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HARRAP'S READERS OF TO-DAY

**FOR THE CLASS-ROOM AND
SILENT READING**

**CHIVALRY & SOCIAL LIFE
IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

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CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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By

DOROTHY MARGARET STUART

AUTHOR OF

"THE BOY THROUGH THE AGES" "HISTORICAL
SONGS AND BALLADS" "SWORD SONGS" ETC



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FOREWORD

THE purpose of this book is to render more pleasant—and therefore more easy—the pursuit of mediæval studies by young students: to give, as no text-book strictly concerned with the broad lines and fundamental facts of history can give, some sense of the colour, the cadence, the movement, of lives lived long since in a world that has passed away.

Many books, many times greater in bulk and wider in scope than the present volume, would be needed in order to bring the whole complicated, brightly hued, gay, and yet gruesome pageant of the Middle Ages before the mental vision. Just perspective is here almost as difficult of attainment as those painters found it who wrought ere Paolo Uccello had mastered and demonstrated that art. It is enough if, like them, we are able to invest with vivid reality the figures and objects in the foreground of the picture.

A survey such as this must of necessity be irregular and incomplete, for many things must be left out, and few can be studied from more angles than one. Yet something will have been gained if the reader feels a new sense of contact with remote realities, and if the

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colours as well as the outlines of the past become more distinct to the eyes of his mind.

It may be that I shall find myself questioned as to why I have vouchsafed no place either to the craftsmen of the towns or the tillers of the fields in mediæval England. To such questions I would make answer that in a later volume both shall, God willing, play their part.

D. M. S.

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CHAPTER I

THE KNIGHT AND THE SQUIRE

IN the Middle Ages—that is to say, from the twelfth to the fifteenth century of the Christian era—three great ideas exercised a powerful influence over the daily lives of men. They were chivalry, monasticism, and the trade guild. We shall consider each in turn, and we shall see that each represented a sort of brotherhood in which fighting men, thinking men, and buying-and-selling men instinctively bound themselves together.

What was a knight? How did he become one? What were the privileges and responsibilities of the knightly caste? Here, as so often happens, the history and the inner meaning are summed up in a word. 'Knight' in English comes from the Old German *Knecht*, a servant or vassal. The knight was often the servitor of some great lord, baron, or prince; always he was—in theory at least—the servitor of his king. *Chevalier* in French, *cavaliere* in Italian, *caballero* in Spanish, all mean the same thing—a *horseman*. A knight always went into battle on horseback. In a mediæval army the knights represented the cavalry, but that branch of the military forces was composed of

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officers only. It was not until a much later date that men-at-arms were mounted.

The knight, in whatever country of Europe he happened to dwell, was a member of a great fraternity, extending throughout Christendom, sharing certain simple but very definite principles, codes, and customs. Every one understood the significance of the heraldic shield and the golden spurs. No one who was not himself either a knight or a priest could confer the honour of knighthood upon anyone else. The ceremony, however, might be performed in three different ways :

1. By the giving of the *acolade*, the touch of the sword on the shoulder, on the field of battle. In the Plantagenet period a knight thus honoured was called a 'knight banneret' because upon that glorious occasion the points attached to his pennon were rent off "and thus the small flag was reduced to the *square* form of the banner by which henceforth he was to be distinguished."¹

2. By a purely ecclesiastical ceremony, for which the proper form was set forth in the service books of the Roman Church.

3. By a ceremony of which the greater part was performed by priests and in some sacred edifice, though the giving of the *acolade* and the buckling on of the

¹ Boutell, *English Heraldry*.

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golden spurs characteristic of knighthood were assigned to some illustrious layman.

It was when the second method was chosen that the young candidate for knighthood kept vigil over his armour before the high altar, and, on the morrow, took a symbolical (and actual) bath—usually in a wooden tub covered by a sort of tent—wherein all his sins were supposed to be washed away.

We have seen—and William the Conqueror saw—that every knight is in theory the servant and the defender of the throne. The first and greatest of our Norman kings, scenting danger in the growing power of the barons, encouraged his liegemen to seek knightly honours, and even made a law that every gentleman whose estates were worth £20 a year (a much larger sum than now) should do so. The idea of knighthood was well established by the time of the Conquest, but its origins are remote and obscure. Some scholars descry in the ancient Roman equestrian order (*equestris ordo*) the germ of the Christian chivalric idea; others quote Tacitus to prove that the Germanic tribes had some such system; others, again, detect Saracenic influence, and it was certainly from their Moslem enemies that the Frankish warriors of Charlemagne learnt to fight on horseback. Charlemagne and his twelve paladins were, indeed, the prototypes of Arthur and

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his twelve knights, and of all the Orders of Knighthood later called into being.

The first Order of Knighthood founded in Christendom was that of the Star, instituted by Robert the Pious of France in 1022. (We cannot count the Order of the Ampulla, said to have been created by Clovis I some five hundred years earlier, as the membership was restricted to four persons, and their principal duty was to carry the *ampulla*, the flask of consecrated oil, at the coronations of the French kings in Rheims Cathedral.) The Knights of the Star were thirty in number, and the collar of the Order was composed of threefold golden chains studded alternately with red and white enamelled roses, and completed with a pendant in the form of a golden star.

As the chivalric idea took a stronger and stronger hold upon the imagination of kings and princes Orders of Knighthood multiplied all over Europe. But it must be remembered that *every* knight was not necessarily a member of some such Order. The founders, and their successors, the heads, of these Orders chose a limited number of gently born warriors, almost always knights *already*, whom they honoured by election. The 'common or garden' knight was a singularly lucky person if he were elected.

The importance of chivalry to the world in general and the principles for which it stood are thus summed

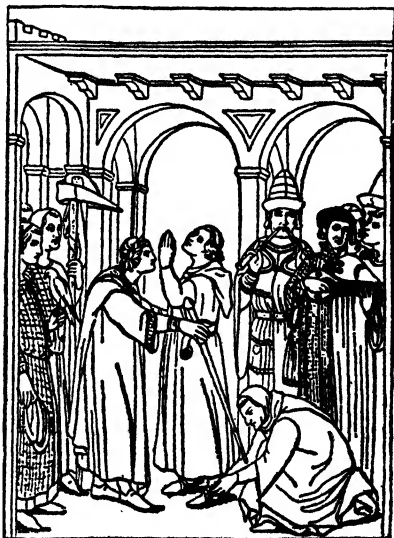
THE KNIGHT AND THE SQUIRE

up in a curious thirteenth-century French poem (translated by "F. S. E."):

If the world knew no Chivalry
Small worth would then its lordship be ;
For Holy Church it aye defends
And ready help to justice lends
'Gainst men whose deeds this world do stain :
Ne'er can I from its praise refrain. . . .
Were not the wicked kept in awe
Good men should stint of life and law.

Thus, in theory always and in practice often, the duties of a knight were to defend Holy Church, to protect the helpless, to punish evildoers, and to be ready to die in defence of his knightly honour and in fulfilment of his knightly vows.

The poem alluded to above contains a very curious and interesting account of the actual ceremony of



THE CEREMONY OF MAKING A KNIGHT

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making a knight, and of how, after purification in the bath, the candidate was wrapped first in a robe of snow-white linen, symbolizing the stainlessness of the life he must now lead, and then in a crimson mantle, symbolizing the blood he must be willing to shed in a righteous cause; finally he is given hose of black, to remind him of

*La mort et la terre où girrez,
D'où venistes, et où irez.*

(Of death and of thy mother earth,
Where thou must go, whence thou hadst
birth.)

The sharpness of the gilded rowel spurs is here said to symbolize the alacrity with which a knight should gallop into the fray; the double edge of the sword signifies the double virtues of justice and loyalty.

Setting aside the knight-errant, the valiant wanderer in search of adventure, whom we shall meet again later on, and considering the knight as a unit in the nation during peace-time, we shall find closely associated with the chivalric idea the *manorial system*.

Roughly speaking, the manor was the estate of a knight, the manor-house (often known as 'the Hall') was his home, and he was lord over the lives and fortunes of the people, the *villeins*, dwelling on his lands. The word comes from the Latin verb *manere*, to remain, and signified originally a dwelling-place;

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hence also 'mansion,' and 'manse.' In each such estate, under the feudal system, the total area was divided into the *demesne*, the holding of the lord, the arable and meadow-lands in which the villeins had a share, and woods and rough pasture common to all. The tenants owed certain duties to their lord, the work of their hands in peace-time, the services of certain



A NORMAN MANOR-HOUSE

of their numbers in his retinue in time of war. Courts called Manorial Courts were held, not so much to punish evildoers as to prevent infringements of manorial rights, and while a steward and a bailiff watched over the interests of the lord, a functionary known as the *manor-reeve* represented the tenants.

Each of these manors maintained a family of gentle birth and of knightly rank. The head of the family was almost invariably a knight, and any one of his sons might hope to win the golden spurs in due course. Thus the great body of the knightly order consisted of country gentlemen—'country squires,' as they came to be called at a much later date. Their sons and their younger brothers were the raw stuff of which knights

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were made. Such of them as did not follow the career of arms usually entered the Church. In the later Middle Ages men of good birth began to enter the legal profession, which at first was almost inextric-



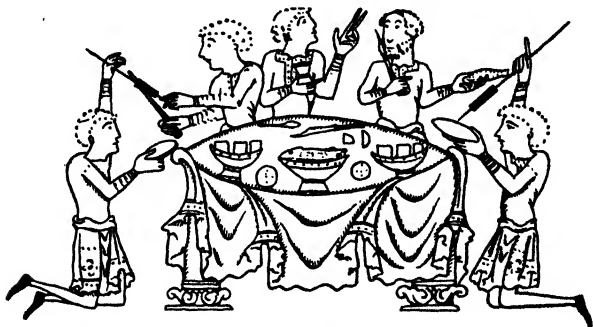
HALL OF A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY MANOR-HOUSE

ably involved with the ecclesiastical. The cadets of impoverished knightly houses were sometimes glad to betake themselves to commerce—as witness Richard Whittington—but the ranks of the merchants were chiefly recruited from the class immediately below that to which the knights and their kinsfolk belonged.

How was a knight trained? For obviously he could not learn the duties of his calling by instinct or by

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imitation only! There were three well-defined stages in the career of the typical gentleman of high birth in the Middle Ages. He began as a page. At the age of twelve or thirteen his father placed him in the household of some important nobleman, the owner not of one manor but of many, and there, with two or three



ANGLO-SAXONS AT DINNER

From a manuscript in the British Museum

other boys of the same age and rank, he learned courtesy, table-manners, the legends of Troy and Camelot, of Hector, Arthur, and Bevis of Hampton, the arts of riding and jousting, the use of sword, battle-axe, and lance, and enough of the elements of heraldry to understand the coats of arms of other families as well as of his own.

At the age of sixteen or seventeen the page became an *esquire* (literally, a shield-bearer) and was especially

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attached to the service of one particular knight.¹ The duties of an esquire, or a squire, as he soon came to be called, were much more arduous than those of a page. Not only had he to carry the shield and take charge of the spare horses of his knight; he had also



CHAUCER'S SQUIÉR
From the Ellesmere MS.

to buckle on his master's spurs, close the rivets in his armour, and, if so desired, comb *and curl* the knightly hair. That he often curled his own is made clear from Chaucer's famous and delightful description of the "Yong Squiér," whose locks were "cruille" (*i.e.*, curled) as if they had been "leyd in presse." We shall meet this Squiér again when we come to consider chivalry

in literature and in art, but what interests us at the moment is the list of his accomplishments:

Wel koude he sitte on hors and fairé ryde;
He koudé songés make, and wel endyte,

¹ All the great noblemen of the mediæval period were knights *as well*, but the principle of hereditary knighthood was not introduced until James I and VI invented *baronets* in 1611.

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Juste¹ and eek daunce, and weel purtreye²
and write. . . .

Curteis he was, lowely and servysáble,
And carf³ biforn his fader at the table.

Thus we see that, in addition to riding and jousting, the perfect squire had to have some knowledge of drawing and music, prosody and carving, dancing and penmanship! Carving was not the least difficult of his tasks, for in addition to ordinary game and poultry he had to tackle such birds as heron, peacock, bustard, and crane.

Chaucer has left us a picture of the ideal knight as well as of the ideal squire, and the picture is indeed a charming one:

A knyght ther was and that a worthy man
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To riden out he loved chivalry,
Trouthe and honóur, fredom and curteisie.

This knight had fought in far and strange lands, in Russia, Egypt, Spain, and Anatolia. His fustian tunic was stained with the rust of his coat of mail, for in his haste to set forth on the Canterbury pilgrimage on his return from one of his warlike wanderings he had not paused to provide himself with newer and finer array; from which we may learn that simple and fervent piety was another knightly virtue. Yet this battered

¹ joust.

² draw.

³ carved.

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and scarred warrior was gentle as a woman, modest and mannerly in discourse, just and benign to all men.

He never yet no vileynye ne sayde
In al his lyf unto no maner wight.
He was a verray parfit, gentil knyght.

The knight-errant, or wandering knight, was a familiar and romantic figure of mediæval life, and even more so of mediæval legend. He was usually a youthful warrior who had been newly dubbed, and, eager for adventures, went out into the perilous and colourful world, attended by a faithful follower to whom was given the courtesy-title of 'squire,' though *he* was not a candidate for knightly honours, and probably belonged to the superior yeoman class. These yeomen were small landholders, not technically 'gentlemen,' that is to say, not entitled to armorial bearings nor capable of attaining knighthood,¹ but forming a solid and worthy stratum between the gentry and the peasant and artisan class. Every son of a yeoman was himself a yeoman, whether he actually held land personally or not. Medley, in his *English Constitutional History*, says that in the fifteenth century the yeomen represented "the small freeholders of the feudal manor."

¹ For a time, as the old ballad of *The Squire of Low Degree* bears witness, it seemed as if the knightly ranks were to be thrown open to men of non-gentle birth who had given proofs of exceptional valour, but the movement was spasmodic and short-lived.

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The son of such a freeholder would—if he had a taste for adventure—be only too eager to follow the son of the lord of the manor in his quest of danger, glory, and—sometimes—gain. Glory was the chief objective of the knight-errant, but he did not disdain more solid rewards, and these might come to him in several different ways: by gifts, or grants of land, from kings or princes whom he had served well in battle, by the ransoms of noble captives, or by the dowry of a fair bride won by his prowess in the lists or on the field.

The world into which the knight-errant and his trusty follower thus boldly plunged differed in many respects from the world of to-day. Supposing them to be Englishmen, they would find themselves journeying through a country of dense forests and pathless marshes, bleak heaths and grim hills, broken here and there by strips of cultivated land, where manors stood, by villages, large or small, each with its church and its mill, and, less frequently, by fair-sized towns encircled with strong walls.

Thanks to the energy of the Romans, England in the Middle Ages was covered with a network of roads; but as these fell into disrepair there arose no second race of great engineers and road-builders to make them sound and solid again. The badness of the non-Roman roads was almost proverbial. In theory, the land-

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holders were responsible for their upkeep and the tenants were bound to give their labour for that purpose; but theories are seldom translated quite successfully into practice, and the badness of many mediæval roads was such that wheeled vehicles constantly became bogged in them, and the usual and much safer



A STATE CARRIAGE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

method of travel was on foot, on horseback, or by horse-litter. And it must be remembered that the most important of these highways were the channels along which poured a tremendous stream of wayfarers, merchants, pilgrims, pedlars, messengers, strolling minstrels, mendicant friars, poor scholars wending to and from the universities, and bands of thieves and footpads.

Along such a road, and in company with such a motley horde of fellow-travellers, the knight-errant would set forth. His accomplishments, even if they

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were less numerous and elegant than those of Chaucer's Squire, would include, as we have seen, a thorough



A PILGRIM OF THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

Morris Meredith Williams

mastery of horsemanship, of the use of the sword, battleaxe, and lance, and a knowledge of the legends of chivalric romance, and of the etiquette and the code

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of conduct observed by gentlemen of his class all over Christendom. Unless he were intended for the honourable calling of a herald, a mediæval gentleman would not necessarily familiarize himself with all the ancient and complicated lore of heraldry, but he would certainly be familiar with its elementary prin-



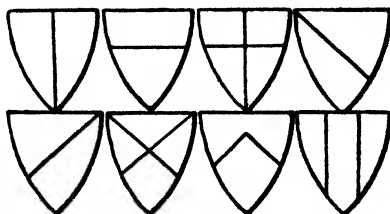
A FRENCH HERALD OF THE
FIFTEENTH CENTURY

ciples and interested in their application. Not only had he a family coat of arms of his own, which he might hope to augment by some deed of outstanding valour; he would be able, thanks to his knowledge of the herald's craft, to identify by their armorial bearings many of the knights and nobles whom he would afterward encounter on his travels, in camp, at Court, or even on the field of battle. The veriest 'prentice-page could have told you at once what were the *tinctures* of heraldry. These were two metals, five colours, and eight furs. The colours were (and are) known as *azure* (blue), *gules* (red), *sable* (black), *vert* (green), *purpure* (purple). In an *uncoloured* representation of a shield or other armorial device these colours are represented as follows: azure, by horizontal lines;

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gules, by perpendicular lines; sable, by a chequerwork of horizontal and perpendicular lines; vert, by lines sloping diagonally from left to right; purpure, by lines sloping diagonally from right to left. The two heraldic metals *or* (gold) and *argent* (silver) are represented in the first instance by a closely spotted and in the second by a blank surface. The eight heraldic furs

include three varieties of ermine, and two of vair, and their representation is a complicated matter, involving much placing of white, black, and gold spots on gold,



PRIMARY DIVISIONS OF THE HERALDIC SHIELD

white, and black backgrounds, and the tracing of a perfect cross-word puzzle of argent and azure.

Our page—and therefore, of course, our squire and knight—would also know how a shield is divided; that when a line is drawn *down* the centre it is *parted per pale*; that when one is drawn *across* the centre it is *parted per fesse*; that when the downward and transverse lines meet in the centre it is *parted per cross* or *quarterly*; that a dividing line running from left to right is a *bend*, and from right to left a *bend sinister*; while a shield in which two bends *meet*, forming a St

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Andrew's cross, is *parted per saltire*, that one divided by a pyramidal line with its apex in the centre of the field is *parted per chevron*, and that one divided into three sections by two vertical lines is *parted per tierce*. A simple law in English heraldry lays down that metal must not be placed upon metal, nor colour upon colour. So if our knight-errant encountered a knight upon whose shield a golden device appeared against a silver background, or a red one against a background of blue, he would conclude at once, and probably with good reason, that the stranger was no Englishman. There was—and, since heraldry is not yet a dead art, we may alter the tense and say there is—an astonishing variety in the objects depicted on knightly shields: animals, real and fabulous, birds, flowers, trees, feathers, swords, daggers, wheat-sheaves, stars, ships, keys, and salamanders jostle each other there.

Some ancient devices are really puns upon the names of those who bore them. Islip, Abbot of Westminster, for example, bore as his personal device a representation of a man falling from a tree and (presumably) exclaiming "I slip!" and also a human eye beside a *slip*, or small cutting, from a tree. Both the device and the motto on a shield may crystallize some far-off, romantic episode in the history of the family bearing them. Such are the device—an oak-tree half sawn asunder—and the motto—"Through"—of the ducal family of

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Hamilton. To find their origin we must go back to the stormy days of Robert the Bruce. A certain Scottish knight, Sir Gilbert Hamilton, being then at the English Court, was tactless enough to express openly his admiration for the Bruce, whose name was odious in English ears. John le Despencer thereupon struck the tactless Scot, who promptly challenged him to single combat. They met on the morrow, and Hamilton, having slain his foe outright, fled northward, with the English in hot pursuit, and with no other attendant than his faithful squire. Near the Border the fugitives encountered some wood-cutters whom they persuaded to allow them to help in the felling of a great oak-tree, so that the pursuing English should not recognize them. They were busy with their arduous and unfamiliar task when their foes came upon the scene. Hamilton's squire, greatly alarmed, started, and looked anxiously round, but the knight, continuing to ply the saw stoutly, steadied him with the one word, *Through!* and the English horsemen galloped unsuspectingly past.



HAMILTON CREST
AND MOTTO

The Arthurian romances throw floods of light upon the romantic idea of knight-errantry. We read there how divers gallant warriors, Sir Epinogris, Sir Dinadan, Sir Tristram, Sir Kay, rode through forests, challenged

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and fought other knights as bold as they, defended or attacked towers and bridges, and obtained hospitality in castles by defeating the owners thereof in (more or less) friendly combat. Many castles were, apparently,



KNIGHTS ENTERING THE LISTS

provided with tilting-grounds in anticipation of such episodes. Thus we read that "Sir Percival passed the water, and when he came unto the castle-gate he said to the porter, 'Go thou unto the good knight within the castle, and tell him that here is come a knight-errant to joust with him.' 'Sir,' said the porter, 'ride ye within the castle, and there shall ye find a common

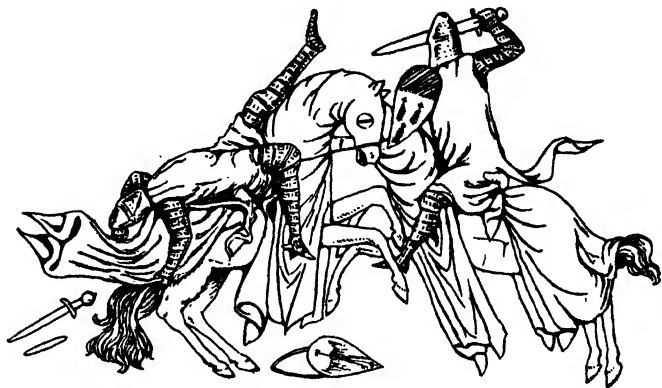
THE KNIGHT AND THE SQUIRE

place for jousting, that lords and ladies may behold you.'” These heroes of romance seem to have been fortunate in that they never lacked either adversaries or rewards. Sometimes the adversaries were decidedly alarming—giants and ogres; sometimes the rewards were of dazzling splendour—well-dowered princesses for brides, or whole provinces over which to reign. But in real life—which was more prosaic and colourless than romance even in the Middle Ages—the knight-errant usually had to make sure beforehand that a joust or tournament was to be held on some particular date, at some particular place, and to enrol himself as a competitor almost as unheroically as does a competitor in a golf- or tennis-tournament to-day.

