

The Wisdom of the Egyptians

The Story of the Egyptians, the Religion of the Ancient Egyptians, the Ptah-Hotep and the Ke'gemini, the "Book of the Dead," the Wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus, Egyptian Magic, the Book of Thoth

Edited, and with an Introduction

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CHAPTER V

HERMES TRISMEGISTUS

HERMES TRISMEGISTUS, "the thrice greatest Hermes." The name given by the Greeks to the Egyptian god Thoth or Tehuti, the god of wisdom, learning, and literature. Thoth is alluded to in later Egyptian writings as "twice very great" and even as "five times very great" in some demotic or popular scripts.--ca. third century B.C. To him was attributed as "scribe of the gods" the authorship of all sacred books which were thus called "Hermetic" by the Greeks. These, according to Clemens Alexandrinus, were forty-two in number and were sub-divided into six portions, of which the first dealt with priestly education, the second with temple ritual, and the third with geographical matter. The fourth division treated of astrology, the fifth of hymns in honor of the gods and a text-book for the guidance of Kings, while the sixth was medical. It is unlikely that these books were all the work of one individual, and it is more probable that they represent the accumulated wisdom of Egypt, attributed in the course of ages to the great god of wisdom.

As "scribe of the gods" Thoth was also the author of all strictly sacred writing. Hence by a convenient fiction the name of Hermes was placed at the head of an extensive cycle of mystic literature, produced in post-Christian times. Most of this Hermetic or Trismegistic literature has perished, but all that remains of it has been gathered and translated into English. It includes the "Poimandres"--virgin of the world--, "the Perfect Sermon," or the "Asclepius" excerpts by Stobacus, and fragments from the church fathers and from the philosophers, Zosimus and Fulgentius. Hitherto these writings have been neglected by theologians, who have dismissed them as the offspring of third century Neo-Platoism. According to the generally accepted view they were eclectic compilations, combining neo-Platonic philosophy, Philonic Judaism and Kabalistic theosophy in an attempt to supply a philosophic substitute for Christianity. The many Christian elements to be found in these mystic scriptures were ascribed to plagiarism.

By an examination of early mystery writings and traditions it has been proved with some degree of certainty that the main source of Trismegistic Tractates is the wisdom of Egypt, and that they "go back in an unbroken tradition of type and form and context to the earliest Ptolemaic times."

The "Poimandres," on which all later Trismegistic literature is based, must, at least in its original form, be placed not later than the first century. The charge of plagiarism from Christian writings, therefore, falls to the ground. If it can be proved that the "Poimandres" belongs to the first century, we have in it a valuable document in determining the environment and development of Christian origins.

Mr. G. R. S. Mead, author of "Thrice Greatest Hermes," says in an illuminating passage: "The more one studies the best of these mystical sermons, casting aside all prejudices, and trying to feel and think with the writers, the more one is conscious of approaching the threshold of what may well be believed to have been the true adytum. of the best in the mystery traditions of antiquity, Innumerable are the hints of the greatnesses and immensities lying beyond that threshold--among other precious things the vision of the key to Egypt's wisdom, the interpretation of apocalypse by the light the sun-clear epopteia of the intelligible cosmos."

HERMETIC WRITINGS

Apparently the earliest of the Hermetic class of writings is the Kore Kosmou or Virgin of the World.

It has more connection with the earlier mythology of Egypt than the other works, Isis and Horus are the teacher and taught; Thoth, Imhotep, and Ptah are all named; the mission of Osiris and Isis is recounted; the divine parentage of the kings is described, and Egypt is the happy centre of all the world. As such Egyptian detail is absent from works of the first or second century B.C., it would be reasonable to put this earlier; and the Egyptian forms of the names of the gods imply earlier translation than that of the other works. What seems to stamp the period is an allusion in sect. 48, where the central land of Egypt is described as "free from trouble, ever it brings forth, adorns and educates, and only with such weapons wars--on men--and wins the victory, and with consummate skill, like a good satrap bestows the fruit of its own victory upon the vanquished." It would seem impossible for the allusion to the government of a satrap to be preferred by an Egyptian, except under the Persian dominion. And such a reference to wise government could not occur in the very troubled years of plunder and confusion, 342 to 332 B.C. We must go back to the days of wise and righteous rule of Persia, 525-405 B.C., to reach a possible comparison with the wise satrap. We know so little of the details of the Persian dealings with Egypt, that the allusion to a generous satrap can hardly be fixed in history. But it is probable that the reference is to the events of the conquest by Cambyses in 525, followed by the enlightened reign of Darius, beginning in 521, soon after which, about 518, the satrap Aryandes attacked Cyrene, and brought back much spoil of captives and plunder into Egypt. Thus within a few years of the conquest of Egypt, a good satrap bestowed the fruits of victory upon the vanquished. This would throw the Kore Kosmou back to about 510 B.C., but in any case we must, by this allusion to a satrap, date it with a century after that. Thus it would precede all the

Apocryphal Wisdom literature of Alexandria, and indeed there is no trace of Jewish influence in the ideas or language.

THE SUBJECT OF THE WORK IS THE ORIGIN OF ALL THINGS

Beginning with the principle "that every nature which lies underneath should be co-ordered and fulfilled by those that lie above," this is carried out by the dive production of heavenly souls, and next of sacred animals. The souls rebel and are then embodied as men, and the gods form the world for them. The evils of man are righted by the Divine Efflux, Osiris and Isis, and the nature of man is explained. Such is the argument of the work, obscured by magnificent images and phrases. The various beliefs which are stated or implied give a body of ideas, which we can thus date as underlying the rest of the literature. The numbers here refer to Mead's sections.

