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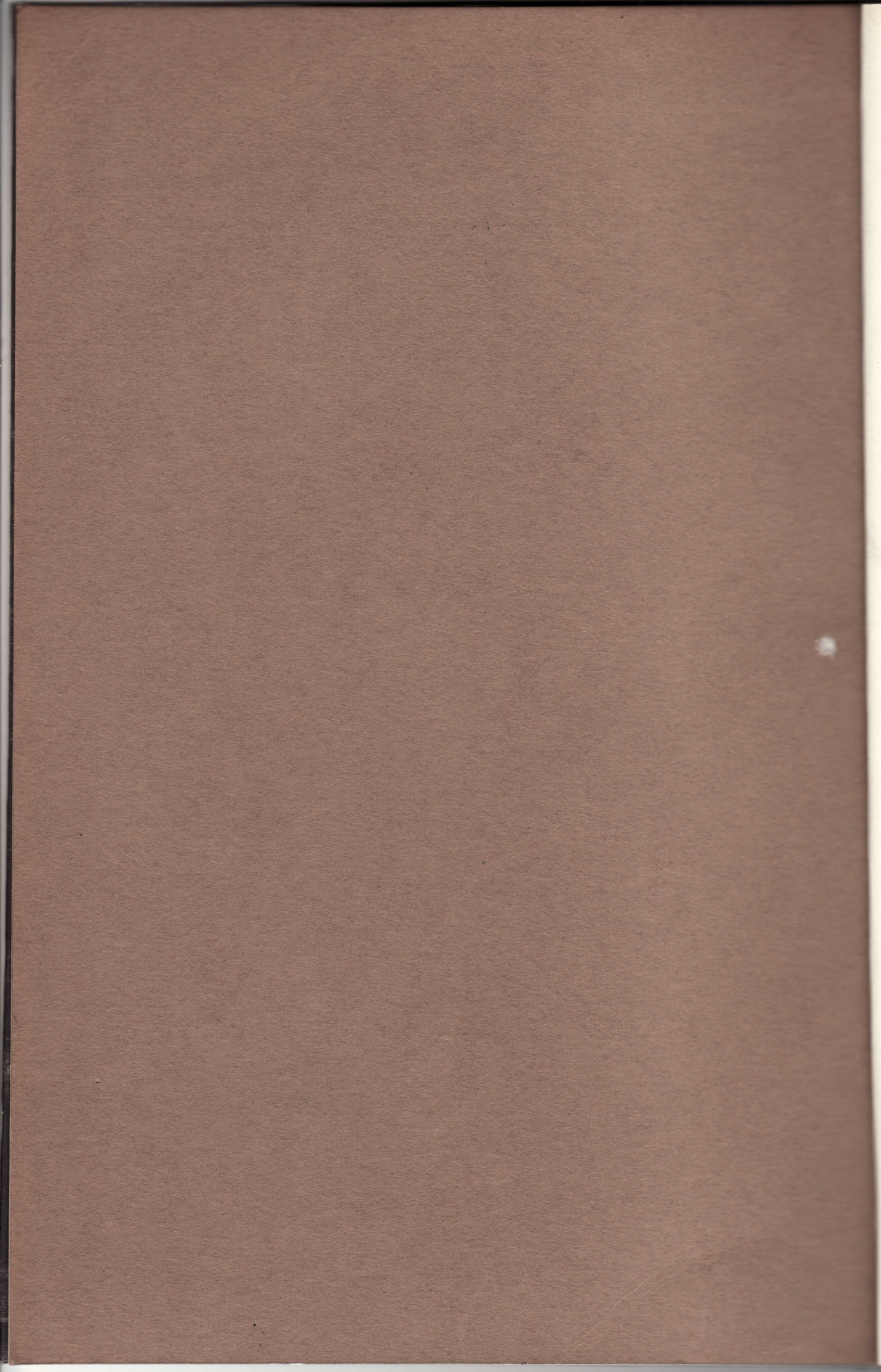
# The Conversion of St. VLADIMIR

BY  
KAREL HAVLIČEK



Illustrated  
by  
V. ČERNÝ.

Translated by Ernst Altschul





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The Conversion of St. Vladimir

A Legend from Early Russian History

Written by

Karel Havlíček (Borovsky)

(1821 - 1856)

Translated from the Bohemian

by

Ernst Altschul

Cleveland, Ohio

1930



VK Olomouc



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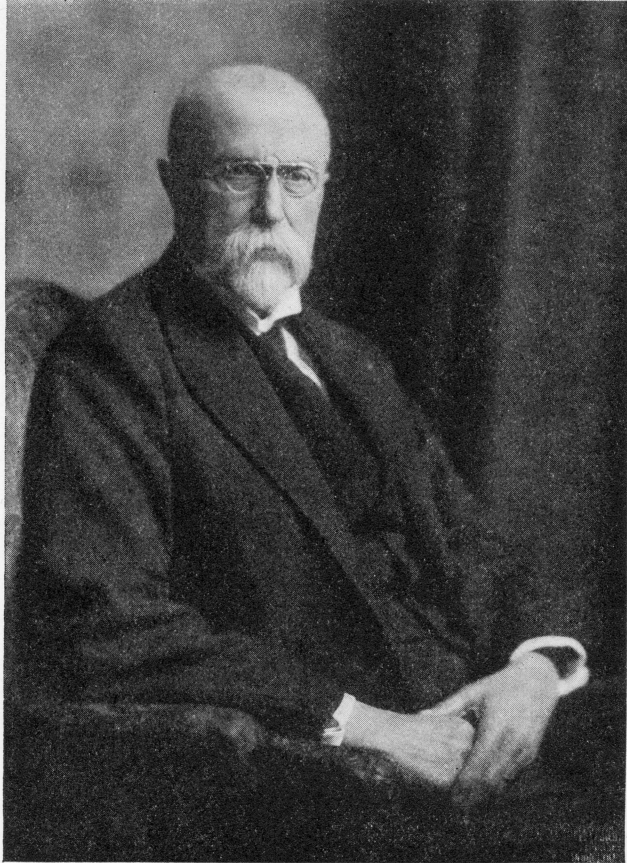
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Dedicated to His Excellency

PROF. THOMAS G. MASARYK

Who enjoys the well deserved distinction of being the First President

of the

CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

As a slight tribute for his fully justified admiration in his treatise on,  
and biography of Karel Havlicek.



## Apology of the Translator

The translator of these verses was born in the same little Bohemian town, attended the same little two-room school house as Karel Havlicek, but left his homeland almost fifty years ago, like so many thousands of others, to seek his fortune in that new Eldorado which has been his home ever since.

Never having seen in print any of the writings, in prose or verse, of that great patriot and martyr, in the English language, the translator here attempts to present a literal translation rather than a poetical rendition of one of the best known poems of that Bohemian satirist.

Havlicek wrote his poems, essays and epigrams in the plainest language, readable and understandable by the masses of his countrymen who were so near to his heart and for whom he sacrificed his liberty and his life.

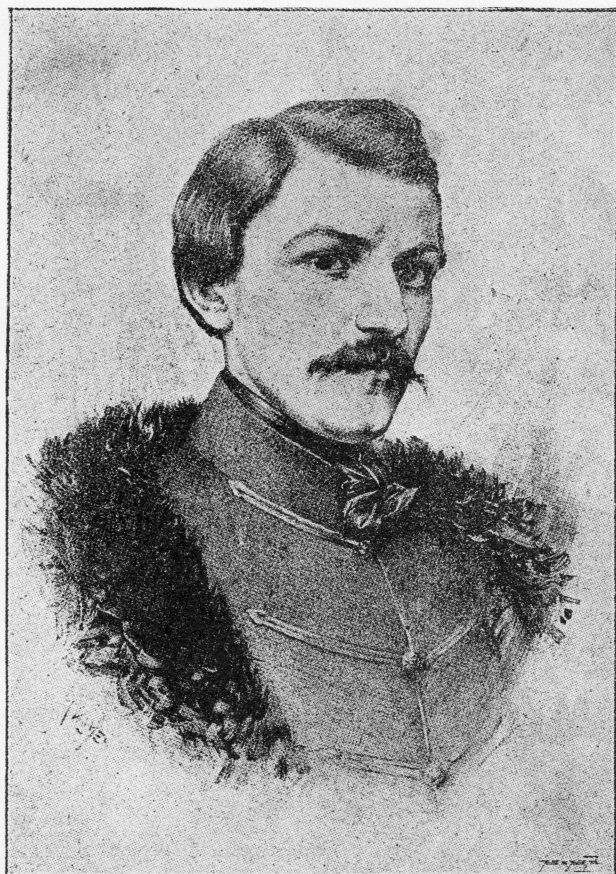
It is difficult to translate verse literally and still give it the expression and feeling of the original poem—an art given but to few of the immortals and to whose laurels the translator, but an amateur in versifying, does not attempt to aspire.

These verses were translated as a tribute to that great Bohemian patriot by one of his former countrymen for the benefit of some of those of Bohemian birth or origin who know well the name and fame of their compatriot but are not familiar with his writings, not being able to read them in the original; and also for the portion of the English-reading public which may be interested in the writings of one whom President Masaryk of Czechoslovakia considers a great figure in Bohemia's, and subsequently Czechoslovakia's history.

This is my apology for having translated "The Conversion of St. Vladimir."

Ernst Altschul





KAREL HAVLÍČEK





## Preface

Karel Havlicek was born in Borova, Bohemia, a parish of about one thousand inhabitants, October 31, 1821. He came from a devout Catholic family and was destined for the priesthood, but forsook it to take up journalism. Throughout his career he waged war on Clericalism and its influence on the policies and politics of the State.

The most illustrious and eminent Czechoslovak of today, Professor Thomas G. Masaryk, at present the first President of the new Republic of Czechoslovakia, has written an exhaustive book and a biography on Karel Havlicek and his literary and political activities, in which he characterizes him as one of the foremost patriots in the cause of the liberation of the Bohemian—in fact of all Slavic—peoples, which through the persistence of the Czech and Slovak diplomats and statesmen, and with the aid of former President Wilson, culminated in the emancipation and the foundation of one of the most progressive, most prosperous and best governed republics of Central Europe.

The translator has taken advantage of the kind permission of His Excellency, President Masaryk, to use excerpts of his book, as well as those from some of his other books, and lectures which he delivered in 1907 during his stay in the United States. In this preface, for which consent the translator is appreciative, President Masaryk emphasizes how much satisfaction it gave him to speak and write about Havlicek who, according to Professor Masaryk, was Bohemia's first political leader and idealist of his day. Very frequently he recalled to himself and to others how much he learned from the poet. Havlicek's political aims and hopes were:

Liberal-mindedness, sane and honest politics, faith in progress and democracy, belief in political betterment, universal education, social reform and advancement of the masses. All of this had to be preceded by a revolution of the mind and the hearts of the people—since he believed in revolutionizing Bohemian thought by education rather than by force.

It is the opinion of Masaryk that Havlicek's epic poem, "The Conversion of St. Vladimir," was a rather radical exhibit of politico-religious satire, more bitter than some of his other writings.

Havlicek was not opposed to true religion. On the contrary, he saw a close relationship between religion and politics. But he differentiated greatly between religious creeds and the true religion of his own understanding, and attempted to uphold religious reform in its administration and not touching upon its dogmatic doctrines. According to Masaryk's ideas, "The Conversion of St. Vladimir" as well as the "Epistles from Kutna Hora" are directed against the combination of religious absolutism with political rule, which Havlicek opposed very strenuously in all his activities.

"The Conversion of St. Vladimir" is a blasphemy (Masaryk declares) in which Havlicek, as poet, showed himself more radical than he ever did as journalist or politician, either in politics or religion. He has repeatedly explained why Havlicek indulged in this irreverence and sacrilege. He sees in it a basis of a catholicism which Havlicek has outgrown and the course of which, in his day, was more provocative to negation than protestantism.

It was he who founded Bohemian journalism—at a time when it was treason to spread news, literature or other propaganda in behalf of freedom and liberation of his countrymen. He was one of that band of staunch '48-ters—those patriots who threw caution to the winds to fight an unequal battle for democracy against the military despotism of the ruling monarchs.