These formal combats were a recognized feature in mediæval life, and were a source of great interest and amusement to all who were permitted to witness them, from the fair ladies sitting under a canopy on a raised stand to the humble archers and yeomen huddled together by the ropes or palings which enclosed the lists. Sometimes pageantry played a great part, and there was little or no real danger to the combatants. Such was the case at a tournament held in Windsor Park in the sixth year of Edward I, when the helmets of the knights were of gilt or silvered leather, their shields of wood, and their weapons also of parchment, painted to represent steel, silver, and gold, and stiffened with

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whalebone. At other times there was great peril to life and limb. Generally speaking, the earlier in date the tournament occurred, the more violent and bloody it was likely to be. As the Middle Ages waned and the Renaissance dawned jousts, tilts, and tourneys became



SINGLE COMBAT
Early fourteenth century

more and more artificial, and less and less strenuous, until finally the custom fell into disuse and died a natural death. Readers of *Ivanhoe* will remember the tournament of Ashby-de-la-Zouche, in which the Disinherited Knight and *Le Noir Fainéant* gave such a good account of themselves, and how Sir Walter Scott drily remarks that "although only four knights . . . had died upon the field, yet upwards of thirty were

THE KNIGHT AND THE SQUIRE

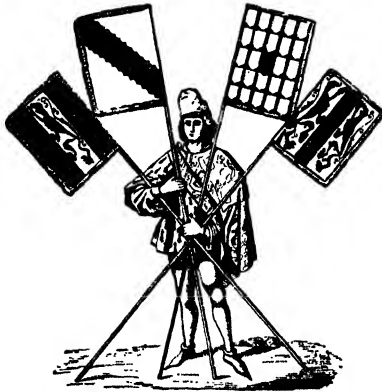
Hesperately wounded, four or five of whom never recovered. Several more were disabled for life; and those who escaped best carried the marks of the conflict to the grave with them. Hence it is always mentioned in the old records as the Gentle and Joyous Passage of Arms of Ashby."

When only two combatants contended it was called *jousting*. If only a friendly trial of skill were contemplated the lances had blunt tips, and the swords sharp *edges* only, not the keen, thrusting points likely to cause a fatal injury. This was the *jouste à plaisance*. If the combatants were allowed to use sharp weapons, and to put forth all their force and skill against one another, this was the *jouste à l'oultrance*, or *à outrance* (the former is the archaic form). When many combatants fought on each side the name 'tournament' was employed.

A knowledge of the rules and traditions of heraldry was especially useful to the young knight who aspired to take part in a tournament, and one of the heaviest sources of incidental expense to him was the 'tipping' of the heralds. These officials loomed large when knightly pride and valour found their expression in the lists. The holder of the tournament, the *challenger* as he was called, never dreamt of drawing up the conditions without the assistance of a properly qualified herald. It was a herald of inferior rank, a *poursuivant*,

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whom he sent forth to proclaim the date and place of the tournament and the prizes offered: a herald gave the signal for the commencement of each 'round' (as we should now say) in the actual combats, crying, "*Laissez les aller, laissez les aller, les bons chevaliers!*" and at the



A KING-AT-ARMS ABOUT TO PROCLAIM
A TOURNAMENT

conclusion of the proceedings their cries of "*Largesse, largesse!*" were answered by showers of gold coins from the noble spectators and the valiant warriors present. It sometimes happened that several young knights would band themselves together to protect a

certain tree, or shield, or fountain, or image against all comers, offering rich prizes to any who should worst them in fight.

Very great personages had heralds attached to their retinues, and monarchs often loaded honours upon the wise and well-versed Kings-at-Arms who presided over all chivalric lore and practice at Court. King George V has *three* Kings-at-Arms, Garter, Clarenceux, and

THE KNIGHT AND THE SQUIRE

Norroy; *six* Heralds, Windsor, Chester, Lancaster, Somerset, York, and Richmond; and *four* Pursuivants, Rouge Croix, Rouge Dragon, Blue Mantle, and Portcullis. The names of these officials call up vivid visions of bygone splendour. And even to-day they are not names only. They keep the records of all the armorial bearings of British families, decide the order and precedence of the guests at royal weddings and funerals, proclaim the new king when the old king is no more, and—what must often be a delicate task—invent coats of arms for newly ennobled persons not previously entitled to bear any!

When a knight rode into the lists a trumpet or horn sounded, and then one of the heralds in attendance declared what were his armorial insignia—which was called ‘blazoning his arms.’ It was the heralds, too, who kept the score, counted the strokes, advised the judge if any knotty points arose, and ran to separate the combatants when the judge gave the signal. Warriors fought either on horseback or on foot, and the choice of weapons usually lay with the challenger, who often offered alternatives, according to the wishes of those who took up his challenge. The two-handed sword, six feet in length, was a favourite weapon; so was the lance, so was the battleaxe. We shall return to the subject of weapons and armour in a later chapter. Here we are concerned rather with the procedure at

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

the tournament, and it is of interest that if the holder of the tournament happened to be very much in love with some fair lady he often wore her sleeve or her handkerchief in his helmet as a 'favour.' At the conclusion of a long-drawn-out and numerous attended assembly of knights, such as that described in *Ivanhoe*, the victor was invited to choose from among the ladies present her whom he deemed the most worthy to be called the Queen of Love and Beauty, and from her hands he received his prize.

The spirit and temper, the colour and movement, of a tournament in the early Middle Ages are admirably described in this immortal romance of Sir Walter Scott's, but, as we shall see later, he is not *quite* accurate in describing the armour of the knightly competitors.¹

At a later period the perils of contests on horseback were considerably lessened by the introduction of the *toile*. This was first of all simply a piece of rope stretched rather tightly down the centre of the lists, about three and a half feet from the ground: over this a long tapestry would often be hung. Later still the *toile* was a wooden screen covered with arras-cloth, and quite a solid affair. The knights approached each other from the two ends, keeping the *toile* between them and meeting and passing each other in the centre.

¹ See page 47.

THE KNIGHT AND THE SQUIRE

Thus were prevented those 'head-on' encounters in which man and beast had formerly suffered so severely. Glancing blows were now struck, instead of deadly thrusts; 'misses' became more frequent; and it was seldom indeed after the introduction of the toile that



THE TOILE

an accident occurred such as that in which Henri II of France lost his life, when a splinter from a spear entered his eye. This was in 1559, when the glories of the chivalric tradition were growing dim and faint. Not many decades later they belonged to the realm of things that have been but are no more.

One of the most impressive ceremonies ever witnessed

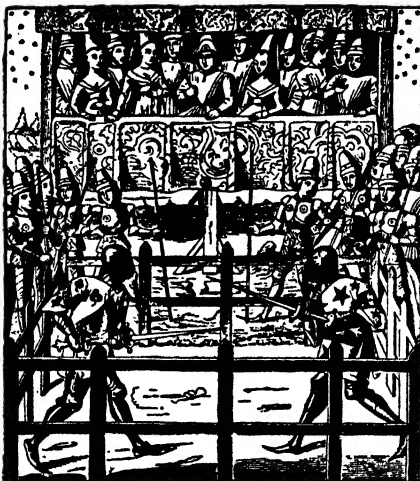
CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

in the Middle Ages was the formal and public degradation of a knight who had been adjudged guilty of some grave breach of knightly honour and virtue, such as treason, murder, or witchcraft. This ceremony was usually—though not always—followed by the execution of the degraded knight. It was preceded by a trial in which the judges were twenty or thirty irreproachable knights and squires, and the part of prosecuting counsel was taken by a King-at-Arms or a herald. A scaffold was erected opposite the raised stand where the judges sat, and there, on a rough post, was hung the shield of the erring knight, upside down and smeared with black paint. Then the heralds brought him forth, dressed in complete armour and wearing all his decorations, with the collar of his knightly Order. On either side of the scaffold sat twelve surpliced priests, who, as the ceremony proceeded, sang the office known as the Vigils of the Dead. At the end of each of the psalms they paused, and during the pause the heralds stripped one piece or another of the poor wretch's armour from him, beginning with the helmet. The reversed shield was broken into three pieces, and a bowl of dirty water was emptied over the head of him who once bore it with pride. Then, tied to a hurdle and covered with a pall, the miserable creature, no longer a knight, was dragged into a church, where the priests chanted over him the psalms for the dead, and

THE KNIGHT AND THE SQUIRE

whence he was usually delivered into the hands of the Provost Marshal for instant execution.

A knight who believed himself to have been wronged by another knight could always—and not infrequently



TRIAL BY COMBAT IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY
FRANCE

did—challenge him to a judicial combat in the lists. Or some claim or cause might be decided in the same way, as was the fate of Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*. One of the most celebrated public duels of this kind was fought as late as 1547, between two French nobles, Chastaigneraie and de Jarnac, who, after being close friends, had quarrelled over the love of a fair lady.

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

At an earlier date these judicial combats were of such usual occurrence that Philippe le Bel, King of France, had an ordonnance drawn up concerning the procedure to be observed. Nor were knights alone permitted to settle their claims and quarrels in this vigorous and romantic fashion. Priests, ladies, and persons of either gender under twenty-one years of age might nominate a champion to represent them in the lists. Wealthy abbeys which found themselves rather frequently involved in lawsuits, either with rival religious houses or with powerful laymen, often kept a champion, as one might keep a watch-dog, in case of need. In mediæval England these hired fighting-men were known as *puggyls* (Latin, *pugil*, a boxer), and a certain Bishop of Salisbury was so well pleased with the services of the abbey *puggyl* that he caused a small image of the man to be introduced upon his own monumental brass.

Though men continued to be dubbed knights—and are so to this day in certain countries—and though jousts and tourneys were held well into Tudor times, the ancient chivalric idea was dying before the fifteenth century was half spent, and had died by the time that it ended. Many of the well-born families had been ruined through pledging their estates in order to raise funds for the Crusades; the younger sons of many such families were turning to commerce for a means

THE KNIGHT AND THE SQUIRE

of livelihood. On the other hand, wealthy traders, such as Whittington and other Lord Mayors of London, might now hope to receive the accolade. With the break up of the feudal system and the introduction of professional warriors serving frankly 'for hire and salary,' came the closing phrases of 'an auld sang.'

CHAPTER II

ARMS AND ARMOUR

MAN'S first weapon was probably the branch of a tree, or a heavy, angular lump of rock—something, that is to say, with which he could smite, or something which



ANGLO-
SAXON
SWORD

he could hurl. Then followed the chipped flints, roughly attached to wooden hefts, and so used as axes, arrows, and spears. Among the ancient Greeks the spear was the principal weapon. They had swords, and we read in the *Iliad* of the purple scabbard of Ajax, but whether these swords were used for thrusting or cutting we do not know. In the Bible we read of both swords and spears; bows and arrows were as early an invention as either—probably a good deal earlier than the sword—and the ancient Egyptians were mighty archers. It must be remembered that the sword was originally a *thrusting* weapon, not a *cutting* one; *i.e.*, the point, and not the edge, did the work. As centuries passed men learned to sharpen one edge, then both, and so the swordsman slashed at his foe instead of stabbing him. Then, curiously enough, the more advanced peoples, notably the Romans, returned

ARMS AND ARMOUR

to the idea of the *thrust*, and it was their barbarian opponents who used the *edge* of the blade. Tacitus tells us how the Roman legions with their sword-points had the advantage over the Britons with their clumsy, blunt-tipped weapons. The sword was the chief arm both of the Norsemen and of the Saxons. In the latter instance the very *name* of the people was derived from the word which in their language signified a sword—*sachs*. To their skill with the sword these Norsemen, after they had settled in the Seine valley, added skill with the bow and with the spear. It was the Franks and the Normans who learned from their Saracenic adversaries to fight *on horseback*, and it was the prowess of his cavalry which gave William the Conqueror so great an advantage over the infantry of Harold at Hastings.

Very early in the history of warfare mankind invented *body-armour*. Helmets, breastplates, shields, and greaves appear in the most ancient art, and are mentioned in the most ancient literature. These were usually of bronze in classical times—‘brass’ in Biblical language must be understood to mean bronze—but by the period of the Norman Conquest steel and iron were in general use. The body-armour of a Norman fighting-man consisted of a tunic and breeches of thick padded and quilted stuff. Very often this stuff was closely sewn with small iron rings, or with over-

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

lapping scales of iron or horn. Later came *chain-mail*, consisting entirely of interlaced rings, and worn *over* the quilted garments or, at a later date, over a tight-fitting suit of leather.

Armour covered with scales was called *mascléd* armour (Latin, *macula*, the mesh of a net); armour covered with rings, or consisting of rings, was known as a *cotte de mailles*, a coat of mail, the word *maille* having, curiously enough, the same derivation as *mascle*, though it is used to indicate a different type of defensive covering. *Plate armour*, as we shall see, was not introduced until the end of the thirteenth century.

The Saxon shield was circular, and of no great size. The Norman shield was kite-shaped, slightly concave, and sometimes nearly as long as the body of him who bore it. As years passed the shield tended to grow broader and shorter, until it achieved the form with which we are most familiar—the form suggested by the phrase ‘shield-shaped.’ It was from the devices painted on their shields, by which the warriors might be distinguished in battle, that the whole art (or science) of heraldry developed. First of all a certain pattern or picture would be recognized as belonging to one particular baron or knight; then his brothers, sons, and grandsons would adopt it; and thence it would come to be the peculiar sign of the *family*, the coat of

ARMS AND ARMOUR

arms, or armorial bearings, by which they and their descendants should always be known.¹

The weapons used by the knights during the Norman and early Plantagenet period were the sword, and the



NORMAN HORSEMEN AT HASTINGS
Part of the Bayeux Tapestry

spear, or lance. The battleaxe and the mace, though not unknown, came into favour somewhat later. Except in hunting, the bow was seldom used by the upper classes, but it was the chief weapon of the foot-soldiers until the introduction of muskets and other firearms. There were two types of bow, the long-bow and the crossbow, and it was with the former that the archers

¹ See Chapter I.

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of England won imperishable renown. The long-bow was *very* long, usually about six feet, and each arrow measured about a yard. The sharp tips or 'barbs' of the arrows were feathered with goose-quills, and the 'fletcher,' or arrow-maker, had to take great pains to make the shaft straight, as a crooked, bent, or warped shaft might put the archer 'out' in his aim. The yew-tree supplied the tough and yet supple wood of which the bow itself was made, and the bowstring, which the archer never forgot to grease well, was of strong gut. The arrows were carried in a quiver, either girt about the body and swinging on the left hip, or slung across the back so that the arrows were drawn forward over the shoulder. The crossbow was a much more complicated affair, and, though it could not be made to discharge its 'bolts' (as crossbow arrows were called) as rapidly or as accurately as an expert archer could send the shafts from his long-bow, it needed less strength and less dexterity, and became widely popular in the second half of the Middle Ages. Italian archers were especially skilful in its use. This bow was usually of steel, and the string had to be re-wound with the aid of a little winch between each 'shot.'

The mail tunic of the Norman and Plantagenet warrior was called a *hauberk*, and was, as we have seen, originally worn without any outer trappings, over a

ARMS AND ARMOUR

quilted undergarment, padded with tow, vegetable fibre, or shreds of cloth. Toward the end of the twelfth century it became the fashion to wear a *surcoat* of linen or silk *over* the hauberk. King John is thus represented on his Great Seal.

The Norman helmet was conical, and it left the face bare with the exception of the nose, which was protected by an odd-looking guard called a *nasal*. Then followed the flat-topped, cylindrical *heaume*, which covered the whole skull, and was pierced with oblong slits to enable the wearer to breathe and to see—though he can have done neither with ease! Richard Cœur de Lion wears such a *heaume* in his second Great Seal. Another type of helmet in vogue during the second half of the thirteenth century was round-topped, and had a movable *ventaille*, or perforated guard. Then came the great sugarloaf-shaped helmet, which had to be attached by a chain to the girdle, or laced to the shoulders of the wearer. This helmet was worn *over* the *coif de mailles*, or chain-mail hood, and the weight of the two together must have been overwhelming! The *coif de mailles* may be studied closely in the



A KNIGHT WEARING
THE CYCLATOUN
AND COIF DE
MAILLES

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

Temple Church, where the effigies of several of the Knights Templars are thus 'bonneted.' Next came the *basinet*, which, as its name suggests, had the form of a *basin*. Sometimes the basinet had a movable visor, sometimes it left the face bare, without even a nasal to protect the warrior's nose. Instead of wearing a coif de mailles under the basinet, our warrior now



BASINET WITH CAMAIL
AND VENTAIL
About A.D. 1360

attached to his helmet a sort of flap or screen of chain-mail, called a *camail*, which effectively protected his neck and throat from the foeman's blade. These knights must have possessed remarkably well-developed neck-muscles, for they sometimes wore the heaume *over* the basinet! As the thirteenth century waned the basinet grew larger and heavier, and it was then no longer possible that the two should be worn together. Gradually the custom established itself that the heaume should be the head-covering of the warrior in tournaments and jousts, while the basinet, strengthened by a visor and a camail, was worn in battle. In its simpler form the basinet was adopted by archers and pikemen as well as by knights and nobles, and this is true also of a later type of helmet, the *salade*, which came into

ARMS AND ARMOUR

favour early in the fifteenth century. But by that time chain-mail had given place to plate armour, the most striking change in the history of the armourer's craft.

The beginnings of this change may be discerned in the second half of the thirteenth century, when knee-caps and elbow-caps of solid steel were added to the *cotte de mailles*.

Then came two queer little wing-shaped shields, called *ailettes*, attached at right angles upon the shoulders, partly to ward off a slashing cut from a sword, and partly, it would appear, for ornament pure and simple. It is thought that both the knee- and elbow-guards and the *ailettes* may have been of *cuir-*

bouilli first of all, and that the *real* change which led to the development of plate armour occurred when steel was substituted for this 'boiled leather.'

In the year 1285, in the reign of Edward I, a law was made that "every man should have in his house harness wherewith to keep the peace," each according



A KNIGHT WEARING AILETTES
From a French bronze in the National
Museum, Florence

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

to the value of his goods and lands. Thus, a man who possessed land to the value of £15 and goods to that of forty marks, was compelled to keep by him a hauberk of iron, a sword, and a dagger, while a poor fellow whose total belongings were worth less than forty shillings must have bows, arrows, knives, and 'greisarmes,' or broad blades fixed to long wooden shafts. One cannot help doubting whether this accumulation of weapons really led to the peace being kept any better than it would have been if the greater part of the population had been then—as now—unarmed. On the other hand, when a sudden and rapid levy of raw troops became necessary, to repel an invasion or to reinforce a depleted army abroad, it was very convenient for the king to be able to count upon having men ready armed, and with a rough knowledge of the manner in which their rough weapons should be used.

Among the knightly weapons of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were the *estoc*, or long, narrow sword for thrusting, the *falchion*, a curved cutting blade (cf. Shakespeare, *King Lear*: "I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion I would have made them skip"), the *anelace*, a double-edged dagger, the *baslard*, a short sword of the dagger type, much worn by civilians, and the *misericorde*, or 'dagger of mercy,' which had a fine point, and was intended to penetrate the joints of the armour and put a fallen adversary out of pain.

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The lance never went out of fashion, the longer kind being used in tournaments only, and the shorter, the lance-gay (Arabic, *zagaye*, a pike or javelin), being rather a weapon of actual warfare, and used, when desired, as a javelin. Sometimes the long tournament lances were made with hollow shafts, so that they should break more easily. The phrase 'to set one's lance in rest' is a decidedly picturesque one, but a writer of historical romance who introduced it in the description of a combat prior to the year 1360 would be guilty of error, as the *rest* did not come into use until that date. It consisted of an iron support, hooked and hinged and screwed to the right side of the breastplate, and it relieved the hand of the combatant of part of the weight of the lance, at the same time transferring part of the shock of the blow to the breastplate from his arm. In the Wallace Collection there is a fine suit of fifteenth-century armour with the rest still in position.



ESTOC
In the Musée
de Cluny

The whole evolution of arms and armour, from the earliest times to the present, is represented by a series of pendulum swings between the idea of defence and the idea of attack. Each new weapon was, in turn, met and counteracted by a new protective invention; and then yet another new weapon

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

was devised, and so the alternations continued, and continue still.

Chain-mail strengthened with a certain amount of plate metal, and aided by *cuir-bouilli* and thickly quilted material, proved an effective defence against swords, arrows, and lances for some years; but as the swordsmiths, the fletchers, and the makers of lance-heads grew more cunning it became necessary for warriors who held their lives and limbs dear to bethink them of some new protective covering. This necessity led to the introduction of the *cyclatoun* or *cyclas*, a sleeveless tunic, longer behind than in front, and laced up the two sides. The favourite material was silk, and the favourite colour, green; though linen was also used, and the knight seems to have had freedom of choice in the matter of colour. The ample folds of the *cyclatoun* deprived a sword-stroke of much of its force, and the cautious wearer was further shielded by *three* other garments, the *gambeson*, the *hauberk*, and the *haqueton*. The *gambeson* was a padded garment, either with or without sleeves, fitting closely round the neck; the *hauberk*, at this period made of a kind of mail in which the rings are arranged in bands, as if threaded upon strips of cord or leather, had loose sleeves, slit up to allow freedom of movement. Under the *hauberk* was the *haqueton*, another stuffed garment, and under that, a thin shirt of wool. Thus muffled

ARMS AND ARMOUR

and swaddled, even the most slender and willowy warriors must have presented a somewhat podgy appearance; but without these intervening layers of padding the weight and the chafing of their armour would soon have become intolerable. The interesting brass effigy of Sir John de Creke, in Westley Waterless Church, Cambridge-shire, enables us to trace the development of plate from chain armour step by step. The good knight, who gave up the ghost somewhere about the year 1325, has arm defences of plate, *demi-brassarts*, reaching from the shoulder to the elbow, and *vambraces*, or armour for the forearm, between the elbow and the wrist; *demi-jambarts*, or leg-shields covering the front part of the lower leg only, protect his shins after the fashion of cricket-pads, and his knees are encased in *genouillères*, either of steel or of *cuir-bouilli*. The *sollerets*, metal sheaths for the feet, consisting of overlapping plates, had not yet been introduced when Sir John de Creke prepared for the fray, but he *has* steel defences upon his very highly arched insteps. His hands, clasped in prayer, are so completely hidden by his shield that we cannot tell whether he is wearing gauntlets or not. It seems



BRASS OF SIR
JOHN DE CREKE

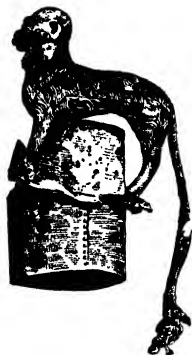
CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

probable that gauntlets of *cuir-bouilli* preceded those of overlapping steel, as in the earliest representations of the gloved hands of warriors no rivets are to be seen. About this period the rowel began to replace the more barbarous prick-spur.

Let us take a forward stride of twenty or thirty years, and find how the warriors were armed who fought at Crécy and Poitiers. The cyclatoun has vanished now, though the camail remains. Arms and legs are encased in plate armour, but thigh-pieces, or *cuissarts*, have not yet appeared. Toward the middle of the fourteenth century armourers began to experiment with the so-called 'splinted' armour, consisting of separate strips of overlapping steel skilfully riveted together upon a leather foundation. The disadvantage of this type of armour was that the sword or lance of the adversary might slip upward between the 'splints.' As the period was one of transition, the body-armour of the knights of Edward III was of great variety, some of the more conservative clinging to fashions that were passing away, while others, of a more enterprising turn of mind, eagerly tested each new invention of the armourer. The basinets, too, show infinite variations of form in this interesting century. Though the camail had not been discarded, a *gorget*, or collar, of solid steel sometimes took its place. Some basinets had no visors, but movable brims; some visors were

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of very quaint shapes, peaked and hollowed and oddly curved. The ailettes vanished about the time when the cyclatoun came in, and the place of the cyclatoun was taken by a sleeveless, tight-fitting tunic, lacing up the back, and often embroidered with the armorial bearings of the wearer. This tunic was called a *jupon*: it will be remembered that Chaucer's knight wore a simple one of fustian. Over the conical-topped basinet the fourteenth-century warrior sometimes wore a sort of hat, surmounted by his crest moulded in *cuir-bouilli*. In Canterbury Cathedral may be seen the heaume, crest, shield, and gauntlets of the Black Prince. At a slightly earlier date crests in the shape of fans or cock's combs had made their appearance on knightly helmets, and toward the middle of the fourteenth century the *panache*, or tuft of feathers, came into fashion. Sometimes a flowing veil, called a *con-toise*, was attached by a staple to the top of the heaume. The feathers were usually those of the ostrich, though proud masses of peacock-plumes were seen not seldom. In the succeeding century these panaches became more and more fashionable—and more and more elaborate. It will be remembered that in his play of *Henry V*



CRESTED HEAUME OF
THE BLACK PRINCE
In Canterbury Cathedral

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

Shakespeare makes the English king, contrasting the gorgeousness of the French forces before Agincourt with the battered and dilapidated condition of his own army, say:

There's not a piece of feather in our host—
Good argument, I hope, we will not fly.

