THE HIDDEN CHURCH OF THE HOLY GRAAL Its Legends and Symbolism Considered in Their Affinity with Certain Mysteries of Initiation and Other Traces of a Secret Tradition in Christian Times

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[Podcast 11]

BOOK FIVE THE GREATER CHRONICLES OF THE HOLY GRAAL

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CHAPTER FOUR Section A— THE VULGATE MERLIN

There are many questions, and some of them may be insoluble, which are concerned with or arise out of the legend of Merlin, but there is perhaps one only which enters at all deeply into the collateral legend of the Graal; it is why the British prophet, partly magician and enchanter, but in part also God’s messenger, with his consequent strange mixture of motives, should have been selected in the mind of romance, or in any more withdrawn mind, as the promulgator of the Graal Mystery in Great Britain—perhaps more correctly—as the semi-supernatural power which was at work in connection therewith; why also it was he who brought about the institution of the Third Symbolical Table, and set up that Siege Perilous which was, in the first place, to terminate the enchantments of Britain, and, in the second, by the alternative intervention of the adventurous times, to make void—but this is long after he

has himself passed away—the high mystery of chivalry so far as the Round Table was concerned. The Didot Perceval intervened in respect of the latter vocation, with results which we have seen already, but in this respect it is scarcely the voice of the literature.

There are those who maintain that the late prophecies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries attributed to Merlin were produced with a political object; but the object of the Graal was, speaking broadly, mystical, and as regards the literature which embodies it, this is either the reflection at a distance of secret sanctuary doctrine, or it stands in some dubious manner for the aspirations of the Celtic Church, and admits therefore a political object to the extent that such aspirations responded to particular ambitions which we know to have been cherished by English kings at or about the period during which the literature was developed. There are those who look to Armorica for the original book of the legend, and say that this was latinised by Geoffrey of Monmouth; but the question as to the origin of the romance elements is too complicated for so simple a settlement, and if it had ever a single source in writing, it was at a period when it was apart from romance, and personally I do not question that it was in the Latin tongue. There are those who consider that Scotland was the home of the Arthurian myth, but the land of second sight is not really that of the Mysteries, and though the old Cumbrian kingdom may have contributed to the story of Merlin, the latter must have been enriched from other sources. It was transported, we have been told, into Brittany, and there it may have undergone an express transformation; but, in common with so much of the Arthurian cycle, it was codified, extended and enriched by the process of late editing in some particular, though unexplained, interest, the method adopted by which was the collection of all the great texts of Arthurian literature about the Holy Graal.

The hypothetical book of that legend was the central sacred point, and all the extant texts stand about it like subsidiary Hallows.

The break between the Early History of Merlin, which ends by saying that King Arthur held his land and kingdom long in peace, and the Vulgate Merlin, which begins by reciting how the nobles who had acknowledged him unwillingly went against him into prolonged rebellion, is sufficient in itself to open a new branch of the literature. My classification, however, does not make it impossible that the later text should reflect something from the Lesser Chronicles, two of the texts in which are by necessity the root-matter of all the Greater Chronicles; but its more important derivations are from the Book of the Holy Graal and the appurtenances thereof, including the prose Lancelot. We are only concerned with the text in respect of its Graal references, and of its content otherwise it will be sufficient, therefore, to say that it embodies an exhaustive account of King Arthur’s wars with the Saxons, a certain group of adventures of the less indubitably romantic kind, and thereafter the various circumstances which led up to the internment of Merlin. In this manner it is the close of the prophet’s chronicle, though it is still only the early history of Arthur.

Here, as elsewhere, the re-editing of romances in the Graal interest is to be distinguished from the innumerable alterations made otherwise by intelligent and pother transcribers, but to which no ulterior motive need be attributed. Perhaps the most signal instance of all the major editing is the production of two, if not three, sequels, executed independently, to the Merlin of Robert de Borron, both of which were less or more exclusively made in the interest which I have mentioned, while both are also ascribed falsely to Robert de Borron. We could better

understand the Vulgate Merlin and the Huth Merlin could one of them be accepted as carrying further forward the De Borron tradition, and thus leading up to a Perceval Quest, A whether that of the Didot manuscript or another; but the derivatives of both texts make insuperable difficulties in respect of this course. At the same time the process of codification is nowhere complete in the literature. We must assume, for example, on the basis of textual criticism, that the prose Lancelot had in some form already enriched the cycle when the Vulgate Merlin came into existence, but in several particulars the Merlin allusions in the Lancelot do not correspond with anything in those later Merlin stories with which we are here concerned. These, on the other hand, when they reflect elements which are particular to the Lancelot, may be reproducing in summary merely, or they may offer new materials by way of variation over details.

The Vulgate Merlin says that God has given to the prophet that skill and discretion which he possesses so to assist him that he shall in fine accomplish the adventures of the Holy Graal, which adventures are predestined to take place in the time of King Arthur, and Blaise, the hermit and scribe, shall live to behold the end. This is true in respect of the Didot Perceval, but not of the other quests, in which this personage is forgotten, or is lost, at least, among many recording clerks. But as it follows from the reference, by implication, that Merlin will not himself survive, the Vulgate text cannot be said to lead up to that document. In the interminable account of the wars with the King Rion, there is some stress laid on the achievements of Nasciens, who is the second of that name, and was a young knight at the time in question. He was a cousin of Perceval le Gallois, and was of near kinship to Joseph of Arimathæa, as also a cousin of Celidoine. Here the derivation is from the Book of the Holy Graal, but the genealogy is a little distracted.

