

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

By Arthur Edward Waite

[Podcast 12]

BOOK FIVE THE GREATER CHRONICLES OF THE HOLY
GRAAL

[continues]

CHAPTER SEVEN THE LONGER PROSE PERCEVAL

Amidst much that is dubious and belonging to the seeming of enchantment, one thing is certain—that the Perceval Quests leave behind them the Graal Castle and that nothing is taken absolutely away, for even the Conte del Graal presents the removal of the Hallows as a point of speculation rather than a thing of certitude. So much is true also of the only Perceval romance in the Northern French cycle which leans towards greatness. I have given it a name which is descriptive rather than its exact title, for, like the Conte, it is Perceval le Gallois, the Perlesvaux for modern scholarship, while for him who in recent years recreated rather than rendered it, the proper designation is The High History of the Holy Graal. By its own hypothesis, it is based upon and was drawn into romance out of a Latin book, said to have been written by Josephus, which scribe is meant possibly to be Joseph the Second of the Book of

the Holy Graal—that first priest who sacrificed the Body of our Lord. So, therefore, as the Lesser Chronicles derive from a Secret Book allocated to the first Joseph, does this reflection of the legends which are called greater draw from the records of his son. But the one is not rendered into the other, for the other derives from the one many points of reference which it does not set forth actually.

The Longer Prose Perceval is an echo of many texts, including the Conte del Graal, and of things unknown which suggest Guiot de Provence, or the group which is covered by his name. It would seem also that the author, though there was much that he remembered, had either forgotten not a few episodes of the antecedent legends, or alternatively he scouted some things and was bent on inventing more. We have seen that, according to Gautier, the failure of Perceval to ask the vital question involved the destruction of kingdoms, but the Longer Prose Perceval is the one story in the whole cycle which, firstly, accounts for the king's languishment, by this failure, as the sole actuating cause, and, secondly, represents King Fisherman as dying in the middle way of the narrative, unconsoled and unhealed, before the word of power is spoken. Further, it is the only story which describes the Secret Sanctuary as the Castle of Souls, or which specifies an evil brother of King Fisherman under the title of the King of Castle Mortal, though this character has analogies with the Klingsor of Wolfram.

There is little need to speak of the story itself, which is available to every one in the best of all possible versions, but it should be understood that its entire action is subsequent to the first visit paid by Perceval to the Graal Castle and the consequent suppression of the Word. In the course of the story such suppressions are several. For example, when the dismembered pageant of the Graal is

going about in the land, a certain Damosel of the Car wanders from place to place, carrying her arm slung at her neck in a golden stole, and lying on a rich pillow. Sir Gawain, who meets and converses with her, fails to inquire the reason, and is told that no greater care will be his at the court of the Rich King Fisherman. That reason is, however, explained to him subsequently, namely, that she was the bearer of the Sacred Vessel on the occasion of Perceval's visit, and nothing else will she carry till she returns to the Holy House. It will be seen that the romance has strange vicarious penances besides its strange quests. It does not appear why the Damosel of the Car is constrained to wander on account of Perceval's silence. But we are moving throughout the narrative in a high region of similitude, and although it is concerned so chiefly with the perpetuation of a mystery which is so divine, it creates no secret from the beginning as to the nature and origin of that mystery, nor does it fail to make plain the fact of the mystical significance which underlies many of its episodes and adventures. Sometimes its dealings in allegory are drawn from materials belonging to another side of the Graal legend, as in one reference to King Pelles, who for the great love of his Saviour had renounced his kingdom and entered into a hermitage. It is said that his son Joseus slew his own mother at a certain castle, which from that time forward continued burning, burning, and it is testified that from this hold and from one other there will be enkindled the strong flame which in fine shall consume the world.

Again, there are many intimations concerning the Earthly Paradise, which lay behind the Castle of the Graal, showing that this House was really a place of initiation—the gate of something that was beyond it. According to Josephus, the soul of any person who passed through the Castle went to Paradise, from which those who are qualified may infer

what grades of initiation were conferred within its penetralia. The true spiritual place was therefore not at Sarras—which in this story has gone utterly out of being—but at the Graal Castle, though before the Earthly Paradise becomes the Home of Souls it must be assumed into the higher Garden of Eden. There is another facet of this jewel of meaning which says elsewhere that the Red Cross symbolises the redeeming blood, meaning that it is the tincture of the Divine Virtue by which the tree of the universal disaster becomes the Tree of Life. There are further allusions designed—as one would imagine—to exhibit the proximity of this world to the next, and it happens sometimes that one side of the world beyond thus realised is not of a desirable kind. Perceval visits a certain Castle of Copper, which is a stronghold of evil faith and an abode of perverse spirits. Beside it there rages a water called the River of Hell, which plunges and ploughs into the sea with a fell hissing, so that it is a place of danger to those who sail by the stars.

