

called *aventures* now have no experiential basis whatever, although it is impossible to fit them into any actual or practically conceivable political system, although they commonly crop up without any rational connection, one after the other, in a long series, we must be careful not to be misled by the modern value of the term adventure, to think of them as purely "accidental." When we moderns speak of adventure, we mean something unstable, peripheral, disordered, or, as Simmel once put it, a something that stands outside the real meaning of existence. All this is precisely what the word does not mean in the courtly romance. On the contrary, trial through adventure is the real meaning of the knight's ideal existence. That the very essence of the knight's ideal of manhood is called forth by adventure, E. Eberwein undertook to show some years since with reference to the *Lais of Marie de France (Zur Deutung mittelalterlicher Existenz, Bonn and Cologne, 1933, pp. 27ff.)*. It can also be demonstrated on the basis of the courtly romance.

Calogrenant seeks the right way and finds it, as we said before. It is the right way into adventure, and this very seeking and finding of it shows him to be one of the chosen, a true knight of King Arthur's Round Table. As a true knight worthy of adventure, he is received by his host—who is also a knight—with delight and with blessings for having found the right way. Host and guest both belong to one social group, a sort of order, admission into which is through a ceremonial election and all members of which are bound to help one another. The host's real calling, the only meaning of his living where he does, seems to be that he should offer knightly hospitality to knights in quest of adventure. But the help he gives his guest is made mysterious by his silence in regard to what lies ahead for Calogrenant. Apparently this secretiveness is one of his knightly duties, quite in contrast to the *vilain*, who withholds nothing of what he knows. What the *vilain* does know are the material circumstances of the adventure; but what "adventure" is, he does not know, for he is without knightly culture. Calogrenant, then, is a true knight, one of the elect. But there are many degrees of election. Not he, but only Yvain, proves capable of sustaining the adventure. The degrees of election, and specific election for a specific adventure, are sometimes more clearly emphasized in the *Lancelot* and the *Perceval* than in the *Yvain*; but the motif is unmistakable wherever we have to do with courtly literature. The series of adventures is thus raised to the status of a fated and graduated test of election; it becomes the basis of a doctrine of personal perfection through a development dictated by fate, a doctrine which was later to break through the class barriers of courtly culture. We must not overlook the fact, it is true, that, contemporaneously with courtly culture, there was another movement which gave expression to this graduated proving of election, as

well as to the theory of love, with much greater rigor and clarity—namely, Victorine and Cistercian mysticism. This movement was not restricted to one class, and it did not require adventure.

The world of knightly proving is a world of adventure. It not only contains a practically uninterrupted series of adventures; more specifically, it contains nothing but the requisites of adventure. Nothing is found in it which is not either accessory or preparatory to an adventure. It is a world specifically created and designed to give the knight opportunity to prove himself. The scene of Calogrenant's departure shows this most clearly. He rides on all day and encounters nothing but the castle prepared to receive him. Nothing is said about all the practical conditions and circumstances necessary to render the existence of such a castle in absolute solitude both possible and compatible with ordinary experience. Such idealization takes us very far from the imitation of reality. In the courtly romance the functional, the historically real aspects of class are passed over. Though it offers a great many culturally significant details concerning the customs of social intercourse and external social forms and conventions in general, we can get no penetrating view of contemporary reality from it, even in respect to the knightly class. Where it depicts reality, it depicts merely the colorful surface, and where it is not superficial, it has other subjects and other ends than contemporary reality. Yet it does contain a class ethics which as such claimed and indeed attained acceptance and validity in this real and earthly world. For it has a great power of attraction which, if I mistake not, is due especially to two characteristics which distinguish it: it is absolute, raised above all earthly contingencies, and it gives those who submit to it dictates the feeling that they belong to a community of the elect, a circle of solidarity (the term comes from Hellmut Ritter, the Orientalist) set apart from the common herd. The ethics of feudalism, the ideal conception of the perfect knight, thus attained a very considerable and very long-lived influence. Concepts associated with it—courage, honor, loyalty, mutual respect, refined manners, service to women—continued to cast their spell on the contemporaries of completely changed cultural periods. Social strata of later urban and bourgeois provenance adopted this ideal, although it is not only class-conditioned and exclusive but also completely devoid of reality. As soon as it transcends the sphere of mere conventions of intercourse and has to do with the practical business of the world, it proves inadequate and needs to be supplemented, often in a manner most unpleasantly in contrast to it. But precisely because it is so removed from reality, it could—as an ideal—adapt itself to any and every situation, at least as long as there were ruling classes at all.

So it came to pass that the knightly ideal survived all the