

IVAN FRANKO

MOSES

Translated from the Ukrainian



Alexander Archipenko: IVAN FRANKO

(Sculptured for the Cultural Garden
in Cleveland, Ohio)

MOSES

P O E M

BY

IVAN FRANKO

.....

Translated from the Ukrainian

by

WALDIMIR SEMENYNA

.....

With a biographical sketch of Ivan Franko

by

STEPHEN SHUMEYKO

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IVAN FRANKO

The World War was attaining its height. On the Eastern Front, Ukrainians were laying down their lives—for every country but their own. Ukraine, then under the misrule of two foreign powers, Russia and Austro-Hungary, was in a tragic position, for her native sons had to fight one another. It was at this juncture that there passed away a great Ukrainian—Ivan Franko, he who long before the war had predicted that the time would come when enslaved Ukraine will rise, cast off her chains of oppression, and take her rightful place in the society of nations.

Franko died after a long illness, on May 28, 1916, at the age of 60. News of his death flashed to all corners of the earth, to every place where dwelt his countrymen. Everywhere it called out the deepest sorrow, for all realized that Ukraine had suffered a great loss. Metropolitan Andrew Shep-titsky, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Greek Rite, stressed this himself when he wrote to a friend that even the devastation suffered by Ukraine till then because of the war, was little compared to the loss she sustained by the death of Ivan Franko. A writer of great fecundity, a poet second only to Taras Shevchenko—the Bard of Ukraine, a scholar, and a great leader of his people, Ivan Franko lived long enough, however, to influence the course

of Ukrainian cultural and national development to a degree equalled by few men in modern times.

No real understanding of Ivan Franko is possible without an understanding of the order of his day among his people. In the main it was quite reactionary, tinged with romanticism of bygone glories — when Ukraine was free. It made little effort to adjust itself to growing modern conditions and to eradicate the prevailing social, economic and political injustices. Nor did it realize that only through self-reliance could the Ukrainian people eventually regain their freedom; instead it naively looked towards the Russian Czar or the Austrian Emperor and his petted Polish nobility for their salvation.

It was into such order that Ivan Franko was born, in 1856, in the village of Nahuyevichi, Galicia, then under Austria. Village and country life form the background of his youthful days. As a pupil in the local grammar school and then in the nearby gymnasium, Franko attracted some attention only by reason of "his rarely polished shoes, soiled shirt, torn jacket, uncombed hair, and—highest rank in class." Poor, shy and sensitive, the lad found most of his relaxation in observing life about him and in omnivorous reading. Self-expression with him took the form of writing verses and simple prose; and soon some of this began to appear in print.

Upon graduation from gymnasium, Franko entered Lviw University. It was during this period that he began to correspond with Michael Drahomaniw, the Ukrainian scholar and publicist of European reputation who from exile ardently advocated the adoption by his people of the progressive ideals of the West. What Drahomaniw advocated struck a responsive chord within Franko and opened new

horizons for him. He began to see with clearer eye the failings of his people that permitted them to become prey to exploitation and mistreatment by their Polish oppressors. Likewise his warm sympathy was stirred by the sorry lot of the peasantry and the workers. He determined, therefore, to devote himself to the remedying of such conditions. And thus his writings at this time began to take on a new character, no longer just of a belle-mot, but of a double-edged sword, cutting the fetters of reaction and servitude and hewing the way to enlightenment, progress, and liberty.

Before Franko had much opportunity of exercising this determination, he was arrested on suspicion of complicity in revolutionary activities, and though innocent, imprisoned for nine months. He emerged from prison in the Spring of 1878, outraged by the raw injustice inflicted upon him and the others whom he met while jailed. He was yet to suffer another cruel blow, in form of ostracism by many of his countrymen, whose conservatism caused them to look with hostility upon his alleged connections with radical circles. Mostly among the youth did Franko find understanding and friendship. Nevertheless, he was now at the crossroads. Either he was to repent his "sins" and become a "respectable" pillar of society, or else, as he later wrote, "join the ranks of the ostracized and find my company among them." He chose the latter course.

Among his first acts in this direction, was to take over, with the aid of some young friends, the publication of the periodical **The People's Friend**, (Hromadsky Druh), and rejuvenate it. The journal became the organ of progressive thought at that time. "With the lightheartedness of youth and the ardency

of those who have nothing to lose, it flung its challenge to society," Franko later wrote. Practically everything in it was written in a provocative tone to society as it was then. Especially did it awaken response among the youth, for it was mainly their feelings that Franko expressed so well. What these feelings were, can be gleaned from his poem **The Stone Breakers** (Kameniari), written in 1878. Basing it on an old legend telling how a tribe was imprisoned by Alexander the Great in a huge barren plain surrounded by impenetrable rocky mountains, and how it broke its way to freedom—Franko expresses in this poem the spirit and hopes that animated him and the Ukrainian youth of his day:

Each one of us believed that with our human power
We'd cut right through that cliff and crush the stone
to dust,
That with our blood and bones, our last remaining
dower,
We'd build a hardy highway over which the flower
Of hopes and youth would come into this world—
and must!

And thus we go ahead in body one united
By that one almighty thought, that infant of the
brain,
What if we are curst and by the world condemned!
We're breaking through that wall to free the truth
we've sighted.
That happiness may come—when none of us remain.*

Though ending thus in a slightly bitter tone, the poem clearly demonstrates that the youth then had

* Translated by W. Semenyina.

no illusions on how long it would take to bring about a new order in the land. Likewise it showed the youth's determination to sacrifice all, even life itself, in the cause of true and worthy ideals.

This poem was soon followed by a novelette, **Boa Constrictor**, in which Franko dealt with the economic exploitation of inhabitants of Borislav during the transformation from the agricultural to the industrial system in that district.

His realistic approach to the problems of the day made Franko a marked man in the eyes of the authorities. In 1880, he was again arrested and imprisoned, this time for three months, after which he was released for lack of any specific charges and incriminating evidence against him. Hounded by police and unable to find remunerative work, the young writer nearly perished of starvation following his release, being saved in the nick of time by a friend.

The year 1880 is important in the life and works of Franko, for the considerable amount of lyrics he wrote then showed him to be a poet of unusual talent and originality. That year too he produced his famous **Eternal Revolutionist** (Vichny Revolutsioner), whose verses vividly portray the unconquerable, flaming spirit of the younger generation of his day in their fight for freedom. This inspiring message to the people was soon followed by his prize-winning novel, **Zakhar Berkut**, a penetrating study and commentary upon the social conditions of his time, yet so romanticized that it can easily be likened to a sugar coated pill that society swallowed without being aware of its real composition until it began to dissolve within its social organism.

Through such and other mediums, Franko began to play a definite role in shaping progressive thought among his people. Conservatism, however, was too deeply rooted among them, and the more progress he made the stronger the opposition against him and his ideas grew. Soon it came to pass that he was denied an opportunity of making a living among his people; to be sure, such opportunities were very few then. As a result, he accepted an offer to become assistant-editor of a Polish newspaper. His new position enabled him now to speak his mind frankly concerning those elements in Ukrainian life that weakened it. At the same time it led him to realize how vain were the hopes of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation. As he later wrote: "At the close of the 19th century, when the Ukrainian younger generation broke all ties that bound them to their elders, and some of them transferred their activities to Polish newspapers—without ceasing, however, to labor in behalf their Ukrainian ideals—the change of terrain for them brought with it a new idea: the possibility of compromise and united efforts between Ukrainian and Polish radical and progressive circles for the attainment of mutual goals, especially the overthrow of the landed and reactionary ruling classes within the country... It took ten years before these Ukrainian idealists finally realized that there was nothing they could gain from the Poles and that only by sowing one's own fields can one win his daily bread."

These "ten years of serfdom" (1887-97) which he spent working for the Poles, were most unfortunate for him, as they seriously hindered his development as a writer of Ukrainian poetry and prose. Yet it should not be supposed that during these ten years

Franko completely "broke the Ukrainian pen," for it was during this time that he wrote, among other works, **The Landlord's Jests** (Pansky Zharti), a narrative poem which one of his severest critics characterized as "monumentum aere perennius," and which movingly describes the abuses suffered under serfdom that existed in Galicia till 1848. During this period, too, he wrote **Death of Cain** (Šmert Kayina), a poem that was little understood at that time, but which endeavored to discover the true value of life, finding it in the harmonious existence within the person of two main elements: emotion and reason. Shortly afterwards, Franko wrote a cycle of poetry known as **Jewish Melodies** (Zhydivsky Melodiyi). By it he showed himself to be the first Western Ukrainian writer who really made an effort to understand the Jews. Hitherto, the Jew in Ukrainian literature, as well as in popular conception, was the tavern keeper, who together with the grasping landlord kept the Ukrainian peasant in endless poverty; and there was reason enough for this conception. Franko was well aware of this type and portrayed it in some of his writings. Yet he also realized that there were many Jews, who were being exploited and who suffered just as much as the downtrodden peasants. It is upon the life and hardships of the latter class of Jews that his Jewish Melodies are based. One of the most poignant of them is **Surka**, a tale of a Jewish mother.

About this time, Franko was imprisoned for the third time. This was done by Polish-dominated authorities, during election time, in an attempt to prevent the possible election of progressive candidates for office, among whom was Franko. As in previous times, he was again released on account of the lack

of charges against him. While in prison, he managed to write his **Prison Sonnets** (Turemni Soneti).

Upon his emergence to freedom, Franko clearly saw that his endeavors and those of his associates had not been in vain. A definite awakening among the people was now visible. The peasantry was beginning to play an unprecedented role in the political life of the country. Mass meetings were being held throughout the land, expressive of the growing rebellion among the masses against reaction and foreign rule, and demanding more universal suffrage, freedom of the press, reforms in the system of taxation, and more advanced agrarian policies. New leaders were appearing, too, most of them of peasant stock. But rising above them all was he, Franko, the guiding spirit of this new movement. Upon him rested the confidence and hopes of the Ukrainian progressives, and upon him, too, of course, fell the brunt of attack from all sides, from the authorities, the reactionary muscophiles—i. e. those who favored closer cultural and political affinity with Russia — from the conservative “populists,” and from all other dominating elements that saw in him danger to themselves. Undeterred by these attacks, Franko kept exhorting his countrymen to struggle for their rights. Likewise from beneath his prolific pen the flow of various literary works continued uninterruptedly, among them being a fine collection of short stories entitled **By the Sweat of One’s Brow** (V Poti Chola — 1890), which pictured “real people that I knew, true facts that I saw or heard,” and which can rightfully be considered as autobiographical. He also produced at this time several books for children, of which the most popular was a version of the epic, **Reynold the Fox** (Lys Mykyta).

