

# The Medieval Tournament: A Functional Sport of the Upper Class

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Many a good tourney have I taken part in with the deadly blows I strike, for I can nowhere without men crying out 'this is Piere Vidal . . . who loves battles and tourneys more than a monk loves peace, and grows sick of resting and remaining too long in one place.'<sup>1</sup>

The twelfth century troubador who wrote these martial lines truly represented the attitude of early chivalry; glory in both battle and tourney was a principal concern to the knights of this period. One would be mistaken, however, in assuming that Piere Vidal typified a cavalier of later years. By the late fifteenth century an obvious lack of the old adventurous zeal caused William Caxton to petition the English nobles:

O ye Knyghtes of Englund where is the custom and vsage of noble chyualry that was vsed in tho dayes.<sup>2</sup>

Hoping to redress this deficiency, Caxton suggested that the king hold periodic jousts and tourneys. He obviously had great faith in the tournament's ability to influence and shape the ideals and images of the upper class.<sup>3</sup> Caxton's hope was empty, however, for the tournament had so drastically changed within three centuries that it, too, was without the old customs and usage. The tourney of Piere Vidal's day had been a swarming, brutal, even deadly melee,<sup>4</sup> the replica of a pitched battle between camps of mounted warriors. The fifteenth

<sup>1</sup>From a poem by Piere Vidal, of the late twelfth century in, *Eight Troubadour Poets*, translated from the *Provençal* with introduction and notes by Barbara Smythe, (N.Y.: Cooper Square Publ., 1966), p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>. William Caxton *The Boke of the Ordre of Chivalry* (ed., Alfred Byles, London; Early English Text Society, 1926) p. 122.

<sup>3</sup>. Caxton said that tourneys would "cause gentylmen to resort to thauncyent customes of chivalry to grete fame and ronomee." *ibid.* p. 124.

<sup>4</sup>Herein the French word Melee, which means a confused struggled, will be anglicized. Others have referred to this disorganized free-for-all as a "bouhourt." See, for instance, Walter Umminger, *Supermen Heroes and Gods*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963) p. 176.

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century found the tournament a well-regulated spectacle of individual jousting matches.

Sport has often both mirrored and conditioned many aspects of particular social classes; change in one has often effected change in the other. The tournament and the medieval upper class appear to have been related in this way.<sup>6</sup>

Thus a detailed consideration of the changes and various determinants of change in this medieval sport could be helpful in understanding the transformation of the most visible element of medieval society itself.<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Strutt characterized the duality of the tournament and the resultant confusion:

Every kind of military combat made in conformity to certain rules, and practiced by the knights and their esquires for diversions or gallantry was anciently called a tournament; yet these amusements frequently differed materially from each other, and have been distinguished accordingly by various denominations in the modern times.<sup>8</sup>

Simply stated, the early tournament, or melee, was a battle-like conflict involving many knights who divided into parties and fought simultaneously. The later tournament involved man on man tests of skill, jousting, generally held on elaborate courses separated by wooden fences. Quite clearly, the melee typified the earlier manifestations of the tournament.<sup>9</sup>

While opinions differ regarding the origins and diffusion of the

<sup>5</sup>While the joust did occur during the earlier period and the melee later, this general transition has been recognized previously. See Francis H. Cripps-Day, *The History of the Tournament in England and France*, (London: B. Quaritch Ltd. 1918); Robert C. Clephan *The Tournament: its Periods and Phases*. (London: Methuen and Co., 1919).

<sup>6</sup>For the gradual change in chivalry and the ideal in general see A. Abram, "Chivalry," in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, VI, (New York: MacMillan, 1936), pp. 799-813; F. Warre Cornish, *Chivalry*, (N.Y.: MacMillan, 1901); Arthur Ferguson, *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry*, (Durham, N.C. (Duke Univ. Press, 1960)); Johann Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1952); Raymond Kilgour *The Decline of Chivalry*, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1937); E. Prestage (ed.) *Chivalry*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928); Sidney Painter *French Chivalry*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940).

<sup>7</sup>Because of the often dramatic regional differences in medieval society, this inquiry will focus its attention on England and Northern France.

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Strutt *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*; (London: Methuen, 1903 ed.) p. 105.

<sup>9</sup>The chronicles of the twelfth and thirteenth century indicate this. See Clephan, *loc. cit.*: K.G.T. Webser "The Twelfth-Century Tourney," in *Anniversary Papers by Colleagues and Pupils of George Lyman Kittredge*, (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1913) pp. 227-234; Noel Denholm-Young "The Tournament in the Thirteenth Century," in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*. (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1948) pp. 240-268. Many of these chronicles are available in editions by the *Early English Text Society* or the *Rolls Series*.



