

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

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BOOK EIGHT MYSTIC ASPECTS OF THE GRAAL LEGEND

CHAPTER ONE THE INTRODUCTORY WORDS

Seeing therefore that we have not found in the Celtic Church anything which suffices to explain the chief implicits of the literature and that the watchwords call us forward, there remains another method of research, and of this I will now proceed to make trial. I suppose that there is no need to exhibit in formal words after what manner the Quest of the Holy Graal became in the later texts a religious experiment, and thus justified the titles from which it began in that story of Robert de Borron which is the earliest extant history. Any one who has proceeded so far in the present inquisition as to have reached these lines—even if he is wholly unfamiliar with the old treasury of books—will be aware that the Quest was ruled throughout by the counsels of perfection. These ruled in fact so strongly as to have reached that stage when two of them were implied only—that is, they were taken for granted: (a) Voluntary poverty, for the knights possessed nothing, and whatever came into their hands was distributed there and

then; (b) entire obedience, in dedication to the proposed term, and all the ships of the world burnt with fire behind them; when change came there followed complete avortement [abortion], as that of Gawain in the Great Quest; (c) perpetual chastity, as the only counsel which stands declared—and in this connection it will be remembered that Bors returned to Logres. The zeal of these counsels does not appear—as I have said—to guarantee election utterly: it is rather the test of merit. And I have said also that there may be a certain success without their fulfilment in the absolute degree. In the Longer Prose Perceval Gawain received signal favours, yet it is admitted that he was wanting in purity, and hence he could make no response when the questionable mystery appeared once in his presence. The King also beheld the arch-natural Eucharist on the manifested side thereof: but Perceval alone possessed the plenary qualifications in this text. On the other hand, in the story of stories there was one who surpassed him, but not so utterly that they were otherwise than classed together as companions of the Quest. The distinction seems to have been that Galahad dissolved temptation, as one more than human. Perceval carried within him the latent desires of the body, and after beholding the Graal he required the purgation of a hermit's life before he entered into the true inheritance of those thrones which are above. By some of my fellowship in research it has been said most truly, though they do not understand Galahad, that the haut prince was just as fit for the Quest at its beginning as he was at its end. Now, that is exactly the sign of perfect vocation—of election as well as calling; the criterion of those who are meant for heaven is that they might ascend thither at any moment. Another test of Galahad was that he knew really from the beginning the whole mystery by the tradition thereof.

I am enumerating here the general implicits of the subject which should be latent in the minds of those whom I address; they do not constitute a question put forward for sifting with a view to a settlement, but of fitness and power to see—of the *verus certusque intuitus animi* [“a true and certain view of the mind”], in some degree and proportion. This being passed by those who can suffer the ruling, it will be obvious that the religious experiment about which I begin to speak can depend only from two considerations: (1) the attainment of the sanctified state in the Questing Knights, and (2) the descent of a peculiar Grace upon them. I enumerate both points, though it is obvious that one of them has in another form but now passed through review, but in dealing with a very difficult subject it is necessary to look at it in more than a single light, and I wish to make it clear that the specifics of the sanctified state—by which I mean the counsels of perfection—are not things that are determined in the given case by a trend of thought and emotion at the given period, and are not therefore to be dismissed as a presentation of the ascetic life or as the definition of canons which have now passed into desuetude. The same experiment always demands the same conditions for its success, and to set aside these is really to renounce that, or in this instance it is to reject the experiment as one of the old ecstasies which never came to a term. On the contrary, the experiment of sanctity is always approximating to a term, and the measure of success is the measure of zeal in its pursuit. I propose therefore to look a little closer at one of the counsels of perfection. The essential point regarding the condition of *virgo intacta*—not in respect of the simple physical fact, which has no inherent sanctity, but in respect of its conscious acceptance at what cost soever—is that there neither was nor can be a more perfect symbol of the prepared matter of the work. It is the analogy in utter transcendence of that old adage: *Mens sana in corpore sano* [“A healthy mind in a healthy

body”], and its nearest expression is: *Anima immaculata in corpore dedicato, ex hoc nunc et usque* [“An immaculate soul in a consecrated body, from now on and until now”], etcetera. In other words, the banns of marriage in the higher degrees cannot be proclaimed till the contracting parties are warranted in their respective orders to have that proportion and likeness apart from which no union could be effected. The consummated grade of sanctity is an intimate state of union, and the nearest analogy thereto is found in human marriage; as the latter presupposes in the sacramental order an antecedent or nominal purity, and has for its object the consecration of intercourse which in its absence is of the animal kind, so the antecedent condition in sanctity—or the life of perfect dedication—is in correspondence with the state of *virgo intacta*. I need not say that because these things are analogical so the discourse concerning them partakes of the language of symbolism or that the state itself is a spiritual state. Entire obedience involves no earthly master; voluntary poverty is of all possibility in a palace, and the law would not deny it at the headquarters of an American Trust; as regards chastity, that is guaranteed to those who receive the sacrament of marriage worthily, and it is to be noted that this sacrament differs from baptism, which is administered once and for all, while marriage, in the effects thereof, is administered in continuity as an abiding presence and a grace abounding daily so long as its covenants are observed. On the other hand, the perpetuity of spiritual chastity in the life within does not mean of necessity that man or woman has never known flesh in the physical order. Galahad in the story had the outward signs as well as the inward grace. His Quest was an allegory throughout and sometimes the allegorical motive obtrudes into the expressed matter, which is an error of art.