His essays, letters, editorial articles and poems were widely read by the masses, since the language he employed, as seen in this epic poem, was that of the masses.

Bohemian literature, to which he added a goodly share, was then only in its inception, though it ranks today on a level with that of most of the civilized nations.

His influence in the field of journalism was a thorn in the side of the body politic of the Habsburg dynasty; so



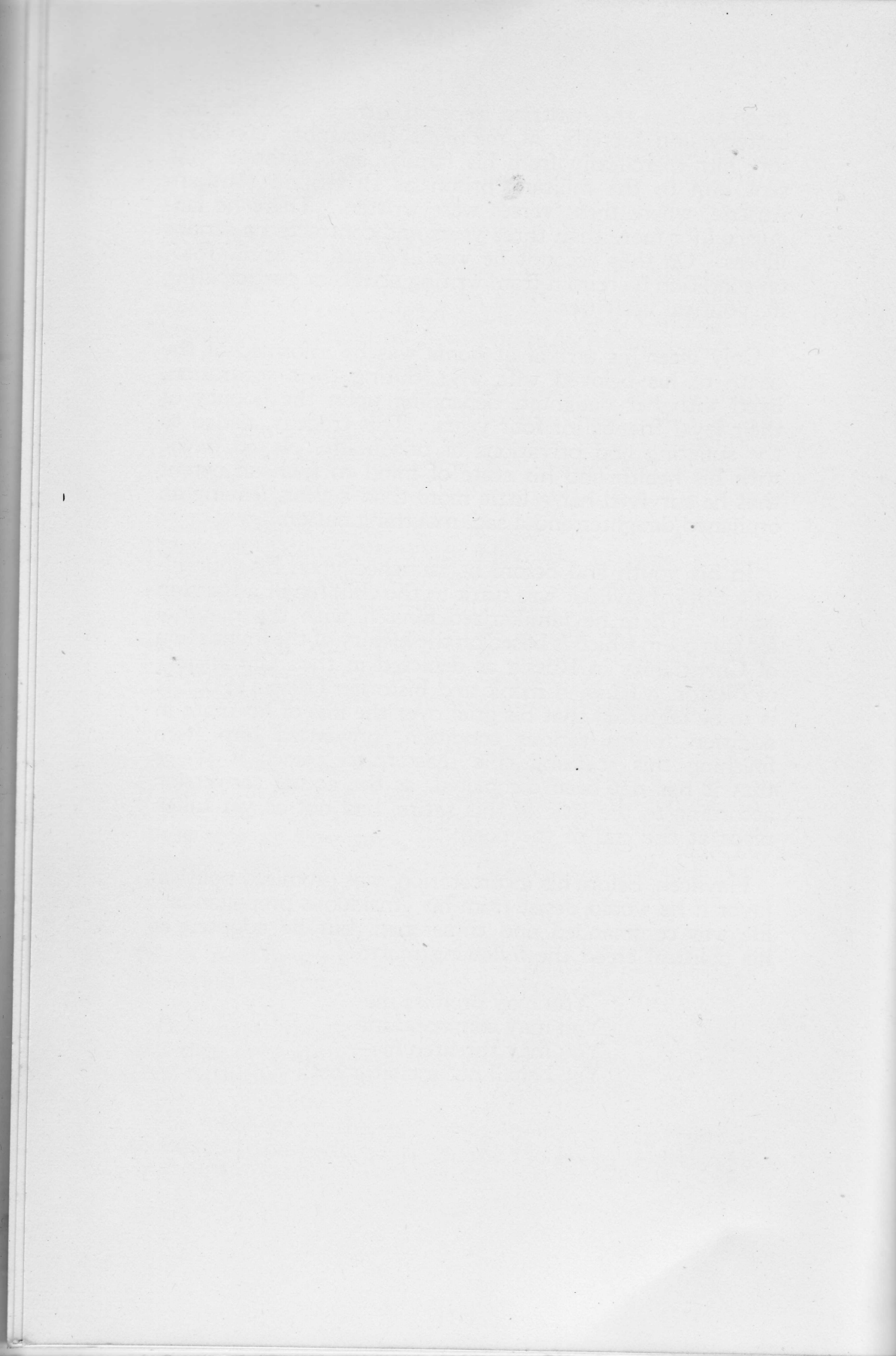
much so, that the Austrian imperial satraps took him into custody and secretly, at midnight (December 16, 1851) tore him mercilessly from his family, and, without trial, sent him to the military prison at Brixen, in southern Austria, where these verses were written. There he languished for more than three years and contracted a serious illness. On that account he was liberated in April, 1855, on condition he refrain from writing about, or participating in, political activities.

Only after his arrival at home was he informed of the death of his beloved wife who, during their separation, lived with her daughter, depending upon the bounty of their loyal friends for four years. This tragedy, added to the suffering and privations of prison life, played havoc with his health and his state of mind to such an extent that he survived her a little more than a year, leaving an orphaned daughter and a sad, mourning nation.

In his youth and before he launched upon his journalistic career Havlicek was tutor to the children of a Russian prince. There he familiarized himself with the material for this poem which is based on the history of the foundation of Christianity in Russia as depicted in the "Chronicles" of Nestor, a Russian monk and historian (1056-1114). It is to be regretted that his grief over the loss of his mate in addition to his serious condition, prevented him from finishing this scathing epic masterpiece, since it seems that it has not been completed, as the actual conversion according to the title of this satire, had not as yet taken place at the end of the poem.

Havlicek, before his incarceration, was promised political favor if he would desist from his "insidious propaganda." He was commanded and threatened, but he adopted as his political creed the following motto:

"You may promise me—  
You may command me—  
You may threaten me—  
Yet I shall not a traitor be!"





A Short Historical Sketch  
of the life of  
St. Vladimir



## St. Vladimir

Although the author of the original poem has omitted to write any preface or make any historical reference in his epic, the translator does not find it amiss to add a short biography of its principal character.

Vladimir was born in 956 A. D. and was the youngest son of Sviatoslav, Grand Duke of Kiev, and one of his bondwomen. Upon the death of his father he received as an endowment one of the provinces. Not content with his share of the heritage he plotted against his two elder brothers, the legitimate sons and heirs of the Grand Duke. Oleg and Yaropolk were slain treacherously; Vladimir took over all their estates and possessions and started out to conquer other provinces.

On one of his marauding expeditions he encountered Regwald, Prince of Polotsk, and demanded his daughter as wife. The proud princess refusing to give her hand in betrothal to the son of a mistress, Vladimir killed her father and took his domains—as well as the princess, by force. He thus warred against all the minor principalities, leaving a trail of plunder, pillage, murder and rape behind, stopping at nothing to achieve his ends. In this manner he became the absolute ruler of nearly the entire vast territory of Russia. He had wives in many cities and kept hundreds of concubines in all parts of his possessions. When not engaged in warfare he passed his time in feasting, debauchery and the chase. To these recreations he added that of slaughtering missionaries as offerings and sacrifices upon the altars of his pagan gods.

In the course of his empire's expansion he discovered some unrest among his subjects and found a great deal of dissatisfaction with paganism. The efforts of the missionaries were taking seed. Cults and creeds were making inroads upon the religious life of the serfs.

Upon consultation with his *boyars* (counselors and ministers) he decided to adopt a new national religion which would be acceptable to the majority of his subjects. To this end he invited emissaries of various creeds from the neighboring countries to present their claims of superiority of their respective faiths. As each one paraded before him the excellence of his particular religion, he questioned them as to the benefits to be derived from it for his people.

The German and other Roman Catholics—with their fasts, confession, celibacy of priesthood and their restraint from jollity—these he dismissed as too cold and solemn. Had he not many wives? Was not feasting and mirth conducive to happiness?

The Mohammedans' inducements were total abstinence, circumcision and the belief in Allah and his Prophet—which would lead them to Paradise where beautiful houris were awaiting them. Did not grapes grow for the delight of man? Why undergo voluntary pain? And why wait for the houris of Paradise when one could have them on this earth?

The Synedrium of Jews offered him Jehova, the only true god, without saints, bishops or other dignitaries. Upon asking where their country was located, they had to admit they had none, having been driven from it for their sins. What assurance could they give him that their god would not drive him, too, from his lands?

Thus he dismissed one deputation after another, without making any decision. After their departure he selected a delegation of his *boyars* as envoys to visit the different countries and to study the condition of their peoples under their various creeds.

Having investigated all the different religions and practices in all the adjacent countries, and having rejected them as unsuitable to their needs, the envoys arrived at Constantinople, seat of the Eastern Catholic See. They were expected, and the stage was set for their reception. Basil II, Roman Emperor of the East and head of the Orthodox Church, displayed for their benefit such magnificence and splendor as their eyes never beheld. Great religious ceremonials, with pomp and ostentatious pageants and processions, feasts and revels were prepared for them. Nothing was left undone to impress them with the grandeur and virtue of their religion.

They returned, a little worse for wear after their debauch but well agreed that this was the only creed for their ruler to adopt—both for himself and his subjects. As they pictured to Vladimir the pomp and display, the glory and splendor, he was much impressed. But when they reported that the Emperor offered to give him his kind and beautiful sister Anna for wife, as proof of his confidence (\*) he was quickly decided. Just about this time Vladimir was engaged in his usual occupation of plunder and was sacking the City of Kherson in the Crimea. He at once sent delegates to Basil with his acceptance, requesting that the ceremonies be performed at Kherson. The Emperor dispatched his sister, accompanied by many magnificently robed dignitaries of the Church, to the Crimean city, where the nuptial rites were performed with all the pomp and grandeur befitting such an important occasion, but preceded by the ceremony of conversion and baptism of Tsar Valdimir (988 A. D.).

From here the triumphant procession wended its way to Kiev, where the announcement of the Tsar's conversion preceded it. The priests at once proceeded with a mass

(\*) Some historians differ with the above version, claiming that while Vladimir was engaged in marauding in the Crimea he dispatched envoys to Emperor Basil, demanding the latter's sister as wife as the price of conversion—but also threatening with the sacking and occupation of Constantinople should his demands be refused.

conversion of the populace without any difficulty. Vladimir ordered that all the pagan idols and their temples be demolished and sacked. On a mound overlooking the city stood the tremendous, gigantic figure of their chief god, Perun—god of thunder—with a solid silver head and a golden beard. This he commanded to be pulled from its pedestal, tied to the tail of a monstrous horse and dragged through the streets of Kiev at the head of a great procession consisting of the entire population, on to the River Dnieper. There it was "drowned" while all the people were being immersed in the waters during the baptismal ceremonies.

From then on, through the influence of his good wife Anne, Vladimir became a changed man. In place of the pagan temples he erected churches, monasteries and convents. He replaced the statues of the pagan gods with those of Christian saints and established ecclesiastic courts and schools.

