

The Jousting of Our Lady

translated by Isabel Butler

Table of Contents

<u>The Jousting of Our Lady</u>	1
<u>translated by Isabel Butler</u>	1
<u>The Jousting of Our Lady</u>	1

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Sweet Jesus, what a fair feat of arms he doth, and how nobly he bears his part in the tourney who of good will entereth the minster wherein is celebrated the holy mystery of the sweet son of the Virgin Mother. To show this I will now tell a story, even as I found it in the book of examples.

A knight, sage and courteous, hardy and of great valiance, that none in all chivalry was of so great worship, held ever in great love Mary the Virgin. To prove his valiance and to exercise his body in feats of arms he was on his way to a tourney, armed and fortified in his joy. So it befell on the day of the jousting, that he to please God rode forth full hastily, for fain would he be first in the field. But anon from a church hardby he heard the bells give signal of the singing of holy mass. And straightway the knight turned into the church to listen to the service of God. Within they sang nobly and devoutly a mass in praise of Mary the Holy Virgin; and then straightway they began another. Full well the knight gave ear and prayed with good heart to Our Lady.

Now when the second mass was done a third was begun forthright in the same place. Thereupon his squire bespoke the knight: "Sir, by the holy body of God the hour of the tourney is passing, and do you yet linger here? Come away I pray you. Think you to turn hermit, or devotee, or hypocrite? Go we now about our own proper trade."

"Friend," the knight then made answer, "he jousts right nobly who listens to the service of God. When all the masses are said and sung we will ride our way; and if it please God, we will not leave before; but afterwards, for God's honour, I will go joust full hardily." Thereafter he spoke no more, but turned his face to the altar and remained at prayer until all the chanting was ended.

Then the twain mounted their horses, as it behooved them to do, and fared forth towards the place wherein they were to take their sport. But even as they rode, they met other knights returning from the tourney which already had been fought out from end to end. And lo you, the knight who came even then from mass was he who had won the prize.

They who were returning, greeted him and praised him, and said that never had any knight done so great feats of arms as he had that day done, and always thenceforth would the honour thereof be his. Many there were who surrendered themselves to him, saying: "We are your prisoners, this we may not deny, nor that you won us by force of arms."

Then was the knight no longer abashed, for he understood speedily that she for whose sake he had stayed him in the church had borne his part in the battle.

Frank and free he called his barons about him, and said to them:

"Now give ear, all ye of your courtesy, for I would tell you of such a marvel that never have ye heard its like."

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Then he told them point by point how he had waited to hear out the masses, and had not entered the lists, nor fought with either lance or shield, but he believed that the Maid whom he had worshipped within the church had fought for him in his stead "Right wondrous is the tourney wherein she hath joustet for me, yet I should make small account thereof and if I did not now do combat for her; foolish and simple would I be and if I turned me again to the vanities of the world." And so of a sooth he promised God that never thenceforth would he tourney save before the true judge, who knoweth all good knights and passeth sentence upon them according to their deeds. Then he took leave full piteously, and many a one wept thereat right tenderly. But he departed from them, and in an abbey of monks thenceforth served the Virgin Mary, and methinks he held to the path that leadeth to a good end.

By this ensample we may well see that the gentle God, whom we worship, loves and cherishes and honours him who gladly stays him to hear mass in holy church, and who gladly does service to his fair, sweet Mother. Fruitful is the custom thereof, and he who is sage and courteous willingly practises good manners; for what the colt learneth in teething time that will he hold to so long as he liveth.