

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 23]

BOOK TEN THE SECRET CHURCH

[continues]

CHAPTER SIX THE TRADITION OF SAINT JOHN THE
DIVINE AND OTHER TRACES OF A HIGHER MIND OF
THE CHURCH

I have set aside in succession every school of tradition in Christian times as an exclusive mouthpiece of the tradition in its root-matter; the most catholic of all is the literature of spiritual alchemy, and it occupies a very high place, being especially a strong contrast to the scheme of symbolical Masonry, which is a legend of loss only. I think that the alchemists had the matter of the whole work, by which I mean the Scriptural Mystery of being born again of water and the Holy Spirit, and the fact—if I am right in the fact—that they did not give under their particular veils an accredited exposition of the Great Experiment, according to the canons of the Art and the tradition which reposed in its Wardens, is positive proof to myself that it was never put into official language. I am not less certain that Eckartshausen approximated only, and that if he had been

fully qualified he would have dwelt more expressly upon the Eucharist. Loupoukine at his highest is an interesting and beloved ghost expressing a remote annunciation dictated perhaps by a strong sentiment rather than certain knowledge in the heart or even in the head. We remain therefore with all the counters in our hands, and perhaps some day they will be rearranged in yet another manner as the time approaches when nihil tam occultum erit quod non revelabitur. Meanwhile, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that several minds will have raised already the question whether there are no traces in the annals of the Church itself. On the assurance that the Great Experiment does not set the Church aside, surely outside the official records and first-hand memorials of sanctity there may be some vestiges of the secret school in the East or the West. When Origen denied in all truth and sincerity that Christian doctrine was a secret system, he made haste to determine the subsistence of an esoteric part which was not declared to the multitude, and he justified it not only by a reference to the more secret side of Pythagorean teaching, but by the secrecy attaching to all the Mysteries. The question therefore arises whether the disciplina arcani, which is usually referred to the Eucharist, because to all else it must be foreign, may not be imbedded in that tradition of Saint John the Divine of which we have traces certainly. I set aside without any hesitation the obvious objection that the Fourth Gospel has no Eucharistic memorial, and its inference, that for Saint John less than for the other evangelists did the flesh profit anything. The great contention of the Gospel is that the Word became flesh, and if it fails to recite the high office and ceremonial of the Last Supper, it announces in the words of the Master (a) that this is a "meat which endureth unto everlasting life;" (b) that Christ is "the living bread which came down from heaven;" and (c) that "he that eateth thereof shall live for ever." In other words, the doctrine concerning the

communication of Divine Substance is taught more explicitly by Saint John than by the rest of the evangelists.

The traditions concerning the beloved disciple are numerous in the Christian Church, and on the thaumaturgic side they issue from the evasive intimation of his gospel that he was to remain on earth until the Second Coming of the Saviour. From his ordeal of martyrdom he therefore came forth alive, according to his legend, and so he remained, in the opinion of Saint Augustine, resting as one asleep in his grave at Ephesus. Saint Cyril also testifies that he never died. But it is Ephrem, I believe, who offers an explicit account of Saint John's interment by his own will at the hands of his disciple, after giving them the last instructions on the mysteries of faith. The grave was dug in his presence; he entered therein; it was sealed by the disciples, who returned as commanded on the day following, opened the sepulchre and found only the grave-clothes. This story represents an alternative legend of Saint John's translation to heaven in the flesh of his body. From the place where he had rested so briefly an oil or manna was collected and was used for healing diseases.

That which did actually survive was the tradition of his secret knowledge, the implicit of which is that he who reposed on the breast of his Master did not arise and go forth without an intimate participation in the Mysteries of the Sacred Heart. Again the tradition has many forms; and seeing that Saint Isidore of Seville in the sixth century tells how Saint John not only broke and rejoined certain precious stones but converted the branches of a tree into golden boughs and changed pebbles into jewels, reconverting both at the end; seeing also that Adam de Saint Victor commemorated one of these miracles in a prose of his period:

“Cum gemmarum partes fractas Solidasset,” etcetera.

[“With broken pieces of jewels It would be solid,”]

it is not surprising that alchemists who had heard of these things adopted the belief that he was a great master of metallic transmutation—by which I speak of the material side and not of the spiritual work.

There is no need to say that this is fantasy of its period, and it is cited only as such. The legends and inventions—but it should be understood that there are many others—are the mere rumours, and so being are less even than intimations, concerning a traditional influence exercised by Saint John, of which, as I have said, there are traces. But it has proved impossible in the past for researches into a concealed side of Christian doctrine to be actuated by another expectation than the discovery of obscure heresy, and it is important that we on our part should again make it plain to ourselves that there is nothing to our purpose in any devious ways of doctrinal thought, nor do those who pursue them, under the banner of the Graal and its quest, carry any antecedent warrant in the likelihood of things. It is said, for example, that there is a chain of evidence passing through Spain and the Knights Templars to Saint John the Divine, so onward to the Essenes, after whom there is the further East. This is the pleasing fable of a few who look to India as the asylum-in-chief of all the veridic mysteries; but it has been found more convenient to state the fact of the evidence than to produce it. Much further back in the past the Abbé Grégoire affirmed that our Saviour placed His disciples under the authority of Saint John, who never quitted the East and from whom certain secret teachings were handed on to his successors, the Johannine Christians, leading after many centuries to the institution of the Templars. Again, the evidence is wanting in respect of the last statement.

