THE WANING OF THE MIDDLE AGES

CHAPTER I

The Violent Tenor of Life

To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us. The contrast between suffering and joy, between adversity and happiness, appeared more striking. All experience had yet to the minds of men the directness and absoluteness of the pleasure and pain of child-life. Every event, every action, was still embodied in expressive and solemn forms, which raised them to the dignity of a ritual. For it was not merely the great facts of birth, marriage, and death which, by the sacredness of the sacrament, were raised to the rank of mysteries; incidents of less importance, like a journey, a task, a visit, were equally attended by a thousand formalities: benedictions, ceremonies, formulas.

Calamities and indigence were more afflicting than at present; it was more difficult to guard against them, and to find solace. Illness and health presented a more striking contrast; the cold and darkness of winter were more real evils. Honours and riches were relished with greater avidity and contrasted more vividly with surrounding misery. We, at the present day, can hardly understand the keenness with which a fur coat, a good fire on the hearth, a soft bed, a glass of wine, were formerly enjoyed.

Then, again, all things in life were of a proud or cruel publicity. Lepers sounded their rattles and went about in processions, beggars exhibited their deformity and their misery in churches. Every order and estate, every rank and profession, was distinguished by its costume. The great lords never moved about without a glorious display of arms and liveries,
exciting fear and envy. Executions and other public acts of justice, hawking, marriages and funerals, were all announced by cries and processions, songs and music. The lover wore the colours of his lady; companions the emblem of their confraternity; parties and servants the badges or blazon of their lords. Between town and country, too, the contrast was very marked. A medieval town did not lose itself in extensive suburbs of factories and villas; girded by its walls, it stood forth as a compact whole, bristling with innumerable turrets. However tall and threatening the houses of noblemen or merchants might be, in the aspect of the town the lofty mass of the churches always remained dominant.

The contrast between silence and sound, darkness and light, like that between summer and winter, was more strongly marked than it is in our lives. The modern town hardly knows silence or darkness in their purity, nor the effect of a solitary light or a single distant cry.

All things presenting themselves to the mind in violent contrasts and impressive forms, lent a tone of excitement and of passion to everyday life and tended to produce that perpetual oscillation between despair and distracted joy, between cruelty and pious tenderness which characterize life in the Middle Ages.

One sound rose ceaselessly above the noises of busy life and lifted all things unto a sphere of order and serenity: the sound of bells. The bells were in daily life like good spirits, which by their familiar voices, now called upon the citizens to mourn and now to rejoice, now warned them of danger, now exhorted them to piety. They were known by their names: big Jacqueline, or the bell Roland. Every one knew the difference in meaning of the various ways of ringing. However continuous the ringing of the bells, people would seem not to have become blunted to the effect of their sound.

Throughout the famous judicial duel between two citizens of Valenciennes, in 1455, the big bell, 'which is hideous to hear,' says Chastellain, never stopped ringing. What intoxication the pealing of the bells of all the churches, and of all the monasteries of Paris, must have produced, sounding from
morning till evening, and even during the night, when a peace was concluded or a pope elected.

The frequent processions, too, were a continual source of pious agitation. When the times were evil, as they often were, processions were seen winding along, day after day, for weeks on end. In 1412 daily processions were ordered in Paris, to implore victory for the king, who had taken up the oriflamme against the Armagnacs. They lasted from May to July, and were formed by ever-varying orders and corporations, going always by new roads, and always carrying different relics. The Burgher of Paris calls them 'the most touching processions in the memory of men.' People looked on or followed, 'weeping piteously, with many tears, in great devotion.' All went barefooted and fasting, councillors of the Parlement as well as the poorer citizens. Those who could afford it, carried a torch or a taper. A great many small children were always among them. Poor country-people of the environs of Paris came barefooted from afar to join the procession. And nearly every day the rain came down in torrents.

Then there were the entries of princes, arranged with all the resources of art and luxury belonging to the age. And, lastly, most frequent of all, one might almost say, uninterrupted, the executions. The cruel excitement and coarse compassion raised by an execution formed an important item in the spiritual food of the common people. They were spectacular plays with a moral. For horrible crimes the law invented atrocious punishments. At Brussels a young incendiary and murderer is placed in the centre of a circle of burning fagots and straw, and made fast to a stake by means of a chain running round an iron ring. He addresses touching words to the spectators, 'and he so softened their hearts that every one burst into tears and his death was commended as the finest that was ever seen.' During the Burgundian terror in Paris in 1411, one of the victims, Messire Mansart du Bois, being requested by the hangman, according to custom, to forgive him, is not only ready to do so with all his heart, but begs the executioner to embrace him. 'There was a great multitude of people, who nearly all wept hot tears.'
When the criminals were great lords, the common people had the satisfaction of seeing rigid justice done, and at the same time finding the inconstancy of fortune exemplified more strikingly than in any sermon or picture. The magistrate took care that nothing should be wanting to the effect of the spectacle: the condemned were conducted to the scaffold, dressed in the garb of their high estate. Jean de Montaigu, grand maître d’hôtel to the king, the victim of Jean sans Peur, is placed high on a cart, preceded by two trumpeters. He wears his robe of state, hood, cloak, and hose half red and half white, and his gold spurs, which are left on the feet of the beheaded and suspended corpse. By special order of Louis XI, the head of maître Oudart de Bussy, who had refused a seat in the Parlement, was dug up and exhibited in the marketplace of Hesdin, covered with a scarlet hood lined with fur ‘selon la mode des conseillers de Parlement,’ with explanatory verses.

Rarer than processions and executions were the sermons of itinerant preachers, coming to shake people by their eloquence. The modern reader of newspapers can no longer conceive the violence of impression caused by the spoken word on an ignorant mind lacking mental food. The Franciscan friar Richard preached in Paris in 1429 during ten consecutive days. He began at five in the morning and spoke without a break till ten or eleven, for the most part in the cemetery of the Innocents. When, at the close of his tenth sermon, he announced that it was to be his last, because he had no permission to preach more, ‘great and small wept as touchingly and as bitterly as if they were watching their best friends being buried; and so did he.’ Thinking that he would preach once more at Saint Denis on the Sunday, the people flocked thither on Saturday evening, and passed the night in the open, to secure good seats.

Another Minorite friar, Antoine Fradin, whom the magistrate of Paris had forbidden to preach, because he inveighed against the bad government, is guarded night and day in the Cordeliers monastery, by women posted around the building, armed with ashes and stones. In all the towns where the
famous Dominican preacher Vincent Ferrer is expected, the people, the magistrates, the lower clergy, and even prelates and bishops, set out to greet him with joyous songs. He journeys with a numerous and ever-increasing following of adherents, who every night make a circuit of the town in procession, with chants and flagellations. Officials are appointed to take charge of lodging and feeding these multitudes. A large number of priests of various religious orders accompany him everywhere, to assist him in celebrating mass and in confessing the faithful. Also several notaries, to draw up, on the spot, deeds embodying the reconciliations which this holy preacher everywhere brings about. His pulpit has to be protected by a fence against the pressure of the congregation which wants to kiss his hand or habit. Work is at a standstill all the time he preaches. He rarely fails to move his auditors to tears. When he spoke of the Last Judgement, of Hell, or of the Passion, both he and his hearers wept so copiously that he had to suspend his sermon till the sobbing had ceased. Malefactors threw themselves at his feet, before every one, confessing their great sins. One day, while he was preaching, he saw two persons, who had been condemned to death – a man and a woman – being led to execution. He begged to have the execution delayed, had them both placed under the pulpit, and went on with his sermon, preaching about their sins. After the sermon, only some bones were found in the place they had occupied, and the people were convinced that the word of the saint had consumed and saved them at the same time.

After Olivier Maillard had been preaching Lenten sermons at Orleans, the roofs of the houses surrounding the place whence he had addressed the people had been so damaged by the spectators who had climbed on to them, that the roofer sent in a bill for repairs extending over sixty-four days.

The diatribes of the preachers against dissoluteness and luxury produced violent excitement which was translated into action. Long before Savonarola started bonfires of ‘vanities’ at Florence, to the irreparable loss of art, the custom of these holocausts of articles of luxury and amusement was
prevalent both in France and in Italy. At the summons of a famous preacher, men and women would hasten to bring cards, dice, finery, ornaments, and burn them with great pomp. Renunciation of the sin of vanity in this way had taken a fixed and solemn form of public manifestation, in accordance with the tendency of the age to invent a style for everything.

All this general facility of emotions, of tears and spiritual upheavals, must be borne in mind in order to conceive fully how violent and high-strung was life at that period.

Public mourning still presented the outward appearance of a general calamity. At the funeral of Charles VII, the people are quite appalled on seeing the cortège of all the court dignitaries, ‘dressed in the deepest mourning, which was most pitiful to see; and because of the great sorrow and grief they exhibited for the death of their master, many tears were shed and lamentations uttered throughout the town.’ People were especially touched at the sight of six pages of the king mounted on horses quite covered with black velvet. One of the pages, according to a rumour, had neither eaten nor drunk for four days. ‘And God knows what doleful and piteous plaints they made, mourning for their master.’

Solemnities of a political character also led to abundant weeping. An ambassador of the king of France repeatedly bursts into tears while addressing a courteous harangue to Philip the Good. At the meeting of the kings of France and of England at Ardres, at the reception of the dauphin at Brussels, at the departure of John of Coïmbre from the court of Burgundy, all the spectators weep hot tears. Chastellain describes the dauphin, the future Louis XI, during his voluntary exile in Brabant, as subject to frequent fits of weeping.

Unquestionably there is some exaggeration in these descriptions of the chroniclers. In describing the emotion caused by the addresses of the ambassadors at the peace congress at Arras, in 1435, Jean Germain, bishop of Chalons, makes the auditors throw themselves on the ground, sobbing and groaning. Things, of course, did not happen thus, but thus the bishop thought fit to represent them, and the palpable exaggeration reveals a foundation of truth. As with the senti-
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mentalists of the eighteenth century, tears were considered fine and honourable. Even nowadays an indifferent spectator of a public procession sometimes feels himself suddenly moved to inexplicable tears. In an age filled with religious reverence for all pomp and grandeur, this propensity will appear altogether natural.

A simple instance will suffice to show the high degree of irritability which distinguishes the Middle Ages from our own time. One can hardly imagine a more peaceful game than that of chess. Still like the chansons de gestes of some centuries back, Olivier de la Marche mentions frequent quarrels arising over it: 'le plus saige y pert patience.'

A scientific historian of the Middle Ages, relying first and foremost on official documents, which rarely refer to the passions, except violence and cupidity, occasionally runs the risk of neglecting the difference of tone between the life of the expiring Middle Ages and that of our own days. Such documents would sometimes make us forget the vehement pathos of medieval life, of which the chroniclers, however defective as to material facts, always keep us in mind.

In more than one respect life had still the colours of a fairy-story; that is to say, it assumed those colours in the eyes of contemporaries. The court chroniclers were men of culture, and they observed the princes, whose deeds they recorded, at close quarters, yet even they give these records a somewhat archaic, hieratic air. The following story, told by Chastellain, serves to prove this. The young count of Charolais, the later Charles the Bold, on arriving at Gorcum, in Holland, on his way from Sluys, learns that his father, the duke, has taken all his pensions and benefices from him. Thereupon he calls his whole court into his presence, down to the scullions, and in a touching speech imparts his misfortune to them, dwelling on his respect for his ill-informed father, and on his anxiety about the welfare of all his retinue. Let those who have the means to live, remain with him awaiting the return of good fortune; let the poor go away freely, and let them come back when they hear that the count's fortune has been re-established: they will
all return to their old places, and the count will reward them for their patience. ‘Then were heard cries and sobs, and with one accord they shouted: “We all, we all, my lord, will live and die with thee.”’ Profoundly touched, Charles accepts their devotion: ‘Well, then, stay and suffer, and I will suffer for you, rather than that you should be in want.’ The nobles then come and offer him what they possess, ‘one saying, I have a thousand, another, ten thousand; I have this, I have that to place at thy service, and I am ready to share all that may befall thee.’ And in this way everything went on as usual, and there was never a hen the less in the kitchen.

Clearly this story has been more or less touched up. What interests us is that Chastellain sees the prince and his court in the epic guise of a popular ballad. If this is a literary man’s conception, how brilliant must royal life have appeared, when displayed in almost magic splendour, to the naive imagination of the uneducated!

Although in reality the mechanism of government had already assumed rather complicated forms, the popular mind pictures it in simple and fixed figures. The current political ideas are those of the Old Testament, of the romainant and the ballad. The kings of the time are reduced to a certain number of types, every one of which corresponds, more or less, to a literary motif. There is the wise and just prince, the prince deceived by evil counsellors, the prince who avenges the honour of his family, the unfortunate prince to whom his servants remain faithful. In the mind of the people political questions are reduced to stories of adventure. Philip the Good knew the political language which the people understands. To convince the Hollanders and Frisians that he was perfectly able to conquer the bishopric of Utrecht, he exhibits, during the festivities of The Hague, in 1456, precious plate to the value of thirty thousand silver marks. Everybody may come and look at it. Amongst other things, two hundred thousand gold lions have been brought from Lille contained in two chests which every one may try to lift up. The demonstration of the solvency of the state took the form of an entertainment at a fair.
Often we find a fantastic element in the life of princes which reminds us of the caliph of the *Arabian Nights*. Charles VI, disguised and mounted with a friend on a single horse, witnesses the entrance of his betrothed and is knocked about in the crowd by petty constables. Philip the Good, whom the physicians ordered to have his head shaved, issues a command to all the nobles to do likewise, and charges Pierre de Hagenbach with the cropping of any whom he finds recalcitrant. In the midst of coolly calculated enterprises princes sometimes act with an impetuous temerity, which endangers their lives and their policy. Edward III does not hesitate to expose his life and that of the prince of Wales in order to capture some Spanish merchantmen, in revenge for deeds of piracy. Philip the Good interrupts the most serious political business to make the dangerous crossing from Rotterdam to Sluys for the sake of a mere whim. On another occasion, mad with rage in consequence of a quarrel with his son, he leaves Brussels in the night alone, and loses his way in the woods. The knight Philippe Pot, to whom fell the delicate task of pacifying him on his return, lights up the happy phrase: ‘Good day, my liege, good day, what is this? Art thou playing King Arthur now, or Sir Lancelot?’

The custom of princes, in the fifteenth century, frequently to seek counsel in political matters from ecstatic preachers and great visionaries, maintained a kind of religious tension in state affairs which at any moment might manifest itself in decisions of a totally unexpected character.

At the end of the fourteenth century and at the beginning of the fifteenth, the political stage of the kingdoms of Europe was so crowded with fierce and tragic conflicts that the peoples could not help seeing all that regards royalty as a succession of sanguinary and romantic events: in England, King Richard II dethroned and next secretly murdered, while nearly at the same time the highest monarch in Christendom, his brother-in-law Wenzel, king of the Romans, is deposed by the electors; in France, a mad king and soon afterwards fierce party strife, openly breaking out with the appalling murder of Louis of Orleans in 1407, and indefinitely prolonged by the retaliation
of 1419 when Jean sans Peur is murdered at Montereau. With their endless train of hostility and vengeance, these two murders have given to the history of France, during a whole century, a sombre tone of hatred. For the contemporary mind cannot help seeing all the national misfortunes which the struggle of the houses of Orleans and of Burgundy was to unchain, in the light of that sole dramatic motive of princely vengeance. It finds no explanation for historic events save in personal quarrels and motives of passion.

In addition to all these evils came the increasing obsession of the Turkish peril, and the still vivid recollection of the catastrophe of Nicopolis in 1396, where a reckless attempt to save Christendom had ended in the wholesale slaughter of French chivalry. Lastly, the great schism of the West had lasted already for a quarter of a century, unsettling all notions about the stability of the Church, dividing every land and community. Two, soon three, claimants contending for the papacy! One of them, the obstinate Aragonese Peter of Luna, or Benedict XIII, was commonly called in France ‘le Pappe de la Lune.’ What can an ignorant populace have imagined when hearing such a name?

