II

FEUDAL CHIVALRY

Men have always admired some qualities as virtues and deplored others as faults. The nature of ideas of this sort in any society is governed by various forces— tradition, environment, and exposure to alien influences. In two later chapters I shall discuss the ethical ideas which outside groups, the clergy and the ladies, attempted to impose on the feudal warriors of France, but here my concern is with those that grew out of their cultural tradition and actual function in society. As these ideas developed in the mind of the noble, the miles or chevalier, and represented his conception of the perfect knight, they have a peculiar right to be termed chivalric. The fact that most of the qualities which this ideal demanded were those which best fitted a nobleman to perform his functions in the feudal system moves me to call these same ideas feudal. Hence I have adopted the term feudal chivalry to describe the set of ethical conceptions to be discussed in this chapter. The ideal knight of feudal chivalry was the lineal descendant of the heroes of Germanic legend and the ancestor of the modern gentleman. In both these capacities he is of interest to the social historian as an important stage in the history of masculine ethics.

The cultural tradition and the environment of the eleventh-century noble combined to instill in him an
admiration for martial qualities. The Teutonic barbarian and the Frankish aristocrat had prized personal bravery, physical strength, and skill in the use of arms. As warfare was the chief occupation of the nobleman, he was bound to value the traits which made a man an effective soldier. Summed up under the term prowess, the ability to beat the other man in battle, these qualities became the fundamental chivalric virtues. The knight who lacked prowess, who was not a competent warrior, was of little use to his lord, the church, or a lady. Prowess enabled the knight to fulfill his function in society—without it he was an object of scorn to his contemporaries. “Be preux” was the usual admonition given to a young man as he received the ceremonial blow that made him a knight.¹ To call a nobleman a preudome, a man of prowess, was to pay him the highest compliment known to the Middle Ages. Not until the knight began to turn into a courtier did this virtue lose any of its importance. Christine de Pisan and Castiglione, who were deeply imbued with the ideas of the Renaissance, did not consider prowess the chief of all admirable qualities, but even they ranked it high among the attributes required of a gentleman.²

The man of prowess was not, however, of much benefit to his contemporaries unless he could be relied on to use his military capacities to fulfill his obligations to others. The members of the ancient Germanic comita-

those of the Frankish truste, and the Carolingian vassi dominici were valued for their loyalty to the man to whom they had sworn fidelity. The disappearance of organized government with the collapse of the Carolingian empire made observance of personal obligations still more important. As feudal society was preserved from complete anarchy only by the mutual contracts between lords and vassals, it was essential that the noblemen observe these contracts faithfully. Hence loyalty, general trustworthiness, joined prowess to form the two basic chivalric virtues. But while the importance of loyalty as an abstract quality was recognized by every noble and every writer on chivalry, they did not all agree on its proper object. To the feudal world it meant observance of the mutual obligations which bound the members of the caste. The churchman on the other hand considered loyalty to the Christian faith and to the church more desirable than fidelity to temporal contracts. Finally the extreme exponents of courtly love made the observance of its customs the object of knightly loyalty. These differences do not, however, alter the fact that the knight was expected to be completely loyal to his obligations.

While the early Teutons undoubtedly placed most stress on a warrior's prowess and loyalty, they admired the open-handed giver. Early German literature abounds with accounts of rich and costly gifts and the honor they gained for him who made them. Thus tradition suggested that the eleventh-century noble should admire lavish generosity. This virtue was vastly elevated in general estimation under the influence of twelfth-century propaganda. The wandering minstrels who
FEUDAL CHIVALRY

composed and circulated the epic tales of knightly deeds depended for their living on the generosity of their noble patrons. Naturally they extolled *largesse* to the skies and placed it among the chief chivalric virtues. Hugh de Méry in his *Tornoient de l’Antechrist* expresses the situation most frankly “If *largesse* dies, we will die of poverty and misery.” In an earlier passage the same writer goes so far as to make prowess a mere follower of *largesse*. Perhaps his idea was similar to that of the eminently practical baron Philip de Novarre who states that generosity can hide most faults. A rich man who lacks prowess but is known for his generosity will find plenty of good knights who will fight for him in the hope of bounty. Philip’s conception of generosity was not, however, in full accord with that of its most enthusiastic admirers. His was a balanced, conservative view. “Every man should be generous according to his wealth and social position . . . not all acts that fools call generosity are really generous; for waste is not generosity. One should give reasonably . . . .” The minstrels were inclined to consider such caution as Philip’s niggardly. The biographer of William Marshal stated that *gentillesse* or nobility was reared in the house of *largesse* and expressed his admiration for Henry the young king whose lavish generosity kept him in a perpetual state of bankruptcy. Many knights accepted the views of the

---

7 *L’histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal, comte de Striguil et de Pem-
writers. Bertrand de Born had no use for the man who lived within his means. The true nobleman would mortgage his estates to gain funds for extending lavish hospitality and giving magnificent presents. The persistent propaganda of hungry minstrels and impudent knights raised largesse so high in the estimation of the feudal class that it was considered the primary characteristic of the noble. According to Stephen of Bourbon a great preacher was asked by a group of knights to name the chief noble virtue, and he proved to their complete satisfaction that the position belonged to largesse. Although throughout the Middle Ages there were sensible writers who limited the exercise of this virtue as did Philip de Novarr, chivalric generosity tended to become more and more closely identified with reckless extravagance. Long after prowess and loyalty had lost their peculiar applicability to men of high birth, a complete disregard of caution in the use of money was considered the mark of a nobleman.

