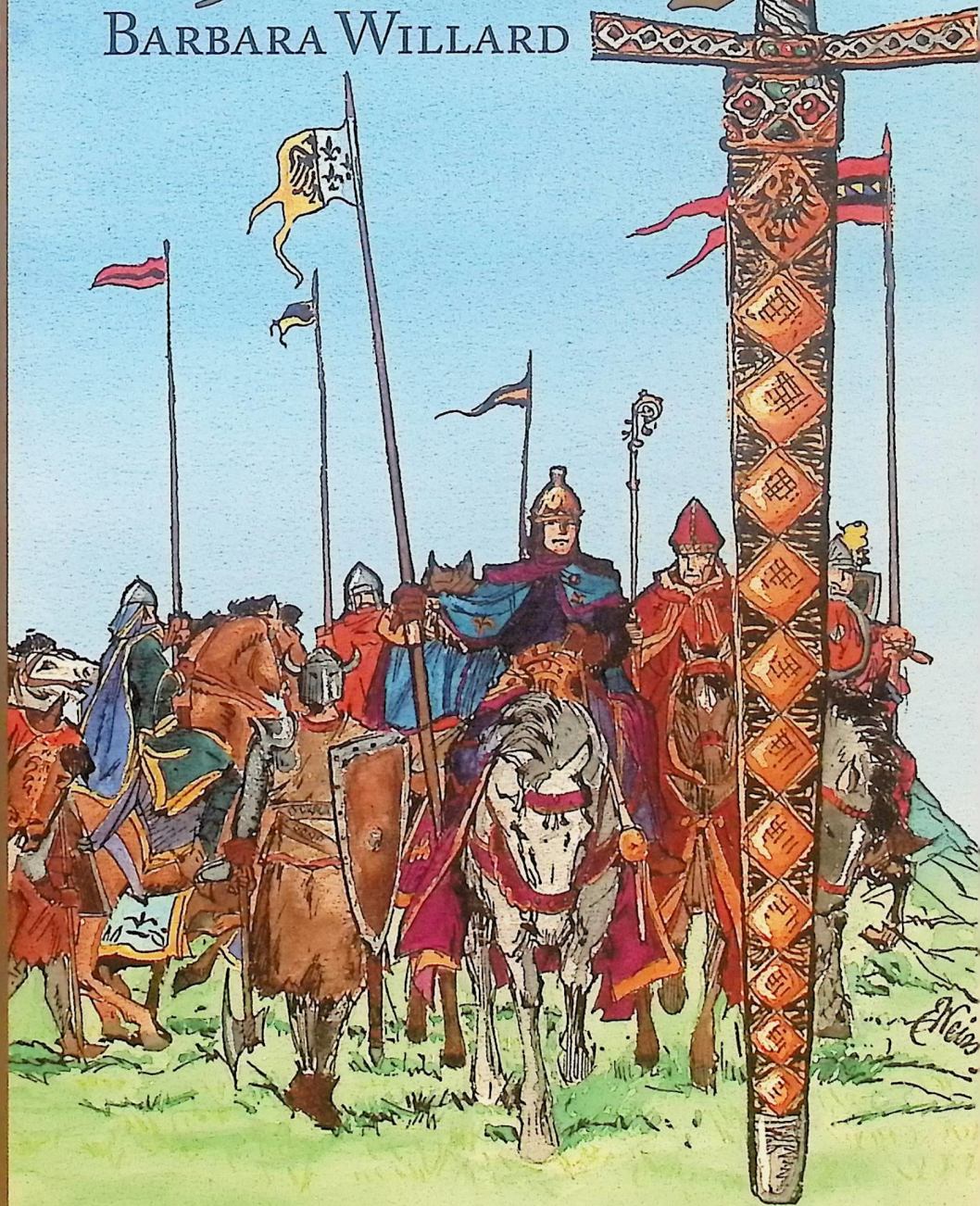


# Son Of Charlemagne

BARBARA WILLARD



## Contents

	<i>Introduction</i>	<i>ix</i>
	<i>Author's Note</i>	<i>xiii</i>
I.	<i>Family Journey, A.D. 781</i>	<i>1</i>
II.	<i>The Palace School</i>	<i>15</i>
III.	<i>Kings in the Making</i>	<i>26</i>
IV.	<i>The Iron King</i>	<i>44</i>
V.	<i>Fastrada</i>	<i>62</i>
VI.	<i>Kings Meet</i>	<i>79</i>
VII.	<i>Witikind</i>	<i>93</i>
VIII.	<i>Bertha</i>	<i>107</i>
IX.	<i>King Offa's Daughter</i>	<i>120</i>
X.	<i>The Traitor</i>	<i>132</i>
XI.	<i>Emperor?</i>	<i>147</i>
XII.	<i>The Pope in Peril</i>	<i>159</i>
XIII.	<i>Christmas, A.D. 800</i>	<i>172</i>



I

*Family Journey, A.D. 781*

DUSK WAS coming down as the head of the long train of men and horses and baggage mules reached the summit of the pass. A strong wind blew up there, whistling across the roof of Europe, whirling the sudden snow into blinding spirals that powdered the thick fur cloaks and hoods of the travelers,

lay upon their shoulders, and whitened even their eyelashes. The King's fair beard sparkled where the snowy particles had frozen diamond-hard.

