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CHIVALRY AND THE MILITARY OFFICER: AN HISTORICAL AND LITERARY INQUIRY

A Trident Scholar Project Report

by

Midshipman Jeffrey E. McFadden

United States Naval Academy

Annapolis, Maryland

Wilson L. Heflin
Professor Wilson L. Heflin

Accepted for Trident Committee

Chairman

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-And of course, to my parents, John and Linda, the two most wonderful people I have ever known.

ABSTRACT

This study will utilize pertinent works of literature and biography to trace the literary and historical development of the concept of chivalry as it has been adopted and applied by the military officer. Following an investigation of the origins of the medieval conception of the ideal, the study will focus on two major figures who stand as chivalric exemplars: Sir Gawain and Vice Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson.

Where practicable, the study will concentrate on aspects of chivalry relating to naval officers and the naval service. The final chapter of the paper will discuss the application of the discoveries made, with the hope that the findings may prove useful to future classes of midshipmen at the Naval Academy.

CHAPTER 1

PRELIMINARIES

On June 8, 1978, the Russian dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn delivered a speech at Harvard University's commencement which challenged the roots of modern western civilization. Entitled A World Split Apart, the address sought to expose the rifts which have left the free world in such a precarious position. Solzhenitsyn declared that a lack of moral courage is responsible for the downward trend of the world today:

> A decline in courage may be the most striking feature which an outside observer notices in the West in our days. The Western world has lost its civil courage, both as a whole, and separately, in each country, each government, each political party, and of course in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling groups and the intellectual elite, causing an impression of loss of courage by the entire society.[1]

One can only wonder how prevalent this lack of courage is in our own military organizations. In an age in which the superpowers are neck-and-neck in an accelerated arms race, what will be the final determining factor in victory or defeat? What will be the consequences, if indeed the United States Armed Forces fall under this charge? Solzhenitsyn's answer is a question:

> Should one point out that from ancient times decline in courage has been considered the beginning of the end?[2]

* * * * * * * * * *

At the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale, a Medal of Honor winner who spent seven and a half years as a Prisoner of War in Viet Nam, is teaching a course entitled

"Foundations of Moral Obligation." As a lieutenant commander doing graduate work at Stanford University, Admiral Stockdale had been introduced to moral philosophies which would eventually enable him to withstand mentally and physically the brutality and humiliation of life as a POW. Through the study of works by such authors as Aristotle, Epictetus, Descartes, Kafka and Camus, Stockdale now hopes to provide his students at the War College with "historical perspective," to inspire the type of moral fibre or collective faith which he believes is a vital part of every officer's education. An education in leadership. As the Admiral himself says:

> I think psychologists would say that leadership is innate, and there is some truth in that. But, I also think you can learn some leadership traits that naturally accrue from a good education: compassion is a necessity for leaders, as are spontaneity, bravery, self-discipline, honesty, and above all, integrity.[3]

Our vocabularies today are riddled with such terms as "systems analysis," "corporate managerial techniques," and "technological competence." Many of the truths which permeate man's history are buried under mountains of technical manuals and paperwork. What are these truths? Are they recoverable? How much emphasis should be placed on leadership in the modern military world? And, if these ideals are recoverable, what are their sources?

* * * * * * * * * *

The Honorable Claire Booth Luce came to the Naval Academy on December 5, 1978, and delivered a speech entitled History and the Nature of Man, discussing her own beliefs in the applicability of the lessons of

history to the contemporary world. It is her belief that the study of man's past provides one with invaluable clues to human nature, clues which serve as guideposts for the future. Quoting Cicero, she says:

> To be ignorant of what happened before you were born is to be ever a child, [for] what is a man's lifetime unless the memory of past events is woven with those of earlier times?[4]

Mrs. Luce emphasized the relationship between social order and collective faith. Polybius observed over twenty-two centuries ago that, "A scrupulous fear of the Gods is the very thing that keeps the Roman Commonwealth together."[5] Reflecting on our own society, and the rise of cultism - Sun Yung Moon, Charles Manson and Jim Jones - is there a need for a return to some sort of collective faith? Is society, especially military society, in need of heroes, and if so, can heroes exist in the Twentieth Century?

* * * * * * * * * *

Almost four years ago I raised my right hand and took the oath of a midshipman in the United States Navy. Above and beyond a myriad of reasons for coming to the Naval Academy, I sought an education which would develop in me the highest standards of moral courage and integrity. Among the vast complexities of an essentially technical education, I sought meaning for the words "honor" and "conduct," concepts which seemed to drift rootlessly in and out of the daily lives of midshipmen. It wasn't long before I began asking myself, "What is the relationship between tradition and behavior?" For some reason, I believed that not all tradition hindered change, that the true function of tradition is to provide a sense of

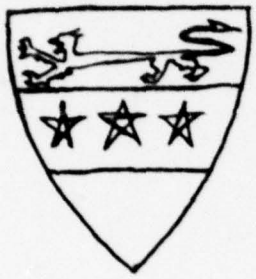
continuity and identity to those precepts to which we were asked to adhere.

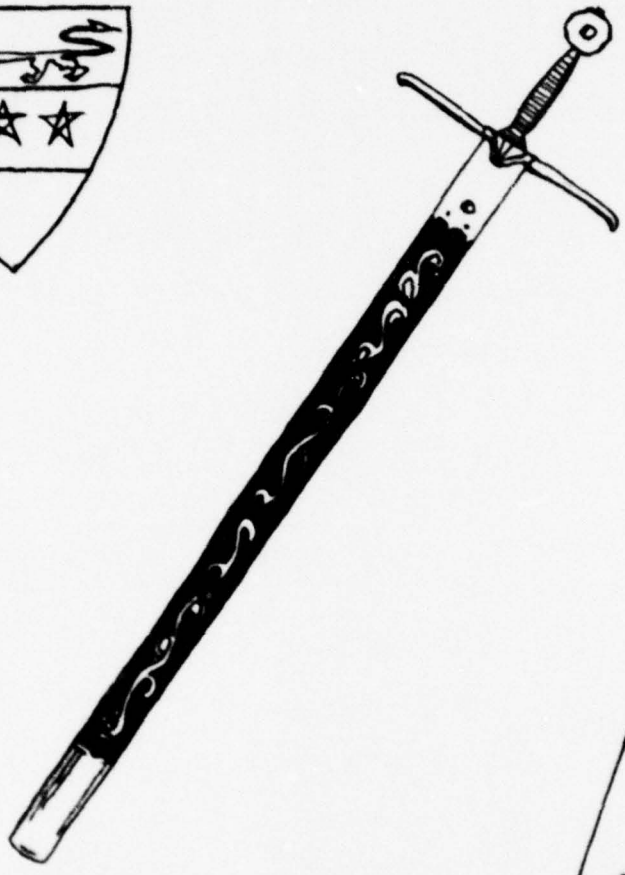
During Plebe Summer, each new midshipman was required to memorize the origins of different uniform items: the black neckerchief for instance, and the bib on the collar of our white works. I will never forget how much more meaningful those uniforms became to me, when I realized what they stood for. But as the rigor of academics engulfed us all, our tradition education came to an abrupt halt. Day after day, the belief that "the good naval officer is the technically competent one" was drummed into our heads, while words like "duty, honor, country" were seldom heard and often scoffed at.

Little by little, I began to acquire a sense of what life as a naval officer was really all about, but knowledge came in small, sporadic fragments, usually discovered unexpectedly, on the fringes of my education. At the same time I saw an Honor Concept, an Administrative Conduct System, and a Navy, all of which, I felt, were suffering from an identity crisis.

The three references with which this chapter opens are only a small sampling of the innumerable statements which began having a tremendous influence on my perceptions of moral education at the Naval Academy. All seemed to share one common denominator: The truths which have withstood the test of time are too important to overlook, and that we are fools to disregard them by devoting too much attention to daily problem-solving. And so, the questions became: What are those truths, where do they originate, and how can we apply them to our own lives?

As I began searching for possible research topics, I discovered what I knew I had to look into. In essence, this project seeks to answer those





questions, because I saw so much of what we stand for morally today, summed up in one pervading concept: Chivalry. It seemed to be precisely what that famous quote attributed to John Paul Jones truly stood for:

> It is by no means enough that an officer of the Navy should be a capable mariner. He must be that of course, but also a great deal more. He should be as well a gentleman of liberal education, refined manners, punctilious courtesy, and the nicest sense of personal honor.

That quote, one of the many I had to commit to memory Plebe Summer, is my starting point.

Through a careful study of exemplary writings of the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, I will attempt to define, and trace the uses of the concept of chivalry, in an effort to determine both its influence on the behavior and ideals of the military officer, and its applicability to modern leadership.

The study will concentrate on two major literary and historical figures: Sir Gawain and Admiral Horatio Nelson, attempting to discover common standards of honor and conduct which manifest themselves in some of the poems, novels, letters, and biographies written about these two exemplars of chivalry. Ultimately, I hope to find a light by which we may steer our own courses as future leaders in the United States Navy and Marine Corps. And where is that guide, I ponder:

> Alas, where is the guide, that fond Virgin Ariadne, to supply the simple clue that will give us courage to face the Minotaur, and the means then to find our way to freedom when the monster has been met and slain?[6]

And so, the search for Ariadne begins.

You who would (take upon you) the order of Knighthood,
It is fitting you should lead a new life;
Devoutly watching in prayer
Fleeing from sin, pride, and villainy;
The church you must defend
And succour the widow and orphan;
Be bold and guard the people;
Loyal and valiant (knights) taking naught from others,
Thus should a knight rule himself.

He should have a humble heart, should work alway
And follow deeds of Chivalry;
Loyal in war, and a great traveller
He should frequent Tourneys and joust for his lady love,
He must keep honours with all
So that he cannot be held to blame
Nor cowardice be found in his doings;
And above all he should uphold the weak;
Thus should a knight rule himself.

He should love his rightful lord
And above all guard his domain,
Have generosity, be a faithful judge,
Seek the company of valiant knights,
Hearkening to their words and learning (from them)
And understanding the prowess of the brave
Until he can (himself) do knightly deeds,
As aforetime did King Alexander,
Thus should a knight rule himself.

- From the Ballad of Eustache Deschamps[7]

CHAPTER II

CHIVALRY DEFINED

Chivalry's Historical and Cultural Evolution

It was an age of great extremes. Long nights spent shivering between cold grey castle walls, or on the dirt floor of a stone, thatched-roof hut. Serfs toiling in their leige-lord's fields, sweating under their coarse clothing in the blazing July heat. Lords stuffing their mouths with capon and sack while fiefs struggled to stay healthy and alive. All across the English and French countrysides, warriors carried out "justice" in the form of public brutality: judicial punishment became a spectator sport, whose only escape was mercy. There was a passion for thirst and revenge; to exist was to lead a violent, high-strung life. And everywhere, a general feeling of impending calamity and disaster pervaded the soul of every man, woman, and child.[8]

This was feudalism, an economic system of necessity, in which "an oath between lord and vassal was the only form of government."[9] Several major events added to this atmosphere of pessimism. Between 1300 and 1350 a mini-Ice Age swept Europe, destroying countless crops, and giving way to one of the most horrifying epidemics in human history: the Black Plague. The disease left over one-third of Europe's population dead, and the remaining two thirds in utter fear. Total adherence to a Christian doctrine that was riddled with pagan superstition and ritual, grew into an obsession. And with the Turkish peril of the East threatening, in 1095 the first of many Holy Crusades began.

In the midst of this incredible social disorder, right and justice, two absolutes, began trying to find expression.

Wars with the Middle East eventually gave way to a succession of Anglo-French conflicts in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, the most devastating of which was the Hundred Year's War. Major events continued to turn moral convention into chaos: In England, 1399, Richard the Second was dethroned and secretly murdered; in France, Louis of Orleans was murdered in 1407, and Jean sans Peur, the famous knight, was assasinated in 1419.[10] Feudalism evolved into the "Third Estate," marking the rise of the aristocracy and monarchism. As the Western European population began growing again, as trade with the Middle East and Northern Africa began to flourish, a defined class structure began to replace feudal society. In essence, countries like England and France were becoming monarch-centered, rather than lord-centered. With this change, an attempt was made to bring social order to the masses through a political and spiritual hierarchy. At the summit of this great "chain of command" was God, and his nine orders of angels, followed by the king, who had two bodies, a spiritual one and an earthly one. He was the link between man and God. Directly under the king was man, followed by women, animals, vegetables, and so on. But the basic flaw of this "Great Chain of Being" lay in its Christian/pagan roots. Although religion served as a strong moral base during the Middle Ages, its basic tenets took man's destiny out of his hands. Emphasis was placed on life after death; life itself was merely suffering from original sin, and torment, could only end through the salvation of death. On the very same manuscripts which depict the

hierarchies of God and man, one finds images of the Goddess Fortuna, the Fates, and the Wheel of Fortune. All of these images, Christian and pagan, totally controlled man's future.

And so this feeling of helplessness and disorder continued to trouble medieval society. Kings found it impossible to establish moral order because there were no common moral precepts to which one could relate. Christianity was fine for salvation, but what about quelling the constant uprisings, both at home and abroad? How could a ruler bring a people together when they were all convinced the world was coming to an end? Literature provided an answer.

In France and England, before printing had even been discovered, minstrels and troubadours, or "scops" as they were known then, roamed the countryside, singing ballads of the personalities and deeds of heroes like Roland and Arthur. Their songs marked the beginning of the Oral Traditiion in French and English literature. Passed on from generation to generation in song and in poetry, the deeds of the hero served as inspiration to listeners, because all the tales celebrated a basic idea in which all men could find pride and identity; that a sense of Right dwells naturally in the heart of man.[12] As these tales grew in popularity, Christian leaders saw them as a means of countering non religious beliefs, adding a spiritual element to man's heroic past. Priests and clergymen hoped that examples of courage and piety would excite emulation; and that is precisely what happened. By the end of the Thirteenth Century, works of prose known as "romances" began appearing.[13] Cistercian monks toiled to translate tales such as The Quest for the Holy Grail, The Song of Roland, and Sir Gawain

and the Green Knight. What was it that all of these romances had in common, and what explanation exists for their widespread appeal in the Middle Ages? What prompted Sir Thomas Malory to set down Le Morte d'Arthur in 1485?[14]

It was chivalry (a word derived from the French "cheval," or horse), a concept which would serve as a cultural bridge between the ages of Arthur, Chaulemagne, and Charles the Bold. What became vitally important in these ancient tales was not the conflicts themselves, but the "pictures of manners," the modes of thinking which transformed the ordinary man into an heroic and ennobled one. This, then, was a moral and spiritual goal towards which every man could look, a life of courtesy to equals, invincible strength, compassion to weakness, valor, justice, modesty, loyalty to superiors, and a devotedness to the church.[15]

Chivalry and medieval society

In its early days, chivalry was founded on feudal obligations, and was closely bound up with the military obligations of fiefs.[16] There was no written law between a feudal lord and the people who served him; thus, a man's word was held sacred. Three principal ceremonies between lord and vassal grew out of this mutual trust, the symbiotic relationship of "you work for me and I'll protect you": The vassal would kneel before the lord, then place his hands in the lord's, pledging to become "his man," bound to defend life and honor.[17] Ceremony was one of the keys to this new way of thinking and behaving, for ceremony meant order, and order meant power.

