

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 20]

BOOK NINE SECRET TRADITION IN CHRISTIAN TIMES

[continues]

CHAPTER EIGHT THE ANALOGIES OF MASONRY

Section A. THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BUILDING GUILD

The interpretation of doctrine is good, but the thing which is essential is life, and thereafter those measures of experience which are proper to the degree of life. In like manner, there is the study of the symbolism which is outside doctrine but gives evidence of its inward sense; herein, as I believe, there are the keys of many sanctuaries, or at least of many gates leading to the holy places; but again it is a certain quality of life—and this only—which sheds light upon symbolism, or by which there is an entrance effected beyond the threshold or artificial and corporate part of secret knowledge and much more therefore into the Holy of Holies. It is in this sense that it is said in the old Scriptures: “He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

As regards the keys and the secrets, it is necessary also that we should distinguish between life and its records. The latter remain as examples, as traces, as evidences, and no one should presume to affirm that they are not of high value. It is, however, after their own manner, and although the bodies of the dead may be embalmed, though they may be laid under all consecrations in the places of rest, and though there is a certain very true and very high manner in which we should look for their glorious resurrection, they remain dead bodies until the Word shall pass above them, crying: "Let these bones live."

It is especially over the place and importance of certain literatures which contain a hidden meaning, and over certain unmanifested confraternities which communicate mysteries other than political in their complexion, that the memorials of the past sometimes prove to be as lavender laid among linen—fragrant, as it may perhaps be, but dead as the past which has buried them. So long, for example, as our great, authorised scholarship—holding, though it does, all warrants of textual research—has recourse only to pre-Christian Celtic records for an explanation of the Graal and its literature, so long it will have nothing to give us but the dry bones of things antecedent in semi-savage folk-lore, and not the essence which is alive. Again, while other experts in research seek among the trade guilds of the Middle Ages for the sources of that which is termed Masonry, they will find nothing that will communicate to them either life or the life of life. Of the latter it should be added that scholarship is not in search, and at its sudden manifestation the old students might be perplexed, and that certainly. I am writing, however, for those who in literature and in secret association would look indifferently for some signs of that quest which they are themselves pursuing—I mean, the Divine Quest. To these I can say plainly that out of the mere things of genealogy there is nothing that can

rise again. It is only under high light and guidance that the gift of interpretation, acknowledging all antecedents which have been demonstrated in the historical order, can relegate them to their proper sphere, and can say at need to others, as they have said long since to themselves:

“Seek not the living among the dead; this has risen; it is not here.”

I have bracketed for the moment the external history of the Holy Graal with that of Freemasonry, because although the analogy between them is of one kind only it is an analogy of great importance. As a time came when the old Celtic folk-tales were taken over in a Christian and indeed in a mystic interest, as it is only subsequently to this acquisition that the literature of the Holy Graal can be said properly to exist, so also came that hour when the mystery—such as it was—of the old building guild was assumed by another mystery, as a consequence of which it was re-expressed with a different intention, and it is thus, and so only, that, as a shadow of things beyond it, there came into being the association which we understand as symbolical Masonry. So far as we can regard it under the aspect of a succeeding or co-incident witness, the epoch of Kabalism was prolonged by the scholiasts of the Zohar, until that period when the next witness was beginning to emerge. After this manner I return to my initial statement that the gift of interpretation is good, but that which is essential is life. It is only the spirit of life which can account, in whatever form it was manifested, for the assumption either of the romance-literature or the particular craft. Without it we have indeed interpretations, as we have also hypotheses of origin, but they are devoid of true roots. As a species of extra-illustration in the first case, there have been various hypotheses put forward which are neither countenanced by the records of the past nor characterised by a gift of

understanding; while in the second case we have had simply the romance of archæology or that alternative gift which fills gaps in history by arbitrary suppositions masqued thinly in the guise of fact. Official authorities may be sometimes short of sight, as they are, outside their horizon, but these unaccredited intermediaries have brought their subjects into something approaching disdain, though a sense of justice inclines me to add that creators of wild hypothesis, with all their distracted material, sometimes make shots in the dark which come nearer to the true goal than the more sober skill which aims only in one direction, but at what happens to be a false object.

The historical side of Masonry has at this day its expositors and students who are characterised by the same patient and untiring spirit which supports other branches of research. They have done valuable work in the past and again will do so in the future, but at present all zeal is held in suspension by the exhaustion of materials—I speak here of the things which are or would be of living and high importance, not of those which are subsidiary or accidental. These too serve their purpose, but they have little or no office in the larger issues; they keep green the spirit of inquiry, which takes into its field the things that signify little and so keeps its hands on the plough. It is better for that spirit to investigate at need the memorials of local lodges than to perish of enforced inanition. It is excusable also, and in a sense it is even good, to exaggerate in one's mind the importance of such tasks, to make much of the little till the great comes in our way, and then to make more of that. But some things—and these vital—which exceed the sphere understood as that of research, pass out of sight in this manner, because, excepting for very gifted, very keen—may I say?—illuminated minds, a dry stick in the hand, though it has no probability of blooming like Aaron's rod, is for some

practical purposes more convenient than a live sapling at the top of an inaccessible hill. This is rather the position of those things out of sight which I have at the moment mentioned; the lesser memorials and their aspects tend to keep them where they are—in remote and unnoticed distances. It is not my design to impeach the historical sense—to which all exaltations and crowns!—but there is a dual difficulty in the path of the perfect term, for the heart of imagination—and those orders—is inhibited by this sense, while imagination, in the excess of its enthusiasm, takes the heart out of history and sets in its place I know not what spirit of fantasy. Between these gulfs on either side of the prudent way, to be an historian is hard.

