

Torrent of Portyngale

(Torrent of Portugal)

anon

a fourteenth century Middle English verse romance

Translated and retold in Modern English prose
by

Richard Scott-Robinson

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Torrent of Portugal

anon

fourteenth century

Here begins a good tale of Torrent of Portugal

God that ys worthy and Bold · Heuen and Erthe haue in hold · Fyld watyr and wynde · Yeve vse grace hevyn to wyne · and brynge vs owt off Dedly synne – God, who is worthy, bold and holds heaven and Earth in his hands – water, wind and every field – deliver us from deadly sin and give us the grace to go to heaven when we die and to be in your service forever.

If you will listen for a moment everybody, you'll hear – through all this noise even! – of a valiant warrior, the most battle-hardened man who has ever lived. Before I finish, you will have heard of all the deeds of a doughty knight who figures highly in romance, as men of letters will tell you. In Portugal, that wealthy land, there once lived an earl who was very courteous and a fine warrior. Once he had married and settled down with a wife, he had a son, the fairest in all the land, and this boy's name was Torrent. By the time this young man was eighteen years old he was well tested in combat and could defeat a knight in battle, and even a king.

But now death arrives and takes his father, for God is mightier than all of us. The King of Portugal is happy to take Torrent into his retinue.

The young man was so brave in battle that the king gave Torrent the revenue of an earldom, with forests, fields and pastures to match. The king had a daughter who was as white as the foam that is blown by the wind from the sea, a very worthy young lady whose name was Desonelle. When Torrent saw her, he fell so much in love with her that his father's lands meant nothing to him in comparison. And for the love of this dear lady he took on many adventures, far and near. Through his skill in fighting on horseback with a lance he knocked to the ground every knight who faced him. Her father, and many other knights, were amazed at how well he could ride a horse and the king said to him one day: 'Torrent, why is it that you despise these fine knights so much that you won't accept the order of knighthood yourself?'

Like Octavian's son Florent and Sir Eglamour of Artois, Torrent of Portugal is a giant-killer. Like Sir Eglamour, he is sent off on a number of impossible quests to kill giants and dragons by the jealous father of the maiden he loves, in order to win her hand in marriage. In the Welsh Arthurian tale How Culhwch won Olwen, the giant Ysbaddaden sends Culhwch off on a series of impossible tasks in order to win his daughter's hand in marriage. But it must also be acknowledged that Torrent of Portyngale resonates equally as strongly with the story of Sir Isumbras and the legend of Saint Eustace, particularly as Torrent's two children, like those of Eustace and Sir Isumbras, are taken by animals before beginning new lives.

The story is found here and in Chetham's Library, Manchester MS Chetham 8009, dating to the fifteenth century. Similarities with Sir Eglamour of Artois point to the tale being broadly contemporary with that English romance – dating it, therefore, to the fourteenth century – and that both are based upon a common antecedent, now lost.

‘So may I prosper,’ replied Torrent, ‘but I need to take on another challenge before I should be made a knight.’ And he swore by the King of Heaven that he had had pleasant and perhaps prophetic dreams in his chamber at night.



When Torrent had explained: ‘Are you telling me that you love my daughter?’ exclaimed the king. ‘You’ll have to pay for her in deeds of arms, be sure of that! By God, you’ll have to win her if you want her, however invincible you may think you are!’

‘By dear Mary, if I proved myself to be so, would you let me marry her?’

‘Before seven years have passed you’ll have your answer. But do you dare, for my daughter’s sake, to take on a battle alone, all by yourself?’

‘Against any man, anywhere!’ replied Torrent.

The king was beside himself with grief and rage. ‘If you’ll control yourself with my daughter, keep good faith and test yourself...’

‘Bring it on!’ interrupted Torrent. ‘If I knew where this adversary was, I’d be there in an instant!’

‘A mile into the Aegean Sea lies an isle where a giant lives. He’s truly evil, he’s torn down all my forests and destroyed all my castles in that country, so that not a single stone stands upon another any more.’

‘By Mary, it’s a pity that he still has his sight. May the devil blind him!’

‘Don’t worry about his eye, you won’t be able to reach it. He’ll blow you away with his breath!’

‘I promise you, I’ll get him. And I’ll not take a single step backwards when I meet him, even if he turns out to be stronger than Samson, or anyone like that.’

Torrent’s squires were very upset when they learned that they couldn’t accompany their master on this journey to fight with this giant. The giant’s name was Bigonmass, and all the world was terrified of him. Torrent went off to gather his arms and a good horse, then he took his leave from all the noble lords and set off by himself. They all prayed for him.

Desonelle had no idea that Torrent was embarking upon this journey for her sake. Now God, who died upon a wooden cross for us, please give him the strength to win this fight. Whoever takes a perilous path like this has great need to pray to Jesus for help.

My author makes it clear that no other knight had ever had the courage to make this journey. Torrent rode for six days beside the sea, looking for this giant. In a very large and well-managed forest he found great olive trees covered in green leaves, but many were stripped of their branches. Soon he glimpsed the giant lying asleep on a mountain. Torrent knelt down in prayer and asked Jesus for help.

‘Lord,’ he prayed, ‘as you never did any wrong, for Mary’s sake let me never do any wrong either, and by doing so let me eat from the same bowl as you. And if I kill him while he sleeps, it will be a cowardly act.’ So Torrent blew his bugle to wake the giant up, and rode near to him. But the giant was sleeping so soundly that the blast from Torrent’s horn didn’t wake him at all. His chest rose and fell like a swell on the sea. When Torrent saw that his bugle wouldn’t stir the giant, he secured his horse’s reins to a branch and began to climb the mountain on foot, for it was too steep for a horse to negotiate, without causing it too much grief from the spurs. The route was perilous, but Torrent pressed on.

At last he prodded the giant with his spear and shouted: ‘Arise, fellow! Who made you so brave as to live here and destroy my lord’s forest? It’s time for you to pay for what you’ve done.’

The giant stood up angrily and faced Torrent on a patch of open grassland. ‘I’m going to knock your block off!’ he shouted.

Although Torrent was very young, the giant gave no quarter and anyone who’d never seen deadly combat before would have learned a trick or two by watching them, that’s for sure. The giant struck the first blow and shattered Torrent’s shield. It lay in splinters on the ground. But stupidly, the giant just stood there, looking. Torrent leapt back up and, slipping under the giant’s guard, gripped him around the waist. ‘Ah, fellow! Is this your game?’ cried the giant, as they began to roll over and over and over again, down the mountain. They turned about, wallowing around and tumbling over the sharp rocks, and soon the giant’s guts began to burst out, as it says in this book of romance. At the foot of the mountain there was a rugged crag that smashed the giant’s shoulder bone and tore open his right side. By God’s grace, the giant was felled. Torrent stood on top of him and dispatched him with a shining knife. Then kneeling, he prayed to the God of all, to Jesus Christ, in thanks:

‘Lord, may you be forever loved, for granting me this victory.’ And holding both hands aloft he cried: ‘I’ve killed this giant without any help from any squire, but by myself, alone!’

What else is there to say? May God protect this young man from harm.

Torrent climbed back up the mountain and gazed at the countryside all around, for far and wide. About a mile distant he could see an island and standing upon this island was a fine castle, finer than any other in the land. The tide was out and Torrent was able to make his way to the castle’s entranceway, weary though he was. Beyond two iron gates he found some magnificent buildings, with towers encrusted with precious stones, shin-

ing like crystal. He rode up to them, intending to rest for the night, but found the hall door guarded by a lion and a lioness who were eating some men. Although a Christian man, Torrent froze with fear, I can tell you. As God is my witness, he dared not go a foot nearer, in case they tried to eat him as well. Torrent stood there and prayed to God to find him a safe place to sleep.

Then he heard behind a wall the faint sound of a young lady sighing and weeping. She began to moan, and cried: 'Aah! Alas, that ever such a gentle maiden and a king's daughter should find herself imprisoned with such fearful company.'

Torrent stood listening. 'Dear God!' he shouted out at last. 'Is there any Christian in this stone castle who will, for the love of God, provide lodgings for a gentleman this night? I have come alone.'

'Saint Mary!' exclaimed the fair lady. 'What Christian man asks for lodgings here?' She approached Torrent. 'I would gladly put you up for the night, but the giant will kill you if I do.'

'Tell me quickly, fair lady, who will drive me from these magnificent towers?'



'By the King of Heaven, there is a giant living here who is so strong that if he sees you, even if you had twenty lives, he would take all of them from you. May Jesus Christ give me the grace to hide you in some secret place, out of sight. I don't know where he is, but I imagine that the tiny birds must have lulled him to sleep.'

'Quite possibly,' replied Torrent. 'But before he wakes, you'll learn something to quell all your fears. First, though, through your generosity, could you ask these lions to lie down, so they don't attack me.'

She took him by the hand and led him between the lion and the lioness, and they obeyed her every command. The lady was very fearful as she led Torrent into a great hall that glimmered with gold. She poured some white wine and some red. 'We may as well celebrate our deaths,' she said, 'for that's what's coming to us.'