The term which is proposed in the Quest, as the consideration thereof, will be best given in the words of the Quest itself. "Now at the yeres ende and the self daye after Galahad had borne the croune of gold, he arose up erly and his felawes, and came to the palais, and sawe to fore hem the holy vessel, and a man knelynge on his knees in lykenes of a Bisshop that had aboute hym a grete felaushyp of Angels as it had ben Jhesu Cryst hym self, & thenne he arose and beganne a masse of oure lady. And whan he cam to the sacrament of the masse, and had done, anone he called Galahad and sayd to hym come forthe the servaunt of Jhesu Cryst and thou shalt see that thou hast moche desyred to see, & thenne he began to tremble ryght hard, when the dedely flesshe beganne to beholde the spyrytuel thynges. Thenne he held vp his handes toward heuen, and sayd lord I thanke the, for now I see that that hath ben my desyre many a daye. Now blessyd lord wold I not lenger lyue yf it myghte please the lord, & there with the good man tooke our lordes body betwixe hys handes, and profered it to Galahad, and he receyued hit ryghte gladly and mekely.... And there with he kneled doune to fore the table, and made his prayers, and thenne sodenly his soule departed to Jhesu Crist and a grete multitude of Angels bare his soule vp to heuen," etcetera. In this citation the most important point for our purpose at the living moment rests neither in that which it expresses nor in that which it conceals: it is assumed and realised that such a term is always hidden because it always exceeds expression, and is the closer veiled wherein it is announced the most. But here was the consummation of all, and here was that more open seeing than was granted at Corbenic wherein all the outward offices of things arch-natural were set aside utterly. Herein therefore was no vision of transubstantiation changes, and as evidence that this was of concert and not of chance, I have the same report to make concerning the Longer Prose Perceval; when the

questing knight comes to his own therein no signs and wonders are connected with the Holy Graal. As regards the vision itself, we may remember the words of Nasciens when he attempted to penetrate the secrets within the new Ark of the Covenant. “Et Nasciens dist que il l’en descouverroit tant comme nule mortieus langue em porroit descouvrir, ne deveroit. Je ai, dist-il, véut la coumenchaille dou grant hardiment, l’ocoison des grans savoirs, le fondement des grans religions, le dessevrement des grans félonnies, la démoustranche des grans mierveilles, la merveille de totes les altrez mervelles, la fin des bontés et des gentillèces vraies.” [“And Nasciens said that he would discover it as much as no mortal tongue could discover it, or would ever have to. I have, he said, wanted the neck of the heat of the queen boldly, the hearing of great knowledge, the foundation of great religions, the weaning of great felonies, the dismantling of great wonders, the marvel of all other wonders, the end of true goodness and kindness.”] This extract from the Book of the Holy Graal is thus rendered in the halting measures of Lovelich:

“‘I have sein,’ quod the sire Nasciens, Of alle manere of wykkednesse the defens; Of alle boldnesse I have sene the begynneng, Of all wittes the fowndyng. I have sein the begynneng of Religeown And of alle bowntes, bothe al & som, And the poyntes of alle gentrye, And a merveil of alle merveilles certainlye.’”

Other masters have expressed the same wonder in other terms, which are the same—as, for example: *quædam prælibatio æternæ vitæ, gustus et suavitas spiritualis, mentis in Deum suspensa elevation* [“a certain delicacy of eternal life, a spiritual taste and sweetness, an elevation of the mind suspended in God”], etcetera.

The qualifications of Galahad and Perceval in the Great Quest are not therefore things which are the fashion of a period, like some aspects of what is termed the ascetic mind, but they obtain from Aleph to Tau, through all grades of expression. Those who speak of the ethical superiority of the Parsifal are saying that which, in all moderation and tenderness, signifies that they are still learning the elements of true discipline.

I have now dealt with the indispensable warrants of the state, and the mode of the descent of Grace belongs to the same category; it was a manifestation to the spiritual flowers of Christian knighthood through the Eucharist—the form of symbolism made use of for this purpose being that of transubstantiation. I have already set down what I believe to be the Divine Truth on this subject, but here again we must as our research proceeds approach it from various standpoints; and, for the rest, it must be obvious that of all men I at least should have no call imposed on me to speak of the Holy Graal were it not for its connection with the Blessed Sacrament. It is the passage of the putative reliquary into the Chalice of the Eucharist, the progressive exaltation of its cultus and the consequent transfiguration of the Quest which have substituted insensibly a tale of eternity for a mediæval legend of the Precious Blood; in place of the Abbey of Fécamp, we have Corbenic and Mont Salvatch shining in the high distance, and where once there abode only the suggestion of some relative and rather trivial devotion, we have the presence of that great sign behind which there lies the Beginning and the End of all things.

