

**WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLD**



TRUSTY SENTINELS

# **WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLD**

**BY**

**EVA MARCH TAPPAN**



**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS**  
**CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA**

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## PREFACE

THIS book is in no degree an attempt to relate the involved and intricate history of the Middle Ages. Its plan is, rather, to present pictures of the manner of life and habits of thought of the people who lived between the eighth and fifteenth centuries. Our writings and our everyday conversation are full of their phrases and of allusions to their ideas. Many of our thoughts and feelings and instincts, of our very follies and superstitions, have descended to us from them. To become better acquainted with them is to explain ourselves. In selecting from the enormous amount of material, I have sought to choose those customs which were most characteristic of the times and which have made the strongest impression upon the life of to-day, describing each custom when at its height, rather than tracing its development and history. I hope that the volume will be found sufficiently full to serve as a work of reference, and sufficiently interesting to win its way as a book of general reading.

EVA MARCH TAPPAN.

*Worcester, Mass.*



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## **PAGE, SQUIRE, AND KNIGHT**

It must have been a sight well worth seeing when a knight mounted his horse and galloped away from a castle. Of course his armor was polished and shining, and, as Lowell says of Sir Launfal, he “made morn through the darksome gate.” The children of the castle especially must have watched him with the greatest interest. The girls looked wistfully at the scarf or glove on his helmet, each one hoping that he who would some day wear her colors would be the bravest man that ever drew a sword. As for the boys, they could hardly wait for the day to come when they, too, could don glittering armor and sally forth into the world in quest of adventures.

Even the youngest of these children knew that a boy must pass through long years of training before he could become a knight. This began when he was a small child, perhaps not more than seven years old. It was not the custom for the son of a noble to be brought up in the home of his father. He was sent for his education and training to the castle of some lord of higher rank or greater reputation, sometimes to the court of the king. He was taught

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LEAVING THE CASTLE

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to look with the utmost respect upon the man who trained him to be a knight, to reverence him as a father, and to behave toward him with humility and meekness. Even if the time ever came when they were fighting on opposite sides, the foster son must never harm the man whose castle had been his home. In those days of warfare and bloodshed, the king himself might well be glad to have as devoted supporters and friends a band of young men who had been carefully trained in the practice of arms. It is no wonder that kings and nobles looked upon it as a privilege to receive these boys into their castles. Indeed, when their fathers were inclined to keep them at home, the king sometimes demanded that they be sent to him.

The boys of the days of knighthood were not so very different from those of to-day, and many of their amusements were the same as now. They had various games of ball, they played marbles, they saw-sawed, and walked on stilts, much as if they belonged to the twentieth century. Of course they played at being knights, just as boys to-day play at being merchants or manufacturers. There is an old picture of some pages, as these boys were called, playing that two toy knights mounted on wooden horses are having a contest. The two horses are pushed toward each other, and if either knight is struck by the spear of the other and thrust out of his place he is vanquished.

This was only play, and there were many things that a page must learn and learn thoroughly

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before he was fourteen or fifteen. How much of “book learning” was given him is not known. Probably the custom differed in different places. In most cases, it could not have been a great amount, perhaps only a little reading, and it seems to have



PLAYING AT TOURNAMENTS

been regarded as no disgrace to a knight if he did not even know his letters. He must learn to sing, however, and to play his accompaniments on the harp; and he must play backgammon and chess, for these games were looked upon as accomplishments which no gentleman could be without. He was taught to say his prayers and to have respect for the Church and religion. It was especially impressed upon him that he must be “serviceable,” that is, he must wait upon the ladies and lords of the castle. He

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must run on errands for them and he must do their bidding in all things, for it was an honor to him to be permitted to serve them. A page who was disobedient would have been scorned and despised by the other pages, for they all hoped to become knights, and no true knight would refuse to obey the commands of his lord or the gentler behests of his lady-love. Such a one would have been looked upon as no knight, indeed, but rather as a rude, boorish churl. The page, or valet or damoiseau or babee, as he was also called, must always be gentle and polite; for the knight was an ideal gentleman, and the gentleman must never fail in courtesy. There is a quaint little volume called "The Babees' Book" which tells just how a boy who wished to become a knight was expected to behave. When he entered the room of his lord, he must greet all modestly with a "God speed you," and he must kneel on one knee before his lord. If his lord spoke to him, he must make an obeisance before answering. He must not lean against a post or handle things, but stand quietly, listen to what was said, and speak when he was spoken to. When the meal was prepared, he must bring water for hand-washing, presenting it first to his lord, and must hold a towel ready for him to use, a most desirable part of the preparation for a meal, as it was the custom for two persons to use the same trencher, or wooden plate, and forks were not in use. When the time came for the page himself to eat, he must not lean upon the table or soil the cloth or throw any bones upon the floor. If he chanced to use the same trencher with any one of higher rank than he, he must take meat from the trencher first,

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but he must be especially careful not to take the best piece.

Thus it was that the indoor life of the page passed. Most of his indoor teaching was given him by the ladies of the castle. It was they who taught him to choose a lady-love for whose sake he was to be ever brave and pure and modest. The story is told of one shy little page at the court of France that when one of the court ladies asked whom he loved best, he replied, "My lady mother first, and after her my sister." "That is not what I mean," said the lady. "Tell me who is your lady-love in chivalry." The little fellow admitted that he had none. After a severe lecture because he was so unchivalric, he chose a little girl of his own age. "She is a pretty little girl," replied the lady, "but she cannot advise you or help you on as a knight. You must choose some lady of noble birth who can give you counsel and aid. Then you must do everything in your power to please her. You must be courteous and humble and strive with all your might to win her favor."