'You have my word, the giant won't be coming here tonight, I promise you,' said Torrent. 'He's in such a slumber that no one on Earth could wake him, except perhaps for God Almighty.'

When she heard this, the young lady was very eager to remove Torrent's armour! 'There is a prisoner here in a dark dungeon,' she said. 'Verdonis, the son of the King of Provence, along with four earls' sons. The giant captured them as they were riding along the shore and he put them into his cold prison, in an iron cage.'

Torrent went straight into the dungeon. 'Is there anyone here?' he called.

The king's son asked in reply whether there was any Christian man who might help them.

'Get us out of this place!' he cried.

'Lord God Almighty, I'd rather spend a day fighting than have all my father's lands!' exclaimed Torrent. He seized an iron mallet and soon broke open an iron door, found the keys and rescued the five children, the fairest ever to have been imprisoned. The young lady was very pleased. She poured some red wine and some white, and they all went to have something to eat.

Everybody, if you will listen, I'll tell you quickly what the children's names were, and their families. The son of the King of Provence was named Verdonis. He was a strong and courageous young man. Torren was an earl's son, and another was Jakis of Berwain. Amyas was another. The young lady was the daughter of the King of Galles and her name was Eleanor, a fine young noblewoman, an asset to any royal court.

Eleanor showed Torrent to the giant's chamber, where gold and silver was spread about, and blue azure. She led him to a stable, and each of them selected a fine horse to ride. And be in no doubt, if the giant had still lived, they wouldn't have been doing this! Torrent stood there clothed in shining steel, ready to saddle his horse and set off at once.

They did not sleep, for Torrent intended to be away at first light. He barred the gates and took everything he wanted, for he had all the keys. The lions that were at the hall door were led to their former master, and they had a fine meal off him! Torrent tied the giant's head to one of the horses, with God's help.

Before three weeks had passed, Torrent arrived back in Portugal. He made his way to the king's hall. The gatekeeper saw him and ran away in terror, as fast as his legs would carry him. 'Sir king,' he spluttered, 'by Christ's crucifixion, Torrent has brought the head of a devil to present to you.'

Desonelle said: 'Porter, be quiet.'

The king made his way to the gates and saw that a crowd had already gathered, great lords, knights and squires. They were all very nervous because of the lions that were accompanying Torrent and they dared not go near him.

'I would kiss you, if it wasn't for these lions,' said the king.

Torrent instructed the lions to lie still, and then he kissed the king with joy and bliss, then other lords as well and many of the ladies. Messengers were sent to the King of Provence, to tell him that his son had been freed from prison. 'Young Torrent of Portugal has brought relief to all his sorrows and killed that bold giant,' they said. Everybody was very happy when they heard this, and couldn't wait to see their prince.

'So may I prosper,' said the King of Provence to the messengers who had brought this news, 'I will give you three towns for the things that you have just told me.'

The messengers replied that they had to go to Galles, and there was no need to give them gifts. The King of Provence travelled to Portugal with them and Verdonis was reunited with his father. As the messengers sailed again on the tide, at the seaside at Peron, the King of Provence said: 'So may I prosper, but you will not be without gifts, I promise you.'

Then turning to Torrent, he said: 'You shall not see this year out without gifts having been bestowed upon you as well. Have this gold ring, and my sword, which is finely wrought and better than any I know of, anywhere in Christendom. It shines like glass and was forged by Welland. There is no other sword like it. I've seen it happen that whoever receives the slightest wound from it is fated to die.'

Torrent was delighted to receive this sword. Its name was Adyloke.

The King of Portugal put on a great feast that lasted for a fortnight, for all who wished to eat. The King of Galles arrived and was very pleased to be reunited with his daughter. 'You can marry her whenever you want,' he declared to Torrent. 'She is my heir.' Then every man took his leave and made his way home to rest.

One day, as they were going along, the King of Portugal spoke to his daughter: 'You should know that a gentleman has won a considerable victory for your sake, my dear.'

'Sir, by the King of Heaven, I had no idea! Until now I didn't know whose love he had done it for.'

'It was for your love that he laboured so valiantly. But I warn you, Desonelle, by the Holy Cross, for both your sakes, I hope that I can trust you both.'

She brought a white steed, as white as the flowers in a meadow, and its hooves were as black as sloes. 'My love,' she said to Torrent, 'take this young horse. Death cannot strike you while you sit on his back, and if you are pursued and have need to flee, he is very swift. The king of Nazareth sent him to me. Torrent, I give him into your care, for I will find no better love than yours.'

One day, young Torrent and the King of Portugal were walking beside a river. The king had realised how happy he would be if Torrent was dead, and found himself wondering how he could bring this about. So the king had forged a letter and instructed a messenger to arrive with it. The messenger appeared, beside the river, and gave to Torrent, who was as true as steel, a letter that claimed to be from Desonelle, asking him to obtain a noble falcon for her, as a way of proving his love. Torrent began to read the letter, and the king came near and pretended not to know what the message contained. 'What does it say?' he asked, peering over Torrent's shoulder.

'Lord, have a look. It concerns a certain kind of falcon. I've no idea where such a bird can be found.'

'I think they're found in the forest of Maudlayne, where this breed of hawks is the finest anywhere, so I hear,' the king lied. 'If you find any, get one for me as well, will you.'

‘So save me God, if I’m able to, you shall have first refusal of the very best of them,’ replied Torrent. Then he called his squire and instructed him to gather his armour, while he waited outside. When he was armed in all his gear, he mounted his horse and rode off.



Torrent took a route that led him to the forest of Maudlayne, through some wild parts of the land. He found bears and apes living there, a large number of wild animals, lions as well. As evening began to descend, he found himself in a dense woodland. Listen everybody, how a perilous thing soon happened. He and his squire became separated. At a crossing of two ways they lost one another. Then they took extra care! Torrent chose a gloomy path that led down into a deep valley where there was a large spring.

A little before midnight Torrent caught sight of a dragon! He’d brought along a shield and a lance, but his squire was carrying these, so Torrent went down upon his knees and prayed to Jesus Christ: ‘Lord, through your great power, since I’ve seen many battles already, don’t let me die before I’ve achieved knight-hood. I’ve been sent here under false pretences, for this is virgin forest and I’ll have to fight with a dragon. Jesus, since I’m only a man, please give me your help tonight, for the sake of your holy name.’

As Torrent prayed to Jesus, he heard the dragon in the gorge. It would move and then wait, move and wait again. The tail that the dragon trailed behind him was seven yards long. His wings were broad and powerful and he suddenly flew towards Torrent making a dreadful noise. Torrent had neither shield nor lance, so he prayed to God to do something to sap the beast’s strength, for he was very wary of it.

The dragon had a lump on the end of its tail that glowed like molten glass, and as it swiped it towards Torrent, through the grace of God almighty, Torrent was able to cut it off with his sword, along with three yards of the tail, as it says in this book of romance. The loathly thing cried out in pain and the valley rang with its hideous noise.

A giant heard it.

‘I believe there is a Christian man close by,’ said the giant. ‘I can hear my dragon crying out. By he who shaped both water and land, I imagine that some brave man must be near him. I’ll go and have a look. If I stayed resting my head on this stone pillow while my most cherished fosterling was being killed, I’d be a poor master indeed.’

By the time the giant had roused himself, Torrent had slain the dragon. In this way was God his shield. He made his way to a mountain to rest for the night. All that day his life had been in danger and he felt a need to be out in the open and away from the confinement of the forest. He slept until dawn, and then the birds began to sing merrily in the

forest below and on the slopes around him.

But we must leave Torrent for the moment and speak of his squire, may Jesus shield his soul from hell. Torrent's squire had ridden all night through dense woodland, looking anxiously for his master. His lord had been taken from him, he knew not where nor how, but he didn't dare to shout, for fear of giving away his presence to the wild animals that were lurking everywhere. A little before dawn he found a ridge and followed carefully along it. He rode on until he came to a path that was not so thickly beset with trees and followed it without much enthusiasm, moving as quickly as he could because of the bears and the apes that might bite him. The sun arose and shone brightly, and soon he saw a castle ahead of him, a magnificent, white castle.

The giant saw him and approached. 'Fellow,' he said, 'may God smile on me but you are welcome! What are you doing in my forest?'

'Lord, to see a hawk's nest, if it pleases you.'

'Then you'll need to take some clothing off.' The giant led him to an oak tree, cut him into four quarters and hung each piece on a branch. Lord, this was his custom!

As Torrent lay on the mountain, he thought he heard a pitiful cry, like a terrified scream. 'Saint Mary, I wonder what happened to my gentle squire?' he mused. He put on his clothes and his sword, mounted his horse and went looking for him. As you can imagine, he soon came across the grisly sight of the four quarters hanging in some branches, it was too conspicuous to miss.

The giant leaned against a tree and looked at Torrent. The fiend was eager to fight. His name was Rochense, and as this book of romance says, there ensued a dreadful tussle. The giant struck child Torrent: 'You thief! Submit! Yield to me at once!'

