**Week 1: Raoul of Cambrai**

*Introduction*

The epic that follows deals depicts the personal bond between vassal and lord, but it does not paint a particularly rosy picture. Rather, it points out the problems that could arise when noble families began to perceive of the fief as a familial inheritance rather than as a temporary gift from the lord. Loyalty to one’s family and loyalty to one’s lord could come into violent conflict. While historians have a fairly good understanding of the juridical character of the early feudal institutions, our knowledge of the manner in which these institutions functioned in practice is much more limited. One source of evidence for early feudal society is provided by the French chansons de geste, or heroic epics. These poems have survived in abundant numbers from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and although of course they are imaginative literature, they reveal many things left unmentioned by other sources. Because they are products of an oral tradition, they also depict practices much older than the period in which they were put into writing. They can be used, in other words, with appropriate care, as a rich picture of early feudal society.

One of the best of these epics, from a historical point of view, is the anonymous Raoul of Cambrai, which has been preserved in a single manuscript from the thirteenth century. It is very nearly a poem without a hero, as its realistic depiction of life leaves us with almost no one to admire. Like the great masterpiece of the genre, the Song of Roland, it is founded upon a historical event, mentioned by the French chronicler Flodoard in 943. In that year, a Rodulfus tried to seize the lands of the deceased Herbert, count of Vermandois, and was killed by his sons. From this spare incident, the poet has elaborated a rich and full story of greed, betrayal and fidelity, war and reconciliation. For historians, the poem is particularly interesting because of the conflicts it describes within noble society. Did the obligations of a vassal toward his family supersede his obligations toward his lord? Did the claims of a family upon the fief of a deceased vassal supersede the lord’s claim over it? Did obligation to a family, or to a lord, prevail over duties to a king? What was the influence of Christian teaching and Christian institutions? Moreover, the battle scenes and the trial by combat near the end of the poem create a remarkably vivid picture of feudal society.

---

**Raoul of Cambrai**

*The Origins of the Conflict*

1

Hear a song of joy and cheer! Many and most of you have heard Of this great family of barons so steeped in valor. Other troubadours have sung to you New songs; but they neglect this flower. This concerns Raoul; he held Cambrai. He was called Taillefer for his pride. He had one son who was a good fighter, Called also Raoul, who had much strength. Against Herbert’s sons he made heavy attack; But young Bernier then dealt him a painful death.

2

This is a song you must hear. If you keep your peace, you can hear sing Of Guerri the Red and of Lady Aalais, [ And of Raoul, lord of Cambrai. .. " His godfather was the bishop of Beauvais. ' Against Herbert's sons he raised much strife, As you shall hear in this song.
This Raoul Taillefer of whom I spoke Was very brave with valorous heart. He so served the emperor of France That the emperor gave him a great reward. He gave him in fief the land of Cambrai And a lovely wife, no fairer was seen. All rejoiced, kinsmen and friends. The wedding was such as you may have heard At the court of the strong King Louis. Thereafter, he lived till his hair grew gray, And when God pleased, he left the world. The gentle Lady Aalais of complexion fair Showed such grief as was not seen before. The barons buried him; The abbey of St. Geri received him into its earth. By this baron of whom I have spoken here, The lady was with child, to tell you the truth.

They have buried the valiant knight, Taillefer, of whom I have told you. The gentle lady with gentle heart remained Great with his child. She carried the child as long as God appointed. When he was born, much joy filled The people of the land, the knights and sergeants. They too had joy, as I know full well, Whose hearts he later made grim and sad. The lady of valiant heart took the child And wrapped him in a costly cloth; She called two knights without delay; Some call the first Thiebaut, I know for sure Acelin was the other. "Barons," she said, "in God's name, come here. Go as fast as you can, straight to Beauvais."

Lady Aalais had no weak heart. She laid her son in costly purple. Then she called two barons of noble birth. "Straight to Beauvais you should go at dawn For me, to Bishop Gui, my cousin." They departed and wasted no time. They took no rest till they reached Beauvais. They found the bishop in his palace of marble. He was the brother of Geoffroy of Lavardin.

Both knights go up to the palace; They carry the infant whom they cherish so much. They find the bishop who is worthy of praise. They salute him well with impeccable courtesy. "May God, Who will judge all things, Save you and help you, righteous bishop. This from Lady Aalais of complexion fair, Wife of Knight Raoul Taillefer. Dead is the count, there is naught to be done; But from him the lady has an heir. With love she has him sent to you, Lest from his kin he be estranged." The bishop listens; he blesses himself, He gives thanks to God, Who guards all things; "Noble countess, may God give you counsel! This affair can brook no delay." He made ready the baptismal font at the abbey, And oil and chrism to anoint the child, And he vested himself for his office.

The gentle bishop came to the abbey, He baptized the child who was so well formed. And for his father, the Marquis Taillefer, He gave him the name Raoul de Cambrai. The gentle bishop made no delay; Well did he dress him as befits a
noble. And the nurse, who was very fair of face, Was dressed in sable and emrine. All those came who had heard about him. On the morrow when they took leave, All returned home; also there was Guerri the Red. At the christening there was neither joy nor laughter. The infant was both loved and cherished, And by his nurse gently reared. Years, months, and days then passed, More than three years, so the record relates.

8
Lady Aalais had no weak heart. Now you shall hear of the pain and the strife Of the great war which ne'er had an ending. The king of France had a noble young man: The French called him Gibouin of Mans. He served the king with his good steel sword; In many wars he made many an orphan; He deserved much from our king of noble line And richly, as champions do. For his service he wanted full reward. Those from beyond the Rhine advised That he be given possession of Cambrai. Aalais held it who had swayed many a heart, From the family of Geoffroy of Lavardin. If God does not halt it Who from water made wine, The fief will be given and the affair concluded For which many noble men shall fall in sudden death.

9
Our emperor heard the barons speak; The gentle men said in one accord That he should give as a bride Aalais Of complexion fair to the baron of Mans, who served him well. The king agreed and earned reproach. He invested him with the glove, for which he was thanked, For which his shoe was kissed. Then said the king of France: "Gibouin, brother, you ought well to thank me; I have given to you a very great fief But with this agreement I wish to convey it: The infant Raoul I do not want bereft. He is still young. Think to keep him well Until he can carry arms. He shall hold Cambrai; no one can deny it to him, But of other land I shall give to you." Gibouin replied, "I do not wish to refuse, But make sure that I marry the lady." What a fool he was when he dared think this, For it would cause many a brave man to fall. The gentle lady of complexion fair Would not take him though they hack off her limbs.

