

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 8]

BOOK THREE THE EARLY EPOCHS OF THE QUEST

[continues]

CHAPTER FOUR THE CONTE DEL GRAAL

Section A— PRELIMINARY TO THE WHOLE SUBJECT

The elements of Robert de Borron's poem are those of the apocryphal gospel rather than of the romance, as we now understand that term. I do not wish to be construed too expressly, as I am simply creating a comparison or instituting a tolerable approximation. In the Conte del Graal of Chrétien de Troyes and the group of poets who continued what his zeal had begun, we enter into a different atmosphere from that of the two texts with which we have been concerned previously, and yet it has analogies therewith. As a whole, it is the sharpest possible contradistinction to the hypothetical non-Graal quest; but in its first part, being that which was furnished by Chrétien, it represents more especially the transition from the folk-tale to the true Graal romance, and it offers in itself a certain typical specimen of the developing process.

There is therefore little which distinguishes especially and signally this branch from the old tale of Peredur, as we can conceive it in its original form; there is a great deal by which several parts of Manessier's conclusion are distinguished from both, and still more the alternative rendering of Gerbert. Between all of them and the Quest of Galahad it is understood, this notwithstanding, that the deep abyss intervenes. The elements of Chrétien's poem are perhaps the most natural born that it has entered into the heart to conceive. The narrative is beautiful, or perhaps I should say that it is charming, after the manner of Nature; it is like a morning in spring. It has something more than the touch of Nature which takes us at once into its kinship; it seems actually Nature speaking; and so much of the Graal Mystery as can be said to enter within its dimensions is that Mystery expressed in the terms of the outside world, though still bearing a suggestion of translation direct from a strange and almost unknown tongue. The poem, taken as a whole, has few symbolic elements, and they are so entirely of the natural sacraments that it is difficult to recognise one touch of grace therein. Again, I except from this description what is termed the interpolation of Gerbert, which in comparison with the rest is like a Masonic tracing-board lecture compared with an essay of Goldsmith. This analogy is instituted expressly to show that in the widest construction Gerbert is also far from the goal.

Well, the Conte is a product of successive generations, but this granted it is the work of a single epoch. If it be approached simply from the poetic standpoint, there is no doubt much to repay the reader, if he be not deterred by the difficulties of extremely archaic French verse. But of the odor suavitatis ["the smell of sweetness"] of the sanctuary, of that which criticism has agreed to describe as the ascetic and mystic element, of that element which I and those whom I represent desire and look for, there is so little

that it can barely be said to exist. Many who know and appreciate the sacramental mystery which attaches in certain parts to the Graal Quest in Malory and to the Longer Prose Perceval, which has been termed *The High History of the Holy Graal*, by Dr. Evans, its translator, will appreciate exactly this contrast, and will understand that in Chrétien de Troyes there is little of the secret once delivered to the saints of any sanctuary, though he made use of materials which may have carried this suggestion with them. He is described by his one editor as the poet of love, and as the poet who created the poetry of sentiment. He is fresh, natural, singularly direct, and he carried his intention very plainly on the surface in respect of his presentation of the story, so far as he is known to have taken it. To put it briefly, anything that is recondite in its significance is that which is typical of the entire cycle, while that which is obvious is of the poet.

The *Conte del Graal* was begun, approximately speaking, about the third quarter of the twelfth century, and this metrical romance is the longest of the whole cycle, unless we elect to include the compilation which passes under the name of the Dutch Lancelot. It is the work of several hands, first among whom, both as to time and merit, is Chrétien de Troyes. He derived his materials from a source which is no longer extant, and is responsible for something less than one-eighth of the entire medley, unless, indeed, his editor, M. C. Potvin, is correct in his opinion that certain preliminary and certain subsequent matter, now regarded as later, should be included in his work. But this, I believe, is rejected with no uncertain voice by all later criticism.

Speaking generally of those quests of the Holy Graal into which we are here entering by a kind of anticipation, in order to dispose of one which offers too little to our purpose, it is not very difficult to follow the mind of

romance in its choice one after another of several heroes, though these are exclusive of each other. In a subject of this kind, I care little for antecedents in folk-lore as such, and many speculative constructions of scholarship may also be set aside reverently. It does not appear, for example, by the texts themselves that Sir Gawain was at any time the typical hero of the quest, not even in the mind of Chrétien, though I have said that he was after the manner born of Nature in his general treatment of the theme. There are two heroes only, whether typical or otherwise, and these are Perceval and Galahad, but among these Perceval is neither the ideal questing Knight nor one who can be called possible until he has undergone the transmuting process of the later texts. Perhaps at the highest he represents the spirit of romance when it was tintured only in part by sacramental mystery; Galahad represents that spirit when it has undergone the complete change. From this point of view, we may say that there are three epochs of the Quest in Northern France:

- a. The epoch of Chrétien, all continuations included, and of the Didot Perceval considered as a derivative of Robert de Borron, one of growth and development after its own manner.
- b. The epoch of the Longer Prose Perceval, deriving from the putative Walter Map and the later Merlin romances.
- c. The epoch of the Great Prose Lancelot and the Quest of Galahad.

It is understood that I am using the term epoch to characterise a condition of mind rather than one of time, and, secondly, that the German cycle of the Holy Graal remains over for consideration. It should be observed in the first epoch that Chrétien and Gautier are the only French

writers who tolerate the notion of an alternative Graal hero in the person of Gawain. In the second epoch there is Perceval shining in the kind of light which is native only to Galahad, for the visit which is paid by Gawain to the Graal Castle is not a part of the Quest but a pure matter of chance, and he is reflected in a high mirror of idealism. In the third epoch we have the Quest in its final exaltation, and there are many heroes, each of whom is dealt with according to his merits, with Galahad as the Morning Star among all the lesser lights. Gawain "died as he had lived, in arms" and spiritual inhibition. It is in the Conte del Graal, the Longer Prose Perceval and in more than one dubious text of the German cycle that he is represented as an intentional Graal quester. It is true that he proposes the experiment in the prose Galahad, but he takes none of the instituted precautions, and he abandons it easily and early. Those who imputed a certain righteousness to Nature allowed him some qualified success within the measure of their capacity, but it came about that the mystic mood intervened and, having found that Nature was of no effect, the Quest was transferred thenceforward into the world of mystery.

Section B— THE POEM OF CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES

By our previous considerations we have ascertained that after certain preliminary matters which are curious, but late in comparison and dubious, the Conte del Graal was opened in ample form by a master-singer of his period—that is to say, by Chrétien de Troyes. Now, if it be agreed that the Peredur and Syr Percyvelle are reflections of a lost primordial quest, it is desirable to note that they offer nothing concerning the feast of good things and the Bowl of Plenty. How, therefore, from the standpoint of scholarship, did this element, confessedly foreign thereto, in the beginning of things, come to be imported therein? There is

no trace of it, as we have seen, in the long section of that great poem which is now set for our consideration, though it is supposed to have heralded and inaugurated everything which belongs to the seeking part of the Graal literature. It was not evidently from this source in folk-lore that Chrétien derived his knowledge of that mysterious object which he calls a Graal and from which was diffused so great a light, though nowhere in his long contribution does he term it the Holy Graal. It was carried by the maid who had charge of it in her two hands, from which it may follow either that it was a heavy object, as might be a large dish, or something exceedingly sacred—to be exalted with reverence—as it might be, an Eucharistic Chalice or a most holy Reliquary. That it was not certainly the first of these objects is made evident by the fact that a Dish was carried separately in the pageant at the Graal Castle. We know further from the brief description that it was a jewelled vessel:

“Pières pressieuses avoit El graal, de maintes manières,
Des plus rices et des plus cières Qui el mont u en tière
soient; Tote autre pières passoient Celes dou gréal, sans
dotance.”

[“Pressing stones had The grail, in many ways, Of the richest and most precious ones Which were mounted in their entirety; All other stones passed Those of the grail, without endowment.”]

That it connects with the second or the third in my enumeration of possible objects is shown at a much later stage to Perceval in the narrative of his uncle the hermit, who tells how some hidden King of the Graal is sustained and comforted by a Sacred Host therein. Whencesoever the German poet Heinrich drew his materials, it is obvious that he and Chrétien speak of the same vessel and, as I have shown otherwise, rather of a ciborium than a Reliquary.

