

LA CHANSON DE ROLAND
TRANSLATED FROM THE SEVENTH EDITION OF LEON GAUTIER
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FIGURE 1 THE DEATH OF ROLAND AT THE BATTLE OF RONCEVAL, ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT, 1455.

CHARLEMAGNE IN SPAIN

I.

[Carle our most noble Emperor and King](#).¹

Hath tarried now full seven years in Spain,²

Conqu'ring the highland regions to the sea;

No fortress stands before him unsubdued,

Nor wall, nor city left, to be destroyed,

Save Sarraguce,³ high on a mountain set.

There rules the [King Marsile](#) who loves not God,

Apollo⁴ worships and Mohammed serves;

Nor can he from his evil doom escape.

Aoi.⁵

GANELON'S TREASON (SUMMARY)

At the end of his seven-year campaign against Spain, Charlemagne finds he cannot penetrate the walls of King Marsile's Saragossa. Fearful of a siege, Marsile promises through a messenger that if Charlemagne will leave Spain, then Marsile will present himself with a ransom at Charlemagne's court to be converted to Christianity. Charlemagne accepts the offer and sends an ambassador to convey same.

¹ Charlemagne (aka Charles the Great, Charles I), King of the Franks and Lombards, Emperor of Europe (742-814).

² Charlemagne was on a mission to Christianize Muslim Spain.

³ [Saragossa](#).

⁴ Apollyon (aka Abaddon, an angel of destruction); medieval Christians believed that Muslims worshipped the unholy trinity of Muhammad, [Abaddon](#), and [Termagant](#). As Termagant is a fiction created by medieval Christians, it is, of course, untrue.

⁵ "The word "Aoi," which is placed at the end of every stanza, and found in no other ancient French poems, is interpreted differently by the commentators. M. Francisque Michel assimilated it at first to the termination of an ecclesiastical chant—Preface, xxvii.—and later to the Saxon Abeg, or the English Away, as a sort of refrain which the "jongleur" repeated at the end of the couplets. M. Génin explains it by ad viam, a vei, avoie, away! it is done, let us go on!

M. Gautier, with his skeptical honesty, declares the word unexplained. See Note 9, p. 4, of his seventh edition." (Léonce Rabillon, trans. *La Chanson de Roland*. Leon Gautier, 7th ed. New York: Holt and Company [1885]: x.)



FIGURE 2 CHARLEMAGNE INFLECTING BAPTISM UPON THE SAXONS, A. DE NEUVILLE.⁶
THIS SUBMISSION TO CHARLEMAGNE AND HIS GOD IS WHAT KING MARSILE MUST CONSIDER.

On the advice of Roland, Charlemagne's nephew and leader of his rear-guard, the Franks send Ganelon, Roland's stepfather, to deliver the message. Because all of the previous ambassadors to Marsile had died horrible deaths, Ganelon assumes that Roland is setting him up for a similar fate. In retaliation to the perceived insult, Ganelon betrays Roland and Charlemagne to King Marsile. Knowing that Roland would lead several other [Paladins](#) and the rear-guard, Ganelon tells Marsile how to ambush the rear-guard at the narrow mountain pass of Ronceval.

⁶ Illustration from Francois Pierre Guillaume Guizot . *A Popular History of France From The Earliest Times Volume I*. Boston: Estes and Lauriat (1869): 215.

PRELUDE TO THE GREAT BATTLE.⁷

LXXXI.

[Olivier](#)⁸ from the summit of a hill⁹
On his right hand looks o'er a grassy vale,
And views the Pagans'¹⁰ onward marching hordes;
Then straight he called his faithful friend Rollánd:
"From Spain a distant rumbling noise I hear,
So many hauberks white and flashing helms
I see!—This will inflame our French men's hearts.
The treason is the work of Ganelon
Who named us for this post before the King."
"Hush! Olivier!"—the Count Rollánd replies,
"'Tis my step-father, speak no other word."
Aoi.

LXXXII.

Count Olivier is posted on a hill
From whence Spain's Kingdom he descries,¹¹ and all
The swarming host of Saracens; their helms
So bright bedecked with gold, and their great shields,
Their 'broidered hauberks, and their waving flags,
He cannot count the squadrons; in such crowds
They come, his sight reached not unto their end.
Then all bewildered he descends the hill,
Rejoins the French, and all to them relates.
Aoi.

LXXXIII.

Said Olivier: "I have seen Pagans more
Than eyes e'er saw upon the earth; at least
One hundred thousand warriors armed with shields,
In their white hauberks clad, with helmets laced,
Lances in rest, and burnished brazen spears.
Battle ye will have, such as ne'er was before.
French Lords, may God inspire you with his strength!
Stand firm your ground, that we may not succumb."
The French say: "Cursed be those who fly the field!
Ready to die, not one shall fail you here."
Aoi.

⁷ The Battle of Ronceval Pass.

⁸ Roland's best friend and fellow-Paladin. Roland is engaged to Olivier's sister, Aude.

⁹ At Ronceval Pass, the rear-guard is about to be cut off from the rest of the army.

¹⁰ The Saracens or Muslim army.

¹¹ Sees.

ROLAND'S PRIDE.

LXXXIV.

Olivier said: "So strong the Pagan host;
Our French, methinks, in number are too few;
Companion Rollánd, sound your horn,¹² that Carle¹³
May hear and send his army back to help."
Rollánd replies:—"Great folly would be mine,
And all my glory in sweet France be lost.
No, I shall strike great blows with Durendal;¹⁴
To the golden hilt the blade shall reek with blood.
In evil hour the felon¹⁵ Pagans came
Unto the Pass, for all are doomed to die!"
Aoi.

LXXXV.

"Rollánd, companion, sound your olifant,¹⁶
That Carle may hear and soon bring back the host.
With all his Baronage¹⁷ the king will give
Us help!"—Replied Rollánd:—"May God fore-fend
That for my cause my kindred e'er¹⁸ be blamed,
Or that dishonor fall upon sweet France.
Nay, I will deal hard blows with Durendal,
This my good sword now girt unto my side
Whose blade you'll see all reeking with red blood.
Those felon Pagans have for their ill fate
Together met—yea, death awaits them all."
Aoi.

LXXXVI.

"Companion Rollánd, sound your olifant!
If Carle who passes through the mounts shall hear,
To you I pledge my word, the French return."
Answered Rollánd:—"May God forbid!—Ne'er be
It said by living man that Pagans could
Cause me to blow my horn, to bring disgrace
Upon my kin!—When on the battle field,
I'll strike one thousand seven hundred blows,
And Durendal all bleeding shall you see.
[The French are brave and bravely will they strike.]
Those Spanish Moors are doomed to certain death."
Aoi.

LXXXVII.

¹² An ivory battle horn.

¹³ Charlemagne.

¹⁴ Roland's sword.

¹⁵ Criminal, unlawful.

¹⁶ The battle horn is made of ivory and called an olifant for the animal whence it came (elephant).

¹⁷ That is the Barons or French nobility.

¹⁸ Ever.

Olivier said:—"To me there seems no shame;
I have beheld the Moors¹⁹ of Spain; they swarm
O'er mountains, vales and lands, hide all the plains;
Great is this stranger host; our number small."
Rollánd replies:—"The more my ardor grows.
God and his [blessed] angels grant that France
Lose naught of her renown through my default.
Better to die than in dishonor [live.]
The more we strike the more Carle's love we gain!"
Aoi.

LXXXVIII.

Rollánd is brave and Olivier is wise;
Both knights of wond'rous courage—and in arms
And mounted on their steeds, they both will die
Ere ²⁰ they will shun the fight. Good are the Counts²¹
And proud their words.—The Pagan felons ride
In fury on!—"Rollánd," said Olivier,
"One moment, look! Our foes so close, and Carle
Afar from us—you have not deigned to blow
Your horn! If came the king, no hurt were ours.
Cast your eyes toward the great defiles²² of Aspre;²³
There see this most unhappy rear-guard. [Those
Who here fight, ne'er shall fight on other fields.]"
Rollánd retorts:—"Speak not such shameful words.
Woe unto him who bears a coward's heart
Within his breast. There firm shall we remain;
The combat and the blows from us shall come."
Aoi.

LXXXIX.

Now when Rollánd the battle sees at hand,
More than a leopard's or a lion's pride
He shows. He calls the French and Olivier:
"Companion, friend, pray, speak of this no more.
The Emperor who left his French in trust
To us, has chos'n those twenty thousand men.
Right well he knows none has a coward's soul.
A man should suffer hurt for his good lord,
Endure great cold or scorching heat, and give
Even to his flesh and blood—Strike with your lance,
And I with Durendal, my trusty sword,
Carle's gift. If here I die, may he who wins
It, say:—"Twas once the sword of a brave knight."
Aoi.

XC.

¹⁹ Muslims; also dark-skinned men.

²⁰ Before.

²¹ The French noblemen.

²² A passage so narrow men must march single-file.

²³ Aspre is another defile in the Pyrenees.

[Turpin the Archbishop](#) from another side,
Spurring his courser, mounts a hill and calls
The French around. This sermon to them speaks:
"Seigneurs Barons, Carle left us here: for him,
Our King, our duty is to die, to aid
In saving Christendom, the Faith of Christ
Uphold. There, battle will ye have, for there
Before your eyes behold the Saracens.
Confess your sins, and for God's mercy pray!
For your soul's cure I absolution give....
If you should die, as holy martyrs ye
Will fall, and places find in Paradise!"
The French alight and fall upon their knees;
The Godly Archbishop grants them benison,
Giving for penance his command to strike.
Aoi.

XCI.
The French arise. They stand assoiled and quit
Of all sins, blessed by Turpin in God's name.
On swift [destriers](#)²⁴ they mount, armed cap-a-pie²⁵
Calls Olivier:—"Companion, sire, full well
You know, it is Count Ganelon who has
Betrayed us all, and guerdon²⁶ rich received
In gold and silver; well the Emp'ror should
Avenge us! King Marsile a bargain made
Of us, but swords will make the reck'ning good."
Aoi.

XCII.
Through the defiles of Spain hath passed Rollánd
Mounted on Veillantif,²⁷ his charger swift
And strong, bearing his bright and glitt'ring arms.
On goes the brave Rollánd, his lance borne up
Skyward, beneath its point a pennon bound,
Snow-white, whose fringes flap his hand.
Fair is his form, his visage bright with smiles.
Behind him follows Olivier his friend;
The French with joy, him as their champion, hail.
He on the Heathens throws a haughty glance,
But casts a sweet and humble look upon
His French, and to them speaks with courteous tone:
"Seigneurs Barons, march steadily and close.
These Pagans hither came to find a grave;
We here shall conquer such great spoil to-day
As never yet was gained by Kings of France."
Even as he spoke the word, the armies met.
Aoi.

²⁴ War-horses.