Subsequently Nasciens had Galahad in his keeping, which statement is reflected into the Welsh Quest. When he left chivalry, Nasciens became a hermit and was taken by the Holy Ghost into the Third Heaven, where he beheld unveiled the Divine Persons of the Trinity. He had subsequently the story in his charge, and by the ordinance of the Great Master he announced that which he had read therein—that is to say, in the Record of Blaise. It follows that the secret chronicle which, according to the Book of the Holy Graal, had been written by Christ Himself, was in reality the work of the hermit performed under the dictation of Merlin, and that the anonymous author of the Book of the Holy Graal is here identified by the device of another author, who is himself also anonymous.

There is one reference to Helayn, the daughter of King Pelles, of the Castle Corbenic, the niece of King Fisher and of Alain who was wounded through both thighs by the avenging spear. She was the fairest lady in the land, and had the Blessed Vessel in her keeping till the time of Galahad's conception. After what manner Helayn was dispossessed of her high office the text covenants to declare at a later time, but seeing that it fails herein, it is reserved on my own part for the branch which belongs to Galahad. We learn also concerning a son of King Pelles, who—as in the romance of Lancelot—is named Eleazar. At the age of fifteen years he told his father that he would never be made a knight till the best knight of the world should give him his arms and the accolade after three years of service. In return for the dignity of chivalry, he believes that he shall take the knight to the country of King Pelles and the place of the Graal. At this time the king's daughter, though the bearer of the Sacred Vessel, is only seven years old. Seeing that Galahad during his brief career of knighthood does not confer the high degree on any squire of his service, save only Melyas de Lyle, the son of the King

of Denmark, and much less on one who would be his uncle according to the flesh, whom also he was destined to meet in the Graal Castle at the term of all, we have here the source of a legend which differs in certain respects from any extant chronicle of the perfect knight. But it should be understood that, in the end, Eleazar serves Gawain and receives the accolade from him.

I do not know what construction is to be placed upon the position of King Pelles; to all intents and purposes he is the Warden-in-chief of the Graal in the Quest of Galahad, but neither there nor in the Vulgate Merlin is he called the Rich Fisher, which is the characteristic title of the Warden. The romance with which we are here and now concerned tells us, this notwithstanding, that he is spoken of as the Rich King, which seems by way of alternative; he is also a full noble king and a true one. But there is under his charge King Pellenore of the Welsh Lands, that is to say, Pellehan, who is sick and will never be healed till he is manifested who shall bring to an end the adventures of the Holy Graal. This comes to pass at the close of the times of Galahad. But there is another brother, who is Alain of the Forayn Lands; he is in sickness also, and will never be cured till the best knight of all Britain shall ask him why he is stricken by that malady and what it is that will help him. It follows that there is here the analogy of Perceval’s question, but it is never asked in the sequel, nor do we hear further of Alain.

In the Vulgate Merlin the place of the Graal is Corbenic; it is situated in the realm of Lytenoys, which might signify Lyonesse; and just as we know that the Castle is one of perilous and even fatal adventure, so the kingdom to which it belongs is in nowise a region of peace, and I have said already that its ruler is a king in warfare. The great romance contains few other references to the Sacred Vessel and the history or the quest thereof. The tidings of

the Graal in Britain are still tidings only; the Quest is still not a search after the place of the Hallows, but of knights who are proper to undertake it. On matters of so-called early history we hear that Joseph of Arimathæa received the blood from the side of Christ into the Sacred Vessel when the body was still hanging on the Cross—representing a tradition that differs from the Lesser Chronicles, though it is reflected from one of the visions in the Book of the Holy Graal. We hear further that the Graal came from heaven above into the city of Sarras, which may be a description by inadvertence, or it may represent a reflection from some source which corresponds to the antecedents of Wolfram. The spear which opened the side of Christ was brought to Logres, presumably—for it is not stated—by him who was the first to consecrate and offer the Eucharist, that is to say, by the second Joseph.

So far in fine as the Vulgate Merlin can be said to end at all—seeing that it stops or breaks off without redeeming its pledges—the close is taken soon after the enchantment of Merlin by arts of his own instruction given to the Lady of the Lake; the record of Blaise ceases for want of materials; but in the meantime the clerks of the court of King Arthur have taken up the story in a sense, though their task is confined to the registration of the prowess exhibited by those who are admitted newly to the fellowship of the Round Table, and are therefore at once postulants of earthly chivalry spiritualised and possible seekers for the Graal.

## Section B— THE HUTH MERLIN

I speak under correction in respect of all matters which are not in the kinship of near consanguinity with my proper subject, but there is one thing, I think, which may occur to many who make acquaintance with the Merlin sub-cycle in

the original texts, and this is, that despite all the archaism of its language and the consequent difficulties which it must cost to the English reader, the method and the atmosphere of the whole seem modern in comparison with the books of the Lesser Chronicles. The devices and conventions suggest a later period, all which may perhaps seem to follow from its express attempt to codify a number of traditions and weld them into a harmonious whole. The Huth manuscript is for our purpose one of considerable and occasionally of great importance. Criticism speaks of it in much the same strain as it has spoken once or twice of the Longer Prose Perceval, which is equivalent to saying that it misses some vital points in a judicial appreciation of its merits on grounds that are within measure of the literary order or in respect of the claims put forward concerning its authorship. As regards the second point, there are two false Roberts de Borron, being him of the Vulgate and him of the Huth Merlin, but the claim of the latter is interesting from my standpoint perhaps for the very reason which makes it suspected by the official critic. The inexpress collaboration which it indicates between its unknown author and another who is also unknown, though not indeed unnamed—that is, Hélie de Borron—is exactly after the manner of codifications of this kind at that period, thus providing us with a putative concordat on the external side of the literature as an equipoise to the mystical concordat between Merlin and Blaise. In this manner it suggests more than it expresses, but in virtue of their supposed understanding the Graal Mystery was more especially in the charge of that other artist Elias of whom the later Paracelsus had not dreamed. The date to which the work is assigned somewhat speculatively is between 1225 and 1230, and it is divisible for our purpose into four sections: (1) the prose version of De Borron’s Joseph of Arimathæa; (2) the constituents of what is held to be the prose version of De Borron’s metrical romance of Merlin; (3) that later

