THE RESTORATION
OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE
AND CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE

The historical importance of the Carolingian age far transcends its material achievement. The unwieldy Empire of Charles the Great did not long survive the death of its founder, and it never really attained the economic and social organisation of a civilised state. But, for all that, it marks the first emergence of the European culture from the twilight of pre-natal existence into the consciousness of active life. Hitherto the barbarians had lived passively on the capital which they had inherited from the civilisation which they had plundered; now they began to co-operate with it in a creative social activity. The centre of mediaeval civilisation was not to be on the shores of the Mediterranean, but in the northern lands between the Loire and the Weser which were the heart of the Frankish dominions. This was the formative centre of the new culture, and it was there that the new conditions which were to govern the history of mediaeval culture find their origin. The ideal of the mediaeval Empire, the political position of the Papacy, the German hegemony in Italy and the expansion of Germany towards the East, the fundamental institutions of mediaeval society both in Church and State, and the incorporation of the classical tradition in mediaeval culture—all have their basis in the history of the Carolingian period.

The essential feature of the new culture was its religious
character. While the Merovingian state had been predominantly secular, the Carolingian Empire was a theocratic power—the political expression of a religious unity. This change in the character of the monarchy is shown by the actual circumstances of the installation of the new dynasty; for Pepin obtained Papal authority for the setting aside of the old royal house and was anointed king in the year 752 by St. Boniface according to the religious coronation rite which had grown up under ecclesiastical influence in Anglo-Saxon England and Visigothic Spain, but which had hitherto been unknown among the Franks. Thus the legitimation of the rule of the Carolingian house sealed the alliance between the Frankish monarchy and the Papacy which St. Boniface had done so much to bring about, and henceforward the Frankish monarchy was the recognized champion and protector of the Holy See. The Papacy had already been alienated from the Byzantine Empire by the Iconoclastic policy of the Isaurian emperors, and the extinction of the last survival of the Byzantine power at Ravenna by the Lombards in 751 forced the Pope to look for support elsewhere. In 754 Stephen II visited Pepin in his own dominions, and obtained from him a treaty which secured to the Papacy the Exarchate of Ravenna and the former Byzantine possessions in Italy, together with the dukedoms of Spoleto and Benevento. In return the Pope reconsecrated Pepin as King of the Franks, and also conferred on him the dignity of Patriarch of the Romans. This was an epoch-making event, for it marked not only the foundation of the Papal State which was to endure until 1870, but also the protectorate of the Carolingians in Italy, and the beginning of their imperial mission as the leaders and organizers of Western Christendom.

The Carolingians were naturally fitted to undertake this mission since they were themselves the representatives of both sides of the European tradition. They traced their descent from Gallo-Roman bishops and saints as well as from Frankish warriors, and they combined the warlike prowess of a Charles Martel with a vein of religious idealism, which shows itself in Carolman’s renunciation of his kingdom in order to enter the cloister, and Pepin’s sincere devotion to the cause of the Church. But it is in Pepin’s successor, Charles the Great, that both these elements find simultaneous expression. He was above all a soldier with a talent for war and military enterprise which made him the greatest conqueror of his
time. But in spite of his ruthlessness and unscrupulous ambition he was no mere barbaric warrior; his policy was inspired by ideals and universal aims. His conquests were not only the fulfillment of the traditional Frankish policy of military expansion; they were also crusades for the protection and unity of Christendom. By his destruction of the Lombard Kingdom he freed the Papacy from the menace which had threatened its independence for two hundred years and brought Italy into the Frankish Empire. The long drawn out struggle with the Saxons was due to his determination to put an end to the last remains of Germanic heathenism as well as of Saxon independence. His conquest of the Avars in 793-794 destroyed the Asiatic robber state which had terrorised the whole of Eastern Europe, and at the same time restored Christianity in the Danube provinces, while his war with the Saracens and his establishment of the Spanish March were the beginning of the Christian reaction to the victorious expansion of Islam. In the course of thirty years of incessant warfare he had extended the frontiers of the Frankish monarchy as far as the Elbe, the Mediterranean and the Lower Danube, and had united Western Christendom in a great imperial state.