'What? Are you mad?' replied Torrent. 'May God who died for us on the cross bring you disaster today!'

The giant aimed a massive blow at Torrent that smashed out all his horse's brains. But Torrent spotted something as they fought together; as swiftly as he could, he ran to where his squire had left all his gear. Gathering up his shield and his spear, he approached the giant again and forced him backwards by about twenty feet. As he gained ground on him, Torrent was pleased to see the giant retreating down this Pyrénéan mountainside, stumbling through woodland and bog, and at last the giant came to a deep gully where he became trapped. Torrent pursued him gleefully and broke his lance against him. But he still had Adyloke. The fiend stood in the water and fought as though he was mad. They struggled together like this for many hours.

When the day was nearly over, Torrent was so tired that he fell down onto his knees. 'Help me God!' he cried, and his thoughts turned to Desonelle. He cast his shield away from him. But Jesus did not wish him to die, so he sent a rainstorm that cooled Torrent down and let him drink. The giant saw this and rushed out of the water, hoping

to deliver a fatal blow. But Torrent was now refreshed and stood up at once, facing the giant. May Christ save Torrent! The giant fought with an iron staff and the first blow he delivered smashed Torrent's shield into three pieces. Torrent ran under the staff and thrust his sword into the giant's heart. The giant gave out a terrible cry and fell at once to the ground. Torrent cut off his head. And so he won the day.

Torrent knelt on the ground at once and thanked God for sending him such grace. He had made two journeys and defeated two giants – giants who had brought many a maiden to grief. Torrent paced out the giant's length and found him to have been twenty-four feet tall. He left his body behind and carried his head to the white castle nearby.

Inside this castle Torrent found armour and other gear, including a bright sword. He went into the tower where he found the giant's bed, and it was very comfortably made. At the head of this bed he found a magnificent sword that was worth an earldom in itself. On the pommel was written the name of a prince. The sword was called Mounpol-yardus. Then Torrent sought out a master-chamber and, to tell you the truth, he lay there asleep until morning.

When morning broke, Torrent went to the stables and found a fine horse that was white and grey. Securing the giant's head onto this horse, and not forgetting the dragon's head as well, he went on his way, leaving behind more wealth in that place than there was in the whole of Portugal.

Torrent rode day and night until he came to the castle where his lord was staying. The king went to the gate and found Torrent kneeling there.

'I have a present for you,' said Torrent. 'I couldn't find any other hawks at Maudlayne's spring.'

'For goodness sake!' muttered the king. 'Torrent must be a son of the devil of hell. Torrent!' he shouted. 'There's a giant whose blows no knight has ever been able to withstand, he's so strong.'

'What's his name?' replied Torrent.

'Slogus of Foulles. And you have his head there.'

Everybody crowded around, noblemen and commoners alike, to gaze at the heads that Torrent had brought back with him. The lords exclaimed to the king: 'By Saint Michael! Sir, it will be shameful if you do not bestow your love fully upon this man.'

Torrent arranged for five priests to sing for his squire's life and to conduct services in his memory and for his soul. Then the lady Desonelle, as white as a swan, went to see Torrent, her lord; for she now had no doubt that she loved him.

Letters arrived for the King of Portugal from the King of Aragon, asking that his youngest son might have the hand in marriage of his daughter Desonelle. Quick to seize an opportunity, the king hurriedly agreed to this proposal and sent the messenger back with

this reply. He did this while Torrent was out hunting, so he knew nothing about it.

One morning, as he lay with the queen, the king said: 'Madam, for charity, you are often considered wise. How should I act regarding our daughter? The King of Aragon has written to me, asking for her hand in marriage on behalf of his youngest son.'

'Sir, I advise you to let Torrent have her, for he is worthier.'

'But madam, is it fair on me to have to make an earl's son my heir? I will not, by Saint James! He has killed two giants and a dragon, but only because of his sword – the one called Hathelock – not through any virtue of his own.'

'Lord,' replied the queen, 'he might be just as happy with a knight's daughter in his bed, but if you warn him away from Desonelle now, those who get to learn of it will think it shameful.'

'Madam, as we speak there is a giant not far from here who has killed many men. I shall say that I'll bestow upon Torrent my daughter's hand in marriage if he can rid me of this friend of fiends. That way, he'll think he's still in favour. But I will stipulate that he must go alone, without a squire or any other servant.'

'Sir,' she said, 'He's done so much for you already. Will you send him out again to do more?'

The bells began to ring and the king got up, along with the queen. Then they went to hear Mass, as Holy Church requires, with solemnity and singing. Then trumpets blew and knights assembled in the hall in rows, each according to his status. It was lovely to see. Torrent sat at a side table, with all the squires who were destined to become fine knights themselves. As they sat eating, the king saw his opportunity. 'Torrent,' he called, 'so save me God, I believe that you have loved my daughter for a long while and would like me to give you to her in marriage?'

'I certainly would,' replied Torrent.

'Well, if you dare to take on one more dangerous mission for me, she's yours.'

'With pleasure! But before I go, you must give me assurances that I can marry her when I return, and you must confirm this in front of twenty-seven knights who are friends of mine. Good sirs, listen to what the king has just said. I call upon you all to bear witness to it. And if I knew where this place was that you want me to go to, I'd be setting off already.'

'In Calabria, there lives an enormous giant who is bold and immensely strong. His name is Sloches. May God propel you there as quickly as possible.'

'Farewell then. Before I return, I'll have found out whether this devil can fight.'

Torrent wasted no time but set off on a marvellous horse. But before he went, he visited Desonelle in her chamber to say goodbye to her. She wept bitterly.

‘Lady, be patient,’ he said, comfortingly. I shall return, be in no doubt, with sweet Mary’s help.’

He rode off, with Christ as his guide – which was just as well because he wasn’t at all sure of the way. He rode through Provence until he came to a high road that led to a castle by the sea where the King of Provence was in residence. Torrent shouted to the porter: ‘Lower the drawbridge, my good fellow, then go and ask your lord if he will give a night’s lodging to Torrent of Portugal.’

The porter did as he had been asked and knelt before the king. ‘God bless you, lord, in your hall. Torrent of Portugal has sent me to ask if you would be so good as to give him a night’s accommodation, if this is to your liking.’

The king swore by Christ: ‘There is no man in Christendom more welcome than he is!’

The king arose and made his way to the gate, along with many other noblemen, who were equally delighted to know that Torrent had come to visit. The king led Torrent into the hall and offered him all kinds of delicacies to eat. ‘Sir,’ said the king, ‘I must ask. Where are all your men?’

‘Sir, I have to ride out to engage with somebody, and my only squire hangs from my belt in its scabbard. No man can come with me.’



‘Sir, tell me if you will, where is this deed of arms to be?’

‘Sir, in Calabria, beside the sea. I am ready with this squire, come what may. But I can assure you, no other knight will dare to come with me, for fear of death.’

‘By the grace of God, I advise you not to go there, then. Folk from that part of the world are always coming to me for food and protection. They do so unceasingly. There’s a giant there, you see, and everybody knows it. He’s destroying towns and cities, everything he can. As books of romance tell us, his mother lay sleeping when he was sired by a devil from hell. By Saint Adrian, I urge you – let someone else take on this mission. Listen, I have a daughter who is very dear to me. You can marry her if you wish. I shall offer you the lands of two dukedoms as her dowry.’

‘Thank you,’ said Torrent, ‘but I have given my word and I will not renege upon a promise.’

‘Then in God’s name, may the power of Our Lord Jesus bring you safely back again.’

The minstrels struck up, with trumpets, harps and merry song, and when the evening was getting late, everybody went to bed.

Torrent arose in the morning, took his leave, said goodbye to the king and to all the knights, and made his way along the coast road. May God guide him along the right path.

Within two or three days he arrived in Calabria. Soon he was approached by a mass of people in carts and hay wagons, fleeing from a great city. 'Dear God!' exclaimed Torrent. 'Good people, what's wrong? Why are you in such a panic?'

'There's a giant in this country, and nobody's safe from him!'

'Where can I find him?'

'In a castle beside the sea,' they replied. 'He's called Sloches and he's killed many men. We know where he is. He's outside the city of Hungary and he won't leave until he's captured the king and thrown him into his prison.'

Without any delay, Torrent rode to this city as fast as he could. When he arrived, he saw that the gates had been smashed down and armed men were trying valiantly to defend the city, but the giant had left fifty of them lying dead on the ground with some terrible wounds. When Torrent saw this, he vowed by Desonelle's beauty that he would strip this giant of all his ill-gotten gains. He stood in his stirrups and prayed: 'Lord, since you are all-powerful, give me the grace to win the battle here today and make this loathly fiend grovel at my feet. A man can only die once, and I'll fight for as long as I can endure.'

Torrent acted like a true nobleman: he prayed to Jesus and then carefully sought out a favourable piece of ground to make his stand. Then he tested his spear and his shield, to make sure that they were good. Then he blew his horn. The giant turned around to look at him.

