CHAPTER VI

Orders of Chivalry and Vows

The ideal of courage, of honour, and of fidelity found other forms of expression, besides those of the tournament. Apart from martial sport, the orders of chivalry opened an ample field where the taste for high aristocratic culture might expand. Like the tournaments and the accolade, the orders of chivalry have their roots in the sacred rites of a very remote past. Their religious origins are pagan, only the feudal system of thought had Christianized them. Strictly speaking, the several orders of chivalry are only ramifications of the order of knighthood itself. For knighthood was a sacred brotherhood, into which admittance was effected by means of solemn rites of initiation. The more elaborate form of these rites shows a most curious blending of Christian and heathen elements: the shaving, the bath, and the vigil of arms undoubtedly go back to pre-Christian times. Those who had gone through these ceremonies were called Knights of the Bath, in distinction from those who were knighted by the simple accolade. The term afterwards gave rise to the legend of a special Order of the Bath instituted by Henry IV, and thus to the establishment of the real one by George I.

The first great orders, those of the Temple, of Saint John, and of the Teutonic Knights, born of the mutual penetration of monastic and feudal ideas, early assumed the character of great political and economic institutions. Their aim was no longer in the first place the practice of chivalry; that element, as well as their spiritual aspirations, had been more or less effaced by their political and financial importance. It was in the orders of more recent origin that the primitive conception of a club, of a game, of an aristocratic federation, reappeared. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the real importance of chivalrous orders, which were founded in great numbers, was very slight, but the aspirations professed in founding
them were always those of the very highest ethical and political idealism. Philippe de Mézières, an unrivalled political dreamer, wishes to remedy all the evils of the century by a new order of chivalry, that of the Passion, which is to unite Christendom in a common effort to expel the Turks. Burgesses and labourers are to find a place in it, side by side with the nobles. The three monastic vows are to be modified for practical reasons: instead of celibacy he only requires conjugal fidelity. Mézières adds a fourth vow, unknown to preceding orders, that of individual, moral perfection, *summa perfectio*. He confided the task of propagating the *Militia Passionis Ihesu Christi* to four ‘mesaiges de Dieu et de la chevalerie’ (among whom was the celebrated Othe de Granson), who were to go to ‘divers lands and kingdoms to preach and to announce the aforesaid holy chivalry, like four evangelists.’

The word ‘order’ thus still preserved much of its spiritual meaning; it alternates with ‘religion,’ which usually designated a monastic order. We hear of the ‘religion’ of the Golden Fleece, of a ‘knight of the religion of Avys.’ The rules of the Golden Fleece are conceived in a truly ecclesiastical spirit; mass and obsequies occupy a large place in them; the knights are seated in choir-stalls like canons. The membership of an order of chivalry constituted a sacred and exclusive tie. The knights of the Star of John the Good are required to withdraw from every other order. Philip the Good declines the honour of the Garter, in spite of the urgency of the duke of Bedford, in order not to tie himself too closely to England. Charles the Bold, on accepting it, was accused by Louis XI of having broken the peace of Péronne, which forbade alliance with England without the king’s consent.

In spite of these serious airs, the founders of new orders had to defend themselves from the reproach of pursuing merely a vain amusement. The Golden Fleece, says the poet Michault, was instituted

Non point pour jeu ne pour esbatement,
Mais à la fin que soit attribuée
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Loenge à Dieu trestout premièrent,
Et aux bons gloire et haute renommée.¹

Similarly, Guillaume Fillastre writes his book of the Golden Fleece to demonstrate the high interest and the sacred importance of the order, that it might not be regarded as a work of vanity. It was not superfluous to draw attention to the high objects of the duke, so that his creation might be distinguished from the numerous orders of recent foundation. There was not a prince or great noble who did not desire to have his own order. Orléans, Bourbon, Savoie, Hainaut-Bavière, Lusignan, Coucy, all eagerly exerted themselves in inventing bizarre emblems and striking devices. The chain of Pierre de Lusignan’s Sword-order was made of gold S’s, which meant ‘silence’. The Porcupine of Louis of Orléans threatens Burgundy with its spines, which it shoots, according to popular belief, cominus et eminus.

If the Golden Fleece eclipsed all the other orders, it is because the dukes of Burgundy placed at its disposal the resources of their enormous wealth. In their view, the order was to serve as the symbol of their power. The fleece was primarily that of Colchis; the fable of Jason was familiar to all. Jason, however, was, as an eponymous hero, not absolutely irreproachable. Had he not broken his word? There was an opening here for nasty allusions to the policy of the dukes towards France. La Ballade de Fougeres of Alain Chartier is an instance:

A Dieu et aux gens detestable
Est menterie et trahison,
Pour ce n’est point mis à la table
Des preux l’image de Jason,
Qui pour emporter la toison
De Colcos se veult parjurer.
Larrecin ne se peut celer.²

¹. Not for amusement, nor for recreation, But for the purpose that praise shall be given To God, in the first place, And glory and high renown to the good.
². To God and to men detestable Is lying and treason, For this reason the image of Jason Is not placed in the gallery of worthies. Who, to carry
It was, therefore, a very happy inspiration of the learned bishop of Chalons, chancellor of the order, to substitute for the fleece of the ram that carried Helle another, far more venerable, namely, that which Gideon spread to receive the dew of Heaven. The fleece of Gideon was one of the most striking symbols of the Annunciation. Thus the Old Testament judge more or less eclipses the pagan hero, as a patron of the order. Guillaume Fillastre, the successor of Jean Germain as chancellor of the order, discovered four more fleeces in Scripture, each of them denoting a special virtue. But this was plainly overdoing it, and, as far as we can see, was not successful. ‘Gedeonis signa’ remained the most revered appellation of the Golden Fleece.

To describe the solemn pomp of the Golden Fleece, or of the Star, would only be adding new instances to the subject-matter of a preceding chapter. Let it suffice here to point out a single trait common to all the orders of chivalry, in which the original character of a primitive and sacred game is particularly conspicuous, namely, the technical appellations of their officials. The kings-at-arms are called Golden Fleece, Garter. The heralds bear names of countries: Charolais, Zeeland. The first of the pursuivants is called ‘Fusil’, after the duke’s emblem, the flint-and-steel. The names of the other pursuivants are of a romantic or moral character, as Montreal, Perseverance, or allegorical, as Humble Request, Sweet Thought, Lawful Pursuit, designations borrowed from the Romances of the Rose. At the feasts of the order, the pursuivants are baptized in these names by sprinkling them with wine. Nicolas Upton, a herald of Humphrey of Gloucester, has described the ceremonial of such a baptism.

The very essence of the conception of an order of chivalry appears in its knightly vows. Every order presupposes vows, but the chivalrous vow exists also outside the orders, under an individual and occasional form. Here the barbarous character, testifying that chivalry has its roots in primitive civiliza-

off the fleece Of Colchos, was willing to commit perjury. Larceny cannot remain hidden.
tion, comes to the surface. We find parallels in the India of the *Mahābhārata*, in ancient Palestine, and in the Iceland of the *Sagas*.

What remained, at the end of the Middle Ages, of the cultural value of these chivalrous vows? We find them very near akin to purely religious vows, serving to accentuate or to fix a lofty moral aspiration. We also find them supplying romantic and erotic needs and degenerating into an amusement and a theme for rillery. It is not easy to determine accurately the degree of sincerity belonging to them. We should not judge them from the impression of silliness and untruthfulness which we derive from the *Vœux du Faisan*, to mention the best known and most historical example. As in the case of tournaments and passages of arms, we only see the dead form of the thing: the cultural significance of the custom has disappeared with the passion animating those to whom these forms were the realization of a dream of beauty.

In the vows we find once more that mixture of asceticism and eroticism which we found underlying the idea of chivalry itself, and so clearly expressed in the tournaments. The Chevalier de la Tour Landry, in his curious book of admonition to his daughters, speaks of a strange order of amorous men and women of noble birth which existed in Poitou and elsewhere, in his youth. They called themselves Galois and Galoises, and had ‘very savage regulations’. In summer they dressed themselves in furs and fur-lined hoods, and lighted a fire on the hearth, whereas in winter they were only allowed to wear a simple coat without fur; neither mantles, nor hats, nor gloves. During the most severe cold they hid the hearth behind evergreen sprigs, and had only very light bed-clothes. It is not surprising that a great many members died of cold. The husband of a Galoise receiving a Galois under his roof was bound, under penalty of dishonouring himself, to give up his house and his wife to him. Here is a very primitive trait, which the author could hardly have invented, although he may have exaggerated this strange aberration in which we divine a wish to exalt love by ascetic excitement.

The savage spirit of the vows of knights manifests itself
very clearly in Le Vau du Héron, a poem of the fourteenth
century, of little historical value, describing the feasts given
at the court of Edward III at the moment when Robert
d’Artois urges the king to declare war on France. The earl
of Salisbury is seated at the feet of his lady. When called upon
to formulate a vow, he begs her to place a finger on his right
eye. Two, if necessary, she replies, and she closes his eye by
placing two fingers on it. ‘Belle, is it well closed?’ asks the
knight. ‘Yes, certainly.’

A dont, dist de le bouche, du cuer le pensement;
Et je veu et prometh à Dieu omnipotent,
Et à sa douche mère que de beauté resplent,
Qu’il n’est jamais ouvers, pour oré, ne pour vent,
Pour mal, ne pour martire, ne pour encombrement,
Si seray dedans Franche, où il a bonne gent,
I’t si aray le fu bouté entièrement
Et serai combatus a grand effortement
Contre les gens Philype, qui tant a hardement.
... Or, aviege qu’aviege, car il n’est autrement.
A donc osta son doit la puchelle au cors gent.
Et li iex clos demeure, si ques virent la gent. ¹

The literary motif is not without a real foundation. Froissart
actually saw English gentlemen who had covered one eye with
a piece of cloth, to redeem a pledge to use only one eye, till
they should have achieved some deed of bravery in France.

The extreme of savagery is reached in the vow of the queen,
which ends the series in The Vow of the Heron. She takes an
oath not to give birth to the child of which she is pregnant
before the king has taken her to the enemy’s country and
to kill herself ‘with a big steel knife’, if the confinement
announces itself too early.

¹. Well then, he said by the mouth the thought of the heart; And I vow
and I promise to Almighty God, And to his sweet mother of resplendent
beauty, That it will never be opened, for storm or for wind, By evil, or
by torture, or by hindrance, Until I shall be in France, where there are
good people, And until I shall have lighted the fire And I shall have
battled with great exertion Against the people of Philip who is so hardy.
... Now come what may, for it is not otherwise. Then the gentle girl took
away her finger And the eye remained shut, as people saw.
'I shall have lost my soul and the fruit will perish.'

*Le Vau du Héron* shows us the literary conception of these vows, the barbarous and primitive character they had in the minds of that time. Their magical element betrays itself in the part which the hair and the beard play in them, as in the case of Benedict XIII, imprisoned at Avignon, who made the very archaic vow not to have his beard shaved before he recovered his liberty.

In making a vow, people imposed some privation upon themselves as a spur to the accomplishment of the actions they were pledged to perform. Most frequently the privation concerns food. The first of the knights whom Philippe de Mézières admitted to his Chivalry of the Passion was a Pole, who during nine years had only eaten and drunk standing. Bertrand du Guesclin was dangerously prone to utter vows of this kind. He will not undress till he has taken Montcontour; he will not eat till he has effected an encounter with the English.

It goes without saying that a nobleman of the fourteenth century understood nothing of the magical meaning implied in these fasts. To us this original meaning is clear. It is equally so in the custom of wearing foot-irons as signs of a vow. As early as the eighteenth century, La Curne de Sainte Palaye remarked that the usage of the Chatti, described by Tacitus, corresponded exactly with the fashion which medieval chivalry had preserved. In 1415 Jean de Bourbon vowed, and sixteen knights and squires with him, that each Sunday during two years they would wear on the left leg foot-irons – the knights of gold, the squires of silver – till they should find sixteen adversaries ready to fight them to the death. The ‘adventurous knight’, Jean de Boniface, arriving at Antwerp from Sicily in 1445, wears an ‘emprise’ of the same sort, so does Sir Loiselench in *Le petit Jehan de Saintré*. The propensity to vow to perform something, when in danger or in violent emotion, undoubtedly always remains a powerful one. It has very deep psychological roots, and does not belong to any particular religion or civilization. Nevertheless, as a form of chivalrous culture, the vow was dying out at the end of the Middle Ages.
When, at Lille, in 1454, Philip the Good, preparing for his crusade, crowns his extravagant feasts by the celebrated Vows of the Pheasant, it is like the last manifestation of a dying usage, which has become a fantastic ornament, after having been a very serious element of earlier civilization. The old ritual, such as chivalrous tradition and romance taught it, is carefully observed. The vows are taken at the banquet; the guests swear by the pheasant served up, one ‘bluffing’ the other, just as the old Norsemen vied with each other in foolhardy vows sworn in drunkenness by the boar served up. There are pious vows, made to God and to the Holy Virgin, to the ladies and to the bird, and others in which the Deity is not mentioned. They contain always the same privations of food or of comfort: not to sleep in a bed on Saturday, not to take animal food on Friday, etc. One act of asceticism is heaped upon another: one nobleman promises to wear no armour, to drink no wine one day in every week, not to sleep in a bed, not to sit down to meals, to wear the hair-shirt. The method of accomplishing the vowed exploit is minutely specified and registered.

Are we to take all this seriously? The actors of the play pretend to do so. In connection with the vow of Philippe Pot to fight with his right arm bare, the duke, as though he feared real danger for his favourite, orders this addition to the registered promise: ‘It is not the pleasure of my very redoubted lord, that Messire Philippe Pot undertakes, in his company, the holy votive journey with his arm bare; but he desires that he shall travel with him well and sufficiently armed, as be-seems.’ As regards the vow of the duke himself, to fight the Great Turk with his own hand, it provokes general emotion. Among the vows there are conditional ones, betraying the intention of escaping, in case of danger, by a pretext. There are those resembling a fillip. And in fact this game, still in fashion some forty years ago, may be regarded as a pale survival of the chivalrous vow.