The story has many questers, and he who attains to the Keepership is not he who can be said to enter the Mysteries at a saving time. As King Arthur is accused at the beginning of falling into a supine state, ceasing from deeds of chivalry and scattering the flock of his knighthood, so a certain poetical justice is done to him by the assignment of an important place of vision in the finding of the Graal. As regards the questers generally, prior to the death of King Fisherman, the latter received a visit from Gawain, who, in accordance with the prophecy uttered by the Damosel of the Car, failed in his turn to ask the vital question, though scarcely—as the romance confesses—through his own fault, for at the sight of the Graal and the Lance he fell into an ecstasy, and, for the first and only time recorded of him in all the literature, the thought of God overflowed his whole consciousness. Lancelot also visited the Castle prior to the

King's death, but there was no manifestation of the Sacred Vessel on this occasion, because of that which had been and was between him and Arthur's royal consort, the reason apparently being less on account of the past than of his long impenitence in the heart. By the evidence of several texts Gawain also had led an evil life, but at least for the purposes of the Quest he had here put it from him in confession. It is just to add that the exalted legend of Galahad is not so severe upon Lancelot, permitting him to see all save the inmost heart of the mystery. For such a measure of success as inhered in his presence and vision at the Graal Castle, Gawain was indebted to the prowess by which, as a preliminary condition, he was enabled to wrest from an unlawful custodian the Sword of Saint John the Baptist. Speaking generally, he was the favoured recipient of many episodical mysteries in this romance, to each one of which a suitable interpretation is allocated; in one case his adventures proved to be an excursion into the mystical domain of the Fall of Adam and that of the scheme of Redemption; in another he beheld three maidens grouped about a fountain who dissolved ultimately into a single maiden, as though they were another symbol of the Holy Trinity and the superincession of the three Divine Persons. If, this notwithstanding, he was allotted no better success than Perceval on his first visit, he learned much, and more indeed than he was qualified to understand fully.

The High Quest is dolorous enough in its consequences even to worthy heroes and others illustrious who undertake it without indubitable election. The realm of Arthur was left sufficiently discourseled when he set forth on that great errand; he suffered even the death of his Queen, in defiance of the whole tradition of the cycle. He is a pathetic and haunting figure moving through the pageant of that one romance which has enrolled him among the Knights of Quest, and though he saw the Graal in its processional

travels when it was uplifted like a monstrance over the world of Logres, he did not reach the Castle till after the second entry of Perceval, as another king in warfare, had been ratified by the return of the Hallows. Then he was welcomed by Perceval and was led into the presence of the Graal, or at least into the chapel where it abode and was accustomed to appear at the serving of the Mass. It is at this point that the mystery of the subject deepens and that he is said to have beheld the five changes, corresponding to the five wounds which Christ received upon the Cross. But the vision had a more withdrawn meaning, which is held in utter reserve, because it is the secret of the sacrament. It was through his experiences in the Hidden House that Arthur, on his return to Cardoil, was enabled to furnish, as we are told, the true pattern for Eucharistic chalices, previously unknown in his kingdom, and, in like manner, of bells for church offices.

It is possible scarcely to say that the numerous allusions to the Sacred Vessel tend to the increase of our knowledge on the descriptive side of the object, but on that which may be called historical there is ample evidence that the story draws from some form of The Book of the Holy Graal, while its specific additions and extensions do not distract its harmony in respect of this source. It is clear from several statements that there is to be no rest in the land until the Graal has been achieved, but the tremor of adventure and enchantment which stirs Logres in its dream is not characterised clearly by either of those diagnoses which are found in the Greater or Lesser Chronicles. Prior to the first arrival of Perceval, and during his keepership subsequently, those maidens and holy hermits who, in one or another way, have been concerned with the Graal service have a devotional refuge therein which carries with it a species of youth renewal. Yet the vessel itself still lies under a certain cloud of mystery, and during the period of

research there is no man, however well he may be acquainted himself therewith, who can instruct another in the quest or in the attainment of the Castle of Desire. The will of God alone can lead the seeker.

Though encompassed by sacramental protections, the Graal and its companion Hallows were not without danger from the assaults of workers of evil. We learn early in the story that King Fisherman is challenged by the King of Castle Mortal in respect of the Graal and Lance. The fact of this claim and the partial success which follows it constitutes a departure from the tradition of the whole French cycle, in so far as it is now extant; but we shall meet with its correspondences in the German cycle, and shall find that, as they do not derive from one another, they are branches with a common root which lies beneath the surface of the literature. The King of Castle Mortal is described as he who sold God for money; but although there is a full account of the evil ruler taking possession of the Graal Castle, we know nothing of his antecedent life, except that he was a brother of him who was sealed with sanctity and the rightful custodian therefore of the sacred objects. It follows from this that he was reared, so to speak, in the sanctuary and must have either betrayed the sanctuary or have been cast out therefrom. The usurpation takes place after the death of King Fisherman, which seems to have created the opportunity; but when the enemy of the Laws of Light entered into the place of God, the Chapel of the Holy Graal was emptied of its Hallows, which were taken into deeper retreat. The sanctuary was not destined, however, to remain under the powers of the darkness, and as in the other romances Perceval returns in fine to ask the postponed question; as by so doing he restores health to the King and joy to the Hidden House; so here he visits the usurper with arms of the body, arms of the soul in purity, invincible arms of grace, and by his conquest of the Castle

he reads himself into the Kingdom, while the self-destruction of the false King follows on that victory. The Hallows are then restored, though the witness does not say whether by hands of men, hands of angels, or borne by the wind of the Spirit. The sepulchre of King Fisherman was before the altar, and it was covered with the jewelled tabernacle, which seems to have been moved by a miracle.