Out of doors, too, the page had much to learn. If his lord went to the field of battle, the page went with him to help him in every way that a boy could. He was in no danger, for a knight who attacked a page would have been shamed and disgraced. As for riding, of course he had not been allowed to reach the age of seven without knowing how to sit on a horse; but now riding became a matter of business. It was not a mere canter on a pony whenever he took a fancy; it was a careful training, for he must practice leaping over ditches

## *PAGE, SQUIRE, AND KNIGHT*

and walls, he must be able to spring into the saddle without touching the stirrup, and, in short, he must learn to be as perfectly at home on the back of a horse as on his own feet. Light weapons were provided for him, and he must learn how to use sword and lance and bow, and how to swim and box and fence. He must meet the other boys of the castle in mock contests. These were carefully watched by the elders, who were eager to see whether or not the son of some valiant knight bade fair to maintain the reputation of his father.

A most important part of the boy's instruction was hunting, or the "mystery of the woods," and hawking, or the "mystery of the rivers," so called because it was often pursued on the open banks of streams. The page who understood hawking had conquered a most complicated branch of his education. He had to learn the different kinds of falcons, how to train the birds to throw themselves upon their prey, how to feed them, and what calls to use with them. There was a rule for every act; for instance, there was only one way in which a hawk might be properly carried. The master's arm must be held parallel with his body, but not touching it, and the forearm must be held out at a right angle as a perch for the bird. A man who would practice the mystery of the rivers and did not carry his falcon in the approved fashion would have been the laughing-stock of his companions. Even pages had their own falcons, and a taste for hunting and hawking was looked upon as a mark of noble blood. When a page was sent to bear a letter, he

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sometimes carried his falcon on his wrist for company on the way. There were possible dangers on every journey, but I fancy that the page was always glad to be sent with a message, especially if it was a pleasant one, for then he was sure of a warm welcome and generous gifts from the happy recipient.



A KING RECEIVING A KNIGHT

During the seven or eight years that he was a page, the boy was always looking forward to the time when he would become a squire, for this was the next step toward knighthood. Now that he had

## *PAGE, SQUIRE, AND KNIGHT*

grown older and stronger, more service was required of him, and his exercises became more severe. Within the castle he continued to serve at the table; but he was now privileged to present the first or principal cup of wine. He still brought water for the hand-washing, and he carved the meat. He never sat at the same table with his lord. Indeed, in many places a knight would not permit his own son to eat with him until he, too, had been made a knight. In Chaucer's description of a squire, he makes it clear that the young man of twenty years was a brave young fellow who had had considerable experience in warfare, but

Curteys he was, lowly and servisable,  
And carf beforn his fader at the table.

After the meal was over, squires and pages together cleared the hall for dancing, or they brought tables for checkers or for the heavy chessboards then in use. Whatever amusement was on foot, the squire was permitted to share. Indeed, throughout all the training of a boy for knighthood, it was never forgotten that he must be taught to make himself as agreeable within the castle as he was expected to be courageous without its walls. An important part of his education was practice in composing love songs. He was expected of course to have his lady-love, for whom he must be ready to endure all hardships and meet all dangers.

He continued the exercises of his days as a page; but he gave much more time to them. He

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learned to leap farther, to run longer distances, to climb jagged cliffs almost as perpendicular as the walls of the cities which he hoped some day to be able to aid in capturing. He learned to bear hunger and thirst and heat and cold and to keep himself awake through long nights of watching. His weapons were now made larger and heavier. He was taught to wield the great battle-axe, to endure the weight of armor, and to move about in it easily. A battle in the Middle Ages was more like a large number of duels than a contest between bodies of troops, and an exceedingly good preparation for this kind of warfare was an exercise known as the quintain. For this a post was set in the ground on top of which was a crosspiece that would whirl around at a touch. From one end of the crosspiece hung a board and from the other a sand-bag. The squire must ride up to this at full tilt and strike the board with his lance. But woe to him who was slow or clumsy, for quick as a flash the crosspiece whirled about, and he was struck a substantial blow by the sand-bag. Often the figure of a knight was used, so hung that unless the young squire was skillful enough to strike it on the breast it struck him—and the wooden knight never missed *his* stroke.

Each squire in turn became “squire of the body,” that is, he was the closest attendant of his lord. When his master went to the field of battle, the helmet was often entrusted to a page, but to carry the shield and armor was the task of the squire of the body. A much more difficult part of his duty was to array the knight in his armor with all its

## PAGE, SQUIRE, AND KNIGHT

complicated fastenings. Every knight had his pennon. If he had given long service and had many followers, the point or points of his pennon were cut off, leaving a square banner. He was then called a banneret. Both banneret and baron were privileged to act as commanders of little armies of their own.



QUINTAIN

They were under the king, but each one had his own war-cry and called his men together under his own standard. Whether the squire served banneret or baron or knight, it was his honorable task to bear the banner or pennon. He needed to have his wits about him, for if the knight dropped his weapon, he must be ready to pass him a fresh one. If the knight was

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unhorsed, the squire must catch his horse if necessary, and help him to mount; and if the horse itself was wounded seriously, the squire must have another one ready or must bring forward his own. If



KNIGHTS FIGHTING

the knight took a prisoner, he was passed over into the charge of the squire, that the knight might be left free for further contests. If the knight was getting the worst of the fight or was attacked by several at once, the squire must come to his aid; if he was taken prisoner, the squire must rescue him if possible; if he was wounded, must carry him to a place of safety; and if he was killed, it was the sad duty of the squire to see that he received an honorable burial.