The breastplate originally protected the front of the body only, but as the fourteenth century advanced it became customary to add back- and shoulder-pieces, thus lending it rather the character of a *cuirass*. The jupon fitted closely over this breastplate, and many of the warriors would appear, from their effigies in brass and marble, to have admired and cultivated the 'wasp-waist.'

The transition from chain-mail to plate armour was not complete until the first decade of the fifteenth century, when the surcoat was discarded. When the skirt of mail vanished it was replaced by *tauces*, or bands of steel overlapping in an upward direction. Spikes sprouted from knee-caps, and even from the knuckles of the jointed steel gauntlets. A knight who had lost his battleaxe, lance, and sword would still have a 'sporting chance' of defending himself with his fists.

The steel foot-gear of the knight waxed narrow or broad as civilian fashions changed. In the reigns of Edward III and Richard II shoes with exaggeratedly

ARMS AND ARMOUR

long peaks were introduced from Poland—whence their name of ‘Pologne’ or ‘Cracowe’ shoes—and then no warrior who had the slightest regard for his appearance would have dreamed of wearing sollerets of any other form. When he fought on horseback the tapering steel peaks looked quite graceful, bending downward over the stirrups, but in a combat on foot they would have hampered him severely, and for this reason they were usually detachable. In the battle of Poitiers those knights who had lost their horses proceeded to shed not only the peaks of their sollerets, but their gilded rowel-spurs as well. This probably explains in some degree why the battle fought at Courtrai in 1302 should have been called “the Battle of the Spurs.” Of the four thousand spurs left on the field of battle many must have been torn off by warriors unhorsed in the shock and stress of the fray.

The sword of the Edward III period was double-edged, a little over a yard in length, and worn attached to the left side of the richly jewelled sword-belt, while the misericorde hung by a small chain on the right. The great two-handed sword, a formidable weapon between five and six feet in length, was intended for



BRASS OF SIR
JOHN LEVEN-
THORPE

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

use in foot-combats only, and even a stalwart knight needed all his strength to wield it effectively. Cautious warriors were wont to carry one of these hefty blades buckled to their saddles, for use if they should be disarmed of their lighter weapons and unhorsed in the *mêlée*.

Two other mediæval weapons of considerable importance were the *mace* and the *battleaxe*. The mace was used at the battle of Hastings, and did not fall into disuse until the Tudor period. The heads were of divers fashions, oval, circular, oblong, studded with sharp knobs or spikes, or set round with perpendicular iron blades. One type, used by ordinary foot-soldiers as well as by mounted warriors, was pleasantly called the 'Morning Star.' Another, which terminated in a chain to which was fixed a spiked globe of metal, bore the grim title of the 'Holy Water Sprinkler.' Prelates and priests who loved war better than peace found in the mace a singularly useful weapon, since the scriptural injunctions against shedding blood and smiting with the sword could not, in their view, possibly apply to a tool used principally for cracking skulls!

Until the fifteenth century the axe was regarded rather as the weapon of the ordinary man-at-arms than as one meet for knightly hands to wield, but by the reign of Edward IV it had become the favourite for knightly combats on foot in the lists. Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, fought with such a weapon against

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Sir Pandolph Malacat at Verona, and gave his adversary such a shrewd thrust upon the left shoulder that the fight was stopped and the Englishman adjudged the winner. It will be seen from the very interesting contemporary drawing here reproduced that these axes had hammer-heads and thrusting points: some others had a cutting blade on one side and a sort of hook, called a *bec de faucon*, on the other. The helmet of Lord Warwick is surmounted by his family crest, the famous Bear and Ragged Staff, and he wears, not the



THE DUEL AT VERONA

now obsolete jupon, but a square-cut, short-sleeved tunic modelled on those worn by heralds and adorned with his armorial bearings. From the helmet of Sir Pandolph rises one solitary but decidedly magnificent ostrich-feather. Here the transition from chain-mail to plate armour is complete, and the warriors are, in Shakespeare's phrase, "locked up in steel."

In the Wallace Collection is to be seen a complete suit of fifteenth-century armour for man and horse, and nobody looking upon it would be inclined to dispute with the expert who declared not long since that

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such a suit is "the most perfect work of craftsmanship that exists." Encased in this finely wrought and



COMPLETE EQUESTRIAN ARMOUR
OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

cunningly planned defensive harness, the warrior would not be greatly perturbed by blows from swords, thrusts from lances, or hits from arrows. Perhaps we are more conscious of the beauty of his armour than he was himself, and certainly in our eyes its beauty is very great. There is no superfluous ornamentation, no unnecessary complication of line and curve, no sacrificing of purpose to effect; yet the whole

thing is exquisitely graceful, harmonious, lucid, and vigorous. The grace is never feeble, the vigour is never crude. There lies the mysterious and delightful secret of fifteenth-century art. If we compare, let us say, Sir John Leventhorpe¹ with Sir Robert Staunton we shall see at a glance the principal

¹ See page 55.

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developments, variations, and modifications which occurred in the third, fourth, and fifth decades of the century. Sir John wears a basinet, he has roundels covering the gussets of his laminated shoulder-guards; his tauces consist of seven layers of steel, the seventh and lowest being hinged and indented to allow free movement of the legs. Now let us look at Sir Robert, who died just twenty-five years later. The first point of difference that strikes us is the helmet. Gone is the basinet, and in its stead we see a new type of head-covering, the *salade*, usually forged in one piece, and not attached in any way to the body-armour. The *salade* was shallow, fitted more or less loosely to the skull, and had a shelving projection behind to guard the neck. The earlier type had no visor, but, being pierced with two eyeholes, could be pulled forward at will to defend the upper part of the wearer's face. Sir Robert *has* a visor, but not a very elaborate one. His shoulder-guards are heavier than Sir John's, and his elbow-guards, or *coudières*, are enormous. His tauces consist of only five bands, and attached to the fifth are two steel flaps protecting the upper thigh.



BRASS OF SIR ROBERT
STAUNTON

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

While Sir John's gauntlets are of comparatively modest dimensions, Sir Robert's are of surprising size.

Surprising also are the size and thickness of the armour worn by combatants in the lists as the age of chivalry waned. In a museum case, or high above a



TILTING-HEAUME
Late fifteenth century

carven tomb, we sometimes see a helmet so huge and so heavy that we wonder how its wearer can have fared in battle. But he did not wear it in battle. These are *tilting-heaumes*, designed to protect the head from the lance of a knightly adversary, and for that reason made of ponderous metal and attached securely to the backplate and breastplate of the warrior.

By this time the shield had practically fallen into disuse as far as actual warfare was concerned, and the shoulder- and elbow-armour on the left side was therefore reinforced. In tournaments and jousts, however, the shield was still borne, though not so frequently used, as it was necessary that the heralds should be able to recognize and record the arms (that is to say, the armorial bearings) of the knightly competitors. These armorial bearings also appeared upon the voluminous housings of their steeds.

The exact date at which horse-armour came into general use is a little uncertain, but housings were

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employed by both the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans, and often included a covering for the horse's head. It would seem that some sort of horse-armour, probably consisting of face-guards and breast-pieces of *cuir-bouilli* or padded material, was known in the army of Edward I, but that not until the third and fourth decades of the fifteenth century did the elaborate and often beautiful suits of equine armour come into being. Then were seen the spiked *chamfron*, sometimes surmounted by a tuft of plumes, the *crinet* of chain-mail following the line of the mane, the saddle with its high cantle and bow, the *peytral* to protect the breast, and the crupper-pieces guarding the quarters and the flanks. Exactly what the sentiments of the horse himself may have been it is rather difficult to imagine. This mass of metal, wood, *cuir-bouilli*, quilting, and leather, which made him look so gorgeous and saved him from so many hard knocks, must also have added greatly to the arduousness of his duties when his master went forth in full panoply of war.

As the Middle Ages waned, craftsmen, and armourers among them, began to lose that purity of line, that severe grace of curve, that characterized their work in the best period. The art of damascening, or inlaying steel with gold, was introduced from the East by way of Spain, and while it added to the beauty of the *surface* of a suit of armour, it could not fail to have a

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regrettable effect upon the *form*, since the intricate designs demanded flat spaces, uninterrupted by any curves or irregularities, and it was impossible to provide these spaces without some sacrifice of the general plan. The art of the armourer surely touched its lowest point of degradation in those early sixteenth-century suits whereon the steel is so wrought as to imitate the puffings, and slashings, and purflings, then fashionable in civilian attire!



'PURFLED' ARMOUR OF THE
SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The introduction of *portable* firearms, as distinct from unwieldy and cumbersome cannon, slings, and culverins, modified and altered the ideas of armourers profoundly. At first it seemed as if body-armour must disappear altogether. Gorgets and visors *did* disappear, but the breastplate or cuirass and the leg- and arm-pieces lingered on until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Between the time of Marlborough and that of Wellington even these lingering relics vanished, one might have thought for ever. On the eve of the Great War troops, such as the French *Cuirassiers* and the English Life Guards, wearing body-armour of burnished steel were re-

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garded as picturesque but somewhat fantastic survivals of other days. But it was soon discovered that there was no better defence against shrapnel and flying shell-splinters than a metal head-protector closely resembling the salade of the fifteenth century—and thus was brought into existence that familiar object, the ‘tin hat’ of the modern foot-soldier.

CHAPTER III

THE CHIVALRIC IDEA IN LITERATURE AND ART

EVERY truly great idea in the world's history has left its imprint upon one, or all, of the great arts—literature, architecture, music, sculpture, and painting.

Polytheism, the cult of many gods, profoundly influenced the plastic arts of Egypt and of Greece; Monotheism, intense belief in one God, shaped and fashioned the literature of the people of Israel; Buddhism inspired the painters and sculptors of India, China, and Japan; Mohammedanism roused the architects and craftsmen of India, Persia, Arabia, Egypt, and Moresque Spain to mighty achievements. For five or six centuries Christianity was the be-all and the end-all of art in Western Europe, pervading though not monopolizing literature, and making sculpture, painting, and architecture its own.

Now, it may well be that the roots of the chivalric idea strike deep into the soil of ancient Rome; it may well be that the code and the customs of the Saracenic warrior-chieftains lent colour to its earlier phases; but it is also beyond doubt that in its fullest development it was a Christian idea, intimately associated with

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Christian practices and principles. Every knight was, *ipso facto*, a defender of the Church as well as of the throne; every knight, in theory if not in fact and deed, was the foe of all 'paynims,' eager to defend the holy places of his faith from heathen usurpation, and, in a sense, "God's soldier."

This affinity between Christianity and chivalry is obvious and insistent in mediæval painting and sculpture; but in literature the lesser and younger element achieves a distinct existence, and can be considered by itself. At a very early date bards and wandering minstrels began to sing of the valiant deeds, the *hauts faits et gestes*, of the knights of the very solid Charlemagne and the somewhat hazy Arthur. The subject was pleasant and interesting to all their hearers, of whatsoever condition and degree; nor were they slow to add brighter colours, making what was ordinary marvellous, and what was already remarkable strange beyond belief.

First in point of time, and by no means last in point of value, is the *Chanson de Roland*, the great French epic telling of the valiant deeds and pitiful death of Charlemagne's nephew, *Roland le preux*, Roland the brave. Some critics assert that in its second and final form the existing *Chanson* was probably copied in England, and may have been the composition of an Anglo-Norman scribe. However this may be, it had far less influence

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in England than on the Continent, and on this side of the Channel left only faint traces in the figurative speech of the people. In mediæval England you would have been perfectly well understood if you called a man a Ganelon, for Ganelon was a notorious traitor, the



KING ARTHUR

From the tomb of Maximilian I in the Franciscan church at Innsbrück

villain of the *Chanson de Roland*; and in modern England 'to give a Roland for an Oliver' is a common enough expression, though it is improbable that every one who uses it is aware that he is alluding to two of Charlemagne's most doughty paladins.

The real hero, the great central and dominating figure of English chivalric romance, is King Arthur.

Whether any living and breathing man, any king or leader with an actual historic existence, lies beyond the mist that enfolds Arthur, must remain a subject for debate among the learned and the wise.

In the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries popular belief in his reality was fervent and profound; but by the end of the fifteenth, when Caxton printed Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, "divers men" had already begun to "hold opinion that there was no such Arthur, and that all such books as be made of him be but feigned and fables." In *The Last Age of Roman Britain* Mr

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Edward Foord advances the interesting theory that the real man, whose form has thus been made indistinct by many golden veils of legend, was a Romano-British general, Artorius by name, to whom was entrusted the defence of Britain against the invasions of the barbarous Picts, Angles, and Saxons.

However this may be, the fact remains that the *legendary* Arthur is one of the great figures of romance. Nor was his renown confined to the island over a large part of which he is reputed to have reigned. Throughout Christendom he was numbered among the Nine Worthies, his companions being Joshua, David, Judas Maccabæus, Hector, Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Charlemagne, and Godefroy de Bouillon. *Le roi Artus* and his *chevaliers de la table ronde* were only one degree less familiar to Continental scribes and bards and chroniclers than were Charlemagne and his paladins. The plot and narrative of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* are, in great part, derived from French originals, but these, in turn, may have been carried across the Channel by Norman minstrels who had learned them from Welsh bards during the Norman occupation of Wales. The close racial and linguistic kinship between the Welsh and the people of Brittany at the time when the Arthurian stories were as yet in a fluid state, makes it very difficult even for scholars and experts to determine whether the real beginnings of the whole cycle are to

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be discovered in Breton or in Welsh soil. There was a constant flux and reflux of ideas, myths, epics, and ballads between the two peoples, and the imagination of each was coloured by that of the other. The earliest allusion to Arthur as an *historical character* would seem to bear out Mr Foord's theory. It occurs in the *Historia Brittonum*, an eighth- or ninth-century compilation attributed to one Nennius, where he is represented not as a king, but as a sort of supreme general, the equivalent of the Roman *dux bellorum*, the leader of the battle. From the eleventh century onward the Arthurian legend rolled along, gaining in weight and mass at every revolution, like some gigantic snowball, until the searching rays of the Renaissance fell upon its swollen bulk, and it began to dwindle. Milton, none the less, hesitated between Arthur and Adam as the hero of his mighty epic. And it was to the "legend of the Table Round" that Tennyson turned when he too was minded to woo Calliope, the muse of epic poetry.

At a very early date, certainly before the dawn of the twelfth century, the belief had grown up among the people of England, especially Western or Celtic England, that Arthur was not dead, that he would some day return. One of the most ancient of surviving Welsh poems says that "There is a grave for Mark, a grave for Guythur, a grave for Gwgawn of the Ruddy

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Sword; a mystery is the grave of Arthur." The four warriors here mentioned were British chieftains, valiant in battle against the barbarians who poured into Britain after the withdrawal of the Roman legions. And of the four, only Arthur had no known or remembered sepulchre. Here is the fountain-head of the legend of his immortality.¹ However, the Arthur of Welsh myth and legend does not greatly resemble the Arthur of chivalric romance. In the Celtic half-light he is seen dimly, a great king endowed with magical powers, and attended by a band of devoted warriors only a little less marvellously gifted than he. It was not until the Normans had overrun Western England, and Norman minstrels had carried the songs of Charlemagne and his paladins from castle to castle up and down the land, that the hero of Celtic mythology girt himself with a knightly sword, buckled golden spurs upon his heels, and rode forth to the joust and the tourney, as the characters in a chivalric romance never failed to do.

We encounter this later and infinitely more picturesque Arthur in the Latin chronicle of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Bishop of St Asaph. Geoffrey posed as a serious historian, and claimed to derive much of his information from an ancient book lent to him by his

¹ Cf. the similar legends relating to Frederick Barbarossa and Holger Dansk.

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friend Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford; but the truth would appear to be that this early twelfth-century (1100-54) churchman was one of the first, and not the least great, of English story-tellers. From him poets and dramatists of later centuries borrowed many stories which their works have made familiar to us all—the stories of King Lear and his three daughters, of King Cymbeline, of Merlin the Wizard, and, above all, the stories of Arthur. He was indeed a marvellous person, the Arthur of Geoffrey's *Chronicon*. Crowned at the early age of fifteen, he began by defeating a combined army of Saxons, Picts, and Scots, and conquering Scotland. Then he proceeded to subjugate Iceland and Ireland, Norway, Dacia, and Gaul. He placed Normandy under the rule of "Bedwyr, his Butler," and Anjou under that of "Kay, his Seneschal." Having slain two giants, one of whom wore a mantle furred with the beards of kings whom he himself had slain, this doughty monarch next inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Romans. Athirst for fresh victories, he entrusted the care of his kingdom and of his queen, the fair Guanhumara, to his nephew Sir Mordred, and set off across the Alps with the intention of subduing Rome itself. Before he had reached the Italian side of the great mountain-barrier, however, word was brought to him that Mordred had seized both the crown and the queen for his own. Arthur, not un-

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naturally, made haste to retrace his steps, and in a desperate battle "by the river Camel, in the country of the west," he and his warriors defeated Mordred and his men. The guilty queen fled to a convent and became a nun. Gawain and many another valiant man lay dead on the field. Arthur was sore wounded, and like to die, but "he was borne thence unto the Island of Avalon for the healing of his wounds."

Here we have the canvas upon which later poets and chroniclers embroidered a rich and elaborate design in golden threads and silks of many colours. They were not slow in setting about their task. What did it matter though Brother William, a carping monk of Newborough, accused Geoffrey of having "lied saucily and shamelessly"? The stories in the *Chronicon* spread over England with incredible rapidity. Copyists were kept busy for years transcribing them. They passed into the everyday thoughts and words of the highest and the most humble. In 1155 a Norman clerk, Wace by name, dedicated to Queen Eleanor, wife of Henry II, a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's work into the Norman-French then spoken at Court. Wace was something more than a mere mechanical translator. He added some new material, probably derived from Breton or Norman sources unknown to the Bishop of St Asaph; and it is in *his* pages that we hear first of the famous Round Table. Wace called his poem *Brut*, after the

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mythical founder of the kingdom of Britain, but its atmosphere is purely Norman. It is otherwise with the *Brut* of Layamon, parish priest of Arley Regis by the banks of the Severn, who set out to translate Wace into the English tongue as it was then spoken by the mass of the English people, and who incidentally made of Arthur an intensely English hero, and of the legends an intensely English epic. According to Layamon, Arthur one day encountered in Cornwall "a man from beyond the sea," who offered to make for him a table of great beauty, at which sixteen hundred men "and more" might sit. This offer the king accepted, and thus was brought into being the famous Round Table, by which the quarrels of Arthur's knights were settled, as *every one* was seated at the head of the board. Although such a large number of persons could seat themselves at it, the table had the magic property of shrinking to such a small size that Arthur could carry it everywhere with him. Truly, a wonderful table!

As the Arthurian legends multiply, in French and in English, in verse and in prose, the central figure tends to lose his definitely English character, and to acquire a more international interest. He is anybody's Arthur; he is everybody's Arthur; his capital and his Court might be anywhere—or nowhere—in Christendom. Also certain of his knights, notably his nephew,

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the gallant Gawain, soon begin to force their way into the foreground of the picture, thus causing Arthur's



KING ARTHUR'S ROUND TABLE

From a manuscript of the fourteenth century in the
National Library, Paris

own image to recede and to become less vivid in colour, less clear-cut in form.

Before the twelfth century closed the Arthurian

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cycle had been yet further extended and enriched by other than English hands. Chrétien de Troyes, a French Court poet, wove a series of poems round Arthur and his knights, and these in turn were translated and adapted by German bards such as Wolfram von Eschenbach and Hartmann von Aue. At this period, and for the following hundred years, it seemed as if the chivalric idea were summed up in Arthur, though it found expression, both artistically and poetically, in many different ways.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century France paid back some of her borrowings, and English translations were made of French metrical romances telling of the wizard Merlin and the mysterious passing of Arthur; one hundred and fifty years later follows a prose translation of much greater merit. And all the time the Arthurian cycle is growing more and more elaborate and unwieldy, and knights (not Arthurian knights *only*) are performing more and more impossible feats, and enduring wilder and wilder adventures. Marie de France, a French poetess at the Court of our King Henry III, set down many such tales, not directly Arthurian, and mostly of Breton origin.

As we have seen, Arthur's nephew, Sir Gawain, early won the goodwill both of the chroniclers and of them who loved their chronicles. He is the hero of several independent romances, of which the best known is

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that of *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight*, a tale of faerie, where the central figure contends with a fierce green-clad opponent of gigantic proportions, and incidentally exhibits all the chivalric virtues, courage, courtesy, fidelity to the pledged word, clemency in triumph, cheerfulness in defeat.

Scholars and historians agree, for the most part, that the original Arthurian root was *Celtic*. But upon this Celtic root and stem were grafted other tales, of non-Celtic colour. Such is the story of the gallant but false knight, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, who loved Arthur's queen, the fair and faithless Guinevere; such is the story of Sir Perceval (Wagner's *Parsifal*) and his quest of the Holy Grail, the cup from which, according to the legend, Christ drank with His disciples at the Last Supper. These were among the narratives chosen and used by Tennyson when, in 1859, he began to write the twelve *Idylls of the King*, once regarded as his highest achievement. It is curious to observe how Tennyson, like his far-off mediæval forerunners, could not avoid making Arthur a somewhat stiff and unconvincing figure. Indeed, a contemporary satirist (W. H. Mallock), in setting forth the ingredients necessary for such a concoction as that of the Laureate, actually begins, "Take one blameless prig."

In the rich flowering-season of chivalric romance many rhymed tales were current in England which

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were only remotely connected with Arthur's Court at Camelot, or not obviously connected with it at all. Such were *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, *Sir Cleges*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Amis and Amiloun*, and *Sir Ipomedon*. After the first



THE FOUR SONS OF AYMON

From a manuscript of the thirteenth century in the
National Library, Paris

Tudor king was seated on the throne of England, Caxton, realizing that the popularity of these old knightly narratives had not yet sunk low, "set in imprint" the story of *The Four Sons of Aymon*, long familiar in France. Some nameless Kentishman of the early fourteenth century translated into English

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from a French original the story of Merlin and Arthur, but there the wizard looms far larger than the king over whose destinies he exerted such a mysterious influence. Here it is to Uther, the father of Arthur, that the credit of instituting the Round Table is given, and the curious information is added that however many knights joined the band and sat at the board it was never *full* until they were born that should "fulfill the mervaile of the Greal." According to some critics the rhymed romance of *Richard Cœur-de-Lion*, which belongs to the same period, is the work of the same hand. Here it is Richard I who is the perfect knight, and here we see how the return of summer brought with it the return of what we may call the Tournament Season.