For myself—if I may be permitted to say so—I present the first consideration of the Holy Graal from a mystic standpoint, which, so far as I am aware, is founded on the requisite knowledge of every existing text. It is such knowledge or its result that enables me to take the *via prudentiæ* which I have mentioned, and to find that, accepting most statements made by official scholarship with any show of evidence, all the important points remain in my hands unaffected. In exactly the same way we can afford—and that gladly—to let the Masonic authorities prosecute their search for still earlier records of the building guilds, while in the absence of fresh materials we can sympathise with their sorrow and aspiration. If things much more archaic than have been so far found should in fine reward their vigilance, it will be all honour to their industry, but it will be also small concern of ours. Let us make a ceremonial obeisance before anything of this kind which may yet transpire, as we do—and also gladly—before the records of Mary's Chapel. I know beforehand the best that can be said about those which are possibly to come, as I know of those which are among us. They will be, as these others are, excellent and valuable within their own degree,

but they will not signify beyond it, and they will not serve any purpose which I can claim to cherish in common with those to whom my appeal is made herein. The Elohim may have formed Adam of the dust of the earth, but it is useless to question that dust concerning man who was created male and female, as the sign of life and its perpetuity. It is useless equally to question the old craft guild concerning symbolical Masonry, since it was not by a natural development that the one was transformed into the other; the seeds of the transformation were brought from very far away, or, to express it more correctly, the craft, as we have it, is not an example of growth after the ordinary kind but of an exceedingly curious grafting. The ground of contention is not that things of handicraft could never have developed by possibility into allegory and symbolism, but that they could not, as the result of that process, have produced the synthesis and summary of all past initiation which we find in the symbolical degrees. Now, it is at the point of grafting, or taking over, and this because of the results which I have just specified, that we, as transcendentalists or mystics, become concerned—and then only—in Masonry.

For the better illustration of my purpose let me now make a short distinction concerning three classes: (1) There are those who have a love for the minima of instituted mystery; who, if they are carefully sifted, would be found to attach some importance to the possession in common with B and C of certain titles, signs and passwords which are unknown to X and Y; (2) there are those who believe, and this in all honesty, that morality is enhanced when expressed, let us say, in parables; when materialised by analogical representation; when decorated by a ceremonial pageant; (3) there are, in fine, those who are looking for the real things, among whom we ask to be inscribed—at least as the lovers of truth, if we cannot with the same boldness

demand to be classed among those who love God. This lesser—or is it an equivalent?—nomenclature we require on the faith that our certain criteria enable us at least to know in what directions, and under what circumstances, it is useless to go in search of real things.

It will be agreed that the first class does not call for our serious attention; they are children, with full licence to take all joy in their play. The second class is entitled to a measure of our respect, for they are at least on the side of the natural goodness, and they recognise in their own mode that it is not exactly in a position to stand alone. At the same time they mistake a means for an end, and they do not know where to turn for the only efficacious consecrations; so that these also signify only in the lesser degree. I have indicated already that it is to the third class that all my thesis is addressed; its members are in a position to appreciate the historical aspects at their proper value, giving to this natural Cæsar all that belongs to Cæsar, yet confessing to some great reservations, which are not less than the things that concern God.

Speaking therefore in the interests of this class, and in terms which they will understand, there is a sharp alternative as follows: Masonry is either consanguineous by the root-meaning of its symbols and legends with schools of real experience; either it shows forth the one thing about which we have been in labour from the beginning, or it returns in the last resource into the category of the Worshipful Company of Vintners, of Cardmakers, of Fishmongers, and so forth. These are admirable institutions, and to be free of them, which is not easy, is no less than a civic distinction. So also are the friendly societies, in their way, excellent, including that Order of Buffaloes which, perhaps because it is late in its series, is termed antediluvian; but if we are incorporated by these it

is for much the same reason that we may be members of a Ratepayers' Association, namely, for benefit and protection in common. These are good reasons, but it is not on account of eternal life that they move us in a given direction.

Eternal Life—initiates, companions and brethren of all the sodalities!—I know well that from the mere reference there will follow the irresistible question: What is there in Masonry, or in any of the allied Orders, which can justify us in suggesting that they might or could be taken up in conjunction with a quest after eternal life? Now, the most pertinent questions are those which have replied to themselves already in the mind of the speaker, and, in this case, the persons who would ask might answer: Masonry is obviously the remanent of a trade guild, which once had its trade secrets and covenanted those whom it received to divulge nothing in respect of its mystery to any who were outside the particular craft of building. They would not conclude at this point, but we may intervene for a moment with an observation on our own part. Assume that, so far as it has proceeded, this is a correct answer, and what then follows? It is not now a building guild; it has no longer any trade secrets; there is perhaps no class of society which would be more utterly discourseled by the suggestion that it should design edifices, or should even dig foundations and lay bricks. To this extent therefore, as the inheritors of a building guild, the Order is apparently stultified. It has as little part in its antecedents and precursors as had the Christ of the fourth gospel in the coming Prince of this world. The proper answer of symbolical Freemasonry as to the operative art might well be: In me it hath not anything.

Those even who are acquainted merely with the rituals of craft Masonry—and they may be numerous enough outside the ranks of the brotherhood—will here intervene and say,

in continuation of that answer which I have so far given in part: That is true, or at least in a certain sense; but the old craft guild became symbolised, and its instruments, and ritual procedure, were taken over—since, you emphasise the term—by the genius of allegory, so that things which were originally physical were exalted into the moral order, and thus they remain till to-day, as the rites, teachings and documents prove indubitably. This is estimable and convincing in its way; it so happens, however, that an appeal of the kind is going to prove too much; and yet it is by such a clear issue that we shall reach one term of our subject.

## Section B. MASONRY AND MORAL SCIENCE

I must put my first point somewhat roughly and crudely, with an apology for the frankness which it involves; decoration is here impossible, and on account of so much that will yet remain to say after, I believe that I shall be exonerated in the end. The ethical position is then, so far as Masonry is concerned, a sincere attempt—and this simply—to effect a sanctification of things which of necessity and essentially are obvious in moral teachings. No one challenges these teachings, and in the world about us no one cares anything. It cannot be less than regrettable if any person should join either one or another confraternity with the idea of improving his ethical position, not because the design is anything except highly laudable, but because his most proper incentives are in himself and his daily life. No association has anything to tell him which he does not know already, and this from his earliest childhood. If I may speak my whole mind, after having followed many highways and byways, I should say that his best and only necessary guides are the official religions, the gate of which is morality, as I have striven to make plain elsewhere. It is they that provide the spirit and reason

which—unless he is called to go further, and that journey will be further within them—should actuate his conduct, just as the laws of his country take charge of the letter thereof, and see that it shall be constructed after their manner and not according to his own.

