

## THE EARTH

THE child of miracle to the world, greeting.

I reach my hands to the leaves and dabble in the dew: I sprinkle dew on you for kisses. I kneel down and hold the grass of the black earth to my bosom; I crush the earth to my lips as if it were a grape. And the wine of Demeter flushes my cheeks; they burn with joy of youth.

Why should I greet the world? Because my heart is bursting with love for the world. Love, say I? Why not lust? Is not lust strength, and merriment, and the famine that only the infinite can stay?

And why do I call myself the child of miracle? Because I have entered a second time into my mother's womb and am born. Because to the knowledge of manhood has come the passion, even the folly, of adolescence; with all its pride and purity.

It is for this that you see me lying upon the thick wet grass, unquenchable; or rejoicing in the fat black loam.

Now the manner of the miracle was this. In the beginning is given to a youth the vision of his mate. This one must he henceforth seek blindly; and many are the enchantments and disenchantments. Through this his vision fades; even his hunger dies away unless he be indeed Elect. But in the end it may be that God shall send him the other half of that Token

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of Paradise. Then, if he have kept the holy fire alight, perhaps with much false fuel, that fire shall instant blaze and fill the temple of his soul. By its insistent energy it shall destroy even the memory of all those marsh-lights that came to greet it; and the priest shall bow down in the glory, and grasp the altar with his hands, and strike it with his forehead seven times. Now this altar is the earthen altar of Demeter.

Then understanding all things by the light of that love, he shall know that this is love, that this is the soul of the earth, that this is fertility and understanding, the secret of Demeter. Nay, (even!) the Oracle may speak in his heart and foretell or foreshadow the greater mysteries of Persephone, of Death the daughter of Love.

Those, too, who are thus reborn will understand that I who write these words am stretched on the wet earth on the day of Spring. It is night, but only the sea whispers of Persephone, as the stars intimate Urania whose mystery is the third, and beyond. My body is absorbed in scent and touch; for the consuming fire of my sight has burnt itself out to blindness, and in my mouth is only the savour of an infinite kiss. The moist earth burns my lips; my fingers search down about the roots of the grass. The life of earth itself is my life: I shall be glad to be buried in the earth. Let my body dissolve into hers, putrefy in her reviving limbeck. He never loved who let them case him in a coffin from the supreme embrace.

It is from the earth, bride of the sun, that all bodily strength derives. It is no figure that Antæus regained all his force when he touched earth. It is no pedantry and folly of the Hindus, who (fearing bodily lust) isolate their acolytes from earth, no futility their doctrine of Prana and the Tamo-

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Guna. It is not mere faith healing, this hygiene of Father Kneipp, and his failures are those who retain decorum and melancholy, who follow the letter and not the spirit, cold-blooded treaders upon earth instead of passionate lovers of its strength.

It is no accident of mythology that the Titans made war upon the Gods, and in Prometheus overthrew them.

It was when Canute failed to drive back the sea that his dynasty was lost to that Norman William who caught hold of Mother Earth with both hands.

When I was a child I fell; and the scars of the earth are on my forehead at this hour.

When I was a boy I was hurt by the explosion of a buried jar of gunpowder; and the scars of the earth are on my face at this hour.

Since then I have been the lover of the earth, that wooed me thus roughly. Many a night have I slept upon her naked breast, in forest and on glacier, upon great plains and upon lonely crags, in heat and cold, fair weather and foul; and my blood is the blood of the earth. My life is hers, and as she is a spark thrown off from the whirling brilliance of the sun, so do I know myself to be a spark of infinite God.

Seek earth, and heaven shall be added unto you! Back to our mother, drive the shining spade into her womb! Wrinkle her with your furrows, she will only smile more kindly!

Let your sweat, the sweat of your toil, which is your passion, drip like benediction from on High upon her; she will render corn and wine. Also your wife shall be desirable in your eyes all the days of your life, and your children shall

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be strong and comely, and the blessing of the Most High shall be upon you.

Then let your grasp relax in the satiety of death, and your weight shall cumber the earth, and the little children of the earth shall make merry with you until the rose strike its root into your breast. Then shall your body be one again with the Mother, and your soul one with the Father, as it is written in the Book of the Law.

All this have I been taught by her whose purity and strength are even as Earth's, chosen before the foundation of Time. Lioness with lion, may we walk by night among the ruins of great cities, when, weary with happiness too great even for our immortality, we turn from the fragrance and fertility of Earth. And at the sunrise return where the peopled valleys call us; where, bronzed and buoyant, our children sing aloud as they drive home the spade.

Glory be to the Earth and to the Sun and to the holy body and soul of Man; and glory be to Love and to the Father of Love, the secret Unity of things!

Glory be to the Shrine within the Temple, and to the God within the Shrine, to the Word and to the Silence that bore it unto Him that is beyond the Silence and the Speech!

Also thanksgiving in the Highest for the Gift of all these things, and for the maiden in whom all these things are found, for the holy body and soul of man, and for the sun, and for the earth. AMEN.

FRANCIS BENDICK.