The general hypothesis has found some favour with the critics of the Graal literature, and Simrock in particular, as we have seen, put forward the tradition of the Sacred Vessel as the root-matter of alleged Templar secrets. He also suggested a connection between the chivalry and the Essenes as the repositories of a concealed science confided by Jesus to His disciples and, in fine, by them communicated to Templar priests.

We hear otherwise of another unbroken chain of tradition hallowed by age, an esoteric oral tradition, revealing “the sacred lore of primæval times,” intimations concerning which are to be found in the Johannine Apocalypse. Some have referred it to the antecedents of the Antichrist myth, to which allusions are supposed in one of Saint Paul’s epistles; but there is a wider horizon within which the whole subject calls to be regarded anew. Several of the speculative directions in which light has been sought thereon are difficult and—so long as we do not exaggerate the evidential possibilities—unnecessary to set aside. The Essenian consanguinities suggest themselves in connection with that which could have been only a contemplative school, the possible repository of the mystic experience which in early times lay behind external Christianity. Thebaid solitaries, children of the valley, so-called penitents of the desert, Eckartshausen, Lopoukine, sons of the Resurrection, and others too many for simple recitation here, are offered to the mind in their order as a possible channel of tradition from age into age. We can only say in our restraint that as there were so many sects with variations in doctrine, it is not unreasonable to suppose that there may have been one in seclusion having a difference, by the way of extension, concerning that spiritual practice which is called the science of the saints.

When I have spoken of the Johannine tradition in previous sections, I must not be understood as referring to a specific external community, such as that which has been popularly described in the past as Johannine Christians. The information concerning them, and reproduced by one writer from another, is based upon exceedingly imperfect research, but among some of my readers, who have not entered these paths, it may remain in some vague sense. It supposed an obscure sect which we are enabled to separate at once from all that we should ourselves understand by a connection with the disciple whom Jesus loved. Their patriarchs or pontiffs are said to have assumed the title of Christ, as Parsifal, with a higher warrant, took that of Presbyter Johannes; but the Christ of their spurious legend is neither King nor Lord, and with an irony all unconscious he is disqualified from the beginning by their own tinkered gospel, which substitutes simple illegitimacy for the virginal and supernatural conception of the Holy Canon. Virus of this kind suggests inoculation from the Sepher Toldosh Jeshu rather than from any Christian—as, for example, a Gnostic—sect.

It must be confessed that the traditional sources concerning Saint John are chiefly the apocryphal texts, and they lie, one and all, under the suspicion of heresy. Leucius—sometimes called pseudo-Luke—who is said to have been a disciple of Marcion, wrote, among other apocrypha, the Acts of John, the particulars of which claim to be drawn from the apostle himself. Now there is, I suppose, no question that fabulatores famosi of this kind were not unlike Master Blihis; if for some things they depended on their invention, they drew much more from floating tradition, and it is obvious on every consideration that round no evangelist and no apostle were legends so likely to collect as the apocalyptic seer of Patmos. We shall therefore deal cautiously with the criticism which suggests

that fathers of the Church like Tertullian drew their mythical accounts of Saint John from heretical texts, for it is equally and more likely that the two schools drew from a source in common. The perpetual virginity of Saint John, which entitled his body to translation or assumption, on the ground that virginity is not subject to death, is a case in point. The Catholic Church did not derive the counsels of perfection from Encratites or Manichees, and Saint Jerome, who tells this story, would not owe it to pseudo-Luke, though Abdias—a very different narrator—in all probability did.

Speaking generally of the Johannine traditions, these represent the apostle as a saint of contemplation who transmitted directly from Christ, and as it is clear from his own gospel that he regarded the Eucharist, interpreted after a spiritual manner, as the condition of Divine Vision, we shall be antecedently prepared for the fact that there is an Eucharistic tradition concerning him. It is said that when preparing for translation he took bread, blessed, broke it and gave it to his disciples, exactly after the manner of his Master, but what he asked with uplifted eyes was that each of the brethren might be worthy of the Eucharist of the Lord and that, in such case, his portion might be also with theirs. It does not signify that, according to orthodox canons, this comes from a dubious source in doctrine the Eucharistic connection was not devised by that source, and—though it scarcely signifies for my purpose—I suppose—and it is interesting to note—that herein is the first recorded instance of communion in one kind.

