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IVAN FRANKO

THE MASTER'S JESTS

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IVAN FRANKO

THE MASTER'S JESTS

Translated by
ROMAN TATCHYN

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1979

PHILOLOGICAL SECTION

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

In translating this poem, I decided to reproduce the original's rhyme and rhythm schemes, largely because these aspects seemed major contributors to the original's narrative power. In deference to these constraints, I have, in places, imposed elisions on some one or two syllables of otherwise normally worded lines. I would like to emphasize that such elisions (e.g. "fin'lly" — to be pronounced as "finely" — instead of "finally") are used to delineate the basic iambic tetrameter form, but are in no way mandatory, especially for those readers who dislike archaisms and elisions of any sort. Such readers are encouraged to read all the words in their complete form.

Throughout the poem there are a handful of places where transliteration from Ukrainian into English was necessary. All such transliterations are my own and were performed according to my own perception of phonetic similarity. For these, and for all other technical details, including most of the footnotes, I claim full responsibility.

The support of many people was instrumental in bringing this work into publication. First of all, I would like to acknowledge my family's assistance throughout the entire venture. Secondly, I would like to thank all the reviewers of the initial manuscripts for their encouraging and helpful comments.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Wasyl Lew and Dr. Nicholas Chirovsky of the Shevchenko Scientific Society for their instrumental roles in making the publication of this book possible.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Larissa Onyshkevych of Rutgers University for her specific suggestions and comments, and Dr. Leonid Rudnytsky of LaSalle College for his gracious contribution of a scholarly foreword to this work.

Roman Orest Tatchyn
Palo Alto, California
November 21, 1978

INTRODUCTION

Ivan Franko's narrative poem *The Master's Jest*s is a novella in poetic form. It was written during the period of January-February 1887 and published later that year as part of the collection *From Heights and Depths*. Its subject matter is life in a Western Ukrainian village during serfdom. Its protagonists are the peasants of the village led by a poor and simple village priest, whose love for his fellow man and adherence to a philosophy of non-violence, contrast sharply with the wanton cruelty and bestiality of the Polish owner of the village.

The initial reaction to the work by both readers and critics was quite favorable, and the work has retained its popularity among Ukrainians until today. Thus the present English translation by Roman Tatchyn is quite overdue and indeed most welcome.

The sources of the work are twofold - historical and literary. In 1884, i. e., three years before the writing of *The Master's Jest*s, Franko published in the journal *Zoria* (1-19), a historical treatise on the Polish rebellion in Halychyna (Galicia) in 1846, and much of the material compiled during the research for this study found its way, poetically transformed, into our poem. The historical sources that Franko used contain several accounts of the mistreatment of Ukrainian priests by Polish landowners, some of whom were almost legendary for their cruelty, and this became the central motif of the work.

The main literary source of *The Master's Jest*s, if we discount Franko's use of oral tradition, i. e., various tales about serfdom which circulated in the rural Galicia of his time, is Mykola Ustianovych's novel *Mes't' verkhovyntsia* (Revenge of the Mountaineer), published in 1850. In this work we find a 70-year-old priest who has most of the features of Franko's protagonist. However, by his own admission, Franko was more influenced by a note which Ustianovych provides to his work. It is a brief, almost anecdotal account of an episode that happened in the early part of the 19th century. According to Ustianovych the owner of the village Jalynkovate, located in the Stryj region of Western Ukraine, ordered the village priest to perform serf labor together with the peasants. The priest went out on the field, but left his oxen and cart there and walked to the city of Peremyshl in order to file a complaint about the master. Ustianovych did not know how this episode ended, but Franko provided both a realistic and a poetic finale to it in his poem.

