

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 15]

BOOK SEVEN THE HOLY GRAAL IN THE LIGHT OF THE
CELTIC CHURCH

CHAPTER ONE STATEMENT OF A POSSIBLE IMPLICIT
ACCOUNTING FOR ALL CLAIMS

Among all external organisations there is one institution—and there is one only—which, on the principle that the best is the nearest, might be expected to offer some of those signs and warrants that we should expect in a society, a sodality, a body—let me say, at once, in a church—which could and did connect with the idea of the Holy Graal—as something nearest to its source, if not indeed that centre from which the entire mystery originated.

The early history of the Holy Graal, as distinguished from the several quests undertaken for the discovery of that sacred object, is one of Christianity colonising. We know in the French cycle, by the universal voice of the texts, that it was a mystery which was brought into Britain, and seeing that the legend, as a whole, is—apart or otherwise from anything involved by the implicits thereof—assuredly of Celtic origin, its religious elements, in the absence of any

special and extrinsic claims, must be accounted for most readily by the characteristics of the Celtic Church.

It is much closer to our hands than anything which has been suggested alternatively, and it was unquestionably that environment in which some of the legends developed. Those who have previously recognised, in their imperfect and dubious way, that the great legends have a mystic aspect, and that hence they are probably referable to something in instituted mysticism, have put forward bare possibilities, and, independently of these, scholarship has itself gone much further afield. It has thought of the Far East as the home of the Holy Graal, and some who are mystics by more than a predisposition on the surface, know certainly—even if it is in a certain sense only—that there is a country deep in Asia. Now, albeit the limits of our evidence concerning the Celtic Church are circumscribed somewhat narrowly, there seems no doubt that this Church bore traces of Eastern influence—by which I mean something stronger and plainer than resides in the common fact that Christianity itself came to us from the oriental world. If, therefore, the Holy Graal has any marks and spirit of the East, it might be accounted for in this manner by way of the most colourable inference. If, however, we prefer to consider without any further preface what is the palmary claim of all, and if therefore we appeal to the veiled suggestion of pre-eminence in the Graal priesthood in respect of an extra-valid form of consecrating the Eucharistic elements and of a super-apostolical succession, it may be advanced that here is simply an exaggerated reflection of that which was actually claimed by the Celtic Church and more especially by that Church in Wales. The claim was that it had a title to existence independently of Rome, Christianity having been established in these islands for a long period prior to the arrival of Saint Augustine, which arrival, from this point of view, was an incursion

upon territory already conquered and held to a defined extent rather than a sacred endeavour to spread the gospel of Christ; thus it brought spiritual war rather than the light of truth. I have classed these two points together—that is to say, the alleged oriental origin and the original independence of Rome—not because I regard the second as important in comparison with the first, but because as a fact we know that the Celtic Church had a certain autonomous existence long before the legend of Joseph of Arimathæa was devised in the local interests of Glastonbury. It was not, therefore, at the beginning any question of Angevin ambition. Further, we can, I think, understand very well how this claim may have been exaggerated in legend, so as to cover—as I have said—the special implicits which I have traced in the Graal literature, and therefore to account for it within as the general characteristics of the Celtic Church may account for it reasonably without. I propose now to set forth some other specific analogies, from which we shall be enabled in fine to draw a general conclusion whether we can be satisfied with the evidence as it so stands, or whether we must go further. Let us remember, in the first place, that the earlier point, if it can be taken apart from the later, would mean probably an origin for the Holy Graal independent of Celtic environment, like that of some Eastern heretical sects which passed into southern France; otherwise a derivation through Spain; or, as an alternative to both, the transit, for example, of the Johannine tradition westward. But if we abandon the earlier and are compelled to have recourse, or this mainly, to the later point, then the legend of the Holy Graal—because it contains elements which are foreign to the mind of romance, though it is expressed in the romance form—must belong to that class of fable which has been invented in an external interest, and its position is not much better than one of forged decretals; it is, indeed, a decretal in literature, put forward in many forms and with

many variants, and it would be useless to look therein for any secret intention beyond that of the particular pretension which it was designed to support. With the merits and defects of Celtic Christianity in Britain, we are sufficiently acquainted to deal rather summarily respecting the value of any mystical suggestions which are discernible in the cycles or remnants of literature which must be regarded as belonging thereto. The suggested implicit with which I am dealing, if found to obtain, would signify therefore the closing of the whole inquiry.

CHAPTER TWO THE FORMULÆ OF THE HYPOTHESIS SCHEDULED

There are traces in the Anglo-Norman romances of a certain fluidic sense in which Britain and its immediate connections, according to the subsurface mind of their writers, stood typically for the world. They were familiar enough with the names of other regions—with Syria, Egypt, Rome—above all, with the Holy Places in the Jerusalem which is below; but their world was the Celtic world, comprised, let us say, between Scotia and Ireland on the one side and central France on the other. This region came, I think, to signify symbolically, and so we hear that the failure to ask “one little question” involved the destruction of kingdoms, while the belated interrogation seems to have lifted the veil of enchantment from the world itself. The cloud upon the sanctuary was a cloud over that world; its lifting was a glory restored everywhere. But as the enchantment, except within very narrow limits, and then ex hypothesi, was only of the imputed order, so the combined restoration of Nature in common with Grace was but imputed also; the woe and inhibition were removed as secretly as they were imposed. So again, when the chivalry of the Round Table—in the Greater Chronicles—covenanted to go forth on the Quest of the Holy Graal, the universal

and proclaimed object was to terminate the hard times of adventure, which had become intolerable: pour deliveir nôtre pais des grans meruelles et des estrainges auentures qui tant y sont auenues, lonc tans a [“to deliver our country from the great wonders and the terrible adventures which have so often occurred there”]. The whole position reminds one of that chapter in the Apocalypse which presents a sheaf of instructions to the Seven Churches of Asia. No one knew better than the Jews not only concerning Rome, Greece and Alexandria, but of the world extended further; this notwithstanding, when the great book of the secret Christian mystery was first written, the world of Christendom was confined chiefly within narrow limits in Asia, and this was the world of the Apocalypse. It was actually all Assiah of Kabalism, though the few who have dared to institute a philological connection between the one name and the other have gone, as usual, astray. Recurring to the fact out of which this analogy arises, let me add, as a matter of justice to an hypothesis which I seek to present adequately, that within this Celtic world the first and most natural sympathies in the religious order would be indubitably with its own aspirations, and I set aside therefore for the time being all speculation as to anything rich and strange in Rite and Doctrine which may have been brought from the Eastern world by those—whoever they were—who first planted Christianity on the known confines of the Western world. The chief points of the hypothesis may be collected into a schedule as follows:

