

THE TABLES OF THE LAW, &  
THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI  
BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

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THE TABLES OF THE LAW



## THE TABLES OF THE LAW

### I

‘WILL you permit me, Aherne,’ I said, ‘to ask you a question, which I have wanted to ask you for years, and have not asked because we have grown nearly strangers? Why did you refuse the berretta, and almost at the last moment? When you and I lived together, you cared neither for wine, women, nor money, and had thoughts for nothing but theology and mysticism.’ I had watched through dinner for a moment to put my question, and ventured now, because he had thrown off a little of the reserve and indifference which, ever since his last return from Italy, had taken the place of our once close friendship. He had just questioned me, too, about certain private and almost sacred things, and my frankness had earned, I thought, a like frankness from him.

When I began to speak he was lifting to his lips a glass of that old wine which he could choose so well and valued so little; and while I spoke, he set

it slowly and meditatively upon the table and held it there, its deep red light dyeing his long delicate fingers. The impression of his face and form, as they were then, is still vivid with me, and is inseparable from another and fanciful impression: the impression of a man holding a flame in his naked hand. He was to me, at that moment, the supreme type of our race, which, when it has risen above, or is sunken below, the formalisms of half-education and the rationalisms of conventional affirmation and denial, turns away, unless my hopes for the world and for the Church have made me blind, from practicable desires and intuitions towards desires so unbounded that no human vessel can contain them, intuitions so immaterial that their sudden and far-off fire leaves heavy darkness about hand and foot. He had the nature, which is half monk, half soldier of fortune, and must needs turn action into dreaming, and dreaming into action; and for such there is no order, no finality, no contentment in this world. When he and I had been students in Paris, we had belonged to a little group which devoted itself to speculations about alchemy and mysticism. More orthodox in most of his beliefs than Michael Robartes, he had surpassed

him in a fanciful hatred of all life, and this hatred had found expression in the curious paradox—half borrowed from some fanatical monk, half invented by himself—that the beautiful arts were sent into the world to overthrow nations, and finally life herself, by sowing everywhere unlimited desires, like torches thrown into a burning city. This idea was not at the time, I believe, more than a paradox, a plume of the pride of youth; and it was only after his return to Ireland that he endured the fermentation of belief which is coming upon our people with the reawakening of their imaginative life.

Presently he stood up, saying: 'Come, and I will show you, for you at any rate will understand,' and taking candles from the table, he lit the way into the long paved passage that led to his private chapel. We passed between the portraits of the Jesuits and priests—some of no little fame—his family had given to the Church; and engravings and photographs of pictures that had especially moved him; and the few paintings his small fortune, eked out by an almost penurious abstinence from the things most men desire, had enabled him to buy in his travels. The pictures that I knew

best, for they had hung there longest, whether reproductions or originals, were of the Sienese School, which he had studied for a long time, claiming that it alone of the schools of the world pictured not the world but what is revealed to saints in their dreams and visions. The Sienese alone among Italians, he would say, could not or would not represent the pride of life, the pleasure in swift movement or sustaining strength, or voluptuous flesh. They were so little interested in these things that there often seemed to be no human body at all under the robe of the saint, but they could represent by a bowed head, or uplifted face, man's reverence before Eternity as no others could, and they were at their happiest when mankind had dwindled to a little group silhouetted upon a golden abyss, as if they saw the world habitually from far off. When I had praised some school that had dipped deeper into life, he would profess to discover a more intense emotion than life knew in those dark outlines. 'Put even Francesca, who felt the supernatural as deeply,' he would say, 'beside the work of Siena, and one finds a faint impurity in his awe, a touch of ghostly terror, where love and humbleness had best been all.' He had



often told me of his hope that by filling his mind with those holy pictures he would help himself to attain at last to vision and ecstasy, and of his disappointment at never getting more than dreams of a curious and broken beauty. But of late he had added pictures of a different kind, French symbolistic pictures which he had bought for a few pounds from little-known painters, English and French pictures of the School of the English Pre-Raphaelites; and now he stood for a moment and said, 'I have changed my taste. I am fascinated a little against my will by these faces, where I find the pallor of souls trembling between the excitement of the flesh and the excitement of the spirit, and by landscapes that are created by heightening the obscurity and disorder of nature. These landscapes do not stir the imagination to the energies of sanctity but as to orgaic dancing and prophetic frenzy.' I saw with some resentment new images where the old ones had often made that long gray, dim, empty, echoing passage become to my eyes a vestibule of Eternity.

