

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

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[Podcast 2]

BOOK ONE THE ROOTS OF THE HOUSE OF MEANING

[continues]

CHAPTER THREE THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE GRAAL
LITERATURE

It is useless to approach the literature of the Holy Graal for any purpose of special consideration, in the absence of a working acquaintance with that which encompassed it externally in history, in church doctrine, in popular devotion and in ecclesiastical legend. As an acquaintance of this kind must not be assumed in my readers, I will take the chief points involved as follows: (a) The doctrinal position of the Church in respect of the Holy Eucharist; (b) the passage of transubstantiation into dogma, and other circumstances which led up to the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264; (c) the cultus of the Precious Blood; (d) the mind exhibited by the higher life and the mystical literature of sanctity; (e) the standing of minstrelsy; (f) the horizon filled by coincident schools

of thought within and without the Church; (g) the state of the official Church itself, and more especially (h) the position of the Church in Britain, including its connection with the ambition of the English king; (i) the legendary history of certain relics; (k) the voice of Catholic tradition regarding Joseph of Arimathæa; (l) the true attitude of coincident heresies which have been connected with Graal literature; (m) the discovery of the Sacro Catino in 1101; (n) the invention of the Sacred Lance at Antioch; (o) the traditional history of certain imputed relics of Saint John the Baptist.

The consideration of some of these points must remain over till we approach the term of our quest, but for the working acquaintance which I have mentioned the particulars hereinafter following will serve a temporary purpose, and will enable the unversed reader to approach the literature of the Holy Graal with a knowledge of several elements which entered into its creation and were concerned in its development.

Man does not live by bread alone, because it is certain that there is the supernatural bread, and although a great literature may arise in part out of folk-lore, primeval fable and legend; though in this sense it will have its antecedents in that which was at first oral but afterwards passed into writing, some records of which may remain after generations and ages; it does not come about that the development can proceed without taking over other elements. That these elements were assumed in the case of the literature of the Holy Graal is so obvious that there could and would be no call to recite the bare fact if a particular motive were not I very clearly in view. As regards this, I desire to establish that every student, and indeed many and any who are simple readers in passing, will be aware that the first matter of the literature was, as I

have said, folk-lore; as if broken meat and garlic, standing for the daily bread of my first illustration. We shall see, in its proper

place, that Celtic folk-lore—Welsh, Irish and what not—had wonder-stories of cauldrons, dishes and goblets, as it had also of swords and lances. Those who in the later twelfth and the early thirteenth century instituted the literature of the Holy Graal—being, as they were, makers of songs and endless tellers of stories—knew well enough of these earlier traditions; they were the heritage of the minstrel from long antecedent generations of Druids and Scalds and Bards. But there had come over them another and a higher knowledge—a tradition, a legend, the hint of a secret perpetuated; above all and more than all, there had come over them the divine oppression, the secret sense of the mystery which lies behind the surface declaration of the specifics of Christian doctrine. There was the power and the portent of the great orthodox Church, there was the abiding presence of the sacraments, there was the unfailing growth of doctrine, there was the generation of new doctrine, not indeed out of no elements, not indeed by the fiat lux of the Seat of Peter, but in the western countries of Europe—at so great a distance from the centre—the growth was unsuspected sometimes and often seemingly unprefaced, as if there had been spontaneous generation. Ever magnified and manifold in its resource, there was the popular devotion, centred about a particular locality, an especial holy person, and this or that individual holy object. Under what circumstances and with what motives actuating, we have to learn if we can in the sequel, but we can understand in the lesser sense, and perhaps too easily almost, how far the singers and the song which they knew from the past underwent a great transformation; how the Bowl of Plenty became the Cup or Chalice of the Eucharist; how the spear of many battles and the sword of destruction

became the Lance which pierced our Saviour and the weapon used at the martyrdom of His precursor. I set it down that these things might have intervened naturally as a simple work of causation which we can trace with comparative ease; but they would not for this reason have assumed the particular complexion which we shall find to characterise the cycle; we should not have its implicits, its air and accent of mystery, its peculiar manifestation of sacred objects, or its insistence on their final removal. For the explanation of these things we shall have to go further afield, but for the moment I need note only that the writers of the literature have almost without exception certified that they followed a book which had either come into their hands or of which they had received an account from some one who had seen or possessed a copy. We can trace in the later texts and can sometimes identify the particular book which they followed, but we come in fine to the alleged document which preceded all and which for us is as a centre of research.

Amidst the remanents of mythic elements and the phantasmagoria of popular devotion, the veneration of I relics included, there stands forth that which from Christian time immemorial has been termed the Mystery of Faith, the grace not less visible because it is veiled so closely, and this is the Real Presence of Christ in the material symbols of the Eucharist. Seeing that the literature of the Holy Graal is, by the hypothesis of its hallow-in-chief, most intimately connected with this doctrine and the manifestation thereto belonging, it is desirable and essential before all things to understand the Eucharistic position at the period of the development of the literature. We have the traces therein of two schools of thought, though the evidence of the one is clearer than that of the other; they are respectively the school of transubstantiation and that which is alternative thereto,

but not in a sectarian sense, namely, the spiritual interpretation of the grace communicated in the palmary sacrament of the altar.