In 1893 Franko published the second edition of his poems, From Heights and Depths (Z Vershyn i Nyzyn), which was met with considerable enthusiasm. The collection definitely showed that Franko's poetry compared favorably with the best of other countries. His beautiful stanzas and flowing rhythms intertwined to form truly artistic creations, with none of the stock situations and over-colored images of most of his predecessors. From the linguistic viewpoint also, the second edition was significant in that it clearly demonstrated Franko's mounting success in fashioning the popular speech of the people into a truly worthwhile literary medium, in place of the previously fashionable but now entirely inadequate Church-Slavonic language.

All this output of literary works together with his publicistic and public activities, did not prevent Franko from pursuing his formal studies. In 1894 he received his Ph. D. from the University of Vienna. He had expected that this degree would enable him to realize his long cherished ambition to teach at L'viv University. When the chair in Ukrainian literature became vacant there, the faculty recommended him for it. This recommendation was virtually equivalent to a direct appointment, for though subsidized by the state, the universities then had complete autonomy. Great was his disappointment and equally great was the popular indignation, therefore, when it was learned that the Polish governor of Galicia, Count Badeni, had prevented the confirmation of this faculty recommendation by the Imperial Government. It is said that some of Franko's Ukrainian opponents also had a hand in this. "For God's sake!" one of them is reported to have exclaimed.

“How can you permit that man to teach at the university! Why, just look at the torn coat he wears!”

This rank injustice to Franko had quite a boomerang effect upon his enemies, for it brought him many new supporters and friends, even from the older generation. The latter were gradually becoming appreciative of his ideas and talents. His continued unsparing criticism of them, however, kept this appreciation at low ebb. Nevertheless, his leadership became more and more recognized, especially when he began to remove himself from active political life, with its attendant friction, and lead the people by sheer force of his principles, ability and personality.

In 1896, Franko wrote his immortal **Withered Leaves** (*Zivvale Lystia*), a series of short poems, subjective in tone, each of an individual character, yet all linked by the theme of unrequited love. He divided it into three clusters. The first expresses a cry of pain. The second constitutes resignation to pain and makes a cult of it; here Franko attains the heights of lyricism, creating poetry of unusual intensity of emotion, mostly of a melancholy nature. The third cluster represents liberation from pain, wherein the poet, goaded beyond all endurance by the pangs of unrequited love, bows before Budha and aspires to emerge from the turmoil and torment of Samsara to the shores of that quietude and freedom of all conditions of existence—Nirvana. Such final apathy is strange for Franko, but quite understandable in the light of his sufferings. This symbolic bow to Budha, however, together with its accompanying seeming approval of suicide as an escape from life's misfortunes, brought down on Franko's head a storm of criticism, especially from the clergy, with the result that for

awhile Franko was bereft of some of his growing popularity.

More philosophical and moralizing in tone, was **My Emerald** (Miy Izmarahd—1898), a sundry collection of poetry, bound into an organic whole not by any one religious or aesthetic dogma, but by a diaphonic combination of the emotional and intellectual tendencies. A good portion of these verses were written under great difficulty, in a darkened room with closed and paining eyes. "Perhaps this physical and spiritual suffering of mine," wrote the poet in the foreword, "has left its mark upon the physiognomy of this book. For in sickness a man wants to be treated very gently, and as a result he becomes gentle and tolerant himself. He becomes imbued with deep yet delicate feelings, a desire to love and feel grateful to someone, to press close and trustingly to such a person, like a child to its parents. I do not know how much such feelings have found reflection in this book, but I do know that I wanted to make of it a work that would be clearly moralistic in tone. It is certain, of course, that my morality is markedly different from that catechistic and dogmatic morality which among us is customarily advanced as the only Christian morality... If from these poems there enters into your heart at least one drop of goodness, gentleness and tolerance not only for opposing doctrines and opinions but for human mistakes, failings and sins as well, then this work shall not have been in vain..." What follows this foreword, however, does not at all times agree with this expressed intention. Perhaps this is because various parts of it were written at different times. Nevertheless, with all its varying moods—of gentleness, of sympathy for the suffering, of scepticism and irony, of despairing

reflections upon the conditions of that time—My Emerald is a valuable addition to Ukrainian literature.

At about this time there appeared on the Ukrainian cultural horizon a new monthly, the **Literary-Scientific Messenger** (*Literaturno-Naukovy Vistnyk*); patterned on West European models. Accepting an invitation to join its editorial staff, Franko helped to make this journal not only a veritable treasure trove of Ukrainian literary achievements of that period, but also a scholarly review encompassing a wide range of subjects based on Ukrainian national, cultural, political, economical and social development.

What hold Franko had obtained by this time on his people, was clearly illustrated in the autumn of 1898 when various Ukrainian organizations and parties united to celebrate the quarter-century jubilee of his literary career. One such celebration was held in L'viv, ancient capitol of Western Ukraine. Among the many gifts he received there was a book of 127 pages containing naught else than the titles of his numerous works, Ukrainian, Polish, and German. Many eulogies were showered upon him on this occasion. When all had finished, Franko rose and delivered a brief address, famous to this day on account of the insight it gives into his character and motives.

"At the very outset," he began, "I wish to express my thanks to all those who arranged this affair and who are taking part in it, especially the youth."

"I also desire to take this opportunity of thanking my opponents too. Throughout the twenty-five years of my work, fate has provided me with plenty of them. By their opposition they have spurred me onward, never allowing me to lag. Since I realize very well the importance of struggle in human pro-

gress, I feel very grateful to them, and have the highest respect for those who fought me fairly.

“As I cast my eyes about this large and illustrious assemblage, I ask myself: what is the reason behind it. It certainly cannot be my person. For I do not regard myself as any highly talented individual, or any sort of a hero, or any kind of a great man.”

“As a son of the soil, nourished on the coarse fare of the peasant, I felt it to be my duty to devote my life's work to the cause of the common people. Raised in a hard school, already as a child I adopted two mandates: the obligation of duty, and the necessity of unremitting toil.

“While yet a child I also perceived that our peasants could obtain nothing without working hard for it; later, I realized that the same is true of us as a nation, that we should not expect any favors from anyone. Only that which we shall win by dint of our own efforts, will truly be ours.

“I attached the greatest importance to the winning of elementary human rights, for I realized that a people winning these basic rights would thereby win for themselves their national rights.

“In all my activity, I sought to be neither a poet, nor a scholar, nor a publicist; above all, I sought to be a man.

“I have been charged with diffusing my work and activities, with leaping from one line of endeavor to another. That is true, and a direct result of my aspiration to be a real man, an enlightened man, a man for whom no basic problems of existence is a stranger... I tried to encompass the whole round of human interests and experiences. Perhaps this lack

of concentration harmed me as a writer, nevertheless among us there is a greater need for such as myself, engaged in building the foundations of a finer and nobler life."

"Undoubtedly I have made mistakes; but that is natural of anyone who strives to accomplish something. Today I look upon these mistakes with equanimity, for I know that for both me and others they serve as warnings and as lessons in wisdom."

"I care not if my name perishes," he concluded, "as long as the Ukrainian nation grows and flourishes."

This, in essence, was the basis of Franko's philosophy of life and work. By it he guided himself to the very end.

Its public pronouncement at the celebration honoring him, was well-nigh concurrent with the people's full realization of it, so that now he encountered practically none of the bitter opposition of former years. He could now press unhindered towards the attainment of his aims. The fecundity of his talents, as a result, became all the more great. His accomplishments in the field of scholarly work and research, for example, were not only instrumental in winning numerous honors at home and abroad, but also, with the cooperation of Prof. Michael Hrushevsky, famous historian and President of the later-day Ukrainian National Republic,—in gaining due recognition throughout Europe for the Shevchenko Scientific Society. Meanwhile his writings continued to enrich Ukrainian literature with fresh poetry (**Semper Tiro**), new novels [**Crossed Paths** — (*Perekhrestni Stezhki*)] and short stories [**The Khoma With and the Khoma Without a Heart** (*Khoma z Sertsem i Khoma bez Sertsia*), **Thorn in the Foot** (*Teren v Nozi*), **Patrimony**, **Jay's Wing** (*Soychene Krylo*)].

During this period, too, Franko produced what is generally considered to be his finest work, **Moses** (Moysey—1905), a poem that is regarded by many as being worthy to stand besides the great creations of world literature. Through the medium of the biblical Moses, Franko poignantly portrays in this poem his own bitter struggle to lead his people into their promised land of progress and freedom. Further comment on the poem appears in Mr. Semynyna's preface to his translation on succeeding pages.

And so, in every manner possible Franko pursued his labors dedicated entirely to the progress and freedom of his countrymen. Yet as the years advanced, he contemplated the frightening possibility that he would not finish his work in time. The thought would cause him to plunge into feverish activity. Still he was unable to accomplish as much as his ardent spirit demanded of him. This was partly because of the dire financial straits in which he usually found himself, and then, when rescued from them by several gifts raised by public subscription, because of domestic unhappiness. His wife, who bore him four children, had become subject to nervous attacks, which greatly interfered with his creative work. But this misfortune was comparatively small to the one that followed. In 1908 he fell victim to a malady that steadily sapped his life away and brought about his death eight years later. The illness took away the use of his hands, and also made him subject to psychological disturbances, which caused him to hear what he described as voices of spirits. His sturdy peasant constitution, however, together with his indomitable will, caused him to resist this array of misfortune to the very end. When, for instance, there was no one about to whom he could dictate, he

would take a pencil in his fist and scrawl out his verse and prose in big capitals. It seemed as if some unseen power was driving him to the completion of his life work, for the amount of literary work he produced in the closing years of his life, when the malady had practically disabled him, is truly amazing.

Just before the outbreak of the World War, in 1913, the Ukrainian people, together with many eminent foreigners, united once more to honor his work. It was very fortunate that they did give this chance to Franko to see that his work had not been in vain, that his people, like the stone-breakers of his early poem, were hewing their way out of servitude and oppression. For the remaining years of his life coincided with one of the blackest periods of Ukraine's history. Following the outbreak of the war, both Russia and Austria-Hungary imposed upon the Ukrainians a rule far more harsh and suppressive than ever before. It seemed for awhile that all the national gains the Ukrainians had made up to this time had become nullified as a result. But as it turned out, this was the darkest part of the night just before dawn, before the collapse of both imperialistic oppressors and the rise of the Ukrainian republic, comprising both eastern and western parts of Ukraine, with a Ukrainian population close to 45,000,000. This republic, as is known, lasted but several years, and collapsed before the combined might of her many powerful enemies and the decisions made against her at Versailles.

