

# THE SONG OF ROLAND



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PUBLISHED BY

Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing  
Indianapolis

Q 1521 / E5 / T4

## XXV

The Emperor Charles holds out his right-hand glove,  
 But Ganelon, who'd rather not be there,  
 Taking the gauntlet, lets it fall to the ground.  
 The Frenchmen say, "Oh, God! What does this mean?  
 Surely this message will bring us to our woe."  
 Says Ganelon, "Your answer won't be slow."

## XXVI

"Sire," says the count, "now grant me leave to go;  
 Since go I must, I care not for delay."  
 The king replies, "In Jesu's name and mine!"  
 340 Then Charles' right hand absolves the count from sin;  
 The staff and letter are both given to him.

## XXVII

Count Ganelon returning to his tent,  
 Arrays himself as if for waging war  
 With the best arms his household can provide.  
 The spurs are gold he fastens to his feet,  
 Murglais, his sword, is hanging at his side,  
 And now he mounts his war-horse Tachebrun,  
 The stirrup held by his uncle Guinemer.  
 Then you could see how many knights shed tears,  
 350 All of them saying, "Alas! You go to die.  
 Long have you served the great king at his court,  
 A noble vassal; none fail to speak your praise.  
 The man who named you the envoy to Marsile  
 Will not live long— in spite of Charlemagne!  
 Roland was wrong not to remember this:  
 Behind you stands a mighty family."

340. One of several examples in the poem of Charlemagne's priestly function.

And then they say, "Let us go with you, lord."  
 The count replies, "Almighty God forbid!  
 I'll die alone, not sacrifice good knights.  
 But you must go, my lords, back to sweet France  
 360 Where you will bring my greetings to my wife,  
 To Pinabel, my good friend and my peer,  
 And to my son, Baldwin, whom you all know—  
 Give him your help, and serve him as your lord."  
 Now toward Marsile Ganelon sets his course. AOI

## XXVIII

Ganelon rides under tall olive trees;  
 Now he has met the envoys from Marsile,  
 And Blancandrin is riding at his side;  
 Both of them talk with great diplomacy.  
 Says Blancandrin, "I marvel at your king—  
 370 For he has conquered the whole of Italy,  
 And then to England he crossed the salty sea  
 So that the Saxons would pay Saint Peter's fee.  
 And what of Spain will Charlemagne require?"  
 The count replies, "That's hidden in his mind.  
 A greater king no man will ever find." AOI

## XXIX

Says Blancandrin, "The Franks are noble men;  
 But they do wrong, those warlike dukes and counts  
 When by the counsel they give to Charlemagne  
 They wear him out, and others suffer too."  
 380  
 359. Ganelon's nobility here may possibly be motivated by the "little trick" he is plotting. Otherwise it is an example, among many in the text, of the poet's insistence on adversaries of equal weight.  
 375. At his trial, Ganelon will insist that he was always loyal to Charlemagne. His conversations with Blancandrin and Marsile show him punctiliously respectful to the Emperor, and often convincingly admiring: the most splendid praise of Charles in the poem comes from Ganelon (*laisse* XL).

Ganelon says, "Of this I could accuse  
 Only Count Roland— who'll pay for it some day.  
 Not long ago, when Charles sat at his ease,  
 His nephew came dressed in his battle gear—  
 He'd gone for plunder somewhere near Carcassonne.  
 In Roland's hand an apple shone, bright red;  
 He told his uncle, 'Accept it, my fair lord!  
 I bring you here the crowns of every king.'  
 But his great pride will lead him on too far,  
 390 For every day we see him risk his life.  
 If he were killed, there'd be an end to strife." A01

## XXX

Says Blancandrin, "Evil is Roland's heart.  
 He'd have the world surrender to his will,  
 Proclaim his right to every land on earth!  
 But by whose help can he attempt so much?"  
 "The Franks of France! He so commands their love,  
 They'll never fail him, they're with him to a man.  
 He gives them gifts of silver and much gold,  
 War-horses, mules, brocades and costly arms;  
 400 The king himself won't cross him in the least:  
 By Roland's sword he'll rule to the far East!" A01

## XXXI

So Ganelon and Blancandrin ride on  
 Until they've made a solemn pact: they vow  
 That they will seek to have Count Roland slain.  
 They go their way, and then dismount at last  
 In Saragossa where a tall yew tree stands.  
 Under a pine a throne has been set up,  
 Draped in brocade of Alexandrian silk.  
 There sits the king, the ruler of all Spain;  
 400. This line could also mean that Roland gives the Emperor every-  
 thing the latter wants, which is equally true.