'If you are a gentleman,' shouted Torrent, 'or if you have any noble blood in you at all, stop all this violence and come and test your strength against me. It's why I'm here, by the Holy Cross!'

'May the devil look after you!' replied the giant. 'Have you come in search of me? I'll twist your nose off, you beardless boy, and give you the best seat in hell!'

The giant strode towards Torrent, carrying a huge stick that was thirteen feet long. And although the coming battle seemed likely to be the deadliest Torrent had ever taken on, he was prepared to fight to the death. He did not pause but spurred his horse into the attack. The giant had only one eye – I've never seen anything like it! – but with the help of God and Saint Austen, Torrent's spear passed through this eye and went out through the back of the giant's head. God be praised. All those in the city peered over the walls, as the giant began to roar. He thrashed about with his great stick all that summer's night long, and set his back to a hill so that Torrent could not reach him. He was skilful enough to think of that. But at last, he'd bled so much that the stick fell from his hand. He was finished. Torrent ran at him with a spear and pierced him through the body, by the grace of God. All the people in the city gave out a great cheer, as the giant fell dead.

They came running out with sticks and began to beat the giant with them.

‘For goodness sake, don’t injure his head!’ cried Torrent. ‘It’ll be bad news for me if its unrecognisable.’

They did as he asked. There were more than three hundred of them in all, ecstatic with joy to see the giant dead. The King of Calabria arrived. He took Torrent by the hand and led him to the hall, where he commanded two squires to remove Torrent’s armour and to dress him in some more comfortable attire. Attendants at the side of the hall blew trumpets and all the knights assembled in front of the king’s throne.

‘Sir,’ cried the king to Torrent. ‘Where are you from?’

‘I’m from Portugal. I was sent here to seek a deadly encounter.’

‘Then will you help me to explore the giant’s castle? It’s not far from here.’

They made their way to the giant’s castle and it was the finest they had ever seen. ‘Sir,’ said the king, ‘by God almighty, because you killed this giant, I’ll give his castle to you, along with an earldom of land. Truly, all this shall be yours. You’ll no longer be the one receiving orders but the one giving them, as a nobleman should.’

Listen, everybody, if you will; that magnificent castle was called the Castle of Cardon. Torrent stayed there for two or three days but then he took his leave, for he wished to set off for home.

Torrent returned by way of Provence and visited the king whose son he had rescued from prison. Everybody was delighted to see him again, in such good health, and they looked forward to entertaining him. Here Torrent learnt that Desonelle was to be married, to some jumped-up prince! Listen, everyone, how his mood changed. He took up his arms and fell onto one knee before the king.

‘My lord,’ he said, ‘as a favour, make me a knight! As you know, my lord’s daughter has been betrothed to a powerful man.’

‘Yes, she’s due to be married in a week’s time, to the Prince of Aragon,’ replied the king, affirmatively. ‘I’ll knight you at once, if you like, then I advise you to gather your arms and leave immediately.’

Sir Torrent got himself a magnificent shield, decorated with a wonderful heraldic emblem that depicted a squire fighting a dragon with its mouth gaping wide. The shield was of azure and gold, and the crest was of gold also.

In Portugal, lords assembled in the hall, far more than are named in my source, which may come as no surprise. Sir Torrent, when he arrived, was soon made in no doubt that his beloved Desonelle had just been married to somebody else. He couldn’t think of any news that was more unwelcome. He didn’t enter the hall until the king and all his knights were halfway through their meal. Then, when they were still eating, he rode into the hall splendidly armed, with a squire, and approached Desonelle, who was wearing

her wedding gown.

‘Lords,’ cried Sir Torrent. ‘I challenge any one of you to three jousts in this hall, or else give Desonelle to me by right.’

The King of Aragon was sitting beside his daughter-in-law and defended her nobly. ‘You shall not have her!’ he cried.

His son cried: ‘Nobody else will joust for my wife! If you insist, and if you’re accusing me of doing nothing to gain her hand, I shall do something to gain it now! Make yourself ready!’

‘Alas!’ cried Desonelle. ‘What took Torrent so long to arrive?’

Trumpets blew, lords stood on the jousting field, ladies looked on. Torrent and the Prince of Aragon galloped towards one another and Torrent delivered such a blow that the prince was knocked to the ground and his shield was smashed to smithereens. The prince was so badly injured that he wasn’t able to take up arms again for another seven years.



‘So save me God,’ cried Torrent, ‘I’ll have another two jousts from you, if you want to stay within the law of this land.’ No one volunteered to take the prince’s place, nobody moved or said a word even, they were all too busy tending to the prince. They carried him back into the hall rather forlornly; he couldn’t stand unaided and the lords were sure that he didn’t have a leg to stand on legally either and judged that it might be better if he made himself scarce. This was all the comfort the prince got.

Torrent waited until noon the next day and when the lords in the hall were halfway through their meal, he made his way to the high dais and threw the giant’s head onto one of the boards. ‘Accept this, or do you want me to get really angry?’ he cried to the king.

All those at the tables sat still. No words were spoken except to agree that Torrent was in the right. Torrent moved to the side of the hall. He’d left his knight’s attire behind and was wearing his squire’s clothes.

‘Listen, lords and noblemen,’ he said. ‘For the love of God almighty, the king promised me his daughter if I would fight and defeat that powerful and wicked giant; he promised that if I did, I could marry his daughter and have half his kingdom while he lives, and inherit it all when he dies. Look! Tell me whether I’ve fulfilled the terms of this agreement or not? Has he been fair to me?’ He stared aggressively at the King of Portugal and all the knights.

The King of Aragon spoke up: ‘Torrent, I know nothing of all this, but you are a great

warrior, that's for sure, and by Saint Griffin, you'll have to win her with a sword first! She's married to my son. Noblemen led her into a church and I call upon all of you to bear witness to this. Sir king, farewell. Have a good day. You'll pay for this if I can arrange it, I swear to God.'

The Emperor of Rome was there as well and he quickly moved between the two kings and said: 'Lords, it's clear that the King of Portugal was under the impression that the squire who has arrived with this giant's head had died during his adventure. So I advise you to declare a Day of Rights and to organise a single combat between two knights, and may no man be killed.'

All the lords cheered in agreement and made arrangements immediately.

Then the King of Aragon had a thought. He decided to send a message to Satan to send a giant whom he would knight and confer lands to. So messengers went off. The king swore great oaths that this giant would fight the single combat as his son's champion and obtained two or three great iron staves for him to use in his fight against Torrent, who had no idea what was going on. Then the king consulted with all his knights and they agreed that the fight should not take place on land but out to sea, on an island. Great efforts were made to arrange this combat. If the giant killed Torrent, half of Portugal would be his, to govern as he wished. If Torrent overcame this giant, he would be given half of Aragon, which was three times better.

The giant, whose name was Cate, travelled to an island a little way offshore that was fertile and pleasant. Sir Torrent arrived on a galloping horse, fully armed. 'Lords,' said Torrent. 'It is becoming for knights to fight on horseback.'

'No,' they replied. 'Your adversary is so heavy that he cannot ride.'

'Then it will be the worse for him,' said Torrent. 'Dishonesty will never prevail. Go to your priest, Sir, and prepare!'

Torrent raised his hands to God and thanked him: 'Jesus Christ, I ask that you send me strength and fortitude this day, to survive against this fiend.'

Torrent went to the ship with the unfailing grace that God had sent him. All the lords of that country, from Rome to the Aegean Sea, stood watching from a safe distance. When Sir Torrent arrived at the place where the fight was to take place, the sailors were anxious to get away. The giant said: 'So may I prosper, but you are a welcome sight! Now I shall kill you.'

Cate the giant delivered the first blow, and knocked Torrent's weapon from his hand. The giant laughed. Sir Torrent tried to move under his guard, where the giant would be most vulnerable, and he got the better of him and began to drive him towards the sea. Soon, the giant was running for his life into the waves. Sir Torrent gathered large cobbles from the beach and threw them at the giant, who had a hard time trying to fend them away. At last, the giant succumbed to the unceasing barrage, with a terrifying roar that

was heard half a mile away.

In fitting style, Torrent thanked Mary's son Jesus for giving him the power to prevail, then: 'Lords! For charity, send me a boat! It's nearly nightfall.'

They found a sailing galley large enough to tow the giant's body back to land. Everybody marvelled at his size. Then they went to fetch Sir Torrent. The Emperor of Rome was there to greet him, and the King of Provence, the King of Calabria and two or three other kings as well. They bestowed upon Sir Torrent the land that had been promised to him, along with Desonelle's hand in marriage. They all said how worthy he was to receive it. Sir Torrent now possessed the wealthy city of Cargon, in Aragon, and all the land around about. Archbishops formally dissolved the marriage between the Prince of Aragon and Desonelle, as the law decreed, and for defeating this giant, Sir Torrent was held in high regard everywhere and considered to be a great knight. Sir Torrent gave to Saint Nicholas de Bari, the patron saint of sailors, a great earldom and a cloak which a great abbey kept for him, for the love of Jesus Christ whose power and strength had helped him through the ordeal. At last, every lord took his leave and everybody made their way home. The Queen of Portugal was very pleased that Torrent had prevailed, and thanked God for it.