Perceval abode in the Castle, except in so far as his toilsome life called him temporarily away, and there also were his mother—who did not die at the beginning of his adventures, as in several of the other texts—and his virgin sister, till they were called at length from earth. The call came also to Perceval, but not in the guise of death. He was instructed, as we have seen in another branch of our inquest, to divide the Hallows between certain hermits who possessed the “building word” for churches of all things holy and houses dedicated to sanctity. From this it follows that the Graal in this story may not in reality depart, but is removed and remains—as it would seem—in some undeclared sanctuary of Britain. Perceval was not instructed, and made no disposition in respect of his kingdom or the Castle, for there began the ringing of certain joyful bells, as if for a bridal. Into the harbour there entered a ship with white sails emblazoned with the Red Cross, and therein was a fair, priestly company, robed for the celebration of Mass. The anchor was cast, and the company went to pray in the Chapel of the Holy Graal, bearing with them glorious vessels of gold and silver, as if on the removal of those things which were without price in the order of the spirit there were left, as a sign of goodwill, the external offerings of precious metals of this world. Perceval took leave of his household and entered the ship, followed by those whose high presence made his departure a pageant. It is said, thereupon, that the Graal would

appear no more in the Chapel or Castle, but that Perceval would know well the place where it would be.

There can be no question that in spite of several discrepancies this version of the Quest is the most significant of all its renderings into the fair language of romance, that being excepted only which is the exalted Quest of all. I record in conclusion as follows: (1) That there is no genealogy given of the Graal Keeper; (2) that among the discrepancies, or as something that is out of reason, there must be included the allocation of the King's illness to the paralysed inquisition of Perceval; (3) that so far as enchantments of Britain are mentioned in this text, the Longer Prose Perceval draws a certain reflection from the Lesser Chronicles; (4) that the final abrogation of the question through the King's death in mischance, and the winning of the Graal by the chance of war, are things which place this branch of the Graal literature apart from all other branches; (5) accepting the judgment of scholarship that the Mabinogi of Peredur and the English Syr Percyvelle are the last reflections of some primeval non-Christian quest, before all marriage with the Graal, it is desirable to note that the Longer Prose Perceval shares with them one characteristic in common, that in none of them is the question asked; and late though it be otherwise, as those texts are late, this also seems to embody a primitive element. I should mention further that the shield borne by Perceval is said to have been the shield of that Joseph who "took down the Saviour of the world from hanging on the rood," and that Joseph set in the boss thereof a relic of the Precious Blood and a piece of our Lord's garment. It seems obvious that this is a reflection from the Book of the Holy Graal concerning the shield of Evalach, but this was reserved for Galahad. And in fine, as regards the question, with all that followed in respect of the King's languishment, it should be noted—as a

suggestion of deeper mystery behind one unaccountable mystery—that, on the evidence of King Fisher himself, he would have been whole of his limbs and his body, had he known that the visitor at the Graal Castle was Perceval, and his own nephew.

CHAPTER EIGHT THE QUEST OF THE HIGH PRINCE

Having passed through many initiations, I can say with the sincerity which comes of full knowledge that the Graal legend, ritually and ceremonially presented, is the greatest of all which lies beyond the known borders of the instituted mysteries. But it is exalted in a place of understanding of which no one can speak in public, not only because of certain seals placed upon the sanctuary, but more especially, in the last resource, because there are no listeners. I know, however, and can say that the Cup appears; I know that it is the Graal cup; and the wonders of its manifestation in romance are not so far removed from the high things which it symbolises, whence it follows that the same story is told everywhere. It is in this way that on these subjects we may make up our minds to say new things, but we say only those which are old, because it would seem that there are no others. If Guiot de Provence ever affirmed that the Graal legend was first written in the starry heavens, he testified to that which is the shadow of the truth, or more properly its bright reflection.

Let us now set before our minds the image of the Graal Castle, having a local habitation and a name on the mountain-side of Corbenic. The inhabitant-in-chief of this sanctuary is the Keeper of the Hallows, holding by lineal descent from the first times of the mystery. This is the noble King Pellès, behind whom is that undeclared type of the consecrated royalty which was—the maimed King Pellehan, whose hurt has to be healed by Galahad. The

maiden who carries the Sacred Vessel in the pageant of the ceremonial rite is the reigning king's daughter, the virgo intacta Helayne. To the Castle on a certain occasion there comes the Knight Lancelot, who is the son of King Ban of Benoic, while his mother Helen is issued from the race of Joseph of Arimathæa, and through him is of the line of King David. It is known by the Keeper Pelles that to bring to its final term the mystery of the Holy Graal, his daughter must bear a child to Lancelot, and this is accomplished under circumstances of enchantment which seem to have eliminated from the maiden all sense of earthly passion. It cannot be said that this was the state of Lancelot, who believed that his partner in the mystery of union was the consort of Arthur the King, and to this extent the sacramental imagery offers the signs of failure. In the case of Helayne the symbolism only deflects from perfection at a single point, which is that of a second meeting with Lancelot under almost similar circumstances. I must not specify them here, except in so far as to say that there was a certain incursion of common motive into that which belonged otherwise to the sacramental side of things, so far as she was concerned. I can imagine nothing in the whole course of literature to compare with the renunciation of this maiden, on whom the pure light of the Graal had fallen for seasons and years, and who was called upon by the exigencies of the Quest to make that sacrifice which is indicated by the great romance. It is at this point that the Book of the Knight Lancelot sets aside finally all sense of triviality and is assumed into the Kingdom of the Mysteries.

