

THE SAN GRĒAL

AN INQUIRY INTO

THE ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE
ROMANCES OF THE SAN GRĒAL

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THE SAN GRÉAL.

OF all the literary productions of the middle ages, the epic poems, or rather the romances of chivalry which compose what has been called *the epic cycle of the San Gréal*, are those which initiate us most intimately into the individual spirit of those times, and most clearly reveal the beauty, grandeur, and truth, as well as the insufficiency and incompleteness of their conceptions. Composed at an epoch when the middle ages, in proportion as they drew near their zenith, were emerging out of their instinctive state and commencing to account for their ideas and tendencies, those romances bear in matter and form the seal of thoughtful invention and reasoning art.

It is also principally in this respect that they differ from most of the ancient epic poems in which fiction is subordinated to tradition, and on that account they deserve the name of *romances* rather than that of *epic poems*, properly so called. In order to comprehend the meaning and details of these romances, we must be acquainted with the ideas which constitute their matter and the poetical elements which compose their form.

The romances of the San Gréal owe their origin principally to five authors, two of whom, Master Guyot, surnamed *the Provençal*, and M. Chrétien de Troyes, are French "trouvères;" two are German poets, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Albrecht von Scharfenberg; the fifth is an English ecclesiastic, Walter Mapes, chaplain of King Henry II. and archdeacon of Oxford. We shall first show in this memoir how Guyot was the first who conceived the idea of the San Gréal, and what poetical elements, either traditional or of his own invention, he admitted into this composition. We shall then examine how that original conception has been worked out and modified more or less by

the poets who treated the same subject after the example of Guyot.

The glory of having invented the fable of the San Gréal belongs by right to Guyot le Provençal. All, however, that we know of this poet and his works rests upon a few data furnished by his German imitator, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and even these obscure data are in a great measure fictitious or erroneous. The real name of the French poet was Guyot, and not Kyot, as it is spelt in Wolfram. The origin of this latter disfigured name may easily be explained by the pronunciation of the German poet, who, knowing neither how to read nor write, dictated this name to his secretary, also a German, who wrote it as he heard it pronounced by his master. Guyot was born in the early part of the twelfth century, and flourished between 1160 and 1180.

By connecting all the details relating to this poet, it may be established with sufficient certainty that he was a native of the Duchy of Anjou, and this induction, contradicted by no circumstance, alone enables us to account for certain peculiarities which are to be remarked in his poem.

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Guyot belonged neither to the nobility nor to the clergy ; he was simply a lay commoner, which is clearly indicated and sufficiently proved by the title of *master* (Meister), which Wolfram von Eschenbach commonly gives him.¹

Guyot seems to have completed his literary and philosophical education in that part of the south of France which in his time was known by the name of the Province of Saint-Giles (Provincia S. Ægidii), and which maintained literary and political relations with northern Spain. He also studied for some time in Spain, at Toledo, under the direction of the learned Arabian doctors.

His taste for the literature of the south, his travels and sojourn in that country, then the most civilized and enlightened in the world, and perhaps, more than anything else, the religious and philosophical tendencies which he had there contracted, were probably the causes which induced his countrymen to give him the surname or sobriquet of Provençal.

¹ If Guyot had been a priest, Wolfram would not have failed to give him this title ; if he had been noble, the German poet would have given him the title of " Herr."

Guyot, a native, as we think must be allowed, of the Duchy of Anjou, wrote in a dialect more akin to the language of the north than to that of the south of France. Consequently Wolfram von Eschenbach calls it a *French* dialect (*franzoyis*); and, indeed, the words which the German poet borrowed from the poem of his precursor belong to a dialect of the *langue d'oïl*, with the exception, however, of certain Provençal names, the southern form of which the poet naturally preserved. Unfortunately, the romance in verse of the Angevine poet no longer exists, and we can only judge of it from the imitation by Wolfram von Eschenbach. As regards the original of this romance, the German poet tells us that Meister Guyot, le Provençal, found at Toledo an Arabian book, written by an astrologer named Flegétanis, and containing the story of the marvellous vase called Gréal, which at first hovered in the air, and afterwards, having been deposited on earth by angels, was guarded by faithful Christians. He adds, that Guyot made researches in the Latin chronicles of Brittany, Ireland, and France, and at last found the story of the Gréal related in a chronicle of Anjou. This information, furnished by the

German poet, does not seem to us to contain much truth. It is true that Guyot, like almost all poets of his time, may, to make a show of his erudition, have spoken of Flegetanis and an Arabian book as the source from which he drew some details of his poem. But Flegetanis can by no means be an Arabian proper name, and consequently all that Wolfram relates of this pretended personage is of his own or Guyot's invention. The name of Flegetanis might be the Latin transcription of *Feleke-Dânêh*, a Persian compound word, which signifies astrologer or astronomer, and in this case it would be the title of an astrological work translated into Latin, and which Guyot had the opportunity of studying while at Toledo. However this may be, it is beyond doubt that the history of the fable of the Gréal neither existed in Arabian nor Spanish books, nor in the Latin chronicles of France or Brittany, but owes its origin to Guyot, who invented and composed it with poetical elements, most of which, it is true, were traditional, but which he combined in a novel manner by connecting them with a philosophical idea which was his own, at the same time that it was the expression and the natural result of the

tendencies and the spirit of his age. Indeed, in the time of Guyot, the two prevailing ideas of the middle ages, religion and feudalism, had just been realized in the clergy and knighthood. These two institutions were soon to attain, on one side the supreme authority of the papacy, on the other the monarchical power of kings. These two rival powers, which both tended to become absolute, could not long exist together without jostling each other on many occasions. To avoid the struggle, both authorities should have been united by an equal and peaceable fusion, but unfortunately the struggle between the priestly and secular power became the fatal destiny of the middle ages, whilst the fusion simply remained an aspiration of the epoch, the ideal of the poet and the philosopher. On seeing the respect and authority enjoyed by the knight and the priest, one was naturally led to think that the highest human destiny would be to unite both qualities either in the knight-priest or the priest-knight. The Church herself, temporarily allured by this beautiful ideal, once attempted to realize it. She founded the order of the Templars, in which, however, she intended the ecclesiastical element to prepon-

derate over the secular; but she soon had cause to repent the creation of an institution which daily showed more decided tendencies gradually to extinguish the sacerdotal spirit in the worldly splendour of chivalry. These tendencies were, moreover, favoured and sustained by the anti-clerical spirit of the Albigenses, who were very numerous in the south of France, where a great number of the richest establishments of the Templars existed.

