



This text was translated by Charles Scott Moncrief (London, 1919). It is in the public domain and has been adapted by Kenneth Rolling.

We pick up the action after the main attack by the Saracens has already occurred. Roland has blown his horn to summon the Emperor after wrestling with his pride, which made him wish to avoid doing so. Of the original multitude of soldiers, very few remain alive.

159

The count Roland has never loved cowards,
Nor arrogant, nor men of evil heart,
Nor chevalier that was not good vassal.
The Archbishop Turpins, he calls apart:
"Sir, you're afoot, and I my charger have;
For love of you, here will I take my stand,
Together we'll endure things good and bad;
I'll leave you not, for no incarnate man:
We'll give again these pagans their attack;
The better blows are those from Durendal."
Says the Archbishop: "Shame on him that holds back!
Charles is at hand, full vengeance he'll exact."

Durendal=a sword brought to Charles by the angel Gabriel, which he in turn gives to Roland

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The pagans say: "Unlucky were we born!
An evil day for us did this day dawn!
For we have lost our peers and all our lords.
Charles his great host once more upon us draws,
Of Frankish men we plainly hear the horns,
"Monjoie" they cry, and great is their uproar.
The count Roland is of such pride and force
He'll never yield to man of woman born;
Let's aim at him, then leave him on the spot!"
And aim they did: with arrows long and short,
Lances and spears and feathered javelots;
Count Roland's shield they've broken through and bored,
The woven mail have from his hauberk torn,
But not himself, they've never touched his corpse;
Veillantif is in thirty places gored,
Beneath the count he's fallen dead, that horse.
Pagans are fled, and leave him on the spot;
The count Roland stands on his feet once more.

Monjoie=Charlemagne's (and his army's) ensign and war cry, referring to his sword, "Joyeuse"

hauberk= long, armor shirt of leather or mail

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The Song of Roland

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UNIT 17

Pagans are fled, enangered and enraged,
Home into Spain with speed they make their way;
The Count Roland, he has not given chase,
For Veillantif, his charger, they have slain;
Will he or nill, on foot he must remain.
To the Archbishop, Turpins, he goes with aid;
He has from his head the golden helm unlaced,
Taken from him his white hauberk away,
And cut the gown in strips, was round his waist;
On his great wounds the pieces of it placed,
Then to his heart has caught him and embraced;
On the green grass he has him softly laid,
Most sweetly then to him has Roland prayed:
"Ah! Gentle sir, give me your leave, I say;
Our companions, whom we so dear appraised,
Are now all dead; we cannot let them stay;
I will go seek and bring them to this place,
Arrange them here in ranks, before your face."
Said the Archbishop: "Go, and return again.
This field is yours and mine now; God be praised!"

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So Roland turns; through the field, all alone,
Searching the vales and mountains, he is gone;
He finds Gerin, Gerers his companion,
Also he finds Berenger and Otton,
There too he finds Anseis and Sanson,
And finds Gerard the old, of Rossillon;
By one and one he's taken those barons,
To the Archbishop with each of them he comes,
Before his knees arranges every one.
That Archbishop, he cannot help but sob,
He lifts his hand, gives benediction;
After he's said: "Unlucky, Lords, your lot!
But all your souls He'll lay, our Glorious God,
In Paradise, His holy flowers upon!
For my own death such anguish now I've got;
I shall not see him, our rich Emperor."

163

So Roland turns, goes through the field in quest;
His companion Olivier finds at length;
He has embraced him close against his breast,
To the Archbishop returns as he can best;
Upon a shield he's laid him, by the rest;

The Song of Roland

YEAR II



UNIT 17

And the Archbishop has them absolved and blest:
Whereon his grief and pity grow afresh.
Then says Roland: "Fair comrade Olivier,
You were the son of the good count Reinier,
Who held the march by th' Vale of Runier;
To shatter spears, through buckled shields to bear,
And from hauberks the mail to break and tear,
Proof men to lead, and prudent counsel share,
Gluttons in field to frighten and conquer,
No land has known a better chevalier."

164

The count Roland, when dead he saw his peers,
And Oliver, he held so very dear,
Grew tender, and began to shed a tear;
Out of his face the color disappeared;
No longer could he stand, for so much grief,
Will he or nill, he swooned upon the field.
Said the Archbishop: "Unlucky lord, indeed!"

