Selections from *The Song of Roland,*
translated by Charles Scott Moncrieff.

**LXXIX**
Ready they make hauberks Sarrazinese,
That folded are, the greater part, in three;
And they lace on good helms Sarragucese;
Gird on their swords of tried steel Viennese;
Fine shields they have, and spears Valentinese,
And white, blue, red, their ensigns take the breeze,
They’ve left their mules behind, and their palfreys,
Their chargers mount, and canter knee by knee.
Fair shines the sun, the day is bright and clear,
Light burns again from all their polished gear.
A thousand horns they sound, more proud to seem;
Great is the noise, the Franks its echo hear.
Says Oliver: “Companion, I believe,
Sarrazins now in battle must we meet.”
Answers Rollanz: “God grant us then the fee!
For our King’s sake well must we quit us here;
Man for his lord should suffer great disease,
Most bitter cold endure, and burning heat,
His hair and skin should offer up at need.
Now must we each lay on most hardily,
So evil songs neer sung of us shall be.
Pagans are wrong: Christians are right indeed.
Evil example will never come of me.”
AOI.

**LXXX**
Oliver mounts upon a lofty peak,
Looks to his right along the valley green,
The pagan tribes approaching there appear;
He calls Rollanz, his companion, to see:
“What sound is this, come out of Spain, we hear,
What hauberks bright, what helmets these that gleam?
They’ll smite our Franks with fury past belief,
He knew it, Guenes, the traitor and the thief,
Who chose us out before the King our chief.”
Answers the count Rollanz: “Olivier, cease.
That man is my good-father; hold thy peace.”

**LXXXI**
Upon a peak is Oliver mounted,
Kingdom of Spain he sees before him spread,
And Sarrazins, so many gathered.
Their helmets gleam, with gold are jewelled,
Also their shields, their hauberks orfreyed,
Also their swords, ensigns on spears fixed.
Rank beyond rank could not be numbered,
So many there, no measure could he set.
In his own heart he's sore astonished,
Fast as he could, down from the peak sped
Comes to the Franks, to them his tale hath said.

LXXXII
Says Oliver: “Pagans from there I saw;
Never on earth did any man see more.
Gainst us their shields an hundred thousand bore,
That laced helms and shining hauberks wore;
And, bolt upright, their bright brown spearheads shone.
Battle we'll have as never was before.

1045 Lords of the Franks, God keep you in valour!
So hold your ground, we be not overborne!”
Then say the Franks “Shame take him that goes off:
If we must die, then perish one and all.”

AOI.

LXXXIII
Says Oliver: “Pagans in force abound,
While of us Franks but very few I count;
Comrade Rollanz, your horn I pray you sound!
If Charles hear, he'll turn his armies round.”
Answers Rollanz: “A fool I should be found;
In France the Douce would perish my renown.

With Durendal I'll lay on thick and stout,
In blood the blade, to its golden hilt, I'll drown.
Felon pagans to th' pass shall not come down;
I pledge you now, to death they all are bound.

AOI.

LXXXIV
"Comrade Rollanz, sound the olifant, I pray;
If Charles hear, the host he'll turn again;
Will succour us our King and baronage.”
Answers Rollanz: “Never, by God, I say,
For my misdeed shall kinsmen hear the blame,
Nor France the Douce fall into evil fame!
Rather stout blows with Durendal I'll lay,
With my good sword that by my side doth sway;
Till bloodied o'er you shall behold the blade.
Felon pagans are gathered to their shame;
I pledge you now, to death they're doomed to-day.”

LXXXV
“Comrade Rollanz, once sound your olifant!
If Charles hear, where in the pass he stands,
I pledge you now, they'll turn again, the Franks.”
“Never, by God,” then answers him Rollanz,
“Shall it be said by any living man,

1075 That for pagans I took my horn in hand!
Never by me shall men reproach my clan.
When I am come into the battle grand,
And blows lay on, by hundred, by thousand,
Of Durendal bloodied you'll see the brand.