But chivalry did not acquire its true status as an order of personal nobility until the time of the Crusades. Somehow, Richard the First of England had to convince his people to arm themselves, and travel

thousands of miles to face the Turks, an enemy who was virtually unknown to them. Richard's answer was found in the fusion of Christian and martial spirits: "Fight for God, slay for God, God will make us victorious." In essence, however, the ultimate effect of this merge was an end to the feudal restrictions of lord and vassal; chivalry ennobled the individual, it put destiny back into man's hands, and turned doomsday pessimism into "fight-for-the-Right" optimism.[18] But this was a feeling shared only by the warriors who actually fought in the crusades; how did this new found ideal take shape in medieval society in general?

It is important to note here that unlike divisions in society today, there was no great separation between the military and civilians in the Middle Ages. Essentially, the king's rule was martial rule. Every boy aspired to a military career. As chivalry began to flower during the Crusades, its seeds were planted in the courts of the aristocracy. It became "a sublime form of secular life," an aesthetic ideal which ultimately took the form of an ethical one.[19] Its conception revolved around a desire to return to the perfection of an imaginary past, focused on the imitation of the ideal hero, and the pastoral life.[20] Thus, the lives of men and women in the Arthurian legends for example, moved from antiquity to a Fourteenth Century pattern for living. The "Third Estate," the new aristocracy, sought identity, and they found it in all that constituted ceremony and etiquette. In this age of extreme passion and violence, people sensed the aesthetic and moral value of manners.[21] For they believed as Goethe later said:

> There is not an outward sign of politeness which has not a profound moral foundation.

And they believed as Emerson later did, that: "Politeness is virtue gone to seed."[22]

Through a strict adherance to manners and custom, the aristocracy found self-worth, and a sense of identity with a culture hundreds of years older than their own. It was a common belief that this dream of past perfection ennobled life and its forms, in a world "gilded by chivalrous romanticism, disguised in the fantastic gear of the Round Table."[23] Of course, like any other ideal, chivalry had its human, as well as spiritual characteristics. For instance, the chivalrous traits of compassion, sacrifice, and fidelity were both religious and erotic. "Sensuality was transformed into a craving for self-sacrifice, a desire to show courage and incur danger."[24] That the ideal was emotionally based or spiritually based (for the two are often difficult to separate), is less important than the emergence of the ideal itself.

Many historians believe that chivalry was nothing more than a plaything of the aristocracy, a fantasy world which had no real bearing on the course of human events in the Middle Ages. But the balladiers, the scops, were commoners who sang to the working man; chivalry ennobled and preached that all men were equal. Its growth during the Crusades put an end to feudalism. People began believing that true nobility was based on virtue, that a king was noble because of his valor and honor. By the Fourteenth Century, Learning, Faith, and Chivalry became the three flowers of society.[25]

Perhaps Joseph Campbell, in his Hero with a Thousand Faces, best describes what medieval man saw in chivalry:

> To bring those images back to life, one has to seek not interesting applications to modern affairs, but illuminating hints from the inspired past. When these are found, vast areas of half-dead iconography disclose again their permanently human meaning.[26]

Long after Feudalism had faded, chivalry continued to have an effect on thinking, manifested in moving powers of political and social evolution found in warlike and courtly nobility. Again, the establishment of order was chivalry's chief contribution to medieval society, "all emotions required a rigid system of conventional forms, for without them, passion and ferocity would have made havoc of life."[27]

Turning to literature once again, one can see what a profound effect chivalry had on all aspects of livlihood, including Christianity. In Piers Plowman, the author refers to the soldier who pierces Jesus' side as a "knight who came forth with his spear in his hand and jousted with Jesus," and in Le Morte D'Arthur, Malory calls Joseph of Arimathea, the man who buried Jesus, "the gentle knight."[28]

The gentle knight. Now that so much attention has been paid to chivalry's effect on society, what about the evolution of knightly chivalry, the concept with which this paper must concern itself.

Knightly Chivalry

In the Middle Ages, a military career was not simply a profession, it was a way of life. Perhaps the term military is inaccurate. Formalized barbarism may be closer to the truth. Military law or ethics was unheard of: one simply killed, or was killed. An atmosphere somewhat similar to the "Wild West" of American history dominated the scene. Feudal lords were fighters; their end of the bargain was to protect the serf who worked

on his land. There was no allegiance to a superior because the superior was hundreds of miles away, practically in another world. But with the emergence and influence of chivalry came knighthood, a formal "education in arms." Chivalry became for knights what Marxism later became for workers: a unifying ideal.

The process of becoming a knight began at age seven, where a young boy chosen by older knights, began his education. Instruction started in the rudiments of the chase, and of hunting and falconry. The young boy became learned in "letters," or the basic medieval "curriculum":

> Grammar - the foundation of Science
> Logic - differentiates True from False
> Rhetoric - the source of Law
> Arithmetic - the foundation of Order
> Geometry - the science of Measurement
> Astronomy - the most noble of the sciences - connected with Divinity and Theology
> Music - analagous to Medicine (bodily harmony)[29]

Even then, a well-rounded education was a key to success as a warrior. One immediately notes how chivalry-related all of these subjects truly are, with an emphasis on Truth, Order, and Harmony. These concepts formed the core of the young knight's moral base, along with one other essential: the study of the ancient knights and their deeds. Young men became well versed in the feats of legendary heroes like Arthur and Charlemagne, for they stood as undeniable proof of the very traits each knight was expected to inculcate.

By the age of fourteen, the apprentice knight's education turned from one of letters (or "rustices") to the qualities of the "gentleman."[30] Godly and courtly love were introduced, emphasis was placed on warrior-like skills: jousting, horsemanship, and mastery of the sword, but just

as importantly, on courtesy, ceremony, and etiquette. The knight-to-be learned that his sword was to be put to the service of justice, right, piety, the Church, the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed.[31]

At age twenty-one, during Christmas, Easter, Ascensiontide, Pentacost, or the Feast of St. John the Baptist, the knight-to-be stood a final vigil in the chapel, and the next morning, he donned his armor and mounted his steed as a newly-made knight.[32] But how close did this man come to chivalry's fantastic ideal? What traits, what behavior was he now expected to exhibit?

In answer to the first question, consider Charles the Bold, one of France's most memorable knights. He believed that the life of the chivalrous knight was one of imitation; he contended that he was most consciously inspired by models of the past when young, often reading over and over again the exploits of Lancelot and Gawain. Most importantly, "he regarded this interest in antiquity as the mainspring of his conduct."[32] Here lies historical proof of the effect this chivalrous ideal had on the behavior of a leading military man. Like his aristocratic counterpart, the knight had found a collective identity, saw himself ennobled by the traditions of a glorious past, and thought himself to be a superior fighter because of it. Chivalry was the essential of the military ideal. As Walter Clifford Meller says in A Knight's Life in the Days of Chivalry:

> It was a romantic and glorious career opened up to him, the highest ideal that warlike age possessed for a perfect Christian and a perfect gentleman.[33]

How is this ideal expressed in literature? What traits found in the great heroic epics of the day were these young knights expected to possess?

One of the most famous pieces of medieval literature is Geoffry Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. The prologue of the "Knight's Tale" begins:

> A worthy man
> That from the time he first began
> To ridden out, he loves Chivalry
> Truth and Honour, Freedom and Courtesy in his Lord's war,
> And thereto had he ridden, no man fair
> As well in Christendom as in heathenesse
> And ever honoured for his worthiness.[34]

Chaucer was influenced by a tremendous number of sources, both oral and written, and his "Knight's Tale" captures the spirit of arms under which the medieval knight served his king. Now warfare as well as society became more ordered, moving away from sheer barbarity. Interestingly, Froissart notes in his Chronicles that the Spaniards and Germans did not practice Chivalry in warfare because "they were too uncouth to understand it."[35] Obviously, the ideal was not without its prejudices.

In Le Chanson de Roland (The Song of Roland), one of the oldest heroic epics known, the ideal knight is glorified: he accepts battle against overwhelming odds, refuses to flee in the face of mortal danger, only to die in the end, giving his life for the cause he was defending. Throughout all of this, he never does anything which would taint his honor.[36] This epic marks a significant change in medieval thinking: the concept of personal sacrifice. A greater "cause" supercedes the personal one, of sparing one's own life. Ultimately, this shift in thinking brought Western man out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. But that projection is not the purpose of this study. Before concentrating on one of these inspirational works: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, a detailed discussion of chivalric (knightly) virtues is essential.

Knightly Virtues

Oaths and Vows

One of the most important practices every knight was expected to partake in was the granting of "boons," symbolic of his good faith, an essential chivalric quality. This act was one of the oldest ceremonies known to knighthood, stemming directly from feudal oaths. Basically, whenever a knight pledged his word, regardless of how rash the pledge was, it was to be carried out at any price, a sacred obligation of a knight to his suppliant. Many instances occur in Romances in which a knight, by rashly granting an indefinite boon, was obliged to do something extremely to his prejudice.[37] However, this good faith was essential to the concept of mutual trust between the superior and the subordinate. As Thomas Bullfinch observed in his Age of Chivalry, good faith was "the cornerstone of chivalry."[38]

On the day a young man was knighted, he took a number of vows which were to dictate to his conduct and ideals for the rest of his life. Betraying any or all of these vows meant immediate disgrace, and even death. These vows are similar to the ones taken at a Christian baptism; in fact, Knighthood itself was considered a rebirth into a life of chivalrous ideals. These were the vows:

1) On a quest or adventure, a knight will never lighten himself of arms except for sleep.

2) Whenever in pursuit of adventure, he will not avoid perilous "passes," and not turn out of his way for fear of meeting powerful chivaliers, or from any dread of monsters, savage beasts, or spirits.

3) He will die rather than desert a lady he undertook to defend or suffer her to be offended.

4) He will be punctual to the day and hour in which he is engaged to contend in arms with a brother knight.

5) Upon returning to court, he will give an accurate account of all adventures, even if they bring shame or disgrace.

6) On being taken prisoner in a tourney, besides rendering up his arms and horses to the victor, he will not contend again without special leave from his captor.

7) He will never fight a single enemy in company, nor carry two swords, unless willing to contend with two opponents.[39]

These vows comprised the knight's Code of Conduct, the basis of all actions as a courageous and honorable knight. Might these vows form the foundation of our own Code today? Perhaps through further research, that question can be better answered. In any case, the formulation of formalized standards of military behavior is, in itself, an important event.

Laws of the Round Table

Several specific practices set down in the Arthurian legends of the Knights of the Round Table are noteworthy. Many of the virtues of chivalry have roots in these legends. This section discusses the law of the Round Table itself, the focal point of all knightly behavior.

The Round Table had thirteen seats, in memory of the Apostles. One seat, the "Seat of Danger" was never occupied (for it represented the seat of the traitor Judas.) Occupied by the knights of the highest fame in Arthur's court, the table acted as a touchstone of virtue. Any knight

who was not totally virtuous, and who dared to sit at the table, was fated to die a horrible, violent death, by the hand of God. Each knight had to prove his worthiness to be one of the twelve; for instance, Sir Tristam had to declare his feat of arms before Arthur and Guenevere in order to take his place at the table.[40]

Each knight, following his admission to the Order, had to pass the next ten days in quest of adventures, during which time his companions might meet him disguised in armor, and try their strength against him.[41] It was a time of constant initiation and testing. In addition, all of Arthur's knights were expected to challenge strange knights to a joust. Life for the Knights of the Round Table was a constant quest for chivalric perfection; to excel, one had to be challenged continuously. To stop improving meant losing one's place of honor at the Round Table to a nobler knight.[42]

Courtly Love

As discussed earlier, a knight's introduction to courtly love began at the age of fourteen; young men were then engaged in acquiring the refinements of civility. An essential part of this learning process was the selection of a young virgin as mistress. The young squire would soon learn that her smiles would be the recompense of his valor; in other words, courage was love-motivated. In its more decadent form, courtly love was guilty love; i.e. extra-marital romance, because at that time, love was considered irrelevant to marriage. So many weddings were prearranged for political reasons.[43] This courtly love was thought to ennoble the knight somehow. The state of being constantly enamoured allowed the warrior to

show an example of goodness, to preserve honor and curb arrogance and coarseness. Above all, it inspired him to greater prowess.[44] A passage from Le Voeu Du Heron by Jean de Beaumont in 1337, best describes courtly love's magical effects:

> When we are in the tavern drinking strong wines, and the ladies pass and look at us with those white throats and tight bodices, those sparkling eyes resplendent with smiling beauty; then Nature urges us to have a desiring heart. Then we could overcome Yaumont and Agincourt and the others could conquer Oliver and Roland. But when we are in camp on our trotting chargers, our bucklers round our necks and our lances lowered, and the great cold is congealing us altogether, and our limbs are crushed before and behind, and our enemies are approaching us, then we should wish to be in a cellar so large that we might never be seen by any means.[45]

Apparently, the power of courtly love was not always all it supposed to be, as evidenced in the last lines of the passage. But of course, knights, like anyone else, were human beings whose actions could not help but fall short of the ideal. The significance of this concept lies not in its apparent flaws, but rather, in the fact that behavior on the battlefield was not a series of cut-and-dry decisions, devoid of emotion. If two men are equally matched in strength, which one will be the ultimate victor? Knightly ideals like courtly love, gave the edge to the man who fought for the love of his lady.

In Le Morte d'Arthur, Lancelot conquered Northumberland and Gallehaut, the King of the Marches, exposed himself to peril in numberless encounters, and brought hosts of prisoners to the feet of his sovereign--all for the love of Guenevere.[46] But of course, Lancelot's love was a decadent one, for Guenevere was Arthur's wife, the Queen of England. If the influence of the Cistercian monks in their translations of this story had predominated,

a decadent courtly love may never have evolved.

Courtesy

Directly related to courtly love was courtesy, another chivalric essential. Going beyond a strict adherence to etiquette, courtesy involved conduct towards one's subordinates, again proving that chivalry was not simply an aristocratic fantasy. In the instructions of the Chevalier de la Tour (folio five ultimo), the author recommends courtesy and its practice quite as much towards those of low degree as those of high estate:

> These will pay you greater praise and greater revision and greater good than the grandees; for honour and courtesy that are paid to the great are only done as their due, which must be paid to them; but that which is paid to the lesser degree of gentry-such as honour and courtesy-comes from a frank and honest heart, and the individual of low degree to whom it is paid holds it for an honour and therefore he exalts it above everything and gives praise therefore and glory to him who has done him this honour. And thus from those of lower degree to whom such courtesy and honour have been paid, there comes a great praise and fair renown, and this grows from day to day.[47]

A condescending attitude, perhaps, but one which formed the basis of a good leadership quality: mutual respect between superior and subordinate.

Several other literary works add to one's understanding of medieval courtesy. The Roman de Rose warns against vulgarity.

> A knight should never shame his sword
> Nor ever let unseemly word
> Escape his lips.[48]

At this point, the issue of women and chivalry should be discussed. Respect for women was an integral part of medieval courtly behavior, raising women out of positions of total servitude. The respect between

the knight and his lady is probably not one found in modern society. Was chivalry sexist in the Middle Ages? Was it chauvánistic? Perhaps. But in essence, the ideals, the true values of chivalry, have little to do with sex. Of course, courtly love was sex-dependent, and placed women on a pedestal, but the spiritual value of chivalry transcends the physical. Valor, courage, charity - these are traits which all humans could look towards. One need only consider Joan of Arc to realize how true this concept really is.