From this view it is impossible to derogate, and it is difficult, in respect of it, to qualify; but there is one matter over which misconception may be avoided. Let it be understood therefore that I do not take exception to the ethical value of Masonic or the other laws—in those matters which belong to the conduct of life—because it is so obviously identical with the written or unwritten law of all civilised conscience; but I affirm that a knowledge which is possessed independently by all, which is mainly derived from unassisted lights of Nature, which no one disputes seriously, which is withal so simple that there is no difficulty in teaching it directly, which in fine has been taught us in our catechisms, even at the knees of our mothers—I affirm that this knowledge does not require an allegorical and ceremonial system of considerable complexity to explain or enforce it. There is above all no evident warrant for secrecy and mystery in the plain basis of individual and social morality. It must be added that, on the evidence of their own history, the associations included by my category have not succeeded in developing a more perfect moral man than has any other system of ethical discipline which is now at work in the world. They do not therefore possess a more powerful instrument than are other instruments with which we may be acquainted independently. When it is said that a Mason, for example, who abides scrupulously by the rule of his Order, cannot fail to be a good man, such a statement may be accepted without reserve; but since the laws of Masonry are simply the expression of an universal ethical standard, as much may be declared of any person, initiated or not initiated,

who elects to guide his life by the recognised code of morality and goodwill, more especially as the element of esprit de corps scarcely enters into questions of this nature.

A certain severity will be read into these strictures, more especially as the majority of Masons have never supposed that their association could offer a higher light than that of good conduct in exaltation, and I ought therefore to add that if this were really the limit of its horizon, so far as they are concerned, the craft as such is—in one sense—amply justified. That which is desirable for them, that which for them is the term and aim of goodness may not only be their strong incentive but a necessity in the lesser degree. Moreover, on broader grounds it is no matter of pretence, for it has never, except in some spurious high grades, which are its burden and not its possession, offered more than it can give. It is not, therefore, as it was described by De Quincey, the great imposture of the modern world; and if it be an error of enthusiasm to put forward an ideal of natural goodness in the guise of a mystery of knowledge, one can only wish that the effect had been to make that ideal an actuality over the whole world.

All this notwithstanding, its success or failure along these lines could be scarcely a special concern of ours, who know of ways as excellent after its own kind and of better ways beyond them. I return therefore to my previous proposition—that Masonry can interest us so far only as it enshrines something more than an ethical doctrine and instruction. This other thing is not, however, by way of additamentum, but by way of essence. The recognition of such an essence will enable us to understand more clearly some of the lesser processes, or at least to tolerate them more patiently, as first stages in a history of development which have also the heights as their term. I may alienate the

sympathies of some of my readers, seeing that there are so many listeners, but the explanation of this last point lies to my mind in the fact that the *raison d'être* of all natural goodness must be sought in the law of grace. So also it remains that the churches are still the accredited guides because grace has its channels therein, or so at least till we transmute the official beliefs into direct experience and thus enter not into that which is apart from them, but that which is their wider consciousness. In the meantime, all that is innocent, all that is blameless, all that is of fair repute makes in fine for goodness; and if that goodness is natural in the first degree, it has also a mode of dissolution into the goodness which transcends Nature. If therefore the laws of brotherly love are maintained and promoted in a lodge of Masons, as they certainly are, it is all honour to Masonry, and so much towards the reign of peace on earth. But it is not less true that it is easy, and very easy, to reach those limits beyond which it has scarcely entered into the heart of Masonry to conceive—by which I mean as it is so far understood in the lodges; as it is to be judged by its literature; and as, outside all personal initiation, we may know it in the life of its members. It is at this point that some who are on higher quests than those of conduct must part with it, leaving their benedictions behind them; or that they must find therein, after all the horizon of ethics has been at last traversed, some region beyond the ordinary ken which may prove the land of their desire. Beyond the seven bands which comprise the spectrum of the corporal works of mercy, there are other rays of light, and in Masonry also there are rays beyond the violet. We may glean something concerning them from its history, but we must seek above all in its symbolism and in the proper meaning of its legends. To conclude as to this part, Masonry either belongs to the secret tradition or it is for us made void.

## Section C. A THEORY OF HERMETIC INTERFERENCE

Having given an example of the manner in which symbolical Masonry explains, as if almost on its own part, how the old craft guild was taken over and transformed, and—although it is by no means suggested that Mary's Chapel and Canongate Kilwinning should burn their earliest records—having seen that the surface explanation is characterised by great insufficiency, I will now show another side of the same subject, prior to which it is assumed that even if craft Masonry may be subject to certain errors of enthusiasm, it has always good faith on its side. On the other hand, outside its records and their inferences, and shipped upon the great sea of speculation, I have seldom met with any subject which has produced more explicit falsehood in the manufacture of historical materials than has the question of the origins of Masonry. There is no need to specify the mendacious legends of some of the high degrees, for they carry their proper seals and marks upon their mere surface. Let us rather take for our illustration one great name in the literature of the craft, for I suppose that there is none more respected in its own country than is that of J. M. Ragon among the Masons of France. I believe that, on questions of historical fact, his authority has been regarded as almost final. He appears indeed as a sober and careful recorder, though it is obvious that he had several strong prejudgments interleaving his notes of researches, and these would, in any case, make his impartiality doubtful. It must, however, be said that between his materials, some of which must have come to him already tinkered, and his peculiar construction of facts, it is almost pure incautiousness to take anything that he says unverified. He is at the same time the one writer in modern times—that is to say, in and about the year 1853—who has spoken with the most unhesitating voice on the origin of symbolical Masonry outside any natural

development of the old craft mystery. In order that I may do no unconscious injustice, I will put his thesis as nearly as possible in his own words.