The familiar image of Fortune’s wheel from which kings are falling with their crowns and their sceptres took a living shape in the person of many an expelled prince, roaming from court to court, without means, but full of projects and still decked with the splendour of the marvellous East whence he had fled – the king of Armenia, the king of Cyprus, before long the emperor of Constantinople. It is not surprising that the people of Paris should have believed in the tale of the Gypsies, who presented themselves in 1427, ‘a duke and a count and ten men, all on horseback,’ while others, to the number of 120, had to stay outside the town. They came from Egypt, they said; the pope had ordered them, by way of penance for their apostasy, to wander about for seven years, without sleeping in a bed; there had been 1,200 of them, but their king, their queen, and all the others had died on the way; as a mitigation the pope had ordered that every bishop and abbot was to give them ten pounds tournois. The people of
Paris came in great numbers to see them, and have their fortunes told by women who eased them of their money ‘by magic art or in other ways.’

The inconstancy of the fortune of princes was strikingly embodied in the person of King René. Having aspired to the crowns of Hungary, of Sicily, and of Jerusalem, he had lost all his opportunities, and reaped nothing but a series of defeats, and imprisonments, chequered by perilous escapes. The royal poet, a lover of the arts, consoled himself for all his disappointments on his estates in Anjou and in Provence; his cruel fate had not cured him of his predilection for pastoral enjoyment. He had seen all his children die but one, a daughter for whom was reserved a fate even harder than his own. Married at sixteen to an imbecile bigot, Henry VI of England, Margaret of Anjou, full of wit, ambition and passion, after living for many years in that hell of hatred and of persecution, the English court, lost her crown when the quarrel between York and Lancaster at last broke out into civil war. Having found refuge, after many dangers and suffering, at the court of Burgundy, she told Chastellain the story of her adventures: how she had been forced to commit herself and her young son to the mercy of a robber, how at mass she had had to ask a Scotch archer a penny for her offering, ‘who reluctantly and with regret took a groat scots for her out of his purse and lent it her.’ The good historiographer, moved by so much misfortune, dedicated to her ‘a certain little treatise on fortune, based on its inconstancy and deceptive nature,’ which he entitled *Le Temple de Bocace*. He could not guess that still graver calamities were in store for the unfortunate queen. At the battle of Tewkesbury, in 1471, the fortunes of Lancaster went down for ever. Her only son perished there, probably slaughtered after the battle. Her husband was secretly murdered; she herself was imprisoned in the Tower of London, where she remained for five years, to be at last given up by Edward IV to Louis XI, who made her renounce her father’s inheritance as the price of her liberty.

An atmosphere of passion and adventure enveloped the
lives of princes. It was not popular fancy alone which lent it that colour.

A present-day reader, studying the history of the Middle Ages based on official documents, will never sufficiently realize the extreme excitability of the medieval soul. The picture drawn mainly from official records, though they may be the most reliable sources, will lack one element: that of the vehement passion possessing princes and peoples alike. To be sure, the passionate element is not absent from modern politics, but it is now restrained and diverted for the most part by the complicated mechanism of social life. Five centuries ago it still made frequent and violent irruptions into practical politics, upsetting rational schemes. In princes this violence of sentiment is doubled by pride and the consciousness of power, and therefore operates with a twofold impetus. It is not surprising, says Chastellain, that princes often live in hostility, ‘for princes are men, and their affairs are high and perilous, and their natures are subject to many passions, such as hatred and envy; their hearts are veritable dwelling-places of these, because of their pride in reigning.’

In writing the history of the house of Burgundy, the leitmotiv should constantly keep before our minds the spirit of revenge. Nobody, of course, will now seek the explanation of the whole conflict of power and interests, whence proceeded the secular struggle between Fiance and the house of Austria, in the family feud between Orleans and Burgundy. All sorts of causes of a general nature – political, economic, ethnographic – have contributed to the genesis of that great conflict. But we should never forget that the apparent origin of it, and the central motive dominating it, was, to the men of the fifteenth century and even later, the thirst for revenge. To them Philip the Good is always, in the first place, the avenger, ‘he who, to avenge the outrage done to the person of Duke John, sustained the war for sixteen years.’ He had undertaken it as a sacred duty: ‘with the most violent and deadly hatred he would give himself up to revenge the dead, as far as ever God would permit him, and he would devote to it body and soul, substance and lands, submitting everything to Fortune,
considering it more a salutary task and agreeable to God to undertake it, than to leave it.'

Read the long list of expiatory deeds which the treaty of Arras demanded in 1435 – chapels, monasteries, churches, chapters to be founded, crosses to be erected, masses to be chanted – then one realizes the immensely high rate at which men valued the need of vengeance and of reparations to outraged honour. The Burgundians were not alone in thinking after this fashion; the most enlightened man of his century, Aeneas Sylvius, in one of his letters praises Philip above all the other princes of his time, for his anxiety to avenge his father.

According to La Marche, this duty of honour and revenge was, to the duke’s subjects, also the cardinal point of policy. All the dominions of the duke, he says, were clamouring for vengeance along with him. We shall find it difficult to believe this, when we remember, for instance, the commercial relations between Flanders and England, a more important political factor, it would seem, than the honour of the ducal family. But to understand the sentiment of the age itself, one should look for the avowed and conscious political ideas. There can be no doubt that no other political motive could be better understood by the people than the primitive motives of hatred and of vengeance. Attachment to princes had still an emotional character; it was based on the innate and immediate sentiments of fidelity and fellowship, it was still feudal sentiment at bottom. It was rather party feeling than political. The last three centuries of the Middle Ages are the time of the great party struggles. From the thirteenth century onward inveterate party quarrels arise in nearly all countries: first in Italy, then in France, the Netherlands, Germany and England. Though economic interests may sometimes have been at the bottom of these quarrels, the attempts which have been made to disengage them often smack somewhat of arbitrary construction. The desire to discover economic causes is to some degree a craze with us, and sometimes leads us to forget a much simpler psychological explanation of the facts.

In the feudal age the private wars between two families
have no other discernible reason than rivalry of rank and
covetousness of possessions. Racial pride, thirst of ven-
genance, fidelity, are their primary and direct motives. There
are no grounds to ascribe another economic basis to them
than mere greed of one’s neighbour’s riches. Accordingly as
the central power consolidates and extends, these isolated
quarrels unite, agglomerate to groups; large parties are
formed, are polarized, so to say; while their members know of
no other grounds for their concord or enmity than those of
honour, tradition, and fidelity. Their economic differences are
often only a consequence of their relation towards their
rulers.

Every page of medieval history proves the spontaneous and
passionate character of the sentiments of loyalty and devotion
to the prince. At Abbeville, in 1462, a messenger comes at
night, bringing the news of a dangerous illness of the duke of
Burgundy. His son requests the good towns to pray for him.
At once the aldermen order the bells of the church of Saint
Vulfran to be rung; the whole population wakes up and goes
to church, where it remains all night in prayer, kneeling or
prostrate on the ground, with ‘grandes allumeries merveil-
leuses,’ while the bells keep tolling.

It might be thought that the schism, which had no dogmatic
cause, could hardly awaken religious passions in countries
distant from Avignon and from Rome, in which the two popes
were only known by name. Yet in fact it immediately engen-
dered a fanatical hatred, such as exists between the faithful
and infidels. When the town of Bruges went over to the
‘obedience’ of Avignon, a great number of people left their
house, trade, or prebend, to go and live according to their
party views in some diocese of the Urbanist obedience: Liège,
Utrecht, or elsewhere. In 1382 the oriflamme, which might
only be unfurled in a holy cause, was taken up against the
Flemings, because they were Urbanists, that is, infidels.
Pierre Salmon, a French political agent, arriving at Utrecht
about Easter, could not find a priest there willing to admit
him to the communion service, ‘because they said I was a
schismatic and believed in Benedict the anti-pope.’
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The emotional character of party sentiments and of fidelity was further heightened by the powerfully suggestive effect of all the outward signs of these divergences: liveries, colours, badges, party cries. During the first years of the war between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians, these signs succeeded each other in Paris with a dangerous alternation: a purple hood with the cross of Saint Andrew, white hoods, then violet ones. Even priests, women, and children wore distinctive signs. The images of saints were decorated with them; it was asserted that certain priests, during mass and in baptizing, refused to make the sign of the cross in the orthodox way, but made it in the form of a Saint Andrew cross.

In the blind passion with which people followed their lord or their party, the unshakable sentiment of right, characteristic of the Middle Ages, is trying to find expression. Man at that time is convinced that right is absolutely fixed and certain. Justice should prosecute the unjust everywhere and to the end. Reparation and retribution have to be extreme, and assume the character of revenge. In this exaggerated need of justice, primitive barbarism, pagan at bottom, blends with the Christian conception of society. The Church, on the one hand, had inculcated gentleness and clemency, and tried, in that way, to soften judicial morals. On the other hand, in adding to the primitive need of retribution the horror of sin, it had, to a certain extent, stimulated the sentiment of justice. And sin, to violent and impulsive spirits, was only too frequently another name for what their enemies did. The barbarous idea of retaliation was reinforced by fanaticism. The chronic insecurity made the greatest possible severity on the part of the public authorities desirable; crime came to be regarded as a menace to order and society, as well as an insult to divine majesty. Thus it was natural that the late Middle Ages should become the special period of judicial cruelty. That the criminal deserved his punishment was not doubted for a moment. The popular sense of justice always sanctioned the most rigorous penalties. At intervals the magistrate undertook regular campaigns of severe justice, now against brigandage, now against sorcery or sodomy.
What strikes us in this judicial cruelty and in the joy the people felt at it, is rather brutality than perversity. Torture and executions are enjoyed by the spectators like an entertainment at a fair. The citizens of Mons bought a brigand, at far too high a price, for the pleasure of seeing him quartered, 'at which the people rejoiced more than if a new holy body had risen from the dead.' The people of Bruges, in 1488, during the captivity of Maximilian, king of the Romans, cannot get their fill of seeing the tortures inflicted, on a high platform in the middle of the market-place, on the magistrates suspected of treason. The unfortunates are refused the death-blow which they implore, that the people may feast again upon their torments.

Both in France and in England, the custom existed of refusing confession and extreme unction to a criminal condemned to death. Sufferings and fear of death were to be aggravated by the certainty of eternal damnation. In vain had the council of Vienne in 1311 ordered to grant them at least the sacrament of penance. Towards the end of the fourteenth century the same custom still existed. Charles V himself, moderate though he was, had declared that no change would be made in his lifetime. The chancellor Pierre d'Orgeumont, whose 'forte cervelle,' says Philippe de Mézières, was more difficult to turn than a mill-stone, remained deaf to the humane remonstrances of the latter. It was only after Gerson had joined his voice to that of Mézières that a royal decree of the 12th of February, 1397, ordered that confession should be accorded to the condemned. A stone cross erected by the care of Pierre de Craon, who had interested himself in the decree, marked the place where the Minorite friars might assist penitents going to execution. And even then the barbarous custom did not disappear. Étienne Ponchier, bishop of Paris, had to renew the decree of 1311 in 1500.

In 1427 a noble brigand is hanged in Paris. At the moment when he is going to be executed, the great treasurer of the regent appears on the scene and vents his hatred against him; he prevents his confession, in spite of his prayers; he climbs the ladder behind him, shouting insults, beats him with a
stick, and gives the hangman a thrashing for exhorting the victim to think of his salvation. The hangman grows nervous and bungles his work; the cord snaps, the wretched criminal falls on the ground, breaks a leg and some ribs, and in this condition has to climb the ladder again.

The Middle Ages knew nothing of all those ideas which have rendered our sentiment of justice timid and hesitating: doubts as to the criminal's responsibility; the conviction that society is, to a certain extent, the accomplice of the individual; the desire to reform instead of inflicting pain; and, we may even add, the fear of judicial errors. Or rather these ideas were implied, unconsciously, in the very strong and direct feeling of pity and of forgiveness which alternated with extreme severity. Instead of lenient penalties, inflicted with hesitation, the Middle Ages knew but the two extremes: the fulness of cruel punishment, and mercy. When the condemned criminal is pardoned, the question whether he deserves it for any special reasons is hardly asked; for mercy has to be gratuitous, like the mercy of God. In practice, it was not always pure pity which determined the question of pardon. The princes of the fifteenth century were very liberal of 'lettres de rémission' for misdeeds of all sorts, and contemporaries thought it quite natural, that they were obtained by the intercession of noble relatives. The majority of these documents, however, concern poor common people.

The contrast of cruelty and of pity recurs at every turn in the manners and customs of the Middle Ages. On the one hand, the sick, the poor, the insane, are objects of that deeply moved pity, born of a feeling of fraternity akin to that which is so strikingly expressed in modern Russian literature; on the other hand, they are treated with incredible hardness or cruelly mocked. The chronicler Pierre de Fenin, having described the death of a gang of brigands, winds up naively: 'and people laughed a good deal, because they were all poor men.' In 1425, an 'esbatement' takes place in Paris, of four blind beggars, armed with sticks, with which they hit each other in trying to kill a pig, which is the prize of the combat. On the evening before they are led through the town, 'all
armed, with a great banner in front, on which was pictured a pig, and preceded by a man beating a drum.’

In the fifteenth century, female dwarfs were objects of amusement, as they still were at the court of Spain when Velazquez painted their infinitely sad faces. Madame d’Or, the blond dwarf of Philip the Good, was famous. She was made to wrestle, at a court festival, with the acrobat Hans. At the wedding-feasts of Charles the Bold, in 1468, Madame de Beaugrant, the female dwarf of Mademoiselle of Burgundy, enters dressed like a shepherdess, mounted on a golden lion, larger than a horse; she is presented to the young duchess and placed on the table. As to the fate of these small creatures, the account-books are more eloquent for us than any sentimental complaint could be. They tell us of a dwarf-girl whom a duchess caused to be fetched from her home, and how her parents came to visit her from time to time and receive a gratuity. ‘Au père de Belon la folle, qui estoit venu veoir sa fille. . . . 27s. 6d.’ The poor fellow perhaps went home well pleased and much elated about the court function of his daughter. That same year a locksmith of Blois furnished two iron collars, the one ‘to make fast Belon, the fool, and the other to put round the neck of the monkey of her grace the Duchess.’

In the harshness of those times there is something ingenuous which almost forbids us to condemn it. When the massacre of the Armagnacs was in full swing in 1418, the Parisians founded a brotherhood of Saint Andrew in the church of Saint Eustache: every one, priest or layman, wore a wreath of red roses, so that the church was perfumed by them, ‘as if it had been washed with rose-water.’ The people of Arras celebrate the annulment of the sentences for witchcraft, which during the whole year 1461 had infested the town like an epidemic, by joyous festivals and a competition in acting ‘folies moralisées,’ of which the prizes were a gold fleur-de-lis, a brace of capons, etc.; nobody, it seems, thought any more of the tortured and executed victims.

So violent and motley was life, that it bore the mixed smell of blood and of roses. The men of that time always oscillate
between the fear of hell and the most naïve joy, between cruelty and tenderness, between harsh asceticism and insane attachment to the delights of this world, between hatred and goodness, always running to extremes.

After the close of the Middle Ages the mortal sins of pride, anger and covetousness have never again shown the unabashed insolence with which they manifested themselves in the life of preceding centuries. The whole history of the house of Burgundy is like an epic of overweening and heroic pride, which takes the form of bravura and ambition with Philippe le Hardi, of hatred and envy with Jean sans Peur, of the lust of vengeance and fondness for display with Philip the Good, of foolhardy temerity and obstinacy with Charles the Bold.