The means of grace are infinite, but the recognised Sacraments are seven, and to each of them is allocated a locus which is symbolical of its position in the system. Baptism is conferred at the West in the pronaos of the temple, because it is the rite of entrance and the reception of the postulant. Confirmation takes place within the sanctuary itself, on the steps of the altar, because those who have been received in the body by the mediation of sponsors are entitled, if they are properly prepared, to their inheritance in the gifts of the Spirit. The place of Penance is in the sideways, because those who have fallen from righteousness have become thereby extra-lineal, having deviated from the straight path which leads to the Holy of Holies, and their rectification is to come. The Eucharist is administered at the steps of the chancel because it is taken from the hands of him who has received it from the altar itself, and thus he comes like Melchisedech carrying bread and wine, or in the signs and symbols of the Mediator. It is symbolical of the act of Christ in offering Himself for the redemption of mankind; He comes therefore half-way to the communicant, because He was manifested in the flesh. This is the material sign of the union which is consummated within, and its correspondence in the Sacraments is Matrimony, which is celebrated in the same place and is another sign of the union, even of the new and eternal covenant. It is the work of Nature sanctified and Love, under its proper warrants, declared holy on all planes. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred on the steps of the altar, and it has more than this external correspondence with that of Confirmation, of which it is the higher form; the latter is the rite of betrothal by which on the threshold of life the candidate is dedicated to the union and the

spouse of the union descends for a moment upon him, with the sign and seal of possession; the former is the spiritual marriage of the priest, by which he espouses the Church militant on earth that the Church triumphant in Heaven may at a proper season intervene for the consummation of the higher conjugal rights. The sacrament of Extreme Unction is the last act and the last consolation which the Church can offer to the faithful, and it is performed outside the temple because the Church follows its children, even to the gate of death, that their eyes may behold His salvation, Who has fulfilled according to His Word.

It is only at first sight that this brief interpretation will seem out of place in the section; its design is to show, by the ritual position in which the sacraments are administered, that the Holy Eucharist, which has its place of repose and exposition at the far East on the Altar, is the great palladium of the Christian mystery, that the Orient comes from on high, moving to meet the communicant, because God is and He recompenses those who seek Him out. The correspondences hereof in the romances are (a) the rumours of the Graal which went before the Holy Quests, and (b) the going about of the Graal, so that it was beheld in chapels and hermitages—yes, even in the palace of the King.

The great doctrinal debate of the closing twelfth and the early thirteenth century was that which concerned the mystery of the Eucharist, and in matters of doctrine there was no other which could be called second in respect of it. It filled all men's ears, and there can be no question that the vast sodality of minstrelsy was scarcely less versed than the outer section of the priesthood in its palmary elements. Of this debate France was a particular centre, and Languedoc, in the persons of the Albigenses, was a place of holocaust, the denial of the Eucharist being one of the

charges against them. As regards the question itself, I suppose it will be true to say that it turned upon the doctrine of transubstantiation, which was decreed by the Council of Lateran in 1215, under Pope Innocent the Third. The words of the definition are: "The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ are really contained under the species of bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar, the bread being transubstantiated into the Body and the Wine into the Blood." Long anterior to this promulgation, there can be no doubt that the doctrine represented the mind of the Church at the seat of its power. In contradistinction thereto were the opinions of the protesting sects, while external to both was the feeling of a minority which did not object openly, yet did not less strongly hold to a spiritual interpretation of the Real Presence. The external devotion to the Eucharist which was manifested more and more by the extremists on the side of the Church would scarcely be checked by the exponents of the middle way, and indeed it might well have been encouraged, though not with an intention which could be termed the same specifically. In the thirteenth century the elements were beginning to be elevated for the adoration of the people; the evidence is regarded as doubtful in respect of any earlier period. It must have become a general custom in 1216, for a constitution of Honorius the Third speaks of it as of something which had been done always. In 1229 Gregory the Ninth. devised the ringing of a bell before consecration as a warning for the faithful to fall on their knees and worship Christ in the Eucharist. Still earlier in the thirteenth century Odo, Bishop of Paris, regulated the forms of veneration, more especially when the Sacred Elements were carried in procession. Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury, had taken similar precautions at the end of the twelfth century. It seems to follow from the constitutions of Odo that some kind of reservation was practised at his period, and I believe that the custom had

descended from primitive times. There is nothing, however, in the romances to show that this usage was familiar; the perpetual presence was for them in the Holy Graal, and apparently in that only. Church and chapel and hermitage resounded daily with the celebration of the Mass. In one instance we hear of a tabernacle on the Altar, or some kind of receptacle in which the Consecrated Elements reposed. The most usual mediaeval practice was to reserve in a dove-shaped repository which hung before the Table of the Lord. The Book of the Holy Graal has, as we shall see, a very curious example of reservation, for it represents a Sacred Host delivered to the custody of a convert, one also who was a woman and not in the vows of religion. It was kept by her in a box, and the inference of the writer is that Christ was, for this reason, always with her. The reader who is dedicated in his heart to the magnum mysterium of faith will be disposed to regard this as something approaching sacrilege, and I confess to the same feeling, but it was a frequent practice in the early church, and not, as it might well be concluded, a device of romance.

As regards transubstantiation, the voice of the literature in the absence of an express statement on either side seems to represent both views. The Greater Chronicles of the Graal are as text-books for the illustration of the doctrine, but it is absent from the Lesser Chronicles, and outside this negative evidence of simple silence there are other grounds for believing that it was unacceptable to their writers, who seem to represent what I have called already the spiritual interpretation of the Real Presence, corresponding to what ecclesiologists have termed a body of Low Doctrine within the Church.

There was another question exercising the Church at the same period, though some centuries were to elapse before it was to be decided by the central authority. It was that of

communion in both kinds, which was finally abolished by the Council of Constance in 1415, the decision then reached being confirmed at Trent in 1562. The ordination of communion in one kind was preceded by an intermediate period when ecclesiastical feeling was moving in that direction, but there was another and an earlier period—that is to say, in the fifth century—when communion under one kind was prohibited expressly on the ground that the division of the one mystery could not take place without sacrilege. As a species of middle way, there was the practice of the intincted or steeped Host which seems to have been coming into use at the beginning of the tenth century, although it was prohibited at the Council of Brago in Galicia, except possibly in the case of the sick and of children. The custom of mixing the elements was defended by Emulphus, Bishop of Rochester, in 1120, and Archbishop Richard referred to the intincted Host in 1175. All these problems of practice and doctrine were the religious atmosphere in which the literature of the Graal was developed. There were great names on all sides; on that of transubstantiation there was the name of Peter Lombard, the Master of Sentences, though he did not dare to determine the nature of the conversion—whether, that is to say, it was “formal, substantial, or of some other kind”; on the side of communion under one element there was that of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Angel of the Schools.