“Philosophical Masonry,” he says, “which neither in fact nor in name had any existence previously, was conceived and embodied in three rituals, in the year 1646, by Elias Ashmole, who rediscovered antique initiation, as Mesmer rediscovered magnetism” (Orthodoxie Maconnique, ). “It is from this primitive source that the Masonic world has drawn that light which illuminates its labours” (ibid). In the same year, being that which saw the reception of Ashmole into the old building guild, a society of Rosicrucians, formed on the plan of Bacon’s New Atlantis, assembled at Freemason’s Hall, London. Ashmole and the other brethren of the Rose-Cross, seeing that speculative Masons already exceeded the diminishing remnant of operative members, concluded that the time had come to abrogate the old form of reception and to substitute a written method of initiation, based upon the Ancient Mysteries, and especially those of Egypt and Greece. “The first grade was composed, substantially as we now have it”. It received the approbation of the initiates, and the grade of Fellow-Craft was devised in 1648, being followed by the Grade of Master a short time subsequently. The specific object of Ashmole was to regenerate, under the veil of architecture, the mysteries of ancient Indian and Egyptian initiation and to provide the new association with a bond of union, fraternity, perfection, equality and science, grounded upon the laws of Nature and the love of humanity (ibid). The learned alchemist codified all the oral traditions; they assumed a form and body; and this was the true and proper beginning of Freemasonry, as we now have it (ibid).

It will be seen that I have not overestimated the force and finality of these statements; it would appear almost

incredible that they could be a pure invention of Ragon, or a mere fable which he took over from some earlier source that cannot now be identified; yet this is the case actually, and outside the bare fact that Ashmole was received into the old craft guild, as he records in a few cold and detached lines of his private diary, there is no particle of evidence to support it. That it were otherwise I could well desire, for I have said that the craft was acquired, and that which took it over knew well enough the purport of the Ancient Mysteries, or, under all its veils and subterfuges, we could never have had the legend of the Chief Degree, nor the equally memorable closing which is attached thereto. But the bodies of tradition, which may coincide, and that closely—which may reflect on one another—which may independently testify to each other—are not derived from one another, and the Alchemists, as such, did not invent Masonry. I do not propose to go over the ground which I have traversed in some previous writings and in particular to recite the conclusions of my Studies in Mysticism as to spiritual rebirth in connection with Masonic Doctrine and Symbolism. That herein lies the true understanding of the Craft Degrees, I am entirely certain, and it is to this point that the grades lead up from the beginning. That the mysteries which we call ancient—though I think that in some form they are always in the world—were concerned with no other subject, I am not less certain. Outside all offices of Masonry there are derivations of the Rosy Cross which, although at a great distance, testify concerning the same doctrine and the same high experience; the old records of the brotherhood also testify; and as there is at least one school of alchemical literature which has inwritten the secret life of the soul under the veil of metallic transmutation, there would be no cause for surprise if we could trace the interference of one or other of the Hermetic fraternities in the transformation of the building guild into symbolical Freemasonry. But the

evidence of fact is wanting, either by the way of record or otherwise; while as regards the change in itself, this is much too general in its character to show the hand of an individual school. We must be content therefore with the voice of the grades themselves, with the legends and the symbolism which they involve.

#### Section D. ONE KEY TO THE SANCTUARY

It should be understood that I am speaking at the present moment only of the craft degrees. I have every reason to know that the high grades do not deserve the unqualified condemnation with which they have been set aside by writers like Ragon and by certain expositors of the German school of Masonic thought. Several of them are great rites which embody important mystic teaching, and without some of them I regard the craft degrees as offering, mystically speaking, an unfinished experience. Those, however, who are familiar with the craft rituals—about which I do not intend to speak otherwise than by assuming such knowledge—will be in a position to realise how far they can be said to embody an ethical doctrine, except as side-issues of their mystery. There is, of course, a very plain inculcation of certain obvious virtues, but it is all so slight, and it is all so obvious, that to speak of it as an ethical system seems to magnify the subject out of all due proportion. On the other hand, we do find certain provinces of knowledge recommended to the study of the candidate at one stage of his advancement. We find also certain illustrations of a great mystery of building, certain references to a secret which has been lost, and a great legend concerning the destruction of a master of knowledge who took away with him that secret, and except under very deep veils, outside all craft Masonry, it has not been since recovered. As I have quoted Ragon in a connection which was necessarily unfavourable, let me now

cite him in a different sense. He has said that when we find in Masonry and in some other secret ways of the past a reference to building—whether of temples, palaces, or towns—what is intended is that there was a manifestation of doctrine; in other words, there was an ordered communication of mysteries. As to the great majority of instances, I believe in this as little as I believe that Troy town was a solar mythos; but in respect of craft Masonry it is the one note of illumination in Ragon's great wild of speculation and discursion on the degrees, high and otherwise, of the fraternity. We may be quite certain that those who transformed the building guild did not intend to put forward an historical thesis. The change which took place presupposes such a spiritualisation of the traditional temple that it passes into the world of symbolism, becoming itself a House of Doctrine. If, apart from the question of mystical death and rebirth, which I have set aside from consideration in this paper, we are to look anywhere for another clue, it is in the amazing inference which follows from the craft legend concerning the stultification of the House of Doctrine before its erection was finished. Those who are familiar with the rituals will understand exactly what I mean, and I give this as the key by which any one who is properly qualified, and who chooses, may really open one of the secret sanctuaries. We know that the Master was asked one little question, and that for one little answer which he declined to make the traditional founder of doctrine came to an end of violence; the mysteries which he reserved perished in his person, and although it has never been noticed so far by any Masonic writer in the living world, it follows therefrom that the Great Symbolical Temple was not finished according to the original plans. It is for this reason that symbolically, if not actually, the True Temple still remains to be erected. Meanwhile, in Masonry, as in other institutions, we rest content as we can with certain conventional proxies in

