

## Dion Fortune and the Holy Grail

By Mara Freeman

### Avalon of the Heart

Shortly after Dion Fortune came to Glastonbury around 1920, she received psychic communications from a group of incarnate monks of its famous abbey, who called themselves the Company of Avalon. They told her that London was the head centre of England, and Glastonbury was its heart; that the Isle of Avalon was the site of a “College of the Illuminati” and a “great centre of the druidic faith” in pre-Christian times. She learned that this area had always been a place of spiritual regeneration where successive generations of initiates maintained contact with inner plane powers over the centuries, and thus the door between the worlds has always been more open there than at any other place in Britain:

*There has never ceased to be an open Lodge at Glastonbury. The succession has never failed; there has never been darkness there. The Tor has never lacked its Hermit. There has always been an Upper Chamber within the bounds of the circle of the marshes, where one soul in solitude meditated upon the mysteries. Thus was maintained a focus in the flesh whereby the necessary contact could be made upon the other side...Those who have functioned in this way have kept the channels open by their concentrated thought, leaving merely the thinnest film, like a psychic parchment, lest the power behind should break through into a world all unprepared, leading to martyrdom, not magic . . . Thus at Glastonbury the contact has never been broken.*<sup>1</sup>

In her visions, Dion Fortune could see the spiritual force that fuels this sacred landscape as a constant downpouring of the Holy Spirit, flowing unceasingly from a crystal chalice high above Glastonbury Tor. Inspired by these messages and by the numinous energy of the area, she acquired a plot of land that was once part of an old orchard at the foot of the Tor, where she set about forming a spiritual community. In 1924 a cluster of huts were hastily erected, and Chalice Orchard, as she named it, came into being, serving both as a pilgrimage centre or “hostel for Avalonians,” and a sanctuary for meditation and ritual work. Here she gathered a small group, the Community of the Inner Light, which was to develop into one of the most influential magical orders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is still in existence today under the name of the Society of the Inner Light. Dion Fortune called Glastonbury “Avalon of the Heart” and immortalized this term in a passage from her book of the same name:

*It is to this Avalon of the Heart the pilgrims still go. Some in bands, knowing what they seek. Some alone, with the staff of vision in their hands, awaiting what may come to meet them on this holy ground. None go away as they came.*<sup>2</sup>

Dion Fortune took frequent walks up to the summit of the Tor, which she called, “the Hill of Vision.” One of her visions up there was of a glorious parade out of Avalon’s mythic past winding through the landscape below:

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<sup>1</sup> Fortune, *Avalon of the Heart*. Northants.: The Aquarian Press, 1986.p. 64

<sup>2</sup> Fortune, *ibid*, p. 2

*Through the valleys of Avalon moves an invisible pageant in an endless procession. The darkness before the dawn is shot through by the magic of Merlin the Atlantean. The dark, wild men of the mere go past, fierce eyes gleaming under matted hair. After them come the white-robed Druids, with their golden sickles, bearing the holy mistletoe, and followed by the captives taken in battle, destined for the sacrificial niche in the Holy Well. Then comes the bowed figure of old St. Joseph, frail and solitary, bearing the Cup. King Arthur rides forth, a strong man in his strength, about his neck the crystal cross which was given him by the Mother of God at Beckary, Excalibur by his side. Guinevere rides behind him in her beauty, her golden hair flowing over her shoulders. . . Behind them follows the Lady of the Lake, seen as if through deep water, waiting the time when Arthur shall return to her after the last battle, borne in the black barge, watched by the weeping queens, and Excalibur shall come back into her hands, lost to men forever.<sup>3</sup>*

### **The Ancient Keltic Church**

Dion Fortune's experiences in Glastonbury led her to develop a magical system which included three paths, symbolized by three coloured rays, each pertaining to a particular strand of the Western Mystery Teachings:

The Orange Ray is the path of Magical Knowledge, the Hermetic way. It has an intellectual emphasis and focuses on working with symbolism and patterns through visualized or ceremonial forms. It was inspired by Dion Fortune's explorations of the Arthurian mythos, which has seeped into the ancient stones of Glastonbury.