Yet a vein of mocking pleasantry runs through the superficial pomp. At the Vow of the Heron, Jean de Beaumont takes an oath to serve the lord from whom he may expect the
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greatest liberality. At those of the Pheasant, Jennet de Rebreviettes swears that unless he wins the favour of his lady before the expedition, he will marry, on his return from the East, the first lady or girl possessing twenty thousand gold pieces, 'if she be willing'. Yet this same Rebreviettes, in spite of his cynicism, set out as a 'poor squire', seeking adventures in the wars against the Moors of Granada.

Thus a blasé aristocracy laughs at its own ideal. After having adorned its dream of heroism with all the resources of fantasy, art, and wealth, it bethinks itself that life is not so fine, after all – and smiles.
CHAPTER VII

The Political and Military Value of
Chivalrous Ideas

In tracing the picture of the declining Middle Ages, the scholars of our days, generally speaking, take little account of the surviving chivalrous ideas. They are regarded by common consent as a more or less artificial revival of ideas, whose real value had long since disappeared. They would seem to be an ornament of society and no more. The men who made the history of those times, princes, nobles, prelates, or burghers, were no romantic dreamers, but dealt in solid facts. Still, nearly all paid homage to the chivalrous bias, and it remains to consider to what extent this bias modified the course of events. For the history of civilization the perennial dream of a sublime life has the value of a very important reality. And even political history itself, under penalty of neglecting actual facts, is bound to take illusions, vanities, follies, into account. There is not a more dangerous tendency in history than that of representing the past, as if it were a rational whole and dictated by clearly defined interests.

We have, therefore, to estimate the influence of chivalrous ideas on politics and on war at the close of the Middle Ages. Were the rules of chivalry taken into account in the councils of kings and in those of war? Were resolutions sometimes inspired by the chivalrous point of view? Without any doubt. If medieval politics were not governed for the better by the idea of chivalry, surely they were so sometimes for the worse. Chivalry during the Middle Ages was, on the one hand, the great source of tragic political errors, exactly as are nationalism and racial pride at the present day. On the other, it tended to disguise well-adjusted calculations under the appearance of generous aspirations. The gravest political error which France could commit was the creation of a quasi-independent Burgundy, and it had a chivalrous reason for its avowed motive:
King John, that knightly muddle-head, wished to reward the courage shown by his son at Poitiers by an extraordinary liberality. The stubborn anti-French policy of the dukes of Burgundy after 1419, although dictated by the interests of their house, was justified in the eyes of contemporaries by the duty of exacting an exemplary vengeance for the murder of Montereau. Burgundian court literature exerts itself to keep up in all political matters the semblance of chivalrous inspiration. The surnames of the dukes, that of ‘Sans Peur’ given to Jean, of ‘Hardi’ to the first Philip, of ‘Qui qu’en hongne’ which they did not succeed in imposing on the second Philip, usually called ‘the Good’, are inventions calculated to place the prince in a nimbus of chivalrous romance.

Now there was one among the political aspirations of the epoch where the chivalrous ideal was implied in the nature of the enterprise itself, namely, the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre. The highest political ideal which all the kings of Europe were obliged to profess was still symbolized by Jerusalem. Here the contrast between the real interest of Christendom and the form the idea took is most striking. The Europe of 1400 was confronted by an Eastern question of supreme urgency: that of repulsing the Turks who had just taken Adrianople and wiped out the Serbian kingdom. The imminent danger ought to have concentrated all efforts on the Balkans. Yet the imperative task of European politics does not yet disengage itself from the old idea of the crusades. People only succeeded in seeing the Turkish question as a secondary part of the sacred duty in which their ancestors had failed: the conquest of Jerusalem.

The conquest of Jerusalem could not but present itself to the mind as a work of piety and of heroism — that is to say, of chivalry. In the councils on Eastern politics the heroic ideal preponderated more than in ordinary politics, and this it is which explains the very meagre success of the war against the Turks. Expeditions which, before all else, required patient preparation and minute inquiry, tended, more than once, to be romanticized, so to speak, from the very outset. The catastrophe of Nicopolis had proved the fatal folly of
undertaking, against a very warlike enemy, an expedition of great importance as light-heartedly as if it were a question of going to kill a handful of heathen peasants in Prussia or in Lithuania.

In the fifteenth century each king still felt virtually bound to set out and recapture Jerusalem. When Henry V of England, dying at Paris in 1422, in the midst of his career of conquest, was listening to the reading of the seven penitential psalms, he interrupted the officiating priest at the words *Beneigne fac, Domine, in bona voluntate tua Sion, ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem*, and declared that he had intended to go and conquer Jerusalem, after having re-established peace in France, 'if it had pleased God, his Creator, to let him live to old age'. After that he orders the priest to go on reading, and dies.

In the case of Philip the Good, the design of a crusade seems to have been a mixture of chivalrous caprice and political advertising; he wished to pose, by this pious and useful project, as the protector of Christendom, to the detriment of the king of France. The expedition to Turkey was, as it were, a trump-card that he did not live to play.

The chivalrous fiction was also at the back of a peculiar form of political advertisement, to which Duke Philip was much attached – to wit, the duel between two princes, always being announced, but never carried out. The idea of having political differences decided by a single combat between the two princes concerned, was a logical consequence of the conception still prevailing, as if political disputes were nothing but a 'quarrel' in the juristic sense of the word. A Burgundian partisan, for instance, serves the 'quarrel' of his lord. What more natural means to settle such a case can be imagined than the duel of two princes, the two parties to the 'quarrel'? The solution was satisfactory to both the primitive sense of right and the chivalrous imagination. In reading the summary of the carefully arranged preparations for these princely duels, we ask ourselves, if they were not a conscious feint, either to impose upon one's enemy, or to appease the grievances of one's own subjects. Are we not rather to regard them as an inextricable mixture of humbug and of a chimerical, but, after
all, sincere, craving to conform to the life heroic, by posing before all the world as the champion of right, who does not hesitate to sacrifice himself for his people?

How, otherwise, are we to explain the surprising persistence of these plans for princely duels? Richard II of England offers to fight, together with his uncles, the dukes of Lancaster, York, and Gloucester, against the king of France, Charles VI, and his uncles, the dukes of Anjou, Burgundy, and Berry. Louis of Orléans defies the king of England, Henry IV. Henry V of England challenges the dauphin before marching upon Agincourt. Above all, the duke of Burgundy displayed an almost frenzied attachment to this mode of settling a question. In 1425 he challenges Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, in connexion with the question of Holland. The motive, as always, is expressly formulated in these terms: ‘To prevent Christian bloodshed and destruction of the people, on whom my heart has compassion,’ I wish ‘that by my own body, this quarrel may be settled, without proceeding by means of wars, which would entail that many noblemen and others, both of your army and of mine, would end their days pitifully.’

All was ready for the combat: the magnificent armour and the state dresses, the pavilions, the standards, the banners, the armorial tabards for the heralds, everything richly adorned with the duke’s blazons and with his emblems, the flint-and-steel and the Saint Andrew’s cross. The duke had gone in for a course of training ‘both by abstinence in the matter of food and by taking exercise to keep him in breath’. He practised fencing every day in his park of Hesdin with the most expert masters. The detailed expenses entailed by this affair are found in the accounts published by de La Borde, but the combat did not take place.

This did not prevent the duke, twenty years later, from again wishing to decide a question touching Luxemburg by a single combat with the duke of Saxony. Towards the close of his life he is still vowing to engage in a hand-to-hand combat with the Grand Turk.

We find this custom of challenges between sovereigns reappearing as late as the heyday of the Renaissance. To
deliver Italy from Cesare Borgia, Francesco Gonzaga offers to fight the latter with sword and dagger. Charles V himself, on two occasions, in 1526 and in 1536, formally proposes to the king of France to end their differences by a single combat.

The notion of two princes fighting a duel in order to decide a conflict between their countries had nothing impossible about it at an epoch when the judicial duel was still as firmly rooted in practice and in ideas as it was in the fifteenth century. If a political duel between two real sovereigns never actually took place, at any rate in 1397 a very great lord, accused of a political crime by a nobleman, fought him in due form and was killed. We refer to Othe de Granson, an illustrious knight and admired poet, who perished at Bourg en Bresse by the hand of Gerard d’Estavayer. The latter had made himself the champion of the towns of the Pays de Vaud, which were very hostile to Granson, as he was suspected of complicity in the murder of his lord, Amadeus VII, of Savoy, surnamed ‘the Red Count’. This judicial duel caused an immense sensation.

If princes had such a chivalrous conception of their duty, it is not astonishing that similar ideas constantly exercised a certain influence on political and military decisions: a negative influence and scarcely of a decisive nature, taking all in all, but nevertheless real. The chivalrous prejudice often caused resolutions to be retarded or precipitated, opportunities to be lost, and profit to be neglected, for the sake of a point of honour; it exposed commanders to unnecessary dangers. Strategical interests were frequently sacrificed in order to keep up the appearances of the heroic life. Sometimes a king himself would go forth to seek military adventure, like Edward III attacking a convoy of Spanish ships by night. Froissart asserts that the knights of the Star had to swear never to fly more than four acres from the battlefield, through which rule soon afterwards more than ninety of them lost their lives. The article is not found in the statutes of the order, as published by Luc d’Achéry; nevertheless, such formalism tallies well with the ideas of that epoch. Some days before the battle of Agincourt, the king of England, on his way to meet the French army, one evening passed by mistake by the village
which the foragers of his army had fixed upon as night-quarters. He would have had time to return, and he would have done it, if a point of honour had not prevented him. The king, 'as the chief guardian of the very laudable ceremonies of honour', had just published an order, according to which knights, while reconnoitring, had to take off their coat-armour, because their honour would not suffer knights to retreat, when accoutred for battle. Now, the king himself had put on his coat-armour, and so, having passed it by, he could not return to the village mentioned. He therefore passed the night in the place he had reached and also made the vanguard advance accordingly, in spite of the dangers that might have been incurred.

Just as a political conflict was regarded as an action at law, so there was also but a difference of degree between a battle and a judicial duel, or the combat of knights in the lists. In his Arbre des Batailles, Honoré Bonet places them under the same head, although carefully distinguishing 'great general battles' and 'particular battles'. In the wars of the fifteenth century, and even later, the custom for two captains or two equal groups to appoint meetings for a fight, in sight of the two armies, was still kept up. The Combat of the Thirty has remained the celebrated type of these fights. It was fought in 1351 at Ploermel, in Brittany, between the French of Beau-manoir and a company of thirty men, English, Germans, and Bretons, under a certain Bamborough. Froissart, though full of admiration, cannot help remarking: 'Some held it a prowess, and some held it a shame and a great overbearing'. The uselessness of these chivalrous spectacles was so evident that those in authority resented them. It was impossible to expose the honour of the kingdom to the hazards of a single combat. When Guy de la Trémoille wished to prove in 1386 the superiority of the French by a duel with an English nobleman, Peter Courtenay, the dukes of Burgundy and Berry at the last moment issued a formal prohibition. The authors of the Jouvenel disapprove of these competitions of glory. 'They are forbidden things and which people should not do. In the first place, those who do it, want to take away the good of others,
that is to say, their honour, to procure themselves vain glory, which is of little value; and, in doing this, he serves none, he spends his money; ... in being occupied in doing this, he neglects his part in waging war, the service of his king and the public cause; and no one should expose his body, unless in meritorious works.’

This is the military spirit, which itself has issued from the spirit of chivalry and is now gradually supplanting it. The custom of these fights outlived the Middle Ages. The French and Spanish armies, in the south of Italy, in 1503, feasted their eyes first upon the Combat of the Eleven, without any fatal result, and then upon the famous duel between Bayard and Sotomayor, which was by no means the last of its sort.

Thus, in warfare, the chivalrous point of honour continues to make itself felt, but when an important question arises for decision, strategic prudence carries the day in the majority of cases. Generals still propose to the enemy to come to an understanding as to the choice of the battlefield, but the invitation is generally declined by the party occupying the better position. In vain did the English in 1333 invite the Scots to come down from their strong position in order to fight them in the plains; in vain did Guillaume de Hainaut propose an armistice of three days to the king of France, during which a bridge could be built permitting the armies to join battle. Reason, however, is not always victorious. Before the battle of Najera (or of Navarrete), in which Bertrand du Guesclin was taken prisoner, Don Henri de Trastamara desires, at any cost, to measure himself with the enemy in the open field. He voluntarily gives up the advantages offered by the configuration of the ground and loses the battle.

If chivalry had to yield to strategy and tactics, none the less it remained of importance in the exterior apparatus of warfare. An army of the fifteenth century, with its splendid show of rich ornament and solemn pomp, still offered the spectacle of a tournament of glory and honour. The multitude of banners and pennons, the variety of heraldic bearings, the sound of clarions, the war-cries resounding all day long, all this, with the military costume itself and the ceremonies of dubbing
knights before the battle, tended to give war the appearance of a noble sport.

After the middle of the century, the drum, of Oriental origin, makes its appearance in the armies of the West, introduced by the lansquenetis. With its unmusical hypnotic effect it symbolizes, as it were, the transition from the epoch of chivalry to that of the art of modern warfare; together with fire-arms it has contributed towards rendering war mechanical.

The chivalrous point of view still presides over the classification of martial exploits by the chroniclers. They take pains to distinguish, according to technical rules, between a pitched battle and an encounter, for it is imperative that every combat has its appropriate place in the records of glory. ‘And so, from this day forward’—says Monstrelet—‘this business was called the encounter of Mons en Vimeu. And it was declared to be no battle, because the parties met by chance and there were hardly any banners unfurled.’ Henry V solemnly baptizes his great victory, the battle of Agincourt, ‘inasmuch as all battles should bear the name of the nearest fortress where they are fought’.

