

M O S E S
and other poems

by

IVAN FRANKO

From Ukrainian translated by

VERA RICH (Moses)

and

PERCIVAL CUNDY (other poems)

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Якби! ...Та нам, знесиленим журбою,
Роздертим сумнівами, битим стидом, —
Не нам тебе провадити до бою!

Та прийде час, і ти вогнистим видом
Засяєш у народів вільних колі,
Труснеш Кавказ, впережешся Бескидом,

Покотиш Чорним Морем гомін волі,
І глянеш, як хазяїн домовитий,
По своїй хаті і по своїм полі.

Прийми ж цей спів, хоч тугою повитий,
Та повний віри, хоч гіркий, та вільний;
Твоїй будучині задаток слізьми злитий,

Твоєму генію мій скромний дар весільний.

Дня 20. липня 1905 р.

[This Ukrainian text of “Prologue” was taken from the second author’s edition of the poem “*Moysey*” (“*Moses*”), dated Lwiv, 1913].

PROLOGUE



y people, tortured utterly and shattered,
Like a poor cripple at the cross-roads lying,
By man's contempt, as if with scabs, bespattered!

My soul is filled for you with care and sighing,
And burning shame permits my sleeping never,
To see the fate before your children lying!

Can it be some iron decalogue for ever
Names you dung 'neath your neighbours' feet, the cattle
Drawing the chariot of their swift endeavour?

Or that your destiny must show its mettle
In hate concealed, humility pretended,
To all who by betrayal or in battle

Have fettered you, forced you to swear dependence?
Are you alone granted no deed of wonder,
Which would reveal your powers without ending?

Or that in vain for you so great a number
Of hearts burned in love's holiest oblation,
Offering soul and body for you humbly?

In vain your landscape soaked with a libation
Of the blood of your heroes? And forbidden
The joys of beauty, healing, liberation?

In vain the sparks within your language hidden
Of might and softness, power and humour thronging,
All that can lift the soul to peaks untrodden?

In vain your music flows with notes of longing,
And chiming laughter, ecstasy of loving,
Of hopes and joys in a shaft bright and songful?

O no! Not only tears and sighs will hover
Over you. For I trust the mighty spirit
That shall your resurrection day discover!

O could I start a wave that hears words quiver,
And start a word whose bright illumination
Will fill that wave with living fire forever!

Or start a song, afire with inspiration,
A song to stir the multitudes, to lead them,
Winging them on the way towards salvation.

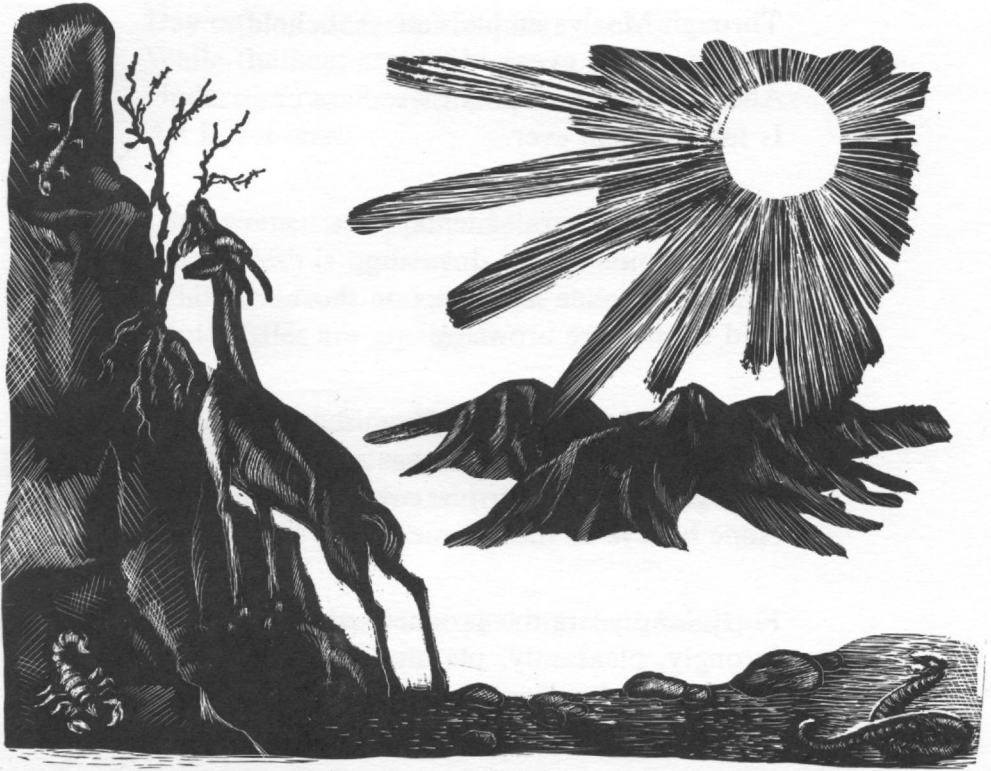
O could I . . . but, care-burdened and impeded,
Torn by sad doubts, and crushed beneath repining,
Not for us to the battle line to speed you!

And yet the time will come and, radiant shining,
You'll shake the Caucasus; one of the free nations,
With the Carpathians as your girdle twining.

You'll set the mighty sound of freedom racing
Over the Black Sea, free-holder, well-seated,
In your own house, in your own fields' broad spaces!

Accept this song, grief-swaddled, I entreat you,
Yet full of faith, bitter yet free, though sorrow's
Tears wash it, it is earnest of what will meet you,

My humble bridal gift for your tomorrow!



I



fter forty long years in Arabian
Desert lands roaming,
To the borders of Palestine Moses
And his people are coming.

Here, too, there are sands red as rust,
Moab's crags sloping barely,
But beyond them the Jordan gleams blue,
Oakgroves, grass springing fairly.

Through Moab's empty valleys, behold,
Israel wanders ever,
And no longing to pass these bare crags
Is felt by them ever.

Under their tatters of tents
The poor nomads lie drowsing,
While their oxen and asses on thorns
And thistles are browsing.

And the wonders of this Promised Land,
Sapphires, emeralds are vain now,
Though they glimmer just over the hill,
None believe in their name now.

Forty long years the prophet spoke forth,
Strongly, pleasantly, plainly,
Of the homeland once promised to them,
— All is empty and vain now.

Forty long years the sapphires of Jordan,
Its vale's wondrous profusion,
Has spurred them and beckoned them, like
A phantom illusion.

And the people lost faith, and they cried:
"The prophets deceived us!
In the desert we live and we die!
Why hope? How long believe them?"

They have given up hoping and wishing
To strive for the skyline,
To send scouts, or themselves to go forth
Past the rust mountains spying.

Day on day, deep in Moab's ravines,
While the heat cruelly blazes,
Under the rags of their tents
All Israel lazes.

Only women still spin, in the embers
Goats' flesh is braising,
While the oxen and asses on thorns
And thistles are grazing.

And groups of small children at play
Act out games strange and pretty,
They make war, found a town, raise the walls
Of a walled city.

And their fathers stir, shaking their heads,
Watching this labour;
"Where have they learned such a game?"
Each asks his neighbour.

"Surely they have not learned it from us,
Or in desert wastes heard it!
Have the prophet's words touched a child's soul
And blood, have they stirred it?"





II



nly one of this throng in his tent
Is not drowsily lying;
He soars, winged by thought and by care,
Over the mountain peaks flying.

This is Moses, the prophet forgotten,
A man old and feeble,
Without kin, without cattle or wives,
On the tomb's edge he trembles.

For his single ideal, his whole life
Was a sacrifice offered,
He laboured for it and he shone,
Burned for it and suffered.

From slavery to Mizraim, he snatched
His folk, like a storm, leading
The slaves through the marchland and its
Narrow gorges, to freedom.

As the soul of their soul he rose often
In exaltation,
To the highest peaks on the earth of
Ecstasy, inspiration.

And on the stormwaves of their souls
In the days of trial, with them
Often he plunged to the depths
Of abysses unfathomed.

But his voice has grown faint, inspiration
Burned to an ember,
Young men, hearing his words, do not heed,
Do not remember.

