Court Service

Next in importance to military service was what is usually known as court service. In some fiefs the lord could summon his vassals to his court whenever he pleased. In others their attendance was confined to certain fixed times of year. These assemblies of vassals had several purposes. We have already seen that disputes between lord and vassal over the services due from the vassal's fief were settled by all the lord's vassals in his court. If a vassal committed any offense against his lord, it was tried in this court. Moreover, disputes between vassals of the same lord came to the lord's tribunal. This was the well-known trial by equals or peers that played so important a part in feudal custom. A lord could not legally attack a vassal or deprive him of his fief without a judgment of his peers. Actually in early feudal custom the judgment by the peers meant simply that a reasonable case had been made against the accused, but only if he refused to appear to answer the charge was it a condemnation. If the accused appeared and denied his guilt, one of the vassals who had rendered the judgment had to prove him guilty by defeating him in battle. Thus service in the feudal court could be both onerous and dangerous.

Another purpose of these solemn assemblies of vassals was to give their lord advice. The efficient conduct of the business of the fief was a subject of mutual interest to both lord and vassals, and the former was expected to seek the latter's counsel before taking any important decision. Thus the marriage of the lord was a matter of grave concern to his vassals. A well-chosen wife might add greatly to the lord's power and the strength of the fief as a whole, while a poorly chosen one might be disastrous. Suppose a lord was waver-
ing between two ladies, each of whom would bring a strong castle as a marriage portion. The vassals would want to weigh carefully the strategic value of the two fortresses before advising their lord as to which girl he should marry. A wise lord also asked his vassals' advice before starting a war or any other venture in which he needed their aid. Finally, changes in the custom of the fief were made by the lord with the approval of his vassals. When the kings of England issued decrees, they were careful to record that it was done with the advice and assent of their vassals.

Then at times a lord might want his vassals around him for a quite different purpose. A nobleman's prestige depended on his military power, and military power consisted largely of knightly vassals who would follow him to war. Hence when a lord wanted to make a show of his importance, he summoned his vassals to court. Perhaps it was for the wedding of his daughter or the knighting of his son. Perhaps the king or a great duke was coming on a visit. But whatever the occasion, the vassals were expected to appear to "do honor to their lord." When the writers of romances wanted to indicate how mighty some nobleman was, they described the number and importance of the vassals who surrounded him.

Although military and court service were the personal obligations common to all vassals, in particular cases the feudal agreement might call for the performance of other duties. The seneschal who was the chief administrative officer of the household and the fief, the constable who commanded the lord's castle, the marshal who supervised the care of the war horses, the butler who saw to the wine supply, and any other officials the lord might need who were of knightly rank received fiefs in return for their services. In
the barony of Richmond the lord's two chief vassals were
the seneschal and the constable. The most powerful vassal
of the earl of Chester was the constable of Chester.

*Economic Obligations*

In addition to personal services a vassal had certain eco-
nomic obligations to his lord. One of these was a payment
called relief. The origin of relief can probably be found in
offers made by a vassal or his son to secure the renewal of
the agreement under which a benefice was held when it was
terminated by the death of either the lord or the vassal. Thus
when a lord died, his vassals would offer his heir some in-
ducement to grant them the benefices they held from his
predecessor. The son of a vassal would also offer the lord
something in return for receiving his father's benefice.
When fiefs became hereditary, these customary payments
remained. The relief due at the death of the lord soon dis-
appeared; only occasional cases of it can be found in the
eleventh century. But the relief due from the vassal's heir
when he inherited the fief became a regular feudal obliga-
tion. In the tenth and eleventh centuries before money was
readily obtainable relief was usually a payment in goods;
the horse and armor of the deceased vassal was the most
common requirement. Later it became a money payment.
The amount varied with the relative bargaining powers of
lord and vassal, but there seems to have been a general feel-
ing that it should represent a year's income from the fief.