Franko, however, did not live long enough to witness those inspiring days when after centuries of foreign misrule his people attained that which he had predicted. Nor was he fated to see how this brief renewal of their ancient liberties gave them

a new lease upon life, and the determination to win permanent freedom in the near future. He missed all this, for he died in the Spring of 1916; conscious to the very end, his death hastened by the sufferings inflicted upon him as a result of the Russian occupation of his native land.

And thus passed away a great Ukrainian, a man who did so much to awaken in his countrymen an appreciation of their heritage and a consciousness of their destiny, and a man who could justly say unto them:

“I have given you my life and all it meant
With an unshatterable zeal;
You will progress through centuries to bear
The imprint of my inner seal.”

STEPHEN SHUMEYKO.



PREFACE

1.

When we think of a poet we should think of the man that is reflected among his own words as if he was writing them on an indestructible mirror. But every man is part of a social group and therefore the genius of a poet lies in his art of portraying on that mirror-like background as much as possible of the society of which he is a part: of the people's problems and their aspirations.

Since we are human we follow the natural law of least resistance: we always enjoy the thoughts that are pleasant—pleasant dreams, pleasant times, pleasant lyrics and music, in short: "all's well that ends well"—than thoughts of struggle, thoughts of "stark reality" which discomfort us. In settled nations where peace prevails that is very true of poets who have produced masterpieces supplying the needs of those human cravings for pleasure. But all in life is not peace, however, and there are those who must battle for the fulfillment of their dreams, who although loving peace, have to fight for it. And, so, it is inevitable that in the outstanding representatives of an unsettled nation we get portrayals of physical and spiritual struggles.

Ivan Franko is such a representative figure of the Ukrainian nation.

Forty years of hard unappreciated work devoted to his people left Franko broken down in health, at times almost broken in spirit, but never in his faith in the young people and the future of his nation. It seems, therefore, most befitting that he should have taken the theme of that biblical figure, Moses, as the medium through which to portray his own life-long struggle for the betterment of his people. That is the background of his poem "Moses."

Outside of the stirring "Prologue" or rather dedication, the poem could well be divided into two sections: the physical and the spiritual. The material obstacles that he fought all his life are depicted in the first half and the spiritual struggles that encountered him are beautifully portrayed in the second half of the poem. Although a thorough review of "Moses" would entail a great deal of biographical comment, it may be advisable to point out some salient features of the poem.

After the first three chapters devoted to the setting of the stage we begin to feel the atmosphere of a father scolding his children. The children are Franko's contemporaries who constantly were placing obstacles in his way—who constantly grumbled when he attempted to wake them up from their lethargy which permeated his era. But like Dathan and Abiram, the leaders of the opposition were crushed and the people eventually were led on by Joshua, the followers of Franko, in the direction pointed out by their teacher.

The scolding begun in the fourth chapter grows to a sharp reprimand in the ninth. The transition between the ninth and tenth chapters

is a very touching scene. It shows the man behind the pen; it shows the outstanding characteristic of the writer—the power which enabled him to sacrifice his life for a cause, and that power was his love for his people. Knowing all their faults, but understanding all their virtues he leans upon them for support and solace in the darkest moments of his life—he has a trust in his people, believing that their common sense will prevail at the end.

It is certain that Franko was the guiding hand at a crossroad in Ukrainian history. Whereas the elder opposition refused to be guided by him, to listen to him—the youth flocked to him for guidance. So we hear him advising the youth in the eleventh chapter.

It is from the twelfth chapter on that we get to understand and appreciate the man in all his misery and glory.

Devoting all his life to his people who, dormant under the spell of foreign propaganda, resist all his efforts to be led in the right direction, Frank begins to question himself—begins to doubt as to whether he, himself, was following the right road. Could it be that his opponents were right? If only he was certain. At times he felt so depressed in spirit that he was ready to accept the opposition's views veneered with logic. He almost gave up struggling—in fact, admitted defeat.

Thus we find him at the end of chapter eighteen.

Yes, he felt defeated—but only for a while. He realizes that what appeared to be logic was nothing but alibis for self-satisfaction coming from those who are willing to sacrifice everything and every one for their own gain. And so he picks up in spirit and carries

on the banner of a cause which drew the youth in his footsteps bearing the imprint of his spirit; his idealism and love for his people.

Accused of impiety (to say it mildly) we see here a man of such strong devotion to his Master, the inner guiding hand, that religion, as practiced and propagated by some, pales in the light of his creed. If love and understanding is not the basis of our religion then it is time that we discard whatever poses as such.

It is said that when the original manuscript was submitted to the publishers it was without a prologue. At the suggestion of the publishers that some kind of an introduction would be appropriate, Franko brought back, the next morning, the "Prologue." If there ever was anything written with the sincerity that Franko poured into this dedication, I have yet to see it. It is worth one's while to read it in the original.

If we would draw a lesson from "Moses" it could be—that true conviction is worth all sacrifice if it is founded on love, understanding and sincere devotion.

This translation was started some years ago and various chapters of it have been printed in past numbers of Svoboda. It was my hope that some day I would be able to devote to it enough time to eliminate whatever drawbacks it seems to present to me. However, the various times that I have re-read the text never failed to draw my attention to additional corrections. Bearing this in mind I realized the futility of trying to bring it up to the letter of the poem's spirit. On the whole, I believe, the spirit and buoyancy of the original has been maintained fairly well.

It is appropriate at this time to admit that much of the credit for my efforts in this work are due to the contagious fiery zeal of Dr. L. Myshuha and the calm advice of Mr. M. O. Hayvoronsky—both friends, the donors of many suggestions.

If the translation gives some of the readers the pleasure that the translating had brought me, the time and effort spent on it was worth it, and if it should influence some of the young folks to take a sincere interest in Franko, then I will feel repaid in full.

W. S.



“MOSES”

By IVAN FRANKO

PROLOGUE

(Dedication)

My people, tortured, overpowered,
And like that beggar at the cross-roads
With human scorn, as if with scabs, all covered!

Your future frightens me and my soul renders:
From shame, which will incense next generations,
I cannot sleep—my bed is one of cinders.

Is it inscribed on some gigantic metal tables
For you to be the muck of all your neighbors,
The teams for pulling them all dressed in sables?

Are you forever destined with this vial
Of hidden anger, meekness, resignation
To those who have betrayed you in your trial,

Who swore you into treacherous alliance?
Are you not fated with that precious moment:
The day of your unmeasured might's defiance?

Have all those many hearts in vain been burning
For you with love, the noblest they could offer—
That sacrifice from which there's no returning?

Have heroes shed their blood just to be praised
in story?

Will not your prairies bloom with health and
beauty,
And everlasting freedom shine in glory?

Are all your sayings to be thought as sterile,
When power, mellowness, and wit is present
And all which any soul needs to be virile?

And are your songs which ring with laughter,
sorrow,

To be forgotten with their loves' misgivings
And hopes and rays of a happy gay tomorrow?

Oh, no! You are not doomed just to dejection
And tears! I still believe in will, its power,
In your uprising day and resurrection!

If one could but create a moment's fraction,
And then a word which would in such a moment
Inflame the people into life and action!

Or just a song with fire and living passion
Which would grip millions and lend them wings
For action leading them to self-expression!

Yes, If!... But we on whom all worries settle,
And torn apart with doubt, with shame inflicted,
We are not fit to lead you into battle!

But the time will come, once obstacles are
hurdled,
When you will shine among the greatest nations:
Will shake the Cauca's (1) while with Beskid (2)
girdled.

Black Sea will echo with your liberation
And you'll behold, once being your own master,
A home of joy and fields of consolation.

Therefore accept this song, which, although
cheerless,
Is full of faith—and frank although not pleasant;
A debt to your great future, though not tearless.
To your great genius this is my humble present.

June 20, 1905.

1. Caucasus Mountains

2. Mount Beskid of the Carpathian Mountains

CHAPTER I

For two score years did Moses wander
Through a desert, in a halting line,
Before the people of his tribes came near
The boundary of Palestine.

Though here are sands and Moab's naked cliffs
Are staring, painted russet-red,
Not far away the Jordan river winds
And flows through groves with pastures clad.

At Moab's feet, on sterile plains and sands,
The Israelites are camping now;
To cross those tops, even to look beyond,
Unwillingness will not allow.

Within their ragged and wind battered tents
The lazy nomads are asleep
While sheep and oxen gnaw the thistle food,
Their eyes aflame and sunken deep.

That with its wonders their long promised land—
The gem they are to retrieve,
Awaits them just beyond those naked hills
Not one is willing to believe.

For two score years their prophet spoke to them
About that promised fatherland
But all the greatness, beauty of his words,
Was lost among those grains of sand.

For two score years did Jordan's sapphire stream
And valley, then unparalleled,
Entice and chase them o'er the desert sands,
Like some mirage which they beheld.

But losing faith, in time, the people cried:
"It is not true, the prophets lied!
The desert is our home and here we will die!
How long then must we wait and why?"

And so they stopped to expect and to hope,
To strive and new goals to attain,
And messengers to send, and even stopped
To look in that direction — as in vain.

Thus day by day in Moab's still ravines:
Above, the sun looks down in wrath
While Israel is dreaming in its tents —
A life comparable to death.

The Hebrew wives alone are working now;
Some roast their meat as supper nears,
While sheep with oxen gnaw the thistle food
Which try their efforts and draw tears.

And in the fields the children played their games
Which caught the elders' breath, as bold:
With cities built of sand and manned they fought
In battles that surprised the old.

Quite often, half asleep, the fathers watched
And each one shrugged or shook his head;
"Where could they learn, where did they get
those games?"
Inquiringly the elders said.

"Why, in the desert we have never seen
Or heard of pranks with such odd roles;
Could it be that the prophet's very words
Have gripped the children's blood and souls?"

CHAPTER II

But in this dreaming tumult there is one,
Within his tent, who cannot sleep
But on the wings of steadfast thoughts and grief
Soars far beyond those mountains steep.

'T is Moses the Prophet, by all forgotten;
'T is time's now feeble aged slave
Who, without children, herds, without a wife,
Alone is standing by his grave.

All that he had in life he sacrificed.
For one idea, one just cause,
And suffered, shone, and flamed throughout his
task,
And labored for it without pause.

Like a storm did he tear his people
From Mizraim and slavery,
And from the closeness of the prison walls
Was leading them to liberty.

And like the soul of all their souls combined,
He very often did ascend
To peaks of unknown heights of ecstasy
Which faith and inspiration lend.

And on the turbulent waves of their souls
In days of trial and of drought,
Quite often, also, did he sink with them
Into abysmal depths of doubt.