Every year brought the time nearer when the squire was to be made a knight. The one thing

## *PAGE, SQUIRE, AND KNIGHT*

necessary to bring this about was for the king or some other knight to give him the accolade, that is, a blow on his shoulder or the back of his neck as he knelt to receive it. This was usually followed by the words, "In the name of God, of Saint Michael, and of Saint George, I dub thee knight. Be brave, ready, and loyal." Sometimes all that was said was, "Be a good knight." When a number of squires were to be made knights, as often happened just before or just after a battle, the ceremony was no more complicated than this. Sometimes on the very battlefield, when a squire had done some praiseworthy deed of bravery, he was knighted in this simple and direct fashion. When there was plenty of time, however, the process was much longer. First, the hair of the candidate was cut. To give up one's hair was looked upon as a mark of the devotion of one's self to God. Generally the cutting of a single lock was regarded as sufficient, but sometimes the head was shaved in the fashion of the tonsure of the priest. The candidate was put into a bath and then into a bed. Every part of the ceremony had a meaning, and these acts signified, first, purity, and then the rest which he who had been pure would enjoy in Paradise. He was now supposed to be cleansed from all sins of his previous life, and to symbolize this he was arrayed in a white shirt, or long tunic. Over it a red garment with long sleeves and a hood was thrown to indicate that he was ready to shed his blood in the service of God, and finally a close black coat was put upon him to remind him of the death which all must meet. After twenty-four hours of fasting, he spent a night in a church,

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keeping what was called the vigil of arms, that is, kneeling by his armor, praying and meditating. When the sun rose, he made his confession to a priest, heard mass, and partook of the Holy Sacrament.



CONFERRING KNIGHTHOOD ON THE BATTLE-FIELD

This was his final preparation. Later in the day he and his friends went to the church or the castle hall. The young man gave his sword to the priest, and the priest laid it upon the altar, praying that God would bless it and that it might defend the Church and protect widows and orphans. The candidate took a solemn oath that it should be used for these purposes. The priest then returned the sword to him

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and made a little address on the duties that lay before him in his new life and reminded him of the happiness that awaited him who performed these duties with faithfulness and zeal.

Now came the moment for which every one was waiting. The young man went forward to the lord who was to make him a knight and knelt before him with clasped hands. The lord questioned him somewhat in this wise: "Why do you wish to be made a knight? Is it with the hope of gaining treasure? Is it that men may show you honor?" On the young man's declaring that he had no such wishes, both knights and ladies united in arming him. The golden spurs came first, then the other pieces of armor, and last of all the sword. The lord then gave him the accolade, sometimes a light touch with the sword on the shoulder or the nape of the neck, and sometimes a hearty blow with the hand or even the clenched fist. This was followed by the charge, to be brave, ready, and loyal. The older knights drew their swords and repeated the vows which they had taken on entering chivalry, and the priest pronounced the blessing of the Church upon one and all. So it was that in the ceremony of making a knight, the Church, the soldier, and the woman had each a share. The assembly then passed out into the open air. The horse of the newly made knight stood waiting. He sprang upon its back—and unless he wished to disgrace his new honors, he must not touch the stirrup—and rode about the court, prancing and caracoling, brandishing his glittering sword, and showing how well he knew the use of his

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lance. The servants and minstrels of the castle had waited patiently, and now they had their share in the rejoicings, for to prove his gratitude for receiving the noble gift of knighthood the young knight made as generous a gift to each one as his purse would permit.

## THE KNIGHT'S ARMS AND ARMOR

THE chief weapons used by knights were the lance and the sword, and therefore they needed especially some sort of protection against the thrust of a lance and the stroke of a sword. Every knight wore a helmet, for nothing would please his enemy better than to strike a mighty blow that would cleave his head from its crown to the breastbone. There were many sorts of helmets. Some were shaped like closely-fitting hoods, covering the back of the head, but leaving the face unprotected. Some were cone-shaped and had visors that could be lifted, and others were much like broadbrimmed hats. Some had a piece of iron called a nasal which extended down over the forehead and nose; and some covered the whole head like a kettle and had slits through which the knight might peer out at his enemy—or through which the enemy might sometimes thrust the point of a spear. The helmet was not always plain by any means, for it was often beautifully ornamented with silver or gold. It was heavy enough at best; but the warrior bold never objected to increasing its weight by adding as a crest a little

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image of an eagle or a lion or a dragon to suggest to his enemy what a brave man he was.

The warrior must guard his heart as well as his head, and he always wore some sort of armor to protect his body. For a long while this was in the form of a short tunic or shirt called a hauberk. With it, chausses, or breeches, were worn. At the neck a hood of mail was joined to the hauberk, or habergeon, which served to protect the back of the head. In the earlier times the hauberk was made of leather or cloth and was often thickly wadded and quilted. Indeed, the leather hauberks never went entirely out of use so long as armor was worn. Sometimes they were really handsome, for the leather was stamped, colored, and gilded in elaborate patterns. They were cheap and convenient; but when an enemy was galloping up to a man and thrusting a lance at his heart with full force, even the thickest leather was small protection. It occurred to some one with an inventive mind that if rings of metal were only sewed upon this tunic, it would not be so easy for either lance or sword to reach the heart of a man. The rings were sewed on in rows, and before long larger rings were sewed over them. Then some one said to himself, "Why sew the rings on leather or cloth? Why not interlace them in a network?" and soon knights were setting forth to battle with coats of mail made of interlaced rings. A coat of this kind was far less clumsy and heavy than a leather tunic. Moreover, it could be rolled up into



CREST

## THE KNIGHT'S ARMS AND ARMOR

so small a bundle that it could be carried on the back of a saddle.