Medieval doctrine found the root of all evil either in the sin of pride or in cupidity. Both opinions were based on Scripture texts: *A superbia initium sumpsit omnis perditio. – Radix omnium malorum est cupiditas.* It seems, nevertheless, that from the twelfth century downward people begin to find the principle of evil rather in cupidity than in pride. The voices which condemn blind cupidity, ‘la cieca cupidigia’ of Dante, become louder and louder. Pride might perhaps be called the sin of the feudal and hierarchic age. Very little property is, in the modern sense, liquid, while power is not yet associated, predominantly, with money; it is still rather inherent in the person and depends on a sort of religious awe which he inspires; it makes itself felt by pomp and magnificence, or a numerous train of faithful followers. Feudal or hierarchic thought expresses the idea of grandeur by visible signs, lending to it a symbolic shape, of homage paid kneeling, of ceremonial reverence. Pride, therefore, is a symbolic sin, and from the fact that, in the last resort, it derives from the pride of Lucifer, the author of all evil, it assumes a metaphysical character.

Cupidity, on the other hand, has neither this symbolic character nor these relations with theology. It is a purely worldly sin, the impulse of nature and of the flesh. In the later Middle Ages the conditions of power had been changed by the increased circulation of money, and an illimitable field
opened to whosoever was desirous of satisfying his ambitions by heaping up wealth. To this epoch cupidity becomes the predominant sin. Riches have not acquired the spectral impalpability which capitalism, founded on credit, will give them later; what haunts the imagination is still the tangible yellow gold. The enjoyment of riches is direct and primitive; it is not yet weakened by the mechanism of an automatic and invisible accumulation by investment; the satisfaction of being rich is found either in luxury and dissipation, or in gross avarice.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages feudal and hierarchic pride had lost nothing, as yet, of its vigour; the relish for pomp and display is as strong as ever. This primitive pride has now united itself with the growing sin of cupidity, and it is this mixture of the two which gives the expiring Middle Ages a tone of extravagant passion that never appears again.

A furious chorus of invectives against cupidity and avarice rises up everywhere from the literature of that period. Preachers, moralists, satirical writers, chroniclers and poets speak with one voice. Hatred of rich people, especially of the new rich, who were then very numerous, is general. Official records confirm the most incredible cases of unbridled avidity told by the chronicles. In 1436 a quarrel between two beggars, in which a few drops of blood had been shed, had soiled the church of the Innocents at Paris. The bishop, Jacques du Châtelier, ‘a very ostentatious, grasping man, of a more worldly disposition than his station required,’ refused to consecrate the church anew, unless he received a certain sum of money from the two poor men, which they did not possess, so that the service was interrupted for twenty-two days. Even worse happened under his successor, Denys de Moulins. During four months of the year 1441, he prohibited both burials and processions in the cemetery of the Innocents, the most favoured of all, because the church could not pay the tax he demanded. This Denys de Moulins was reputed ‘a man who showed very little pity to people, if he did not receive money or some equivalent; and it was told for truth that he had more than fifty lawsuits before the Parlement. for nothing could be got out of him without going to law.’
A general feeling of impending calamity hangs over all. Perpetual danger prevails everywhere. To realize the continuous insecurity in which the lives of great and small alike were passed, it suffices to read the details which Monsieur Pierre Champion has collected regarding the persons mentioned by Villon in his Testament, or the notes of Monsieur A. Tuetey to the diary of a Burgher of Paris. They present to us an interminable string of lawsuits, crimes, assaults, and persecutions. A chronicle like that of Jacques du Clercq, or a diary such as that of the citizen of Metz, Philippe de Vigneulles, perhaps lays too much stress on the darker side of contemporary life, but every investigation of the careers of individual persons seems to confirm them, by revealing to us strangely troubled lives.

In reading the chronicle of Mathieu d’Escouchy, simple, exact, impartial, moralizing, one would think that the author was a studious, quiet, and honest man. His character was unknown before Monsieur du Fresne de Beaucourt had elicited the history of his life from the archives. But what a life it was, that of this representative of ‘colérique Picardie.’ Alderman, then, towards 1445 provost, of Péronne, we find him from the outset engaged in a family quarrel with Jean Froment, the city syndic. They harass each other reciprocally with lawsuits, for forgery and murder, for ‘excès et attemptaz.’ The attempt of the provost to get the widow of his enemy condemned for witchcraft costs him dear. Summoned before the Parlement of Paris himself, d’Escouchy is imprisoned. We find him again in prison as an accused on five more occasions, always in grave criminal causes, and more than once in heavy chains. A son of Froment wounds him in an encounter. Each of the parties hires brigands to assail the other. After this long feud ceases to be mentioned in the records, others arise of similar violence. All this does not check the career of d’Escouchy: he becomes bailiff, provost of Ribemont, ‘procureur du roi’ at Saint Quentin; he is ennobled. He is taken prisoner at Montlhéry, then comes back maimed from a later campaign. Next he marries, but not to settle down to a quiet life. Once more, he appears accused of counterfeiting seals, conducted
to Paris 'comme larron et murdrier,' forced into confessions by torture, prevented from appealing, condemned; then rehabilitated and again condemned, till the traces of this career of hatred and persecutions disappear from the records.

Is it surprising that the people could see their fate and that of the world only as an endless succession of evils? Bad government, exactions, the cupidity and violence of the great, wars and brigandage, scarcity, misery and pestilence— to this is contemporary history nearly reduced in the eyes of the people. The feeling of general insecurity which was caused by the chronic form wars were apt to take, by the constant menace of the dangerous classes, by the mistrust of justice, was further aggravated by the obsession of the coming end of the world, and by the fear of hell, of sorcerers and of devils. The background of all life in the world seems black. Everywhere the flames of hatred arise and injustice reigns. Satan covers a gloomy earth with his sombre wings. In vain the militant Church battles, preachers deliver their sermons; the world remains unconverted. According to a popular belief, current towards the end of the fourteenth century, no one, since the beginning of the great Western schism, had entered Paradise.
CHAPTER II

Pessimism and the Ideal of the Sublime Life

At the close of the Middle Ages, a sombre melancholy weighed on people's souls. Whether we read a chronicle, a poem, a sermon, a legal document even, the same impression of immense sadness is produced by them all. It would sometimes seem as if this period had been particularly unhappy, as if it had left behind only the memory of violence, of covetousness and mortal hatred, as if it had known no other enjoyment but that of intemperance, of pride and of cruelty.

Now in the records of all periods misfortune has left more traces than happiness. Great evils form the groundwork of history. We are perhaps inclined to assume without much evidence that, roughly speaking, and notwithstanding all calamities, the sum of happiness can have hardly changed from one period to another. But in the fifteenth century, as in the epoch of romanticism, it was, so to say, bad form to praise the world and life openly. It was fashionable to see only its suffering and misery, to discover everywhere signs of decadence and of the near end – in short, to condemn the times or to despise them.

We look in vain in the French literature of the beginning of the fifteenth century for the vigorous optimism which will spring up at the Renaissance – though, by the way, the optimist tendency of the Renaissance is sometimes exaggerated. The exulting exclamation of Ulrich von Hutten, which has become trite from much quoting, 'O saeculum, O literae! juvat vivere!' expresses the enthusiasm of the scholar rather than that of the man. With the humanists optimism is still tempered by the ancient contempt, both Christian and Stoic, for the world. A passage extracted from a letter written by Erasmus in 1518, may serve better than Hutten's exclamation

1. 'O world, O letters, it is a delight to live!'
to show the average valuation put upon life by a humanist. ‘I am not so greatly attached to life; having entered upon my fifty-first year, I judge I have lived long enough; and on the other hand, I see in this life nothing so excellent or agreeable that a man might wish for it, on whom the Christian creed has conferred the hope of a much happier life, in store for those who have attached themselves closely to piety. Nevertheless, at present, I could almost wish to be rejuvenated for a few years, for this only reason that I believe I see a golden age dawning in the near future.’ He then describes the concord reigning among the princes of Christendom and their inclination to peace – which was so dear to him personally – then he continues: ‘Everything confirms my hope that not only good morals and Christian piety will be reborn and flourish, but also pure and true literature and good learning.’ Thanks to the protection of princes, be it understood. ‘It is to their pious feelings that we are indebted for seeing everywhere, as at a given signal, illustrious spirits awakening and conspiring to restore good learning.’

In short, the appreciation of the joys of life, which Erasmus manifests, is fairly cool; moreover, he soon changed his mood of hopeful expectation, never to find it again. However, compared with current feeling in the preceding century, except in Italy, Erasmus’s appreciation might rather be called warm. The men of letters at the court of Charles VII, or at that of Philip the Good, never tire of inveighing against life and the age. The note of despair and profound dejection is predominantly sounded not by ascetic monks, but by the court poets and the chroniclers – laymen, living in aristocratic circles and amid aristocratic ideas. Possessing only a slight intellectual and moral culture, being for the most part strangers to study and learning, and of only a feebly religious temper, they were incapable of finding consolation or hope in the spectacle of universal misery and decay, and could only bewail the decline of the world and despair of justice and of peace.

No one has been so lavish of complaints of this nature as Eustache Deschamps:
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Temps de doleur et de temptacion,
Aages de plour, d’envie et de tourment,
Temps de langour et de dampnacion,
Aages menueur près du définement,
Temps plains d’orreur qui tout fait faussement,
Aage menteur, plain d’orgueil et d’envie,
Temps sans honteur et sans vray jugement,
Aage en tristesse qui abrège la vie.¹

The ballads he has composed in this spirit may be counted by the dozen: monotonous and gloomy variations of the same dismal theme. There must have prevailed among the nobility a general disposition to melancholy; otherwise we could not account for the manifest popularity of these poems.

Toute léesse defaut,
Tous cueurs ont prins par assaut
Tristesse et merencolie.²

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, the tone is still unchanged; Jean Meschinot sighs as did Deschamps.

O miserable et très dolente vie! . . .
La guerre avons, mortalité, famine;
Le froid, le chaud, le jour, la nuit nous mine,
Puces, cirons et tant d’autre vermine
Nous guerroyent. Bref, miserere domine
Noz meschans corps, dont le vivre est très court.³

He too is convinced that all goes wrong in the world; there is no justice any more; the great exploit the small, and the small exploit each other. He pretends to have been led by

1. Time of mourning and of temptation, Age of tears, of envy and of torment, Time of languor and of damnation, Age of decline nigh to the end, Time full of horror which does all things falsely, Lying age, full of pride and of envy, Time without honour and without true judgement, Age of sadness which shortens life.
2. All mirth is lost, All hearts have been taken by storm By sadness and melancholy.
3. O miserable and very sad life! . . . We suffer from warfare, death and famine; Cold and heat, day and night, sap our strength; Fleas, scab-mites and so much other vermin Make war upon us. In short, have mercy, Lord, upon our wicked persons, whose life is very short.

W.M.A.
his hypochondria within an ace of suicide. He depicts himself in the following terms:

Et je, le pouvre escrivain,
Au cueur triste, faible et vain,
Voyant de chascun le deuil,
Soucy me tient en sa main;
Toujours les larmes à l’oeil,
Rien fors mourir je ne vueil.¹

All that we get to know of the moral state of the nobles points to a sentimental need of enrobing their souls with the garb of woe. There is hardly one who does not come forward to affirm that he has seen nothing but misery during his life and expects only worse things from the future. Georges Chastellain, the historiographer of the dukes of Burgundy and chief of the Burgundian rhetorical school, speaks thus of himself in the prologue to his chronicle: ‘I, man of sadness, born in an eclipse of darkness, and thick fogs of lamentation.’ His successor, Olivier de la Marche, chooses for his device the lament, ‘tant a souffert La Marche.’² It would be interesting to study from the point of view of physiognomy the portraits of that time, which for the most part strike us by their sad expression.

It is curious to notice the variation of meaning which the word melancholy shows in the fourteenth century. The ideas of sadness, of reflection, and of fancy, are blended in the term. For example, in speaking of Philip of Artevelde, lost in thought, in consequence of a message he had just received, Froissart expresses himself thus: ‘Quant il eut merancoliet une espasse, il s’avisa que il rescriproit aus commissaires dou roi de France.’³ Deschamps says of something that is uglier than could be imagined: no artist is ‘merencolieux’ enough to be able to paint it. The change of meaning evidently shows a

¹. And I, poor writer, With the sad, feeble and vain heart, When I see every one mourning, Then Affliction holds me in her hand; I have always tears in my eye, I wish for nothing but to die.
². So much has La Marche suffered.
³. When he had reflected for a space, he resolved to answer the emissaries of the king of France.
tendency to identify all serious occupation of the mind with sadness.

The poetry of Eustache Deschamps is full of petty reviling of life and its inevitable troubles. Happy is he who has no children, for babies mean nothing but crying and stench; they give only trouble and anxiety; they have to be clothed, shod, fed; they are always in danger of falling and hurting themselves; they contract some illness and die. When they grow up, they may go to the bad and be put in prison. Nothing but cares and sorrows; no happiness compensates us for our anxiety, for the trouble and expenses of their education. Is there a greater evil than to have deformed children? The poet has no word of pity for their misfortune; he holds

Que homes de membre contrefais
Est en sa pensée mefais,
Plains de pechiez et plains de vices.¹

Happy are bachelors, for a man who has an evil wife has a bad time of it, and he who has a good one always fears to lose her. In other words, happiness is feared together with misfortune. In old age the poet sees only evil and disgust, a lamentable decline of the body and the mind, ridicule and insipidity. It comes soon, at thirty for a woman, at fifty for a man, and neither lives beyond sixty, for the most part. It is a far cry to the serene ideality of Dante’s conception of noble old age in the Convivio!

The world, says Deschamps, is like an old man fallen into dotage. He has begun by being innocent, then he has been wise for a long time, just, virtuous and strong:

Or est laches, chetis et molz,
Veulx, convoiteux et mal parlant:
Je ne voy que foles et folz....
La fin s’approche, en vérité....
Tout va mal.²

¹. That a man with deformed limbs is misshapen of mind, — Full of sins and full of vices.
². Now the world is cowardly, decayed and weak, Old, covetous, confused of speech: I see only female and male fools. . . . The end approaches, in sooth. . . . All goes badly.
The Waning of the Middle Ages

In another place he laments:

Pour quoy est si obscurs le temps,
Que li uns l’autre ne coignoit,
Mais muent les gouvernements
De mal en pis, si comme on voit?
Le temps passé trop mieulx valoit.
Qui règne? Tristesse et Ennu;
Il ne court justice ne droit;
Je ne scé mais desquelz je suy.¹

And again:

Se ce temps tient, je deviendray hermite,
Car je n’i voys fors que deuil et tourment.²

Pessimism of this kind has hardly anything to do with religion. Deschamps only gives an off-hand pious purport to his reflections. Despondency and spleen are at the bottom of them, not piety. A contempt of the world, which is dominated by fear of weariness and of sorrow, of disease and of old age, is by an asceticism of the blasé, born of disillusion and of satiety. It has nothing in common with religion but its terminology.

Even in ascetic utterances of a purer and loftier kind such fear of life, such recoiling before its inevitable sorrows, is not seldom mingled. The series of arguments which Jean Gerson propounds in his *Discours de l’excellence de Virginité*, written for his sisters, with a view to keep them from marrying, does not essentially differ from Deschamps’ gloomy lamentations. All the evils attaching to wedlock are found there. The husband may be a drunkard, a spendthrift, a miser. If he be honest and good, bad harvests, death of cattle, a shipwreck may occur, robbing him of all he possesses. What misery it is to be pregnant! How many women die in childbirth! The woman who suckles her baby knows neither rest nor pleasure.

¹. Why are the times so dark That men do not know each other, But governments move From bad to worse, as we see? The past was much better. Who reigns? Affliction and annoyance; Justice nor law are current; I know no more where I belong.

². If the time remain so, I shall become a hermit, For I see nothing but grief and torment.
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Children may be deformed or disobedient; the husband may die, and leave his widow behind in care and poverty.

Thus, always and everywhere in the literature of the age, we find a confessed pessimism. As soon as the soul of these men has passed from childlike mirth and unreasoning enjoyment to reflection, deep dejection about all earthly misery takes their place and they see only the woe of life. Still this very pessimism is the ground whence their soul will soar up to the aspiration of a life of beauty and serenity. For at all times the vision of a sublime life has haunted the souls of men, and the gloomier the present is, the more strongly this aspiration will make itself felt.

