

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 4]

BOOK TWO MYSTERIES OF THE HOLY GRAAL IN  
MANIFESTATION AND REMOVAL

CHAPTER ONE A PRELIMINARY ACCOUNT OF CERTAIN  
ROOT-SECRETS INCLUDED IN THE WHOLE SUBJECT

It is a very curious heaven which stands around the infancy of romance-literature, and more than one warrant is required to constitute a full title for the interpretation of those strange signs and portents which are seen in some of its zones. The academies of official learning are consecrated places, and those who have graduated in other schools, and know well that they hold, within their own province, the higher authority, must be the first to recognise and respect the unsleeping vigilance and patience of students who are their colleagues and brothers in a different sphere. In the study of archaic literature, the external history of the texts and the criticisms thereto belonging are in the hands of a recognised college, and its authority is usually final; but the inward spirit of the literature is sometimes an essence which escapes the academical processes. At the same time, any school of

criticism which should decide that some books of the Holy Graal do not put forward extraordinary claims of the evasive kind, and do not so far contain the suggestion of an inward purpose, must be held to have failed even within its own province.

Having indicated after what manner the literature with which we are dealing falls readily into several groups of a distinct kind for the purpose of particular classification, we are now called to regard it a little differently, though without prejudice to the schedule-in-chief of my proper choice. The distinction between quest-versions and versions of early history is known to students, and though it is not absolutely definite in itself, so far as the intention of criticism is concerned solely, it is important from another point of view. The reason is that both classes have their particular mystery, which is not without its antecedents in distinct schools of symbolism. The keynotes of the historical series—to make use of the expression in a sense which is not usually or so concisely attached to it—are those which have been considered as the implicits-in-chief of the literature. They are two in number, and they are embodied in two palmary historical texts, from which they were carried forward through intermediate documents which answer, broadly speaking, to the same description, and thence through certain quest-versions by which the literature is taken to its term. I am speaking, however, only of those cycles which have been classified in the previous section as the Lesser and Greater Chronicles of the Holy Graal; but it should be understood that the same or analogous early histories are presupposed by the later sequels to the poem of Chrétien de Troyes. On the other hand, the German cycle, as represented by Wolfram von Eschenbach and the author of the later *Titirel*, has an early history which differs from all existing French sources,

though the Quest of Parsifal is in close correspondence with the Perceval quests current in northern France.

We have seen, concerning the keynotes of the early histories, that they are:

A. The suppression or concealment of a potent sacramental formula, in the absence of which the office of the Christian ministry is not indeed abrogated but is foreshortened or has become substituted, so that there seems to be something of a vital character wanting to all the sanctuaries. Whatever therefore the elements which entered into the composition of the Graal conception, several versions of the legend unite in relating it to the mystery and power of certain high consecrations or of certain unmanifested and withheld forms of speech. Those who can acquire and retain the words may exercise at will a strange power and mastery over all about them, and will possess great credit in the sight of God. They need never fear the deprivation of their proper rights, sufferings from evil judgments, or conquest in battle, so long as their cause is just. It is, however, as I have intimated, either (1) impossible to communicate these words in writing, or (2) they are recorded in one place only; that is to say, in the secret archives, or great book of the Graal. They are too precious and holy for common utterance, and, moreover, they are the secret of the Graal itself, in which a strange power of speech also resides. Joseph was himself under singular direction in accordance with the preconceived order of the Mystery, for the fulfilment of its concealed term.

B. The removal, cessation, or assumption of a certain school of ordination, which held from heaven the highest warrants, which was perpetuated from generation to generation in one line of descent, which had the custody of

the sacred mysteries, which, in fine, ordained no one; and the substitution, both concurrently and thereafter, of some other form of succession—venerable enough in its way, and the next surviving best after the abrogation of the first, but not the highest actuality of all, not the evidence of things unseen made spiritually and materially manifest as the term of faith. To this extent did the powers of the Secret Sanctuary differ by the hypothesis concerning it from the powers of the Holy Church manifested in the world. Yet the Church manifest was also the Church Holy.

In the prologue or preamble to the Book of the Holy Graal, the hermit who receives the revelations and the custody of the mysterious Book of the Legend testifies that the greatest secret of the world has been confided to him, and the communication took place amidst inexpressible experiences in that third heaven to which Saint Paul was translated. The description of his ecstasy is written in fervent language, but in place of an indicible formula there is a great mystery attributed to the entire text of that cryptic record which, although it is said to be translated, yet remains unknown. The form wherein we have it is a concession to human disqualification and even to the frailty of external Nature. We possess only a substitute. On the other hand, the keynotes of the French quests are also of two kinds, by which—if it were possible otherwise—they might be divided into two cycles. That of the several Percevals is the suppression of a certain word, question, or formula, which suppression, on the surface side of things, causes dire misery and postpones the advancement of the elect hero, but in the end it makes for his further recognition and ensures his more perfect calling, so that he is crowned in fine as he might not have been crowned at first. If at his initial opportunity he had asked in the Graal Castle that simple question which covers the whole adventure with so deep a cloud of mystery, he would not

have been perfected in suffering, regret and exile; some of the quests would have terminated almost at their inception, and one in its present form could not have existed at all.

The withheld word of the Perceval quests takes, as I have indicated, the form of a simple question—a question, that is to say, which should have been asked but was not; as such it is, so to speak, the reverse side or antithesis of the old classical legend of the sphinx. The sphinx asked questions and devoured those who did not reply or whose answers blundered. Perceval kept silence when he should have urged his inquiries, sometimes through false modesty, sometimes because he had been cautioned against idle curiosity; but in both cases, by the working of some apparently blind destiny, the omission carried with it the long series of its disastrous consequences. There came, however, a time of joy and deliverance, and it followed a belated utterance of the word; thereby great enchantments were determined, great wrongs were redressed, and the wounds and sufferings endured through many years were healed and annulled. It follows that there is a twofold mystery of words connected by certain texts with the Quest of Perceval. Its higher sense is that of the sacramental formula, and this was interned with Perceval according to the Lesser Chronicles. But the word alternative—that which could be reserved or uttered—had performed in the meantime, and was still fulfilling, a certain office of amelioration, so that it is not by a merely vain observance that, in a sense, it is replaced by the quests for that unknown formula which was reserved as the last mystery of the Hidden Sanctuary. In contradistinction to this, there is one quest—and it is to be noted that it is one only—which depends entirely from the second alternative of the historical implicits. This is the Galahad Quest, and the keynote hereof is separate from all mysteries of asking, all joy of answer, as if these were of the Lesser Enigmas, and

it is uplifted into a great world of holiness, where no longer is there any shadow of similitude to secret claims—doctrinal or ecclesiastical; but the heroism of human life is received into the Divine Rapture, so that the last formulary of the search after and finding of the Holy Graal is in all truth that which is expressed by the admirable doctor Ruysbroeck—in *vastissimum divinitatis pelagus navigare*. Of such is the Graal legend, and those who are acquainted with it in the most elect of its early forms will agree not only that many portions of it are singularly winning, but that it is indeed

“A part Of the hunger and thirst of the heart.”