history of Merlin which is exclusive to this manuscript; (4) a Quest of the Holy Graal, but this has not come down to us —at least in the French language. We know that it was a Quest of Galahad, and we are enabled to follow some of its variations from the extant Galahad romance by the allusions in the Huth Merlin, and not by these only, for it is supposed that the Vulgate Merlin also borrowed therefrom, that it was consequently an anterior document, so that the two later competitive Merlin codices had texts which were identical at the beginning and a text which was the same at the end. As regards the intermediate portions which differ so completely, their distinction is without prejudice to the fact that the prime inspiration of both is the Book of the Holy Graal, and that both in a subsidiary sense are indebted to the Lancelot.

The express purpose which has been noticed in the Vulgate Merlin is present in the alternative text, and is indeed marked more strongly. It may be accepted that the first part, as we have agreed to call it, offers no deviation of importance from other texts of the Lesser Holy Graal, and that it therefore reflects almost literally the metrical romance of De Borron. It has not, however, been printed. In the second part there are also no really important deviations, but when Blaise is engaged by the prophet to write the history of Joseph, and therewith to incorporate his own proposed records, it appears that the custodians of the Graal had their independent memorials, to which access was apparently possible, and these also were to be embodied by the scribe. In other words, he kept the minutes of the Mystery, and the claim is that there was therefore a great Graal book in the form of a general prototype. As regards the third part, with which we are concerned henceforward in the present section, it may be said generally that, in place of the unending, sanguinary battles with so-called Saxon Saracens, we are brought into

the world of romance, high enchantments and pageants marshalled gorgeously; after what manner this distinction appealed to those who came after is evident from the use which was made of the text by Malory.

We are concerned as before only with the intimate things of the Sacred Vessel and the appurtenances thereof, but as to the latter the undivided text might be embodied almost in any complete schedule. Merlin moves through the story as the ambassador rather than the messenger of those who are the custodians of the Graal, but the advertisements concerning it are still as of a Parnassus which is remote. About the time of a certain tourney held in Logres, a great rumour passed over the land regarding the Sacred Vessel and its location in Britain. Where it abode was unknown—for if Merlin spoke in season, he told little—but the grace of its discovery and the limit of the adventurous times were reserved for the best knight of the world. The Companions of the Round Table set themselves—as they do also in the Vulgate—to follow the Quest, and—as again they do therein—to report concerning any Good Knight unknown heretofore among them. If such were found, he was straightway led to the Court, his chivalry was proved—as if a stranger knocked for admission at a lodge of the craft degrees—and on withstanding the tests, he was received into the great company. Each Knight who returned from the Quest recited his adventures, and these were reduced into writing by four clerks retained in the service of the Queen. In this manner they were transmitted to later times. It was an age of secret chronicles, of their sealing and the breaking of the seals. On the pre-viewed approach of his doom, and before finally parting from Blaise, Merlin indited that prophecy concerning the times of the Quest, to which I have referred previously. It opened as follows: “This is the beginning of the adventures in the land of Britain, whereby the mighty Lion shall be overthrown: these adventures shall

be taken to their term by a King’s son, who shall be chaste, and the best Knight of the world.” After this manner did he who instigated the Quest seem thereby to encompass rather than foresee the destruction of the Round Table, its king also and its chivalry. It is said further—and still on the ground that he had not much longer to remain in the world—that Merlin engaged King Arthur to record all the occurrences which took place at the royal Court, and that fifty clerks were set aside for this office. Finally, as regards such memorials, another book was written by the own hand of the prophet, giving before the event an account of the death of Arthur and of Gawain. It was in the keeping of Morgan le Fay, but with its contents she was not acquainted, and it was presumably therefore a cipher manuscript.

The Hidden Life of the Holy House is a prolonged mystery of the ages through all the literature, and if one corner of the veil is lifted for a few moments by the Vulgate Merlin in its unconcerted allusions to King Pelles, the Huth manuscript does not compete with even this vague quality of candour, nor is there any certain ray of light cast upon the Graal itself. It is only the two great texts of transubstantiation in the days of quest which claim to have drawn aside the curtains of the Temple and to have manifested the secret things, though they continue to say that these should be kept covertly, and thus even in the unveiling they suggest that there is a deeper hiding. In the Book of the Holy Graal Corbenic is not more accessible because it is portrayed so openly, and it is not perhaps more withdrawn because it is in nowise named by the Huth Merlin. This text has allusive and hinting methods which are particular to itself, and there is one among them which seems to suggest a wilderness of strange meaning behind its simple words. When Bademagus, like other of the knights to whom no attainment was destined, was

concerned for a period in the Quest, he found a branch of an holy herb, which was a sign of the San Greal, and no knight came upon such token unless his life was good.