The seeds at least of the knightly ideals of prowess, loyalty, and generosity existed in the cultural tradition of the noble class and needed only the nourishment provided by twelfth-century France to spring into full flower, but another chivalric ideal, courtesy, seems to have grown directly out of the feudal environment. Now courtesy as used by mediaeval writers had a wide variety of meanings. In so far as it referred to the ability of a knight to please the ladies, it was the product

of the romantic influence and will be discussed in a later chapter. Here our interest must be confined to courtesy as applied to the relations between noblemen. As the heritability of fiefs became firmly established in the tenth and eleventh centuries it led to the stabilization of the feudal class and to the development of class consciousness. In time the idea appeared that nobles deserved special consideration from their fellows. One result of this feeling was the growth of interest in courtesy in its narrowest sense, ordinary politeness in conversation and social relations. All chivalric writers agree that a good knight should be polite to his fellows. But the class consciousness of the nobles showed itself in more practical forms of courtesy. By the twelfth century feudal opinion seems to have required that the hardships of war should be ameliorated through mutual consideration shown to noble by noble. This tendency appears in some of the cruder chansons de geste. When Gaydon had cut off the head of his opponent in a duel, he laid two swords crosswise on his foe's body. This moved the Emperor Charles to cry "Ha! God, how courteous this duke is!" In Raoul de Cambrai Bernier had by devious stratagems persuaded his enemy to step naked into a fountain while he himself stood by armed, yet he refused to kill the helpless man. Such a deed would cause him to be an object of scorn and reproach all his days. This belief that it was unethical to attack

an unarmed man is illustrated throughout the *chansons de geste* and is one of the few courteous principles mentioned in this literature. The Arthurian works of Chrétien de Troyes show these ideas in a more developed form. When the hero of a tale overthrows a villainous knight, he practically always spares his life and releases him on parole. No one attacks an unarmed man. Two knights never set upon one. Even bands of robbers who meet an adventuring knight are careful to assault him one by one. While this picture of the most wicked knights scrupulously observing the requirements of courtesy may be regarded as rather fanciful, there seems little doubt that feudal propriety demanded that knights fight each other on essentially equal terms and that the vanquished be treated with consideration. In Froissart's opinion a true knight would show every possible courtesy to his noble prisoners, would quickly release them on parole, and would set their ransoms at sums easily within their means.\(^\text{13}\) All this was merely the courtesy one knight owed to another.

In addition to developing the chivalric conceptions of prowess, loyalty, generosity, and courtesy the knights of twelfth-century France produced an ethical rationalization which seemed to endow their endless turbulence and violence with an elevated motive. Prestige has always been dear to man, and in warlike societies it is usually based on fame for soldierly deeds. The broader conception of glory that would be perpetuated through future generations has been equally common. The early German warrior liked to think that his prowess would

\(^{13}\) *Chroniques de J. Froissart* (ed. Siméon Luce, *Société de l'histoire de France*, Paris, 1869-1878), V, 64-5.
long be the subject for song and story just as the Roman legate dreamed of a triumphal arch to celebrate his victories. Affection for prestige and desire for glory were part of the inheritance of the mediaeval nobleman. But in the early feudal period the bitterness of the struggle for survival forced these ideas to play a minor rôle. The eleventh-century knight fought for the means of subsistence—land, plunder, ransoms. This view of the purpose of war was neatly expressed by Bertrand de Born in a poem written in joyful anticipation of a conflict between Richard the Lionhearted and Alphonse of Castille.

And it will be good to live for one will take the property of usurers and there will no longer be a peaceful pack-horse on the roads, all the townsman will tremble; the merchant will no longer journey in peace on the road to France. He who wishes to enrich himself will only need to steal well.¹⁴

Bertrand was a man of no reticence. While undoubtedly many of his contemporaries shared his reasons for loving war, few would have avowed them so frankly. By his day, the latter part of the twelfth century, various circumstances had combined to encourage knights to claim a more lofty motive for their fighting. As war became more and more a contest between feudal princes rather than between local lords, the knight found it more difficult to believe that he fought to protect his fief and its inhabitants. The gradual replacement of the feudal levy by paid knights weakened the idea that one went to war to serve one's lord. The knight was left with profit, pay, booty, ransoms, as his sole motive. Since the

church frowned particularly on fighting for profit, he was inclined to seek another purpose. Then too as wars grew less frequent the knights turned their energies to tourneying, but few liked to admit that they entered these chivalric sports for profit. Thus there was a clear need for a noble reason for following their traditional occupation, and one was easily found. The knight of the twelfth century passed the long evenings listening to tales of the great heroes of the past. Naturally it occurred to him that it would be pleasant to have his own deeds recounted long after his death. From this idea grew the conception that glory was the true aim of a good knight. He would, in theory at least, practice the chivalric virtues for reputation—to be known through the ages as a perfect knight. This idea that the desire for glory was the proper motive for a knight can be seen very clearly in the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*.

Again and again the author asserts that William had no interest in capturing horses, arms, or noble prisoners. His sole purpose was to acquire glory. Philip de Navarre in his usual practical manner combines glory with profit as the aims of a knight. “The young nobleman, the knight, and other men-at-arms should work to acquire honor so as to be renowned for valor and to gain temporal goods, riches, and inheritances.” In another passage in which he discusses the advantages of chivalry as a career Philip points out that many knights have been honored by having their deeds recorded in stories, poems, and epics. By Froissart’s time the profit motive

---

15 *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*. See also Sidney Painter, *William Marshal* (Baltimore, 1933).


