THE DECLINE OF THE NOBILITY IN FRANCE DURING THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Richard M. Judd, Jr.

1961

THESIS

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THE DECLINE OF THE NOBILITY IN FRANCE DURING THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

By

Richard M. Judd, Jr.

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to demonstrate the decline of the nobility in France during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In order to discern any change one must first have a standard against which new findings can be compared. The standards used in this study involve first an analysis of the ramifications of the feudal obligations prior to 1300. The ideals of the code of chivalry which so thoroughly captured the nobility are of even greater importance.

With these standards in mind, the next step involved the consultation of sources to demonstrate in what way the nobility deviated from the established norm. The chronicles of Froissart give a great deal of valuable information concerning the nobility's decline from about 1326 until 1400. Beginning at the point where Jean Froissart leaves off, Enguerrand de Monstrelet presents excellent information for the period spanning the first half of the fifteenth century. Though these two chroniclers were eulogists of chivalry, they nevertheless offer an enormous amount of information which reveals the multitudinous transgressions committed by the men of rank. Philip de Commines completes the trilogy with his invaluable portrayal of the reign of Louis XI of France and his poignant but realistic political commentaries.

The above mentioned writers, in addition to other less comprehensive tracts, give evidence concerning the nobility in several important areas. The sources substantiate a protracted dispute between the nobility and monarchy. The relationship between the fellow nobles themselves changed perceptably during the later Middle Ages. In endeavoring to demonstrate the glories of knighthood the eulogists of chivalry tended instead only to portray it as an outmoded ideal. The major sources involved also present extensive information concerning the nobility's relationships with the Church, the urban classes, and the peasantry.

After analyzing information from the major sources pertaining to the areas mentioned above one finds an overwhelming amount of information indicating that the nobility degenerated in almost every aspect. They shamefully violated their duties to the monarchy. Their irresponsibility eventually enabled the king to gain the upper hand. In respect to fellow individuals of noble rank, the virtues and deference previously so prevalent were plainly lacking during the last two centuries of the Middle Ages. Even chivalry itself appeared utterly inept to cope with the changing conditions. The nobility miserably failed to uphold their obligations to the Church, acting as a class without any purpose or valid reason for existence. In their relations with the urban classes and peasantry the men of rank, with few exceptions, degenerated into wretches who either participated

in themselves, or condoned the murderous plundering forays of their men. Indeed in every aspect, the nobility, en masse, declined perceptably during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis was suggested by Cervantes' immortal tale of Don Quixote, the idealistic knight-errant who roamed the Spanish countryside with his humorous partner, Sancho Panca. This brilliant novel put an end to chivalry as a workable ideal by literally laughing it out of existence. Cervantes clearly demonstrated the ridiculous state into which chivalry had fallen. Knights not only failed to fill any useful purpose in society but they actually caused extensive destruction and injury to the property and people of all classes in the milieu of which they were a part. Realizing that chivalry was the major ideal after which the nobility of the Middle Ages patterned their lives, Cervantes' satire suggested a study of the decline of nobility which would endeavor to demonstrate just how they happened to fall into such a state of decadence.

The decline of the nobility was a universal phenomenon in Western Europe in the era of the later Middle Ages (1300-1500). To survey so vast a range of materials proved too extensive for this study. It was therefore decided to deal only with the nobility of France, which indeed was the true home of chivalry during the Middle Ages. Since the boundaries of France were constantly fluctuating during

the course of the Middle Ages, it is most difficult to speak of this country with any degree of precision. This is especially true during the period 1300-1500 because of the constant interchange of the various duchies and counties between France and England. For reasons of expediency and clarity the term "France" shall be understood to include not only the boundaries of France as they exist in 1961 but also the geographic areas of Belgium and the Netherlands.

In addition to confining the study to the nobility in France, the author found it desirable to focus his attention on a selected group of sources. This seemed justifiable since certain major primary sources of the era under consideration supply more than enough reliable information needed to substantiate the hypothesis purported in this study. Material gathered from the major sources specifically demonstrates in what respects the nobility failed to meet the obligations which it had set up for itself.

Fortunately, there were three writers whose works collectively spanned the later Middle Ages, and who, though differing in ability, treated the condition of the nobility in their respective periods with great thoroughness. The chronicles of Froissart undoubtedly contain the most valuable information concerning the nobility and its actions during the fourteenth century. Froissart was a eulogist of chivalry; however, one is able to find innumerable examples of unchivalrous and irresponsible behavior exhibited by the

nobility in the exciting pages of this writer. In the very year that Froissart terminated his chronicle (1400) Enguerrand de Monstrelet began his narrative, which encompassed the first half of the fifteenth century. His description, though less colorful and more tedious to read, is more accurate than is Froissart's, especially concerning dates, names, and events. Philip de Commines completes the detailed coverage of the era in a brilliant work which deals mainly with the reign of Louis XI (1461-1483). Commines can be classified as a true historian and one of the very few writers during the Middle Ages able to perceive the qualities necessary to classify a king or noble as a successful intelligent ruler. Many of his criticisms concerning fifteenth century statesmen are as true today as they were 450 years ago.

Upon analysis of the three fundamental sources mentioned above, in addition to other lesser known but valuable tracts, one concludes that the nobility did indeed violate its obligations in every respect. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the nobility in France repeatedly displayed a lack of responsibility toward the society to which they belonged. These two centuries encompassed the devastating Hundred Years' War which sent France into turmoil and brought death and destruction to people from all walks of life. Over the space of these two centuries the nobility repeatedly had opportunities to strengthen their position; however, they failed to accept any responsibility

toward socity and consequently steadily declined in power.

At the end of the thirteenth century France was the most prosperous and best governed country in Europe. The farms were producing rich crops and her peasants were healthy and happy. The towns were strong and safe and trade grew steadily. The roads had become much safer for the traveler and merchant. Justice prevailed in the courts of the kingdom, especially under Louis IX, and the whole country seemed to be functioning in an orderly fashion. The Church became somewhat disrupted when the papacy moved to Avignon in 1305; however, loyalty to the French popes was not seriously challenged by people of other countries during the first years of the Babylonian Captivity. Up until the beginning of the Hundred Years' War in 1337 one can honestly state that conditions in France were excellent.

This rich country quickly deteriorated into a strife torn battlefield during the Hundred Years' War. The battles were spasmodic and certain areas felt the hand of destruction more heavily than others, but before order was restored completely, practically every town and village was subjected to innumerable depredations against both life and property. Persons from all walks of life, from the lowliest peasant to the most noble duke, were left with deep scars of warfare and chaos that required many years to heal. Not until the reign of Louis XI and the death of Charles the Bold in 1477 can one perceive any real order and unity returning in France.

One might legitimately ask at this point, was it not the duty of the monarch to control the destiny of the state? In our modern age of the Nation State one gives praise or assigns blame for the running of the affairs of any state upon the central government. It would thus appear that in the late Middle Ages it was the duty of the French monarchy to control the destiny of that nation; but upon further examination one will readily perceive that prior to the last half of the reign of Charles VII, the Valois kings were unable to keep order in France. Consequently, only the powerful nobility were in a position to bring about some sort of stability out of this period of disorder. The story of their abysmal failure to rise to this challenge will be of major importance in this study.

The most logical method to treat the downfall of the nobility must begin by examining exactly what position they held in society at the beginning of the period. This analysis is facilitated by the valuable material dealing with the feudal structure and explicit statements of a stringent code of chivalry. The nobles over a period of several centuries had laid down a strict set of rules to regulate themselves. Our purpose is not to criticize every infraction of the rules, for even Saint Louis, king of France, failed in some respects to fulfill his classification as a perfect knight. There did, however, appear such a marked increase in the number of violations of their self

imposed code during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that the nobles no longer even attempted to meet their obligations. Not only did they violate their feudal bonds and code of honor but they swung to the utmost extremes of viciousness, victimizing society at every turn, and committed acts of perversity that the peasant equalled only in the wildest moments of the Jacquerie.

Once the obligations of the nobility have been clearly shown, the easiest way to discern their downfall is to examine their conduct with respect to the various other segments of society. Honorable relations between the nobles and the king and even between fellow nobles deteriorated during the course of the Hundred Years' War. Although, with the exception of Charles V, the first four Valois monarchs were generally incompetent, the nobility made no attempt to unify and present a strong common front to counter the weakness of the monarchy. The powerful dukes and counts lacked any feeling that they had an obligation to work for France as a unified nation; instead they constantly undermined not only the strength of the monarchy but also brought about the downfall of fellow nobles. Their whole purpose deteriorated from one of seeking honor to one of seeking pillage and booty from the helpless lesser segments of society. Harmless tournaments replaced the rough but chivalrous melée of the previous centuries. The religious zeal shown during the crusades wasted away and in its place sprang an emphasis

upon courtly love. In all respects the nobility failed to show any purpose or valid reason for their existence.

The noble class became degenerate in respect to their obligations to the Church. The ideal knight of the earlier medieval period took upon himself the oath to defend the Church even at the risk of injury or death to himself. In the later Middle Ages, one finds instead numerous examples during the Hundred Years' War of the failure of knights even to pay lip-service to their oath and of their swinging to the other extreme whereby they physically attacked the clergy and the various churches and monasteries, burning and destroying them almost at will.

During the course of the war the French towns suffered prostration and many were demolished by the armies of France and England, plus the smaller roving bands of Free Companies and similar groups. In almost every case, the various depredations to which the towns were subjected can be traced to irresponsible leadership by knights whose duty it was to protect society. While nothing in the oath of a knight stated specifically that he must aid the towns, he was obligated to act with courage, justice, and honor and by no stretch of the imagination can one present the destruction of the towns by bands of knights in armor as anything but an outright disavowal of every virtue they were supposed to hold. Mercy was rarely shown for the lives or property of the townsmen, and trade was risky if not impossible for

the merchants. The French towns did not begin to recover until Louis XI ascended to the throne and protected and encouraged the merchants, thereby forming a loose alliance based on mutual support between the monarchy and bourgeoisie.

The common peasant was probably hit hardest by the predatory nobility. When the nobles moved their armies of knights and squires they literally lived off of the land that they passed through. Whether they were an organized army or just a band of roving knights they settled upon the poor peasant like a flock of locust, carrying off his crops and livestock and burning what they could not take with them. In some cases, such as the Black Prince's expedition in 1370 in Southern France, the land was devastated so badly they could not even sustain themselves and were forced to retreat.

In many instances over the course of the Hundred Years' War the English nobility in France were just as guilty of depredatory actions as were the French. Consequently, no attempt will be made to treat the actions of the latter in isolation. In many cases, such as the actions of the Free Companies and <u>routiers</u>, it is practically impossible to separate the nationalities due to the lack of definite national lines until near the end of the fifteenth century. Consequently the following discourse will occasionally refer to the English as well as the French nobility in order to demonstrate the decline of the nobility.

CHAPTER I

ORIGINS AND STRUCTURE OF THE FEUDAL NOBILITY AND KNIGHTHOOD

By the year 1300, feudalism had lost its vitality as a workable basis of government, yet its structure lingered on for almost two hundred years. To understand the nobility in France during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it is first necessary to discuss briefly the nature of the feudal relationship and the obligations which this relationship placed on the nobility.

Feudalism essentially rested upon a personal contract or agreement between two individuals. "It consisted of private contracts whereby one man willingly accepted the status of being an honorable dependent of another."[1] When an owner of property found it impossible to live securely and comfortably due to the warfare of neighboring nobles or outside invaders, he selected a powerful man who possessed adequate resources to protect him. His property was given to his new lord and immediately returned as a benefice to be used by the vassal. The lesser noble or vassal received the protection of his lands and his person; in return he

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[1] John B. Harrison and Richard E. Sullivan, A Short History of Western Civilization (New York, 1960), p. 211.

pledged military service to his lord for "the benefice of a vassal was held on condition of military service. . . ."[2]

Feudalism originated as a combination of Roman and early Germanic institutions. The precarium principally obligated any powerful Roman who accepted the land (voluntarily given) of a small landowner to protect him in exchange for title to the land. For those people without land the Roman institution of patronage, known as patrocinium, arose, whereby the wealthy and influential man, as patron, surrounded himself with a group of dependent followers, called clients, who sought his aid and support. The patrocinium became amalgamated with the German comitatus, described as early as the second century A. D. by Tacitus in the Germania. The comitatus stripped to its barest elements consisted essentially of a band of armed men, seeking adventure, booty, and glory. These warriors devoted themselves to a powerful leader, whereby they were bound to defend and obey him with the most diligent loyalty and courage. Both of these institutions had two features in common: "The personal dependence of the weaker man on the stronger and the rendering of service, often military, in return for protection and support."[3]

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[2]Carl Stephenson, Mediaeval Feudalism (New York, 1960), p. 11. (Hereafter cited as Stephenson, Feudalism).

[3]James Westfall Thompson and Edgar Nathaniel Johnson, An Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500 (New York, 1937), pp. 293-4. (Hereafter cited as Thompson and Johnson, Medieval Europe).

To form a feudal system it was now necessary to combine the _precarium_ with the _patrocinium_ and _comitatus_. "It was Charles Martel who fused these two into one system, chiefly as a result of the Arabian attack on Gaul."[4] The Carolingians utilized proto-feudal practices to such an extent that these practices became a recognized part of the structure of society. The Carolingian rulers sanctioned the feudal practices in an effort to preserve and strengthen their own authority. "These rulers depended less on their theoretical sovereignty than on the fidelity of their personal retainers, now styled vassals."[5] In order to establish his power more securely, Charlemagne established himself as supreme lord over all his vassals. Such Carolingian rulers as Charles Martel, Pepin, and Charlemagne were powerful enough to control their vassals and keep the nascent feudal system in check. However, their sanction of the feudal system set a legal precedent for centuries to come.[6] After these powerful Carolingian monarchs passed on, their successors were not able to cope with the nascent feudal system

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[4]Raymond Lincoln Kilgour, _The Decline of Chivalry as Shown in the French Literature of the Late Middle Ages_ (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1937), Introduction, p. xi. (Hereafter cited as Kilgour, _Decline of Chivalry_).

[5]Stephenson, _Feudalism_, p. 11.

[6]Francois Louis Ganshof, _Feudalism_, trans. Philip Grierson (London, 1952), supplies the best description of the evolution of feudalism during the Carolingian period.

so successfully. Feudalism hereafter began to root itself firmly as a workable replacement to the void left following the collapse of the Carolingian system. For approximately the next five centuries, feudalism remained the primary system of government in Europe.

Feudalism was more than a system of government for it implied a method of land tenure whereby one man held or used the land of another by a contract made between the two giving the holder of the land almost a perpetual lease. In return, the landholder owed his lord certain services and the lord was obliged to aid in the protection of the land.

The word fief is used to designate the land which the vassal held, but it was more than a piece of land for it included the laborers, buildings, and equipment needed for the cultivation of that land. The fief might even be in the form of a sum of money given to the vassal for his support or in order to buy a piece of land. In other words, a fief might be anything that yielded an income. Control of a fief implied vassalage for the fief legally existed only when held by a vassal. The reverse of this was not necessarily true, for it was possible for a man to become a vassal without receiving a fief. However, this latter arrangement became increasingly more rare as the Middle Ages wore on and the fief and vassalage tended to become fused.

While the fief best exemplifies the tangible bond between the parties involved, the term vassalage best

describes the personal element. The vassal commended himself to his lord and was "his man;" by virtue of this arrangement he obligated himself to perform certain services for his lord, the most important of which was military. Though the vassal owed certain services to his lord, there was no loss of social prestige for this was a reciprocal bond. The fact that one was a vassal was degrading in no way, for even the greatest noble was almost invariably the vassal of the king. Though a hierarchy of nobility did arise, a man's worth as a noble was based on other criterion than the amount of land that he controlled. Ultimately, however, the feudal ties were based on force and the "disloyal refusal of a vassal to perform his owed service"[7] was a felony and usually meant confiscation of his fief. On the other hand, a powerful vassal occasionally overthrew his lord if he possessed the military might. "As in all free competition the fit survived and the unfit lost their property and disappeared, usually into a monastery."[8]

From the description so far one might get the impression that the feudal system was completely chaotic due to its decentralized nature and the fact that it was formed on a basis of military force. However, there were several

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[7]Stephenson, Feudalism, p. 34.

[8]Sidney Painter, French Chivalry: Chivalric Ideas and Practices in Mediaeval France, (Ithaca, New York, 1957), p. 7. (Hereafter cited as Painter, Chivalry.

important factors which stabilized the feudal system and gave it a quality of permanence and respectability. The heritability of the fief and vassalage was one such stabilizing factor. The lord-vassal relationship specifically entailed a personal bond and technically the feudal contract ended upon the death of either party; however, by the tenth century this relationship had become hereditary.[9] It was necessary for the heir to seal again the contract by swearing a new oath to his lord, and by paying an inheritance tax, called a relief, but the land and official position became inseparable, continuing for generations in the same family.

Of paramount value to the stabilization of the feudal form of government was the mutual oath sworn between the lord and vassal. The personal bond between these two parties lent an air of honor to the institution which became more and more idealized. The act of homage and oath of fealty represent the outward and inward actions binding the two parties together. By the ceremony of homage the vassal publicly declared his intention to aid and serve his lord

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[9]There is some disagreement among medieval historians upon this point. In Harrison and Sullivan, A Short History of Western Civilization, p. 212, Sullivan claims heritability became common in the tenth century. Ganshof, Feudalism, p. 119, claims the fief became hereditary in the eleventh century. For our purposes, this technical difference will have no effect on the results of this study.

and demonstrated this by a corporeal act, usually placing his hands between those of the lord who accepted him. Having made an act of homage to his lord, the vassal next took an oath of fealty or fidelity which was sworn upon the Holy Scriptures or some holy relic. The Church played a major role in this latter ceremony by giving the oath a sacred nature, thereby placing the mutual obligations of both parties under the auspices of the deity. The principle virtue of the lord was one of responsibility. By right, the lord owed his vassal military support to help protect the property and person of the latter. The vassal also expected aid from his lord in righting all wrongs, both on the field of battle and in the court. In return, the vassal was expected to render his lord military service, which in the twelfth century was restricted to forty days a year. In addition, the vassal was expected to attend his lord's court and assist in the administration of justice. Among the monetary aids, the vassal was expected to contribute a specified sum of money upon the knighting of the lord's eldest son and the marriage of his eldest daughter, or if the occasion required, he was obligated to contribute for the ransom of his lord. The lord was also entitled to entertainment, which consisted of food and lodging when he was traveling through the lands of his vassals. This too became restricted to a specified number of visits per year, "and lords--the king included--when traveling were expected to live as far as possible from their own manors, that is, manors not given out as fiefs."[10] However, in the

[10]Thompson, and Johnson, Medieval Europe, p. 306.

last analysis the chief virtue of the vassal was loyalty, for loyalty was the major force that kept feudal society from anarchy. As Ramón Lull so aptly put it in the thirteenth century it was a "wycked knyght that aydeth not his erthely lord and naturel countrey ageynst another prynce. . . . A knyght withoute offyce. . . ."[11]

A clearly defined nobility arose as part of the structure of the feudal system. This aristocracy increasingly set itself above and apart from the rest of society, more especially the common people, becoming an exclusive class unto itself. Economically and politically the nobility's position was based upon control of the only source of wealth, land, and upon its monopoly on the chief functions of government. Equally important to the position of this class was the development of a code of conduct whose rules applied especially to the feudal nobles. This code of conduct is called chivalry. As it developed the code of chivalry postulated a group of qualities considered proper to the behavior of the noble. The nobility enthusiastically accepted this ideal code of conduct and sought to enact its demands in daily life. "The profession of arms came to be governed by

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[11]Ramón Lull, The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry, trans, William Caxton, ed. Alfred T. P. Byles (London, 1926), pp. 32-3. (Hereafter cited as Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry). I have taken the liberty to add punctuation and occasionally modernize the spelling in Caxton's translations, but only in the cases where obsolete symbols and obscure spelling has necessitated this be done.

an aristocratic code of chivalry--a set of rules that had meaning only for the highborn. Thus in the later Middle Ages knight and noble were virtually synonymous terms."[12] Though every knight was a man of nobility the reverse of this did not necessarily follow. A man might be born of the nobility and yet remain a mere fief holder the remainder of his life. To become accepted in the order of knighthood a noble was required to undergo a period of rigorous training and an elaborate ceremony. However, during the later Middle Ages every noble of any significance whatsoever was a knight and for the purposes of this study the terms shall hereafter be used interchangeably.

During the early Middle Ages cavalry came to be the most effective method of warfare and chivalry emerged out of the requirements which this type of warfare imposed. Originating basically as a combination of the comitatus and patrocinium, chivalry "conferred privileges" but also "imposed duties"[13] upon its members, the primary duty being military service. The first knights were crude and rough but fulfilled the function of protecting the fief of their lord and all of the people on that fief. Always fighting

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[12]Carl Stephenson, "The Origin and Significance of Feudalism," American Historical Review, XLVI (1941), p. 807.

[13]Gustave Masson, The Story of Mediaeval France: From the Reign of Hugues Capet to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century (New York, 1888), p. 35.

astride a horse, the knight was obligated to serve both his lord and the state, for the lower classes were not considered capable of governing and protecting themselves. With their monopoly upon warfare, the feudal knights were the only ones the commoner could look towards for protection.

The training to become a knight was long and arduous. A boy born of aristocracy began learning horsemanship and the use of arms as soon as he could walk. Usually at the age of seven he was sent to the court of his father's lord to begin a period of formal training. At this stage he was known as a page or valet. Though such tasks as running errands for ladies or assisting knights with horse and harness seemed menial, the purpose of this early training was to develop the page's skill in the martial exercises and to familiarize him with the aristocratic way of life. At the age of fourteen he became an écuyer or squire and began his military training in earnest. "Henceforth he was regularly attached to an individual knight, whom it was his duty to accompany and assist. In the event of battle, the squire carried the knight's reserve of arms, led his extra horse if he had one, laced on his defensive armor, rescued him when dismounted or wounded, and took charge of any prisoners he might capture. Through such activity the squire learned the brutal business of war at first hand."[14] About the age

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[14]Stephenson, Feudalism, p. 46.

of twenty-one after proving himself a warrior, he was "dubbed" a knight. The regular ceremony was elaborate and expensive and usually was performed by his father or some distinguished warrior. Under extreme circumstances, normally prior to an important battle, a squire could be "dubbed" a knight in the field but this was the exception rather than the rule. The formal ceremony was highly symbolic including a ritualistic bath, a twenty-four hour fast, and a night-long vigil in a chapel. Upon taking his vows the knight donned his armor, mounted his steed, and was off to prove himself a man of courage and honor. A truly perfect and gentle knight was bound

> . . . to fear God and maintain the Christian religion; to serve the King faithfully and valorously; to protect the weak and defenceless; to refrain from the wanton giving of offence; to live for honour and glory, despising pecuniary reward; to fight for the general welfare of all; to obey those placed in authority; to guard the honour of the knightly order; to shun unfairness, meanness and deceit; to keep faith and speak the truth; to persevere to the end in all enterprises begun; to respect the honour of women; to refuse no challenge from an equal and never to turn the back upon a foe.[15]

Chivalry did in fact set up a code of honor for all men to look up to and did instill a sense of duty and trustworthiness in men.

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[15] F. J. C. Hearnshaw, "Chivalry and its Place in History," in Edgar Prestage, ed., Chivalry: A Series of Studies to Illustrate its Historical Significance and Civilizing Influence (London, 1928), p. 24.

Probably one of the major reasons why the nobility lend themselves so easily to criticism lies in the fact that they set up an almost monastic code to pattern their lives by, while the commoners for example had no such strict doctrines.

> Among the laity the gap between the ideal and the actual may best be observed in the warrior class whose ideals accorded with the feudal situation and tended to express themselves in chivalry. Not that knights and ladies were better or worse than other mediaeval men and women. But literature contains clearer statements of their ideals. The knightly virtues range before us as distinctly as the monastic; and harsh is the contrast between the character they outline and the feudal actuality of cruelty and greed and lust. Feudalism itself presents everywhere a state of contrast between its principles of mutual fidelity and protection, and its actuality of oppression, revolt, and private war.[16]

It is not our purpose to chastise the nobility for their failure to follow every facet of their code of chivalry for not even Saint Louis of France achieved perfection. One can find sufficient examples of knights breaking their code of chivalry prior to 1300. However the fact remains they were serious in their efforts to live up to their ideals, and both the knights themselves and the code of chivalry served a useful function in society.

Let us now discuss in slightly greater detail some of the virtues which formed the basis of chivalry. After

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[16] Henry Osborn Taylor, The Mediaeval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages, 4th ed. (London, 1938), I, 538. (Hereafter cited as Taylor, Mediaeval Mind).

trying to categorize these virtues one finds a striking resemblance between the five major virtues in classical Greece and those advocated by the medieval knights. Courage as known by the Greek would be termed prowess by a knight. Knighthood embodied a martial spirit, probably derived from the Germanic tribes with their emphasis on bravery and skill with arms. Courage was often carried to the point of recklessness, so dramatically demonstrated in the Song of Roland by Roland's bravery and loyalty to Charlemagne. Saint Louis on occasion displayed an excessive bravery, often carried to the point of foolishness. As in ancient Greece, the knight was admonished to be courageous but always to temper his courage with discretion.

Piety played a small role in the lives of the early knights. These crude warriors had little time or interest to devote to the affairs of the Church. Religious chivalry reached its zenith during the centuries of the crusades when the goals of chivalry and of the Church became intermixed. The knights of the crusading era became true warriors of the Church. For almost two centuries, knighthood was inspired with a religious fervor whereby the knights admirably upheld the religious ideals of chivalry and set a noble example for the members of the lower classes.

The Greeks felt that justice was giving every man his due but one can find no such specific statement of the justice expected of a knight. Ramón Lull probably comes

closest to any clear definition of justice.

> The knyghtes ought to be mayntened and kept justyce, for in lyke wyse as the juges haue thoffyce to juge, in lyke wyse haue the knyghtes thoffyce for to kepe them fro vyolence in exercysyng the fayt of iustyce. Yf it myght be that chyualry and clergy assebled them to gyder in such maner that knyghtes shold be learned so that by scyece they were sufficient to be juges, none office sholde be so proper to be a juge as chyualry, for he that by justyce may best be holden is more proper to be a juge than any other.[17]

Justice is one of those disputable terms which has always intrigued mankind. The writers on chivalry tended to banter the term about rather loosely, but probably its closest synonym for the medieval knight would be fairness in his interactions with his fellow men. The account of the eleventh century Spanish hero, known as the Cid, offers an excellent example of the exhibition of a lack of justice. The Cid represented the ideal Castilian noble, faithfully serving his lord, Alfonso VI, upon the ascension of the latter to the throne of Castile. However in 1081, upon returning from a campaign in the service of his king, the Cid was unjustly accused by Alfonso of keeping part of the tribute taken on the expedition. As punishment he was exiled from Castile. Though his exile released him from all dependence upon the king, he never lost his love and desire to serve both king and country. Several years later he was happily restored to royal favor. His stay in court was brief, for at the

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[17]Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry, pp. 30-31.

behest of the Cid's enemies, the king again subjected him to unjust accusations, this time not only exiling the Cid but confiscating his property and imprisoning his wife and children. The Cid offered to submit himself to the ordinary judicial procedure of the time to clear himself on oath but Alfonso would not consent. Hereafter the Cid set out on his own, winning fame and fortune by his military prowess. Though he eventually gained greater military and political prestige than his king, he sincerely regretted the injustice shown him and always retained a desire to serve his native country and monarch.

The virtue of temperance as known by the Greek was certainly a goal for and a restraint upon medieval chivalry. However, in actual practice the medieval knight had a most difficult time in achieving this virtue. It was a rare person such as Saint Louis who tempered his drinking (watered his wine) and eating. Yet within their chivalrous hierarchy knightly behavior was considered moderate prior to 1300, not reaching the extremes of the waning Middle Ages so vividly described by Huizinga.[18]

Of the five Greek virtues which were crucial to knighthood, wisdom was the least realized in actual practice.

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[18] See J(ohan) Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries (Garden City, New York, 1956), Chapter I. (Hereafter cited as Huizinga, Waning Middle Ages).

A knight might have good common sense but few had more knowledge than the art of warfare, and many could neither read or write. Ramón Lull recommended there be books and schools whereby a squire could receive the proper training to become a knight.[19] Probably one of the best arguments for a wise and intelligent nobility was put forth in the thirteenth century poem, Romance of the Rose.

> Much fairer chance the learned have
> To prove them noble, wise, and suave.
> . . . .
> Briefly, a man from books may learn
> Virtue to love and vice to spurn.
> . . . .
> When comes the dreadful dooming day,
> Find sterner judge than people lay,
> Who ne'er in books were trained to read
> How vice to shun and virtue speed.
> . . . .
> If men fain would learn
> How they for high noblesse may earn
> Distinction, with this golden lore
> Their minds and memories let them store:
> Whoso would practise true noblesse
> Must cast off pride and idleness,
> Himself to arms or study give,
> And pure of soul and spirit live.[20]

Among the other virtues of significance, courtesy received increasing emphasis as chivalry matured. In its feudal environment, courtesy meant being polite to another knight and not attacking an unarmed man. Fighting must take place under equal conditions for both concerned. Due mainly

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[19]Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry, p. 22.

[20]W(Guillaume de) Lorris and J(ohn) Clopinel (Jean de Meun), The Romance of the Rose, trans. F. S. Ellis (London, 1900), III, 134-5.

to the influence of the romance literature, courtesy was eventually expanded to include an elaborate set of manners specifying the proper interrelationship between a knight and a lady, having as an ultimate effect the upraising of the status of womanhood. In the late thirteenth century, Lull gave a good definition of courtesy; however, he explained it from a moral point of view.

> To a knyght apperteyneth to speke nobly and curtoisly, and to haue fayr harnoys and to be wel cladde, and to holde a good houshold and an honest hows. For alle these thynges ben to honoure Chyualrye necessarye. Curtosye and chyualry concorden to gyder. For vylaynous and foule wordes ben ageynst thordre of chyualry. Pryualte and acqueyntaunce of good folke, loyalte and trouthe, hardynesse, largesse, honeste, humylyte, pyte and the other thynges semblable to these apperteyne to chyualry.[21]

Courtesy reached fruition in the court life of France with elaborate rules being prescribed which specified the behavior of the nobility, more especially concerning the art of love. Courtly love developed in the twelfth century, emerging mainly as a fusion of Latin and Moslem elements. The troubadours of southern France first popularized it; henceforth it spread throughout France and Europe. In the late twelfth century Andreas Capellanus wrote a classic tract showing not only the traits necessary to be a perfect lover but more important those actions that would tend to undermine love. "Things which weaken love are blasphemy

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[21]Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry, p. 113.

against God or His saints, mockery of the ceremonies of the Church, and a deliberate withholding of charity from the poor. We find that love decreases very sharply if one is unfaithful to his friend, or if he brazenly says one thing while he deceitfully conceals a different idea in his heart. Love decreases, too, if the lover piles up more wealth than is proper, or if he is too ready to go to law over trifles."[22] The rules set down here are most stringent and never perfectly followed, but at least the institution of courtly love as presented by Capellanus contained none of the artificiality and false delusions of perfection that came to characterize so many of the writings on this topic.

Just as the crusades brought an end to a strictly feudal chivalry and gave it a more noble and honorable purpose, so too, courtly love began to replace the ardent religious zeal so prevalent among the crusaders. As early as the twelfth century courtesy and courtly love tended to be emphasized in differing ways. Such writers as Capellanus and Lull stressed courtesy and courtly love from a moral point of view, emphasizing their refinements and demonstrating the beneficial effect this new aspect of chivalry could have upon the individual knight and society in general. However, also beginning in the twelfth century courtesy and courtly

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[22] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John Jay Parry (New York, 1959), pp. 155-6.

love tended to emerge in a different direction which had the effect of undermining the true virtues of chivalry. Though this aspect will be dealt with to a greater extent in a later chapter, it is sufficient to state at this point that the type of courtly love generally presented in such works as the Romance of the Rose was basically opposed to the virtues of both Christianity and chivalry.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries largesse struck its way into the code of chivalry. Largesse might be defined as lavish generosity sometimes expressed in an almost reckless extravagance. Tournaments and jousts in particular gave expression to elaborate displays of food and drink by the cordial host. It is inconceivable to picture a knight being thrifty or miserly.

Honesty and humility were also of great importance as part of the repertoire of the knightly virtues. Honesty and loyalty showed many patterns of similarity in their requirements of fulfillment. Humility was not only a knightly but also a Christian virtue being directly opposed to the deadly sin of pride. The strict adherence to all of these virtues was the prerequisite to perfect fulfillment of one's role as a knight.

It will now be most beneficial to consider some of the religious obligations and aspects of feudalism and chivalry. The feudal ceremony which began as a secular bond very early received the sanction of the Church. The oath

of fealty was sworn on the Holy Scriptures or some holy relic and the "king and count . . . agreed to permit their lands to fall under the interdict of the Church in case either failed in his duty."[23] It was difficult to instill a sense of charity and "love thy neighbor" in these early feudal nobles and the Church first maintained that a vicious knight was not a good Christian. Later as chivalry became more prevalent as an ideal this was reinterpreted to mean an unchristian knight was not a true knight. As early as the tenth century the Peace of God was put forth to restrain the unbridled feudal warfare and protect the clergy, the peasants, and eventually the merchants from violence and oppression. Some lords accepted this peace, going so far as to take oaths voluntarily to this effect. However, the unruly segments of the nobility were not effectively restrained until the Truce of God was promulgated early in the eleventh century. By this arrangement the Church restricted feudal warfare to certain specific times of the year, thereby giving relief to the oppressed peasantry during the season of cultivation and harvesting of crops. Those who ignored this decree received the penalty of excommunication. The ultimate solution to unbridled warfare came in channeling the energy of the knights against the infidel via the crusade.

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[23]Thompson and Johnson, Medieval Europe, p. 301.

In a very real sense chivalry was the spiritual force that gave value to feudalism. The ceremony of becoming a knight was filled with religious significance beginning with the twenty-four hour fast, the ceremonial bath, the all night vigil before the altar, the blessing of the sword, and ending with the final vow to aid the Church and the poor and oppressed. Lull claimed that the office of a knight was second only to the clergy.[24] "The offyce of a knyght is to mayntene and deffende the holy feyth catholyque . . . and for to honoure and multyplye the feythe suffryd in this world. For . . . god of glory hath chosen knyghtes be cause by force of armes they vaynquysshe the mescreautes whiche daily laboure for to destroy [the] holy chirche, and such knyghtes god holdeth them for his frendes honoured in this world, and in that other when they kepe and mayntene the feith by the whiche we entende to be saved."[25] It was the knight's duty to combine with the clergy in enforcing God's will for he owed his first responsibility to the Church, secondly to his lord, and then to his native land. Up until the eleventh century knights did not usually respond in this manner; however, in the year 1095 chivalry took on a whole new aspect.

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[24]Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry, p. 115.

[25]Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry, p. 24.

Beginning in the late eleventh century and continuing through the twelfth and thirteenth the crusades raised the religious fervor of the knights to a fever pitch. Here was an opportunity for an exciting life of adventure and glory with paradise as the ultimate reward. The knight became a type of policeman for the Church. One might argue the worth of the crusades to society but no one can dispute the religious enthusiasm they created. One gains a feeling of the enthusiasm after reading the summons which Urban II made at Clermont in 1095 and the response he received from these first crusaders. Urban appealed to the vanity of the Frenchmen by beginning his speech "O ye men of the Franks, who live beyond the mountains! God hath favored you in many ways, in your happy land as in your steadfast faith and valor. To you our words are spoken, and by you our message will be passed on." Urban continued his appeal by stating the urgent need to recover the holy land from the infidel Turks and Arabs. In order to build up the fervor he related numerous examples of inhuman atrocities committed by the Turks against the Christians. He appealed to those who were robbers and pillagers to turn their energies against the infidel. "You are girdled knights, but you are arrogant with pride. . . . Come forward to the defense of Christ. O ye who have carried on feuds, come to the war against the infidels. O ye who have been thieves, become soldiers. Fight a just war. . . . Let no obstacle turn you aside

. . . God [is] guiding you--." With great emotion, the knights present answered in a tumultuous "Dieu lo vult, God wills it!" And upon this zealous note the first crusade was initiated.[26]

On a later crusade one catches some of the religious fervor from the pages of Villehardouin as he described how the knights fell prostrate before the Doge and people of Venice. After the Venetians agreed to finance the trip there arose great shouts of consent.[27] Villehardouin emphasizes that due to God's will the crusaders were able to gain victories over superior numbers.[28]

Saint Louis of France represents the perfect embodiment and in a sense the culmination of the ideal knight. His religious zeal was indisputable as he lead two crusades, but he also strove to achieve the other virtues of chivalry.

> This holy man loved God with all his heart, and followed Him in His acts; and this appeared in that, as God died for the love He bore His people, so did the king put his body in peril, and that several times, for the love he bore to his people. . . . The holy king so loved truth, that . . . he would never consent to lie to the Saracens as to any covenant that he had made with them. Of his mouth he was so sober, that on no day of my life did I ever hear him order

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[26]The quotations are from Harold Lamb, The Crusades: Iron Men and Saints (Garden City, New York, 1930), pp. 39-41.

[27]Villehardouin, Memoirs of the Crusade, trans. Sir Frank T. Marzials (New York, 1958), p. 8.

[28]Ibid., p. 126.

> special meats. . . . In his words he was temperate; for on no day of my life did I ever hear him speak evil of any one. . . .[29]

Joinville, the famous biographer of Saint Louis, relates that his king also showed great temperance in his drink. "He put water into his wine by measure, according as he saw that the strength of the wine would suffer it." Louis warned Joinville "that it was too foul a thing for a brave man to get drunk."[30] Perhaps the most famous and also most illustrative example of Saint Louis' deep piety and humility comes to us today in the form of a conversation that took place between this chivalrous king and his beloved vassal, Joinville. In this discussion Saint Louis demonstrates his love of the poor and abhorrence of all mortal sins and he endeavors to persuade Joinville to follow his example.

> "Now I ask you," said he, "which you would the better like, either to be a leper, or to have committed a mortal sin?" And I, who never lied to him, made answer that I would rather have committed thirty mortal sins than be a leper. And when the monks had departed, he called me to him alone, and made me sit at his feet, and said, "How came you to say that to me yesterday?" And I told him that I said it again. And he answered, "You spoke hastily and as a fool. For you should know that there is no leprosy so hideous as the being in mortal sin, inasmuch as the soul that is in mortal sin is like unto the Devil; wherefore no leprosy can be so hideous. And sooth it is that, when a man dies, he is healed of the leprosy in his body; but when a man who has committed mortal sin dies, he cannot know of a certainty that he has, during his lifetime, repented in

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[29]Joinville, Memoirs of the Crusades, trans. Sir Frank T. Marzials (New York, 1958), p. 139.

[30]*Ibid*., p. 140.

> such sort that God has forgiven him; wherefore he must stand in great fear lest that leprosy of sin should last as long as God is in paradise. So I pray you," said he, "as strongly as I can, for the love of God, and for the love of me, so to set your heart that you prefer any evil that can happen to the body, whether it be leprosy, or any other sickness, rather than that mortal sin should enter into your soul."
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> He asked me if I washed the feet of the poor on Holy Thursday. "Sire," said I, "it would make me sick! The feet of these villains will I not wash." "In truth," said he, "that was ill said; for you should never disdain what God did for our teaching. So I pray you, for the love of God first, and then for the love of me, that you accustom yourself to wash the feet of the poor."[31]

Louis truly practiced almost every virtue that was advocated in the code of chivalry. However, on numerous occasions Louis carried his piety and bravery entirely too far, needlessly endangering his own life, as well as the lives of his family and also of his companions. On one occasion his ship struck a rock and was greatly damaged. Instead of directing the men in abandoning ship and seeing to it his family was saved, Louis placed himself prostrate in the form of the sign of the cross on the ship's deck, swearing not to leave the ship even though it was damaged. Luckily the ship did not sink but it could have been a most unfortunate incident.

