

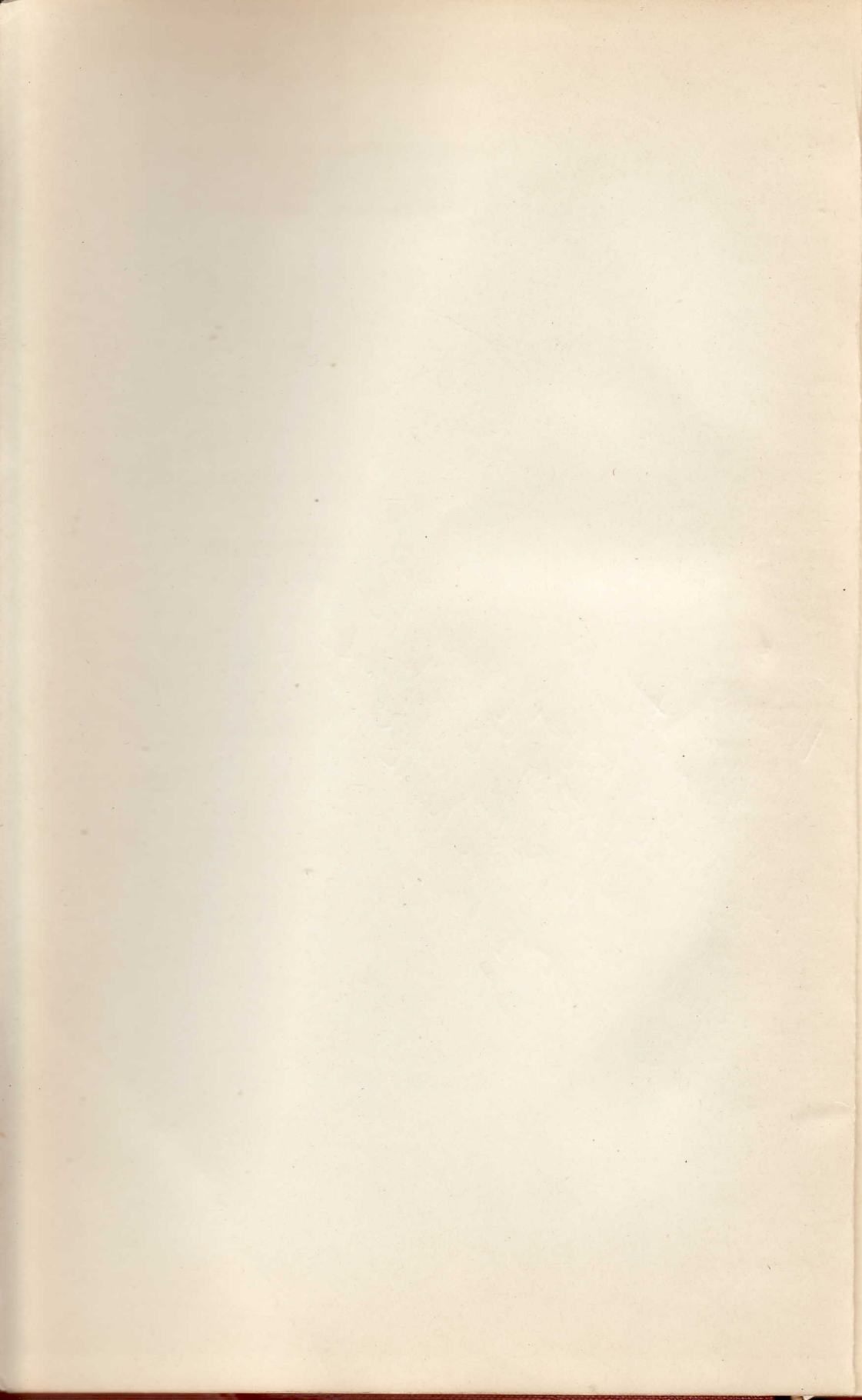
Satanella

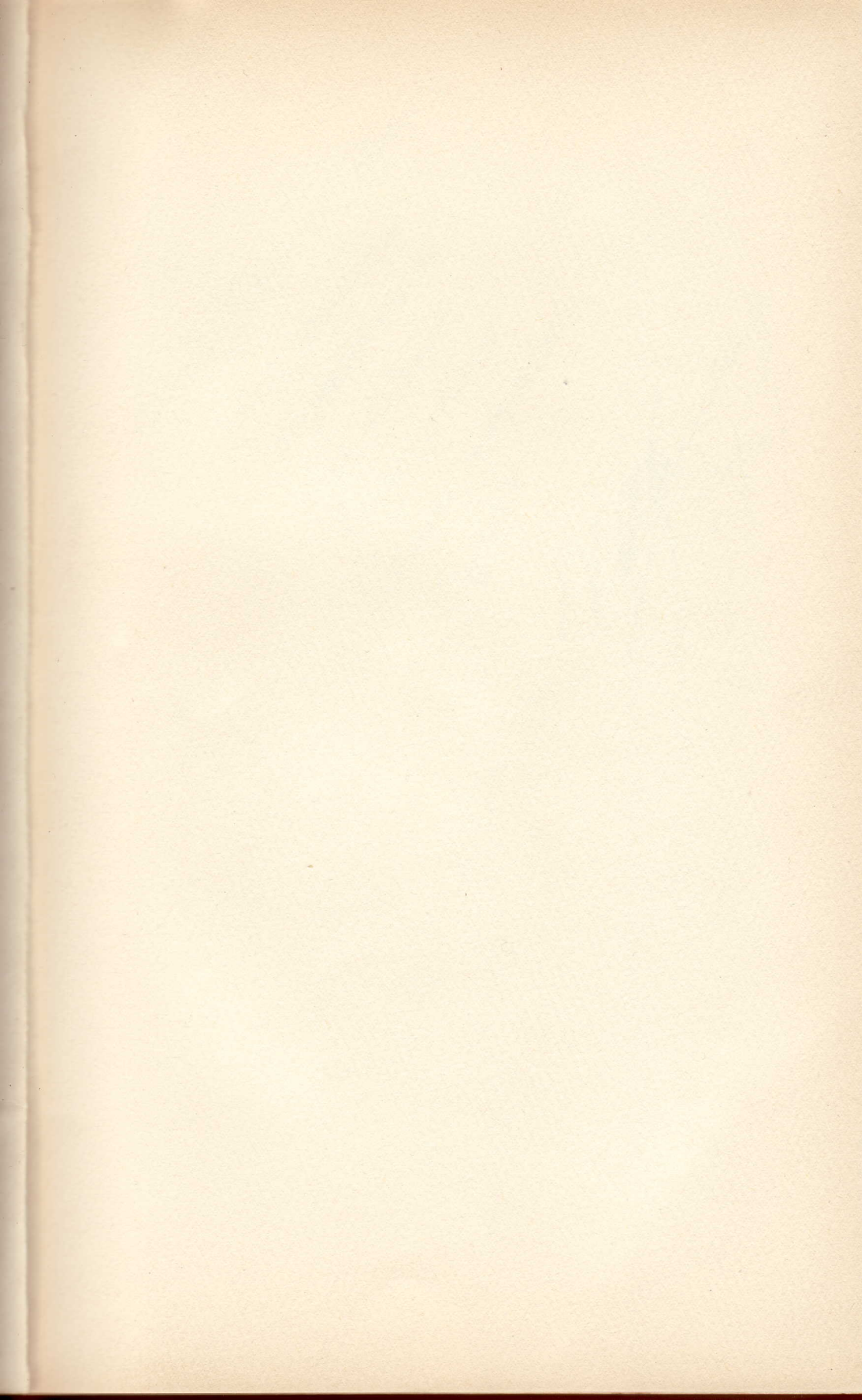


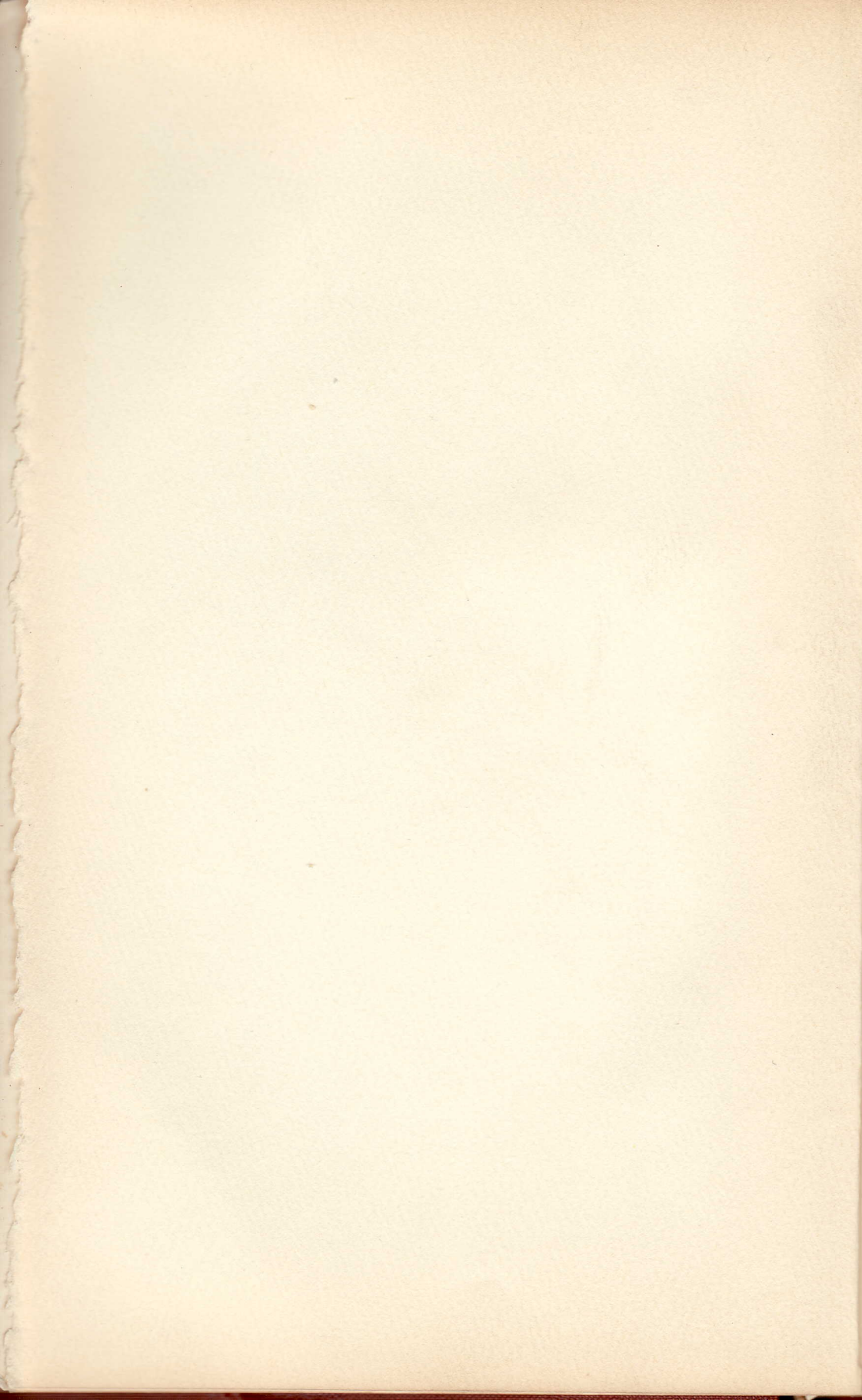
Jaroslav Vrchlický





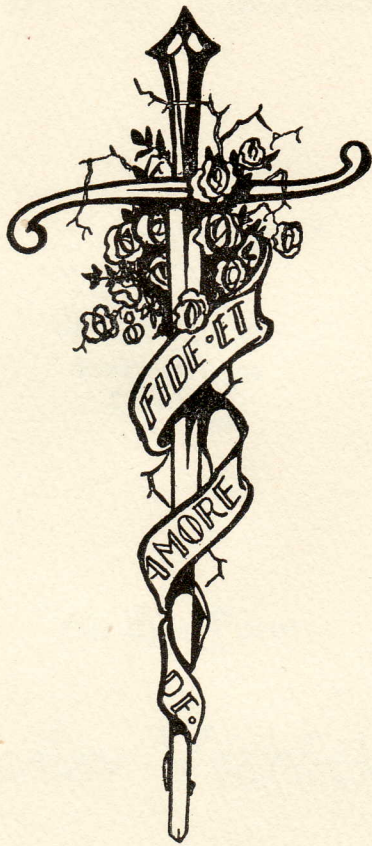






To
Libuše Bartůvková-Brown
whose vivacious
interpretations of
Czech & Slovak
songs & dances
I have so repeatedly
enjoyed

Margherita
5/31/32



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May 1932

SATANELLA



An Epic Poem

Jaroslav Vrchlicky

Translated from the Czech

RODERICK A. GINSBURG

Drawings

Y. Victor Brozek

R.2010

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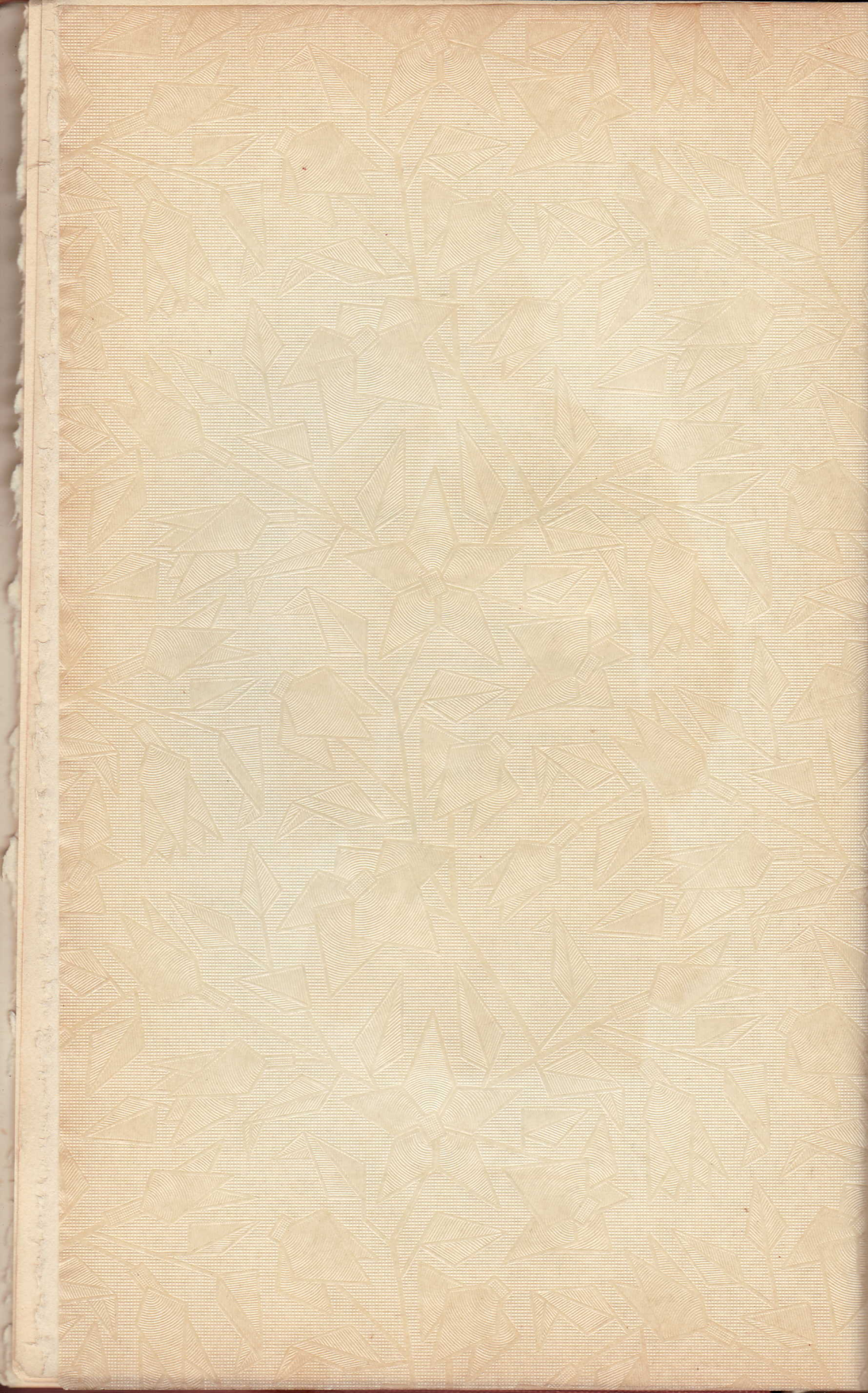