A vassal was expected to come to his lord's aid whenever
he needed assistance. If the lord was captured in war, it was
the duty of his vassals to contribute to the payment of his
ransom. When the prestige of the lord required that he put
on a particularly magnificent celebration, the vassals were
expected to bear part of the expense. If the lord planned a crusade or a long and costly pilgrimage, he might ask his vassals to help him. In short, whenever a lord saw himself faced with unusual expenses, he was inclined to ask his vassals for an “aid.” Obviously under an impecunious and extravagant lord this obligation could become a serious burden on the vassals. As time went on a distinction was drawn between the occasions when the lord could demand an aid as a right and those on which he had to rely on the good will of his vassals. All lords had the right to demand an aid on three occasions: when the lord was a prisoner and had to be ransomed, when he married his eldest daughter, and when he made his eldest son a knight. In some fiefs the vassals were obliged to contribute when the lord paid relief for his fief. If the lord wanted an aid for any other purpose, he had to persuade his vassals to give it to him.

*Feudal Privileges*

Besides being entitled to the services owed by his vassal, the lord had certain privileges that grew out of the nature of the feudal contract. A vassal could not give his daughter in marriage without his lord’s consent. When a girl was married, she carried with her as a marriage portion a part of her father’s fief. As this meant that her husband would control land held from the lord, he had the right to make certain that the husband was not one who was likely to be his foe. Then when a vassal died leaving a daughter as heiress or a son who was a minor, the lord had the right to insist that some adult male should perform the service due from the fief. If the daughter was of marriageable age, the lord could select a husband for her—in fact it was his duty to do so. In the case of a minor heir or heiress some adult male had to be
given custody of the fief. Here feudal custom varied greatly. A very common rule was to give the custody to the nearest male relative on the mother's side, usually her eldest brother. As he could never succeed to the fief, he was not tempted to do away with the young heir. An uncle on the father's side was a less reliable guardian since he would inherit if the heir were to die. But in many regions the right of custody belonged to the lord. This was true in Normandy, in England, and in other important feudal states. The lord would appoint someone as his representative to look after the fief and perform the service due from it.

Under certain circumstances a lord could seize a fief that was held of him. If a vassal failed to perform the services due from his fief or committed any serious offense against his lord, his peers assembled in the lord's court could condemn him to forfeit his fief. Then if a vassal died without heirs, his fief passed to the lord by escheat. Obviously the frequency of escheat would depend on the rules of inheritance. In theory all descendants of a holder of the fief were possible heirs to it, but in most regions this right of inheritance was restricted in practice. The rights of the brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts of the last tenant were almost universally recognized. First cousins were commonly accepted as heirs. But unless a second cousin was a powerful man whose friendship the lord needed, his chances were usually very slight.

*The Operation of the Feudal System*

Having described the origins, development, and general nature of feudalism, it seems worth while to make some comments on how the system actually operated. One obvious question is: At what stage in the feudal hierarchy from king to simple knight did the most effective power rest? In
the tenth and eleventh centuries before the reappearance of a money economy it seems clear that the most powerful link in the feudal chain was the lowest vassal who possessed a strong castle. If a simple knight who did not have a castle defied his lord and the judgment of his peers given in the lord's court, he could be disciplined with comparative ease. But a strong castle adequately garrisoned made a man almost immune from punishment. It was a poor castle indeed that, given a determined garrison with sufficient supplies, could not hold out for forty days, and few feudal armies could be held together longer than that. If a great feudal prince like the duke of Normandy or the count of Champagne was determined to crush some vassal who had a strong castle, he could do it by calling up part of his feudal levy at a time and so maintaining the siege until the castle was taken, but rarely did anyone want to discipline a vassal that badly. In short, the baron, the man who had one or two strong castles and whose vassals were simple knights, was relatively the most powerful figure in the feudal hierarchy. He could effectively discipline his own vassals and could defy his lord with impunity.

It is important to remember that the feudal system was devised by the warrior class of France to furnish the necessary minimum of political and military co-operation while imposing the least possible restraint on the individual knight. It was the blackest of crimes—a felony—for a vassal to strike his lord, seduce his wife or daughter, or commit any personal offense against his lord. If he murdered a fellow vassal or raped his wife, he could be called to answer for the offense in the lord's court. But as far as feudal custom was concerned he could murder with complete impunity the vassal of some lord other than his own. And feudal law had no interest
whatever in his behavior toward anyone not a member of
the feudal class. In tenth- and eleventh-century France
where the feudal system was almost the only effective political
force, the members of the feudal class had almost complete
personal freedom. As the basic function of this class was
fighting, it was bound to be an age of turbulence and vio-

lence.

