CLASSICS TO GO

THE SECRET GLORY

ARTHUR MACHEN

The Secret Glory

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PREFACE

Some years ago I met my old master, Sir Frank Benson—he was Mr. F. R. Benson then—and he asked me in his friendly way what I had been doing lately.

"I am just finishing a book," I replied, "a book that everybody will hate."

"As usual," said the Don Quixote of our English stage—if I knew any nobler title to bestow upon him, I would, bestow it —"as usual; running your head against a stone wall!"

Well, I don't know about "as usual"; there may be something to be said for the personal criticism or there may not; but it has struck me that Sir Frank's remark is a very good description of "The Secret Glory," the book I had in mind as I talked to him. It is emphatically the history of an unfortunate fellow who ran his head against stone walls from the beginning to the end. He could think nothing and do nothing after the common fashion of the world; even when he "went wrong," he did so in a highly unusual and eccentric manner. It will be for the reader to determine whether he were a saint who had lost his way in the centuries or merely an undeveloped lunatic; I hold no passionate view on either side. In every age, there are people great and small for whom the times are out of joint, for whom everything is, somehow, wrong and askew. Consider Hamlet; an amiable man and an intelligent man. But what a mess he made of it! Fortunately, my hero—or idiot, which you will—was not called upon to intermeddle with affairs of State, and so only brought himself to grief: if it were grief; for the least chink of the door should be kept open, I am inclined to hold, for the other point of view. I

have just been rereading Kipling's "The Miracle of Purun Bhagat," the tale of the Brahmin Prime Minister of the Native State in India, who saw all the world and the glory of it, in the West as well as in the East, and suddenly abjured all to become a hermit in the wood. Was he mad, or was he supremely wise? It is just a matter of opinion.

The origin and genesis of "The Secret Glory" were odd enough. Once on a time, I read the life of a famous schoolmaster, one of the most notable schoolmasters of these later days. I believe he was an excellent man in every way; but, somehow, that "Life" got on my nerves. I thought that the School Songs—for which, amongst other things, this master was famous—were drivel; I thought his views about football, regarded, not as a good game, but as the discipline and guide of life, were rot, and poisonous rot at that. In a word, the "Life" of this excellent man got my back up.

Very good. The year after, schoolmasters and football had ceased to engage my attention. I was deeply interested in a curious and minute investigation of the wonderful legend of the Holy Grail; or rather, in one aspect of that extraordinary complex. My researches led me to the connection of the Grail Legend with the vanished Celtic Church which held the field in Britain in the fifth and sixth and seventh centuries; I undertook an extraordinary and fascinating journey into a misty and uncertain region of Christian history. I must not say more here, lest—as Nurse says to the troublesome and persistent child—I "begin all over again"; but, indeed, it was a voyage on perilous seas, a journey to faery lands forlorn—and I would declare, by the way, my conviction that if there had been no Celtic Church, Keats could never have written those lines of tremendous evocation and incantation.

Again; very good. The year after, it came upon me to write a book. And I hit upon an original plan; or so I thought. I took my dislike of the good schoolmaster's "Life," I took my

knowledge of Celtic mysteries—and combined my information.

Original, this plan! It was all thought of years before I was born. Do you remember the critic of the "Eatanswill Gazette"? He had to review for that admirable journal a work on Chinese Metaphysics. Mr. Pott tells the story of the article.

"He read up for the subject, at my desire, in the Encyclopædia Britannica ... he read for metaphysics under the letter M, and for China under the letter C, and combined his information!"

I

A heavy cloud passed swiftly away before the wind that came with the night, and far in a clear sky the evening star shone with pure brightness, a gleaming world set high above the dark earth and the black shadows in the lane. In the ending of October a great storm had blown from the west, and it was through the bare boughs of a twisted oak that Ambrose Meyrick saw the silver light of the star. As the last faint flash died in the sky he leaned against a gate and gazed upward; and then his eyes fell on the dull and weary undulations of the land, the vast circle of dun ploughland and grey meadow bounded by a dim horizon, dreary as a prison wall. He remembered with a start how late it must be; he should have been back an hour before, and he was still in the open country, a mile away at least from the outskirts of Lupton. He turned from the star and began to walk as quickly as he could along the lane through the puddles and the sticky clay, soaked with three weeks' heavy rain.