The Promised Land sounds to their ears
Like some outworn story,
The herds that yield meat, cheese and butter
Are their highest glory.

Though from Mizraim their grandsires and sires
Began this expedition,
They think it but folly and sin,
The nation's perdition.

Dathan and Abiron now
Have become today's leaders.
The prophet speaks — and they retort:
“Our goats all want feeding;”

He begs them continue the march!
“Our horses need shoeing!”
He promises victory, glory:
“Foes are fierce to pursue us!”

He lures with a new land ahead:
“We do well here, why leave it!”
As for the commandment of God:
“Hold your peace, you deceiver!”

And when the seer threatened once more
God's new maledictions,
Then Abiron ordered him cease
His blaspheming predictions.

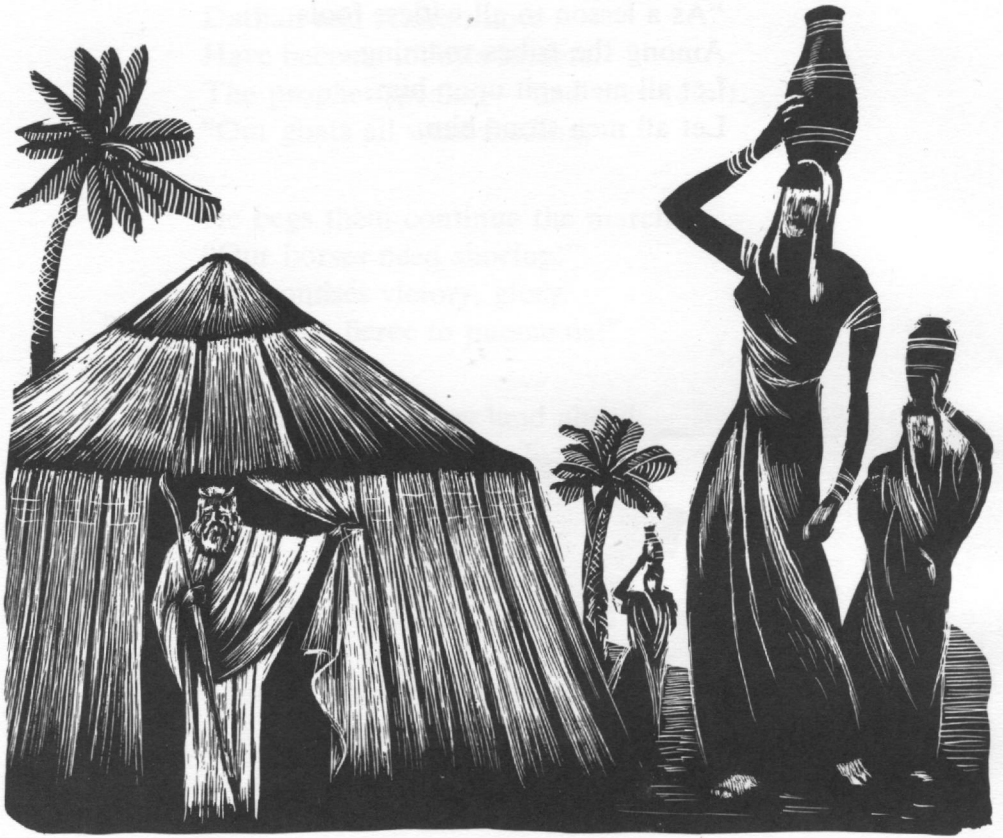
And when Israel's sons were assembled
(Ba'al's worship being over),
Then vociferous Dathan proposed:
(The crowd was won over)

“Whoever would make himself prophet,
Wild ravings expressing,
Sway the ignorant tribesmen with promise
Of God's curse or blessing —

“Who arouses the people for change,
To rebellion woos them,
Or beckons them over the mountains
To their final ruin —

“As a lesson to all witless fools
Among the tribes roaming,
Let all men spit upon him,
Let all men stone him.





III



Evening came. The long heat of the day
Gradually dwindled;
On the mountains the skyline was blazing
Like far-off fires kindled.

Like a shower of gold rain from the sky,
Coolness descended.
In the tents, the tribes started to stir
As the day ended.

Leisurely, down stony paths,
Dark-eyed Hebrew maidens
Are coming, their heads all with earthen
Water-jars laden.

With water-jars, under the crags
To the well-spring together,
In their hands, for the milk of the ewes
Are buckets of leather.

In the bare plain, older children
Like little hares play now,
They run races or shoot from their bows,
Shouting so gaily.

Now somewhere, deep in a tent,
A girl's laughter is squealing,
Or someone intones a sad song,
Like the plains of night pealing.

And the elders here, grandsires and sires,
From their tents come once more now,
And scan with their eyes mountain crags
And the bare plain before them.

Are enemy riders astir,
In the yellow mists hiding?
Does the southern storm-fiend roll his clouds
Of wild sandstorms flying?

No. All is quiet. Gossiping starts,
Daily, neighbourly chatter.
"The ewes' milk grows less every day!
Lambs are tiny as that, now!"

“And as for the donkeys, just think,
Even thistles are sparse now!
We shall have to move onward to find
A new, fresher pasture.

“Abiron suggests Midian’s land,
Dathan says even yonder.
Moses? After last evening’s decree
He’ll be quiet, never wonder!”

In the camp sudden movement and noise,
Shouting and running;
From the tents run the people, both great
And small swiftly coming.

What is this? Does a foeman approach?
Is some beast snared and pent now?
No, Moses! Behold, Moses comes
Out from his tent now!

Although he is bent by the years,
His cares and his yearning,
Still in his eyes, as in stormclouds,
Lightnings are burning.

Although his hair shines white as snow,
His age’s adornment,
Still those two tufts of hair proudly stand
Like twin horns on his forehead.

He walks to the broad place of assembly,
To the covenant tent there,
With its four sides to the world’s
Four corners extending.

In this tent a heavy chest stands,
From pure copper beaten,
In it Jehovah's laws lie,
Signs of victory and freedom.

It is long now since anyone dared
Enter this sanctuary,
Awe protects it by day and by night
Like a watchdog wary.

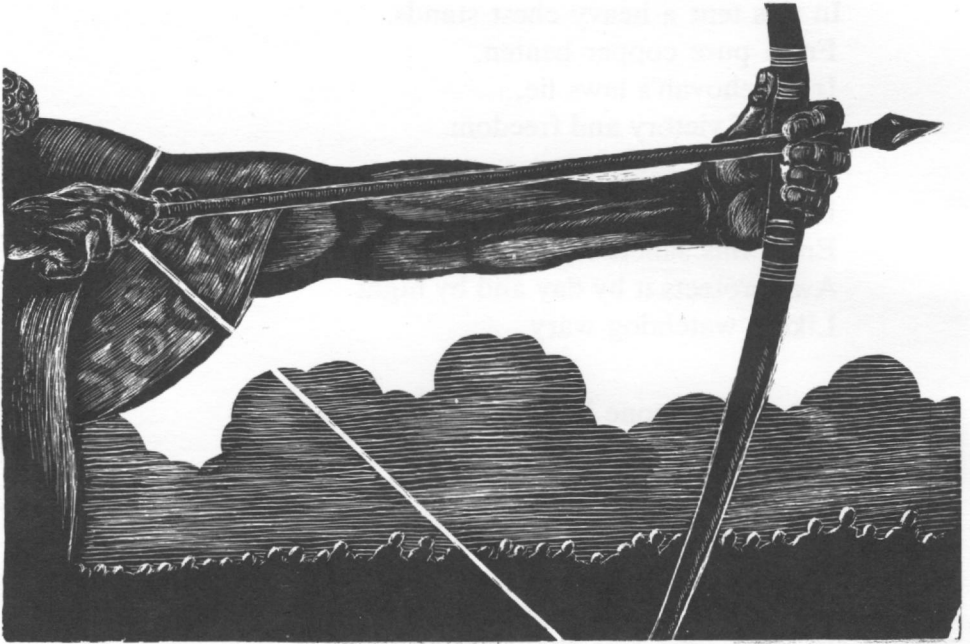
But a huge stone lies near to the tent,
Slightly to eastward,
And by custom it is from this stone
That they speak to the people.