165

When the Archbishop beheld him swoon, Roland,
Never before such bitter grief he'd had;
Stretching his hand, he took that Oliphant.
Through Rencesvals a little river ran;
He would go there, fetch water for Roland.
Went step by step, to stumble soon began,
So feeble he is, no further fare he can,
For too much blood he's lost, and no strength has;
Ere he has crossed an acre of the land,
His heart grows faint, he falls down forwards and
Death comes to him with very cruel pangs.

Oliphant=Roland's battle horn, made from an elephant tusk; Rencesvals=small town near their location

166

The count Roland wakes from his swoon once more,
Climbs to his feet; his pains are very sore;
Looks down the vale, looks to the hills above;
On the green grass, beyond his companions,
He sees him lie, that noble old baron;
'Tis the Archbishop, whom in His name wrought God;
There he proclaims his sins, and looks above;
Joins his two hands, to Heaven holds them forth,
And Paradise prays God to him to accord.
Dead is Turpin, the warrior of Charlon.
In battles great and very rare sermons

The Song of Roland

YEAR II



UNIT 17

Against pagans ever a champion.
God grant him now His Benediction!

167

The count Roland sees the Archbishop lie dead,
Sees the bowels out of his body shed,
And sees the brains that surge from his forehead;
Between his two arm-pits, upon his breast,
Crossways he folds those hands so white and fair.
Then mourns aloud, as was the custom there:
"Thee, gentle sir, chevalier nobly bred,
To the Glorious Celestial I commend;
Ne'er shall man be, that will Him serve so well;
Since the Apostles was never such prophet,
To hold the laws and draw the hearts of men.
Now may your soul no pain nor sorrow ken,
Finding the gates of Paradise open!"

168

Then Roland feels that death to him draws near,
For all his brain is issued from his ears;
He prays to God that He will call the peers,
Bids Gabriel, the angel, t' himself appear.
Takes the Oliphant, that no reproach shall hear,
And Durendal in the other hand he wields;
Further than might a cross-bow's arrow speed
Goes towards Spain into a fallow-field;
Climbs on a cliff; where, under two fair trees,
Four terraces, of marble wrought, he sees.
There he falls down, and lies upon the green;
He swoons again, for death is very near.

169

High are the peaks, the trees are very high.
Four terraces of polished marble shine;
On the green grass count Roland swoons thereby.
A Sarasin him all the time espies,
Who feigning death among the others hides;
Blood hath his face and all his body dyed;
He gets afoot, running towards him hies;
Fair was he, strong and of a courage high;
A mortal hate he's kindled in his pride.
He's seized Roland, and the arms, were at his side,
"Charles nephew," he's said, "here conquered lies.
To Araby I'll bear this sword as prize."

to hie=to hasten, to go



As he drew it, something the Count descried.

170

So Roland felt his sword was taken forth,
Opened his eyes, and this word to him spoke
"Thou'rt never one of ours, full well I know."
Took the Oliphant, that he would not let go,
Struck him on th' helm, that jeweled was with gold,
And broke its steel, his skull and all his bones,
Out of his head both the two eyes he drove;
Dead at his feet he has the pagan thrown:
After he's said: "Foul Pagan, thou wert too bold,
Or right or wrong, of my sword seizing hold!
They'll dub thee fool, to whom the tale is told.
But my great one, my Oliphant I broke;
Fallen from it the crystal and the gold."

171

Then Roland feels that he has lost his sight,
Climbs to his feet, uses what strength he might;
In all his face the color is grown white.
In front of him a great brown boulder lies;
Whereon ten blows with grief and rage he strikes;
The steel cries out, but does not break outright;
And the count says: "Saint Mary, be my guide
Good Durendal, unlucky is your plight!
I've need of you no more; spent is my pride!
We in the field have won so many fights,
Combating through so many regions wide
That Charles holds, whose beard is hoary white!
Be you not his that turns from any in flight!
A good vassal has held you this long time;
Never shall France the Free behold his like."