He saw at last the faint lamps of the nearest streets where the shoemakers lived and he tramped hurriedly through this wretched quarter, past its penny shops, its raw public-house, its rawer chapel, with twelve foundation-stones on which are written the names of the twelve leading Congregationalists of Lupton, past the squalling children whose mothers were raiding and harrying them to bed. Then came the Free Library, an admirable instance, as the *Lupton Mercury* declared, of the adaptation of Gothic to modern requirements. From a sort of tower of this building a great arm shot out and hung a round clock-face over the street, and Meyrick experienced another shock when he saw that it was even later than he had feared. He had to get to the

other side of the town, and it was past seven already! He began to run, wondering what his fate would be at his uncle's hands, and he went by "our grand old parish church" (completely "restored" in the early 'forties), past the remains of the market-cross, converted most successfully, according to local opinion, into a drinking fountain for dogs and cattle, dodging his way among the late shoppers and the early loafers who lounged to and fro along the High Street.

He shuddered as he rang the bell at the Old Grange. He tried to put a bold face on it when the servant opened the door, and he would have gone straight down the hall into the schoolroom, but the girl stopped him.

"Master said you're to go to the study at once, Master Meyrick, as soon as ever you come in."

She was looking strangely at him, and the boy grew sick with dread. He was a "funk" through and through, and was frightened out of his wits about twelve times a day every day of his life. His uncle had said a few years before: "Lupton will make a man of you," and Lupton was doing its best. The face of the miserable wretch whitened and grew wet; there was a choking sensation in his throat, and he felt very cold. Nelly Foran, the maid, still looked at him with strange, eager eyes, then whispered suddenly:

"You must go directly, Master Meyrick, Master heard the bell, I know; but I'll make it up to you."

Ambrose understood nothing except the approach of doom. He drew a long breath and knocked at the study door, and entered on his uncle's command.

It was an extremely comfortable room. The red curtains were drawn close, shutting out the dreary night, and there was a great fire of coal that bubbled unctuously and shot

out great jets of flame—in the schoolroom they used coke. The carpet was soft to the feet, and the chairs promised softness to the body, and the walls were well furnished with books. There were Thackeray, Dickens, Lord Lytton, uniform in red morocco, gilt extra; the Cambridge Bible for Students in many volumes, Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, Coplestone's *Prælectiones Academicæ*, commentaries, dictionaries, first editions of Tennyson, school and college prizes in calf, and, of course, a great brigade of Latin and Greek classics. Three of the wonderful and terrible pictures of Piranesi hung in the room; these Mr.

Horbury admired more for the subject-matter than for the treatment, in which he found, as he said, a certain lack of the *aurea mediocritas*—almost, indeed, a touch of morbidity. The gas was turned low, for the High Usher was writing at his desk, and a shaded lamp cast a bright circle of light on a mass of papers.

He turned round as Ambrose Meyrick came in. He had a high, bald forehead, and his fresh-coloured face was edged with reddish "mutton-chop" whiskers. There was a dangerous glint in his grey-green eyes, and his opening sentence was unpromising.

"Now, Ambrose, you must understand quite definitely that this sort of thing is not going to be tolerated any longer."

Perhaps it would not have fared quite so badly with the unhappy lad if only his uncle had not lunched with the Head. There was a concatenation accordingly, every link in which had helped to make Ambrose Meyrick's position hopeless. In the first place there was boiled mutton for luncheon, and this was a dish hateful to Mr. Horbury's palate. Secondly, the wine was sherry. Of this Mr. Horbury was very fond, but unfortunately the Head's sherry, though making a specious appeal to the taste, was in reality far from good and teemed

with those fiery and irritating spirits which make the liver to burn and rage. Then Chesson had practically found fault with his chief assistant's work. He had not, of course, told him in so many words that he was unable to teach; he had merely remarked:

"I don't know whether you've noticed it, Horbury, but it struck me the other day that there was a certain lack of grip about those fellows of yours in the fifth. Some of them struck me as *muddlers*, if you know what I mean: there was a sort of *vagueness*, for example, about their construing in that chorus. Have you remarked anything of the kind yourself?"

