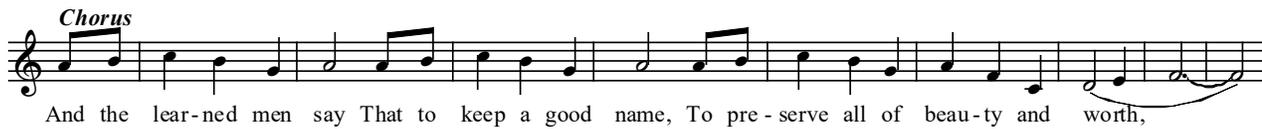
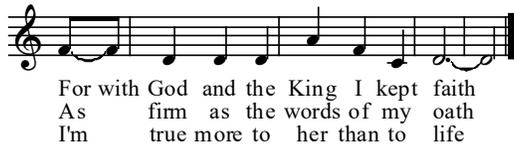
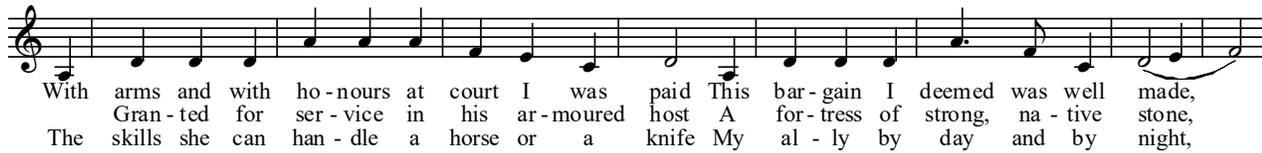
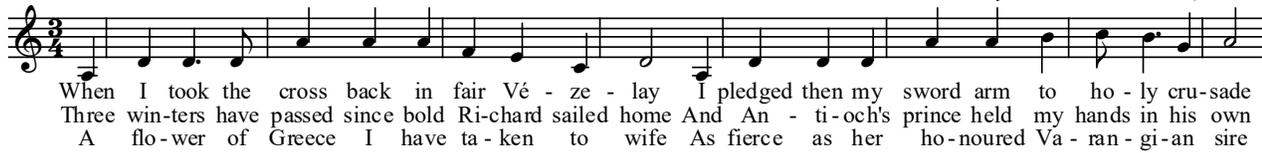


To Be Loyal

by Conn MacNeill (Bob Charon)



When I took the cross back in fair Vézelay
I pledged then my sword arm to holy crusade
With arms and with honours at court I was paid
This bargain I deemed was well made
For with G-d and the King I kept faith

Three winters have passed since bold Richard sailed home
And Antioch's prince held my hands in his own
Granted for service in his armoured host
A fortress of strong, native stone
As firm as the words of my oath

A flower of Greece I have taken to wife
As fierce as her honoured Varangian sire
The skills she can handle a horse or a knife
My ally by day and by night,
I'm true more to her than to life

*And the learned men say
That to keep a good name,
To preserve all of beauty and worth,
They say you must first keep your word.*

Now I embrace her and saddle my steed
The Prince in his letters bids march to the east
Near Aleppo the atabeg's army was seen
His path I'm to bar with all speed
My knights and my footmen to bring

Then a rider bears tidings exceedingly grave
The Shaizar's emir keeps Bedouin pay
His tents have been sighted but a days ride away
To steal when there's none to say nay
What oath shall I then break today

My lady says "True knight, in sooth you'll break none
"You'll keep both your land and the oaths that you've sworn
"I'll keep but three donzels, they're brave though they're young
"Return when your victory is won
And we'll hold all here til you're done.

*And the learned men say
That to keep a good name,
To preserve all of beauty and worth,
They say you must first keep your word.*

Three battles the prince formed in well-ordered lines
The first charged their center with chivalrous might
The second was mine and we shattered their right
The third put their army to flight
We paid well the warrior's title

I beseeched then the prince for to grant me his leave
To return to my lands which were suffering siege
"You have it," quoth he, "and as well you have these
"Fine horses to make better speed
For you've kept well your sworn oath to me."

From the battle, my body was sore wracked with pain
But love and my oath drove me on toward my aim
Afraid all my striving shall not be in vain
That all that I held shall be saved,
The lady I loved never shamed.

*And the learned men say
That to keep a good name,
To preserve all of beauty and worth,
They say you must first keep your word.*

The keep was still mine for my banner was flown
The donzel then let down strong ladders of rope
In silence we moved like a gathering storm
On the walls were men skilled with the bow
My knights in the courtyard below.

My bowmen loosed arrows with iron-toothed might
The unarmoured bedu had no hope but flight
The emir's own askar came on in its might
His favour would belong to my knights
We'd ridden too far not to fight.

We drove out the bedu then the gatehouse we sealed
And met there the askar in the narrowest field
Where numbers are useless and strength is reveled
An anvil we forged of our shields
And broke them of hammers of steel.

*And the learned men say
That to keep a good name,
To preserve all of beauty and worth,
They say you must first keep your word.*

'Twas then that I looked to the keep's broken door
My lady in armour of leather stepped forth
Her sword and the donzels all covered in gore
At their feet lay at least half a score
And never should steal any more.

The emir to fly there in vain charged the gate
I swore on the saints that he'd ne'er gain escape
I cut down his horse, twas a fair price to pay
And had him sore loaded with chains
As a gift to the Prince led away.

I hold a strong fortress, fair lands, a good wife
And oaths that I've honoured brought honour in life
So bind yourself strongly to the just and the right
And keep to your troth once it's plied,
Tis a lesson beyond any price.

*And the learned men say
That to keep a good name,
To preserve all of beauty and worth,
They say you must first keep your word.
And always you must keep your word*