Moses now on this stone takes his stand —
Fearfully the folk tremble;
Surely he will not dare prophesy
And flout the assembly?

Must we strike him, like rotten tree hew
Down in degradation
Him whom our sires and grandsires once called
Father of the nation?

In the front row, see, Abiron red
With exasperation,
In the midst, Dathan whispering away,
The ill-fiend of the nation.





IV



Yesterday, my poor children, you counselled
Together unwisely,
That is what, at the beginning
I want to advise you.

“To seal up my lips and my soul
Was your resolution,
And therefore, despite your desire,
I now must speak to you.

“Understand then, and take heed,
You blind generation,
If you silence the living soul, stones
Will make proclamation.

“Together you vowed that your ears
Would be shut to this preaching,
Not my words, of these lips of clay,
But Jehovah’s own teaching.

“Beware! Or He’ll speak forth to you
In His own voice of wonder,
In His own voice, a hundred times more
Dread than desert-land thunder.

“And at His word the earth sinks,
Mountain peaks start and quiver,
And your hearts, like to leaves in the fire,
Will crackle and shrivel.

“Yesterday you condemned all revolt,
But your words were vain vaunting,
For against these fools’ curses, your heart
Is rebelling undaunted.

“For Jehovah has placed in that heart
(Like yeast in dough swelling)
A life-force that to the predestined
Place must impel you.

“Yesterday you swore peace is a state
Most blessed and lovely,
But did your mind take counsel with
The Lord God above you?

“Was it for peace that he called
From Ur and from Harran,
Abraham and his tribe to come forth
To the meadows of Canaan?

“Was it for peace that He led them
Through Jordan’s wide lowlands,
Or drove them, by seven years’ famine
To where Nile is flowing.

“Had He wished to keep you in peace
Like a corpse in a deep crypt,
Still you, like grey oxen, would bow
Your heads low in Egypt.

“Therefore I speak to you, not my words,
But by God authorized.
That rebellion against the Lord God
Is a thing ill-advised.

“For the bow of Jehovah is drawn,
And the string stretched for war now,
And the arrow is nocked to the string,
(And you are the arrow),

“And the arrow is sharpened for battle,
And at the mark aimed now —
So how can the arrow speak forth:
‘I want peace!’ proclaim now,

“And since yesterday you swore an oath
— Weak as womanish sighing —
Not to listen to promise or threat
Or my prophesying,

“Therefore I would speak of these things
That you would not permit me,
Promise that which will come, prophesy
And threaten a little.

“And you must hear me, although anger
With a cold sting will smite you.
Gladly would I know whose hand first
Will be raised to strike me! . . .”





V



ou have vowed not to listen to words
Of the grace of Jehovah,
Hence, as to witless babes, I a fable
Now must tell over.

“In olden times, once, the trees met
In a wide lowland region.
‘Now let us elect us a king
By our own free decision.

'To be for us honour and hope,
Haven and assistance,
To be for us servant and lord,
Goal, and path to the distance!'

"And some spoke: 'We all are agreed
On one choice for our leader.
So let him rule o'er us for aye,
Great Lebanon's Cedar!'

"But the Cedar replied and spoke thus:
'Wherefore comes this imploring?
That I should renounce for your sakes
My crags, with peaks soaring?

"'That I should renounce for your sakes
My sunshine and freedom,
From liberty stooping to serve
Plebeians and lead them?

"'You have brought me and offered a crown?
What an honour 'tis for me!
Uncrowned I am pride of the earth,
Crown of Lebanon's glory.'"

"And straightway the trees turned aside
To the Palm-Tree imploring:
'Thou has grown here with us, art our kin,
Come thou and rule o'er us!'

"But the Palm-Tree said: 'Brothers, what itch
Drives you, irksome and galling?
To rule and keep order for you,
Is this really my calling?

“To rule and keep order for you,
Must I leave for this duty
All my fair blossoms and fruit,
My dates, sweet and juicy?

“Must the sun vainly drink up my sap
And parch it dry daily?
Must the eyes of men and the dumb beasts
Seek for my fruit vainly?

“Whosoever is willing may rule,
To a throne you’ll not press me,
My shade I will give unto all,
And food, and refreshment.’

“And all the trees hung down their heads,
Over heavy thoughts poring,
Since neither the Cedar nor Palm-Tree
Desired to rule o’er them.

“‘Let us turn to the Rose!’ But the Rose
Is the belle of creation,
Without crown she is queen of all plants,
Goddess-like is her station.

“‘Let us turn to the Oak!’ But the Oak,
Like a lord rich in acres,
Is busy about his affairs,
Branches, roots, bark and acorns.

“‘Let us turn to the Birch-Tree!’ But she
Soft in white silk had gowned her,

Timidly bowed down her head,
Spread long tresses around her.

“Then someone spoke, just for a jest,
A thought childish and silly:
‘Perhaps we should go to the Bramble!
He, maybe, is willing!’

“And all the trees spoke with one voice,
On this idea agreed then,
And started imploring the Bramble
To be king and to lead them.

“Said the Bramble: ’Tis well someone guided
Your deliberations.
I boldly will sit on your throne,
Without hesitation.

“ ‘I do not, like the Cedar, stand tall,
Nor am fair like the Palm-Tree
Nor egoist I, like the Oak,
No Birch, timid and qualmy.

“ ‘I shall win the wide field for your sake
Though I have no need for it,
And close to the ground I’ll creep, while
You to heaven stand soaring.

“ ‘And I shall defend you your gate
With spines sharper and grimmer,
And all the waste land I’ll make fair
With my flowers’ milky glimmer.

“ I shall serve as a home for the hare,
The bird's nest I shall cherish,
You will grow ever fairer, while I
On the pathway shall perish! ”





VI



In deep silence the Hebrews' ears strain
To catch this oration.

“This is your fable,” said Moses,
“This the explanation:

“The trees are the nations on earth,
And the king of them reigning
Is God's chosen, His son and His servant,
The Lord's will obeying.

“When like flowers of summer Jehovah
The nations created,
He looked in the souls of them all
And read every one’s fate there.

“He looked in their souls, and sought in them
Their nature and reason,
Seeking the one He should take
As His son and His chosen.

“He chose not the proud ones, whose thoughts
Against heaven are smiting,
Who over the necks of mankind
Raise a heel strong and mighty.

“He chose not rich rulers who loot
From the whole world are reaping,
Building coffin-walls high with the gold
And the sweat of the people.

“He chose not the handsome, the dandies
Who set lyre-strings ringing,
Who would make known their talents for ever
In marble and singing.

“All glory, all glitter He shunned,
Earthly power despising,
All the arts’ fragrance, and all
Books and philosophizing.

“As the bramble among the trees seems
Of aspect unhonoured,
And having no glory, no fruit,
No blossom upon it,

“So the nation God chose for His own
Among nations stands poorly;
Where honour and pomp rule, the thresholds
Are set too high for them!

“Among wise men, they are unwise,
In the war are no warriors,
In their native land they are but guests,
Everlastingly wanderers.

“But in their soul He placed His treasure,
Jehovah, the all-knowing,
That they might be in darkness a lamp,
His words’ treasurer glowing.

“He gave them His aid for their life’s
Endless roaming and yearning,
His promises and His commandments,
Like bread for the journey.

“But jealous Jehovah, our God,
Is wrathful and awesome;
That which by Him is beloved
Let no other love also!

“He had clad, therefore, His chosen one
In His love as a mantle,
Unapproachable, thorny to touch,
Like the spines of the bramble.

“And He made it sharp, harsh to the touch,
Set a nettle’s sting in it,
So that He and He only might breathe
The perfume of their spirit.

“And He gave a dread message to them,
Sealed seven times over,
To bear it into the far future,
Hated by all their brothers.

“Woe to that envoy uncaring
Who dreams on his journey,
Or else breaks asunder the seal,
God’s great matters spurning.

“Another will take the dread message
From the hand of the idler,
He will run, reach his goal, and will shine
In a crown gleaming brightly.

“But happy the envoy who bears it
Faithfully, swiftly,
A kingly crown, glory unbounded,
The Lord then will give him.