The Gentle Heart

One very basic requirement of all knights was that they be "of gentle birth," i.e. of noble birth. Again, the idea of gentility directly equates to nobility. The gentle heart was not one of animal desire, but one of reason, endowing the knight with the ability to respond in "aware," gentle sympathy, to an emotional situation. This characteristic separated the true knight from the barbarian, giving way to compassion, pity, and mercy, and just as importantly, sensitivity to the needs of fellow knights and subordinates.[49]

The Call to Adventure

It was the obligation of every knight to answer a call to adventure. The term "adventure" takes on many aspects, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. A refusal to seek adventure when called was one of the most disgraceful actions imaginable, for it labeled the knight a coward. Again, this trait underscores a basic shift in medieval attitude: the call was more important than the desires of the

individual.

Loyalty

In A Distant Mirror, Barbara Tuchman refers to loyalty as "chivalry's fulcrum." It might be interesting to note that loyalty, in the medieval sense, did not preclude treachery.[50] For example, a knight could disguise himself and his fellows as an enemy's allies, as long as no oaths were broken.

Closely related to loyalty was the concept of brotherhood-in-arms, a relationship taken very seriously, because it meant trusting another in life and death situations. Two men, engaged under the most solemn vows in a band of fraternity for life, held a constant and faithful friendship with one another, solidified by the common experience of warfare.[51]

A passage from Le Jouvencel, a biographical romance about Jean de Brueil, beautifully describes the relationship between this brotherhood, and courage under fire:

> It is a joyous thing, is war... you love your comrade so in war. When you see that your quarrel is just and your blood is fighting well, tears rise to your eye. A great sweet feeling of loyalty and of pity fills your heart on seeing your friend so valiantly exposing his body to execute and accomplish the command of our Creator. And then you prepare to go and die or live with him, and for love not to abandon him. And out of that there arrives such a delectation, that he who has not tasted it is not fit to say what a delight it is. Do you think that a man who does that fears death? Not at all, for he feels so strengthened, he is so elated, that he does not know where he is. Truly, he is afraid of nothing.[52]

The sense of a shared experience in combat is captured so perfectly here, an almost ineffable feeling which the narrator finds almost impossible to convey to others. One may easily see that the love fellow

knights had for one another was unlike any other, because it was forged and strengthened in the battlefield.

Prowess

Courage, strength, and skill which made for chivalier "preux" were essentials.[53] "Preux" (or prowess) was a collective for the functional skills every young boy began developing at an early age: combat with the lance and sword, the elements of the chase, horsemanship, and the development of unfailing strength.

In Le Morte d'Arthur, Lancelot's courage and fidelity were said to be unequalled among knights, no rider could unhorse him, and because of his "preux," he vanquished many an opponent. An Arthurian law of combat relating directly to prowess instructed the knight in the event that his lance was broken in jousting or in combat. Should such a mishap occur, the knight was obligated to continue the battle with his sword, and could not refuse to meet with his shield the lance of his antagonist.[59]

Honor

In medieval times, this term encompassed a number of essential chivalric characteristics. It meant personal integrity, placed tremendous value on the innate dignity of man, and was a basis for many other knightly virtues, such as truthfulness and justice. Knightly honor, in theory, allowed only two possibilities - death in action, or capture. Of course, this absolute concept of honor had to be reconciled with the interests of society and of human safety.[55] A great deal of attention will be paid to this concept in the detailed analysis of Sir Gawain and Lord Nelson.

Of all the virtues discussed thus far, honor is most synonymous with chivalry.

Personal concern for subordinates

Richard the First of England, known as Richard the Lion-Hearted, was renowned as being an able commander in the field, chiefly because of the personal attention he gave his men. He "took care to provide for them properly, allowed no unreasonably long marches, imposed strict discipline to protect the whole column of march, supervised the execution of his orders personally, and at the same time, was ready for any unforseen eventuality."[56] Historically, the good leader was always out in front, leading the way.

Sparing One Another in Battle

One of the most notable changes in the conduct of the knight in battle was his treatment of helpless enemies and captives. Contrary to the behavior found in barbaric warfare, the military objective had more influence than the lust for bloodshed. In a passage from the Orderic Vitalis describing the Battle of Bremille in 1119, the author reports that only three knights were killed in comparison to one hundred and forty captured, due in part to how well the protective equipment worked, but mainly because the knights "spared each other, and tried not so much to kill as to capture the fleeting enemy. Christian knights had no desire to shed the blood of brothers."[57]

Condemned Practices

In addition to the behavior expected of every knight, there were a

number of defined taboos which included:

1) the desire for vain glory[58]

2) malicious intentions in battle[59]

3) slaying a naked (unarmed) man, an act equated with treason

4) betraying a fellow knight; "A good man is never in danger but when he is in danger of a coward."[60]

5) doing battle while fresh with a wounded knight

Of course these were only a few of the many vices the good knight steered away from. Basically, any departure from the virtues with which the third section of this chapter deals was considered dishonorable, and labeled the knight a villain.

This list is by no means definitive. It serves simply as a starting point for an investigation into the moral and ethical natures of Sir Gawain, Lord Nelson, and military officers in general. It is also extremely important to note that these are not traits exclusive to medieval knighthood. The basic purpose of this paper is to trace their manifestation in two completely different periods of literary history.

Simply documenting these "leadership traits is not enough; the exploration of the universal truths behind them must be undertaken.

How influential were these standards of behavior in the Middle Ages? Consider this eulogy from Le Morte d'Arthur, in which Sir Ector praises Sir Lancelot:

> Ah, Sir Lancelot, thou wert head of all Christian knights, now there thou liest; thou wert never matched of more earthly knight's hands, and thou wert the curtiest knight that ever bore shield. And thou wert the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse. And thou wert the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman.

> And thou wert the kindest man that ever struck sword. And thou wert the goodliest person that ever came among a press of knights. And thou wert the meekest man and the gentlest man that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou wert the sternest foe to thy mortal enemy that ever set spear in rest.[61]

Passages like this were the medieval knight's guideposts. Their inspirational messages were vital to the education of the fighting man. Why? Because they were unattainable goals, goals which had as their reward, not achievement, but constant pursuit. So strong was the influence of chivalry, that even the knight's armor became symbolic of his virtues.

> The sword, in the shape of a cross, was to be used in the defense of justice, it was to be cutting on both sides. The spear was straight and even, because truth is so, and its iron head was significant of strength. The pennon, which must be seen afar, was the sign of courage which wished not to be hidden. The steel helmet was emblematical of modesty. The hauberk was a castle or a fortification against the powers of evil. The leg armour was to keep the feet from the peril of evil ways. The spurs were tokens of diligence and swiftness in all honourable designs. The gorget signified obedience, and as it encompassed the neck, so should the commands of his lord encompass the knight. The mace represented strength of courage, and the knife (or misericordia) with which the combatant dispatched his enemy when other arms failed - the mercy of God and trust in his aid. The shield was typical of the knight standing between the prince and the people, or between the prince and his enemies, as the safeguard of the former. The gauntlets, in using which he lifted up his hand on high, were to remind him of prayer to God, and that he was not to be guilty of putting his hand on a false oath. The saddle of his horse betokened surety of courage, and the great charger which pertained to chivalry an emblem of courage and readiness in daring.
>
> (Book of Chivalry)[62]

Imagine what a sense of respect and identity a knight had for his own armor, when looked upon not merely as protection and instruments of destruction, but as allegorical symbols for moral absolutes.

Problems

Thus far, this discussion of chivalry and all its virtues may appear one-sided. If this code was so strictly adhered to, then why do the chronicles of medieval warfare spend most of their time talking of endless treasons and cruelties?[63] Great paradoxes did exist as one would expect when dealing with any ideal. Knights always fell short of the mark; brutality and cruelty often did seem to outweigh generosity and respect for the enemy. And at times, the lofty concepts of honor and duty overrode a decision not to go into battle, and great losses were incurred as a result.[64]

How significant was the gap between the theory and practice of chivalry? Historically, and literally, that question loses its importance in light of the manners themselves. Can man discover his own nature by studying events, or by studying the moods and temperaments which shaped those events? I end this chapter with two statements which both summarize chivalry, and project into a closer investigation of its qualities:

> Despite therefore many shortcomings in its high ideals, as is ever the case in all the fallible conceptions of men, knighthood, when in its glory, was essentially religious; not perhaps in the sense in which we should apply it when speaking of it in modern times, but when it signified the presence of a strong devotional spirit, the influence of awe, hope, and the mysterious interpositions of aid from the supernatural.[65]

> It is better to look for courage in the manner in which (the knights) braved danger, for it is important to know how they overcame their fear and fought bravely.[66]

And it is still important to know. Perhaps we can benefit from that discovery.

[22 av]

Gawain

Whether fate be foul or fair
Why falter I or fear?
What should man do but dare?

- Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
ll. 563-565

Chapter III

A DETAILED INVESTIGATION OF SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Nowhere else in medieval literature are the concepts of knightly virtue and the moral ordeal more clearly and beautifully defined than in the classical alliterative poem, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Time and again, research revealed a general consensus on the part of most medieval scholars that this work stands in the same class as Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in terms of its lyrical style, its sophisticated content, and its unparalleled dramatic and descriptive nature.

While seeking to further clarify the definition of chivalry as it relates to the military officer, this chapter will discuss the historical background of the work, including the legends of Arthur and Gawain. It will then move to a synopsis of the poem's plot, followed by a detailed inquiry into the ways in which chivalry manifests itself in the text.

The Gawain-poet

A tremendous amount of speculation has been devoted to the anonymous author of Sir Gawain. The literary historians' best estimates date the work close to the year 1400. Most believe that he was a country type who lived in upper-central England, far from Chaucer's London. And of these two great medieval poets, it is commonly agreed upon that the Gawain poet actually lived the life of a country gentleman, because of his detailed description of the "gentleman's pursuits" - hunting, hawking, music, chess, law, the old code of chivalry, and the theoretical discussions of heaven and earth.[68] Several other works are attributed to this unknown author,

entitled Pearl, Purity, Patience, and St. Erhenwald, and from these poems some notable conclusions about the Gawain poet may be drawn: firstly, that he had a deep emotional commitment to Feudalism. Secondly, that he was somewhat influenced by the philosophy of St. Augustine.[69] Finally, and most significantly, "in both his choice of form and his choice of subject, the Gawain-poet is mainly, though not entirely, a conscious traditionalist." Keeping these facts in mind, one should watch for a strong religious element in the poem, while realizing that the concepts the author treats are not new, but founded in the traditions of Feudalism and all that led up to it. Thus, it is already becoming apparent that the Gawain poet sensed some type of value in meticulously recounting a very old legend, hoping to rekindle the sparks of an inspirational fire. As one contemporary critic states:

> The Gawain-poet believes that man is an animal who must try to become Godlike; on the chaos of his nature man must impose order, Platonic "form."[70]

What sources did he have at his disposal to bring this "order" about?

Basically, the plot may be broken down into two major parts: the Challenge or Beheading Game, and the Temptation, and each has a variety of sources. One of the earliest examples of the Challenge may be found in part of Chretien's Perceval entitled the "Le Livre de Caradoc," and later appears in Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur as the story of Caradoc and the Stranger. In each story, a stranger comes to the court and challenges any knight to a blow-for-blow contest. Only Caradoc agrees; he cuts off the stranger's head, which is magically put back on, and when Caradoc submits to the stranger's blow, he is instead rewarded for his courage and for fidelity to his word.[71]

The second major part of Sir Gawain, the Temptation, finds sources as far back as the Mabinogi of Pwyll, dated in the Eleventh Century, and The Lanzelet of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, translated from the Anglo-Norman around 1194.[72] Here a young knight journeys to an unknown castle, whereupon his chastity and chivalric virtue is called into question by a comely maiden. All of these legends are Celtic in origin, undergoing the transformation from pagan tales to Christian ones.

One final motif in Sir Gawain which bears mentioning is the "Exchange of winnings." This idea finds its origins not in Celtic mythology, but in a medieval Latin poem known as the Miles Gloriosus, thought to have been written about 1175 in the Loire valley.[73] As yet, these three concepts - The Challenge, the Temptation, and the Exchange of Winnings - lack any type of relationship; a treatise of their background was provided in order to illustrate how the Gawain-poet took them, and unlike any other medieval poet, wove them into an heroic epic, marking him as one of the true literary geniuses of his time.

Arthur

No discussion of Gawain would be complete without first giving some attention to his legendary lord, King Arthur. Very little historical evidence exists to support the argument that an Arthur did, in fact, once rule Britain. According to several sources, Arthur was the prince of a tribe of Britons called Silures in South Wales. He was the son of Uther, named Pendragon (a title) and began his military career around 500 AD. It is alleged that the famous battle of Camlan, Cornwall in 542 marked his death.[74] Departing from fact, legend has it that when Uther Pendragon

ascended to the throne after his brother died in a Saxon war, he took in Merlin, the magician, as his advisor. From there, Merlin was sent to Carlisle (Camelot) to prepare the Round Table. When Arthur becomes king by removing Excalibur from the stone, and defeats his chief enemy Lucius Tiberius, he charges his knights to:

> never do outrage nor murder, always fleet treason, do not be cruel, give mercy to that ask first, always do ladies, damsels and gentlewomen service upon pain of death; do not take battle in a wrongful quarrel, for no law, nor for any worldly goods.[75]

And the one knight who perhaps adhered to this charge more than any other, was Gawain.

Gawain

As one of four sons of Morgause, Arthur's sister (including Agravaine, Gaheris, and Gareth) Gawain was actually Arthur's nephew. All four first came to Arthur's court after doing battle with over seven thousand of the king's enemies. In this incredible contest, Gawain split the chief from "crown to breast"; winning him a place of honor at the Round Table, and underscoring one of chivalry's legendary traits: incredible strength against terrible odds.[76] Gawain soon became one of the most famous knights in Camelot, widely known for his sagacity and courtesy. In fact, Chaucer in his Squire's Tale, says that Gawain has "high reverance and observance in speech and countenance."[77] Soon the noble knight became known as the Golden-Tongued, because he outshone all his peers in courtesy.

Now the question of "Why study Sir Gawain and the Green Knight?" may be more succinctly answered; of all the various knights a close look at Gawain's character will be of most value, for, unlike Lancelot, he was not

guilty of the sin of adultery, and unlike Galahad, he was not God-like, but rather human. And in all the literature dedicated to these legendary warriors, Sir Gawain rises above the rest as the best example of both spiritual and physical testing.

Herein begins the tale.

The Poem

Broken up into four "fits" and one hundred and one verses, the poem begins in Camelot at Christmastide, where gaiety and laughter prevail. As dinner is being served, the court is suddenly struck to silence as a veritable green giant appears in the great hall on horseback. The stranger identifies himself as the Green Knight, and, while questioning the very reputation of Arthur and his knights, challenges anyone to strike him with the huge battle-axe he carries, in return for a return blow to be given a year later. Breaking the awesome silence, Gawain agrees, takes the axe, and with one mighty swing, sends the Green Knight's head rolling. But to the amazement of everyone, the giant picks up his head, tells Gawain to seek him at the Green Chapel in a year, and rides out with his head in his hand, leaving the King, the Queen, and everyone present in fear and wonder.