In (1) we read of the divine beauty of the rich majesty of Night, before God was known, and of the ordered motions and hidden influences of the Sun and planets bestowing order on the things below. (2) Beside the Creator there were immortal gods, into whom he breathes love and pours radiance, that they might seek and desire to find and win success. (3) Among the gods were Hermes Tat his son and heir, afterwards came Asklepios-Imhotep according to the will of Ptah who is Hephaistos. Their inquiry was ordained by Fore-knowledge of Providence, queen of all; thus fate is over the gods. (5) Hermes binds his holy books with spells, until they shall be found by souls. (6) When the Kosmos was to awake, God said, "Nature, arise!" and from His word came a perfectly beautiful feminine principle, at whom the gods marvelled. This seems to be the Kore Kosmou or Virgin of the Kosmos, after whom this writing is named. By the help of Toil she made her daughter Invention, who was to rule over all that had been made. These, however, take no further action, but (8) the Breath of God and Conscious Fire blended with unconscious matter is (9) the material for myriads of souls (10) of sixty different degrees. (11) These kept the circulation of Nature in motion, but are threatened if they transgress. (12) God then makes the sacred animals of water and of earth, and gives some matter to the souls to make men in their own nature. The souls make birds of the lightest stuff, quadrupeds of the stiffer plasm, then fish, and of the cold and heavy residue creeping things. But the whole of this existence is entirely before and outside of the present world of men.

The second great stage is the rebellion of souls and its results. (15) Proud of their work, the souls armed themselves, and were forever moving; God therefore resolved to embody them as men. (16) The gods are called to promise their gifts to the new world of men. (17) The sun will shine; the moon give fear, silence, sleep and memory; Kronos will give justice and necessity; Zeus will give fortune, hope, and peace; Ares gives struggle, wrath and strife; Aphrodite gives despair, desire, bliss, and laughter; and Hermes gives prudence, wisdom, persuasiveness, and truth, and will work with invention. This idea of the gods endowing men is seen in the tale of the creation of the wife of Bata, and is therefore Egyptian, but the details are Greek in origin. It is possible that sect. 17 is a later Greek expansion inserted in the Egyptian text; otherwise we must regard the whole as a Græco-Egyptian philosophy, for the Egyptian would not admit Greek elements at this date into a religious myth.

(18) Hermes then made the bodies, with too much water added that they should not be powerful. The souls are thus en fleshed by God, and wail at their fate. (19) The history of this was confided by Hermes to Kneph, and by him told to Isis, who now tells Horus. (20,21). The wail of imprisoned souls is (22) answered by God that if they are sinless they shall dwell in the fields of Heaven--fields of Aalu--, if blameable then on earth, if they improve they shall regain Heaven, but if they sin worse then they shall become animals. Here Metempsychosis is fully stated, as in Plato; but it is not in the Egyptian form, and the Indian influence appears already at work. (23) Then all receive breath, and the reward of the final dissolution of the body is a return to the happiness of their first state. The more righteous, upon the threshold of the divine change, shall be righteous kings, genuine philosophers, founders of states, lawgivers, real seers, true herb-knowers, prophets of the gods, skillful musicians, astronomers, augurers and sacrificers. (24) Others lower shall be eagles, lions, dragons and dolphins.

(25) Then a mighty spirit rises from the earth, and as the souls were entering their plasms he protests against making such daring and (26) enquiring beings, and (27) prays that they may have pain, cares, struggles, and illness to keep them down. This conception seems quite un-Egyptian, and much more of the Pandora type. (28) Hermes agrees to impose Fate upon them. (29) God then assembled the gods who are free from all decay and who regulate the mighty Aeon--the only æonic reference here--to join with him in making the Heaven, earth, and sun. All previous creations appear to have been pre-sensuous, the visible world only now appearing. (31) Then the souls cause such impious turmoil, newly shut in prison, that (32) Fire complains that it is turned from sacrificial rites with sweet-smelling vapours, to burn up flesh--this point is strongly Indian, as implying that no flesh was sacrificed, but only spices--; (33) Air complains that it is polluted with dead bodies, Water complains that rivers wash the hands of murderers and receive the slain; and (34) Earth complains that it is dishonoured by the corruption of their carcasses. (35) God remedies this condition by sending another efflux of His nature. (36) Osiris and Isis. They filled life full of life, stopped slaughter, hallowed shrines, gave laws, food, and shelter, set up courts of law, filled the world with justice, and introduced the witness of an oath. They also taught embalming, and the doctrine of the soul passing out in a swoon--which might result in death--taught about daimons, and engraved the teaching, were authors of arts, sciences, and laws, established the sacred rites, the grade of prophets, and magic, philosophy, and medicine. This is far earlier than the account of Osiris by Plutarch, and agrees with that. (38) Then Osiris and Isis, having fulfilled their mission, were demanded back by those who dwell in Heaven, and were permitted to return.

(39) HORUS DEMANDS HOW ROYAL SOULS ARE BORN

Isis replies that in Heaven the gods dwell with the Architect of all, in the Aether are the stars and the sun, in the Air are souls and the moon, and on Earth are men and living things. (40) The king is the last of gods but first of men, divorced from his godship while on earth; his soul descends from a region above that of other souls. (41) Those who have lived a blameless life and are about to be changed into gods, become kings that they may train for godship; or those souls who are already gods, but have slightly erred, are born as kings. (42) Dispositions of kings depend upon their angels and daimons who attend them. (43) The birth of noble souls is because they descend from a more

glorious place--agreeing with the idea of sixty grades of souls--. (44) Sex is a thing of bodies not of souls. (46) The inhabited earth is like a human being lying face up, (47) at the south is its head, its feet at the north; on the right to the east are fighters, on the left to the west men fight with the left hand, those to the north excel in legs and feet. Egypt is the heart, its men gifted with intelligence and filled with wisdom. (48) The Nile flows from the south on breaking of the frost; east and west is burnt by the rising and setting sun, and the north congealed. Hence Egypt alone is happy. (49, 50) Souls are constrained differently by the four elements.

The most essential notions that we see here are creation by the word, the gods acting under the command of a supreme God, the function of created souls to keep nature circulating, the body a prison of the soul, the heavenly types of animals preceding the earthly creation, and the mission of gods on earth. Besides the Egyptian ideas already mentioned, Greek influence is seen in the characters of gods and in the episode of the earth spirit, and probably Indian influence in the Metempsychosis and the fire-sacrifice of spices, as by Apollonios. There is throughout this cosmology a vigorous and eventful chain of thought, entirely different to the maundering of later writers.

