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For several thousand years, the world's wealthy and nobility usedmarriage as a contract, a method of binding two families together toincrease power or money. Only in the last century has that sort ofarranged marriage disappeared. During the Middle Ages, arranged marriageswere common in every station of life. From princes to weavers to peasantfarmers, it was the social norm for two families to arrange a match betweentheir children for the sake of power and wealth. In some cases, theseunions might bring together two powerful estates or kingdoms, while inother cases, two smaller farms might combine to become a small estate. This kind of arranged marriage did not always take into account the basichuman need for affection.

All people want to be loved on some level, especially by someone with whom they spend a significant amount of time. It is this lack of affection in so many marriages that helped lead to theera of courtly love and chivalry, the effects of which are still seen inmodern Western culture. Marriage itself was incredibly important during the Middle Ages forall social classes for both religious and social reasons. Getting marriedwas a way to devote yourself to one person for the rest of your life, muchlike monks devoted themselves to God. Perhaps this is the reason whyGratian felt justified in saying, " That no woman is to be compelled tomarry a man Ambrose testifies commenting on the First Epistle to theCorinthians: ' Let her marry whom she wills, only in the Lord.' That is sheshall marry one whom she thinks fit for her, for unwilling marriagescommonly have bad results1." His main point is that anyone who is forcedinto marriage is very likely to be unhappy and the sacrament of marriage isnot meant to be a punishment. Marriage is the holy union between a man anda woman for the sake of love and having children.

However, socialstandards required men and women to marry people of a similar station. Aking would never be allowed to marry the daughter of a peasant farmer, anda common soldier would never dream of asking a duchess to marry him, regardless of any level of affection between them. For the most part, marriages were still arranged by parents eventhough the idea was looked down upon by the church, however, it wasn'tunusual for the intended couple to have some say in who they would or wouldnot marry. In the eyes of many, a marriage couldn't be seen as valid unlessthere was some form of consent or agreement from both of the partiesinvolved.

" For between them there was consent which is the efficient causeof marriage according to the words of Isidore…2" For example, a fathercould approve of several suitors for his daughter, but she would be allowedto choose which of them she would marry.

Of course, this wasn't always thecase. There were some instances where children were betrothed at birth toseal an alliance. The marriage itself is somewhat difficult to define. During theMiddle Ages, Gratian said, " It should be known that a marriage is begun bybetrothal and completed by intercourse3." By this, he meant that abetrothal was the technical beginning of the marriage, however, themarriage wasn't entirely valid until it was consummated. There was somedebate over this because many nobles considered a marriage binding as soonas the betrothal was declared, while others had reasons to withdraw frommarriage contracts and used the absence of sexual intercourse as a reasonto have the marriage annulled. Essentially, marriage was a tool that therich and powerful used to make

themselves even more so, though the churchdid sometimes support those who did not consent to a forced marriage.

From the late twelfth century to the beginning of the thirteenthcentury, the idea of courtly love became a standard of behavior forsociety, especially among the nobility and wealthy middle class. The imageof knighthood changed entirely with the advent of courtly love andchivalry. Before the late twelfth century, knights were essentiallymounted soldiers who only retained their status for as long as they hadtheir weapons4. But, when you think of a knight today, you get theimage of a courageous soldier, fighting for good and protecting the weakand innocent. The ideas behind several of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales aswell as Thomas Mallory's le Morte d'Artur – two of