In spite of the care taken on all hands to keep up the illusion of chivalry, reality perpetually gives the lie to it, and obliges it to take refuge in the domains of literature and of conversation. The ideal of the fine heroic life could only be cultivated within the limits of a close caste. The sentiments of chivalry were current only among the members of the caste and by no means extended to inferior persons. The Burgundian court, which was saturated with chivalrous prejudice, and would not have tolerated the slightest infringement of rules in a ‘combat à outrance’ between noblemen, relished the unbridled ferocity of a judicial duel between burghers, where there was no code of honour to observe. Nothing could be more remarkable in this respect than the interest excited everywhere by the combat of two burghers of Valenciennes in 1455. The old Duke Philip wanted to see the rare spectacle at any cost. One must read the vivid and realistic description given by Chastellain in order to appreciate how a chivalrous writer who never suc-
ceeded in giving more than a vaguely fanciful description of a Passage of Arms, made up for it here by giving full rein to the instincts of natural cruelty. Not one detail of the ‘very beautiful ceremony’ escaped him. The adversaries, accompanied by their fencing masters, enter the lists, first Jacotin Plouvier, the plaintiff, next Mahuot. Their heads are cropped close and they are sewn up from head to foot in cordwain dresses of a single piece. They are very pale. After having saluted the duke, who was seated behind lattice-work, they await the signal, seated upon two chairs upholstered in black. The spectators exchange remarks in a low voice on the chances of the combat: How pale Mahuot is as he kisses the Testament! Two servants come to rub them with grease from the neck to the ankles. Both champions rub their hands with ashes and take sugar in their mouths; next they are given quartersticks and bucklers painted with images of saints, which they hold upside down, having, moreover, in their hands ‘a scroll of devotion’.

Mahuot, a small man, begins the combat by throwing sand into Jacotin’s face with the point of his buckler. Soon afterwards he falls to the ground under the formidable blows of Jacotin, who throws himself on him, fills his eyes and mouth with sand, and thrusts his thumb into the socket of his eye, to make him let go of a finger which Mahuot has between his teeth. Jacotin wrings the other’s arms, jumps upon his back and tries to break it. In vain does Mahuot cry for mercy, and asks to be confessed. ‘O my lord of Burgundy’, he calls out, ‘I have served you so well in your war of Ghent! O my lord, for God’s sake, I beg for mercy, save my life!’ ... Here some pages of Chastellain’s chronicle are missing; we learn elsewhere that the dying man was dragged out of the lists and hanged by the executioner.

Did Chastellain end his lively narrative by a moral? It is probable; anyhow, La Marche tells that the nobility were a little ashamed at having been present at such a spectacle. ‘Because of which God caused a duel of knights to follow, which was irreproachable and without fatal consequences’, adds the incorrigible court poet.
As soon as it is a question of non-nobles, the old and deep-rooted contempt for the villein shows us that the ideas of chivalry had availed but little in mitigating feudal barbarism. Charles VI, after the battle of Rosebeke, wishes to see the corpse of Philip of Artevelde. The king does not show the slightest respect for the illustrious rebel. According to one chronicle, he is said to have kicked the body, ‘treating it as a villein’. ‘When it had been looked at, for some time’ – says Froissart – ‘it was taken from that place and hanged on a tree’.

Hard realities were bound to open the eyes of the nobility and show the falseness and uselessness of their ideal. The financial side of a knight’s career was frankly avowed. Froissart never omits to enumerate the profits which a successful enterprise procured for its heroes. The ransom of a noble prisoner was the backbone of the business to the warriors of the fifteenth century. Pensions, rents, governor’s places, occupy a large place in a knight’s life. His aim is ‘s’avanchier par armes’ (to get on in life by arms). Commines rates the courtiers according to their pay, and speaks of ‘a nobleman of twenty crowns’, and Deschamps makes them sigh after the day of payment, in a ballad with the refrain:

Et quant venra le trésorier? ¹

As a military principle, chivalry was no longer sufficient. Tactics had long since given up all thought of conforming to its rules. The custom of making the knights fight on foot was borrowed by the French from the English, though the chivalrous spirit was opposed to this practice. It was also opposed to sea-fights. In the Debat des Hérauts d’Armes de France et d’Angleterre, the French herald being asked by his English colleague: Why does the king of France not maintain a great naval force, like that of England? replies very naïvely: – In the first place he does not need it, and, then, the French nobility prefer wars on dry land, for several reasons, ‘for (on the sea) there is danger and loss of life and God knows how awful it is when a storm rages and sea-sickness prevails which

¹ And when will the paymaster come?
many people find hard to bear. Again, look at the hard life which has to be lived, which does not beseeem nobility.’

Nevertheless, chivalrous ideas did not die out without having borne some fruit. In so far as they formed a system of rules of honour and precepts of virtue, they exercised a certain influence on the evolution of the laws of war. The law of nations originated in antiquity and in canon law, but it was chivalry which caused it to flower. The aspiration after universal peace is linked with the idea of crusades and with that of the orders of chivalry. Philippe de Mézières planned his ‘Order of the Passion’ to ensure the good of the world. The young king of France – (this was written about 1388, when such great hopes were still entertained of the unhappy Charles VI) – will be easily able to conclude peace with Richard of England, young like himself and also innocent of bloodshed in the past. Let them discuss the peace personally; let them tell each other of the marvellous revelations which have already heralded it. Let them ignore all the futile differences which might prevent peace if negotiations were left to ecclesiastics, to lawyers and to soldiers. The king of France may fearlessly cede a few frontier towns and castles. Directly after the conclusion of peace the crusade will be prepared. Quarrels and hostilities will cease everywhere; the tyrannical governments of countries will be reformed; a general council will summon the princes of Christendom to undertake a crusade, in case sermons do not suffice to convert the Tartars, Turks, Jews, and Saracens.

The share which the ideas of chivalry have had in the development of the law of nations is not limited to these dreams. The notion of a law of nations itself was preceded and led up to by the ideal of a beautiful life of honour and of loyalty. In the fourteenth century we find the formulation of principles of international law blending with the casuistical and often puerile regulations of passages of arms and combats in the lists. In 1352 Sir Geoffroi de Charny (who died at Poitiers bearing the oriflamme) addresses to the king, who has just instituted his order of the Star, a treatise composed of a long list of ‘demandes’, that is to say, questions of casuistry,
Value of Chivalrous Ideas

concerning jousts, tournaments and war. Jousts and tournaments rank first, but the importance of questions of military law is shown by their far greater number. It should be remembered that this order of the Star was the culmination of chivalrous romanticism, founded expressly ‘in the manner of the Round Table’.

Better known than the ‘demandes’ of Geoffroi de Charny is a work that appeared towards the end of the fourteenth century, and which remained in vogue till the sixteenth: L’Arbre des Batailles of Honoré Bonet, prior of Selonnet, in Provence. The influence of chivalry on the development of the law of nations nowhere appears more clearly than here. Though the author is an ecclesiastic, the idea which suggests his very remarkable conceptions to him is that of chivalry. He treats promiscuously questions of personal honour and the gravest questions of the law of nations. For example, ‘by what right can one wage war against the Saracens or other unbelievers’, or, ‘if a prince may refuse the passage through his country to another’. What is especially remarkable is the spirit of gentleness and of humanity in which Bonet solves these problems. May the king of France, waging war with England, take prisoner ‘the poor English, merchants, labourers of the soil and shepherds who tend their flocks in the fields’? The author answers in the negative; not only do Christian morals forbid it, but also ‘the honour of the age’. He even goes so far as to extend the privilege of safe conduct in the enemy’s country to the case of the father of an English student wishing to visit his sick son in Paris.

L’Arbre des Batailles was, unfortunately, only a theoretical treatise. We know full well that war in those times was very cruel. The fine rules and the generous exemptions enumerated by the good prior of Selonnet were too rarely observed. Still, if a little clemency was slowly introduced into political and military practice, this was due rather to the sentiment of honour than to convictions based on legal and moral principles. Military duty was conceived in the first place as the honour of a knight.
Taine said: ‘In the middle and lower classes the chief motive of conduct is self-interest. With an aristocracy the mainspring is pride. Now among the profound sentiments of man there is none more apt to be transformed into probity, patriotism and conscience, for a proud man feels the need of self-respect, and, to obtain it, he is led to deserve it.’ Is not this the point of view whence we must consider the importance of chivalry in the history of civilization? Pride assuming the features of a high ethical value, knightly self-respect preparing the way for clemency and right. These transitions in the domain of thought are real. In the passage quoted above from Le Jouvenel we noticed how chivalric sentiment passes into patriotism. All the best elements of patriotism – the spirit of sacrifice, the desire for justice and protection for the oppressed – sprouted in the soil of chivalry. It is in the classic country of chivalry, in France, that are heard, for the first time, the touching accents of love of the fatherland, irradiated by the sentiment of justice. One need not be a great poet to say these simple things with dignity. No author of those times has given French patriotism such a touching and also such a varied expression as Boustache Deschamps, whom we can only rate as a mediocre poet. Addressing France, he says:

Tu as duré et durras sans doublance
Tant cern raisons sera de toy amée,
Aitrement, non; fay done à la balance
Justice en toy et que bien soit gardée.\(^1\)

Chivalry would never have been the ideal of life during several centuries if it had not contained high social values. Its strength lay in the very exaggeration of its generous and fantastic views. The soul of the Middle Ages, ferocious and passionate, could only be led by placing far too high the ideal towards which its aspirations should tend. Thus acted the Church, thus also feudal thought. We may apply here Emerson’s words: ‘Without this violence of direction, which

\(^1\) You have endured and will, no doubt, endure So long as reason will be loved by you. Not otherwise; so hold the balance Of justice in yourself, and let it be well kept.
men and women have, without a spice of bigot and fanatic, no excitement, no efficiency. We aim above the mark to hit the mark. Every act hath some falsehood of exaggeration in it.' That reality has constantly given the lie to these high illusions of a pure and noble social life, who would deny? But where should we be, if our thoughts had never transcended the exact limits of the feasible?
CHAPTER VIII

Love Formalized

When in the twelfth century unsatisfied desire was placed by the troubadours of Provence in the centre of the poetic conception of love, an important turn in the history of civilization was effected. Antiquity, too, had sung the sufferings of love, but it had never conceived them save as the expectation of happiness or as its pitiful frustration. The sentimental point of Pyramus and Thisbe, of Cephalus and Procris, lies in their tragic end; in the heart-rending loss of a happiness already enjoyed. Courtly poetry, on the other hand, makes desire itself the essential motif, and so creates a conception of love with a negative ground-note. Without giving up all connexion with sensual love, the new poetic ideal was capable of embracing all kinds of ethical aspirations. Love now became the field where all moral and cultural perfection flowered. Because of his love, the courtly lover is pure and virtuous. The spiritual element dominates more and more, till towards the end of the thirteenth century, the dolce stil nuovo of Dante and his friends ends by attributing to love the gift of bringing about a state of piety and holy intuition. Here an extreme had been reached. Italian poetry was gradually to find its way back to a less exalted expression of erotic sentiment. Petrarch is divided between the ideal of spiritualized love and the more natural charm of antique models. Soon the artificial system of courtly love is abandoned, and its subtle distinctions will not be revived, when the Platonism of the Renaissance, latent, already, in the courtly conception, gives rise to new forms of erotic poetry with a spiritual tendency.

In France the evolution of erotic culture was more complicated. The idea of courtly love was not to be supplanted so easily there. The system is not given up; but the forms are filled by new values. Even before Dante had found the eternal
harmony of his *Vita Nuova*, the *Roman de la Rose* had in-
augurated a novel phase of erotic thought in France. The
work, begun before 1240 by Guillaume de Lorris, was
finished, before 1280, by Jean Chopinel. Few books have
exercised a more profound and enduring influence on the
life of any period than the *Romant of the Rose*. Its popu-
larly lasted for two centuries at least. It determined the
aristocratic conception of love in the expiring Middle Ages.
By reason of its encyclopedic range it became the trea-
sure-house whence lay society drew the better part of its
erudition.

The existence of an upper class whose intellectual and moral
notions are enshrined in an *ars amandi* remains a rather excep-
tional fact in history. In no other epoch did the ideal of
civilization amalgamate to such a degree with that of love.
Just as scholasticism represents the grand effort of the medi-
val spirit to unite all philosophic thought in a single centre,
so the theory of courtly love, in a less elevated sphere, tends
to embrace all that appertains to the noble life. The *Roman de
la Rose* did not destroy the system; it only modified its ten-
dencies and enriched its contents.

To formalize love is the supreme realization of the aspira-
tion to the life beautiful, of which we traced above both the
ceremonial and the heroic expression. More than in pride and
in strength, beauty is found in love. To formalize love is,
moreover, a social necessity, a need that is the more imperious
as life is more ferocious. Love has to be elevated to the height
of a rite. The overflowing violence of passion demands it.
Only by constructing a system of forms and rules for the
vehement emotions can barbarity be escaped. The brutality
and the licence of the lower classes was always fervently, but
never very efficiently, repressed by the Church. The aristo-
cracy could feel less dependent on religious admonition, be-
cause they had a piece of culture of their own from which to
draw their standards of conduct, namely, courtesy. Literature,
fashion, and conversation here formed the means to regulate
and refine erotic life. If they did not altogether succeed, they
at least created the appearance of an honourable life of courtly
love. For, in reality, the sexual life of the higher classes remained surprisingly rude.

In the erotic conceptions of the Middle Ages two diverging currents are to be distinguished. Extreme indecency showing itself freely in customs, as in literature, contrasts with an excessive formalism, bordering on prudery. Chastellain mentions frankly how the duke of Burgundy, awaiting an English embassy at Valenciennes, reserves the baths of the town ‘for them and for all their retinue, baths provided with everything required for the calling of Venus, to take by choice and by election what they liked best, and all at the expense of the duke’. Charles the Bold was reproached with his continence, which was thought unbecoming in a prince. At the royal or princely courts of the fifteenth century, marriage feasts were accompanied by all sorts of licentious pleasantries – a usage which had not disappeared two centuries later. In Froissart’s narrative of the marriage of Charles VI with Isabella of Bavaria we hear the obscene grinning of the court. Deschamps dedicates to Antoine de Bourgogne an epithalamium of extreme indecency. A certain rhymer makes a lascivious ballad at the request of the lady of Burgundy and of all the ladies.