1. It is certain that the Graal Legend is of Celtic origin and making, because of the Celtic attributions of the romances and their Celtic mise-en-scène and characters; because of the Celtic names, disguised and otherwise, which are found in the romances, even in those which belong to the Teutonic cycle; and because of the undoubted derivations into the Graal Legend

from Welsh folklore. This is agreed on all hands, and will therefore call of necessity for no extension or comment in this place.

2. The romance of the Holy Graal, regarding the cycles synthetically, is a glorified ecclesiastical legend of Celtic origin; there are other ecclesiastical legends, referable to the same source, which suggest the Graal atmosphere. The "Graal Church" was in its earlier stages the Celtic Church contrasted with the Saxo-Roman.
3. The nucleus is to be found in the story of Saint David and his miraculous altar. The apostle of South Wales, with some other saints, made a pilgrimage in the legend to Jerusalem, where the patriarch of the Holy City invested him as archbishop and gave him "a consecrated altar in which the body of our Lord once lay." It was transported to Wales, performed innumerable miracles, but after the death of Saint David it was covered with skins and was never seen by any one. According to a variant of the legend, this altar—and possibly some other Hallows—was carried through the air to Britain, and hence was often described as *e coelo veniens*. Though apparently it was the rock-hewn sepulchre mentioned in the New Testament, no man could specify its shape, its colour, or of what material it was fashioned; in addition to its other wonders, it gave oracles—that is to say, a voice spoke therein, as it did, according to the romances, in the Graal itself. Saint David died about 601 A.D.; he gave the Mass to Britain; he was of the lineage of Our Lady; and his birth having been foretold by the finding of a great fish, he was termed the Waterman—*vir aquaticus*—which recalls the Rich Fisherman of the later legends. It might be said that this title was

applicable especially to him, as one who was rich in the conversion of souls to Christ and in the greater gifts of sanctity. His ancestors bore the name of Avallach, whence that of the king .of Sarras seems to be derived certainly; and he is said to have provided sacred vessels for the celebration of the Eucharist.

4. The secret words of the Robert de Borron cycle refer to the Epiclesis of the Celtic Rite. The form of Eucharistic consecration in the Latin Rite is actually the words of Institution—that is to say, the New Testament's account of the Last Supper. In the East, however, consecration is effected by addition of the Epiclesis clause—that is, by the invocation of the Holy Spirit. In its more usual form, it is a petition for the descent of the Comforter, firstly, upon the worshippers, and, secondly, upon the Altar gifts, that the elements may be converted into the Divine Body and Blood. The liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom may be consulted on this point; indeed, from one passage it would seem to follow that what was communicated was the Holy Ghost, an idea in which all that is usually attached to the Eucharistic office seems to dissolve in a higher light. The evidence is, however, confessedly somewhat indirect, as no Gallican or other connected liturgy gives the words of institution, but they are found in full in a North Italian, perhaps a Milanese, liturgy, and elsewhere, as we shall see shortly. It has been said that between 750 and 820 A.D. certain words in the Celtic Rite vanished from the consecration of the Eucharist, which would correspond, I suppose, *ex hypothesi*, to the intervention of the Roman Rite. The Celtic was abolished formally about 850, but is said to have survived to the period of the Graal literature. The Welsh would have learned from the Crusades that the Liturgy of the Holy Spirit was still used in the East.

5. The hereditary Graal Keepers, so strongly emphasised in the romances, are derived from the Hereditary Relic Keepers of the Celtic Church. Mr. J. Romilly Allen, in his *Monumental History of the Early British Church*, has said: "The vicissitudes through which the relics passed in the course of centuries were often of a most romantic description. The story was generally the same. The book, bell or crozier belonging to the founder of the Church was supposed to have acquired peculiar sanctity and even supernatural properties by association with him; and after his death it was often enclosed in a costly metal shrine of exquisite workmanship. Each relic had its hereditary custodian, who was responsible for its safe keeping and who in return received certain privileges, such as... the title to inherit certain land, of which the relic constituted the tenure." The preservation of relics under hereditary guardianship seems to have been common among Celtic families—as, for example, the banner of Saint Columba. So also the relics of certain saints belonging to the Scoto-Irish Church were placed in the care of families of hereditary keepers; these were consecrated objects, not human remains, and they were regarded as of great virtue when borne in battle by a person who was free from any deadly sin. Sometimes a venerable cup was deposited in a special shrine; sometimes the book of the gospels was enclosed in triple cases—as of wood, copper and silver. The custody of such an object became an office of dignity from generation to generation in a single family. The general characteristics of the Celtic relic may be enumerated as follows, but it is not intended to say that every sacred object possessed all the qualities: (a) It came from heaven, like the Graal; (b) it was of mysterious and incomprehensible matter; (c) it was oracular; (d) like the Graal, it had the power of speech; (e) it healed the

sick, as the Graal did also occasionally, though this was not its specific office; (f) like the Graal, it must not be seen by unqualified persons; (g) it had the power of miraculous self-transportation, and the Holy Cup, in certain romances, was also a wandering vessel; (h) it acted as a guide; (i) it was a palladium; (k) it executed judgment on the wicked and profane, which is the characteristic in chief of the Graal in the metrical romance of De Borron.

