



THE KINGDOM OF THE EARTH¹

LONG, long ago a Gypsy king, old and blind, but dowered with ancestral wisdom beyond all men that have lived, heard that the Son of God was born among men. He rose from his place, and on the eve of the third day, he came to where Jesus sat among the gifts brought by the wise men of the East. The little Lad sat in Mary's lap beneath a tree filled with quiet light; and while the folk of Bethlehem came and went He was only a Child as other children are. But when the Gypsy king drew near, the Child's eyes deepened with knowledge.

'What is it, my little Son?' said Mary the Virgin.

'Sure, mother dear,' said Jesus, who had never yet spoken word, 'is it Deep Knowledge that is coming to me?'

'And what will that be, O my Wonder and Glory?'

'That which will come in at the door before you speak to me again.'

Even as the Child spoke, an old blind man entered, and bowed his head.

'Come near, O tired old man,' said Mary that had borne a son to Joseph, but whose womb knew him not.

¹ From 'The Washer of the Ford.'

With that the tears fell into the old man's beard. 'Sorrow of sorrows,' he said, 'but that will be the voice of the Queen of Heaven!'

But Jesus said to His mother: 'Take up the tears, and throw them into the dark night.' And Mary did so; and lo! upon the wilderness, where no light was, and on the dark wave where seamen toiled without hope, clusters of shining stars rayed downward in a white peace. Thereupon the old king of the desert said:

'Heal me, O King of the Elements.'

And Jesus healed him. His sight was upon him again, and his grey ancientness was green youth once more.

'I have come with Deep Knowledge,' he said.

'Ay, sure, I am for knowing that,' said the King of the Elements, that was a little Child.

'Well, if you will be knowing that, you can tell who is at my right side?'

'It is my elder brother the Wind.'

'And what colour will the Wind be?'

'Now blue as Hope, now green as Compassion.'

'And who is on my left?'

'The Shadow of Life.'

'And what colour will the Shadow be?'

'That which is woven out of the bowels of the earth and out of the belly of the sea.'

'Truly, thou art the King of the Elements. I am bringing you a great gift, I am: I have come with Deep Knowledge.'

And with that the old blind man, whose eyes were now as stars, and whose youth was a green garland about him, chanted nine runes.

The First Rune was the Rune of the Four Winds:

The Second Rune was the Rune of the Deep Seas:

The Third Rune was the Rune of the Lochs and Rivers and the Rains and the Dews and the many waters:

The Fourth Rune was the Rune of the Green Trees and of all things that grow:

The Fifth Rune was the Rune of Man and Bird and Beast, and of everything that lives and moves, in the air, on the earth, and in the sea: all that is seen of man, and all that is unseen of man:

The Sixth Rune was the Rune of Birth, from the spawn on the wave to the Passion of Woman:

The Seventh Rune was the Rune of Death, from the quenching of a gnat to the fading of the stars:

The Eighth Rune was the Rune of the Soul that dieth not, and the Spirit that is:

The Ninth Rune was the Rune of the mud and the dross, and the slime of Evil—that is the Garden of God, wherein He walks with sunlight streaming from the palms of His hands, and with stars springing beneath His feet:

Then when he had done, the old man said: 'I have brought you Deep Knowledge.' But at that Jesus the Child said:

'All this I heard on my way hither.'

The old Desert king bowed his head. Then he took a blade of grass, and played upon it. It was a wild strange air that he played.

'Iosa mac Dhè, tell the woman what song that is,' cried the Gypsy king.

'It is the secret speech of the Wind that is my brother,' cried the Child, clapping His hands for joy.

'And what will this be?'—and with that the old man took a green leaf, and played a lovely whispering song.

'It is the secret speech of the leaves,' cried Jesus the little Lad, laughing low.

And thereafter the Gypsy king played upon a handful of dust and upon a drop of water, and upon a flame of fire: and the Child laughed for the knowing and the joy. Then he gave the secret speech of the singing bird, and the barking fox, and the howling wolf, and the bleating sheep: of all and every created kind.

'O King of the Elements,' he said then, 'for sure you knew much, but now I have made you to know the secret things of the green Earth that is Mother of you and of Mary too.' But while Jesus pondered that one mystery the old man was gone: and when he got to his people they put him alive into a hollow of the earth and covered him up—because of his shining eyes, and the green youth that was about him as a garland.

And when Christ was nailed upon the Cross, Deep Knowledge went back into the green world, and passed into the grass and the sap in trees, and the flowing wind, and the dust that swirls and is gone.

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