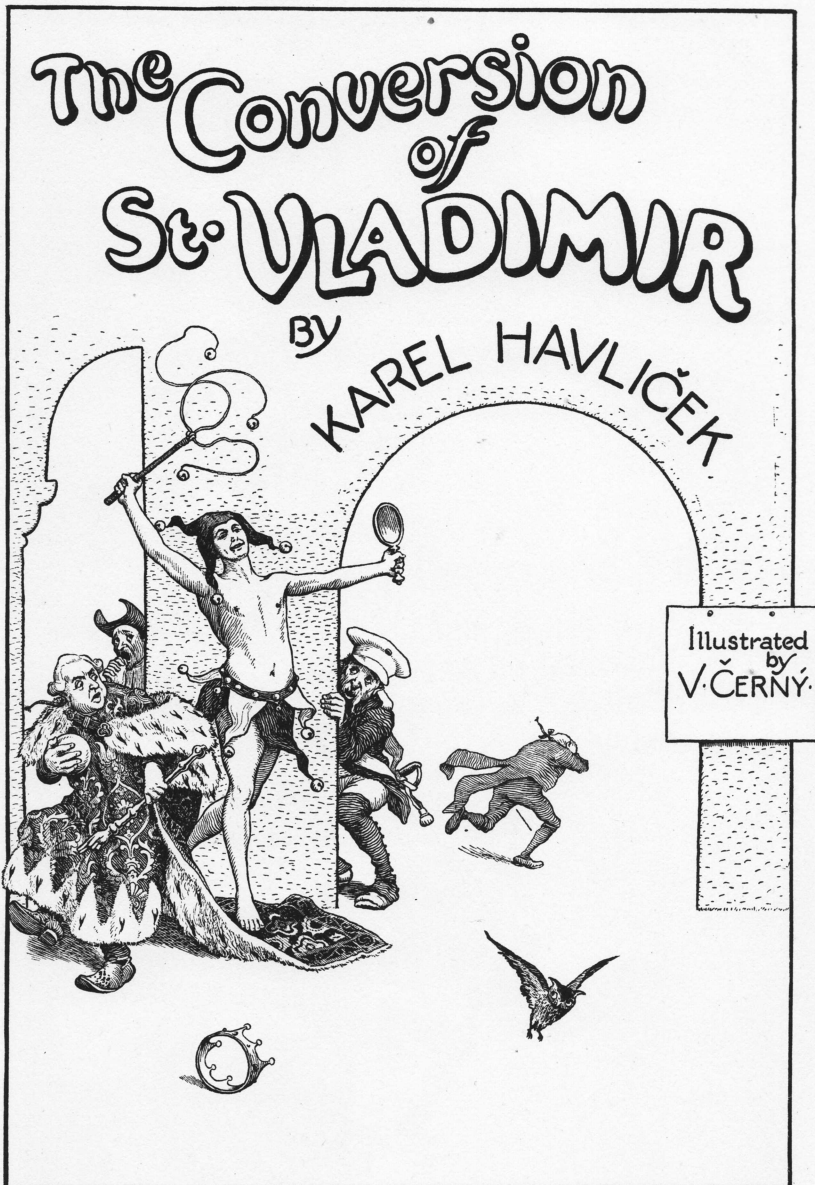
After his death (1015 A. D.) he was canonized. His sainted body was dismembered and the parts of it were distributed among the churches and other ecclesiastic institutions of the land. They are venerated by the devout up to this day. The Cathedral of Kiev, erected upon the mound where stood the thunder-god Perun, is one of the remaining monuments of this great and versatile ruler.

This is the abbreviated history of St. Vladimir, translated in part from the most authentic works of the Russian historians of his day.

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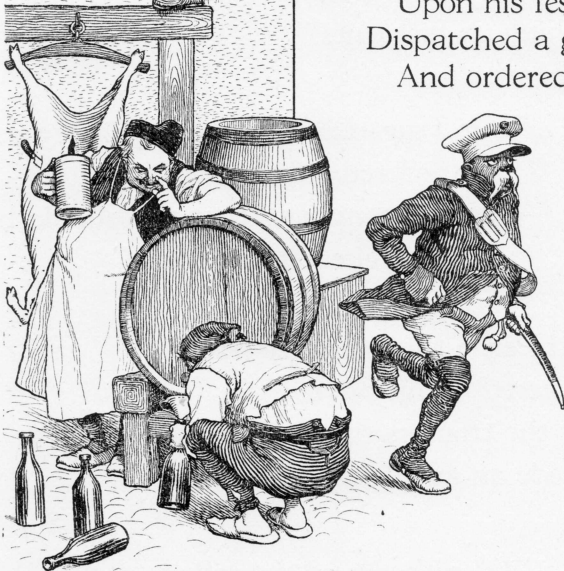




## CANTO I

### Perun and Vladimir

Vladimir, seated on the throne  
Upon his festive day,  
Dispatched a guard to god Perun  
And ordered him to say:



Perun, upon this holiday  
Release your thunder's roar,  
'Twere wasteful to use powder,  
We need it in our war.

"Send thunderbolts, to save my guns,  
Upon this day of glee—  
Then you come and enjoy a cup  
Of chocolate with me."

The guard arrived at Perun's gate  
And knocked with noisy din,  
And sharply asked the scullion maid:  
"Is Daddy Perun in?"

"Yes, Mister Guard, he's home, all right,  
Cross as a bear—and rants—  
A-top the bake-oven he sits,  
A-patching up his pants."

"Our Tsar, dear Dad, sends his regards;  
He ordered me to come  
With the command that you should beat  
Today your loudest drum."

When god Perun this mandate heard,  
He puckered up his brow,  
He threw the trousers to the floor  
And made an awful row.

"I'd rather herd the village geese  
And wade through mire and smear  
Than to slave on this job as god  
For your Tsar Vladimir.

“Hard labor—working day and night—  
And very little pay,—  
Must I, even on holidays,  
Do clowning for his play?

“During that recent thunderstorm  
In the hot lightning’s fire—  
There’s where I burned a great big hole  
In this, my best attire.

“Small wages, and but little graft,  
And scarcely any tips—  
Hardly enough for salad oil  
To grease my parching lips.

“A roast on Sundays only,  
With water—what a life—  
On such a paltry income  
I could hardly get a wife!

“This job would never keep me  
Did I not have the choice  
To help with physics lessons  
Some backward college boys.

Did not some peasant women  
Make a few kopeks clink,  
I could not, e’en on Sundays,  
Buy me a little drink.

“To work for nearly nothing  
Drives me most to despair;  
Tell him that for his chocolate  
I do not give a care.

“I shall no longer thunder,  
Week-day nor holiday,  
For Vladimir or others;  
I find it does not pay.”

The messenger, dumbfounded,  
Looked silly as a mawk—  
“Remember, Daddy Perun,  
Be careful with your talk!”

“I, too, am but a servant,  
We each must do our bit.  
If I should bring this answer  
The Tsar would have a fit.”

Perun, enraged, was ready  
The messenger to drub,  
And reached beneath the table  
For his big thunder-club.

The copper did not tarry  
And, seized with sudden fear,  
Ran fast as legs would carry  
Him, to Tsar Vladimir.

“Your Tsarship’s humble servant,  
I hasten to report  
With abject shame and horror  
God Perun’s foul retort.

“He claims he will not thunder;  
He chased me like a cur.  
Upon your Excellency  
He cast a filthy slur.

“You may devour your chocolate  
Without him, as you please;  
And for his situation  
He does not give a sneeze.

“As for your private holiday,  
He does not care a fig,  
The Tsar to him is nothing  
But a conceited pig.”

Vladimir, after hearing  
This villainous retort,  
Spat on the marble flooring,  
As did his noble court.

He hastened four policemen  
At once, for god Perun;  
“Go, bring before our mighty throne  
That scurrilous poltroon.”

They left, but he recalled them  
With a contemptuous cry:  
“Just leave it till tomorrow—  
We’re sitting high and dry!

“Let with our gay carousal  
No roughneck interfere,  
But bring him back tomorrow,  
Then we shall pull his ear!

“We need not beg god Perun  
To let his thunder loose,  
Since we, with shot and cannon  
Can lot of noise produce.”

His chief Adjutant-General,  
While feasting at the meal,  
Called out a pair of batteries  
To make the cannons peal.

And by the sound of music  
With greed they gorge and quaff,  
Full many belts were loosened  
By all the royal staff.

They drank wine, beer and vodka,  
And many a valiant knight  
Filled up on meat and pastry—  
Then found his vest too tight.

They sang and danced, made merry  
Upon the ballroom floor—  
With popping corks they smothered  
The noisy mortars' roar.

And all who joined this jolly feast  
Happily got drunk;  
And, loaded up with dainties,  
Were carried to their bunk.







## Domestic Affairs

Some mountain peaks are very high,  
Others, again, are low—  
Who cannot hire a fiddler  
Must his own whistle blow.



During the Tsar's carousal  
And revels at his court  
His god Perun was grouchy—  
His humor out of sort.

“Who never had a job as god  
Will never know, indeed,  
The precarious existence  
A busy god must lead.

Before he breakfasts he must spray  
The dew. When that is done  
He takes the light out of the moon  
And heats the shining sun.

He has to lock the imps of night  
In, with the devil's troop,—  
Then call the little twinkling stars  
Like chickens, to their coop.

And then for all the animals—  
Or birds, or bugs—he pours  
Their rations every morning  
Out from his meager stores.

“But my real troubles just begin  
When folks get out of bed;  
With all their noisy racket  
I almost lose my head.

“Who never had a hornet  
A-buzzing in his ear,  
He knows not what god Perun  
Each morning has to hear.

“Some people weep, some whisper,  
While others loudly sing;  
Some whimper psalms in churches—  
It makes my eardrums ring.

“The things for which they ask me  
Can hardly be compiled,  
And if I were to grant them  
’Twould almost drive me wild.

“Some pray for health—or children,  
Or something good to eat—  
While others, who are lazy,  
For easy jobs entreat.

“One begs me watch his meadow  
Or help him with his plow—  
Another asks my service  
As midwife to his cow.

“One peasant asks for showers,  
He wants his flax to grow—  
Another one wants sunshine,  
His grass is ripe to mow.

“One wants it hot, another cold;  
One wet, another dry—  
One wants the price of corn low,  
Another wants it high.

“But that I raised old women  
Fills me with bitter gall—  
Their obstinate annoyance  
Tempts me to starve them all.

"I wish the devil took them—  
(Although I should not cuss),—  
Whene'er their goats skimp on their milk  
They cry and rant and fuss.

"Nobody wants to labor,  
They all but pray and drone  
That god be the provider  
For them, and them alone.

"Some want it to be windy,  
Some want their fields manured.  
Some, ill from wanton gorging,  
Are praying to be cured.

Old maids for some kind husbands  
Are praying night and day—  
Benedicts beg the plague may take  
Their nagging wives away.

"One brings me gifts,—to tip him off  
When he the lottery plays—  
While one insured his chattels  
And wishes for a blaze.

"O rogues, did not my temper  
To kindness succumb,  
I'd crush you all to jelly  
Just like a rotten plum."

He took a goodly pinch of snuff,  
Which caused a roaring sneeze  
And sent to earth a thunderstorm,—  
His anger to appease.

“Truly, boys, to be a god  
Is not a happy station—  
Brixen’s Jail (\*), compared to this,  
Would be a relaxation!”

When all on earth had quietened,  
Exhausted from his yoke,  
Late in the night, poor Perun  
Sat down, to have a smoke.

Soon as he hauled his chibouk  
And his tobacco bag,  
As usual, Mistress Perun  
Began to scold and nag.

“Quite well I heard the message—  
The door was half ajar—  
You’d sent with that policeman  
To Vladimir, our Tsar.

“If you antagonize the Tsar,  
I told you right along  
You, with your opposition,  
Are sure to get in wrong!

“To tell, whate’er is on your tongue  
To everybody’s face,  
Will make you many enemies  
And bring you to disgrace.”

When one’s wife, in her fury  
Rails, as but women can,  
’Tis sure to drive one frantic,  
Be he god, or merely man.

