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 7]

BOOK THREE THE EARLY EPOCHS OF THE QUEST

CHAPTER ONE THE ANTECEDENTS OF THE LEGEND IN FOLK-LORE

The beginnings of literature are like the beginnings of life—questions of antecedents which are past finding out, and perhaps they do not signify vitally on either side, because the keys of all mysteries are to be sought in the comprehension of their term rather than in their initial stages. Modern scholarship lays great and almost exclusive stress on the old Celtic antecedents of the Graal literature, and on certain Welsh and other prototypes of the Perceval Quest in which the Sacred Vessel does not appear at all. As regards these affiliations, whether Welsh, English or Irish, I do not think that sufficient allowance has been made for the following facts: (a) That every archaic fiction and every legend depends, as already suggested, from prior legend and fiction; (b) that the antecedents are both explicit and implicit, intentional or unconscious, just as in these days we have wilful and undesigned imitation; (c) that the persistence of legends is by the way of their

transfiguration. We have done nothing to explain the ascension of the Graal to heaven and the assumption of Galahad when we have ascertained that some centuries before there were myths about the Cauldron of Ceridwen or that of the Dagda, any more than we have accounted for Christianity if we have ascertained, and this even indubitably, that some ecclesiastical ceremonial is an adaptation of pre-Christian rites. Here, as in so many other instances, the essence of everything resides in the intention. If I possess the true apostolical succession, then, ex hypothesi at least, I do not the less consecrate the Eucharist if I use the Latin rite, which expresses the words of institution in the past tense; or some archaic oriental rite, by which they are expressed in the future, and to which there is added at some point the Epiclesis clause, being the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

There is, in any case, no question as to the Graal antecedents in folk-lore, and I should be the last to minimise their importance after their own kind, just as I should not abandon the official Church because I had been received into the greater Church which is within. I believe personally that the importance has been magnified unduly because it has been taken by scholarship for the all in all of its research. But there is plenty of room for every one of the interests, and as that which I represent does not interfere with anything which has become so far vested, I ask for tolerance regarding it. My position is that the old myths were taken over for the purposes of Christian symbolism, under the influence of a particular but not an expressed motive, and it was subsequently to this appropriation that they assumed importance. It is, therefore, as I have said, simply to clear the issues that I place those of my readers who may feel concerned with the subject in possession of the bare elements which were

carried from pre-Christian times into the Graal mythos, as follows:

1. We hear of an Irish legend concerning the Cauldron of the Dagda, from which no company ever went away unsatisfied. It was one of the four talismans which a certain godlike race brought with them when they first came into Ireland. As the particular talisman in question, though magical, was not spiritual, it is useless to our purpose; but it connects with the palmary Hallow of the Graal mystery, because that also is reputed to have been food-giving, though this property was the least of its great virtues, just as the stone of transmutation by alchemy was classed among the least possessions of the Rosicrucian Fraternity.

2. There is the Cauldron of Bendigeid Vran, the son of Llyr, in one of the old Welsh Mabinogion, the property of which, says one story, is that if a man be slain to-day and cast therein, to-morrow he will be as well as he ever was at the best, except that he will not regain his speech. He remains, therefore, in the condition of Perceval when that hero of the Graal stood in the presence of the mystery with a spell of silence upon him. It follows that the Druidic Mysteries, as we find them in Welsh legend, are like other initiations: the candidate is passed through the experience of a mystical death and is brought back, as, for example, by the Cauldron of Ceridwen, to a new term of existence; but although in this sense the dead are raised, they are not, or at least in this case, restored with the gift of tongues—life, but no word of life. In other language, the silence of the great pledges is henceforth imposed upon them. The dead rise up, but they do not begin to speak. Except in so far as the Cup of the Graal legend concerns a mystery of speech and its suppression, it is

> difficult to trace its correspondence with this cauldron, which I should mention, however, came into Wales from Ireland. If these things can be considered as so much raw material out of which the Graal legend in fine issued, the fact extends rather than reduces the transformation which so operated that the Holy Vessel of Christian symbolism was brought forth from a Druidic cauldron, which is sometimes that of Ceridwen and sometimes of Bendigeid, being at once the fountain of Bardic inspiration and the provider of a feast of good things. In this connection we may remember further that the chief mystic hero of Wales was not so much King Arthur as Cadwaladr Fendigeid. Paulin Paris was the first who attempted to identify this chieftain with Galahad, but one essential distinction is that in the Welsh myth Cadwaladr is destined to return, whereas in the romance Galahad comes no more.

It so happens that institutions of analogy are made occasionally by scholarship on warrants which they would be the first to repudiate if the object, let us say, were to establish some point advanced by a mystic. I do not reject them exactly, and I do not intend to use similar comparisons on evidence which appears so slight; but I must place on record that the derivations here mentioned, if true, are unimportant, even as it is also unimportant that Adam, who received the breath of life from the Divine Spirit, had elements of red earth which entered into his material composition. The lights which shine upon the altar are not less sacramental lights because they are also earthly wax; and though the externals are bread and wine, the Eucharist is still the Eucharist.

