

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

By Arthur Edward Waite

[Podcast 5]

BOOK TWO MYSTERIES OF THE HOLY GRAAL IN
MANIFESTATION AND REMOVAL

[continues]

CHAPTER FIVE THE LESSER HALLOWS OF THE LEGEND

Section A— THE SUMMARY OF THESE MATTERS

The Hallows of the Graal legend are the beginning of its wonders and of its meanings only; but, as I have intimated already, the greater includes the lesser, and that which is of all the highest has assumed from the beginning in its symbolism the things by which it is surrounded. As it is in the light of man's higher part that we are able to interpret the lower, as the body is explained by the soul, so even the Castle of the Graal and the great Temple, with all their allusions and all their sacred things, are resolved into the mystery of the Cup, because there is a cloud of witnesses but one true voice which is the spokesman of all. There is obviously no need in this place—as we are concerned with the greater subjects—to lay stress upon the subsidiary Hallows as if they were an integral portion of the Holy

Graal regarded symbolically. They are of the accidents only, and as such they are not vital. The Lance is important to the legends, but not otherwise than from the legendary standpoint; the Sword is also important, but not in a sacramental sense; the Dish signifies nothing, or next to nothing. The explanation is that the French literature of the Holy Graal, in its form as now extant, has on the external side its roots in traditions and memorials connected with the Passion of Christ. The different cycles of the literature develop their account of these memorials with motives that vary, but they combine therewith certain sacred objects derived from other sources and not belonging logically to the scheme. They worked, for example, upon pre-existent materials which were not assimilated wholly into the matter of the romances, and it is largely these portions for which, in any scheme of interpretation, we shall be scarcely able to account unless upon divergent lines.

Speaking generally of the Lesser Hallows, the following points are clear. The German cycle, as represented by Wolfram, derived its idea of the Lance from a source in folk-lore apart from the Graal legend as we know it in Northern French. The Northern French literature is clear as to those Hallows connecting with the Passion of Christ; these are the Cup, otherwise the Paschal Dish, and the Lance. It is dubious and variable about the Sword and Dish or Platter, for which there are no antecedents in the Passion. Several texts have carried over some of the Hallows without modification from folk-lore, even when great Christian relics were ready to their hands. For example, the sword used by Peter at Gethsemane did not occur to them, though it would have been more to their purpose, the reason being that there was no official tradition concerning it in the external life of the Church. The Dish is in the same position of unmodified folk-lore; the platter on which the head of Saint John the Baptist was

served to Herodias is a chance missed even by the Longer Prose Perceval, despite its allocation of the Sword to the instrument of the Precursor's martyrdom. Other subsidiary Hallows, mentioned therein, which are by way of after-thought, increase without exhausting the possible relics of the Passion—one of them tells of the Crown of Thorns; another of the cloth with which Christ was covered when He was laid on the sepulchre; and yet another of the sacred nails used at the Crucifixion. I do not remember that the scourge has occurred to any maker of texts. The Crown of Thorns was called the Golden Circle, having been set in precious metal and jewels by the Queen of the Castle where it was preserved. We have also the pincers wherewith the nails were drawn from the limbs of Christ when He was taken down from the Cross. Finally, the shield of Judas Maccabæus is met with in one romance, where it is won in battle by Gawain. The Sword has been also referred. to the same prince in Israel.

I suppose that the legend of the face-cloth, which is part of the Veronica legend, is the earliest of the Passion relics, and among the evangelisation traditions, that of Lazarus and his companions coming to the South of France, carrying the face-cloth with them, has the palm of antiquity in the West. But this relic, though it occupies an important position in the early history of the Graal, is not included among the Hallows of the Graal Castle.

The metrical romance of De Borron has one Hallow only, and this is the first extant Graal history. The first extant Quest is that portion of the Conte del Graal which we owe to Chrétien; so far as his work is concerned there are four Hallows—the Vessel called Graal, the Lance, the Sword and the Dish. The Lance has been called his particular introduction. The Didot Perceval, which is thought to owe something to Chrétien, introduces the Lance without any

explanation concerning it. The Chrétien sequels, the Longer Prose Perceval and the Galahad Quest, lay stress upon the Sacred Sword, which is usually broken, and the task of the elect hero is to re-solder the weapon. In all texts the Lance ranks next to the Cup in importance, and when the one is removed to heaven at the close of the Galahad Quest, it is accompanied by the other. The Longer Prose Perceval is a very late Quest, and it has Hallows innumerable. The Book of the Holy Graal, at least in its present form, is a very late history, and it introduces the Nails of the Passion; it gives also an invented and artificial allegory to account for the Sword.

It being obvious, as I have said, that the Sword and the Dish are but little to the purpose of the Graal, it will not be difficult to understand that those who took over these objects from antecedent legends were not of one mind concerning them, more especially in respect of the Dish, which remains a superfluity in the pageant and a hindrance in the symbolism as it stands. The Sword in several instances is important especially, as I have said, to the plot of the story, but it has no reason in the symbolism.