*Knight in Arms*

early tourney, most scholars agree that the features of the melee were widespread by the twelfth century.<sup>10</sup> The melee was, in essence, a battle whose object was not to kill the opponent but to capture him for ransom. William FitzStephen's often-quoted description of youthful Londoners engaging in mock tournaments during Lent emphasizes the words "swarm" and "host." These words are most significant for understanding the melee; it was now well regulated.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, on numerous occasions the warriors abandoned the ideals of sport and engaged in real combat.<sup>12</sup> The going was extremely hazardous. Once the melee begins, "no effort is made to mitigate the effect of the sharp weapons; a spear pins shield to arm and arm to side, ears and arms are lopped off, and bodies transfixed so that the lance, pennon and all, stands out six feet beyond."<sup>13</sup> Many never fully recovered from the trauma of the sport. Some never returned.<sup>14</sup>

The object of the melee was to capture as many opponents as possible. This fact has been clearly outlined in the twelfth century work *L'Histoire De Guillaume le Marechal*, based on the life of an English noble, William Marshall. Marshall spent at least twenty years of his youth as a tournament champion in England and northern France. In his first tournament William:

wasted no time in getting about the business of the day. Attacking Philip de Valognes. . . he seized his horse by the reins and forced him out of the melee. Then after taking Philip's pledge that he would pay his ransom, William returned to the combat and captured two more knights . . . Each of the captured knights was forced to surrender all his equipment. William gained war horses, palfreys, arms, and armor for his own use, roncins for his servants and sumpter horses for his baggage.<sup>15</sup>

A well-fought tourney could yield a healthy amount of ransom and equipment as well as honor and renown.

While the basic object of the sport seemed clear to the participants,

<sup>10</sup> Cornish, *op. cit.*, p. 91; Denholm-Young, "The Tournament. . ." p. 241, n. 1.

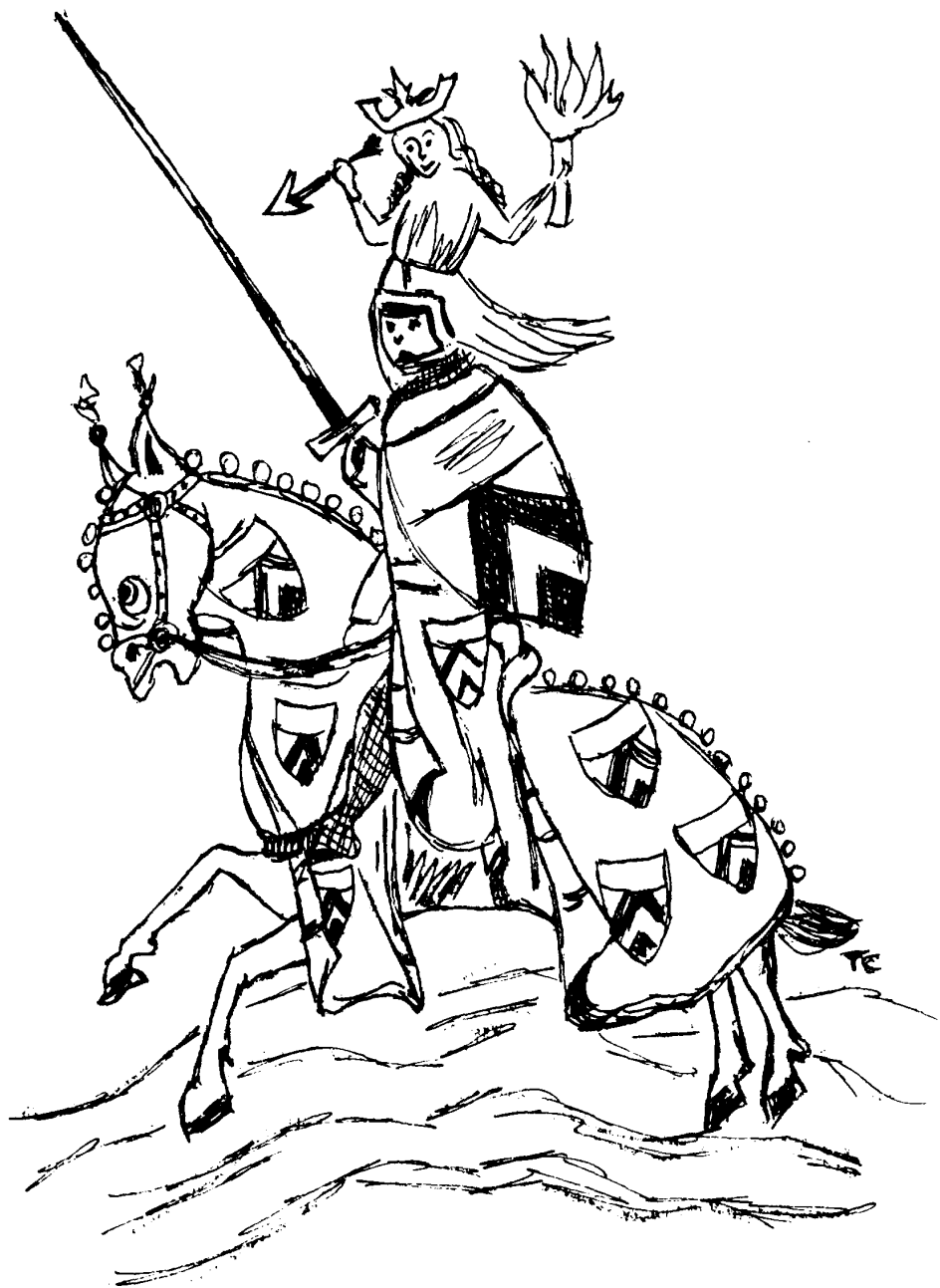
<sup>11</sup> William FitzStephen, "Description of the City of London 1170-1183" in (David Douglas and George Greenaway eds.) *English Historical Documents 1042-1189*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953), p. 960. The lower class's imitating of upper class sporting motifs seems to be a common historical occurrence. Matthew Paris related an incident in which Londoners soundly thrashed a group of young nobles who had mockingly challenged the Londoners to their own game. Matthew Paris *Chronica Majora* (ed., Henry Luard, 7 vols., London: Rolls Series, 1872) V. 367.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, III, 404; IV. 135, 649.

