

## La menace des Franks

H. 117, 1848; in collection *Vox populi*

Anonymous

### La menace des Franks

Ah! si, le sceptre en main,  
trop fier d'un pouvoir surhumain,  
Roi, tu prétends éclipser notre gloire,  
À la victoire, à la victoire  
On nous verra marcher soudain.

Malgré ta couronne  
tu trembleras  
Et de ton trône  
tu redescendras.  
Les bras, les âmes,  
Enfants et femmes,  
Tout pour nous combattra,  
tout à nous s'unira,  
Et contre toi sur nos pas entraîné,  
Armé du fer et des flammes,  
Le peuple entier marchera.

### The Menace of the Franks

Oh, if, scepter in hand,  
Too proud of o'erweening power,  
King, you claim to stifle our glory,  
To victory, to victory  
They'll see us march.

Despite your crown  
You will tremble,  
And from your throne  
You will step down.  
Strong arms and souls,  
Women and children,  
All will fight for us,  
All will join with us,  
And swept along in our footsteps,  
Armed with torches and steel  
Against you the people will march.

(The second section is repeated in its entirety.)

– Translation by Katharine Conley  
and Katherine Kolb

In Berlioz's autograph, the title reads "La Menace du Peuple," i.e. "The Menace of the People." His change of "People" to "Franks" registers a distinction hinted at in the final stanza between the people (the masses) and their leaders, in whose footsteps ordinary men, women, and children will march to defy a king who has overstepped his power. When Berlioz composed the piece in February 1848, the French had just overthrown Louis-Philippe and established a second Republic. The first French Republic had followed the Revolution of 1789, which established "our glory": that of a nation of free citizens as opposed to a kingdom of subjects ruled by a king. As for the Franks, they were the Germanic tribe that gave France its name. According to the snapshot view of French history, the conquest of a Celtic, peasant Gaul previously under Roman rule by the Franks, a branch of the people who had once sacked Rome, brought to the future French territory the founding elements of a nobility and a monarchy. In theory, the king ruled as one noble among many—first among equals. In practice, French history would exhibit an ongoing power struggle between the king and his would-be equals, seemingly ended by the absolute monarchs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If this song speaks of "trembling" before a threatened violence but also seeks to temper that threat, it is because the French remained haunted by memories of the mob mentality of 1793, when King Louis XVI and many aristocrats fell victim to the guillotine. – KK

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