It was probably also under the influence of this spirit that our poet, during his sojourn in Provence, conceived the idea of a sacerdotal chivalry and royalty, which, in his idea, were to be the guardians of the temporal and spiritual welfare of humanity, in the same manner as the Pope and the Catholic clergy represented the kingly power and the soldiery which watched over the safety of the Church. Unable to give historic reality to this idea, which appeared so beautiful to him, he desired at least to represent it through art, through poetry—the only vehicle at the entire disposal of the man of genius. He undertook to show in his poem how the true knight, by his actions and virtues, renders himself worthy of the highest destiny which man can attain, that priestly

kingship, namely, to which it was necessary to be called both by birth and the grace of God. Temporal and spiritual welfare, the guardianship of which was to be confided to a priestly knighthood, the poet represented under the symbol of a sacred vase,—the limpid and transparent element, water, and by extension, the vase or basin which contained it being, according to the symbols of the East and of the middle ages, images of purity and truth, and consequently the symbols of wisdom and salvation. We should lose sight of the principal aim of this memoir, if we at this place entered into details regarding the origin of this symbol, and its frequent use in the religions, mythologies, and popular traditions of Asia and Europe. We shall simply notice the myths founded on this symbol, as for instance the Scandinavian myths on the fountain of Urd and the well of Mimir, which are the sources of the wisdom of Odin and of the Trolls.¹ We should remember that the fairies so renowned for their wisdom, lived in lakes, in rivers; let us recall the personification of Wisdom herself, who, according to tradition,

¹ See F. G. Bergmann, *Poèmes Islandais*, p. 229.

dwelt in a well. It is with a goblet or cup containing pure water, that the future was foretold in the East and in some countries of Europe. Poetry, which may justly be called the wisdom of nations, was represented by the Scalds of the North and the Breton bards under the symbolic form of a cup filled with a precious liquid; thence the Scandinavian myth on the vase of Quasir; thence also, among the Bretons, the mysteries of the magic caldron of Cyridwen, the goddess of poetry; and, lastly, let us mention the celebrated goblet of Djemschid, which was nothing but the symbol of the safety, the happiness, and the abundance which the people enjoyed under the reign of this illustrious king of Persia. It is perhaps the latter myth, explained in some Arabian work, or that of the basin of Cyridwen, contained in some Breton book, which determined our poet to choose the vase as a symbol of temporal and spiritual welfare, the guardianship of which he intrusted to his priestly knighthood.

In mediæval Latinity the masculine *gradalis* or neuter *gradale* means vase, goblet, or basin.¹

¹ See Ducange.

The dialects of the south of France having preserved the form of Latin words almost intact, only changed the mean dental *d* into the hissing dental *s* or *z*, so that to this day, in some parts of the south, a *grasal* (masc.) or a *grazale* (fem.), signifies a basin.¹ In the dialects of southern France, the final consonants of the syllables of Latin words have been cut off or modified; and, consequently, *grad-alis* and *grad-ale* were changed into *gra-alz* and *gra-al*.² Such, indeed, was the form of these words in the Burgundian dialects, which formed the transition from the *langue d'oïl* to the *langue d'oc*. The dialects of Picardy and Normandy, which tended to sharpen the pronunciation of vowels, instead of *Graal* adopted the form of *Gréal*, which the Normans also introduced into England.

Guyot the Provençal, a native, as we have said, of the Duchy of Anjou, and consequently writing in a French dialect very much akin to that of Burgundy, found in his country the expression *Graal* to designate a vase; and what proves that he really

¹ See Borel, *Trésor des Antiquités Françaises*.

² See Tissier, *Bibl. Patr. Cisterc.* chap. vii. p. 92.

employed it to designate a sacred vase, is the use which his immediate imitators, Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, made of the same word.

The sacred vase, or the San Gréal, the symbol of grace and salvation, was placed, according to the fiction of Guyot, in a temple guarded by Knights *Templeis* or *Templois*. This name reminds us of that of the Templars, whom the poet imitated and idealized in his poem.

The temple of the Gréal was placed upon a mountain in the midst of a thick wood, which is a symbolic representation of the moral elevation and the sanctity of this place, which no one can approach except by divine favour. And even as Mount Meru of the Hindoos and Olympus of the Greeks are placed in the mythological poetry in a mysterious distance, so has our poet placed the mountain of the Gréal far from his country, beyond the Pyrenees, in Spain. For that reason he gave it the Catalonian name of *Mont Salvagge* (wild or inaccessible mountain). The Gréal, according to Guyot, was made of a wonderful stone called *Exillis*, which had once been the most brilliant in the crown of the archangel Lucifer. This

cup was brought from heaven by angels, and left to the care of Titurel, the first king of the Gréal, who transmitted it to Amfortas, the second king, whose sister, Herzeloïde, was the mother of Parzival, the third king of the San Gréal. This genealogy of the kings of the Saint Gréal commences in the east, and is connected with Sennabor, an imaginary king of Armenia; it comprises fictitious names of kings of France and princes of Spain, and ends in the house of Anjou. As this genealogy comprises nearly eleven centuries, and descends to the epoch when Guyot lived, it cannot have existed previously to this poet, and it is more than probable that he invented it. If, nevertheless, Wolfram von Eschenbach mentions that Guyot found it in a chronicle of Anjou, this indication, which doubtless was furnished to him by the romance of the Angevine poet, only proves to us that the latter wanted to exalt his native country, the Duchy of Anjou, in certain details of his poem.

Though the story of the San Gréal was sufficiently interesting by itself, and above all by the idea on which it was based, Guyot, whose chief aim was not to instruct, but to amuse the reader, wished to enrich his

romance with an additional poetical element in order to make it more attractive. The favourite reading of those times consisted of knightly histories and adventures ; and, precisely at that epoch, the tales of King Arthur's adventures and those of the Knights of the Round Table were spreading all over France, and fully satisfied the taste of the century for all that was adventurous, marvellous, and fantastical. Exactly as at the same epoch in Germany the poets rejected the national epic subjects for foreign ones, so were the Breton tales preferred in France to the national traditions regarding Charlemagne and the twelve peers of France, and that the more willingly that Breton poesy actually did surpass all others by its marvellous and highly imaginative fictions. It is therefore principally on that account that Guyot connected the story of the San Gréal, not with the epic cycle of Charlemagne, as he might have done, but with that of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. As these Breton traditions form the greater part of Guyot's romance, it is necessary to know the transformations they underwent from their origin to the epoch when our poet

amalgamated with them his story of the San Gréal. In order better to comprehend the progress of these transformations, it will be necessary to examine them from a general point of view.

II.

WHEN we glance at the history of the epic poetry of the middle ages, we see that the epic traditions underwent three principal transformations, or that they assumed three different forms, which present themselves at three successive periods.

The first period, extending from the great migration of nations to the introduction of Christianity into the different countries, bears an essentially heroic character. Intrepidity, bravery, physical strength have a value by themselves, and are exalted as such by poetry, which, called forth without effort by the enthusiasm inspired by heroism, was at once lyric and epic, rather instinctive and without art than methodical and artificial. The subjects, too, were not fictitious but historical, and poetry was indeed nothing

but history narrated with enthusiasm, but with an enthusiasm of such a kind that the recital simply consisted in allusions, understood, nevertheless, by the auditors who had witnessed the event or been informed of it by popular tradition.

And naturally these poems were only intelligible in the country itself, and as they were essentially national, they spread but little abroad. Most frequently also they were not written, but transmitted from mouth to mouth, which is also the reason why only a very small number of those primitive poetical compositions have come down to us.

These general observations on the first period may all be applied to the ancient Welsh poems which celebrate the heroism of Arthur and his companions in arms. These poems are at once lyric and epic: they require, in order to be perfectly understood, historical comments, such as we require in order to understand the songs of the Scalds and the Arabian poems of the *Hamâsa*.

