

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 6]

BOOK TWO MYSTERIES OF THE HOLY GRAAL IN  
MANIFESTATION AND REMOVAL

[continues]

CHAPTER EIGHT THE PAGEANTS IN THE QUESTS

The presence of the Holy Vessel signified the Divine Presence. The Life of Life had remained in the Precious Blood. The Voice of the Angel of Great Counsel, the Voice of the Son and the Voice of the Holy Spirit abode therein, or spoke as if from behind it. The Presence was sacramental, but the Presence was also real, and through the soul it was one which sustained the body itself at need. So far as regards the Lesser Chronicles, and in those which I call Greater, there was a reservation which continued through centuries, an arch-natural Mass—said from time to time and not, as we may suppose, daily—an unfailing ministry to body and soul alike. In a word, the Last Supper was maintained for ever and ever. It was the sacramental side of the eternal festival of the followers of Bran, and those who say that the roots of the mystery are in folk-lore say only the most negligible part of the truth concerning it;

for if I accomplish by a secret science the transmutation of lead into gold, it will be useless for any scholarship of science to depose that the important fact is the lead. The latter is the antecedent, and as such is, of course, indispensable, but the great fact is the conversion; and I say the same of the Graal literature.

On this and all other considerations, it will be understood that the Mystic Castle was a place of the highest reverence, and that all things concerning the Sacred Vessel were done with ceremonial solemnity, following a prescribed order. In this way it comes about that all the quests present the pageant of the Graal on its manifestation within the hall and the shrine of the Castle. There are instances in which it is exceedingly simple, and others in which it is ornate. It is the former in the Lesser Chronicles, and demands scarcely the express name of a pageant; in the Greater Chronicles it is decorative, and this term will apply to some of the manifestations which are described in the Conte del Graal. The section which is referable to Chrétien offers, however, nothing to detain us. The procession enters the hall in single file, and consists in succession of a page, or squire, who carries the mysterious Sword which will break in one danger only, of another squire who bears the Sacred Lance from which the blood issues, and then of two squires together, each supporting a ten-branched candlestick. Between these there walks the gentle and beautiful maiden who lifts up the Holy Graal in her two hands; she is followed by another maiden, who carries the Silver Dish. The procession passes twice before the couch on which the King of the Castle reclines, and it is to be noticed that whatever efficacy and wonder may reside in the objects which are manifested thus, the office of the bearers is as purely ceremonial as that of the acolytes and thurifers at any High Mass in the world. When the questing knight pays his first visit in the Didot Perceval, the offices are

transposed partially and the Sword is missing from the pageant. He who upraises the Lance enters in the prescribed manner, but he carries it with both hands and is followed by a maiden with two silver plates and a napkin on her arm, while the vessel containing the Precious Blood of our Saviour, as if it were a phial or reliquary, is in the charge of a second squire. On the occasion of the later visit, it is said, still more tersely, that the Graal and the other venerable relics come out from a chamber beyond, but we do not learn who carries: them. It is a characteristic of all the versions that, even in telling the same story, it is done always with respect to a certain genius of difference and a variant intervening in the text. Gautier de Douvens recounts in two versions the visit of Gawain to the Graal Castle, in the more important case under circumstances of unexplained mystery, for no one was less on the quest. This is comparable to the reception of a neophyte who is neither introduced nor prepared, but is mistaken at first for another. The pageant is also dismembered, for the Dish does not appear, the Hallow of the Broken Sword is placed upon the breast of a dead body, which lies on a rich bier. As if it were a subsidiary Hallow, a stately clerk carries an enormous cross of jewelled silver, and the only procession described is of canons in silken copes, who celebrate the office of the dead amidst thuribles and golden candlesticks. The Graal itself does not appear till the supper is served in the hall, but it is held by no visible hand and no other sacred object is seen in connection therewith. At a later stage of the episode, the Lance manifests and the blood which distils from its point is received, as we have seen, in a silver cup; the Broken Sword, in fine, reappears at the close; it is a very curious and piecemeal pageant. When Perceval revisits the Castle, the account of Gautier is in better conformity with what may be termed the conventional or authorised ceremonial type.

Passing to this point at the term of the continuation by Gautier de Doulens, there is again a very simple pageant, in which the Graal comes first—a Holy and Glorious Vessel—under the charge of a maiden, who issues from the secret chamber and passes before the royal table, carrying the Hallow exalted. There follows a second maiden, than whom none is fairer, clothed in white drapery, and bearing the Lance from which flows the mysterious blood. In fine, there enters the squire exposing a naked sword broken in the middle thereof. It is at this point that, abruptly enough, the continuation reaches its term and is taken up by Manessier, who causes the Graal and the Lance to pass for a second time before the King and his guest, together with the noble Silver Dish, which is carried by a third maiden—a procession of vestals only, seeing that the work of the Sword—which has been partly resoldered by Perceval—has no longer its place in the pageant. When the questing hero pays his third visit to the Graal Castle, under the auspices of the same poet, the Lance and Graal are carried by two maidens, and a squire holds the Silver Dish, enveloped in his rich amice of red samite. The sacred objects pass three times, and return as they issued into the secret chamber, the mystery of which is never disclosed fully by the makers of this romance. In fine, when Perceval is crowned—and this is his fourth visit—a gentle maiden exalts the Holy Vessel, the Lance is borne by a squire, while another maiden holds the Silver Dish. It will be seen that on each occasion there is some variation in the offices, as if these were determined by accident. The alternative of Gerbert—which seems interposed before the partial resoldering of the sword by Perceval in the Gautier version—some few verbal modifications notwithstanding, gives the same account of the Graal procession.