In addition to analogies like those which I have just cited, there are two versions of the quest or mission of Perceval into which the mystery of the Graal does not enter as a

part. In their extant forms they are much later than any of the Graal literature in Northern French. One is the story of Peredur, the son of Evrawc, in the Welsh Mabinogion, and the other is the English metrical romance of Syr Percyvelle. Scholars have compared both to the Lay of the Great Fool, and I think that the analogy obtains not only in the Welsh and English fables, but even in such masterpieces of nature-born poetry as the work of Chrétien de Troyes. On the other hand, the English poem is a thing of no importance except in respect of its connections, its perfect form as a narrative, and its high literary value. These claims notwithstanding, it will be sufficient to say that even scholarship values it chiefly for its doubtful traces of some early prototype which is lost.

The scholarship of Dr. Evans is thought to account for certain opinions which he holds regarding the high importance of the Longer Prose Perceval, but he is correct at least in his instinct by the consequence of its comparison with other quests outside the Parsifal of Wolfram and the Quest of Galahad. The Welsh Mabinogi is like the wild world before the institution of the sacraments, and from any literary standpoint we shall see that it is confused and disconcerting; the poem of Chrétien is like the natural world with its interdict just beginning to be removed; it is also like the blind man in part restored to sight, seeing all things inverted and devoid of their normal proportions. The Longer Prose Perceval occupies a middle position between the Great Quest and Wolfram; the enchantment of Britain—as if Logres were this visible Nature—has dissolved partly; Grace is moving through Nature; the Great Mystery is being declared and testified to everywhere. In the Parsifal the things which are without have suffered a certain renewal, and yet the German epic is not the nearest correspondence and equivalent of the Galahad Quest.

It follows from these considerations, so far as they have now proceeded, that the folk-lore antecedents of the Graal are Celtic; but I should mention that it has not been determined finally by scholarship whether we should look to Wales through Norman-French poets or to Armorica through poets of Northern France for the primordial matter of romance in respect of the literature. Such a question, except as a preliminary gleaning leading up to another concern, is a little outside our horizon, but the concensus of opinion in England and France favours the first alternative. To direct our attention thither is by no means to set for our consideration a clear vista or to open an easy pathway. It happens, unfortunately, that as regards Wales there is as yet no certain canon of criticism to distinguish the genuine memorials of archaic literature from the vast mass of false seeming which wears only the vestures and mask of antiquity. It is now many years since M. Villemarqué, the Breton, illustrated what it was possible to do in the production and extension of Armorican remains, and in the Principality there have been more than one Villemarqué fabulatores famosi—whose results obtained, if they have not been calculated to deceive even the elect, have at least made the specialist wary, sometimes about rejecting, but always of accepting anything in the definite and absolute degree. Having regard to my own limitations as one who has observed the strife scarcely, much less shared therein, I seek only to note a single question of parallel. The antecedents of folk-lore passed into the literature of the Graal undergoing great transmutations, and so also did certain elements of old Druidism merge into Christianity; Rite and Myth and Doctrine were tinged by Tradition and Doctrine and Rite; for things which co-exist tend to dovetail, at least by their outer edges; and there are traces, I think, of a time when the priest who said mass at the altar was not only a Druid at heart, but in his heart saw no reason also for the Druid to be priest any less. Long after

the conversion of the Celt, enigmatical fables and mystical Rites lingered in Gaul and Britain, and if one could say that the Cauldron of Ceridwen was a vessel of pagan doctrine, then in an equal symbolical sense it became a vessel of hotch-potch under the strange ægis of the Celtic Church. There were masters of mysteries and secret science, whose knowledge, it is claimed, was perpetuated under the shadow of that Church and even within the pale thereof. The Bardic Sanctuary, by the evidence of some who claimed to speak in its name, opposed no precious concealed mysteries, and perhaps on its own part the Church received into its alembic much that was not of its matter expecting to convert it therein and turn it out in a new form. In the fourth century there were professors at Bordeaux who had once at least been Druids, and for the doctrines of their later reception the heart of their old experience may have been also an alembic. Saint Beuno in his last moments is recorded to have exclaimed: “I see the Trinity and Peter and Paul, and the Druids and the Saints!”—a choir invisible, the recognition of which would, if known, have imperilled his canonisation, supposing that its process had been planned in Rome. At a much later period, even in the twelfth century, we have still the indication of perpetuated mysteries, and there is no doubt that the belief in these was promoted generally by the bards. The twelfth century saw also the beginning of a great revival of literature in Wales. There are certain Iolo manuscripts which are late and of doubtful authenticity, but accepting their evidence under all necessary reserves, they refer the revival in question to Rhys ap Twdur, who assumed the sovereignty of South Wales, bringing with him “the system of the Round Table, as it is with regard to minstrels and bards.” And when the time came for the last struggle between the Celtic and Latin Rites for the independence of the British Church, I can well believe that all which remained, under all transformations, of that old

mixed wisdom of the West was also fighting for its life. When pseudo-Taliesin prophesied the return of Cadwaladr, who had passed into the unmanifest, like Arthur, and, like Arthur, was destined to return, I believe also that this allegory of rebirth or resurrection, if it referred on one side to the aspirations of the Celtic Church, did not less embody on another the desired notion of a second spring for the mysteries which once dwelt in Wales, which even after many centuries were interned rather than dead.