172

Roland hath struck the sardonyx rock;
The steel cries out, but broken is no ways.
So when he sees he never can it break,
Within himself begins he to complain:
"Ah! Durendal, white art thou, clear of stain!
Beneath the sun reflecting back his rays!
In Moriane was Charles, in the vale,
When from heaven God by His angel bade

The Song of Roland

YEAR II



UNIT 17

Him give thee to a count and capitain;
Girt thee on me that noble King and great.
I won for him with thee Anjou, Bretaigne,
And won for him with thee Peitou, the Maine,
And Normandy the free for him I gained,
Also with thee Provence and Equitaine,
And Lombardie and all the whole Romaine,
I won Baivere, all Flanders in the plain,
Also Burguigne and all the whole Puillane,
Costentinnople, that homage to him pays;
In Saisonie all is as he ordains;
With thee I won him Scotland, Ireland, Wales,
England also, where he his chamber makes;
Won I with thee so many countries strange
That Charles holds, whose beard is white with age!
For this sword's sake sorrow upon me weighs,
Rather I'd die, than it mid pagans stay.
Lord God Father, never let France be shamed!"

173

Roland his stroke on a dark stone repeats,
And more of it breaks off than I can speak.
The sword cries out, yet breaks not in the least,
Back from the blow into the air it leaps.
Destroy it can he not; which when he sees,
Within himself he makes a plaint most sweet.
"Ah! Durendal, most holy, fair indeed!
Relics enough thy golden hilt conceals:
Saint Peter's Tooth, the Blood of Saint Basile,
Some of the Hairs of my Lord, Saint Denise,
Some of the Robe, was worn by Saint Mary.
It is not right that pagans should thee seize,
For Christian men your use shall ever be.
Nor any man's that worketh cowardice!
Many broad lands with you have I retrieved
Which Charles holds, who hath the great white beard;
Wherefore that King so proud and rich is he."

174

But Roland felt that death had made a way
Down from his head till on his heart it lay;
Beneath a pine running in haste he came,
On the green grass he lay there on his face;
His Oliphant and sword beneath him placed,
Turning his head towards the pagan race,

The Song of Roland

YEAR II



UNIT 17

Now this he did, in truth, that Charles might say
(As he desired) and all the Franks his race; --
'Ah, gentle count; conquering he was slain!' --
He owned his faults often and every way,
And for his sins his glove to God upraised.

175

But Roland feels he's no more time to seek;
Looking to Spain, he lies on a sharp peak,
And with one hand upon his breast he beats:
"Mea Culpa! God, by Thy Virtues clean
Me from my sins, the mortal and the mean,
Which from the hour that I was born have been
Until this day, when life is ended here!"
Holds out his glove towards God, as he speaks
Angels descend from heaven on that scene.

176

The Count Roland, beneath a pine he sits,;
Turning his eyes towards Spain, he begins
Remembering so many diverse things:
So many lands where he went conquering,
And France the Douce, the heroes of his kin,
And Charlemagne, his lord who nourished him.
Nor can he help but weep and sigh at this.
But his own self, he's not forgotten him,
He owns his faults, and God's forgiveness bids:
"Very Father, in Whom no falsehood is,
Saint Lazaron from death Thou didst remit,
And Daniel save from the lions' pit;
My soul in me preserve from all perils
And from the sins I did in life commit!"
His right-hand glove, to God he offers it
Saint Gabriel from his hand hath taken it.
Over his arm his head bows down and slips,
He joins his hands: and so is life finish'd.
God sent him down His angel cherubim,
And Saint Michael, we worship in peril;
And by their side Saint Gabriel alit;
So the count's soul they bare to Paradis.

douce=sedate, modest, quiet; from Latin *dulce*

177

Roland is dead; his soul to heav'n God bare.
That Emperor to Rencesvals doth fare.
There was no path nor passage anywhere

The Song of Roland

YEAR II



UNIT 17

Nor of waste ground no ell nor foot to spare
Without a Frank or pagan lying there.
Charles cries aloud: "Where are you, nephew fair?
Where's the Archbishop and that count Oliviers?
Where is Gerins and his comrade Gerers?
Otes the Duke, and the count Berengiers
And Ivorie, and Ive, so dear they were?
What is become of Gascon Engelier,
Sansun the Duke and Anseis the fierce?
Where's old Gerard of Russillun; oh, where
The dozen peers I left behind me here?"
But what avail, since none can answer bear?
"God!" says the King, "Now well may I despair,
I was not here the first assault to share!"
Seeming enraged, his beard the King doth tear.
Weep from their eyes barons and chevaliers,
A thousand score, they swoon upon the earth;
Duke Neimes for them was moved with pity rare.

