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Guerilla Teaching Lecture

The Medieval Age was a very dangerous period in history. There were frequent wars and brittle peace. Moral standards were high and chivalry was regarded as a must. The life of a knight was not easy in the Medieval Times. They were full of the brightest hope and darkest despair. Through it, the knights stood strong, ready to protect the honor they were blessed with or go down respectably in a fight.

The idea of knighthood originated in ancient Rome. However, the social standing of knights came from the feudal system. After the Roman Empire fell, European countries had to protect themselves with large standing armies consisting of ordinary men. However, they quickly learned that they were no match for a new kind of soldier, the mounted warrior. The peasants and tenant farmers could not afford to commit themselves to mounted training because of their duties to their families so the practice of "commendation" was used. A soldier would attach himself to a superior military member, promising military help for some sort of support in return, usually a land grant complete with serfs to tend it. Once committed to the army, a warrior would become a lord and use the income from his land to equip himself with weapons and a horse and use his spare time to train in horsemanship and weaponry. Thus, the life of a knight was born.

Knighthood evolved into a bloodline occupation. If a Lord or knight had a son, the child was moved to a nearby castle, made a page, and acted as a personal assistant to his lord. He partook in many training games as a child and was not often taught to read or write because that was not considered very knightly. If the page showed promise, then he

became a squire at the age of fourteen. At this point, the boy was in real battle, replacing lances, swords, or any item damaged in battle. If a squire was successful in all his tasks, he was dubbed a knight. However, a man could not become a knight merely by being born into it. Among other things, a knight had to be courageous, honorable, noble, and loyal. All of these aspects meld into the code of chivalry.

One way a knight could practice for battle was tournaments. It was also a way for knights who were looking for service to prove themselves. During these tournaments, groups of fighters were pitted against each other over miles of countryside. They wore their usual battle armor and fought with sharp weapons. A defeated knight often had to pay the victor with belongings such as his armor, weapons, and horse; and death was not uncommon. However, these brutal tournaments were soon looked down upon and during the end of the twelfth century, King Richard I of England attempted to bring the tournaments under control. Other safety measures began to appear and the tournaments were watered down to a one-on-one joust.

Soon the joust became a great spectacle. Townspeople were informed of the event weeks in advance and large processions and feasts were held prior to a jousting match. Special weapons and armor were created to ensure a low death rate. The point was to test and prove your talent, not to kill the opponent.

On the battlefield, knights were often on horseback. Their field of vision was minimal because of their face shield, but they were successful in killing. Many different kinds of weapons were at their disposal but knights often donned the sword and swung it around haphazardly hoping to kill as many opponents as possible.

Chivalry is an elusive term that is constantly fluctuating and meeting whatever ideals a person may have for it. Nevertheless, a few concrete principles exist. Chivalry combined aristocratic mannerisms and ideals and later added Christian virtues. To be a good knight, a man had to follow many guidelines including living to serve his Lord and country, respect women, avenge the wronged, and avoid cheating. A knight was brave in battle, loyal to his king and God, and willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. To women, a knight was to be gracious and gentle, and to his peers, merciful, courteous, and humble.

Knighthood is an ancient practice that encompasses all aspects of life. A knight had to be daring, brave, noble, and polite. They lived by the chivalric code and allowed their lives to be foretold by the common ideals of the time. However, by living up to the social pressures of the time, the knight marked himself in history as a symbol of nobility and morality.

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