

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 3]

BOOK ONE THE ROOTS OF THE HOUSE OF MEANING

[continues]

CHAPTER FOUR THE LITERATURE OF THE CYCLE

The cycle of the Holy Graal is put into our hands like counters which can be arranged after more than one manner, but that which will obtain reasonably for a specific purpose may not of necessity conform to the chronological order which by other considerations would be recommended to archeological research. It will be pertinent, therefore, to say a few words about the classification which I have adopted for these studies, and this is the more important because at first sight it may seem calculated to incur those strictures on the part of recognised learning which, on the whole, I rather think that I should prefer to disarm. I must in any case justify myself, and towards this, in the first place, it should be indicated that my arrangement depends solely from the indubitable sequence of the texts, as they now stand, and secondly, by an exercise of implicit faith, from several palmary findings of scholarship itself. It follows that the disposition of the

literature which has been adopted for my own purpose is, on the evidence of the texts, a legitimate way in which to treat that literature. There are certain texts which arise out of one another, and it is a matter of logic to group them under their proper sections. Comparatively few documents of the whole cycle have reached us in their original form, even subsequently to that period at which the legends were taken over in a Christian interest, while many of them have been unified and harmonised so that they can stand together in a series. It is the relation which has been thus instituted that I have sought to preserve, because among the questions which are posed for our consideration there is that of the motive which actuated successive writers to create texts in succession which, although in many cases of distinct authorship, are designed to follow from one another; as also to re-edit old texts; and to adjust works to one another with the object of presenting in a long series of narratives the Mystery of the Holy Graal manifested in Britain. The bulk of the texts as they stand represents the acquisition completed and certain intentions exhibited to their highest degree. Hence a disposition which shows this the most plainly is for my object the reasonable grouping of all, that object depending from almost the last state of the literature and differing to this extent from ordinary textual criticism, to which the first state is not only important but vital.

The Graal cycle, as it is understood and as it will be set forth in these pages, belongs chiefly to France and Germany. Within these limits in respect of place and language, there is also a limit of time, for textual criticism has assigned, under specific reserves, the production of the chief works to the fifty years intervening between the year 1170 and the year 1220. As regards the reserves, I need only mention here that the romantic histories of Merlin subsequent to the coronation of Arthur have not so far been

regarded by scholarship as an integral part of the Graal literature, while one later German text has been ignored practically in England. Seeing that within the stated period and perhaps later, many of the texts were subjected, as I have just indicated, to editing and even to re-editing, it seems to follow that approximate dates of composition would be the most precarious of all arrangements for my special design. As regards that course which I have chosen, I have found that the French romances fall into three divisions and that they cannot be classified otherwise. The elaborate analysis of contents which I have prefixed to each division will of itself convey the general scheme, but I must speak of it more expressly in the present case because of the implicits with which we shall be concerned presently.

We may assume, and this is correct probably, that the earliest extant romances of the Holy Graal—the speculative versions which have been supposed in the interests of folk-lore being, of course, set apart—are the first part of the *Conte del Graal* written by Chrétien de Troyes, and the metrical *Joseph of Arimathæa* by Robert de Borron—in the original draft thereof. In the earlier records of criticism the preference was given to the latter, but it is exercised now in respect of the former text.

Besides the folk-lore and non-Christian legends of Peredur and the Bowl of Plenty—which shall be considered in their proper place—there was another class of traditions taken over in the interests of the Holy Graal. That the Arthurian legend had pre-existed in another form is not only shown by the early metrical literature of northern and southern France but by isolated English texts, such as the fifteenth-century *Morte d'Arthur*, which suggest older prototypes that are not now extant. It is shown otherwise by the Welsh *Mabinogion*, which, much or little as they have borrowed in their subsisting form from French sources, point clearly to

indigenous traditions. The North-French romances were refounded in the interest—whatever that was—of the Graal sub-surface design. The most notable example in another sense was perhaps the Merlin cycle, which took over the floating traditions concerning the prophet and enchanter and created two divergent romances, each having the object of connecting Merlin with the Graal. The general process was something after the manner following: (1) Lays innumerable, originally oral but drifting into the written form; (2) the same lays reedited in the Arthurian interest; (3) the Graal mystery at first independent of Arthurian legend, or such at least is the strong inference concerning it; (4) the Graal legend married to Arthurian romance, the connection being at first incidental; (5) the Arthurian tradition after it had been assumed entirely in the interests of the Holy Graal.