Everyone had dismounted long ago. The horses had to be cajoled along the narrow slippery tracks that were barely tracks at all. Only the mules went blithely; many had had their packs removed because the bulk was too great, and these were being man-handled over this worst section of the mountain journey. There was a great deal of shouting and swearing and praying among the men. But the end of the journey was in sight. Soon they would be dropping down into the plain of Lombardy. The last part of the route would be child's play. By the time the return journey was made flowers would have replaced the snow.

Carl found it difficult to walk, the snow was so deep here at the head of the pass. He would have liked to catch hold of his father's cloak to help himself along, but he was ashamed to appear so babyish. He glanced back over his shoulder, his breath making a thick misty cloud about his head, and saw that his sister Bertha was being carried by Anghilbert; they were laughing and talking together and Bertha's cheeks, whipped by the cold air, shone like apples. Behind them strode the tall Duke Eric, the King's close friend, with Carloman held high against his shoulder. Carl waved to his brother, and young Carloman waved back. There was no sign of Rhotrud, the elder sister. She was probably much farther back, helping their mother with Lewis, the youngest child, who was only three

years old. Pepin would be there too; he was the eldest of all, half brother to the rest, but he never managed very well on journeys of this kind.

Just before the summit was reached the King looked back to Carl, who was panting a bit as he plowed along. The tall, striding man paused and held out his hand.

"We'll do better if we give one another a hand, my son," he said, smiling over his frosty beard. "This is enough to tax the strongest of us."

Carl said nothing, but he glanced up gratefully at his father, then clasped his hand in its great fur mitt.

"We shall soon be in shelter," the King said. "Below that great mound of stones the ground drops away and we shall be out of the wind. We will camp there for the night."

Still breathless, young Carl only nodded. He looked toward the pile of stones that reared up out of the snowy twilight, standing harsh and black against the purple sky.

"Look the other way as you pass," his father told Carl. "This is where men once worshiped Jupiter, the pagan god of the ancient Romans. That mound of stones is a place of prayer and sacrifice. One day we will come here in fair weather and scatter the stones and we will raise the Cross in its place."

As they skirted the mighty pile, the King drew Carl within the shelter of his blue cloak, holding its folds against his cheek, as though he would protect his son against an evil which might still linger in that desolate place.

Soon, as the King had promised, they came to shelter. A score of men were there already, knowing the camping ground of old. They were preparing a resting place and they had fires burning. In the increasing dusk the flames leaped comfortingly against the snow. The cold wind, the threatening stone mound, the sinister crags of the mountain's head were left behind. Gradually the whole party assembled. More and more fires sprang into life and the air hummed with the cheerful sound of men busy about making themselves secure against the night. Soon the smell of roasting meat added to the feeling of rest and relaxation.

Against the convenient shelter of rocks six or seven feet high, a tent of skins had been pitched for the King's wife and children; he himself would sleep outside, rolled in his cloak by the fire, a soldier among soldiers. Carl, who had been dodging about among the men and amusing himself with the idea that he, too, was one of them, went at last to find his mother and his brothers and sisters.

"We thought you were lost," his mother said as he strode in and stamped his feet boldly, scattering the snow, so that Rhotrud shrieked and drew aside her skirts. "Come into the warm, my darling. We shall soon have our supper."

It was snug in the tent, with skins on the snowy floor and a brazier by the door. Bertha stood warming her feet and chattering.

"Anghilbert told me a story as we came up the mountain."

"He was lucky to have breath enough—since he

was carrying you!" Carl taunted, and ducked as she kicked off one of the warm slippers she had just pulled on and sent it sailing toward his head.

"About a princess in a tower," Bertha went on, "and how she was rescued by her bold lover. Anghilbert is a wonderful storyteller, Mother."

"We'll ask him for another tale presently," their mother said.

She was busy with the two little boys. She had piled up rugs of fur to make a bed for them. Lewis, the baby, was already asleep. Carloman was protesting against being bundled in beside him, but his mother was firm. On the far side of the tent, the half brother, Pepin, sat and watched the rest. He laughed at Carloman's antics, encouraging him in his disobedience. The child threw off the covers and rushed to Pepin. Rhotrud was after him in a flash. She dragged him back. Her patience was fast going. At last she cried out angrily and slapped Carloman, so that he shouted in fury. Lewis woke and began to cry. Bertha ran to the baby and began to croon over him extravagantly. Carl taunted Carloman for minding what Rhotrud did, and Pepin joined in. Rhotrud, her temper still high, began to cry in her turn.

The din brought the King to the tent.

"Be silent!" he said, standing tall and stern in the opening.

And they were silent, even Lewis, the baby.

"Are these my children?" the King demanded. "Or a pack of wolves?"

Their mother laughed and held out her hand to

the King. His sternness left him as he went toward her.

"Hildegarde," he said, shaking his fist at her, "have you no care that your sons and daughters behave like wild animals?"