²⁵ Head to toe.

²⁶ Reward.

²⁷ Roland's war-horse.

XCIII.

Said Olivier:—"No care have I to speak,
Since you deigned not to blow your olifant,
All hope of help from Carle for you is lost.
He knows no word of this; the fault lies not
In him, nor are yon Knights to blame—ride on
And gallop to the charge as best you can.
Seigneurs Barons, recoil not from the foe,
In God's name! bearing ever this in mind,
Hard blows to deal and hard blows to endure
Forget we not the war-cry of King Carle!"
At this word all the French together shout.
Who then had heard the cry, "Montjoie!"²⁸ had known
What courage is. Then all together rush
Right onward; God! with what an onset fierce!
Deeply they spur their steeds for greater speed;
They burn to fight. What else can they desire?
The Saracens stand firm and nothing fear...
Behold the Franks and Pagans hand to hand...
Aoi.

THE MELEE.

XCIV.

The nephew of Marsile—his name Aëlroth,²⁹
Forward the first of all spurs on his horse
Against our French, hurling forth insulting words:
"To-day, French villains, ye will joust with us;
Who was to guard you, has betrayed you; mad
Must be the King who left you in the pass.
So now the honor of sweet France is lost,
And Carle the great shall lose his right arm here."
Rollând heard.—God! what pain to him! He drives
His golden spurs into his courser's flanks,
And rushes at full speed against Aëlroth;
His shield he breaks, dismails the hauberk linked;
Cleaving his breast, he severs all the bones,
And from the spine the ribs disjoint. The lance
Forth from his body thrusts the Pagan's soul;
The Heathen's corse³⁰ reels from his horse, falls down
Upon the earth, the neck cloven in two halves.
Rollând still taunts him:—"Go thou, wretch, and know
Carle was not mad. Ne'er did he treason love,
And he did well to leave us in the pass.
To-day sweet France will not her honor lose!
Strike, Frenchmen, strike; the first sword-stroke is ours;

²⁸ The afore-mentioned war-cry of Charlemagne.

²⁹ The negative analog to Roland.

³⁰ Corpse.

We have the right, these gluttons have the wrong!"
Aoi.

XCV.

Then comes a Duke whose name is Falsarun;
He is the brother of the King Marsile.
The lands of Dathan and of Abirun
He holds: no viler wretch lives under Heaven.
Vast is his forehead, and the space between
His deeply sunken eyes is half a foot.
Seeing his nephew dead, in grief he bounds
Forth from the serried ranks, and shouts aloud
The Pagan war-cry, furious 'gainst the French.
"To-day," he cries, "at last sweet France shall lose
Her fame!"—When Olivier heard this, in wrath
He pricks with golden spurs his charger's flanks,
And, like true baron, lifts his arm to strike,
Shivers the Pagan's shield, his hauberk tears
Apart. The pennon's folds pass through his breast
As with the shaft he hurls him from the selle,³¹
A mangled corpse;—here lies he on the ground.
Unto the prostrate body Olivier
Says proudly:—"Wretch, to me thy threats are vain!
Strike boldly, Franks! The victory shall be ours!
Montjoie!" he shouts, the battle-cry of Carle.
Aoi.

XCVI.

A king, named Corsablis, from Barbarie,³²
A distant land, is there.—The Pagan host
He calls;—"The field is ours with ease: the French
So few in numbers we may well disdain,
Nor Carle shall rescue one; all perish here.
To-day, they all are doomed to death!" Turpin
The Archbishop heard him; lived no man on earth
He hated more than Corsablis; he pricks
His horse with both his spurs of purest gold,
And 'gainst him rushes with tremendous force.
The shield and hauberk split; and with a stroke
Of the long lance into his body driven,
Corsablis lifeless drops across the path;
Him, though a corpse, Turpin addresses thus:
"Thou, coward Pagan, thou hast lied! Great Carl
My lord, was ever and will ever be
Our help; and Frenchmen know not how to fly.
As for thy fellows, we can keep them here;
I tell you, each this day shall die.—Strike, Franks,
Yourselves forget not. This first blow, thank God,
Is ours! Montjoie!" cries he, to hold the field.
Aoi.

³¹ Saddle.

³² Arabia.

XCVII.

Gérin³³ attacks Malprimis de Brigal
Whose good shield now was not a denier³⁴ worth:
The crystal boss all broken, and one half
Fall'n on the ground. Down to the flesh Gérin
His hauberk cleaves, and passes through his heart
The brazen point of a stout lance. Then falls
The Pagan chief and dies by that good blow;
And Sathanas³⁵ bears off the wretched soul.
Aoi.

XCVIII.

Gérier,³⁶ his comrade, strikes the Amurafle,³⁷
Breaks his good shield, his hauberk white unmails,
Plants in his heart a spear's steel point with such
Good aim, one blow has pierced the body through;
And his strong lance-thrust hurls him dead to earth.—
Said Olivier: "A noble combat ours!"
Aoi.

XCIX.

Duke Sansun³⁸ rushes on the Almazour;³⁹
He splits the shield with painted flowers and gold
Embossed. The strong-mailed hauberk shelters not,
As he is pierced through liver, heart and lungs.
For him may mourn who will—death-struck he falls:
"That is a Baron's stroke!" the Archbishop cries.
Aoi.

C.

Anseïs⁴⁰ gives his steed the rein, and charges
Fierce on Turgis de Turteluse; beneath
The golden boss asunder breaks the shield,
Rips up the hauberk double-linked; so true
The thrust, that all the steel passed through his breast.
With this one blow the shaft has struck him dead.
Rollánd exclaimed: "The stroke is of a Knight!"
Aoi.

CI.

Then Engelier,⁴¹ the Gasquin⁴² of Burdele,
Spurs deep his horse, and casting loose the rein,

³³ A Paladin, one of the 12 Peers of Charlemagne.

³⁴ French coin.

³⁵ Satan.

³⁶ Another Paladin.

³⁷ Admiral.

³⁸ Also, Samson; another Paladin.

³⁹ Arabic military title.

⁴⁰ Paladin.

⁴¹ Paladin.

⁴² Gascon from Gascony, a region in France.

Rushes upon Escremiz de Valterne;
Breaks down the buckler fastened to his throat
And rends his gorget-mail; full in the breast
The lance strikes deep and passes in between
The collar bones; dead from the saddle struck
He falls.—And Turpin says: "Ye all are lost!"
Aoi.

CII.
Othon⁴³ assails a Pagan, Estorgant,
His thrust hits hard the leather of the shield,
Effacing its bright colors red and white,
Breaks in his hauberk's sides, and plunges deep
Within his heart a strong and trenchant spear,
From off the flying steed striking him dead.
This done, he says:—"No hope for you remains!"
Aoi.

CIII.
And Bérengier⁴⁴ smites now Estramaris,
Splits down his shield, shivers his coat of mail
In shreds and through his bosom drives a lance.
Dead 'midst one thousand Saracens he drops.
Of their twelve Peers⁴⁵ now ten have breathed their last:
Chernuble—Margariz, the Count, survive.
Aoi.

CIV.
Most valiant Knight is Margariz. 'Mid all
Beauteous, strong, slender, quick of hand. He spurs
His horse and charges Olivier; beneath
The boss of purest gold his shield breaks down,
Then at his side a pointed lance he aims;
But God protects him, for the blow ne'er reached
The flesh. The point grazed only, wounding not.
Then Margariz unhindered rides away
And sounds his horn to rally his own men.
Aoi.

CV.
The battle rages fierce. All men engage.
Rollánd, the dauntless, combats with his lance
As long as holds the shaft. Fifteen good blows
It dealt, then broke and fell; now his good sword,
Loved Durendal, he draws, spurs on his steed
'Gainst Chernubles, splits his bright helm adorned
With gems; one blow cleaves through mail-cap and skull,
Cutting both eyes and visage in two parts,
And the white hauberk with its close-linked mail;

⁴³ Also Otton or Otto; a Paladin.

⁴⁴ Paladin.

⁴⁵ That is, the twelve Muslim Peers, negative analogs of the French Peers.

Down to the body's fork, the saddle all
Of beaten gold, still deeper goes the sword,
Cuts through the courser's chine, nor seeks the joint.
Upon the verdant grass fall dead both knight
And steed. And then he cries: "Wretch! ill inspired
To venture here! Mohammed helped thee not....
Wretches like you this battle shall not win."
Aoi.

CVI.
The Count Rollând rides through the battle-field
And makes, with Durendal's keen blade in hand,
A mighty carnage of the Saracens.
Ah! had you then beheld the valiant Knight
Heap corse on corse; blood drenching all the ground;
His own arms, hauberk, all besmeared with gore,
And his good steed from neck to shoulder bleed!
Still Olivier halts not in his career.
Of the twelve Peers not one deserves reproach,
And all the French strike well and massacre
The foe. The Pagans dead or dying fall.
Cries the Archbishop: "Well done, Knights of France!
Montjoie! Montjoie! It is Carle's battle cry!"
Aoi.

CVII.
Olivier grasps the truncheon⁴⁶ of his lance,
Spurs through the storm and fury of the fight,
And rushes on the Pagan Malsarun,
Breaks down his shield with flowers and gold embossed,
Thrusts from their orbs his eyes; his brains dashed out
Are crushed and trampled 'neath the victor's feet;
With seven hundred men of theirs he fell.
The Count next slew Turgis and Estorgus;
But now the shaft breaks short off by his hand.
Then said Rollând: "What mean you, Compagnon?⁴⁷
In such a fight as this 'tis not a staff
We need, but steel and iron, as I deem.
Where now that sword called Halteclere, with hilt
Of gold and crystal pommel?" "I lack time
To draw it," valiant Olivier replies,
"So busy is my hand in dealing blows!"
Aoi.

CVIII.
Lord Olivier then his good sword unsheathed,
For which Rollând entreated him so much,
And showed it to his friend with knightly pride;
Strikes down a Pagan, Justin de Val-Ferrée,
Whose head is severed by the blow; cuts through

⁴⁶ Handle.

⁴⁷ Companion.

Th' embroider'd hauberk, through the body, through
The saddle all with studs and gold embossed,
And through the back-bone of the steed. Both man
And steed fall on the grass before him, dead.
Rollánd exclaims: "Henceforth, you are indeed
My brother! These, the strokes loved by King Carle!"
And echoes round the cry: "Montjoie! Montjoie!"
Aoi.

CIX.

The Count Gérin sits on his horse, Sorel,
And his companion Gérier, on Passe-Cerf,
They loose the reins, and both spur on against
A Pagan, Timozel. One strikes the shield,
The other strikes the hauberk;—in his heart
The two spears meet and hurl him lifeless down.
I never heard it said nor can I know
By which of them the swifter blow was struck.—
Esperveris, son to Borel, was next
By Engelier de Burdele⁴⁸ slain. Turpin
With his own hand gave death to Siglorel
Th' Enchanter who once entered hell, led there
By Jupiter's craft. Turpin said:—"Forfeit paid
For crime!"—"The wretch is vanquished," cried Rollánd,
"My brother Olivier, such blows I love!"
Aoi.

