COSMOS

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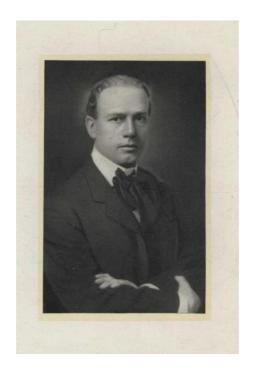
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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK COSMOS ***

Produced by Al Haines.

COSMOS

By ERNEST McGAFFEY



Ernest McGaffey

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DEDICATED TO CARTER H. HARRISON

OF CHICAGO

COSMOS

ONE

Ι

Go search the æons an you will Where withered leaves of Doubt are whirled, And who hath solved this riddle, Life, Or Death—that moves with sails unfurled, Beyond the straining eyes of man Marooned upon an unknown world.

II

Nor tongue hath told, nor vision caught That paradox, Primeval Cause; Each age has had some parable Each age succeeding marked the flaws; While shifted, with the calendar, What men have termed generic laws.

Ш

Creed after creed behold them now Like Etna on Vesuvius piled; Till, scaled to earth by drifting sands They lie in later days reviled, And pushed aside by Time's rough hand As toys are, by a peevish child.

IV

For Priest-made doctrine reads grotesque. And earthly worship is but dross; Whether it be your Brahm of Ind Or squat and hideous Chinese Joss; Or Jove, aloft on cloud-capped throne Or the pale Christ upon his cross.

V

Why question still the blindfold graves
Or pluck the veil of Isis dread?
Over Death's icy mystery
A pall immutable is spread;
And never tear-wrung agony
Shall move the lips we loved—once dead.

VI

Why grope in labyrinthian maze? Why palter thus with doubt and fear? The Past is but the mollusc print The Future looms, a barrier sheer; The Present centers in To-day The hope for men is Now, and Here.

VII

Believe no scientific cant That man descended from the ape; Gorilla-like once beat his breast And grew at last to human shape, To watch the flocks, and till the fields, Harry the seas and bruise the grape.

VIII

For though enrobed in savage skins And though his forehead backward ran, The brute was not all-dominant Some spark revealed a Primal plan; His brain was coupled with his will The hairy mammal still was man.

ΙX

And ever as the cycles waned He came and went, he rose and fell, At times transformed, as butterflies That rise from chrysalis in the cell; And oft through hate and ignorance Sunk downward deep as fabled Hell.

X

But through it all, and with it all How-e'er the upward trending veers, He fought his fight against great odds He peopled ice-bound hemispheres, Endured the sweltering Torrid Zones And stamped his impress on the years.

TWO

Ι

What romance hast thy childhood known Of God-made world in seven days? Of woven sands and swaying grass And bird and beast in forest ways, Of panoramas vast unrolled Before a stern Creator's gaze? Of rivers ribboning the vales; Of plains that stretched in smoothness down, And unborn seasons yet to be Spring's violet banks, and Autumn's brown; Bright Summer, mistress of the sun, And grey-beard Winter's boreal crown.

Ш

And when at length the scheme complete Unfolded to the Maker's sight,
How He, Almighty and divine
Said in his power, "Let there be light!"
Gave sun and moon, and sowed the stars
Along the furrows of the night!

IV

Lo! every nation has its tale
And every people, how they be;
Whether where Southern zephyrs loose
The blooms from off the tamarind tree,
Or where the six-month seasons bide
Around the cloistered Polar sea.

V

And Science with unyielding scales Weighs each and all of varied styles; And like a Goddess molds decrees Oblivious both to tears or smiles; Points out the error, reads the rule And God with Nature reconciles.

VI

But who shall sift the false and true? What Oracle the rule enforce? Not man-made creed, nor man-learned law Is wise to fathom Nature's course; No sea is deeper than its bed No stream is higher than its source.

VII

Vain hope to solve the Infinite!

Mere words to babble, when they say
"Thus Science teaches,"—"thus our God"—
Thus this or that—what of it, pray?
The marvel overlapping all—
Go ask the Sphynx of Yesterday.

VIII

We know the All, and nothing know; The great we ken as well as least; But sum it all when we have said That man is different from the beast; And spite of all Theology The Pagan's equal to the Priest.

ΙX

And globes will lapse, and suns expire; As stars have fallen, worlds can change; Forever shall the centuries roll And roving planets tireless range; And Life be masked in secrecy With Death, as ever, passing strange.

X

And trow not, Mortal, in thy pride That where yon beetling column stands Rests Permanence; 'twill disappear To sink in marsh or barren lands, Where bitterns boom, or sunlight stares Across the immemorial sands.