One is impressed by what appeared to be sincere relivious zeal shown by many of the knights who took part in the crusades. However, as is the case with all movements of this nature the interest dropped as each succeeding crusade

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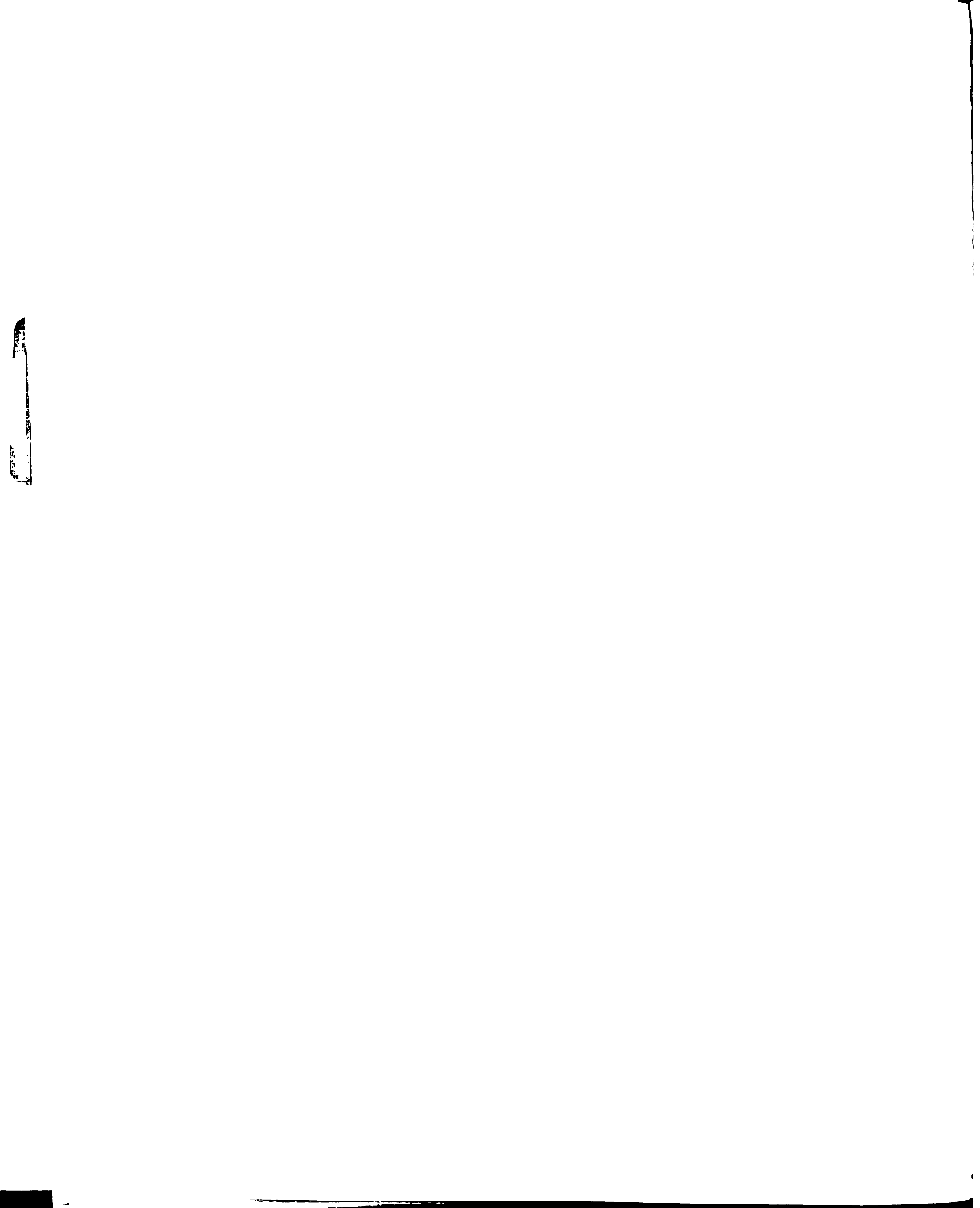
[31]*Ibid*., p. 141.



was initiated. Joinville would not even join Saint Louis in his second crusade in 1270 for he wisely foresaw the disaster which was forthcoming. This fiasco culminated in the death of Louis and was the last crusade of any significance. From this point forth chivalry changed direction. In fact, even before the crusading era had ended a more formalized, less purposeful type of chivalry had sprung up and begun to undermine the virtues of prowess and piety which had been of such great importance to the knights of the feudal and religious era of chivalry.

Let us now delve into some of the interactions which took place between the men of chivalry and those people known as commoners. During the early feudal period the lower classes often received harsh treatment due to the almost constant warfare of the nobility. However, the Church endeavored to soften the burdens of the peasantry, townsmen and merchants by proclaiming the Peace and Truce of God, and achieved some degree of success. While the knight himself in no way swore to assist the lower classes, he did realize that it was through their labor and support that he was able to lead his life free from manual labor. Lull summarized it when he stated that "to a knyght apperteyneth that he be louer of the comyn wele, for by the comynalte of the people was chyualry founden and establysshed. And the comyn wele is gretter and more necessary than propre good

and specyall."[32]

The code of chivalry did prescribe that knights especially aid women (particularly widows), children, the helpless and poor and oppressed of society. In other words, a knight must show charity toward society for

> a knyght withoute charyte maye not be without cruelte, and euyll wylle. And cruelte and euyll wylle accorde not to the offyce of chyualrye by cause that charyte behoueth to be in a knyght. For yf a knyght haue not charyte in god and in his neyghbour, how or in what wyse shold he loue god. And yf he had not pyte on poure men, not myghty and dyseased, how shold he haue mercy on the men taken and vaynquysshed that demaunde mercy, as not of power to escape and maye not fynde the fynaunce that is of them demaunded for theyr delyueraunce. And yf in a knyght were not charyte, how myght he be in thordre of chyualry. Charite is a vertu above other vertues for she departeth euery vyce. Charite is a loue of the which euery knyght ought to have as moche as nede is to mayntene his offyce.[33]

Now that the obligations of the nobility have been discerned let us look at the actual practices and conditions prior to the Hundred Years' War. Private warfare was rampant during the early Middle Ages; however, this warfare was restricted mainly to small bands of knights fighting each other. Consequently wars remained localized, upsetting only small scattered areas at any one time. The nobility did in fact fulfill their functions as armed knights by protecting their fiefs and the people on them from outside

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[32] Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry, p. 113.

[33] Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry, pp. 93-3.

invaders and other greedy nobles. Conditions improved greatly during the twelfth and especially the thirteenth century in France as private warfare decreased considerably in the wake of a more centralized monarchy. France has always placed her strength in her superior rural economy and this prospered greatly prior to the Hundred Years' War due to the increasingly longer periods of peace resulting from decreased private warfare. "At the end of the thirteenth century France was the most prosperous and best governed nation in Europe."[34] Relative peace and justice reigned in the kingdom. One can picture Saint Louis sitting under an oak tree hearing the cases of those whose rights had been impinged upon.

The towns also flourished prior to the Hundred Years' War, more especially due to the aid and protection of Philip IV. "Commerce and industry had a great extension and historians agree in recognizing that the years which preceeded the Hundred Years' War may be counted among the most fortunate which France has known in its long history. . . . The majority of the towns did not exceed 10,000 inhabitants; the villages were more populous than now [1931]; and in particular there were many isolated villages which disappeared

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[34] James Westfall Thompson, Economic and Social History of Europe in the Later Middle Ages (1300-1530) (New York, 1931), p. 22. (Hereafter cited as Thompson, Economic History).

during the Hundred Years' War. . . . New towns or _bastides_ were created everywhere, and fixed to the soil that wandering population always numerous in the Middle Ages and often dangerous."[35]

Under the leadership of Louis IX and Philip IV the French monarchy gained increasing strength. The former supressed private warfare which disconcerted the nobility, for this was not only their function but their pastime. His efforts to channel the knights' energy into a dynamic crusade completely failed. Philip IV allied with the bourgeoisie which became a great source of wealth and power to draw upon. These two monarchs had gained much strength at the expense of the nobility. The feudal institutions were practically dead, for by "the end of the thirteenth century they ceased in western Europe to be the most fundamental element in the structure of society, lying behind and influencing every aspect of its life and thought."[36] In the thirteenth century the kings were truly above feudalism.

Although chivalry had separated itself from the legalistic and economic aspects of the feudal structure, it still had strong roots in the feudal system, and a blow to one had an effect on the other. Within the code of chivalry itself there was a conflict between the obligations of

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[35]Thompson, _Economic History_, p. 46.

[36]Ganshof, _Feudalism_, p. 152.

warfare, religion, and courtesy. It was difficult if not impossible for any knight to satisfy them all and still maintain a balance between the three. It was only during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that these three vital functions of a knight were reconciled most effectively due to the religious zeal of the crusades, the suppression of private warfare, and rising emphasis on courtesy with the great influx of romance literature.

The chief purpose of this study is not to show that feudalism was an empty institution by 1300 and that absolute monarchy was in the ascendancy, for this is a conclusion agreed upon by most all medieval historians. Nor will we further dwell on the technical structure and achievements of chivalry prior to the Hundred Years' War. Our purpose is to analyze the behavior of the nobility during these two long centuries of warfare and chaos. After the reign of Philip IV the French monarchy floundered in an age of warfare for almost a century and a half. This lapse in monarchical power offered the nobility a chance to recoup the losses they had suffered at the hands of the strong kings of the thirteenth century and to regain a position of power in the society to which they belonged. The fact that they failed to grasp this golden opportunity to retain their mastery over society shall concern us hereafter.

CHAPTER II

THE NOBILITY REACTS TO MONARCHY

Out of the rubble of the Hundred Years' War emerged the great nations of modern Europe. In the case of France the monarchy emerged absolutistic almost in spite of itself. With the exception of Charles V, the first four Valois kings were incompetent, tending to undo the work of the earlier powerful Capetian monarchs such as Louis IX and Philip IV. Realizing the void left by lack of strong monarchical direction and the chaos brought on by a long war the responsibility fell to the powerful nobles of France to rise above their petty differences and give direction and support to the established government. Not only did they fail to control the lesser nobility by force if necessary or even by example, but they played a negative role concerning any sense of loyalty toward France as a whole and unified society. While it is true some of the literature of this period (more especially during the fifteenth century) reflects an increasing awareness of a national consciousness, the nobility on few occasions demonstrated any loyalty further than would enhance their own greedy ends. The war offered the nobility a chance to regain some of their diminishing prestige and power, but they failed to grasp this opportunity

either because they could not rise above their own avaricious tendencies or because they had become too set in their out-worn chivalric practices.

The chief source concerning the actions of the nobility during the fourteenth century is Jean Froissart, whose chronicles cover a period ranging from 1326 to 1400. Since his first patron, Robert of Namur, fought on the side of the English, Froissart is accused of favoring England in his writings. Perroy, whose classic book on the Hundred Years' War is the best to date, claims "Froissart, [was] always predjudiced in favour of the Plantagenets. . . ."[1] Others have contended he was pro-French after the Peace of Bretigny in 1360. One could find evidence to support both of these contentions but it appears more likely that neither gives an accurate portrayal of this man, for he was first and foremost a chronicler and historian of chivalry. Froissart is representative of his age in the sense that he lacked any true patriotism, for there was no French nation in the fourteenth century but only a kingdom of France which tottered on the brink of disintegration.

Froissart's greatest glee comes when describing the "feates of armes" and the glitter and excitement of a battle

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[1] Édouard Perroy, The Hundred Years War, trans. W. B. Wells (New York, 1951), p. 125.

with little thought of its significance other than a great display of chivalry. He describes a battle between the English and French at Rayvombergues as follows: "It was great beautie to beholde shynynge agaynst the sonne, to baners, penons, and clere bassenettes, and so great nombre of people, that the eye of man coude nat nombre them: their speares semed a great thicke wode."[2] His enthusiasm for chivalry comes bubbling forth at its finest in his description of the battle of Poitiers in 1356. The burning of the towns, pillaging of the countryside and finally the capture of King John the Good at Poitiers do not strike him as injurious to France but as part of the trappings and the excitement which seemed so natural for this chivalrous visionary.

> Often tymes the adventures of amours and of war are more fortunate and marvelous than any man canne thynke or wysshe; truly this batayle, the which was nere to Poycters . . . was right great and peryllous, and many dedes of armes there was done. . . . The fyghters on bothe parties endured moche payne; kyng John with his owne handes dyd that day marvels in armes; he had an an axe in his handes wherwith he defended hymselfe and fought in the brekynge of the prease. . . . The chase endured to the gates of Poiters: Ther were many slayne and beaten downe, horse and man, for they of Poyters closed their gates and wolde suffre none to entre; wherfore in the strete before the gate was horrible murdre, men hurt and beaten downe.[3]

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[2]Sir John Froissart, <u>The Chronicles of Froissart</u>, trans. Sir John Bourchier Lord Berners(annis 1523-25) (London, 1901), III, 448. (Hereafter cited as Froissart).

[3]Froissart, I, 378.

This incident is not only typical of Froissart's love of chivalry to the exclusion of any patriotism but also represents the futility of fighting in small, disorganized armies. Insubordination was a common occurrence and the French king's control over his army of knights was loose indeed. While by mid-fourteenth century the English forces contained a great number of commoners mostly wielding the longbow, the armed knights continued to monopolize the warfare in France. Their lack of discipline and disobedience to the king was clearly demonstrated at Crécy in 1346. King Philip sent out four scouts to gain information about the enemy. Upon returning they reported that the enemy was well rested and it would be best to rest the French army overnight, for by the time they could organize the men and prepare them for battle it would be late in the day and the troops would be exhausted. Early in the morning the French would be fresh and have the leisure to prepare for battle. Philip agreed with this sensible advice and "than the kynge commaunded . . . Tary and abyde here in the name of God and saynt Denys. They that were formast taryed, but they that were behynde wolde nat tary, but rode forthe and sayd howe they wolde in no wyse abyde tyll they were as ferr forward as the formast: And whan they before sawe them come on behynde, than they rode forward agayne, so that the kyng nor his marshals coude nat rule them. So they rode without order or good aray, tyll they came in sight of their

ennemyes; and assone as the formast sawe them, they reculed them abacke without good aray; whereof they behynde had marvell and were abasshed. . . ."[4] Clearly these nobles broke their feudal oath of loyalty to King Philip. Since they were still acting according to the modes of the feudal system and rules of chivalry, they may be legitimately castigated for this most flagrant violation of duties and sworn loyalty to their lord the king. Their insubordination and disunity cost France one of her worst defeats in her long history.

Perhaps at this point we might clarify some of the obligations which were required of the nobility in their relationship with the king. Technically every vassal of the king, that vassal's vassal, and so forth down the line owed service to the king for he was considered the supreme lord within the feudal hierarchy of his kingdom. In this sense according to feudal theory the kings were the ultimate source of all political rights and land tenure. The powerful princes of the land who were vassals of the king owed him the same military, monetary, and court services as they expected from their vassals. Ultimately, however, it was only through force and military conquest that the king truly controlled his lands. During the twelfth century the French monarchs began to consolidate and strengthen their feudal

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[4]Froissart, I, 296.

holdings. The Capetian monarchs gained greater control over the officials of the household and also asserted greater authority over local governmental officials. They also expanded their legal power and taxation rights beyond those ordinarily exercised by feudal lords. Consequently with the opening of the fourteenth century the kingship entailed extensive power above and beyond that held by the average lord.

The responsibility of the nobility to back the king as their supreme lord deteriorated greatly during the course of the fourteenth century for the French nobles continuously broke their feudal obligations to their monarch; in many cases for the most dishonorable reasons. At the very beginning of the war King Edward endeavored to persuade the Flemish nobility to join his service and they replied "we wolde gladly do this; but, syr, we be bounde by faith and othe, and on the somme of two myllyons of floreyns in the popes chaumbre, that we may make nor move no warre agaynst the kynge of Fraunce, whosoever it be, on payne to lose the sayd somme, and besyde that, to ryn in the sentence of cursyng; but, syr, if ye wyll take on you the armes of Fraunce, . . . and call your selfe kyng of Fraunce, . . . than we woll take you for rightful kyng of Fraunce. . . ."[5]

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[5]Froissart, I, 122.

This Edward willingly agreed to; hence technically the nobles had not broken their allegiance to the French monarch. However, one readily perceives their loyalty was extremely shallow to agree to such a Machiavellian maneuver as made by Edward even though he did have a claim to the French throne (his mother was the daughter of Philip IV). This same type of situation occurred in reverse concerning John of Hainault and King Philip. The latter endeavored to persuade John to switch his loyalty from England to France by offering him greater revenues. Sir John finally succumbed when informed that England would no longer pay him his pension, even though since early youth he had been in the services of the English. King Philip must bear some of the blame for his flagrant dishonesty; however, John of Hainault took his loyalty rather lightly, if, for purely monetary reasons, he was willing to switch his allegiance. It is not so much our concern to deal exclusively with the nobility's allegiance to either France or England but to gain a general understanding of the apparent superficiality of their loyalty in respect to the state and the willingness with which they snapped their bonds.

Charles the Bad, king of Navarre, in spite of his marriage to the daughter of King John, was one of the most notorious hypocrites and traitors the fourteenth century produced. He continuously intrigued with Edward III, but due to his powerful holdings in Normandy, so vulnerable to

invasion by England, John was perpetually forced to capitulate to his wishes. Following the capture of John at Poitiers France was in great turmoil and the people knew not where to turn for leadership. The royal authority was reduced to a shadow, as rival factions split the country. The Estates General was impotent, gaining the support of only one of the conflicting factions. Simplifying this struggle to its barest essentials, Charles of Navarre joined Étienne Marcel (the richest man in France who controlled the Third Estate in Paris) in an effort to gain control of the French government. Their motives were contrary, however, for Marcel wished to reform the government through the Estates General while Charles sought to be king and have supreme power in France. The young nineteen year old dauphin representing the royal authority opposed Charles the Bad and the Estates and eventually in 1359 got the upper hand in supressing the disorder. Marcel was killed and Charles was discredited due to his treacherous behavior. In the meantime King John had signed a humiliating peace which the dauphin, now supported by the Estates General, refused to accept. Peace finally ensued in 1360 upon the signing of the Peace of Bretigny. These four complicated years following Poitiers represent one of the most sordid periods of France's long history. Royal authority was stultified with the disunified, irresponsible nobility only making matters worse. It would take a strong king such as Charles

V to revive France.

The young Charles V made great strides in bringing unity and order to France, but he was still confronted with the treasonous Charles the Bad. "The king learnt through the capture of some agents of the King of Navarre that Charles the Bad had not ceased to play the traitor, and that in 1370, 1372, and again in 1378, he had negotiated with the English for the dismemberment of the French kingdom. All sorts of crimes were imputed to him, the last being a cunningly-laid plot to poison Charles V."[6] Finally Bertrand du Guesclin was sent by the king to subdue Charles the Bad. Although he received the aid of the English, Charles was despoiled of most of his domains in France including Montpellier. All his principle castles were seized and he endured the remainder of his days in hopeless destitution.

On occasion there arose a spark of sincere allegiance to the king, as in the case of the nobles of Gascony in 1360. Since according to the agreements signed at Bretigny and Calais Edward III gained control of the duchies of Guienne and Gascony, it was necessary for King John to release the nobles from their allegiance to France. This was accomplished but many nobles showed great reluctance to do so. They appeared to be faithful French subjects.

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[6]A. Coville, in The Cambridge Medieval History (New York and Cambridge, England, 1932), VII, 365.

Eight years later, after returning to the French fold, these same knights of Gascony defied Charles V by stating that if he did not aid them against the Black Prince they would find some other lord. Since they wielded such great power, Charles was forced to aid them, paying their expenses and giving them gifts.

The Companions or Free Companies which formed shortly after the battle of Poitiers represent knighthood at its worst. At this point let us limit ourselves only to their interactions with the kingship. These bands of roving pillagers were commanded by and formed from knights from England, Gascony and Germany, left unemployed after the formal fighting ceased. They roamed at will paying heed to no one "for all that the kyng of Englandes duputies had commaunded them to avoyde and to departe; howbeit, they wolde nat all obey. . . ."[7] For several decades these unmanageable fighters remained in France, causing a general turmoil and following the orders of neither the king of England nor of France. In 1369 a great band of Companions led by Sir Perducas Dalbreth split away and became French, while the rest of the band led mainly by Sir Robert Briquet remained loyal to England.[8] Though "loyalty" here is used

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[7]Froissart, II, 86.

[8]Froissart, II, 262.

in the most superficial sense, the example is typical of the unpredictability of these bands of rowdies. Their "loyalties" were easily channeled from one king to another in direct relationship to the amount of pillage and plunder they expected to receive.

Charles V spent his whole reign undoing the damage of the previous two Valois kings, making the monarchy a more powerful office than it had ever been before. Upon his death in 1380 there began a period of fifty years of factional disputes that rocked the French kingdom almost to the breaking point. The background of the ensuing conflict dates from 1363 when King John made his son, Philip the Bold, the duke of Burgundy. Thinking to strengthen France by making Burgundy a hereditary possession of his son, he discovered instead that this duchy, under the direction of Philip, rose to challenge the kingship. Philip allied with the rich province of Flanders through his marriage to Margaret of Flanders and soon perceived that his interests differed greatly from those of France.

The new king, twelve year old Charles VI, was crowned immediately after his father's death. However, because of his age and weak will the affairs of the kingdom were placed in a Council of Twelve, presided over by his extravagant uncle, the duke of Anjou. He pilfered the royal treasury and set out on an adventurous mission to conquer Naples, where he met his death in 1384. The other three uncles of

the king (the dukes of Burgundy and Berry were brothers of his father and the duke of Bourbon was his mother's brother) stood ready to assume control of the government. Philip of Burgundy held the upper hand and it was he who led the young king against the rebellious Flemings in 1382 in which the French gained the victory of Roosebeke and Philip van Artevelde met his death. The uncles of the king rules in a manner that would enhance their own private holdings by manipulating the kingship to serve their own personal needs, illustrated best by their extractions from the royal treasury. "The dukes of Berrey and Burgoyne kepte styll the governaunce of the realme of Fraunce, for they had great profyte therby: they had apoynted suche persones as them pleased to be about the kyng."[9]

The duke of Burgundy remained the real head of the royal government, pursuing a selfish policy to be regularly followed by the house of Burgundy. In 1388 probably under the influence of his brother, Louis, Charles VI announced to his uncles his intention to rule by himself. His primary guidance came from the "Marmousets," who were old counsellors of Charles V; these men were backed by the Constable Clisson and Louis, duke of Touraine (the king's younger brother). Things looked bright during the brief period of their rule as many excellent ordinances were passed, peace was concluded

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[9]Froissart, VI, 102.

with the English, and order and justice returned to the realm. Charles VI personally set out to reform the abuses and extortions of the duke of Berry's administration. The duke's treasurer, Bétizac, was put to death by the constable, Oliver de Clisson, an act which brought upon him the enmity of both the dukes of Berry and of Burgundy. In the spring of 1392, an old quarrel between the duke of Brittany and Constable Clisson flared up once again and led the duke to engineer a plot designed to assassinate his foe. The king, who was devoted to his constable, set out to avenge him even though he had been warned by his physicians not to travel until he was fully recovered from the sickness that had struck him in the spring. On a boiling day in August while riding through the forest of Le Mans, Charles was startled by the clash of a page's spear against a steel helmet. This capped a series of incidents which sent the king into a fit of madness.[10] While the madness was intermittent, the periods of sanity diminished each year. Once again the reins of government fell to the powerful princes who immediately dismissed all of the prominent royal counsellors including Clisson.

The power of the dukes of Berry and Burgundy was henceforth challenged by a new force who claimed the leadership

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[10]For an excellent account of the immediate sequence of events leading up to and following this pitiful scene read Froissart's (VI, 68-9) colorful description.

of the Council. This was none other than Louis, the younger brother of the king, who had just been made duke of Orleans. "When the king recovered his sanity, or when the Duke of Burgundy was in his own domains, the Duke of Orleans, with the king's partiality and affection to support him, appeared as master, and the finances and the disposal of favours were at his command. So there was constant vicissitude in the government of the kingdom."[11] The lavish spending and irresponsible actions of the powerful princes only tended to increase as time went on while the kingship declined just as fast in the opposite direction. "Indeed, can one still call it a monarchy, when the kingdom was dominated by a group of magnates, territorial princes already too powerful, but insatiably ambitious and eager to acquire the utmost of the wealth, still great, in the hands of the royal government?"[12]

The rivalry between the Orleanist and Burgundian factions increased but did not break into violence and civil war until John the Fearless replaced his father, upon the death of the latter in 1404, as head of the house of Burgundy. The spark which set off the conflagration occurred in the form of the cruel murder of Louis of Orleans in 1407 by the

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[11] A. Coville, in The Cambridge Medieval History, VII, 373.

[12] Perroy, The Hundred Years War, p. 219.

Burgundians. Both sides claimed they were on the side of justice and that it was the other party who was disloyal and treasonous against the king, but there is much evidence to show the latter half of this statement was true of both parties. The common people, more especially the people of Paris, felt little remorse at the loss of this extravagant spendthrift but it is interesting to note John's justification for having Louis of Orleans done away with. His main argument as put forth by Jean Petit, a scholar and theologian, stated that it was lawful for a subject to kill such a disloyal traitor as Louis according to the mandates of divine, moral, and natural law. In fact Petit argued that it was honorable and even laudable to kill a tyrant, giving as a parallel case the death of Julius Caesar.[13] Were this argument carried to its logical conclusion anarchy would reign and justice and order would be crushed which in fact was the case during the years the dispute raged between the Burgundians and house of Orleans (or Armagnacs as they came to be known). Clearly no prince, no matter how powerful, has the right to arbitrarily exterminate another prince for treason, for only the monarch has the prerogative to act in cases of this sort. One would be naive to believe that the murder of the duke of Orleans was anything more than the

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[13]Enguerrand de Monstrelet, <u>The Chronicles of Enguerrand De Monstrelet</u>, trans. Thomas Johnes (London, 1849), I, 71. (Hereafter cited as Monstrelet).

by-product of a factional struggle for power, but the justification is indicative of the self-confidence and feeling of security which motivated the powerful princes, little realizing that in continuing their petty struggles they were only digging their future grave into which would fall their power and positive role in society.

The royal treasury was being quickly depleted and dishonesty and scandal were bywords in the French court. The poor insane king was pitifully neglected while his princes pilfered the treasury. In 1409 the dukes of Berry, Burgundy, and Bourbon asked the king for permission to reform the finances and dismiss the dishonest officials. One of the richest, Jean de Montague, was executed and the king's gold and silver was confiscated; however, all the spoils fell back into the hands of the princes.

The Armagnacs and Burgundians embarked upon open civil war in 1411, paying no attention to the king's efforts to mediate and secure peace for his realm. The Burgundians kept large bodies of men-at-arms south of Paris in direct opposition to the king's orders to return to their own lands. In one of his ever diminishing moments of sanity, Charles VI proclaimed to the Estates General in February, 1413, that "having learnt that after this our said cousin of Burgundy was assembling a large body of men-at-arms, we sent one of the sergeants-at-arms of the parliament with sealed letters to him, to forbid him to raise any forces whatever.

Notwithstanding this, in defiance of the treaty of peace and of our positive orders, our cousin of Burgundy continued to assemble men-at-arms and . . . gained possession of our towns of Compiegne and Soissons . . . also attempted to gain by force our town of Senlis. . . ."[14] Later that month the Burgundians marched on Paris itself, ironically all the time claiming that they were aiding the king.

Not only did the Burgundians disregard the king's authority, but prior to Agincourt they defected to the English. John the Fearless had negotiated with both kings before the battle and finally ordered his troops to remain aloof. While he did not directly aid the English, this was a traitorous act against his rightful lord, King Charles VI. For the next seventy years Burgundy retained a somewhat independent status, always playing one side off against the other until she finally was absorbed by France under Louis XI.

With his army almost completely destroyed, Charles VI was weaker than ever. He continued to admonish the duke of Burgundy to cease his acts of agression but his words went unheeded as John marched on Paris once again in 1418. While John managed to establish himself in the city, he seldom made any effort to restore order and subdue the unruly elements.

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[14]Monstrelet, I, 289.

The situation looked more promising in 1419 after John met with the young dauphin Charles (virtual head of the Armagnacs) several times in an effort to make peace. All hope was shattered, however, after the fateful slaying of John the Fearless on the bridge at Montereau by some followers of the dauphin. Immediately the Burgundian successor, Philip the Good, turned his support to the English. After short negotiations the Treaty of Troyes was signed in May, 1420, between the kings of France and England. The most significant results lay in the marriage of Henry V to Catherine of France (daughter of Charles VI), whereby Henry became the adopted son of Charles VI and heir to the French throne, superseding the rights of the dauphin, son of the king and queen of France. Ironically Henry V preceded Charles VI to the grave, and consequently his one year old son became Henry VI, king of England and _de jure_ king of France though not _de facto_.

At the funeral of the pitiful Charles VI the only person of high nobility to attend was John, duke of Bedford, brother of Henry V and regent for Henry VI. An air of complete indifference seemed to reign among the princes and nobles. However, the continuous intrigue and warfare carried on between the Armagnacs and Burgundians was for naught. Not only had the power, prestige, and dignity of the French crown reached an all-time low, but the crown itself had been transferred to foreign soil. France was not meant to

meet such an end even though fruitless change and disorder had plagued the government.

In 1423, the duke of Burgundy formed a triple alliance with the dukes of Bedford and Brittany, throwing his full support against the dauphin. Monstrelet attacked Philip for his alliance with the English for Henry VI only became "king of France through the aid of the duke of Burgundy . . . [and] they had sworn to keep peace and friendship between them on the holy sacrament, and had divided the wafer between them as a pledge of their amity,--which was a most disgraceful act, and never can be enough condemned."[15] The duke of Bedford faced an impossible task in his efforts to bring the French under the suzerainty of Henry VI. Upon the defection of the Burgundians and the death of the duke of Bedford in 1435, any English hope of retaining France disintegrated. Philip the Good signed the Peace of Arras with Charles VII in which he outwardly forgave Charles for any part he played in the murder of his father. Monstrelet states that the "duke Philip of Burgundy, from loyalty to the crown of France, and a dislike to see the English in possession of that country, which they were destroying, at the earnest request and solicitations of king Charles agreed to a peace, which was signed at

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[15] Monstrelet, II, 275.

Arras. . . ."[16] Probably a better explanation of Philip's action was that he now controlled the Low Countries and England was no longer such an indispensible ally. Philip set his own terms in the treaty, exempting himself from homage to Charles and restoring to himself much of his territory and revenue. The duke of Burgundy had not made peace for any patriotic reasons, for he was intent upon carving out a kingdom in his own right and this seemed like the best method to achieve his goal.

It has been claimed that the desertion of the duke of Burgundy broke England's hold on France, and there is much truth in this statement. However, the advent of Joan of Arc six years earlier had a great deal to do with the weakening of the English hold and subsequently the strengthening of French monarchy. For our purposes her significance lies in the fact that the nobles shunned and distrusted her, indicating their fear that she might be the catalyst that would unite France and thereby strengthen the monarchy at their expense. After Charles VII was crowned at Rheims, La Trémoille counseled the king not to proceed too rapidly. Unfortunately, the immature monarch listened to this jealous prince and delayed the maid's attack on Paris thereby compromising the campaign. To a loyal Frenchman this was nothing more than treason but to a fearful nobility it was better to have a disunified country than one led by an

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[16] Monstrelet, II, 275.

aggressive monarch. Joan of Arc was finally captured by the Burgundians who traitorously turned her over to the English. After a year of imprisonment and trials she was convicted of heresy and burned at the stake in 1431, while the ungrateful French rulers made no attempt to intercede in her behalf.

One is amazed to find the lack of attention given to this famous maiden in such an important chronicle as Monstrelet's, and there seems little indication that she inspired the masses or that her fame spread much beyond her immediate contacts. Her immediate value seemed to lie in ıer military victories while her fame and importance as a ıartyr came much later. The appearance of Joan of Arc ruly marks a turning point for thenceforth the nobility ɔst any chance to become a positive force in either ıe French government or French society.

The French kingship had yet to receive some serious allenges not withstanding Joan of Arc and the Peace of ras. The challenge came from the army captains, every of which was a representative member of the nobility. captains of King Charles' army, if one can call it such, ned their energy toward driving the English from France. ir overpowering motivation was not a strong loyalty to ıce as might be expected but a hatred of the English and sire to obtain plunder and booty from the land. Luckily people blamed the English for their misfortunes. Sometimes

the desire for plunder overpowered the noble captains' enmity toward the English. The king found it practically impossible to subject these unruly nobles to his authority, as Monstrelet so lucidly explained in 1437. "King Charles of France, in the course of this year learned that many of his captains were grievously harassing divers parts of his kingdom, and that they kept large bodies of armed men under their command to overrun the provinces. The principal among them was Roderigo de Villandros, who had upwards of six hundred horse under his orders. The king sent him his commands to quit his territories immediately, and to make war on those of the English, but he refused obedience to them."[17]

When King Charles did endeavor to pass ordinances gainst these disobedient nobles and finally to subdue them y force he naturally met with violent opposition. The ebellious captains lacked any real unity or purpose for e only thing that even nominally held them together was eir mutual fear of a strong monarchy. This "decimated d impoverished nobility proved their impotence in the alitions they attempted between 1437 and 1442, of which most important, the Praguerie, fell to pieces almost ectly, despite the support of the dauphin himself."[18]

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[17]Monstrelet, II, 74.

[18]The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed. (Cambridge, land, 1910), X, 823.

The Praguerie took place in 1440 and was led by Charles I, the duke of Bourbon. He and his bastard brothers, Alexander and Georges de la Trémoille, the dukes of Brittany and Alencon, several mercenary captains, plus the dauphin (the future Louis XI) all rebelled against the king. Due to the energy of the king's officers and the loyalty of the Constable de Richemont and Xantrailles the uprising was quickly crushed and civil war averted. The king won the loyalty of the duke of Bourbon by giving him a pension; the remainder of the rebellious gentry were forgiven and his son installed in Dauphiné. Hereafter the French nobility was more pliable in the hands of King Charles and the only real threat to a unified France lay with the duke of Burgundy.

The duke of Burgundy continued to remain aloof and independent of France throughout the reign of Charles VII. The Burgundian policies had worked to the detriment of France since the days of Philip the Bold's intrigues against harles VI. Their treasonous action at Agincourt and their id to the English under Bedford's regency exemplify the isloyal nobility at their very worst. As Charles VII bean to grow wiser and gain strength many of his disloyal bles were brought under control. However, the duke of rgundy with strong leadership could have brought the French bility into a position of responsibility and power had been wise enough to see that unity of purpose was the ly path to survival. Early in the reign of King Louis XI,

the dukes of Berry and Brittany and the count of Charolois (Charles the Bold, next duke of Burgundy) formed a weak alliance called the League of the Public Weal. In 1465 they descended upon Paris demanding the city, the distribution of the offices of the realm, the person of the king and governance of the same, and the immediate convocation of the three estates. While they had less chance of achieving these goals than had the English under the leadership of Simon de Montfort in the thirteenth century, with strong leadership it could have been accomplished. However, "Francis II of Brittany and Charles the Bold were not anxious so much to share in the government as to be left independent in their own principalities; moreover, they were mediocre statesmen, and the same is true of John of Anjou and the Duke of Bourbon. The men of real ability were not princes and so could not direct the policy of the League."[19]

These princes camped outside of Paris and had they been unified they could have easily taken the city. Philip de Commines, truly the greatest historian in the fifteenth century, gives us an excellent description of the situation between the king and the princes as they threatened Paris. The "admission of the princes would not only have been the means of gaining the town, but of finishing the whole

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[19]Charles Petit-Dutaillis, in The Cambridge Medieval History (New York, 1936), VIII, 282.

enterprise; for the whole people would, for several reasons, have easily gone over, in imitation of their example, to their side, and by consequence the whole kingdom would have revolted. But God gave the king wise counsel, and he executed it vigorously; being informed of all their secret practices and cabals. . . ."[20] Had the princes entered, the city would have revolted and Louis would admittedly have retired to Dauphiné where his nobles were loyal. With the support of the petty nobility who remained loyal to the king, he was able to win several decisive battles but he failed to crush the Burgundian forces. Peace was temporarily concluded at Conflans in October, 1465, at which time the Burgundians gained additional territory.

Charles the Bold continued to threaten the king-ship; however, this courageous but foolish prince was no atch for the crafty and treacherous Louis. Charles finally et his end in a rather ignoble fashion while fighting the wiss in 1477. With his death the house of Burgundy dis-ntegrated and the French nobility had nowhere to turn for adership but to the king. Occasionally there were to be ken uprisings of the nobility but for all intents and rposes the princes hereafter remained a docile and weak gment of French society.

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[20]Philip de Commines, The Memoirs of Philip De mines, Lord of Argenton, ed. Andrew R. Scoble, esq. (London, 5), I, 51. (Hereafter cited as Commines).

During the two centuries when the nobility in France were reacting to monarchy, the king intermittently strengthened his position at their expense. Some useful insights into the decline of the nobility can be achieved by very briefly analyzing the steps which entrenched the French monarchy so firmly in power. As early as Philip Augustus the monarchy began to rise above the other princes. "Philip, more definitely than any of his predecessors, established the principle that the feudal hierarchy culminates in the king who is nobody's vassal."[21] The feudal nobility were first weakened by the restrictions placed by Louis IX and Philip IV on their right to wage private war. Philip the Fair gained judicial power at the expense of the nobles and also attempted to set up a permanent tax system. The Estates General was formulated in order to lend support to Philip's policies but he relied most heavily on the rising middle class. With the advent of the Hundred Years' War it was necessary for Philip VI to appeal to the Estates General for more revenue which he proposed in the form of a gabelle or salt tax. Due mainly to the weak support of the nobility, the Estates General were not not effective in restraining the king's power of taxation. "Unlike the English parliaments, which vigorously demanded concessions of the royal

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[21] Charles Petit-Dutaillis, The Feudal Monarchy in France and England from the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries (London, 1936), p. 201.

prerogative and imposed limitations upon the crown in return for grants of taxes and subsidies, thereby laying the foundations of parliamentary government in England, the French states general pliably yielded to the demands of the king, and so forfeited the opportunity which the war gave to establish the elements of constitutional government in France."[22] The gabelle became permanent in 1356 but due to the series of weak Valois kings the power to tax was not properly utilized. Even such a strong and wise monarch as Charles V weakened on his death bed and revoked the hearth-tax. This action cleared his conscience but deprived his successors of a large portion of their revenue. Due to the popular uprisings against the burdensome taxation the young King Charles VI's uncles were also forced to repeal the gabelle. Taxes, however, still were not light as Froissart analyzed them in 1386. "They that were ryche men in the royalme of Fraunce, to the ayde of this voyage were taxed and tayled to the iii. and iiii. parte of theyr goodes; and many payde more then they were worth besyde, to accomplysshe the payment for men of warre."[23]

The French monarchy floundered through the reign of Charles VI with inadequate finances due to the lack of power

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[22] Thompson, Economic History, p. 105.

[23] Froissart, IV, 306.

to tax and the great loss resulting from embezzlement by the influential princes. At the beginning of the reign of Charles VII the condition of the government remained impoverished in the hands of this weak-willed king, so slow to mature. With the advent of Joan of Arc and especially after the Peace of Arras Charles was free to carry out a program of reform. Having matured and grown much wiser and more courageous Charles set out to subdue the rebellious _écorcheurs_ and finally put down the uprising of nobles in Poitou known as the Praguerie. With order temporarily restored Charles began a series of ordinances which were to give the kingship in France absolute power, for "the future of the monarchy depended above all on its power of obtaining money, and consequently hired troops, by means of taxation of a general character."[24] The two keystones of the power of the nobility were their control of the royal finances through the Estates General and their monopoly in the royal army both of which were to be swept away.

The first _ordonnance_ was initiated by the Constable Richemont in 1439 aimed at the abuses committed by the military forces, more especially the abuses of the captains. Feudal warfare was virtually banished as royal authority took over the function of raising troops and declared that companies

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[24]Ch-V. Langlois, _Medieval France; A Companion to French Studies_, ed. Arthur Tilley (Cambridge, England, 1922), p. 75.

could not move without royal authorization, thereby supress-
ing private warfare and roving bands of pillagers. Charles
slowly purged the unwanted routiers from the army and after
signing a truce with the English in 1444, he was able to
proceed to his next large reform measure which created a
standing army. These measures created the mounted segment
of the army and in the famous ordonnance of 1448 the Francs-
Archers were formed, thereby supplying France with an in-
fantry. These "free archers" were a tax exempt, well trained
group of bowmen upon whom the king could depend.

One does not raise a standing army without a per-
manent means of taxation and this Charles accomplished with
the taille, a direct tax assessed on the basis of landed
property. Monstrelet described the army and new permanent
tax structure of Charles in these terms: "He always kept
on foot fifteen hundred lances, and from five to six thou-
sand archers, on regular pay,--namely, for each man-at-arms
nd three horses fifteen florins, royal money, and for each
rcher seven florins, per month. These sums were raised
y taxes on the inhabitants of the good towns and villages,
nd, in common, so punctually collected that there was
arcely any delay in the payments."[25]

The nobility, realizing their position was being

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[25] Monstrelet, II, 275.

undermined, reacted by requesting that Charles obtain his taxes from the Estates General. By 1440 when this request was submitted, the king was well on his way to becoming absolute and no longer needed to consider the requests of his princes so seriously. They had failed to unify and secure their position when the kingship was weak. Now this king could easily afford to refuse their demands. Once again Monstrelet gives an excellent summary of the viewpoints of both the king and the nobles.

