

Michael in the European East

St. Michael on the Crescent Moon

Hast thou seen gleam up, in clear and exalted autumn nights, the sparkling stars on the sky? They rise like hope in a human soul; they dive down in radiant force, like a human heart's resolve. Then they are called falling stars by men. But whoever loves his angel and, from childhood on, knows no fear, recognizes their true being. He sees in the clear autumn nights amidst the stars the great warrior who is called St. George on earth, but St. Michael in the Heavens. And he sees his countenance shining in golden Wisdom which, unconscious of itself, reflects the heart of the highest Godhead. And he sees his arm with the shimmering weapon which, strong and pure, seems to be hardened by Divine Justice.

And with his valiant hand, St. Michael strikes the sword, which will destroy the crawling, the desirous, the wallowing, the corroding impurity. And when St. Michael strikes his sword, the stars tremble and diamantine sparks fly through the air.

Hast thou seen glide, in dark winter nights, the delicate moon crescent above the gossamer white clouds? There is around them something like a rustling of distant grass growing on the wide and fair meadows of Heaven. The hearts of men looking at the crescent in wintry nights are seized by a longing to be far, far away. But whoever loves his angel and, from childhood on, has harbored purity in his heart, sees something else. He sees the Heavenly Virgin Maria standing on the narrow silver crescent. And he knows that she is a Queen. For she smiles at those who are longing and hungering on earth. And she bestows on them heavenly wheat-corns which fall down from her rosy hands and bring blessings to earth. She prays that the depths may become filled and may become good and may become penetrated with the miracle harbored in the heights. She bestows blessings with hands that are folded in prayer.

And one day it will happen that the birch tree, when its leaves are falling in autumn, will not weep because of its bereavement. Then the leaves will joyously fall down to earth. And one day a stairway, whose steps resemble milk-white stone, will appear above the moon. And Maria, waving her hands in a promise of redemption, will walk up the white steps unto the golden table spread in Heaven with the thanksgiving of men on whom the harvest has been bestowed. And it seems as if her foot was treading on fluttering doves' wings.

Henceforth the moon's crescent will not be forsaken. A song will resound from it, such as has never been heard in Heaven and on earth. St. Michael will stand on the crescent. As a heavenly smith, he has forged his sword into the frame of a lyre whose strings are fashioned from men's valiant thoughts. The

dragon-slayer will play and sing. He will perform his office as heavenly lutist. Strength is alive in his song. He will sing of consolation and fulfillment of old promises. He will sing of the outflowing of the highest light encompassing the smile of Maria.

And the birch tree will tremble down to its very pith in its joyfulness whenever this song is sounded. And autumn will be the same to it as spring.

Many a man will not see it, many a man not hear it. But whoever loves his angel and harbors faithfulness in his heart: Such a one knows the song full well and will want to be better.

– After a Polish Legend

Of Michael, the Archangel

And now come forth, oh man, climb up the Mount of Zion,
Gaze at the Mother Earth, moistened by gushing springs.
What makes the earth so rich and fair?
What fills the earth so splendidly?
What covers it so radiantly?
The earth is adorned with the Temples of God,
The earth is filled with the Mercy of God.
And the earth is covered with precious stones,
And a stream that is blazing in fire
There rides the ferryman: Michael the Prince,
Who leads the souls of all that are pure
Through the fiery stream to the portal of light,
To the heavenly forecourt illumined by the sun,
To the throne of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
And to Christ, the eternal Guardian of Heaven.
And there the voices of angels resound
And there the Cherubims' songs come forth.
But the sinners' souls are left behind,
And the sinful souls, they weep and pray:
"Mayest thou, Oh Michael, Prince of Peace,
Lead us also on through the fire-stream
Through the fire-stream to the portal of light,
To the heavenly forecourt illumined by the sun,
To the throne of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!"
And in answer says Michael these brazen words:
"Oh all ye could! Ye sinful ones!
How did ye live in the world of God?"

Ye never loved the goodly deed,
Ye spent Good Friday in empty chatter,
Ye never greeted the Holy Sunday,
Ye were no guests in the Temple of God,
Ye took the Communion without hunger of heart,
Ye gave to the beggar neither drink nor bread,
Ye did not clothe the naked wanderer,
Ye never helped him who fell down on the way,
Ye never prayed for those who have died.
And so go alone to the fiery stream!”
And the souls went alone through the fire-stream,
And their bodies glowed in the fire-sea,
And the hair on their heads was writhing like flames.
And, moaning, they fell on the bosom of earth:
“Oh father, oh mother! Why did ye beget us?
Had we but died at the mother’s breast!”

– From the Russian