

FIRE-DANCERS OF THE MOON

BY OLIVER S. ARATA

Behold, O children of clay,
Yon gloricus chant of celestial lay—
A daub of red, a strip of crimson
Around the milky, pale moon,
Like fires of Theosophists incantations!
The flimsy gauzes twirl and swirl
Around the naked thews of the dancers,
Forming brilliant colors and fantastic curls.
Nymphs of youthful jollity,
Sages of steel-ribbed fidelity,
Blue-veined, moth bitten, aged men of morbid sobriety,
Behold the patriarch from ages past,
Of centurion, rust-covered Time.

During the pillage of Sodom,
The destruction of Gomorrah,
Their dance was a dirge of vent,
And their song a low, wailing lament.

II. REMORSE

O crosses three, two blessed and one accursed,
That flare, gaunt and terrible,
Against the molten yet ebony sky.
Behold them, O Christians!
Behold the Cross of diamond
Upon whose mortal structure,
There, on high, drooped like one atoned,
Is the bowed, sacred head of the Saviour, the Crucified!
Lo, by His unjustly pierced side

Is the hideous image of the thief whose thirst
 For gold died with him.
 There lingers on his lips a blaspheme.
 His gibbet is of bloodstone made.
 To the Saviour's right is the serene form
 Of the converted, God-praising thief,
 Whose lips are blessed and sweet with gratitude.
 His annointed soul adorns not Hades,
 But dwells in Heaven's golden shades.

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The wrath of the Father descended
 And the earth quaked to bursting.
 The stars gathered their tresses;
 Then slinked back, like thieves in the night,
 Into the sacristy of Heaven.
 The burning Sun, awe-stricken and aghast,
 Hesitated, lo,
 Stood still in its heavenly path.
 Affrighted the fire-dancers heard the consternation
 That reigned in the celestial shore of planets,
 In the azure land of the starry spirits.

Like beautiful fairies lift radiant bubbles,
 So did they lift, these airy spirits, their pale shrine
 To the sacrilege of the Christ;
 While the blessed fires of Osiris faded
 Into atoms of nothingness
 Towards the sorrows of the sprites,
 The dancers of the pale-faced moon.

The dancers heaped coals upon coals
 Into the glowing fires of Cimmerian's realm:
 Lo, the molten flames of Hades,
 That beat against three-faced Cerebus,
 Were but a Tyrian mite,
 Even like zephyrs that wither gently on Hebe's fair brow
 Alas, all were dimmed and paled
 Into pearls and sapphire tints,
 And their scarfs were silenced into awe
 At the divine, august death of their Creator.

Yea. All the vast Universe sadly mourned.
 The magic flute of Pan was silenced and churned
 Into a water-lily of spotless hue,
 Through whose virgin petals the wind gently sighed.
 The voice of Echo made not reply to shepherds' call.
 All Nature seems stupified
 Into an awe-inspired monument.

The court of Jove and of the gods
 Held session in bitter tears and mourning.
 The eyes of Fate were filled with drops like dew.
 The Muses played not their lyres.
 Even grim, hardened Pluto shed a tear
 That trickled down his iron cheek.
 The sweet song of Philomel was quailed in the dells.
 And from Heaven drops fell
 To the burning, scorching floor of Hades,
 Wetting the burning thirst of the asphodels.

III. REVELRY

O brooding silence of Egyptian night,
 O creeping shadows from dew-strewn Pyramids,
 O Hymn of Death, O Cid of Life,
 O Psalm of Love, O Chant of Immortality,
 Aside, I say, and ope your vaunts
 To secrets of your hidden heart!
 At thy casement, O royal monument of antiquity,
 The beateous Cleopatra,
 Most lustrous gem in Egypt's diadem,
 Sipped the great mystic silence of the Arabian solitude;
 Clipped the wine from Antony's lips wantonly;
 Stole the master passion from his eyes;
 And made of him, the great Antony, a weakling,
 Like a babe nestled in his mother's arms.
 Who, O who was more worthy to be a wooer
 Of Egypt's immortal Queen?
 None but the noble Antony!

"O Star of Egypt!" exclaimed the noble Roman.
 "Gaze, my love, upon yon celestial region, the sky.

Behold, O beautiful one, the shimmering moon!"
 The eyes of Cleopatra shone like crystal dew,
 Even brighter than the mystic stars upon which she gazed.