The romance-writers, seeking in their symbolism a reduction to the evidence of the senses, selected and exaggerated the least desirable side of Eucharistic dogma; but we have no occasion to dispute with them on that

score, seeing that—for the skilled craftsman—any material will serve in the purposes of the Great Work. The only point which stands out for our consideration is that—following the sense of all doctrine and the testimony of all experience—the gate by which faith presses into realisation is the gate of that Sacrament from which all others depend—of that Sacrament the institution of which was the last act of Christ and the term of His ministry; thereafter He suffered only until He rose in glory. When therefore the makers of the Graal books designed to show after what manner, and under what circumstances, those who were still in flesh could behold the spiritual things and have opened for them that door of understanding which, according to the keepers of the Old Law, was not opened for Moses, they had no choice in the matter, and it is for this reason that they represent the Bread of Life and the Chalice of the Everlasting Testament as being lifted up in the secret places of Logres, even in the palais esperiteux.

Hereof are the mystic aspects of the Great Quest, and it seems to follow that the secret temple of the soul was entered by those who dwelt in the world of romance as by those in the world of learning. The adepts of both schools were saying the same thing at the same period, seeing that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which moved and had their being under the wonderful ægis of the scholastic mind, there began to arise over the intellectual horizon of Europe the light of another experience than that of spiritual truth realised intellectually; this was the experience of the mystic life, which opened—shall we say?—with the name of Bonaventura and closed for the period in question with that of Ruysbroeck.

CHAPTER TWO THE POSITION OF THE LITERATURE DEFINED

The books of the Holy Graal are either purely of literary, antiquarian and mythological interest, or they are more. If literary, antiquarian and mythological only, they can and should be left to the antiquaries, the critics and the folklore societies. But if more it is not improbable antecedently, having regard to the subject, that the excess belongs to the mystics, and to those generally who recognise that the legends of the soul are met with in many places, often unexpectedly enough, and wherever found that they have issues outside that which is understood commonly and critically by the origin of religious belief. The ascetic and mystic element—to repeat the conventional description—outside the considerations which I have put forward, is for those of all importance, and it is otherwise and invariably the only thing that is really vital in legends. The impression which is left upon the mind after the conclusions of the last sub-section is assuredly that the “divine event” is not especially, or not only, that “towards which creation moves,” but a term, both here and now, towards which souls can approximate and wherein they can rest at the centre. Over the threshold of the Galahad Quest we pass as if out of worlds of enchantment, worlds of færie, worlds of the mighty Morgan le Fay, into realms of allegory and dual meaning, and then—transcending allegory—into a region more deeply unrealised; so also, after having reflected on the external side of the romances and the preliminary analogies of things that are in ward, we pass, as we approach the end of our research, into a world of which nothing but the veils and their emblazonments have been so far declared. No other romances of chivalry exhibit the characteristics which we discern in the perfect and rectified books of the Holy Graal, but if we do not know categorically why romance came to be the vehicle for one expression of man’s highest experience, we have reasons—and more than enough—to determine that it was not automatic, not arbitrary, and yet it was not fortuitous; it

came about in the nature of things by the successive exaltation of a legend which had the capacity for exaltation into transcendence. The genesis of the story of Galahad is not like the institution of the ritual belonging to the third craft grade in Masonry, which seems without antecedents that are traceable in the elements—actual or symbolical—of the early building guilds. By successive steps the legend of the Graal was built till it reached that height when the hierarchies could begin to come down and the soul of Galahad could go up. It is important for my own purpose to establish this fact, because in that which remains to be said I must guard against the supposition that a conventional secret society or a sect took over the romances, edited them and interpenetrated the texts with mystic elements. That is the kind of hypothesis which occult interests might have manufactured sincerely enough in the old days, and it would have had a certain warrant because there is ample evidence that this is exactly the kind of work which in given cases was performed by the concealed orders. The Graal, as a literature, came into other hands, which worked after their own manner, and worked well.

There is another fact which is not less important because of certain tendencies recognisable in modern criticism. I will mention it only at the moment, that the reader may be put on his guard mentally; there is no single text in the literature which was or could have been put forward as a veiled pronunciamento against the reigning Church on the part of any historical sect, heresy, or rival orthodoxy. The pure Christianities and the incipient principles of reform took their quack processes into other quarters. The voices which spoke in the books of the Holy Graal as no voices had ever spoken in romance were not putting forward a mystery which was superior specifically to the mysteries preserved by the official Church. They trended in the same direction as the highest inquisitions move, and that

invariably. The most intelligent of all the heresies is only the truth of the Church foreshadowed or travestied. The reforms of the Church are only its essential lights variously refracted. Even modern science, outside the true prerogatives of its election as our growing physical providence, is the notification of the things which do not ultimately matter in comparison with the science of the Church, which is that of the laws ruling in the search after the eternal reality. The Graal at its highest is the simulacrum or effigy of the Divine Mystery within the Church. If she, as an institution, has failed so far—and as to the failure within limits there is no question—to accomplish the transmutation of humanity, the explanation is not merely that she has been at work upon gross and refractory elements—though this is true assuredly—but that in the great mystery of her development she has still to enter into the fruition of her higher consciousness. Hereof are the wounds of the Church, and for this reason she has been in sorrow throughout the ages.