10
King Louis made that day the greatest blunder, Who deprived his nephew of his heritage. And Gibouin did great outrage When he wished another's lands for his baronage. For this he would die a shameful death. Our emperor has spoken to his herald: "Go at once, saddle the Arabian steed. Take the news to my sister with the fair countenance. Go direct to Cambrai, her rich heritage. She should take as her husband the knight of Mans, Gibouin, who has so much courage (Such a knight is not found 'twixt here and Carthage). All the land is due him in marriage. Come to my court without any delay. Let her retinue come with her, And I shall send for most of my court. But if she fails me, through arrogance, I will seize the land, her inheritance. She shall live from her dowry, For of no other land shall she take lordly dues." The messenger took his leave and departed. He mounted his saddled steed And leaves Paris; straight to Cambrai he goes; By the
great gate he entered the city. He went to the great abbey of St. Geri And found the lady in the square; Many a knight she had in her company. The messenger reined his horse and dismounted; In the king's name he saluted the lady: "May God, Who made the world And commands all things in heaven and earth, Save the countess and those she loves-This from the king who protects us!" "May God the Creator guard you too, brother! Tell me the wishes of the king, conceal nothing." "In God's name, lady, I shall tell you: The king, who has so much power, tells you That he will give you to Baron Gibouin; Believe me, the king commands it." Lady Aalais falls to the earth; Tears fell from her eyes and she heaved a great sigh. She summons her counselors. "0 God," she says, "this is a wicked command."

[Two pages are missing, the twelfth and thirteenth stanzas.]

14

"Just emperor," said Baron Guerri, "Do you wish by this to disinherit One who can neither ride nor walk? By the faith which I bear you, Rather you shall see a thousand knights fall, Before the knight of Mans can boast of this at court. Just emperor, I cannot conceal from you That if he should be ever found at Cambrai, He can be sure of losing his head. And you, foolish king, deserve reprimand; The child is your nephew, you should never have thought To grant his large land to another." The king replied: "Let all this be; The gift is made, I cannot revoke it." Guerri departed; he would not stay longer; Evil would come of the leave that he took! At the foot of the stairs the good steeds were waiting, And the barons thought to mount them. Guerri commenced to shout in a loud voice: "Now make ready, you bachelor knights, Who wish to endure pains. For by Him who let Himself suffer, I would rather have all my limbs hacked off Than fail my nephew as long as I live." Guerri the Red was filled with great anger. Back to Cambrai he thought to return. He dismounted in the square; Dame Aalais saw her vassal come back, And spoke to him as you shall hear: "Sire Guerri, you must not deceive me, Will you let me know the truth?" "Lady," he said "I do not wish to lie. Your heritage the king has taken away For Gibouin, may God curse him! Take him for your husband, for only thus can you reconcile Louis, who has France in his power." "God!" said the lady. "Of grief could I die! I would rather be burned in a fire Than he should force a greyhound to lie with a mean watchdog. God will give me food for my infant Until he can bear these arms." Guerri replied, "Lady, good for you to have dared to say it. In your great need, I cannot leave you."

16

Guerri, valiant in spirit, speaks: "Lady Aalais, by God the Redeemer, I shall not fail you as long as I live. Where is my nephew? Bring him forward." Two young knights arose And brought the child forward to the square. He had three years, as I know for sure; He was dressed in shining silk, and he wore a shift of fine red cloth. No, one had ever seen a lovelier child. Guerri now takes him in his arms. "Child," he says, "you are not very large, And the knight of Mans has wicked designs on you. He wishes to deprive you of your inheritance." "Uncle," said the child; "let him have it; I shall get it back if only I live so long That I may carry arms
"Truly," said Guerri, "you shall not lose a clod of it, Till there shall die twenty
thousand warriors." The valiant knights ask for water And sit themselves at table.

17
Lady Aalais and the vassal Guerri And the barons seat themselves at table. The
seneschals were interspersed; Each was well taught how to serve. After dinner
the lady of complexion fair Gave to the barons much sable and ermine. The rich
Guerri the Red makes his departure. He kisses the lady and then he departs. To
Arras he goes directly, very provoked. Then there pass many days and years.
There was no din or discord in this land. When Raoul of Cambrai had fifteen
years, To the admiration of all, he was courteous and gentle; His vassals and his
nobles loved him strongly Lady Aalais, honored for her gentle heart, Saw her
child grow large and heavy and handsome. Fifteen years were finished and
passed. A gentle man there was in this kingdom; He bore the name Ybert; he
was fiercely proud. He had one son; he was called Bernier As a baby at his
baptism. The child grew much and was of great goodness, He was tall and
strong when he passed fifteen years. Count Raoul held him in great love. Lady
Aalais by her kindness Had raised him from an early age. Raoul took him to the
city of Paris And acquainted him with the assembly of richest barons. He served
Raoul with wine and claret. It would have been better, know this for a truth, For
him to have his head hacked from his body, For he would kill Raoul, sadly and
shamefully, in the end.

18
Count Raoul of handsome face To the admiration of all held Bernier dear. This
was the son of Ybert of Ribemont. Noland contained a fairer youth,
Nor any more skilled at the shield or spear, Nor of greater wisdom and prudence
at the royal court, Although they called him a bastard. Raoul of handsome face
loved him; He willingly made him his squire, But found in him a strange
companion. Dame Aalais saw her son grow up, Saw that he could wield arms.
She spoke to him as you may hear: "Gather your people and summon them here
If you wish to see them at Cambrai. We shall well see who hesitates to serve."
Raoul calls them and tells them his pleasure: "You should not fail me in my
need."
[Gap in the manuscript, probably 58 verses; Raoul asks to be knighted by
Emperor Louis.]

22
Our emperor has dubbed the child; He summons his seneschals. "Bring me arms
for this I command you." The emperor of valiant heart says, "Good nephew
Raoul, I see you strong and great. I thank God, Father Almighty."

23
Our emperor much loved the young man. He gave him a helmet, once a
Saracen's, Whom Roland had killed at the river Rhine. He placed it over the hood
of the double-thick hauberk. Then he said: "Nephew, Here is a helmet, once a Saracen's; No strong arm can dent it a bit. May He give you faith Who from water made wine And sat at the wedding of St. Arcedclin." Raoul replied, "I take this for this purpose: Your enemies will have in me a dangerous neighbor. Evening and morning they shall have no peace." And that helmet had a nose protector of pure gold; And it bore a jewel in the middle; By it on darkest night one could see the road The emperor girded him with a strong and hard sword. The pommel and hilt were of gold, And it was forged in a dark valley; The one who gave it all his care was named Gallant. Apart from Durendel, which was the choicest of swords, Of all others this was deemed the best. No arm in this world could stand against it. Such were the arms, I say, which suited his measure. Handsome was Raoul and of a gentle frame. If within him there were a little restraint, No lord ever had a better vassal. But his excess caused a grievous incident; An unrestrained man must suffer much sorrow.

[After his knighting, and for reason of service to Emperor Louis, Raoul was rewarded with a grant of lands held by the sons of Herbert; these sons happened also to be the uncles of his best friend, Bernier. Raoul set forth to conquer the land and, against the advice of his mother, began to besiege the town of Origny. Bernier was still in his service, but distraught that his duties as a vassal forced him to make war against the members of his own family.]