The essence of a Reliquary is that it should contain an invariable sacred deposit, as, for example, the Precious Blood of our Saviour or the liquefying blood of Saint Januarius. We are therefore at once in the region of great sacramental wonders. The legends of sanctity had already in far other texts borne witness to those cases in which the supersensual Bread of Life had served for the saints as their only daily nourishment. This is therefore the manner in which Chrétien de Troyes understood—had he indeed heard of them—the feeding properties of the Graal. It follows—and we shall see duly—that three poets—Wolfram, Heinrich and Chrétien—who are at the poles sometimes in variance over matters of symbolism, do yet, in the most important of all their concerns, tell the same story. And we who know better than they could have ever known all that is involved in the root-matter of their testimony, can say in our hearts, even when we hear these dim echoes which are far from the term of the Quest:

“Tu qui cuncta scis et vales, Qui nos pascis hic mortales,
Tuos ibi commensales, Cohæredes et sodales Fac
sanctorum civium.”

[“You who know all things and are able, Who feeds us
mortals here Your guests there, Cohesives and members
Make holy citizens.”]

We have no doubt as to the service or the table, and can bear witness on our own part that “many men, both of high and low condition in these last years past,” have to our knowledge seen the mystery of all sacredness and sweetness unveiled before their spiritual eyes. It follows that if there were many antecedents, the Graal is still one, and that even at the epoch of Chrétien the true nature of the Sacred Vessel was known, and that clearly. Of himself the poet knew nothing, but in some book which he followed

there must have been strange materials. One of the keynotes may be—among many others—that Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, investigated about 1140 a case of miraculous sustenance by the Eucharist.

As regards the source of his story the poet himself gives us an exceedingly simple explanation. He says that he wrote by command of a certain Count—that is to say, Count Philip of Flanders. The order was:

“À rimoir le mellor conte Qui soit contés en court roial.”

[“To rhyme the best tale Which is told in royal court.”]

The materials were written materials, namely, li contes del Gréal, as to which li Quens li bailla le livre. Such was the source of the earliest Quest-matter; and the earliest extant History-matter depends also from a great book, wherein great clerks wrote “the great secrets which are called the Graal”:

“Ge n’ose conter ne retreire, Ne ge ne le pourroie feire,
Neis, se je feire le voloie, Se je le grant livre n’avoie Oû les
estoires sunt escrites, Par les granz clers feites et dites: La
sunt li grant secré escrit Qu’en nvmme le Graal et dit.”

[“I dare not tell nor withdraw, I would not be able to do so,
But, if I did want to, If I did not have the great book Where
the stories were written, By the great scholars made and
told: There was a great secret written That even the Grail is
told.”]

Whereas therefore his patron communicated to Chrétien, it was Robert de Borron who communicated to Walter Montbéliard, in whose service he was. We see in this manner that the first poet of the Conte del Graal depended on antecedent authority which was not of the oral kind; by

one stage the question of source raised here has been moved back, and there must be left for the present.

We saw in the Welsh Perceval that there was a sword which broke and was rejoined, but in the stress of the last trial it was shattered beyond recovery. The episode in Chrétien which corresponds hereto is represented sufficiently for my purpose by the details already given when considering the Hallows of the Legend. I may add only that while certain codices make no attempt to account for the return of the Broken Sword to the Graal Castle, there are others which illustrate the foreknowledge of the king by his despatch of a messenger to follow Perceval in his travels till the mischance of the promised peril overtakes him. In yet others the fragments of the mystic weapon seem to have been spirited away. It will be seen that in the Welsh Perceval there is nothing to connect the maiming of the Lord of the Castle with the gigantic Lance which is carried about therein. The connection remains naturally a reasonable inference, but we cannot tell. The Sword certainly serves no purpose but that of a trial of strength. In Chrétien it appears, on the other hand, almost as a part of the plot, and the scheme is carried out by the sequels in accordance with so much as may be called manifest in the intention of the first poet.

Turning from the Hallows of the story, it so happens that it is after the manner of Chrétien to furnish his most important elucidations with the least suggestion of intention. I have spoken of the mystery of that Chamber wherein the Graal enters or re-enters after its manifestation in the pageant, or into which alternatively the dove flies in one Quest of the Greater Chronicles, before the Sacred Vessel is displayed. It is Chrétien only who discloses the secret of the hidden place, or at least manifests up to what point he understands it himself, when

he says of the king, whom I interpret as sometime king of the Graal:

“. xx . ans i a estet ensi. Que fors de la cambre n'issi Û le Gréal véis entrer.”

[“Eight-fold rays (of two crosses) years I have obstacles first. That through the arch that isn't Where the Grail sees you enter.”]

It was the bedchamber of that Warden of the Hallows who was far more concealed than he who is called or miscalled the Rich Fisher in the same text. The further question which arises for our consideration concerns, therefore, this nameless being who is the father of the king in evidence. The allusions to him are so brief and so vague that those who continued the story thought it best to ignore them, though I hold it as certain that Gautier had the elements of an explanation in his hands. Without forestalling what there is to say on this point in the next sub-section, I will refer back to an earlier part of our inquiry, when it was noted that the quest in Chrétien presupposes an early history and—notwithstanding certain 1 confusions, as, for example, regarding the origin of the title King Fisherman—that this history may have corresponded, in respect of its essence, to the first draft of the metrical romance by Robert de Borron, or alternatively to the source from which the latter drew, and in which it may be hazarded that there seem to have been several histories. It is too early to speculate whether the texts which had come into the possession of the pious minstrel included the single story which the Count of Flanders placed in the hands of Chrétien, but there must have been a general prototype. Apart from the Longer Prose Perceval, which is extra-lineal in most details of its tradition, there are three persons connected immediately with the Graal in the various quests. In the Parsifal of

Wolfram there are (a) Titurel—precisely in the position of the mysterious king in Chrétien, and like him abdicated; (b) the reigning king Amfortas, who is fed by the Graal; and (c) Parsifal, the king who is to come. In the quest of Galahad there are (a) the maimed king, Pellehan; (b) the reigning king, Pelles; and (c) Galahad, the king who is to come. In the Didot Perceval there are (a) Brons, who is sick of the centuries, but still the Graal king; (b) his i son Alain, but in this case he dies, without it being possible for us to assign his special place in the mystery; and (c) Perceval, as a coming king who is in the warfare of his training. Now, this notion of a triple guardianship was first put forward in the romance of De Borron, and is evidently one of the root-ideas of the historical branches; and if in a certain sense it is broken in the Book of the Holy Graal to establish some phantom of a chronological succession, the Quest which follows therefrom recurs, as we see, thereto. I should add that the Royal Family of the Holy Graal—in the story of Chrétien and its sequels—has no names in the canonical texts till Perceval comes into his own, but there is a variant or interpolation in a Berne manuscript which follows the keepership in De Borron.

Separating from the poem of Chrétien not merely the prologue, which is by another hand, but an introductory part which is also of uncertain authorship, while it has elements in rather close correspondence with the Welsh Mabinogi of Peredur, and adhering to the more authentic poem itself, there is a diversity of the circumstances under which Perceval was born whereby it is set apart from the Welsh story and from the English poem. In the introduction there are variants from these, but they are matters of detail. According to Chrétien, it is the maiming of Perceval's father which takes the family into the woods. Perceval is the youngest of three sons, and the time comes for the others to be sent into the world. They are

commissioned to the courts of two kings, where they are both knighted on the same day, and, though widely separated, both are also slain. It is this misfortune which causes the death of the father and the desire on the mother's part to isolate her remaining boy from all knowledge of chivalry. While the result is a certain inexperience, he does not seem so savage or untrained as in the texts which we have considered previously, and the surroundings of his father's house are those of a knight who has retired to a country estate on account of his health. Seeing that there is nothing so little to my purpose as to be at any unnecessary pains regarding the conventional story part of successive texts, I shall deal very shortly with points of minor variation in the life and adventures of the hero, and as regards the major episodes, they may be thus recited in summary: The adventure of the Pavilion; the initial visit to the Court of King Arthur; the struggle with the Red Knight; the sojourn with an instructor in chivalry; the liberation of that Lady of the Castle who is here named Blanchefleur; the first visit to the House of the Graal; the meeting with Perceval's kinswoman afterwards; the exoneration of the Lady of the Pavilion; the search of the King and his knights after the hero whom they had once rejected almost; the love-trance; the denunciation of Perceval by the laidly damosel; his godless wanderings; the episode of Good Friday; the renewal of grace which he receives at the hands of a hermit, who—in this case—is his uncle: all these follow in due order, and though it is not throughout the exact order which we find in the Welsh Mabinogi, that text remains the artificial prototype representing the early narrative portion, and to this Chrétien has added the Holy Graal as his ostensible motive in chief. The first sojourn of Perceval at the Graal Castle takes place in the absence of any design on the part of the hero; he is not, in other words, on the Quest of the Sacred Vessel and he knew nothing about it. When he has

liberated Blanchefleur from her thralldom in the castle of Beaurepaire, his avowed quest is that which will bring him to his mother, but when he has found her he will return to the maiden, will marry her and share her rule. The other maiden who reproaches him for his failure immediately after his departure from the Graal Castle is his cousin-german instead of his foster-sister, and in addition to his responsibility in respect of his mother's death, she denounces him for not asking the redeeming questions concerning the Vessel and the Lance. In this manner the subsequent reproaches of the laidly damosel at the Court of King Arthur—which is in camp on the quest of Perceval, and not at Caerleon—concern a twice-told tale. The adventures of Perceval are carried by Chrétien as far as his visit to that uncle who has embraced the life of a hermit.