Closely linked with the Kore Kosmou is the sermon of Isis to Horus. It is slightly less Egyptian, writing of Hephaistos and Ptah, classing Horus with the mighty gods, and being rather less concrete. It may then be a rather later continuation, as it closely joins on in subject to the close of the Kore Kosmou. The ideas of this sermon are that the souls of men and animals are all alike, and Metempsychosis is assumed between human and animal bodies; the soul is individual, the work of God's hands and mind; its congress with the body is a concord wrought by God's necessity; at death it returns to its proper region. The reign of souls is between the moon and earth, for above the moon are the gods and stars and providence; the souls pass through air and wind without friction; their reign is divided into the four quarters of earth, higher the eight winds, higher sixteen spaces of subtler air, and highest thirty-two spaces of subtlest air; these are called zones, firmaments, or strata. The kingly souls occupy the highest, and so in order down to the base souls the lowest. There is a warder of souls, and a conductor to and from the bodies. Bodies are a blend of the four elements, each affecting the character.

THE VIRGIN OF THE WORLD

"From Thrice Greatest Hermes' sacred book 'The Virgin of the World.'"

1. So speaking Isis doth pour forth for Horus the sweet draught--the first--of deathless which souls have custom to receive from gods, and thus begins her holiest discourse--logos--.

Seeing that, Son Horus, Heaven, adorned with many a wreath--of starry crowns--, is set o'er every nature of--all--things beneath, and that nowhere it lacketh aught of anything which the whole cosmos now doth hold,--in every way it needs must be that every nature which lies underneath, should be co-ordered and full-filled by those that lie above; for things below cannot of course give order to the ordering above.

It needs must, therefore, be the less should give place to the greater mysteries. The ordinance of the sublimer things transcends the lower; it is both sure in every way and falleth 'neath no mortal's thought. Wherefore the--mysteries--below did sign, fearing the wondrous beauty and the everlasting durance of the ones above.

'Twas worth the gazing and the pains to see Heaven's beauty, beauty that seemed like God,--God who was yet unknown, and the rich majesty of night, who weaves her web with rapid light, though it be less than sun's, and of the other mysteries in turn that move in Heaven, with ordered motions and with periods of times, with certain hidden influences bestowing order on the things below and co-increasing them.

2. Thus fear succeeded fear, and searching search incessant, and for so long as the Creator of the universals willed, did ignorance retain its grip on all. But when He judged it fit to manifest Him who He is, He breathed into the Gods and Loves, and freely poured the splendor which He had within His heart, into their minds, in ever greater and still greater measure; that firstly they might have the wish to seek, next they might yearn to find, and finally have power to win success as well. But this, my Horus, wonder-worthy son, could never have been done had that seed been subject to death, for that as yet had no existence, but only with a soul that could vibrate responsive to the mysteries of Heaven.

3. Such was all-knowing Hermes, who saw all things, and seeing understood, and understanding had the power both to disclose and to give explanation. For what he knew, he graved on stone; yet though he graved them onto stone he hid them mostly, keeping sure silence though in speech, that every younger age of cosmic time might seek for them. And thus, with charge unto his kinsmen of the Gods to keep sure watch, he mounted to the stars.

To him succeeded Tat, who was at once his son and heir unto these knowledges; and not long afterwards Asclepius-Imuth, according to the will of Ptah who is Hephæstus, and all the rest who were to make enquiry of the faithful certitude of heavenly contemplation, as foreknowledge willed, foreknowledge queen of all.

4. Hermes, however, made explanation to surrounding--space--, how that not even to his son--because of the yet newness of his youth--had he been able to hand on the Perfect Vision. But when the sun did rise for me, and with all-seeing eyes I gazed upon the hidden--mysteries--of that new dawn, and contemplated them, slowly there came to me--but it was sure--conviction that the sacred symbols of the cosmic elements were hid away hard by the secrets of Osiris.

5. --Hermes--, ere he returned to Heaven, invoked a spell on them, and spake these words.--For 'tis not meet, my son, that I should leave this proclamation ineffectual, but--rather--should speak forth what words--our--Hermes uttered when he hid his books away. Thus then he said:

"O holy books, who have been made by my immortal hands, by incorruption's magic spells. . . . free from decay and incorrupt from time! Become unseeable, for every one

whose foot shall tread the plains of this--our--land, until old Heaven doth bring forth meet instruments for you, whom the Creator shall call souls."

Thus spake he, and, laying spells on them by means of his own works, he shuts them safe away in their own zones. And long enough the time has been since they were hid away.

6. And Nature, O my son, was barren, till they who then were under orders to patrol the Heaven, approaching to the God of all, their King, reported on the lethargy of things. The time was come for cosmos to awake, and this was no one's task but His alone.

"We pray Thee, then," they said, "direct Thy thought to things which now exist and to what things the future needs."

7. When they spake thus, God smiled and said: "Nature, arise!" And from His word there came a marvel, feminine, possessed of perfect beauty, gazing at which the Gods stood all-amazed. And God the Fore-father, with name of Nature, honoured her, and bade her be prolific.

Then gazing fixedly on the surrounding space, He spake these words as well: "Let Heaven be filled with all things full, and Air, and Æther too!" God spake and it was so. And Nature with herself communing knew she must not disregard the Sire's command; so with the help of Toil she made a daughter fair, whom she did call Invention. And on her God bestowed the gift of being, and with His gift He set apart all them that had been so-far made, filled them with mysteries, and to Invention gave the power of ruling them.

8. But He, no longer willing that the world above should be inert, but think good to fill it full of breaths, so that its parts should not remain immotive and inert, He thus began on these with use of holy arts as proper for the bringing forth of His own special work.

For taking breath from His own breath and blending this with knowing Fire, He mingled them with certain other substances which have no power to know; and having made the two--either with other one, with certain hidden words of power, He thus set all the mixture going thoroughly; until out of the compost smiled a substance, as it were, far subtler, purer far, and more translucent than the things from which it came; it was so clear that no one but the artist could detect it.

