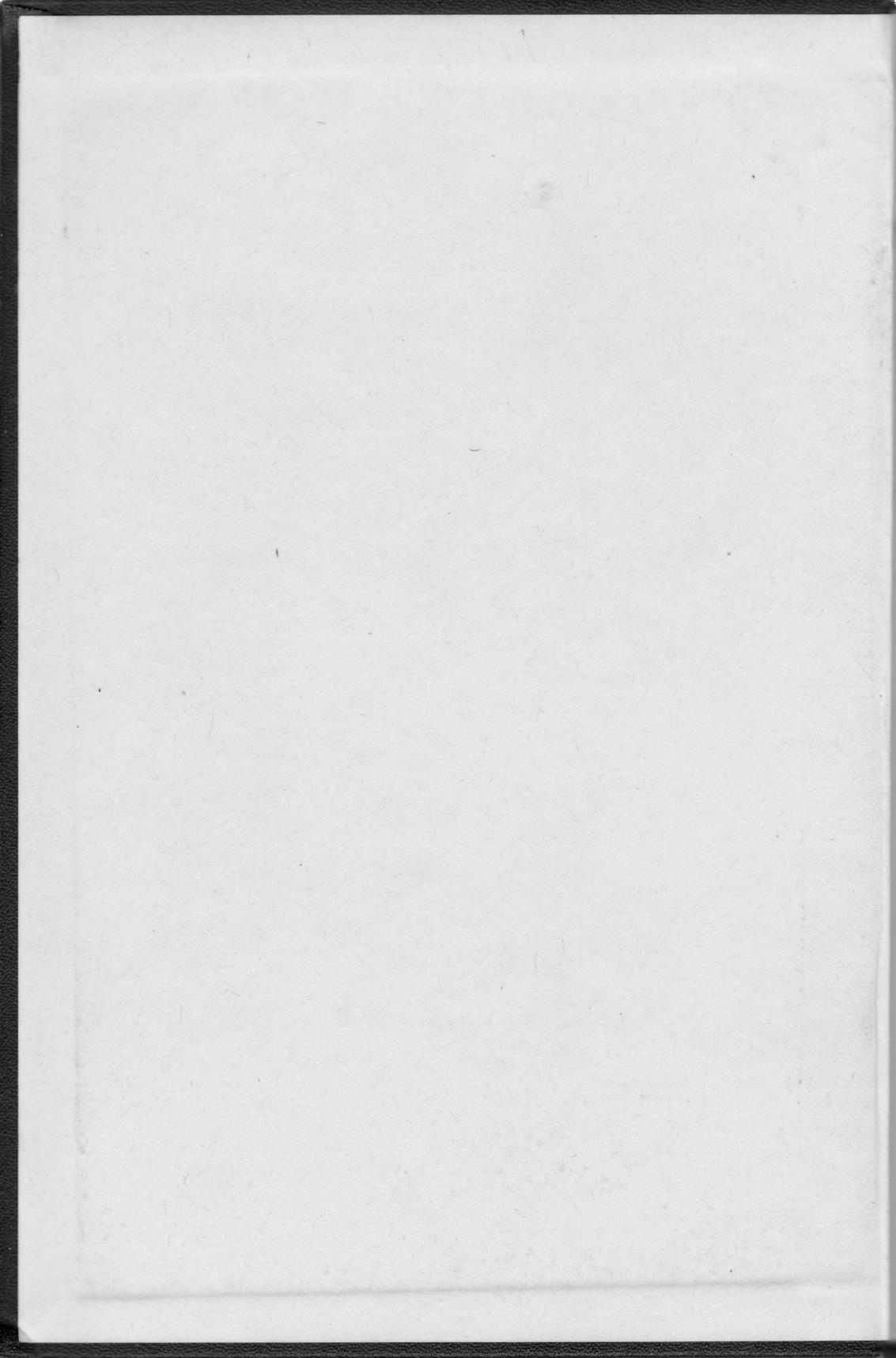


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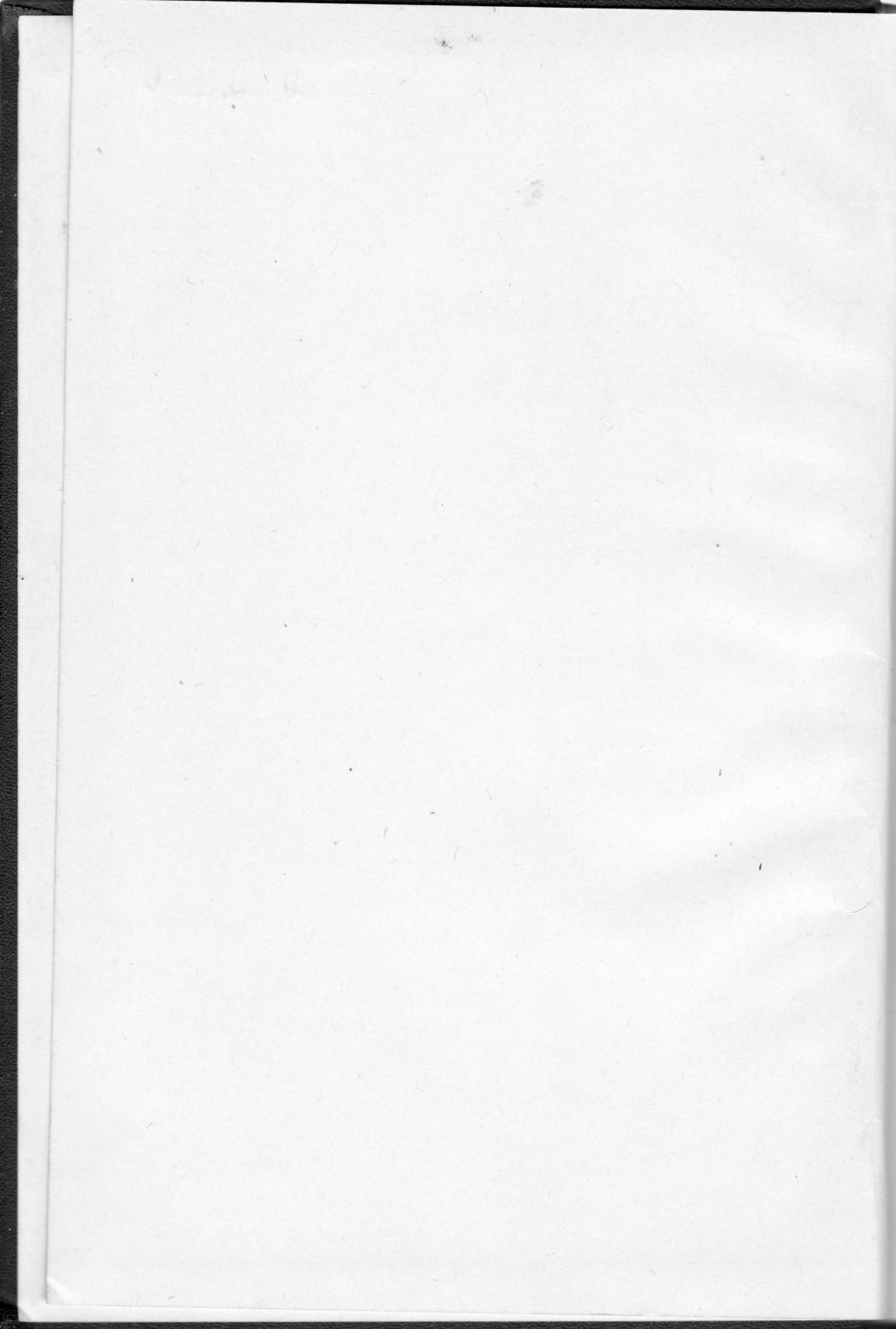
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THE SOUL OF
A CENTURY



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THE SOUL OF A CENTURY

COLLECTION OF CZECH
POETRY IN ENGLISH

*TRANSLATED AND
COLLECTED BY*
R. A. Ginsburg

MZK-UK Brno



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P R E F A C E

"The Soul Of A Century" contains English translations of the poetic works of representative Czech Poets, from the first decade of the 19th century to a corresponding milestone of the 20th century. The collection is by no means exhaustive, critical or even scholarly. The selections were made primarily on the basis of translatability, and their English readability was the final criterion of choice.

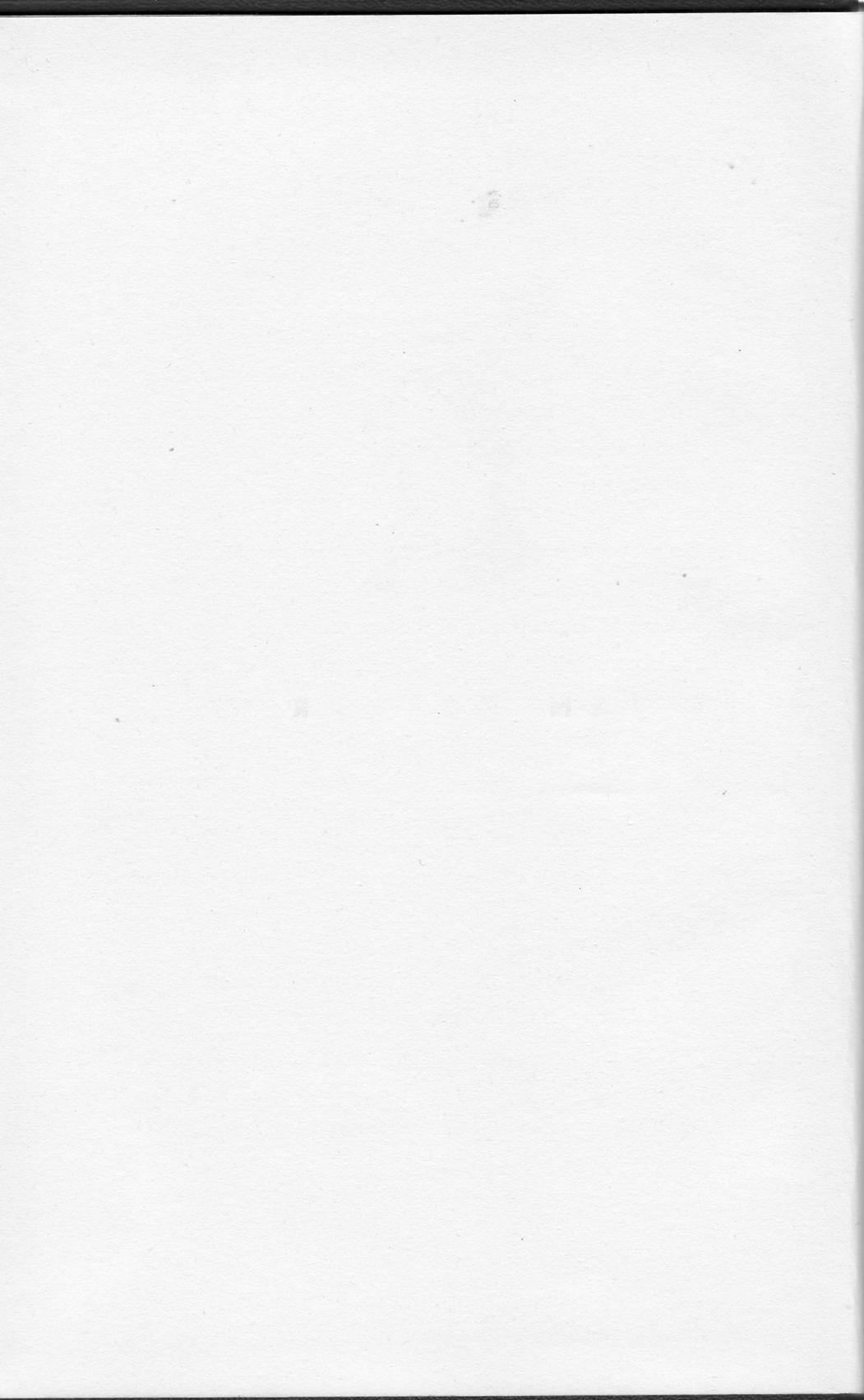
In the preparation of this volume the translator had in mind the need for familiarizing the interested English reading public with a few random selections of Czech poetry of the last century. Wherever possible the selections are complete rather than excerpts. Most of the poems included appear for the first time, while some have appeared in part or completely in previous publications.

No attempt has been made to present a scholarly anthology and the interested reader is referred to an appended list of available English anthologies of Czechoslovak literature for further study of the various authors included.

If this volume serves to stimulate further interest in Czech poetry, the translator will feel well compensated for the efforts involved.

R. A. Ginsburg

Berwyn,
Illinois.

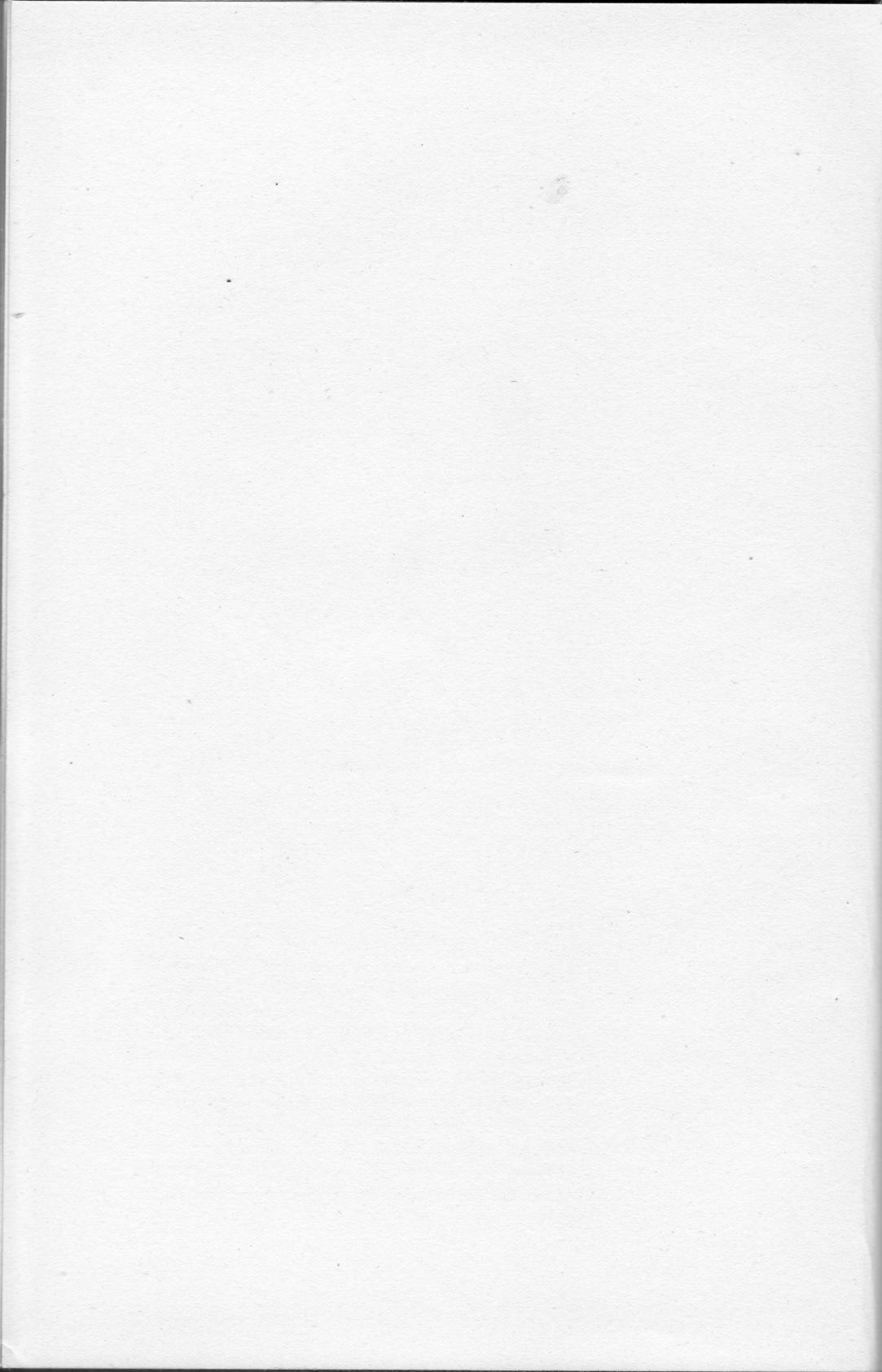




J A N K O L L A R

(1793 - 1852)

Jan Kollar, a native of Slovakia, was born July 29, 1793 in Mosovice and died January 24, 1852 in Vienna. Kollar studied at Bratislava and at Jena and entered priesthood in 1819. His interests led Kollar to philology and archeology and in 1849 he was appointed to the chair of Slavonic Antiquities at the University of Vienna. Kollar's poetic fame rests on his monumental collection of sonnets, published under the title of *SLAVY DCERA*. Though today we may criticize the contents and structure of this work, its author still remains as the founder of modern Czech poetry.



SONNETS

1.

It is not the earth, nor wholly the starry skies
That are reflected in her slender mould:
It is holiness ensnared in beauty's hold,
A soul divine that in her body lies.

One moment love consumes her; the next she sighs,
Refusing love, the heavens she would enfold:
Runs to your arms as a lightning, fast and bold,
Her glowing forehead, the starry world defies.

Yes, I suspect that some omnipresent power
She borrowed from the very Gods above,
'Cause in my eyes and mind she lingers every hour.

O, tell me lovely object of my love,
Are you a clod? Then I shall not grieve in vain.
Are you an angel? I shall worship you again.

2.

By these lips, your heart's untrodden sill,
'Fore your eyes, the blossoms of your soul,
My eternal love I now extol:
Take this as a promise I must fill.

Life is ruled by Time that aims to kill;
Time that beckons us beyond its realm,
There and here I'm yours with love at helm.
The stars and heavens bear witness to my will.

On this drifting cloud I am descending,
I, who pity you, who am your Fate,
Hush your pledges, faced with strife unending.

Peace and strife I'll separate past mending,
'Till somewhere, but when, I cannot state
I will bind you in a joyous ending.

Love, O love, you sweet untamed deceit,
 Sparkling goblet filled with sheer delight,
 Wherein kindred souls are bound in plight,
 In one passion, earth and heavens meet.

If we could only see your charms replete,
 While hid beyond some thicket, still as night,
 Ere the winds in their destructive might
 Wreck our sails and bring us to defeat.

Where, O sister of the Gods Immortal,
 Are you, faithless guest within my heart,
 Child of gladness, keeper of grief's portal?

I have hastened vainly to your bower,
 While a north wind tore my rose apart
 Leaving sharpened thorns as it took the flower.

4.

Dearest relic of my youthful days
 Tresses interwove with purest gold
 You deserve that Pope your life unfold
 That the bard of Illiad proclaim your praise.

Offer me a golden fleece or the stars' bright rays
 Give me palaces with a Sultan's wealth untold,
 I would not trade you, memory of old,
 Not for all the worldly wealth ablaze.

Guard the key to my heart's beating fire,
 Teach it e'er to hold in cold disdain
 Hollow beauty and untamed desire.

Some day, when the winds my dust will scatter,
 Lose yourself among the stars again,
 Where Berenice's Locks the heavens flatter.

5.

Mountains, mountains! Listen, I implore,
 Climb atop each others stony face,
 Build a ladder for me into space,
 That I may behold her evermore.
 Mountains, mountains! Listen, I implore!

Rivers, rivers, hear me from the shore,
Ere you reach your distant ocean base,
Have compassion, my grief to embrace
Take my tears to her unsheltered door.
Rivers, rivers, hear me from the shore.

Why be still? Go waft to her my sighs,
Cool winds blow into that distant land,
Let your speed grow greater with my cries.
Why be still? Go waft to her my sighs.

Take me to her, or else bring her here,
Mystic spirits lend your helping hand,
Haste your steps through darkness, storm and fear,
Take me to her, or else bring her here.

6.

How to welcome you, with a tear or a song?
Like a mother or a foster mother?
Land once honored now despised by another,
Rich with godly good and godly wrong?
Your castles now to owls and snakes belong,
A stranger roams your plains, and not your brother,
Your lions, mighty once, now weakly totter,
And weakness lurks where freemen should be strong.
To Vltava speed forth each grief-born tear,
Like rains and lightning crashing from the skies,
Carry these words for the sons of Slavs to hear:
"Cease bickerings that brought your downfall near,
List to your people, not to some jackal's cries,
The names of both St. John and Hus hold dear."

7.

Hear me Slavs, men of a discordant soul,
Living constantly in bitter enmity,
Get together and in unity
Learn a lesson from the burning coal.
There, together in a glowing whole,
Each coal heats and burns in jollity,
But alone without security
Slowly dies and reaches not its goal.
Hand in hand, unite to please your mother,
Every Russian, Serb and Czech and Pole,
Live like one great clan in peace together.
Only thus no wars nor hatred of another
Can destroy your Nation's mighty role,
You'll stand firm, none dare your life to smother.

PROLOGUE TO SLAVA'S DAUGHTER

(Excerpts)

Here lies this ancestral land before my saddened tear-dimmed eyes,
My nation's cradle once, today its burial casket.
Withhold your steps! For hallowed is the ground you tread upon.
To the heavens raise your eyes, Tatra's bewildered son;
Or better, cling with all might to yonder aged oak
That weathered the ravage of time unto this very day.
More cruel than time is a man who raises a punishing hand
To strike you fair Slavia, within your own domain.
Yea, worse than destructive wars, more destructive than tempest or flame
Is one who blinded with hate, plots evil against own kin.
Oh aged epochs of yore, spread all around like the night,
Oh suffering, ancient lands, scenes of both glory and shame!
From Labe's treacherous shores to where the Vistula flows,
From the Danube's verdant banks to where the Baltic foams.
Where echoed the mellow words of courageous peaceful Slavs
Now lifeless and mute this voice, a victim of envy and hate.
Who is to blame for these crimes that cry to the heavens above?
Who in assaulting one, insulted all nations and men?
Blush envious Teuton whose lands bordered the homes of the Slavs,
Your hands are stained with the guilt of these most callous crimes.

* * * * *

Where are your dwellings today, Slav nations who peopled these lands?
Who drank of the distant sea, or yon, where the Saale flows?
Where are you peaceful Sorbs, descendants of Abodrite tribes?
Where are the ancient Vilcs, grandchildren of the Uckers of old?
I gaze to the right, far and wide, then leftward I cast my eyes,
But in vain I search for Slavs in these hoary Slavic lands.
Tell me oh tree, who has served as their natural sacred shrine,
Beneath whose crown they burnt offerings to ancient Gods,
Where are these nations today? Where are their rulers and towns?
Where are they who engendered life in these barren lands of the North?

* * * * *

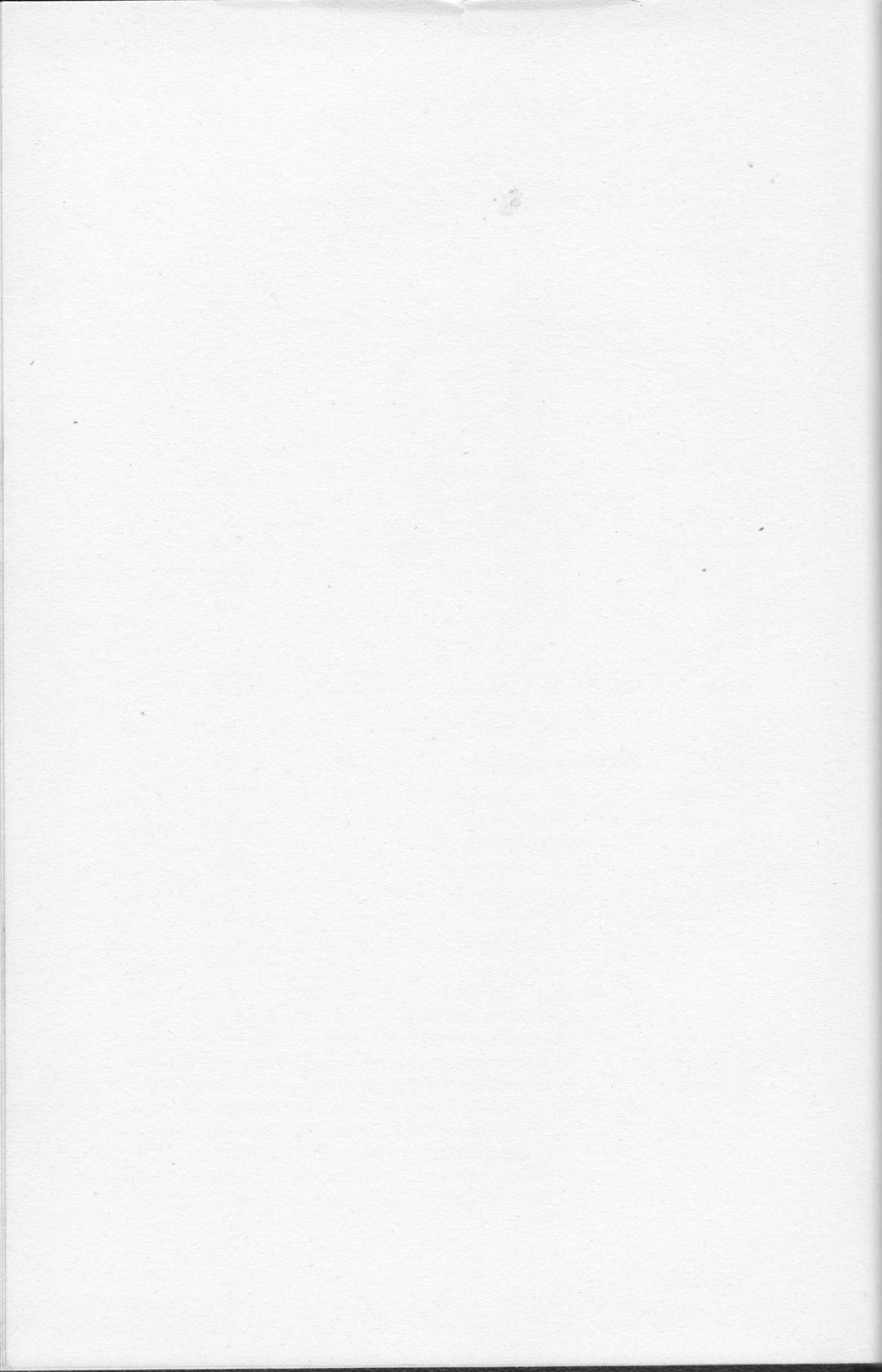
Henceforth be stilled oh grief! Toward the future direct your gaze!
With hopeful, sunlit eyes dispel the clouds of your thought.
There is no greater vice than to bemoan one's misfortune and loss.
Much better fares he whose deeds quiet the angered Gods.
Hope rises from active hands, not from a saddened eye,
Apparent evil may oft be turned to some needed good.
Though a man may be easily swayed, all men cannot be misled;
The blunders and errors of a few, are oft for the good of the whole.
Time changes all, even time; to victory it leads the Truth.
The errors of blundering ages one fleeting moment may change.



FRANTISEK LADISLAV CELAKOVSKY

(1799 - 1852)

An influential contemporary of Kollar, Frantisek Ladislav Celakovsky was born March 7, 1799 in Strakonice, and died August 5, 1852, in Prague. After completing his studies, Celakovsky spent his time as tutor, editor and as professor of Slavonic languages at Prague and elsewhere. Through his tutorship years with the Kinsky family, the versatile writer had ample opportunity for travel, and spent some time gathering material for his later day literary and pedagogic activities. Among his outstanding works are "The Hundred-Leaf Rose," "Echoes of Russian Songs" and "Collected Poems", all published between 1822 and 1840.



THY WILL BE DONE

Thy will be done! Thou, who sees without strife
The world's far ends from your throne above the star;
Who, with a loving eye, to these very ends brings life
Across the plains and mystic depths afar;
Who dwells above in the boundless realm of might,
Encircled by the glamor of your suns;
Thou, who commands all living creatures' plight
With a holy wisdom as yet attained by none,
Thy will for e'er be done!

Thy will be done! That will, which humbles low
The heavenly court, attired in light's robes;
That will, which sets the very skies aglow
And fills with bliss men's most inspired souls.
Our Father, as your will is solemnized
By the angels and the blessed in your domain,
So, on this earth it shall be recognized
By all, your children, and thus it shall remain.
Thy will for e'er be done!

Thy will be done! When the aura of thy grace
And the splendor of thy gifts brightens our life;
When songs of gladness in our hearts find place,
And when with joy and peace our soul is rife.
Or when dark tempests gather overhead,
And want or grief cast shadows on our days;
When our earthly paths are crossed by foes we dread
And tragic sorrow against our courage plays.
Thy will for e'er be done!

Thy will be done! As we linger o'er the bier
Refusing consolation's kind relief,
Or when through the loss of those we treasured dear
Our cheeks turn pale with an unspoken grief;
'Tis then we say, in times with gloom replete
When the world to us seems barren, cold and drear,
We, in our soul, find strength as we repeat;
"Your gift, Oh Lord, to you return we here."
Thy will for e'er be done!

Thy will be done! Let the seedlings of Thy laws
Grow forth and bloom for ever in our hearts.
We will accept and bear each heavy cross,
Your mercy shall help us to carry out our parts.
For we are weak; you give us strength, endurance,
And lest we fall, we seek your helping hand.
As through our life, so too at death's appearance
Oh comforter, we'll do what e'er you may command.
Thy will for e'er be done!

FROM A HUNDRED - LEAF ROSE

Let the ocean toss assunder
My life's sail upon its course,
Let it cringe neath storm and thunder,
Whipped by elements' blind force.

On the voyage God has charted
Bravely I am sailing forth,
With a fearless soul I've started
For that distant, blissful port.

And to light the deep, dark night
In the triad of their might,
Rising o'er me high above
Linger Faith with Hope and Love.

* * *

Having spent the day in torment,
I haste through the peaceful night
Toward the brook, whose hillside torrent
Glistens in the moon's pale light.

Dreary, tear-stained eyes are blazing
Where the foaming waters boom,
While my saddened mind is gazing
In that mirror of my doom.

Strange indeed! These dashing streams
Yonder fall in sparkling beams,
Here they turn to liquid fire
As when tears blend with desire.