Almost every detail of the chapel, which we entered by a narrow Gothic door, whose threshold had been worn smooth by the secret worshippers

of the penal times, was vivid in my memory ; for it was in this chapel that I had first, and when but a boy, been moved by the mediævalism which is now, I think, the governing influence in my life. The only thing that seemed new was a square bronze box which stood upon the altar before the six unlighted candles and the ebony crucifix, and was like those made in ancient times of more precious substances to hold the sacred books. Aherne made me sit down on an oak bench, and having bowed very low before the crucifix, took the bronze box from the altar, and sat down beside me with the box upon his knees.

‘You will perhaps have forgotten,’ he said, ‘most of what you have read about Joachim of Flora, for he is little more than a name to even the well read. He was an abbot in Cortale in the twelfth century, and is best known for his prophecy, in a book called *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, that the Kingdom of the Father was passed, the Kingdom of the Son passing, the Kingdom of the Spirit yet to come. The Kingdom of the Spirit was to be a complete triumph of the Spirit, the *spiritualis intelligentia* he called it, over the dead letter. He had many followers among the more

extreme Franciscans, and these were accused of possessing a secret book of his called the *Liber Inducens in Evangelium Æternum*. Again and again groups of visionaries were accused of possessing this terrible book, in which the freedom of the Renaissance lay hidden, until at last Pope Alexander IV. had it found and cast into the flames. I have here the greatest treasure the world contains. I have a copy of that book ; and see what great artists have made the robes in which it is wrapped. The greater portion of the book itself is illuminated in the Byzantine style, which so few care for to-day, but which moves me because these tall, emaciated angels and saints seem to have less relation to the world about us than to an abstract pattern of flowing lines that suggest an imagination absorbed in the contemplation of Eternity. Even if you do not care for so formal an art, you cannot help seeing that work where there is so much gold, and of that purple colour which has gold dissolved in it, was valued at a great price in its day. But it was only at the Renaissance the labour was spent upon it which has made it the priceless thing it is. The wooden boards of the cover show by the astrological

allegories painted upon them, as by the style of painting itself, some craftsman of the school of Francesco Cossi of Ferrara, but the gold clasps and hinges are known to be the work of Benvenuto Cellini, who made likewise the bronze box and covered it with gods and demons, whose eyes are closed, to signify an absorption in the inner light.'

I took the book in my hands and began turning over the gilded, many-coloured pages, holding it close to the candle to discover the texture of the paper.

'Where did you get this amazing book?' I said. 'If genuine, and I cannot judge by this light, you have discovered one of the most precious things in the world.'

'It is certainly genuine,' he replied. 'When the original was destroyed, one copy alone remained, and was in the hands of a lute-player of Florence, and from him it passed to his son, and so from generation to generation until it came to the lute-player who was father to Benvenuto Cellini, and from Benvenuto Cellini to that Cardinal of Ferrara who released him from prison, and from him to a natural son, so from generation to generation, the story of its wandering passing on with it, until it

came into the possession of the family of Aretino, and to Giulio Aretino, an artist and worker in metals, and student of the kabalistic heresies of Pico della Mirandola. He spent many nights with me at Rome, discussing philosophy ; and at last I won his confidence so perfectly that he showed me this, his greatest treasure ; and, finding how much I valued it, and feeling that he himself was growing old and beyond the help of its teaching, he sold it to me for no great sum, considering its great preciousness.'

'What is the doctrine?' I said. 'Some mediæval straw-splitting about the nature of the Trinity, which is only useful to-day to show how many things are unimportant to us, which once shook the world?'

'I could never make you understand,' he said, with a sigh, 'that nothing is unimportant in belief, but even you will admit that this book goes to the heart. Do you see the tables on which the commandments were written in Latin?' I looked to the end of the room, opposite to the altar, and saw that the two marble tablets were gone, and that two large empty tablets of ivory, like large copies of the little tablets we set over our desks, had