The motherhood of King Pelles' daughter, because of her consanguinity with the mysteries, of which she is an assistant-guardian under the Hereditary Keeper, occurs as the result of an intercourse which has some aspects of a magical marriage, and, considering all its circumstances, it is difficult at this stage to speculate about all that which

lies behind it. We may almost say that the Lesser Mysteries took flesh for a period under an ordained enchantment and were ill at ease in their envelope. Having regard to Galahad's election, the response which he made thereto, and the achievement which in fine crowned it, the manner of his birth is no longer even a stain; it is a triviality, the sufficing cause of which removes the suggestion of profanation in respect of the Holy Place which by that unusual conception drew to the term of its ministry. I can understand that the mind unversed in the harmony of the whole scheme may think that the generation of Galahad should have been left in a cloud of uncertainty and himself without declared father or mother, like the mystic King of Salem. We have, however, to remember that what we now term bastardy does not rank in the romances exactly as a stain upon origin; it is almost a conventional mode of begetting heroes-in-chief, and that which obtains for Galahad obtains for the ideal hero and king who was the son according to the flesh of Uther Pendragon. As no romances ascribe a higher importance to chastity, and even to virginity, than the Graal legends, so—antecedently at least—their writers had every reason to attach its proper degree of value to the pre-eminence and sanctity of the nuptial bond; but there was that in the antecedents of Lancelot which made him the only possible father for the most exotic flower of chivalry who was the predestined Graal winner, but at the same time nothing could insure that possibility, except in the absence of his marriage.

So, therefore, Galahad is begotten in the fulness of time, and over all connected therewith falls suddenly the veil of concealment. Though on one occasion he was seen as a babe by Sir Bors in the Holy Place, we do not know certainly where he was born or by whom nurtured; but if we are guided by the sequel, as it follows in the Great Quest, it was probably away from the Graal Castle and with

mystic nurses. When we first meet him he is among the pageants and holy places of the mysteries of official religion. Subsequently he is led towards his term by one who seems a steward of other mysteries, and when the quest begins he passes at once into the world of parable and symbol, having firstly been consecrated as a knight by his own father, who does not apparently know him, who acts under the direction of the stewards, while Galahad dissembles any knowledge that he might be assumed to possess. He has come, so far as we can say, out of the hidden places of the King. He bears the outward signs of the Mysteries, and has an imputed prescience of events in a certain chain of cause and effect. He passes through adventures as a man passes through visions, and he has many combats, but they are chiefly of such an order that the alternative title of the Great Quest might well be the Spiritual Combat. In the quests which he undertakes, although there is nominally one castle in which the Graal has its normal abode, it is yet a moving wonder, and a studied comparison might show that it is more closely connected with the Eucharistic mystery than it is according to the other romances, the Longer Prose Perceval excepted. Still, an efficacious mass is being said everywhere in the world. The Graal is more especially the secret of high sanctity. Galahad himself is the mystery of spiritual chivalry exemplified in human form; his history is one of initiation, and his term is to see God. As compared with the rest of the literature, we enter in his legend upon new ground, and are on the eminence of Mont Salvatch rather than among the normal offices of chivalry. It is more especially this legend which is regarded by scholarship as the last outcome of the ascetic element introduced into the Graal cycle; but it is not understood that throughout the period of the middle ages the mystic life manifested only under an ascetic aspect, or with an environment of that kind. The Galahad romance is not ascetic after the ordinary way, or as the term is

commonly accepted; it has an interior quality which places it above that degree, and this quality is the open sense of the mystic life. But the gate of the mystic life is assuredly the ascetic gate, in the same manner that the normal life of religion has morality as the door thereof. Those who have talked of asceticism meant in reality to speak of the supernatural life, of which the Galahad romance is a kind of archetypal picture. Though Wolfram, on the authority of Guiot, may have told what he called the true story, that story was never recited till the creation of the Galahad legend. The atmosphere of the romance gives up Galahad as the natural air gives up the vision from beyond. It is the story of the arch-natural man who comes to those who will receive him. He issues from the place of the mystery as Lancelot came from fairyland, or at least a world of enchantment. The atmosphere is that of great mysteries, the odour that of the sanctuary withdrawn behind the Hallows of the outward Holy Places. Galahad's entire life is bound up so completely with the Quest to which he is dedicated that apart therefrom he can scarcely be said to live. The desire of a certain house not made with hands has so eaten him up that he has never entered the precincts of the halls of passion. He is indeed faithful and true, but earthly attraction is foreign to him, even in its exaltation. Even his meetings with his father are shadowy and not of this world—a characteristic which seems the more prominent when he is the better fulfilling what would be understood by his filial duty. It is not that he is explicitly outside the sphere of sense and its temptations, but that his actuating motives are of the transmuted kind. In proportion, his quest is of the unrealised order; it is the working of a mystery within the place of a mystery; and it is in comparison therewith that we may understand the deep foreboding which fell upon the heart of Arthur when the flower of his wonderful court went forth to seek the Graal. In this respect the old legend illustrates the fact that many

