

# The Lament of Hermes

Trismegistus:

“Do you not know, Asclepius, that Egypt is an image of heaven, or, to speak more exactly, in Egypt all the operations of the powers which rule and work in heaven have been transferred to earth below?”

Nay, it should rather be said that the whole Kosmos dwells in this our land as in its sanctuary. And yet, since it is fitting that wise men should have knowledge of all events before they come to pass, you must not be left in ignorance of this: there will come a time when it will be seen that in vain have the Egyptians honoured the deity with heartfelt piety and assiduous service; and all our holy worship will be found bootless and ineffectual. For the gods will return from earth to heaven.

Egypt will be forsaken, and the land which was once the home of religion will be left desolate, bereft of the presence of its deities.

This land and region will be filled with foreigners; not only will men neglect the service of the gods, but ... ; and Egypt will be occupied by Scythians or Indians or by some such race from the barbarian countries thereabout. In that day will our most holy land, this land of shrines and temples, be filled with funerals and corpses. To thee, most holy Nile, I cry, to thee I foretell that which shall be; swollen with torrents of blood, thou wilt rise to the level of thy banks, and thy sacred waves will be not only stained, but utterly fouled with gore.

Do you weep at this, Asclepius? There is worse to come; Egypt herself will have yet more to suffer; she will fall into a far more piteous plight, and will be infected with yet more, grievous plagues; and this land, which once was holy, a land which loved the gods, and wherein alone, in reward for her devotion, the gods deigned to sojourn upon earth, a land which was the teacher of mankind in holiness and piety, this land will go beyond all in cruel deeds. The dead will far outnumber the living; and the survivors will be known for Egyptians by their tongue alone, but in their actions they will seem to be men of another race.

O Egypt, Egypt, of thy religion nothing will remain but an empty tale, which thine own children in time to come will not believe; nothing will be left but graven words, and only the stones will tell of thy piety. And in that day men will be weary of life, and they will cease to think the universe worthy of reverent wonder and of worship. And so religion, the greatest of all blessings, for there is nothing, nor has been, nor ever shall be, that can be deemed a greater boon, will be threatened with destruction; men will think it a burden, and will come to scorn it. They will no longer love this world around us, this incomparable work of God, this glorious structure which he has built, this sum of good made up of things of many diverse forms, this instrument whereby the will of God operates in that which he has

made, ungrudgingly favouring man's welfare, this combination and accumulation of all the manifold things that can call forth the veneration, praise, and love of the beholder.

Darkness will be preferred to light, and death will be thought more profitable than life; no one will raise his eyes to heaven ; the pious will be deemed insane, and the impious wise; the madman will be thought a brave man, and the wicked will be esteemed as good. As to the soul, and the belief that it is immortal by nature, or may hope to attain to immortality, as I have taught you, all this they will mock at, and will even persuade themselves that it is false. No word of reverence or piety, no utterance worthy of heaven and of the gods of heaven, will be heard or believed.

And so the gods will depart from mankind, a grievous thing!, and only evil angels will remain, who will mingle with men, and drive the poor wretches by main force into all manner of reckless crime, into wars, and robberies, and frauds, and all things hostile to the nature of the soul. Then will the earth no longer stand unshaken, and the sea will bear no ships; heaven will not support the stars in their orbits, nor will the stars pursue their constant course in heaven; all voices of the gods will of necessity be silenced and dumb; the fruits of the earth will rot; the soil will turn barren, and the very air will sicken in sullen stagnation. After this manner will old age come upon the world. Religion will be no more; all things will be disordered and awry; all good will disappear.

But when all this has befallen, Asclepius, then the Master and Father, God, the first before all, the maker of that god who first came into being, will look on that which has come to pass, and will stay the disorder by the counterworking of his will, which is the good. He will call back to the right path those who have gone astray; he will cleanse the world from evil, now washing it away with water-floods, now burning it out with fiercest fire, or again expelling it by war and pestilence. And thus he will bring back his world to its former aspect, so that the Kosmos will once more be deemed worthy of worship and wondering reverence, and God, the maker and restorer of the mighty fabric, will be adored by the men of that day with unceasing hymns of praise and blessing.

Such is the new birth of the Kosmos; it is a making again of all things good, a holy and awe-striking restoration of all nature; and it is wrought in the process of time by the eternal will of God. For Gods will has no beginning; it is ever the same, and as it now is, even so it has ever been, without beginning. For it is the very being of God to purpose good.”