6. In the Panegyric of Saint Columba, a document ascribed to the last years of the eleventh century, it is recorded among his other good works that—like his peer, Saint David of Wales—he provided a Mass Chalice for every Church—presumably within his special sphere of influence or perhaps even in the islands generally. Readers of the prose *Perceval* Le Gallois will remember that chalices were so uncommon in Arthurian days that the King, during a certain quest, seems to have met with one, and that miraculously, for the first time in his life. The explanation is that wooden bowls may have been used previously for purposes of consecration. This was at the Mass of the Graal which Arthur was permitted to see in the course of his travelling. We should remember at this point that it is only at the close of the cycle in Northern French—that is to say, in the romance which I have just mentioned, in that of Galahad and in the *Book of the Holy Graal*, that the Sacred Vessel—its other uses notwithstanding—is connected expressly and indubitably with the administration of the Eucharist, though it is not always the vessel of communion.
7. There are historical memorials of mystic and holy cups, possessing great virtues and preserved in old Welsh families. Among these is the Holy Cup of Tregaron,

which was made of the wood of the True Cross and its healing virtues were manifested so recently as the year 1901. The curious thing in the romances is that the Holy Graal heals every one except the Keeper himself, who in the Perceval cycle can be cured only by a question, and in the Galahad legend—but here it is a former Keeper—by the magnetic touch of his last lineal descendant.

8. In England during the Middle Ages—but this is a side-issue which is mentioned only for its possible greater antiquity and origin in Celtic times—the Eucharist was reserved, as we have seen otherwise, in a Columbarium, or Dove-House, being a vessel shaped like a dove. This was the Tabernacle of its period, and it recalls (a) some archaic pictures of a Cup over which a dove broods; (b) the descent of a dove on the Graal stone in Wolfram's poem; (c) the passage of symbolic doves in connection with the Graal procession as told by several romances, but especially in the Quest of Galahad; and (d) the office of the Holy Spirit in the Graal legend. But it is also suggested—and this, I believe, is by Huysman—that the Tabernacle was frequently in the form of an ivory tower to symbolise Christ in the womb of the Virgin, who is herself called *Turrus eburnea*.
9. The vanishing of the Graal refers (a) to the actual disappearance of Saint David's altar after the death of its custodian; (b) to the disappearance of the Celtic Church before the Roman; and (c) to the subjugation of the British by the Saxons. The Welsh Church was preeminently a monastic church, and, in spite of the existence of bishops, its government was in the hands of monks. The claim of the ancient British Church generally, including its legend that the first Church of

Glastonbury was consecrated by our Lord Himself, may help us to explain the undertone of dissent from Rome which has been noted here and there in the subsurface of the Graal literature, but especially, as it has been thought, in the Longer Prose Perceval. To appreciate the position fully, we have to remember that the Latin rite gained ground and influence with the Norman Conquest, though independently of that rite there were monasteries in remote valleys where the old liturgy and the ancient form of consecration may have been still used and where also the ancient wisdom of the Druids was preserved, though—in spite of certain testimonies—it could have been scarcely considered consistent for a man to be a mystic Druid and also a Christian. The Druidic secret was symbolised by the term Afalon, which means the Apple Orchard. The last Welsh Archbishop of Saint David's died in 1115, and was succeeded by a Norman, that is to say, by a Roman prelate.

10. Cadwaladr is Galahad. Galahad took away the Holy Graal, because, according to the Welsh Quest, the world was not worthy. His prototype, in despair of his country, removed certain relics, and, by the testimony of one tradition, he died in the Holy Land, as if he also had departed to Sarras, with the intention of proceeding further. Another story says that he projected the reconquest of Britain in a fleet furnished by his kinsman Alain of Brittany, where he was then in exile; but an angel warned him to desist. He was to seek the Pope and confess, and he would be canonised after his death—which, according to this legend, occurred at Rome. This chieftain, who loomed so largely in the Welsh imagination, who, like Bran of pre-Christian legend, was termed the Blessed, was regarded as of the royal line of David; he is thought to

have been the custodian of holy relics belonging to his family before him, and when he died, in reality, as it seems, of the Yellow Sickness, in 664, his return was confidently expected. So many legends grew up around him that he appears to have gathered up in himself all the aspirations of Celtdom. His return is associated with the second manifestation of his relics and with the final felicity of the Celts. Awaiting that event, the entire British Church, for some reason not otherwise explicable, began to droop and decay. But I may note here that a great Welsh revival was inaugurated in the year 1077 A.D. by the return of Rhys-ap-Tewdwr from Brittany. Bards and Druids were at white heat, and Rhys himself was a descendant traditionally of Cadwaladr the Blessed, who was to restore all things. He even claimed identity with that departed hero.

11. When the particular set of claims connected with Glastonbury began to be manufactured about 1150, to centralise a wide field of interests at a defined point, Joseph of Arimathæa was substituted for Saint David. There was the supposed body of Joseph, there the phial which he brought containing the Precious Blood, there also the body of King Arthur, and by imputation the Sapphirus, the lost altar of the Welsh apostle, the last of these recalling rather plausibly, and accounting for, the Lapsit exillis, or exilix, of Wolfram. From this point of view it is worthy of close attention (a) for its sacramental connection; (b) for its association with the body of our Lord; and (c) for the mystery attaching to its form, with which we may compare the vagueness which characterises nearly all the descriptions of the Graal vessel.
12. The descent of the Graal prima materia from folk-lore no more explains the Christian legend of the Graal than

the words *vir* and *virtus* explain the particular significance attaching to the term *virtuoso*. The mythological Salmon of Wisdom as a prototype of the Fish in De Borron's poem is a case in point. The real approximate progenitor is the primitive Christian symbol, which was familiar to Celtic Christianity, and seeing that the latter was much like the Church at large of several centuries earlier, so it may have preserved things which elsewhere had passed out of memory—the Ichthus symbol among them. This signified Christ, and especially the Eucharistic species. It also symbolised the *Disciplina Arcani* and was the most general of Christian emblems; it passed into a specific form of expression for the concealment of the more interior mysteries, and to partake of the Fish was an evasion for the reception of the sacrament.

