

The Gods of Pegana

Lord Dunsany

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Preface

There be islands in the Central Sea, whose waters are bounded by no shore and where no ships come—this is the faith of their people.

In the mists before the Beginning, Fate and Chance cast lots to decide whose the Game should be; and he that won strode through the mists to MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI and said: "Now make gods for Me, for I have won the cast and the Game is to be Mine." Who it was that won the cast, and whether it was Fate or whether Chance that went through the mists before the Beginning to MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI—none knoweth.

The Gods of Pegana

Before there stood gods upon Olympus, or ever Allah was Allah, had wrought and rested MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI.

There are in Pegana—Mung and Sish and Kib, and the maker of all small gods, who is MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI. Moreover, we have a faith in Roon and Slid.

And it has been said of old that all things that have been were wrought by the small gods, excepting only MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI, who made the gods and hath thereafter rested.

And none may pray to MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI but only the gods whom he hath made.

But at the Last will MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI forget to rest, and will make again new gods and other worlds, and will destroy the gods whom he hath made.

And the gods and the worlds shall depart, and there shall be only MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI.

Of Skarl the Drummer

When MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI had made the gods and Skarl, Skarl made a drum, and began to beat upon it that he might drum for ever. Then because he was weary after the making of the gods, and because of the drumming of Skarl, did MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI grow drowsy and fall asleep.

And there fell a hush upon the gods when they saw that MANA rested, and there was silence on Pegana save for the drumming of Skarl. Skarl sitteth upon the mist before the feet of MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI, above the gods of Pegana, and there he beateth his drum. Some say that the Worlds and the Suns are but the echoes of the drumming of Skarl, and others say that they be dreams that arise in the mind of MANA because of the drumming of Skarl, as one may dream whose rest is troubled by sound of song, but none knoweth, for who hath heard the voice of MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI, or who hath seen his drummer?

Whether the season be winter or whether it be summer, whether it be morning among the worlds or whether it be night, Skarl still beateth his drum, for the purposes of the gods are not yet fulfilled. Sometimes the arm of Skarl grows weary; but still he beateth his drum, that the gods may do the work of the gods, and the worlds go on, for if he cease for an instant then MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI will start awake, and there will be worlds nor gods no more.

But, when at the last the arm of Skarl shall cease to beat his drum, silence shall startle Pegana like thunder in a cave, and MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI shall cease to rest..

Then shall Skarl put his drum upon his back and walk forth into the void beyond the worlds, because it is THE END, and the work of Skarl is over.

There there may arise some other god whom Skarl may serve, or it may be that he shall perish; but to Skarl it shall matter not, for he shall have done the work of Skarl.

Of the Making of the Worlds

When MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI had made the gods there were only the gods, and They sat in the middle of Time, for there was as much Time before them as behind them, which having no end had neither a beginning.

And Pegana was without heat or light or sound, save for the drumming of Skarl; moreover Pegana was The Middle of All, for there was below Pegana what there was above it, and there lay before it that which lay beyond.

Then said the gods, making the signs of the gods and speaking with Their hands lest the silence of Pegana should blush; then said the gods to one another, speaking with Their hands; "Let Us make worlds to amuse Ourselves while MANA rests. Let Us make worlds and Life and Death, and colours in the sky; only let Us not break the silence upon Pegana."

Then raising Their hands, each god according to his sign, They made the worlds and the suns, and put a light in the houses of the sky.

Then said the gods: "Let Us make one to seek, to seek and never to find out concerning the wherefore of the making of the gods."

And They made by the lifting of Their hands, each god according to his sign, the Bright One with the flaring tail to seek from the end of the Worlds to the end of them again, to return again after a hundred years.

Man, when thou seest the comet, know that another seeketh besides thee nor ever findeth out.

Then said the gods, still speaking with Their hands: "Let there be now a Watcher to regard."

And They made the Moon, with his face wrinkled with many mountains and worn with a thousand valleys, to regard with pale eyes the games of the small gods, and to watch throughout the resting time of MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI; to watch, to regard all things, and be silent.

Then said the gods: "Let Us make one to rest. One not to move among the moving. One not to seek like the comet, nor to go round like the worlds; to rest while MANA rests."

And They made the Star of the Abiding and set it in the North.

Man, when thou seest the Star of the Abiding to the North, know that one resteth as doth MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI, and know that somewhere among the Worlds is rest.

Lastly the gods said: "We have made worlds and suns, and one to seek and another to regard, let Us now make one to wonder."

And They made Earth to wonder, each god by the uplifting of his hand according to his sign.

And Earth Was.

Of the Game of the Gods

A million years passed over the first game of the gods. And MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI still rested, still in the middle of Time, and the gods still played with Worlds. The Moon regarded, and the Bright One sought, and returned again to his seeking.

Then Kib grew weary of the first game of the gods, and raised his hand in Pegana, making the sign of Kib, and Earth became covered with beasts for Kib to play with.

And Kib played with beasts.

But the other gods said one to another, speaking with their hands: "What is it that Kib has done?"