> It has been advanced, that before any taxes be laid, the king should call together the three estates of the realm, to consult with them and have their opinions thereon. In reply to this: the taxes have been laid on the lands of these lords with their consent,--and as for the other impositions, the king, when there has been an opportunity, has called these together, and shown them, of his royal authority, the urgent state of his kingdom, when great part was occupied by his enemies. There can be no need for calling the three estates to lay on taxes,--for this would only add to the expenses of the poorer people in paying the deputies' charges for coming and going; and many lords of great weight have, in consequence, required that such convocations should cease, and were satisfied that proper warrants should be issued in the king's name for the raising of these taxes. In respect, however, to the affairs of the nation, the king is bounden to consult with the princes of his blood in preference to all others, considering how much they are interested in its welfare,--and this has been usually done by the most christian kings, his predecessors. Item, the nobles have requested the king to preserve to them their prerogatives and authorities which they hold, as well from their peerage as from the other lordships they possess within the realm of France.[26]

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[26] Monstrelet, II, 122.

Here the nobility demonstrated their fear of being deprived of their prerogatives, which despite the kings assurances, was the very thing the monarchy had set out to accomplish.

After several years of relative peace with the English, Charles, now backed by a new, well organized armed force, was able to renew the war in 1449 and push the English completely off the continent except for the small port area of Calais. His successor, Louis XI, had yet to subdue the duke of Burgundy, the chief foe to French unity, before France could be classified a nation.

Louis was not a typical medieval monarch and has been aptly called the "spider king" because of his crafty and sometimes treacherous methods. Like Philip the Fair he aligned himself with the bourgeoisie from whom he obtained the financial support necessary to increase the size of his permanent army which contained an increasing number of mercenaries. Naturally the old aristocracy was weakened by such methods and feudalism finally ended for good. With the power of private warfare and consequently the power to pillage and plunder outlawed, the princes and lesser nobles turned to the king for financial support, thereby exchanging their independence and prerogatives for privileges bestowed upon them by the king.

Louis met a strong challenge to his authority in the person of the count of Charolois, known as Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy after the death of his father in 1467.

Louis and Charles were diametrically opposed in every respect. Charles thought of having a half dozen separate monarchs in France, while Louis strove for one absolute king. Charles was extravagant, romantic and chivalrous while Louis was thrifty, calculating and businesslike in his dealings. The courage of Charles cannot be doubted and at times he held Louis tightly in his grasp, as the Péronne affair exemplifies. However, in the long run the wily monarch proved much superior to this foolish prince who met such a useless death against the Swiss pikemen in 1477. Philip de Commines candidly described his former lord in these terms: "as for the Count of Charolois, when he was Duke of Burgundy, and fortune had exalted him to a greater height of glory and honour than ever any of his family had arrived at, and made him so great, that he thought no prince in Christendom equal to him, God was pleased to put a stop to his glory, and to infatuate him so, that, despising all counsel but his own, he lost his own life unhappily, sacrificed the lives of many thousands of his subjects, and brought his family to desolation, as is now visible to all the world."[27]

The "balance of power" in France was now decisively altered. Louis had recovered the duchy of Guienne upon the death of his brother, the house of Anjou was extinct,

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[27] Commines, I, 68-9.

and the count d'Armagnac had been killed. Now with the duke of Brittany under control and with the fall of the house of Burgundy Louis reigned supreme. His major blunder was in his failure to tie Burgundy to France by a marriage alliance between Mary, daughter of Charles the Bold, and a member of the royal family. While he retained the duchy of Burgundy, the valuable province of Flanders and the Low Countries reverted to Maximilian of Austria upon the latter's marriage to Mary of Burgundy. Hereafter these lands were lost to the French domain.

Louis virtually ended feudalism in France, striking the final blow in the long decline of the nobility. When Charles the Bold died so did organized chivalry for hereafter the knights were dependent upon the king. To grasp the nature of the downfall of the feudal nobles it is indispensable to analyze their interactions with the monarchy but this is only a part of the story. There was also an interior deterioration within the ranks of both the powerful princes and the petty nobles, plainly perceived in their failure to meet their feudal and chivalrous obligations and their diminishing lack of purpose.

CHAPTER III

INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NOBLES

During the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the nobility in France increasingly failed to fulfill their feudal obligations and those imposed upon them by the code of chivalry. It is relatively simpler to point out the deterioration of the feudal bonds than to demonstrate the degeneration of chivalry. Since the latter represents an ideal, it is extremely difficult to state anything specific about it. However, keeping in mind the obligations a knight pledged himself to uphold as put forth in Chapter I, there is ample evidence to show that chivalry was transformed during the course of the Hundred Years' War from an honorable approach to society to that of a strictly utilitarian one. Following the crusades the knights seemed to lose their sense of purpose and function and during the course of the Hundred Years' War little or no attempt was made to adhere to the ideals of chivalry.

In the early Middle Ages the feudal nobles and robber barons were readily distinguishable. The latter were suppressed and hated by the honorable members of chivalry. During the Hundred Years' War the feudal nobles and robber barons became almost as one and those not falling in

the latter category did little or nothing to suppress those who continuously robbed and pillaged the people and the land in France. Pillage truly became a byword in France and the foremost occupation of the nobility. Since the profit motive was not a respectable reason to fight, the knight talked of fighting for glory. While the petty nobility were primarily responsible for the pillaging to which we shall draw attention, the powerful princes such as the Black Prince, and the dukes of Berry, Bourbon, and Burgundy were equally guilty for either sanctioning their actions or doing nothing to suppress this destructive element of society. Once again many commoners joined with the nobles but the fault necessarily lies with the latter for they took upon themselves an oath to perform certain functions in society and restrain themselves from other actions; they were supposedly the leaders to whom the commoners could look for guidance and yet in too many cases the commoner fulfilled the principles for which the knight stood better than the knight himself.

The primary chronicler of the fourteenth century, Froissart, eulogized chivalry but his passion for a minute account of scenes and characters and all the glitter of chivalry led him to report incidents very much in conflict with the knightly ideal. Whether he did not realize these contradictions or he was indulgent to the knights' faults is not of major concern here. However, we can safely assume that the actions of the knights were as bad and probably

worse than Froissart represents them to us. He shows little emotion over the destruction arising out of the war and talks continuously of the burning of towns and countryside, the robberies, and the despoiling of numerous churches. Froissart gives one of his most typical statements when he tells how "there was done many feates of armes [and] . . . they hurt dyvers assaylantes [while] . . . ther were dyvers slayne and hurt, and the base court wonne and brent. . . ."[1] An eminent medieval historian has described the war as chronicled by Froissart in these terms: "It is all beautifully pointless and adventurous, and carried out in the spirit of a knighthood that loves fighting and seeks honour and adventure, while steadying itself with a hope of plunder and reward."[2]

During the turbulent Hundred Years' War there arose bands of Free Companies which best exemplify knights turned plunderers. These Companions, as we shall hereafter refer to them, arose mainly from the unemployed men-at-arms turned loose after the battle at Poitiers and were led chiefly by English, Navarrese, and Gascon captains who felt little responsibility to any authority, least of all to their obligations as knights. These "compayons spredde abrode all about the countre, [and] . . . dyde moche hurt and yvell,

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[1] Froissart, III, 132.

[2] Taylor, Mediaeval Mind, I, 568.

as well in the lande of their frendes as on their ennemyes."[3] It will be most fruitful to follow the escapades of several of these captains in order to demonstrate that they were captains and men of nobility and secondly that they failed miserably to follow any policy but one of immediate gain through plunder.

Sir Robert Knolles, Sir Bertucat d'Albret, and Sir Robert Briquet exemplify excellently the utilitarian segment of the nobility who gained their livelihood not as honorable knights but by ransoms, sometimes extracted from a whole village, and plunder from the land.[4] Though all their backgrounds are English their loyalties fluctuated frequently. Consequently they will be treated among the degenerate nobility in France. Robert Briquet represents one of the captains leading a group of sixteen-thousand Companions in 1361. In electing the captains "they gathered themselfe toguyther, and made amonge themselfe newe capitaynes, and toke by election the worste and moost unhappy personne of theym all. . . ."[5] Briquet helped lead these rebel bands in cruel pillaging raids in the area of the Somme River near Lyons. Three years hence Briquet was joined by Robert

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[3]Froissart, II, 371.

[4]Froissart refers to Knolles as Robert Canoll and d'Albret as Perducas Dalbreth.

[5]Froissart, II, 78.

Knolles in the service of Louis of Navarre. While they fought fiercely against the French, much needless destruction was inflicted upon Auverne as they overran this territory.

One of the major enterprises these captains engaged in was the battle over Castile. Many Companions, including Briquet, joined du Guesclin in his effort to place Henry Trastamara upon the throne of Castile. In 1365 "these men of warre were to the nombre of xxx. thousande, and ther were the chefe capitayns of the companyons, as sir Robert Briquet. . . ."[6] After ousting Pedro the Cruel and placing Henry upon the throne of Castile, the Black Prince decided he must endeavor to aid Pedro. He called together his captains, many of whom were in the service of du Guesclin, and he was also joined by many Companions including Briquet who left the forces of the French. Also leading this expedition were "sir Robert Canoll, . . . sir Perducas Dalbreth, . . . and all the other of the companyons, and they were a ten thousande horse; [and] . . . they lay styll thus about Panpylone the space of thre dayes, bycause they founde the countre plentyfull, bothe in fleshe, breed, wyne, and all other purveyaunces, for them and for their horses. Howbeit these companyons payed nat for every thynge as was demaunded of them, nor they coude nat absteyne fro robbynge and

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[6] Froissart, II, 154.

pyllyng that they coude get. . . ." The king of Navarre, an ally of the Black Prince, soon regretted his decision to let these troops cross his land for they caused inestimable damage. "For he parceyved well howe he hadde therby more hurt than profyte [and] . . . he sawe well and consydered that he was nat as thane mayster of his owne countre." He received many complaints from the people of his country and "he caused some of his counsayle, suche as knewe well these companyons . . . to desyre them to absteyn themselfe fro robbying and pillynge the countre as they dyde; to whome they promysed so to do."[7] This behavior by the Companions is not the exception or an exaggeration but an understatement of their action if anything. Because they were paid there is less excuse for the plundering. One finds few if any of the qualities of a good knight in these men. Yet on this very campaign, Robert Briquet was one of about a dozen Companions who were dubbed knights by such illustrious figures as the Black Prince, John Chandos, and the duke of Lancaster.

In 1369, the year that Charles V resumed the war with England, the loyalty of the Companions vacillated once again between the French and the English. Sir Bertucat d'Albret had been literally purchased by the duke of Anjou

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[7]Froissart, II, 190.

to turn French which he and a group of Companions had willingly done. Robert Knolles, who had just been made "mayster and chyefe soveraygne of all the knyghtes and squyers of hys [The Black Prince's] courte, bycause of his valoure and noble chyvalrie . . ."[8] was able to persuade d'Albret to return to the English fold. With the Companions united behind the English, destruction and warfare reigned supreme once again. At this point in history, Froissart relates one of the most sordid episodes which occurred during the entire war. He reveals in shocking detail the misguided leadership of the powerful princes and the destructive methods by which they suggested the Companions make their living.

Sir John Chandos and Sir Thomas Felton were obliged temporarily to turn over command of their troops to Sir Robert Knolles in order to keep a prearranged meeting with the Black Prince. They perceived it would be necessary to precipitate a war to keep the Companions occupied during their absence, so they ordered Knolles and d'Albret to "assemble you, toguyder with your companyes, and entre into the marchesse of Lymosyn and Auvergne, and make ther warre; for without warr ye cannat lyve. . . ."[9] Froissart does not seem to understand the implications of this statement for it demonstrates so precisely the true motivating

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[8]Froissart, II, 279-80.

[9]Froissart, II, 289.

force of the nobility, fighting not for honor or defense of a fief but blatantly precipitating warfare in order to supply their men compensation and sustenance through pillage and plunder. Truly the nobility was miserably failing to fulfill their duties. Even Froissart admits that "these people assembled them togyther, and entred into the realme of Fraunce, without any tytell of reason, wherby ensued mortall and cruell warre, greater than was before: these companyons called the realme of Fraunce their chambre. . . ."[10] Knolles, d'Albret, and Briquet continued to lead a useless existence for another two decades, finally meeting death by the sword by which they lived.

Suprisingly enough, Froissart, with all his love of chivalry, admits that he was a captain in the ranks of a disorganized group of Companions during the year 1388. "Than all maner of men of warre and poore companyons drewe toguyder, and the capitayns tooke counsayle what they shulde do; and than they sayde, Thoughe these two kynges [English and French] have taken peace toguyder, yet we muste lyve. Than they wente into Burgoyne, and there were capitayns of all nacyons, Englysshe, Gascons, Spanyardes, Naveroise, Almayns, Scottes, and all maner of nacyons, and there I was a capitayne."[11] After their formation Froissart

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[10]Froissart, VI, 167.

[11]Froissart, IV, 152.

relates how they went on to gain great profit through their exploits. Briquet also served in this campaign which turned out to be his last as he met his death near Sanxere.

The Companions were surely not the only knights failing to meet their obligations as can readily be seen by the behavior of Sir Arnaud de Cervale. Serving as a captain of men-at-arms in the French king's service since about 1350, this knight, sometimes known as the Archpriest, served King John bravely at Poitiers. A year after this he appears in a much different role when "he assembled togyder a great company of men of warr of dyvers contrees suche as lacked wages in other places . . . and robbed all the countrey to Avygnone, and they had none other capitayne but this knight. . . ."[12] Five years later he is fighting beside James of Bourbon for the cause of justice and France against the cruel Companions. Froissart hailed him as "a good and an expert knyght. . . ."[13] However, in 1363 he set out on another adventure which makes Froissart's last statement look most doubtful. "The so-called Archpriest and his Bretons . . . went on to plunder Burgundy . . . [and] they inflicted many injuries on that land and on all wayfarers there. Men could travel only with difficulty and at the risk of being robbed and could defend themselves only at

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[12]Froissart, I, 399.

[13]Froissart, II, 83.

the risk of being killed."[14] Though the Archpriest did appear brave and good on occasion, the above incidents are representative of the typical behavior of an average noble.

Even the illustrious "Duguesclin was no more than a captain of routiers, fond of pillage and raids; but he surpassed his fellows by his iron authority and the strict discipline he imposed on his mercenaries."[15] This unorthodox Breton fulfilled his natural role when leading the Companions to Castile to help oust Pedro the Cruel. He truly was no better than the rest of the pillagers, constantly violating his duties as a knight. However, it shall later be demonstrated that his unorthodox methods made him a most successful captain.

During the turbulent reign of Charles VI, the nobility continued to degenerate. New bands of men were formed called routiers and écorcheurs but their motives were basically the same as the Companions. Our richest source, Monstrelet, shows much similarity to Froissart in that he also eulogized chivalry, not seeming to realize that the actions of the knights directly contradicted the things for which they stood. In his prologue he discusses desolation of the churches, towns, cities, and fortresses

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[14] Jean de Venette, The Chronicles of Jean de Venette, trans. Jean Birdsall, ed. Richard A. Newhall (New York, 1953), p. 4. (Hereafter cited as Venette).

[15] Perroy, The Hundred Years War, p. 149.

and in the next breath admonishes the knights to be valiant men and perform deeds of courage. Like Froissart, Monstrelet entails a bundle of inconsistencies for he was a member of the new free companies which were organized after the battle of Agincourt. These "bands of armed ruffians harried the countryside. . . . Some of these bands were well organized like the Free Companies in the previous century. The leader of one of them was no less a person than Enguerran de Monstrelet, the historian, who made a fortune as a freebooter, retired to private life, and took to letters."[16]

Many men of princely blood were named among the captains of these robbers. Monstrelet relates the names and mischievous deeds committed by these nobles. These are too numerous to treat in detail so let us examine the performance of only a few who are illustrative.

In 1416

> . . . different companies were formed of nobles or others, but attached to the party of the duke of Burgundy, . . . the principal leaders were, St. Mauroy de St. Leger, sir Jennet de Poix, his brother David, the lord de Sores in Beauvoisis, . . . and numbers of others, who . . . invaded the territories of France. . . . In these parts they committed every sort of ravage, plundering the property, and making the inhabitants prisoners, as would be done to a country against which war had been declared. There were also other companies, formed by captains under pretence of their attachment to the duke of Burgundy; such as sir Gastellin, a Lombard knight, Jean de Gaingy, . . .

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[16]Thompson, <u>Economic History</u>, p. 307.

> and others, who amounted to two thousand horsemen. . . . They for a long time quartered themselves on the territories of Burgundy as well as France, and did incredible mischief to both.[17]

Throughout the period of the regency of the duke of Bedford, Normandy was rocked by the blows of a group of roving brigands. Some have conjectured that these men were patriots endeavoring to undermine the power of the English but this has been disproven after closer analysis of this period.[18] Since traitors were beheaded, brigands hung, and those convicted of both crimes were gibbeted after being beheaded, it is significant that there were recorded many more cases of the latter two types of execution. Miss Rowe validly demonstrated that the Norman robbers sought only plunder and were punished accordingly as brigands not French loyalists. The chief significance of these bands lies in the fact that many of the participants belonged to the petty nobility. "By 1426 the countryside . . . was infested by bands of 'poor gentlemen' [who became] . . . 'robbers by day and by night'. In Normandy 'for fear of the brigands', was the cry that echoed on all sides; travelling became utterly unsafe; any sudden outcry in a village spelled 'brigands' to the villagers. . . . The band commanded

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[17] Monstrelet, I, 355.

[18] See B. J. H. Rowe, "John Duke of Bedford and the Norman 'Brigands'," English Historical Review, XLVII (1932), pp. 583-600. (Hereafter cited as Rowe, "Norman Brigands."

by Guillaume Hallé may be taken as typical. He recruited his forces with ne'er-do-weels of all sorts, and made war, if war it might be called, by terrorizing the local peasants."[19]

The captains of these bands were nothing more than penniless knights and squires called very aptly routiers. "All Languedoc groaned under the ravages of such routier captains as Guilhem Valette, de Bathhasar, Jean d'Apchier, de Peyre, Ramonet de Guerra, and above all Rodrigue de Villandrandro, adventurers nominally in the pay of the French king who pillaged the country at will, and whose standards became the rallying point for all the desperadoes of the South."[20]

After the Peace of Arras the pillaging grew worse due to greater numbers of unemployed soldiers. Much of the nobility acted in an irresponsible fashion, desiring only to pillage and to be divorced of all authority. As indicated previously the nobility was finally brought under control by Charles VII and Louis XI.[21]

The princes and petty nobles not only condoned or directly pursued pillage to the exclusion of honor but they disregarded their feudal and moral obligations in various other ways. Infidelity, dishonesty, treachery, and trickery

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[19]Rowe, "Norman Brigands," p. 588.

[20]Rowe, "Norman Brigands," p. 598.

[21]See Chapter II, pp. 60-3.

are terms indicative of their actions. During the early years of the war, Henry of Penfort was captured by the earl of Mountfort near the city of Rennes, the former thereafter swearing homage and fealty to his new lord. Shortly thereafter the earl endeavored to take Hanybont, the strongest castle in Brittany, by force of arms. Since Henry's brother was governor of this castle, he proposed to his new lord that he proceed with a small force of men carrying the banner of Brittany so that his brother would let him enter the castle.

> Than sir Henry Penfort departed with his company apoynted, and agaynst evenynge, he came to Hanybont, and whan his brother, Olyver Penfort, knewe of his commyng, he opyned the gates and let hym entre, wenynge he had ben come to have ayded hym, and so came and mette his brother in the strete. Assone as sir Henry saw hym, he aproached to hym, and toke hym by the arme, and sayd, Olyver, ye ar my prisoner. Howe so, quoth he, I have put my trust in you, thynkyng that ye were come hyther to ayde me to kepe this towne and castell. Brother, quoth sir Henry, the mater gothe nat so: I take possession of this towne for therele Mountfort, who is nowe duke of Bretayne. . . .[22]

One would have to look hard to find such flagrant treachery a century earlier, but in the fourteenth century behavior of this sort was common.

Another instance of dishonesty and treachery occurred during a campaign in 1364 led by an illustrious knight, Sir Boucicaut, marshall to the duke of Normandy. His objective was to seize the castle and town of Maunt in Navarre. He

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[22] Froissart, I, 176.

devised a plan whereby he would hide his troops near the city, place in ambush those of Sir Bertrand du Guesclin, who was aiding him, and approach the town with only ten men. He then appealed to those in the town to let him enter but he was refused entry. Sir Boucicaut next explained that the free companies of Rolebosse, their common enemy, had pursued furiously him and his men, putting them in great need of refurbishing and succor. He swore on his faith not to injure the townsmen and claimed his mission was only to subdue the Rolebosse, whereupon they of Maunt opened the gate and let them enter. Then "sir Boucequaut drewe him to a logyng and unarmed him, therby to apease them of the towne, and that they shuld nat mystrust; but than sir Bertram and his company came galoppyng and entred into the towne, and cryed Saynt Ives Clesquy, to the dethe all the Naveroyse; and so entred into the logynges, and pylled and robbed all that ever they founde, and toke prisoners, and slewe whom they lyst."[23] In our modern age the Machiavellian approach pervades much of our action, especially warfare. However chivalry during the Middle Ages imposed a much more strigent criterion. Force, it is true, was the ultimate means but force tempered by honesty and imposed with honor. Certainly by the fourteenth century, honesty and trust-worthiness no longer characterized the nobility in France.

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[23] Froissart, II, 104-5.

The loyal, dutiful squire no longer obeyed his lord with the undying fidelity of earlier times. Froissart wrote on numerous occasions of squires betraying their lords. In one instance the squire of the earl of Ventadore, who was "a good peasable man," treacherously betrayed his lord to Geffray Tetenoyre, a "moost cruell knight," causing the lord to lose his castle and possessions.[24] This is as clear a case of infidelity as one can find anywhere.

Ambushing of knights became a more prevalent means of conquest. Instead of fighting an honest battle, it became only too common to way-lay an unwitting band of knights. The rules of warfare also prescribed that a lord must not attack the lands of a man whom he held as prisoner. Surprisingly the usually moderate duke of Bedford committed an unprecedented act for a gallant knight by laying seige to Orleans while he held Charles of Orleans a captive.

Even the gallant Charles the Bold was not above discretion. Due to certain transgressions committed by the Constable of France, Louis XI wished to capture and execute him. Charles, who knew of Louis' wish, also bore a mortal hatred against the Constable. Still, he assured the Constable upon his word of honor that he would protect him, whereupon he promptly turned the Constable over to Louis. For "though the duke had just reason to bear a mortal hatred

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[24]Froissart, III, 60.

against the constable, and to pursue him even to death, yet he should have done it without breaking his faith. . . ."[25] Commines further states that there was no "necessity for the Duke of Burgundy, who was so potent a prince and of such an illustrious and honourable family, to have given him his protection in order to imprison him; and without dispute, it was the highest act of injustice and severity imaginable to deliver him up to a person who, he was sure, would put him to death, especially upon the account of avarice. After this dishonourable action the duke's good fortune was strangely altered. . . ."[26] Not only had the duke broken his word but done so out of avarice in order to seize the Constable's rich lands in Lorraine.

Courtesy, being one of the chief tenets of chivalry, had a tendency to temper the cruelties of warfare, and with some success during the first period of the Hundred Years' War. Sir Thomas Holand, a one-eyed English knight, demonstrated great courtesy in the seige of Cane when he "mounted agayne on his horse and rode into the streates, and saved many lyves of ladyes, damosels, and cloysterers fro defolyng for the soudyers were without mercy."[27] Froissart makes

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[25]Commines, I, 327.

[26]Commines, I, 297.

[27]Froissart, I, 284.

a great point of the courtesy shown the prisoners taken by the French compared to the cruelty of the Germans. While in retreat the French "ledde with them their prisoners, and raunsomed theym courtesly, in lyke maner as was acustomed bytwene the Englysshmen and Frenchmen."[28]

Real as these examples are they represent only a small segment of the nobility. Page after page of the late medieval chroniclers is devoted to stories of inhuman atrocities, increasing cruelties and decreasing show of courtesy. At the battle of Crécy the English commoners went around "with great knyves, and they went in among the men of armes, and slewe and murdredde many as they lay on the grounde . . . wherof the kyng of Englande was after dyspleased, for he had rather they had bene taken prisoners."[29] It was not that Edward III abhorred the cruelty of murdering helpless knights on the ground but for every one killed he lost the ransom money.

Cruelty to prisoners actually increased during the fourteenth century. Upon one occasion about one thousand French prisoners were slain by their English and Portugese captors.[30] The courageous knight would not undertake such a vile action as to murder his noble captives in cold blood;

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[28] Froissart, II, 306.

[29] Froissart, I, 298.

[30] Froissart, IV, 196.

however these knights were neither brave nor noble.

The Black Prince has oft been touted as one of the most perfect specimens of knighthood that ever existed. Indeed the courtesy shown King John after his capture at Poitiers represents the true spirit of chivalry. The very evening of the day upon which the battle was fought, the Black Prince invited the French king and several great lords who were prisoners to dine with him in his lodgings. On the trip from Poitiers to Bordeaux, the port from which King John was to depart for England, the Black Prince subjected his prisoner to only the lightest guard.[31] It would be difficult to find a more courteous treatment of an enemy in the annals of history yet this most noble prince engaged in one of the most sordid affairs purported by man. In 1370 the Black Prince masterminded and directed the horrible assault upon the city of Limoges. Thousands of innocent people suffered death in the churches, streets, and homes of the city. The vicious sack of Limoges undertaken by the Black Prince is so violently opposed to the spirit of chivalry that it is most difficult to believe that he was a superior noble in even the loosest sense of the word.

Monstrelet, even more so than Froissart, represents the intensification of cruelty toward prisoners, whereby

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[31] For a complete description of the courtesy shown King John see Froissart, I, 384-7.

mercy and courtesy become more and more exceptional. For example in 1434, La Hire, a captain in the service of Charles VII, one day passed by the castle of Clermont in Beauvoisis. The governor, Lord d'Auffemont, ordered several attendants to fetch wine and accompany him in bringing it to La Hire and his company as a good will offering, an act of great courtesy. "During the conversation, La Hire laid hands on him, [for no reason at all] and forced him to surrender the castle, putting him withal in irons and in confinement. In this state he kept him upwards of a month, insomuch that his limbs were greatly bruised and benumbed, and he was covered with lice and all sorts of vermin." Finally he was released after paying a tremendous ransom. "King Charles wrote several times to La Hire to set him at liberty without ransom . . . but it was all in vain."[32] Incidents of this nature constantly appear in the chronicles of Monstrelet.

Charles the Bold bears some similarity to the Black Prince in that they could be most courteous on occasion, and at other times fall to the depths of cruelty. Charles was a man of wide knowledge and austere morals and is often represented as one of the last true knights of the Middle Ages. He could also be exceedingly harsh when he wished as demonstrated by his ravenous attacks against Liege in 1467-8.[33]

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[32] Monstrelet, I, 631.

[33] See Commines, I, pp. 92-105 and 156-9.

These raids compare in destruction to the one perpetrated by the Black Prince. Charles brought death to thousands of innocent people as he turned his knights loose upon this helpless city. Just five years later the Burgundians treated the town of Nesle in similar fashion, destroying the city and killing the inhabitants after the duke of Burgundy had given his word the people would be set free if they surrendered peacefully.

The depredations committed by the nobility against the weak represent cowardly action on their part. "Noble chivalry based on honour was stained with cowardly violence against the weak. While a rigid code of rules controlled the jousts and tourneys we find an utter failure of knightly ideals in battle."[34] Christine de Pisan, writing in the early fifteenth century, advocated that knights should "do right" to every man be he gentleman or merchant.[35]

Cowardly, cold-blooded assassinations amongst men of lineage must be added to the other infamous deeds committed by this degenerate class. "From the middle of the twelfth century to the middle of the thirteenth . . . assassination . . . was so rare as to be practically unknown."[36]

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[34] Otto Cartellieri, The Court of Burgundy, trans. Malcolm Letts (London, 1929), p. 242.

[35] Christine de Pisan, The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyvalrye, trans. William Caxton, ed. A. T. B. Byles (London, 1932), p. 194. (Hereafter cited as Christine, Fayttes of Armes).

[36] Painter, Chivalry, p. 93.

During the Hundred Years' War this crime was committed with greater frequency. The assassination attempt by Peter of Craon against the life of Oliver du Clisson, Constable of France, ranks among the most infamous. Also backing this escapade was the duke of Brittany, who wished to have the Constable disposed of. On a spring night in the year 1392 Peter, with the backing of sixty men, ambushed the Constable on a dark street in Paris. The latter, returning from a party at the king's residence, was armed with only a long knife and had only a few men with him. "Than syr Peters men sayd, Shall we slee them all? Yea, quod sir Peter, all suche as make any defence. Their defence was but small, for they were but eight persones, and without armure. Sir Peter demaunded . . . the dethe of the constable. Some that were there, whan they knewe it was the constable, they gave him but faynte strokes, for a thynge doone by trayson is doone cowardly, without any hardynesse."[37] The fact that it was cowardly did not seem to deter honorable Sir Peter for he struck several blows at the defenseless Constable. When the latter was finally struck from his horse he luckily fell against a baker's door which sprang open and protected him from his attackers. Believing him dead, Peter and his band fled Paris. The Constable recovered in time yet he had barely escaped death at the hands of the

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[37] Froissart, VI, 49.

dastardly Peter of Craon.

Undoubtedly the most infamous assassinations during this era occurred during the period of strife between the Burgundians and Armagnacs. On November 24, 1407, Louis, duke of Orleans, was inhumanly slain by a group of eighteen men laying in ambush. The leader, Raoul d'Oquetonville, a Norman knight, received his orders and pay from the duke of Burgundy who later admitted he was behind this dastardly deed. The knightly means of handling a dispute would require John the Fearless to challenge Louis to battle; instead he had him ambushed and chopped to bits by these eighteen ruffians. Not only did he have Louis murdered but he boldly admitted his action to both the king and the public, endeavoring to justify the action by claiming Louis was a traitor. The ambitious wife of Louis, the duchess Valentine Visconti, endeavored to persuade the king to do justice and punish the murderers of his brother, but to no avail.

Twelve years later, at a time when the Burgundian and Armagnac factions appeared near reconciliation, France was thrown into further turmoil by the cruel murder of John the Fearless on the bridge at Montereau. In July, 1419, the dauphin, virtual head of the Armagnacs, met twice with the duke of Burgundy, the latter time swearing a bond of friendship between them. However, during their third meeting in September the conversation between them became bitter

and the dauphin departed. His companions who remained behind became very excited and threw themselves on John the Fearless, piercing him through several times with their sword. "Thus was the duke of Burgundy cruelly murdered, trusting to the promises and securities of the duke de Touraine, dauphin of Vienne, and his ministers. The act and the manner of perpetrating it were most horrible; and the hearts of noble and worthy men, natives of France, must suffer the greatest shame and grief thus to witness the noble blood of the flower de luces, and princes so nearly allied destroy each other. . . ."[38]

Though this murder was probably not premeditated and therefore more excusable than the earlier slaying of Louis of Orleans, it still represents the looseness with which the nobility followed their duties and ideals. Their actions in warfare, their treachery, and the rise in the number of cowardly murders all added together to show the decadent nobility in their true light, a class that increasingly failed to follow its own self-imposed rules. In other areas also, such as jousts and tournaments, one can see a clear-cut transformation of events that had some significance in earlier times to a purposeless superfluity, definitely out-of-tune with the nobles' function in society.

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[38] Monstrelet, I, 424.

During the course of the fourteenth and especially the fifteenth century the tournaments of the feudal age had become transformed into nothing more than a frivolous pastime for the nobility. "The knights of the twelfth century had conducted their martial games like battles--their descendants made their battles resemble tourneys."[39] The tournaments of the feudal age were a training ground for war. The melée, as these events were appropriately named, resembled an actual battle whereby two opposing groups of knights fought with each other. Usually the battle was most fierce with some being killed and many taken prisoner. The prisoners were released for ransom and many knights made a great deal of money by this means.

As chivalry became softened by courtesy harmless touraments became more prevalent, almost entirely replacing the melée. A full tournament included a series of tilts between individual knights wielding the lance followed by the combatants striking a specified number of blows with the sword, axe, and dagger, all while on horseback. One knight might challenge another to a single joust which consisted of the two charging each other on horseback with raised lances. This was terminated after both knights shattered their lances and one of them was unhorsed. An elaborate set of rules began to lessen the danger of tournaments,

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[39] Painter, Chivalry, p. 54.

especially with the introduction of blunted weapons and heavy suits of armor. The pomp and ceremony further increased as the tournaments expanded due to the presence of ladies. While the "men of the feudal age fought for the love of fighting . . ." the knights now fought "with blunted weapons--for love of the ladies."[40]

The chronicles of Froissart are rich in information concerning tournaments. After 1380 he increasingly emphasized the element of love in these affairs. The Church especially opposed tournaments in which knights fought over such a triviality as the love of a woman but had little success in banning them. In the year 1380 Froissart wrote of a joust between two squires for the love of a lady. He focused great attention on the challenge and the rules involved. The French

> squyer of Beause avaunsed himselfe without any settyng on by any other person, and came to the barryers scrimysshynge, and sayd to the Englysshmen, Sirs, is there any gentylman among you, that for the love of his lady wyll do any dede of armes? If there be any, here I am redy to issue out, armed at all peces a horsbacke, to ren thre courses with a speare, to stryke thre strokes with an axe, and thre strokes with a dagger. Nowe let us se if there be any amorous amonge you. This squyer was called Gawen Mychaell. This worde and request was anon spredde among the Englysshmen: than an Englysshe squyer, called Joachym Cathore, stept forthe and sayd, I am here, redy to delyver his request; let hym come out of the castell. Than the lorde Fitzwater, marshall of the hoost, came to the barryers, and sayd to sir Guy le Baveaux, Cause your squyer to come forthe, he shall fynde one wyll be gladde to delyver him, and

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[40]Stephenson, Feudalism, p. 74.

> we shall assure hym in all thynges. Gawen Mychaell was right joyouse of those wordes, and armed hym incontynent, and the lordes dyde helpe to arme hym and sette hym a horsbacke: so he yssued out of the castell and thre with him, and the varlettes bare thre speares, thre axes, and thre daggers.[41]

Froissart continues the description in detail, demonstrating the elaborate extent to which tournaments and jousts had evolved by the late fourteenth century. In this joust the French squire finally got the best of his English opponent, won the love of his lady, and returned to camp in great glee.

Tournaments fought on an individual basis but between larger groups of knights became the national sport of the French nobility and a harmless substitute for actual warfare. Sometimes twenty to thirty knights would take part in a tournament with nary one of them receiving a scratch. In the year 1388 Froissart described a joust between five French knights and five Englishmen under the duke of Lancaster. The ladies and damsels of the countryside congregated to view this event in which the only injury that occurred involved the horse of one of the knights.[42] On one occasion three brave French knights, led by the Marshall Boucicaut, challenged any and every knight who wished to joust to meet them at an appointed spot near Calais.

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[41] Froissart, III, 149.

[42] Froissart, V, 266.

Elaborate preparations were made to accommodate both the challengers and their opponents and notices were sent as far as England, Spain, Germany, and Italy. Such notables as Henry of Lancaster, John of Holland, and the earl of Huntingdon participated in this affair which went on for a whole month. Charles VI even attended during part of the tourney. While the three challengers emerged unscathed they claimed to have injured many opponents. However, it is most unlikely that anyone was wounded seriously as blunted lances were used.[43]

Occasionally battles were fought over a matter of honor. In one case a squire, Jaques le Grys, had an affair with the wife of a knight named John of Carouge while the latter was away. The wife claimed the squire had forced himself upon her so John took the case to the squire's lord. Finally it was decided the knight and the squire would do battle to settle the case. The knight not only put his honor at stake but also the lives of his wife and himself, since were he to lose both would die. John was able to defeat the squire who was promptly hung. This type of battle, however, was becoming much rarer in the later Middle Ages.[44]

The chronicles of Monstrelet contain even more information about jousts and tournaments, especially concerning

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[43]See Froissart, V, 342-59, for a complete description of this elaborate affair.

[44]Froissart, IV, 365-6.

the technical data involved in challenges and the rules and etiquette of these affairs. The monarchs and important princes lent an air of added regality by their presence. The knights bedecked themselves in gold and silver robes thrown over intricate suits of expensive armor. The court of Burgundy became the home of the tournament during the fifteenth century under the tutelage of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold. In most cases the jousts were suspended when there appeared any likelihood that one of the combatants would be injured. The king of France in attendance at a tournament held in Paris intently watched a joust between a Breton and an English knight. "In this last combat the Englishman was slightly wounded below his armour, when the king instantly put an end to the right."[45]

In the feudal age a bold knight could gain profit and glory by challenging other knights to do battle but even this aspect of chivalry had become rare by the fifteenth century. Jacques de Lalaing, a bold Burgundian knight-errant, traveled throughout France, Spain, and Portugal seeking out opponents, much as the immortal Don Quixote was portrayed to do by Cervantes. Though he was treated very courteously wherever he traveled, he found only one knight during his long journey who would joust with him.[46]

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[45]Monstrelet, I, 135.

[46]Cartellieri, p. 94.

The martial sports which had delighted the knights of an earlier period were dead by the fifteenth century, more especially after the battle of Agincourt. While one would be a sadist to regret the passing of the bloody melée it had served to train knights under actual battle conditions for their role as protectors of their lord and the people connected with his estate. The joust of the later Middle Ages served no function whatsoever except as an expensive display of a decadent segment of society.

Courtly love and court life exemplify other aspects of the changing condition of the nobility. The term prowess best characterized the chief virtue displayed in warfare and tournaments during the early feudal age. Religious service was a prime reason for fighting during the era of the crusades but towards the end of the thirteenth century the emphasis upon courtesy tended to overbalance prowess and piety. Love and service to women began to occupy the minds of romantic knights. Proficiency in the art of love illustrated in the growing abundance of romance literature tended to replace the brave, sword wielding knight portrayed in the epic. The <u>chansons de geste</u> dealt with bold fighters who had fierce loyalties whether it was Roland fighting for his lord, Charlemagne, or a knight fighting the Turks or Saracens on a crusade. The romance emphasized the knight fighting for his lady love whereby love either enhanced his prowess or was even supreme over prowess.

The Romance of the Rose is illustrative of the romance literature which tended to idealize and formalize the love element of chivalry. While its details are of little concern here its impact on the nobility tended to set them apart from the rest of society, more especially the lower classes. Hereafter they tended to lose sight of the reasons for their existence and began to live in a dream world of love, court life, and luxury. In both The Romance of the Rose and The Art of Courtly Love the emphasis is on a love not tightly restrained by reason and temperance and never between husband and wife, but love between a knight and the wife of another man. By nature, courtly love thrives upon exuberant behavior and condones illicit relationships between man and woman.

The Romance of the Rose and courtly love in general sparked much criticism not only from the clergy but from the distraught members of the nobility. Christine de Pisan spoke out boldly against the debauchery and sensualism of courtly love as it was actually practiced. For example she condemned adultery. "Yf a man were putte vpon and accused to haue layen wyth a mannys wyffe the whiche cas . . . the iustyce is capitall deth, that is to saye, worthy to lese his hed for the same. . . ."[47] While some romances such as the tales of Sir Lancelot emphasized purity and chasitity, The Romance of the Rose tended to encourage illicit relationships

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[47]Christine, Fayttes of Armes, p. 263.

between unmarried couples and to undermine the respect for womanhood. Christine de Pisan endeavored to instill a chivalrous regard for women which she claimed had been jeopardized by some of the romance literature. False and deceitful knights who betrayed their lovers were attacked bitterly by this female critic who upheld so strongly the position of women's rights.

Geoffroy La Tour Landry, a somewhat conservative French noble, wrote a book in the year 1371 in which he also reacted to The Romance of the Rose. He wrote primarily to instruct his daughters to be faithful to their husbands and pious in all ways, but the book also served as a manual for other women to follow. La Tour Landry attacked the overemphasis on courtly love which he perceived did not enhance prowess but weakened the courage of a knight and degraded the status of women. He believed courtly love to be artificial and a threat to the religious aspect of chivalry and damaging to the soul.

By analyzing his instructions to his daughters one can obtain a great deal of information from this pious knight about the defects of the fourteenth century nobility, more especially in their relationship to women. Contrary to the view held by many knights, La Tour Landry believed a knight should love only one woman and that should be his wife. The woman also must be faithful for "it is not good to a woman

to be found alone with a man, but if it be with her husband."[48] In an assault on the weakening moral code he relates an incident in which a false knight attempted to trick an innocent maid who would not consent to his desires by casting about false statements concerning her actions. Finally her honor was restored when a "noble knight, that was piteous and had compassion upon this maiden, gaged battle against the false knight, and there was a sore battle between them both; but the discomfiture befell upon the false knight, and was mischieved for his falseness; and upon the point of his death he acknowledged all the treason that he had wrought against this young maid."[49] The point he makes is that the immoral knight as exemplified in such works as The Romance of the Rose will pay for his transgressions at the hands of justice.