Around him wait his twenty thousand men.  
 Not one of them lets fall a single word;  
 They're all intent on what they hope to hear  
 From those two men who even now appear.

410

## XXXII

Now Blancandrin has come before Marsile,  
 And by the fist he holds Count Ganelon.  
 He speaks these words: "Hail, in Mohammed's name,  
 Apollo's too, whose Law we all obey!  
 We have delivered your message to King Charles;  
 When he had heard us, he raised his hands on high  
 To praise his God, but gave us no reply.  
 420 Now he has sent you one of his noble lords,  
 A count of France, a man of power and wealth.  
 From him you'll learn if there is hope for peace."  
 Marsile replies, "We'll hear him; let him speak."

420

## XXXIII

Count Ganelon has taken careful thought,  
 Now he begins in well-considered words,  
 Subtly contrived— the count knows how to talk.  
 He tells Marsile: "May God grant you His grace,  
 That glorious Lord to whom all men must pray!  
 Now by the will of Charlemagne the King,  
 You must accept the holy Christian law,  
 And half of Spain he'll let you hold in fief.  
 Should you refuse agreement to these terms,  
 You'll find yourself a captive and in chains,

430

425 ff. Ganelon is not only an accomplished liar, but an enthusiastic one (see his description of the death of the Caliph, in *laisse* LIV). Here only the tone would seem to misrepresent Charlemagne, except that Marsile will be allowed to keep only half of Spain, in fief to Charles; the other half is to be ruled by Roland. Thus the latter is made, once again, the focal point of the pagans' anger.

Taken by force to answer Charles at Aix.  
 There you'll be judged, and you will be condemned  
 To die a death of infamy and shame."  
 At that Marsile in fear and fury raised  
 A throwing spear— its feathering was gold;  
 440 He would have struck, but that his men took hold. A01

## XXXIV

In the king's face they see the color change;  
 He stands there raging, shaking his javelin.  
 Ganelon's hand reaches to grasp his sword,  
 Out of the scabbard draws it two finger lengths;  
 He tells the blade: "Shining you are, and fair!  
 Long have we served, we two, at King Charles' court!  
 The Emperor of France shall never say  
 I died alone here in this foreign land  
 Before their best have bought you at your price."  
 450 The pagans say, "We must not let them fight!"

## XXXV

The Saracens prevail upon Marsile  
 Until the king will take his seat again.  
 Said the caliph, "You don't do any good  
 When you are ready to strike the Frenchman down.  
 Just let him speak, and listen to him well."  
 Ganelon says, "My lord, I'll suffer that.  
 But I won't stop, for all the gold God made,  
 For all the treasure that's gathered in this land,  
 Before I give him, if he will grant me time,  
 460 The message Charles confided to my care,  
 The words he sends his mortal enemy."  
 Ganelon wore a cloak of sable furs  
 Covered in folds of Alexandrian silk.  
 He throws it down— it's caught by Blancandrin—  
 But has no thought of letting go his sword:

His right hand grasps the handle made of gold.  
 The pagans say, "Noble he is, and bold!" A01

## XXXVI

Count Ganelon stands close beside the king,  
 And says to him, "You have no cause for wrath  
 If Charlemagne who rules the land of France  
 Says you must take the holy Christian law: 470  
 One half of Spain he'll let you hold in fief,  
 His nephew Roland will rule the other part—  
 There you will have a partner full of pride!  
 If you refuse agreement to these terms,  
 In Saragossa you soon will be beseiged,  
 You'll find yourself a prisoner in chains,  
 And straight away you'll be led off to Aix.  
 And then no palfrey, no war-horse will you have,  
 Nor yet a mule to ride with dignity, 480  
 But you'll be thrown onto some pack-beast's back,  
 And lose your head at that long journey's end.  
 Here is the message I've brought at Charles' command."  
 He puts the letter into Marsile's right hand.

