

A New Heaven and a New Earth

As Foreshadowed in
Lord Dunsany's *The Gods of Pegana*

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The mills of Gods grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small. Whether it is the War or—"Progress!"—the big men are coming into their own. Lord Dunsany was the sensation of the past season; and it is only his beginning. He will be seen in his true image before another five years are gone. He is the coming man. The more he is understood, the greater he will appear. He is still a young man, a fine sportsman, a brave soldier, wounded cheerfully and asking for more; no crank, yet his ideas are colossal; they surpass the so-called "realists" as heaven surpasses earth.

For to him earth offers no illusions; he knows that his own world is the true one. Well for us if we can join him; if we can leave the jingle-jangle of matter for the gorgeous music of the spirit.

To Lord Dunsany all things have personality, genius, voice. The Desert is an entity more concrete and vital than a Soap Combine; the wind that blows from Kragua and the bleak unknown lands behind it is as near as a brother. His success is due to the fact that people are beginning to perceive with intuition, with the Eye of Truth. And, no doubt of it, he himself found Truth in the mystic bogs of Ireland, the amorous and inexorable wastes and palaces of Hindustan. While he was yet a boy, he was carried away by the fairies, and taught the Ultimate Secrets. Now he is giving them to us; and we are taking them, slowly but with ineffable delight, under the veil of his art, as a woman at a masked ball accepts the arm of a cavalier who may be—the King!

It will be interesting to look at his "conversion" in its early stage; to see what came of him in essence, before it was transmitted into an art so gracious and intelligible. For like all the prophets and the poets, Truth came to him at first obscure and fantastic, an hieroglyph. Today, in the light of the Rosetta Stone of his plays, we may reach back, and lay reverent lips upon his soul itself.

Schopenhauer, in one of his hawk perceptions, cried that the greatest of all artists was he who created a new order of gods. For by the gods we mean not principles in man, things too deep to be individual, perhaps four-dimensional objects whose manifestations, diverse as they may be, are yet somehow recognizable as parts of some obscure entity beyond the veil, unintelligible to us so long as we cannot put together all the pieces in the puzzle.

As the years go by, and man learns more and more of his surroundings and contents, he revises the list of his gods. The cave-man was quite content with a god or so who kept him warm, the sun, fire, a tree, and others who supplied him with food, gods of the corn or of the reindeer. The savage cannibals who discovered the thrills of war, and carried the game on even in peace by human sacrifice, were pleased to recognize their ideas in a Yod-heh- vau-heh or a Quetzlacotal. The philosophical Indians invented Brahma; the best of the Chinese avoided the snare of anthropomorphism, but they made mathematical laws the rulers of the universe. The oldest book in the world, the Yi Ching, is a treatise on the combination of two things taken six at a time.

Now, since every order of gods is an analysis of the human mind, it follows that the creations of human genius develop on what are really religious lines. Chinese art is mathematical in its inevitability and in its independence of time and place; Egyptian art compromises with passion; Greek art, taking one step further, becomes wholly human. At the other end of the scale we find Catholic art, purely romantic or emotional.

Thus, reversing the process, from any given art we can divine the moral and philosophical principles which are at its source. Let us ask ourselves why the plays of Lord Dunsany have that quality which separates them so wholly from other contemporary masterpieces. One might suspect the author of having achieved that colossal task with whose consideration we began, of having made "a new heaven and a new earth." And we should be right. His first book, the book of his boyhood, a book which very few people have read, and fewer still have understood, is a complete, original, theophany.

The modest dimensions of this book, *The Gods of Pegana*, its intensely artistic form, the super-simplicity of its language, all have tended to hide it from the general public. But it is incomparably the greatest work of Lord Dunsany's genius. If it were translated into philosophical terms, it would astonish the world of metaphysics. Its complications are all-embracing as all-penetrating. Here's for a glimpse of them!

Long before the Beginnings of Things Chance or Fate—nobody knows which—strode through the mists to Mana-Yood-Sushai and put the creative power in his hands. And he made gods for his pleasure, and went to sleep. While he slept the gods made toys for their amusement—ultimately one of them, Kib, made man. Then other gods arose to join Kib in his game, Sish, with his hound Time, and Mung, with Death. We cannot give a full idea of the scheme without reprinting the book; for the author did not waste a word; but—observe the size of the units in which Lord Dunsany thinks! Later on he gives ideas of life and man, close, concentrated, penetrating, essential; but from cover to cover the reader may have prescience of the end. For—here we come close to the legend of Shiva in Hindu philosophy—a time will come when Mana-Yood-Sushai shall wake, and Time and Space, and all the immortal gods, shall be as they have never been, and what then? Is all bent in a closed curve? Shall we come suddenly upon remembered

things, wheel through the aeons of forgetfulness, and find ourselves as we were long ago—as we have always been, did we but know it? In that small quarto are many suggestions as to the real nature of things, intense, profound, prehensile—every one fascinating as Death itself. The mind is constantly withdrawn from the book itself, and goes star-hunting with the gods. Almost every sentence is the plan, so to speak, of a vision far more glorious than any opium or hashish could give.

If ever a book of magic were written, it is this. It challenges even *Liber Legis* and its pendant *The Vision and the Voice* by reason of its intense atmosphere of art. Those other books are much more serious, more scientific; they recreate their readers, drive them forward in a new channel of life. But *The Gods of Pegana* has no such urge; you can read it without acting according to its motions; like a Chinese bowl, it is pure art, a thing to contemplate forever. And this is just the reason why our modern dreamer-philosophers should make this bibelot a bible!