are called but few are chosen; and even in the latter class it is only the rarest flower of the mystic chivalry which can be thought of as chosen among thousands. Of the Perceval Quest there are many versions, but of Galahad there is one story only. So are the peers of the Round Table a great company, but Galahad is one. So also, of the high kings and princes, there are some who come again, and of such is the royal Arthur; but there are some who return no more, and of these is Galahad. He has not been understood even by great poets, for there could be scarcely a worse interpretation of his position than a poem, like that of Tennyson, in which he celebrates his strength on the ground that his heart is pure. Let me add, in conclusion of this part, that at the time of his coming the Graal went about in the land, looking for those it belonged to, and that in this respect Galahad had the true secret of Le Moyen de parvenir. It has its secret place of abiding, its altar of repose, at Corbenic, the Graal Castle, but it appears at the King's court—and this is exclusive to the story. The voice of the Quest passed through all Britain, in part by common report—because all the Arthurian knighthood bound itself to assume the task—but in part also by the miracle of unknown voices and of holy fore-knowledge. The Graal itself is not the official sacrament, or it is that and something which exceeds it. If it were otherwise there would be no sense in the declaration made by a hermit that certain knights may seek but shall never find it. On the Eucharistic side, it is the vision of Christ Himself, and the mystery of Divine Providence is manifested strangely therein; it works through faith, represented as the way of vision and the gate of things unseen. In the poem of De Borron and other early versions, the Sacred Vessel is invisible—and that utterly—to persons of evil life; but, though still under its due veils, it is shown in the Quest more openly, and on one occasion even to all who are present—good knights and indifferent. The vision imposes

silence, and this seems to have been always its office, but it is that kind of silence which comes about by the mode of ecstasy, and in the case of Lancelot it is described rather fully, as if there were a particular intention discernible in his advancement through those grades of his partial initiation, when he sees without participating. One form of this ecstasy seems to be connected with the working of the Holy Spirit. But there is no assurance to be inferred from favour to further favour, since, on another occasion, the Graal is invisible to Lancelot when it is seen at the same time and in the same place by a company of white knights.

Of such is the Vessel of the legend and as regards the search after it, the elect knight is told that God entered into this world to free men from the wearisome adventures which were on them and from the evil belief. A close parallel is instituted between the Knight and Christ, since Galahad came to terminate the adventurous and evil destinies in this island of Britain. For this reason he is likened to the Son of the High Father, who brought souls out of thrall, and even a demon confesses to him as the way of truth.

I conceive that there is little occasion to recite the story of the Quest which is available after so many manners of English vesture to young and old alike. At the Vigil of Pentecost, Lancelot was carried by a gentlewoman to a Holy House, where he was required to knight the son of his own body, but, as we have seen, without learning his name or recognising him after any manner. Galahad, who "was semely and demure as a dove, with all maner of good features," was acquainted, undoubtedly, with his geniture, but he made no claim on his father. After this mode, at the beginning of his progress, was he consecrated by the secular order and received into the degree of chivalry. He came forth from the sacred precincts, being a convent of

white nuns, wherein it is said that he had been nourished, and was brought to the Court of King Arthur by “a good old man and an auncyent clothed al in whyte,” who saluted the company at table with words of peace. Against this arrival the palace had been prepared strangely by the emblazonment of letters of gold on the Siege Perilous—testifying that the time had come when it should be at length occupied—and by the appearance of a great stone in the river outside, with a sword embedded therein, which none present could withdraw. The ancient man uplifted the draperies of the chair, and there was found a new emblazonment: “this is the Sege of Galahalt the haute prynce.” The youth is seated accordingly, as a prince who was not of this world, and it was seen that he was clothed in red arms, though without sword or shield. But he had begun to move amidst enchantments; the sword implanted in the stone was to him predestined, and by him it was withdrawn, after which he revealed by the word of his own mouth that it was that weapon wherewith the good Knight Balyn had slain Balan, his brother. At the festival which followed this episode the Graal, under its proper veils, appeared in the hall, illuminating all things by the grace of the Holy Ghost and imposing that sacred silence—already mentioned—in the presence of the Great Mysteries. As the light enlightened them spiritually, and to each uplifted the countenance of each in beauty? so the sacred vision fed them abundantly in their bodies; but because of those draperies which shrouded the vessel; the great chivalry vowed to go in quest thereof, that they might see it more openly. After this manner began the mystic inquisition which, by a messenger from Nascien the Hermit—who was the early Keeper of Galahad according to the Vulgate Merlin and the recipient of those revelations contained in the Book of the Holy Graal—was forbidden to natural women, like that of Masonry, though the ministers of the Graal were maidens, and if Masonry had retained its

secrets in conscious memory they would be served by women who were virgins.

The first adventures of Galahad were those which befell him at an Abbey of white monks, when he who was as yet without shield received that which Joseph the Second gave in the far past to Evalach that he might prevail against the King of Egypt—that also which Joseph crossed with his blood on his death-bed. It was a sign that the evil adventures would be ended by Galahad. Previously, it had been a shield perilous to all who used it, because it was predestined to one, but I do not find that it had a special office in the later part of the legend.

Of the Graal and the other Hallows, of their ministry and mystery, and of all things connected therewith, we have heard in their proper sections otherwise. After what manner Lancelot, Perceval and Bors passed through worlds of parable as through places of purification—I do not speak here, and even in respect of the High Prince, I am concerned only in so far as his story completes the things which were left over from other branches of the Greater Chronicles; the healing of Mordrains, the King—penitent of all the centuries; the release of Simeon; and the manumission of the unfaithful Moses. But of this last I find nothing in the Quest. As regards Simeon, the abbey which was visited by Lancelot was reached by Galahad towards the close of his time of quest, and there he beheld a burning wood in a croft under the minster, but the “flammynge faylled, and the fyre staunched” as he drew thereto, and there paused for a space. The voice of Simeon from within greeted him in a good hour when he was to draw a soul out of earthly pain into the joy of Paradise. It said also that he who spoke was of his kindred, and that for three hundred and fifty-four years he had been thus purged of the sin which he had done against Joseph of Arimathæa.