With an environment of this kind it was inevitable that poetry and legend should take over the mystery of the Eucharist, and should exalt it and dwell thereon. We shall see very shortly that the assumption was not so simple as might appear from this suggestion, and that something which has the appearance of a secret within the sanctuary had been heard of in connection with the central institution of official Christianity. In any case, from the moment that the Eucharist entered into the life of romantic literature,

that literature entered after a new manner into the heart of the western peoples. Very soon, it has been said, the Graal came to be regarded as the material symbol of the Catholic and Christian faith, but it was really the most spiritual symbol; I believe that it was so considered, and the statement does little more than put into English the inspired words of the Ordinary of the Mass. In the middle of the mistaken passion for holy wars in Palestine; through the monstrous iniquity of Albigensian Crusades; the ever-changing struggle notwithstanding between Pope and King and Emperor; within the recurring darkness of interdict, when the Sacraments were hidden like the Graal; the Legend of the Holy Graal grew and brightened, till the most stressful of times adventurous, the most baleful of all enchantments, shone, as it seemed, in its shining, and a light which had been never previously on the land or sea of literature glorified the spirit of romance. It was truly as if the great company of singers and chroniclers had gathered at the high altar to partake of the Blessed Sacrament, and had communicated not only in both kinds, but in elements of extra-valid consecration.

The thesis of this section is that God's immanence was declared at the time of the literature, through all Christendom, by the Mystery of Faith and that the development of Eucharistic doctrine into that of transubstantiation was a peculiar recognition of the corporate union between Christ and His people. That immanence also was declared by the high branches of Graal romance, even as by the quests of the mind in philosophy—in which manner romance, in fine, became the mirror of religion, and the literature testified, under certain veils, to a mystery of Divine experience which once at least was manifested in Christendom.

So I who am about to speak offer a loving salutation to the learned and admirable souls who have preceded me in the way of research. It is because I have ascended an untrodden peak in Darien to survey the prospect of the Quest, and have found that there is another point of view, that I come forward in these pages carrying strange tidings, but leaving to all my precursors the crowns and bays and laurels which they have deserved so well, and offering no contradiction to anything which they have attained truly. How admirable is the life of the scholar—how unselfish are the motives which inspire him—and how earnestly we who, past all revocation, are dedicated to the one subject desire that those paths which he travels—when even they seem far from the goal—may lead him to that term which is his as well as ours, for assuredly he seeks only the truth as he conceives thereof.

As the theory of transubstantiation did not pass into dogma till a late period in the development of the canon of the Graal, so it can be said that romantic texts like the Book of the Holy Graal, the Longer Prose Perceval and the Galahad Quest, but the last especially, which contains the higher code of chivalry, were instrumental in promoting that dogma by the proclamation of a sacrosaintly feast of Corpus Christi maintained for ever in the Hidden House of the Graal, till the time came when the great feast of exaltation and the assumption into heaven of the sacred emblems was held in fine at Sarras. There was, therefore, a correlation of activity between the two sides of the work, for it was out of the growing dogma that the Graal legend in the Greater Chronicles assumes its particular sacramental complexion.

When all has been granted and, after granting, has been exalted even, it remains that the Eucharistic symbol is so much the greatest of all that we can say that there is a

second scarcely, because this is the palmary channel of grace, and—in the last resource—we do not need another. If it were not that the literature of the Holy Graal offers intimations of still more glorious things behind this mystery than we are accustomed to find in theological and devotional handbooks, I suppose that the old books would have never concerned my thoughts. Now therefore, God willing, I speak to no one, in or out of churches, sects and learned societies, who does not realise in his heart that the path of the life everlasting lies, mystically speaking, within the consecrated elements of bread and wine, beyond which veils all the high Quests are followed.

Passing from the doctrinal matters expressed and implied in the Graal literature to the sacred palladia with which it is concerned more especially, we enter into another species of environment. Out of the doctrine of transubstantiation, and perhaps more especially out of the particular congeries of devotional feelings connected therewith, there originated what may be termed a cultus of the body of God and of His blood, understood in the mystery of the Incarnation, and the instinct which lies behind the veneration of relics came into a marked degree of operation. Such veneration is instinctive, as I have just said, and representing on the external side, invalidly or not, the substance of things unseen in religion, it is so rooted in our natural humanity that it would be difficult to regard its manifestation in Christendom as characteristic more especially of Christianity than of some other phases of belief. The devotion which, because of its excesses, is by a hasty and unrooted philosophy termed superstition—which no instinct can ever be—manifested early enough and never wanted its objects. There can be scarcely any call to point out that in the considerations which here follow I am concerned with questions of fact and not with adjudication thereon. The veneration of relics and cognate objects, to

which some kind of sanctity was imputed, became not only an environment of Christianity at a very early period, but it so remains to the present day for more than half of Christendom. It may be one of the grievous burdens of those ecclesiastical systems about which it prevails and in which it is still promoted, but having said what the sense of intellectual justice seems to require, that it may be exonerated from the false charge of superstition, I have only to add—and this is to lift the Graal literature out of the common judgment which might be passed upon memorials of relic worship—that the instinct of such devotions, as seen at their best in the official churches, has always an arch-natural implicit; it works upon the simple principle that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and the reverence, by example, for the Precious Blood of Christ depends from the doctrine of His immanence in any memorials which He has left. I need not add that, on the hypothesis of the Church itself, the sense of devotion would be better directed, among external objects, towards the Real Presence in the symbols of the Eucharist; but in the Graal literature it was round about the Sacramental Mystery that the Relics of the Passion were collected, operating and shining in that light.