The woman on the other hand was admonished to be temperate in her dress and especially in her speech. It was the woman's duty to obey her husband and not talk back, especially in front of strangers. In one case where a woman did get impudent with her husband he "smote her with his fist down to the earth; And then with his foot he struck her in the visage and brake her nose, and all her life after she had

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[48] Geoffroy La Tour Landry, The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry, ed. G. S. Taylor (London, 1930), p. 46. (Hereafter cited as La Tour Landry).

[49] La Tour Landry, p. 116.

her nose crooked, the which shent and disfigured her visage after. . . ."[50] One would probably not find such a passage in the romance literature for this represents the statement of a puritanical reactionary striving to counter a rising tendency toward carefree irresponsibility and moral decay among both the men and women of the noble class. While the examples he presents are exaggerations, so typical of the extremes of the waning Middle Ages, they are significant representations of actual or similar cases drawn from his experience. La Tour Landry's admonitions unfortunately went unheeded by a majority of the nobility who were too interested in their own pleasures and follies to take advice concerning the consequences they would have to suffer for their actions.

Not only courtly love but court life too became more formal and subsequently more artificial as the Middle Ages drew to a climax. La Tour Landry has some warning to make in this area also, giving reasons why women should avoid attending jousts and feasts. The case in point concerns a woman who attended feasts against the advice of her husband. Whereupon on one occasion the torches were extinguished and after being relit she was found near the brother of her husband. While she was probably innocent of any false behavior her husband "loved his wife never after so well as he did before."[51] This warning appears to have had no affect in

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[50]La Tour Landry, p. 22.

[51]La Tour Landry, p. 30.

diminishing the attendance at feasts for these affairs only tended to increase in popularity.

Froissart relates several interesting accounts of French court life and great banquets and feasts,[52] but it is not until the reign of Charles VI that the nobility really blossomed forth in all its extravagance and excessive tastes and actions. "The French nobility of the epoch of Charles VI displayed a shameless luxury. Never were the entertainments more brilliant than those given at the court at this time; never were the royal entrances into the town of greater splendor. The costumes worn by the nobles were magnificent, and the industry which was fed by this luxury was very pros-persous; but the nobles in order to keep it up doubled the taxes on their lands and heavily oppressed the people. More-over they contracted huge debts which they never paid. The senseless luxury of the time ruined them and the working classes."[53]

After the battle of Agincourt the court of Burgundy became a haven for chivalry; however it was not the dedicated chivalry of the crusades but the empty formal chivalry of the romances, emphasizing etiquette, court life, jousts, and constant banquets. The princes here lived in luxury and they

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[52]For a good description of one of these elaborate banquets see Froissart, V, 280-83.

[53]Thompson, <u>Economic History</u>, pp. 299-300.

of course required much money to uphold their status. It has been estimated that in 1455 their budget was twice that of the popes.[54] Aside from the elaborate tournaments, the most flagrant display of knightly decadence is exemplified in the ostentatious feasts. The Feast of the Pheasant is in itself one of the finest examples, plainly illustrating how far the form had become divorced from the spirit of chivalry. Philip the Good held this extensive banquet in 1454 in an effort to raise men and money to recover Constantinople which the Turks had captured the year previous. The significance of this affair lay not in the religious realm but in the exuberence and splendor of the affair, much more typical of an event which would attract the sensuous Cellini during the Renaissaince than something appropriate for a dedicated ascetic, pious, knight. Actually this banquet was held in three parts at two week intervals with jousts and festivities continuing throughout the entire period. The final banquet held on a Sunday achieved the extreme in most every sense. The wine literally flowed like water and the food was exotic and entirely too excessive. Each meat course contained forty different dishes, and each carriage contained eighty-two pieces of meat. During the meal birds flew around the great hall while a three act play relating the adventures of Jason created another diversion. Upon the walls of the

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[54]Cartellieri, The Court of Burgundy, p. 16.

immense hall hung tapestries depicting the labors of Hercules and scattered throughout the room were numerous statues set with precious jewels. The whole affair seemed to represent one grand show with the participants being the principal actors. The banquet had become an end in itself as the knights began to assume their new role as gentlemen and courtiers, living in luxury, but being relegated to a secondary status as far as their power and influence was concerned.[55]

Charles the Bold continued the tradition set by his father, displaying an ostentation which made Burgundy the prodigal state in Europe during the fifteenth century. Commines lists some of the items obtained by the Swiss in 1476 when they defeated Charles the Bold and captured his camp. Just a few will be listed to demonstrate the extravagance of the dukes of Burgundy. "Four hundred tents of great richness, fitted with silk and velvet, and with the duke's arms embroidered thereon in gold and pearls." "Four hundred lbs. weight of silver plate. . . ." "Three hundred complete services of magnificent silver plate; and so great a quanity of coined money that it was distributed by handfulls. . . ." "The duke's rosary, with the apostles in massive gold." "The duke's sword, adorned with seven large diamonds and as many rubies, with fifteen pearls of the size of a bean, . . . 160 pieces of cloth of gold and silk . . . the

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[55]For a delightful account of this banquet see Cartellieri, The Court of Burgundy, pp. 138-152.

duke's gilded chair, and his gold ring, and the ring of his brother Antony, and two large pearls set in gold, each as large as a nut."[56] This is sufficient to give some idea of the prosperity and splendor displayed by the house of Burgundy. The licentiousness and excesses of the house helped bring about the downfall of this last bastion of chivalry. Even Philip de Commines, once a lord in the service of the duke of Burgundy, heaped scorn on "their baths and other amusements with women [which were] lavish and disorderly, and many times immodest. . . ."[57] Following the death of Charles the Bold in 1477 the perceptive Commines summarized and analyzed the house of Burgundy in penetrating depth.

> Their losses equalled, if they did not overbalance, their former prosperity; for as I had seen these princes puissant, rich and honorable, so it fared with their subjects; for I think I have seen and known the greatest part of Europe, yet I never knew any province or country, though of a larger extent, so abounding in money, so extravagantly fine in their furniture, so sumptuous in their buildings, so profuse in their expenses, so luxurious in their feasts and entertainments, and so prodigal in all respects, as the subjects of these princes in my time; and if any think I have exaggerated, others who lived in my time, will be of opinion that I have rather said too little. . . . In short, I have seen this family in all respects the most flourishing of any in Christendom: and then, in a short space of time, it was quite ruined and turned upside down, and left the most desolate and miserable of any house in Europe, as regards both prince and subjects.[58]

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[56] Commines, I, 311-2.

[57] Commines, I, 13.

[58] Commines, I, 341-2.

The formation of artificial chivalrous orders concerns another area of the growing decadence of chivalry. The Order of the Garter, promulgated by Edward III near the middle of the fourteenth century, remains one of the oldest and most well known. In 1430 Philip the Good established one of the greatest knightly orders begun in Europe during the Middle Ages known as the Order of the Golden Fleece. This fraternity of knights was organized similarly to the Order of the Garter but upon a more exclusive basis. Membership in the Order of the Golden Fleece was restricted to twenty-four nobles of high aristocracy (emperors, kings, and dukes). The knights promised not to join any other order and vowed to join together in the defense of the Catholic faith and the protection of the Holy Church. The ruling duke of Burgundy was always to remain grand master of the order; however, he could take no action without consulting each of the twenty-four members in the order. Though outwardly it appeared to be a most honorable and sought after institution, the Order of the Golden Fleece was mere frosting. In fact all of the knightly orders of the later Middle Ages are analagous in their desire to revive the fading chivalrous practices of the past by incorporating them into a formal institution. These orders represent only one more example of the decline of the nobility as its institutions became increasingly formal and it became a static segment of society.

An eminent medieval historian drew the following clear and definitive picture of the nobility, comparing their actions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with those of the later Middle Ages. "In sense of honor, in the amenities of gentility and courtesy, in kindliness, in feeling of responsibility, either to the individual or to society, in bearing and forbearing, in reverence towards the mysteries of life, the generations of these centuries [fourteenth and fifteenth] were immeasurably inferior to their predecessors."[59]

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[59] Thompson, Economic History, p. 9.

CHAPTER IV

CHIVALRY OUTMODED

The failure of the nobility in France to fulfill their feudal and chivalrous obligations in relationship to the other members of that class completes a most important segment of their decline. Nevertheless, one cannot grasp the reality of their downfall unless he thoroughly understands that chivalry, the ideal which gave vitality to the nobility, had passed its zenith and commenced to become outmoded during the last two centuries of the Middle Ages. The first distinct indication that it had outlived its usefullness arose in the military realm.

As early as the battle of Bouvines, paid mercenaries had been effectively used in the royal armies. However, at the turn of the fourteenth century the mounted knight remained undisputably the backbone of every major army in Europe. Such mercenary troops as the Genoese crossbowmen and the Swiss pikemen fought entirely for monetary reasons and were many times unreliable; consequently, they presented no threat of usurping the nobles power and of forming a permanent army behind the king.

Until about 1300 the commoners offered no challenge to the nobility due partly to the fact that they could not

afford the heavy cost of obtaining the equipment necessary to participate in feudal warfare. The fully armed knight required a great deal of expensive equipment. To mention only a part of his regalia the typical knight first had to have a good horse and secondly a good suit of armor (usually a suit of chain mail with only the partial protection of plate armor in the fourteenth century). In addition he wielded an expensive sword and retained as few or as many squires as he could support financially. Consequently the knight retained a monopoly upon feudal warfare. His position was first strongly challenged at the battle at Coutrai in 1302. A Flemish revolt necessitated that a French army travel to Flanders in order to subdue a group of unruly burghers. The French knights believed they would easily overrun their foes. However, much to everyone's surprise, the French knights were pitifully slaughtered as the Flemish burghers attacked them viciously. This battle was only an indication of what was to come, for from this point forward the mounted knight met one defeat after another.

The classic longbow undoubtedly was the greatest innovation which undermined the foundations of feudal warfare. The longbow had the advantage over the crossbow of a longer range and more rapid fire while realizing great penetrating power. Up until the fourteenth century the bow had offered no serious challenge to the cavalry charge due mainly to the fact that no well trained large army of bowmen had been

organized prior to this time. Consequently the French had no reason to change their tactics. The defeat at Coutrai had been caused mainly by terrain unfavorable to a cavalry, and the French knights' overwhelming victory at Cassel in 1328 reassured them of the superiority of their ancient method of fighting. At this very moment across the channel the English were forming a highly skilled corp of longbowmen that were to become the dominating factor for the duration of the Hundred Years' War and the backbone in the army of the English kings. The English tended to give up knightly sports somewhat and treat war more as a business.

The first really crucial test of infantry against cavalry came in 1346 when King Edward IV led approximately 20,000 Englishmen against twice that many in the French forces led by King Philip VI. Known throughout history as the battle of Crécy, the flower of French chivalry proved no match for the English longbowmen.[1] The English knights dismounted to fight next to their archers who darkened the sky with their arrows, putting the Genoese mercenaries to flight and disrupting the already disorganized French cavalry who were clumsily trying to maneuver on the soggy rain-soaked battlefield. The classical description of this battle

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[1] King Philip had hired some Genoese mercenaries but just prior to the battle a heavy rainfall had caused the strings on their crossbows to shrink rendering them almost useless throughout the battle. The English had wisely put their bowstrings under their hats to keep them dry.

comes from the pages of Froissart who did not seem to realize the importance of the longbow in ending the supremecy of the armed knight. He described how "thengylsshe archers stept forthe one pase, and lette fly their arowes so holly and so thycke, that it seemed snowe. . . . And ever styll the Englysshmen shot where as they saw thyckest preace: the sharpe arowes ranne into the men of armes and into their horses, and many fell, horse and men, . . . and whan they were downe, they coude nat relyve agayne. . . ."[2] The French sent wave after wave of knights to the front; each in turn was slaughtered or turned back. The disabled but courageous blind King John of Bohemia pitifully met death while leading a Luxemburg contingent against the English. It is unknown exactly how many of the French forces were killed in this battle but all figures show considerably more French than English were slain that fateful day. Froissart gives a complete account, though somewhat exaggerated, of the inventory Edward III ordered taken of the number that lay dead on the field of battle. "Than the kyng sende to serche howe many were slayne, and what they were. Sir Reynolds Cobham, and sir Richard Stafforde with thre haraldes went to serche the felde and contrey; they visyted all them that were slayne and rode all day in the feldes, and retourned agayne to the hoost as the king was goynge to supper: they

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[2]Froissart, I, 298.

made just report of that they had sene, and sayde howe ther were xi. great princes deed, fourscore baners, xii.C. knyghtes, and mo than xxx. thousande other."[3] The mounted man-at-arms had clearly met his nemesis in the form of the longbowman.

After such a resounding defeat one would immediately surmise that the French army would undergo a rapid and thorough reorganization in order to cope with the powerful English forces, but unfortunately this was not the case. Only ten years later, the French, led by a new king but with basically the same army, met the English at Poitiers. Again the English, this time led by the Black Prince, were outnumbered two to one. Prior to the battle two cardinals of the Church endeavored to intercede between the opposing forces; however, "they failed to bring peace to the discordant parties. On the contrary, pride reigned, confidence in the might and multitude of armed men persisted, and as a result a pitched battle was agreed upon."[4] The confident French led by the chivalrous King John did change their tactics to the extent that they dismounted and fought on foot but to no avail as the French were routed, overcome by the volleys sent forth by the English archers and many were slain or fled the battle. Though King John "defended himself manfully and slew many, he could not withstand so overwhelming an attack."[5] "And

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[3] Froissart, I, 303.

[4] Venette, p. 64.

[5] Venette, p. 64.

as it was reported, there was slayne all the floure of Fraunce, and there was taken with the kyng and the lorde Philyppe his sonne a sevyntene erles, besyde barones, knyghtes and squyers, and slayne a fyve or sixe thousande of one and other."[6] For the second time in a decade chivalry had been demonstrated obsolete and utterly defenseless before a trained corps of longbowmen.

For the brief period spanning the reign of Charles V (1364-80) there appeared hope that France was finally adopting a realistic approach to warfare. Charles, appropriately named "the Wise," directed his war efforts through Bertrand du Guesclin, whom he made Constable of France. Oftentimes du Guesclin is pictured as the French counterpart to such illustrious knights as John Chandos and the Black Prince. On the contrary his success lay in his ability to overthrow the knightly mores, and adopt new methods of warfare. Froissart was hesitant to give credit to this somewhat unorthodox and unchivalrous captain and constantly underplayed his role in relation to Chandos for example.

The immediate problem confronting Charles V was how to get rid of the destructive Companions. For this task he called upon du Guesclin to lead these pillagers away from France for "there was no getting rid of these brigands except

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[6] Froissart, I, 382.

by leading them to fight and pillage elsewhere. No one could succeed in this manoeuvre better than Duguesclin, who shared their tastes and knew how to flatter their ambitions. Charles V encouraged him to try."[7] Du Guesclin first endeavored to lead the Companions into Hungary to battle the Turks but their destination was too distant and they proceeded no farther than Alsace before they poured back into France. He next persuaded the Companions to join him in a mission to unseat Pedro the Cruel as ruler of Castile and place Henry Trastamara upon the throne. This plan worked with great success and occupied the Companions for four years. By 1369, when Charles V was ready to resume the war with the English, both the noble captains of the Companions and their followers were so utterly exhausted they presented no serious problem to France. While the methods of neither Charles V nor du Gueslin were considered honorable or chivalrous, they were successful and served as a prototype for Charles VII to follow some eighty years later.

Charles V approached the renewal of warfare against the English in a rather unique fashion. Unlike his two immediate predecessors he directed the war from behind the scenes never engaging in battle himself. This he left up to his constable who masterfully led the French forces. Christine de Pisan praised the good king for wisely letting

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[7] Perroy, The Hundred Years War, pp. 155-6.

the constable lead the troops for a man of experience was most important in this job. The king's great value lay in his wisdom and the respect he inspired in the people, therefore his life should not be jeopardized in battle.[8] Charles deeply wished to recover all the French territory assigned to the English in the treaties of Bretigny and Calais and set out to reorganize the taxes and army in order to achieve his goals. All the nobles of the realm were enlisted in the king's army for pay and an auxiliary force of bowmen were formed.

In 1369 when war was renewed the French changed their tactics of warfare. Perceiving that open warfare against the English had only resulted in disaster the king instructed du Guesclin to use hit-and-run tactics. The French then began using successful "guerilla" type tactics always avoiding pitched battles. The English "had rather that the Frenche kyng had sente downe power of men to have fought with them; but the Frenche kyng alwayes commaunded in no wyse to gyve them batayle, but wolde that they shulde be ever pursued, and kept shorte. And every night the Frenchmen laye in fortresses, and in the day pursued thenglysshe host, who went ever close toguyder."[9] This type of warfare

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[8]Christine, Fayttes of Armes, p. 21.

[9]Froissart, II, 438.

caused much grief to the peasants for it left the English soldiers free to live off the land. However, it was highly successful, for the French were able to recover many of the towns and provinces held by the English. The French recovered much territory and prestige under the leadership of Charles V and du Guesclin; this success can be accredited mainly to their rather unchivalrous methods of warfare. Unfortunately, France had not learned her lesson well enough, for she had yet to receive one more costly and humiliating defeat before the antiquated chivalric practices in warfare were completely discredited.

At Agincourt in 1415 the French knights suffered another horrendous defeat at the hands of the English. The night before the battle the French men-at-armes remained on their horses sitting through a heavy rainstorm while the English spent their time in rest and prayer. In order to fight, the French troops were required to dismount, forming themselves into tight huddles of thirty or forty men. These groups of knights made excellent targets for the English archers who virtually riddled their ranks with their accurate volleys. Discerning that the knights clad in heavy army could barely stir in the slippery mud the unprotected and scantily armed English infantry lay down their bows and proceeded to go amongst the French, slaying them by the thousands. The French began the day with a force of approximately 50,000 men outnumbering the English by six to one. When the

battle was completed Monstrelet claimed 10,000 Frenchmen were slain of which only 1,600 were of low degree, while the English only lost 500.[10] While his ratio of French to English is a little high his statement of the number dead is relatively accurate. The real chivalry of Franch died at Agincourt for warfare became a more serious business hereafter in the fifteenth century. The nobility had proven their inadequacy for the last time and though they clung to the characteristics of their class they could not cope with the new methods of warfare.

In addition to the deadly longbowmen the Swiss pikemen emerged as a further deterrent to the cavalry charge. This well trained group of mercenaries wielded long pointed spears which when handled correctly were capable of doing great injury to both horse and rider. "Drilled to maneuver in mass formation, the Swiss could withstand the charges of the heavy horse. Determined and well-clad cavalry could impede and delay their advance, but could rarely stop them or destroy their mass formation."[11] Undoubtedly one of the most famous series of defeats which the Swiss inflicted upon armed knights occurred against Charles the Bold. In 1476-7 Charles led his Burgundian knights against this superior group of infantrymen. The Burgundian cause was

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[10] Monstrelet, I, 334.

[11] Painter, <u>Chivalry</u>, p. 23.

futile and the Swiss imposed several severe defeats upon these men-at-arms. On January 5, 1477 the Swiss achieved their supreme victory at Nancy as Charles himself met death. The day after the battle his mutilated body was found lying upon the battlefield, a gruesome memento to the men of chivalry.

During the fifteenth century a permanent national army emerged in France replacing the decentralized feudal armies once and for all.

> The use of infantry has increased and that of cavalry has declined. Army organization no longer is of a feudal nature. The old tie of military service between lord and vassal has been disolved. Armies are royal and national in spirit and organization. The ancient forty days' service has given way to a system of indentures under which a captain enters into a contract with the king to furnish a certain number of men of his own selection and to keep them provided with arms, horses and food, while the government for its part pays quarterly wages according to an established scale which varies according to the rank and status of each fighting unit. War has become a trade supported by royal taxation and in which immense private capital is invested.[12]

Even the armor which the fifteenth century knights had perfected to give them a high degree of protection was now obsolete. By 1400 the knights donned suits of full plate armor. While these heavy steel outfits had become impervious to the longbow they left the knight more and more immobile and unable to maneuver or retreat as the Agincourt fiasco clearly indicated. If its function was not

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[12] Thompson, Economic History, pp. 492-3.

entirely impeded by its sheer clumsiness, full plate armor was made obsolete by the introduction of firearms. As cannons and guns became more powerful in the fifteenth century, armor became less protective and less desirable. Truly the refinement of gunpowder dealt the final blow to the armored knight with all his glitter and glory. Jacques de Lalaing renders a perfect example of the death of the old ways in the path of progress. "Jacques de Lalaing did not fall, as he had dreamed, in glorious battle with an antagonist of equal rank. He was killed most unromantically by a cannonball. Can the conflict between the knightly ideals of the fifteenth century and the claims of practical reality be better illustrated?"[13]

The courtesies of warfare shown by knights often had a detrimental affect upon the outcome of a battle and usually it was the common people or innocent bystanders who received the full force of the repercussions. Strategic interests were sometimes sacrificed to the interests of chivalry. The knightly ideal prescribed there be a greater emphasis on glory gained through courtesy and prowess than on victory. Cartellieri succinctly relates an example of the dilemma of courtesy and victory in the following passage.

> The contrast between the knightly ideal and reality was to become more marked as time went on. Honour required that the knight should never refuse battle

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[13] Cartellieri, The Court of Burgundy, p. 96.

> when it was offered by his opponent. Tactical and strategic necessity, however, frequently demanded that the challenge should be refused. Philip the Good allowed the army commander to get the better of the knight when he avoided a battle three times in one day. He even allowed his magnificent and conspicuous armour to be worn in battle by one of his knights. He arrived at such decisions with great difficulty; they deprived him of his sleep; for it was Philip's boast that he preferred death to dishonour. But even in Philip's case sober political reasons were at times thrown into the background by the joy of battle. In order to encourage his followers, he galloped alone far ahead of his troops to the attack, and at the siege of Melun he took up his position in the trenches like King Henry V, and engaged an opponent.[14]

On more than one occasion Henry Trastamara stringently put chivalry before the welfare of his army and the people of the country he was trying to rule in the absence of Pedro the Cruel. To cite a lucid example, the Black Prince, John Chandos and "the floure of all the chivalry of the worlde," were endeavoring to restore Pedro upon the throne of Castile in 1367. Sir Arnold Daudrehen counseled Henry that the English forces were very powerful and probably would overpower the forces of Castile in an open battle. However, there was one possibility to stop the English by blocking a vital mountain pass. Sir Arnold advised Henry:

> Sir, it is necessary that ye take good hede and counsell in this matter; but, sir, and ye wyll do by my counsayle ye shall disconfyte them without any stroke strikyng: as thus, if ye wyll kepe the straites and passages so that no provisyon may come at them, ye shall famysshe them, and so disconfite them: for than they shal be fayne to retourne into their own countre warde, without good order or array, and than may you

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

> have your desyre acomplysshed. Than this kyng Henry answered and sayd: Marshall, by the soule of my dere father, I desyre so moche to se the Prince, and to prove his puisaunce and myne, that I wyll never depart hens without batayle. . . .[15]

Subsequently Henry and his forces suffered several defeats at the hands of the English and many thousands of his soldiers and innocent people of the towns and countryside were slaughtered. To complete this fiasco, Pedro the Cruel was temporarily restored to power. Had Henry placed good judgment and military strategy ahead of his love of chivalry this ridiculous and injurious folly could have been averted.

The ways of chivalry were inadequate in many other areas than just the military. A strict adherence to the rules of chivalry as King John followed them became most incompatible with the running of a well ordered state in the fourteenth century. By briefly analyzing some of the weaknesses in King John's behavior one can better understand some of the more blatant inadequecies. John's impulsiveness and poor judgment caused him to make many blunders. His first act upon becoming king was to order the execution of the constable, Raoul de Brienne. The reasons for this execution are not entirely clear but it seems likely that the constable was killed for no other purpose than to make way for the king's favorite, Charles of Spain. In imitation of the English Order of the Garter, John, with great pomp

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[15] Froissart, II, 201.

and display established the Order of the Star. In 1355 John was forced to ask the Estates General for money needed to raise troops in order to suppress the raids which the Black Prince was undertaking in Languedoc. The Estates General approved the gabelle "but sanctioned the right of resistance against all kinds of pillage--a distinct commentary on the imcompetence of the king."[16] In the same year that the gabelle was granted, John made the magnificent chivalrous gesture of challenging the king of England to combat. "The Frenche kyng, who had made his assemble at the citie of Amyens heryng of the kyng of Englande rode towarde hym . . . [and] send his marshall Dauthayne . . . to the kyng of Englande, offeryng to fight body to body or power to power, what day soever he wold apoynt. But the Kyng of England refused. . . ."[17] Truly this was a great act of chivalry for a knight but for a king of a powerful nation it was an utterly ridiculous action. As a further example, the whole episode of John's capture of Poitiers and his imprisonment in England was completely out of harmony with the good of the people and his role as a monarch. One cannot doubt his courage in that final brave but ridiculous charge against the English at Poitiers. The courtesies exchanged between John and the Black Prince following his capture are inspiring even today;

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[16] The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed. (Cambridge, England, 1911), XV, 441.

[17] Froissart, I, 350-1.

however, his whole attitude during his imprisonment represented that of a naive chivalrous prince and not a monarch of a powerful country. For four years after 1356 John lived in captivity, but of a strange variety for the majority of this period. Much of the time he lived in luxury, hunting and jousting at will and receiving money and good wines from France. During the four years this unfortunate king remained captive, France underwent some of the worst domestic troubles which have ever plagued any kingdom. The Estates General, torn between the conflicting factions of Étienne Marcel, Charles the Bad of Navaree, and the dauphin, was unable to restore order in the realm. In addition, the war torn, poverty ridden peasantry rose up in a bloody revolt known as the Jacquerie. Throughout this chaotic period King John never seemed to grasp the magnitude of the turmoil and the depths of poverty and suffering which the people were undergoing. Not only did he not realize but he did not really care under what conditions the people existed. He was primarily concerned that the people raise the necessary money to ransom him so that he could resume his knightly activities. This chivalrous spendthrift looked at warfare as one big tournament.

In 1360 as part of the Peace of Bretigny the release of John was agreed upon in exchange for a tremendous ransom. After part of the ransom was delivered and certain hostages were turned over to the English, the king was liberated. The

common people were greatly oppressed under the burden of raising the king's ransom, yet they remained loyal to their ruler. John had yet to commit one more chivalrous but unfortunate act before his miserable life ended. After one of the hostages, the duke of Anjou, who was the king's second son, broke his parole and escaped from England, John voluntarily returned to captivity. He spent the winter of 1363 in entertainment at London. Fortunately he passed away the following spring and left France in the hands of his much wiser son, Charles V. One cannot doubt King John's strict adherence to the rules of chivalry; however, it is regretable that he remained so inflexible in the interpretation of these rules that he never considered the ultimate effect upon the kingdom and people of France.

The Black Prince involved himself in several affairs whereby he obviously placed a strict adherence to the principles of chivalry above good judgment. The results of his blunders caused him much discomfort, but even more important was the detrimental affect his actions had upon society. Both King John and the Black Prince had little comprehension of the effect of their actions upon the other elements of society. One of the most unjustified acts perpetrated by the Black Prince involved his efforts to restore Pedro the Cruel to his position upon the throne in Castile.

Pedro was a hated man in his kingdom. Even Froissart was willing to admit his unpopularity.

> Kynge Dampeter was soore behated with his owne men, throughout all the realme of Castell, bycause of the marveylous cruell justyce that he had done, and by the occasyon of the distruccyon of the noble men of his realme, the whiche he had put to deth and slayne with his handes. Wherfore assoone as they sawe his bastard brother entre into the realme with so great puyssaunce, than they drue all to hym, and receyved him to their lorde, and so rode forthe with him; and they caused cytees, townes, borowes, and castels, to be opyned to hym, and every man to do hym homage. And so the Spanyards, all with one voyce, cryed, Lyve Henry and dye Dampeter, who hath been to us so cruell and so yvell.[18]

Among Pedro's few good qualities were his intelligence and courage but his brutality completely overshadowed these. His dislike of his wife led him to have her imprisoned and later killed. Suspicious jealousy caused him to drive one of his father's bastard sons, Henry of Trastamara, from his kingdom. As indicated earlier, du Guesclin and the Companions placed Henry upon the throne and his entry as described above by Froissart was a welcomed event. A great majority of the people backed Henry as king of Castile and all indications led one to believe his reign was to be highly successful.

Why, one might legitimately ask, did the Black Prince aid Pedro the Cruel against the beloved and successful Henry Trastamara. England had no interests in Castile or any binding obligations to aid Pedro. The pope had backed Henry and there is every indication to believe that an overwhelming majority of the people backed him. Concerning the characteristics which designated a man a true and courageous knight,

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[18]Froissart, II, 156.

Henry resembled the Black Prince much more than did his brother, the treacherous Pedro the Cruel. It appears that the Black Prince and his followers intervened in favor of Pedro for the sake of pure adventure and for a rectification of a technical violation of justice as interpreted by the Prince. Since Henry was a bastard son he could not legally hold office as king. While this appears somewhat trivial today, the Prince perceived Henry's action as an affront to chivalry. His counselors had emphatically warned him not to aid a man that

> ronneth throughout his realme, apd by his owne men, howe he caused to dye his wyfe, your cosyn, doughter to the duke of Burbone. . . . But to these words, the Prince answered thus: sayeng, Lordes, I thynke and byleve certenly, that ye counsell me truely to the best of your powers: I knowe well, and am well enfourmed of the lyfe and state of this kyng Dampeter, and knowe well, that without nombre, he hath done many yvell dedes . . . But . . . it is nat covenable that a bastard shulde hold a realme in herytage, and put out of his owne realme his brother, ryghtfull enheryter to the lande, the whiche thyng all kynges and kinges sonnes shulde in no wyse suffre nor consent to, for it is a great prejudice agaynst the state royall.[19]

It is most ironical that the Prince defeated Henry, a true knight in every respect, and aided the cruel Pedro, hated by both the Church and people.

Undoubtedly in simplifying the issues involved we have made this dispute appear too "black and white" for there are other factors to be considered. However, the basic fact remains that the Prince intervened as a matter of sheer

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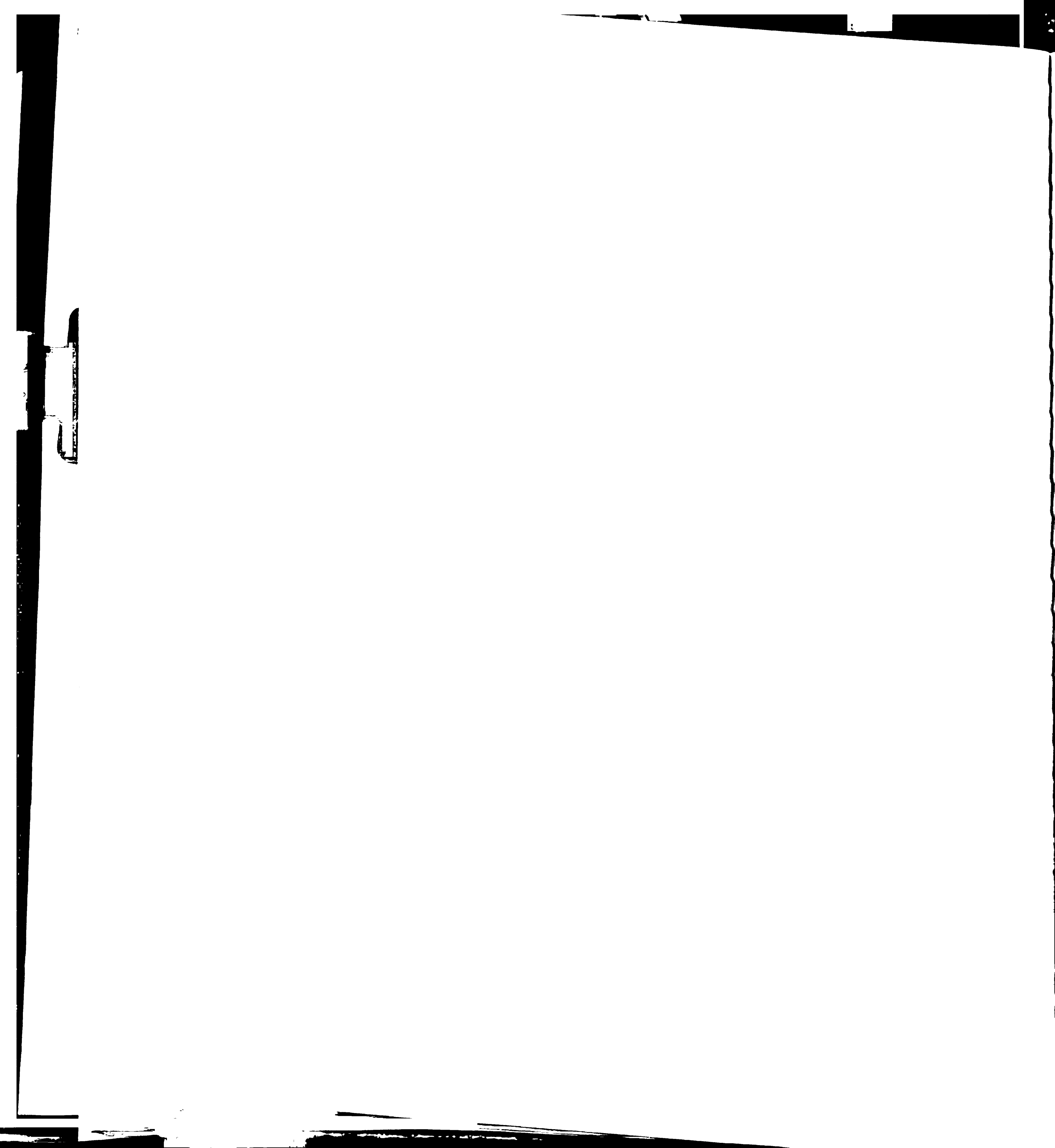
[19]Froissart, II, 163.



principle, fully realizing the weaknesses and unpopularity of Pedro. This truly indicates how sterile and antiquated chivalry could be when carried to extremes.

As a climax to the Prince's mission, he was unable to collect the money which Pedro had agreed to pay upon his restoration to the throne. Pedro had promised to reimburse the troops of the Black Prince for their aid, but he broke his word and endeavored to stall the Prince by conjuring up excuses. Finally, perceiving there would be no money forthcoming, the Prince returned home with his troops promising to reimburse them out of his own funds. Barely two years later in 1369, Henry once again overcame Pedro, this time putting him to death. Thereafter Henry remained permanently upon the throne of Castile emerging as a good and powerful ruler.

Let us relate one more incident in which the Black Prince let his love of chivalry overpower common sense. In the campaign which restored Pedro to the kingship in Castile, du Guesclin was taken captive and held prisoner by the Black Prince. The latter, realizing the value of his prisoner, delayed setting a ransom for his release. Du Guesclin called his bluff by stating "it is sayd, in the realme of Fraunce and in other places, that ye feare me so moche, that ye dare nat let me out of prison, the whiche to me is full great honour." The Prince, realizing he had been tricked, answered,

"Sir, than ye thinke that we kepe you for feare of your chivalry: nay, thynke it nat, for I swere by saint George it is nat so; therfore pay for your raunsome a hundred thousande frankes, and ye shall be delyvered."[20] Though the ransom was high it was paid, demonstrating once more how good chivalry and pride conflicted with good policy, working to the detriment of the knightly proponents and many times to the welfare of society.

Beginning as early as the thirteenth century there arose direct criticism of the noble classes with their chivalrous ideals. Some was in a constructive vein but many of the critics mocked the rules of chivalry and proposed new ones to replace the old. In the thirteenth century a nascent weakness in the structure of the nobility was exposed in the Romance of the Rose. While most medieval authors would have agreed with Ramón Lull that "parage and chyvalrye accorden to gyder . . .,"[21] Jean de Meun proposed a nobility based on virtue. Unlike the crude feudal nobility and the knights of the crusading era, the thirteenth century nobility came to look upon themselves increasingly as a class apart from the rest. This class consciousness emerged not because of any virtues the nobles possessed but by sheer fact of their lineage. Jean de Meun contended that birth was not the sole

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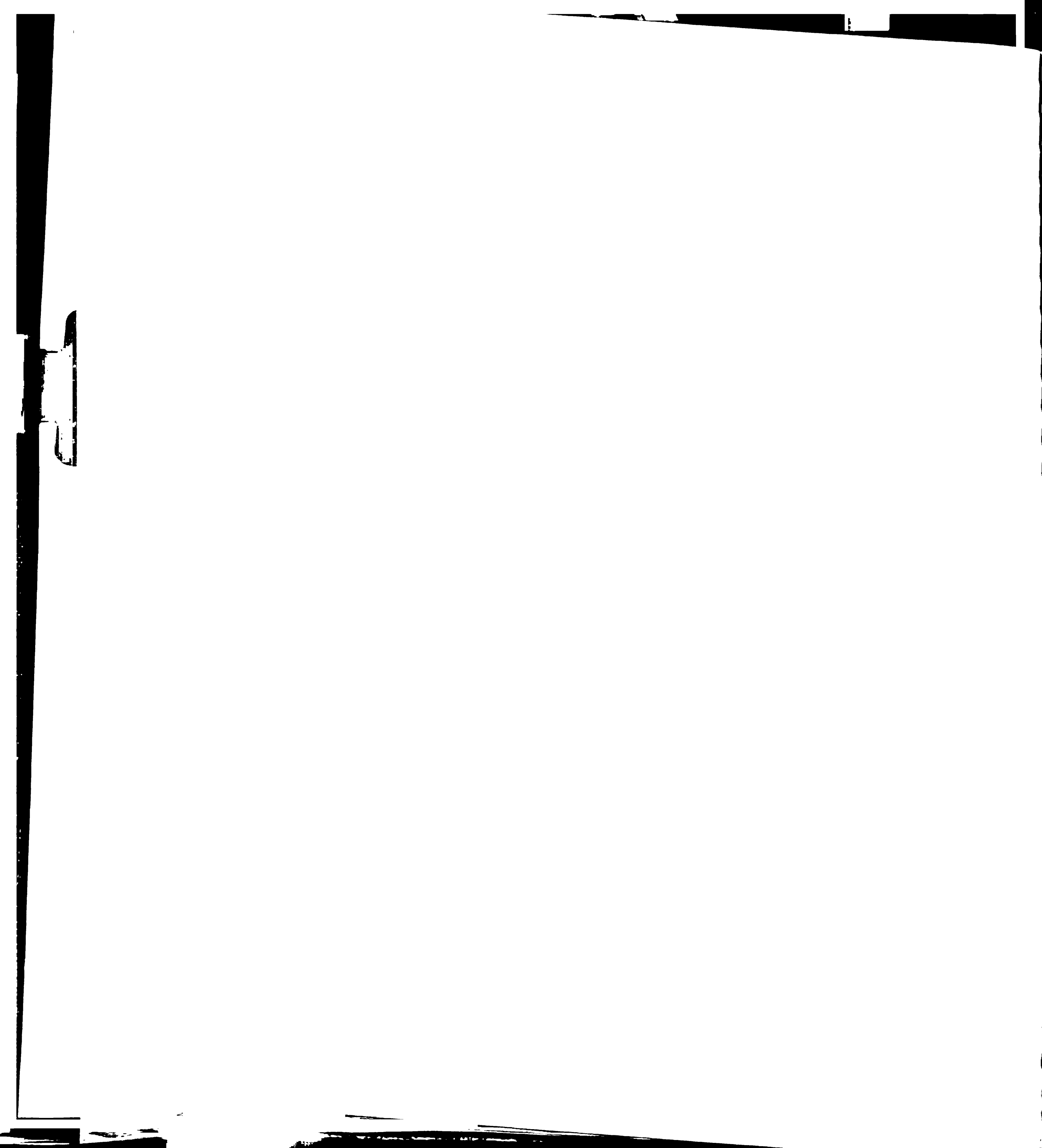
[20] Froissart, II, 225-6.

[21] Lull, Ordre of Chyvalry, p. 58.



prerequisite to the nobility and knighthood but that training, education, and the deeds he performed made a man a true noble. He stated that some men,

> Long lineage boasts and blazonry,
> Above rude folk who are but born
> To till the earth, with labour worn,
> I should reply that, 'tis alone
> By virtue noblemen are known,
> And only he should men count base
> In whom fair virtue giveth place
> To hideous vice. An upright heart
> Doth true nobility impart,
> But mere nobility of birth
> I reckon as of little worth.[22]

He goes on to state:

> With names could I fill many a page
> Of men who, though their lineage
> Was lowly, yet to fame did mount,
> By genius, above king or count,
> And worthily were held to be
> The flower of all nobility.
> But those good days are dead, alas!
> And now may men a lifetime pass
> In studying deep philosophy,
> Faring therefor o'er land and sea
> In poverty and misery great,
> Begging their bread at Dives' gate,
> Barefooted, clad in threadbare gown,
> Wending their way from town to town,
> Esteemed by kings not worth a hen,
> Although far worthier gentlemen, . . .[23]

For several more pages Jean de Meun attempts to point up the fallacies of a nobility based on lineage as compared with that based on virtue but his admonitions apparently had little effect.