Galahad took the body in his arms, bore it into the minster, had service said over it, and interred it before the high altar. Of such was the rest of Simeon.

It was at another abbey that he came upon the age-long vigil of King Mordrains. Galahad had the hands of healing, and seeing that he was born in the sanctuary, it may be said that in this romance the healing comes from within. These were the words of the King: "Galahad the seruant of Jhesu Cryst whos comynge I haue abyden soo longe, now embrace me & lete me reste on thy breste, so that I may reste bitwene thine armes, for thou art a clene vyrgyn aboue all Knyghtes as the floure of the lely, in whome vyrgynyte is sygnefyed, & thou art the rose the whiche is the floure of all good vertues, & in coloure of fyre. For the fyre of the holy ghoost is taken so in thee that my flesshe which was of dede oldnesse, is become yong ageyne." When Galahad heard his words, he covered his whole body in a close embrace, in which position the King prays Christ to visit him, wherein and whereafter the soul departed from his body. So was the curious impertinent, who had been called but not chosen at that time, after his long penance, at length forgiven the offence, and was taken into the great peace, fortified with all Rites of the most secret and Holy Church of the Hidden Graal.

The Ship of Solomon had, prior to these episodes, conveyed the questing knights—Galahad, Perceval and Bors—from point to point of their progress; it had taken Lancelot a certain distance in his son's company, till they commended each other to God for the rest of their mortal life; it had borne the sister of Perceval, who of her own hair and of silk, combined with precious stones, had braided the true and proper girdle for the Sword of David, to replace the mean girdle attached to it by the wife of Solomon. But she had yielded her life before the healing and passing in God

of Mordrains, and had been placed by her proper desire in another ship, with a covenant on her part that it should meet the questers at Sarras, when the Ship of Solomon brought them to that bourne of their voyaging. It remained only that those three should now gather at Corbenic for the healing of the maimed King Pellehan, about whose place and identity we have seen that the text offers some elements of minor confusion. This is he whom we must suppose to have received the Dolorous Stroke at the hands of Balyn.

As the path of quest drew towards its central point, the three, who had traversed various converging roads, met, as it is said, at travers, knowing that the adventures of Logres were at last achieved. They entered within the Castle, and King Pelles greeted them with great joy. In this as in some other romances grave importance is attached to resoldering the Broken Sword, and that which was brought by Eleazer, the King's son, was that with which Joseph the Second was once stricken through the thighs. It was set perfectly by Galahad when the others had essayed in vain, and was then given to Bors, as a good knight and a worthy man. What followed thereon was the sustenance of the elect Graal knights after a spiritual manner, to the exclusion of the general assembly, who were dismissed from the presence. Those who remained were three and three, namely, Galahad, Perceval and Bors, for the first triad; King Pelles, his son Eleazar, and a maiden who was the King's niece, for the second triad. To these were joined certain pilgrims who were knights also, namely, three of Gaul, three of Ireland, and three of Denmark. Finally, there was brought in the maimed King, and thereon a voice said that two of those who were present did not belong to the Quest, at which words King Pelles—although he was the Keeper—rose up with his son and departed. They were, therefore, thirteen in all, and one of these was a woman,

who was present with them when Joseph of Arimathæa, the first Bishop of Christendom, came down with angels from heaven, and celebrated an arch-natural Mass in the Holy Place. After the Kiss of Peace given to Galahad, and communicated by him to his fellows, the celebrants dissolved, but out of the Graal itself there came the Saviour of all, with the signs of His passion upon Him, and communicated to them all in the Eucharist. He also vanished, and Galahad, who had received his instructions, went up to the maimed King and anointed him with the blood flowing from the Hallowed Spear. Thereupon, he, being healed, rose up and gave thanks to God. It is said that, in the sequel of time, he united himself to a company of white monks.

“Sir,” said Galahad to the Great Master at the close of the Mysteries, “why shalle not these other felawes goo with us?”—that is to say, unto Sarras, the reference being to the nine mysterious knights. The answer hereto was significant: “For this cause: for ryght as I departed my postels, one here and another there soo I will that ye departe, and two of yow shall dye in my servyse, but one of you shal come ageyne and telle tydynges.” So, therefore, the company of the adepts dissevered; but we have seen how Galahad, Perceval and Bors were carried by the Ship of Solomon to Sarras, “in the partyes of Babylone,” called an island in the Quest. There met them, in accordance with her covenant, that other vessel, which carried the body of Perceval’s most holy sister. We have seen also how the soul of Galahad departed, and it rests only to say that Perceval died in a hermitage, but Sir Bors returned to Logres, bearing the messages of his brethren, but especially of Galahad to his father: “And whanne he had said these wordes Galahad went to Percyual and kyssed hym & commaunded hym to God, and soo he went to sire Bors, & kyssed hym, and commaunded hym to God, and sayde:

Fayre lord, salewe me to my lord syr launcelot my fader.
And as soone as ye see hym, byd hym remember of this
unstable world.”

