

This paper discusses chivalry displayed by Englishmen during the first half of the Hundred Years' War as described in Jean Froissart's *The Chronicles of Froissart*. Three instances of chivalry or nobleness are mentioned here, and it is proved that the War was not fought only in the name of national identity. Chivalrous acts were preferred over acts to secure national identity alone.

English Chivalry in the Hundred Years' War

Jean Froissart's *The Chronicles of Froissart* cover the years 1322 until 1400, describing how the first half of the Hundred Years' War were initiated and how they progressed. For centuries, *The Chronicles* have been recognized as the most important expression of the chivalric revival of fourteenth century England and France. Indeed, Froissart the wanderer did not set out with *The Chronicles* to be partial to anyone. He disliked the Germans as unchivalrous, but was a friend to both the English and the French. Chivalry or nobleness was his focus, and this quality concerns friend as well as foe. Whenever and wherever a man treated a foe as a friendly stranger, Froissart was quick to make a record of it for future generations. He began the *Chronicles* with remembrance of God and gratitude toward Him for sending him over to the courts and palaces of kings. He added that all of the nobles, kings, dukes, counts, barons and knights of all nations, received him graciously, paid attention to him, and proved useful to him. It was this welcome that he had received from the nobles of all nations that led him to focus his attention on chivalry regardless of national origin. Froissart continued:

Wherever I went I enquired of old knights and squires who had shared in deeds of

arms, and could speak with authority concerning them, and also spoke with heralds in order to verify and corroborate all that was told me. In this way I gathered noble facts for my history, and as long as I live, I shall, by the grace of God, continue to do this, for the more I labor at this the more pleasure I have, and I trust that the gentle knight who loves arms will be nourished on such noble fare, and accomplish still more.

The gentle knight who loves arms, in Froissart's tales, is not he who fights only to secure his national identity. Rather, it is he who fights for righteousness or for the protection of his people whenever the need arises to take up arms. He is fair in battle, even lenient in his fairness. An illustration is presented by Froissart in *The Chronicles* when the French king orders four of his soldiers to go and spy on the doings of the English side. The English army is prepared for battle. The Englishmen can see the spies that have come to watch their maneuvers to take news about them to the French king. Yet, the Englishmen do not harm the spies at all and let them go. They will await the battle instead, when the victory can be fair and square. To put it another way, the Englishmen do not intend to kill the French spies just because the enemy is French and the French king has sent them for spying. National identity is of no significance here when the battle must be won by all fair and decisive means. Killing four spies is easy for the English army, yet doing so does not give a decisive victory to any side. Hence, the Englishmen eye their approaching enemies carefully, knowing exactly why they had approached them. They leave them to do what they must, and allow them to return where they must.

The nobleness of the Englishmen is admirable, as they allow their enemy to go and prepare for battle. They are loyal knights and are not disobeying the order of the King of England while they engage in this behavior. In truth, the Englishmen have learned knightliness from their superiors alone. Consider the behavior of the Prince of Wales toward the French king when the latter has been captured by the English. First of all, the Prince must attend to his own faithful Lord James Audley, who has proved through his bravery that he is deeply devoted to the throne of England. Lord James Audley is quite hurt when the Prince of Wales expresses his wish to either fetch him over to himself or to call upon him. The Prince expresses his sorrow for the injuries of Lord James Audley. He apologizes for the injuries of Lord James Audley, in fact. And when a messenger is sent for Lord James Audley, the latter is deeply thankful to the Prince for caring about his poor and humble subject.

The Prince embraces the courageous knight as soon as they meet. He says:

‘Sir James, I ought greatly to honor you, for by your valiance ye have this day achieved the grace and renown of us all, and ye are reputed for the most valiant of all other.’ ‘Ah, sir,’ said the knight, ‘ye say as it pleaseth you: I would it were so: and if I have this day anything advanced myself to serve you and to accomplish the vow that I made, it ought not to be reputed to me any prowess.’

Naturally, the English knights have learned chivalry from their chiefs. Another vital matter to note is that the entire English retinue was deeply devoted to God Almighty. The Englishmen talked and expressed universal values.

After the Prince of Wales has furnished Lord James Audley with gifts equivalent in our times to gold medals and bonus provisions – which Lord Audley later distributed among his own subordinates – the Prince attends to the French king who has been captured by the English. The Prince behaved reverentially toward the French king. He asked for wine and spices to serve the king. And he served the king by himself! There is no indication here that the Prince assumed that his national identity was superior to that of the French king. Rather, perfect hospitality and courtliness are on display.

The Prince of Wales proved himself to be utterly gracious yet another time when he made supper in his lodging for the French king and his major knights that were prisoners of war at the time. This was the day of another battle between the French and the English, by the by. The Prince of Wales praised the French king much, mentioning that even his father, the King of England, would be very pleased to befriend the great French king. Moreover, the Prince of Wales gave moral courage to the beaten French king, adding that he was not doing so to mock the king. He pointed at all of the Englishmen present who had observed each of the battlers closely, and solemnly pronounced that every one of them agreed with him and could testify to the heroism of the French king.

Once again, there is no sign of national identity getting in the way of hospitality and graciousness. The French king murmured to his knights that the Prince of Wales had spoken nobly. Chivalry was thus applauded by the enemy. Hatred did not cloud anybody's sense of appreciation for generosity shown. The battle that day was won by the English.

Works Cited

1. Froissart, Jean. *The Chronicles of Froissart*. Translated by John Bourchier and Lord Berners. Edited by G. C. Macaulay. New York: P. F. Collier & Son Company, 1910.