13. His connection with the Quest of the Graal not only enabled King Arthur to furnish chalices for churches but bells also, which seem to have been unknown previously in Logres. In the Celtic veneration for relics they bear, however, a conspicuous part, the examples being far too numerous for recitation in this place. I can say only that their cultus, their care, the keeperships instituted in connection and the wonders ascribed to them are common to ancient Wales, Scotland and Ireland.
14. Reverting once more to Saint David, it is reported traditionally that the first church which he built was situated at Glastonbury, and in connection with this ascription, it is said to have been consecrated by Christ Himself; so that in more senses than in one sense merely the place was a source and fountain of all religion in the Kingdom of Britain, as affirmed by William of Malmesbury. It was therefore among

ecclesiastical structures what the second Joseph was among the bishops of Christendom. If ever there was an arch-natural Mass celebrated and a noumenal Eucharist administered at a specific place in Logres, assuredly with these warrants it would have been only at Glastonbury, the connection of which with Saint David raises one further point. The Celtic Church held that the Roman Pontiff was the successor of Saint Peter, but the patriarch of Jerusalem—who ordained the Apostle of Wales—was the successor of Christ. The subsurface intention which created this legend seems to have been nearly identical with that which put forward the super-apostolical succession of Joseph the Second, and it follows that Celtic imagination at work in the field of hagiology furnished the makers of romance—and the author in particular of the Book of the Holy Graal—with an ample groundwork. The substitution of the man of Arimathæa for the original patron of Wales was the appropriation of an independent legend, which served the ecclesiastical side of Angevin ambition without affording a handle to the troublesome principality on the western side of the vast dominions of Anjou.

15. There are “distinct traces of something ‘queer’ in the Masses of the earliest Celtic Church—before the coming of Saint David in Wales or of Saint Columba in Scotland and Ireland.” An allusion to the “queerness” in question may be found in the following passage of the Lesser Holy Graal, forming part of the discourse of Christ to Joseph of Arimathæa when He brought the Holy Graal to console the prisoner in his tower: “Et ensinc con ge lou dis à la table, seront pluseurs tables establies à moi sacrefier, qui sénéfiera la croiz, et lov vaissel là où l’an sacrefiera et saintefiera, la pierre où tu méis mon cors, que li caalices sénéfiera où mes cors

sera sacrez, en samblance d'une oïste, et la platainne qui sera dessus mises sénéfiera lou couvercle de coi tu me covris," ["And thus with what you said at the table, there will be several tables established for me to swear, which will serve the cross, and the dish where the year will swear and sanctify, the stone where you put my body, that the chalice will serve where my bodies will be sworn, in the likeness of an oyster, and the plane tree which will be placed on it will serve the lid with which you cover me,"] etcetera. Alternatively, seeing that there is no mention of the Blood, it may be "a manifesto of the party who wished the chalice to be denied the laity," or, finally, the utterance of some obscure party or sect. "The latter view finds some support in the Hermit's story"—referring here to the Prologue of the Book of the Holy Graal—"of his meeting with a knight who had seen him in a place that he named."

16. And now as regards the summary of the whole matter, the position may be expressed as follows: (a) The Graal legend is demonstrably of Celtic stuff—in part of Celtic folk-lore which has turned good Christian, but more largely of ecclesiastical legend; (b) it derives from the story of Saint David and his altar; (c) the original Graal book was probably a legend following a special and peculiar Liturgy; (d) the legend told of the Christianising of Britain by Saint David, the celebration of the Christian Mysteries on the saints' miraculous altar, which was actually the sepulchre of our Lord, of the wonders wrought by this altar, of the coming of the heathens, the ruin of Britain, the flight of its King—who was Saint David's last descendant—bearing with him the altar relic to the East. There he died, thence he shall yet return, again bearing the relic; the Britons shall triumph, the Saxons shall suffer expulsion, and

the mystic words shall be uttered once more over the Thaumaturgic Altar. It is obvious that, according to this hypothesis, the book, which was far older than any Graal literature, remained in concealment in Wales and perhaps was unearthed at the Norman Conquest of Glamorganshire, when it was modified, varied, exalted, transformed and allegorised by successive makers of romance, being adapted specifically as an aid to the House of Anjou, in its struggle with the Pope, by the author of the Book of the Holy Graal—whether Walter Map or another. But Rome proved more than one part too strong and by more than one interest too many for the ambition of Henry the Second, while as regards Wales, it had long and long already succumbed to the Latin Rite.

CHAPTER THREE IN WHAT SENSE THE PLEA MUST BE HELD TO FAIL

It is indubitable, and we have seen in the plenary sense, that folk-lore provided its elements as the crude matter of the scheme of the Holy Graal. It is true, and also indubitable, that many accidentals of the Celtic Church became accidentals of the literature; they were worked into the Graal cycle as well as the pre-Christian elements, the process arising in the most natural of all possible manners. It was not exactly that the most early romancers took the matter which was nearest to their hands, but rather that there was no other; the external aspect of religion was of necessity therefore a reflection of the Celtic Church. But as folk-lore does not explain the Christian Graal and the high experiments of sanctity therewith connected, so the contributory memorials on the Celtic ecclesiastical side do not explain it either. Behind all there lies the secret tradition of the epoch, and it is this precisely which makes the whole research so remote and intractable in respect of