The tradition of the Third Table is carried over from the Early History of Merlin, in which Robert de Borron is credited with inventing, rather idly, its institution by Uther; but all discrepancy notwithstanding, the Huth text, following the prose Lancelot, refers it to King Leodegan of Carmelide, the father of Guinevere, in which case it would seem to be independent of the prophet and of all logical Graal connections. The apparent discrepancy is explained, however, by the Vulgate Merlin, which says that the Knights of the Round Table, being weary of the evil estate into which all the country had fallen, retired to the realm of King Leodegan. It does not say what appears to follow from the text of the Huth Merlin, namely, that the material table itself is in the palace of the King of Carmelide. The story of the Siege Perilous is given much after the usual manner, and stress is laid upon the fact that each Knight on rising from the table finds his name inscribed miraculously upon the seat to him belonging—an incident which, according to the mind of the romance, exhibits the high pleasure taken by God in the institution of the Round Table.

Among the signs and tokens which go before, or are conterminous with the Quest, there is the appearance of a strange, nondescript animal, which is a combination of many creatures, and because within her there is the noise of hounds baying, she is called the Questing Beast. In the Huth Merlin she appears, as if it were out of due season, during the reign of Uther, who is told by his great counsellor that she concerns one of the adventures of the Graal, which will be explained to him by Perceval le Gallois, who will be the son of the knight that at that time is chasing the beast in question. As Perceval is therefore

unborn, and as Uther dies on his day, the prophecy does not come to pass, but it serves to introduce Pellinore, who is now represented as a king and again as a knight, and he it is who follows the Questing Beast. After his death, we know from Malory that she was long followed by Palamedes, in both cases, to no purpose apparently, for nothing comes therefrom. It is only in the Longer Prose Perceval that the mystical interpretation of the interminable pursuit is given to Perceval himself. At this time I have said that Pellinore had not begotten Perceval, and though on his first introduction in the days of Arthur, his jousting seems to have constituted a kind of guerilla warfare against the chivalry of the Court, he is married ultimately to one of the King's sisters, and when the Round Table is sent by Leodegan of Carmelide as his daughter's dowry, he is chosen by Merlin to fill one of two vacant seats which were left thereat by the prophet's ordinance. Moreover, when other seats fall vacant, owing to death, he assists the king to fill them, and he serves him also in warfare. Pellinore was in fine slain by Gawain, whose father had fallen at his hands. It will be seen that the genealogy of Perceval, according to this romance, makes void that of the Lesser Chronicles, as it does also the corresponding account in the Longer Prose Perceval.

These things connect with the Holy Graal, though it is in the subsidiary sense only, but the root and centre of the story is the great device by which the Huth Merlin brings war upon the House of the Hallows, devastation on the surrounding country, and a living death upon one of the Hereditary Wardens by means of the Dolorous Stroke. Of this fatality I have given some account already in a previous section, and I must speak of it here without covering precisely the same ground. The romance shows that the Secret Powers of Avalon were hostile in respect of King Arthur even from the beginning. From those realms of

dream and faerie the Lady Lilith or Lylle brought a mysterious sword to the royal court, then being held at London. The weapon was her great encumbrance, but she was condemned to carry it till some knight should succeed in unsheathing it. Arthur and all his companions made the attempt in vain, but the poor Knight Balyn, who had just been released from prison, fulfilled the task easily. He refused to restore the sword to the damosel, and though he was told that it would cause his own destruction, he agreed to take the risk. Thereupon a Lady of the Lake entered and demanded either the head of the knight who had won the sword or that of the maiden who brought it. Balyn, however, cut off her own head, saying that he had been in quest of her these three years past, she having slain his mother by her arts of enchantment. In this manner he saved the other damosel, though Merlin showed that she was of evil ways and life, never appearing for good, but for great harm only. So begins the story of Balyn and Balan, as a tale of dole from the first, and such it remains to the end. But the Dolorous Stroke itself came about through a knight who had the power to ride invisible, and thus had others at his mercy. Balyn was in chase of this knight, to put an end to his evil deeds, and after the episode of the sword he overtook him in the castle of his brother, who is the King Pellehan. There he destroyed him in open court at a festival, and he was pursued by the king from room to room of the building to avenge what appeared to be an act of wanton murder. They met in a richly dight bedchamber, where there was a table of gold on four pillars of silver, and on the table a marvellous spear strangely wrought. Therewith Balyn smote his pursuer, who fell down in a swoon. The castle roof and walls broke and caved in. Merlin appeared and prophesied that the King Pellehan would remain sorely wounded for many years—that is to say, until Galahad healed him in the Quest of the Holy Graal. Merlin said also that there was preserved in the castle a part of

the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which Joseph of Arimathæa had brought into this land, while the spear was that of Longinus, and the king himself was nearly of Joseph's kindred. Balyn rode subsequently through fair lands and cities, of which many inhabitants were slain on all sides, while those who remained cried out piteously against him. Such was the visitation of the Graal—a strange and unheard of enchantment. The story continues, multiplying dole and doom, with greater doom foretold, till the two brethren, Balyn and Balan, destroy one another unwittingly—truly adventurous times, from which all might pray to be delivered.

The opening incidents of this story are found in the Chevalier aux deux épées, and, so far as these are concerned, it may have drawn from some unknown source which is common to both. On the other hand, the passing of Merlin through the arts of Vivien or Nivienne, that Lady of the Lake who was the foster-mother of Lancelot, owes something to the great romance which is concerned with his story. When of his entombment the story ceases to speak, it promises henceforth to be concerned with the Graal only, but in the imperfect state that we possess the text it ceases to speak at all. As a final word on my own part, the fact may be cited that the Knight Pelleas is said to be one of great, worship, and one also of those four who achieved the Holy Graal. It follows herefrom that the missing Quest of the Huth Merlin had grave variations from that with which we are acquainted, because it is not to be assumed that he was one of the nine knights, mostly unknown, who presented themselves, demanding and receiving admission, in the Graal Castle at the term of the Holy Quest.