K 3413

This Volume Is Lovingly
DEDICATED
To the Cherished Memory
of my brother,
DR. JOSEF GINSBURG
whose untimely death on
a forgotten battlefield of
war-mad Europe left
an irreparable void
in my life.

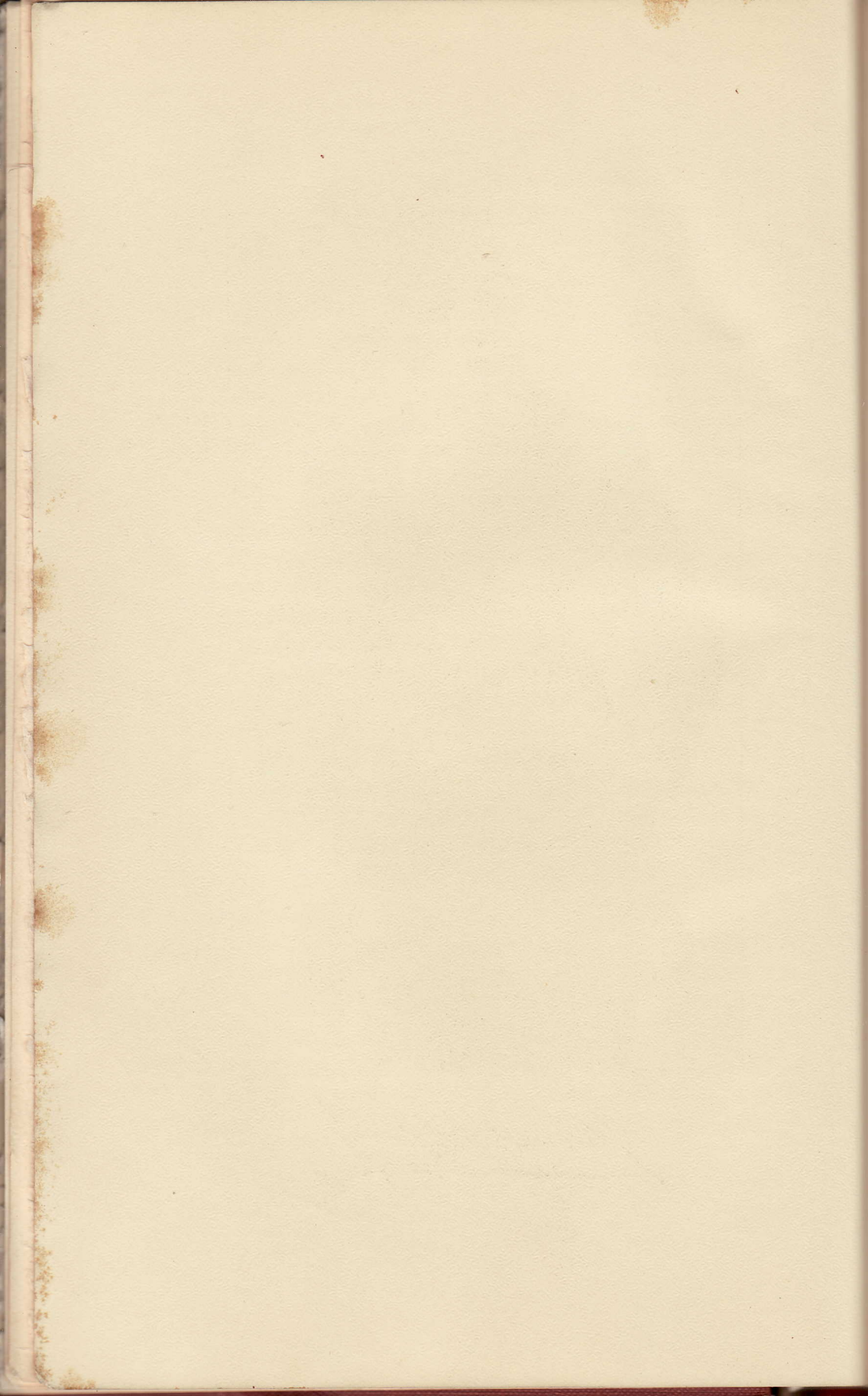


Jan. 1861





Mr. Whiting



JAROSLAV VRCHLICKY

(1853-1912)

On a beautiful and brilliant September morning, twenty years ago, the sad news reached Prague that Jaroslav Vrchlicky died . . . after four years of both physical and mental anguish. The capital was shocked by the irreparable loss of the greatest Czech poet.