As a matter of fact, even where the feudal system should
in theory have checked the warlike tendencies of the nobles,
it did not do so very effectively. Although two vassals of the
same lord could settle their disputes in his court, they usu-
ally preferred to wage war on each other, and the lord was
inclined to let them fight it out. Disputes between a lord and
his vassal often if not usually led to war. Only a weak and
low-spirited vassal would accept an unfavorable decision by
his lord's court; in a matter of any moment, it had to be en-
forced by arms. Then if a vassal felt that his lord had treated
him unjustly, he could issue a formal defiance, renounce his
oath of homage, and go to war against the lord. If he was
defeated, he might lose his fief, but he could usually rely on
the assistance of some enemy of his lord, and after a pleasant
little war the affair would be amiably compromised.

Knighthood

The life of the male members of the feudal class was al-
most entirely devoted to preparing for and pursuing their
occupation: fighting. In the belief that parents, in particular
the mother, would be too indulgent toward a boy, the young
noble was sent off when he was seven or eight to be brought
up in another feudal household, usually that of his parent's
lord or some close relative. Thus young William Marshal
was placed in the care of a relative, the chamberlain of Tan-
carville. The boy was then taught to care for arms, armor, and war horses and to handle them in practice. He lived the hard, rough life best calculated to prepare him for a career as a warrior. When he was considered ready to take his place in battle, usually when he was about twenty or twenty-one, he was given his arms in a solemn ceremony. He knelt before an experienced knight and received a stroke by the hand or the flat of the sword. In the early days this seems to have been a terrific blow intended to knock him out if possible. Later it became a gentle ceremonial tap on the shoulder. This was the "dubbing" of a knight. Once the young man had received his arms and the blow, he was a full-fledged knight. A king could not rule nor could an heir take over the conduct of his fief until he was made a knight. It was the mark of coming of age.

The knight passed most of his time fighting, practicing with his arms, and hunting. Hunting meant riding, violent exercise, and often a dangerous battle with some formidable animal like a wild boar. It was thus closely akin to fighting. When in the twelfth century the growing power of the feudal princes and their desire to keep some sort of order in their lands began to reduce the amount of feudal warfare, the nobles held mock battles called tournaments. A great lord who felt that life was too dull and peaceful would send word around the countryside that he would hold a tournament on a certain day. The knights who came would be divided into two parties and would fight a regular pitched battle. The only differences between these early tournaments and real battles were that refuges were provided where knights could arm themselves and the injured seek safety and that those who were captured were not actually
put in prison. But knights captured in a tournament were expected to pay ransom just as if they had been taken in war. These early tournaments were just about as dangerous as actual battle. It is, however, important to remember that feudal warfare was not very lethal. The knights were well protected by armor, and no one as a rule had any desire to kill his foe. A dead enemy was just a useless corpse, and the slain man’s son was ready to take his place as your foe. But a captive could be held for ransom: a large sum of money or perhaps a village or a strong castle. The decisive battle of Lincoln in 1217 where some five hundred knights fought on each side resulted in the death of one man of knightly rank, and everyone felt very badly about the unfortunate occurrence.

The Place of Women

The women of the feudal caste spent most of their time in spinning, weaving, sewing, and general supervision of the household. Their status was a peculiar one. Under early feudal custom a woman was always in the custody of some male: first her father, then her husband. A widow was in the custody of her lord or her eldest son. A woman could inherit a fief, but she could rule it only through her husband. The reason for this is perfectly obvious. The function of the feudal class was to fight and a woman could not do that. She had no rights whatever against her husband. The writers of the romances clearly consider it quite in order for a husband to knock his wife down and stamp on her face because she annoyed him. The church tried to protect the wife to some extent by limiting the size of the stick with which her husband could beat her, but it also emphasized the
fact that she was the chief source of the world's sin. Nevertheless, though the feudal wife was a very inferior partner, she was her husband's partner. She had no rights he was bound to respect, but she was after him the mistress of his castle and his fief. In the lord's absence vassals, officials, and servants obeyed the lord's wife. In short, although she was without rights toward her husband, she shared his status toward all others.