The strength and the beauty of the work lies in Franko's realistic depiction of the milieu and his warm and vibrant portrayal of the people in it. After a historical sketch which leads us into the years 1846-1848, Franko draws a faithful replica of a Galician village, which serves as a model, enabling us to examine the various social strata of the village and the problems prevailing in the community. Franko looks at life in this village with the auditory and visual accuracy of a natural scientist and presents it to us in all its aspects. The population of the village consists of the owner Migutski, the old priest, the peasants, and the Jewish tavernkeeper. The problems besetting the people are exploitation and mistreatment by the master, poverty, alcoholism, and a general state of despondency and depression which results from all this. Thus Franko presents us with a microcosm of rural Galicia in the 19th century and reveals to us all the tragedy of the suffering of its inhabitants under the yoke of serfdom. This becomes particularly apparent if we consider that none of the characters in the poem have names, except Migutski; they are types, not just individual persons, and this device enhances the symbolic dimension of the work. In this respect, the work shows a strong kinship with the tenets of Naturalism, as enunciated in Germany by the dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946), the literary theorists Arno Holz (1863-1929) and Johannes Schlaf (1862-1941), and in France by Emile Zola (1840-1902) and the brothers Edmond (1822-1896) and Jules (1830-1870) de Goncourt. This connection with Naturalism becomes especially evident in Franko's introduction of the imperial commissar, who, in effect, is one of the stock characters of German Naturalism. He is the catalytic agent who enters the villages, and by virtue of his different experience and background, changes the course of its life.

Another characteristic of the work is the well developed speech pattern of each individual character, which reveals to us the very soul of the person involved. Migutski, for example, always speaks with great authority and arrogance; here is a sample of his view of the role and function of the peasant:

"For serfs to know to fix my fences,
To swing the girls when th' dance commences,
To say the 'Creed' and 'Our Father' — fine.
But teach them letters? How misleading!
Why, when the serfs are busy reading,
Then who will tend my hungry swine?" (Canto IV)

And in discussing the imminent emancipation of serfs he categorically states:

"Heed no one's words on liberation,
For they bring no emancipation,
But woe. Nor tsissar, nor e'en,
In Heaven God, without restriction,
May take and reassign my share." (Canto XIV) _

The priest, on the other hand, always speaks with gentleness and humility, accompanied, however, by a firm conviction in the righteousness of his cause:

“If I was wrong,
And did indeed illegal action
Commit, I take the blame for all!
My deeds were done i'th' satisfaction
Of God's commands. I am growing older,
And death is perched behind my shoulder.
No longer can you me appal
With threats, to force me to inaction.
My conscience guides me over all!” (Canto VIII)

And in admonishing his flock to be patient and to suffer without responding with violence to violence he says:

“God shield you, children! Have you been
Possessed by Satan's emissary?
What are you, Tartar, Janissary,
That here by Heaven's sanctuary
You've brought such violence into play?

.....
The Master's wrong, I don't deny it.
He binds his soul in mortal sin!
But does it follow, from his action
That you no less a stern infraction
Should make in turn, and here begin
With violence God's estate debasing?
No, children, you are God disgracing.” (Canto XI)

The peasants' speech pattern, on the other hand, consists in individual words or broken phrases which reflect the charged emotion of a desperate people:

“..... Hey!
Break down the doors! We'll make them rate us!
May they inside annihilate us!
Hey lackeys, from the gate away! (Canto XI)

Most distinct, however, in his speech pattern is the imperial commissar whose language consists of a curious and often comic mixture of Ukrainian, Polish, and German. An example of this is his admonition to Migutski, after the latter has threatened his life toward the end of the poem:

“Consider well, Herr Schlachziz, Master,”
The commissar quietly replied,
And shook his head from side to side, —
“Gedenken Sie, was Sie da sprechen!
Do'nt say such tings, dey are Verbrechen!
Dey are a threat! Your own disaster

You made yourself, your snout, your views,
Yourself got into trouble talking!
I here was chust dis minute walking
To bring to you some welcome news." (Canto XX)

It should be obvious, that such lines present a supreme challenge to a translator, and Mr. Tatchyn has done a commendable job in overcoming many of the difficulties which the original poses while retaining, for the most part, the rhyme and the meter of the original.