Section B— LEGENDS OF THE SACRED LANCE

In the Gautier section of the Conte del Graal, and in the description of Gawain's visit to the Graal Castle, he sees among the sacred objects a Lance, which bleeds into a silver cup, but it is not the Cup of the Graal. The Lance is the weapon which pierced the side of Christ, and it is said that it will bleed till Doomsday. The body of the arm was of wood. The blade was white as snow, and the weapon was at the head of the master dais; it seems to have reposed in the vessel, and two tapers were burning before it. The stream of blood issued from the point of the Lance and ran down into the vessel, from which, as it overflowed, it poured into

a channel of gold and ran without the Hall. This extravagant description is substituted for a much simpler account in Chrétien's portion of the poem; there only a single drop of blood trickles down to the hand of the squire who bears the weapon in the pageant. The fuller historical account is found in Manessier's section, which says that the Lance is that of the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Christ. According to a Montpellier manuscript, Joseph of Arimathæa was present at the foot of the Cross, and seeing, as the spear was withdrawn, how the blood ran down, he collected it in the Holy Vessel, turning black as he did so with sorrow. The Didot Perceval says only that a squire in the Graal Castle carried a Lance in his two hands, that it was that of Longinus, and that a drop of blood flowed from the sacred point. I believe that this romance represents a primitive state of the Christian Quest, though it is late in its actual form, the reason being that the Hallows of the Passion are the only wonder-objects which belong properly to the Quest. The wider field of vision offered in the Greater Chronicles and the multiplication of relics are indubitable signs of lateness. In the Book of the Holy Graal the Hallows which are seen in the vision preceding the ordination of the younger Joseph are a great ensanguined cross, three nails from which blood seems to flow, a Lance of which the iron point is stained also with blood, an ensanguined cincture and a bended rod dyed in the same manner. It will be seen that the writer of this romance knew well enough that with the Graal itself he could connect only the things thereto belonging—namely, the other Relics of the Passion, and realising this fact in later branches of his Chronicle, while he perpetuates other objects through centuries of hidden life, he is careful not to locate them in the Graal Castle. The Huth Merlin is the only legend of the prophet which knows of another Hallow than the Sacred Vessel; and this is the Lance, but the circumstances under which it is introduced and the account

which is given concerning it belong to a later stage of our research. I may say, however, that it was an instrument of mystic vengeance, and as such it reappears in the great prose Lancelot. It is seen there by Gawain, who is smitten by its blade of fire, and afterwards is healed by the Graal. It is seen also by Sir Bors when he visits Corbenic; an old man carries it in one hand, while he swings a censer with the other. In the romance of Galahad, as we know it, the Lance manifests twice, and this is at the end of the Quest, when it is borne in one hand by an angel, who holds in the other a box to receive the blood from its point. The ipsissima verba of the Longer Prose Perceval are that of the Hallows there are "right great plenty." Perceval's shield had in the boss thereof some of the Blood of our Lord and a piece of His garment; they were placed therein by Joseph of Arimathæa. As regards the Lance itself, the point bleeds into the Holy Graal, and here also the weapon is one of vengeance, or rather of doom, for he who is elected to the Quest has something to perform in respect of it, and he fails therein. This notwithstanding, the Hallow in the romance under notice serves little purpose, because it does nothing. For, the sake of completeness the Lesser Hallows of the German cycle may be mentioned with great brevity in this section, though their history and import must be held over for a very long time to come. In the Parsifal of Wolfram, the ensanguined head of a Lance is carried round a certain chamber; it has no connection with the Passion, but once more it is a memorial of vengeance, of fatality which is long and grievous. In Heinrich's Diu Crône, the Lance is held by two young men, and it sheds three great drops of blood, which are received in a salver. I should observe in conclusion, for the time being, as to this Hallow that the French cycle may be classified in three sections, of which A does not mention the Lance, B mentions but does not explain its antecedents, and C says that it is the Lance

of Longinus used at the Crucifixion. Late or early, there is no other history concerning it.

Section C— THE BROKEN SWORD

The Graal Cup was not so much connected with the Passion as originated therefrom, because it is clear in history that, or ever Robert de Borron spoke of secret words, the meaning of Mass chalices, and the transit of the Great Hallow from East to West, the Precious Blood had been brought already within the wonder-world of relics. So also the sacred Lance had received its justification in tradition before it was exalted in romance. The allocation of other objects within the same sphere of devotion was so natural that it was not likely to be resisted, but it must be observed that the attributions were inherited and not invented by the makers of books of chivalry. Face-cloth and loin-cloth, nails and crown of thorns had long been included among the objects provided for veneration before the Book of the Holy Graal or the Longer Prose Perceval had dreamed of registering them among the Hallows of the Graal ark, or elsewhere in their holy and marvellous shrines. That they were capable of inventing relics is shown by the history of the sacred Sword, and such relics had their imputed antecedents in Scripture; but the things of the Passion of Christ were too sacred for their interference, and they were left in the hands of the Church. The Church perhaps was not idle, and the Church did not scruple perhaps, but minstrels and weavers of stories knew their proper limits and abode therein. Their respect in the case under notice guarantees it in yet another, for which reason I hold it as certain that never did Robert de Borron tamper with Eucharistic formulæ, or, in other words, that, whether from far or near, he inherited and did not invent the sacred words of the mystery.