<sup>13</sup> Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Paris *Chronica Majora*; V. 609, (his description reads like that of a nervous breakdown): V. 557; (death), IV. 135.

<sup>15</sup> Sidney Painter *William Marshall*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1933), p. 24. This is the best available work in English that is based on *L'Histoire*. On ransoms, see also Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 234.



*Ulrich von Lichtenstein  
in Tournament*

few other rules existed or were recognized. One entered when one wished, with as many troops as could be mustered.<sup>16</sup> Moreover unchivalrous strategy was often employed. Count Philip of Flanders, otherwise the flower of chivalry, but quite pragmatic in his view of the tourney, often held his troop back until the other contestants were thoroughly exhausted. At that point he would "charge into the melee at the head of his mesnie and take many valuable prisoners at small risk to his own men."<sup>17</sup> Whole groups often attacked one man, if he was valuable enough.<sup>18</sup> Few magnanimous gestures existed during this unregulated period.

The area of engagement was as unstructured as the contest itself. The early melee was held on lices or lists which were, in essence, any available open area. There were few provisions for spectators and certainly no structures expressly for their comfort; the action was too freewheeling for such amenities. Also, the Fair Lady of troubador fame, was conspicuous in her absence. While she appeared occasionally in romances, she never appeared in histories.<sup>19</sup>

Thus we find that the early tournament was a battle-like melee, the object of which was to capture opponents. It was unregulated, it was not a spectacle, and there was little in the way of romantic chivalry attached to it. In fact, the danger attendant to the early tournament was so great that monarchs often prohibited them.<sup>20</sup> The later tournament of the fourteenth century onward was quite a different affair indeed.

There is little doubt that the joust gradually became the predominant feature of the tournament, to the virtual exclusion of the melee. The older concourse, so much the image of unregulated battle, found its way from open field to fenced-in court, from unbridled bouhourt to embellished spectacle and courtly pageant.<sup>21</sup> Two chroniclers of this later period, Jean Froissart of the late fourteenth

<sup>16</sup>Webster amusingly noted:

"In these present days of overregulation of Sport it is a relief to find a pastime as free from rules as is the twelfth century tournament. There was no such thing as obligatory fair play; that would have been too great a restriction on the right of the individual." p. 232

<sup>17</sup> Sidney Painter, *William Marshall*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup>Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>19</sup>Urban Holmes, *Daily Living in the Twelfth Century*, (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1952) pp. 180ff. This work is based on the writings of Alexander Neckam. See also Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 230. On the question of ladies see Denholm-Young, "The Tournament..." p. 242; Ruth Cline "The Influence of Romances on Tournaments of the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 20 (1945). A good source on the role of noble women during the period is *The Book of the Knight of Latour Landry Compiled for the Instruction of his Daughters* (London: Early English Text Society, 1868).