Perhaps the most significant contribution made by this translation, however, is the fact, that the poem provides the American reader with an insight into the spiritual make-up of the Ukrainian people and, to some extent, into that of Ivan Franko. It is important to note, that the focal point around which all the action of the poem revolves, is the village church. It is, so to speak, a *Dingsymbol*, which dominates the entire work. In addition, there are other related leitmotifs, which are subordinate to it. Words such as *God* or various synonyms for it and phrases such as the ancient Ukrainian Easter greeting "Christ is Risen" abound in the work and give it a pronounced Christian ethos. On the other hand, there are such words as *devil* and its synonyms (including the German *Teufel*), which give the work transcendental character. Thus, the dispute between the priest and Migutski assumes added dimension. The priest with his humble Galician provincialism, his simple philosophy of passive resistance to evil, based on the biblical imperative to turn the other cheek, becomes a powerful symbol of Christianity. He is the Apostle of non-violence; one is tempted to see him as a Christ figure, particularly when he, in paraphrasing Christ's words (Matthew 26,53), to St. Peter, admonishes his parishioners to desist from violence and passively to resist evil:

"Have you the sacred words forgot:
If danger threatened Heaven's regions,
Then God could summon countless legions
Of Heaven's angels in defence?" (Canto XI)

Suffering is the substance of life for this simple village priest, and its humble acceptance — his understanding of life. But in his humility, as the author points out throughout the work, lies dignity and a moral victory. Migutski, on the other hand, with his hybris, is the priest's antipode on this symbolic level. At one point in the poem he is actually referred to as the anti-Christ, and his doom is *a priori* sealed because he dares to jest with God himself. Seen in this context, the juxtaposition of Easter and its joyous spiritual exuberance with the abolition of serfdom has profound symbolic value — a liberation both physical and spiritual — and the words "Christ is Risen and serfdom's birth/The Devil took!" (Canto XVIII), express the ultimate triumph of Good over Evil.

Thus, Franko's *The Master's Jest*s establishes the importance of the

Ukrainian Church and Ukrainian spirituality for the Ukrainian people. In our times, the Soviet Ukrainian historian Valentyn Moroz has expressed similar thoughts in his *A Chronicle of Resistance*, which re-affirms for us Franko's view. In discussing the Church in Ukraine Moroz writes:

In Eastern Europe the Church was the only power independent of the authorities. Let us take the Ukrainian revival in Halychyna. How trivial was the role played by the teacher as compared with that of the priest. The teacher was a state employee afraid of losing his job. The priest did not know this fear. The majority of the people working for the Ukrainian cause come from the clergy. "The Reverend" was often justifiably criticized, but it is also important to remember that it was he who kept the Ukrainian movement alive. Halychyna did not become Polish because of the Ukrainian Church. In this and similar cases we can equate the Church and the nation — just as we can equate the Church and spirituality in general.

We often hear: "The Church always sided with the exploiters." We hear it so often, that we accept it as a matter of fact. But facts provide a different story.

At this point Moroz quotes an ancient folksong in which the peasants lament that the masters are preventing them from going to church on Sunday, and continues:

The exploiters, as we see, drove the people from church with whips. Would they do this if the Church were really on their side? And the people were willing to work any kind of serf labor — just so they were not forbidden "to go to church and pray." People know instinctively that under certain conditions the Church is their only hope for spiritual self preservation, their only guarantee from becoming a beast of burden. The master also understood that it is impossible to break people and make slaves of them until you have robbed them of their holyday, ruined traditions, trampled their temples.

These words of Valentyn Moroz are, in my opinion, a most meaningful and cogent commentary on the message in Franko's poem. They demonstrate the importance of the Christian heritage on Ukraine's cultural tradition and thus place the work in its proper perspective. Perhaps, in writing the poem Franko tried to come to terms with his own existential dilemma and, having discovered this spiritual heritage within himself, he set an enduring monument to it in *The Master's Jest*s.

Leonid Rudnytzky
La Salle College

DEDICATION

Dedicated in memory of my father, Yakiv Franko.

Through gloomy days of dread and squalor,
And hope's and schooling's dismal dearth,
You, yoked with serfdom's crushing collar,
Were born, and grew to manhood's worth.

