

Flame and Adventure

By A. C. Dalton

(An appreciation by Alice M. Winlow)

In the poem "Flame and Adventure" life is shown to be a gradual evolution from "primal ooze" to the "Blossoming of Love's immortal flower."

The poem is deeply emotional, but at the same time it satisfies the demand of the intellect to feel itself intensely alive. In reading some of the stanzas one recalls Leonardo Da Vinci who played on a harp of silver made in the shape of an animal's skull.

"We were the men-abortions of young Time,
Spewed from th' abhorred, the world's ensanguined slime,
Hated, and hunted forth from bog and pen,
Naked and homeless—God! and we were men.

What old and monstrous god reigned there, supine?
Stamped earth his winepress, quaffed her blood for wine,
Brutish with drunken orgy, senseless play,
Flung hearts and bodies like squeezed grapes away?

But the music is still from a harp of silver. It contains the questionings, cries of revolt, tumultuous rushing of wings, and the shouts of victory of Beethoven's "Apassionata" Sonata.

"Why, why, and why this blood forever flowing?
Is it Thy hell for us, and we unknowing,
Earning Thy price for heaven ere yet we own
The power to frame Thee on Thy awful throne?

The fish the reptile and the mammal formed
The bridge o'er which our youth and ardor stormed,
With many a fearful slip or flying leap,
To blunder up Life's cold and treacherous steep.

We ask Thee not for quietness and rest,
But for the ecstasy of endless quest,
That chief adventure, questing for the truth,
That radiant wholesomeness, immortal youth.

Journeying with Thee—what height we dare not dare?
Tramps inescapable, fearless, we fare!
On fin, on foot, on wing, Creation goes,
And where? Comrades with Thee, who cares? Who knows."

In the poem "God's Spies" Life is conceived of as an evolution from fire-mist to soul-triumph.

"at His urgent sovereign call
The flame-rent sun revolved, His willing thrall:
And planets in their terrifying orbits spun
Around the organ-thunder of the sun; . . .

"We go with Thee, discovering as we go
Our royal progress through the seeming void,
The pageantry, the minstrelsy, the masque,
The merriment and laughter, and withal,
Merriest of all, the laughing Christ."

In reading "The Robin's Egg" one lingers among the lines for the musical phrase, the hint of fragrance, the flutter of some exquisite color.

"Fallen, fallen amongst the daffodils,
A robin's egg half-crushed—
Bluer than any sky could be,
Blue with a tense divinity
As if some god had brushed,
Impatiently, a jewel from his hand—"

In the garden poems come honey-colored phrases and verses like music in the sunlit key of D major.

"I look into the face
Of this wild larkspur,
And see a vision
A holy place.

I hear in color, curve and petal,
All songs that ever were,
With nought of sweet precision,
Or rote of chorister;
Nor string, nor reed, nor metal
Could weave such gossamer.
Not to be told, or tempted
To strangling theme or form,
This flower-music, law-exempted,
Doth take my heart by storm;
And, hearing thus Thy melody,
O God, I am possessed with Thee!"

Throughout the whole volume of poems there are profoundly significant lines; salutations to the stars, the color of a flower, the fragrance of the drenched earth, the infinitesimal atom.

The spirit is startled into a keener perception of earth's loveliness and one catches breathlessly at these exquisite moments.

Walter Pater says, "Some spend life in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest in art and song. Art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass." But the poems in this little volume do more than this. They also make visible for an instant the viewless tip of the spirit's azure flame.

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