Such customs seem to be absolutely opposed to the constraint and the modesty imposed by courtesy. The same circles which showed so much shamelessness in sexual relations professed to venerate the ideal of courtly love. Are we to look for hypocrisy in their theory or for cynical abandonment of troublesome forms in their practice?

We should rather picture to ourselves two layers of civilization superimposed, coexisting though contradictory. Side by side with the courtly style, of literary and rather recent origin, the primitive forms of erotic life kept all their force; for a complicated civilization like that of the closing Middle Ages could not but be heir to a crowd of conceptions, motives, erotic forms, which now collided and now blended.

The whole of the epithalamic genre may be considered as a heritage of a remote past. In primitive culture marriage and
nuptials form but one single sacred rite, converging in the mystery of copulation. Afterwards the Church, by transferring the sacred element of marriage to the sacrament, reserved the mystery for itself, leaving its accessories, to which it objected, to develop freely as popular practices. Thus the episthalmic apparatus, though stripped of its sacred character, nevertheless kept its importance as the main element in the nuptial feasts, thriving there more freely than ever. Licentious expression and gross symbolism were essential to it. The Church was powerless to bridle them. Neither Catholic discipline nor Reformed Puritanism could do away with the quasi-publicity of the marriage-bed, which remained in vogue well into the seventeenth century.

It is therefore from an ethnological point of view, as survivals, that we have to regard the mass of obscenities, equivocal sayings, and lascivious symbols which we meet in the civilization of the Middle Ages. They were the remains of mysteries that had degenerated into games and amusements. Evidently the people of that epoch did not feel that, in taking pleasure in them, they were infringing the prescriptions of the courtly code; they felt themselves on different soil where courtesy was not current.

It would be an exaggeration to say that in erotic literature the whole comic genre was derived from the episthalmium. Certainly the indecent tale, the farce, and the lascivious song had long formed a genre of their own of which the forms of expression were liable to but little variation. Obscene allegory predominates; every trade lent itself to this treatment; the literature of the time abounds in symbolism borrowed from the tournament, the chase, or music; but most popular of all was the religious travesty of erotic matters. Besides the grossly comic style of the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles, punning with homonymous words like saint and seins, or using in an obscene sense the words for blessing and confession, erotic-ecclesiastical allegory took a more refined form. The poets of the circle of Charles d'Orléans compared their amorous sadness to the sufferings of the ascetic and the martyr. They call themselves 'les amoureux de l'observance', alluding to the
severe reform which the Franciscan order had just undergone. Charles d’Orléans begins one of his pieces:

Ce sont ici les dix commandements,
Vray Dieu d’amours. . . .

Or, lamenting his dead love, he says:

J’ay fait l’obseque de ma dame
Dedans le moustier amoureux,
Et le service pour son ame
A chanté Penser doloreux.
Mains siergus de soupirs piteux
Ont esté en son luminaire,
Aussi j’ay fait la tombre faire
De regrets. . . .

All the effects of a sweet and melancholy burlesque are found together in that very tender and pure poem of the end of the century called L’Amant rendu Cordelier de l’Observance d’Amour, which describes the reception of an inconsolable lover in the convent of amorous martyrs. It is as though erotic poetry even in this perverse way strove to recover that primitive connexion with sacred matters of which the Christian religion had bereft it.

French authors like to oppose ‘l’esprit gaULOIS’ to the conventions of courtly love, as the natural conception and expression opposed to the artificial. Now the former is no less a fiction than the latter. Erotic thought never acquires literary value save by some process of transfiguration of complex and painful reality into illusionary forms. The whole genre of Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles and the loose song, with its wilful neglect of all the natural and social complications of love, with its indulgence towards the lies and egotism of sexual life, and its vision of a never-ending lust, implies, no less than the screwed-up system of courtly love, an attempt to

1. These are the ten commandments, True God of love. . . .
2. I have celebrated the obseque of my lady In the church of love,
And the service for her soul Was sung by dolorous Thought. Many tapers of pitiful sighs Have burned in her illumination, Also I had the tomb made Of regrets. . . .
substitute for reality the dream of a happier life. It is once more the aspiration towards the life sublime, but this time viewed from the animal side. It is an ideal all the same, even though it be that of unchastity. Reality at all times has been worse and more brutal than the refined aestheticism of courtesy would have it be, but also more chaste than it is represented to be by the vulgar genre which is wrongly regarded as realism.

As an element of literary culture the 'genre gaulois' could only occupy a secondary place, because erotic poetry is only fit to beautify life and to serve as a source of inspiration and imitation, in so far as it takes for its themes, not sexual intercourse itself, but the possibility of happiness, the promise, desire, languor, expectation. Only thus will it be capable of expressing all the different shadings of love, and of treating it equally from the sad and from the merry side. By introducing into love's domain the concepts of honour, courage, fidelity, and all the other elements of moral life, it will be of far greater aesthetic and ethical value. The Roman de la Rose, by combining the passionate character of its sensuous central theme with all the elaborate fancy of the system of courtly love, satisfied the needs of erotic expression of a whole age.

In this veritable treasure-house of amorous doctrine, ritual and legend, systematic and complete, the encyclopedic spirit of the thirteenth century had poured itself out, as it did in the sterner work of a Vincent of Beauvais. The extraordinary influence of the book could not but be heightened by its ambiguous nature. The work of two poets of different trends of thought, it joined – it would be more correct to say it juxtaposed – the courtly conception of love and sensual cynicism of the most daring kind. Texts could be found in it for all purposes.

Guillaume de Lorris had given it charm of form and tenderness of accent. The background of vernal landscape, the bizarre and yet harmonious imagery of allegorical figures, are his work. As soon as the lover has approached the wall of the mysterious garden of love, the allegorical system is unfolded. Dame Leisure opens the gate for him, Gaiety conducts
the dance, Amor holds by the hand Beauty, who is accompanied by Wealth, Liberality, Frankness, Courtesy, and Youth. After having locked the heart of his vassal, Amor enumerates to him the blessings of love, called Hope, Sweet Thought, Sweet Speech, Sweet Look. Then, when Bel-Accueil, the son of Courtesy, invites him to come and see the roses, Danger, Malebouche, Fear, and Shame come to chase him away. The dramatic struggle commences. Reason comes down from its high tower, and Venus appears upon the scene. The text of Guillaume de Lorris ends in the middle of the crisis.

Jean Chopinel, or Clopinel, or de Meun, who finished the work, adding much more than he found, sacrificed the harmony of the composition to his fondness for psychological and social analysis. The conquest of the castle of the roses is drowned in a continual flood of digressions, speculations and examples. The sweet breeze of Guillaume de Lorris was followed by the east wind of chilling scepticism and cruel cynicism of his successor. The vigorous and trenchant spirit of the second tarnished the naive and lightsome idealism of the first. Jean de Meun is an enlightened man, who believes neither in spectres nor in sorcerers, neither in faithful love nor in the chastity of woman, who has an inkling of the problems of mental pathology, and puts into the mouths of Venus, Nature, and Genius the most daring apology for sensuality.

Venus, requested by her son to come to his aid, swears not to leave a single woman chaste and makes Amor and the whole army of assailants take the same vow as regards men. Nature, occupied in her smithy with her task of preserving the various species, her eternal struggle against Death, complains that of all creatures, man alone transgresses her commandments by abstaining from procreation. She charges Genius, her priest, to go and hurl at Love's army Nature's anathema on those who despise her laws. In sacerdotal dress, a taper in his hand, Genius pronounces the sacrilegious excommunication, in which the boldest sensualism blends with refined mysticism. Virginity is condemned, hell is reserved for those who do not observe the commandments of nature
and of love. For the others the flowered field, where the white sheep, led by Jesus, the lamb born of the Virgin, crop the incorruptible grass in endless daylight. At the close Genius throws the taper into the besieged fortress; its flame sets the universe on fire. Venus also throws her torch; then Shame and Fear flee, the castle is taken, and Bel-Accueil allows the lover to pluck the rose.

Here, then, in the Roman de la Rose, the sexual motif is again placed in the centre of erotic poetry, but enveloped by symbolism and mystery and presented in the guise of saintliness. It is impossible to imagine a more deliberate defiance of the Christian ideal. The dream of love had taken a form as artistic as it was passionate. The profusion of allegory satisfied all the requirements of medieval imagination. These personifications were indispensable for expressing the finer shades of sentiments. Erotic terminology, to be understood, could not dispense with these graceful puppets. People used these figures of Danger, Evil Mouth, etc., as the accepted terms of a scientific psychology. The passionate character of the central motif prevented tediousness and pedantry.

In theory, the Roman de la Rose does not deny the ideal of courtesy. The garden of delights is inaccessible except to the elect, regenerated by love. He who wants to enter must be free from all hatred, felony, villainy, avarice, envy, sadness, hypocrisy, poverty, and old age. But the positive qualities he has to oppose to these are no longer ethical, as in the system of courtly love, but simply of an aristocratic character. They are leisure, pleasure, gaiety, love, beauty, wealth, liberality, frankness, and courteousness. They are no longer so many perfections brought about by the sacredness of love, but simply the proper means to conquer the object desired. For the veneration of idealized womanhood, Jean Chépinel substituted a cruel contempt for its feebleness.

Now, whatever influence the Roman de la Rose may have exercised on the minds of men, it did not succeed in completely destroying the older conception of love. Side by side with the glorification of seduction professed by the Rose, the glorification of the pure and faithful love of the knight main-
tained its ground, both in lyrical poetry and in the romance of chivalry, not to speak of the fantasy of tournaments and passages of arms. Towards the end of the fourteenth century the question which of the two conceptions of love should be held by the perfect nobleman provoked a literary dispute such as French taste loved in later centuries also. The noble Boucicaut had made himself the champion of true courtesy by composing with his travelling companions the Livre des Cent Ballades, in which he called on the wits of the court to decide between the honest and self-denying service of a single lady, and fashionable flirtation. Knights or poets who, like Boucicaut, honoured the old ideal of courtesy, were vaunted as models, Othe de Granson and Louis de Sancerre among others. Christine de Pisan took part in the dispute by posing as the intrepid advocate of female honour. Her Épistre au Dieu d’Amours formulated the complaints of women about all the deceit and insults of men. With serious indignation she denounces the doctrine of the Roman de la Rose.

Then the multitude of fervent admirers of Jean de Meun appeared upon the scene. Among them were men of very varying spiritual bent, even ecclesiastics. The debate lasted for years. The nobility and the court took it up as a means of amusement. Boucicaut – encouraged, perhaps, by the praise of Christine de Pisan, for his defence of ideal courtesy – had already founded his ‘ordre de l’escu vert à la dame blanche’, for the defence of oppressed women, when the duke of Burgundy eclipsed him by founding in Paris, at the ‘hôtel d’Artois’, on 14 February, 1401, a court of love on a very splendid scale. Philippe le Hardi, the old diplomat, whom one would have supposed to be occupied with affairs of a very different nature, and Louis de Bourbon, had begged the king to institute a court of love to furnish some distraction during an epidemic of the plague which raged at Paris, ‘to spend part of the time more graciously and in order to find awakening of new joy.’ The cause of chivalry triumphed in the form of a literary salon. The court was founded on the virtues of humility and of fidelity, ‘to the honour, praise and commendation and service of all noble ladies.’ The members
were provided with illustrious titles. The two founders and the king were called the Grands Conservateurs. Among the conservators we find Jean sans Peur, his brother Antoine, and his six-year-old son, Philippe. A certain Pierre d’Hauteville, from Hainault, was Prince of Love; there were also ministers, auditors, knights of honour, knights treasurers, councillors, grand-masters of the chase, squires of love, etc. Burghters and lower clergy were admitted, side by side with princes and prelates. The business of the court much resembled that of a ‘rhetorical chamber.’ Refrains were set to be worked up into ‘ballades couronnées ou chapelées’, songs, sirventois, complaints, rondels, lays, virelais, etc. There were debates ‘in the form of amorous law-suits to defend different opinions.’ The ladies distributed the prizes, and poems attacking the honour of women were forbidden.

In this pompous and grave apparatus of a graceful amusement one cannot help feeling the effect of Burgundian style beginning to influence the French court itself. It is equally obvious that the royal court, archaic like all courts, must declare in favour of the ancient and severe ideal of love, and that the 700 known members of the club were far from conforming their practice to it. By what is known of their habits, the great lords of that epoch were rather strange protectors of female honour. The most curious fact is that we find there the same persons who, in the debate about love, had defended the Roman de la Rose and attacked Christine de Pisan. Evidently it was merely a society amusement.

The intimate circle of Jean de Meun’s admirers consisted of men in the service of princes, both priests and laymen. It is identical with that of the first French humanists. One of them, Jean de Montreuil, provost of Lille, secretary to the dauphin and later to the duke of Burgundy, was the author of a good many Ciceronian epistles, and, like his friends, Gontier and Pierre Col, he corresponded with Nicolas de Cleemanges, the grave censor of the abuses in the Church. We now find him devoting his talents to the defence of the Roman de la Rose, and of its author, Jean de Meun. He asserts that several of the most learned and enlightened men honour the Roman
de la Rose so much that their appreciation resembles a cult (paene ut colerent), and that they would rather do without their shirt than this book. He exhorts his friends to undertake its defence, like himself. ‘The more I study’ – he writes to one of the detractors – ‘the gravity of the mysteries and the mystery of the gravity of this profound and famous work of Master Jean de Meun, the more I am astonished at your disapprobation.’ He himself will defend it to his last breath, and many others will serve this cause with words and deeds.