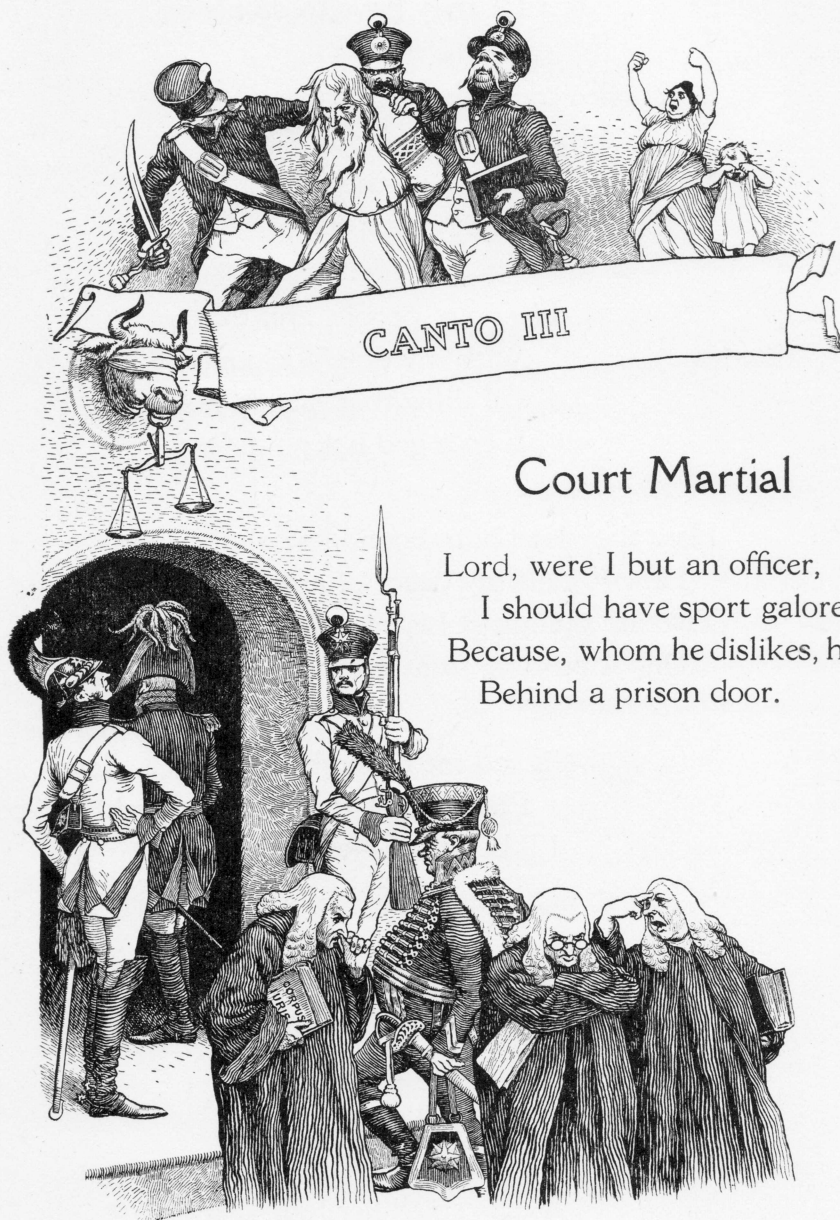
\*There the author spent four years as political prisoner.

Poor Perun, I have compassion  
For your sorry, wretched lot—  
There awaits you on the morrow  
An extremely fiendish plot!

O Perun, unlucky creature,  
Without favor, dread or fear,  
You have dared to show your hatred  
'Gainst your lord, Tsar Vladimir!

Oh, why did you not consider  
Poor, unfortunate Perun?  
Flee, oh, flee—else if they get you  
Your career will end too soon!





### CANTO III

## Court Martial

Lord, were I but an officer,  
I should have sport galore;  
Because, whom he dislikes, he puts  
Behind a prison door.

Everybody must respect him;  
Who dares pester him, or twit,  
Or else in the slightest taunt him,  
He may have to do his bit.

The police commands obeisance,  
It will flay you if you kick—  
With a switch it whips the tailor,  
And the cobbler with a stick.

Hearken, people, and take warning;  
With my doleful eloquence  
I will show that 'gainst policemen  
E'en a god has no defense.

Here they lead him, bound and shackled—  
How it galls my peace of mind!—  
Two are pulling at his elbows,  
One is pushing from behind.

“Lead me through the darker alleys,  
Please—not through the market place;  
I'll be gentle—only spare me  
The dishonor and disgrace!”

Perun's wife was in the backyard  
Washing out the dirt  
At the well, from Perun's little  
Youngster's muddy shirt.

As she spied her lord, arrested,  
She became extremely wroth  
And assaulted his attendants  
With a sippy, dirty cloth.



But Perun rebuked her kindly:  
"Unavailing is your zeal,  
Put your sword back in its scabbard  
For my hour has come, I feel."

The police are in the alley  
Dodging Mistress Perun's claws—  
While at court the jurists worry  
About Perun and the laws.

God Perun is safely shackled  
In the dungeon, in disgrace;  
But the legal sharks yet have not  
Found a law to fit his case.

For the makers of the statutes  
And the laws have never dreamt  
That the Tsar would ever dare to  
Cite god Perun for contempt.

Now the barristers came, trembling,  
To the Tsar with the appeal  
That there are no ordinances  
Which with Perun's case can deal.

Angrily the Tsar dismissed them  
With abuse—and with a snort  
Sent an envoy to the barracks  
For a military court.

The military court, supreme,  
Rules with a vigilance;  
It carries in its knapsack  
Every law and ordinance.

The military court holds legal  
Judgments in duress—  
It does not judge by law-books,  
It adjudicates by guess.

The military court digests  
Its victims like a pike—  
It can devour the guilty  
And the innocent alike.

The royal military court  
Did not deliberate;  
But gave offhand this verdict,  
Concurred in by the State:

“It is the wise opinion  
Of this court, and in accord  
With imperial decisions  
Of the high commanding Lord!

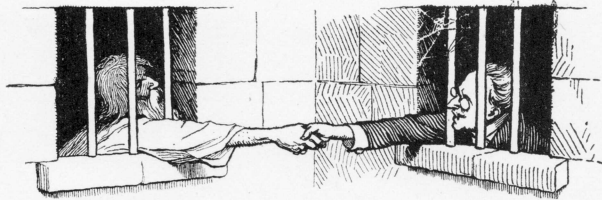
“For committing lese majeste  
And for disobedience,  
For rebellion, filthy language,  
And for his impertinence:

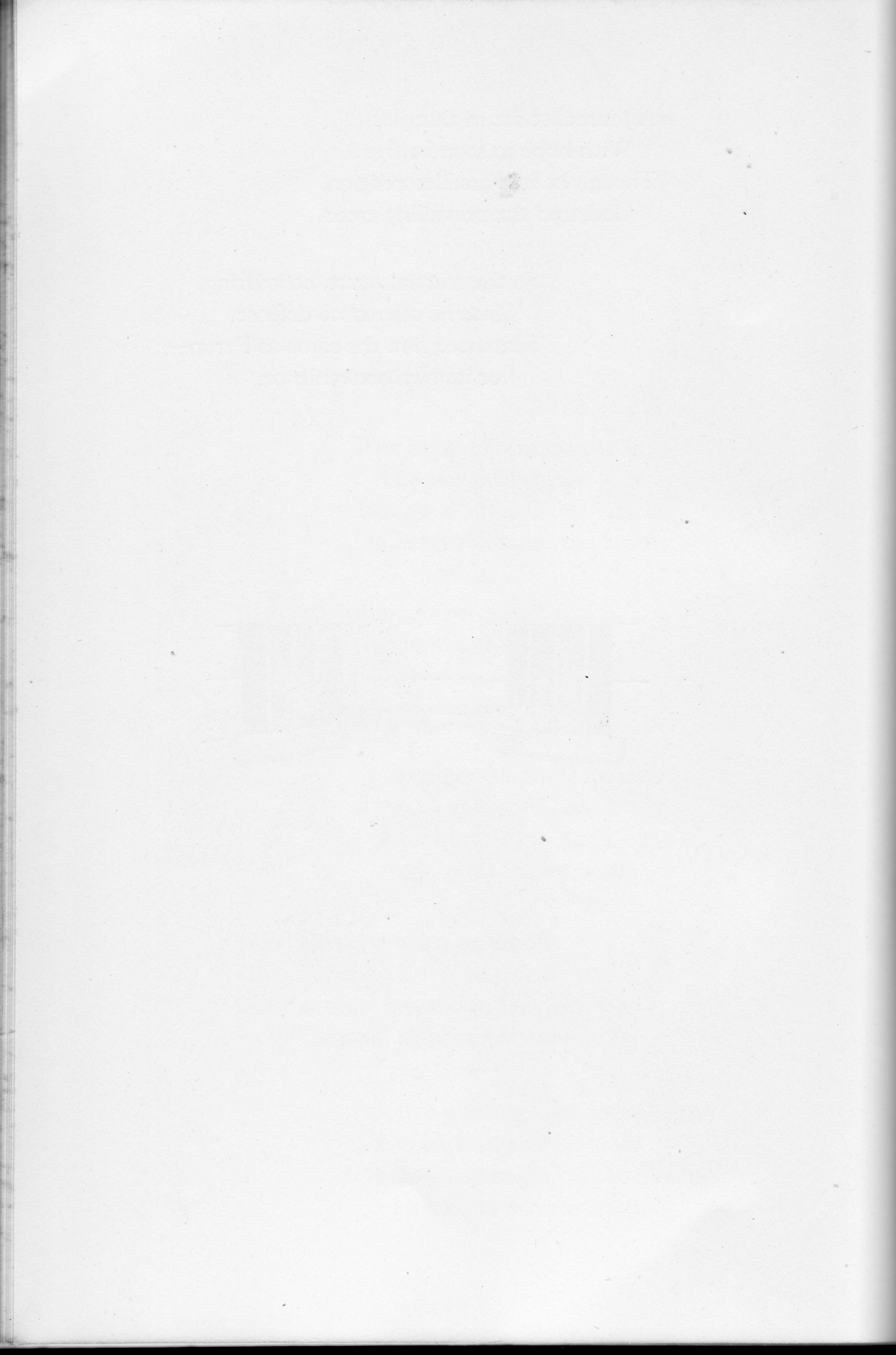
“God Perun is being sentenced  
To be hanged until he's dead;  
But the court has shown him mercy—  
And he shall be drowned, instead.

“But as warning, and to make the  
Disobedient rabble quail,  
He shall be dragged to the Dnieper  
Fastened to a horse's tail.”

A journalist sat in that jail  
With hope to soon be freed,  
Though he had assailed religion,  
God, and the prevailing creed.

So the martial court, concurring,  
Since he offered no defense,  
Sentenced him the same as Perun—  
For its own convenience.







## Perun's Testament

Hark, good Christians, to the story—  
Sad, indeed, 'tis to relate—  
Of the Russian god's last hour  
And his sorry, mournful fate.



List not ye with tender feeling,  
But your heart control  
And invoke a Pater Noster  
For his pitiable soul.

Brutally, to a wild mare's tail  
They tied him by his feet,  
And dragged him over cobblestones  
And mire, through the street.

And in his wake the journalist—  
Oh, may the fates fend—  
Was inhumanely fastened  
To a stallion's rear end!

Thus the Tsar's cruel satraps  
Who held the hangman's role,  
With the unfortunate creatures  
Wiped every muddy hole.

Coming to the river's bank  
Badly cut and torn,  
There, like kittens, they were drowned,—  
Blind, helpless, newly born.

Thus they perished, unconfessed,  
Sadly disappointed,  
Save that on their final trip  
They were with mud anointed.

I, myself, did not attend  
This affair—I quote  
That which Nestor, for his kin,  
In his "Memoirs" wrote.—

“Thus upon this mundane sphere  
Honors quickly pass—  
Yesterday you were a god,  
Today you’re but an ass.

“Today upon your altar  
They incense burn, and myrrh;  
Tomorrow they are eager  
In mire you to inter.”

The new gods they establish  
Must to their moods appeal,  
Whom yesterday they murdered  
Today before him kneel.

“In this world all things perish  
Like rubbish, and decay.  
Even the kingdom of a god,  
It seems, must pass away.

“No one but Tsars and autocrats  
And other such galoots  
Endure and last forever,  
Like a pair of cowhide boots.”

Thus did god Perun ponder  
While trailing through the street,  
And just as it was told me  
I truthfully repeat.

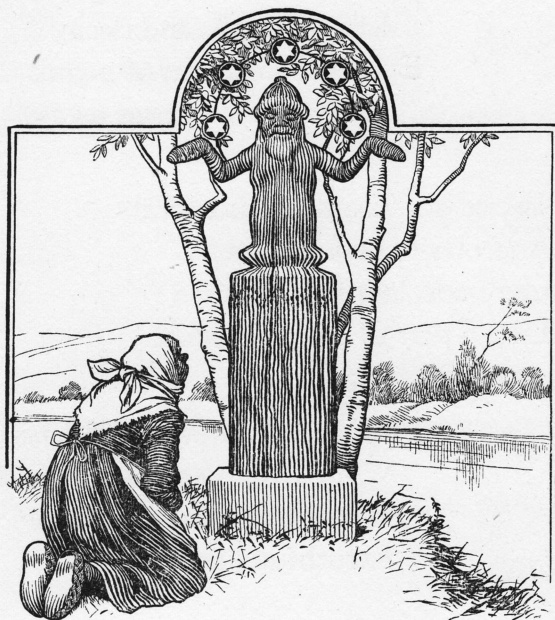
I hardly would invent it  
Even had I the skill,  
Since I, for fabricating,  
A prison cell might fill.