178

No chevalier nor baron is there, who
Pitifully weeps not for grief and dule;
They mourn their sons, their brothers, their nephews,
And their liege lords, and trusty friends and true;
Upon the ground a many of them swoon.
Thereon Duke Neimes doth act with wisdom proof,
First before all he's said to the Emperor:
"See beforehand, a league from us or two,
From the highways dust rising in our view;
Pagans are there, and many them, too.
Canter therefore! Vengeance upon them do!"
"Ah, God!" says Charles, "so far are they re-moved!
Do right by me, my honor still renew!
They've torn from me the flower of France the Douce."
The King commands Gebuin and Otun,
Tedbalt of Reims, also the count Milun:
"Guard me this field, these hills and valleys too,
Let the dead lie, all as they are, unmoved,
Let not approach lion, nor any brute,
Let not approach esquire, nor any groom;
For I forbid that any come thereto,
Until God will that we return anew."
These answer him sweetly, their love to prove:
"Right Emperor, dear Sire, so will we do."
A thousand knights they keep in retinue.



179

That Emperor bids trumpets sound again,
Then canters forth with his great host so brave.
Of Spanish men, whose backs are turned their way,
Franks one and all continue in their chase.
When the King sees the light at even fade,
On the green grass dismounting as he may,
He kneels aground, to God the Lord doth pray
That the sun's course He will for him delay,
Put off the night, and still prolong the day.
An angel then, with him should reason make,
Nimbly enough appeared to him and spake:
"Charles, canter on! Light needst not thou await.
The flower of France, as God knows well, is slain;
Thou canst be avenged upon that crimeful race."
Upon that word mounts the Emperor again.

180

For Charlemagne a great marvel God planned:
Making the sun still in his course to stand.
So pagans fled, and chased them well the Franks
Through the Valley of Shadows, close in hand;
Towards Sarraguce by force they chased them back,
And as they went with killing blows attacked:
Barred their highways and every path they had.
The River Sebre before them reared its bank,
'Twas very deep, marvelous current ran;
No barge thereon nor dromond nor caland. dromond=a type of boat, caland=?
A god of theirs invoked they, Tervagant.
And then leaped in, but there no warrant had.
The armed men more weighty were for that,
Many of them down to the bottom sank,
Downstream the rest floated as they might hap;
So much water the luckiest of them drank,
That all were drowned, with marvellous keen pangs.
"An evil day," cry Franks, "ye saw Roland!"

181

When Charles sees that pagans all are dead,
Some of them slain, the greater part drowned;
(Whereby great spoils his chevaliers collect)
That gentle King upon his feet descends,
Kneels on the ground, his thanks to God presents.
When he once more rise, the sun is set.

The Song of Roland

YEAR II



UNIT 17

Says the Emperor "Time is to pitch our tents;
To Rencesvals too late to go again.
Our horses are worn out and foundered:
Unsaddle them, take bridles from their heads,
And through these meads let them refreshment get."
Answer the Franks: "Sire, you have spoken well."

182

That Emperor hath chosen his bivouac;
The Franks dismount in those deserted tracts,
Their saddles take from off their horses' backs,
Bridles of gold from off their heads unstrap,
Let them go free; there is enough fresh grass --
No service can they render them, save that.
Who is most tired sleeps on the ground stretched flat.
Upon this night no sentinels keep watch.

bivouac=place of encampment

183

That Emperor is lying in a mead;
By his head, so brave, he's placed his mighty spear;
On such a night unarmed he will not be.
He's donned his white hauberk, with broidery,
Has laced his helm, jeweled with golden beads,
Girt on Joyeuse, there never was its peer,
Whereon each day thirty fresh hues appear.

mead=a meadow

Joyeuse= Its golden hilt contains the tip of the so-called "Spear of Longinus" which is reputed

All of us know that lance, and well may speak
Our Lord was wounded on the Tree:
Charles, by God's grace, possessed its point of steel!
His golden hilt he enshrined it underneath.
By that honor and by that sanctity
The name Joyeuse was for that sword decreed.
Barons of France may not forgetful be
Whence comes the ensign "Monjoie," they cry at need;
Wherefore no race against them can succeed.

to have pierced the crucified Jesus Whereby
and thus received a bath of His
Blood. This is the reason why the sword was
dubbed with this name which means "joyous"

At this point the Emperor has avenged Roland. The song continues beyond this and we find the Emperor seeking out the traitor who led Roland and the others into the ambush that began the song. The fellow is tried and executed for his crime.