taken their place. 'It has swept the commandments of the Father away,' he went on, 'and displaced the commandments of the Son by the commandments of the Holy Spirit. The first book is called *Fractura Tabularum*. In the first chapter it mentions the names of the great artists who made them graven things and the likeness of many things, and adored them and served them ; and the second the names of the great wits who took the name of the Lord their God in vain ; and that long third chapter, set with the emblems of sanctified faces, and having wings upon its borders, is the praise of breakers of the seventh day and wasters of the six days, who yet lived comely and pleasant days. Those two chapters tell of men and women who railed upon their parents, remembering that their god was older than the god of their parents ; and that which has the sword of Michael for an emblem commends the kings that wrought secret murder and so won for their people a peace that was *amore somnoque gravata et vestibus versicoloribus*, heavy with love and sleep and many-coloured raiment ; and that with the pale star at the closing has the lives of the noble youths who loved the wives of others and were transformed into memories,

which have transformed many poorer hearts into sweet flames; and that with the winged head is the history of the robbers who lived upon the sea or in the desert, lives which it compares to the twittering of the string of a bow, *nervi stridentis instar*; and those two last, that are fire and gold, are devoted to the satirists who bore false witness against their neighbours and yet illustrated eternal wrath, and to those that have coveted more than other men the house of God, and all things that are His, which no man has seen and handled, except in madness and in dreams.

‘The second book is called *Lex Secreta*, and describes the true inspiration of action, the only Eternal Evangel; and ends with a vision, which he saw among the mountains of La Sila, of his disciples sitting throned in the blue deep of the air, and laughing aloud, with a laughter that was like the rustling of the wings of Time: *Cælis in cæruleis ridentes sedebant discipuli mei super thronos: talis erat risus, qualis temporis pennati susurrus.*’

‘I know little of Joachim of Flora,’ I said, ‘except that Dante set him in Paradise among the great doctors. If he held a heresy so singular, I cannot understand how no rumours of it came to

the ears of Dante ; and Dante made no peace with the enemies of the Church.'

'Joachim of Flora acknowledged openly the authority of the Church, and even asked that all his published writings, and those to be published by his desire after his death, should be submitted to the censorship of the Pope. He considered that those whose work was to live and not to reveal were children and that the Pope was their Father ; but he taught in secret that certain others, and in always increasing numbers, were elected, not to live, but to reveal that hidden substance of God which is colour and music and softness and a sweet odour ; and that these have no father but the Holy Spirit. Just as poets and painters and musicians labour at their works, building them with lawless and lawful things alike, so long as they embody the beauty that is beyond the grave, these children of the Holy Spirit labour at their moments with eyes upon the shining substance on which Time has heaped the refuse of creation ; for the world only exists to be a tale in the ears of coming generations ; and terror and content, birth and death, love and hatred, and the fruit of the Tree, are but instruments for that supreme art which is



to win us from life and gather us into eternity like doves into their dove-cots.

‘I shall go away in a little while and travel into many lands, that I may know all accidents and destinies, and when I return will write my secret law upon those ivory tablets, just as poets and romance writers have written the principles of their art in prefaces ; and when I know what principle of life, discoverable at first by imagination and instinct, I am to express, I will gather my pupils that they may discover their law in the study of my law, as poets and painters discover their own art of expression by the study of some Master. I know nothing certain as yet but this—I am to become completely alive, that is, completely passionate, for beauty is only another name for perfect passion. I shall create a world where the whole lives of men shall be articulated and simplified as if seventy years were but one moment, or as they were the leaping of a fish or the opening of a flower.’

He was pacing up and down, and I listened to the fervour of his words and watched the excitement of his gestures with not a little concern. I had been accustomed to welcome the most singular speculations, and had always found them as harmless as

the Persian cat who half closes her meditative eyes and stretches out her long claws before my fire. But now I would battle in the interests of orthodoxy, even of the commonplace: and yet could find nothing better to say than: 'It is not necessary to judge everyone by the law, for we have also Christ's commandment of love.'

He turned and said, looking at me with shining eyes: 'Jonathan Swift made a soul for the gentlemen of this city by hating his neighbour as himself.'

'At any rate, you cannot deny that to teach so dangerous a doctrine is to accept a terrible responsibility.'

'Leonardo da Vinci,' he replied, 'has this noble sentence: "The hope and desire of returning home to one's former state is like the moth's desire for the light; and the man who with constant longing awaits each new month and new year, deeming that the things he longs for are ever too late in coming, does not perceive that he is longing for his own destruction." How, then, can the pathway which will lead us into the heart of God be other than dangerous? why should you, who are no materialist, cherish the continuity and order of the world as those do who have only the world? You

do not value the writers who will express nothing unless their reason understands how it will make what is called the right more easy ; why, then, will you deny a like freedom to the supreme art, the art which is the foundation of all arts? Yes, I shall send out of this chapel saints, lovers, rebels and prophets : souls who will surround themselves with peace, as with a nest made with grass ; and others over whom I shall weep. The dust shall fall for many years over this little box ; and then I shall open it ; and the tumults, which are, perhaps, the flames of the last day, shall come from under the lid.'