9. And since it neither thawed when fire was set unto it--for it was made of fire--, nor yet did freeze when it had once been properly produced--for it was made of breath--, but it kept its mixture's composition a certain special kind, peculiar to itself, of special type and special blend,--which composition, you must know, God called psychosis, after the more auspicious meaning of the name and from the similarity of its behaviour--it was from this coagulate He fashioned souls enough in myriads, moulding with order and with measure the efflorescent product of the mixture for what He willed, with skilled experience and fitting reason, so that they should not be compelled to differ any way one from another.

10. For, you must know the efflorescence that exhaled out of the movement God induced, was not like to itself. For that its first florescence was greater, fuller, every way more pure, than was its second; its second was far second to the first, but greater far than this was its third. And thus the total number of degrees reached up to sixty. In spite of this, in laying down the law, He ordered it that all should be eternal, as though from out one essence, the forms of which Himself alone could bring to their completion.

11. Moreover, He appointed for them limits and reservations in the height of upper Nature, that they might keep the cylinder a-whirl in proper order and economy and--thus--might please their Sire. And so in that all-fairest station of the Æther He summoned unto Him the natures of all things that had as yet been made, and spake these words:

"O Souls, ye children fair of Mine own breath and My solicitude, whom I have now with My own hands brought to successful birth and consecrate to My own world, give ear unto these words of Mine as unto laws, and meddle not with any other space but that which is appointed for you by My will.

"For you, if ye keep steadfast, the Heaven, with the star-order, and thrones I have ordained fulfilled with virtue, shall stay as now they are for you; but if ye shall in any way attempt some innovation contrary to My decrees, I swear to you by My most holy breath, and by this mixture out of which I brought you into being, and by these hands of Mine which gave you life, that I will speedily devise for you a bond and punishments."

12. And having said these words, the God, who is my Lord, mixed the remaining cognate elements --water and earth--together, and, as before, invoking on them certain occult words, words of great power though not so potent as the first, He set them moving rapidly, and breathed into the mixture power of life; and taking the coagulate--which like the other floated to the top--, when it had been well steeped and had become consistent, He modelled out of it those of the--sacred animals possessing forms like unto men's.

The mixtures' residue He gave unto those souls that had gone in advance and had been summoned to the lands of gods, to regions near the stars, and to the--choir of--holy daimons. He said:

13. "My sons, ye children of My Nature, fashion things! Take ye the residue of what My art hath made, and let each fashion something which shall bear resemblance to his own nature. These will I further give to you as models."

He took and set in order fair and fine, agreeably to the motions of the souls, the world of sacred animals, appending as it were to those resembling men those which came next in order, and on these types of lives He did bestow the all devising powers and all-contriving pro-creative breath of all the things which were for ever generally to be.

And He withdrew, with promises to join unto the visible productions of their hands breath that cannot be seen, and essence of engendering its like to each, so that they

might give birth to others like themselves. And these are under no necessity to do aught else than what they did at first.

14. --And Horus asked--:

What did the souls do, Mother, then?

And Isis said:

Taking the blend of matter, Horus, my son, they first looked at the Father's mixture and adored it, and tried to find out whence it was composed; but this was not an easy thing for them to know.

They then began to fear lest they should fall beneath the Father's wrath for trying to find out, and so they set to work to do what they were bid.

Thereon, out of the upper stuff which had its topmost layer superfluously light, they formed the race of birds; while they were doing this the mixture had become half hardened, and by this time had taken on a firm consistency--thereon they fashioned out the race of things which have four feet--next they did fashion forth--the race of fish--less light and needing a moist substance of a different kind to swim in; and as the residue was of a cold and heavy nature, from it the Souls devised the race of creeping things.

15. They then, my son, as though they had done something grand, with overbusy daring armed themselves, and acted contrary to the commands they had received; and forthwith they began to overstep their proper limits and their reservations, and would no longer stay in the same place, but were forever moving, and thought that being ever stationed in one place was death.

That they would do this thing, however, O my son--as Hermes says when he speaks unto me--, had not escaped the eye of Him who is the God and Lord of universal things; and He searched out a punishment and bond, the which they now in misery endure.

Thus was it that the Sovereign King of all resolved to fabricate with art the human frame, in order that in it the race of souls throughout might be chastised.

16. "Then sending for me," Hermes says, "He spake: 'Soul of My Soul, and holy mind of My own Mind, up to what point, the nature of the things beneath, shall be seen in the gloom? How long shall what has up to now been made remain inactive and be destitute of praise? Bring hither to Me now, My son, all of the Gods in heaven,' said God"--as Hermes saith.

And when they came obedient to His command,--"Look down," said He, "upon the earth, and all beneath." And they forthwith both looked and understood the Sovereign's will. And when He spake to them on human kind's behalf, they--all--agreed to furnish those who were to be, with whatsoever thing they each could best provide.

17. Sun said: "I'll shine unto my full." Moon promised to pour light upon the after-the-sun course, and said she had already given birth to fear and silence, and also sleep, and memory--a thing that would turn out to be most useful to them.

Cronus announced himself already sire of justice and necessity.

Zeus said: "So that the race which is to be may not forever fight, already for them have I made fortune, and hope and peace."

Ares declared he had become already sire of struggle, wrath, and strife.

Nor yet did Aphrodite hesitate; she also said: "I'll join to them desire, my Lord, and bliss, and laughter--too--, so that our kindred souls, in working out their very grievous condemnation, may not exhaust their punishment unto the full."

Full pleased were all, my son, at Aphrodite's words.

"And for my part," said Hermes, "I will make men's nature well endowed; I will devote to them prudence and wisdom, persuasiveness and truth, and never will I cease from congress with invention, but ever will I benefit the mortal life of men born underneath my types of life. For that the types our Father and Creator hath set apart for me, are types of wisdom and intelligence, and more than ever--is this so--what time the motion of the stars set over them doth have the natural power of each consonant with itself."

18. And God, the Master of the universe, rejoiced on hearing this, and ordered that the race of men should be.

"I," Hermes says, "was seeking for the stuff which had to be employed, and calling on the Monarch for His aid. And He gave order to the souls to give the mixture's residue; and taking it I found it utterly dried up.

"Thereon, in mixing it, I used more water far than was required to bring the matter back unto its former state, so that the plasm was in every way relaxable, and weak and powerless, in order that it might not in addition to its natural sagacity, be full of power as well.