And then, again, the Head had gone on:

"And, by the way, Horbury, I don't quite know what to make of your nephew, Meyrick. He was your wife's nephew, wasn't he? Yes. Well, I hardly know whether I can explain what I feel about the boy; but I can't help saying that there is something wrong about him. His work strikes me as good enough—in fact, quite above the form average—but, to use the musical term, he seems to be in the wrong key. Of course, it may be my fancy; but the lad reminds me of those very objectionable persons who are said to have a joke up their sleeve. I doubt whether he is taking the Lupton stamp; and when he gets up in the school I shall be afraid of his influence on the other boys."

Here, again, the master detected a note of blame; and by the time he reached the Old Grange he was in an evil humour. He hardly knew which he found the more offensive—Chesson's dish or his discourse. He was a dainty man in his feeding, and the thought of the great fat gigot pouring out a thin red stream from the gaping wound dealt to it by the Head mingled with his resentment of the indirect scolding which he considered that he had received, and on

the fire just kindled every drop of that corrosive sherry was oil. He drank his tea in black silence, his rage growing fiercer for want of vent, and it is doubtful whether in his inmost heart he was altogether displeased when report was made at six o'clock that Meyrick had not come in. He saw a prospect—more than a prospect—of satisfactory relief.

Some philosophers have affirmed that lunatic doctors (or mental specialists) grow in time to a certain resemblance to their patients, or, in more direct language, become half mad themselves. There seems a good deal to be said for the position; indeed, it is probably a more noxious madness to swear a man into perpetual imprisonment in the company of maniacs and imbeciles because he sings in his bath and will wear a purple dressing-gown at dinner than to fancy oneself Emperor of China. However this may be, it is very certain that in many cases the schoolmaster is nothing more or less than a bloated schoolboy: the beasts are, radically, the same, but morbid conditions have increased the venom of the former's sting. Indeed, it is not uncommon for well-wishers to the great Public School System to praise their favourite masters in terms which admit, nay, glory in, this identity. Read the memorial tributes to departed Heads in a well-known and most respectable Church paper. "To the last he was a big boy at heart," writes Canon Diver of his friend, that illiterate old sycophant who brought up the numbers of the school to such a pitch by means of his conciliator policy to Jews, Turks, heretics and infidels that there was nothing for it but to make him a bishop. "I always thought he seemed more at home in the playing fields than in the sixth-form room.... He had all the English boy's healthy horror of anything approaching pose or eccentricity.... He could be a severe disciplinarian when severity seemed necessary, but everybody in the school knew that a well-placed 'boundary,' a difficult catch or a goal well won or well averted would atone for all but the most serious offences." There are many

other points of resemblance between the average master and the average boy: each, for example, is intensely cruel, and experiences a quite abnormal joy in the infliction of pain. The baser boy tortures those animals which are not *méchants*. Tales have been told (they are hushed up by all true friends of the "System") of wonderful and exquisite orgies in lonely hollows of the moors, in obscure and hidden thickets: tales of a boy or two, a lizard or a toad, and the slow simmering heat of a bonfire. But these are the exceptional pleasures of the *virtuosi*; for the average lad there is plenty of fun to be got out of his feebler fellows, of whom there are generally a few even in the healthiest community. After all, the weakest must go to the wall, and if the bones of the weakest are ground in the process, that is their fault. When some miserable little wretch, after a year or two of prolonged and exquisite torture of body and mind, seeks the last escape of suicide, one knows how the Old Boys will come forward, how gallantly they will declare that the days at the "dear old school" were the happiest in their lives; how "the Doctor" was their father and the Sixth their nursing-mother; how the delights of the Mahomedans' fabled Paradise are but grey and weary sport compared with the joys of the happy fag, whose heart, as the inspired bard of Harrow tells us, will thrill in future years at the thought of the Hill. They write from all quarters, these brave Old Boys: from the hard-won Deanery, result of many years of indefatigable attack on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith; from the comfortable villa, the reward of commercial activity and acuteness on the Stock Exchange; from the courts and from the camps; from all the high seats of the successful; and common to them all is the convincing argument of praise. And we all agree, and say there is nothing like our great Public Schools, and perhaps the only dissentient voices are those of the father and mother who bury the body of a little child about whose neck is the black sign of the rope. But let them be comforted: the boy was no

good at games, though his torments were not bad sport while he lasted.