CX.

The combat paused not. Franks and Pagans vie
In dealing blows; attacking now, and now
Defending. Splintered spears, dripping with blood
So many; o'er the field such numbers strewn:
Of banners torn and shattered gonfalons!
So many valiant French mowed in their prime,
Whom mothers and sweet wives will never see
Again, nor those of France who in the Pass
Await them! Carle for these shall weep and mourn.
But what avails? Naught can he help them now.
Ill service rendered Ganelon to them
The day when he to Sarraguce repaired
To sell his kin. Ere long for this he lost
Both limb and life, judged and condemned at Aix,
There to be hanged with thirty of his race
Who were not spared the punishment of death.
Aoi.

CXI.

The battle rages. Wonders all perform;
Rollánd and Olivier strike hard; Turpin
Th' Archbishop, deals more than a thousand blows;
The twelve Peers dally not upon the field,

⁴⁸ Another Paladin.

While all the French together fight as if
One man. By hundreds and by thousands fall
The Pagans: none escapes death, save those who fly
Whether they will or no, all lose their lives.
And yet the French have lost their strongest arms,
Their fathers and their kin they will ne'er see
Again, nor Carle who waits them in the Pass.
Meantime in France an awful scourge prevails:
Wind, storm, rain, hail and flashing lightning bolts
Conflict confusedly, and naught more true,
The earth shook from Saint Michiel-del-Peril
As far as to the Saints, from Besançon
Unto the [sea-port] of Guitzand; no house
Whose walls unshaken stood; darkness at noon
Shrouded the sky. No beam of light above
Save when a flash rips up the clouds. Dismayed
Beholders cry:—"The world's last day has come,
The destined end of all things is at hand!"
Unwitting of the truth, their speech is vain....
'Tis dolour⁴⁹ for the death of Count Rollánd!
Aoi.

CXII.

The French [strike] hard; they strike with all their force.
In multitudes—by thousands die their foes;
Not two out of one hundred thousand now
Survive. [Turpin] says:—"Brave are all our men;—
None braver under Heaven—In the Geste⁵⁰
Of France 'tis writ true vassals have our Kings."
Seeking their friends, they overrun the field.
Their eyes are filled with tenderness and tears
For their dear kindred they so fondly loved....
Now King Marsile with his great host appears....
Aoi.

CXIII.

Marsile advances 'midst a valley deep,
Surrounded by the mighty host he brought,
In twenty squadrons mustered and arrayed.
Bright shine the helmets strewn with gold and gems,
And shields and hauberks graced. They sound a charge
With seven hundred clarions sending forth
Loud blasts throughout the land—Thus said Rollánd:
"Companion Olivier, my brother, friend,
The traitor, Ganelon, has sworn our death....
His treason is too sure; the Emp'ror Carle
For this vile crime will take a vengeance deep.
A long and cruel battle we shall have,
Ere this unknown to man. There, I will fight
With my good Durendal; you, friend, will strike

⁴⁹ Sadness.

⁵⁰ Tales of Great Deeds.

With Halteclere—Those noble swords we bore
Throughout so many lands; such combats won
By them, vile strains must never chant their deeds."
Aoi.

CXIV.

When the French see the Pagan cohorts swarm
The country o'er, they call on Olivier,
Rollánd and the twelve Peers to guard their lives.
Unto them now the Archbishop speaks his mind:
"Barons, be not unworthy of yourselves!
Fly not the field, for God's sake, that brave men
Sing not ill songs of you! Far better die
In battle. Doomed, I know, we are to death,
And ere this day has passed, our lives are o'er.
But for one thing ye can believe my word:
For you God's Paradise stands open wide,
And seats await you 'mid the blessèd Saints."
These words of comfort reassure the French;
All in one voice cry out:—"Montjoie! Montjoie!"
Aoi.

CXV.

There was a Saracen from Sarraguce
Lord of one half the city—Climorin,
Unlike a Baron; he received the faith
Of Ganelon, and sealed the treacherous bond
By pressing on his lip a kiss—Besides
Unto him gave his sword and carbuncle.⁵¹
"I will," said he, "put your great France to shame
And from the Emperor's head shake off the crown!"
Mounted on Barbamouche that faster flies
Than hawk or swallow on the wing, he spurs
His courser hard, and dropping on its neck
The rein, he strikes Engelier de Gascoigne;
Hauberk nor shield is for him a defense:
Deep in the core the Pagan thrusts his spear
So mightily, its point comes out behind,
And with the shaft o'erturns him on the field
A corse;—he cries. "Fit for destruction these!
Strike, Pagans, strike, and let us break their lines!"
The French cry: "God! to lose so brave a Knight!"....
Aoi.

CXVI.

The Count Rollánd calls Olivier: "You know,
Companion, sire, Engelier is no more....
No better Knight had we"—The Count replies:
"God grant that I avenge him well!" He drives
His golden spurs into his charger's flanks;
And waving Halteclere's blood dripping blade,

⁵¹ Shield, perhaps.

The Pagan he assails, and deals a blow....
O'erthrown is Climorin. The fiends of hell
Bear off his soul. The Knight then slays the Duke
Alphaïen, beheads Escababi,
Unhorses seven Arabs with such skill
They rise no more to fight. Then said Rollánd:
"Wroth is my sire, and by my side achieves
Renown! by such good blows Carl's love is gained.
Strike, Chevaliers!⁵² strike on!"—he cries aloud.
Aoi.

CXVII.

From otherwhere is Valdabrun who armed
Marsile a Knight; lord of four hundred ships.
There is no sailor but swears by his name;
'Twas he by treason took Jerusalem,
Who there the shrine of Solomon profaned,
And slew before the Fonts the Patriarch;
'Twas he, received Count Ganelon's vile oath
And gave him with his sword a thousand marks;
Faster than falcon in its flight his steed
Named Graminond. He sharply spurs his flanks
And rushes 'gainst the mighty Duke Sansun,
Breaks down his shield—the hauberk rends, and thrusts
Within his breast the pennon of the flag;
The shaft o'erthrows him from the saddle, dead.
"Strike Pagans! strike, for we shall conquer them!"
The French say:—"God! what Baron true we lose!"
Aoi.

CXVIII.

When Count Rollánd sees Sansun lifeless fall,
You may well know what grief was his. He spurs
His horse down on the Pagan. Durendal
More worth than precious gold he lifts to strike
With all his might; gold studded helm, head, trunk,
Hauberk asunder cleaves; the blow, e'en through
The gold boss'd saddle, strikes the courser's back,
Killing both horse and man. Blame or approve
Who may. The Pagans say:—"Hard is this blow!"
Retorts Rollánd:—"For yours no pity can
I feel—With you the vaunting and the wrong!"
Aoi.

CXIX.

An African fresh from the desert land
Was there, Malquidant, son of king Malcud;
His armor highly wrought in beaten gold
Outshines all others in the sun's bright rays.
Mounted upon his horse named Salt-Perdut,
He aims a blow at Anseïs' shield, and cuts

⁵² Knights.

The azure and vermillion all away.
His hauberk rives asunder, side from side,
And through his body pass both point and shaft.
The Count is dead.—His last breath spent and flown.
The French say:—"Baron, such great woe for you!"
Aoi.

CXX.
The Archbishop Turpin rides across the fields;
No shaven priest sang ever mass so well
As he, and showed such prowess in his deeds.
He to the Pagan:—"May God send all ills
To thee, who slew the knight my heart bewails!"
Turpin spurs hard his good steed 'gainst the wretch;
One blow strikes down his strong Toledo shield:
The miscreant dead upon the green sward falls.
Aoi.

CXXI.
Elsewhere stands Grandomie who is the son
Of Capuel king of Cappadoce. He sits
A steed named Marmorie, than flying bird
More swift. Loosening the rein, and spurring deep,
To smite Gérin with all his force he rides;
Torn from the neck which bears it, shattered falls
The purple shield, through the rent mail he drives
The whole blue pennon in his breast. Gérin
Drops lifeless by this blow, against a rock.
The Pagan also slays Gérier, his friend,
And Bérengier, and Gui de Saint-Antoine;
Assailing then the noble Duke Austoire
Who holds Valence and fiefs along the Rosne,
He strikes him dead. The Saracens extol
Their triumph, but how many fall of ours!
Aoi.

CXXII.
Hearing the Frenchmen's sobs, the Count Rollánd
Grasps in his hand his sword, all reeking blood.
His mighty heart nigh breaking with his grief,
Cries to the foe:—"May God all evils send
On thee! him hast thou slain for whom thou shalt
Most dearly pay!—" He spurs his flying steed....
Conquer who may—these two fight hand to hand.
Aoi.

CXXIII.
A wise and valiant knight was Grandonie,
Virtuous and fearless vassal. 'Mid his way
Encountering Count Rollánd, though never seen
Before, at once he knew 'twas he, as well
By his proud mien and noble beauty, as
By his fair countenance and lofty look.

Awe-struck, despite himself, he vainly tries
To fly, but rooted to the spot he stays.
The Count Rollánd smites him so skillfully,
He splits in two the nazal, helm, nose, mouth,
And teeth, the body and mailed-armor, then
Hews through the golden selle, both silver-flaps;
With a still deeper stroke the courser's back
Is gashed. So both are slain past remedy.
The men of Spain cry out all sorrowful;
But say the French:—"Well our defender strikes."
Aoi.

CXXIV.

Marv'lous the battle, and the tumult fierce;
The French of strength and fury full, raise high
Their swords: backs, ribs and wrists are slashed; the flesh
Cut through rent garments to the quick; along
The verdant soil the red blood runs in streams.
The Pagans cry:—"We cannot more endure!
Great land, Mohammed curse thee!—More than all
This people bold."—Not one who does not cry
"Marsile! ride on, O King, thy aid we need!"
Aoi.

CXXV.

A battle fierce and wonderful!—Hard strike
The French with glittering lance, and there you might
Have seen what miseries man can suffer: Mowed
And heaped in bloody mounds, all gasping out
Their lives, some on their backs, some on their teeth—
The Saracens give way, willing or not;
By the French lances forced, they fly the field.
Aoi.

CXXVI.

Marsile his warriors massacred beholds,
And, bidding all his horns and trumpets blow,
Rides forward, and his whole van rides with him.
In the van rode a Saracen, Abisme,
The vilest wretch among his men, sunk deep
In crimes and shame, who has no faith in God,
Sainte Marie's son; as black as melted pitch
His face; more fond of blood and treason foul
Than of the gold of all Galice. None saw
Him laugh or play; for courage and rash deeds
He pleased the vile Marsile whose dragon flag
He bears. No pity can the Archbishop feel
For him, and at his sight he craves to try
His arm, all softly saying to himself:
"This Saracen is but a heretic;
Far better die than not to give him death.
Ne'er cowardice nor coward I endured!"
Aoi.