THREE

T

Of old when man to being came He fashioned Gods of brittle bone; Bowed down to wooden fetiches Or worshipped idols carved from stone; And, locked in Superstition's grasp For sacrifice made lives atone.

Π

And Fear was then the Higher Law And fleshly joys the aftermath; He knew no screed of Righteousness And trod no straight and narrow path; His Deity a terror was A Demon winged with might and wrath.

Ш

And then where Nilus dipped his feet By Egypt sands, rose temples tall To Isis and Osiris—Ptah— And many a God foredoomed to fall; Where sank the shades of Pharaoh's reign? Whence have they vanished, one and all?

IV

But whiles to other years advanced And now by cosmic marvels won,

Men sought remote Pelagian shores Where breeze and spray their tapestry spun, To wait the coming of the day And there adore the rising sun.

V

This passed; the Gods of Greece and Rome In splendor thronged the earth and skies; Jove, with the thunders in his hand Apollo of the star-lit eyes, Aurora, Priestess of the Dawn And Pan of haunting melodies,—

VI

And countless more; their temples fair Where reverent Pagans curved the knee, Mid sweet, perpetual summer stood While murmured as the murmuring bee, The lulling sweep of listless brine Beside the green Ægean sea.

VII

And merged in island-wooded calms By towering groves of ancient oak, where Triton's charging cavalry Against the cliffs of Britain broke, With horrid rite of human blood The Celtic Druids moved and spoke.

VIII

Still wheeled the cycles; still did men With new religions make them wise; Mahomet rose magnificent As rainbow in the eastern skies; With Seven Heavens of Koran taught And Houris with the sloe-black eyes. ΙX

Brahm, Baal, Dagon, Moloch, Thor, And legions more had long sufficed; Heavens in turn with bliss diverse And Hells with ebon glaciers iced; And latest on celestial scrolls The prophets wrote the name of Christ.

X

We need them not; No! each and all Will load Tradition's dusty shelf; As shattered Idols, put away To lie forgot like broken delf; Humanity is over all! And Man's redemption in himself.

FOUR

I

The morning stars together sang So runs the story, in that time, When groves were loud with melody And ripples danced to liquid rhyme; Far in the embryonic spheres Before the earth was in her prime.

Π

Then first the feline-padded gales Unleashed and prowling journeyed free, To purr amid the cowering grass Or roar in stormy jubilee, Or, joining in with Ocean, growl A hoarse duet of wind and sea.

Ш

And where by meadowy rushes dank
The yellow sunbeams thick were sown,
And brooks flowed down through April ways
O'er pebbled bar and shingly stone,
There first welled up in gurgling strain
The lisping current's monotone.

IV

And oft was heard, in forest aisles Where rocking trees of leaves were thinned, And drear November wandered lorn With wild wide eyes and hair unpinned, A wailing harp of minor chords Struck by the strong hands of the wind.

V

And Man, through imitative art, With clumsy tool and method crude, Copied these echoes as he might To soothe him in his solitude; And when that other sound was dumb His reed-notes quavered music rude.

VI

And as the gentler graces came To vivify barbaric night, So Poesy, with singing Lyre, Descended from Parnassian height, With constellations aureoled Her raiment wove of flowing light.

VII

And in Man's heart a thrill leaped up; His eye was lit by prophet gleams; He sought the truth of When and How He voiced the lyrics of the streams; His beard was tossed, his locks were gray His soul beneath the spell of dreams.

VIII

Thus numbers came; and Poets lived To chant the glories of the Race; Their rhyme on limp papyrus roll Or etched on crumbling pillar's base, Has long outlived the Kings they sung And conquered even Time and Space.

IX

Aye! vain the vaunt of Heroes; vain
The deeds that once were thought sublime;
And vain your Monarchs, briefly staged
In tinselled royal pantomime;
Their House was builded on the sands
And they unworth a random rhyme.

X

Vain are the works of man; most vain His bubbled Glory, Aye! or Fame; More fragile than a last-year's leaf Unnoticed of the sunset's flame; And naught endures unless it stands Linked with a deathless Poet's name. Ι

How flourished then the lesser arts
As man to manhood slowly grew?
With blackened stick from ruddy fires
That on his cave reflections threw,
He scrawled the rock which sheltered him
And thus the first rude picture drew.

Π

And catching hints from Nature's lore He squeezed his colors from the clay; Steeped leaf and bark, and dyed the skins That round about his dwelling lay; And, urged by vanity, his cheeks Were daubed with dash of pigments gay.