<sup>20</sup>William of Newbury, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (London, 1856) V iv: Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, iv. 649, v. 54.

<sup>21</sup>Clephan *loc. cit.*; Cripps-Day, *loc. cit.*; Ferguson *op. cit.* p. 14; Huizinga, *op. cit.*, p. 69; Otto Cartellieri, *The Court of Burgundy* (N.Y., 1929), pp. 119ff.

century and Enguerrand de Monstrelet of the early fifteenth century, related the events of the wars between England and France. In doing so, each had many occasions to describe tournaments; in all cases the joust had supplanted the melee. Single, regulated conflict was the order of the day.<sup>22</sup> Froissart described a tournament of 1399 in which three Frenchmen jousted all challengers for days; the old melee was not mentioned.<sup>23</sup> In 1467, an English noble, Lord Scales, arranged a joust at the request of Edward IV and the court ladies. The competition was kept in bounds, for at the conclusion:

He (Edward IV) commanded each of them to take the other by the hand, and love each other as brothers in arms, which they so did. And there they immediately gave each other as courteous, goodly and friendly language as could be thought. . . .<sup>24</sup>

The joust became more and more regulated, a phenomenon foreign to William Marshall. A manuscript from the time of Edward IV outlined, in detail, the program and even the equipment to be used in a joust:

And on seide day there beyng officers of armys shewyng their mesure of their speris garneste, that is cornall, vamplate, + arapers all of a cise that they shall just with. And that the comers may take the length of the seide speris with the arise of the seide officers of arms that shall be indifferent unto all parties unto the seide day.<sup>25</sup>

Theseus, in Chaucer's *Knights Tale*, prohibited various and sundry equipment, "wherefore to shapen that they shal no die."<sup>26</sup> As early as the thirteenth century English nobles had established a committee of five earls to set up and administer rules for the tourney. The committee's major concern was to eliminate disturbances caused by unruly squires and spectators.<sup>27</sup> Both Froissart and Monstrelet

<sup>22</sup>Sir John Froissart, *Chronicles* . . . , trans. Thomas Johnes, (N.Y.. n.d.), I, lxxxxix; II, lxiii, cliv; IV, xiii.; *The Chronicles of Enguerrand de Monstrelet*, trans. Thomas Jones, Esq., (2. vols., London: William Smith, 1845), I, 549; II, 130, 131, 121-122.

<sup>23</sup>Froissart, *Chronicles*, IV, xiii.

<sup>24</sup>"The Tournament between Lord Scales and the Bastard of Burgundy" *English Historical Documents 1327-1485* (London, 1969), p. 1174.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in: Francis Douce, "On the Peaceable Justs, or Tiltings of the Middle Ages," *Archeologia XVII* (1814), 290-296.

<sup>26</sup>Chaucer "The Knights Tale," ed. by A.C. Spearing, (Cambridge: at the University Press. 1966) 11. 1683ff. Chaucer based the narrative of the tournament on medieval chroniclers, including Froissart. See S. Robertson, "Elements of Realism in the *Knights Tale*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (1915).

<sup>27</sup>The organization and activities of this committee, truly one of the earliest controlling bodies of sport, marks a definite transition point in the tournament's history. See Denholm-Young, "The Tournament . . .," pp. 257ff.

referred to the joust as well-outlined by rules and regulations.<sup>28</sup> By the fifteenth century, jousting rules of a catholic nature were available.<sup>29</sup>

Excessive rules help effect the tourneys transition to spectacle. Predetermined prizes became the remuneration for the participants, as opposed to the ransoms of earlier days.<sup>30</sup> Most often the prizes were awarded by consensus of the lords and ladies in the gallery, as at the joust in honor of a lavish Burgundian wedding of 1385,<sup>31</sup> or at the tournament for Henry IV at Oxford.<sup>32</sup> Most significant, however, was the circus-like atmosphere. Tourneys became the occasion for the noble class to show off their latest fashions<sup>33</sup> and lavish accoutrements.<sup>34</sup> It was now the prelude to banquets and dancing;<sup>35</sup> it was the chance to impress one's lady-faire.<sup>36</sup> The tournament had become more a social outing, less a martial exercise.

We can readily see that the tournament changed complexion through the course of the later middle ages. It became more regulated and less the image of actual battle. The most interesting task of the sport historian, however, is the consideration of societal elements that effected this change, and the pondering of the simple question "what can the tournament tell us about this particular social class, the mounted knights?" An appropriate beginning to this analysis would lie in an examination of the melee's popularity. Herein one quickly discovers that the early tournament was extremely functional to the maintenance of chivalry: militarily, socially and economically.