CXXVII.

The Archbishop gives the signal for the fight;
He rides the horse he captured from Grossaille,
A King he slew among the Danes: a horse
Of wondrous fleetness, light-hoofed, slender-limbed;
Thigh short; with broad and mighty haunch; the flanks
Are long, and very high his spine; pure white
His tail, and yellow is his mane—his ears
Are small—light brown his head. This paragon
Of all the beasts of earth has not his peer.
The Archbishop, baron-like, spurs on the horse,
Full bent upon the encounter with Abisme;
He gains his side and hard he strikes his shield
Glittering with gems, topaz and amethyst,
Crystals and carbuncles, which to him gave
The Emir Galafés—a demon's gift
To this in Val-Metas. Him Turpin smites
Nor mercy shows; 'gainst such a blow avails
The shield but little; sheer from side to side
Passes the blade ... dead on the place he falls.
At such exploit amazed, the French exclaim:
"The archbishop's crosier in his hand is safe!"
Aoi.

CXXVIII.

The Count Rollánd calls Olivier: "With me,
Companion, sire, confess that 'mong brave knights
The archbishop upon earth or under Heav'n
Has not his peer in casting spear or lance."
Olivier answers:—"To his rescue on!"
At this the French once more resume the fight.
Hard are the blows, rough is the strife—Meantime
The Christian host in greatest sorrow mourn.
Aoi.

CXXIX.

Whoever could this fight describe? Rollánd
And Olivier vie with Turpin in skill
And glorious deeds—The slain can counted be;
In charts and briefs their numbers are enrolled:
More than four thousand fell, so says the Geste.
Four times the French arms were victorious,
But on the fifth, a cruel fate they met;
The knights of France found there a grave, except
Three more whose lives God saved; yet those brave knights,
Ere falling, their last breath will dearly sell.
Aoi.

CXXX.

Seeing so many warriors fall'n around,
Rollánd unto his comrade Olivier
Spoke thus: "Companion fair and dear, for God
Whose blessing rest on you, those vassals true
And brave lie corpses on the battle-field:
Look! We must mourn for France so sweet and fair,
From henceforth widowed of such valiant knights.
Carle, 'would you were amongst us, King and friend!
What can we do, say, brother Olivier,
To bring him news of this sore strait of ours!"
Olivier answers:—"I know not; but this
I know; for us is better death than shame."
Aoi.

CXXXI.

Rollánd says;—"I will blow mine olifant,
And Carle will hear it from the pass. I pledge
My word the French at once retrace their steps."
Said Olivier:—"This a great shame would be,
One which to all your kindred would bequeathe
A lifetime's stain. When this I asked of you,
You answered nay, and would do naught. Well, now
With my consent you shall not;—if you blow
Your horn, of valor true you show no proof.
Already, both your arms are drenched with blood."
Responds the Count:—"These arms have nobly struck."
Aoi.

CXXXII.

"The strife is rude," Rollánd says—"I will blow
My horn, that Carle may hear."—Said Olivier:—
"This would not courage be. What I desired,
Companion, you disdained. Were the king here,
Safe would we be, but yon brave men are not
To blame"—"By this my beard," said Olivier,
"I swear, if e'er I see again sweet Aude,
My sister, in her arms you ne'er shall lie."
Aoi.

CXXXIII.

Rollánd asked Olivier—"Why show to me
Your anger, friend!"—"Companion, yours the fault;
True courage means not folly. Better far
Is prudence than your valiant rage. Our French
Their lives have lost, your rashness is the cause.
And now our arms can never more give Carle
Their service good. Had you believed your friend,
Amongst us would he be, and ours the field,

The King Marsile, a captive or a corse.
Rollánd, your valor brought ill fortune, nor
Shall Carle the great e'er more our help receive,
A man unequaled till God's judgment-day.
Here you shall die, and dying, humble France, ...
This day our loyal friendship ends—ere falls
The Vesper-eve, dolorously we part!"
Aoi.

CXXXIV.

The Archbishop heard their strife. In haste he drives
Into his horse his spurs of purest gold,
And quick beside them rides. Then chiding them,
Says:—"Sire Rollánd, and you, Sire Olivier,
In God's name be no feud between you two;
No more your horn shall save us; nathless⁵³ 'twere
Far better Carle should come and soon avenge
Our deaths. So joyous then these Spanish foes
Would not return. But as our Franks alight,
Find us or slain or mangled on the field,
They will our bodies on their chargers' backs
Lift in their shrouds with grief and pity, all
In tears, and bury us in holy ground:
And neither wolves, nor swine, nor curs shall feed
On us—" Replies Rollánd:—"Well have you said."
Aoi.

CXXXV.

Rollánd raised to his lips the olifant,
Drew a deep breath, and blew with all his force.
High are the mountains, and from peak to peak
The sound re-echoes; thirty leagues away
'Twas heard by Carle and all his brave compeers.
Cried the king:—"Our men make battle!—" Ganelon
Retorts in haste:—"If thus another dared
To speak, we should denounce it as a lie."
Aoi.

CXXXVI.

The Count Rollánd in his great anguish blows
His olifant so mightily, with such
Despairing agony, his mouth pours forth
The crimson blood, and his swoll'n temples burst.
Yea, but so far the ringing blast resounds;
Carle hears it, marching through the pass, Naimés harks,
The French all listen with attentive ear.
"That is Rollánd's horn!—" Carle cried, "which ne'er yet
Was, save in battle, blown!—" But Ganelon
Replies:—"No fight is there!—you, sire, are old,
Your hair and beard are all bestrewn with gray,
And as a child your speech. Well do you know

⁵³ Nevertheless.

Rollánd's great pride. 'Tis marvelous God bears
With him so long. Already took he Noble
Without your leave. The Pagans left their walls
And fought Rollánd, your brave Knight, in the field;
With his good blade he slew them all, and then
Washed all the plain with water, that no trace
Of blood was left—yea, oftentimes he runs
After a hare all day and blows his horn.
Doubtless he takes his sport now with his peers;
And who 'neath Heav'n would dare attack Rollánd?
None, as I deem. Nay, sire, ride on apace;
Why do you halt? Still far is the Great Land."
Aoi.

CXXXVII.

Rollánd with bleeding mouth and temples burst,
Still in his anguish, blows his olifant;
Carle hears it, and his Franks. The king exclaims:
"That horn has a long breath!" Duke Naimes replies:
"Rollánd it is, and in a sore distress,
Upon my faith, a battle rages there!
A traitor he who would deceive you now.
To arms! Your war-cry shout, your kinsman save!
Plainly enough you hear his call for help."
Aoi.

CXXXVIII.

Carle orders all the trumpeters to sound
The march. The French alight. They arm themselves
With helmets, hauberks and gold hilted swords,
Bright bucklers, long sharp spears, with pennons white
And red and blue. The barons of the host
Leap on their steeds, all spurring on; while through
The pass they march, each to the other says:
"Could we but reach Rollánd before he dies,
What deadly blows, with his, our swords would strike!"
But what avails?—Too late they will arrive.
Aoi.

CXXXIX.

The ev'n⁵⁴ is clear, the sun its radiant beams
Reflects upon the marching legions. Spears,
Hauberks and helms, shields painted with bright flowers,
Gold pennons all ablaze with glitt'ring hues.
Burning with wrath the Emperor rides on;
The French with sad and angered looks. None there
But weeps aloud. All tremble for Rollánd.
The King commands Count Ganelon be seized
And given to the scullions of his house.
Their chief, named Bègue, he calls and bids: "Guard well
This man as one who all my kin betrayed."

⁵⁴ Evening.

Him Bègue received, and set upon the Count
One hundred of his kitchen comrades—best
And worst;—they pluck his beard on lip and cheek;
Each deals him with his fist four blows, and falls
On him with lash and stick; they chain his neck
As they would chain a bear, and he is thrown
For more dishonor on a sumpter⁵⁵ mule,
There guarded so until to Carle brought back.
Aoi.

CXL.
High are the mountains, gloomy, terrible,
The valleys deep, and swift the rushing streams.
In van, in rear, the brazen trumpets blow,
Answ'ring the olifant. With angry look
Rides on the Emp'ror; filled with wrath and grief,
Follow the French, each sobbing, each in tears,
Praying that God may guard Rollánd, until
They reach the battle-field. With him what blows
Will they not strike? Alas! what boots it now?
Too late they are and can not come in time.
Aoi.

CXLI.
Carle in great anger rides—his snow-white beard
O'erspreads his breast-plate. Hard the Barons spur,
For never one but inwardly doth rage
That he is far from their great chief, Rollánd,
Who combats now the Saracens of Spain:
If wounded he, will one of his survive?
O God! What Knights those sixty left by him!
Nor King nor captain better ever had....
Aoi.

THE ROUT.

CXLII.

The Count Rollánd casts o'er the mounts and vales
A glance: French corses strew the plains in heaps;
He for them mourns as gentle chevalier.
At such a sight the noble hero weeps:
"Seigneurs, to you may God be merciful!
To all your souls may He grant Paradise,
And there may they on beds of heavenly flowers
Repose!—No better vassals lived! so long
Have ye served me! So many lands for Carle
Ye won!—The Emperor for this ill fate

⁵⁵ Pack-horse.

Has nurtured you!—O land of France, most sweet
Art thou, but now forsaken and a waste.
Barons of France, to-day I see you die
For me; nor can I save or e'en defend
Your lives. Be God your aid, who ne'er played false!
Olivier, brother, I must not fail thee!
If other death comes not, of grief I die.
Come, sire companion ... come to fight again!"
Aoi.

CXLIII.

Soon to the field returns the Count Rollánd
With Durendal in hand; as a true knight
He fights. Faldrun del Pin he cleaves in half
With twenty-four among the bravest foes.
Never was man so bent upon revenge.
As run wild deer before the chasing hounds,
Before Rollánd the Pagans flee.—"Well done!"
The Archbishop cries, "Such valor a true Knight
Should have, when mounted, armed, on his good steed!
Else, not four deniers is he worth: a monk
In cloister should he be, and spend his life
In praying for our sins!..." "Strike," said Rollánd,
"No quarter!"⁵⁶—At the word the French renew
The combat ... yet the Christian loss was great.
Aoi.

CXLIV.