We can imagine—though perhaps at a far distance—what kinds of medley resulted from such interpenetration of mysteries as I have here indicated: the sacrifice of human victims in the ceremonial rites, on the one side; the eternal sacrifice of the Victim who was divine and human, on the other; the renovation of the candidate as the term of symbolical ritual, and the Resurrection of Christ as the first-fruits of the redeemed in the signal degree. With these as the analogies of opposites, there were meeting-points and enough in the Lesser Mysteries, while encircling all as an atmosphere there were, on the one hand, the presages, the signs, the omens, the vaticinations, the inspirations, dark and strange, of seers and bards; but, on the other, there were the great consecrations, the holy objects, the sacred traditions, the inspired writings and all the annals of sanctity. In fine, against the solemn pageants of pagan ceremonial performances there was the Great Mystery of the faith of Christ, the white sacrifice and the clean oblation of the Eucharist. I confess that if there were otherwise any evidence, I can imagine that secret words, exceeding ex hypothesi all words of institution in the Ordinary of the official Mass-Book, and strange claims of a priesthood which had never been seen at Rome, might well issue from so enigmatic and dubious a sanctuary.

From all this matter of fact, matter of speculation and high matter of dream, we can infer that wherever the cradle may be of the true legend of the Graal—Gaul, Armorica, or Wales, but the last as a probability apart—there was at work, less or more everywhere in the Celtic world, what I have called the alembic of transmutation. I care not what went therein—Cauldron of Ceridwen, Cauldron of the Dagda, head of Bran and poisoned spear which smote him, Lay of the Great Fool, Expulsion and Return Formula, Visitations of the Underworld, and so forward for ever and ever—but that which came out was the Mystery of Faith manifested after a new manner, and the search for that sanctuary wherein, among all waste places of the world, the evidence of things unseen became palpable to the exalted senses of the great Quest. Little and less than little it matters how that began which ends at this high point, and for us, therefore, who “needs must love the highest when we see it,” we can only bless the beginning which brought the term we find; but its work is done, and it is not a concern of ours.

In our childhood we passed through the realm of fables from Bidpai to Lafontaine, but these were not everlasting dwellings. In our youth there may still have been some of us who looked to see great lights in L’Origine de tous les Cultes and in The Ruins of Empires, but again there was no abiding place. At this day it seems weariness, as it is indeed idleness, to go back to the solar mythologies, or otherwise than with great caution to folk-lore, when in far different flights we have touched the hem of His garment. I do not propose to include the study of folklore in the same category as the imaginings of Dupuis, Volney and Godfrey Higgins; but unless we can presuppose a certain enlightenment, it proves a morass sometimes rather than a pathway. However this may be regarded, in establishing a new scheme of interpretation, it is perhaps necessary

rather than desirable that a beginning should be made by doing justice to old schemes, the office of which is at once recognised and reduced by the entrance of an overlord into his proper patrimony. I wish, therefore, to say that the appeal of scholarship to the derivation of the legends from folklore and the anxious collection of fresh data from this source have acted in the past upon several groups of students like the head of Braid's lancet-case on his hypnotic subjects. They are pretexts which have entranced them. There was never an occasion in which folk-lore was more important at the beginning and mattered in finality so little; it is a land of enchantment, withal somewhat dreary, and through it the unspelling quest passes laboriously to its term.

An old metaphorical maxim of one of the secret sciences once said: "The stone becomes a plant, the plant an animal, and the animal a man"; but it did not counsel its students to consult the stone that it might better understand a man, though the stone remains a proper subject of investigation within its own limit. I leave it to readers who are after my own heart and within the classes of my proper school to apply this little parable to the question which is here at issue in respect of the Graal in folk-lore. It remains to be said that one field of Celtic research has been so far neglected by scholarship, and it is that precisely which throws light on the Christian aspects of the Graal legend apart from the aspects of old non-Christian myth. If there are analogies in the root-matter between the Hallows of Cup and Lance and folk-lore talismans, there are others which are far more intimate between the lesser matters of the literature and Celtic Christian hagiology. But this is a point which I note only, because it belongs to the close rather than the beginning of our research. It seems a commonplace to add at the moment that particular Christian tradition has for its environment the general

traditions of Christianity, and, for explanatory purposes, that may be best which lies the nearest to hand, but at least it enters reasonably into the full consideration of the whole subject.

Apart from the fixed purpose in the direction which I have specified—that purpose which having exhausted, and this too easily, the available fields of evidence, begins to imagine new—apart from the thousand and one things which, by the hypothesis, would be referable to folk-lore if the wreckage of that world had not been disintegrated so thoroughly by the mills of the centuries, the antecedents of the Graal legend in folk-lore have been a wide field for patient research, nor is that field exhausted; it has also offered an opportunity for great speculations which go to show that the worlds of enchantment are not worlds which have passed like the Edomite kings; but as I know that there was a king afterwards in Israel, I have concluded at this point to abandon those quests which for myself and those whom I represent are without term or effect, and to hold only to the matter in hand, which is the development of a sacramental and mystical cosmos in literature out of the strange elements which strove one with another, as in the time of chaos so also in pre-Christian Celtic folk-lore.