Ш

So, ever as the seasons died His mind expanded with his will; He saw the dry leaves touched with gold And grass grow tawny on the hill; Found etchings on the ruffled streams And marked the sunset's hectic thrill.

IV

And dreaming thus, with defter skill He fast employed his nights and days, Spun magic webs of chequered lights And limned October's purple haze; While women's faces from his brush Fired, like wine, the se'er's gaze.

V

Until at last was handed down Beyond the treasure-trove of Greece, Beyond the strain that Sappho sung And reveries of the Golden Fleece, The art of Titian, Rubens, Thal, And Tintoretto's masterpiece.

VI

Thus, too, as man with curious eye Had noted outline, curve, and form, In toppling surge or lofty crag In woman's bosom beating warm, In cloudy shapes revealed on high Intaglios of the wind and storm,—

VII

He modelled from the plastic loam; On shell and boulder graved a sign; Chiselled the stately obelisks With hieroglyphics, line on line; Colossal wrought his haughty Kings Or metal-traced the clambering vine.

VIII

And many an image was his work And many a statuette and bust; Some that remain, but most that lie As shards to outer darkness thrust; These buried under coral sands Those cloaked beneath forgotten dust.

ΙX

Upon the lonely washes that stretch Where the Egyptian rivers croon, And floats above the Pyramids On tropic nights the lifeless moon, The mightiest waits,—the brooding Sphynx—Half-lion and half Daemon hewn.

Χ

So Sculpture, pierced in mountain sides Or dragged from Mythologic seas, Still holds a sway; and worlds will bow In homage yet to such as these— The noble bronze by Phidias wrought, The marbles of Praxiteles.

SIX

Ι

To those who for their country bleed To those who die for freedom's sake, All Hail! for them the Immortal dawns In waves of lilied silver break; For them in dusky-templed night The eternal stars a halo make.

II

In History's tome their chronicle An ever-living page shall be; The souls who flashed like sabers drawn The men who died to make men free; Their flag in every land has flown Their sails have whitened every sea.

III

On gallows high they met their doom Or breasted straight the serried spears Of Tyranny; in dungeons damp Scarred on the stones their name appears; For them the flower of Memory Shall blossom, watered by our tears.

IV

But Conquest, Glory, transient Fame, What baubles these to struggle for, When draped in sulphurous films uprise The cannon-throated fiends of War! What childish trumpery cheap as this— The trophies of a Conqueror?

V

How many an army marches forth With bugle-note or battle-hymn, To drench the soil in human gore And multiply Golgothas grim; And all for what? a Ruler's pique Religion's call, or Harlot's whim.

VI

And ghastliest far among them all Where torn and stained the thirsty sod With carnage reeks—where standards fly, And horses gallop, iron-shod, Are those remorseless mockeries The wars they wage in name of God.

VIII

Vague, dim and vague, and noiselessly, The Warrior's triumphs fade like haze; And building winds have heaped the sands O'er monuments of martial days; While Legend throws a flickering gleam Where the tall Trojan towers blaze.

VIII

Yea! whether sought for Woman's face Or, Conquest-seeking, seaward poured, Or at the beck of Holy Church War still shall be the thing abhorred; And they who by the sword would live Shall surely perish by the sword.

ΙX

Yet whether at Thermopylæ Where battled the intrepid Greek, Or Waterloo—their quarry still The red-eyed ravening vultures seek; Where prowl the jackal and the fox And the swart raven whets his beak.

X

And somewhere, though by Alien seas The tide of Hate unceasing frets; For dawn to dusk, and dusk to dawn The red sun rises, no, nor sets, Save where the wraith of War is seen Above her glittering bayonets.

SEVEN

Ι

How fared the body when the soul In olden days had taken flight? Had passed as through a shutter slips A trembling shaft of summer light! And all that once was Life's warm glow Had sudden changed to dreadful night! II

How fared the mourners; how the Priest; How spoken his funereal theme? What dirges for the Heroic dead What flowers to soften death's extreme? Was Life to them a wayside Inn Death the beginning of a dream?

Ш

We cannot know; except by tales Caught in the traveller's flying loom, Or carven granite friezes found Or parchment penned in convent gloom; Or here and there, defying Time Some long-dead Emperor's giant tomb.

IV

Where tower the steep Egyptian cones By couriers of the storm bestrid, Wrapped in his blackening cerements Sahura lies in shadow hid, While billowy sand-curves rise and dash Like surf, against his Pyramid.

V

And on the bald Norweyan shores When Odin for the Viking came, A ship was launched, and on it placed With solemn state, the Hero's frame; The torch applied, and sent to sea, A double burial,—wave and flame.