When soldiers on the battle-field expect
No quarter—desperate they fight; and thus
The French, like lions, fiercely stand at bay.
Like a true baron King Marsile rides forth
Upon his steed Gaignon, and spurs him on
Against Bevum, of Belne and Digun lord,
His buckler cleaves, his hauberk with a blow
Shatters, and lays him dead upon the field.
Then fall beneath the Pagan King, Ivoire
And Ivun; then Gerard de Roussillon.⁵⁷—
The Count Rollánd is nigh and cries aloud:
"God give damnation unto thee who thus
So foully slay'st my friends! But ere we part,
Dearly shalt thou abye it, and to-day
Shalt learn the name my good sword bears."—He strikes
The King a true Knight's stroke, and his right hand
Lops at the wrist; then Turfaleu the fair,
Marsile's own son, beheads.⁵⁸ The Pagans say:
"Aid us, Mahum!⁵⁹ Avenge us, Gods of ours,
On Carle, who brought such villains to our land,

⁵⁶ No mercy.

⁵⁷ The three Paladins not yet mentioned.

⁵⁸ That is, Roland beheads Turfaleu, Marsile's son.

⁵⁹ Mohammed.

As rather than depart will die."—And each
To each cries: "Let us fly!"—Upon the word,
A hundred thousand turn in sudden flight.
Whoever calls them, ne'er will they return.
Aoi.

CXLV.

Alas, it not avails! If Marsile flies,
His uncle Manganice unhurt remained.
'Tis he who held Carthage, Alferne, Garnaille,
And Ethiopia, a land accursed;
Chief of the Blacks, a thick-nosed, large-eared race.
Of these he more than fifty thousand leads,
Who ride on proudly, full of wrath, and shout
The Pagan war-cry.—"Here," said Count Rolland,
"Here shall we fall as martyrs. Well I know
Our end is nigh; but dastard I count him
Who sells not dear his life. Barons, strike well,
Strike with your burnished swords, and set such price
On death and life, that naught of shame shall fall
On our sweet France. When Carle, my lord, shall come
Upon this field, and see such slaughter here
Of Saracens, fifteen to one of ours,
Then will he breathe a blessing on his Knights."
Aoi.

OLIVIER'S DEATH.

CXLVI.

When sees Rolland this tribe accursed, more black
Than ink, with glist'ning teeth, their only gleam
Of white, he said:—"Truly I know to-day
We die! Strike, Frenchmen, that is my command."
And Olivier, "Woe to the laggards," cries.
These words the French hearts fired to meet the fray.
Aoi.

CXLVII.

The Pagans, when they mark how few the French,
Are filled with pride and comfort, and they say
One to the other:—"Their King Carle is wrong!"—
Upon his sorrel steed sits Manganice;
Urging him hard with pricking spurs of gold,
Encounters Olivier—strikes him behind,
Drives his white hauberk-links into his heart,
And through in front came forth the pointed lance.
The Kalif⁶⁰ cries:—"That blow struck home! Carlmagne,
For thy mishap, left you to guard the Pass!

⁶⁰ Caliph, Islamic nobleman.

That he has wronged us, little may he boast.
Your death alone for us a vengeance full!"
Aoi.

CXLVIII.

Olivier knows his death-wound. In his hand
He grasps Halteclere's bright steel, and strikes a blow
Well aimed upon the Kalif's pointed helm;
He scatters golden flow'rs and gems in dust.
His head the trenchant blade cleaves to the teeth,
And dead the Kalif falls.—"Pagan accursed,"
He cries, "not here shalt thou say Carle lost aught;
To wife nor lady shalt thou ever boast
In thine own land, that thou hast reft from Carle
One denier's⁶¹ worth, or me or others harmed!"
And then he called Rollànd unto his aid.
Aoi.

CXLIX.

Olivier feels that he is hurt to death.
No vengeance can suffice him; Baron-like
He strikes amid the press, cuts shields embossed
And ashen shafts, and spears, feet, shoulders, wrists
And breasts of horsemen. He who saw him thus
Dismember Saracens, corse over corse
Heap on the ground, would of a vassal true
Remembrance keep. Nor does he now forget
The rallying cry of Carle:—"Montjoie!" he cries
Loudly and clear; then calls Rollánd, his friend
And compeer:—"Sire companion, stand by me!
This day our breaking hearts forever part!"
Aoi.

CL.

Rollánd looks Olivier full in the face;
Pale, livid, colorless; pure crimson blood
Drips from his body, and streams on the earth.
"God!" cried Rollánd, "I know not what to do,
Companion, friend, thy courage was betrayed
To-day; nor will such courage e'er be seen
In human heart. Sweet France, oh! how shalt thou,
As widow,⁶² wail thy vassals true and brave,
Humbled and wrecked! The great heart of King Carle
Will break!" He spake and on his saddle swooned.
Aoi.

CLI.

Behold Rollánd, there, fainting on his steed,
While Olivier stands wounded to the death.
So great the loss of blood, his troubled eyes

⁶¹ A French coin.

⁶² France is the widow, bereft of her greatest defenders.

See naught afar or near, nor mortal man
Can recognize. Encount'ring there Rollánd,
Upon his golden-studded helm he struck
A dreadful blow, which to the nose-plate cleft,
And split the crest in twain, but left the head
Untouched. Rollánd at this, upon him looks,
And softly, sweetly asks:—"Sire compagnon!
Was that blow meant for me? I am Rollánd
By whom you are beloved so well; to me
Could you by any chance, defiance give?"
Said Olivier:—"I hear your speech, but see
You now no more. May God behold you, friend!
I struck the blow; beseech you, pardon me."
Rollánd responds:—"I am not wounded—here
And before God I pardon you." At this,
Each to the other bends in courtesy.
With such great tenderness and love they part.
Aoi.

CLII.
Olivier feels the agony of death;
His vacant eyes roll wildly in his head,
And all his hearing and his sight are lost.
Dismounting, on the ground he lies, and smites
His breast, aloud confessing all his sins;
With joined hands tow'rd Heaven lifted up
He prays to God to give him Paradise,
To bless Carl'magne, sweet France, and far beyond
All other men, Rollánd, his compagnon.
His heart fails—forward droops his helmet—prone
Upon the earth he lies—'tis over now....
The Count is dead. Rollánd, the Baron, mourns
And weeps as never mortal mourned before.
Aoi.

CLIII.
When sees the Count Rollánd the breath of life
Gone from his friend, his body stretched on earth,
His face low in the dust, his tears gush out
With heavy sobs. Then tenderly he speaks:
"Alas! for all thy valor, comrade dear!
Year after year, day after day, a life
Of love we led; ne'er didst thou wrong to me,
Nor I to thee. If death takes thee away,
My life is but a pain." While speaking thus,
The Marchis⁶³ faints on Veillantif, his steed.
But still firm in his stirrups of pure gold:
Where'er Rollánd may ride, he cannot fall.
Aoi.

⁶³ Marquis, another noble title.

CLIV.

Scarce hath the Count recovered from his swoon,
When all the great disaster meets his sight;
The French lie on the field; all lost to him
Save the Archbishop and Gualtier de l'Hum,
Who had descended from the mountain height
Where he the men of Spain all day withstood
Till all his own fell 'neath the Pagan swords.
Willed he or not, he fled into the vale,
And now upon Rollánd he calls for aid;
"Most gentle Count, most valiant, where art thou?
Ne'er had I fear where'er thou wert!—'tis I,
Gualtier, who conquered Maëlgut, who am
Old gray-haired Droün's nephew; till this day
My courage won thy love. So well I fought
Against the Saracens, my spear was broke,
My shield was pierced, my hauberk torn and wrung,
And in my body eight steel darts I bear.
Done are my days, but dear the last I sold!"
The words of that brave knight Rollánd has heard,
Spurs on his steed and gallops to his help.
Aoi.

CLV.

With grief and rage Rollánd's great heart is full;
Amidst the thick ranks of a swarming foe
He rides. He fights—and twenty Pagans fall
Slain by his hand; by Gualtier's six, and five
By the Archbishop's. Loud the Pagans cry:
"Vile wretches these! Let none escape alive!
Eternal shame to them who dare not make
Attack; foul recreants those who let their flight
Avail."—Renewing then their hues and cries,
The Pagans rush from all parts 'gainst the knights.
Aoi.

CHARLEMAGNE APPROACHES.

CLVI.

The Count Rollánd was ever great in war;
Most valiant is Gualtier de l'Hum; Turpin
The Archbishop, of a valor proved: each leaves
The other naught to do, and 'mid the throng
Strikes Pagans down, who though one thousand foot
And forty thousand horsemen mustering, yet
Dare not approach, forsooth; but from afar
Against them hurl their jav'lins, spears and darts,
Their lances and winged arrows. First of all
Is slain Gualtier; Turpin de Reins' good shield

Is pierced, his helmet broken, and his head
Wounded, his hauberk shattered and dislinked;
Four spears have pierced his body; his good steed
Dies under him. Alas! the Archbishop falls.
Aoi.

CLVII.

Hardly had Turpin fallen on the earth,
By four spear-shafts transfixed, when the brave knight
Sprang quickly to his feet once more. His look
Sought for Rollánd to whom he ran in haste.
One word he said:—"Unconquered yet am I!
While life doth last, a true knight yields it not!"
He draws Almace, his sword of burnished steel,
And rushing 'mid the throng, one thousand blows
And more he deals.—Carle said in after days,
Turpin spared none, as dead upon the field
He saw four hundred men, some cut in twain,
Some with lopped heads: so says the Geste of France,
And one who saw the field, the brave Saint-Gille
For whom God showed his might; who in the cloister
Of Loüm wrote the record of these deeds.
Who knows not this, he knows not any thing.
Aoi.

CLVIII.

As hero fights the Count Rollánd; but all
His body burns with heat and drips with sweat;
His head is torn by pain; his temple burst
By that strong blast he gave the olifant.
Still would he know if Carle returns; once more
He blows his horn—Alas, with feeble blast.
Carle caught the distant sound, and, list'ning, waits:
"Seigneurs," cried he, "great evils fall apace;
I hear his dying blast upon his horn.
If we would find him yet alive, we need
Urge on our steeds. Let all our trumpets blow!"
Then sixty thousand trumps rang forth their peals;
The hills reëcho, and the vales respond.
The Pagans hear—and stay their gabbling mirth.
One to the other says:—"Tis Carle who comes!"
Aoi.

CLIX.

The Pagans say:—"The Emperor returns;
These are the clarions of the French we hear.
If Carle should come, 'twill be our doom; if lives
Rollánd, the war begins anew, and Spain
Our land is lost to us for evermore."
Four hundred warriors well armed cap-a-pie,
The bravest of the host, then closed their ranks
And dashed in fierce attack against Rollánd.
Mighty the deeds the Count must now achieve!

Aoi.

CLX.

As they draw near, Rollánd calls up his pride
And summons all his strength to meet the charge.
No foot of ground he yields while life remains.
Firm on his courser Veillantif he sits
And gores his flanks with spurs of purest gold.
Into the thickest ranks he and Turpin
The Archbishop rush. And now the Pagans all
Unto each other cry: "Hence, friends, away!
The horns of those of France we now have heard,
Carlemagne the mighty Emperor returns!"
Aoi.