Section C— THE EXTENSION OF GAUTIER

It is certain that the poet who took up the thread of the story which was left by Chrétien had antecedent texts to go upon outside the work of his predecessor, and that one at least of these is not to be identified with purely folk-lore materials. It is considered that the metrical romance of De Borron was not one of his documents, and on the hypothesis—or perhaps I should say on the theory—of a primordial non-Graal Quest—as reflected into the Welsh Mabinogi and the English Syr Percyvelle—it would follow that he had seen this. Now, there are traces in the Mabinogi of an intention which might have led up to the marriage of Perceval and Blanchefleur, if his enchantment by the empress had not extended over a period which put such a possibility out of the question. In the English metrical story the marriage is a natural conclusion, and we have seen that it takes place accordingly. In Chrétien there are the same traces, and they reappear more strongly in Gautier, but the term of his intention is unmanifest because

he failed to conclude. The common consent of scholarship would hold probably that the prototype of both poets celebrated a bridal at its end. It contained also the widely diffused story of the maiden and the hound, or brachet, which I have held over from the Welsh story to speak of in this place. Finally, in some form it had the curious episode of the chessboard. But, fully developed as they are in the long extension of Gautier, these things are of his accidents only, while of the essence is his zeal of the Graal Quest, which overrules all things else in his ingarnering of diverse memorials. Of that quest he has practically two heroes, and though a superior success attends the search of Perceval the adventures of his alternate Gawain are recounted at still greater length. This latter part, taken over from the first poet of the Conte, at once so extended and so important in its Graal elements, is postponed for consideration separately, registering here the bare fact only that in the section of Gautier and in the additamenta thereto belonging, Gawain appears most expressly as one of the heroes connected with the vision of the Holy Vessel. Of their comparative merits there need be no question, as the grace of sanctity had not entered into the heart of the poet who began or of him who extended the Graal story. The Sacred Vessel was glorious and the Sacred Vessel was saintly, but the election thereto was that of the best Knight in the world, or his nearest co-heir in chivalry, and not of him who was resplendent in the arms of spiritual achievement. Gawain was therefore, in this sense, scarcely less eligible than Perceval, and the ground of his comparative failure was either an implied incapacity from the fact that he was not of the Keepership lineage or that for some reason it had been decided to regard Perceval as the more elect hero among two exotic flowers of Knighthood.

Of Perceval himself, however, who for the purpose of introducing Gawain had been left far behind in the narrative of Chrétien, we hear no single word till nearly half the work has been accomplished by Gautier. His story is then resumed at the point when the hero has departed from the hermitage of that uncle who has brought him into a tolerable state of repentance, purging him by the offices of the Church, and has communicated, as if it were in secret Mass or sacred Eucharist, the first mysteries of the Graal. Perceval had been denounced previously for the omission which he had almost covenanted to make, and no hope had been extended that he should yet act as repairer in fine, so that from initial point to term, as he could then perceive it, some blind and implacable fatality appeared to have been at work alone. Now, on the other hand, and if not all too plainly, it looked as if there followed by inference that a high hope of achievement was held out to him by his uncle's words; he resolved therefore that he would not return to King Arthur's court till he had revisited the Fisher King's Castle and inquired concerning the Graal. But all without that secret fastness was not only beset by perils and hard encounters, but it turned in a glass of strange vision and great deception. Once more, I am not concerned in summarising the story to take in all its details, because, as usual, several of its episodes are idle and extrinsic in respect of our proper purpose. The Castle of all Desire moved near or far upon the confused horizon of adventure, and at a certain point Perceval reached a river, beyond which he was assured that the bourne rose up grandly, in a rich and peopled land; but he could find no means of crossing. The day passed from noon to vespers, and still on the further side he came to a vacant palace, beautiful exceedingly in situation, moult bien séant, but now standing drearily in ruins. There he found a maiden who was prepared to show him a place of crossing and mounted her mule for the purpose, but her intention was

only to drown him. Unless we can connect this incident with something which will follow presently, I find nothing therein except an unmeaning hindrance, and the same may be said of an episode which occurs hereabouts in certain manuscripts, being the meeting between Perceval and a huntsman who reproached him for the fatality of the unasked question at the Graal Castle. It shows only that the rumour of the ill-starred visit had gone about the district, which was acquainted otherwise, and too well, with the sorrows of the Holy House and their effects beyond the precincts. As regards the maiden and the mule, I would note further that in the Conte del Graal there is a curse on Logres which occupies a middle term between times of adventure and times of enchantment, and one inference may be that Perceval had fallen into the hands of a water-fairy, belonging to the kelpie type, as the malice of an earthly maiden could be assumed scarcely in connection with such a meeting between complete strangers; or—that which is still more probable—the brief occurrence may be due only to the sporadic invention of the writer. In any case, the Knight, having been better counselled, learned of a ford, and so entered presumably on the direct road which led, by the hypothesis, to the desired House of Great Hallows. Yet he was still far from his term, and many adventures in the vicinity intervened without him reaching the goal. First among these was a visit to another deserted castle—such desolation being perhaps a part of the curse—and therein he found the chess-board of which we have heard something in the metamorphoses and adventures of the Welsh Peredur. Here it was no hideous damosel who came in to upbraid him, but a maid of great beauty, who rose from the midst of the lake into which Perceval had proposed to cast the board and pieces. The fact that she held his hands substituted another quest for that of their recovery in the alternative story. A white stag ranged in the park of the castle, and if the knight would receive those

favours which her beauty led him to demand he must bring her the head of this animal, to facilitate which she lent him a hound with express injunctions to return it. I do not propose to follow the adventures which arise out of this undertaking. The favours involved by the covenant had unhappily been granted to Perceval in the case of Blanchefleur, though not perhaps when her distress, at their first meeting, had brought her to his bedside, and into his arms afterwards, through the whole night. Her true love was to follow her liberation by him from the violence of an undesired suitor. But it was granted indubitably in the plenary sense when he reached her castle unexpectedly for the second time. Still it was under circumstances which do not occur commonly in romances of chivalry unless the consummation of marriage is intended at the close of all. That she was a bride elect is clear beyond all in the poem, and in yielding, it was to her husband that she yielded only, which makes one later episode in Perceval's story the more iniquitous for this reason. That Perceval was self-devoted to Blanchefleur follows from the episode of the love-trance, but his inclinations are variable in the Conte, as they are in the Welsh story; for the love of the Lady of the Chess-board he goes through long-enduring quests which so end that at length he attains his desires. In all this there are only two points that concern us—firstly, that the attainment involves the desertion of Blanchefleur under circumstances that for the knight are disgraceful; and, secondly, that the prolongation of the adventures which follow the slaying of the stag are due to the daughter of the Fisher King, or at least in part, and are designed to punish Perceval for not having asked the question.