The second period of the epic poetry of the middle ages extends from the time when Christianity was firmly established in different countries to the beginning of the

Crusades ; it bears an essentially *mythic* or *legendary* character. This arises from the lapse of ages having left the ancient heroes of the nation in a nebulous distance, which did not allow of their primitive features being clearly distinguished. The Christian writers, for the most part ecclesiastics, seized upon those ancient figures of heroes, and modified them according to the Christian idea. Then it was no longer physical strength alone, or valour, that was admired for itself : valour placed at the service of Christianity was alone admired. The hero, therefore, was no longer simply a hero ; he was, besides, the defender of the faith, he was a holy personage, and, as such, protected by Heaven, and surrounded with miracles. The writers of that period, connecting their works with those of preceding ages, collected the ancient national poems ; but as the popular traditions by which they were understood had gradually been lost, they elaborated them in their way, and composed with these materials chronicles in which fiction had a greater share than historical truth. Moreover, Christian ideas and truths ought, according to these writers, to have a much greater importance than historical truth. It

is likely, therefore, that they would, without any scruple, shape the facts to suit their ideas, and unhesitatingly put the fable or legend which favoured their views in the place of historical truths, which in most cases were opposed to and contradicted them. Such is indeed the origin and character of chronicles composed during that period. As they were mostly written in Latin, they had the advantage of rendering accessible to foreigners the contents of national poems or traditions, which, during the first period, could not extend beyond the limits of the country. Arthur, the Breton chief, who in the primitive Welsh poems figured only as a hero, is represented in the chronicles of this second period as the defender of the faith, a holy man who is visibly protected and favoured by Heaven. With him are connected a crowd of fables, which William of Malmesbury, Alanus de Insulis (1109), and Giraldus Cambrensis (1188), already appreciate at their just value. On their part, the Welsh bards of the second period hide King Arthur under a mysterious veil, and awakening the memory of the ancient mysticism of the Druids, they make him almost a mythical personage.

The third period of the epic poetry of the middle ages extends from the establishment of the feudal system and the beginning of the Crusades to the time of the apogee of the middle ages. It may be called the *romantic and chivalric* period. If the primitive national poems have become the sources of the Latin chronicles, these chronicles now become in their turn the sources of a great number of romances of chivalry, principally in France and Great Britain. The character of this new kind of epic or narrative poetry is, that in these romances the chief interest does not lie in the personal character, or the qualities of the hero, but in the adventures through which the poet conducts him, and which he endeavours to render as marvellous, romantic, fantastical, and frequently as singular as possible. It may even be said that these heroes of romances have no individual character, that they most often resemble one another, and that there is no other difference between them except that of the adventures of which they are the sport, or which they bring to a successful issue. They are not individuals, but abstract beings, uniformly representing the general spirit of chivalry, belonging to no

time, to no nation, or, what comes to the same, belonging to all times, to all nations, in consequence of the general character which the feudal system and the Crusades had, in all countries, impressed upon the institutions of chivalry. What still further contributed to obliterate in these romances the national character, is that, in consequence of the decided taste for all that was foreign, it happened that most epic traditions were not transformed into romances in that country in which they had arisen, but abroad, where a more lively interest was taken in them. Thus, Armorica composed tales after the traditions of Wales; the French took the subjects of their chivalric romances from the Breton tales of Armorica; Italy composed epic poems with the French traditions on Charlemagne and Roland; Scandinavia wrote the German traditions on Siegfried and Dietrich of Verona; Northern France composed the primitive romance of Reynard, after traditions that had originated in Germany, etc.

The short account which we have just given of the general history of epic poetry in the middle ages, offers us an insight into the character and nature of the Breton traditions into which Guyot has

merged his history of the San Gréal. Arthur was no longer represented in it as a hero, nor as a defender of the faith, but as a feudal king surrounded by a great many knights, who thought it an honour to be his vassals. In his quality of feudal king, Arthur no longer goes in search of adventures; he remains in a majestic inaction, like Charlemagne in the French romances, or Attila in the *Nibelungen*. Arthur only presides at the Round Table, which now assumes an entirely fresh importance. Originally it only signified the court feasts,—the jousts and tournaments given by the Breton chiefs. Now it designates an association of the bravest knights in the world, invested with a dignity almost similar to that of the twelve Peers of France. Amongst these Breton knights, who broke lances with all comers, and boldly fought with dragons, giants, and against the most insurmountable obstacles, we chiefly distinguish three: *Gwain*, *Geraint*, and *Peredur*. It is principally from the traditions regarding the last of the three that Guyot borrowed a great many of the incidents with which he composed the history of Parzival, the principal hero of his romance. It is sufficient, in

order to convince the reader of this, to point out a few striking analogies which exist between the history of Parzival and the Breton tale of Peredur. It is true that the Breton tale which is found among the Mabinogion or traditional tales¹ contained in the *Redbook* of Hergest, was not written till the fourteenth century ; but the foundation of it is older, and was probably known to Guyot through the traditions spread in Armorica, a province adjoining the Duchy of Anjou. The proof that they were not unknown to him, is that the history of the youth of Parzival is composed of the same incidents as the history of the youth of Peredur. The details about the castle of the sick old man, and the two uncles of Peredur, were reproduced more or less faithfully in the romance of Parzival. Lastly, the castle of the king of the Gréal which figures in the poems of Guyot corresponds to the marvellous castle of the Breton tale. One might even be tempted to think our poet had borrowed from the Breton traditions the very history of the San Gréal, since,

¹ See *Contes populaires des anciens Bretons*, par Th. de la Villemarqué, 2 vols. 8vo. Paris, 1842.

in the tale of Peredur, a basin or a Graal is made mention of, and even the name of Peredur might be explained as meaning *seeker of the cup*, or *searcher after the graal*. But this illusion disappears when we consider that the cup mentioned has not the slightest relation with the idea of the San Gréal, and plays in the tale but an accessory or accidental part. If, therefore, the name of Peredur really signifies *seeker of the basin*, it is equally a fortuitous circumstance since it is caused neither by the sense nor the details of the tale. This name was probably very common among the Bretons, and if it had the signification which is given to it, doubtless related and alluded to the vase or basin of the goddess Cyridwen. Peredur was the name of the chief of the Guenedocians, who distinguished himself at the battle of Ardderyd, and who, at a later period, transformed by tradition into a knight of the Round Table, became the hero whose adventures and great feats are celebrated in the Breton text referred to. It is therefore evident that the history of the San Gréal did not exist among the Bretons, and is, we repeat it, entirely of Guyot's invention, who borrowed nothing from Bre-

ton traditions save, perhaps, the idea of representing the salvation of mankind by the symbol of a cup—an idea which may have been suggested to him by the myth on the vase of Cyridwen. Far from borrowing the matter of his poem from foreign countries, our poet only connected the story, which he had invented, with the Breton traditions of the cycles of Arthur, so that the fiction of the Gréal forms indeed the accessory, but nevertheless the most important, part of his romance. Guyot skilfully managed to unite these two elements of different origin without however confounding them. Thus the Templois, who bear the dignified character of a priestly knighthood, are clearly distinct in his poem from the Knights of the Round Table, who only represent the worldly or common chivalry. More than that, our poet did not simply imitate the Breton traditions, he embellished them and gave them more interest, endowing them with a meaning at once more poetical and more philosophical.

Thus, to quote a few instances, the silence which Peredur, according to the Breton tale, keeps in presence of the marvels he sees in the palace of the sick old man, is simply caused by the vow he had made, to remain

dumb until he should have obtained the hand of Angarad. In Guyot's romance, on the contrary, Parzival's silence arises from deeper causes, and forms, as it were, the knot of the whole fiction of the Gréal.