And They said to Kib: "What are these things that move upon The Earth yet move not in circles like the Worlds, that regard like the Moon and yet they do not shine?"

And Kib said: "This is Life."

But the gods said one to another: "If Kib has thus made beasts he will in time make Men, and will endanger the Secret of the gods."

And Mung was jealous of the work of Kib, and sent down Death among the beasts, but could not stamp them out.

A million years passed over the second game of the gods, and still it was the Middle of Time.

And Kib grew weary of the second game, and raised his hand in the Middle of All, making the sign of Kib, and made Men: out of beasts he made them, and Earth was covered with Men.

Then the gods feared greatly for the Secret of the gods, and set a veil between Man and his ignorance that he might not understand. And Mung was busy among Men.

But when the other gods saw Kib playing his new game They came and played it too. And this They will play until MANA arise to rebuke Them, saying: "What do ye playing with Worlds and Suns and Men and Life and Death?" And They shall be ashamed of Their playing in the hour of the laughter of MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI.

It was Kib who first broke the Silence of Pegana, by speaking with his mouth like a man.

And all the other gods were angry with Kib that he had spoken with his mouth.

And there was no longer silence in Pegana or the Worlds.

The Chaunt of the Gods

There came the voice of the gods singing the chaunt of the gods, singing: "We are the gods; We are the little games of MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI that he hath played and hath forgotten.

"MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI hath made us, and We made the Worlds and the Suns.

"And We play with the Worlds and the Sun and Life and Death until MANA arise to rebuke us, saying: `What do ye playing with Worlds and Suns?'

"It is a very serious thing that there be Worlds and Suns, and yet most withering is the laughter of MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI.

"And when he arises from resting at the Last, and laughs at us for playing with Worlds and Suns, We will hastily put them behind us, and there shall be Worlds no more."

The Sayings of Kib

(Sender of Life in all the Worlds) Kib said: "I am Kib. I am none other than Kib."

Kib is Kib. Kib is he and no other. Believe!

Kib said: "When Time was early, when Time was very early indeed— there was only MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI. MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI was before the beginning of the gods, and shall be after their going."

And Kib said: "After the going of the gods there will be no small worlds nor big."

Kib said: "It will be lonely for MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI."

Because this is written, believe! For is it not written, or are you greater than Kib? Kib is Kib.

Concerning Sish (The Destroyer of Hours)

Time is the hound of Sish.

At Sish's bidding do the hours run before him as he goeth upon his way.

Never hath Sish stepped backward nor ever hath he tarried; never hath he relented to the things that once he knew nor turned to them again.

Before Sish is Kib, and behind him goeth Mung.

Very pleasant are all things before the face of Sish, but behind him they are withered and old.

And Sish goeth ceaselessly upon his way.

Once the gods walked upon Earth as men walk and spake with their mouths like Men. That was in Wornath–Mavai. They walk not now.

And Wornath–Mavai was a garden fairer than all the gardens upon Earth.

Kib was propitious, and Mung raised not his hand against it, neither did Sish assail it with his hours.

Wornath–Mavai lieth in a valley and looketh towards the south, and on the slopes of it Sish rested among the flowers when Sish was young.

Thence Sish went forth into the world to destroy its cities, and to provoke his hours to assail all things, and to batter against them with the rust and with the dust.

And Time, which is the hound of Sish, devoured all things; and Sish sent up the ivy and fostered weeds, and dust fell from the hand of Sish and covered stately things. Only the valley where Sish rested when he and Time were young did Sish not provoke his hours to assail.

There he restrained his old hound Time, and at its borders Mung withheld his footsteps.

Wornath–Mavai still lieth looking towards the south, a garden among gardens, and still the flowers grow about its slopes as they grew when the gods were young; and even the butterflies live in Wornath–Mavai still. For the minds of the gods relent towards their earliest memories, who relent not otherwise at all.

Wornath–Mavai still lieth looking towards the south; but if thou shouldst ever find it thou art then more fortunate than the gods, because they walk not in Wornath–Mavai now.

Once did the prophet think that he discerned it in the distance beyond mountains, a garden exceeding fair with flowers; but Sish arose, and pointed with his hand, and set his hound to pursue him, who hath followed ever since.

Time is the hound of the gods; but it hath been said of old that he will one day turn upon his masters, and seek to slay the gods, excepting only MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI, whose dreams are the gods themselves — dreamed long ago.

The Sayings of Slid (Whose Soul is by the Sea)

Slid said: "Let no man pray to MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI, for who shall trouble MANA with mortal woes or irk him with the sorrows of all the houses of Earth?"

"Nor let any sacrifice to MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI, for what glory shall he find in sacrifices or altars who hath made the gods themselves?"

"Pray to the small gods, who are the gods of Doing; but MANA is the god of Having Done—the god of Having Done and of the Resting.

"Pray to the small gods and hope that they may hear thee. Yet what mercy should the small gods have, who themselves made Death and Pain; or shall they restrain their old hound Time for thee?"