its final issues. I need hardly say that the secret tradition had no claim to put forward in respect of super-apostolical succession in the form belonging, as we find, to the Graal literature, though it had—*ex hypothesi*—its own Divine Warrants. This claim may represent therefore, by a hazardous ascription, the ecclesiastical political programme of the Anjou dynasty in England, and it would be in this way a separable element in the literature. There is no other sense than this in which a Britannic Church shows any true correspondence with Graal subsurface intention, because that intention had neither hostility to Rome nor a plea to put forward in respect of religious independence and the institution of an autonomous pan-Britannic Church. It follows that the secret tradition and the glimpse which we obtain thereof in the Graal books are either a mere dream, or the point of departure for this subsection must be a total denial of all that has been put forward previously in regard to Saint David's legend. As it is premature, however, to make it a point of departure, I must lead up to it from other considerations, and I will therefore say a few further words concerning the Church itself in Britain, not that they are essential to the subject but for the information of those of my readers who may have had no call to consider it.

Brief as it is, the following schedule will, I think, be sufficient for the purpose, and I note: (a) that Christianity existed in Britain during the Roman occupation, and that three British bishops were present at the council of Arles, about 350 A.D.; (b) that the extent of its diffusion is doubtful, but it was probably the religion of Romans and Romanised Britons in and about the garrison towns; (c) that it became universal early in the fifth century, which was the beginning of the age of Saints; (d) that it is doubtful whether the Celtic Church at this period was a descendant of the Roman-British Church or a colonisation

de novo from Gaul, but it may have combined both sources; (e) that an episcopal mission from Gaul into Britain is certain, and its object is supposed to have been the extinction of Pelagian heresy, or Pagan, as it has been suggested alternatively; (f) that the derivation ab origine symboli was possibly from Ephesus through the Johannine Rite into Southern Gaul, and thence into Britain; (g) that, also possibly, there were other Oriental influences, and particularly from Egypt, in the fifth century, the evidence being: (1) The derivation of Celtic ornament from Egyptian ornament; (2) the commemoration in ancient Irish books of "Holy Egyptian hermits" buried in Ireland; (3) the correspondences between the Celtic monastic system and that of Egypt; (4) the practice, attributed to Saint Columba, of removing his sandals before entering the sanctuary, a practice known otherwise only in Egypt.

As regards the hypothesis put forward in the previous subsection, it is observable that we have not been invited to consider in the Celtic Church any traces of a particular theological or doctrinal tradition—such as might, for example, be inferred from the Johannine Rite—or of an evasive or concealed claim; it is not suggested that in Wales, Scotia or Ireland there is any trace of an ecclesiastical legend concerning a relic which at any distance might be held to offer a real correspondence with that of the Holy Graal or its companion Hallows, because the essential condition of the analogy must be indubitably the existence of memorials of the Passion of our Lord. Of these it is certain that there were none, because otherwise it is certain that they would be adduced. We are asked, on the contrary, to assume that a variant liturgical reading, the legend of an historical apostle after passing under a specific transmutation, and the mythical restitution of a Welsh King are the first matter in combination of the complex cycles of literature which are comprised in the

Graal legend. If this hypothesis can be taken with such high seriousness that we may suppose it put forward—shall I say?—as an equivalent by analogy for that which has offered Saint Dominic and the enchanting fable of a question which should have been put to the Pope as a real explanation of the Perceval-Graal myth, it will be sufficient, I think, to deal with it on general lines rather than by an exhaustive process of criticism in detail. Let us put aside, in the first place, all that part which is purely in the region of supposition, and take the actual facts as things for valuation in the schedule. Question of Epiclesis or question—as we shall see presently—of a particular tense, it is obvious that the oriental terms of consecration, when those prevailed in the West, were the secret of no particular sanctuary as distinguished from all other holy places in Brittany, Britain and Wales. They were catholic to these countries and also to a great part of that which we understand by Scotia, Ireland and Gaul. They connect in themselves with no keepership and with no Hallows. We know that the Roman rite colonised all these countries, and that in the course of time it prevailed. But the period between the public use of the words now in question and their final abrogation was one of centuries, and although during a portion thereof—*ex hypothesi*—they may have been perpetuated in concealment, there is no doubt that they had fallen into complete desuetude long before the third quarter of the twelfth century. It is impossible to suppose that there was at that time any one concerned in their perpetuation sufficiently to put them forward as a great mystery of sanctity inherent in the heart of Christianity, and it is impossible, mystically speaking, that they should carry this significance. The secret words do not appear in the metrical romance of Joseph as in any sense the material of romance; they appear with all the marks of a particular claim advanced for a special reason and maintained through more than one generation by the

successive production, firstly, of a prose version of the early metrical Merlin, and, secondly, by the similar derivation or independent invention of the Didot Perceval, which carried on the same tradition, though it seems left unfinished, perhaps from the standpoint of narrative and assuredly of the term of its intention. In the second place two concurrent claims appear, and the second—which is stronger than the first—abandons the claim in respect of secret words. It does this so explicitly that it makes public the words of consecration, by which we are enabled to see at once how little they could have ever signified, if indeed it were possible to suppose that these are the lost words of Graal literature. Moreover, by a particular fatality, they do not happen to contain the Epiclesis clause. In its place, as we know so well already, we have the claim to a super-apostolical succession—as I have said, a much stronger claim and one for which there is little precedent in the dubious history of the Celtic Church. It is out of this pretension that the Galahad Quest arises, though at a period when the claim itself appears to have lapsed. We are agreed that, so far as there is a true story at all, it is that of Galahad, and the question of secret words never entered into the heart thereof. It is, therefore, useless to put forward the assumed fact of their existence in the Celtic Rite of Institution as something which is explanatory of the literature. In this connection it is of importance to remember (a) that the only prose Perceval which is of any importance mystically is that which depends from the Book of the Holy Graal, not from Robert de Borron; and (b) that the only metrical romance of Perceval which mystically may be also important is that of Wolfram. The first has abandoned the words and the second nearly all Eucharistic connection. The first puts the Roman dogma of transubstantiation in its most materialised possible form. It will be seen, therefore, that the Celtic hypothesis fails along what must be regarded as the most important line. I