We know already that the Sacred Vessel of the legends was in the root-idea a Reliquary, and as such that it was the container and preserver of the Precious Blood of Christ. The romantic passion which brought this Reliquary into connection with the idea of that sacrament which communicated the life of Christ's blood to the believing soul, and the doctrinal passion which led to the definition concerning transubstantiation interacted one upon another. John Damascene had said in the eighth century that the elements of bread and wine were assumed and united to the Divinity—which took place by the invocation of the Holy Ghost, for the Spirit descends and changes. The Venerable

Bede had said that the Lord gave us the sacrament of His flesh and blood in the figure of bread and wine. And again: "Christ is absent as to His Body, but is present as to His Divinity." And yet further: "The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ are received in the mouth of believers for their salvation." I do not know whether the implicits of this presentation have been realised in any school of interpreters, but there is one of them which covers all phases of sacramental exegesis, however variant from each other, and however in conflict with high Roman doctrine concerning the Eucharist. I state it as one who after long searchings has found a hidden jewel of the sacrament which might be an eirenicon for all the sects alive. It has also the simplicity which Khunrath, in expounding the Hermetic side of Eternal Wisdom, has said to be the seal of Nature and Art. I testify, therefore, that the true mystery of the Eucharist resides in the assumption by the Divine Life of the veils of Bread and Wine, and that even as once in time and somewhere in the world that life assumed the veils of flesh and blood, which became the Body of the Lord, so here and now—daily on every worshipful and authorised altar over the wide, wide world—do those unspotted elements become again that sacred vehicle, so that he who communicates in the faith of spirit and of truth, receives that which is not less truly the Divine Body than the especial polarisation of elements which was born in Nazareth of the sacred and glorious Virgin. Moreover, I am very certain that the one mystery was operated as if in the terms and valid forms of the other by the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the utter consecration of the elements. The reason is that given by Leo the Great, or another, so long and long ago—that Mary conceived in her heart before she conceived in her body. But having so conceived, the elements within her were transubstantiated into the Divine Body. I desire to add with all veneration and homage that this root-mystery of redemption is that which lies behind

the devotion to the Mother of God, which has ascended to such heights in the Latin Church. This Church is the one witness through the ages whose instinct on the great subjects has never erred, however long and urgently the powers of the deep and the powers of perdition have hammered at the outer gates. Among other things, she has always recognised in the withdrawn and most holy part of her consciousness that she who conceived Christ—by the desire of the mystery of God satisfied out of all measure in a consummated marriage of the mind—had entered through her humanity into assumption with the Divine, and was to be counted no longer merely among the elected daughters of Zion.

To return therefore, those who say that the Eucharist is flesh and blood are speaking God's truth, and I ask in examine mortis—

“In life's delight, in death's dismay”—

that I may never receive otherwise. And those who say that such things are understood spiritually say also the truth which is eternal after their own manner, whence I look to communicate with them when “the dedely flesh” begins “to beholde the spyrytuel thynges”—or ever I set forth in that ship of mystic faith which was built from the beginning of this external order that it may carry us in fine to Sarras, though it is known that we shall go further.

Well, fratres carissimi, sorores ex omnibus dilectissimæ, to whom I speak the wisdom of the other world in a mystery—those who out of all expectation translated the deep things of doctrine, as they best could, into the language of romance—out of the Latin, as they said in their cryptic fashion—the Palladium of all research was that Vessel of Singular Election which contained, in their ingenuous

symbolism, the Blood of Christ; but seeing that they were in a hurry to show how those who were worthy to receive the arch-natural sacraments did after some undeclared manner partake at the Graal Mass of corporeal and incorporeal elements which were fit to sustain both body and soul, so did the Reliquary become the Chalice, or alternatively it was elevated and the Christ came down to distribute His own life with the osculum fraternitatis and the consolamentum of all consolation. They collected, also, under the ecclesiastical and monastic ægis, certain other relics about the relic-in-chief. Now, the point concerning all is that most of the minor Hallows were known already as local objects of sanctity no less than the palmary Hallow, but the sanctity ascribed to the latter and the devotion thereto belonging were beginning to prevail generally. It is difficult to trace the growth of this kind of cultus; but as to the worship of spiritual devotion there was offered everywhere in Christendom the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, so at many shrines—as if the more visible symbol carried with it a validity of its own, a more direct and material appeal—there was the reputed sang réal of Christ preserved in a reliquary. Some of these local devotions were established and well known before the appearance of any text of the Holy Graal with which we are acquainted—probably before those texts which we can discern behind the extant literature.

We have at the present day the Feast of the Precious Blood, which is a modern invention, and perhaps for some even who are within the fold of the Latin Church, it is classed among the unhappy memorials of the pontificate of Pius IX. This notwithstanding, it is what may be termed popular, and has in England its confraternities and other systems to maintain it in the mind of the laity. It has the London Oratory as its more particular centre, and it is described as an union and an apostolate of intercessory prayer. Without

such assistance in the Middle Ages we can understand that the cultus had its appeal to the devotional side of the material mind, for which flesh and blood profited a good deal, in spite of asceticism and the complication of implicits behind the counsels of perfection in the religious life of the age.

The historical antiquity of the local sanctities which centre about certain relics is shrouded like some Masonic events in the vague grandeur of time immemorial, and a defined date is impossible. Because the legends of the Graal are connected with the powers and wonders of several hallowed objects belonging to 'the Passion of Christ, it is essential rather than desirable to ascertain whether at the period when the literature arose—and antedating it, if that be possible—there were such objects already in existence and sufficiently well known to respond as a terminus a quo in respect of the development of the legends. The places which appear as claimants to the possession of relics of the Precious Blood are, comparatively speaking, numerous; among others there are Bruges, Mantua, Saintes, the Imperial Monastery at Weingarten, and even Beyrout. According to the story of Mantua, the relic was preserved by Longinus, the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Christ. Within the historical period, it is said to have been divided, and some part of it was secured by the monastery of Weingarten, already mentioned. This portion was again subdivided and brought from Germany by Richard of Cornwall, the brother of Henry the Third Fractional as the portion was, it is affirmed to have been a large relic, and the fortunate possessor founded a religious congregation to guard and venerate it. Later on it was, however, divided again into three parts, of which one was retained by the congregation, one was deposited in a monastery built for the purpose at Ashted, near Berkhampstead, and the third in a third monastery erected at Hailes in Gloucestershire.

