Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Treason Of Ganelon

Sir George W. Cox

Charles the great king had tarried with his host seven years in Spain, until he conquered all the land down to the sea, and his banners were riddled through with battle-marks. There remained neither burg nor castle the walls whereof he brake not down, save only Zaragoz, a fortress on a rugged mountain top, so steep and strong that he could not take it. There dwelt the pagan King Marsilius, who feared not God.

King Marsilius caused his throne to be set in his garden beneath an olive-tree, and thither he summoned his lords and nobles to council. Twenty thousand of his warriors being gathered about him, he spake to his dukes and counts saying, "What shall we do? Lo! these seven years the great Charles has been winning all our lands till only Zaragoz remains to us. We are too few to give him battle, and, were it not so, man for man we are no match for his warriors. What shall we do to save our lands?"

Then up and spake Blancandrin, wily counsellor—"It is plain we must be rid of this proud Charles; Spain must be rid of him. And since he is too strong to drive out with the sword, let us try what promises will do. Send an ambassage and say we will give him great treasure in gold and cattle, hawk and hound; say we will be his vassals, do him service at his call; say we will be baptized, forsake our gods and call upon his God: say anything, so long as it will persuade him to rise up with his host and quit our land."

And all the pagans said, "It is well spoken."

Charles the emperor held festival before Cordova, and rejoiced, he and his host, because they had taken the city. They had overthrown its walls; they had gotten much booty, both of gold and silver and rich raiment; they had put cables round about its towers and dragged them down. Not a pagan remained in the city; for they were all either slain or turned Christian. The emperor sat among his knights in a green pleasance. Round about him were Roland his nephew, captain of his host, and Oliver, and Duke Sampson; proud Anseis, Geoffrey of Anjou the king's standard-bearer, and fifteen thousand of the noblest born of gentle France. Beneath a pine-tree where a rose-briar twined, sat Charles the Great, ruler of France, upon a chair of gold. White and long was his beard; huge of limb and hale of body was the king, and of noble countenance. It needed not that any man should ask his fellow, saying, "Which is the king?" for all might plainly know

him for the ruler of his people.

When the messengers of King Marsilius came into his presence, they knew him straightway, and lighted quickly down from their mules and came meekly bending at his feet. Then said Blancandrin, "God save the king, the glorious king whom all men ought to worship. My master King Marsilius sends greeting to the great Charles, whose power no man can withstand, and he prays thee make peace with him. Marsilius offers gifts of bears and lions and leashed hounds, seven hundred camels and a thousand moulted falcons, of gold and silver so much as four hundred mules harnessed to fifty chariots can draw, with all his treasure of jewels. Only make the peace and get thee to Aachen, and my master will meet thee there at the feast of St. Michael; and he will be thy man henceforth in service and worship, and hold Spain of thee; thou shalt be his lord, and thy God shall be his God."

The emperor bowed his head the while he thought upon the purport of the message; for he never spake a hasty word, and never went back from a word once spoken. Having mused awhile he raised his head and answered, "The King Marsilius is greatly my enemy. In what manner shall I be assured that he will keep his covenant?" The messengers said, "Great king, we offer hostages of good faith, the children of our noblest. Take ten or twenty as it seemeth good to thee; but treat them tenderly, for verily at the feast of St. Michael our king will redeem his pledge, and come to Aachen to be baptized and pay his homage and his tribute."

Then the king commanded a pavilion to be spread wherein to lodge them for the night. On the morrow, after they had taken their journey home, he called his barons to him and showed them after what manner the messengers had spoken, and asked their counsel.

With one voice the Franks answered, "Beware of King Marsilius."

Then spake Roland and said, "Parley not with him, trust him not. Remember how he took and slew Count Basant and Count Basil, the messengers whom we sent to him aforetime on a peaceful errand. Seven years have we been in Spain, and now only Zaragoz holds out against us. Finish what has been so long a-doing and is well nigh done. Gather the host; lay siege to Zaragoz with all thy might, and conquer the last stronghold of the pagans; so win Spain, and end this long and weary war."