This was a fairly good protection against sword and spear, and probably the knights who first went out to battle with new and shining ring or chain armor felt that nothing better could ever be invented; but there were two other weapons whose blow was only made more dangerous by this armor. These were the battle-axe and the heavy battle-hammer, or

martel. The head of the hammer sometimes weighed twenty pounds, and with a strong man to wield it with both hands it became a terrible weapon. The priests and bishops of those days were often called upon to lead their people in fighting as well as in praying. The Church law forbade them to "take the sword," but it said nothing about the hammer; therefore they took the hammer and went into battle with clear consciences. When either hammer or axe struck its crushing blow, chain armor was worse than nothing, for it tore the flesh beneath it into rough, jagged wounds that were hard to heal.



HAUBERK

## WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLD



KNIGHT IN  
ARMOR

The next invention was to fasten on plates of steel at the most exposed places, and soon the *coudière* protected the elbow and the *genouillère* the knee. Little by little the chain armor disappeared, and armor of overlapping scales took its place. Every piece had its name. The chest and back were protected by a *cuirass*; the throat by a *gorget*, and thighs by *cuisse*s, the arms and shoulders by *brassarts* and *ailettes*, and the hands by gauntlets, while the *chausses*

were extended to protect the toes. The chain armor was much easier to put on, and a knight could slip it over his head even after he saw his enemy in the distance galloping toward him. The plate armor protected him from sword and spear and in great degree from hammer and battle-axe, but it took so long to put it on that the knight had to wear it not only in time of battle, but whenever there was the least danger of being surprised by an enemy. When two knights fought, the one who could unhorse the other was usually the winner, for while his adversary rolled helplessly on the ground, he could slip a thin, slender dagger in between the plates of his armor and kill him. To do such a deed, however, would have been a shame and disgrace to any true knight unless he first asked, "Will you yield, rescue or no

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rescue?" If the vanquished man replied, "I yield," the dagger of mercy, as it was called, was not used, but he was led away as a prisoner. If a knight fell into the power of a man who had not taken even the first steps toward knighthood, he was indeed in difficulties. Naturally, he wished to save his life; but to surrender to an adversary of low degree would be a humiliation hard for any valiant knight to endure. Some one discovered an amusing way of escaping from this dilemma. He simply made his captor a knight and then surrendered to him; thus saving both his life and his pride.

The knight wore golden spurs. These were his especial badge of honor, and they were forbidden to all of lesser rank. He carried a shield large enough to protect his body and to serve as a litter on which, if he was wounded, he could be carried from the field. Across his shoulder he often wore a silken scarf called a baldric, embroidered by the lady for whose glory his deeds of prowess were done. In Joseph Rodman Drake's poem on *The American Flag*, he said that its white came from "the milky baldric of the skies," meaning the Milky Way. Another way by which a knight could show loyalty to one's lady-love was to fasten her glove or scarf to his helmet. Still another way was to fasten one of her sleeves to his shoulder. Sleeves were so long in those times that they sometimes touched the ground, and must have hampered the knight badly. The fashion of wearing them as pennons was much more reasonable.

As a protection from the heat of the sun, which beat down upon his armor of steel, the knight

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wore also a sort of sleeveless tunic called a tabard, and also jupon, gipon, and surcoat. At first this was made of linen or a coarse cloth known as fustian, but as people became more luxurious, silk or fur or cloth of gold was used. It must soon have become badly stained by the armor beneath it. The poet Chaucer never failed to notice whether things were fresh and clean and dainty, and he wrote of a knight who had just returned from warfare,—

Of fustian he wered a gipoun  
Al bismotered [stained] with his habergeoun.

After armor was so made that it hid the face of the knight, the custom arose of engraving some device upon the shield or breastplate by which he might be recognized. This was also



SHIELDS

embroidered upon his surcoat and upon the trappings of his horse. These are the “arms” or “coats of arms” or “armorial bearings” that have been handed down in many families, together with the figures on the helmets known as crests. The oldest arms were simple arrangements of straight lines, but soon the devices became more complex. Circles, trefoils, arrows, and swords were used. The figures of animals appeared, such as cranes, mullets, lions, and horses; and also fabulous beasts, such as dragons and unicorns. Frequently a device was chosen which had connection with some event of its bearer’s life. If a

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man had a noted adventure with a wolf, he was likely to choose the figure of a wolf for his coat of arms. The terms in which arms are described are taken from the French; for instance, in figure 2, if the shield is silver and the bar, or "rafter," is red, the proper description would be: "Argent, a chevron gules."

The favorite weapons of the knight were the spear and the sword, as has been said. The spear was made of ash and had a head of iron. Just below the head the ensign, called the gonfalon, or pennon, was fastened. This was sometimes made of linen, but often of the richest silk. The sword which hung from the knight's belt was his darling. He spoke of it almost as affectionately as if it had been a brother in arms. "My own good sword," he called it. He even gave it a name. Charlemagne's sword was Joyosa; Roland's was Durindana; Arthur's was Excalibur. The Cid's favorite sword, Tizona, was buried with him. The sword was more than a weapon, for blade and hilt formed the sacred sign of the cross, and many a good knight and true has kissed it fervently and murmured his last prayer as he lay dying on the field of battle. Not only the sword, but also many other parts of the knight's equipment had their significance. The straightness of the spear symbolized truth, and its iron head, strength. The helmet suggested modesty; the spurs, diligence. The shield reminded him that as by its use he saved his own body, so ought he to use that body to protect his lord when in danger.