All these were foundations by Richard of Cornwall; and to explain such continual division, it must be remembered that this was a period when the building of churches and religious houses was prohibited without relics to sanctify them. Now, the story of Richard himself may be accepted as tolerably well founded, but there is much doubt concerning the relics at Weingarten and at Mantua itself. The alternative statements are (1) that in 1247 the Templars sent to King Henry the Third a *vas vetustissimum*, having the appearance of crystal and reputed to contain the Precious Blood; (2) that in the same year, and to the same King, there was remitted by the Patriarch of Jerusalem a Reliquary termed the *Sangreal*, which had once belonged to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa. Now it is obvious that at the period of Henry the Third the canon of the Graal literature was almost closed; the last of these stories is obviously a reflection of that literature; it was also the time when (a) the *Sacro Catino* of Geneva may have begun to be regarded as the Graal, and when (b) a similar attribution was given to a sacred vessel which had been long preserved at Constantinople; but these objects, whether dishes or chalices, were not reliquaries. It will be seen that the claim of Mantua remains over with nothing to account for its origin. Of Beyrout I have heard only, and have no details to offer. But the relic of Bruges has a clear and methodical history, passing from legend into a domain which may be that of fact. The legend is that Joseph of Arimathæa having collected the Blood from the wounds of Christ, as the literature of the Graal tells us, placed it in a phial, which was taken to Antioch by Saint James the Less, who was the first bishop of that city. The possible historical fact is that the Patriarch of Antioch gave the Reliquary about 1130 to a knight of Bruges who had rendered signal services to the church in Antioch. It was brought back by the knight to his native place, and there it has remained to this day. The

dubious element in the story is the gift of such a relic under any circumstances whatever; the point in its favour is that the phial has the character of oriental work, which is referred by experts in ancient glass to the seventh or eighth century.

Against, or rather in competition with, this simple and consistent claim, there is the monstrous invention connected with the monastery of the Holy Trinity at Fécamp in Normandy. Here there is—or there was at least in the year 1840—a tabernacle of white marble, decorated with sculptured figures and inscribed: “Hic SANGUIS D.N., I.H.V., X.P.I.” It is therefore called the Tabernacle of the Precious Blood.

The story is that Joseph of Arimathæa removed the blood from the wounds of Christ, after the body had been taken down from the Cross, using his knife for the purpose, and collecting the sacred fluid in his gauntlet. The gauntlet he placed in a coffer, and this he concealed in his house. The years passed away, and on his deathbed he bequeathed the uncouth reliquary to his nephew Isaac, telling him that if he preserved it the Lord would bless him in all his ways. Isaac and his wife began to enjoy every manner of wealth and prosperity; but she was an unconverted Jewess, and seeing her husband performing his devotions before the coffer, she concluded that he had dealings with an evil spirit, and she denounced him to the high priest. The story says that he was acquitted, but he removed with the reliquary to Sidon, where the approaching siege of Jerusalem was made known to him in a vision. He therefore concealed the reliquary in a double tube of lead, with the knife and the head of the Lance which had pierced the side of Christ. The tube itself he concealed in the trunk of a fig-tree, the bark of which closed over its contents, so that no fissure was visible. A second vision on the same subject caused him to

cut down the tree, and he was inspired to commit it to the waves. In the desolation which he felt thereafter an angel told him that his treasure had reached shore in Gaul, and was hidden in the sand near the valley of Fécamp.

I do not propose to recount the various devices by which the history of the fig-tree is brought up to the period when the monastery was founded at the end of the tenth century. The important points in addition are (a) that the nature of the Reliquary did not satisfy the custodians, and, like the makers of Graal books, they wanted an arch-natural chalice to help out their central Hallow; (b) that they secured this from the priest of a neighbouring church who had celebrated Mass on a certain occasion, and had seen the consecrated elements converted into flesh and blood; (c) that a second knife was brought, later on, by an angel; (d) that a general exposition of all the imputed relics took place on the high altar in 1171; (e) that their praises and wonders were celebrated by a guild of jongleurs attached to the monastery, which guild is said to have originated early in the eleventh century, and was perpetuated for over four hundred years; (f) that the story is told in a mediæval romance of the thirteenth century, though in place of Joseph the character in chief is there said to be Nicodemus; (g) that there are other documents in French and in Latin belonging to different and some of them to similarly early periods; (h) that there is also a Mass of the Precious Blood, which was published together with the poem in 1840, and this is, exoterically speaking, a kind of Mass of the Graal, but I fear that a careful examination might create some doubt of its antiquity, and, speaking generally, I do not see (1) that any of the documents have been subjected to critical study; or (2) that Fécamp is likely to have been more disdainful about the law of great inventions than other places with Hallows to maintain in Christian—or indeed in any other—times.

So far as regards the depositions which it might be possible to take in the Monastery concerning its Tabernacle; and there is only one thing more which need be mentioned at this stage. It has been proved by very careful and exhaustive research into the extant codices of the Conte del Graal that some copies of the continuation by Gautier de Douzens state that the episode of Mont Douloureux was derived from a book written at Fécamp. It follows that one early text at least in the literature of the Holy Graal draws something from the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, but, lest too much importance should be attributed to this fact, I desire to note for my conclusion: (a) that the episode in question has no integral connection with the Graal itself; (b) that the tradition of Fécamp, which I have characterised as monstrous, by which I mean in comparison with the worst side of the general legends of the Precious Blood, is utterly distinct from that of the Holy Graal in the texts which constitute the literature; and (c) that this literature passed, as we shall find, out of legend into the annunciation of a mystic claim. It is the nature of this claim, the mystery of sanctity which lies behind it, and the quality of perpetuation by which the mystery was handed on, that is the whole term of my quest, and here it stands declared.