But now his voice — which has grown faint
from age —
The inspirations long since dead —
Has lost the power over the fathers' sons
That over the fathers once it had.

The inspirations long since dead —
To them is just a fairy tale;
The meat of their herds and butter and cheese
Is all the favor they will hail.

That their fathers from Mizraim have fled —
Their long migration through the sands,
To them is nought but foolishness and sin
And people's ruin in strange lands.

Now Dathan and Abiram hold the reins
Through discontent, in which they breed,
And to the prophet's words their answer is:
"Our goats are hungry and in need!"

And to his call to them to march ahead:
"Our steeds have not a single shoe."
To promises of conquest and of fame:
"The foes are fierce and many, too!"

To gain of pastures and new, fertile land:
"We are quite satisfied right here!"
Then, when the God-sent message he brought up:
"Keep still, deceiving mutineer!"

And when he warned them with Jehovah's ire,
Whose arm does everybody reach,
Abiram had forbade him even to dare
"To make a sacrilegious speech."

And at the meeting of the Israelites
With honors paid at Baal's knee
The noisy Dathan managed to obtain
From them the following decree:

"Whoever makes prophetic claims and then
Talks nonsense which he thinks is wise,
And promises the unenlightened mass
God's anger or some paradise;

“Who dares to preach rebellion and unrest,
To urge the people from their way
And beckons them beyond unfriendly hills
Where ruin gapes and stalks for prey,

“He, as example to the rest of them
Who have from reason been dethroned,
Shall, without a hearing, be found guilty
And by us all bespat and stoned.”



CHAPTER III

The eve approached and in a gentle breeze
The day long heat did slowly tire
While over the hills the skyline seemed to flame
Like some gigantic distant fire.

Like that awaited shower from above
A coolness everywhere had spread
And action soon prevailed in all the tents
Which recently in sleep were clad.

From every nook, over stony winding paths,
With jars which they had made from clay,
The dark-eyed daughters of the Israelites
With rhythmic strides begin their day.

With jars perched gracefully upon their heads
They're walking slowly toward a bluff;
With skins in hand some go to milk the ewes
Which for themselves have not enough.

The older of the children jump around
Like little rabbits of the plains:
They race each other, shout and cheer, or shoot
From bows made out of father's canes.

From this and yonder tent one plainly hears
Girls' laughter merged with angry cries;
A song of grief comes drifting from afar
On waves of dusk, and slowly dies.

And now the elders, fathers of them all,
Have left their steads for open air
And all their eyes are centered on the hills,
Then they observe the plains with care.

Is there by chance a movement in the hills
Which would betray some lurking foe?
Perhaps some evil spirits of the north
Have sent a hurricane to blow?

No, all is quite; so they start to talk
About those common daily themes:
“Our ewes are giving us less milk each day,
And the lambs look underfed, it seems!

“Besides, that thorny fodder that is left
Will not suffice the beasts’ demand...
It seems that we shall have to venture forth
In search of better pasture land.

“To Media Abiram does advise
While Dathan wants to go beyond,
And Moses? He, no doubt, will keep his peace
If of his life he’s really fond.”

Then all at once there rose a warning cry:
Each friend turns to his neighbor’s call;
The tents are pouring out a varied mass
Of human beings, small and tall.

What is it? Have they trapped some roaming
beast?

A foe is making his descent?...
No, Moses! Look! ’T is Moses that came out
Into the open from his tent!

Though years and all his suffering, in pair,
Are bending him into a bow,
His eyes, those clouds with their potential fires,
Are burning with a sparkling glow.

Although his hair, now, is as white as snow
On top of that old hoary frame,
His head is crowned with beams of silver rays
Like shafts of wisdom and of fame.

And now he is heading for the holy tent
Which stands in the middle of the square
Extending its four corners of belief
To earth's four corners of despair.

In the middle of this tent there lies a chest,
Once copper bound from knee to knee,
And in it rest Jehovah's ten decrees:
The codes of triumph and of liberty.

But for a long, long time no one has dared
To pass the threshold any more;
A fear is guarding it each night and day
As would a dog his master's door.

Beside the temple, on the morning side,
Imbedded, lies a massive rock;
By custom fixed 't is usual to speak
To all the people from this block.

Upon that boulder Moses now ascends;—
The people gasp and stop all still:
Could this be true? Is he to prophesy
Against the people's spoken will?

And we will be obliged to stamp and crush,
To cut away a dying tree,
To kill one whom our fathers used to call
God's messenger of victory?

There, on the outskirts of the gathered mass,
His anger turns Abiram red,
While people in the middle of the crowd
By Dathan with contempt are fed.



CHAPTER IV

“The other eve, my poor deluded lambs,
You held a meeting most absurd,
And that is just what I have meant to say
As introduction to my word.

“By your decree you meant to seal my lips,
To lock my soul within this frame?
That reason, in itself, is quite enough
For me to contradict your aim.

“Now listen you, descendants of the blind,
Take heed and store it in your head:
Should you deprive a living soul of breath
The stones will echo what you dread!

“Last night you all had sworn not pay heed
To any words that come to you
From lips, not mine, these earth begotten lips,
But from Jehovah's, just and true.

“Beware, or in a manner all His own,
Speaking to you what is in store,
His uttering will hundred-fold surpass
The desert's rumbling thunder roar.

“For from His words the mountains quake,
And to their peal the earth succumbs;
Your hearts, like leaves consumed by autumn
fires,
Will shrivel tiny crumbs!

“The other night you had condemned revolt?
How uselessly your breath was spent —
Because against the foolish judgements passed
Your hearts are with rebellion rent.

“Because into that heart Jehovah placed,
Like yeast into unleavened dough,
Creative powers which will spur you on
To where you were ordained go.

“The other night you had considered peace
As that most blessed human state;
But has your mind consulted over this
With God, your Master Ultimate?

“Was it in quest of peace that He had led
The soul of Abraham from Haran, then,
Into the lands He promised to his seed,
The open fields of Canaan?

“Was it for peace that He had led them through
That land of promised domicile,
And drove them with those seven years of want
Way down south to the banks of the Nile?

“If He intended keeping you in peace
Just like the corpse within a crypt
Then you would even now be groaning, yoked,
And by Egyptians kicked and whipt.

“That is the reason I will talk to you,
Not from myself, but what is right,
That you may know the impropriety
Of quarreling with God, Our Light!

“Because Jehovah’s mighty bow is set
And on that bow-string, which is taut,
Is placed an arrow all in readiness —
And you are the arrow to be shot.

“And when the arrow is aimed to meet its goal
And sharpened for its vital deed,
Is then the time for the arrow to retort:
“Enough, it is peace now that I need!”

“And since you swore last night to listen not —
In the name of a woman’s mould —
To any promises or prophecies
Or warnings which you may think are bold,

“Then I must speak to you, in spite of it,
About the very things you rile:
Again will I remind you what will come
And prophesy and warn a while.

“And you will listen though your anger burn
And torture you from skin to bone;
And I would like to know who will be first
To raise his hand, to throw the stone!”



CHAPTER V

“The words about Jehovah’s patronage
You have foresworn to treat as frail,
Therefore, as if to simple stubborn babes,
I will relate to you a tale.

“How once upon a time some trees had met
Within a valley’s broad expanse:
‘Now that we met let us choose, in all good faith,
A king, in that word’s broadest sense.

“‘A leader that would bring protection, fame,
And bring us hope and dangers quell;
One who would be our master and our slave,
Besides our goal and path as well.’

“And so some cried: ‘If choose, then let us
choose —
Except that all our names are one;
Let us give the right to that there cedar, yon,
That hugs the sides of Lebanon.’

“And all the trees agreed to what had seemed
The best made choice, and went to plead:
‘Come down from your proud height and come
to us
To occupy our ruler’s seat!’

“But to this plea the cedar then replied:
‘What, what is that, that you request?’
You want me to abandon, just for you,
My mountains and protected nest?

“That I should leave, just on account of you,
My freedom in this world, behind,
And being free that I should go and serve
A gathering without a mind?

“You think that by bequeathing me a crown
You would do favor unto me?
I am, as is, the beauty of the land,
The Lebanon's majestic tree'.

“And all the trees, downcast at heart, returned—
To meet a palm and plead again:
'We have grown up together, you 're our kin,
So come to us and start your reign'.

“To that the palm replied: 'My fellow trees,
What are you thinking of, to ask
That I should rule you; was I born
With shady leaves for such a task?

“Should I, with my life giving sap, each day
Be basking in the sun for naught;
Should the fruit of my seed, by those in need—
Both man and beast—in vain be sought?

“Let there reign on your throne whoever will
But I won't occupy the seat;
I much prefer to feed and to console,
And shade the needy from sun's heat.'

“And so dejection overcame the trees,
Their minds astounded and weighed down:
That neither cedar nor the haughty palm
Is willing to assume their crown.

“Let’s beg the pretty rose! To her sweet
charm
The world in ecstasy does nod;
She is, without a crown, the queen of plants,
The ward and protege of God.’ . . .

“Let’s beg the oak!’ But the oak with his mane
Is like a busy man of means:
He is occupied with branches, trunk and roots,
With leaves and acorns which he weans.

“Let us appeal, then, to the birch!’ But she,
All dressed in silk as white as snow,
Has spread her pretty tresses in the air,
Her pining head a-drooping low.

“Then someone, though it seemed to be in jest,
A youth no doubt it was that said:
‘It looks like we should ask the blackthorn yet,
Perhaps the blackthorn will be glad.’

“And so the trees, without a minute’s pause,
Unanimously all agreed
And started pleading with the thorny bush
To be the ruler of their creed.

“And the blackthorn replied: ‘It was indeed
A very good and sound advice;
I’ll occupy the throne and take the crown
Without you even asking twice.

“Indeed, I’m not like that there cedar tall,
Nor look as stately as the palm,
And will not praise myself just like that oak
Nor birch-like weep, appearing calm.

“My task will be to conquer fields for you
While for myself I will not try;
I’ll spread along the surface of the earth
That you may tower to the sky.

“The entrance to your presence I will guard
With ever ready prickly thorns,
And all the deserts I will decorate
With blossom that all danger scorns.

“And I shall serve the rabbit as a nest
And for the birds provide abode:
That you may grow and prosper with your
growth
While I will perish by the road.’”



CHAPTER VI

This story every Hebrew listened to
With eager and expectant ear;
“And now,” said Moses, “that you have heard
my tale,
I will unfold it — make it clear.

“Those trees are nothing but the races of the
earth;
The king who did their minds but fill
Is the selected one, His servant, son,
Who executes Jehovah’s will.