But Ganelon drew near to the king and spake: "Heed not the counsel of any babbler, unless it be to thine own profit. What has Marsilius promised? Will he not give up his gods, himself, his service and his treasure? Could man ask more? Could we get more by fighting him? How glorious would it be to go to war with a beaten man who offers thee his all! How wise to wage a war to win what one can

get without! Roland is wholly puffed up with the pride of fools. He counsels battle for his glory's sake. What careth he how many of us be slain in a causeless fight, if he can win renown? Roland is a brave man; brave enough and strong enough to save his skin, and so is reckless of our lives."

Then said Duke Naymes (a better vassal never stood before a king), "Ganelon has spoken well, albeit bitterly. Marsilius is altogether vanquished, and there is no more glory in fighting him. Spurn not him who sues at thy feet for pity. Make peace, and let this long war end." And all the Franks answered, "The counsel is good."

So Charles said, "Who will go up to Zaragoz to King Marsilius, and bear my glove and staff and make the covenant with him?"

Duke Naymes said straightway, "I will go;" but the king answered, "Nay, thou shalt not go. Thou art my right hand in counsel and I cannot spare thee." Then said Roland, "Send me." But Count Oliver, his dear companion, said, "What! send thee upon a peaceful errand? Hot-blooded as thou art, impatient of all parleying? Nay, good Roland, thou wouldst spoil any truce. Let the king send me."

Charles stroked his long white beard and said, "Hold your peace, both of you; neither shall go."

Then arose Archbishop Turpin and said, "Let me go. I am eager to see this pagan Marsilius and his heathen band. I long to baptize them all, and make their everlasting peace."

The king answered, "All in good time, zealous Turpin; but first let them make their peace with me: take thy seat. Noble Franks, choose me a right worthy man to bear my message to Marsilius."

Roland answered, "Send Ganelon, my stepfather." And the Franks said, "Ganelon is the man, for there is none more cunning of speech than he."

Now when the coward Ganelon heard these words, he feared greatly, well knowing the fate of them which had gone aforetime as messengers to Marsilius; and his anger was kindled against Roland insomuch that the expression of his countenance changed in sight of all. He arose from the ground and throwing the mantle of sable fur from his neck, said fiercely to Roland, "Men know full well that I am thy step-father, and that there is no love between us; but thou art a fool thus openly to show thy malice. If God but give me to return alive, I will requite thee."

Then he came bending to King Charles, "Rightful emperor, I am ready to go up to Zaragoz, albeit no messenger ever returned thence alive. But I pray thee for my boy Baldwin, who is yet young, that thou wilt care for him. Is he not the son of thy sister whom I wedded? Let him have my lands and honors, and train him up

among thy knights if I return no more."

Charles answered, "Be not so faint-hearted; take the glove and baton, since the Franks have awarded it to thee, and go, do my bidding." Ganelon said, "Sire, this is Roland's doing. All my life have I hated him; and I like no better his companion, Oliver. And as for the twelve champion peers of France, who stand by him in all he does, and in whose eyes Roland can do no wrong, I defy them all, here and now."

Charles smoothed his snowy beard and said, "Verily Count Ganelon thou hast an ill humor. Wert thou as valiant of fight as thou art of speech, the twelve peers perchance might tremble. But they laugh. Let them. Thy tongue may prove of better service to us upon this mission than their swords." Then the king drew off the glove from his right hand, and held it forth; but Ganelon, when he went to take it, let it fall upon the ground. Thereat the Franks murmured, and said one to another, "This is an evil omen, and bodes ill for the message." But Ganelon picked it up quickly, saying, "Fear not: you shall all hear tidings of it." And Ganelon said to the king, "Dismiss me, I pray thee." So the king gave him a letter signed with his hand and seal, and delivered to him the staff, saying, "Go, in God's name and mine."

Many of his good vassals would fain have accompanied him upon his journey, but Ganelon answered, "Nay. 'Tis better one should die than many." Then Ganelon leaped to horse, and rode on until he overtook the pagan messengers who had halted beneath an olive-tree to rest. There Blancandrin talked with Ganelon of the great Charles, and of the countries he had conquered, and of his riches and the splendor of his court. Ganelon also spake bitterly of Roland and his eagerness for war, and how he continually drove the king to battle, and was the fiercest of all the Franks against the pagans. And Blancandrin said to Ganelon, "Shall we have peace?" Ganelon said, "He that sueth for peace often seeketh opportunity for war." Blancandrin answered, "He that beareth peace to his master's enemies often desireth to be avenged of his own." Then each of the two men knew the other to be a rogue; and they made friends, and opened their hearts to each other, and each spake of what was in his mind, and they laid their plans. So it befell that when they came to Zaragoz, Blancandrin took Ganelon by the hand, and led him to King Marsilius, saying, "O king! we have borne thy message to the haughty Charles, but he answered never a word. He only raised his hands on high to his God, and held his peace; but he has sent the noble Count Ganelon, at whose mouth we shall hear whether we may have peace or no."