\*At Kiefelstein and Spielberg  
A great many dungeons are,  
If one wants to avoid them  
He must shout, "God save the Tsar!"

Honor whom sits on a throne,  
Dear son, and wears a crown—  
For on the loyal, lowly soul  
The Tsar looks kindly down.

He who worships Tsardom blindly  
Has rewards for him in store;  
Who rebels against its mandates,  
He is lost forevermore.

\*Austrian Prisons

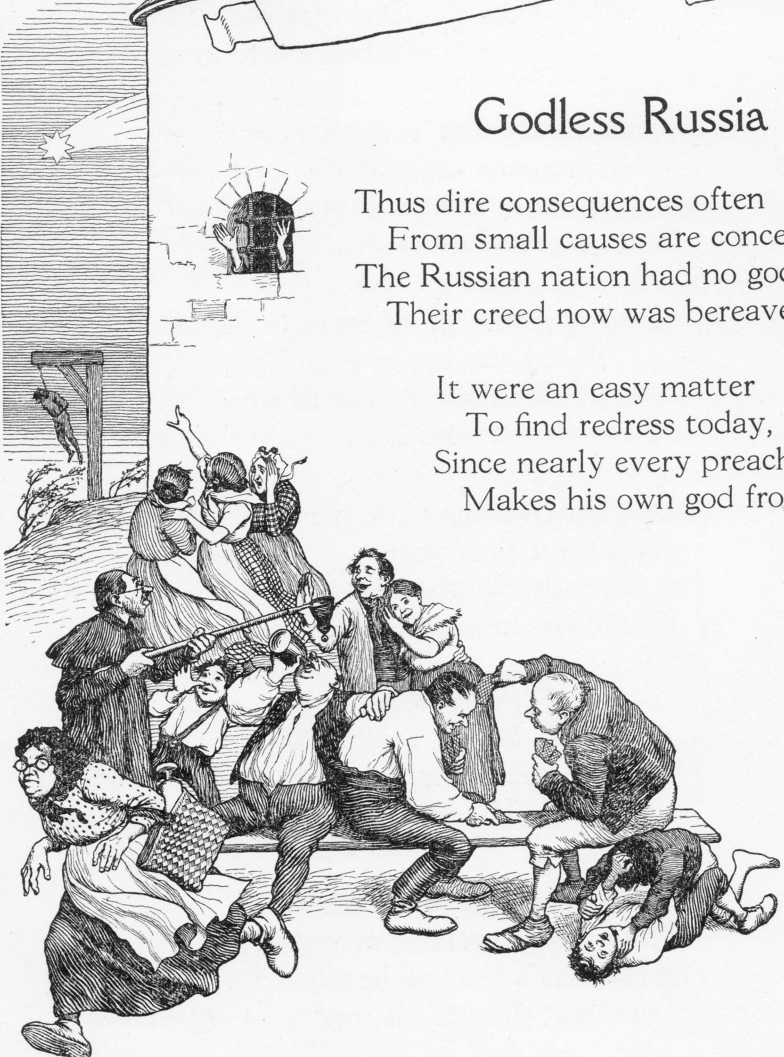






CANTO V

## Godless Russia



Thus dire consequences often  
From small causes are conceived—  
The Russian nation had no god,  
Their creed now was bereaved.

It were an easy matter  
To find redress today,  
Since nearly every preacher  
Makes his own god from clay.

The Russians took for granted  
Without the slightest doubt  
That, since they drowned god Perun,  
Their needs must go without.

And since of such procedure  
They never heard before.  
They dreaded that their future  
Strange horrors held in store.

This world, though, is unchanging,  
While humans there abide—  
And spitting in the ocean  
Will never turn its tide.

The Ship of State in Russia  
Ran on an even keel,  
Without Perun, as smoothly  
As would a spinning wheel.

Old people died, and children  
Were born as of yore—  
The toper drank, the laborer  
Worked as he did before.

Plums ripened in the autumn,  
So did the luscious pear—  
And after the rainy weather  
The sky again was fair.

The sun shone but in daytime,  
The moon but shone at night;  
The summer's heat molested  
The Tsar, despite his might.

Corn, wheat, had to be planted,  
Weeds grew with disregard;  
Nobility was idle,  
The peasant labored hard.

Who paid his obligations  
Was ever favored first;  
Folks ate when they were hungry,  
And drank whene'er athirst.

All rocks and stones were solid,  
The lakes and rivers wet.  
The rich were proud, the lowly  
With poverty beset.

The gentry scorned the townsmen  
As of a lower sphere.  
The innkeepers, as ever,  
Poured water in their beer.

Impatiently youth hurried,  
The aged, for relief  
Rested; each bit of pleasure  
Was followed by some grief.

Whoever owned some chattels  
Served avarice as prize;  
People were mostly stupid,  
Only a few were wise.

Thieves and rascals prospered  
As in Perun's day—  
Honest, trustful mortals  
Were their easy prey.

For this world is unchanging,  
Wherever people roam  
And spitting in the ocean  
Will never make it foam.

The Ship of State in Russia,  
Like a machine well oiled  
Ran on, without god Perun,  
Unruffled and unspoiled.

The clerical machine, though,  
Came to a sudden stop,  
Since its collection pouches  
Were strangled at the top.

The cunning, wily peasants  
Who never miss a trick  
Took of god Perun's drowning  
Advantage rather quick.

Donations at the Masses,  
And Prayers, they forebore—  
Why should they give their kopecks,  
Since Perun was no more?

Offertories were neglected,  
Funerals were very still;  
Sextons suffered of starvation,  
Priests could not their bellies fill.

Miracles appeared—some people  
Saw Saints' pictures blood exude,  
And a virgin village maiden  
Gave birth to a dragon brood.

Signs and omens scarred the heavens,  
All the hags were stricken dumb;  
All disposed of their possessions,  
Fearing judgment day to come.

Women, scared of premonitions,  
Seemed to hear the water roar  
Of another flood arushing  
Through each crevice, crack and door.

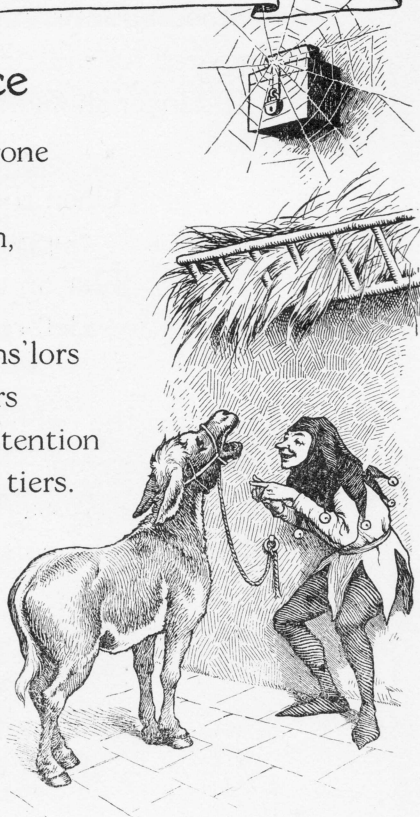
Newlyweds were blessed with babies  
Three months after they were wed—  
Kinsmen, don your life preservers  
Ere the Flood pours o'er your head!



## Public Audience

Vladimir, sitting on his throne  
At his great residence,  
Granted, as was his custom,  
A public audience.

His ministers and couns'ors  
And courtly cavaliers  
Stood 'round him at attention  
Like jars of fruit, in tiers.



His many secretaries,  
With blanched and sallow cheek,  
With bended back before him  
Kneeled, groveling and meek.

Inkwell tied to the button,  
And in their hand a quill,  
And on their back a knapsack  
Petitioners might fill.

Gendarmes, austere and trusty,  
Stood back of Vladimir,  
Prepared for drastic treatment  
If danger should appear.

Upon the floor his subjects  
Suppliant lay, and prone  
Flat on their bellies, cringing  
Before his mighty throne.

This time the public hearing  
Was boisterous and loud;  
Most of the Russian Clergy  
Made up the noisy crowd.

The popes, the priests, the deacons,  
The vestry of the fold,  
Old women candle-lighters,  
Boys who the church-bells tolled.

With them came chorus singers,  
Musicians, proselytes,  
The grave diggers and elders—  
Even the acolytes.

The drum major had scarcely  
Announced, so all could hear,  
That their kind Tsar has deigned to  
Lend his magnanimous ear,

When all the godly servants  
Began to weep and moan  
Like wicked gypsy women,  
Who for their sins atone.

Thus wailed the priests and bishops,  
The vestry of the fold,  
The candle-lighter women,  
Boys who the churchbells tolled.

With them the chorus singers,  
Musicians, acolytes,  
The gravediggers and cantors,  
Even the proselytes.

“What ails you?” came the query  
From 'neath the baldachin.  
“We're perishing, O Sire!”  
They cried with fearful din.

The clergy then sent forward  
One, who with solemn zeal  
Should importune His Tsarship  
Presenting this appeal:

“Great is our Tsar Vladimir,  
Sainted his power and Grace;  
But since you drowned our god, put  
Another in his place.

“One god is like another god—  
It matters not at all—  
As long as he keeps peasants  
In reverence and thrall.

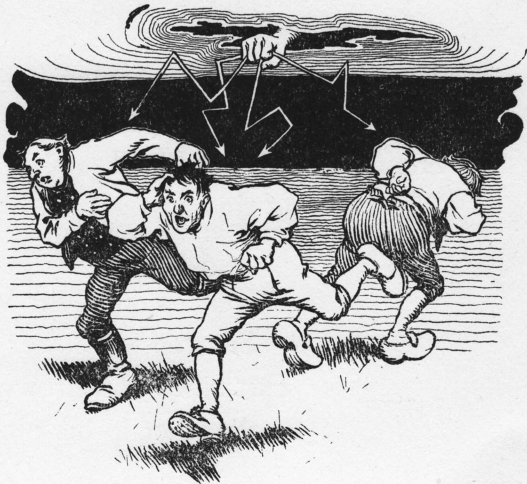
“They ridicule our sermons  
As were they asses’ bray,  
And they have now to no one  
For Vladimir to pray.

“They need some god to make them  
Quail with his thunder’s roar—  
We cannot work without one,  
You must some god restore!”

This argument affected  
His Excellency strange;  
It caused his disposition  
To take a sudden change.

And, like all mighty sovereigns  
He had a tender heart—  
Compassion would not let him  
Tear e’en a chick apart.

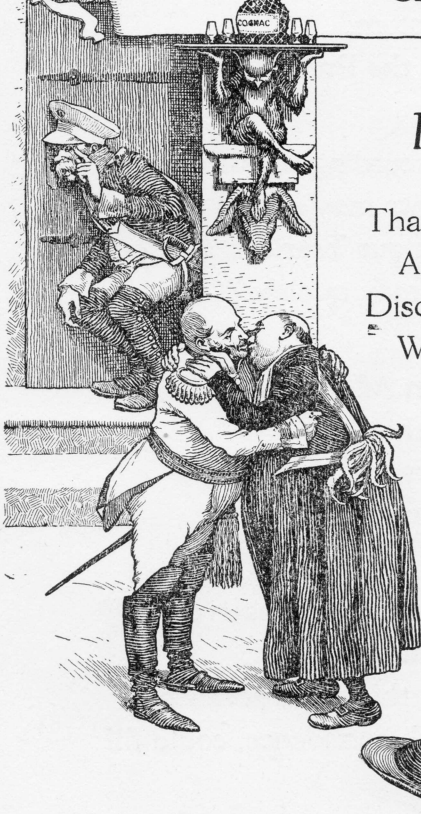
“Depart with royal grace, friends,  
So pious and so leal.  
We shall, with proper caution,  
Consider your appeal.”







## CANTO VII



### Ministerial Conference

That night the ministerial corps  
At secret cabinet session  
Discussed the topic of a god,—  
Which was a rare digressicn.

On one point they were all agreed,  
For all of them maintained  
Without a god the common herd  
Could never be restrained.

Aside from this agreement  
Their differences were wide;  
Since to each weighty problem  
There is another side.

While the progressives favored  
A salary from rents,  
The mossbacks advocated  
Pay from emoluments.