“O Israel, you are that envoy,
And the world’s future emperor;
Why do you not think of your message,
Its commandments remember?

“Your kingdom is not of this earth,
Nor is your glory measured
By this world. But woe if you are tempted
Ever by worldly pleasures!

“You who might have been salt of the earth
Will become but bare ashes;
You who might have won grace for mankind
Will deserve no such graces.

“You who might set the world free from pain,
From strife and from terror,
Will be but a worm, crushed underfoot,
On the road doomed to perish!”





VII



hen acidly Abiron spoke:
“Moses, noble and mighty,
How greatly this fable of yours
Has warned us and frightened!

“To be among nations a bramble!
For this mighty favour
Can it really be worthwhile accepting
As Lord your Jehovah?

“And to go as His envoy? Such honour!
To bear His sealed missive
Into a future unknown!
A fate much to be wished for!

“This is the fate of a donkey
Who bears bread-sacks tied tightly
At some stranger’s will, though his own
Hunger gnaws, unrequited!

“The Hebrews deserve better fortune,
They have not yet departed
From their wits; they will win better fate
Serving Ba’al and Astarte.

“Let Jehovah upon rocky Sinai
Send forth His thunders;
Ba’al will give to us riches and power
In a mighty country.

“Let Jehovah have the spiny bramble,
His beloved, His chosen;
The hand of Astarte shall lead us
Among myrtles and roses.

“Our birthright is Senaar and Harran,
Our path lies eastward ever:
And west towards your land of Canaan
We shall turn our steps never.

“This is clear; it is not worth discussion,
Nor thought of revision.
But what shall we do with you, after
Yesterday’s firm decision?

“Shall we stone this old ruin? A waste
Of our efforts and bother.
He can still serve the people of Israel,
One way or another.

“He is a past-master of fables,
Blowing soap-bubbles. Suited
He is to be sent to the children;
Public nursemaid his duties!”

So he spoke, and loud laughter rang out.
As the loud laughter rumbled,
Through the people, as if through a hail-cloud,
There ran a low grumble.

But tranquilly Moses replied:
“So be it, this notion,
Abiron! The man doomed to be hanged
Will not drown in the ocean!”

“It is not granted you to see Canaan,
Nor to go eastward ever,
From this place neither forward nor back
Will you move a step, never!”

On the lips of them all fell a deathly
Silence. Breath bated,
Abiron grew pale with fear,
For some miracle waiting.

But no miracle! Abiron laughed,
And as his laughter rumbled,
Through the people, as if through a hail-cloud,
There ran a low grumble.





VIII



hen bold Dathan rose: "Vainly you threaten
And prophesy fiercely;
Maybe if I tell you the truth
You will not wish to hear me!

"Confess: did you not study in Egypt's
Schools, so that better
You might know how to forge for our freedom
And honour strong fetters?"

“Confess: did you not share Egypt’s councils
For this one reason,
With magi and priests to forge Israel’s
Betrayal and treason?”

“Confess: did they not have some prediction,
From ancient times cherished,
That an oak with twelve branches should cause
Egypt’s power to perish?”

“They all knew, priests and Pharaoh, this oak
With its twelve branches growing
Were the twelve tribes of Israel that flourished
Beside the Nile’s flowing.

“And they feared that despite all their efforts,
Their torments and tortures,
That Israel would grow and would grow
Like Nile’s swelling flood-waters.

“They all knew, when in some Hebrew home
There is born to be cherished
A first-born son, then some Egyptian’s
First-born must perish.

“But none knew a good counsel for this,
None knew how to aid it,
Only you before Pharaoh’s feet fell,
You, the renegade traitor!

“And you said: ‘I will lead them away,
With your gracious permission,
To the desert. I’ll weaken them, parch them,
And teach them submission!’”

“And you kept your word, you led us forth,
A herd, stupid, unknowing,
For Pharaoh’s joy into the sand,
For our woe and pain only.

“How many folk died in the desert!
Sands and rocks have for hundreds
Of thousands of Israel’s sons
Become tombs without number.

“And now, when from our war-bands there are
A mere handful remaining,
And Israel’s once-dread might long
In the sands has been waning,

“When our valiant spirit has failed
Like a small child, and lofty
Resolution of soul like wet clay
Has weakened and softened,

“You are leading us on into Canaan, —
A wolf-trap it is truly;
Surely there Pharaoh is sovereign
Over all petty rulers!

“It is surely great folly to enter
The trap willingly. Ought we
To meet the Egyptians in war,
Or to ask them for quarter?”

“O Dathan”, said Moses, “My son,
Grieve not over this issue!
You’ll not behold Canaan, nor bow
Your proud back in submission.

“I’ll say even more, my dear Dathan,
When death comes to claim you,
Of earth under your feet you’ll not have
One hand’s breadth remaining.”

“Hey, Hebrews!” cried Dathan, “you swore
To Ba’al your allegiance.
Is the decision of yesterday
Forgotten so fleetly?”

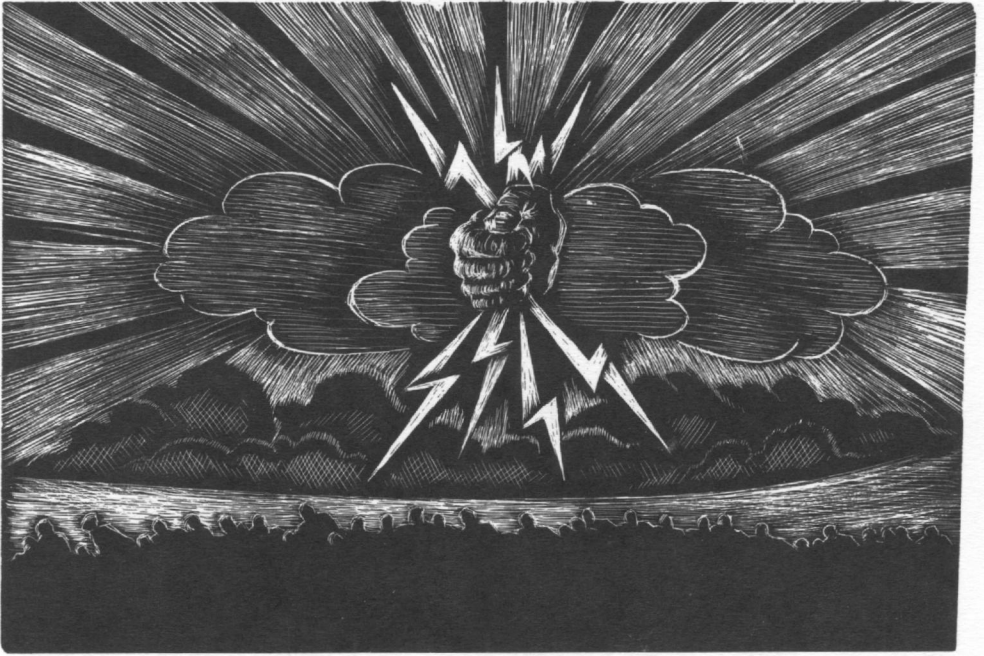
“Take your stones! He is mocking at us,
As he mocked at us ever!
Let him perish! Far better that one does
Than all through his endeavour!”

“Let him perish!” they roared all around,
“‘Amen’ to all his preaching!”
But strangely not one single hand
For a stone started reaching!

Dathan instantly grasped how it was.
“Begone, this very moment!
Lest our hands should be stained with your blood
Before this night’s coming!”

And the crowd, as if maddened, roared forth:
“Begone now! Do not dally!”
And their roar like a whirlwind rose up,
Like a storm in the valley.





IX



But now Moses raised up his voice
In an angry outpouring,
His words rolled out over the plain
Like the thunder's loud roaring.

“Woe unto you, slaves unthinking,
On pride's buskins set lofty,
For you like a blind man are led
By fools and imposters!

“Woe unto you, minds rebellious,
For, from Egypt beginning,
Ever against your own good
Your rebellion was springing!

“Woe unto you, hot, fanatical,
Stubborn, overbearing,
For this stubbornness, like a wedge, your
Very entrails is tearing!