Merry it is in time of May
When fowlés sing in their lay; . . .
Ladies strew their bowers
With red roses and lilly-flowers; . . .
The damiseles lead dance;
Knights play with shield and lance;
In jousts and tournaments they ride.

We have noted that by the time that another Kentishman, William Caxton, printed Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, faith in the historical reality of all these knightly heroes was much less fervent and far-reaching than it had formerly been. But before the fourteenth century closed another and an even more famous Englishman

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had both exalted and derided the chivalric idea in verse. This was Geoffrey Chaucer.

We have already seen, in the chapter on the Knight and the Squire, how Chaucer drew a vivid and memorable portrait of each type in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, and how the knight was valiant, gentle, pure of heart, and the squire gay, gallant, and accomplished. Not only had the knight fought in far and strange lands; he had jousted in the lists to such good purpose that thrice he had slain his adversary outright. There was nothing of the glitter and glow of chivalry about his outward looks. His horse, we are told, was good, but he "was nat gay"; his gypoun was of simple fustian, stained with the rust of his hauberk. Such must have been the appearance of many of those knights in actual, everyday life, who upon their monumental brasses look so amazingly slim, and elegant, and neat. His curly-haired son, the musical and romantically minded Squiér, was a much more decorative figure in the procession of pilgrims, with his long-sleeved, short-cut gown, embroidered

as it were a meede

Al ful of freshé flowrés whyte and reede.

In the whole pageant of English literature these are assuredly the chivalric figures that stand out most clearly. And the chivalric idea pervades Chaucer's poetry, sometimes giving very quaint forms and colours

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to pre-chivalric scenes and characters. The background of the tale told by the knight himself is the Athens of Theseus, but the morals and manners of the Greek 'knights' would have done credit to them of the Round Table, and when the two young heroes, Palamon and Arcite, are found half dead on the battlefield the heralds know by their coats of arms that they are of the blood royal of Thebes!¹ Theseus makes the disguised Arcite his "chief squiér"; in order to decide which of the two is to wed the fair Emelye, he suggests that each of them should bring a hundred knights

Arméd for listés up at allé rightes

and let the victor in the general *mêlée* have the princess as his prize. When the knights duly assembled some wore hauberks, some breastplates, some favoured "a light gypoun." Every detail of their battle-harness is of Chaucer's own time.

This transplantation of chivalric images to classical soil is even more remarkable in Chaucer's most considerable *sustained* narrative-poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*, the scene of which is laid in Troy during the siege. The hero and all his friends, in speech, costume, mind, and body, might well be knights and squires in the

¹ There were, of course, 'heralds' in Greek classical drama, but their functions were not akin to those of the mediæval heralds, and their *rôle* was rather that of messengers.

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train of Lionel of Clarence or John of Gaunt. Here—and elsewhere—the poet treats the chivalric ideal with respect. But he was too essentially sane, his sense of humour was too keen, for its absurdities to pass unmarked and unrecorded by his eyes and his pen. In *The Canterbury Tales* there occurs one of the earliest and most amusing of the many parodies of the exaggerated and incredible chivalric stories then current. Chaucer himself, being called upon by the Host to “sey now somewhat, syn oother folk han sayd,” protests that he knows no tale to tell unless it be a “rym” which he had learned long before. And he then proceeds to babble in six-lined stanzas “of a knyght was fair and gent,” whose name was Sir Thopas. We hear first of his bodily perfections:

Sire Thopas wax a doghty swayn;
Whit was his face as payndemayn,¹
His lippès rede as rose;
His rode ² is like scarlet in grayn,
And I yow tell in good certayn
He hadde a semely nose.

His virtues, his valour, his skill in archery, hawking, and wrestling are next described in the same mock heroic vein. Inevitably this paragon must ride “thruh a fair forest,” fall in love with the Elf-queene, and meet a giant; but here there is an abrupt break with tradition,

¹ fine bread.

² rosiness, ruddiness.

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for instead of worsting the fearsome creature in single combat the knight, after bragging of what he will do "tomorwe" when he is more adequately equipped for fighting, is pelted with stones by the giant and "drow abak ful faste." Unfortunately it was a case of "never shall sun that morrow see," for although Chaucer gives an elaborate description of his hero's preparations for the encounter, and urges his hearers, in the authentic strolling-minstrel fashion, to listen to his tale, we are not allowed to learn the sequel, for the patience of the pilgrims gave out before the thirtieth stanza was done, and the Host told the narrator in blunt terms,

"Thou doost nought ellès but despendest tyme;
Sire, at o¹ word, thou shalt no lenger ryme."

Such, if they had but known it, was the doom pronounced upon all these old rhymers by the new spirit that was then astir in Europe. Yet the old idea died hard. When Caxton set up his printing-press at the Sign of the Red Pale, under the shadow of Westminster Abbey, one of the earliest of its productions was Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Caxton was a conservative to the very bones. He chose, as he himself tells us, to "set in imprint" this translation "out of certain books of French," in order that noble men might "see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle

¹ one.

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and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honour." And he tells them that the book treats of "prowess, hardiness, humanity, love, courtesy, and very gentleness, with many wonderful histories and adventures." So, indeed, it does. But the adventures are *so* many, and *so* wonderful, that "the sense faints picturing them." There are five hundred and seven chapters in the *Morte d'Arthur*, and there is hardly one of them without its marvellous incident, while not a few contain several such incidents within their narrow limits. The tales are often tedious, the figures are often stiff and unconvincing; but the *Morte d'Arthur* remains one of the great masterpieces of English prose. It is of very unequal texture, threadbare and moth-eaten stretches of canvas alternating with patches of Tyrian silk and cloth-of-gold. It is the easiest thing in the world to parody, and the most difficult to imitate. Arthur, though not the "blameless prig" of Tennyson's *Idylls*, is, perhaps, the least impressive of the characters. But Lancelot, Gareth, Galahad, Tristram, and Gawain, though they are alive only by fits and starts, spring sometimes into an intense and passionate reality.

Between June 1483 and August 1485—the exact date is uncertain—Caxton printed the *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, an English translation from French and Latin translations of a book written in the last decades of

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the thirteenth century by a Majorcan mystic, Ramón Lull (or Lully). To Ramón's work the earlier translators had made many additions, and his English sponsor made many more. It would appear that even the 'imprinting' of the five hundred and seven chapters of the *Morte d'Arthur* had not fully aroused the "knyghtes of England" to a sense of their duties and responsibilities. So Caxton returns to the attack. He provides them with a manual of chivalric lore, he urges the King (it was by that time Richard III) to institute periodical jousts, he urges the 'knyghtes' themselves to emulate the memorable deeds of their forerunners; but at the same time he accuses them of sloth, of indolence, of taking too many baths (an unexpected reproach in an age which we have been taught to regard as exceedingly unhygienic in its personal habits), and of playing too many games at dice.

The chivalric idea faded, and grew vague and formless in early Tudor literature, though it seemed to enjoy a brief reincarnation in the person of Sir Philip Sidney. When we come to Spenser and his *Faerie Queene* we cannot but realize that the "gentle knight" whom we there see "pricking o'er the plain," and who is "Ycladd in mightie armes and silver shield," is not an authentic knight, not Chaucer's knight in his youth, or Chaucer's squire in his prime, but a Tudor hero wearing fancy dress. Spenser has imitated the diction

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of an earlier age, and he has tried valiantly to reproduce its thoughts, its colours, its point of view. The result is a magnificent poem—or fragment of a poem—but the attempt has not been successful. The body and the garments of the chivalric idea have been revived, and brought from dust and darkness into the light of day, but the *spirit* eludes the poet's hand.

That chivalry and romance were closely associated was perceived by the leaders of the romantic revival in the eighteenth century, and this fact was later seized upon and exploited by Sir Walter Scott, notably in *The Talisman* and *Ivanhoe*. There is much to be learned from the latter novel about the outward trappings of chivalry, and even about its "inward and spiritual grace," though the details—such as the premature introduction of plate armour—are not all severely accurate. The knights whom we meet later, those in Tennyson's *Idylls*, in Keats's *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, in Maurice Hewlett's *Richard Yea and Nay*, to mention only a few at random, belong to the same type and class as Spenser's knight, and, despite many merits, are obviously not "the thing itself." We have seen that Chaucer made merry at the expense of the chivalric idea in "Sir Thopas." Many other satirists did the same. Cervantes, though he produced a masterpiece of pathos, wisdom, wit, and truth in the process, set out to belabour that obsolete image in *Don Quixote*. Samuel Butler

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followed, with *Hudibras*. Peacock, Barham, Thackeray, and Calverley parodied its epic and its lyric manifestations with malicious glee. Now we can look at it from afar off, and behold it as a strange, beautiful, imperfect, half-pitiful thing, once potent to rule the lives of men, and still potent at times to touch the heart and the memory.

In art the chivalric idea has found various expressions, and continues to find them to this day. As the Church was the sole custodian of art during the Dark Ages, and their chief nourisher and protector during the mediæval period, it is natural that the idea of knight-hood should be summed up and expressed by the painters, sculptors, glass-stainers, and goldsmiths in the persons of St Michael, the archangel, and St George, the slayer of the fabled dragon. Individual knights were, of course, depicted in various places and in various ways—in purbeck marble, alabaster, or brass upon their tombs, in illuminated miniatures in their prayer-books, in quaint, vivid little pictures illustrating the lives of valiant warriors, legendary and real. But the idea, in the abstract, was most often symbolized by one—or both—of these two saints.

The favourite manner of depicting St Michael was either struggling with, or trampling upon, Satan. Occasionally he is seen weighing the good and bad souls upon a gigantic pair of scales at the Day of

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Judgment. Always he wears the knightly armour and wields the knightly weapons of the age in which the painter or sculptor happened to live. Artists of the Primitive Flemish school were very fond of encasing him in beautiful plate armour; but Raphael, under the influence of the classical revival, dressed him as an ancient Roman, with embossed cuirass and flowing military cloak. St Martin, who really *was* a Roman soldier, provided mediæval painters with another opportunity of making an effective picture of a warrior in battle-harness; nor did they hesitate to depict the heroes of antiquity, Hector, Æneas, and Jason, in chain-



ST MICHAEL

From a fresco of the fourteenth century at Pisa

mail or well-wrought steel, with golden spurs upon their sollerets, vambraces on their arms, and basinets or salades upon their heads.

The favourite embodiment of the knightly ideal, however, was St George. Raphael twice painted him riding a plump white horse, once driving his spear with glorious energy into the scaly dragon sprawling on the ground, and once flourishing his falchion over

CHIVALRY IN LITERATURE AND ART

a grim beast which rears up and clutches at his right foot. Donatello, the great Florentine sculptor of the fifteenth century, showed him dismounted, a slight, boyish figure, with his two hands resting on his shield, of which the base touches the ground between his feet. Dürer, the German painter and engraver, imagined him as a fierce-looking fellow in elaborate armour, mounted on a heavy and shaggy steed, and wearing a queer wide hat; Carpaccio mounts him on a dark and fiery Arab charger, and sends him spurring full-tilt against a monster which obligingly opens its fierce jaws to receive the tip of the saint's spear. Dismounted, this patron saint of knighthood often appears at the side of a group of the Virgin and Child, placed there by the artist at the request of the donor of the picture. It is worthy of note that even in our own days St George has been chosen by an artist to typify certain unchanging virtues of the *chevalier*, the warrior who fights on horseback. The memorial in Hyde Park, raised in honour of the English cavalry that fell in the Great War, consists of a bronze statue of England's saint, clad in mediæval armour, mounted on a war-horse, and triumphing over a dragon as weird as any in the art of ancient times.

CHAPTER IV

TRADE AND COMMERCE

WHEN primitive man discovered that by mixing with copper an alloy of tin he could produce a metal more serviceable to him than either—to wit, *bronze*—the period known as the Bronze Age began. Its beginnings lie far back in the mists of time, before men began to write history, or to write at all; but long after the great civilizations of Greece and Rome had arisen bronze continued to be the metal most commonly used for weapons, tools, and personal ornaments. It is the ‘brass’ of the Old Testament, of which Goliath’s greaves were made. The Sumerians, they who dwelt in the clay-built city of Ur of the Chaldees, adopted it at an early period in their history. The Trojans and the Greeks of the Homeric poems could have done little or nothing without it. The ancient world in general depended upon this beautiful and useful substance for almost all the arts and crafts of war and of peace.

Now, in that ancient world copper was fairly plentiful, but tin was hard to come by. The principal tin-mines of which the bronze-using nations had knowledge were situated in Spain, in the Scilly Isles (called by them the

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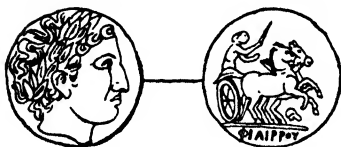
“Tin Isles”), and in Cornwall. Men were fain to concentrate all their intelligence and all their courage upon the problem of obtaining supplies of this metal without which bronze could not be made. A certain money-loving, adventurous, and resourceful people, the Phœnicians, tackled this problem and solved it long centuries before the birth of Christ. They were the first great traders, and it was for purely commercial purposes that they invented—or adapted from the more intricate forms already existing—the alphabet from which are derived the characters we use to-day. These were the men who built Tyre and Sidon, who planted a colony at Carthage, and another at Carthagera, in Spain. It was they who discovered the trade-routes to Spain and to the more distant and perilous shores of Cornwall. This latter secret they guarded jealously, and made strenuous efforts to conceal from their rivals, and ultimate conquerors, the Romans. It was thus that the island of Britain first came into the ambit of world-trade, and that the more civilized nations of the East were made aware of the existence of that misty speck of land in the grey and perilous waters of the West.

Matthew Arnold has drawn a vivid word-picture of the Tyrian trader, uncording his bales of purple cloth upon the beach “where the Atlantic raves,” ready to barter them for tin and pearls and hides with those

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

“shy traffickers, the dark Iberians”—by which he means the aboriginal inhabitants of the Cornish peninsula. At the geographical centre of the greatest commercial nation of the modern world, in the Royal Exchange, London, you may see on the wall a painting of these same Tyrian merchants with their bales, and those same “shy traffickers” gathering on the seashore to barter merchandise with them.

Before the soil of Britain had ever been scarred by the sandalled feet of the Roman legionaries the Britons were in touch with Rome by means of the Gaulish and Greek traders who frequented

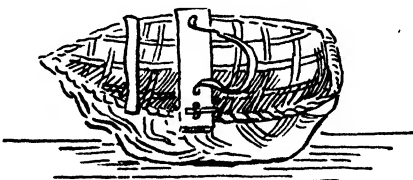


THE GOLD STATER OF PHILIP
OF MACEDON

such centres of British life as Avebury (Stonehenge), and who brought into this semi-civilized land golden staters of Philip of Macedon and glass jars from Tyre. There was also an intermittent exchange of British bronze for Scandinavian gold between the Celts of the West and the Norsemen of North-eastern Europe. During the Roman occupation, when *fora*, or market-places, formed the centres of all the important towns, and when distinctively British coinage was minted at Eboracum (York) and Londinium Augusta (London), trade between Britain and the Continent flourished mightily, only to be partially—if not entirely—eclipsed during

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the earlier decades of the Anglo-Saxon period. As those coarse and fierce invaders became more civilized—probably by contact with conquered Britons, whose minds and customs still bore the imprint of Rome—the pulse of commerce began to beat again. It is certain that the early Britons had learned—or had taught themselves—how to make boats of a more elaborate type than the scooped-out tree-trunk and the hide-covered coracle, because when Cæsar was in Spain he ordered his soldiers to construct hurriedly some boats “after the



A WELSH CORACLE

fashion of those used by the Britons,” with keels and ribs of timber, and hulls woven of osier and covered with stretched skins. The whole course of English history might be expressed in pictures of the different sorts of ships and boats that have played their part in it,¹ from the galleys of the Phœnicians and the Romans, the transports of the Saxons, the dragon-ships of the Norsemen, the brightly painted fleet of William the Conqueror, the merchant vessels and pilgrim vessels of the Middle Ages, the cogs, and carracks, and caravels, the high-pooped ships that sailed to Virginia and went

¹ See *The Sailing-ship*, R. and R. C. Anderson (Harrap).

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forth against the Armada, down to the black-and-white timbered frigates and ships-of-the-line that harassed Napoleon.

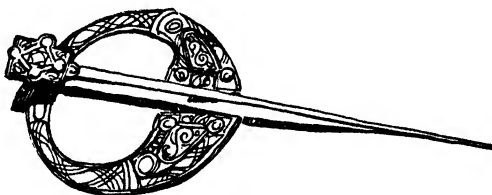
Trade between England and the Continent was certainly beginning to revive



ANGLO-SAXON PENDANTS

when the Emperor Charlemagne wrote to Offa, King of Mercia, complaining that many English merchants were wont to pose as pilgrims in

order to obtain safe-conducts through the Imperial dominions, whereas their real purpose was to smuggle their wares, and dispose of them by the way. These



ANGLO-SAXON BROOCH OF GILT BRONZE

wares were probably small articles of jewellery, in the making of which Anglo-Saxon goldsmiths had come to excel. During the reign of Athelstan (925-940) a law was made that every merchant who had fared thrice across the wide ocean at his own cost was "thegn-right worthy," and entitled to rank as a *thane*, a position lower than that of the *eorl*, but considerably higher than that of the *ceorl*.

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This law shows that as early as the tenth century English merchant-venturers were daring the perils of strange seas and strange lands in quest of gain and gold. In the *Colloquies* of Ælfric¹ we make the acquaintance of a merchant of the early eleventh century, who tells us, "I go aboard my ship with my goods, and go over sea and sell my things, and buy precious wares such as this country does not produce, and bring them hither—brocade and silk, gems and gold, various raiments and dye-stuffs, wine and oil, ivory and brass, copper and tin, sulphur and glass, and so forth. And," he adds, with engaging simplicity, "I wish to sell them dearer here than I buy them there, that I may get some profit wherewith I may feed my wife, and myself, and my sons."



ANGLO-SAXON BRONZE DISK

These goods came chiefly from Constantinople to Venice, thence overland to Flanders, and so by sea to England. Hides, ropes, tall tree-trunks for ships' masts, and ironwork of various kinds came from the

¹ For a further account of these *Colloquies* see *The Boy through the Ages*, D. M. Stuart (Harrap).

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Scandinavian countries, and the lands lying round the Baltic or eastward of the North Sea. English exports were seldom manufactured goods at this time. Cornish tin was still a valuable raw material, and so was lead from the Peak district in Derbyshire. The excellence of the fleeces of the English flocks was early recognized, and even before the Conquest the great weaving industry of Flanders drew its chief supplies from England. As time passed sheep-breeding for the sake of wool became so profitable that many great landowners transferred to pasture acres of land formerly used for corn and other crops, until under the Tudors it was said metaphorically that in this country you might see a strange sight—sheep devouring men.

Domesday Book, William the Conqueror's great register of his island realm, gives us many interesting glimpses of the activities of the Anglo-Saxons, and we learn there that salt was both a staple commodity and the wherewithal of a flourishing industry. Salt-works to the number of 727 and 5000 salt-mills are mentioned in the Norman record. The export of manufactured articles developed slowly for more reasons than one. It must be remembered that the monasteries were busy centres of craftsmanship, and that mills, forges, masons' yards, and carpenters' shops were attached to all the principal monastic houses, where monkish millers, blacksmiths, masons, and carpenters were glad to work

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for the laity, either in exchange for a donation to the coffers of the abbey or priory, or simply "for the love of God and His saints."

The first effect of the Norman Conquest was to impoverish all the small centres of trade in the larger towns and villages, and to handicap and harass the traders. Soon, however, there came a great inrush of new influences and activities. The Normans had much to teach the Anglo-Saxons, and, half reluctantly, their lessons were tackled and mastered. French and Spanish



A SHOP IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY PARIS

ships began to discharge and reload at the southern harbours of England. Craftsmen from France and from the Low Countries came in legions and settled in the country and plied their several callings unmolested. The towns—which means the trading communities dwelling in the towns—began to prosper, and to be jealous of their privileges, and to petition the

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king for charters, not often in vain. Then merchants banded themselves together into guilds, for their protection and to ensure fair dealing all round. Of these guilds we shall have more to say later. Theirs was a



TRANSPORTING MERCHANDISE FROM ASIA

very important rôle in the Middle Ages, quite apart from their assigned sphere of trade and commerce, for they were the fosterers of many arts, the drama among the rest.

Till the thirteenth century the chief exports of England continued to be raw materials, and the agents through whom the export trade was carried on were

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not, as a rule, Englishmen. German merchants of the *Hansa*, a league formed for trading purposes and later known as the *Hanseatic League*, were firmly established in London in the thirteenth century, and had as their



AN ENGLISH FAIR, FOURTEENTH CENTURY

headquarters a walled fortress—the Steelyard—on Thames-side, where, when their gates were bolted at curfew, they could bid defiance to all the King's horses and all the King's men. The first Hansa merchants hailed from Cologne and Lübeck and Hamburg; they were followed by others from Flanders and the Netherlands. Trade with Genoa began at the period of the

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Third Crusade, and flourished mightily. Russian tallows and Chinese silks reached Western Europe through the trafficking that went on between the Hansa merchants and them of Muscovy and Cathay at the great fair held in Novgorod.

In England itself there were no great manufacturing cities, no centres of world-finance, such as the Manchester, London, Chicago, or New York of to-day. Trade was kept circulating, buyers and sellers were brought together, foreign merchants were given opportunities to do business with English ones, at weekly markets, held in all towns and villages of any importance, and at annual fairs, held, by royal charter, in such places as London, Chester, Oxford, Stourbridge, Winchester, York, Hull, and King's Lynn—to mention only a few. In towns where 'shops'—as the term was then understood—were open all the year round, the trade of the townspeople seemed to concentrate itself about the principal church. Thence developed those cathedral squares, surrounded by quaint old houses, which one sees more often on the Continent than in England. Pious traders probably liked to "ply their music" under the shadow of a belfry, just as the merchants of prehistoric Britain liked to meet for exchange and barter under the shadow of the great triliths of Stonehenge. When a fair was in progress all other trading in the neighbourhood was at a standstill. 'Streets' of

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wooden booths, each assigned to some particular craft or calling, were erected on some suitable stretch of open ground, and thither hied a motley crowd, some of them sober and solvent and honest, and some of them most decidedly the reverse. Foreign merchants, come to barter wines and spices, silks and fine cloths, were recognizable by their strange jargon and by certain peculiarities of costume. (We shall have something to say about costume later on.) They came from places as far asunder as Hamburg and Genoa, Bruges and Florence, Rouen and Cologne. Some of



PILGRIMS' TOKENS

- (1) The Compostella cockle-shell
- (2) St Thomas of Canterbury

them had been in strange, remote lands, and were tanned by the ardent Eastern sun or scarred by the bitter winds of the Baltic. Many had combined a little prudent piety with their quest of gold, and had made a point of visiting any famous places of pilgrimage that happened to lie upon their way. You could tell these pious merchants at a glance, because their hoods or cloaks would be decorated with pilgrims' tokens, in pewter, or lead, or, perhaps, in gold.