## XXXVII

Now King Marsile, his face gone white with rage,  
 Breaks the seal open and throws the wax away,  
 Looks at the letter and sees what it contains.  
 "Thus writes King Charles who rules the land of France:  
 He won't forget his anger and his grief  
 About Basant and his brother Basile 490  
 Whose heads I took on a hill near Haltilie.  
 If I would make amends, there's just one way:

485. Jenkins' reading here is *escolez de lire*, "had been taught how to read." The fact is in any case verified by line 487. The letter itself, if Marsile gives us its full contents, asks only for the one proof of submission, which Marsile does not provide.

I'll have to send him my uncle, the Caliph;  
 If I refuse, he'll have no love for me."  
 His son spoke up and said to King Marsile,  
 "Wild empty words we've had from Ganelon,  
 He's gone too far— he well deserves to die.  
 Leave him to me, and I'll do what is right."  
 Then Ganelon prepared for the attack,  
 500 Brandished his sword, the pine tree at his back.

## XXXVIII

Into an orchard the pagan king retired,  
 And with him went the wisest of his men.  
 Blancandrin came whose heavy beard was grey,  
 And Jurfare, Marsile's own son and heir,  
 And the Caliph, his uncle and good friend.  
 Says Blancandrin, "Summon the Frenchman here—  
 I have his word that he will serve our cause."  
 Marsile replies, "Then bring him to me now."  
 Blancandrin takes the count by the right hand,  
 510 Walks through the orchard, and leads him to Marsile.  
 They plot the treason that cunning will conceal. A01

## XXXIX

Thus speaks the king: "My fair lord Ganelon,  
 I know I did an ill-considered thing  
 When in my rage I went to strike you down.  
 I pledge you now by these fine sable furs—  
 The gold they're trimmed with is worth five hundred pounds:  
 Tomorrow evening I'll have made fair amends."  
 Says Ganelon, "Your gift I won't refuse.  
 And if God please, by this you shall not lose!" A01

## XL

520 Then says Marsile, "Know that I speak the truth,  
 Count Ganelon; I want to be your friend.

Now will you tell me something of Charlemagne.  
 Old as he is, his time must have run out—  
 I know he's lived more than two hundred years.  
 He has made journeys to so many far lands,  
 So many blows he's taken on his shield,  
 He has made beggars of so many rich kings—  
 When will he ever give up and take his rest?"  
 The count replies, "He's not as you suppose.  
 No one who sees him and learns to know him well  
 530 Can fail to say the emperor is great.  
 My words won't give you the measure of this man—  
 His noble virtues are far beyond my praise—  
 And who could put his courage into speech!  
 By God's grace honor illuminates my lord:  
 He'd rather die than break faith with his court.

## XLI

The pagan says, "Truly, I am amazed  
 By Charlemagne whose hair is grey with age—  
 I know he's lived more than two hundred years.  
 He's dragged his body through so many far lands,  
 540 Taken such blows from lances and from spears,  
 So many kings reduced to beggary,  
 It must be time for him to look for peace."  
 "That will not happen while Roland is alive;  
 There's no such vassal under the high-domed sky;  
 And very brave is Oliver his friend.  
 While the twelve peers whom Charlemagne so loves

\* 544. Here again Ganelon insists that only Roland is responsible for the pagans' misfortunes, and prepares the accomplishment of his own revenge, which depends on the separation of Roland and Charles. While the motive for this may be practical, as Marsile obviously could not hope to defeat the Emperor's entire army even with Ganelon's help, it seems that Ganelon really has no grudge against Charles in spite of the latter's obvious lack of enthusiasm for him. It should be remembered that Ganelon's wife is Charles's sister, and Roland's mother.

Serve as his vanguard with twenty thousand knights,  
The king is safe; he fears no man alive." AOI

## XLII

550 The pagan says, "Now marvelous indeed  
Is Charlemagne whose hair has grown so white—  
He is at least two hundred years of age. ;  
When he has conquered so many distant lands,  
Has taken blows from so many sharp spears,  
And such great kings brought to defeat and death,  
Is he not ready to take his rest at home?"  
The count replies, "Not while his nephew lives.  
There's none so valiant from here to the far East.  
A great lord too is Oliver his friend.  
560 While the twelve peers, for whom Charles feels such love,  
Serve him and lead those twenty thousand Franks,  
Charles can be sure no foe will break his ranks."