I did not reason with him that night, because his excitement was great and I feared to make him angry ; and when I called at his house a few days later, he was gone and his house was locked up and empty. I have deeply regretted my failure both to combat his heresy and to test the genuineness of his strange book. Since my conversion I have indeed done penance for an error which I was only able to measure after some years.

## II

I was walking along one of the Dublin quays, on the side nearest the river, about ten years after our conversation, stopping from time to time to turn over the books upon an old bookstall, and thinking, curiously enough, of the terrible destiny of Michael Robartes, and his brotherhood; when I saw a tall and bent man walking slowly along the other side of the quay. I recognized, with a start, in a lifeless mask with dim eyes, the once resolute and delicate face of Owen Aherne. I crossed the quay quickly, but had not gone many yards before he turned away, as though he had seen me, and hurried down a side street; I followed, but only to lose him among the intricate streets on the north side of the river. During the next few weeks I inquired of everybody who had once known him, but he had made himself known to nobody; and I knocked, without result, at the door of his old house; and had nearly persuaded myself that I was mistaken, when I saw him again in a narrow street behind the Four Courts, and followed him to the door of his house.

I laid my hand on his arm; he turned quite

without surprise ; and indeed it is possible that to him, whose inner life had soaked up the outer life, a parting of years was a parting from forenoon to afternoon. He stood holding the door half open, as though he would keep me from entering ; and would perhaps have parted from me without further words had I not said : ‘Owen Aherne, you trusted me once, will you not trust me again, and tell me what has come of the ideas we discussed in this house ten years ago?—but perhaps you have already forgotten them.’

‘You have a right to hear,’ he said, ‘for since I have told you the ideas, I should tell you the extreme danger they contain, or rather the boundless wickedness they contain ; but when you have heard this we must part, and part for ever, because I am lost, and must be hidden !’

I followed him through the paved passage, and saw that its corners were choked, and the pictures gray, with dust and cobwebs ; and that the dust and cobwebs which covered the ruby and sapphire of the saints on the window had made it very dim. He pointed to where the ivory tablets glimmered faintly in the dimness, and I saw that they were covered with small writing, and went up to them

and began to read the writing. It was in Latin, and was an elaborate casuistry, illustrated with many examples, but whether from his own life or from the lives of others I do not know. I had read but a few sentences when I imagined that a faint perfume had begun to fill the room, and turning round asked Owen Aherne if he were lighting the incense.

‘No,’ he replied, and pointed where the thurible lay rusty and empty on one of the benches; as he spoke the faint perfume seemed to vanish, and I was persuaded I had imagined it.

‘Has the philosophy of the *Liber Inducens in Evangelium Æternum* made you very unhappy?’ I said.

‘At first I was full of happiness,’ he replied, ‘for I felt a divine ecstasy, an immortal fire in every passion, in every hope, in every desire, in every dream; and I saw, in the shadows under leaves, in the hollow waters, in the eyes of men and women, its image, as in a mirror; and it was as though I was about to touch the Heart of God. Then all changed and I was full of misery, and I said to myself that I was caught in the glittering folds of an enormous serpent, and was falling with

him through a fathomless abyss, and that henceforth the glittering folds were my world; and in my misery it was revealed to me that man can only come to that Heart through the sense of separation from it which we call sin, and I understood that I could not sin, because I had discovered the law of my being, and could only express or fail to express my being, and I understood that God has made a simple and an arbitrary law that we may sin and repent!

He had sat down on one of the wooden benches and now became silent, his bowed head and hanging arms and listless body having more of dejection than any image I have met with in life or in any art. I went and stood leaning against the altar, and watched him, not knowing what I should say; and I noticed his black closely-buttoned coat, his short hair, and shaven head, which preserved a memory of his priestly ambition, and understood how Catholicism had seized him in the midst of the vertigo he called philosophy; and I noticed his lightless eyes and his earth-coloured complexion, and understood how she had failed to do more than hold him on the margin: and I was full of an anguish of pity.