We have seen how. at Fécamp there occurred a very curious intervention on the part of an arch-natural chalice, being that vessel into which the Graal passes by a kind of superincession, if it does not begin and end therein. But there are other legends of chalices and dishes in the wide world of reliquaries, and in order to clear the issues I may state in the 1st place that the Table of the Last Supper is said to be preserved at Saint John Lateran, with no history of its migration attached thereto. The Church of Savillac in the diocese of Montauban has also, or once had, a Tabula Cœnæ Domini and the Bread used at that Table. As regards the chalice itself, there is one of silver at Valencia which

the Catholic mind of Spain has long regarded as that of the Last Supper; but I have no records of its history. There is one other which is world-wide in its repute, and this I have mentioned already, as if by an accidental reference. The Sacro Catino is preserved in the Church of Saint Laurence at Genoa, and it is pictured in the book which Fra Gaetano di San Teresa dedicated to the subject in 1726. It corresponds by its general appearance—which recalls, broadly speaking, the calix of an enormous flower more closely to the form which might, in the absence of expert knowledge, be attributed to a decorative Paschal Dish than a wine-cup; but there is no need to say that it is not an archaic glass vessel of Jewry. The history of so well known an object is rather one of weariness in recital, but at the crusading sack of Cæsarea in 1101 the Genoese received as their share of the booty, or in part consideration thereof, what they believed to be a great cup or dish carved out of a single emerald; it was about forty centimetres in height, and a little more than one metre in circumference; the form was hexagonal, and it was furnished with two handles, polished and rough respectively. Now, Cæsarea was near enough to the Holy Fields for the purposes of a sacred identification in the hearts of crusaders, and moreover the vessel had been found in the mosque of Antioch, which might have helped to confuse their minds by suggesting that it was a stolen relic of Christian sanctity. But at the time when the city was pillaged there is no evidence that the notion occurred to the Genoese, unless it was on some vague ground of the kind that at the return of some of them it was deposited in their church as a gift. It may well have been a thank-offering, and this only, but I confess to a certain suspicion that, vaguely or otherwise, they had assumed its sacred character, and that its identification, not certainly with the Holy Graal, but with the dish or chalice of the Last Supper, may have begun earlier than has been so far supposed—antedating, that is to say, the

first record in history. This record is connected with the name of the author of the Golden Legend, Jacobus de Voragine, at the end of the thirteenth century. There is, however, some reason to believe that the attribution was common already in Genoa prior to the period in question. The point which is posed for consideration is whether the wide diffusion of the Graal literature caused such a claim to be put forward by the wardens of the Sacro Catino. The materials for a decision are unfortunately not in our hands. With the Graal itself it could not have been connected properly, seeing that the vessel was empty; but perversions of this kind are not outside the field of possibility. Whatever the ultimate value of an empirical consideration like this, the heaviest fines, and even death itself, were threatened against those who should touch the vessel with any hard object. A cruel but belated disillusion, however, awaited its wardens when it was taken to Paris in 1816, and was not only broken on the way back, but, having been subjected to testing, was proved to be only glass.

Second in importance only to the vessel of the Holy Graal was the Sacred Lance of the Legend, and as in the majority of texts this is also a relic of the Passion, our next task is to ascertain its antecedent or concurrent history in the life of popular devotion. We know already of the thesis issued at Fécamp, but the claims are so many that no one has cared especially. The shaft of the spear used by Longinus when he pierced the side of Christ is preserved in the Basilica of Saint Peter. According to the Roman Martyrology, the Deicide was suffering from ophthalmia when he inflicted the wound, and some of the Precious Blood overflowing his face, he was healed immediately—which miracle led, it is declared, to his conversion. Cassiodorus, who belongs to the fifth century, says that the Lance was in his days at Jerusalem, but this was the head and the imbedded part of the shaft, the rest being missing. He does not account for

its preservation from the time of Christ to his own. Gregory of Tours speaks of its removal to Constantinople, which notwithstanding it was discovered once more at Antioch for the encouragement of Crusaders, under circumstances of particular suspicion, even in the history of relics. This was in 1098. There is also a long story of its being pledged by Baldwin the Second to Venice, and of its redemption by Saint Louis, which event brought it to Paris; but this is too late for our subject. A Holy Lance with an exceedingly confused history—but identical as to its imputed connection with the Passion—came also into the possession of Charlemagne. That any history of such a hallow is worthless does not make it less important when the object is to exhibit the simple fact that it was well known in this world before Graal literature, as we find it, had as yet come into existence. According to Saint Andrew of Crete, the head of the Lance was buried with the True Cross, but it does not seem to have been disinterred therewith. It is just to add that some who have investigated the question bear witness that the history of the Hallow is reasonably satisfactory in the sixth century and thence onwards.

The next relic which may be taken to follow on our list is the Crown of Thorns; it figures only in one romance of the Graal, but has an important position therein. The possession of single or several Sacred Thorns has been claimed by more than one hundred churches, without prejudice to which there are those which have the Crown itself, less or more intact. This also is not included among the discoveries of Saint Helena in connection with the True Cross, and there is no early record concerning it; but it is mentioned as extant by Saint Paulin de Nole at the beginning of the fifth century. One hundred years later, Cassiodorus said that it was at Jerusalem; Gregory of Tours also bears testimony to its existence. In the tenth century part of it was at Constantinople, which was a general

centre, if not a forcing-house, of desirable sacred objects. Saint Germain, Bishop of Paris, was in that city and received part of it as a present from the Emperor Justinian. Much earlier the patriarch of Jerusalem is supposed to have sent another portion to Charlemagne. In 1106 the treasure at Constantinople is mentioned by Alexis Comnenus. Another Crown of Thorns is preserved in Santa Maria della Spina of Pisa.