Mr. Horbury was an old Luptonian; he was, in the words of Canon Diver, but "a big boy at heart," and so he gave orders that Meyrick was to be sent in the study directly he came in, and he looked at the clock on the desk before him with satisfaction and yet with impatience. A hungry man may long for his delayed dinner almost with a sense of fury, and yet at the back of his mind he cannot help being consoled by the thought of how wonderfully he will enjoy the soup when it appears at last. When seven struck, Mr. Horbury moistened his lips slightly. He got up and felt cautiously behind one of the bookshelves. The object was there, and he sat down again. He listened; there were footfalls on the drive. Ah! there was the expected ring. There was a brief interval, and then a knock. The fire was glowing with red flashes, and the wretched toad was secured.

"Now, Ambrose, you must understand quite definitely that this sort of thing isn't going to be tolerated any longer. This is the third time during this term that you have been late for lockup. You know the rules: six o'clock at latest. It is now twenty minutes past seven. What excuse have you to make? What have you been doing with yourself? Have you been in the Fields?"

"No, Sir."

"Why not? You must have seen the Resolution of the Sixth on the notice-board of the High School? You know what it promised any boy who shirked rocker? 'A good sound thrashing with tuds before the First Thirty.' I am afraid you will have a very bad time of it on Monday, after Graham has sent up your name to the Room."

There was a pause. Mr. Horbury looked quietly and lengthily at the boy, who stood white and sick before him. He was a rather sallow, ugly lad of fifteen. There was something of intelligence in his expression, and it was this glance that Chesson, the Headmaster, had resented. His heart beat against his breast, his breath came in gasps and the sweat of terror poured down his body. The master gazed at him, and at last spoke again.

"But what have you been doing? Where have you been all this time?"

"If you please, Sir, I walked over to Selden Abbey."

"To Selden Abbey? Why, it's at least six miles away! What on earth did you want to go to Selden Abbey for? Are you fond of old stones?"

"If you please, Sir, I wanted to see the Norman arches. There is a picture of them in *Parker's Glossary*."

"Oh, I see! You are a budding antiquarian, are you, Ambrose, with an interest in Norman arches—eh? I suppose we are to look forward to the time when your researches will have made Lupton famous? Perhaps you would like to lecture to the school on St. Paul's Cathedral? Pray, what are your views as to the age of Stonehenge?"

The wit was heavy enough, but the speaker's position gave a bitter sting to his lash. Mr. Horbury saw that every cut had told, and, without prejudice to more immediate and acuter pleasures, he resolved that such biting satire must have a larger audience. Indeed, it was a long time before Ambrose Meyrick heard the last of those wretched Norman arches. The method was absurdly easy. "Openings" presented themselves every day. For example, if the boy made a mistake in construing, the retort was obvious:

"Thank you, Meyrick, for your most original ideas on the force of the aorist. Perhaps if you studied your Greek Grammar a little more and your favourite *Glossary of Architecture* a little less, it would be the better. Write out 'Aorist means indefinite' five hundred times."

Or, again, perhaps the Classic Orders were referred to. Mr. Horbury would begin to instruct the form as to the difference between Ionic and Doric. The form listened with poor imitation of interest. Suddenly the master would break off:

"I beg your pardon. I was forgetting that we have a great architectural authority amongst us. Be so kind as to instruct us, Meyrick. What does Parker say? Or perhaps you have excogitated some theories of your own? I know you have an original mind, from the extraordinary quantities of your last copy of verse. By the way, I must ask you to write out 'The *e* in *venio* is short' five hundred times. I am sorry to interfere with your more important architectural studies, but I am afraid there is no help for it."

And so on; while the form howled with amusement.

But Mr. Horbury kept these gems for future and public use. For the moment he had more exciting work on hand. He burst out suddenly:

"The fact is, Ambrose Meyrick, you're a miserable little humbug! You haven't the honesty to say, fair and square, that you funked rocker and went loafing about the country, looking for any mischief you could lay your hands on. Instead of that you make up this cock-and-bull story of Selden Abbey and Norman arches—as if any boy in his senses ever knew or cared twopence about such things! I hope you haven't been spending the afternoon in some low public-house? There, don't speak! I don't want to hear any

more lies. But, whatever you have been doing, you have broken the rules, and you must be taught that the rules have to be kept. Stand still!"