Then Ganelon, who had well considered beforehand what he should say, began, "God save the worthy King Marsilius. Thus saith the mighty Charles through me his messenger: 'So thou wilt become a Christian, I will give thee the half of Spain

to hold of me, and thou shalt pay me tribute and be my servant. Otherwise I will come suddenly and take the land away by force, and will bring thee to Aachen, to my court, and will there put thee to death.'"

When King Marsilius heard this, the color went from his face, and he snatched a javelin by the shaft, and poised it in his hand. Ganelon watched him, his fingers playing the while with the sword-hilt underneath his mantle, and he said, "Great king, I have given my message and have freed me of my burden. Let the bearer of such a message die if so it seemeth good to thee. What shall it profit thee to slay the messenger? Will that wipe out the message, or bring a gentler one? Or thinkest thou Charles careth not for his barons? Read now the writing of King Charles the Great." Therewith he gave into the king's hand a parchment he had made ready in the likeness of his master's writing. And Marsilius brake the seal, and read: "Before I will make the peace, I command thee send hither to me thine uncle, the caliph, that sitteth next thee on the throne, that I may do with him as I will." Then the king's son drew his scimitar and ran on Ganelon, saying, "Give him to me; it is not fit this man should live!" But Ganelon turned, brandished his sword and set his back against a pine-trunk. Then cried Blancandrin, "Do the Frank no harm; for he has pledged himself to be our spy, and work for our profit." So Blancandrin went and fetched Ganelon, and led him by the hand and brought him against the king. And the king said, "Good Sir Ganelon, I was wrong to be angry; but I will make amends. I will give thee five hundred pieces of gold in token of my favor." Ganelon answered, "He that taketh not counsel to his own profit is a fool. God forbid I should so ill requite thy bounty as to say thee nay."



Marsilius said, "Charles is very old. For years and years he has fought and conquered, and put down kings and taken their lands, and heaped up riches more than can be counted. Is he not yet weary of war, nor tired of conquest, nor satisfied with his riches?" Ganelon answered, "Charles has long been tired of war; but Roland, his captain, is a covetous man, and greedy of possession. He and his companion Oliver, and the twelve peers of France, continually do stir up the king to war. Were these but slain, the world would be at peace. But they have under them full twenty thousand men, the pick of all the host of France, and they are very terrible in war."

Marsilius spake to him again, saying, "Tell me; I have four hundred thousand warriors, better men were never seen: would not these suffice to fight with Charles?"

Ganelon answered, "Nay; what folly is this! Heed wiser counsel. Send back the hostages to Charles with me. Then will Charles gather his host together, and depart out of Spain, and go to Aachen, there to await the fulfilment of thy covenant. But he will leave his rear-guard of twenty thousand, together with Roland and Oliver and the Twelve, to follow after him. Fall thou on these with all thy warriors; let not one escape. Destroy them, and thou mayest choose thy terms of peace, for Charles will fight no more. The rear-guard will take their journey by the pass of Siza, along the narrow Valley of Roncesvalles. Wherefore surround the valley with thy host, and lie in wait for them. They will fight hard, but in vain."

Then Marsilius made him swear upon the book of the law of Mohammed, and upon his sword handle, that all should happen as he had said. Thus Ganelon did the treason. And Marsilius gave Ganelon rich presents of gold and precious stones, and bracelets of great worth. He gave him also the keys of his city of Zaragoz, that he should rule it after these things were come to pass, and promised him ten mules' burden of fine gold of Arabia. So he sent Ganelon again to Charles, and with him twenty hostages of good faith.

When Ganelon came before Charles, he told him King Marsilius would perform all the oath which he sware, and was even now set out upon his journey to do his fealty, and pay the price of peace, and be baptized. Then Charles lifted up his hands toward Heaven, and thanked God for the prosperous ending of the war in Spain.

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.
Instagram: @ririro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/ririrocom