The Breton tale speaks of a bleeding lance which was presented to Peredur, and was probably intended to remind him to avenge the murder of his uncle and nephews, who had been treacherously assassinated. And in reality the lance is the symbol of protection, and a bleeding body that of an appeal for revenge. The bleeding lance was therefore likely to indicate that the instrument of protection had been violated, and will consequently bleed until revenge shall have been taken. Guyot, giving a more moral and deeper meaning to the bleeding lance, connects with it one of his chief poetical fictions. By a play upon words, which was only possible in French, the old sick king, who in the Breton tradition is surnamed the *fisherman* (*pêcheur*) because he whiled away his troubles in fishing with a line, is transformed into a king *sinner* (*pécheur*). His sin, according to Guyot, consists in his having fought for a sensual love against a paynim prince by whose lance he was wounded as a punish-

ment for his fault. This lance will bleed until the king shall have been cured of his wound, or until his sins shall have been expiated. The Breton tale also mentions a magic sword, which the kingly fisher gave to Peredur as a symbol of sovereignty and strength. This sword broke in the hands of the knight, which signified that he had not yet the strength required to be worthy of sovereignty. But, according to Guyot's fiction, Parzival only receives this sword when already broken, and as it is only with this sword that he can conquer the kingdom of the Gréal, the poet represents this circumstance as almost an insurmountable obstacle, which the hero nevertheless succeeds in overcoming. It is thus that Guyot managed to give to certain details, void of meaning in the Breton tradition, a moral and philosophical signification.

On the whole, the romance of the Angevine poet, though destined, like all romances of chivalry, to amuse noble lords and ladies, bore a character somewhat philosophical, and on that account we must not be astonished if certain of Guyot's ideas are not in agreement with the orthodoxy of his century. This poet did not share in the

hatred against the Mohammedans so energetically manifested throughout Christendom during the Crusades. The Templois do not turn their arms against the infidels; on the contrary, their intercourse with them is that of friends, companions of arms, allies and relations. This tolerance, which in the eyes of orthodoxy probably seemed criminal, appears to have been the fruit of the sojourn which Guyot had made at Toledo, in the midst of the Mohammedan Arabs. We must also remark that the Templois, though Christians, rather resemble an association formed without the pale of the Church than a Catholic community. Moreover, the apostles, saints, angels, and ceremonies of the Church, which always occupy the first rank in the religious poems of the middle ages, do not occupy so important a place in Guyot's poem. These heterodox and somewhat anticlerical tendencies were contracted by the poet in the south of France, where he must frequently have come into contact with Albigenes and Templars; and, we repeat it, it is very probably on account of this conformity of views with the sectarians of the south that he received from his con-

temporaries the surname or nickname of *Provençal*. Lastly, we must attribute to the heterodoxy of Guyot the loss or the destruction of his romance, which was likely to have the same fate as the books of the Albigenses and the works of the Templars.

Guyot's romance, however, spread rapidly, and attracted the attention of a large number of readers in France, England, and Germany. What proves this is, that it was imitated in those countries shortly after its publication, and that the history of the Gréal soon formed a kind of epic tradition, which, as such, was modified and developed by several French and foreign poets. The first who treated this subject after Guyot was Chrétien de Troyes, who flourished from 1150 to 1170. At that period a large number of chivalric poems came out in France, and they increased in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The subjects of the most popular romances were almost all borrowed from Breton or Armorican traditions, and related to Arthur and to the Knights of the Round Table. Almost every one of these knights became the hero of a separate romance. Chrétien, finding in

Guyot's poem the history of Parzival, who, without being a knight of the Round Table, was nevertheless in relation with it, took this episode and treated it separately, consulting, besides, as for his other romances, the original Armorican traditions. This Champenois *trouvère* died before he had finished his romance of *Perceval-le-Gallois*, which, however, is extant even now with the continuations composed by different poets. What proves that Chrétien imitated the romance of Guyot is, first, the name of *Perceval* which he kept for his hero, and which is nothing else than the Champenois pronunciation of the name of Parzival, which he found in Guyot's poem. This name, invented by Guyot, is doubtless, derived from *fârisi-fâl*, a compound Persian word signifying *ignorant knight*, and alludes to the ignorance of young Parzival, who, in consequence of the extreme solicitude of his mother to shelter him from every danger, had been deprived of all knightly education. Chrétien de Troyes, unacquainted with the foreign origin of this word, explains it as signifying one who *pierces* or wanders through *vales* to seek adventures.

What is a yet more incontrovertible proof

that Chrétien imitated Guyot, is that we find in his poem the name and history of the Gréal, which both are of the Angevine poet's invention. Lastly, the history of the King-Fisher, which, as we have seen, was invented by the same poet, is also met with in the romance of *Perceval-le-Gallois*. But though Chrétien de Troyes has freely borrowed from Guyot, his romance bears, nevertheless, a different character from that of his precursor. The history of the San Gréal occupies but a very secondary place in it, nor did it receive in it any development or any new element. Nor do the Templois figure in the romance of Perceval, perhaps because Chrétien did not take so much interest as Guyot did in the Templars, who were at that period already beginning to be suspected of heresy and contumacy. The anti-clerical tendencies noticeable in Guyot entirely disappeared in Chrétien, whose sole aim was to narrate in an amusing manner knightly adventures. The talent of the Champenois *trouvère* is chiefly seen in a pleasant, graceful, and fluent narrative; and this poet would even sometimes give a trifling but amusing turn to details to which his precursor had given a philosophical sense, and on that account Wolfram von

Eschenbach, the admirer of Guyot, cannot help charging Chrétien with carelessness, frivolity, and ignorance. This German poet, who is much more distinguished by the depth of his feelings, and the elevation of his ideas, than by simplicity, elegance, and fluency of his narrative, followed the Angevine poet's plan throughout, and we have hence been enabled to judge from his poem of the character and composition of the original romance of Guyot.

III.

WOLFRAM, lord of Eschenbach, in Bavaria, lived at the beginning of the thirteenth century, at the time when the French language spread at the courts of the German princes, and when the literary productions of the north and south of France were very popular in Germany. The German poets neglected their national epic traditions, and preferred the subjects treated by the *trouvères* and *troubadours*. Wolfram was acquainted not only with the poem of Guyot, but also with the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, such as the romances of *Perceval-le-Gallois*, *Guillaume d'Orange*, *Alexandre-le-Grand*, and *Lancelot du Lac*. He knew French himself, and was so vain of his knowledge as to introduce a great many French expressions into his German verse.

Wolfram was surnamed *the learned* (*der wise*), though he could neither read nor write. To understand how he could compose his romance, we must suppose that he had Guyot's poem read or recited to him by a wandering French *trouvère*, and that, after having translated freely and from memory the French pieces recited to him, he dictated the free translation to his German secretary. Wolfram, like Chrétien, only took from Guyot's romance the most interesting episode, the history of Parzival, and treated this subject in his first poem, which he began towards 1204. As this remarkable poem is but little known, and since it can give us a perfect idea of a great part of Guyot's romance, it will not be out of place to point out in a few words its principal features. The following is the plot of Wolfram's romance :—