The Green Ray is the path of Elemental Power, which has an emotional and instinctive emphasis and is focused on Earth magic, including nature spirits, elementals and faeries. Inspiration for the Green Ray arose out of her experience of living at the foot of the Tor, with the chthonic power of the Underworld below and the forces of wind, sun and storm above.

The Purple Ray is the path of Mystical Devotion, focused on direct communion with the Divine. The influence of Glastonbury Abbey and its pervading air of sanctity which still lingers throughout the area like the faint fragrance of incense, provided the inspiration for this branch of the Mysteries.

Although she felt herself to be more suited temperamentally to the Hermetic Ray, Dion Fortune found herself called to take a leadership role in service of the Purple Ray. She fulfilled this through a branch of her order called the Guild of the Master Jesus, later known as the Church of the Graal. This branch embodied an esoteric Christianity influenced in part from her early involvement with theosophical teachings, wherein Jesus was seen as a highly evolved human being, Master or Inner Plane Adept, who had attained Christhood:

*The Christ is the redemptive force that harmonizes the pairs of opposites in the Cosmos, and in the individual unites the pairs of opposites – the higher and lower nature. In other words,*

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<sup>3</sup> Fortune, *ibid*, p. 101

*it is the exaltation of consciousness. The illuminating power of the Christ is not a person, but a potency – the aspect of the One God aptly called the Son.*<sup>4</sup>

The central symbol of the Guild was the Grail as the vessel of the Christ-force:

*... in the Guild of the Master Jesus you concentrate not upon the personality of the Master, but upon the Graal, because this represents a higher and more mystical symbolism than the incarnated personality. . .*<sup>5</sup>

The risen Christ was held to be more important than the crucified Christ, and the role of the cross assumed its rightful place in the Christian Mysteries of Life-Death-Rebirth by symbolizing the suffering and sacrifice that preceded the resurrection. Emphasis was on the eventual triumph of Spirit in the life of Jesus – and in the life of the initiate of these Mysteries, who followed in His footsteps.

Yet the inner mysteries of the Church of the Graal went further than the traditional *imitatio Christi*. The main focus of the church was not so much on Christ as on the Grail itself:

*For some people the cult of the Master Jesus is a way they can understand, but behind the Master shines the Light of the Graal, and the Master brings us the Graal, and the symbolism of the Graal is the cult of the Illuminati. Therefore take for your symbol – for your concentration – the Graal, which enshrines the Christian power – and then shall come the fuller illumination.*<sup>6</sup>

She emphasized that the cup, not the cross, was to be the sacred symbol of the Guild because it was the vessel that could receive the divine influence of the Holy Spirit:

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and

*The Graal is the Cup into which the power of the Holy Ghost is drawn, and in the Graal symbolism you find the esoteric significance of Christianity.*<sup>8</sup>

The Church of the Graal was based on Dion Fortune's concept of the "ancient Keltic Church" which although no longer present in the physical world is "eternal in the heavens." It was seen as having its origins in Glastonbury, "the holiest earthe in Englande" which enshrines the legend of the Grail being brought there by Joseph of Arimathea, the uncle of Christ. This

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<sup>4</sup>Fortune, Dion. Unpublished paper of the Guild of the Master Jesus

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Fortune, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Fortune, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Fortune, *ibid.*

was the Grail seen as the cup Christ drank from at the Last Supper, and in which Joseph had collected Christ's blood when he hung from the cross. Dion Fortune's version of the legend was strongly influenced by the psychic work of her colleague, Frederick Bligh Bond, the Bristol architect who presided over the first excavations of Glastonbury Abbey. She described Joseph as an old man coming to Glastonbury with his eleven companions and building a humble church of reeds from the marshes in which to house the Grail. The twelve men dwelt in simple circular huts which surrounded the central shrine. Here they

*kept guard over the Holy Cup; wearing with their feet paths as they walked in meditation, even like the starry belt of the heavens where the sun moves in his circle.*<sup>9</sup>

In Dion Fortune's retelling of the Grail legend, when a time of evil befell the world, angels came to take the cup away into safety. They gave it into the keeping of the Fisher King where it was guarded by three maidens. When the Fisher King died of his incurable wound, darkness fell more deeply on earth, and the angels then removed the Grail to the "heavenly Jerusalem."

