

pressing him sharply, making havoc in his rear-guard, reaching Châlons so closely upon his march that the Goths, under Torismond, the young and valiant son of their king, were able to seize a commanding height in the midst of the field, driving back the Huns who were ascending from the opposite side.

The battle that followed was one of the decisive battles of history. Had the Huns won the victory, all western Europe might have become their prey. The victory of Ætius was the first check received by this mighty horde in their career of ruin and devastation. The conflict, as described by the historians of the time, was "fierce, various, obstinate, and bloody; such as could not be paralleled, either in the present or in past ages." The number of the slain is variously estimated at from three hundred thousand to about half that number. Exaggerated as these estimates undoubtedly are, they will serve to indicate the ferocity and bloody nature of the struggle. For a time it seemed as if the Huns would win. Led by their king, they broke through the centre of the allies, separated their wings, turned their whole strength against the Goths, and slew Theodoric, their king, at the head of his men.

But the victory which seemed theirs was snatched from them by the valiant Torismond, who descended from the height he had seized, assailed the Huns with intrepid courage, and so changed the fortune of the field that Attila was obliged to retreat,—vanquished for the first time in his long career. The approach of night alone saved the Huns from a total defeat. They retired within the circle of their