Three different paths, at all times, have seemed to lead to the ideal life. Firstly, that of forsaking the world. The perfection of life here seems only to be reached beyond the domain of earthly labour and delight, by a loosening of all ties. The second path conducts to amelioration of the world itself, by consciously improving political, social, and moral institutions and conditions. Now, in the Middle Ages, Christian faith had so strongly implanted in all minds the ideal of renunciation as the base of all personal and social perfection, that there was scarcely any room left for entering upon this path of material and political progress. The idea of a purposed and continual reform and improvement of society did not exist. Institutions in general are considered as good or as bad as they can be; having been ordained by God, they are intrinsically good, only the sins of men pervert them. What therefore is in need of remedy is the individual soul. Legislation in the Middle Ages never aims consciously and avowedly at creating a new organism; professedly it is always opportunistic, it only restores good old law (or at least thinks it does no more) or mends special abuses. It looks more towards an ideal past than towards an earthly future. For the true future is the Last Judgement, and that is near at hand.

It goes without saying that this mental disposition must have greatly contributed to the general pessimism. If in all that regards the things of this world there is no hope of improvement and of progress, however slow, those who love
the world too much to give up its delights, and who nevertheless cannot help aspiring to a better order of things, see nothing before them but a gulf. We will have to wait till the eighteenth century — for even the Renaissance does not truly bring the idea of progress — before men resolutely enter the path of social optimism; — only then the perfectibility of man and society is raised to the rank of a central dogma, and the next century will only lose the naïveté of this belief, but not the courage and optimism which it inspired.

It would be a mistake to think that the medieval mind, lacking the ideas of progress and conscious reform, had only known the religious form of the aspiration to ideal life. For there is a third path to a world more beautiful, trodden in all ages and civilizations, the easiest and also the most fallacious of all, that of the dream. A promise of escape from the gloomy actual is held out to all; we have only to colour life with fancy, to enter upon the quest of oblivion, sought in the delusion of ideal harmony. After the religious and the social solution we here have the poetical.

A simple tune suffices for the enrapturing fugue to develop itself; an outlook on the heroism, the virtue, or the happiness of an ideal past is all that is wanted. The themes are few in number, and have hardly changed since antiquity; we may call them the heroic and the bucolic theme. Nearly all the literary culture of later ages has been built upon them.

But was it only a question of literature, this third path to the sublime life, this flight from harsh reality into illusion? Surely it has been more. History pays too little attention to the influence of these dreams of a sublime life on civilization itself and on the forms of social life. The content of the ideal is a desire to return to the perfection of an imaginary past. All aspiration to raise life to that level, be it in poetry only or in fact, is an imitation. The essence of chivalry is the imitation of the ideal hero, just as the imitation of the ancient sage is the essence of humanism. Strongest and most lasting of all is the illusion of a return to nature and its innocent charms by an imitation of the shepherd’s life. Since Theocritus it has never lost its hold upon civilized society.
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Now, the more primitive a society is, the more the need of conforming real life to an ideal standard overflows beyond literature into the sphere of the actual. Modern man is a worker. To work is his ideal. The modern male costume since the end of the eighteenth century is essentially a workman’s dress. Since political progress and social perfection have stood foremost in general appreciation, and the ideal itself is sought in the highest production and most equitable distribution of goods, there is no longer any need for playing the hero or the sage. The ideal itself has become democratic. In aristocratic periods, on the other hand, to be representative of true culture means to produce by conduct, by customs, by manners, by costume, by deportment, the illusion of a heroic being, full of dignity and honour, of wisdom and, at all events, of courtesy. This seems possible by the aforesaid imitation of an ideal past. The dream of past perfection ennobles life and its forms, fills them with beauty and fashions them anew as forms of art. Life is regulated like a noble game. Only a small aristocratic group can come up to the standard of this artistic game. To imitate the hero and the sage is not everybody’s business. Without leisure or wealth one does not succeed in giving life an epic or idyllic colour. The aspiration to realize a dream of beauty in the forms of social life bears as a vitium originis the stamp of aristocratic exclusiveness.

Here, then, we have attained a point of view from which we can consider the lay culture of the waning Middle Ages: aristocratic life decorated by ideal forms, gilded by chivalrous romanticism, a world disguised in the fantastic gear of the Round Table.

The quest of the life beautiful is much older than the Italian quattrocento. Here, as elsewhere, the line of demarcation between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance has been too much insisted upon. Florence had but to adopt and develop ancient motifs which the Middle Ages had known. In spite of the aesthetic distance separating the Giostre of the Medici from the barbarous pageantry of the dukes of Burgundy, the inspiration is the same. Italy, indeed, discovered new worlds of beauty, and tuned life to a new tone; but the impulse itself
to force it up to a thing of art, generally taken as typical of the Renaissance, was not its invention.

In the Middle Ages the choice lay, in principle, only between God and the world, between contempt or eager acceptance, at the peril of one’s soul, of all that makes up the beauty and the charm of earthly life. All terrestrial beauty bore the stain of sin. Even where art and piety succeeded in hallowing it by placing it in the service of religion, the artist or the lover of art had to take care not to surrender to the charms of colour and line. Now, all noble life was in its essential manifestations full of such beauty tainted by sin. Knightly exercises and courteous fashions with their worship of bodily strength; honours and dignities with their vanity and their pomp, and especially love; – what were they but pride, envy, avarice, and lust, all condemned by religion! To be admitted as elements of higher culture all these things had to be ennobled and raised to the rank of virtue.

It was here that the path of fancy proved its civilizing value. All aristocratic life in the later Middle Ages is a wholesale attempt to act the vision of a dream. In cloaking itself in the fanciful brilliance of the heroism and probity of a past age, the life of the nobles elevated itself towards the sublime. By this trait the Renaissance is linked to the times of feudalism.

The need of high culture found its most direct expression in all that constitutes ceremonial and etiquette. The actions of princes, even daily and common actions, all assume a quasi-symbolic form and tend to raise themselves to the rank of mysteries. Births, marriages, deaths, are framed in an apparatus of solemn and sublime formalities. The emotions which accompany them are dramatized and amplified. Byzantinism is nothing but the expression of the same tendency, and to realize that it survived the Middle Ages, it is sufficient to remember the Roi Soleil.

The court was pre-eminently the field where this aestheticism flourished. Nowhere did it attain to greater development than at the court of the dukes of Burgundy, which was more pompous and better arranged than that of the kings of France. It is well known how much importance the dukes attached to
the magnificence of their household. A splendid court could, better than anything else, convince rivals of the high rank the dukes claimed to occupy among the princes of Europe. 'After the deeds and exploits of war, which are claims to glory,' says Chastellain, 'the household is the first thing that strikes the eye, and that which it is, therefore, most necessary to conduct and arrange well.' It was boasted that the Burgundian court was the richest and best regulated of all. Charles the Bold, especially, had the passion of magnificence. The archaic and idyllic function of justice administered by the prince in person, even to the humblest of his subjects, was practised by the duke, who was in the habit of sitting in audience with great solemnity two or three times a week, when everyone might tender his petition. He would deliver judgement in the presence of all the noblemen of his household, seated on a 'hautdos' covered with cloth of gold, and assisted by two 'maîtres des requêtes,' the warrant-officer and the clerk kneeling before him. The noblemen were a good deal bored, but there was no help for it, says Chastellain, who expresses some doubt as to the use of these audiences. 'It seemed to be a magnificent and very praiseworthy thing, whatever fruit it might bear. But I have neither heard nor seen such a thing done in my time by a prince or a king.'

For amusements, too, Charles felt the need of solemn and showy forms. 'He was in the habit of devoting part of his day to serious occupations, and, with games and laughter mixed, pleased himself with fine speeches and with exhorting his nobles, like an orator, to practise virtue. And in this regard he was often seen sitting in a chair of state, with his nobles before him, remonstrating with them according to time and circumstances. And always, as the prince and chief of all, he was richly and magnificently dressed, more so than all the others.'

This 'haute magnificence de coeur pour estre vu et regardé en singulières choses,' is it not altogether according to the

1. High magnificence of heart to be seen and regarded in extraordinary things.
spirit of the Renaissance, in spite of its naïve and somewhat stiff outward appearance?

The meals of the duke were ceremonies of a dignity that was almost liturgic. The descriptions by the master of ceremonies, Olivier de la Marche, are well worth reading. His treatise, *L’État de la Maison du duc Charles de Bourgogne*, composed at the request of the king of England, Edward IV, to serve him for a model, expounds the complicated service of breadmasters, carvers, cup-bearers, cooks, and the ordered course of the banquet, which was crowned by all the noblemen filing past the duke, who was still seated at table, 'pour lui donner gloire.'

The kitchen regulations are truly Pantagruelistic. We may picture them in operation in the kitchen of heroic dimensions, with its seven gigantic chimneys, which can still be seen in the ducal palace of Dijon. The chief cook is seated on a raised chair, overlooking the whole apartment; 'and he must hold in his hand a big wooden ladle which serves him for a double purpose: on the one hand to taste soup and broth, on the other to chase the scullions from the kitchen to their work, and to strike them, if need be.'

La Marche speaks of the ceremonies which he describes, in as respectful and quasi-scholastic a tone as if he were treating of sacred mysteries. He submits to his readers grave questions of precedence and of service, and answers them most knowing. – Why is the chief-cook present at the meals of his lord and not the 'écuyer de la cuisine'? How does one proceed to nominate the chief-cook? To which he replies in his wisdom: When the office of chief-cook falls vacant at the court of the prince, the 'maîtres d'hôtel' call the 'écuyers' and all the kitchen servants to them one by one. Each one solemnly gives his vote, attested by an oath, and in this way the chief-cook is elected. – Who is to take the chief-cook's place in case he is absent: the 'spit-master,' or the 'soup-master'? – Answer: Neither; the substitute will be designated by election. – Why do the 'panetiers' and cup-bearers form the first and second ranks, above the carvers and cooks? – Because they are in charge of bread and wine, to which the sanctity of the sacra-
ment gives a holy character.

The extreme importance which attaches to questions of precedence and etiquette can only be explained by the almost religious significance ascribed to them wherever tradition is strong, and where a primitive spirit still prevails. They contain, so to say, a ritualistic element. All forms of etiquette are elaborated so as to constitute a noble game, which, although artificial, has not yet degenerated altogether into a vain parade. Sometimes the polite form takes such an importance that the gravity of the matter in hand is lost sight of.

Before the battle of Crécy, four French knights returned from reconnoitring the English lines. The incident is told by Froissart. Impatient to hear the news they bring, the king rides forward to meet them and stops as soon as he sees them. They force their way through the ranks of the men-at-arms and reach the king. ‘What news, my lords?’ asks the king. Then they look at each other without speaking a word, for not one is willing to speak before his companions. And one said to the other: ‘Lord, do you say it, speak to the king. I shall not speak before you.’ So, for a time they were debating, as none would begin to speak ‘par honneur.’ Till at last the king ordered Sir Monne de Basele to tell what he knew.

Messire Gaultier Rallart, ‘chevalier du guet’ at Paris, in 1418, was in the habit of never going his rounds without being preceded ‘by three or four musicians playing brass instruments, which appeared a strange thing to the people, for they said that it seemed that he said to malefactors: “Get away, for I am coming.” ’ This case, reported by the Burgher of Paris, of a chief of police warning malefactors of his approach, is not an isolated one. Jean de Roye tells the same thing of Jean Balue, bishop of Evreux in 1465. At night he went his rounds, ‘with clarions, trumpets, and other instruments of music, through the streets and on the walls, which was not a customary thing to do for men of the watch.’

Even on the scaffold the honours due to rank are strictly observed. Thus the scaffold mounted by the Constable of Saint Pol is richly shrouded with black velvet strewn with fleurs-de-lis; the cloth with which his eyes are bandaged, the
cushion on which he kneels, are of crimson velvet, and the hangman is a fellow who has never yet executed a single criminal — rather a doubtful privilege for the noble victim.

The struggles of politeness, which some forty years ago were still characteristic of lower-middle-class etiquette, were extraordinarily developed in the court life of the fifteenth century. A person of fashion would have considered himself dishonoured by not according to a superior the place which belonged to him. The dukes of Burgundy give precedence scrupulously to their royal relations of France. Jean sans Peur never fails to show exaggerated respect to his daughter-in-law, the young princess Michelle of France; he calls her Madame; he bends his knee to the earth before her and at table always tries to help her, which she will not suffer him to do. When Philip the Good learns that his cousin, the dauphin, in consequence of a quarrel with his father, has removed to Brabant, he at once raises the siege of Deventer, which formed the first step to his very important scheme of conquering Friesland. He travels in hot haste to Brussels, there to receive his royal guest. As the moment of the meeting approaches, there follows a veritable race to be the first in doing homage to the other. At the news that the dauphin is coming to meet him, the old duke is extremely vexed; he sends him ‘three, four messages, one after the other, to tell him, that if he should ride forward to meet him, he had taken an oath, he would quickly return to where he came from, and would retire before him so quickly and so far, that the other would not find him for a whole year, nor would see him, whatever he did; for, he said, it would mean to him, the duke, ridicule and shame, which would never cease, but be imputed to him throughout the world, to all eternity as a great outrage and a foolish thing; which he was very anxious to avoid.’ Out of reverence for the blood of France, the duke, although in the territory of the Empire, prohibits his sword to be carried before him, on entering Brussels; before reaching the palace, he hastily alights from his horse, enters the court and passes on quickly on perceiving the king’s son, ‘who has come
down from his apartment, holding the duchess by the hand, and rapidly goes to him in the inner court with wide-open arms.' At once the old duke bares his head, kneels down for a moment and passes on quickly. The duchess holds the dauphin to prevent his advancing a step, the dauphin vainly seizes the duke to prevent him from kneeling, and makes a fruitless attempt to make him rise. Both cried with emotion, says Chastellain, and so did all the spectators.

In the royal receptions of modern times we undoubtedly find ceremonies bordering on the ludicrous, but we shall look in vain for this passionate anxiety about formalities, which attests that towards the close of the Middle Ages a moral significance still attached to them.

After the young count of Charolais, out of modesty, has obstinately refused to use the wash-basin before a meal at the same time with the queen of England, the court talks the whole day of the incident; the duke, to whom the case is submitted, charges two noblemen to argue the case on both sides. Humble refusals to take precedence of another last upwards of a quarter of an hour; the longer one resists, the more one is praised. People hide their hands to avoid the honour of a hand-kiss; the queen of Spain does so on meeting the young archduke Philippe le Beau; the latter waits patiently, for a moment of inattentiveness on the part of the queen, to seize her hand and kiss it. For once Spanish gravity was at fault; the court laughed.

All the trifling amenities of social intercourse are minutely regulated. Etiquette not only prescribes which ladies of the court may hold each other by the hand, but also which lady is entitled to encourage others to this mark of intimacy, by beckoning them. This right of beckoning, 'hucher,' is a technical question for the old court lady Aliénor de Poitiers, who has described the ceremonial of the court of Burgundy. The departure of a guest is opposed with troublesome insistence. Philip the Good refuses to let the queen of France go on the day fixed by the king, in spite of the fear which the poor queen and her train felt for the anger of Louis XI.

Goethe has said that there is not an outward sign of polite-
ness which has not a profound moral foundation, and Emerson expresses almost the same thought when calling politeness ‘virtue gone to seed.’ It would, perhaps, be an exaggeration to say that at the end of the Middle Ages people were still fully conscious of the ethical value of politeness; but surely people still felt its aesthetic value, which marks the transition of these forms from sincere professions of affection to arid formalities of civility.

It is obvious that this rich adornment of life flourished nowhere so much as at the court of princes, where people could devote time to it and had room for it. This same cult of forms, however, spread downwards from the nobility to the middle classes, where they lingered on, after having become obsolete in higher circles. Customs such as that of urging a guest to have another helping of a dish, or to prolong his visit, of refusing to take precedence, now hardly fashionable, were in full bloom in the fifteenth century, scrupulously observed, though at the same time an object of satire.

