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# INTRODUCTION

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by Charles A. Coulombe

CHIVALRY has fascinated countless thousands from to-day until way back—well, way back when Knighthood was in flower. Even when knights actually were bold, riding against the foe in heavy armour—be it in actual battle or in tournament—for God, King and Lady Fair, the one thing they loved almost as much as combat was hearing or reading tales of other brave knights. King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, Charlemagne and Roland, Parsifal and the Holy Grail, and so many more caught and kept the imagination of all of Europe for about half-a-millennium. After the so-called Reformation, such interest waned, until being revived by the Romantic revolt against the age of reason, which began with witty blasphemies in polite salons, and ended with torrents of bloodshed from Ireland to Moscow.

Sir Walter Scott in English and François de Chateaubriand in French were the first writers to re-sound the horn of Chivalry. They have had many followers in the literary community down to the present, as the popularity of heroic fantasy—and most certainly J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*—indicates. Certainly, one of this writer's earliest memories is the musical introduction to the Disney cartoon film, *The Sword in the Stone*. Long after the rest of it had faded from my mind, I remembered the stirring first words of the movie: "A legend is sung of when England was young, and knights were brave and bold..."

But Chivalry's hold upon the imagination is far from confined to books and movies. Several ancient orders of Knighthood continue their work to-day, such as the Orders

of Malta and the Holy Sepulchre. Among their lofty ranks are to be found the noble (in Europe) and the wealthy (in America) united in their efforts to assist the poorest of the poor and sick. The Queen of Great Britain and a great number of other ruling and deposed Monarchs continue to award knighthoods. Indeed, so great is the hunger for such things that a real trade in bogus orders has arisen, and even such republics as France (with its Legion of Honour) and Italy make knights.

But beyond that, the desire for Chivalry has grown to such an extent in these un-Chivalric times that a number of Catholic religious orders—old and new—have either revived extinct or created new knightly branches. Such are the Teutonic Order, the Mercedarians, the Hospitallers of St. John of God, and various others; there has even been a revival of the Templars as a Catholic religious order—they make no claim to descent from the original order (as do many fake “Templar” groups) but follow its constitution. There are lay groups like the Militia Christi and the Militia Sanctae Mariae who are new orders of knighthood dedicated to and accepted as such by the Church. Everyone is familiar with such as the Knights of Columbus, who invoke the past spirit of Chivalry without claiming knighthood in the same sense. A trip along the internet shall reveal countless self-grown groups of knights appealing to every shade of religious opinion.

Interesting as all of this is, the question remains: what *IS* Chivalry? Is it proper manners (the lack of which, especially toward ladies, is sometimes spoken of as “Chivalry being dead”—or not, as when someone remembers to open the door for a woman)? Is it kindness? Steadfastness? It is all of those things, and much more. Leon Gautier, the author of this magnificent book, describes it thusly: “Chivalry is the Christian form of the military profession: the knight is the Christian soldier.” In a word, it is militant Christianity, or Christian militancy. But this is neither a religion confined to Sunday worship, nor a profession restricted to barracks; nor yet are the religion and the profession at all separate from each other.

This is a tremendous paradox for us moderns, living in a time when even the drawing of ceremonial swords by

Knights of Columbus is regarded with horror by some bishops and priests. But whatever else it may be, Gautier shows that such disfavour is not Catholic. Indeed, he first resolves that paradox by use of the Church Fathers, explores the rise of Knighthood, the manner—from history and romance—in which knights lived their Faith and military vocation, and then analyses the code of Chivalry itself. This latter he finds most relevant to us moderns.

Even in translation, Gautier's prose retains the triumphant seriousness about matters of Faith that one finds in Dom Gueranger's *Liturgical Year*. This is no accident. Their generation of French Catholics had been raised on their grandparents' stories of the Vendee and the Martyrs of the Revolution, and raised in the resulting wreckage. Their parents had started the rebuilding, while Kings, Presidents, and an Emperor succeeded each other, only for the latter to be overthrown in the course of the disastrous Franco-Prussian War. The Third Republic that emerged from that debacle began both pro-Royalist and Catholic, but in 1878 became anticlerical, becoming ever more so as the years went on and its desire to oppress and insult the Church in every way increased.