The coronation of Charles as Roman Emperor and the restoration of the Western Empire in the year 800 marked the final stage in the reorganisation of Western Christendom and completed the union between the Frankish monarchy and the Roman Church which had been begun by the work of Boniface and Pepin. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that the theocratic element in Charles' rule was based upon his imperial title or that he derived the universal character of his authority from the tradition of Roman imperialism.

Under the influence of his Anglo-Saxon adviser Alcuin, which was no less decisive than that of Boniface had been during the previous period, he had already acquired an exalted view of his authority as the divinely appointed leader of the Christian people. But this ideal was based on the teaching of the Bible and St. Augustine rather than on the classical tradition of imperial Rome. For to Alcuin and the authors of the Libri Carolini, Rome—even in its Byzantine form, was still the last of the heathen empires of prophecy and the representative of the Earthly Kingdom, whereas the Frankish monarch possessed the higher dignity of ruler and guide of
the people of God. Charles was the new David and the sec-
ond Josias, and as the latter had restored the law of God, so
too Charles was the lawgiver of the Church and held the two
swords of spiritual and temporal authority.1

This theocratic ideal dominates every aspect of Carolingian
government. The new Frankish state was to an even greater
extent than the Byzantine Empire a church-state, the secular
and religious aspects of which were inextricably inter-
mingled.

The King is the governor of the Church as well as of the
State, and his legislation lays down the strictest and most
minute rules for the conduct of the clergy and the regulation
of doctrine and ritual. The observance of Sunday, the per-
formance of the ecclesiastical chant and the conditions for
the reception of novices into the monasteries are all dealt
with in the Capitularies, no less than the defence of the
frontiers and the economic administration of the royal estate.
On one occasion Charles even required a written answer
from every parish priest as to the mode in which he ad-
ministered baptism, the replies being forwarded by the bish-
ops to Charles’ palace for his personal inspection.

The government of the whole Empire was largely ecclesias-
tical, for the bishop shared equally with the count in the
local administration of the 300 counties into which the Em-
pire was divided, while the central government was mainly
in the hands of the ecclesiastics of the chancery and of the
royal chapel; the archchapelain being the King’s chief ad-
viser and one of the highest dignitaries of the Empire. The
control and supervision of the local administration was en-
sured by the characteristic Carolingian institution of the Missi
Dominici, who went on circuit through the counties of the
Empire, like English judges of assize, and here too, the most
important missions were entrusted to bishops and abbots.

The theocratic spirit which inspired the Carolingian govern-
ment is well shown by the curious address of one of Charles
Missi which has been preserved. “We have been sent here,”
he begins, “by our Lord, the Emperor Charles, for your eternal
salvation, and we charge you to live virtuously according to
the law of God, and justly according to the law of the world.
We would have you know first of all that you must believe
in one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, . . .
Love God with all your hearts. Love your neighbours as your-
selves. Give alms to the poor according to your means,” and
after recounting the duties of every class and state of life from wives and sons to monks and counts and public officials he concludes: "Nothing is hidden from God. Life is short and the moment of death is unknown. Be ye therefore always ready." 3

This address is more in the style of a Moslem Kadi than of a Roman official: indeed the Augustinian ideal of the City of God has become transformed by a crude simplification into something dangerously similar to a Christian version of Islam with Charles as the Commander of the Faithful. There was the same identification of religion and polity, the same attempt to enforce morality by legal means and to spread the faith by war. As Alcuin complained, the faith of the Saxons had been destroyed by tithes, and Charles' missionaries were plunderers (praedones) rather than preachers (praedicatores). The religion of Charles was like that of Islam, a religion of the sword, and his private life, in spite of his sincere piety, resembled that of a Moslem ruler. Yet for all that, he claimed direct authority over the Church and intervened even in matters of dogma. In the words of his first letter to Leo III, he was "the representative of God who has to protect and govern all the members of God," he is "Lord and Father, King and Priest, the Leader and Guide of all Christians."