“When Jehovah perceived the humankind
That grew like saplings on the field,
He looked into the soul of every one
And read the fate that each did wield.

“Observing them He delved into their souls
To find their nature and their aim,
And searched to find a representative
Whom He for His own son could claim.

“And He did not select the haughty ones —
Who pound the sky with empty words,
Who raise their ever-threatening heels
And drive their kin just like some herds.

“Nor did He choose the wealthy, money-mad,
That plunder earth for what they can,
Who build the stately mansions for themselves
With gold and sweat of other men.

“Nor those who, though attractive to the eye,
Keep jingling on the strings of lyres
And crave eternity in marble, songs,
For talents born in human fires.

“He disregarded all the glory, fame,
The reigning over earthly nooks,
And all enticements of the arts, and all
The wisdom of the dusty books.

“But like the blackthorn that among the trees
Is unimposing to the eye —
Its flowers and its seeds don't bring the fame
For which the others like to vie —

“So is the God-selected race on earth:
The poor among their wealthy kin;
For them to tread where honors fly around
And graces pace, would be a sin.

“Among the wordly they are not the wise
Nor hero worship do they hail;
At home, their motherland, they are just guests;
The wanderers of every trail.

“But, in their soul, the reader of our hearts
Has placed a treasure — to be heard:
That they may be, just like the torch at night,
Disseminators of His word.

“For their unbounded wandering in life
He granted them the most He could:
He gave them His commandments and His
pledge —
To strengthen them as if with food.

“But our Jehovah is a jealous God,
With threatening and angry ways !
For, what He has once clasped to His heart
Is not for someone else’s praise.

“Therefore He clothed His servant with His love:
An armor which protects and warns
And keeps trespassers from approaching close
Just like the blackthorn with its thorns.

“And He made him as threatening and sharp
As is that stinging nettle plant
So that just He, Himself, could breathe, inhale,
The soul’s most aromatic scent.

“And a terrible message He gave him,
Under a sacred heavy seal,
To be carried into the distant future
Despised by brethren for his weal.

“Woe to the messenger that lingers
And falls asleep while on his way,
Or disregards the holiest dispatch
And with the seals begins to play.

“Then, someone else the message will acquire,
Will take it from loafer’s hand
And speed away, attain the highest goal
And have the crown in his command.

“But happy will be he who His dispatch
Delivers quickly and on time;
Because Jehovah will reward him well —
Acclaiming him through every clime.

“Oh Israel, you are that messenger
And future ruler of what be!
Why don't you try to realize your task
And His commandments, willingly?”

“Your kingdom come is not born of this earth;
Unmeasurable is your fame;
But woe to you, if once you should be sullied
By any earthly gain in shame!

“For then, instead of being the salt of the earth
You will be the soil's worst depraver;
Instead of favors to give out, you 'll be
Yourself unworthy of a favor.

“Instead of liberating all the world
From tortures, chaos, and from fright,
You 'll be just like that measly stept-on worm
That for its very life must fight.”



CHAPTER VII

Then rose Abiram and half spoke, half sneered:
“Your Highness, Moses, did not fail
To brace us with encouragement and fright
Through your quite entertaining tale.

“Be thorns among the races of the world!
For such a favor we, indeed,
Should recognize, in your Jehovah, Him
Who should be master of our creed.

“To be His messenger is honor, too!
And what is more, to be His constant post
Into the distant future so unknown,
I'll say, entices us the most.

“That is the fate of that hard ridden ass
That totes the grain, and even pelf,
So that some stranger may enjoy the loot
While he walks hungry by himself.

“The Hebrews are not yet deprived of sense;
They still deserve a better fate,
And they will get it when they honor Baal
And praise Astarte not too late.

“Let your Jehovah thunder at His will
There on that cliff bound Sinai Mount;
Our Baal will lead us to the land of wealth
And power which are all that count.

“Jehovah may be easily content
With thistles, with a single thorn;
Astarte’s hand will lead us to the groves
Where bounty of all kind is born.

“Our destination ’s eastward! To the land
Where sun first shows his morning face,
And westward to your promised Canaan
We will not take a single pace.

“All that is clear! To talk about it more
Would only be a waste of time;
But now, considering our last decree
You have committed quite a crime.

“What shall we do? To stone him? Ruin-age!
A waste of effort and of strength;
Perhaps he may be able yet to serve
The Israelites for some time’s length.

“It seems that he is very capable
In pasting stories out of air,
So let us make him our common nurse
And place the children in his care.”

His words brought peals of laughter from the
men
And with the tumult’s laughing cry
There spread among the mass an angry sound
As though a thunder rumbled by.

But Moses calmly answered to his words:
“If so, Abiram, let it be!
For what is fated to be hung in time
Will never drown in any sea.

“Your eyes will never rest on Canaan
Nor eastward will you ever trudge,
From this here place not only forth, but back
You will not have the strength to budge.”

A deathlike stillness enveloped them all
And wiped from off their lips all mirth
While fear gripped Abiram as he stood
Expecting miracles on earth.

But nothing happened! Abiram laughs
Out loud! Joined by the tumult's cry
There spread among the mass an angry sound
As though a thunder rumbled by.



CHAPTER VIII

Encouraged now bold Dathan took the reigns:
“You warn and prophesy in vain!
Now I will tell the truth which you no doubt
Will never want to hear again.

“Admit! Were you not sent to Egyptian schools
For training so that you could be
A very able tool to forge our bonds
And check our pride and liberty.

“Admit! Were you not present in their court
To hold a council, and one day
Did not the priests entrust you with a plan
To lead the Israelites away?

“Admit it now! Did not Egyptians have
An old belief which did maintain
That a tree and its twelve branching limbs
Would be the downfall of their reign?

“They all, the Pharaoh and his priests, knew
 well
That those twelve branches and their ranks
Were Israel’s twelve families that grew
And prospered on the Nile banks.

“And so they quaked with fear because, in
 spite
Of all their torture and ill blood,
That Israel was growing, gaining strength,
Just like the river’s yearly flood.

“All knew that when a Hebrew mother clasps
The first born baby to her heart,
That very day in some Egyptian home
A first born with its life must part.

“But how to counteract it no one knew,
Not one knew how this ill to meet
But you, the traitor of our rising race,
Who, fell before the Pharaoh’s feet,

“And said: If you will give me a free hand
To lead them through the desert sands
I ’ll wear them out, dry out their growing
strength
And make them eat out of your hands.

“And you have kept your word — have led us
all
Just like a foolish herd, to flight —
And all: to punish us with misery,
To Pharaoh’s unperturbed delight.

“How many people did the desert claim?
This desert with its cliff bound womb
Became to thousands of poor Israelites
Their last abode — a sandy tomb.

“And now when of the numbers of our clans
Only a handful has been left,
When in the sands the Israel’s great might
Is of all hope and strength bereft;

“When our courageous spirit ebbed to nought
Just like that brook on summer day,
And our vigor, once as hard as flint,
Has changed to moist and pasty clay,

“You want to lead us to this Canaan
As if into some lion’s den,
For is not Pharaoh sovereign of all
These lands, their princes and their men!

“It is insanity to force ourselves
So willingly into a snare!
Shall we give battle here or foolishly
Repent and ask for favors there?”

“Oh, Dathan, Dathan,” Moses then replied,
“Don’t nettle so your brain, my son!
Your haughtiness is vain, for, Canaan
Your eyes will never rest upon.

“And, what is more, I will tell you Dathan, now,
Since for it you did so entreat,
At death you will not have a crumb of earth
On which to rest your weary feet.”

“Hey, Hebrews!” Dathan cried, with anger rife.
“Have you not sworn at Baal’s knee!
Has memory departed so that you
Forgot the other day’s decree?”

“To stones! He is jeering at us now, the same
As he did often in the past;
Better that he should perish all alone
Than have him mock us to our last!”

“To stones! To death with him for his
contempt!
Better that he should perish all alone!...”
But wonder as one may, not one did move
To be the first to throw a stone.

And Dathan, quickly orienting self:
“Get out! Get out and go away!
Before our hands get filthy with your blood
Just at the closing of the day!”

And like a madman the raging mob cried:
“Get out! Get out this very day!”
Which echoed from the mountain walls and
cliffs
And, slowly drifted far away.



CHAPTER IX

With brows beknitted, Moses raised his head
And tearing the silence asunder
Gave way to the words that rent the air
Like peals of heavenly thunder.

“Woe unto you! You blunderheaded slaves,
Creations of conceited tools,
Permitting yourself to be blindly led
By stupid and ambitious fools!

“Woe unto you, rebellion nursing minds!
Since you have left the banks of Nile
Against the things which are for your own
good
You have resisted all the while.

“Woe unto you! You restless fiery brands,
That stubbornness can never hide;
This very opposition, like a wedge,
Is always tearing you inside.

“Just like that nettle plant you burn the hand
That weans you like the bird its brood,
And like that bull you chase the one that seeks
To find new pastures for your food.

“Woe unto you! Having been made by God
His choice of all the humankind;
This greatest of His gifts will be your curse —
The heaviest that you will find.

“Because when God with His benevolence
Will visit you another day,
The messengers and prophets which He sends
You will try, with stones, to chase away.

“For every drop of blood that will be shed
By any of His faithful sons
Jehovah will revenge himself on you,
Your children, and their little ones.

“For He will humble you and torture you
Till you from agony will cry
And in your misery will swear to do
His will, which now you so defy.

“And when the bitter punishment shall pass
And your necks shall harden again,
A series of misdoings and of griefs
Again will take you in its reign.

“Woe unto you because, in disregard,
For ages you will fill this school, until
You learn to treasure the commandments,
To read Jehovah’s book of will !

“I see your picture: a shepherd in the woods
Stripping the beech tree of its rind
Then, soaking, drying, ramming it to free
And leave all waste and chaff behind,

“And thus: until that sponge will soften to a
puff
And will have strength, and will not stint
The energy to very quickly grasp
The flowing spark sent by the flint.

“You, Israel, are that unbeaten bark!
It is you Jehovah will so maul
Until you soften to puff and catch
That spark of God’s redeeming call!

“You will go to your goal as willingless
As cattle go to plough the land —
Woe unto those unbending stubborn necks
On which will fall Jehovah’s hand!

“You always look into the distant past
And look for highways yet to meet
While, all along the way, o’er shrubs and
stumps,
You stub your evershifting feet.

“You’re like that horse that is running
amuck
Into a gorge, with impulse blind,
And someday to come you will change your
crown
For bondage which you left behind.

“Beware, that Jehovah may not retract
The promise you so oft have heard;
Lest He decide to take into account
Your stubbornness and break His word!