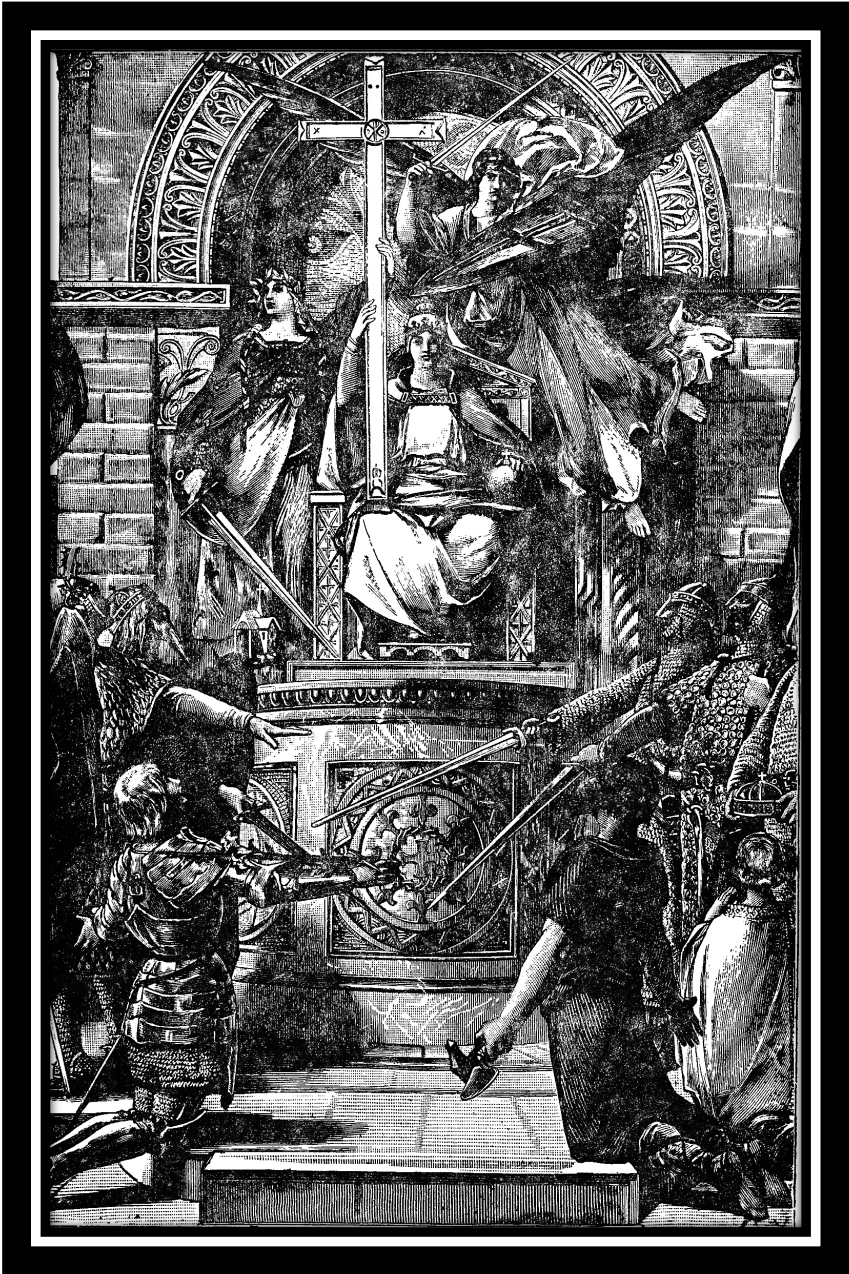
But where sin abounded, so did Grace: great saints, such as St. John Vianney emerged. The religious orders were refounded on French soil, and innumerable cathedrals and churches renovated or rebuilt. Our Lady appeared at the Rue de Bac, La Salette, Lourdes, Pellevoisin, Pontmain, and elsewhere. Above all, devotion to the Sacred Heart grew, especially in the light of the twin losses of war to Prussia and of Rome to the Italians (where many Frenchmen served in the Papal Zouaves). Literary defenders of the Faith also emerged by the score, their language as tough and forthright as that of the enemies of the Faith. In those ranks one finds Leon Gautier.