"You bring them to forage in the snow," she told him, still laughing. "They are certain to grow a little like the creatures who live in these wild places. If you prefer a tame and docile family you must leave us all behind in the palace at Aachen. I daresay we should behave ourselves better there."

"No," he said, his arm firm about her shoulders, "I shall always take my pack with me and accept the consequences. Snapping and snarling are better than separation."

"Be thankful you have a wife who is not too dainty to tramp over the mountains with you, my dear," Hildegarde said. She took his hand and held it for a moment against her cheek.

"I am thankful," he assured her seriously. "I praise God seven times a day for my Hildegarde."

At that moment the servants came in with food and wine. The family gathered round thankfully, for the cold air and the long day's journey had given them sharp appetites. Lewis sank off to sleep again, and the King took Carloman on his lap and fed him the choicest bits of meat. The other children looked a little resentful at this favoritism, but their mother watched with a soft and contented expression. This was one of the moments she most enjoyed, when her husband forgot all the cares of his kingdom and



settled down with his growing family as easily as any peasant. Charles, King of the Franks, was a great warrior, a great ruler, a great scholar, a great Christian; but it was by his simplicity that Hildegarde his wife knew him to be a great man.

King Charles of the Franks was on his way to Rome. This was no military expedition, such as he had conducted for many years throughout Europe, where man was at last emerging from the dreadful night of the Dark Ages. When the Roman Empire collapsed, much of Europe slipped back into savagery and paganism. Christianity had seemed almost on the point of extinction. But in the lonely and often threatened monasteries, the monks diligently working kept a little flame of faith and learning burning steadily. Gradually the darkness lifted. And Charles of the Franks was the champion who had arisen to reawaken and restore the Church, and order in civil things, and the precious knowledge of books and the things of the mind. They had called his grandfather Charles the Hammer because of his strength and indomitable power. He it was who had founded the new line of Christian kings of whom the Frankish King Charles was the greatest yet. The greatest man, some said, who had ever ruled an earthly kingdom.

Charles of the Franks, successor and soon superior of his powerful grandfather, had thrust his way about Europe subduing race after savage race, converting them to Christianity and making them his vassals. Yearly his kingdom grew wider and more

powerful, stretching from the Pyrenees toward the Baltic shore, reaching out to the Breton frontiers and the Netherlands or Frisia, and over the great Alps into Lombardy. The Saxons, under their leader Witikind, had fought the most fiercely against King Charles. They were not yet subdued, but they were quiet; and Witikind had fled into Scandinavia. So, in a period of apparent peace, the King was on his way to visit the good and noble Pope Hadrian in Rome.

King Charles had more than one reason for this journey. Ostensibly he wished to visit those lands of Lombardy which had come under his rule only a few years previously. He wished to present his sons to the Pope. But most of all he intended the visit to be a preparation for the future—a future whose ultimate aim was so great and grand he had barely dared to put it into thoughts, let alone words.

“Save me, O Lord, from my own arrogance!” was a prayer the King spoke often and often. Then he would add: “But strengthen me in arrogance for Thy sake!”

Although there was still a Roman Emperor, his throne was no longer in Rome but in Constantinople. He was a minor under the control of his mother, the Empress Irene. In his secret heart, Charles dreamed of a new Roman Empire, one based and rooted firmly in the Christian faith, as the old Empire had been founded on paganism. By appearing in Rome now, with his counselors and his warriors and his sons, he meant to lay such foundations as must inevitably work not only for his own good but for the good

of Christian Europe. To do so he must make a personal sacrifice which so far he had confided to no one.

The night which had settled over the encampment in the mountains was clear and cold. The wind had dropped and the stars were now so thickly sprinkled it was difficult to see a pin's space between them. Circling the sleeping men were the fires carefully tended by the guards, a protection against wolves and bears, and perhaps some would say against those evil spirits which might still linger on the mountain side. The King looked over his encampment and felt some satisfaction that the journey had gone well so far. He would never allow himself to be beaten by the difficulties of travel at a time when only the roughest routes led over the foothills and the passes of the mighty Alps. Some losses were inevitable. Three horses had plunged over a precipice on the fourth day; two days after that a suddenly displaced boulder had caused the death of two men. Otherwise everything had been smooth enough, a compliment to the organization of a hardened campaigner who could rely utterly on his followers.

The King smiled as he thought of those followers, soldiers and servants, friends and statesmen and scholars, who went with him unquestioning, that his administration might be maintained even though he were away from home for months. And with them went Queen Hildegarde, cheerful and loving and unflurried by hardship, caring as splendidly for the children as if she were safe in some city palace.

The thought of his wife led the King to consider

his sons. He began to pace quietly in the snow, trying to assure himself that what he was about to do was the right thing, praying that he might not be making a mistake in so laying his plans that this happy family must be broken and scattered. How would he soothe the grief of Hildegarde when she knew his intention? Would she ever forgive him for thinking so much of the future that he was prepared to sacrifice the contentment of the present?

Drawing his cloak tighter about him, the King sighed. He moved toward the tent where his family lay sleeping. For a moment he felt he must enter and awaken his wife, and so end his loneliness. But he hesitated to burden her before he needed to. So he passed on, with his problem and his decision still heavy about him.