Fit II begins ten months later, when, to the chagrin of all, Gawain leaves Camelot in order to keep his oath to the Green Knight. He heads north in search of the Green Chapel, enduring the most incredible physical hardships imaginable. Finally, on Christmas Eve, he arrives at a castle, and the lord invites him to stay for Christmas and New Year, since according to the host, the Green Chapel is nearby. The lord proposes that during

the days between, Gawain should be entertained while he himself hunts, and that at the end of each day they should exchange whatever they had "won."

While the host is out hunting deer, boar, and fox, in Fit IV, his wife makes three visits to Gawain's bedroom, in an attempt to seduce him. She gains no more than kisses, however, which Gawain duly exchanges with his host for the trophies of the hunt. When the lady makes her third attempt, she persuades Gawain to accept her girdle, which, she says, will protect his life. But when the lord returns from the days hunting, Gawain hides the garment.

In Fit IV, the host leads Gawain to the Green Chapel, and upon meeting the Green Knight, bares his neck to receive his part of the bargain. Instead, he receives three feinted blows, the third of which just nicks his neck. The giant man then reveals that he is in fact Gawain's host, that the first two feinted blows were for the two occasions on which Gawain faithfully gave him his gains (the kisses), and that the nick is for the noble knight's failure to reveal the girdle. Gawain returns to Camelot, and after hearing his incredible tale, his peers judge that he has indeed brought honor to the Round Table.

A tall tale indeed, but further explication of this work will reveal what a lesson in chivalry the Gawain-poet truly offers.

Analysis

Prior to the vivid descriptions of Camelot at Christmastide, Fit I opens with a recount of the fall of Troy, which immediately places Gawain's story within a classical historical structure. Opening the poem in this

way, the author employs an often used medieval literary convention. It makes the reader immediately aware that a "great story" is about to be told, one on a par with such legendary figures as Paris, Helen, Agamemnon, and Achilleus. In addition, this "signature," (opening and closing the poem with Troy's fall) gives the work a cyclical quality, and alludes to the "central conflict between the vulnerability of mortal kingdoms and the permanence of the Kingdom of God,"[78] more specifically, the conflict between man's reality and his chivalrous ideals.

Immediately following in the second verse is a brief treatise on the founding of Britain and the subsequent rise of civilization there, building upon images of "turbulent times," and distant kings, all of which Arthur inherits. Then, the reader is told:

> But of all who abode here of Britain's kings,
> Arthur was highest in honour, as I have heard.
>
> ll. 25-26

The author wants to make it clear that this story takes place in the court of no ordinary monarch, but in that of the most renowned of all.

Turning finally to the Christmastide festivities at Camelot, great care is taken to describe an atmosphere of complete jollity and merry making. And yet, in the midst of all this the good manners of Arthur prevail. For when dinner is brought out:

> Arthur would not eat until all were served.
>
> l. 85

A simple courtesy perhaps, and yet one which gives testimony to one of his many leadership qualities. Interestingly, the king's custom was not to eat until he had heard of some adventure concerning one or more of his knights. Little does he know what a shattering adventure is about to

beset the entire court.

A trumpet sounds, the door of the great hall is thrown open, and the din of courtly frivolity is suddenly silenced by the appearance of "an awesome fellow/who in height outstripped all earthly men." Over seventy lines are devoted to his description, and for good reason, because he is the Green Knight, the challenger, the tester. In the midst of everyone's dumbfoundedness, the giant, who is unarmored save for a giant battle-axe, makes the challenge, but not without insulting Arthur and all his knights first:

> it is not combat I crave, for come to that,
> On this bench only beardless boys are sitting...
> If any in this household is so hardy in spirit,
> Of such mettlesome mind and so madly rash
> As to strike a strong blow in return for another
> I shall offer to him this fine axe freely;
> This one, which is heavy enough, to handle as he please.
> And I shall bide the first blow, as bare as I sit here.
> If some intrepid man is tempted to try what I suggest,
> Let him leap towards me and lay hold of this weapon,
> Acquiring clear possession of it, no claim from me ensuing.
> Then shall I stand up to his stroke, quite still on this floor-
> So long as I shall have leave to launch a return blow
> Unchecked.
>
> 11. 280-297

The challenge is particularly perplexing, because Arthur and his knights are "damned if they do and damned if they don't." Chivalric principle insists that they fully respond to the very blatant accusation of "beardless boys," yet, at the same time, forbids the slaying of an unarmed man, wearing no armor. To make matters worse, the spell-binding nature of the entire situation has struck a supernatural fear into all present. Sensing this lack of courage, the Green Knight continues his unmerciful taunting:

What, is this Arthur's house, the honour of which
Is bruited abroad so abundantly?
Has your pride disappeared? Your prowess gone?
Your victories, your valour, your vaunts, where are they?
The revel and renown of the Round Table
Is now overwhelmed by a word from one man's voice,
For all flinch for fear from a fight not begun!

ll. 309-315

Unable to brook this insufferable propaganda any longer, Arthur grabs the axe, but is unable to bring it to bear against his adversary; and although not specifically alluded to in the text, the reader is to assume that Arthur's failure to strike a blow lies in his cuckoldry: his wife is having an adulterous affair with Sir Lancelot.

Forward comes Gawain, and from the moment he begins speaking, his virtues unfold before the reader like the petals of a flower, the first of which is loyalty: he sees his king in an untenable situation, and hastens to come to his aid. While entreating Arthur to allow him to take up the challenge, he exhibits another virtue: humility, when he says:

I am the weakest, the most wanting in wisdom, I know.
And my life if lost, would be least missed, truly.

ll. 355-356

This of course, could not be further from the truth, but Arthur in courtly response gives the axe over to Gawain, and after reaffirming the Green Knight's challenge by crying "Here is my oath on it, in absolute honour!" he severs the giant's head from his body in one bloody stroke. What occurs next may stun the reader seeking chivalry. The moment the Green Knight's head hits the floor, the people in court begin kicking it around, for a very real reason. In folklore, if an enchanter has his head chopped off and can be prevented from re-uniting head and body, he

truly dies.[79] One should be quick to note that a pagan superstition here equates to a completely barbaric act, lacking any type of chivalry whatsoever.

Unfortunately, the Green Knight regains his head, and the ensuing challenge is truly gruesome. Holding it by the hair, the blooded figure turns his head towards Gawain, reminds him that now he must keep his oath, and mounting his horse, gallops out, head in hand.

One can easily imagine the state the court is in by this time; the Gawain-poet has masterfully juxtaposed a scene of complete joy with one of terror, and surely, one may safely label the Green Knight a terrorist. But Arthur, the good military leader, refuses to allow the event to spark disorder:

> Though honoured King Arthur was at heart astounded,
> He let no sign of it be seen, but said clearly
> To the comely queen in courtly speech,
> 'Do not be dismayed, dear lady, today:
> Such cleverness comes well at Christmastide,
> Like the playing interludes, laughter and song,
> As lords and ladies delight in courtly carols.'
>
> ll. 467-473

Immediatly sensing the potentially devastating effects of the Green Knight's visit, Arthur shows no sign of perturbation, but rather, assumes complete formality to restore order and morale after a terrifying and dangerous experience. Another leadership quality is revealed. At this point, one may ask, why does Arthur adopt such formality in order to bring peace to his court. One critic seems to supply a fairly good answer:

> Given the fallen condition of man, the best defense one has in the test which is life on earth, the time trial in Nature, is the careful ordering of one's dimmed soul in order to direct one's rational part, one's irascible part, and one's concupiscent part as nobly as possible.[79]

These three "parts" of man's soul: the irasable, the rational, and the concupiscent, roughly equate to Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego, with a spiritual, rather than psychological base. The first phrase of the above quote concerning the fallen condition of man, becomes vitally important in the investigation of chivalry, as does the soul's three parts. Because man has fallen from God's grace, his only chance of attaining spiritual enlightenment is by dealing with nature in a chivalrous way, i.e., by bringing order to the three parts of the soul through formality. Accepting this as a basic medieval tenet, Arthur's behavior is not only understandable, but expected.

Referring back to the concept of the "boon" in Chapter II, one may observe that Gawain suffers from the predicament of an adventure rashly undertaken. When one of the courtiers commenting on Gawain's plight says:

> By Christ, it is evil
> That you lord should be lost
> Who lives so nobly.
>
> ll. 674-675

He uses the term "lost" to mean misguided. In other words, he thinks that Gawain's arrogance has blinded him to the true peril of his situation, revealing that neither he, nor any of the others present, truly understands the values that are at stake. How familiar this predicament sounds. Gawain, like so many other warriors, suffers isolation because his peers do not truly comprehend why he is setting out on this most hazardous adventure. But at least one knight believes in the excellence the Green Knight spent so much time challenging, and for him, if for no one else, the challenge is "a test of Arthur's court and of the chivalric concept

of order itself."[80] By this time, one should surmise that the very nature of the "courteous knight" is going to be called into question.

Prior to the hero's departure, the Gawain-poet devotes a great many verses to describing the noble knight's armour, especially his shield. Emblazoned on the outside of this protective instrument are a number of pentangles; this five-sided star becomes one of the most important archetypal symbols in the work. As the author explains:

> And I intend to tell you, though I tarry therefore,
> Why the Pentangle is proper to this prince of knights.
> It is a symbol which Solomon conceived once
> To betoken holy truth, by its instrinsic right,
> For it is a figure which has five points,
> And each line overlaps and is locked with another,
> And it is endless everywhere, and the English call it,
> In all the land, I hear, the Endless Knot
>
> ll. 623-630

Clearly, this simple symbol provides a tremendous amount of insight into some of chivalry's most basic principles. The reference to Solomon establishes a Biblical tie, strengthening the idea that the star stands for holy truth, which is an intrinsic right. Here the assumption is made that truth is one of God's absolutes, and more importantly, an intrinsic part of every man's nature. The Gawain-poet perceives all of nature as a "vast array of emblems of God's virtue,"[81] and that through the recognition of, and formal use of these allegorical symbols, man will grow closer to God.

Even more intriguing is the constant recurrence of the number five. The pentangle of course, is five-sided, and five-pointed, each point representing another set of qualities:

1. Gawain was found faultless in his five wits.

2. Five fingers never failed the knight.

3. All his trust on earth was in Christ's five wounds.

4. His prowess depended upon the five joys of Mary: the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Assumption.

5. Liberality, Lovingkindness, Continence, Courtesy and Piety.[82]

And with the exception of the one hundred and first stanza, the four fits are broken up into five sets of five linked stanzas each.

This constant recurrence and the endless nature of the pentangle, further increases the archetypal quality of chivalric virtue.

Fully armed, Gawain is prepared to answer the call. As he leaves the safety and comfort of Camelot, observing the sorrowful air of his peers at his departure, he says, in true knightly fashion:

> Whether fate be foul or fair
> Why falter I or fear?
> What should man do but dare?
>
> ll. 563-565

Here Gawain speaks with a keen sense of the deliverance, the deliverance into manhood this adventure may have in store for him. His posing of the rhetorical question in the third line seems to infer that daring is an absolute requirement for masculine fulfillment, giving way to the psycho-mythological concept of the "Rite of Passage." Now the definition of chivalry is beginning to take on a new aspect: the hero's need for adventure, and the ability to discern the innate value of that experience, and share it with others. The journey is known as the "epicycyle," and as explained by Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces:

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder. Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.[83]

How closely does Sir Gawain's story correlate to this theory? One must complete the journey with this brave knight to find the answer.

The first part of the young knight's test, the physical trials, begin:

> He had death-struggles with dragons, did battle with wolves,
> Warred with wild men who dwelt among the crags,
> Battled with bulls and bears and boars at other times,
> And ogres that panted after him on the high fells.
> Had he not been doughty in endurance and dutiful to God,
> Doubtless he would have been done to death time and again.
> Yet the warring little worried him; worse was the winter,
> When the cold clear water cascaded from the clouds
> And froze before it could fall to the fallow earth.
> Half-slain by the sleet, he slept in his armour
> Night after night among the naked rocks,
> Where the cold streams splashed from the steep crests
> Or hung high over his head in hard icicles.
> So in peril and pain, in parlous plight,
> The knight covered the country till Christmas Eve
> Alone;
>
> 11. 720-735

Particular attention should be paid to the type of enemies Gawain faces. Because they take on a mystical, almost monstrous aspect, the courage required to counter these forces must take on super-human qualities. Thus, Campbell's idea of encountering "fabulous forces" begins to take form. The conditional nature of Gawain's peril bears a great deal of importance as well, for as the passage states, a lack of duty to God would have resulted in his death. One could interpret this to mean that the bold knight's fate was completely out of his hands, but regarded with greater scrutiny, it becomes apparent that without the inspiration

of God, his courage would have waned, and one of these many forces would have overpowered him. The religious foundation of Gawain's chivalry is becoming more and more undeniable. In the midst of his physical anguish, Gawain falls on his knees and entreats his heavenly master:

> I beseech thee Lord,
> And thee Mary, mildest mother so dear,
> That in some haven with due honor I may hear Mass
> And promptly thereto I pray my Palter and Ave
> And Creed
> Christ speed
> My cause, his cross my guide.
>
> ll. 753-62

Regardless of how much he suffers, he will not accept shelter or hear Mass without "due honour," and all his requests are made meekly. Key words such as "cause" and "guide" are two more building blocks in the construction of chivalry's full definition. Returning to a discussion of Gawain's shield for a moment, one discovers that, in addition to the pentangles decorating the outside, the inside of the shield holds an image of the Virgin Mary, one more token of chivalric inspiration:

> Accordingly the courteous knight had that queen's image
> Etched on the inside of his armoured shield,
> So that when he beheld her, his heart did not fail.
>
> ll. 848-650

When Gawain finally arrives at a strange castle, and is immediately welcomed in by its master, the second, more spiritual part of his test begins. As mentioned in the plot summary, Gawain and his host agree to an exchange of winnings; the host will sport at hunting while Gawain "sports" with the castle's mistress, and at the end of each day, the two men will share whatever their pursuits have gained.

The symbolism of the hunt juxtaposed with the Arthurian knight's "joust" in bed is fascinating; apparently the poet had some very defined reasons for presenting this part of the work in such a manner. Two tests are taking place, one of sexuality, one of the chase, both of prowess. Turning to the very dramatic descriptions of the hunt for a moment, one notices how the behavior of the hunters is likened to knights in battle:

> Then men shoved forward, shaped to shoot at him,
> Loosed arrows at him, biting him often
> But the points, for all their power, could not pierce
> his flanks,
> Nor would the barks bite on his bristling brow.
> Though the smooth-shaven shaft shattered in pieces,
> Whenever it hit, the head rebounded.
> But when the boar was battered with blows unceasing,
> Goaded and driven demented, he dashed at the men,
> Striking them savagely as he assailed them in rushes,
> So that some lacking stomach stood back in fear.
> But the lord on a lithe horse lunged after him,
> Blew on his bugle like a bold knight in battle,
> Rallied the hounds as he rode through the rank thickets,
> Pursuing this savage boar till the sun set.
>
> ll. 1454-1467

It is easy to understand why young men, prior to attaining knighthood, were well versed in the elements of the chase. In fact, there seems to be a correlation between hunting and warfare; the hunters and the knights both perceive their enemies as savages, dark forces of primal evil, devoid of any chivalric virtue. By simply changing a few words in the above passage, the scene can shift from a hunt to a joust.