'You have fought for my daughter and for my land, and won them both,' said the King of Portugal. 'You are therefore under my protection and I will not stand against you.'

After dinner, Torrent went to Desonelle's chamber to speak with her. This proud damsel invited him to sit on the edge of her bed and said: 'Welcome, with all my heart!' And his words were such sweet music to her that they spent the night together.

Sir Torrent stayed for twelve weeks and more, until letters arrived from the King of Norway. The king implored Torrent, if he would, for the love of Jesus, to come to fight a giant who was destroying all his lands, and as a reward he would give his dear daughter to him, along with half of Norway. Sir Torrent said to the King of Portugal: 'So save me God, I have all that I wish for and don't desire any more, unless it might be to take up this challenge for the sake of Jesus, who has helped me many times before. And I promise you, on my word, that Desonelle shall receive all my land if I fail to return.'

Sir Torrent prepared to make his way to Norway, but there were more than fifty with him who would prove to be traitors. He went to see Desonelle and very nobly and courteously said: 'Desonelle, farewell. I must set off now to defend a king's land. Take these gold rings and keep them safe, my generous lady, in case God should send us a child.'

Desonelle carefully took the rings and fainted three times when she saw that Sir Torrent intended to leave her.

The ship was provisioned, horses and armour were loaded aboard, and many noble gentlemen said farewell to their friends before embarking with Torrent. King Colomon of Portugal, to be honest, hoped never to see Torrent again, much to his grief.

The voyage took fifty days, but they arrived at last in Norway, and found it to be a harsh and forbidding place. The ship was driven by a strong wind blowing out of the west, and when they caught sight of the coast of Norway, the gale continued to blow them towards land. Before long, a little before midnight, the ship was riding high waves at anchor beside a forest. The shipmen cried: 'We're lost! There's a giant living here. We'll be cast onto his land.'

The master shipman said: 'Sir, by God almighty, this giant lies every night on a mountain that's quite close to us now. My lord the king will not fight until he knows that you're here. He's pinned all his hopes on you and we should go to see him first. I suggest that we take down all sail and row back out to sea, while the tide is still in our favour.'

'Here is my hand,' replied Sir Torrent. 'Since we've been driven against this shore tonight, I shall get on my horse and disembark right now.'

Sir Torrent armed himself with shield and spear and all his knights did likewise. The shipman said: 'I advise you all to make your peace with God, then, before we land.'

'We'll first see to that giant,' said Torrent. 'Gentlemen, be of good heart! Christ will be our help. We will not fail.'

They made their way into a dense forest, a forest of Brasill so the book says, and here they found lions, bears and all sorts of other wild beasts. The knights turned around as one man and fled back to the ship; they took to the water once again and rowed far from land, leaving Torrent to the attentions of the wild animals. The shipmen raised the sail and arrived at a nearby shore, one inhabited, with castles. They found the King of Norway resting in a chamber and told him a pack of lies – how Torrent had run away from the giant and abandoned the country that could have been his.

'Sir king,' they said. 'You have ten or twelve of your own earls who are as strong and valiant as the best. Send messengers around the country to gather these men, and they'll defeat this proud giant and set your daughter free.'

'I would rather have had that knight, who has the grace of God almighty,' replied the king, little knowing that Torrent was, even then, riding alone in the forest and, by the help of God almighty, had escaped the attentions of the wild beasts and made it safely to the top of a high hill.

Just before dawn, Torrent heard a terrible noise coming from a valley, like a yelling. He rode to see what was going on and found two dragons sitting beside a deep watering hole, singing to each other, as was their custom. Sir Torrent offered up a prayer: 'God, as you are Lord of everything, give me the grace to kill these unlovely fiends.'

When Sir Torrent had said his prayers, he galloped quickly towards the dragons and skewered one of them on his lance. This was how easy he found it, through the might of Jesus Christ, heaven's king, whom we should all love. The other dragon didn't run away but tried to attack Sir Torrent, spitting fire like bolts of lightning. But Sir Torrent rained

down blows upon it until at last he was able to overcome that foul and loathly creature as well.

Dawn broke, the birds began to sing and then the sun began to rise. Torrent was very happy to see the sunlight and rode out of that valley as quickly as he could. He made his way to a mountain where he saw a castle with some high and magnificent towers. He came to a main street, but there were few people to greet him or to give him directions, so he rode up to the gates alone. They were made of iron and wood and very massively built, whole tree trunks had been used, one of which was so great that nine oxen couldn't have pulled it out. The walls were made of stone, and some of these stones were immense.

'I have no idea where my squires have got to,' thought Sir Torrent. 'They're a timid lot. But what can I do? If I go back to the ship now, it's likely I'll find that it's gone. They've been away for quite a while now. And if I take any other route through this forest, I'll be attacked by wild animals. A curse on unfaithfulness! I shall fight here, then, by Jesus. Lord, keep me under your protection, as much as you can!'

This gentle knight dismounted and took the bridle from his steed, intending to rest for a short while. His horse pulled at the grass while Sir Torrent took a breather.

The giant went to gather stones and spotted Sir Torrent lying there, fully armed. Be in no doubt, when they saw one another, they jumped to it! Sir Torrent leapt immediately back onto his steed and prayed to Jesus: 'Son of Mary, since I've arrived at the place where I intend to risk everything, please hear my prayer.' At once, a voice came from heaven and said: 'Be of good cheer, Sir Torrent. Give of your best as you fight with my Lord's enemy, for whether you live or die, you shall receive your reward.'

By this time the giant had prepared himself and he faced this gentle knight as courageously as any wild boar. He carried a great stick over his shoulder and woe betide any man who got in the way of it, for it was over twelve feet long.

'Sir,' said Sir Torrent, 'for charity! Look, you're a courteous man, I'm sure, and if you wouldn't mind, I've been up all night fighting your two dragons and slaying them has left me terribly bruised and exhausted.'

'You bastard!' exclaimed the giant. 'Have you killed them? They were my pride and joy! I'll let nothing get in my way of giving you a good clobbering, for you killed my brother Cate as well, and for that you'll pay dearly.'

If men had been standing there to watch, they would have seen some dreadful blows exchanged! Sir Torrent redoubled his attack, for he believed what the angel had said to him and gave no thought to death. He plunged his spear into the giant's chest, leaving the spearhead behind. The giant gave a blow in return that smashed through shield and plate armour and buried itself in Sir Torrent's flesh. The giant pulled at the staff and found that it was stuck fast in Torrent's flesh and shield and wouldn't come away again, however much he tugged. Sir Torrent kept his composure, managed to free the staff

from his armour and cast his shield, along with the staff and everything else that had become entangled with it, into the water to go wherever it wished. The giant, desperate to retrieve his weapon, followed it out into the water. Sir Torrent kept up his blows until the giant became so tired that he drowned, and only then did he let up. Sir Torrent had only a single injury, but it would have been grievous for a lesser man. But God is noble and kind. Through the grace of he who governs this world, Sir Torrent had won the day and the battle was his.

By now it was nearly dark and Sir Torrent made his way to the castle to spend the night. There was nothing much inside, but as he searched, he found, high in a tower, a chamber where he came across a lady sitting on her bed. She was as white as a lily, and she got off the bed as soon as Sir Torrent appeared and said: 'Welcome, Sir knight. You look to be very strong in battle.'

'Welcome, damsel,' replied Sir Torrent. 'As a favour, and through your generosity, will you let me stay the night?'

'By coming here, I think you may have signed your own death warrant,' she cautioned in reply. 'A giant lives here, his name is Werant and he's the devil's own pupil. Today at dawn he took his club and went down to the main gates to have a drink. But there are two or three chambers here and I can try to hide you in one of them if you like, and may God protect you from harm.'

'I saw that thief just now,' replied Sir Torrent. 'He seemed to be a frightful man to fight with. A young knight battled against him and they exchanged some fearsome blows. As I was standing there, I reckoned that he must be some kind of a devil, he was built so fiendishly; but madam, if you don't believe me, come and see for yourself which of them came out on top.'

The lady went with the knight to see this marvel, and when she came to where the giant lay: 'Sir, by my faith!' she exclaimed. 'That's him! It can only have been a knight of God or else Saint George himself, who did this. If it was a Christian man who struck him down, he deserves to have his name honoured throughout all of Christendom.'

'How do you come to be in his castle, then?' asked Sir Torrent. 'Were you captured?'

'Sir,' she said, 'my father, the King of Norway, was out hunting early one morning, at the head of the chase, and he pursued a deer to this very castle, and it pains me to have to admit it but the giant captured him and in return for his own freedom my father gave him me, for the giant wouldn't accept anything else.' She fetched some bread and wine, for Sir Torrent was very hungry. Soon he was in good spirits, although he'd been badly injured by the giant. But he was eager to get away and to take the fair lady back to her father.