Gamuret, the son of Gandin, Duke of Anjou, marries, during his wanderings in the East, the Moorish queen Belacane, by whom he has a son called Feirifiz. Impelled by his desire of returning to the west, Gamuret leaves the queen and his son; he returns to France, where, being elected Duke of Anjou, he takes for his second wife Her-

zeloïde ; but shortly afterwards he dies, and his second wife gives birth to a posthumous son, called Parzival. Herzeloïde, anxious to guard her son against all danger, above all against those incidental to the adventurous life of knights, retires with him to a solitude in Soltane. Parzival is destined, however, to become a model of knight-hood. Notwithstanding the ignorance in which he is kept by his mother, the knightly inclination of the youth and his curiosity irresistibly manifest themselves, and having one day met with some knights of the court of Arthur, he follows them, arrives at Nantes, where Arthur was residing, and begs to be first instructed, and afterwards received, as a knight. But Parzival must instruct himself, and gain his spurs in the midst of adventures. He sets out, arrives at the court of Cundwiramour of Pelrapeire, with whom he falls in love, and who is eventually to be his wife ; he comes afterwards to the court of Amfortas, king of the Gréal, who is ill on account of a sin he committed, and whose cure will only be effected when his successor Parzival, seated with him at the banquet of the Gréal, shall ask an explanation of the wonderful things he beholds. Par-

zival, ignorant of this condition imposed on him by his destiny, and restrained by too much discretion, keeps silence at the banquet, and leaves the castle of Amfortas without inquiring into what he has seen. Thus frustrated, unknown to himself and partly by his own fault, of the brilliant destiny which awaited him, he begins anew to seek adventures, until, after many a fight, he meets with his friend Gawain, who takes him back to the court of Arthur. There Cundrie the witch, the messenger of the San Gréal, informs him of the great wrong of his silence, not only to himself, but also to the king Amfortas, who is his uncle. Parzival, full of grief and regret, at once sets out to find again, if possible, the castle of Amfortas, and repair his fault. At the same time his friend Gawain also leaves the court of Arthur, and, after having fought in many an adventure, succeeds in freeing ladies imprisoned in the *Chastel Merveil* by the fierce necromancer Klingschor, the nephew of the celebrated magician Virgil of Naples. As for Parzival, after protracted wanderings, he arrives at a hermitage at some distance from the castle and the temple of San Gréal; the hermit's name is Trevri-

zent, who eventually makes himself known to him as his maternal uncle. Knowing Parzival to be destined to become king of the Gréal, but not yet worthy of this dignity, he makes known to him that the Gréal is only accessible to him who is called to it by heavenly grace. He recommends him, before approaching it, to purify his soul from all sin, and seeing the good dispositions of the neophyte, he initiates him into its mysteries. The Gréal, he tells him, is made of the *lapis exillis*, gives its servants bodily and spiritual nourishment, and communicates fresh forces for a week to those who see it. Every Good Friday a dove from heaven comes and places upon the stone a white wafer, which communicates to it mysterious virtues. A writing, which suddenly appears on the vase, always indicates who is destined to its service and guard. Parzival, thus initiated into the mysteries of the Gréal, departs to prepare himself for his high destiny. He returns to the Knights of the Round Table, and strives to acquire the knightly virtues necessary to become a Templar, and king of the Gréal. At last, when he is worthy to reign, Cundrie, the witch, again appears at the court of

King Arthur, and announces to him that the writing of the Gréal has pointed him out to be king at Montsalvagge. Before going to the temple of the Gréal, Parzival visits his wife Cundwiramour, who has borne him two promising sons, Loherangrin and Cardeiz. After this he directs his steps towards Montsalvagge; the Templois come out to meet him, the banquet of the San Gréal is celebrated, and the conditions imposed by destiny being fulfilled, Amfortas is cured of his disease, and transmits the royal dignity to his nephew Parzival. The new king again meets with his brother on his father's side, Feirifiz, king of India, who, wandering about in search of adventures, has chanced to come to Montsalvagge. But, being a heathen, he was ignorant of the sanctity of the place and the mystery of the San Gréal. Feirifiz, seeing at Montsalvagge Parzival's aunt, *Urepanse-de-Joie*, falls in love with her, and, after receiving baptism, marries her, though the decease of his first wife, *Secondille*, whom he had left in the East, is as yet unknown to him. The newly married pair set out for their kingdom in India. On their way they hear of *Secondille's* death. *Urepanse-de-Joie* gives birth to a son, who

receives the name of *Jean-le-prêtre*, Prester John. As for Parzival, he destines his son Loherangrin to succeed him one day in the kingship of the Gréal. This young man early distinguishes himself in an adventurous expedition which he undertakes into the Duchy of Brabant. Wolfram von Eschenbach ends his romance as Guyot had ended his, without telling us what becomes of the San Gréal. He only seems to hint that Prester John will succeed his cousin Loherangrin, and the kingship of the Gréal continue in the marvellous country of India.

. In the romance we have just analysed, the German poet follows exactly the same course as Guyot in the corresponding episode of his poem; he only adds a few details of his own invention, such as, for instance, the details regarding Klingschor the necromancer, the history of Prester John, and perhaps also the history of Loherangrin.

Klingschor has become the type of the necromancer in the German poetry of the middle ages, like Merlin with the Bretons, and Virgil of Naples with the Italians and the Spaniards. But the Germans modified this type in their way, after having received it from south Italy or Sicily, which was the

country of Klingschor. For there is no doubt that Klingschor originally was an historical personage, like Merdhin le Gallois in Brittany, Virgil of Mantua in Italy, and Doctor Faust in Germany.

As regards the tradition about Prester John, it is scarcely probable that it was known to Guyot. In the twelfth century there was in China a great Mongol tribe professing Buddhism such as it had developed itself in Tibet. This religion bore in its sacerdotal hierarchy and in some religious rites and ceremonies so striking a resemblance to Catholicism, that not only the Nestorian Christians dwelling among the Mongols, but also the strangers who visited Mongolia, mistook the Buddha religion of Tibet for an Oriental Christian religion. The temporal and spiritual prince of this supposed Christian tribe took the half-Chinese half-Mongol title of *Ouanh-kohan*, literally *prince-chief*. The Nestorian Christians, who spoke the Syriac language, rendered this by the homonyms *Iouchman-kohan*, meaning, in their language, *John the Priest*. Such is the origin of the tradition that there was in the centre of Asia a Christian Church, whose popes bore the title of *Prester John*. This tradition

spread in Europe towards the end of the twelfth century; it was perhaps known to Guyot and Chrétien de Troyes, but neither of them connected it with the history of the San Gréal. Wolfram von Eschenbach, on the contrary, availed himself of it in his romance. He looked upon the supposed Christian Church of Asia as a continuation of the priesthood of the Gréal, which priesthood was, after the death of Loherangrin, transmitted to his cousin, Prester John. This ingenious fiction, which, on the whole, Wolfram von Eschenbach only indicated in his romance, was afterwards developed by Albrecht von Scharfenberg in his poem entitled *Titurel*.

The wonderful history of *Loherinc Garin*, or of Lohengrin, seems likewise to have been unknown to Guyot and Chrétien. It is Wolfram at least who seems first to have conceived the idea of borrowing it from the Lorrain epic cycle, and connecting it with the fable of the San Gréal, in the same way as it was at a later period connected with the epic cycle of the Knights of the Round Table.

Besides the romance of Parzival, of which we have just given an analysis, Wolfram took from Guyot's romance another episode

to make of it a separate poem, the history of Titurel, first king of the Gréal. Unfortunately this latter romance remained unfinished; for the author was removed by death when he had only composed a few parts of it. But the same subject was taken up again, and treated in its completeness by Albrecht von Scharfenberg.