Leaving the sport of the hunt and moving to the sport of love, the hero finds himself in a precarious position. Each morning the host's wife enters Gawain's bedroom, sits beside him, and makes some very concerted efforts to rob him of his chastity. The problem becomes: how does one maintain Christian and chivalric codes without insulting or failing in

service to a lady. Christian dogma is unimpeachable, but courtly love and the chivalric code are "human constructions which may or may not perfectly interpret the order of the cosmos."[84] Gawain finds himself torn between the absolutism of his chastity and the potential fallibility of his courtly ideals.

In medieval literature, there are two types of women who declare their love openly: 1) a lady who vows service to a knight, and 2) the enchantress, who tries to enslave a knight or deflect him from a quest.[85] Well aware of the two possibilities, Gawain is forced to suspect the latter, for she does a very thorough job (much like the Green Knight), of throwing chivalric premises into question. She sees courtly love in this way:

> ...Since the choisest thing in Chivalry, the chief thing praised,
> Is the loyal sport of love, the very lore of arms?
> For the tale of the contentions of true knights
> Is told by the title and texts of their feats,
> How lords for their true loves put their lives at hazard,
> Endured dreadful trials for their dear love's sakes,
> And with valour avenged and made void their woes,
> Bringing home abundant bliss by their virtues?
>
> ll. 1512-1519

What the lady says is true enough; the function of courtly love is to inspire knights to glorious deeds, but she uses the fact as her rationale for an adulterous affair. The passage may now be rephrased: "If you're so chivalrous, then why aren't we making love right now?" Fortunately, Gawain was not known as the Golden-Tongued simply by chance. While his courtesy both forces him to show some kindness to the lady but forbids him to be seduced, it also provides him with a certain amount of diplomacy. No matter how pressing or perplexing the temptress' questions become, the knight always has an answer which does not insult her, but keeps her advances

at bay. This trait is not without its religious support. During this sexual bantering, the Gawain-poet confides:

> Peril would have impended
> Had Mary not minded her knight.
>
> 11. 1768-1769

Once again, one finds that these chivalrous traits go beyond the individual; without some type of spiritual foundation, they are hollow and meaningless. In any event, one cannot help but admire Gawain for his fortitude; it is impressive to observe how his adherance to a strong personal integrity prevents his ideals from being undermined or compromised.

The more this idea of courtesy is expressed in the poem, the more fascinating and multi-faceted it becomes. Courtesy serves as the link between inner values and outward behavior.

> The courteous man is noble, religious, decent, graceful, eloquent, compassionate, humble, grave; he is capable of both love and chastity, frank in attitude but reserved in behavior, and aware of all the delicacies of personal relationship and public demeanor which go to make up civilized life... it is "courteous" for inner values to correspond to outer. In courtesy external cleanliness signifies inner purity, good manners are a sign of moral goodness, appearance is reality.[86]

Gawain's "awaré" is not a hollow one; the "delicacies of personal relationship" require a sensitivity that goes beyond simple martial training. As one modern critic states: "Cortaysye to the poet was more than a sophistication of behavior in polite society; he sees it as a gentleness and sensitiveness of spirit pervading personal relationships."[87] Here the concept of humanitarianism becomes extremely important. To the medieval thinker, "awaré" went beyond reason, it was a state of mind achieved only through intellectual rigor. For the knight, simply deciding "I will be

courteous" was not enough; he had to constantly ask himself "Why should I be courteous?" He found a great part of the answer in one of the fundamental principles of chivalric courtesy, differentiating the prescriptive from the proscriptive. In determining the basic differences between right and wrong, medieval law became the negative "thou-shalt-not," while courtesy was the affirmative "thou shalt." Consequently, the knightly code evolved from a behavioral one into an ideological one, and law-breaking was dangerous "not in itself, but in its denial of the cosmic order which law was established to support."[88] To be dishonorable meant to deny that man was inherently honorable. The beauty of courtesy was that theoretically, legality supported morality, and not vice versa. Additionally, it insisted upon distinctions of rank, but at the same time, recognized the absolute value of all stations within an overall scheme, precisely what military good order and discipline depended upon.

Returning to the story, one finds the castle's mistress making a third and final attempt to seduce Gawain. As mentioned in the synopsis, she is once again unable to win anything more than a few polite kisses. However, she does convince the young knight to accept her girdle as a token of her affection, explaining to him that it will protect his life. Like the shield, the girdle is a standard device in medieval poetry; but unlike the shield, it represents not something spiritual, but something self-serving. The juxtaposition of these two devices is not found outside of Gawain, and when the knight is unable to present the girdle to his host at the end of the day's hunt, the garment becomes symbolic of an earthly flaw in Gawain's character.

Finally, Gawain's host informs him that the time has come to leave the safety and comfort of the castle, and journey to the Green Chapel for his appointed confrontation with the Green Knight. In response to the disconcerted laments of the hostess, Gawain displays his unfailing sense of duty, saying: "Man must do as he must; neither repent Nor repine" (ll. 1811-1812). Gawain's greatest ordeal is about to begin.

Enroute to the Green Chapel, Gawain's host speaks to him of some of the Green Knight's unchivalrous traits, intimating that it may prove difficult for such a man of courtesy as Gawain to deal reasonably with such a churl as his challenger:

> For he is an immoderate man, to mercy a stranger
> For which churl or chaplain by the chapel rides
> Monk or mass-priest of man of other king,
> He thinks it as convenient to kill him as keep alive
> himself.

Although the Green Knight is spoken of in a completely derogatory manner, a number of chivalrous characteristics come to light: mercy, respect for clergymen, moderation, and most important of all, respect for life. This last trait is what makes the Green Knight such a seemingly revolting individual; he disregards the inherent sanctity of human life. One can see that the poem is reaching a dramatic cresendo, because the opposition of chivalry and barbarity is becoming intensified.

Gawain arrives at the Green Chapel, and the second half of the confrontation begins. It is difficult to imagine what must be running through the noble warrior's mind at this point: after an incredible scene at Camelot, he has spent a year battling all kinds of physical danger, has had to repel the sexual advances of a gorgeous woman, and is now about

to have his head cut off. One would only concede that just about any behavior on Gawain's part after all that would be understandable. But well does he remember his lord's conduct a year earlier, when after the most frightening of experiences, Arthur maintained complete calm and civility, restoring order. This Green Knight, Gawain knows, is a terrorist of the worst sorts, and that the whole point of his challenge is to try and taint the very chivalry which Arthur's knights have subscribed to.

Taking the mighty axe in his hands, the Green Knight reminds Gawain of his oath, and raises the weapon in readiness. The behavior of the knight in this most frightening of circumstances immortalizes the power of chivalric virtue:

> Head bent, Sir Gawain bowed,
> And showed the knight flesh bare.
> He behaved as if uncowed,
> Being loth to display his care.

Gawain's chivalry provides him with both the courage and the insight into human nature to realize that no honor is lost by behaving in such a manner, foiling the very purpose of the Green Knight's cruelty.

Twice the giant feigns blows with the axe, and with the third stroke, just grazes the flesh on Gawain's neck. His life thus spared, Gawain questions the Green Knight, seeking a reason for his strange actions. The latter then reveals the full mystery of the test, that he was in fact, Gawain's host at the castle, that the two feinted blows were rewards for the kisses he exchanged in complete adherence to his oath, and that the grazing wound was a reprimand for the noble knight's concealment of the girdle. Now the full value of the allegorical garment becomes apparent. One realizes that Gawain is not perfect, that like any other man, his sense

of the Right does have its earthly flaws. The true genius of the poet is once again made manifest, for the reader is now able to sympathize with the hero; "because he is human, because he is the hero, and because by entering his predicaments we can recognize our own."[89] No wonder this legendary tale was so closely studied by the knights of the Middle Ages; not only did they recognize Gawain as a man of great chivalry, but by seeing that he too, was subject to earthly shortcomings, they were able to identify with him, and emulate him, the very same reason Jesus had to live on earth as a man to bring the spiritual and the natural into accord with one another. The message is clear: (to quote Anne Morrow Lindberg), "it is the journey, not the arrival, which is important."

Upon his triumphant return to Camelot, Gawain completes the epicycle. Twelve months previous he set forth into the unknown, was driven to the extremes of physical and spiritual torment, and in the end, underwent a symbolic death and rebirth. It is Gawain's chivalry which allows him to recognize the importance of all of these events, and share them when he returns to his peers. This psychological death, or self-annihilation, is one of the most recurrent themes in literature dealing with the warrior: the catharsis which takes place on the field of battle. Ultimately, Gawain is recognized as heroic because his catharsis has ennobled him; his chivalry has undergone the ordeal, emerging victorious.

Thus, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is one of chivalry's primers; its main purpose is to reveal the necessity of testing the hero, "that he may reveal his true self in his behavior while under the threat of death."[90] Certainly, Gawain makes mistakes, as any idealist is bound to, but those

mistakes do not make the ideal any less important, and the fact that Gawain errs, makes him better than the ordinary man, who would not err, because he has not the courage to risk failure or setback.

What tremendous applicability the many lessons of this beautiful work have to our own military standards, and the standards of society today! The analysis of this poem strongly reinforces the need to reestablish ties with the past, in order to grow as a civilization in the future.

Never was any commander more beloved. He governed men by their reason and their affections; they knew that he was incapable of caprice or tyranny; and they obeyed him with alacrity and joy, because he possessed their confidence as well as their love. "Our Nel" they used to say, "is as brave as a lion, and as gentle as a lamb." Severe discipline he detested, though he had been bred in a severe school: he never inflicted corporal punishment if it were possible to avoid it, and when compelled to enforce it, he, who was familiar with wounds and death, suffered like a woman. In his whole life Nelson was never known to act unkindly towards an officer. In Nelson there was more than the easiness and humanity of a happy nature: he did not merely abstain from injury; his was an active and watchful benevolence, ever desirous not only to render justice, but to do good.

To his midshipmen he ever showed the most winning kindness, encouraging the diffident, tempering the hasty, counselling and befriending both. "Recollect" he used to say "that you must be a seamen to be an officer; and also, that you cannot be a good officer without being a gentleman.

- Southey's Life of Nelson

Chapter IV

The Chivalric Qualities of Nelson

Without dispute, Vice Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson may be considered naval history's greatest hero, so distinguished, in fact, that the famous naval biographer, Alfred Thayer Mahan referred to him as "the embodiment of sea power."[91] From his first introduction to a seagoing life at the age of twelve, to his tragic death at Trafalgar, this courageous man became the model of "the gentleman officer" for many successive generations. Many famous battles, and many more events both at sea and ashore, highlighted the great man's career. But once again, in considering the essence and subsequent manifestations of Nelson's sense of chivalry, the character of the man, and the foundations of his beliefs and practices, becomes the focal point of this investigation.

One may well question the very noticeable jump from the study of a medieval knight in the 1400's to that of a British naval officer at the turn of the Nineteenth Century. Surely something is lost in ignoring almost five hundred years of history and literature. However, the purpose of this investigation is to seek a definition of chivalry which surfaces in two completely separate exemplars of officer-like behavior. If, in fact, some comparison may be made of these two, then perhaps the continuum joining Gawain and Nelson might ultimately be carried forward to the present.

From encounters with American ships in the West Indies, to command of HMS Agamemnon, to the Nile, to Copenhagen and finally to Trafalgar, Nelson's career was one of glorious successes and debilitating failures. But what was the nature of the man behind the history? Fortunately, Nelson

was a prolific letter writer, and many biographers have dedicated their careers to documenting and recreating through literature the life of this great hero. A detailed investigation of these works, and the subsequent comparison to the principles Sir Gawain lived by, must now be undertaken.

Early life

Born in September 29, 1758, Nelson began life as a weak and sickly child. Those closest to him never would have guessed what a strong willed man he would become, for up until the age of twelve, his very survival was constantly in question. But from the outset, the boy became attracted to the romantic notions of life as a sea-captain. Through an uncle, he was able to serve aboard his first ship, gaining a large number of traits from this relative, who imbued in him "through gentle precept and the force of example that enthusiastic attachment to his profession which very rarely fails to create renown and lead to the highes. honours."[92] Early on, the young Nelson gained in confidence and proficiency, making very favorable impressions on the officers he served under.

As a midshipman, Nelson corresponded with an old friend of the family, one Captain William Locker, Lieutenant Governor of Greenwich Hospital, who became in a manner, the young officer's professional father.[93] Like the young knights of the middle ages, midshipmen in the British Navy learned the essence of their craft from those who had gone before; thus, Nelson's uncle and Captain Locker became invaluable role models.

Serving at sea as a midshipman for eighteen months off the coast of India, Nelson's sickly disposition continued to plague him. He finally became so sick, that he was forced to sail for England. Enroute, had it

not been for the unfailing care of his superiors, he would have surely died. But the cruise marked for him the revelation, the epiphany which opened the doors of his glorious career. Looking back on those precarious days, Nelson wrote:

> I felt impressed with a feeling that I should never rise in my profession. My mind was staggered with a view of the difficulties I had to surmount, and the little interest I possessed. I could discover no means of reaching the object of ambition. After a long and gloomy reverie, in which I almost wished myself overboard, a sudden glow of patriotism was kindled within me, and presented my King and Country as patron. 'Well then,' I exclaimed, 'I will be a hero! and, confiding in Providence, brave every danger!'[94]

And so it was that Nelson's questionable youth ended, and his deliverance into manhood began. In the ensuing years, he exhibited a great number of timeless leadership characteristics, on which this paper will now focus its attention.

Nelson's Personal Charm

Perhaps the characteristic most remembered by his biographers was the overwhelming charisma Nelson always seemed to exhibit, endearing him to officers, seamen and civilians alike. The increasing energy and enthusiasm which emanated from him worked magic on admirals and the lowliest deck hand. Although this energy often manifested itself in the form of incredible self-esteem, his character and manner inspired both confidence and trust, the foundations of loyalty and obedience.

While on station in the West Indies in 1799, Nelson was ordered out to the Musquito shore to protect the Baymen from American privateers, in an effort to enforce the Navigation Act. So great and caring was the attention he paid to these people that one chronicler wrote:

> By his care, his gentleness of manners, and conciliating conduct, he gained the entire love of all the settlers, who, when his time of service on that station expired, voted him their unanimous thanks for his conduct.[95]

Particular note should be taken of the words "care," "gentleness of manners" and "conciliating conduct." These concepts certainly seem to fall within the "aware" spoken of in the last chapter. Humanity is the essence of these qualities, again and again Nelson's human concern for his fellow man dictated to his actions, and the reputation which grew out of that case followed him everywhere.