The conviction with which Jean de Montreuil speaks seems already to indicate that the question of love, after all, involved graver issues than those of a court amusement, and this is further proved by the fact that Jean Gerson, the illustrious chancellor of the university, took part in the quarrel. He hated the Roman de la Rose with implacable hatred. The book seemed to him to be the most dangerous pest, the source of all immorality. In his works he reverts again and again to the pernicious influence ‘of the vicious romant of the rose.’ If he had a copy, which was the only one and worth a thousand pounds, he would rather burn it than sell it to be published. When Pierre Col had refuted one of Gerson’s polemical writings, the latter replied by a treatise against the Roman de la Rose, which was more bitter than his former denunciations. He dated it ‘from my study, on the evening of the 18th of May, 1402.’

Following the example of the author of the Roman de la Rose, he gave his treatise the form of an allegorical vision. Awakening, one morning, he feels his soul flying far away, ‘using the feathers and the wings of various thoughts, from one place to another, to the sacred court of Christianity,’ where he hears the complaints of Chastity addressed to Justice, Conscience, and Wisdom about the Fool of love, that is to say, Jean de Meun, who has chased her from the earth, with all her train. The ‘good guardians’ of Chastity are precisely the evil personages of the Rose: Shame, Fear, and Danger, ‘the good porter, who would not dare, who would not deign to sanction even an impure kiss or dissolute look, or attractive smile or
light speech.' Chastity overwhems the Fool of love with reproaches. The Fool rails at marriage and monastic life. He teaches 'how all young girls should sell their persons early and dearly, without fear and without shame, and that they should make light of deceit and perjury.' He directs the fancy exclusively to carnal desire, and, to top all perversity, in the speeches of Venus, of Nature, and of Dame Reason, he blends conceptions of Paradise, and of the mysteries of the Faith, with those of sensual pleasure.

There, in truth, was the peril. This imposing work, with its mixture of sensuality, scoffing cynicism and elegant symbolism, infused a voluptuous mysticism into the mind which, to an austere man, was simply an abyss of sin. Had not Gerson's adversary dared to affirm that only the Fool of love could judge of the value of passion? He who does not know it sees it only as in a glass, to him it remains a riddle. Such was the use he had made, for his sacrilegious purposes, of the holy words of Saint Paul! Pierre Col had not scrupled to affirm that the Song of Solomon was composed in honour of the daughter of Pharaoh. Those who have defamed the Roman de la Rose, he declared, have bent their knees before Baal. Nature does not wish that a woman should be content with one single man, and the genius of Nature is God. He carried his blasphemy so far as to show from the Gospel of Saint Luke that formerly a woman's genitals, the rose of the romance, were sacred. Being convinced of the truth of this impious mysticism, he appealed to the friends of the book, forming a cloud of witnesses, and predicted that Gerson himself would fall madly in love, as had happened to other theologians before him.

Gerson did not succeed in destroying the authority, or, at least, the popularity, of the Roman de la Rose. In 1444 a canon of Lisieux, Estienne LeGris, composed a Répertoire du Roman de la Rose. Towards the end of the century Jean Molinet could assert that its sentences were current like proverbs. He has given himself the trouble of 'moralizing' the whole book, in giving its allegories a religious meaning. The nightingale calling to love meant the voice of the preacher, the
rose meant Jesus. Even in the heyday of the Renaissance, Clément Marot considered that the work deserved to be modernized, and Ronsard did not consider the figures of Bel-Accueil and Faus Danger too worn for use in his verse.
CHAPTER IX

The Conventions of Love

It is from literature that we gather the forms of erotic thought belonging to a period, but we should try to picture them functioning as elements of social life. A whole system of amatory conceptions and usages was current in aristocratic conversation of those times. What signs and figures of love which later ages have dropped! Around the god of Love the bizarre mythology of the Roman de la Rose was grouped. Then there was the symbolism of colours in costume, and of flowers and precious stones. The meaning of colours, of which feeble traces still obtain, was of extreme importance in amorous conversation during the Middle Ages. A manual of the subject was written about 1458, by the herald Sicily in his Le Blason des Couleurs, laughed at by Rabelais. When Guillaume de Machaut meets his beloved for the first time, he is delighted to see her wear a white dress and a sky-blue hood with a design of green parrots, because green signifies new love and blue fidelity. Later, he sees her image in a dream, turning away from him and dressed in green, ‘signifying novelty’, and reproaches her with it in a ballad:

En lieu de bleu, dame, vous vestez vert.¹

Rings, veils and bands, all the jewels and presents of courtship had their special function, with devices and enigmatic emblems which sometimes were veritable rebuses. The standard of the dauphin in 1414 bore a gold K, a swan (cygne) and an L, indicating one of his mother’s maids of honour, who was called la Cassinelle. The ‘glorieux de court et transporteurs de noms’, at whom Rabelais mocked, represent ‘espoir’ by a sphere, ‘mélancholie’ by a columbine (ancolie). Numerous games served to express the finesses of sentiment, such as the King who does not lie, the Castle of love, Sales

¹. Instead of in blue, lady, you dress in green.
of love, Games for sale. In one of them, for instance, the lady mentions a flower; the young man has to answer by a rhymed compliment.

    Je vous vens la passerose.
    – Belle, dire ne vous ose
    Comment Amours vers vous me tire,
    Si l'apercevez tout sanz dire.¹

The game of Castle of love consisted of a series of allegorical riddles.

    Du chastel d'Amours vous demant:
    Dites le premier fondement!
    – Amer loyaument.

    Or me nommez le mestre mur
    Qui joli le font, fort et seur!
    – Celer sagement.

    Dites moy qui sont li crenel,
    Les fenestres et li carrel
    – Regart atraitant.

    Amis, nommez moy le portier!
    – Dangier mauparlant.

    Qui est la clef qui le puet defferm?
    – Prié courtosingement.²

Since the times of the troubadours the casuistry of love had occupied a large place in courtly conversation. It was, so to say, curiosity and backbiting raised to the level of a literary form. At the court of Louis of Orleans people amuse themselves at meals by ‘tales, ballads’ and ‘graceful questions’. Poets are especially laid under contribution. Machaut is

¹. I sell you the hollyhock. – Belle, I dare not tell How Love draws me towards you, But you perceive it, without saying a word.

². Of the castle of Love I ask you: Tell me the first foundation! – To love loyally. Now mention the principal wall Which makes it fine, strong and sure! – To conceal wisely. Tell me what are the loopholes, The windows and the stones! – Alluring looks. Friend, mention the porter! – Ill-speaking danger. Which is the key that can unlock it? – Courteous request.
The Conventions of Love

requested by a company of ladies and noblemen to reply to a series of 'partures of love and of its adventures.' Every love-affair is discussed according to rigorous rules. 'Beau sire, which would you prefer: that people spoke ill of your lady and that you found her good, or that she were well spoken of and you should find her bad?' The strict conception of honour obliged a gentleman to answer: 'Lady, I should prefer to hear her well spoken of and that I should find her bad.'

Does a lady, neglected by her lover, break faith by choosing another? May a knight bereft of all hope of seeing his lady, whom a jealous husband keeps locked up, seek a new love? One step more and love questions will be treated as lawsuits, as in the Arrestz d'Amour of Martial d'Auvergne.

The courtly code did not serve exclusively for making verses; it claimed to be applicable to life, or at least to conversation. It is very difficult to pierce the clouds of poetry and to penetrate to the real life of the epoch. How far did courting and flirtation during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries come up to the requirements of the courtly system or to the precepts of Jean de Meun? Autobiographical confessions are very rare at that epoch. Even when an actual love-affair is described with the intention of being accurate, the author cannot free himself from the accepted style and technical conceptions. We find an instance of this in the too lengthy narrative of a love-affair of an old poet and a young girl, which Guillaume de Machaut has given us in Le Livre du l'air-Dit. He was approaching his sixtieth year, when Peronneelle d'Armentières, of a noble family in Champagne, sent him, in 1362, her first rondelet, in which she offered her heart to the celebrated poet, whom she did not know, and invited him to enter with her into a poetical love correspondence. The poor poet, sickly, blind of one eye, gouty, at once kindles. He replies to her rondelet and an exchange of letters and of poems begins. Peronneelle is proud of her literary connexion; she does not make a secret of it, and begs the poet to put in writing the true story of their love, inserting their letters and their poetry. Machaut readily complies. 'I shall make,' he
says, 'to your glory and praise, something that will be well remembered.'

'And, my very sweet heart, are you sorry because we have begun so late? By God, so am I; but here is the remedy: let us enjoy life as much as circumstances permit, so that we may make up for the time we have lost; and that people may speak of our love a hundred years hence, and all well and honourably; for if there were evil, you would conceal it from God, if you could.'

The narrative connecting the letters and the poetry teaches us what degree of intimacy was considered compatible with a decent love-affair. The young lady may permit herself extraordinary liberties, provided everything takes place in the presence of third parties, her sister-in-law, her maid or her secretary. At the first interview, which Machaut has been waiting for with misgivings, because of his unattractive appearance, Peronnelle falls asleep, or pretends to sleep, under a cherry tree, with her head on the poet's knees. The secretary covers her mouth with a green leaf and tells Machaut to kiss the leaf. Just when the latter takes courage to do so, the secretary pulls the leaf away.

She grants him other favours. A pilgrimage to Saint Denis, at the time of the fair, provides them with an opportunity of passing some days together. One afternoon, overcome by the heat of mid-June, they fly from the crowd at the fair to take a few hours' rest. A burgher of the town provides them with a double-bedded room. The blinds are closed and the company lies down. The sister-in-law takes one of the two beds. Peronnelle and her maid occupy the other. She orders the bashful poet to lie down between them, which he does, lying very still for fear of disturbing her. On waking, she orders him to kiss her.

At the end of the trip, she permits him to come and wake her, in order to take leave, and the narrative gives us to understand that she refused him nothing. She gives him the golden key of her honour, to guard that treasure, or what was left of it.

The poet’s good fortune ended there. He did not see her again, and, for lack of other adventures, he filled the rest of
his book with mythological excursions. At last she lets him know that their relations must end, because of a marriage, probably. He resolves to go on loving and revering her till the end of his days. And after their death, he will pray God, to reserve for her, in the glory of Heaven, the name he gave her: Toute-belle.

In the *Voir-Dit* of Machaut religion and love are mixed up with a sort of ingenuous shamelessness. We need not be shocked by the fact that the author was a canon of the church of Reims, for, in the Middle Ages, minor orders, which sufficed for a canon (Petrarch was one), did not absolutely impose celibacy. The fact that a pilgrimage was chosen as an occasion for the lovers to meet was not extraordinary either. At this period pilgrimages served all sorts of frivolous purposes. But what astonishes us is that Machaut, a serious and delicate poet, claims to perform his pilgrimage 'very devoutly.' At mass he is seated behind her:

... Quant on dist: Agnus Dei,
Foy que je doy à Saint Crepaus,
Doucement me donna la pais, 1
Entre deux pilers du moustier.
Et j'en avoie bien mestier,
Car mes cuers amoureus estoit
Troublés, quant si tost se partoit. 2

He says his hours as he is waiting for her in the garden. He glorifies her portrait as his God on earth. Entering the church to begin a novena, he takes a mental vow to compose a poem about his beloved on each of the nine days – which does not prevent him from speaking about the great devotion with which he said his prayers.

We shall revert elsewhere to the astonishing ingenuousness with which, before the Council of Trent, worldly occupations were mixed up with works of the Faith.

1. *Vide* page 37.
2. When the priest said: Agnus Dei, Faith I owe to Saint Crepaus, Sweetly she gave me the pax Between two pillars of the church. And I needed it indeed, For my amorous heart was Troubled that we had to part so soon.
As regards the tone of the love-affair of Machaut and Peronne, it is soft, cloying, somewhat morbid. The expression of their feelings remains enveloped in arguments and allegories. But there is something touching in the tenderness of the old poet, which prevents him from seeing that 'Toutebelle', after all, has but played with him and with her own heart.

To grasp what little we can of actual love relations, apart from literature, we should oppose to the l'oir-Dit, as a pendant, Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'Enseignement de ses Filles, written at the same epoch. This time we are not concerned with an amorous old poet; we have to do with a father of a rather prosaic turn of mind, an Angevin nobleman, who relates his reminiscences, anecdotes and tales 'pour mes filles apprendre à roumancier.' This might be rendered, 'to teach my daughters the fashionable conventions in love matters.' The instruction, however, does not turn out romantic at all. The moral of the examples and admonitions which the cautious father recommends to his daughters tends especially to put them on their guard against the dangers of romantic flirtations. Take heed of eloquent people, always ready with their 'false long and pensive looks and little sighs, and wonderful emotional faces, and who have more words at hand than other people.' Do not be too encouraging. He himself, when young, was conducted by his father to a castle to make the acquaintance of a young lady to whom they wanted to betroth him. The girl received him very kindly. He conversed with her on all sorts of subjects, so as to probe her character somewhat. They got to talk of prisoners, which gave the knight a chance to pay a neat compliment: '“Mademoiselle, it would be better to fall into your hands as a prisoner than into many another’s, and I think your prison would not be so hard as that of the English.”' She replied that she had recently seen one whom she could wish to be her prisoner. And then I asked her, if she would make a bad prison for him, and she said not at all, and that she would hold him as dear as her own person, and I told her that the man would be very fortunate in having such a sweet and
noble prison. What shall I say? She could talk well enough, and it seemed, to judge from her conversation, that she knew a good deal, and her eyes had also a very lively and lightsome expression.' When they took leave she begged him two or three times to come back soon, as if she had known him for a long time already. 'And when we had departed my lord my father said to me: "What do you think of her whom you have seen? Tell me your opinion." "Monseigneur, she seems to me all well and good, but I shall never be nearer to her than I am now, if you please".' Her lack of reserve left him without any desire to get better acquainted with her. So they did not get engaged, and of course the author says that he afterwards had reason not to repent it.

