

Carlou the King, our Emperor Charlemagne,
Full seven years long has been abroad in Spain,
He's won the highlands as far as to the main;
No castle more can stand before his face,
City nor wall is left for him to break,
Save Saragossa in its high mountain place;
Marsilion holds it, the king who hates God's name,
Mahound he serves, and to Apollyon prays:
He'll not escape the ruin that awaits.
The Emperor Charles is glad and full of cheer.
Cordova's taken, the outer walls are pierced,
His catapults have cast the towers down sheer;

Rich booty's gone to all his chevaliers,
Silver and gold and goodly battle gear.
In all the city no paynim now appears
Who is not slain or turned to Christian fear.
The Emperor sits in a great orchard near,
Having about him Roland and Olivere.
Full fifteen thousand of France the fair and dear.
For draughts and chess the chequer-boards are reared;
To entertain the elder lords revered;
Young bachelors disport with sword and spear.
Beneath a pine beside the eglantier
A faldstool stands all of the red gold clear;
Of fairest France there sits the king austere.

"Guenes, fair sir," the King Marsilion cries,
 "What must I do to bring Roland to die?"
 "I'll tell you that," Count Ganelon replies.
 "At Sizer Gate the King will have arrived,
 Leaving a rear-guard to keep the pass behind.
There'll be his nephew Count Roland, the great knight,
 Oliver too, on whom he most relies,
With twenty thousand good Frenchman at their side.
 An hundred thousand send of your Paynim kind,
 And these shall first engage the French in fight.

 Of the French force the loss will not be light --
Yours will be slaughtered, and that I'll not disguise!
 The like assault you'll launch a second time,
 And first or last, Roland will not get by.
 You will have done a deed of arms full fine;
 You'll ne'er again see war in all your life."
 Roland is fierce and Oliver is wise
 And both for valour may beat away the prize.
Once horsed and armed the quarrel to decide,
 For dread of death the field they'll never fly.

The counts are brave, their words are stem and high.
 Now the false Paynims with wondrous fury ride.
 Quoth Oliver: "Look, Roland, they're in sight.
 Charles is far off, and these are very nigh;
 You would not sound Oliphant for pride;
Had we the Emperor we should have been all right.
 To Gate of Spain, turn now and lift your eyes,
 See for yourself the rear-guard's woeful plight
 Who fights this day will never more see fight."
 Roland replies: "Speak no such foul despite!"

Curst be the breast whose heart knows cowardice!
Here in our place we'll stand and here abide:
Buffets and blows be ours to take and strike!"

Roland surveys the mountains and the fells;
How many French he sees there lying dead!
Like a good knight he makes them this lament:
Barons, my lords, may God of His largesse
Bring all your souls to Paradise the blest,
Amid bright flowers to make their hallowed beds!

I never saw braver or truer men..
So long you served me unceasingly and well,
So many lands conquered for Carlon's realm!
The Emperor bred you alas! to what sad end! .

O dearest land, fair nursery of the French,
By what hard hap art thou this day bereft! .
Barons of France, for me you go to death,
Nought can I give you of safeguard or defence;
Now aid you God, who ne'er failed any yet!
Oliver, brother, you shall not lack my help. .
Though none should slay me I'll die of grief no less;
Sweet sir, companion, let's go and fight afresh!

The County Roland lay down beneath a pine;
To land of Spain he's turned him as he lies,
And many things begin to call to mind:
All the broad lands he conquered in his time,
And fairest France, and the men of his line,
And Charles his lord, who bred him from a child;
He cannot help but weep for them and sigh.
Yet of himself he is mindful betimes;

He beats his breast and on God's mercy cries:

"Father most true, in whom there is no lie,
Who didst from death St. Lazarus make to rise,
And bring out Daniel safe from the lion's might,
Save Thou my soul from danger and despite
Of all the sins I did inlay my life."

His right-hand glove he's tendered unto Christ,
And from his hand Gabriel accepts the sign.
Straightway his head upon his arm declines;
The day is past, the dark draws on to night,
Clear is the moon, the stars are shining bright;
All Saragossa lies in the Emperor's might.

Some thousand French search the whole town to spy
Synagogues out and mosques and heathen shrines.
With heavy hammers and with mallets of iron
They smash the idols, the images they smite,
Make clean sweep of mummeries and lies,
For Charles fears God and still to serve Him strives.

The Bishops next the water sanctify;
Then to the font the Paynim folk they drive..
Should Carlon's orders by any be defied
The man is hanged or slain or burned with fire,
An hundred thousand or more are thus baptized
And christened, - only the Queen fares otherwise:
She's to go captive to the fair France by and by,
Her would the King convert by love to Christ.