‘It may be,’ he went on, ‘that the angels whose hearts are shadows of the Divine Heart, and whose bodies are made of the Divine Intellect, may come to where their longing is always by a thirst for the divine ecstasy, the immortal fire, that is in passion, in hope, in desire, in dreams ; but we whose hearts perish every moment, and whose bodies melt away like a sigh, must bow and obey !’

I went nearer to him and said : ‘Prayer and repentance will make you like other men.’

‘No, no,’ he said, ‘I am not among those for whom Christ died, and this is why I must be hidden. I have a leprosy that even eternity cannot cure. I have seen the whole, and how can I come again to believe that a part is the whole ? I have lost my soul because I have looked out of the eyes of the angels.’

Suddenly I saw, or imagined that I saw, the room darken, and faint figures robed in purple, and lifting faint torches with arms that gleamed like silver, bending, above Owen Aherne ; and I saw, or imagined that I saw, drops, as of burning gum, fall from the torches, and a heavy purple smoke, as of incense, come pouring from the flames and sweeping about us. Owen Aherne, more happy



than I who have been half initiated into the Order of the Alchemical Rose, and protected perhaps by his great piety, had sunk again into dejection and listlessness, and saw none of these things; but my knees shook under me, for the purple-robed figures were less faint every moment, and now I could hear the hissing of the gum in the torches. They did not appear to see me, for their eyes were upon Owen Aherne; and now and again I could hear them sigh as though with sorrow for his sorrow, and presently I heard words which I could not understand except that they were words of sorrow, and sweet as though immortal was talking to immortal. Then one of them waved her torch, and all the torches waved, and for a moment it was as though some great bird made of flames had fluttered its plumage, and a voice cried as from far up in the air: 'He has charged even his angels with folly, and they also bow and obey; but let your heart mingle with our hearts, which are wrought of divine ecstasy, and your body with our bodies, which are wrought of divine intellect.' And at that cry I understood that the Order of the Alchemical Rose was not of this earth, and that it was still seeking over this earth for what-

ever souls it could gather within its glittering net ; and when all the faces turned towards me, and I saw the mild eyes and the unshaken eyelids, I was full of terror, and thought they were about to fling their torches upon me, so that all I held dear, all that bound me to spiritual and social order, would be burnt up, and my soul left naked and shivering among the winds that blow from beyond this world and from beyond the stars ; and then a faint voice cried, ‘Why do you fly from our torches that were made out of the trees under which Christ wept in the Garden of Gethsemane ? Why do you fly from our torches that were made out of sweet wood, after it had perished from the world and come to us who made it of old times with our breath ?’

It was not until the door of the house had closed behind my flight, and the noise of the street was breaking on my ears, that I came back to myself and to a little of my courage ; and I have never dared to pass the house of Owen Aherne from that day, even though I believe him to have been driven into some distant country by the spirits whose name is legion, and whose throne is in the indefinite abyss, and whom he obeys and cannot see.

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI



## THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

I WAS sitting reading late into the night a little after my last meeting with Aherne, when I heard a light knocking on my front door. I found upon the doorstep three very old men with stout sticks in their hands, who said they had been told I should be up and about, and that they were to tell me important things. I brought them into my study, and when the peacock curtains had closed behind us, I set their chairs for them close to the fire, for I saw that the frost was on their great-coats of frieze and upon the long beards that flowed almost to their waists. They took off their great-coats, and leaned over the fire warming their hands, and I saw that their clothes had much of the country of our time, but a little also, as it seemed to me, of the town life of a more courtly time. When they had warmed themselves—and they warmed themselves, I thought, less because of the cold of the night than because of a pleasure in warmth for the sake of warmth—they turned towards me, so that the light of the lamp fell full upon their weather-

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beaten faces, and told the story I am about to tell. Now one talked and now another, and they often interrupted one another, with a desire like that of countrymen, when they tell a story, to leave no detail untold. When they had finished they made me take notes of whatever conversation they had quoted, so that I might have the exact words, and got up to go. When I asked them where they were going, and what they were doing, and by what names I should call them, they would tell me nothing, except that they had been commanded to travel over Ireland continually, and upon foot and at night, that they might live close to the stones and the trees and at the hours when the immortals are awake.