CLXI.

Ne'er could the Count Rollánd a coward love,
Nor proud, nor wicked men, nor faithless knights.
He calls to the Archbishop: "You, on foot,
And I on horseback, sire! For love of you
I by your side will stand; together we
Will share or good or ill; I leave you not
For aught of human mold. This day we shall
Hurl back the Pagan charge, and Durendal
Shall deal his mightiest blows!"—To this replies
The Archbishop: "Traitor he who strikes not well!
King Carle returns—Great shall his vengeance be!"
Aoi.

CLXII.

The Pagans say: "For such ill were we born!
What fatal morn this day for us has ris'n!
Dead lie our lords and Peers! With his great host
King Carle returns, the mighty Baron—Hark!
His clarions sound, and loud the cry 'Montjoie;'
Rollánd has so great pride, no man of flesh
Can make him yield, or vanquished fall. 'Twere best
We pierced him from afar, and left him lying
Upon the field!"——'Twas done: darts, lances, spears,
Javelins, winged arrows flew so thick,
That his good shield was pierced, his hauberk rent
And torn apart—his body yet unharmed.
Veillantif, pierced with thirty wounds, falls dead
Beneath the Count.—The affrighted Pagans fly.
The Count Rollánd stands on the field, alone.
Aoi.

THE LAST BENEDICTION OF THE ARCHBISHOP.

CLXIII.

Raging in wrath the Pagans fly, and toward
The land of Spain they haste. The Count Rollánd
Pursues them not, for Veillantif lies dead.
On foot he stands whether he will or not.
To help Turpin, the Archbishop, fast he ran,
His helm unclasped, removed the hauberk white
And light, then ripped the sides of his bialt⁶⁴
To find his gaping wounds; then tenderly
Pressing him in his arms, on the green sward
He laid him gently down, and fondly prayed:
"O noble man, grant me your leave in this;
Our brave compeers, so dear to us, have breathed
Their last—we should not leave them on the field;
I will their bodies seek and gather here,
To lay them out before you."—"Go, and soon
Return," the Archbishop said; "the field is yours
And also mine, thanks to Almighty God!"
Aoi.

CLXIV.

Alone the Count Rollánd retraced his steps
Throughout the field. Vales, mounts, he searched, and found
Gerin and his companion Gerier, then
Berengier and Otun; here Anseïs,
There Sansun, then beyond, Gerard the old
De Roussillon he found—one after one
He bore each knight within his arms, and placed
Them gently, side by side, before the knees
Of Turpin who cannot restrain his tears;
With lifted hands he blesses them and says:
"Most hapless Knights!—May God the Glorious
Receive your souls, and in his Paradise
'Mid holy flowers place them!—In this hour
Of death, my deepest grief is that no more
The mighty Emperor I shall behold!"
Aoi.

CLXV.

Rollánd turns back, and searching through the field,
Has found, alas! his comrade Olivier....
He pressed him 'gainst his bosom tenderly,
And, as he could, returning to Turpin,
Stretched on a shield he lays him down among
The other knights. The Archbishop then assoils⁶⁵
And signs him with the holy cross. The grief

⁶⁴ "A sort of undergarment made of gold and silk brocade worn in time of war under the coat of mail, and in time of peace under the mantle of fur. In the latter case it was of silk." (Rabillon, 208).

⁶⁵ Absolves.

And pity were more sore than heart can bear....
Then said Rollánd:—"Fair comrade Olivier,
Son of the good Count Renier, he who held
The marches to the distant shores of Gennes;
To break a lance, to pierce a shield, the brave
To counsel, traitors to dismay and foil,
No land e'er saw a better chevalier."
Aoi.

CLXVI.

When Count Rollánd beheld his Peers lie dead,
And Olivier, that friend so tenderly
Beloved, his soul by pity was o'erflowed;
Tears from his eyes gush out, his countenance
Turns pale; distressed, he can no longer stand.
Would he or not, he swooned and fell to earth.
The Archbishop said: "Baron, what woe is yours!"
Aoi.

CLXVII.

The Archbishop, when he saw Count Rollánd swoon,
Felt keener grief than e'er he felt before;
Stretched forth his hand, and took the olifant.—
Ronceval there is a running stream;
Thence will he water bring to Count Rollánd.
Staggering, with feeble steps, thither he goes,
But loss of blood has made him all too weak:
Ere he has gone an acre's length, his heart
Fails, and he sinks in mortal agony.
Aoi.

CLXVIII.

Meantime the Count Rollánd revives.—Erect
He stands, but with great pain; then downward looks
And upward. Then he sees the noble lord
The Archbishop, holy minister of God,
Beyond his comrades lying on the sward
Stretched out.—He lifts his eyes to Heav'n, recalls
His sins, and raising both his joinèd hands,
He prays Our God to grant him paradise.—
Turpin, Carle's Knight, is dead, who all his life,
With doughty blows and sermons erudite,
Ne'er ceased to fight the Pagans. May the Lord
Grant him His holy blessing evermore!
Aoi.

CLXIX.

The Count Rollánd sees lifeless on the field
The Archbishop lie; gush from the gaping wounds
His entrails in the dust, and through his skull
The oozing brain pours o'er his brow.—In form
Of holy Cross upon his breast Rollánd
Disposes both his hands so fair and white,

And mourned him in the fashion of his land:
"O noble man! O knight of lineage pure!
To the Glorious One of Heav'n I thee commend;
For ne'er was man who Him more truly served,
Nor since the Apostles' days, such prophet, strong,
To keep God's law and draw the hearts of men.
From ev'ry pain your soul be freed, and wide
Before it ope the Gates of Paradise!"
Aoi.

ROLAND'S DEATH.

CLXX.

Rollánd now feels his death is drawing nigh:
From both his ears the brain is oozing fast.
For all his peers he prays that God may call
Their souls to Him; to the Angel Gabriel
He recommends his spirit. In one hand
He takes the olifant, that no reproach
May rest upon him; in the other grasps
Durendal, his good sword. Forward he goes,
Far as an arblast⁶⁶ sends a shaft, across
A new-tilled ground and toward the land of Spain.
Upon a hill, beneath two lofty trees,
Four terraces of marble spread:—he falls
Prone fainting on the green, for death draws near.
Aoi.

CLXXI.

High are the mounts, and lofty are the trees.
Four terraces are there, of marble bright:
There Count Rollánd lies senseless on the grass.
Him at this moment spies a Saracen
Who lies among the corpses, feigning death,
His face and body all besmeared with blood.
Sudden he rises to his feet, and bounds
Upon the Baron.—Handsome, brave and strong
He was, but from his pride sprang mortal rage.
He seized the body of Rollánd, and grasped
His arms, exclaiming thus:—"Here vanquished Carle's
Great nephew lies!"—"This sword to Araby
I'll bear."—He drew it;—this aroused the Count.
Aoi.

CLXXII.

Rollánd perceived an alien hand would rob
Him of his sword; his eyes he oped; one word
He spoke:—"I trow,⁶⁷ not one of us art thou!"

⁶⁶ Crossbow.

Then with his olifant from which he parts
Never, he smites the golden studded helm,
Crushing the steel, the head, the bones; both eyes
Are from their sockets beaten out—o'erthrown
Dead at the Baron's feet he falls:—"O wretch,"
He cries, "how durst thou, or for good or ill,
Lay hands upon Rollánd? Who hears of this
Will call thee fool. Mine olifant is cleft,
Its gems and gold all scattered by the blow."
Aoi.

CLXXIII.

Now feels Rollánd that death is near at hand
And struggles up with all his force; his face
Grows livid;—[Durendal, his naked sword]
He holds;—beside him rises a gray rock
On which he strikes ten mighty blows through grief
And rage—The steel but grinds; it breaks not, nor
Is notched; then cries the Count:—"Saint Mary, help!
O Durendal! Good sword! ill starred art thou!
Though we two part, I care not less for thee.
What victories together thou and I,
Have gained, what kingdoms conquered, which now holds
White-bearded Carle! No coward's hand shall grasp
Thy hilt: a valiant knight has borne thee long,
Such as none shall e'er bear in France the Free!"
Aoi.

CLXXIV.

Rollánd smites hard the rock of Sardonix;⁶⁸
The steel but grinds, it breaks not, nor grows blunt;
Then seeing that he can not break his sword,
Thus to himself he mourns for Durendal:
"O good my sword, how bright and pure! Against
The sun what flashing light thy blade reflects!
When Carle passed through the valley of Moriane,
The God of Heaven by his Angel sent
Command that he should give thee to a Count,
A valiant captain; it was then the great
And gentle King did gird thee to my side.—
With thee I won for him Anjou—Bretaigne;⁶⁹
For him with thee I won Poitou, le Maine
And Normandie⁷⁰ the free; I won Provence
And Aquitaine, and Lombardie,⁷¹ and all
The Romanie;⁷² I won for him Bavière,⁷³
All Flandre⁷⁴—Buguerie⁷⁵—all Puillanie,⁷⁶

⁶⁷ Believe.

⁶⁸ Sardonyx, onyx and sard.

⁶⁹ Brittany.

⁷⁰ Normandy.

⁷¹ Lombardy.

⁷² Romania (?).

⁷³ Bavaria.

Costentinnoble⁷⁷ which allegiance paid,
And Saxonie⁷⁸ submitted to his power;
For him I won Escoce⁷⁹ and Galle,⁸⁰ Irlande⁸¹
And Engleterre⁸² he made his royal seat;
With thee I conquered all the lands and realms
Which Carle, the hoary-bearded monarch, rules.
Now for this sword I mourn.... Far better die
Than in the hands of Pagans let it fall!
May God, Our Father, save sweet France this shame!"
Aoi.

CLXXV.

Upon the grey rock mightily he smites,
Shattering it more than I can tell; the sword
But grinds.—It breaks not—nor receives a notch,
And upwards springs more dazzling in the air.
When sees the Count Rollánd his sword can never break,
Softly within himself its fate he mourns:
"O Durendal, how fair and holy thou!
In thy gold-hilt are relics rare; a tooth
Of great saint Pierre—some blood of Saint Basile,
A lock of hair of Monseigneur Saint Denis,
A fragment of the robe of Sainte-Marie.
It is not right that Pagans should own thee;
By Christian hand alone be held. Vast realms
I shall have conquered once that now are ruled
By Carle, the King with beard all blossom-white,
And by them made great emperor and Lord.
May thou ne'er fall into a cowardly hand."
Aoi.

CLXXVI.

The Count Rollánd feels through his limbs the grasp
Of death, and from his head ev'n to his heart
A mortal chill descends. Unto a pine
He hastens, and falls stretched upon the grass.
Beneath him lie his sword and olifant,
And toward the Heathen land he turns his head,
That Carle and all his knightly host may say:
"The gentle Count a conqueror has died...."
Then asking pardon for his sins, or great
Or small, he offers up his glove to God.
Aoi.