It is obvious that these claims were hardly reconcilable with the traditional authority of the Papacy. For Charles regarded the Pope as his chaplain, and plainly tells Leo III that it is the King's business to govern and defend the Church and that it is the Pope's duty to pray for it. Thus the destruction of the Lombard Kingdom seemed only to have increased the difficulties of the Papacy. It left Rome isolated between the two imperial powers of the Frankish monarchy and the Byzantine Empire, neither of which respected its independence. The dangers inherent in the situation soon became evident in the disputes that followed the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. The latter was a victory of the allied forces of Rome and Hellenism over the oriental heresy of the Iconoclasts. But Charles, whose religion had something in common with the militant simplicity of the Isaurian emperors, refused to accept the conciliar decisions. The Franks could hardly appreciate the importance of the question of image-worship for the peoples of Hellenic tradition. For as Strzygowski has shown (though not without ex-
aggeration), the art of the Northern peoples was essentially at one with that of the East in its abstract aniconic character. Moreover, the influence of the Old Testament which was so strong in the Caroline circle led to a Puritanical attitude in the question of image-worship no less than in that of the observance of Sunday. Consequently, Charles in person entered the theological lists against Byzantium and Rome. He caused his theologians to compile a series of treatises against the council which were published in his name as the Libri Carolini. He sent a Missus to Rome with a capitulary of eighty-five reprehensions for the Pope’s instruction, and finally, in 794, he called a great council of all the Western bishops at Frankfurt in which the Council of Nicaea was condemned and the doctrines of the image-worshippers refuted. 

The position of Pope Hadrian was one of intense difficulty, and he was forced to temporise. He found himself in agreement with the Byzantine Empire against the Frankish kingdom and the Western Church, and yet the Byzantines had robbed him of his patrimonies in the East and regarded him as no better than an alien. In the event of a schism between East and West he would have been left isolated and powerless. Politically he was entirely dependent on the Frankish power, and on the death of Hadrian in 795, his successor did homage to Charles as his overlord.

This anomalous state of things was ended by the Pope's recognition of Charles as Roman Emperor and his coronation at Rome on Christmas Day in the year 800. It is difficult to say how far the Pope acted on his own initiative or whether he was the instrument of Charles and his Frankish advisers. The testimony of Charles' biographer, Einhard, is in favour of the former alternative, but it has met with little favour from modern historians, at least in France and England. Certainly Charles was the gainer, for his universal authority in the West now received the sanction of Roman law and tradition. For the Papacy, however, the advantage was no less clear. The supremacy of the Frankish monarchy which had threatened to overshadow that of Rome was now associated with Rome, and consequently also with the Papacy. The political allegiance of the Pope was no longer divided between the de jure authority of the Emperor at Constantinople and the de facto power of the Frankish King. As King, Charles had stood outside the Roman tradition; as Emperor, he entered into a
definite juridical relationship with the head of the Church. His power was still as formidable as ever, but it was no longer indefinite and incalculable. Moreover, the idea of the Roman Empire was still indispensable to the Church. It was synonymous with Christian civilisation, while the rule of the barbarians was so identified with heathenism and war that the Liturgy couples together, "the enemies of the Roman name and the foes of the Catholic Faith." Consequently, it is by no means improbable that the Papacy as the representation of Roman universalism should have taken the initiative in the restoration of the Empire in 800, as it did once more seventy-five years later in the case of Charles the Bald.

However this may be, it is certain that the restoration of the Roman Empire, or rather the foundation of the new medieaval Empire, had a religious and symbolic value which far outweighed its immediate importance from a political point of view. Charles used it, no doubt, as a diplomatic counter in his negotiations with the Eastern Empire, but his coronation made no difference in his life or government. He never attempted to ape the ways of a Roman or Byzantine Caesar, as did Otto III and other mediaeval emperors, but remained a thorough Frank, in dress and manners as well as in his political ideals. He even perilled his whole work of imperial unification by dividing his dominions among his heirs in 866 according to the old Frankish custom, instead of following the Roman principle of indivisible political sovereignty; and the same tradition reasserted itself among his successors and proved fatal to the unity and continuity of the Carolingian Empire.

It was the churchmen and the men of letters, rather than the princes and statesmen, who cherished the ideal of the Holy Roman Empire. To them it meant the end of the centuries of barbarism and a return to civilised order. To Einhard, Charles is a new Augustus, and he views his achievement in the light of the Augustan ideal; while Modoin, the Bishop of Auxerre, writes of his age as the Renaissance of classical antiquity:

"rursus in antiquos mutataque saecula mores; aurea Roma iterum renovata renascitur orbe."