"I moulded it, and it was fair; and I rejoiced at seeing mine own work, and from below I called upon the Monarch to behold. And He did look on it, and was rejoiced, and ordered that the souls should be en fleshed.

"Then were they first plunged in deep gloom, and, learning that they were condemned, began to wail. I was myself amazed at the souls' utterances."

19. Now give good heed, son Horus, for thou are being told the mystic spectacle which Kamephis, our forefather, was privileged to hear from Hermes, record-writer of all deeds, and I from Kamephis, most ancient of--us--all, when he did honour me with the black--rite--that gives perfection; hear thou it now from me.

For when, O wondrous Sun of mighty fame, they were about to be shut in their prisons, some simply uttered wails and groans--in just the selfsame way as beasts that once have been a liberty, when torn from their accustomed haunts they love so well, will be bad slaves, will fight and make revolt, and be in no agreement with their masters; nay more, if circumstances should serve, will even do to death those that oppress them.

Others with louder outcry hissed like snakes; another shrieked shrilly, and ere he spake shed many tears, and, turning up and down what things served him as eyes, he said:

20. "O Heaven, thou source of our begetting, O Æther, air, O hands and holy breath of God our Monarch, O ye most brilliant stars, eyes of the gods, O tireless light of sun and moon, co-nurslings of our origin,--reft from (you) all we suffer piteously.

"And this the more, in that from spacious realms of light, from out--thy--holy envelope and wealthy dome, and from the blessed government we shared with gods, we shall be thus shut down into these honourless and lowly quarters.

"What is the so unseemly thing we miserables have done? What--crime--deserves these punishments? How many sins await us wretched ones? How many are the things we have to do in this our hopeless plight, necessities to furnish for this watery frame that is soon dissolved?

21. "For that no longer shall our eyes behold the souls of God; when through such watery spheres as these we see our own forefather Heaven grown small and tiny, we shall dissolve in signs,--nay, there'll be times we shall not see at all, for sentence hath been passed on us poor things; the gift of real sight hath not been given to us, in that it hath not been permitted us to see without the light. Windows, they are, not eyes!

"How wretchedly shall we endure to hear our kindred breaths breathe in the air, when we no longer shall be breathing with them! For home, instead of this great world high in the air, a heart's small mass awaits us. Set Thou us free from bonds so base as these to which we have sunk down, and end our grief!

"O Lord and Father, and our Maker, if so it be Thou hast thus quickly grown indifferent unto the works of Thine own Hands, appoint for us some limits! Still deem us worthy of some words, though they be few, while yet we can see through the whole world-order bright on every side."

22. Thus speaking, Horus, son, the Souls gained their request; for that the Monarch came, and sitting on the throne of truth made answer to their prayers:

"O souls, love and Necessity shall be your lords, they who are lords and marshals after Me of all. Know, all of you who are set under My gaining rule, that as long as ye keep you free of sin, ye shall dwell in the fields of Heaven; but if some cause of blame for aught attached itself to you, ye shall dwell in the place that Destiny allots, condemned to mortal wombs.

"If, then, the things imputed to your charge be slight, leaving the bond of fleshly frames subject to death, ye shall again embrace your--father--Heaven, and sin no more; but if ye shall commit some greater sins, and with the end appointed of your frames be not advanced, no longer shall ye dwell in Heaven, nor even in the bodies of mankind, but shall continue after that to wander round in lives irrational."

23. Thus speaking, Horus mine, He gave to all the gift of breath, and thus continued:

"It is not without purpose or by chance I have laid down the law of your transformings; but as--it will be--for the worse if ye do aught unseemly, so for the better, if she shall will what's worthy of your birth.

"For L and no one else, will be the witness and the watcher. Know, then, it is for what ye have done heretofore, ye do endure this being shut in bodies as a punishment.

"The difference in your rebirths, accordingly, for you, shall be as I have said, a difference of bodies, and their--final--dissolution--shall be--a benefit and a--return to--the fair happiness of former days.

"But if ye think to do aught else unworthy of Me, your mind shall lose its sight so as to think the contrary--of what is true--, and take the punishment for benefit; the change to better things for infamous despite.

"But the more righteous of you, who stand upon the threshold of the change to the diviner state, shall among men be righteous kings, and genuine philosophers, founders of states, and lawgivers, and real seers, and true herb-knowers, and prophets of the gods most excellent, skillful musicians, skilled astronomers, and augurs wise, consummate sacrificers--as many of you as are worthy of things fair and good.

24. "Among winged tribes--they shall be--eagles, for these will neither scare away their kind nor feed on them; nay more, when they are by, no other weaker beast will be allowed by them to suffer wrong, for what will be the eagles' nature is too just--to suffer it--.

"Among four-footed things--they will be--lions,--a life of strength and of a kind which in a measure needs no sleep, in mortal body practising the exercises of immortal life--for they nor weary grow nor sleep.

"And among creeping things--they will be--dragons, in that this animal will have great strength and live for long, will do no harm, and in a way be friends with man, and let itself be tamed; it will possess no poison and will cast its skin, as the nature of the Gods.

"Among the things that swim--they will be--dolphins; for dolphins will take pity upon those who fall into the sea, and if they are still breathing bear them to the land, while if they're dead they will not ever even touch them, though they will be the most voracious tribe that in the water dwells."

25. Thus speaking God became imperishable mind. Thereon, son Horus, from earth uprose a very mighty spirit which no mass of body could contain, whose strength consisted in his intellect. And though he knew full well the things on which he questioned--the body with which man was clothed according to his type, a body fair and dignified, yet savage overmuch and full of fear--immediately he saw the souls were entering the plasms, he cried out: "What are these called, O Hermes, writer of the records of the gods?"

And when He answered "Men!--" Hermes," he said, "it is a daring work, this making man, with eyes inquisitive, and talkative of tongue, with power henceforth to hear things even which are no concern of his, dainty of smell, who will use to its full his power of touch on every thing.