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The knight's good steed that carried him into the battle was an important part of his equipment. The powerful horses of Spain were always liked by knights, but the Arabian coursers were even greater favorites. The horses of the Arabs had been petted and loved and treated almost as members of their masters' families for so many generations that they



KNIGHT ON HORSEBACK

were fearless servants and devoted friends. If the knight was thrown from his seat, the horse had no thought of running away, but stood quietly beside him, waiting for him to mount. The horse as well as his rider was protected by armor, so that head, chest, and flanks were safe from spear thrusts. He was arrayed in trappings as handsome as his master could afford. The housings, or saddlecloths, were

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often of rich material and decorated with embroidery. On his head, he, too, wore a crest, and around his neck a collar of little bells. Chaucer says of a monk who liked to go hunting,

And whan he rood men myghte his brydel here  
Gynglen in a whistlyng wynd as clere,  
And eek as loude as doth the chapel belle.

It was on the bridle, however, that the knight lavished his pennies. This was ornamented with gold and silver and embroidery, and even with precious stones, that flashed and sparkled as the steed bore his rider proudly into the contest. After the combat of the day was over, the tent pitched, and the supper prepared, the faithful horse was not forgotten, and one of the early pictures shows him eating comfortably from a crib in his master's tent close to the knight's own table.

## **JOUSTS AND TOURNAMENTS**

AFTER the young squire had become a knight, he sometimes remained in the castle of his lord for a time or he went back to his father's home. In either case life must have seemed a little tame after all the excitement of entering knighthood. It is no wonder that he was eager to go out into the world to try his new armor and do honor to his lady by his deeds of valor.

There were several ways in which a knight might prove his worthiness to enter chivalry. The simplest was to mount his horse and ride out in quest of adventures. His bright shining armor was protected from rain and he himself from heat by his unsoiled surcoat. Behind him rode his squire, carrying his master's shield and helmet and an armful of lances. The squire was not always a rash, hot-headed young fellow by any means. A man could hardly maintain knighthood properly without a generous income, and many a squire who was fully qualified to enter the ranks of the knights never went beyond the second grade in chivalry. It was well for the venturesome knight errant, or wandering knight, if his squire was some sturdy warrior of middle age

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who would sympathize with his master's thirst for gallant achievements, but would hold him back from foolish recklessness. The country was wild and rough. Deeds of violence were common, and the young knight might be fortunate enough to find an adventure ready made. He might discover that some maiden fair had been torn from her friends; and he could perhaps rescue her and restore her to them. He might stop at a friendly castle to spend the night and find that its lord would be glad of his aid to defend it against some expected attack of its enemies. Even if all was peaceful, there might be a chance of a contest, or joust. When he appeared at the gate, the porter might tell him that it was the "custom of the castle" for every knight who wished a lodging to joust with one or two of the knightly inmates or with the lord of the castle. If the knight errant vanquished his challenger, he should have the best lodging that the castle afforded; but if he was overcome, he might go his way, or so the porter declared. Visitors were so welcome, however, in the rather lonely castles that I doubt whether any promising stranger was ever allowed to go forth to make his lodgment in the forest. Sometimes the stranger himself was the challenger; and when he came to a castle gate, he would bid the porter say to the lord of the castle that a knight errant would gladly joust with him or some other brave knight. The stranger was welcomed and led within the walls, and the word was carried through the castle that a joust was to take place. Then ladies and knights and squires, the great folk and the small folk of the place, all betook themselves to the tilting-ground. This was

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a green, grassy, level spot within the courtyard, surrounded by turf banks for the lookers-on. The knights took their places, one at each end of the open space. They bent low upon their horses and couched their lances. Then they put spurs to their steeds and dashed together with all their might, each trying to strike the shield of the other with such force that he would fall to the ground. Sometimes both spears were shivered. Then the men would take fresh weapons and try a second bout.

Another way by which an ardent knight errant often made sure of a contest was by taking his stand at a bridge or where two roads crossed and challenging every passing knight to joust with him. If darkness came and no adversary had been found, he would lay down his shield, take his helmet for a pillow, say his prayers, and go to sleep, hoping for better luck in the morning. Sometimes the knight errant, instead of simply challenging the other to a contest, would declare that his lady was the fairest woman in the world, and that he was ready to fight any knight in the land to maintain her preëminence in beauty. The opposing knight was of course equally ready to declare that *his* lady-love was far more beautiful. The question must be decided by a combat. This usually meant three courses. The spears were carefully "bated," that is, blunted. This was often done by heading them with a "coronal," a sort of crown ending in from two to six blunt points. These would take hold on shield or helmet, but would do no injury to the wearer. Such a contest was called a *joute à plaisance*, or joust of peace. Unless

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something happened to arouse the wrath of the combatants, there was rarely any serious injury done to either of them; but if two knights fought in anger, using deadly weapons, their combat was known as a *joute à outrance*, that is, a joust to the extreme. After the contest was done, the victor spoke in somewhat this wise to the vanquished: "I bid you make your way to my lady, through whose favor I have won this victory, and submit yourself wholly to her grace



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and mercy." As one knight after another presented himself to the lady, she must certainly have been fully convinced that her champion was true to her. Moreover, those were times of danger and violence, and every evidence of his courage and valor was one

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more proof of his ability to guard her and protect her.