The Sacred Nails of the Passion appear once in the Book of the Holy Graal, and these also have an early history in relics. Some or all of them were discovered by Saint Helena with the True Cross, and, according to Saint Ambrose, one of them was placed by her in the diadem of Constantine, or alternatively in his helmet, and a second in the bit of his horse. In the sixth century Saint Gregory of Tours speaks of four nails, and it seems to follow from Saint Chrysostom that the bit of Constantine's charger was coupled with the Lance as an object of veneration in his days. As regards the diadem fashioned by Saint Helena this was welded of iron and became the Iron Crown of Lombardy, being given by Gregory the First to Theodolinde in recognition of her zeal for the conversion of the Lombard people. Charlemagne, Sigismund, Charles the Fifth and Napoleon the First were crowned therewith. Muratori and others say that the Nail which hallowed it was not heard of in this connection till the end of the sixteenth century, and the Crown itself has been challenged. Twenty-nine places in all have laid claim to the possession of one or other of the four nails, and there are some commendable devices of subtlety to remove the sting of this anomaly. It is sufficient for our own clear purpose to realise that the relics, if not everywhere, were in "right great plenty."

It is also in the Book of the Holy Graal, and there only, that we see for a moment, in the high pageant of all, a vision of

an ensanguined Cross, a blood-stained Cincture and a bended rod, also dyed with blood. Of the Crux vera and its invention I need say nothing, because its relics, imputed and otherwise, are treasured everywhere, and I suppose that their multiplicity, even at the earliest Graal period, made it impossible to introduce the Cross as an exclusive Hallow in the Sacred House of Relics. By the Cincture there was understood probably that bandage with which the eyes of Christ were blindfolded, and this, or its substitute, had been in the possession of Charlemagne and was by him given to Saint Namphasus, who built the Abbey of Marcillac and there deposited the relic. It is now in a little country church called Saint Julian of Lunegarde. According to Saint Gregory of Tours, the reed and the sponge, which had once been filled with vinegar, were objects of veneration at his day in Jerusalem. They are supposed to have been taken to Constantinople, which notwithstanding an informant of the Venerable Bede saw the sponge with his own eyes, deposited in a silver cup at the Holy City. He saw also the shorter reed, which served as the derisive symbol of the Lord's royalty.

The last relic of the Passion of which we hear in the books of the Graal is the Volto Santo, which all men know and venerate in connection with the piteous legend of Veronica. The memorials of this tradition are, on a moderate computation, as old as the eighth century, but the course of time has separated it into four distinct branches. The first and the oldest of these is preserved in a Vatican manuscript, which says that Veronica was the woman whose issue of blood was healed by Christ, and she herself was the artist who painted the likeness. She was carried to Rome with the picture for the healing of the Emperor Tiberius. The second branch is contained in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the eleventh century, and this says that the relic was a piece of Christ's garment which received in a

miraculous manner the impression of His countenance. The origin of the third tradition seems to have been in Germany, but it is preserved in some metrical and other Latin narrative versions. The likeness of Christ is said to be very large, apparently full length. It was in the possession of Veronica, but without particulars of the way in which it was acquired. In another story—this is perhaps of the twelfth century—the Emperor who was healed is Vespasian, and Christ Himself impressed His picture on the face-cloth which He used when He washed before supper at the house of Veronica. She had asked Saint Luke, whom tradition represents as an artist, for a copy of the Master's likeness. The fourth and last variant is the familiar Calvary legend, wherein the holy woman offers in His service the cloth which she has on her arm when Christ is carrying the Cross, and she is rewarded by the impress of His countenance thereon. The noticeable point is that the story of Veronica, of the Volta Santo, and of the healing of a Roman Emperor is the root-matter of the earliest historical account of the Holy Graal, and this fact has led certain scholars to infer that the entire literature has been developed out of the Veronica legend, as a part of the conversion legend of Gaul, according to which the holy woman, in the company of the three Maries and of Lazarus, took ship to Marseilles and preached the Gospel therein. They carried the Volto Santo and other Hallows.

I approach now the term of this inquiry, and there remains for consideration the Sword of the Graal legends, which is accounted for variously in respect of its history and is also described variously, but it is not under any circumstances a Hallow of the Passion. A romance which stands late in the cycle, so far as chronology is concerned, connects it with the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist. I have found no story in the world of relics to help us in accounting for this invention, though there are traces of a sword of Saint

Michael. In this respect, as indeed in other ways, the Hallow is complicated in the literature. It embodies (a) matter brought over from folk-lore; (b) deliberate invention, as when one story affirms it to be the sword of David, and another that of Judas Maccabæus; and (c) the semi-devotional fable to which I have referred above, and this must be taken in connection with the legends of the head of Saint John, served to Herodias on a charger to satiate her desire for revenge on the precursor of Christ, he seeming to have reproached her concerning her manner of life. It will be plain from the enumeration subjoined that the relics of Saint John are comprehensive as to the person of his body. (1) A martyrology tells us that some of his blood was collected by a holy woman at the time of his decapitation, was put into a vessel of silver, and was carried into her country of Guienne; there it was placed in a temple which she erected to his honour. (2) The body was, according to one account, placed in a temple at Alexandria, which was dedicated to the Saint. Another says that the head was first interred in the sepulchre of Eliseus at Samaria. During the reign of Julian the Apostate it was redeemed from possible profanation, and sent to Saint Athanasius, who concealed it in a wall of his church. At the end of the fourth century the same remains were removed to a new church, built on the site of a temple of Serapis. Subsequently they were divided and distributed. (3) The Caput Johannis was carried to Antioch by Saint Luke, or alternatively to Cæsarea. From whichever place, it was afterwards removed to Constantinople and brought finally into France, where it was divided into three parts, one of which is at Amiens, another at Angély in the diocese of Nantes, and the third at Nemours in the diocese of Sens. A distinct account states that the head was found in Syria in the year 453, and that the removal to Constantinople took place five centuries later. When that city was taken by the French in 1204, a canon of Amiens, who was present,

transported it into France, where it was divided, but into two portions apparently, one being deposited at Amiens and the other sent to the Church of Saint Sylvester in Rome. I have also seen a report of two heads, but without particulars of their whereabouts.