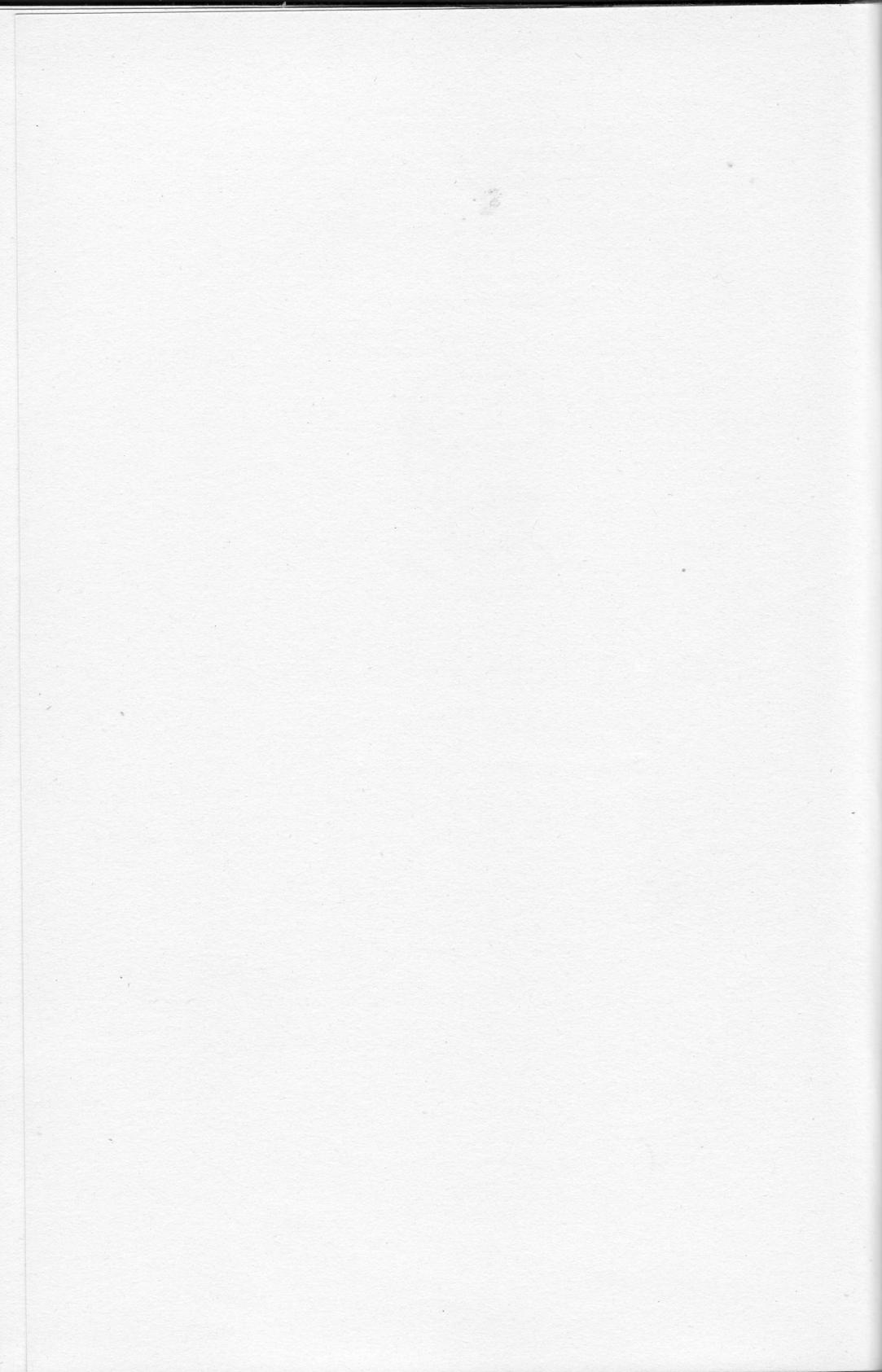
The home of my dreams is past yon stream
Beneath a mountain, in a tree,
Where high above, the tall oaks seem
To weave a shady roof for me.

When the stillness, soft, appealing,
Settles in yon airy height,
When the passing day is stealing
Over hill and dale in fright.

Holy stillness . . . nearer, nearer,
O'er my head I hear it clearer,
'tis the flow of time that stole
Through my languid, dreaming soul.

A SHORT PRAYER

God Almighty please preserve
Our mead and plain;
Bless our work at Harvest time
With a golden grain.
Guard our roofs against all flames
And from hates, that flare anew,
And for ages long preserve
All Czechs, forever true.

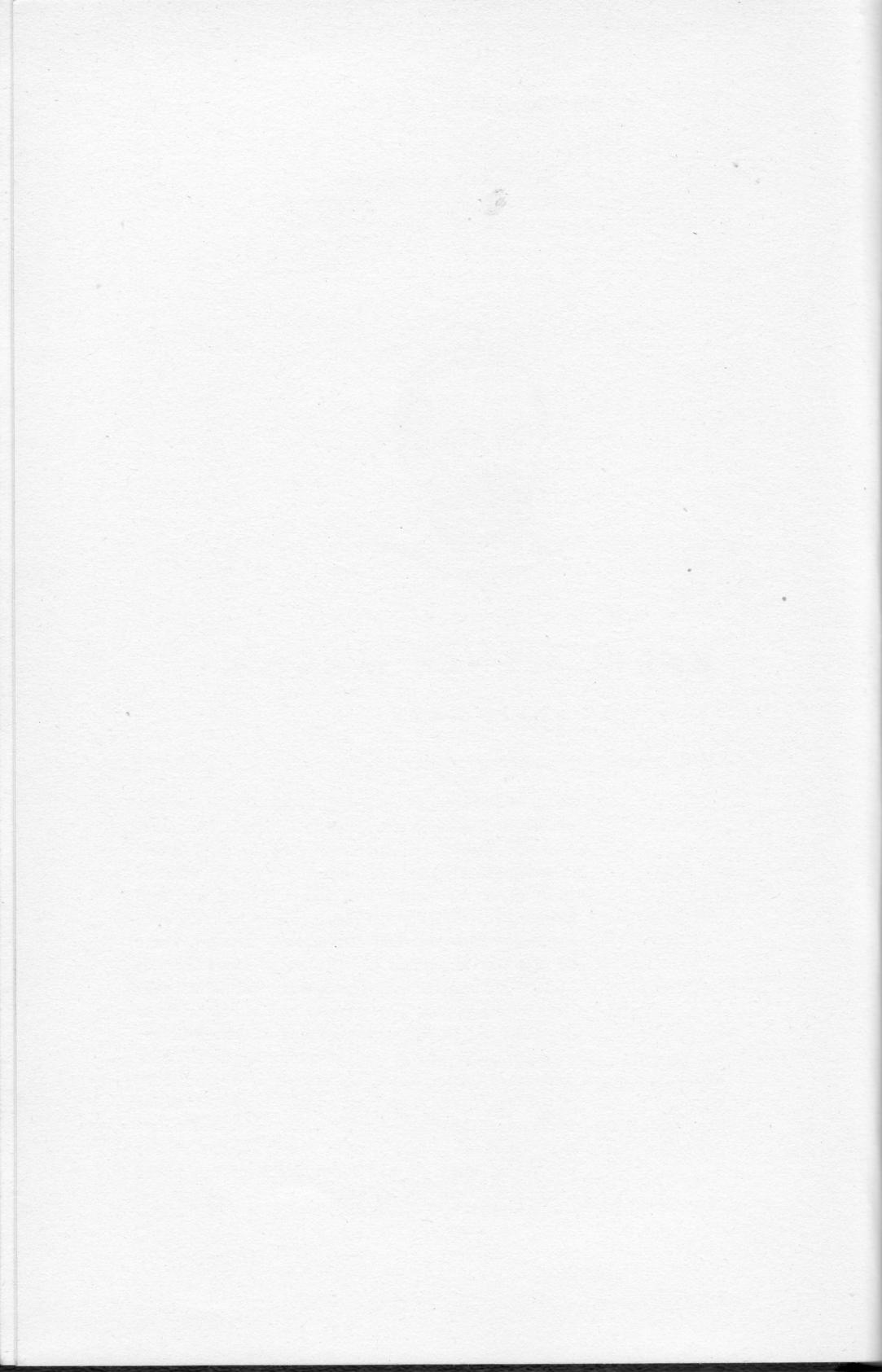




KAREL HYNEK MACHA

(1810-1836)

Karel Hynek Macha may well be called the founder of the Romanticist movement in Czech literature. Macha's "May" and his unfinished poem "Mnich" (The Monk) show to what extent the young dreamer came under the influence of Byron. Macha was born November 10, 1810, in Prague, where he completed his study of law and then moved to Litomerice, where he died under tragic circumstances November 5, 1836. As usual, the young poet was misunderstood by his contemporaries, who accused him of mimickry in his devotion to the general trend of romanticism. However, later day critics have exonerated Macha. They have found his works refreshingly original both in the lyrical quality and specifically local color of his work, which blends admirably with traces of the foreign influence. Today Macha stands as one of the recognized founders of modern Czech poetry, whose importance increases with time.



A D R E A M O F P R A H A

What is this, a city I envision?
You say Praha? The nation's crowning glory?
It is Praha, but what change transformed her.
Years ago a famous castle towered
Yonder, formerly the seat of royal grandeur.
Other bridges spanned the ancient river,
While today, all dwellings are deserted,
Where the noisy throngs once rolled and thundered
All is steeped in horror stricken silence.
In this city neither man nor creature,
Everything is desolate and barren.
Doors ajar to every silent dwelling,
And the rooms stand open and unguarded,
With the household implements still standing,
Left by men who seem to have just vanished,
For there is no trace of man nor movement.
Ancient towers still point to the heavens,
And the altar cloths are still spread out,
As if services were just concluded.
Lifeless, deathlike stands the ancient city,
Like a wasted grave now Praha stands,
Like the grave of a nation's former splendor,
A nation's grave bedecked with blooming flowers.
Speeding Labe and Vltava's waters,
Blend their voices like a distant bugle,
As they chant the nation's dirge of sorrow.

M A Y

(Excerpts)

'Twas late at eve . . . the first of May,
A night in May . . . 'twas time for love.
A love song sang the turtle dove,
Where scented pine groves stretched away.
The tranquil moss sighed love's lament;
Love's sorrow shammed the blooming tree,
A nightingale sang love's melody,
While a rose replied with love's sweet scent.
The lake, hid where the thicket reared,
Expressed its grief in a muffled sound,
Where banks entwined it all around;
The suns of other worlds appeared
And strayed across the azure spheres,

Gleaming above like love's bright tears.
Whole worlds of them appeared at length
Upon the skies—love's timeless seat.
Then, changed to fading stars, whose strength,
Was spent by love's o'er sweet extent,
They met, as roaming lovers meet.

* * * *

The gaoler cautiously bends near,
Close to the captive's lips, his ear,
And as a breeze lulls o'er the dale
The captive whispers on his tale.
Nearer and nearer the gaoler dips,
Closer and closer to the captive's lips,
Till lips and ear blend into one.
Each whispered sound now softly drips,
Then all is hushed - as if asleep.
The gaoler stands - moves not - undone.
Large tears beneath his eyelids run
And eyes and heart with sorrow weep.
Long stands he, helpless to decide,
Till as a beast prepared to leap,
He leaves the cell with one long stride.
Long as he lived - his lips kept sealed
The secret he had heard revealed,
And ne'er again he wore with grace
A smile upon his furrowed face.

* * * *

The gaoler gone — the shadow'd spell
Fills once again the prison cell.
Through night profound—the drops of slime
Again, in falling, measure time.

* * * *

There where the bleak stone table stands,
The captive kneels—leans on his hands,
His haggard face—a frightful sight.
Motionless eyes that now appear
Fixed on some boundless, timeless sphere.
Tears, sweat and blood on cheeks alight,
And endlessly the drops of slime
Slowly, in falling, measure time.
The sound of drops, the winds of night,
Foretell the unrelenting doom
Of him, whose failing reason fled.
From far an owl hoots in dread,
At midnight, when the church-bells boom.

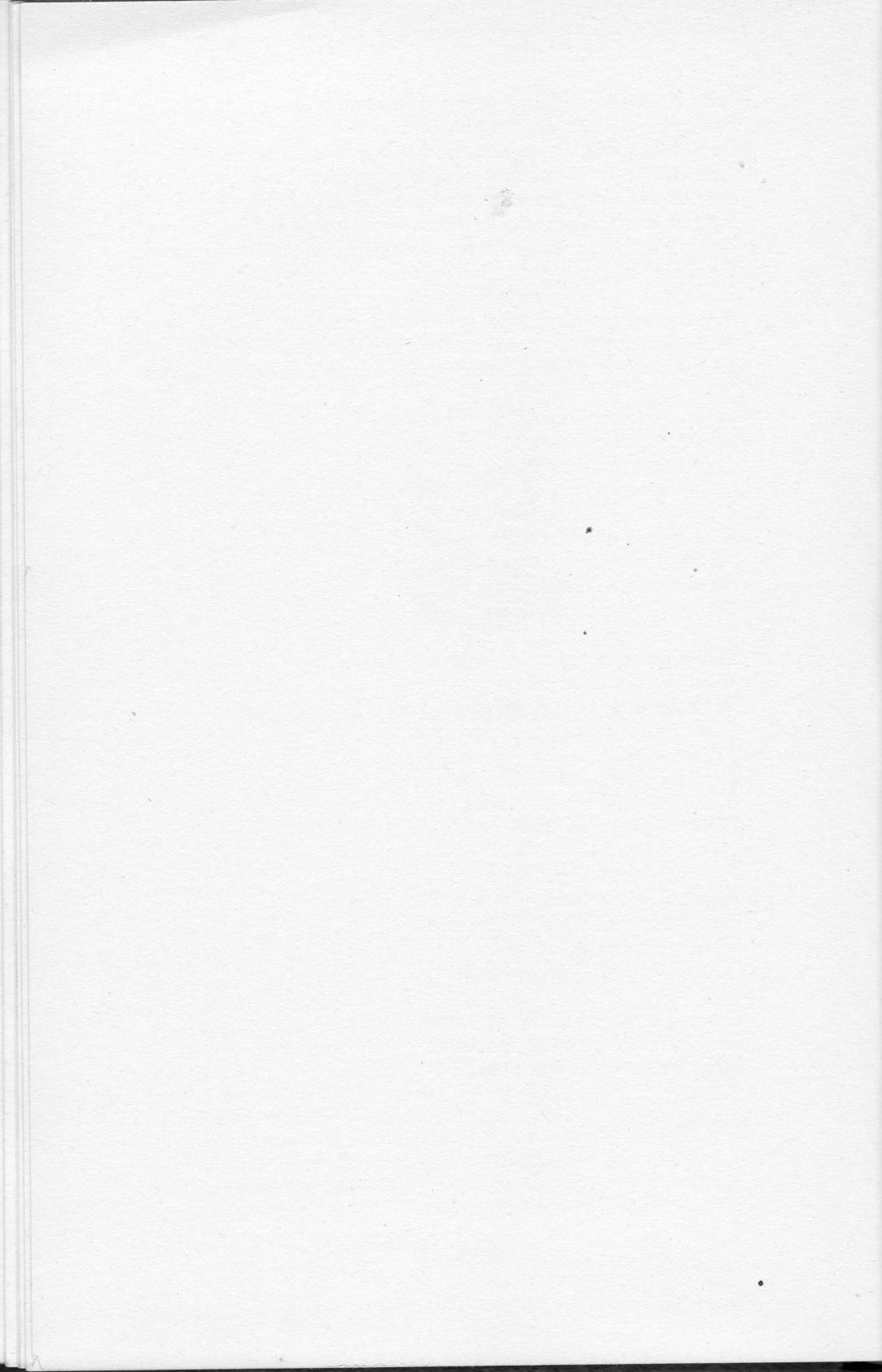
His youth was swept away by time's relentless rage.
Far away fled its dream, dead as a lifeless shade,
Reflections of cities white, that in the waters bathe.
Just as the final thought of men who died before,
Just as their very names, as wars of ancient hordes,
Just as the northern light, whose dead flame shines no more,
Tones of an age-warped harp, sounds of its shattered chords,
Events of by-gone days, the light of a lifeless star,
Feelings of one you loved, a wanderer's path so far,
A grave long since forgot, eternities' old scar,
A smold'ring fire's smoke, sounds of metallic chimes,
These are the echoed dreams of the man's childhood times.

Within the cool dale's darkened lap,
Where aged oak trees form a gap,
A grieving chorus sits around;
All wrapped within their cloaks of white.
They are the comrades of the night.
Each gazes ahead at the dark, still ground.
Without words and without motion
As if fear's relentless ocean
Changed them into lifeless molds.
As an evening song unfolds,
Softly whispering, softly sighing
Thus the circle trembles gravely,
With an endless whisper crying:
"Our mighty chieftain perished."

As a wind that howls and bounds,
O'er the rigid circle sounds,
"Our mighty chieftain perished."

As the whispering of the trees
Beneath the mount, where echoes moan,
Thus resounded on the breeze
In an unchanged monotone:
"Our mighty chieftain perished."

Distant forests faintly shivered,
And lamenting voices quivered.
"Our beloved Master perished."

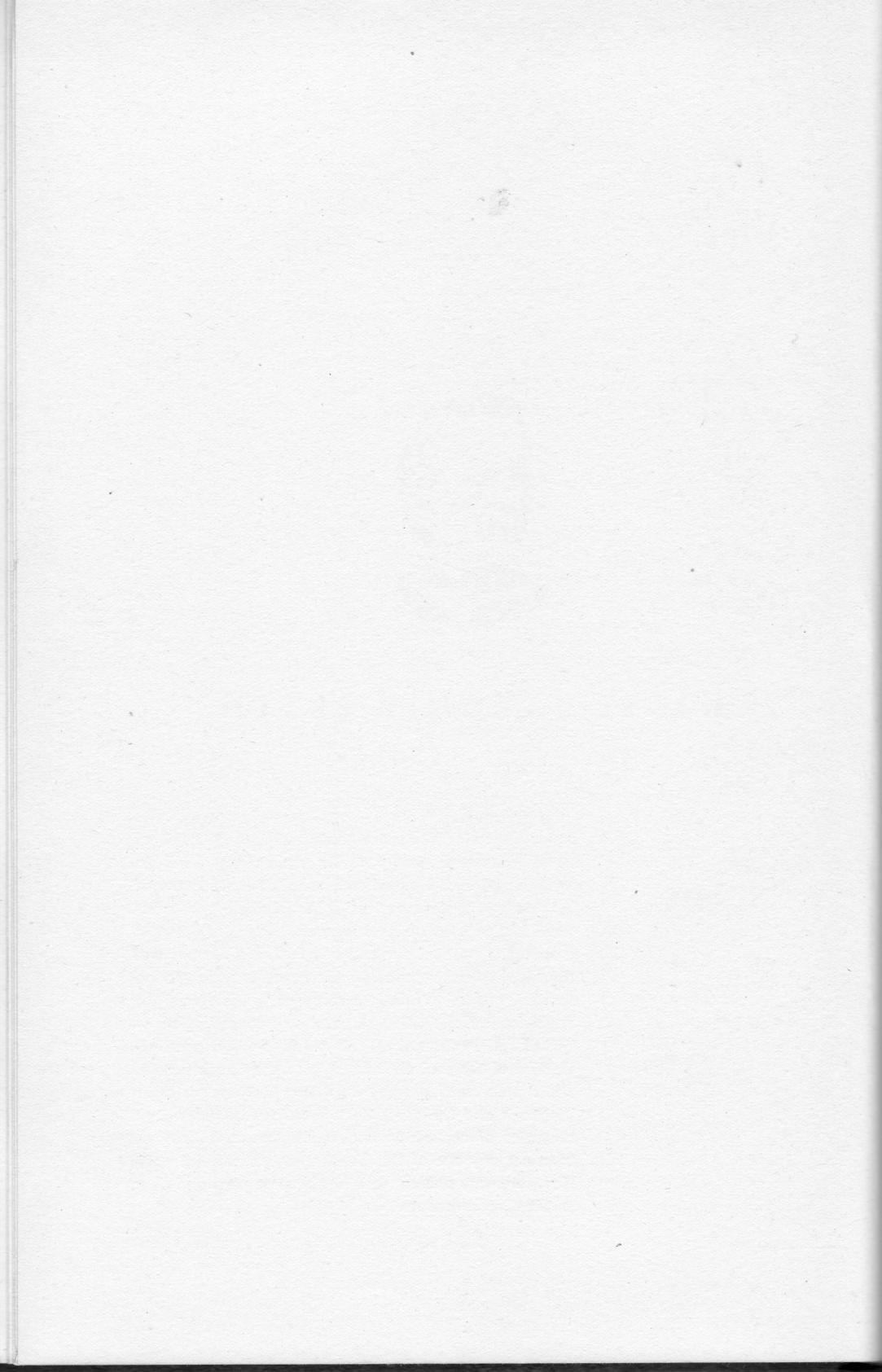




KAREL JAROMÍR ERBEN

(1811-1870)

Karel Jaromír Erben, the outstanding folk-lorist of Czech literature, was born November 7th, 1811 in Miletín and died November 21, 1870. As so many of his literary contemporaries Erben studied and practiced law, was active as a journalist, and took part in the stormy political currents of 1848. His literary and historical interests gave him the necessary background for the wealth of folk-lore material which forms the basis for the *KYTICE*, his best known collection of ballads. The material of this collection is a good reflection of the soul and thoughts of the Czech people, the simple rural people, in whom the love of their language and their traditions remained alive through centuries of oppression and repression. It is difficult to select any one of the ballads for preferential position, for every one of them has become near and dear to the Czech readers.



A SEERESS

(Fragments)

Whenever your eye fills with a bitter tear,
Whenever hardships fall upon your days
'tis then I bring my branch of hope and cheer
'tis then I raise a prophetic voice that says:

"Do not weigh lightly the meaning of my words,
In the heavens above my prophecy finds its birth,
Unflinching laws embrace all men and worlds,
And all must pay their debts upon this earth.

A river seeks its end in the distant rolling sea,
The flames leap high, the heavens to embrace,
Whatever the earth creates by earth destroyed shall be,
But nought shall go to waste or lose its finite place.

Firm and assured is destiny's each tread
And what shall be, shall come as time moves on,
And what one day may bury, in its stead
Another day will bring to life anon.

THE DOVE

Along the old grave yard
A travelled path winds high,
Over this, bent with grief,
A widow passes by.

Mourning softly, bitterly
The loss of one so dear
Where she had only recently
Wept o'er her husband's bier.

Out from the white estate
Across the winding path,
A handsome youth rides forth,
A feather in his hat.

Cry not, and stop lamenting,
Young widow in dismay,
For shame to dim your pretty eyes,
Listen to what I say.

Cry not, and cease lamenting,
Young widow, as fair as a rose,
Since you have lost your husband,
Let me once more propose.

One day she spent in weeping,
Quiet the second day,
Before the third day vanished
Her grief hath passed away.

Before a week passed by
Thoughts of the dead had parted,
Within another month
A wedding gown she started.

Along the old grave yard
Now jollier the way,
As the bridal pair rides by
To the wedding feast today.

The wedding was so gay,
And full of noisy jesting,
In the bridegroom's fond embrace
The bride at length was resting.

The wedding was so gay,
Music rang with gladness,
He pressed her to his bosom,
She laughed in joyous madness.

Laugh fair bride . . . keep laughing
It doth become you well,
The dead man 'neath the earth
Hears not and cannot tell.

Embrace and love your dear one,
Fears do not entertain,
The casket's tight and narrow,
The dead shan't turn again.

Now you can kiss and treasure
The cheeks for which you sighed;
For he, who drank your potion
Can never be revived.

* * *

Time is swiftly fleeing,
All changes in its track,
What was not, shall soon be;
What was, shall ne'er come back.

Time is swiftly fleeing
A year just like a day,
But one thing never changes . . .
A sin cannot pass away.

Three years sped by and vanished
Since he was laid to rest,
Over his grave a scented rug
Of verdant grass is pressed.

Green grass upon his grave,
An oak tree at the head,
Upon the oak, a dove coos sadly,
Its snowy wings outspread.

Upon the oak he flutters,
And coos a mournful strain,
The hearts of all who hear it
Fill with an untold pain.

But none grieves more or suffers
As grieves one woman's heart,
She tears her hair, lamenting,
Fear rends her soul apart.

"Oh, do not coo, and cry not,
Moan not into my ears,
Your cruel song is piercing
My aching soul with spears.

Oh, do not coo, complain not,
My head swims in sheer dread,
Or better that you howl until
It bursts my weary head."

Swiftly flow the waters,
The waves each other chase,
And 'twixt the foaming billows
A white dress seeks a place.

Here a limb protruding,
An arm there cuts the wave,
A luckless, hapless woman
At last has found her grave.

To the mossy banks they bore her,
And dug a grave in haste
Where the two field-paths are crossing,
In the rye field's yellow waste.

She was to have no tomb stone,
No restful mound was made,
Naught but a heavy boulder
Above her head was laid.

No boulder e'er so heavy
Can lie with so much weight,
As lies the curse of inner guilt,
Upon her name of hate.

THE WATER SPRITE

O'er the lake on a poplar dreaming,
A water-sprite sits of an evening:
"Shine moon-beam, shine on,
Help me thread my yarn."

A pair of stout shoes I am sewing
For dry land and watery going:
"Shine moon-beam, shine on,
Help me thread my yarn."

This is Thursday, Friday's coming,
My new frock-coat I am sewing:
"Shine moon-beam, shine on,
Help me thread my yarn."

Bright red shoes, a coat green as the sea,
Tomorrow shall my wedding be:
"Shine moon-beam, shine on,
Help me thread my yarn."

II.

Early next morning a maiden arose,
Bundled together her snow-white clothes.
"Mother, I'm going to the lake
To wash my clothes, ere day shall break."

"Go not today to the edge of the water,
Better stay home my child, my daughter.
Last night I had an evil dream.
Do not go near where the waters gleam.

I picked white pearls in my dream last night,
Picked them for you and dressed you in white,
In a sheer gown of watery foam.
Do not go out my child; stay home!

A white dress portends that mourning is near;
Each pearl conceals a bitter tear,
And Friday is a luckless day;
Go not my child, go not away."

There is no peace for the restless daughter,
Something attracts her to the water,
Pulls her by force to the tempting lake,
She lacks the strength the spell to break.

As soon as a kerchief she submerged
With a crash and a roar, the foot-bridge burst,
And yon where the maiden fell in, is left
Only a seething, foaming depth.

Up from the bottom rolled a wave,
Rings whirled about the watery grave.
And on the swaying poplar tree
A little green man clapped his hands in glee.

III.

Ever mirthless, ever sad
Are these watery lands,
Where beneath the lotus leaves
The gleaming fishes dance.

Here the bright sun never shines,
A warm wind never blows;
Cold and silent, as a grief
In a heart that weary grows.

Ever mirthless, ever sad
Are these watery lands,
Half in light and half in shadow
The days by days advance.

The Water-sprite has a large gay court
Filled with many a treasure.
Against their will the guests are held,
Never for their pleasure.

He who comes into this court
Beneath its crystal dome,
Never more shall see or hold
His beloved ones at home.

At the gates the Water-sprite
His tattered nets is mending,
While his youthful wife, nearby
A little babe is tending.

"Sleep my dear unwanted babe,
'tis for you I am crying,
While you're smiling up at me
I with grief am dying.

Joyfully you stretch towards me
Two small hands so brave,
I would rather see myself
On earth, within a grave.

There on earth, beyond the church,
Where the black crosses stand,
My old mother would have me
Close and near at hand.

Sleep and rest my little boy,
My little water-sprite,
How can I try not to think
Of mother, in my plight.

How she worried, poor old soul,
Who should be my groom,
And before many a day,
I had met my doom.

I am married, married now
But against my wishes,
For our best men stood black crabs,
For my bridesmaids . . . fishes.

And my husband, God forbid,
Stays wet on the dryest land.
Human souls he keeps in cups
Buried in the sand.

Sleep and rest my little darling
With your greenish tresses,
Know your mother married not
Under love's caresses.

But deceived and caught within
A treacherous, stout net,
She has here no other joy
But you, my little pet."

CHRISTMAS DAY

Part 1

'Tis dark as a grave . . . A wintery gale moans;
From the hearth glowing warmth slowly spreads . . .
The fire-place roars . . . grandmother nods and drones
While the girls spin flax into threads.

Hum and whirl my spinning wheel,
The end of Advent soon shall peal
And closer, close comes Christmas Day.

To spin is a joyous task for a girl
During the long wintery eves,
That not in vain her spinning-wheels whirl
The maiden firmly believes.

A day will come when someone shall say
To the busy maid: "Come rejoice!
You, be my loving bride today,
Let me, be the man of your choice.

I will be yours and you will be mine,
Give me your hand our love to betroth."
And the shy young maid who spun yarn so fine,
Is now sewing a gown from the cloth.

Hum and whirl my spinning wheel,
The end of Advent soon shall peal
And closer, close comes Christmas Day.

Part II.

Hail you wondrous Christmas Eve,
You holiday of myth,
What varied gifts you bring each one
To recollect you with?

To the master, Christmas bread,
Fodder to his cattle,
To the rooster, garlic spread,
Peas to hens which prattle.

To the fruit-trees in the grove
Bones from the repast,
Gold reflections on the wall
To him who keeps the fast.

* * *

Oh, I am a youthful maid
With heart as yet untaken,
In my restless, care-free mind
Other thoughts awaken.

Yonder, where the forest ends
And the sluice-gate forms a gap,
Venerable willows stand
Each crowned with a snowy cap.

One of these, a gnarled old tree
Wearily is nodding
Downward, where beneath the ice
The cold blue lake is plodding.

There, they say, when midnight comes
And the moon shines bright above,
Within the waters' depth appears
A maiden's future love.

* * *

Midnight does not frighten me,
I scoff at superstition,
With an axe I'll chop the ice
And fulfill my mission.

Deep into the icy waves
I'll gaze with hopeful eyes,
My destined lover to behold
Where his image mirrored lies.

Part III.

Midnight set in . . . The Heavens are gay
With the glory of stars brightly strewn,
Like sheep straggling home at the close of a day,
Their shepherd, the glistening moon.

Midnight set in . . . a night holy, supreme,
Christmas night peaceful and still;
Across the white snow fresh footprints gleam,
Marking a trail toward the lake 'neath the hill.

One girl is kneeling where the ice shows a break,
Impatient, the other stands by.
"Hannah dear, Hannah, for our friendship's sake
Tell me what meets your eye."

"I see a cottage, as yet hazy and far,
It looks like my Václav's home . . .
The vision grows brighter . . . the door stands ajar . . .
Now I see a man's shadowy form.

He is wearing a coat of dark green cloth,
His hat's to one side . . . Now I see,
On the hat are the flowers I myself had bought . . .
Good God! It is Václav! . . It's he!

She leaps to her feet, heart wildly a thrill,
The waiting girl kneels in her place.
Good luck dear Marie! Tell me, if you will,
What future you shall face."

"I see something there . . . so faint in the haze.
A flickering ray that streams
Out of the mist . . . Red lights are ablaze . . .
I have entered a church, it seems.

All is somber and black, pierced with flashes of white,
It dawns upon me . . . It is clear!
The white are the maids . . . and the vapory light . . .
My God! A cross and a bier."

Part V.

Winter set in . . . A wintery gale moans;
From the hearth glowing warmth slowly spreads . . .
The fireplace roars . . . grandmother nods and drones
Once again girls spin flax into threads.

Hum and whirl my spinning wheel,
The end of Advent soon shall peal
And closer, close comes Christmas Day.

Hail you wondrous Christmas Eve,
You night of magic art,
Whenever I think of you
Something stabs me through the heart.

Like today it was we sat
A year ago together,
And before a year passed by
Two are gone forever.

One with a shawl about her head,
Her infant's clothes is heaping.
O'er the other, for three long months
The Earth and the Skies are weeping,
Yonder where Marie is sleeping.

Like today it was we sat
As now and yesterday,
And before a year goes by
Whither shall we stray?

Hum and whirl my spinning wheel,
All in this world has a short appeal,
And human life is but a Dream.