Above all, public worship offered ample occasion for lengthy displays of civility. In the first place, there is the ‘offrande’; no one is willing to be the first to place his alms on the altar:

‘Passez. – Non feray. – Or avant!
Certes si ferez, ma cousine.
– Non feray. – Huchez no voisine,
Qu’elle doit mieux devant offrir.’
– Vous ne le devriez souffrir.
Dist la voisine; ‘n’appartient
A moy; offrez, qu’a vous ne tient
Que li prestres ne se delivre.’

When at last the person of highest rank has led the way, the same debate will be repeated in connexion with the ‘pax,’ a disc of wood, silver, or ivory, that was kissed after the Agnus Dei. Amid polite refusals to kiss first, the ‘pax’ went from

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1. ‘Go on – I shall not – Come forward! Certainly, you will do so, cousin – I shall not – Call to our neighbour, That she should offer before you – You should not suffer it,’ the neighbour says: ‘it does not belong To me; offer, only for you The priest has to wait.’
hand to hand among the notabilities, with the result of a prolonged interruption of the service.

Responde doit la juene fame:
– Prenez, je ne prendray pas, dame.
– Si ferez, prenez, douce amie.
– Certes, je ne le prandrav mie;
L’en me tendroit pour une sote.
– Baillez, damoiselle Marote.
– Non feray, Jhesucrist m’en gart!
Portez a ma dame Ermagart.
– Dame, prenez. – Saincte Marie,
Portez la paix a la baillie
– Non, mais a la gouverneressc.¹

Even a holy man like St Francis of Paula thought it his duty to take part in these childish observances; the witnesses in the process for his canonization considered this behaviour a mark of great humility and merit, which shows that satire can have hardly exaggerated and that the ethical idea of these forms had not completely disappeared.

With all this business of compliments, attending public worship became almost like dancing a minuet. For on leaving the church similar scenes are enacted, in getting a superior to walk on the right hand, or to be the first to cross a plank-bridge or enter a narrow lane. Arrived at home, the whole company has to be invited to enter and drink some wine (as Spanish courtesy demands to this day). The company excuse themselves politely, upon which it becomes requisite to accompany them part of the way, in spite of their repeated protestations.

These futile forms become touching, and their moral and civilizing value is better understood, on remembering they emanated from the passionate soul of a savage race, struggling to tame its pride and its anger. Quarrels and acts of violence

¹. The young woman should answer, Take it, I shall not, lady – Yes, do, take it, dear friend – I shall certainly not take it; People would take me for a fool – Pass it, miss Marote – I shall not, Jesus Christ forbid! Take it to the lady Ermagart – Lady, take it – Holy Mary, Take the pax to the bailiff’s wife – No, but to the governor’s wife.
go hand in hand with the ceremonious abdication of all pride, of which they are the reverse. Noble families disputed fiercely for that same precedence in church by which they courteously pretended to set little store. Often enough native rudeness pierces through the thin veneer of politeness. Duke John of Bavaria, the elect of Liège, is a guest at Paris. At the festivities given in his honour by the great nobles, he wins all their money from them in gaming. One of the princes cannot restrain himself any longer, and exclaims: ‘What devil of a priest have we got here?’ (It is the chronicler of Liège, Jean de Stavelot, who reports the fact.) ‘What, is he to win all our money? Whereupon my lord of Liège rose from the table and said angrily: I am not a priest and I do not want your money. And he took it and threw it all about the room; and many marvelled greatly at his liberality.’

The magnificent order maintained at the court of Burgundy, praised by Christine de Pisan, by Chastellain, and by the Bohemian nobleman León of Rozmítal, acquires its full significance only when compared with the disorder which reigned at the court of France, Burgundy’s older and more illustrious model. In a number of his ballads Eustache Deschamps complains of the misery at court, and these complaints are not merely variations on the familiar theme of disparagement of court life. Bad fare and poor lodgings; continual noise and disorder; swearing and quarrels; jealousies and injuries; in short, the court is an abyss of sins, the gate of hell.

Neither the sacred respect for royalty, nor the almost sacramental value attaching to ceremonies, could prevent decorum from being occasionally ignominiously thrust aside on the most solemn occasions. At the coronation banquet of Charles VI, in 1380, the duke of Burgundy seeks, by force, to take the place to which he is entitled, as doyen of the peers, between the king and the duke of Anjou. Already the train of the duke begins to thrust aside their opponents; threatening cries arise, a scuffle is breaking out when the king prevents it, by doing justice to the claims of the duke of Burgundy.

Even the infractions of solemn forms tended to become
forms themselves. It seems that it was more or less a custom for the funeral of a king of France to be interrupted by a quarrel, of which the object was the possession of the utensils of the ceremony. In 1422 the corporation of the ‘henouars,’ or salt-weighers, of Paris, whose privilege it was to carry the king’s corpse to Saint-Denis, came to blows with the monks of the abbey, as both parties claimed the pall covering the bier of Charles VI.

An analogous case occurred in 1461, at the funeral of Charles VII. In consequence of an altercation with the monks, the ‘henouars’ put down the coffin when they have come halfway and refuse to carry it any further, unless they are paid ten pounds Paris. The Lord Grand Master of the Horse quiets them by promising to pay them out of his own pocket, but the delay had been so long that the cortège arrives at Saint-Denis only towards eight at night. After the interment, a new conflict arises with regard to the pall of cloth of gold, between the monks and the Grand Master of the Horse himself.

The great publicity which it was customary to give to all important events in the life of a king, and which survived to the times of Louis XIV, sometimes led to a pitiable breakdown of discipline on the most solemn occasions. At the coronation banquet of 1380, the throng of spectators, guests, and servants was such that the constable and the marshal of Sancerre had to serve up the dishes on horseback. At the coronation of Henry VI of England at Paris, in 1431, the people force their way at daybreak into the great hall where the feast was to take place, ‘some to look on, others to regale themselves, others to pilfer or to steal victuals or other things.’ The members of the Parlement and of the University, the provost of the merchants and the aldermen, after having succeeded with great difficulty in entering the hall, find the tables assigned to them occupied by all sorts of artisans. An attempt is made to remove them, ‘but when they had succeeded in driving away one or two, six or eight sat down on the other side.’ At the inauguration of Louis XI, in 1461, the precaution had been taken of closing the doors of the cathe
The Waning of the Middle Ages

dral of Reims early and placing a guard there, so that not more persons should enter the church than the choir could hold. Nevertheless, the spectators so pressed round the altar where the king was anointed, that the prelates assisting the archbishop could scarcely move, and the princes of the blood were nearly squeezed to death in their seats of honour.

The passionate and violent soul of the age, always vacillating between tearful piety and frigid cruelty, between respect and insolence, between despondency and wantonness, could not dispense with the severest rules and the strictest formalism. All emotions required a rigid system of conventional forms, for without them passion and ferocity would have made havoc of life. By this sublimating faculty each event became a spectacle for others; mirth and sorrow were artificially and theatrically made up. For want of the faculty to express emotions in a simple and natural way, recourse must needs be had to aesthetic representations of sorrow and of joy.

The ceremonies accompanying birth, marriage, and death fully assumed this character of spectacles. Aesthetic values have here taken the place of their old religious (pagan for the most part) or magic signification.

Nowhere does the formalizing of the emotions assume a more suggestive appearance than in the sphere of mourning rites. There is a tendency in primitive times to exaggerate the expression of grief, like that of joy. Pompous mourning is the counterpart of immoderate rejoicings and of insane luxury. At the death of Jean sans Peur the mourning is organized with incomparable magnificence, in which there was, no doubt, also a political by-purpose. The retinue escorting Philip of Burgundy, who went out to meet the kings of France and of England, carry two thousand black vanes, to say nothing of the standards and banners seven yards long, of the same colour. The carriage of the duke and also the state seats have been painted black for the occasion. At the meeting of Troyes, Philip wears a mantle of black velvet which is so long as to hang down from his horse to the
ground. For a long time afterwards he and his court only show themselves dressed in black.

Amidst the general black of court mourning the red worn only by the king of France (not even by the queen) must have made a most startling contrast. In 1393 the Parisians had the surprise of a pompous funeral all in white: that of the king of Armenia, Léon de Lusignan, who died in exile.

The manifestations of sorrow at the death of a prince, if at times purposely exaggerated, undoubtedly often enfolded a deep and unfeigned grief. The general instability of the soul, the extreme horror of death, the fervour of family attachment and loyalty, all contributed to make the decease of a king or a prince an afflicting event. A savage exuberance of grief breaks out when the news is brought to Ghent of the murder of Jean sans Peur. All chronicles confirm it; Chastelain is diffuse on the subject. His heavy and trailing style is wonderfully well adapted for reporting the long harangue of the bishop of Tournai to prepare the young duke for the awful tidings, as well as for the majestic lamentations of Philip and of Michelle of France, his consort. Half a century later we see Charles the Bold, at the death-bed of his father, weeping, crying out, wringing his hands, falling on the ground, 'so as to make every one wonder at his unmeasured grief.'

Whatever may be the share of the court style in these narratives, what they tell us fits in too well with the overstrung sensibility of the epoch, and at the same time with the craving for clamorous mourning as an edifying thing, not to be substantially true. Primitive custom demanding that the dead should be publicly and loudly lamented still survived in considerable strength in the fifteenth century. Noisy manifestations of sorrow were thought fine and becoming, and all things connected with a deceased person had to bear witness to unmeasured grief.

The extreme fear of announcing a death likewise bears testimony to the same intermingling of primitive ritual and passionate emotionalism. The death of her father is kept a secret from the countess of Charolais, who is pregnant. During an illness of Philip the Good, the court does not dare to
announce to him a single death touching him at all nearly; Adolphus of Cleves is forbidden to go into mourning for his wife, out of consideration for the duke, who is ill. The chancellor Nicolas Rolin dies: the duke is left in ignorance of his decease. Yet he begins to suspect it and asks the bishop of Tournai, who has come to visit him, to tell him the truth. ‘My liege, says the bishop – in sooth, he is dead, indeed, for he is old and broken, and cannot live long. – Déal says the duke, I do not ask that. I ask if he is truly dead and gone. – Ha! my liege – the bishop retorts, he is not dead, but paralysed on one side, and therefore practically dead. – The duke grows angry. – Vechy merveilles! Tell me clearly, now, whether he is dead. Only then says the bishop: Yes, truly, my liege, he is really dead.’

Does not this curious way of announcing a death suggest some trace of ancient superstition, more even than the wish to spare a sick man? The anxiety to exclude systematically the thought of death denotes a state of mind analogous to that of Louis XI, who would never again wear the dress he had on, nor use the horse he was riding at the moment when evil tidings were announced to him, and who even had a part of the forest of Loches cut down where the tidings of the death of a new-born son were brought to him. ‘Monsieur the Chancellor,’ the king writes on 25 May, 1483, ‘I thank you for the letters etc., but I beg you to send me no more by him who brought them, for I found his face terribly changed since I last saw him, and I tell you on my word that he made me much afraid, and farewell.’

The cultural value of mourning is that it gives grief its form and rhythm. It transfers actual life to the sphere of the drama. It shoes it with the cothurnus. Mourning at the court of France or of Burgundy, at the time with which we are concerned, has to be regarded as a sort of acted elegy. Funeral ceremonial and funeral poetry, which in primitive civilizations are still undistinguished (in Ireland, for instance), had not yet been completely separated. Mourning still continued a remnant of its poetical functions. It dramatized the effects of grief.
The nobler the deceased and the survivors are, the more heroic the mourning. For a whole year the queen of France may not leave the room in which the death of her consort was announced to her. For the princesses the seclusion lasts six weeks. During all the time that Madame de Charolais is in mourning for her father, she remains in bed, propped up by cushions and dressed in bands, coif, and mantle. The rooms are upholstered in black; the floor is covered with a large black cloth. Aliénor de Poitiers has described for us all the gradations of the ceremonial, varying according to rank.

Under this fine outward show the feelings which are thus exhibited and formalized often tend to disappear. The pathetic posture belies itself behind the scenes. ‘State’ and real life are clearly and naively distinguished. Aliénor, having described the sumptuous mourning of the countess of Charolais, adds: ‘When Madame was “en son particulier” she by no means always lay in bed, nor confined herself to one room.’

Next to mourning, the lying-in chamber affords ample opportunity for fine ceremonial and differentiation according to rank. The colours and materials of coverings and clothes all have a meaning. Green is the privilege of queens and of princesses, whereas it was white in preceding ages. ‘La chambre verte’ was forbidden even to countesses. During the lying-in of Isabelle de Bourbon, mother of Mary of Burgundy, five large state beds, all draped with an artful fabric of green curtain, remain empty, like state coaches at funerals, only to serve for ceremonious use at the baptism, while the mother reposes on a low couch near the fire. The blinds are kept closed all the time, and the room is lighted by candles.

Through all the ranks of society a severe hierarchy of material and colour kept classes apart, and gave to each estate or rank an outward distinction, which preserved and exalted the feeling of dignity.

Moreover, outside the sphere of birth, marriage, and death, a strongly felt aesthetic need tends to create a solemn and decorous form for every event and every notable deed. A sinner who humbles himself, a condemned prisoner who repents, a holy person sacrificing himself, all afford a kind of
public spectacle. Public life in this way almost presents the appearance of a perpetual ‘morale en action.’

Even intimate relations in medieval society are rather paraded than kept secret. Not only love, but friendship too, has its finely made up forms. Two friends dress in the same way, share the same room, or the same bed, and call one another by the name of ‘mignon.’ It is good form for the prince to have his minion. We must not let the well-known case of Henry III of France affect for us the ordinary acceptance of the word ‘mignon’ in the fifteenth century. There have been princes and favourites in the Middle Ages too who were accused of culpable relations – Richard II of England and Robert de Vere, for instance – but minions would not have been spoken of so freely, if we had to regard this institution as connoting anything but sentimental friendship. It was a distinction of which the friends boasted in public. On the occasion of solemn receptions the prince leans on the shoulder of the minion, as Charles V at his abdication leaned on William of Orange. To understand the duke’s sentiment towards Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, we must recall this form of sentimental friendship, which maintained itself as a formal institution till the days of James I and George Villiers.

The complex of all these fine forms, veiling cruel reality under apparent harmony, made life an art. This art leaves no traces, and it is for this reason that its cultural importance has been noticed too little. The tenderness of compliments, the charming fiction of modesty and altruism, the hieratic pomp of ceremonies, the pageant of marriage, all this is ephemeral and may seem culturally sterile. That which gives them their style and expression is fashion, not art, and fashion leaves no monuments behind.

And yet, at the close of the Middle Ages, the connexions between art and fashion were closer than at present. Art had not yet fled to transcendental heights; it formed an integral part of social life. In the domain of costume art and fashion were still inextricably blended, style in dress stood nearer to artistic style than later, and the function of costume in social
Pessimism and the Ideal of the Sublime Life

life, that of accentuating the strict order of society itself, almost partook of the liturgic. The amazing extravagance of dress during the last centuries of the Middle Ages was, as it were, the expression of an overflowing aesthetic craving which art alone did not suffice to satisfy.

All relations, all dignities, all actions, all sentiments, had found their style. The higher the moral value of a social function, the nearer its form of expression approached to pure art. Whereas ceremony and courtesy have no other expression than conversation and luxury, and pass away without visible residue, the rites of mourning do not exhaust themselves in funeral pomp and fictions of etiquette, but leave a durable and artistic expression in the sepulchral monument. As in the case of marriage and baptism, the link of mourning with religion heightens its cultural value.

Still, the richest flower of beautiful forms was reserved for three other elements of life – courage, honour, and love.
CHAPTER III

The Hierarchic Conception of Society

When, somewhat more than a hundred years ago, medieval history began to assert itself as an object of interest and admiration, the first element of it to draw general attention and to become a source of enthusiasm and inspiration was chivalry. To the epoch of romanticism the Middle Ages and Chivalry were almost synonymous terms. Historical imagination dwelt by preference on crusades, tournaments, knights-errant. Since then history has become democratic. Chivalry is now only seen as a very special efflorescence of civilization, which, far from having controlled the course of medieval history, has been rather a secondary factor in the political and social evolution of the epoch. For us the problems of the Middle Ages lie first of all in the development of communal organization, of economic conditions, of monarchical power, of administrative and judicial institutions; and, in the second place, in the domain of religion, scholasticism, and art. Towards the end of the period our attention is almost entirely occupied by the genesis of new forms of political and economic life (absolutism, capitalism), and new modes of expression (Renaissance). From this point of view feudalism and chivalry appear as little more than a remnant of a superannuated order already crumbling into insignificance, and, for the understanding of the epoch, almost negligible.