"Hast thou, his generator, judged it good to leave him from care, who in the future daringly will gaze upon the fairest mysteries which Nature hath? Wouldst thou leave him without a grief, who in the days to come will make his thoughts reach unto mysteries beyond the Earth?"

26. "Men will dig up the roots of plants, and will find out their juices' qualities. Men will observe the nature of the stones. Men will dissect not only animals irrational, but they'll dissect themselves, daring to find out how they were made. They will stretch out their daring hands e'en to the sea, and cutting self-grown forests down will ferry one another o'er to lands beyond. --Men--will seek out as well the inner nature of the holy spaces which no foot may tread, and will chase after them into the great Space, desiring to observe the nature of the motion of the Heaven.

"These are yet moderate things--which they will do--. For nothing more remains than earth's remotest realms; nay, in their daring they will track out night, the farthest night of all.

27. "Naught have they, then, to stop them from receiving their initiation in the good of freedom from all pain, and unconstrained by terror's grievous goads, from living softly out a life free from care.

"Then will they not gird on the armour of an over-busy daring up to Heaven? Will they not, then, reach out their souls free from all care unto the--primal--elements themselves?"

"Teach them henceforth to long to plan out something, where they have as well to fear the danger of its ill-success, in order that they may be tamed by the sharp tooth of pain in failure of their hopes.

"Let the too busy nature of their souls be balanced by desires, and fears, and griefs, and empty hopes.

"Let loves in quick succession sway their souls, hopes, manifold desires, sometimes fulfilled, and sometimes unfulfilled, that the sweet bait of their success may draw them

into struggle amid direr ills, "Let fever lay its heavy hand on them, that losing heart they may submit desire to discipline."

28. Thou grieveest, dost thou, Horus, Son, to hear thy mother put these things in words? Art thou not struck with wonder, art thou not terrorstruck at how poor man was grievously oppressed? Hear what is sadder still!

When Momos said these things Hermes was pleased, for what he said was said out of affection for him; and so he did all that he recommended, speaking thus:

"Momos, the nature of the breath divine which doth surround--all things--shall not become inert. The Master of the universe appointed me as steward and as manager.

Wherefore the overseer of His command will be the keen-eyed goddess of the all, Adrasteia; and I will skillfully devise an instrument, mysterious, possessed of power of sight that cannot err, and cannot be escaped, whereto all things on earth shall of necessity be subject, from birth to final dissolution,--an instrument which binds together all that's done. This instrument shall rule all other things on earth as well--as man."

29. These words, said Hermes, did I speak to Momos, and forthwith the instrument was set a-going.

When this was done, and when the souls had entered in the bodies, and--Hermes--had himself been praised for what was done, again the Monarch did convoke the gods in session. The gods assembled, and once more did He make proclamation, saying:

"Ye Gods, all ye who have been made of chiefest nature, free from all decay, who have received as your appointed lot for ever more to order out the mighty Aeon, through whom all universal things will never weary grow surrendering themselves in urn the one to other,--how long shall we be rulers of this sovereignty that none can ever know? How long these things, shall they transcend the power of sight of sun and moon?"

"Let each of us bring forth according to his power. Let us by our own energy wipe out this inert state of things; let chaos seem to be a myth incredible to future days. Set hand to mighty work; and I myself will first begin."

30. He spake; straightway in cosmic order there began the differentiation of the up-to-then black unity--of things--. And heaven shone forth above tricked out with all his mysteries; earth, still a-tremble, as the sun shone forth grew harder, and appeared with all the fair adornment that bedeck her round on every side. For beautiful to God are even things which men think mean, in that in truth they have been made to serve the laws of God.

And God rejoiced when now He saw His works a-moving; and filling full His hands, which held as much as all surrounding space, with all that nature had produced, and squeezing tight the handfuls mightily, He said:

"Take--these--, O holy Earth, take those, all honoured one, who are to be the mother of all things, and henceforth lack thou naught!"

31. God spake and opening His hands, such hands as God should have, He poured them all into the composition of the world. And they in the beginning were unknown in every way; for that the souls as newly shut in prison, not enduring their disgrace, began to strive in emulation with the gods in heaven, in full command, in that they had the same creator, made revolt, and using weaker men as instruments, began to make them set upon each other, and range themselves in conflict, and make war among themselves.

Thus strength did mightily prevail o'er weakness, so that the strong did burn and massacre the weak, and from the holy places down they cast the living and the dead down from the holy shrines, until the elements in their distress resolved to go to God their Monarch--to complain--about the savage state in which men lived.

The evil now being very great, the elements approached to God who made them, and formulated their complaint in some such words as these:

32. It was moreover fire who first received authority to speak. He said:

"O Lord, artificer of this new world, thou name mysterious among the gods, and up to now revered by all mankind, how long hast Thou, O Daimon, judged it right to leave the life of mortals without God?"

"Show now Thyself unto Thy world consulting Thee; initiate the savagery of life with peace; give laws to life; to right give oracles; fill with fair hopes all things; and let men fear the vengeance of the gods, and none will sin.

"Should they receive due retribution for their sins, they will refrain henceforth from doing wrong; they will respect their oaths, and no one any more will ponder sacrilege.

"Let them be taught to render thanks for benefits received, that I, the fire, may joyfully do service in the sacrificial rites, that they may from the altar send sweet-smelling vapours forth.

"For up to now I am polluted, Lord; and by the godless daring of these men I am compelled to burn up flesh. They will not let me be for what I was brought forth; but they adulterate with all indecency my undecaying state."

33. And the air too said:

"I also, Master, I am made turbid by the vapours which the bodies of the dead exhale, and I am pestilential, and, no longer filled with health, I gaze down on things I ought not to behold."

Next water, O my son of mighty soul, received authority to speak, and spake and said:

"O Father, O wonderful creator of all things, daimon self-born, and Nature's maker, who through Thee doth conceive all things, now at this last, command the rivers' streams for ever to be pure, for that the rivers and the seas or wash the murderers' hands or else receive the murdered."

34. After came earth in bitter grief, and taking up the tale, O son of high renown, thus she began to speak:

"O sovereign Lord, chief of the heavenly ones, and master of the wheels, Thou ruler of us elements, O Sire of them who stand beside Thee, for whom all things have the beginning of their increase and of their decrease, and into whom they cease again and have the end that is their due according to necessity's decree, O greatly honoured One, the godless rout of men doth dance upon my bosom.