[II. The Siege of Origny]

Raoul takes leave of Cambrai; He departs from his mother, Aalais, of complexion fair, And passes through the Arrouaise, which is his land. Together with him rides Guerri the Red. Both are well armed on their excellent steeds. They advance into the Vermandois. They seize the herds; many a man they make prisoner; They scorch the earth, and the farms are destroyed. Bernier was gloomy and pensive; When he saw the land of his father and his friends So razed, he almost went mad. Where the others went, Bernier lagged behind, And was slow to don his arms.

Count Raoul calls Manecier, Droon the count, and his brother Gautier. "Take quickly your arms without delay; Let four hundred of you each upon his charger Ride to Origny before the fall of night. Pitch my tent in the middle of the church. In its porches let my beasts of burden be tied. Beneath the vaults prepare my food. On the crosses of gold let my falcons rest. Before the altar have ready for me A rich bed where I wish to sleep. I wish to lean on the crucifix, And my squires shall possess the nuns. I wish to destroy and ruin the place, Since the sons of Herbert hold it so dear." And they responded, "We must do it all." Quickly they go to prepare themselves. The noble warriors mount their horses. Not a one of them lacks a steel sword, Shield, lance, and a good double hauberk. Toward Origny they draw nearer. The bells ring from the church tower; They think of God the just Father; Even the most foolish felt compelled to pray. They no longer wished to ravish the holy place. Outside on the meadows
they pitch their tents, The night long they lay until dawn appeared. Then they carefully made preparations, As if they intended to remain the entire year.

61
Near Origny there was a lovely and pleasant grove, Where the valiant knights passed the night Until on the morrow the dawn appeared. Raoul came there when matins were sounding; He rebuked his men: "Sons of bitches, mean, dirty curs, You are very much the scheming swine Who have failed to obey my command!" "Pardon, fair sire, by God the Redeemer, We are neither Jews nor tyrants Who could destroy the holy relics"

62
Count Raoul was extremely abusive. "Sons of bitches," he said, out of control, "I commanded that within the abbey be stretched My linen tents and gold pommels, By whose order was it placed outside?" "Truly," said Guerri,"you go too far; you have only recently been knighted.
If you give offense to God, you soon shall be finished. This place is honored by noble men. The holy relics ought not to be violated. For lovely is the grass and fresh on the meadows And the river banks are fair Where your vanguard and your men can lie, Where they will not be surprised or ambushed. " Raoul replied, "Just as you request, So shall I allow, since it is your wish." On the green grass they placed their carpets, Raoul lay down and took counsel. He brought ten knights with him. They gave advice from which evil emerged.

63
Raoul cried, "Knights to arms; Let's go at once to attack Origny! I shall never hold dear one who lags behind." The barons mount: they did not dare to disobey. Together they were more than four thousand. Toward Origny they began to advance; They attacked the fortress and began to hurl their lances. Those within defended themselves skillfully. Raoul's men press closer; they go to level the trees before the town. The nuns come forth from the abbey, The gentle ladies, each one has her psalter, And they do service to God. Marcent was there, the mother of Bernier; "Mercy, Raoul, by the just God! Gravely would you sin if you permit our destruction; Although easily we might be destroyed."

64
Marcent was the name of Bernier's mother; She held a book dating from Solomon's age, And said a prayer to God. She grasped Raoul by his shining hauberk. "Sire," she said, "by God and by His name, Where is Bernier, gentle son of a baron? I have not seen him since I nursed him as a babe." "In the name of God, lady, he's in the master tent, Where he plays with his many good fellows; No knight is his equal as far as Rome. He made me make war against Herbert's sons, And said that he did not care in the slightest If I left them stripped to naught save a button." "God," said the lady, "he has the heart of a felon! They are his uncles, as everyone knows; If they lose their possessions, evil will come to him."
"Sire Raoul, is it worth nothing to pray That you withdraw a little distance? We are nuns, by the saints of Bavaria; We hold neither lance nor banner, And by us no one has been laid on a bier." "Truly," said Raoul, "you are an inveigler. But I will have nothing to do with a cheap whore Who has moved from hand to hand, sold for a farthing. A harlot shared by everyone. To Count Herbert you also sold your favors; Your flesh was never very expensive If anyone wanted it, by the Lord St. Peter; It's very easy to deny your request." "God!" said the lady, "I hear fierce words, I hear myself abused in a strange manner. I was never passed from hand to hand, sold for a farthing. One noble person had his way with me. I had one son of whom I am still proud. Please God, do not refuse my plea. Who serves God well shall see His face."

66

"Sire Raoul," said the mother of Bernier, "We do not know how to manage arms; Easily you could destroy and ruin us. Neither shield nor lance shall you see us raise To defend our bodies; I hide nothing from you. All our livelihood and all our support We derive from this altar. And in this town we make our home. Noble men hold this place so dear That they send us silver and purest gold. Grant us peace for the altar and for the church, And go rest yourself on our meadows. By our expense, sire, if you wish to accept it, We will feed you and your knights. Your squires shall have rations, Fodder, oats, and plenty to eat." Raoul replied, "By the body of St. Richier, For your love as you have beseeched me, You shall have the peace, no matter whom it annoys." And the lady said, "This deserves thanks." Raoul departs on his charger. Bernier, who did much to be praised, came there To see his mother, Marcent, with the fair face. To speak with her he had very great need.

67

Raoul departs and goes without delay. Bernier comes dressed in rich cloth To see his mother, and dismounts from his charger. She kisses him and takes him in her arms, Three times she embraces him; she was not at all abashed. "Fair son," she said, "you have taken arms; Blessed be the count from whom you have them so young; Blessed be yourself since you have earned them. But one thing you cannot conceal from me. The possession of your father, why do you invade it? He has no other heirs, you cannot lose it; By your bravery and by your wisdom you shall have it." Bernier replied, "By the body of St. Thomas, I would not do it for the lordship of Baghdad. Raoul, my lord, is more evil than Judas. He is my lord; horses he gives me and robes, Arms and cloths of Baghdad. I would not do it for the lordship of Damascus, Until you said, 'Bernier, you do rightly." "Son," said the mother, "by my faith you do rightly. Serve your lord; God will reward you."