⁷⁴ Flanders.

⁷⁵ Bulgaria.

⁷⁶ Poland.

⁷⁷ Constantinople.

⁷⁸ Germany home of the Saxons.

⁷⁹ Scotland.

⁸⁰ Gaul (Gallic France).

⁸¹ Ireland.

⁸² England.

CLXXVII.

The Count Rollánd feels now his end approach.
Against a pointed rock, and facing Spain,
He lies. Three times he beats his breast, and says:
"Mea culpa! Oh, my God, may through thy grace,
Be pardoned all my sins, or great or small,
Until this hour committed since my birth!"
Then his right glove he offers up to God,
And toward him angels from high Heav'n descend.
Aoi.

CLXXVIII.

Beneath a pine Rollánd doth lie, and looks
Toward Spain—He broods on many things of yore:
On all the lands he conquered, on sweet France,
On all his kinsmen, on great Carle his lord
Who nurtured him;—he sighs—nor can restrain
His tears, but can not yet himself forget;
Recalls his sins, and for the grace of God
He prays:—"Our Father, never yet untrue,
Who Saint-Lazare raised from the dead, and saved
Thy Daniel from the lions' claws—Oh, free
My soul from peril, from my whole life's sins!"
His right hand glove he offered up to God;
Saint Gabriel took the glove.—With head reclined
Upon his arm, with hands devoutly joined
He breathed his last. God sent his Cherubim,
Saint-Raphaël, Saint Michiel del Peril.
Together with them Gabriel came.—All bring
The soul of Count Rollánd to Paradise...
Aoi.

THE CHASTISEMENT OF THE SARACENS.

CLXXIX.

Rollánd is dead: God has his soul in heaven.
To Ronceval the Emperor has come.
There, neither road nor any path is seen,
Nor vacant space, nor ell, nor foot of land
That mounds of mangled bodies cover not,
Pagans or French.—The Emperor exclaims:
"Fair nephew, where art thou? The Archbishop, where?
And Olivier, alas, where are they all?
Gérin, Gérier, the two companions, where
Are they? And where is Otes and Bérengier,
Ives and Ivoire both to my heart so dear?
The Gasquin Engelier, Sansun the Duke,
Anseïs the rash, Gerard de Roussillon
The old, and my twelve Peers I left behind,
What fate is theirs?"—What boots it? None replies."—
"—God," cries the King, "what grief is mine to think
"I stood not here the battle to begin."
He tears his beard with anger; all his knights

And barons weep great tears; dizzy with woe
And swooning, twenty thousand fall to earth.
Duke Naimes feels pity overflow his heart.
Aoi.

CLXXX.

No baron is there now, no chevalier
Who, in his pity, sheds not tears for sons,
For brothers—nephews—friends—and for liege-lords.
Many have fallen swooning on the earth,
But Duke Naimes bore himself as valorous knight:
He foremost said to Carle:—"Behold two leagues
Away!—The roads are dark with clouds of dust.
There swarm the Pagan tribes.... Ride on them now,
Avenge this bitter woe."—"O God," said Carle,
"Are they already flown so far?—our rights
And honor shield! Those Pagans took from me
The flower of my Sweet France!"—The King commands
Gebuin, Otun, Tedbalt de Reins and Count
Milun:—"Watch ye the field, the vales, the mounts;
The slain, leave to their rest; see that no beast
Nor lion, squire nor page approach. I charge
You, let no man upon them lay his hand
Until, with God's assistance, we return."
They lovingly and with sweet tone reply:
"Thus shall we do, just Emperor, dear sire!"
Upon the field they keep one thousand knights.
Aoi.

CLXXXI.

Now bids the Emperor his trumpets blow,
Then forward at the head of his great host
He rides, that Baron true. Of those of Spain
He finds the tracks, points out the road; in quick
Pursuit all follow Carle.... When sees the King
The eve decline, he on the verdant grass
Dismounts, and prostrate prays to God our Lord
The sun to stay, the shades of night hold back
And longer make the day. To him appears
A Counselor-Angel with the swift command;
"Ride on, O King, nor fear that night shall fall!
God knows that thou hast lost the flower of France;
But vengeance canst have now upon that horde
Of unbelievers." Thus the Angel spake.
The Emp'ror rises and remounts his steed.
Aoi.

CLXXXII.

To Carlemagne Our Lord now showed his might;
The sun stays in its course. The Pagans fly,
And fast the French pursuing, overtake
Them in the Val-Tenebre. They drive them on
Toward Sarraguce, while close behind them fall

The upraised swords, and strew the ground with dead.
No issue, no escape, by road or pass!
In front deep Ebro rolls its mighty waves:
No boat, no barge, no raft. They call for help
On Tervagant, then plunge into the flood.
Vain was their trust: some, weighted with their arms,
Sink in a moment; others are swept down,
And those most favored swallow monstrous draughts.
All drown most cruelly. The French cry out:
"For your own woe wished ye to see Rollánd!"
Aoi.

CHARLEMAGNE AND BALIGANT AT RONCEVAL (SUMMARY AND EXCERPT)

Meanwhile, back at Saragossa, Marsile has summoned the aid of Baligant, his liege lord. Marsile, dying and unable to lead, hands over the defense of Saragossa to Baligant. Baligant leads his army to engage Charlemagne at Ronceval, where the Franks are mourning and honoring the dead. Both armies fight with distinction, and Charlemagne meets Baligant on the battle field:

CCLXIII.

The mighty Emir⁸³ with a giant's strength
Smites Carle⁸⁴ upon the helm of burnished steel,
Which splits in twain beneath the ponderous blow,
Cuts through the silky hair, shears from the scalp
Fully the breadth of a man's palm and more,
Baring the skull. Carle staggers, nearly falls,
But God willed not that he should die or yield.
Saint Gabriel, with eager flight once more
Descends, demanding:—"What ails thee, great King?"
Aoi.

CCLXIV.

When Carle the Angel's heavenly accent hears,
All thought or dread of death forsakes his soul,
And in him springs again his former strength.
The Emir by the royal sword of France
Is struck, his helm all bright with gems is rent,
His cloven skull pours out the brain, his face
Is cleft to the very roots of his white beard:
Dead falls the Pagan past recovery.
Then shouts the King his rallying cry, "Montjoie!"
Hearing his shout, Duke Naimés hastes up, and brings
The charger Tecendur for Carle the great
To mount. The Pagans turn their backs—God wills
They should not stay. The Franks have their desires.
Aoi.

⁸³ Baligant is Emir of Babylon.

⁸⁴ Charlemagne.

THE DEATH OF MARSILE; CAPTURE OF BRAMIMUNDE

CCLXVI.

Amidst the sultry heat and clouds of dust
The Pagans rousèd, by their foes harassed,
Flee far for Sarraguçe. To her high tower
Ascends Queen Bramimunde, where, seeing thus
The routed Arabs fly, she calls her priests
And canons, subjects to false law, by God
Ne'er loved: their crowns no holy tonsure wear.
She cries aloud:—"Aid us, Mahum!⁸⁵ Oh aid!
O gentle King! Already vanquished are
Our men, the Emir⁸⁶ slain in shameful death!"
On hearing this, Marsile turned to the wall
His covered face, and amid bitter tears
His life departed. Soon the eager fiends
Bore off to judgment his sin-burthened⁸⁷ soul.
Aoi.

CCLXVII.

The Pagans all are slain [or put to flight];
Carle wins the day. The gates of Sarraguçe
Are stormed, and well he knows, defense is vain.
He takes the city. All the Christian host
Pour in, and there repose their limbs this night.
The King with snow-white beard is filled with pride:
Queen Bramimunde gives up the citadels;
Ten of these forts are large, and fifty small.
Well helped are they whom God Almighty aids.
Aoi.

CCLXVIII.

The sunny day had passed, the shades of night
Had fallen; bright the moonlight; all the stars
In heaven shone. Carle ruled in Sarraguçe.
Unto one thousand men he gave command
To search throughout the city's synagogues
And mosques for all their idols and graven signs
Of gods—these to be broken up and crushed
By ax and iron mallet he ordains.
Nor sorcery nor falsehood left. King Carle
Believes in God and serves him faithfully.
Then bishops bless the fountains, leading up
The Heathens to the blest baptismal Font.
If one perchance resist the King, condemned
Is he to die, or hanged, or burnt, or slain.
More than one hundred thousand are baptized
True Christians; but not so Queen Bramimunde:

⁸⁵ Mohammed.

⁸⁶ Baligant.

⁸⁷ Burdened.

A captive shall she go unto sweet France
And be converted by the King through love.
Aoi.

THE PUNISHMENT OF GANELON.

CCLXX.

From Spain at last the Emperor has returned
To Aix, the noblest seat of France; ascends
His palace, enters in the stately hall.—
Now comes to greet him the fair [lady] Aude,
And asks the King:—"Where is Rollánd the chief
Who pledged his faith to take me for his wife?"
Sore-pained, heart-broken, Carle, with weeping eyes,
Tears his white beard.—"Ah! sister well beloved,
Thou askest me of one who is no more.
A worthier match I give thee in exchange;
Loewis it is. I can not better say.
He is my son, and will protect my realms."
Aude answers:—"To my ear these words are strange.
May God, His saints, His angels, all forfend
That, if Rollánd lives not, I still should live."
Her color fades, she falls prone at the feet
Of Carlemagne—dead ... God's mercy on her soul!
Barons of France mourn her with pitying tears.
Aoi.

CCLXXI.

Such was the end of Aude the beautiful.
The King, in hope 'tis but a swoon, with tears
And pity taking both her hands, uplifts
Her form; the head upon the shoulders sinks.
As soon as Carle knows it is death indeed,
Four countesses he summons, bids them bear
In haste the Lady to a nunnery.—
All night they watched the body, and at morn
Beside a shrine gently she was entombed
With highest honors by the King's command.
Aoi.

CCLXXII.

The Emperor is once more at Aix. There stands
Amid the city 'fore the palace gate,
In iron chains, the traitor Ganelon.
His hands are fastened to a stake with thongs
Of deer-skin by the sergeants who then beat
His body well with staves and heavy cords.
Such treatment was his true desert. He waits
His coming doom, in agony of soul.
Aoi.

CCLXXIII.

Written it is in ancient Geste of France
That Carle then summoned men from all his lands,
Who met at Aix's Chapelle. A solemn feast
It was; some say the Baron Saint Silvestre's.
This day began the plea and history
Of Ganelon who wove the treason's plot.
The Emperor bade them drag him to his bar.
Aoi.

CCLXXIV.