“Like a nettle you sting the hand which
Rears you like a flower, tends you,
Like a bull, though the herdsman seeks pasture
You gore and you rend him!

“Woe unto you whom the Lord made
The pyre of all nations,
For this greatest gift will become
Your most heavy damnation!

“For whenever the rays of the Lord’s
Grace and favour are shown you,
When His envoys and prophets come, you
Always will stone them!

“Every last drop of blood of these servants,
Of His best sons, relentless
Jehovah on you will avenge,
And on your descendants!

“He will smite and torment you, until
Weeping and praying,
In your anguish you swear to submit,
His just will obeying.

“But when the harsh punishment ceases,
Your neck will grow unbending,
And the cycle unfold once more: sin,
Punishment and repentance.

“Woe unto you, for long centuries
In that school sitting,
Till fluently you read the book
Of God’s will and His bidding.

“Your picture I see: In a forest
A shepherd has gathered
Beech-bark, he soaks, dries and beats it,
And first presses it over.

“Till the tinder becomes soft as down,
And the power is given
To it to catch the bright spark
From the flint riven.

“You, Israel, are that bark. And
Jehovah will smite you,
Till you grow tinder-soft and can capture
His word’s spark of brightness.

“You will go to your goal like plough-oxen
Unwillingly ever!
Woe unto those on whose necks
Falls the fist of Jehovah.

“You are gazing far into the past
And the paths of the future,
But on thorns and on stumps near at hand
Your feet you are wounding.

“Like a horse gone wild, in your mad race
Hurling into abysses;
And the time will come when for a yoke
Your crown you will relinquish.

“Beware lest Jehovah take back
His promises spoken;
Beware, lest, due but to your stubbornness,
His word is broken,

“Lest He desert you, to all nations
A warning of terror,
Like a mottled snake, crushed underfoot,
On the road doomed to perish!”

Bowed down, they all listened to him,
Downcast and silent,
Yet some pipe in their breast murmured dully,
Like a storm sighing.





X



nd now the sun, mighty and red,
The mountain was nearing,
It seemed like a hero, a swimmer,
That will drown, being weary.

Over the cloudless sky, dusk's
Melancholy was gliding,
And the howling of jackals was trembling,
Like a wound's painful tidings.

Something human and soft in the prophet's
Old heart started trembling,
And his lofty thoughts from their high flight
For a moment descended.

Must he always be herald of punishment,
Threatening the people?
Something deep in his breast, like a child
Sick and hungry, sobbed, weeping.

“O Israel, if you but knew
How my full heart is swelling!
If you but knew how I love you
With love past all telling!

“You are my kin and my child,
All my glory, my future,
In you lies my spirit, my honour,
And power and beauty.

“I gave you all my life, all my pains,
With resolve never broken,
Through centuries' wanderings you'll pass
Stamped with my spirit's token.

“But no, it is not my own self
That I find to love in you;
All I knew finest and highest
I placed within you.

“O Israel, heed not this blaspheming,
Nor con it over:
I love you more strongly, more fully
That does great Jehovah.

“For He has millions of children,
He warms all, dew He gives them, —
But I have only you, you alone,
And you are sufficient.

“For, though out of millions He chose you
His servant for ever,
I without choice am your servant
Through love’s longing and fervour.

“And, though He takes from you the might
Of your toil, as befits Him,
I, Israel, want nothing from you,
Not one jot nor tittle.

“And though He asks incense and praise,
Honour duly given,
Your ingratitude I will accept,
And wounds, and derision.

“For I love not only your virtues,
But also your failings,
Your faults and your malice I love,
Although I bewail them!

The lofty conceit of your spirit,
“Its stubbornness, blindness,
That, once set on its own foolish path,
Of God is not mindful.

“The lies of your tongue, and your conscience
That spreads its bounds widely
And clasps at the goods of this world
Like strong roots, clinging tightly!

“Your daughters’ lives, shameless and bold,
Their loves filled with ardour;
Your speech and your customs of life,
Your breath and your laughter.

“O Israel, my offspring, seek out
The God, Shaddai, and, grieving,
Complain, though without bound I love you,
Yet I must leave you.

“For already my last, unknown hour
Is waiting to claim me,
And I must, and I must still win to
The borders of Canaan.

“I dreamed that with horns sounding thunder
We should go there together,
But the Lord God has humbled me, and
Alone I must enter.

“But, although only on Jordan’s banks
My body is dying,
In the land of God’s promise my old
Bones will be lying.

“There I shall lie, and at Moab’s
Mountains gaze ever,
Until you all follow me there,
Like children their mother.

“I shall send all my longing to you,
Round your ankles to worry,
As a dog calls his master away —
Come hunting, and hurry!

“And I know that at last you’ll burst out
Like spring flood-waters pouring,
But do not seek for me in that
Expedition of glory!

“Let your great expedition go forth
Like swift-flowing rivers!
O Israel, my offspring, farewell!
May you prosper for ever!”





XI



As he left the camp, into the plain,
Still the mountains were burning,
And their purple road lured to a goal,
To the far distance urging.

But darkness lay in the ravines,
Rolled across lowlands level.
In the exile's heart something was weeping:
"I shall return never!"

But see, from their games, Hebrew children
Come running, and catching
At Moses, they cluster around him,
At his hands and robe snatching.

“Are you going out into the night?
Stay with us grandfather!
See the walls we have built, and the gates,
And watchtowers to guard them!”

“You have built your walls nicely, dear children,
But I cannot stay now.
To see the wall 'twixt life and death
I must be on my way now!”

“Look, grandfather, in the ravine
We have killed an enormous
Scorpion, and caught three leverets
Down in the thornbush!”

“Well done, children! Kill all such scorpions
With bold endeavour!
Although such a deed is unjust,
It is useful, however!

“Unjust, for the scorpion, too,
Wants to live; is it any
Fault of his that in his tail
He carries such venom?”

“But go, put the leverets back
Where they were captured!
Their mother is weeping for them;
Did you not think this mattered?”

“To all living creatures you must
Show mercy’s due measure,
For life is a jewel. Can there be
A more valuable treasure?”

“Grandfather, wait, do not go!
Sit down in our midst here!
Tell us about your adventures!
Gladly will we listen!

“Tell us about when you were young,
All the wonders you saw then,
How you pastured your wife’s father’s flocks
On the high peaks of Horeb.

“How you once saw the thornbush that burned,
Unconsumed ever,
And how from the bush came a voice
That filled you with terror!”

“There is no time to talk of this now,
Children, I cannot linger!
See, already night comes with its mists,
And day’s eye is extinguished.

“But to you the time also will come
In life’s onrush, when for you
The Burning Bush too will appear,
As to me upon Horeb.

“Holiness will fill you like a shrine
In that memorable instant,
And to you there will speak from the fire
A voice mighty, insistent:

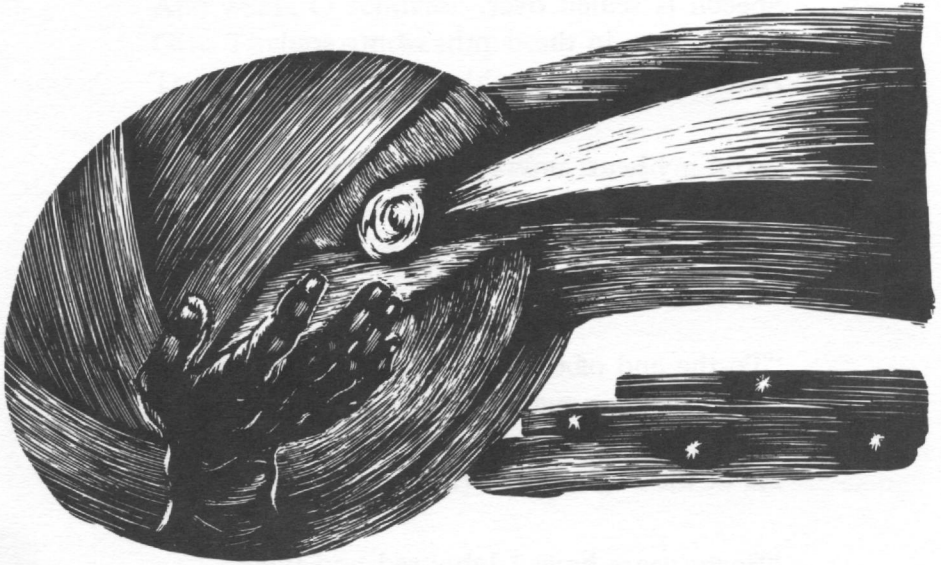
“Put off the shoes of daily cares,
Boldly, without terror,
Approach, for I wish now to send you
Forth on a mighty errand!”

