

HISTORY OF FRANCE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649752348

History of France by Charlotte M. Yonge

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CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

**HISTORY
OF FRANCE**

History Primers

Edited by J. R. GREEN

HISTORY
OF
FRANCE

BY
CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1898

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FRANCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE EARLIER KINGS OF FRANCE.

1. **France.**—The country we now know as France is the tract of land shut in by the British Channel, the Bay of Biscay, the Pyrenees, the Mediterranean, and the Alps. But this country only gained the name of France by degrees. In the earliest days of which we have any account, it was peopled by the Celts, and it was known to the Romans as part of a larger country which bore the name of Gaul. After all of it, save the north-western moorlands, or what we now call Brittany, had been conquered and settled by the Romans, it was overrun by tribes of the great Teutonic race, the same family to which Englishmen belong. Of these tribes, the Goths settled in the provinces to the south; the Burgundians, in the east, around the Jura; while

the Franks, coming over the rivers in its unprotected north-eastern corner, and making themselves masters of a far wider territory, broke up into two kingdoms—that of the Eastern Franks in what is now Germany, and that of the Western Franks reaching from the Rhine to the Atlantic. These Franks subdued all the other Teutonic conquerors of Gaul, while they adopted the religion, the language, and some of the civilization of the Romanized Gauls who became their subjects. Under the second Frankish dynasty, the Empire was renewed in the West, where it had been for a time put an end to by these Teutonic invasions, and the then Frankish king, Charles the Great, took his place as Emperor at its head. But in the time of his grandsons the various kingdoms and nations of which the Empire was composed, fell apart again under different descendants of his. One of these, *Charles the Bald*, was made King of the Western Franks in what was termed the Neustrian, or “not eastern,” kingdom, from which the present France has sprung. This kingdom in name covered all the country west of the Upper Meuse, but practically the Neustrian king had little power south of the Loire; and the Celts of Brittany were never included in it.

2. **The House of Paris.**—The great danger which this Neustrian kingdom had to meet came from the Northmen, or as they were called in Eng-

land the Danes. These ravaged in Neustria as they ravaged in England; and a large part of the northern coast, including the mouth of the Seine, was given by Charles the Simple to Rolf or Rollo, one of their leaders, whose land became known as the Northman's land, or Normandy. What most checked the ravages of these pirates was the resistance of Paris, a town which commanded the road along the river Seine; and it was in defending the city of Paris from the Northmen that a warrior named Robert the Strong gained the trust and affection of the inhabitants of the Neustrian kingdom. He and his family became Counts (*i.e.*, judges and protectors) of Paris, and Dukes (or leaders) of the Franks. Three generations of them were really great men—Robert the Strong, Odo, and Hugh the White; and when the descendants of Charles the Great had died out, a Duke of the Franks, *Hugh Capet*, was in 987 crowned King of the Franks. All the after kings of France down to Louis Philippe were descendants of Hugh Capet. By this change, however, he gained little in real power; for, though he claimed to rule over the whole country of the Neustrian Franks, his authority was little heeded, save in the domain which he had possessed as Count of Paris, including the cities of Paris, Orleans, Amiens, and Rheims (the coronation place). He was guardian, too, of the great Abbeys of St. Denys and St. Martin of Tours. The Duke of Normandy and the

Count of Anjou to the west, the Count of Flanders to the north, the Count of Champagne to the east, and the Duke of Aquitaine to the south, paid him homage, but were the only actual rulers in their own domains.

3. *The Kingdom of Hugh Capet.*—The language of Hugh's kingdom was clipped Latin; the peasantry and townsmen were mostly Gaulish; the nobles were almost entirely Frank. There was an understanding that the king could only act by their consent, and must be chosen by them; but matters went more by old custom and the right of the strongest than by any law. A Salic law, so called from the place whence the Franks had come, was supposed to exist; but this had never been used by their subjects, whose law remained that of the old Roman Empire. Both of these systems of law, however, fell into disuse, and were replaced by rude bodies of "customs," which gradually grew up. The habits of the time were exceedingly rude and ferocious. The Franks had been the fiercest and most untamable of all the Teutonic nations, and only submitted themselves to the influence of Christianity and civilization from the respect which the Roman Empire inspired. Charles the Great had tried to bring in Roman cultivation, but we find him reproaching the young Franks in his schools with letting themselves be surpassed by the Gauls, whom they despised; and in the disorders that followed his death, barbarism

increased again. The convents alone kept up any remnants of culture ; but as the fury of the Northmen was chiefly directed to them, numbers had been destroyed, and there was more ignorance and wretchedness than at any other time. In the duchy of Aquitaine, much more of the old Roman civilization survived, both among the cities and the nobility ; and the Normans, newly settled in the north, had brought with them the vigour of their race. They had taken up such dead or dying culture as they found in France, and were carrying it further, so as in some degree to awaken their neighbours. Kings and their great vassals could generally read and write, and understand the Latin in which all records were made, but few except the clergy studied at all. There were schools in convents, and already at Paris a university was growing up for the study of theology, grammar, law, philosophy, and music, the sciences which were held to form a course of education. The doctors of these sciences lectured ; the scholars of low degree lived, begged, and struggled as best they could ; and gentlemen were lodged with clergy, who served as a sort of private tutors.

4. Earlier Kings of the House of Paris.—Neither Hugh nor the next three kings (*Robert*, 996–1031; *Henry*, 1031–1060; *Philip*, 1060–1108) were able men, and they were almost helpless among the