Before examining this latter romance, it will be necessary to show what great modifications, both as regards the matter and the form, the fable of the San Gréal, when it had passed to the state of tradition, underwent after Guyot, Chrétien de Troyes, and Wolfram von Eschenbach. The romance of Guyot, or at least the traditional fable of the San Gréal, spread over France, Germany, and England; it principally attracted the attention of the clergy, who doubtless were struck with the fundamental idea of the poem, and the philosophical and sometimes not very orthodox signification which Guyot had given to the San Gréal. Their expectation on reading this romance was disappointed, and all the more because the title seemed to promise a history analogous to the traditions of the Church. Not that at that period the relation was

likely to be already conceived, which in our day would be at once so natural and so poetical between the San Gréal, the symbol of salvation, and the chalice, the symbol of redemption. For, in the twelfth century, the dogma of transubstantiation not being yet defined by the Church, the chalice had not the deep mystic meaning which it received in the following century. But as the word *graal* signified a *vase*, the idea must naturally have presented itself, particularly to an ecclesiastic, of designating by this name the vase or vessel in which Christ had partaken of the Supper with his apostles on the eve of his death. One might, besides, by considering this vase as a holy relic, easily connect with it traditions partly historical, partly legendary. Lastly, by modifying the fundamental idea of the San Gréal, the history which Guyot had given it must also have been modified. And this actually took place.

Contemporary with Guyot, Chrétien de Troyes, and Wolfram von Eschenbach, was *Walter Mapes*, chaplain of King Henry II., and archdeacon of Oxford. This ecclesiastic, who must not be confounded with his colleague, *Walter Calenius*, was known by his writings against the popes, the Court of

Rome, and the order of the Cistercians. The King of England, his master, was at the same time Duke of Normandy, Count of Anjou, Tourraine, and Maine, and his wife had moreover brought to him as her dower Guyenne, Poitou, and Saintonge, so that the principal provinces of the north and south of France stood in political relation with England. As this young prince had, under the guidance of Robert of Gloucester, imbibed a great taste for literature, and munificently rewarded the Breton bards, the minstrels, *trouvères*, and troubadours, he thereby encouraged the literary movement in France and England, and the exchange of poetical productions between the two countries. As Walter Mapes lived in close relations with a prince who was particularly fond of romances, he had occasion to become acquainted with Guyot's poem, and conceived the idea of composing one on the same subject, but differing from it both in matter and form.

He identified the San Gréal with the vessel in which Jesus celebrated the Holy Supper, and which also was used to receive His blood flowing from the wound inflicted upon Him by the centurion Longinus. The kingship of the Gréal, imagined by Guyot, disappeared to make room for a more ecclesi-

astical setting. These new guardians of the sacred vase were partly fictitious, partly historical. There existed in the Church an old tradition, according to which Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, especially the latter, were represented as the apostles of Christ. This tradition was to be found in the pseudo-Gospel of Nicodemus, already so widely circulated in the East in the first half of the second century. Another work of this kind, the *Acts of Pilate*, based on the Gospel of Nicodemus, contributed some new fictions to the legend of Joseph of Arimathea, and it is probably on this authority, of small historical value, that Gregory of Tours (✠ 595) narrates the imprisonment of Joseph, his voyage and his arrival in Britain, where he is supposed to have preached the gospel. The tradition regarding the apostleship of Joseph was, however, unknown in England, at least until the middle of the twelfth century. The chronicle of Galfrid ap Arthur, better known as Geoffrey of Monmouth, who became Bishop of Saint Asaph towards 1152, makes no mention of Joseph of Arimathea.

According to William of Malmesbury, towards 1143, St. Philip is the apostle of the Britons; Joseph is only mentioned as

one of his helpers, one of his missionaries in Britain.¹ Besides, if this legend had been known in England, the chronicles of the country would not have failed to seize upon it, all the more because it encouraged the obvious tendencies of the Church of England to attribute its foundation, not to the Church of Rome, its true origin, but immediately to the Church of the East. It is, therefore, at the earliest, in the second half of the twelfth century that the tradition of Joseph as the apostle of England would be known in that country, and it was probably the ecclesiastic Walter Mapes who introduced it by making Joseph one of the coryphæi of his history of the *San Gréal*. To show the great difference which existed between this history and the one imagined by Guyot, it will be sufficient to point out the principal features of this romance of Walter Mapes. Jesus Christ having just expired on the cross, his disciple, the Knight, Joseph of Arimathea, requests of Pilate the favour of burying the mortal remains of the Saviour of the world. On the third day, the Lord having vanquished death by rising again,

¹ See Gale, *Histor. Anglicæ Saxonice Anglo-Danicæ Scriptores*, xv. t. 1. p. 292. Oxon. 1691.

the Jews accused Joseph of having stolen the body of Christ, and they cast him into a prison, with the intention of starving him to death. But the Lord appears to him, comforts him, and gives him the sacred vessel with his blood, which has the marvellous virtue of nourishing the prisoner physically and spiritually. After forty-two years of captivity, Joseph is at last set at liberty by the Emperor Vespasian. In possession of the sacred vessel, and a few more relics, and accompanied by his relations and disciples, Hebron and Alain the Fisherman, he travels over a part of Asia, where he converts Enelach, king of Sarras. He then goes to Rome, and thence to Britain, where he preaches the gospel, and performs thirty-four miracles. He settles in the island of *Yniswitrin* (isle of glass) or *Glastonbury*, where he founds an abbey, and institutes the Round Table, in imitation of the Holy Supper. Lastly, the apostle of the Britons builds a palace, in which he preserves his precious relics, the sacred cup which takes the name of San Gréal, the bloody spear with which the centurion Longinus pierced the side of the Lord, and lastly, the sword of the Maccabees, which he brought

from the East, with the Gréal and the lance. He establishes in this palace, as the king of the Gréal, or rather as chief of the Round Table, his faithful disciple Alain the Fisherman, who in allusion to the words of Jesus Christ (Matt. iv. 19), takes the title of the *rich fisherman*, which he transmits to his successors. Joseph, the apostle of the Britons, having fulfilled his mission upon earth, dies a holy man, and is buried in the chapel of the abbey which he founded at Glastonbury. His principal successors as chiefs of the Round Table, are—Alain, Nascian, Celidonius, Galahad, Arthur, Boort, and Lancelot.

Such are the principal features of Walter Mapes's history of the Gréal. The sacred cup is identified with the vessel of the Holy Supper; the Templois are replaced by the Knights of the Round Table; and the Round Table itself is confounded with the table of the Holy Supper.

To give more authority to his history of the San Gréal, Walter Mapes ascribed to it a supernatural origin. He gave out that God was its real author, and had revealed it in a celestial vision to a holy hermit of Britain towards the year A.D. 720. These circumstances are told as true by Helinand, a monk

of the abbey of Froidmont, in the diocese of Beauvais.¹ This Cistercian monk did not suspect that this history of the Gréal, which he eagerly sought for everywhere, and nevertheless could not procure, had been written by the ecclesiastic Walter Mapes, the same who, in his writings, had shown himself so hostile to the Order of Citeaux. The history was composed in the Latin tongue,—a proof that its author did not destine it for general perusal. The book was thus but little known in France in the time of Helinand, who died in 1227. There existed, however, already a French translation, a small number of copies of which were circulated in the castles of the noble lords. This was very probably the translation made by the knight Luces du Gast, in the Calvados, but habitually residing near Salisbury, in England, the same who is also known as the author of the romance of *Tristan-le-Leonais*.² Another translation was made later, towards 1231, by Robert de Boron, a knight of the court of Henry II. of England, and this formed the basis of a new edition pub-

¹ See Tissier, *Bibliotheca Cisterciens.* t. vii. p. 92.

