

It was itself a part of Germanic usage. Later on the occasions when the full ceremonial was used, it became a custom for candidates to spend the night before they were to be dubbed knights in prayer and vigil, with their weapons exposed on the altar, and the taking of a ritual bath before the vigil gave rise to the designation "Knights of the bath" - distinguish knights selected for this treatment from others designated dubbed more summarily. Henry the III of England made 46 knights of the bath in 1251.

Thomas Hardy

By the beginning of the 13th century, when the Christianization of Knighthood was incontestable, an ideal of knightly behavior came to be accepted. Much imagination from the later centuries of the middle ages to modern has been put into constructing the code of chivalry; but for the early period of Knighthood (10th-12th centuries) there is little reason to suppose that anything more was asked of the knight than that he should respect the teaching of the gospel, the laws of the church, loyalty to his feudal or military superior, and preserve his personal honour both in war and in civil affairs. Under one or another of these general heads all the detail of chivalry - protection of the weak (women, orphans, religious, etc.) obedience, courage, the pursuit of glory and so on - can be included.

On rare occasions, a knight guilty of some grave infraction of the rules of chivalry would be degraded from knighthood (e.g., for treason or some notorious crime that his superiors or comrades could not condone (ordinarily perhaps from the Christian standard were venial enough, as were successful ruses in war, however dishonourable). His arms and shield would then be publicly smashed and his spurs smitten off.

3) The Crusades and the Religious Orders of Knighthood: From the end of the 11th century the crusades (qv) brought the knights of Christian Europe together in a common cause or enterprise under the auspices of the Church. For a time the chivalrous ideal seemed to be on the point of realization. Knights dubbed at the Tomb of Christ were known as Knights of the Holy Sepulchre. The first orders of knights came into being. These were the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (qv) the Order of the Temple of Solomon aka The Temple or Knights Templar and, rather later, the Order of St. Lazarus, whose special duty was to protect leper hospitals. These were truly international and of an expressly religious nature both in their purpose and in their form, with celibacy for their members and a hierarchical structure (grand master, pillars or lands or provincial masters, grand priors, commanders, knights) resembling that of the church itself. But it was not long before their religious aim gave place to political activity as the orders grew in numbers and in wealth.

At the same time crusading orders with a rather more national bias came into being. In Spain, for the struggle against the Muslims there for the protection of pilgrims, the Orders of Calatrava, of Alcantara and Santiago (St James) were founded in Castile between 1156 and 1171; Portugal had the Order of Avis, founded about the same time; but the Aragon order of Montesa (1317) and Portugal's Order of Christ were not founded till after the dissolution of the Templars. The Teutonic Order, Knights of

These "national" crusading orders followed a course of worldly aggrandizement like that of the international orders; but the crusades in Europe that they undertook, no less than the international enterprises in Palestine, would long attract individual knights from abroad or from outside their ranks. Younger sons of feudal families, with neither the hope of inheriting land from their fathers nor of any inclination to enter the church, were very ready to seek admission to these orders; and as the endowments of the orders increased, the greatest nobility of western Europe placed its younger sons in them.

4) Knighthood and later Feudalism - Between the end of the 11th century and the 13th century and the middle of the 13th a change took place in the relationship of knighthood to feudalism. The feudal lord, whose knights were mainly enfeoffed landholders obliged to render 40 days service annually, had been adequate for defence and for service within a kingdom; but it was scarcely appropriate for the now more frequent long distance expeditions, whether crusades or sustained invasions such as those launched in the Anglo-French wars. The proportion of knights with money-fiefs instead of land fiefs increased proportionately but still the total of knights was insufficient to meet the needs of military requirements, as the steeply rising cost of stronger horses and heavier armour made men more and more reluctant to assume the obligations of knighthood. The result was two-fold: on the one hand the kings, in particular Henry III and Edward I of England - often resorted to distraint of knighthood, that is to compel holders of land above a certain value to come and be dubbed knights and it was at these mass dubbings that the ceremonial was most elaborated; on the other hand, the armies came to be composed more and more largely of mercenary soldiers, with the knights, who had once formed the main body of combatants, reduced to a minority - as it were to a class of officers. In such an army the knight, conspicuous for his personal insignia, would have a row according to his retinue or to his prowess. The greater knights displayed a square banner like that of the feudal magnates and so were called knights banneret, while the others, called knights bachelor, had only a pointed or forked flag, the pennon. The leader of the army could convert a pennon to a banneret status. An Esquire's flag was only a narrow strip of cloth, the penceil.

Heraldry

It is obvious that distraint produced a very different sort of knight from that knight aspiring to valour. By the 13th century, however, the kings were wanting knights for other purposes besides cavalry fighting. In England, the so-called knights of the shires were important links between the king's court and the local administration of the country, which they were often summoned to represent in parliaments and the feudal dues obtainable from knights were another motive for distraints. More frequent recourse to the long standing institute of scutage (qv) whereby the obligation of military service could be remitted on payment of a sum of money, shows further the transformation of knighthood was undergoing.