“Beware lest out of you He make a scare
For other people to avoid
Just like a mutilated colored snake
That ’s perishing along some road!”

In deathly silence and with sullen moods
The words were caught by every ear
While in their bosoms something breathed in
gasps
Like winds that warn of a storm that is near.

CHAPTER X

The restful crimson ball of daily light
Was sinking o'er the hills, to be
Just like that swimmer, who, bereft of strength,
Is disappearing in the sea.

Over the cloudless sky began to drift
A melancholy strain out of the east
And then, an agonizing cry was heard:
The howling of a preying beast.

Something human and soft began to quake
Within the aged prophet's heart,
And from their heights his soaring thoughts
For just a moment did depart.

Must he forever pound their ears with cries
Of punishment which they detest?
As if it was a cold and hungry child
He felt a tug within his breast.

“Oh, Israel, if you but only knew
The pain that's tearing me apart,
If you but knew, just knew my love for you —
A love that fills my aching heart!

“You are my kin, you are my only child,
You are my honor and my fame;
Your future is my prayer, you are my soul,
Your destination is my aim!

“I have given you my life and all it meant
With an unshatterable zeal;
You will progress through centuries to bear
The imprint of my inner seal.

“But it is not that I just love in you
The things that but reflect myself:
The finest everything I had and knew
I'm placing gladly into you.

“Oh, Israel, forgive me for my sin,
For saying something none should dare:
I love you so that often I'm in doubt
If God Himself shows better care.

“For, children He has millions, and they all
Of His protection get a share—
While I have only you, and you alone
Are all for which I will ever care.

“And when Jehovah, out of all of them
Has chosen you to serve His aim,
I, without choice, your servant have become
Just due to my consuming flame.

“And when your working strength is wanted by
Our Master, of the kings The King,
For my own self, I do not want from you,
My Israel, a single thing.

“And when He wants the incense-burning done,
With constant reverence and praise,
I will accept from you ingratitude
And any wounding scornful phrase.

“Because I love you dearly, not alone
For your good nature, true and deep,
But for the wrongs you do and other faults
Though over them I often weep;

“For that persistent stubbornness of yours,
The haughtiness with which you trod,
Which, having strayed its foolish way,
Refuses to give ear to God;

“For the untruthfulness of your quick tongue,
Your indiscriminating soul
Which grasps and holds unto the earthly wealth
As if it was the highest goal;

“For the immodesty your daughters show,
Their loving ways, intriguing eyes;
And for your cherished customs and your
tongue,
And merry laughter and your sighs.

“Oh, Israel, my only child and soul!
Pray to Our Maker and believe!
As much as I am bound to you by love
I must be taking now my leave.

“Because I feel my hour is coming near:
The termination of my plan;
And be what may I must, I must yet reach
The borders of our Canaan.

“I hoped so much to enter there with you
Midst thundering roar of trumpets blown,
But God has humbled me and so it seems
That I shall enter all alone.

“I wish that I could, now, by Jordan’s side,
Be stricken down just as I stand,
That I may only rest my aged bones
In that beloved Promised Land.

“And there will I be waiting for the time
When on the hilltops I may see
How, like those babes that trace a mother’s
steps,
You all will come to follow me.

“My longing I will send to follow you
And tug your conscience till it yields,
Just like that dog that, with his barking, calls
His master to the hunting fields.

“And I am sure that all of you will come
Like river floods that onward bear;
But in that famous march of yours don’t stop
To ask for me...I did my share.

“So onward, onward bear and forge ahead
And let no one your progress sever!
Oh, Israel, thou offspring of my heart,
Farewell! Farewell forever!”



CHAPTER XI

When he had left the camping grounds behind,
The mountain tops were yet aflame
And from the west the purple spread its arms
Which beckoned him to reach his aim.

While shadows crouched behind the mountain
crag
And spread its talons o'er the plain
In the heart of the exile something wept:
"Never will I return again."

You come a-running Hebrew children, youth
Which had been playing in the sands;
Surrounding Moses they began to grasp
The prophet's coat and aged hands.

"Oh, Grandpa, where are you going at this
time?
Why don't you stay with us—it's late!
Look, come and see the great big wall we
built,
With its towers and big strong gate."

"That is fine, my children, keep building your
wall!
But this is not the time for me;
I am going to inspect the wall of life
Surrounded by a deadly sea."

"Oh, Grandpa! Look, way yonder, in that gorge
We killed a scorpion today!
And over there we caught three rabbit babes
While mother rabbit was away."

“That’s good, my little ones! The scorpions
You kill and fear you do not need;
Although it is not right, yet after all
It is a beneficial deed.

“Not right because the insect wants to live
As well as even you and I,
And just because he has been gifted with
A baneful tail, must he die?

“But these poor tiny rabbits you return
And do not take them any more
Because their mother will be crying! Why!
You did not think of that before?

“You must be merciful to every thing
That lives, no matter what it be;
For we should never trifle with a life;
More priceless thing you ’ll never see!”

“Wait a bit longer, grandpa, don’t leave yet!
Come stay a while with us! Sit down,
And tell us the adventures that you had!”
They pleaded tugging at his gown.

“Tell us about the time when you were young;
All the excitement that you had
When on the Horeb hilltops and between,
You tended sheep for grandma’s dad.

“Just how you came to notice on that hill
The bush that burned and flame endured,
And how you heard a voice come from that
bush —
A voice that frightened and assured.”

“I have no time, my children, to relate
What you are asking, in detail;
You see, the dusk is dragging night behind,
And daily light begins to fail.

“But there will come a time when all of you,
In life’s inevitable urge,
Will see before your eyes a burning bush
As I did on that distant ridge.

“Your hearts will fill then, with the sanctity
Of that untainted morning dew,
And from the grandeur of the flame you ’ll
hear
The mighty voice say unto you:

“ ‘Discard the bondage of your daily strife
And fearlessly come unto me,
Because I want to send you to a task
Too mighty for the weak to see!’

“Do not extinguish that most sacred fire,
So that, when you will hear the call,
You will be able to sincerely say:
I ’m waiting ready, Lord of All!”

A long, long time the children pondered fast
Over the man’s strange, touching speech,
While he himself, without a sound, went forth
Into the spreading shadow’s breach.

A long, long time the silent children felt
A void that comes at a sorrow’s height,
Until the outline of his silhouette
Was lost completely in the night.



CHAPTER XII

“I am enveloped by a solitude
As deep as is that boundless sea,
And with its breath it fills my lonely soul
And efforts do not set it free.

“Oh, I have been acquainted long with her,
This gentle unaffected prude —
Throughout my life no matter where I went
I always walked in solitude.

“Just like that wandering planet do I fly
Right headlong into an abyss
And feel the touch of but one hand, within —
That steady guarding hand of His.

“Silence throughout: the lips are keeping peace—
The word is doomed before its birth,
Yes, but for Thee, who speaks within my heart.
I would, long since, have parted with this earth.

“It is only Thee, Jehovah, that my heart
Is seeking with its lonely hopes;
Speak unto me once more, as Thou didst then
On those inspiring Horeb slopes.

“The journey, Father, that Thou hast foretold
Is coming to a closing end,
And now I'm facing Thee again, alone,
As at the starting did I stand.

“For two score years have I strived and taught,
Imbued with naught but Thee above,
In order that the slaves may be a race
That would be worthy of Thy love.

“And like that blacksmith did I temper them,
Their hearts and souls, for forty years—
And in their estimation I deserve
Nothing else but stones and mocking jeers.

“And just at the time when we were about
To step into The Promised Land!
Oh, Knowing One, were those results a part
Of some great scheme that Thou hast planned?

“A sorrow grips my lonely heart at times:
Perhaps it is a fault of mine?
Perhaps I have, myself, not heeded right
Those ten commanding laws of Thine?

“Father Jehovah, I have prayed with tears,
I am weak and words are failing me!
Please give this message to some one else
More worthy of this legacy!

“A doubt is prying right into my heart,
A penetrating stinging dart;
Almighty One! Please speak to me, did I
To satisfaction play my part?!”



CHAPTER XIII

Then, at his side he felt a voice, which seemed
To be a stifled laughing sound
As if someone was walking by his side
Though nothing could be heard around.

And then, his ears caught some whispered words
Resembling hisses of some snakes:
"The bud of folly always propagates
But barbs which rend the heart with aches.

"And when one finds the issue of its stock
Too heavy to be borne alone,
'T is easier to transfer onto God
The weight which rightly is his own."

MOSES

"Someone is speaking! Or is this perhaps,
My own, with woe unsettled, mind?
Or does this mocking of my prayer here
Come from a demon of some kind?"

VOICE

"So now you are beginning to have doubts
Of your reformatory spree?
Yet, forty years you were sure and led,
Though blindly, yet courageously!"

MOSES

"Some one is speaking! But why all the beads
Of perspiration on my head?
Afraid? No! No! But this is burning me
Right through the heart, like molten lead!"

VOICE

“With your unlimited ambition’s pride
You shoved your people off their way
To mould them to the pattern you desired.
Is this the time for your dismay?”

MOSES

“Who are you that refuses to be seen
And to be shaken off my back?
I only feel your penetrating gaze
From which my soul is turning black!”

VOICE

“What is the difference as to who I be?
To one who could command the sea
What is more pertinent than who, and what
Is if my words are true or not!”

MOSES

“No, it is not true that I started my task
Out of ambition born of pride!
It was to the sight of my people enslaved
That my heart could never abide.”

VOICE

“Because you felt related to the slaves
You were humiliated! True?
You wanted to remould them into such
As would be pleasant unto you.”

MOSES

“Yes, from those valleys of mirk and of fright
I craved to raise them up to me,
To there where I have stood, upon the heights
Of honor, love and liberty.”

VOICE

“Yet at the time you did not seek advice
Of God who sent them there below —
Till now, when you have fallen, do you ask
If he would help you in your woe.”

MOSES

“No, no, in this endeavor I was forced
And led by His almighty will:
The Horeb flame revived a stumbling soul
With understanding, on that hill.”

VOICE

“And are you certain that the flame you note
Took place at all near Horeb slopes,
But only in your too persistent heart,
In your unreasonable hopes?

“Perhaps the voice that led you to attempt
This march, which yet did not expire,
Did not come forth from any burning bush
But was your own internal fire?

“Because the human passions blind the sight,
And cravings are deceiving charms
Which to the eyes present a world of gods,
Like those mirage enticing arms.

“It was this craving howling in your soul,
Just like that beast of prey in rage,
And nothing else, that made of you the one
They called their leader and their sage!”

MOSES

“Enough! My solitude is amplified
A hundred-fold with this address!
Who are you, my foe?”

