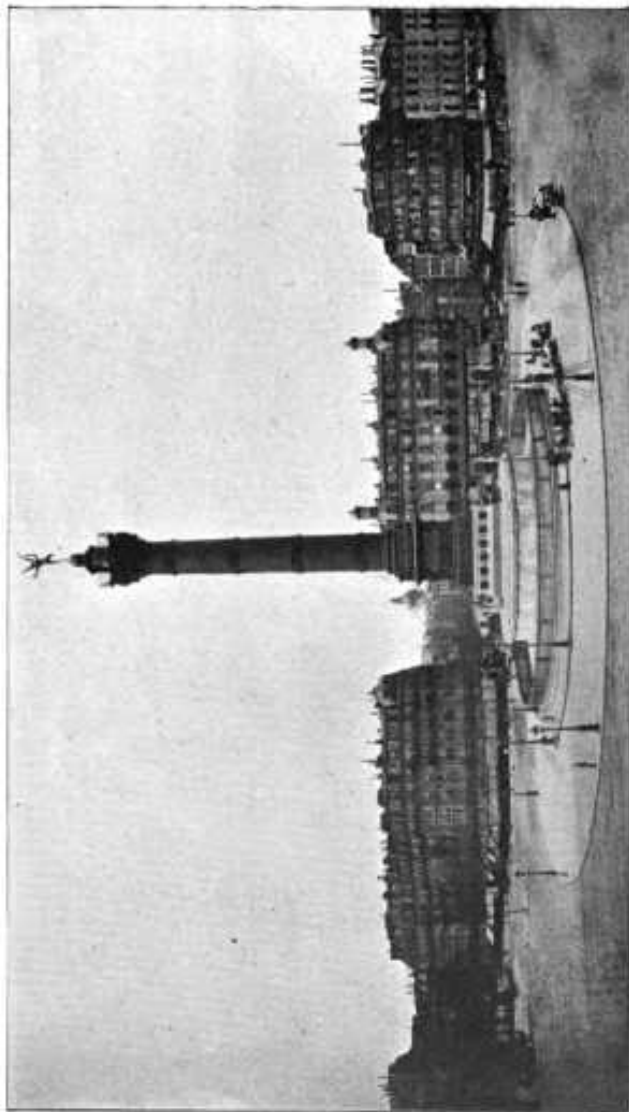
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CHARLES MORRIS

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COLUMN OF JULY, PLACE DE LA BASTILLE.

(See page 273.)

HISTORICAL TALES

The Romance of Reality

BY

CHARLES MORRIS

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ARTHUR AND THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND-TABLE," ETC.

FRENCH

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THE HUNS AT ORLEANS.

On the edge of a grand plain, almost in the centre of France, rises a rich and beautiful city, time-honored and famous, for it stood there before France had begun and while Rome still spread its wide wings over this whole region, and it has been the scene of some of the most notable events in French history. The Gauls, one of whose cities it was, named it Genabum. The Romans renamed it Aureliani, probably from their Emperor Aurelian. Time and the evolution of the French language wore this name down to Orleans, by which the city has for many centuries been known.

The broad Loire, the longest river of France, sweeps the foot of the sloping plain on which the city stands, and bears its commerce to the sea. Near by grows a magnificent forest, one of the largest in France, covering no less than ninety-four thousand acres. Within the city appear the lofty spires of a magnificent cathedral, while numerous towers rise from a maze of buildings, giving the place, from a distance, a highly attractive aspect. It is still surrounded by its mediæval walls, outside of which extend prosperous suburbs, while far and wide beyond stretches the fertile plain.

Such is the Orleans of to-day. In the past it was the scene of two striking and romantic events, one of them associated with the name of Joan of Arc, the most interesting figure in French history; the other, which we have now to tell, concerned with the terrible Attila and his horde of devastating Huns, who had swept over Europe and threatened to annihilate civilization. Orleans was the turning-point in the career of victory of this all-conquering barbarian. From its walls he was driven backward to defeat.

Out from the endless wilds of Scythia had poured a vast swarm of nomad horsemen, ill-favored, fierce, ruthless, the scions of the desert and seemingly sworn to make a desert of Europe. They were led by Attila, the "Scourge of God," as he called himself, in the tracks of whose horse's hoofs the grass could never grow again, as he proudly boasted.

Writers of the time picture to us this savage chieftain as a deformed monster, short, ill-formed, with a large head, swarthy complexion, small, deep-seated eyes, flat nose, a few hairs in place of a beard, and with a habit of fiercely rolling his eyes, as if to inspire terror. He had broad shoulders, a square, strong form, and was as powerful in body as he was ready and alert in mind. The man had been born for a conqueror, and Europe was his prey.

The Scythians adored the god of war, whom they worshipped under the shape of an iron cimex. It was through the aid of this superstition that Attila raised himself to dominion over their savage and tameless hordes. One of their shepherds, finding that a heifer was wounded in the foot, followed the

track of blood which the animal had made, and discovered amid the long grass the point of an ancient sword. This he dug from the earth in which it was buried and presented to Attila. The artful chief claimed that it was a celestial gift, sent to him by the god of war, and giving him a divine claim to the dominion of the earth. Doubtless his sacred gift was consecrated with the Scythian rites,—a lofty heap of fagots, three hundred yards in length and breadth, being raised on a spacious plain, the sword of Mars placed erect on its summit, and the rude altar consecrated by the blood of sheep, horses, and probably of human captives. But Attila soon proved a better claim to a divine commission by leading the hordes of the Huns to victory after victory, until he threatened to subjugate, if not to depopulate, all Europe. It was in pursuance of this conquering career that he was brought, in the year 451, to the banks of the Rhine and the borders of the future realm of France, then still known as Gaul, and held by the feeble hand of the expiring empire of Rome.

The broad Rhine proved but a feeble obstacle to the innumerable cavalry of the Huns. A bridge of boats was quickly built, and across the stream they poured into the fair provinces of Gaul. Universal consternation prevailed. Long peace had made the country rich, and had robbed its people of their ancient valor. As the story goes, the degenerate Gauls trusted for their defence to the prayers of the saints. St. Lupus saved Troyes. The prayers of St. Genevieve turned the march of Attila aside from Paris. Unluckily, most of the cities of the land held neither