In fact, though the learning of the Carolingian age may seem a poor thing to set by the side of that of the great Italian humanists, it was none the less a genuine Renaissance which had no less importance for the development of European culture than the more brilliant movement of the fifteenth
century. The gathering together of the scattered elements of the classical and patristic traditions and their reorganisation as the basis of a new culture was the greatest of all the achievements of the Carolingian age. The movement was due to the co-operation of the two forces that we have already described—the monastic culture of the Anglo-Saxon and Irish missionaries and the organising genius of the Frankish monarchy. At the beginning of the eighth century continental culture had reached its lowest ebb, and the turn of the tide was due to the coming of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries. Boniface himself was a scholar and poet of the type of Aldehelm, and his reforming activity extended to the education as well as the discipline of the clergy. He was the author of a treatise on grammar founded on Donatus, Charisius and Diomedes, and his great foundation at Fulda was the centre of a revival of literary culture and calligraphy that had a wide influence throughout the Eastern part of the Frankish dominions.

But it was the personal influence of Charles the Great which gave the movement a wider scope, and nothing shows the real greatness of his character more clearly than the zeal with which this almost unlettered warrior prince threw himself into the work of restoring learning and raising the standard of education in his dominions. The Carolingian Renaissance, both in letters and art, found its centre in the school of the Palace and was thence diffused throughout the Empire by means of the monastic and episcopal centres, such as Fulda, Tours, the two Corbies, St. Gall, Reichenau, Lorsch, St. Wandrille, Ferrières, Orleans, Auxerre and Pavia. From all parts of his realm Charles gathered together scholars and theologians—from Southern Gaul, Theodulf and Agobard; from Italy, Paul the Deacon, Peter of Pisa, and Paulinus of Aquileia; from Ireland, Clement and Dungal; and from his own land of the Franks, Angilbert and Einhard. But as with the earlier movement of ecclesiastical reform, it was above all from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of culture that the new movement derived its character. In France and Italy, where Latin was a living language, it had become contaminated by contact with the barbarised vernacular. In England it was a learned language, founded upon the study of classical models, and its cultivation was encouraged by that enthusiasm for the Roman tradition which had inspired Anglo-Saxon culture since the days of St. Wilfred and Benedict Biscop.

It was the chief representative of this Anglian culture, "Al-
Alcuin, the head of the school of York, who became the link between what M. Halphen has termed the Anglo-Saxon “pre-Renaissance” and the new Carolingian movement. He entered Charles’ service in 782 as the director of the Palace school, and thenceforward exercised a decisive influence on Charles’ educational policy and on the whole literary movement. Alcuin was no literary genius; he was essentially a schoolmaster and grammarian who based his teaching on the old classical curriculum of the seven liberal arts, according to the tradition of Boethius and Cassiodorus and Isidore and Bede. But it was just such a schoolmaster that the age required, and thanks to the support of his royal pupil, he was able to realise his educational ideas on an imperial scale and to make the school of the Palace the standard of culture for the greater part of Western Europe. It was to him, apparently, that Charles entrusted the work of revising the Bible and the service books, and thus of initiating the Carolingian liturgical reform which is the foundation of the liturgy of the medieval church. The Roman rite had already been adopted by the Anglo-Saxon Church under Benedictine influence, and it now became the universal rite of the Carolingian Empire, displacing the old Gallican use, which together with the allied Ambrosian and Mozarabic rites had obtained throughout the West, save in Rome and its suburban jurisdiction. But the new Carolingian liturgy still retained traces of Gallican influence, and in this way a considerable Gallican element has entered the Roman liturgy itself.

The influence of Alcuin and the Anglo-Saxon culture is also to be seen in the reform of the script, which is one of the characteristic achievements of the Carolingian age. The new Christian culture of England and Ireland owed its existence to the transmission and multiplication of manuscripts, and had attained a high level of calligraphy. Consequently it was to England, even more than to Italy, that the Carolingian scholars turned for more correct texts, not only of the Bible and the Roman liturgy, but also of the works of classical writers; and both Anglo-Saxon and Irish scholars and copyists flocked to the palace school and the great continental abbeys.