CHAPTER TWO THE WELSH PERCEVAL

This is one of the two texts which have been held to offer independent traces of a pre-Christian and pre-Graal period of the Quest, but in their present state they are among the latest documents of the literature. It is perhaps more difficult to speak of the Mabinogi concerning Peredur, the Son of Evrawc, than of anything in the Graal literature; its elements are simple, its dimensions small, but its difficulties seem almost insuperable. The Red Book of Hergest, of which it forms one of the stories, is found in a

Welsh manuscript which belongs probably to the end of the thirteenth century, but the contents of the collection are held to have existed in a much earlier form, and this is now unknown. The voice of criticism concerning the Peredur has become less assured of late years, but in matter and manner the story exhibits some elements which, even to the unversed mind, might suggest its correspondence in essentials with the claim which is made concerning it—or that it is among the oldest of the quests. On the other hand, there is little to support the unimaginative and frigid criticism which, because the plot turns on a conventional and not very purposeful vendetta, terms the narrative logical and straightforward. I have intimated already that it is really confused and disconcerting. It is, indeed, the idlest of all stories, and it leaves several of its episodes unfinished. We can accept, however, the alternative construction which criticism has placed upon the document; it may be either an intermediate between folk-lore and Graal literature, or otherwise a chaotic reflection from French sources. Probably it is a combination of both. The question is very interesting from some points of view, but hereto it matters little. The Mabinogi contains in any case the root-matter of the Perceval legend, and it includes, therefore, some part of those elements which were taken over by the Graal literature and were perpetuated through all the Graal-Perceval quests, though some part was abandoned when that quest was carried into transcension. For example, the personal history of the hero has certain uniform elements which persist throughout; the Peredur is, moreover, a pure vengeance legend, which characteristic prevails in the Conte del Graal, but has been eliminated from the Longer Prose Perceval. I should add that the Didot Perceval stands apart from the other texts not only by the absence of any vengeance motive, but by the fact that its early history of the hero must be held to differ in totality.

Whether regarded as a sacrament or a talisman, it is understood that there is nothing in the Welsh Perceval which answers to the Holy Graal, but it enters into the category of the literature for three palmary reasons: (1) Because it embodies the idea of a quest; (2) because this quest is connected with asking a conventional question concerning certain talismans; (3) because these talismans are in the house of a king or lord who is maimed and whose healing would have resulted from the question. Outside these specific correspondences, it is obvious that Peredur of Wales is the Perceval le Gallois of the Conte del Graal and the other Graal romances, while, all variations notwithstanding, the history of the one, in a broad sense, is also the history of the other. Some important details on these several points may be scheduled as follows: (1) The motive of the Quest does not enter into the story until nearly its very end; (2) the question is never asked; (3) there is no record that the king is ever healed; (4) the one accredited talisman of the whole story does not figure as that weapon which caused the maiming of the story.

It should be noted, however, with due consideration for what has been said to the contrary by criticism, that shadows of the characteristic Graal Hallows are to be found in the story, but they serve no real purpose therein. (a) THE CUP: there are, in fact, two cups, both filled with wine and presented with their contents to Perceval, on condition that he fights with their bearers. (b) THE BOWL, also filled with wine, and this passes on similar conditions. Perceval slays the bearers, and we shall see that he is afterwards entertained by an Empress for fourteen years. This incident has no analogy with anything in the other documents. (c) THE STONE, which is guarded by a serpent and is carried on the tail of the reptile. The virtue of this stone is that whosoever possesses it and holds it in one hand may have in the other as much gold as he desires. The analogy is

therefore rather with the purse of Fortunatus than with a Feast of Good Things, but incidentally it recalls the latter. (d) THE SPEAR: this is of mighty size, with three streams of blood flowing from its point to the ground. It is the only so-called talisman of the story, and its purpose is to occasion the question which, if answered, will lead to the king's healing. Why it is a spear and why it distils blood the story does not explain. It has either been transferred from some other legend, as, for example, a genuine Graal romance, and placed without much reason in its present setting, or there is no better instance of such an alleged transfer in the whole cycle. The spear is seen once only, and on that occasion is accompanied by a large salver in which is a man's head surrounded with a profusion of blood.

The question which Perceval should have asked was the meaning and the cause of these wonders. He is cursed the next morning by his foster-sister, but it is not because he forbears at the instance of his maternal uncle. It is only after long years that his silence is denounced by a boy disguised as a laidly woman, but at the end of the whole business the question is never asked. Apparently it is too late, and Perceval had only a single chance, as he had in the poem of Heinrich and, after another sense, in the Longer Prose Perceval. The penalty of his failure is that "the lame king will have to endure battles and conflicts, and his knights will perish, and wives will be widows, and maidens will be left portionless." It does not appear that any of these disasters come to pass, but certain sorceresses of Gloucester, who caused the king's lameness among other misdeeds, are destroyed, which does not heal the king, so that the vendetta is a vain affair.

The father of Peredur was Evrac, who owned the earldom of the North and had seven sons, with six of whom he was

slain, for they began in the folly of tournaments and so ended. Peredur, the surviving and youngest son, was taken by his mother into the wilderness, where he could see neither horses nor arms, lest he also should become a great warrior before the face of the Lord, and die in battle, with all that violence which signified the perfection of valour in those days of harsh adventure. His companions were the women of his mother, with some boys and spiritless men. In spite of such precautions he was destined, however, to depart from the house of his childhood in the wild and solitary ways, where the life which he led was like that of a savage hermit. He was the cutting of a fruit-tree and was sadly in need of grafting: grafted he was in the end on the great tree of Knighthood, yet he behaved throughout with the thoughtlessness of the impassioned man. It is only in the Graal romances that he puts forth many blossoms, and sometimes splendidly, but even then he does not bear the good fruit after its own kind in anything but the latest texts.