The Prime Minister now arose,  
His colleagues to address:  
"We must, as is the custom,  
Announce it through the Press;

"So that, according to our rules,  
Contestants may apply  
From whom our Tsar can pick out  
One who may qualify."

The Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Now gave a guarded hint  
That also foreign papers,  
Should the announcement print,

Since there was not a native  
With ability or skill  
With whom this great position  
They, with confidence, could fill:

"We cannot use a novice—  
We must have one well tried;  
One highly recommended,  
Able and dignified.

“Nor must we stint our roubles  
For the honor of the State,  
We dare not wrong impressions  
In foreign lands create.”

The Minister of Finance,  
With penury beset,  
Urged that by public auction  
The job of god be let.

“Whoever makes the offer  
To take the smallest pay,  
Shall, disregarding fitness,  
Be hired, without delay.

“But ere we sign a contract  
Conditions we’ll insert  
That churchly gold and silver  
Must to our mint revert.

“So that with our obligations  
Our bonds be kept at par,  
This is a financial problem;  
All the rest is—caviar.”

Now the Minister of Buildings  
Argued that they must arrange  
Into military barracks  
Every monast’ry to change.

By this coup the Tsar’s possessions  
Greatly would accumulate,  
Ere they place in his position  
The prospective candidate.

“It is my sincere opinion,”  
Said the Minister of Laws,  
“That in all of our announcements  
We insert the following clause:

“‘The incumbent must agree to  
Punish every lying dolt—  
Or whoever bears false witness—  
With his mighty thunderbolt.’

“For the rabble, in it’s folly  
Might betray the royal court—  
Perjure itself, disobey us—  
Of the Tsar make wanton sport.”

But the Chief of Education  
Ventured forth to this effect:  
That they, to perform god’s duties,  
Some fair widow should select.

She may choose as an assistant,  
Which they gladly will permit  
Perhaps a howling dervish,  
Or some wily Jesuit.

Thus they could run the office  
At a much lower price,  
Since he himself, if need be,  
Would help with his advice.

He slyly calculated  
That he would soon control  
Widow, as well as office—  
Which was his secret goal.

Now came the Minister of War  
And said: "I recommend  
That one of our old generals  
God's office should attend.

"Inured to regulation,  
He will subordinate  
His will to our Tsar's wishes,—  
Save money for the State.

"The one who is best suited  
Is Marshal Comispeer,  
For he can fill the peasants  
With terror and with fear.

"And then, as greater safeguard,  
To the outfit we may add  
Some clever literary  
And theologic lad.

"Thus we will Church and Army  
Bring under one command,  
And discipline the Clergy—  
That contumacious band."

The Minister of Safety,  
Devoid of argument,  
As last, sent his proposal,  
A well sealed document—

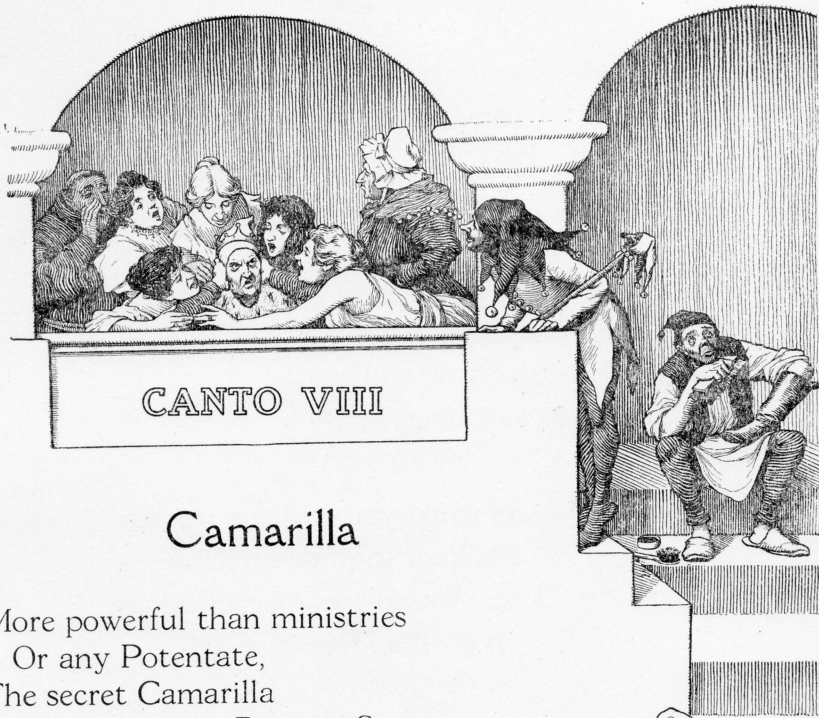
Since the police in darkness  
Delights to prowl and prey  
In surreptitious manner,  
It shuns the light of day.

Though it was sealed and secret  
What the Safety Chief advised,  
These were his recommendations,  
As everyone surmised:

Confession, absolution,  
Jesuits, Latin prayer;  
Teach people moderation  
In daily drink and fare.

As bait: a bit of heaven,  
Some swollen-throated saint—  
From high up comes all power—  
And devils—for restraint.





CANTO VIII

Camarilla

More powerful than ministries  
 Or any Potentate,  
 The secret Camarilla  
 Ruled, too, the Russian State.

Preserve us, Lord—Shumavsky,\*  
 The glorious contender!  
 For every Camarilla seems  
 To be of female gender.



\* A Radical of Havlicek's era.

In his regard of sexes  
Vladimir was oblique!  
He ruled men with an iron hand,  
But women made him weak.

One of his wives was Grecian  
And one from Normandy,  
Two were Bohemian beauties,  
And one from Bulgary.

Three hundred concubines he kept  
Besides, in Belegrad;  
Three hundred more in Brestov,  
Ten score in Vishegrad.

And when you add the women  
He kept in different Clubs—  
There weren't as many beakers  
In all the Hessian pubs.

Attending these their mothers,  
Their cousins and their aunts,  
With numerous confessors  
And all their ministrants.

This mighty Camarilla  
Was with advice replete,  
Just as a butcher's market  
Is ever full of meat.

Well did the clamorous lobby  
With candidates abound!  
The Tsar was much berated  
Because their god he drowned.



They railed and jeered and scolded,  
As women can,—all day—  
Poor Vladimir was worried,  
His hair turned almost gray.

And when his trusty Matthew,  
At night, came to undress  
The Tsar, he had to listen  
To tales of his distress.

Mat was his chief adviser—  
Kept everything in swing.  
He led the Camarilla  
And council by a string.

“O Mat, my dearest Matthew,  
Relieve me of my yoke;  
I cannot cope nor reason  
With all those womenfolk!”

Mat, after he disrobed him  
And put the Tsar to bed,  
At once to the official  
Newspaper's sanctum sped.

“Make this important notice  
In your next sheet appear,  
Lest you invite a drubbing  
From our Tsar Vladimir!”

All Kiev's population  
Next morning read with zeal  
In their official paper  
The following appeal:

“Tsar Vladimir has ordered  
That, by His Royal Grace,  
Applicants are invited  
To fill god’s vacant place.

“Prospective candidates who  
Expect to qualify  
Must at Police Headquarters  
For legal blanks apply.”

The news of the Imperial  
Ukase the Tsar decreed  
Spread through the whole dominion  
As with a lightning speed.

The telegraphers’ tickers  
Like bees a-buzzing hurled  
The news through all the papers  
Of the entire world.

\* \* \* \*

At Rome, the worthy Cardinals  
Enjoyed a little glass  
Of rum at the Red Lobster Inn  
Before they went to Mass.

As Cardinal Samsulini  
The “Augsburg Daily” spied,  
He jumped up from his armchair  
As if electrified.

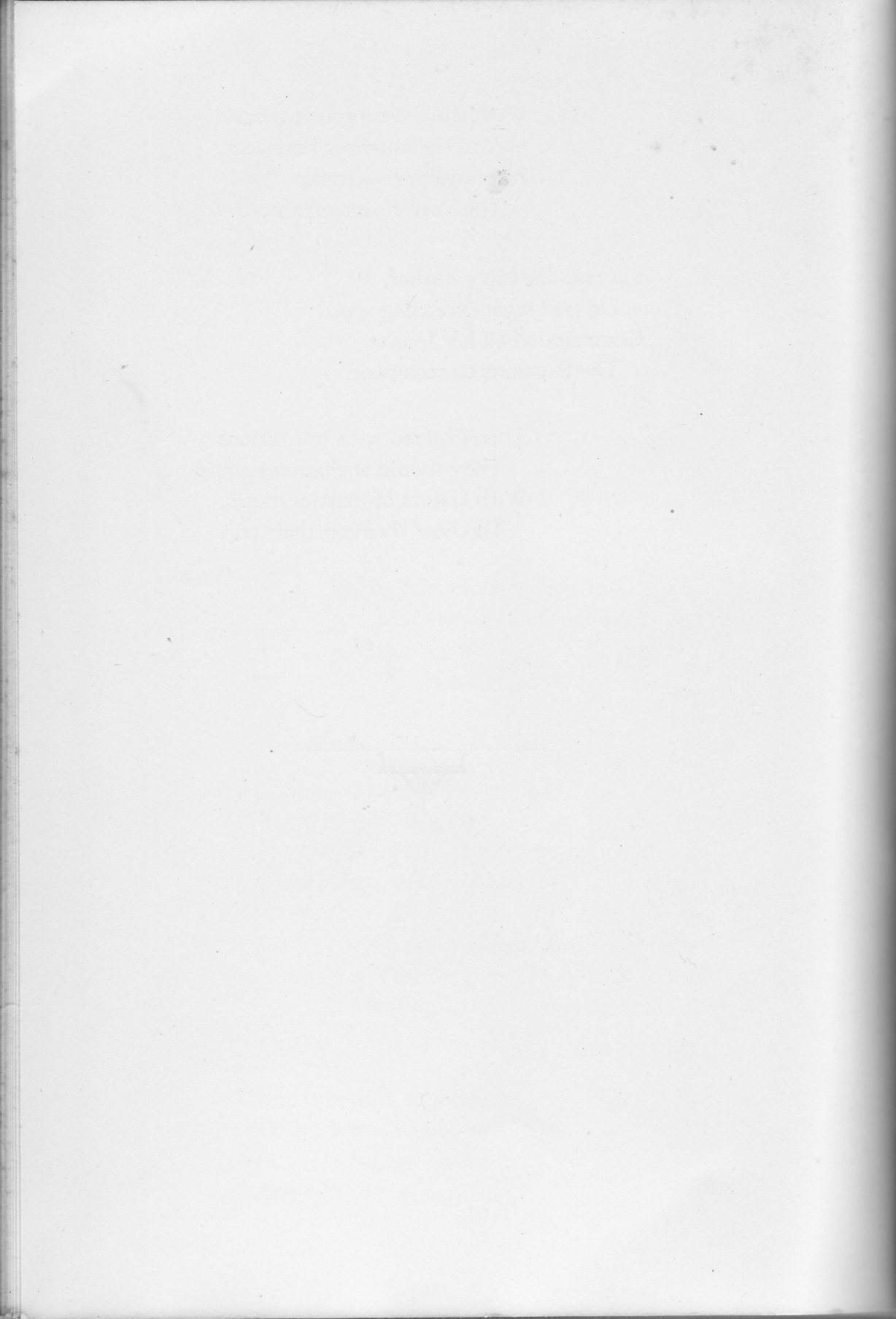
He ordered him a beaker  
Of Lachrimae and ran,  
As soon as he had drunk it,  
Straight to the Vatican.