It is also on the external side a very melancholy legend; it is the passing of a great procession and a great sacrament, which, owing to the imputed stress and terror of the time, is destined never to return in the same form; it is a portion of the loss of humanity on one side of its manhood; and it is no matter for surprise that in these late days, which are so full of the hunger and the thirst, several persons have attempted to read into it the particular significance which appeals to them. This has been anything in some cases but that which could have been intended consciously by any maker of chronicles, and the question of Perceval abides therefore amongst us, but now in the reverse form, seeing that it is asked, and this often, yet it remains to this day unanswered, save in those Holy Places, beyond the external voices, of which this world, as such, knows not anything. To the glory of God and to those Holy Places, within the Great Church of the Mysteries, I dedicate this research as a sign without of the things signified within.

CHAPTER TWO THE INSTITUTION OF THE HALLOWS,  
AND IN THE FIRST PLACE GENERAL INTRODUCTION  
CONCERNING THEM

Having thus indicated after what manner the Graal legend and its literature is tinged with mystery and symbolism à parte ante et à parte post, the next matter of our inquiry is concerned with the Institution of the Hallows. In all its forms indifferently, the Legend of the Holy Graal depends upon powers and offices ascribed to certain sacred objects. Those texts which it has become customary to term the Early Histories, equally with those which present the various versions of the Quest, revolve about these Hallows, showing how they were instituted, how they came into Britain, in whose hands they were preserved at first, to whom they were transmitted successively, why and by whom they were sought, and what, in fine, became of them.

Among the general characteristics of the French cycle we shall find that there is the passage of these Hallows from East to West. They are in hereditary keeping, and in the end, according to certain versions, they are again taken East. There are, however, numerous phases of the legend, important variations in the Hallows, while claims which are manifest in certain texts are in others non-existent. The cycle in Germany took over the legend of the Swan Knight and imported the Templar interest expressly; on the other hand, the introduction of certain highly ascetic elements is thought to be characterised by the coming of Galahad into the Graal Quest. The peculiar ecclesiastical claims which are the subsurface warrant of the cycle written in Northern French were never put forward ostensibly, and in the Galahad legend there remains only the shadow of those earlier designs which might be constructed as in dissonance with the Latin rite.

The Quest of the Holy Graal and of the other Hallows which were from time to time connected therewith is followed by many knightly heroes, most of whom are unsuccessful; the preliminary conditions of attainment are purity and

sanctity, but there is nothing to show that these were sufficient in themselves, and as there were other qualifications, so in some signal instances a partial success was not impossible in the absence, or at least comparatively, of those warrants which in given cases were claimed as essential. Once more, therefore, the cycle of Northern France may be regarded as falling into four divisions:

- a. The Institution of the Hallows, and more especially that which concerns the origin of the Sacred Vessel.
- b. The circumstances under which the Hallows were carried into Britain, or alternatively were found therein, and the later circumstances of their partial manifestation.
- c. The details of the search for the Hallows, and other things within and without which led to their removal or recession.
- d. The occasion of their final departure.

The texts, therefore, purport to provide the complete History of the Graal, including whence it came, where it abode for a while, and whither it has gone. This is not to say that there are express books treating of each section only. The metrical romance of De Borron does, however, stand simply for the first part, and the same applies to its prose rendering in the Lesser Holy Graal. The second part is found in the Book of the Holy Graal, and the third in the Didot Perceval, the Conte del Graal, the Parsifal of Wolfram, the Longer Prose Perceval and the Great Quest of Galahad. The German Perceval excepted, all these stories of research give an account of the withdrawal—some at considerable length, and some briefly.



Again, the later romances may be divided into two sections: (a) those which speak of an enchantment fallen on Britain, and (b) those which are concerned with the termination of certain adventurous times. If the literature follows any set purpose, a definable importance must be attributed to the meaning of that enchantment and those adventures. In this manner, the chief questions may be summarised alternatively as follows:

- a. The sacramental claim and its connections, so far as these appear in the Quests.
- b. The qualifications for the Quest.
- c. The Hereditary Keepers of the Graal.
- d. The King's Wounding and the King's Healing.
- e. The enchantments of Britain in connection with the Wounded Keeper.
- f. The removal of the Graal and the close those times which the texts term adventurous, since when there has been silence on earth in respect of the Holy Graal.

The sacramental claim is introduced, among other documents, in (a) the De Borron poem; (b) the Lesser Holy Graal; while its shadow is projected as a secret which cannot be told in (c) the proem to the Conte del Graal. It seems to be found by a vague and remote inference in the Longer Prose Perceval, and it may be gathered by brief allusions in the early prose Merlin. In the Great Quest it has been expunged, while it is outside the tradition as represented by Wolfram. The Quest qualifications are vague in Chrétien and exceed reason. They are perhaps what might be termed ethical—but in the high degree—in Wolfram, who presents the marriage of Perceval. The so-

called ascetic element appears fully in the Book of the Holy Graal, in the Longer Prose Perceval, and in the Quest of Galahad. The King's Wounding is accounted for differently in every romance; the withdrawal of the Graal is also told differently; sometimes it passes simply into deeper concealment; sometimes it seems taken away utterly; in one version there is another keeper appointed, but of the realm apart from the Hallows; it is carried to the far East in another; in two texts it remains where it was.

If there is a secret intention permeating the bulk of the literature, again it must partly reside in those epochs into which the literature falls; their consideration should manifest it and should enable us to deal, at the close of the whole research, with the final problem, being that which is signified by the departure of the Sacred Vessel.

Each of the Hallows has its implied enigma, besides that which appears openly in its express nature, and as we know that the mysteries of God are mysteries of patience and compassion, we shall be prepared to find in their reflections through the Graal Legend that even some offices of judgment are formularies of concealed mercy. They are therefore both declared and undeclared—that is to say, understood; and as there are certain Hallows which only appear occasionally, so there are suggestions and inferences concerning others which do not appear at all. That which was always in evidence is that to which the distinctive name of Graal is applied in every text, but enough has been said concerning it till we come to its exhaustive consideration in the next section. The second and third Hallows are the Lance and the Sword. The Lance is that which was used by the Roman soldier Longinus to pierce the side of Christ at the Crucifixion, or it is this at least according to the more general tradition. Of the Sword there are various stories, and it is this which in some cases

serves to inflict the wound from which the Enchantments of Britain follow. It is (a) that which served to behead Saint John the Baptist, in which connection we can understand its position as a sacred object; (b) that of the King and Prophet David, committed by Solomon to a wonderful ship, which went voyaging, voyaging throughout the ages till it should be seen by Galahad, the last scion of the royal house of Israel; or (c) it is simply an instrument preserved as a token belonging to a legend of vengeance, in which relation it was brought over from folk-lore and is nothing to the purpose of the Graal.