The last asylum of Saint John was Ephesus, which was a great house of theosophical speculations, and though the pivot and centre of the fourth gospel is that the Word was made flesh, that composite and wonderful text bears all the marks of being written in a Gnostic atmosphere. From that

which it was intended to denounce, it has been thought to derive something in the higher part of the old eclectic dream, and as the personal influence of the writer must have been great, so also it is reasonable to think that it did not pass with him utterly away. The notion that he communicated something, and that this something remained, is so recurring, and amidst so many divided interests, that it is hard to reject it as a fiction; it is hard even to say that no Knight Templar sojourning in the East did never, in late centuries, hear strange tidings. Apart from this last, too curious dream, it will be seen that here is slender ground on which to affirm that the Secret Tradition connected more closely with the Church side of Christianity at a Johannine point of contact; but it is good to remember that not only has the last word not been said on the subject, but that we have listened here and there only to a strange rumour. I conclude that he who reported the deepest and most sacramental words which are on record from the mouth of Christ: "My flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed" is our first historical witness to the Eucharistic side of the Secret Tradition in Christian times. There are strange indications of sources behind the Gospel according to Saint John. Behind the memorials of the Gnosis there are also indications of a stage when there was no separation as yet of orthodox and heretical schools, but rather an union in the highest direct experience, as if mysteries were celebrated, and at a stage of these there was the presence of the Master. But the presence of the Master was the term of experience in the Graal. I leave therefore the Johannine tradition, its possible perpetuation all secretly within the Church and its possible westward transition, as a quest so far unfinished for want of materials.

CHAPTER SEVEN THE CONCLUSION OF THIS HOLY QUEST

And now, seeing that the end of all is upon the very threshold, that the keepers of the paths of quest have sounded the horns for our retirement, and that the hour has also struck when we must turn down the glass of vision, it remains as a last duty to gather up certain threads which have been left under a covenant to recur, and these in their turn involve other considerations which must be treated shortly. The result of necessity is an attempt to codify things which, for the most part, are detached and even disjointed, yet some of them will be found to overlap under any mode of grouping.

Preliminary and General— Setting aside its sacramental part, the literature, as literature, is Celtic in its elements and atmosphere; but this is the body and the environment in which the spirit of the mystery reposes. The Graal itself is in the root a reliquary legend. This legend was taken over and connected with rumours of secret doctrine concerning the Eucharist and the priesthood, being part of a tradition handed down within the Church, but unconsciously to the Church at large. It passed into romance and incorporated many folk-lore elements which seemed adaptable to its purpose. They are naturally its hindrance. In the hands of the Northern French writers, it got further away from the Celtic element as it drew towards its term. We cannot therefore explain the French cycles and much less the German Graal literature by means of the Celtic Church. The secret doctrine reflected into the literature abode in a secret school. Out of this school—but not in an official sense—there developed at later periods spiritual alchemy, symbolical craft Masonry, certain Rosicrucian institutions and certain Christian high grades of Masonic complexion, as successive veils. It was a school of Christian mystics, and it was Latin for a long time on its external side. It is of necessity catholic at heart. The doctrine concerning it is that there are High Princes of the

Spirit whose experiences surpass not only those of devout souls but of many of the great saints. Their time was not “about half-an-hour,” but an experience in perpetuity. The school said that the way of the Church was the true way and not a good one only, but also that the heights are still the heights. It comes about thus that the message of the Secret Words and the Super-Apostolical Succession is that until we enter the paths of sanctity and reach a defined term therein, we have only the shadow of the real things; but that shadow is a sacred reflection. On the surface the claim concerning them sounds like a word written against the Church, but it is really a call to go forward. Those who are satisfied with the literal sense of sacred things are not defrauded thereby, but receive ministry therein. Yet the second sense remains, which is brought from very far away, because it draws from the sanctuary of the soul. Where there is no consciousness of this sense, and of the deep implicits of doctrine, the Graal is said to be removed, yet all things remain and are waiting to manifest. The mystery which the school celebrated corresponded, as I have said, to a Mass of the Beatific Vision. It is obvious that this was celebrated by the Hermit in the Book of the Holy Graal. He carried its signs on his person; but they were not the badge, symbol, or token of an instituted Order. The prologue to this book is the nearest that we are likely to get to the expressed side of the mystery. The event in history which is parallel to the removal of the Graal is the entrance of the spirit of the world into the instituted House of Doctrine. The Mass of the Graal is recoverable, but it is understood that it is celebrated only in the Secret Church and that Church is within. When the priest enters the Sanctuary he returns into himself by contemplation and approaches the altar which is within. He says: Introibo [“I will enter”]. When he utters the words which are spirit and life, the Lord Christ comes down and communicates to him in the heart; or, alternatively, he is taken up into the Third

Heaven and enjoys the dilucid contemplation. But I do not put it in this way because I am satisfied with the expression: only we must have some expression.

The Veil of the Eucharist— It has been said that, as the supreme mystery of the Christian Church, the Eucharist was the last ceremony of initiation and constituted the final enlightenment of the neophyte. The terms of expression may here be exaggerated, but those who were stewards of the Christian Mystery had in many cases received the Mysteries of the Gentiles and may have adapted some of their procedure. The rumour which came into romance—and this in the natural manner that official religion permeated romance everywhere—was a mystery of the Eucharist, and in the minds of external piety it translated itself into memorials of the Divine Body and the Precious Blood. It would be idle to suggest that any higher school of religion was concerned with the veneration of relics. The desire was to behold in the Eucharist that which the faithful believed to repose in the Eucharist. Beyond the knowledge of the outside world there is another knowledge, but it abides in concealed sources which are outside all reach of the senses, and in simple Eucharistic terms it is called the communication of Christ. In the deeper speculation behind the Epiclesis clause, it is the Descent of the Comforter within. The missing events and motives behind Super-Apostolical Succession are the Great Event and the Divine Reason. He who has performed the one rigorously scientific experiment and has opened the Holy Place does go in and celebrate his Mass in virtue of a warrant which is not necessarily that of the official priesthood, but it does not set it aside or compete therewith. I say that this interpretation remains donec de medio fiat, but it will not be taken out of the way. Herein is the experiment which I believe to be performed even now in the world, because the great mysteries of experience do