And we, his former students from the University of Prague, where he had been active for many years as professor of the history of modern literature, were touched more deeply by his early departure than perhaps anyone. For, how long ago was it that we listened to his absorbing lectures dealing with the Spanish dramatists of the 17th century, with Goethe's "Faust" and Madach's "Tragedy of Man," with Dante's "Divina Commedia" and Shelley's "The Cenci"—to name only a few of his many subjects. We were a mere handful, not more than four or five graduates who, in the narrow worm-eaten benches of the old college of Klementinum, drank from the inexhaustible fountain of Vrchlicky's profound knowledge, matured poetical wisdom and sparkling critical inspiration.

We vividly saw our beloved professor, as he walked the streets of the city of "a hundred towers." In his grotesque, "out-of-fashion" overcoat, his slouchy, large brimmed gray felt hat, his long silvery hair protruding underneath, and occasionally a lighted cigarette in his mouth, he was a picture of the heroic dreamer amidst the toil and tumult of a great city in the modern, mechanical age.

Or, we saw him standing on the rostrum before his professorial pulpit, and with closed eyes—while only the few gas-burners in the dimly lighted lecture room were humming their monotonous melody—reciting in a high pitched voice a few scattered verses of his masterful translations. With what anxiety we listened, always eager to hear more and more from him, whom a French contemporary not inaptly chose to label, "the Czech Victor Hugo!"

And then, as members of the academic fencing club, we stood around his coffin, a silent, stolid guard in the monumental Pantheon hall of the National Museum. And, when at last, just before dusk of a gorgeous summer evening, his body was laid to rest in "Slavin," the renowned burial ground of Vysehrad (the Czech Westminster Abbey), we all felt that in the passing of Vrchlicky Czech literature lost its greatest poet and inspirator.

In 1903, there appeared in Pelcl's "Rozhledy," an influential Prague magazine, an inflammatory article entitled "A Paper Pyramid," containing a condemnation of Vrchlicky's achievements. We, his ardent students, were thoroughly convinced that a flagrant injustice had been inflicted upon the prince of the Czech poets whose fiftieth birthday was then being observed throughout the nation with unexampled solemnity.

It is true, indeed, that there never was a poet more productive than Vrchlicky. As one of his more recent critics sets out, Vrchlicky wrote such a mass of verse, original and translated, besides a large quantity of prose, that the literary output of his life was greater in volume than that of any other of the world's leading writers excepting Lope de Vega.

Vrchlicky published about seventy volumes of original lyric and epic poetry, more than thirty dramas, fifteen volumes of prose-criticism, essays and stories.

In addition to his exuberant productivity he was unquestionably a poet of God's grace, a perfect magician of the Czech letters, a master of form and versification, an inspiring teacher who opened new horizons to the creative faculties of his nation in the field of poetry.

An equally important part in the literary work of Vrchlicky are his prolific translations, from the Romance languages including Victor Hugo and the rest of the Parnassians, Baudelaire and Verlaine, representatives of French poetry, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Michael Angelo, Parini, Giuseppe Carducci and other Italian poets, Calderon, Camoens, and Verdaguer, the principal Spanish authors. From English and American literature Vrchlicky translated Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, Swinburne, Poe, Whitman; and from the German, Goethe (the whole of his "Faust"), Schiller, and Robert Hamerling. Among others his translations include Ibsen, Mickiewicz, the Magyar poets, Petofi, Aranyi and Madach, the Persian poet Hafiz and the Chinese "Shi-King" (collaborating with Professor Rudolph Dvorak) besides several voluminous anthologies of Italian, French and English modern poetry.

The most amazing fact about this enormous quantity of Vrchlicky's literary work, is that it was produced by a man who was not merely a writer and scholar, but who also, in a unique manner, understood the difficult art of living, who was a refined "bon viveur" in the Rabelaisian sense of the word; and who was a model husband to his wife and a loving and doting father to his daughter Eve, who at present is one of the prominent actresses of the National Theatre in Prague.

My dear friend, Mr. Roderick A. Ginsburg, undertook to familiarize the English-reading public in this country and abroad with one of Vrchlicky's earliest epic poems, "Satanella" (1874), written at the age of twenty-four years under the spell of romanticism so happily inaugurated in Czech literature in 1836 by Karel Hynek Macha and his immortal epico-lyrical poem "Maj" (May).

It is my firm conviction that Mr. Ginsburg fully succeeded in his difficult and painstaking task of interpreting Vrchlicky's beautifully molded verses into their equivalent English counterparts.

I hope that his English version of Vrchlicky's colorful poem will be gratefully received by English lovers of poetry who will have the opportunity to see to what extent the Czechs, now flourishing as a virile, independent nation, possess commendable qualities not only in the domain of music, so well known through the compositions of Dvorak, Smetana and Janacek, but also in the wide realm of literature.

JOHN J. REICHMAN, PH.D., J.D.

Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A., May 1932.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

In presenting this translation of Jaroslav Vrchlicky's Epic Poem, SATANELLA, I am fully aware of the dual danger I am facing. On the side of the Czech literary world I am exposing myself to severe, justifiable censure, for having selected this particular poem from the large, wealthy collections of Vrchlicky's works, many of which are better and more typical of the man than Satanella . . . On the part of the English readers, I am facing the danger of creating a false impression as to the quality and nature of Czech poetry, and the works of Vrchlicky, for the reader may be led to believe that SATANELLA is a typical illustration of the poetic-literature of the Czechs and of their foremost poet . . .

To the English reader I offer no apology for my choice, merely an explanation. The Czech poetry of the 19th Century is a veritable treasure trove of much that is worthy of a place among the world's poetical gems . . . The poetry of this period divides itself on the contents side into two general groups, of which the first contains much of purely local, folk-lorish nature. In this group we find much ill-suppressed patriotism and much longing and bemoaning of past Czech glory . . . In the other group, of which Vrchlicky may be taken as an outstanding representative we find much of cosmopolitan, world-wide nature, a poet's yearning for truth and beauty, a poet's quest for the Ultimate. It is the latter form of reflective, philosophic poetry that really unites the Czech poetry with that of the other world's poets, and which also shows the immense influence of German, French, Italian and English thought and literature upon that of the Czech thinkers . . .

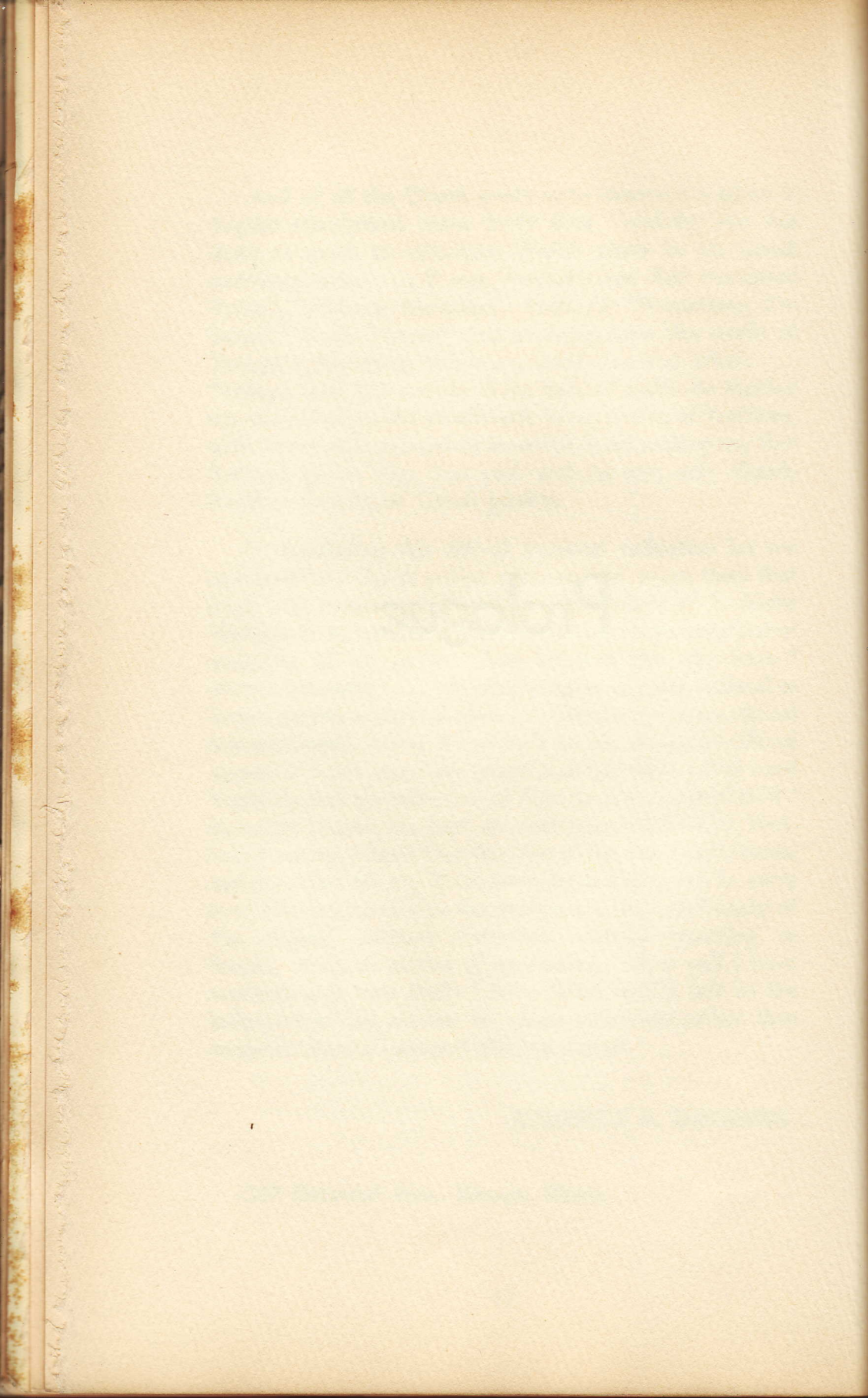
And of all the Czech poets none deserves a place in English translations more justly than Vrchlicky who has done so much to introduce English poets to his Czech contemporaries . . . It was Vrchlicky who first translated Byron's "Hebrew Melodies," Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound," Poe's "Raven" and excerpts from the works of Tennyson, Browning, Whitman, Swinburne and others . . . Perhaps, then, it is a sense of the debt of gratitude that led me, not rationally but emotionally to my choice of Vrchlicky, with whose epic presented herewith, I am making my first hesitant inroad into that vast and, as yet, only slightly trodden domain of Czech poetry.

In concluding this bit of personal reflection let me anticipate my Czech critics' censure, and assure them that I am fully aware that there are many works of Vrchlicky that are more typical of the man, and perhaps even better examples of his genius. Then knowing this why have I chosen *Satanella*? . . . My choice again was not rational or based on any analytical basis . . . I chose the poem almost subconsciously, being driven to it by the strong emotional appeal it made upon my youthful mind, when I first read Vrchlicky and his collection of Epic poetry . . . And so if I have not chosen the best or most characteristic of Vrchlicky's poems, I hope that the love of the one I did choose, compensated for my ill-choosing by enabling me to carry over into the translation the pathos and the lyric beauty of the original, without distortion, without resorting to forced, artificial modes of expression. How well I have succeeded or how badly I have failed is now left to the judgment of the reader, to whose emotional rather than analytical nature I present this translation.