The Sword of the Graal is considerable under two aspects—firstly, as a derivative from folk-lore, which passes, as we have seen, through certain branches of the literature without suffering an especial change in its nature; secondly, as a hallowed object having an imputed derivation from the history of the Church of God under one of its two covenants. In the second case, we must be prepared to find—and this is natural also—that certain reflections from folk-lore, as from the earlier state of the object, are to be found in its consecrated form. In the Chrétien portion of the Conte del Graal the Sword is suspended from the neck of a page or squire and is brought to the Master of the House as a present from his niece, with leave to bestow it apparently howsoever he will, so only that it shall be well used. An inscription upon it says that it will never break except in one peril, which is known only to the smith who forged it. In his time as a craftsman he made three such weapons, and no others will follow. As regards this particular example, the belt was worth a treasure, the crosspiece was of fine gold, and the sheath was of Venetian smith's work. It is given to Perceval by the King of the Graal Castle as something to him predestined. But it is only at a later stage that he learns under what circumstances it will fly in pieces and how it may be repaired—namely, by plunging it in a certain lake which is hard by the smithy of him who wrought it. The continuation of Gautier ignores these facts and reproduces the Sword at the Castle, where it is carried by a crowned knight; it is broken already and Gawain is asked to resolder it, in which task he fails. Perceval succeeds, on the occasion of his second visit, except for a slight crevice, thus proving that, at least in a certain measure, he is a lover of God, a true knight, and one who loves also the Church, which is the Spouse of God. The conclusion of Manessier furnishes the history of the Hallow in full, though it has been the subject of allusion previously: (a) one stroke was given therewith; it

destroyed the realm of Logres and the country thereto adjacent; (b) this stroke was inflicted on the King's brother, in the course of a battle; (c) when the King himself took up the fragments unwarily, he was pierced through the thigh, and the wound will be healed only when his brother's death has been avenged. In Chrétien, on the contrary, the wound of the Graal King is caused by a spear which passes through his two thighs. The intercalation or alternative conclusion of Gerbert sends Perceval again into exile, because certain imperfections in his life account for the fact that he cannot resolder the Sword, and the Quest must be fulfilled better. The Hallow remains in the Castle, but another sword is introduced and serves to indicate that behind the strange memorial of this unknown poet there were sources of legend which, if we could now recover them, might place yet another construction upon the root-matter of the Graal legend. In Gerbert the sword under notice is broken not in a conflict which calls for a conventional vengeance, after the worthless motives of folk-lore, but in an attempt to enforce an entrance into the Earthly Paradise.

Passing over the Lesser Chronicles, which, although in the Didot Perceval it is hinted on one occasion that there were many worthy relics, make no reference to the Sword, and coming to the Greater Chronicles we find that in the Book of the Holy Graal there is a Hallow of this kind, and it is very important from the standpoint of the romance itself and for the Quest which follows therefrom. It was the sword of David the King, and it was placed, as we have seen, by Solomon in a mysterious ship destined to sail the seas for centuries as a testimony to Galahad that his ancestor was aware of his coming at the end of the times of the Graal. During the course of its history more than one wound is inflicted therewith, and the circumstances under which it is broken are also told variously. In the Book of the

Holy Graal there are actually two swords; to that of David the particular virtue ascribed is that no one can draw it—before the predestined hero in the days of the Quest—without being visited heavily for his rashness. The doom works automatically even to the infliction of death. It is only by a kind of accident that this sword is broken, and then it is rejoined instantly, according to one of the codices. In another there is a distinct account, which does not say how or whether the sword was resoldered in fine. As regards the second sword, it is merely an ordinary weapon with which Joseph the Second is smitten by a certain seneschal when he is endeavouring to convert the prince of a certain part of Great Britain. The sword breaks when it pierces him, and the point remains in the wound. After various miracles, which result in the general conversion of the people, the sufferer places his hand on the point of the sword, which is apparently protruding from his thigh; it comes out of the wound, and the place heals up immediately. Joseph then takes the two portions of the broken sword and says: “God grant that this good weapon shall never be soldered except by him who is destined to accomplish the adventure of the Siege Perilous at the Round Table, in the time of King Arthur; and God grant also that the point shall not cease to exude blood until the two portions are so soldered.”