I recur, therefore, to my original thesis, that there is one aspect at least in which for my purpose the superior importance resides not in the primordial elements of the literature but in their final and unified form. As a typical example, it is customary to recognise that there was an early state of the Book of the Holy Graal which is not now extant. The text, as we have it, is later than most of the cycle to which it belongs properly, yet it poses as the introduction thereto. Now the early draft may or may not have preceded, chronologically speaking, the corresponding first versions of some of the connecting texts, and in either case when the time came for the whole literature to be harmonised it was and remains entitled to the priority which it claimed, but that priority is in respect of its place in the series and not in respect of time. The re-editing of the romances in the Graal interest must be, however, distinguished carefully from the innumerable alterations which have been made otherwise but to which no ulterior motive can be attributed. There is further no

difficulty in assuming (1) that the passage of folk-lore into Christian symbolical literature may have followed a fixed plan; (2) that when late editing exhibits throughout a number of texts some defined scheme of instituted correlation, there may have been again a design in view, and it is this design which is the concern of my whole research.

The places of the Graal legend, its reflections and its rumours, are France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, England and Wales.

In matters of literature France and England were united during the Anglo-Norman period, and when this period was over England produced nothing except renderings of French texts and one compilation therefrom. Germany had an independent version of the legend derived by its own evidence from a French source which is now unknown. The German cycle therefore differs in important respects from the French cycle; the central figure is a characteristic hero in each, but the central sacred object is different, the subsidiary persons are different in certain cases—or have at least undergone transformation—and, within limits, the purpose is apparently diverse. The Dutch version is comparatively an old compilation from French sources, some of which either cannot be identified or in the hands of the poet who translated them they have passed out of recognition. Italy is represented only by translations from the French and one of these was the work of Rusticien de Pise, who has been idly accredited with the production of sources rather than derivatives of the legend, and this in the Latin tongue. There is also another compilation, the *Tavola Ritonda*, but in both instances more than the names of the MSS. seems unknown to scholars. The Italian cycle is not of importance to any issue of the literature, either directly or otherwise, and so far as familiarity is concerned

it is almost ignored by modern students. The inclusion of Spain in the present schedule of places might seem merely a question of liberality, for the Spanish version of the Graal legend exists only in (1) the inferred allusions of a certain romance of Merlin, printed at Burgos in 1498, and (2) in a romance of Merlin and the Quest of the Holy Graal, printed at Seville in the year 1500. Of the first work only a single copy is known to exist, and no French or English scholar seems to have seen it; the second has so far escaped the attention of scholarship, outside the bare record of its existence. This notwithstanding, according to the German cycle, the source of the legend and its true presentation in at least one department thereof, are to be looked for in Spain, and the first account concerning it was received by a Spanish Jew. Portugal, so far as I am aware, is responsible only for a single printed text, but it represents a French original which is otherwise lost; it is therefore important and it should receive full consideration at a later stage. As regards Wales, it is very difficult and fortunately unnecessary to speak at this initial stage. Of the Graal, as we find it in France, there is no indigenous Welsh literature, but there are certain primeval traditions and bardic remanents which are held to be fundamental elements of the cycle, and more than one of the questing knights are found among the Mabinogion heroes. In the thirteenth century and later, the legend, as we now have it, was carried across the marches, but it is represented only by translations.

For the purpose of the classification which follows, we must set aside for the moment all whatsoever that has come down to us concerning quests, missions and heroes in which the central object known as the Holy Graal does not appear. We shall deal with these fully when we come to the study of the texts severally; we are now dealing generally, and there is nothing to our purpose in the Welsh Peredur or

in the English *Syr Percyvelle*. Whatever its importance to folk-lore, the Welsh *Peredur*, in respect of its literary history, is a tangled skein which it will not repay us to unravel more than is necessary absolutely. It has been compared, and no doubt rightly enough, to the Lay of the Great Fool, but, whether we have regard to his foolishness or to the nature of his mission, *Peredur* never interests and also never signifies. His mission is confined to the extermination of sorceresses, and among these of such sorceresses as those of Gloucester. On the other hand, the English metrical romance is entitled to less consideration except for its claims as literature, and it is only in its speculative attribution to a lost prototype that it has concerned scholarship. It must be understood at the same time that both texts are essential to the literary history of the whole subject from the standpoint of folk-lore. The remaining works may be classified into cycles, according either to affinities of intention or to the seat of their origin, and among these the Northern French texts fall into three divisions, the distribution of two being, within their own lines, a chronological arrangement strictly.