submit, therefore, that the pretension to a super-apostolical warrant is either part of a fraudulent scheme of pre-eminence as an argument for autonomy on the part of the British Church, with the advisers of a King for its spokesmen, or it belongs to another order of concealed sentiment and event, the details and motives of which are wanting on the historical side of things. In the former case it is not of our concern, and it is explanatory only of one branch in a large literature; in the latter, we must go much further, and, if we can supply the missing events and motives, from certain hidden sources, we shall be in possession, for the time being at least, of a provisional explanation concerning things which are most important in the literature, and—donec de medio fiat [“until it is done in the middle”]—it must be allowed to hold.

The distinctive note of the Latin Eucharistic Rite is that, like the gospels of Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, it gives the first words of institution thus: *Accipite et manducate ex hoc omnes. Hoc est enim corpus meum* (“Take and eat ye all of this. For this is My body”). Hereto certain oriental rites added other words which should read in Latin: *Quod pro multis confrangetur* (“Which shall be broken for many”). The Book of the Holy Graal gives: *Venés, si mangiés et chou est li miens cors qui pour vous et pour maintes autres gens sera livres à martire et à torment*—the substantial equivalent of *pro multis confrangetur* [“Come, if you eat cabbage it is mine, for you and for many people will be delivered to martyrdom and to torment”—the substantial equivalent of “for many it will be broken”]. Compare the gospel of Saint Luke in the Latin Vulgate, which uses the present tense: *quod pro vobis datur* [“which is given for you”].

So far as regards the really trivial question of tense. The mode of consecration by *Epiclesis*, or the Invocation of the

Holy Spirit, may be unknown to some of my readers, and I extract it therefore from the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.

THE PRIEST (saith): Blessed art Thou, Christ our God, who didst fill the fishermen with all manner of wisdom, sending down upon them the Holy Ghost, and by them hast brought the whole world into Thy net, O Lover of men: Glory be to Thee. B. Both now and ever, etcetera. THE PRIEST (saith): When the Highest came down and confounded the tongues, He divided the nations; when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all to unity; and with one voice we praise the Holy Ghost.

The Deacon, pointing to the Holy Bread, saith in a low voice:

DEACON: Sir, bless the Holy Bread.

The Priest standeth up, and thrice maketh the sign of the Cross on the Holy Gifts, saying:

PRIEST: And make this bread the Precious Body of Thy Christ. DEACON: Amen. Sir, bless the Holy Cup. PRIEST: And that which is in this Cup the Precious Blood of Thy Christ DEACON: Amen. (And pointing with his stole to both the Holy Things) Sir, Bless. PRIEST: Changing them by Thy Holy Ghost. DEACON: Amen, Amen, Amen. PRIEST: (after a pause) So that they may be for purification of soul, forgiveness of sins, communion of the Holy Ghost, etcetera.

I believe that in the Mozarabic Rite, which is thought to be in near consanguinity with the Celtic, the Epiclesis formula is used on occasions only. It is missing altogether from the so-called Liturgy of Saint Dionysius, which only survives in the Latin. I should add that the existence of the clause in the Celtic Rite—whatever the strength of the inferences—is

a matter of speculation, for the simple reason that no such liturgy is extant.

The other analogies and possibilities are a little attractive on the surface, and are of the kind which are caught at rather readily; but they seize upon a single point where they can be made to apply, and the other issues in a long sequence are ignored. The name Cadwaladr naturally suggests that of Galahad, and on the appeal to certain laws of permutation, it seems for a moment justified; but it is not justified in the legends. The last King of the Britons had indeed the hallows of his family by the right of inheritance, but there was no antecedent keeper whom he was required to heal, and there was no quest to undertake in order that he might secure his own. But this healing and this quest inhere in the Graal legend, and are manifestly at the root of the design, so that there is no connection possible between the two cases. Moreover, Cadwaladr is destined by his legend to return, while it is of the essence of that of Galahad that he comes back no more. The same remarks will apply to all traceable instances of hereditary Keepership in Celtic families, whatever the object reserved. It is even more certain that any comparison of Saint David the Waterman with the Rich Fisherman who is wounded is highest fantasy; neither physically nor symbolically did the Saint suffer any hurt, but, again, one of the foremost Graal intentions resides in the King's wounding. The symbolical term Fisherman signifies the guardian of the Holy Mysteries; it can have nothing to do with DEVERUR = Waterman. We do not know why a great fish is said to have heralded the birth of the Welsh Apostle. To help out the argument, we may affirm that he was a guardian of the Christian Mysteries in the land to which he was commissioned, but we do not in this manner account, either in the historical or symbolical sense, for the fishing of Brons or Alain in the lake, or for the title of Rich Fisherman

applied to the Wardens of the Graal. It is true that they also were Guardians of Mysteries, but this is an instance of concurrence and not of derivation. The Lesser Holy Graal may create a comparison between the Sacred Vessel and the Sepulchre in which Christ was laid; but it does not for this reason institute any analogy between that vessel and Saint David's altar, nor is the appeal to Wolfram useful except in the opposite sense, for the Graal stone of the Parsifal, whether or not it was once in the crown of Lucifer, can tolerate still less the institution of its likeness to "a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid." The altar of Saint David is an interesting fable of its type, as preposterous as that of Fécamp, and between the tomb of Christ, *ex hypothesi*, transported to Wales, and the sacramental ciborium likened to the Holy Sepulchre there is no analogy in any world of correspondences.