One day Peredur saw three knights, but his mother said that they were angels. He decided to become an angel, but the questions which he put to them subsequently having obtained a more reliable account, he resolved further to follow their vocation. Finding that she could not dissuade him, his mother gave him some notable instructions, as, for example, that he should pay court to a fair woman, whether she would or no, and that if he obtained anything precious he should bestow it, and so earn fame for his largesse. In fine, she told him to repair to the court of King Arthur. He mounted a sorry hackney and began a long journey. Arriving at a rich tent, he mistook it for a church and repeated his Pater noster, for he had little knowledge of religion; but the tent contained a beautiful lady, who gave him refreshment and allowed him to take a ring from her hand. Now, the lord of the glade became angry because of Peredur, and said that the lady, who was his wife, should

not rest two nights in the same house till he had visited vengeance upon him.

As the youth drew towards the court of King Arthur, a Red Knight entered the palace, and seeing how the Queen was served with wine by a page from a golden goblet, he dashed the liquor in her face and smote her on the face also; but, despite his challenge, such was the unknightly condition of the Round Table that all present feared to avenge the insult, believing that the aggressor had magical protection; and so he retired with the vessel. Peredur then rode in, and asked for the honour of knighthood; but because of his outlandish appearance, he was treated with indignity by Kay and others of the household. A male and female dwarf, who had dwelt in the palace for a twelvemonth, uttering no word, found their tongues suddenly to praise him as the flower of chivalry, for which they were beaten by Kay. When Peredur demanded the accolade, he was told jeeringly to follow the Red Knight, recover the goblet, and possess himself of his horse and armour. He found no difficulty in obeying, and by slaying the Knight he accomplished 'his first mission of vengeance, which contains a more important implicit than the vindication of Arthur's Queen; for, unknown to himself, the Red Knight was he who had slain his father. The removal of the armour he could not accomplish till Sir Owain of the Round Table came to his help, after which he assumed it and mounted the dead man's horse. He restored the goblet to Owain; but to return and receive knighthood at the King's hands he refused until he had punished Kay for the insult which he had offered to the dwarfs. In this manner he began his second mission of vengeance, the implicit whereof involved his own vindication, because he, too, had been treated injuriously. After various encounters, the result of which is that many are sent to place themselves at King Arthur's mercy, on account of the dwarfs, he met with

an ancient man, richly vested, whose attendants were fishing on a lake, and who was therefore the substituted Rich Fisher of the Graal stories.

It does not seem to follow that the servants caught anything, but if they did it was not to our purpose. The ancient man was lame, and he is therefore an alternative of the maimed king. He retired into a castle at hand, whither Peredur followed, and being there welcomed he learned that the host was his own uncle. By him he was taught chivalry, was cautioned, for no apparent reason, against asking questions, and was assured that any reproach involved by his silence should not fall on the boy but on himself only. It was as if this uncle said: “Do not explore the concealed mysteries I will account.” He accounts so badly, however, that the disgrace is ultimately on Peredur.

The next day the youth reached another castle, where he found a second uncle, at whose bidding he smote a great staple three times with a sword, and both things were shattered. The first and second time he rejoined the pieces of the sword, and the staple was also made good, as if automatically. The third time neither would unite, and we thus have an alternative of the Broken Sword in the Graal legends; but nothing follows in the Welsh story, nor is the weapon heard of afterwards. What next occurred at the castle was a Rite as of a Lodge of Mourning. Two youths entered the hall bearing the mighty spear, from which poured torrents of blood, and at the sight of this all the company fell into grievous lamentation. Two maidens followed carrying a large salver, whereon was the man’s head; and this, which was swimming in blood, as we have heard, caused another great outcry. Peredur, however, had been well counselled, and he asked nothing concerning these marvels, which fact constitutes the great mystery of the voided question and the prolonged sorrow of the lord.

Now, either the two uncles are distinct persons inhabiting two castles, in which case (a) the story afterwards identifies them, although vaguely, and (b) the relations are working one against the other, unless there was some cryptic understanding between them; or they are one person strangely confused, while the castles are one castle, in which case the lame uncle himself issues that decree of silence which will delay his healing indefinitely and testifies to his separate existence as the brother first seen by his guest. Whatever alternative is chosen, the story rests distracting.

On the morning which followed these occurrences Peredur rode away from the castle, and while still in its vicinity he came upon a beautiful maiden, who was watching by the side of her dead husband. She told the youth that she was his foster-sister, that he was responsible for his mother's death because of his desertion, and that he had therefore become accursed.

We shall see in the sequel that he was under interdict after two manners, but in neither case does it appear to carry a consequence. After this meeting, in which he does everything to assist the distressed lady, and to recognise a relationship for which there is nothing to account in the story, he continued his journey and reached a castle, wherein was another maiden, also in stress and besieged by an earl whom she would not consent to wed. The unwelcome suitor was vanquished by Peredur, who sent him to the court of King Arthur, restored all her possessions to the despoiled lady, and after the space of three weeks again rode away. It should be noted that this maiden is the Blanchefleur of the Perceval-Graal romances, the bride-elect of the hero in some parts of the Conte del Graal, his wife in the conclusion of Gerbert, and so also in the Parsifal of Wolfram.