RODERICK A. GINSBURG.

1247 Elmwood Ave., Berwyn, Illinois.

Prologue



As within a castle's ruins
Steals a full moon's shining ray;
As within a forest's shadows
Colored butterfly has strayed,
As within a rusty goblet
Falls a drop of golden wine;
Thus within my saddened bosom
And within my orphaned heart
Gleamed a ray of love eternal,
Strayed a butterfly of dreams,
Fell a droplet of my musing;
Tell me, is there aught yet needed
To complete this song of mine? . . .



Roderigo Gonvazales,
Knight of the Johannite order,
Wandered on his morning vigil
As had been his daily custom;
For the Isle of Rhodos was then
Bulwark of the Christian nations
'gainst the Godless Turkish heathen.

As he left the castle portals
He beheld a barefoot child there
Leaning 'gainst the massive entrance.
Tender body as if breathed
In a gaily colored bodice,
And her black hair hast'ly gathered
Underneath a snow-white kerchief.

Soon as Roderigo reached her,
Smilingly she lifted towards him
Eyes that burned as sparks of fire,

And she handed him a flow'ret,
Mountain flower strangely scented,
With white ribbons tied together.

Roderigo smiled in greeting,
Kissed the gaily colored blossoms,
Leaning over till his curls
Lightly touched upon her forehead,
From his lips escaped a question
As the scent escapes from flowers:

—Pretty child, what do they call you?

—Sir, they call me Satanella!

—Satanella? . . . What a strange name
Gallantly the knight retorted,
But full worthy that an angel
Bow before your Godly beauty!

And thereafter, every morning
At the same time, after daybreak,
Dusky, barefoot child would stand there
At the citadel's wide portals. . . .

Thus the knight received each morning
One lone flower, kissed its blossoms—
Thinking perhaps he was kissing
Satanella's lips so tender.

But one day, in early Autumn
Disappeared his Satanella,
As a bird from forest's shadows
As a golden bee from meadows . . .
Flying, mayhap, with the swallows.

But next year, when through the window
May exhaled sweet scent of roses,
She returned there with the first bird,
With first primrose of the meadows.
Soon the knight became accustomed
To the flowers and the kisses,
While his kisses often wandered
From the blooms to lips so tender,
Like the bees for honey hung'ring.

Thus, today, long winter over,
With the blooms came Satanella.
But, my heavens—child no longer
But a woman in full beauty.
Bud of amaranth no longer
Now a scented rose, dark colored:
Now a bashful child no longer
But a maid, eyes closed demurely
In a joyous, glad confusion.
Tender lips that were but segments
Of pale leaves of briar roses,
Now have opened in full blossom

For whose heavy, toxic nectar
One could die with endless yearning.
And the buds upon her bosom
Forward shot like restless billows
Till your head swam in a circle
Longing for a restful moment
On their dusky, silky velvet.
And her hair now closely braided
In three garlands round her forehead,
Like a frame about a picture;
Once released, would surely tumble
To her heels like waves of ocean.

But another transformation:—
At the gate she stood no longer,
But amidst the crowding masses
She was dancing in the market.
All around her, like an ocean
Colored caps and dusky features,
People shouting, noisy discourse
'twixt the tambourine and cymbal.
Like a lily twig, her body,
In her eyes a flame of lightning
Slender limbs in dancing, twirling
Like a leaf, when stirred by breezes.

Roderigo thus had seen her
In the market place this morning.
Saw all this, and all his being
Lost itself within his bosom.
All day long he heard resounding
"Satanella! Satanella!"
And at eve in contemplation
He would sit, o'er empty goblets
Cursing at his darkened cassock.





Surely it is not my doing
That for love Spring is selected,
Evening star by love is chosen,
That the rose is lovers' flower,
Nightingale their sacred song-bird,
And the poets' song so gentle,
Lullaby is of their gladness
And the dirge of lovers' blisses.

Two old walls of gloomy ruins
As two sisters, self-embracing
Forward lean their aged arches.
Ivy grows from every crevice,
On the battlement, a hawthorne
And a rug of mossy verdure.
Grass between the stones has settled:
Downward hang dark blades so tender,
Playthings of the blowing breezes
As a woman's flowing tresses.

And within these saddened ruins
—formerly a famous cloister—
Gypsies have their camp erected.

Twilight fell upon the country,
Far away a stream was booming,
Time to time the forest whispered
As if dreaming. . . . Then all quiet. . . .
Out upon this midnight darkness
Gazed the greyish cloister ruins
As a giant of past ages,
Who to earth from grave returning,
After flight of years uncounted,
Stands there now, as if bewildered
By the time's fast fleeting changes.
Yes, these ruins were a giant,
Rock-hewn walls its shoulders forming,
With its arms, two massive arches
Stretching in the darkened distance,
While the windows, now illumined
By the glare of gypsies' fire
Forward shine like eyes aglowing.

Quiet, quiet o'er the country. . . .
But gay life among the ruins!
'twixt the walls of crumbling glory
Fleeting shadows come and vanish.
Toward the darkened vaulted ceiling
Soar the flames of hungry fires;
Through the caverns, nooks and hollows
Used to sleepy rest and quiet,

Or to wint'ry winds' sad howling,
Rustling leaves or birds' sweet singing,
Now resounds the saucy cymbal,
Now ring out song's playful verses.

On a rock, close to the fire
White-haired, hoary man is sitting,
Chieftain of the camping gypsies.
And within the glaring flicker
Shine his cloak's metallic buckles
And the knives from belt protruding. . . .
Straight before him, fair young woman
Part reclining on a carpet,
Shielding with one hand her forehead,
Dreamily stares in the fire.
Strings of dimly shining pearls
And her hair's abundant billows
Decorate, though part concealing
Restless waves of full-formed bosom.
Next to her, a youth is resting
With a knowing eye caressing
Chieftain's dagger's shining edges. . . .
On the wall a boy is stretching
Gazing into hazy distance. . . .
There two gypsies play their cymbals
With whose clear metallic music

Blends the gypsies' mournful singing. . . .
Here and there, within the shadows,
Gypsies' reddish cloaks are gathered,
Near the fires sit the women,
While the men sit, freely scattered
On the boulders, partly dreaming:
Time to time their heads go nodding
To the tune . . . then weave more fancies.

Motley camp around the fire,
But where is our Satanella?

'neath the ruins in the valley,
In the mountain guarded recess,
Sheltered by a bush of roses
Hangs Madonna's holy picture,
Relic of the days this cloister
For unfortunates was shelter
And a wanderers' oasis.
Age-worn rock before the picture,
On the rock the happy lover,
Roderigo in a dark cloak.
In his arms is Satanella
Softly upward at him smiling
As the Evening Star in heaven,
As Madonna in the picture.

Gone the hair-enclosing 'kerchief,
Gone her tresses' triple garland;
Naught but hundred streams of darkness
Winding out as shining billows
Round the gaily colored bodice
From whose feeble, helpless bondage,
Overcome by their sweet pressure,
Found escape her dusky bosom.
And her hand is now embracing
Roderigo's neck and shoulders
While in truth her eyes are drinking
Lightning, shining 'neath his eye lids;
And her heart with quickened beating
Hastens forth in uncurbed yearning
To blend with his measured heart beats.

Head to head, lips lips enfolding
And one sigh, sweet and caressing,
"Do you love me, Roderigo?"

Head to head, lips lips enfolding
And one sigh, sweet and caressing,
"Yes, I love you, Satanella." . . .

For a long while, all was quiet,
Distant waters barely rippled,
Darkened forests barely whispered.
Just the thicket faintly trembled
With the earth's sweet, heavy breathing,

Just two lips that faintly trembled
'neath a cataract of kisses
As a lotus flower trembles
'neath the faithful moon's caressing,
As the rolling ocean trembles
'neath the rays of golden sunshine.

"Tell me, do you still remember,"
—softly asks the happy lover—
"Years ago when shyly, coyly,
I dared kiss the blooms you offered?
From the blooms I passed to your lips—
And today, see what a difference,
Now I kiss your tan-hued forehead,
Supple cheeks and two lips smiling,
Full-formed breasts and two bare ankles,
Your moist eyes and raven tresses;
All of you now is a flower
And a lip now, all my being,
Satanella! . Satanella!"

"Tell me, do you still remember,"
—answers she her knightly lover—
"Years ago, when shyly, coyly
I dared rest one eye upon you?
And today, see what a difference,
Both my eyes I dare submerge now
And with them my soul is sinking,

Everlastingly submersing
In your eyes, blue as an ocean,
In your eyes your soul I see now,
As it beckons me and calls me,
All the earthly bliss I see there,
And I swoon with joy's abundance.
Burning, longing lips repeating:
'Roderigo, Roderigo.' "

For a long while, all was quiet.
Fires dying 'tween the ruins,
Cymbal's final note has sounded.
—In the mountains sleeps its echo.
But with greater, keener brightness
Shines the Evening Star in heaven,
And with melody much sweeter
Shakes the leaf and tremble billows,
Nightingale's throat faintly trembles,
Tremble lovers' lips with kisses.

Midnight onward floats in silence,
Sleeps the grove, the hills are dormant,
Rests the brook, each bird is dreaming.
Quiet, quiet. . . . Like an echo
Floats love's breath into the distance.

"Do you love me, Roderigo?"

"Yes, I love you, Satanelle."

"Love for ever?"

"Ever! . . . ever! . . . "

Surely it is not my doing
That for love Spring is selected,
Evening Star by love is chosen,
That the rose is lovers' flower,
Nightingale their sacred song-bird,
And the poets' song so gentle
Lullaby is of their gladness
And the dirge of lovers' blisses.





Booming drums and blaring trumpets,
Ringing bells on every tower,
Sacred songs each throat is chanting
Till with all this sound and bustle,
Seems to quake the very island.
Constantly the throng is growing
While a glorious procession
'cross the bridge is slowly winding.

Booming drums and blaring trumpets,
All abounds in festive glory,
Yes, the very sun from heaven
Pours a stream of gold abundance
On the crosiers, ensigns, crosses,
On the mitres and chasubles.

On each side of this procession
Rows of bald-pate monks are flanking.
In the center, walking slowly,
Prettiest of city's daughters
Bear a picture of Madonna.

Through the incense' smoky columns
Barely penetrates the sunshine,
Barely o'er the clanging church bells
Heard monks' psalms and songs of people.