I have said that the locality of the Graal Castle is as if it were a place in flux; there is nothing in the opening of the story to lend colour to the supposition that the Sacred Vessel and the Mystery and the House of these were close

to the manorial residence and rural retreat wherein Perceval passed his childhood; hence it is doubtless by reason that the Castle was here to-day and gone to-morrow that they are brought suddenly into comparative proximity. Perceval was still in the course of his stag adventures and still seeking the prize which was to follow their completion; still also he was hearing casually concerning the Graal, or at least was in occasional speculation regarding its whereabouts; when he found himself, without expectation and without intention, at the door of his old home, for the first time only in ten years. There he entered, there he tarried but too briefly, and there he met with his sister—of whom Chrétien knows nothing, even as Gautier elects to ignore entirely the cousin-german of the earlier poet. He seems, however, to have been following some earlier stage of the legend, to which the Longer Prose Perceval and the Great Quest also conform, and in that last and glorious text the personality of the sister is exalted to a high grade of sanctity, of which we find nothing but the first traces—for the first traces are present—in the account of Gautier. Herein she is a spirit of recollection and a meditative recluse—

“Une moult très cointe pucièle, Blanc com flours en may novele.”

[“A very pretty little maiden, White with flowers in May new.”]

But she is clothed richly withal and encompassed by a fair retinue, so living sad and unfriended in the woodland, lamenting the loss of her brother, of whose fate she had heard nothing. When Perceval declared himself there was great joy between them, and of her he learned the particulars of their mother's death, through the love and the loss of him. Together they visited a hermit uncle who is

not to be identified with the former, being on the father's side; to him Perceval made his confession—though of all prayers he knew only the Pater noster—heard at his celebration a Mass of the Holy Ghost, knelt at the tomb of their mother, and of his uncle prayed piteously that he might learn concerning the Graal and the other Hallows. But his uncle would tell him nothing at that time, though he gave him high instruction regarding holy mysteries of religion. That the heart of Perceval was not reached, his reverence notwithstanding, was too soon made evident by the fact that he bequeathed his sister to renewed isolation, with a mere promise to return which is never fulfilled, and soon or some time afterwards he was in a position—as we shall see—to claim and receive his dues from the Lady of the Chess-board.

Neither sin of concupiscence nor sin of desertion have disqualified him for the Quest of the Graal in the opinion of Gautier, and he was still less or more on that Quest when he came to a Castle of Maidens, who were reputed to have raised the beautiful edifice with their own hands—

“Ains le fisent . IIII . pucièles, Moult avenans et moult très bides.”

[“So they did, four rays (four lines) maidens, Much pleasant and very, very bad.”]

Of these things he heard the story, though he was weary and looked rather for rest. So was he delivered to his slumber, but the place was all work of faerie, and he reposed in enchantment that night. Faerie houses are, however, like faerie gold—dead leaves and dry in the morning, or mere shadow and rainbow semblance which dissolve in the eastern light. So Perceval woke in a meadow with an oak murmuring above him. From all this there

follows nothing, but it is designed that the next adventure should take him a further step in the direction of his term. It seems that in the neighbourhood of the Graal Castle there was always a river to cross, and as on the first occasion he met with a lady and a mule from whom followed his destruction almost, so now there was another maiden with a similar beast in her charge, thus creating a kind of equilibrium between false and true assistance. The story is very long, and much of it is outside the object, but it may be reduced under three heads: (1) Perceval was riding with the lady, whom he lost at night in the forest. Alone and so lost, he beheld a great light—very clear and very resplendent—but it was followed by tempest. (2) In the morning he recovered the damosel, who said that it was the light of the Graal, which the Rich King Fisher was accustomed to carry in the forest, so that no infernal temptation should have power over him. In the Conte therefore, as in the Quest of Galahad, the Graal goes about, but it is not for the same reason. (3) The maiden described the Vessel as that which contained the glorious blood of the King of Kings which was received therein as He hung upon the cross. This is rather the account of the Vulgate Merlin than of Robert de Borron, but the distinction is one of detail, and it follows that the Early History which was known to Gautier was that of a relic of the Passion. (4) More than this the lady would not reveal, because it was a thing too secret for dame or damosel to recount; it was also a tale of terror, though a man of holy life might express the marvels. (5) That which she could do she would do, however—namely, lend him her white mule—the beast which another romance declares to be on God's side—and she would lend him also her ring, by which the mule was governed. Thus assisted, he would be able to cross a certain bridge of glass, from which he might travel direct to the King's Castle. Thereafter the mule would return of itself. He was not all the same destined to continue the

journey far beyond the waterside. He was riding the mule, and leading his horse by the bridle, when he encountered a knight who gave him news of a tourney about to be held by King Arthur, and—ignoring his original resolve—he turned aside from the straight path to attend it. The digression delayed his achievement, but it left him the best knight of the world, and this was a condition of the achievement. It did not, however, meet the views of the damosel who was owner of the mule and the ring, for she reappeared and demanded their return, on ascertaining that his Quest was not achieved. They were both delivered, and thereafter—without salutation or farewell—he was left to shift as he might on the way, now all unknown, to the Holy House. It was at this time, as if once more without God in the world, that his road took him to the Castle of the Chess-board, for during all these scenes and times he had carried the stag's head and the dog of the damosel. The term of this foolish business should have increased the difficulties of his Quest, but—on the contrary—the lady was to a certain extent his conductress in place of the maiden of the mule, for she it was who took him again to the waterside and to a great boat there at hand which carried him—horse and all—to the opposite shore, beyond which stretched that broad way which led to the Court of King Fisher.

The subsequent occurrences are all intended to connect intimately with his arrival thereat and with the Rite of Questioning which is his prime object, but we shall see in their later understanding that they are fantastic rather than important, which also appears on their surface. He found a child of apparently five years old, clothed in rich vestments and seated on a branch of a tree higher than any lance could reach. Of him Perceval, now full of his mission, inquired concerning the Fisher King but was told only that if he would learn news which might prove good and pleasant he must go to the Mount Dolorous, after which the

speaker put a period to further questioning by ascending higher in the tree and thence vanishing. Perceval reached the mountain and met with a maid coming down on a palfrey who counselled him against the adventure, but he began the ascent and at the summit found fifteen crosses, of which five were white, five red and five blue. These encircled a pillar, to which he must fasten his steed. To fail was to lose reason. The achievement seems childish, but it was a proof of valour devised of old by Merlin in order that the flower of chivalry should alone serve King Arthur, and the maid who told this story was Merlin's daughter, of whom we find nothing otherwise in the canonical romances of the Graal. Seeing that very few knights of the Round Table ever heard of Mount Dolorous and much less of the testing, the account seems an idle invention, but it is regarded as important for early Arthurian history. Perceval being still on his journey, at the conclusion of this adventure, came next to a great tree which was illuminated by innumerable candles, like a high altar at the exposition of the Most Holy Sacrament. It was the spectacle of a moment only, for the lights vanished on his approach, and he found himself at a wonderful chapel, where a dead knight lay in repose on the altar and a black hand, appearing behind the altar, extinguished one great light thereon. The significance of these things appears in the sequel and does not signify especially. In fine, Perceval arrived at the Graal Castle, wherein he found the King and told him of his latest adventures, namely, those on his way to the Castle. The Hallows appeared, and for the first time in the poem the expression Saint Greal is used in connection with the actual vision of the object. When the procession had passed and repassed, Perceval asked, as we know, the required questions, whereat the King told him that these were great matters, and in the first place he recounted the meaning of the child seated on the branch of that tree which the knight passed on his way thither.

Perceval did not learn what he wanted, because of his sins, and the episode as a whole indicated that the thought of man should be raised towards his Creator—an allegorical trifle which is after the manner of Masonic teaching, as this appears on the surface, or much ado about little. Before he could hear further Perceval was invited to piece the broken sword together, which he did, apparently by the power of his magnetism as the best knight in the world. He left only a slight crevice at the point of junction, which I should account for as signifying that other point in time at which the sin of sense entered into his life—but this is without prejudice to the explanation provided in one of the sequels which stand over for consideration. The partial success led the Keeper of the Hallows to hail Perceval as one of the lords of the House, though he was told at the same time that the Quest was yet unfinished. As Gautier dwells more especially on the resoldering of the Broken Sword, it may be inferred that what still remained was the perfect completion of this work. The next teller of the story will be found, however, to import another element, which so far may have been an implicit of the poem but has not been explicated. For the rest, Gautier explains nothing concerning that withdrawn and abdicated king, of whom we hear something in Chrétien, nor does he make more than the one reference, which I have cited, to the daughter of the Rich Fisher, except that to all appearance she continued her office as Bearer of the Holy Graal.