68

In Origny, the great and prosperous town, The sons of Herbert hold the place most dear, So that they have enclosed it with a palisade. But to defend the city, it was not worth a farthing. There was a marvelous and spacious meadow Around
Origny where one could joust. The lowlands belonged to the abbey's nuns; Their cattle grazed from which they drew profit; Under the heavens no man dared injure them. Count Raoul there pitched his tent; All the poles were of silver and purest gold; Four hundred men could lodge there. From the army there departed three worthless persons. From there to the town they did not spare the spurs, Riches they robbed there; they wished to leave nothing. But the booty became a burden. Ten men gave them pursuit; each carried a crowbar; Two of them died through their great burden; The third escaped through flight on his horse; From there to the tents he didn't pause; He dismounted on the sand And went to kiss the foot of his just lord; While begging for mercy, he began to cry; In a loud voice he commenced to appeal: "May God never help your body If you do not take vengeance on the townsmen, Who are so rich and proud and haughty. To them neither you nor anyone is worth a farthing. Thus, they say they will shave your head. If they can take you or capture you, All the gold of Montpellier will not ransom you. I have seen my brother killed and cut up, And my nephew dead and murdered. They would have killed me, by the body of St. Richier, When I took to flight upon this steed." Raoul heard this, his temperament changed; He cried aloud, "Forward, noble knights! I wish to shatter Origny to bits. Since they have started war against me, If God aids me, they will pay dearly for it!" When the knights hear this, they don their armor Instantly, since they dare not disobey. There are ten thousand, I have heard it reported. Toward Origny they begin to gallop. They cross the moats to better attack it. They cut the palisades with their steel axes, Under their feet they trample them down; They cross the moats beside the fishpond And do not tarry from there to the walls. The townsmen had only frustration that day When they saw that the palisades offered no help.

The townsmen see that the palisades are lost; Even the bravest are much depressed. They resort to the walled fortifications; Down they rain stones and many sharp stakes; Of Raoul's men there are many dispatched. Within the town not a man remains Who has not come to the walls for defense, Who has not sworn by God and his own strength That if they find Raoul, evil finds him too. Well they defend themselves, men hairless and hirsute. Raoul observes them, his heart was wrathful. He swears to God and his own strength That if a man escapes, and is not hanged, He would value his valor not worth a fig. Aloud he cries, "Barons, put it to flame," And they did as they had understood, Since for booty they had willingly come. Poorly has Raoul the agreement maintained Which was between him and the abbess. This day he rendered them an evil service; They burned the town, there nothing remained. Young Bernier from this had great sorrow When he saw there Origny so ravished. Count Raoul had a heart most enraged Against the treacherous townsmen. He swore by God and his own compassion That not for the archbishop of Rheims would he desist From burning them all before night should fall. He called for fire; his men responded. The rooms are ablaze, the beams collapse. The barrels explode; their bands are ruptured. Fires consume the children, sadly and sinfully. Count Raoul has foully destroyed them. The day before, he promised Marcent That the nuns would lose
not a folded napkin; Today he burns them, so greatly was he angered! They flee to the abbey, but it avails them naught. They still would have suffered in flight or fight.

71
In Origny, the great and prosperous town, The sons of Herbert hold the place most dear. Marcent they placed there, who was Bernier's mother, With a hundred nuns to beseech the Lord God. Count Raoul, with spirit so proud, Has made fire run through the streets. The houses are burned, the beams collapse. The wines explode, the cellars run red. The bacons brn, the fats feed the fire, The bells fan the flames. The great belfry and the towers are ablaze. The tapestries fall down from their places. Between the two walls a great furnace rages. The nuns are aflame, the heat there is too great. All one hundred burn in the greatest torment. Marcent is in flames, the mother of Bernier, And Clamados, the daughter of duke Renier; In the midst of the fire, they can but lie down. From pity weep the bravest knights. When Bernier saw the ruin, So much sorrow he had, his mind overturned. Oh, that you could have seen how he gripped his shield! With drawn sword he came to the church, Through the doors he saw the racing flame. From a distance over which a lance could be thrown, No man could draw closer to the fire. Bernier sees by the side of a rich marble, He sees his mother recumbent, lying; He sees the face of her, recumbent, lying; On her breast he sees her psalter burning. Then the boy said, "There is much folly here. Never shall the master have help. 0 sweet mother, you kissed me yesterday! In me you have a very bad heir. I can neither help you nor aid you. May God, Who must judge the world, take your soul. 0 Raoul, felon, God must punish you! I wish to do you homage no more. If now I cannot avenge this shame, I hold myself not worth a farthing." Such grief remained that he dropped his sword; Three times he fainted on the neck of his charger. He went for counsel to Guerri the Red; But his advice could not aid him.

[Bernier, embittered by Raoul's ruthless sack of Origny, defies him. The two quarrel bitterly, and Raoul strikes him on the head. In spite of subsequent apologies, Bernier deserts him to join his uncles' army. The forces clash, and in the melee, Raoul slices off the left hand of Ernaut, one of Bernier's uncles. After a bloody battle, the two antagonists meet in single combat.]

153
Bernier was a very good knight, Strong and brave and a noble warrior. With his clear voice he began to shout, "Uncle Ernaut, you need not be frightened, For I shall go speak to my lord." He leaned on the neck of his charger; In a loud voice he started to shout, "O Sire Raoul, son of a noble mother, You made me a knight, this I cannot deny. But dearly you have made me pay for it since You have killed so many of our brave warriors. My mother you burned in Origny's church, And you struck me a blow on the head. You offered me justice, this I cannot deny. In compensation I might have had many a charger. One hundred good steeds were offered me, And a hundred mules and a hundred rich palfreys, And a hundred
shields and a hundred double hauberks. But angry was I when I saw my blood spilling. To my friends I went to take counsel. Now the brave knights advised me if now you renew this offer, I cannot refuse it, And I shall forgive you everything by St. Richier. If my uncles can make peace with you, This battle I would let pass. You or no one could make complaint, All our lands I would place in your power; You would not lack a branch or a tree. Forget the dead, there is nothing to be done. 0 Sire Raoul, by the just God, Take pity; let us make peace. It is not right to pursue this dead man farther. He who has lost a hand has nothing but wrath in him." Raoul listened: his Spirit grew hot. He stretched himself so that his stirrups bent; Beneath him buckled his steed. "Bastard," he called, "you know how to plead; But flattery avails you naught. You shall not leave here with your head in one piece." "Truly," said Bernier, "I have good cause for anger. Now I will not humble myself."

154
When Bernier sees that the fighting Raoul Cares not a whit for his plea, With force he spurs his steed beneath him; And Raoul, spurring too, comes against him. They trade great blows on the shields before them; Beneath the buckles the shields both split. Bernier, who had so much right, struck him; The good spear and the affixed flag He thrust in his body, and he could not go forward. Raoul hit him with such a great blow, That his shield and hauberk were not worth a glove. He should have killed him, believe one who knows, But God and justice so much aided Bernier That the iron only grazed his side. Then Bernier made his turn in anger And struck Raoul in his shining helmet, That flowers and jewels went crashing down. It cut the hood of the good hauberk; Into the brain he made the sword plunge. Barons, by God, who could continue this lay, Since death is near and the man is at his end? For on his feet he can scarcely stand, The leader falls down from his horse. The sons of Herbert rejoice and are glad. There are those who rejoice who later found sadness, As you shall hear, if I sing that long.