Franks are good men; like vassals brave they'll stand;
Nay, Spanish men from death have no warrant.”

LXXXVI
Says Oliver: “In this I see no blame;
I have beheld the Sarrazins of Spain;
Covered with them, the mountains and the vales,
The wastes I saw, and all the farthest plains.
A muster great they've made, this people strange;
We have of men a very little tale.”
Answers Rollanz: “My anger is inflamed.
Never, please God His Angels and His Saints,
Never by me shall Frankish valour fail!
Rather I'll die than shame shall me attain.
Therefore strike on, the Emperour’s love to gain.”

LXXXVII
Pride hath Rollanz, wisdom Olivier hath;
And both of them shew marvellous courage;
Once they are horsed, once they have donned their arms,
Rather they’d die than from the battle pass.
Good are the counts, and lofty their language.
Felon pagans come cantering in their wrath.
Says Oliver: “Behold and see, Rollanz,
These are right near, but Charles is very far.
On the olifant de ign now to sound a blast;
Were the King here, we should not fear damage.
Only look up towards the Pass of Aspre,
In sorrow there you'll see the whole rereward.
Who does this deed, does no more afterward.”
Answers Rollanz: “Utter not such outrage!
Evil his heart that is in thought coward!
We shall remain firm in our place installed;
From us the blows shall come, from us the assault.”

LXXXVIII
When Rollant sees that now must be combat,
More fierce he’s found than lion or leopard;
The Franks he calls, and Oliver commands:
“Now say no more, my friends, nor thou, comrade.
That Emperour, who left us Franks on guard,
A thousand score stout men he set apart,
And well he knows, not one will prove coward.
Man for his lord should suffer with good heart,
Of bitter cold and great heat bear the smart,
His blood let drain, and all his flesh be scarred.
Strike with thy lance, and I with Durendal,
With my good sword that was the King's reward.
So, if I die, who has it afterward
Noble vassal's he well may say it was."

LXXXIX
From the other part is the Archbishop Turpin,
He pricks his horse and mounts upon a hill;
Calling the Franks, sermon to them begins:
“My lords barons, Charles left us here for this;
He is our King, well may we die for him:
To Christendom good service offering.
Battle you'll have, you all are bound to it,
For with your eyes you see the Sarrazins.
Pray for God's grace, confessing Him your sins!
For your souls' health, I'll absolution give
So, though you die, blest martyrs shall you live,
Thrones you shall win in the great Paradis.”
The Franks dismount, upon the ground are lit.
That Archbishop God's Benediction gives,
For their penance, good blows to strike he bids.

XC
The Franks arise, and stand upon their feet,
They're well absolved, and from their sins made clean,
And the Archbishop has signed them with God's seal;
And next they mount upon their chargers keen;
By rule of knights they have put on their gear,
For battle all apparelled as is meet.
The count Rollant calls Oliver, and speaks
“Comrade and friend, now clearly have you seen
That Guenelun hath got us by deceit;
Gold hath he ta'en; much wealth is his to keep;
That Emperour vengeance for us must wreak.
King Marsilies hath bargained for us cheap;
At the sword's point he yet shall pay our meed.”

XCI
To Spanish pass is Rollanz now going
On Veillantif, his good steed, galloping;
He is well armed, pride is in his bearing,
He goes, so brave, his spear in hand holding,
He goes, its point against the sky turning;
A gonfalon all white thereon he’s pinned,
Down to his hand flutters the golden fringe:
Noble his limbs, his face clear and smiling.
His companion goes after, following,
The men of France their warrant find in him.
Proudly he looks towards the Sarrazins,
And to the Franks sweetly, himself humbling;
And courteously has said to them this thing:
“My lords barons, go now your pace holding!
Pagans are come great martyrdom seeking;
Noble and fair reward this day shall bring,
Was never won by any Frankish King.”
Upon these words the hosts are come touching.