"I hold in my embrace as well as the nature of all things; for I, as Thou didst give command, not only bear them all, but I receive them also when they're killed. But now I am dishonoured. The world upon the earth though filled with all things--else--hath not a God.

"For having naught to fear they sin in everything, and from my heights, O Lord, down--dead--they fall from every evil art. And soaking with the juices of their carcasses I'm all corrupt. Hence am I, Lord, compelled to hold in me those of no worth. With all I bear I would hold God as well.

"Bestow on earth, if not Thyself, for I could not contain Thee, yet some holy emanation of Thyself. Make Thou the earth more honoured than the rest of elements; for it is right that she should boast of gifts from Thee, in that she giveth all."

35. Thus spake the elements; and God, fulfilling all things with the sound of His--most--holy Voice, spake thus: "Depart, ye Holy Ones, ye children worthy of a mighty sire, nor yet in any way attempt to innovate, nor leave the whole of--this--My world without your active service.

"For now another efflux of My nature is among you, and he shall be a pious supervisor of all deeds--judge incorruptible of living men and monarch absolute of those beneath the earth, not only striking terror--into them--but taking vengeance on them. And by his class of birth the fate he hath deserved shall follow every man."

And so the elements did cease from their complaint, upon the master's order, and they held their peace; and each of them continued in the exercise of his authority and in his rule.

36. And Horus thereon said:

How was it, mother, then, that earth received God's efflux?

And Isis said:

I may not tell the story of--this--birth; for it is not permitted to describe the origin of thy descent, O Horus--son--of mighty power, lest afterwards the way-of-birth of the immortal Gods should be known unto men,--except so far that God the monarch, the universal orderer and architect, sent for a little while thy mighty sire Osiris, and the mightiest Goddess Isis, that they might help the world, for all things needed them.

'Tis they who filled life full of life. 'Tis they who caused the savagery of mutual slaughtering of men to cease. 'Tis they who hallowed precincts to the gods their ancestors and spots for holy rites. 'Tis they who gave to men laws, food, and shelter.

'Tis they who will, says Hermes, learn to know the secrets of my records all, and will make separation of them; and some they will keep for themselves, while those that are best suited for the benefit of mortal men, they will engrave on tablet and on obelisk.

'Tis they who were the first to set up courts of law; and filled the world with justice and fair rule. 'Tis they who were the authors of good pledges and of faith, and brought the mighty witness of an oath into men's lives.

'Tis they who taught men how to wrap up those who ceased to live, as they should be.

'Tis they who searched into the cruelty of death, and learned that though the spirit which goes out longs to return into men's bodies, yet if it ever fail to have the power of getting back again, then loss of life results.

'Tis they who learned from Hermes that surrounding space was filled with daimons, and graved on hidden stones--the hidden teaching--.

'Tis they alone who, taught by Hermes in God's hidden codes, became the authors of the arts, and sciences, and all pursuits which men do practice, and givers of the laws.

'Tis they who, taught by Hermes that the things below have been disposed of by God to be in sympathy with things above, established on the earth the sacred rites o'er which the mysteries in Heaven preside.

'Tis they who, knowing the destructibility of--mortal--frames, devised the grade of prophets, in all things perfected, in order that no prophet who stretched forth his hands unto the Gods, should be in ignorance of anything, that magic and philosophy should feed the soul, and medicine preserve the body when it suffered pain.

38. And having done all this, my son, Osiris and myself perceiving that the world was--now--quite full, were thereupon demanded back by those who dwell in Heaven, but could not go above until he had made appeal unto the monarch, that surrounding space might with this knowledge of the soul be filled as well, and we ourselves succeed in making our ascent acceptable--to Him-- . . . For that God doth in hymns rejoice.

Ay, mother, Horus said. On me as well bestow the knowledge of this hymn, that I may not remain in ignorance.

And Isis said: Give ear, O son!

THE VIRGIN OF THE WORLD--II

39. Now if thou wouldst, O son of mighty soul, know aught beside, ask on!

And Horus said: O mother of great honour, I would know how royal souls are born?

And Isis said: Son Horus, the distinction which marks out the royal souls is somewhat of this kind.

Four regions are there in the universe which fall beneath a law and leadership which cannot be transgressed--heaven, and the æther, and the air, and the most holy earth.

Above in Heaven, son, the gods do dwell, o'er whom with all the rest doth rule the Architect of all; and in the æther--dwell--the stars o'er whom the mighty light-giver the sun holds sway; but in the air--live--only souls, o'er whom doth rule the moon; and on the earth--do dwell--men and the rest of living things, o'er whom he who doth happen to be king holds sway.

40. The gods engender, son, the kings it has deserved, to rule--the race--that lives on earth. The rulers are the emanations of the king, of whom the nearer to him is more royal than the rest; for that the sun, in that 'tis nearer than the moon to God, is far more vast and potent, to whom the moon comes second both in rank and power.

The king, then, is the last of all the other gods, but first of men; and so long as he is upon the earth, he is divorced from his true godship, but hath something that doth distinguish him from men and which is like to God.

The soul which is sent down to dwell in him, is from that space which is above those regions whence--the souls--descend to other men. Down from that space the souls are sent to rule for those two reasons, son.

41. They who have run a noble, blameless race throughout the cycle of their lives, and are about to be changed into Gods--are born as kings--in order that by exercise of kingship they may train themselves to use the power the gods enjoy; while certain souls who are already gods, but have in some slight way infringed the rule of life which God inspired, are born as kings, in order that they may not, in being clothed in bodies, undergo the punishment of loss of dignity as well as nature, and that they may not, when they are enfleshed, have the same lot as other men, but have when bound what they enjoyed when free.

42. The differences which are, however, in the dispositions shown by those who play the part of kings, are not determined by distinguishing their souls, for these are all divine, but by the constitution of the angels and the daimons who attend on them. For that such souls as these descending for such purposes do not come down without a guard and escort, for justice up above knows how to give to each what is its due estate e'en though they be made exiles from their country ever fair.