155
Count Raoul attempts to regain his feet. With great effort he draws his steel sword. Oh, that you could have seen him wield his blade! But he cannot find his mark or use his sword; Down to earth he lets his arm fall; Into the meadow the steel blade cuts; With the great test of effort, he finally frees it. His beautiful mouth begins to contort, His sparkling eye begins to dull. He called on God, Who holds all in His rule: "Glorious Father, Who can judge all things, How I see now my body grow feeble! Under the sky there was no man who, if I struck him yesterday, After my blow could have arisen. Evil I see my grant of earth; This land or other land cannot help me now. Help me, sweet lady of heaven! " Bernier heard him, his temperament changed. Beneath his helmet he began to weep. In a loud voice he started to cry: "0 Sire Raoul, son of a noble mother, You made me a knight, this I cannot deny. But dearly have you made me pay for it since. My mother you burned within a church, And my own head you struck. You offered me justice, this I cannot deny; More vengeance I do not wish to have." Count Ernaut began to cry, "Let this dead man pay for my hand!" "Truly," said
Bernier, "I cannot forbid it; But he is dead and you have no right to touch him."
Ernaut responded, "I have right to be angry." In a leftward turn he maneuvered
his steed; His right hand held his steel blade, And he struck Raoul: he wished not
to spare him; Through his helmet he wished to break. The great jewel he made
fall to the earth; He cut through the hood of his double hauberk, And the blade
bloodied his brain. This still was not enough, and again he took the steel blade;
In the heart he made it plunge to the hilt; The soul of the noble knight departed.
May God receive it, if for this one may pray.

156
Bernier cried out, "St. Quentin and Douai! Dead is Raoul, lord of Cambrai. Ernaut
and Bernier have killed him, I know it well." Count Ernaut spurred his bay steed.
Bernier swears by the body of St. Nicholas: "It pains me that I have killed Raoul,
May God help me, but I did it by my right." And Guerri, on a great bay steed,
Found his nephew and was greatly distressed. He mourned for him as I shall tell
you. "Fair nephew," said he, "I have great sorrow for you, I shall never love the
one who has killed you. With him peace or concord or truce I shall never make
Until that hour when they are all dead. I shall destroy them all, hanged on the
gallows. Lady Aalais, what sorrow I shall tell you! Never shall I dare to speak to
you."

157
And Guerri, as he galloped along, Found his nephew lying on the sand. The
noble man still grasped his sword in his hand; He gripped it so hard between hilt
and pommel That only with great effort could they take it from him; On his chest
was his shield with its lion emblem. Guerri collapsed on the breast of the baron.
"Fair nephew," he said, "this is an evil deed. I see here the work of the bastard
Bernier, Whom you knighted in the palace at Paris. He has killed you for a
wicked cause; But by him who suffered the passion, If I do not rip from him the
liver and the lung, I will never hold myself to be a valiant knight."

158
Guerri the Red sees his men die, The last agony and death of his nephew, And
his brain lying over his eyes. From that grief he almost lost his senses. "Fair
nephew," he said, "I do not know what will happen. By that Lord Who deigned to
suffer, Those who have taken you from me Shall never have peace if I can allow
it. I shall destroy them and shame them, Or soon drive them from the earth. Now
I ask for a truce if I can attain it, So that I can bury you in the earth."

159
Great sorrow held Guerri the Red of Arras. He called Perron: "Come forward,
friend, And Hardouin and Berart of Senlis, Ride forward to my enemies, And
make truce as I request it, Until my nephew is buried in the earth." And they
responded: "Willingly, at once." They spur their horses, their shields covering
their eyes. It did not take long to find the sons of Herbert. They found them
seated upon their prize steeds; They were rejoicing greatly at the death of Raoul.
They also had joy who later would be grieved. Now the messengers began to speak: With these words, their shields still on their necks: "You are wrong, by the body of St. Denis; Count Raoul was of high nobility, His uncles were our King Louis And the good vassal Guerri of Arras. Those who make joy, healthy and whole and well, Shall later be dismembered and killed. Guerri the bold and the brave asks you Respite and truce by the body of St. Denis Until his nephew shall be buried in the earth." "We shall grant it," said Ybert of the white beard, "Even if you ask that it last till Judgment Day."

160
They agreed to the truce before the bells knelled noon. On the field they walked, turning over the dead. One found a father or a son, A nephew, an uncle, or a kinsman. You may well believe his heart had great sorrow As Guerri went in search of his own dead kin. He now forgot both his dead sons On account of his nephew Raoul the fighter. He looked before him; he saw John in bloody death. In all of France there was no knight as tall. Raoul had killed him, this most of you know. Guerri saw him and quickly approached. Both him and Raoul he took now. With his cutting sword, he opens both their bodies. He removed the hearts as we read in the records; On a shield of fine shining gold He placed them down to see their appearance. One was as small as a child's, But Raoul's heart, as most of you know, Was as large, in my knowledge, As that of a bull which pulls a plow. Guerri viewed it; from grief he came weeping. In tears he called on the knights: "Noble comrades, in God's name, come forward. See in Raoul the hardy fighter, What a heart he had compared to this giant's! You have pledged me, noble and valiant knights, Force and aid for all my life. See my enemies before us. They have killed the one whom I loved so much. If I do not avenge it, mark me a scoundrel. Pierre of Artois, rush to them now; Renounce the truce which I want no more to maintain." And they responded, "All at your command." To Herbert's sons they galloped. He cried loudly in the hearing of all: "Guerri tells you, by the body of St Amant, Take back your truce; know it for sure, That ifhe has his way, none of you shall escape death." When they heard these things, they were much depressed; From the battle they were tired, And their steeds were exhausted and restless. Back to Guerri came the messenger. And the Red put all his men in battle array. Before evening there shall be a thousand sorrows.

[IV. Vengeance, Reconciliation, War]
The battle is rejoined, and Bernier and Guerri meet in single combat, but no decision is reached. Guerri leaves the battlefield with one hundred and forty men surviving out of ten thousand. He renews his oath to have vengeance from Bernier. Bernier and the sons of Herbert have only three hundred men left out of eleven thousand. Raoul's young nephew, Gautier, similarly swears to avenge his uncle. Several years pass, and after further combat, the emperor attempts to restore peace among his barons by summoning them all to his court on Pentecost.]

222
Our emperor has assembled his vassals, At thirty thousand their number that day was reckoned. In the morning they heard Mass, And afterward they went up into the tiled hall. The seneschal passed among the tables; In his right hand he held a stripped branch. And he cried with a very loud voice: "Listen, lords, noble and honored men, This word the king has commanded. He who causes disturbance here, Before the evening shall lose his head." Guerri heard these words and his color changed. He looked at Bernier with his hand on his sword, But Gautier pushed it back in the sheath. "Uncle," he said, "it is proven folly, As the outcome shows, for a man to undertake something Of which he has shame and his people are condemned. See that the affair is tempered. Disgrace comes to those without restraint, Until such time as amends can be taken."