Mr. Horbury went to the bookshelf and drew out the object. He stood at a little distance behind Meyrick and opened proceedings with a savage cut at his right arm, well above the elbow. Then it was the turn of the left arm, and the master felt the cane bite so pleasantly into the flesh that he distributed some dozen cuts between the two arms. Then he turned his attention to the lad's thighs and finished up in the orthodox manner, Meyrick bending over a chair.

The boy's whole body was one mass of burning, stinging torture; and, though he had not uttered a sound during the process, the tears were streaming down his cheeks. It was not the bodily anguish, though that was extreme enough, so much as a far-off recollection. He was quite a little boy, and his father, dead long since, was showing him the western doorway of a grey church on a high hill and carefully instructing him in the difference between "billetty" and "chevronny."

"It's no good snivelling, you know, Ambrose. I daresay you think me severe, but, though you won't believe me now, the day will come when you will thank me from your heart for what I have just done. Let this day be a turning-point in your life. Now go to your work."

II

It was strange, but Meyrick never came in the after days and thanked his uncle for that sharp dose of physical and mental pain. Even when he was a man he dreamed of Mr. Horbury and woke up in a cold sweat, and then would fall asleep again with a great sigh of relief and gladness as he realised that he was no longer in the power of that "infernal

old swine," "that filthy, canting, cruel brute," as he roughly called his old master.

The fact was, as some old Luptonians remarked, the two had never understood one another. With the majority of the boys the High Usher passed for a popular master enough. He had been a distinguished athlete in his time, and up to his last days at the school was a football enthusiast. Indeed, he organised a variety of the Lupton game which met with immense popularity till the Head was reluctantly compelled to stop it; some said because he always liked to drop bitter into Horbury's cup when possible; others—and with more probability on their side—maintained that it was in consequence of a report received from the school doctor to the effect that this new species of football was rapidly setting up an old species of heart disease in the weaker players.

However that might be, there could be no doubt as to Horbury's intense and deep-rooted devotion to the school. His father had been a Luptonian before him. He himself had gone from the school to the University, and within a year or two of taking his degree he had returned to Lupton to serve it as a master. It was the general opinion in Public School circles that the High Usher had counted for as much as Chesson, the Headmaster, if not for more, in the immense advance in prestige and popularity that the school had made; and everybody thought that when Chesson received the episcopal order Horbury's succession was a certainty. Unfortunately, however, there were wheels within wheels, and a total stranger was appointed, a man who knew nothing of the famous Lupton traditions, who (it was whispered) had been heard to say that "this athletic business" was getting a bit overdone. Mr. Horbury's friends were furious, and Horbury himself, it was supposed, was bitterly disappointed. He retreated to one of the few decent

canonries which have survived the wave of agricultural depression; but those who knew him best doubted whether his ecclesiastical duties were an adequate consolation for the loss of that coveted Headmastership of Lupton.

To quote the memoir which appeared in the *Guardian* soon after his death, over some well-known initials:

"His friends were shocked when they saw him at the Residence. He seemed no longer the same man, he had aged more in six months, as some of them expressed themselves, than in the dozen years before. The old joyous Horbury, full of mirth, an apt master of word-play and logic-fence, was somehow 'dimmed,' to use the happy phrase of a former colleague, the Dean of Dorchester. Old Boys who remembered the sparkle of his wit, the zest which he threw into everything, making the most ordinary form-work better fun than the games at other schools, as one of them observed, missed something indefinable from the man whom they had loved so long and so well. One of them, who had perhaps penetrated as closely as any into the *arcana* of Horbury's friendship (a privilege which he will ever esteem as one of the greatest blessings of his life), tried to rouse him with an extravagant rumour which was then going the round of the popular Press, to the effect that considerable modifications were about to be introduced into the compulsory system of games at X., one of the greatest of our great Public Schools. Horbury flushed; the old light came into his eyes; his friend was reminded of the ancient war-horse who hears once more the inspiring notes of the trumpet. 'I can't believe it,' he said, and there was a tremor in his voice. 'They wouldn't dare. Not even Y. (the Headmaster of X.) would do such a scoundrelly thing as that. I *won't* believe it.' But the flush soon faded and his apathy returned. 'After all,' he said, 'I shouldn't wonder if it were so. Our day is past, I suppose, and for all I know they

may be construing the Breviary and playing dominoes at X. in a few years' time.'