not die. I have found that the Graal romances in their proper understanding—but chiefly because of their implicits—are a great introduction to the whole great subject. They testify after many ways. The Graal is a guide of the distressed in the Lesser Chronicles. They represent that Mystery which is implied in the Hidden Voice of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Their Secret Words were words of power, because that which rules above rules also below. As such the Lesser Chronicles did not derive from Fécamp, which—like the Greater Chronicles—put forward the wonder-side of transubstantiation. But the Book of the Holy Graal, which cuts short the discourse between Christ and Joseph in the tower and so suppresses all reference to the communication of Secret Words, can derive no more than a reflection from this source, and even that little may be, alternatively, drawn from general tradition. I should state in this connection that the insufficiency of transubstantiation is on the external side mainly; on the spiritual side the arch-natural body is communicated to the human body and the Divine Life to the human spiritual part. This is the deeper aspect not only of the Blessed Sacrament but of the Bowl of Plenty. Every text of the French cycles is confused and discounselled by this extraneous element, for which reason I have called it foreign, for example, to the Romance of Lancelot. I do not mean that the feeding properties are never introduced therein, but that the writer was dubious as to their proper place and ministry. The meats and the spicery now follow the dove—as in the case of Lancelot's visit to the Castle and that of Sir Bors—but now follow the Vessel—as in that of Gawain. The Longer Prose Perceval hints, as we have seen, at a secret of the sacrament which was held in utter reserve. It tells us by inference that it was the revelation of Christ in His own person, behind which there is another mystery. Only in the texts of transubstantiation do we find these deep allusions. The Conte del Graal has not heard of

them; the Didot Perceval is aware of an undeclared mystery, but has no license to speak; the German Parsifal has chiefly an office of concealed mercy amidst suffering, and hereof is Heinrich a shadow. Yet all of them, in their several manners, are haunted from far away: Joseph the Second began in priesthood and therein ends the Perceval of Manessier, as if he too discerned that those who attained the Great Mystery were thereby Pontifices maximi. I think also that the Fish in the Metrical Joseph has curious sacramental intimations; it is the sign of spiritual sustenance, of Christ's presence among His faithful, and hence of the Eucharist. In the Book of the Holy Graal it only duplicates one part of a canonical miracle. The master-key of the Mystery is most surely provided by the Quest of Galahad, where, after the magical marriage of High Art and Nature has taken place in transubstantiation, the questing knight bows his head, utters his consummatum est, and is dissolved. I conclude that the Christian and Graal Mystery of the Eucharist was a veil which could at need be parted by warranted hands, and that behind it there was then found the path which leads to the Union. The knowledge of that path arose within the Church but led behind it, the Church remaining the gate by which man enters into salvation. The romance-literature of the Graal worked towards the consciousness of the path, reaching its term in the last texts of quest.

The French and German Percevals— The notion of an exalted hero is given in the Longer Prose Perceval, but he does not attain the highest vision, as Galahad does. The return of the Graal to the Castle after his induction is only like the return of a Reliquary. By the evidence of the text itself, he saw less than Arthur. Wolfram's Parsifal is indeed a dream of Eden, for that which is likened to the glory of the celestial height is truly of the supernal Paradise. It is to be understood—without exhausting the subject—that the

poet's religious claim depends from the genealogy of the Stone, which is that whereby we are enabled to make the best of both worlds through a participation in the world which signifies in the absolute degree. I have said that Wolfram, Chrétien and Heinrich are agreed over the most important of their concerns, for the wonders of the Feeding Dish in the Parsifal are only a gross exaggeration of miraculous sustenance by the Host. The point which remains for our solution is after what manner did Wolfram and his source draw from the Secret Tradition. The answer is that their Graal is the Stone of Knowledge, and the hidden meaning behind the non-removal of the Graal is the perpetuity of the Secret Tradition somewhere in the world. The Mystic Question itself is only, and can be, the search after knowledge. The Keeper is in travail therewith—he must communicate, but he must be asked. The sense is that, in the order of human prudence, the tradition is in danger of perishing, and the Keeper must remain, like the Master of a Craft Lodge, till his successor is appointed. The same idea may lie behind the *Questiones Druidicæ*, or tests of proficiency which were put by the Druids to the Bards. The key to the meaning of the Stone of Knowledge—that testimony of main importance which we know to have existed in Guiot—is that the Graal was written in the heavens and remains therein; for I do not doubt that the stars tell the same story. In allegories of this kind the hindrance to attainment inheres in its necessary conditions. The keeper in Heinrich must press Gawain to drink, and the brother of the Rich Fisher must persuade Perceval not to ask questions.