The distress of damsels is a lesser keynote of the story, and Peredur met now for a second time the lady of the tent and pavilion, only to find her in sorry straits through her lord's treatment, owing to the intrusion of the youth in the early part of the story. He overcame the knight in due course, enforced the usual pilgrimage, and pledged him to deal loyally with the lady in future, she having been at fault in nothing. In the adventure which next followed, he found that a whole country had been wasted by nine sorceresses of Gloucester, and they were now attacking the sole remaining castle. Over one of them Peredur prevailed, and she—though aware from of old of all that they must suffer at his hands—invited him to their palace. During three weeks he led a hidden life among them for the ostensible purpose of learning chivalry, which he knew already by its practice and otherwise by the instruction of his uncle; it is thus certain that they could teach him little thereof, and of sanctity nothing. The episode remains so unreasonable that almost surely it must have followed some prototype embodying another motive. By this time Peredur had sent so many knights as hostages to Arthur's court, in part to justify the dwarfs, that the king determined to seek for him. The search began accordingly, and after he had taken leave of his imputed instructors, the youth was found by the companions of the Round Table at the moment when he was wrapped in a love-trance, thinking of the lady of his heart. This incident, so trivial in itself, is included here because all the romances repeat it in one or another form. Kay, among others, disturbed Peredur rudely, and was chastised with violence. In this manner was accomplished the second mission of vengeance, or rather its implied part. Gwalchmai, who is Gawain, approached Peredur gently and courteously, and so brought him to the king. All went to Caerleon, and there Peredur, who, by inference from his trance and a certain period of tarrying, may be supposed to have loved previously the lady of the castle, became deeply

enamoured of another maiden; but seeing that she failed to respond, he vowed himself to silence in all Christendom till she should love him above every man. He left King Arthur’s court and passed through various adventures, from which little follows in respect of the other romances. The time came when he yearned to revisit Caerleon and again have the maiden’s society, besides that of the knighthood. At the court on account of his silence he suffered further indignity, still on the part of Kay; but after many signal examples of chivalry, the lady of his affections, although she did not recognise him, confessed that if only he could speak, she should love him best of all men, as she did indeed already, his dumbness notwithstanding. So was his vow fulfilled; and as he had sent many living gifts to the male and female dwarfs, after a votive manner, it is to be inferred that his second vengeance was further and fully accomplished by the disgrace which his deeds reflected upon the unworthy Kay.

At a later period, he being again on his travels, Peredur arrived at a castle, where the lord was a black man who had lost one of his eyes, and it was his custom to destroy every visitor who went to the place unasked. One of the lord’s daughters interceded vainly, for he who at the time of need neglected to question his own uncle now demanded an explanation of the circumstances under which his present host had been deprived of his eye. For this he was informed that he should not escape with his life. However, in due course, he conquered the Black Master of the House and slew him, after learning his secret. That secret caused him to visit another castle, the knights in which rode out daily to do battle with an obscure monster, which is termed an Addanc in the story; their bodies were brought back by the horses, and they themselves were raised up again nightly by the women of the household. Peredur, as will be expected, went forth to destroy the monster and, in return

for the pledge of his future love, he was presented by a strange woman with a stone which ensured his success. As regards the covenant between them, he was told when he next sought her to seek in the East—that is to say, in India. Omitting an intermediate episode on which nothing depends, he came to the Mound of Mourning, where three. hundred nobles guarded a serpent until the time should come for it to die. The explanation is that the tail of the serpent contained that mysterious stone to which I have referred already—the stone of wealth inexhaustible—and the intent of the whole company was to compete for this jewel. Peredur destroyed the serpent, which they did not dare to attempt, and, having compensated the other seekers, he bestowed the prize on a knight who had been in his service, thus fulfilling one behest of his mother. He next reached a galaxy of tents, gathered about the pavilion of the Empress Cristinobyl, who was resolved to wed the most valiant man in the world, and him only. This was the unknown enchantress by whose aid he was enabled to conquer the Addanc. The place was filled with competitors for her hand, but Peredur overcame them all, and was entertained by the Empress for fourteen years, as the story is said to relate; it is the only appeal to some antecedent source which occurs in the whole text. In this way the hero’s variable affections find their rest for a period—by inference, in such a fairyland as was visited by Ogier the Dane.

Peredur came back at length to the Court of King Arthur, without having attracted apparently any surprise at his absence; and, almost immediately after, the palace was visited by a laidly damosel, through whom it transpired what misery followed the failure to ask the question at the Castle of the Lame King. It is to be noted that so only, almost at the end of the story, does the hero learn anything concerning his omission and the fatality which it involved.