She envisioned the Church of the Graal as an inner re-creation of England's first church, which had eventually grown from the small circle of huts into the magnificent stone edifice of Glastonbury Abbey until Henry VIII had it destroyed during the Reformation:

*And even as the great Abbey was built about the little hut of reeds from the marshes, enshrining it, so does the Church of the Graal contain the Invisible Cup. Upon our altars it shines like the sun at midnight, and from it we partake of the sacraments of power.*<sup>10</sup>

True to the tenets of the original church of the early Celts, the Church of the Graal encouraged the autonomy of each individual, man or woman, who sought God. Services were centred around a form of the Eucharist called, "the Ritual of the Cup," in which the Christ-force was invoked through "the calling down of power into a receptacle, that receptacle being the soul of man." The service depended not only on the minister or celebrant, but on the active participation and full engagement of each member of the congregation. Through their focused visualization and intense concentration on a single theme, which included a "mighty Chalice of gold" a group-mind, or *egregore*, was formed, in order to "build up thought-forms upon the astral which shall serve as channels for the descending spiritual force." The aim was that "each individual member of the group thus formed is then filled with the descending force in such measure as he is capable of receiving."<sup>11</sup>

### **The Way of the Graal**

For those wishing to embark upon an initiatory path, Dion Fortune also provided a training system. Three courses marked the stages on what was called the "Way of the Graal." Candidates were known as, in turn, Seekers, Servers, and, lastly, Watchers.

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<sup>9</sup> Fortune, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Fortune, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Fielding, *ibid.*, p.256

The first two grades were focused on biblical texts from both the Old and New Testaments. The third was based on the story of the Grail, and the candidate was seen as making his or her way up the steep slopes to the summit of "Mount Salvatch," (aka Munsalvaesche or Montsalvat, the Mount of Salvation.)

At this point, the candidate received scripts of inner plane teachings and was introduced to the Glastonbury inner contacts. These most likely included the Company of Avalon and a mysterious "brotherhood" of Montsalvat, probably akin to the Templar-like knights who guarded the Grail in Wolfram von Eschenbach's poem, *Parzival*. In this astral temple they might come face to face with the Holy of Holies:

*Within the Great Hall of Montsalvat, behind the Chair of State whereon sits the King and Master of Montsalvat, there is a small doorway which leads into the Chapel of the Grail. There is very little furniture in this Chapel but a central altar, on which there burns eternally, in the midst of jeweled flames, the mighty symbol of the Spirit through all the ages of man.*<sup>12</sup>

On the successful completion of the third course, the initiate became a "Watcher of the Graal," a priest in his or her own right, and could work with these mysteries autonomously, for

*The Church of the Graal . . . is built by thought, eternal in each man's heart. Each man is his own priest, and lifts therein the Cup of the Graal, and calls down the Flame of Fire, which is the Holy Spirit.*<sup>13</sup>

Among his or her daily devotions, the priest was instructed to build the inner Church of the Graal through the intensive formulating of an image of the following scenes, thus establishing their reality on the astral plane:

*Likewise should he work at the building of the church not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. To this end he should visualise the Isle of Avalon as it was in the days of the Coming of the Graal. He should see the Tor crowned with the circle of standing stones of the sun-worship, below it, the Well of the Wisdom of Merlin. He should see the circular Church of the Graal that enshrined the Cup, from which shines an eternal light. Around it are the cells of the twelve anchorites. Beyond, among the marshes, is the hermitage of Bride. Through and around all come and go Arthur and his knights, showing forth the ideal of chivalry. These are the Holy Places of the initiates of the Master Jesus in these islands. Likewise also Iona, Lindisfarne and St. Albans. And in a lesser degree, Tintagel, Camelot and Caerleon.*

*Now the Keltic Church was built by the wise men of old; men that had knowledge, and it stands eternal in the heavens. Those who have the sight can revive it today. Let us therefore look for this Church with the eye of faith that it may live, and be built again between heaven and earth that power may come down and men may worship.*

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<sup>12</sup> Knight, Gareth. *Pythoness*, Sun Chalice Books, Oceanside, CA, 1993 p. 186.