VOICE

“Azazel I am called
The demon of the wilderness!”

CHAPTER XIV

Darkness throughout — except the stars above
Which idled with their twinkling lights
While Moses, guarded by their feeble rays,
Was slowly rising to new heights.

Through darkness he was led by different
sounds
Over the land without a trail:
Once by the weird hyena howl below,
Then by a serpent's swishing tail.

And like that hero, stopping not, he went
To meet the foeman face to face
Although a raging battle with himself,
Within his heart, was taking place.

"That yearning," something queried his heart,
"The offspring of my shame and pains?
That 's what I thought to be the burning bush
That bade me brake the people's chains?"

"That yearning was the superhuman force,
The unextinguishable flame
That had created in the troubled mind
Jehovah's message and his name?"

"That yearning to alleviate their pain
And save them from another's wrath —
Is that the sin for which I now deserve
Expulsion by my kin, and death?"

"It is not true! Beware and don't distort
Your soul to please a moment's doubt;
That yearning is a sanctity! But what
If sin in there began to sprout?"

“Were you not their leader once, and of their
souls

And bodies master from the start?
Are you sure that your authority did not
Devour those yearnings in your heart?

“Were you not to them a Pharaoh’s duplicate,
Or worse — considered as a whole,
Because with your control you reached beneath
Into their conscience and their soul?

“It is not safe to take a stand against
The run of natural events;
It is so easy to mistake one’s whim
For some command from Providence.

“And what if during forty years you were
A maniac of godly news
And in place of giving them the truth
You fed them with your narrow views?

“Perhaps midst tortures as Egyptian slaves,
Once multiplied throughout their lands,
They, growing stronger, might have taken hold
Of all the country in their hands?

“In leading them into the desert land
From homes where they have lived that long,
Did you once think; perhaps in doing this
I may be doing them a wrong?

“What does it mean to offer liberty
To masses void of all regime?
Is that unlike uprooting some great oak
And letting it drift down a stream?

“And did not Dathan tell the truth, before,
That having left the banks of Nile
They do not have the willingness or strength
To look for other homes worth while?

“Oh, Jehovah, speak unto me again!
Did I fulfill Thy will aright,
Or was I just the plaything of my grief
And blindness, in my constant plight?”

“Oh, Jehovah, speak unto me! Doest Thou
Arouse that oratoric gift
Just in the passions of our souls, in dreams,
And in our blood on ire adrift?”

But Jehovah kept silent; only sounds
Of evil tidings blocked his trail:
At first the weird hyena howl below,
And then a serpent's swishing tail.



CHAPTER XV

The sun was rolling up a mountain side
Just like a huge and crimson wheel
And with its rays, as if with darts of gold,
Was piercing through the morning seal.

In this array the highest of the hills,
Just like a king in tinted red,
Was growing taller every moment
As the sun was climbing to its head.

And on the highest of the mountain peaks,
Upon a rock protruding stage,
A motionless and lonely figure stands
Like some colossus of the age.

Above all earthly turmoil and its noise,
The figure outlined in the sky,
Stands he, a symbol of humanity,
His arms outstretched and held up high.

In oriental glory of the sky,
With a crown of radiating beams,
His giant silhouette is visible
Throughout the plains where life now teems.

And from the Hebrews' tents of teeming life
The troubled gaze of every eye,
Like messengers, is running to the man
Who's silhouetted in the sky.

“It is Moses!” went the cry from lips to lips
Though in a hesitating way;
But utter they cannot what in their hearts
Is causing them so much dismay,

It is Moses in prayer that is standing there
In silence conversing with God.
And that prayer is prodding the heavens:
Flashes of lightning with each prod.

Although his lips are set and do not talk,
His face is lifted to the sky
And in his heart are agonizing words
That burn and shout to Him on high.

The beaming sun is rising to its peak
Beneath a canopy of blue
While Moses stands in his deep reverence
Retaining a forboding view.

The demon from the south is sending forth
Fatigue to settle over the clime
While Moses as if lifted by some hands
Seems to be rising all the time.

And slowly settling to the earth, the sun,
Departing for another day,
Casts huge and creeping shadows from the hills
Upon the plains and far away.

And from the figure on the mountain top
A huge and spreading shadow fell
Way down upon the Hebrews' tattered tents —
A lonesome father's “fare ye well.”

A stream of fear rushed through the waking
camp:

“Oh, God, let 's hope he won't invcke
A curse upon us now, because it would
Eliminate us in a stroke.

“Such prayers tend to quake the world
Down to its very inner bone,
And melt the cliffs of granite just like wax,
And even shake Jehovah's throne.

“And should he curse us at this moment, now.
And in the west the sun should wane,
Then, from this night the people of this land
Will never see the light again.”



CHAPTER XVI

Meanwhile as Moses struggled with himself
In his attempt to gain his ground,
The night enveloped all the hills — and he,
Bereft of consciousness, fell down.

And when he touched the earth the mountain
shook
With every out-protruding rib,
While he lay motionless just like a babe
That is rocked to sleep within its crib.

Some melancholy tune came humming by,
A song that drifted through the air
As he was gently rocked, to lull his pains,
By some soft hand that stroked his hair.

And then he heard the quiet whispered words:
“Poor soul, unhappy son of mine!
So this is what your life made out of you —
Has made you pay this cruel fine?”

“Is it so long ago that I had weaned
And led you with a guiding hand ?
I brought you up into the world for this:
A suffering without an end?”

“What many wrinkles on your forehead, now!
How you have aged: bent like a bow!
The hair which with affection I caressed
Has turned from grey to white as snow.

“And yet there was a time when you did rush
To take in everything a part!
See, what you have come to? Tell me, now, my
son,
How many wounds are in your heart?”

“Poor little one, my child, to see you so!
What you have lived and suffered through;
And even now — all day beneath the sun!
Where will this plodding lead you to?”

“In prayer! You would like to ascertain
Your people’s destiny afar
Into the future — praying even now?
Misguided son — how blind you are!”

“Here, off this precipice I ’ll throw a stone;
Accelerating it will go
From shelf to shelf along the wall beneath
Way down into the gorge below.

“Here it will leave a chip, another there,
Flying away from every shelf —
And does anyone know where every chip
Will fall and satisfy itself?”

“I maintain: even Jehovah does not know!
And even though you pray and cry.
The chips from off those stones are bound to
reach
The places in which they will lie.

“The law and steering force lies in itself:
Within itself lies that great force
Which made the chip of stone just what it is
And found its resting place and course.

“As powerful as your Jehovah is
This force is not within His might,
And not a single flying chip of stone
Will he arrest throughout its flight.

“And take the pollen seed: with naked eye
Its tremor you can hardly see,
Yet even that Jehovah won’t attempt
To change from what it’s bound to be.

“Nor, can He will that particle of life
To travel any other way
Then that over which the inbound power leads
From birth to its redeeming day.

“And that is a pollen! What, then, can one say
About a being manifold:
Where every soul contributes to the flight
The impetus of its own mould.

“Have you heard the song about Orion,
The giant who vision had none,
And who to regain the use of his eyes
Had wandered in search of the sun.

“And on his back he lugged along a guide,
A joking youngster full of pranks
Who, showing him the road to take, made sure
To lead him nowhere, for his thanks.

“Make sure to lead me to the sun, my boy!”
So west he trudges in the morn;
At noon the wily chap is carried north
And to the east at dusk is borne.

“Thus Orion kept walking on and on
Imbued with faith in that great light,
Full of thirst with the hope that soon the sun
Is bound to come within his sight.

“Over mountains and seas he keeps moving
With mighty strides through every clime
And does not know that he is burdened with
A smiling lad who bides his time.

“This Orion is all the humankind;
With might and strength within its soul
It hurries in an effort of despair
To some unseen and distant goal.

“It always loves the unattainable,
Believes the most in thing least known:
To reach the most fantastic of its dreams
It treads on treasures of its own.

“It plans beyond its strength to execute —
Its goals don't tally with its acts,
And all the plans and works are laughed at —
By a lad — the logic of pure facts.

“And just like that man, deprived of his sight,
Believing what an agent speaks,
The mass pursues what's out of reach
And reaches what it never seeks.

“And you are praying! My poor little child!
Where is your reason, your self-esteem?
You may as well be asking of the foam
To dam the waters of the stream!”

CHAPTER XVII

At first there was something in those words
As clear as the water of a spring:
Some soothing spirit seemed to drift from them
And pure contentment seemed to bring.

But then, just like before a storm, there came
A feeling of depressive heat,
And then a fear began to grip the soul—
As darkness grips a youngster's feet.

And Moses started, and with what was left
Of his last strength, got on his knees
And rising, said: "Why do you torture me
And do not let me rest in peace?"

"You 're not my mother! In your very words
I cannot find a trace of love.
You 're not my mother! Azazel, it is you,
The evil spirit of despair!"

"Be damned by Him who made you what you
are
For saying what you did to me!
I don't believe a word you say! You lie,
Immortal even though you be!"

Then to his ears drifted the words:
"Oh child, thou offspring of a plight!
You curse me with His name when I myself
Am but a part of His great might.

“What does your humble cursing mean to me?
Why, you would perish from despair
If you but knew a hundred-thousandth part
Of what I know, and knowing — dare.

“You curse when in your blindness you were
touched
Just by a tiny ray of grace
In which live I and He above, beyond
The boundary of time and space.

“Here, let me open up a little more
Your human, visionary-dam:
Look at the country which was promised once
By Him to father Abraham.”

And all the west lit up with crimson red,
And Palestine, the promised land,
Spread out below the top where Moses stood
Like some strange curtain made by hand.

And then, unseen, the seeming friend of his
Began to whisper in his head:
“Look yonder! See that black mirror down
below;
That is the sea benamed the Dead.

“And on that side, the haughty mountain peaks
Which shrug their shoulders at the sky
And bunch together in a crooked line:
That 's where the cliffs of Carmel lie.

“See to the north the Sion hills? That 's where
The Jebusites a camp have found,
And should one shout out loud from off the hill
The Amorites will hear the sound.

“That silver ribbon is the Jordan stream
Which vents into that salty sea
And at its mouth lies Jericho which preys
On wanderers, to get a fee.

“That is the only valley in the place;
Yet into it the Amonites
Are crowding on this side, and right across
Are camping some Canaanites.

“And to the east lie hills and mountain tops
With level stretches here and there
While to the north you see a little lake
And lofty mountains everywhere.

“That, as you see, is all of Palestine:
The sheep and barley raising land!
Mount Carmel to Kadish, which, so to speak,
Could be enveloped by a hand.