Nevertheless, an assiduous reader of the chronicles and literature of the fifteenth century will hardly resist the impression that nobility and chivalry occupy a much more considerable place there than our general conception of the epoch would imply. The reason of this disproportion lies in the fact, that long after nobility and feudalism had ceased to be really essential factors in the state and in society, they continued to impress the mind as dominant forms of life. The men of the fifteenth century could not understand that the
real moving powers of political and social evolution might be looked for anywhere else than in the doings of a warlike or courtly nobility. They persisted in regarding the nobility as the foremost of social forces and attributed a very exaggerated importance to it, undervaluing altogether the social significance of the lower classes.

So the mistake, it may be argued, is theirs, and our conception of the Middle Ages is right. This would be so if, to understand the spirit of an age, it sufficed to know its real and hidden forces and not its illusions, its fancies, and its errors. But for the history of civilization every delusion or opinion of an epoch has the value of an important fact. In the fifteenth century chivalry was still, after religion, the strongest of all the ethical conceptions which dominated the mind and the heart. It was thought of as the crown of the whole social system. Medieval political speculation is imbued to the marrow with the idea of a structure of society based upon distinct orders. This notion of 'orders' is itself by no means fixed. The words 'estate' and 'order', almost synonymous, designate a great variety of social realities. The idea of an 'estate' is not at all limited to that of a class; it extends to every social function, to every profession, to every group. Side by side with the French system of the three estates of the realm, which in England, according to Professor Pollard, was only secondarily and theoretically adopted after the French model, we find traces of a system of twelve social estates. The functions or groupings, which the Middle Ages designated by the words 'estate' and 'order', are of very diverse natures. There are, first of all, the estates of the realm, but there are also the trades, the state of matrimony and that of virginity, the state of sin. At court there are the 'four estates of body and mouth': bread-masters, cup-bearers, carvers, and cooks. In the Church there are sacerdotal orders and monastic orders. Finally, there are the different orders of chivalry. That which, in medieval thought, establishes unity in the very dissimilar meanings of the word, is the conviction that every one of these groupings represents a divine institution, an element of the organism of Creation emanating
from the will of God, constituting an actual entity, and being, 
at bottom, as venerable as the angelic hierarchy.

Now, if the degrees of the social edifice are conceived as the 
lower steps of the throne of the Eternal, the value assigned to 
each order will not depend on its utility, but on its sanctity – 
that is to say, its proximity to the highest place. Even if the 
Middle Ages had recognized the diminishing importance of 
the nobility as a limb of the social body, that would not have 
changed the conception they had of its high value, any more 
than the spectacle of a violent and dissipated nobility ever 
hindered the veneration of the order in itself. To the catholic 
soul the unworthiness of the persons never compromises the 
sacred character of the institution. The morals of the clergy, 
or the decadence of chivalrous virtues, might be stigmatized 
without deviating for a moment from the respect due to the 
Church or the nobility as such. The estates of society cannot 
but be venerable and lasting, because they all have been 
ordained by God. The conception of society in the Middle 
Ages is static, not dynamic.

The aspect which society and politics assume under the 
influence of these general ideas is bound to be a strange one. 
The chroniclers of the fifteenth century have, nearly all, been 
the dupes of an absolute misappreciation of their times, of 
which the real moving forces escaped their attention. Chastellain, 
the historiographer of the dukes of Burgundy, may serve 
as an instance. A Fleming by birth, he had been face to face, 
in the Netherlands, with the power and the wealth of the 
commoners, nowhere stronger and more self-conscious than 
there. The extraordinary fortune of the Burgundian branch of 
Valois transplanted to Flanders was in reality based on the 
wealth of the Flemish and Brabant towns. Nevertheless, 
dazzled by the splendour and magnificence of an extravagant 
court, Chastellain imagined that the power of the house of 
Burgundy was especially due to the heroism and the devotion 
of knighthood.

God, he says, created the common people to till the earth 
and to procure by trade the commodities necessary for life; 
he created the clergy for the works of religion; the nobles that
they should cultivate virtue and maintain justice, so that the deeds and the morals of these fine personages might be a pattern to others. All the highest tasks in the state are assigned by Chastellain to the nobility; notably those of protecting the Church, augmenting the faith, defending the people from oppression, maintaining public prosperity, combating violence and tyranny, confirming peace. Veracity, courage, integrity, liberality, appertain properly to the noble class, and French nobility, according to this pompous panegyrist, comes up to this ideal image. In spite of his general pessimism, Chastellain does his best to see his times through the tinted glasses of this aristocratic conception.

This failing to see the social importance of the common people, which is proper to nearly all authors of the fifteenth century, may be regarded as a kind of mental inertia, which is a phenomenon of frequent occurrence and vital importance in history. The idea which people had of the third estate had not yet been corrected and remodelled in accordance with altered realities. This idea was simple and summary, like those miniatures of breviaries, or those bas-reliefs of cathedrals, representing the tasks of the year in the shape of the toiling labourer, the industrious artisan, or the busy merchant. Among archaic types like these there is neither place for the figure of the wealthy patrician encroaching upon the power of the nobleman, nor for that of the militant representative of a revolutionary craft-guild. Nobody perceived that the nobility only maintained itself, thanks to the blood and the riches of the commoners. No distinction in principle was made in the third estate, between rich and poor citizens, nor between townsman and country-people. The figure of the poor peasant alternates indiscriminately with that of the wealthy burgher, but a sound definition of the economic and political functions of these different classes does not take shape. In 1412 the reform programme of an Augustinian friar demanded in all earnest that every non-noble person in France should either devote himself to some handicraft or to labour, or be banished from the kingdom, evidently considering commerce and law as useless occupations.
Chastellain, who is very naïve in political matters and very susceptible to ethical delusions, attributes sublime virtues only to the nobility, and only inferior ones to the common people. ‘Coming to the third estate, making up the kingdom as a whole, it is the estate of the good towns, of merchants and of labouring men, of whom it is not becoming to give such a long exposition as of the others, because it is hardly possible to attribute great qualities to them, as they are of a servile degree.’ Humility, diligence, obedience to the king, and docility in bowing ‘voluntarily to the pleasure of the lords’, those are the qualities which bring credit to ‘cestuy bas estat de Français’.

May not this strange infatuation, by preventing them from foreseeing future times of economic expansion, have contributed to engender pessimism in minds such as that of Chastellain, who could only expect the good of mankind from the virtues of the nobility?

Chastellain still calls the rich burghers simply villeins. He has not the slightest notion of middle-class honour. Duke Philip the Good was wont to abuse his power by marrying his archers or other servants of lesser gentility to rich burgher widows or heiresses. To avoid those alliances, the parents on their side married their daughters as soon as they reached marriageable age. Jacques du Clercq mentions the case of a widow, who for this reason remarried two days after the burial of her husband. Once the duke, while engaged in such marriage-broking, met with an obstinate refusal from a rich brewer of Lille, who felt affronted at such an alliance for his daughter. The duke secured the person of the young girl; the father removed with all his possessions to Tournai, outside the ducal jurisdiction, in order to be able to bring the matter before the Parlement of Paris. This brought him nothing but vexation, and he fell ill with grief. At last he sent his wife to Lille ‘in order to beg mercy of the duke and give up his daughter to him’. This latter, in honour of Good Friday, gave her back to the mother, but with scornful and humiliating words. — Chastellain’s sympathies are all on the

1. This low estate of Frenchmen.
side of his master, though, on other occasions, he did not at all fear to record his disapproval of the duke’s conduct. For the injured father he has no other terms than ‘this rebellious rustic brewer’, ‘and such a naughty villein too’.

There are in the sentiments of the aristocratic class towards the people two parallel currents. Side by side with this haughty disdain of the small man, already a little out of date, we notice a sympathetic attitude in the nobility, which seems in absolute contrast with it. Whereas feudal satire goes on expressing hatred mixed with contempt and sometimes with fear, as in the *Proverbes del Vilain* and in the *Kerelstied*, the song of the Flemish villagers, the code of aristocratic ethics teaches, on the other hand, a sentimental compassion for the miseries of the oppressed and defenceless people. Despoiled by war, exploited by the officials, the people live in the greatest distress.

_Si fault de faim peur les innocens_
_Dont les grans loups font chacun jour ventrée,_
_Qui amassent à milliers et à cens_
_Les faulx trésors; c’est le grain, c’est la blée,_
_Les sang, les os qui ont la terre arée_
_Des povres gens, dont leur esperit crie_
_Vengeance à Dieu, vé à la seignourie._

They suffer in patience. ‘The prince knows nothing of this.’ If, at times, they murmur, ‘poor sheep, poor foolish people,’ a word from the prince will suffice to appease them. The devastation and insecurity which in consequence of the Hundred Years’ War had finally spread over almost all France, gave these laments a sad actuality. From the year 1400 downwards there is no end to the complaints about the fate of the peasants, plundered, squeezed, maltreated by gangs of enemies or friends, robbed of their cattle, driven from their

1. The innocents must starve With which the big wolves fill their belly every day, Who by thousands and hundreds hoard ill-gotten treasures; it is the grain, it is the corn. The blood, the bones of poor people, which have ploughed the earth And therefore their souls call Upon God for vengeance and woe to lordship.
homes. They are expressed by the great Churchmen who favoured reform, such as Nicolas de Cleanges, in his Liber de lapsu et reparatione justitiae, or Gerson in his political sermon Vivat rex, preached on 7 November, 1405, in the queen’s palace at Paris, before the regents and the court. ‘The poor man’ – said the brave chancellor – ‘will not have bread to eat, except perhaps a handful of rye or barley; his poor wife will lie in and they will have four or six little ones about the hearth or the oven, which perchance will be warm; they will ask for bread, they will scream, mad with hunger. The poor mother will but have a very little salted bread to put into their mouths. Now such misery ought to suffice; but no: – the plunderers will come, who will seek everything. ... Everything will be taken and snapped up; and we need not ask who pays.’

Statesmen, too, make themselves the spokesmen of the miserable people, and utter their complaints. Jean Jouvenel laid them before the States of Blois in 1433, and those of Orléans in 1439. In a petition presented to the king at the meeting of the States of Tours in 1484, these complaints take the direct form of a political ‘remonstrance.’

The chroniclers could not help reverting to the subject again and again: it was bound up with their subject-matter.

The poets in their turn took hold of the motif. Alain Chartier treats it in his Quadriloge Inventif, and Robert Gagus in his Debat du Laboureur, du Prestre et du Gendarme, inspired by Chartier. A hundred years after La Complainte du povere Commun et des povres Laboureurs de France of about 1400, Jean Molinet was to compose a Resource du petit Peuple. Jean Meschinot never tires of reminding the ruling classes of the fact that the common people are being neglected.

O Dieu, voyez du commun l’indigence,
Pourvoyez-y à toute diligence:
Lais par faim, froid, paour et misère tremble.
S’il a peché ou commis negligence
Encontre vous, il demande indulgence.
N’est-ce pitié des biens que l’on lui emble?
The Hierarchic Conception of Society

Il n’a plus bled pour porter au molin,
On lui oste draps de laine et de lin,
L’eau, sans plus, lui demeure pour boire.  

This pity, however, remains sterile. It does not result in acts, not even in programmes, of reform. The felt need of serious reform is wanting to it and will be wanting for a long time. In La Bruyère, in Fénelon, perhaps in the elder Mirabeau, the theme is still the same; even they have not yet got beyond theoretical and stereotyped commiseration.

It is natural that the belated chivalrous spirits of the fifteenth century join in this chorus of pity for the people. Was it not the knight’s duty to protect the weak? The ideal of chivalry implied, after all, two ideas which might seem to concur in forbidding a haughty contempt for the small man; the ideas, namely, that true nobility is based on virtue, and that all men are equal.

We should be careful not to overrate the importance of these two ideas. They were equally stereotyped and theoretical. To acknowledge true chivalry a matter of the heart should not be considered a victory over the spirit of feudalism or an achievement of the Renaissance. This medieval notion of equality is by no means a manifestation of the spirit of revolt. It does not owe its origin to radical reformers. In quoting the text of John Ball, who preached the revolt of 1381, ‘When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?’ one is inclined to fancy that the nobles must have trembled on hearing it. But, in fact, it was the nobility themselves who for a long time had been repeating this ancient theme.

The two ideas of the equality of men and of the nature of true nobility were commonplaces of courteous literature, just as they were in the salons of the ‘ancien régime’. Both derived

1. O God, see the indigence of the common people, Provide for it with all speed: Alas! with hunger, cold, fear and misery they tremble, If they have sinned or are guilty of negligence Toward Thee, they beg indulgence. Is it not a pity that they are bereft of their goods? They have no more corn to take to the mill, Woollen and linen goods are taken from them, Only water is left to them to drink.
The Waning of the Middle Ages

from antiquity. The poetry of the troubadours had sung and popularized them. Every one applauded them.

Dont vient a tous souveraine noblesse?
Du gentil cuer, paré de nobles mours.
... Nulz n’est villains se du cuer ne lui muet.¹

The notion of equality had been borrowed by the Fathers of the Church from Cicero and Seneca. Gregory the Great, the great initiator of the Middle Ages, had given a text for coming ages in his Omnes namque homines natura aequales sumus. It had been repeated in all keys, but an actual social purport was not attached to it. It was a moral sentence, nothing more; to the men of the Middle Ages it meant the approaching equality of death, and was far from holding out, as a consolation for the iniquities of this world, a deceptive prospect of equality on earth. The thought of equality in the Middle Ages is closely akin to a memento mori. Thus we find it in a ballad by Eustache Deschamps, where Adam addresses his posterity:

Enfans, enfans, de moy, Adam, venuz,
Qui après Dieu suis peres premerain
Créé de lui, tous estes descenduz
Naturelment de ma coste et d’Evaïn;
Vo mere fut. Comment est l’un villain
Et l’autre prant le nom de gentillesse
De vous, freres? dont vient tele noblesse?
Je ne le sçay, se ce n’est des vertus,
Et les villains de tout vice qui blesse:
Vous estes tous d’une pel revestuz.

Quant Dieu me fist de la boc ou je fus,
Homme mortel, faible, pesant et vain,
Eve de moy, il nous crea tous nuz,
Mais l’esprit nous inspira a plain
Perpetuel puis eusmes soif et faim,
Labour, dolour, et enfans en tristesce;
Pour noz pechiez enfantent a destresce

¹. Whence comes to all sovereign nobility? From a gentle heart, adorned by noble morals. ... No one is a villein unless it comes from his heart.
The Hierarchic Conception of Society

Toutes femmes; vilment estes conçuz.
Vous estes tous d’une pel revestuz.

Les roys puissans, les contes et les dus,
Le gouverneur du peuple et souverain,
Quant ilz naissent, de quoy sont ilz vestuz?
D’une orde pel.
... Prince, pensez, sans avoir en desdain
Les povres gens, que la mort tient le frain.1

Jean le Maire de Belges, in Les Chansons de Namur, purposely mentions the exploits of rustic heroes, to acquaint the nobles with the fact that those whom they treat as villeins are sometimes animated by the greatest gallantry. For the reason of these poetical admonitions on the subject of true nobility and human equality generally lies in the stimulus they impart to the nobles to adapt themselves to the true ideal of knighthood, and thereby to support and to purify the world. In the virtues of the nobles, says Chastellain, lies the remedy for the evils of the time; the weal of the kingdom, the peace of the Church, the rule of justice, depend on them. — "Two things," it is said in Le Livre des Faicts du Mareschal Bouicaut, 'have, by the will of God, been established in the world, like two pillars to sustain the order of divine and human laws ... and without which the world would be like a confused thing and

1. Children, descended from me, Adam, Who am the first father, after God, Created by him, you are all born Naturally of my rib and of Eve; She was your mother. How is it that one is a villein And the other assumes the name of gentility, Of you, brothers? Whence comes such nobility? I do not know, unless it springs from virtues And the villeins from all vice, which wounds: You are all covered by the same skin.