Collectanea Mystica— (a) The Lesser Hallows— The Lance renewed the Graal in some of the legends, but the places of the Hallows are in certain symbolical worlds which are known to the Secret Tradition. The Dish, which, as I have said, signifies little in the romances, has, for the above

reason, aspects of importance in the Tarot. It was never pretended in any Church legend that the Sacred Lance was in England. The Sword of Saint John the Baptist was not a relic of the Celtic or indeed of another Church. The subsidiary Hallows of the Lesser Chronicles therefore arrived later than the Graal in Britain, but we do not know how or why. In the Greater Chronicles many sacred relics were displayed at the ordination of Joseph the Second, and they were evidently brought over in the Ark of the Graal.

(b) The Implicits— Those of the Graal Keepers are of inheritance by genealogical legitimacy, in or out of marriage. This is simply the succession of initiation. Masonry recites the order in the same manner with the same kind of variations. There are three keepers in the Lesser Chronicles, and there are three archetypal Craft Lodges. There are nine keepers in the Greater Chronicles and there are nine Masonic Wardens who preserved the Secret Tradition. (2) Merlin is the sorcery of the sensitive life, which—because of its mixed nature—is of the serpent on one side and of Eve on the other, who is a virgin. The admixture makes therefore for righteousness, and the true son, after having been nurtured therein, is called out of its Egypt; but it makes also for delusion, and when the spirit of the world intervenes all is withdrawn. (3) Moses is the intrusion of heretical Christianity into the Holy Place on the ground that it has the signs. His redemption is promised, but this does not take place, because it is found afterwards that “the end is everywhere,” and the Church itself is not spared. (4) As regards the destruction of the Round Table, with all its chivalry and kinghood, I must register, with some reluctance, that it seems to convey chiefly a very simple and also obvious lesson, being that of the fatality of trespass and the poison instilled into those who partake of the evil fruit; but in so far as in some of the texts it appears predetermined by Merlin, it is not accounted for so simply. I think that it may be left at this point, because we have no

criterion for distinction between the enchanter's prophetic foresight and his formal intent. We should remember, however, (5) that the meaning of the enchantments and adventures is identified by the Quest of Galahad with the prevalence of an evil time and forgetfulness of the great things. It was for much the same reason that, according to the Vulgate Merlin, the Round Table was removed to the Kingdom of Leodegan prior to the coming of Arthur. (6) Sarras was the place of exit on the outward journey, and was thus the point at which the holy things began to manifest in the world; but it was this also on the return journey, when they issued forth in mystery. The transit westward is here of the soul outward. (7) It must be admitted that the Lesser Chronicles are in some sense a failure: they seem to hold up only an imperfect and a partial glass of vision. But they are full testimony to the secrecy of the whole experiment; they are also the most wonderful cycle by way of intimation. Their especial key-phrase is my oft-quoted *exeunt in mysterium*. How profited the Secret Words to the interned Perceval? It is the most ghostly of all suggestions concerning that which is done in the heart.

The Lost Book— I have said that Chrétien must have followed some book which had strange materials. I do not mean that it was an authorised text of Secret Tradition, but that there were many rumours oral and written, and that this was one of the latter. The speculation concerning it is like the warrant of the nine knights—that is to say, we can speculate, but we cannot find out. The alleged document which went before the tradition at large may have been the rumour of the tradition itself. We have seen that the Huth Merlin speaks of a Book of the Sanctuary, as of records continued henceforward, like a Calendar of the Saints; but it is to be understood that this is romance and not a dark allusion. If I must admit speculation on my own part and

suppose that there was any written legend of the Graal per se in 1100, vel circa, I should say that this was a Mass-Book and there is a hypothetical possibility of such a document; but I do not think in my heart that it ever existed. If it did, I have indicated that it was concerned with such a Mass as might have been assumed to follow the Last Supper—when Christ gave Himself visibly, and the priest served like the altar-boy. I conclude that, in or out of such a text, the epochs of the literature are those of origin, manifestation and removal in respect of the Graal. As to the first, it was part of the mystery of the Incarnation; as to the second, there was a manifestation intended, but it did not take place because the world was not worthy; so the third epoch supervened, and the Graal was said to be removed. This is the secret intention, exhibited but not declared.

The Great Experiment— To those who have studied the secret literatures with something of the spirit in themselves by which those literatures are informed, it becomes a matter of assurance that the signs of the Stewards of the Mysteries have never been wanting in the world. The Masonic High Grades suggest that they became Christian, but this is an error of expression: it was the Official Mysteries that became Christian: the Stewards had always known that their Redeemer liveth. Again, therefore, it is not surprising that a time came—and it was in many ways a remarkable time—when the rumours passed into romance. I speak here of the encompassing circle of wisdom which stands round the Great Experiment and not of the things which lie too deep for words. The memorials of that which has never been uttered because it is entombed in manifestation are about us in all our ways, and for ever and ever goes out the yearning of the heart in the presence of these silent witnesses. The genius of romance drew all things from all quarters to serve its purpose, and there is no question that the Longer Prose Perceval and the Quest