## XLIII

"Fair Ganelon," then says the pagan king,  
"You'll see no soldiers better at war than mine,  
And I can summon four hundred thousand knights.  
Can I not fight King Charles and all his Franks?"  
"If you should try it," Count Ganelon replies,  
"I tell you this, you'd massacre your men.  
Forget that folly, and hear what I advise:  
570 To Charlemagne send such a royal gift  
As to amaze and gratify the French.  
Send twenty men as hostages for you,  
And then the king will go home to sweet France.  
Behind his army the rear-guard will remain,  
And with them Roland, the nephew of the king,  
And Oliver, so gallant and so brave.  
And there they die— if you'll do as I say.  
King Charles will see the downfall of his pride;  
He'll have no wish to carry on the fight." AOI

## XLIV

Answers Marsile, "My fair lord Ganelon,  
Tell me the way Count Roland can be killed." 580  
Ganelon says, "Here is the plan I've made:  
The king will cross the mountain pass at Cize,  
With a strong guard remaining far behind.  
He'll leave his nephew, Count Roland, in the rear,  
Oliver too, in whom he has such faith,  
With them a host of twenty thousand Franks.  
Then of your pagans, a hundred thousand men  
Must be sent out to launch the first attack.  
You'll see the Frenchmen wounded and overcome— 590  
Not that I say your men won't suffer too.  
If you attack a second time that way,  
You can be sure that Roland won't escape.  
Once you have done this brave and knightly deed,  
All your life long from warfare you'll be freed."

## XLV

"With that same blow that struck Count Roland down,  
You would cut off the Emperor's right arm;  
His mighty host you'd scatter and destroy,  
Nor would he find so great a force again.  
All of his Empire would be restored to peace." 600  
Marsile fell on his neck; with joy he swore  
That Ganelon should loot his treasure-store. AOI

580. Jenkins supplies *ço dist li reis Marsilies* from V<sup>4</sup>, as the line is incomplete in the Oxford manuscript. V<sup>4</sup> is an assonanced version of the *Roland* in 6012 lines. Jenkins uses it to correct certain defects in the Oxford manuscript when a corresponding line can be located.

600. Following Jenkins I have translated *Tere Maior* as "the Empire" throughout. Bédier calls it *la terre des Aieux*, "land of our fathers."

602. Bédier does not translate this line (*Puis si cumencet a venir ses tresors*). It seems clear enough, however, that Marsile is about to offer material expression of his delight,

## XLVI

Then says Marsile, "There's one thing more to do,  
 Since all good counsel depends on perfect trust;  
 Give me your oath that Roland ~~is~~ to die."  
 Ganelon says, "That shall be as you wish."  
 He swore by relics he carried in his sword,  
 And so forever turned from his rightful lord. A01

## XLVII

610 A throne was there, made all of ivory.  
 A book was brought by King Marsile's command:  
 Laws of Mohammed and Tervagant, his gods.  
 On this he swore, the Spanish Saracen,  
 If he found Roland was named to the rear-guard,  
 He would attack with all his pagan knights,  
 And do his utmost to see the Frenchman die.  
 "Amen to that!" was Ganelon's reply.

## XLVIII

620 There was a pagan, his name was Valdabron,  
 Who now approached, and stood before Marsile.  
 Laughing for joy, he said to Ganelon:  
 "Here is my sword, a better you'll not find;  
 The hilt is worth a thousand coins of gold!  
 I give you this for friendship's sake, fair lord;

603-4. Bédier's translation expresses the same meaning, but words missing from the two lines are supplied by Jenkins.

611. The spelling of this and many other proper names varies throughout the text. Bédier reproduces all the variants, but I have preferred to adopt the most frequently used versions.

621. The line in the Oxford manuscript seems to mean that counting its two parts (*entre les helz*), the hilt is worth a thousand *mangons*. Bédier, however, considers this an abbreviation of the fact, mentioned in 1570, that Valdabron gave Ganelon a sword *and* a thousand *mangons*.

If you will help us, we cannot fail to find  
 The valiant Roland commanding the rear-guard."  
 The count replies, "You'll find him there, and win."  
 Then they exchange kisses on cheek and chin.