The Dish, which is the fourth and final object included among the authorised Hallows, is more difficult to specify, because its almost invariable appearance in the pageant of the high processions is accompanied by no intelligible explanation respecting it; and although it has also its antecedents in folk-lore, its mystic explanation, if any, must be sought very far away. Like the rest of the Hallows, it is described with many variations in the different books. It may be a salver of gold and precious stones, set on a silver cloth and carried by two maidens; it may be a goodly plate of silver, or a little golden vessel, and this simply, except in the Longer Prose Perceval, which as it multiplies the Hallows so it divides their ministry; but here, as elsewhere, the Dish does not embody apparently the feeding properties which are one aspect of the mystery.

In summary therefore: subject to characteristic variations which are particular to each text, it will be found that the several romances follow or forecast one general process, exhibiting a general secret intention, manifested though not declared, and it is for this intention that my study has to account.

### CHAPTER THREE THE INSTITUTION OF THE HALLOWS, AND, SECONDLY, THE VARIATIONS OF THE CUP LEGEND

We have seen that the secret of the Graal, signifying the super-substantial nourishment of man, was communicated by Christ to His chosen disciple Joseph of Arimathæa, who, by preserving the body of his Master after the Crucifixion, became an instrument of the Resurrection. He laid it in the sepulchre, and thus sowed the seed whence issued the arch-natural body. On Ascension Day this was removed from the world, but there remained the Holy Vessel, into which the blood of the natural body had been received by Joseph. Strangely endued with the virtues of the risen Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost, it sustained him spiritually, and by a kind of reflection physically, during forty years of imprisonment, through which period he was in that condition of ecstasy which is said by the Christian masters of contemplation to last for half-an-hour—being that time when there is silence in heaven. We find accordingly that Joseph had no sense of duration in respect of the years; he was already in that mystery of God into which the ages pass. After his release the Holy Vessel became a sign of saving grace, instruction and all wonder to that great company which he was elected to take westward. He committed it in fine to another keeper, by whom it was brought into Britain, and there, or elsewhere, certain lesser Hallows were added to the Hallow-in-chief, and were held with it in the places of concealment. Those which are met with most frequently, as we have seen, are four in number, but the mystery is really one, since it is all assumed into that vessel which is known for the most part as the Cup of legend. It is understood that for us at least this Cup is a symbol, seeing that the most precious of all vessels are not made with hands. It is in such sense that the true soul of philosophy is a cup which

contains the universe. We shall understand also the ministry of material sustenance, frequently attributed to the Holy Graal, after another manner than that which can be presumed within the offices of folk-lore. It is in this sense that the old fable concerning the Bowl of Plenty, when incorporated by the Graal Mystery, may prove to have a profound meaning. Some things are taken externally; some are received within; but the food of the body has analogies with that of the soul. So much may be said at the moment concerning certain aspects which encompass the literature of the Graal, as the hills stand round Jerusalem.

The four Hallows are therefore the Cup, the Lance, the Sword and the Dish, Paten or Patella—these four, and the greatest of these is the Cup. As regards this Hallow-in-chief, of two things one: either the Graal Vessel contained the most sacred of all relics in Christendom, or it contained the Secret Mystery of the Eucharist. Now, the first question which arises is whether the general description which obtains concerning it—as I was almost about to say, in the popular mind—reposes on the authority of the texts. Here also will be found our first difficulty. I may not be pardoned such flippancy, but the Psalmist said: *Calix meus quam inebrians est* [“How intoxicating is my cup”], and this has rather a bearing on the Graal chalice; for the variety of the accounts concerning it may produce in the mind a sense of having visited some inn of strange description where those who come to ask questions are served with strong measures, and full at that.

There are three available sources of information concerning the Sacred Vessel, including those which are purely of the Eucharistic office. (1) The apocryphal legends concerning Joseph of Arimathæa which are distinct from those that have been incorporated with the romances of

chivalry and with the histories leading up to these. (2) The romances themselves and their prolegomena, which are the chief bases of our knowledge, but on the understanding that there is no criterion for the distinction between that which is traditional and that which is pure invention. (3) Some archæological aspects of sacramental practice.

The apocryphal legends which connect Joseph with the cultus of the Precious Blood are late, and they lie under the suspicion of having been devised in the interests of Glastonbury, or through Glastonbury of ecclesiastical pretensions on the part of the British Church at or about the period of Henry the Second Above these as a substratum of solid fact—I refer to the fact of the inventions—there has been of late years superposed an alleged dream of a pan-Britannic Church, which belongs, however, more particularly to the romance of history. The chivalrous romances themselves have so overlaid the Graal object with decorations and wonder-elements that the object itself has been obscured and its nature can, in some cases, be extricated scarcely. Eucharistic archæology remains as a source of information on which it is possible to rely implicitly, but while this can satisfy us as to the variations in the form and matter of the Sacred Vessel used in the Sacrifice of the Mass, it does not offer us, except indirectly, much or perhaps any assistance to determine the relic of legend.

The Evangelium Nicodemi, Acta [vel Gesta] Pilati [namely, “The Gospel of Nicodemus” and “The Acts of Pilate”] and some other oriental apocryphal documents are the authorities for the imprisonment of Joseph by the Jews because he had laid the body of Christ in the sepulchre. William of Malmesbury, John of Glastonbury and similar makers of chronicles are responsible for referring the first evangelisation of Britain to Joseph of Arimathæa. From

these, however, we must except Geoffrey of Monmouth, and William of Malmesbury has nothing to tell us of the Graal, though he has the story of two phials containing the Precious Blood. The reference to relics of any kind is also late in the chronicles. An English metrical life of Joseph, belonging to the first years of the sixteenth century, but drawing from previous sources, shows how the precious blood was collected by that saint and received into two cruets, which we find figuring at a later period in the arms of Glastonbury Abbey. One of these sources, though perhaps at a far distance, may have been the lost book attributed to Melkin or Mewyn, which gives an account of these cruets. The tradition supposes (1) that they were buried at Glastonbury, (2) that they will be discovered concurrently with the coffin of Joseph, and (3) that thereafter there will be no more drought in Britain. John of Glastonbury is one of the authorities for the existence of a book of Melkin—sometimes identified with the Chronicle of Nennius. The more immediate antecedent of the metrical story is, however, the *Nova Legenda Angliæ* of Capgrave, and it represents Joseph as living with twelve hermits at Glastonbury, where he also died and was buried. The Oxford Vernon MS., written in verse about 1350, shows that there was a sacred vessel containing blood. The Chronicle of Helinandus describes the Graal as a wide and shallow vessel, wherein meats in their juice are served to wealthy persons. The *Historia Aurea*, written by John of Tynemouth, connects Joseph with the Holy Vessel, which it describes as that large dish or platter in which the Lord supped with His disciples, with which concurs one entire cycle of the legend. It may be added, for what it is worth, that the Armorican Gauls seem to have had a sacred vessel used in certain rites from a very early period. An object of this kind is thought to be depicted on Armorican coins, being semicircular in shape, held by means of thongs and

devoid of stem or base. Under Roman domination the vessel was figured with a pedestal.