In the prose Lancelot, which prefaces the great and glorious Quest, the pageant has this characteristic—that it

is preceded invariably by a dove which enters through a window bearing a golden censer in its beak, and the palace fills thereupon with the eternal sweetness of the Paradise which is above. The bird passes through the hall and from sight into a chamber beyond. Out of that chamber—as if at a concerted signal—almost as if the dove had suffered transformation—there issues the maiden of the Graal, carrying the Precious Vessel. The manifestation in the prose Lancelot is at first on the occasion of Gawain's visit, and he sees nothing of the other Hallows till the Lance at a later stage issues from the chamber beyond and smites him between the shoulders. In the middle of the night of terror which follows this episode, he beholds another pageant preceded by a choir of voices. Once more the maiden issues from the hidden chamber carrying the sacred vessel, with lights and thuribles before her, and the service of the Graal is performed on a silver table in the middle place of the hall, but there are no other Hallows. When Lancelot comes to the Castle—from which event follows the conception of Galahad—the manifestation of the Graal is identical; but because of that which must be consummated he suffers no infliction, and he does not therefore behold the avenging Lance. It can be said scarcely that there is a pageant; the dove enters and vanishes; it passes within the secret chamber that the maiden in charge of the Vessel may come out therefrom; she appears accordingly, bearing the Holy Palladium, a vessel of gold, "the richest thing that any man hath lyving." She issues from the secret chamber, and again she returns therein, but not before Lancelot—also for that which must follow—is dazzled by her surpassing beauty.

In the time of the great Quest there are, strictly speaking, no pageants in the sense of the other romances, for the Graal is going about. Its apparition at the Court of King Arthur is heralded by a sunbeam only, and it is borne by no

visible hand. In Corbenic, when all things draw to the holy marvel of their close, there is a solemn procession of angels to the secret shrine of the Graal, two of them bearing wax lights, the third a cloth, and the last the Sacred Lance, because heaven has come down at the removal of that which is meant for earth no more. In Sarras, at the last scene of all, which ends the strange, eventful mystery, there is a great cohort of angels; but this is the choir above descending to witness that which must be done in fine below. There is no passing between intermediate spaces.

In the Longer Prose Perceval two damosels issue together from a chapel which is attached to the banqueting-hall, one of them carrying the most Holy Graal and the other the Lance, the point of which distils its blood therein. It is suggested also, but as if by a dream within a dream, that there are two angels, bearing two candlesticks of gold filled with wax lights. The damosels move through the hall and pass into another chapel; again they come forth, and it seems then that there are three maidens, with the figure of a child in the midst of the Holy Graal. They pass for a third time, and then above the Vessel there is a Vision of the Crucified King.

In the Parsifal of Wolfram a Squire enters hurriedly bearing the Lance, which bleeds profusely into his sleeve—an uncouth and ill-begotten symbol. Two gracious maidens, wearing chaplets on their heads, follow with flowing hair; they bear up golden candlesticks. Two other women, of whom one is described as a duchess, carry two stools of ivory, which they place before the king. Next in order are four maidens having as many tapers, and four other maidens who sustain between them an oblong slab of jacinth. There are then two princesses carrying knives of silver, and these also are preceded by four maidens. The princesses are followed by six additional maidens, holding

tall glasses filled with rare perfumes. There is, in fine, the queen of all, with the Graal in the hands of her, and behind is the squire who carries the Sword of Legend. When we come at the proper time to see how much and how little on the surface sense of things follows from this cumbrous display, we shall turn with the more relief to versions that are less decorative, though we can understand and excuse also the influence of the oriental mind reflected in the Parsifal from the prototype of Guiot de Provence. Relief at the moment will come from the poem of Heinrich, though it is the idlest of all the quests. Here the procession is in two parts. In the first there is a beautiful youth of highest mien, holding the Sword in one hand, and followed by cupbearers who serve wine at the feast. When this is over there enter two maidens carrying golden candlesticks; behind them come two youths, who lift up the Lance between them; they are followed by other two maidens, in whose charge is a salver of jewelled gold, borne upon a silken cloth. Behind these there walks the fairest of women holding the Precious Reliquary of the Graal, and after her the last maiden of all, whose hands are empty, whose office is weeping only—a variation which will be found also in the Montpellier codex of the Conte del Graal.

## CHAPTER NINE THE ENCHANTMENTS OF BRITAIN, THE TIMES CALLED ADVENTUROUS AND THE WOUNDING OF THE KING

The Longer Prose Perceval says that the great and secret sanctuary gives upon the Earthly Paradise, even as the visible world may be said to give upon the world unseen—a comparison which would signify for us—or at least by a suggestion to the mind—that the Temple of the Hallows and all its external splendour are the adornment of the soul which is within. Even apart from such a reading, we can understand that the manner of doctrine put forward