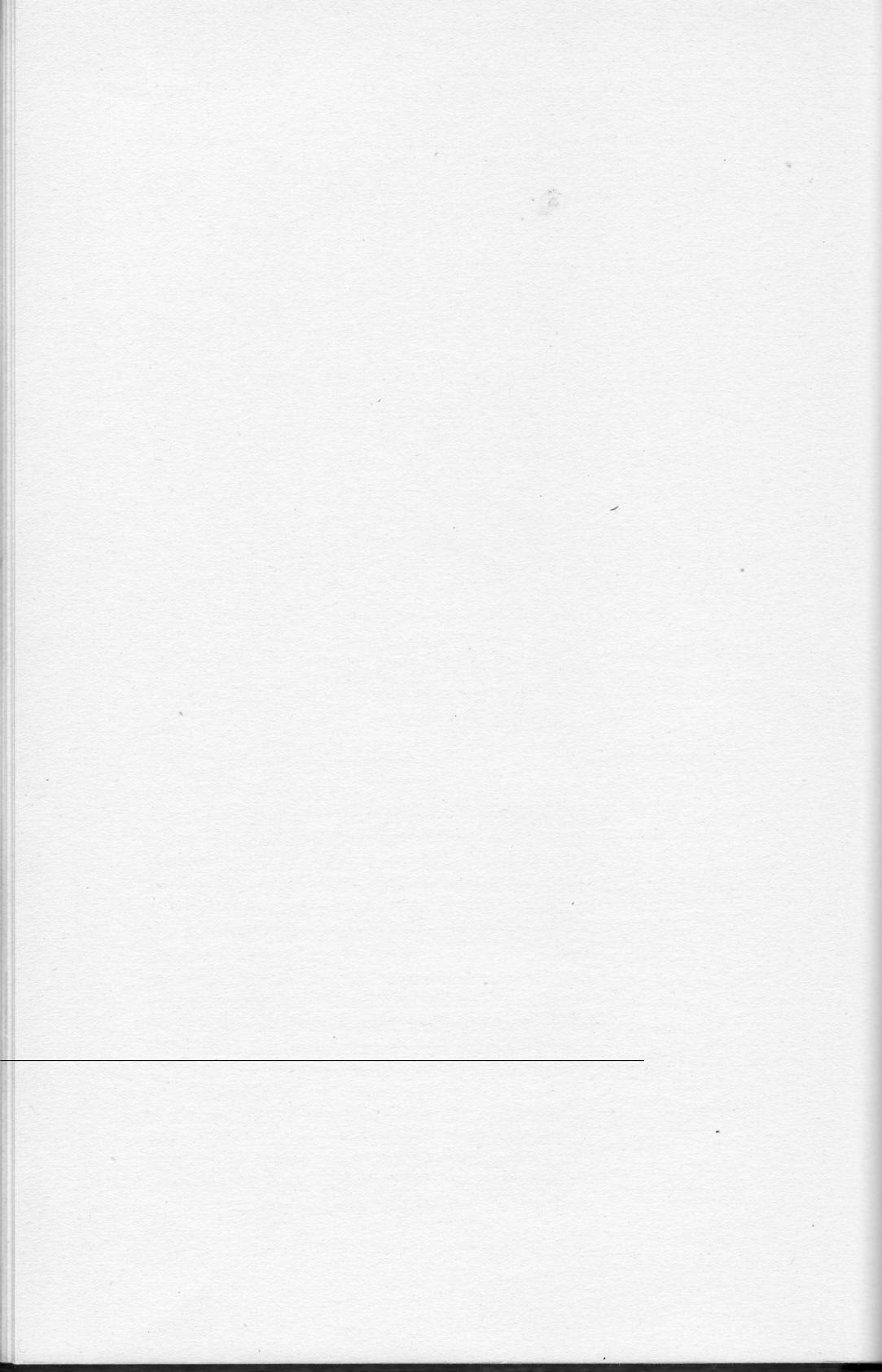
'Tis better to dream in hopes that are vain,
In sheerest darkness to grope about,
Than to have our future revealed starkly plain
And to know our unchangeable lot.



JAN NERUDA

(1834 - 1891)

Jan Neruda, one of the most versatile of the Czech writers, was born in Praha, July 9, 1834 and died after a wasting illness on August 22, 1891. His work and importance may well be divided into two general divisions. The first part of Neruda's literary activity was concerned with lyrical poetry, travel sketches and essays, while the latter part of his literary life was devoted to short stories, ballads and deeply rooted impressions of local color. Neruda had prepared originally for a pedagogic mission, but shortly left the school room for a permanent journalistic and literary career. His simplicity of form and depth of meaning, his sincere self-critical reflections have won for him a permanent place in the heart of generations of Czech readers. His outstanding poetic works include "Graveyard Blossoms" (1858) "Cosmic Songs" (1878) "Simple Motives" (1883) "Friday Songs" (Posthumous Publication) and many other collections.



ARISE! ON GUARD!

We know not how to sacrifice or die,
Die for our country, nation, freedom's cause!
Against the benefits and blessings to our land,
We cautiously weigh each selfish loss.

We know not how to sacrifice or die,
We know not how to live and act as men!
But should our wondrous country die some day
Could we but try to live such lives again?

Through centuries we felt Fate's heavy hand,
But this shall not pursue us unto death.
Though all the temples we had built by day
Were shattered in the night, by treason's breath.

Yea, every blow bestowed on us by fate
Must help us anew in every risen plight.
Hence let us learn to build our shrines anew,
To work by day and guard them through the night.

SPRING

Peering through spectacles, a cane in one hand,
I walk through the flowery dale;
I plod slowly, solemnly, as if I failed to see
The changes Spring brought to the vale.

Indeed! Everything is exactly the same
As it was two score years ago . . .
The twittering birds fill the skies with their songs,
The trees are with blossoms aglow.

Again, little girls are prancing about,
So are the boys with immature hips.
The girls are singing this year's newest songs
That were written for older lips.

There is no advancement, no progress, no change,
All moves in the same slow gear;
I fear it is we, who grow older with time,
Who get wiser from year to year.

I fear 'twill be thus to the end of the world,
Forever, all over this earth;
That Springtime will always its blossoms display
And youth have its song and its mirth.

I pass by a group of girls and boys
With whose chatter, I have weary grown,
Peering through spectacles, a cane in one hand,
My features as lifeless as stone.

GRANDPA'S TROUGH

In the hearth, a crackling log is burning
Grandpa seated warms his hands and soul.
Softly hums the wheel his son is turning,
Carving out the wood a sturdy bowl.

What a queer chant this old wheel is singing;
The grandson's wondering eyes are wide awake;
"See the curly shavings dad is spinning,
Look at all the things that he can make!"

From the forest came the log you're breaking,
"Whose will be the finished wood-trough dad?
""Tis for grandpa . . . his old hands are shaking,
He broke all the dishes that he had."

"Teach me how to do this . . ." "Look here, laddie!
Why should your hands learn these things to do?"
"Some day when your hands will tremble, daddy,
I will make a wooden trough for you."

In the hearth a crackling log is spouting.
A shamefaced son clasps grandpa's trembling hands.
The shaping wheel is still, the boy is shouting
"Daddy, tell me why the wheel now stands?"

AN INNER LIFE

If you possess an inner-life
Guard carefully this treasure,
Or life will sear into your soul
Eternal grief's full measure.

When you step out into the world
You are a stranger there,
The finer blossoms of your soul,
Yes, the soul itself grows bare.

Only within your inner self
 You grasp the world's full scope,
Therein reside unfettered thoughts,
 Therefrom spring deeds and hope.

Only within your inner self
 Can great ambitions breathe,
And the sparkling diamonds of your hope
 Are woven in glory's wreath.

Your inner-life is the only life
 Where you are free to reign,
Beyond its scope you trample on
 Your neighbor's fixed domain.

When beaten here and beaten there
 You grow weary with the strife;
You are alone as a drifting spar
 On the stormy sea of life.

Your inner-life holds blissful peace,
 No quarrels threaten there,
You rise within onto a mount,
 A giant, proud and fair.

People will come, bow down to you
 And honor your command,
With silver words of praise they ring
 Your fame throughout the land.

The outer world is brightly garbed,
 With a siren's call it spurs;
Many a man has answered it,
 But never a man returns.

Who venture forth, brave angry storms,
 And when exhausted sleep,
While the inner emptiness yields space
 To emotions, stirred and deep.

Learn well the art of inner life
 To know the joys of song.
And having learned this, man decide
 To sing through right or wrong.

Live always in your inner-life
And open not its door,
Because for joys of life you give
A part of you and more.

In strife I spent my inner-life,
Now its songs I oft repeat.
On wings of song sped life itself . . .
My heart, why do you beat?

I finish now my plaintive song
And lay aside the Lyre,
I have lost my faith in its very strings,
In myself and my desire.

The strings send forth an anguished strain
Of beauty's withered flowers,
Of squandered youth, of wasted days,
Of buried, ill-spent hours.

The strings have snapped and loosely hang
Like a widow's grief-torn hair,
But still they ring so madly sweet
Like Aeol's harp, in air.

MAN USED TO SAY

What am I? A lonely man twixt the world's wide spheres.
Humility forbids me to brag and rave;
But turn your eyes upon a royal court
There you will know a master from the slave.

I am on friendly terms with the Sun and the Stars
Yet they, with all their bright splendor,
Stand ever meekly, far away,
On their cheeks, a smile of surrender.

MAN NOW SAYS:

Like pacing lions we strike at the bars,
Like lions in a cage.
We would rise up to the heaven's heights,
But are held by the Earth in helpless rage.

We seem to hear a voice from the stars;
"Come higher, away from your toil.
Come closer, conceited, arrogant men
Held by the bonds of your soil."

We'll come! Mother Earth, you are so small,
Forgive us if ungrateful we seem.
We chain our thoughts to the lightning above,
Our feet speed with the power of steam.

We'll come! Our spirits higher soar,
Our blood beats with an unquenched thirst;
With a feverish longing for far off worlds,
'Tis a wonder our hearts do not burst.

We will come nearer, higher still . . .
To the ends of the world we shall see.
We strike at our bars, we, the lions at heart,
We'll shatter the bars and be free.

MY RED AND WHITE FLAG

(“Friday Songs”)

Our waving flag of red with its neighboring field of white
Whipping against its staff with a sweeping, unchecked might;
One moment madly flying, its wings are reaching far,
Then in a flash it shivers, and huddles against its bar.
Two colors flashing by in an everchanging race,
Until we hardly dare these colors to embrace.
Look! Look! There in the height sweeps a blotch of crimson hue
And in its reddish wake, sputters a white churned foam;
A sweeping gust of wind brings another phase in view,
A drift of fallen snow, topped with a bloody dome.
Now it appears as if a white-winged dove flew by
To be swallowed by the flames, whose hungry tongues reach high.
New thoughts arise and die; while I, with bated breath,
Gaze at the color of life blend with the color of death.

Two gayly flowered goblets I raise high to the light,
In one a wine of red; in one a wine of white.
These colors, these two lights, may they ever keep aflame,
To lead us through peace and battles to a pinnacle of fame.
If humanity should waver like a mighty heaving sea,
Then like the ocean coral, the peaceful Czechs should be.
And if humanity, like an Alpine range, should soar,
The Czechs should be a Mont Blanc, and rise for evermore.

And if humanity should seem like skies aglow with stars,
Then let the Czechs be known as the flaming, mighty Mars.
Fly high, you joyous flag of streaming crimson red,
And like the Spartans once, swarmed in their garb of war,
So let the Czechs stand firm with swords besmeared with gore.
You lead us on, go forth, smite our enemies' bared head.
Fly high, you waving flag of spotless milky white,
Our forefathers' proud eagle who rules the airy height.
And let the flowers bloom beneath your waving hand
For this nation is as just as the Gods upon their stand.
Destiny, give us struggles, for our heroes true to bear,
But then let the morning follow, sparklingly fresh and fair,
And let the sun leap forth and flood the Czech's domain.
Let there come days of peace and roses bloom again.

AND WHAT I WAS, THAT I WAS GLAD TO BE

Why should I grumble at my Fate, and be sad
Because Fate used me as a bouncing ball,
That it patted me, or whipped me till I'd fall,
That it made much of me, either good or bad
From a humble question to a proud reply,
I fell a hundred times and rose with glee.
Many a role in God's wide world played I,
And what I was, that I was glad to be.

Fate placed me in a hardworn, narrow crib,
And sewed a patch upon my humble cloak.
To still my tears, floods of new tears it woke
And held me short, by stabbing at my rib.
Yet all about me, base pride reached high
Hence to lash the pampered sons I then felt free.
Many a role in God's wide world played I,
And what I was, that I was glad to be.

Then to my poverty Fate added strength,
And with an even stride I measured life,
Each day, each year, I grew more strong with strife.
From boy to manhood I attained at length,
Humble in asking, haughty in reply,
And none would dare to taunt or humble me.
Many a role in God's wide world played I,
And what I was, that I was glad to be.

Thus when I reached my manhood, groomed and suave,
And taunting maidens made of me, as is their way,
Their gardener, to serve them day by day,
They sweetly said to me, "Hence you shall be our slave.
Tend carefully our youth, that swiftly passes by,
Youth that would ever bloom, but soon must ripened be."

Many a role in God's wide world played I,
And what I was, that I was glad to be.

Then Fate stepped in and said: "Time flies, old man, beware!
When you have reached the height of love divine,
Forcefully tear her lifeless lips from thine,
You live, and in your heart her dying image bear.
Though longing, while the frosts of scorn rise high.
Alone traverse life's storm-swept, tossing sea."

Many a role in God's wide world played I,
And what I was, that I was glad to be.

Fate said to me, "You be the Czech's own bard,
Sing only songs that stir unhappy souls,
Desperate anger, poverty's sad tolls.
Your song of love its bitterness shall guard,
Its cruel frost, life's summers will defy
It shall heal men, while your heart shall shattered be
Many a role in God's wide world played I,
And what I was, that I was glad to be.

It further said. "Be a soldier, do your best.
Stand as the foremost guard in every strife.
Though spat upon by foes throughout your life,
And rocks of anger pound against your chest,
Though wounded thousand times, as often die,
And feel your own, your peoples' grief and glee."
Many a role in God's wide world played I,
And what I was, that I was glad to be.

Perhaps my Fate holds other dreams in store.
I know I always stood, where stood the right.
And in my heart and soul, all's sound and light.
Fate as from childhood, anew my strength will try,
Let each new day bring new hopes unto me.

Many a role in God's wide world played I,
And what I was, that I was glad to be.

WHAT'S A TEAR?

What's a tear? It is a splendid garnet
Shining through the night with mystic light,
With its glare destroying night's deep shadows
Whose oppressive fears it puts to flight.

What's a tear? It is a cooling dew drop
A hemlock's burning leaf so oft collects,
Yet this dew drop, like an ocean billow,
The splendor of the skies above reflects.

What's a tear? It is a milky path-way,
A silvery light steeped in the skies' blue flame,
In its facets linger lights uncounted,
Countless, timeless lights without a name.

WE TOO MUST DIE

(Cosmic Songs)

The prophets' never dying words
That even we must die . . .
Oh yes, oh yes, we know it well,
The World we can't defy.

Whatever blooms must wither too;
What grows must rot someday.
Even the Earth with all its men
Like a rose will fade away.

We will not grieve our beating hearts
With thoughts of death's last deed.
We'll live our life and live it well
To give the world a lead.

We'll seek the origin of worlds,
The mystic force of sages,
We'll reach down to the base of time
And count the flight of ages.

No mystery . . . no unknown force
Can halt our forward march,
Our souls will ring in clarion tones
Against the heavens' highest arch.

We'll die, but first we'll steep our graves
With glory for our bed,
The whole wide world must come to mourn
And stand with a bowed head.

AN ETERNAL SYMPHONY

(Cosmic Songs)

World! Master Poet! You have passed through aeons long
Before you set the stars in the verses of your song;
Before, each single sun and its planet's varied flowers,
You wove in rhythmic cadences of poetic sparkling showers.
'Ere out of the confusion of your chaotic thought
You brought the suns together and set their wars at nought.
'Ere to the new-born earth you said: "Awake to life!"
When first you set the pace of a heart's pulsating beat,
Brought light to human eyes and said: "Go forth to strife."

World! Master Poet! Your Hymn outlives all time
Your every stanza breathes life's restless, ageless rhyme
And when it blooms, your hands once more enfold
As grateful seeds of life, death's lifeless, pallid mold.
World! Master Poet! What span your Hymns' wide wings?
Darkened mystic depths, across the world's hidden springs.
Tell me how far the wings of your hymns are spread?
When 'cross the sea they blow, the ocean's bottoms rise . . .
When through the land they blow, the earth smolders to the skies.
When o'er the skies they blow, worlds pause as in breathless dread.

World! Master Poet! What meaning holds your Hymn?
All that within it dies, immortally lives on?
There is no beauty known that does not bloom in you,
There is no morn yet born that shines not in your dew.
There is no ray of light that you do not reflect,
And not a flower to which you pay not your respect.

Nor are there feathered throats that do not sing your strain,
No children's laughter where it does not ring out,
There are no tears through which your sorrow does not spout,
No wild despair wherein it does not tug in vain.
There is no struggle that your thunder does not feed,
No martyred hero known through whom you did not bleed.
There is no longing thought in which it does not breathe,
No love, no passion known wherein it does not seethe.
There are no hearts on earth with tender, kindred feeling,
That do not beat in tune with your Hymn's majestic pealing.

World! Master Poet! You are the poet's God
And yet a poet too, in whose footsteps all bards must plod.
And though your Hymn is as spacious as the sky,
What you offer therein, but your mere fragments of your 'I'.
And we who read today the lines you wrote before,
We are enthused, yet say; "The poet felt much more."
You with a creator's joy must share the creator's pain,
And who of those who read, know the anguish your Hymns contain.

FRAGMENTS OF LIFE

(Cosmic Songs)

Green star above, in Zenith's heights,
Shine cheerfully from afar.
From time to time, I stop to think
What dear old friends we are.

'Twas years ago, you heard me shout
In a mirthful, joyous whirl,
When for the first time I embraced
A sweet and lovely girl.

'Twas years ago you saw my face
Turn deathly pale one night,
When to my lips I raised and kissed
Her dead cold hand, in fright.

These are just fragments out of life,
Just bubbles in life's streams.
From time to time, in course of years,
Man thinks of them and dreams.

We'll live through sorrow and through joys,
We'll live through all, some how.
Why does this sudden tear appear?
When nothing pains me now?

LOOK UP ABOVE!

(Cosmic Songs)

My People, raise your head on high
Toward the heavens direct your glance
Behold that there are little stars
Around which, the large ones dance.

Here's the reason why: The little ones
Are made of solid knotty stuff,
While those great, big, obedient stars
Are made of flimsy gaseous fluff.

I trust that as you grasp this thought
Your heart will leap and yearn.
Yes . . . let us be the little star
Around which, the big ones turn.

It can be done, if each of us,
Sees to his own sound stock.
If each of us be hard as flint,
Our nation will be hard as a rock.

A STELLAR RHYTHM

(Cosmic Songs)

Across the heavens the Stars are spilled
Like the heathery flowers of spring,
Tenderly led by the breath of time
They dance in an exulting, joyous ring.
We can barely see them up on high,
To number them, you I would defy.
Though a master at numbers and answers

The Earth and the Moon glide hand in hand,
While the Earth sweeps in a mighty sphere
Around the Sun that shines above,
With a host of planets, lustrous, clear . . .
And even the timeless, burning Sun
Madly revolves 'round another One.
And where is this Sun heading?
Whither its light is shedding?

Let your thoughts soar as they may;
There the stars are as thick as the heathery bloom;
And though you were as old as the Sun itself
Your thoughts could not fathom eternity's doom.
I kneel and gaze at the heaven's face,
My thoughts fly upward into space,
Higher and higher, above the skies . . .
A tear over fills the gazing eyes.

REFLECTION

Within my heart all seems so dead
That words cannot portray,
And when I roam about my heart
A tombstone bars my way.

All about me so desolate . . .
One rose in bloom . . . one bud . . .
Yet this one is so beautiful
As if grown from human blood.

And while it grows, its petals spread
Their stirring blood-red stain,
This rose, my love of humankind . . .
Demanding blood again.

I often tried to kill this bloom
All efforts were in vain,
Its roots remained beneath the ground;
Through the night it grew again.

YOUR WASTED HEAT

(Graveyard Blossoms)

II

It seems that Spring will not arrive this year.
Though it is April, we still welcome the hearth's heat.
While outdoor's icy winds blow far and near,
And a drizzling rain spreads o'er the slippery street.
I am seated near a breath-fogged window pane
And gaze into the ever changing fire,
Into its flaming orange-tinted chain.
Within the stove, sparks fly up to the hood;
Perhaps they are the dreams and the desire
Of by-gone springs that slumbered in the wood.
Their light paints roses on the window haze
And conjures May and Youth within the blaze.

Old weathered man, why stand you in the sleet?
The biting frost blows through your aged bones
And in your beard, the rain drops pearly stones.
Are you afraid to ask for a night's retreat?
Surely there are good people on this earth
To whom true kindness is an inborn trait;
Who curse the world for its poverty and dearth
And the thankless poor, who rebel at their fate.
Yes, you do well that you ask not for love
And firmly bear the lot willed from above.
Why should you bow your head of silver hair;
Oh yes . . . your hair . . . it does appear in truth,
Like a sudden illness that strikes one in his youth.
Perhaps you have not lived your youth's full share,
And some great worry, rather than old age
Deepened the furrow on your cheeks, old sage?
Your eyes gazed at me and I shook in fright,
As if but recently they had lost their sight,
As if to pierce the darkness it had tried;
Glittered once more and then forever died.
Your lip as pale as a violet's faded bloom,
Perhaps had just been blushing like a rose
And lately gave its burning kiss to whom?
A kiss as warm as only young love knows.
And now, a tooth cuts in your lip with pain.
Go aged man and do not sadden me,
My tender heart is tempting me to be
Like kind St. Martin and to play his role again.

Here! Take my cloak and hide your nakedness,
Here's silver; drink; Why think of wretchedness?
His shriveled lips are curved in ridicule,
A feeble smile forces his lips to part;
"Why, don't you know me any more, you fool?
I am your own, your ailing withered heart."

THE ROAD OF LIFE

(Graveyard Blossoms)

III.

Oh mother, better stay at home,
I think I'll find the way.
Were we to part out in the street,
What would the people say?

A little pack with left-overs,
Half of a wasted brain;
Some withered wreaths of bygone Springs;
Half of a heart in pain.

A Sunday shirt of snow-white cloth
Woven of dreams of life;
A shroud of thoughts for when I fall
Exhausted with the strife.

Two shoes protrude from out the pack,
Their soles are strong and tried,
The hide for them came off the back
Of my relentless pride.

AND WHEN I DIE

(Graveyard Blossoms)

IV.

And when I die, my friends, wish 'twere today,
Bury me in the deep woods far away,
Where semi-darkness hovers through the brightest day
Where it is cool, though the summer's hot winds blow,
And where, in narrow streams, the sunrays play;
Where in the moss the choicest flowers grow,
Where rarely sighs a plaintive forest bird,
Sings not a song, but pleads in a warning tone;
And where, from mankind hides, lest it be heard,
Mute, hapless Love, wishing to dwell alone.

As through the woods, alone I passed life's test,
Just dreaming of my happiness and love,
And when I grieved I sang to the skies above.
Hence, when I die, alone I want to rest.

LATER? TOO LATE!

(Graveyard Blossoms)

V.

Love came to me with tender supplication
And shamelessly sought entrance to my nook,
I gauged the maiden with a chilling look
And gruffly mumbled: "Later."

The years passed by. With a mournful supplication
Measuring hopes with a weary, feeble look,
Alone I sought to enter love's white nook.
A voice replied: "Too Late."

THE SCARS OF LIFE

(Graveyard Blossoms)

VIII.

Before me lies a skull white-bleached and furrowed,
My eyes try hard to count each ridge of strife
While in my mind, from out these convolutions,
I weave a living picture of past life.

Love carved this furrow; envy cut this groove;
This one meant bliss; ill fortune that one wrought;
And these few shorter, straighter running furrows
Are they not the paths of some former thought?

As my memory records this deathly picture,
Thus the mind endows the skull with signs.
If in your life you thought but less, old fellow,
How much smoother could have been these lines!

GRAVEYARD BLOSSOMS

IX

Do not weep my comrade, do not worry,
'Cause life's mysteries give you no rest,
Eat and drink and spend life in a hurry,
Deep in your grave you'll have time to digest.

When you die, you will be freed forever,
Only dust will you become again,
And what puzzled here your best endeavor
Still an unsolved puzzle will remain.

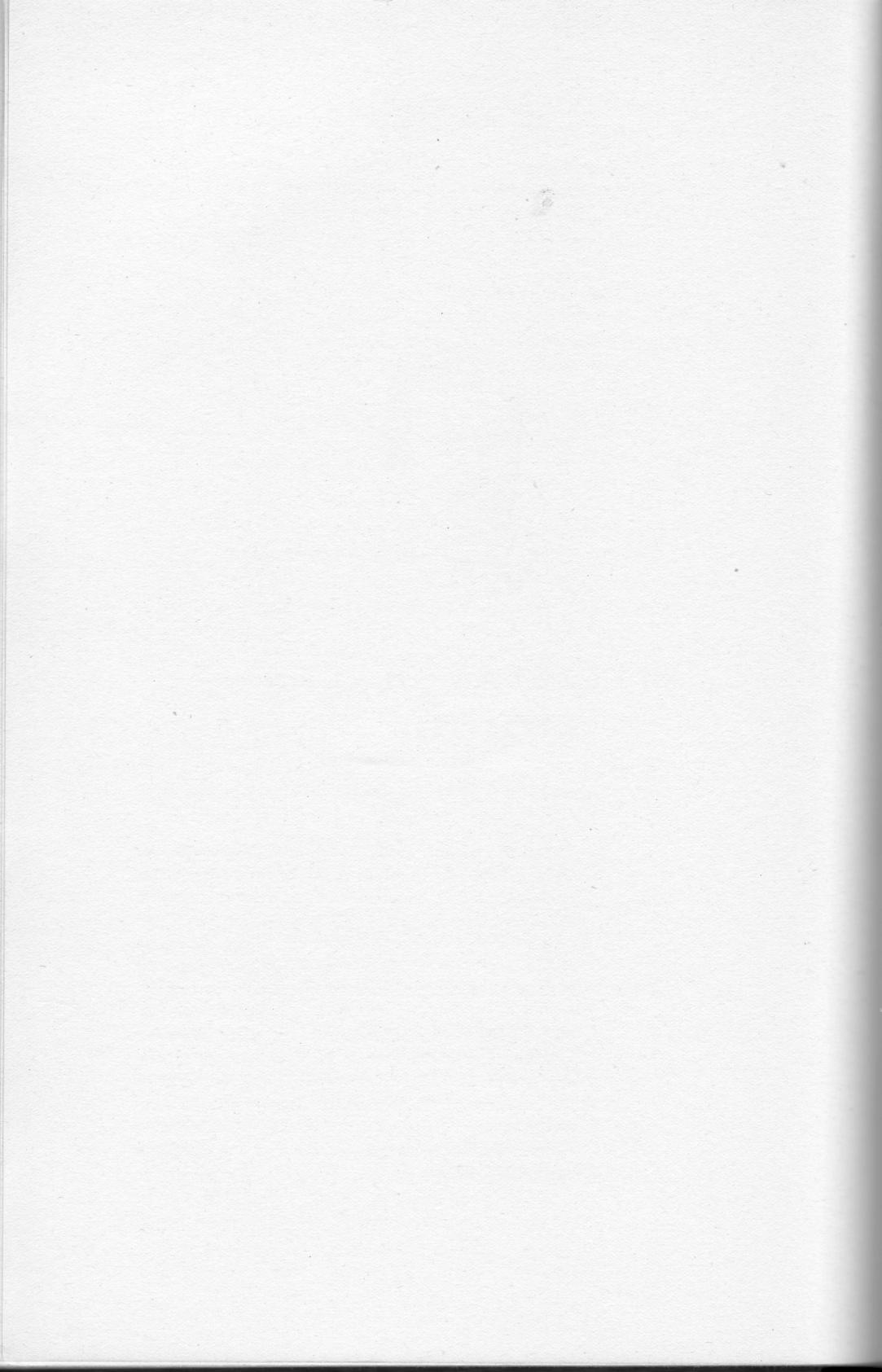
For the very song your mind is weaving
Shall be sung throughout the time of storms,
Vexing falsehoods that have left you grieving
Shall vex other men in other forms.



VITEZSLAV HALEK

(1835-1874)

Vitezslav Halek is justly called the "nightingale of Czech poetry" for in all his works he sings with joyous abandon of the beauties and splendor of nature. Halek was born April 5, 1835, and died at the height of his fame in Prague, October 8th, 1874. Although philosophy claimed Halek's early interest, he soon gave it up to plunge headlong into the fomenting literary currents of his time. Halek worked feverishly in all branches of the belles-lettres, but at all times his lyricism crops forth, even in his heavy tragedies and epic poems. In his lyrical poetry Halek shows traces of the influence of Heine, but free from the latter's cynicism and irony. Halek's complete works, comprising eleven volumes, were published in Prague during the years 1879-87.



IN NATURE

A Hundred years later I came to behold
The grave where I was laid to sleep.
The grave digger, singing one of my songs
Had gathered my bones on a heap.

I said to the man, "Find my heart if you can,
From whence came my song's sad tones."
The man, quite bewildered, searching in vain,
Found nothing but old bleached bones.

He straightened his back, looked up and said:
"Down there, a heart has no worth.
Though many the hearts you treasured before
All smolder to dust in the earth."

He finished. I sighed and haltingly asked;
"Is this what you've accomplished my heart?"
The grave digger said as if to comfort my grief:
"Thus perish all who once played their part."

OUT OF MY SONGS

Out of my songs a throne I shall make,
As did the bards of long ago.
My faithful heart for your scepter take;
Like a diadem, my fame shall glow.

That love be our law, I shall implore
My songs will celebrate your day,
Love's bliss into your soul I'll pour,
Sweet yearnings in your dreams will play.

To you, the singing birds will fly,
Your feet will tread my blooms of mirth,
When I command the stars on high,
To heavens below we shall change the earth.

For you, I'll conquer the hearts of men,
I will bring you Eden back again,
My queen I will proclaim you then,
Where-e'er the world extends its reign.

EVENING SONGS

Spring fluttered in from distant lands
To fill the world with yearning . . .
All hastened forth to greet the sun
From its lengthy dream returning.

The finches flew from out their nests
The children from each shanty,
Bright colored flowers in the fields
Exhaled their scented plenty.

Upon each branch new leaves push forth,
While the song birds chirp above
In every youthful, joyous heart
Sprout tender buds of love.

EVENING SONGS

I dreamt that you had passed away,
I heard the mournful knell
And all about me weeping, sighs,
Lamenting, rose and fell.

How queerly they prepared your bed;
With stone upon your grave.
They asked me that I write a verse
For you there to engrave.

O people, people made of stone
Here, take my heart instead.
And what I did not sing as yet
Engrave above her head.

You disbelieved my deepest love,
My words met your disdain.
Perhaps if this stone speaks to you
It shall not speak in vain.