In the year 1797 the British fleet was troubled with a number of mutinies that resulted in the hanging of two British sailors. Amidst these uprisings, Nelson took command of HMS Theseus on May 27th. Several weeks later, a paper was found dropped on the quarterdeck, signed in the name of all the ship's company, and it read:

> Success attend Admiral Nelson! God bless Captain Miller! We thank them for the officers they have placed over us. We are happy and comfortable; and will shed every drop of blood in our veins to support them, -- and the name of THESEUS shall be immortalized as high as the Captain's."[96]

Obviously, Nelson must have possessed some spectacular personal qualities to win such respect from sailors influenced by a pervading feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest. One must seriously wonder whether such a letter would ever be found on the quarterdeck of a modern warship. And if such an affection does not exist, who is to blame? According to Southey, "Whenever an officer fails to win the affections of those who are under his command, he may be assured that the fault is chiefly in himself."[97]

By the end of his career, Nelson's personal charm had won the love and reverence of all of England. Enroute to his last and greatest battle,

Trafalgar, he stopped briefly at Portsmouth, and was immediately set upon by the crowd. The biographers recount that England had seen many heroes, but none who so entirely possessed the love of his fellow countrymen as Nelson:

> All men knew that his heart was as human as it was fearless; that there was not in his nature the slightest alloy of selfishness or cupidity; but that, with perfect and entire devotion, he served his country with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength; and therefore, they loved him as truly and as ferverently as he loved England.[98]

How fortunate the Britons truly were to have a hero such as Nelson, for his actions and character brought them together under one common purpose; the defeat of the French. Somehow, this personal charm of his so greatly outweighed his faults, that his heroism was unquestioned in society. Of all leadership traits, perhaps the origin of this concept is the most difficult to define. But rather than attempting to learn how one might attain it, it is more beneficial to study some other characteristics which contributed to it.

Concern for Peers and Subordinates

As discussed in the second chapter, Richard the First was most noted for the attention he paid to his men. Nelson, too, made the welfare of those who served with him one of his greatest priorities.

In the West Indies, deaths on board from sickness and disease were not uncommon. But while in command of HMS BOREAS, which remained on station there for three years, not a single ship's man or officer lost his life. This remarkable accomplishment was directly attributed to the care Nelson had for his crew. Firstly, he never required his ship to

remain more than three or four weeks at any of the islands. If confined to an English harbor by hurricane weather, "he encouraged all hands of useful amusements: music, dancing, and cudgelling among the men; theatricals among the officers: anything which would employ their attention, and keep their spirits cheerful."[99] Nelson knew how devastating idleness and boredom could be to morale, and that the high spiritedness of a ship's crew was the key to its effectiveness.

While in command of HMS ALBEMARLE, Nelson's first order of business after returning to England, before even seeing his relatives, was to see that all of his men were paid the wages due them. Writing of his distress at the lack of concern the Navy showed for enlisted men, he said:

> The disgust of seamen to the navy was all owing to the infernal plan of turning them over from ship to ship; so that men could not be attached to the officers, nor the officers care the least about the men.[100]

"What Nelson knew by sympathy and instinct, what indeed Drake had known centuries before - that the man before the mast had his rights every whit as much as the gentleman aft - was not to be understood by the Admiralty until serious trouble had forced their unwilling eyes to contemplate the reality of the sailor's life."[101] Nelson spent a good deal of his life trying to convince his superiors how essential the sailor was to the success of the Royal Navy, and was often frustrated and disconcerted with the lack of response he received.

Following his glorious victory at Copenhagen, Nelson refused to receive any decorations until his comrades were "thought justly of by the city of London," adding "I am fixed never to abandon the fair fame of my companions in danger."[102] This is only one of the many instances of

Nelson's insistence on equal recognition for all of his captains.

At the Battle of the Nile, he received a very severe head wound from a piece of shrapnel, and was immediately carried below decks. The ship's surgeon, upon seeing his wounded captain, left the poor fellow he was attending to, and immediately came to treat Nelson. But the brave officer commanded "No! I will take my turn with my brave fellows,"[103] and he refused medical attention until every man who had been previously wounded was properly attended to. Here again, one may easily conclude what a profoundly positive effect such action had on those who saw this amazing demonstration of leadership. Just as Arthur refused to eat at the court of Camelot until all had been served, so did Nelson attend to the welfare of his compatriots.

Sense of Duty

Nelson's dedication to his Navy and his country were beyond reproach; time and again he sacrificed personal interests for a greater good: the good of the service. Just as chivalry marked a shift in medieval thinking from the "self" to the "cause," so too did it act as a foundation for Nelson's behavior.

After completing his tour in the West Indies, Nelson was displeased to learn that England had lost possession of the island of Jamaica, consequently turning public sentiment against him. But the sea-captain was steadfast in his response, writing:

> I am not made to despair, what man can do shall be done. I have marked out for myself a decided line of conduct, and I shall follow it well up; although I have now before me a letter from the physician of the fleet, enforcing my return to England...[104]

Nelson knew in his heart that by rigidly adhering to his sense of the right, i.e. integrity, the British people could not remain displeased with him indefinitely, and that regardless of their sentiments his own sense of duty would not be compromised.

Monetary gain in no way competed for a place in Nelson's mind when set against the more spiritual aspects of his character. When his command of HMS ALBEMARLE came to an end, he wrote:

> I have closed the war without a fortune; but there is not a speck in my character. True, honor, I hope, predominates in my mind far above riches.[105]

Today's overwhelming "me-ism" had absolutely no place in Nelson's attitude. Even in his married affairs, his dedication to the needs of the service came first. Three months before marrying Lady Nelson he wrote a letter to a Mrs. Nisbet, describing the relationship he would share with his future wife:

> "We are often separate, but our affections are not by any means on that account diminished. Our country has the first demand for our services; and private convenience or happiness must ever give way to the public good. Duty is the great business of a sea officer; all private considerations must give way to it, however painful."[106]

It may be almost inconceivable to hear a man utter those very same words today; this long standing relationship between the sea going officer and his wife has been a point of conflict and misunderstanding for generations, but Nelson realized the full implication of his duty, willingly setting the needs of his married life below the needs of the navy.

At the Battle of Trafalgar, Nelson's conception of duty was most glorified. The last signal he sent to his captains remains in the hearts of all Englishmen:

ENGLAND EXPECTS EVERY MAN TO DO HIS DUTY.

Perhaps the critical word here is "expects," because it signifies a belief in an inherent sense of duty, rather than saying "demands" or "desires." Nelson fully knew that the greater the expectations he placed on his men, the more gallantly they would perform.

As he lay dying below decks, after receiving a mortal gunshot wound in the spine, Nelson uttered his last words: "Now I am satisfied. Thank God I have done my duty."[107]

Disputing Orders

Nelson often acted independent of his superiors, defying orthodox military practices. Under Hughes in the West Indies, Jervis at Cape. St. Vincent, Keith in the Mediterranean and again at Copenhagen, he so completely disregarded his instructions that only the most brilliant successes could justify them. For instance, off of Cape. St. Vincent, Nelson left the column, departing from Jervis' Fighting Instructions to engage in the SANTISSIMA TRINIDAD, the Spaniard's largest warship. This ship, at the head of the Spanish column, was so checked by Nelson's brash move that it allowed the remainder of the British Fleet to execute their turn and come up with the enemy. Thus, Nelson sparked the total defeat of this enemy force. In defeat, his conduct would have been considered insubordination, but in victory, it was regarded as the courageous assumption of responsibility, which ultimately accounted for the daring officer's rapid rise to prominence. Nelson knew what a razor's edge he balanced on by his actions, saying "If I had not succeeded, I might have been broke."[108]

At the Battle of Copenhagen, when Nelson's superior Sir Hyde Parker

sent up a signal for withdrawal from action, Nelson held up his spyglass to his blind eye, pretending not to see the signal. Here he exhibited the "supreme moral characteristic which enabled him to shut his eyes to the perils and doubts surrounding the only path by which he could achieve success, and save his command from a defeat verging on annihilation."[109] Nelson's blindness was symbolic as well as actual, for he believed that there was a time to be blind to orders as well as to see them.

At times it seemed as though he almost went out of his way to cause trouble with his superiors, but he was immovable when it came to matters of principle. Whether he was right or wrong, he possessed the courage and determination to act under the conviction that he was in the right.

While assigned to defend Malta, Nelson wrote to the Duke of Clarence, addressing his concept of the obedience to orders:

> To say that an officer is never, for any object, to alter his orders, is what I cannot comprehend. The circumstances of this war so often vary, that an officer has almost every moment to consider, What would my superiors direct did they know what is passing under my nose? But sir, I find few think as I do. To obey orders is all perfection. To serve my kind, and to destroy the French, I consider as the great order of all, from which little ones spring; and if one of these militate against it (for who can tell exactly at a distance?) I go back and obey the great order and object, to down-down with the damned French villians.[110]

Nelson is making the very chivalrous distinction of obeying orders versus obeying the "spirit" of the orders. As in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the concept of legality versus morality; "thou-shalt-not" versus "thou-shalt," is brought to the surface. Nelson realized what danger there was in strictly adhering to laws themselves, rather than acting in accordance with the principles upon which those laws were founded. Perhaps if this

realization had been made in more modern times, the horror of Nuremberg and My Lai might never have taken place. Nelson didn't preach disobedience, but rather, preached against blind obedience. In fact, he believed that this leadership quality distinguished naval officers from Army officers. In a letter to Earl St. Vincent while stationed off the Canary Islands, in preparation for an amphibious assault, Nelson wrote:

> But here soldiers must be consulted; and I know from experience, they have not the same boldness in undertaking a political measure that we have: we look to the benefit of our country, and risk our fame every day to serve her; -- a soldier obeys his orders, and no more.[111]

Courage

Nelson's displays of courage took on many forms, from personal, to moral, to political. Every biography ever written about him must undoubtedly contain a well known anecdote pertaining to the hazardous courage he exhibited as a midshipman. The squadrons to which he was attached was on a polar expedition, and soon became caught in some heavy ice flows. One afternoon, Nelson and a fellow midshipman set off with a flintlock rifle, and when they did not return by nightfall, the ship's captain became rather distressed. The next day the young Nelson was spotted chasing a polar bear with the rifle raised above his head. The captain immediately ordered a round fired, both to signal Nelson to return and scare the bear off. When the zesty lad was finally brought back aboard, the incredulous captain demanded an explanation. The young hero quite calmly replied, "I was in hopes, sir, on getting a skin for my father."[112] This was not the last time Nelson was to display such rash courage in the face of an enemy.

As a captain stationed in the West Indies, Nelson displayed a

tremendous amount of moral courage on several occasions. Dismayed that England was not doing its best to enforce the Navigation Act in the Carribean, he went to complain to Major General Sir Thomas Shirley, Governor of the Leeward Islands. The seasoned army officer attempted to reprimand him by saying: "Old generals are not in the habit of taking advice from young gentlemen," to which Nelson replied, "Sir, I am as old as the Prime Minister of England, and think myself as capable of commanding one of His Majesty's ships as that minister is of governing the state."[113] But his most admirable yet costly stand came in his attempt to put an end to the fraudulent practices of the contractors, prize-agents and other persons in the West Indies connected with the naval service. Writing to Sir Charles Middleton, Comptroller of the Navy, Nelson called for an end to the political corruption which was causing huge monetary losses to the Navy while making civilians rich. But his pleas served only to raise many prejudices at the Board of the Admiralty which took years to subdue. Ultimately, some changes were effected, but Nelson received no credit for it. Soon afterwards, Nelson wrote of his attitude towards uncompromisable ethics:

> I must still buffet the waves in search of - What? Alas! that they called honor is now thought of no more. Why fortune, God knows, has grown worse for the service: so much for serving my country... I have invariably laid down, and followed close, a plan of what ought to be uppermost in the breast of an officer,--that it is much better to serve an ungrateful country, than to give up his own fame. Posterity will do him justice. A uniform course of honor and integrity seldom fails of bringing a man to the goal of fame at last.[114]

What tremendous impact the last part of this statement has, for it underscores the essence of moral courage: to do what is right, regardless

of the consequences, is always the true course of action for the naval officer. Nelson dared to challenge a corrupt system, which makes him as much a hero as if he had won a decisive military victory.

For Nelson, political courage was as important as personal courage. While stationed off of Genoa, Italy, he wrote:

> I am acting not only without the orders of my Commander-in-Chief, but, in some measure, contrary to him. However, I have not only the support of His Majesty's ministers, both at Turin and Genoa, but a consciousness that I am doing what is right and proper for our King and Country. Political courage in an officer abroad, is as highly necessary as military courage.[115]

For Nelson, the ability to project power in the courts as well as on the seas was a vital attribute for a senior naval officer. He fully realized what the consequences of giving the enemy a false sense of power could be; that is why maintaining the highest standards of belief and conduct were so important to his character.

Never was his courage without a strong backing, however. It was Nelson's maxim that, to negotiate with effect, force should be at hand, and in a situation to act.[116] This brilliant conception of military expediency forced the admiral to implore in a letter to Sir Hyde Parker prior to the Battle of Copenhagen:

> The more I have reflected, the more I am confirmed in opinion, that not a moment should be lost in attacking the enemy. They will every day and every hour be stronger: we shall never be so good a match for them as at this moment. The only consideration is, how to get at them with the least risk to our ships.--Here you are, with almost the safety, certainly with the honor, of England, more entrusted to you then ever yet fell to the lot of any British officer. On your decision depends whether our country shall be degraded in the eyes of Europe, or whether she shall rear her head higher than ever. Again, I do repeat, never did our country depend so much upon the success of any fleet as on this. How best to honor her, and abate the pride of her enemies must be the subject of your deepest consideration.[117]

Here one confronts the classic conflict between the commander in the field, and the decision maker at home. Nelson's genius lay in the fact that he knew how all the eyes of the world were upon England, and that her every action would be most closely scrutinized by both enemies and allies alike. The courage Nelson refers to in the above passage is very similar to what Solzhenitsyn called for in the speech with which this paper opens.

But the aspect of Nelson's character which far outshone his moral or political fortitude, was his increasing display of personal courage. While leading a landing party at Santa Cruz, he was shot through the right arm; the fragment badly damaging the limb. Having already lost an eye in an earlier conflict, the brave officer was not to be set back by the calamity. Upon returning to his flagship, HMS THESEUS, he refused assistance in getting back on board. A single rope was lowered over the side, and wrapping it around his left hand, said, in complete calm: "Let me alone: I have yet my legs left and one arm. Tell the surgeon to make haste, and get his instruments. I know I must lose my right arm; so the sooner it is off the better."[118]

One need only consider the lack of anaesthetic and the crude methods of amputation employed in that day to appreciate the type of pain Nelson had to face, but like Gawain baring his neck to the Green Knight's axe, Nelson's indomitable spirit knew no fear. Again, the effect his action had on inspiring both officer and seamen alike must have been tremendous.

Certainly, Nelson's attraction to glory had a great deal to do with his exhibitions, glory not in a vain sense, but in a inspired and patriotic one; the achievement or attainment of an idealistic goal. In a letter to

Lady Hamilton, he wrote:

> ....first, my greatest happiness is to serve my gracious King and Country, and I am envious only of glory; for if it be a sin to covet glory, I am the most offending soul alive.[119]

All of these admirable types of courage may be summed up in considering Nelson's spirit during his last day before death at Trafalgar. Exhibiting a calm and peace of mind reminiscent of Arthur after the Green Knight left Camelot, the admiral retired to his sea-cabin, knowing in his heart that the entire fate of Britain lay in his hands. But he also knew that he had the character to carry that burden, and the beyond anything else, Providence was watching out for him. Prior to his last night's sleep, he wrote:

> Let the battle be when in may, it will never have been surpassed. My shattered frame, if I survive that day, will require rest, and that is all I shall ask for. If I fall on such a glorious occasion, it shall be my pride to take care that my friends shall not blush for me. These things are in the hands of a wise and just Providence, and His will be done! I have got some trifle, thank God, to leave those I hold most dear, and I have taken care not to neglect it. Do not think I am low spirited on this account, or fancy anything is to happen to me; quite the contrary - my mind is calm, and I have only to think of destroying our inveterate foe.[120]

So many of Nelson's greatest attributes are highlighted in these, his last written words. The complete confidence, the humility, the faith in God, the care for his fellows; all these and more had raised Nelson to the pinnacle, ultimately bringing victory to the British in one of the greatest naval encounters in history.