When chivalry and its attendant military training was virile the tournament thrived as the melee. Through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the mounted knight remained the crucial figure on the battlefield; military tactics centered around his efficiency.<sup>37</sup> The melee was the ideal training ground for hardened fighters, for as

<sup>28</sup>Froissart, *Chronicles* II. Ixiii; Monstrelet, *Chronicles*, II, 130.

<sup>29</sup>The *Tournois du Roi Rene* was written to decrease the danger in jousting (Clephan, *op. cit.*, p. 46) John Tiptoft, the Earl of Worcester, drew up *Ordinances for Joustes and Triumphes* in 1466. (Cripps Day, *op. cit.*, app. iv).

<sup>30</sup>Diamonds were often the prizes. Monstrelet, *Chronicles*, II, 130.

<sup>31</sup>Froissart, *Chronicles*, II, cliv.

<sup>32</sup>Albert Way, "Jousts of Peace, Tournaments, and Judicial Combats," *Archeological Journal* IV (1847), p. 232.

<sup>33</sup>Monstrelet, *Chronicles*, I, 549.

<sup>34</sup>*Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* detailed the hero's procession:

"he is preceded by drummers on horseback, minstrels, trumpeters, heralds, and Kings at arms, by armourers with pack animals... then comes his ensign bearing his colors at the head of a lance..." Found in E. Prestage ed., *op. cit.*, p. 77. See also: Froissart, *Chronicles* I, lxxxix; Chaucer, *op. cit.*, II, 1683ff; Way, *op. cit.*, p. 233; Douce, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

<sup>35</sup>Monstrelet, *Chronicles*, I, 549.

<sup>36</sup>Cartellieri, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>37</sup>Charles Oman *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, in 2 vols., (London: Methuen & Co., 1924).



Roger of Hovendon explained:

a youth must have seen his blood flow and felt his teeth crack under the blow of his adversary and have been thrown to the ground twenty times. Thus will he be able to face real war with the hopes of victory.<sup>38</sup>

The tactics of warfare were frequently adapted from those of the melee.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, participation in the tourney was an integral part of the physical regimen of early chivalry. It was a functional exercise recommended to all knights.<sup>40</sup>

While the melee prepared nobles for war, it also enabled them to satisfy their chivalrous quest for glory and renown. The young novice or "Knight-errant" entered the contest "so that he might acquire a great name in chivalry."<sup>41</sup> One twelfth century troubador perfectly echoed this sentiment:

Whoever may plow and cultivate his land, I have always taken trouble about how I may get bolts and darts. helmets and havberks, horses and swords, for thus do I please myself: and I take joy in assaults and tournaments, in making gifts and making love.<sup>42</sup>

The search for fame led the knight to many different areas. Settling down was anathema, and no one wishing to rise in esteem stayed too long in one place.<sup>43</sup> Through knight-errantry the young noble could make a widely-known reputation in a relatively short time; it is no wonder that large numbers engaged in the practice, or envied those who were able to do so.<sup>44</sup> Wandering in search of war and tourney became a distinct and almost mandatory phase of life for the twelfth

<sup>38</sup>In Cripps-Day, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>40</sup>Caxton, *The Book of the Ordre of Chivalry*, p. 31. The book was written in the 13th century. John XXII reallocated the tournament, in milder form, in 1316 because it would help train soldiers for the Crusades. See Denholm-Young, "The Tournament . . ." p. 240, n. 2.

<sup>41</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, v. 17-18, 557. War and tourney. physical endeavors. were the paths to glory. See Jan Broekhoff, "Chivalric Education in the Middle Ages" *Quest* XI (Dec. 1968) 24-32.

<sup>42</sup>Eight Troubadour Poets, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>43</sup>Clephan, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup>*Hardyings Chronicle* told of a thousand knights engaged in round table "in armes so eche other to revie to get fame in play of chivalry." Clephan, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18. *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* related that many envied William's life of war and tourney and "wandering through all the lands where knights must win renown." See Georges Duby, "In Northwestern France, The 'Youth' in Twelfth Century Aristocratic Society," *Lordship and Community in Medieval Society*, ed. Frederick Cheyette, (New York, 1968) p. 207.

century youthful knight.<sup>45</sup>

Besides its military and social functions, the early melee served a distinct economic purpose to the knight-errant, the need for which was determined by the system of land tenure, so fundamental to the fabric of feudal society.<sup>46</sup> Although the vassal's fief had become hereditary as early as the ninth century, the doctrine of impartibility prevented him from leaving the fief to more than one offspring.<sup>47</sup> Quite logically, the fief quickly came to be relegated to the eldest son: by the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries the law of primogeniture prevailed in chivalric society.<sup>48</sup> Since the control of a manor was the crucial element of economic power, the younger sons of a twelfth century noble family were in a difficult situation.<sup>49</sup> The circumstances that surrounded William Marshall's knight-errantry are exemplary.

