



# The Spirit and Influence of Chivalry

JOHN BATTY

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In this work, the author considers the principles of Chivalry and describes the Chivalric feeling which has emanated from the Middle Ages, tracing its operations on the mind and actions of mankind. The manners and ideas explained here may appear odd to us now, but they were very real to the Medieval people of the time they represent.

**John Batty** was a private antiquarian and writer.

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## PREFACE.

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THIS essay was originally composed some twenty-five years ago, when the writer was a young man and in what might be termed the romantic stage of life.

The manuscript lay on the shelf until quite recently ; on being casually read to several literary friends it was deemed to possess merit and worthy of publication. The matured judgment of the author, however, recognised that certain ideas in it would be better toned down, some effusive expressions modified, and passages which might possibly be objectionable entirely left out ; in short, he decided that the whole essay should be re-written and thoroughly revised before venturing to place it in the



hands of a discerning and reading public.

In the process of revising and polishing the author has been fortunate in having valuable assistance freely rendered, for which he feels extremely grateful, namely, to Miss L. Toulmin Smith, of London, who kindly corrected the proofs and obligingly furnished a translation from an ancient romance in Norman-French bearing upon the subject ; to Mr. D. A. Cruse, B.A., of Leeds, who spared no pains in thoroughly revising the MSS. and showed great interest in the work ; and to Mr. George Williamson, of East Ardsley, who favoured the author with several important suggestions.

Finding that the original MSS. did not produce the amount of printed matter specified in the prospectus, the author has had the agreeable task imposed upon him of making considerable additions, and this has delayed the publication of the work.

Judging it unadvisable to disturb

the flow of language and the continuity of ideas expressed in the earlier portion of the work, which contains more particularly the sentiments of the author on the fascinating theme of chivalry and his estimate of it, he set about to write or rather compile what may be termed 'supplementary chapters.' In these he takes little credit for original matter, but only a novel method of dealing with facts and opinions collected from many sources and the result of much research, intended to illustrate more fully the effect of ancient chivalry on the manners and customs of the 'Middle Ages,' and, furthermore, to substantiate the statements which had been previously made in the essay.

The author ventures to believe that some of the concluding chapters, namely, 'Chivalry as represented by Archæology and in Pictorial Art,' and the 'Doctrines and Maxims of Chivalry, as inculcated in the Ancient Romances and the Statutes of

the Orders of Knighthood,' will, at least, be acceptable to the social antiquary, and give a peculiar value, if not charm, to the present undertaking. These, to the historical mind, are tangible and unmistakable proofs that the *élite* of the period, at all events, were imbued with and actuated by the spirit of chivalry, seeing that they delighted to be surrounded by scenes from ancient and popular romances, which were the favourite recital and reading of the times. They also had them depicted on tapestry and carved on everyday utensils of charming artistic beauty and workmanship, as numerous specimens of mediæval antiquities both in English and Continental museums amply testify.

In passing it may be remarked that the French archæologists, Du Sommerard, Viollet-le-Duc, Labarte, Lacroix, and others, have distinguished themselves by the publication of magnificently illustrated and minutely descriptive works in eluci-

dation of the arts, manners and costumes of the 'Moyen Âge' and the 'Renaissance' period.

In order to arrive at a just conclusion, if possible, of the whole matter, a few extracts are given from various authors, exhibiting what may be designated the 'dark side' of the somewhat brilliant picture of chivalry displayed in the present work. Though this may be acceptable to the sceptical or those who have only an indifferent opinion of the true merits of chivalry, and are ready to assert that it was merely a fantastic emotion of the past, yet those who have studied the subject deeply and with sympathetic feelings will be fully convinced of its civilizing and humanizing effect on society. Such students, the author ventures to believe, will acknowledge that he has established his point in favour of the everlasting influence of the noble spirit of chivalry as instanced by the overwhelming evidences and historical illustrations

adduced, and by the examples of courtesy and self-sacrifice constantly occurring in the world's history.

It is not the author's intention to describe the paraphernalia and accoutrements of knighthood, or to enter into the minutiae of its fantastic garniture, with its peculiar changes of fashion ; neither does he purpose to furnish a description of the imposing spectacle of the tournament, with its conditions, ceremonies, and moving incidents. Those who desire to be acquainted with these particulars, may be referred to the magnificent word-pictures of Sir Walter Scott, who surpasses all other writers in this literary art, also in his mastery of details and marvellous realization of the characters and accessories of the period he wishes to portray—as witness his charming tale of 'Ivanhoe.'