## CHAPTER FIVE THE GREAT PROSE LANCELOT

By many ways do all the antecedent texts of the Greater Chronicles lead up, in the hands of their editors, to the romance of Lancelot. Therefrom, or therein, all reflect, according to their respective measures, and itself is the great text which goes before the romance of Galahad, as a royal prince may herald the king of all. The prototype of the story in respect of early Graal history is the Book of the Holy Graal, but some of its references have no authority in that document. In comparison with its vast extent, the allusions to the Sacred Vessel are rare and brief. I will take all the necessary points in their order, beginning with two pregnant statements, the first of which is conclusive as to the historical source, for it is said that the Holy Graal was that Dish in which Christ ate the Paschal Lamb with His disciples. But the story is late chronologically in the sequence; it reflected much; its ambition was to include all Arthurian chivalry in its province; and none knew better than the successive authors, who are thought to have welded it into one whole, that the true service of the Sacred Vessel took place at no festival of earthly meats, but at an arch-natural mass. It is haunted therefore with the same idea as we shall find in the Longer Prose Perceval—that what besides it was, the Graal was also a chalice, and it is so described accordingly in one of the later branches. In evidence of this it may be noted that it is apparently the dove's censer in the story of Lancelot which brings the good meat and drink. The second statement occurs in a printed codex, and scholarship, which misses so little within its own province, has somehow overlooked this: the book says, however, that the natural Graal is to be distinguished from that which is supernatural, and this I take to mean that on the one side there is the festival of the Feeding Dish and on the other the Feast mystical of Transubstantiation, at the revelation of the whole mystery in the Quest of Galahad, foreshadowed, as a thing done out

of due season, at the ordination of Joseph the Second in the old time of Sarras.

It will not be found, otherwise than as I have here specified, that the Graal elements differ so much from the earlier versions as the actuating sentiments regarding the heroes of the Quest and the qualifications thereto belonging. A certain new spirit has entered—perhaps even a higher quality of the secret life of the Church—and it has moderated, among other things, the final aim regarding the Stewards of the Graal and the persons with and for whom it is represented as sojourning on earth. Speaking of the romance as a whole, it may be said that it is a Wonder-Book rather than a Book of Initiation, though at certain points it embodies very high mysteries. According to its own description, it is a branch of the great book of the Holy Graal, but the implied reason is that Lancelot was the father of Galahad. Make as it may for confusion, it is just to add here that, in this connection, one of the unprinted manuscripts speaks of Perceval as the leader and term of all stories told about other knights; it was he who achieved the Great Quest, but his story also is a branch of the high story concerning the Graal, which is the head and crown of all stories. This would seem to indicate that Galahad was not the final hero of the Quest, so far as this codex is concerned, but it may also and more probably mean that he had his own great place at the last consummation, or that he was an intermediate seeker, as were Lancelot also and Gawain.

We have seen in the Huth Merlin, firstly, that it has allusions to various occurrences in the Quest of Galahad which are not found in the extant romance, and, secondly, that much of its material is derived from the Great Prose Lancelot; so also in this text there are references to the succeeding branch of the Quest which we have now no

means of checking, but they are not identical throughout with those in the Huth Merlin. It is said (a) that the story will recur in this part to the Knight Meliadus, but we hear nothing concerning him; (b) that it will speak of Helain the White, who became Emperor of Constantinople, but this it does not do; (c) that many marvels concerning the Tower of Merlin will be recounted therein, but we hear nothing; (d) that Orpheus, a certain enchanter, is doomed to remain in the Castle of the Holy Graal, with two snakes about his neck, until the Quest has been achieved, but he is forgotten entirely therein. These items may be contrasted with those which have been specified in respect of the Vulgate and the Huth Merlin; if there are others, as a more exhaustive analysis would find, and this assuredly, I believe that my purpose has been served within the measure of reason, and I will turn therefore to some further Graal references found in the Lancelot, and of which we hear otherwise.

There are several intimations concerning the close of the adventurous times in Great Britain, and the occupation of the Siege Perilous at the Round Table; the commencement of these times was on the occasion of the war declared by Uther Pendragon against King Urien. There is also a certain knight, named Elias, who carried two swords, after the manner of Balyn; one of them was enclosed in a priceless scabbard, and is said to be that in the old days which pierced the loins of Joseph of Arimathæa and was broken therein, as narrated in the Book of the Holy Graal. It was destined not to be re-soldered except by the Lord of Chivalry, who was to put an end to the adventurous times, with all the wonders and mysteries of the Holy Vessel.

A few other points will be best taken with the personal history of Lancelot, though it is not within my province to provide a formal analysis of the romance itself. Lancelot was the son of King Ban of Benoic, and his mother Helen

was of the race of Joseph of Arimathæa, through whom she was of the line of King David. It is therefore said that, through his mother, Lancelot had the same blood in his veins as the King of Heaven Himself had deigned to take.

His baptismal name was Galahad, and, according to the Huth Merlin, Lancelot was that which he received in confirmation, though I find no record concerning this sacrament in his own romance. He was carried away in his infancy by one of the Ladies of the Lake; she is really that Vivien who deceived Merlin, and who, under a cloud of poetic modernism, is familiar to the readers of Tennyson. The part which she plays through all the tale of chivalry is out of true kinship with what we have been disposed to conceive as she is pictured in the laureate's glass of vision. By the knowledge which she derived from Merlin she entered that unincorporated hierarchy of fairyland of which we hear in the books of chivalry; she became a fay-lady, which signifies not an extra-human being of some minor or elemental order, but a woman proficient in magic. It should be noted here that whereas, in the ordinary acceptation, a fairy may correspond either to male or female, the term is never used in the Arthurian books except with reference to a woman. For example, the Fountain of Fairies, which is mentioned once in the Lancelot, received that name because beautiful unknown ladies had been seen thereat. The Lake into which the child was carried was therefore a Lake of Magic, concealing from public view the palace or manor in which his guardian dwelt, and the great park-land about it. The account of the region within this water of enchantment recalls one of the romantic episodes in the Le Roman de Jaufre, and, speaking generally, there are distinct analogies between this comparatively unknown Provençal poem and other tales of the Round Table.