Section D— THE CONCLUSION OF MANESSIER

There is a disposition to think that the extension of Gautier broke off in the middle of a sentence, which was brought by the poet who followed him to its due point, and the narrative continues thereafter, in his hands remaining to the very end. This poet was Manessier. We have, however, to remember that at or about the alleged break there

intervened another singer, who intended, almost certainly, to furnish an alternative or independent conclusion, the term of which may have been by possibility at the penultimate completed sentence of Gautier's version, wherein the Fisher King calls Perceval to enter within the fold of the house—

“Sires soiés de ma maison, Je vos mec tout en abandon
Quan que jou ai, sans nul dangier; À tous jours vos arai plus
cier Que nul homme qui jà mais soit.”

[“Sirs, beloved of my house, I leave you all in abandon
Whenever I have, without any danger; At all times you will
be more sure Than any man who has ever known me.”]

It would be in this case much the same ending as that of the Berne Perceval. Alternatively, there may have been some further extension which is not now extant, or Gerbert, on his own part, may have failed to complete as he proposed. I speak with considerable diffidence, because the only editor of the text has given such a vague account of that which preceded the interpolation and followed it that it is impossible to decide whether he has mistaken the line of Gautier, which is said to be the point of intervention, or whether the experiment of the Broken Sword is repeated a second time—with glaring inconsequence—and proves a failure, soon after it was resoldered in Gautier's text. Again, the welcome among his household by the Fisher King is repeated at the end in the one manuscript which gives—according to the editor—the narrative of Gerbert in extenso. There is, of course, another alternative which would exonerate M. Potvin—the editor in question—and this is that the scribe of the codex brought in the Gerbert version at an arbitrary point without reference to that which went before and came after in the text of Gautier. The two poets are in any case of one mind as to the

unfinished state of the Quest, and so also is Manessier, but the latter is of opinion evidently that Perceval has accomplished enough to have, on taking up the thread of the narrative, as much information concerning the Graal and Lance as he intends to provide under any circumstances whatever, together with so exhaustive a history of the Broken Sword that the hero shall be equipped fully for the undertaking which remains to be accomplished. I have said that Gautier is concerned more especially with the resoldering of this weapon, and it is out of the same talisman that Manessier obtains his keynote, or that which concerns himself in the palmary sense—namely, the vengeance-legend. It was the sword which inflicted the dolorous stroke and by fraud encompassed the destruction of the king's brother. It was the sword which wounded the king himself by a chance in which lurked a fatality, and his healing depended, as we know, on the visitation of tardy wrath and delayed justice upon him who used and misused the weapon. With the explanation of the Graal and the Lance we are already acquainted, but the inter-relation between the two Hallows is much closer in Manessier than it is in some other versions; as the Sacred Spear penetrated the side of Christ, the Graal was raised up to receive it, and the historic account which follows shows that the poet was acquainted with some early rendering of the Book of the Holy Graal which differed materially from the now extant form, as it knew nothing of the Second Joseph—the son of Joseph of Arimathæa, to whom such prominence is given in the later text. It was the elder or, for the early version, the only Joseph of the Graal, who brought the Hallows into Britain, who erected the Manor or Castle in which the King was now speaking to Perceval, and the speaker was of his own lineage. If there were any comparative connection in the romances, it would follow that the Castle was Corbenic and that the king was Pelles; but as the latter is not certainly this personage, so in the former case there is.

tolerable reason to suppose that the nameless House does not correspond to the mighty pile built of old by a converted pagan ruler, for which he was visited so heavily. After allowance has been made for several obvious disparities, it remains of no little importance that the early history of the Graal, so far as it is given in the Conte, is not that of Robert de Borron but of the putative Walter Map, and that in the sequence of texts as we have them the source of this Early History leads up to the Quest of Galahad and not to that of Perceval. Apart from the German cycle, for which there appear to be two sources—the one being in Northern French and the other in something so far untranslatable—the root-matter of Graal history was a text which corresponded of all things most closely with the metrical romance of De Borron. It was sometimes reflected through that medium and at others through the early form of the Book of the Holy Graal—and this history was one of Christian symbolism and religious legend, not one of folklore—by the elements of which it was contaminated in the course of development in romance.

Perceval, on the great night of his visit to the Graal Castle, heard other wonders than those of the Relics of the Passion and the Sword of wrath and vengeance. He heard that the maiden who carried the Graal was of royal lineage and so also was she who bore the salver, but the former was the King's daughter. He heard that the illuminated tree which he passed in his journey was the Tree of Enchantment, where the fairies assemble; for the powers of the height and the powers of the deep and the powers of the intermediate world encompassed the Graal Castle, that the times of enchantment, times of adventure, times of wonder might be illustrated by abundant pageants. He heard, in fine, of the Chapel and the Black Hand, to which I have alluded as a tale of little meaning, wherein the Graal has no part, and there is no need to repeat the explanation here.

After all these narratives, Perceval covenanted to visit the death of the King's brother on the person who accomplished it. On the morning following he took his leave, commending his host to God and refusing all invitations to tarry. Perhaps Manessier did not know what to do in order to retard, for the purpose of storytelling, the accomplishment of his Vengeance Quest. Alternatively, perhaps he regarded it as a point of honour to follow his precursors by giving an inordinate space to the adventures of Gawain, with whom he couples those of Saigremor, another knight of fame in Arthurian romance. In any case, there are various digressions at this point which account for one half of the poem. When the story returns ultimately to Perceval he was again in the Chapel which he had visited previously—that of the Black Hand, the extinguished candle and the corpse on the altar. He did battle with and expelled a demon, purified the place and slept therein. The next day he assisted three hermits to bury the body of the person whom the Black Hand had slain. All this notwithstanding—indeed, perhaps because of it—for a considerable part of his mission the powers of the deep attacked him. On one occasion the Accuser, in the form of a horse, endeavoured to carry him to hell, but he was saved by the sign of the Cross. Later on he arrived at that river which he had crossed originally, and there the demon sought once more to deceive him, assuming the guise of Blanchefleur coming to him in a wherry. But at the right moment another vessel appeared, with sails of samite, bearing a holy man, and Perceval took refuge therein.

It is evident that the story has reached that point when its proper term is on the threshold rather than in sight merely, and the various delays which intervene can be dealt with in a few words, if we omit miscellaneous adventures which serve no important object, as they are nothing to do with the Graal. The most purposeful of all was the arrival of a

messenger from Blanchefleur, who was again in peril, and so he paid his third visit to Beaurepaire, which he delivered duly and again departed from the lady, but this time in all chastity and reserve. She who had declared to him her love, now in the far past, she who expected to wed him, was destined to see him no more. The next most important episode was a stormy encounter with Hector of the Round Table, as a result of which both were destroyed nearly; but in the dark of the midnight there shone a great light about them, which was the Graal carried by an angel, and thereby they were again made whole. It follows, once more, that here, as in the Quest of Galahad, the Graal was going about, at least on occasion, and we have had an instance previously in connection with the wanderings of the Fisher King. Like all hallows the efficacy of which is transcendent and even of the absolute degree, there was no active ministry on the part thereof and nothing was done by the angel. He moved simply about them, holding the Precious Vessel, and their wounds, with the pains, left them. Doubtless after such manner was the company of the Blessed Joseph sustained and fed in the wilderness.

After this miraculous healing, Perceval, departing from Hector, as those who after great experiences have quenched all hatred in their heart, continued his way, as we may suppose, concerned now only with the accomplishment of his mission; and so in the fulness of time he reached that castle wherein there dwelt the knight who slew the brother of the Fisher King. Sorrow and outrage had the evil master of chivalry brought to his intended victim, and more even than that to the keeper of the Sacred Vessel. Why it had entailed such consequences nobody knows—perhaps also no one would care to speculate. The Graal had healed Perceval, and it had healed Hector, even in the absence of any desert on his own part, for he was the unworthy kinsman of Lancelot; but its own custodian it

could not cure of the wound which a mere accident had inflicted. After a long encounter, Perceval despatched the worker of this mischief and started on his return journey to the Graal Castle, carrying the head of the destroyer with him. His mission once accomplished, all the hard and doubtful roads ran behind the hoofs of Perceval's horse; all the hindrances were taken out of the way. Of that way he knew nothing probably, and there was no need that he should. To the right he went and the left, with a certain sense of questing; the moons of the magical summer waxed and waned above him; and all suddenly the Castle rose up before him. A herald on the walls without beheld his approach and hurried to the Master of the House, not so much with the news of his coming as of that which he bore slung from the front of his saddle; whereupon the Fisher King rose up healed—with a great cry. Perceval presented his terrible gift, and it was fixed on the summit of the tower belonging to that Castle which so far was a place of vengeance rather than of mercy. Thus finished the last and crowning adventure. Whether it was the implicit of Chrétien that the question properly put would have restored all things within and without the Castle we cannot say; perhaps it would only have led to the vengeance quest, but again we cannot say. There is nothing in Chrétien to make us infer that quest and in the Didot Perceval—the prose romance which corresponds in the French cycle most nearly to the first portion of the Conte del Graal—the whole mission is one of asking and receiving a true answer. The relationship between the King and the knight was now for the first time declared by one to another; the King appointed his lands to the hero, promising to make him King in succession at Pentecost—as one who devises to an heir, or perhaps as if he also were a priest having power to consecrate. To this, however, Perceval would not accede so long as his uncle was alive, and he was also under covenant to visit the court of King Arthur, which he departed to fulfil

accordingly. He was still there when a maiden arrived with the news that the Fisher King was dead, and that there was a vacancy of the royal office in the House of the Graal.