A LOVELESS WORLD

Then inwardly I mused and asked;
 "How would a love-less world appear?"
'Twould be a barren, lifeless waste
 Without flowers blooming here.

The heart would roam about the world
 'Til grief would end its plight.
'Twould be as sad as it was before
 God said, "Let there be Light."

'Twould be so sad that man alone
 Would not want to tread the sod,
And even the Lord in the heavens above
 Would not want to be a God.

EVENING SONGS

All slumbers now upon the world
 Except the beating heart;
The Lord only knows why this alone
 Ne'er stops, again to start.

Upon God's world, all's stilled and hushed
 Except the heart's glad tones;
The Lord only knows why this alone
 Ne'er with exhaustion groans.

Sleep overtakes the very thought,
 Night follows day's loud din;
Only the heart keeps e'er awake
 To guard our Love within.

EVENING SONGS

Stilled is the whispering of the trees,
The leaves are barely breathing,
The birds are dreaming pleasant dreams . . .
So peaceful, so unheeding.

Upon the skies rose many stars,
All seem so free, so sweeping,
Only the bosom sighs with grief,
'round the heart a pain is creeping.

Within the goblets of the blooms,
The cooling dew is glowing.
Dear God, it seems as if this dew
From my weary eyes were flowing.

IN NATURE

I am no more than yonder rose bud,
No more than a summer's nightingale;
When spring departs, my leaves will wither,
My songs will pass with the Autumn gale.

But as the nightingale rejoices,
And as the scented rose-bud blooms,
Thus too my soul waits for its hour
And all it holds, resounds and booms.

And it suffices for me to know that
When the time was ripe I sang my songs;
Rejoicing in them without sorrow,
Sorrowing in them for my wrongs.

Then let the winds play o'er the grasses
That hide my grave in a far-off dale;
I know that when my life's rose blossomed
I was a singing nightingale.

IN NATURE

I am looking, searching for you man,
I am peering deep into your well,
I want to find your human core
And cast away your outer shell.

I am looking for you with the morn,
I am picking roses for your day,
I am looking for you in the Spring,
I am breathing warmth across your way.

I am looking for you in the fields,
Gathering pollen on my course.
I am looking for you 'neath the oaks
And wish that you knew true remorse.

I am looking for you with the bees
Collecting honey as your prize,
I am looking for you with the birds
And bring delight into your eyes.

I am looking for you with a song
Within your soul, songs' true domain.
I am looking and I'll find you when
You have become a man again.

TALES FROM OUR VILLAGE

My dear old Hamlet in the dreamy peaceful plain,
When I, a weary wanderer, behold you in your place,
I know you gleam to welcome me home again
Like a smile that wreathes a mother's wrinkled face.

I walk between your cottages and gaze;
Where'er I look, part of my heart exclaims with glee.
From every corner dash forth my bygone youthful days,
My soul once more feels the force of youth set free.

All is so known . . . The herdsman with his flock
Tips low his cap and in memories goes back;
My friend, your storie's unexhausted stock
I see it in your eyes, still lives intact.

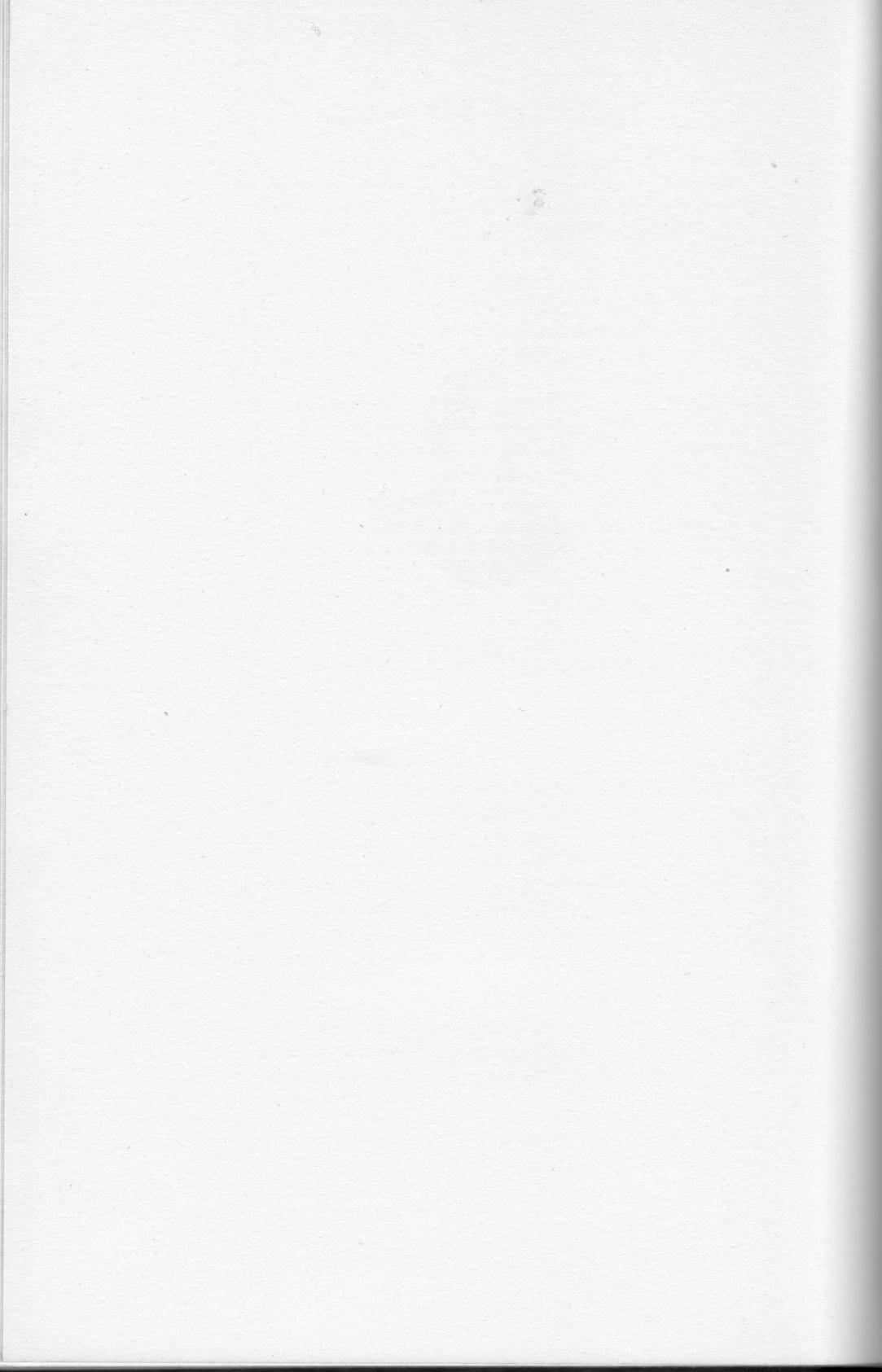
A grave digger goes by with song and spade
To dig anew where an old grave stood alone.
My friend, recall how often you I bade
To tell who slept beneath each weathered stone.

A wagon passes through the waving field,
I know each path, each meadow far and wide
From whence the nightingale to heavens oft appealed
And the quail cried out in unrestricted pride.

A fiddler passes . . . the man can barely see,
I know each mood his ancient fiddle told.
The brawls today are'n't what they used to be,
And as for songs, you cannot beat the old.

A mother with her babe comes by, and pays no heed,
A maid with eyes that speak of secret strife,
Each face seems like an open book, I read,
Inscribed therein, my entire former life.

When the bells ring of an evening from the belfry top
Their tones as warm as dearly treasured friends,
When their echoes keep repeating without pause or stop
I hear therein, the beats that my heart sends.

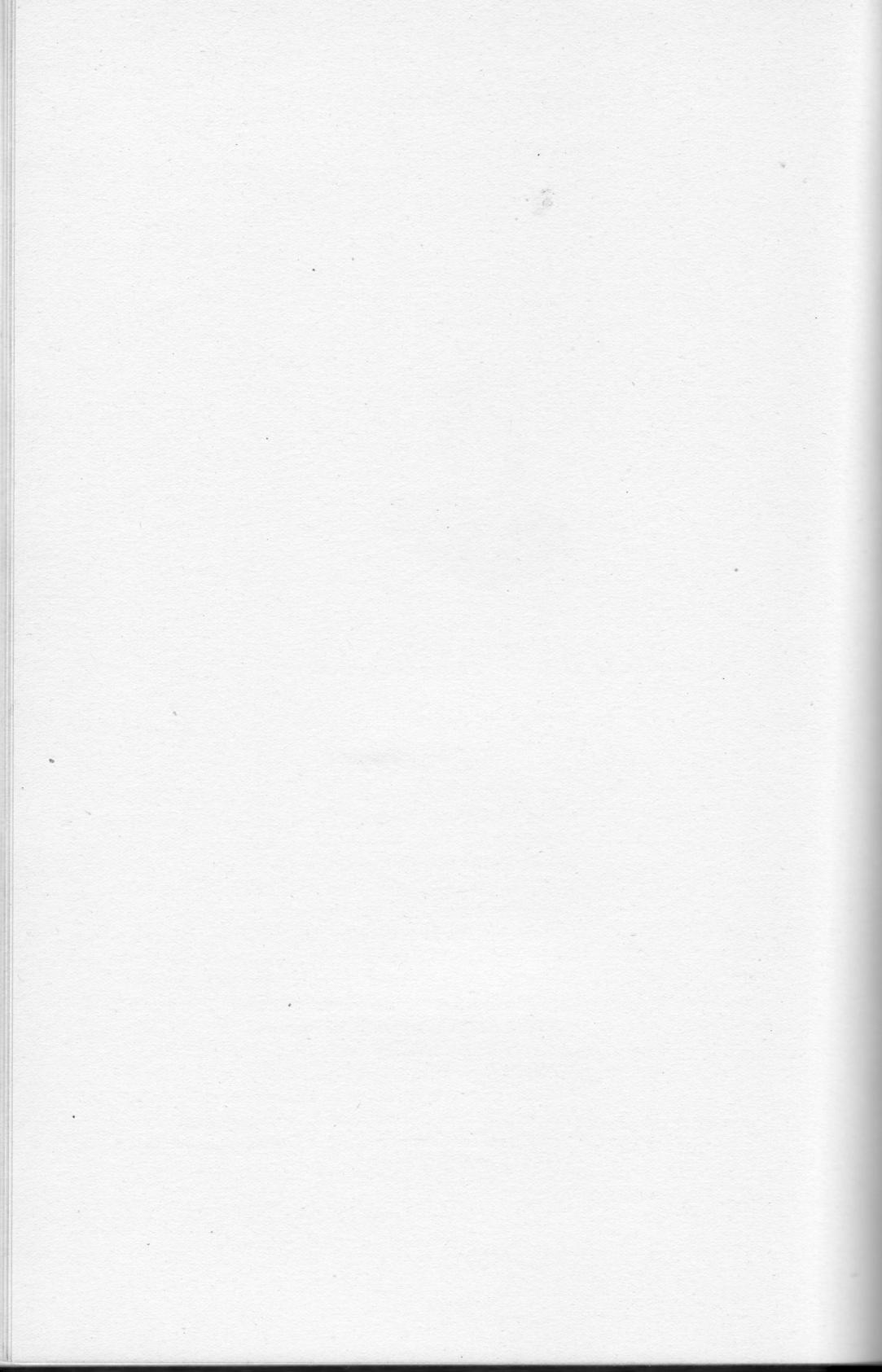




ADOLF HEYDUK

(1835 - 1923)

Adolph Heyduk, a contemporary of Halek and Neruda was born June 7th, 1835 and died, February 6th, 1923. Unlike so many of the Czech poets, Heyduk was not a journalist or lawyer, but spent his active years as a professor of drawing in the technical (real) schools of Pisek. The years spent in the peaceful small town environment had a marked mellowing effect upon Heyduk and his poetry reflects all the soothing tenderness of undisturbed nature. Heyduk's genuinely sincere lyrics are a faithful reproduction of every mood of nature, of every whim of man. His poetry is plain, simple and yet full of beauty and emotional depths. Heyduk's journey to Italy, to Slovakia and to the Caucasus have added richness and breadth to his otherwise local subject matter, and have inspired such works as Southern Tunes, The Cymbal and the Violin and Upon the Waves.



GYPSY MELODIES

I am a gypsy, wild and free,
My forehead is dark and sad;
Only a coarsely woven shirt
My body ever clad.

The woods are my nation and my skies,
From my cap, green branches swing,
A rough-hewn violin I've made
To play on while I sing.

My bed, the softly spreading moss;
The thunder is God's own word.
In spite of all, love forced its way
And my gypsy heart was stirred.

FAREWELL

At last I am parting with my youth,
My joyous years have fled,
My youthful days wave me a farewell;
I refuse to turn my head.

No! No! I cannot stop to pause
No matter how they call.
And yet, I often see those days
When the evening shadows fall.

And yet I often see those days
With my weak and aged eyes,
Waving a snow-white handkerchief,
"Farewell" my childhood cries.

SOUTHERN TUNES

I am torn and tortured by love's all consuming claims,
Burn me and destroy me with your eye's bright flames.
Offer me as a hostage to your deeply heaving sighs,
Pierce my heart, if need be, with your love's sweet ties.

Your breath, a fragrant zephyr that in the springtime blows,
Your breath is sweetly scented, your breath exhaustion knows.
And my love that seeks to still your grief and lessen mine
Bubbles over the goblet like a pearly foaming wine.

And before my passion's cup I fully drain,
In your heaving bosom hid I would remain,
Weave around my neck your lustrous waving tresses,
Cool my boiling blood in love's sweet caresses.

Like a desert steed my passion paws its impatient feet,
Would your breath destroy me with its scorching heat,
And your arms embrace, my limply yielding form,
Till I would feebly totter like an oak tree in a storm.

WINTER

Winter speeds across the plain,
Thunders drum the marching strain,
And what once within me blossomed
Will not bear new fruit again.

Winter settles in the park
Where the trees stand bleak and stark;
With a merry song who'll cheer me
When it's cold and when it's dark?

Winter roams about the grove,
Silenced birds leave in a drove;
'Twill be hard to dream of Maytime
And of roses that once throve.

Winter hastens towards the field
Where frosts have cast their chilling shield.
And I fear that what once pained me
Will again new anguish yield.

Winter grips the forest's wreath,
Blows across the moss and heath;
And I know not how I can live
When my song no more shall breathe.

A LETTER

I tried to write to you that in your eye
My heart bloomed forth into a rose again,
That deep within me, where emotions lie
A nightingale sings love's most tender strain.
That many tales are whispered in its den,
And many buds breathe in its flowered glen;
Into a garden my heart changed at your call;
But all I write, I love you above all.

And I tried to write that my heart wildly quakes
As the meadows stir under the fairies' dancing feet,
When a southern zephyr through their tresses breaks
 And wakes the flowers to love's rustling beat;
And that the strength, concealed within my heart
With songs of joy its secret would impart,
Like the scent that speaks of Spring when shadows fall;
But all I write, I love you above all.

And I tried to write that my thoughts are set ablaze
Like a golden light within a crystal fount,
Like a Morning Star shines through the morning haze,
 Like the bush that burned on Sinai's Sacred mount;
And I tried to write that all my life and might
Was set aflame like a sparkling diamond's light
From whence your soul shines like a fiery ball,
But all I write, I love you above all.

And I tried to write that ne'er shall I forget,
Like a maple ne'er forgets the warmth of Springs,
That I must seek you and still my soul's regret
 Like Saul once sought the harp's love-laden strings.
That you were once my most resplendant song,
That your forehead's gleam will light my grave for long,
Though the wings of death will shield it as a pall,
But all I write, I love you above all.

TORCELLO

Torcello, you distant island,
 Longing drew me to your shores,
In your groves I want to linger
 Here man! Throw away the oars!

Here at last I want to linger
 In the shade of swaying trees,
While my thoughts turn to my country,
 To my home beyond the seas.

And I rested . . . the trees above me
 Showered leaves unto my bed,
And each floweret 'twixt the grasses
 Waved at me its nodding head.

Thence I gazed far in the distance,
 Listening to the ocean's sound,
To whose elemental beauty,
 No one yet the answer found.

And while gazing, thinking, dreaming,
 Something stirred my soul again,
Like young birds . . . these sweet songs fluttered
 Longing for their native plain.

I WAS EVER THINKING

I was ever thinking of unknown, distant lands,
Of flowered banks and palm trees that stretch in waving bands

Thinking of aged lions, of gulls in swooping flocks,
Of long forgotten cities and old bells on castle tops.

Thinking of lofty mountains and deep, unfathomed seas,
Of a splendid golden castle on a glass hill beyond the trees.

But now I think no longer of happy dreams gone by,
I think only of you dear and of my joy when you were nigh.

Now I am thinking only of each winter's cold I knew
And if the grave you sleep in, is not too small for you.

I am forever thinking if in your verdant, grassy mound,
Your casket of bright metal is o'er weighted with the ground.

And I am ever thinking if you can see me sigh and yearn,
See how my heart grows weary, see how my sad eyes burn.

And I am ever thinking, throughout the day and night,
If the shroud of white we gave you, is not a bit too tight.

Dear, I am ever thinking if you could take me with,
As I used to take you, when you sighed or cried a bit.

Yes, I am ever thinking that when all my grief is past
In your embrace, my dear one, I'll find happiness at last.

A D R E A M

Signorina, you will not believe me,
 You will not believe my dream of yore;
I beheld a sea, yet not an ocean
 A heaving plain that touched the Grecian shore.

It was evening and the town was quiet,
 Just the moon shone brightly overhead,
And we walked together, slowly, speechless,
 Signorina, where our fancies led.

And I told you much, while we were walking,
 And so strangely you gazed at my face
That the fire of your night-black glances
 Like a shot, found in my heart a place.

You gazed strangely as if you were reading
 All the wishes of my burning breath,
Wishing to live with you in our amours,
 Signorina 'till we part in death.

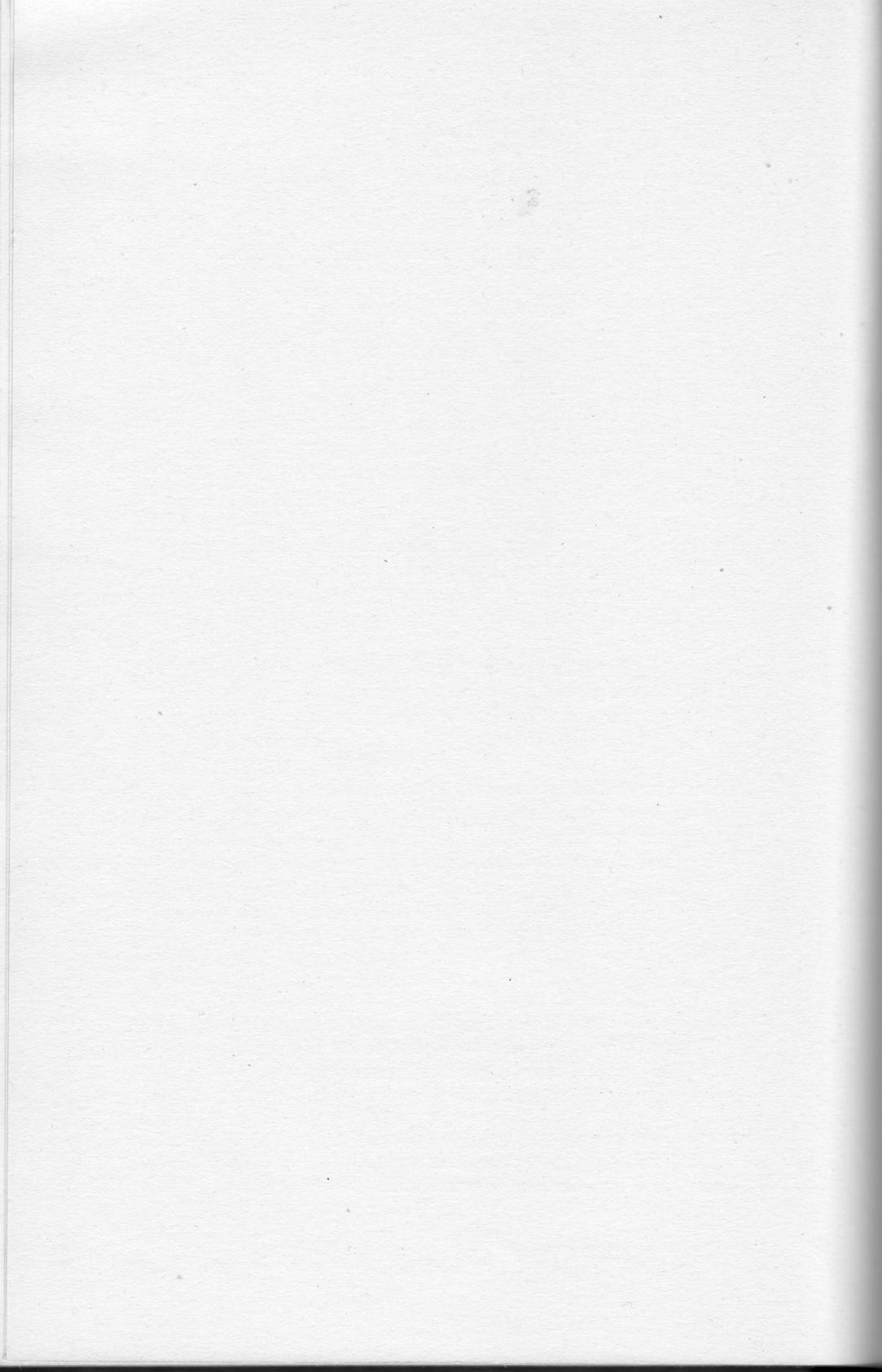
You read all and then you gazed intently
 At the sculptured steeds with eyes of fire,
At the steeds upon St. Mark's old statue.
 They came down like a bullet shot in ire.

You commanded, we leaped to the saddles,
 You on one and I upon the other,
By an escort each of us was followed,
 Signorina, thus we sped together.

Love and Sorrow were our silent escorts
 As we sped 'cross plain and mountain crest,
Flying like an eagle, swift, unhampered,
 Speeding with no word nor look nor rest.

Well known regions . . . You know where we hastened?
 Toward my native land we turned our flight,
But what more I saw in my wild dreaming
 My remorseful heart cannot recite.

For we left behind our wildest rider,
 Only three of us kept up the pace,
You and I and Sorrow, Signorina . . .
 Love was lost in fate's deceitful race.

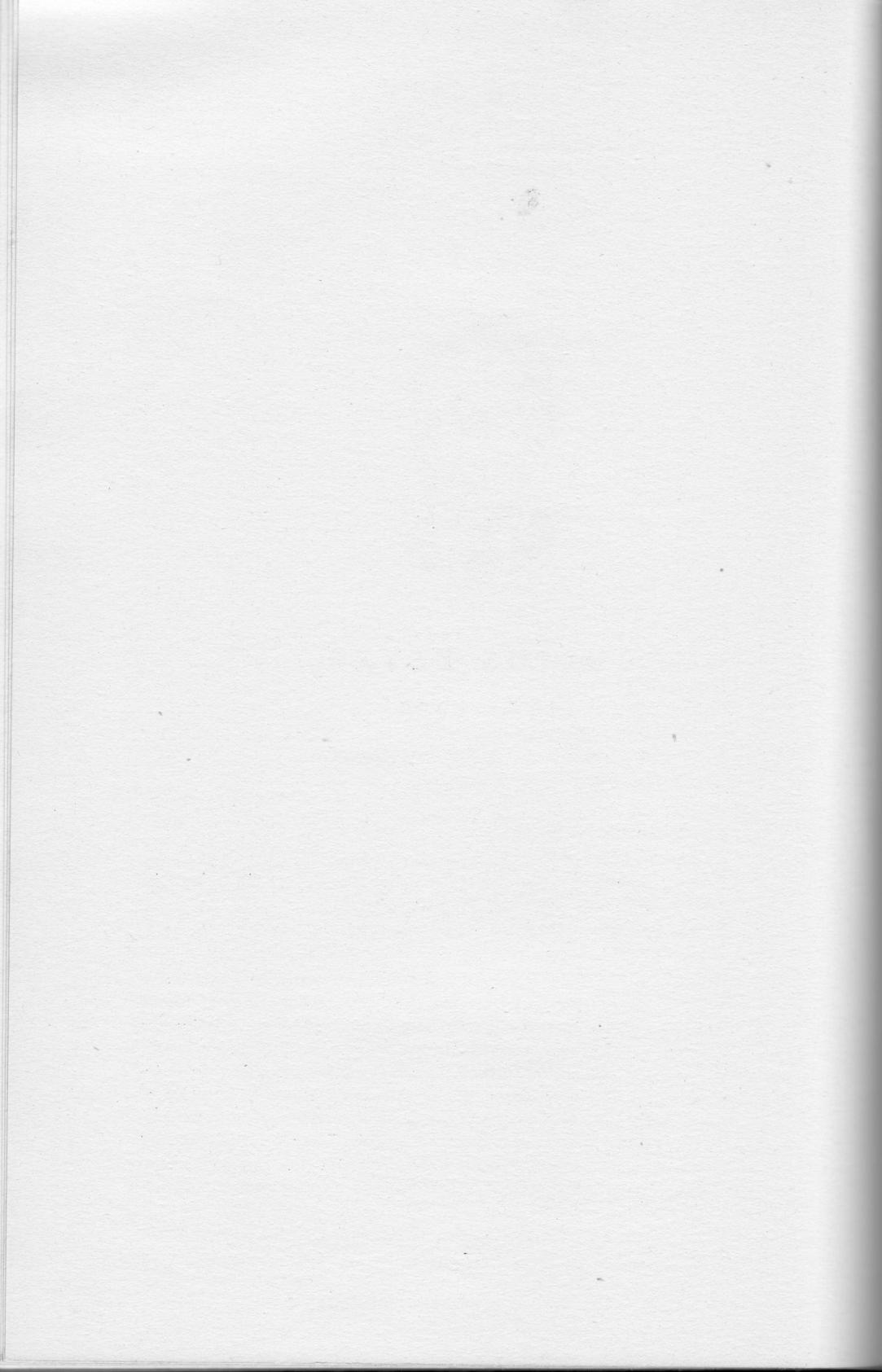




JULIUS ZEYER

(1841-1901)

Julius Zeyer represents a truly cosmopolitan literary type whose works show the influence of the French-German-Jewish blood coursing through his veins. Unlike so many other poets Zeyer was born of wealthy parents, and had the opportunity of education and travel denied to others. Zeyer was born in Prague, April 26th, 1841, where he died on January 29th, 1901. It seems that the elegiac beauty of old Prague had a marked influence upon Zeyer, and that under this guidance the deeply impressionistic poet turned consciously away from German and Viennese influences to a deep penetration into the realm of Czech history and philosophy. To offset the prevalent German influence Zeyer reached out into the heroic literature of old France and the Christian nobility found in the pre-Raphaelite literature in Italy. Zeyer is a true aristocrat of art, who turns away from the grey commonplace of the present to the inspiring glory of historical yesterdays.



I AM SO LONELY

I am so lonely, God above,
Like the pear-tree yonder;
Fear and sorrow hand in hand,
Through my sad soul wander.

In the pear-tree, God above,
At least the birds are singing;
While despair and agony
Through my soul are ringing.

You pour your sunshine, God above,
Over the tree at will;
Have you not a single ray,
My darkened soul to fill?

DONNATELLO, A Legend

All Florence is astir with hum and haste,
For Donnatelo's statue is complete.
Beneath a canopy of stony lace
That towards the sky projects its daring arch,
Behold! St. George stands with his polished shield,
The symbol of Florentian liberty;
That statue of sublime simplicity
To whom its maker gave eternal life,
To whom he gave his soul's unfettered flight,
Upon whose brow he wrote heroic deeds.

All through the day, the people mill about,
Rejoicing around the gleaming, marble form.
Young Donnatelo's name resounds throughout the town
Like music or a triumphant battle song.
The air is so suffused with all this praise,
That the shouts and words of unrestrained delight
Reach high into the sculptor's darkened room.

There, pale and musing, in his shaded nook,
Sits Donnatelo, wrapped in a dark cloak,
As if such hollow fame had chilled him through.
Yes, every artist suffers martyrdom;
For in the secret recess of his heart
The worm of doubt relentlessly gnaws on :
'Tis only when the slurs of envy born
Spatter with venom the products of his soul,

That the artist stills these gnawing, prying doubts,
To let defiance take their place.
Then with a sparkling eye and twitching pallid cheeks,
The quiet artist plunges into the fray,
Like a tigress leaping at an enemy
That stalks to slay her unsuspecting young.
His suffering exceeds the tigress' pains,
For she gave only milk to feed her suckling young,
But the artist gave the blood from out his heart!

Thus Donnatello spends in prying thoughts,
That slowly passing, drawn-out, sunlit day.
And when, at length, the streets at dusk are stilled,
And the starry splendor of the dreamy night
Blazes in glory over the sleeping town,
Then Donnatello slowly opens his doors
And pausing on the threshold of his home,
Thus muses, in his aching burdened heart.

"What means the peoples' praise and blame to me?
'Tis just a wind that comes and goes at will
And does not leave a trace once it is gone.
But humbly, deeply I will bow my head
Before my master's most judicious words,
Because his lips are like a tent of truth,
His soul a shrine of all that is beautiful.
Upon my temples he alone shall place
A laurel wreath or else a hawthorn leaf."
Then with a quickened step he hastens forth
And finds his aged master still awake,
Upon a roof from whence the aged eyes can see
The sleeping city and the whispering stream;
The scented gardens' darkened leafy trees
Where blazing glow-worms flicker here and there;
And the bluish wreath of far Apennine hills
Above whose summit dreams the yellow moon.

"My master!" Donnatello pleads, "My dearest friend!"
The old man's eyes, filled with the sparkling rays
His soul absorbed from out the glimmering skies,
Are fixed upon the pupil's pallid cheeks.
"I waited for you, Donnatello mine."
The pupil grasps the outstretched bony hand
The master offers him in welcoming,
And in a voice with passion tremulous
He speaks and pours in words his burdened soul:

"Father and friend and teacher most sublime,
You, who have guided my uncertain steps
Across the stony, steep and winding road
That leads men to the dizzy heights of fame,
Upon your soul's salvation, answer me!
You saw my work, the statue hewn of stone.
I placed therein all that my soul could feel;
My pains, my daring flight, my starry dreams,
And all the strength and fervor of my youth;
My very thoughts, my all, I placed therein.
My soul possessed a daring, mighty dream.
It would attain what cannot be attained
By any mortal man upon this earth . . .
I would create a perfect work of art.

These haughty words, perhaps, are blasphemy?
Perhaps you'll say to me, "Such perfect work
Can only rise from out the deep unknown
From whence the world bloomed as a lotus bud;
That faultless is alone the work of God
To whom it is a sacred privilege."
Then why did he inculcate in my soul
This boundless yearning, striving for the heights?
He did not light the spark of genius
That it should smoulder in me aimlessly,
As an eternal torment? No. He chose
That it should flare forth as the glowing sun!
I know my hands fashioned all they could,
The highest point that I can aspire to;
And heights to which my spirit has not soared,
I shall not reach nor ever more attain!
My master see, I humbly bow my head.
Now let your lips their judgment freely pass.
Tell me if perfect is the work I have done.
If not, what is it that my statue lacks?"