So far I have defined, but in one sense only, the position of the literature. It remains to be said that what I have termed from the beginning the major implicits, as they project vaguely and evasively upon the surface, are integral elements of the mystic aspects. But they must be taken here in connection with one feature of the quests which is in no sense implied, because this will concern us in a very important manner in the next book. I refer to the Recession of the Graal. I have no need to remind any one after so many enumerations that the final testimony of all the French Quests is that, in one or another way, the Graal was withdrawn. It is not always by a removal in space; it is not always by assumption to heaven. In the German cycle the Temple was inaccessible from the beginning and the Palladium never travelled, till—once and for all—it was carried in a great procession to the furthest East. Wolfram

left it in primeval concealment; but this did not satisfy one of the later poets, who married—as we have seen—the Graal legend to that of Prester John. Now, it might be more easy to attain translation, like Saint Paul, than to find that sanctuary in India where, by the assumption, it must be supposed to remain. But having regard to the hidden meaning which seems to lie behind Wolfram's source he was within the measures of his symbolism when he left the Graal at Mont Salvatch, not removing to the East that which in his case did not come therefrom. Albrecht, who tells of the transit, first took the precaution to change the hallowed object. I believe that the testimony to removal was inherent to the whole conception from the beginning, concurrently with the Secret Words, and that the latter were reflected at a later period into the peculiar claim concerning sacerdotal succession. They were all Eucharistic in their nature. The testimony itself is twofold, because, in addition to the withdrawal of the Living Sign, the texts tell us of the House that is emptied of its Hallows; these are in particular the Longer Prose Perceval and the Quest of Galahad. There is also Manessier's conclusion of the Conte del Graal, but no very important inference is to be drawn therefrom. One of our immediate concerns will be to find the analogies of this prevailing conception elsewhere in the world; the present study of Graal mystic aspects is simply preliminary thereto, and the eduction of the significance behind the major implicits. It is at this point curiously that one element of Graal history which has been somehow ascribed to Guiot comes to our assistance, providing an intermediary between the literature of mystical romance and—as we shall learn—the obvious textbooks of the secret schools. It opens, I think, strange vistas of intellectual wonder and enchantment. We have heard already that the Stone which is identified with the Graal in Wolfram was at one time a stone in the crown of Lucifer, and seeing that, according to other legends, the thrones

left vacant by the fallen angels are reserved for human souls, it becomes intelligible why the Graal was brought to earth and what is signified by the mystic jewel. The Stone in the crown of Lucifer symbolises the great estate from which the archangel fell. It was held by the fathers of the Church that, when still in the delights of Paradise, Lucifer was adorned by all manner of precious stones, understanding mystically of him what in the text of the prophet Ezekiel is said literally of the Prince of Tyre: *In deliciis paradisi Dei fuisti; omnis lapis preciosus operimentum tuum: sardius, topazius, et jaspis, chrysolithus, et onyx, et beryllus, sapphirus, et carbunculus, et smaragdus* ["You were in the delights of God's paradise; every precious stone was your covering: sardius, topaz, and jasper, chrysolite, and onyx, and beryl, sapphire, and carbuncle, and emerald"]—nine kinds of stones, according to Gregory the Great, because of the nine choirs of angels. And Bartolucci, the Cistercian, following all authorities, understands these jewels to signify the knowledge and other ornaments of grace with which Lucifer was adorned in his original state as the *perfecta similitudo Dei* ["the perfect likeness of God"]—in other words, the light and splendour of the hidden knowledge. It follows on this interpretation (1) That the Graal Stone in no sense belongs to folk-lore; (2) that it offers in respect of its origin no connection with the idea of physical maintenance, except in the sense that the things which sustain the soul maintain also the body, because the *panis quotidianus* ["daily bread"] depends from the *panis supersubstantialis* ["supersubstantial bread," from "my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven" (John 6:32)]; (3) that the wisdom of the Graal is an Eucharistic wisdom, because the descent of an arch-natural Host takes place annually to renew the virtues thereof; (4) that the correspondence of this is, in other versions of the legend, the Host which is consecrated extra-validly by the Secret Words, and so also the

correspondence of the Stone which comes from heaven is the Cup which goes thereto; but in fine (5) that the jewel in the crown of Lucifer is called also the Morning Star, and thus it is not less than certain that the Graal returns whence it came. [Note: In the Holy Bible, "Lucifer" is a Latin word translated for the Hebrew word Hayleel (Hey, Lamed, Lamed, with numerical values of 5, 30, and 30 = making 65 (and reducing to 11, then 2), which means by the letters signified "Behold" "Staff" "Staff" a complex meaning of brightness of life or death with wisdom or foolishness). The same Identity is pertaining to verse 12 of The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 14, verses 11 through 20 (in context): "Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned."