<sup>13</sup> Fortune, *ibid*.

*In the working of the rites of the Guild we build this Church. Let us go forth by the pilgrim way up the Tor, and upon the crest rebuilt the Chapel of St. Michael, and above the tower, the Star of Bethlehem. Within, the Chapel is even as our own sanctuary in black and silver, with the two pillars of positive and negative force and the Keltic cross between. But upon the altar stands the Very Graal, shining with an inner light, and above the altar descends the power of the Holy Spirit. These things we see with the inner eye, which is the eye of faith.<sup>14</sup>*

This passage, with its reference to the two pillars, also shows that Dion Fortune viewed the Way of the Graal as a way of "rising through the planes" on the Middle Pillar of the Qabalistic Tree of Life. Elsewhere she calls the Grail "the glyph of Tiphareth." Climbing the sacred mountain to the Grail Chapel is a way of describing the ascent of the Middle Pillar to Tiphareth. Here he or she could receive the divine influences pouring down from Kether at the crown of the Tree into the prepared and awaiting chalice, which is to say, the soul of the initiate.

### **The Magical Battle of Britain**

The Grail was also at the centre of the most powerful magical workings practiced by Dion Fortune and the Fellowship of the Inner Light.<sup>15</sup> At the worst crisis point of the Second World War, when it seemed like a Nazi invasion might happen at any moment, she opened the gates of the "Inner Court" and invited ordinary members to take part in magical work that up until now had only been undertaken by initiates. Wartime conditions made it difficult for people to assemble in one place, so to those unable to come to their London headquarters, she sent out a weekly letter containing a lesson and the description of a symbol to build on the inner planes. An hour was set when, no matter where they were, everyone involved focused on this symbol as a "key-call" to the powers of the Inner Planes to enlist their aid in England's greatest time of crisis.

The working began with the formulating of the symbol of the Rose-Cross. As this symbol was built on the astral planes each week, it developed through a series of changes in a clear sequence – a sign that the inner powers had been contacted and were responding. First, the Rose-Cross was surrounded by a golden light, then a diamond light, indicating a very high grade of power. Soon it became clear that the Rose-Cross was situated in a cavern deep beneath Glastonbury Tor. The figures of seven of the Masters then appeared around it. In later meditations, three key figures appeared: King Arthur, Merlin and the Master Jesus, later joined by the figure of the Virgin Mary, also seen as Binah and the heavenly Isis, bearing the Grail.

More levels were revealed within the Tor, which Dion Fortune now called the Holy Mountain of the Illuminati. She also referred to it as the Hill of Vision, the term used by Bligh Bond in his book of the same name, and Mount Abnegus, after the Rosicrucian mountain of initiation. Clearly it had become one and the same with "Montsalvatch."

The cavern was at the lowest level in the roots of the Tor. Above it, reached by a spiral staircase, appeared a great library, the Hall of Learning, and above that was the Chapel of

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<sup>14</sup> Fortune, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Knight, Gareth, ed. *The Magical Battle of Britain*. Oceanside, CA: Sun Chalice Books, 2003.

the Graal. The highest level was called the Watchtower, the inner equivalent of St Michael's Tower. This was guarded by a mysterious cowed figure, and was considered too perilous for the uninitiated to visit.<sup>16</sup> During these workings, many of the meditators experienced a profound and brilliant spiritual illumination in the Grail Chapel. Gareth Knight's commentary in *The Magical Battle of Britain*, in which he chronicles significant turning points in the war, clearly show that the work of one woman and her small band of dedicated followers had a decided effect on the success of Britain's defence and may have contributed to the inexplicable failure of the Nazis' plans to invade this small and vulnerable island. Dion Fortune had summoned the aid of the greatest source of inner power of the western world, for which we owe her a debt of gratitude today.

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p. 51