The sound of the King's footsteps in the crunching snow roused Carl. He, too, rolled himself tighter in his cloak. Wanting to emulate his father in all things, he had scorned the soft bed of furs and settled himself down by the fire. But the ground felt cold and hard and it was difficult to sleep deeply.

Carl pulled back a corner of the tent flap very gently and saw his father's tall figure pass, sharp against the starry sky. The boy rose, shivered a little as the cold air struck him, and stepped outside.

The guard standing a pace or two away turned his head at once. He grinned when he saw Carl, but barred his way none the less.

"You will have me in trouble, young sir. Where are you going at this hour?"

"Let me pass, Wolfred," Carl said, pushing aside the spear. "I cannot sleep. I am going to my father."

"Then tell the King I would have stopped you if I could."

"I'll tell him," Carl promised.

When Carl reached his father, the King had paused by a fireside. He was holding his hands out to the glow, and the guard had retired a few paces that his master might be alone.

"I can't sleep either," Carl said, rubbing his hands in his turn.

"Stay with me a little then. What keeps you awake? You have no worries, at your age."

"Are you worried, Father?" Carl asked, surprised, for he could not imagine that his father ever had doubts of anything at all. "Is it because of the difficult journey? Will it be worse tomorrow?"

The King shook his head. He took Carl's hand and held it firmly. "When we come to Rome you will know that I am naming you my heir. One day you will rule over all my lands. I want you to remember that I trust you to continue the work I have begun."

Carl frowned. "But, Father . . ."

"I know what you are going to say. You are not the eldest. There is Pepin. Pepin, whose mother was my first wife. Pepin, whose name—" He broke off and sighed deeply. "What is it the men call the King's eldest son, Carl?"

"They call him Gobbo. We all do, Father!"

"You do not know what it means?"

Carl hesitated. He knew but did not want to admit the fact. He knew too there was a certain amount of contempt for his half brother among the court and army. And he was a difficult boy. Hildegarde always took pains to treat him gently as if he were her own, but he remained aloof. He was the most handsome of the whole handsome family, save for one thing.

"Gobbo means hunchback," the King said. His voice was bitter. "The men picked the word up in Italy, when we fought the Lombards the year you were born. When I heard my son called Gobbo I knew he must not succeed me. No King must be mocked. Besides—"

He paused, and Carl peered into his face, waiting.

"Besides—what, Father?"

"Remember this, Carl—it is a warning. I fear that Gobbo is not entirely to be trusted."

As his father spoke, Carl remembered that Gobbo was indeed inclined to spiteful tricks. He knew, though, that this was because he was often left out and thrust aside. Carl realized that if Gobbo had to fight back to make up for his misfortune, it was because of the unkindness of those who should, rather, have helped him. He flushed in the dark to realize that he himself had often enough pushed the elder boy out of the way, and taken advantage of running faster, fighting harder, never feeling tired or sickly.

Carl had heard the King called stern and implacable, but no man had ever questioned his wisdom. Now his face in the starlight was so full of pain that

Carl could hardly bear to look at it. Vaguely he knew that what his father intended doing would always seem cruel, and that the King himself knew this but would act according to his own honest certainty of what was right for the future of his kingdom and thus for Europe and all Christendom.

"You are young," his father said, as though he read the boy's thoughts. "But you must try with all your might to understand. He is my son and will always be dear to me, as all my children are. But I have made my decision and I will abide by it. You are my heir."

"Does he know?" Carl asked.

"No. You will not speak of it to him or to anyone. Get back to sleep now. I will see the guards changed and then I shall sleep, too. God be with you, child."

"And with you, Father."

Carl went back through the snow to the tent and crept inside. The brazier was glowing and in its light he saw his brother Gobbo leaning on one elbow. The rosy light painted his shadow hugely on the wall of the tent.

"I saw you with him out there," Gobbo said, in a sharp low voice. "You sneak after him, trying to win favors."

"Leave me alone, Gobbo," Carl replied. He used the nickname without thinking. Immediately the word was out he bit his lip and flushed. "Can't you sleep?" he asked gently, anxious to make up in some way for his half brother's misfortune.

"I am too tired, Carl. It was heavy going over the

pass." He shivered. "I keep thinking how those men were killed—and the horses . . ."

Carl drew near and slipped in under the skins beside the elder boy, wanting to comfort him, drawing the furs up until they tickled his chin.

"If we huddle together we'll soon be warm. We'll soon sleep. It's so starry outside it's like day. Wolfred was on guard, but now they're changing. Wolfrith, his twin brother, will take his place. Do you wish," Carl asked, "that we were twins?"

"Should I be like you—or you like me?"

There seemed no easy reply to that. Carl closed his eyes and settled down. Much later he awoke once more. The brazier had been tended by the guard. Its glow showed Carl the sleeping heaps that were his mother and his sisters and brothers. It showed him, too, the unsleeping Gobbo, his eyes wide open and brimful of tears; he was biting his knuckles as though his sorrow and loneliness were too much for him to bear.