We come now to the putative historical romances and the poems and tales of chivalry which contain the developed legend of the Graal. The Conte del Graal, which is the first text for our consideration, has many decorative descriptions of the Sacred Vessel, but they present certain difficulties, as will be exhibited by their simple recitation in summary. (1) It was covered with the most precious stones that are found in the world, and it gave forth so great a light that the candles at the table were eclipsed, even as are the stars of heaven in the glory of the sun and moon (Chrétien de Troyes). (2) It passed to and fro quickly amidst the lights, but no hand appeared to hold it (Gautier de Douzens, or, as he is now termed, Wauchier de Denain). (3) It was borne uplifted by a beautiful maiden, who was discounselled and weeping (Montpellier MS.). (4) It was carried to and fro before the table by a maiden more beautiful than flowers in April (second account of Gautier, with which compare the similar recital of Gerbert). (5) It was carried amidst a great light by an angel, to heal Perceval (Manessier). (6) It was carried in the pageant by a maiden through the castle chamber (ibid.). (7) It was carried openly at the coronation of Perceval, also by a maiden (ibid.). (8) It was, in fine, ravished with the soul of Perceval, and has never since been seen so openly:

“Ne jà mais nus hommes qui soit nés Nel vera si apiertement.”

[“Never but men who were born Will see her so avidly.”]

What follows from these citations will have occurred to the reader—that in all these several sections of the Conte del Graal there is no intelligible description of the sacred



object; that the writers knew of it at a far distance only; that some of their references seem to indicate a brilliant lamp rather than a chalice; and, when they allocated it to Christian symbolism, that they may have wavered in their meaning between the idea of the Paschal Dish and the Cup in which Christ consecrated the wine of the first Eucharist; but we cannot tell. I should add that the prologue, which is certainly the work of a later or at least of another hand, and embodies some curious material, mentions, but very briefly, the pageant of the Graal procession, saying that the Vessel appears at the Castle without sergeant or seneschal, but again there is no description of the Vessel. In conclusion of this account, the alternative ending of Gerbert retells with variations part of the story of Joseph, and although there is once again no intimation as to the form of the Graal, an account of the service performed at an altar over “the holy, spiritual thing”—the Vessel more beautiful than eye of man has seen—is there recounted, while it leaves no doubt in the mind that this service was a Mass of the Graal. It is the only suggestion of the kind which is afforded by the vast poem, though the origin and early history of the sacred object is in accordance with the received tradition.

The fuller memorials of this tradition are embodied, as we have seen, in two cycles of literature, but the text which is first in time and chief in importance is the metrical Romance of the Graal, or Joseph of Arimathæa, by Robert de Borron. A French and a German critic have said that this is the earliest text of the Graal literature proper, and an English writer has concluded, on the contrary, that it is not: *mais que m’importe* [“but what does it matter to me”]? I will not even ask for the benefit of the doubt, so far as enumeration is concerned. The metrical Joseph says that the Graal was a passing fair vessel, wherein did Christ make His sacrament. This is vague admittedly, and

assuming a certain confusion in the mind of the writer, it might have been that Dish mentioned by John of Tynemouth in which the Paschal Lamb was eaten by Christ and His disciples. In place of the words *mout gent*, which are given by the original French editor of the only text, Paulin Paris, following I know not what authority, or imagining a variant reading, substituted the words *mout grant*, which might well apply to the Paschal Dish. But Robert de Borron certifies to his own meaning when he recites an utterance of Christ in His discourse to Joseph, for it is there said that the vessel which has served as the reliquary shall be called henceforth a chalice:

“Cist vaisseau où men sanc méis, Quant de men cors le requeillis, Calices apelez sera.”

[“This ship where men holy honeys go, How many of my heart you gather, Chalices there will be.”]

It is impossible to read the later verses in which the Eucharistic chalice is compared with the sepulchre of Christ, the mass corporal with the grave-clothes, and the paten with the stone at the mouth of the tomb, without concluding that by the Graal was intended the first Eucharistic chalice, and the presence of this symbolism in the mind of Robert de Borron suggests a symbolical intention on his part in the whole legend which he presented. If it is said that his idea of a chalice does not correspond to a vessel the content of which is sacramental wine, it should be remembered that the ciborium which contains consecrated Hosts is still at this day replaced on occasion by a chalice of the ordinary form.

The idea of the devotional poet, supposing it to have been as purely mystical as he was himself deeply religious, might have embodied an attempt to shadow forth in the

perpetuation of the most precious of all reliquaries the sacramental mystery of the Real Presence.

It seems certain, in any case, that when Robert de Borron speaks of the Graal as that vessel in which Christ made his sacrament, this must not be understood as referring to the Paschal Dish, though one probable derivation of the word Graal would support the latter view. In the dialect of Languedoc, Grazal signified a large vessel, usually of clay; in the dialect of Provence, Grasal was a bowl or platter; in Anglo-Norman, or its connections, Graal was a dish made of some costly material for the purpose of great feasts, which, as we have seen, is the description of Helinandus. With all this some of the later romancers were dissatisfied, and, following Robert de Borron, they exalted the vessel into a chalice, so that they might bring it into line with the Eucharistic side of the legend, with which side a paschal dish—whether that of Christ or another—offered little analogy. The material of such a chalice would have been probably glass. It follows from Tertullian that in Rome at the beginning of the third century they used glass chalices; so did the Bishop of Toulouse at the end of the fourth century; and about A.D. 550 the same custom prevailed, as appears by the life of Cesarius, Bishop of Arles. A council of Rheims in the days of Charlemagne is said to have forbidden glass chalices because they were brittle.

The Lesser Holy Graal does not depart from the rendering which I have here given in respect of the metrical romance, but it seems to make the assurance of the poet more certain by elucidating further the application of the secret words to the consecration and administering of the Eucharist. Where the poem says that there is a great book in which has been written the great secret called the Graal, the Lesser Holy Graal says: This is the secret uttered at the great sacrament performed over the Graal—that is to say,

over the chalice. The vessel is otherwise described as the one in which Christ sacrificed, as if He actually celebrated the first Mass, and from the Eucharistic standpoint this seems much stronger than the corresponding *feisoit son sacrament* ["was doing his sacrament"], which are the words of Robert de Borron. The repetition of the experience of the sacred table which is enjoined by Joseph in both texts is in both termed the service of the Graal, but in the prose version alone is it adjudged to the hour of tierce, as if the Mass of the day were celebrated, and as if certain persons, evidently in a state of grace, were sustained in the body by the sacramental nutriment of the soul. The Early Merlin and the Didot Perceval neither reduce nor increase the evidence; but it may be hazarded, for what it is worth, that the original disclosure of the secret words may have had some office in preserving the content of the great relic.