which we suppose, by a precarious hypothesis, which has, however, a profound meaning imbedded, that some analogy inheres. It is understood that two kings who represented at one time the royal houses of official Grace and Nature knew the canonical answer to the question, supposing that this had been put under the due warrants, but it is to be inferred that it was the verbal formula and not the ground-plan of the mystic building. In any case it remained *Sacramentum Regis*, the Secret of the King, and it follows, still speaking symbolically, that all Masonry derives not from a lodge of Masters but from that of an inferior grade. The missing formula was a word of life, and the *locum tenens*, by a contradistinctive analogy, is a word of death. It is for this reason that the whole corporate fraternity undertakes a Quest which is in rigid correspondence with that of the Round Table, but they move in the opposite direction to that in which the Mysteries repose. It is the most mystical of all inquests, for it is the history of our human life. But there is an Orient from on high which in fine rises on the soul; the soul turns in that light and moves thenceforward in the true and one direction.

It is possible to express what follows from these facts in terms of comparative simplicity, for even as Moses came down from the mountain of God with a veil upon the face of him, so have I been speaking thus far to the mixed assembly of my readers under the veil of a careful reservation, because these things are not to be discussed in public without changing the voice. Let me say now more openly, since this is permitted, that the ideal of the True Temple is in our hearts, and it is there that we rebuild it. We do this daily by all the aspirations of our nature, but for want of the lost designs we have not been able to externalise it. No doubt we have not led the life which entitles us to know of the doctrine; we feel that it is implied and latent in all the roots of our being; and we seem to die

with it on our lips. It speaks in our dreams but it uses an unknown language, and if heart utters it to heart, it is only in oracles. But we have conceived enough regarding it to be aware that the Spiritual Temple is a House not made with hands. And so neither Masonry nor any other one of the great instituted Mysteries has designed a rebuilding of material holy places. The rites of initiation may deal—as they do certainly—in parables and in allegories; they may present—and they do also—their particular forms of thought in the guise of a legend of yesterday, but they are really the legends of to-morrow, the expressed heart of expectation and not a retrospective review. But if this be the case—as it is indeed beyond challenge—what part have we otherwise in Masonry, seeing that we have come out of Jewry as others came out of Egypt? If this, I say, be the case, what manner of House was that which was planned of old in wisdom and was afterwards finished as it best could be, because treason fell upon the keeper, because, in the absence of preparation and title, there had been an attempt to take the Kingdom of Heaven by violence? Let us seek our first illustrative answer from an episode of the Law which was once promulgated in Israel. Moses the prophet came down in his glory from Mount Sinai bringing with him the Tables of the Law, but he found his rebellious people unqualified for the high knowledge, and before the face of them he broke those tables. Afterwards he gave them indeed certain commandments, but I do not doubt that they were the shadows of the others only—the code of unruly children, not of the elected truly. The world was not worthy. And the second example is that which we know already—that the Graal was taken away, that something was missing thereafter from the House of Quest, that again the world was not worthy. The three stories are therefore one story, and the same thing is everywhere. It is so much everywhere that the knowledge which remained with Moses was not withdrawn utterly by him—according to the

tradition of Israel—when he went up the mountain in fine, when no man living followed him, when he did not return ever more. It has been held always in Jewry that there were certain elders who received the secret deposit and transmitted it in their turn in secret, so that it was perpetuated from generation to generation till it became known to the world at large, but only in an imperfect form, about the middle period of the Christian centuries. The original Zohar is reported by a paradox to have been a sufficient load for twelve camels, and the extant Zohar is on its own showing a substitute. The correspondence in Graal literature is the disparting of the Hallows among certain holy hermits and the removal of the Sacred Vessel to that place of which Perceval should know surely and with all speed.

That which was made void, according to the great craft legend, was a non-Christian House of Doctrine. The step beyond this is to show that there is a parallel in Masonry concerning Christian doctrine, but it is found in high degrees and in those which are militantly Christian. If I were asked to speak frankly, I should civil it a concealed legend of Templar vengeance. It is an old story in the high grades that the murder of Jacques de Molai was destined to be avenged heavily, and one section of criticism has concluded that this was effected ultimately by the decapitation of Louis the Sixteenth; but this is romance of Faerie. Whether the supposed vengeance came otherwise to anything I am not prepared to say, but I can show that the secret plan was more deeply laid, though it may have been actuated by far different motives than inhere usually in the idea of vengeance. The plan is not illustrated by any legend of murder or by anything that, remotely or approximately, can suggest a vendetta; but in one Masonic grade which, by the hypothesis, is the last transformation of the Templars, the fact is shown forth by the silent

eloquence of symbolism. As in the craft degrees we learn how the vital secret was taken away, so here the rite sets before us a picture of all Christendom, personified by the flower of its chivalry, standing guard, amidst the adjuncts of pomp and ceremony, over a vacant sepulchre—the shrine from which a God has departed. Could anything signify more profoundly the bereavement and widowhood of the Christian House of Doctrine? Could anything indicate more pregnantly the presence of a sub-surface design among the old Knights Templars, supposing that this grade were really, at some far distance, descended therefrom? Would it not seem like a challenge by the way of evasion, saying to the modern world: “Do you suppose, in your fondness, that about those hallows of the past our intention was ever centralised except to conceal it?”