evasively in story-books by the Graal literature, was sufficient to make the orthodox church stand aloof, but vigilant and dubious. We have now to consider how a horror fell upon the Secret House of God and a subtle work of sorcery on the world which encompassed it. All texts indifferently of the Northern French cycles say that, as a consequence of certain events connected with the Castle of the Graal, there fell an interdiction upon Logres. In the Lesser Chronicles it is termed an Enchantment, while in the Greater Chronicles it is characterised as Adventurous Times, but the distinctions dissolve into one another; there is not less adventure, nor is it less hazardous, in the texts of enchantment, while in the adventurous texts the graces and terrors of sorcery abound on every side. We can therefore consider them together, as aspects of the same subject which are scarcely so much as alternative, and, in fact, on the study of the documents it will be found that the adventurous times are almost too vague by themselves to admit of being specified separately. As regards the enchantments, they are a consequence which works outward from within—that is to say, directly or indirectly, something which has transpired within is responsible for the inhibition without. The enchantments are the result of an evil which has fallen on the keeper for the time being of the Holy Graal. They are the exteriorised sorrow of the king. The action is, however, reciprocal, for in some instances that sorrow has reached him by an intrusion of the external order, though in certain other cases it has arisen in his own house or in his own person. It remains that as enchantment fell upon Merlin, so also it has fallen about the Secret House and has entered into the Holy of Holies. Now, the places of enchantment are also places of sadness, and the nature of the horror within, abiding as a certain cloud upon the sanctuary, is described after several manners. In one story, the flesh, which at no time profits anything, has smitten deeply into the life of the Keeper,



who has been a victim of earthly passion. In another, he is unable to die till he has seen the last scion of his house, and because of the protraction of the centuries, he is suffering, in the meantime, the heavy burden of his great age. He has alternatively received a dolorous stroke, reacting on him from the person of one of his relatives; and as a final explanation he is afflicted by the failure of a knight to ask the conventional question, which is at once vital and mystic. These things are reflected upon the order without, sometimes, as it would seem, only in the immediate neighbourhood of the Castle; more generally through the whole of Logres; while in rare instances the world itself is involved, at least by imputation.

The Perceval Quests turn entirely on the asking of that question which I have specified in the previous enumeration, and the pivot of the question itself is the failure to perform what is expected in this respect—namely, to ask and to receive. In the Chrétien section of the Conte del Graal the explanation of the king's sickness is that he was wounded by a spear in battle and hence is carried by four sergeants because he has no strength in his bones. In the Didot Perceval Brons, the Rich Fisherman, is said to be in great infirmity, an old man and full of maladies, nor will his health be restored until the office of the question has been fulfilled in all perfection. But this is not ordinary old age; rather—as I have just intimated—it is the oppression of many centuries. It is clear, however, that Brons was not suffering from any curse or enchantment; he cannot depart from this life until he has communicated to Perceval the secret words pronounced at the sacrament of the Graal, which he himself learned from Joseph. This and the instruction which will follow the question asked by the hero shall put a period to the enchantments of Britain. There is a failure in the first instance, as in the poem of Chrétien, and the Quest in the Conte del Graal is to some extent assumed

by Gawain, who visits the Graal Castle in the continuation of Gautier; he does ask, and thereupon the king promises him that, subject to one other condition, he shall hear the great story of the Broken Sword and of the woe which it brought upon the kingdom of Logres—but Gawain fails and falls asleep. The failure of Perceval has worked the destruction of kingdoms, which may mean certain petty principalities of Britain passing under this name—otherwise they cannot have been of this world, as the prophecy does not come to pass here. On the occasion of Perceval's second visit, the king is seated on a couch as before, and the discourse is not closed in the section of Gautier. The conclusion of Manessier recounts how the Broken Sword dealt that stroke which, prior to the voided question, has destroyed the realm of Logres and all the surrounding country. The unfinished inquiry of Gawain, before he fell into slumber, restored verdure to the land about the Graal Castle and the waters found their course. It was not, however, the keeper but his brother who received the Dolorous Stroke, being slain treacherously in a battle. The sword, which broke in the act, was placed upon the bier when the body was brought to the Castle; it was taken up incautiously by the king and in some undeclared manner it wounded him in both thighs; this wound could not be healed till the death of his brother was avenged. For these events the late prologue to the Conte del Graal substitutes a desolation which fell upon Logres prior to the coming of King Arthur. There were certain maidens who kept the wells and ministered refreshment to travellers out of golden cups. So admirable as was this custom, an evil king despoiled the maidens and scattered them, after which the service ceased. The elements of the prologue stand apart from the rest of the literature, like an allegory in another tongue; and though it is very curious in itself, it connects with nothing which follows in the texts that it is supposed to introduce.

The Book of the Holy Graal, like the metrical romance of De Borron, antecedes the period alike of enchantments and quests; but as, in its present form, it is later in fact than the chronicles which it is supposed to precede, so, as a part of its warrants, it forestalls many of their characteristics by a kind of spurious prophecy. It tells how the younger Joseph, the second keeper of the Graal, was smitten in the thighs by an angel for aiding certain people who did not embrace Christianity, and it testifies that the avenging spear with which the wounds were inflicted will be heard of again at the beginning of those marvels that shall occur in the land of Britain. In this manner it foreshadows the particular Dolorous Stroke of which we have a full account in the Huth Merlin and all the sorrowful adventures which follow therein. These are destined to continue for twenty-two years, corresponding to the twenty-two days during which the head of the Lance was embedded in the flesh of Joseph.