King Arthur accompanied Perceval to the Castle with all the chivalry of the Round Table—remaining a full month and being served daily by the Sacred Vessel. It does not appear who consecrated Perceval, whether this was effected, in the ordinary way, by a prelate of the church, or whether the office itself carried with it its own anointing. The text says only that he was crowned at the Feast of All Saints. After seven long years of reign in peace he bequeathed the lands in turn, and the official part of his royalty, to the King of Maronne, who had married the daughter of King Fisher; but the Hallows he did not bequeath. He retired into a hermitage, whither the Graal followed him. By a departure from tradition, he was consecrated acolyte, sub-deacon, deacon, and, in five years, he was ordained priest and sang Mass. Thereafter so did he serve God and so love Him that he was called at length from this world into the joy of Paradise. During the last period of his earthly life one codex says that he was fed only by the Holy Graal—that is to say, by the Eucharist.

Section E— THE ALTERNATIVE SEQUEL OF GERBERT

It will be seen that in his wonderful kingdom Perceval had entirely neglected Blanchefleur, who is no longer even mentioned: he went into his own, and his own seem to have received him with no interrogation of the past. Had his sins been scarlet, the fulfilment of the vengeance mission and the consequent healing of the King would have made them white as snow, so far as we can follow Manessier; and yet in some obscure manner the poet knew that the things which he dealt in were sealed with holiness and that the office of the Warden, if it did not begin with priesthood, and

all its sanctity, must end therein. The sense of poetical justice might have suggested another conclusion, and so did, but this was not to the mind of Manessier. There is, as we are aware, a long and long sequel by another writer which interpenetrates the last lines of Gautier, and it is a romance truly which is full of entrancements and hints of spiritual meaning. It has been summarised very fully indeed by the one editor of the *Conte del Graal*, but it has never been printed in full, as it demands and deserves. I do not know what Gerbert thought of the chessboard episode and that which followed thereafter as the term of the whole adventure. He seems to have isolated it from his mind and thus contrived to ignore it. Certainly a subsequent action, or a denial, as I should say rather, which he attributes to his hero, seems to assume tacitly the previous continence of his life. Putting aside this question of an implicit, there are three express preoccupations to which the poem confesses: (a) that the desertion of Perceval's mother was an offence which called for expiation; (b) that the neglect of his sister must be overglossed by proper care in the future; and (c) that the rest of his life must atone for all his previous deficiencies in respect of Blanchefleur, who—as I do not doubt that he determined in his secret mind—must be united through him with the Graal. Of such was his programme, and after what manner he fulfilled it can be told shortly. Perceval had reason to say in his heart: *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa* ["my fault, my fault, my greatest fault"]—for three offences and of these one was the greatest. I have indicated that in the midst of the editor's confusion, or at least as the allocation is found in the printed text, it is difficult to understand whether it is assumed by Gerbert that the Broken Sword had been resoldered partially before he begins his narrative, but even in this case it was clear to Gautier. that the task of his hero was unfinished. That which he intended to do with him subsequently, there is, of course, no means of knowing;

what he ought to have done, Gerbert has designed to illustrate. Perceval was to be treated, in the first instance, precisely as we shall find that Gautier presents the treatment of Gawain over his particular failure—he was not to know the truth concerning the Graal—the mystery, that is to say, of all secrecy. A state more approaching perfection was to deserve so high a prize. The King, who pronounced the judgment, consoled him, and him counselled, after which the knight was left to his repose in the holy and glorious Castle. The night of sleep was a night also which was intended to recall him to the sense of his first duty. The clear strokes of a clock, proclaiming the hour of midnight, awoke him; he saw a great light and he heard sweet singing, after which came the voice of one who was unseen, warning him concerning his sister, who was encompassed by great danger in the manorial house of their mother. He passed again into deep wells of slumber, and again—but now in the morning—he awoke, as others had awakened previously, to find himself lying on greensward, since the Castle had passed for the time being beyond the witness of the senses. He mounted his horse, which stood caparisoned and ready; he went forward, and soon—as it might seem, suddenly—a wonder of great wonders awaited him. It took the form of crystal walls, within which he heard all manner of instruments making a joyful music. The door in the hither wall being fastened, he smote it three times with increasing vehemence, using his sword for the purpose. It should be noted that this weapon neither was nor could have been the Graal Hallow, but on the third occasion it broke with a great clatter. Thereupon the door moved back, and one who was in white shining appeared and challenged. For Perceval it was a rebuff in more senses than he could understand at the moment, and though he entreated earnestly, not only was he denied entrance, but he was told by one who knew all his failure and success at the Graal Castle, that this his business with

the sword must cost him another seven years of quest and exile. Apparently for the King's sake and the relief of him, he had striven in the first place, though the measure of his intention was small; now it was his own purification that was the chief work in hand. So he knocked and he did not enter, even as in the youth and inexperience of his brave spirit he saw the Pageant and the Hallows, but asked nothing concerning them. On both occasions, it was accounted to him as if he had sinned with knowledge. The truth is that the counsels of prudence do not obtain in the presence of the Mysteries, nor do the high conventions of good conduct, at least utterly. This was in the earlier case, and in the present one, while it is true that the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by violence, no one can enter unwarranted into the secret sanctuaries that have been instituted on earth to guard the memorials of the Kingdom which as yet is not upon earth, though with harp and viol and lute, and with all manner of music and psaltery, we pray that it may come quickly.

What, it will be asked, was this enclosure—within walls as the luminous shadow of the Jerusalem which is above? What manner of castle was this which resounded with the hallowings and enchantments of melody? Was it not, indeed, the Graal Castle, to which he had returned unwittingly by a devious way? According to the answer which the text furnishes, it was the Earthly Paradise, but another text tells us that among the added names of the Graal Shrine there was to be included the Castle of Eden, that it was the Castle of Joy also—as of music for ever sounding—and that behind it there was the Earthly Paradise, one of the rivers of which encircled the sacred enclosure. Therefore I leave those who will to draw the conclusion which pleases them, knowing, as at least I do, that places of this unquestionable order may be now on the crown of a causeway which the sea lashes, and again

“clos de mur fait à crestiax.”

[“wall enclosure made in growth.”]

Perceval retired discourseled, but had he been advanced further in the knowledge of secret things, he would have recognised perhaps that there was encouragement and high hope which he could put to his heart because he had not been met by swords of fire, keeping the way of the Tree of Life, but by one in his own likeness, exalted gloriously, who had said to him: Not yet! Moreover, at the end of the terse interlocutory discourse, he was given what is termed in the poem a Brief, Charter or Warranty, which—so long as he bore it—would ensure that through all his subsequent exile he should suffer no grievous harm, for thereby was he rendered invincible. We see in this manner that all kinds of miracle in medicine and every form of palladium were available there and here for knights of quest and pilgrimage; that they seemed to be reflections or radiations from the central star of the Holy Graal; and hence that when he who was served thereby and maintained thereof could find not even a palliative in its vision and mystery, the explanation can only be that his sickness was not of this world.