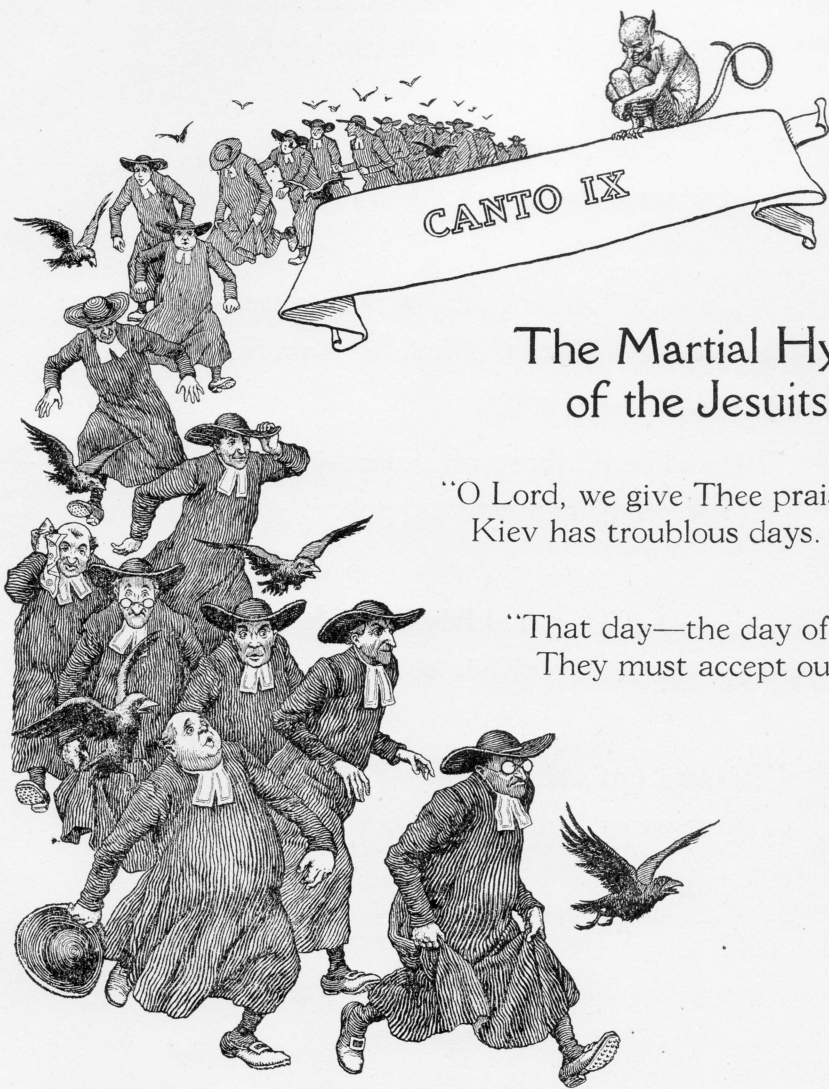
With the momentous tidings  
Into the chamber bounced  
He, noisily awakening  
The Pontiff, unannounced.

Up rose the Holy Father,  
Dressed with exceeding speed;  
Commanded all his Jesuits  
The Russians to stampede.

Then ordered with full rations  
They should themselves equip  
With chants of martial music,  
To cheer them on their trip.







## The Martial Hymn of the Jesuits\*

“O Lord, we give Thee praise—”  
Kiev has troublous days.

“That day—the day of wrath—”  
They must accept our faith.

\*This Canto is a double translation, since every first line in the original was written in Latin.

“We beseech Thee, Lord, to hear—”  
We must convert Vladimir.

“Glory to the Lord on high—”  
We shall catch him on the sly.

“Our God is the only one—”  
Now since Perun’s race has run.

“Let us peace in prayer seek—”  
Our humble faith is meek.

“Blessed be all those who come—”  
True believers must be dumb.

“HOLY, Holy, Holy be—”  
Every novice will be free.

“In our Lord’s holy name—”  
Newspapers are Satan’s game.

“Proper it is, and meet—”  
Good old times with honor treat.

“The Lord be ever with you hence—”  
Folly is valued more than sense.

“Holy Mother, to Thee we cleave—”  
We are threatened here with disbelief.

“Come to us, O Holy Spirit—”  
We shall Russia inherit.

“Listen to our plea, Lord, hear us—”  
We must make the Russians fear us.

“The heavens of His glory tell—”  
Russia shall treat us well.

“Thou art the world’s Saviour—”  
We will set up a jolly corps.

“O Lord, we put our hope in Thee—”  
Our stay shall be a constant spree.

“Free us from evil, we entreat—”  
We shall feed on the choicest meat.

“To Thee, O Lord, we lift our prayer—”  
We shall have ham and beef to spare.

“From the depths to Thee I cry—”  
Their cellars will our wine supply.

“O Lord, let peace with us abide—”  
Their kitchen-maids shall our sport provide.

“The gates of Hell shall not prevail—”  
With joy their ignorance we hail.

“My guilt, O my exceeding guilt—”  
Our faith on miracles is built.

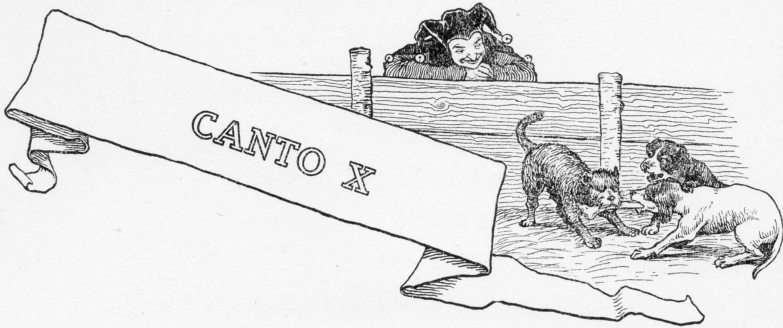
“Lord, have mercy upon us—”  
We are so impecunious.

“O lead us not into temptation—”  
Take all you get, is our vocation.

“Thou wert, Thou art, wilt ever endure—”  
Their fear of Hell makes us secure.  
For ever and ever, Amen.

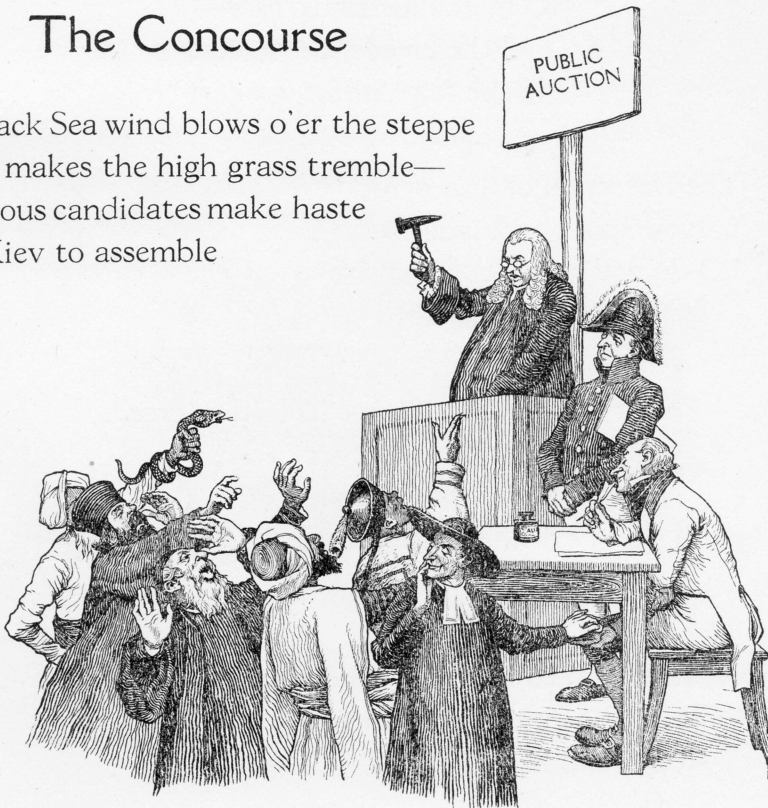






## The Concourse

The Black Sea wind blows o'er the steppe  
And makes the high grass tremble—  
Ambitious candidates make haste  
In Kiev to assemble



The western wind through Kiev blows  
And fills the town with dust—  
Each applicant extols himself,  
Puts others in distrust.

From Rome, with seals of pie-plate size,  
The Pontiff's plea was sent:  
"Do not adopt the creed of Greeks—  
It is not worth a cent!

"Our creed is not like other creeds,  
O most illustrious Tsar—  
Of all the creeds, the Roman  
Is the faithfullest, by far!"

The Patriarch of Tsarograd  
Now spoke to Vladimir:  
"O do not let that Antichrist  
Befoul your noble ear!

"Our creed is not like other creeds,  
It will stand every test;  
The Greek Catholic faith, of all  
Religions, is the best."

The Synedrium of Rabbis  
Now pleaded: "Do not heed,  
O Tsar, the Greeks or Romans—  
Accept old Moses' creed!

"Our creed is not like other creeds—  
It is the best, O Sire!  
The true faith is the Jewish faith  
Your subjects to inspire."

Now came of Moslem Muftis  
A crying caravan:  
"Chase out these unbelieving Giaurs—  
Become an Ottoman!

"Our creed is not like other creeds—  
Our Allah, he is great!  
Faith in his prophet Mohamet  
Will lead to heaven's gate."

Thus many more contestants  
Appeared before the throne,  
Like dogs behind a kitchen door  
When fighting for a bone.

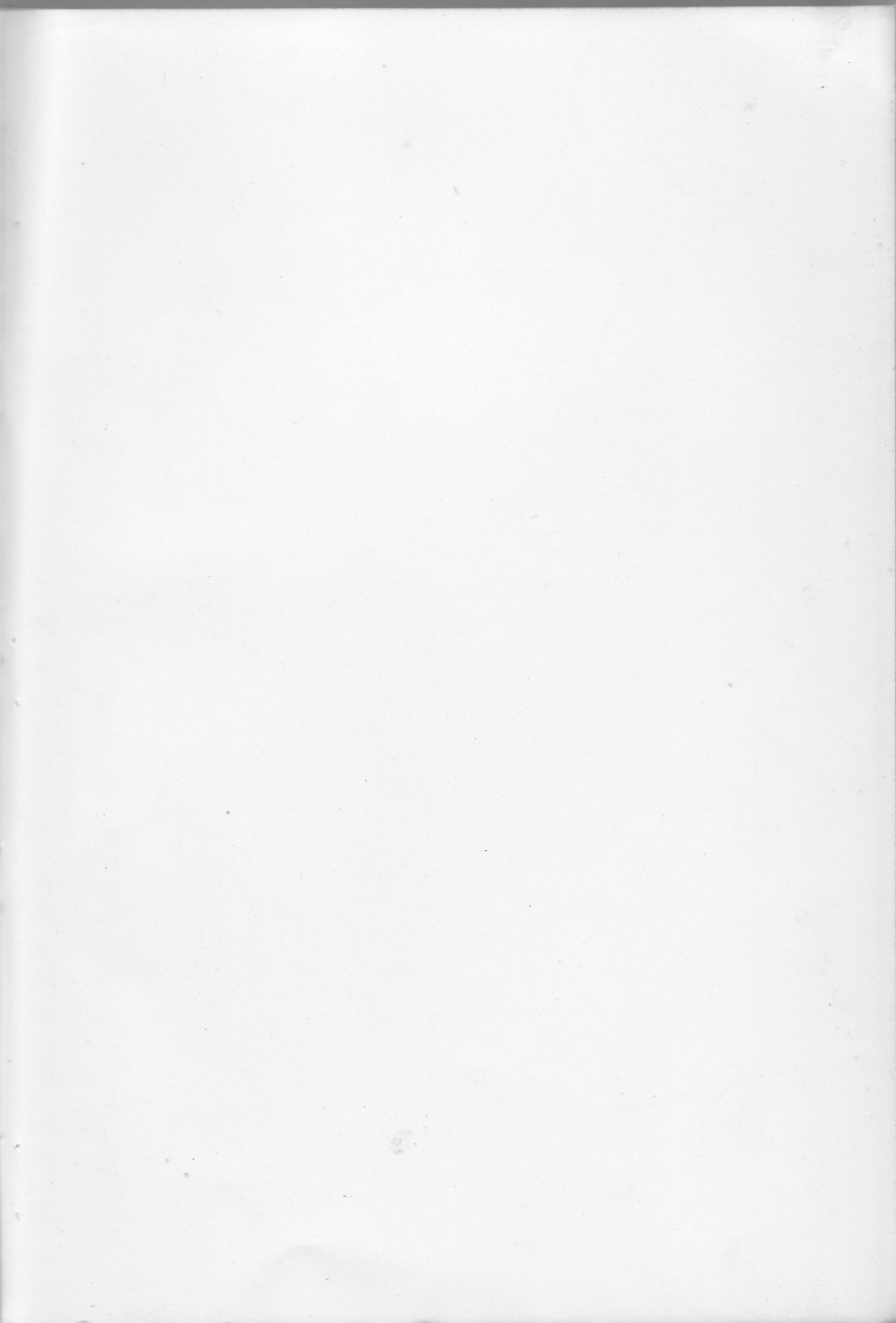
The devil only knew them all,  
Of every creed and sect,  
As they abused each other  
With shameless disrespect.