At the markets much of the business was between

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neighbours, and much of it was exchange rather than sale. Thus, a farmer would barter a load of hay for so many barrels of salt or tar. People depended on the fairs for merchandise that was hard to come by, but the markets provided them with most of the simple necessities of their very rough and simple lives. One of the most famous fairs of the Middle Ages was held on the green and pleasant hill to the east of the ancient city of Winchester, the hill of St Giles, upon whose festival the fair began. Young monks from the monastery in the valley below were given a 'fairing' every year that they might supply themselves with fresh penknives, and it is interesting to realize that even in these far-off days the knives made in Sheffield were known to be excellent. Pedlars plied their irregular trade among the frequenters of the fairs, and even the poorest ploughman was not so poor that he could not bring home to his wattle-and-daub cottage a little brooch or button for his womenfolk.

Certain English towns were distinguished by the name of *Staple* towns—a name that carried with it both responsibilities and privileges. It was at these places, and these alone, that *staple* commodities—wool, hides, leather, lead, and tin might be sold to buyers from overseas. The wool-trade, one of the most vital, was controlled by a group of men known as the Merchants of the Staple. A wool-pack was their recognized

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badge or emblem, and appeared on the seals of certain of the Staple towns. The seal of Lincoln represents the Virgin and Child standing upon one, and on that of Boston we see St Botolph, the patron saint of the town, standing behind one of generous proportions. Edward III, whose bride, Philippa, was a Fleming,



STAPLE SEAL OF BOSTON

greatly desired to encourage trade between Flanders and England, and to this end made, in 1353, the Ordinance of the Staple, regulating transactions between foreigners and his own subjects in such a wise as to give a sense of security to the former. Many of these Flemish merchants deserted their own flat, reedy homeland for the eastern and southern shires of England. You see their monumental brasses, side by side with those of native-born neighbours, in ancient churches of East Anglia, and there is one in All Hallows, Barking, by the Tower. Very well pleased with themselves do all these



BRASS OF A WOOL MERCHANT IN NORTH-LEACH CHURCH

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worthy fellows look, with their neatly cropped hair, their furred gowns, and their rich chains. England could—and *did*—produce the finest fleeces, but not for many years were English weavers as skilful as they of Flanders. Chaucer mentions it as something quite remarkable about his Good Wyf of Bath that she had such skill in cloth-making.

She passéd hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.

As trade increased seaports grew in importance.

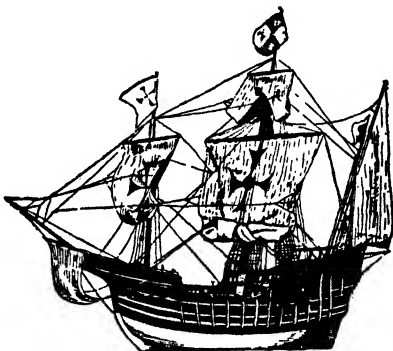


SEAL OF WINCHELSEA

Those on the south coast had an especially momentous part to play, for they were the chief points of contact with France both in peace and war. Along the coast of Kent and Sussex runs a chain of seven ancient towns of which only two—Hastings and Dover—are still awake and astir to-day. The other five—Romney, Hythe, Sandwich, Winchelsea, and Rye—are tranquil and drowsy places now; the grass grows high among the cobble-stones that once clattered beneath the hooves of pack-horses; the old belfries that once rang the alarm when French raiders landed, and English farms went up in flames, have long forgotten the very sound

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of a call to arms. Winchelsea and Rye are the most picturesque, but their five sister-towns were the original Cinque Ports. To them Edward I granted a royal charter, whereby they were exempt from taxation and from the jurisdiction of the law, in return for which they had to provide fifty-seven ships for fifteen days each year. At the coronation of the English monarch the barons of the Cinque Ports had—and still have—the honour of bearing the embroidered canopy over his head in procession. In the West Bristol was the most flourishing port, and thence



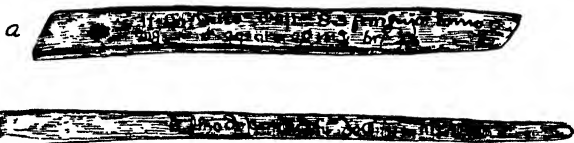
THE "SANTA MARIA," 1492

sailed many a proud ship, with gilded fo'c'sle and painted sails, on a perilous voyage of discovery. Thence went John and Sebastian Cabot, in 1497, on a journey which lasted for two months, and ended on the wild and then unrecked-of coast of Labrador.

The growth of commerce led indirectly to the spread of education. Merchants had either to keep accounts or to hire clerks to keep them, and if the Church held an absolute monopoly in learning it was obvious that

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trade must either wither away or lapse into priestly hands. Such hands were often both worthy and capable, as witness the practical business ability of many prelates, priors, and stewards of monastic houses; but, on the other hand, trade was the very life-blood of the nation, and in order that it should circulate freely one obstruction after another had to be removed. Even



TALLY-STICKS OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

(a) A private tally; (b) an Exchequer tally

so, well into the nineteenth century the unlettered people, the simple folk who would modestly describe themselves as poor scholars or none, were fain to check their buying and selling with the aid of notched sticks called *tallies* (German, *thalen*, to count), such as may now be seen in many museums.

Many arts and sciences owe much to the fostering and stimulating influences of commerce. Geography and navigation obviously do. When once the Crusades had established contact between the Eastern and the Western world, a stream of merchandise began to flow from Asia and Africa to Europe. Alongside it flowed another, invisible, but none the less swift and strong

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—a stream of *ideas*. Those stout-hearted early merchants brought home in their square-sailed, high-prowed ships more marvellous cargoes than they recked of; together with casks of Spanish and Greek wine, bales of silk and barrels of spices, they brought legends and fables, tales of far, fantastic lands and peoples, and of even more fantastic birds and beasts. And they were carriers of *words*, as we shall soon realize if we pause to think how many terms in common use are of Oriental origin, and must have been brought westward by the merchants of the Middle Ages. Spices were very valuable in the days when large quantities of meat and fish had to be pickled every autumn in anticipation of the needs of the winter; so, by way of Greek, we get the Hebrew word ‘cinnamon’; ‘tariff’ is not much unlike the Arabic *ta’rif*, a notification; ‘scarlet’ has a Persian source in *saqalat*, red cloth; ‘muslin’ came first from Mosul, and ‘gauze’ perhaps from Gaza; ‘alcove’ is Arabic, and ‘awning’ Persian, and both the science of algebra and its name travelled westward from Moorish Spain. In order to describe a man playing chess or eating an orange, or a lady putting jessamine in a jar, an English scribe had to use almost purely Persian words; but if, in addition, his hero or heroine happened to eat ginger, he all unwittingly ‘tapped’ the language of a civilization even more ancient than that of Greece, Sanskrit, the mother of all the (so-called)

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Indo-European tongues; for in Sanskrit *kringa vera* means 'the horn-shaped thing,' and every one who has seen the root of the ginger-plant will understand how that name came to be given to it in Vedic India. With



CHAUCER'S MERCHANT
From the Ellesmere MS.

these Oriental words came Oriental fairy - tales and romances, which were retold under grey skies long before *The Arabian Nights* was translated into French in the eighteenth century. That is how it chanced that Chaucer's Yong Squiér began to tell the "story of Cambuscan bold" — that wonderful story of a brazen steed and an enchanted glass which,

unfortunately, he "left untold." "The Pardoner's Tale" is another importation from the East, and so, in all probability, is the Merchant's. The Merchant himself, though his portrait fills only fifteen lines of the Prologue, is a lifelike figure, with his forked beard, his Flemish beaver hat, his neatly clasped boots, and his impressive talk about his rising profits, his bargains, and his journeys. Chaucer tells us, too, that

Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldès selle.

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These 'sheeldès' were not such as knights and heralds bore, but French coins, *écus*, stamped with the lilled shield (*écu*) of France.

Coinage and currency were subjects of much interest to the merchants of the Middle Ages. If unscrupulous kings tampered with the mint, and debased, clipped, or imperfect coins got into circulation, buying and selling became difficult, and profits uncertain. The English pound represented a pound's weight of silver, and the Hanseatic Mint at Lübeck, where the purest coins were struck, adopted this standard of value. Now, the English called these Hansa merchants "Easterlings," and thence comes our modern word 'sterling' applied to metal, minted or otherwise. The merchants were the bankers of early days, and spendthrift princes, eager to make war on their neighbours or to give dowries to their daughters, were glad to dip their royal fingers into the coffers of such men as Richard Whittington. And then the lender began to assert his power over the borrower, and merchants were knighted, and monarchs deigned to sit at meat in Guildhall. The first recorded Lord Mayor of London was Henry FitzAlwyn; like John Gilpin, "a draper bold was he," though probably not a *linen*-draper only. The city over which he held sway was moated like a castle, girdled with walls, and bristling with spires and towers. He and his successors had many duties to perform besides guarding the rights

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and liberties of their city. They had to organize a sort of rough and ineffectual police-force, to persuade (or compel) their fellow-citizens to keep lamps alight before their doors after dusk, to abstain from flinging all household refuse into the middle of the road, and to prevent their pigs and ducks from wandering to and fro, and hampering the progress of passers-by, both mounted and on foot. Moreover, if a baker's loaves were underweight, or a vintner sold bad wine, the culprit was haled before the Lord Mayor, who decreed some suitable penance, causing him, perhaps, to sit in the stocks, or to stand in the pillory, amid the jeers of his more virtuous fellow-citizens.

Though the story of Richard Whittington, mercer and four times Lord Mayor of London, has passed from the sober realm of history to the golden world of fairy-tales, what we know of the real man, albeit it is not much, is yet enough to give us a very good idea of the career, the activities, and the ideals of a great London merchant of the early fifteenth century. Richard was the younger son of a Gloucestershire knight, and, like many younger sons, had to turn to trade for a livelihood, since the more glorious calling of his father might not be his. Whether his immortal cat was a real animal, or the name of a ship in which he invested all his money, historians cannot agree, and it is improbable that anybody will ever know. But Richard is

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no misty myth, like King Arthur, as Henry IV and Henry V had reason to know when they borrowed from him the funds they needed for their wars at home and abroad. Many of the archers who fought so well at Agincourt, and of the bows and shafts with which they harried the French cavalry, were hired and purchased with coins from the coffers of Whittington. There is a legend, so picturesque that one hopes it may be shot through with truth, that when the great mercer, in the year 1421, feasted the victor of Agincourt and his queen, he "concluded the banquet" by flinging into the fire, instead of the aromatic spices which it was then the fashion to cast upon the flames, a wad of crackling parchments dangling with royal seals—the king's bonds to repay the modest sum of £21,000 lent to him by his host.

Whittington died a very wealthy man, and his manner of disposing of his wealth shows us what manner of man he was. The plight of the prisoners in the ruinous and reeking prison of Newgate, the sad case of the aged and friendless poor, the sufferings of "sick persons and young children," the hardships of needy scholars lacking books, had all touched his heart; and even the difficulties of Londoners who had to go far afield in quest of water, and to bring it home laboriously in heavy buckets or barrels, did not escape his keen and yet compassionate eyes. So with the

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ample funds that passed from his cold grasp to their living hands, his executors rebuilt Newgate, founded almshouses, repaired St Bartholomew's Hospital (al-



A MERCHANT OF
THE FOURTEENTH
CENTURY

ready an ancient foundation), contributed to the glazing and paving of the 'new' Guildhall, and bore half the cost of building the library attached to it; and they also had conduits made, and 'bosses' set up, in Billingsgate and Cripplegate, whence the people of those thickly populated districts might draw supplies of pure water—or, at least, water as pure as the conditions of the time could afford!

Well might it be written upon his long-vanished monument in the church of St Michael, Paternoster Royal:

*Ut fragrans nardus
Fama fuit iste Ricardus.*

(Fragrant as spikenard
The fame was of this Richard.)

In Whittington's century—the fifteenth—London had come into her own as the "flower of cities all," an almost unimaginable London, fair and smokeless, with her belfries gleaming pearly white against the clear sky, and silver-winged swans floating on a Thames shaded by the apple-trees in the orchards of the riverside houses.

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The streets in what we should now call the 'business



SHOP BOOTHS AT BLACK GATE, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE
Fourteenth century

quarter' of the city were full of movement—and of noise. Beside the open booths, and under the projecting

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upper stories of the houses, leather-lunged 'prentices were calling out the merits of their master's goods, while wandering hawkers and pedlars added their voices to the din. A visitor from the country would find himself beset on all hands, one man offering him hot ribs of beef, another cherries still on the bough, another spectacles, another felt hats. There were bad characters about, then as now. One such bewildered countryman (John Lydgate) has recorded his sensations when he lost his hood at one end of the city in the morning, and before sunset had recognized it ("I knew it as well as I knew my creed," says he) hung up for sale at the other.

CHAPTER V

THE CHURCH: PRIESTS AND PRELATES

It is more than a little difficult for us to realize the part played by the Church in the common life of the people of England before the Reformation. That life was a hard one, grim, laborious, and grey; almost the only source of rest, colour, and refreshment was to be found in the services and the festivals of the Church. The edifice itself was the centre round which revolved the spiritual and intellectual activities of the parish or village where it stood. But for the simple, and sometimes even meagre, instruction given by their priests, the ignorance of the mass of the nation would have been profound. Anything that they knew—and the most learned of them did not know much—about other times and other countries than their own, they had heard or seen within consecrated walls. One says ‘seen’ advisedly, for few churches were so poor that they boasted no carvings in stone or wood, no mural paintings, no windows with coloured panes: and the images represented not only the famous figures of sacred history, prophets, patriarchs, and saints, but dragons, lions, and dromedaries, and far-off cities in *this* world, and beautiful or terrible regions in the *next*. That

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wayward genius, François Villon, has given us a glimpse of the wall-paintings of a fifteenth-century French church in the *Ballade which he wrote at the Request of his Mother*. There he makes the good woman say:

*Au moustier voy dont suis paroissienne
Paradis paint, où sont harpes et luz,
Et ung enfer, où dampnez sont boulluz ;
L'ung me fait paour, l'autre, joye et liesse.*

(A painted Paradise in church I see,
Where amid harps and lights the blessed dwell,
And lost souls burning in a painted hell ;
Fearful is one, the other fair to me.)

To the mediæval mind, unvexed by astronomical lore, nothing appeared more certain than that the golden-azure City of Peace was immediately above the heads of men, and the flaming pit immediately below their feet; nothing seemed more right and natural than that the sun, moon, and stars should have been expressly created to illumine and to direct the comings and goings of the dwellers upon this flat world in the precise centre of the visible universe. This conception of the nature and purpose of "all things visible and invisible" made the task of the priest an easy one when he began to instruct his open-mouthed flock. From him they would learn not only the first elements of their faith, but also fascinating legends of dragons and damsels, demons and saints. Just as in pagan times an elusive divinity, perhaps friendly, perhaps the reverse, was apt to lurk among

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the woods and waters, so in Christian Europe wells and caves, trees and pools, had their angelic or demonic guardians. Scoffers were few, but the bold fellow who laughed at such notions in the safe and comfortable light of day would be fain to cross himself and mutter an *Ave* if his way led him past the haunted spot after dusk had fallen and when the wind was high.

In England the Reformation was never the devastating whirlwind which it became on the Continent. Much loveliness was swept away, but much remains. It was not in the English character to set to work with the bitter and relentless energy of—for example—the Dutch and the Scots. Standing in a mediæval English church, or in one of the great English cathedrals, you still have a sense of contact with the past; whereas in a grim Scottish kirk or a bleak Dutch *kapelle*, however venerable the walls themselves may be, you feel that the bridge between yourself and its long-dead builders has been rudely hacked asunder.

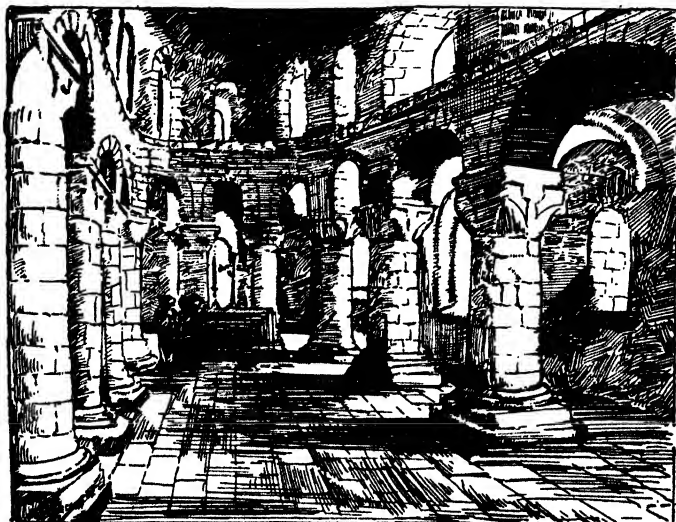
Only a modest amount of architectural knowledge is necessary in order to recognize the four chief orders of English architecture. These are: Norman (from the middle of the eleventh to the close of the twelfth century); Early English (from the end of the twelfth to near the end of the thirteenth century); Decorated (from the end of the thirteenth to near the end of the fourteenth century); Perpendicular (from the end of

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the fourteenth to the middle of the sixteenth century). The Anglo-Saxon churches that remain are few, and, like the men who built them, they are simple and sturdy rather than beautiful; the thickness of the walls is remarkable, as is also the smallness of the windows. Much toil and much time were needed to build a worthy church, but neither was grudged in the days when both were dedicated wholeheartedly to the glory of God. When many years went to the making of one particular fabric it was inevitable that the ideas of the earlier generation should overlap those of the later. The result is that not a few of our most lovely cathedrals are masses of architectural patchwork. At Winchester, for example, the transepts or crossbars of the cruciform plan are pure Norman, the retro-choir and the Lady Chapel Early English, the choir-stalls Decorated, and the nave Perpendicular. Massive strength and dignity are the first characteristics of Norman architecture. Columns are heavy, arches round. The walls are often circled with arcades of single or intersecting arches, adorned with elaborate moulding. Norwich, Durham, St John's Chapel in the Tower of London, and the church of St Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield, illustrate these features. The Early English architects loved high and narrow pointed windows (lancets); they planted delicate pinnacles upon the stalwart Norman towers; they replaced the

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stalwart Norman columns with clustered shafts of darker marble, making a sharp contrast with the paler and duller stonework above. As their walls were thinner, external buttresses became necessary, to resist



ST JOHN'S CHAPEL

the outward thrust. For ornament, they loved what is known as 'dog-tooth' moulding on their pointed arches, and on blank wall-spaces they set carvings in 'diaper-work,' the design borrowed from that in the rich Oriental silk-stuffs then used so much in making the vestments of the priests. Salisbury Cathedral is the

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most unified and uncomplicated English example of this style. Between the Early English and the Deco-

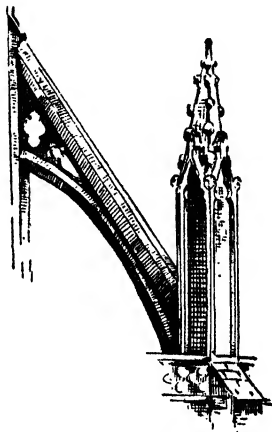


SALISBURY CATHEDRAL, WEST FRONT

rated came a time of transition, when one style had not quite arrived and the other had not quite departed. When the Decorated had declared itself arches and windows began to grow broader. Such windows had to be divided in the centre by a vertical bar of masonry,

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and this necessity led to the invention of the graceful and flowing tracery typical of the style. The capitals of the columns blossomed with stone flowers and fruits, the frames of doors and windows budded into the 'ball-flower'; wherever peaks rose from tombs, or choir-stalls, or pews, or screens, they ended in beautiful carved ornaments, of which the most attractive is known as the 'poppy-head finial.' The buttresses, instead of huddling closely against the walls, now spring outward in a graceful curve, and become *flying* buttresses. To this period belong the cathedrals of Exeter, Wells, and York. Then comes the Perpendicular, so called because as the windows broadened yet more, long upright mul-

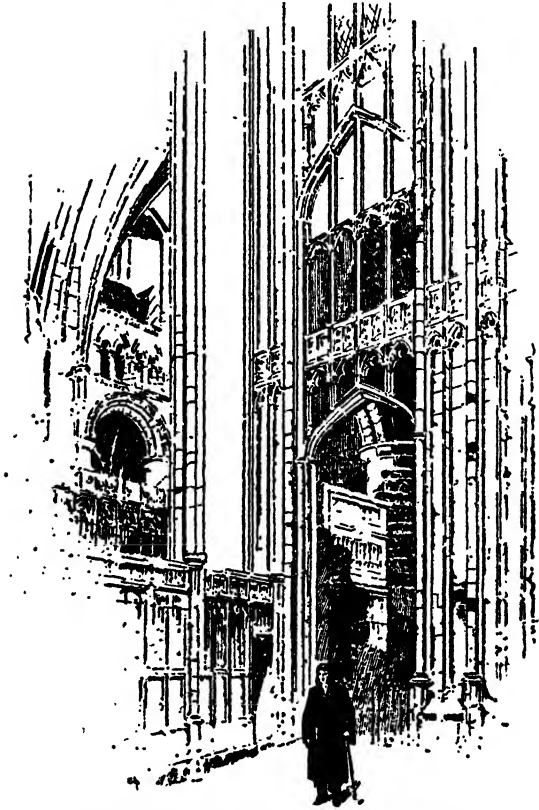


A FLYING BUTTRESS

lions were introduced to divide them. Indeed, the greater space occupied by the windows is the most characteristic feature of this style of architecture. As the Perpendicular period wanes curious changes occur. The Norman arch—and, consequently, the Norman window—were round; the Early English arch and window were high, pointed, and narrow;

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the Decorated arch and window, though still pointed,

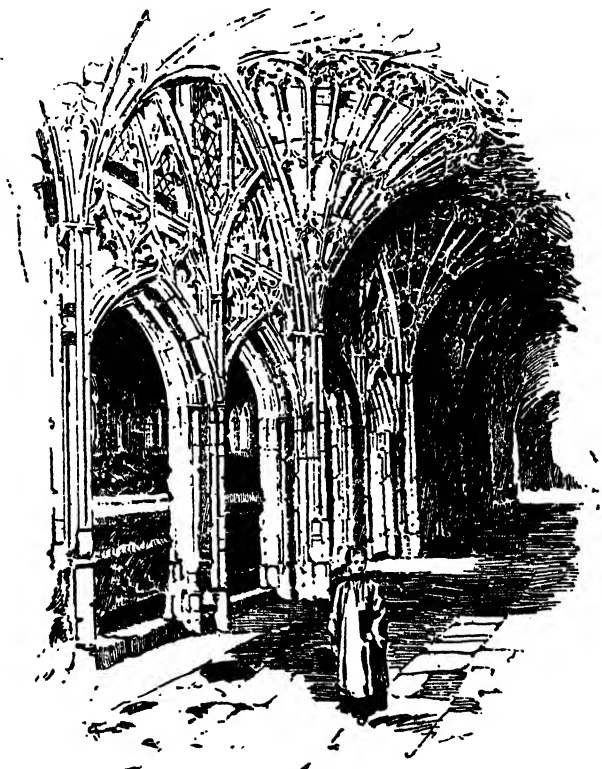


GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL, NORTH TRANSEPT

were less sharply so; then, as the Perpendicular windows and doors continue to broaden, square

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arches, and doors either square, or with square hoods



THE CLOISTERS, GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL

above their pointed arches, make their appearance. The vaulted roofs now adorn themselves with exquisite fan-tracery, and, presently, from the intersecting

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fans depend bosses, elaborately carved. To the later Perpendicular belong Henry VII's Chapel, Westminster; St George's, Windsor; and King's College Chapel, Cambridge. Of fan-vaulting in its earlier and more graceful phase there is no better example than the cloisters at Gloucester.