17 Ibid., p. 12.
as a reason for fighting had lost all its respectability. Knights fought to win glory, and the function of the historian was to see that no worthy deed went unrecorded and that the honor was distributed fairly.\(^{18}\)

Having discussed the various chivalric ideals which were developed by the feudal class under the influence of its tradition and environment, we must now examine these ideas in practice. We must discover if possible to what extent the nobles of France were actually competent warriors, loyal, generous, courteous, and avid for glory. As the knight was primarily a soldier and a vassal, prowess and loyalty were the basic qualities which he had to possess if he were to fulfill his functions in society. A full discussion of the knight as soldier and vassal would obviously involve the entire military and political history of mediaeval France. All that can be done here is to supply a few broad and rather tentative generalizations. By the end of the twelfth century the knights of France were noted throughout the world for their prowess in battle. The biographer of William Marshal considered them definitely superior to their close relatives who formed the chivalry of England.\(^{19}\) A contemporary of William's, Giraldus Cambrensis, believed that in military glory the knights of France surpassed those of all other nations.\(^{20}\) The French played so dominant a part in the crusades both in Spain and in Palestine that the Moslems called all crusaders Franks. Norman knights supported by those of neighboring

\(^{18}\) *Chroniques de Froissart*, I, 1-2.

\(^{19}\) *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, I, lines 4481-4484; II, lines 16388-16391.

provinces conquered England, Ireland, lowland Scotland, Sicily, and southern Italy. In general it can be said that during the twelfth and thirteenth century the French knights met no troops except the Turks who could stand up against them in battle. While they suffered several severe defeats at the hands of Turkish armies, disasters like Tiberias and Mansourah were more the result of faulty leadership than of any lack of prowess on the part of the knights. Moreover such brilliant victories as Bouvines and Muret gained against European enemies had far more influence on the prestige of the knights of France than their failures in the distant lands of Palestine and Egypt. The first great blow to the reputation of the French came in 1302 when the feudal levy of the kingdom was routed at Courtrai by the Flemish townsman, but here again the defeat was caused by the ineptness of the French commanders. Not until Duke Philip of Orleans and his division fled without striking a blow from the field of Poitiers did serious doubts arise in France about the fighting ability of its noble knights. In short Turkish light horse, Flemish townsman, and English bowmen when given their choice of position could defeat French knights, but none of these troops could face them successfully on ground suited to the heavy feudal cavalry. If knightly prowess had been mental as well as physical, if the tactical ability of the noble leaders had equalled the courage and skill in the use of arms shown by their knights, the chivalry of France need not have suffered these blows to its prestige. Despite such isolated incidents as the flight of Orleans at Poitiers it can be said that the knights of France retained throughout the
Middle Ages the courage, hardiness, and skill in arms that won them fame in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In fact they may have increased in pure physical strength. To bear and use the frightfully heavy equipment of a fifteenth-century knight must have required remarkable dexterity and stamina. We are assured that Marshal Boucicaut as a young man could turn a somersault fully armed except for his helmet and when completely equipped for battle could vault on a horse or climb the under side of a scaling ladder using his hands alone. While it is perfectly possible that the good Marshal may have boasted a bit to his earnest biographer, the fact that such feats were considered within the realm of possibility is a decided tribute to the prowess of fifteenth-century knights.

Although reasonably satisfactory generalizations about the prowess of mediaeval French knights can be based on its obvious results, the winning or losing of battles, no such course is open with respect to loyalty. Any statement about the practice of this latter quality must be founded purely on the impression left on one’s mind by a large number of individual incidents and hence can be nothing more than the expression of a personal opinion. With this reservation I venture to make the generalization that a nobleman rarely violated his feudal obligations as they were interpreted by his class. The limitation expressed in the last clause is obviously of primary importance. Historians have described the feudal aristocrat as habitually perfidious, and even when

---

the historian makes no moral judgment modern readers have drawn that conclusion from his account of the behavior of the nobles. We are inclined to examine the feudal oath and contemporary customary law, interpret them according to our own ideas, and condemn acts which seem to us to violate the feudal contract. While this mode of thought is natural, from the point of view of historical methodology it is utterly fantastic. Ethical principles are established by contemporary opinion, not by law. We are little troubled when a friend is convicted of speeding, but we would be profoundly shocked were he found guilty of forgery. Yet if a future generation should take the former offense more seriously, it would be possible for a historian to describe the sons of President Roosevelt as habitual criminals on the ground that they were frequently arrested for violating the speed laws. In short we interpret our laws as freely as the feudal noble interpreted his customary law. The noble class of mediaeval France had well established standards of loyalty to feudal obligations. When King Philip Augustus exacted promises from a vassal, he knew pretty closely what performance he could count on. Let me take an example from the turbulent career of Peter of Dreux, duke of Brittany. From our point of view he continually violated his general feudal obligations and his solemn oaths, but this was clearly not the opinion of his contemporaries. Apparently only once did he cross the line set by his class. When he made an alliance with the king of England after specifically swearing that he would not do so, his fellow barons assembled in
King Louis' court solemnly condemned him. In general the feudal class scorned the noble who did not maintain its standards of loyalty. William Marshal reproved King Philip Augustus for taking advantage of the treasonable behavior of several of King John's Norman castellans. Froissart was unable to believe that as good a knight as Oliver de Clisson was capable of treason “But I think it most unlikely that so noble and so gentle a knight and so powerful a man could think of and arrange falseness or treason.” In short I believe that most nobles observed their feudal obligations to the extent that the common opinion of their class required.

When the feudal bond was not involved, knightly loyalty appears in an even better light. Violation of parole or of a solemn promise was exceedingly rare. Writing in the twelfth century Orderic Vitalis quotes William Rufus as saying “Far from me would it be to believe that an honest knight would violate his parole. If he did, he would be forever an object of contempt as a man outside the law.”

The sceptical and far from chivalrously inclined King John considered that to require his disaffected barons to make charters promising to be faithful to him was an effective means of preventing a revolt, and very few barons appeared in arms against him until those charters had been formally invalidated by Magna Carta.