## II

### *The Palace School*

IN LOMBARDY they were all housed in a ducal palace. Their struggle across the mountains at once seemed very far away, for here the spring was very soft on the air, the poplar trees were shaking out leaves so tender and young they were gold rather

than green. It was possible to walk out in the sun without a cloak.

For Carl, for all the family but the two little boys, Carloman and Lewis, the comfortable lodging meant that school must start again. For just as the King took with him abroad his counselors and captains, so, too, he took with him tutors and clerks. Wherever the King's court was established, there too was established the palace school, where his sons and daughters, and the sons and daughters of his friends and followers, down to the humblest, sat side by side to learn what wise men could teach them. And sometimes the King himself came to school.

"I'd rather be a hunter or soldier," Carl complained, "than a silly scholar."

"Father must not hear you say so," Rhotrud warned. She was a rather severe little girl and liked to keep her brothers in their place. "You know he will have us all scholars before we can be anything."

"It's all right for you and Bertha," Carl said. "You will never be soldiers. The best you can do is to marry kings."

"I shall marry Anghilbert," Bertha declared.

She was a fair-haired sturdy child, very like the King in features—Carl's particular friend who would always stand up for him and expected him to do the same for her.

"Anghilbert is no king!" Rhotrud cried. "He's nothing but a poor clerk."

"He is a scholar!" replied Bertha. "So he must be a splendid person."

At that moment Anghilbert came into the room where they were sitting, and Bertha turned scarlet.

"Lesson time," Anghilbert told them. "We are to go to the far hall, and the King will join us there. Hurry, then, and take your places."

"Will you tell us a tale, Anghilbert?" Bertha asked, running beside him along the stone cloister that led to the King's quarters, and skipping every now and again in an attempt to keep up with his long stride.

"Master Peter is to talk of mathematics," he replied. "And there is a Lombardy scholar come to tell us his findings in astronomy. After supper, Lady Bertha."

"About the lady in the high golden tower . . . ?"

"No!" Carl broke in. "About Roland. Tell us again about Roland, Anghilbert. And Oliver. And the Twelve Peers. And the horn. And the sword Durandel."

Anghilbert looked quickly over his shoulder and frowned.

"When we are private. Do not let your father hear the name Roland. You know he will never speak of that day of defeat."

When the King was campaigning against the infidel Saracens, who had long occupied Spain and threatened all Europe, the flower of his following had been trapped and slain in the long defile of Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees. Young Roland had been there, the Warden of the Breton Marches, of whom great things had been hoped, whose deeds in the field were already spoken of with admiration. Treachery had caused the death of those splendid warriors,

but Charles the King always blamed his own faulty generalship. Even now he would cover his face and weep when the names of Roland and the rest were spoken in his presence. And so those about him guarded their tongues and when the tale was told, a tale of proud and desperate valor in the face of fearful odds, it was told secretly. . . .

As they reached the hall, where the school was to be set up, they heard a great babble of voices. The children of the duke whose palace they lived in had come to join the school, and with them the children of the duke's servants, his huntsmen and stewards. And there were many other strangers, grown men anxious to benefit from the opportunity offered by the presence in Lombardy of the King of the Franks. There were several monks there, and some quite rough fellows, and a richly clad, portly man who must have been a merchant. When the King's children came in, these strangers rose out of respect. But Anghilbert called to them at once to be seated.

"In this school learning is our king and all pupils are equal in the eyes of their master."

Anghilbert himself was in charge of the class that morning. He was a splendid teacher. Even Carl, who had come reluctantly to his lessons, fell under the spell of Anghilbert's voice and manner, and the way his eyes flashed with enthusiasm as he spoke to them of what man knew of the world in which he lived.

Anghilbert cut short his own discourse to allow Master Peter, the monk, to instruct them in mathematics. Immediately Carl's attention flagged. Master

Peter spoke through his nose, and he had a sharp, rather angry manner which softened only when he spoke to Rhotrud, who was his favorite pupil. Rhotrud knew this perfectly well and made the most of the situation. She had a clear, eager mind, astonishingly agile for her years; she was the only one of them all who really appreciated Master Peter's calculations.

As for Bertha, she paid no attention at all to Master Peter, but sat watching Anghilbert, who had taken a place a little behind the speaker. He sat leaning forward with his elbow on his knee and his chin on his fist. He had a lean, clear-skinned face and dark eyes that sparkled with humor. The sun shone through the high archway at his back. He wore a red mantle over his dark green tunic, and the color glowed warm and rich in the sunshine. Once he looked across to Bertha and smiled. But although she was his favorite pupil, just as Rhotrud was Master Peter's, he never neglected his other pupils for her sake, as Master Peter did. As he was doing at this very moment, taking so long to discuss the problem with Rhotrud that the rest of the class began to fidget and whisper.