"I am afraid that those last years at Wareham were far from happy. He felt, I think, out of tune with his surroundings, and, *pace* the readers of the *Guardian*, I doubt whether he was ever quite at home in his stall. He confessed to one of his old associates that he doubted the wisdom of the whole Cathedral system. 'What,' he said, in his old characteristic manner, 'would St. Peter say if he could enter this building and see that gorgeous window in which he is represented with mitre, cope and keys?' And I do not think that he was ever quite reconciled to the daily recitation of the Liturgy, accompanied as it is in such establishments by elaborate music and all the pomp of the surpliced choir. 'Rome and water, Rome and water!' he has been heard to mutter under his breath as the procession swept up the nave, and before he died I think that he had the satisfaction of feeling that many in high places were coming round to his views.

"But to the very last he never forgot Lupton. A year or two before he died he wrote the great school song, 'Follow, follow, follow!' He was pleased, I know, when it appeared in the *Luptonian*, and a famous Old Boy informs me that he will never forget Horbury's delight when he was told that the song was already a great favourite in 'Chantry.' To many of your readers the words will be familiar; but I cannot resist quoting the first verse:

"I am getting old and grey and the hills seem far away,
And I cannot hear the horn that once proclaimed the morn
When we sallied forth upon the chase together;
For the years are gone—alack!—when we hastened on the track,

And the huntsman's whip went crack! as a signal to our pack
Riding in the sunshine and fair weather.
And yet across the ground
I seem to hear a sound,
A sound that comes up floating from the hollow;
And its note is very clear
As it echoes in my ear,
And the words are: 'Lupton, follow, follow, follow!'

Chorus.

"Lupton, follow away!
The darkness lies behind us, and before us is the day.
Follow, follow the sun,
The whole world's to be won,
So, Lupton, follow, follow, follow, follow away!

"An old pupil sang this verse to him on his death-bed, and I think, perhaps, that some at least of the readers of the *Guardian* will allow that George Horbury died 'fortified,' in the truest sense, 'with the rites of the Church'—the Church of a Great Aspiration."

Such was the impression that Mr. Horbury had evidently made upon some of his oldest friends; but Meyrick was, to the last, an infidel. He read the verses in the *Guardian* (he would never subscribe to the *Luptonian*) and jeered savagely at the whole sentiment of the memoir, and at the poetry, too.

"Isn't it incredible?" he would say. "Let's allow that the main purpose of the great Public Schools is to breed brave average boobies by means of rocker, sticker and mucker and the rest of it. Still, they do acknowledge that they have a sort of *parergon*—the teaching of two great literatures, two literatures that have moulded the whole of Western

thought for more than two thousand years. And they pay an animal like this to teach these literatures—a swine that has not enough literature of any kind in him to save the soul of a louse! Look at those verses! Why, a decent fourth form boy would be ashamed to put his name to them!"

He was foolish to talk in this fashion. People merely said that it was evident he was one of the failures of the great Public School system; and the song was much admired in the right circles. A very well-turned *idem Latine* appeared in the *Guardian* shortly after the publication of the memoir, and the initials at the foot of the version were recognised as those of a literary dean.

And on that autumn evening, far away in the 'seventies, Meyrick, the boy, left Mr. Horbury's study in a white fury of grief and pain and rage. He would have murdered his master without the faintest compunction, nay, with huge delight. Psychologically, his frame of mind was quite interesting, though he was only a schoolboy who had just had a sound thrashing for breaking rules.

For the fact, of course, was that Horbury, the irritating influence of the Head's conversation and sherry apart, was by no means a bad fellow. He was for the moment savagely cruel, but then, most men are apt to be savagely cruel when they suffer from an inflamed liver and offensive superiors, more especially when there is an inferior, warranted defenceless, in their power. But, in the main, Horbury was a very decent specimen of his class—English schoolmaster—and Meyrick would never allow that. In all his reasoning about schools and schoolmasters there was a fatal flaw—he blamed both for not being what they never pretended to be. To use a figure that would have appealed to him, it was if one quarrelled with a plain, old-fashioned meeting-house because it was not in the least like Lincoln Cathedral. A chimney may not be a decorative object, but then it does