## XLIX

Afterward came a man called Climorin.  
 Laughing for joy, he said to Ganelon:  
 "Now take my helmet— none better have I seen—  
 For with your help in showing us the way,  
 We'll bring great Roland to his defeat and shame."  
 Ganelon said, "You won't have far to seek."  
 Then they exchanged kisses on lips and cheek. A01

630

## L

Then came the queen, the lady Bramimonde.  
 "My lord," she said, "I count myself your friend,  
 The king admires you, and so do all his men.  
 Give to your wife these necklaces from me,  
 Heavy with gold, jacinths and amethysts—  
 A greater prize than all the wealth of Rome,  
 And none so fine has Charles who rules the Franks."  
 He put them in his boots, and gave her thanks. A01

640

## LI

Then the king summons his treasurer Malduit:  
 "Have they prepared the tribute for King Charles?"  
 "The seven hundred camels, by your command,  
 Have all been loaded with silver and with gold,  
 And twenty men, our noblest, set to go." A01

641. It would indeed seem uncomfortable, as Sayers points out, to carry heavy jewelry in one's boots, but this translation of *hoese* is accepted by most editors. Jenkins mentions that Duke Naimon in *Aspremont* carries a griffon's paw in his "hose," so discomfort must have been irrelevant.

## LII

King Marsile places his arm around the count,  
 Saying to him, "Valiant you are, and wise.  
 But as you keep your God's most holy law,  
 650 I charge you never to turn your heart from me!  
 Of all I own I'll give you a good part:  
 Ten mules are loaded with fine Arabian gold,  
 And every year you'll have as much again.  
 Give Charles the keys to this broad city's walls,  
 Tell him its treasures will henceforth be his own,  
 And then name Roland commander of the guard.  
 If I can find him crossing some narrow pass,  
 There I'll attack and fight him to the death."  
 Ganelon says, "Then let us speed the day."  
 660 He mounts his horse, and quickly rides away. AOI

## LIII

The Emperor Charles has now retraced his steps  
 As far as Galne— that was a captured town  
 Whose walls Count Roland had leveled to the ground;  
 No one would live there for the next hundred years.  
 He waits for news of Ganelon's return,  
 And for the tribute offered to him by Spain.  
 At dawn one morning, just as the sky grows light,  
 Count Ganelon comes back from his long ride. AOI

## LIV

The Emperor Charles rose early on that day.  
 670 Now, having prayed at matins and a mass,  
 He goes outside and stands on the green grass.  
 Roland is with him, the noble Oliver,  
 Naimon the Duke, and many others too.

Ganelon comes, treacherous and forsworn.  
 All of his cunning he puts into his speech,  
 Saying to Charles, "I greet you in God's name!  
 Here are the keys to King Marsile's fair town;  
 From Saragossa, treasures beyond all price,  
 And twenty nobles, hostages—guard them well!  
 But King Marsile has asked me to explain  
 Why you won't see his uncle, the Caliph: 680  
 Before my eyes a hundred thousand men  
 All armed in mail, some with their helmets closed,  
 Swords at their belts, the hilts inlaid with gold,  
 Sailed with that lord out to the open sea.  
 They fled Marsile, hating the Christian law  
 Which they refused to honor and to keep.  
 They sailed away, but had not gone four leagues  
 When they were caught in such a frightful storm  
 They all were drowned. So perished the Caliph. 690  
 Were he alive, he'd be here with me now.  
 As for Marsile, my lord, you can be sure  
 That well before a single month has passed,  
 He'll follow you when you return to France.  
 There he'll accept the Faith that you uphold,  
 Both of his hands he'll place between your own,  
 And do you homage for all his lands in Spain."  
 Then said the king, "For this may God be thanked!  
 You have done well, and great shall be your prize."  
 Among the hosts, a thousand trumpets sound; 700  
 The French break camp, they load each mule and horse,  
 And toward sweet France they gladly set their course. AOI

680 ff. This account of the Caliph's death is obviously a fiction created to explain his failure to accompany Ganelon. According to Jenkins, the copyist of the Oxford manuscript made the mistake of believing Ganelon, and for that reason replaced "the Caliph" with "Marganice" when he appears at Roncevaux (1915).