It is reasonable to expect that these Hallows should prove a source of confusion as to their duplication and their purpose. I do not conceive that the sword which is brought out of Fairyland in the Huth Merlin, which is claimed by Balan, which brings about the Dolorous Stroke—though this is inflicted actually by another instrument, which in fine involves the two brothers in mutual destruction, can be connected with either of the weapons with which we have been just dealing. The alternative later Merlin has no mystery of swords which can be identified with the Hallow

of the Graal, and the prose Lancelot knows nothing of that of David. It speaks, however, of a knight named Elias, who carries two swords; one of them is enclosed in a priceless sheath, and is said to be that which pierced the loins of Joseph of Arimathæa and was broken therein. It is scarcely necessary to notice that the father here is confused with the son. The Quest of Galahad distinguishes the two swords, except in the Welsh version, which identifies them by a natural mischance. That one of them by which Joseph was wounded is presented to Galahad for soldering, and when the elect knight has performed the task, it is given into the charge of Bors, because he was a good knight and a worthy man. After the soldering "it arose grete and marvellous, and was full of grete hete that many men felle for drede." It seems to follow that it was brought back to Logres on the return of Sir Bors from Sarras. The Sword of David was carried to Sarras, as we may infer, by Galahad, but it was not taken to heaven with the Graal and Lance, the reason being doubtless that it was not a symbol of the Passion. In the Longer Prose Perceval the Sword, as we know, is that with which Saint John the Baptist was beheaded, and though there is, firstly, no attempt to account for the presence of this Hallow in England, nor, secondly, any reference to it in early literature, the identification helps us to understand better its place among the Hallows, as some other swords met with in the literature have scarcely a title to be included with sacred objects. The office of Gawain, before he can know anything of Graal mysteries, is to obtain this Sword from its wrongful keepers, and herein he succeeds. The scabbard is loaded with precious stones and the mountings are of silk with buttons of gold. The hilt has also precious stones, and the pommel is a holy and sacred stone set upon it by a certain Roman Emperor. When the Sword came forth from the scabbard it was covered with blood, and this seems always to have been the case at the hour of noon, which was the

time of the saint's martyrdom. When noon has passed it becomes clear and green like an emerald. It is the same length as another sword, but when sheathed neither the weapon nor the scabbard seems to be of two spans length. It is said on the testimony of Josephus that the Old Law was destroyed by a stroke of this sword without recovery, and that to effect the destruction our Lord Himself suffered to be smitten in the side with the Spear. These things are not to be understood on the open sense of the text.

The Greater Chronicles of the Graal may be, as they indeed are, upon God's side, but the judgment concerning this subsection of the Lesser Hallows must be that the Sword is an impediment before the face of the symbolism of the cycle, and often an idle wonder which we could wish to be taken out of the way. We could wish also—or at least I personally—that something of the mystery behind the ascription of Gerbert might come at this day into our hands. In the Parsifal of Wolfram the hero of that great Quest is refreshed as by fruits brought from the Earthly Paradise on the occasion of his first visit to the Temple of the Holy Graal. We know not how or why, but this is another reflection, probably from the source of Gerbert, and one which takes us no further, except that from time to time, by dim hints and allusions, we see that the legend of the Graal is not so far apart from the legend of Eden. In this manner we recur to the German cycle, and there we find that there is a sword of mark in the Parsifal; it is that which was given to the hero by Amfortas, the Graal King. Now that this, amidst any variations, is the same story as that which is told by Chrétien is rather evident than likely. Another sword broke when Parsifal was fighting with his unknown brother Feirfis, because it would not drink the blood of his kinship, and this is the far antithesis of some of the French stories. In Heinrich's *Diu Crône*, a fair youth of exalted mien carries a fair broad sword, which he lays before the

King of the Castle, and this sword is given by the King to Gawain after he has asked the question which we know to be all important.

In conclusion as to this matter, the Hallow of the Sword is not unlike a corresponding weapon in some of the grades of Masonic chivalry; in the same way as the reverend Knights therein do not, in many cases, know how to use the symbolic arm, so in the Graal literature the poets and romancers have accepted the custody of something which is so little to their purpose that they know scarcely what they shall do therewith: had they only thought less of their folk-lore and hence omitted it entirely, they would have told a better—aye, even a truer—story from the standpoint of their own symbolism.