These chance jousts at crossroads and castles were good practice in the use of arms, but the grand opportunity for a knight not only to show excellence in knighthood but to manifest ability under the very eyes of his lady-love was found in the tournament, or encounter of many knights in a sort of mimic battle. These tournaments were given by wealthy nobles or by the king himself, and elaborate preparations were made for them long beforehand. The invitations were carried by the heralds of the giver of the tournament. A castle guard would report that a herald with trumpets and escort was making his way to the castle gate. The gate was straightway thrown open, and with a great clattering of hoofs the little cavalcade rode over the draw-bridge and through the low, dark gateway into the courtyard. The trumpeter blew a blast to call the attention of the folk of the castle. He might have saved his breath, however, for long before this, lords and ladies, knights, squires, pages, and servants, even down to the scullions in the kitchen, had hurried into the courtyard or had found some other place where they could hear what the herald had to say. Then came the proclamation of the tournament, addressed to all who would show their right to knighthood and manifest their respect for ladies. The place, the hour, the prizes, the armor and weapons required, and sometimes even the number of squires and attendants that each knight must bring were proclaimed. The herald blew his trumpet and

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gave his announcement not only at castles, but, wherever markets were held. Sometimes, if the tournament was to be of unusual splendor, invitations were sent not only throughout the land of the giver, but even into neighboring countries.

Traveling was slow work, therefore the invitations must have been given long before the time set for the tournament, but I fancy that there

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was not a young knight in the land who did not, on the very day of the herald's visit, begin to polish his armor and take a look at his spears to make sure that their ashen shafts showed no sign of flaw. As for the ladies, they, too, had their share of preparations to make, for they must appear in their most sumptuous attire to grace the occasion. Each one hoped that her own special knight would cover himself with glory, and then she would fain look her fairest that all might have respect for the choice that he had made.

The journey to a tournament might be long, but it was safer than other journeys, for even rulers of hostile countries would have thought it unworthy of them to interfere with those who were on their way to a trial of arms. As for the king of whatever land it might be in which the tournament was to take place, he was always delighted with any occasion that gave his knights practice. From far and near little companies of knights with the ladies of the noble households and the squires and pages and servants in attendance rode merrily toward the place of meeting. Once there, they were welcomed by their host, and lodgings were arranged for them. Some were to sleep within the castle itself, some in a neighboring village, some in tents belonging to the lord of the castle, and some had brought their own tents. Wherever a knight was lodged, he planted his spear and banner, and over the entrance he set up the design which was on his coat of arms. These designs were known to all the other knights, and they were carefully scrutinized. In the earlier days of

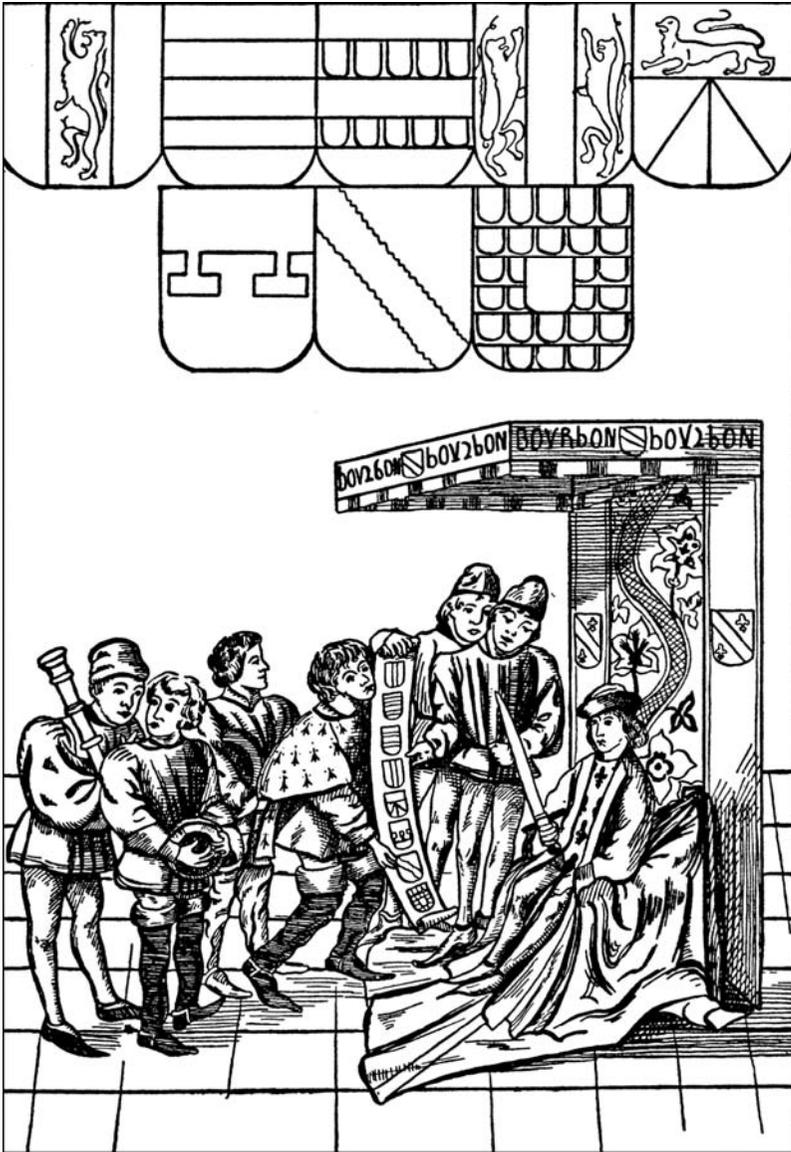
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chivalry, only knights of noble descent were allowed to join in a tournament, but in later times not only men of humble birth who had been knighted for their bravery, but even squires were admitted to the privileges of the lists. Occasionally, too, a man who had some good reason for not revealing his name was allowed to join the tourney. Humble birth, then, might be pardoned and concealment of one's name might sometimes be overlooked, but there was one thing that was never forgiven, and that was unworthiness. If a knight had been false to any woman or had broken his word or