Close behind the monks and maidens
Midst his clergy, walks the bishop
On whose cloak and shining monstrance
Flaming brilliants are burning.

In the summer heat, two servants
Bending 'neath their swaying burden
Waft cool breezes o'er his features
With a fan of ostrich feathers.

And the bishop, with his monstrance
All around him passes blessings,
And where'er his gaze but wanders
Masses kneel in dust before him.

After bishop, in one column,
Rides the Johannitic Order,
And their swords, belts, shields and helmets
Burn as gold beneath the sunshine.

And the silver-haired grand-master
On a snow-white horse is riding,
On each side a page to lead him
By a gold embroidered bridle.

'twixt his comrades, Roderigo
In full armor, splendid raiment,
Walking with a cloudy forehead,
Lowered head and stormy vision.

Through the squares and down the avenues,
In one line drags the procession,
O'er the fields, beyond the city,
Shining, monstrous snake resembling.

Well I know that you would query
Why this marching, why this singing?
When a truce was signed for five years
With the warring Turkish peoples,
When all ships with treasures laden
Daily enter island harbors,
As the Island, like a pearl,
Is hemmed in with silvery waters.
Crops and grapes are fully ripened,
Wherever your eye but wanders,
And the fishermen pull daily
Burdened nets from depths of ocean.

Neither pirates of the ocean,
Neither Turk, the godless heathen,
Neither hunger nor poor harvest
But a greater, greater evil,
Greater danger dreads the islet.

From the distant steppes past Ural,
From the land of fog eternal,
Monstrous bird to skies has risen
Bringing dread to all the people.

Wheresoever on his journey
Bat-like wings, the monster lowered,
Groves were stilled, the waters vanished,
Orchards wasted, grasses withered.

And much worse, the people dying
Suddenly and naught availing,
Like the playful moths that flutter
To a tempting light attracted.

All grew bare, the glaring sunshine
Bleached the yellow bones, unburied,
Perished all but cloud-dark vultures
And hyennas in the forests.

And this bird—a plague they called him,
Or a punishment of God—now
Lightly flew o'er every ocean,
Soared above each mountain apex.

In a veil of poisoned vapor
He would fly by night and daylight,
Where he flew, the sun grew crimson,
Howled the dogs where'er he landed.

Fears, lamenting, sighs and curses
Spread he 'fore him in confusion
As he flew from Ural mountains
To Byzantium with tempests.

On the shores of Asia Minor
Many cities stand deserted,
Ships are rotting in the harbors,
In the streets rot human bodies.

And in midst of scorching summer
Near the very shores of Rhodos
This black Turk made his appearance,
He whose shield, the blood-red sunshine,
Whose projectiles strike each target
And whose sword of poisoned vapors
Penetrates most hardened armour.

That is why the long procession
Leaves the city for the ruins,
To the nook where hangs the picture;
Supplicating, weeping, praying,
Asking for Madonna's succour
In the Island's pressing hour.

That is why each city portal
And in haste each island harbor
Is enclosed with chains of iron.
But the plague through air is flying
But the plague kills with its breathing.

No I know not if the plague-bird
Of his flight will change direction
Hot the wind . . . the sun grows crimson
All in yellow fog . . . enfolded.

Booming drums and blaring trumpets,
Throngs are marching toward the ruins. . . .





On the wall of crumbling bulwark
In a thoughtful meditation,
Satanella now is sitting
With her black hair loosely flying.

Round her shoulders merged the tresses
In a sea of dark-hued billows
Blending with the yellow grasses,
With the leaves of dark spread ivy.

Satanella thus was resting:
White bare limbs were freely dangling
O'er the wall among acacia's
Sweetly scented snow-white flowers.
Shaking with her every movement
Dewy pearls off the blossoms.
Long, long while she thus was sitting.
What she thought of, hard to fathom,
But a lengthy meditation
Was for her no pleasant duty.
Soon she shook her flowing tresses,
Upturned palms received her forehead,
And with smile upon her features
She gazed at the bluish mountains.

Then her gaze passed from the mountains
To the stream that shone in distance,
Like a snake in sunshine sleeping.
Then she glanced upon the forests
Motionlessly far off, resting
'neath a veil of golden vapor.
Then she looked upon the flowers
Over which her feet had frolicked,
Thence upon the spreading mosses,
Scabious, in many colors
Golden buzzing bees upon it,
And the struggling ants beneath it.
Suddenly, her feet aswaying
From among the snow white flowers
Waked a butterfly, soft velvet
Wings of black with white hemmed edges.
He flew up and fluttered onward,
Sat upon a cliff's protrusion,
Then flew back, 'round Satanella,
Darted like a flash of sorrow,
Like a thought whose melancholy
Suddenly and unsuspecting
Caught her in its spreading meshes.

And perchance this darting creature,
This black butterfly of mourning,
Took upon its wings of velvet

All of Satanella's sadness.
As he vanished in the blue heights
Satanella laughed out loudly
With a rippling, tumbling laughter
That from mount to mountain travelled,
Flew among the greyish ruins,
Then returned on wings of echo.
Thus at night across the snow drifts
Falls the bells' metallic tinkle,
Sound the sleigh-bells and the laughter.
Soon but ceased this jolly outburst
Passed into a song of sadness
From whose waves of melancholy
It shone forth like flash of moonlight,
Like a shiny golden fish-scale.

Now it vanished . . . perhaps drowning
In that sea of sweet emotions
That encircles hearts of lovers
With a sweetly-mellow current—
Then it burst anew however,
Passed through many variations,
Then rejoiced, the daring dreamer
Having found a bough with flowers
Where to hang its wings of music,
Now had found a sturdy tower
Where to hang its bells of metal.
What approaches in the distance?

With a hand her forehead shading,
Satanella holds her laughter
And a while with solemn features
She examines the procession
From the town as it approaches
Winding like a snake through meadows.

To this child of boundless deserts
Who but knew the clear-toned cymbal,
Songs of winds, and but the people
That she grew with from her childhood,
Laughable to her this picture,
These old monks with long black garments,
Monks, whose large white shining bald-pates
Glistened bright beneath the sunshine;
And the clergy in chasubles
Holding golden incense burners
From which rose thick, smoky columns;
But more laughable than all these
Seems the bishop with the mitre,
Being fanned with ostrich feathers
While he blesses with his monstrance.
As if stunned, a while she stood there
While her restless gaze was roving;
Then in new-born streams of laughter
Seemed to melt her speechless wonder.

Finally, the long procession
Came up to the greyish ruins
And stopped at the foot of mountain
Where Madonna's Holy picture
Hangs among the briar roses.
In two streams the throng divided
To let pass, right through their center
Johannites with monks and clergy.
Through this trebly made formation
Passed the bishop to the picture,
To their knees sank thronging people,
Ceased all whisp'ring . . . long drawn quiet.

Up above the wall of mountain
In the shade of white acacia,
Satanella gazed and wondered
What went on there far beneath her.
In the meanwhile she selected
From her lap, dates long and slender
Feasted on them, and assembled
All their pits and stones about her.
Suddenly her roaming vision
'twixt the Johannites detected
Roderigo in his dark cloak,
Standing there with shaded forehead
As a cloud on skies in summer.

In a twinkle that she saw him,
One date-pit she threw upon him,
And as he, in sheer amazement
Looked up at the tow'ring ruins
She again released the current
Of her carefree, joyous laughter.
Up at her gazed wond'ring people.
But this only brought rejoicing
To the laughing Satanella
And she threw a rain of date-pits
Down upon the solemn bishop
Who was blessing with his monstrance
People kneeling all about him.

New commotion, new disturbance;
Varied voices and her laughter
Blend together in a mixture.

"Go and seize the witch of witches,"
Johannites' grand-master shouted.
"Go and seize the witch of witches
Who just dared to bring upon us
With her blasphemy and laughter
Heaven's most revengeful anger.
Go and seize her, I command you."

As he finished, more disturbance
And a pack of angry soldiers

Clambered up the sloping mountains
There to capture Satanella.
But she with a new-born laughter
Flitted sidewise to evade them,
Like the bird in ancient fable
Tempted on the ancient shepherd
With his shining golden feathers.
Higher, higher, she kept climbing
From one mountain to another
From one wall she scaled another,
With an ever rising laughter,
Like a butterfly escaping
When a meddling boy he teases.

With her constant flight grew angered
More and more the pack of soldiers,
Till at last they overtook her
As a doe with chase exhausted.
But refusing to be captured
She broke forth from her pursuers
And ran down the sloping hillside
Till she reached the wall of ruins,
From where, having lost the pathway
With a daring jump she landed
At the bishop's feet beneath her.
Frightened by her wild appearance
Bishop almost dropped the monstrance

And in following confusion
Almost floored the fanning servants.

Wonder, shouting, storm 'twixt people.
"Burn at stake the witch of witches
Who has blasphemed."

—"Chains about her."

Thus commands the guards about him,
Aged Johannite grand-master,
But then, like an angered lion,
From the throng springs Roderigo,
Draws his sword and shouts like thunder;
"At the hell's own gates shall find self
Whosoever dares to trifle
With one hair upon this maiden.
Step no further! Back you rabble!—
As for you, my Satanella,
Go, return among your ruins;
Leave the fools to their own folly."

Thus he spoke, and raised the maiden
Who shook like a round-leaved willow.
Kissed her on the dusky forehead,
Stroked her cheek as smooth as velvet.
And then, with a stride determined
Would return among his comrades,
When the order's oldest member

Blocked his way, and thus addressed him,
In a solemn voice that quivered;

"Roderigo Gonvazales,
To my hands return your sabre,
Tainted in your holy service.
To obey you failed, and broke thus
Our order's highest promise.
With defiance in your spirit
Drew your sword against the prelate
And with blasphemy dishonored
The white cross upon your mantle.
Give up sword, the court shall judge you!
Give up sword, my final order!"

"I'll not give it, never, never!"
Roderigo thus defies him
Wildly with his sabre striking.
But alas, in one brief moment
On all sides he is surrounded
And deprived of shield and sabre.
At the same time, Satanella
Fettered is without resistance.

But new terror grips the people,
Listen to their dreadful shouting:
"Woe to us, the plague's upon us."

Here lamenting, yonder cursing,
Sudden flight and crowding masses
And one shout, from out this turmoil,
Rising like a flash of lightning;

"Plague's upon us! Plague's upon us!"

In a ne'er beheld disorder
All to city gates are rushing,
All of them round Satanella
Crowding, massing, yelling, shouting,
"Burn at stake the witch of witches
Who, with blasphemy, attracted
Pestilence within our city."

Barely could defend the soldiers
With their sabres, shields and lances
Satanella, who between them
Proudly, spitefully is walking,
Round her lips a constant laughter,
And repeating as she passes
One refrain of song eternal
Vibrating throughout her being,
While its echo keeps returning
In her heart with voice unweakened,
"Roderigo! Roderigo!"