In the Early Merlin there is no allusion to the office of secret words, and no Graal Hallows are mentioned excepting the Cup, as it is obvious that we cannot include the sword of Merlin, through which Arthur was chosen to be king. It does not appear that this weapon had any antecedent history. In the Didot Perceval the rumour and the wonder of the Graal moves pageant-like through all the pages, but it is more shorn of descriptive allusions than anything that has preceded it in the quests. When the predestined Knight visits the castle, tower, or hold in which the Hallow has been preserved through so many centuries, he sees it plainly enough at the supper-table, along which it passes, carried with no ostentation by a mere page of the chamber; but he is said only to hold a vessel wherein the blood of our Saviour reposed. This is at the first visit, and at the second, when Perceval is initiated into the whole mystery and becomes the Lord of the Graal, the description is repeated merely, as if it were a counsel of perfection to

maintain and even to increase in the third text of the trilogy whatsoever could be called vague and dubious in the first.

The Book of the Holy Graal, even when it reproduces with several variations the prose version of Robert de Borron's poem, gives, in some of its codices, an explanation of the Sacred Vessel which is the antithesis of his own. It is described as that Dish in which the Son of God partook of the Last Supper before He gave to the disciples His own flesh and blood. It was, therefore, the Paschal Dish. Certain manuscripts, however, differ so widely that it is difficult to determine the original state of the text. Another codex follows the account of the Lesser Holy Graal. According to a third codex, it was the content and not the Vessel which was called the Holy Graal; but, speaking generally, most versions concur in describing it as the Holy Dish. The connection with the Eucharist is, however, sufficiently close, for he who is elected to say the first Mass and to consecrate the unspotted elements is he also to whom by Divine instruction Joseph surrenders the vessel. But the Blessed Reliquary would seem to have been rather the outward witness to the presence within those elements. For example, in the first unveiled vision of the Holy Graal which is granted to any one outside Joseph himself, we hear of an altar, on one side of which were the nails used for the Crucifixion, together with the hallowed Lance; on the other side was the Dish; and in the centre there was an exceeding rich vessel of gold in the semblance of a goblet—obviously the chalice of consecration: it had a lid after the manner of a ciborium [vaulted]. More astonishing still, the cup of the Eucharist is placed within the Graal during a ceremony which corresponds to the Mass. In a romance so overcharged with decoration and so lavish in episodes of wonder, we should expect, and shall not be disappointed, that many pageants and ornaments would collect about the Holy Vessel, and that it should work many marvels. The

Sacrament consecrated within it reveals the mysteries of Christ openly to chosen eyes, but thereon can no man look until he is cleansed from sin. It gives also on occasion the vision of an Eternal Eucharist and a great company sitting at the high table in the Paradise which is above. So far as concerns the authority of the text itself, it would appear that the Mass of the Graal is not like that of the Church without—an office which recurs daily; it is rather an arch-natural sacrifice, at which the incarnate Christ figures as the sensible oblation and subsequently as the Melchisedech of the rite, communicating Himself to the witnesses, while a thousand voices about him give thanks to God amidst a great beating of birds' wings, and

“Young men whom no one knew went in and out With a far look in their eternal eyes.”

The texts of the later Merlin have several references to the Graal, and it is the chief purpose which moves through the dual romance, leading up, as it does obviously, to a Quest of the Sacred Vessel; but what is understood thereby must be gathered chiefly from its reflections of the Joseph legend. We shall see that in certain codices the account differs from that of Robert de Borron. The Vulgate Merlin has one very remarkable passage, which tells how the tidings of the Holy Graal spread through the realm of King Arthur, and how the Graal was that Vessel in which Joseph of Arimathæa received the blood from the side of Jesus Christ when He hung upon the Cross. It represents, therefore, a tradition which is familiar enough not only in the literature of romance, but in that of religious legend, though it is the antithesis of the account given in the Lesser Chronicles, wherein we are told that the blood was drawn into the Vessel after Joseph and Nicodemus had taken down the Body of the Lord. Secondly, the Graal was that Holy Vessel which came from Heaven above into the city of

Sarras. We have here a reflection only, and that at a far distance, of the Book of the Holy Graal in the form which is now extant. Thirdly, and to us most important, the Graal was that Vessel in which Christ first sacrificed His Blessed Body and His Flesh by the mediation of His bishop, the Second Joseph, whom He ordained with His own hands. According to the Huth Merlin the Graal was that Vessel in which Jesus and His Apostles ate the Last Supper. It was again, therefore, the Paschal Dish.

The Longer Prose Perceval has many descriptions of the vessel, all of which are designed to connect it with the chalice, but they are highly mystical in their nature. As one of the most express attempts to relate the Graal with the Eucharist, it must be regarded as important for the subject of the Hallow-in-chief. This romance and the great Quest of Galahad are both texts of transubstantiation, and they must rank also among the latest documents of the literature. The Lesser Chronicles, even in the prose version of De Borron's poem, offer no suggestion concerning this doctrine, the Graal Vessel being simply a Hallow containing a precious relic. About the period of the Quest and the High History, the tide of ecclesiastical feeling, which long previously had set towards the definition of the dogma, must have permeated the mind of the laity, prepared as it also was by the desire of things sensible and tangible in matters of religion. It was, this notwithstanding, still long to the establishment of the high, symbolical festival of Corpus Christi, which provided an external epilogue to the closed canon of the Graal, as if by a final substitution that which was taken away, or at least *ex hypothesi*, was to be in perpetuity memorialised about the precincts of the gate by the wardens thereof. In connection with transubstantiation, it may be remarked that the religious office of Knighthood was above all things to hear mass, and, next, to confess sins. There are few records in the Graal romances that the