"By Isis!" her voice was as mellow as dew.
 "The moon, the moon, the crystal mirage!
 Doth thou see, Love, yon crimson strip—
 The liquid moon, the mellow urn?
 Sweetest herbage of my breath.
 Yon colors fluttering on the moon's crest,
 Yon fire-dancers, they dance the dance of joy.
 They dance to the lyric notes of Happiness.
 "Love," her sea-green eyes shone like those of a boy;
 "Yon gods, yon wild gods, their pagan hearts
 Have strayed to Earth to learn
 That the unquenchable, burning fires of Love,
 Whose incense burned not in Vesta's temple,
 O breath of my breath,
 O worshipper kneeling at my shrine,
 Are red, like hearts of passing and mating doves;
 Winging and cooing as they fly
 Over the desert's barren canopies."
 Then neither spoke nor uttered a sound.

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"By eyes of Hymen, and the Hymn of Death,
 I melt into thy arms, noble Antony!"
 "And I, immortal one, into thy jonquil charms."

IV. ANGER

The emerald studded chalice is spilled
 Upon the purple cloth of the Earth;
 Upon waving, golden-latticed fields
 Guarded by magic hands of Persephone,
 Overhead, the dove of Peace flies.
 His shadow mantles the sphere of the Earth,
 Like haggard Death o'er Dante's tomb.
 But, red crows, green eagles, black vultures,
 Unseen, swoop down upon Juno's messenger. They tear
 His white breast, the heart of a lotus bud,
 Until it is rent from throat to thigh:
 His stifled blood falls to consecrated ground,

Like the dew falls from the pollen of the eglantine. . . .
 His olive branch falls in hoary Charon's stream
 And will be gathered by the withered hands of Time.

Great war rages over the continents,
 Even unto the sea and clouds.
 O putrid pestilence, O sceptre of God's divine wrath,
 O battlefields bestrewn with flesh and with blood,
 And towering above all the souls of honest men ;
 The anguished cry of wounded and slain ;
 The tramp of beating hoofs ; the crash and thud
 Of cannon's roar, its shells hurrying on destructive paths !
 And, this sacrilege is called modern civilization ?
 Could the diabolical brains of Iago and of Brutus,
 Or the thoughts of green-eyed Lucifer, the charlatan
 Of Heaven, devise a more gruesome destruction ?
 Has the Messiah's suffering and His bitter agony
 Been forgotten in the ever overflowing urn of madness ?

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The Saviour comes upon the death-strewn battlefield,
 His languid eyes drooped in utter sadness.
 The Redeemer who died for the love of mankind
 With painful steps walked over the ground where rested
 Phantom drops of consecrated blood.
 These martyrs were like Christians whose sacrificed bodies
 Were strewn in the Coliseum of Roman dynasty
 And splashed, sweet drops, on Roman soil.

"O kind, benevolent Father in Heaven, forgive them,
 For they know not what they do!"
 Were the compassionate, knowing words of the Redeemer,
 As he gazed, with a look of pity, upon the terrible slaughter.

V. THE BRIDGE OF LIFE

A mighty bridge upward spans
 The yearning, deep abyss from Heaven to Earth,
 While upon its unfathomed length
 Unborn souls of babes slowly and blindly tread.
 They, who have not seen the ray of Life,
 And have not throbbled with love and with hate, with breath,

And with gnawing remorse, with Ambition's stings,
 Or with the sweet and great power of strength,
 March on, barren in soul and in body,
 In mind and in thought, in sin and in virtue, and their kind.
 Nor have their immature thoughts taken wing
 On some sweet reverie, or scalded a Parnassian height.
 The fire-dancers gaze, intently, upon this undying horde,
 Knowing full well that some day the world will reap
 The reward of these future peasants and lords ;
 These unborn of rich and of poor,
 Of high estate and of low degree.

VI. THE CHASM OF DEATH

The haggard forms upward march
 In files two score and ten ;
 Gaunt and terrible, lean with white age,
 Thin to emaciation. With an aimless lurch
 They approach the ravenous, fiery Chasm.
 Whether they be beggar or thief, rich man or sage,
 Poet or peasant, it matters not ;
 For, they are as lilies withering on a pond.

One by one they tumble into the hell-pit—death.
 O pity, they are but a meagre frond
 In a seething flame that scorches and burns,
 Like a molten fire lashes its sting upon a delicate flower.
 Lo, they are swallowed in the Chasm of Death.
 Their hands wave, in a faint signal of distress ;
 Then, the shivering bodies go under, helpless,
 Abandoning all their earthly desires.
 They go to meet the judgment of their Creator,
 To receive the sentence of everlasting happiness,
 Or, the curse of hell-fire—forever.