of Galahad incorporated some of this yearning; but I refer more especially to the rumours of the Holy Threshold. In this connection it is most important to understand that their makers neither were nor could be the spokesmen of a secret school. They had heard only, and it was but dimly that they grasped what they heard. Otherwise, they would have scarcely put forward the arch-natural side of relics. The office of minstrelsy and romance was to collect traditions, to express the current motive and sentiment. They became the mirror of their period and had therefore their religious side, which was accentuated sometimes, as when abbeys like Fécamp kept a court of song attached to them. A time came, however, when the consciousness of express intention intervened; it is prominent in the Graal cycles, and it accounts for the great process of editing, harmonising and allegorising upon earlier texts. The normal limits of the horizon in romance were not, however, broken up except by the latest quests. These had also their restrictions, as I have tried to show previously, and the complexity of their symbolic machinery has tempted me to add that alchemy—sealed house of darkness as it is—seems in a manner more simple. The vessel, the matter and the fire are the three which give testimony therein on the physical side, and these are one on the spiritual. Its literature had also restrictions, more especially in its use of artificial language to conceal the real sense. It is high commonplace to say that the device is justified when it is dangerous to speak openly because the rulers of the Church or the world are jealous, or when the things which exceed common understanding are proscribed thereby. I say therefore that concealment is justified when it is to hide the Secret of the King.

The Inner House of Doctrine— I have promised to show whether there is commerce or competition between the theory of the Great Experiment and that of the Voided

House, but I believe that it has been made clear abundantly in much that has preceded. The position is indeed simple, for the Great Experiment exists, but it is not remembered in the world at large: it is in this sense that the House is made void. It may well be that those who said it in romance had imagined an instituted House, while those others who said in effect: "Lift up your eyes, for your salvation is both there and here," were aware that the roots of the House are not in this world. The explanation is that the location of the Secret Church is in that ineffable region which lies, behind dogma, in glorious sanctuaries. It is not a repository of relics, and the reliquary is the husk only of the Holy Graal, which is a mystery of the Eucharist in its essence and not a legend of the preservation of the Precious Blood. The location of that Church and the places of the Hallows therein will be understood by saying that it is entered sometimes in an ecstasy through the eastern side of the plainest external sanctuary. It may be thought that on the evidence of the romances it is the Secret Church which itself is made void. But after the departure of the Supreme Mystery, what remains is the official Church. This does not mean that the Graal Castle or Temple signifies the official Church during an age of perfection. It is the inward mystery of doctrine. So long as it remained there, however hard of entrance, there was a way in—as Pausanias tells us that there was a way into the Garden of Venus. It died, however, in the consciousness except of a few faithful witnesses who knew after what manner it was still and is ever possible to lie, like Saint John, on the breast of the Master.

The remembrance of the one thing needful is starred over all the secret literatures. Their maxim is not so much that God encompasses as that God is within; and in virtue hereof they could say in their hearts what they said with their lips so often: *Absque nube pro nobis* ["Away with the

cloud for us”]. I affirm on the authority of research and on other authority and on that which I have seen of the Mysteries and on the high intimations which are communicated to those who seek, that the Great Experiment subsists, that those exist who have pursued it, and that behind the Secret Orders which are good and just and holy, we discern many traces of the Veiled Masters. The term of quest in those orders is the term of the Graal Quest, and the sacraments of procedure are not otherwise therein. The path of the instituted Mysteries, it should be understood, is in no sense the only path, but it is one of the nearest, because the mind is trained therein, firstly, in the sense of possibility, and, secondly, in the direction of consciousness, so that it may be overflowed by the experience of the experiment. It was carried on in the secret schools; but at this day the great instituted Rites are like the Rich King Fisherman, either wounded or in a condition of languishment, and it is either for the same symbolic reason—namely, that few are prepared to come forward and ask the required question—the equivalent of which is to beget Galahad on the daughter of King Pelles—or the consciousness of the Great Experiment has closed down upon the Wardens of the Rites and they stand guard over its memorials only. It has been pursued also in the official Churches, which are permanent witnesses to its root-matter in the world. The two constitute together a great, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which is empowered to say: *Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui* [“The light of your countenance is set upon us”]. But seeing that it is more than all *signatum*, we have to look in the deep places for its hidden virtue. The key which we must take in our hands is that God is everywhere and that He recompenses those who seek Him out. But we do not look to find Him more especially in the Master’s chair of a Craft Lodge or the pulpit of a popular preacher, and hence those who are on the quest of the Veiled Masters will do well to

release themselves from the notion of any corporate fellowship as a *sine qua non*. I say now truly and utterly that the Veiled Master is in the heart of each one of us and the path to his throne is the path to the Secret Church. Some say that the Pearl without Price is here, some that it is there, some that it has been taken into hiding, and some that it is withdrawn into heaven; which things are true and without let or hindrance of my own testimony; wherefore I add that if any one can exclaim truly: *Nunc dimittis, Domine, servum tuum secundum verbum tuum in pace, it is, and this only, quoniam vidit oculus meus salutare tuum* ["Now, Lord, let your servant go in peace according to your word," it is, and this only, "because my eye has seen your salutation"], and he then also has seen the Graal.