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[22] Romance of the Rose, III, 133.

[23] Romance of the Rose, III, 137.

A century later the austere Geoffroy La Tour Landry offered indirect criticism in the form of advice to his daughters. Much of his emphasis centered upon the revival of a pious nobility to the exclusion of the growing preoccupation with romance and exuberant court life. However, he delved into other areas than the above mentioned. For example, he emphasized "the great honour and the great wealth that is for to be well Renowned, to bear a good name, and to be well spoken of, which is one of the greatest grace that may be in the world. . . ." He goes on to show the extensive labor and peril of death which a knight must undergo "and after he hath suffered thus much, then he is drawn forth and put unto much worship, and the princes give him great lordships and governances, for his nobleness and for he hath no parail in honour of good name."[24] La Tour Landry used this example to demonstrate the goal that knights should strive to achieve but were not coming close to attaining in his era.

About the same time that La Tour Landry was writing his memorable reproof of chivalry a book emerged in England known as Piers the Plowman. The best historians agree that this work was written by William Langland, a commoner, who criticized the nobility and clergy more especially in their relations with the commoners. In one allegorical

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[24]La Tour Landry, p. 128.

passage Langland criticized the nobility in an indirect way for their failure to protect the lands of the peasants. The plowman mentions to a knight how the peasant earns meat and drink for all men. Graciously the knight offers his aid to the plowman but the latter quickly refuses it stating:

> That I will sweat and see to it, and sow for us both,
> And labour for your love, all my life-time,
> If you charge yourself to cherish Holy Church and myself
> And chase off the wicked that lay the world waste.
> And be a hardy hunter of hares and of foxes
> Of boars and of badgers that break down my hedges;
> Go and fly falcons to fall upon wild-fowl
> that come into my croft and crop up my wheat'. . . .[25]

This passage is obviously directed at the noblemen who failed to protect the lands of the peasants from bands of roving pillagers and who treated the land as game preserves, failing ever to exterminate completely the predatory animals who preyed on the peasants' crops. This type of criticism recurs repeatedly throughout the pages of Langland.

Early in the fifteenth century a new type of critic emerged in the writings of Christine de Pisan. It is significant to note that she was born of noble blood, thereby giving her remarks a greater importance. She spoke out strongly for women's rights, rebuking the adultery and degradation of women in the Romance of the Rose. Her criticism differed from that purported by La Tour Landry in the

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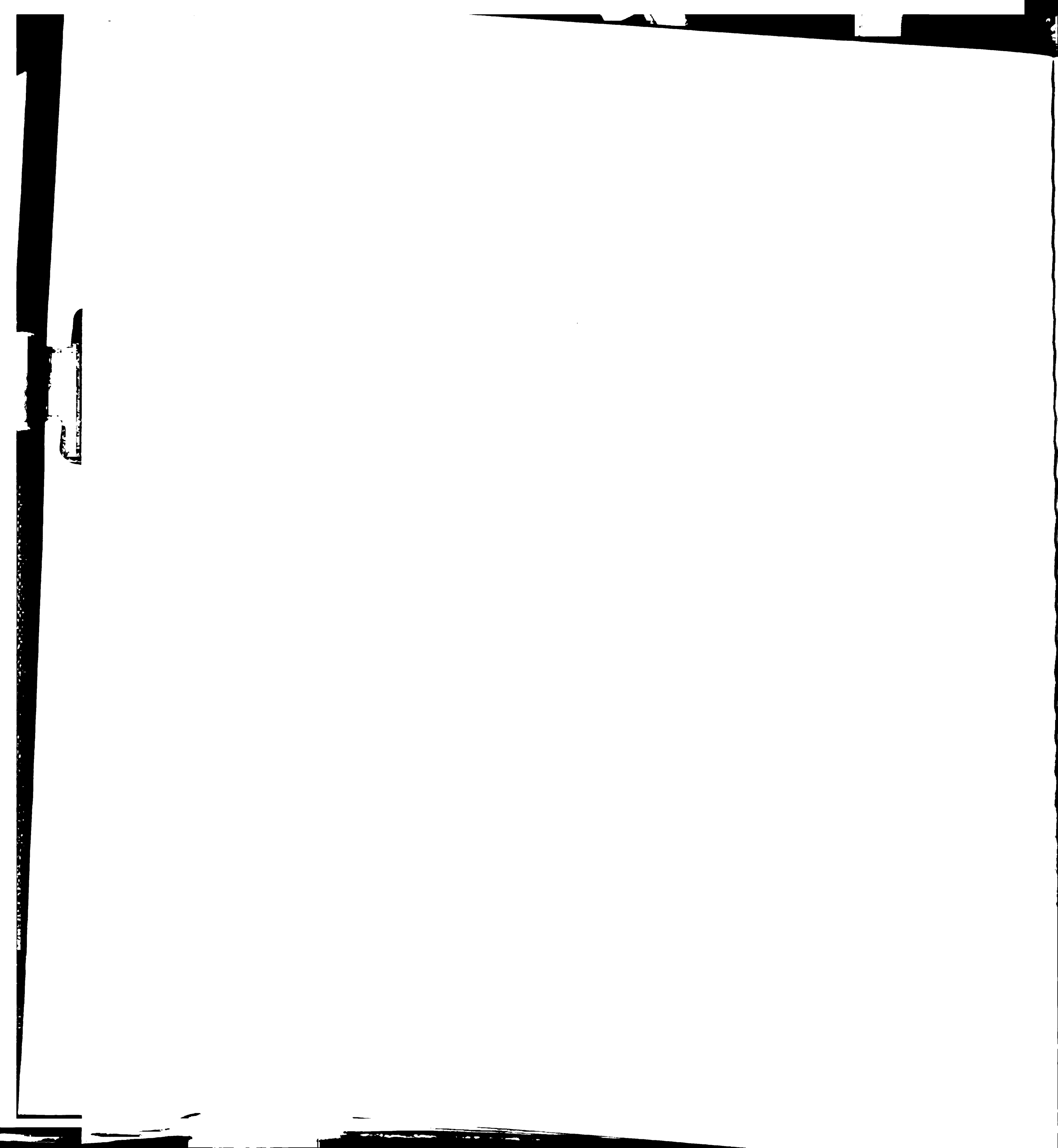
[25] Visions From Piers Plowman taken from the poem of William Langland, trans. into modern English by Nevill Coghill (New York, 1950), p. 49. (Hereafter cited as Piers Plowman).



sense that she did not emphasize returning to the "good old days" so much as suggesting an alteration of the old ways of chivalry to meet new conditions. Though spying and lying in ambush were deplored by good knights she cautiously began to speak of using these methods in unusual circumstances. She advocated caution in respect to the trust one placed in other captains and admonished care in arbitrating for peace with an enemy for fear it might be a trick to gain time.[26] Her ideal ruler was the unchivalrous but wise Charles V who remained in Paris while his experienced constable, du Guesclin, led the French armies into battle. Her attitude can be explained in part by the turbulent and treacherous Burgundian-Armagnac dispute which plunged France into civil war, yet her writings are more than a mere reflection of her chaotic age. She seriously began to challenge the basic tenets of chivalry and began speaking of using diplomacy instead of warfare in many situations. Her writings mark a radical departure from the fourteenth century writers.

The departure becomes even more clearly defined in the writings of Philip de Commines. Commines went to great extremes to heap derision upon the chivalrous nobility. In fact, if there were not other chroniclers writing in the late fifteenth century one would surmise that chivalry no longer

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[26] For a complete account of her views on these topics see Christine, Fayttes of Armes, pp. 70-74.

existed. Unlike Froissart, he realistically looked at the nobility with all their frailties, boldly calling a coward a coward and concluding by heaping scorn on the false pretensions of chivalry. He pictured warfare as a wicked business and one to be undertaken in the most efficient manner possible. He approached diplomacy and warfare with much the same attitude as Machiavelli advocating that expediency prevail over the outmoded methods of chivalry. One is puzzled by the great amount of moralizing and emphasis upon divine intervention which appears on page after page of the memoirs of this cynic. The best possible explanation which is consistent with his other views would equate him with Frederick the Great in the sense that both felt that God stood on the side with the largest battalions.

Commines looked to his Sovereign, Louis XI, as almost an ideal statesman. The virtues which appealed to Commines were the same ones which appeared in Louis. Both Commines and his sovereign were crafty in their dealings. Commines advocated the use of trickery, cheating or any other means of statecraft that would best enable a wise prince to achieve his purposes. The successful prince could not retain a high regard for honesty and loyalty and still achieve his goals. This approach is a far cry from the ideals upheld in the code of chivalry.

Commines is most outspoken in presenting the virtues and vices of Louis XI, especially in comparison to the other

princes and lesser nobles. At one point he states:

> I am very confident that if his [the king's] education had not been different from the usual education of such nobles as I have seen in France, he could not so easily have worked himself out of his troubles; for they are brought up to nothing but to make themselves ridiculous, both in their clothes and discourse; they have no knowledge of letters; no wise man is suffered to come near them, to improve their understandings; they have governors who manage their business, but they do nothing themselves . . . and I have seen their servants take great advantage of them, giving them to understand they were fools; and if afterwards they came to apply their minds to business, and attempted to manage their own affairs, they began so late, they could make nothing of it.[27]

Though he condoned treachery and trickery, he had great respect for wisdom and sincerely believed that the success of the king lay in the fact that he was more suspicious and sage than the other princes, more especially Charles the Bold. Since man's life was so short that he was not able to experience everything for himself, Commines suggested that the greatest means to wisdom was to have studied the histories of the ancients. He felt nothing but scorn for the illiterate princes who were led about by the nose by lawyers and priests.

Commines originally served as an important noble in the house of Burgundy under the successive reigns of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold. In the year 1472, he defected to the court of Louis, king of France, whom he served faithfully until the time of his death. The reasons and justification

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[27] Commines, I, 61.

for his defection are somewhat confusing, but it appears he finally reached a point where he could no longer tolerate the knightly idealism of the foolhardy Charles and departed to serve the wiser and more realistic Louis XI. Another explanation which is just as feasible involved a large pension which Louis probably paid Commines for entering his service. Despite his devotion to Louis, this brilliant historian and statesman was also quick to point out the failings of his beloved monarch. The blunders committed by Louis usually precipated a bit of philosophizing and constructive criticism from Commines. The Péronne affair in 1468 offers an excellent example. Louis foolishly left himself in a position whereby he was quickly seized by Charles the Bold after news reached the latter that some of the king's agents had incited a revolt in the city of Liege. Commines' interpretation stated that "it is the highest act of imprudence for any prince to put himself into the power of another, especially if they be at war . . . I do not say that everybody has met with such treacherous dealings, but one example is sufficient to make many people more wise. . . ."[28] To be a successful prince and ruler one must be suspicious and wary of one's opponents at all times. These views come from the mind of a realist whose outlook was completely divorced from that of a traditional medieval knight.

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[28] Commines, I, 115-6.

Commines derided the chivalrous nobility en masse for their love of honor and glory, their implacable pride, and their enjoyment of warfare. However, he particularly concentrated on his impetuous and conceited former lord, Charles the Bold of Burgundy. The insatiable desire of the duke to extend his dominions led him to undertake the most difficult enterprises. While Commines never doubted his courage, "he was defective in judgment, and in the cunning management of his affairs: and if a prince be deficient in that point, let him be every way as complete and as nicely qualified for heroic actions as he will, it signifies nothing. . . ." Much of the misfortune that befell Charles came from his stubborn adherence to a knightly code that was no longer practiced or practical. "In short, he that could have taken part of the king's qualities, and mingled them with the duke's, might have made a perfect prince; for certainly the king was much superior to him in judgment and management, and the end sufficiently demonstrated it to all the world."[29] The death of Charles the Bold at the hands of the Swiss brought no sympathy from Commines; instead, he perceived it as the passing of the last major obstacle to the unity of France.

As Froissart, with his love and praise of chivalry, typified an order that was slowly being outmoded and undermined, Commines truly symbolized a new era. He had no praise

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[29]The quotes are from Commines, I, 180.

and little if any constructive criticism to bestow upon those who adhered to the knightly ideals of courtesy and honor. His philosophy entailed a Machiavellian code of conduct which he expressed especially well in his views on diplomacy and the running of a national state. He rose above the quarrels of the petty princes and perceived affairs on a national and even international scope. He thoroughly grasped the significance of a "balance of power" in Europe which he believed was partly upset by the fall of the house of Burgundy. However France was still not autonomous for "France has England as a check; England has Scotland; and Spain, Portugal. . . ."[30] Such a penetrating insight as this would never occur to the average medieval knight for it took a man like Commines who had severed all ties with chivalry to achieve a perception of the world in this scope and depth.

Contemporary with and in direct contrast to Commines, William Caxton published many important books in an effort to revitalize chivalry. Thanks to the recent invention of the printing press many of his copies are extant today. He tried to revive the knightly customs which he felt were so essential to noblemen by translating and publishing such works as Ramón Lull's The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry. In the epilogue to this book he bemoans the fact that knights no longer behave as they did in the days of old.

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[30] Commines, I, 379.

> O ye knyghtes of Englond, where is the custome and vsage of noble chyualry that was vsed in tho dayes. What do ye now but go to the baynes and playe att dyse. And some not wel aduysed yse not honest and good rule. Ageyn alle ordre of knyghthode learn this, learn it and rede the noble volumes of saynt graal, of lancelot, of galaad . . . and many mo. Ther shalle ye see manhode, curtosye, and gentylnesse. And loke in latter dayes of the noble actes syth the coquest, as in kyng Rychard dayes cuer du lyon, Edward the fyrste and the thyrd . . . Syre Robert knolles . . . Syr Johan chaudos . . . rede froissart . . . and many other whoos names shyne gloryously by their vertuous noblesse and actes that they did in thonour of thordre of chyualry. Allas what doo ye but slepe and take ease and ar al disordred fro chyualry.[31]

Though this is directed at the English it is equally applicable in France, for in both countries the environment was inconducive to the practice of chivalry as known in the previous centuries. The knights which Caxton refers to in his time were no more than courtiers whose mere existence was a detriment to society.

One could not conclude a survey of the critics of chivalry without mentioning the immortal work of Cervantes. Through the humorous escapades of that infamous knight-errant Don Quixote and his faithful squire Sancho Panca, he literally laughed chivalry out of existence. One is astounded at the similarity between some of the ridiculous missions of this idealistic knight and the adventures of such anachronistic characters as Jacques de Lalaing and Charles the Bold. Cervantes poignantly exposed the multitudinous incongruities of the medieval knight, thereby ridiculing chivalry out of existence once and for all.

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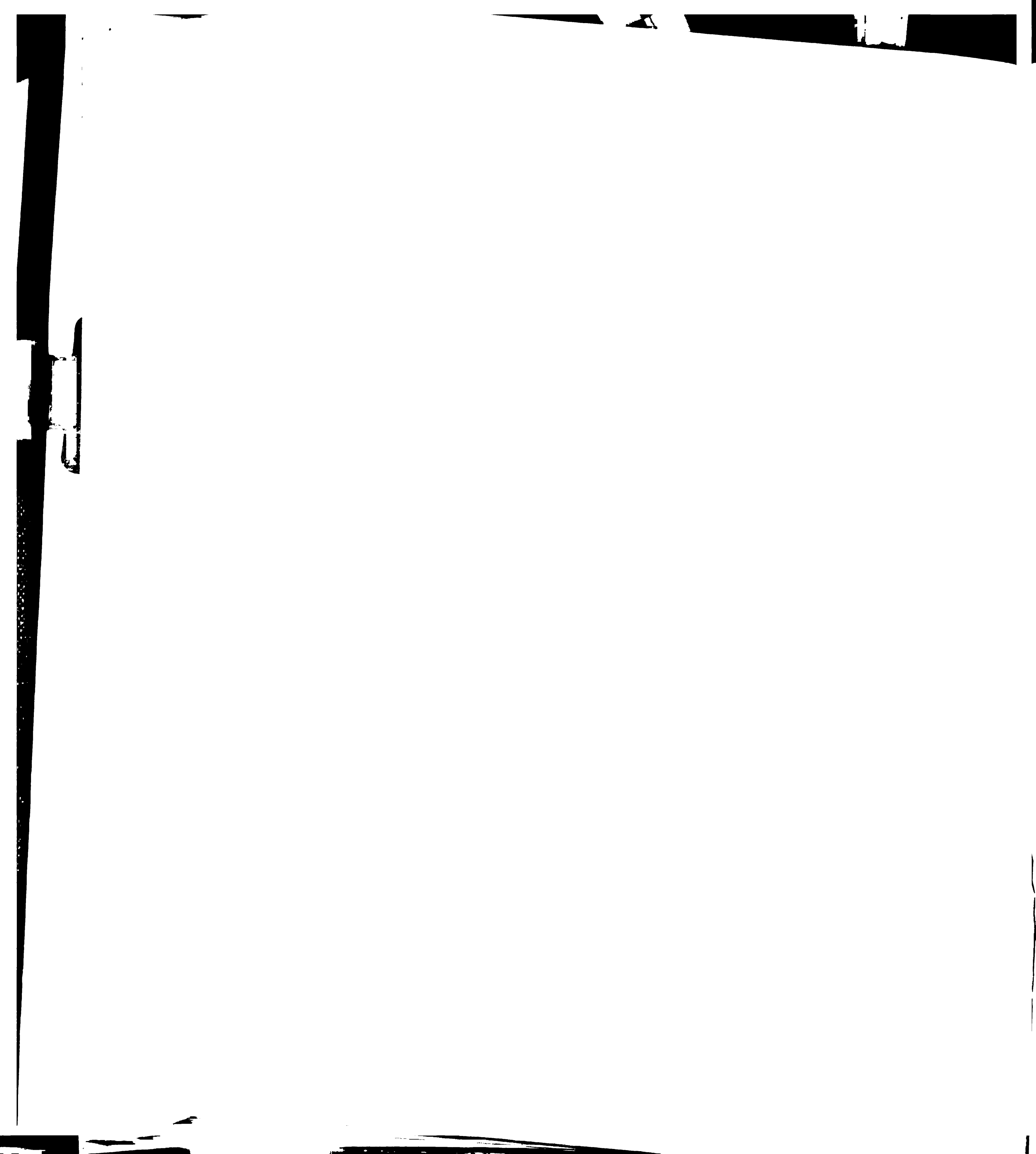
[31] Caxton, Ordre of Chyvalry, p. 123.

CHAPTER V

THE NOBILITY AND THE CHURCH

Endeavoring to analyze and classify the religious beliefs and practices of persons or groups of persons is a tremendous task that should be undertaken with the utmost humility and restraint. The discussion to follow will only scratch the surface of the religious position of the nobility in France during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Brief as this appraisal shall be, there is justification for delving into this area, for there arises a perceptible change in the religious behavior of the nobility during the last two centuries of the Middle Ages. A significant transition can be perceived between the tone of the chronicles of Joinville and Froissart. The former constantly speaks of the intervention of God as a significant factor in turning the tide of battle, while Froissart rarely speaks of divine intervention. This can be explained in part by the fact that the chronicles of Joinville concerned a religious crusade; however, the real answer goes deeper than this. The writings of Froissart reflect a nobility who lacked any serious purpose. The crusading knights, no matter what their other reasons, fought primarily for a religious purpose with the feeling that they could rely upon the deity for aid. The



nobility which Froissart described fought for such dubious reasons as plunder, personal glory, and the love of a fair damsel. Throughout the thirteenth century one can undoubtedly find numerous examples of knights fighting for less worthy reasons than the glory of God, but it is not until the commencement of the Hundred Years' War that one clearly realizes the transition that had taken place.

The comparison between the two eras can be strikingly illustrated by briefly examining several crusades or attempts at crusades during the later Middle Ages. In 1396 Sigismund of Hungary led a crusade against the Turks, known as the Crusade of Nicopolis. He was supported by the Balkan rulers, German and English knights, as well as by the Roman and Avignon popes. At the king's behest, the French also sent a good-sized contingent of knights led by John of Burgundy. The knights assembled along the Danube with great pomp but as they proceeded they pillaged and slew at will. Unlike the earlier crusades the knights acted as if they were participating in a great sporting festival. Froissart writes of the extravagant outfits donned by the French knights who were "so richely arayed that they semed lyke kynges. . . ."[1] Finally the knights, ignoring all advice, pressed forth into battle. After an initial success they were completely overwhelmed by the Turks and many of the knights were captured

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[1]Froissart, I, 236.

or killed. The crusade ended in complete failure, partially due to lack of discipline. But of even greater importance the knights felt no compelling motivation to fight the infidel. They lacked the religious zeal and sense of purpose that drove the earlier crusading knights to great acts of heroism and sacrifice.

An even more pitiful episode occurred in 1454 as Philip the Good endeavored to form a crusade against the powerful Turks, who had captured Constantinople the previous year. At the pope's behest, Philip called upon the knights of Burgundy, France, and in fact all Christendom to rally to the cause of the Church. Philip had long dreamed of the glory and prestige that would accrue by leading a crusade against the infidel and now he had a golden opportunity to avenge his father's disaster at Nicopolis. In order to recruit knights for this holy cause Philip planned several weeks of elaborate festivities revolving around the lavish Feast of the Pheasant, described earlier in detail.[2] It is difficult to deny the duke's sincerity in planning his crusade, but the means he used to do so definitely stigmatized it as a romantic expedition that could never reach any solid basis in reality. As the grandiose banquet reached a fever pitch Philip announced he would accompany his most Christian king in taking the Cross, and if the king could not

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[2]See Chapter III, pp. 107-8.

go he would lead the crusade himself. The knights immediately responded and more than a hundred vows in writing were placed in the records. Some weakened their vows by adding many conditions, while others breathed of bravado in imitation of the duke. Some knights and squires even fell to making a joke of their vows, swearing such outlandish things as striking with their sword the crown of the first Saracen king the knight met or marrying the first lady who accepted his favors upon his return. Unlike the first crusading knights there was no need to be sincere, for this was all part of an elaborate theatrical performance. As might be expected, the great enthusiasm cooled considerably after the banquet ended and the crusade finally came to naught. This whole farce demonstrates the futility of inspiring any religious zeal into a decadent nobility whose energies were directed toward such diversions as romance, jousts, feasts and similar superfluities. The nobility no longer showed any regard for the religious vows of their feudal or chivalric obligations and on occasion appeared not even to be Christians.

There was indeed a growing pagan tinge to the beliefs and practices of the nobility. "To find paganism, there was no need for the spirit of the waning Middle Ages to revert to classic literature. The pagan spirit displayed itself, as amply as possible, in the Roman de la Rose."[3] This classic

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[3] Huizinga, Waning Middle Ages, p. 334.

work placed great emphasis upon love and the fulfilling of man's temporal desires with little concentration upon the spiritual. The whole theme revolved around the lover seeking the rose or seeking fulfillment of his sensual drives. This work served as a guidebook on love and court life for over two centuries after its conception. Its tremendous effect can be exemplified time and again throughout the waning Middle Ages but probably one of the best illustrations appears in the court of Burgundy. The Feast of the Pheasant stripped of its false religious significance might easily be compared to some of the ancient bacchanalian festivals. It was truly a pagan affair with its participants acting in a manner more typical of the exuberant Renaissance than like Christian knights and soliders of the Holy Church. "Altogether the Feast of the Pheasant had caused a '<u>fort oultrageuse et desraisonable despense</u>' such as had scarcely been seen on the occasion of a princely wedding or the visits of illustrious strangers."[4] After the banquet there arose much criticism of the pagan actions of the participants. Philippe de Mézières was one of the persons most vociferous in criticizing the errors of the knights attending the banquet but his criticism fell upon deaf ears.

A small minority did react to the paganism of the nobility and endeavored to channel their misguided energy

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[4]Cartellieri, <u>The Court of Burgundy</u>, p. 152.

back into the religious realm. Much of the criticism was naturally aimed at The Romance of the Rose, whose theme rang of licentiousness and infidelity and encouraged such unknightly and unchristian sins as pride, intemperence, sloth and idleness. As one would expect, La Tour Landry represents one of the major critics of the religious behavior of the nobility. In his reproof he endeavored to demonstrate vividly, for the edification of his daughters, that both immoral and sacrilegious knights and clergy would suffer some physical punishment here on earth or even worse, suffer the agony of eternal damnation. Though the intrigues and affairs he uses for examples cannot be taken to be strictly factual, without a doubt they must have been drawn from conditions and abuses that did exist in the fourteenth century. He admonished his daughters to be faithful to their husbands and virtuous and pious in all ways. He gives as an example two sisters, one of whom was unchaste, lewd, evil of body and soul, and irreverent to God. This type of woman would either be killed, blinded or at the very least lose the love of her husband. Her sister was chaste, pious, and said her matins regularly and consequently lived a happy life.[5] In another case a nobleman and his wife had a habit of sleeping late on Sunday morning; consequently, the priest had to delay the service until their arrival. On one occasion they slept past noon thereby depriving themselves and the whole parish

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[5]La Tour Landry, pp. 5-6.

of Mass that Sunday.

> And the same night the knight and the lady dreamed that they were become horned swine and sow, and would not let the sheep go to their pasture nor feeding. And after them thought that there came many, black hunters, and black horses, with many black greyhounds, and raches; and the hounds were uncoupled on them, and chased and bit them desspiteously by the ears and the eyes; and them thought that the chase dured so long on them till they were taken and slain. And of this vision, when they were awaked they were foul afraid. . . .[6]

They immediately went to the priest and repented their slothfulness and thereafter were always prompt and never again deprived the parishioners of another Mass. La Tour Landry used this type of allegory continuously to demonstrate the consequences of transgressing the knightly and Christian mode of conduct.

The punishments which La Tour Landry indicates sinful knights will receive closely resemble in severity and horror those mentioned in Dante's Inferno. In numerous cases La Tour Landry speaks of those who fail to act in a Christian manner burning in hell for a thousand years. In one instance a noblewoman became to enamored with her cloths and jewels and on judgment day "the devil took her, and bare her away, and put her clothes and array burning in the flame on her with the fire of hell, and cast her down into the pit of hell, and the poor soul cried, and made much sorrow and pity, but it booted not."[7] Practically all the examples he presented

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[6]La Tour Landry, p. 306.

[7]La Tour Landry, p. 54.

to his daughters are approached from the same pessimistic point of view shown above. La Tour Landry made the punishments for sins and transgressions convincingly real, impressing upon the reader the compelling necessity this austere knight must have felt to reform his fellow noblemen and women, and the doom and degradition that would befall those who did not mend their ways.

William Langland is very similar to La Tour Landry in his criticism of the pagan practices of the nobility and in his portrayal of the pain and suffering that befell those who burned in the seething pits of hell. His approach also tends to be pessimistic, chastising the prideful, leacherous, gluttonous nobility for their evil ways and showing that among all the animals man is the only one not ruled by reason. To elevate oneself from the depths of hell one must live by faith, hope, and charity not treachery, envy, and idleness. Man can find truth only through the love of God and must eschew his evil ways here on earth.[8]

This pervading sense of doom became even more prevalent during the fifteenth century as is most clearly demonstrated in the memoirs of Philip de Commines. He constantly speaks of God stepping in to aid the king or some worthy

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[8] For an account of Langland's views see Piers Plowman, pp. 118-9.

prince; however, on numerous other occasions he describes many a mighty prince who met disaster because he displeased God or failed to do His will. Whether he sincerely believed all he wrote about divine intervention and the influence God had on men's lives is an unsolved riddle, but one cannot help but grasp the feeling of pessimism which constantly surrounded any description of the actions of the nobility in which anything of religious significance or recriminations might be involved. At the death of Louis XI Commines expressed a note of gloom when he stated

> small hopes and comfort ought poor and inferior people to have in this world, considering what so great a king suffered and underwent, and how he was at last forced to leave all, and could not, with all his care and diligence, protract his life one single hour. I knew him, and . . . yet I never saw him free from labour and care.[9]

On a later occasion he relates that,

> no creature is exempt from adversity; every man eats his bread in pain and sorrow: God Almighty promised it to our first parents, and he has performed it very faithfully ever since to all people. Yet there are degrees and distinctions of sorrow, and the troubles and vexations of the mind are greater than those of the body. . . .

Some look at the nobility as,

> the envy of all people, by their riches, health, and prosperity. Those who have not conversed with them so much as I have done, believe the condition of great persons to be the happiest in the world; but I have seen their troubles and disquiets, aroused upon such trifling occasions, as persons at a distance could

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[9] Commines, II, 80.

> hardly believe . . . and this is the secret distemper that reigns in the courts of great princes. . . .[10]

From these passages one does not receive an optimistic perception of the nobility. Commines often wears a mask of glumness especially concerning the religious implications of the nobility's indiscretions. Though he disavowed and mocked almost everything that chivalry stood for, he never tampered with its religious basis in any disparaging fashion; instead he constantly reminded the nobility of their spiritual shortcomings and often viewed their actions with a dismal foreboding.

Spiritually, the nobility of the late Middle Ages seems to have lacked the drive that motivated their ancestors. Their attitude attracted criticism and some segments of the nobility began to adopt an air of pessimism concerning the religious purpose and future of their class. Now let us analyze their behavior when they came in actual physical contact with the churches and monasteries and the secular and regular clergy.

One of the most important events which occurred in the fourteenth century involved the transfer of the residency of the pope from Rome to Avignon for a period of over seventy years. One would expect to find a great deal of information in the chronicles of Froissart concerning the "Babylonian Captivity" but amazingly enough little is mentioned

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[10] Commines, II, 255-6.

about this important event in history. What material Froissart does present usually concerns the threats of the Companion captains against the pope. In 1361 a band of Companions led by Sir Robert Briquet and other noble captains swooped down upon the area around Avignon. They pillaged the land and threatened to put the pope himself at their mercy. "And whan that pope Innocent the sixt, and the colledge of Rome, sawe howe they were vexed by these cursed people, they were greatly abasshed; and than ordeyned a croysey agaynst these yvell Christen people, who dyde their payne to distroy Chrystendome. . . ." Finally after they had "haryed the Pope, the Cardynals, and the marchauntes about Avygnon, and dyd moche yvell . . ."[11] they were driven off. As representative of a class that were supposed to be the policemen of the Church these knights were certainly not fulfilling their function.

Even the celebrated du Guesclin challenged the pope at Avignon. As leader of the Companions in the mid thirteen-sixties he was in sore need of cash in order to finance the campaign to place Henry Trastamara upon the throne of Castile. He used the Free Companies for bargaining purposes by threatening to let them pillage the city if the pope did not turn over the funds they demanded. When the pope attempted to raise the money by levying a tax upon the townsmen,

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[11] Froissart, II, 87-8.

du Guesclin balked and forced him to take the money from the papal coffers. This terrible Breton was so effective that he received absolution for himself and his companies as part of the bargain. Such an incident further exemplifies how far apart religion and chivalry had drifted.

During the period in which Froissart admits to the fact that he was one of the captains of a group of Companions, these desperados again threatened the pope. While on a mission of pillage and plunder they "made warr to the Pope and to the Cardynalles, who coude nat be quyte of them. . . ."[12] Among the other infamous knights harassing the pope was Sir Robert Briquet in all his decadent glory. As usual, the Companions either were driven off or left voluntarily after they had exhausted the possibilities of pillage in the area. This represents only one more in a long line of outrages which the sordid Companions perpetrated against the papacy.

Froissart, surprisingly enough, on one occasion rises above his usual blind acceptance of all actions perpetrated by the nobility to show real literary skill in criticizing their interest, or lack of it, in the great schism that had split the Church. He appears astonished that

> the grete lordes of the erthe at the begynnyng dyd nothynge but laughe at the chyrche . . . [and] moche

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[12]Froissart, IV, 152.

> of the comon people mervayled howe the grete lordes . . . dyd provyde no remedy in that case. There was one thynge reasonable to appease the common people, and to escuse the hyghe prynces and kynges, dukes and erles, and other lordes; as by ensample: The yolke of the egge can not be without the whyte, nor the whyte without the yolke, no more maye the clergy and the lordes be one without another; for the lordes are governed by the clergy, or they coulde not lyve but as beestes, and the clergy were not: and the clergy counsayleth and exhorteth the lordes to do as they do.[13]

The surprising thing about this indictment is not the nobility's lack of interest, but the fact that Froissart mentions it. The nobles had remained aloof of the schism and had made no efforts to help get Christianity unified once again. This attitude of disinterest in the affairs of the papacy is significant in showing the widening chasm between the religious ideals and obligations of the nobility and their actual practice in the fourteenth century.

The nobility flaunted their disrespect for the Church in other areas besides attacks upon or flagrant neglect of the papacy. An even clearer indication of their lack of deference to the clergy and devotion to Christianity may be attained by analyzing the interaction of these two classes at the "grass roots" level. This can be shown by investigating a few of the multitudinous depredations committed by the petty nobility (and even the powerful princes) against the secular and regular clergy and the physical destruction of the numerous churches and monasteries. "The Hundred Years'

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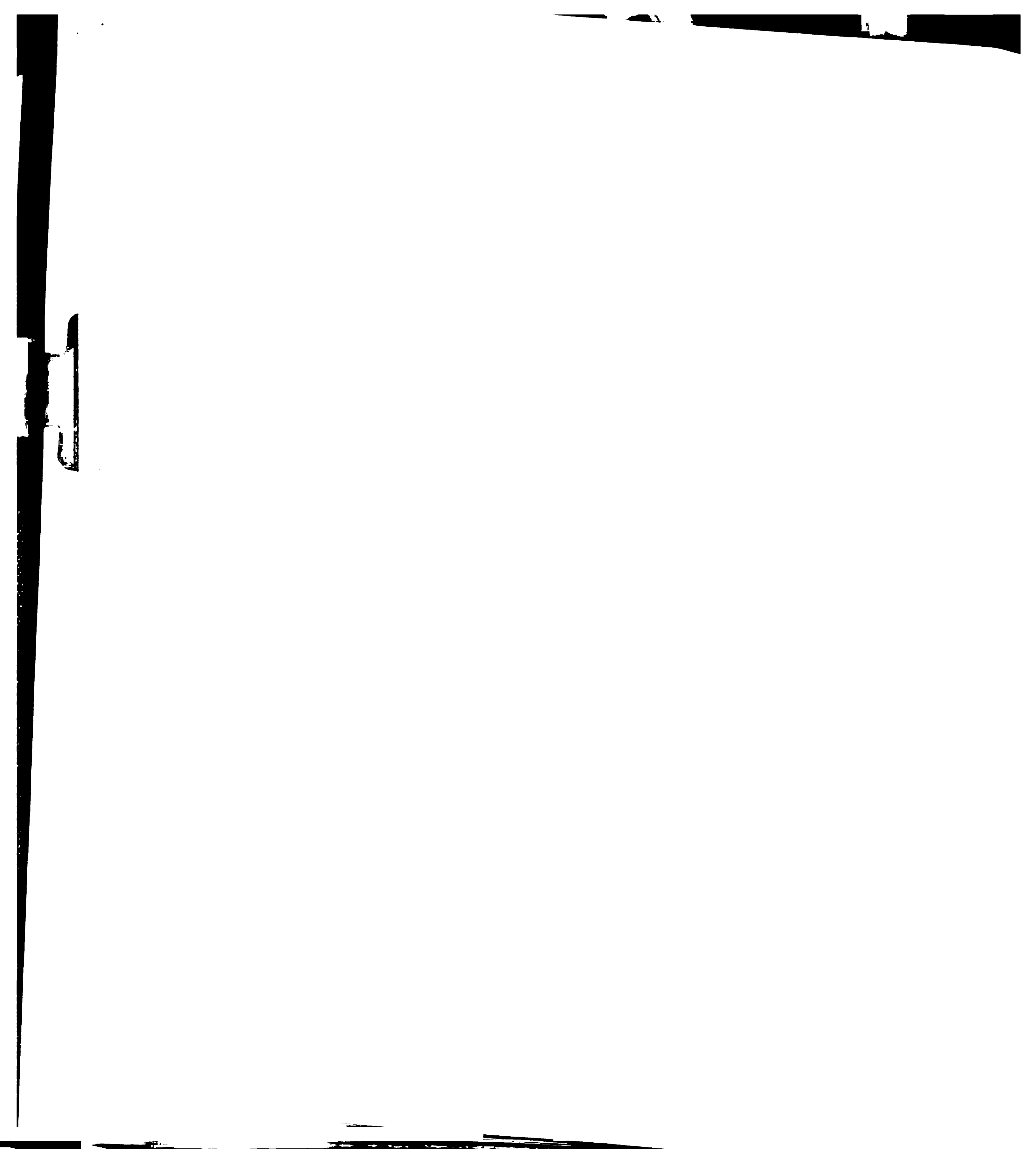
[13]Froissart, IV, 240.



War was more disastrous for the great churches and abbeys than the religious wars. . . . A great number of abbeys were forced to give up much of their property and income; [and] others were seized by nobles. . . ."[14] The pages of Froissart are an invaluable source from which one can gain information concerning these depredations.

Early in the war a group of French knights fell upon the town of Aspre, burning and pillaging with the permission of the French king. However, also

> within the towne ther was a priory of blacke monkis, with great byldinges besyde the church, which helde of saynt Wast of Arras; the Frenchemen also robbed the place, and brent it to the yerth, and withall their pyllage they retourned to Cambray.[15]

One year later, in 1340 another group of French men-at-arms from

> saynt Amande yssued out, and came to Hanon, in Heynalt, and burnt the towne, and vyolated the abbey, and dystroyed the mynster, and caryed away all that they might to saynt Amande: and an other tyme the same French soudyours passed the wood of saynt Amande, and came to the abbey of Vycongne, and made a great fyre at the gate, to have burnt it.[16]

One naturally expects to find a certain amount of destruction during a period of warfare; however, this wasteful, thoughtless destruction of churches and clergymen surpasses the tolerable limit. The above passages do not represent isolated

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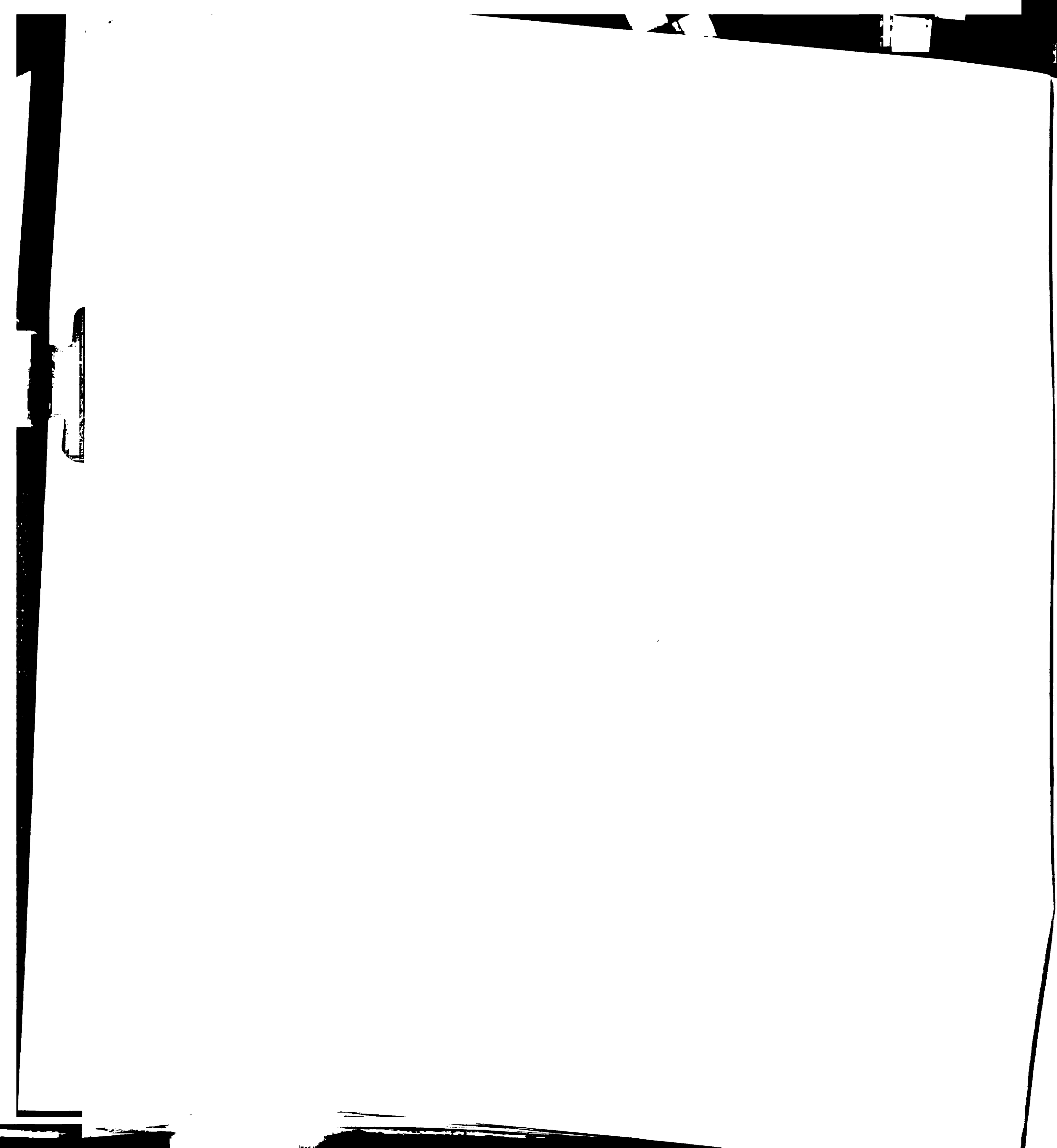
[14] Thompson, <u>Economic History</u>, pp. 124-5.

