

INSIDE  STORY

A MEDIEVAL CASTLE

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LORDS AND LADIES

Life in the castle was organised to please the lord and lady. In peacetime country castles were used as hunting lodges, or as healthy retreats from dirty and disease-ridden towns. There was the chance to relax and greet visitors, or enjoy songs and poems newly-composed by favourite minstrels.



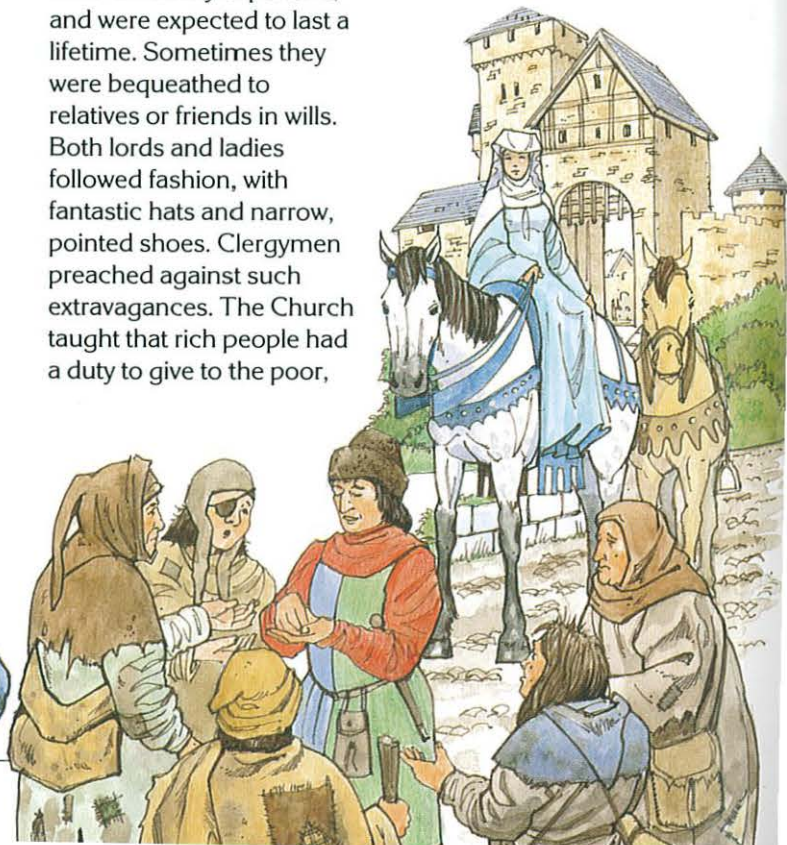
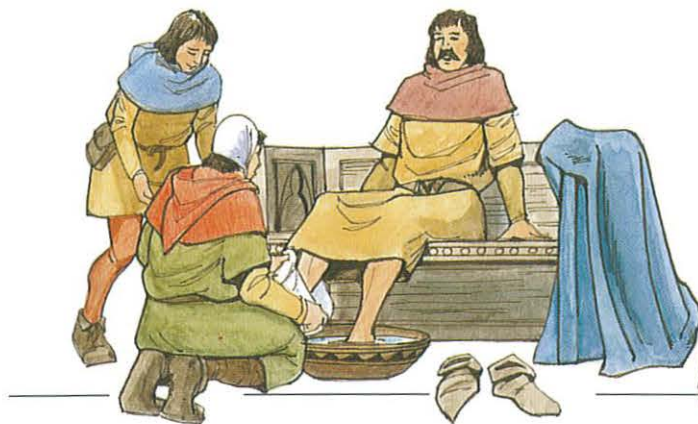
In whichever castle he was, the lord had to deal with bundles of documents needing his attention. Possibly an urgent summons to attend the king's court, or a petition from poor villagers explaining why they could not pay their taxes. He had to inspect the annual accounts drawn up by his steward and bailiff. He might receive letters from merchants trading overseas, or secret messages from conspirators seeking his support.