The mediæval period has ever been an attractive one to novelists and historians of almost every country, who have illustrated in their works the heraldic show and martial array

of chivalry—some of them with singular power, fascination, and beauty. Those who wish to see the various styles of armour, the equipment of knights, and the insignia of knight-hood, should consult Meyrick's great work on 'Ancient Armour,' in which are shown many kinds of martial defence.

An excellent idea of the appearance of an armed knight would be gained by visiting the wonderful collection of armour preserved in beautiful and bright condition in the Tower of London, where may be seen figures on horseback, clad from head to foot in complete suits-of-mail, from the rude suits-of-chain to the delicately embossed suits-of-steel.

These antique productions of the armourer's skill, viewed in a chronological order, indicate a growing perception of the beautiful by the ornamentation upon them, likewise an adaptation of the various parts of the armour to the object in view, as well as showing the progress of art and

manufacture in this particular branch. Hewitt, in his descriptive catalogue of the Tower Armories, remarks : 'The fertility of invention shown by the armourers of the Middle Ages is deserving of attentive consideration. As the chief business of existence was warfare, the first distinction personal prowess, so the art of the armourer became the paramount art of life.'

It is the purpose of the author rather to consider the abstract principle of chivalry, only incidentally alluding to its ostensible medium, and to endeavour to describe the chivalric feeling which animated the Middle Ages, and to trace its operations upon the mind and actions of mankind.

And in so doing he would impress upon his readers, as they review this interesting subject, the desirability, if they wish to arrive at the truth, of trying to enter into the spirit and feeling of these times. Men should pause before they ridicule the ideas and manners of the people of past

ages, and be ready to believe that there is a natural cause for every historical phenomenon if they will only search it out. The true attitude of scientific inquiry is a spirit of humility. Bearing this in mind, and acting up to it, men will, in all probability, judge more correctly, and see the reason of certain deeds, and the causes which brought about great movements affecting the human race.

EAST ARDSLEY,  
NEAR WAKEFIELD,  
*August, 1890.*



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# *THE SPIRIT AND INFLUENCE OF CHIVALRY.*



## INTRODUCTION.

IN viewing the most remote period of a nation's history—the mythic heroic, or traditional age—we find it enveloped in a thick and almost impenetrable mist of the marvellous and superhuman. The characters that flit to and fro in the dim distance—existing, as it were, betwixt heaven and earth—seem magnified into huge, god-like beings of Titanic proportions, who are said to have performed wonderful feats of prowess, strength, and agility, displaying great endurance, and traversing vast fields of adventure ; to whom neither cold, nor storms, nor distance, nor danger offered any barrier ; whose delight

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and object in life seemed to be to combat other giants, doing vast service to the rest of the human race in redressing their wrongs, in slaying robbers and in ridding the world of frightful monsters—greatly exaggerated (through the power of imagination) into dragons, large serpents, and strange beasts of horrible form. Infant Greece, like all Aryan nations in their earliest times, had its mythic age—its Hercules and Perseus—knights errant, so to speak, of antiquity; men of enormous strength and unconquerable will. Scandinavia was prolific in giants noted for agility, perseverance and immense physical strength—heroes deified in their pantheon of mythology: for example, Thor, the great hammer-wielder, their god of thunder, comparable with the great Jove of classical mythology. Physical power and skill are always admired by savage and barbarous peoples, and the rulers and chieftains of the tribes were expressly chosen for these qualities.

The Vikings—the sea-kings of the

North—scoured the seas, and swooped down upon all they came across; for the life of a pirate in their eyes was honourable and praiseworthy, and all that they obtained by this means rightful. Yet even these bold and rough seamen had some spark of pity in them; they thought that women and boys—innocent people—were no fit objects of plunder, and always strove to shield them.

Britain has had its Gog and Magog, St. George and the Dragon, Jack the Giant-killer and other doughty heroes; all traceable to the legendary era of the nation's history.