Great was the revel in the rich palace; At the high tables sat the knights. The seneschal has much to learn. Together he placed Bernier and Gautier, Guerri the Red and Ybert the warrior, Wedon of Role and Louis of the haughty mien, And the lame Ernaut, who did nothing but rage. Now these noble warriors are all together. Guerri sees them and his temperament changed. In his hand he holds a great steel knife. He wished that day to throw it at Bernier. But Gautier would not let him touch him. "Uncle," he said, "you ought justly be blamed. You are invited here to a free meal. You have indeed a great disgrace to amend If you provoke everyone to mortal combat" Guerri was served a dish of rich venison, With the largest bone of the animal's rump. Guerri saw it and showed no more restraint. With it he struck Bernier's temple. From the skin to the bone, he forced it through the flesh. All his face he made wet with blood. Bernier saw it and wrath seized him. The valiant knights had seen it. Since they had sat down to eat He jumped from the table and would have paid him a blow In the neck and would have spared nothing, But would have sent him sprawling on the table. Gautier jumped up to aid his uncle. By the hair he seized Bernier. Count Ybert began to rise. Louis seized an apple bough, Wedon of Role ran to his steel sword. Guerri the Red seized a large crowbar, And Gautier a big steel knife. On both sides the baron knights began the assault. This melee would have cost very much Had not the sergeants and the dispensers rushed up. They began to drag the barons from the table And brought them to the king who rules all France. The king said, "Who started this?" "Guerri the Red," said many a knight. "He was the first to start it."

"The king said, "Noble knights and barons, Who first began this strife?" "Guerri the Red, by the body of St. Simon, First began it with Bernier." Then the king swore by the knight St. James: "I shall have justice according to my decree." Guerri replied proudly: "Just emperor, a wicked deed has been done here. May God help me, you are not worth a button. How could I have looked at that traitor Who treacherously killed my nephew? He was your sister's son, as all know for a fact." "Truly," said Bernier, "you speak treason. Raoul I defied in his own tent. But by the apostle whom pilgrims seek at Rome, Never in battle shall you lack an
opponent. Certainly, you shall have so many mounted men Who before evening will count you as a fool. "Guerri heard him; the man had such joy. He desired him more than a hawk does a lark.

225
Guerri, full of great anger, spoke. "Just emperor, I cannot lie to you. All the world will hold you in hate, Since you are able to look upon him Who dispatched your nephew's soul from his body. I wonder how you can refrain From having him limb from limb Or hanged on the gallows or made to die shamefully." The king replied, "One cannot agree. If a noble man summons another to service, He may not shame or dishonor him. Nonetheless, by the martyr St. Paul, If this man cannot defend and maintain himself, His destruction will surely follow." Bernier heard him, and he began to grow wrathful. "My lords," he said, "try to injure me; All of you can come to the battle."

226
The boy Gautier sprang straight to his feet. He spoke loudly in the hearing of all. "Just emperor, hear my thought. I shall combat with my sharp sword Bernier, the lying bastard. I shall beat him and make him remorseful, And have him confess in the hearing of all That he killed Raoul, my valiant uncle, Feloniously, as most of you know." Guerri replied, "That's enough, you scoundrel. You are too young, and you still have the mind of a child. If anyone should tap you on the nose with a single glove, So that a drop of blood appeared, You would break into tears, I know for a fact. But my muscles are strong and hard and resilient, And I have a brave warrior heart. When someone strikes me with his sharp lance, I take vengeance at once with my noble blade. Against this bastard I wish to take the field. If before evening I do not make him repent, Woe betide the king if I am not made to answer for it. "Then said Gautier of the dauntless spirit, "I would not want for the lordship of Milan That another than myself should take up the blade. "Truly," said Bernier, "I grant it. Before the sun sets in the evening I shall give you so much battle That not for another living man will you want to continue."

227
"Just emperor," said the experienced Bernier, "This battle I shall well assume, With this understanding, as you shall hear me say. If the truth is not as you have heard me tell it, May God, Who was nailed on the cross, not permit That I return whole and secure." "Truly," said the king, "I will guarantee it for you, But nonetheless you must give me hostages." Bernier replied, "Let it be as you command." His father was included among them. Gautier took no delay, To his lodging he went at once. He donned the hauberk and tied his helmet. He girded his sword at his left side; He leaped on the horse without use of the stirrups, Then hung his shield on his left side. The good lance he did not forget, With the pennon affixed with three golden nails. Bernier too armed himself well, With richly burnished arms. Our emperor acted wisely.
In two boats he has them taken across the Seine. Gautier the noble baron is across; Also Bernier, who has done many praiseworthy things. Holy relics the king had carried there, And had a green cloth placed upon the grass. Who then saw the cloth shaken by the breeze, Arid the relics moving and tumbling With great wonder would remember it.

229
The young Gautier rose to his feet. "Barons," he said, "be quiet and listen. By all the saints whom you see here, And by all the others by whom God is beseeched, Bernier has done perjury. Presently, he will be remorseful and beaten. "Bernier replied, "If it please God, you lie."

[A bloody combat follows. Each family prepares to send its men into full-scale battle, should its knight die. To prevent this, the king has the two combatants, Gautier and Bernier, separated.]

234
Their wounds were great; they did not cease to bleed. The doctors came and bandaged the warriors, And fanned them to cool their bodies. Then they bore them and lay them down in the palace; Two rich beds were prepared. 'But the emperor did something foolish. So close did the two warriors lie That they could see each other stirring and reclining. To Gautier the king first came. Courteously he began to address him: "Will you survive? Tell me the truth. " "Yes, surely, sire, I cannot deceive you. " "God," said the king, "I owe you thanks. I would have you make peace with Bernier. " Gautier heard him; wrath seized him once more. Loudly he shouted: "Just emperor, may God curse you! You were the one who started this war, Killed and cut up Raoul, my uncle. By that God Who judges all things, Rather I would dissect all his limbs. " Bernier said, "Now I hear a fool talking. Now I must not drink or eat. You shall never see the month of February. "

235
Our emperor turned from Gautier. To Bernier he went directly. Courteously he spoke to him: "Sire Bernier, noble and renowned knight, Will you survive? Tell me the truth. " "Yes, truly, sire, but I am gravely wounded. " "God," said the king, "may you be praised. Do not misjudge me, I wish to live until You should be reconciled with Gautier. But he is so proud and excessive That he will have nothing of it, for the gold of ten cities." "Bernier said, "Sire, you will not see otherwise. Gautier is young and newly knighted; He thinks he can well do whatever he wants. But by Him Who was hanged on the cross, It will never happen for all my life That I shall know remorse or defeat." "Gautier heard him and was much incensed. "Vile bastard, how excessive you are! My uncle you killed, who was brave and wise, Your rightful lord; you are proved a traitor. Marvelous how you deny it so long.
You've come out of this badly with the loss of your ear, Which by the Seine lies on the field." Bernier replied, "You are very wrong. I gave you a blow, as you well know; You were almost broken in your left side. This weighs upon me and I
grieve for it. You do a great sin when you do not make peace." Gautier heard him, but he took no pity.