When Donnatello finished thus his plea,
The master placed a kiss upon his lips;
He deeply gazed into the youth's sad eyes
And with a gentle smile thus answered him.
"My Donnatello, you, not I, have said
That God alone creates without a fault.
There is but one thing that your marble lacks . . .
I will not tell you what. That you must solve,
When you have found the answer come again to me."

The words cut deeply through the pupil's heart,
But silently, without a sigh he left,
The master knowing not, that bitter frost
Crept slowly into Donnatello's soul.

From that night on, illness and secret grief
Have settled on the artist's burdened mind;
No trace remains of his once cheerful smile,
Around his lips, nor in the sunken eyes.
Day after day, he prods and meditates
Before the statue, musing restlessly,
Seeking its faults and finding more and more,
Until, at length, the statue seems to him
One huge mistake throughout its stony mass
And as to dust of hopes, crumbles the edifice
Fashioned by Donnatello from his dreams,
Burying in the ruins' smouldering dust
All that was once immortal in the man.
And of his being, nothing more remains
But that which slowly turns to dust again,
And Donnatello sadly faces death . . .
He even lacks the strength to leave his rooms,
And sits all day within the sunlit door,
An infirm, aged man, whose dying eyes
Are fastened far beyond, upon his towering work,
And those who pass his feeble staring form
Bathe with their tears his blue-veined, wasted hands;
And maidens shower roses in his lap,
Like flowers thrown into a gaping grave . . .
Then came the day he took unto his bed
From which it was his lot never more to rise,
And Donnatello for his master sends
To come to him and bid him farewell.

The master comes into the silent room,
Where stream, like gold, the warm rays of the sun
And where the black-birds' sparkling song is heard
As if to cheer once more, with song and light
The sadly disillusioned, dying heart.
The master speaks, his voice replete with grief;
"What pain tormented you, angelic soul?
What broke the lily blossom of your life?
What grieved you so that I, an aged man,
Over your death-bed tear my snow-white hair?"

And Donnatello feebly answers him;
Before I die, my master, quickly speak!
You said one thing alone, my statue lacks.
What is this need? What is the fault you saw?"

The master speaks: "All that it lacks is speech."

Then Donnatello cries with reborn joy,
His eyes once more are lit with happiness.
He whispers faintly: "Happily I die."
And painlessly sinks to eternal dreams
Like a bird who falls asleep, fatigued with song,
When the sun has set beyond the mountain top.

TO A WHITE HOUSE IN THE OLD GARDEN

A wanderer paused upon his weary way
And in fatigue, leaned on a heavy cane.
His eyes roamed slowly across the rolling plain,
He heaved a burdened sigh and softly spoke:

"You old white house, hid in the garden's shade
So far away beyond the mountain's range,
The swallows are returning from the South
And looking for their old, deserted nests
Along your coping, and you will welcome them.
But I will never more return to you.
I'll never cross the doorstep dear to me
Where she, who bore me and gave me my life,
Paused every evening for a little while
To see the stars shine through the branches of the trees.
To Her, who died, the Stars are now the steps
Beyond which rest the mysteries of God,
And where the eyes of those who passed beyond
Fill with strange luster. But their shadows still
Fall darkly upon the hearts of those
Who yet must wait for death upon the dreary earth.

You old white house, hid in the garden's shade,
Tell me if souls of lifeless things are similar
To our souls, that never can be taught
How to forget their sorrows and their ills.
You old white house, hid in the garden's shade,
Tell me if you are grieved when strangers' steps

Re-echo through your halls. And are you waiting
If I will return, like the swallows to their nests,
To dream once more beneath your aged roof
Those wondrous dreams . . . to list and hear again
Her words of blessing, who has passed away,
Words that still linger within your very walls
To blend at night, when the strangers soundly sleep,
With the sweet and dreamy whispering of the trees."

Thus spoke the wanderer . . . and a gleaming tear
Fell to the dust of that winding, endless road
That stretched so far away . . To where? . . To where . . ?

R O M A N C E

Angrily the King addressed her:
"All my glory without blemish,
My heroic heart and fervor
I laid at your feet to trample;
I bent low my back that never
Bent before in dumb submission,
Bent before you and your beauty,
But in vain; And now, what happened?
Your bright eyes, made to be worshipped,
Eyes that barely seemed to see me
When in awe I gazed upon them,
Whither have your glances wandered?
Full of tears and deep compassion,
Full of love they shine, like starlight,
Falling on a man unhonored,
Without name or wealth or power,
On him all your love was showered
Like alms given to the paupers."

To the King she thus gave answer:
"Master, 'tis the truth you've spoken.
Yes, I gave my love completely
To this man who is unhonored.
Man without a name or power.
You may laugh or storm in anger
Just as long my heart rejoices.
In mocked humbleness, oh Master,

Was concealed your pride unconscious,
And this trait so poorly covered,
My own vanity had tempted.
Then my pride to earth had crumbled,
Fell to naught before his greatness
That knew not own worth or measure.
Sir, believe me, 'twas a prayer
That had from his eyes descended
Like a call from depths abysmal.
He was captivating, sire,
Far more so, than others, master.
And my soul steeped deeply, fully,
In his soul, where it shall linger
Evermore in love unending.

THE GREEN VICTOR

(An Excerpt)

'Twas then it seems, that I began to weave
A daring, never-ending dream of life.
I felt so sweetly happy, yet so sad,
It seemed that through a fog I visioned all,
As in the fleeting moments, long ago
While listening to father's beating heart,
And half in dream, I watched with keen intent
The rising of the moon above the woods.
My wondering eyes kept gazing high above
Resting upon the blossoms on the tree,
And higher, higher to the vaulting skies,
My father once had likened to an oak.
For from the birth of time it spreads above the earth
Its endless, all-embracing leafy top
Within whose branches nestles the golden bird
Known as the 'Sun' by those who in the shade
Of this eternal oak enjoy the fruits of life.
Behold! Bright stars massed yonder in the sky,
Words of surprise escaped my open lips
When I beheld that rare, bewildering scene.
Above my head a green star brightly shone;
'Twas fairer than it e'er seemed before,
Glittered and then as quickly disappeared.
I felt the star, an omen meant for me,
Bowed low my head, and quietly returned.
From that night onward I have sought to find

With longing eyes, that strangely shining star;
But all in vain . . . When father led me far
Along a silvery river's winding bank
Where in the midst of woods he built a home
That I forget the castle we had left behind,
On orders of our old ancestral Gods,
'Twas there again I saw my shining star
When in the moment of my mother's death
I fell to depths of utter sheer despair,
And when I called upon the Gods of Death
To bring me solace and to comfort me,
The Star's green lustre seemed a sign to me,
A note of greeting that my mother sent,
And my weary, troubled heart found peace again.

KING ABGAR

Pale in his beauty like a broken blossom
King Abgar, ruler of Armenia,
Reclined upon his bed in distant Rome,
Far from his kin. It was a night of dreams,
Rome, bathed in the sunset's liquid gold,
Stretched at his feet, a vision of wondrous splendor
A dream but rarely dreamed by mortal man
Since Time began to measure off its flight.
The pride of Rome, its buildings towered to the skies
And further, to the foot of the bluish hills,
A sea of temples and of palaces
Of porphyritic columns, statuettes
Merged softly with the dreaming sombre groves
And with the mystic aromatic gardens.

But Abgar turned away his cheeks and sighed.
Looked away from that imposing, splendid view;
And his weary head, in an exhausted doze
Fell to the pillows. The enchanting air
And all the splendor of the Ceasars of old Rome
Did not affect or move his worried soul.
Caesar Augustus, who had been his host
For full three years and who loved the ailing youth,
And highly praised his sentiments and thought,
Approached his couch upon the balcony
And said to him; "O Abgar, King of Kings,
Tell me when will that sad smile disappear.

When will it leave you? It seems like a reproach.
What ought I do to make you happier?
My theaters, my combats and my games
Fail to amuse you and you coolly look
On the world's wonders. Why are you so sad?
You are the ruler of a renowned land,
And youthful too and like Appolo, beautiful,
O, tell me then
What would you have me do? I, master of the world
Promise on oath to gratify your wants."

Thus spoke Augustus. And the King replied;
"Do I know that? Deep in my heart I feel
Such all-embracing, unlimited longing
For aught unknown, that with grief I am dying.
From early childhood I was melancholy
And with the years, my longing only grew
Until I nearly died. One day my mother
Spoke to me and said. "Dear child, Rome is the center
Of all the world and Augustus its ruler,
Is the light of Rome. Go, hasten to his city.
Perhaps you'll quench your soul's thirst at his fountain
Some great ambition may inflame you there
And lend you wings. Go forth! Return in health!"
Thus she advised. I listened and am here.
You tried and did all any man could do.
Your friendship and its gifts I hold most dear,
And clearly see the greatness of your reign.
Rome is a wonder . . . But, my master, still
I am not well . . . The protests of my soul
Outclamor all . . . I shall perish with my grief.

Augustus hear me! Permit me to return
To my mother and my distant native land."

A long-drawn sigh broke off these bitter words
And vainly pleaded the mighty emperor,
That Abgar stay in Rome. At length, the Roman yielded,
Bade Abgar farewell. Two heralds sped ahead
With this plaintive message to the mother;
"I am returning with a saddened soul
Just as I left the Armenian hills.
Prepare a chamber for me where the sun
Creeps in at evening for a fleeting look
As if it tried to say: "Come after me."

The messengers sped forth and Abgar followed;
Slowly he rode a grieving, youthful king,
Over high mountains and wide stretching fields,
And rivers as blue as the heaven's arching dome.
And when he reached Armenia's steep hills
And reached the city, his mother welcomed him,
Suppressing tears and just a feeble smile
That tried to hide them, spoke their eloquence.

"Welcome, dear child! Be welcomed to your home,"
She whispered as she led Abgar away
To his secluded, longed-for quiet room
Where the dying rays of the swiftly setting sun
Crept through a darkening wall of cypress trees.
An ivory inlaid bedstead stood prepared;
And across the polished, mosaic floor were spread
Colorful Persian carpetries and cloths;
A harp was hanging near the open door;
And in the corners, vessels of heavy gold
Held blushing apples and pomegranates.

King Abgar knew full well what all this meant.
According to his people's old belief,
The angels linger over a sick-room bed
Waiting until the Lord of life and death
Gives forth the sign for the soul to either flee
Or else remain within a healthy form.
These Persian rugs for the angels are prepared
To rest upon, the while the tempting fruits
Refresh them with their scent, and the stringed harp
Hangs near so every visitor that comes
To cheer the sick man with a kindly word
Or with a warming hand-clasp or a smile,
Can strike the silver strings
To amuse the souls . . .
All this Abgar knew, as he gave his mother a melancholy smile,
Removed the harp, and rested peacefully
His weary head sinking into the lap
Of her who bore him. The mother slowly rose,
As if to show her strength, she stilled a rising sigh,
And smothering her weeping soul's lament,
Began to humor him with softly spoken words:
"Apparently, Rome cannot heal all hearts?
I thought as much and while my child was gone,
Seeking in vain, away from our shores,
Wherewith to still a grieving, ailing soul,

I found, perhaps, the solace that you sought." "When questioningly Abgar raised his head, The mother thus continued, with a smile; "You will not guess! But I will now explain. During the months you dwelt in distant Rome, I sent my messengers to foreign lands That with their brush, they capture on the cloth The prettiest of maidens of all lands.

If we but find the one whose very touch Will ope the portals of your enclosed soul Than all the flowers, hid within its depths Will rise to light, beneath the magic touch." Upon these words, she motioned with her hand. A slave drew wide a drape of precious cloth And a host of artists stood beyond the door, Each carrying a painted masterpiece Of some fair maiden from a distant land.

King Abgar flushed, turned sulkily away, And only when his mother begged of him He looked, but showed no interest or warmth, And in his mother's eyes, hope swiftly died, Hope that had risen in a troubled heart. When all the artists left, the mother saw One, who still lingered at the open door, Without a picture, a strangely lonely man, With cheeks of pallor and bright burning eyes. He waited in his dark, close-fitting cloak.

"Where is your painting?" kindly asked the queen.

Without a word, he loosed his heavy cloak; And rays of light illumined the dark room With the light of stars. This light poured From out the fringes of a folded, snow-white cloth.

King Abgar stirred with ill concealed foreboding. "You have brought me news?" he asked. "Then speak, good man

The artist approached the king and his words flowed As from afar. They sounded dreamily Like the winds that blow through the cypress trees. As thus he told the king this narrative:

"Commanded by your mother, I went forth
To where the Jordan flows. Judea's women
Blinded me with their beauty. Each one seemed
More beautiful to me. I heard of one,
A sinner she was called, and this was said of her;
That she had met a strangely gifted man
Who made of her a saint with but a glance.
I was so curious, that I set out
At once to reach the seat of Judea
Where she dwelt alone. And the nearer I approached
The more I heard about this gifted man
Whom men called Holy. Wearily, at length I came
To far Jerusalem. My mind over filled
With thoughts of this strange man, and I forgot
To seek the sinner of whose varied charms
They spoke throughout that distant, foreign land.

My King, 'twas there that I saw Jesus Christ.
His look contained more in one passing glance
Than could be stated in the words of man.
I knelt before him and I humbly begged
Of him the right to paint his countenance,
Hoping that I could bring to you, My Lord,
His shining features to Armenia.
Christ smiled and nodded in a dreamy way
And I began to work. But all in vain.
My hands just trembled and into my eyes
Rose unchecked tears; My heart began to beat
With so much sadness and unbridled joy,
That I was blinded and could no longer work.
Thrice I attempted to record those lines
With brush on canvas and thrice ill luck
Filled my soul with despair, and wretchedly
I hid my tear-stained face. Then Christ, who saw
My struggling grief, came near and said to me
Softly; "Man, cease your sorrowing lament,
For I will help you." From his mother's hand
He took a white cloth and gently buried there
His holy countenance in the soft wool web.
That very moment, Mighty miracle!
His features shone upon the snow-white cloth
As brightly as a star that gleams above.
And his holy picture, look, rests in my hands."

Upon these words, he unfolded the cloth,
And Abgar, seeing Christ's sweet countenance
Fell to his knees, and an unbounded joy
And holy ardor stirred him fervently,
And joyously, 'mid tears, he sighed and said;
"My soul is healed at last and grieves no more."
Then he began to kiss Christ's saintly cheek.
With pleading hands, he begged the artist speak
And tell him more of Christ. The artist spoke
And told about Christ's mission on this earth;
Spoke of his holy life and miracles;
About Christ's more than human kindness;
About God's kingdom and the destruction that
Perils the sons of man in Judea.
The night passed thus and with fatigue
King Abgar fell into a troubled sleep.
And when he woke, he said: "Send messengers
To far Canaan and let them take to Christ
The message that I will entrust to them."

He took a parchment and wrote in words of gold:
"O Saviour! O son of God on earth!
I have heard about you and your many deeds.
And learned that, in their blindness, Christ, your kin
Plot ill against you. Listen to my plea!
I have a wondrous city, dreaming in a grove;
A golden palace; all is open wide
My city and my home of famed kings.
Come to me, Christ! My soul is weak with grief."

The messengers sped swiftly to Canaan,
But came too late for on a wooden cross,
Christ gave his soul into the hands of God.

Then sadly they returned, with heavy feet,
As men who know that grief shall follow them
Into the home of one whom they hold dear.
While the heralds plodded on their weary way,
King Abgar lingered between life and death
Upon the bed within his darkened room.
"If they would only come," he prayed incessantly,
With his mother who, with grief, bent over him
As a willow-tree bends over a lonely grave.
With the night at length the messengers returned

And whispered haltingly, their grievous news
To the queen. King Abgar slept and did not feel
The flow of burning tears that fell
Upon his wasted head; nor did he feel
The mother's greying, gently stirring hair
With which she deftly wiped the tears away.
Suddenly, Abgar opened wide his eyes
And the room was filled with pure-white, blinding rays,
And He, who was to have been Abgar's guest
Appeared in all the burning glory there
And with a tender voice of mystic dreaminess
He said to Abgar; "I came unto your house
To realize the wish you had expressed.
Your city is wondrous, dreaming in the grove,
But far more wondrous is my city, O King!
Come with me hence! Your soul will rest and heal."

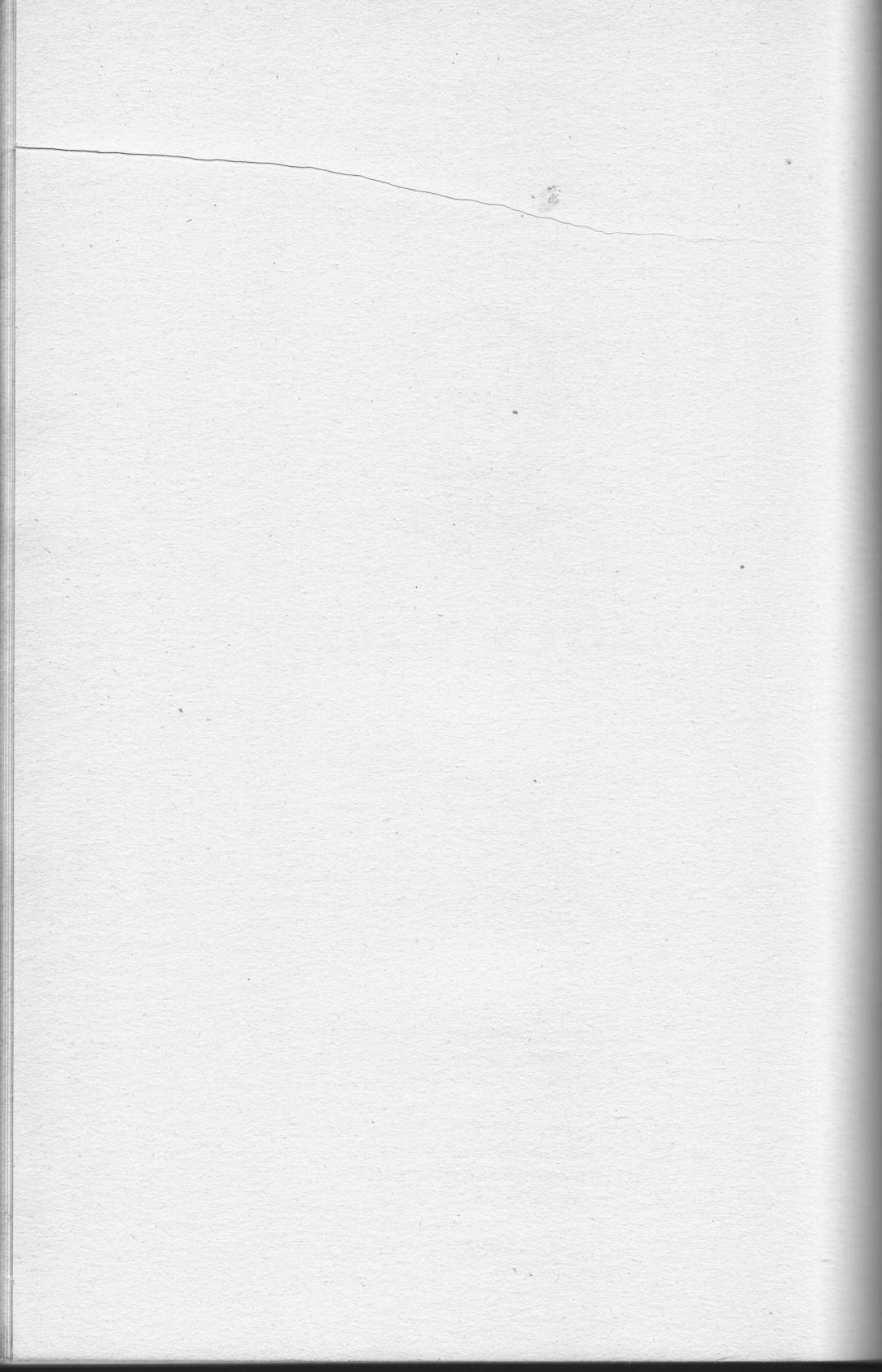
And while the mother, tremulous with grief,
Pressed Abgar's body to her aching heart,
His soul went up with Christ. For he was not
Of those whose kingdom is upon the Earth.



JOSEF V. SLADEK

(1845-1912)

Josef V. Sladek ranks high as a poet and a translator as well. He was born in Zbirov, October 27th, 1845, and died in 1912. After completing his philosophic studies at the Charles University of Prague, Sladek left for America, where he spent two years (1869-70). No doubt that this brief but important period had marked influence upon Sladek and made possible his translations of Longfellow's Hiawatha ,Byron's Hebrew Melodies, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, and many Shakespearean plays. His works include Poems (1875) Sparks at Sea (1880) On the Threshold of Paradise (1883) Sunshine and Shadows (1881) and others. Sladek's poetry ranges from tender dreaminess to bold manly resolve. Between his lines seeps a constant stream of tender love, combined with bitter hate of every form of treachery and deceit. He is sincere and convincing whether it be sparks of humor or darts of disdain that fly like sparks from off the anvil of his creative genius.



NOTHING ELSE

We dream a little bit, are happy for a while,
We love a little bit and hold one another too.
We wreck a little bit our happiness and smile,
And then for e'er we say our parting Adieu,
Nothing else . . .

This may last for just a wink; or for ages we may roam;
Who wearies of the pause may hope and hope again.
The dead find ample time to wait beneath the loam,
The dead will wait the while we may despair in vain.
Nothing else . . .

WE KNOW NOT . . .

How came we to this world, which was then as it is now
 We know not.
About the cold black clod that some day will fill our grave
 We know not.
Though half of our life in dreams we live, true throbbing life
 We know not.
What we were before we came, it matters not that
 We know not.
Then why worry what we'll be, when no longer we shall be?
 We know not.

IN SOLITUDE

Contentment breathes from your bosom,
Peace from your shaded eyes,
Hold me closer to you
That I may know where my happiness lies.

Just gaze at me, gaze longer,
Prolonged is the sorrow I've borne,
But your smile now falls upon it
Like a sunray at the break of morn.

My soul is light and gay now,
So peaceful, warm, unstirred,
The eyes with tears are moistened;
How could this have occurred?

MY HAPPINESS

My happiness has flown away,
I seek it with tear-filled eyes;
And people come to cheer me and say;
"It can't be otherwise."

Oh, yes, good people, time will change,
Believe me, it will be found.
For it is not so very far,
Just a few feet beneath the ground.

FROM DESTINY'S HAND

From Destiny's hand I took my lot and toil;
Like a seed sown at random upon the black soil.

Like a seed of rich grain that grows 'neath a warm clime
And leans towards the earth in the fullness of time.

It blossoms and grows, yields a seed and no more;
Like a seed I too visit on earth's fertile shore.

Thus lives each man, though a leader or slave;
I relish my life and fear not the grave.

To earth that once bore it, the stalk bends in twain;
In a heavenly garden, I will blossom again.

I COULD NOT FORGET

The clouds are sailing toward the west,
They call me from above in vain,
As I recline my head to rest . . .
"Come with us, once, come west again.
Perhaps out there you could forget."

The clouds have passed; I too passed by
Where the oceans roll and mountains rise,
My path was marked for me on high,
By troubled clouds - - - two troubled eyes.
These, too, I never could forget.

Life is so fair beyond the sea
Where God all mankind rules and shields,
Where arms are strong and hearts are free
Beautiful are the rolling fields,
To them who have learned to forget.

I stood where lands and oceans meet,
Gazing beyond the water's foam.
And though this were the Eden's seat
I could not rest away from home,
Because I learned not to forget.

Keep passing westward at your pleasure,
Men and clouds and birds of flight
But for all your wealth and treasure
Our poverty and plight
This I never could forget.

BUTTERCUPS

I dearly love those rich moist meadow plains
Covered in Spring with gay buttercups of gold;
I love the winding brook with its waters cold,
And all that grows and breathes and blooms again.

I love the lapwings, as through the grass they breeze,
And the butterflies beneath the sun's carress,
The aged willow in its newly fashioned dress,
The woodpecker, as it drills the tan-barked trees.

I love to see the boys at Easter time
Distributing gay colored Easter eggs
The maiden, who serenely and sublime
Asks of the brook: "What is it my lover begs?"
Whereupon she leaps and picks a bloom in haste,
And wades to her skirts across the golden waste.

WHITE MOUNTAIN

The Battle's lost, the ranks flee past recall
--- Only three hundred heroes stand and fight.
"Surrender now, but futile further spite!"
Three hundred men still stand along the wall.

Regiments fore and aft and around them all
--- Only beyond them, the blue tinged mountain forts
Their native brownish huts with snow white courts!
Not one of them would yield along the wall.

The muskets roared, --- men worked each pointed halberd,
--- The aged oaks above them shook and fell
Man after man fell dead along the rampart,
Man after man kept standing in death's Hell.
The King escaped --- the coward saved his head.
A Nation defeated . . . lives proudly in her dead.

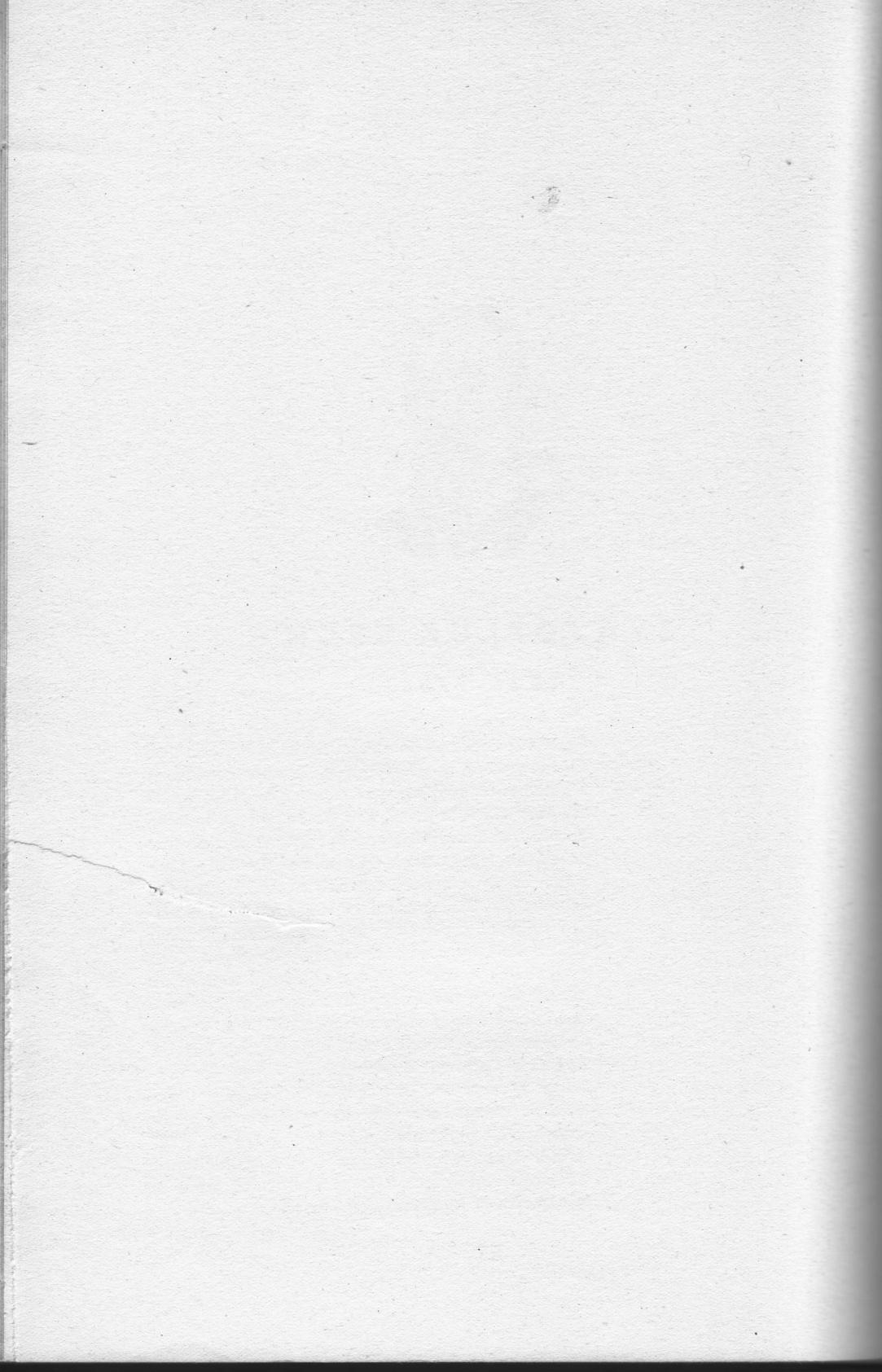




SVATOPLUK CECH

(1846-1908)

Svatopluk Cech was born February 21, 1846 and died February 23rd, 1908. For a while after completing his studies of law, Cech worked in a law office but in the year 1879, together with his brother he founded an illustrated monthly, and this journalistic venture ended his legal career. His formal schooling Cech enhanced by extended travels to the Balkans to England and Denmark and in 1895, following a sudden surge of popularity, the modest retiring author fled to Italy for a valuable sojourn. Svatopluk Cech may well be likened to Russia's Pushkin, to Poland's Mickiewicz or the French Lamartine, for his work embodies the prophetic undertones of these inspirational writers. Although a product of Kollar's Slavonic Byronism, Cech quickly freed himself from its confining influence and developed an individual refreshing style in prose and verse as well. Among his best known poetic works are the Songs of a Slave, a masterfully concealed protest against the contemporary spiritual enslavement of his people, and a group of epic poems of historical significance.



A MORNING PRAYER

A light spreads over meadows, fields and lane,
Streams brightly shine through the fogs of fading night,
As in a castle lit by fables' light again
In the distance windows burn with a crimson light
Of the newly risen sun's reflected flame . . .
Light, fire, beauty, bliss delight and fame
I humbly bow before your shining might . . .

How 'neath your spell all wakes to live, rejoice.
How with delight shines all that fore me lies.
And sparkling dew that shines on flowers choice
Unwittingly now rises into my eyes.
Even the aged woman's furrows gleam
As she greets me, passing by, as in a dream
"Praised be the Lord." . . Amen, answers my voice.

"Praised be the Lord" . . . We both praise Him on high.
The woman, hobbling yonder to the shrine.
Where He will be revealed to her on nigh
Where gleam the jewelled altar cloth, and sacred candles shine
And I who worship Him, sublime and stern
Among the meadows green, where only burn
The dew's bright jewels, that on the flowers lie.

Be praised . . Be worshipped . . How else can we express
In human speech the soul's outpouring thought,
That emanates from the horizon's light excess
The morning air, with the scent of meadows fraught,
The blooming merigolds that paint the waters gold,
The songs of nightingales whose straining throats unfold
A greeting to the sun, while they soar to heights unsought.

How could one show his gratitude unbound
To the Unknown Might and Will, that watched my dreams
Through the night of many a frightening scene and sound,
Then permitted me to see daylight's early beams
And to breathe again upon the break of day,
All the beauty of a sunlit morn in May,
And to find delight in life's ever changing schemes . .