Our next step takes us to a grade which is, comparatively speaking, obscure, though it is still worked in England. It is one the position and claim of which is a little difficult to determine, whether as to origin or history. On the surface its similarity to the eighteenth degree of Rose Croix has caused many persons to repudiate it as a mere copy. The better view is, however, to infer that both rites originated from a common prototype, and I may mention here that there are not only several variants of the eighteenth degree incorporated by other systems, but there have also been Rosicrucian degrees current from time to time in Masonry which have very slight correspondence with the grade supereminent of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. This question apart, the particular chivalrous and Masonic Order is rendered important to our present purpose because it gives the symbolical counterpart by alternative of that intimation which is conveyed in the analogous grade. The latter represents a particular state of the assumed case at the period of the Crusades, the former at an epoch which—on account of several historical

confusions, having an appearance of design—is scarcely possible to determine. In any event it dissolves at a certain stage into yet another degree, and between the successive points of the two rituals the candidate is brought to a period when all earthly Houses of Doctrine have given place to the high spiritual House of Eternal Wisdom. As a preliminary to this, the externalised House of Doctrine, represented by the Holy Sepulchre, is made subject to a simple visitation, with the result that it is found empty, and those who look therein are told in a veiled manner that in such a place it is useless to go in quest of lost secrets, because the Divine Warden thereof has risen and gone away. As the candidate—and this of necessity—is left always in the position of Satan after his lectures at Salamanca, that is to say, with the shadow instead of the substance, so here the chivalry of the sepulchre has to be content with what it has—with the rumour of the resurrection constructed into glad tidings, though it remains that the place of the Hallows is now an empty place.

Our last step takes us again to the literature of the Holy Graal, which depicts a House of Doctrine, like the temples, towns and palaces of which we have been speaking previously. It shows how that House was in the first place visited by sin and sorrow; how secondly it was made void, the secret things thereto belonging being transferred therefrom. Symbolism has sometimes the way of sparing nothing, and probably the makers of the legend intended only—as some expressly say—to show how the realm of Logres had become unworthy of the most holy things; but the House of the Doctrine is involved in the common ruin.

The question which now supervenes is one which will occur spontaneously to all those who have followed this account. Is it intended to suggest—shall I say?—that the secret of

Masonry is anti-Jewish and anti-Christian, or, to put it better, that the interests which took over the building guild had either never entered into those holy places of the past or had come forth therefrom? The answer is a decisive negative. It follows from all the legends, all the symbolism, or that part at least which is other than accidental, and in fine from all the rituals of Masonry, that those who set forth the widowhood of the House of Doctrine spoke not from without it but from within; that they looked for the return of that which, for the time, had been taken away; that when they speak to us of what was lost to Jewry, they were never more assured of the wisdom which once dwelt in Israel; that when they mourn over the Holy Sepulchre, they were never more certain that what has been removed is alive; and as all the degrees end in a substituted restoration it is also certain that thither where the truth and beauty had been taken they looked also to go. In other words, it is the intimation of the secret schools that somewhere in time and the world there is that which can confer upon the candidate a real as well as a symbolical experience. And this is the identical message of the Graal literature; it speaks too from within the official House of Christian Doctrine concerning that which once inhered therein and is now in the state of withdrawal or profound latency; but it offers all honour and devotion to the substituted sanctuary which remains, as Masonry offers it in the higher understanding both to Jew and Christian. Here therefore is no enemy setting to at the work of destruction, but here rather are the rumours and voices as if of Unknown Superiors, like a power—which makes for righteousness—between the seat of Peter and the seat of the chief Patriarch, as if something were guiding and consoling all the keepers of the keys, but dissuading them at the same time from the opening of certain doors till that which has been lost is at length restored to the sanctuaries. It is in this sense only that we shall ever get to understand

the inner Mystery of the Holy Graal, the Mystery of the Craft Degrees, and of the great, disordered cohort of things from near and far—reflections, rumours, replicæ and morganatic descents from older Mysteries—which make up the cloud of witnesses in the high degrees. The work, not indeed of the same hands but of many at the same work, is therefore everywhere, the traces of the same high intention, the evidence—not less strong because it is not declared openly—of masters, who are also our brothers, watching haply over the quests of humanity and shaping them, at proper seasons, to the true ends.

I conclude therefore (1) that Masonry is herein referred to its true place and is saved otherwise from the category of vain observances that are consecrated by good intention, because it leads us back, after many travellings, to the one subject; (2) that it is an index-finger pointing to other rites, to pure and exalted ceremonies, which—somewhat shadowy, somewhat dubious, yet distinguishable as to their purpose—remain among the records of the past, not without suggestions that, even at this day, the Mysteries have not died utterly.

I have made it plain already that in so far as there is mystic purpose or hidden doctrine in the Graal literature it is at most an echo from afar—a rumour, a legend which had fallen into the hands of romancers. It is as if Sir Walter Montbeliard, the patron of Robert de Borron, being by the hypothesis a Templar, had told a strange story to the poet of things which he also had heard from afar concerning the Sons of the Valley; it is as if Guiot de Provence, having seen a transcript from Toledo, had compared it with some Templar records belonging to the house of Anjou. These are not the directions of research, but they stand for more likely ways, and I put forward as so many materials of assistance, so many traces of the same implicits

perpetuated through several centuries—(a) the Sacramental Mystery of Alchemy as corresponding to the Eucharistic Mystery of the Holy Graal; (b) the mystical pageant of Kabalism as analogical to the Graal pageant; (c) certain quests in Masonry as synonymous with the Graal Quest. The conclusion is that from the middle of the twelfth century, and so forward, there has been always a witness in the world that the greatest and the highest among the holy things have been represented by a certain substitution within the official churches. The churches have not been made void; they are still “those holy fields”; but they bear the same relation to the sacred mystery behind them that Sinai and Horeb, Tabor and Carmel, Gethsemane and Calvary, bear to the official churches. Remember that the highest office in no sense makes void the second best among any offices that are inferior. The Supernatural Graal is without prejudice to the instituted sacrament, even as the transliterations and complexities of Kabalistic interpretation reduce nothing in the literal word.