Carl glanced at Anghilbert to see how he was taking this. Anghilbert's face told him nothing, but under the hem of his tunic his sandaled foot tapped on the stone floor. He shifted his position and leaned back against a pillar, folding his arms. Carl felt a glow of admiration as he watched. Anghilbert was one of the people he liked best in the world; he was wise and knew how to teach his wisdom, but he was merry too, and he wrote songs that he sang in a fine voice,

strong and yet tender. Some of the songs were stirring, about battles in lonely places and horsemen spurring under the full moon across trackless plains; some were songs of love and romance; and some were songs of prayer that you might remember if you woke in the dark night, speaking over the words softly and sleeping again in comfort.

Everyone but Rhotrud and Master Peter was beginning to yawn. Carl looked out through the archway to the courtyard beyond. He saw his father crossing by the fountain with a stranger at his side. Carl saw no more than that the stranger wore the sober clothes of a clerk, that he was tall and walked proudly. Then the two men moved out of sight into the shadow of the cloister.

But the King's page had run ahead and came into the hall where the school was assembled.

"Master Anghilbert," he cried in a loud voice. "The King is coming. With him a visitor from overseas."

"What visitor, page?"

"It is Alcuin of England!" the boy replied.

A quick excited murmur at once arose. Master Peter forgot even Rhotrud. The name of Alcuin was known and respected by many of the older students present. The Englishman was spoken of as the spiritual heir of the great scholar Bede of Yarrow, whose missionary work was recognized wherever the Christian faith had found root.

Alcuin had been in Rome to take council with the Pope on behalf of the Archbishop of York. Now on his way home to England he had paused in Lom-

bardy to make himself known to the great King of the Franks. Alcuin was not the only man of God who realized that King Charles held in his hands the whole future of the Christian world. Perhaps he had come to find out exactly what manner of man this King was so that he might carry the tidings home with him. And perhaps he had approached the meeting with reserve, with even a little suspicion. For the name of Charles of the Franks was ringing round all Europe in these days of change and stress, and it might well be that a cautious man would feel inclined to suspect so great a volume of enthusiasm.

However that might be, Alcuin was there in the ducal palace, and he and the King were approaching together toward the school. As they entered the hall and the students surged to their feet in eager greeting, Carl looked swiftly from his father's face to that of the stranger. He could not have explained what made him believe then so joyfully that his father had met a man who would forever be his friend; and that Alcuin knew this and was glad.

Alcuin was tall and upright—quite as upright, nearly as tall as the King. But it was the stern gentleness of his eyes and the shape of his mouth, firm yet ready to smile, that most pleased Carl.

He saw his father looking at him. "Carl—come here and greet Master Alcuin for us all."

Carl stepped out into the front of the class. He gave a quick grin at the stranger, then screwed up his eyes as though he would take a mental look at all the Latin words he knew and thus be able to

decide which were best to use on this occasion. Suddenly he was nervous and tongue-tied and knew he could not find the words he needed.

"We are all waiting, boy," the King said; and Carl thought he sounded disappointed in his son.

Carl glanced frantically round the class, at the students young and old, strange and familiar, waiting to hear what he would say to Alcuin in greeting from them all. Then he caught sight of his half brother, sitting over in the far corner. Gobbo was staring intently at Carl, he was willing Carl to look that way and to understand what he wanted. Gobbo knew what to say and was begging for the chance to say it.

For what seemed to Carl ages of time, the silence held while he tried to make up his mind what to do—to admit his own failure and give Gobbo his chance, or at least to make an attempt, however bungling.

"Well, never mind," the King said. He laughed a little. "He is very young."

"My brother, sir—" Carl stammered.

But it was too late.

"Anghilbert," said the King, "I see how eager you are for this opportunity."

Eager indeed to greet a man of whom he knew so much, and all of it good, Anghilbert stepped forward swiftly and clasped Alcuin's hand. Always fluent, he now surpassed himself in the graceful honesty with which he welcomed the visitor. An appreciative murmur ran over the class.

Carl went back slowly to his place. He could not



look at Gobbo, and his self-disappointment made him sullen. He was aware of his two sisters watching him; Rhotrud impatient with his stupidity, Bertha sympathetic. The younger girl moved to his side and slid her fingers into his. But he jerked his hand away, too cross with himself to accept her friendly gesture.

"I have brought Alcuin here to our school," the King was saying, "that he may judge for himself of our industry and desire for learning. I would I might persuade him to stay with us, to be head teacher of the school, master over all of us—yes, Anghilbert, master over you too."

"It is too fine a dream," Anghilbert replied. "What a school we might have then—and what scholars we would make!"

Then the King invited Alcuin to take the master's seat and speak to the class of what he chose, whether of his own country, or of historical matters, or of poetry and religion.

"I will speak of Bede," said Alcuin, "the greatest man our monastery has known. In the year that I was born, he died. I would I had come to this world sooner, that I might have been his pupil—one of those, perhaps, to whom he dictated his translation of the Holy Gospel of St. John. But you all know that story."

Some of them knew and others not. The King begged his visitor to tell the tale again.

"The great scholar knew that he was near his death," Alcuin said. "Each day his pupils gathered about him as he lay on his bed, weak in flesh but

strong and bold in spirit, striving still that he might finish the work that was dearest to his heart. Soon almost all the great Gospel was committed to parchment, and soon the Abbot would be able to rest.