He was reproached, as we have seen, bitterly by his foster-sister, but not about this matter; and the inference is that so far he had only reason for satisfaction in having followed the counsel of his first uncle—until the time came when he forgot the injunction at the castle of the one-eyed lord. Being now undeceived, he vowed to rest never until he knew the story of the Lance. He departed accordingly, while, at the suggestion of the same visitant, Gawain went in quest of a castle on a high mountain, wherein it is said that there was a certain maid in prison, and the fame of the world was promised to him who released her. This is the only instance, and a shadow at that, in which any quest is allotted to the hero of all gallantry in this story, though his adventures occupy so large a space in other romances of Perceval. We hear nothing, however, as to the term reached by Gawain. Peredur, after long wanderings in search of the laidly maiden, whom he seems to have regarded as a guide, was accosted by a hermit, who upbraided him for bearing arms on so holy a day as Good Friday. Recalled to that sense of religion which he had forgotten apparently, he responded in a becoming manner and received some directions which brought him ultimately to the Castle of Wonders. The first marvel which he saw therein was a chess-board, whereon automatic pieces were playing the game by themselves. The side which he favoured was defeated, and in his anger he cast both board and men into a lake. The laidly maiden appeared thereupon and reproached him. He was set certain tasks, under the pretext of recovering the playthings; they included that adventure of stag and hound with which we shall be concerned later; but the term of all was to bring him for a second time to the castle of his maimed uncle and to the end of his quest. Thither Gawain had preceded him, and in this manner, as in several of the Graal romances, the knight of earthly courtesy is somehow connected with the quest—

whether he has undertaken it himself, or by accident, as in this instance.

Peredur found no Lance and he asked no questions, but he was told by a yellow-haired youth, who begged the boon of his friendship since, they two were cousins, that it was he who in the far past carried the ensanguined talisman, that he bore also the salver, and at the end of long years of adventure, long years of faerie life, that he appeared as the laidly [ugly] maiden. As the question had passed into desuetude [disuse; discontinuance of practice, custom or fashion] and, all his vow notwithstanding, as he learned nothing concerning the Lance, it is possible, as I have suggested, that the opportunity of asking and of receiving knowledge was not granted a second time to the seeker. With these things also the head in the dish of blood passed into the limbus of desuetude, like the foster-sister of Peredur and his dubious alternative uncle; no one thought further about them, though the seeker did learn that the head was that of another cousin, who was killed by the sorceresses of Gloucester. It was they also who lamed his uncle, and for this he was to wreak vengeance upon them. Here, therefore, was the third and final vendetta which Peredur accomplished, with the assistance, curiously enough, of Arthur and all his household, by the destruction of the nine priestesses of evil magic. Whether this healed his uncle or relieved the land and the people is not told in the story, nor do we learn anything further concerning the hero, or what, in fine, became of him. Perhaps in the castle of his uncle he completed a third period of hidden life.

I have not entered into the Quest of the Holy Graal for the unsatisfying purpose of reproducing the romances in synopsis, and those more especially which are outside the high issues of my real concern. But in respect of the claims which have been and are still advanced concerning it, as

the last reflection of some primordial type of quest, the Welsh Perceval seems to call for presentation adequately, that my readers may understand, firstly, the scope of the points of contact, and, secondly, may thus appreciate the better those greater points of divergence between this text and the true traditional tales of the Holy Vessel. The same motive will occasion the same treatment of the next and more excellent version, which is now posed for our consideration.

CHAPTER THREE THE ENGLISH METRICAL ROMANCE OF SYR PERCYVELLE

Among the extrinsic evidences that the Welsh non-Graal quest of Peredur contains the fibrous roots of a legend which was earlier than the Graal period of literature, there is the analogical story of Syr Percyvelle, which belongs in its present form to the fifteenth century, being therefore far later than the Mabinogion, though there is an Italian story which is even later still. Among the intrinsic evidences are the wild elements which characterise the Mabinogion generally of the Red Book of Hergest, suggesting an archaic state. I do not know that the last word has been said upon either testimony, but I do know that the Peredur is not a Graal story, and if its roots could be traced to Atlantis it would still be nothing to our purpose. When the bells began to ring at the outset, of our great speculation, we said in our hearts: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus [“Holy, Holy, Holy”]. We look, therefore, for the elevation of the Graal on our high altar of research, and our password is, Sanctum Graal.

There is very little question that this poem is in the position described by scholarship—that is to say, it is a fifteenth-century presentation of a legend which may be far older than any of the Graal quests in which Perceval is the hero.

Its elements are simple and primitive. They are much simpler and perhaps far more primitive than are those of the Welsh Peredur, while they are less disconcerting and aimless. The poem is in perfect harmony with itself; it has a conclusion proper to its beginning and intervening incidents which so work that the term indicated at the start is brought logically about.

It is the antithesis of any of the Graal romances—there is scarcely any quest at all; secondly, there is no question; there are no hallows of any kind, either Lance or Sword or Cup; finally, there is no enchantment of Britain. It is a savage story—naked and not ashamed; it calls on the kingdom of blood to be manifested about the hero, and he ensures its coming.