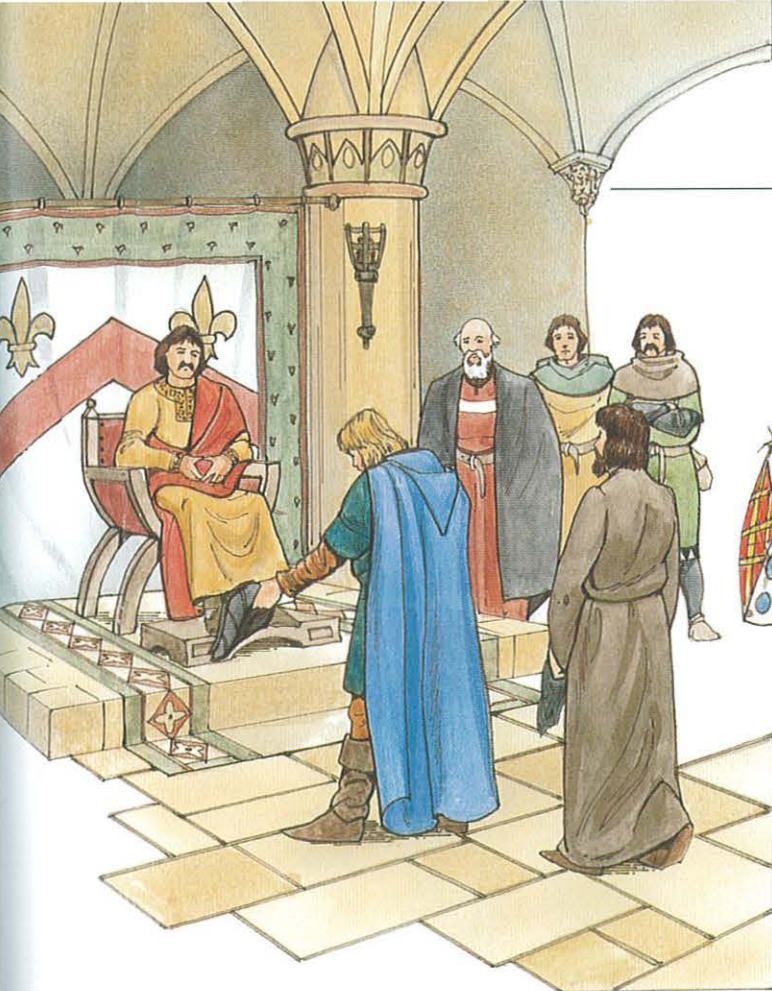
A great lord might be away, on government business or at war for months at a time. Often, he left his wife in charge of all his castles, trusting her to ensure that everything ran smoothly during his absence. Noblewomen were taught from childhood how to manage a large household, how to give orders to servants, and how to keep accounts. Occasionally, they even had to organise the defence of a castle when it was attacked. One 14th-century lady, Joan of Flanders, fought off her husband's enemies, and was described as having 'the courage of a man and the heart of a lion'.

On special occasions, lords and ladies wore magnificent clothes, made of brilliantly-dyed wool or rich silk and velvet, lavishly embroidered and trimmed with fur. Men as well as women wore jewellery, and both sexes perfumed their hair and their gloves. Nobles' clothes were extremely expensive, and were expected to last a lifetime. Sometimes they were bequeathed to relatives or friends in wills. Both lords and ladies followed fashion, with fantastic hats and narrow, pointed shoes. Clergymen preached against such extravagances. The Church taught that rich people had a duty to give to the poor,

but there was a great contrast between the rich man in his castle and the beggars huddled outside.

Below left
Washing and taking baths were popular; sometimes the lord and lady bathed together.