And though misfortune marred your station,
And chilled your soul, you ever blazed,
You lived your life to serve your nation,
You never dimmed, were never fazed.

You selflessly, with bold persistence
And honesty, as best you could,
Assailed for peaceful coexistence,
And common rights — for common good.

You strove, the fire of love within you,
And forged yourself a temper true,
And won, as did your strife continue,
You nation's love and honor due.

And if with but this tiny ember
I can ignite again that fire,
In trying, e'en as you, — remember? —
To turn things evil good, o Sire;

And if, defeating ills, dissuasion,
I shall not falter then, nor fall,
But stand resolved to serve my nation, —
O Sire, 'twas you who taught me all.

So in your name to ev'ry village
Let this, my song, itself deploy,

To all those gloomy nests of tillage,
Where woe awaits — a word of joy.

And may it there, ablaze, enliven,
The soul that's free, and free from fear,
Whose all to love of man is given,
And holds the truth o'er all as dear.

CANTO I

Aye, children, — jest, be God your pastor!
Today you're free — and fit to jest.
But when, each village held a Master,
They'd "jest" with us — that hell-disaster
Keep God fore'er from thought recessed!
'Twas for the smallest misdemeanor —
But strike a Master's cow, demean her,
Or kick his dog, attacking you
To steal your bread, begin complaining,
Upset a wain, drop sheaves when graining —
He'd have you horsewhipped black and blue!

The Masters then were ne'er as gloomy
As now — what boot these Lords today!¹?
Though still their clothes are rich and roomy,
Though still they're stuffed, like swine to slay;
Today they step alertly, sadly,
As if afraid to waken Fate;
They sidle through the lender's gate
With comic stealth, and borrow gladly,
But through and through they tremble madly,
For they're in debt for what they ate,
And sense their lives are going badly.

How high they stood in days of yore!
Back then all Masters seemed as clever,
(Aloof, ignoring serfs' endeavor),
As emperors, (though rich or poor
Were they in holdings!). So secure
Did Masters seem with their condition,
That freedom which could fast endure

1. "Today" — circa 1900.

Was something dim in definition,
The Masters, strong in their position,
Would stand, it seemed to all, forever!

Back then a glance that caught a Master
Would start the heart a-beating faster,
From fear that Master might be riled,
Though spoke he softly, aye, and smiled.
Why frown? 'Twould spoil his disposition!
No, even kings give not th'emission,
Inside their castles, of the hauteur,
As when the Master walked his town!
Not bad, this widow's pretty daughter —
"Into the manse with her!" Some ground
A serf had freshly fenced — "Hey, cretin!
You've used my wood! You want a beating?
Destroy the fence — return the wood!
Or pay me cash to make it good!"

The Master's word, his graces, rages,
With all the doom of Judgement Day,
Held ev'ry helpless serf in sway,
And e'en to sigh, or weep — outrageous!
Aye, Masters' eyes then danced with laughter,
Gay revels, banquets filled their halls,
Their woodlands roared with hunting-calls,
Their songs and cheers shook roof and rafter....
'Twas then that Masters cherished falls
Of pranks and jests as food for laughter.

And oh their matchless poker-playing!
Oh sure, they also play today —
Entranced, they play their days away.
Without their cards they'd not be laying
About at parties. But, my heirs,
I doubt you'll ever witness players
Like those that I once watched at play!
A cup of ducats² he would ante,
And sprawl unruffled, sipping brandy,

2. Ducat — a gold coin of high denomination.

On losing all, no words he'd say!
No trembling, paleness round his sockets,
And if he moved, 'twas to his pockets —
To scratch them in a careless way!

But that was, children, oh no wonder!
For from our sweat it was, and lands,
That flowed that precious golden plunder
For countless years to th'Masters' hands.
The knighthood old, the olden glory,
The ancient sieges, grim and gory,
The treasure troves, the gold, the spices,
The vile corruptions, evil vices,
The Masters' hunts and cards and feasting,
And all their sprees awash with wine,
And Masters' rage and Masters' jesting —
It all was borne on th'peasant's spine.