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HERALD SHOWING ARMORIAL BEARINGS OF CONTESTANTS

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had shown cowardice or ingratitude, he might as well have remained at home, for he would be forbidden to take any part in the tournament and his banner would be torn down in disgrace.

The courtyard of the castle must have seemed like a village in a time of holiday. There were old friends who saw each other but seldom; there were knights whose rumored bravery every one wanted to see tested; there were gallant youths and maidens fair. There was talk of other tournaments and the feats which had made them remembered, of hawking and hunting, of new castles that had been built and old ones that had been valiantly defended, of weapons and warfare and horses and heroes. There were little trial jousts between knights. There were feasting and music and dancing and singing and exchanging of gifts and plighting of troth.

On the night before the tournament everybody went to bed early; but when the morning had come, the courtyard was no longer a village on a holiday, it was rather a village hard at work. No one was idle, for the handles of the shields must be tried, the armor must have its final polish; straps, rivets, and buckles must be examined for the last time. Horses must be fed and rubbed down. Even the musicians were testing their clarions and kettle-drums and pipes and trumpets as if the success of the whole day depended upon their being in full tone. Everybody was discussing those who were to contest. One was a favorite because he had distinguished himself elsewhere, another because of his great strength or his determined manner or his

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skill in managing his horse. Of course every lady had her favorite knight; but the ladies were bound to be fair, for they were umpires if any dispute arose, and the prizes were presented according to their decision. Early in the morning the contestants had been to mass, and now, when all was ready, every one turned toward the lists. These had been prepared long before. A level oblong area had been fenced off with a double row of wooden railings. Between the two was a space saved for those who were to assist injured knights or who held some position of responsibility. Outside of this space wooden galleries, often very handsome, had been built for the spectators. These galleries were gorgeous with tapestry and banners and with the bright-colored dresses and sparkling jewels of the ladies. The lord of the tournament had already announced what arms it would be allowable to use. As a general thing, it was forbidden to bring into the lists any weapon with a sharp point. The broadsword, but not the pointed sword, was sometimes permitted. The points of the lances were removed or protected by coronals or covered with pieces of wood called rockets. The heralds now proclaimed the rules of the contest. He who broke most lances was to have the first prize; but they must be broken in strict accordance with the laws of the tournament; for instance, to break a spear by striking a man out of his saddle counted three points, but to break one by striking the saddle itself made a loss of one point. To meet coronal with coronal twice was regarded as worthy of a prize, but it counted less than to unhorse a man with a spear thrust. The prize

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THE FEAT OF ARMS, ST. INGLEBERT'S

was lost to any one who struck a horse, or struck a man when his back was turned or when he was unarmed. To break a lance across the breast of an opponent was looked upon as a shame because it showed poor riding, and to ride well was the most essential qualification of a knight. Shakespeare laughs at the “puny tilter, that spurs his horse but on one side.” If for a moment of rest or for any other reason a man took off his helmet, no one might touch him until it was replaced; but to prevent any abuse of the privilege, he who removed his helmet twice for any other reason than because his horse had failed him lost all chance of a prize.

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After the constable had examined the arms of the knights, he looked carefully at their saddle fastenings to make sure that no one proposed to stick to his horse by leather straps rather than by good horsemanship. When all was ready, the heralds cried, "Come forth, knights, come forth!" and a glittering cavalcade made its way into the lists. The horses in their superb trappings, their bridles blazing with jewels, pranced and caracoled. Sometimes every knight was led by a chain of gold or silver, the other end of which was held in the white hand of some lady fair. The armor gleamed and flashed in the sun. Armorial bearings shone forth on the brightly polished shields. From jeweled helmets and from lances fluttered gloves or ribbons belonging to the ladies who were watching so eagerly, and from many a knightly shoulder hung the richly ornamented sleeve of some comely maiden.

The knights were in two groups separated by a rope, one party at either end of the lists. Behind them rode their squires, often as many as three to a knight. "Let go," cried the ladies. The trumpets sounded. "Do your duty, valiant knights!" the heralds shouted. The rope was snatched aside. The knights bent low, put spurs to their horses, and with lances in rest dashed forward to meet their opponents, each one calling the name of his lady-love. "The eyes of the beautiful behold you! Onward, onward!" cried the spectators. The minstrels played, the trumpets blared, the plain was shaken with the trampling of the horses; the din of arms and the cracking of stout ashen spears filled the

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air. Men were thrown from their steeds, blood mingled with the dust—and the first course had been run.

