

Charles the great



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Charlemagne, also known as Charles the Great, became the undisputed ruler of Western Europe, " By the sword and the cross." (Compton" s 346) As Western Europe was deteriorating Charlemagne was crowned the privilege of being joint king of the Franks in 768 A. D. People of Western Europe, excluding the church followers, had all but forgotten the great gifts of education and arts that they had possessed at one time. Charlemagne solidly defeated barbarians and kings in identical fashion during his reign. Using the re-establishment of education and order, Charlemagne was able to save many political rights and restore culture in Western Europe.

Charlemagne was born in 742 A. D., to a very famous and well-known family. Charlemagne" s grandfather was Charles Martel, the man who was responsible for the defeat of the Saracens. Charlemagne was also the eldest son of Bertrade (also known as Bertha Greatfoot) and Pepin the Short, the first to become king of the Franks. With the almost full extinction of schools in the 8th century, many historians say that Charlemagne received very little education, but did learn the art of reading from Bertrade.

The one thing that kept Charlemagne motivated throughout his entire life was his deep devotion to the church. Charlemagne was a tall young man with light blond hair, and was described by his secretary as, " face laughing and merry. . . his appearance was always stately and dignified." (World book 452) Charlemagne had great wit, but was stern at times. He had simple and moderate tastes; he enjoyed hunting, riding and swimming. Charlemagne had a large wardrobe with many Frankish dresses, linen shirts and breeches, silk-fringed tunics, hoses wrapped with bands, and for the winter he had coats

made of otter or marten skins. Charlemagne asked his people to improve their lifestyles, but he divorced two of his four wives without any given cause.

In 768 A. D., Charlemagne at the age of 26, along with his brother Carloman inherited the kingdom of Franks. However, in 771 A. D. Carloman died, making Charlemagne the sole ruler of the kingdom. At this time the northern part of Europe was out of order and unruly. In the south, the Roman Catholic Church was asserting itself alongside the Lombard kingdom in Italy. While in Charlemagne's own kingdom, the people were becoming and acting as barbarians and neglecting education and faith.

But Charlemagne was determined to make his kingdom as strong as possible. In 772 A. D., Charlemagne put forth a 30-year campaign to conquer and Christianize the extremely mighty Saxons in the north. He charged over the Avars, a large tribe on the Danube. He forced the Bavarians to surrender to him. When possible Charlemagne attempted to settle his conflicts peacefully. However, he was forced to use brute in some situations. For instance, Charlemagne offered to pay Desiderius for the return of lands to the pope, but after Desiderius refused, Charlemagne seized the kingdom of Desiderius and restored the Papal States.

The most important aspect of Charlemagne's conquests was his uncanny ability to organize. Charlemagne sent out more than 50 military missions during his time in power and he led the missions as commander more than half of the time. He was able to lead his troops through vast lands in unprecedented times, but his every move was planned ahead of time. Before every crusade, he informed all those involved the number of men needed,

the weapons required, and he even went as far as to tell what should be in the supply wagons. These tactics were later studied and used by another great man, Napoleon.

One of the smallest campaigns undertaken by Charlemagne became one of the most well known. In 778 A. D., Charlemagne led his troops into Spain and laid an attack on Saragossa. The movement failed and upon their recoil they were attacked from the rear and Count Roland one of the leaders of the group was killed in that battle. Roland went on to become a hero in medieval songs.

By 800 A. D. Charlemagne was the sole ruler of Western Europe. His immense kingdom included what are now France, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. It also covered half of present-day Italy and Germany, part of Austria, and the Spanish March. This Spanish March stretched to the Ebro River. Through his establishment of a single government over the entire Western Europe, Charlemagne re-established much of the old Roman Empire, which paved the way for the progress of present-day Europe.

It was on Christmas Day in 800 A. D. that while praying in St. Peter's in Rome, Pope Leo III approached Charlemagne with a golden crown and placed it on the head of the king. The crowd in the church shouted concurrently, "To Charles the August, crowned by God, great and pacific emperor, long life and victory!" (Compton's 347) It is said that Charlemagne was surprised by what happened and stated that he would not have come into the church had he known the pope's plan. However, other historians say that the pope

would not have gambled doing what he did without Charlemagne" s knowing about it. (Compton" s 347)

Charlemagne was a very noble man and he had great compassion for the peasant people and had a belief that that government was in place to benefit those that it governed. When Charlemagne came into power many of the people working under him were very careless and sometimes unfair. To change the ways of these people Charlemagne expanded their work, wrote down everything they did and forced them to work in groups of people. This helped those lacking in their work effort to restore some law and order.

Two times a year Charlemagne would summon the leading man in the kingdom to talk about the happenings going around. Charlemagne always had the final word in everything including church matters. Charlemagne was determined in establishing improvement in lives of his people. By setting up money values he encouraged trade, he attempted to build a Rhine-Danube canal, and gave advice on different farming techniques. Charlemagne preached the most on education and Christianity to his people. He was responsible for the restoration of Palace School at Aachen, his capital. He also set up other schools for noble boys as well as peasants.

Charlemagne was very devoted to education and he never stopped studying himself. He brought in scholars of many languages to his courts. He learned to read in Latin, some Greek, however, he was not too keen of mastering writing. During his dinners, he preferred to have men reading books to him rather than having jesters performing.

For his churches, Charlemagne sent his monks to Rome to learn to sing. For his art collections, Charlemagne brought some valuable pieces from Italy. In the cathedral at Aachen there is a large monument, which stands in loyalty to Charlemagne for his religious devotion. Charlemagne built and was buried in the cathedral in Aachen.

At the time of Charlemagne's death in 814 A. D. only one of his three sons, Louis, was alive. Louis had a weak ruling after his father, which brought on many civil wars and rebellions. Charlemagne brought back order to Western Europe; he led his people to many victories and was responsible for the rise of Western Europe.