It is to be regretted that the chevalier has not given more autobiographical details and fewer moral exhortations, because these personal traits, showing how customs adapted themselves to the ideal, are very rare in the traditions of the Middle Ages.

In spite of his avowed intention to teach his girls 'à rou-mancier', the knight de la Tour Landry thinks, before all things, of a good marriage; and marriage had little to do with love. He reports to them a 'debate' between his wife and himself, on the question, whether it is becoming 'd'amour par amours'. He thinks that a girl may, in certain cases, for example, 'in the hope of marrying', love honourably. His wife thinks otherwise. It is better that a girl should not fall in love at all, not even with her betrothed, otherwise piety would suffer in consequence. 'For I have heard many women say who were in love in their youth, that when they were in church, their thoughts and fancies made them dwell more on those nimble imaginations and delights of their love-affairs than on the service of God, and the art of love is of such a nature that just at the holiest moments of the service, that is to say, when the priest holds our Lord on the altar, the most of these little thoughts would come to them.' Machaut and Peronnelie might have confirmed this.

It is not easy for us to reconcile the general austerity of the Chevalier de la Tour Landry with the fact that this father
The Waning of the Middle Ages

does not scruple to instruct his daughters by means of stories which would not have been out of place in the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles. Still, even more recent literature, that of the Elizabethan age, for instance, may remind us how completely the world becomes estranged from the erotic forms of a few centuries back. As for betrothals and marriages, neither the graceful forms of the courtly ideal nor the refined frivolity and open cynicism of the Roman de la Rose had any real hold upon them. In the very matter-of-fact considerations on which a match between noble families was based there was little room for the chivalrous fictions of prowess and of service. Thus it came about that the courtly notions of love were never corrected by contact with real life. They could unfold freely in aristocratic conversation, they could offer a literary amusement or a charming game, but no more. The ideal of love, such as it was, could not be lived up to, except in a fashion inherently false.

Cruel reality constantly gave the lie to it. At the bottom of the intoxicating cup of the Roman de la Rose the moralist exposed the bitter dregs. From the side of religion maledictions were poured upon love in all its aspects, as the sin by which the world is being ruined. Whence, exclaims Gerson, come the bastards, the infanticides, the abortions, whence hatred, whence poisonings? – Woman joins her voice to that from the pulpit: all the conventions of love are the work of men: even when it dons an idealistic guise, erotic culture is altogether saturated by male egotism: and what else is the cause of the endlessly repeated insults to matrimonial, to woman and her feebleness, but the need of masking this egotism? One word suffices, says Christine de Pisan, to answer all these infamies: it is not the women who have written the books.

Indeed, medieval literature shows little true pity for woman, little compassion for her weakness and the dangers and pains which love has in store for her. Pity took on a stereotyped and factitious form, in the sentimental fiction of the knight delivering the virgin. The author of the Quinze Joyes de Mariage, after having mocked at all the faults of women,
undertakes to describe also the wrongs they have to suffer. So far as is known, he never performed this task.

Civilization always needs to wrap up the idea of love in veils of fancy, to exalt and refine it, and thereby to forget cruel reality. The solemn or graceful game of the faithful knight or the amorous shepherd, the fine imagery of courtly allegories, however brutally life belied them, never lost their charm nor all their moral value. The human mind needs these forms, and they always remain essentially the same.
Chapter X

The Idyllic Vision of Life

The lasting vogue of the pastoral genre towards the end of the Middle Ages implies a reaction against the ideal of courtesy. Weary of the complicated formalism of chivalrous love, the aristocratic soul renounces the overstrung pretension of heroism in love, and praises rural life as the escape from it. The new, or rather revived, bucolic ideal remains essentially an erotic one. Still there is a strain of bucolic sentiment, the inspiration of which is rather ethical than erotic. We may perhaps distinguish it from the pastoral proper by calling it the idea of the simple life, or of *aurea mediocritas*. It is continually merging into the other.

The negation of the chivalric ideal arises among the nobles themselves. It is in court literature that sarcastic or sentimental criticism of it springs up. The burghers, on the other hand, are always striving to imitate the forms of the noble life. Nothing could be false than to picture the third estate in the Middle Ages as animated by class hatred, or scorning chivalry. On the contrary, the splendour of the life of the nobility dazzles and seduces them. The rich burghers take pains to adopt the forms and the tone of the nobility. Philip van Artevelde, the leader of the Flemish insurgents, whom one would like to picture as a simple, sober revolutionary, kept a state like a prince’s. His going in to dinner is announced by music. His meals are served up on silver plate like that of a count of Flanders; he goes about dressed in scarlet and miniver, preceded by his unfurled pennon showing a sable scutcheon with three silver hats. The great financier, Jacques Coeur, whom one instinctively thinks of as a modern, took a lively interest, according to Jacques de Lalaing’s biographer, in the fantastic and useless projects of that anachronistic knight-errant.

Among those who freed themselves from the chivalric
The Idyllic Vision of Life

illusion, seeing the misery and the falsehood of it, we must begin with those practical and frigid minds which were, so to say, opposed to it by temperament. Such were Philippe de Commines and his master, Louis XI. In describing the battle of Montlhéry, Commines abstains from all heroic fiction: no fine exploits, no dramatic turns; he only gives us a realistic picture of comings and goings, of hesitations and fears. He takes pleasure in telling of flights and noting how courage returned with security. He rejects all chivalrous terminology and scarcely mentions honour, which he treats almost as an inevitable evil.

The ideal of chivalry tallies with the spirit of a primitive age, susceptible of gross delusion and little accessible to the corrections of experience. Sooner or later intellectual progress demands a revision of this ideal. It does not disappear, however, it only sheds its too fantastic tendencies. Chivalry, far from being completely disavowed, drops its affectation of a quasi-religious perfection, and will be henceforth only a model of social life. The knight is transformed into the cavalier, who, though still keeping up a very severe code of honour and of glory, will no longer claim to be a defender of the Faith or a protector of the oppressed. The modern gentleman is still ideally linked with the medieval conception of chivalry.

The requirements of moral, aesthetic and social perfection weighed too heavily on the knight. This highly praised chivalry, considered from any point of view whatever, could not conceal its inherent falsity. It was a ridiculous anachronism, a piece of factitious making up. No social utility, no moral value, everywhere vanity and sin. Even as an aesthetic game, the courtly life ended by boring the players. So they turn to another ideal, that of simplicity and of repose. Does this mean that the disillusioned nobles turned to a spiritual life? Sometimes they did. At all times the lives of many courtiers and soldiers have ended in renunciation of the world. More often, however, they are content themselves to seek elsewhere the sublime life which chivalry failed to give. From the days of antiquity a promise had been held out of an earthly felicity to be found in rural life. Here true peace
seemed attainable without strife, simply by flight. Here was a sure refuge from envy and hatred, from the vanity of honours, from oppressive luxury and cruel war.

Medieval literature inherited from the classic authors the theme of the praise of the simple life, which may be called the negative side of the bucolic sentiment. Court life and aristocratic pretension are disavowed in favour of solitude, work and study. In the fourteenth century this theme had found its typical expression in France in *Le Dit de Franc Gontier* of Philippe de Vitri, bishop of Meaux, musician and poet, and a friend of Petrarch.

Soubz feuille vert, sur herbe delicable
Lez ru bruant et prez clere fontaine
Trouvay fichee une borde portable,
Ilece mengeott Gontier o dame Helayne
Fromage frais, laict, burre fromaige,
Craime, matton, pomme, nois, prune, poire,
Auls et oignons, escaillongne froyee
Sur crouste bise, au gros sel, pour mieux boire.¹

After the meal they kiss ‘both the mouth and the nose, the soft and the shaggy,’ then Gontier goes off to fell a tree, while Helayne goes to do the washing.

J’oy Gontier en abatant son arbre
Dieu mercier de sa vie seure:
‘Ne sçay,’ dit-il, ‘que sont pilliers de marbre,
Pommeaux luisans, murs vestus de paincture,
Je n’ay paour de traison tissue
Soubz beau semblant, ne qu’empoissonné soye
I’n vaisseau d’or. Je n’ay la teste nue
Devant thirant, ne genoil qui s’i ploye.

‘Verge d’uissier jamais ne me deboute,
Car jusques la ne m’esprent convoitise,
Ambicion, ne lescherie gloute.
Labour me paist en joieuse franchise;

¹ Under green leaves, on delightful grass Near a noisy brook and a clear fountain I found a portable board, There Gontier took his meal with dame Helayne On fresh cheese, milk, cream and cheese, curds, apple, nut, plum, pear, Garlic and onions, chopped shallots On a brown crust, with coarse salt, to drink the better.
Moult j’ame Helayne et elle moy sans faille,
Et c’est assez. De tombel n’avons cure.’
Lors je dy: ‘Las! serf de court ne vault maille,
Mais Franc Gontier vault en or jame pure.’

We observe how here already the motif of the simple life is coupled with that of natural love.

For later generations the poem of Philippe de Vitri remained the classic expression of the bucolic sentiment and of the happiness procured by security and independence, frugality and health, useful labour and conjugal love, without complications.

Eustache Deschamps imitated him in a number of ballads, of which one follows its model very closely.

En retournant d’une court souveraine
Ou j’avoie longuement sejourné,
En un bosquet, dessus une fontaine
Trouvay Robin le franc, enchapelé;
Chapeauls de flouris avoit cilz asublé
Dessus son chief, et Marion sa drue . . etc.

He has enlarged the motif in adding to it an indictment of a knight’s or a soldier’s life; there is no worse condition than that of a warrior; he commits the seven deadly sins every day; avarice and vainglory are the essence of warfare.

... Je vueil mener d’or en avant
Estat moien, c’est mon opinion,

1. I heard Gontier in felling his tree Thank God for his life of security. ‘I do not know,’ he said, ‘what are pillars of marble, Shining pommels, walls decorated with paintings; I have no fear of treason hidden Under fine appearances, nor that I shall be poisoned In a gold cup. I do not bare my head Before a tyrant, nor bend my knee.

‘No usher’s rod ever turns me away, For no covetousness, Ambition, nor lechery entice me (to court). Labour holds me in joyous liberty; I love Helayne dearly, and she loves me without fail, And that is enough. We are not afraid of the grave.’ Then I said: ‘Alas! a serf of the court is not worth a doit. But Franc Gontier is worth a sure gem set in gold.’

2. Returning from a sovereign’s court Where I had long sojourned, In a bush, near a fountain I found Robin the free, his head crowned, With chaplets of flowers had he adorned His head, and Marion, his beloved . .
Guerre laisser et vivre en labourant,
Guerre mener n'est que damnacion.¹

Generally, however, he simply praises the golden mean.

Je ne requier à Dieu fors qu'il me doint
En ce monde de lui servir et loer,
Vivre pour moy, cote entiere ou pourpoint,
Aucun cheval pour mon labour porter.
Et que je puisse mon estat gouverner
Moissennement, en grace, sanz envie,
Sanz trop avoir et sanz pain demander,
Car au jour d'ui est la plus seure vie.²

The quest of glory or of gain does but entail misery; only the poor man is happy, he lives tranquilly and long.

Un ouvrier et uns povres chartons
Va mauvostuz, deschierz et deschaulex
Maus en ouvrant prant en gre ses travaulx
Et liement fait son cuvre finir.
Par nuit dort bien pour ce uns telz cuez uolaulx
Voit quatre roys et leur regne finir.³

The picture of a working man surviving four kings pleased him so much that he used it several times.

The editor of Deschamps' works, Monsieur Gaston Raymond, supposes that the poems of this tendency all date from the last period of his life, when, deprived of his functions, forsaken and disappointed, he has at last learned to understand the vanity of court affairs. This is perhaps going too far; these poems would seem rather to be the expression of

1. Henceforth I will take up a Middle station, so I am resolved To leave off fighting and to live by labour; Waging war is but damnation.

2. I only ask of God to give me That I may serve and praise him in this world, Live for myself, my coat of doubler whole, One horse to carry my labour, And that I may govern my estate In mediocre style, in grace, without envy, Without having too much and without begging my bread, For this day is the safest life.

3. A working man and a poor waggoner, Go about ill dressed, in torn clothes and ill shod, But, labouring, he takes pleasure in his work And merrily finishes it. At night he sleeps well; and therefore such a loyal heart Sees four kings and their reigns end.
sentiments, more or less conventional, current among the
nobility itself in the midst of court life.

The theme of contempt for a courtier’s life enjoyed great
favour with a group of scholars who, towards the end of the
fourteenth century, mark the beginning of French humanism,
and whose circle was connected with that of the leaders of the
great councils of the Church. Pierre d’Ailly himself is the
author of a poem forming a companion piece with that of
Francois Gontier: the tyrant, in contrast with the happy rustic,
leading the life of a slave in continuous fear. The theme was
admirably fit to be treated in the epistolary style, after the
model of Petrarch. Jean de Montreuil tried his hand at it; so
did Nicolas de Clemanges, three times over. A secretary to
the duke of Orleans, the Milanese Ambrose de Millis,
addressed to Gontier Col a Latin letter, in which a courtier
dissuades his friend from entering into court service. Trans-
lated into French, this letter figures among the works of
Alain Chartier, under the title Le Curial, and afterwards
Robert Gaguin translated it back into Latin.

The theme was even worked out by a certain Charles
Rochefort in a long-winded allegorical poem, L’Abuzé en
Court, afterwards attributed to King René. Towards the end
of the fifteenth century, Jean Meschinot still rhymes as
follows:

La court est une mer, dont sourt
Vagues d’orgueil, d’envie orages . . .
Irc esmeut debats et outrages,
Qui les nefs jettent souvent bas:
Traison y fait son personnage.
Nage aulacre part pour tes ebats.1

In the sixteenth century the old motif had lost nothing of
its freshness.