236
"Sire Gautier!" said the noble Bernier, "For the love of God, Who was put on the cross, Will this war last forever? God forgave His death to Longinus [who thrust his spear into his side]. Accept compensation, excellent and noble knight. I shall at once give you such justice as you may desire. I shall surrender to you my land and my country, I shall go with you to Cambrai. I shall serve you, this I say in pledge. I ask only to have two poor horses; Never shall I wear either ermine or sable. From my squire I shall beg For water to drink and for rye bread to eat. For as long as you wish I will be so punished Until the hour that pity enters your heart. Otherwise take your sword and now kill me. "Then both Gautier and Guerrl cried, "Vile bastard, how you have fallen! By that God Who was placed on the cross, Your amends will never be accepted. Rather shall you die, by the body of St. Denis." " All rests with God," said the noble Bernier. "I cannot die before God's chosen time. "Into the city comes the sister of Louis. When she entered the streets of Paris, On all sides she heard the cries Concerning the two vassals who had injured each other. The lady heard it; her heart was saddened. One might have given her all the wealth of St. Denis, And she would have shown neither joy nor pleasure, So much she wished to know what had happened to her friend. She dismounted, from her Arabian horse, Then mounted the steps of the vaulted palace. She entered the hall before King Louis, Together with twenty excellent knights.

237
Lady Aalais, worthy of praise, descended From her mount without delay. Up the palace steps she began to mount; She had with her many a valiant knight. To meet her came her dearest friends, Guerri the Red and many another prince, And the emperor who has France in his power. He saluted her graciously without delay; After he had embraced and kissed her, The gentle lady pushed him back. "Away with you, king, may you have troubles; You are not worthy to rule a kingdom. If I were a man, before the sun sets, I would show with a sword of steel That you are wrongly king; Well could I declare it, Since you allow at your table to eat The one who has cut off your nephew's limbs." She looks ahead and sees Gautier lying there. From grief she swoons at once. All her valiant knights hold her erect. And Gautier began to shout, "Noble company, take courage and pride. Tell my aunt what I did to Bernier. Never in his life will he do service to a man. I've taken his ear with my steel lance." The lady heard him and stretched her hands toward the sky: "Dear Sire God, I owe You thanks." On the other side she sees Bernier lying, She ran toward him and seized a crowbar. Surely she would have killed him without further ado, But the barons did not allow her to touch him. And Bernier slipped out of his bed Gracefully without further delay. He ran to embrace the legs of Lady Aalais, And sweetly to kiss her shoe; "Gentle countess, I wish no further delay. You reared me, I cannot deny it, And you gave me to eat and to drink. Alas, Gautier, by the just God, If now you do not wish to make
peace for Jesus' sake, See here my sword; from me you can take vengeance, For I do not wish to fight you further." Lady Aalais began to weep; She no longer insisted on cutting his members When she saw Bernier so humble himself.

238
Great was the movement in the furnished hall. The youth Bernier with the brave countenance Bound his head with a bandage of silk. He wore only breeches and he had no shirt. On his face he lay, holding his burnished sword; Before the king he prayed Gautier for mercy: "Mercy, Gautier, in the name of God, Mary's Son, Who raised the dead man in Bethany And received death to give us life. I pray you, sire, let this folly pass; This folly should not last all our days. Either now kill me or grant me life. " Gautier heard him and his complexion grew black. His loud words shook the hall: "By God, bastard, thus it shall never end. Either you shall hang or die at duel, If you do not flee to Apulia or to Hungary." To Gautier the court turned. Their loud cry filled the hall. "Sire Gautier, you are full of pride. When he speaks to you, strength nearly fails him; But he still has a thousand men in his service; They will not fail him at the risk of their lives. " Bernier responded, avoiding foolish words: "Mercy, lords, by God the Son of Mary. If God grant it, Who rules all things, That my prayer will be favorably received, Before night this war will be ended."

239
Bernier lay in the vaulted palace, With his face down he held the sharpened blade. From St. Germain there comes the abbot, Precious relics he brings in quantity, Of St. Denis and St. Honore In a loud voice which all could hear, "Barons," he said, "hear my will. You know well by holy charity, That the Lord God so full of goodness Had His holy body tortured and pained On the holy cross on that infamous Friday. Longinus was there by the blessed body And struck the left side. For a long time he had not use of his eyes, But he rubbed his eyes and perceived the light. He cried for mercy, with good will, And our Lord at once pardoned him. Sire Gautier by the God of majesty, This war has lasted too long. Bernier offers you amen in good will; If you do not accept it, you will be condemned for it." The gentle abbot was steadfast. He called by name on Count Ybeft, Wedon of Roie, Louis the hardened, And the wise Ernaut of Douai, Who had his left hand cut from his body In the battle fought near the meadow of Origny. "Barons," he said, "now hear my thought. Each of you take his good sharpened blade, Let them be so given to your enemies That if it pleases God, you will be reconciled, Through that agreement which you shall now hear. May all your sins be pardoned you To the same measure that at the Judgment Day their sins are pardoned." "Truly," said Ybert, "this should not be rejected." They knelt down in the sight of all the barons. In good will they cried for forgiveness. But Gautier did not cast them a glance. The abbot saw this and nearly lost his mind.

240
The abbot, who was very learned, cried out: "What are you doing, Guerri the Red of Arras? Bid them rise, noble and gentle knight." And Gautier cried loudly: "You
bid them rise, lady, by your mercy, By the Lord God, Who has never lied. I say
that he will never be my friend Until he be cut up and killed." Guerri heard him
and laughed aloud: "Fair nephew," he said, "you are greatly prized. You have
much spirit against your enemies. The caitiff Bemier will never recover." The
abbot heard him and his face grew dark: "Sire Guerri, you have gray hair, You do
not know the day of your judgment If you do not make peace, may St. Denis hear
me, Never will your soul have paradise."

241
The people stirred noisily in the palace. Before Gautier, Bernier was humbly
prostrate. Before Guerri, the skilled Ybert And Louis his brother together lay.
Wedon of Roie prayed quietly, He and Ernaut of Douai of gentle body. And
Bernier cried aloud: " 0 Sire Gautier, by the almighty God, Our five swords are
here given to you. We shall never recover them. Now by God may your anger
pardon us, Or take the sword and make quick vengeance." Through the palace
seven hundred voices were raised: " 0 Gautier, in the name of God, Who knows
all things, For the love of God, noble man, bid them rise." "God," said Gautier, "I
do it sorrowfully." He quickly and gracefully raised them; Then they embraced as
friends and kinsmen. The king turned away; he was full of anger, For he
regretted this agreement. Guerri the Red arose at once. He went to the window
and cried out in a loud voice: "Brother Bernier, in the name of God, come
forward. This king is a felon; I hold him to be a rascal. He started this war, as
many know. By the body of St. Amant Let us make war on him, noble and valiant
knight." "Truly," said Bernier, "I consent and agree.' I would not fail you for
anything living. " Ybert with the mustache spoke: " All Vermandois, the strong
and large land, I abandon to you to do as you wish. And against you I will not
take a clod of earth From my land worth a farthing. This only I regret, by the body
of St. Amant, That this war has lasted so long." Guerri replied, "It cannot be
otherwise. From now on we shall be as close kinsmen."