Prison cell . . . Around black columns
Reaching over with their shoulders;
On the window-bar sheer cobwebs
Flutter with the night-winds breathing.

Echo of the wind falls hither
With a groan, and long-drawn sighing
As if shadows of men slaughtered
Passed in haste across the chamber.

Echoes of the watchman's footsteps
Penetrate with deadened sound here,
As if dying heart had quivered
With its final struggling tempo.

Heavy head on chest reclining
All alone sits Roderigo;
Storm of thoughts his soul harrassing
As a boat tossed on an ocean.
Shame and love, with pain and anger,
Rays of hope and clouds of doubting,
Withered leaves of treasured mem'ries
All are twirling in a whirlpool
Round his heavy, tired forehead,

As a flock of crows and jack-daws,
Host of owls, bats and buzzards
Flying round the weathered turret
Of an aged, leaning tower.

But one hope still gives him courage,
Is his sunshine in this darkness;
He knows well the camping gypsies,
Knows their weapons, strength and numbers,
And he hopes in this, believing
That perhaps with sudden onslaught
Or by some ruse, craft'ly plotted
They will free their Satanella
From the claws of angered people,
Who, much like a savage dragon
Sitting at a cavern's entrance
Waiting for its helpless victim,
Night and day, they too are waiting
Under Satanella's window
Seething mass forever shouting;
"Burn at stake the witch of witches!"

That is why, soon after daybreak,
Ere the guards changed at the prison,
He sent Beppo, childhood comrade,
To the gypsies 'twixt the ruins.
Since he sent him, he is waiting
Stretched upon a rack of doubting,

Till he hears the door-hinge grating
And the thud of heavy footsteps. . .

Beppo entered.—In his features,
In the shrug of both his shoulders,
In his bosom's heavy sighing,
Roderigo read the answer.

Overnight from out the ruins
Suddenly the camp had vanished,
Not a single clew remaining.
Beppo crawled through every cavern,
But the peaceful, quiet ruins
Just sent back the hollow echo
Of his footstep. . . . They fled, no doubt,
When they saw the angered people,
Fled because they, too, feared capture,
Feared the court and feared its sentence.

But his second message further
Drew the dark clouds that have hovered
Over Roderigo's forehead.
Pestilence is further spreading,
People rebel more than ever,
And rush, full strength toward the castle
All demanding in a body
To console the angry heavens,
That at stake burns Satanella,

Whose blaspheme against Madonna
And against the bishop's monstrance
Brought the plague upon the island.

Sadly listened Roderigo,
Sadly listened to the message.
He no longer cared or thought of
His own future, his own being,
Satanella's life however,
Now to him seemed doubly treasured.
Long he sat there, meditating
Till at length his friend he spoke to:

"Strike a tune on yon guitar strings,
Play for me, though well I know that
All the strings have snapped asunder
On my heart's guitar forever.
Even then, my friend, play for me,
And perhaps my dread of future
And the past day's bitter anguish
I shall bury in your canto."

Beppo strummed the old guitar strings.
Queer the song within the prison!
Lights and shadows, hell and heaven,
Pleasure, torture in it mingle.
About life sings faithful comrade;
Sings about the heart's first longing,

Love's embracing, tender kisses,
Of young mother's joyous dreaming
As she leans o'er baby's cradle.
And it sounds like winds abreathing
As they slumber in the blossoms,
Or relate their olden fables
'twixt the bull rush in the moonlight.
About life sings faithful comrade;
Sings about fair lady's beauty,
Sings about her charms so tempting,
Sings of tournaments, carousals,
And of serenades at moonlight.
And it sounds as hollow metals
Or as bugle's joyous flourish,
As a song beneath the window,
Or in fields the skylark's longing.
About life sings faithful comrade;
Sings about soul's youthful dreaming,
Sings of yearning, futile wishes,
Of young days so often squandered,
Sings of life, when all its flowers
Have been singed by flames of passion.
And it sounds as night owls' hooting,
As its crying and complaining,
As the tempest howls, when autumn
Flies through fog across the stubble.

Song's last strain was not yet ended
When the doors were flung wide open
And through them, with solemn footsteps
Walked the herald of the order.
On his chest, to knees extending
'gainst the black a white cross flashes,
All about him, bright escutcheons,
In one hand, a gold-topped scepter.
Just behind him, judge in velvet,
Pale of cheek and stern of vision.
Following him, knights in armor,
Soldiers bearing blazing torches,
And within the hallway's darkness
Stood the guards—like clouds of tempests.

Forward quick sprang Roderigo,
Blood-filled veins rose on his forehead,
As he saw 'twixt judge's fingers
Shining sheet of crackling parchment.
He reached hipwise—but what pity—
He forgot there was no sabre,
To the heart he reached, then faltered,
Fell the hand—then fell the body.

In dead silence judge is reading
From the sheet of trembling parchment
With an icy voice, the judgment:

"You have broken rite most sacred,
Drew a sword against grand master,
With a youthful witch held meetings
Secretly, 'gainst holy promise—
To your death you have been sentenced.
But because you once defended
'gainst the Turk in many battles,
Sacred creed and order's honor,
Therefore judges changed their sentence.
You shall stand with head clear shaven
Without cloak and without armour,
Round your neck a toughened cordage,
To be gazed at by the people.
Thus you'll stand and shall behold there
When at stake they'll stand and burn her,
Satanella, witch of witches.
And after her execution
You shall spend your life's remainder
'twixt the walls of our castle,
Till, with some great deed in battle,
You'll efface with your own blood stream
Your heart's guilt and our dishonor."

Judges finished and then left him
With a solemn stride. . . . Then quiet. . . .
Only night now casts its shadows
On the wall, o'er floor and corners.

With a thud snapped one guitar string
And its echo met, ere dying
Near the vaulted arch, the echo
Of the knight's deep heavy sighing.
Now they merged, to sound together
Through the heart of Roderigo,
Sounded through the hall and chamber,
Flew betwixt the endless ages,
Still resound within my bosom
With love's torment, pain and longing,
Satanella! Satanella!





Summer eve to earth descended
Quietly on wings descending;
Bringing gifts to every creature:
Sleep to people, dew to flowers,
And the birds, nest's warmth and comfort.

In the Johannite refect'ry
Night had hung its lengthy shadows,
In the gilded candle-holders
Slowly died the smould'ring candles.
Sad and silent is the chamber
With its floor of mosaic patterns.

On the wall and 'tween the windows
In the circular recesses,
Antique statuettes are standing,
Images of past grand masters,
From the order's first beginning.
In the still, nocturnal twilight,
Ghostly seem the shining mantles,
Long, black mantles with white crosses.

Soon the full moon rose in glory,
Glanced through windows into chamber,

With its lustre but disturbing
Silent birds, the night's black shadows,
That on helmets, shields and crosses
Settled self, at twilight's falling.
Bolder grew the searching moonbeams
With the shadows' play on ceiling,
On the floor and 'tween the windows
And with full light filled refect'ry
'luminating here long tables,
Rows of chairs and massive pulpit,
Even someone's skull, close-shaven,
Yonder in a corner ling'ring,
Heavily o'er goblet bending.

Thus aroused from heavy musings,
Grand master his forehead lifted,
Looked about the long, dark chamber
And then emptying his goblet
Once again his dull eyes fastened
At the goblet's clear-drained bottom.
Whirl of thoughts his head disturbed now,
As a shadow 'cross the mosaics,
Or as clouds on skies in summer.

Queerest dreams and queerest visions
Threw their net about his being.
He knew not what had beset him,
Whether past days' fleeting mem'ry,
Whether unknown grief's forebodings.

Last few days' disturbed occurrence:
Roderigo's stay in prison,
Satanella's cruel judgment,
Pestilence that every moment
Claims new victims on the island;
All this in his mind was seething
As volcanoes' boiling lava,
As the young wine's effervescence.

Long he sat, then filled the goblet,
Drank and fell to further musing.
Till at length the moon's white roundness
Poured its flood of streaming brightness
'cross front wall of refectory,
Where from floor to ceiling reaching
Stood a hearth . . . work queerly fashioned,

As if led by moon's carresses
Grand-master his bald-pate raises
To observe the moonbeams' dancing
O'er the hearth, along its cornice,
Over queerly fashioned flowers,
O'er the arabesques entwining,
And the statues bulging cluster.
Seems the longer he was gazing
He beheld new forms and features
That passed formerly unnoticed.

On the pyramid, he noticed
Many pictured presentations
Taken from those mythful fables
Handed down from olden ages.
Still the moon stole higher, higher,
Over arabesques and garlands
Till it reached the very apex,
Reached the picture of St. Michael
In his struggle with the Satan.

With one foot upon a cloudlet
Stands the archangel while raising
O'er his head a lance of lightning.
Other foot stands on the Satan
In the dust before him cringing,
Vainly with one hand concealing
Forehead, marked with scars of lightning.
What a depth in his expression!
Uncurbed pain and untamed anger,
Shame, disgrace and meek submission,
All are struggling in his features.
In his eyes coarse sneer, ill-hidden.
With his other hand he raises
Heavy shield with eight sharp edges,
Armor 'gainst the angel's lightning.

With an all observing vision,
Long, long while the prelate gazes

At the Satan . . . and what sees he?
As the moon stole higher, higher,
Animated seems the Satan,
Wrinkling up his cloudy forehead.
And it seems to the grand master
That betwixt the Satan's fingers
Stretched across his scar marked forehead,
He beheld a tear that glittered.

But a play of lights and shadows,
Muses on the gazing prelate.
Once again refills the goblet
And sinks back into his musings.

As he mused, he saw injustice
In the fate of Satanella.
How had sinned this child of gypsies
In disturbing the procession,
And in throwing but few date-pits
At the monks and on the bishop?
Should at stake she burn for but this?
But it is the will of people,
Threatening to break in fury,
For they hold that Satanella
Is the cause of plague's appearance.
Yes, it is the will of people
Whom the night had barely scattered

From the stake that stands erected
On the castle's spacious court-yard,
From the stake whose gruesome outline
Gazes through the chamber windows
As a horrible indictment
Of her innocent conviction.

Led by secret inner calling
Gazes on the musing prelate,
As the cautious, frightened, moonbeam
Steals across the Satan's picture.
And at times to him it seems that
Once before, in past now distant,
He had seen those dreadful features;
Where and when? In vain he muses!
Is it only play of moonbeams,
Or is it imagination?
Now he clearly sees the Satan
Drop the hand before his forehead,
Lay aside the shield, eight-pointed,
Sees him stretch his limbs and body
And with slow delib'rate movement
Leave the hearth and walk right towards him.
And his spectral silent paces
Flit as noiselessly as shadows
'cross the floor illumined brightly
By the fickle, changing moonbeams.