For the most part the praises of a frugal life and of hard
work in the fields are not based on the delights of simplicity
and labour in themselves, nor on the security and indepen-
dence. The court is a sea, whence come Waves of pride, thunderstorms of
envy. Wrath stirs up quarrels and outrages, Which often cause the ships to
sink, Treason plays its part there, Swim elsewhere for your amusement.
dence they seemed to confer; the positive content of the ideal is the longing for natural love. The pastoral is the idyllic form assumed by erotic thought. Just like the dream of heroism which is at the bottom of the ideas of chivalry, the bucolic dream is somewhat more than a literary genre. It is a craving to reform life itself. It does not stop at describing the life of shepherds with its innocent and natural pleasures. People want to imitate it, if not in real life, at least in the illusion of a graceful game. Weary of factitious conceptions of love, the aristocracy sought a remedy for them in the pastoral ideal. Facile and innocent love amid the delights of nature seemed to be the lot of country people, theirs to be the truly enviable form of happiness. The villein, in his turn, becomes an ideal type.

The antique form of bucolic life still satisfied the aspirations of the waning Middle Ages. No need is felt to correct the pastoral fiction in accordance with real life. The new enthusiasm for nature does not mean a truly deep sense of reality, not even a sincere admiration for work; it is only an attempt to adorn courteous manners by an array of artificial flowers, playing at shepherd and shepherdess just as people had played at Lancelot and Guinevere.

In the Pastourelle, the short poem relating the facile adventure of the knight with the country girl, pastoral fancy is still in touch with reality. In the pastoral proper, however, the lover or poet thinks himself a shepherd too, all contact with reality is lost, all things are transferred to a sunlit landscape full of the singing of birds and playing of reed-pipes, where even sadness assumes a sweet sound. The faithful shepherd continues to resemble the faithful knight only too closely; after all, it is courtly love transposed into another key.

However artificial it might be, pastoral fancy still tended to bring the loving soul into touch with nature and its beauties. The pastoral genre was the school where a keener perception and a stronger affection towards nature were learned. The literary expression of the sentiment of nature was a by-product of the pastoral. Out of the simple words of exultation at the joys caused by sunshine and shade, birds and flowers, the loving description of scenery and rural life gradually
develops. A poem like *Le Dit de la Pastoure* of Christine de Pisan marks the transition of the pastoral to a new genre.

The bucolic idyll, then, offered itself as a new style for courtly amusement, a supplement to chivalry, as it were. Once received as such, it becomes another mask. The pastoral travesty serves for all sorts of diversions; the domains of pastoral fancy and of chivalric romanticism mingle. Tourna-ments are held in the apparel of an eclogue, like the 'Pas d’armes de la bergère' of King René. These pastoral represen-tations, even if they did not really deceive people, at least seem to have been regarded as important. Among his ‘Mar-vels of the World’ Chastellain mentions King René’s playing at shepherd.

\[
\begin{align*}
J'ay\ \text{un} \ \text{iol de Cécille} \\
Vu\ \text{devenir berger} \\
l'et\ sa\ \text{femme gentille} \\
\text{De ce mesme mestier,} \\
\text{Portant la panetière,} \\
\text{La houlette et chappeau,} \\
\text{Logeans sur la bruyère} \\
\text{Auprès de leur troupeau.} \quad 1
\end{align*}
\]

On another occasion, pastoral fancy had to supply a literary form for political satire. It is hard to imagine a more bizarre product than *Le Pastoralet*, a very long poem by a partisan of Burgundy, who, in this pretty disguise, relates the murder of Louis of Orleans for the purpose of exculpating Jean sans Peur and of venting his spleen on the house of Orleans. The two hostile dukes represented by Tristifer and Léonet in an environment of country dances and ornaments of flowers, Tristifer-Orleans robbing the shepherds of their bread and cheese, apples and nuts, shepherd’s reeds and bells, and threatening them with his large crook, even the battle of Agincourt described in pastoral guise... one would be inclined to think this style rather flamboyant, if we did not remember that Ariosto uses the same machinery for excul-

1. I have seen a king of Sicily Turn shepherd And his gentle wife Take to the same trade, Carrying the shepherd’s pouch, The crook and hat, Dwelling on the heath Nea’ their flock.
panning his patron, the Cardinal d’Este, who was hardly less guilty than Jean sans Peur.

The pastoral element is never absent from court festivities. It was admirably fitted both for masquerades and for political allegories. Here the bucolic conception coalesced with another of Scriptural origin: the prince and his people symbolized by the shepherd and his sheep, the duties of the ruler compared to those of the shepherd. Meschinot sings:

Seigneur, tu es de Dieu bergier,
Garde ses bestes loyaument,
Mets les en champ ou en vergier,
Mais ne les perds aucune ment,
Pour ta peine auras bon paiement
I’en bien le gardant, et se non,
A male heure reçus ce nom.1

Represented in actual mummeries, these ideas naturally took the outward appearance of the pastoral proper. At the marriage feasts of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York at Bruges in 1468, an ‘entremets’ glorified the princesses of yore as ‘noble shepherdesses who formerly tended and guarded the sheep of the “pays de par deça” (the provinces “over here”).’ At Valenciennes, in 1493, the revival of the land after the devastations of war was represented, ‘all in pastoral style.’ Even in war the pastoral game was kept up. The stone-mortars of the duke of Burgundy before Granson are called ‘the shepherd and the shepherdess’. Philippe de Ravestein takes the field with four-and-twenty noblemen; they are all dressed up as shepherds and carry shepherds’ pouches and crooks.

As the Roman de la Rose had done, because of its contrast with the chivalric ideal, so the bucolic ideal in its turn gave rise to an elegant quarrel. A number of variations had been made on the theme of Franc Gontier: every one had declared that he was sighing for a diet of cheese, apples, onions, brown

1. Lord, you are God’s shepherd, Guard his animals loyally, Lead them to the field or the orchard, But lose them by no means. You will have good payment for your trouble Of guarding them well, and if you do not, You received this name in an evil hour.
bread and fresh water, for a woodcutter's work with its liberty and carelessness. But aristocratic life still looked very little like it and sceptics were aware of the inherent falsity of the factitious ideal. Villon unmasked it. In *Les contredix* Franc Gontier he opposed to the idealized country man and his love under the roses, the fat canon, free from care, tasting good wines and the joys of love in a comfortable room, supplied with an ample hearth and a soft bed. The brown bread and the water of Franc Gontier?

Tous les oyseaulx d'ici en Babiloine
A tel escot une seule journée
Ne me tiendroient, non une matinée.¹

¹ All the birds from here to Babylon With such a fate a single day Would not keep me, no not one morning.
CHAPTER XI

The Vision of Death

No other epoch has laid so much stress as the expiring Middle Ages on the thought of death. An everlasting call of *memento mori* resounds through life. Denis the Carthusian, in his *Directory of the Life of Nobles*, exhorts them: 'And when going to bed at night, he should consider how, just as he now lies down himself, soon strange hands will lay his body in the grave'. In earlier times, too, religion had insisted on the constant thought of death, but the pious treatises of these ages only reached those who had already turned away from the world. Since the thirteenth century, the popular preaching of the mendicant orders had made the eternal admonition to remember death swell into a sombre chorus ringing throughout the world. Towards the fifteenth century, a new means of inculcating the awful thought into all minds was added to the words of the preacher, namely, the popular woodcut. Now these two means of expression, sermons and woodcuts, both addressing themselves to the multitude and limited to crude effects, could only represent death in a simple and striking form. All that the meditations on death of the monks of yore had produced, was now condensed into a very primitive image. This vivid image, continually impressed upon all minds, had hardly assimilated more than a single element of the great complex of ideas relating to death, namely, the sense of the perishable nature of all things. It would seem, at times, as if the soul of the declining Middle Ages only succeeded in seeing death under this aspect.

The endless complaint of the frailty of all earthly glory was sung to various melodies. Three motifs may be distinguished. The first is expressed by the question: Where are now all those who once filled the world with their splendour? The second motif dwells on the frightful spectacle of human beauty gone
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to decay. The third is the death-dance: death dragging along men of all conditions and ages.

Compared with the two others, the first of these themes is but a graceful and elegiac sigh. After having taken shape in Greek poetry, it was adopted by the Fathers, and pervaded the literature of all Christendom, and that of Islam also. Byron, too, used it in Don Juan. The Middle Ages cultivated it with special predilection. We find it in the heavy rhythm of the erudite poetry of the twelfth century:

Est ubi gloria nunc Babylonia? nunc ubi dirus
Nabugodonosor, et Daru vigor, illeque Cyrus? . . .
Nunc ubi Regulus? aut ubi Romulus, aut ubi Remus?
Stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus.1

Franciscan poetry of the thirteenth century (if the following lines are not of an older date) still preserves an echo of these rhyming hexameters:

Die ubi Salomon, olim tam nobilis
Vel Sampson ubi est, dux invincibilis,
Et pulcher Absalon, vultu mirabilis,
Aut dulcis Jonathas, multum amabilis? 2

Deschamps composed at least four of his ballads on this theme. Gerson worked it out in a sermon; Denis the Carthusian in his treatise, De quattuor hominum novissimis (on the four last things of man); Chastellain in a long poem entitled Le Pas de la Mort. Olivier de la Marche, in his Parement et Triomphe des Dames composed on it a lament over all the princesses who died in his time. Villon gives it a new accent of soft tenderness in his Ballade des Dames du Temps jadis, with the refrain:

Mais où sont les neiges d’antan?

And then he sprinkles it with irony in the Ballad of the

1. Where is now your glory, Babylon, where is now the terrible Nebuchadnezzar, and strong Darius and the famous Cyrus? Where is now Regulus, or where Romulus, or where Remus? The rose of yore is but a name, mere names are left to us.

2. Say where is Solomon, once so noble, Or Samson where is he, the invincible chief, And fair Absalom of the wonderful face, Or sweet Jonathan, the most amiable?
Lords by adding to the series of kings, popes, and princes of
his time the words:

Helas! et le bon roy d’Espaigne
Duquel je ne saay pas le nom.¹

However, the wistfulness of remembrance and the thought
of frailty in itself do not satisfy the need of expressing, with
violence, the shudder caused by death. The medieval soul
demands a more concrete embodiment of the perishable: that
of the putrefying corpse.

Ascetic meditation had, in all ages, dwelt on dust and
worms. The treatises on the contempt of the world had, long
since, evoked all the horrors of decomposition, but it is only
towards the end of the fourteenth century that pictorial art,
in its turn, seizes upon this motif. To render the horrible
details of decomposition, a realistic force of expression was
required, to which painting and sculpture only attained
towards 1400. At the same time, the motif spread from
ecclesiastical to popular literature. Until far into the sixteenth
century, tombs are adorned with hideous images of a naked
corpse with clenched hands and rigid feet, gaping mouth and
bowels crawling with worms. The imagination of those times
relished these horrors, without ever looking one stage further,
to see how corruption perishes in its turn, and flowers grow
where it lay.

A thought which so strongly attaches to the earthly side
of death can hardly be called truly pious. It would rather seem
a kind of spasmodic reaction against an excessive sensuality.
In exhibiting the horrors awaiting all human beauty, already
lurking below the surface of corporeal charms, these preachers
of contempt for the world express, indeed, a very materialistic
sentiment, namely, that all beauty and all happiness are worth-
less because they are bound to end soon. Renunciation founded
on disgust does not spring from Christian wisdom.

It is noteworthy that the pious exhortations to think of
death and the profane exhortations to make the most of youth
almost meet. A painting in the monastery of the Celestines at

¹. Alas! and the good king of Spain, Whose name I do not know.
Avignon, now destroyed, attributed by tradition to the founder, King René himself, represented the body of a dead woman, standing, enveloped in a shroud, with her head dressed and worms gnawing her bowels. In the inscription at the foot of the picture the first lines read:

Une fois sur toute femme belle
Mais par la mort suis devenu telle,
Ma chair estoit très belle, fraîche et tendre,
Or, est-elle toute tournée en cendre.
Mon corps estoit très plaisant et très gent, ¹
Je me souvoye souvent vestir de soye,
Or en droit fault que toute neu je soy.
Fourrée estois de gris et de menu van,
En grand palais me logeois à mon vueil,
Or suis logée en ce petit cercueil.
Ma chambre estoit de beaux tapis ornée,
Or est d’aragnes ma fosse environnée. ²

Here the memento mori still predominates. It tends imperceptibly to change into the quite worldly complaint of the woman who sees her charms fade, as in the following lines of the Parement et Triumphe des Dames by Olivier de la Marche.

Ces douxx regards, ces yeuxx faz pour plaisance,
Pensez y bien, ilz perdront leur clarté,
Nez et sourcilz, la bouche d’eloquence
Se pourriront .
Se vous vivez le droit cours de nature
Dont l.X ans est pour ung bien grant nombre,
Vostre beaulté changera en laydure,
Vostre santé en maladie obscure,
Et ne ferez en ce monde que encombre.

¹ It seems that two lines are missing after the lines 5 and 8.
² Once I was beautiful above all women But by death I became like this. My flesh was very beautiful, fresh and soft, Now it is altogether turned to ashes. My body was very pleasing and very pretty, I used frequently to dress in silk, Now I must rightly be quite nude. I was dressed in grey fur and miniver, I lived in a great palace as I wished, Now I am lodged in this little coffin. My room was adorned with fine tapestry, Now my grave is enveloped by cobwebs.
Se fille avez, vous luy serez ung umbré,
Celle sera requise et demandée,
Et de chascun la mère habandonnée.¹

All pious purpose has disappeared in the ballads of Villon, where the old courtesan, 'la belle heaulmière', calls to mind her irresistible beauty of former times and is deeply grieved at its sad decline.