The Vulgate Merlin has nothing to say concerning the enchantments of Britain, except that the prophet's skill and discretion were gifts vouchsafed by God so that he might accomplish the adventures of the Seynt Graal. That it was the rumour of the Sacred Vessel which inaugurated the time of adventure is clear from this passage, as it is also from the Huth Merlin, which speaks of a prophecy written by the enchanter on parchment and concerned with those marvels which would characterise the Quest, encompassing in fine the destruction of the marvellous lion—that is to say, the overthrow of King Arthur. The implicits of this statement are one crux of the Merlin cycle. It is also, as I have intimated, to the Huth Merlin that we owe our acquaintance with the beautiful story of Balyn and Balan, the two brethren born in Northumberland, who were good knights, according to Malory. Balyn was destined to inflict the Dolorous Stroke, which during the allotted period of twenty-two years would cause dire distress throughout

three kingdoms, for by this stroke he would pierce the most holy man in the world, and inaugurate the marvels of the Graal in Great Britain. There can be no doubt that the Warden of the Sacred Vessel is here the intended victim, and that the stroke is actually given in the Graal Castle, with the hallowed spear of the legend. Balyn himself nearly loses his life in the cataclysm which follows, and is informed by Merlin that he has deserved the hatred of the whole world, the obvious reason being that he has desecrated the sanctuary. The recipient of the wound is, however, said to be King Pellehan, who is the brother of King Pelles the Keeper. In any chronological tabulation this event would most likely precede the visit of Gawain to the Graal Castle and indubitably the first arrival of Lancelot therein. These occurrences are related in the prose Lancelot, but in this romance the Keeper of the Sacred Vessel is, as I have said, King Pelles, and he is not wounded. Pellehan reappears in the Quest of Galahad not only as the Maimed King, but as he who bears the title of the Rich Fisher, which is reserved to the royalty of the Graal wardens. It will be seen, therefore, that a certain confusion has arisen, owing to continuous editing, and it may follow that there was originally but one King in the Castle, that his name was Pelles, that he was wounded by the Dolorous Stroke, and was destined to be healed by Galahad at the term of the Quest. As it is, there is actually a dual healing—that of the King Pellehan and that of another personage whose sin dates back to the first times of the legend, being one of unprepared intrusion into the most secret mysteries of the Graal. In the Quest of Galahad the confusion which I have noticed is made greater by the story of Sir Perceval's sister concerning the maiming of King Pelles, who found the ship of Solomon towards the coast of Ireland. He entered therein and drew the sword of David about half-way from its scabbard. In punishment of this rashness a spear smote him through both thighs, and never

since might he be healed, says she, “to fore we come to hym.” None of this takes place actually, but it goes to show that the original intention of the story was the intention of the Perceval quests—namely, to wound the keeper of the Graal. Speaking otherwise of this great romance, the whole process of the Quest is lifted into a high spiritual region, the implicits of which will provide us at a later stage with one key of the mystery.

In the Longer Prose Perceval it is said that there shall be no rest in the land till the Graal has been achieved. But here the horror of the house was the failure of Perceval to ask that question the simplicity of which is the seal of the whole enigma. As a consequence, the shepherd has been smitten and the sheep have been scattered. Those who ministered in the Castle were sent out by the general fatality beyond the sacred precincts, for no other reason apparently than to act as witnesses of the woe abroad before the face of the world; and so, therefore, in place of ceremonial pageants within, there are strange processions without.

In the German cycle, the adequate consideration of which must be referred as before to a later stage, the Parsifal of Wolfram sets a blot on the scutcheon by showing that sin entered the sanctuary, and in this, as in other respects, the story is set apart from all else in the general pageant of the literature. On the other hand, the poem of Heinrich, though its root-matter is almost out of knowledge, conforms, as it does usually, to the more normal tradition in points of detail, saying that the doom of the king was the outcome of war between brothers. With this, in other connections and a far other sense, we have some analogy in the Longer Prose Perceval.

I believe that the implicits of the Graal keepers must rank among the most important of those which remain for consideration in their place. While they are connected more especially with the headship in the persons of the successive Wardens, there are also subsidiary matters which will arise in their proper order. Woe has fallen on the Wardens, though, speaking symbolically, they abide in the place of life. Not only is the hereditary custodian of the secrets that person in most of the romances on whom comes the symbolic grief, but he is dependent peculiarly on help expected from without, and although his sustenance is within his healing is beyond the sanctuary. Even such a sinner as Gawain can bring him a partial consolation. He receives a nondescript savage like Perceval, as he is depicted in the more primitive stories, within the fold of election, for doing something after a clownish failure which any child might have been expected to perform at once. All this is so out of reason on the surface that a meaning in concealment seems inevitable. Its investigation is reserved of necessity, but as something consistent with the subject down the first vistas of which we are looking only, it may be said, as the characteristic of every initiation, that the candidate does not ask questions; it is he who is catechised and must answer. One key from one point of view might again be the counsel: Ask, and ye shall receive. But the Graal quester is to bestow before he receives. The suggestion seems that if we are dealing with a rite which follows a certain procedure, it is one which works rather the reverse way, so far as other mysteries are concerned. That rite has been going on for generations, inviting and accepting no candidate, for it is perpetuated by hereditary transmission, though its treasury has been a heritage of woe. There is no symbolical object in all the literature of romance to compare with the secret guardianship, whether the keeper is wounded for his own, or another's, and even for our transgressions; whether also the consideration of

his mystery arises from the texts themselves or from suggestions belonging thereto and admitted from a very high standpoint. No one could find the Castle, or come into the presence of the king, except by a special warrant and sometimes by a congenital election. The Castle was hidden from the world, like the analogous House of the Holy Ghost in the Rosicrucian Mystery, and he who entered therein had somehow to awaken the oracle. The hidden life of the keepers passed in the Castle, but not in the visionary rapture of those who go into Avalon and other isles of the blessed. Now, there are two palmary mysteries connected with two divisions of the Chronicles of Quest—one is the silence of Perceval and the other is the conception of Galahad. By the way of anticipation something more will be said of the first in the next section.