Might! Will! Again but hollow words of Man
That but suffice within man's meager scope
That from the sphere of matter never can
Reach up into that unknown far off slope
Where ends at length, Cosmic serenity.
Beyond all matter, thought, Eternity,
You rule alone in the realm of unreached Hope.

You mystery, whose name we know not to employ,
Henceforth I bid my lips be sealed as stone
My admiration, gratitude, wild joy
Are my soul's offerings to the Unknown.
That, and my will to serve You at your feet
To fill each wish I sense with my heart-beat
I pledge my days to this and this alone . . .

To stir one stalk at least from out the barren soil,
To plant one floweret upon some arid plain,
To add with one grain to all the toil
That in the years to come we shall harvest not in vain.
To join in planting all, whose yearnings meet
In making of your living world the seat
Of happier and better men again . . .

DREAMS OF PALESTINE

Fond dreams of Palestine, land mythically strange,
From early childhood you have traced within my life
Your morning light, and your mystic shadows' range,
The dread of your deserts and the joy of your fruit-trees rife.

Your distant shadows in my youngest days
Wove in my mind Bethlehem's mystic star,
Within me, Jordan, your palm trees used to sway,
While your shrine, Jerusalem, shone brightly from afar.

Your peoples spirits gave my inner soul its cloak
Its own emotions, musing thought and fears
And with its tempting music there awoke,
Words to the harp-strings, strumming in my ears.

Like a foreign fragrance, heavy with fullness sweet,
It wafted me with the texture of its lore,
With its dreamy poesy, with sorrows' pangs replete
In clouded dreams and fiery thought of yore.

Around me Jehovah rose with angered glares,
I heard the prophets' voices that strangely shook,
On the Levite's burdened backs, amidst trumpet blares
The covenant shone from the bloody brook.

I saw where Ruth once passed through the fields of grain
And on far Carmel's, pleasant sloping side,
My fantasy wove on its charm again,
More beautiful than Solomon's cloak and pride.

Yon bluish lake, of biblical Simon's fame
How you have pierced my soul, you distant height,
Where the Master wrapped himself with a blinding flame
And Golgotha trembled with a bloody fright.

Like a foreign bind-week that has been planted deep
About a homegrown bush, entwines its stem,
And weaves through blossoms that impertinently creep
On every side, to the bush-tops crowning hem.

Thus has the soul of Palestine from childhood days
Embraced us with its hundreds of varied chains
And slowly changed our beings and our ways,
Giving its imprint to our dreams and brains.

The Jewish tribe can proudly raise its head
Above all those who would besmear its birth
For with its soul, it slowly overspread
All men and slowly reached all points on Earth.

Our God, Our Saviour, the birth of man,
Our paradise, our Hell, our views of life,
Each thought with which, we would the unknown scan
Has parts at least of Hebrew faith and strife.

Thus I grew up with dreams of you, my Palestine,
But oft your foreign image crossed my thought
The glaring light of Suns that elsewhere shine
The breath of foreign races that you brought.

It seemed I felt a different blood in me
New, different thought, emotions, sentiment,
And differently, than where the palms grow past the sea
My scenes were colored by our blue-tinged firmament.

I oft was seized with a native stubborn pride
And tried to rid myself of foreign force,
And freely in my own way I had tried,
To see the world and seek the Unknown's source.

To fashion my own God, in thoughts I oft would try,
Not like the Semites saw him long ago,
But as I sensed him with my inner I
And as I saw him, when the skies were set aglow.

But all in vain, to sever all of the ties
That grew so closely with every childhood day
Ere you're awake, around your forehead flies
Another cloud of Jordan's birds of prey.

For thousands of years you have darkened Europe's air,
Discoloring our darkest days it seems . . .
Will there come a day, when you will leave for e'er
Man's darkened brows, Palestine's ancient dreams?

MY SHADOW

Why must you at my heels forever cling,
And follow like a spy, with stealthy gain,
You empty image, without form or wing,
You, who are less than the breath upon a window pane.
Why do you borrow my own form and shape,
And even dress in garments that I wear?
Why do you parody my looks, why do you ape
And why repeat my every move and stare?

Thus in my thoughts I ask, and look aside
To where my mocking shadow quakes on the wall again,
It seems that even an unkempt lock I spied
As his head bends low over the hand that holds the pen.
Yet, in that outlined head in yonder nook,
My rough sketched image seems to be revealed,
My lips' ironic play, my eyes' disdainful look,
It seems I hear a chuckle, ill-concealed.

I even hear the words of subdued strains,
The sound of my own voice I seem to heed,
But fainter than the whisper of far off grains,
Or the buzzing song, heard from a distant mead.
It is more like the language of the soul,
That speaks to us with the fathomed dreams of yore,
Dreams that into a poet's bosom stole.
When he dipped low into his fancy's store.

Do not despise me . . . pleads the whispering shade.
Because I lack own substance, form or base,
That only by your limbs each move I make is made,
And that I weave my features on the outline of your face.
Go out, where living din and struggling lords
Or inwardly direct your searching frown,
There you will find the living shadow's hordes
With shame your pride will bow its guilded crown.

See yonder gallant with the lovely miss
A coupled silhouette of charms' excess,
Who had borrowed love's contour of age-known bliss
All lovers' garb and a shadow's tenderness
The fan's coy play, the smile, the tear-filled eyes,
All this was borrowed from another twain,
Who from another pair had snatched the lies,
With which love shams its joys and griefs in vain.

See yonder man, how dignified his pace,
Upon his noble forehead serene peace is engraved,
Look with what gentle gesture he condescends to grace
The bowing, bending throngs of men enslaved.
That pose is borrowed from some other Great,
That majesty comes from some higher seat,
If you could pierce that hollow shell and plate
You would find only empty, vain conceit.

This one prefers a scholar's weighty mien
That one a nobleman, a social peer,
Another one would mimic Byron's sheen,
While one in Rembrandt's barret would appear.
Thus in a motley semblage all perform
According to a pattern from their birth,
'Tis all you need, the outline of good form
Who asks about your deeper inner worth?

What wealth of living shadows in their clothes
Play in the streets, and in their homes carouse.
Friend welcomes friends, each others hand enfolds
Each would outdo the others courtly bows.
Upon their features, honor and virtue beam
Of which their bosom harbors not a spark.
Believe me, our society's whole scheme
Is just an endless shadowplay and lark.

Look at some nations! The height of their achievement
To be an image of some other tribe,
To mock its gestures and without concealment
Follow its lead, its customs to imbibe.
Their sparkling trinkets are an imitation,
They blindly copy every single deed,
Without initiative, such hapless nation
Is but a shadow of some foreign breed.

And now, old bard, try your own worth to measure
Look in your bosom, the workshop of your soul!
Perhaps the Gods loaned you a golden treasure,
Where did you leave it, what did you extol?
You forced yourself to fit a patterned image,
A mold that pleased the masses for the while,
Your golden lyre sang a foreign language
You grasped the shadows of some borrowed style.

In trembling fears, distrustful of your moment,
You oft refused to undertake own tasks
And often borrowed for a mere adornment
The sparkle of some borrowed, jeweled masks.
When out the rags you have gathered far and near
You sew your garment like a laughing clown,
Until your inner self must disappear,
Are you not worse than I, the shadow of your frown?

C U P O F Y O U T H

A dying lustre lingers as in fright
Upon his sunken cheeks and greyish hair,
Upon the wrinkled face and eyes that stare
Out of the window at the charming night.
How sweet to gaze into the golden breeze,
To watch the flight of swallows, flies and bees,
And see the blooming trees snow laden tresses.
About his temples, warm evening breezes glide,
Laughter and song ring out on every side
While the soul imbibes the evening's warm caresses.
The dreaming man sees in bewitching splendour
Time long gone by, his heart hears the refrain
Of mighty longing and a grief so tender.
"Come back once more. Be young, be young again . . ."

With rising violence this yearning fills his heart
The bosom's heavy sighs no power can restrain
His moistened eyes with bitter grief now smart,
"Oh Paradise come back . . . Be young again . . ."

Suddenly, on the crimson cloud appears
A lovely creature of some airy spheres
A light-hued image that beckons from the haze,
With a smile that lights his stirring youthful dream.
He used to see her with his soul agleam
But ne'er beheld her with his human gaze.
She quivers in the room with charms untold
And lifts a crystal goblet to his lip
A goblet bubbling with a foaming dew,
A rosy garland forms about its tip
A blushing ornament set fresh anew.

"Your burning wish now shall be satisfied.
This cup of reborn youth shall weave the spell
Drink . . . By this nectar you will be revived,
The stream of life's young spring again shall swell.
Your soul again with sparkling stars will shine
Your bosom heavy with happiness divine
The golden bird of love your heart shall spear
Your eyes will sparkle with a youthful fire,
Your hair again wave to your heart's desire,
Your cheeks turn light, and wrinkles disappear
Worry and boredom shall leave you with a wink,
A Poem will refresh your soul . . . Come, drink."

The vision's voice sounds like music from afar
The goblet sparkles temptingly on high
While with a trembling hand he reaches for the star
Whose lovely scent the cup exhales so nigh,
Fresh as the breath of woods 'neath summer skies
A scent as sweet as the balmy breath of spring;
His soul is rocked in dreams of paradise
While golden bells within him sweetly ring . . .
But suddenly his outstretched hand withdraws,
Shadows of doubt cause him to ask and pause,
"Is there a drop with magic to forget,
In all the pearly wine you hold?" he asks.

"That mystic drop my goblet truly lacks,
For Lethes shores, around your dreams are set."

Should I then cast away life's heavy role
To gain my youth, but keep within my soul
A memory of all Life took away
And that I know from me again will seize?
To know that youth's ideals are fancy's plays,
Inspired mottoes, just words cast to the breeze.
Should I return to Life's young merriment
With the mournful thought of how rare it is to hold
A faithful friend, what shallow sentiment
Is hid beneath even best friendship's mold?
How easily the warmest hands turn cool
How oft hearts change, when the mask no more can fool.

How suddenly man shivers, left alone,
Chilled by man's selfishness, as cold as stone?
Should I return then with a youthful heart
To love-stirred yearning, though I understand
That the aura that gives love its gilded part
Is just a trinket from a story land?
What I called heaven turns to earth once more
Heavenly manna is only the bread of yore,
That saintly love to which young dreams give birth
Holds its airy throne high up above the earth.
Should my ambition's flame rise up again
When I have learned that fame but sparks in vain,
That it is not worth the anguish and defeat
That empty, hollow laurel's woven wreath
Should I retain within my memories nook,
How small, deceitful all that our young soul
Sees hallowed with perfections very look?
How futile is this earthly sham and role
Where 'neath the banners of ideals and dreams
And to the tunes of jeweled words, as tools
They speak of honor, truth and love's sweet schemes
While only passion and cold metal rules?

Away tempting glass . . . I will be satisfied
With my grey hairs . . . 'Tis easier to bear
The weight of age than youth of sham deprived
It is this sham that gives youth charm and glare
When Life's crude hand destroys the golden thread
Of youthful dreams, and when the eye through tears
Sees the emptiness of earthly joy and dread,
And man in vain weeps for his bygone years.
Then but in vain we seek lost Eden's shore
Deprived of all the charms it knew before.

Away from my threshold, thwarted disillusioned truth
Of saddened dreams . . . Away false cup of youth.
'Tis farewell to you, young lovely form
Farewell for e'er . . . In peace I would grow old
In peace await the passing of life's storm
When another vision will moist my lips grown cold,
From out an agate goblet of black wine
With the mystic ferment of forgetfulness divine.

SONGS OF A SLAVE

On a crag at dusk I am standing, while below me fumes and roars
Crashing, screeching, foaming tempest of the crater's endless stores.
Like a bird who vainly flutters, seeking rocks on which to pause,
Thus my eyes are sadly peering through the wat'ry hazy gauze.
In that maze that darkly stretches, in the boundless distant blue,
While the whirlpools and cyclones fume and boil like a witches brew.

Here I stand and look beyond me. Slavery there holds my land
I look forward and before me maddened tempest holds command.
Angered hurricane approaches . . . Rising winds play through my hair,
E'en the clanging of my shackles weakens in the tempest's blare.
But I gladly raise the shackles, while the rising tempest shrieks,
And like to a maiden's kisses, to the winds I turn my cheeks.

Welcome tempests. Your appearance promises deliverance.
In your rumbling I can fathom liberty's first resonance.

Suddenly my tired vision seems to fill with gleaming light,
And I feel my temples burning with a rising fiery might.
As if from my burdened bosom, dreams rise to my trembling lips
And I feel my soul arising on the wings of fancy's whips.
Something seems to flicker, quiver, to arise beyond the clouds,
As if midst the pains of labor, a new born day rose through the shrouds,
In a cloak of crimson sunset now appears the angered sea
As if all its churning waters turned to blood, engulfing me.

No, it was no mere illusion, figment of some feverish dreams
I am certain of the coming of a morning star of better schemes.
That a large part of this vision will be filled in course of time,
Though I will not be so blessed, as to shake this yoke of mine.
And my greyish head will slumber in the slave's unhonored soil,
Slavish hands with earth will cover, these old chains of endless toil
But you younger friends, before you end your life's uncertain course
You'll alight with feet unshackled yon, on freedom's sunny shores.

In the darkness that surrounds you let the whips and fists hold sway,
Cherish faithfully within you promise of a brighter day,
All your thoughts should be united in one firm determined whole,
All your strengths should be collected to attain the final goal.
Soon, free mankind will be brothers, slaves will drop their clang ing chains
Once again our flag will flutter high above the sunlit plains.

* * * *

Well then, break the dam e'er tight'ning,
Storms that swell my chest with wrong,
Thoughts that, with the speed of lightning,
Criss-cross through my soul so long.
Flames of shame and winds of anger,
From their lazy dreams and languor,
Stir to life, my plaintive song . . .

For my songs were not inspired
In a nest of fragrant tresses,
Nor by maidens I desired,
Dreaming in my warm caresses.
Through a weary head they glittered,
When, by haughty fists embittered,
My cheeks flushed with blood's excesses.

Yes, from gall and blood and tears,
They were born in time of woe,
When I saw, through darkened years,
My kin tortured by our foe.
And in vain my teeth I ground
When the jailers I had found
Laughing at our helpless throe.

* * * *

By a slave I was begot,
A slave, my mother's lot.
My childhood's sole delight
Was the lullaby of chains.
And all through life, I found
The rusty metal's sound
Clanging from morn 'till night,
Across my life's bare plains.

As soon as growing strength
My youthful nape had bent,
They fastened round my neck
A yoke of cold-blue steel.
I stooped beneath the grip
To kiss the headman's whip,
And my forehead at his beck
Against the ground would reel.

A feeble slave I grew
Among a slavish crew.
In place of jewels, chains
Rang at my sister's side;
Whene'er I looked around,
With shame and grief, I found,
Bowed to the dust of plains,
My race in slavery's hide.

I grew resigned to fate,
To the iron's song of hate,
That drove from out my reach
The very joy of life;
And when, with feeling wrought,
Solace in music I sought,
My song was but the screech
Of the grinding chains of strife.

* * * *

We're only slaves . . . Toys of a strange desire,
Unpunished are the fists that strike our breast,
What we possess, stills other men's desire,
At others mercy must our honor rest.
We're only cattle, whipped beneath the yoke
From morn 'till night, for other peoples' gain.

Slaves' Chorus:

We're without will or law, doomed to invoke
Justice in vain . . .

The master says: "Labor in sweat and heat,
Gather abundant crops from off my lands,
That I may better thus my fancies meet
And generously fill my lovers' hands;
That I may get for you more toughened rope,
And newer whips and heavier clanging chains."

Slaves' Chorus:

Laughter of scorn cuts through our souls and hope,
Slaves we remain . . .

Nothing is ours; another rules with all;
Our sweat for him bedews our fathers' soil;
We have no will beside his beck and call,
Our law is but our master's will and toil.
Lies are the truth against us, wrongs are right,
The heavens too, are helpless in this reign.

Slaves' Chorus:

We are a lawless mob, a herd without might,
Slaves we'll remain . . .

Watch our master's whip of power
Waving high above his cheeks,
While its swishing tune, in keeping
Blasphemously thus he speaks:
"See how gay and many colored
Are these knots so closely tied,
Like a maze of snakes entwining,
Are these squirming straps of hide.

Listen how harmoniously
Hisses every single snake,
How he twists and turns and cringes,
Your bent backs to overtake
And to make its fangs of venom
Seem less cruel, feel more tame,
To each motley colored viper,
I will give some lofty name.

Look! This strap is FAITH OF MANKIND
That commands the slaving hordes;
Bear on earth your masters' burdens
Up in heaven, seek rewards,
And this swishing strand is JUSTICE
From your backs its hide was torn,
With your blood, theron is written
"I'm your master, slaves forlorn."

This firm knot is labelled CUSTOM:
KNOWLEDGE, HABIT, all are here;
Even LIBERTY and ORDER
In this cruel farce appear.
HUMANISM is this leather,
TRUTH and HONOR in this whip;
All these attributes to pick from,
Sing and swish here in my grip.

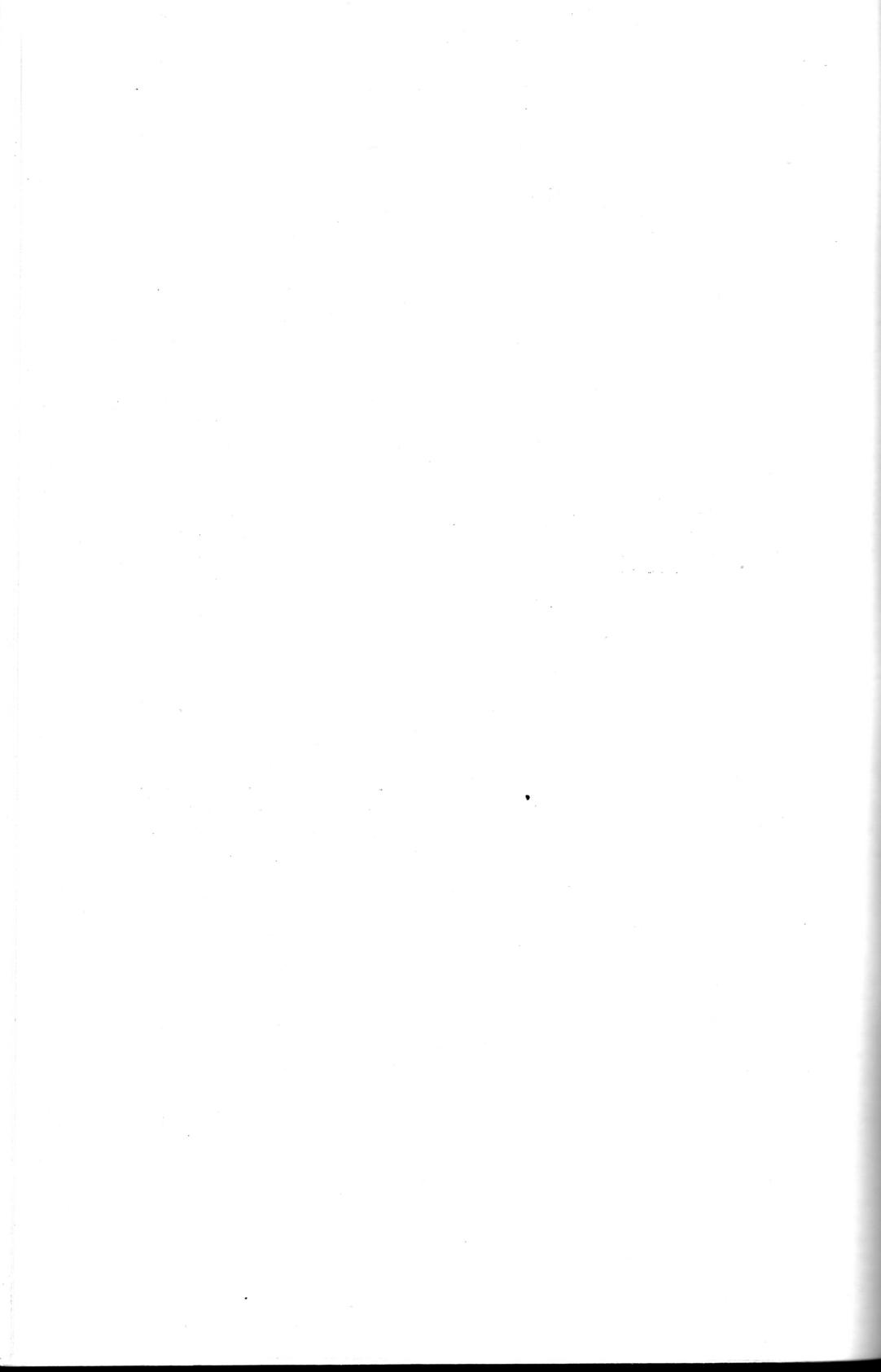
Yes, your father and your grandad
Were whipped too, with these same straps,
They're a heritage of ages,
Consecrated by time's lapse.
If you wish, I'll decorate them
With new ornaments and knacks
Just as long as my fist holds them,
You will feel them on your backs.



JAROSLAV VRCHLICKY

(1853-1912)

With the appearance of Jaroslav Vrchlicky upon the horizon of Czech literary firmament, the scope of Czech literature leaps suddenly from the narrow local confines to cosmopolitan dimensions and significance. Vrchlicky was born February 16, 1853, and died September 9th, 1912. At an early age he came under the guidance and influence of his uncle, a theologian, and young Vrchlicky's first steps almost naturally led to the field of theology. Within six months after entering the theological faculty Vrchlicky made a complete change in his plans and chose philosophy, history and comparative philology for his life's work. As was the custom of the day, the young philosophy student accepted a tutorship in the family circle of Count Montecuccoli-Laderchi, and was thus enabled to spend a profitable year in Italy. After his return to Prague he accepted a teaching position and remained in several teaching appointments until 1893. In 1892 Vrchlicky was awarded an honorary doctorate of letters at the Charles University, where in 1898 he was appointed to a professorship. Vrchlicky is unquestionably the most prolific, most versatile of the Czech poets, and an outstanding translator of all world literature.



DREAMS OF HAPPINESS

When in parting we embrace
 I cannot refrain from tears;
Even yonder branch will shudder
 When its song-bird disappears.
When my life begins to fade,
 Do not ask the reason why;
Even well-waters turn cloudy
 When a stone drops from on high.
Know you why my yearning song
 Still is lingering on my breath?
E'en a nightingale sings freely
 Just before it meets its death.

I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW

I would like to know . . . I would like to know . . .
How has warm Spring arrived?
 On the wings of birds did it fly down?
 Was it born in the dew-drops pearly gown?
Or was it from my soul derived?

I would like to know . . . I would like to know . . .
What Springtime means to love.
 Why to embrace and kiss and dream
 We are driven by flowers and a moonlight beam
'Neath the peaceful stars above?

I would like to know . . . I would like to know . . .
What in my soul found rest.
 Is it love's burning flame divine
 Or bits of flickering songs that shine,
Or a passing dream at best . . .

BARKOCHEBA

(An Excerpt)

Herein again you see our fateful lot,
Eternal weeping and eternal groans!
They knock their heads against the temple walls
And yet, in truth, for this they should be blessed,
For their despondent grief is but a sign,
A living witness that we are alive.

Though we are scorned and endlessly complain;
Just as a river flows beneath the ice
Thus underneath the Roman tyrant's yoke
A nation lives and who shall still its voice?
Before this wall, the ices are released,
We are, we live, we breathe and feel again,
Once more we are a Nation; 'tis this that really counts.

MY CHANGELESS FATE

My Fate will never change for me
But one day to arise and fall
And 'ere Death plays her melody
Only these words will I recall;
"My Fate will never change for me."

I would drink wine, but I swallow dust,
I would cheer others, but grieve alone.
I long for strength and fancy's thrust
But only grievous words intone.
I would drink wine, but swallow dust.

My dreams of happiness are brief,
Across my life, deep shadows plod.
I feel the weight of all my grief,
I am fashioned of a luckless clod.
My dreams of happiness are brief.

What can I do! Be still and bear?
Someday perhaps, my sun will rise.
I wish my soul, like a bird could flare
And fly from out its narrow ties.
What can I do! Be still and bear?

No one will I stop to upbraid,
To reproach him for his sham and pain,
Of storms and thunder unafraid
Like a nightingale I will sing my strain.
No one will I stop to upbraid.

My Fate will never change for me,
Perhaps this is my end, at length,
To die in my dreams' rhapsody,
To hold you back, I lack the strength.
My Fate will never change for me.

THE TEARS WITHIN

When God was at His Mercy's height,
The Human heart He fashioned,
And in eternal memory
Placed therein his love impassioned.

And when His kind prophetic eye,
Upon the heart had rested,
God wept with joy when He beheld
Happiness thus arrested.

But as he wept, into the heart
A tear dropped, without malice,
As oft a dewdrop falls within
A floweret's thirsty chalice.

And that is why Love brings a pain
But a pain so dear and tender
That we must pity hundredfold
Hearts empty of its splendor.

And that is why Love holds of Joy
And Sorrow equal measure,
And often when the tear is stirred,
The heart bursts with its treasure.

L I F E

Though your life be straight or turning,
Be it peaceful, be it stirred,
Little tears and much of yearning,
Always fulfillment deferred.

Though it drag or rush unchanneled,
Be a rose or a barren glade,
You will always be impaneled
'Twixt a double pointed blade.

When your blood stream stains the saber
And your weeping stirs the night
Man and even God will waver
To assist you in your plight.

You must suffer in life's maelstrom,
Though you win, or yield to fear,
'Til you've touched Life's very bottom —
You know not . . . that Death is near.

ECHOES OF YESTERDAY

Repeat that song . . . so close, so dear to me . . .
As if my passions' tempestuous oceans
My love . . . my wasted youth's emotions . . .
My poesy were mirrored in its plea . . .

At length she rose:
And in her sheer white gown, draped loosely about her arms,
She looked more like a specter leaving his dark, cold tent,
Beneath the stone he raised, than a living thing of charm.
Gracefully she sat upon the low piano chair
Two hands, like butterflies, dancing about the keys,
And with her song, my soul's wings spread upon the breeze,
I saw again my home . . . I felt the woodland air . . .
And she played on . . . of happiness . . . and dreams . . . and youth.

BELLADONNA

Why do you flaunt before my aching head
Love's blood-stained rose, held boldly in your hand?
Why all this flame? I would ask for a tear instead
And be content with a lowly amaranth.

My head swoons weakly beneath love's spent caress
I have emptied long ago their cup of lies;
And the feeble flame that lights my heart's recess
This, you'll put out with the tear drops from your eyes.

I do not blame myself, the time, the world,
Lord knows that now I would dread an excess of joy;
Across my lips, reproach shall not be hurled,
My soul refuses hope's supporting buoy.

Why should we love, I ask you. Tell me why?
When we no longer feel love's scorching breath.
Why look for peace, where haste and storms speed by,
Where happiness to man comes after death.

Why should we tempt old dreams again to life,
When strange to us appears their joyous dance.
Why should we live in Fall as when our Spring was rife,
Why should we weep when life laughs at its chance.

Our life is like an empty banquet hall
Where you feel only hunger and a thirst,
When passion's flame grows weaker with each call,
Never again into a blaze to burst.

Where will you find a shield when life has fled,
When from feeble hands the sword drops to the ground?
When the flowers you would wreath about your head,
Will grow in ridicule upon your mound?

Why flaunt you then before my aching head
Love's blood-stained rose, held boldly in your hand?
Why all this flame? I would seek a tear instead
And be content with a lowly amaranth.

THREE HORSEMEN

Three horsemen rode where the aged oak trees spread,
Rode through the marshes, dark clouds overhead.
The crimson sunset, tinged the skies aglow
While the first man spoke his woe in accents slow.

"Never before have I so feared the fray
But I've left my sister home alone today.
She is so young, oh endless grief and woes,
If she should fall into some stranger's throes."

Another cloud sped 'cross the heaven's bleak,
And the second horseman thus began to speak:

"A sister's grieving heart will cease to bleed,
Soon as she hears her lover's pawing steed.
I am worse off . . . I left my wife at home,
I dread to think of her, as thus I roam.
And children too . . . my heart is torn apart,
One in her arms, another beneath her heart.
As bitter as the fruits the hawthornes bear
Are children raised without paternal care."

'Twas not the wind that 'twixt the mountains stole,
But the weeping of the third man's tortured soul.

"I dare say, sister, wife, 'tis hard to bear,
But I was forced to leave my mother there.
Poor aged mother, she is so weak and bent,
Like the willows that along the brook lament.
Her eyes will weep 'till there'll be tears no more,
For I have never left my home before.
'Mid tears I think of her with every breath,
Who'll close her eyes when she is called by Death?"

And in the stillness, on and on they ride,
Through darkened bogs and barren rocks beside.
And ere the moon spilled o'er the river's shore,
The first man of his sister thinks no more.
And when the battle cry is heard at last,
The second horseman's forehead brightens fast.
The hostile camp at length is set ablaze,
And still the third man sobs as through a haze.
And ere the fogs conceal the setting sun,
The bloody battle has been fought and won.

An eagle cleft the first man's skull in two,
And quenched his thirst in the freshly fallen dew.

Beneath the brush, where skulks the hungry beast,
The second man was dragged for a wolf's feast.

But the third man bore the banner on to fame,
And died, still whispering his mother's name.

And since he thinks of her, even though dead,
A snowball tree grew out his moss decked bed.
And on the tree a snow-white bird had flown,
And sang . . . The blooms and leaves again have grown,
The white bird sings, through night's dominion.
"My child" . . "Oh mother" . . What reunion!

A GYPSY'S VIOLIN

All is jolly in the castle
Cymbals and the bagpipe whine
For the young, the master ordered
Barrels full of sparkling wine.

Noisy din in the halls and chambers
In the court yard the dancers sway
And in golden goblets, sparkles
Blood red wine from far Tokay.

Ah, a Gypsy! Welcome brother!
Fear not that your coat is torn
For the dogs and whips are sleeping,
Play a dance tune until morn.

And he plays . . . a piercing torrent
He pours out in the tones keen darts
Every tone a spark of fire
Every spark burns in the heart.

And it sounds as wild complainings
Crackles like a flame of blue.
You'd expect that any moment
His taut string must break in two.

And it moans like winds o'er hillsides
Followed by a storm in Spring
From the depth it clammers upwards
As he plucks the second string.

Wildly and in streams unbounded
Now it plays and rings full speed
Thus with winds across the prairies
Rides a brave's unfettered steed.

And now softly, as if bated,
Like a snake betwixt the grass
Prolonged baying as if wolves had
Gathered for a deadly clash.

List . . . A knife is being sharpened
And another plaintive sound
Strangely humming, flock of buzzards
Flying low above the ground.

Do you hear their wings aflapping,
Fighting for the lifeless form?
Suddenly as if touched by magic
Something cuts the hellish storm.

And the third string sounds and echoes
Tenderly like bells above,
Passing as a flash of lightning
Gleaming from an eye of love.

Like a nightingale lamenting,
Burning like a cup of wine,
Like a gypsy fallen wildly
In his loved one's mad entwine.

And it sounds with sudden longing,
Cheeks aglow and burning bones,
Futile yearning, searing pleasures,
And with jealousies wild tones.