Section D— THE DISH

The Sacred Dish being also, as we have seen, rather an unmeaning mystery, and as although it recurs frequently the descriptions are brief and the office which it holds is doubtful, it will be only desirable to distinguish those texts in which it is found. Subject to one possibility, and this is of the speculative order, it is, as we have seen, an unmodified survival from folk-lore; we should therefore expect it to appear in the Chrétien portion of the Conte del Graal, and this is the case actually, but it serves therein a very practical and mundane purpose, being used by the King and his guest to wash their hands. It is a silver plate and is carried by a damsel. It reappears in one codex of the continuation by Gautier. The conclusion by Manessier describes it after a similar manner, but its purpose is not delineated; Perceval asks all the necessary questions regarding the Graal and Lance; he asks also concerning the Dish, but there is apparently nothing to ask, or at least he hears nothing. At the same time it may have had a higher

significance for this poet than for all the others, since he causes the Holy Dish to follow Perceval with the other Hallows when he goes with a hermit into the wilderness, where he serves the Lord for ten years. Finally, he states in his last words that the Dish was doubtless assumed into heaven with the other sacred objects, namely, the Lance and the Sword. According to Gerbert, a lady named Philosophine, who here, as in another romance, figures as the mother of Perceval, came over with Joseph of Arimathæa bearing a certain plate; another lady carried an ever-bleeding lance, while Joseph himself bore a fairer vessel than eye had ever beheld. In the Lesser Chronicles there is only a single reference, which occurs in the Didot Perceval; when the Graal and the other Hallows are first manifested to Perceval, it is said that a damsel bears two silver plates, together with draperies. In the Book of the Holy Graal, and on the occasion that the Second Joseph is raised to the high pontificate, the Paschal Dish is seen on the altar, and in the middle place thereof is an exceedingly rich vessel of gold and precious stones. Here the reference is probably to the Sacramental Cup, but the account is confused; and elsewhere the complex romance presents a new aspect of folk-lore, for there is another Dish or Charger, bearing a great and glorious head, about which we have no explanation and of which we hear nothing subsequently, either in the text itself or in the later documents of the cycle. The Dish also passes out of the horizon, not only in the prose Lancelot but also in the Quest of Galahad. The German cycle speaks of a Golden Salver jewelled with precious stones and carried upon a silken cloth. It is used in Heinrich's poem to receive the blood which issues from the Lance.

It seems possible that there was an early tendency on the part of Christian romancers to distinguish between the chalice—being the Cup in which Christ made His

sacrament—and the Dish—being the vessel in which He and His disciples ate the Paschal Lamb. They are to some extent confused in the Book of the Holy Graal, and the prose Lancelot knows of a single vessel only, which is the Eucharistic Cup. If such an implicit was present to the mind of Manessier, we can understand why he says that the Dish was assumed into heaven.

I wonder that it has not occurred to some of those who have preceded me in the tortuous paths and among the pitfalls of interpretation, to understand the four Hallows after another and more highly symbolical manner, as follows: (1) The Chalice is the Cup of the Sacrament; (2) The Dish is the Paten; (3) The Sword symbolises the Body of Christ; its fracture is the bruising for our sins and the breaking for our trespasses, while at some far distance the resoldering signifies the Resurrection; (4) In another sense, the Spear is also the wounding for our iniquities, by which the life flowed from the body, and the issue of blood therefrom is the outgoing of the divine life for our salvation. Yet it is not after this manner that we shall come into the truth of the Graal, while it is likely enough that hereabouts is one of those pits which bring the unwary to destruction.

We shall meet with all the Hallows under a very slight modification in the most unexpected of all places, but this will be at a later stage. We shall then see that the people preserved something besides folk-lore, or that folk-lore had other meanings behind it than the recognised schools would be disposed to attribute thereto.

CHAPTER SIX THE CASTLE OF THE HOLY GRAAL

The true legitimacies are for the most part in exile, or otherwise with their rights in abeyance. The real canons of

literature can be uttered only behind doors or in the secrecy of taverns. The secrets of the great orthodoxies are very seldom communicated, even to epopts on their advancement. The highest claims of all are not so much wanting in warrant as wanting those spokesmen who are willing to utter them. We shall not be surprised, therefore, to find that the custodians of the Holy Graal, which was a mystery of all secrecy, "there where no sinner can be," despite the kingly titles ascribed to them, sometimes abode in the utmost seclusion.

Let us seek in the first instance to realise the nature and the place of that Castle or Temple which, according to the legend, was for a period of centuries the sanctuary of the Sacred Vessel and of the other hallowed objects connected therewith. It is in the several locations of the Hallows that we shall come at a later time into a fuller understanding of their offices and of the meanings which may lie behind them. They are not to be regarded exactly as part of the mystery of the Castle; but at least this is more than a casket, and between the container and the things contained, distinct though their significance may be, there are points of correlation, so that the one throws light on the other.

We have seen that the Vessel itself was brought from Salem to Britain, and it follows from the historical texts that the transit had a special purpose, one explanation of which will be found ready to our hands when the time comes for its consideration. The Castle is described after several manners, the later romances being naturally the more specific, and we get in fine a geographical settlement and boundary. In the Chrétien portion of the Conte del Graal, Perceval discovers the Castle in a valley, wherein it is well and beautifully situated, having a four-square tower, with a principal hall and a bridge leading up to the chief entrance.