Marshall's father had shown great loyalty to the Norman sovereigns of his day, yet he still lacked the lands to provide for all his sons. Hence, the younger ones had to make it on their own, "elsewhere by the sword."<sup>50</sup> Marshall's case was not an isolated one.<sup>51</sup> With economic considerations as important to this group of knights as glory, the most expedient avenue to wealth lay in the income from booty and ransoms, so much a part of feudal warfare.<sup>52</sup> But what happened when feudal wars ebbed? Indeed, once the princes were in a position to check the private wars among vassals, the wealth from war booty and ransom slowed to a trickle. Peace meant unemployment for the knight-errant. Quite naturally then, battle-like melees began to be staged with regularity; the opportunity to obtain horses, arms and ransom became extant once more.<sup>53</sup>

Thus the poorer knights-errant, so nobly represented by William Marshall and Arnold of Guines, travelled from tourney to tourney, in search of far more than fame and glory. Without land, they relied

<sup>45</sup>Clephan, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12; Duby, *op. cit.*, p. 199; Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 175; Cripps-Day, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>46</sup>The classic work on Feudal Society is Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L.A. Manyon, (Chicago, 1964). Also F.L. Ganshof *Feudalism*, trans. Philip Grierson, (New York, 1964); David Herlihy *The History of Feudalism*, (London, 1942)

<sup>47</sup>Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 193, 203; Ganshof, *op. cit.*, p. 137; Sir William Holdrworth *A History of English Law* (London, 1942) pp. 172-173.

<sup>48</sup>*Tractatus de legibus et Consuetudinibus regni Angliae qui Glanvilla vocatur*, ed. and trans G.D.G. Hall: (London: 1965) p. 75; Evelyn Cecil, *Primogeniture* (London, 1895) pp. 22, 23, 92; Robert Hoyt *Europe in the Middle Ages* (N. Y., 1966) p. 296.

<sup>49</sup>Sidney Painter, *William Marshall*, p. 11; Bloch, *op. cit.*, pp. 240ff.

<sup>50</sup>James W. Thompson *An Economic and Social History of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1928) p. 714.

<sup>51</sup>In *The Chronicle of Lambert of Ardes* Count Arnold of Guines, the younger son of a less wealthy family, was farmed out to France, in hopes that he could make his fortune there. Jeremy du Quesnay Adams *Patterns of Medieval Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N.Y., 1969) pp. 151-155; Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup>Catellieri, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>53</sup>Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 47.

upon the melee for economic support.<sup>54</sup> Success in the tournament afforded a real chance for economic elevation. By his capture of knight after knight, William Marshall was able to engage in a tourney of 1179 as a knight—ganneret, with a mesnie of his own; “although still a landless man, he had risen to the point where he could flaunt his banner beside those of counts and barons.”<sup>55</sup> The landless knight could not afford to see the tourney prohibited, as a French *Fabliau* indicated:

Listen gentles, while I tell  
 How this knight in fortune fell;  
 Lands nor vineyards had he none,  
 Jousts and war his living won . . .  
 Rust the shield and falchion hid,  
 Joust and tourney were forbid,  
 All his means of living gone  
 Ermine mantle he had none.<sup>56</sup>

The early tournament was functionally important to the knights of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It not only mirrored the values and life style of this class, it actually conditioned them. Max Weber attempted to explain this relationship:

As a result the feudal style of life incorporated the game as an important means of training that inculcated useful abilities and qualities of character. The game was not a “pastime” but the natural medium in which the physical and psychological capacities of the human organism came alive and became supple.<sup>57</sup>

Would the same be true of the tournament in the late fifteenth century, when it had become a spectacle? If the tournament was an empty image at this time, it only mirrored the chivalrous life:

all aristocratic life in the later middle ages is a wholesale attempt to

<sup>54</sup>Matthew Paris *Chronica Majora*, IV. 135; Duby, *op. cit.*, p. 201, 202; du Quesnay Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 151; Denholm-Young, “The Tournament,” p. 243; Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>55</sup>By tradition, this privilege required considerable resources. See: Sidney Painter, *William Marshall*, p. 45; *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. VI, p. 806.