VI

And when the Hindu Prince lay prone— In final consecration dire His Hindu Princess followed on And climbed the blazing funeral pyre, To stand in living sacrifice Transfigured in her robes of fire.

VII

Where the red Indian of the Plains To the Great Spirit bowed his head, On pole-built scaffold, Eagle-plumed, The painted warrior laid his dead; Beneath, the favorite charger slain And by the Chief his weapons spread.

VIII

We clothe our dead in modish dress Dust unto dust the Preacher saith, The church-bells toll, the organ peals, And mourners wait with ebbing breath; Oh! grave, this is thy mockery, The weird farce-comedy of Death.

IX

Nay! burn the shell with simplest rites; Scatter its ashes to the skies; And on the stairways of the clouds In winding spirals let it rise; What needs the soul of mortal garb Whether in Hell or Paradise?

X

Aye! lost and gone; what cares the corse When Death unfolds his sable wings, Whether it rest in wind-swept tree Or where the deep-sea echo rings? Be laid to sleep in Potter's Field Or lone Iona's cairn of Kings?

EIGHT

I

Above unsightly city roofs Where smoky serpents trail the sky, Broods Commerce; in her factories A million clacking shuttles fly; Where, choked with lint, in sickly air The little children droop and die.

Π

The rattling clash of jarring wheels Against the windows echoing beats; And when the pallid gas-jets flare Where sombre night with twilight meets, Like flotsam on the stream of Fate The toiler's myriads crowd the streets.

III

With hiving tumult to and fro Trade's devotees, a hurrying mass, Through the long corridor of years In due procession rise and pass; To earn their wage, to seek their goal And melt, like dew-drops on the grass.

IV

And here, within the age of Gain Our forest-masted harbors shine With shimmering fleets; and we go on To climes afar of palm and vine, And in the warp of Traffic weave A sinister and base design,

V

Of mild and hapless Islanders Who fall before our soldiers' aim; Of broken faith—of sophistries— Of sin, of blood-shed, and of shame; Oh! Commerce, Commerce, who shall tell The crimes committed in thy name.

VI

Turn, turn my Fancy, inland borne Where Nature's solace shall not fail To ease the heart; view skyey seas Where cloud armadas, sail on sail, Manned by the winds go warping down Below the far horizon's trail.

VII

And as the budding willows blow When March comes whirling past the lanes, With bird-note wild, and fifing winds And undertone of sibilant rains, On slopes where Winter's garment melts Blue as the sea are violet stains.

VIII

Where cattle seek the shaded pools And silence folds the sun-burned lands, Her auburn tresses backward flung Mid-Summer, like to Ceres stands, Beside the fields of waving grain With harvest-apples in her hands. ΙX

And stealthily through winnowing dusk I see the curling smoke ascend, Where lie the farms; and evermore Where hope, and health, and manhood blend; While stubble shorn and pastures bare Proclaim the waning season's end.

X

And as beyond the naked hills The chill November sunset dies, And cloudward now a phalanx swims Where guttural honking fills the skies, Black-sculptured on approaching night And southward bound, the wild-goose flies.

NINE

I

Behold the kindred human types Tribe, Sept, and class, Race, Caste, and Clan; Red, Black and Yellow; White and Brown; Processions of Primordial Man That wax apace, and stream across In one unending caravan.

П

The Fisher-People with their shells And dwellers of the Age of Stone; The Kirghiz of the Western Steppes The Greek, the Turk, the Mongol shown, The Goth, the Frank,—I see them pass Like flash-lights by a mirror thrown.

Ш

So, too, the Arab, burnoose clad Who braves the stifling Simoon dry, Adrift upon Saharan tides His awkward camels lurching high, Long, lank, uncouth, but staunch as Death, Ships of the Desert, sailing by.

IV

Note the Caucasian in his pride Who prates of moldy pedigrees; A mushroom he, compared in Eld To the impassive, sly Chinese; Their records co-extant with Time And swarming by the sundown seas.

V

Each comes and goes; as came and went Rameses' millions; in their day What boast was made of Egypt's Kings How God-like seemed their valorous play; But cynic years dispersed their line Swift hurried with the winds away.

VI

Aye! even as motes they had their grace For a brief moment, son and sire; Then passed; as foam that sinks at sea Or chords which flee the Minstrel's lyre; Where rot the walls by Sidon raised? And where the long-lost hulls of Tyre?

VII

And all men listen in their turn
To the same Sirens; greed of Gain—
Love—Hate—Revenge—the lust of Power—
And craze o'er fellow-man to reign—
Ambition's lure—these intertwine
Like links that form an endless chain.

