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XXXI.6 Second era of the humiliation of kings of the first dynasty

- 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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Since the execution of Brunhilde, the mayors had been the administrators of the kingdom under the kings ; and though they had the conduct of war, the kings nonetheless led the armies, and the mayor and the nation fought under them. But the victory of the duke Pépin [1] against Theodoric and his mayor [2] consummated the debasement of kings ; the victory won by Charles Martel over Chilperic and his mayor Rainfroy [3] confirmed this debasement. Austrasia triumphed twice over Neustria and Burgundy ; and the mayoralty of Astrasia being seemingly attached to the family of the Pépins, that mayoralty rose over all the other mayoralties, and that house over all the other houses. The victors feared lest some accredited man seize the person of the kings to incite disturbances. They held them in a royal house as in a sort of prison. [4] Once a year they were shown to the people. There they issued ordinances, [5] but they were the mayor's ; they replied to ambassadors, but they were the mayor's replies. It was in this time that the historians speak to us of the government of mayors over the kings who were in subjection to them. [6]

The mania of the nation for the Pépin family went so far that it elected as mayor one of his grandsons who was still a child [7] ; it established him over a certain Dagobert, and put phantom over phantom.

[1] See Annals of Metz, on the years 687 and 688.

[2] *Illis quidem nomina regum imponens, ipse totius regni habens privilegium, etc. (ibid. for the year 695).*

[3] *Ibid.* on the year 719.

[4] *Sedemque illi regalem sub sua ditone concessit* (Annals of Metz for the year 719).

[5] *Ex Chronico Centulensi, Lib. II. Ut responsa quæ erat edoctus, vel potius jussus, ex sua velut potestate redderet.*

[6] Annals of Metz for the year 691. *Anno Principatus Pippini super Theodericum... Annales de Fulde ou de Laurishan ; Pippinus dux Francorum obtinuit regnum Francorum per annos 27 cum regibus sibi subjectis.*

[7] *Posthæc Theudoaldus filius ejus (Grimoaldi) parvulus, in loco ipsius, cum prædicto rege Dagoberto, major-comus palatii effectus est* (the anonymous continuator of Fredegar for the year 714, ch. civ).