XCII
Speaks Oliver: “No more now will I say.
Your olifant, to sound it do not deign,
Since from Carlun you’ll never more have aid.
He has not heard; no fault of his, so brave.
Those with him there are never to be blamed.
So canter on, with what prowess you may!
Lords and barons, firmly your ground maintain!
Be minded well, I pray you in God’s Name,
Stout blows to strike, to give as you shall take.
Forget the cry of Charles we never may.”

Upon this word the Franks cry out amain.
Who then had heard them all “Monjoie!” acclaim
Of vassalage might well recall the tale.
They canter forth, God! with what proud parade,
Pricking their spurs, the better speed to gain;
They go to strike,— what other thing could they?
But Sarrazins are not at all afraid.
Pagans and Franks, you’d see them now engaged.

XCIII
Marsile’s nephew, his name is Aelroth,
First of them all canters before the host,
Says of our Franks these ill words as he goes:
“Felons of France, so here on us you close!
Betrayed you has he that to guard you ought;
Mad is the King who left you in this post.
So shall the fame of France the Douce be lost,
And the right arm from Charles body torn.”
When Rollant hears, what rage he has, by God!
His steed he spurs, gallops with great effort;
He goes, that count, to strike with all his force,
The shield he breaks, the hauberk’s seam unsews,
Slices the heart, and shatters up the bones,
All of the spine he severs with that blow,
And with his spear the soul from body throws
So well he’s pinned, he shakes in the air that corse,
On his spear’s hilt he’s flung it from the horse:
So in two halves Aeroth’s neck he broke,
Nor left him yet, they say, but rather spoke:
“Avaunt, culvert! A madman Charles is not,
No treachery was ever in his thought.
Proudly he did, who left us in this post;
The fame of France the Douce shall not be lost.
Strike on, the Franks! Ours are the foremost blows.  
For we are right, but these gluttons are wrong.”  

AOI.

XCIV
A duke there was, his name was Falfarun,  
Brother was he to King Marsiliun,  
He held their land, Dathan’s and Abirun’s;  
Beneath the sky no more encrimed felun;  
Between his eyes so broad was he in front  
A great half-foot you’d measure there in full.  
His nephew dead he’s seen with grief enough,  
Comes through the press and wildly forth he runs,  
Aloud he shouts their cry the pagans use;  
And to the Franks is right contrarious:  
“Honour of France the Douce shall fall to us!”  
Hears Oliver, he’s very furious,  
His horse he pricks with both his golden spurs,  
And goes to strike, ev’n as a baron doth;  
The shield he breaks and through the hauberk cuts,  
His ensign’s fringe into the carcass thrusts,  
On his spear’s hilt he’s flung it dead in dust.  
Looks on the ground, sees glutton lying thus,  
And says to him, with reason proud enough:  
“From threatening, culvert, your mouth I’ve shut.  
Strike on, the Franks! Right well we’ll overcome.”  
“Monjoie,” he shouts, ’twas the ensign of Carlun.  

AOI.

XCV
A king there was, his name was Corsablix,  
Barbarian, and of a strange country,  
He’s called aloud to the other Sarrazins:  
“Well may we join battle upon this field,  
For of the Franks but very few are here;  
And those are here, we should account them cheap,  
From Charles not one has any warranty.  
This is the day when they their death shall meet.”  
Has heard him well that Archbishop Turpin,  
Spurs of fine gold he pricks into his steed,  
To strike that king by virtue great goes he,  
The hauberk all unfastens, breaks the shield,  
Thrusts his great spear in through the carcass clean,  
Pins it so well he shakes it in its seat,  
Dead in the road he’s flung it from his spear.  
Looks on the ground, that glutton lying sees,  
Nor leaves him yet, they say, but rather speaks:  
“Culvert pagan, you lied now in your teeth,  
Charles my lord our warrant is indeed;  
None of our Franks hath any mind to flee.
Your companions all on this spot we’ll keep,
I tell you news; death shall ye suffer here.
Strike on, the Franks! Fail none of you at need!
Ours the first blow, to God the glory be!”

1260    “Monjoie!” he cries, for all the camp to hear.