If I have not spoken my whole mind on certain aspects and memorials of the Secret Tradition which do now repose in the instituted but veiled sanctuaries, it is because I am conscious of several inherent difficulties, and I remember many covenants. If, therefore, recognising this, some voice in the cloud of listeners should intervene and say: "But again, where are they—the Stewards?"—I should answer, as I could answer only: "I have brought back from a long and long journey those few typical memorials which I have interwoven in this book for the encouragement of some of my kinship, that where I have been they may enter also in their time—supposing that they are called in truth. If they see at the end only the trail of the garments of some who elude them at a distant angle of the vista, they may at least confess with me that Titans have gone before and have cast their shadows behind. To whatever such quest might lead in one case or another, be it understood, and this clearly, that in assuming the legends of the Holy Graal as a sacred and beautiful opportunity to speak of the Eucharist and other divine things connected with and arising therefrom, I have put forward no personal claim. If I have dwelt in the

secret places it has not been to return and testify that no others can enter; and I, least of all, am the authorised spokesman of Stewards behind the veil. But that which it has been given me to do, I have done faithfully, within the measure of my knowledge: I have indicated the stages of reception, or the golden links of the chain, from Christian High Grade, of Masonry to the Craft Grades, from the Rosy Cross to the spiritual alchemists, and from these to the Graal literature. Behind all this I should look assuredly to the East, in the direction of that pure catholic gnosticism which lies like a pearl of great price within the glistening shell of external Christianity, which is not of Marcion or Valentinus, of Cerinthus and all their cohorts, but is the unexpressed mystery of experience in deep wells whence issues no strife of sects.

We know that in its higher grades the spirit of imagination moves through a world not manifest, and this is the world of mystery; it is that also in which many are initiated who are called but not chosen utterly; yet it is that in which the epopt is at last enthroned—that world in which the Graal Castle, Corbenic or Mont Salvatch, the most holy temple and secret sanctuary, are attainable at any point, all points being out of time and place. It is the world of Quest, which is also the world of Attainment. There in fine, at the striking of a certain mystic hour, that translation takes place in which the soul is removed, with the Graal thereto belonging, and it is idle for any one to say that it is shown henceforth so openly. It is there that the offices of all the high degrees meet in the term of their unity, and the great systems also, at which height we understand vitally what now we realise intellectually—that the great translation of alchemy, the passage from kingdom to crown in Kabalism, the journey through Hades to Elysium in the Greek Mysteries and in Dante as their last spokesman, and lastly

the great Quest of Galahad, are the various aspects and symbolical presentations of one subject.

At this stage of the interpretation I shall not need to point out that in the final adjustments even the highest symbols are merely pretexts; they are tokens, "lest we forget"; and this is for the same reason that neither chalice nor paten really impart anything. They are among the great conventions to which the soul confesses on the upward path of its progress, but within their proper offices they are not to be set aside. The explanation is less that they impart as that through them the high graces communicate in proportion to the powers of reception. The soul which has opened up the heights of the undeclared consciousness within partakes as a great vessel of election, while another soul, which is still under seals, may receive nothing.

Independently of corporate connections, the Mystic Quest is the highest of all adventures, the mirror of all knighthood, all institutes of chivalry. And this Quest is also that of the Graal, but written after another manner. The makers of the mighty chronicles said more than they knew that they were saying, but they knew in part and they saw through a glass darkly. We are "full of sad and strange experience," though we have not come to our rest, and for this reason we are in a better position to understand the old books than when they were first drawn into language. Better than they who wrote them in their far past do we now know after what manner the highest things go forth into mystery; but of the gate they knew and of the way also. Chivalry was a mystery of idealism and the Graal a mystery of transfiguration, but when it was removed from this world it was not any further away.

We have, on these considerations, and many others, every cause to be thankful to those learned persons who have

gone before us, taking such lamps as they have been licensed to carry; but in the last resource the term of learning is attained, after which there is only the great light which can be made to enlighten every man who comes into this world. It is that sun which shines in Mont Salvatch, in Sarras, the spiritual city, and in the place of rest which is Avalon. It exhibits the abiding necessity of the sacraments as well as their suspension; it exhibits that priesthood which comes rather by inward grace than by apostolical succession, albeit those who deny the succession are usually far from the grace.

The monks sat in their cells and stalls and scriptoria during the great adventurous times when the rumour of the Holy Graal moved through the world of literature; they dreamed of a chivalry spiritualised and a church of sanctity exalted: so came into being the Longer Prose Perceval, the Quest of Galahad and the Parsifal of Wolfram. Whether in the normal consciousness I know not or in the subconsciousness I know not—God knoweth—that dream of theirs was of the super-concealed sanctuary behind the known chancel and the visible altar. This is the sense of all that which I understand concerning the traces of the Secret Church in the Graal literature. As before, I am not speaking of formal institutions, of esoteric brotherhoods, or incorporations of any kind; it is a question of the direction of consciousness and of its growth in that direction. A man does not leave the external church because he enters into the spiritual Church; Ruysbroeck does not cease to say Mass because he has been in those heights and across those seas of which we hear in his Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage. At the same time his language is not exactly that of the official Church in its earliest or latest encyclical; it is not like that of Saint Irenæus writing against heresies or Pius X. denouncing the spirit of modernism. It is something the same as, if one may say it,

in the brotherhood of Masonry. The craft degrees are the whole summary of Masonry, but there is a certain distinction between him who has taken these only and him who has added thereto the eighteenth degree of Rose Croix, or the still more exalted and now almost secret grade of Knights Beneficent of the Holy City of Jerusalem. Yet the one is a Mason and the other is not more than a Mason, but there are or at least there may be degrees of consciousness in the Mysteries. So also the lay member of any one among the official Churches whose instruction has scarcely exceeded the catechisms of Christian doctrine is not—or need not be at least—less a Christian than he who has studied Summa, but again there are degrees of consciousness in the mystery of the faith.