The *Conte del Graal* is allocated properly after the cycle of folk-lore—as it is reflected at a far distance in the non-Graal texts that survive. The fact that the Lesser Chronicles are given a priority of place in respect of the Greater Chronicles does not for that reason mean that all their parts are assumed to be older than all the documents contained in the third division. In the third division itself the chronological arrangement has been abandoned, as it is more important for my purpose to show the codification of the documents by which they have been harmonised into a series rather than to place them in an order of dates which would at best be approximate only and would represent the first drafts rather than the texts as they remain. The divisions are therefore as follows:

A. The Conte del Graal. Let me say, in the first place, that our problems are not the authorship of an individual prose or metrical romance, not even the comparative dates of certain documents as they now stand actually, but whether we, who as mystics have come to know the significance and value of the hidden life of doctrine, can determine by research the extent to which the intimations of such doctrine found in the Graal literature are true or false lights. Now, I suppose that there is no very serious question as to the literary greatness of Chrétien de Troyes, while some of the sequels and alternatives added to his unfinished poem are not perhaps unworthy to rank with his own work; the collection, however, as a whole, offers very little to our purpose. So far as Chrétien himself carried the story, we are not only unable to gather clearly what he intended by the Graal, but why he had adventured so far from his proper path as to plan and even to begin such a story. If he had gone further, as I believe personally, we should have found that the Sacred Vessel, Telesma, or Wonder-Working Palladium carried with it the same legend as it carried for most other writers; but we do not know and it matters less than little, for the Conte del Graal at its best is Nature in the pronaos of the temple testifying that she is properly prepared. If we grant this claim, we know that in Chrétien at least, however she may have been prepared conventionally, she has not been sanctified. The alternative termination of Gerbert carries the story up to a higher level, moving it in the direction of Wolfram's Parsifal, yet not attaining its height. So far as any mystic term is concerned, the great Conte is rather after the manner of a hindrance which calls to be taken out of the way; it is useless for the higher issues, and even for the business of scholarship it seems of late days to have lapsed from its first importance.

The chief additamentum of this cycle is the unprinted metrical Perceval, which is preserved in the library at Berne. The desire of the eyes of students is a certain lost Provençal poem, connected by the hypothesis with Perceval, as to which we shall hear more fully in connection with the German cycle of the Holy Graal.

The Chrétien portion of the Conte del Graal was written not later than 1189, and the most recent views assign it somewhere between that year and 1175. Manessier and Gerbert are believed to have produced their rival conclusions between 1216 and 1225. As regards the Chrétien portion, it has been recognised, and may be called obvious, that it “presupposes an early history.” This being so, it does not seem unreasonable to infer that the first form of the early history was either (a) the first draft of De Borron’s poem, or (b) it corresponded to the book from which De Borron drew and of which, Chrétien notwithstanding, he is probably the most faithful, perhaps even the only representative. On the other hand, if the particular quest does not draw directly or indirectly from the particular history, then my own view is that in the question of date but little can be held to depend from the priority of Chrétien’s poem—which is a quest—or that of De Borron—which is a history. I have therefore no call to indicate a special persuasion. For what it is worth, the inferences from admitted opinion seem to leave the priority of De Borron still tenable in the first form of his poem, and for the rest I hold it as certain that my classification, although a novelty, is justified and even necessary; but exact chronological arrangement, in so tinkered a cycle of literature as that of the Holy Graal, is perhaps scarcely possible, nor is it my concern exactly.

B. The cycle of Robert de Borron, being that which is connected more especially and accurately with his name,

and herein is comprised:

1. The metrical romance of Joseph of Arimathæa, in which we learn the origin, early history and migration of the Graal westward, though it does not show that the Sacred Vessel came actually into Britain.
2. The Lesser Holy Graal, called usually Le Petit Saint Graal. We have here a prose version of the poem by Robert de Borron, which accounts for its missing portions, but the two documents are not entirely coincident.
3. The Early History of Merlin, and, this represents in full another metrical romance of the same authorship but of which the first 500 lines are alone extant.
4. The Didot Perceval, but this text is regarded as a later composition, though it seems to contain some primitive elements of the quest. Its designation is explained by the fact that it was at one time in the possession of M. Firmin Didot, the well-known Parisian bookseller. Its analogies with the poem of Chrétien de Troyes are thought to indicate a common source of knowledge rather than a reflection or derivation from one to another. This romance has been also somewhat generally regarded as the prose version of another lost poem by Robert de Borron. The additamentum of this cycle is the fuller unprinted codex of the Didot Perceval preserved in the library at Modena.

These documents constitute what may be termed the Lesser Histories or Chronicles of the Holy Graal. Their characteristics in common, by which they are grouped into a cycle, are (1) the idea that certain secret and sacramental words were transmitted from apostolic times and were

taken from East to West; (2) the succession of Brons as Keeper of the Holy Graal immediately after Joseph of Arimathæa.

The metrical Joseph may have been written soon after 1170, but the balance of opinion favours the last years of the twelfth century. Criticism supposes that there were two drafts, of which only the second is extant. It was succeeded by the early Merlin. As regards the Didot Perceval, this is known chiefly by a manuscript ascribed to the end of the thirteenth century.

