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Esotericism

Kore Kosmou

(The Virgin of the World)

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Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus (English translation by G. R. S. Mead)

G. R. S. Mead (1906)

Credits

Author	Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus (English translation by G. R. S. Mead)
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About:

The Kore Kosmou is the longest of the Hermetic texts that have come down to us only in excerpts, preserved in the anthology compiled by John of Stobi (Stobaeus) in the 5th century.

The Greek title can be read as "The Virgin of the World" or "The Pupil of the World", and its exact sense is still debated.

Written in Roman Egypt between the 2nd and 3rd centuries, like the Corpus Hermeticum and the Asclepius, it takes the form of a discourse by Isis to her son Horus.

Isis tells how Hermes hid his sacred books before ascending to heaven; how God created Nature and formed the souls from a mixture of His breath with fire; how the souls, disobeying, overstepped their limits and were punished by being shut into human bodies, amid laments; how Momus, the spirit of criticism, warned Hermes about the daring of men; and how the Elements complained to God of human violence, until He sent Osiris and Isis to civilise the world.

The second part explains the birth of royal souls, the difference between male and female souls, intelligence, and the influence of the regions of the Earth on peoples.

The English translation is by G. R. S. Mead (1863–1933), in Thrice-Greatest Hermes, vol. III (1906), excerpts XXV and XXVI. Each passage is one of Mead's numbered sections; his numbering jumps from 36 to 38.

The hymn Isis announces at the end of the first part has not survived, and the second part also has a gap; Mead's asterisks mark both places. The notes and the source references are not included.

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THE VIRGIN OF THE WORLD I

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1 So speaking Isis doth pour forth for Horus the sweet draught (the first) of deathlessness 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.

1.2 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.

1.3 Wherefore the [mysteries] below did sigh, 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 the Loves, and freely poured the splendour 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.

2.2 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.

3.2 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.)

5.2 Thus then he said: "O holy books, who have been made by my immortal hands, by incorruption's magic spells, . . . free from decay throughout eternity remain and incorrupt from time! Become unseeable, unfindable, 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."

5.3 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.

7.2 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.

7.3 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 thinking 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 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 Psychōsis, 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 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.

11.2 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.

11.3 "For you, if ye keep steadfast, the Heaven, with the star-order, and thrones I have ordained full-filled 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.

12.2 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 daimones. 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."

13.2 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 procreative breath of all the things which were for ever generally to be.

13.3 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, 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.

14.2 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 over-busy 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 for ever moving, and thought that being ever stationed in one place was death.

15.2 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.

15.3 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 it be seen in 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.

16.2 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 for them. Cronus announced himself already sire of Justice and Necessity.

17.2 Zeus said: "So that the race which is to be may not for ever fight, already for them have I made Fortune, and Hope, and Peace." Ares declared he had become already sire of Struggle, Wrath, and Strife.

17.3 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.

17.4 "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.

17.5 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.

18.2 "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 enfleshed. "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 art being told the Mystic Spectacle which Kamēphis, our forefather, was privileged to hear from Hermes, record-writer of all deeds, and I from Kamēphis, most ancient of [us] all, when he did honour me with the Black [Rite] that gives perfection; hear thou it now from me!

19.2 For when, O wondrous son of mighty fame, if they were about to be shut in their prisons, some simply uttered wails and groans—in just the self-same way as beasts that once have been at 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 circumstance should serve, will even do to death those that oppress them.

19.3 Others with louder outcry hissed like snakes; another one 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?

20.2 How many are the things we have to do in this our hopeless plight, necessities to furnish for this watery frame that is so 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 sighs,—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.

21.2 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!

21.3 "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 unageing 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 attach itself to you, ye shall dwell in the place that Destiny allots, condemned to mortal wombs.

22.2 "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 sigh 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 ye shall will what's worthy of your birth.

23.2 "For I, 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.

23.3 "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, skilful 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].

24.2 "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 is the nature of the Gods.

24.3 "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 the Earth uprose a very Mighty Spirit which no mass of body could contain, whose strength consisted in his intellect.

25.2 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?"

25.3 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 free 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, desiring to find out how they were made.

26.2 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 height, desiring to observe the nature of the motion of the Heaven.

26.3 "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 all care.

27.2 "Then will they not gird on the armour of an over-busy daring up to Heaven? Will they not, then, reach out their souls freed 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.

27.3 "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 grievest, dost thou, Horus, son, to hear thy mother put these things in words? Art thou not struck with wonder, art thou not terror-struck at how poor man was grievously oppressed? Hear what is sadder

still!

28.2 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.

28.3 "Wherefore the overseer of His command will be the keen-eyed Goddess of the all, Adrasteia; and I will skilfully 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.

29.2 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 Æon, through whom all universal things will never weary grow surrendering themselves in turn 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.

29.3 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 adornments that bedeck her round on every side.

30.2 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 art 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 beginnings 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 of their high birth, and when held back, 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.

31.2 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.

31.3 The evil now being very great, the Elements approached the 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.

32.2 "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 Air too said: "I also, Master, 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 from above 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, from 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.

34.2 "I hold in my embrace as well 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 am I dishonoured. The world upon the Earth though filled with all things [else] hath not a God.

34.3 "For having naught to fear they sin in everything, and from my heights, O Lord, down [dead] they fall by every evil art. And soaking with the juices of their carcases 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.

34.4 "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, fullfilling 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."

35.2 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 practise, and givers of their laws. 'Tis they who, taught by Hermes that the things below have been disposed 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 till we 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]. . . .

38.2 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! * * * * *

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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.

39.2 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.

39.3 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.

40.2 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.

42.2 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.

42.3 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.

42.4 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 philosophize.

42.5 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 the 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.

43.2 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 modelled them; nor male nor female are they. Sex is a thing of bodies, not of souls.

44.2 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 envelopes it, an element which is composed of earth and water, air and fire.

44.3 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.

44.4 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 how 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 is it also for the soul. For it as well has envelopes incorporal appropriate to it, just as it is itself incorporal.

45.2 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.

46.2 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 south-east, left shoulder to south-west; 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.

47.2 Those underneath 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.

47.3 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.

48.2 For whensoe'er 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.

48.3 Whereas the east, O Horus, great in glory, in that 'tis thrown into confusion and made overhot 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.

48.4 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.

48.5 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 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?

49.2 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.

49.3 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.

49.4 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 their 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.

50.2 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.

50.3 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.

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