Lancelot remained in the charge of the Lady of the Lake until he was eighteen. About this period she told him the story of his ancestor Joseph, and also of Joseph's son, the first Galahad, who became the King of that country which was afterwards called Wales. She referred to King Pelles of Lytenoys and his brother, a second and later Alain le Gros, who had never ceased to maintain themselves in high honour and glory before the world and in the sight of God. As regards his own future course, she told him that he was called to carry to their term many wonderful adventures, while those which he did not achieve would remain over for a knight who was yet unborn, that is to say, for the last and true Galahad. But of the Graal she did not tell him, though at a later time he heard of the tomb of Lucan, connected with a house of religion, wherein was buried the godson of Joseph of Arimathæa, who was once charged with the guardianship of the Sacred Vessel. The Huth Merlin says, however, that it was a granddaughter of the First Keeper, which seems to accord better with the general tradition.

Before parting with Lancelot, the Lady of the Lake gave him a wand or ring—for the codices differ—which had the power of dissolving enchantments, presumably other than her own, and it served him in good stead at many junctures. Thus equipped, he went forth into the world, followed by her secret providence, and repaired to the Court of King Arthur, where, in due time, he was entered as a Companion of the Round Table, a reception which was characterised by considerable ceremonial grandeur. So passed he into the world of chivalry, but through the glory of his after-life, and through the scandal of his unhappy, over-measured, too faithful love, we have no call to follow him. Before we come—in another section—to the great event of his history, outside these particular vocations, there are only three further points to be noted. On one occasion he has a vision of his ancestors, namely, Nascien,

Celidoine, the second Nascien, Alain le Gros and Jonas, who begot the first Lancelot, who was himself father to King Ban of Benoic; but it will be observed that this is on the male side, and is therefore without prejudice to his derivation on the mother's side from the radix Jesse. On another occasion Lancelot visited the tomb of the first Galahad, King of Wales. He saw also the burning sepulchre of Simeon, and spoke with that victim of the centuries, who told him that the knight who should deliver him would be of his own kindred, and as nearly as possible the very flesh of Lancelot. It is said in explanation that Simeon was the father of Moses and the nephew of Joseph, all which is in opposition to Robert de Borron, though it reproduces literally the Book of the Holy Graal. Moses was tormented in a similar tomb, but owing to the prayers of Lancelot both experienced a certain mitigation, and their delivery in thirty years was insured further. Lancelot removed the body of the first Galahad, which was transported to Wales and reinterred with great honour. The third point concerns the visit of Gawain and Hector to a graveyard which they are counselled not to enter unless one of them is the recreant knight whose evil living has caused him to forfeit the honour of achieving the adventures of the Graal. The reference is to Lancelot, and the graveyard is said to contain Simeon, Canaan and the twelve brothers whom they immolated. But this does not seem to correspond with the previous account of Simeon's tomb. It is conclusive, however, as to the disqualification of Lancelot for the Great Quest. Had he never loved the Queen, he would not have begotten Galahad, for whom no office would have remained, seeing that he himself was the exotic flower of chivalry, palm of faith and cedar of purity. But, as things were, the great light of Lancelot was clouded deeply, nor ever shone freely until that term of all when he was received into the priestly sanctuary of the official church and was clothed at last in incense. It is certain that,

speaking generally of the Greater Chronicles, there was no true light of Gawain, though some of the romances issued from the ministry of Nature have pictured him in glowing colours. Subject to one great and cryptic exception, the day of Chrétien and Gautier had given way to the day of the prose Lancelot, and Gawain had been stripped of nearly all his graces, a process first begun in the Romance of Tristram. Perhaps it may be said that although he saw something according to the Conte del Graal, therein is an episode of personation, on which I have dwelt shortly, though it was not consciously to the hero himself. In Heinrich's poem he enters only into a world of ghosts. In the prose Lancelot he is characterised by a constitutional incapacity, to which the Galahad Quest adds impenitence in evil-doing. The picture of Sir Bors is one of great beauty, but it does not carry with it any particular significance, except that of a witness on his way back into the world. Among the Graal heroes we are therefore reduced, as we have seen and shall otherwise see further, to Perceval and Galahad. Of these two there is little doubt that Perceval was the first in time, or that in a certain sense Galahad was an afterthought. I use the expression so that I may introduce the more probable theory that this elect knight represents a later but exceedingly express intention, as if it were the design of the legend to say that a day would come when that Arthurian sacrament of which I have spoken previously, would not only be communicated at last to the world without, but that the official church would receive also, on its knees, acknowledging that there are great consecrations. If, without seeming too fantastic, I may refer to an old symbol which has no special connection with the present order of ideas, Galahad is like the horn of the quintessence in the microcosmic and alchemical star, and the four other horns are the four aspects of the symbolical legend of Perceval, being (a) the Didot Perceval; (b) the Conte del Graal; (c) the Longer Prose Perceval; and (d) the

Parsifal of Wolfram. It does no real outrage to the order of time if I say that these aspects represent, symbolically speaking, the growth of the tradition. The Didot Perceval may be doubtless later than Chrétien, and from him may have borrowed something, but the two texts are near enough in time to make the question of priority, at least to an extent, unimportant. Let me endeavour to compare for a moment the intention of this strange pentagram in literature. Collectively or individually its documents are best taken in connection one with another, and in conjunction also with those which lead up to them. It is only the Longer Prose Perceval which stands to some extent alone in the Northern French cycle, though it has certain connections with the Book of the Holy Graal. In the German cycle the Parsifal is by no means without antecedents, for we can trace the hand of Guiot up to a certain point, and we can trace also the analogies with Chrétien, though Wolfram scouted his version. Finally, we have the Galahad legend, as if the closing were taken in a superlative grade of romance.