## CHAPTER TEN THE SUPPRESSED WORD AND THE MYSTIC QUESTION

It is agreed that the essential and predominant characteristic of the Perceval literature is the asking and answering of a question which bears on its surface every aspect of triviality, but is yet the pivot on which the whole circle of these romances may be said to revolve. On the other hand, the question is absent from the Galahad story, and in place of it we have a stately pageant of chivalry moving through the world of Logres to find the high mystery of sanctity. But that finding is destined only to dismember the Arthurian empire and to pass, in fine, leaving no trace behind it, except the sporadic vision of a rejected knight, which is mentioned but not described, and occurs under circumstances that justify grave doubts as to its existence in the original texts.

Now, the entire critical literature of the Graal may be searched in vain for any serious explanation as to the

actuating motive, in or out of folk-lore, concerning the Graal question. On the part of the folk-lore authorities there have been naturally attempts to refer it to something antecedent within the scope of their subject, but the analogies have been no analogies, and as much extravagance has resulted as we have yet heard of in the connection which some scholars have vaguely termed mysticism. The symbolical and sacramental value of the Graal Quest, outside all issues in folk-lore, is from my standpoint paramount, as it is this indeed without any reference to the opinions which are founded in folk-lore or to the speculations thereout arising; and the fact remains that the palmary importance of the mystic question lapses with the pre-eminence of the Perceval Quest. Initiation, like folk-lore, knows many offices of silence but few of asking; and after many researches I conclude—or at least tentatively—that in this respect the Graal romances stand practically alone. It is therefore useful to know that it is not the highest term of the literature.

In the *Conte del Graal* of Chrétien, the law and order of the Quest is that Perceval shall ask the meaning of those wonders which he sees in the pageant at the Castle of the Quest. The references are many in the poem, but they are merely repetitions. Perceval did not ask (1) how such things came to pass; (2) nor anything whatsoever; (3) he did not dare to ask about the Graal, *qui on en servoit* [“who were served”], because his teacher in chivalry had cautioned him against idle curiosity and such impertinence, for which reason he reserved his speech. It is understood that through the oppression of the centuries the keeper of the Holy Graal is, according to the *Didot Perceval*, in a state of distress, longing for his delayed release. Before he can go in peace he must pass on the divine tradition of the Secret Words, but before he can so transmit them he must he asked a question. That question is: *De quoi li Graus sert*



[“What is the Grail for”]. It will perform a twofold office, firstly, to heal the king, and, secondly, to liberate his speech. Perceval reaches the Castle, but notwithstanding that the voice of one who was invisible had announced at the Court of King Arthur, in Perceval’s presence and in that of all the knights, both the nature and effect of the question, he entreats nothing for fear of offending his host. Hence he departs in disgrace, and the king remains unhealed.

Within the limits of the Gautier section of the Conte del Graal there are not less than three versions of the visit of Gawain to the Graal Castle, representing specific variations of different manuscripts. Without exercising any discrimination between them, but rather by a harmony of all, it may be said that he does ask concerning the Lance and Graal, but as he cannot re-solder the sword, he can learn nothing regarding the Sacred Vessel, or, if there is a sign of willingness on the part of the Keeper, he goes to sleep and so escapes the story. The result is that the enchantment is in part only removed from the land. When the same poet recounts the second visit of Perceval, the knight on beholding the Hallows does not know where to begin, but at length prays that he may hear the whole truth concerning the Graal, the Sword and the Lance. The condition of the answer, as in the case of Gawain, is that he shall re-solder the Sword, and we have seen already that in this task Perceval is successful partly, but the king’s healing does not seem to be effected, though the path thereof is open, and the knight has not yet achieved the Quest. The result on external nature is not stated by Manessier.

At the beginning of the Longer Prose Perceval it is said that the reticence of the questing Knight at the Graal Castle caused such mischances in Greater Britain that all the

lands and islands fell into sorrow. There appeared to be war everywhere, no knight meeting another in the forest without running on him and slaying him, if he could. The King Fisherman himself passed into languishment. The question which ought to have been asked was: "Unto whom one serveth of the Graal." Many penances will be ended, it is said, when he who visits the Graal Castle demands unto whom it is served; but this event never comes to pass in the story. The desire to ask questions seems to have been rare therein, for Gawain when conversing with a wandering damsel, who was formerly the bearer of the Graal, fails to inquire why she carries her arm slung on her neck in a golden stole, or concerning the rich pillow whereon her arm reposes. He is told that he will give no greater heed at the court of King Fisherman. The King himself always dwells on the misfortune which overtook him through the failure of Perceval. When Gawain actually reaches the mystic Castle, he sees the Graal and the Lance, but he is lost in a joy of contemplation and he utters no word.

It has been said that there is a question in the Romance of Galahad, and it might have been added that there is one in the prose Lancelot; the second illustrates the first, and we shall find that they are both mere traces and survivals, as the prologue to the Conte del Graal has the shadow of the secret words, peculiar to the cycle of De Borron, when it affirms that the Graal secret must be never disclosed. I do not think that, as regards the later instance, I should be justified in assuming that he who wrote this prologue was in touch direct with the implicit of the De Borron cycle, and I do think alternatively that if people were disposed to lay stress on such remanents of the question as I am citing here, they are likely to find that it will work rather in a reverse direction. The fact remains that Lancelot saw the Graal in one episode of the great story dedicated to him, that he asked the question which is so important in some

other romances, that he asked it quite naturally—as who would have failed to do?—that he was answered also naturally, and that nothing depended therefrom. He cried in his wonder: “O Jesu! what does this mean?” He was told: “This is the richest thing in the world.” In the Galahad romance, when he beheld, by the Stone Cross in the wild, a sudden passage of the Graal and the healing of a certain knight, it is hinted by some texts that he ought to have asked something, despite the lesson which he had in the voiding of things previously; but he was so far right on the fact that his imputed omission carried no consequence.