Now the Secret Tradition in Christian times is the rumour of the Secret Sanctuary, and this tradition has many voices. The voice of spiritual alchemy, succeeding that of the Graal, is the voice of the Graal literature under another veil, but it says that He is there; and after its departure it is known and recorded that many earnest and holy persons beheld the Vessel of Singular Devotion: yet there is something wanting in the official sanctuaries. The voice of the Temple, reflected in its later revival, says that He is risen and gone away. The voice of Masonry says that the old Temple was not built according to the true and original plan. The voice of the Rosy Cross says that in places withdrawn He, being dead, yet testifies. The voice of Saint John on Patmos says that he was given a book to eat, and that in his mouth it was sweet but in his belly it was bitter—because thenceforward he was in travail with the Secret Doctrine. The witness of the Graal literature heard something at a very great distance, and to decorate what they had heard the artists of the literature gathered from the four quarters of romance and legend and folk-lore. As such their reflection is a failure. The witness of alchemical

books chose a worse medium, but they made it serve their purpose more expressly. The voice of Masonry created a great legend to commemorate an universal loss, and testified that the Quest would never end till the speculative Masons found that which was once among them. The Voice of the Rosy Cross said that, having found the body of the Master, the brethren again closed the sepulchre and set their seals thereon, though they also looked for a great resurrection. The voice of Saint John reflected the last message of the Master: "Behold, I come quickly." And all Christendom has resounded since with the anthem: "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus." The Hidden Voice of Christ is in the Secret Literature, and I have therefore written this book as the text-book of a Great Initiation. Meanwhile, the Churches are not made void, but they are in widowhood and desolation, during which time our place is with them, that we may offer them comfort in their sorrow, without being deceived by their distractions. It is certain also that His reflections abide with them. Chrétien may have drawn from an episodic romance of adventure in the possession of the Count of Flanders. Master Blihis, the great maker of fables, may have recited things, with or without consequence, concerning Sanctum Graal. Neither these nor others that could be mentioned are the books concerning the Secret Words of the Eucharist or the text of Secret Ordination. The legends of Welsh saints may tell us of Sacred Hosts coming down from heaven, but the Epiclesis clause, if the Welsh had it, in their book of the Mass, is not the Lost Word which we seek like the Mason. They may tell us also of holy personages who were consecrated by Christ, and the fables may be famous indeed, but they want the motive which fills the Greater Chronicles of the Holy Graal with meaning and suggestions of meaning. Therefore I still hear and listen with all my ears while the voices of many traditions say the same things differently. The Holy Sepulchre is empty; the Tomb of C. R. C. in the House of

the Holy Spirit is sealed up; the Word of Masonry is lost; the Zelator of alchemy now looks in vain for a Master. The traditional book of the Graal, by whatever name of convention we may choose to term it—Liber Gradalis or Sanctum Graal—is not only as much lost as that which was eaten by Saint John, though it might not be so difficult to conjecture the elements in the one as in the other case.

And now to make an end of these pleadings: I have chosen to give some account of the Holy Graal as it was and as it is, that I could lead up to what it might be, that is to say, how it could be realised in high literature, because in other respects some things which might be in the ideal order are those also which are—and God redeems the future as well as the past. As regards therefore the true theory of this mystery, with others of the mystic school, we may hope in the Lord continually, even as one who believes that he will not be confounded unto eternity. Reason has many palaces, but the sovereign peace rules in a single place. Dilated in the mystery of cloud and moisture and moonlight, the Graal appears even now, and that suddenly. It abides in the memory for those who can live in its light, and it is elevated in the light for those who can so keep it in the high spirit of recollection that it has become their guide and their nourishment. For myself it is in virtue of many related dedications that I have allocated a great experiment in literature to a great consanguineous experiment in spiritual life. I have not so much demonstrated the value of a pure hypothesis as elucidated after what manner those who are concerned with the one subject do from all points return triumphantly thereto. As a seeker after the high mysteries, at this last I testify that whosoever shall in any subject offer me daily bread, I will say to him: “But what of the Panis vivus et vitalis? What of the supersubstantial bread?” And if there be any one who deals therein, under what rules soever of any houses of exchange, I will have him know that

if he sells in the open market, even I am a buyer. So therefore the author of this book gives thanks that he has written concerning the romance-pageants and sanctity as of the catholic and eternal secrets of religion. Quod erat demonstrandum [“That was to be demonstrated”]: it is written for those alone who in the silence of the heart and in a sacred suspension of the senses have heard the voice of the Graal.

In the great desolation of Logres I hear also—I hear and I hear—the penitent Knight Lancelot singing his twelve-month Mass. So also till he turns at the Altar saying: *Ite, Missa est*, because the King himself is coming in the morning tide, I will respect all the findings of scholarship concerning quests which are not of the Graal and Cups which contain no sacrament, but I am on the quest of the Graal and, Master of True Life, after all and all and all, it is not so far to Thee. And even Gwalchmai saw it.

The Colophon of this book wishes Godspeed to all whom it may concern on the Great Quest.