When God made me out of the mud where I lay, A mortal man, feeble, heavy and vain, Eve out of me, he created us quite nude, But the spirit fully inspired us, Afterwards we were perpetually thirsty and hungry. We laboured, suffered, children were born in sorrow; For our sins, all women bear children In pain; vilely you are conceived. Whence then comes this name: villein that wounds the hearts? You are all covered by the same skin.

The mighty kings, the counts and the dukes, The governor of the people and sovereign, When they are born, with what are they clothed? By a dirty skin. ... Prince, remember, without disdaining The poor people, that death holds the reins.
without any order . . . these two flawless pillars are Chivalry and Learning, which go very well together.' 'Learning, Faith, and Chivalry' are the three flowers of the *Chapel des Fleurs-de-lis* of Philippe de Vitri; it is the duty of knighthood to preserve and protect the two others.

Long after the Middle Ages a certain equivalence of knighthood and a doctor's degree was generally acknowledged. This parallelism indicates the high ethical value attaching to the idea of chivalry. The two dignities of a knight and of a doctor are conceived as the sacred forms of two superior functions, that of courage and of knowledge. By being knighted the man of action is raised to an ideal level; by taking his doctor's degree the man of knowledge receives a badge of superiority. They are stamped, the one as a hero, the other as a sage. The devotion to a higher life-work is expressed by a ceremonial consecration. If as an element of social life the idea of chivalry has been of much greater importance, it was because it contained, besides its ethical value, an abundance of aesthetic value of the most suggestive kind.
CHAPTER IV

The Idea of Chivalry

MEDIEVAL thought in general was saturated in every part with the conceptions of the Christian faith. In a similar way and in a more limited sphere the thought of all those who lived in the circles of court or castle was impregnated with the idea of chivalry. Their whole system of ideas was permeated by the fiction that chivalry ruled the world. This conception even tends to invade the transcendental domain. The primordial feat of arms of the archangel Michael is glorified by Jean Molinet as ‘the first deed of knighthood and chivalrous prowess that was ever achieved.’ From the archangel ‘terrestrial knighthood and human chivalry’ take their origin, and in so far are but an imitation of the host of the angels around God’s throne.

This illusion of society based on chivalry curiously clashed with the reality of things. The chroniclers themselves, in describing the history of their time, tell us far more of covetousness, of cruelty, of cool calculation, of well-understood self-interest, and of diplomatic subtlety, than of chivalry. None the less, all, as a rule, profess to write in honour of chivalry, which is the stay of the world. Froissart, Monstrelet, d’Escouchy, Chastellain, La Marche, Molinet, all, with the exception only of Philippe de Commines and Thomas Basin, open their works by high-sounding declarations of their purpose of glorifying knightly bravery and virtues, of recording ‘noble enterprises, conquests, feats of heroism, and of arms,’ ‘the great marvels and the fine feats of arms that have come to pass because of the great wars.’ History, to them, is illuminated throughout by this their ideal. Later, when writing, they forget it more or less. Froissart, himself the author of a super-romantic epic of chivalry, Méliador, narrates endless treasons and cruelties, without being aware of the contradiction between his general conceptions and the contents of
his narrative. Molineet, in his chronicle, from time to time remembers his chivalrous intention, and interrupts his matter-of-fact account of events, to unbosom himself in a flood of high-flown terms.

The conception of chivalry constituted for these authors a sort of magic key, by the aid of which they explained to themselves the motives of politics and of history. The confused image of contemporaneous history being much too complicated for their comprehension, they simplified it, as it were, by the fiction of chivalry as a moving force (not consciously, of course). A very fantastic and rather shallow point of view, no doubt. How much vaster is ours, embracing all sorts of economic and social forces and causes. Still, this vision of a world ruled by chivalry, however superficial and mistaken it might be, was the best they had in the matter of general political ideas. It served them as a formula to understand, in their poor way, the appalling complexity of the world's way. What they saw about them looked primarily mere violence and confusion. War in the fifteenth century tended to be a chronic process of isolated raids and incursions; diplomacy was mostly a very solemn and very verbose procedure, in which a multitude of questions about juridical details clashed with some very general traditions and some points of honour. All notions which might have enabled them to discern in history a social development were lacking to them. Yet they required a form for their political conceptions, and here the idea of chivalry came in. By this traditional fiction they succeeded in explaining to themselves, as well as they could, the motives and the course of history, which thus was reduced to a spectacle of the honour of princes and the virtue of knights, to a noble game with edifying and heroic rules.

As a principle of historiography, this point of view is a very inferior one. History thus conceived becomes a summary of feats of arms and of ceremonies. The historians par excellence will be heralds and kings-at-arms — Froissart thinks so — for they are the witnesses of these sublime deeds; they are experts in matters of honour and of glory, and it is to record honour and glory that history is written. The statues of the Golden
Fleece enjoined that the feats of arms of the knights be noted down. Types of this combination of herald and historiographer are the king-at-arms of the Golden Fleece, Lefèvre de Saint Remy, and Gilles le Bouvier, dit le héraut Berry.

The conception of chivalry as a sublime form of secular life might be defined as an aesthetic ideal assuming the appearance of an ethical ideal. Heroic fancy and romantic sentiment form its basis. But medieval thought did not permit ideal forms of noble life, independent of religion. For this reason piety and virtue have to be the essence of a knight’s life. Chivalry, however, will always fall short of this ethical function. Its earthly origin draws it down. For the source of the chivalrous idea is pride aspiring to beauty, and formalized pride gives rise to a conception of honour, which is the pole of noble life. The sentiment of honour, says Burckhardt, this strange mixture of conscience and of egotism, ‘is compatible with many vices and susceptible to extravagant delusions; nevertheless, all that has remained pure and noble in man may find support in it and draw new strength from it.’ Is not this almost what Chastellain tried to say, when he expressed himself thus:

Honneur semont toute noble nature
D’aimer tout ce qui noble est en son estre.
Noblesse aussi y adjoint sa drouture.¹

And again:

La gloire des princes pend en orgueil et en haut peril emprendre;
toutes principales puissances conviengnent en un point estrait qui se dit orgueil.²

According to the celebrated Swiss historian, the quest of personal glory was the characteristic attribute of the men of the Renaissance. The Middle Ages proper, according to him, knew honour and glory only in collective forms, as the honour due to groups and orders of society, the honour of rank, of

¹. Honour urges every noble nature To love all that is noble in being. Nobility also adds its uprightness to it.
². The glory of princes is in their pride and in undertaking, great peril; all principal forces meet in a small point, which is called pride.
class, or of profession. It was in Italy, he thinks, under the influence of antique models, that the craving for individual glory originated. Here, as elsewhere, Burckhardt has exaggerated the distance separating Italy from the Western countries and the Renaissance from the Middle Ages.

The thirst for honour and glory proper to the men of the Renaissance is essentially the same as the chivalrous ambition of earlier times, and of French origin. Only it has shaken off the feudal form and assumed an antique garb. The passionate desire to find himself praised by contemporaries or by posterity was the source of virtue with the courtly knight of the twelfth century and the rude captain of the fourteenth, no less than with the beaux-esprits of the quattrocento. When Beaumanoir and Bamborough fix the conditions of the famous combat of the Thirty, the English captain, according to Froissart, expresses himself in these terms: 'And let us right there try ourselves and do so much that people will speak of it in future times in halls, in palaces, in public places and elsewhere throughout the world.' The saying may not be authentic, but it teaches us what Froissart thought.

The quest of glory and of honour goes hand in hand with a hero-worship which also might seem to announce the Renaissance. The somewhat factitious revival of the splendour of chivalry that we find everywhere in European courts after 1300 is already connected with the Renaissance by a real link. It is a naïve prelude to it. In reviving chivalry the poets and princes imagined that they were returning to antiquity. In the minds of the fourteenth century, a vision of antiquity had hardly yet disengaged itself from the fairy-land sphere of the Round Table. Classical heroes were still tinged with the general colour of romance. On the one hand, the figure of Alexander had long ago entered the sphere of chivalry; on the other, chivalry was supposed to be of Roman origin. 'And he maintained the discipline of chivalry well, as did the Romans formerly,' thus a Burgundian chronicler praised Henry V of England. The blazons of Caesar, of Hercules, and of Troilus, are placed in a fantasy of King René, side by side with those of Arthur and of Lancelot. Certain coinci-
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dences of terminology played a part in tracing back the origin of chivalry to Roman antiquity. How could people have known that the word *miles* with Roman authors did not mean a *miles* in the sense of medieval Latin, that is to say, a knight, or that a Roman *eques* differed from a feudal knight? Consequently, Romulus, because he raised a band of a thousand mounted warriors, was taken to be the founder of chivalry.

The life of a knight is an imitation; that of princes is so too, sometimes. No one was so consciously inspired by models of the past, or manifested such desire to rival them, as Charles the Bold. In his youth he made his attendants read out to him the exploits of Gawain and of Lancelot. Later he preferred the ancients. Before retiring to rest, he listens for an hour or two to the 'lofty histories of Rome'. He especially admires Caesar, Hannibal, and Alexander, 'whom he wished to follow and imitate'. All his contemporaries attach great importance to this eagerness to imitate the heroes of antiquity, and agree in regarding it as the mainspring of his conduct. 'He desired great glory'—says Commines—'which more than anything else led him to undertake his wars; and longed to resemble those ancient princes who have been so much talked of after their death.' The anecdote is well known of the jester who, after the defeat of Granson, called out to him: 'My lord, we are well Hannibaled this time!' His love of the 'beau geste' in antique style was observed by Chastellain at Mechlin in 1467, when he made his first entry there as duke. He had to punish a rising. He sat down facing the scaffold erected for the leader of the insurgents. Already the hangman has drawn the sword and is preparing to strike the blow. 'Stop,' said the duke then, 'take the bandage from his eyes and help him up.' 'And then I perceived'—says Chastellain—'that he had set his heart on high and singular purposes for the future, and on acquiring glory and renown by extraordinary works.'

Thus the aspiration to the splendour of antique life, which is the characteristic of the Renaissance, has its roots in the chivalrous ideal. Between the ponderous spirit of the Burgundian and the classical instinct of an Italian of the same period there is only a difference of nuance. The forms which
Charles the Bold affected are still flamboyant Gothic, and he still read his classics in translations.

The chivalrous element and the Renaissance element are also confounded in the cult of the Nine Worthies (‘les neuf preux’). The grouping of three pagans, three Jews, and three Christians in a sort of gallery of heroism is found for the first time in a work of the beginning of the fourteenth century, Les Vaux du Paon, by Jacques de Longuyon. The choice of the heroes betrays a close connexion with the romances of chivalry. There are Hector, Caesar, Alexander, Josauh, David, Judas Maccabaeus, Arthur, Charlemagne, Godfrey of Bouillon. Eustache Deschamps adopted the idea of the ‘neuf preux’ from his master, Guillaume de Machaut, and devoted many of his ballads to the subject. The craving for symmetry, so strong in the Middle Ages, demanded that the series should be completed by counterparts of the female sex. Deschamps satisfied the demand by choosing from fiction and history a group of rather bizarre heroines. Among them we find Penthesilea, Tomyris, Semiramis. His idea was successful. Literature and tapestry popularized the female as well as the male worthies. Blazons were invented for them. On the occasion of his entry into Paris, in 1431, the English king, Henry VI, is preceded by all the eighteen worthies of both sexes. How popular the idea was, is attested by the parody which Molinet composed of the ‘nine worthies of gluttony.’ Francis I still occasionally dressed himself ‘in the antique style,’ in order to represent one of the worthies.

Deschamps went further. He completed the series of the nine worthies by adding a tenth, Bertrand du Guesclin, the brave and prudent Breton warrior to whom France owed her recovery from Crécy and Poitiers. In this way he linked the cult of ancient heroes to the budding sentiment of national military glory. His idea was generally adopted. Louis of Orleans had the statue of Du Guesclin, as tenth of the ‘preux,’ erected in the great hall of the castle of Coucy. His special reason for honouring the constable’s memory was the fact that the latter had held him at the baptismal font and put a sword into his little hand.
The inventories of the Burgundian dukes enumerate curious relics of ancient and modern heroes, such as 'the sword of Saint George,' with his coat of arms; 'another war-sword which belonged to Messire Bertran de Claquin'; 'a big boar's fang, said to be the fang of the boar of Garin le Loherain'; 'the psalter of Saint Louis, out of which he learned in his childhood.' How curiously the spheres of imagination, of chivalrous romance, and of religious veneration, blend here with the coming spirit of the Renaissance!

About 1300 the sword of Sir Tristram, with an inscription in French verse, was said to have been discovered in Lombardy, in an ancient tomb. Here we are only a step from Pope Leo X, who accepted solemnly, as though it were a relic, a humerus of Livy, offered him by the Venetians.

This hero-worship of the declining Middle Ages finds its literary expression in the biography of the perfect knight. In this genre the figures of recent history gradually superseded the legendary ones like that of Gillon de Trazegnies. Three of these lives of contemporary and illustrious knights are characteristic, although very different from each other: those of Marshal Boucicaut, of Jean de Bueil, and of Jacques de Lalaing.

The military career of Jean le Meingre, surnamed the Marshal Boucicaut, had led him from the defeat of Nicopolis to that of Agincourt, where he was taken prisoner, to die in captivity, six years later. As early as 1409 one of his admirers wrote his biography from reliable information, but with the intention of producing, not a book of contemporary history, but a mirror of chivalrous life. The real facts of this hard life of a captain and statesman disappear beneath the appearances of ideal heroism. The marshal is depicted as the type of a frugal and pious knight, at once courtly and well read. He is not rich. His father would neither augment nor diminish his possessions, saying: 'If my children are honest and brave, they will have enough; if they are worthless, it would be a pity to leave them much.' Boucicaut's piety has a Puritan

1. A sword of Tristram figures also among King John's jewels lost in the Wash in 1216.
flavour. He rises early and remains in prayer for three hours. However occupied or hurried he may be, he hears, on his knees, two masses a day. On Fridays he dresses in black. On Sundays and festal days he makes pilgrimages on foot, discourses of holy matters, or has some life of a saint read out to him or some story of ‘the valiant dead – Roman or other’. He lives soberly, he speaks little, and when he speaks it is of God and the saints, or of chivalry and virtue. He has accustomed his servants to practise piety and observe decency; they have given up the habit of swearing. We shall find him again as one of the propagandists of faithful and chaste love, and as the founder of the order of ‘l’escu vert a la dame blanche,’ for the defence of women, for which Christine de Pisan praised him. At Genoa, as a regent of the king of France, one day he courteously returned the curtsey of two ladies whom he met. ‘My lord’ – said his squire – ‘who are those two women to whom you bowed so deeply?’ – ‘Huguenin,’ said he, ‘I do not know.’ Then he said to him: ‘My lord, they are harlots.’ ‘Harlots,’ said he; ‘Huguenin, I would rather have paid my salutations to ten harlots than have omitted them to one respectable woman.’ His device, resigned and enigmatical, is ‘What you will’.

Such are the colours of piety, austerity, and fidelity in which the ideal image of a knight is painted. The real Boucicaut did not altogether resemble this portrait; no one would have expected it. He was neither free from violence nor from avarice, common faults in his class.

There are, however, patterns of chivalry of another type. The biographical romance about Jean de Bueil, entitled *Le Jouvenel*, was written half a century after *Le Livre des Faicts* of Boucicaut, which partly explains the differences. Jean de Bueil had fought under the banner of Joan of Arc. He had taken part in the rising called the Praguerie and in the war ‘du bien public’; he died in 1477. Fallen in disgrace with the king, he dictated, or rather suggested, about 1465, an account of his life to three of his servants. In contrast with the *Life of Boucicaut*, of which the historical form hardly conceals the romantic purpose, *Le Jouvenel* contains in fictitious garb a
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great deal of simple realism; this is so, at least, in the first part, for further on the authors have lost themselves in very insipid romanticism.