The Standard of Living

On the material side the life of the feudal class was rough and uncomfortable. The castles were cold and drafty. If a castle was of wood, you had no fire, and if a stone castle allowed you to have one, you smothered in the smoke. Until the thirteenth century no one except a few great feudal princes had a castle providing more than two rooms. In the hall the lord did his business: received his officials and vassals, held his court, and entertained ordinary guests. There the family and retainers ate on trestle tables that at night served as beds for the servants and guests. The chamber was the private abode of the lord and his family. The lord and lady slept in a great bed, their children had smaller beds, and their personal servants slept on the floor. Distinguished visitors were entertained in the chamber. When the lord of the castle wanted a private talk with a guest, they sat on the bed. The lord and his family could have all the food they could eat, but it was limited in variety. Great platters of game, both birds and beasts, were the chief stand-by, reinforced with bread and vast quantities of wine. They also had plenty of clothing, but the quality was largely limited by the capacity of the servant girls who made it. In short, in the tenth and eleventh centuries the noble had two re-
sources, land and labor. But the labor was magnificently inefficient and by our standards the land was badly tilled. Not until the revival of trade could the feudal class begin to live in anything approaching luxury.

Religious Faith

In accord with the atmosphere of the age in which they lived the members of the feudal aristocracy were intensely devout. With some few possible exceptions they accepted absolutely the teachings of the Christian church. They might sin with vigor and enthusiasm, but they repented and atoned equally thoroughly. Although the crusaders who set forth to fight the Moslems in Spain and the Holy Land were by no means moved by purely spiritual considerations, there can be little doubt that their paramount motive was the desire for salvation. Moreover, every fief of any importance had its monastic establishment, and the great feudal families were the founders and patrons of numerous monasteries. Every lord had his chaplain and every feudal residence some sort of a chapel. A large proportion of the gross revenues of most fiefs were assigned to religious purposes, and by the thirteenth century we find once important baronies reduced to insignificance by generations of munificent friends of the church. One must, moreover, be careful not to judge the devoutness of a feudal lord by individual acts. Peter of Dreux, duke of Brittany, was a bitter foe of the Breton bishops and was guilty of atrocities against certain clergymen. At times his actions seemed those of a complete sceptic. Yet he built the south porch of Chartres cathedral and went on two crusades, in addition to making many gifts to cathedral chapters and monastic houses.
Chivalry

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries there grew out of the environment and way of life of the feudal class a system of ethical ideas that we call chivalry: virtues appropriate to the knight or chevalier. Chivalry was not a logical, consistent system of ethics. Its basic ideas sprang from a variety of sources and were often inconsistent with one another. Hence it is convenient to speak of three types of chivalry. In what may be called "feudal chivalry" the basic ideas developed naturally out of the way of life of the feudal noble. "Religious chivalry," on the other hand, represented the church's conception of the ideal knight. Finally, the ideas that are usually called those of "courtly love" were nourished by the ladies and by men whose chief object was to please them.

The German warriors had brought with them into the Roman Empire an admiration for the warrior virtues: courage and prowess in battle. They also valued the sound judgment that the feudal age was to call wisdom and fidelity to one's plighted word, later known as loyalty. Respect for these virtues was not a recent acquisition of the Frankish nobles. Their importance among the Germanic peoples can be clearly seen by a reader of the Norse sagas and Anglo-Saxon literature. But they were peculiarly applicable to feudal society. A man whose chief function was fighting had to be brave and effective in battle. Wisdom was a necessary attribute of the successful captain. The whole structure of the feudal system depended on respect for one's oath of homage and fidelity. These were the basic feudal virtues and formed the core of feudal chivalry.