Alternatively, the phrase “Morning Star” in the Holy Bible appears twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of The Revelation of Saint John the Divine:

Chapter 2: verses 26 through 29 “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

And Chapter 22: verses 16 through 17 “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” End of note.]

CHAPTER THREE CONCERNING THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

If there be any who at this stage should say that the term of the Holy Graal is not the end of the mysteries—which is the Vision that is He—I would not ask him to define the distinction, but the term in either case, for that which must be said of the one is said also of the other, and if he understands the other it is certain that he understands the one. The Quest of the Holy Graal is for the wonder of all sacredness, there where no sinner can be. The provisional manifestation is in the Longer Prose Perceval and the full disclosure—not as to what it is but as to what it is about—is in the romance of Galahad. If, after the haut prince had given his final message, “Remember of this unstable world,” he had been asked what he had seen which led him

to exercise his high prerogative and call to be dissolved, he might have answered: *Visi sunt oculi mei salutare suum* ["My eyes seemed to greet him"], yet he would have said in his heart: "Eye hath not seen." But it has been divined and foretasted by those who have gone before the cohorts of election in the life that is within and have spoken with tongues of fire concerning that which they have seen in the vista. One approximation has told us that it is the eternal intercourse of the Father and the Son wherein we are enveloped lovingly by the Holy Spirit in that love which is eternal. And him who said this the wondering plaudits of an after-age termed the Admirable Ruysbroeck. He knew little Latin and less Greek, and, speaking from his own root, he had not read the authorities; but he had stood upon that shore where the waves of the divine sea baptize the pilgrim, or in that undeclared sphere which is Kether, the Crown of Kabalism, whence those who can look further discern that there is *Ain Soph Aour*, the Limitless Light. The equivalent hereof is in that which was said by Jesus Christ to the men of the Quest: "My Knyghtes and my seruantes & my true children whiche ben come oute of dedely lyf in to spyrytual lyf I wyl now no longer hyde me from yow, but ye shal see now a parte of my secretes & of my hydde thynges." And in the measure of that time they knew as they were known in full, that is, by participation in, and correspondence with the Divine, Knowledge. Meat indeed: it is in that sense that Christ gave to Galahad "the hyghe mete" and "then he receyved his saueour." The monk who wrote this might have exhausted all the language of the schools, but he also knew little Latin and less Greek, if any, so he said only of the communicants: "They thoughte it soo swete that hit was merveillous to telle." And of Galahad he said later: "He receyued hit ryghte gladly and mekely." But yes, and that is fuller and stronger than all the eloquence of the Master of Sentences. It is the voice of Ruysbroeck but further simplified—saying

the same thing: "And he tastes and sees, out of all bounds, after God's own manner, the riches which are in God's own self, in the unity of the living deep, wherein He has fruition of Himself, according to the mode of His uncreated essence."

This is the Great Term of the Great Experiment followed by the Mystic Schools, and here by its own words the Graal legend is expressed in the terms of this Experiment. It has been made, within their several measures, by all churches, sects and religions, for which reason I have said elsewhere that the skilled craftsman does not quarrel with his tools. All materials are possible; the ascent to eternal life can be made by any ladder, assuming that it is fixed in the height; there is no need to go in search of something that is new and strange. And those who can receive this assurance will, I think, understand why it is that the Church of a man's childhood—assuming that it is a Church and not a latitudinarian chapel of ease or a narrow and voided sect—may and perhaps should contain for him the materials of his work, and these he will be able to adapt as an efficient craftsman. There is neither compulsion nor restraint, but the changes in official religion, the too easy transition from one to another kind, taking the sanctuaries as one takes high grades in Masonry, are a note of weakness rather than a pledge of sincerity, or of the true motive which should impel the soul on its quest.

There are, of course, many helpers of that soul on that progress:

"We, said the day and the night
And the law of gravitation;
And we, said the dark and the light
And the stars in their gyration;
But I, said Justice, moving
To the right hand of the Throne;
And I, said Fate, approving;
I make thy cause mine own."

Among these there are certain of the secret orders—those, I mean, which contain the counterparts of the Catholic tradition—and it is necessary to mention them here because of what follows. They offer no royal road, seeing that such roads there are none; but they do in cases shorten some of the preliminaries, by developing the implicits of a man's own consciousness, which is the setting of the prepared postulant on the proper path. There are, of course, some who enter within them having no special call, and these see very little of that which lies behind their official workings, just as there are many who have been born within the Church, as the body of Christ, but have never entered into the life which is communicated from the soul of Christ. They remain the children of this world, participating—as we hope—according to their degree, in so much of grace and salvation as is possible at the particular time. There are others who, out of all time, have received a high election, and for them the subject is often—in its undivided entirety—found resident in that state of external religious life in which it has pleased God to call them.