C. The Cycle of the Greater Holy Graal and the Great Quest, comprising:

1. The Saint Graal, that is, The Book of the Holy Graal, or Joseph of Arimathæa, called also the First Branch of the Romances of the Round Table and the Grand Saint Graal. The last designation is due perhaps to its dimensions; but it may be held to deserve the title on higher considerations, as the most important development of the legend in its so-called historical aspects, by which I mean apart from the heroes of the various quests. The work has been widely attributed to Walter Map, sometime archdeacon of Oxford and Chaplain to Henry the Second of England. While the trend of present opinion is to regard it as of unknown authorship, I think that the ascription is not untenderly regarded by scholarship, and recognising, as we must, that evidence is wanting to support the traditional view, no personage of the period is perhaps antecedently more likely. Unfortunately more than one other romance, which seems distinct generically in respect of its style, has received the same attribution. The Greater Holy Graal was intended to create a complete sequence and harmony between those parts of the cycle with

which it was more especially concerned, and the Galahad Quest, as we have it, may represent the form of one document which it intended to harmonise. The alternative is that there was another version of the Quest which arose out of the later Merlin, or that such a version was intended. I believe in fine that my order is true and right.

2. The later Merlin romances, and because the Vulgate Merlin is in certain respects, though not perhaps expressly, a harmony of De Borron's cycle and that of the Book of the Holy Graal, drawing something from both sources, I refer here more especially to the Huth Merlin and the secret archives of the Graal from which it claims to derive. The history of Merlin is taken by the first text up to his final enchantment in the forest of Broceliande, and in particular to that point when the knight Gawain hears the last utterance of the prophet. An analogous term is reached by the Huth Merlin in respect of Bademagus, through a long series of entirely distinct episodes; it should be stated that the references to the Holy Graal are few in both romances, but they are pregnant with meaning.

As an addendum to these branches, there is the late text called The Prophecies of Merlin, which I know only by the printed edition of Rouen. It has wide variations from the texts mentioned previously in so far as it covers their ground, but it has also its Graal references. It has been regarded as a continuation of the early prose Merlin, and in this sense it is alternative to the Vulgate and the Huth texts.

3. The great prose Lancelot, which in spite of its subject-matter is, properly understood, a book of high sanctity,

or it lies at least on the fringe of this description, and towards the close passes therein.

4. The Longer Prose Perceval le Gallois, or High History of the Holy Graal, which offers a term and conclusion of the Graal mystery by way of alternative to or substitute for that of the Galahad quest. It is like a rite which has narrowly escaped perfection; it holds certain keys, but the doors which they open are not doors which give entrance to the greatest mysteries. Herein the king is dead, and with all the claims of Perceval it is a little difficult to say of him: Long live the king! The romance does not harmonise with the other histories of Perceval; it has elements which are particular to itself and the air of an independent creation. It should be added that it draws also from sources to us unknown and has haunting suggestions of familiarity with the source of Wolfram. So far as there has been any critical opinion expressed concerning it in England, it must be said that it has missed the mark.
5. The Quest of the Holy Graal, called also The Last Book of the Round Table, containing the term of the mystery as given in the Chronicle concerning Galahad the haut prince, and this is the quest par excellence, the head and crown of the Graal legend. I know that this statement will be challenged in certain high quarters of special research, but before any one speaks of human interest he should say, or at least in his heart: The Life Everlasting; and this stated, it must be added that all which is commonly understood by human interest, all which has been sometimes regarded as characterising the chief quests and one of them in particular, is excluded by the Great Prose Quest. We have in place thereof a spiritual romance, setting forth under this guise a mystery of the soul in its progress. It is only the

books of perfection which make at once for high rites and gorgeous pageants of literature. Hereof is the Galahad Quest.

These five romances constitute what I have termed the Greater Chronicles of the Holy Graal. It will have been understood that the Longer Prose Perceval and the Great Prose Quest exclude one another; they stand as alternatives in the tabulation. The characteristics of this cycle are (1) the succession of Joseph the Second as keeper of the Holy Graal immediately after his father and during the latter's lifetime, this dignity not being conferred upon Brons, either then or later; (2) the substitution of a claim in respect of apostolical succession—which placed the Graal keepers in a superior position to any priesthood holding from the apostles—for that of a secret verbal formula applied in respect of the Eucharist.

The dates of the texts which are included in the Greater Chronicles differ widely so far as the extant manuscripts are concerned. The canon of the Graal literature was not in reality closed till the end of the thirteenth century if these manuscripts are to be regarded as the final drafts. The lost antecedent documents cannot, of course, be assigned. It is suggested, for example, that the prototype of the Book of the Holy Graal and the Quest of Galahad preceded the continuations of Chrétien. The unique text comprised in the Huth Merlin has been dated about 1225 or 1230, the MS. itself belonging to the last quarter of the thirteenth century. There was a fourth part which is now wanting; it contained a version of the Galahad quest, and though it has been concluded that it corresponds to the extant text, the Huth Merlin embodies allusions to episodes in the lost part which are not to be met with in the Galahad romance as it now stands.