"Seigneurs Barons," said to them Carle the King,
"Judge Ganelon according to the law.—
Among my host with me to Spain he came;
His craft lost twenty thousand of my Franks;
My nephew, whom ye nevermore shall see,
And Olivier, the brave and courteous Knight.
The traitor sold my brave twelve Peers for gain."
Then Ganelon:—"May I be cursed ere I
Deny. Of wealth and honors had [Rollánd]
Deprived me, and for this, his loss and death
I wrought, but treason none I will confess."
Respond the French:—"On this we counsel take."
Aoi.

CCLXXV.

In presence of the King stands Ganelon
With bearing hardy, florid countenance;
Were he but loyal, as a Baron true
His mien. Upon the French and judges he
Has cast a glance, and on his thirty kin
Who 'round him stand; then with firm voice exclaims:
"Barons! Now hear me all, for love of God!
I to the Emperor's host belonged, and served
Him ever in all faith and love. Rollánd,
His nephew, hatred bore to me, and fain
Had doomed my days to torture and to death.
As message-bearer I to King Marsile
Was sent, wisdom alone my shield and guard;
I gave defiance to Rollánd the bold,
To Olivier and to their comrades all:
By Carle and all his Barons this was heard.
Revenge this was, but treason it was none."
Reply the French:—"All this we well shall weigh."
Aoi.

CCLXXVI.

On seeing the great plea was to commence,
Thirty good Knights were called by Ganelon
Out of his kin, and one among them makes
A speech all others hark: 'tis Pinabel
Of Castel de Sorence, of greatest skill
In words, and apt with reason plausible;

Withal, a vassal brave to guard his arms.
Thus to him Ganelon:—"In you my trust
I place; my life from death, my name from shame
Preserve!"—Said Pinabel:—"Thou shalt be saved.
Dare one French Knight condemn thee to be hanged,
And would the Emperor make us both to meet
In combat, my good sword will his rash word
Believe."—And at his feet falls Ganelon.
Aoi.

CCLXXVII.

Baiviers, Saines, Poitevins, Normans and French
In council met;—Allemans, Tiedeis in great
Array. Those from Alverne most courteous prove
And show more kindness unto Pinabel.
One to the others said:—"To leave this plea
Right would it be, and pray Carl'magne, this once
To pardon Ganelon who, from this day,
Will serve his lord with truer faith and love.
Rollánd lies in his grave; nor wealth, nor gold
Restores him to your eyes. This cruel fight
Is folly."—All the Knights approve, save one,
Tierri, a brother of the Lord Geffrei.
Aoi.

CCLXXVIII.

To Carle his Barons come again, and say:
"We pray you, sire, acquit Count Ganelon;
Then will he serve you with true faith and love.
Grant him his life which springs from noble race.
Rollánd lies in his grave; ne'er shall we see
Him more, nor treasures e'er can bring him back."
Exclaimed the King: "Vile traitors are ye all!"
Aoi.

CLXXIX.

Now, seeing all will fail him, o'er Carle's eyes
And features gloom descends; by grief o'erwhelmed
He cries: "Unhappy that I am!" Then stood
[Tierri], the brother of Geffrei, the Duke
D'Anjou, before the King. Thin, light of frame,
Hair raven-black, [face] somewhat brown of hue,
In height nor tall nor short; with courtesy
He spake thus to the Emp'ror: "Fair sire King,
Be not cast down. That I have served you well
Ere this, you know. 'Tis my ancestral right
To sit among the judges of the plea.
However guilty was Rollánd against
Count Ganelon, his duty to the King
Should have restrained his hate. A treason foul
Ganelon wrought against Rollánd; forsworn
In perjury tow'rd you, he lost himself.
For all his crimes his death I here demand,

Death by the cord; his body to the dogs
Be thrown away—the perjurer's just doom.
Should any of his kin deny the words
I speak, this sword of mine girt to my side
Will make them good."—All cry: "Well have you said."
Aoi.

CCLXXX.

Then toward the King advances Pinabel;
Tall, strong and swift, and brave. Strike he but once,
No second blow need follow; to the King
He said: "Sire, unto you belongs this plea.
Command these clamors to be hushed. There stands
Tierri who now his judgment has pronounced.
The lie I give him and to fight defy!"
With this his right hand glove of deer-skin gave
Unto the King who said: "I must receive
Good pledges." Of his kin then thirty knights
Were given as legal sureties of his pledge.
"I also give my pledge," the Emperor said,
"And have them guarded safe till judgment pass."
Aoi.

CCLXXXI.

When Tierri sees that now the fight is near,
He gives the Emperor his right hand glove.
To him the sureties Carle himself provides,
Bids that they bring four benches to the place
Whereon the combatants shall sit. The terms
Are judged by all the others as most fair.
Ogier de Dannemarche was chosen to rule
The lists. Then for their steeds and arms both called.
Aoi.

CCLXXXII.

Both knights now made them ready for the fight,
Were shriven, assoiled, and blessed; a mass have heard,
Communion have received, and richest alms
Bequeathed to monasteries.—Before striking
They both appear.—Gold spurs their heels adorn;
They wear white hauberks light and strong; bright helms
Clasp on their heads, and gold hilt swords are girt
Upon their thighs, and to their necks are bound
Strong quartered shields; they wield in each right hand
A trenchant sword, and on fleet steeds they mount;
Then melt in tears one hundred thousand knights
Who for Rollánd's sake wish Tierri well.
Yea—but God knows what way the thing will end.
Aoi.

CCLXXXIII.

Beyond the town of Aix a plain extends:
And here our Barons will the combat try.

Most valiant knights are both; the steeds they ride
Are swift and stout; with spurs in flanks, and freed
Of rein, they dash.—The warriors all their might
And skill unite to strike the surest blow.
Bucklers beneath the shock are torn and crushed,
White hauberks rent in shreds, asunder bursts
Each courser's girth, the saddles, turning, fall.
One hundred thousand men look weeping on....
Aoi.

CCLXXXIV.

Both knights leap on the earth, and, quick as light,
Stand face to face.—Strong, fiery Pinabel
And Tierri for each other seek. Their steeds
Are fled.—But their gold-hilted swords they wield;
And on the helms of steel they shower such blows
As rashed the thongs. Loudly the knights lament,
And Carle exclaims:—"Show thou the right, O God!"
Aoi.

CCLXXXV.

Cried Pinabel:—"Tierri, surrender thou!
Thy vassal I will be in faith and love,
And to thy pleasure will I yield my wealth;
But let the King forgive Count Ganelon!"
Tierri replied:—"Thy offers all are vain;
Vile treason were it such a pact to make;
But God shall judge us and make plain the right."
Aoi.

CCLXXXVI.

Then Tierri spake:—"I hold thee, Pinabel,
As Baron true, great, strong, of handsome mold;
Thy peers acknowledge thee as valiant knight;
Well, let this combat cease, between the King
And thee a covenant I will strive to make.
On Ganelon such justice shall be done
That future ages shall record the doom."
They grasp again their swords and hew
Each other's gold-encrusted helm with rage
So rash that sparkling fires spurt through the air.
No power will now disjoint the combatants:
The death of one can only close the strife.
Aoi.

CCLXXXVII.

No braver man than Pinabel.—Such blows
He deals on Tierri's helmet of Provence,
That the sparks fly in showers, and, falling, set
The grass ablaze. Then aiming at his foe
His keen-edged brand, down to the brow cuts through
His helm; the blade glides down across his face,
And plows his right cheek with a deep red gash;

Unto his stomach is the haubert rent,
But God protects him, and averts his death.
Aoi.

CCLXXXVIII.

Tierri, on seeing blood gush from his brow
And tinge the grassy field, strikes Pinabel
On his steel-burnished helmet, and cuts through
To the nose-plate. His head is cleft in twain
And gushes forth the brain. This fatal blow
Gives Pinabel his death, and ends the fight.
The French exclaim:—"O wondrous work of God!
Full right it is that Ganelon be hanged
With all his kin who sureties were for him!"
Aoi.

CCLXXXIX.

Tierri had won, and on the battle-field
The Emperor Carle arrived with an escort
Of forty Barons,—Naimés the Duke, Ogier
De Dannemarche, Geffrei d'Anjou, Willalmes
De Blaive.—In close embrace the King has pressed
Tierri, and with his mantle's sables wiped
The warrior's face; then lays his furs aside
And on his shoulders others are arrayed.
Meanwhile the knight, by friendly hands disarmed,
On an Arabian mule is placed, and so
This valorous Baron full of joy returns
To Aix.—Amid the place they all dismount,
And now the sureties must abide their doom.
Aoi.

CCXC.

Carlemagne around him calls his counts and dukes:
"What counsel give ye touching those I kept,
Unto this plea who came for Ganelon
Themselves sworn hostages for Pinabel?"
Respond the French:—"Let none of them survive!"—
Carle then commands a road-keeper, Basbrun:
"Hang them all up on yon accursed tree!
By this gray beard of mine, I swear, if one
Escape, thou diest but a villain's death!"—
Answered the man:—"What else but to obey?"—
Then by a hundred sergeants roughly seized,
Those thirty men are hanged.—Who man betrays
Destroys himself and others drags to death.
Aoi.

CCXCI.

And now have turned away Baiviers, Allemans,
Poitevins, Bretons and Normans; but more
Than all, the French advise that Ganelon
Should die a death of torture. Then they tie

With cords his hands and feet. Four sergeants bring
Four wild and fiery destriers, made mad
By a mare 'mid the field. A fearful end
For Ganelon; bound between them, limb from limb
Is rent away, each nerve and muscle stretched
And torn. The clear blood streams upon the green.
Thus perished Ganelon by a felon's death....
Traitors of evil deeds must never boast.
Aoi.

CCXCII.

When the Emperor Carle had wreaked his full revenge,
He called the bishops from the realms of France,
And from Baviere, and those of Alemaigne:
"Now in my [court] have I a captive, sprung
From noble race. Such sermons has she heard,
So good examples seen, she will believe
In the true God, and Christian faith embrace.
Baptize her so that He may save her soul;
God-mothers choose her of our noblest dames."
With a great company the Baths at Aix
Were thronged, and soon before the holy Fonts
The Queen received the name of Juliane:
Henceforth a Christian holding fast the Truth.
Aoi.

CCXCIII.

But when the Emperor had made complete
His justice and his heavy wrath assuaged,
And brought Queen Bramimunde to Christian faith,
The day was over and the night had fall'n.
The King sought rest within his vaulted room.
Saint Gabriel brought him word from God and said:
"Carle, of thy empire summon all the hosts
For swiftest marching to the land of Bire;
So shalt thou succor King Vivien in Imphe,
The city compassed by the Pagan foe.
The Christians look to thee and cry for help."—
Will has he none to go, the King, but moans:—
"O, God," quoth he, "so troublous is my life!"—
Whereat he weeps, and tears his hoary beard.
Aoi.