Thus equipped, Perceval resumed his pilgrimage, much as the novice in some temple of the Instituted Mysteries circumambulates the Hall of Reception under the guidance of its Wardens, having only a vague notion of what is the intention and the term, but still progressing thereto. Again the road was strewn with wonders before him, but to his exaltation on this occasion. The world itself had assumed an aspect of May-time on a morning of Fairyland, and hold and keep and city poured out their garlanded trains, as with bells and banners and thuribles, to honour and acclaim him. Of the reason no one knew less than Perceval,

or divined as little, but he had asked the question at the Castle, and although it had not been answered, although he had learned nothing of Graal and Lance, and was therefore less instructed than Gawain, the interdict had been lifted from Nature, the winter was over and done, and all the cushats and turtles in all green places of the land—and all the ballad voices—broke into joy and melody, as if the Rite of Marriage had been celebrated between Heaven and Earth. He was clothed at castles in rich vestments, and from high-born maiden to simple peasant all hearts were his and all welcome.

It must be said at this point that we know little, and so little, of Gerbert that it may be reasonably a matter for speculation whether the place at which his sequel is introduced by the scribes of certain codices corresponds or not to his intention. There are some respects in which it could be allocated better if it were possible to suppose that it was part only of a Graal poem which was meant to follow immediately from the section of Chrétien; a very pertinent case in favour of this view is the palmary fact that Gerbert seems to assume almost certainly the virginity of Perceval up to, and, as we shall see, after his marriage night, which supposition is doubly impossible in view of the Gautier section. It must further be noted that in one remarkable reference to Crestiens de Troie, he speaks of himself as the poet who resumed the task, following the true history:

“Si com li livres li aprent, Où la matière en est escripte.”

[“If he learns books, Where the matter is written.”]

I feel that in making this suggestion I am exceeding my proper province, which is not that of textual criticism, and I recognise that it has its difficulties, assuming, as it does, that the Gerbert sequel must have existed in a much more

extended form, because at the opening Perceval is at the Graal Castle for a second time, which is either pursuant to the account of Gautier or to some unknown portion of his own narrative. If, however, he followed Gautier, then he chose to forget or ignore him at several crucial moments. Sometimes he seems to forget Chrétien himself, for except on this hypothesis it is difficult to understand his introduction of another Broken Sword, being that which was shattered on the door of the Earthly Paradise. Now we have, in all respects, to remember that the putative Hallow which causes this confusion is in the position that we should expect it to occupy, seeing that it has no true place in the Legend of the Holy Graal. Not only does its history differ in every quest, but within the limits of the Conte del Graal it is contradictory under circumstances which exclude one another. At the poem's very inception the weapon is adjudged to Perceval and he carries it away. In certain codices the only further reference made to the Hallow by Chrétien is found in the warning which the questing knight receives from his cousin-german immediately after his departure from the Castle; in others we hear how the Sword splinters in the hands of Perceval, and thereafter how it is restored to the Castle. It is there, in any case, not only on the hero's revisit but long previously—in connection with the arrival of Gawain. Manessier tells a story concerning it from which it follows that in breaking it occasioned the wounding of the King at a period which was antecedent to all the quests. Therefore it could not have been at any time offered to Perceval, but must have remained in the Castle, with its resoldering always as the test of success in the case of each questing knight. Now, either Chrétien had conceived a different history of the Hallow or he told the wrong story, for the cousin-german of Perceval testifies in his poem that the Rich King Fisher was wounded in the thigh with a spear. When Gerbert intervened he left Chrétien's intention dubious, and

substituted another sword, which was not a Hallow, though, like that of his predecessor, it was one that had been forged specially—would break in one peril only and must be re-soldered where it was made. After the triumph of his welcome, as related already, Perceval came to a castle in which the smithy was set up under the guard of serpents, for there were reasons why the craftsman who forged the weapon did not wish it to be mended, and the duty of the serpents was to destroy any one who brought the pieces to the smithy. These reasons are not explained by Gerbert, but—as we have seen—in certain codices of Chrétien the life of the smith is somehow dependent on the sword, and its reforging foreshadows his death approaching. If we can suppose that Gerbert's continuation began at a much earlier point than is now established, some explanation might be possible, though his own evidence seems to be against this view. Perceval conquered the serpents, and the weapon was therefore re-forged. It does not appear to serve him in any special event subsequently, and as thus nothing follows from the episode we must conclude that its introduction is idle, that in this respect Gerbert did not know what to do with the materials which had come into his hands; and this is perhaps the conclusion that we should desire in respect of the Sword.

The next episode in Gerbert is a kind of addendum to that of Mount Dolorous in Manessier, and to this again no consequence attaches, except that it is an accident by which the hero is brought to Caerleon and to the court of King Arthur, when the poet gives us a new and revolutionary explanation concerning the Siege Perilous of Arthurian romance. The Siege is a decorative chair of jewelled gold sent from Fairyland—possibly that of Avalon—for occupation by the best knight in the world, and by him only with safety. For others who sit therein, the earth opens and swallows them. This chair is taken by Perceval,

as at a great Rite of Exaltation, and the earth does open; but the Siege remains suspended in middle air, and the result of this achievement is that the previous ill-starred heroes, who have been engulfed but not destroyed, are restored to light and air. Perceval's next adventure is intended to illustrate his continence when tempted by a demon in the guise of a very fair woman. He emerged unsullied, and reached the abode of his sister, to her unspeakable joy and comfort. They visited the tomb of their mother, and then set forth together. Some time after they arrived at the Castle of Maidens, where Perceval in fine left her in hands of safety. Here there was another office of healing, which is of medicine rather than of anodyne; but though all the ways of wonder lead to and from the Castle of the Holy Graal, the King of that Castle knew too well, the fatality by which he was encompassed to seek, for he would have sought vainly, his relief thereat. Within the merciful precincts of her new asylum Perceval's sister was enrolled henceforth as a ministering spirit, and thereat the questing knight learned something more concerning the antecedents of his Quest and also of his own family. The Castle of Maidens received wanderers, but sheltered in its ordinary course women only, and a reverend dame—under whose rule the whole company abode—declared herself a kinswoman of Perceval, being his mother's cousin. The name of his mother was Filosofine, and they two had entered Logres together, carrying the Sacred Hallow; but this event of the past was evidently a part of the historical mystery, and was not to be declared even to the knight of Quest until he had proved himself. He knew now that even from his very beginning he was a scion of the Sacred House, and he might have rested content in his heart that the house would at length receive him. He knew also that it was the sinful state of the land which had caused the Holy Graal to be placed in a concealed sanctuary under the ward of the good King Fisher.

Meanwhile the closing had been taken in the degree of his duty towards his sister, and, in the next place he was called to a subsidiary work in the region of filial duty. With whatever offence he could be charged in respect of his mother, she was past the reach of his atonement; but his father in chivalry, now in the distress of sorcery—as at the hands of the sorceresses of Gloucester in the Welsh romance—demanded his vengeance. This incident is one of many which would make the investigation of Gerbert's materials a quest of high enchantment if only the road were open. Of the duty which was thus imposed and accepted in all the honour of his knighthood, Perceval acquitted himself with credit, his brief from the Earthly Paradise coming to his aid, and the providence attached thereto; though—differing from the putative archaic romance—the event did not lead to the utter destruction of the people of the witchcraft, but of their military hirelings only. The episode, however, has a second object, more important to Perceval than itself, which is to aid in recalling a relationship between Blanchefleur and his father in Chivalry—as the same is recorded by Chrétien—and so forward to the root-matter of the poem, which is the marriage of Perceval. As regards this marriage there are two noticeable points, outside the fact that the union itself was the head and crown of exile ordeal. There is (a) the ideal set before the poet, which was to preserve the virginity of Perceval till he had accomplished the Quest of the Graal; and (b) the promise that at some time subsequently—when that was removed which hindered the consummation of the marriage in chastity—there should arise, as issue from those high nuptials, the mystic genealogy of the Swan Knight, whereby the Holy Sepulchre would be delivered. It is for this reason that—by a covenant which was made between them—Blanchefleur remained a maid on the night of her bridal. Of such was the marriage of Perceval, and thereafter he who was lord henceforth of all her lands, holding the sworn

fealty of many princes and barons, went forth again into the world to prosecute the Great Quest. Of the virgin bride we hear nothing further, but there can be no doubt that if he had finished with her, as he seems to have planned, Gerbert would have recounted, and did perhaps, the reunion of Blanchefleur and Perceval.