The Secret Doctrine in the religions equally and the schools is that of the communication of Divine Substance. I speak of it as secret in both cases, though it is obvious that in the official church there is no instituted reservation or conscious concealment on any point of doctrine or practice; but the language of the heights is not the language of the plains, and that which is heard in the nooks, byways and corners, among brakes and thickets, is not the voice of the rushing waters and the open sea. That is true of it in the uttermost which was said long ago by Paracelsus: *Nihil tam occultum erit quod non revelabitur* ["Nothing shall be so secret that it shall not be revealed"]; but as there are few with ears to hear, it remains a voice in the wilderness crying in the unknown tongue. We know only that, according to high theology, the Divine Substance is

communicated in the Eucharist—normally in the symbolical manner, but, in cases, essentially and vitally according to the true testimonies. It is therefore as if the elements were at times consecrated normally and at times by other words, more secret and efficient arch-naturally. Then the enchantments terminate which are the swoon of the sensitive life in respect of the individual, who enters into real knowledge—the soul’s knowledge before that supervened which is termed mystically the fall into matter. The Great Experiment is therefore one of reintegration in the secret knowledge before the Fall, and when, or if, the Holy Graal is identified with the stone in the crown of Lucifer, that which is indicated thereby is (a) the perpetuation of this secret knowledge, and (b) that under all circumstances there is a way back whence we came. So close also those times of adventure which—among other things and manifold—are the life of external activity governed by the spirit of the world, and this is accomplished by taking the great secret into the heart of the heart, as if the Blessed Sacrament, truly and virtually, into the inmost being.

Of such is the office of the Quests, but it is understood that it is not of my concern to enumerate these particulars as present consciously in the minds of the old monastic scribes, who wrote the greatest of the books; they spoke of the things which they knew; without reference or intention they said what others had said of the same mysteries, and the testimony continued through the centuries. The story of the assumption of Galahad draws into romance the hypothesis of the Catholic Church concerning the term of all sanctity manifested; in both it is attained through the Eucharist. I mean to say that this is, by the hypothesis, the normal channel of the Divine Favour, and the devotion which was shown by the saints to the Sacrament of the Altar was not like the particular,

sentimental disposition in minds of piety to the Precious Blood or the Heart of Jesus. Concerning these exercises I have no call to pronounce, but among the misjudgments on spiritual life in the Roman communion has been the frittering of spiritual powers in the popular devotion. If the Great Mysteries of the Church are insufficient to command the dedication of the whole world, then the world is left best under interdict, just as no pictures at all are better than those which are bad in art, and no books than those which are poor and trivial.

There is one point more, because here we have been trending in directions which will call for more full consideration presently. I have mentioned Secret Orders, and I cannot recall too early that any Secret Tradition—either in the East or the West—has been always an open secret in respect of the root-principles concerning the Way, the Truth and the Life. We are only beginning, and that by very slow stages, to enter into our inheritance from the past; and still perhaps in respect of the larger part we are seeking far and wide for the mystic treasures of Basra. It is therefore desirable to remember that the great subjects of preoccupation are all at our very doors. One reason, of which we shall hear again in another connection, is because among the wise of the ages, in whatsoever regions of the world, I do not think that there has been ever any difference of opinion about the true object of research; the modes and form of the Quest have varied, and that widely, but to a single point have all the ways converged. Therein is no change or shadow of vicissitude. We may hear of shorter roads, and we might say at first sight that such a suggestion must be true indubitably; but in one sense it is rather a convention of language and in another it is a commonplace which tends to confuse the issues. It is a convention of language, because the Great Quests are not pursued in time or place, and it would be just as true to say

that in a journey from the circumference to the centre all roads are the same length, supposing that they are straight roads. It is a commonplace, because if any one should enter the byways, or return on his path and restart, it is obvious that he must look to be delayed. Furthermore, it may be true that all paths lead ultimately to the centre, and that if we descend into hell there may be still a way back to the light: yet in any house of right reason the issues are too clear to consider such extrinsic possibilities.

On this and on any consideration, we have to lay down one irrevocable law—that he who has resolved—setting all things else aside—to enter the path of the Quest must look for his progress in proportion as he pursues holiness for its own sake. He who in the Secret Orders dreams of the adeptship which they claim, *ex hypothesi*, to impart to those who can receive, and who does not say sanctity in his heart till his lips are cleansed, and then does not say it with his lips, is not so much far from the goal as without having conceived regarding it.