Just like this, a flock of ravens
Noiselessly, with black wings flying,
Sweeps across a snow decked country.
Without rustle was his footstep
And his body . . . without shadows.

Ere in fright the old grand-master
Reached down for his scapulary,
Quietly sat at the table
Dreadful guest of this late hour,
Took a goblet off the table,
Filled it with a wine of crimson
And then spoke, voice softly gliding
As a snake through grass is creeping,
As a rustling wind that whispers
O'er a lone tomb's withered garland:

"Long the night, what say, my brother,
Raise your cup, let's drink together!
Long the night and endless, endless
As the sea of human sorrows."

Gazing with a lifeless vision,
Prelate raised his sparkling goblet,
Drank . . . and thought while thus imbibing
That he swallowed burning fires.
Satan crossed his legs before him
And then fixed his piercing gazes

Firmly on the aged prelate . . .
And the latter, wine excited
Asked him in a voice that quivered:

"By what right, my nightly comrade,
By what right you call me brother?"
Hideously sneered the Satan
And began his lengthy answer:

"Night is long, I say, my brother,
And perhaps I'll entertain you.
I know well an old, old story
And if you'll but hear me fully
You shall know why you're my brother.
Night is long, and next time, maybe,
I shall try in vain escaping
From St. Michael's yoke of lightning.
Well, then hear me! . . . fill a goblet,
Night is long and I am thirsty! . . . "

Once again clanged wine-filled goblets
And the Satan spun his story:

"Far beyond the seas and mountains,
Many years since then elapsing,
On their father's ancient castle
Peacefully, two heirs resided,
Lived in concord, two blood-brothers.
Older of the two was master,
Hunted in the hillside forests,

Tilled the soil and planted seeds there.
Younger over books would ponder,
Out of clay queer figures moulding
As he saw them in old bibles,
In the church, or castle's hallways.
Many years they lived thus peacefully,
Till one day they broke in quarrel,
Toward each other deathly angered.
And their break came o'er a woman,
Beautiful as heaven's angel,
Tempting as the Eden's devil.
Yes, it seems that in her blood stream
Coursed a drop of blood of demons,
Blood of Lilith, female devil,
She who was first wife of Adam.
Then one night, upon a pathway
Angered brothers met each other;
Older one armed with a sabre
And the younger one with chisel,
The same tool which from cold marble
Cut Madonna's saintly features.
What then happened, you know better
Than I could repeat in story. . . .
Right next morn young brother vanished
No one even asked about him.
Older one, the girl married,

In a year a son she bore him.
Three days later the son vanished;
Futile all the guards and efforts
Not a clew the wide world over.
And in years, the older brother's
Happy wife bore him a daughter.
Vainly thrice-strong guards are stationed
Fore the gates and cross the pathways.
Futile care . . . before the third day
With night's shadows lost its battle,
New born daughter also vanished. . . .
Moved by this, the older brother
Suddenly became repentant,
And when his wife died soon after
To the church gave all belongings,
Took the cross 'gainst Turkish heathens,
Holy grave to free forever.
He had sought his death in battles
But in vain . . . and soon his courage,
Strength and wisdom made him famous.
Ere he knew it, he was chosen
As the Johannite grand-master.

Younger brother, roamed world over,
Creating no longer statues
Of some angels or of martyrs,

But creating only devils,
And his statues all bore traces
Of his older brother's features.
Soon he took to wildest pleasures,
Fought with drunkards, fought at duels,
Drugged himself with wines of fire;
Just perhaps to drown the snake that
Gnawed him with eternal torment.

And at length, fatigued and ailing
He came to this very island,
Where the Johannitic convent
Let him mend the aged statues
Standing in the refectory.
With his soul fatigued, tormented
By its passion and rebellion,
With the last strength of his spirit
He imbued the Satan's statue
As he struggles in a battle
With St. Michael, the archangel. . . .
And these features were a wonder.
But its masterful creator
Lived not long. . . . Paid daily visit
To behold his last creation,
Stood before it meditating,
Wept aloud for hours . . . hours . . .
Then he vanished . . . soon, however,

They had found him, as if sleeping,
Dead among the cloister ruins. . . .
And they saw beneath the moonbeams
Saw the grave the gypsies made him,
O'er the grave, bitterly weeping,
Dusky child, a barefoot maiden
With a braid of pitch-black tresses
Quickly 'neath red 'kerchief gathered
And in gaily colored bodice,
As if breathed tender body. . . .

I have finished now my story,
In your mind you'll find the balance.
Time is calling, I'm returning
'neath St. Michael's yoke of lightning.
Elsewhere we shall meet tomorrow!"

Once again with solemn footsteps
Walked the Satan without rustling,
Without shadow . . . clambered upward
Laid beneath the foot of Cherub,
With left hand his features covered
And as formerly, self-guarding,
Raised his shield with eight sharp edges.
But upon his horrid features
So much pain and so much sorrow,
That the prelate thought he saw there

'twixt the partly opened fingers
Wealth of pearly tears outpouring
Like a flood of shining rain drops,
Yes, and that with heavy sighing
Tremble walls and trembles ceiling.
Thus, no doubt, felt man in parting
With the Eden's gates for ever,
Thus have felt the subdued demons
When by God thrown in the abyss.
Thus felt God at world's creation
When he realized, thereafter,
That he made the world . . . for sorrow.

Moonlight vanished . . . all is darkness
As within the prelate's bosom.

At the daybreak, Brothers found him
Lying on the slab of marble,
Blood upon his wrinkled features.
They revived him with an effort.
Twice his withered lips yet quivered
As he whispered his last query.

"What happened to Satanella?"
—Burned at stake, as was the judgment!

"What happened to Roderigo?"
—He had tried to leap and perish
At the stake with Satanella.

When restrained—he lost his reason.

Aged prelate asked no further.
Passed away before the evening,
As the Satan had predicted.

