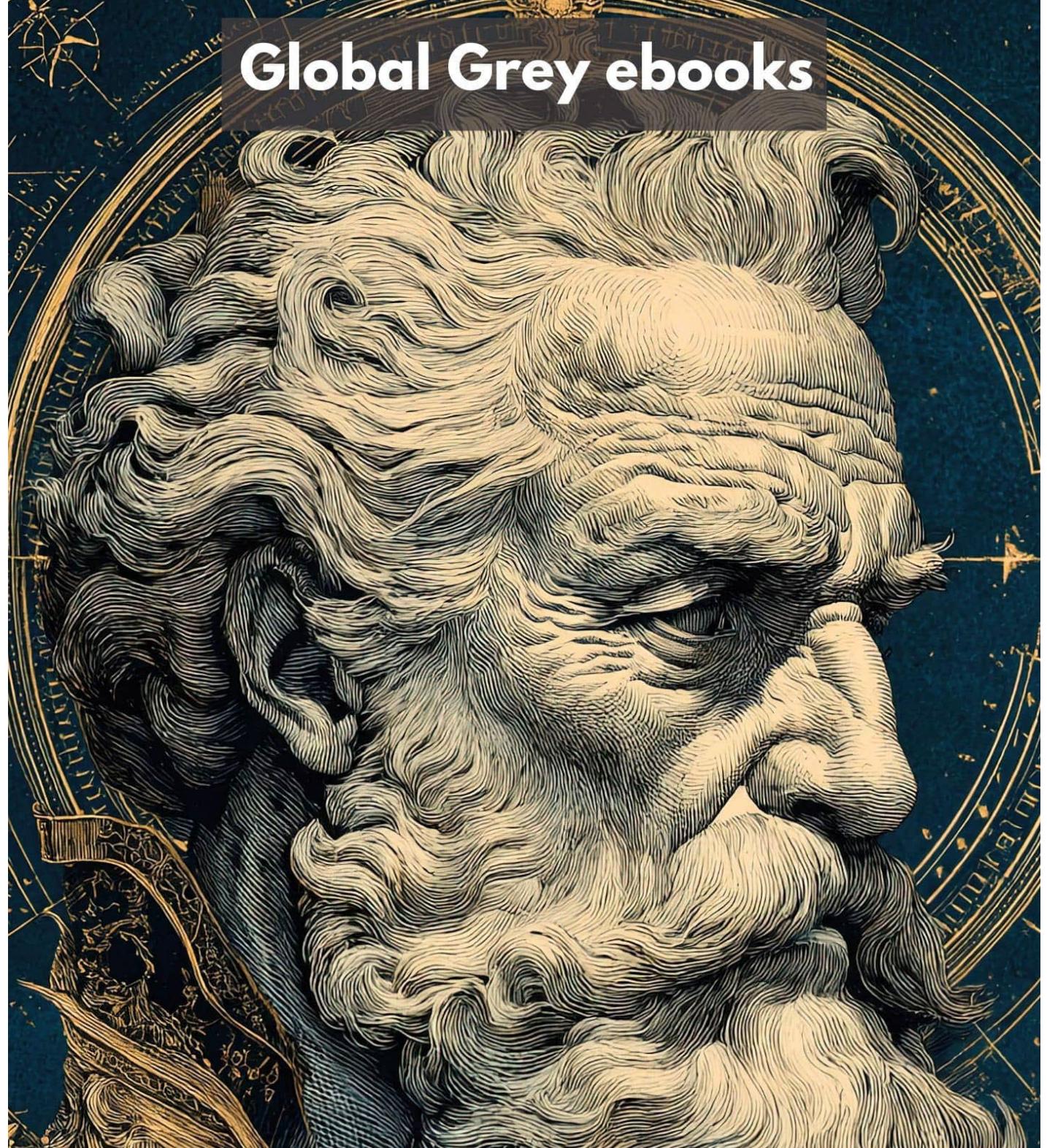


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# **THE CORPUS HERMETICUM**

**George Robert Stowe Mead**

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# Poemandres, The Shepherd Of Men

*Notes on the text: This is the most famous of the Hermetic documents, a revelation account describing a vision of the creation of the universe and the nature and fate of humanity. Authors from the Renaissance onward have been struck by the way in which its creation myth seems partly inspired by Genesis, partly reacting against it. The Fall has here become the descent of the Primal Man through the spheres of the planets to the world of Nature, a descent caused not by disobedience but by love, and done with the blessing of God.*

*The seven rulers of fate discussed in sections 9, 14 and 25 are the archons of the seven planets, which also appear in Plato's Timaeus and in a number of the ancient writings usually lumped together as "Gnostic". Their role here is an oddly ambivalent one, powers of Harmony who are nonetheless the sources of humanity's tendencies to evil.*

1. It chanced once on a time my mind was meditating on the things that are, my thought was raised to a great height, the senses of my body being held back - just as men who are weighed down with sleep after a fill of food, or from fatigue of body.

Methought a Being more than vast, in size beyond all bounds, called out my name and saith: What wouldst thou hear and see, and what hast thou in mind to learn and know?

2. And I do say: Who art thou?

He saith: I am Man-Shepherd (*Poemandres*), Mind of all-masterhood; I know what thou desirest and I am with thee everywhere.

3. [And] I reply: I long to learn the things that are, and comprehend their nature, and know God. This is, I said, what I desire to hear.

He answered back to me: Hold in thy mind all thou wouldst know, and I will teach thee.

4. Even with these words His aspect changed, and straightway, in the twinkling of an eye, all things were opened to me, and I see a Vision limitless, all things turned into Light - sweet, joyous [Light]. And I became transported as I gazed.

But in a little while Darkness came settling down on part [of it], awesome and gloomy, coiling in sinuous folds, so that methought it like unto a snake.

And then the Darkness changed into some sort of a Moist Nature, tossed about beyond all power of words, belching out smoke as from a fire, and groaning forth a wailing sound that beggars all description.

[And] after that an outcry inarticulate came forth from it, as though it were a Voice of Fire.

5. [Thereon] out of the Light [...] a Holy Word (Logos) descended on that Nature. And upwards to the height from the Moist Nature leaped forth pure Fire; light was it, swift and active too.

The Air, too, being light, followed after the Fire; from out of the Earth-and-Water rising up to Fire so that it seemed to hang therefrom.

But Earth-and-Water stayed so mingled with each other, that Earth from Water no one could discern. Yet were they moved to hear by reason of the Spirit-Word (Logos) pervading them.

6. Then saith to me Man-Shepherd: Didst understand this Vision what it means?

Nay; that shall I know, said I.