

CHARLES THE GREAT

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Charles the Great by Thomas Hodgkin

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THOMAS HODGKIN

**CHARLES
THE GREAT**

Foreign Statesmen

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BY

THOMAS HODGKIN, D.C.L.

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PREFACE

IN attempting to compress the history of the great Emperor Charles within the narrow limits of the present volume, I have undertaken a difficult task, and I trust that my fellow-historians will consider, not how much has been omitted, but how much, or rather how little, it was possible to insert.

It may be thought that I might have gained space by proceeding at once to the beginning of Charles's own reign, instead of devoting more than eighty pages to his predecessors, but this did not seem to me possible. The great Emperor was the last term of an ascending series—nobles, mayors of the palace, kings; and in order to understand the law of the series it is absolutely necessary to study some of its earlier members.

It will be observed that, though I generally speak of my hero as Charles, I have not absolutely declined to use the familiar compound Charlemagne. This is done with no disrespect to the teaching of my honoured friend, the late Prof. Freeman, who first lifted up his voice against this form of the name. A generation ago his protest against Gallicising the great Teutonic hero

was certainly needed, but now that the lesson has been learnt, I think that we need not absolutely ban a form of his name which has been used by Milton and by Scott, and which, after all, by its union of the Teutonic Karl with the Latin Magnus, not inaptly symbolises the blending of German and Roman elements in the Frankish Empire.

A few words as to our authorities. For the period before the accession of Pippin our chief authority is the chronicle which is known by the name of *Fredegarius*, very meagre, and written in barbarous Latin, but honest; then a still more miserable continuation of this work by an unknown scribe; and lastly, a much better performance, from a literary point of view, *The Lives of the Bishops of Metz*, by Paulus Diaconus.

For the reigns of Pippin and of Charles the Great we have fairly satisfactory materials in the shape of the Annals, which now began to be kept at various monasteries; chief among them the *Annales Lawrissenses majores*, so-called from their connection, real or supposed, with the great monastery of Lorsch (in Hesse-Darmstadt, about ten miles east of Worms). So extensive, however, is the knowledge of State affairs possessed by this writer that it is the opinion of Professor Ranke, and of most modern enquirers, that he cannot have been a mere monk writing his chronicle in a convent, but that we have here in fact the chronicles of the Frankish kingdom. This view is to some extent

confirmed by the fact that there is a fuller recension of them in a more literary form, which bears the name of *Annales Einhardi*, and thus professes to be the work of Charles's friend and secretary. The precious *Vita Caroli*, from the pen of the same writer, is described in the following pages.

The writers who in modern times have treated of the life of Charles the Great number some hundreds, and I make no pretension to even a superficial acquaintance with the bibliography of so vast a subject, but I may mention that the books which I have found most helpful in the composition of the following pages are Waitz's *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, Guizot's *Lectures on the History of Civilisation*, Dahn's *Urgeschichte der germanischen und romanischen Völker*, and pre-eminently the series of *Jahrbücher der deutschen Geschichte*, in which Bonnell has treated of *The Beginnings of the Carolingian House*; Oelsner, of *The Life of Pippin, King of the Franks*; and Abel and Simson, of *The Life of Charles the Great*. To the last work (in two volumes) I have been under great and continual obligation.

THOS. HODGKIN.

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