'Jesus,' he prayed, 'you who made heaven and hell, let me live to see Desonelle once again, so that I can tell her how much I love her.'

As they were riding beside the edge of a forest they became aware of some men-at-arms coming towards them on well-equipped warhorses. The lady said: 'This is my father, he's come for me. Perhaps he intends to fight the giant.'

A herald spotted Sir Torrent. 'Over there!' he cried. 'I can see an armed knight on his own, without a squire. Some say that this giant can ride a horse. He's so big, it must be the giant, by the Holy Cross!'

'No,' said the king. 'It's not the giant, it's the knight I sent for to defeat him, thanks be to God and Saint John! He must have killed that monster and rescued my daughter. Oh joy!'

Be in no doubt, Sir Torrent was greeted with great acclaim. The king and other noble lords cried: 'Welcome, Sir Torrent. Welcome to Norway!' They brought him to a farmstead and doctors were called to search his wounds. Their prognosis was that if a man has only one life, they didn't give much for his chances, however much they might be paid in gold to try to save him.

The lady had had no idea that he was hurt, but as soon as she knew, she went to him. She searched his wounds and said: 'You will live, and all will be well. My lord the king has told me that you shall marry me, for this is what you both agreed.'

'Damsel, here is my hand. If I take any wife in this land, I promise that it shall be you.'



The lady's name was Gendres. Sir Torrent had brought the giant's head with him, and the heads of the two dragons as well. You could hear from a mile away all the shouting and the anger as men vented their rage on these heads, cursed them, beat them with sticks and urinated upon them, for all the shame that they had brought upon the land. Sir Torrent stayed for twelve months and more, but then he decided that it was time to go.

'Now, you deceitful villains,' said the King of Norway to all those who had abandoned Sir Torrent in the forest. 'You thought you were very cunning when you said that this knight had run away from the giant. Get out of my kingdom at once, or I'll have you all hanged!'

All of Sir Torrent's squires who had fled from the forest were beaten into an angry sea, cast into the waves and drowned, except for one boy who made it to land in a very sorry state. He came ashore in Portugal, beside a wealthy town that was known in those days, and will be forevermore I imagine, as the city of Peron. He made his way to the king and knelt before him.

'Your men greet you with all courtesy, lord,' he said, 'although they cannot do so in per-

son because they're all dead. They've all drowned.'

'Where's Torrent?' interrupted Desonelle, with a pang of fear.

'Still in Norway, lady.'

Desonelle fainted, and as she fell and lay on the floor, she inadvertently gave away evidence of her pregnancy. Her maidens all tried desperately to cover her up; it was embarrassing to see. 'My daughter, away with you!' cried the king at once. 'By God! You can say goodbye to any happiness that may have been in store for you now! There'll be no husband for you. I shall have you cast into the sea, you and that bastard child inside you, and you can learn to ride the waves.'

Earls and barons crowded around the king, many on their knees, pleading on behalf of that young lady. The queen, her mother, fell onto her knees: 'For Jesus' love,' she wept. 'Lord, have mercy on her. That thing which she has done was with the son of an earl. He's wealthy enough! But if she must die, let her remain here until the baby is born.'

So Desonelle stayed there until her baby was delivered, and in fact she gave birth to healthy twins, two boys. They were fine and noble babies and looked very like their father, Sir Torrent. But for the love he bore for their mother, they were to suffer.

'Now it is time for you to be thrown into the sea,' said the king. 'There's nothing more to say. You shall be an example to every king's daughter, for far and wide, so that they'll know how to behave and what to expect if they don't!'

It was pitiful to see that lady led away. The queen nearly went mad with grief and knights stood weeping openly. They took a silk cloth, tore it into two pieces and wrapped the babies in them. When the young lady was pushed away in her boat, a hundred people fainted, on the beach at Peron. Desonelle called on Jesus Christ and knelt in prayer:

'Rightful God,' she said, 'please send me a good shore to make land upon, so that my children can be christened. Knights and noble ladies, greet my lord Sir Torrent for me, if you ever see him again, if he hasn't been killed by that giant.'

The wind picked up and in the darkness it blew that lady out into the green sea. Gales and storms carried the boat to a beach beside a forest, where wild animals roamed. The tide went out and left the boat high and dry. The lady and her two babies were alone and unprotected. One of them woke up and began to cry, and the lady woke up as well.

'Be still, my little one,' she comforted. 'Jesus Christ has brought us to land. If there are any Christian men here, we will receive help soon enough.' She quickly and anxiously hurried up the beach just as dawn was breaking and the birds were singing their delightful songs and melodies. The lady made her way to a mountain and saw in the distance a city with magnificent, sunlit towers. The sight made her very happy and after sitting down to suckle her infants, so I've heard, she descended a little and came across a garden filled with plants and herbs. But a griffin was living on the mountain and it suddenly swooped down and carried her young son away across a lake and into a wilderness,

where Saint Anthony was living as a hermit and had a chapel.

Desonelle lay her other child down on the ground and began shouting and screaming at the bird as though she was mad. Sobbing and weeping, she took her remaining baby carefully into her arms again and tried to find a way through some thick woodland in pursuit of the griffin, but when she could see that the chase was hopeless, she knelt down and offered a prayer to God and Saint John. Then a hungry leopard snatched her other child away! She made a prayer to God and to his mother Mary, for now she was alone, weeping so much that she couldn't stand. 'My greatest complaint,' she sobbed, 'is that my children are with wild animals and they haven't been christened, otherwise their lives would be in God's hands.'



The King of Jerusalem had just attended the wedding of his brother, who was the lord of all this land, and as he was on his way home he saw a leopard playing with a child.

'By sweet Mary, over there is a leopard with a child, a little boy or a little girl, I can't tell which,' he said.

Men-at-arms went over to investigate, but the leopard tore the guts from out of their horses and wouldn't stop for any blows that the men could deliver, until at last, in order to get to the child, they

killed her with a thrust from a spear. Desonelle had placed one of the rings that Torrent had given to her with each of her two sons, for his safety, and when they took up the baby and brought it to the king, he unwrapped it from its swaddling clothes and found one of these gold rings closed in the baby's hand.

'This is a noble child indeed,' declared the king. 'I wonder how it was that this animal came by it.'

The book of romance tells us that the child was seized by the leopard in a heathen land and that the King of Jerusalem named the little boy Leopardus. Two squires were sent running into a nearby town and a wet nurse was quickly found. The king took the baby boy into his own land and told the queen how he had found him beside a stream. When the lady saw the ring she exclaimed: 'What a noble child! You have no heir to give this land to as an inheritance, so why don't you make him the Prince of Jerusalem?'

Now the book says that as Saint Anthony was walking about, concentrating upon his prayers, he caught sight of a griffin flying towards her nest. Between her claws dangled a child. He prayed to God and to Mary that the child might be delivered safely to the ground, for he wished to save the little baby from death. That man was on good terms with God, and all at once the griffin landed right beside him. He snatched away the child and took it straight to the altar in his chapel, where he found the beautiful gold ring clasped in its hand and saw that it was a boy. Saint Anthony took the baby as quick-

ly as he could to a great city where his father ruled as king. A griffin flew above his head as he entered the city, crying out as though he was mad. Beneath the white towers, the King of Greece was standing near the city gates with other lords and knights, watching some squires jousting.

‘By sweet Mary, here comes my son Anthony with a griffin!’ he exclaimed. ‘He’s taken some of his birds and brought them to me!’ Everybody was amazed at what they saw.

The king went to greet his son. ‘You are very welcome,’ he said.

‘God save you, father,’ replied Saint Anthony. ‘I’ve found a baby boy. I took him from a griffin who must have snatched him away in some other land, but he’s a noble child. You have no heir to inherit your lands, so for the love of Jesus, why don’t you make him your son, and then he can take my place.’

‘He shall have privilege and protection, for as long as I live,’ replied the king. ‘I shall receive him as my son. And since you’ve forsaken all Earthly concerns, he shall inherit all my lands when he’s old enough to rule.’

They took the baby to a font and christened him. So now he is out of all danger. The holy man gave him a name, so that Jesus might shield him from dishonour, and called him Anthony Fitzgriffin. ‘Father, take this ring,’ said Saint Antony. ‘I found it on this lovely child. Keep it safe, if you can. It will protect any man in battle, if by the grace of God he is a knight.’

But let us leave these children for a moment and speak of Desonelle. She is very unhappy, for her children have both been taken from her. God, who died upon the cross, may you give grace enough that her fortunes might improve!

This lady walked all alone amongst the wild beasts, in grief and dismay. Daybreak arrived and the birds began to sing merrily on every bough. ‘Birds and animals, you are always so cruel,’ she complained. ‘You have spared me but killed my two children.’ And as she walked alone, she saw a hunting party and made her way quickly towards these noblemen. She gave out a shout, but then she heard a hunting horn and ran back into the woodland among the wild animals, for fear that she might be killed. By afternoon she had descended from the uplands onto a plain. The King of Nazareth was hunting there, amongst noble and harmless deer, which was a great relief to her. The king and all his knights were amazed when they saw this bright lady all alone and wondered where she could have come from. She asked a squire: ‘Who is your lord?’