The hindrance to the question in the Parsifal is the same as we have found in Chrétien; at all that he saw the knight of the Quest was agaze with wonder; he thought also that if he refrained from asking he would be told eventually. That which followed herefrom was sorrow to the host, with continued suffering, and woe also to the guest. For this silence he is always represented in the romances as earning reproach and contumely from persons outside the Castle, but in the German poem there is no suggestion of an external enchantment. It is to be noted further that Parsifal has not received a prefatory warning regarding the question, as he has in the Didot Perceval.

In *Diu Crône* by Heinrich, when the questing knight has beheld the Reliquary and the Spear, he does the opposite exactly, for he can no longer contain himself, and so asks his host, for the sake of God, to tell him what the marvels mean and who also are the great company whom he beholds. Even as he speaks, all present spring from their seats with a loud cry and the sound of great rejoicing. The host tells them to sit down again, and then he explains to the knight that he has seen the Holy Vessel of which he may say nothing, except that joy and consolation supervene upon his saving question. Many are liberated from the

bondage which they have endured so long, having little hope of acquittance. There was a time when they trusted in Perceval, as in one predestined to enter into the knowledge of the Graal, as if through everlasting portals, but he fell away like a knight of no spirit who dared and demanded nothing. Had he done otherwise, he would have released many from their toil who remain in the semblance of life and are yet dead. The woe came about through the strife of kinsmen, “when one brother smote the other for his land.” For this disloyalty the judgment of God descended upon him and his consanguinities, so that doom overtook them all. The living were expatriated, and the dead, under greater disaster, remained in the shadow of life. To end their woe it was necessary that a man of their race should seek an explanation of their sad, long-enduring prodigies. It does not appear that the Graal or the Spear have any connection with the Passion of Christ, and there is no secret communicated, for the history of the Sacred Vessel is not recounted?

From the consideration of this subject we may come away therefore, confirmed in our reasonable certainty that the question with which we have been dealing is unlike anything in literature. We shall see ultimately how it is accounted for by expert knowledge of folk-lore—connected or otherwise with quests and vengeance missions—in Welsh or English literature.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN THE HEALING OF THE KING

It came about, therefore, at the end of the Quest, that the Suppressed Word was at last spoken, that the question was asked and answered. There are certain texts in which the asking and the answering are all that was required by the hypothesis, and then it was well in the Secret House of the Wardens. There are other texts, which connect more

directly with folk-lore, in which the king's healing depended upon a dual office, of which the first part was the question itself, as a kind of interlocutory discourse, and then upon a mission of vengeance. It was fulfilled in either case. The head of the Blessed Bran does not appear in the symbolism of these branches, but the head as the sign of the accomplished sacrifice is an essential, in these branches, of the Quest fulfilled, and this is the characteristic in chief of the Conte del Graal. As a Rite of the Observance with Mercy, the question and its answer were held to be all-sufficient in the Lesser Chronicles, because the curse on the Keeper is like that on the Wandering Jew—it is the ages continued henceforward, and he comes at length to his rest. The Greater Chronicles offer another pageant of the Quest, the particulars of which are as follows: (1) The Building of the Ship of the Secret Faith, that at the end of a certain time it might carry into the far distance the most valid and efficacious symbols of the Mystery of Faith; (2) the healing of a King of the East who is not to be confused with the Keeper himself, but he dates *ab initio symboli* and is doubtless the witness in chief of the mystery even to the times of the Quest: concerning him it may be said that he tried to take the mystery of faith by violence, outside which his existence is parallel to that of the Keeper Brons, having been prolonged through the centuries from the first times of the legend; (3) the redemption of the Cain of the legend who slew his brethren; (4) an intercalatory and voided wonder concerning the maiming of the Graal King when he drew the Sword of David.

The particulars in all branches may be collected shortly as follows: In the Conte del Graal Gautier presents a certain lifting of the heavy veil of enchantment, so that the desert becomes the sown, and we are enabled to compare how it was in the dry tree with that which it is in the green:

Winter has passed, so to speak, and the voice of the turtle is heard again in the land. In Manessier, the keeper, who has suffered from that illogical maiming occasioned by the death of his brother, is healed at the sight of his head who committed the original act of violence. The whole business is foolish, and so unutterably. It was necessary, for some reason that derived probably its roots from folk-lore, for the king to be smitten in his thighs; the event conies to pass under circumstances that are quite and frankly impossible; and there is also no reason why the wound which was self-inflicted unconsciously should not have been healed at once, unless death intervened as the term. Assuming that Gerbert knew nothing of Manessier's conclusion and that he regarded the last words of Gautier—in which the Rich Fisher hails Perceval as the Lord of his house—as the term, in fine, of the story, his own intercalation was intended to account for the closing along better lines, and he did not concern himself with any explanation of the King's wounding. On the contrary, his intention was to show that the proper demand and reply exercised their proper office, and that the one thing which remained to complete the whole was for Perceval to redeem his past. The poem does not offer a termination which follows from the text, while that of Manessier, from any explanatory standpoint, is so much idle baggage. The Conte del Graal, considered as a Graal story, is therefore at once imperfect and piecemeal. The Didot Perceval is by no means entirely satisfactory as a completion of De Borron's trilogy, but as a simple term of a quest which is exceedingly simple, it leaves nothing undone. The Keeper of the Graal, as we have seen, must communicate his mystery before he departs hence. The mode of communication presupposes the arbitrary question which is a pretext for unveiling the mysteries, and the issue, which is clear from the beginning, is not clouded subsequently by extraneous matters. The king is healed—that is to say, he is relieved of the long burden of the