When, then, my son, the angels and the daimons who bring down the soul are of a warlike kind, it has to keep firm hold of their proclivities, forgetting its own proper deeds, but all the more remembering the doings of the other host attached to it.

When they are peaceful, then the soul as well doth order its own course in peace.

When they love justice, then it too defends the right.

When they are music-lovers, then it also sings.

And when they are truth-lovers, then it also doth philosophise.

For as it were out of necessity these souls keep a firm hold of the proclivities of those that bring them here; for they are falling down to man's estate, forgetting their own nature, and the farther they depart from it, the more they have in memory the disposition of those--powers--which shut them--into bodies--.

43. Well hast thou, mother, all explained, said Horus. But noble souls,--how they are born, thou hast not told me yet.

As on earth, son Horus, there are states which differ one from other, so also is it in the case of souls. For they have regions whence they start; and that which starts from a more glorious place, hath nobler birth than one which doth not so. For just as among men the free is thought more noble than the slave--for that which is superior in souls and of a ruling nature of necessity subjects what is inferior--so also, son . . .

44. And how are male and female souls produced?

Souls, Horus, son, are of the self-same nature in themselves, in that they are from one and the same place where the Creator modeled them; nor male nor female are they.
Sex is a thing of bodies, not of souls.

That which brings it about that some of them are stouter, some more delicate, is, son, that--cosmic--"air" in which all things are made. "Air" for the soul is nothing but the body which envelops it, an element which is composed of earth and water, air and fire.

As, then, the composition of the female ones has more of wet and cold, but less of dry and warm, accordingly the soul which is shut in a plasm of this kind becomes relaxed and delicate, just as the contrary is found to be in case of males.

For in their case there's more of dry and warm, and less of cold and wet; wherefore the souls in bodies such as these are sturdy and more active.

45. And bow do souls become intelligent, O mother mine?

And Isis answered:

The organ of the sight, my son, is swathed in wrappings. When these are dense and thick, the eye is dim, but when they're thin and light, then is the sight most keen. So also is it for the soul. For it as well has envelopes incorporal appropriate to it, just as it is itself incorporal. These envelopes are "airs" which are in us. When these are light and thin and clear, then is the soul intelligent, but, on the contrary, when they are dense and thick and turbid, then--the soul--, as in bad weather, sees not at distance but only things which lie about its feet.

46. And Horus said:

What is the reason, mother, that the men outside our holiest land are not so wise of mind as our compatriots?

And Isis said:

The earth lies in the middle of the universe upon her back, like to a human being, with eyes turned up to heaven, and portioned out into as many regions as there are limbs in man.

She turns her eyes to heaven as though to her own sire, that with his changes she may also bring about her own.

She hath her head set to the south of all, right shoulder to southeast, left shoulder to southwest; her feet below the Bear, right foot beneath its tail, left under its head; her thighs beneath those that succeed the Bear; her waist beneath the middle--stars--.

47. A sign of this is that men in the south, who dwell upon her head, are fine about the head and have good hair. Those in the east are ready for a fight and archer folk--for this pertains to the right hand.

Those in the west are steadier and for the most part fight with the left hand, and what is done by others with the right, they for their part attribute to the left.

Those beneath the Bear excel in feet and have especially good legs.

Those who come after them a little way, about the zone which is our present Italy, and Greece, they all have well made thighs and backs . . .

Moreover, all these--northern--parts being whiter than the rest bear whiter men upon them,

'But since the holiest land of our forebears lies in the midst of earth, and that the midst of a man's body serves as the precinct of the heart alone, and heart's the spot from which the soul doth start, the men of it not only have no less the other things which all the rest possess, but as a special thing are gifted with intelligence beyond all men and filled with wisdom, in that they are begotten and brought up above her heart.

48. Further, my son, the south being the receiver of the clouds which mass themselves together from the atmosphere . . .

For instance, it is just because there is this concentration of them in the south, that it is said our river doth flow thence, upon the breaking up of the frost there.

For whensoever a cloud descends, it turns the air about it into mist, and sends it downward in a kind of fog; and fog or mist is an impediment not only to the eyes, but also to the mind.

Whereas the east, O Horus, great in glory, in that 'tis thrown into confusion and made over-hot by the continual risings of the sun, and in like fashion too, the west, its opposite, in that it suffers the same things through its descents, afford the men born in them no conditions for clear observation. And Boreas with his concordant cold, together with their bodies doth congeal the minds of men as well.

Whereas the centre of all these being pure and undisturbed, foreknows both for itself and all that are in it. For, free from trouble, ever it brings forth, adorns and educates, and only with such weapons wars--on men--, and wins the victory, and with consummate skill, like a good satrap, bestows the fruit of its own victory upon the vanquished.

49. This too expound, O lady, mother of mine! For what cause is it that when men still keep alive in long disease, their rational part--their very reason and their very soul--at times becomes disabled?

And Isis answer made:

Of living things, my son, some are made friends with fire, and some with water, some with air, and some with earth, and some with two or three of these, and some with all.

And, on the contrary, again some are made enemies of fire, and some of water, some of earth, and some of air, and some of two of them, and some of three, and some of all.

For instance, son, the locust and all flies flee fire; the eagle and the hawk and all high-flying birds flee water; fish, air and earth; the snake avoids the open air. Whereas snakes and all creeping things love earth; all swimming things--love--water; winged things, air, of which they are the citizens; while those that fly still higher--love--the fire and have the habitat near it. Not that some of the animals as well do not love fire; for instance salamanders, for they even have their homes in it. It is because one or another of the elements doth form their bodies' outer envelope.

50. Each soul, accordingly, while it is in its body is weighted and constricted by these four.

Moreover it is natural it also should be pleased with some of them and pained with others.

For this cause, then, it doth not reach the height of its prosperity; still, as it is divine by nature, e'en while--wrapped up--in them, it struggles and it thinks, though not such thoughts as it would think were it set free from being bound in bodies.

Moreover if these--frames--are swept with storm and stress, or of disease or fear, then is the soul itself tossed on the waves, as man upon the deep with nothing steady under him.