Now, it is precisely this word sanctity which takes us back, a little unintentionally, to the claim of the Church, and raises the question whether we are to interpret it according to the mind of the Church or another mind. My answer is that I doubt if the Great Experiment was ever pursued to its term in Christian times on the part of any person who had once been incorporated by the mystical body but subsequently had set himself aside therefrom. When the Quest of the Holy Graal was in fine achieved, there were some who, as we know, were translated, but others became monks and hermits; they were incorporated, that is to say, by the official annals of sanctity. I am dealing here with what I regard as a question of fact, not with antecedent grounds, and the fact is that the Church has the Eucharist. It may in certain respects have hampered Christian

Mysticism by the restriction of its own consciousness so especially to the literal side; it may, on the historical side, have approached too often that picture of a certain King of Castle Mortal, who sold God for money; it may in this sense have told the wrong story, though the elements placed in its hands were the right and true elements. But not only is it certain that because of these elements we have to cleave as we can to the Church, but—speaking as a doctor dubitantium—I know that the Church Mystic on the highest throne of its consciousness does not differ in anything otherwise than per accidentia—or alternatively, the prudence of expression—from formal Catholic doctrine. It can say with its heart of knowledge what the ordinary churchman says with his lips of faith; the Symbolum remains; it has not taken on another meaning; it has only unfolded itself, like a flower, from within. The Christian Mystic can therefore recite his Credo in unum Deum by clause and by; clause, including in unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam, and there is neither heresy in the construction nor Jesuitry in the arrière pensée. Above all, the path of the mystic does not pass through the heresies. It has seemed worth while to make this plain, because the Holy Graal is the Catholic Quest drawn into romance.

CHAPTER FOUR THE MYSTERY OF INITIATION

The Mystic Aspects of the Graal legend having been developed up to this stage, the question arises whether they have points of correspondence with any scheme of the Instituted Mysteries, whether any element which is present in the romances can be regarded as a faint and far off reflection of something which at that time was known and done in any secret schools. The possibility has presented itself already to the mind of scholarship, which, having performed admirable work in the study of the Graal texts,

is still in search of a final explanation concerning them. The shadow of the old Order of the Temple has haunted them in dreams fitfully, and they have lingered almost longingly over vague imagined reflections of the Orgies of Adonis and Tammuz. As behind the Christian symbolism of the extant literature there spreads the whole world of pagan folk-lore, so—at least antecedently—there might be implied also some old scheme of the epopts. It seems permissible therefore to offer an alternative, under proper judgments of reserve, as something which—if otherwise considerable—may be held tentatively until later circumstances of research either lead it into demonstration or furnish a fitting substitute. The Graal legends are comparable to certain distinct literatures with which the theory here put forward will connect them by a twofold consanguinity of purpose. Scholarship had scarcely troubled itself with the great books of Kabalism till it was found or conceived that they could be made to enforce the official doctrines of Christianity. Many errors of enthusiasm followed, but the books of the mystery of Israel became in this manner the public heritage of philosophy, and we are now able to say after what manner it enters into the general scheme of mystic knowledge. The literature of alchemy, in like manner, so long as it was in the hands of certain amateurs of infant science and its counterfeits, remained particular to themselves, and outside a questionable research in physics it had no office or horizon until it was discovered or inferred that many curious texts of the subject had been written in a language of subterfuge, that in place of a metallurgical interest it was concerned in its way with the keeping of spiritual mysteries. There were again errors of enthusiasm, but a corner of the veil was lifted. Now, it is indubitably the message of the Graal that there is more in the Eucharist than is indicated by the sufficing graces imparted to the ordinary communicant, and if it is possible to show that behind this undeclared excess there lies that

which has been at all times sought by the Wise, that est in sacramento quicquid quærunt sapientes, then the Graal literature will enter after a new manner into our heritage from the past, and another corner of the veil will be lifted on the path of knowledge. It will be seen that the literature—contrary to what it appears on the surface—is not without points of comparison in other Christian cycles—that it does not stand exactly alone, even if its consanguinities, though declared by official religion, are not entirely before the face of the world but within the sanctuaries of secret fraternities. To suggest this is not to say that these stories of old are a defined part or abstract of any mysteries of initiation; they are at most a byway winding through a secret woodland to a postern giving upon the chancel of some great and primeval abbey.

Those who have concerned themselves with the subject of hidden knowledge will know that the secret claims have been put forth under all manners of guises. This has arisen to some extent naturally enough in the course of the ages and under the special atmosphere of motives peculiar to different nations. It has also come about through the institution of multiples of convention on the part of some who have become in later times the custodians of the mysteries, such wardens having been actuated by a twofold purpose, firstly, to preserve their witness in the world, and, secondly, to see that the knowledge was, as far as might be, kept away from the world. This is equivalent to saying that the paramount law of silence has of necessity a permanent competitor in the law of the sign. We may take the readiest illustration in the rituals of Craft Masonry. They contain the whole marrow of bourgeoisie, but they contain also the shadow of the great mysteries revealed occasionally. The unknown person or assembly which conceived the closing of the Lodge according to one of the grades had a set of moral feelings in common with those of

all the retired masters in the craft of joinery, and a language like a journeyman carpenter, but this notwithstanding the words of the adepts had passed over them and they spoke of the Hidden Token as no one had ever spoken before. That closing gives the true explanation of the secret which cannot be told and yet is imparted quite simply; of that mystery which has never been expressed and can yet be recited by the least literate occupant of the chair placed in Wisdom. Nor does it prove in communication to be anything that is strictly unfamiliar. And yet the explanation, so far from making the concealed part of the rite familiar and a thing of no moment, has built about the concealment a wall of preservation which has made its real significance more profound and in the minds of the adepts more important.