The earliest ethical ideas of the feudal class concerned
their chief occupation and were designed to make war more pleasant for its participants. Armor was heavy and extremely hot under the blazing sun. No knight wanted to wear his armor when he was simply riding about, yet no knight was ever entirely safe from sudden attack by an enemy. Hence the idea developed that it was highly improper to attack an unarmed knight. You could ambush your foe, but you did not attack him until he had had time to put on his armor and prepare for battle. Then the chief purpose of feudal warfare was to take prisoners who could be ransomed. In the early days you put your prisoner in chains and dumped him in an unused storage bin under your hall. But this was highly unpleasant for the prisoner—and he was likely to be the captor next time. Soon it was the custom to treat a knightly prisoner as an honored guest. The next step was to accept a son or nephew as a hostage while the captive collected his ransom. By the thirteenth century it was usual to release a captured knight on his pledge to return if he could not raise his ransom. The early tournaments were, as has been suggested, merely arranged battles. But the knights who fought in them felt it necessary to rationalize their activity. Hence they soon believed that they fought in tournaments not for amusement or to profit by ransoms but to win glory. As time went on the tournaments were surrounded by various courteous customs, and eventually these customs developed in tournaments were carried over into actual warfare. To Froissart the Hundred Years’ War was just a vast series of pleasant and amusing jousts between noble knights whose only purpose was the desire for glory. Perhaps the high point of chivalric behavior was the return of King John of France to prison in England when he found he could not raise his ransom, unless it be the action of a
noble lord who hanged one of his infantrymen because he had had the bad taste to kill a knight in battle.

One more virtue of feudal chivalry requires mention: generosity. In most societies men have admired the giver of lavish gifts, and this was a marked trait among the Germans. But this virtue assumed an unusually important place in the feudal code of chivalry. Although the concepts of feudal chivalry sprang from the feudal environment, they were popularized and made universally known by professional story tellers. The evenings dragged heavily in the gloomy castles, and knights and ladies were avid for entertainment. This was supplied by various types of wanderers. There were the tellers of bawdy stories, the dancing bears, and dancing girls. But there were also trouvères who composed and recited long tales in verse and minstrels who sang the compositions of others. It was through these stories that the ideas of chivalry were spread. The livelihood of the singers and composers depended on the generosity of their patrons. Hence in their stories generosity was inclined to become the chief of all knightly virtues.

The Influence of the Church

Throughout the period in which feudalism was developing the church had consistently attempted to curb feudal warfare and turn the energies of the knights into what it considered more useful channels. The church preached vigorously its official doctrine that the taking of booty in war was sinful; on his deathbed in 1218 William Marshal complained of the rigidity of the church in this respect. In the eleventh century it decreed and tried to enforce the Truce and Peace of God, periods in which warfare was forbidden, and to protect noncombatants. It seems likely that in the
minds of churchmen one purpose of the crusades was to divert knightly energy into war against the Moslems. Then in the twelfth century various ecclesiastical writers, the best known of whom was John of Salisbury, began to develop the church’s conception of the perfect knight. He would be a devout Christian whose chief purpose would be to protect the church and its faith. He would faithfully serve his lawful prince. He would put down crime of all sorts and care for the weak and helpless. To strengthen its propaganda the church advanced the theory that knights formed an order like the clergy. The knight was appointed by God to fight in His service. The clergy encouraged the use of religious ceremonies in making a young man a knight and developed a complicated ritual for this purpose. The church’s ideals of knightly behavior were expressed in treatises, in sermons, and also in literary works. When the noted trouvère Chrétien de Troyes wrote his *Perceval le Gallois*, he intended to depict the perfect Christian knight. A more extreme expression of the ideas of religious chivalry can be found in the stories about Galahad.

*Courtly Love*

The ideas of courtly love first appeared in lyric poetry composed in southern France in the second half of the eleventh century. The men and women who composed these poems were called troubadours. Scholars are not in agreement whether the origins of troubadour poetry are to be found in remnants of classical poetry preserved as folk songs or in the love poetry of the Moslems in Spain. At any rate, professional entertainers in southern France began to write poems glorifying ladies and describing the benefits to be derived from adoring them. The idea appealed to the greatest
feudal prince of the region, William IX, duke of Aquitaine. Soon the composing of lyric love poems or at least the appreciation of them had become fashionable throughout southern France, the land of the langue d'oc. The ideas of the troubadours were few and comparatively simple. The adoration of a lady improved a man in every way. It made him a better poet, a wiser lord, and a braver knight. A lady won adoration by her beauty, her kindness, her gaiety, and her wisdom. The adorer of a lady could think of nothing but pleasing her; a slight smile from her filled him with delight. He had no interest in food and drink and was unaware whether he was hot or cold. All his thoughts and feelings were centered in his lady.