As in the Conte del Graal, so in the romance of Lancelot, there is one visit paid by Gawain to the Graal Castle, and it begins abruptly with an adventure at a pavilion by a certain fountain. Gawain, who is the actor-in-chief, reached a castle subsequently in some annex or quarter of which he found a maiden in the durance of a scalding bath, wherefrom no one could save her except the highest typical example of earthly knighthood. Gawain was not Lancelot—for whom the adventure was reserved—and he failed therefore, for which he was promised shame to ensue quickly. He was received with pomp in the castle, and came into the presence of the king, by whom he was welcomed after the true manner of chivalry. In a word, he was at Corbenic, the Graal Castle, and the herald of the secret ministry entered in the shape of a dove, bearing a censer in its beak. This

vision was momentary only, and was not repeated, but it served as a sign for the company to take their seats at the tables, and this was followed by the entrance of a maiden—that daughter, fairest among women—who carried the chalice of the Graal, in her passage through the hall replenishing the dishes and filling the place with sweet odours. After what manner this multiplication of loaves and fishes takes place does not appear—a feature which characterises nearly all the coincident legends of this particular type. It is worth a passing note that it is perhaps the only instance in which the Graal bearer is unaccompanied entirely. So much was Gawain bespelled by the maiden's beauty that he had no eyes for anything else. She departed at length, and he, coming to himself, found that, for some fault which he could not identify, he only was left without refection of any kind—even as the evil livers in the company of Joseph. The meal proceeded in complete silence, and was disconsolate enough for the hero, who already began to feel the working of that shame which was promised him. At the end of the supper the whole company departed, still without any word, and a dwarf—who tried to chastise him, because of his presence in that part of the building—bade him at length go in search of some other chamber, where no one would see him. He remained, however, in the hall, and there had a certain partial vision of a Graal service. The presence of the Sacred Vessel healed him not only of a grievous wound which he had received from a spear a little earlier in the narrative, but also of various hurts in a long combat with an unknown knight in the hall. I omit any special account of this meeting, except that here again Gawain was attacked because he refused to depart. I omit also a clumsy parable concerning a dragon who gave birth to a vast progeny and afterwards strove with a leopard, only to be destroyed in the end by her own children, who likewise perished in the struggle. In a state of exhaustion Gawain at length fell

asleep, and found on waking in the morning that he was being drawn through the public streets of the city in a vile cart. After being pelted with filth, he was released ultimately, and arrived at the hold of one whom men termed the Secret Hermit. From him he ascertained that he had been at the Graal Castle, which appears to be new tidings; of the Sacred Vessel and its mysteries he learned nothing, though it was foretold that he should know soon, but this does not seem to come to pass.

Of such is the message of the literature as it moved towards the greater heights of its root-conception. It should be added that whereas in the prose Lancelot Gawain is thus covered with disdain, the romance of Galahad paints him in darker colours. But between the one and the other I propose to introduce a different picture in the Longer Prose Perceval. Meanwhile, I do not know why there was such a revulsion of feeling in respect of one who in certain texts appears as the knight of earthly courtesy, and who assuredly in the Conte del Graal is not less entitled to consideration than Perceval himself.

After another manner is it dealt to another knight, who visited the castle also, but he was the diadem of chivalry which at that time had been exalted in the world of Logres. By this I mean that he was Lancelot, and he arrived not only as an expected guest, but as one whose advent had been decreed and led up to from the first times of the mystery. It was then that the great parable of the adventurous times passed into that other parable concerning the times of enchantment, because it was understood before everything, and was also accepted, that the faith of King Ban’s son was with the heart of the Queen forever, and so utterly that, in the sub-surface mind of romance, it had even moved somewhere as if towards the sacramental order; or without being condoned therein it

was believed to have carried within it an element of redemption. Dedicated and vowed as he was, no other willing union was possible; hence therefore the office of enchantment to bring about the conception of Galahad by the daughter of the House of the Graal, with Lancelot as the morganatic father, thus ensuring the genealogical legitimacy of the last recipient of the mysteries.

Of this conception I propose to speak in another section, because the Lancelot dissolves into the Quest, of which the first condition is the birth of Galahad.

## CHAPTER SIX A PREFACE OR INTRODUCTORY PORTION APPERTAINING TO ALL THE QUESTS

There is a certain sense in which we can say that the knight of old was consecrated like the priest of old, and we can picture the whole ceremony as if it were included in some unwritten part of the Pontificale Romanum. The institution of chivalry existed for a particular impression of ecclesiastical idealism on one domain of the life in the world. It was as if it were the outcome of some undeclared design to dedicate even warfare to the high ends of the Church, as if the implied covenant of battle were that a man should be so prepared through all his days that no sudden and violent death should find him unfitted for his transit. The causes of strife are many, and some of them are doubtful enough, but so clothed in the armour of salvation the natural-born hero experienced a kind of rebirth and came forth, so far as he himself was concerned, a soldier of the cross. One section at least in the romantic literature of chivalry was devoted to this ideal, and better than any formal catechism of doctrine and conduct did it uphold the authority of the Church and illustrate the principles of its practice. That section was the quest of the Holy Graal in its proper understanding, and on the

authority of this fact I can say that this branch became a search after high sanctity expressed in the form of romance; as such it does not differ from the quest-in-chief of holiness. It has been rendered after more than one manner out of the consecrated implicits imbedded in consciousness, as if this were the rare and secret book from which the texts, almost indifferently, claim to have derived their knowledge, and it happens—for our greater misdirection—that some of the modes of transcript are like Frater Pereclinus de Faustis in the old mystery of salvation—that is to say, they are far from the goal.