The always delightful pastime of repeopleing an ancient church with long-vanished worshippers becomes much less hazy and haphazard if we take care not to evoke the figure of a knight in chain-mail emerging from an arch which was not built until plate-armour was the order of the day, and not to imagine a coifed or hooded Angevin gentlewoman telling her beads by the light of a window whose jewelled rays fell first upon Plantagenet headdresses, peaked and horned.

As windows grew broader more glass was required, and the art of the glazier kept pace with this need. In earlier times, when only small and narrow windows were seen, or lancets such as the "Five Sisters" at York, the glass was applied rather in the manner of mosaic, dozens of small, intensely hued fragments being fitted together to form the design. Much of the fine old glass in Canterbury Cathedral is of this type. As the windows expanded the glass-workers grew more enterprising, and worked with a more free and generous touch; and then came the beautiful fourteenth- and

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fifteenth-century examples, such as those at Gloucester and at Great Malvern, where figures and buildings are skilfully fitted in, but always subordinated to the



THE "FIVE SISTERS" WINDOW, YORK MINSTER

general effect, which remains that of a mesh of rainbow jewels spun from point to point of the stone tracery. Later still this jewelled effect vanishes, and the windows become simply pictures painted upon large panes of glass, as are those in the cathedral-church of St Gudule at Brussels.

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In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the basic glass was never pure white. The sand used in its manufacture contained so much iron that even the clearest had a yellowish or greenish tinge. The flakes of red colour, being held in suspension, had a gorgeous ruby glow. At the end of the fourteenth century, instead of the colour being thus held in the glass, it was applied in a layer upon the surface, and gained in brightness what it lost in depth. As the oxides with which the glass was stained were never chemically pure, the glazier could never tell beforehand exactly *how* a certain colour would 'come out,' and chance and guesswork played a large part in the production of his masterpieces.

The great abbeys and cathedrals became veritable treasuries of decorative art, where the loveliest achievements of sculptors and goldsmiths, embroiderers and glass-stainers, were gathered together, the piety and enthusiasm of each successive generation seeming to outstrip and over-climb everything that had gone before. Most of these buildings possessed the relic or relics of one saint or more, and many of them guarded in a shrine of fretted gold the complete—or *almost* complete—skeleton of some famous bishop, virgin, or martyr. Such possessions were a source of much wealth, as we shall find when we come to consider the fascinating subject of pilgrims and pilgrimages. Not only did prosperous pilgrims hang gorgeous gifts

PRIESTS AND PRELATES

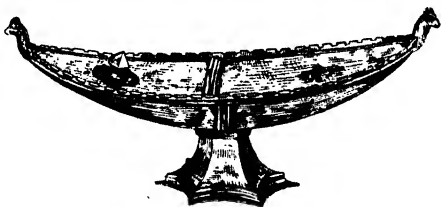
upon such shrines; proud lords and noble ladies desired passionately that their dust should lie near that of some famous saint, and to that end bequeathed much gold to the chosen shrine, and endowed chantries, that Masses might be sung for the repose of their 'sowlys' as long as the world should last. Sometimes it befell that a man who in his lifetime had astonished both his friends and his foes by his splendour and his pride would leave word in his will that he should, as a belated but probably quite sincere act of humility, be buried in the coarse woollen gown and cowl of a monk. Louis d'Orléans, most gay and debonair of French princes, slain in 1406 by the hirelings of his kinsman John of Burgundy, chose to be interred clad in the habit of a Celestinian friar, with face and hands uncovered, in an earthen grave.

Royal sinners naturally liked to shelter beneath the shadow of a royal saint, and even some whose sins were not exactly as scarlet felt a pleasant sense of security in the immediate neighbourhood of haunted and holy sepulchres. In Westminster the stiff, golden-bronze Plantagenet kings and queens huddle nervously round the lofty tomb of Edward the Confessor; Henry IV may have felt a certain reluctance to thrust himself into the ghostly company of Richard II, for he and his queen rest at Canterbury, as does his valiant cousin, the Black Prince, hard by the spot where

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the glorious shrine of Thomas à Becket once rose like an ark of fretted gold above a surging sea of pilgrims' hoods.

One of the crafts to which the mediæval Church gave the fullest encouragement was that of the worker in metals. For the high altars of the greater edifices huge candlesticks were needed, traceried tabernacles, many-rayed monstrances, chalices, and patens of pale



THE RAMSEY INCENSE-BOAT

and beautiful silver-gilt; for the ceremonies and processions jewelled crosses would be required, and incense-boats, and thuribles. The thurible (it is another name for a censer, or incense-burner) was often in the form of a pointed tower with elaborately pierced sides. The thurifer, or incense-bearer, swung it to and fro, with a rhythmic movement, upon its four slender chains, and spirals of fragrant blue smoke climbed to the intersecting arches high above. When the fuming embers began to fail the thurifer's companion lifted the roof-shaped lid, and with the aid of a long spoon added some fresh frankincense from the boat-shaped

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vessel which he carried. Nearly eighty years ago such a thurible and such a vessel were found in Whittlesea Mere, Huntingdon, and these are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. They date from the fourteenth century, and once formed part of the treasure of Ramsey Abbey.

Obviously the richer churches would possess more costly and exquisite altar-furniture than the poorer and smaller ones. Gloucester Cathedral was proud of its marvellously wrought candlestick, a mass of writhing and intertwining foliage, thick-set with tiny figures of men and demons; but a parish church might have nothing finer than a pair of grey pewter prickets. (A pricket-candlestick is one upon which the candle is impaled, instead of being fixed into a socket.) Before the

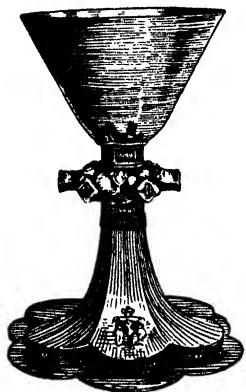


THE GLOUCESTER
CANDLESTICK

Reformation the priest alone drank from the cup during the Communion service: that is why mediæval chalices have comparatively small and shallow bowls, though the stem and foot may be of great beauty, heavy with disks of coloured enamel or of crystal, or engraved with scenes from the Passion.

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The vestments of the priests also varied in gorgeousness according to the size and importance of the church in which they were worn. When fully vested for Mass the priest wore: the *amice*, an oblong of linen passed over the head and then fastened round the neck with



A FIFTEENTH-CENTURY
CHALICE

corde; the *alb*, a tight-sleeved linen garment, reaching from the shoulders to the feet; the *stole*, a narrow strip of fringed and embroidered silk worn round the neck, the two ends dangling beneath the *chasuble*, an oval, sleeveless mantle, ornamented with bars of embroidery, called *orphreys*, which are usually arranged so as to form a cross. To the left cuff of the *alb* is attached another strip of silk, smaller than the *stole*, called the *maniple*. The origin of this strip of silk is obscure, but, according to some authorities, it may be found in the ceremonial handkerchiefs with which the magistrates of pagan Rome used to give the signal for the opening of the *Ludi*, or games in the circus. The outer mantle worn by the priest in processions, and at solemn ceremonies other than the Mass, is called a *cope*, and the design upon it is not usually arranged in bars, like the *orphreys* on the *chasuble*, but may be massed or

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scattered, or may consist simply of the pattern woven into the fabric itself.

Many of these silken fabrics used for priestly vestments in mediæval times were of great beauty in themselves, apart from the needle-work with which they were enriched, and most of them came from distant countries: from China, Persia, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. The five liturgical colours were white, red, green, violet, and black, and their use was related to the various feasts of the Church's year, and the particular ceremony during which they were to be worn. White, for example, was the correct colour



A CHASUBLE

for Trinity Sunday, Christmas, and Easter, for the Conversion of St Paul, for anniversaries of the coronations of popes and bishops, and during the celebration of a Bridal Mass; red was worn at Pentecost; green during Trinity-tide and between the Epiphany and Septuagesima; violet during Lent and Advent; black at Requiem Masses and offices for the dead.

Among the fabrics most in favour for priestly

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garments, altar-hangings, and so forth, were sendal, baudekin, samite, taffety, sarcenet, diaper-silk, and velvet. Here again history is caught and held in a word. 'Sendal' comes from the Sanskrit *Sindhu*, which is also the root of the word 'India,' and means from, or of, the river Indus, *i.e.*, Indian; 'baudekin' is silk of Bagdad, from the Italian name, *Baldacco*, of Haroun al-Raschid's city; 'samite' has a Greek source in two words *hex*, six, and *mitos*, a thread, and may have been so called because in this fabric the weft-threads are caught only at every *sixth* warp-thread; 'taffety' is Persian, the root-word meaning to twist; 'diaper-silk' is not, as some good people once thought, *toile d'Ypres*, but in Byzantine Greek was called *diaspros*: *dia*, through, and *aspros*, white; 'sarcenet' is simply *drap sarrasinois* in old French, 'Saracenic cloth'; and the Low Latin *villus*, 'shaggy hair,' is the 'parent' of 'velvet.'

The demand for these costly and beautiful silks of the East was constant and keen, as the farseeing merchants of Venice and London, Genoa and Florence, soon perceived. In Italy, especially in the two cities last mentioned, dextrous weavers began without delay to copy the designs in the Persian and Chinese fabrics, but the less adaptable English were for the most part content to import them ready woven from the East and then have them embroidered, usually, in the case of

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church vestments or hangings, by the patient and skilful hands of cloistered nuns. It happens, however, that one of the most lovely of existing masterpieces of English ecclesiastical needlecraft is wrought not upon silk but upon linen. This is the Syon cope, so called because it belonged to a convent of Bridgettine nuns (nuns following the rule of St Bridget, a Swedish saint who, by the by, was not yet born when the cope was made) at Isleworth, on the Thames. Being a cope and not a chasuble it is covered entirely with figures of saints, archangels, and Apostles, and scenes from the life of Christ. The chief colours introduced are tawny brown, gold, green, and deep blue. This last tint appears rather startlingly upon the hair and beard of more than one Apostle! Some of the little figures are very graceful, especially the archangels and the seraphim, with their wings plumed with peacock's feathers. This monument of industry dates from the last years of the thirteenth century, so the nuns were busy upon it at the same time that the masons were busy upon the choir of Westminster Abbey a little farther down the river. Much ingenuity and not a little humour were shown by the designers of such embroideries. Upon one fourteenth-century altar-frontal we see the angels appearing to the shepherds, and the scene is treated with delightful directness and more than a touch of childish gaiety. A shepherd is blowing so loud a blast

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upon his own bagpipe that he cannot hear the heavenly song, but several of the sheep hear it, as well as his fellow-shepherds, and from the manner in which the trusty hound is gazing upward with open jaws it looks as if the beast were unmannerly enough to howl in rivalry with the singing of the angelic messengers. Sometimes it happened that a lady would give or bequeath one of her best gowns, or a gentleman one of *his*, to the church, in order that the priests should have new copes. Thus we read that in 1477 Thomas Blower, of Croscombe in Somerset, gave to his parish church "1 vyolet long gowne." Philippa of Hainault bestowed upon Simon, Bishop of Ely, the dress she wore when she went to give thanks for the birth of her eldest son, afterward the Black Prince. It was of mulberry-coloured velvet, powdered with golden squirrels, and ample enough to make no less than three copes.

In addition to the permanent adornings of each church—its candlesticks of pewter or of silver-gilt, its images hewn out of stone or carven in tough oak, its banners and frontals of needlework—the interior would be beautified at certain seasons of the year with fresh green boughs and garlands of flowers. This was the case not only in country churches, but in those of the cities of London and Westminster. The churchwardens' accounts of St Margaret's, Westminster, for the year 1484 show that they spent fivepence upon red

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roses for Corpus Christi Day; those of St Mary-at-Hill in 1477 record a payment of eightpence "for Rose garlondis and wodrofe garlondis on St Barnabas' daye"; while St Andrew Hubbard expended twopence on "bircche and lylies at Mydsomer" in 1485. Most picturesque of all is the note in the records of Thame Church, Oxfordshire, that in 1465 the churchwardens gave a penny "to Chyldryn to gadyr yvy."

Chaucer has left us an adorable and unforgettable portrait of the finest type of parish priest in fourteenth-century England—the Poure Persoun of a Toun.

But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk;
He was also a lerned man, a clerk.

This learned and holy priest was, as we should now say, 'a son of the people'; his own brother, one of his fellow-pilgrims, was a ploughman. His tastes were simple, his needs few; "He koude in lytel thyng have suffisaunce," and when a more worldly minded cleric might have threatened his flock with the thunders of the Church if they left their tithes unpaid he was patient, forbearing, reluctant to ask for what was in truth his own already.

Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer asonder,
But he ne lafté ¹ nat for reyn ne thonder
In siknesse or in meschief ² to visite
The ferreste in his parisshe, muche and lite,³
Upon his feet, and in his hand a staf.

¹ omitted. ² trouble. ³ great and small.

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This noble ensample to his sheepe he yaf¹
That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.
Out of the gospel he tho wordés caughte,
And this figure he added eek thereto
That if gold rusté, what shall iren do ?

A restless, or a mirth-loving, or an ambitious man would soon have grown weary of so arduous and austere a way of life as his. Such men gravitated toward London, and, if no better employment offered there, often became chantry priests at St Paul's Cathedral, familiarly called "Powlys," where many little side-chapels had been endowed by the pious departed in order that Masses might be sung for the repose of their souls "as long as the world should last." This was the fate of Chaucer's great contemporary poet, William Langland, "Long Will," the gaunt, grim, dissatisfied cleric-dreamer, author of *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*. He lived meagrely and sombrely in London, "feeding from a dead hand," as it has been strikingly said, while the Poure Persoun, trudging through the mire from one daub-and-wattle hut to another, had peace in his soul and a smile in his eyes.

At the opposite pole, far from the parish priests and the chantry priests, were the powerful prelates, princely in rank, in wealth, and in magnificence, though sometimes as humble and as pure of heart as the dear

¹ gave.

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Persoun himself. These bishops and archbishops of mediæval England were not always—nor even frequently—of ancient and noble birth. The word ‘democracy’ was never heard in those days—happier days for that reason if for no other!—but the thing itself existed, in a rough and irregular form, and was part of the very fabric of the nation. Certain heights the humbly born might never hope to scale; but within the compass of Holy Church there was no peak so lofty that the son of a ploughman might not set his foot upon it. The statesmen who advised the monarch and, through him, virtually ruled the land were almost always churchmen as well. The Chancellor of the realm was a priest just as inevitably as the Archbishop of Canterbury was one—and not unseldom the two offices were united in a single person. As ‘Keeper of the King’s Conscience’ and royal confessor, the Chancellor had a difficult and delicate task to perform. Not until the reign of Henry VIII was the Chancellorship held by a layman.¹ The layman in question was Sir Thomas More, and the sequel did not bode well for the success of the innovation. Till that distressful era of upheaval and transition, statecraft and priestcraft—to use neither term in a disrespectful sense—walked hand-in-glove, and

¹ During the decrepitude of Edward III one of the demands made by John of Gaunt and his malcontent followers was that the Chancellor of the realm should be a layman, but the effect upon the course of history was negligible.

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the gloves were always episcopal gloves of crimson silk.

Becket and Wolsey, two crimson-gloved and crimson-



MITRE AND STOLE OF ST THOMAS À BECKET

robed phantoms, advance, and fill the foreground of the picture with their triumphant splendour. They stand for ever as the supreme types and examples of the alliance between statecraft and priestcraft in England. Less familiar, but not less interesting, are the characters

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and careers of two other prelates, Robert Grosseteste and William of Wykeham.

Grosseteste was born toward the close of the twelfth century, in the little Suffolk village of Stradbrook. His father and mother were humble folk, tillers of the soil, and it is not known whether his second name, Grosseteste (big head) was a nickname or an inherited one. About his childhood we know nothing beyond what he himself has recorded, and that is little indeed. We are told that he took delight in studying, and in trying to imitate, the great figures in the Bible story. Now, the only teacher from whom he could then have gained even the most faint and fragmentary knowledge of biblical history would be the "Poure Persoun" of Stradbrook. This good Persoun must have been quick to detect and to encourage the unusual intellectual gifts of the boy. Without some such encouragement little Robert would probably have been set to weeding or digging, or sent to scare the crows from the corn, at the time when he was actually commencing his studies at the University of Oxford. That he studied to good purpose we know. This child of a Suffolk peasant became one of the most brilliant 'all round' scholars of his age. Dr Luard writes of him, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*: "Probably no one had a greater influence upon English thought and English literature for the two centuries following his time than Bishop Grosseteste." To skill

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in moral philosophy and in theology he added skill in medicine and music, agriculture and law. At an epoch when Western Europe was not only profoundly ignorant, but intensely distrustful of both natural science and exact science, he threw himself with ardour into the pursuit of knowledge by *experiment*. He studied—and taught—mathematics. With his friends Adam de Marisco and the more famous Roger Bacon he made researches into the problems of heat, light, and colour, reasoned about rainbows, speculated concerning spheres and comets. Much credit has been given to Grocyn, Erasmus, and Cheke for bringing to England the *renewed* knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, classical Greek at the dawn of the sixteenth century; and they deserve much. But let it not be forgotten that early in the thirteenth century there was a small group of English pioneers who studied and taught not only Greek, but Hebrew, and who had the courage and the wisdom to place observation and experiment above tradition, and thus to anticipate by seven hundred years modern scientific methods and principles.

In 1224 Grosseteste, though not himself a Franciscan, became Rector of the recently established Franciscan school at Oxford. Ten years later he was appointed to the largest diocese in England—that of Lincoln—and enthroned in the beautiful cathedral whither, in 1220, the Kings of England and Scotland had borne the body

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of St Hugh upon their shoulders to its resting-place in the choir. The new bishop flung himself with enthusiasm into his pastoral duties. Indeed, many good easy men who had jogged along very comfortably under the lighter rule of his predecessor began to think that, though zeal was an excellent quality, you might have too much of it—in a bishop. There must, it seems, have been a streak of the Puritan in Grosseteste. It was his will that county folk should dance no more on consecrated ground, that the ancient buffooneries of the Feast of All Fools should be abandoned, together with all games, pastimes, and pursuits that might conceivably lead to brawling and profanity, that all mothers should personally direct the religious education of their young children; and, as he was a man of exceptionally strong character, it went ill with them who neglected his behests. About his disputes with the Vatican it is not necessary to speak at any length here. Though personally humble and courteous, he was a proud and passionate defender of the rights of the English Church, as he saw them, and his loyalty to the Holy See did not prevent him from protesting bitterly when Italians of tender years were appointed to English canonries.

Among the devoted friends of this Suffolk peasant's son was Simon de Montfort, to whose children Grosseteste acted for a time as tutor. It was probably through de Montfort that the brilliant churchman was

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introduced to the Court of Henry III and Eleanor of Provence. Henry was certainly not "a man of exceptionally strong character": one chronicler called him the King with the Heart of Wax! But he was personally lovable, and few Kings of England, with the exception of Charles I, have had such a fervent and such an intelligent love for architecture and art as his. He was the creator of Westminster Abbey as we see it—of the choir and transepts, that is to say. When he enriched the amazing treasures of the Confessor's shrine with a relic of marvellous virtue, nothing less than a phial said to contain some drops of the blood of Christ, a solemn ceremony was held in the newly finished choir, and the sermon was preached by the eloquent and learned Bishop of Lincoln. When he sought enlightenment concerning the purpose and significance of the anointing of the sovereign at his coronation it was to the same bishop that he had recourse. The gifted but undependable Queen was also wont to seek spiritual guidance from Grosseteste, and it may have been some last, lingering trace of his influence which moved her to end her days as a nun in the convent at Amesbury. The fiery and warlike character of this great scholar-prelate entangled him in many troubles, and the last years of his life were spent under the constant shadow of excommunication. None the less, his death was so fair and so tranquil that

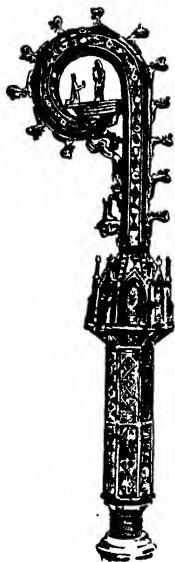
PRIESTS AND PRELATES

legends soon arose that it had been accompanied by marvels, by heavenly music from invisible harps and shawms ; efforts were even made to obtain the honour of canonization for him, and thus to set a fellow-saint beside St Hugh of Lincoln. Strange to say, these efforts were not encouraged at Rome, so St Hugh was never called upon to share his splendour with a St Robert Grosseteste.

Rather different was the personality of another son of the people, who rose from obscurity to power in much the same way. In the Hampshire village of Wickham, or Wykeham, there was born in 1324, just one hundred years after Grosseteste became Rector of the Franciscans at Oxford, a boy who, like his father, took as a family name the name of the place of his birth. As was the case with Shakespeare, his mother was better born than his father, and, as is the case with many sons, he probably resembled her more than him. This boy was christened William, and when he was old enough to learn such lessons as were taught in the schools of the time, reading, elementary Latin, the grammar of Donatus, plainsong, he was sent to the Prior's school at Winchester. He must have been a devout child, for it is recorded that he loved to rise in the grey hush of dawn and creep to the cathedral to hear what was known as the 'Morrow Mass,' Mass sung for the benefit of such townfolk and poor people, craftsmen and labourers,

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

who had to set about their daily tasks betimes. Little did William dream that the time would come when he would wear a jewelled mitre and carry a crosier of carved ivory within those very walls. His



THE REICHENAU
CROSIER

first employment was as under-notary to the Constable of Winchester Castle; though a 'clerk,' he was not then a full-fledged priest, nor did he become one until 1362. In 1356 he entered the royal service, being appointed clerk of the King's works in the manors of Henley and Easthampstead. Five months later he was surveyor of the building operations then in progress at Windsor Castle. This does not mean that he had anything to do with the *planning* of the work, but only that he had to pay the masons' wages, and see to the supply of raw materials. So well pleased was the King with his surveyor, honours and preferments, pre-

bends, canonries, and deaneries, soon began to shower down upon Wykeham's head. In those days what is called 'plurality of benefices' was very usual, and though most people—except the holders of them—agreed that it was both strange and wrong that one man should draw the revenues of so many posts at

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once and perform the duties of none, the abuse did not disappear till long after the Reformation. Wykeham was just as passionate in defence of national rights as Grosseteste had been, but he was far more temperate and tactful. His business ability, the quickness with which he fitted himself for the various tasks entrusted to him, his skill in pleasing his royal master, were so great that they aroused wonder in many minds and envy in not a few. "By him," writes Froissart, "everything was done, and without him, nothing." In 1366 he was, in accordance with the King's desire conveyed to the monks of the cathedral, elected Bishop of Winchester; in 1367 he became Chancellor. The ravages of the Black Death in 1348 and again in 1361 had led to such a serious shortage of priests, scholars, and clerks that people began to fear that the children then growing up, especially those far from towns, would be little better than barbarians, uncouth and untaught. With this danger before his eyes, Wykeham set about the noblest work of his life, the founding of New College, Oxford, and of "a college for seventy poor scholars who should live college-wise and study grammar near the city of Winchester." Great wealth was now at Wykeham's command, and he made use of it greatly. His experience as clerk of the works at Windsor had given him a profound knowledge of architecture and a keen enthusiasm for beauty, and he willed that his poor

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

scholars, both at Winchester and Oxford, should work and play in a stately and lovely environment of fretted stone and carven wood and painted glass. "Manners makyth Man" was the good



WILLIAM OF WYKEHAM

bishop's motto, and a Winchester boy who did not—and does not—act upon it could never be counted a worthy Wykehamist. Chantry chapels have long been silent whose builders dreamed that Masses would be chanted there till

doomsday for their souls' weal, lamps have long been quenched whose donors thought that they would burn in remembrance of them before certain altars and images till heaven and earth should pass away; but the dreams of Wykeham, and others like him, know a perpetual fulfilment, and the lamps lit by him burn even more clearly than of old.