## LV

King Charles the Great has conquered all of Spain,  
 Captured its forts, its cities laid to waste;  
 His war, he says, has now come to its end.  
 The emperor rides once more toward his sweet France.  
 From Roland's spearhead the flag of battle flies;  
 When, from a hilltop, it waves against the sky,  
 The French make camp throughout the countryside.  
 710 Pagans are riding through valleys deep and dark,  
 Their coats of mail are laced up to the chin,  
 Their helmets closed; bright swords hang at their sides,  
 Shields at their necks, a pennon on each lance;  
 Where trees grow thick high on a hill they wait,  
 Four hundred thousand watching for day's first light.  
 Alas! If only the French could see that sight! AOI

## LVI

The day is over, the night grows calm and still.  
 The Emperor Charles goes to his bed and sleeps.  
 In dream he rides through the great pass at Cize;  
 720 Clapsed in his hands he holds an ashwood spear:  
 Count Ganelon wrenches it from his grasp,  
 With raging strength shatters and breaks the wood,  
 And sends the splinters flying against the sky.  
 King Charles sleeps on, not opening his eyes.

## LVII

After that dream another vision came:  
 He was in France, in his chapel at Aix.  
 A vicious beast was biting his right arm.  
 Out of the forest he sees a leopard run,  
 And he himself it cruelly attacks.  
 703. The poet returns to the beginning of his story, as also in line  
 2610.

From his great hall a boarhound rushes out  
 730 And comes to Charles, running with leaps and bounds,  
 Seizes the beast, biting off its right ear,  
 And in its fury attacks the leopard too.  
 The Frenchmen watch the mighty battle rage,  
 But they don't know which side will win the fight.  
 King Charles sleeps on, and does not wake all night. AOI

## LVIII

Darkness of night gives way to shining dawn.  
 Throughout the host, clarion trumpets sound.  
 Proud, on his horse, the emperor appears.  
 "Barons, my lords," says Charlemagne the King,  
 740 "Narrow and dark will be this mountain pass—  
 Who shall remain to guard us from the rear?"  
 Ganelon says, "Choose Roland, my stepson.  
 You have no baron as valorous as he."  
 Fiercely the king looks at the one who spoke,  
 And says to him: "Vile demon that you are!  
 You are insane, possessed by deadly rage!  
 And in the vanguard— who'll have the leader's place?"  
 Ganelon says, "Count Ogier the Dane.  
 None would do better, and no one can complain." 750

## LIX

Count Roland heard what Ganelon proposed,  
 And then he answered with knightly courtesy:  
 "Noble stepfather, now I must hold you dear,  
 For you have named me commander of this guard.  
 The King of France won't lose by my neglect  
 War-horse or palfrey, that I can promise you;

738. Jenkins supplies the end of this line, *sonent menut cil graisle* from V<sup>4</sup>V<sup>7</sup>, since the Oxford reading is unintelligible.

750. "And no one can complain" is implied in the text, although it is not stated.

He shall not lose a single riding-mule,  
Saddle-horse, pack-horse— none shall give up its life  
Until our swords take payment for that prize.”

760 Ganelon says, “I know you tell no lies.” AOI

## LX

When Roland heard he'd stay with the rear-guard,  
To his stepfather he angrily replied:  
“Ignoble serf, despicable foul wretch,  
Do you suppose I'll let the glove fall here  
The way you dropped the staff at King Charles' feet?” AOI

## LXI

“My rightful lord,” says Roland to the king,  
“Give me the bow you're holding in your hand;  
I promise you that no man here will say  
I let it fall, like Ganelon that day  
The envoy's staff dropped out of his right hand.”  
770 The Emperor Charles sits with his head bowed low,

761. *Laisse* LX occurs only in the Oxford manuscript, and seems an unlikely contradiction of Roland's usual gallantry (of which he has just given an example). Jenkins believes the *laisse* to be unauthentic, and points out that Ganelon had let fall a glove and not a staff. This same mistake is reproduced, however, in the following *laisse*. Bédier attributes the vigor of Roland's reply to his concern lest Ganelon not understand the irony of the preceding *laisse*. The poet would have used this means to emphasize the fact that Roland was never in any doubt about Ganelon's intentions. It seems to me sufficiently apparent, without this, that no one could have been. Only the fact that Ganelon had previously accepted Roland's nomination makes it impossible for Charles to act on his immediate suspicions. He would also have hesitated to believe that Ganelon, violent as he was, would dare to betray Roland while he himself remained with Charles.  
767. The bow is a symbol of command.

Pulls his moustache, and strokes his long white beard,  
While in his eyes unwilling tears appear.