‘This is the land of Nazareth,’ replied the squire. ‘The king is over there, can you see? He’s clothed in gold.’

‘Thank you,’ she said, and made her way towards him. Lords came over to meet her, for she was recognised by those who had been in her land before and knew her. ‘God protect you, noble lady, what are you doing here?’ they asked.

‘I was on pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Katherine but violent storms have carried me

here into this forest. All on board have been drowned, except for myself. I managed to reach the shore, where wild animals were roaming.'

'Welcome, Desonelle,' said the king, as he approached. 'I once sent you a horse, noble lady. You're so generous and beautiful, and I was so in love with you, that I wanted us to be married.'

Knights and squires brought up a horse for Desonelle and then they all went back to the city. The queen was very courteous; she took the lady by the hand and said: 'Welcome, my noble lady. You are very welcome. Make yourself at home. The entire country is at your disposal. Stay in my chamber if you like, for there'll be enough to keep you occupied there, I'm sure.'

'One thing distresses me above all other things,' replied Desonelle. 'If only my two children had been christened before they were taken from me in the forest.'

But let us leave this gentle lady now and speak of the noble Sir Torrent. The King of Norway is very sad to hear that Torrent wants to leave. 'Sir, why don't you stay with us and marry my daughter,' he said.

Torrent insisted that he could not. He took a ship from Norway and arrived in Portugal, where he was quickly told what had happened to Desonelle. He fell at once onto the cold ground in a dead faint, while the faithless King of Portugal lowered the portcullis of his castle against him.

'By sweet Mary, you won't find a wife here!' the king shouted. 'Go and look for her in the sea! She took two babies with her and I hope she's learnt how to row!'

'By God, you'd better be lying!' shouted back Sir Torrent. 'King Colomond, I swear to you – here is my hand on it, as a knight – I shall make sure that this deed is avenged!'

Torrent did not rest but sent letters far and wide to gather knights to help him. Noble warriors rode out from Aragon, knights of great renown with fine horses, and many more came from Provence and Calabria in response to Torrent's plea. None of King Colomond's knights dared to fight against Sir Torrent but left the gates undefended, and Sir Torrent was able to enter with all his men, unopposed. Quickly, a council was summoned to determine what punishment the king should suffer for killing his own daughter.

'Lords,' said Sir Torrent, 'he is a king, so we cannot behead him or have him hanged or anything like that,' and everybody agreed. So they suggested the procurement of a wooden ship to send him out to sea on, to be alone amongst the waves. All of the great lords of the land agreed that this should be done. In the harbour of Portugal there were many ships of wood and iron to be found, and they brought him before a wooden boat that had been drilled full of holes. The king asked if he could receive the Eucharist and a last confession.

'By Saint John,' replied Sir Torrent, 'since you gave no such favour to my lady your

daughter, I don't see why we should do it for you.'

The shipmen bundled the king onto the vessel and sent him on his way. Be in no doubt, he never came to land again. There were some terrible storms that season.

Lords of great renown made Sir Torrent their king, with great rejoicing. Lo! All you lords everywhere, think upon the terrible end that falsehood leads you to, and will do so forevermore!

Sir Torrent stayed in Portugal for forty days and was very busy with sessions and councils. Then he chose two bold and worthy knights to govern the kingdom on his behalf. 'Madam,' he said to the queen. 'You shall remain as queen here, to live in the way you've been accustomed to, if you wish.' Then Sir Torrent cast his gaze over the sea, intending to make a journey to the place where Our Lord Jesus was betrayed. And now, listen for a moment, and hear how Sir Torrent took over the arms and the heraldic emblems of King Colomond. Listen to what you would have seen on his shield: three silver ships on an azure background. For Desonelle's sake, he gave over his lands to a steward and made plans to set sail. 'Portugal, farewell!' he declared. 'I'll be away for seven years, seeking adventure and going where my destiny leads.'

Sir Torrent crossed the Aegean Sea and came into a fertile and lovely land. He made straight for the city of Quarelle, as the book of romance tells us, where a sultan ruled, and here he slashed with his sword and thrust with his lance, during an assault of that city that the book of romance describes in great detail. The city was so well provisioned that the assault lasted for two years before success could be achieved. When the gates finally fell, Sir Torrent commanded that all those who were still alive in the city should be slain, with a spear or a knife.

'We've been here for over two years, nearly three!' he exclaimed.

Everything that could be ransacked from this city was divided fairly between his men – gold, silver and all the land which Sir Torrent had won. Then he rode to another city not far away that was worth three times as much as Quarelle. Here he thrust with his spear, beat men down with his sword and laid siege to that city for six years, and at the end of the sixth year, most of the people inside had died of hunger. The sultan sent a message to Sir Torrent, informing him that if the siege continued for any longer, all the people in the city will have starved to death.

'If you come here to live, you will have wine and exotic spices enough, for there is plenty in this land,' he implored.

Every Good Friday, Sir Torrent was accustomed to do battle with this sultan – may God reward him for it – and Jesus gave him the strength on this occasion to kill the sultan with his sword. None of the sultan's men were left alive on the battlefield. Torrent knelt and gave thanks to God, as was fitting, but didn't enter the city; instead he rode straight to Antioch, which was not far away. He besieged this city for another seven years and gave battle to the Saracens every Good Friday. And when seven years had passed, the

child that the leopard had taken away in its mouth was summoned by the King of Jerusalem, for he had received news of the fearsome Sir Torrent and how mighty he was. He said to his knights: 'Organise yourselves as quickly as you can, and let nothing hinder you.'

They gathered an army fifty thousand strong and rode out of that land towards Antioch, intending to do battle with Sir Torrent.

'My dear son, Leopardus,' said the King of Jerusalem. 'Be valiant and courageous. You shall defend this land from that villain, and I hereby confer upon you the order of knighthood.'

He gave his son arms before he went, and they depicted the way that he had been found: an azure leopard holding a child in its front paws, upon a gold background. It will recall some painful memories for one lady who may shortly see it!

Sir Torrent did not delay but rode at once to meet his enemies. Soon, two knights were causing many men to bleed. No man dared to come anywhere near Sir Torrent, except for his son, although Sir Torrent had no idea who this brave young knight might be. However much he beat at his shield, Torrent couldn't hurt him. Before long, Torrent found himself captured, much to his great annoyance.

When Sir Torrent was taken, his men fled, every one of them. They dared not stay to see what transpired. It was pitiful to see Sir Torrent offering his sword in capitulation and surrendering to his son. He was led into Jerusalem and all his armour was heaped beside the king.

'Sir,' said the king, 'don't worry, you'll be looked after well enough and won't be killed, although I can see that your pride has taken a dent.'

Sir Torrent has been captured, and mighty warriors have thrown him into prison. His son slept above him and kept him under close watch, since he knew how strong Sir Torrent was. In prison, Sir Torrent sighed and cried: 'Alas!' for there was no other song for him to sing. They held him in this dungeon for over twelve months, and the time dragged excruciatingly slowly for him.

One morning, as he lay in his cell, Sir Torrent said to himself: 'Why am I lying here all alone? God, have you forsaken me? Everywhere I've been, I've put all my trust in you, you gave me the strength and the courage to defeat giants and dragons, but now a man in a wicked land has taken my armour and my horse and I wish my life was ended.'

Sir Torrent's son overheard all this and felt pity for the man, as he lay in his chamber.

'Sir,' he said. 'I have your armour in safekeeping and no one is allowed to ride your horse.'



I see to that. But by our lady Saint Mary, I'll see that you are kept here no longer. For the sake of courtesy and nobility, I'll go to the king and ask for mercy on your behalf.'

The next morning, when he arose, the prince went to the king and knelt down upon one knee. 'Sir,' he said. 'That knight who languishes in your dungeon, for the sake of the Son of God will you give him to me? I heard him say that he has defeated giants singlehandedly, and two or three dragons as well.'

'By my faith,' replied the king. 'I will if you make sure that he doesn't escape. He'll be your responsibility.'

The prince went back into the prison, took Torrent by the hand and led him out of the cold dungeon. He took him to the castle and put light fetters on him.

'If he escapes, his ransom will be doubled when we catch him again,' said the king.

'Sir, I'll keep him securely, have no fear.'

Because Sir Torrent was a courteous knight he was seated next to the king at dinner, on the dais. 'Sir,' said the king. 'You've been to jousts and to tournaments, both friendly ones and those that are deadly serious, and I was wondering, since you're going to be here with us for quite a while it seems, would you teach my son to joust?'

'Sir, I'd be delighted to teach him all that I was taught in Portugal, as soon as you wish.'

The castle had a large courtyard within its confines and a jousting arena was marked out within it for their sole use. They rode at each other again and again, and such magnificent skill and horsemanship was never seen before. The prince in his armour was willing and very able, and he broke three lances into shivers against Sir Torrent's shield.'