The additamenta of this cycle are the quests of the Holy Graal in the Spanish and Portuguese versions, and one rendering into Welsh. There is also material of importance in the draft of the Great Quest printed at Rouen in 1488 together with the Lancelot and the Morte d'Arthur, as also in the Paris edition of 1533. Finally, the English metrical chronicle of Hardyng contains a version of the Galahad legend which differs in some express particulars from anything with which we are acquainted in the original romance texts.

D. The German Cycle. The Parsifal of Wolfram is the high moral sense saying that it has received the light, and I know not how we could accept the testimony even if that which uttered it had risen from the dead. I am speaking, however, of the German legend only in one of its phases, and at a later stage I shall exhibit every material which will enable us to judge of its importance. The Conte del Graal, except in its latest portions, and then by chance allusions or derivations at a far distance, has nothing to tell us of secret words, Eucharistic or otherwise; it has also no hint of any super-apostolical succession. It is the same with Wolfram's Parsifal; the legend, as it stands therein, is in fact revolutionised, or rather it is distinct generically, and the quest, though it follows the broad lines of the other Percevals, has gone under I know not what greatness of alteration. If the Northern French stories concerning the widow's son could be likened to a high grade in Masonry, then assuredly the German version would be that rite rectified. The Tituel of Albrecht von Scharfenberg, which deserves a notice which it has never received in England, seems to suggest that there is a greater light in the East than has been found as an abiding presence in the West, and except in a very high mystic sense, a sense much higher than is to be found in any of the romances, this suggestion offers the token of illusion. In fine, to dispose of

this cycle, let me say that the metrical romance of *Diu Crône* by Heinrich von dem Turlin has no secret message, even in the order of phantasy. At this day we rest assured, or those at least whose opinion matters anything, that the most hopeless of all worlds to enter in search of wisdom is the world of ghosts. It happens, however, that in Heinrich's poem ghosts, or the dead alive, are the custodians of the mysteries. At the same time they may hold the kind of office which it is possible to confer on Sir Gawain, who is the hero of this voided quest. I speak, of course, in comparison with the palmary texts by which the Quest itself has entered into the holy places of literature.

It will follow from the above tabulation that while the Graal literature is divisible into several cycles there are three only which belong to our particular concern. The classification which I have made is serviceable therefore in yet another way, since it enables us, firstly, to set apart that which is *nihil ad rem nostram catholicam et sanctam*, and, secondly, to come into our own.

CHAPTER FIVE THE IMPLICIT OF THE MYSTERY

There are several literatures which exhibit with various degrees of plainness the presence of that sub-surface meaning to which I have referred in respect of the Graal legend; but there, as here, so far as the outward sense is concerned, it is nearly always suggested rather than affirmed. This additional sense may underlie the entire body of a literature, or it may be merely some concealed intention or a claim put forward evasively. The sub-surface significance of the Graal literature belongs mainly to the second class. It is from this point of view that my departure is here made, and if it is a warrantable assumption, some portion at least of the literature will prove, explicitly or otherwise, to contain these elements in no uncertain

manner. As a matter of fact, we shall find them, though, as I have indicated, it is rather by the way of things which are implied, or which follow as inferences, but they are not for this reason less clear or less demonstrable. The implicits of the Graal literature are, indeed, more numerous than we should expect to meet with at the period in books of the western world. They may almost exceed, for example, those which are imbedded in the alchemic writings of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, though antecedently we should be prepared to find them more numerous in the avowedly secret books of Hermetic adepts.

The most important of the Graal implicits are those from which my study depends in its entirety, but there are others which in the present place need only be specified, as they belong more properly to the consideration of individual texts. There is, in fine, one implicit which is reserved to the end, because it is that upon which the debate centres.

The implicit in chief of that cycle which I have termed the Lesser Histories, or Chronicles of the Holy Graal, is that certain secret words, having an attributed application to the Sacrament in chief of the Altar, and to certain powers of judgment, were communicated to Joseph of Arimathæa by Christ Himself, and that these remained in reserve, being committed from keeper to keeper by the oral method only.

It must be noted, though more especially for consideration at a later stage, that the secret words are also represented in the poem of Robert de Borron as words of power on the material plane; that is to say, outside any efficacy which they may be assumed to possess in consecrating the elements at the Mass. They are "sweet, precious and holy words." It is these qualities which stand out more strongly in the metrical romance than the Eucharistic side of the

formula, and there seems, therefore, a certain doubt as to De Borron's chief intention respecting their office. But in the Lesser Holy Graal the implicit of the metrical romance passes into actual expression, and it becomes more clear in consequence that the secret words were those used, *ex hypothesi*, by the custodians of the Holy Graal in the consecration of the elements of the Eucharist.