<sup>56</sup>From the *Recueil de Fabliaux et contes des poetes francois*, III, 409-410, in Kilgour, *op. cit.*, p. 24. For another account of a knight complaining that the church had cut off his source of livelihood see F.S. Shears, *op. cit.*, p. 75. John Mundy, *Europe in the High Middle ages 1150-1309* (London, 1973) suggests that the tourney was never adequately prohibited, partially because of its economic importance. p. 253.

<sup>57</sup>In R. Bendix, *Max Weber; An Intellectual Portrait* (Garden City, N.Y., 1960) p. 364. The author thanks Professor John Loy for pointing this out.

act the vision of a dream. In cloaking itself in the fanciful brilliance of the heroism and probity of a past age, the life of the nobles elevated itself toward the sublime.<sup>58</sup>

Many social pressures aided in the process of transforming both chivalry and the tournament, not least of these was the Church.

The established Church had always been adamant in its opposition to the melee. Most of the twelfth century Popes had issued Bulls forbidding the practice of “those abominable, even savage, affairs that the crowd calls tournaments.”<sup>59</sup> Participants were threatened with certain damnation.<sup>60</sup> The Synod of Clermont, under Innocent II, in 1130 had already delivered the ultimate threat:

Because if any one of them at that moment will have died, although repentance will not be denied to him begging it, nevertheless he will lack a Christian burial.<sup>61</sup>

While religious opposition never succeeded in eliminating the tournament itself, such pressure undoubtedly contributed to the growth of regulations and the decrease in brutality. While John XXII consented to Philip of France’s request of papal sanction in 1316, the sport allowed was not very deadly.<sup>62</sup> The Church’s alliance with and embrace of chivalry, particularly for the sake of the Crusades, did much to temper the brutal aspects of knighthood.<sup>63</sup>

Royal courts also lessened the vitality of these mass gatherings by means of direct prohibitions. Henry III, in an attempt to limit the political intrigue and factional interests attendant at tournaments, issued no less than thirty two prohibitions in a ten-year period.<sup>64</sup> Yet political attempts at curtailment were less successful than the religious, as their continuous renewal indicates. When Henry decided to disinherit Walter Marshall for his part in a tourney, Walter advised that for Henry to disinherit all participants would arouse “no small

<sup>58</sup> Huizinga, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> Thus spoke Alexander III at the Lateran Council of 1179. Eugenius III, Innocent III and Innocent IV had also expressed similar concern. See Cornish, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>60</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, a Cistercian monk of the early thirteenth century warned:

“for there is no question but that such as are slain in tournaments go down to Hell, if they be not helped by the benefit of contrition”

in: G.G. Coulton (ed.): *Life in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1928), I. p. 68.

<sup>61</sup> William of Newbury, *Historia*, V. iv.

<sup>62</sup> *Intra*, note 40.

<sup>63</sup> Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>64</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, iv. 633; v. 54; Denholm Young, “Feudal Society in The 13th Century: The Knights” *History* XXIX (Sept. 1944) 107-119; Denholm-Young “The Tournament...,” p. 245ff.; Clephan, *op. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, iv. 157.

disturbance in the realm.”<sup>65</sup> The desire to avoid direct confrontation with monarchs, however, led to self-regulation and pacification, the goals of Lord Edwards committee of earls.<sup>66</sup>

Certainly the greatest force bearing on the fortunes of the tourney involved the, gradual shift in military tactics. The heavily armed and mounted knight, once so terrifying in single combat and so devastating to untrained infantry became ineffective in the face of trained and coordinated units of pikemen and archers, or worse yet, in the face of guns. The man-at-arms became a disadvantage vis a vis the increasing efficiency of firearms and the necessity for, greater mobility in the field. The French chivalry had been routed by Swiss pike and English longbow well before the final blow at Agincourt in 1415.<sup>67</sup>

While the wars between England and France rendered the chivalrous knight more obsolete in battle, they also dealt him a more serious blow. They eroded the knight's political and social status. The Hundred Years War truly nationalized the opposing armies. Monarchs had become the rallying figures for their respective peoples. The right to wage war had become, in effect, a right reserved for the monarchies, so that “the vast majority of nobles were reduced to the status of subjects and deprived of all independent political authority.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed, by the fifteenth century the feudal contract of military service in return for a fief was a relic. As early as the twelfth century nobles bought off their military commitment by the payment of ‘scutage.’<sup>69</sup> Eventually scutage became a general tax which the monarch used to improve their armies, and the greatest improvement came with the use of mercenaries.<sup>70</sup> By the fourteenth century definite pay scales had been outlined.<sup>71</sup> Under Charles VII, who successfully expelled the English, the French army became nationalized, paid and regulated.<sup>72</sup> When the kings took troops into their own pay, the notion of knight service and its subsequent status had all but vanished.<sup>73</sup> The armored knights were no longer crucial in battle, either tactically or strategically.