In some of the other legends the asylum is so withdrawn that it is neither named nor described. The Early History of Merlin speaks of it not less simply as the place where they had the Holy Vessel in keeping. According to the Didot Perceval, it is the house of the Rich King Fisherman; it is situated in a valley; it has a tower, and is approached by a bridge. It might be a tower merely, for the description is not less vague than many accounts of the Cup. One of the late Merlin texts says merely that the Holy Vessel is in the West—that is, in the Land of Vortigern, or that it abides in Northumbria. Another says that the Castle is Corbenic; but though we hear a good deal concerning it, there is no description whatever.

The section of the Conte del Graal which is referable to Gautier de Doulens says that it is situated on a causeway tormented by the sea. The building is of vast extent and is inhabited by a great folk. We hear of its ceiling, emblazoned with gold and embroidered with silver stars, of its tables of precious metal, its images and the rich gems which enlighten it. In a word, we are already in the region of imaginative development and adornment, but it is all mere decoration which carries with it no meaning beyond the heavy tokens of splendour. Manessier furnishes no special account, and Gerbert, who has other affairs at heart than solicitude about a material building or desire to exalt it into allegory, leaves it unsketched entirely.

The Book of the Holy Graal is the only French text which contains in a methodical account the building of the Holy House. The first wardens have passed from the land of the living, and Alain le Gros is the keeper of the Blessed Vessel. The actual builder is a certain converted king of Terre Foraine, and there is a covenant between him and Alain, one condition of which is that the Graal shall remain in his kingdom. The Castle on its completion is given the mystic

name of Corbenic, in obedience to an inscription which is found blazoned on one of the entrance gates. The name is said to signify the Treasury of the Holy Vessel. The Graal is placed in a fair chamber of the Castle, as if on an altar of repose, but, all his munificence notwithstanding and all the sacramental visions which he sees in the Holy Place, beating of birds' wings and chanting of innumerable voices, the king is visited speedily for his mere presence and receives his death-wound at the very altar: it is the judgment of the sanctuary on those who desecrate the sanctuary by carrying, however unwittingly, an unhallowed past therein, and it recalls the traditional conclusion of the Cabiric Mysteries, wherein the candidate was destroyed by the gods. Setting aside an analogy on which I am by no means insisting, the event was the beginning of those wonders which earned for Castle Corbenic the name of the Palace Adventurous, because no one could enter therein, and no one could sleep, its lawful people excepted, without death overtaking them, or some other grievous penalty.

The prose Lancelot is in near correspondence with Chrétien, representing the Castle as situated at the far end of a great valley, with water encircling it. On another occasion it is named rather than described, and visited but not expounded, but we learn that it is situated in a town which has many dwellers therein. In the Quest of Galahad it is a rich and fair building, with a postern opening towards the sea, and this was guarded by lions, between which a man might pass only if he carried the arms of faith, since the sword availed nothing and there was no protection in harness. For the visitor who was expected or tolerated, it would seem that all doors stood open, except the door of the sanctuary. But this would uncloset of itself; the light would issue from within; the silver table would be seen; and thereon the Holy Vessel, covered with drapery of samite. There also on a day might be celebrated, with

becoming solemnity, the Great Mass of the Supersanctified, and this even in the presence of those who were not clean in their past, so only that they had put away their sin when they entered on the Quest. It was thus beheld by Lancelot, though he lay as one dead afterwards, because of his intrusion. So also the welcome guest had reason to know that the court of King Pelles held a great fellowship in the town of Corbenic. But there were other visitors at times and seasons who saw little of all this royalty, like Hector de Marys, who—brother as he was to my lord Sir Lancelot—found the doors all barred against him and no warden to open, long as he hailed thereat.

The most decorative of all the accounts is, however, in the Longer Prose Perceval, where the Castle is reached by means of three bridges, which are horrible to cross. Three great waters run below them, the first bridge being a bow-shot in length and not more than a foot in width. This is the Bridge of the Eel; but it proves wide and a fair thorough-way in the act of crossing. The second bridge is of ice, feeble and thin, and it is arched high above the water. This is transformed on passing into the richest and strangest ever seen, and its abutments are full of images. The third and last bridge stands on columns of marble. Beyond it there is a sculptured gate, giving upon a flight of steps, which leads to a spacious hall painted with figures in gold. When Perceval visited the Castle a second time he found it encompassed by a river, which came from the Earthly Paradise and proceeded through the forest beyond as far as the hold of a hermit, where it found peace in the earth. To the Castle itself there were three names attributed: the Castle of Eden, the Castle of Joy and the Castle of Souls. In conclusion as to this matter, the location, in fine, is Corbenic—not as the unvaried name, but as that which may be called the accepted, representing the Temple at its highest, and corresponding in French romance to

Montsalvatch, in German—which our late redaction of the Book of the Holy Graal mentions specifically, and which, all doubtful clouds of mystic adventure notwithstanding, looms almost as a landmark in the Lancelot and the Quest of Galahad.