Charlemagne himself took special pains to secure the multiplication of manuscripts and the use of correct texts. Among the instructions to his Missi is a capitulary de Scribis, ut non vitiose scribant, and he frequently complains of the confusion introduced into the services of the Church by the use of cor-
rupt manuscripts. It was largely owing to his efforts and those of Alcuin that the various and illegible cursive scripts of the Merovingian Age were replaced by a new style of writing which became the standard for the whole of Western Europe outside Spain and Ireland and Southern Italy. This was the so-called "Caroline Minuscule" which seems to have originated in the abbey of Corbie in the second half of the eighth century, and reached its highest developments in the famous scriptorium at Alcuin's abbey at Tours. Its general diffusion was no doubt due to its employment by Alcuin and his fellow workers in the revised copies of the liturgical books which were issued under imperial authority.

In this respect the Carolingian Renaissance was a worthy precursor of that of the fifteenth century. In fact it had a direct influence upon the achievement of the latter, for the "humanist script" of the Italian Renaissance is nothing but a revival of the Caroline minuscule hand, which thus became the direct source of the modern printed Latin type. Moreover, it is to the Carolingian copyists that we owe the preservation of a large part of Latin literature, and the modern textual criticism of the classics is still largely based on the manuscripts that have been handed down from this period.

The influence of the Carolingian revival was equally felt in the region of art and architecture. Here again the influence of the imperial tradition was predominant, and it has been said that Charlemagne was the founder of a "Holy Roman" architecture as well as a Holy Roman Empire. But the classical tradition was even more moribund in art than it was in letters. The Carolingian artists were subject both to the oriental-Byzantine and even the oriental-Moorish influences on the one hand, and to that of the mixed Anglo-Celtic art with its passion for geometrical ornament and elaborate spiral and fretted designs on the other. Even Charlemagne's famous Palace Church at Aix-la-Chapelle was built on the thoroughly oriental octagonal plan, whether it was derived directly from the East, or through the medium of the Church of S. Vitale at Ravenna; and this central plan became a favourite model for Carolingian architects in Germany. Nevertheless, even this building shows classical features in its architecture, its columns, and its bronze fountain and doors, and there are other churches, like the one built by Einhard at Steinbach, which preserve the traditional Roman plan of the basilica with apse
and timbered roof. It was from these that the later German Romanesque type of church, with its apse at each end and four towers, which became typical of the Rhineland and Lombardy, was derived.

But it is in miniature-painting and illumination that the mixed art of the Carolingian period is seen to best advantage. The numerous schools of painting which radiate outwards from the Rhineland to the German monasteries on the one hand, and to Metz and Tours and Reims and Corbie on the other, embody in varied proportions the oriental and Anglo-Irish elements that we have mentioned. But their most characteristic feature is their tendency to return to the classical tradition, both in their treatment of the human figure and in their use of the acanthus-leaf ornament. This neo-classical tendency is most fully represented by the manuscripts of the so-called Palace School, such as the famous Vienna Gospels, on which the later German Emperors used to take their coronation oath. It is clearly inspired by the influence of the Byzantine Renaissance and was probably introduced into the north by scribes from Southern Italy. Carolingian art was the direct ancestor of the fine schools of painting which developed in Germany, especially in the Rhineland, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and was thus one of the leading influences in the formation of the artistic style of the early Middle Ages.

The Carolingian Renaissance attained its full development in the generation that followed the death of Charlemagne among the pupils and successors of Alcin; men such as Einhard, the biographer of the great emperor, Rabanus Maurus of Fulda, and his pupils Walafrid Strabo, Abbot of Reichenau, and Servatus Lupus, Abbot of Ferrières. All of these men were great scholars and students of classical literature, and it was through them and their like that the monastic libraries and copying schools attained their full development. The successors of Charlemagne, especially Charles the Bald, carried on his patronage of learning, and under the latter the Palace School of the Western Frankish realm was under the direction of the Irish scholar, Johannes Scotus, or Erigena, who was one of the most original thinkers of the Middle Ages. His philosophy, which was inspired by the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite and through him of the Neoplatonists, resembles that of the Arabic and Jewish philosophers of the tenth and eleventh centuries rather than that of the schools of the West. In-
deed a French scholar—the late Pierre Duhem—has traced a direct influence from him on the philosophy of the Spanish Jew—Ibn Geibirol.