Now it trinkles like a goblet,
Rising to a maddened flare,
Followed by a heart-sent wailing,
As if someone tore his hair.

And the fourth string answers sadly
To the crying, sighing spell,
With a heavy bell-like clanging,
Mournful, as a final knell.

And it howls like winds and flurries,
Racing through the restless night,
Then it whispers, lonely deathlike,
Like a dying man's last plight.

Then a scream . . . and every string now
Screams with gladness, quivers, cries,
And the gypsy hugs his fiddle,
Fire gleaming in his eyes.

Finis! Midnight! All in stupor,
Just the master is awake.
"What quaint music, tell me brother
What does each string indicate?"

And the gypsy looks about him
Where each drunken servant sleeps,
Something like his fiddle's echo
Into his soft voice now creeps.

"Master, you will not believe me
That a string can have a soul.
Anger, gladness, all I thought of
Somehow in my fiddle stole."

Yes I had a bent old mother,
Good God knows her love for me,
Just to still our endless hunger,
She told fortunes for a fee.

She was caught, and for a pastime,
She was stuck on roasting spits.
Any wonder that my fiddle,
Weeps for her in angered fits?

Then I had an older brother,
Tramping as all gypsies free,
I know not why on the gallows
He swings now beneath a tree.

Served him well, I keep repeating,
Often when I sit up late,
But this foolish string keeps sighing
As if it bemoaned his fate.

And a wife I had, still see her,
Blushing, struggling, angered, grim,
She was stripped to dance the czardas
For her master's passing whim.

For the blush upon her features,
He gave silks and shining gold,
All old fables, my dear master,
Fables best be left untold."

Thus he finished, stroked his fiddle
Smiled and neared the open door,
"Wait there, tell me" the master shouted
"Meaning of string number four."

Then the gypsy paused and grimaced
Looked out at the crimson sky,
"You won't need it, worthy master,
No I need not tell you why."

And he vanished. The haughty master
Frightened in his black insides,
Could not wake the sleeping servants,
While flames rose on all four sides.

A RETURN

Your souls own life is like a heaving wave,
'tis hard to tell its origin or crest.
The mind knows not to what mood to be a slave,
When the wave shall rise, or when to seek its rest.

From lofty dreams, when skyward soars the soul,
You will embrace coarse matter once again.
And he who would Raphael's fame extol,
Will soon return to Giotto's style and plane.

From Beethoven's hymns of unrestricted storms,
Wherein with the Gods, the roaring thunders war,
The soul returns to its more simple forms,
To the cradle tunes that mother sang of yore.

From Hamlet's skull, Nirvana's mystic waste,
From truth that in the fables buried lies,
When you unearth it, frightfully in haste
You will return to man's Lost Paradise.

From orgies wild that fill the cup with glee,
And pour red wine o'er nudes in ecstasy,
You will return to a babe on mother's knee
And find at length true, unspoiled poesy.

The wings of Odes, for which you tried to borrow,
The blush of dawn, and the pearls from the stars,
These you will drop, and awed by fear and sorrow
You'll try to soothe your musings burning scars.

And when you ask what is Life's goal or thread,
Is it the crest or the pit where the waves must start?
The wings of life hum softly about your head,
And you find the tree of life, bloom in your heart.

I CLOSE MY EYES AND DARKNESS OVERTAKES ME

Oh the beauty of your limbs, so white and slender,
Oh the endless longing in your dreamy eyes,
Oh the strength of passion that within you lies,
Oh the tempting nets of your tresses wild surrender.

A siren's song, angelic voice and Judgment's call
Dreams of a Spring asleep for centuries,
All this assails me in my memories,
And all this tempts me in your arms to fall.

I close my eyes, and yield to the wings of night,
Like a star, your being pours a stream of light
It seems, in you, I hold all Beauty's mold.

Oh mystery, oh flames of a burning kiss,
Oh flaming tears, boundless abandon of bliss,
Oh budding breasts and hair of molten gold !

THE SPIRIT OF SOLITUDE

Hid in the mountains, in the dark still woods
Where from the cloudy heights, the eagle's screech,
But barely reaches to the human ear,
There leaning against an aged stately fir
He stands alone in meditation deep . . .

When in the noonday heat the forest sleeps,
Then o'er the flowered carpet of green moss
He loves to steep his quickly roaming gaze
As if within the moss and sparse grown grass
He seeks to find the agelong, constant laws,
That gave to Nature too, its life and form.
He showers pearls here upon a bloom,
And here upon a gay-tinged butterfly
That slumbers in the full-bloomed fernery,
Struck by the arrow of the noonday sun,
He paints the semblance of a gruesome skull.
A golden fly he rescues from a trap
Straightens a bluebell in the verdant moss
That bent perhaps beneath the nimble feet
Of a fleeing deer, that sped across the green.
Yon silver threads of a sheer spun spider web
He weaves with nimble fingers in a net
That spreads from branch to branch its gossamer.
But suddenly when with the evening fogs,
The sun's bright diadem no longer crowns his head,
Then first begins his many-sided work.
For he either lights upon the crimson skies
The blazing faggots of eternal stars,
Or else he locks within the flower-cups,
Their scented amber, that with the break of day,
They'd sweeten with their breath the morning air.
And often too within the fogs grey veil
He leans above the mounts, and spreads thereon
The cool, dark colored spreading ivy leaves,
Or else he plants into the barren rocks
Evergreen flowers of the houseleek plant.
And when the star bespeckled cloak of night
Falls finally upon his mighty back
And on his forehead the shadows of the night
Are firmly clasped by the moonbeams changing light,
He flies across the slum'bring Universe,
Then Nature shudders when his cloak's dark hem
Touches the sleeping dale and sloping mountainside . . .

What is mere man and all the Earth to HIM?
What all our petty grievances and pains?
What is the starry realm, the oceans' depths?
What all the thoughts within whose dizzy whirl
Man's reason quivers like a dying spark?
All this he sees through with a keen clear eye,
All mysteries, all secrets are to him,
An open book, outspread before his gaze.
And when He turns the pages of this book
Then thunder's mighty voice rolls o'er the sky,
And when a lightning crashes through the trees,
Into the rocky covers of a book
He chisels letters of an eternal script.
World's hungry haste is poison to his soul
And only rarely he keeps company
With mortal men . . . More often when disturbed
By nearing footsteps, all his musing stops,
And to the cloudy heights he flies on colored wings.
Only at times he breaks a poet's dream
To scatter rainbow-colored beauty there
Or takes the sparkle of the eye divine
That slumbers in some bosom young and fair,
And kindles it into a mighty flame.
O blessed is he, who trusted to HIS hand
His fantasie's unbridled eagle flight.
He guides it ever to abysmal heights
And with a key of feelings that are true
He opes the land of eternal ideals.
Again at other times he reaches to the depths
Where the fresh current of humanity
Scatters its waves in a crystalline flight.
Or else he pauses in oblivion,
And with the torch of timeless changeless truth
He casts true light upon the aims of man
Or else seeks paths to aid man in his quest.
And the bitter cup of cold ingratitude,
That a poet often to the bottom drains
He wreathes with garlands of unfading blooms,
And sweetens with a nectar of world's fame.
Thus I beheld him in the darkened woods
And in the lightning over a whispering stream
He showed me his sublimely molded face.

O Master Spirit that with the breath of winds
And with the scent of flowers speaks to me,

You raised me from the dust of commonplace
And set for me a far-reached, daring goal
Before whose scope I shudder with mere thought.
You have revived my faded, drooping will
And in the long-stilled strings within my heart
You struck again a mighty sounding chord,
And often when I madly would rejoice
And pause mid tears, 'tis you instead of I
That strikes against the strings with starry wings.
You taught me my lone journey's final goal
You roused me when through inactivity
In futile grief I wasted treasured days.
'twas you who showed me that the very song
That quivers in a nightingale's young throat
Is as a sister to my wandering chant,
And that my soul, that radiant bright spark,
Is but a part of Nature and its plans,
Nature that in an ever changing form
Is a reflection of God's eternal cheeks!
You taught me that the waters, virgin woods,
The hillsides in their jeweled autumn garb
The heavens shield ablaze with gleaming stars
Though clear or stormy with tempestuous wrath,
That all these are my souls most cherished share,
That with their weird, majestic symphony,
I am allowed to blend my grief and joy.
You stirred my being; whether boundless joys
Are woven in between the throes of life
With yearning winding ivy or roses of love,
Or whether sorrow with wide open arms
Embrace me with a wreath of bitter herbs,
And pours its bitter droplets into my wounded heart,
To you my song keeps turning o'er and o'er,
You stand by me in life's disturbances,
You press for me my feeble dying eyes,
And when some day upon my grave will stand
A stone, lone witness to my memory
And its inscription will have disappeared,
Then scatter roses over the crumbling wall
And intertwine green ivy about the sinking stone,
And in the graveyard's darkened silent nook,
Let a nightingale nest with his noisy brood,
That in his sweet impassioned melody
He may stir my soul in timeless ecstasy.

SATANELLA

(Excerpts)

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 orphand 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 a
Bulwark of the Christian nations
Against 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 flowers strangely scented,
Tied together with white ribbons.

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!"

* * * *

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?
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.'"

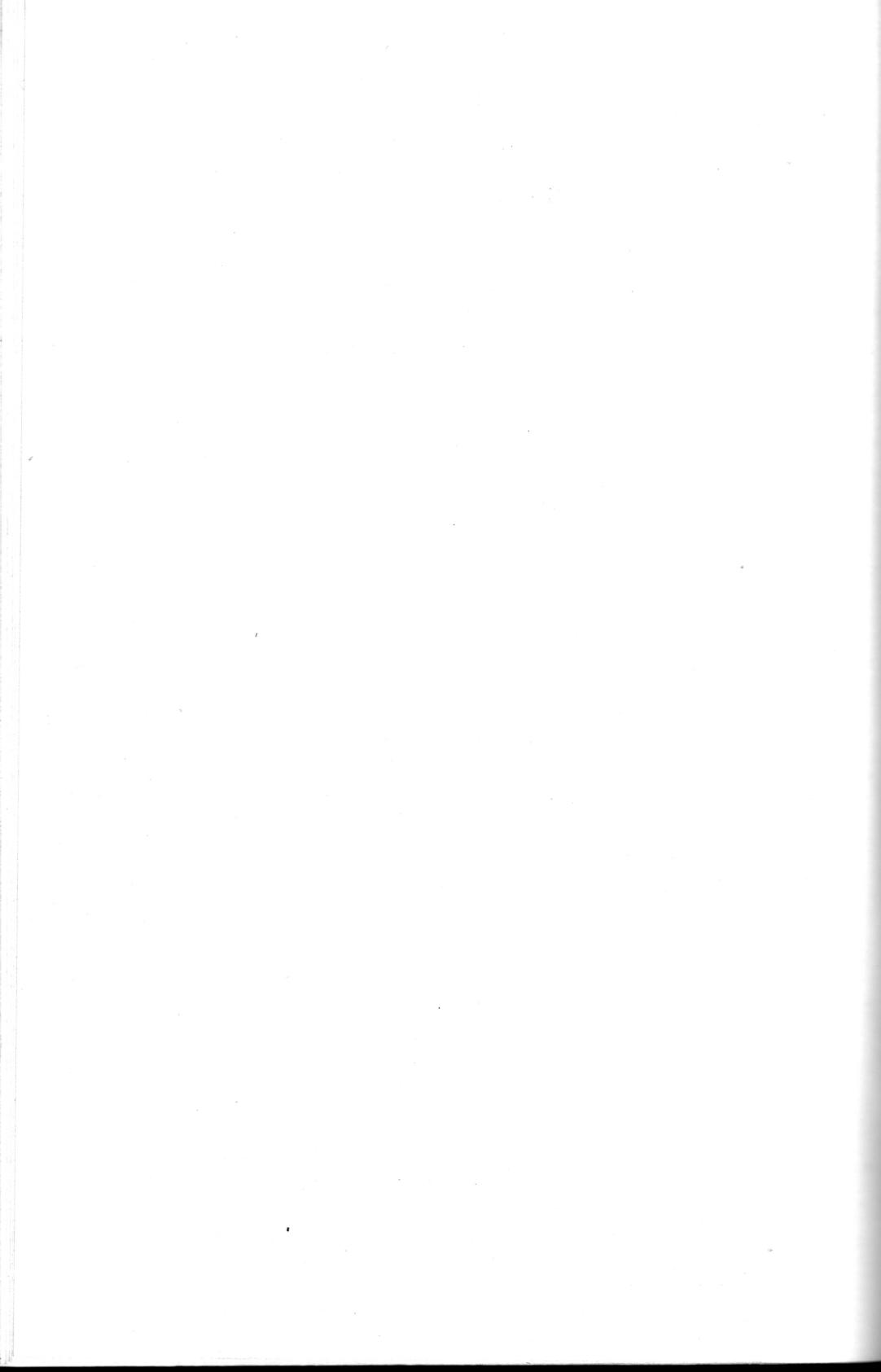




OTAKAR BREZINA

(1868-1929)

Otakar Brezina, born September 13, 1868, to a poor artisan family, died March 26, 1929, as the unique laureate of Czech poetry. Brezina is recognized today as the best representative of modern Czech lyricism, and a deep mysticist, whose diction and concepts breathe the air of deepest religious ecstasy. His symbolic rapturous interpretation of life cries out for social justice and for a better understanding of man's limited role in the grand scheme of the Universe. Brezina spent his active years as a teacher in western Moravia, whose peaceful, secluded atmosphere enabled him to write his grandiose at times unreal views of life, cloaked in a diction and style rarely equalled in Czech literature. Brezina's poetic works may well be summed up in the following six volumes, each of which carries its own interpretation of the problems of life. "Mysterious Distances" (1895) followed by "Dawning in the West" (1896) to which he added "The Polar Winds" (1897). Then came a two year period of silence broken in 1899 by "The Temple Builders". The cycle of Brezina's poetic mysticism concludes with "The Hands" (1901) and "The Symphony of Streams" (1903).



MY MOTHER

Through life my mother went, like a saddened penitent
Her days had not the hue, the scent, the splendor of a bloom;
She plucked an arid fruit, whose ashen taste was spent
For nourishment from off the tree of doom.

Into her cheeks poverty's keen edged dust its beauty seared,
And into her eyes, where years but cooled the inflamed pain,
Then as a torrid simoon at her feet it swirled and reared
Allowing her in its waves her exhausted strength to gain.

Beneath the burden of dark years she bent her back,
Labor's corrosive heat drained freshness from her banks;
She kissed cold death and in agony's last attack
Her smiling lips but whispered gratitude's words of thanks.

Upon a cathedral's moistened marble she would kneel
Dreaming before the altar, where the tapers cast a deathly scent and hue
While the sweetened rain of solace and of heard appeal
She gathered in the chalice of her soul like cooling dew.

Oh Mother, today you are transformed into a light
A golden arrow shot into the flaming core
Of blazing Myths! The sound of your name took flight
And ceased upon our waves, but you are as near as ever before.

I am the faded blossom of your cold, lifeless blood,
That thrived and grew beneath the moisture of your eyes.
The bitter taste of life I drank from your lips' flood,
And as your heritage, now, grief in my bosom lies.

And when the midnight green, nights stillness lights again,
You rise from out your tomb, and share with me my bed,
I hear within my breath, your own hearts rhythmic strain,
And as if revived with my voice you seem to moan with dread.

And the warmth in my veins found your body's rising heat,
The lustre of your eyes poured over in my gaze,
The glow of mystic faith, whose quivers in your soul repeat
Embodyed self in me into a burning, crimson blaze.

And as once was your path, sadly my way I went,
My days had not the hue, the scent, the splendor of a bloom,
I plucked an arid fruit whose ashen taste was spent,
Within your shade, from off the tree of man's relentless doom.

S I E S T A

The dreams of greyish blue awoke in the shadows of the snow
Whose lustre fell asleep in the soft-tinged yellow shades.
In the drifts of streaming light the air settled in sheets of hard
chilled glow
And froze the grating sound of the wind-wheels turning blades.
The peace of white-stretched lines spread over the sleeping plain
Like a garb of undulating levels and lifeless forests of old,
The birds in their flight traced a net across the azure skies in vain,
And the breath of living men, froze not beneath the cold.
Only a Great Thought swept over the land like a floating cloud,
It spoke with the play of shades, the dreams of light, the voices
of soundless calm,
With exerted strengths and a dominant sad melancholic shroud
That breathes into the human soul from the snow's comforting balm.

A N A U T U M N E V E N I N G

Into the heated atmosphere, hungrily is seeping
The twilight's greying onrush, while the fire throws
A bloody reflex on the walls . . . My soul is weeping
With the subdued music of a dream whose melancholy grows.
The fog casts its darkened shadows across the lonely graves
Where crosses, as if faintly sketched, pierce through the somber scene
The light of eternal lamps radiates in crimson waves
Over the frescoed walls and carved-out alter screens.
The forest ranges dip into a sea of silver foams,
And the streams of darkened waters thicken with fogs overhead.
The song of saintly nuns escapes from their cloister homes,
And heavy painless sleep descends upon each sick-room bed.
Upon the marble steps, dew's sparkling tears delay,
The skeletons of trees are huddled in a greyish gear,
The heavens above the earth, like a chiseled arch of grey
Fashioned of vaulted rocks, span across the darkened sphere.
Time flows into the void; night's shadows quake with dearth,
The dikes of the black sea of space crumble beneath the night's wrath,
The heavy foam of darkness sputters forth, and the earth
Swallowed by the gaping depths, swerves from its beaten path.
From these gigantic dimensions, I sense the hum and breath
As of a thousand wings that fluttered through the night,
I hear the exultant notes of souls redeemed by death,
I hear the mournful plaint of a newborn's helpless plight.

A MEMORY

Through the rhythm of your steps and through the vaporous quiver of
your sounds,
(Wherin slumber forgotten words) before me now flares to glowing heat,
That one day's smouldering sunset, and in a verdure of light rebounds
And overcomes me with its clouds of sweet scent and languorous
warmth's deceit.

For years, that sweet scent ripened within me. And as I now inhale,
A question long thought dead and speechless, rises in smoke from
its decay,
Like the sweetness of a thought, that melted too late with life's
destructive gale,
Like the burning oil of fully ripened olives . . . Over my dreams'
furrowed way,

I sail at night with the song of waves that dash beneath my meter's oars,
I am carried away beneath the celestial map's outspread, starry wings,
And I feel in the winds that blow from desolate island shores,
The peace of cypress blossoms, of soft, warm shadows and
glowing Springs.

WHITE GLOW OF LIGHT . . .

A white glow of light you poured into my soul's lamp
'Til in an agony of red it bled into the dark.
I walked in thought, beneath the day's ceiling cold and damp
As in the dreaded melancholies of a darkened park.

Where on the frescoed walls, the twilight's billows fall
And long forgotten legends gaze through the darkened frames
Like windows that open onto the centuries' mystic hall
And gaze on the darkened horizon of Mysteries without names . . .

Yon in the smoking distance, where roll the fogs of grey
Above the rooftops of palaces and over the boulevards' flight,
Victorious life tosses and bubbles o'er with a maddening play
In the bizarre foams of passions and longing and might . . .

As women's fiery looks rain with sparks into the bodily desires
The burned out strengths of nerves beneath the skull decay,
And the joys and fears and sorrows in countless illusory fires,
Upon the taut stretched strings of The Secret, quiver away.

A white glow of light you poured into my soul's lamp,
'Til in an agony of red it bled into the dark.
I walked in thought beneath the day's ceiling, cold and damp
As in the dreaded melancholies of a darkened park.

And I list to the Clocks of The Night, as through the dark they toll
'Til on the tower of the City Eternal the metallic tears will awake
An angelic Rhapsody, falling upon my waiting soul;
Striking my final hour, the Secret's Angelus will quake

DEAD YOUTH

On an aged instrument's metallic strings
I heard a rhythmic fall of a harp's far distant din,
As a tearful dew of feeble tones, this cadence clings
To the faint vibrating wires strung within.

Like some heavy scent a thought within my soul awoke,
And a song I used to hear in the days of my youthful tears
Breathed into my cheeks, and grasping my hand and cloak
It led me into the stilled garden of by-gone years.

Heavenly beauty shone with the constellations glistening storm,
Upon the quiet waters of time, a starry myth delayed,
Where in a casket of glass like a saint's lifeless form
In a shroud of faded Springs, my wasted youth was laid.

A blush of rosy dreams upon the cheeks had bloomed,
Like a diadem the jewels of my tears shone through
Upon the forehead I had embalmed and gently groomed
With scented treasures of memories born anew.

I saw the warmth of long dead charms, that tempted once the eye
Beneath the flimsy veil woven at life's first dawn,
The glow of lingering looks that buried within me lie
And kisses without life, whose flames are forever gone

The grapes embittered blood, that was not my ambition's sap,
And the fervor of embrace that cooled with thought,
The rain of drifted blooms, that fell into my lap
And withered beneath my touch and turned to naught.

The light of risen mornings that did not paint my cheek
The feeble flame of rainbows, that did not cool my way,
The glare of bygone days, time turned to night so bleak
That it changed the peace of night to a charmless, turpid day.

All this flared in my soul, and the wishes of the dead
Re-echoed within my I, with a mortal sobbing sound.
Over my lifeless youth, I bent my musing head
As one bends over a lover, whom death had found.

MYSTIC DISTANCE

O strength of ecstasies and dreams, all art from you
Glow with a fan of hues and in mystic tones resounds,
Beneath your spell, thoughts in a blaze stream through
As the light from the ether in vibrant threads rebounds.

Send down upon my soul, your glowing burning flow
O might victorious, where inspiration lies,
As on to the altar of stone, heavens poured fires below,
Whereon Elias of old offered his bloody sacrifice.

Within my soul dwell sadness and a bitter longing scent,
My thought is just a taper of feeble light that shone
Quiveringly in the human sconce, impure and bent
A taper upon the timeless altar of the Great Unknown.

My blood was not inflamed by a woman's burning kiss,
Insanity of love ne'er in my visions gleamed,
My nerves were not illumined by the glowing light of bliss
And friendship's fragrant winds through my life but rarely streamed.

Alone I sat and solved the problems of my strife,
Alone I toiled and bent over the flower-bed of my dreams
More in my thoughts I erred and sinned than in my life
Illusions I once loved, but kissed only yearning's vaporous streams.

My Springtime was a lonely elegiac song
Played tremulously for me by the Life I knew,
The days of my joys were like a cluster of grass grown strong
As it crowds along the wall and glistens with fallen dew . . .

My memories now are colorless and arid,
Like a pressed-out cudweed, breathing its whitish mold,
In poverty soured atmosphere I early tarried,
And reaped the harvest of the humble, on my hold.

The grandiose light of the Universe that through my vision stole,
With its secret of eternal flames and timeless might,
Was reflected by the mirror of the Cosmos in my soul
And focused itself into a crimson burning nucleus of light.

The stench of dessicated blood I breathed from the tales of old
The terrors of the Unknown, the depths of my soul amassed,
I saw in life the phantom of happiness unfold
And break when refracted by the upper spheres it passed.

I do not long to quench my thirst at life's water-ways
Nor as Gedeon's army, drink at the source from out my palms,
I gathered in my soul the tenderness of mystic rays,
And in the Secret shrine I knelt with unknown qualms.

My soul is saddened now, and full of a longing scent,
My thought is just a taper of feeble light that shone
Quiveringly in the human sconce, impure and bent
A taper upon the timeless altar of the Great Unknown . . .

O strength of ecstasies and dreams, all art from you
Glow with a fan of hues and in its tones resounds
Beneath your spell, thoughts in a blaze stream through
As the light from ether in vibrant threads rebounds.

Send down upon my soul your glowing burning flow
O might victorious where inspiration lies,
As onto the altar of stone heavens poured fires below
Wheron Elias of old offered his bloody sacrifice . . .

WASTED YOUTH

In one lone refrain melted our youth's romance. At twilight's gleam,
Our gazes met and kissed, in one embrace two forms nervously shook,
With rapture I breathed the scent of your being, and in the garden
of dreams,
Like one seeking a lover, my soul sought you at the murmuring brook.

To us spoke yearning and passion, power and dread and sin
The veiled mysteries of stony nature spoke to us not in vain,
In the features of my thought and yours, set the same frigid grin,
The same contraction of muscles, the same cramping pain.

The splendor of the night I absorbed and inhaled with our two souls
The delicate fluid of music I gathered with dual nervous strands
And the miracle of beauty imprisoned with dual sight, mournfully stole
Over me, like rays of light passing through a prism to burn with
fiery brands.

You fogs of smouldering days, who cast sadness over the souls of men!
Glowing, briny fumes of the unknown oceans of forgotten dead
Within whom wither the groves of blossoming moods as when
Corrosive ashes fall upon the billowy scent of crimson red.

Who melted two lights flown together? Who darkened my smile on
your cheeks?

Who gave to our voice the strange sound that from our soul escapes?
Who stunned the gentle quiver of caress? Who threw in with a shriek
A ferment, disturbing the intoxicant flames of our grapes?

Why did the summer's waste wither your lillies upon my garden
embankment?

Like a floating Island cast off the shore, you are drifting, shattered
and torn.

In the scent of my memories bitters the essence of your enchantment,
Wherein are submersed the stars of spent nights, and the lights
of a risen morn.

And like a woman whose pleasures one has tasted, strange now your
longing seems

My eyes no longer shed your tears in a brotherly unified beat.

And only above the graves of bygone Springs, in the graveyard of
wasted dreams

Like a loved one's lifeless phantom, our souls again will meet.

A QUIET PAIN

Across a soft black rug that stretched along my bed
Woven of the yarns of Night into a shadowed gossamer dress
You came my Love, and poured a cup of red,
The bitter wine of your caress . . .
You pierced and penetrated like a light's feeble wave,
You burned within my nerves as the cold touch of death,
And buried in your arms as in a cold live grave,
I awoke fatigued with the burden of your breath.

I measured the gulf of seconds with many years' hasty flight,
The vanished scent of Springs, poured into the seconds' spheres
Through the curtain of our dreams dawned eternity's faint light
Like the break of a new day appears.
To the Secret's distant poles, silently together we went
Where in the rays and facets of sparkling chandeliers
Played the Eternal's miracle, where the darkened heavens bent
As if set with flames of sapphires and burning tears.

When did you strike the keys, that over the keyboards' snow
Quivered beneath your fingers like the waves on a moonlit plain?
And then you played of my life, of the evening's tender glow,
Romance, of dreams, denials and disdain.
In your music my hour's slumbering choir came to life
And melted through the stillness, as an angelus of silver bells
Even my blood's refrain poured in my veins through the rhythmic strife
Of joyous youth, as if accented by my laughter's riotous spells.

The pain of burnt desires smouldered beneath your song
In solemn requiem's cadences fell as tears
And a longing for the Highest fell to the ripened ground
As dew drops fall in sparkling golden streaks.
Time inhaled, a feeble scent, stirred by your music's might
In grapes of foreign wines it settled beneath your tone's impact,
While the glory of bygone suns, and the splendor of a starry night
Were mirrored in your rhythm's pitch black cataract.

Then with your strings' vibrations you touched the mystic strain
'Til through excessive quivers it flared into a bluish light
Of a flaming haze . . . But your music reached in vain
With the Unknown's voice of might.
My listening mortal ear . . . Where the stillness vaulted and wept
My soul's soft, deadened sighs, and grief in speechless forms!
Like a scent of offerings, to the angels' windows crept,
The sorrows of future days . . . the ozones of coming storms . . .

THE ANNIVERSARY

The familiar road I travelled on changed before my very eyes.
Even the trees that grew before me out of the lifeless snow
Seemed not the same! In the filtering greenish light smouldered
the sunset.
Like an extinct pyre of a dead, wasted day, now strangely saddened.

The horizon narrowed self with a drawn circle of steel. The night ripened.
I saw black brotherhoods of forests kneeling to the ground,
As if to pray for the dead . . . The pall of the heavens was lowered
Above my head, as if pressed and weighted down by the dusk.

The stillness that smoked from afar, fell from above and weirdly glorious
It deadened the steps . . . With whispers of awed respect quivered the
 voice of my soul,
(Something languishly feeble filled the air as if its freshness were
 absorbed
By the glowing thirst of burning tapers.)

It was a time like this, in the past when with mournful rapture I inhaled
The prolonged dying of colors and lights and listened to the music
Of approaching shadows . . . A mysterious meaning, spoke to me
Through the nearness of the night and the sighing of eternal dreams.

Today an unknown fear swept hurriedly across my cheeks, and long
 forgotten years

Again in my soul arose. How strange now appears my very breath,
As if some one invisible walked with me at my side.
And with a touch I knew, were to press my shaking hand.

O Holy One . . . This is the festive day in your garden of eternity.
It is a requiem my thoughts are chanting as in a billowy choir.
Mingling with the warm tears of the tapers, where crimson blood
 o'erflows

The chalice of eternal light, upon your black draped altar

The breath of cold death blew a curtain of shadow into my soul
And the prayer of meditant solitude pityingly pressed my hand;
For the black-draped flowing veil of my life's memories,
Was the downy couch, whereon forever was impressed the outline
 of your lifeless form





JOSEF SVATOPLUK MACHAR

(1 8 6 4 - 1 9 4 2)

Joseph Svatopluk Machar, the outstanding Czech realist in poetry was born February 29th, 1864 in Kolin and according to recent advice from London died March 17th, 1942. In the year 1891 Machar left for Vienna where he remained until 1918 as a bank official, who kept lively contacts with the political and literary trends at home. Machar's stay in Vienna broadened his political and social outlook, and enabled him to gauge all problems with a sounder perspective. Some of Machar's original works bear marked traces of Vrchlicky's lyricism, but soon the maturing poet surrenders the neurotic, sceptical eroticism of his early works and embarks upon reflective, philosophical and critical writings that dominate his more mature works. Machar's poetry is marked by a deep sincerity of thought, a piercing penetration of the restless human soul and a definite deviation from the conventional form of the poetry of his predecessors and contemporaries. In his own evaluation Machar has placed himself as a direct follower of Celakovsky, Havlicek and Neruda, with whom he feels an intellectual and spiritual affinity.



NEAR JERUSALEM

Atop Golgotha, tower three darkened crosses;
Atop each cross, a bloody, lifeless form.

The evening clouds stretch out their crimson wings
Above the city's mansions and cathedrals,
Above the homes, the walls and fragrant gardens,
While the winds that drive the restless roaming clouds,
Ruffle the silvery waves of ripened olives
Upon the mountain tops of distant Cedron.
Toward the city's gates are noisily returning
The multitudes who saw the gruesome hanging,
Satisfied now, the lifeless forms ceased swaying.

A lonely soldier stands beneath each cross,
The first, a Roman, of his Rome is thinking,
Of Roman women, theatres and baths,
Longingly thinking of the crowded Forum,
The while he casts his brutal coarse damnation
Upon the stench-filled city, dormant at his feet,
And on the race of filthy Jews therein.

The second soldier sends to distant Gaul
His hope filled dreams and thoughts.
He thinks of woods alive with birds and beasts,
Of cooling streams with pure transparent waters,
Of light-haired women with their tempting charms,
The feasts, the songs, the cups o'erfilled with wine —
Of these he thinks, and casts a look of utter hatred
Scornfully, bitterly across the sleeping land.