chivalry of Logres communicated, except in the Quest of Galahad, and then only in the case of the elect knights. All high festivals were observed, all penances fulfilled; but to participate in the Eucharistic mystery seemed apart from the life of the world and withdrawn into the sphere of sanctity. However this may be, the Longer Prose Perceval has two cryptic descriptions of the Graal Vessel, which, on account of their complexity, but for the moment only, I must present as they stand actually in the story. (1) It is said concerning Gawain, when he looked at the Graal in his wonder, that it seemed to him a chalice was therein, "albeit there was none at this time." It was, therefore, an ark or a tabernacle which was designed to contain a cup, but when the latter was removed it still held the shadow or semblance thereof. (2) In the course of the same episode a change was performed in the aspect of the external object, and it appeared to be "all in flesh," meaning that it was transformed into a vision of Christ crucified. Towards the close of the story, when a certain Queen Jandree relates her visions to Perceval, she sees, in one of these, an image of the crucifixion from which people collect the Blood into a most Holy Vessel, elevated for that object by one of them. There are no names mentioned, but for purposes of simplicity we may assume that they were Joseph and Nicodemus. In the castle of King Fisherman the office of the Cup was to receive the Blood which fell from the point of the Sacred Lance. The priest who officiated at the Graal service is said to begin his sacrament, with which expression we may compare the words *feisoit son sacrement*, which are those of Robert de Borron. There is indubitably reference to the Eucharist in both cases, and perhaps the Graal Mass Book was a traditional version of the Mass, supposed, *ex hypothesi*, to follow the Last Supper. Speaking generally, the historical account of the Cup follows the Book of the Holy Graal rather than De Borron's poem, for the blood which flowed from the



wounds of Christ when He was set upon the Cross is said to have been received into the Sacred Vessel. There is no ministry in respect of material sustenance attributed to the Graal in this spiritual romance.

It is, therefore, in one sense the antithesis of the Quest of Galahad, which dwells with equal fulness on the food giving properties of the Vessel and on its connection with the mystery of such a mass and such an office of the Eucharist as never before or after was said in the wide world, apart from this sacred object. When the Holy Graal enters the court of King Arthur and into the banqueting-hall it is clothed in white samite, but neither the Vessel nor the bearer are visible to human eyes. On a later occasion it manifests as a Holy Vessel on a table of silver in an old chapel. Elsewhere it is observed that the Flesh and Blood of God are present in the Graal. When it appears to Lancelot in the Castle of Corbenic, it is still upon a table of silver, but this time the object is covered with red in place of white samite, and it is surrounded by angels. In the course of the ceremony Lancelot sees three men, who represent the Trinity, exalted above the head of the officiating priest. Two of them place the youngest between the hands of the priest, who again exalts him. On another occasion a child enters visibly into the substance of the Mass-bread. A man is also elevated, bearing the signs of the Passion of Christ, and this Personage issues out of the Vessel, coming subsequently among the knights present, and causing them to communicate sacramentally. It is after this episode that the Graal is removed to the spiritual city of Sarras. There Christ appears to Galahad and his companions, and this is the last manifestation in connection with the Sacred Vessel. It is the viaticum of the haut prince, who thereafter exercises the high option which has been granted previously and demands that he should be taken away.

As the chief Hallow in the Parsifal of Wolfram differs from all the other romances, it will be left for more full consideration in dealing with the German cycle; but seeing that in this cycle there are correspondences outside this great poem with the Northern French accounts, one of these may be placed here so as to illustrate the Germanic allusions to the Sacred Vessel in the general understanding thereof. *Diu Crône*, the poem of Heinrich, says that it was borne on a cloth of samite and had a base of red gold, on which a reliquary of gold and gems was superposed. It was carried by a crowned maiden. There is here, however, a fresh departure from the Graal in Christian symbolism, for as, on the one hand, it is the quest of a feigned and impossible hero, so, on the other, the content ascribed to the reliquary is not the true content. It holds the semblance of bread, as if that of the Divine Body, but the wine or royal blood, which corresponds to the second element of the Eucharist, is distilled from the Lance of the legend.

We are now approaching the term of the inquiry allocated to this section, and it will be seen on reflection that we have three possible hypotheses regarding the precious vessel: (1) that it was a cruet or phial, wherein the blood of Christ was reserved permanently—in which case we can understand the legend on the score of comparative possibility; (2) that it was an open platter or bowl, which, it is obvious, could have had no permanent content, much less the precious or indeed any other blood; (3) that it corresponded to the notion of a chalice, but probably with a cover, after the manner of a ciborium. It is in late texts that the vessel appears most indubitably in connection with the sacrifice of the Mass; it was and could be only that which was recognised by *Diu Crône* of Heinrich and by John of Tynemouth—namely, a reliquary; but the mystic side of the legend, reflecting in the minds of the romancers many conflicting issues, took it over to the Eucharist, influenced

by the irresistible connection between the sacramental blood and the sang réal poured out at the Crucifixion. There is evidence that this view is almost coincident with the marriage of the legend to romance. The mind of romance connected the vessel and its office with secret words of consecration and a wonderful grade of priesthood, the root-matter of which must have been drawn from some source wherein relics could have counted for little in the presence of the higher secrets of sanctity.

In conclusion as to this matter, the Holy Graal, according to the Greater Chronicles, was not the only Hallow which was brought into Britain by those whose mission was to preach first the gospel therein, but it was more especially the exotic of the legend, as this was developed in Northern France. In several cases the other Hallows, as we shall see, were either present in Britain or arrived some centuries later. As regards the Lesser Chronicles, it is warrantable to decide that, in the mind of Robert de Borron, the Sacred Vessel was a ciborium or covered chalice, and that in some manner which is not clearly declared it was connected with a sacramental service performed in great seclusion. As regards the Greater Chronicles, it was originally a Dish, and that Dish in which the Paschal Lamb was eaten at the Last Supper; but from the very beginning of this ascription the notion of a cup was essential to the Eucharistic office which also resided in the Vessel; in the Book of the Holy Graal a cup is inserted therein, but in later texts of the cycle the Dish sometimes undergoes transmutation and reappears as a chalice.

#### CHAPTER FOUR THE GRAAL VESSEL CONSIDERED AS A BOWL OF PLENTY

The incidental allusions which have been made already to certain physical properties which are ascribed to the Holy

Graal in several branches of the literature seem to call at this point for some further explanation, without anticipating what will be said at the close as to any higher aspects of this tradition or exhausting specifically its connections with folk-lore, which remain to be stated separately. The conception itself seems so repugnant to all that we attach to the Graal that it is at least desirable to ascertain its scope in the texts. As it is acknowledged to embody a reversion from old non-Christian fable, we should expect it to be most prominent in those texts which are nearest to the transitional stage, and more especially in the Chrétien portion of the Conte del Graal. It should be understood in the first place—as indeed it follows sufficiently from previous sections—that in the Perceval quests—one version excepted—and in more than one of the Gawain quests the visit to the Graal Castle is followed by a banquet or supper, at which the questing knight is treated for the most part as an honoured guest.

