

allow any man to rule them as Theodoric ruled the Visigoths, or Attila the Huns; and thus, while the other nations were settling down into comparative civilization, building cities, and practicing rude husbandry with primitive implements, the Franks were still a savage race of marauders, living by plunder and robbery.

Under Clovis, the aspect of the nation changed entirely. This remarkable man contrived to obtain a complete ascendancy over the Franks; to be a king not only in name but in deed to preserve during the days of peace the authority his predecessors had only enjoyed in time of war. When he first commenced his conquests in 481, the Franks were a wandering tribe, plundering the towns and villages of the more peaceful inhabitants of Gaul. At his death, in 511, he left among his sons an empire larger in extent than the present France, containing a Christian population—rude, indeed, and warlike but no longer dwellers in tents and vagabonds on the face of the earth. The means by which he obtained his ascendancy, and the difficulties he had to encounter, are vividly illustrated in one of the earliest anecdotes recorded in French history—the story of the Vase of Soissons.

The particulars are as follows: There happened to be among the treasures in the cathedral at Rheims a vase of silver, wrought with great skill and highly valued alike for its intrinsic worth and as a specimen of the craft of the silversmith. One day some Frankish warriors, pursuing a fugitive enemy through the streets, broke open the gates of the cathedral, penetrated to the very altar, and carried off the vase. The clergy were grieved at the loss, and the Bishop of Rheims came in person to Clovis to beg for its restitution. Clovis who afterward embraced Christianity himself, was always well disposed toward the Church. He replied that

the vase had no doubt been placed among the booty taken during the war and promised to ask that it should be given up when the lots were apportioned. So the bishop and his attendants departed, somewhat comforted by this reply.

Not long afterward the day came for apportioning the spoils. The Frankish warriors were drawn up in a circle on a plain near Soissons. In the centre of the group lay heaped a glittering pile, the spoils of the recent war. There were mingled in motley confusion rich suits of armor, not unfrequently stained with the life-blood of the last wearers. There were jewels and gold, and silver, carpets, head-pieces, and even household furniture, and horses' saddles and bridles—everything that could tempt the rapacity of those undisciplined hordes was there heaped together; and a little apart had been placed, by the direction of Clovis, the silver vase whose loss was so deeply deplored by the clergy and inhabitants of the good City of Rheims.

"My friends," said the king, "before we apportion the spoils, I would crave at your hands yonder vase of silver. It was taken from the Cathedral of Rheims, and I have even promised the bishop it shall be restored to him."

One of the chiefs advanced from the circle and spoke in the name of the rest.

"How shall we refuse the prayer of our valiant leader?" he cried. "Take the vase, O king, and do therewith as seemeth good to thee."

The other chiefs waved their weapons and raised a shout of joyful acquiescence.

"Do you all consent?" demanded the king.

"All!" shouted a thousand voices. But then there came forward from among the ranks a grim-visaged savage clad in the skin of a bear, and brandish a mighty axe.

"Are we Franks," he yelled, "or are