Most of the troubadour love poems were addressed to great ladies by men of comparatively humble station. If the troubadour did not want to find himself hanging from some castle tower, his adoration had to be distant and respectful, and a smile was about all the response he could expect. Presumably he was rewarded for his verse by gifts or at least by a long period of entertainment in the castle. Most of the nobles who composed poems adopted the conventions of their lesser colleagues. Hence most troubadour poetry not only glorified woman but placed her on a pedestal far above the humble lover. It is, however, interesting to notice that this idea did not occur to Duke William IX. He was a great lord and a lusty lover. No one is left in any doubt as to the reward he expected for his poems.

Troubadour poetry was not an isolated phenomenon. The same period that saw its birth and development witnessed a general rise in the status of women. The Virgin Mary, who had previously occupied a comparatively minor place in the Christian cult, became the chief intercessor
with her Son for sinful man. In his youth the great Pope
Innocent III wrote troubadour poems to the Virgin. In western France Robert d’Arbrissel founded a monastic order for
noble women, the famous house of Fontevrault. There had,
of course, always been nunneries, but they had lacked the
prestige, wealth, and dignity of the great monastic founda-
tions. Fontevrault could match in importance any monas-
tery in the land. In short, throughout western Europe the
late eleventh century saw a decided appreciation of the
status of woman in the civilization as a whole.

Eleanor of Aquitaine

The ideas of courtly love spread to northern France in
the train of Eleanor, duchess of Aquitaine, granddaughter
of the troubadour William IX. Eleanor’s first husband was
King Louis VII of France, a gentle, pious man who had
little appreciation for his gay and high-spirited queen and
her southern attendants. When it began to appear that
Eleanor would not produce a male heir for the Capetian
house, Louis had the marriage annulled. Eleanor promptly
married Henry, duke of Normandy and count of Anjou,
who was soon to become King Henry II of England.
Eleanor was a patroness of all sorts of men of letters but
particularly of troubadours. One of the greatest of all the
troubadours, Bernard de Ventadour, served her for many
years. Her second son, Richard, known to history as the
Lion-Hearted, was a patron of poets and composed some
poems himself. But more important in the development of
courtly love were Eleanor’s two daughters by Louis VII,
Marie and Alice. Marie married the most powerful and rich-
est feudal prince of France, Henry the Liberal, count of
Champagne. With plenty of money at her disposal she made
her court the center for composers of works about love. Her sister Alice married Henry’s younger brother, Theobald, count of Blois and Chartres, and she maintained at her court a lesser circle of literary men.

The men and women of northern France wanted something more solid than the rather vague ideas of the troubadours. If they were to sing and talk about love, they wanted to define it, examine its symptoms, and work out rules for its practice. The men of the Middle Ages were accustomed to look for the knowledge they needed in the great storehouse of classical learning. There they found a book seemingly exactly suited to their purpose, Ovid’s *Art of Love*. This work was translated into French by Marie’s favorite writer, Chrétien de Troyes. Another attaché of Marie’s court, Andrew the chaplain, wrote a treatise on love to guide his contemporaries. Chrétien wrote a series of stories in which courtly love was an important theme. Moreover, Marie and her ladies amused themselves by holding “courts of love” at which questions dealing with the practice of this fashionable sport were debated.

The devotees of courtly love believed that they had made a great discovery and they were probably even more right than they realized. They thought that the love they were interested in had existed in classical times and had been discussed by Ovid. Now, although there are grounds for grave doubts that what we call “romantic love,” the courtly love of the Middle Ages, can be found in classical literature, it is unwise to press the argument too vigorously. But there is no doubt that the love Ovid wrote about should be spelled lust. And certainly there was no romantic love in the early Middle Ages. A knight married to get a marriage portion and sons to succeed him; love did not enter into the matter. His
vigorous lust was well cared for by the prostitutes who frequented the castles and by peasant girls. This conviction on the part of its devotees that courtly love was new and different led to an interesting conception, that of the incompatibility of love and marriage. A wife had to perform her marital duties, and love could never come through compulsion. This they cheerily supported by citing the ancient doctrine of the church that intercourse in marriage was justified only when there was a desire to beget children, not for mere entertainment. And the northern followers of courtly love had left far behind the conception of love as a distant admiration for a woman on a pedestal. To them love was love with no reservations.