As the feudal knight became gradually encased in armor, an

<sup>66</sup>Denholm-Young, “The Tournament...,” pp. 252ff.

<sup>67</sup>Clephan, *op. cit.*, p. 139; Oman, *loc. cit.*: Painter, *French Chivalry* pp. 22, 60, 61; Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 225ff.; Kilgour, *op. cit.*, p. 44ff.

<sup>68</sup>Sidney Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 17; Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. VIII, p. 254; Kilgour, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>69</sup>Oman, *op. cit.*, I, p. 369; Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>70</sup>C. Warren Hollister, *The Military Organization of Norman England* (Oxford: 1965), p. 200; Denholm-Young “Feudal Society...,” p. 119.

<sup>71</sup>H. J. Hewitt *The Organization of War Under Edward III 1338-62* (N.Y.: Barnes and Noble, 1966) p. 36.

<sup>72</sup>Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. VIII: p-255.

<sup>73</sup>Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. VII: p. 345; Kilgour, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

expensive proposition, and the knight-errant disappeared, the joust replaced the melee as the chief exercise in the tournament.<sup>74</sup> Yet the joust, and the spectacle therein, by no means served as a training for warfare. Why, then, was it maintained and embellished? While the tournament of the late fifteenth century might well have been a healthy mode of exercise and a true challenge of individual skill, it served a more important purpose to the upper class: the tourney was a means of retaining a sense of chivalrous worth and ostensible status.

A number of factors worked together to insure social exclusiveness in the later joust.<sup>75</sup> From the twelfth century on knighthood had gradually changed from a class open to all with the wealth and the skill to fight, to one closed to all who could not claim knightly birth and lineage.<sup>76</sup> Proclamations for fourteenth century jousts indicated that only "gentilmen of name and of armys" might enter.<sup>77</sup> Further, only the wealthy could afford the armor and accouterments necessary to engage in the affair.<sup>78</sup> Only this class, of diminished military and political prestige, had the material resources and skill to desport in this manner. Younger sons and poorer knights had to settle for employment with regular pay in the king's army or "the practice of law or customs of land or of civil matters."<sup>79</sup> Deliberate or not, the later tournament may be seen as a kind of status mechanism; such a function is by no means foreign to sport.<sup>80</sup>

The laments of Caxton and William Worcester were real enough. The chivalry of a knight-errant was dead. However, their beliefs that the tournament might rejuvenate this ideal were hopeless. The manifestations of chivalry had become empty images of a mystical ideal. The tournament fell into this mainstream; it became a showcase for obsolete tactics and attitudes.<sup>81</sup> In this sense the tournament might be seen as the mirror of a particular social class. But this medieval sport can tell us more about society because it had a function throughout its own history. While the tourney thrived as the melee, it

<sup>74</sup> Denholm-Young, "The Tournament ....," p. 240.

<sup>75</sup> One cannot maintain, however, that the knights advertently exploited this.

<sup>76</sup> Herlihy, *op. cit.*, p. 285; William Caxton trans., *The Book of Faytes of Armes and of Chivalry* (London: Early English Text Society, 1932).

<sup>77</sup> Douce, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292, 295; Way, *op. cit.*, p. 234, 235; Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>79</sup> William Worcester "A Lament for the decline of Chivalry," *English Historical Documents 1327-1485* (London, 1969) p. 1134. Young Thomas de Clare rose to wealth in late 13th century England through administrative service to the crown. Michael Altschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England: The Clares 1217-1314* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965) p. 187.

<sup>80</sup> E. Digby Baltzell *The Protestant Establishment* (N.Y. 1964), p. 355, discusses country clubs in this light, although the exclusion herein is quite advertent.

<sup>81</sup> Ruth Cline, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

created a nexus between the knight and his pivotal role in the real world. We can learn much about the nobles by examining the melee. Yet the later tourney yields fruitful insights as well. As an embellished spectacle replete with ornate splendor and allusions to Arthurian romance, the tourney of the fifteenth century helped the knight seal himself off from reality and seek an idyllic past.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Thus in its romanticized form the later tournament seems to parallel in many ways the function of upper class sport in "Fin-de-Siecle" France. See Eugen Weber, "Gymnastics and Sport in 'Fin-de-Siecle' France: Opium of the Classes." *The American Historical Review*, 76 (Feb. 1971), 70-98.