The exception as regards Perceval is in the longer prose romance or High History, the action of which is subsequent to the first visit of the hero, and he does not enter it a second time till he has taken it by force of arms out of the hands of God's enemy and the enemy of Holy Church. In other cases, where the ceremonial meal is described—sometimes at considerable length—it is nearly always at the table and before or in the midst of the festival that the Graal and the other Hallows make their processional appearance, and there are certain texts which say that the Sacred Vessel serves the high company—sometimes with rarest meats, sometimes also with wine. In these specific instances the manifestation is that which occurs first after they are seated at table. It was to be expected, as I have said, that we should hear of this material efficacy in Chrétien, but though the courses of the banquet are described fully, and are rare and precious enough, it is only

a high reverence in a lordly castle of this world, and it is precisely from this text that it proves wanting. The wonder resides in the Hallows, but they dispense nothing to the body. It follows from this that the metrical romance of De Borron was not written to explain Chrétien. It follows also that Gautier had no precedent in the poet who was his precursor, and it was therefore from other antecedents that he derived his notion of the Feeding Dish and from yet others his knowledge of early Graal history which does not appear in Chrétien. When Gautier brings Gawain to the Graal Castle, he says that the Sacred Vessel served seven courses, but the wine was served by the butlers. His idea of the Sacred Vessel must therefore have corresponded rather to the Paschal Dish than to a Reliquary of the Precious Blood. On the other hand, his account of Perceval's second visit contains no allusion to this side of the festival. Manessier, in continuation of the same visit, offers no suggestion; but when the time comes for him to tell the story of Perceval's third arrival, the Hallows appear in their order and all are filled at the table. At the fourth and final visit, and the coronation of the questing knight, Manessier recounts how the Graal feeds the whole company with costliest meats. On the other hand, Gerbert, preoccupied by far other matters, gives no indication of the kind.

Except in so far as the Early History of Merlin reproduces one episode from the Lesser Holy Graal, it has no allusion to the properties under consideration, and they have passed out of all recollection in the Didot Perceval. On the other hand, the Greater Chronicles, represented by the Book of the Holy Graal and the Quest of Galahad, embody a marked development of this particular tradition. Between them there is the later Merlin without any reference whatever, the prose Lancelot—to which we shall see that it is a foreign element—and the Longer Prose Perceval into the consciousness of whose author it has never once

entered and by whom it would, I think, have been repudiated. Its recurrence, on a single occasion, in the presence of Galahad, and in connection with his story, may seem un-searchable, having regard to the claims which inhere in this romance, but in the order of the texts it is explained by the antecedents in the first form of the first document of the cycle. We must recur, therefore, to the root-matter of the early histories.

The poem of Robert de Borron narrates that among those who accompanied Joseph westward a certain number departed from grace through the sin of luxury, but the spiritual mind of the minstrel has spared us all particulars. The result was a famine in the company; it does not appear that it fell upon all without exception, for the fact that there was want among the people had to be notified to the leaders; but, these apart, good and bad seem to have suffered indifferently. An appeal was made to Brons that he should take counsel with Joseph, which was done accordingly, and Joseph invoked the Son of God on his knees in the presence of the Graal, reciting the petition of his people, who were in need of bread and meat. He was told in reply to expose the Sacred Vessel openly in the presence of the brethren, on a table similar to that of his own Last Supper,—by which means the sinners will be discovered speedily. It is Christ Himself who was speaking, and He ordained further that Brons should repair to a certain water and there angle for a fish. The first which he caught must be brought straightway to Joseph, who, on his part, should place it upon the Graal table over against the Sacred Vessel. The people were then to be summoned and informed that if they were true believers, who had kept the commandments and followed out the teachings of Christ, as given through Joseph, so that they had trespassed in nothing, they would be welcome to sit down at the table. These instructions were followed, with the result that a

part only of the company accepted this invitation. The table was arranged duly, and whosoever was seated thereat had the accomplishment of his heart's desire, and that entirely. Petrus, who was one of the recipients, asked the crowd who stood about whether they did not experience anything of the good which penetrated those at the table, and they answered that they felt nothing. Thereupon Petrus denounced them as guilty of the vile, dolorous sin, and they went forth out of the house of Joseph covered with shame. The poem says:

“La taule toute pleine estoit, Fors le liu qui pleins ne pooit Estre;”

[“The whole place was full, Except the place which could not be full;”]

but the experience of the sitters, thus collected together, seems to indicate that they were fed from within rather than from without. It will be seen and we must always remember that the chief necessity and often the chief privation of early quests and ventures in the voyages of romance was that of food in season, but in this case what I have called the spiritual mind of the poet could not clearly connect the idea of physical refreshment with the sacramental powers of the Relic. As regards the elect who were present, when the service was finished each of them rose up and went out among the rest, Joseph commanding that they should return day by day to partake of the grace administered. Thus was the vessel, says the poem, proved for the first time. In the speech of Petrus to the people who were rejected there is further evidence that the sustenance was more especially of the spiritual order, and it is important to establish this point from the earliest of the Graal histories. He speaks of the great delight experienced in the Grace and of the great joy with which the

communicants were penetrated. They were filled as the Psalmist was filled and she who sang the Magnificat: *Esurientes implevit bonis* ["He filled the hungry with good things"]. What was filled was the heart of man, and what was reflected was the entire soul. My contention is therefore that Robert de Borron had the idea of the Feeding Dish present to his mind when he made the scarcity of food for his company an opportunity for the discriminating test of the second great table of refectio, but in place of bodily meat and bread, symbolised by the single fish, as something intentionally placed out of all reasonable proportion, he administered extasis. That question of Petrus to the unworthy crowd about him: Do you experience nothing? is so evidently impossible, in their case, as a reference to eating and drinking that there is no need to dwell thereon. It left no opportunity to the prose editors whose versions complete the trilogy, and they lose all touch with the notion.

As regards the Fish, by which we shall be brought at a later stage to another form of symbolism found in the poem, the text offers a comparison which, although a little cryptic, seems also significant. It says that in the sight of the Graal, in its company and the service thereof, true believers experience as much satisfaction as a fish, which, having been taken by a man in his hand, has contrived to escape therefrom and again go swimming in the sea. The specific fish of the story was placed before the Sacred Vessel exactly in the middle of the table, and was covered with a cloth. There is no suggestion that it was eaten, and it appears to have remained as a kind of fixed dish whenever the service was celebrated.

The noticeable point about the poem is that the material sustenance provided once only by the sacred vessel, as something *nihil ad rem*, is passed over so slightly and



lightly that on the face of the text it is a matter of inference whether the Company partook (a) of anything physical at all, except the broken meats which remained in the stewardship of the camp; or (b) alternately of anything except the Eucharist, which certainly provides bodily sustenance in the most material of the sacramental texts. On the other hand, all processes of language are enlisted by Robert de Borron to show that they were sustained spiritually. Further, the palmary miracle accomplished by the vessel on this occasion was not any kind of refreshment, spiritual or corporeal, but that of discrimination between the good and evil among the people: for this kind of judgment the table of Joseph was set up and the goats were separated from the sheep. There was, I suppose, in the poet's mind no question that what could nourish the soul, which is vital, could at need refresh the body, which is accessory only. It is therefore small wonder that when the fountain text says so little, those which derive therefrom are content to leave it thereat, and they add nothing. For Joseph and his brethren it remained that the Lord was the part of my chalice, and perhaps in the last understanding the famine which fell upon the companions was the scarcity of grace in the soul rather than of food in the stomach.