'So may I prosper, you are very strong and fit!' exclaimed Sir Torrent. 'You'll be a fine warrior, without doubt.'

Heralds cried an end to their effort, but word had got around and many lords arrived in the city to join in. Everyone tested his agility before going home; the sport lasted for six weeks and by the end of it Sir Torrent had unhorsed every knight in the city. Then a feast was held, with all manner of food and drink, and songs and tales from the minstrels, and it lasted for seven days. Then all the lords, and everybody else, took their leave from the king and made their way home. They gave Torrent the prize with much honour, and it was well-deserved.

'I shall give you your freedom, and lands, and I'll give you all your armour back,' said the king. But when Sir Torrent saw fair ladies walking about, they reminded him of Desonelle and he would sigh, and cry: 'Alas!'

The King of Nazareth returned home from the tournament to his wife, in his own land.

‘Sir,’ she said. ‘Who won the prize at jousting?’

‘Upon my soul, one of the finest knights to sleep on a summer’s eve. He’s so strong and fit that he defeated every single knight who came to the fighting.’

‘Good lord!’ exclaimed Desonelle. ‘For God’s love, tell me, what heraldic emblem did he wear?’

‘Damsel, he wore silver and azure, I remember it clearly, and his crest depicted a giant holding a shepherd’s crook. He was so formidable at every encounter that he must



be a prince and a champion. He’s victorious wherever he goes – he’s a knight of Portugal and won the town of Raynes by force of arms, and the city of Quarelle also. In his final joust he was pitted against my brother’s son, prince Leopardus of Jerusalem, who could not prevail against him. Prince Antony Fitzgriffin of Greece was lying unhorsed on the ground nearby at the time. There’s no warrior to equal him, that’s for sure. I intend to organise a tournament here and I’ll send word of it to him.’

Desonelle was delighted to hear this.

The tournament was announced far and wide. The King of Jerusalem received word of it and learnt where it was to be. ‘Son,’ he said, ‘the King of Nazareth has announced that there will be a jousting competition and that many Christian knights will be there. It’s being put on for the sake of a beautiful lady, and knights have been invited from the four corners of the Earth to take part in it. Get yourself ready as quickly as you can, you and your Christian knight, for I would like us all to attend.’

Great lords who heard this announcement travelled to the tournament in all their finery, each according to his rank. The King of Greece made the journey with his son Anthony Fitzgriffin, with great anticipation and more than a little ambition.

It was wonderful to be amongst all these kings and all the magnificent knights coming to participate in this tournament. Two mighty kings came to the city, each with a great entourage. Many other men arrived with no great hope of winning the lady but just to test their horses and their own prowess on the tournament field, and then to go home again. When they arrived at the wonderful castle, it was to a royal tournament, I can tell you! Trumpets resounded on the walls, lords assembled in the hall, and then they all went to supper. They were received with honour, each man according to his rank and nobility, and afterwards they all retired to their lodgings for the night.

The next morning all the lords arose at the same time, I understand, and went to hear Mass. Then straightaway, they went to wash and to have something to eat, for they were

eager to be out on the jousting field. After breakfast, they asked for their horses and their armour, and then they all rode out together, lords and knights resplendent in their arms and regalia. Ladies looked on from the castle walls in admiration. Each one of the knights took up his lance, chose an adversary to fight against and then swiftly delivered a heavy blow against his opponent. Prince Leopardus of Jerusalem and his brother Prince Antony Fitzgriffin of Greece chose to gallop against one another, and although Anthony Fitzgriffin was the second-born, he knocked his brother Leopardus out of his saddle onto the ground. Sir Torrent stood watching. 'By my faith, as I am a Christian man, I shall avenge this,' he said.

Sir Torrent mounted a strong warhorse and took up a very long and sturdy lance, then galloped so fast at Anthony Fitzgriffin that he knocked him to the ground and left him lying there dazed. There was no man of any rank who could trouble Sir Torrent in the slightest at each encounter; he couldn't be bent over backwards or unbalanced in the saddle at all. The knights jousted and fought with each other all day and every man found his equal to engage in combat with. No one was killed, in all the day's jousting, but Sir Torrent took away the prize and, be in no doubt, his two sons came a very close second. The next morning, amongst all the fine and worthy lords decked out in their resplendent clothes, Desonelle made her choice and went to kneel before Sir Torrent.

'Welcome, my lord Sir Torrent,' she said.

'I've found you at last, my noble lady,' he replied.

She fell in a faint and was taken up and cared for while they all went to eat with great joy and enthusiasm. Once she had recovered, Desonelle sought out the king to ask if she might sit alone with Sir Torrent for a while.

'Yes, lady, by heaven's king! By all means. He's a very worthy knight, by Saint John!'

They all washed and went to eat, and were seated very splendidly and served very regally. Every lord in the hall was matched with some very beautiful ladies of suitable rank, but of all the ladies who were there, Desonelle was the fairest by far. The queen ate in the hall with all her ladies, who were well-versed in etiquette and courtesy, but Desonelle went to sit with Sir Torrent, which caused some eyebrows to be raised. When she and Sir Torrent looked at one another, all their cares evaporated and their hearts were filled with joy.

Desonelle quickly told all the lords how Sir Torrent had killed dragons and giants in her name, and they were very happy indeed to hear this. She told them all how her father had cast her into the sea with her two little boys, when they were only babes-in-arms. They all cursed him many times for it. 'Sir king,' she said, 'these two children were taken from me in a wilderness, I can no longer hide it. Sir Torrent gave me two rings, the finest I have ever seen, and I gave one to each of these babies. A griffin carried away one of them, and a leopard took away the other one, at the foot of a crag.'

'I found one of these babies beside a stream!' declared the King of Jerusalem. 'With blood and bone, he lives!'

'I can tell you that Anthony my son must be the other one!' exclaimed the King of Greece.

'This is absolutely true,' said his wife.

'Since this is so,' said the King of Nazareth, 'you should both kiss your father and ask for his blessing.'

Anthony and Leopardus both knelt down before their father Sir Torrent. 'Give us your blessing, father,' they said.

'Welcome, my young children!' exclaimed Sir Torrent, and he took them into his arms. He was the happiest man alive! And no wonder. He had his wife and his children back, and his two sons would carry prizes away at many tournaments to come, he knew. Torrent knelt upon one knee and addressed the King of Jerusalem, the King of Greece and the King of Nazareth: 'May God give you all that you desire, my noble lords,' he said, 'for taking care of my loved ones. We will always be indebted to you and will undertake any adventures you may wish us to embark upon, with the help of Jesus. But will you three kings first come with me to my own land, to help me secure my own kingship?'

They all agreed to do this – great lords, knights and squires agreed. All the refined and honourable ladies went with Desonelle. Ships were brought with great masts and huge sails and they sailed to Portugal with a following wind. It was magnificent to see!

The Queen of Portugal stood in her castle tower and gazed out to sea. 'I can see ships on the horizon,' she said to a knight. 'Truly I can! A great fleet of them. I can see the arms of Sir Torrent. There can be no doubt. It's him!'

'Madam, I hope it is. May God give us the grace that this is so.'

The queen was delighted. She went out with a fleet of small craft to welcome him, she and many knights in shining arms. She took Sir Torrent by the hand and turning to the others: 'Lords of a distant land, you are all welcome,' she said. Then she caught sight of her daughter Desonelle and fell immediately in a faint. Torrent picked her up.

'Her two children are here with us as well,' he assured her. 'They're both alive and well.'

In the castle of Peron, in Portugal, trumpets sounded and they all went to eat. Sir Torrent had sent messengers far and wide with letters to many noble lords and kings, inviting them to the feast. The Emperor of Rome arrived. And with all the guests assembled, Sir Torrent married Desonelle. Then he organised a tournament.

It happened one day that the King of Jerusalem said to Torrent: 'Sir, I found your son lying in the mouth of a leopard. He was helpless and at death's door. Will you let him stay with me until I die, and then he can inherit my lands and rejoice in them?'

Before all these lords of great renown, Sir Torrent gave his son to the King of Jerusalem. Then the King of Greece said: 'Sir knight, I have arranged things so that your son shall inherit all my lands in the Aegean Sea. Will you allow him to live with me and fulfil this

destiny?’

‘Yes, lord, so may I prosper! May God grant you riches in abundance.’

All the great lords remained in Portugal for forty days and then they made their way home. And because Sir Torrent was so strong and courageous in battle, and the best warrior of his generation, they made him an emperor. He gave his sons two swords that were dear to him, one to each of them, and he had churches built, and great abbeys, for himself and all his people to pray in.

Of all the romances, this one bears the crown and is the most renowned of them all. Sir Torrent lies in a fair abbey. Now Jesus Christ, who made this world and died on the cross for us – he died for you and me and gave us his blessing and granted us bliss to enjoy when we die, whoever we are, young or old, rich or poor – Amen!

Here ends Torrent of Portugal.