CHAPTER VI

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

THOUGH a hermit and a monk are not one and the same thing, the first hermits were, in a sense, the first monks. They were restless and yet meditative souls, who sought peace in the desert (Greek, *eremos*), and chose to dwell there, each one in stern solitude, far from the fever and the fret of human activity. That the word 'monk' should be derived from the Greek word *monos* (alone) is a little curious, since monks, properly so called, never live alone, but always in large or small companies. Their 'aloneness' is of another kind from that of the hermits; it is intermittent; but it is none the less real, and it is an important part of the spiritual discipline imposed upon every monk both by his own will, and by the rules of his Order.

The difference between a hermit and a monk is really less great than that between a monk and a friar. The typical monk is cloistered; even if he works in the fields, they are the fields of his monastery, and he may not stray beyond them. He must sleep always in the same cell, kneel always in the same chapel, eat always at the same board, until he die. The friar, on the other hand, moves about the world freely. It is his duty to

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

do so. In the Middle Ages the friars were to be seen on every highroad, and in every village and town. They had their 'rounds,' just as the pedlars and the strolling minstrels had, and they were constantly in touch with the rough, gay, cruel, perilous, beautiful everyday world.



A BENEDICTINE

The first Christian hermits withdrew into the deserts of Egypt, but the *idea* of seeking peace and enlightenment in austere solitude is much older than Christianity. Buddhists and Hebrews had both conceived and practised it long before. Indeed, Buddha himself spent five years among the barren hills of Rajagriha before he received his sudden revelation in the Deer Park near Benares. As Christianity spread westward the monastic habit of mind and body spread with it. In Anglo-Saxon England, and in Celtic Christendom, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, thick-walled monasteries arose from the flowering meadows and from the grey hillsides, and these brotherhoods, varying in numbers from a mere dozen to several hundreds, praised God, worked with their hands, and led lives of primitive simplicity. When St Augustine came to Kent he brought with him an ideal of monastic life slightly different from

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

that evolved by the Celtic Church—the Benedictine ideal. Before St Benedict wrote his *Rule* both



PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF ST BENEDICT

On the left, monks persuading Benedict to leave his hermitage; on the right, offering the poisoned cup. From a fresco of the fourteenth century.

Gaulish and Celtic monasticism greatly resembled the Egyptian type, and tended toward individualism.

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

Each brother was a sort of self-contained unit, an 'island,' and there was no complete uniformity, no sense of the pervading community to which the individual must be subdued. All this was changed, and mediæval monasticism was created, by that very remarkable man, St Benedict. The place of his birth was Nursia, in Umbria, and the time 480. The Roman Empire was in the last distressful stages of decay, battered without and corrupt within. Benedict, sick at heart, fled from Rome itself, whither he had been sent to complete his education, and took refuge in a dark gorge of the river Anio, forty miles from the doomed city. There he remained for three years, and there he was sought out by the monks of a neighbouring monastery, who persuaded him, against his will, to place himself at their head. They soon regretted it, for his ideas were so much more severe than theirs that they attempted to get rid of him by the simple and picturesque device of a poisoned cup. The cup split asunder in his hands before he had raised it to his lips, and, with a quiet rebuke to their ingratitude, he rose and departed from their midst for ever. Near the source of the river Liris there stood, on a lonely hill called Monte Cassino, a ruined temple dedicated to the god of the golden bow, Apollo. In this place, and on the site of this pagan shrine, Benedict spent the closing years of his life. The old faith was not yet dead; the

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poor folk of the valley still brought offerings to the old god. Benedict razed Apollo's temple to the ground, and built there two oratories, one dedicated to St John the Baptist and one to St Martin of Tours. Round these two chapels grew the great monastery of Monte Cassino, the cradle of the Benedictine Order. Not far away was a nunnery, founded by Benedict's pious and devoted sister, Scholastica, with whom he spent one day once a year. The great change introduced by Benedict into



PRIOR REYMUND OF ST ALBANS

Western monasticism was the idea of unity, obedience, and labour as the basis of the holy life. No longer might each good brother 'gang his ain gait.' The abbot or, in smaller fraternities, the prior, ruled them all in all things. No longer might each good brother meditate when he felt inclined, and do nothing but meditate, except when he was at prayer.

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

Prayer and meditation were to be the duty of *all* the brothers, at certain fixed hours, and between times they were to work with their hands. To this last clause in the Benedictine rule the debt of Europe, especially England and France, could hardly be exaggerated. Thanks to the devoted toil of the black-robed brethren, shaggy heaths were turned into green pastures, bleak wastes into fields of corn. Nor was this the sum of the debt. When there were no schools and no hospitals the great monasteries provided the equivalent of both. When, for lack of the still undreamed-of printing-press, learning might have perished the patient quills of monkish scribes kept records of history, ancient and modern, fabulous and true, of philosophy, sacred and profane, and copied, again and again, the psalter and the missal and the Old Testament and the New. The Benedictines were, above all things, scholars and builders. Canterbury, York, Westminster, Winchester, and Gloucester, to mention only a few, were Benedictine abbeys. These beautiful churches, now cathedrals, were simply the chapels attached to monasteries, though, as in the case of all those mentioned, special conditions, royal associations, shrines of saints, established contact between the monks and the outer world.

The monks spent the greater part of their time, when they were neither working out of doors nor praying in

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

choir, in some part of the cloisters, the vaulted and traceried arcades running along all four sides of a quadrangle, in the centre of which was a plat of turf. One cloister would be set apart for those monks who were skilful penmen or illuminators, another for the



A SCRIPTORIUM OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

studies of the young novices, another for the weekly washing of the brethren's heads and feet. At Gloucester the *lavatorium*, or washing-place, has altered hardly at all, and you can still see the troughs along which the water was directed, and the hinge-marks of the oaken cupboards where the towels were kept. In summer the flagstones were covered with hay and straw,

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in winter with rushes. When the stone tracery was

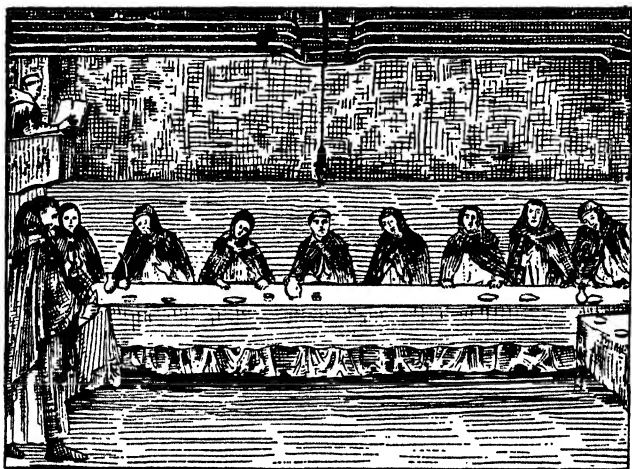


THE WRITING-CELLS OF THE MONKS IN THE SOUTH CLOISTER,
GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL

unglazed the cold in the cloisters during the winter months must have been almost unendurable, and the poor monks were no doubt glad to bury their blue noses

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and numbed fingers in their ample cowls and cuffs. In the refectory the brethren took their simple repasts. Chatting at table was not allowed, but, lest greedy thoughts should fill every shaven skull, one of the monks



DOMINICAN REFECTORY OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

read aloud some portions of the Old or the New Testament in Latin while the others dined. The fare set before them was simple, but eminently hygienic and—though they had never heard the magic catch-phrase—‘rich in vitamins.’ Vegetable soup was the main item, and beans loomed large in the menu. Eggs from the monastery hens and fish from the monastery ponds were often seen, and meat, salted or fresh, appeared

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

from time to time, though not frequently. It is pleasant to think that at Easter the good monks had lamb and mint sauce. Even pork was not unknown. At some monasteries, for example, at St Edmundsbury, staid married women of good repute were engaged from time to time to make puddings and tarts for the refectory table. The 'pudding-wives,' as they were called, had a special building to work in, the 'pudding-house,' and we can well believe that the younger monks rejoiced when the word went round that these good dames were busy inside. Courtesy at table was strictly enjoined, and at the conclusion of each repast two young monks brought a basket and collected any remains, crusts, odd pieces of bread, etc., for the use of the poor. The monk, as Cardinal Gasquet has reminded us, "was in no sense a gloomy person." *Angelic cheerfulness joined to monastic simplicity* summed up the monastic ideal at its sanest and best. The novices were allowed to play bowls and other games, even in the cloisters, where squares and circles neatly traced upon the flagstones still bear witness that the life led in that quadrangle of fretted stone was not all gloom and toil. Fishing was a duty and a diversion as well. Some abbots indulged in the pleasures of the chase; others kept pet animals, dogs, falcons, and monkeys. Sometimes the monks were so blithe and merry that people spoke a little ill-naturedly of them, or criticized their doings

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quite severely. In the main, however, the religious were liked by their neighbours, who had proof every day of the fidelity with which the divine words "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" were remembered and translated into deeds within the monastery walls. Attached to many of the great abbeys—though by no means to all—were hospitals where the sick poor might be received and tended for the love of God; and even when the infirmary



THE INFIRMARIAN OF ST ALBAN'S ABBEY

was not open to any but the brethren the good counsels of the infirmarian, the brother in charge, backed up by strong spices, ginger, cinnamon, and peony-seeds, were usually at the disposal of such as sought them at the abbey gate. At the hospital attached to the Augustinian priory of St Bartholomew

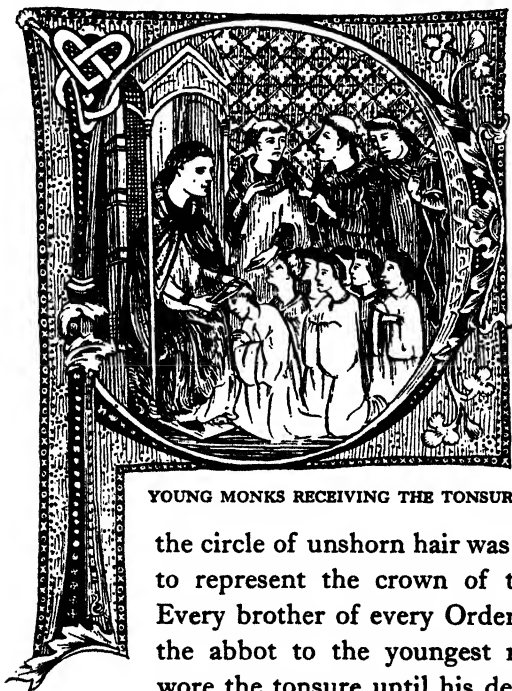
CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

the Great, Smithfield—a hospital which has now pursued its noble work without a pause for more than eight hundred years—the first patient ever admitted was a poor carpenter whose hands were crippled with rheumatism. Under the care of the monks he recovered; but such was his gratitude, and so happy had he been, he would not go away! Rather did he choose to spend the rest of his days in the priory, working at his craft as a carpenter for the benefit of his monkish friends, and accepting in return only such simple food and lodging as they could give.

Next to the robe and the cowl, the distinguishing mark of the monk was his shaven head. The giving and the renewing of the tonsure (Latin, *tondere*, to shave or shear) was an important part of monkish practice. After the tenth century the initial tonsure could be bestowed only by a bishop or an abbot, and its bestowal was accompanied by solemn and elaborate ceremonies. It symbolized the dedication of the subject to some branch or aspect of the religious life. But because a youth or a man had received the tonsure it did not follow that he must become either a priest or a monk. All 'clerks,' all men in 'orders minor,' and even all boys in the monastic schools were bound to have their heads shaved. And the clerk, scholar, priest, or monk who omitted to repeat the process once a month thereby forfeited the rights and privileges which he had auto-

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

matically acquired when he first received it. The exact origin of the custom is obscure; but it may well be that



YOUNG MONKS RECEIVING THE TONSURE

the circle of unshorn hair was meant to represent the crown of thorns. Every brother of every Order, from the abbot to the youngest novice, wore the tonsure until his death.

Monks who showed practical ability, and proved themselves to be good organizers, were not allowed to bury these useful talents in napkins, but given free opportunity to exercise them for the benefit of the community at large. Such men were appointed cellarers,

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refectorians, kitcheners, guest-masters, almoners, or chamberlains. The cellarer had charge not only of the beer and wine of the monastery—it must be remembered that pure drinking-water was hard to come by, and that the beer was *small* beer, of very low alcoholic strength—but of all the provisions necessary; he was, as Cardinal Gasquet says, “the ‘Martha’ of the establishment.” The refectorian’s duties were with the table-linen and utensils; he had to see that fresh rushes, hay, or straw were strewn on the refectory floor, and sometimes in summer he added mint, fennel, and sweet-smelling herbs to purify the air. The kitchener looked after the pots and pans, had them mended when worn out, and replaced when past service; he also had charge of the poultry being fattened for the monastic table. The guest-master looked after the poor wayfarers to whom the guest-hall of the monastery was ever open, and also after the more prosperous visitors who sometimes came as ‘paying guests.’ The almoner’s duties were many, and he had much to do besides dividing alms among the poor. In cold weather he distributed the old gowns of the monks to the needy, and gave presents of woollen stockings to “widows, orphans, and poor clerks.” Here he and the chamberlain would take counsel together, as it was the chamberlain who had charge of the monastic wardrobe.

The daily offices said and sung in the monastic church

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

were eight in number: *matins*, sung at midnight or soon after, and followed immediately by *lauds*; *prime*, at six o'clock in the morning; *terce*, at nine o'clock; *sext*, at noon; *none*, at 3 p.m.; *vespers*, toward sunset; *compline*, before retiring to rest. Six o'clock in the morning was reckoned as the *first* hour, so noon was naturally the *sixth*.

The Order of St Benedict was the most numerous and the most influential in mediæval England, but there were many monks of other Orders scattered up and down the land, wearing robes of different colours, and keeping slightly different rules. Some of these Orders were themselves offshoots of the Benedictine. Such were the Cistercians, so called from the monastery of Cîteaux, in France. Their habit was white, and their practices were austere. Candlesticks of iron instead of silver-gilt appeared on their altars, and their priests sang Mass in chasubles of humble fustian instead of samite or baudekin. Even more austere were the Carthusians, founded by St Bruno among the mountains near Grenoble. Not for them were the roast lamb and mint



A CISTERCIAN



A CARTHUSIAN

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

sauce of the gentler Benedictines. They ate (and eat, for the Order still flourishes) but one meal a day, and that had to be of pulse, bread, and water only. The habit was white, and the tonsure was more drastic than in other Orders. Members of the Augustinian Order were the clergy of cathedral and collegiate churches. They lived in communities after the manner of monks, and were known as Canons Regular, and also, from the colour of their gowns, as Black Canons.



A CANON REGULAR
OF ST AUGUSTINE

Careless readers (and writers) often fail to distinguish between monks and friars. These latter were originally missionaries, sent forth by their founders to rekindle the fading fires of pious ardour both among the priests and among the laity. They were travellers, wayfarers, men of no abiding city, except when—as at Oxford—they founded schools. There were, of course, houses where friars gathered together, but they did not live strictly according to fixed rules and timetables as the monks did, nor were they under the governance of abbots or priors, nor were they, collectively or individually, attached to one single place.

The two chief Orders of friars in mediæval England were the Dominicans and the Franciscans. The great

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

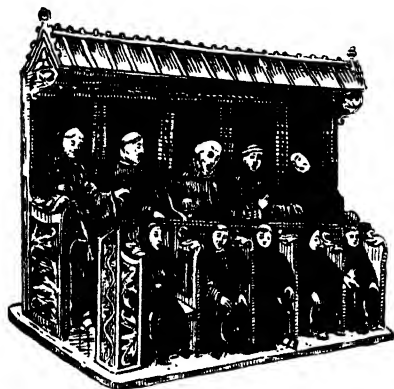
aim of St Dominic was the stamping out of heresy. He was a Spaniard, fervent to fanaticism, yet so tender-hearted that he would shed bitter tears over the spiritual plight of the heretics whom he sought to bring back to the faith they had discarded. His Friars Preachers multiplied rapidly, and journeyed to the wildest and most perilous regions of the world—to Persia, India, China, Russia, Tartary, and even to Thibet. Their white robes and cowls and black cloaks were seen first in England when Peter de Rupibus, Bishop of Winchester, brought some of them in his train in the year 1221. When Henry VIII's rude hands pulled down the monastic system in England the Dominicans had fifty-eight convents, one being as far north as Bam-
borough, one as far west as Brecon, one as far south as Chichester. Their friary in London, where the trial of Catherine of Aragon took place, has long since vanished, but the place where it stood is still called Blackfriars. The Franciscans, the other great Order of friars, modestly dubbed themselves the Minorites, the Friars Minor, the *least* of the friars. Following their founder, the gentle Francis of Assisi, they vowed themselves to poverty, chastity, and obedience, and devoted



A DOMINICAN
FRIAR

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

themselves to missionary work (what would now be called 'propaganda'!) not only among the heretics and the heathen, but among Christians whose faith had grown cold. Their habit was at first grey, and from the knotted cord with which it was girt they were some-



FRANCISCANS IN CHOIR

times called "Cordeliers." In the fifteenth century, however, the colour was changed to brown, which it has remained ever since. The Franciscans reached England in 1223. At Oxford they founded the school of which Robert Grosseteste¹ became Rector, and where the

chief glory of their Order—though the heads of it did not realize it at the time—studied and taught. This was Grosseteste's friend Roger Bacon, whose experiments and researches gained for him the reputation of a dabbler in black arts. Mother Shipton and her prophecies belong to the borderland of fact and fable; Roger Bacon really did predict that men would fly in the air and travel swiftly in the depths of the sea. He

¹ See Chapter V.

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

has been described as "the first man of science in the modern sense."¹ He devised something in the nature of a telescope more than three centuries before Galileo was born; he was the first to give the formula for the production of gunpowder; and it was his arguments about the size and shape of the earth which helped to convince Columbus of the existence of a western continent.



FRANCISCAN FRIAR



CARMELITE FRIAR

The Carmelites were also known as the White Friars, and they too have given their name to a district in modern London. They originated in a company of hermits who dwelt upon the grim and inhospitable flanks of Mount Carmel. The third general of the Order was an Englishman with the bluff and breezy name of Simon Stock, and they were introduced into England by a Crusader, Sir John de Vesci, who is said to have ascended Mount Carmel during his wanderings in the Holy Land.

The nuns, on their side, played a very important part

¹ Dr Charles Singer in *Mediæval Contributions to Modern Civilisation* (Harrap).

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

in mediæval life, and introduced a gracious, tranquil, and civilizing influence in a world where such influences were all too rare. Within their convent-walls the art of embroidery and the science of leechcraft were practised, and the young daughters of nobles, knights, and burghesses were received as pupils. They had gardens as



FRANCISCAN NUNS IN CHOIR

well as orchards, pastures, and fields of grain. Their cloisters and their parlours were often oases of fragrance and quiet, set here and there in a grey and restless waste.

From the account-books of Dame

Petronilla, a nun of the convent of Grace Dieu in Leicestershire in the days of Henry V, we know that among the livestock of the sisterhood there were many pigs. Fish, salt and fresh, appeared with wearisome frequency at the board, served sometimes with mustard, sometimes—as a singular treat—with sugar. These nuns wore gowns of white wool, woven from the fleeces of their own flocks and within their own walls, and wimples of white linen spun from the blue-flowering flax of their own meadows.

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

In addition to weaving and spinning, collecting and drying herbs and simples, looking after their farms and their tenants, and singing the offices of each day, these nuns—and others all over the land—employed themselves much with needlecraft. Most of the richly

embroidered copes and chasubles, altar-frontals, banners, palls, and canopies that gave added splendour and solemnity to divine service were the work of their patient and skilful hands. Their stitchery is exquisitely fine, their silken and golden threads are grouped



A BENEDICTINE ABBESS AND NUN

with wonderful judgment, and if the little figures of saints and seraphim sometimes make us smile with their quaint, stiff outlines and their surprised faces, the charm of the good nuns' handiwork is not one whit the less for that. The convents in which feminine accomplishments were cultivated were usually of the Benedictine Order. Life was more strenuous and more austere in Franciscan and Carmelite nunneries. The Minoresses

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

or Nuns of St Clare, sometimes called the Poor Clares, were founded by St Clare, the spiritual sister and devoted follower of Francis of Assisi. They wore the girdle of knotted cord, and went barefoot, or shod only with sandals.

Without these monasteries and nunneries one shudders to think what the plight would have been of simple, sensitive, and thoughtful people, and of unmarried women. The only drawback to the practical and complete success of a system that sounds in many ways so pleasant and attractive seems to have lain in the fact that every monk and nun was not one *from choice*, and that many were vowed to God by their parents in their infancy, before they had had time or opportunity to discover whether they had a vocation. Imagine the restless, rebellious, and despairing sensations of a youth whom nature had intended for a warrior, or a merchant-venturer, or even a reveller, when he found himself trapped and fettered by the monastic rule, with no hope of escape unless by death! Imagine how much trouble such unmonkish monks must have brought into their cloisters! Parents who laid their baby in its cradle on the altar of a monastery church, or, as St Benedict decreed, wrapped its tiny hand in the edge of the altar-cloth, in sign of dedication to the religious life, were taking upon their shoulders a very heavy responsibility.