I have let some years go by before writing out this story, for I am always in dread of the illusions which come of that inquietude of the veil of the Temple, which M. Mallarmé considers a characteristic of our times ; and only write it now because I have grown to believe that there is no dangerous idea which does not become less dangerous when written out in sincere and careful English.

The three old men were three brothers, who had lived in one of the western islands from their early

manhood, and had cared all their lives for nothing except for those classical writers and old Gaelic writers who expounded an heroic and simple life; night after night in winter, Gaelic story-tellers would chant old poems to them over the poteen; and night after night in summer, when the Gaelic story-tellers were at work in the fields or away at the fishing, they would read to one another Virgil and Homer, for they would not enjoy in solitude, but as the ancients enjoyed. At last a man, who told them he was Michael Robartes, came to them in a fishing boat, like St. Brandan drawn by some vision and called by some voice; and spoke of the coming again of the gods and the ancient things; and their hearts, which had never endured the body and pressure of our time, but only of distant times, found nothing unlikely in anything he told them, but accepted all simply and were happy. Years passed, and one day, when the oldest of the old men, who travelled in his youth and thought sometimes of other lands, looked out on the grey waters, on which the people see the dim outline of the Islands of the Young—the Happy Islands where the Gaelic heroes live the lives of Homer's Phæacians—a voice came out of the air over the

waters and told him of the death of Michael Robartes. They were still mourning when the next oldest of the old men fell asleep while reading out the Fifth Eclogue of Virgil, and a strange voice spoke through him, and bid them set out for Paris, where a woman lay dying, who would reveal to them the secret names of the gods, which can be perfectly spoken only when the mind is steeped in certain colours and certain sounds and certain odours; but at whose perfect speaking the immortals cease to be cries and shadows, and walk and talk with one like men and women.

They left their island, at first much troubled at all they saw in the world, and came to Paris, and there the youngest met a person in a dream, who told him they were to wander about at hazard until those who had been guiding their footsteps had brought them to a street and a house, whose likeness was shown him in the dream. They wandered hither and thither for many days, but one morning they came into some narrow and shabby streets, on the south of the Seine, where women with pale faces and untidy hair looked at them out of the windows; and just as they were about to turn back because Wisdom could not



have alighted in so foolish a neighbourhood, they came to the street and the house of the dream. The oldest of the old men, who still remembered some of the modern languages he had known in his youth, went up to the door and knocked, but when he had knocked, the next in age to him said it was not a good house, and could not be the house they were looking for, and urged him to ask for some one they knew was not there and go away. The door was opened by an old overdressed woman, who said, 'O, you are her three kinsmen from Ireland. She has been expecting you all day.' The old men looked at one another and followed her upstairs, passing doors from which pale and untidy women thrust out their heads, and into a room where a beautiful woman lay asleep in a bed, with another woman sitting by her.

The old woman said: 'Yes they have come at last; now she will be able to die in peace,' and went out.

'We have been deceived by devils,' said one of the old men, 'for the immortals would not speak through a woman like this.'

'Yes,' said another, 'we have been deceived by devils, and we must go away quickly.'

‘Yes,’ said the third, ‘we have been deceived by devils, but let us kneel down for a little, for we are by the deathbed of one that has been beautiful.’ They knelt down, and the woman who sat by the bed, and seemed to be overcome with fear and awe, lowered her head. They watched for a little the face upon the pillow and wondered at its look, as of unquenchable desire, and at the porcelain-like refinement of the vessel in which so malevolent a flame had burned.

Suddenly the second oldest of them crowed like a cock, and until the room seemed to shake with the crowing. The woman in the bed still slept on in her death-like sleep, but the woman who sat by her head crossed herself and grew pale, and the youngest of the old men cried out: ‘A devil has gone into him, and we must begone or it will go into us also.’ Before they could rise from their knees a resonant chanting voice came from the lips that had crowed and said: ‘I am not a devil, but I am Hermes the Shepherd of the Dead, and I run upon the errands of the gods, and you have heard my sign, that has been my sign from the old days. Bow down before her from whose lips the secret names of the immortals, and of the things

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near their hearts, are about to come, that the immortals may come again into the world. Bow down, and understand that when they are about to overthrow the things that are to-day and bring the things that were yesterday, they have no one to help them, but one whom the things that are to-day have cast out. Bow down and very low, for they have chosen for their priestess this woman in whose heart all follies have gathered, and in whose body all desires have awaked; this woman who has been driven out of Time, and has lain upon the bosom of Eternity. After you have bowed down the old things shall be again, and another Argo shall carry heroes over sea, and another Achilles beleaguer another Troy.'