---

24 *Chroniques de Froissart*, III, 35.
sart and his contemporaries assumed that a knight’s word was good, and they furnish examples of rather amazing promises faithfully observed. For instance on one occasion John, duke of Normandy, the future King John the Good of France, lay with his host at St. Quentin preparing to raid the duchy of Hainault. One night the seneschal of Hainault with a few followers slipped into St. Quentin and captured a French noble. The prisoner gave his word to meet the seneschal at Valenciennes, the capital of Hainault, three days later, and the seneschal retired from the town with full and justified confidence that his captive would appear on the appointed day. King John of France, who had been captured at Poitiers, was released from his English prison in exchange for a number of hostages. When one of these hostages was so unchivalrous as to escape, the king returned to prison in London. In short there is plenty of evidence to show that as a rule the knights of France were most scrupulous in keeping their plighted word.

The practice of generosity requires no extended discussion. It was woven deeply into the fabric of noble life in mediaeval France. On the field of battle or in the council chamber a knight might be esteemed according to his prowess or loyalty, but elsewhere his worth was judged by the lavishness of his hospitality and the magnificence of his gifts. The Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal contains a pleasant little example of knightly largesse. One day William was waiting fully armed for a tournament to begin. Just as the first knight of the opposing side came into view, a young herald asked William for a gift. Leaping on his horse

26 Chroniques de Froissart, II, 10-11.
the Marshal rode at the other knight, overthrew him, and presented the mount of the vanquished to the herald. This combination of prowess and generosity was greatly admired as a chivalric exploit. The practice of knightly generosity on a grand scale can be seen in the register of the Black Prince, eldest son of King Edward III of England. A few entries must suffice as examples.

A gold mug, made like a wine cask; to the lord of Castelnau of Burgundy when he ate with the prince at Caleis.

A small gold mug; to the lady Isabel de Trokesford when she ate with the prince at the same place.

A destrier called Morel de Burghersh; to a minstrel at a tournament at Bury St. Edmunds, Edward III.

A pony called Dun Crump; to a knight of Almain at Caleis.

Two dozen hoods for falcons . . . ; to divers knights and squires of the prince’s household.

Two pairs of spurs, . . . ; to the lord of Tankevill and his brother.

. . . a silver cup, weighing 78s 3d and bought at twice that amount, together with £13 6s 8d placed therein, given by the prince to the lady Eleanor Giffard.

. . . a cup, silver-gilt, weighing £4 3s 4d and bought at twice that amount, given by the prince to the wife of Adam Louches. . . .

As few knights could afford to be as lavish as the Black Prince, his case cannot be called typical, but it shows how largesse was practiced by one whom his contemporaries admired as a paragon of chivalry.

28 Register of Edward the Black Prince (Rolls Series), IV, 66-77, 89. There are many similar accounts in the four volumes.
The last two ideals of feudal chivalry, courtesy and love of glory, may be treated together. Although both could be practiced in peaceful surroundings, they can be illustrated most strikingly by martial incidents. The chronicles tell little of ordinary politeness between nobles, but they are filled with accounts of courtesies exchanged by combatants. While a knight might hope that loyalty and generosity would heighten his reputation, it was to prowess on the field of battle that he looked for true fame. Of course any discussion of whether or not knights really fought for glory is utterly futile. One cannot delve into the mind of a man long dead and discern his motive. I can simply present examples that seem to me to represent battle primarily for glory—cases in which I can think of no other reasonable motive. Hence the next few paragraphs will consist of a study of the process by which courtesy ameliorated the hardships of war and a few examples of men who fought for no discernible motive except glory.

The earliest instances of knightly courtesy in the realm of war appeared in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Orderic Vitalis praised William Rufus for his treatment of knights. He never held noble prisoners in chains, but released them on parole. A generation later the biographer of Count Geoffrey of Anjou gives an illuminating incident. While sitting at table one day Geoffrey saw some knightly prisoners who were fettered, unkempt, and garbed in dirty, torn clothes. “If we are knights, we ought to pity knights. Free them from chains, bathe them and cut their hair, give them

29 Orderic Vitalis, IV, 44, 49.
new clothes, and let them sit with me at table."  

Another pleasant tale of knightly courtesy is told by Walter Map. Louis VI of France was at war with Count Thibaut of Blois and Chartres and one day he planned an ambush for his enemy. After secreting himself with a strong force near Chartres, he sent a small party up to the walls in the hope that the count would sorty from the town and be led into the ambush. Just as everything was ready, Count Thibaut, unprepared and slenderly escorted, rode past the ambush. King Louis absolutely refused to allow his men to attack. He would have been glad to have captured Thibaut by a clever stratagem, but he declined to take advantage of pure chance. Hence the king simply sent word to Thibaut that he should ride about less casually in time of war and returned to Paris with his troops. Examples of this sort could be multiplied, but not to any great extent. The twelfth century saw courtesy on battle fields and kindly treatment of noble captives, but it also saw knights passing their lives in grim prisons and others savagely mutilated. War was still a serious business, and courtesy could only slowly ameliorate its savagery. In fact the courteous practices that were to make war a pleasant sport as far as the nobles were concerned seem to have developed less on the field of battle than on the tourney ground.