So much concerning the Caput Johannis, but I should not have had occasion to furnish these instances were it not for the apparition of an angel carrying a head upon a salver when the wonders of the Holy Graal were first manifested at Sarras. But this vision is not found in the story which connects the Hallowed Sword with the head of Saint John the Baptist. The Dish, with its content, is supposed to be a complication occasioned by the intervention of folk-lore elements concerning the head of the Blessed Bran. The Dish, apart from the head, is almost always the fourth Hallow in the legends of the Graal—perhaps, as I shall indicate later, because the Sacred Vessel, which is the central object of all, is sometimes identified with the Paschal Dish of the Last Supper and sometimes with the Chalice of the First Eucharist.

It follows from the considerations of this section that although there has been a passage of folk-lore materials through the channel of Graal literature—which passage has less or more involved their conversion—its real importation into romance has been various elements of Christian symbolism, doctrine and legend; it is these, above all, that we are in a position to know and account for, and I have made a beginning here. We have, therefore, certain lines laid down already for our inquiry which assure that it will have the aspect of a religious and even of an ecclesiastical quest.

There is nothing on our part which can be added to the discoveries of folk-lore scholars, nor have we—except in a

most elementary manner, and for the better understanding of our own subject—any need to summarise the result even of such researches—as these now stand. This work has been done too well already. We are entering a new region, and we carry our own warrants. I need not add that in assuming Celtic or any other legends, the Church took over its own, because she had come into possession, by right and by fact, of all the patrimonies of the Western world.

I want it to be understood, in conclusion as to this side of the Hallows of the Holy Graal, that the literature is not to be regarded as a particular extension of the history of relics, nor should my own design in presenting the external history of certain sacred objects suffer misconstruction of this or an allied kind. The compilers of encyclopædic dictionaries and handbooks have sometimes treated the value of such legends, and of the claims which lie behind them, in a spirit which has been so far serious that they have pointed out how the multiplicity of claims in respect of a single object must be held to militate against the genuineness of any. One Juggernaut effigy of all that is virulent in heresy took the trouble, centuries ago, to calculate how many crosses might be formed full-size from the relics of the one true Cross which were then extant in the world, and an opponent not less grave took the further trouble of recalculating to prove that he was wrong. So also Luther, accepting a caution from Judas, lamented that so much gold had gone to enshrine the imputed relics of the Cross when it might have been given to the poor. The truth is that the veneration of relics is open to every kind of charge save that which Protestantism has preferred, and this an enlightened sense of doctrine and practice enables us to rule out of court on every count.

It is desirable now to notice a few points which are likely to be overlooked by the informed student even, while the

unversed reader should know of them that he may be on his guard hereafter. (1) The German cycle of the Holy Graal has the least possible connection with Christian relics; speaking of the important branches, it is so much *sui generis* in its symbolical elements that it enters scarcely into the same category as the Northern French romances, with which we shall be dealing chiefly. (2) No existing reliquary and no story concerning one did more than provide the great makers of romance with raw materials and pretexts; the stories they abandoned in all cases nearly, and the symbols they exalted by their genius. (3) As I have once already indicated, but not so expressly, the knowledge or the rumour of some unknown book had come to them in an unknown manner, and of this book neither Fécamp nor its competitive monasteries, abbeys and holy houses had ever heard a syllable. The general conclusion of this part is therefore that the growing literature of the Holy Graal drew from the life of devotion in its application to the Mystery of the Eucharist and to the secondary veneration of relics at the period; but, on the other hand, it contributed something of its own life to stimulate and extend the great doctrine of the mystery, and the devotion also. The elucidations which have been here afforded represent but a part of the schedule with which this section opened; it is that, however, which is most needed at the moment, and all that remains will find its proper place in the later stages of research.

About that mystery in chief of the faith in Christ which is the only real concern of the Holy Graal, there are other environments which will appeal to us, though their time is not yet in our methodical scheme of progress. There is (a) the state of the official church, so glorious in some respects, so clouded in others, like a keeper of sacred things who has been wounded for his own sins, or like a House of Doctrine against which he who sold God for

money has warred, and not in vain, for at times he has invaded the precincts and entered even the sanctuary, though the holy deposit has not been affected thereby, because by its nature and essence it is at once removed from his grasp. There is (b) the Church in Britain and its connections of the Celtic world, having aspirations of its own, as there is no question—having a legitimacy of its own, as none can dare to deny—but with only a local horizon, a local mission, and used, for the rest, as a tool for ambitious kings, much as the orthodox claim of the Church at large was the tool of the popes at need. There is (c) the resounding rumour and there is the universal wonder of the high impossible quest of holy wars in Palestine, without which we might have never had the Graal literature, the romances of chivalry, or the secret treasures of the disdainful East brought to the intellectual marts and houses of exchange in the restless, roving, ever-curious kingdoms of the West—kingdoms in travail towards their puberty. There is (d)—and of five things to be enumerated, I count this the head and crown—there is the higher life of sanctity and its annals at the Graal period, as the outcome of which the West went to the East, carrying what it believed to be the missing talent of gold, without which, as the standard of all values, all other talents were either debased or spurious. It was the age of a thousand reflections, at centuries sometimes of distance, from Dionysius, Augustine, and the first great lights of Christendom; it was the age of Hugo de Saint Victor, of Bernard, of Bonaventura; it was the age which Thomas of Aquinas had taken up as plastic matter in his hands, and he shaped the mind of the world after the image and the likeness of his own mind in the high places of the schools; it was the age of many doctors, who would have known in their heart of hearts what was the real message of the Graal literature, and where its key was to be sought. There is in fine (e) my fifth branch, but this is the sects of the period, because

more than one division of the Christian world was quaking and working towards the emancipation which begins by departing from orthodox doctrine in official religion, but seeing that it begins wrongly and takes turnings which are the fatalities of true direction, so it ends far from God. As to all this, it is needful to say at this moment, because it is almost from the beginning, that the Books of the Holy Graal are among the most catholic of literature, and that reformations have nothing therein. I say, therefore, that the vessels are many but the good is one, of which Galahad beheld the vision.

