

1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 5 — Charles (Duke of Burgundy)



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CHARLES, called **THE BOLD** (1433–1477), duke of Burgundy, son of Philip the Good of Burgundy and Isabella of Portugal, was born at Dijon on the 10th of November 1433. In his father's lifetime he bore the title of count of Charolais. He was brought up under the direction of the seigneur d'Auxy, and early showed great application to study and also to warlike exercises. Although he was on familiar terms with the dauphin (afterwards Louis XI.), when the latter was a refugee at the court of Burgundy, he could not but view with chagrin the repurchase by the king of France of the towns on the Somme, which had been temporarily ceded to Philip the Good by the treaty of Arras; and when his father's failing health enabled him to take into his hands the reins of government (which Philip abandoned to him completely by an act of the 12th of April 1465), he entered upon his lifelong struggle against Louis XI., and became one of the principal leaders of the League of the Public Weal. His brilliant bravery at the battle of Monthéry (16th of July 1465), where he was wounded and was left master of the field, neither prevented the king from re-entering Paris nor assured Charles a decisive victory. He succeeded, however, in forcing upon Louis the treaty of Conflans (1466), by which the king restored to him the towns on the Somme, and promised him the hand of his infant daughter Catherine, with Champagne as dowry. In the meanwhile the count of Charolais obtained the surrender of Ponthieu. The revolt of Liége and Dinant intervened to divert his attention from the affairs of France.

On the 25th of August 1466 Charles took possession of Dinant, which he pillaged and sacked, and succeeded in treating at the same time with the Liégeois. After the death of Philip the Good (15th June 1467), the Liégeois renewed hostilities, but Charles defeated them at St Trond, and made a victorious entry into Liége, which he dismantled and deprived of some of its privileges.

Alarmed by these early successes of the duke of Burgundy, and anxious to settle various questions relating to the execution of the treaty of Conflans, Louis requested a meeting with Charles and placed himself in his hands at Péronne. In the course of the negotiations the duke was informed of a fresh revolt of the Liégeois secretly fomented by Louis. After deliberating for four days how to deal with his adversary, who had thus maladroitly placed himself at his mercy, Charles decided to respect the parole he had given and to treat with Louis (October 1468), at the same time forcing him to assist in quelling the revolt. The town was carried by assault and the inhabitants were massacred, Louis not having the courage to intervene on behalf of his ancient allies. At the expiry of the one year's truce which followed the treaty of Péronne, the king accused Charles of treason, cited him to appear before the parlement, and seized some of the towns on the Somme (1471). The duke retaliated by invading France with a large army, taking possession of Nesle and massacring its inhabitants. He failed, however, in an attack on Beauvais, and had to content himself with ravaging the country as far as Rouen,

eventually retiring without having attained any useful result.

Other matters, moreover, engaged his attention. Relinquishing, if not the stately magnificence, at least the gay and wasteful profusion which had characterized the court of Burgundy under the preceding duke, he had bent all his efforts towards the development of his military and political power. Since the beginning of his reign he had employed himself in reorganizing his army and the administration of his territories. While retaining the principles of feudal recruiting, he had endeavoured to establish a system of rigid discipline among his troops, which he had strengthened by taking into his pay foreign mercenaries, particularly Englishmen and Italians, and by developing his artillery. Furthermore, he had lost no opportunity of extending his power. In 1469 the archduke of Austria, Sigismund, had sold him the county of Ferrette, and the landgraviate of Alsace and some other towns, reserving to himself the right to repurchase. In 1472–1473 Charles bought the reversion of the duchy of Gelderland from its old duke, Arnold, whom he had supported against the rebellion of his son. Not content with being “the grand duke of the West,” he conceived the project of forming a kingdom of Burgundy or Arles with himself as independent sovereign, and even persuaded the emperor Frederick to assent to crown him king at Trier. The ceremony, however, did not take place owing to the emperor’s precipitate flight by night (September 1473), occasioned by his displeasure at

the duke's attitude. In the following year Charles involved himself in a series of difficulties and struggles which ultimately brought about his downfall. He embroiled himself successively with Sigismund of Austria, to whom he refused to restore his possessions in Alsace for the stipulated sum; with the Swiss, who supported the free towns of Alsace in their revolt against the tyranny of the ducal governor, Peter von Hagenbach (who was condemned and executed by the rebels in May 1474); and finally, with René of Lorraine, with whom he disputed the succession of Lorraine, the possession of which had united the two principal portions of Charles's territories—Flanders and the duchy and county of Burgundy. All these enemies, incited and supported as they were by Louis, were not long in joining forces against their common adversary. Charles suffered a first rebuff in endeavouring to protect his kinsman, the archbishop of Cologne, against his rebel subjects. He spent ten months (July 1474-June 1475) in besieging the little town of Neuss on the Rhine, but was compelled by the approach of a powerful imperial army to raise the siege. Moreover, the expedition he had persuaded his brother-in-law, Edward IV. of England, to undertake against Louis was stopped by the treaty of Picquigny (29th of August 1475). He was more successful in Lorraine, where he seized Nancy (30th of November 1475). From Nancy he marched against the Swiss, hanging and drowning the garrison of Granson in spite of the capitulation. Some days later, however, he was attacked before Granson by the confederate army and suffered a shameful defeat, being

compelled to fly with a handful of attendants, and leaving his artillery and an immense booty in the hands of the allies (February 1476). He succeeded in raising a fresh army of 30,000 men, with which he attacked Morat, but he was again defeated by the Swiss army, assisted by the cavalry of René of Lorraine (22nd of June 1476). On the 6th of October Charles lost Nancy, which was re-entered by René. Making a last effort, Charles formed a new army and arrived in the depth of winter before the walls of Nancy. Having lost many of his troops through the severe cold, it was with only a few thousand men that he met the joint forces of the Lorrainers and the Swiss, who had come to the relief of the town (6th of January 1477). He himself perished in the fight, his mutilated body being discovered some days afterwards.

Charles the Bold has often been regarded as the last representative of the feudal spirit—a man who possessed no other quality than a blind bravery—and accordingly has often been contrasted with his rival Louis XI. as representing modern politics. In reality, he was a prince of wide knowledge and culture, knowing several languages and austere in morals; and although he cannot be acquitted of occasional harshness, he had the secret of winning the hearts of his subjects, who never refused him their support in times of difficulty. He was thrice married—to Catherine (d. 1446), daughter of Charles VII. of France, by whom he had one daughter, Mary, afterwards the wife of the Emperor Maximilian I.; to Isabella (d. 1465), daughter of Charles I.,

duke of Bourbon; and to Margaret of York, sister of Edward IV. of England, whom he married in 1468.

The original authorities for the life and times of Charles the Bold are the numerous French, Burgundian and Flemish chroniclers of the latter part of the 15th century. Special mention may be made of the *Mémoires* of Philippe de Comines, and of the *Mémoires* and other writings of Olivier de la Marche. See also A. Molinier, *Les Sources de l'histoire de France*, tome iv. (1904), and the compendious bibliography in U. Chevalier's *Répertoire des sources historiques*, part iii. (1904). *Charles the Bold*, by J. F. Kirk (1863–1868), is a good English biography for its date; a more recent life is R. Putnam's *Charles the Bold* (1908). For a general sketch of the relations between France and Burgundy at this time see E. Lavissee, *Histoire de France*, tome iv. (1902). ([R. Po.](#))

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