

### **Summary of the *Perlesvaus* or *The High History of the Grail***

(probably first decade of 13<sup>th</sup> century, certainly before 1225, author unknown). Survives in 3 manuscripts, 2 partial copies, and one early print edition

Percival starts out as the young adventurous knight who did not fulfill his destiny of achieving the Holy Grail because he failed to ask the Fisher King the question that would heal him, events related in Chrétien's work. The author soon digresses into the adventures of knights like Lancelot and Gawain, many of which have no analogue in other Arthurian literature. Often events and depictions of characters in the *Perlesvaus* differ greatly from other versions of the story. For instance, while later literature depicts Loholt as a good knight and illegitimate son of King Arthur, in *Perlesvaus* he is apparently the legitimate son of Arthur and Guinevere, and he is slain treacherously by Arthur's seneschal Kay, who is elsewhere portrayed as a boor and a braggart but always as Arthur's loyal servant (and often, foster brother. Kay is jealous when Loholt kills a giant, so he murders him to take the credit. This backfires when Loholt's head is sent to Arthur's court in a box that can only be opened by his murderer. Kay is banished, and joins with Arthur's enemies, Brian of the Isles and Meliant. Guinevere expires upon seeing her son dead, which alters Arthur and Lancelot's actions substantially from what is found in later works. Though its plot is frequently at variance with the standard Arthurian outline, *Perlesvaus* did have an effect on subsequent literature. Arthur's traditional enemies Claudas and Brian appear for the first time in its pages, as does the Questing Beast (though in a radically different form than it would take later).

In *The High History of the Grail*, Perceval (Perlesvaus), then Gawain, then Lancelot fails to recover the Grail. The king dies before Perceval can have another attempt. The Grail Castle flourishes but eventually disappears.

The Grail in *Perlesvaus* is not a serving dish for normal food and drink. It is now a chalice, used in the Mass, and is imbued with divine grace. It was the cup used at the Last Supper. Joseph of Arimathea collected some of the Savior's blood in it. It was associated with the spear of the Roman Longinus, which pierced Christ's side when he was on the cross.

Where is the Grail? In the Grail Castle of the Fisher King, which is in the British Isles, not on the European mainland (where Wolfram put it). It was brought there from the Holy Land by Joseph of Arimathea. The story is preserved at Avalon, where King Arthur lies; Avalon is specifically identified as Glastonbury in Somerset.