² See *Catalogue de la Vallière*, t. ii. pp. 614, 4015.

lished by his relation, Helis de Boron. Towards the end of the thirteenth century the prose of Robert de Boron was turned into verse; and this poem, which still exists,¹ though defective, may give us some idea of the primitive work of Walter Mapes, which has not yet been found. This history of the Gréal, once spread abroad, was diversely modified, and gave birth to a great number of prose romances in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One of the most remarkable editions of these romances is that of Paris, in folio, published in 1516, in which the history of the Gréal is divided into two branches. The first includes the history of the search for the Gréal, the history of Joseph of Arimathea and his son Joseph, the conversion of Enelach, and the history of the descendants of Joseph, Nascian, Celi-donius, Galahad, Boort, and Lancelot. The second branch narrates the adventures of Gawain, Lancelot, and Perlevaux (Perceval); and it is said in this book that the history is taken from a work of Joseph himself, translated from the Latin into French.

¹ Vide *Roman de Saint Graal*, published by M. F. Michel.

IV.

ALL these romances, modified or disguised, but all more or less directly derived from the history of the Gréal, written in Latin by Walter Mapes, were circulated in Europe, and may explain why, as early as the middle of the thirteenth century, the notion prevailed that the Gréal was the vessel in which Jesus and His apostles had partaken of the Supper. From that time, public attention being roused on this subject, a great many towns pretended to possess this holy relic. In 1247 the patriarch of Jerusalem sent the San Gréal to King Henry III. of England, as having belonged to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. About the same time the inhabitants of Constantinople also fancied that a vessel, which they had long esteemed as a sacred

relic, was the San Gréal. The Genoese also felt certain that their *santo catino* was nothing else but the San Gréal. This vessel, of plasma or molten glass of hexagonal shape, and greenish colour, was taken at Cæsarea by the Crusaders in 1101, and in the division of the spoil fell to the lot of the Genoese, who thought it was made of an enormous emerald, and valued it merely on account of its material worth, and presented it to the Church of St. Laurence at Genoa. But as early as the second half of the thirteenth century, Jacobo de Voragine having read in some English books the history of the Gréal after Walter Mapes, at once expressed his opinion in his *Chronicle of Genoa*, chap. xviii., that the emerald vessel might very well be the cup which the English called Sangréal. From that time the idea expressed by the chronicler took root and changed into real belief, so that, to this day, the vase called *santo catino* is an object of great veneration to the faithful.

The history of the San Gréal of Walter Mapes and the numerous compilations derived from it not only called attention to the sacred cups which might pass for the vessel of the Holy Supper; their influence extended to

the past, and greatly modified even the primitive traditions of the Gréal. All the poets who, since the publication of the romance of Mapes, treated this subject, though in a great measure following the traditions of Guyot, Chrétien de Troyes, and Wolfram von Eschenbach, nevertheless thought fit, in several particulars, to remodel the primitive traditions after the new history. Thus Gautier de Denet, Cauchier de Dordan, Gerbert de Montreuil, and Manessier, the continuators of Chrétien de Troyes, already speak of Joseph of Arimathea, who had not been mentioned in the romance of Guyot. In the history of these continuators the sacerdotal spirit preponderates over the chivalric spirit; the Gréal no longer has a symbolic and philosophical, but a religious and half legendary, signification. The bleeding lance and the marvellous sword of the romance of Guyot lose their poetical signification: they are relics having a merely historical importance as being the spear of Longinus or the sword of the Maccabees.

The same modifications are to be noticed in a romance in prose, entitled *Perceval-le-Gallois*. Not only is the Round Table considered in it as an imitation of the Holy

Supper, but the author goes so far as to give it the name of San Gréal itself. In the *Romance of Merlin*, written towards the end of the thirteenth century, it is said that the Round Table, instituted by Joseph in imitation of the Holy Supper, was called *Graal*, and that Joseph induced Arthur's father to create a third Round Table in honour of the Holy Trinity.

In Germany the influence of the new traditions of the Gréal upon the old is principally remarkable in the poem of *Titurel*, written about the end of the thirteenth century, by Albrecht von Scharfenberg.

This romance, one of the most popular of the middle ages, admired by the author himself as a masterpiece of poetry and piety, contains several pieces from two or three different poets. The most remarkable of these pieces are the fragments composed by Wolfram von Eschenbach for his poem *Titurel*, left unfinished. As regards the details of the history of the Gréal, Albrecht generally followed the fable invented by Guyot, and reproduced by Wolfram; but other details of his romance show that he was also acquainted with the version of Walter Mapes. Thus, in Albrecht's *Titurel*,

the San Gréal has not, as in Guyot, a purely symbolic signification, but is identified with the vessel of the Holy Supper. The sacerdotal, and not the chivalric spirit, preponderates in it. Orthodoxy, asceticism, and intolerance towards the infidels are in striking contrast with the philosophic and conciliatory spirit prevailing in the romance of the Angevine poet. Albrecht, above all, delights in developing the history of Prester John, and adorning it with all the prestige of his poetry. This history, for which Wolfram had but few data, and which, for this reason, he had only indicated in his *Parzival*, could now be considerably amplified by means of the new information furnished to the poet by the reports of the pope's legate and the French ambassadors who had returned from the East. Jean du Plan de Carpin, of the order of the Minorites, had been sent by Pope Innocent IV. to Mongol Tartary, where he had stayed from 1245 to 1247. A new embassy, headed by the Franciscan friar, William de Rubruquis, had been sent to Mongolia by Saint Louis in 1253. Lastly, the reports of the celebrated travellers Nicolo Polo and Marco Polo perhaps also furnished Albrecht with some new and interesting de-

tails. This poet exerts his utmost talent to trace in the history of Prester John the brilliant picture of a true sacerdotal government, and we may say that, if Guyot depicted in his romance his ideal of chivalry, Albrecht von Scharfenberg endeavoured to express his ideal, or perhaps the ideal which his age had conceived, of priesthood and ecclesiastical hierarchy. Moreover, this important subject, which transported the reader into the land of wonders, to the centre of Asia, at the same time presented to the poet a favourable opportunity to exhibit his knowledge of geography, history, and natural sciences,—a kind of knowledge which he indeed possessed extensively, and of which, like most poets of the middle ages, he did not fail to be somewhat vain.