Jean de Bueil must have given his scribes a very lively narrative of his exploits. It would hardly be possible to quote in the literature of the fifteenth century another work giving as sober a picture as *Le Jouvencel* of the wars of those times. We find the small miseries of military life, its privations and boredom, gay endurance of hardships and courage in danger. A castellan musters his garrison; there are but fifteen horses, lean and old beasts, most of them unshod. He puts two men on each horse, but of the men also most are blind of one eye or lame. They set out to seize the enemy’s laundry in order to patch the captain’s clothes. A captured cow is courteously returned to a hostile captain at his request. Reading the description of a nocturnal march, one feels as though surrounded by the silence and the freshness of the night. It is not saying too much that here military France is announcing herself in literature, which will give birth to the types of the ‘mousquetaire’, the ‘grognard’, and the ‘poilu’. The feudal knight is merging into the soldier of modern times; the universal and religious ideal is becoming national and military. The hero of the book releases his prisoners without a ransom, on condition that they shall become good Frenchmen. Having risen to great dignities, he yearns for the old life of adventure and liberty.

*Le Jouvencel* is an expression of true French sentiment. Literature in the Burgundian sphere, being more old-fashioned, more feudal, and more solemn, would not have been able as yet to create so realistic a type of a knight. By the side of the Jouvencel, the figure of the Hainault pattern knight of the fifteenth century, Jacques de Lalaing, is an antique curiosity, more or less modelled on the knights-errant of a preceding age. *Le Livre des Faits du bon Chevalier Messire Jacques de Lalaing* is far more concerned with tournaments and jousts than with real war.

In the *Jouvencel* we find a remarkable portrayal, hardly to be surpassed, of the psychology of warlike courage of a
simple and touching kind. 'It is a joyous thing, is war. . . . You love your comrade so in war. When you see that your quarrel is just and your blood is fighting well, tears rise to your eye. A great sweet feeling of loyalty and of pity fills your heart on seeing your friend so valiantly exposing his body to execute and accomplish the command of our Creator. And then you prepare to go and die or live with him, and for love not to abandon him. And out of that there arises such a delectation, that he who has not tasted it is not fit to say what a delight it is. Do you think that a man who does that fears death? Not at all; for he feels so strengthened, he is so elated, that he does not know where he is. Truly he is afraid of nothing.'

These sentiments have nothing specifically chivalrous or medieval. The words might have been spoken by a modern soldier. They show us the very core of courage: man, in the excitement of danger, stepping out of his narrow egotism, the ineffable feeling caused by a comrade's bravery, the rapture of fidelity and of sacrifice — in short, the primitive and spontaneous asceticism, which is at the bottom of the chivalrous ideal.
CHAPTER V

The Dream of Heroism and of Love

A conception of military life resembling that of medieval chivalry is found nearly everywhere, notably with the Hindus of the Mahābhārata and in Japan. Warlike aristocracies need an ideal form of manly perfection. The aspiration to a pure and beautiful life, expressed in the kalokagathia of the Hellenes, in the Middle Ages gives birth to chivalry. And during several centuries that ideal remains a source of energy, and at the same time a cloak for a whole world of violence and self-interest.

The ascetic element is never absent from it. It is most accentuated in the times when the function of knighthood is most vital, as in the times of the early crusades. The noble warrior has to be poor and exempt from worldly ties. ‘This ideal of the well-born man without possessions’ – says William James – ‘was embodied in knight-errantry and templardom, and, hideously corrupted as it has always been, it still dominates sentimentally, if not practically, the military and aristocratic view of life. We glorify the soldier as the man absolutely unencumbered. Owning nothing but his bare life, and willing to toss that up at any moment when the cause commands him, he is the representative of unhampered freedom in ideal directions.’ Medieval chivalry, in its first bloom, was bound to blend with monachism. From this union were born the military orders of the Templars, of Saint John, of the Teutonic knights, and also those of Spain. Soon, however, or rather from the very beginning, reality gives the lie to the ideal, and accordingly the ideal will soar more and more towards the regions of fantasy, there to preserve the traits of asceticism and sacrifice too rarely visible in real life. The knight-errant, fantastic and useless, will always be poor and without ties, as the first Templars had been.
It would thus be unjust to regard as factitious or superficial the religious elements of chivalry, such as compassion, fidelity, justice. They are essential to it. Yet the complex of aspirations and imaginings, forming the idea of chivalry, in spite of its strong ethical foundation and the combative instinct of man, would never have made so solid a frame for the life beautiful if love had not been the source of its constantly revived ardour.

These very traits, moreover, of compassion, of sacrifice, and of fidelity, which characterize chivalry, are not purely religious; they are erotic at the same time. Here, again, it must be remembered that the desire of bestowing a form, a style, on sentiment, is not expressed exclusively in art and literature; it also unfolds in life itself: in courtly conversation, in games, in sports. There, too, love incessantly seeks a sublime and romantic expression. If, therefore, life borrows motifs and forms from literature, literature, after all, is only copying life. The chivalrous aspect of love had somehow to make its appearance in life before it expressed itself in literature.

The knight and his lady, that is to say, the hero who serves for love, this is the primary and invariable motif from which erotic fantasy will always start. It is sensuality transformed into the craving for self-sacrifice, into the desire of the male to show his courage, to incur danger, to be strong, to suffer and to bleed before his lady-love.

From the moment when the dream of heroism through love has intoxicated the yearning heart, fantasy grows and overflows. The first simple theme is soon left behind, the soul thirsts for new fancies, and passion colours the cream of suffering and of renunciation. The man will not be content merely to suffer, he will want to save from danger, or from suffering, the object of his desire. A more vehement stimulus is added to the primary motif: its chief feature will be that of defending imperilled virginity — in other words, that of ousting the rival. This, then, is the essential theme of chivalrous love poetry: the young hero, delivering the virgin. The sexual motif is always behind it, even when the aggressor is only an
artless dragon; a glance at Burne-Jones’s famous picture suffices to prove it.

One is surprised that comparative mythology should have looked so indefatigably to meteorological phenomena for the explanation of such an immediate and perpetual motif as the deliverance of the virgin, which is the oldest of literary motifs and one which can never grow antiquated. It may from time to time become stale from overmuch repetition, and yet it will reappear, adapting itself to all times and surroundings. New romantic types will arise, just as the cowboy has succeeded the corsair.

The Middle Ages cultivated these motifs of a primitive romanticism with a youthful insatiability. Whereas in some higher genres of literature, such as lyrical poetry, the expression of desire and fulfilment became more refined, the romance of adventure always preserved it in its crude and naïve form, without ever losing its charm to its contemporaries. We might have expected that the last centuries of the Middle Ages would have lost their relish for these childish fancies. We are inclined to suppose that Mélisande, the super-romantic novel by Froissart, or Perceforest, those belated fruits of chivalrous romance, were anachronisms even in their own day. They were no more so than the sensational novel is at present. Erotic imagination always requires similar models, and it finds them here. In the heyday of the Renaissance we see them revive in the cycle of Amadis of Gaul. When, a good while after the middle of the sixteenth century, François de la Noue affirms that the novels of Amadis had caused ‘un esprit de vertige’ among his generation – the generation of the Huguenots, which had passed through humanism with its vein of rationalism – we can imagine what must have been the romantic susceptibility of the ill-balanced and ignorant generation of 1400.

Literature did not suffice for the almost insatiable needs of the romantic imagination of the age. Some more active form of expression was required. Dramatic art might have supplied it, but the medieval drama in the real sense of the word treated love matters only exceptionally; sacred subjects were its substance. There was, however, another form of representa-
tion, namely, noble sports, tourneys and jousts. Sportive struggles always and everywhere contain a strong dramatic element and an erotic element. In the medieval tournament these two elements had so much got the upper hand, that its character of a contest of force and courage had been almost obliterated by its romantic purport. With its bizarre accoutrements and pompous staging, its poetical illusion and pathos, it filled the place of the drama of a later age.

The life of aristocracies when they are still strong, though of small utility, tends to become an all-round game. In order to forget the painful imperfection of reality, the nobles turn to the continual illusion of a high and heroic life. They wear the mask of Lancelot and of Tristram. It is an amazing self-deception. The crying falsehood of it can only be borne by treating it with some amount of raillery. The whole chivalrous culture of the last centuries of the Middle Ages is marked by an unstable equilibrium between sentimentality and mockery. Honour, fidelity, and love are treated with unimpeachable seriousness; only from time to time the solemn rigidity relaxes into a smile, but downright parody never prevails. Even after the Morgante of Pulci and the Orlando Innamorato of Boiardo had made the heroic pose ridiculous, Ariosto recaptured the absolute serenity of chivalrous sentiment.

In French circles, of about 1400, the cult of chivalry was treated with perfect gravity. It is not easy for us to understand this seriousness, and not to be startled by the contrast between the literary note of a Boucicaut and the facts of his career. He is represented as the indefatigable defender of courtesy and of chivalry, serving his lady according to the old rules of courteous love. ‘He served all, he honoured all, for the love of one. His speech was graceful, courteous, and diffident before his lady.’ During his travels in the Near East in 1388, he and his companions in arms amuse themselves by composing a poetical defence of the faithful and chaste love of a knight – the Livre des Cent Ballades. One might have supposed him cured of all chivalrous delusions after the catastrophe of Nicopolis. There he had seen the lamentable consequences of statecraft recklessly embarking on an enterprise of vital
import in the spirit of a chivalrous adventure. His companions of the Cent Ballades had perished. That would suffice, one would think, to make him turn his back on old-fashioned forms of courtesy. Yet he remains devoted to them and resumes his moral task in founding the order ‘de la dame blanche à l’escu vert’.

Like all romantic forms that are worn out as an instrument of passion, this apparatus of chivalry and of courtesy affects us at first sight as a silly and ridiculous thing. The accents of passion are heard in it no more save in some rare products of literary genius. Still, all these costly elaborated forms of social conduct have played their part as a decoration of life, as a framework for a living passion. In reading this antiquated love poetry, or the clumsy descriptions of tournaments, no exact knowledge of historical details avails without the vision of the smiling eyes, long turned to dust, which at one time were infinitely more important than the written word that remains.

Only a stray glimmer now reminds us of the passionate significance of these cultural forms. In the Vau du Héron the unknown author makes Jean de Beaumont speak:

Quant sommes és tavernes, de ces fors vins buvant,
Et ces dames délés qui nous vont regardant,
A ces gorgues polies, ces colés tirant,
Chil oeil vair resplendissent de biauté souriant,
Nature nous semont d’avoir coeur désirant,
... Adonc conquerons-nous Yaumont et Agoumant
Et li autre conquierrent Olivier et Rollant.
Mais, quant sommes as camps sus nos destriers courans,
Nos escus à no coł et nos lansses bais(s)ans,
Et le froidure grande nous va tout engelant,
Li membres nous effondrent, et derrière et devant,
Et nos ennemies sont envers nous approchant,
Adonc vorrièmes estre en un chélier si grant
Que jamais ne fussions veu tant ne quant.1

1. When we are in the tavern, drinking strong wines, And the ladies pass and look at us, With those white throats, and tight bodices, Those sparkling eyes resplendent with smiling beauty, Then nature urges us to have a desiring heart, ... Then we could overcome Yaumont and Agou- lant And the others would conquer Oliver and Roland. But when we are
Nowhere does the erotic element of the tournament appear more clearly than in the custom of the knight’s wearing the veil or the dress of his lady. In *Perceforest* we read how the lady spectators of the combat take off their finery, one article after another, to throw them to the knights in the lists. At the end of the fight they are bareheaded and without sleeves. A poem of the thirteenth century, the work of a Picard or a Hainault minstrel, entitled *Des trois Chevaliers et del Chainse*,¹ has worked out this motif in all its force. The wife of a nobleman of great liberality, but not very fond of fighting, sends her shirt to three knights who serve her for love, that one of them at the tournament which her husband is going to give may wear it as a coat-armour, without any mail underneath. The first and the second knights excuse themselves. The third, who is poor, takes the shirt in his arms at night, and kisses it passionately. He appears at the tournament, dressed in the shirt and without a coat of mail; he is grievously wounded, the shirt, stained with his blood, is torn. Then his extraordinary bravery is perceived and he is awarded the prize. The lady gives him her heart. The lover asks something in his turn. He sends back the garment, all blood-stained, to the lady, that she may wear it over her gown at the meal which is to conclude the feast. She embraces it tenderly and shows herself dressed in the shirt as the knight had demanded. The majority of those present blame her, the husband is confounded, and the minstrel winds up by asking the question: Which of the two lovers sacrificed most for the sake of the other?

The Church was openly hostile to tournaments; it repeatedly prohibited them, and there is no doubt that the fear of the passionate character of this noble game, and of the abuses resulting from it, had a great share in this hostility. Moralists were not favourably disposed towards tournaments, neither

in camp on our trotting chargers, Our bucklers round our necks and our lances lowered, And the great cold is congealing us altogether, And our limbs are crushed before and behind, And our enemies are approaching as, Then we should wish to be in a cellar so large That we might never be seen by any means.

¹ Of the three knights and the shirt.
were the humanists. Where do we read, Petrarch asks, that Cicero or Scipio jousted? The burghers thought them useless and ridiculous. Only the world of the nobility continued to cultivate all that regarded tournaments and jousts, as things of the highest importance. Monuments were erected on the sites of famous combats, as the Pélérine Cross near Saint Omer, in remembrance of the Passage of Arms of la Pélérine and of the exploits of the bastard of Saint Pol and a Spanish knight. Bayard piously went to visit this cross, as if on a pilgrimage. In the church of Notre Dame of Boulogne were preserved the decorations of the Passage of Arms of the Fontaine des Pleurs, solemnly dedicated to the Holy Virgin.

The warlike sports of the Middle Ages differ from Greek and modern athletics by being far less simple and natural. Pride, honour, love, and art give additional stimulus to the competition itself. Overloaded with pomp and decoration full of heroic fancy, they serve to express romantic needs too strong for mere literature to satisfy. The realities of court life or a military career offered too little opportunity for the fine make-belief of heroism and love, which filled the soul. So they had to be acted. The staging of the tournament, therefore, had to be that of romance; that is to say, the imaginary world of Arthur, where the fancy of a fairy-tale was enhanced by the sentimentality of courtly love.

A Passage of Arms of the fifteenth century is based on a fictitious case of chivalrous adventure, connected with an artificial scene called by a romantic name, as, for instance, *La fontaine des pleurs, L’arbre Charlemagne*. A fountain is expressly constructed, and beside it a pavilion, where during a whole year a lady is to reside (in effigy, be it understood), holding a unicorn which bears three shields. The first day of each month knights come to touch the shields, and in this way to pledge themselves for a combat of which the ‘Chapters’ of the Passage of Arms lay down the rules. They will find horses in readiness, for the shields have to be touched on horseback. Or, in the case of the *Emprise du dragon*, four knights will be stationed at a cross-road where, unless she gives a gage, no lady may pass without a knight breaking two lances for her. There is an
unnecessary connexion between these primitive forms of warlike and erotic sport and the children’s play of forfeits. One of the rules of the ‘Chapters’ of the Fontaine des pleurs runs thus: he who, in a combat, is unhorsed, will during a year wear a gold bracelet, until he finds the lady who holds the key to it and who can free him, on condition that he shall serve her.

The nobles liked to throw a veil of mystery and melancholy over the procedure. The knight should be unknown. He is called ‘le blanc chevalier,’ ‘le chevalier mesconnu,’ or he wears the crest of Lancelot or Palamedes. The shields of the Fount of Tears are white, violet, and black, and overspread with white tears; those of the Tree of Charlemagne are sable and violet, with gold and sable tears. At the Emprise du dragon, celebrated on the occasion of the departure of his daughter Margaret for England, King René was present, dressed all in black, and his whole outfit, caparison, horse and all, down to the wood of his lance, was of the same colour.