“It came to the Festival of the Ascension of Our Lord, and away went all the young scholars to keep the feast. Only one scribe remained that day with Abbot Bede.

“‘Dearest Master,’ said the scribe, ‘there is yet one chapter wanting, and it is hard for thee to question thyself.’

“‘No, it is easy,’ said the Bede, though his breath was shallow and his heart beat heavily against the frail wall of his breast. ‘Take thy pen and write quickly.’

“So all day they worked together, the old man and the young. Then it was evening and the boy saw that his master grew weaker every moment.

“‘There is yet one more sentence, dear master, to write out,’ said he.

“The Bede smiled and said in his frailest voice: ‘Write quickly!’

“So the quill flew over the parchment and at last the old man’s voice was silent and at last the pen stopped on the final word.

“‘Now it is finished,’ said the boy in the silence.

“‘Well, thou hast spoken truly,’ said the Bede. ‘It is finished!’

“Then the boy called the returned brethren, and the great scholar bade them place him where he could look on the spot where he was wont to pray. And he

began to chant the *Gloria*. But as he uttered the words 'the Holy Ghost,' he breathed his last.

"And so on that day," said Alcuin, "the Feast of the Ascension, the twenty-sixth of May in the year of Our Lord 735, the great Bede, his work accomplished, died and passed to the Kingdom of Heaven."

A deep silence followed Alcuin's soft and steady voice. As soldiers will feel their hearts beat harder at a tale of battle and heroism, so these scholars, whose eyes looked to a great future, felt a surge of spirit and inspiration as they recalled the tale they had just been told.

Then the King rose. Swiftly the students followed him. With one thought and one great voice they began to chant as the dying Bede had chanted:

*"Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis. . . ."*



### III

#### *Kings in the Making*

WHILE THEY rested in Lombardy the spring came to its full splendor, and the day they approached Rome the sun shone brightly, the air seemed full of promise. All along the ranks of King Charles's following, excitement ran like a delightful breeze. They

were coming to the Eternal City. They would see the Pope himself, the Holy Father, the head of the Church, St. Peter's deputy, whose hands now held the crozier and the keys that were the sacred symbols of his great office.

At the head of the column the King rode with Hildegarde at his right side. On his left Duke Eric rode, and behind came a good company of counts—Edo was there, and Roccolf and Hildigern, Udolf and others. Carl and Gobbo were side by side after the counts, with Anghilbert, and with Arnold, who held a trusted position in the royal household. After them came the rest of the family, Rhotrud and Bertha on white palfreys, and the two youngest children, Carloman and Lewis, in the care of their nurses and stewards. What with the soldiery and the servants and the baggage mules and the spare horses, the train stretched away along the road in such size and splendor that men and women ran from their homes as it passed to stare in amazement and awe.

They were still a mile or two from the city when the King held up his hand and the train came to a straggling halt.

"What's the matter?" Carl wondered. "Can you see anything, Gobbo?"

"There's a band of horse coming along the road toward us," Gobbo replied. He had immensely long sight, the others would always ask him to report on what was ahead, wherever they might be. "Yes, look, Carl—there's dust rising!"

"Will they be bandits?" Bertha asked, sounding

more excited than alarmed. "Shall we skirmish with them?"

"They're riding slowly," Gobbo reported. "It is quite a small cloud of dust."

"The Pope must have sent an escort to lead the King into the city!" Rhotrud cried.

The present feeling of excited anticipation increased as word of the approaching riders ran back along the column. The King now beckoned them on. This time they rode slowly, talking together in loud eager tones. The long journey was nearing its end as the two parties of riders approached one another along the sunny road leading across the plain to the hills and the splendors of Rome.

Suddenly the King threw up his hand and reined in his horse so abruptly that those following behind were thrown into confusion. There was a ringing of hoofs on the dry road and a shouting of men to their beasts.

"The King has dismounted!" Gobbo cried.

The King, afoot in the roadway, had pushed back the hood he was wearing and now stood bareheaded, facing the oncoming riders.

Duke Eric shouted something over his shoulder; then he, too, dismounted and holding out his hands to Hildegarde, helped her from the saddle. Grooms ran up to hold the horses.

The word that Duke Eric had tossed over his shoulder like a golden coin was seized and handed back, was called and shouted in increasing triumph and awe.

"It is Pope Hadrian! It is the Pope himself who

comes to greet our master. God save His Holiness! God bless his days! May his reign be long! God bless Pope Hadrian, our Holy Father! God be with St. Peter's heir!"

And as the cries of greeting and blessing swelled and rang over the great column brought to a standstill there in the open plain, the bareheaded King knelt in the dust, waiting for Pope Hadrian to approach nearer and receive his homage.

Hadrian had himself dismounted. He came now toward the King, holding out his arms, his face full of the warm affection he felt for this great man who was yet ready to bend his head and his knee when occasion demanded. Hadrian placed his hands on King Charles's shoulders and embraced him warmly.

"Welcome, my son! Welcome to this great and holy city! May God bless you and keep you! Rise up, my good friend Charles, and let me lead you home."

Bertha murmured to Carl in astonishment: "He is an ordinary man!"