centuries, and he is enabled to pass in peace. In the Great Prose Quest it is the hands of Galahad which are the hands of healing. The Hallow of the ensanguined lance inflicted the wound from which the unknown king Pellehan suffered through the whole period during which the Quest was prepared and achieved. The restoration was accomplished by Galahad with the blood from the same weapon; therewith he anointed the king. It is after this or another manner that the remedial elements are sometimes in the House of the Graal, but they must be administered by one who comes from external places. It may be admitted that, at least on the surface, both wounding and healing in the Galahad Quest are a burden to the logical understanding. For what it is worth—which is little—in other respects, there is on this point a certain consistence in the Conte del Graal. At the beginning it carries the implicit of a vengeance legend, and though something is forgotten in the antecedence by Gautier and something else by Manessier, as if they had not read fully their precursors, that is explicated in fine which was implied at first. The Longer Prose Perceval has a root-difficulty, because there is no attempt to explain either why the question was necessary, when all was well with the king, or why—whether necessary or not—the failure of Perceval should have caused the Keeper of the Holy Graal to fall into such languishment that ultimately he died unhealed. For these are the distinctions, among many, between the High History and all other Perceval Quests—that it begins at the middle point of the story and that the Keeper perishes. Among the correspondences in the reverse order of these differences is the Quest of Gawain, according to *Diu Crône* by Heinrich, where the king indeed dies coincidentally with his release, but this is his desired liberation from the condition of death in life. Speaking generally, the death of the wounded keeper is designed throughout to make room for his successor. In the Didot Perceval he is released

according to his yearning, and that almost at once; in the Conte del Graal Perceval, far from the Castle, awaits the keeper's demise, which occurs in the natural course. In the Parsifal of Wolfram there is a kind of abdication by Amfortas in favour of the Questing Knight, but the two abide together, and, as in the Didot Perceval, there is, in fact, a trinity of keepers. In the Quest of Galahad, that glorious and saintly knight can be called a keeper scarcely; if I may be pardoned the expression, he and his companions act as the transport agents of the Sacred Vessel, so far as the term is concerned, though we may still regard Galahad as the keeper in heaven. We are not concerned with the healing of King Pellehan, because he is not the keeper of the Graal, as the text stands, though we feel that some editor has blundered. I will leave him therefore with the last word which he might have addressed to Galahad: Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo et sanabitur corpus meum ["Lord, I am not worthy to come under my roof, but just say the word and my body will be healed"]. I will leave also at this point the mystery of the healing of the king. For us and for our salvation, the quests of the Graal are the exteriorised zeal of the hearts which desire the bread of heaven and a visible sign that it is more than the daily bread. Such a romance of sanctity they appear in the story of Galahad, whose kingdom is not of this world; he is crowned indeed at Sarras, but it is contrary to the will of him who sought only to be dissolved and to be with Christ. The first term of the other quests sometimes carried with it a species of kingship, and, as to these, it was on the king's healing that it was said of his successor: Long live the King! 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

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## BOOK TWO MYSTERIES OF THE HOLY GRAAL IN MANIFESTATION AND REMOVAL

### CHAPTER TWELVE THE REMOVAL OF THE HALLOWS

We have now seen that the Rich Fisherman, King and Warden of the Graal, was healed as the consequence of the Quest, or that, this failing, a provision was made for his successor after some other manner. Now, this is the penultimate stage of the mystery regarded as a whole, and the one question which still remains to be answered is—what became of the Graal? Subject to characteristic variations which are particular to each text, it will be found—as I have said—that the several romances follow or forecast one general process, suggesting a prevailing secret intention, and it is for this intention that my study will have to account. At the moment the external answer to the problem above propounded, resting on the evidence of the documents, is an example of variation—which tends, however, to one term; this term is that either the Holy Graal and the other Hallows of the Passion were removed altogether or they were taken into deeper concealment. The specific testimonies are as follows. After the death of King Fisher, Perceval inherits his kingdom—in the Conte del Graal—and he reigns for seven years. He appoints his successor, who does not become the Warden of the Hallows, and he passes himself into the seclusion of a hermitage, where he remains for ten years, having been ordained a priest. The Graal follows him, and he is at length assumed into the joy of Paradise, since which time the Sacred Vessel and the other precious objects have never been beheld so openly. As a rider to this, it is added that no