The voice ended with a sigh, and immediately the old man awoke out of sleep, and said: 'Has a voice spoken through me, as it did when I fell asleep over my Virgil, or have I only been asleep?'

The oldest of them said: 'A voice has spoken through you. Where has your soul been while the voice was speaking through you?'

'I do not know where my soul has been, but I dreamed I was under the roof of a manger, and I looked down and I saw an ox and an ass; and I

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saw a red cock perching on the hay-rack ; and a woman hugging a child ; and three old men, in armour, studded with rubies, kneeling with their heads bowed very low in front of the woman and the child. While I was looking the cock crowed and a man with wings on his heels swept up through the air, and as he passed me, cried out : " Foolish old men, you had once all the wisdom of the stars." I do not understand my dream or what it would have us do, but you who have heard the voice out of the wisdom of my sleep know what we have to do.'

Then the oldest of the old men told him they were to take the parchments they had brought with them out of their pockets and spread them on the ground. When they had spread them on the ground, they took out of their pockets their pens, made of three feathers, which had fallen from the wing of the old eagle that is believed to have talked of wisdom with St. Patrick.

'He meant, I think,' said the youngest, as he put their ink-bottles by the side of the rolls of parchment, 'that when people are good the world likes them and takes possession of them, and so eternity comes through people who are not good

or who have been forgotten. Perhaps Christianity was good and the world liked it, so now it is going away and the immortals are beginning to awake.'

'What you say has no wisdom,' said the oldest, 'because if there are many immortals, there cannot be only one immortal.'

Then the woman in the bed sat up and looked about her with wild eyes; and the oldest of the old men said: 'Lady, we have come to write down the secret names,' and at his words a look of great joy came into her face. Presently she began to speak slowly, and yet eagerly, as though she knew she had but a little while to live, and in the Gaelic of their own country; and she spoke to them many secret powerful names, and of the colours, and odours, and weapons, and instruments of music and instruments of handicraft belonging to the owners of those names; but most about the Sidhe of Ireland and of their love for the Cauldron, and the Whetstone, and the Sword, and the Spear. Then she tossed feebly for a while and moaned, and when she spoke again it was in so faint a murmur that the woman who sat by the bed leaned down to listen, and while she was listening the spirit went out of the body.

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Then the oldest of the old men said in French to the woman who was still bending over the bed : 'There must have been yet one name which she had not given us, for she murmured a name while the spirit was going out of the body,' and the woman said, 'She was but murmuring over the name of a symbolist painter she was fond of. He used to go to something he called the Black Mass, and it was he who taught her to see visions and to hear voices. She met him for the first time a few months ago, and we have had no peace from that day because of her talk about visions and about voices. Why ! it was only last night that I dreamed I saw a man with a red beard and red hair, and dressed in red, standing by my bedside. He held a rose in one hand, and tore it in pieces with the other hand, and the petals drifted about the room, and became beautiful people who began to dance slowly. When I woke up I was all in a heat with terror.'

This is all the old men told me, and when I think of their speech and of their silence, of their coming and of their going, I am almost persuaded that had I gone out of the house after they had gone out of it, I should have found no footsteps on the snow. They may, for all I or any man

can say, have been themselves immortals: immortal demons, come to put an untrue story into my mind for some purpose I do not understand. Whatever they were I have turned into a pathway which will lead me from them and from the Order of the Alchemical Rose. I no longer live an elaborate and haughty life, but seek to lose myself among the prayers and the sorrows of the multitude. I pray best in poor chapels, where the frieze coats brush by me as I kneel, and when I pray against the demons I repeat a prayer which was made I know not how many centuries ago to help some poor Gaelic man or woman who had suffered with a suffering like mine.

*Seacht b-páidreacha fò seacht  
 Chuir Muire faoi n-a Mac,  
 Chuir Brigbid faoi n-a brat,  
 Chuir Dia faoi n-a neart,  
 Eidir sinn 'san Sluagh Sidhe,  
 Eidir sinn 'san Sluagh Gaoith.*

Seven paters seven times,  
 Send Mary by her Son,  
 Send Bridget by her mantle,  
 Send God by His strength,  
 Between us and the faery host,  
 Between us and the demons of the air.

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