The romance of Albrecht von Scharfenberg embraces a more extensive area than that of Wolfram von Eschenbach, without however being superior to the latter in conception or poetical execution. The following are the principal features that compose the romance of *Titurel* :—

Parille, the son of Sennabor of Cappadocia, having embraced the Christian faith with his brothers and sisters, assists the Em-

peror Vespasian at the siege and taking of Jerusalem. As a reward for his services, the emperor gives him his daughter Argusilla in marriage ; and moreover, gives him the kingdom of France in fief. Parille has a son, Titurisone, who marries Eligabel of Arragon. The son of Titurisone and Eligabel is called Titurel, a name composed and contracted from those of his father and mother. An angel from heaven announces that God has chosen Titurel to be the defender of the faith and the guardian of the San Gréal. The youth receives an education at once pious and knightly, and after having fought with his father against the infidels in Spain, is conducted by angels to Montsalvage. There he builds the magnificent chapel in which the San Gréal, on descending from heaven, has placed itself of its own accord. Titurel marries the Princess Richoude of Spain ; he watches over the San Gréal, and propagates the Christian faith among the infidels. When old, his son Frimutel is designated as the King of the Gréal by an inscription which appears on the sacred vase. Frimutel marries Clarissa of Grenada, and has five children by her. These are *Amfortas*, who succeeds his father

in the kingship of the Gréal ; *Trevrizent*, the wise hermit ; *Tchoysiane*, who becomes the mother of Sigune, and who dies on giving birth to this child ; *Herzelöide*, the mother of Parzival ; and lastly, *Urepanse de Joie*, who marries Feirifiz, and becomes the mother of John the Priest. The beautiful Sigune is brought up at the court of her aunt Herzelöide, and betrothed to *Tchionatulander*. This young knight distinguishes himself in the East by his bravery, and stands in friendly relationship with the Knights of the Round Table. He delivers, conjointly with King Arthur, the kingdom of Canvoleis, invaded by the Duke Orilus, but is killed by this enemy in single combat. Sigune is inconsolable for the death of her betrothed ; she has his body embalmed, places it among the branches of a lime-tree, and sits by it a prey to the most poignant grief. There her cousin Parzival finds her, and she informs him of the fault he committed by his too great discretion at the banquet of the San Gréal. Full of regret, Parzival desires to repair his fault ; after many efforts and many an adventure, he at last obtains the kingship of the Gréal at Montsalvagge. In the meantime, the West, more and more given up to sin, is

no longer worthy of possessing the sacred vase. Parzival thinks of transporting it to the East. He takes the San Gréal, embarks at Marseilles with the Templois, and arrives at the court of his brother Feirifiz, in India. The latter draws an enchanting picture of the riches and sanctity of Prester John, who is the spiritual and temporal chief of a neighbouring country in India. Parzival consents to intrust this personage with the Gréal ; but the sacred cup manifests the desire that Parzival should remain king, and only change his name into that of Prester John. Consequently, Parzival and the Templois settle in India ; they implore the San Gréal that the palace and chapel of Montsalvage be also transported to India. Their prayer is granted ; on the following day both palace and chapel, miraculously transported through the air during the night, are placed more beautiful and brilliant in India, and the chapel again holds the sacred cup of the Gréal. After the death of Parzival, the son of Feirifiz and Urepanse de Joie becomes Priest John. After the disappearance of the Gréal in the West, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table go in search of it : they travel over the world, but in vain,

they cannot find it ; it is for ever hidden in the far East.

Such are the principal features of the romance of *Titirel*. Albrecht von Scharfenberg is the last German poet who has treated the history of the San Gréal as a whole, and added new details to it. After him the poets only relate with more or less exactness the different traditions spread abroad in France, England, and Germany. They modify them to their liking, without, however, giving them an original character. Among the German poems written during the fourteenth century, and in which the Gréal is still spoken of, we shall only mention the romance of *Loherangrin* and the romance of *Parzival and the Round Table*. In the romance of *Loherangrin*, written about 1300, the San Gréal is several times spoken of ; in this romance it is Arthur and his knights who accompany it to India, and guard it as the Templois did in the primitive romances. The Gréal itself is considered as a kind of oracle, which is consulted in all sorts of difficulties, and is, so to speak, at the orders of the mother of God to execute all her commands.

The romance entitled *Parzival and the Round Table*, of which a manuscript still exists in the library of the Vatican,¹ was composed by Nicolas Wisse and Philip Colin, goldsmith of Strasburg. They dedicated it in 1336 to Ulric, lord of Rappoltstein, in Alsace. These *meistersänger* chiefly followed the romance of the French poet Manessier, the continuator of *Perceval-le-Gallois*, by Chrétien de Troyes. They were also acquainted with the romances of Wolfram and of Albrecht von Scharfenberg, and placed their ambition more in being complete, and relating all kinds of amusing anecdotes, than in composing a poem faultless in conception and poetical execution.

As we are unwilling to dwell on a few more romances of the same kind written in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and presenting nothing new, nothing original, we may consider our task finished, and nothing remains but to sum up in a few words the principal results of this memoir. We have explained the formation and signification of the romances of the San Gréal. These romances, we have seen, all spring

¹ See Von der Hagen, *Briefe in die Heimath*, ii. p. 305.

from two principal sources, the first of which is found in the French romance of Guyot, and is connected with the great cycle of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table; the other is found in the history of the Gréal, written in the Latin tongue by Walter Mapes, and is connected with the legendary literature of the middle ages. These two original romances represent the two principal tendencies of that period, the one the knightly, the other the sacerdotal. The romances derived from these two primitive sources are afterwards confounded, mixed, and at last disappear in the sixteenth century, when the middle ages had exhausted all that was true and beautiful in their ideas and tendencies, and the modern times were commencing with their new tendencies and more complete ideas.

These romances remained buried in libraries until the present time, when curiosity and erudition drew them out of the dust to study and appreciate them at their real value. What will be the final judgment on these literary productions? Let us speak frankly: the literary taste of our period differs so much from that of the

middle ages, that these poems, which were the admiration and delight of their time, can no longer claim the same degree of interest. We do not mean to deny the great poetical beauties existing in these romances, nor the great gifts of the principal poets of the middle ages. But their productions are generally deficient in that finished perfection in literature which alone can secure a complete and universal success. In the middle ages, idea preponderates too much over form to allow of an harmonious union of both, and of the beauty and artistical perfection arising from that union. If you love great and fruitful ideas, warmth, passion, you will indeed find them in the poetry of the middle ages, and perhaps more frequently than in the somewhat cold and measured poetry of antiquity. But you will not find in it that harmony of form, that wisdom which moderates warmth, that calm in the midst of passions, which are the distinctive characteristic of ancient classic poetry, and in which consists its peculiar merit. The results of this want of harmony, so common a feature in the poems of the middle ages, are exuberance of form, absence of symmetry between the parts, and defective ar-

rangement of the whole. Most markedly in narrative poetry, an idea, after giving birth to facts, seems to let them wander at random. Numberless adventures, therefore, connected with each other, were the essential part of the romances of chivalry, and a poetical fiction of those times, the personification of Lady Adventure, invoked by the romancers as the poets of antiquity invoked the muses, sufficiently proves, in our judgment, that the greatest merit of narrative poems was held to be the adventurous character of the actions and events.

Still further: from this absence of harmony between the idea and the form arises a perhaps still more serious defect, which is the want of truth and local colour; and, indeed, in proportion as the middle ages draw nearer their zenith, we see what may be called the individual physiognomy of the times, places, and persons disappearing more and more from their poetry. Those rude and manly individualities of the heroic ages, the character, full of assurance, of the Christian heroes, defenders of the faith, is found no longer in the heroes of the romances of chivalry. Everything takes a general character, an abstract physiognomy, which is

contrary to the real nature of poetry, which, like all arts, and in imitation of nature, should only produce special, individual, and concrete forms. It is true that it is precisely in this diversity of character, in this mixture of nationalities, in this absence of individuality and local colour, that the *romantic* poetry, properly so called, consists. But this poetry, admissible on certain conditions, cannot in all respects satisfy a taste in the least degree severe. The defects which we have pointed out in the romances of knighthood will not make us overlook the numerous beauties of the poetry of the middle ages, nor prevent us from appreciating all its qualities. We venture, therefore, to say, that the perfection of art consists, according to our notions, in uniting, by a happy synthesis, the abundance of ideas, the movement and passion of the poetry of the middle ages, with the regular and finished forms of the classic poetry of antiquity.

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