VIII

Since Power is but the instant's clutch And naught so trivial as a Name, What crucial proof shall fix men's worth On lasting tablets write their claim; So that their memories may fill A niche within the walls of Fame?

ΙX

The test is not of Birth nor Race Since each is worthy of his hire; It rests in what men do for men Uplifted by the soul's desire, To tread Life's fiery furnaces And save their brothers from the fire.

X

And ranging far and searching deep However though the annals be, We find but one nigh faultless man There was none other such as He; The Jew who taught and practiced Love The man who walked by Galilee. Ι

Enough my Muse; thy message cast As stone from out a sling is hurled, Let drop to night; or re-appear Where morning's gathering grey is pearled, And the bent sun, like Sisyphus, Toils laboring up the underworld.

Π

Let be; thy wisdom knoweth well The just degrees of right and wrong; Although mayhap unmarked by men Shall fall the echoes of thy song; Unheeded by the pilgrim years Unrecked of, by the heedless throng.

Ш

And yet before the highways part And thou and I in darkness dwell, Do thou thy swiftest Herald send And this as final warning tell; 'Banish all hope of gilded Heaven And laugh to scorn the fires of Hell'.

IV

Phantasmal dance those dual sprites Mere witch-craft mummeries of the brain; The lying sorcery of the Priests A worldly influence to retain; Where shalt thou go? What quest is thine? Where falls the single drop of rain?

V

But Courage, Faith, and Constancy, The cardinal virtues as I deem, May well be worshipped, as indeed The lilies of the soul they seem; Undying in their fragrance rare And glassed upon a sacred stream.

VI

Know thou, the Ideal Harmony
That fills all space, below, above,
Is not in Creed, nor Form, nor Rite
Nor in those things thou dreamest of;
But holds within its breadth and scope
The sole and only note of Love.

VII

Reject all Creeds; and yet in each Seek such material as thou can, With here a tenet, there a thought Whether it sprang from Christ or Pan; And make the key-stone of thy arch The common brotherhood of Man.

VIII

And striving thus, a happier creed In time to come shall burst its bud, The pure air cleared of battle-smoke And war no more by field and flood; Where men can lift up guiltless hands Uncrimsoned by a brother's blood.

IΧ

When nevermore in calm or storm Shall hawk-like hover on the seas, The canvas of opposing ships Their pennants floating to the breeze; And golden hopes will supersede The apples of Hesperides. Χ

When man-emancipated man Through loftier purpose wins control; With Justice as his only God To reign supreme o'er heart and soul; And Love, sun-like, illuminates The one, the true, the perfect whole.

NOTES TO COSMOS

Notes to Cosmos

Certain stanzas once intended for the original are here given. They are set down according to the chapters in which they were to have appeared.

Chapter Two

Of trees that stirred in early Spring The slow sap moving in their veins; Of flowers that dyed the woodland slopes The primrose pale, and daisy-chains; Sun-kissed betimes, or overmourned By shimmery tears of sobbing rains.

Chapter Four

And all night long the restless sea Against its barriers rose and fell, Till grey-eyed Dawn, by lonely sands Saw flash and fade the last broad swell, Before her there the ebb-tide's gleam And at her feet a murmuring shell.

And then were heard the Elder Bards In full, Prophetic tone sublime, Their eyes ablaze with ecstacy And on their lips the living rhyme; King-honored in an age of Kings And on their heards the frosts of Time.

Chapter Eight

And when a-down the bare brown lanes Pattered the swift, white feet of Spring, I saw the velvet-golden flash That marked the yellow-hammer's wing A-curve on high; and later heard The robin, and the blue-bird sing.

Far seaward on unnumbered isles Mid scent of spice and drowsy balm, The lotos-eating Islanders Lay soothed to sleep by utter calm; Low at their feet the pulsing tides And o'er their heads the tufted palm.

Chapter Nine

Stark warriors of the Age of Stone With pristine valor all elate, Who sought and slew the great Cave Bear And robbed the tigress of her mate; And, weaponed with the ax and spear, Defied the towering mammoth's hate.

And slant-eyed Mongols, yellow-skinned, Who traversed Western Steppes afar, Drank mare's milk, and observed their flocks White-clustered 'neath the Morning Star; Or, sallying forth with lance and bow Engaged in fierce Nomadic war.

On vine-clad hills was found the Gaul; Above him glistened Alpine snows: And lower down where valleys lay Loved of the lily and the rose, By moon-light tranced, the nightingale Sang silvery-sweet adagios. *** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK COSMOS ***

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