It remains therefore that in this literature we have shown how evil fell upon the House of the Doctrine; how it overtook also the Keeper of secret knowledge; after what manner he was at length healed; how the hidden treasures passed under the care of his saviour; and how at the term of all they were removed because of a fell and faithless time. That would be a very pleasant scheme of interpretation which could say that the House of Doctrine was the Celtic Church and that the wounded Keeper signified the Church in desolation, but it remains that we must go further in our search for a key to these mysteries.

If the legend of the Holy Graal were the last light of the Celtic Church before it expired in proscription, one would confess that it was glorious in its death. But the most that we can actually say is that it left elements which in fine served a better purpose. The Longer Prose Perceval, the poem of Wolfram, and the sacred and beautiful Quest of

Galahad, these are three records which bear witness on earth of the secret things which are declared only in the heavens. There are three tabernacles wherein transfiguration takes place.

In the extrinsic Celtic remains, the only substitute which offers for the great legend of the Holy and Sacramental Cup is an obscure and nameless vessel which is subject in its latest history to the irreverence of a pedlar, and this it was deemed worth while to avenge. From such inefficiencies and trifles it is certain that we must have recourse, even if for a moment only, to the Glastonbury legend, which did invent high fictions to glorify the British Church. This resource must however in its turn fail us, because Glastonbury is (a) of very small moment throughout the Graal literature; (b) is never the place of the sacred vessel, for even its most mythical allocations—as, for example, Corbenic—cannot be identified therewith; and (c) it knows nothing of the second Joseph. The Book of the Holy Graal does, in one of its codices, speak of Glastonbury as the burial-place of the elder Joseph, but it only says Glas in England, for which other texts substitute Scotland. I doubt very much whether the Glastonbury legend was intended for more than the praise of a particular monastery; it represents Joseph of Arimathæa as the chief among twelve apostles sent by Saint Philip to Britain, and they carried a phial or phials containing the Precious Blood. The Graal notion may have gratified Henry the Second, who concerned himself with things Arthurian, but beyond this we have only romance of history. It is certain in any case that Saint David was not transformed into Joseph of Arimathæa, so far as Glastonbury is concerned. He and his apostoli coadjutores, his staff and his relics, belong to another story brought over from the Continent when Saint David had passed into desuetude. Even so, of the Joseph claim, as we have it in the Graal

romances, there is little enough trace in the historical writers of the time. The abbey of Noirmoutier in France laid claim to the original possession of Joseph's body, but it disappeared, or was stolen—as some said—by the monks of Glastonbury. If it be affirmed that the second Joseph, who is a creation of the Book of the Holy Graal, signifies some move in the strange ecclesiastical game which was played by Henry the Second, the evidence is in the opposite direction, so far as it can be said to exist; it is obvious that any game would have worked better with the original apostolical Joseph than with his imaginary son.

It is time to close these reflections, and there are only two points which remain, as I have not covenanted to deal with the minima as a whole. If King Arthur was enabled to make chalices for ordinary sacramental uses in official churches from the prototype which he saw in his vision, being a chalice that was arch-natural wholly, this occurred after the same manner that the Pilgrim Masons who discovered the body of the Master Builder were enabled to bring away certain things in substitution for the secrets that were lost at his death, and there are thus other analogies than the natural and reasonable gifts of the Welsh Apostle, but there is no need to dwell upon them in this place.

The quotation which I have given from the Lesser Holy Graal raises an interesting point, and, without being versed in the ecclesiastical side of things, we can all of us believe that a church so strange as that which once ministered in Wales had also some curious things belonging to the liturgical world; but the extract in question must be read in connection with the original metrical romance, where the symbolism is expressed differently.

“Aussi sera représentée Cele taule en meinte contrée. Ce que tu de la crouiz m’ostas Et ou sepulchre me couchas,

C'est l'auteurs seur quoi me mettrunt Cil qui me sacrifierunt.
Li dras où fui envolepez, Sera corparaus apelez. Cist
veissiaus où men sanc méis Quant de men cors le requeillis,
Calices apelez sera. La platine ki sus girra lert la pierre
senefiée Qui fu deseur moi seelée, Quant ou sepulchre
m'éus mis."

["Also will be represented For this is my country. That you
of the cross kill me And you entomb me, It is the author
who told me Those who sacrificed for me. The thing where
I was wrapped, It will be bodily appeal. The ships of men go
holy honeys How many of my heart you gather, Chalices
there will be. The table will turn The art of seen stone Who
was my sealed desire, When I was entombed."]

The Blood is therefore mentioned and the analogy is
complete; it is also gracious and piteous, as the poem might
say itself; and, in fine, it is a true, catholic and efficacious
comparison, which exhibits for those who can read in the
heart one other side of secret Eucharistic symbolism—even
the deep mystery of that mystical death which is suffered
by the Lord of Glory in the assumption of the veils of bread
and wine, that He may arise into a new life in the soul of
the reborn communicant.

I do not propose to speak of the original Graal book,
because this is for another consideration, but if there was a
secret liturgy or missal at the root of the legend, I know
that it was not especially Celtic and still less Welsh
especially. Behind the hypothesis of the Euclesis clause
there lies a deeper speculation, for there are traces of a
very wonderful and super-efficacious Office of the Holy
Spirit here and there in the Graal literature, and I believe
that this is one of the keys as to its source in doctrine. We
shall open hereafter another gate which may bring us back
to the Johannine Rite.

I have indicated already that if we accept the hypothesis of a Pan-Britannic Church, it has no operation outside the Book of the Holy Graal. Of Chrétien's intention we can discern little, nor does it signify; it seems fairly clear that he had no religious, much less ecclesiastical, implicits. Gautier is in the same position; Manessier was merely a story-teller; Gerbert offers few allusions, but we cannot tell where he began, and his end is a thing frustrated. There is nothing so remote from all ecclesiastical programme in the official order as the Lesser Chronicles, and the Parsifal of Wolfram—which renders to God all that can be offered in ethics—like another Cain, though not of necessity rejected, offering the fruits of the earth—and to the spiritual Cæsar seeming to deny nothing—if the Parsifal has an ulterior motive, it is not of the Celtic Church nor yet of the House of Anjou, about which methinks that it protests too much, either for the Provençal Guiot or the lord of Eschenbach. There remain therefore only the Greater Chronicles and outside the primary text in place, which happens to be last in time—here, for the hypothesis in question, a moment surrendered formally—I know that of God moveth the High History and the Galahad of the King of all.