The conscientious monk who was aware of some

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

lapse from duty on his part had an alarming ordeal to undergo when the brethren assembled in the chapter-house. This they did every day, immediately after morning Mass. A great variety of business, both pious

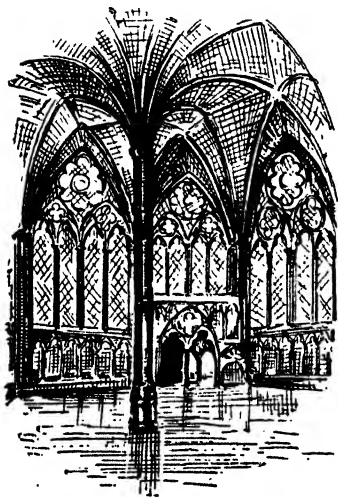


ABBOT AND MONKS IN CHAPTER-HOUSE

and practical, was transacted in these beautiful buildings, placed on the eastern side of the cloisters. Where—as at Westminster and York—one of them remains in something like its former glory, it is possible to imagine most vividly the abbot seated in his stall or chair, with his crozier in his hand, and the cowled and shaven

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

monks silently taking their places, to the heavy tolling of a bell. A monk whose conscience was pricking now had an opportunity to unburden himself. Kneeling on a low stool before the abbot, he



THE CHAPTER-HOUSE, SALISBURY
CATHEDRAL

confessed his fault. If it were a slight one his superior signified by an inclination of the head that it was pardoned. If it were too serious to be thus mercifully remitted the culprit was stripped and scourged. In chapter-houses such as those at Westminster and Salisbury, where there is a central pillar supporting the roof, it was to this pillar that the monk was bound during his punishment. He

suffered in singularly majestic surroundings, for the monkish builders lavished ornamentation on these council-chambers, illuminating them with vast jewelled windows, surmounting the stalls of the brethren with delicately wrought canopies and pinnacles, and making the walls gay with many-coloured frescoes. One of the

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

most beautiful of all was—and is—the chapter-house at York, with its amazing wealth of carving, its heads and figures, some serious and some the reverse, its clambering and brimming-over masses of fretted foliage. Bogo de Clare, to whom the credit for building it seems to have been due, was not in every respect a praiseworthy person, but he certainly wrought well in this one thing, and perhaps the proud and grateful monks, gazing on their glorious chapter-house, were not disposed to be excessively severe upon his failings.

In Chapter VII we shall have something to say about the pilgrimages which were such an important and interesting feature in mediæval life, but here and now we may allow ourselves a glimpse at one or two immortal pilgrims, members of that motley company with whom Chaucer jogged along the road to Canterbury. There were among them a Monk, a Friar, a Prioress with a nun and a chaplain in attendance on her, and an Augustinian Canon. The Monk is as jovial a fellow as Prior Aymer in *Ivanhoe*, and the merry tinkling of his bridle-bells accorded well with his plump and rosy face and his restless, waggish eyes. No doubt his duties made it necessary for him to stir abroad and mingle with the



THE MONK

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

jostling world, and no doubt he carried them out with alacrity. The saying that a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water appeared singularly foolish to him, and for the suggestion that holiness and hunting do not go together he did not give "a pulled hen." To brighten the severity of his monkish attire he wore trimmings of grey fur on his sleeves, and fastened his hood under his chin with a curious gold pin in the form of a true lovers' knot. The host was quick to see that here was

No pouré cloysterer, ne no novys ;

and, when he calls upon him to tell a story to while away the time, he says admiringly :

Upon my feith, thou art som officer,
Som worthy sexteyn ¹ or som celerer,
For by my fader soule, as to my doom ²
Thou art a maister when thou art at hoom.

Both the host and the other pilgrims were greatly disappointed when this burly monk, instead of amusing them with some merry tale, proceeded to "tell sad stories of the deaths of kings" and of other notable personages who came to a bad end, among them "Sampson, this noble almyghty champioun," Hercules, "Nabugodonozor," Zenobia, "of Palymerie queene," Pedro the Cruel, Julius Cæsar, and "riche Cresus

¹ sacristan.

² opinion.

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

whilom kyng of Lyde." At last the patience of one of the most polite pilgrims gives out.

"Hoo!" quod the Knyght, "good sire, namoore of this!"

The Friar pleases them far better with his lively tale of how a Somonour, an ecclesiastical officer, got the worse of a bargain with the Evil One. This Friar was a 'lymytour,' licensed to collect offerings and gifts for the benefit of his Order, and Chaucer makes it clear that he performed that part of his duty most successfully.



THE FRIAR

Ful swetely herdé he confessioun
And plesaunt was his absolucioun ;
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce
Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce ;¹
For unto a poure ordre for to yive
Is signé that a man is wel y-shrive ;² . . .
Therefore in stede of wepyng and preyères
Men moote yeve silver to the pouré freres.

He was a cheerful fellow, who sang and played upon the 'rote' (a small harp), and whose hood was stuck full of little knives and pins intended as presents to the pious and open-handed dames upon his 'round.'

¹ Where he knew there was plenty of money.

² shriven.

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

All the company, even the most boisterous, quarrelsome, and rough-tongued, unite in paying honour to the Prioress, and hers is indeed a gracious and charming figure. She has her little affectations, she counterfeits 'cheere of court,' she speaks French, the Court language,

ful faire and fetisly ¹

After the scole of Stratford-attè-Bowe,
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.

From this Chaucer means it to be understood that his pretty, grey-eyed Prioress was educated at the Benedictine convent of Stratford-le-Bow, where Anglo-Norman French was taught long after the more up-to-date "Frenssh of Parys" was used elsewhere. It was probably at the same convent that Madame Eglentyne—her name is as pretty as herself—learnt to sing

the servicé dyvyne

Entunéd in hir nose ful semely.

She was compassionate, gentle, and so full of pity that the sight of a mouse in a trap would bring tears to her grey eyes, "if it were deed or bledde"; and great was her wrath if any man dared strike one of the little 'houndès,' which she fed on

Rosted flessh, or milk and wastel breed.²

Dainty and coquettish and coy was Madame Eglen-

¹ daintily.

² cake of fine flour.

MONKS, FRIARS, AND NUNS

tyne; and that she was fair to look upon as well Chaucer convinces us. Her neatly folded wimple would serve only to emphasize the beauty of her broad brow, her delicately cut nose, her eyes "greye as glas," and her mouth small, soft, and red. The monk allowed himself a touch of finery in the form of a gold brooch; the Prioress's innocent vanity found expression in a coral bracelet with green beads from which hung a pendant of gold, with an 'A' surmounted by a crown, and the motto, *Amor vincit omnia*—Love conquers all things.



THE PRIORESS

The Black Canon did not set out with the pilgrims from Southwark, but overtook and joined them at Boghton-under-Blee. Under his black habit he wore a white surplice, and under his hood he had put a burdock-leaf

For swoot,¹ and for to kepe his heed from heete.

His yeoman, or attendant, was an odd-looking fellow with a face strangely smudged and discoloured. Presently the pilgrims learnt the reason of his odd looks. His master dabbled in alchemy, and it was by dint of blowing the fire upon which he heated his divers weird and mysterious chemicals that his unfortunate assistant

¹ sweat.

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

had 'chaunged' his colour. It is by way of a 'Canterbury Tale' that the yeoman relates his various hardships and adventures in the service of this priest-chemist. The Prioress tells the story of little St Hugh of Lincoln, and

When seyde was al this miracle every man
As sobre was that wonder was to se.

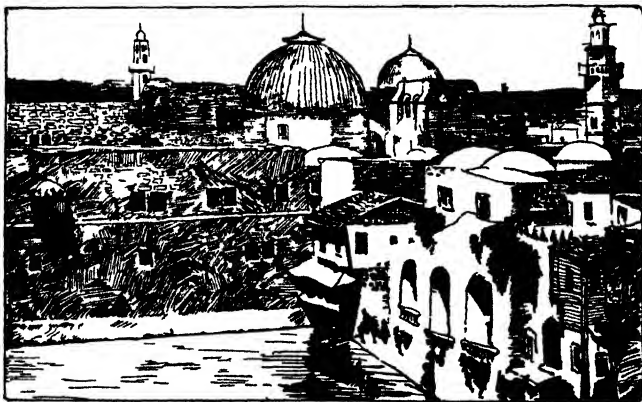
CHAPTER VII

PILGRIMS, PILGRIMAGES, AND FESTIVALS

THE motives of the first pilgrims to Palestine were of extreme simplicity. They desired to behold with their own eyes Bethlehem, Calvary, and the Holy Sepulchre. The reward of such a journey lay in its accomplishment, and of no other reward did they dream, in this world or in another. Soon, however, this selfless devotion was coloured by somewhat different ideas. Men began to promise themselves—and each other—definite and tempting prizes at the end of the arduous voyage. Might not the pilgrims hope to be healed of bodily and spiritual ills, released from guilt, assured of bliss hereafter, without any interval of purgatory or any peril of everlasting damnation? When these questions were answered in the affirmative, the stream of pilgrims swelled into a flood. Shipmasters prospered greatly; something not unlike a 'tourist' service of passenger vessels was 'run' from suitable harbours in France, Italy, and Spain. Tavern-keepers flourished. So did pirates and bandits. Against the first, pilgrims learnt to protect themselves by sailing in groups, or even in fleets, of ships; against the second, they were defended by the Knights Templars, an Order called into being for

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

that especial purpose in 1118. For such as were sick, or poor, or both, Christian charity raised up hostels and guest-houses along the route. In 1092 certain merchants of Amalfi founded a guest-house or hospital (Latin, *hospes*, a guest), hard by the Holy Sepulchre, and



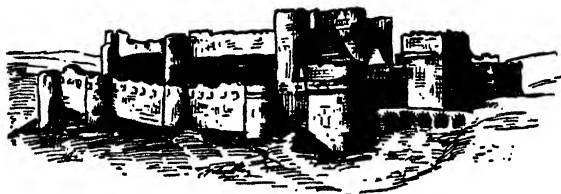
THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE, JERUSALEM

dedicated it to St John the Evangelist. Thence arose the Knights Hospitallers, whose Order, much changed as to its outward trappings, survives to this day in the Order of St John of Jerusalem.

Though Jerusalem was—and remains—the focus of Christian enthusiasm, the supreme place of pilgrimage, other centres sprang up, and were much frequented by pilgrims too poor, too lazy, or too feeble, to undertake the long and perilous journey to Palestine. The tombs

PILGRIMS, PILGRIMAGES, FESTIVALS

of apostles, saints, and martyrs, and then the churches which possessed even small relics of saints, attracted to themselves an ever-increasing number of pious and hopeful people. Rome, the burial-place of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and the scene of so many martyrdoms, ranked next to Jerusalem in popularity; next to Rome came St James (Santiago) of Compostella, in Spain,



RUINS OF THE KRAK OR FORTRESS OF THE KNIGHTS
HOSPITALLERS OF THE ORDER OF ST JOHN

Built in the early thirteenth century

where the shrine containing the Apostle's bones was an object of profound and passionate veneration.

Presently the great Christian communities of both Eastern and Western Europe began to set up little shrines within their own borders. These were often, as if by the operation of some mysterious natural law, erected upon spots once sacred to the old pagan gods. To these old gods a stubborn believer would sometimes erect a modest altar to prove that *he*, at least, had not abandoned them. There is one such, dedicated to the *Dii Veteres*, in the British Museum. It was vain for

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

these pious pagans to dig in their heels. With gradually increasing impetus the new faith swept all before it. Where heathen divinities had been honoured of



PILGRIM WITH
WALLET AND STAFF
From a manuscript

yore saints and sages, virgins and martyrs, became the centre of pious devotion and of unreasoning hope. Of both these elements was compounded the true pilgrim mentality.

The pilgrims who in the Middle Ages thronged the highroads of England were drawn from all classes of the community, and their motives, manners, and morals were as varied as their garments. Chaucer has painted twenty-nine strongly contrasted types in the immortal Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, where he tells us how they set out from the Tabard in Southwark:

That hooly blisful martir for to seke
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

The "hooly blisful martir" was, of course, Thomas à Becket, St Thomas of Canterbury. Very soon after his canonization he acquired a reputation for helpfulness and good nature. It is recorded that there was a gentlewoman once who held him in such esteem that she even taught her pet bird to cry aloud, "Oh, St Thomas, have pity on us!" Now, one day a fierce hawk swooped upon this bird, and bore it high into the

PILGRIMS, PILGRIMAGES, FESTIVALS

air. Immediately the frightened creature uttered its favourite call; the astonished hawk relaxed its hold, and, by the grace of St Thomas, its might-have-been victim fluttered unhurt to the ground.

Many pilgrims sought healing either of bodily or spiritual ills; many went to return thanks for graces received, or in fulfilment of a sick-bed vow; many went to acquire credit, and some went in the hope of picking up a little profit on the way; others, again, were prompted simply by a love of adventure and travel, a restless desire to see strange places and mix with strange people. Chaucer shows us all these types except the first. And this is a little curious, for one imagines that they must have formed the most numerous class. The Knight has obviously made a vow to wend to Canterbury if he should return safely from his "viage"; perhaps the Squiér intended to ask St Thomas's aid to win the hand of his lady-love; the Merchant, the Shipman, the Man of Lawe, and the Frankéleyn may have been either acknowledging benefits or seeking them; the Doctour of Phisik may have had gain as well as piety before his eyes. Certainly the Somonour and the Pardoner were on business bent. Piety, pure and undefiled, inspired the Poure Persoun and his brother; the Wyf of Bath was simply in quest of variety, amusement—and possibly a sixth husband. Of none of the pilgrims are we told that he was seeking to be cured of

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

any bodily ill, though it may be that when the Cook reached Canterbury he asked St Thomas to remove the "mormal," or sore, which Chaucer tells us he had "on his shyne."

The cathedral of Canterbury, one of the most beautiful in the world, was planned and built so as to form a



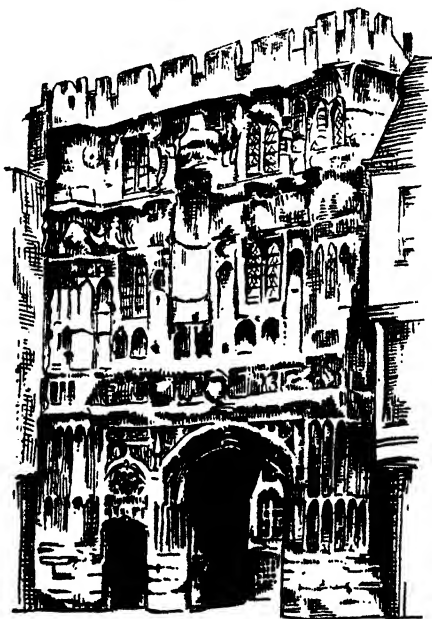
THE COOK
From the Ellesmere MS.

vast shrine for the murdered archbishop. His actual sarcophagus was approached by two flights of stone steps, ascended by many pilgrims on their knees, and had stone niches below, like those in the surviving shrine of St Edward the Confessor, into which diseased and crippled suppliants might crawl. When the cover of the shrine itself was raised by a pulley, and the great gold-cased coffin was revealed,

the eyes of the kneeling multitude were dazzled by the splendour they beheld. Among the rich offerings hung there upon a network of golden wire was the glorious diamond, the "Regale of France," given by King Louis VII, and afterward so far degraded and profaned as to adorn the fat thumb of Henry VIII. Erasmus, who visited the cathedral shortly before it was looted by Henry's myrmidons, remarks of the high altar that "you

PILGRIMS, PILGRIMAGES, FESTIVALS

would say Midas and Cræsus were beggars if you saw that vast assemblage of gold and silver." Fortunately none of the simple folk who frequented the shrine had any



CHRISTCHURCH GATE, CANTERBURY, THROUGH WHICH THE
PILGRIMS FROM LONDON ENTERED THE CATHEDRAL

prophetic knowledge of its fate. Nothing could have seemed more certain to them than that the saint would sleep tranquilly there, under an ever-growing mountain of rich gifts, until doomsday.

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

When I think of Domèsdai, full sore I am a-dread !
exclaimed an Early English poet—so early that it is quite necessary to alter his spelling a little. Such



PILGRIMS PAYING TOLL ON LANDING AT JOPPA

From a manuscript of the fifteenth century

thoughts must have troubled many pilgrims. But a pilgrimage was an excellent way of easing the pangs of remorse, and priests often prescribed one to a worried penitent as a sort of spiritual 'cure.' Whether such a journey were a distressful or an agreeable adventure depended chiefly on the worldly wealth and rank of the

PILGRIMS, PILGRIMAGES, FESTIVALS

pilgrim. When, for example, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, betook himself to the Holy Land, things were made as comfortable for him as the rigours of the time allowed. He proceeded to Joppa in a fair and goodly ship, and his land-travelling was done either in a silk-curtained litter or upon an easy-pacing steed. He would hardly have cared to change places with Sir Ingoldsby Bray, who, it was decreed, should never

wash himself, comb or shave, . . .
Nor indulge in a pipe, but dine upon tripe,
And blackberries gathered before they were ripe.

For those who could hope to reach them, Jerusalem, Rome, and Compostella remained the favourite destinations, but there were many famous shrines which English folk might visit without crossing the sea. There were Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk, with its wonder-working image of the Blessed Virgin, St Edmund at St Edmundsbury, St Cuthbert at Durham, St Hugh at Lincoln, St Etheldreda at Ely, St Frideswide at Oxford, to name only a few. Every pilgrim took care to provide himself or herself with a token, to be sewn on the hood or cape, showing to what shrine a



PILGRIM AND CRIPPLE AT THE
SHRINE OF ST EDMUND
From a manuscript

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

journey had been made. From the Holy Land branches of palm were brought—hence the name ‘palmer’; a vernicle, a representation in lead or pewter of St Veronica’s handkerchief, indicated that the wearer had been to Rome; a cockle-shell that he had reached Compostella. Devotees of St Thomas¹ flaunted leaden or pewter models of that *ampulla*, or flask, in which the



THE CANTERBURY
AMPULLA

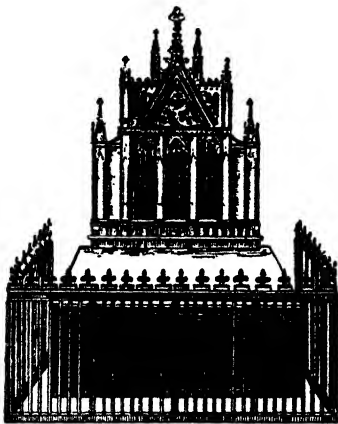
monks were wont to circulate small quantities of water sanctified by the immersion in it of a fragment of fabric stained with the martyr’s blood; another recognized Canterbury sign was a rough representation of Becket’s mitred head, or of the whole of him, mounted on a queer, angular little steed. But profane people whispered that *some* ‘pilgrims’ whose hoods bristled with tokens, and whose talk was remarkable for its variety and vividness, had never gone farther afield than Canterbury—if so far!

Londoners had two saints in their midst, and one at Westminster, round the bend of the river. These two were St Mellitus and St Erkenwald, an Italian and an Anglo-Saxon. Erkenwald was the greater favourite of the pair, and his shrine was one of remarkable grace, wrought of delicately pinnaced and traceried gold-

¹ See p. 99.

PILGRIMS, PILGRIMAGES, FESTIVALS

smiths' work, and dangling with goodly gifts. Thomas Samkyn gave his own silver girdle to St Erkenwald, and Richard de Preston, grocer and citizen of London, gave his finest sapphire, a very kindly gift, as this jewel



THE SHRINE OF ST ERKENWALD

was believed to possess the power to cure diseases of the eye.

It sometimes happened that popular sympathy and enthusiasm invested certain tombs with marvellous powers against the teaching and against the will of Holy Church. The very unsaintly Simon de Montfort was invoked after his death as *Protector gentis Angliæ*, and though Edward II was never within a mile of being canonized, the offerings at his grave were so abundant

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

that they enabled the monks of Gloucester to rebuild their choir. Human nature being what it is, a mass of contradictions and imperfections, it follows that most human inventions, however good in themselves, however pure in their beginnings, change and deteriorate with the passing of time. So it



From a manuscript

was with pilgrimages. Yet even when their first seriousness and ardour had spent themselves these pilgrimages probably did more good than harm. They saved people from becoming mere clods, without imagination and without enterprise. They touched with colour lives that might otherwise have been dull and dim. And, indirectly, they encouraged certain civic and

communal virtues upon which depended the security of the nation itself.

Of the miracle-plays, which were so attractive a feature in mediæval England, we can say only a little here. The usual time of their performance was the festival of Corpus Christi, held on the first Thursday after Trinity, at a season of the year when there was at least a 'sporting chance' of fine weather. The anniversary of the dedication of a church was often the occasion

PILGRIMS, PILGRIMAGES, FESTIVALS

for much merrymaking, and for such plentiful quaffing of ale, that the festivities came to be known as 'church ales.' The fairs associated with the festal-days of certain saints, such as Bartholomew Fair in London, and St Etheldreda's (St Audrey's) at Ely, were also centres of more-or-less harmless junketing. It is rather interesting that our word 'tawdry' comes from St Audrey, and no doubt the wares which the pedlars sold at her annual fair were well described by that adjective. We have seen how Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, forbade the village-folk to dance in the churchyard—that is, upon consecrated ground; but most of their mumming and jigging must have been performed within sight of the church, for the natural scene of such performances was the village-green.

On the first day of May the ancient Romans had been wont to hold festivals called *Floralia* in honour of Flora, the goddess of flowers. These were probably the source of the mediæval May Day ceremonies, when the maypole was set up and decked with hawthorns, and maids went a-maying while the dew was still on the grass, and the windows of houses were decked with fresh boughs, green and white and rose-hued. There was probably a trace of primitive tree-worship in the maypole dance. The Puritans frowned upon it as pagan and popish both, and remorselessly hacked into faggots the great, mast-like poles that had once been

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

the centre of so much joyous prancing and twirling. The church of St Andrew Undershaft, in the City of London, takes its name from the fact that the 'shaft' was set up hard by each May Day, and kept on hooks in a neighbouring alley (still called Shaft Alley) from one year to another. As the pole was taller than the church-steeple, the church itself came to be dubbed '*Under-shaft*.' There was also a maypole in the Strand, a fine one, no less than a hundred feet high, which raised its garlanded head where the church of St Mary-le-Strand stands now, while at Kennington Green, despite the Puritans, another maypole remained erect till 1795.

May Day was the special festival of the morris-dancers, who, with ribbons and bells on their knees, danced the lively measures said to have been introduced by John of Gaunt from Moorish Spain, and replayed the old pageant of Robin Hood and Maid Marian, where the hobby-horse curvetted so proudly on its two human legs, and Maid Marian tried to trip as gracefully as if 'she' wore long petticoats, instead of doublet and hose, on all the other days of the year. So strong a hold had Robin Hood upon the affections of his countrymen that it needed all the bitter zeal of the Puritans to stamp out his yearly festivals. These continued right up to the Civil War. Their exceeding popularity in early Tudor times is amusingly illustrated by a sermon of

PILGRIMS, PILGRIMAGES, FESTIVALS

Bishop Latymer, who, preaching before the pale, sandy-haired, prim little Edward VI, complained that when he came to a certain town on May Day, ex-



MAY DAY REVELS

pecting to preach to a large congregation, he found the church door locked, and the parishioners nowhere to be seen. When he had tarried there for half an hour "one of the parish" came to him and said, "Syr, this is a busy day with us; we cannot hear

CHIVALRY AND SOCIAL LIFE

you; it is Robin Hood's day." There was no more to be said. The bishop's rochet,¹ as he himself ruefully remarked, "was faine to give place to Robin Hood's men."

¹ A linen vestment, resembling a surplice, worn by bishops. (German, *Rock*, a coat.)

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