[15] Froissart, I, 126.

[16] Froissart, I, 153.



incidents but are examples of the common behavior of the nobility. Froissart tells of over thirty churches and monasteries that were destroyed by the nobility in France between the years 1337 and 1360 which he himself had knowledge of. Who knows how many more were violated?

The men of Hanon endeavored to obtain revenge upon Saint Amand by assaulting the city. When the men-at-arms had successfully entered the city and "whan therle and his company wer entred into thabbey, he commaunded that all shulde be put to the swerde. . . ."[17] Such cruelty had no place in chivalry but there is even less reason for perpetrating such action in a house of the Lord. The earl of Hainault finished the day's seige when he "brent clene the towne, and thabbey minster and all. . . ."[18] The following day the earl and his men beset a great French abbey named Marchienes, whose inhabitants put up a valiant defense. Eventually they were overcome by the earl "and ther were taken dyvers monkes, and thabbey robbed and brent. . . ."[19]

The knights of England and France did not even curtail their fighting on the most important holy days of the year. One would expect to find that fighting ceased and the men-at-arms attending church on Good Friday. Instead one discovers

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[17]Froissart, I, 163.

[18]Froissart, I, 163.

[19]Froissart, I, 164.

the knights attacking the symbols of the very Church they pledged to defend. In 1360 Jean de Venette relates how

> The English took and utterly destroyed all the church towers which had been fortified in the country villages around Paris. Among these was a church and its tower in a village near Paris called Orly, which had been fortified by the men of the village. . . . The English came up on Good Friday and stormed it. . . . On that [same] Good Friday and Holy Saturday the English set fire to Montlhéry in the bourg and to Longjumeau and to many other towns round about. The smoke and flames rising from the towns to the heavens were visible at Paris in innumerable places. Thither a great part of the rural population had fled. It was lamentable to see men, women, and children desolate. On Easter Day, I myself saw priests of ten country parishes communicating their people and keeping Easter in various chapels or any spot they could find in the monastery of the Carmelite friars at Paris.[20]

These dastardly deeds would appear cruel and unchristian if undertaken by any man, but their significance becomes infinitely more important when undertaken by men who swore to uphold the principles of Christianity and protect the Church at all times. Even the birthday of Christ was not inviolate. In 1378 on the day when there was to be "peace on earth and good will toward men" the English and Navarrese were burning, pillaging and killing the people of Spain.[21]

In accordance with their usual destructive behavior the Companion captains committed their fair share of depredations against the churches and clergy. In 1370 Sir Robert Knolles led a body of English warriors across France, burning

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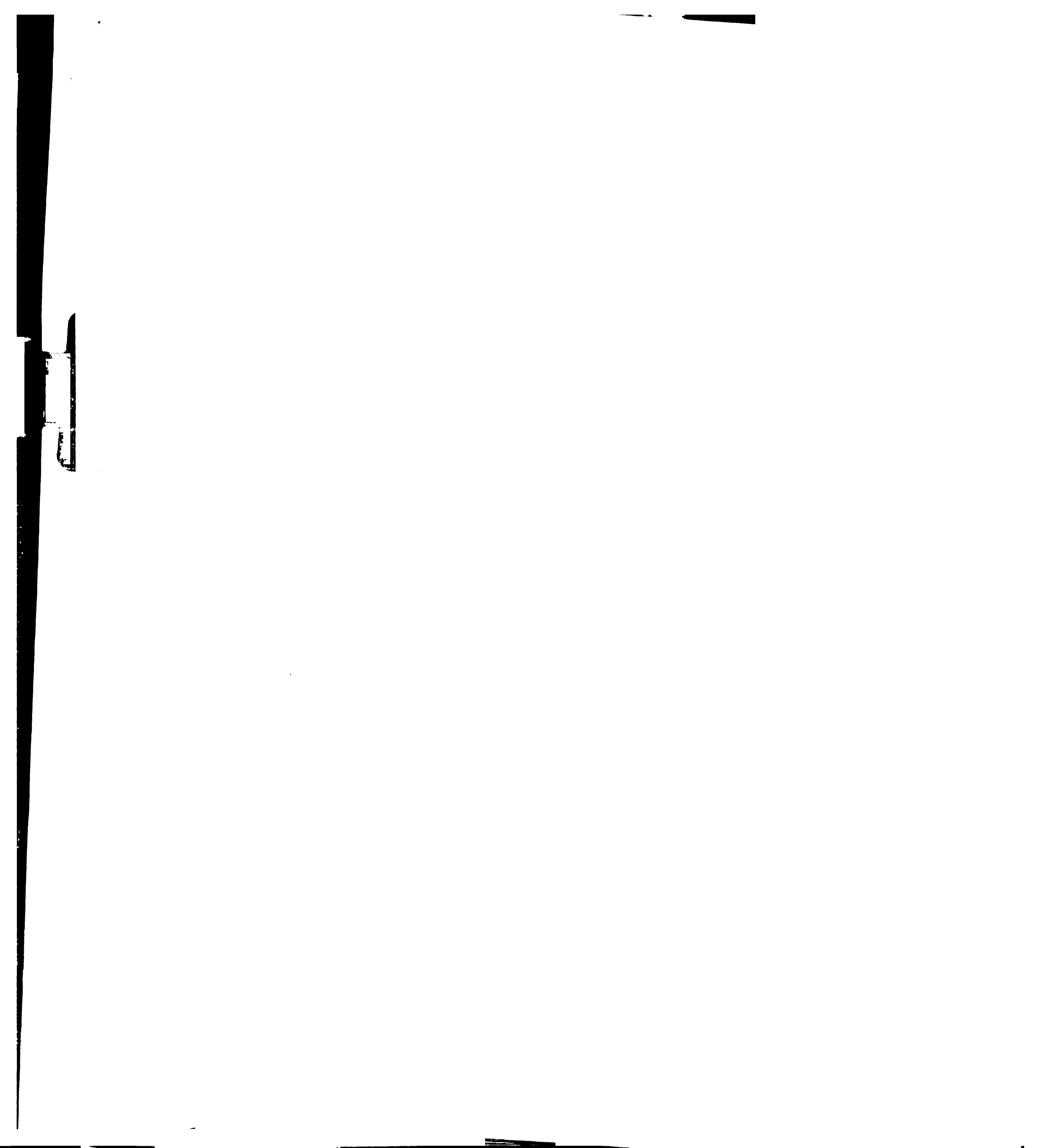
[20] Venette, p. 99.

[21] Froissart, III, 38-40.



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[20]Venette, p. 99.

[21]Froissart, III, 38-40.

and plundering as they went. Stopping at Arras, they endeavored to have battle with those in the city but they would not issue out. In order to draw them out to fight, the English succumbed to one of the most despicable operations of the whole war. Trying to draw the soldiers from the city, the English set fire to the suburbs "and so the fyre dyd moch hurt and domage, for ther they brent a great monastery of Freers Prechers, cloyster and all: and so thenglysshmen passed forthe . . . brennyng and wastyng the countre."[22] Part of the destruction can be excused by the fact that England and France were engaged in war but there can be no feasible explanation for burning a cloister full of friars.

During the Hundred Years' War the churches were literally turned into battle fields. On several occasions they served as horrible execution chambers for many a hapless man-at-arms. One of the most odious of the mass murders occurred in 1381 at which time the Low Countries were in great turmoil. The earl of Flanders, with the backing of many noble knights, doggedly pursued the forces from Ghent who were led by John de Launoy. The latter, overcome by the sheer numerical advantage of the earl, retreated to the town of Nievle and many took refuge there in a church. Instead of giving Launoy's forces a fair chance as any brave and Christian knight would have done, the earl turned the

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[22] Froissart, II, 344.

church and those inside into a giant funeral pyre when

> he commaunded to sette fyre on the mynster: his commaundement was shortely done; fyre, fagottes and strawe were set togyder rounde about the churche, the fyre anone mounted up to the coverynge of the mynster. There dyed the Gauntoyse in great payne, for they were brent quicke, and such as issued oute were slayne, and cast agayne into the fyre. Johan Launoy, who was in the steple, seinge hymselfe at the poynt to be brent, cryed to them without, Raunsome, raunsome, and offred his cote, whiche was full of florens, to save his lyfe. But they without dyd but laughe and scorn at him. . . . He thought it were better for hym to be slayne than to be brent, and so he lept out at a wyndowe among his enemyes, and ther he was receyved on speres and swerdes, and cut all to peces, and cast agayne into the fyre. Thus ended John Launoy.[23]

Almost a century later, Charles the Bold engaged in a similar act of brutality in the villainous sack of Nesle. After agreeing to a truce the foes of the Burgundians gave up their arms. No sooner were the Picards defenseless than the Burgundians pursued them once again. Many sought refuge in a "church of Nesle, but were followed by the Burgundians, and barbarously put to death. When this slaughter had been completed, the duke of Burgundy arrived on horseback, and entered the church, which was half a foot deep of blood, from the poor creatures who there lay naked and dead. On looking around, he said, it was a fine sight! and he was glad to have with him such excellent butchers!!"[24] Such an

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[23]Froissart, III, 205-6.

[24]Monstrelet, II, 400. This passage is verified by two other contemporary accounts. Jean De Troyes, The Scandalous Chronicle or Secret History of Louis XI in The Memoirs of Philip De Commines, Lord of Argenton, ed. Andrew R. Scoble, Esq. (London, 1855), II, 368 gives a very similar description of this affair. Commines, I, 211, also verifies the incident, though in much less gory detail than the other two writers.

abominable action as this can only be explained as a barbarous act of cruelty and a demonstration of the high disregard with which the nobility treated the sanctity of the Christian Church. Of especial significance is the fact that the whole episode was directed and lauded by the supposedly Christian knight, Charles, duke of Burgundy.

The chronicles of Monstrelet give some of the most precise information we have today concerning the true interactions between the nobility and clergy. In a concisely worded passage the author states, "it is a well-known fact, that the clergy are greviously vexed, and suffer great losses . . . from men at arms . . . who take by force their provisions, ransack their houses, nay, make them ransom themselves from further injuries, by which means they have scarcely a sufficiency left to perform the divine service."[25] His examples of the depredations committed by the nobility against the Church ran similar to those of Froissart but contain a greater precision and frankness than those presented by this fourteenth century author.

Many of Monstrelet's illustrations arise out of the era of the Burgundian-Armagnac disputes. On one occasion William, count of Hainault, led an expedition near Liege, burning and destroying a great amount of property belonging to the Cistercian order.[26] Numerous other accounts of

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[25] Monstrelet, I, 40.

[26] Monstrelet, I, 86.

destruction could be added to this, but Monstrelet very simply and concisely summarized the entire dispute and its affect on the Church in the following terms: "It will be impossible to relate one half of the mischiefs the armies of both parties committed: suffice it to say, that churches, churchmen, and the poor people were very great sufferers."[27]

After one has analyzed the actions of the nobility in France during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries one readily concludes that they had somehow failed to live up to their Christian obligations. Their growing paganism and seeming lack of interest at a time when opposing forces threatened to permanently tear the Church apart are grounds enough to show their spiritual degeneration. However, their physical attack upon the churches and clergy is most certainly inexcusable. Had their primary energies been directed against the Saracen infidels, the terrible Turks, or unwanted heretics and schismatics, there would be no reason to chastise an occasional transgression but their destructive actions were aimed at none other than fellow Christians. By the very fact that they set themselves up as a class above other men, swearing to fight for the Holy Catholic faith, their violations appear even more odious. Truly, the Christian nobility degenerated miserably, in respect to their ideals and obligations as Christian princes, during the later Middle Ages.

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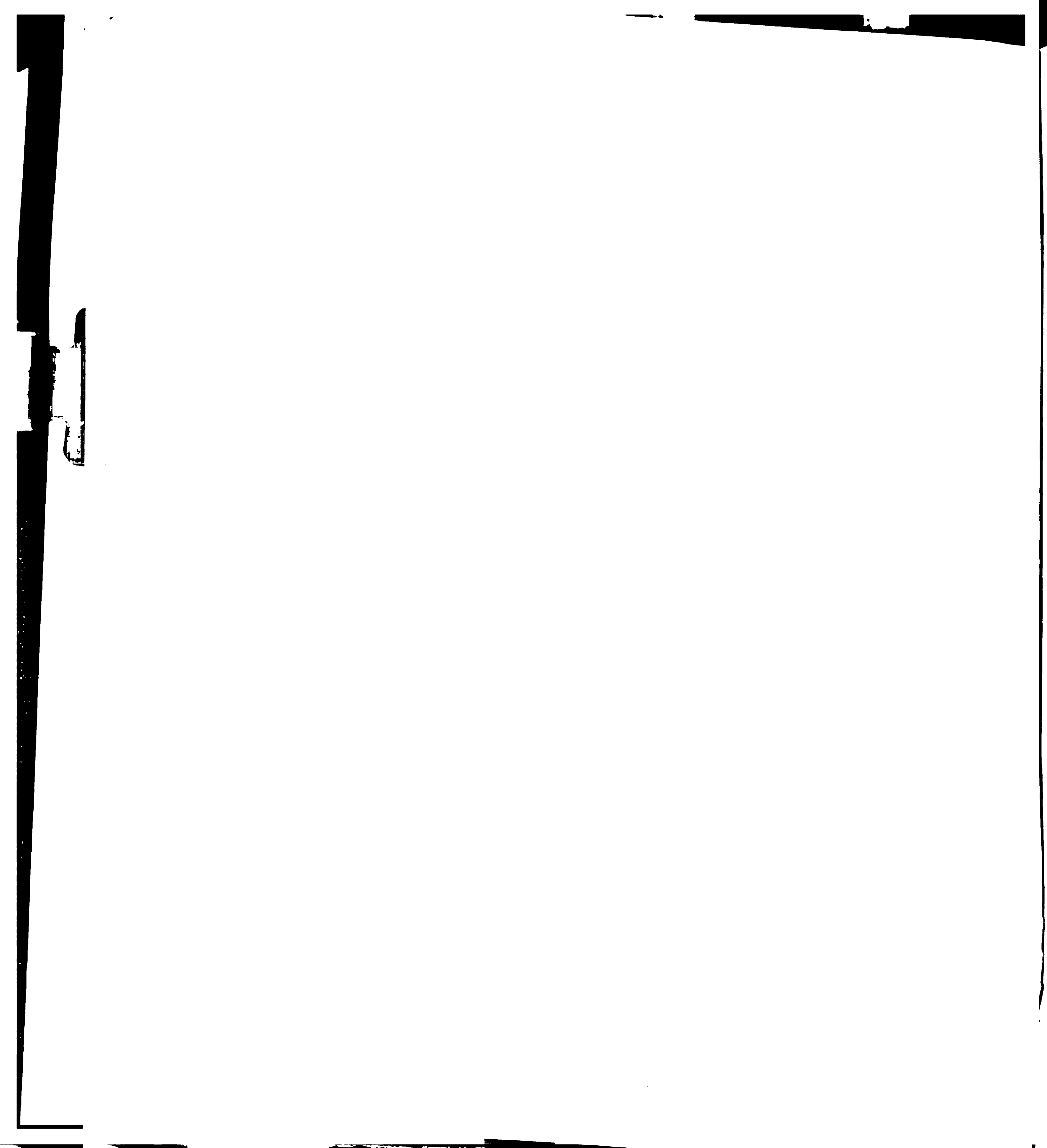
[27]Monstrelet, I, 164.

CHAPTER VI

THE NOBILITY AND THE URBAN CLASSES

The clergy were not the only unfortunates to suffer injury at the hands of the nobility. The bourgeoisie and the common city dwellers also received harsh treatment and their progress was perceptibly retarded by the irresponsible men of rank. Let us first analyze some of the problems the middle class merchants faced, especially observing the injuries they sustained and the means they used to counteract the aristocracy.

Since the Hundred Years' War was partially precipitated by a dispute over the economic ties between England and the Low Countries, the burghers of the latter were especially hard hit throughout the course of the war. Froissart gives innumerable examples of injury done to the merchants, in most cases with little reason or provocation. The merchants were subjected to constant humiliation, personal harm, and loss of property, many times being fortunate to escape with their lives. Froissart relates an assault upon Antwerp in which "the men fledde out of their houses all naked, and lept over the walles, and left all behynde them, and wadded throughe the dykes and waters about the towne. The ryche men bare nothyng away with them, for they were happy that



might save themselfe alyve. Ther was the same night a great nombre slayne in the towne and drowned in the dykes and waters."[1]

Oftentimes the burghers were forced into warfare against their will. In 1446, Philip, duke of Burgundy, obligated the men of Ghent to aid him in his siege of the port of Calais. Many of the burghers were unwilling to aid the duke but failure to respond would mean loss of their franchise. Not only were they forced into service but they were required to furnish their own equipment for war.[2] On a later occasion the duke subjected the burghers of Ghent to undue humiliation. He forced two thousand of them to kneel half naked before him and to beg for mercy.[3] This extreme degradation was surely not beneficial to these people and was definitely not the action of a true nobleman.

The English also caused the middle classes much despair during the Hundred Years' War. The burghers of the city of Carentan in Normandy, after receiving assurance from the English men-at-arms that they would receive no injury, let the English enter their city. As soon as the soldiers gained entrance, they broke their word to the burghers and ravaged their property, their belongings, and wives. When

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[1]Froissart, III, 455.

[2]Monstrelet, II, 33.

[3]Monstrelet, II, 220-21.

"thengylsshmen had their pleasure of that good towne and castell, and whan they sawe they might nat mentayne to kepe it, they set fyre therin and brent it, and made the burgesses of the towne to entre into their shyppes, as they had done with them of Harflewe, Chyerburgue, and Mountbourge, and of other townes that they had wonne on the see syde. . . ."[4] Some burghers were even less fortunate than these as was the case with Master John Tilet. Early in the fifteenth century, he was thought to be one of the wisest and most learned men in Soissons and had managed the business of running the city for some time. In 1413, the French forces, under the leadership of the king, captured the city. Among the numerous atrocities committed by the French knights was the abduction of Tilet and many wealthy burghers, all of whom were summarily beheaded and hung by the shoulders on a gallows in the nearby city of Lyon. This affair is of added significance when one notes that there were present many nobles of princely blood who did nothing to control their knights or to prevent such cruel executions as related above.[5] Many similar examples are presented in the pages of the fourteenth and fifteenth century chroniclers recounting the injuries which the nobles inflicted on the bourgeoisie.

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[4]Froissart, I, 280.

[5]For an excellent account of the entire sordid affair see Monstrelet, I, 303.

The bourgeoisie had more to fear than loss of property and life within the confines of their individual towns. Travel had become so unsafe and uncertain that the merchants dared not venture outside their city walls, thereby causing almost a virtual extinction of trade. It is understandable, even in our modern age with all of our international laws which govern warfare, for international trade to be somewhat upset during a period of war. However during the Hundred Years' War the nobility made no attempt to follow any code of law or code of conduct which regulated their relationship with the bourgeoisie. Not only were they injurious to any and all of their enemies but attacked friends as well, seeming to have no respect for the particular allegiance of any of the bourgeoisie. Many nobles were similar to the duke of Bourbon, who in 1387 departed from Spain with 9,000 men-at-arms under his command. This vagabond corps of knights were said to have "unhorsed whome soever they met, and made warre to all marchauntes. . . ."[6] On another occasion, early in the war, a group of burghers from Amiens were assaulted near Paris by a large band of knights led by Geoffrey of Harcourt. Froissart relates that after a valiant struggle almost all of the burghers were slain and all their merchandise confiscated.[7]

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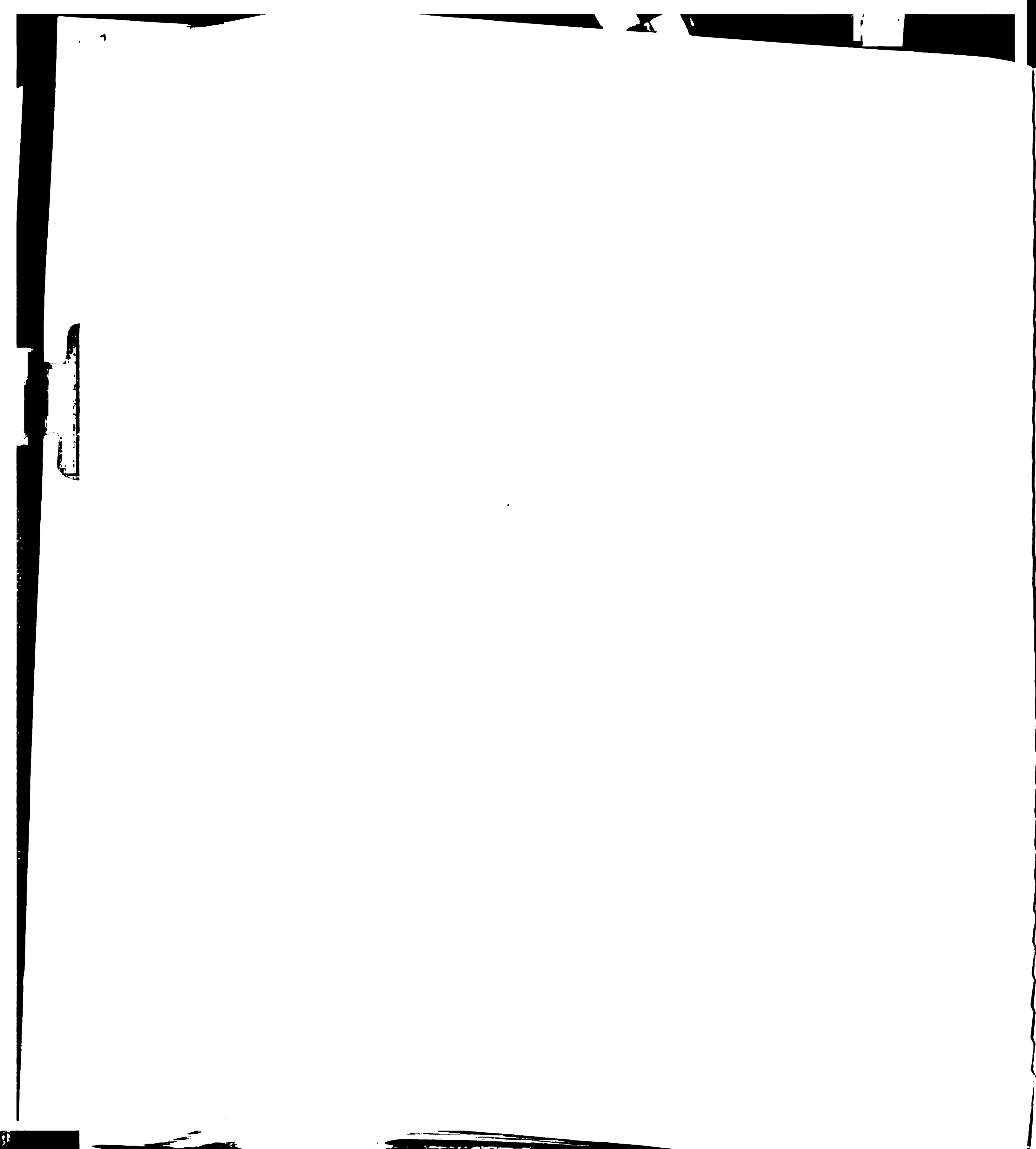
[6]Froissart, V, 71

[7]Froissart, I, 287.



In many instances, more especially during the period of the Burgundian-Armagnac civil strife, the burghers were trapped in their towns due to sieges making it either unsafe or impossible to venture forth. Those who dared leave the city did so with great risk and usually after paying a high cost for safe passage. Monstrelet mentions that they "could not venture abroad with their goods out of the fortified towns without paying tribute for passports, under risk of being robbed and murdered."[8] Rowe gives an excellent description of the danger the Norman merchants faced in endeavoring to carry on trade. They were constantly attacked by bands of brigands armed and manned by men of the lower nobility. "By 1409 travelling along the great high road from Rugles and Beaumont-le-Rogier to Rouen had become so dangerous that merchants dared pass that way only in large companies and in full daylight, for many people had . . . been robbed, assaulted, and murdered by the robbers who infested the woods above Beaumont."[9]

Christine de Pisan raised her voice in loud protest against the treatment which the bourgeoisie received at the hands of the men-at-arms. She contended that pillage and robbery should not be permitted and that it was the duty of the captains to keep their soldiers under control, seeing

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[8]Monstrelet, I, 358.

[9]Rowe, "Norman Brigands," p. 585.

to it that they were paid well enough so they did not have to gain money by such devious methods. It was up to the captain to make it safe "so that marchaunts may surely come and that he make an ordynaunce vpon peyne of deth that noo thing be taken but it be payed for, nor nought mysdoo to the marchaunt. . . ." She very pointedly stated that it was against God's will and the code of chivalry for knights to abuse the bourgeoisie the way they did "and suche folke ought bettre to be called theuis and robbers than men of armes or cheualrous. . . ."[10]

The criticism of Christine de Pisan, valid though it was, brought no immediate change in the actions of the nobility. In fact, the burghers suffered even greater damage during the period beginning after the advent of Joan of Arc and especially after the Peace of Arras in 1435. During the decade from 1435 to 1445 a particularly destructive band of unemployed men-at-arms appeared on the scene, known as _écorcheurs_. These roving bands were more dangerous during the times of peace than war, for there were no forces to counteract their destruction. The leaders of the _écorcheurs_ were such well-known captains as the duke of Bourbon, La Hire, Dunois, Chabannes, La Trémoille, and Rodrigo de Villandrando. These cruel nobles made trade utterly impossible since there remained no place in France which was safe for travel. "Aucune

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[10]Quotes are from Christine, _Fayttes of Armes_, p. 44.

province ne fut épargnée; de la Guyenne à la Lorraine, de la Bretagne au Dauphiné, ce ne furent que pillages, dévastations, meurtres, commis par ceux qu'on appelait les 'Ecorcheurs' parce qu'ils ne laissaient même pas une chemise à leur victimes. Il n'en fallait pas tant pour achever la ruine du pays."[11] The failure of the Praguerie and the ordonnances perpetrated by Charles VII helped bring the unruly nobility under control thereby greatly increasing the safety of the life, trade, and travel of the bourgeoisie. However, many decades passed before they recovered the position they held prior to the war.

The bourgeoisie reacted to the encroachments of the nobility in many ways, but one of the most famous protest movements occurred after the French defeat at Poitiers and was directed by the dynamic Étienne Marcel. The efforts of Marcel and the third estate to gain control of the government by strengthening the Estates General, involved more than the nobility, for they also planned to acquire some of the power attached to the kingship. Marcel had the solid backing of the bourgeoisie of Paris; in fact, the whole populace of the city supported him as he set out, inspired by an ideal to reform the French government. The details of his failure

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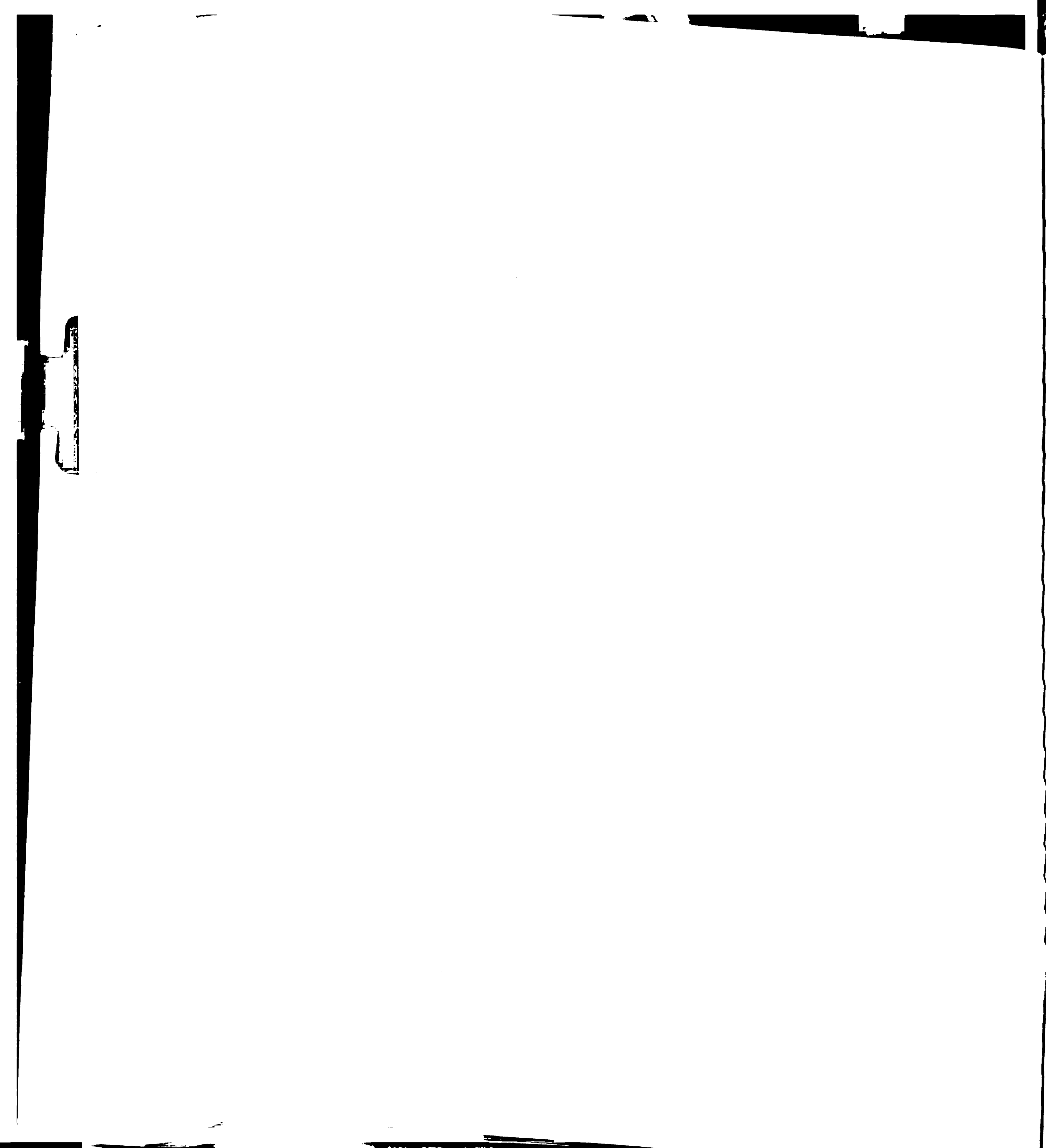
[11]"Édouard Perroy," in Henri Pirenne, Édouard Perroy, et al., La Fin du Moyen Âge: La désagrégation du monde médiéval (1285-1453) (Louis Halphen et Philippe Sagnac, eds., Peuples et Civilisation, Vol. VII) (Paris, 1931), p. 445.



are too numerous to involve us here but to summarize it briefly the bourgeoisie failed to attain the necessary support for their program.[12] The proposed reforms of this bourgeois revolution were noble indeed but the times were too troubled to enforce them. The movement was further compromised by their inability to collect adequate taxes and after the loose alliance between Marcel and the ambitious Charles the Bad of Navarre there was no hope of an equitable solution. Though the bourgeoisie continued to raise grievances through the Estates General, they did so with decreasing success and hereafter reacted by different means.

After the collapse of Marcel's bourgeois revolution the merchants and upper middle classes began to realize that they could not gain the protection they so desired through the parliamentary process. Since they were basically interested in protecting their own interests, they looked more and more for some strong power for aid. When it suited their purposes, they allied with the king, their fellow townsmen, or even the nobility. However, as has been demonstrated, the latter offered more in the way of destruction than protection. Increasingly the bourgeoisie turned to the king for support, especially under the reigns of Charles V, Charles VII, and Louis XI. Their intentions were basically

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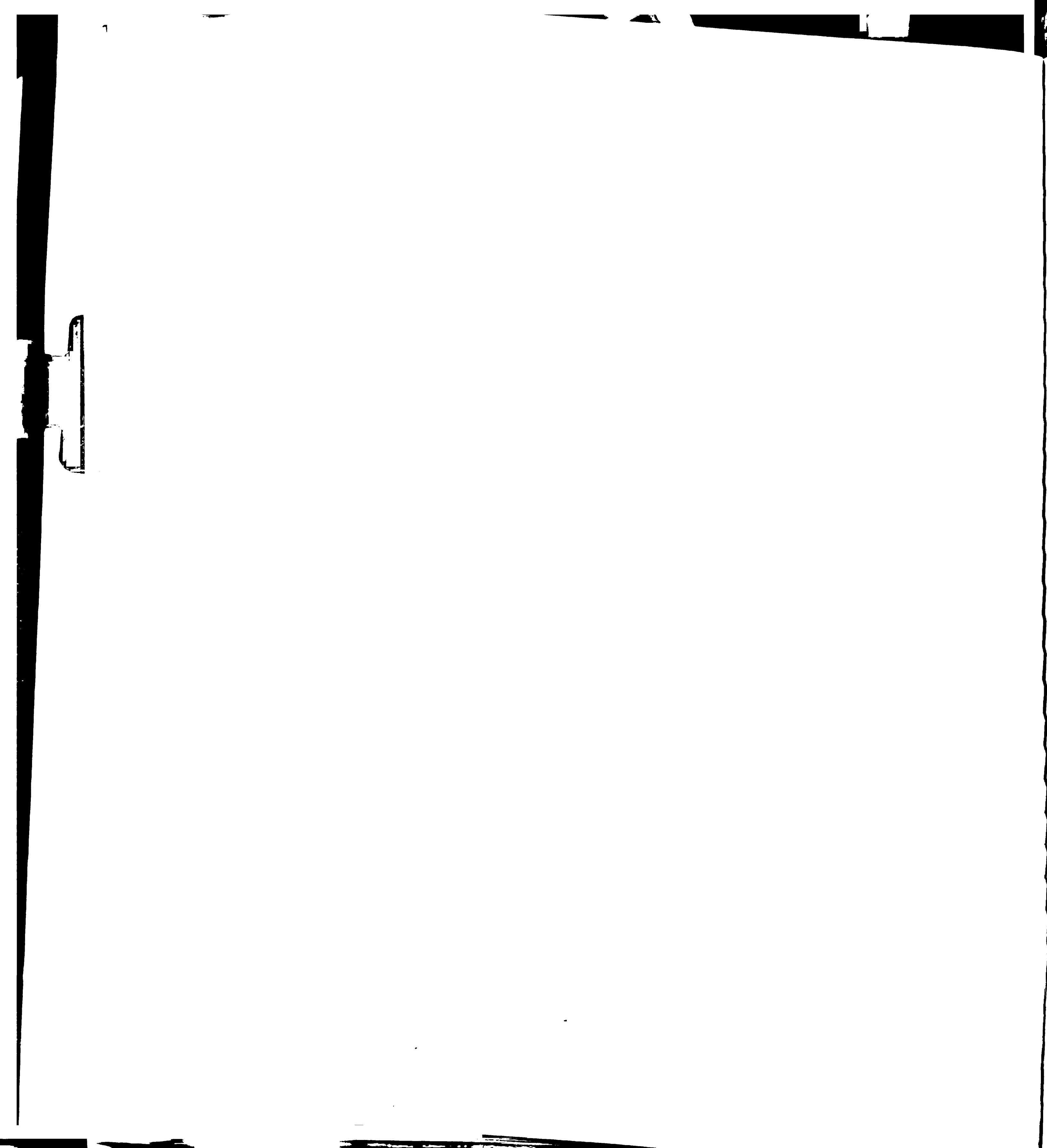
[12]See Froissart, I, 402-15. For a more concise statement of the failure of Marcel and the Estates General see A. Coville in <u>The Cambridge Medieval History</u>, VII, 351-6.



not patriotic as is often conjectured, but essentially the bourgeoisie were opportunistic. Though one occasionally finds a sense of patriotism amongst the bourgeoisie it was not a primary motivating force until the ascension of Louis XI to the throne. Contrary to being nationalists these opportunistic burghers could be just as inconsistent and ruthless as their primary foes, the nobility tended to be.

The situation in the Low Countries from 1379 to 1382 lends an excellent example. A dispute raged between the count of Flanders, backed by the nobility, and a small group of burghers from Ghent, known as the White Hats. The latter were led by a harsh but enterprising leader named John Lyon. At first the White Hats represented almost all of the burghers of Ghent in presenting their grievances to the earl; however, the actions of the White Hats became so extreme that a majority of the burghers broke with the movement. The moderates endeavored to reach a reconciliation with the count but their negotiations were jeopardized by the actions of the extreme elements of the movement. The moderates begged the count's pardon, explaining that they were not responsible for the murders undertaken by the White Hats. Full scale civil war soon broke out involving the moderate burghers who had no desire to fight. Though the moderates were able to restore peace temporarily the White Hats immediately precipitated another debacle. In 1381 Philip Artevelde, son of the famous Jacques Artevelde,

assumed the leadership with the backing of the burghers and populace of Ghent. He was a Machiavellian type leader, both feared and loved. Before assuming power, he was asked these questions by Peter du Boyse.

> Can ye beare yourselfe high and be cruell among the comons; and specially in suche thynges as we shall have to do, a man is nothynge worthe without he be feared, doubted, and some tyme renowned with crueltie; thus must the Flemmynges be governed; a man must set no more by the lyfe of men, nor have no more pitie therof, than the lyves of swalowes or larkes, the whiche be taken in season to eate. By my fayth, sayd Philip, all this can I do right well.[13]

Indeed this middle class ruler did turn out to be ruthless and won several important battles. His troops captured town after town in Flanders and sent the count and his forces reeling back. Perceiving that the count might attract powerful support to his cause, Artevelde appealed to both France and England for aid. His emissary to France was laughed at and imprisoned. After this rebuttal, Artevelde sent twelve burghers to England in order to solicit English aid. He sought both military support and financial backing by collecting a forty year old debt which the English owed the towns of Flanders. Both requests were refused and Artevelde's shrewd scheme to gain the support of either the English or French failed.

For our purposes this affair is symbolic of the inconsistency and sometimes even ruthlessness of the bourgeoisie.

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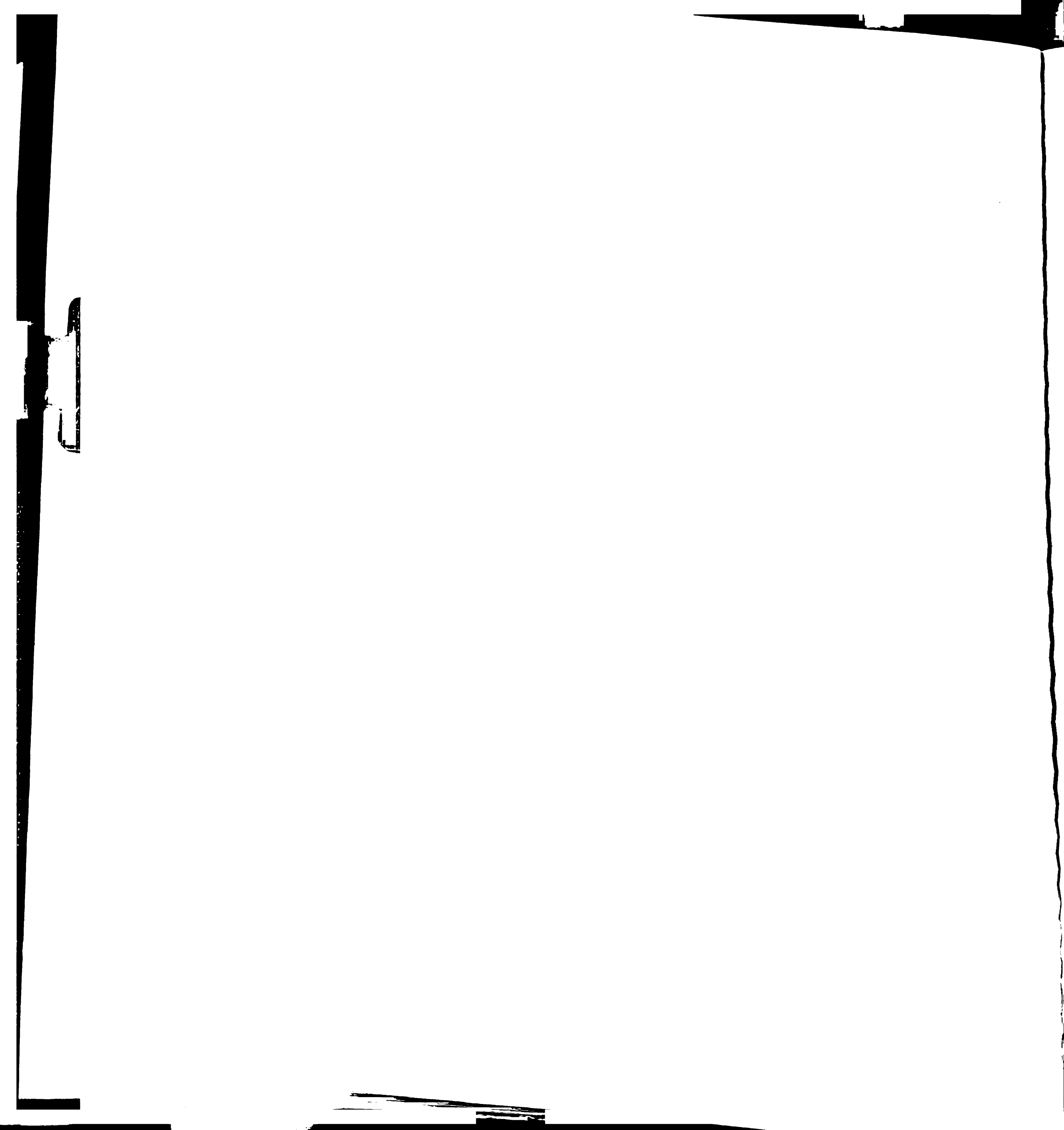
[13] Froissart, III, 215.