"Slid is but a small god. Yet Slid is Slid—it is written and hath been said.

"Pray, thou, therefore, to Slid, and forget not Slid, and it may be that Slid will not forget to send thee Death when most thou needest it."

And the People of Earth said: "There is a melody upon the Earth as though ten thousand streams all sang together for their homes that they had forsaken in the hills."

And Slid said: "I am the Lord of gliding waters and of foaming waters and of still. I am the Lord of all the waters in the world and all that long streams garner in the hills; but the soul of Slid is in the Sea. Thither goes all that glides upon Earth, and the end of all the rivers is the Sea."

And Slid said: "The hand of Slid hath toyed with cataracts, adown the valleys have trod the feet of Slid, and out of the lakes of the plains regard the eyes of Slid; but the soul of Slid is in the sea."

Much homage hath Slid among the cities of men and pleasant are the woodland paths and the paths of the plains, and pleasant the high valleys where he danceth in the hills; but Slid would be fettered neither by banks nor boundaries —so the soul of Slid is in the Sea.

For there may Slid repose beneath the sun and smile at the gods above him with all the smiles of Slid, and be a happier god than Those who sway the Worlds, whose work is Life and Death.

There may he sit and smile, or creep among the ships, or moan and sigh round islands in his great content—the miser lord of wealth in gems and pearls beyond the telling of all fables.

Or there may he, when Slid would fain exult, throw up his great arms, or toss with many a fathom of wandering hair the mighty head of Slid, and cry aloud tumultuous dirges of shipwreck, and feel through all his being the crashing might of Slid, and sway the sea. Then doth the Sea, like venturous legions on the eve of war that exult to acclaim their chief, gather its force together from under all the winds and roar and follow and sing and crash together to vanquish all things—and all at the bidding of Slid, whose soul is in the sea.

There is ease in the soul of Slid and there be calms upon the sea; also, there be storms upon the sea and troubles in the soul of Slid, for the gods have many moods. And Slid is in many places, for he sitteth in high Pegana. Also along the valleys walketh Slid, wherever water moveth or lieth still; but the voice and the cry of Slid are from the sea. And to whoever that cry hath ever come he must needs follow and follow, leaving all stable things; only to be always with Slid in all the moods of Slid, to find no rest until he reaches the sea. With the cry of Slid before them and the hills of their home behind have gone a hundred thousand to the sea, over whose bones doth Slid lament with the voice of a god lamenting for his people. Even the streams from the inner lands have heard Slid's far-off cry, and all together have forsaken lawns and trees to follow where Slid is gathering up his own, to rejoice where Slid rejoices, singing the chaunt of Slid, even as will at the Last gather all the Lives of the People about the feet of MANA–YOOD–SUSHAI.

The Deeds of Mung (Lord of all Deaths between Pegana and the Rim)

Once, as Mung went his way athwart the Earth and up and down its cities and across its plains, Mung came upon a man who was afraid when Mung said: "I am Mung!"

And Mung said: "Were the forty million years before thy coming intolerable to thee?"

And Mung said: "Not less tolerable to thee shall be the forty million years to come!"

Then Mung made against him the sign of Mung and the Life of the Man was fettered no longer with hands and feet.

At the end of the flight of the arrow there is Mung, and in the houses and the cities of Men. Mung walketh in all places at all times. But mostly he loves to walk in the dark and still, along the river mists when the wind hath sank, a little before night meeteth with the morning upon the highway between Pegana and the Worlds.

Sometimes Mung entereth the poor man's cottage; Mung also boweth very low before The King. Then do the Lives of the poor man and of The King go forth among the Worlds.

And Mung said: "Many turnings hath the road that Kib hath given every man to tread upon the earth. Behind one of these turnings sitteth Mung."

One day as a man trod upon the road that Kib had given him to tread he came suddenly upon Mung. And when Mung said: "I am Mung!" the man cried out: "Alas, that I took this road, for had I gone by any other way then had I not met with Mung."

And Mung said: "Had it been possible for thee to go by any other way then had the Scheme of Things been otherwise and the gods had been other gods. When MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI forgets to rest and makes again new gods it may be that They will send thee again into the Worlds; and then thou mayest choose some other way, and not meet with Mung."

Then Mung made the sign of Mung. And the Life of that man went forth with yesterday's regrets and all old sorrows and forgotten things—whither Mung knoweth.

And Mung went onward with his work to sunder Life from flesh, and Mung came upon a man who became stricken with sorrow when he saw the shadow of Mung. But Mung said: "When at the sign of Mung thy Life shall float away there will also disappear thy sorrow at forsaking it." But the man cried out: "O Mung! tarry for a little, and make not the sign of Mung against me *now*, for I have a family upon the earth with whom sorrow will remain, though mine should disappear because of the sign of Mung."

And Mung said: "With the gods it is always Now. And before Sish hath banished many of the years the sorrows of thy family for thee shall go the way of thine." And the man beheld Mung making the sign of Mung before his eyes, which beheld things no more.