Was Nelson born to greatness? Was his heroism some type of inborn trait? Perhaps. But like Gawain, Nelson was a human being, with human faults; thus be too serves as a timeless role model, a study in courage.

Organizational Ability

According to many modern proponents of leadership, administrative talent is just as essential to the officer as its more humanistic aspects. In other words, "knowing one's job" is just as important as "knowing one's men." Here, Nelson was not lacking. "Nelson was in his element as an organiser, attending to every detail from gun calibres to ship's stores and all the numerous other matters which affected his command on land and sea."[121] It seems as though he had no equals in any area of naval leadership, and it is rare to find organizational abilities combined with such reckless personal courage.

Humility

The battle off of Santa Cruz in the Canary Islands, in which Nelson lost his right arm, was a shattering defeat for the bold officer. Rather than making any vain excuses for the loss, he offered to step down from command of the Mediterranean fleet, humbly beseeching in a letter to Lord St. Vincent that "A left-handed admiral will never again be considered as useful; therefore, the sooner I get to a very humble cottage the better; and make room for a sounder man to serve the state."[122] What a tremendous amount of humility it must have taken for this great hero to call for a more worthy and able man to replace him, proving that his concern for the greater good consistently outweighed his own personal desires.

Exemplary Behavior

The essence of all those leadership traits Nelson believed in were most apparent in his treatment of midshipmen. Exemplary behavior was,

for him, the keystone in the foundations of a young man's officer-education. Even as a young officer, Nelson cared so much for his midshipmen that he called them his "children," even though they were not much younger than he.

The example he set for these young lads, is best remembered by Lady Hughes, the wife of one of Nelson's senior officers in the West Indies. Writing after Trafalgar, she gave her recollections of the young man's leadership style while serving under her husband:

> Among the number (of midshipmen) it may reasonably be supposed that there must be timid as well as bold; the timid he never rebuked, but always wished to show them he desired nothing of them that he would not instantly do himself: and I have known him to say 'Well, sir, I am going on a race to the mast-head, and beg I may meet you there.' No denial could be given to such a wish, and the poor fellow instantly began his march.[123]

Thus, the reasons for Nelson's early effectiveness as a leader becomes apparent: constantly challenging his subordinates, while requiring them to do nothing he himself would not undertake, the basis of leadership by example. Lady Hughes continued, "No one there could be behind-hand in their business when their Captain set them so good and example."

So concerned was Nelson that his midshipmen be exposed to the refinements, courtesy, and nobility of exemplary role-models, that he was in the habit of bringing one or several of the boys with him on official visits. When he landed at Barbados to dine with the Governor, he brought one of his midshipmen along, explaining, "Your excellency must excuse me for bringing one of my midshipmen, as I make it a rule to introduce them to all the good company I can, as they have few to look up to besides myself during the time they are at sea."[124] Simply instructing these youths in

the basics of life as an officer did not make for these qualities imbued in the very natures of their superiors; and to that end, Nelson did everything in his power to see to it that he continuously behaved in an exemplary manner.

As commanding officer of HMS AGAMEMNON, he was reported to say to one of his midshipmen:

> There are three things, young gentleman, which you are constantly to bear in mind. First, you must always implicitly obey orders, without attempting to form any opinion of your own respecting their propriety. Secondly, you must consider every man your enemy who speaks ill of your king; and, thirdly, you must hate a Frenchman as you do the devil.[125]

Apparently, Nelson felt that midshipmen were too young to appreciate the subtle differences involved in disputing orders!

Courtly Love

What endless conjectural webs have been woven concerning the relationship of Nelson and his mistress, Lady Emma Hamilton. A great deal of time could be taken in discussing the legitimacy of their affairs, and one has to wonder if Nelson could ever survive the scandal such a relationship would bring in today's society. However, the important concept to consider here is the part of Nelson's character that his lover's affection filled in for him. Truly, he believed that without the love of Emma, many of his beliefs would echo in an unemotional hollowness. In a way, in this famous letter to Lady Hamilton, Nelson describes the mystical qualities of masculinity and femininity in terms of chivalry and courtly love.

> It is your sex that makes us go forth, and seems to tell us 'None but the brave deserve the fair;' - and if we fall, we still live in the hearts of those females. It is your sex

> that rewards us, it is your sex who cherish our memories; and you, my dear honoured friend, are, believe me, the first, the best of your sex... You know how to reward virtue, honor, and courage, and never ask if it is placed in a prince, duke, lord, or peasant.[126]

Like the medieval knights inspired by their fair ladies, a very special symbiosis appears to exist between the gentleman officer and his love. It simply cannot be denied that Nelson, too, felt somehow ennobled by Lady Hamilton's affections; he understood his role as a courageous man, she understood hers as a fair woman of grace and support. One may argue that the relationship was a bit condescending, but Nelson recognized qualities in her femininity that he himself could not possibly possess, which strengthened his love for her. Is the concept of courtly love important to the definition of chivalry? Ultimately, the answer must be yes, because like chivalry, it placed an inherent value on convention; the roots of love grew into the roots of honor, courage, and integrity, and it is foolish to try separating the former from the latter.

Brotherhood

Contending that the love between brother officers was unlike any other, Nelson was very emotionally attached to his comrades, in a way which today's society would find difficult to comprehend, for there was nothing perverse about it. It was simply the attachments which naturally grow out of a communal, yet trying, experience.

After receiving news of the injury or death of any of his "companions in danger," Nelson always took the loss most personally. For instance when Captain Parker, one of Nelson's closest subordinates, was mortally wounded in the thigh at Boulounge, the paternal admiral was heard to say "Dear

Parker is my child, for I found him in distress," Upon learning of his subsequent death, Nelson lamented it greatly:

> You will judge my feelings: God's will be done. I beg that his hair may be cut off and given me; - it shall be buried in my grave. Poor Mr. Parker! What a son has he lost! If I were to say I was content, I should be; but I shall endeavour to submit with all the fortitude in my power - His loss has made a wound in my heart which time will hardly heal.[127]

History remembers this gallant group of officers as Nelson's "Band of Brothers," a term he himself first used in reply to a congratulatory letter sent by Lord Howe for victory at the Nile. Nelson wrote "I had the happiness to command a Band of Brothers." It would not be the last time he referred to his comrades in such a way.

Downcast by Britain's failure to send an adequate frigate squadron to counter Spanish hostilities in the Mediterranean, Nelson wrote:

> I had though, I fancied--but, nay: it must have been a dream, an idle dream; - yet, I confess it, I did fancy that I had done my country service; and thus they use me! And under what circumstances, and with what pointed aggravation! Yet, if I know my own thoughts, it is not for myself, on my own account chiefly, that I feel the sting of disappointment. No! it is for my brave officers; for my noble-minded friends and comrades. Such a gallant set of fellows! Such a band of brothers! My heart swells at the thought of them![128]

This love Nelson felt for his fellows only served to intensify his frustration at the way in which the British Admiralty seemed to constantly act in a way contrary to its ideals. As he so poignantly states, if the disregard of his superiors was aimed only at him, he could have borne the brunt of it, but it grated against the actions of those who served under his command, and that he could not tolerate.

The "Nelson Touch"

Enroute to the Battle of the Nile, Nelson sent his chief captain, Lord Collingwood, what he referred to in his diary as the "Nelson Touch." It involved the basic plan of attack for the British fleet: Collingwood's division would attack the enemy's rear, while Nelson attacked the center. The plan had several distinct advantages:

1. in the division of forces and freedom of action granted to the second in command;

2. in the concentration on rear and center, effectively cutting the enemy force in two, while bringing the British line into more effective action; and

3. in the adaptability to modification under the exigencies of actual conflict.[129]

The "Nelson Touch" finally became a term for the trust the commander placed in all of his captains by giving them leave to act independently of the main force if separated in battle. Nelson would call these brave men aboard his flagship, and after a formal and gracious meal, all would be required to take part in a tactical discussion, hammering out plans for group and independent action once engaged. One can easily perceive how this new independence and latitude was responsible for creating a very marked mutual trust between all concerned, and thus, the "Nelson Touch" became a landmark in leadership style.

Realizing the value of constant communication, he sent long and detailed dispatches back to England, when he was enroute to the Nile, after being criticized for conducting the fleet to Egypt. The sagacious Nelson

knew that "when an officer is not successful in his plans, it is absolutely necessary that he should explain the matters upon which they were founded."[130] In other words, the expression of one's "philosophy" behind his actions must be communicated to the superior in times of misunderstanding, what is now commonly referred to as communication "up the chain of command."

Respect for the Enemy

Just as Christian knights spared foes in battle, so too did Nelson in his many encounters with a capitulating enemy. Mercy, a manifestation of Nelson's awaré, often brought him as much renown as a capture itself.

In command of HMS ALBEMARLE, he sailed for Canada from the West Indies, soon capturing a fishing schooner, whose master had nearly all of his possessions on board, with a large family waiting at home. Rather than gathering up the spoils and locking the man in irons, Nelson employed him as a pilot in Boston Bay, eventually restoring him to his schooner and cargo, with a certificate which would prevent capture by any other vessel. In return, the skipper gave him a gift of sheep, poultry and fresh provisions, which Nelson's men were desperately in need of.[131] Mercy had paid off.

On board MNS MINERVE, while battling the Spaniards off the Spanish coast, Nelson capture Don Jolobo Stuart of the SABINA. Upon reaching Porto Ferrato, he sent the prisoner with a flag of truce to Carthagena, having returned him his sword, in honor of the gallantry the Spanish captain had displayed. Later, Nelson spoke of the overwhelming respect he held for an enemy who fought nobly:

> I felt it consonant to the dignity of my country, and I always act as I feel right, without regard to custom: he was reputed the best officer in Spain, and his men worthy of such a commander.[132]

Of Napoleon, however, and the French in general, he thought quite differently. As in Gawain, the enemy is perceived as unchivalrous, churlish, almost monstrous; Nelson constantly refers to the French as "those devils," saying:

> The Army of Bonaparte are entirely destitute of every principle of honor: they have always acted like licentious thieves.

All the more reason for Nelson to hold a kind of disgust and hatred for them, which may have further inspired his gallantry.

Conclusions

Accounts of the brave deeds of this phenomenal leader could be given ad infinitum. Nelson was, beyond question, the epitome of the naval "gentleman officer." And although the same honor by which he so valiantly directed his actions ultimately resulted in his death (for he insisted on wearing his decorations in battle), despite his outbursts of arrogance and egotism, Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson stands as an unblemished model for the modern military man.

So many of the precepts which ruled his character are timeless in nature, so many relate directly to those qualities praised in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, that their importance cannot be denied.

What was it about this man, the avid hunter, who, like his medieval ancestors, shared in the sense of belonging to a heritage of proud action both on and off the battlefield? His exquisite nobility, his simplicity of mind and manners, were dominated by a "nameless ruling principle, inspiring him with an exacted pride, which looked down with contempt on the littleness of political and professional parties, and with a sincerity

which would have disqualified him to act with them."[133] This "nameless principle" was integrity, that remarkable human courage by which history's heroes have steered their course.

Nelson's contribution to the continuation of chivalric virtue, is most beautifully summed up in the final paragraph of Southey's Life of Nelson:

> He has left us, not indeed his mantle of inspiration, but a name and an example, which are at this hour inspiring thousands of the youth of England: - a name which is our pride, and an example which will continue to be our shield and our strength. Thus it is that the spirits of the great and the wise continue to live and to act after them; verifying in this sense, the language of the old mythologist:
>
> 'These god-like spirits, through the will of almighty ZEUS, are beneficent, and remain on earth as the protectors of mortal men.'[134]

And let us hope, for the sake of our own society, that this spirit may be rediscovered in the near future.

"Hic jacet Arthurus, Rex quondam, Rexque futurus."

- Le Morte d'Arthur

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION, APPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As research in this project progressed, I began to realize how timely the subject of chivalry truly is. Perhaps the real beauty of this investigation lies in the fact that I seemed to live it; every time I spoke with a professor, or a peer, the need for an understanding of chivalry became more and more apparent. Each time I picked up a book written in the Twentieth Century, or read the latest editorials, the crises of social disorder demanded a solution. Political apathy, inflation, foreign policy difficulties, the war of the sexes, the post-Vietnam syndrome; all this and more may be traced back to one all embracing social malady: a lack of courage.

The similarities between our culture today and medieval society are so striking that they prompted one modern historian, Barbara Tuchman, to title her treatise on the Fourteenth Century A Distant Mirror. Black Death pessimism has been replaced with nuclear holocaust pessimism; science and technology have stripped us of much of our humanity; the Fates and the Goddess Fortuna have fallen to the "machine." Today's younger generation, crying out for some type of collective faith to subscribe to, turns to decadent "causes," such as Jonestown, the Moon movement, or the new Christianity.

At the Naval Academy, concepts such as honor and conduct are suffering from a defined identity crisis, and midshipmen are unable to grasp the spirit of their inception. Caught in a morass of technological emphasis and undefined goals, Naval Academy students cannot determine what their

service wants of them; thus, they make demands on the system, and the "cause" falls to anthropocentricity.

The problems seem endless, but this close look at chivalry; at Sir Gawain and Lord Nelson, has, I believe, provided a number of answers.

Leadership

Like all other forms of human expression: language, music, drama -- leadership is an art, and like any art, requires a foundation in classical concepts. It is impossible to be a good painter without studying Rembrandt, to be a good musician without embracing Mozart, to be a leader of men without studying chivalry. The virtues which Gawain and all his knights strove to perfect, the qualities Admiral Nelson imbued to become the most famous naval officer in history, are all founded on timeless, undeniable, moral principles. Modern day problems often require modern day solutions; but human nature, the governing force underneath centuries of change, and the understanding of that nature, is as applicable today as it was five thousand years ago.

Twentieth Century Western civilization has fallen into the trap of believing that somehow, the truths by which man has lived for centuries no longer apply, that the key to leadership may be found in systems analysis and corporate managerial techniques. We manage commodities; we lead men. As Vice Admiral Stockdale said, and as Gawain and Nelson verify, honesty, sensitivity, compassion, courage, and integrity, are musts for the successful leader. Their formulas will not be found in any textbook; there is no numerical expression for them. Only by returning to a study of their inculcation in the past may we learn to act in the future, which points to another corallary of chivalry: the need for heroes.

Heroes

The Twentieth Century saw the rise of the anti-hero, the small man who dares to fight the system that is crushing him. By the advent of the Vietnam war, heroes ceased to exist. Servicemen returning from the Far East were not hailed for their deeds, but rather, asked to apologize for them. And those who did attempt to rise to positions of prominence were raised up or cast down at the will of public opinion and the media.