The Courts of Love

The ideas that circulated at Marie's court are expressed largely in the treatise of Andrew the chaplain and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. Thus Andrew discusses the interesting question as to whether or not a peasant could love. To him "No" was the obvious answer. Let a knight rape the peasant girl who caught his fancy; she could not appreciate the delicate maneuvers of the courtly lover. Then Andrew speaks of a decision by Countess Marie in her court of love. A knight had asked a lady to allow him to be her courtly lover. She had answered that she already had one, but that he could have the position if a vacancy occurred. When she married her lover, the substitute demanded that she accept him. Marie agreed with the knight. As marriage was incompatible with love, when the lady married, the position as her lover became vacant. Andrew even supplies a code of the laws of love. But perhaps the supreme expression of the courtly ideas to come from
Marie's circle is the *Lancelot* or *Le Chevalier de la charrette* of Chrétien de Troyes. Here Lancelot, the best knight in the world, renounces all that feudal chivalry prized for the sake of love. He loves Guenevere, his lord's wife, which was deep felony in feudal law. He rides in a hangman's cart, the deepest disgrace a knight could face. He allows himself to be driven ignominiously from a tournament by his opponents. He even refuses to sleep with a charming lady who offers him shelter and food when he is tired and hungry if he will be her bedmate. Thus to Lancelot all the ordinary knightly desires are of no importance; all that matters is his love for Queen Guenevere. Chrétien had his doubts about the propriety of this story. He was careful to assert that Marie had furnished the material and told him how to handle it. Soon after composing *Lancelot*, he went into the service of Count Philip of Flanders and wrote the eminently proper *Perceval*. But Lancelot remained the great hero of courtly love.

*The Chansons de Geste*

Before closing our discussion of chivalry, a little more extended discussion seems in order of the literature that gave expression to chivalric ideas. Feudal chivalry comes to life in the *chansons de geste*, long narrative poems. These were obviously intended for the feudal male. Their chief components are endless accounts of battles and stories of feudal intrigue. We hear how the hero hacked his foes to pieces and how he outmaneuvered them in some feudal court. Women appear only as noble mothers sending their sons to battle, as wives being beaten for indiscreet remarks, or as beautiful princesses, either Christian or Moslem, burning
with desire to sleep with the hero and with no reluctance about making their wants known. Moslem princesses had one advantage from the composer's point of view: they had to be baptized eventually, and this involved undressing them and describing their charms in detail. Some chansons de geste had a religious element: the hero might fight the Moslems or be the benefactor of a monastery. The most beautiful of the chansons de geste and one of the earliest, the famous Chanson de Roland, is devoted almost exclusively to fighting and feudal intrigue, but the fighting was against the Moslem foes of God. Religious chivalry is best expressed in treatises by such ecclesiastics as John of Salisbury, in sermons, and in a few romances like Perceval and Galahad. We have already said a good deal about the literature of courtly love. The poems of the troubadours, those of northern poets called trouvères who wrote in the same tradition, treatises like that of Andrew the chaplain, and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes express the ideas of courtly love very fully. Then there was Marie de France, who wrote little short tales in which some of the conceptions of courtly love appear, but who was no devotee of the cult. Her Lais, as they were called, give us the best idea of noble life in the twelfth century that can be found in any source. Finally, we have the vast group of Arthurian stories. The basic material of the Arthurian legends was drawn from Welsh folk stories, a source used freely by Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France. To these stories were added whatever pleased the writer. In Lancelot and Tristram and Iseult the addition is mostly courtly love. Perceval and Galahad were Welsh tales written from the point of view of religious chivalry. But a number of the Arthurian tales, perhaps the majority, bear
the clear impress of the ideas of feudal chivalry. They consist of battle after battle and joust after joust. Thus if one reads through the Arthurian cycle even in its latest mediaeval form, the *Morte d'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, one will find all three types of chivalry worked into the background of Welsh folklore.