The Roots of Chivalry

Chivalry has come to be very watered down in modern day times. For the most part we think of chivalry as the way a man behaves toward, and around, women. And while this does characterize chivalry it is actually a very small component of what chivalry was.

Chivalry was an all encompassing guide for living. This included combat, horsemanship, law, religion, management of people and lands, and well just about every aspect of a knight's life.

There has been a long-standing debate about chivalry and whether anybody actually followed any of it and I believe it was something that knights aspired to. Let me explain why I think so.

The early middle ages were an extraordinarily tumultuous time and there was no such thing as chivalry. Europe was in darkness, plague ravaged the people, and war was found everywhere. The prime rule of thumb during this time was that might was right; and the only rule that was effective was rule by the sword. Barons, lords, knights and kings took by force what they could take.

But, Europe slowly came out of this darkness in the centuries leading up to the Renaissance. The plague disappeared, Kings consolidated their lands (which caused stability) and the Church exercised power over a significant portion of the continent.

So what happened? What happens when stability occurs and food once again becomes a reliable resource? People turn to new ways of doing things. They gain the freedom to examine themselves and their lives. They search for meaning in new ways, and it is from this stability that the Renaissance was born and the ideals of chivalry were also born.

Chivalry is a natural development of the need for structure and organization in any large culture or society. As a society grows in size and complexity it needs a set of rules of behavior for its people and chivalry was exactly this. It was a set of rules that laid out how a knight could manage himself, his people, his affairs and also how he could better himself. So among other things the code of chivalry was the first self-help program! See that, chivalry is so much more than just holding a door open!

We tend to think of chivalry as a very limited set of rules but chivalry was a code for living that influences much of the culture we live in today. It is a fascinating topic and there were books written about chivalry going back more than 500 years - and some

of them are still in print. Among the best of these are A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry by Geoffroi De Charny and the Book of Knighthood and Chivalry by Ramon Lull.

An example of Chivalry and Courage

The Song of Roland is a French Epic Poem that tells the story of Charlemagne and how the rearguard of his army was exposed to attack because of treachery by the Saracens. Roland refused help and had sworn an oath to his king so he charged the enemy along with the soldiers that would join him even though it meant certain death.

Did you know? Here is some interesting information about the term "Knight".

For the most part, and in most countries Knight's were closely related to horses. This is because a knight mounted on a horse was a very dangerous force to be feared. It took wealth to have warhorses for battle. This use of the horse had a big impact on the name knight. In many countries this is reflected in their names. In France a knight was known as a "Chevalier". In Spain he was a "Caballero". In Italy he was a "Cavalier". And in Germany he was a "Ritter". These are all derivates from the word horse or the word to ride. In England we find the exception to this rule where the term "Knight" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "cniht" which means household servant or retainer.

Many societies didn't have any exposure to horses and when knights on horseback invaded into their territories it evoked terror and many myths such as the centuar from ancient greece.

"The Roots of Chivalry and the Medieval Knight." *The Roots of Chivalry and the Medieval Knight*. Kalif Publishing, n.d. Web. 19 Mar. 2013.

"-Knight-Medieval.com-." *Knight Medieval.com*. Kalif Publishing, n.d. Web. 19 Mar. 2013.