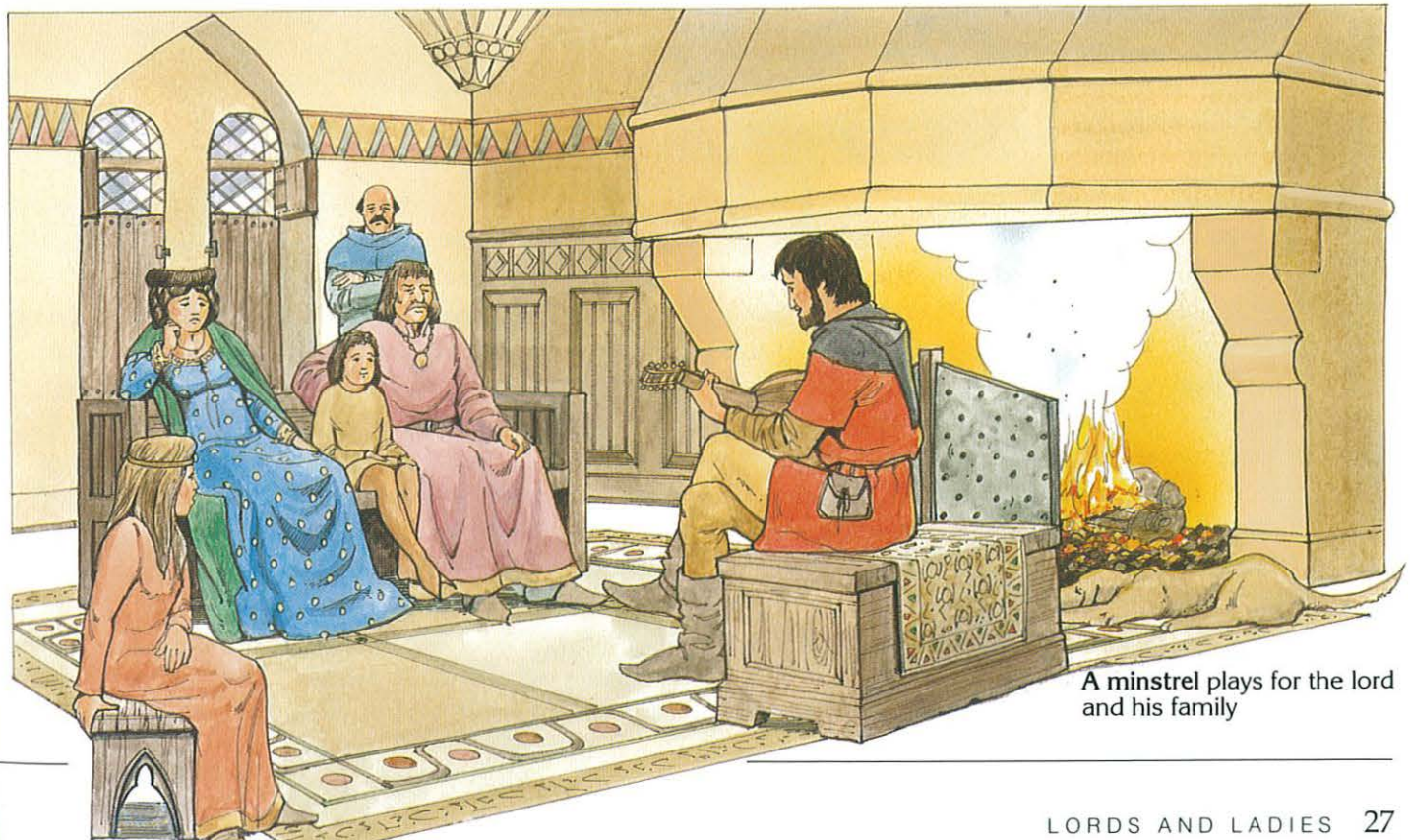


Lords, and sometimes ladies, administered justice on behalf of the king. Criminals might be brought before them and their

officials to be tried and punished for minor offences. Some castles had dungeons where prisoners were kept.

A lord had the right to demand work, rents and taxes from the peasants living on his estates, but also had a duty to defend them.

Fighting was therefore very important to medieval lords. If they refused to take part in battle, they risked disgrace and dishonour.



A minstrel plays for the lord and his family