

The Knighting Ceremony of Sir William Talbot

I

Introduction

The ceremony is based on the traditions established in the 13th century poem L'Ordene de Chevalerie, William Durands Pontifical (C. 1295,) the knightings at Henry IV's 1399 coronation, the early fifteenth century book Tirant lo Blanc by Sir Joanot Martorel and Elias Ashmole's Ceremonies of the Order of the Garter. These five sources contain all of the basic information used in a late fourteenth century English knighting ceremony. No one source contained a complete ceremony, though these sources overlap in their detail enough to lead me to believe that the complete ceremony has been restored.

II

The Vigil

The vigil is to be a time of prayer and contemplation where "ancient and grave knights" may come and instruct the candidate in the ways of knighthood (this is actually to be an open vigil.) The candidate is bathed (already done,) shaved and given a hair cut. He is dressed in robes of scarlet over a white shirt with black hose and shoes. The white shirt symbolizes the hoped-for purity of the knight's future. The scarlet robes symbolize the blood that he will shed for God and honor, and the black hose and shoes symbolize the earth from which we came and the death which he must prepare to face without fear. The vigil room should be decorated with fine cloths and banners of the members of his household. There should be a bed in the vigil room clothed in white upon which the candidate is laid after his bath. He should fast and drink only spiced wine. His armour and sword should be laid upon an altar along with a holy relic, and blessed with the following words.

III

The Blessing of the Sword

The priest will hold the sword aloft and say: "Grant, we pray, O Lord, our prayers, and see fit to bless with the hand of Your majesty this sword with which your servant desires to be girt, to the end that he may be a defender of the Church, of widows, of orphans, and of all servants of god, against the cruelty of Pagans, and that he may be the terror and dread of his other enemies, ensuring for him the performance of equitable prosecution and just defense, Amen."

IV

The Blessing of the Armour:

The priest will then return the sword to the altar and raise the helmet toward heaven and say: "Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, through the invocation of Your holy name and through the coming of Christ Your Son, Our Lord, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, bless this armour, so that this man Your servant, who is enclosed in it, by favor of your benevolence, may trample under foot his invisible enemies and, gaining victory in all things, always remain safe and sound, Amen."

V

Begging the Boon of Knighthood

After the King's court is nearly complete a grave and ancient knight will approach the King and beg the boon of knighthood for the candidate. The order of the chivalry is summoned before the King and asked if the candidate is deemed worthy of elevation to the order of chivalry. If they assent, the candidate is then called forth.

VI

The Ceremony of Knighthood

The candidate for knighthood would be led to the chapel by four "squires" (unbelted fighters) and minstrels who should sport, dance and make merry. When the candidate is led to the king's presence the squires and the minstrels are dismissed and he kneels before the King. A sermon is then given explaining the symbolism of the knight's regalia and the duties of a knight. The sermon is given by four worthy knights.

VII

The Meaning of the Sword

The first knight explains the symbolism of the sword. He says: "The sword's significance lies in the fact that it slays and wounds with both edges, and its point also stabs. The sword is the knight's noblest weapon, and he too should serve in three ways. He should defend the church, killing and wounding those who oppose it as do the two edges of a sword. He should also defend the poor and weak against the powerful influence of the rich. And just as a sword pierces whatever it touches, likewise a knight should pierce all heretics and villains, attacking them mercilessly wherever he may find them. The pommel symbolizes the world, for a knight is obliged to defend his king. The guard symbolizes the cross, on which Our Redeemer died to preserve mankind, and every true knight should do likewise, braving death to preserve his brethren. Should he perish in the attempt, his soul will surely go to heaven."

VIII

The Meaning of the Belt

The second knight then explains the symbolism of the belt. He says: "The sword belt means

that, just as a knight wears his sword girded to his body, so he himself should be girded with chastity. Its color is white, signifying purity and truth."

IX

The Meaning of the Spurs

The third knight then explains the symbolism of the spurs. He says: "A knight's golden spurs symbolize many things, for by placing the precious metal near his feet, he shows his disdain for worldly things, and his duty to commit no evil that might disgrace his order. His spurs are sharpened to goad his steed just as a knight should goad the people to virtue, but a virtuous knight should also make himself feared by the wicked."

X

The Meaning of the Chain

The fourth and final knight then explains the symbolism of the chain. He says: "The golden chain of a knight symbolizes the chain of fealty that binds him to his king. The chain is made of the purest of all metals, gold, and is made without end symbolizing the pure and eternal nature of the bond of fealty."

XI

Questioning the Candidate

The king then asks the candidate, "For what purpose do you wish to join the order? If to be rich, to take your ease, and be held in honor without doing honor to knighthood, you are unworthy of it." The candidate replies, "I desire to be a knight that I might serve my God my King and my Lady Wife to the best of my abilities."

XII

The Dubbing of the Knight

The candidate's lady would then remove the scarlet robes and place upon him a houppelande of blue velvet lined in white linen. (Traditionally since the reign of Edward III, knights should be formally attired in blue because it is the color of servants and a knight is the servant of the king.) The four knights would each come forth and place the regalia on the candidate. When the belt, chain, spurs and sword have been placed on his body the king will give him the Colee by tapping him on the shoulders with the flat of his sword saying "In the name of God, St. Michael, and St. George, I create thee knight. Be thou valiant, fearless, and loyal." The new knight will then swear the oath of fealty. The King would then tell the new knight to rise and greet the members of the order. The squires who ushered him in will then return with baskets of largesse to distribute to the populace as is the custom of old.