I do not much care on what materials the makers of the Graal romances may be agreed to have worked, since it is clear that they imported therein a new spirit. If any one should like still to say that Cadwaladr who went to Rome or Jerusalem is to be identified with Galahad who went to heaven, they can have it that way since they so please, understanding that, on my part, I may reserve my judgment. I know that the one has suffered a high change before he has passed into the other. I know that every literature has its antecedents in some other literature, and that every religion owes something to a religion that preceded it. Sometimes the consanguinity is close and sometimes it is very far away. Only those who affirm that

the one accounts for the other, and this simply and only, seem to be a little unwise. Christianity arose within Jewry and doctrinally out of Jewry, but this fact only brings their generic difference into greater relief. So also the Graal literature rose up in the Celtic Church; its analogies are many therein; they are many also in folk-lore; but there are also as many ways in which the one, as we know it, does not account for the other, as we have it actually.

The Celtic Church has, however, assisted us to see one thing more plainly, though we know it on other considerations, namely, that in fine there is but a single quest, which is that of Galahad. We must make every allowance for the honest findings of scholars, for whom the Holy Graal, as it was and it is, has never spoken, for whom it is only a feeding-dish under a light cloud of imagery, and by whom it is thought perhaps in their hearts that the intervention of Christianity in the wild old pagan myth is on the whole rather regrettable. They turn naturally to those quarters whence issue the voices of purely natural life, and therefore they prefer Gawain and Perceval in his cruder forms, because these speak their own language. It is to be trusted, and this devoutly, that they will find more and more evidences for the maintenance of their particular view. Unmanifested now but still discerned darkly, if the true proto-Perceval should be at length found, that which went before the Peredur and the English metrical romance, and if, as there is no doubt, it should be devoid of all elements belonging to Graal or quester, our case will be the better proved which is (1) the natural succession of the Galahad Quest after the Graal history in its longer recension; (2) the succession of Perceval in the sequence of Robert de Borron, but rather as the scion of a dubious legitimacy; (3) the introduction of the late prose Perceval le Gallois as a final act of transmutation in the Anglo-Norman cycle, which so far assists our case that it manifests the

unfitness, realised at that period, of Perceval as he was known by the earlier texts; (4) the derivation of the Wolfram Parsifal in part from Celtic elements, in part from some which are, or may have been, Teutonic, but also with derivatives through Provence from Spain.

CHAPTER FOUR THE VICTORY OF THE LATIN RITE

I have now put forward the hypothesis of the Celtic Church as it has never been expressed previously; I have diminished nothing, and any contrary inferences have been proposed so far temperately; but the issues are not entirely those of the Graal legend, and in view of all that comes after a few words in conclusion of this part may perhaps be said more expressly. It should be on record, for those who have ears, that the Welsh Church, with its phantom and figurehead bishops, its hereditary priesthood, its fighting and sanguinary prelates, and its profession of sanctity as others profess trades, seems a very good case for those who insist that the first Christianity of Britain was independent of Saint Augustine, which it was, and very much indeed, but on the whole we may prefer Rome. When we have considered all the crazes and heresies, all the pure, primitive and unadulterated Christianities, being only human and therefore disposed to gratitude, it is difficult not to thank God for Popery. But it would also be difficult to be so thankful, that is to say, with the same measure of sincerity, if we were still in the school courses and belonged officially thereto. I mean to say, although under all reserves, that there is always some disposition to hold a fluidic brief for Rome in the presence of the other assemblies. William Howitt, the historian of priestcraft à rebours, once said: "Thanks be to God for the mountains!" It is well to quote from our enemies, but not in the sense of our enemies, and hence I read by substitution the seven hills and the city built thereon. Let therefore those who will

strive with those who can over the dismembered relics of apostolical Christianity; but so far as we are concerned the dead can bury their dead. We have left the Celtic Church as we have left carved gods. A Pan-Britannic Church might have been the dream of one period, and were that so, seeing that it never came to fulfilment, we could understand why it is that in several respects the Graal literature has now the aspect of a legend of loss and now of a legend of to-morrow. The Anglican Church seems in this sense to recall for a moment that perverse generation which asked for a sign and was given the sign of Jonah. It has demanded apostolical evidences to enforce its own claim and it has been given the Celtic Church. Let us therefore surrender thereto the full fruition thereof. There may be insufficiencies and imperfect warrants in the great orthodox assemblies, but in the Celtic Church there is nothing which we can regret. Gildas and Saint Bernard are eloquent witnesses concerning it. The Latin rite prevailed because it was bound to prevail, because the greater absorbs the lesser. On the other hand, and now only in respect of the legends, let us say lastly that the ascension of Galahad is, symbolically speaking, without prejudice to the second coming of Cadwaladr. It does not signify for our purpose whether Arthur ever lived, and if so whether he was merely a petty British prince. The Graal is still the Graal, and the mystery of the Round Table is still the sweet and secret spirit of universal knighthood.

It follows, in fine, that we must go further, and in the next section, as one who has been in exile among disjecta membra, like Marius among the ruins of Carthage, I shall re-enter into my own patrimony. To my old friend, Arthur Machen, himself of Caerleon-upon-Usk, I owe most of the materials which have been collated for the presentation of the hypothesis concerning the Graal and the Celtic Church. He collected them in my interest out of his good heart of

brotherhood, and I trust that in the time to come he will extend them further in his own.