"What did you expect him to be?"

"A sort of archangel, I suppose."

"Yes—with a halo and long golden wings," Rhotrud agreed, not bothering to appear clever for once. "But he has the face of a very kind man. Much less frightening than an archangel."

"Of course he is an ordinary man!" Gobbo said, sneering a little. "And just as ambitious and cunning, I daresay, as any other mighty ruler."

"Peace, Gobbo!" Anghilbert cried sharply.

Gobbo flushed. "You call me by my nickname. Call

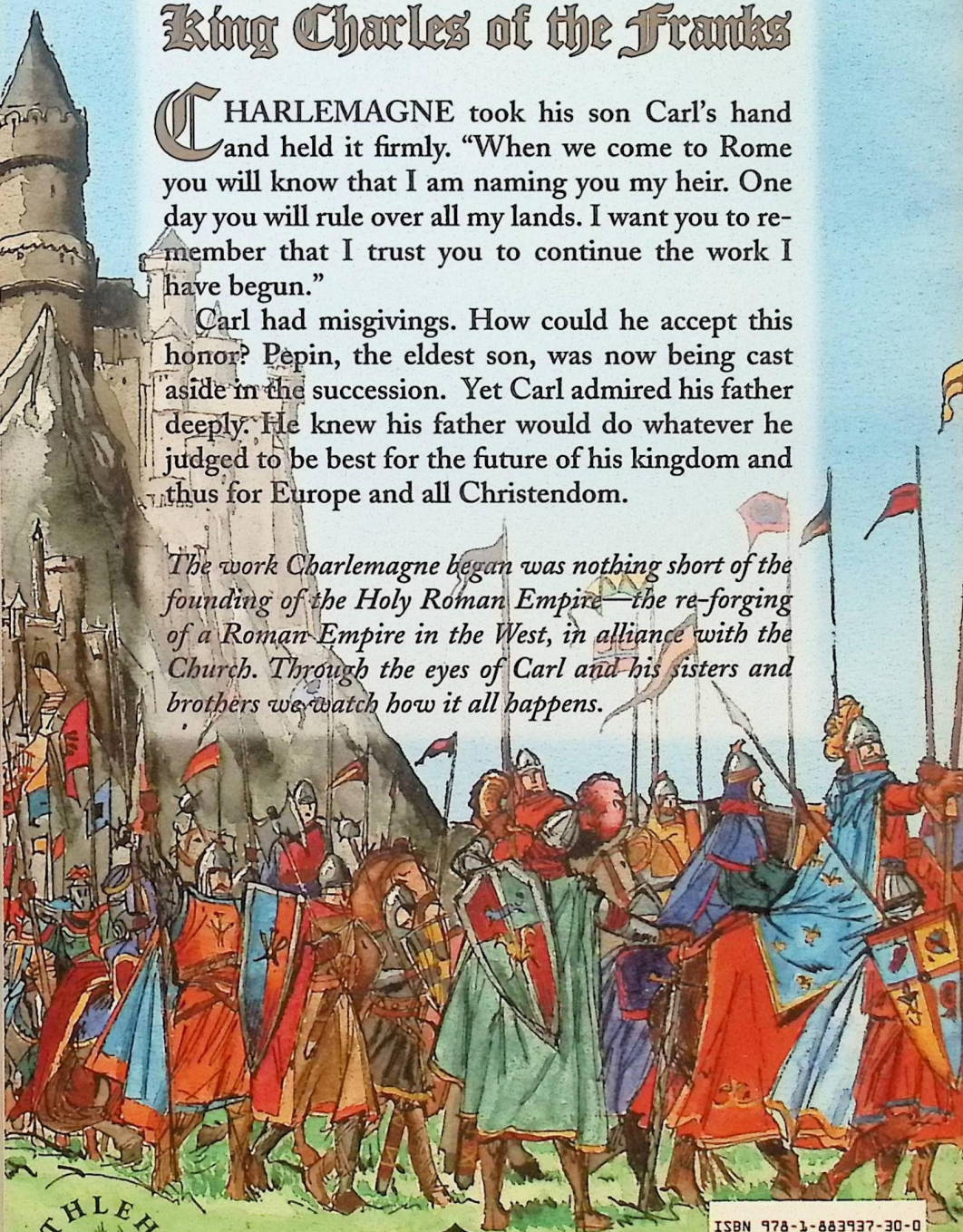
A.D. 781

## King Charles of the Franks

**C**HARLEMAGNE took his son Carl's hand and held it firmly. "When we come to Rome you will know that I am naming you my heir. One day you will rule over all my lands. I want you to remember that I trust you to continue the work I have begun."

Carl had misgivings. How could he accept this honor? Pepin, the eldest son, was now being cast aside in the succession. Yet Carl admired his father deeply. He knew his father would do whatever he judged to be best for the future of his kingdom and thus for Europe and all Christendom.

*The work Charlemagne began was nothing short of the founding of the Holy Roman Empire—the re-forging of a Roman Empire in the West, in alliance with the Church. Through the eyes of Carl and his sisters and brothers we watch how it all happens.*



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