The most devastating effect of this phenomenon is the disappearance of centralized idealism; the reason classical heroes were "bigger than life" was to set a standard above and beyond anyone's capability. Heroes were, and should be, role models, living or legendary exemplars of qualities of excellence. Just as Charles the Bold felt himself ennobled by studying Arthur and Gawain, and just as Nelson's midshipmen looked to him for guidance and inspiration, so should our leaders function. At the Naval Academy, this role must be undertaken by the officers, especially the company officers. A midshipman cannot be asked to accept an abstraction such as moral courage if he or she does not see it embodied in a superior. One cannot throw 4300 men and women--from all walks of society--together, inside four walls, and expect leadership to magically appear out of some sort of instinctual spontaneity. The concept of the "shadow command" appears to be contrary to this need for heroes. The sooner the officer chain-of-command realizes how important their roles as models for leadership are, the Naval Academy will begin producing more competent officers.

Answering the Call

Every young person seeks direction in life, and each is naturally

attracted to an organization or body which, they believe, will provide it. The young man of today still searches for the experience that will test him; this is the Rite of Passage, the baptism by fire. Of course, we can always disclaim five millenniums of human history by saying that such a need no longer exists, but it certainly did in Gawain's day, and Nelson's. Regardless of what pragmatists or social economists may say, men and women are not attracted to a service life simply for the money and the rank, and as soon as the armed forces, including the academies, stop appealing to materialistic desires, and get back to providing the "call to adventure," then they will begin seeing the type of individual who won't "do his four years" and then leave. Retention rates for mid-level enlisted personnel and officers are shockingly low, and no amount of money is going to change that. Men go to sea for the romance, the mystery attached to it. Strip service life of that mystery, and the relationship is reduced to "man vs. the system."

The Naval Academy recruits candidates under every pretense but one, the desire to become a naval officer. Then the institution cannot understand why midshipmen don't have a better attitude towards the military. Unity is impossible without a unifying ideal. A greater emphasis on the ideals of chivalry will cause a shift of focus within the Brigade from the individual to the cause.

Honor

Western society has so disregarded chivalry that our preoccupation with legality ("thou-shalt-not"), has completely cut us off from morality ("thou-shalt"). The honor concept at the Naval Academy suffers from the

same problem. "Honor education" should not involve the recounting of endless gruesome tales of midshipmen being discharged for honor violations. This only serves to reinforce the "thou-shalt-not" aspect of the ideal, and the code becomes a behavioral rather than an idealistic one. Plebes are told that they will not lie, cheat, or steal because they will be thrown out if they do, rather than being told that such beliefs are expected of them as naval officers. For some reason, we insist on denying the inherent sense of Right in man, and as a result, no midshipman is taught that the task of every leader is to elucidate the good in his subordinates.

The Administrative Conduct System suffers from a similar problem. Most stripers have bastardized the entire concept, because they focus their attention on the "regs," rather than on the spirit upon which those regulations were founded. By simply "frying" another individual, the midshipman has found an easy way out, exercising little or no leadership or decision making. This legalistic disease is the essence of bureaucracy, and paper policy becomes a substitute for moral courage and personal involvement. Once again, it is up to the officers to be the trend setters in shifting the emphasis back to a moral, rather than legal, base.

Courtesy

As Henry David Thoreau said in Walden:

> The laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day. He cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has not time to be anything but a machine.

so too does the development of integrity in Bancroft Hall fall under a

similar dilemma. One of the major conclusions of studying Gawain and Nelson is that courtesy is essential to the development of integrity; unfortunately, life in "the hall" is so counter to courtesy that moral development has trouble getting off the ground. One of the most disturbing aspects of academy life is the way in which midshipmen treat one another. Everyone is so caught up in incredibly hectic daily schedules, their minds are so "burned out" with formulas and appointments to keep, that attention to the personal needs of another becomes a very low priority. Midshipmen, as leaders, usually take no personal interest in their subordinates, and as a result get no respect in return. Nelson's success as a leader was most attributed to his caring and gentle manner; most midshipmen are convinced that the best way to lead is to scream and curse until their point has been made.

A direct result of caring for one another is the concept of brotherhood. But is today's "band of brothers" being replaced by a "fraternity of technocrats"? The effectiveness of any military unit lies in its camaraderie, its esprit de corps. Look at any color company to verify that. And camaraderie can only come about through courtesy.

The phenomena of the "suspension of adolescence," and the fifty percent June Week wedding divorce rate can find solutions in courtesy as well. If midshipmen can somehow be given more opportunity to develop those qualities which mark the true lady or gentleman social maturity will grow and prosper. But what is the rationale for sending nine hundred brilliant "kids" into the fleet each June?

The argument is often made that, compared to civilian colleges, the

Naval Academy is still far superior in its standards and expectations. But, to quote from the copy of Reef Points I was issued as a plebe:

> The standards of manliness, honor and integrity of other schools or communities have no bearing on those which must prevail at the Naval Academy.

To make an excuse for the lowering of standards at the Naval Academy using the above argument is to invite an oppressive mediocrity to prevail. And it is the duty of every leader to insure that his subordinates are made fully aware of the expectations made by these standards. Midshipmen come to the Academy to experience discipline, to have demands placed on them. But the demands of character are replaced by demands on time, and rather than encouraging intellectual rigor, one only has sufficient time to "get the gouge" and "plug and chug." Courtesy and integrity die in such an environment. I end this section with a passage from Five Minutes to One Bell, a small guide (written for junior Royal Navy officers) in 1925:

> One hears a lot nowadays about consideration for officers and men - and rightly so. Unfortunately, in so many cases this is construed as meaning relaxation of discipline.
>
> I am prepared to stake my chances of a future state on the fact that ninety-nine out of every hundred sane Englishmen - be they officers or men - do not resent discipline. Rather the reverse. What the men (and officers) in your destroyer ask from you is courtesy, and the avoidance of unnecessary work - and I am tempted to add that the greatest of these is courtesy.

Courage

With just a little imagination, we can find a striking similarity between the behavior of the Green Knight in Arthur's court, and the tactics of the third world and Soviet Russia, in terms of terrorism. The whole

point of the Challenge lies in the idea of forces of evil testing the virtues which rule the world of good. If in fact the Green Knight had succeeded in undermining Gawain's chivalric integrity, the entire court of Camelot might have fallen. This same test goes on day after day between the East and the West. Each time the United States fails to display national or political courage at home or abroad, the possibility of being unable to wield the battle-axe of military might grows stronger and stronger.

Perhaps the example set by Gawain as he bent his head before the Green Knight has no greater parallel in history than the ordeal of American prisoners-of-war in Viet Nam. Like their legendary green predecessor, the North Vietnamese subjected their prisoners to a constant test of physical and spiritual will, always challenging the democratic principles the prisoners adhered to. But the American fighting men soon learned that behavior quite similar to Gawain's foiled the attempts of the enemy. To once again quote Admiral Stockdale, "With integrity, I knew that I couldn't be had and couldn't be hurt."

The idea of encouraging bravery through intellectual rigor may have been best expressed centuries ago when Pericles gave a funeral speech to the Athenians:

> The man who can most truly be accounted brave is he who best knows the meaning of what is sweet in life and what is terrible, and then goes undeterred to meet what is to come.

This is what chivalry truly stands for: developing those insights, perceptions, and the sensitivity which allows us to face ourselves and the rest of the world without fear.

Only now are we beginning to come to grips with the historical importance of the Viet Nam war; historical in terms of the very important experiences the men who came back from those jungles have to share with the rest of the world. Those who went in with a sense of chivalry, were able to recognize the importance of the "journeys" they were taking, while those without that sense emerged broken and embittered. The release of James Webb's brilliant novel Fields of Fire provided our society with its first look at the lessons in the human condition that conflict had to teach. The unchivalrous behavior of American society in the 60's, our lack of courage, caused more servicemen to lose their lives by suicide than by combat. The reason the film The Deerhunter has received such tremendous acclaim is because its creators rediscovered the timeless values of brotherhood-in-arms: the same juxtaposition of the hunt and warfare that we saw in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

* * * * * * * * * *

The ascent or decline of the West depends upon our ability to rediscover and reapply the values of the human continuum, the same process which brought civilization out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Until a centralized idealism, one of honor, truth, and integrity, is brought about by the emergence of courageous leaders, our stance as a first-rate civilization will continue to decline.

If the attitudes of duty, honor, and country which once set Naval Academy graduates apart from all of their contemporaries are not given more emphasis in the future, there will be no justification for spending

$100,000 on a midshipman when OCS and ROTC can produce as competent a naval officer. This study leads me to believe that we are in fact moving back in that direction; the pendulum is beginning to swing from a historical apathy towards thoughtful concern and human growth.

We cannot deny the words inscribed on the grave of King Arthur:

HERE ARTHUR LIES, KING ONCE, AND KING TO BE.

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A GLOSSARY OF CHIVALRIC TERMS[135]

ARMS OF COURTESY- weapons not intended to inflict serious damage.

BALDRIC- a broad belt or girdle, often richly ornamented, passing over one shoulder, across the breast, and under the other, supporting the sword, dagger, or bugle.

BANNER- one of the three chief classes of flags used in the Middle Ages, the other two being the pennon and the standard. The banner was square or rectangular in shape and bore the owner's arms over its whole surface, as though it were his shield.

BASELARD (or BASILARD)- sharply tapering, two-edged dagger, popular in the 13th and 14th centuries. Though it was sometimes worn with armor, it was more often an accessory of civilian dress and was even carried by ladies, attached to their girdles.

BLAZON- to blazon is to describe a coat of arms in the correct heraldic language and manner. The rules of blazon are strict and fairly complicated; e.g., there is a correct order of blazon to be observed when a description os given.

BUCKLER- a shield; properly speaking, the small round shield for fighting on foot.

CAMELOT- the name imperishably given in poetry and romance as King Arthur's chief seat of government, though its exact whereabouts, like all the cherished places of legend, remains mercifully mysterious.

CAP-A-PIE- Old French, meaning head to foot; i.e., fully armed or accoutred.

CHANSONS DE GESTE- the old national epics, chanted and sung in France and other countries by wandering minstrels or jongleurs in inn, marketplace, and castle. The stories, told in swinging metre that made them more easily remembered, were handed down by word of mouth and were added to as years went on.

CHEVALIER- a knight or horseman (French cheval, a horse); a member of some foreign orders of knighthood.

DAMOISEAU- a young man of gentle birth, aspiring to knighthood, but not yet admitted to the order of chivalry. Often, as the next step up, he became a squire to an established knight.

FLEUR-DE-LYS- the emblem of the kings of France from about the reign of Louis VII (1120-1180). Various accounts have been given of its origin, but the most generally accepted is that it is based on the iris flower.

GLOSSARY (cont'd)

GAGE- among other meanings, a glove or cap thrown down as an act of defiance or as a challenge to combat, and to be picked up as a sign that the challenge was accepted.

GAUNTLETS- armored glaves, often formed of a single plate for the back of the hand fastened to leather, and smaller overlapping plates for the fingers to enable them to move easily.

GESTE- an old word for exploit, adventure, a tale of achievements, particularly as told in medieval ballads and metrical romances.

GORGET- close-fitting armor, of mail or plate, to protect the throat and upper part of the chest. Often, it was accompanied with a back-plate. The word was also used for a type of ruff or whimple worn by women.

HALBERD- a long-handled weapon, of many different forms and designs, but consisting essentially of a spike at the head and an axe-blade, either square or curved, concave or convex.

HAUBERK- a long coat of mail, almost knee-length, the short sleeves becoming, in time, long and close-fitting and terminating in mittins of mail with a separate thumb stall.

HELM- complete covering for the head, usually made of four or five iron plates riveted tigether, and often worn right over other protective coverings beneath.

KNIGHT BACHELOR- the oldest class of knight, a member of 'the bachelery of England'; usually a landless knight who had won his spurs but was not a member of any order of chivalry; or a young knight following the banner of another.

KNIGHT BANNERET- sometimes a knight of high standing who led others to war under his own banner; but also a knight created on the field of battle, in which case the knight or knighter often cut off the tail of the long pennon to make it a square banner as a symbol of new rank.

KNIGHT-ERRANT- a wandering knight, seeking romantic adventure and the opportunity to display his prowess.

LANCE- the chief knightly weapon and, though other arms were employed, the one most used in joust and tournament. For hundreds of years, though there were many local variations of the pattern, the lance was little more than a tapering pole up to a dozen feet in length, with a small metal head.

LISTS- the enclosed area of land where jousts and tournaments were held.

LYONESSE- the legendary land from which King Arthur came, between Land's End and the Scilly Isles, now deep beneath the sea.

MAIL- type of armor formed either from rings punched out of a sheet metal or of individually hand-formed wire links with the ends flattened.

MISERICORDE- literally, 'mercy'. A straight, thin-bladed dagger, to be found represented on a number of knightly effigies; apparently so-called because it was often used to give the final 'mercy' stroke to a fallen adversary.

PALADIN- a knight-errant, a great champion.

PALFREY- a horse of good breeding, used for travelling and hunting, and, because of its good disposition and ease of control, particularly valuable for occasions of display and ceremony.

PENNON- a small, pointed flag borne at the lance-head by knights, and sometimes by squires, if they commanded sufficient followers.

QUARTER, GIVING OF- sparing the life of a defeated enemy or prisoner.

RAPIER- a late type of sword, slender and finely pointed; used for thrusting and parrying, instead of cutting and hewing with the edge.

ROUND TABLE- the table made by Merlin for Uther Pendragon and given by him to King Leodegrance, whose daughter Guenevere became King Arthur's wife. Leodegrance gave the Round Table to Arthur as a marriage gift.

SCUTAGE- derived from the Latin scutum, a shield. Money paid to the king by a knight or other tenant instead of performing military service in the field.

STANDARD- a word which has had several meanings through the centuries. The most important are (1) a pole or staff supporting some device or symbol that was not, properly speaking, a flag; (2) a framework or scaffolding on wheels, supporting a variety of objects, including banners or flags; (3) a long tapering flag displaying the badges and, sometimes, the motto of king, noble, or knight.

SURCOAT- a garment worn over armor from about 1190-1420. It varied greatly in length at different periods, from almost heel-length early on to the shorter, more closely fitting jupon of later times.

TILT- (1) the verb, meaning to run a course with a lance in joust or tournament. We still say that someone rushing at top speed is going 'full tilt'.

(2) the noun, meaning the long barrier erected down the lists from the early 15th century onwards.

GLOSSARY (cont'd)

TOURNAMENT- the chief sport and most important school of the age of chivalry; the training ground of the great warrior, the opportunity for the unknown and fortuneless, the career of the landless, the favorite spectacle of the masses. They began as real encounters with dangerous weapons, in which a man hazarded life of limb, and finished as more or less harmful pageants.

VALET- a word which has changed its meaning in the course of the centuries. Nowadays it is used only for a man's personal servant concerned with his clothes. In the Middle Ages, it could mean a squire of the body, responsible for the knight's armor, etc.

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Military officers.

20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

This study is utilizing pertinent works of literature and biography to trace the historical development of the concept of chivalry as it has been adopted and applied by the military officer. Following an investigation of the origins of the medieval conception of the ideal, when the concept of the "gentleman officer" first appears, and it will continue until the year 1914. - The study is focusing on two major figures, who stand as chivalric

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exemplars : Sir Gawain and Vice Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson.

Where practicable, the study is concentrating on aspects of chivalry relating to naval officers and the naval service. The final chapter of the paper discusses the application of the discoveries made, with the hope that the findings may prove useful to future classes of Midshipmen at the Naval Academy.

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