“There is no easy access to the sea
Nor welcome highways through or by;
Where is there room for people to progress,
To live, to grow, to multiply?”

And Moses answered in a sullen voice:
“He, who gave water out of stone,
Will change this land to paradise on earth,
A land where want will not be known!”

CHAPTER XVIII

Again a whisper with a stifled laugh:
“A strong belief will move a hill!
But take a look at those unfolded views
Of what is bound to come, and will.

“See how your clan is moving to the front
And crosses Jordan’s bed of mud;
It is taking Jericho and everywhere
Is wading in a stream of blood.

“And now, just for a piece of Palestine,
Blood is shed, in battle, between
The Amorites, the Hebrews, Hittite tribes,
Amelekites and Philistine.

“That is the Hebrew kingdom! Now, just think
What blood it will have cost, and tears!
And to the world it will have meant as much
As would a fly to a horse’s ears.

“Without a chance to develop itself
It slowly will disintegrate
In order to become an easy prey
For neighbors filled with greed and hate.

“Now look! You see those shadows coming on
From yon Damascus and Halan —
That ’s Asshur coming to bring Israel
Its ruin and ensuing end.

“And now look yon upon those crimson fields
Where death is reaping one by one:
They are the sons of Judah smitten by
The growing frightful Babylon.

“Jehovah’s temple is in flames...and that,
Resembling locusts on the field,
Are thousands of survivors bound as one
Who to captivity must yield.

“Hear the lament? That, weeping on the ruins,
Is the only sage of Hebrew womb
Who counceled to submit to Babylon
And keep alive within its tomb.

“What stench of desolation !... But again
The dawn is breaking through the night...
Out of the thousands that went forth, look,
now,
How few are coming from their plight.

“Now, see that little stirring group, way yon,
Where the walls ’round Salim course:
New people, a new god, a temple new,
Crowned by a new and unknown force.

“It grows and it struggles in poverty
But wherever it goes it takes root,
And like that lowly and unwelcome thorn,
It buds through every spreading shoot.

“Above its head world storms are passing by
In a kaleidoscopic view:
Empires tumble, kingdoms rise and fall —
Like phantoms with their retinuc.

“While growing in its corner it conceals —
Steady in determination —
A hate, for all who disbelieve its cause,
And positive damnation.

“And just on account of another god!
That scorn is the hardest of all;
See how it grows and gathers by the steps
Of that majestic temple hall!

“The seed of scorn bears nothing but contempt.
Look yon! At a tyrant’s command
Come forces to annihilate your clan
And raze its cherished fatherland.

“Hear the knocks? Those are the martial steps
Of those armed legions come to stay,
Which tramp Judea’s fields into dust
And devastate what ’s in their way.

“Hear the splash? Those are the foemen’s
knives
Which drain, with zeal, your people’s blood.
Hear the cries? Those are the Hebrew girls
Dragged by the horses through the mud.

“And yonder a mother is gnawing at
The flesh fed by her own poor breast
While thousands die from hanging on the cross.
The flower of Judea’s best.

“Once more Jehovah’s temple is in flames
And this time is the last in train,
Because what that hand lays to ruin once
Will never rise to life again.

“Once more captivity is swallowing
The few survivors of the past;
No more will they adorn the native land,
For this departure is their last.

“And Israel’s bright star will fade away
Never to shine for them again,
While the scorn, born at the temple hall,
Will fly the winds and never wane.

“You hesitate and doubt? You don’t believe?
Oh yes, I ’m sure you will, my friend!
That is the paradise your kin will find
On settling in that Promised Land!

“And you have strived to reach it! Tell me, now,
Do you believe it still worth while?
And maybe you will want to pray again
That they may reach their domicile?”

And aged Moses dropped his head in grief:
“Woe unto my despairing sorrow!
Are they predestined to be slaves of time —
Never to see a new tomorrow?”

And then he fell to earth, his hands hard
clenched:
“Jehovah fooled us like a herd!”
The demon’s laughter drifted through the air
Reechoing his every word.

CHAPTER XIX

At once a raging thundering roar was heard:
The mountains shook, and all around
Jehovah's messengers came passing by,
Each with a different warning sound.

A dismal threatening wall of clouds arose
Between the hidden earth and skies,
And the mother-night crept in, consumed with
 hate,
Casting around her frightful eyes.

And blinking, through the darkness of the wall,
Her penetrating flashing eyes
She grumbled like that mother who in haste
Berates a youngster for its lies.

With awe and fear did Moses listen to
That conversation of the clouds —
But no, his heart could not detect the Voice
Which may have spoken through those shrouds.

A deafening report of thunder-clap;
His hair stood up, his face turned meek,
His heart stopped beating as he gasped —
But still Jehovah did not speak.

The winds began to whistle 'round the cliffs
And their unwelcome angry note,
Like a groan, was gripping at the soul — but
 still
Jehovah's voice seemed quite remote.

And rain and hail began to pelt the earth
And a chill enwrapped the mountain side,
And in its feebleness the human soul
Began to battle with the tide...

Then, calmness; the streams began to burble —
Like sobs conceived in human care;
The misty warmth brought aromatic scents
And almond perfume soothed the air.

And in this warm and floating mistiness
There was some power, so unique
That Moses felt it with his heart and knew
It was Jehovah come to speak...

“Jehovah fooled us? And since when did we
Come to an agreement, do you think,
And in the people’s presence, sign and seal
A contract bonded with a drink?

“Did you ever see any of my plans
Or read what is written in my book?
Have you forseen and positively know
That I would break my word? Now look!

“Faint hearted sheep! Why, you did not
begin
To move within your mother’s womb
When I had counted every hair of yours,
Your every breath from birth till doom.

“Before the faithful Abraham had left
The soil of Ur to Haran land
I knew his children and their destiny
From his beginning to their end.

“Your land is poor? Too narrow and too tight
And is not much of any prize?
Did you forget that small is every crib
No matter what the baby’s size?

“The time will come when I will lead you forth
To pains and labor without rest,
As does the mother, when the time is ripe,
Wean every baby from her breast,

“Here, on this miserly and sterile land,
You are to grow just like that thorn
And gain the necessary fortitude
For that great change that will be born.

“Oh yes, how well I know your sturdy souls
With their unsatiable ways!
On fertile land, no doubt, you would grow fast—
Beset with appetizing trays!

“Your body and your soul would so get used
To licking each and every dish
That Mammon would decoy you to his net
Like that returning home-bound fish.

“Why, in Egypt you groaned in slavery
While relishing what you did eat...
You will always feel it coming up, and belch
Not once from that Egyptian meat.

“And having sprung from that new native land,
With fetterless unshackled hands,
You will disseminate, to conquer all
The life and treasures of the lands.

“But I will place on all that you will gain
A heavy and relentless curse
Which, in its time, will bring you only grief
And worries led from bad to worse.

“Whoever wins the riches of the earth
And cherishes them above all,
Will find himself their servant and their slave—
Will lose all treasures of the soul.

“The master of his riches and their slave—
Paid for with blood and with disgrace,
In order to increase them he, himself,
In time will undermine their base.

“Like the leech that, feeding on human blood,
Is apt to perish with its hold,
So will you in your greed repent your ways
When stranded on the sea of gold.

“And in that sea of gold you will find yourself
Forever thirsting and in grief,
And from the bread of gold that you possess
No mouth or soul will get relief.

“And you, in time, will be my witnesses
Spread out throughout the different lands
That I choose only those that feed the soul
And not the palms of itching hands.

“Whoever feeds you only with some bread
Will with that bread himself decay;
But he who satisfies your hungry souls
Will always be my protege!

“That is where you will find your promised land:
The soil of boundless glory, pride;
So, as the people’s leader, you have been
A very narrow-sighted guide.

“That is where the glory of your future lies —
Of all the realms the finest part;
This Palestine is nothing but a gift
With which to offer you a start.

“It will only be a memory, a dream,
A longing without any end,
So that my people, looking for it, will
Become the masters of all land.

“And since, for a moment, you dared to doubt
The meaning of my spoken will,
Having once seen the promised ratherland
You foot will never pass this hill.

“Here will your bones be bleaching in the sun
As an example of dismay
To all who always strive to reach the goal
And slowly perish on their way.”

CHAPTER XX

A stark anxiety, spread over the hills
Just like a shadow of the night,
Is sowing thought, and on the plains below
Is spreading longings from its height.

It strews afresh the flowers and the leaves
Which faded, once beneath the snow,
And in the soul, again, is raising cries
Which have been silenced long ago.

What, yesterday, was looked upon with scorn—
Today with love is all esteemed;
What, yesterday, was trampled and bespat —
Today with sanctity is deemed.

Within the Hebrew camp, that night was spent
In fear with feelings all on edge;
At the break of the dawn they all looked up
Upon that overhanging ledge.

“Why, he is gone!” . . . And that “gone” was like
death
That haunts a guilty fugitive;
They all now felt that something disappeared,
Without which none of them could live.

It was that something, indiscernible,
Which fed their hearts with constant fire;
It was the thing that led them to a goal
Without which life would be too dire.

And so a boundless feeling of their guilt
Enveloped their cemented soul
And all the camp, as if by charm, was numbed
And of all motion lost control.

They all stole glances at each other's face, —
Their feet kept shifting without end —
Like murderers caught in the very act
Of killing a beloved friend.

A stamping sound! Is that a hurricane?
Perhaps he prophesied the truth?
It is Joshua, the herdsmen's chosen prince
Who is followed by the faithful youth.

They drive the herds and seem to be in haste —
Perhaps it is a foe's attack?
No, they are prodded by Jehovah's will:
That nameless feeling at their back.

From spiritual hunger, solitude,
From chos of the past they flee,
While Joshua is rending his command:
"To arms! To arms and liberty!"

And like an eagle did his cry soar forth
Above the tumult's silent head,
Reechoing from gaping hills: "To arms!
Retreat is closed but for the dead!"

A moment more and all will come to life
From that involuntary spell,
And none will know what in that flash of time
Had shattered the hypnotic shell.

A moment more and Joshua's command
Will be a hundred-thousand cries,
And from the lazy nomads, in a flash,
A race of heroes will arise.

A din of drums will come—their marching feet
Will knead to mud the desert sand,
And proud Abiram will be stoned to death
While hanging will be Dathan's end.

Across the mountains they will fly like birds;
The Jordan waters will be strown,
And the walls of Jericho will melt away
Before the sound of trumpets blown.

Thus will they wander through uncertainty,
While full of yearning and dismay,
To pave the highway for the human soul
And slowly perish on their way.

END

Lviv, January to June, 1905.

Translated by Waldimir Semenyina.