‘ I am Saint George, the noble champion  
bold,  
And with my glittering sword  
I've won three crowns of gold.  
It's I who fought the fiery dragon,  
And brought it to the slaughter,  
And so I won fair Sabra,  
The King of Egypt's daughter.  
Seven have I won, but married none,  
And bear my glory all alone.  
With my sword in my hand,  
Who dare against me stand?  
I swear I'll cut him down  
With my victorious brand.’

*Peace Egg.*

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The infancy of nations has ever been delighted and lulled with stories—strongly appealing to the imagination—of marvel, achievement, and warlike adventure; and many of these are embodied in the folk-lore of the special country. It may fairly be inferred that the lesson of all this is, that there is always some element of good in the world ready to counteract its innumerable and gigantic evils; or to have recourse to metaphor, there is ever a virtuous, redoubtable knight who, being armed with the sharp and trenchant sword of truth and right, proves eventually all-conquering over tyranny, oppression, and injustice.

Though we may come across, in reading the ancient legends of semi-barbarous peoples, slight traces of honour, truth, and devotion, akin to the spirit of chivalry, yet they are so strangely mingled with deeds of ferocious cruelty, bloodshed, and disregard of human life that we are glad to turn our attention from such scenes of horror and proceed to trace the silent growth of true chivalry as it

came in contact with, and was moulded by, the influence of Christianity.

The manners and graces of chivalry never entered into, or formed part of, the civilization of the ancient polities. In the age of chivalry woman held a high position in the social scale—at least equal to man. For her sake its greatest achievements were performed and the most romantic adventures undertaken; she even became an object of veneration. But amongst the ancient nations—as Egypt, Assyria, India, and even polished Greece and imperial Rome—her position was degraded, and she was considered much inferior to man—her lord and master—and was often treated as little better than a slave. It would be difficult to find any resemblance between the Roman eques and the chivalrous knight; the Roman eques discharged civil functions regarding the administration of justice and the farming of the public revenue; but the chivalry of the Middle Ages had no such office

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to perform. Moreover, the Roman was stern and unamiable, by no means fond of adventure—priding himself in pursuing a straight and unflinching line of duty; was eminently patriotic, doing everything for the public good and the honour of his country. He was also a stranger to the tender endearments of domestic life, and was, above all, a practical man of business, thoroughly competent to govern, and gifted with a wonderful power of organization. On the other hand, the knight of the ages of chivalry was fond of strange and romantic adventure, was attached to his chief or lord; everything poetic charmed him; he was softened and refined by the graces of woman, and a patron of the troubadour. His character was influenced and moulded by the social and religious forces of those stirring days. Thus there appears little in the ancient civilizations analogous to the chivalry and knighthood of mediæval times.

To Christianity was due the birth of this purer and more beneficent state

of things, unknown before its introduction.

In a general subject like the one before us, it is not easy to mark the precise years of the rise, progress, maturity, and decline of chivalry, for historians of the Middle Ages are not all unanimous on the dates of these periods. However, the stages of its growth and development shall be indicated as accurately as possible.



## THE ORIGIN OF CHIVALRY.

IN the first place, before entering fully into the subject, it will not be amiss if we endeavour to explain the meaning of the words 'chivalry' and 'knight.' Chivalry is derived from the French word 'cheval,' a horse, and meant that part of an army or array of soldiers that was accustomed to ride on horseback; they were called the cavalry, and constituted in mediæval warfare the strongest arm of military defence.

Knight is originated from the Anglo-Saxon 'cniht,' signifying 'boy,' or 'a servant,' but afterwards 'a rider.' The horse was regarded with great fondness by the knight, who spoke of it as his 'goode steede,' and often gave it the name of the mistress of his affections. In all the feats of chivalry it played an important part.

Hampson, in his 'Origines Patriciæ,' states that :

'Amongst the ancient Germans, their chiefs were surrounded by a troop of youths, selected as the flower of the hundreds, to constitute at once their glory and their defence; and a very ancient order of nobility still existing, whose members are styled youths, for such is the meaning of the old German *knetchen*, and the modern English knights. They are otherwise termed riders or cavaliers, that is, horsemen, and the service of those youths on horseback is particularly noticed by the Roman historian (Tacitus).

'The bravery of the German "juvenes," or knights, is commemorated by Ammianus Marcellinus, and the use of the term "juvenis" was understood to signify a martial youth, and these constituted the knighthood and chivalry of the period. For this service and attendance in the field, *cniht* became an appellation equally attributable to the servant and the professed soldier. At what period