Let it be understood that I am not seeking to press this inference, but am stating an aspect only. If the references to the secret words in the metrical Joseph do not offer a sacramental connection with full clearness—because they are also talismanic and protective—their operation in the latter respects must be regarded as subsidiary and apart from the real concern of the Holy Graal. When all possible issues have been exhausted, the matter remains Eucharistic in the final terms of its appearance, and behind it there is that which lies wholly *perdu* for the simple senses in sources that are concealed utterly. It is further to be noted that any Eucharistic appearance has nothing to do with transubstantiation, of which there is no trace in the Lesser Chronicles. Finally, the sole custodian of the Sacred Vessel through a period of many centuries lived in utter seclusion, and after the words were imparted to Perceval he was interned apparently for ever. The message of the Lesser Chronicles seems to be that something was brought into Britain which it was intended to manifest, but no manifestation took place.

When the Book of the Holy Graal was produced as an imputed branch of Arthurian literature, there is no need to say that the Roman Pontiff was then as now, at least in respect of his claim, the first bishop of Christendom, and, by the evidence of the traditional claim, he derived from Saint Peter, who was *episcopus primus et pontifex primordialis*. This notwithstanding, the romance attributes

the same title to a son of Joseph of Arimathæa, who is called the Second Joseph, and here is the first suggestion of a concealed motive therein. The Book of the Holy Graal and the metrical romance of De Borron are the historical texts in chief of their particular cycles, and it does not follow, or at least in all cases, that their several continuations or derivatives are extensions of the implicits which I have mentioned. In the first case, the early prose Merlin has an implied motive of its own which need not at the moment detain us, and the Didot Perceval is of dubious authenticity as a sequel, by which I mean that it does not fully represent the mind of the earlier texts, though it has an importance of its own and also its own implicits. On the other hand, in what I have termed the Greater Chronicles of the Holy Graal there is, if possible, a more complete divergence in respect of the final document, and I can best explain it by saying that if we could suppose for a moment that the Book of the Holy Graal was produced in the interests of a pan-Britannic Church, or alternatively of some secret school of religion, then the Great Prose Quest, or Chronicle of Galahad, might represent an interposition on the part of the orthodox Church to take over the literature. At the same time the several parts of each cycle under consideration belong thereto and cannot be located otherwise.

The further divisions under which I have scheduled the body-general of the literature, and especially the German cycle, will be considered at some length in their proper place, when their explicit and implied motives will be specified; for the present it will be sufficient to say that the German poems do not put forward the claims with which I am now dealing, namely, the secret formula in respect of the De Borron cycle and a super-apostolical succession in respect of the Book of the Holy Graal, and that which is classed therewith. We do not know, at least here in

England, that Wolfram had prototypes to follow outside those to which he himself confesses. As to these, he rejected one of them, and we have means only by inference of ascertaining what he derived from the other. It may seem certain, however, for many that his acknowledged exemplar could not have originated all those generic distinctions which characterise the German Parsifal, and the fact of what Wolfram borrowed throws perhaps into clearer light all that which he created, or alternatively it indicates an unknown source the nature of which we can determine only by reference to schools of symbolism which cannot be properly discussed except towards the close of our inquiry.

I have adopted what I consider to be the best way of treating the whole cycle for the purpose in view. I have said already that it is not an instruction to scholarship, nor is it an appeal thereto, except for reasonable tolerance regarding an issue external to its own, and then even only in the sense of that forbearance which I should be expected to extend on my own part to the probability of a speculative date, or the existence of a lost text, which scholars may favour in a particular case.

If certain mystic sects took over at a given period the hypothesis and symbolism of alchemy, if they used them as a secret language to enshrine their researches and discoveries in a wholly different region, it is obviously useless for any one to have recourse to the physical alchemists—otherwise than as a light on method and especially on the antithetical use of terms—for an explanation of the later mode and intention. If also some other or any mystic sect appropriated certain crude legends, prehistoric or what not, which they magnified, developed and transformed, designing to use them for the furtherance of a particular scheme to which they were

themselves dedicated; it is not then less obvious that the original form of such legends will in no wise help us to understand the later position to which they have been assigned by that school. In these few words the whole thesis of scholarship concerning the sources of the Graal elements is disposed of for our purpose, though with many titles of honour, and the alternative with which we are concerned can be put no less shortly.