## LXII

At that Duke Naimon stood up to speak his mind—  
The court could boast no better man than he—  
Saying to Charles, “You have heard what's been said;  
It's clear enough that Roland is enraged.  
He has been named to go with the rear-guard;  
You have no baron who will dispute that now.  
Give him the bow that you yourself have bent;  
Then choose good men to fight at his command.” 780  
Charles puts the bow in Roland's outstretched hand.

## LXIII

The Emperor Charles calls Roland to come forth.  
“My noble nephew, this is what I intend:  
Half of my army shall stay behind with you.  
Accept their service, and then you will be safe.”  
Count Roland answers, “Never will I agree.  
May God destroy me, if I so shame my race!  
Just twenty thousand shall serve me, valiant Franks.  
You'll cross the mountains, safely in France arrive— 790  
And fear no man as long as I'm alive!” AOI

## LXIV

Roland has mounted the horse he rides to war.  
There comes to join him his friend Count Oliver,  
And Gerin comes, the brave Count Gerier,  
And Oton comes, with him Count Bérengier,  
And Astor comes, and fiery Anseïs,  
And old Gérard, the Count of Roussillon,

773. Although Charlemagne tries to restrain his tears, they obviously do him credit: sensitivity was no sign of weakness in a warrior. Roland, in *laisse* CXL, weeps for the dead Franks “like a noble knight.”  
774. Duke Naimon's advice is always followed, usually to disaster.

The powerful and wealthy Duke Gaifier.  
Says the Archbishop, "My head on it, I'll go!"  
800 "And I am with you," answers Count Gautier,  
"I'm Roland's vassal— my help is his by right."  
Then they select the twenty thousand knights. AOI

## LXV

Count Roland says to Gautier de l'Hum:  
"A thousand Franks, men of our land, you'll take  
To occupy the hills and the ravines,  
So that King Charles may safely go his way." AOI  
Gautier answers, "For you I'll do my best."  
Leading away a thousand Franks of France,  
Gautier will guard the mountains and ravines;  
810 Whatever happens, he won't come down again  
Without a battle— Almaris of Belferne  
Gave them a fight; and seven hundred blades  
Flashed from their scabbards on that most evil day.

## LXVI

High are the hills, deep valleys shun the light;  
The cliffs rise grey, the gorges hold dark fear.  
The French ride on in misery and pain,  
Their passing heard some fifteen leagues around;  
And when once more they're back again in France,  
In Gascony, where Charlemagne is lord,  
820 Then they remember the lands they hold, their sons,  
Their maiden daughters, their fair and noble wives—  
There is not one who is not moved to weep  
But of them all none sorrows as does Charles,  
For he has left his nephew there in Spain;  
And now his tears the king cannot restrain. AOI

## LXVII

All the twelve peers have stayed behind in Spain;  
They guard the pass with twenty thousand Franks,

Courageous men who do not fear to die.  
And now King Charles is riding home again;  
He drapes his cloak to hide his grieving face. 830  
Duke Naimon rides next to the emperor;  
He says to Charles, "What weighs your spirits down?"  
The king replies, "Who asks me that does wrong.  
I can't keep silent the sorrow that I feel,  
For Ganelon will be the doom of France.  
Last night an angel sent me a warning dream:  
I held a spear— he broke it from my grasp,  
That count who named my nephew to the guard.  
And I left Roland among that pagan race—  
God! If I lose him, no one can take his place." AOI 840

## LXVIII

Charlemagne weeps; he can't hold back his tears.  
They grieve for him, his hundred thousand Franks,  
And for Count Roland are suddenly afraid.  
A traitor's lies left him to die in Spain—  
Rich gifts the pagan bestowed on Ganelon:  
Silver and gold, brocades and silken cloaks,  
Camels and lions, fine horses, riding mules.  
Now King Marsile summons the lords of Spain,  
His counts and viscounts, his chieftains and his dukes,  
His high emirs, and all their warrior sons: 850  
Four hundred thousand assemble in three days.  
In Saragossa the drums begin to sound;  
They place Mohammed high on the citadel—  
No pagan fails to worship him and pray.  
And then they ride with all their might and main  
Through Terre Certaine, through valleys, over hills,  
Until they see the battle-flags of France.

848. This admirable transition should be noted: from the unproven but accurate presentiments of the Franks to the actual preparations of Marsile.