The origins of the tournament are lost in the obscurity that shrouds most phases of the history of the early

---

Middle Ages. It has been suggested that the tourney was the lineal descendant of the rough martial games of the early Germans, but the evidence of continuity which would give this theory historical validity is entirely lacking. One can merely say that tournaments began to be mentioned in the eleventh century and were common by the middle of the twelfth. It is not, however, difficult to produce a plausible explanation for their appearance. As war was the chief occupation and interest of the nobleman, he probably always spent much of his spare time in military exercises. Tilting at a ring was a well recognized manner of demonstrating skill with horse and lance. It seems equally likely that knights would ride at each other in sport while exercising in the castle yard. But in the tenth and early eleventh centuries there was no reason for an extensive development of martial sports. The knights obtained their amusement and exercise in arms in the continuous warfare that marked the period. It was only when the rising feudal princes began to check private war that knights began to find time lying heavy on their hands. By the twelfth century wars were fought when called for by the policy of great lords rather than when knights grew bored. As a result the nobles found themselves faced with long, dull periods of peace. Perhaps even more serious for the poorer knights was the fact that peace meant no income from booty and ransoms. Under these conditions it was only natural that it should occur to someone that martial sports and exercise would be both more exciting and more profitable if they took the form of

32 Gautier, La chevalerie, p. 675.
33 Ibid., pp. 675-6.
FEUDAL CHIVALRY

regular pitched battles arranged in advance. Be that as it may, by the latter part of the twelfth century the tournament was a flourishing institution in northern France. The author of the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* asserts that there was a tourney held somewhere in the region every fortnight. The same source shows clearly the reasons for these meetings, both real and avowed. Knights needed exercise in the use of arms and opportunities to acquire glory. Less strongly emphasized but no less definitely expressed was the boredom with peace and desire for ransoms. While one is inclined to doubt the reality of the knights’ consuming desire to improve their skill in the use of arms, it seems very likely that the numerous tourneys held in France contributed something to the prowess of French knights. Effective use of knightly arms demanded continual practice, and this the tournament provided. But whatever may have been the value of the tourney as a school for soldiers, it was an invaluable breeding ground for chivalric practices.

The tournaments of the twelfth century differed but little from ordinary battles. When a prolonged period of peace, say six months or more, made life grow dull and knights feel rusty, some rich and chivalrously inclined feudal prince would decide to hold a tourney. He would select as a site a pleasant meadow in his lands and then send heralds about the countryside to announce the affair. For instance the count of Dreux might despatch his heralds to proclaim that on a certain day the knights of Normandy would combat those of France between the villages of Anet and Sorel-Moussel in the

---

34 *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, I, lines 4974-5.
valley of the Eure. On the appointed day the knights would gather on the field, put on their armor in safety-zones provided for the purpose, and line up in opposing ranks. Then when a herald gave the signal the two lines of heavy feudal cavalry would level their lances and charge full tilt. Once the lances were broken, the knights would draw their swords and continue the contest. There were no restrictions on the number of knights on either side and when one party was bested and sought to retire, the victors harried them through the countryside in the hope of capturing as many as possible. Occasionally one party would conceal an infantry force to cover its retreat. That flower of chivalrous princes, Philip of Alsace, count of Flanders, was not above bringing into the tournament itself infantrymen armed with hooks for dragging knights from their horses. The monk of Montaudon suggests that some nobles went so far as to use crossbowmen in tourneys. These practices were frowned on—the tournament was a knightly affair and infantry had no place in it. There was, however, another device used by the count of Flanders that was apparently acceptable. He and his men would arm and announce that they were going to watch the tourney. Then when the contestants grew tired, the count would enter the field and capture large numbers of his exhausted opponents. In short as long as only knights took part, any stratagem was in order. There were two respects in which these combats differed from regular battles. Places of refuge were provided where the knights could put on their armor in preparation for the tourney and to which they could retire if they suff-

ered some such disaster as having the laces of a helmet broken. Moreover when a knight was overcome and surrendered to his opponent, he was released at once on parole. After the tournament the knights who had been captured sought out their conquerors to arrange for ransom. Apparently in most cases the penalty for the defeated was limited to the loss of horse and armor, and this equipment was usually redeemed by a cash payment. Thus the provision of safety-zones and restrictions on the financial losses that were possible were the only differences between tournaments and regular battles.\textsuperscript{36}

Despite its close resemblance to the savage melée of feudal warfare, the twelfth-century tournament was a fertile breeding ground for the courteous practices of chivalry. After the contest the richer knights held open house for friend and foe in their quarters. Often indeed the lord who sponsored the tourney would give a great feast for the participants. These social activities tended to increase the feeling of friendliness among the contestants and remove the tournament further from the animosities of war. Then as the courtly idea that the true purpose of glory won by prowess was to gain the affection and esteem of a lady developed, women began to play a more prominent part in tournaments. A group of ladies watched one of the contests in which William Marshal took part, and his biographer assures us that their bright eyes moved him to outdo himself in valor. On another occasion a great lady, probably Marie, coun-

\textsuperscript{36} The most extensive source of information about twelfth-century tournaments is the \textit{Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal}. See Painter, \textit{William Marshal}, pp. 23-60, especially pp. 56-59.
tess of Champagne, presented William with a prize to reward him for his prowess. Soon a gallery of ladies was an essential part of every well-ordered tournament. These various influences were bound to lessen the savagery of these contests. Bit by bit as time went on the tournament became a festival instead of a mere substitute for warfare. The first step in the amelioration of the ferocity of martial sports came with the development of the joust or single combat between two knights. Although jousts are referred to by twelfth-century writers, the fact that they are barely mentioned in the Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal indicates that they were not yet a popular form of knightly sport. Nevertheless certain incidents in the Histoire suggest that when knights arrived on the field early they were inclined to amuse themselves by fighting single combats while waiting for the melée to begin. Certainly by the middle of the thirteenth century most tournaments were preceded by a series of jousts. The joust was far milder and less dangerous than the wild melée and therefore it grew in favor at the expense of the other. The general combats became more and more rare until many affairs that were called tournaments were in reality merely a series of jousts. Then during the same period, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it began to be customary to use special blunted weapons in tourney and joust. With these changes went the development of complicated rules and regulations that turned martial sports into comparatively gentle games.