## CHAPTER NINE THE HALLOWS OF THE GRAAL MYSTERY REDISCOVERED IN THE TALISMANS OF THE TAROT

To restate the fact that the canonical Hallows of the Graal legend are the Cup, the Lance, the Sword and the Dish will seem almost impertinent at this stage; the least versed of my readers will regard it as a weary reiteration, for he and they all are in plenary possession of whatever need be said upon the subject. I must specify the bare fact, this notwithstanding, because of what follows hereafter. And it may seem to arise from the repetition if, further, I recall to their minds—and my memory—one experience which comes to us all, and startles us when it does come, revealing the fund of unobservance to which we must confess by necessity. When any of us have been studying

exhaustively—as we think—a given subject and are surfeited in our familiarity therewith, it may happen that we alight unawares on something which had escaped us utterly. It may be through the random remark of a stranger, through an apparently detached sentence in a forgotten or unknown book, but the well of other waters is opened and we see the whole thing under a new aspect. On the surface this illustrates the difficulty with which we notice anything that is ever so little outside our special groove; but there are times when it seems to have a deeper root, and we realise in our hearts that anything may serve as a pretext to open another horizon—“a flower, a leaf, the ocean” may touch and kindle “the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound.” So falls the “spark from heaven.” Now, as an example to the purpose in hand, I wonder how many critical works have been written on the Holy Graal, and yet it has occurred to no one that its Hallows, under a slight modification, may be somewhere else in the world than in those old books of romance. I might have shown that their bases are in modern high grades of Masonry, but I can understand how this has been missed, and my default means that I have not attached undue importance to the fact. But they are to be found also in the most unexpected of all places, outside the grades of literature, and they have existed there from what would be termed masonically time immemorial. They are in the antecedents of our playing-cards—that is to say, in the old Talismans of the Tarot. These are things which, in a sense, are almost of worldwide knowledge, which have interested innumerable people, which still constitute, as they have constituted for generations and centuries, the most prolific form of divination and the vagrant art of fortune-telling. We know nothing concerning their origin and of their distribution little enough. I trust that I am least disposed of any one to assume the antiquity of doubtful documents or to predate traditions on the basis of their uncertain origin. I leave to

those whom it may concern the history of playing-cards and their precedents, this so-called Book of Thoth, nor do I need to recite, even shortly, what has been assumed regarding it, because one class of scholarship which has dealt more particularly with the question of historical antiquity in these matters is that precisely which lies under most suspicion on the ground of its enthusiasm. In particular the measures on the side of speculation are pressed down and running over with every kind of folly and extravagance. The uttermost of all hazards is expressed in the language of certitude, even as J. M. Ragon expressed the hazard of a root-connection between Elias Ashmole and the institution of speculative Masonry. There is another order of learning which has confined itself to the simple archæology of the subject with sober and valuable results; by such people I shall be challenged scarcely if I say that there are traces of the Tarot cards in the fourteenth century, prior to which they are not of necessity non-existent because, like the Graal itself, they are lost to sight.

Archæology is, however, its own term, so that usually there is nothing beyond it; and therefore, having so far distinguished between two schools, I must say that there is yet another side which might rivet attention generally if it were possible to speak fully concerning it.

I record in the first place (a) that the correspondence of certain Tarot symbols with those of the Holy Graal stands rather in the light of a discovery without a consequence which I can pretend to develop here; and (b) the reason will, I think, be evident because this side which I have mentioned reposes in certain secret schools now existing in Europe. In these the Talismans of the Tarot have been pressed into the service of a logical, constructed system of symbolism with results that are very curious. It might or might not be useless to speak about the system in public,

supposing that this were possible, but I think that there are considerations involved which would be almost an unknown language to people who have not had their training in a particular school of thought. Those who know regard the results as important, yet those who see the importance have not in most cases any idea of the term. As I must now say that this term belongs under one of its aspects to the domain of occultism, it should be understood that my strictures on wild Tarot speculations ought to carry a certain weight because those speculations are of the occult order. If any of my readers should wish to look a little further into a strange and problematical subject, they may be recommended to consult one book called *Le Tarot des Bohémiens*, issued by the French school of philosophical Martinism. I can tell them for their consolation that from root to branch it is a tissue of errors, because this school has not the true reading, while specific alternative readings in other academies are also wrong. Except in purely archæological aspects, the inquirer can, however, get nothing better than the content of this work, and if he misses the major sacraments he will find a limited quantity of fortune-telling rubbish therein which is altogether diverting and may be mastered with a little trouble.

It must be explained that the old sheaf of oracles consists of seventy-eight cards, of which fifty-six are the equivalents of ordinary playing-cards, plus four knights; and the remaining twenty-two are pictorial keys, the symbolical nature of which is seen on their surface, though it must be understood that hereon all of them are conventional and many are grotesque, as if they were coarse allegories. The keys are allocated by interpretation in various orders to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and herefrom as a root many instituted analogies with Kabbalism have been devised by the divergent schools which have devoted their attention to the pictures. The Sephirotic attributions which have

been obtained in this way are especially remarkable. I offer my assurance, as one who has more to lose than to gain by making the statement, that certain secret schools have developed their scheme of symbolic interpretation to a very high point by the allocation of these cards according to a system which is not known outside them.

Having made this explanation, my next point is to state that the four palmary symbols of the Tarot are—

1. The Cup, corresponding to Hearts in the common signs of cards.
2. The Wand, corresponding to Diamonds in the common signs of cards.
3. The Sword, corresponding to Spades in the common signs of cards.
4. The Pentacle, corresponding to Clubs in the common signs of cards.

The Wand is alternately a sceptre in the Tarot descriptions, but its proper alternative in the symbolism is a spear or lance, the misdescribed Diamond in the modern suit being obviously the head of the weapon. In respect of the Pentacle that which is depicted under this name answers to a dish, usually after the outline of a four-leaved shamrock, or alternatively of a circle. In either case the emblem is also misdescribed under the term Pentacle, which must have five angles or flanges. With these modifications, which are in no sense of an arbitrary kind, the Tarot suits are actually the Graal Hallows.

And now, to move one step forward, being the last point to which I can take the subject: The place of the Cup in the extension of the symbolism under the light of all its analogies, corresponds to the place of spiritual life; to the rest of knowledge; to the receptacle of the graces which

are above and to the channel of their communication to things which are below; but this is the equivalent hypothesis of the arch-natural Eucharist. In a word, it is the world not manifested, and this is the world of adeptship, attained by sanctity. In so far therefore as it can be said in the open day, hereof is the message of the Secret Tradition in Christian times—as it remains among the guardians thereof—on the subject of the Graal Mystery. So also under a certain transfiguration does the Graal still appear in the Hidden Sanctuaries.