Their loyalties vacillated quickly, as can be seen in the case of Ypres. In 1382 this fair city was under heavy attack by the French forces, led by Charles VI. The rich merchants, thinking only of their own interests wished to give up the city to the French. The captain of Ypres, a strong proponent of Artevelde, felt the city was strong and said they would resist the attacks of the French. Hearing this, the merchants rose up and slew the captain. The city was then offered to King Charles who demanded they pay 60,000 francs. After receiving the money the French entered the city. The motives of the merchants were surely not patriotic. On the contrary they took the calculated risk that they would lose less by paying the required fee to the French and letting them peacefully enter the city than by carrying on the battle.[14]

On other occasions, however, the town merchants were willing and able to do battle. Early in the Hundred Years' War the earl of Mountfort besieged Rennes and captured the captain of the city, Sir Henry Penfort, whom he threatened to hang if the city did not surrender. The burghers perceiving they had much to lose in the way of money and goods preferred to chance battle. After a short battle the common townsmen, who had less to forfeit, overcame the burghers and opened the gates of the city to the earl and his men.

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[14]For a complete account of this affair see Froissart, III, 379.

The city was captured and the burghers faced the possibility of losing much of their property and goods.[15] The merchants followed no consistent pattern but reacted in whatever manner they thought would most enhance their position.

In the early fifteenth century the bourgeoisie of France give an excellent expression of the basis of their true motivation. During and after the battle of Agincourt the Norman burghers had bravely resisted the assaults of the English led by Henry V and the duke of Bedford. After the English victory was complete they had no inhibitations about supporting the English as long as their own interests were enhanced. "The merchant burgesses of the towns, after heroically resisting the invader, made no bones about rallying to him [Bedford] once restoration of order meant prosperous trade. . . . The renewal of trade with England rounded off the rally of the burgesses."[16] Truly it was not until the reign of Louis XI that the burghers fell in full support behind the French monarch. The loose alliance between the kingship and bourgeoisie solidified in the late fifteenth century as the monarchy tended to place more responsibility in the hands of the merchants and upper middle classes and less power in the hands of the nobility.

The bourgeois classes usurped much of the power of the nobility rather indirectly by the mere fact that they

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[15] Froissart, I, 174-5.

[16] Perroy, The Hundred Years War, p. 251.

controlled a much greater amount of wealth. Warfare came to be increasingly expensive during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The armor necessary to protect horse and rider against the deadly longbow represented a major expense. While the feudal cavalry of the twelfth century consisted of men whose equipment was about the same, in the fifteenth century there was a wide divergence amongst the armor donned by the nobility. In other words as chivalry became more costly, it declined and became modified in many ways.

The rising costs of chivalry brought about a dramatic reduction in the sheer number of nobles that became knights. "In the twelfth century every feudal male was a knight, but in the fifteenth the knights were an aristocratic minority of the nobles."[17] In the fourteenth and especially the fifteenth century the fief became a less reliable source of income. In order to compete with the bourgeoisie and retain their position as knights, many nobles turned to such enterprises as tournaments, ransoms, and pillage in order to enhance their lagging incomes. Though such critics as Christine de Pisan stated that knights were to be rich enough to sustain themselves without robbing and stealing, this became the prevalent means of support.[18] Those not able to garner the

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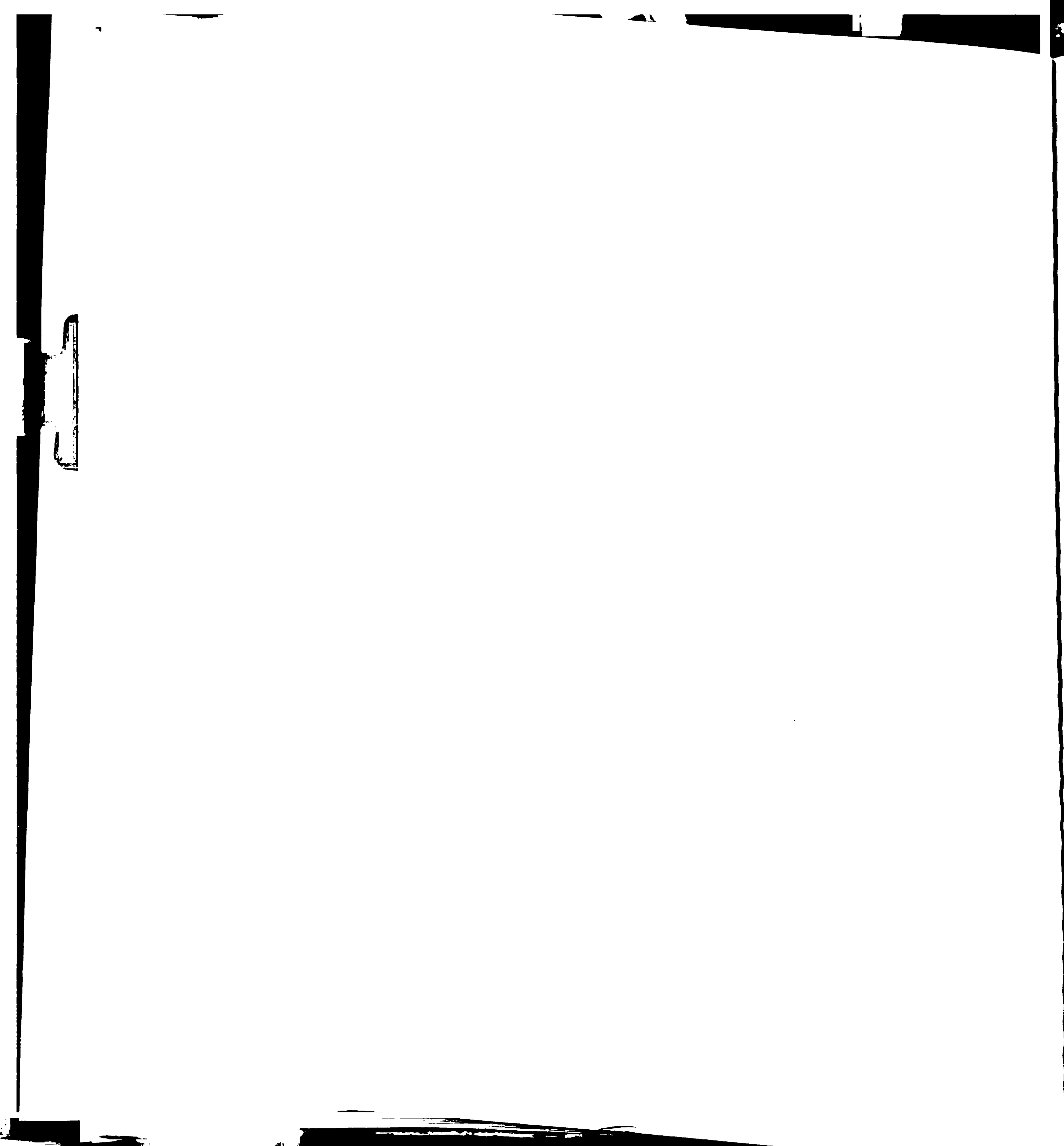
[17] Painter, Chivalry, p. 22.

[18] See Christine, Fayttes of Armes, p. 44.

means necessary to rise to the station of full-fledged knights remained squires, and as Painter so clearly shows, these displaced the knights numerically in the fifteenth century. One should not conclude that the fifteenth century squires were perceptibly inferior to knights for they differed only in name. The squire was socially, politically, and intellectually an equal, taking upon himself essentially the same obligations as the full knight.

Following the devastation caused by the Black Death in 1349 the whole texture of society in France, in fact all Europe, was profoundly modified. As many of the old nobility passed away the _nouveaux riches_ and favorites of the king assumed positions and titles formerly retained by men of lineage. One of the greatest insults came in the form of bestowing knighthood upon the bourgeoisie, begun by Philip IV and continued by Charles V. The _noblesse_ based chiefly upon wealth, altered the customs and manners held sacred by the old aristocracy and tended to place greater emphasis on the extravagant in dress and action. It was partly due to the influence of this element of the nobility that chivalry declined. As the emphasis upon luxuries helped increase the nobles expenses during the fifteenth century, the old aristocracy with decreased revenues was forced to turn to the monarchy for support through pensions, thereby retaining privilege but losing their power.

The story of the nobility's interaction with the



common people of the towns is even more disheartening. These miserable creatures sustained even greater injury than had been inflicted upon the richer classes. The artisans and laborers had little to bargain with and fewer means to protect themselves from the ever present assaults of the nobility. "Not a province, scarce even a town of all France except in the far south escaped depredation and destruction in the long period between 1346 and 1380."[19] "Most of the towns, even the greatest, were sacked, many of them more than once."[20] The cruelties committed by the nobles against the commoners of the towns were especially harsh and courtesy and mercy were rarely shown. Though the knight had no direct obligation to aid the city dweller he did swear to respect womanhood and aid the poor and oppressed. However, one is only able to grasp the extreme maltreatment which the townsmen suffered at the hands of the depraved nobility by analyzing several illustrative examples.

During the early part of the Hundred Years' War the towns received particularly oppressive treatment. In one foray, "thenglysshmen left Roon, and went to Gysors . . . [and] they brent the towne, and then they brent Vernon . . . and Pont de Lache [Pont de l'Arche] . . . and brent saynt Germayne in Lay, and Mountjoy, and saynt Clowde, and pety Bolayne

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[19] Thompson, <u>Economic History</u>, pp. 90-91.

[20] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 123-4.

[Boulogne] by Parys. . . ."[21] The destruction was not caused solely by the English knights for the French added their fair share. Froissart gives numerous examples of the destruction caused by the French forces in Southern France, emphasizing that the dukes of Berry and Anjou were particularly active.[22]

Undoubtedly the towns suffered some of the severest maltreatment at the hands of the Companions. These roving bands fell upon the almost defenseless towns of France after they had been subjected to over twenty years of warfare, which was supposed to have been outlawed by the Peace of Bretigny. Froissart related how "the noble realme of France was sore greved on all sides.. . . These companyons . . . ymagined nyght and day howe they might geat and steale townes and fortresses. On a nyght they came to a strong towne . . . called Pierpont, standyng in a maresse. . . . They . . . came to the walles, and so entred into the towne and wanne it without defence, and robbed it at their pleasure: they found ther more riches than ever they founde before in any towne. And whan it was day they brent the towne, and returned to Chemy, well furnysshed with great pyllage."[23] These Companions traveled from town to town, destroying and burning with no other purpose than pillage.

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[21] Froissart, I, 286.

[22] See Froissart, V, 299.

[23] Froissart, II, 52-3.

Even Froissart, while a member of the Companions, engaged in cruel and unknightly activities concerning the city of Thury. In an effort to gain entrance to this city, Froissart and six others dressed up as women. After being admitted they let fifty other Companions into the city over which they promptly took command.[24] This type of behavior is diametrically opposed to the spirit of chivalry and typical of the deception which knights used to capture and destroy many towns in France.

In 1370 the usually noble and courteous Black Prince led one of the most vile and brutal missions undertaken during the entire Middle Ages. Known down through history as the bloody sack of Limoges, this debacle marks a milestone in the long list of cruelties committed by the men of chivalry. Froissart states that it was

> great pytie to se the men, women, and chyldren, that kneled downe on their knees before the Prince for mercy; but he was so enflamed with yre that he toke no hede to theym, so that none was herde, but all putte to dethe as they were mette withal, and suche as were nothyng culpable; there was no pyte taken of the poore people who wrought never no maner of treason, yet they bought it dererr than the great personages, suche as had done the yvell and trespace. There was nat so harde a hert within the cytie of Lymoges, and yf he had any remembraunce of God, but that wepte pyteously for the great mischefe that they sawe before their eyen: for mo than thre thousande men, women, and chyldren were slayne and beheeded that day: God have mercy on their soules, for I trowe they were martyrs.[25]

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[24]Froissart, IV, 159.

[25]Froissart, II, 356.

No matter what reason the Black Prince had for attacking the city there can be no justification for the indiscriminate slaughter of thousands of innocent and helpless people. One shudders to think that this account comes not from the mythical pages of some chanson de geste but from the pages of a contemporary chronicler. Froissart's colorful narrative does not belong to the imaginative or fictitious side of chivalry but to its actualities.

Monstrelet described similar accounts of towns that were sacked and burned by both French and English knights during the fifteenth century.[26] However, it is from the pen of Commines that we receive one of the truly illuminating insights into the endless suffering which the nobility caused the common people of the towns. From 1467 to 1472 Charles the Bold inflicted horrible death and destruction upon the people of Liege, Nesle, and Dinant. For example in 1467 the Burgundians fell upon the city of Liege, partially destroying the city and sending the people scurrying for refuge. Many who were unfortunate enough to be taking prisoner were slain. The following year the duke assaulted the city once again, almost totally destroying it this time.[27]

Even more cruel was the Burgundian assault upon Nesle. We have already viewed the cruelty of the duke of Burgundy

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[26] See Monstrelet, I, 355 and I, 614.

[27] Commines, I, 159.

concerning the executions carried out in the church at Nesle. "His thirst of blood and vengeance [did not] cease here, for . . . he ordered the captain to be hanged, and the town to be set on fire."[28] Not only was his treatment of the people brutal but he had used a most treacherous and ignoble means to gain entry to the city. After having concluded a treaty with the Picard captains offering safe conduct to their forces and security to the people of the city he wickedly had his forces turn on their foes, slaying them by the hundreds.

With no difficulty numerous other examples could be added to these already presented, all of which indicate the average nobleman's lack of regard for the lives and property of the members of the urban classes. The chronicles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are filled with factual accounts of the depredations committed against the bourgeoisie and the commoners of the towns. For almost two centuries they lived in constant fear of annihilation at the hands of the almost omnipresent nobility. One admittedly expects to find disruption of normal economic life during a period of warfare, especially one as chaotic as the Hundred Years' War. However, the greater part of the devastation and destruction perpetrated by the nobility was entirely unnecessary and often undertaken with a morbid sense of glee,

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[28] Jean De Troyes, The Scandalous Chronicle in Commines, II, 368.

as in the case of the exterminations engaged in at Limoges and Nesle. Though the nobility had no direct responsibility to the urban classes, they failed to even uphold the lowest level of decency when dealing with these people. Truly a great many knights had lost respect for the value of a human life and must have completely forgotten their true purpose as men-at-arms and protectors of those unable to protect themselves.

CHAPTER VII

THE NOBILITY AND THE PEASANTS

There is little doubt that of all the social classes affected by the decadent nobility in France during the later Middle Ages, the common peasant endured immeasurably more than the rest. The brutality and destruction carried on at Limoges and Nesle were horrible indeed, but in general, the towns suffered less than the countryside.[1] During the course of the Hundred Years' War, in periods of actual fighting, the opposing forces of the French and English literally lived off of the land. It was a rare army which carried its own provisions and even rarer were those which paid for the supplies they took from the peasantry. In times when formal fighting ceased, the countryside fell to the ravages of such roving bands as the Companions, routiers, and écorcheurs whose destruction surpassed even that of the organized armies.

Let us analyze first the havoc which groups such as the Companions raised with the commoners of the countryside. After the first twenty years of the war, France lay prostrate. The lands of this noble country, whose main source of sustenance came from agriculture, lay in utter ruin. The

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[1]Perroy, The Hundred Years War, p. 325.

peasantry not only suffered from the reckless armies but had the added burden of the Black Death, in addition to several years of crop failure. Jean de Venette states that

> in A.D. 1348, the people of France and of almost the whole world were struck by a blow other than war. For in addition to the famine which I described in the beginning and to the wars which I described in the course of this narrative, pestilence and its attendant tribulations appeared again in various parts of the world. . . . This sickness or pestilence was called an epidemic by the doctors. Nothing like the great numbers who died in the years 1348 and 1349 has been heard of or seen or read of in times past. . . . In many places not two out of twenty remained alive.[2]

In the late thirteen fifties France was once again struck by terrible famine. Conditions were so adverse in 1359 the English army was forced to bring along its own provisions. With the signing of the Peace of Bretigny the people anticipated a well deserved period of rest and recovery.

The desired respite was not forthcoming, for prior even to the Peace of Bretigny armed bands of unemployed knights, known as Companions, were organized and began roving the countryside of France. These obstreperous nobles maintained themselves from the pillage and plunder they acquired from their victims. We have previously shown that they respected the authority of neither the king, fellow nobles, the clergy, the bourgeoisie, nor common city dwellers. However, their disregard for these groups was often tempered somewhat by the fact that the latter usually had some defense

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[2]Venette, pp. 48-9.

with which they could resist the Companions. The peasantry, on the other hand, had little to hope for in the face of these onrushing scoundrels. Unless the peasants' overlord protected them, and this was rare in the fourteenth century, they had only a faint hope of surviving the attack of a group of Companions for they had virtually no means of defense.

The Companions cannot be classified as mere robbers, for even among thieves there is some honor. When these wayward knights attacked they scourged the territory and mere robbery was one of their more moderate misdeeds. Seldom did they leave a village or a peasant's hut and tract of land without burning everything in sight to the ground. Among their more heinous crimes were rape and murder, often committed in the most brutal fashion. One can best grasp the multitude and magnitude of their crimes against the poor by referring to the pages of Froissart. Though he was a lover of chivalry, he could not resist relating the deeds of knights in great detail, be they honorable or otherwise. In 1361, a group of Companions, in which Sir Robert Briquet was a chief leader, "wasted all the countrey without any cause, and robbed without sparyng, all that ever they coude gette, and vyolated and defoyled women, olde and yong, without pytie, and slewe men, women and chyldren, without mercy, doyng to them no trespace; and suche as dyde moost shamefullyst dedes were reputed with them moost valyaunt."[3] Page after

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[3]Froissart, II, 87.

page relates how "they overranne and distroyed all the countrey. And . . . [how] syr Hugh Caurell [Calverley], syr Robert Brequet, . . . and the nombre of companyons made great warre, and burned and distroyed the landes. . . ."[4] Numerous other incidents could be presented concerning the ruinous assaults which the Companions committed against the peasantry, but suffice it to say the poorer folk were trampled underfoot by the Companions, being crushed like trees before an on-rushing avalanche.[5]

Early in the fifteenth century new aggregations of destructive nobles sprung up in France. Though they were called by different names, they had essentially the same motives as the Free Companies. The Norman brigands were one such group of petty nobility who sustained themselves entirely by pillage. Miss Rowe offers a valuable description of the treatment which the peasants received at the hands of these scoundrels.

> The band commanded by Guillaume Hallé may be taken as typical. He recruited his forces with ne'er-do-weels of all sorts, and made war, if war it can be called, by terrorizing the local peasants. Their houses were burnt, some were beaten and others murdered, until none dared defy Hallé or refuse to bring him provisions. To secure money he organized raids at night and under cover of darkness broke into the houses of the unhappy villagers, carrying off two or three

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[4]Froissart, II, 276.

[5]For other examples of the destruction of the Companions see Froissart, I, 400; II, 78-89; II, 352-3; III, 288-90; and V, 114.

> victims to hold to ransom. In one case at least, when he could not find the man he sought, he took his wife and tortured her, and when he could get nothing from her, carried off two of her dresses, a pot of lard, and her bed covering. Another woman was said to have been kept prisoner in the woods for three days and nights without either food or drink; and another story tells of an old man of seventy-eight dragged struggling from his house at night before the eyes of his wife and children and never heard of again. People living in forest villages or lonely places dared deny the brigands nothing, and the well-known price of safety was not allegiance to Charles but assistance to the brigands in their life of plunder and rapine.[6]

The Peace of Arras in 1435 brought little relief to the peasantry. Bands of routiers or écorcheurs, men nominally in the service of either the French or Burgundian factions, roamed the land, harassing the poor people continuously. The narratives of such contemporary chroniclers as Monstrelet relate that their raids surpassed in horror even those of the Companions. The people appropriately designated these macabre men-at-arms écorcheurs or skinners, since those wretches unfortunate enough to be robbed by them usually lost their shirts and sometimes even their skins. The innocent civilian population of the countryside received the chief brunt of the assaults of these scoundrels. Pillage, burning, torture, rape, massacre, nothing was spared which fell in their path. They gave no mercy and expected none, giving little thought of the morrow, but thinking only of the immediate, fleeting advantages they could gain. The attacks of the écorcheurs were doubly oppressive to the

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[6]Rowe, "Norman Brigands," p. 588.

peasantry since the latter were suffering from the destruction caused by a resumption of open hostilities between France and England. For twenty years, since the battle of Agincourt, these two nations had engaged in warfare on French soil. At the very point when the peasants lay in utter exhaustion the _écorcheurs_ added to their misery.

Monstrelet relates numerous incidents of the suffering the peasantry underwent in the face of these _écorcheurs_ who took the clothes right off of the victims. Beneath their repeated blows the population of France decreased, and poverty and desolation became wide spread. No district or province escaped their raids which brought with them nothing but impoverishment. In a most lucid and moving passage, Monstrelet described the strife and turmoil in 1436, caused by the warring factions of French and Burgundian _routiers_.

> Throughout all France the poor people and the church were sorely oppressed by this war, for they had no defenders; and notwithstanding the peace concluded at Arras, the French and Burgundians in the countries of Beauvoisis, Vermandois, Santois, Laonnois, Champagne, and in the Rethelois, made frequent wars on each other on the most unreasonable pretences, by which the country was wasted and destroyed, and the inhabitants suffered more than before peace was made. The poor labourers had no other recource than pitifully to cry out to God, their creator, for vengence on their oppressors. But the worst was, when they had obtained letters of favour from any captains, they were frequently not attended to by others, even though of the same party.[7]

This is a mild account of the situation compared to what

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[7]Monstrelet, II, 45.

developed in the next few years. Only after the passage of Charles VII's <u>ordonnances</u> were the <u>écorcheurs</u> subdued and the peasantry given some relief from the scourges of these destructive outlaws.

The disorganized Companions, <u>routiers</u>, and <u>écorcheurs</u> were not alone in raising havoc with the rural dwellers in France, for the organized armies of the kings of France and England and the troops of such powerful princes as the duke of Burgundy also destroyed a great deal of life and property. For instance, the tactics which Charles V used against the English enabled his foes to lay waste to much of the rural area. The peasantry had already undergone twenty years of devastating warfare prior to the Peace of Bretigny, and recently sustained a decade of ravenous assaults by the Free Companies. With the renewal of war with England in 1369 Charles left the peasantry undefended in the wake of the onrushing English forces. He instructed his constable, du Guesclin, to engage in hit-and-run tactics against the enemy, whereby the French armies would strike quickly and then return to the protection of a strong fortress. While this strategy was highly successful for France as a nation, it left the rural areas defenseless and open to assault by the English knights.

Some of the evils committed by the nobles may readily be seen in the chronicles of Froissart. Even the chivalrous John Chandos led his forces across the French lands bringing

misery to the poor people and destruction to their lands. Froissart relates that Chandos and his captains "sent forthe their currours before them, to bren and exyle the playne countrey. So they dyde many yvels in that good plentyfull countrey of Anjowe, and none came to fight with them, . . . and so [they] entred into the lande of the vycont of Rochechoart, and brent and wasted the countre all about, for they left nothynge abrode without the fortresse. . . ."[8] The earl of Pembroke followed Chandos "and so entred into Anjou, and brent and exyled the countre, and toke all that was lefte . . ."[9] and he and his men "coulde nat absteyne themselfe fro doyng of yvell."[10] Truly the innocent peasant paid the full price of the devastation wrought by the savage English knights and the wise but brutal strategy of Charles V.

One of the most unchivalrous and senseless episodes of the entire war occurred not on French soil but on the borders of England and Scotland. Though this deviates a bit geographically from the area under study it is too illustrative of the changing purpose of warfare and the motivating interests of the men-at-arms to bypass. In 1385 the English troops were engaged in a border war with the Scots, the latter

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[8] Froissart, II, 299.

[9] Froissart, II, 300.

[10] Froissart, II, 334.

being backed by a thousand barons and knights of France.[11] King Richard and the duke of Lancaster led the English knights into Scotland where they ravaged the land. The commoners had no protection and the English seemed to be purposely avoiding battle in order that they might pillage and burn the country. These knights concentrated their energies on robbing and plundering the innocent men, women, and children of Scotland and demonstrated no responsibility whatsoever toward their duties as knights, to engage in battle other men-at-arms.

Unfortunately, the Scotch and French knights made no efforts to deter the English. Instead of defending their homeland against the English marauders, these cowardly knights avoided battle and embarked upon their own destructive mission. "Thus in lykewise as the Englysshemen dyde in Scotlande, so dyd the Frenchemen and Scottes in Englande. . . . They brent a great countre as they went out of Northumberlande . . . and brent in their voyage dyvers great villages, for they were no men of warre in that countre as than, for they were all with the kyng."[12] No clearer example could be drawn of the irresponsibility of the nobility. One of the primary reasons for the existence of a noble class stemmed from their obligation to protect the lands and lives

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[11]Froissart, IV, 58.

[12]Froissart, IV, 60.

of the peasantry which supported them. As knights they swore always to be courageous, never shunning battle and always endeavoring to aid the poor and oppressed of society. By embarking upon these reciprocal destructive forays, the Scotch, French, and English knights violated almost every tenet held dear for centuries by the members of their class. Not only did they engage in pillaging and burning the defenseless lands of their enemies but these knights also displayed the utmost cowardliness by failing to engage their foes in battle. Truly the peasantry never had the distinction of being pillaged and murdered by a more dishonorable nobility.

The French themselves were often as destructive to the land of the native peasant as were the invading English. In 1386 as the French king gathered troops for a planned assault on England, he and his growing force of men-at-arms made successive stops in the cities of Noyon, Péronne, and Arras. As they passed through the country, the knights fell upon the land like locusts, leaving the countryside practically barren. The peasants, who previously had wheat were left nothing but straw, and those who spoke out in resentment were beaten or slain. Their waters were fished out and their homes broken up for firewood. Froissart relates that the English could have done no better job of destruction than the French did themselves. After robbing the peasants of their goods the knights paid not a cent for them. "But the poore people, when they saw theyr goodes taken and spente

away . . . durst not speke ther agaynst, [but] they cursed betwene theyr tethe, sayenge, Go into Englande or to the Devyll, and never retourne agayne."[13]

The common people got no relief in the fifteenth century, for Monstrelet recounts many examples similar to those recorded by Froissart in respect to their cruelty and destructiveness. The poor suffered greatly as a result of the factional dispute that raged between the Armagnac-Royalist forces and the Burgundian-English coalition. On one occasion, Lord Blanchefort, in the service of the French king, did a great deal of damage to the territory around Amiens by burning and pillaging the countryside and slaying the peasantry. The damage was so terrible that many of the inhabitants were forced to desert the country. However, "they were likewise harassed by those of the Burgundy faction. The poor labourers knew not whither to fly, for they were not defended by the lords of either party. . . ."[14]

These persons who imposed such destruction on the poor laborers were men of noble rank. There is no mistaking this fact, for Monstrelet specifically named the noble captains who ravaged the country time and time again.[15] Miss

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[13]Froissart, IV, 348.

[14]Monstrelet, I, 608.

[15]See Monstrelet, I, 356, for an excellent listing of the men of rank who took part in much of the pillaging.

Rowe gives a precise summary of the function of the nobility when she states to the "fifteenth-century soldiers plunder seemed a natural pastime."[16]

To grasp firmly the significance of the nobility's disregard for the peasantry, one must look to the peasants' reaction to their maltreatment and also analyze the opinion of some of the contemporary chroniclers and critics. Among the many peasant revolts during the later Middle Ages the most infamous and bloody was known as the Jacquerie. This violent peasant uprising occurred in 1358 in reaction to the increasingly heavy taxation necessary to ransom the king and nobles imprisoned in England and to help pay for the heavy cost of the war. The revolt also represented a general show of resentment against the depraved nobility. These mischievous laborers went berserk, burning and distroying over a hundred castles and houses of the nobles of France.[17] Their deeds of rapine and slaughter defy description. Froissart relates how they roasted one knight on a spit over an open fire before the eyes of his onlooking wife.[18] Many of the cruelties were even worse than this.

Froissart was too enamored with chivalry to show anything but disdain for the reaction of the peasantry. Truly

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[16]Rowe, "Norman Brigands," p. 194.

[17]Froissart, I, 405.

[18]Froissart, I, 404.

they did act in a vile and inhuman fashion but not without sufficient provocation. When Froissart asked why the peasants should commit such mischief, he unknowingly answered his own question by relating that the peasants "sayd howe the noble men of the realme of Fraunce, knyghtes and squyers, shamed the realme, and that it shulde be a great welth to dystroy them all. . . ."[19] In other words, the peasants were only returning some of the many cruel deeds which the nobility had inflicted upon them. Eventually, the nobles put down the peasants' revolt in an even more cruel fashion than the revolt itself. Though the peasants were subdued they had given the nobility a frightening realization of the depths of their resentment against the oppressive practices of these men of lineage.

Though Froissart wrote a great deal about the poor peasantry and the continuous suffering which the men-at-arms caused them, he surely had little, if any, understanding of the problems they faced, especially in their interactions with the nobility. It is doubtful that he felt any sincere compassion for their plight; in fact many of his statements sound more like anecdotes than descriptions of real circumstances. On one occasion he states the "men ran over the countre and left nothyng untaken, without it were to hote, to colde, or to hevy."[20] Again, he recounts how "the Frenchmen

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[19]Froissart, I, 403.

[20]Froissart, II, 146.

rode and brent the contrey, and . . . the poore peple wept. . . ."[21] Later he states "there is noo warre made but at poore mennes purses. . . ."[22] These phrases appear to be mere superficial quips rather than clear perceptions of the problems involved.

There did exist chroniclers, contemporary with Froissart, who possessed a firm understanding of the cruel relationship between the nobility and peasantry, and perceived that the nobles treatment of the latter was brutal, unjust, and diametrically opposed to the purposes and ideals for which they stood. Jean de Venette was one such writer who had a profound sympathy for the plight of the common man. He spoke of nobles in terms of being thieves and robbers and stated how "the nobles despised and hated all others and took no thought for the mutual usefulness and profit of lord and men. They subjected and despoiled the peasants and the men of the villages. In no wise did they defend their country from its enemies. Rather did they trample it underfoot, robbing and pillaging the peasants' goods."[23]

Much criticism was directed at the nobility in the allegorical passages of Piers the Plowman. William Langland objected strongly to such common practices as the

[21] Froissart, I, 136.

[22] Froissart, IV, 437.

[23] Venette, p. 66.

abusive hunting and fishing rights which the nobility maintained. This prerogative was either used in excess, whereby the peasants' streams and forests were completely fished and hunted out by passing bands of men-at-arms, or used so little that the peasants' lands fell prey to the excessive wildlife of the nobles' game preserve. The great lords were also chastised for the unscrupulous way in which their great retinues of them made cross-country journeys, living at the expense of villages they chanced to pass through. In one instance, the great lords are represented in the character of "Wrong" as they sweep down upon a peasant village. One peasant laments how a noble

> Borrowed the brown mare, but never brought her back;
> And never a farthing for her! Aye, he outfaced me,
> Maintaining his men to murder my servants;
> Forstalled me at the fair, fought me in bargaining,
> Broke down by barn-door and bore off my wheat,
> Tendering me a tally for ten quarters of oats!
> And on top of that he beat me and lay with my maid. . . ."[24]

Under the dictates of the manorial system the serf did indeed owe his immediate overlord certain specified obligations. However, these lords were nothing but vagabond travelers to whom the peasant owed nothing in the way of goods and services for which he should not expect to be recompensed. The fact that this was not forthcoming from the lords represents a transgression on their part. Though Langland fails to point out specifically the error of the overlord in not

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[24] Piers Plowman, pp. 34-35.

protecting his peasant, he indirectly indicates another flagrant fault which the nobility committed with greater frequency.

La Tour Landry's criticism of the nobility's treatment of the peasantry was closely related to his criticism of their religious practices. He contended that it was the solemn duty of a noble, as a Christian and as a knight, to aid and succor the sick, the weak, and oppressed and to show respect for womanhood. He praised highly those knights who fulfilled their obligations to the weaker members of society during the war, and showed the utmost contempt for those who violated their obligations to the commoners.[25]

Let us complete our analysis of the relationship of the nobility and the peasants by consulting one very important authoress, Christine de Pisan. We have previously viewed her criticism of pillage in respect to the bourgeoisie. She excoriated the nobles for plundering the commoners in even stronger terms. She explained that the men-at-arms received wages for their services and it was evil extortion and a great wrong for them to pillage and rob the poor people. No rule of war gave them the right to engage in such action. If, however, the princely captain was unable to pay his men a sufficient wage he should be greatly blamed and should

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[25]For a fuller account of this discussion see La Tour Landry, p. 93.

never have engaged in war in the first place.[26] She further stated that even if the war was just, the men of war had no right to overrun the lands of their enemies. It was the knights' duty to fight other men-at-arms and not make war on the poor folk. These people wished to live in peace and by no right of the knights office did he have any prerogative to molest them. The "gentylmen of armes ought to kepe hem self . . . that they dystroye not the goode symple folke nor to suffre that theyre folke shal inhumaynly hurt them, for they ben crysten and not sarrasyns. . . . Soo ought they to hurt them that ledeth the werre and spare the symple and peasyble of all theyre puyssaunce. . . ."[27] This noblewoman seems to have thoroughly grasped the injustice which the nobles inflicted upon the poor people and clearly perceived that if the nobility did not cease their dastardly behavior they might lose some of the privileges which they legally held in society.

In retrospect, no one during the entire Hundred Years' War received any more unjust treatment at the hands of the nobility than the common peasant. These miserable creatures were subjected to every type of injury and destruction that one could conceive of. Though it was not until 1789 that the commoner got complete revenge against the nobility, much

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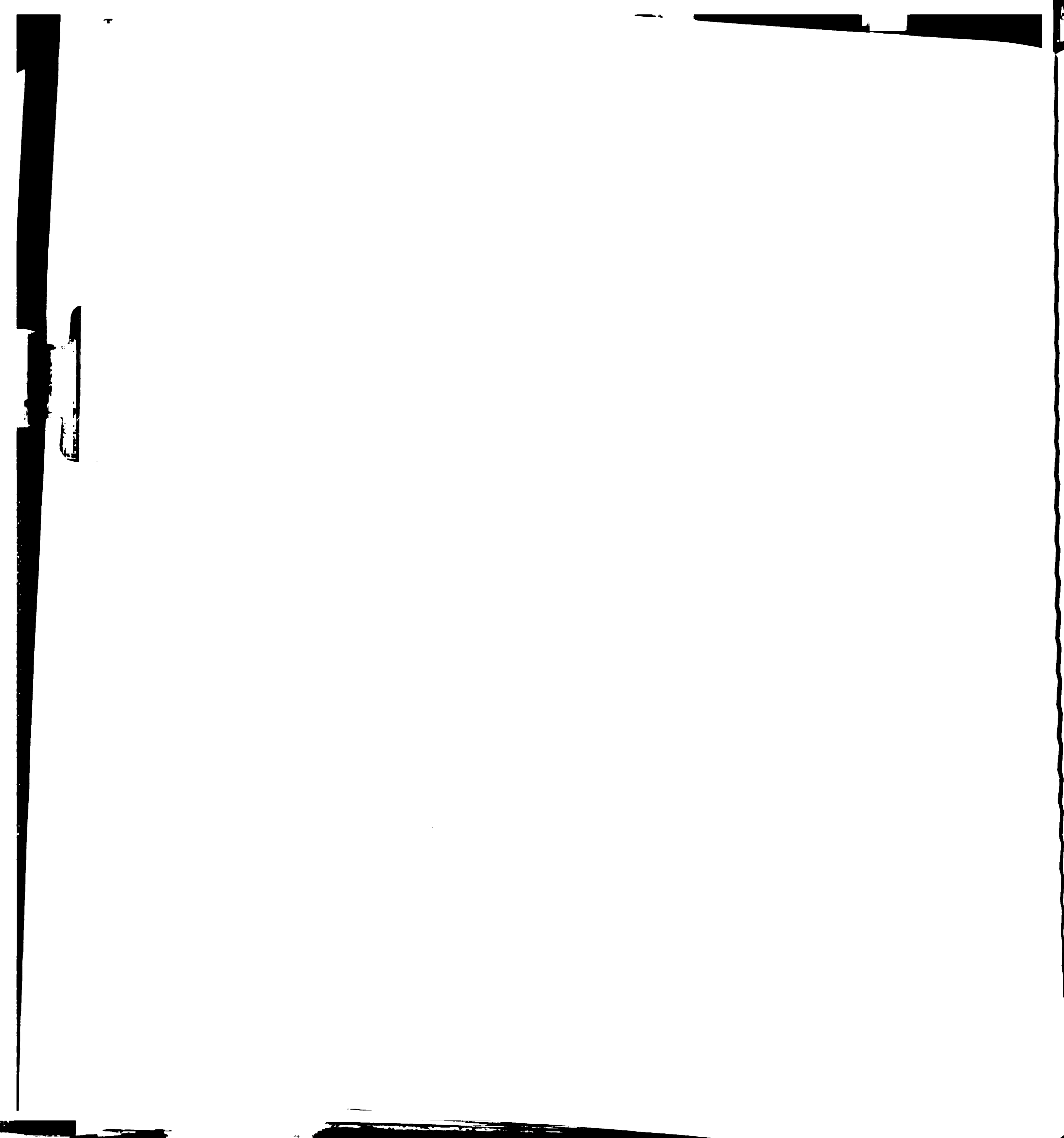
[26]Christine, Fayttes of Armes, p. 217.

[27]*Ibid.*, p. 225.

