

THE BIRTH OF GOD

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The Birth of God by Karoline M. Knudsen & Verner von Heidenstam

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KAROLINE M. KNUDSEN & VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM

THE BIRTH OF GOD

THE BIRTH OF GOD
(Guds Födelse)

BY
VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM THE SWEDISH BY
KAROLINE M. KNUDSEN



BOSTON
THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY
1920

THE BIRTH OF GOD

PERSONS REPRESENTED

EGYPTIAN DEITIES:

OSIRIS, *the God of Judgment*

HORUS, *the God of the Sun*

THOTH, *the God of Wisdom*

ANUBIS, *the God of the Dead*

TYPHON-SETH, *the God of Evil*

HATHOR-SEKHMET, *the God of Love*

DYSKOLUS, *an Ancient*

STRANGER, *a Modern*

SCENE

Karnak, in The Street of the Sphinxes

TIME

The Present

THE BIRTH OF GOD

TEMPLE-RUIN IN KARNAK

[Moonlight is falling brightly upon the tumbled stone-blocks.]

A tall column stands in their midst, topped with the head of great Osiris. All around it have grown up branches of parched tamarisk.

Ancient gods and goddesses, animal-idols, move around the column in a slow and majestic dance.]

* * *

[A Stranger appears.]

He has on a coat and a broad-brimmed hat of white felt.

His face is swarthy; his beard, raven-black, is closely cropped.

*Dyskolus comes forth from
the shadows.*

His beard is white.

*His hooded mantle of coarse
camel's-hair is wrapped about
him, and his feet are wound in
strips of rag.]*

* * *

STRANGER

This is a dream, a vision . . . But who are
you? I am not sure any longer what language
we can use to talk with one another.

DYSKOLUS

And thou . . . Who art thou, thyself?

STRANGER

A man, who has come to the wrong place, at
the wrong time. I think I should have been a
powerful pope or a cardinal.

DYSKOLUS

Dextrous in swinging the monstrance?

STRANGER

Dextrous in swinging both the monstrance and
the sword. Throw over me the robe of a priest

[8]

and I shall appear natural and real, like my own true self. Look around you, here, in the East! Why do we consider it the source of reflection and knowledge? Because here so great a comprehension regulates life that man becomes unworldly—even in his clothes! Even that white turban, which the man of the East winds around his head, has its sacred significance, and shall, some day, be his shroud. But in my homeland, kings walk about the streets in winter-overcoats, and poets and seers sit in gilded tap-rooms and drink whiskey.

DYSKOLUS

That betokeneth that thy kings and thy sooth-sayers have forgotten their call. Priests, they were born. Priests—they should dedicate themselves, even from earliest childhood, both to be and to live as priests.

STRANGER

Whenever, back in my home, I put on my worldly, grey work-clothes, I seem to be living in a state of daily sham. I feel myself an actor who has wandered in upon a wretched masquerade, where he must act a part beneath himself, or be thrown, with oaths, out of the door . . . But, maybe, all this is but incidental, something

to be endured, for the sake of gaining an understanding of the things of this world . . . then take a leap out into something new.

[He moves aside a few steps as Dyskolus approaches, and glances uneasily at him and the dancing idols; but he musters up his courage and his voice takes on a sharper pitch.]

There, at home, Life goes on as it will, with no special meaning, and everything and every action likewise become meaningless. Laughing boisterously, men ride around in street cars and talk of money; either they kill time by reading worldly tales or by going to the theatre to see some skilfully-enacted play.

DYSKOLUS

Thou really oughtest to have seen the ancient play of Dionysius, in which the altar-fire burns and the sacred hymn is chanted behind the vine-clad hill. That was the naturally-human state, in which its divine destiny had not yet been forgotten. Humanity is no longer pure and undefiled.