The tournaments of the fifteenth century were pri-

marily festivals and pageants rather than trials of prowess. They lasted several days, and the major part of the time was occupied with feasts and dances. On the rare occasions when a mêlée was part of the affair, it consisted simply of two parties charging each other and breaking their blunted and intentionally fragile lances. The fierce general combats with the sword were things of the past. The jousts which were the chief feature of most festivities of this sort were like modern prize fights. The contestants rode at each other a set number of times. If one was unhorsed in accordance with the rules, it was a knockout. Usually, however, neither won decisively and the decision was given on points. For instance to lose a stirrup meant defeat in that tilt. Sometimes the jousts included combats on foot, but these were also strictly regulated. Each contestant was allowed a certain number of strokes with sword or battle-ax, and here again the victory was usually decided on points as the massive armor of the period made it essentially improbable that either participant would be hurt. In fact so heavy and cumbersome was the knightly equipment that a contestant who fell down was practically out of the combat.

One of the most interesting features of the martial sports of the latter part of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was the series of jousts arranged by individuals. During the lull in the Hundred Years War that marked the last years of the fourteenth century Marshal Bouicaut found himself at a loss to think of ways of acquiring glory. Finally he “planned an enterprise the most high, most gracious, and most honorable that any Christian knight had undertaken for a long time.” He and two
companions would take up their residence for a month on the frontier between the county of Boulogne and the English town of Calais. Three months in advance heralds would go through England, Aragon, Germany, and Italy announcing the Marshal’s intention to be at the appointed place from March 20 to April 20. Each of the three knights would be ready to meet all challengers on any day except Friday. Enemies of France could choose whether they were to contend with real lances or with blunted tilting weapons. Friends of the Marshal’s country would be met with blunted lances. Each contest was to consist of five tilts. When the appointed time had come, Boucicaut set up four magnificent pavilions on a lovely meadow, three for himself and his companions and one for their opponents. He also laid in a vast supply of food and wine so that he could lavishly entertain his large escort of knights, squires, heralds, trumpeters, and minstrels and also offer sumptuous hospitality to knights who came to fight. In front of the tents of Boucicaut and his companions stood a great oak. On each of three branches hung two shields, one for friends and one for foes, and a supply of pointed and blunt lances, while another branch was adorned with a horn. Under each pair of shields was the coat-of-arms of the knight to whom it belonged. When a knight appeared who desired to joust, he would blow the horn and strike one of the shields. Thus if he were an Englishman who wished to tilt with Boucicaut he would strike the shield of the Marshal which was reserved for foes of the realm of France. According to the Marshal’s biographer the affair was a great success. During the month the three companions jousted against
one hundred and twenty English knights and forty from other lands. Their English opponents included such distinguished figures as Henry of Lancaster, earl of Derby, later King Henry IV, and John of Holland, earl of Huntingdon. We are assured that although the three knights wounded many challengers, they themselves suffered no injuries.

This “noble enterprise” of the Marshal Boucicaut may be taken as typical of many similar affairs. Some years later Jacques de Lalaing, a noble Burgundian knight, held a series of jousts with even more entrancing arrangements. For one thing a beautiful lady replaced the oak tree as a post on which to hang the defender’s shields. Prospective challengers were expected to prove that they were sprung from four noble lines to the satisfaction of a herald who accompanied the shield-bearing lady. The lady carried three shields, white, violet, and black. A challenger who struck the white shield could exchange as many blows of the ax as he chose with Lalaing. The violet shield meant a similar contest with swords, while he who struck the black shield was committed to twenty-five tilts with the lance. A sad comment on the chivalry of the day is the provision that in the combats on horseback neither contestant should be tied to his saddle. The penalties provided for the losers were fantastic. For instance if a knight were knocked down in the combat with axes he was obliged to wear a gold bracelet for a year unless before that he could find the lady who held the key. The knight who had his ax struck from his hand was to offer a diamond to the most beautiful lady of France.

---

Every challenger was to receive a wand the color of the shield he struck as a memento of the occasion. As William Marshal turns violently in his grave, let us leave the fifteenth-century joust.\(^5^0\)

During the fourteenth century the courteous practices which had developed in the tournament were applied on the field of battle. The knights of the twelfth century had conducted their martial games like battles—their descendants made their battles resemble tourneys. The nobles who fought under the banners of France and England in the Hundred Years War had little direct personal interest in the result. National patriotism had not yet appeared as an important force and devotion to a liege lord was rarely strong enough to move a knight to make sacrifices for his suzerain. The nobles fought because war was their traditional occupation and because they were paid to. As a result the desire for glory became the avowed and in the case of many individuals the real motive for military activities. Glory was the chief object in both battle and tourney and it could be won as much by courtesy as by prowess. The pleasant kindnesses and social amenities of the joust and tournament were carried over into the conduct of war—often to the decided detriment of military effectiveness. War became a martial sport. This attitude is clearly indicated in contemporary chronicles. In 1304 according to the *Chronique Normande* the chivalrous entourage of King Philip V urged him to make peace with the Flemings. They were a cruel people who made war mortally with-

out ransom. Froissart remarks about the duke of Hainault who bent all his energies to preserving his duchy from a French invasion that “he took this war too much to heart.”

What this spirit meant in the actual conduct of military operations can best be shown by a few examples. On one occasion the duke of Lancaster was invading Champagne from the north and the duke of Bourbon was watching the region from Troyes. The captain of the garrison at Plancy, a minor fortress on Lancaster’s path, notified the duke of Bourbon that the English were about to pass near his stronghold. If the duke would send him fifty good men, they could have a “belle adventure.” Bourbon immediately despatched fifty picked knights and squires. When these gay nobles arrived at Plancy, they built a barrier just outside its main gate and named it “La Barrière Amoureuse.” Then as soon as the English appeared they sallied out, got behind their barrier, and challenged the English knights to combat. A fair number of the latter, as thirsty for glory as their opponents, dismounted and attacked the barrier. The result was a gentlemanly fight that reflected glory on everyone and was of no military value. The duke of Lancaster had no intention of assaulting Plancy, and the troops in the fortress were too few to be any danger to him. It was simply a pleasant passage at arms.