“Do not quench, then, that all-holy fire,
So that, when the call beckons,
You may proclaim with your heart:
‘O Lord, I am ready!’ ”

Long on the speech of the prophet
The small children pondered,
While, unnoticed, he went forth to meet
The night and dark yonder.

And long above the silent children
Grief and sadness were hanging,
Until in the shades of the night
His dark silhouette vanished.





XII



Loneliness wraps me around
Like an ocean unbounded,
And sail-like my spirit draws in
The breath of its profoundness.

“For long have I known her, for long
Had this nursemaid to guide me!
All my life, in the plains, or with people,
Loneliness walked beside me.

“Like a wandering planet, I fly
Into mysteries plumbless,
And yet I can still feel one touch —
The Lord’s hand, all wondrous.

“All is quiet, and lips have grown silent,
Speech is sealed over,
Only Thou, in the depths of my soul
Art speaking, Jehovah!

“And my heart now seeks Thee in a surge
Of deep yearning for Thee:
O, appear to me yet once again
As Thou didst upon Horeb!

“To the end of the road Thou hast shown me,
Father, I am now winning,
And, once more, I stand here before Thee,
As at the beginning.

“Forty years have I laboured and taught,
Plunged in Thee to the limit,
To make from these slaves a true nation
In Thine own image.

“Forty years like a smith at their hearts
And their conscience I hammered,
And to this it has come: that I flee
From their stones and their clamour.

“Just when into the land of Thy promise
We should be going! . . .
O didst Thou fore-know such an outcome,
Thou the all-knowing?

“And distress is astir in my heart:
Maybe I am not blameless?
Maybe I did not follow aright
All Thou ordainest?

“Weeping, I pray: ‘I am voiceless,
And weak, O Jehovah!
Give Thy word’s dread majesty
To someone other!’

“And doubt in my soul strikes a cold
Sting pressing through me . . .
Art Thou satisfied with me, Almighty One,
Tell me now truly?”

Thus, as he went, Moses prayed,
Deeply grieving and thinking,
But still the dumb desert was silent
And the stars quietly twinkled.





XIII



ut now muffled laughter was heard
There close beside him,
As if (though no foot-fall was heard)
Someone near him was striding.

And, like the hissing of serpents,
Quiet words suborned him:
“The flower of unconsciousness fruits
To thorns only and torments.

“And when to bear that fruit alone
You no longer have power,
It is best to load all your own burden
On God in that hour!”

MOSES:

“Who is speaking? My own frenzied grief
Deep in me ruling,
Or can it be, maybe, some demon
That mocks me and fools me?”

VOICE:

“Do doubts of your task of reforming
Come to your mind now?
Forty years you were certain, and led them
Bravely, though blindly!”

MOSES:

“Who is speaking? And why is my brow
With sweatdrops all beaded?
Terror? No, but it pierces the heart
Like a wire strongly heated!”

VOICE:

“In your boundless pride you drove your nation,
From their true pathway veering,
To make of them what you desired;
Is it not late for fearing?”

MOSES:

“Who are you? Though I cannot see you,
Strange one, I'll not fear you!
I only can feel your keen sight
Through my soul deeply searing!”

VOICE:

“Does it matter who am I? Who knows
How to calm the sea’s raging?
Not who am I that matters, but is it
The truth I am saying?”

MOSES:

“No! It is not true I assumed
This task from vain glory!
But seeing my people enslaved
My heart was grieved sorely!”

VOICE:

“Yes, for feeling the brother of slaves
Your shame burned you, unceasing,
Therefore you wished to make of them such
That you might feel easy!”

MOSES:

“Yes, from the depths, murky and dread,
I wanted to raise them,
On the bright peaks of freedom and honour
Where I stood, to place them!”

VOICE:

“The Creator had set them so low,
But you sought not His guidance;
And now you run praying to Him
In the woe that betides you!”

MOSES:

“No! In this His Almighty Command
Was my one inspiration,
Horeb’s fire into my dark soul
Breathed its illumination!”

VOICE:

“But Horeb’s fire, maybe, on Horeb
Never was blazing,
But only within your bold heart
Its wild impetus crazed you!

“And that voice, maybe, urging you to
This ill-starred expedition,
Was from no Burning Bush, but from your
Own will and ambition.

“Indeed, wild desire blinds the sight,
And wishes are wonders!
Like desert mirages the world
And the gods they engender.

“And that wish, like a jackal, within
Your soul howling, succeeded
To make out of you, of itself,
Their prophet and leader!”

MOSES:

“Ah, these words make me feel loneliness
A hundredfold keenly!
Who are you, my foe?”

VOICE:

“Azazel,
The desert’s dark demon!”





XIV



It was dark. Now the bright stars alone
Twinkled with fire;
Moses guided his way by their gleam,
Ever higher and higher.

Not a path. Through the darkness, strange sounds
Were leading him ever:
Hyena-howls in the ravine,
A serpent's soft slither.

Like a hero into his last battle
He went, never pausing,
Yet in his heart a dread conflict
Within him was coursing.

“This wish”, something in him cried out,
“From shame’s anguish proceeding,
Was it this Burning Bush made me root
Up my people for freedom? . . .

“This wish — did it kindle the fire?
Was it that force which drove me?
Was it for me Jehovah’s command,
And even Jehovah?

“This wish, that I might help my brothers,
Dry the tears of their yearning,
Was this my sin that brought exile
And death as its earning?

“No! Not so! Be on guard! Keep your soul
Firm and undeviating!
A holy wish, that! But has sin,
Serpent-like, penetrated?

“You were leader? Their souls and their bodies
You held in dominion?
And your heart’s holy wish — did not power
Consume it within you?

“Were you not a new Pharaoh for them,
And one more oppressive,
For by your rule you entered within
Their soul’s deepest recesses?

“Stand against the due flow of events,
Danger soon whelms you over!
It is easy to give your own whim
As the will of Jehovah!

“But suppose forty years you were sick,
With divine madness blighted,
And you forced on them plans, not of God,
But your own, narrow-sighted?

“For, suppose that, in Egypt, their numbers
Grew strong among tortures,
They might rise up to power and seize
The whole land as their fortune?

“And in rooting them up from the ground,
Leading them to the desert,
Did you not think: Maybe I commit
A crime cruel beyond measure?

“For what can the promise of freedom
To a landless tribe matter?
Why not tear up an oak from the soil,
Cast it into the water?

“Could Dathan be telling the truth?
Their old nests they have quitted,
But no power nor urge to build new ones
To them is transmitted!

“O Jehovah, speak! Tell me: was I
Thy Commandment obeying,
Or was it my cares, blindness, griefs
That made me their plaything?

“O Jehovah, speak! Or art Thou granted
The gift of speech for us,
Through our passions alone, and our dreams,
Our blood raging and stormy?”

But Jehovah spoke not. There stirred only
Ill-omened sounds ever,
Hyena-howls in the ravine,
A serpent’s soft slither.





XV



he sun came up over the plain
Like a ring of royal crimson,
And like arrows its rays pricked and pierced
The dark and the dimness.

In the rays stood Mount Nebo, a queen
In purple robes looming,
Over all other mountains it raised
High aloft its ribs gloomy.

High upon the top peak of the mountain,
Above screens and crags cleaving,
Something immoveably stands
Like a giant primaeval.

There, high over the hubbub of earth
The noise and contending,
He stands, and he stretches to heaven
His arms, wide-extended.

In the dawn radiance of heaven,
The purple rays' glister,
His giant silhouette could be seen
In the far desert distance.

From the Hebrew tents, glances perturbed
Are flying and mounting,
Like messengers up to the giant
On the radiant mountain.