These statements—which are introduced like an interlude in a section apart and as if extrajudical—will sound strangely in the ears of those who have preceded me, and it must be understood that, of course, I am speaking of things as they are found at their highest in the great texts; but the evidence is there; it is there also in terms that it is impossible to elude and impossible also to discount. In respect of the Conte del Graal, we must surrender to Nature the things which are Nature's; but the Longer Prose Perceval says that of God moveth its High History, and I say likewise—but in a more exalted degree still—concerning the Quest of Galahad. Were it otherwise, the literature of the Graal would be like the records of any other princes of this world, and my predilections would have nothing therein. My true intent from the beginning of my life in letters has been for the delight of the soul in God, and I have not consented with my heart to the making of books for another and lesser end.

It was only by slow stages that the course of the literature rose up to that height at which it found rather than created the ideal of Galahad. We may take as our most obvious illustration of the developing process one crucial point which characterises the Perceval quests, and this is the

loves of the hero. The earlier branches of the Conte del Graal show little conscience on the subject of restraint, the deportment of the hero being simply a question of opportunity. I know that we are dealing with a period when the natural passions were condoned rather easily, though the Church had intervened to consecrate the rite of marriage after an especial manner. Hence it was little stigma for a hero of chivalry to be born out of lawful wedlock, or to beget sons of desire who would shine in his light and their own subsequently. The ideal of virginity remained, all this notwithstanding, so that the makers of romance knew well enough where the instituted counsels of perfection lay. It is comparatively late in the cycles that ascetic purity became an indefectible title to success in the Quest of the Holy Graal, about which time Gawain and Lancelot were relegated to their proper places—ridicule and confusion, in the one case, and final, though not irreverent, disqualification in the other.

The Didot Perceval offers a frigid quality of abstinence, apart from either sympathy or enlightenment, and without one touch of grace to make it kindred with the ardours and solitudes of the Divine Life. The poem of Gerbert preserves the hero’s virginity even on his marriage night, but the precaution—considering the texts which he had elected to follow—has the aspect of a leap in the dark. Wolfram insures the chastity of Perceval by introducing the marriage of his questing knight at an early stage. The Longer Prose Perceval is like heaven, knowing neither marriage nor giving in marriage, or at least nuptials are so utterly made in heaven that they are not reflected on earth. Blanchefleur has disappeared entirely, and it is never supposed that the Quest would be achieved in perfection by one who was not a virgin. If we turn now to the story of Galahad, we shall find that the Quest of the Holy Graal has become an unearthly experiment. There is illumination,

there is sanctity, there is ecstasy, and the greatest of these is ecstasy, because it is the term of the others. All the high researches end in a rapture, and thereby is that change of location which does not mean passage through space. I believe that the author of the Great Quest knew what he was doing when—leaving nothing outside—he so transmuted all, and assuredly in the order of romance he spoke as no man had spoken before him.

Now, seeing that all subjects bring us back to the one subject; that in spite, for example, of any scandalous histories, every official congregation returns us to the. one official Church; so, at whatever point we may begin, I affirm that every quest takes us ultimately to that of Galahad. It would seem, therefore, that this is the crown of all. If Galahad had come in the good time instead of in the evil, the Graal would have been set up for adoration before the whole face of Logres. But the Quest says that the world was not worthy, though the Parsifal seems to say: “Behold, I am with you always.”

Of Perceval and his great experiment there are several phases; but this is the lesser Quest. Of Galahad there is one phase only, led up to by many romances, but represented in fine by a single transcendent text. This text is the quintessence and transmutation of everything, allocating all seekers—Perceval, Bors, Lancelot, Gawain—to their proper spheres, over whom shines Galahad as an exalted horn in the great pentagram of chivalry. Of the Perceval Quest there are two great versions; one of them, as I have already noted, is an alternative conclusion to the cycle of the Greater Chronicles; and one—which is the German Parsifal—all antecedents notwithstanding, is something set apart by itself in a peculiar house of mystery. It is the story of the natural man taken gradually to the heights. There is also a third quest, that of the Didot Perceval, which, amidst

many insufficiencies, is important for several reasons after its own manner—that is to say, because of its genealogy. The fourth is the Conte del Graal, and this—apart from Gerbert—is of no importance symbolically, though it is a great and powerful talisman of archaic poetry. The truth is that for all the high things there are many substitutes, after the manner of colourable pretences, and many transcripts, as out of the language of the angels into that of man, after the same way that the great external churches have expressed the mysteries of doctrine in words of one syllable for children who are learning to read. But the absolute and direct message of the things most high, coming in the name of these, is alone commonly. In fine, it sometimes happens that as from any corner of the veil the prepared eyes can look through and perceive something of the immeasurable region which lies beyond the common faculties of sense, so there are mysteries of books which are in no way sufficient in themselves, but they contain the elements and portents concerning all those great things of which it is given the heart to conceive. Among these are the Graal books in the forms which present the legend at its highest.