The Graal literature is open to a parallel criticism, and the result is also the same. Whatever disappointment may await, in fine, the pursuit of an inquiry like the present, partly on account of the uncouth presentation of important symbolism to the mind of the early romancist, partly by reason of the inherent defect of romance as a vehicle of symbolism, and more than either by the fatal hiatus brought about through the loss of the earliest documents, there is enough evidence to show that a very strange leaven was working in the mass of the texts. Let me add in respect of it, with all necessary reservations and in no illiberal spirit, that the quality of this leaven can be appreciated scarcely by those who are unacquainted (a) with the inward phases of the life of Christian sanctity during the Middle Ages, after which period the voices sound uncertain and the consciousness of experience more remote, and (b) with the interior working of those concealed orders of which the Masonic experiment is a part only, and elementary at that. The most important lights are therefore either in the very old books or in the catholic

motive which characterises secret rituals that, whether old or not, have never entered into the knowledge of the outside world.

The testimony is of two kinds invariably—first of all, to the existence of the Great Experiment and the success with which, under given circumstances, it can be carried to its term, and, secondly, to a great failure in respect of the external world. The one is reflected by the achieved Quest of the Holy Graal, and the other by the removal of the Graal. In respect of the one it is as if a great mystery had been communicated at one time in the external places, but as if the communication had afterwards been suspended, the secret had as if died. In respect of the other, it is as if the House of Doctrine had been voided. Did these statements exhaust the content of the alternatives, the testimony might be that of a sect, but we shall see at the proper time after what manner they conform to external doctrine, even if the keepers of that doctrine should themselves be unable to see the law of the union.

The great literatures and the great individual books may be often at this day as so many counters or heaps of letters put into the hands of the mystic, and he interprets them after his own manner, imparting to them that light which, at least intellectually, abides in himself. I make this formal statement because I realise that it is perilous for my position and because it enables me to add that though literatures may be clay in our hands, we must not suppose that they who in the first place put a shape of their own kind on the material which they had ingarnered were invariably conscious that it would bear that other seal and impression which we set upon it in our own minds as the one thing that is desirable. It is too much to suppose that behind the external sense of texts there was always designed that inward and illusory significance which in

some of them we seem to trace so indubitably. The Baron de la Motte Fouqué once wrote a beautiful and knightly romance in which a correspondent discovered a subtle and complete allegory, and the author, who planned, when he wrote it, no subsurface meaning, did not less sincerely confess to the additional sense, explaining in reply that high art in literature is true upon all the planes. There are certain romances which are found to connect in this manner with the mystery of our science—that is to say, in the non-intentional way, and we must only be thankful to discern that there is the deep below the deep, without pressing interpenetration into a formal scheme. It is well to notice this position and thus go before a criticism which presents itself rather than calls to be sought out. The books of the Holy Graal are not exactly of this kind. A text which says that certain secret words were once imparted under very wonderful and exceptional circumstances is certainly obtruding a meaning behind meaning; another which affirms that a certain mythical personage was ordained secretly, owing to a similar intervention, and was made thereby the first Bishop of Christendom, manifests an ulterior motive, or there are no such motives in the world. And further, when the two great Quests of the whole literature are written partly in the form of confessed allegory, it is not unreasonable to infer that they had some such motive throughout; while, in fine, as their express, undisguised intention is to show the existence of an arch-natural Mass, the graces and the mysteries of which can be experienced and seen by some who are of perfect life, then the interpretation which illustrates this intention by the mystic side of Eucharistic doctrine in the Church offers a true construction, and its valid criticism is *vere dignum et justum est, æquum ét salutare*. I will pour three cups to the health and coronation of him who shall discover the speculative proto-Perceval of primeval folk-lore, yet on the present subject let him and all other brethren in the holy

places of research keep silence, unless God graces them with agreement. The unknown writers of the Longer Prose Perceval and the Quest of Galahad spoke of the Great Experiment as those who knew something of their theme and bore true witness on the term of the research.

We know in our own hearts that eternity is the sole thing which signifies ultimately and great literature should confess to no narrower horizon. It happens that they begin sometimes by proposing a lesser theme, but they are afterwards exalted; and this was the case with the Graal books, which were given the early legends of Perceval according to the office of Nature, but afterwards the legend of Galahad according to the Law of Grace.