But now in conclusion generally as to all the schools of symbolism, successive or coincident: it follows from the considerations which I have developed in what approaches an exhaustive manner that we are confronted by two theses, from the first of which it follows that the Mystery of Divine Attainment is of that order which passes into experience, while dubiously and elusively its traces are met with even in the modern world, though it does not say “Come quickly” to the majority of aspirants. From the second it follows that the great secret—at least so far as its specific declaration and visible existence are concerned—has passed into abeyance in the external sanctuaries. I can scarcely conceive of a clearer issue established by way of contrast. Several accredited scholars have recognised the evidences of secret doctrine in the Graal literature, more especially in respect of the Eucharist, but some of them have been disposed to account for its presence by a familiarity with obscure apocryphal gospels. This is a source in legend, and of sources in the experiences of sanctity or of perpetuated secret doctrine they knew little enough. In particular they did not dream that such perpetuation could have taken place except in heretical schools. They appreciated the concealment of sects which carried their lives in danger, but not the concealment of the sanctuary. There is, however, the vision of the Third

Heaven, about which it is not lawful to speak, the reason being that it exceeds expression, and utterance is therefore only by way of similitude and approximation. The secret school for which I look and of which I recognise the existence did not differ in doctrine from the external ways of salvation, but it opened out the infinite world which lies behind the manifest life of teaching—that world which was recognised by Saint Augustine when he said—as we have seen—that the definition of Three Persons subsisting in one God was not an expression which satisfied the mind, but that some kind of expression is necessary. This school never came forward with improvements on doctrine, with proposals to reduce doctrine, or with new opinions on the Eucharist. It carried the implicits of religious teaching to their final issue; the implicits were Catholic and the issue was also Catholic.

Therefore so it remains to this day, while we in our spiritual isolation are conscious of loss everywhere.

The great rites are celebrated, the high offices continue, the moving liturgical formulæ are recited from day to day and year after year; we pass hurriedly through the crowded streets, over the quiet countrysides; we pause by solitary seas. The veiled voices signify the Presence, yet the Master is taken away, and we know not where they have laid Him. The great legends tell us that He has been assumed into Heaven because of the evil times, or that He is in a place of concealment, or that He is not seen so openly. Prohibited, spoliated and extirpated with fire and sword, the memory of the dead sects of Southern France can offer us at their highest only the lips of the noble lady Esclairmonde communicating the osculum fraternitatis [“fraternal kiss”]—consolamentum of all things saddest—through the flames of the auto-da-fé. One Masonic chivalry consents to protect us from the insidious attacks of the infidel if we visit the

holy fields, but it is confessed that the sepulchre is empty and we know that the worst danger is from the infidel who is within. A later and more obscure chivalry, with a vainer office of observance, keeps ritual guard over the shadow of a sacred legend, we asking the daughters of Zion whether there is any greater desolation. It pledges us to maintain the Sepulchre when it is agreed that the Master is not there, and we continue to say with our lips: Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam [“And one holy catholic and apostolic church”], with a certain unconscious relief that the word Credo stands far away in the symbol. Saddest and proudest of all, the great craft legends of Masonry tell us that until that which from time immemorial has been lost in the secret places is at length restored to the mysteries, the true temple can only be built in the heart. The Kabalistic sages are also waiting for the word, that there may be mercy on every side, and the stress and terror of the centuries is because Adonai has been substituted for Jehovah in the true form thereof. It is only the higher side of alchemy which, without faltering, has continued to point the path of attainment, speaking of no change, no substitution therein—telling us of the one matter, the one vessel, the one way of perfection, yet also saying that except the Divine Guidance lead us in the path of illumination, no man shall acquire the most hidden of all secrets without a Master, which is another mode of expressing the same thing. I suppose that there is no more unvarying witness continued through the ages, amidst all which we have felt, as we still feel, that only a small change in the axis of inclination would transform the world of greatest inhibition into that of the greatest grace. It is as if we were in the position of Perceval, according to the High History—as if we had failed only on account of “one little question.” But we do not know what it is, or rather we know it only in its external and substituted forms. We go on, therefore, sadly enough and slowly, yet in a sense we

are haunted men, with a voice saying ever and again in our ears: "Ask, and ye shall receive"; search your heart, for the true question is within and the answer thereof— A sad and strange enchantment has fallen even over the animal world, and all the gentle creatures with kind eyes are waiting with us for the close of the adventurous times, the term of enchantment in Logres, and the unspelling quest. Of these three things, two are of the Order of Mercy and one is of the High Order of the Union. All this is not to say that the high offices fail, that the great conventions are abrogated, that the glorious sense of chivalry towards our second mother in those sodalities which are external—but yet in that order are some intellectual and some also spiritual—that this sense is not of the highest counsel. But a time comes when the "glory to God in the highest," having been declared sufficiently without, is expressed more perfectly within, and we know in fine that this glory is to be revealed.

The same story of loss is therefore everywhere, but it is never told twice in the same way. Now it is a despoiled sanctuary; now a withdrawn sacramental mystery; now the abandonment of a great military and religious order; now the age-long frustration of the greatest building plan which was ever conceived; now the Lost Word of Kabalism; now the vacancy of the most holy of all sepulchres. But the sanctuary is sacred, the king is to return, the Order of Chivalry has not really died; at some undeclared time, and under some unknown circumstances, the Word which gives the key to some treasure-house of the building plan will be restored in full, and meanwhile the quest is continued for ever; the true Word will also be restored to Israel, and so from age to age goes on the great story of divine expectation. Meanwhile the Christian mystics say: "Take no thought for the morrow, because it is here and now"; and to this grand antiphon the response of the Hermetic Mystery

is: “Even so, in the place of wisdom there is still the Stone of the Wise.”