Johannes Scotus was also remarkable for his knowledge of Greek, though in this he does not stand alone. It was shared to some extent by several of his fellow-countrymen, above all by Seculius Scotus, one of the most attractive scholars and poets of the age, who taught at Liège in the middle decades of the ninth century. Moreover, the contact with the culture of the Byzantine world still kept alive a certain amount of Greek scholarship in Italy, as we see from the translations and historical work of Anastasius Bibliothecarius, the author of the later parts of the Liber Pontificalis, who was the central figure of that short-lived revival of culture and literary activity which took place at Rome in the age of Nicholas I and John VIII (858-882). The other leading representative of this movement was Anastasius' friend, John the Deacon, surnamed Hymonides, who brought to the service of the Papacy an enthusiastic devotion to classical culture and to Rome as the heir of the Latin tradition. His life of St. Gregory, which he dedicated to Pope John VIII as the representative of "the people of Romulus," is inspired by these ideals to such an extent that he transforms St. Gregory himself into a humanist Pope of the type of Leo XI. "In Gregory's time," he writes, "wisdom, as it were, visibly built herself a temple in Rome and the Seven Liberal Arts, like seven columns of precious stone, supported the vestibule of the Apostolic See. Not one of those who attended the Pope, from the greatest to the least, showed the slightest trace of barbarism either in speech or dress, and the Latin genius in its classic toga made its home in the Latin palace."

As a description of the Rome of St. Gregory nothing could be more inept, but it is none the less interesting as foreshadowing the humanist ideal of the Papacy as the patron of classical culture, which was to find its realisation six centuries later in the Rome of the Renaissance. There was, however, little room for such ideals in the Rome of the ninth century, threatened, as it was, by the Saracens from without and torn asunder by the feuds of local factions. After the murder of John VIII the temporary revival of culture at Rome came to an end, and the classical tradition survived only in the cities of the South—Naples, Amalfi and Salerno—where the last representatives of Roman culture found a ref-
uge. It was here, at the close of the ninth century, that one
of the Roman exiles composed the curious elegy on the de-
cline of Rome, which is the earliest example of those invec-
tives against the avarice and corruption of Roman society that
are so common in mediaeval literature. Unlike the majority
of such poems, however, it is not inspired by religious ideas.
It is entirely secular and even anticlerical in tone, and has
more in common with the spirit of the Italian Renaissance of
the fifteenth century than with that of the Carolingian Renais-
sance of the North.

It was indeed only in the semi-Byzantine city-states of Italy
that any independent tradition of secular culture survived.
Elsewhere, throughout Central and Northern Europe, the
higher culture was entirely confined to ecclesiastical circles.
The cities had practically no share in it. All intellectual life
was concentrated in the abbeys and in the royal or episcopal
palaces which were themselves like monasteries. Although
trade and town life had not entirely ceased, they were re-
duced to a rudimentary form, and society had become almost
completely agrarian. The economy alike of the Empire and the
Church was based on the ownership of land. The large estate
or villa was organised as a little self-sufficient society, managed
by a bailiff according to the old system of rural administration
which had in the main descended from the senatorial propert-
ies of the later Empire. The produce of such estates might
support the lord and his retinue on their periodic visits, after
the manner of the "one night's farm" of the Saxon and Nor-
man charters, but more often it supplied the needs of the
lord's central residence, which was the apex of the economic
edifice. The Carolingian palace, as revealed by the German ex-
cavations at Ingelheim and elsewhere, was a vast rambling
building, intended to house the whole retinue of the imperial
court. With its porticoes, its churches and its halls, it resem-
bled an abbey, or the old Papal palace of the Lateran, rather
than the modern type of a royal residence. Above all, it was
economically self-sufficient and was surrounded by the dwell-
ings and workshops of the artisans and labourers whose crafts
were necessary for the needs of the court—brewers and bakers,
weavers and spinners, carpenters and workers in metal.