242
Great was the movement in the rich palace. There were Aalais and Ybert, proud
of visage, Guerri the Red and the courteous Gautier, Count Ernaut of Douai, the
warrior, And Louis and Wedon and Bernier. Now all the counts go together to
eat. The king of France felt nothing but anger. He summoned the barons to come
and speak with him. This they do, as they dared not disobey. Before reaching the
palace they did not tarry. To the king they went and leaned against the table; He
called Ybert, the brave warrior: " Ybert, " he said, "I have held you very dear. .
After your death, by the just God, I wish to give Vermandois to one of my nobles."
Ybert replied: "Sire, you cannot do it. I gave it the other day to Bernier." "What,
you devil!" said the king of haughty mien, "Has then a bastard a right to claim a
fief?" Ybert answered and felt nothing but wrath: "Just emperor, by the just God,
You do a great wrong insulting your vassal. I too was your vassal this morning,
But I can no longer bear you homage, If you do not do justice and pledge me the
land." "Truly," said the king, "you vaunt yourself too much. Never from the land
shall you have a farthing. I've already given it to Gilemer of Ponthieu." Bernier
said: "Sire, you can plead in vain, Since by Him Who rules all things, He shall never have from you help or protection Until I shall have hacked away all his limbs." The king answered, "Shut up, you rotter and villain! Miserable bastard, do you want to fight with me? Soon I shall have you thrown on a dung heap."

Bernier heard this, and wrath came upon him. In anger he drew his sword of steel And cried aloud: "What are you doing, Gautier? Now all your men must aid me." And Guerri said: "I must not fail you, Nor shall I fail you for the gold of Montpellier. This coward king one ought well to ruin, For he made us begin this war And caused my nephews to be slain and quartered." You should have seen how they drew their swords. Guerri the Red brandished his aloft, And the king's men trembled and ran. Many more than seven they overpowered, Not even the emperor kept his skin intact, For Bernier went to stab him. Inside his cuirass he slipped the blade, So that he made him fall to the earth.

243
The king was saddened and dismayed. Gautier rose to his feet. "Just emperor," he says, "you have done a great wrong. I am your nephew, you ought not to have disinherit me." The king replied: "Scoundrel, let me be. By Him Who was hanged upon the cross Everyone will in the end be disinherit." Gautier replied, "Since you deny your faith to me, From now on, beware of my body." To the lodgings soon a messenger arrived. He cried aloud: "Noble knights, mount your horses. Our barons have come to blows in the palace. "When they heard this, all of them speedily mounted. In a short hour, one thousand of them were armed And were rushing toward the palace.

244
Great was the movement in the vaulted hall. Guerrl spoke with a brave look: "Just emperor, it is right that I tell you this. This war you caused by your stupidity. Raoul you invested with another man's fief. You swore to him before the barons That you would never fail him as long as he lived. Everyone knows what this guarantee was worth. Near Origny, close to the abbey, he was killed. But by Him to Whom all men pray, Still your entire host has not been summoned." The king replied, "Old traitor, may God curse you! Whatever happens, you shall never have Arras. Within a month you will be deprived of your fief. If I find you there, by God, Son of Mary, At the great gate which is built there, I shall hang you in the sight of my barons."

Guerri listened, and now he defies him: "Watch out for my burnished sword! Bernier, my brother, now I have need of help." Bernier answered with a hardy countenance: "I will not cease to attend you." And the court dispersed amid much strife.

245
Gueri the Red descended the stairs. At the foot he found one thousand armed knights. Bernier cried out to them: "Noble knights, think to do well. Our squires are already armed. Quickly sack this town. All that you seize will be yours." They responded: "Let it be as you command." They cried for fire, and the town was at
once put to the torch, And it was at once lit up; Through the streets of the city fire raced, Up to the palace of which you have heard, From the great bridge where the ships anchored To the small bridge which is so renowned That day from all its riches there did not remain Enough to burden a single peasant.

246
They burned the city in their great anger. Guerrl and Bernier quickly departed, And Gautier quietly left. They had no wish to stay in the city. To Pierrefont they came directly, And they rode all the dark night To San Quentin they went quickly. All the people of the country made secure their houses Because of the great war soon to break out The king held as a great offense That in the city they have done him such injury. In bad temper he swears by the body of St. Peter That neither castle nor fortress will protect them, Nor kinship nor bonds of vassalage, Until he takes of them all great punishment.

247
They arrived at San Quentin in the Vermandois. "Sire Gautier," says the courteous Bernier, "Guerri my lord will go to Artois, And you will go at once to Cambrai. I am still wearied from my wounds, And you yourself will not be whole for months. I know he can in Vermandois. He will come against us with terrible strength. Summon all the men that you can. Guerri the brave and the courteous will call his men. And I am very close to Laon; Very often I shall raise havoc within it. Neither barricade nor stronghold nor defense Will restrain my good Viennese blade." At these words all departed. Guerrl the Red went to Artois, And Lady Aalais to her land in Cambrai.

248
Directly to Arras went Guerrl the Red, And Gautier returned to Cambrai, And Aalais was there with complexion fair. They summoned their men and their best friends. Guerri the Red did likewise, For Bernier is certain of war. The king swears by God, Who was placed on the cross, That he would not stop for all the gold of Senlis Until he should have vengeance from the bastard Who burned and sacked his fortress And robbed the city of Paris, And did great shame to the country Bernier, Gautier, and Guerrl the Red of Arras. If he does not have their land within fifteen days, And has not taken Vermandois by force, He will not consider himself worth two farthings. He summoned his scribes and addressed them: "Write my letters as I shall tell you. I wish to summon at once my best friends, And my barons and those whom I have reared, So that for my shame vengeance may be taken. Neither castles nor forts will protect them. I shall drag them forth; I am in great haste." The scribes responded, "All shall be as you wish." Gautier, Guerri, and the courteous Bernier Came to St. Quentin in Vermandois. They stayed there a great part of the month, For from their wounds they were still weary. With them they had two good doctors. When they were cured, they departed at once. Guerrl the Red went to Artois And with him went the courteous Bernier. Lady Aalais to her lands in Cambrai Has gone; she takes Gautier with her.
[This ends the first part of the poem; there exists a continuation written later and in a much different spirit, largely concerned with the romantic adventures of Bernier]

QUESTIONS:
1. Why would a monarch deprive a noble of his fief?
2. What recourse did the noble have if he did lose his fief?
3. Did the knights in this epic answer to any higher sources of authority?
4. What roles did women play?
5. How were religious institutions viewed? What elements of Christianity played a role in the story?

Source: David and Patricia Herlihy, "Fiefs, Feuds and Justice in Raoul of Cambrai," from The History of Feudalism by David Herlihy (1979), pp. 131-77. The text may be found in Raoul de Cambrai: Chanson de geste, eds. P. Meyer and A. Longnon (Societe des Anciens Textes Français, 17; Paris, 1882).