"It is Moses", they said, timidly,
One to another,
But none would pronounce what within
Their hearts silently quivered.

There Moses is standing at prayer,
Speaking with the Almighty,
And his prayer, like a sharp horn of flame,
Through the heaven is spiking.

Although his lips firmly are sealed,
And his voice is heard never,
Yet in his heart he is speaking,
Beseeching Jehovah.

Higher climbs the sun, now all the zenith
Of heaven is burning,
Still Moses is standing at prayer,
Like a rock, never turning.

Although in the plain the noon demon
Sends lassitude tiring;
As if someone's hands hold him, still Moses
Is raised ever higher.

And now the sun starts to descend
Above Pisgah's peaks slowly,
And a shadow gigantic lies spread
From the plains to the lowlands.

And the shadow gigantic falls, from
Moses' figure spills over
To the Hebrew tents, like the last sad
Farewell of a father.

And a shudder runs through all the tents:
"Lord God, now defend us,
Lest the Prophet now curse us; such curse
Would have power tremendous.

"For from prayer such as this the foundations
Of the earth quake and quiver,
Crag melt like wax, the throne shakes
Of primaeval Jehovah!

"And if he should curse us all now,
Then with the sun's waning,
The land and the people would vanish,
Leave no trace remaining!"





XVI



ut Moses still strove on, aflame,
To his goal struggling nearer;
But when night lay down on the mountain
He fell, utterly weary.

Beneath him, from the high peaks, the rocks
Trembled and swayed then,
But he lay unconscious as if
In his own mother's cradle.

Some song filled with yearning was crooned
Softly above him,
And a hand, soft as down, white as snow,
Rocked him with loving.

And quiet words were heard speaking to him:
“My poor son, all dismayed now!
See what in a short span of time
Harsh life has made you!

“Was it so long ago that I tended you,
By the hand led you?
Did I then bring you into the world
To bear torments so dreadful?

“So many the lines on your brow,
Your form withered and slight now,
And your hair, which in days past I smoothed,
Like the snow has grown white now!

“But secretly from me you rushed
Into battles and duels!
See what you have done! Say how many
Wounds pierce your heart cruelly!

“My poor child, my poor child, thou hast suffered
Torments exceeding!
And today . . . the whole day in the sun,
And where was it leading?

“For prayer! You are anxious to pierce
The past and the future
Of your nation with your ardent prayer, —
My child, unwise, untutored!

“See, I cast down a stone from the cliff,
And it falls, rolling, pounding,
From crag to crag, gulley to gulley,
Leaping and bounding,

“Here it strikes itself on a sharp fang,
And is broken to pieces,
Here it tears off a stone in its flight,
And both fall without ceasing;

“Here one fragment is left, there another,
Still it flies and it clatters;
But who knows the last resting place
Of each fragment that shatters?

“I say: even Jehovah knows not,
Though prostrate you request Him;
Where each piece is fated to fall,
There it must land, predestined!

“For in that very stone lies the power,
The force and the guiding,
That points out to it the true place
Fashioned for its abiding.

“And however strong is your Jehovah,
He cannot circumvent it,
And when one small stone is in flight
He cannot prevent it!

“Look! A dustmote! Your eye barely sees
Its trembling vibration,
But Jehovah still cannot achieve
Its annihilation!

“And Jehovah cannot bid it halt;
It pursues to the limit
The path where it for ever is driven
By the forces within it!

“So much for a mote! But consider,
A many-souled nation,
Where each soul gives some part of its flight
To the whole’s perturbation!

“You have heard sung the tale of Orion,
The blind giant, aiming
In his roamings to reach to the sun,
His sight to regain there?

“And he bore on his shoulders a lad,
A guide who misled him,
Who should show him the way, but each hour
On a different path sped him.

“Guide me, lad, to the sun! ‘So at dawn
To the east they were going,
At noon they went south, and at dusk
To the western ford’s flowing.

“And Orion goes on, ever on,
Faithful to the sun, truly,
Thirsting for that light, which in the end
Must shine for him surely.

“He directs his giant march through the seas,
And mountain crags rocky,
But he knows not that, perched on his shoulders,
The boy ever mocks him.

“This Orion is all humankind,
Full of power and believing,
That with dread efforts persists
To an unknown goal striving.

“It loves all that is beyond reach,
Believes the undiscovered,
And to reach the fantastic the near
And the known tramples ever.

“It makes plans that lie out of its power,
For fantastic goals dreaming,
And the logic of facts is the lad
That makes mock of its scheming.

“Like the blind man of fable who trusted
The eyes of a stranger,
Arriving where he would not go,
To a goal never aimed at!

“Yet you pray! My poor child, where has gone
Your reason, your force now?
You pray to the foam that it should
Halt the whole river’s course now!”





XVII



At first, in those words there seemed something
Like a clear water freset,
There breathed from it cleanness and goodness,
And coolness refreshing.

But gradually something weighed heavy,
Like a desert wind stifling;
There was fear, like a child left alone
Without light in the night-time.

And Moses from terror leapt up,
Mustering all his forces,
And said: "Why, ere I lie in my grave,
Do you bring me such tortures?"

"You are not my mother! Your words
Are not loving nor caring!
Not my mother! You are Azazel,
The dark fiend of despairing!"

“Begone! With the Tetragrammaton
I curse and defy you!
I do not believe you! Immortal
You are — but a liar!”

And quiet words were heard speaking to him:
“My unwise child! Now you
Are cursing me, knowing not I
Too am part of His power!

“What are your poor curses to me?
You would die from despairing,
If you knew but a hundredth of all
I know and am bearing!

“You curse that one small ray of fire
Touched your blindness; the traces
Of that fire where I dwell and He dwells
Beyond all times and spaces!

“The barrier of your narrow sight
I’ll draw back for you rather;
Look at the land which He promised
Abraham, your forefather!”

And the whole western skyline blazed forth,
And all Palestine boldly
Could be seen from the peak where he stood,
Like a broad map unfolded.

And his unseen companion spoke to him,
Quietly explaining:
“Do you see that black mirror below?
The Dead Sea they name it!

“And yonder the peaks that to heaven’s
High ceiling rise craggy,
Stretching away in steep lines,
They are Carmel’s heights jagged!

“Look to the north, to Mount Zion!
Jebusites are camped near there!
And if you shout loud from the mountain,
The Amorites hear you!

“That silver ribbon is Jordan,
To the Dead Sea descending;
Close to its mouth, Jericho,
Her ford-dues defending!

“And that single valley above it,
That closely enfolds it,
On the far bank the Ammonites dwell,
This side Caananies hold it

“And westward lie mountains and peaks,
Wide highland pastures,
A little lake there to the north,
And high mountains after!

“See, this is all Palestine for you,
Sheep may graze, barley grows there;
From Kadesh to Carmel your fist
Easily could enclose it!

“There are no broad pathways for you,
No way to the ocean!
Where to live, to expand, where to grow,
Multiply as a nation?”

Moses said: "From the rock He brought water,
In our migration,
If need be, this land He'll make Eden
For His own nation!"





XVIII



nce again muffled laughter was heard:
"Faith can move mountains, truly!
But look on this new line of scenes,
What must be in the future!

"See how your tribesmen advance,
See them crossing the Jordan,
Jericho has been taken, and rivers
Of blood they have forded.

"For centuries long battles rage
To take Palestine now,

Amalechites, Hebrews and Hittites,
Amorites, Philistines now.

“See the Hebrew kingdom — its price
Of blood and of weeping,
And on history it weighs like a fly
On a plough-oxen creeping!

“It will fall into fragments apart
Before reaching full flower,
On all sides, mighty neighbours with greed
Part by part will devour it.

“See the clouds fly from Gilead, swift
From Damascus, pursuing!
The Assyrians come, and they bring
Desolation and ruin.

“See all the fields growing red,
Corpse on corpse in spoilation,
For Babylon raises her might
For Judah’s desolation.

“The Temple is burning. . . . That crowd
Like marching ants, driven
They go, chained in thousands together,
The captive survivors!

“You hear weeping? The only wise man¹
On the ruins lamenting,
He advised them to bow to the foe
That doom might be prevented.