The bodies of Perceval and Galahad were buried in the spiritualities of Sarras, which may have been in some sense a city of initiation, though until their coming it was ruled by evil rather than good. It was not the abiding place, but that of the final trial for the stewards of the Mystery, and at first they were imprisoned therein; but Galahad was afterwards made King. The Spear was taken into heaven, together with the Holy Vessel, but Bors returned—as it has been intimated—carrying the re-soldered Broken Sword, as if grace had been removed, but not that which now may have symbolised the coming destruction of the Round Table. Of the Sword of David we hear nothing further, nor do we know what became of the Ship of Solomon. As the symbol of Faith, it may have continued voyaging, but on other considerations it had done its work: there was no reason why it should remain when Galahad had gone.

But perhaps the saddest mystery of all is the end of King Pelles himself, and how it fared with him after the departure of the Graal. It will be seen that the Quest versions offer many alternatives, but there is one text only which says that the Hereditary Keeper was dispossessed utterly and left in an empty sanctuary.

We have now, and in fine, to account as we can for the great disaster of the whole experiment. The earthly knighthood undertakes, in despite of the high earthly king, a quest to which it is in a sense perhaps called but for which it is in no sense chosen. The result, as I have said, is that the chivalry of the world is broken and the kingdom is destroyed, while the object of all research is said to be taken away. It was not, therefore, the concealment of the

Sacred Vessel, but its manifestation rather, which brought ruin to the Round Table. It went about in the world of Logres, and the ruin followed, because the world was not worthy. In a certain manner it is the mystery of the Graal itself which gives forth Galahad as its own manifestation, in the order of the visible body, and sends him on designed offices of healing, with a warrant to close a specific cycle of times. When the Graal romances say that the Sacred Vessel was seen no more, or was carried up to heaven, they do not mean that it was taken away, in the sense that it had become unattainable, but that it was—as some of them say also—in concealment. It is certain that the great things are always in concealment, and are perhaps the more hidden in proportion to their more apparently open manifestation. In this respect, the distinction between the natural and supernatural Graal, which is made by the prose Lancelot, has a side of highest value. Let us reserve for a moment the consideration of the Hallows as mere relics, and in so far as the Cup is concerned, let us remember the two forms of sustenance which it offered—in correspondence closely enough with the ideas of Nature and Grace. It should be understood, however, that between the mysteries themselves there is a certain superincursion, and so also there is in the romances what the light heart of criticism regards as un peu confus, namely, some disposition to talk of the one office in the terms of the other. At the same time certain romances give prominence to the greater and others to the lesser office.

CHAPTER NINE THE WELSH QUEST OF GALAHAD

It is considered that this translation, which is referable to the early part of the fifteenth century, was made from another codex than that which was used by Malory for the *Morte d'Arthur*, but it embodied material from the *Book of the Holy Graal*, which may mean that the anonymous

author of the rendering was either the compiler of a harmony or the simple translator of a manuscript corresponding to the texts followed by Dr. Furnivall in his edition of the Quest. At the same time, outside all evidences of mistranslation, the Welsh version of the Quest itself differs unquestionably in several particulars from all codices which are known to scholarship, and it seems quite certain that the variations are not those of invention. On the one hand, there is a certain slight attenuation of the mystic atmosphere, though the general features remain; for example, that enhanced knowledge of one another which is attributed to the knights who saw the Holy Vessel, under the veils thereof, at the King's table, is unmentioned in the Welsh text. Alternatively, there are other respects in which there is an added disposition to lean on the spiritual side of things, and this is manifested plainly in a few crucial cases. The Table of the Lord's Supper is described as that which fed the body and the soul with heavenly food, while the Graal itself is said to provide a spiritual nourishment, which is sent by the Holy Ghost to him who seeks in grace to sit at the table thereof. The close connection between the Sacred Vessel and the office of the Divine Spirit—which is so evident in the metrical romance of De Borron—is also apparent, and one who is on the quest is told that by falling into sin he will fail to see that Spirit, even as Lancelot failed. Outside those wanderings of the Holy Graal which are recorded in the French texts, there are references to its manifestation at sundry places in Logres—or there more especially, but not there to the exclusion of all other countries. Finally as to this part, I recognise a note of undeclared mystery as regards the House of the Hallows. There was the permanent shrine of the Holy Vessel, but whether it was visible always to those who dwelt within or at certain times and seasons is not apparent, and remains indeed doubtful on the evidence of all the literature. It is therefore open to question whether it was the daily

nourishment of the House, or whether its varied ministry was contingent on the arrival of a stranger who was prepared so far sufficiently that he was admitted within the gates. It was the latter probably, because Lancelot rested there for four days; but it was not until the fifth day, and then in the midst of the supper, that the Graal appeared and filled all with the meats most loved by them.

The Welsh Quest, like its prototype of Northern France, draws then from the Book of the Holy Graal, but not from one of those codices with which we have been made acquainted so far by the pains of scholarship. For example, the account of the Second Table is given with specific variations, though there is nothing to justify their enumeration in this place, except that the son of Joseph is said to have occupied the seat which corresponded to that of Christ, and no one ventured to take it after him. It was not so occupied in the parent historical text, and we know, of course, that the Siege Perilous in other presentations of the legend is that of Judas Iscariot.