As regards both the claims with which I am at the present moment more especially concerned, we must remember that although we are dealing with a department of romantic literature, their content does not belong to romance; the faculty of invention in stories is one thing, and I think that modern criticism has sometimes made insufficient allowance for its spontaneity, yet through all the tales of chivalry it worked within certain lines. It would not devise secret Eucharistic words or put forward strange claims which almost make void the Christian apostolate in favour of some unheard-of succession communicated directly from Christ after Pentecost. We know absolutely that this kind of machinery belongs to another order. If it does not, then the apocryphal gospels were imbued with the romantic spirit, and the explanation of Manichean heresy may be sought in a flight of verse. In particular, the higher understanding of secret consecration is not a question of literature, but of the communication to the human soul of the Divine Nature. It lies behind the Eucharistic doctrine of the Latin Church, but on the external side that doctrine—and of necessity—by the hypothesis of transubstantiation, communicates the Divine Humanity rather than the Eternal and Divine Substance.

I suppose that what follows from the claims has not entered into the consciousness of official scholarship, because it is otherwise concerned, but it may have entered already into

the thought of those among my readers whose preoccupations are similar to my own, and I will now state it in a summary manner. As the secret words of consecration, the extra-efficacious words which must be pronounced over the sacramental elements so that they may be converted into the arch-natural Eucharist, have, by the hypothesis, never been expressed in writing, or alternatively have been enshrined only in a lost or hypothetical book, it follows that since the Graal was withdrawn from the world, together with its custodians, the Christian Church has had to be content with what it has, namely, a substituted sacrament. And as the superapostolical succession, also by the hypothesis, must have ceased from the world when the last keeper of the Graal followed his vessel into heaven, the Christian Church has again been reduced to the ministration of some other and apparently lesser ordination. It follows, therefore, that the Graal literature is not only a cycle of romance originating from many traditions, but is also, in respect of those claims—and even in a marked manner—a departure from tradition.

If I were asked to adjudicate on the value of such claims, I should say that the doctrine is the body of the Lord and its right understanding is the spirit. Whosoever therefore puts forward a claim on behalf of secret formulæ in connection with the Eucharistic Rite may appear in the higher hermeneutics to have forgotten one thing which is needful—that there are efficacious consecrations everywhere. The question of apostolical succession would seem also in the same position, because the truly valid transmissions are those of grace itself, which communicates from the source of grace direct to the soul; and the essence of the sacerdotal office is that those who have received supernatural life should assist others so to prepare their ground that they may also in due season, but always from

the same source, become spiritually alive. If there is another and higher understanding of any apostolical warrant, I do not know what it is. It remains, however, that the implicits with which I have been dealing are actually the implicits in chief of the Graal books, and that they do not make for harmony with the teaching of the orthodox churches does not need stating. From whence therefore and with what intention were they imported into the body of romance? Before this question can be answered we shall have to proceed much further in the consideration of the literature.

The few people who have approached the Graal legend with any idea of its significance—I will not say from the mystic standpoint, but from that of a secret tradition perpetuated through Christian times, or a certain remanent thereof—have been wholly unequipped in respect of textual knowledge and in a manner of official religious training. They have, therefore, missed the points. Scholarship, on the other hand, has been well trained in its proper groove, but it has had no eyes for another and more especially for any mystic aspect. I am about to tabulate a few facts and to draw from them several inferences which have not been noted previously.

The Graal in the Graal Castle appeared on certain occasions in connection with the Mass, but it was, for the most part, manifested only at a feast. There it operated sometimes in relation to the idea of sustenance, but seemingly by way of transmutation. Subject to a single exception, it was not itself eaten or drunk, but it was passed over food and wine when these were available. When they were not forthcoming, it produced the notion of rare refection. The particular vessel—understood usually as a cup or chalice—which, as we shall see, was, under the distinctive name of Graal, the chief Hallow of the Castle,

contained, however, blood and water, without increase, of which there is no record, or diminution, of which there is also no record, though on one occasion which passes all understanding it might have been supposed to occur. It was therefore solely a relic of great virtue and miraculous efficacy. We shall see in what manner, at the end of various quests, it was taken to heaven, or at least into deeper seclusion; but this, in spite of the Eucharistic implicit, did not mean, in the minds of the makers of romance, any sacramental decrease, because it is obvious from all the texts that Mass was said independently in church and hermitage while the Graal was still in the castle. The indubitable inference from the Book of the Holy Graal, and indeed from De Borron's poem, is that Britain was entirely heathen when Joseph came thereto, and it might therefore follow that its priesthood held subsequently from him. In the later and longer text the claim of Robert de Borron is voided, or rather has undergone substitution; there are no secret words, of consecration or otherwise; the Eucharistic formula is given in full, and its variations, such as they are, from that of the Latin rite, bear traces of oriental influence derived through a Gallican channel and offer nothing to our purpose. In this case, and so far certainly as England was concerned, when the time came for the Graal to be taken away, that removal signified at most the loss of a great hallow, a precious relic, and, this granted, things remained as they were for all ecclesiastical purposes. In connection with the recession, a period was put to certain times of adventure, aspects of enchantment, inhibition and disaster, much as if a sovereign pontiff had laid the city or land of Logres under a long interdict and had at length removed it, one only sanctuary, during the whole period, remaining free from suspension.