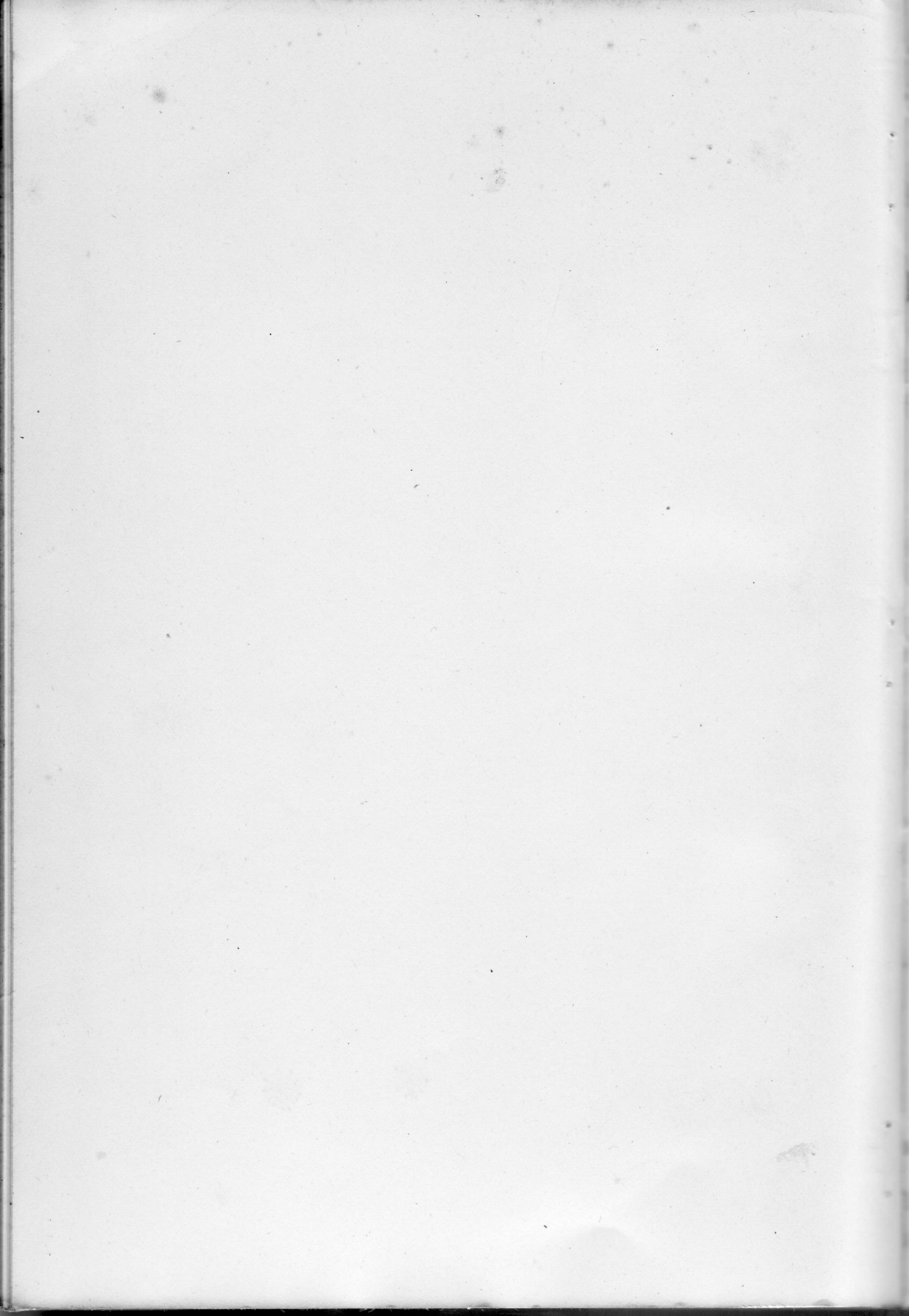
Oh, how those emissaries  
Could cheat, and drink and gorge!  
They have, since that occurrence,  
Been called "The Heav'nly Scourge."

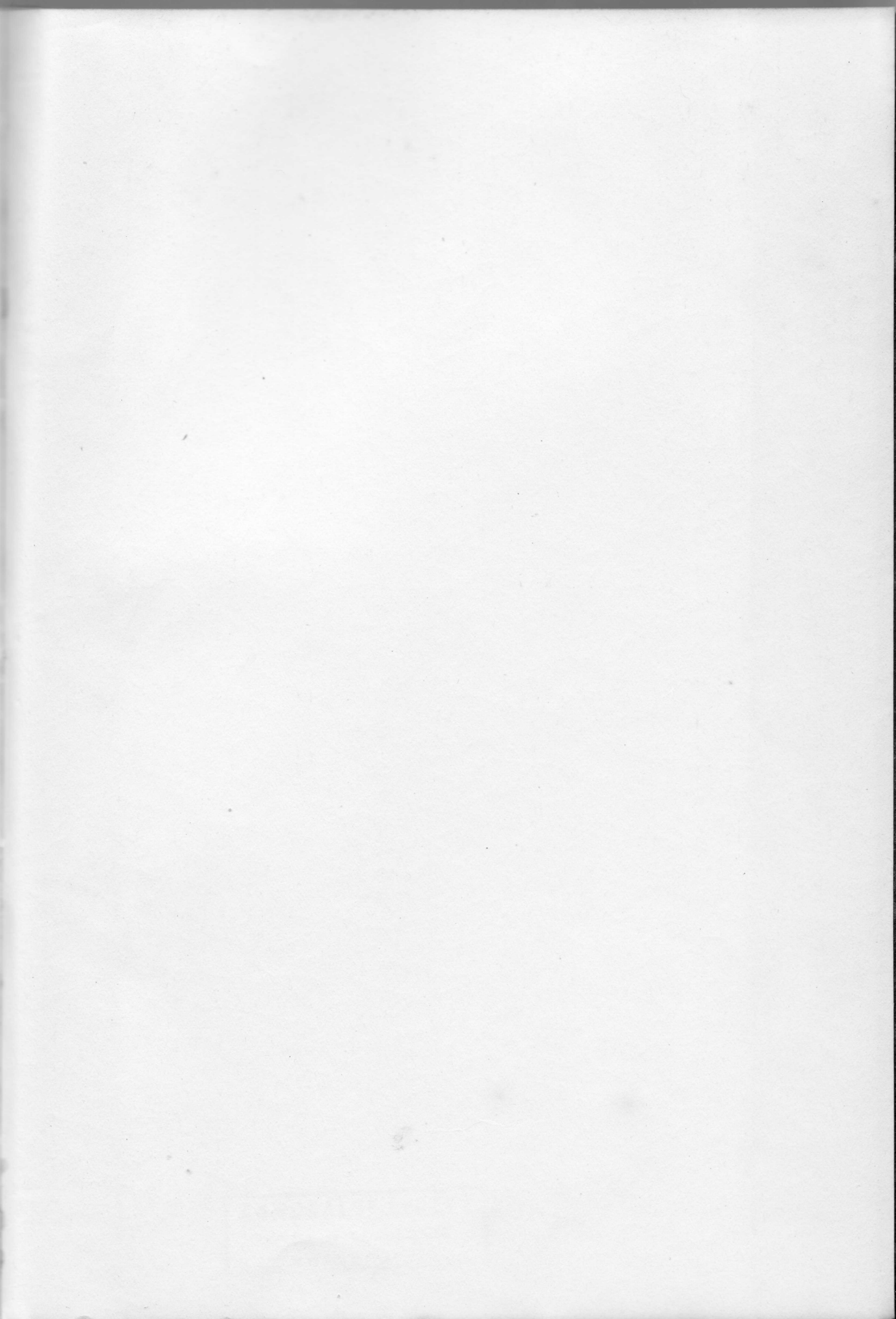


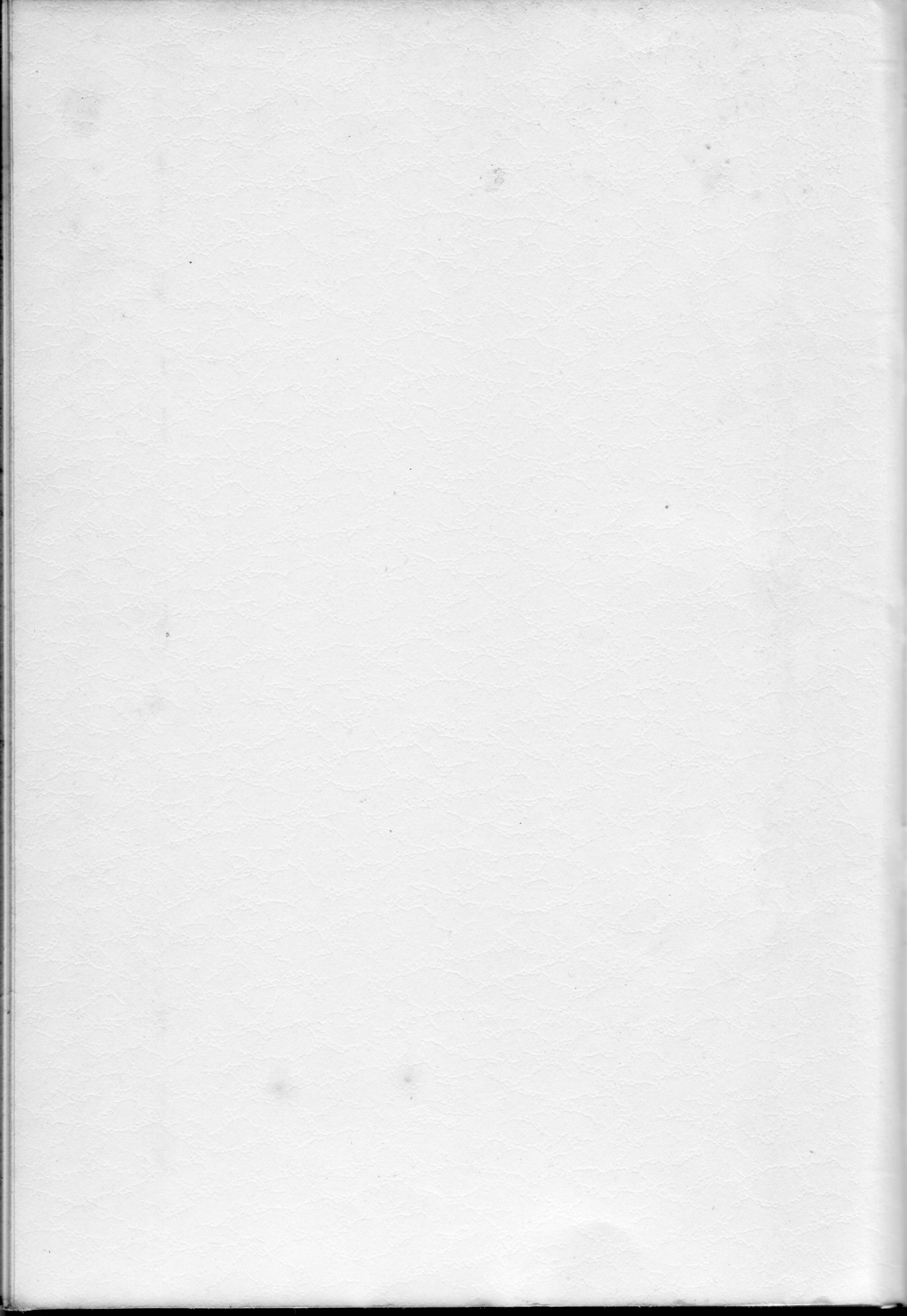
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KOMUNÁLNÍ SLUŽBY  
města Uničova  
knihárství