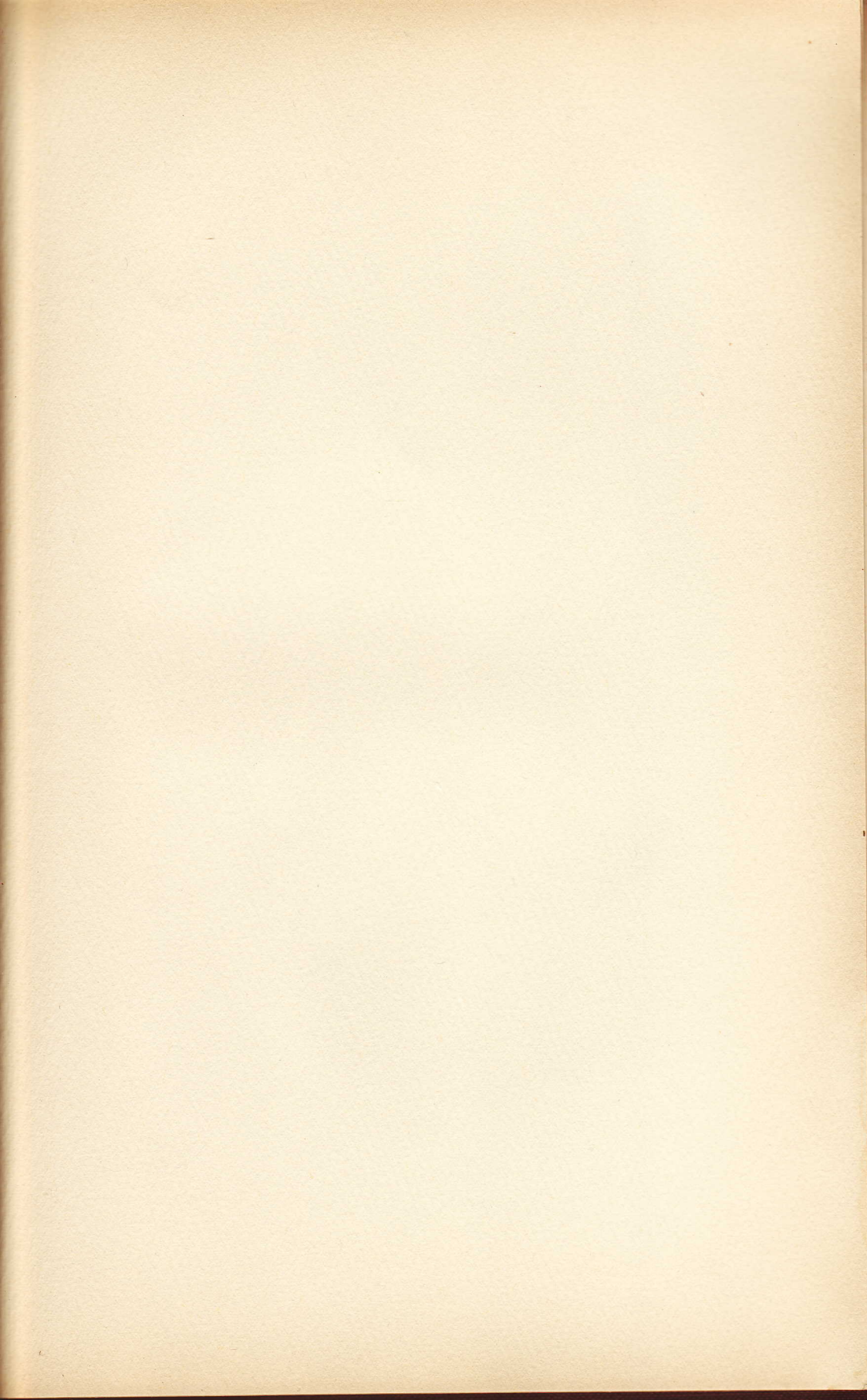


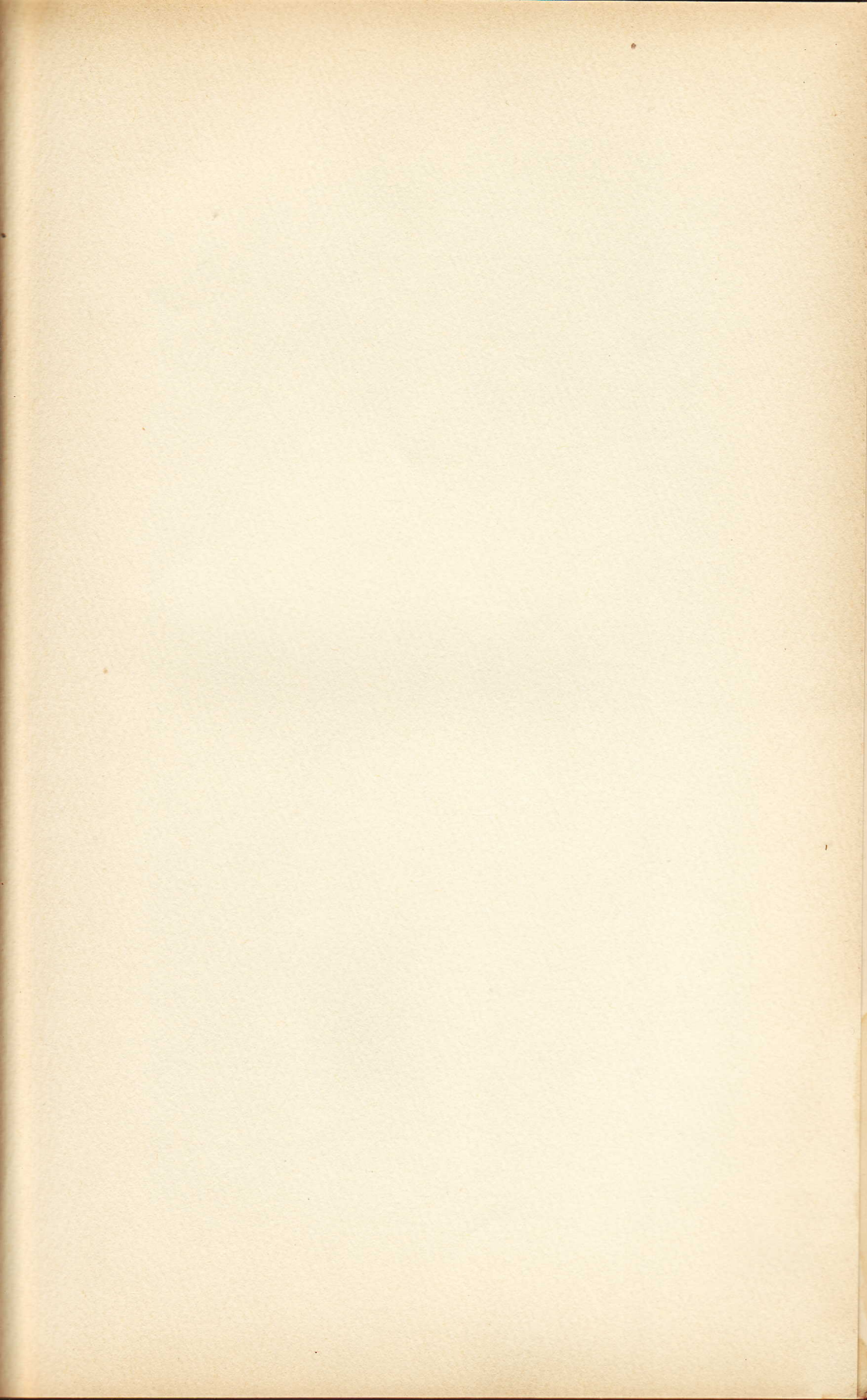
Epilogue

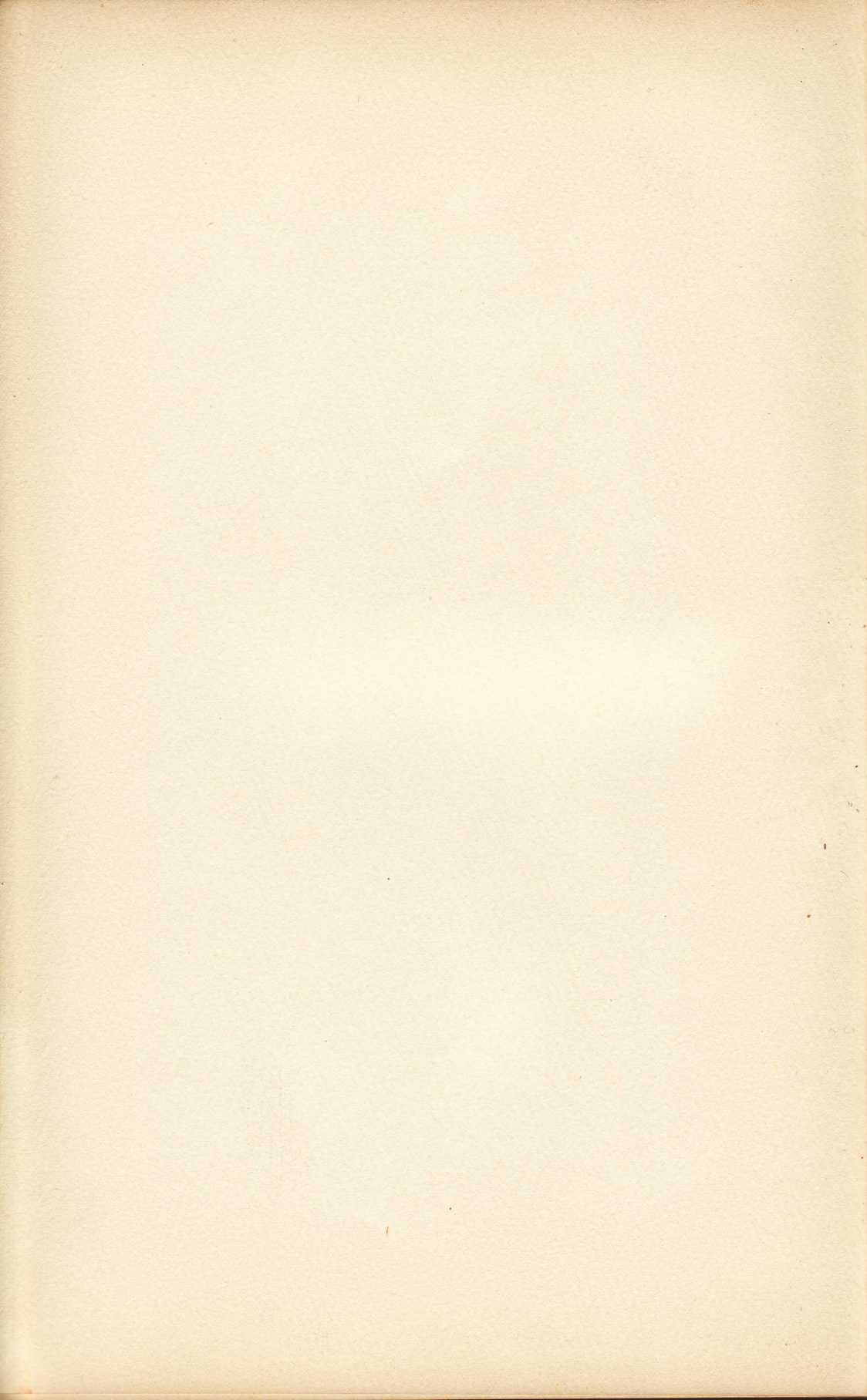
Died the ray of love eternal,
Fled the butterfly of dreaming
And the droplet of my musing
Changed into a tear of sorrow
Dedicated to your mem'ry,
Satanella, Satanella. . . .

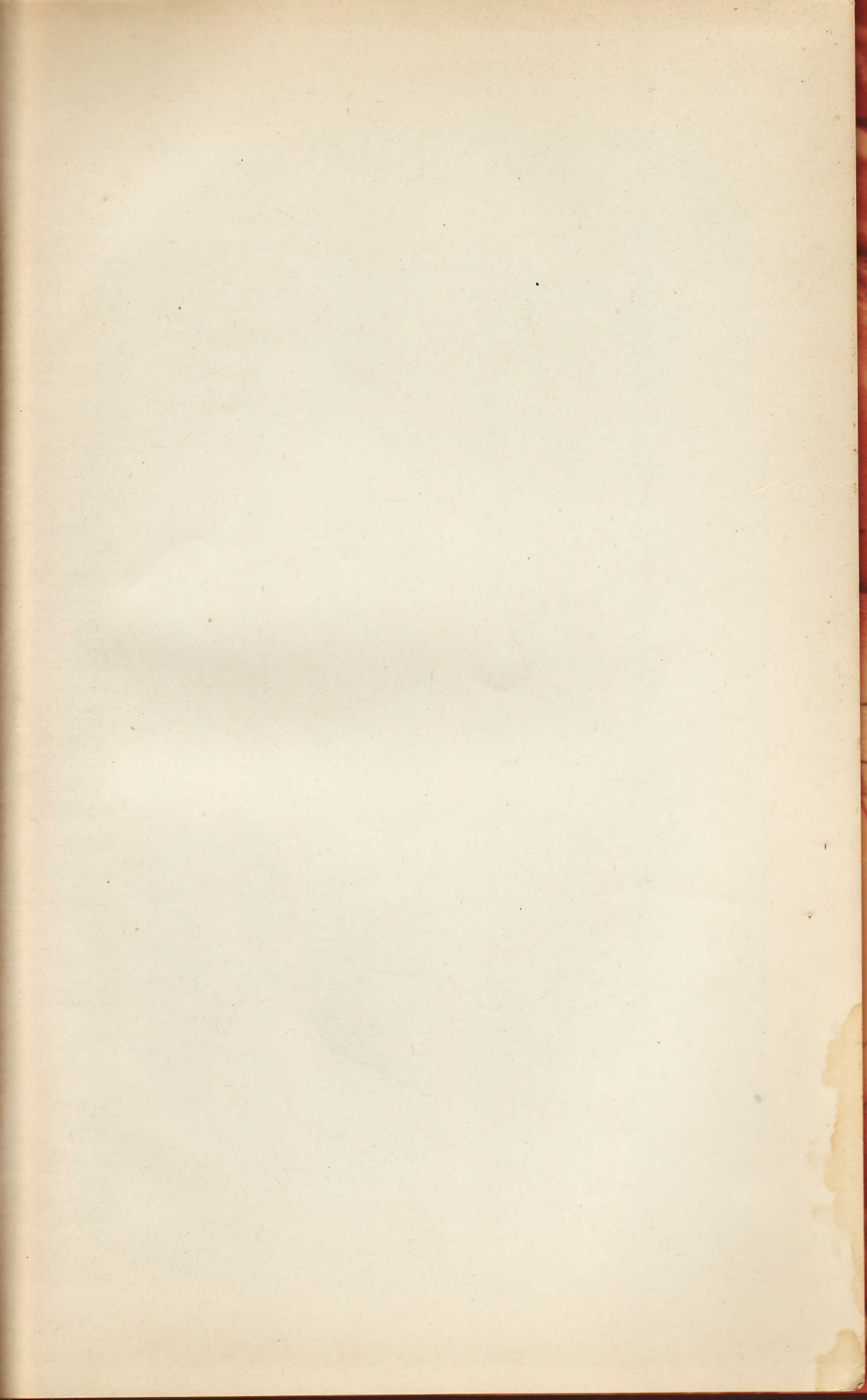
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