The third, a dusky Ethiopian soldier,
Resting on his upward pointing spear
Rolls lazily his large, white gleaming eyeballs
Towards the swaying bodies, bedecked with smears of blood
Towards the rolling waves of gardens filled with olives,
The dreaming city bathing in the sunset,
The darkened, mystic, distant mountain tops . . .
He neither thinks nor dreams
But nods his head and yawns.

T I B E R I U S

(Venom of Judea)

Look! All the lights aglow, and yet you cannot fathom
His soul's true worth . . . A shadow cast over the ages
And he, who cast the shadow, no longer can be seen.

He ruled the world, himself a lonely beggar
Surfeited with flatteries, through which he clearly saw.
Detesting mankind, self as well detesting,
He slew his soul, deprived of life's
Few pleasures by his fellow beings.
He destroyed his soul, that he might further live,
Wanting to live, that he might ridicule
The undernourished life of starving souls.

And then he died, like a flickering feeble taper
Whose flame was lit at night, but threw no light.
The barking dogs who used to lick his footsteps
With frothing mouths, attacked his memory,
In dog-like manner, tearing it and yelping.
Plebian brains called upon their inner lights,
That they might better gauge and measure him
According to the scales of scheming merchants.

And Tacitus who tried to paint on canvas
The picture of his battered, murdered soul,
Was so engrossed by the fervor of his painting,
That only the image, not the soul, lives on.

Lights all aglow . . . and he is still in darkness.
A mystery . . . a riddle . . . a shadow cast over the ages,
And he, who cast the shadow, no longer can be seen.

A K T E

All is quiet now . . . They left . . . and here he lies
In his own blood that cooled and set in clogs,
The blood that ran, and blends as into one
With the purplish rags outstretched beneath his head.
How still he lies, appearing as if dreaming,
A bluish light still glistens beneath the lashes
As of one who partly sheathes his eyes while thinking
Of some verse or rhyme he plans to write.
My Lord . . . or may I just say "Nero."
Or "Lover", I your Akte from Attalea?

But yesterday, no, yet this very morning
I stole about your palace like a shadow
But to behold the smile upon your features . . .
And now your head is reclining in my lap,
And no one here to question my possession.
And you alone, you cannot free yourself . . .
Alone I have you, as I have always wanted
Alone with you, with not a soul around
No one but I, your Akte . . . You are not breathing?
Well, what of that? You are mine, I need not share
You now with others . . . you will never leave me
No-one will dare to rob me of you, my treasure . . .

When first you passed me by, I know for certain
It was Destiny that ordered you to look
And questioningly gaze into my eyes.
Perhaps you dimly felt that someday I will be more
To you than all the people of your land.
More than your own breath, yes more than life itself.
All fled from you and I alone remained.
They spoke so ill of you and sought to judge
And torture you according to their customs . . .
I failed to grasp it . . . Your look, so sweet and tender,
Your voice, whose softness sank to my soul's depths,
Your wondrous locks, now equalled but by Phoebus'.
Why did they curse and drive you to the by-paths
That lead to Hades' depths? . . . They did not know,
And I who knew, I merely gazed at you with that same look
With which a flower gazes towards her sun,
And does not seem to care that this very sun
For other flowers shines, by others is beloved.
Yes, it was I, who could have found their errors
For I knew best, they did not understand.
But none would stop to hear a slave's complaining
And why should they? . . . Your early burning kisses
Fell fresh upon my unaccustomed lips
While your heart-beats blend with my own frightened beating,
Both hearts astir with love's first flaming passion.
And now, by God's own graces I am favored
To offer you my love's most painful rite,
To close your eyes . . . A splendid cloak I know of
The one you wore each festive New Year's Day,
Your cloak of white with the gold embroidered flowers.
In this, dead Phoebe, I will softly place you
Upon a pyre of sweetly scented woods, your ashes
I will lay at rest, in honor

Within your family tomb . . . What? Will they let me?
You are dead, and hatred only follows
To the gates that lead to Hades. My beloved
You would be moved to wonder now, to hear that one
Should dare to question the right to bury you,
You! . . . Emperor! . . . The Lord of men! . . . Their ruler.
Yes, that will be your final service Akte,
The final means of serving your former master,
The final homage, offered by a flower
To her lifeless sun, and after that
Poor Akte? . . . Is there for you an "After?"

THE LAND OF PALESTINE

Within Caesarea's proud castle tower
King Herod sat, his head in palms reclining.
The king, a weary wasted man whose life
By many ills was being undermined.

Westwardly racing, sped the crimson sunset
Into the waves that bear the blood red ring
To the tower's base The King just turned his head,
For painful is this light to tired eyes,
And he gazes across the stretching Plain of Sharon.

His gaze first fell upon Gerizim's summit,
And thence, like one infirm with age, it stole
Across Sebastia, to Bethel, and
Then further yet, to distant Antipatris.
A few steps more it dragged and then stood still
Steeped in the verdant sea. How near now seem
Its waves! The tops of palms and olives,
The crooked sycamores and tetrabints with their naked
Bark-free bodies, the pastures' buoyant grasses
All swelled and raised, all helter-skelter rushing
Toward the bluish mountain-tops that eastward rise.
Those golden islands bathing in this ocean,
Fields rich with crops, around them endless fences
Of mighty cactus, full of crimson blossoms
As if besmeared with blood just freshly shed.
And over all, a reddish light is playing
Like a bloody dust

The King closed his weary eyes.
And bloody rings begin to madly circle
Before his tightly closed and tired pupils.
Madly they dance while they upward slowly rise,
And others come, revolve and disappear,
The while the King would want to catch them all
To entertain his eyes with their lithe dancing.

From out the sea a wind blows o'er the plain,
The wind that breathes the plains' perfumed breath,
The King dilates his wasted trembling nostrils,
To catch this scent . . . The soul of grassy plains,
The lillies' sighs, the scented breath of Roses . . .
Roses of Sharon, blessed by the priests
In sacred chants of Lord of Sabaoth,
Like love's excitement is this breath of Roses,
Roses of Sharon, glorified in Cantos,
Sung in the evening by maidens around the fountain.
The sweetened odor sinks into his bosom
And wakes therein again an age-old pain;
His Miriam, this proud and dusky maid unconquered,
His Miriam, so mercilessly murdered,
His dream, his lonesome soul's eternal grief,
For his Rose of Sharon yearns the grief-sick King.

T. POMPONIUS ATTICUS

'Tis true that by the will of God remains
Concealed our future life . . . but the knowing man,
Like a pilot steering carefully his craft
Avoids the dangers of protruding rocks,
Of destructive winds, treacherous sandy shoals,
And does not take to sail when tempests rage.

My own life's course, my bosom friend
Cornelius Nepos, plans to perpetuate
Within his histories; Such picture serves
Not merely as remembrance but as an inspiration
And example: In such a manner we can will
The sum of our life's experience to our heirs
And friends, as carefully collected treasures.

Hence, merely mention the name of Pomponius
And every man of Rome will tell you thus:
"A prudent man was he" . . . Such praise remains my pride,
My best possession (excepting here of course the many favors
Shown me by Him, Augustus, and may he rule
In health and happiness for many years to come!)

'Tis true that health is but a gift of Gods,
And happiness thereof God's gilded smile
Cast down upon us struggling earthly mortals . . .
But health and happiness must prudence have
To make man's life an enviable lot.
For health and happiness are like two fiery steeds,
By prudence held in check and safely guided
To one's set goals . . .

The gift of prudence

Faithfully was given both to Augustus
And to Pomponius. (That I dare link my name
Boldly to Caesar's is not a mere bravado
Or empty flattery. The noble one himself
From time to time discusses my life's journey
And thoughtfully he speaks of by-gone days,
And praises me . . . contending oft and on
That my deep friendship was one among the jewels
Of his own life.)

My friends, my Comrades!

From time to time, when by-gone days I travel,
The days that seem so endless-distant now,
Not by their length of time, but by the number
Of incidents that lie between us now . . .
(Why even Cicero and the son of Marius
Were once my class-mates . . . and Catallina too
I knew, and Sulla-Felix, he who thought me highly
Above all other mortals!) My friends . . .
If you but gaze into those by-gone days
You realize that I have sailed my life
Through stormy seas of deeds . . . always with prudence.

About the time when Sulla and Cinna together
Angrily thinned out their ranks of friends,
I went to Athens, did not commit myself,
(Not knowing the outcome of their fearful anger).
Then prudently and at the proper moment
I sold my home, and disposed of all possessions:

In stormy times, I knew it was the custom
To take one's life as well as one's belongings
And if you hid yourself in distant corners
Your property they'd take . . . then burdensome becomes
The barren life, devoid of earthly treasures.
So I sold out, succeeded thus to hide
My life and wealth within the shades of science
In famous Athens . . . There I was enabled
To aid with loans, when the city's need arose,
Or poverty had threatened to invade the homes
Of individuals I knew . . . Thus grew my wealth,
For money grows and strengthens, the more it travels
Like a river's stream, increasing as it flows.
I was soon known as Athen's benefactor.
(Which proves my motives were not based on profit)
They offered me the rights of citizenship,
Proposed a monument erected to my name . . .
But I refused . . . for one, it is not prudent
In times of strife to cause the shout of glory
About one's person . . . if you but care to live . . .
And secondly, it ill becomes a Roman
To change his country in a time of stress,
Knowing such times will pass . . . I offered grain
When Athenians were starving . . . and friends,
At times I could not pass the streets
Because the Greek's affection was so pressing
It fairly crushed me, sirs, that is the truth.
Later, when Sulla Felix came to Athens,
I quickly gained his favor, for I spoke
The Grecian tongue as a grammarian.
I Homer knew, recited lengthy passages
From his famed tragedies, and Felix listened
While his freckled hands, carelessly ruffled
Through his reddish hair . . . I followed him about
Like the very shadow.
Then finally when peace returned to Rome
I too returned . . . And there I lived, enjoying
Cicero's warm and confidential friendship.
(Indeed, my sister soon became his wife).
And with Hortensius, Cicero's rival
I too kept friendly, for he is but a fool
Who foolishly incites hostilities
With his friend's enemies, yes, he's a fool
Who would deny that it is not a folly,
Since enemies are life's most deadly venom,
A chilling shadow cast over pleasing sunshine.

When Caesar and Pompeius later quarreled
I did not side with either of the two,
But like a scale-tongue, centrally kept pointing . . .
I stayed at home and visited but rarely,
Shamming an illness, which truly did reside
Within my body, for I slept very little
And tossed about, with many fears perspiring,
And tortured by the influx of my thoughts,
Surely that is an illness. If not, what is an illness?
Like yonder geese, compelled by heat to migrate,
To leave the Orient for cooler climes,
Before they reach the mountain-tops of Taurus
Where dwell their enemies, the killing eagles.
The geese pick up small pebbles in their beaks
And carry these across the tops of Taurus,
For fear their habitual noisy cackling
Might wake the eagles, dozing in the sunshine.
Just like the geese one must be very careful
In times uncertain, in places wrought with danger.
Pompeius once invited me to visit
In distant Thracea, I humbly sent him word
That I will gladly lend him any moneys
That he might need, but he should not insist
On my own presence . . . because I was quite ailing
And feared the dangers of a prolonged journey.

Later when Caesar to Rome again returned,
(By then Pompeius was in Egypt slain)
I went to Caesar . . . We managed well together,
And friendly I remained with this rare man.

In self-same way, my prudence always guided
My cautious steps, in later wars and storms.
I did not side with Anthony, nor Brutus,
Though freely loaned I money to the former,
The latter too enjoyed my proffered aid,
And neither cause could claim my preference.
Thus I remained towards Augustus and Anthony
When unwise haste drove many of my friends
Into abysmal depths of sheer destruction.
Yes, even Cicero, for lack of caution
Soon met his end . . . how bitterly I wept
When told . . . for Tullius I know loved me
More dearly than he loved his brother, Quintus.
This balance of a prudent man, my comrades,

This has its fault, the only fault I know of.
It will not let you offer aid to others,
Though they may be your closest bosom friends
I could but witness Cicero's sad fall.

I do not want to further preach, my comrades,
I lived my life . . . Cornelius Nepos
Will write it out, employ his style and judgment
And we can hope, his logical conclusions
Will all explain to us . . . It will appear
That prudence is the substance of our whole life.
That was my object . . . I will not detain you,
For night advances, and we have passed the time
The doctors recommend for good digestion.
I know the feast was not the most resplendent,
For I believe and often so have said,
Not to indulge the stomach. If you do so
Your brain will suffer, weep over its poor lot.
You have learned all.

'Tis time our aging limbs

Were laid to needed rest . . . Live well and hale,
My noble friends, my comrades, one and all.

THREE RINGS

Sultan Saladin was greatly worried,
Lack of money vexed this famed ruler.
He was told a Jew in near Damascus
Had more money than he could make use of.
So the Jew was called before the Caliph
Who addressed him in a kindly manner:
"Look, you Jews, of books you have a treasure,
Your wise men possess all worldly knowledge,
Tell me then, according to your judgement
Which of all the Faiths you think is best?"

Saladin thus planned to trap the Hebrew:
"If he'll say the Jewish faith is highest,
I'll reply that he offended our faith
And will order him to pay a forfeit.
If he'll say that my faith, or the Christian's,
I will ask why he had not adopted
Teachings of Mohamed or of Christ.
And again, he'll have to pay a forfeit.
I will find him guilty in each instance,
Make him pay a fine and reprimand him."

When the hoary Hebrew thus was questioned,
For a while he deeply mused, then answered:
"Mighty ruler, true, our books hold wisdom,
Yet they do not answer every query.
Our scholars do know many secrets
But the Omniscient alone can know all;
He who ever rules the earth and heaven,
Who beholds all things and who outlives
Time itself and nations and their rulers.
He is nameless; no one e'er can see him;
He is everywhere . . . Then what can I know?
I will tell a story, won't you please listen
To an old man's oft repeated story . . .
Once upon a time there lived a merchant
With three sons he loved with same devotion,
And he had a ring, a rare old jewel,
Set with stones unmatched in all creation.
This old jewel, each son sorely wanted,
Each would have it, each one begged and pleaded
That it be included with his heirloom.

So the father called a famous goldsmith:
"Master, make two rings in every detail
To be the same in workmanship and rareness
As this ring that I have on my finger."

When the goldsmith brought the rings he fashioned,
They were so alike in every detail,
That the father's eyes alone detected
Which among them was the first and true ring.
Then he called his oldest son before him
And presented him one ring, beseeching
That he not reveal this to his brothers,
Thus to spare them envy, aches and sorrow . . .
Next in turn his second son he spoke to
And with kindly words one ring he gave him,
Asking that he not reveal this token.
And the last son's ring was thus presented . . .
When the father died, the brothers parted
Each one with his ring and each one thinking
That his was the true and only jewel.

Mighty ruler, thus 'tis with religion.
You with your ring live in sheer contentment . . .
I with mine . . . the Christian with the third one . . .
And only our Father up in heaven

He who gave them, knows who has the true ring." For a while the Sultan meditated, Stroked his beard and nodded his approval: "On your way! Return in peace now brother! Unmolested bear your father's jewel . . ."

A SUN FLOWER

Over each garden wall and leafy hedge
That winds around the huts of railroad guards,
Up toward the sky, you raise your golden head
To the Sun's golden cheeks, o floweret.

How fared it then in Hellas long ago,
When on Olympus lived the ancient Gods
And when, at times, they came to mortal men?

'Twas once upon a time, there lived a King
Who had two daughters, fairest of the fair.
And one of these, the gold-haired Clythia,
Was loved and loved the young God Hellius,
The god who guides the sun's bright chariot.

But Love is as inconstant as a stream
With men at least; and as a further proof
Behold the lot of gold-haired Clythia
To show that godly lovers are like men.
A fair Olympian treads over earthly fields
To pass and stoop above a floweret,
To pluck and smell and cast away the bloom
And quickly looks around for other gems . . .

Clythia's sister, Helius beheld,
The blackhaired, pale and fair Leucothea.
'Twas your misfortune, hapless Clythia,
That he beheld her . . . Clythia farewell.
His love's bright rays that were once dear to you
Were now to you a torture, for you knew
That now they warm your sister's soft white cheeks.
And then came dreams . . . and then came memories . . .
Through these you drank of torment's bitter draught;
And when you passed the places that you knew,
It felt as if your bare feet slowly trod
Across a stubble field where once sweet roses grew.

Then to your father, you sped, Clythia,
Complained to him about your sister's love,
And in his rage, the angered aged king
Ordered his daughter be entombed alive,
The black-haired, pale and fair Leucothea,
To still your jealousy and cleanse the family name.
Then longingly you waited, Clythia,
Upon the hill where once he used to come
And had to come . . .

The God did not return.

At length you saw his golden chariot
Pass gloriously across the grey-blue skies,
And you gazed after him so sadly, longingly,
That your eyes and head grew feeble with fatigue.
He came and passed on toward the distant sea;
He went his way . . . but you waited still in vain.

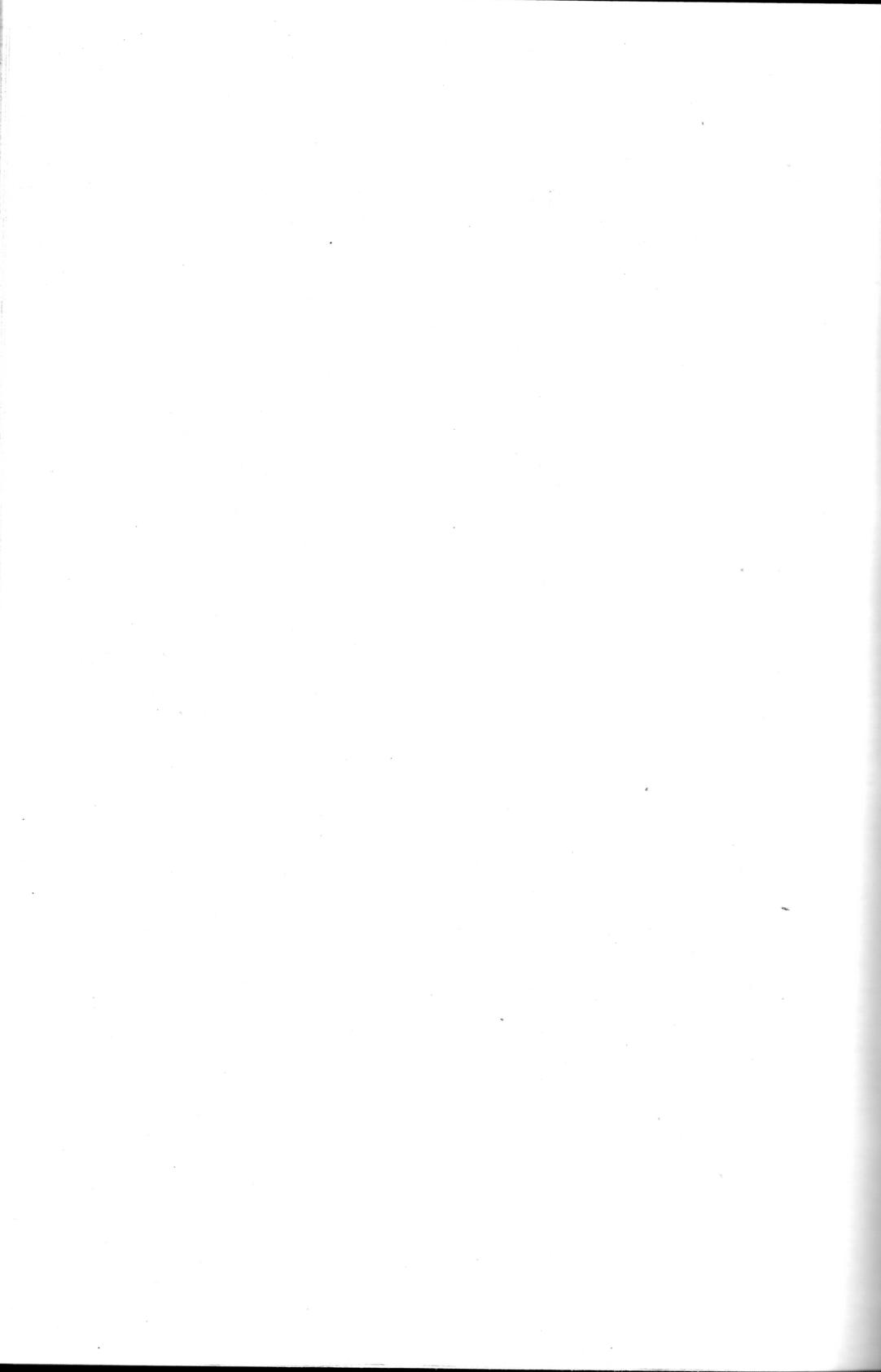
The evening chills cast dew drops in your hair
Whose gold was ruffled by the evening winds,
But you cared not . . . and waited . . . waited on.
You feebly turned your weary, yearning head
Yon where the pink-tinged Morning Star prepared
To open wide the heaven's shining gates . . .

Again he rode across the azure path
And after him you turned your aching head
Trying to capture with a saddened eye
Just one bright look from out the skies above.
But all in vain . . . He sped toward the distant sea
And disappeared . . . and you waited still in vain.

He pitied you and with compassion which
Is only alms for Love that was and fled,
He changed you to a golden floweret,
The fate of mortals who had aught to do
With the Gods who ruled upon Olympus' heights.
But deep within you, Love lived on for e'er;
Your golden head kept turning on its stem
Seeking your lover's golden chariot.

O Clythia . . . no longer does he trespass
Across the heavens in his chariot,
Your faithless lover, light haired Hellius.
Though God immortal, he too has passed away,

Olympus is deserted . . . time has fled . . .
You know this not and still your golden head
Keep looking after the empty chariot.
And when it vanishes beyond the mount,
You droop your head with yearning, longing, grief.
O Clythia, and thus you gaze for ever
Over each garden wall and leafy hedge
That winds around the huts of railroad guards;
A reminder of past times and vanished men,
Still rises high the symbol of that love
That outlives Men, Eternities and Gods
And mutely speaks about its bitter grief.





F. Gellner

FRANTISEK GELNER

(1881 - ?)

Frantisek Gellner represents a forerunner of truly modern poetry in Czechoslovakia, and at the same time, one of the tragedies of World War I. Gelner was born June 18, 1881, and died during the war, date and place unknown. Thus a truly great poet was lost before he had time to mature and develop to his fullest literary fruition. In addition to poetry, Gelner won recognition for his caricatures, both of which bear the stamp of his biting cynicism, satire and a sweeping disregard and contempt for petty foppish society. Gelner's poetic darts are directed against the vulnerable shield of small town smugness, shammed virtues and hollow praise and glory. Yet underneath this light veined critique one can detect a truly chivalrous devotion to the love of pure emotions, and a youthful worship of nature and freedom. In his style and subject Gelner shows the influence of Heine, while the simplicity and plasticity of his poetry brings Gelner steadily closer to the primitiveness of folklore ballads and ditties.



MY SONG

I know my skepsis is severe
And that my mind is proud, I fear.
My mean, blaspheming ridicule
Poisons pure ecstasy's deep pool.

I dream by day and wake by night,
My views are paradoxic light,
I turn to hate my love's wild trends,
And quickly loathe my nearest friends.

I little care what my neighbor says,
If good or bad he finds my ways.
In time I'll mow the field I seed
For obsequies I will not plead.

PUBERTY

Too soon it sang to me of love's mad wiles,
Of wasted nights, of maidens' warm caresses,
Too soon its promising and tempting smiles
Tired my body with extreme excesses.

Vainly I stretched my arms and yearned
For remnants off the table laden low,
Against my breast, where carnal passions burned,
I only grasped the phantom's foggy snow.

Oh, the endless nights of intermittent waking,
Ere through the window creeps the morning light,
When the body feels a thirst that knows no slaking,
And bluntly bleeds in the dark enfolding night.

THE BRIMMING CUP

I hold a cup within my palm,
A foaming cup that overran;
I hold a cup within my palm,
That is waiting for the lips of man.

That is waiting if its wine
O'er arid furrows will find its way,
Or if on languid blooms elsewhere
Its droplets it shall hang some day.

That's waiting if the blooms will bow
To earth beneath this burden sweet,
Waiting if other worlds somehow
Its scent will wake to glowing heat.

I hold a cup within my palm,
That's waiting for the lips of man,
I hold a cup within my palm,
I hold my heart, that overran.

THE SONG OF AN ADVENTURER

The home of my fathers was far, far away
(How far and how long ago, I cannot learn)
For lands that were steeped in a maddening fray,
Shattered and ruined in a desperate fray
For lands wasted thus, I no longer yearn.

When 'er I return I find ample proof
That I am a stranger in this new found home.
How strange all appears beneath the new roof,
Where people are huddled beneath a low roof
How strange and unkind the land I now roam.

The flames in my heart burn, fanned by a breeze
In a desolate chamber I am forging my shield.
I am longing to reach the realms of far seas,
Over the waves of strange stormy seas,
To strike at the elements and force them to yield.

When in my dreams the tempests I'll face
Feeble with rapture I'll toss on the slopes
Strange mystic hurricanes I will embrace
Mysterious passions I will embrace,
That do not mirror my unfathomed hopes.

GREETINGS TO MY NATIVE LAND

The day is full of scent and piercing light
I am blinded by the beauty of the morn,
Upon the fields now restless waves alight
Of grains that from this fertile land were born.

My native land! I wish my soul could swell
With a tourist's joy and nothing else beside.
To think is loathsome . . . Perhaps it is as well
That to this land my heart strings are not tied.

I greet it not with love but with a sneer!
A local townsman burdened with his own weight
Approaches slowly in his Sunday gear,
With his heavy breathing, overfattened mate . . .

It is quite likely they were born and reared
Here, where they spent their blunt-edged joys and strife.
Peopled few homes with a progeny they steered
Until they too were capable of life . . .

And when in years will end their earthly toil
In peace, contentment they will close their eyes
And gratefully, this bit of native soil
Their elements in death will fertilize . . .

PATHLESS JOURNEY

Disgust with my inaction e'er increases
For work I ne'er had love or high esteem.
Oh if I could destroy and tear to pieces
Each obligation, aim, or wasted dream.

To start anew . . . 'twould be a vain endeavor
When disappointment curses all I do . . .
And when a hand, no sooner raised, falls ever
Back in my lap . . . ere it can work anew . . .

And this I know . . . Were I born a woman instead . . .
I would expose my cheeks to the world's sleet . . .
With a brazen smile and skirts raised o'er my head
I would go and sell my body in the street . . .

AFTER US . . THE DELUGE

(Apres nous deluge.)

You good old pals, you who went out to break
With tight clenched fists, defiance in your hearts,
You who for men a new paradise would make
To you I sing before I leave these parts . . .

My own defiance chilled with rains of time
And rust has sealed in one, my sheathe and sword,
I know a brutal, singing crew of crime,
And I love with all my heart this reckless horde.

My friends each day live for their appetites,
To sink tomorrow to privations way.
At night they raise their heads and each recites
"Diem Perdidi" . . . I have lost a day . . .

With godly awe they do not kiss a girl . .
And fertile females their interest don't claim . .
In night cafes, mid squallid smoky whirl
They are the knights of dames of doubtful fame . . .

I have as friends extravagant old men,
We'll gladly give our all its last refuge . . .
We flaunt red roses in our hair . . and then . .
When we are gone . . "after us, the deluge . . "

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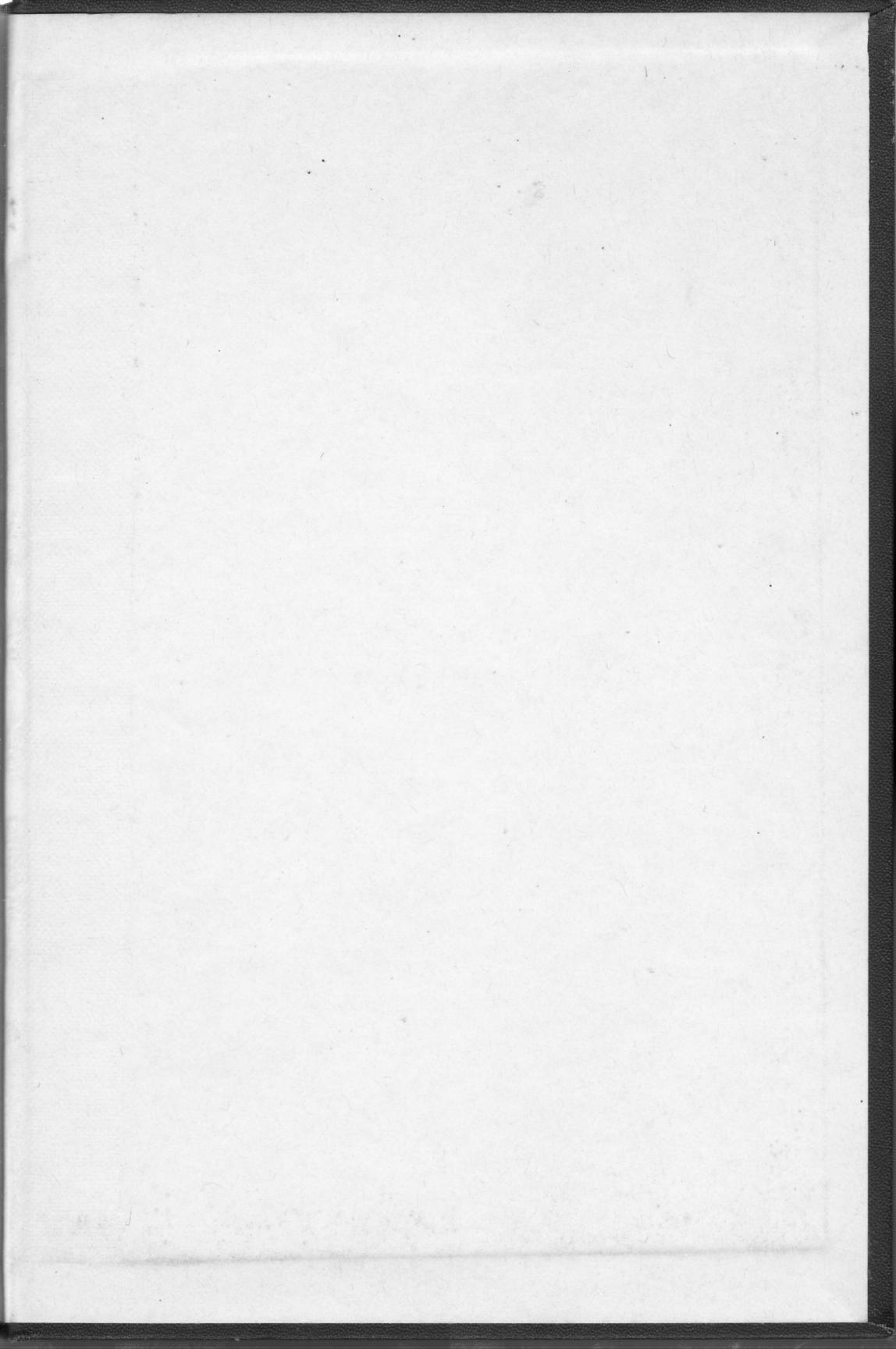












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