¹) The Prophet Jeremiah. (I. F.)

“The stench of the wastes. . . . Through the dark
A faint dawnlight is burning. . . .
But from those who went forth in such hordes,
See how few are returning!

“Around Salem’s walls, very small,
Something stirs, something trembles;
A new people, a new God, a new
Force unseen, a new Temple.

“And it grows, in its poverty struggle,
Closely to the ground thriving,
Like a thistle set low, steadfastly
Always ready for striving.

“And over the heads of these people,
The world’s tempests are tossing,
Empires and kingdoms rise, fall,
Like grim phantoms passing.

“But He, in His corner, His stubbornness
Unbending nurses,
He only has hatred for all
And unchanging curses.

“And hatred most heavy ‘for any
Other god as His rival!’
See how at the gates of His Temple
Hatred is thriving!

“Hatred gives birth to hate. And now see
At a tyrant’s word, brutal
Forces advance on your tribe,
Once again to uproot them.

“You hear clangour? It is the iron march
Of the dread legions,
That trample Judean fields, turn
Ploughland to desert regions.

“You hear splashing? Jews’ blood spilt by swords
Of the enemy forces.
You hear screaming? The girls of Judea,
Dragged by wild horses.

“A mother here eats her dead child,
Mad with starvation!
A thousand die there, crucified,
The flower of your nation.

“And once more the Temple is burning,
And this time gone for ever,
For what this foe’s hand shall bring down
Will rise again never.

“Once more captive survivors flow forth
In a river of yearning,
But there is no more homeland for them,
And no more returning.

“And the bright star of Israel is quenched
To shine again never;
But the hate which grew up in the Temple,
Through the wide world will revel.

“Are you sorrowful? Have you no faith?
You have faith, I know surely!
It is this Paradise which is waiting
In the Promised Land for you!

“You have toiled for this! Say, was it worth
The toil and endeavour?
For them to draw near, do you still
Wish to pray with all fervour?”

And Moses hung down his head. “Woe
To my evil misfortune!
Can I never, then, snatch my dear people
From slavery and torture?”

And he fell with his face to the ground:
“Jehovah has deceived us!”
And a wild laughter echoed his words,
Demonic, evil.





XIX



Thunder roared. The deep roots of the mountain
Trembled and quivered,
One after another, the heralds
Came of Jehovah.

And up to the sky, thunderclouds
In a black wall were mounting,
As if Mother Night from dread hate
Grimly were frowning.

And swift in the darkness her eyes
Of fire she was rolling,
Like a mother she raged, who a wicked
Daughter is scolding.

In alarm Moses heard the dark speak
And the lightning. However,
His heart could not find in them yet
The voice of Jehovah.

And the thunder roared over the mountains,
His hair rose from fearing;
His heart swooned in his breast: no, it is not
Jehovah he's hearing!

Among the crags howl the wild winds,
Angrily shrieking,
Gripping the soul, and yet through them
Jehovah is not speaking!

Rain beats together with hail,
The chill gale bites bleakly,
And the soul, its strength gone, must surrender
To utter weakness.

Sudden silence. The waters alone
Murmur like a sad sobbing;
A warm breeze blew, with perfume of almond
And terebinth throbbing.

And in the warm breeze came a word
Mysterious, that hovered,
Moses felt in his heart this was truly
The voice of Jehovah.

“Jehovah betrayed you? Then state
Your justification!
Was there a bond, signed and sealed,
Between Me and your nation?

“Have you seen My plans, read in My book
Wherein men’s fates are spoken?
Have you seen the end, do you know surely
My word will be broken?”

“You of little faith, you were not formed
In the womb of your mother,
But I knew every breath you would draw,
All your hairs had I numbered!

“Before Abraham from Ur to Harran
Began his migration,
I knew all his progeny down
To the last generation!

“Poor is your land, narrow, close,
And no wealth decks it brightly,
But, remember, the cradle is close,
Even of the most mighty!

“In due time, for conquest and labour,
Away I shall lead you.
Just as a mother will wean
Her child when it is needful.

“Here in a field, sparse and lean,
Like thorns upon gravel,
You will grow hard and firm, on the road
Of the great change to travel.

“I know your inflexible soul,
Your insatiable nature,
And like thistles you would run to seed
With rich soil for your nurture!

“With body and soul to the furrow
Like a leech you would snatch then,
And like a fat fish in a net,
Mammon would catch you.

“In Egypt you bent to the yoke,
And lived daintily from it . . .
But that fine meat of Egypt you shall
Forevermore vomit.

“So, when you are torn from this land,
And all ties have been severed,
Scattered all through the world, you shall conquer
Its saps and its treasures.

“But to all your deeds I shall place
A firmly set limit,
Like a snake on a treasure, I’ll give you
Only grief and woe in it!

“He who conquers the treasures of earth,
Above all things adores them,
He will become but their slave,
Lose the soul’s treasures for them!

“He is slave, he is lord of these treasures,
Bought with blood, lamentations,
And to make them increase, he is forced
To destroy their foundations!

“A leech sucks your blood, you are healed,
But the leech dies, however, —
So this golden sea on a shoal
Will strand you for ever!

“In this golden sea, thirst will always
Be torment exceeding,
And golden bread will be unable
To nourish or feed you.

“And you shall be always My witnesses
To the world’s limits,
That from all men I choose for Myself
Those that nourish the spirit.

“He who feeds you on bread, with that bread
Will become dung together,
But he who feeds the spirit in you
Will flow to Me forever.

“That is where your true Promised Land lies,
Unbounded and gleaming,
And to it for My people you were
A guide, though unseeing!

“That is the radiant homeland,
Loveliest of your yearnings;
This Palestine is but a fragment,
Only an earnest!

“It will be but a memory, a dream,
That unquenchable longing,
So that seeking it you would become
Lords of all the earth thronging.

“But as you have doubted My will,
Though for a minute,
Having now seen this homeland, you cannot
Enter within it!

“Here you shall lay down your bones,
An example of terror
To all, rushing through life to their goal,
On the pathway to perish!”





XX



cross the bare mountain, his yearning
Like desert mist flows now,
Across the broad country his thoughts
And his wishes he sows now.

Flowers and leaves long since grown
Sere and yellow he scatters,
Voices arise in the soul
That had long ceased their clamour.

All is honoured and dear now, that yesterday
Had no true meaning,
What was yesterday trampled and spurned
Is holy and gleaming.

Down in the Hebrew camp, night
Passed full of fearing.
Dawn came; they look up. Is he there
On the steep crags appearing?

He is gone. And that "gone" struck them like
A cold deathly terror.
They all felt the whole source of their life
Had vanished for ever.

That unseen, inconceivable something
Which always had warmed them,
Giving a meaning to life,
Instructed, informed them.

And a fathomless grief lay upon
Consciences hard to dumbness.
The whole camp, as if spellbound, was seized
By faintness and numbness.

Pale of face, without ceasing, they looked
One to another,
Like murderers who in a dream
Had killed their beloved.

Sound of hooves! Sandstorm? Or prophecy
At last coming true now?
It is Joshua, prince of the horsemen,
And his troop in pursuit now!

Is a foeman attacking? They drive
The herds on, never linger!
A nameless fear drives them all forward,
It is God's unknown finger!

The soul's hunger, fear of old abysses
And desolation. . . .
But Joshua gives a bold cry:
"To arms! Forward the nation!"

The shout soars like an eagle above
The dumb crowd, roars and rattles
Echoing into the mountains:
"Forward! To battle!"

Yet a moment — then all will awake,
From their dull langour,
And no one knows what in this moment
In him starts to clamour!

Yet a moment — the warcry will come,
Hundred-thousand-fold cheering,
In that moment, dull nomads will turn
To a nation of heroes!

Tumult will break, desert sands
Into mud will be beaten,
They will stone Abiron unto death,
They will hang Dathan.

Through the mountains they'll speed like a bird,
Through the Jordan's spray splashing,
And Jericho's walls melt like ice,
To their trumpet-sounds crashing.

They will go into centuries unknown,
Filled with longing and terror,
They will make straight the way of the spirit,
On the pathway will perish. . . .