I must speak very lightly of the German cycle, because, through all these branches, it is understood that I shall deal with it again. In the Parsifal and Titurel the Temple is completely spiritualised, so that it has ceased almost to be a house made with hands, though the descriptions on the external side are here and there almost severe in their simplicity. On that side it has the strength of a feudal fortress, turret by turret rising. In the master-hall of the palace there is something of Oriental splendour—carpets and couches and cushions, marble hearths burning strange fragrant woods, and a great blazing of lights. So far the Parsifal of Wolfram, but we must turn to other texts for the building of the Temple—which is after another manner than anything told of Corbenic in the Northern French cycle. The building was the work of Titurel, the first King of the Graal, and in answer to his prayers the High Powers of Heaven prepared the ground-plan of the Holy Place and furnished the raw material. Over the construction itself the powers of earth toiled by day and the Powers of Heaven by night. The floor was of pure onyx; at the summit of the tower there was a ruby surmounted by a cross of crystal, and carbuncles shone at the meeting-points of the great arches within. The roof was of sapphire, and a pictured starry heaven moved therein in true order.

We are on a different level when we have recourse to the poem of Heinrich, which presents several anomalies in respect of the literature as a whole. The road leading to the Graal Castle was one of harsh and hazardous enterprise—world without end; but it brought the questing hero at

some far point into a plenteous and gracious land, where rose the Palace of Desire, looking beautiful exceedingly, with a meadow before it which was set apart for joust and tournament. A great concourse of knights and gentlewomen abode in the burg, and for the Castle itself we are told that there was none so fair. Though it will be seen that there is nothing distinctive in this account, as it is here reduced into summary, the design is among many things strange, for if it is not the Castle of Souls it is that of a Living Tomb, as the story concerning it will show at the proper time.

So did the place of the mysteries, from a dim and vague allusion, become

“A wilderness of building, sinking far And self-withdrawn into a wondrous depth Far sinking into splendour.”

We can scarcely say whether that which had begun on earth was assumed into the spiritual place, or whether the powers and virtues from above descended to brood thereon.

I have left over from this consideration all reference to another spiritual place, in Sarras on the confines of Egypt, where the Graal, upon its outward journey, dwelt for a period, and whither, after generations and centuries, it also returned for a period. As this was not the point of its origin, so it was not that of its rest; it was a stage in the passage from Salem and a stage in the transit to heaven. What was meant by this infidel city, which was yet so strangely consecrated, is hard to determine, but its consideration belongs to a later stage. It is too early again to ask what are the implicits of the great prose Perceval when it identifies the Castle of the Graal with the Earthly Paradise and the Place of Souls; but we may note it as a sign of

intention, and we shall meet with it in another connection where no one has thought to look for it.

CHAPTER SEVEN THE KEEPERS OF THE HALLOWS

Such was the Abode of the Halloo, s; and those who dwelt therein, the succession of Graal Keepers, belong to that Order which we should expect in such precincts. It should be noted that in the poem of Chrétien the Keeper is called the Fisher King, but his other name and his lineage are not disclosed. It is, however, the beginning only of a very long story, and though it is difficult to say how the poet would have carried it to its term, personally I do not question that he would have borne no different witness to the rest of the Graal cycle in Northern French. By this, without exception, Joseph of Arimathæa is the first guardian of the Sacred Vessel, but either he passes from the scene before it has found a sanctuary or he assumes a secondary position in his son's favour. According to the metrical romance of De Borron and the Lesser Chronicles generally, he was succeeded by his son-in-law, Brons; but according to the Greater Chronicles, as I have termed them, he was succeeded by his own son, the second Joseph, who is unknown to the other cycle. The Lesser Chronicles bridge the centuries between that generation which saw the Ascension of Christ and that which was to behold the Flower of Chivalry in Arthur, by means of a single keeper, who was to remain on earth until he had seen his grandson, Perceval, and had remitted into his hands the secrets and Hallows of which he had been in charge so long. Perceval is the third who counts in the line of election to complete the human trinity of Graal guardians, reflecting, after their own mystic manner, those Three who bear witness in heaven, namely, the Divine Trinity. To accomplish the hero's geniture, Alain, the son of Brons, although he had accepted celibacy, married in some undeclared manner, and it was

as his issue that Perceval was born in the fulness of the adventurous times. For the Early History of Merlin the Keepers are those who have the Holy Vessel, and the reticence in this case may seem like that of Chrétien, but it is not so exactly, because the prose romance of Merlin follows directly from the metrical romance of Joseph. We infer further that the promise of union with the Keepers is like *la joie perdurable*.

Gautier's continuation of the *Conte del Graal* offers no materials for the identification of the Fisher King, but the variants or interpolated passages in the Montpellier MS. follow the Lesser Chronicles, representing him as the father of Alain le Gros who married Enigea, the sister of Joseph. Manessier and Gerbert, on the other hand, reflect the Greater Chronicles, and apparently some early draft of the Book of the Holy Graal, for they know nothing concerning the younger Joseph.