CANTO II

A curious era — times were nearing,
When one could see, from ev'rywhere,
E'er stronger omens keep appearing,
Of social changes, and repair.
New words rang "freedom", "rights", and "justice"...
E'en Masters' sons began to care,
And selflessly attacked injustice
By going among the serfs and teaching
These concepts to them. Minds far-reaching
Could e'en be found among the Masters,
Who, sensing where the wind was blowing,
Commenced to prove a lib'ral showing;
For outcomes, they could see, disast'rous,
Impended like an April rain.

But like the waif within a forest,
Who, lost, for help will shout his hardest,
Then, panicking, will scream — in vain:
Belike that waif, these changing stages
Were, for the most, ignored by Lords.
Save inwardly — as food for rages,
And constant fuel for duels, and swords.
Some Masters even tried complaining
To foreign guests, with care explaining
To all who'd hear: "It's awful here!
Not just for serfs, but too, for Masters!
This forced labor, — it's disast'rous.
It's ruining us!" (So 'twould appear.)
Then they would quote from book and paper,
And theorize their gains from labor
Remunerated, void of force.
But even these had no intentions
Of controverting old conventions,
And stopping slavedom at its source.

Small wonder! Naught's as tantalizing
As playing God; too, who's to know,
Or care, what could occur, or grow,
From democratic enterprising?
And though some prophets soundly stated
That serfdom's end was surely slated,
And that the law would lay it low, —
They were berated: "Tripe, your groaning!
Why, serfs and land are private owning!
What rights did government arrive at,
To take from us possessions private?"

Thus, self-commiserating, dwelt
The Masters till their final hour,
Without the least remorse to melt
Their pride, their show of haughty power.
Belike when summer's full in flower:
When distant thunderclouds will loom
With menace o'er the far horizons,
And slowly grow, with murky gloom
And hollow groans — like herds of bisons;
The sun, betimes, will burst with light,
As if exerting all its power —
'Twas how the Masters made us cower,
With spite, as neared their final hour,
As time was touching up the tower
From where would herald freedom's light.

CANTO III

'Tis from that fearful, feudal era,
A grim adventure comes to me;
The like of which, with all its terror,
Please Heaven grant, you ne'er may see!
Milord Migutski's "jest", and pleasance,
My mem'ry stirs when thus possessed;
And all the groaning, weeping peasants,
Who served as objects of his jest.

But hear me well! I'm not recalling
To stir you up, to make you bid
For th'sons to suffer some appalling
Revenge for what their fathers did.
God keep them! They've been dearly paying
For all the blindness that was theirs.
Just look, a relic, fast decaying,
Is standing still — devoid of heirs.
Aye, 'tis the mansion we erected
For our Milord — assuming airs,
He's say, "my fortress." There reported
Serfs trembled, while musicians courted
The gentry, who for days cavorted,
And sang. And now? Now Jews disport it,
They run it as a tavern — theirs.

Thus God's avenged our grief of ages!
And when I dwell on these outrageous
Migutski's "jests", I never mean
To waken hate in your intentions,
Nor with the birth of thirst for vengeance
The gift of freedom to demean.

1. The Ukrainian pronunciation is with an h, "Mihutski".

But, children, my intention, rather,
Is that from me, your aged father,
This little story should revive
Within you strength, and will to strive.

For e'er our bane its strength recovers;
In many masks anigh it hovers,
Awaiting its return to rive.
Who knows, perhaps, some coming season,
You too might get to see the day
When all that men can think or reason
Is: "Change this life, or life away!"
The truth is dead and doom is certain,
The public's voice is stilled, uncertain,
And falseness fiercely holds the sway.

'Tis, children, seeing such days of fury,
I would you'd call my words to mind,
And bear in mind my words, and story,
Are all from past events refined.
In times when lies in your environs
Most boldly rear their wicked head,
In times when rules enforced by tyrants
Are irking most; when, fast in irons,
The public's voice is hushed with dread,
The light of hope away has fled,
And ignorance has grown in stead, —
It's then should you unveil your vision
Of hope, and hold — with sure precision —
That soon the dire will crumble, dead.
Cede ne'er to evil's dread division,
Nor fail your faith with low derision,
But fight the bonds on you instead.