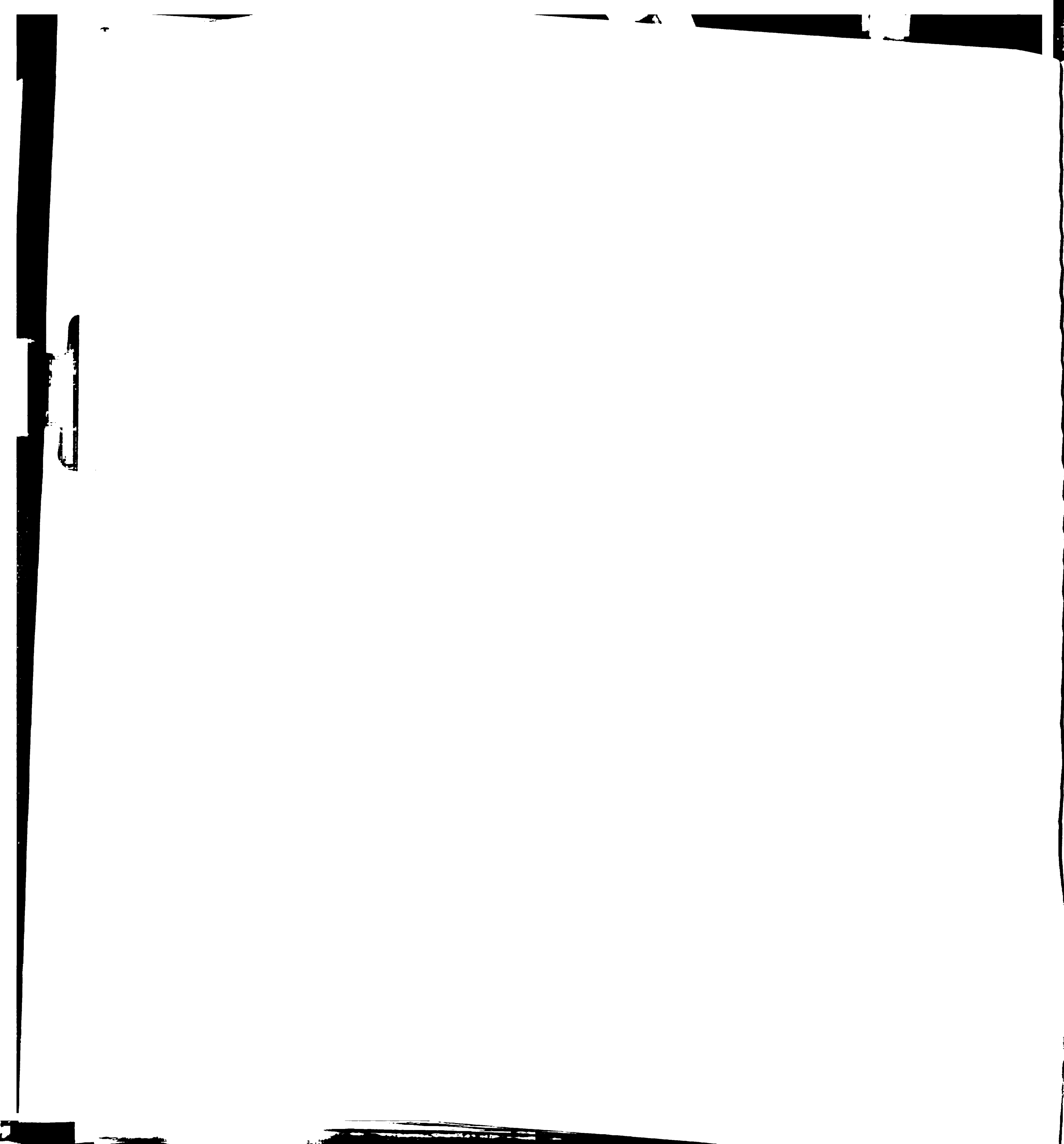
of the pent-up hatred dated back to the era of the Hundred Years' War. The men of lineage not only failed to uphold even a minimum code of decency in respect to the peasant but unfortunately he had not the foresight to perceive the eventual ruinous consequences his malevolence would bring upon himself.



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The nobility in France, which prior to 1300 offered many positive contributions to the nation, the Church, and society in general, during the course of the Hundred Years' War underwent a significant transformation. In the space of two centuries the most powerful and influential class in France fell from a position of puissance to one of impuissance. The power of the nobility decreased in respect to their inability to unite in order to contain a nascent monarchy. The potent princes and petty nobles of the later Middle Ages lacked the deference previously shown to their fellow comrades and men-at-arms. In regards to the Church, there appeared a complete disintegration of the religious spirit so prevalent in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Contrary to enhancing the power of the Church destructiveness best characterizes the actions of the men of lineage toward the Church. Not only were they destructive in respect to the Church but also toward the urban classes and peasantry. The men of lineage came to represent a negative force in society.

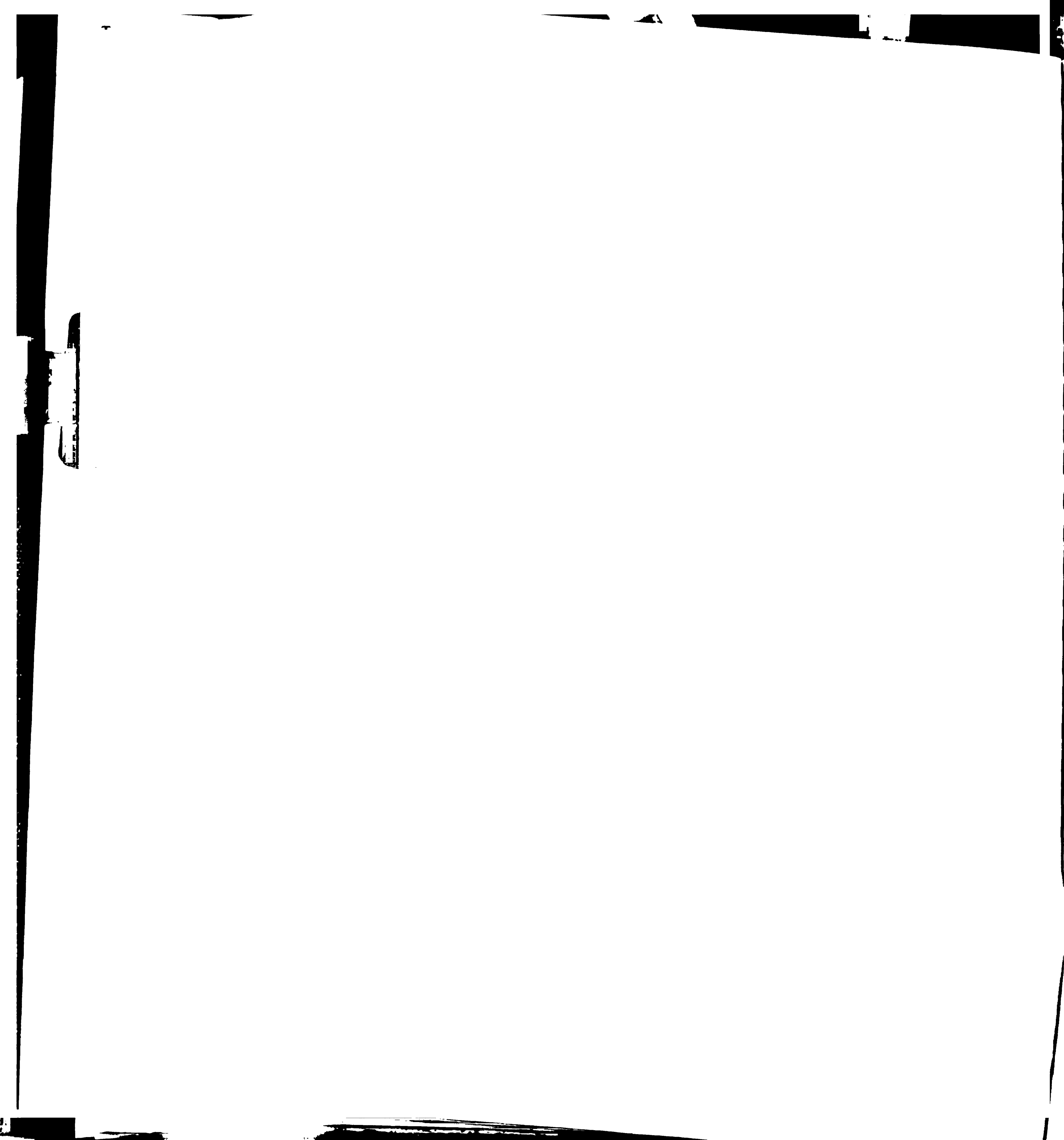
The guiding standard, by which one is able to measure the decline, is derived partially from the feudal obligations between lord and vassal but mainly from the elaborate code of chivalry which evolved over the long span of the Middle Ages. The standards adopted by the men of knighthood were



stringent indeed and never perfectly fulfilled, but the knights at least endeavored to meet their obligations and appeared to be inspired by a genuine ideal. Even during the first phases of the Hundred Years' War chivalry occasionally tended to temper some of the cruelties of the fighting and gave just cause for its existence. However, in general, the knights of this later age aspired to satisfy few if any of the obligations and ideals which their forefathers devoted themselves to so fervently.

The many examples presented in this study representing the horrible behavior of the nobility are not exaggerations in any way. The extensive number of samples drawn from the chronicles of Froissart, for instance, exemplify the typical knight and were drawn for purely illustrative purposes. Below all the glitter of tournaments and pomp of court life there lay nothing but a decadent aristocracy, and misery and poverty flourished for the less fortunates. In our civilized society it is difficult to believe that so many men of such great responsibility acted so dishonorably so often.

While the major purpose of this study has been to show that the nobility did decline, it is impossible to delve into such a subject without mentioning some of the reasons why. Some of the "whys" have been briefly touched upon already. For example, chivalry itself was unable to cope with the changing times. Failing to counteract the new



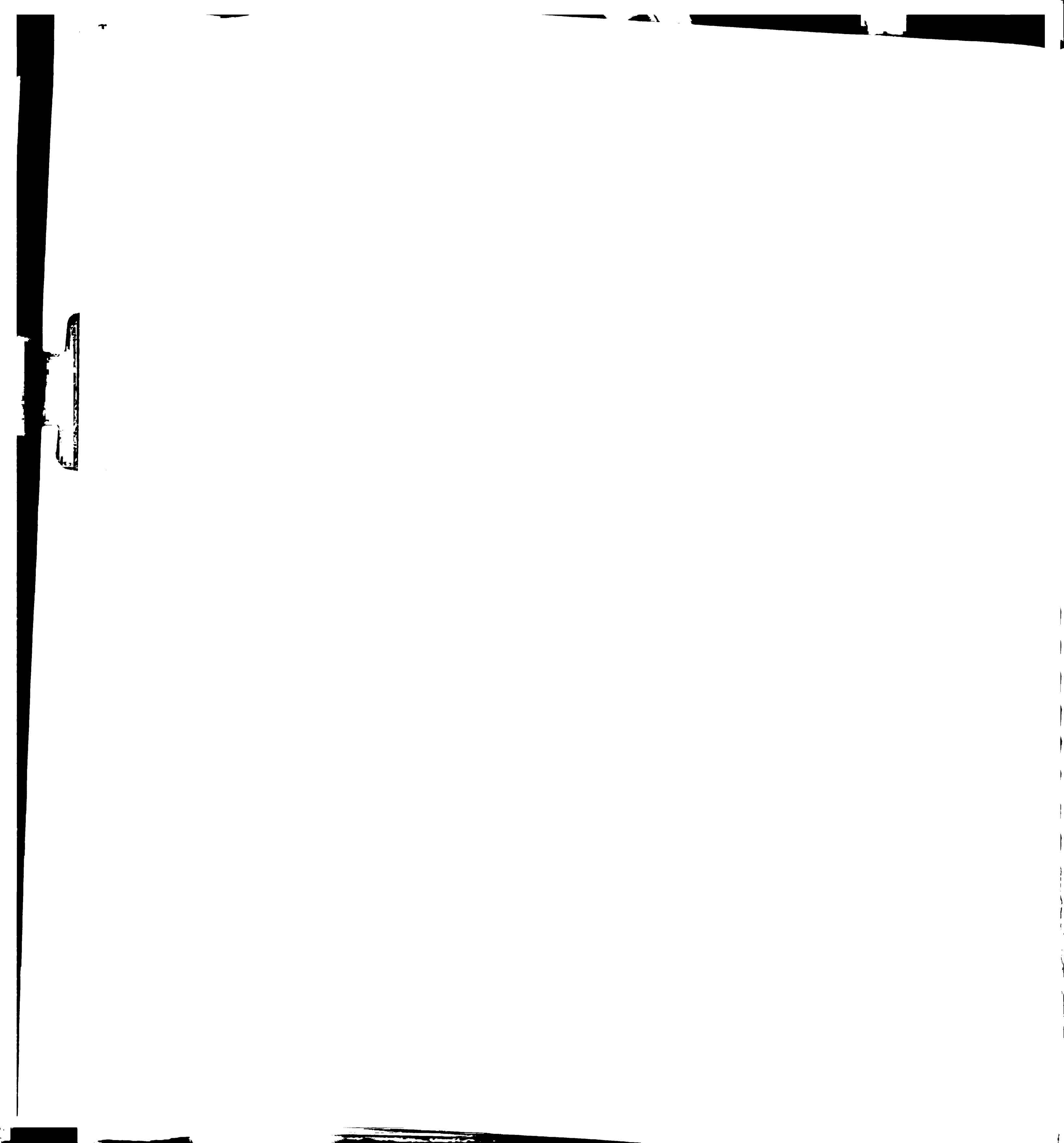
armies and revolutionary weapons the knights continued to practice their antiquated methods in the safety of magnificent tournaments. The cost of tournaments, court life, or the very office of knighthood itself placed the knight in a great financial dilemma which, in part, explains his decline. With increasing expenses and decreasing revenues, the knights found greater difficulty in meeting their financial obligations and were constantly being undercut by the rising middle class.

Of major importance in their ultimate downfall was their refusal to support the Estates General. The nobles' failure to help sustain a strong parliamentary government in France enabled ambitious monarchs such as Charles VII and Louis XI to establish a permanent army and permanent taxation at their expense. The failure of parliamentary government in France is a prodigious study in and of itself but all facts seem to indicate that at this juncture the nobility met one of its major defeats.

Though not treated in the main body of the work, the best evidence available supports one other major cause of the nobles' decline in France. In England the practice of primogeniture led to a more stable class structure. The eldest son inherited the fief thereby permitting the estates to remain intact for generations. The other sons remained landless knights, and subsequently joined the middle classes in strengthening the third estate. With the support of an

ambitious third estate, parliamentary government flourished in England. In France, on the contrary, the fiefs were divided amongst the various sons, thereby burdening the country with a decentralized, bickering noble class. In England, the landless knights paid taxes thereby lending them more responsible and creating a smaller gap between the gentry and the masses. The French knights paid no taxes and there arose a large cleavage between the upper classes and the masses.

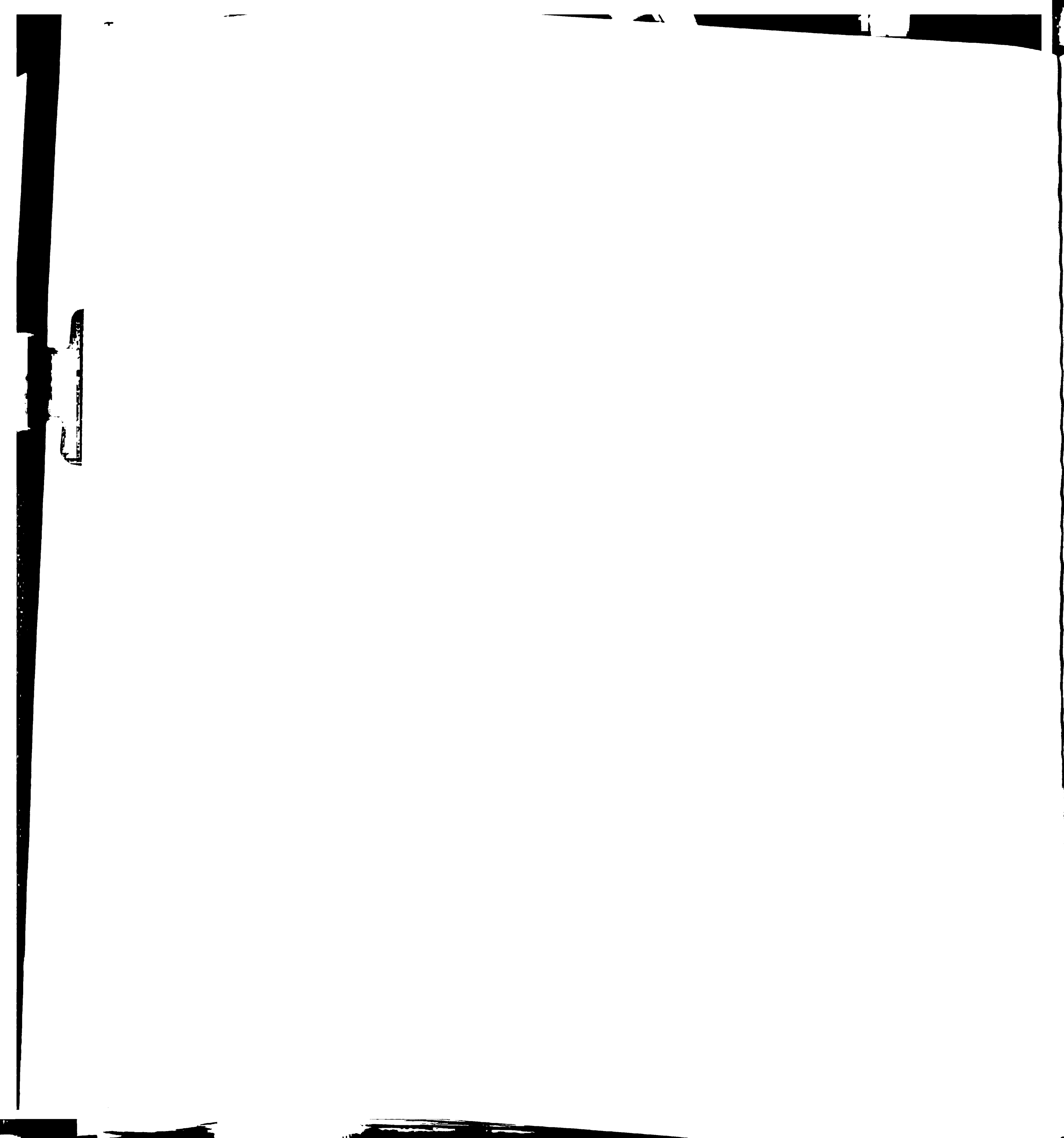
With the aid of hindsight and sufficient analysis there seems little doubt that the nobility in France did degenerate terribly during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Sufficient examples have been given to indicate some of the many ways they declined. Only through further study can the "whys" of their disintegration be thoroughly and decisively discerned.



BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Primary Sources:

The foundation of this study rests upon three important authors whose writings span the last two centuries of the Middle Ages. Sir John Froissart, The Chronicles of Froissart, trans. Sir John Bourchier Lord Berners, 6 vols. (Annis 1523-25) (London, 1901), covers the period ranging from 1326-1400. The first two volumes are the most valuable for his description tends to become dull and repetitious after this point. His chief value arises out of his candid description of the political and military conditions in France and his chief weakness emerges from his unyielding love of the deeds of knights causing him to overlook other important data. The translation itself is generally good; however, Bourchier fails to correct the errors in names, places, and dates in the manuscript he used and he added many errors himself. The Chronicles of Enguerrand De Monstrelet, trans. Thomas Johnes, 2 vols. (London, 1849), covers a period from 1400-1516. However, Monstrelet's writings probably ended in 1444, and the selections hereafter are collected from a variety of chroniclers whose writings are of little value. Though the writings of Monstrelet are less exciting and chivalrous than are Froissart's and are filled with tedious detail, they are much more accurate and somewhat more



sophisticated. The Memoirs of Philip De Commines, Lord of Argenton, ed. Andrew R. Scoble, Esq., 2 vols. (London, 1855), is of chief importance in dealing with the affairs in France and Burgundy during the reign of Louis XI. Commines' memoirs are history written by a student of history, diplomacy, and political philosophy. Though they do not present the thrill of warfare and show of chivalry so apparent in the chronicles of Froissart, they give the reader a much deeper insight into the underlying motivations of the monarchy and the nobility in France.

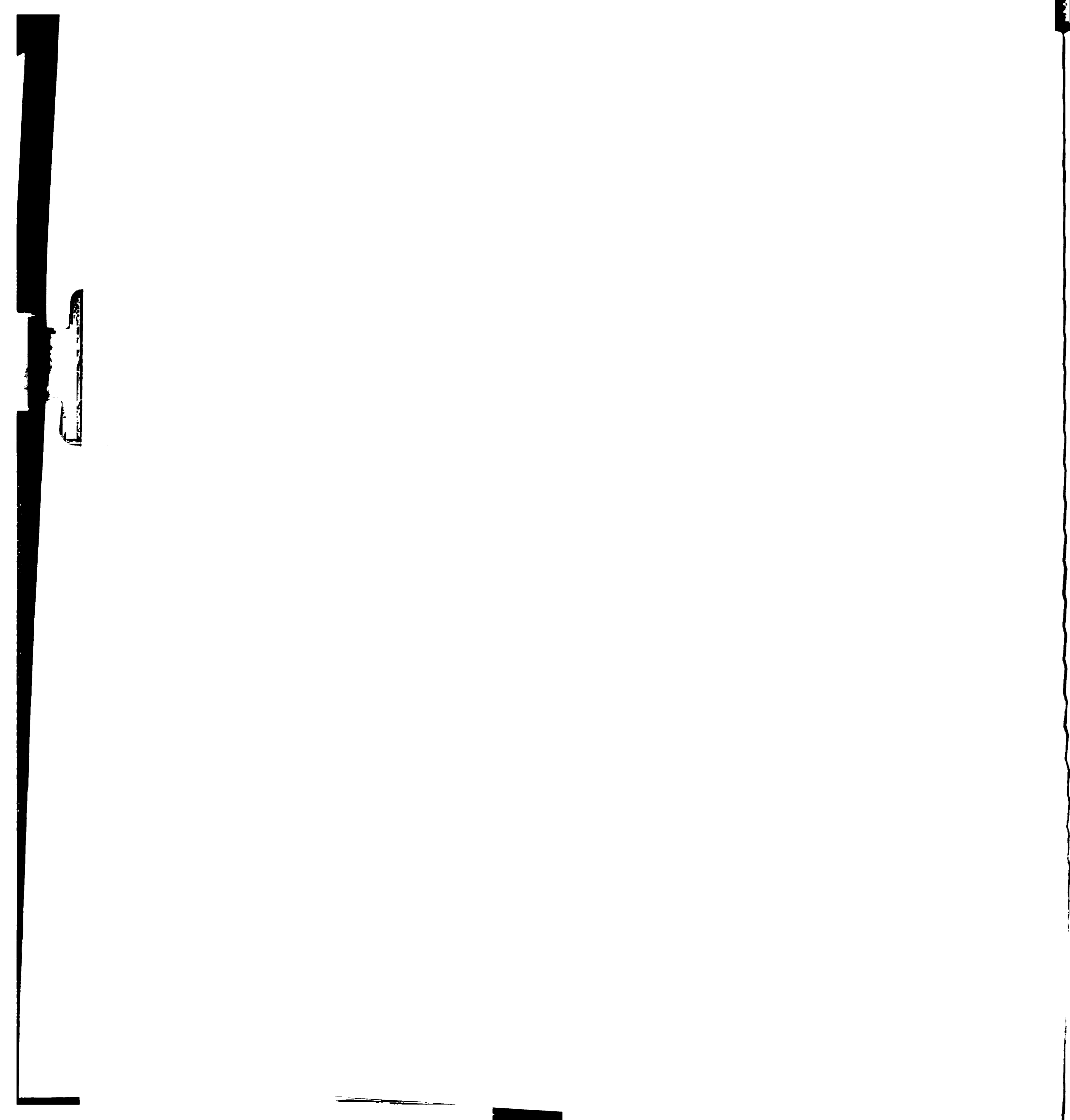
In addition to these three important writers, two other chroniclers offer valuable information concerning the later Middle Ages. The Chronicles of Jean de Venette, trans. Jean Birdsall, ed. Richard A. Newhall (New York, 1953), is a short document but it parallels the years of Froissart's most fruitful writing (1340-1368) thereby giving the reader a good check upon the validity of the remarks made by the latter author. Vennete was a peasant who became a Carmelite monk and he was therefore able to observe society, more especially the excesses of the nobility, from an entirely different point of view than was Froissart. Jean de Troyes, The Scandalous Chronicle or Secret History of Louis XI, is included in The Memoirs of Philip de Commines and runs parallel to Commines' history. It is thought but not proved that Jean de Troyes wrote this rather superficial chronicle which, in spite of the implications of its title, is not

really scandalous at all. This chronicle is really a history of the curious remarks and passing events of the reign of Louis XI and in reality is not written as a chronicle but written to please its readers. This account, unlike Commines' memoirs, is the history that Louis XI would like to have his subjects read for it covers up the king's blunder at Péronne and other similar unfortunate incidents.

Some of the most useful information about the behavior of the nobility prior to 1300 was derived from the chronicles concerning the crusades. Villehardouin, The Chronicle of the Fourth Crusade and the Conquest of Constantinople, in Memoirs of the Crusades, trans. Frank T. Marzials (New York, 1958), gives the reader a good, clear, accurate account of the fourth crusade though the narrative tends to be somewhat dull and repetitious. Jean de Joinville, The Chronicle of the Crusade of St. Lewis, in Memoirs of the Crusades, trans. Frank T. Marzials (New York, 1958), is written in much more elaborate prose than the chronicle of Villehardouin. Joinville is known chiefly as the biographer of Louis IX and the body of this document concerns the deeds and the drama of the seventh crusade upon which Saint Louis was pictured as the embodiment of perfect knighthood. Other helpful background information concerning the nobility was obtained from Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John Jay Parry (New York, 1959). This late twelfth century author explained the rules of court life and courtly love by

presenting a series of fictitious dialogues between combinations of persons from the middle class, the nobility, and high nobility whereby the prerogatives and restrictions of each class were clearly defined. W. [Guillaume de] Lorris and J[ohn] Clopinel (Jean de Meun), The Romance of The Rose, trans. F. S. Ellis, 3 vols. (London, 1900), was extremely popular among the nobility during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was widely circulated in Europe. The first section, written by Guillaume de Lorris in the first part of the thirteenth century is relatively short and idealistic and allegorical in nature. For the purposes of this study the larger segment, written by Jean de Meun some forty years after Lorris, was of greater value for Jean de Meun carefully analyzed the social relationships of the nobility and openly advocated that illicit relations replace the idealistic chivalrous adherence to chastity and respect for womanhood. In the late thirteenth century Ramón Lull, a Spanish churchman, wrote The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry, trans. William Caxton, ed. Alfred T. P. Byles (London, 1926), which is the clearest and most concise single source of the obligations and duties of the medieval knight which we possess today.

Several writers are chiefly important for the information one can gain from their criticisms of the nobility. Visions From Piers Plowman, taken from the poem of William Langland, trans. into modern English by Nevill Coghill (New York, 1950), is written by a commoner and offers a great deal



of valuable information concerning the abuses of the nobility against the peasantry. Visions from Piers Plowman is only a part of the complete book and this edition was derived mainly from the B text which Langland wrote in 1377 as a revision of the original text. The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry, ed. G. S. Taylor (London, 1930), was written in 1371 by the chivalrous Geoffroy La Tour Landry as a manual upon morality for the education of his daughters. However, from the examples presented and the poignant criticisms provided by La Tour Landry, one gains a great deal of useful information concerning the rapid degeneration of the nobility. Early in the fourteenth century Christine de Pisan wrote The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyvalrye, trans. William Caxton, ed. A. T. B. Byles (London, 1932), primarily as a manual of warfare and the duties of men-at-arms. Of greater importance is her recognition of some of the outmoded practices of chivalry and her criticism of the immoral and destructive practices of the nobility. Miguel de Cervantes rounds out the critics of the chivalrous nobility with his classic book Don Quixote, Ozell's revision of the trans. of Peter Motteux (New York, 1930), written in the early seventeenth century. This famous tale of that idealistic knight-errant Don Quixote literally laughed chivalry, as practiced in the Middle Ages, out of existence.

Secondary Sources:

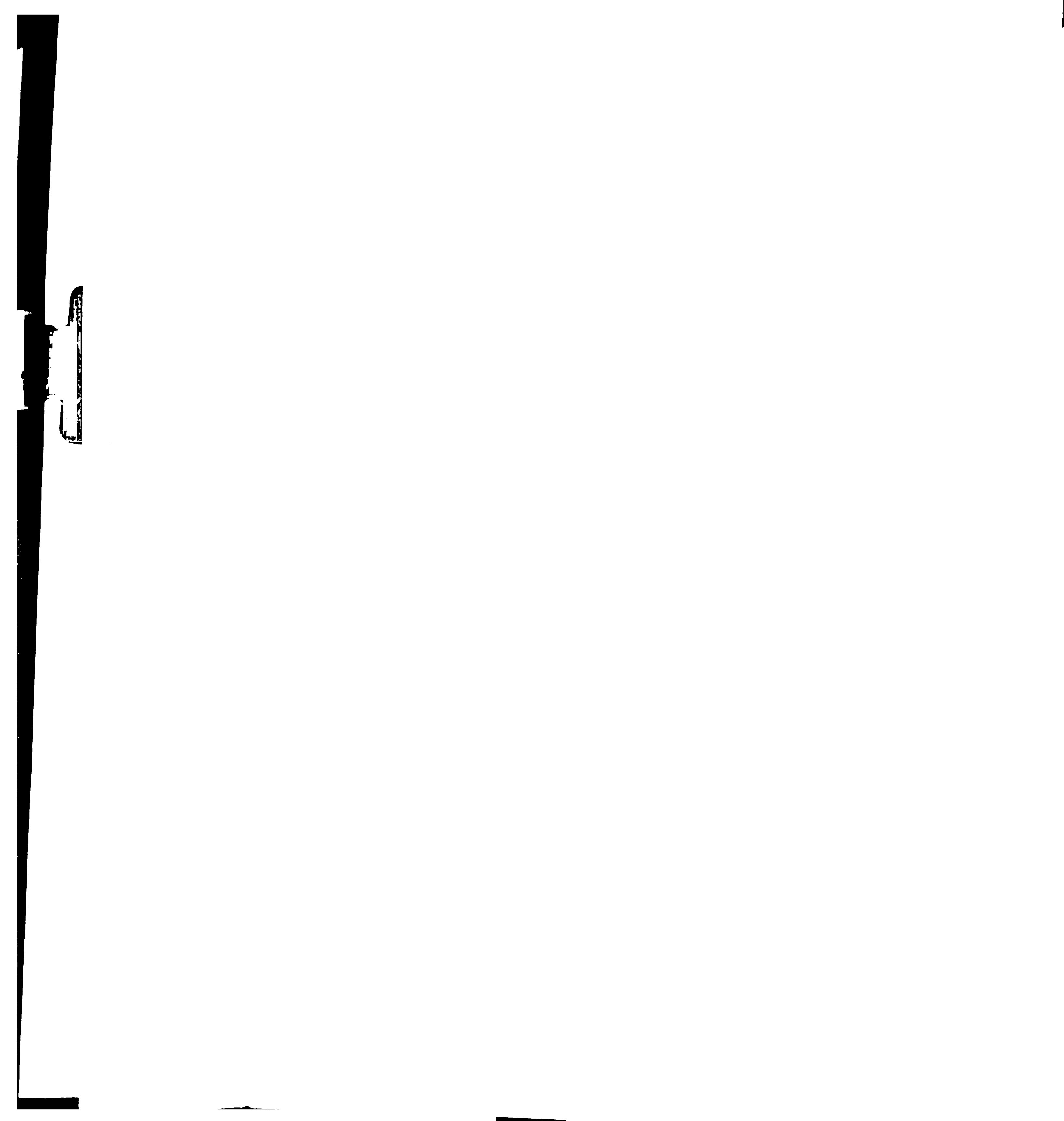
The author found several general histories of the later Middle Ages helpful in gaining a more complete understanding of this period. R. Lodge, The Close of the Middle Ages 1273-1494, 5th ed. (New York, 1901), gives a good overall coverage of Europe. He gives a good account of the major personalities and events during this period but is somewhat lacking in his coverage of England. Gustave Masson, The Story of Mediaeval France: From The Reign of Hugues Capet to The Beginning of the Sixteenth Century (New York, 1888), is simple and short but a fairly good history of medieval France. Its chief weakness lies in the sparse treatment of the social, religious, and philosophical history of medieval France and in the author's unfortunate heavy reliance upon Edward Gibbon as a source. Medieval France: A Companion to French Studies, ed. Arthur Tilley (Cambridge, England, 1922), consists of a series of chapters written by French and English scholars dealing with the political, economic, social, and other phases of French history during the Middle Ages. Though it contains several good chapters, such as the one by V. Langlois on political history, it is generally a rather elementary and incomplete study and lacks any sense of coherence or unity. James Westfall Thompson and Edgar Nathaniel Johnson, An Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500 (New York, 1937), is an excellent book and especially valuable for the chapters on feudalism and France

during the later Middle Ages. Henri Pirenne, Édouard Perroy, et al., La Fin du Moyen Âge: La désagrégation du monde médiéval (1285-1453) (Louis Halphen et Philippe Sagnac, eds., Peuples et Civilisation, VII, Paris, 1931), contains the contributions of five prominent French and Belgium historians. Of special interest for the purpose of this study were the chapters by Édouard Perroy dealing with France during the Hundred Years' War. Édouard Perroy offers an excellent and complete coverage of the war in his book entitled The Hundred Years War, trans. W. B. Wells (New York, 1951). Though Perroy does let his pro-French feelings enter his interpretations somewhat, his factual information is complete and accurate and his book remains the best study of the war written to date. J[ohn] Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries (London, 1927), presents the reader with an excellent account of the general tenor of life during the later Middle Ages with a special emphasis upon the extremes and excesses of this period. James Westfall Thompson gives an excellent coverage of economic and social developments in his Economic and Social History of Europe in the Later Middle Ages (1300-1530) (New York, 1931), He purposely concentrates upon conditions on the continent, omitting almost all mention of England. His explanation of the causes of the Hundred Years' War is even clearer and more concise than is the account

given by Perroy. He does seem to have a bias toward the French monarchy as he constantly endeavors to place the monarchy in a good light in comparison to the other segments of society. A great deal of concise, factual, accurate information was obtained or verified by The Cambridge Medieval History, 8 vols. (New York and Cambridge, England, 1911-36), more especially from A. Coville's chapters in Volume VII dealing with France during the Hundred Years' War. For a delightful and masterful account of the court which became the haven for the chivalrous nobility during the fifteenth century one should read Otto Cartellieri's The Court of Burgundy, trans. Malcolm Letts (London, 1929). The interesting and lucid description which Cartellieri presents makes the reader keenly aware of the court life, jousts, feasts and splendor of the nobility of this magnificent court. Harold Lamb's book entitled The Crusades: Iron Men and Saints (Garden City, New York, 1930) deals specifically with the first three crusades and was especially useful to the author for the treatment of the Council of Clermont which demonstrated some of the enthusiasm for the first crusade.

Several specialized books or sections of books were helpful in gaining information concerning the institutions and ideals held by the nobility and how these changed over the course of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Charles Edmond Petit-Dutaillis, The Feudal Monarchy in France and England From the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries (London,

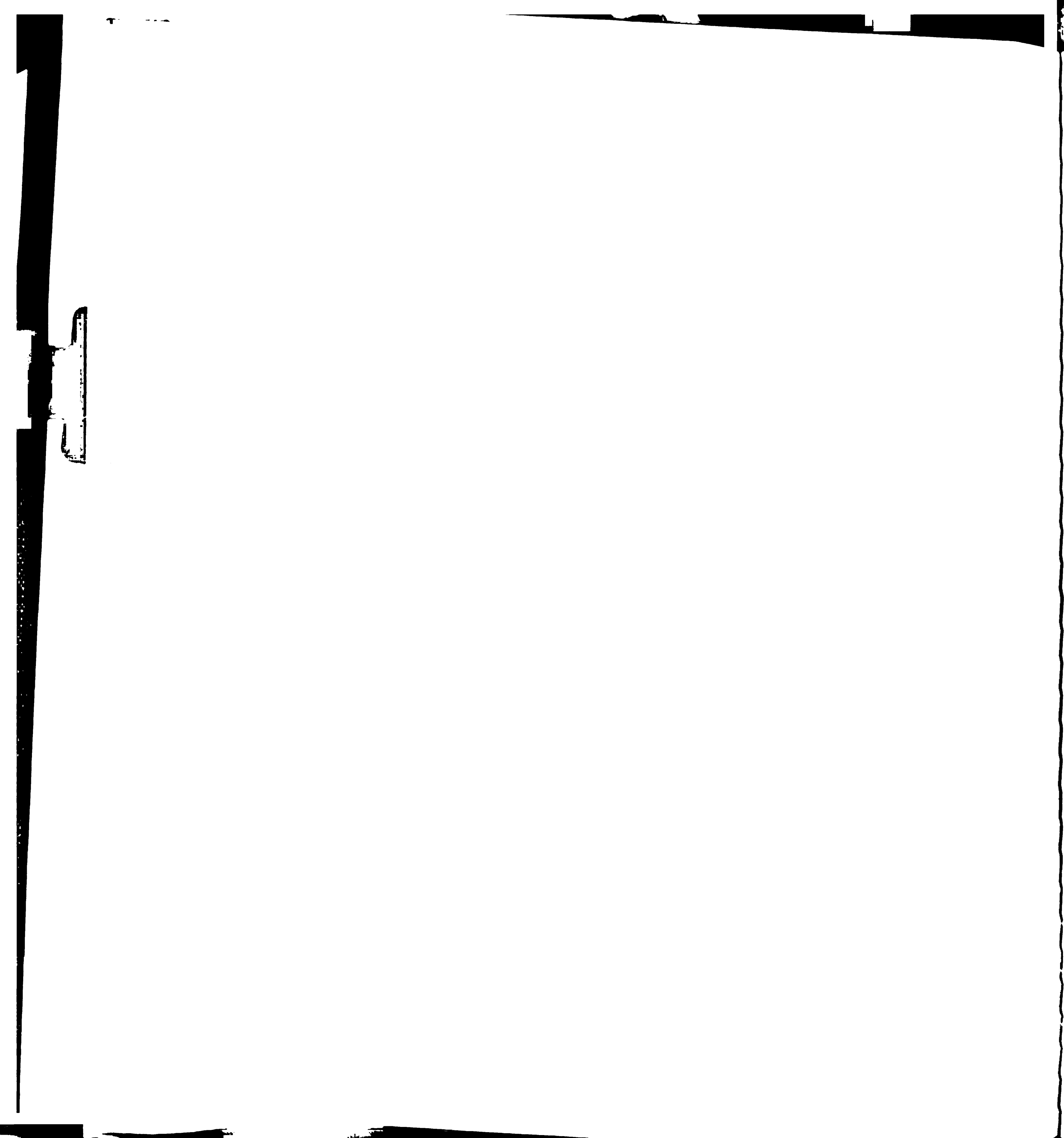
1936), is an excellent background work. Petit-Dutaillis attempts to show that the histories of France and England were tied together from 1000 to 1300 and that feudalism sprang up out of anarchy and successfully filled a need in society. Francois Louis Ganshof, _Feudalism_, trans. Philip Grierson (London, 1952), is probably the best single source from which one can gain a knowledge of the origin and historical development of the feudal institutions. Carl Stephenson's book entitled _Mediaeval Feudalism_ (Ithaca, New York, 1960), presents an excellent complement to the study made by Ganshof. In this short work Stephenson expertly untangles this complicated institution and presents the reader with a clear and readable account of the nature of the various institutions which were so essential to feudalism. John B. Harrison and Richard E. Sullivan, _A Short History of Western Civilization_ (New York, 1960), was also of great value in supplying the author with precise information concerning the origin and nature of the feudal relationship. _Chivalry: A Series of Studies to Illustrate Its Historical Significance and Civilizing Influence_, ed. Edgar Prestage (London, 1928), supplied the author with a great deal of information concerning the role, the duties, and the behavior of the medieval knight. Of special importance was the chapter by F. J. C. Hearnshaw dealing with the historical development of chivalry. Sidney Painter limits his study to France in his excellent book entitled _French_



Chivalry: Chivalric Ideas and Practices in Mediaeval France (Ithaca, New York, 1957). He presents the reader with an interpretation rather than a history of chivalry backing his arguments with data drawn from the most prominent authors of the later Middle Ages. Ramond Lincoln Kilgour wrote The Decline of Chivalry as Shown in the French Literature of the Late Middle Ages (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1937), as a doctoral dissertation and later had it published. It is undoubtedly the most penetrating account of the decline of chivalry that is in print. Henry Osborn Taylor's book entitled The Mediaeval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages, 4th ed., 2 vols. (London, 1938), contains several excellent chapters dealing with knighthood and the decadent state into which it fell. This book is especially useful for its treatment of the emotional and intellectual development which took place during the Middle Ages and one that should not be overlooked by the serious student of this period of history. The author found A. B. Taylor's book entitled An Introduction to Medieval Romance (London, 1930), most helpful in discerning the affect which the medieval romance literature had upon chivalry. Taylor generally tends to be objective and accurate in his treatment of the medieval institutions except he has a tendency to deal with the medieval Church rather harshly.

Periodicals:

Carl Stephenson, "The Origin and Significance of Feudalism," <u>American Historical Review</u>, XLVI (1941), pp. 788-812, contains many valuable insights into the nature of feudalism which were not included in his book on this subject. B. J. H. Rowe wrote three articles which proved helpful in discerning the nature of the loyalties and the general behavior of the nobility in Normandy during the regency of the duke of Bedford. The first two entitled "Discipline in the Norman Garrisons under Bedford, 1422-35," <u>English Historical Review</u>, XLVI (1931), pp. 194-208, and "The Estates of Normandy Under the Duke of Bedford, 1422-35," <u>English Historical Review</u>, XLVI (1931), pp. 551-578, were useful to the author. However her article concerning "John Duke of Bedford and the Norman 'Brigands'," <u>English Historical Review</u>, XLVII (1932), pp. 583-600 was by far the most informative and presented the author with a great deal of useful material concerning the nobility in France.



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