A still more illuminating incident comes from the

41 Chroniques de Froissart, II, 69.
career of this same duke of Bourbon. The duke had invested the castle of Verteuil in Poitou. The castellan, Bartholomew de Montprivat, was absent, but he had left the fortress in charge of a noble squire named Regnaud de Montferrand. The place was so strong and the defense so effective that Bourbon soon decided that it could be taken only by mining. After about a month of hard labor the mine was completed so that it afforded a passage into the interior of the castle. When the duke learned of its completion, it occurred to him that here was a chance for a fine chivalrous passage at arms. He sent his lieutenant up to the castle gate to inquire whether there was any knight inside who would like to meet another knight in the mine. The garrison replied that they could not boast a knight but that a noble gentleman would be glad to accept the challenge. Bourbon then armed and descended into the mine while Regnaud came to meet him from the other side. There in the narrow passage, it was only eighteen inches wide, the two men fought with their swords. Despite the fact that it could hardly have been more than a poking match which could not have been dangerous for men in full armor, Bourbon grew very excited and gave his war cry. Immediately his opponent asked if he were indeed Duke Louis of Bourbon. The dignity of his foe overwhelmed Regnaud. “I praise God that he has today done me the grace and honor to fight so valiant a prince.” After expressing this pious sentiment he coolly offered to surrender the castle if the duke would dub him knight. Bourbon, who was not too much of a gentleman to be cautious, demanded the keys in advance. Regnaud immediately surrendered the keys and was duly knighted.
The two commanders then agreed that it would be selfish of them to have the castle surrender at once and thus prevent their men from enjoying the mine. Hence the surrender was planned for the next day. Meanwhile the gentlemen of both sides could disport themselves in the mine. The next morning the garrison rode out of the castle. Bourbon gave Regnaud a horse and a belt and they exchanged courteous compliments. Thus a nobleman was so appreciative of the glory gained from fighting the duke of Bourbon and of the honor of being knighted by him that he surrendered an important castle entrusted to his care. The chronicler assures us that everyone who heard of this affair was filled with admiration for the courtesy of the two participants. One would like, however, to have the comments of the absent castellan of Verteuil and his superior, the English seneschal of Guienne.

The absorbing interest in gaining glory through the practice of prowess and courtesy to the almost complete exclusion of any consideration for practical military objectives is best illustrated in the pages of Froissart. This chronicler frankly states in his prologue that he is writing so that "the great marvels and beautiful feats of arms may be notably registered." In fact he uses this purpose as a basis for assigning to various sorts of men their proper function in society. The warriors strive to win glory, the common people talk about their deeds, and the clergy write down their feats of arms. To Froissart the Hundred Years War was a long series of

43 Chronique de Loys de Bourbon, pp. 149-152.
44 Chroniques de Froissart, 1, 1.
45 Ibid., p. 5.
knightly deeds. He had little interest in the fundamental tactics of battles and sieges, but turned his attention to the “beautiful skirmishes” where small groups of knights demonstrated their prowess. The interminable siege of Hennebont which was marked by few bloody assaults but by many small affrays between the garrison and its foes delighted him. Then he described with relish the numerous arranged combats between equal parties of knights. It was not unusual to settle such questions as the possession of a castle by an affair of this sort. Froissart was particularly fond of recounting the courteous treatment accorded to one another by noble foes. He praised the English not for the military skill that won them battle after battle, but for their kindness to their prisoners and the reasonableness of the ransoms they demanded. Edward III informed Hervey de Léon, a great Breton noble who had been captured by the English, that he well knew he could pay easily a ransom of forty thousand écus, but he would release him for ten thousand if he would be kind enough to bear the king’s defiance to King Philip of France. Still more illuminating is Froissart’s account of a conversation between the Black Prince and the Constable Bertrand du Quesclin who had fallen into the hands of the English while aiding King Henry of Castille. One morning the prince asked Bertrand how he was. The constable replied “Thank God, I was never better and it is right I should be well for I am the most honored knight of the world since I remain in prison and you know why. They say in the realm of France and else-

46 Chroniques de Froissart, V, 64-5.
where that you dare not let me go." The prince was so impressed by this argument that he immediately fixed a ransom for Bertrand's release. As the constable was the only really effective commander the French possessed, sound military policy demanded that the prince follow his apparent inclination to keep him captive, but courtesy and reputation called for the other course. One could go on indefinitely illustrating the kindness of noble to noble from the pages of Froissart. One of the best examples comes from another source. A low class soldier had killed in battle the count of St. Pol. One day he was so indiscreet as to boast of this feat in the presence of his commander, the duke of Julliers, who had been St. Pol's bitter foe. The duke promptly had the fellow hanged for killing so noble a prince. Mutual courtesy and class solidarity could go no farther than this.

The nobleman who wished to win fame as a knight could not afford to limit his efforts to the wars fought in his own country. Even in the midst of the Hundred Years War France knew brief periods of peace. While one could always arrange a series of jousts, these gentle knightly sports could not completely satisfy the more ardent spirits. To men intensely avid for martial glory crusades still offered promising opportunities. The favorite resort for French and English knights during lulls in their mutual hostilities was Prussia where the members of the Teutonic Order were gradually slashing Christianity into the native inhabitants. Among the

\[48\] Ibid., VII, 62-3.
noted captains who made expeditions to Prussia were Henry of Lancaster, earl of Derby, Duke Louis of Bourbon, John de Grailly, capitul de Buch, and Gaston Phoebus, count of Foix. The Marshal Boucicaut made three trips to this land of knightly exploits. The reader may remember that Chaucer's knight "ful ofte tyme hadde the bord bigonne aboven alle naciouns in Pruce." Somewhat rarer because more difficult than excursions to Prussia were crusades against the Moslem world. Duke Louis of Bourbon led an abortive expedition to aid the king of Castille against the Moors of Granada and commanded an energetic if not very fruitful Franco-Genoese invasion of north Africa. Many a glory-seeking French knight including Boucicaut followed Count John of Nevers, later duke of Burgundy, on his expedition against the Turks which ended in the disastrous defeat at Nicopolis. Chaucer's emphasis on the foreign adventures of his knight was in full accord with the customs of the time. If a nobleman desired glory, he had to seek opportunities for martial exploits.