The question therefore arises as to what was the nature of the pre-eminence ascribed to Joseph and his line. I speak

here so far as its object and intention were concerned, and, of course, the readiest answer will be sought in the secret aspirations of the Celtic Church; but we shall see in the end that they are inadequate. There is another explanation which is not only ready to our hand, but is so plausible that it is desirable to exercise a certain caution against it. I would say, therefore, that the claims with which we are concerned must be distinguished from doctrinal confusions and errors of theological ignorance; of these we have full evidence otherwise. They are to be accounted for in the most natural of all manners, but, whether explicit or implied, the claims of Eucharistic efficacy and supereminence in succession carry with them an evidence of set purpose which makes it impossible to enter them in any category of mere blunders. I say this with the greater certainty because every concealed sense which we can trace in the literature must be held to co-exist with manifest surface insufficiency even within its own province, and more especially regarding the Eucharist. We shall learn towards the term of our inquiry that this fact offers evidence in itself that the real mystery of the Graal was brought from a great distance—not exactly in time or place, but in the matter of connection with its source. I should add that other concealed literatures offer similar difficulties, as, for example, those which are constituted by the grossness of the Talmud, the barbarisms of the Zohar and other Midrashim, or the scientific fatuities of Latin alchemy. In conclusion for the moment as to this part, if I have spoken as though there were some fundamental spirit of rivalry to the external Church indicated by the fact of the romances, it is pre-eminently desirable to state that there is no intention, at least on my part, to present the Graal Mystery as a secret process at work outside the Church. It was assuredly working from within, as if in the opinion of those who held its keys they looked that it would act as a leaven and accomplish some modification in the entire mass. It

would be a mistake to suppose that the Eucharistic and super-apostolical claims denied those which have their authority in the New Testament and in the outer offices of the Church. The institutions of the one remain as we know it already on sacred evidence; as to the other, its validity is in no sense diminished, but the presence of a still higher or at least of a distinct warrant is indicated, and it is of the essence thereof that it is not in competition; it is a secret thing, but it might have been manifested more openly, if the world had been worthy: the world, however, was so unworthy that the Palladium was taken still farther away. One evidence of the whole position is that the apostolate of Joseph the Second is compared with that of the known apostles in other countries than Britain, and without diminution of either. This notwithstanding, there remains the irresistible suspicion of the external Church at the suggestion that one who was outside the chosen twelve is represented as the first to consecrate the Eucharist under an imprescriptible title and to receive the benefit of installation in the episcopal chair; Peter, who in the days of his Master understood so little, seems to take an inferior place. But if, as I believe, the implicits of the Graal literature, are the rumour rather than the replica of secret sanctuary doctrine, there is probably a better understanding of both than can be found imbedded in the texts. The true intention may have concerned a statement of higher experience in the communication of the Divine Substance; or, in still more simple language, the external Eucharist conveys Christ symbolically, but the attainment of Christ in the higher consciousness offers a direct experience. The succession, the modes of ordination in a company of sanctity who have thus attained is *ex hypothesi* and *de facto* of a different order than that which, also *ex hypothesi* and *per doctrinam sanctam*, is conveyed from one to another by the episcopal intention. We have, however, to take things as they are offered to us in the

official churches and in the glorious literatures of the soul, ascribing to them that sense in which we can understand them best, so only that it is our highest sense.

In conclusion as to the greater implicits, seeing that the import of the Secret Words in the cycle of Robert de Borron has eluded critical analysis, while that of the extra-apostolical succession was appreciated—it is sixty years since, and has occasioned scarcely a notice—by Paulin Paris, there is one thing at least obvious—that the second is more largely written on the surface of the particular texts than the first, and when we come to consider in their order the romances comprised in the cycle of the Lesser Chronicles, we shall find that there are several difficulties. It is only after their grave and full evaluation that I have put forward in this section the possession of certain secret words in relation to the Eucharist as being one of the two sovereign implicits of the Graal literature.

The lesser implicits may, for purposes of convenience, be tabulated simply as follows:

- a. The Implicits of Moses and Simeon.
- b. The Implicits of the Merlin legend.
- c. The Implicits of the Graal keepers.
- d. The Implicits of the several Quests and the distinctions thereto belonging.

I recognise that the general subject of these and the other subsurface meanings is at this stage much too advanced for the reader, who is perhaps wholly unskilled, and hence those that are major I have sketched only in outline and those that are minor I have limited to a simple enumeration: it has been necessary to define all, so that the

scope of the literature may be indicated in respect of our proper concern even from the beginning. After the problems which they offer have been studied at length in the light of the texts themselves, we shall turn for further help to certain coincident schools of symbolism.

