

<http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article3175>



# XXXI.20 Successors of Charlemagne

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXXI. Theory of feudal laws among the Franks, in their relation to the transformations in their monarchy -

Date de mise en ligne : samedi 8 septembre 2018

---

Copyright © Montesquieu - Tous droits réservés

---

Augustus, while in Egypt, had the tomb of Alexander opened ; when he was asked whether he wanted them to open those of the Ptolemys, he said he had wanted to see the king and not the dead ; thus, in the history of this second dynasty, we seek Pépin and Charlemagne : we would like to see the kings and not the dead.

A prince, plaything of his passions and the dupe even of his virtues, a prince who never knew his strength nor his weakness, who was unable to win either fear or love, who with few vices in his heart had all sorts of flaws in his mind, took in hand the reins of the empire that Charlemagne had held. [1]

Louis the Debonaire, mixing all the concessions of an old husband with all the weaknesses of an old king, put a disorder in his family that brought on the fall of the monarchy. He constantly changed the shares he had meted to his children. Yet these shares had been confirmed in turn by his oaths, those of his children, and those of the lords. This was to try to tempt the loyalty of his subjects ; it was to try to introduce uncertainty, scruples and equivocations into obedience ; it was to confuse the various rights of princes and make their titles uncertain, especially at a time when, fortresses being rare, the first rampart of authority was troth sworn and troth received.

The emperor's children, to maintain their shares, solicited the clergy, and gave them rights unheard of until then. Those rights were specious ; they brought the clergy in to guarantee something they had wanted them to authorize. Agobard notified Louis the Debonaire that he had sent Lothaire to Rome to have him declared emperor, and that he had made distributions to his children after consulting heaven during three days of fasting and prayer. [2] What could a superstitious prince do, attacked by superstition itself ? What a defeat sovereign authority absorbed twice, in the imprisonment of this prince and in his public penitence, is evident ; they had wanted to degrade the king, and they degraded royalty. [3]

---

[1] [In the 1758 edition, the Annex 24 is inserted here.]

[2] See his letters.

[3] [In the 1758 edition, chapter XX continues as follows (Annex 25).]