The fifteenth century saw a gradual decrease both in the practice of courtesy in war and in the importance of desire for glory as a motive for fighting. Military tactics and the composition of armies were changing to the detriment of chivalry. The forces which followed Henry V and his brother Bedford consisted of low-born archers with a few gentlemen as officers. After the rout of the chivalry of France at Agincourt, the cause of the French king was supported for the most part by mercenary companies which rarely could boast of a noble captain. Moreover while I have some hesitation about subscribing to the common view that this stage of the
Hundred Years War saw a strong development of national feeling, it is certain that there was a bitterness between the contending parties which had been lacking in the fourteenth century. Henry V and Bedford were cold-blooded conquerors, not chivalrous adventurers, and their noble captains were professional soldiers who valued military success above chivalric glory. With the possible exception of Dunois and Richemont the French captains who eventually expelled the English were men of the same type as their foes. War had become a serious business. Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy might encourage jousts and tourneys as court amusements, but his armies were bodies of professional soldiers whose duty was to win battles. The days were past when generals cared little whether they won or lost so long as it was done gloriously.

The change in the nature of war was not the only force which tended to hamper chivalric practices. During the fourteenth century the nobles of France as a whole were rich and prosperous. They could afford to ask reasonable ransoms, to abstain from plundering, and to subordinate greed for profit to desire for glory. But the decrease in their resources and the expansion in the noble standard of living which marked the fifteenth century wrought a change in their attitude. Nobles began to hold gentlewomen for ransom—a thing practically unheard of in the fourteenth century. Others acted as captains of mercenary bands and cheerfully shared with their men in the plunder of the countryside. Still others entered elite regiments of the crown where one served frankly for pay as a permanent professional soldier. The nobles who banded against Louis XI in the
"League of the Public Weal" fought not for the traditional privileges of their class but for increased pensions and offices in the royal government. Once more as in the twelfth century the nobleman talked of glory but he fought primarily for cash.

The conditions of the fifteenth century drove the practice of courtesy and the search for glory from the battlefield and forced them to take refuge in the martial sports from which they had sprung. Among the nostalgic noblemen who tried to preserve the knightly practices of the past was many a forerunner of Don Quixote. Adventurous young men wandered about Europe hopefully issuing challenges and finding few princes whose romantic inclinations were strong enough to move them to permit their subjects to joust with the challengers. Now and then princely courts sought entertainment in watching two massively armored knights tilt at each other over a breast-high fence. But all this was pure froth. The glory gained from such affairs was not for prowess in battle but for reverence for tradition. The noblemen whose real occupation was wheedling offices, sinecures, and pensions out of kings and sovereign princes still felt obliged to make their bow to the customs of the past. The martial sports which had delighted the knights of mediaeval France died on the field of Agincourt, but the corpse was not buried until Montgomery's lance ended the reign of Henry II.

Such in brief was the history of the practice of feudal chivalry in mediaeval France. Its connection with the development of chivalric ideas is highly interesting but quite intangible. Nevertheless it seems worth while to venture a few rather reckless generalizations about the
FEUDAL CHIVALRY

relation between these ideas and their practice. In the period of growth ideas and practices seem to have developed together reacting one upon the other. The conditions of their environment induced scattered noblemen to behave in a certain manner. When this behavior had become fairly common and had persisted for a long time, men began to feel that it was peculiarly proper for noblemen. Then many nobles who might not otherwise have done so began to act in the same manner. Let us for instance assume that a fair number of late eleventh-century nobles found their resources greatly increased by the expansion of the arable land in their fiefs and were inclined to demonstrate their prosperity by lavish hospitality. Wandering minstrels and impecunious landless knights enjoyed the bounty of these laden tables and spread abroad the praises of their hosts. Less well endowed nobles felt called upon to be as lavish as their resources would permit. Soon hospitality on a generous scale became the mark of a nobleman and the chivalric virtue of largesse was fully developed. Thus the idea had its origin in practice but itself encouraged the spread of the practice. Ideas and practice grew side by side fertilizing each other.

The relation between ideas and practice in the period of decay was quite different from that which had prevailed in the period of growth. By the middle of the fourteenth century the noble class of France had accepted the ideas of feudal chivalry and was carrying them out in practice to a greater extent than at any earlier time. These ideas and practices had become the characteristic which in addition to high birth distinguished the nobleman. Rich townsmen who wished to ape
the manners of the aristocracy made rather ludicrous attempts to hold jousts and tourneys. The complete identification of the ideas and practices of feudal chivalry with the dominant social class gave them an immense capacity for survival in the face of adverse conditions. Although the military, political, and economic conditions which formed the environment of the fifteenth-century nobleman were steadily growing less favorable to chivalric ideas and practice, the nobles clung desperately to what they and their contemporaries considered the true characteristics of their class. Hence during this period the popular conception of how a noble should behave definitely influenced the actions of the aristocracy and delayed the complete disappearance of chivalric practices. Caxton published the Book of the Order of Chivalry in the hope of reviving the knightly customs proper to noblemen. Henry VIII and Francis I held jousts at their courts because they felt that tradition demanded that nobles indulge in knightly sports.