From one point of view, the succession, in respect of the Greater Chronicles, involves fewer difficulties, because it exhibits a rudimentary sense of chronology and develops in consequence a long line of successive custodians. They are, however, quite shadowy, and exist only to bridge the gulf of time in the order following: (1) Joseph of Arimathæa and Joseph the Second; (2) Alain, the son of Brons; (3) Eminadap, the son of Joshua, who was himself a brother of Alain; (4) Carceloys; (5) Manuiel; (6) Lambor: the last four were kings, holding from Calafas of Terre Foraine, called Alphasan in baptism; (7) the King Pelles.

So far as regards the Book of the Holy Graal, and it is difficult to say what version or prototype of this text was before the authors of the Vulgate and Huth Merlin, but whatever it was they seem to have drawn from the same source. The Graal Castle, as we have seen, is Corbenic; it is

situated in the realm of Listenoys, and the Keeper is King Pelles. As much and no more may be said concerning the prose Lancelot. Enumerations of this kind serve very little purpose, and I will speak, therefore, only of the alternative keepers who were in evidence during the days of quest. On the one side, there is Brons, to whom succeeded Perceval at the close of a life of search; on the other, there is King Pelles, of the Castle Corbenic, whose daughter, Helayne, gave Galahad as issue to Lancelot, himself the lineal descendant of the king reigning at Sarras in the days of Joseph of Arimathæa and the first flight of the Graal. Galahad was the last Keeper recognised by this cycle, except in the Longer Prose Perceval, and he seems to have been appointed only for the purpose of removing the Vessel. It was: *Ite, missa est, and est consummatum* ["Go, it is sent," and "it is finished"], when he died and rose to the stars. As the Longer Prose Perceval is extra-lineal and thus stands by itself, though its antecedents and certain characteristics have involved its inclusion among the Greater Chronicles, I will say of it only in the present place that the King's title is that adopted by Chrétien, or the Rich King Fisherman, and that his name is not otherwise declared. His successor is Perceval, but he enters into the secret royalty after an interregnum only, and his stewardship also is with a view to the withdrawal of the mystery. As regards the German cycle, which will be dealt with elsewhere, the succession of Graal Keepers are Titurel, Frimutel and Amfortas, to whom succeeds Perceval. Titurel at the beginning was a holy hero of earthly chivalry, to whom a divine voice brought the strange tidings that he had been elected to guard the Holy Graal on Mont Salvatch. His progenitor was a man of Cappadocia who was attached to the Emperor Vespasian, and received for his services a grant of land in southern France.

The hereditary stewardship of the Holy Graal was the most secret of all mysteries, and never initiated any one outside the predestined family. There is seclusion in all cases, but that of the Brons keepership is greater beyond comparison than that of Alain and his successors. One explanation of this may be sought in the simple fact that, as regards the first case, several intermediate texts are or may be wanting, and that transparently. This is true so far as it goes, but in the most proximate pre-Arthurian period, and in the time of the king, we find still the same concealment, though it is not quite so unvaried in the records of the Conte del Graal as it is in the Early History of Merlin and in the Didot Perceval. The comparative position seems as another line of demarcation between the Lesser and Greater Chronicles, but always on the understanding that the allocation of the Longer Prose Perceval to the second series, though it cannot be placed otherwise, and apart especially, is not fully satisfactory in the nature of things. Speaking generally, the distinctions between the two branches will be appreciated most clearly by a comparison between the Early History of Merlin and the later Vulgate and Huth texts. The sanctuary is shrouded in the first, and we know only that those who have the Sacred Vessel are somewhere in Northumbria. In the second, the keeper, King Pelles, is in continual evidence. He is also a king in warfare, and it is by no means certain that he is always on the side of the over-lord Arthur.

It would be easy to extend this section very much further than I purpose doing, in view of all that is to follow; my intention here is a schedule, or this mainly; and the specific summary is as follows. There are two prototypes of the Early History versions, and they are represented, firstly, by the original draft of De Borron's metrical romance, which is much earlier than any other historical account; they are represented, secondly, by the speculative prototype of the

Book of the Holy Graal. About this book there are two things certain: (a) that it is very much later—or at least that it is later certainly—than the first recension or transcript of the book which in some undeclared manner had come into the hands of Robert de Borron; (b) that it is a good deal earlier than the Quest of Galahad as we know it, which involves also an antecedence in some form of the prose Lancelot and the Later Histories of Merlin. We are left therefore with two claims which appear to be at the root of the Mystery of the Holy Graal, as it is manifested in the French literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: these are the claim of an Eucharistic formula, the validity and efficacy of which transcended the words of institution known by the official Church, and the claim of a priesthood which did not draw from the official apostolate, though it did not question its authority. These two are one probably in their essence, and it is out of these respectively that we come to understand why Perceval is withdrawn into the innermost seclusion by the Lesser Chronicles, and why in the Greater Chronicles Galahad is assumed into heaven—both carrying their warrants.