Qu'est devenu ce front poly,
Ces cheveulx blons, sourcils voutiz,
Grant entroeil, le regart joly,
Dont prenoie les plus soubtilz;
Ce beau nez droit, grant ne petitz,
Ces petites jointes oreilles,
Menton fourchu, cler vis traitiz
Et ces belles levres vermeilles?
.Le front ridé, les cheveux gris,
Les sourcilz cheuz, les yeuls estains. ...²

This inability to free oneself from the attachment to matter manifests itself in yet other forms. A result of the same sentiment is to be found in the extreme importance ascribed in the Middle Ages to the fact that the bodies of certain saints had never decayed – that of Saint Rose of Viterbo, for example. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin exempting her body from earthly corruption was on that account regarded as the most precious of all graces. On various occasions attempts were made to retard decomposition. The features of the corpse of

¹. These sweet looks, these eyes made for pleasance, Remember, they will lose their lustre, Nose and eyelashes, the eloquent mouth Will putrefy. ... If you live your natural lifetime, Of which sixty years is a great deal, Your beauty will change into ugliness, Your health into obscure malady, And you will only be in the way here below. If you have a daughter, you will be a shadow to her, She will be in request and asked for, And the mother will be abandoned by all.

². What has become of this smooth forehead, Fair hair, curving eyelashes, Large space between the eyes, pretty looks, Wherewith I caught the most subtle ones, That fine straight nose, neither large nor small, Th*re* tiny ears close to the head, The dimpled chin, well-shaped bright face, And those beautiful vermilion lips? ... The forehead wrinkled, hair grey, The eyelashes come off, lack-lustre eyes. ...
Pierre de Luxembourg were touched up with paint to preserve them intact until the burial. The body of a heretic preacher of the sect of the Turlupins, who died in prison, before sentence was passed, was preserved in lime for a fortnight, that it might be burned at the same time with a living heretical woman.

The importance attached to being buried in the soil of one’s own country gave rise to usages which the Church had to interdict strictly as being contrary to the Christian religion. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when a prince or a person of rank died far from his country, the body was often cut up and boiled so as to extract the bones, which were sent home in a chest, whereas the rest was interred, not without ceremony, however, on the spot. Emperors, kings, and bishops have undergone this strange operation. Pope Boniface VIII forbade it as detestandae feritatis abusus, quam ex quodam more horribili nonnulli fidèles improvide prosequuntur. Yet his successors sometimes granted dispensations. Numbers of Englishmen who fell in France in the Hundred Years’ War enjoyed this privilege, notably Edward of York and the earl of Suffolk, who died at Agincourt; Henry V himself; William Glasdale, who perished at Orleans at the time of its relief; a nephew of Sir John Fastolfe, and others.

At the close of the Middle Ages the whole vision of death may be summed up in the word *macabre*, in its modern meaning. Of course, this meaning is the outcome of a long process. But the sentiment it embodies, of something gruesome and dismal, is precisely the conception of death which arose during the last centuries of the Middle Ages. This bizarre word appeared in French in the fourteenth century, under the form *macabré*, and, whatever may be its etymology, as a proper name. A line of the poet Jean Le Fèvre, ‘Je fis de Macabré la dance,’ which may be dated 1376, remains the birth-certificate of the word for us.

Towards 1400 the conception of death in art and literature

1. An abuse of abominable savagery, practised by some of the faithful in a horrible way and inconsiderately.
took a spectral and fantastic shape. A new and vivid shudder was added to the great primitive horror of death. The macabre vision arose from deep psychological strata of fear; religious thought at once reduced it to a means of moral exhortation. As such it was a great cultural idea, till in its turn it went out of fashion, lingering on in epitaphs and symbols in village cemeteries.

The idea of the death-dance is the central point of a whole group of connected conceptions. The priority belongs to the motif of the three dead and three living men, which is found in French literature from the thirteenth century onward. Three young noblemen suddenly meet three hideous dead men, who tell them of their past grandeur and warn them of their own near end. Art soon took hold of this suggestive theme. We can see it still in the striking frescoes of the *Campo Santo* of Pisa. The sculpture of the portal of the church of the Innocents at Paris, which the duke of Berry had carved in 1408, but which has not been preserved, represented the same subject. Miniature painting and woodcuts spread it broadcast.

The theme of the three dead and three living men connects the horrible motif of putrefaction with that of the death-dance. This theme, too, seems to have originated in France, but it is unknown whether the pictorial representation preceded the scenic or the reverse. The thesis of Monsieur Émile Mâle, according to which the sculptural and pictorial motifs of the fifteenth century were supposed as a rule to be derived from dramatic representations, has not been able to keep its ground, on critical examination. It may be, however, that we should make an exception in favour of the death-dance. Anyhow, the Dance of the Dead has been acted as well as painted and engraved. The duke of Burgundy had it performed in his mansion at Bruges in 1449. If we could form an idea of the effect produced by such a dance, with vague lights and shadows gliding over the moving figures, we should no doubt be better able to understand the horror inspired by the subject, than we are by the aid of the pictures of Guyot Marchant or Holbein.

The woodcuts with which the Parisian printer, Guyot
Marchant, ornamented the first edition of the *Danse Macabre* in 1485 were, very probably, imitated from the most celebrated of these painted death-dances, namely, that which, since 1424, covered the walls of the cloister of the churchyard of the Innocents at Paris. The stanzas printed by Marchant were those written under these mural paintings; perhaps they even hail back to the lost poetry of Jean Le Fèvre, who in his turn seems to have followed a Latin model. The woodcuts of 1485 can give but a feeble impression of the paintings of the Innocents, of which they are not exact copies, as the costumes prove. To have a notion of the effect of these frescoes, one should rather look at the mural paintings of the church of La Chaise-Dieu, where the unfinished condition of the work heightens the spectral effect.

The dancing person whom we see coming back forty times to lead away the living, originally does not represent Death itself, but a corpse: the living man such as he will presently be. In the stanzas the dancer is called ‘the dead man’ or ‘the dead woman’. It is a dance of the dead and not of Death; the researches of Monsieur Gédéon Huet have made it probable that the primitive subject was a roundabout dance of dead people come forth from their graves, a theme which Goethe revived in his *Totentanz*. The indefatigable dancer is the living man himself in his future shape, a frightful double of his person. ‘It is yourself’, said the horrible vision to each of the spectators. It is only towards the end of the century that the figure of the great dancer, of a corpse with hollow and fleshless body, becomes a skeleton, as Holbein depicts it. Death in person has then replaced the individual dead man.

While it reminded the spectators of the frailty and the vanity of earthly things, the death-dance at the same time preached social equality as the Middle Ages understood it, Death levelling the various ranks and professions. At first only men appeared in the picture. The success of his publication, however, suggested to Guyot the idea of a dance macabre of women. Martial d’Auvergne wrote the poetry; an unknown artist, without equalling his model, completed the pictures by a series of feminine figures dragged along by
a corpse. Now it was impossible to enumerate forty dignities and professions of women. After the queen, the abbess, the nun, the saleswoman, the nurse, and a few others, it was necessary to fall back on the different states of feminine life: the virgin, the beloved, the bride, the woman newly married, the woman with child. And here the sensual note reappears, to which we referred above. In lamenting the frailty of the lives of women, it is still the briefness of joy that is deplored, and with the grave tone of the *memento mori* is mixed the regret for lost beauty.

Nothing betrays more clearly the excessive fear of death felt in the Middle Ages than the popular belief, then widely spread, according to which Lazarus, after his resurrection, lived in continual misery and horror at the thought that he should have again to pass through the gate of death. If the just had so much to fear, how could the sinner soothe himself? And then what motif was more poignant than the calling up of the agony of death? It appeared under two traditional forms: the *Ars moriendi* and the *Quatuor hominum novissima*, that is, the four last experiences awaiting man, of which death was the first. These two subjects were largely propagated in the fifteenth century by the printing-press and by engravings. The Art of Dying, as well as the Last Four Things, comprised a description of the agony of death, in which it is easy to recognize a model supplied by the ecclesiastical literature of former centuries.

Chastellain, in a long-winded poem, *Le Pas de la Mort*, has assembled all the above motifs; he gives successively the image of putrefaction – the lament: Where are the great ones of the earth? – an outline of a death-dance – and the art of dying. Being prolix and heavy, he needs a great many lines to express what Villon presents in half a stanza. But in comparing them we recognize their common model. Chastellain writes:

\[
\text{Il n'a membre ne facture} \\
\text{Qui ne sente sa pourreture.} \\
\text{Avant que l'esperit soit hors,} \\
\text{Le coeur qui veut crevier au corps}
\]
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Haulce et souliève la poitrine
Qui se veult joindre à son eschine.
- La face est tainte et apalhe,
Et les yeux treilliés en la teste.
La parole luy est faillie,
Car la langue au palais se lie.
Le poulx tressault et sy halette.

Les os desjoindent à tous lez;
Il n'a nerf qu'au rompre ne tende. 1

And Villon:

La mort le fait fœmîr, pallir,
Le nez courber, les vaines tendre,
L'œ col enfler, la chair mollir,
Jointes et nerfs croistre et estendre.  .

And again the sensual thought mingles with it:

Corps femenin, qui tant es tendre,
Poly, souéf, si precieux,
Te fauldra il ces maulx attendre?
Oy, ou tout vit aller es ciculx. 3

Nowhere else were all the images tending to evoke the horror of death assembled so strikingly as in the churchyard of the Innocents at Paris. There the medieval soul, fond of a religious shudder, could take its fill of the horrible. Above all other saints, the remembrance of the saints of that spot, and of their bloody and pitiful martyrdom, was fitted to awake the crude compassion which was dear to the epoch. The fifteenth

1. There is not a limb nor a form, Which does not smell of putrefaction. Before the soul is outside, The heart which wants to burst in the body Raises and lifts the chest Which nearly touches the backbone. – The face is discoloured and pale, And the eyes veiled in the head Speech fails him, For the tongue cleaves to the palate. The pulse trembles and he pants. . . .
The bones are disjointed on all sides; There is not a tendon which does not stretch as to burst.

2. Death makes him shudder and turn pale, The nose to curve, the veins to swell, The neck to inflate, the flesh to soften, Joints and tendons to grow and swell.

3. O female body, which is so soft, Smooth, suave, precious, Do these evils await you? Yes, or you must go to heaven quite alive.
century honoured the Holy Innocents with special veneration. Louis XI presented to the church ‘a whole Innocent’, encased in a crystal shrine. The cemetery was preferred to every other place of burial. A bishop of Paris had a little of the earth of the churchyard of the Innocents put into his grave, as he could not be laid there. The poor and the rich were interred without distinction. They did not rest there long, for the cemetery was used so much, twenty parishes having a right of burial there, that it was necessary, in order to make room, to dig up the bones and sell the tombstones after a very short time. It was believed that in this earth a human body was decomposed to the bone in nine days. Skulls and bones were heaped up in charnel-houses along the cloisters enclosing the ground on three sides, and lay there open to the eye by thousands, preaching to all the lesson of equality. The noble Boucicaut, among others, had contributed to the construction of these ‘fine charnel-houses.’ Under the cloisters the death-dance exhibited its images and its stanzas. No place was better suited to the simian figure of grinning death, dragging along pope and emperor, monk and fool. The duke of Berry, who wished to be buried there, had the history of the three dead and the three living men carved at the portal of the church. A century later, this exhibition of funeral symbols was completed by a large statue of Death, now in the Louvre, and the only remnant of it all.

Such was the place which the Parisians of the fifteenth century frequented as a sort of lugubrious counterpart of the Palais Royal of 1789. Day after day, crowds of people walked under the cloisters, looking at the figures and reading the simple verses, which reminded them of the approaching end. In spite of the incessant burials and exhumations going on there, it was a public lounge and a rendezvous. Shops were established before the charnel-houses and prostitutes strolled under the cloisters. A female recluse was immured on one of the sides of the church. Friars came to preach and processions were drawn up there. A procession of children only (12,500 strong, thinks the Burgher of Paris) assembled there, with tapers in their hands, to carry an Innocent to Notre Dame
The desire to invent a visible image of all that appertained to death entailed the neglecting of all those aspects of it which were not suited to direct representation. Thus the cruder conceptions of death, and these only, impressed themselves continually on the minds. The macabre vision does not represent the emotions of tenderness or of consolation. The elegiac note is wanting altogether. At the bottom the macabre sentiment is self-seeking and earthly. It is hardly the absence of the departed dear ones that is deplored; it is the fear of one’s own death, and this only seen as the worst of evils. Neither the conception of death the consoler, nor that of rest long wished for, of the end of suffering, of the task performed or interrupted, have a share in the funeral sentiment of that epoch. The soul of the Middle Ages did not know the ‘divine depth of sorrow.’ Or, rather, it knew it only in connexion with the Passion of Christ.

In all these sombre lamentations about death the accents of true tenderness are extremely rare. They could, however, hardly be wanting in relation to the death of children. And, indeed, Martial d’Auvergne, in his death-dance of women, makes the little girl, when led away by death, say to her mother: ‘Take good care of my doll, my knuckle-bones and my fine dress.’ But this touching note is only heard exceptionally. The literature of the epoch knew child-life so little! When Antoine de la Salle, in Le Reconsort de Madame du Fresne, wishes to console a mother for the death of her twelve-year-old son, he can think of nothing better than citing a still more cruel loss: the heart-rending case of a boy given as a hostage and put to death. To overcome grief, the only advice he can offer is to abstain from all earthly attachments. A doctrinaire and dry consolation! La Salle, however, adds a second short story. It is a version of the popular tale of the dead child, who came back to beg its mother to weep no more, that its shroud might dry. And here suddenly from this simple story — not of his own invention — there arises a poetical
tenderness and beneficent wisdom, which we look for in vain in the thousands of voices repeating in various tones the awful *memento mori*. Folk-tale and folk-song, no doubt, in these ages preserved many sentiments which higher literature hardly knew.

The dominant thought, as expressed in the literature, both ecclesiastical and lay, of that period, hardly knew anything with regard to death but these two extremes: lamentation about the briefness of all earthly glory, and jubilation over the salvation of the soul. All that lay between — pity, resignation, longing, consolation — remained unexpressed and was, so to say, absorbed by the too much accentuated and too vivid representation of Death hideous and threatening. Living emotion stiffens amid the abused imagery of skeletons and worms.