From both the spirit of the Crusades and that of the French Catholic revival, Gautier derived the magic which infuses this book. For Gautier, Chivalry is neither merely a historical fact nor a literary charm, but a living, breathing spiritual fountain from which anyone who desires to ennoble his life can drink. He tells us: "We may add, to prevent disappointment, that it is quite possible for any one

of the present day to become as chivalric as any knight of old time, and if anyone will conform to the ten commandments of the Code of Chivalry which we have enumerated, he will find this feasible, and actually true.” Gautier then ends his book with the stirring call to arms: “Let us, with open brow, and transparent soul, learn, not only how to die for the truth, but learn also, what is much more difficult, how to live in it!” This is a lesson essential for the Catholic in 1291, 1891, and indeed, any age in which the Faith is under attack by the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. *Chivalry* can help us learn it.

Charles A. Coulombe  
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St. Edward the Confessor





*ALLEGORICAL REPRESENTATION OF CHIVALRY.*



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## PREFACE

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OUR first intention was to give this volume the more expanded title of *Chivalry, according to the Epic Poems*, but we have been compelled to consult so many other authorities that we feel obliged to adopt a more general and shorter title.

The Epic Poems (*Chansons de Geste*) do not the less remain as the principal and the best of all our sources of information; for in them (in our own opinion) we find the truest pictures of Chivalry itself, and the most exact representations of the days of Chivalry. The authors of these popular poems, whose sincerity is unquestionable, only depicted what they actually witnessed. No other writers have so minutely described the costumes, armor, habitations, furniture, the private lives and the manners of the Feudal nobility. Good judges are not easily deceived. There is perhaps not a page of the admirable Glossary of Ducange, or of the Memoirs of Saint Palaye, which does not bear witness to the truthfulness of our songs. Nor does Jules Quicherat hold them in less esteem; he declares in round terms that: "their heroes are creations modeled on Feudal seignors." Viollet le Duc quotes them as frequently

as Ducange. They complete the Annals and the Chronicles, filling in lapses, and adding force to the cases recorded. It is, besides, very easy to assure one's self that the poets spoke the same language as our historians. This can be substantiated by reading alternately such a Chronicle as that of Lambert d'Ardre and a poem like Ogier.

It will appear to many good souls that our enterprise is rather a rash one, if we reflect how many volumes have been inspired by Chivalry. But we have chosen to produce our book on a new plan, and this view may commend it to competent judges. We have devoted a large portion of the volume to the private life of the period: and have enshrined it in a chronological frame which is not very elastic. We have seldom gone farther back than the time of Philip Augustus, and rarely go lower than his death. Within these limits, as has been truly said, lies the golden epoch of the Middle Ages—and to it we have confined ourselves. The chief fault of works which have preceded this is, in our opinion, the long period included in them, and they do not sufficiently draw the distinction between the Chivalry of the twelfth and of the thirteenth centuries. We hope we have avoided this confusion.

The result of many years of application, this volume has been from all points of view the object of conscientious preparation. The writer has, above all things, striven to be perfectly impartial, and would be the very last person deliberately to lay on color too thickly or to embellish his models. His confessed aim is to bring out the glories of old France, to compel affection by making her known; and, as Guizot says, "to bring her back to the memory, and into the intelligence, of her generations."

But we conceived another idea, which may appear more daring still: this was to enlarge the mind, to check the mercantile spirit which abases, and the egotism which is killing it: to convey to it some of the enthusiasm for the Beautiful, which is menaced; and for the Truth, which seems to us to be dying out.

There is more than one kind of Chivalry, and lance thrusts are not everything! In default of the sword, we have the pen: failing the pen, speech: and in default of speech, honor, in our lives!



The Author of Chivalry will esteem himself happy if he has created some “knights.”

LÉON GAUTIER.