Sometimes there were several such encounters; and when the end had come, the heralds cried, “Fold your banners!” and soon the lists were deserted. After the knights had bathed and dressed, they met the ladies in the great hall of the castle and banqueted and made merry. The scene for which all waited was yet to come; and when the feasting had been brought to an end, the fair lady who had been chosen “Queen of Love and Beauty” took her seat upon a dais. The heralds led up to her one brave knight after another, rehearsing in a loud voice the claims of each to a prize; and as they knelt before her, she presented to each one the reward which in the judgment of the ladies was due to his valor. This was sometimes a silver helmet or one richly ornamented with gold, a crown of gold, a golden clasp, or perhaps a diamond, ruby, or sapphire, set in a heavy golden ring. With every gift the “Queen” made a little speech which always closed with the hope that the recipient might be happy with his lady-love. “The victory was owing to the favor of my lady which I wore in my helmet,” was the proper reply for the knight to make. After the prizes had all been awarded, gifts were made to the heralds. Then followed a ball; and here not the man of noblest birth, but the man who had shown most valor in the lists was most highly honored. With music and dancing the long, bright, joyous day came to its close.



CONFERRING PRIZES

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Frequently a single day was not enough to satisfy the love of knightly prowess, and on the second day the lists were given over to the squires. They wore the armor of their respective knights and strove their best to do it honor. Prizes were presented to them by young maidens. Sometimes there was even a third day of tilting, and in that case both knights and squires took part.

Such was the general course of tournaments, but they differed at different times and in different countries and according to the wishes and rulings of the givers. Sometimes if the leaders of the two sides chanced to be enemies or rivals, the tournament became a little war. Deadly weapons were then smuggled into the lists, and the ground was drenched with blood. The intention of the tournament, however, was that the utmost courtesy should be shown and that an opportunity should be given to manifest skill in arms and cultivate it rather than to wound or maim or destroy life. At best it was a rough and sometimes a fatal sport, but it did teach men that even in the midst of the most eager struggles for victory it was possible for them to recognize laws and exercise self-restraint.

An appeal to arms was often made to settle questions of justice. If two men claimed the same piece of ground for instance, they might decide the ownership by a contest. Even if a man was accused of crime, he was sometimes allowed to prove his innocence—if he could—by showing himself or his chosen champion the victor in a duel. Under Charlemagne a test of endurance was legally used

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when two men differed. They were made to take their stand before a cross with their arms stretched out. The one whose arms first dropped lost his suit.

In charges of serious crime, however, the people of the Middle Ages often used methods that might well appall the most innocent. One was to bind the accused, hand and foot, and let him down by a rope into the water. It was believed that if he was guilty, the water would refuse to receive him and he would float; but that if he was innocent, he would sink. It is to be hoped that the officers never forgot to rescue the man who sank. Far worse than this was the ordeal by boiling water. This was a matter of much ceremony. It took place in the church. First, a cross, a censer, and relics of the saints were borne into the building. The priest followed, carrying a copy of the Gospels. He chanted a litany and the seven penitential Psalms. He prayed that the truth might be revealed, and that if the accused had had recourse to herbs or magic, it might not save him. Holy water was sprinkled about, particularly upon the kettle, in order that any illusions of the devil might be driven away. Then with many prayers the hand of the accused was thoroughly washed. He drank a cup of holy water and plunged his hand into the boiling kettle. The hand was sealed up, and at the end of three days it was formally examined. If it showed no sign of a burn, the man was declared innocent; but if there was a blister "half as large as a walnut," this was regarded as proof of his guilt.

Another ordeal was that of the hot iron. This sometimes consisted of carrying redhot iron seven

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or nine paces; sometimes of walking upon burning ploughshares. In the eleventh century Queen Emma of England was accused of crime and was brought into the church for the test. The pavement was carefully swept and nine redhot ploughshares were laid upon it. The queen's shoes and stockings were taken off and her cloak thrown aside. Two bishops, one on either hand, led her toward the iron. Throughout the church there was sobbing and weeping. "Help her, help her! Saint Swithin, help her!" the people cried. The bishops, too, were in tears; but they bade her not to fear, for God would not suffer the innocent to come to harm. Then she stepped upon the ploughshares, one after another. The old account says that she felt no pain and that her feet showed no injury.

The theory of these trials was that God would always save the guiltless; but many explanations have been attempted of the reason why hot water and hot iron did not burn. If the water, or the melted lead, which was sometimes used, was hot enough, feats similar to these have been performed. In regard to the test of the redhot iron, it has been suggested that during the many prayers that seem to have been said after the irons were laid in place, ploughshares on a stone floor would cool very rapidly. Again, we are reminded that all these trials were in the hands of the priests, that the people were expecting miracles, and that if the priests wished to save a man, they could easily arrange some deception or could harden his skin by some ointment—only no one can guess what the ointment could have been.

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People connected with the Church were not obliged to undergo such experiences; for, no matter of what crime they were accused, they could always demand a trial before the Church courts. This was called "benefit of clergy." In some of the Church courts of the thirteenth century, if a man accused of crime swore that he was innocent and could bring in twelve of his friends who would lay their hands on some holy relics and swear that they believed him, he was allowed to go free. To escape in this way was not quite so easy as it looks; for the general belief was that a perjurer would probably be made a dwarf or would be unable to remove his hands or would even be struck dead. Naturally, then, the *compurgators*, or fellow-swearers, were somewhat nervous, and if they made the least mistake in repeating the required form of words, their oaths were of no avail. Not only priests, but all their assistants, even to the door-keeper, were allowed benefit of clergy. In some places if a man could read a single line, he was allowed the same privilege. It is even said that the same verse of the Psalms was always used as a test. Besides the comparative comfort of the trial, the punishments of the Church courts were exceedingly light when contrasted with the brutal penalties of the kings' courts. But for the man accused of serious crime who could not make out that he had any connection with the Church or any "book learning," there was generally little hope of escaping some one of the ordeals which have just been described.