doubt they were taken to heaven, which is an argument from the unworthiness of the world. In the Didot Perceval the Knight of the Quest and a certain hermit, who is a character of importance in the Lesser Chronicles, become the guardians of the Graal, and the prophet Merlin also abides with them. Merlin, in fine, goes away, seeking a deeper seclusion, and neither he nor the Graal are heard of subsequently. The inference is that the Graal remains in the asylum of the Holy House, under the charge, of its wardens. The Longer Prose Perceval, after a faithful picture of the Questing Knight in loneliness and rapture, surviving all his kindred, says that a secret voice commanded him to divide the Hallows among a certain company of hermits, after which a mystic ship anchors by the Castle, and Perceval, taking his leave of all those who still remained about him, entered that vessel and was carried far over the sea, "nor never thereafter did no earthly man know what became of him, nor doeth the history speak of him more." In the Great Prose Quest the most holy companions—Galahad, Perceval and Bors—are conveyed in the ship mystic of Solomon to a place in the East, named Sarras; the Hallows with which they are charged are the Sacred Vessel and the Lance, together with the Sword of David, wherewith Galahad is girded. For a certain allotted period of days that are sad, consecrated and strange, the companions watch over the Hallows in the city of Sarras; and then the call comes to Galahad. "There with he kneled doune to fore the table, and made his prayers, and thenne sodenly his soule departed to Jhesu Crist and a grete multitude of angels bare his soule up to Heuen, that the two felawes myghte wel behold hit. Also the two felawes sawe come from heven an hand, but they sawe not the body. And thenne hit cam ryght to the vessel, and took it and the spere and soo bare hit up to heuen. Sythen was ther neuer man soo hardy to saye that he had sene the Sancgreal." In the German cycle, the Parsifal of

Wolfram leaves the Graal where it was always since its first manifestation, but the Titirel of Albrecht von Scharfenberg—a text which is so late that it is excluded generally from the canon of the literature—narrates the rise and growth of an evil time, wherein, for its better protection, Parsifal and the chivalry of the Graal, bearing the Blessed Palladium, go forth from Mont Salvatch into the far East, where is the kingdom of Prester John, and there it may remain to this day—most surely in another kingdom which is not of this world. After these high memorials it is almost unnecessary to speak of the Quest in Heinrich, at the term of which the Graal and the ghostly company dissolve before the eyes of the Questing Knight, and thenceforth the tongue of man cannot show forth the mysteries.

Seeing now that the great sacraments do not pass away, it must follow that in the removal of the Holy Graal, as it is narrated in the texts, we are in the presence of another mystery of intention which appears the most obscure of all. The cloud that dwelt on the sanctuary, the inhibition which was on the world without, the hurt almost past healing which overtook the hereditary keeper, are ample evidence in themselves that evil had entered into the holy place, despite all the warrants which it held and all the Graces and Hallows which dwelt therein. With one curious exception, the Keeper was, in fine, healed; the enchantment was also removed; and the achievement of the last Warden, at least in some instances, must have been designed, after a certain manner and within a certain measure, to substitute a greater glory for the cloud on the secret sanctuary. All this notwithstanding, the end of the great quests, the term of the whole mystery, was simply the removal thereof. It occurs in each romance under different circumstances, and it was not, as we shall learn more fully, always of an absolute kind. In the Conte del Graal it is said—and we have seen previously—that it was taken away,

possibly to heaven; in the Didot Perceval it was seen no more; in the Longer Prose Perceval it was distributed, so far as we can tell, with the other Hallows, to certain hermits, and it ceased simply to manifest; in Wolfram the whole question is left open in perpetuity, for at the close of the poem the keeper remains alive; in the Titurel of Albrecht von Scharfenberg the Vessel was carried eastward into the dubious realm of Prester John, and there apparently it remains; in the Quest of Galahad it is assumed by Heaven itself, and the last keeper followed; but, in spite of this, the lost recension, as represented, faithfully or otherwise, by the Welsh Quest, says that though it was not seen so openly, it was seen once by Sir Gawain, the least prepared and least warranted of all the Graal seekers, whose quest, moreover, was for the most part rather accidental than intended.

Speaking now from the mystic standpoint, the removal of the Holy Graal has in a certain sense the characteristics of an obscure vengeance. The destruction of the external order would appear to have been decreed. The Graal is carried away and its custodians are translated. The removal certifies the withdrawal of an object which we know, mystically speaking, is never taken away, though it is always hidden from the unworthy. In respect of its imputed removal, it is taken thither where it belongs; it is the same story as that of the Lost Word in Masonry. It is that which in departing hence draws after it all that belongs thereto. In other words, it goes before the cohort of election as the Pillars of Fire and Cloud before Israel in the Wilderness. The root and essence of the matter can be put shortly in these words: The Graal was not taken away, but it went to its own place, which is that of every man.

The Galahad Quest closes the canon of the literature. Other romances have said that the Sacred Vessel was not seen so

openly, or that it was heard of no more, or that it had passed into concealment, and so forth; but this crowning legend carries it into complete transcendence, amidst appropriate ceremonial, though otherwise it leaves the Arthurian sacrament sufficiently unfinished. That is to say, it is still to be communicated for the last time to the whole world on the return of Arthur. The Graal is in hiding, like Arthur; but the Graal is, like Arthur, to return. Meanwhile, the chivalry of the world is broken, and the kingdom is destroyed. The master of all chivalry has received in his turn a dolorous stroke and is removed through a mist of enchantment, under dubious wardens, to the land of the setting sun, even into an exile of the ages. But he also is to be, in fine, healed and to return, though at what time we know not, for centuries pass as days, within the certain knowledge of Ogier the Dane. So much as this may perhaps be hazarded on the point of time, namely, that the King's rendering shall be when the King's dark barge, sailing westward, like the lighter craft of Hiawatha, shall meet with the Graal, which set forth eastward, since the Graal must heal the King, and these shall meet truly when justice and mercy kiss. The Graal is not therefore lost, but gone before.

Of such are the mysteries of the Graal, considered in their manifestation and considered also in their removal. I have passed through many houses of initiation in literature, but I know of nothing in suggestion and allusion to compare with the House of the Graal.