I do not conceive that there is any object in prolonging this summary of a narrative which is protracted in various ways, but has reached its proper term. Some of its later, and, as one would say, redundant episodes occur or recur in the Longer Prose Perceval, but we have no criterion of judgment by which to decide whether one drew from another or both from that common source to which they appeal both. At the end of his probation Perceval is again at the Graal Castle, ostensibly for the third time, and the last lines of Gerbert repeat, as they stand in my text, those which are last of Gautier. I have stated my opinion already, under the necessary reserves, that Gerbert carried his sequel further and produced a conclusion which did not impose upon Perceval—under the genius of Manessier—two other pilgrimages outwards, but, as in the Parsifal of Wolfram, reconciled his own institution in the Graal Castle with the healing and concurrent prolongation of the old king's life. As regards the sources of the Conte del Graal in what is termed early historical matter, it is only at a late period that we reach accounts which are not interpolated obviously, and then they connect with the Book of the Holy Graal and not with the simpler history of De Bolton. This is true of Manessier and true in part of Gerbert, but on the understanding that the story of Perceval's mother—in the latter case—does not represent any other extant narrative, more especially in respect of the circumstances under which the Fisher King became the guardian of the Graal. On the other hand, Gautier gives a few indications which are of the matter of the putative Walter Map.

Section F— IN WHICH SIR GAWAIN IS CONSIDERED BRIEFLY AS A COMPANION OF THE HOLY QUEST

There are three that give testimony on earth concerning the Mystery of the Graal—Perceval, Bors and Galahad—and the greatest of these is Galahad. This notwithstanding, as there are persons who, through a certain mental deviation, turn aside from the highways of Christendom and look for better paths, out of the beaten track, in the issues of obscure heresy, so it has happened that scholarship, without setting aside the great heroes of research, has discovered some vague predilection for the adventurous and courtly Sir Gawain. They have been led even to think that he was the first popular hero of the Great Quest. If the evidence can be held as sufficient—and it is tolerable in certain directions—I suppose that I should waste my time by saying that it does not signify, any more than the preference of Jewry for Barabbas rather than Christ could accredit the Jewish robber with a valid or possible title. In order to strengthen the view, scholarship has supposed certain speculative versions, now more lost than regrettable, which present Gawain more fully as the quest-hero than any document which is extant. In such event these versions were like the poem of Chrétien de Troyes, as it was judged by Wolfram—that is to say, they told the wrong story. At the same time there are several accessory considerations which call for mention. Gawain was exactly the kind of character who would be disposed to initiate and undertake all kinds of quests, high and low. That he was a popular Graal hero might mean that some of his chroniclers did not see exactly why his methods and mode of life should create a barrier. It must be admitted also that for many purposes of the Greater Mysteries it is possible that the merely continent man requires a more express preparation than one of the opposite tendency in certain cases. I think further that the old romancists had in their minds a

distinction between the continuity of the sin in Lancelot and the sporadic misdemeanours of Gawain, as also between the essential gravity of the particular offence in the two contrasted instances. There is the fullest evidence of this in respect of Guinevere, when considered side by side with other heroines of the cycles. Moreover, the romances reflected the unquestioned concensus of opinion at the period regarding the barren woman, and it seems clear that the unfailing fidelity with which plenary favours were granted by maidens in the matter of a covenant fulfilled, and the frankness which permitted such favours to rank as the term of reward, had its root in the sentiment that, except in houses of religion, the womb which bore no fruit was under a greater interdict than that which conceived without consecration by the sacred offices of the Church. This must be remembered when the literature suggests, as it will, that the chivalry of King Arthur's court translated in an inverted manner the institutes of heaven; that it was not very particular about marrying and giving in marriage; and that it seemed to have assumed to itself an indulgence, both general and particular, to follow the untinctured office of Nature without much consciousness of a stigma attaching thereto. Finally, it is just to add that the later romances manifest a set purpose to depict Gawain in blacker colours exceedingly than the earlier texts warrant.

For the rest, and from the mystic standpoint, it seems pertinent to say that while there is no period at which it was customary on the part of the Church to impose celibacy as an ideal on those who lived in the world, and while from most of the higher standpoints the grace of chastity is less in its simple possession than in its impassioned recovery, we have to remember that the great masters do not marry because of the Divine Union. The connection in Chrétien between Gawain and the Graal Quest arises out of a challenge which he had accepted to

clear himself of a charge of murder, as to which it was a matter of agreement that if he could find and bring back the Lance which bleeds he should be excused from returning to withstand the ordeal by battle. Out of this condition certain codices present the visit of Gawain to the Graal Castle very early in the version of Gautier. He beheld, firstly, a bier and, secondly, all the Hallows, asked the required question, and was told by the Royal Warden that if he could resolder the Broken Sword he should know (a) why the beautiful maiden who carried the Sacred Vessel was dissolved in tears; (b) why a bier formed part of the pageant; and (c) whose body was laid thereon. These points are peculiar to Gautier and his connections. The experiment with the Sword proved, however, a failure; Gawain learned nothing; he fell asleep after hearing the discourse of the King, who explained what was wanting in him; and on awaking next morning he discovered himself in the open country, with his horse and his arms close by him. It is obvious that he had found the Lance, but he had not carried it away, and for this reason he set out to take up the challenge. King Arthur, however, intervened, and the matter was settled in peace.

The codices which embody this account give much more extended particulars of another visit which was paid by Gawain to the Castle; but it is obvious that they are exclusive mutually, and the alternative texts which omit the first visit, and determine in a different sense the question of the accusation and the ordeal, are for the quest of Gawain the logical and preferable texts. Second or first, on this occasion, nothing was further from the mind of the character in chief than to go on the Quest of the Graal, nor was he concerned with the covenant of any challenge. He assumed the responsibility of a knight who was slain by a hand invisible when riding under his safe conduct. The identity of this knight is never disclosed, but Gawain wore

his armour and was carried by his steed, who had mysterious foreknowledge of the way, to a destination of which he himself could dream nothing. He arrived at his term in due course, but what took place was the reception of a masquerading neophyte, who was un-introduced, unwarranted and unqualified. In place of being he that was to come, they had still to look for another; but his harness for a moment deceived the company about him.

Chrétien knew nothing of a bier and a dead body, in that place where the sign of arch-natural life abode in perpetuity; those who took up the story in the footsteps of Gautier knew nothing also, and agreed to ignore his intimations of unexplained disaster. But Gautier or another, the bier was again seen at this visit of him who was unexpected, and a procession of canons and clerks recited thereover the Holy Office for the Dead, with a great ceremony of solemn voices intoning. The King also visited the bier and lamented over it. The pageant of the Graal was manifested, after the manner which I have described elsewhere, and Gawain saw it openly. At the conventional feast it was the Sacred Vessel which served so far as the food was concerned, but the sacramental communication was in one kind only, since the wine, as we have seen, was brought round by the butlers. Gawain, as in the previous case, asked all the necessary and saving questions, and was invited to solder the Sword, but he failed, as before, in this ordeal and learned only concerning its history. A stroke which was dealt therewith destroyed the realm of Logres and all the surrounding country. In the midst of this narrative Gawain fell asleep at the table, and was left to repose. When he awoke there was neither hall nor castle, neither King nor chivalry about him, but a fairly garnished land lying on the brink of the sea and restored by so much of the belated question as he had asked the King. The common folk blessed him, and the common folk accused

him, because he had not finished his work or insured their full felicity.

Of such is the Quest of Gawain as it appears in the Conte del Graal, even as the pillars of a temple which was never finished. It intervenes between the first and second visit of Perceval to the High House of the Hallows, but on Perceval's own Quest it has no effect whatever, and the narrative of the one ignores that of the other. It is said in some old fable—which is not, I think, of the Graal,—that Arthur and Gawain at last reposed in Fairyland. There are two classes of Knighthood—that which goes in and returns, and thereof is Ogier; that which enters but does not come back evermore, and thereof is Launfal. Now, Arthur returns in the fulness of the times that are to come, and, however these dreams may be, it is certain that the Peace of the King is not the peace of Gawain. In conclusion as to the Conte del Graal, after every allowance has been made for one statement in Chrétien, from which it follows that the father of the Fisher King was, as we have seen, sustained by a Sacred Host taken from the Holy Graal, the keynote of the whole cycle is that it has no sacramental connections such as we find elsewhere in the literature. On this account, if indeed on no other, the Conte del Graal has nothing to tell us which signifies in respect of our true affair, except by way of its echoes and reflections from sources which do concern us nearly, and are better and fuller witnesses. It has every title to possess in perpetuity the kind of Perceval which it has helped materially to create—in whom the Parsifal of Wolfram has little and the transfigured Knight of the High History has next to nothing at all.