The mere skeleton of the poem will exhibit its points of contact with the Welsh Perceval and those of its divergence therefrom. The father of Perceval, who had also the same name, was for his valiant deeds married to the sister of King Arthur. She bore him only the one son, for a great tourney was held to celebrate the birth, and thereat the father was slain by a knight in red armour. As in the previous story, his widow fled into the wilderness, taking the child with her, so that he should know nothing of deeds of arms. He was brought up in the wild wood, with the wild beasts for his companions. However, as the boy grew up the mother gave him a small Scotch spear, and with this he became so dexterous that nothing could escape him. He was clothed in skins, and for a long time seems to have been reared as a heathen; but it came about at length that the lady taught him some prayers to the Son of God, and shortly after he met with three knights of King Arthur’s court, one of them being Gawain and another Kay. He inquired which of them was the great God about whom his mother had taught him, and threatened to slay them if they

refused to answer. He was told who they were, and then asked whether King Arthur would knight him also. He obtained a sorry horse, took leave of his mother, and rode to court clothed in his skins of beasts, and nourishing a firm resolution to slay the king if he would not grant his request. At parting the mother gave him a ring to be kept as a token, and she promised that she would await his return. On his road he reached a pavilion wherein was a lady asleep. He kissed her and exchanged a certain ring which she wore for the one that had been given to himself. He arrived at the court of all chivalry, add King Arthur recognised the boy's likeness to that older Perceval who had received his own sister as wife. The king, however, and apparently the whole chivalry had been reduced to recurring distress through fear of the Red Knight, who came regularly to rob the king of the cup out of which he was drinking. Perceval's arrival was coincident with another visitation of this kind, being the fifth during as many years. The Cup was of red gold, and it was seized while the king was in the act of putting it to his lips. Perceval, who was a witness, offered to bring back the vessel if the king would knight him, and the king promised to do so on his return. He went to fetch armour for the child, but Perceval in the meantime departed. The Red Knight did not wish to do battle with so sorry an opponent, but in the end there was a momentary combat, Perceval slaying the champion by throwing his dart, which passed through one of his eyes. For what it is worth, we have here an instance of that vengeance legend of which folk-lore traces examples in the Graal literature. It is true that Perceval slays the Red Knight, but, as in the Welsh Peredur, he does so without knowing that his victim was responsible for his father's death; his sole and simple object is to wipe out the affront offered to the king. After the encounter Perceval, with the assistance of Gawain, who had followed and come upon the scene, stripped the body

of the armour, and the youth was clothed therein. He did not return to claim the promised reward of knighthood, and Gawain was the bearer of the Cup to the king. His next office was to destroy a witch who was the mother of the Red Knight, and on account of his armour he was taken then and subsequently for that personage himself. He arrived at a castle, to which there came presently from the Maiden Land a messenger who was on his way to King Arthur entreating assistance for his mistress, the Lady Lufamour. She was being oppressed by a sultan who desired her for his wife, and because of her refusal he had slain her father and brother and had wasted her lands, so that she had only one castle left in which to take refuge. To this castle Perceval asked the way of the messenger, with the intention of destroying the Saracen, but the messenger preferred to continue his own road and get help from the king. Perceval, on his part, determined to discover it for himself, and the three sons of his host insisted on accompanying him, which they did for a certain distance, after which he contrived to shake them off. Meanwhile the messenger reached the court and had a very indifferent answer from the king, who, together with his knights, appears in rather a pitiful light throughout all the early portion of the story. The king, in fact, tells him that there is no lord in his land who is worthy to be called a knight. However, on hearing of the description of the chivalrous youth who was seen by the messenger from the castle on his road to court, the king concluded that this was Perceval, and called for horses, arms and companions of his table to follow in quest of the hero, fearing that he might be slain before they could reach him. By this time Perceval had arrived at the Maiden Land, and found a host of tents marshalled about a city. He set to and slew many, his ingenuous warcry being apparently that he had come to destroy a soldan. He slept in the open field, with his dead round him. The Lady Lufamour came to survey the

slaughter from the height of her walls, and descried the knight whom she supposed to have effected it. She sent her chamberlain to bring him into the city; therein she made him good cheer, and fell in love at first sight. He returned to do battle in her cause, she promising herself and the kingdom if he destroyed the soldan. He behaved in a manner which recalls the worst combats in the Spanish romances of chivalry, wherein one knight scatters a thousand paynims. Meanwhile, King Arthur and his companions arrived, but were mistaken by Perceval for enemies, and he fought with Gawain. However, ultimately they recognised each other and embraced. All proceeded to the castle, and Arthur recounted to the lady the early history of Perceval. The next morning he was knighted by the king, and again went forth against the soldan, whom he slew finally. He was made king of the country, and wedded Lufamour. He was still in the first year of his marriage when he remembered his mother, and rode away to find her. This is the quest of the story, and on the way he had to champion the lady of the pavilion, who had fallen into the hands of her husband for the business of the ring. He reconciled them vi et armis [“by force and arms”], and learned that the ring which he had borrowed had such virtues that the wearer could be neither slain nor wounded. He proposed to exchange again, but the husband had given that which was Perceval’s to the lord of the land, a giant of whom none would dare to ask it: he was, indeed, the brother of the soldan, but there is no need to say that Perceval in due course not only defeated but dismembered him. He recovered his ring at the giant’s castle, and learned from the seneschal that his master had offered it to a lady whom he besought in marriage; that she recognised it as her son’s ring, and, supposing that he had been slain by the giant, she fled distracted into the forest hard by. Perceval was now close on the track of his quest-object; he assumed a garment of skins, that she might know him the

more easily; and it was not long before the mother and son met and were henceforth reunited. They repaired to the giant’s castle, till the lady was restored to health and sanity. In fine, he carried her home, where she was welcomed by his queen and the great lords. This was the good end of Perceval’s mother, and in this way the story describes its perfect circle. The end of Perceval himself was in the Holy Land.