So, too, with the Carolingian abbey. It was no longer a
colony of self-supporting ascetics; it was a great social and
economic centre, the owner of vast estates, the civiliser of
conquered territories, and the scene of a many-sided and
intense cultural activity. The great German monasteries of
the Carolingian period, whose origins were due directly or
indirectly to the work of Boniface, were like the ancient
temple states of Asia Minor, and played a similar part in the
life of the people. In the eighth century, Fulda alone owned
15,000 plough lands; Lorsch somewhat later possessed 911
estates in the Rhineland. At Corbie, in addition to the 300
monks, there was a whole population of craftsmen and de-
pendents grouped round the abbey. We possess in the fa-
mous ninth-century plan of St. Gall a picture of the ideal
Carolingian abbey—a kind of miniature city which includes
within its walls, churches and schools, workshops and gran-
aries, hospitals and baths, mills and farm buildings.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Car-
olingian abbey in the history of early mediaeval civilisation.
Here was an institution which was based on a purely agrarian
economy and yet embodied the highest spiritual and intel-
lectual culture of the age. The great abbeys, such as St. Gall
and Reichenau, Fulda and Corbie, were not only the intel-
lectual and religious leaders of Europe, but also the chief
centres of material culture and of artistic and industrial ac-
tivity. In them there was developed the traditions of learning
and literature, art and architecture, music and liturgy, paint-
ing and calligraphy, which were the foundations of mediaeval
culture. For that culture was in its origins essentially liturgical
and centred in the Divine Office—*Opus Dei*—which was the
source and end of the monastic life. And in the same way
the vast wealth of the monasteries was not simply the prop-
erty of the abbot and the community, as we should view it; it
was the patrimony of the saint in whose name the church
was dedicated. All the lands of an abbey and all its economic
activity were subject to a supernatural governor and enjoyed
supernatural protection. Hence the serfs of the Church were
in a different category to those of other lords, and we find
free men voluntarily surrendering their liberty in order to
become the "Saints' Men"—"Homes Sanctorum" or "Saint-
eurs"—as they were called.

Under these conditions it is easy to understand how the
monasteries were able to clear the forests and drain the fens
and to establish flourishing settlements in places that had
formerly been waste; like the Isle of Thorney, which William
of Malmesbury describes in a well-known passage, standing
like a Paradise in the waste of the fens with its groves and
meadows, its vineyards and orchards—a miracle of nature and art.

And the monasteries were not only great agricultural centres, they were also centres of trade; and, thanks to the immunities that they enjoyed, they were able to establish markets, to coin money and even to develop a system of credit. They fulfilled in a primitive fashion the function of banks and insurance societies. Landowners could purchase pensions or become permanent residents at a monastery as oblates. Thus the Carolingian culture far outlived the Empire itself, and continued to survive in monastic centres such as St. Gall, the home of the four Ekkehards and the two Notker, while Western Europe was plunging into the deepest anarchy and distress that it has perhaps ever known. It was owing to the work of the monasteries that the Carolingian culture was able to survive the fall of the Carolingian Empire. All through the darkness and distress of the hundred years of anarchy from 850 to 950 the great monasteries of Central Europe, such as St. Gall and Reichenau and Corvey, kept the flame of civilisation alight, so that there was no interruption in the transmission of the culture from the Carolingian period to that of the new Saxon Empire.
THE AGE OF THE VIKINGS
AND THE CONVERSION OF THE NORTH

We have seen how Western Europe first achieved cultural unity in the Carolingian period. The rise of the Carolingian Empire marks the end of the dualism of culture that had characterized the age of the invasions and the full acceptance by the Western barbarians of the ideal of unity for which the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church alike stood. And thus in the new culture all the elements that constitute European civilisation were already represented—the political tradition of the Roman Empire, the religious tradition of the Catholic Church, the intellectual tradition of classical learning and the national traditions of the barbarian peoples.

Nevertheless, it was a premature synthesis, since the forces of barbarism both within and without the Empire were still far too strong to be completely assimilated. Within the limits of the Carolingian world itself, there was an almost immeasurable gap between the artificial humanism of men like Servatius Lupus and Walfrid Strabo and the mentality of the warrior noble or the peasant serf: while in the outer lands there yet remained new peoples who were still unaffected by the influence of Christianity and Roman-Christian civilisation. Hence the age of Carolingian unity was followed by a violent reaction, in which a new wave of barbarian invasion threatened to destroy all the work of Charles the Great and his predecessors, and to reduce Europe to a state of anarchy and confusion even more complete than that which followed the fall of the Roman Empire four centuries earlier.