XCVI
And Gerins strikes Malprimis of Brigal
So his good shield is nothing worth at all,
Shatters the boss, was fashioned of crystal,
One half of it downward to earth flies off;

1265    Right to the flesh has through his hauberk torn,
On his good spear he has the carcass caught.
And with one blow that pagan downward falls;
The soul of him Satan away hath borne.

AOI.
CXL
Rollant regards the barren mountain-sides;
Dead men of France, he sees so many lie,
And weeps for them as fits a gentle knight:
“Lords and barons, may God to you be kind!
And all your souls redeem for Paradise!
And let you there mid holy flowers lie!
Better vassals than you saw never I.
Ever you’ve served me, and so long a time,
By you Carlon hath conquered kingdoms wide;
That Emperour reared you for evil plight!
Douce land of France, o very precious clime,
Laid desolate by such a sour exile!
Barons of France, for me I’ve seen you die,
And no support, no warrant could I find;
God be your aid, Who never yet hath lied!
I must not fail now, brother, by your side;
Save I be slain, for sorrow shall I die.
Sir companion, let us again go strike!”

CXLI
The count Rollanz, back to the field then hieing
Holds Durendal, and like a vassal striking
Faldrun of Pui has through the middle sliced,
With twenty-four of all they rated highest;
Was never man, for vengeance shewed such liking.
Even as a stag before the hounds goes flying,
Before Rollanz the pagans scatter, frightened.
Says the Archbishop: “You deal now very wisely!
Such valour should he shew that is bred knightly,
And bearth arms, and a good charger rideth;
In battle should be strong and proud and sprightly;
Or otherwise he is not worth a shilling,
Should be a monk in one of those old minsters,
Where, day, by day, he’d pray for us poor sinners.”
Answers Rollant: “Strike on; no quarter give them!”
Upon these words Franks are again beginning;
Very great loss they suffer then, the Christians.
CLXVIII
Then Rollanz 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 olifant, 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.

CLXIX
High are the peaks, the trees are very high.
Four terraces of polished marble shine;
On the green grass count Rollant swoons thereby.
A Sarrazin 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 Rollant, and the arms, were at his side,
“To Araby I’ll bear this sword as prize.”
As he drew it, something the count descried.

CLXX
So Rollant 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 olifant, that he would not let go,
Struck him on th’ helm, that jewelled 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: “Culvert, 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 olifant I broke;
Fallen from it the crystal and the gold.”

CLXXI
Then Rollanz feels that he has lost his sight,
Climbs to his feet, uses what strength he might;
In all his face the colour 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.”

CLXXII
Rollant hath struck the sardonyx terrace;
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
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 Equitaigne,
And Lumbardie 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!”

CLXXIII
Rollant 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.”

CLXXIV
But Rollant 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 olifant and sword beneath him placed,
Turning his head towards the pagan race,
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.

AOI.

CLXXV
But Rollant 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.

AOI.

CLXXVI
The count Rollanz, beneath a pine he sits,;
Turning his eyes towards Spain, he begins
Remembering so many divers 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
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
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 cherubin,
And Saint Michael, we worship in peril;
And by their side Saint Gabriel alit;
So the count’s soul they bare to Paradis.

CLXXVII
Rollant is dead; his soul to heav’n God bare.
That Emperour to Rencesvals doth fare.
There was no path nor passage anywhere
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.

CLXXVIII
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 trustworthy 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 Emperour:
“See beforehand, a league from us or two,
From the highways dust rising in our view;
Canter therefore! Vengeance upon them do!”
“Ah, God!” says Charles, “so far are they re-moved!
Do right by me, my honour 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.”
2440 These answer him sweetly, their love to prove:
   “Right Emperour, dear Sire, so will we do.”
A thousand knights they keep in retinue.
   AOI.

CLXXIX
That Emperour bids trumpets sound again,
Then canters forth with his great host so brave.

2445 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,

2450 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.

2455 The flower of France, as God knows well, is slain;
   Thou canst be avenged upon that crimeful race.”
Upon that word mounts the Emperour again.
   AOI.