Now, on the other hand, the Book of the Holy Graal is in one sense the legend of the Feeding Dish consecrated and exalted, and seeing that as the texts stand it is that from which the greatest of all quests and the most wonderful version of all the quests which are accessory must be supposed to derive *ex hypothesi*, it is essential that we should understand its position clearly, and I will tabulate the references as follows:

1. The people on their way to Britain are fed marvellously with all manner of viands, both meat and drink, as, for

example, at houses by the way and at lordly castles. (2) In this primary allusion the Graal is not said to feed them. (3) They receive nourishment from the table of the Graal, but this is the Eucharist, and it is expressly stated that the company had nothing else on that day. (4) At a later stage, a second instance is given of this super-substantial refreshment. (5) It is not till we are approaching comparatively the close of the chronicle that we reach something more definite. The company are already in Britain, and through the persecution of their heathen enemies they are hungry. Twelve loaves are obtained; they are broken by Joseph, are placed in the Dish, and they feed 500 people, more than the twelve loaves being left subsequently. (6) It does not prove food of spiritual life, for those who were filthy before are filthy still. (7) At yet a later stage, the heathens test the feeding powers of the Vessel by the imprisonment of the Christians. In Wales the Vessel again furnishes all manner of viands, and one fish is a superabundant provision for the whole company. After a similar manner, they are fed with all possible delicacies in Scotland.

Passing over the later Merlin romances, which are neither exactly Graal histories nor quests, and offer nothing to our purpose, we find that the shadow of the Quest is projected into the prose Lancelot, though there is no questing intention, and the visit of Gawain to the Graal Castle is the one example of indignity offered to a guest therein. The responsibility, however, does not rest with the royal and saintly host, whose high-erected thought "is seated in a heart of courtesy." There is the flight of the mystical dove from casement to inmost Shrine, as if the bird went to renew the virtues of the Holy Graal; there is the apparition of the unattended damozel, bearing that which itself bore the likeness of a chalice; there is the genuflection of all

knees before the Holy Vessel; and there are sweet odours with all delicacies lavished upon the great table. But in the feast which follows, the peer of the Round Table alone has an empty plate. It was the discrimination and forejudgment of the Hallow in respect of that Knight, who, in the days of Galahad, would indeed propose the Quest but would not persevere therein.

In the Longer Prose Perceval, after the restitution of all things, there is abundance everywhere in the Castle, "insomuch that there is nought wanting that is needful for the bodies of noble folk," even as for noble souls. But the source of all this plenty is in a river which comes from the Earthly Paradise and not in the Holy Graal. On the occasion of Gawain's visit, the table is garnished richly, but it is with game of the forest and other meats of this world; it is the same on the arrival of Lancelot; and then even the earthly food does not vary.

In the Quest of Galahad the manifestations of the Graal are as follows: (1) In the banqueting-hall of King Arthur, and it is the only record of its appearance in any castle of the external world, the reason being that the Graal is "going about." On this occasion—yes, even in the presence of Galahad—"every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in this world." As the table was dight for the festival, it seems to follow that what was otherwise provided already underwent transformation, probably in the minds of the participants. (2) At the stone cross in the forest and in the waste land, where stood the old chapel and where in the presence of Lancelot the sick knight was made whole by the Precious Vessel. (3) To Lancelot in the Graal Castle, where there was, firstly, a Mass of the Graal, and, secondly, a banquet at which all were fed by the Vessel. (4) To Galahad and his elect companions at the consummation of the Quest, but the sweet meats were

those of the Eucharist exalted to the arch-natural degree. (5) In Sarras at the close of all, “when the deadly flesh began to behold the spiritual things,” and Christ’s transcendence was manifested in Christ’s immanence. Of these five changes in the exposition of the Holy Graal, the first only and the lowest was that of earthly food; it was communicated by a special indulgence, in the palace of a lord of the world, as an encouragement to the quest of Heaven.

If we turn to the German cycle, we shall find that the feeding qualities are before all things obvious in Wolfram. At the first visit of Parsifal, what is taken from the Graal is bread, but other dishes stand before it in right great plenty, both rare and common. Some say that there are no such riches on earth, but to the poet this is a word of foolishness, since the Graal is the crown of all. The wine also was the gift of the precious object, and the cups on the table were filled by the power thereof. In the great and high festival, when the questing Knight was crowned as King and Warden of the mystery, even the ordinary fowl of the forest were taken from the Graal. I am afraid that such ministry in the Parsifal is comparable to the procession therein, somewhat indiscriminate in method and “like a tale of little meaning, though the words are strong.” In the curious chronicle of Heinrich, the service of the table is after the manner born of this world, but the host does not partake till he is served from the sacred Reliquary with something which, by its description, bears the external semblance of the symbolical Bread of Heaven. The poem, however, has otherwise no sacramental connections, nor has the Vessel, strictly speaking, what is understood here by feeding properties.

It remains now to sum up and to ask in our hearts—though the answer is remote in our quest—what is the meaning of

all this disconcerting medley, which out of the Holy Graal, as an issue in time and place, brings now the voice of an oracle, like the classical Bætylus; now a certain Βασανος or touchstone, a criterion of judgment which separates the good from the evil; now a suspended viaticum, which keeps the sick alive and the dead in a false life, but offers no relief in suffering; now manifests the corporeal changes in the growth of the Divine Body; now shows Christ crucified; and now out of all reason—like a coarse Talmudic allegory—provides the game of the forest—all commonest and rarest meats; yet in all and through all is (a) the Mystery of the Eucharist, and (b) a simple reliquary containing ex hypothesi the Precious Blood of the Redeemer. At the moment let us note further—and this only—as a little curious, that two out of the three express texts of transubstantiation are texts of the Feeding Dish, but the third in the series has spiritualised all its houses and acknowledges not the flesh or its ministry except in the Eucharist. The Chrétien portion of the Conte del Graal is a pagan wonder-book tintured thinly with Christianity, but it is not nearly so gross regarding the service of the Sacred Vessel as the Book of the Holy Graal or the Great Quest itself. There is more in Gautier than in Chrétien, and very much more in Wolfram than in the putative Walter Map. But those who continued and those who finished the Conte are fitful in their introduction of the feeding element, and the romance of Galahad puts the disconcerting ceremonial outside the holy places of the mystic Castle.

I think, in conclusion, that the intention of the Greater Chronicles concerning the Feeding Dish is to be taken in another sense of the Quest of Galahad, which says of Lancelot: “Yf ye wold aske how he lyved, he that fedde the peple of Israel with manna in deserte, soo was he fedde. For every day when he had sayd his prayers, he was susteyned with the grace of the Holy Ghoost.” And, as the

Welsh version has it, “so that he thought himself to be full of the best meats.”

