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# XXXI.18 Charlemagne

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

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Charlemagne's design was to hold the power of the nobility within bounds, and to prevent the oppression of the clergy and the free men ; he introduced such moderation into the orders of the state that they were counterbalanced, and he remained the master. Everything was unified by the force of his genius ; he led the nobility continually from expedition to expedition ; he did not leave them time to formulate plans, and kept them fully occupied following his own. The empire was maintained by the greatness of the chief ; the prince was great, the man more so. The kings his children were his first subjects, the instruments of his power and models of obedience. He made admirable statutes ; more than that, he saw that they were carried out. His genius spread throughout the empire. We see in this prince's laws a spirit of foresight that encompasses everything, and a certain force that carries everything along ; pretexts for eluding duties are taken away, negligence corrected, abuses reformed or anticipated [1] ; he knew how to punish, and even more how to pardon. Vast in his designs, simple in the execution, no one possessed to a higher degree the art of accomplishing the greatest things with ease, and the difficult ones expeditiously. He ranged constantly over his vast empire, bringing help wherever it was showing strain. Problems came up everywhere, and everywhere he put them down. Never was a prince better at braving dangers, never was a prince better at avoiding them. He mocked every peril, and particularly the ones which the great conquerors almost always experience : by this I mean conspiracies. This prodigious prince was extremely moderate ; his character was gentle, his manners simple ; he liked being with the people of his court. He was perhaps too susceptible to the pleasure of women ; but a prince who always governed by himself, and who devoted his life to his toils, can deserve more excuses. He put an admirable order into his expenditures ; he exploited his domains wisely, attentively, economically ; a paterfamilias could learn from his laws to govern his household [2] ; we see in his capitularies the pure and sacred source from which he drew his wealth. I have only one further word : he ordered that the eggs from his domain's farmyards be sold, [3] and unneeded greens from his gardens ; and he had distributed to his peoples all the wealth of the Lombards, and the immense treasuries of those Huns who had pillaged the globe.

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[1] See his capitulary III, year 811, p. 486, art. 1-8, and capitulary I, year 812, p. 490, art. 1, and capitulary of the same year, p. 494, art. 9 and 11 and others.

[2] See capitulary of Villis, year 800, his Capitulary II, year 813, art. 6 and 19, and book V of capitularies, art. 303.

[3] Capitulary of Villis, art. 39. See this whole capitulary, which is a masterpiece of prudence, good administration, and economy.