What appears to be the Dolorous Stroke in the Welsh Quest is exceedingly involved, but the account is as follows: (a) King Lambor was father of the Lame King, and was at war with King Urlain, formerly a Saracen. (b) Lambor was forced to flight, and in doing so reached the seashore, where he found the Ship of Solomon. (c) He took up the Sword therein and smote Urlain, so that he and his horse were cut in two pieces. This occurred in England, and was the first blow that was ever given with the weapon. (d) The King who was slain is said to have been so holy that great vengeance was taken by God for that blow. (e) In neither kingdom for a long time was there found any fruit, everything being dried up, so that the land is called to this day the Decayed Kingdom. It will be seen that this is in direct contradiction to the particulars in the Book of the

Holy Graal concerning the death of Lambor, the keeper at that time of the Sacred Vessel. It follows also that the story of Balyn and Balan was unknown to the Welsh translator.

The Lamé King was the Uncle of Perceval, and so good was his manner of living that his like could not be found in the world. One day he was hunting, and came to the seashore, where he also found the ship. In spite of the warning written therein, he entered without fear, and drew the Sword partly from the scabbard. He was struck by a spear in the thigh, and was maimed from that time forward. In the French Quest of Galahad this episode is attributed to King Pelles.

As an illustration of general intention prevailing through the Welsh Quest, a hermit reminds Gawain that the dignity of knighthood was conferred upon him—among other things—for the defence of the Church, and as this specific statement is part only of the general atmosphere through which the romance moves, it is itself an eloquent comment on the alleged underlying hostility to official ecclesiasticism which is sometimes traced in the literature. The condition of Wales at the time of the Quest, as it is depicted in the Welsh text, is not an encouraging report regarding the last stronghold of the Celtic Church, but it is possible that the worst particulars are things which the translator has interpolated.

Whether in their agreement or variation, the details of the story do not call to be scheduled here, but there are a few points which may be noted with all brevity. Galahad is described as the foster-child of the abbey where Lancelot finds him, and he is commanded to watch his arms prior to receiving knighthood. He is introduced at the Court of King Arthur as the desired Knight descended from the line of the prophet David and Joseph of Arimathæa: on him rest all the

adventures and wonders of Great Britain and all countries. He is called the son of the daughter of King Pelles, but the later story speaks invariably of the Graal Castle as that of King Pelour, whom I should identify as the maimed and abdicated Keeper who was healed by Galahad in the French version, of which, however, there is no mention in the Welsh Quest. The manifested festival of the Graal in the hall of Arthur is heralded by an unknown messenger—a lady vested in white on a white palfrey, who gives warning concerning its advent, and this is found also in Malory's version, but he follows a defective text, for in him the prophecy is uttered after the event itself. So great are the delicacies at the table, by the provision of the Sacred Vessel, so much are they dwelt on in the Welsh version, that the resolution of the knights in respect of the coming Quest has the aspect of material appetite, and they resolve not to rest till they can eat at another table where they will be fed as rarely. According to Gawain, there is no such place on earth except the Court of King Peleur. When the Quest is thus undertaken Galahad says nothing. All this is an accident of aspect, for elsewhere it is stated (a) that no one shall see the Holy Graal except through the gate which is called Confession, and this is obviously the gate of the Eucharist; (b) that the final return of Bors was designed to exhibit the spirituality of that good which at the last end of things was lost by so many on account of their sins.

The time comes when Galahad swears upon the relics with the others to maintain the Quest, and, apart from this position—which has not been understood by scholarship—there are episodes and intimations which seem intended to show that the natural child of the sanctuary was not permitted to know all—though he had that which was implied in his heirship—until, in common with the others, he undertook the great enterprise. The Knights proceeded on their journey weeping and in great sorrow—that is to

say, with failing hearts, foreboding the discourselling of so many and all the disaster coming after: Euntes ibant et flebant [“They went away and wept”].

There is one reference to Eleazar, the son of King Pelles, and one to a Knight named Argus, who, by an unthinkable confusion, is said to be the son of Helayne, as if this daughter of the House had married or begotten subsequently. The hermit Nasciens, whose identity is so important for the Book of the Holy Graal, is described as the son-in-law of Evalach, instead of his brother by marriage, as he appears in the extant text. He is found; on one occasion by Gawain in a very poor cell or hermitage, with a small chapel attached.

When the questing Knights arrive at the Graal Castle, it is not said that they see either Pelles or Peleur, nor are these or Eleazar present at the manifestation of the Holy Graal. The maiden who remains in the text of Malory is also bidden to depart, following in this respect the chief French manuscripts. He who comes down from Heaven as the first Bishop of Christendom is distinguished rightly from Joseph of Arimathæa, and is therefore the second Joseph. When he celebrates the secret mass of the Graal, he takes out a wafer from the Vessel, which shows that it was used as a ciborium. In the divine discourse thereafter, it is said by Christ that many a good man has come to the Castle through the grace of the Holy Ghost. As regards the nine mysterious Knights who are not to accompany the three on their journey to Sarras, the parting of those with these takes place amidst great brotherhood, and each of them says who he is, but the nine are not named in the text. Galahad asks them to salute Arthur if they go to his Court, and they reply that they shall do so gladly, but they do not say that they will go. Probably they went back by another way into their own countries.

Now, these are the chief points which I promised to set forth; and there is one thing more only—that the Spear was not taken to Sarras, nor was it removed to Heaven with the Sacred Vessel. In conclusion as to the Quest of Galahad, the presence of that maiden who was niece of King Pelles at the great vision of the Graal seems without authority in extant French texts; it is therefore peculiar to Malory and the version which he followed. If it were possible to trace the variations of the Quest through developments of the Tristram cycle, we should meet with very curious details, but they are not necessary to our subject.