CANTO IV

Migutski was a wealthy Master,
E'en though he owned — a single town.
His pedigrees — no man has mastered;
But as he whipped his serfs like hounds;
And as he raised their taxes yearly,
And counted their working-days severely,
And never spared a minute's loss;
As he was rich, his peasants dowdy,
The neighb'ring Masters praised him loudly,
And hailed him high — as a model boss.

At times in winter, with the able
Treefelling done, and with the stable
All swept; and th'hills with snowfall deep;
So's not to "waste" his work-resources,
He'd have his serfs plow snow, like horses, —
"Or else those pigs would loaf, and sleep."

It's true, he served his serfs provender, —
The way he served his stock with hay;
In winter, wood to them he'd render,
Enough so they could shiv'r and pray,
In spring some bread to them he'd tender,
So they would last to work in May.

He liked his serfs in health and vigor,
Prepared to work, and slow to figure,
Disposed to laugh and dance and joke;
But hated those with rich possessions,
Those, too, who kept aloof expressions, —
And lit'rate serfs would make him smoke.

"For serfs to know to fix my fences,
To swing the girls when th'dance commences,

To say the 'Creed', 'Our Father' — fine.
But teach them letters? How misleading!
Why, when the serfs are busy reading,
Then who will tend my famished swine?"

And though no man was ever quicker
To back sobriety with talk,
He peddled, in his village, liquor.
His every shipment he would chalk
To serve the count in every hold:

As many fifths as there were people
Inside a house — were they or fæble
Or girls or boys, or young or old.
Each bought, compelled, from th'inventory,
And each was charged for what was sold. —
'Twas cast in serfdom's daily mold;
You paid your bill with work or gold;
As for the drink, whate'er the story,
Don't dare resell a single jar!

And too, he kept another hold;
He had his agent, one of Jewry,
Beguile the serfs inside his bar
With music. There, with drunken smiles,
Drunk serfs signed o'er their boots and plows,
Young girls forgot engagement vows,
And widows willed to th'Jew their cows;
Therein were held our village trials, —
The Jew just bent his back with bows.

The years went by and, openhanded,
The Master's business gained in ground.
When all at once, the bar grew stranded!
An eerie mood befell the town.
The peasants fall to moody musing
About their plight, and serfdom's pain,
They do their work, and sweat, and strain;
And each is quick, to naught refusing,
(If not — the whip will meet a bruising), —
But quiet-like, with lip set thin.
E'en glumly, as if each, in spirit,
Were slowly mold'ring from within.
'Twas like when some unearthly power
Awakes at night and heaves about;

Its presence all can feel throughout,
Though nothing's seen, and none can hear it.

The music's lost its luring power,
The only ones that that still go out
To drink are those who've grown addicted
To th'Master's "school". The agent tears
Toward the manse, with fear afflicted:
"My rent! I can't procure the shares!"

Migutski, though, himself was sadder,
For he himself this change had spored, —
He'd raged and punished, flogged and roared —
But all in vain. This him assured
That this was not a trifling matter.
He knew full well that while a man
Stays silent, works without vacation,
And drinks, he stays no better than
Some broken, docile beast in station;
That spends its life inside its pen,
Its only pleasure being when
It gets of grain a gen'rous ration.
But when he starts to act with sadness,
To hang his head with seeming care,
To ponder o'er his daily staidness,
To seek communal talk with gladness, —
It's time to tremble and beware!

For freedom, thought within a nation,
And unity's unbowed creation,
Are bitter enemies of those
Who've built their strong and wealthy station
Upon the blood and sweat that flows
From slavery. And thus the Master
Spent nights and days in meditating
Upon his state, with doubt debating:
"Perhaps I'm mis-administrating?"
Then roared he, so he shook the plaster:
"Of course! It's someone agitating!"

1. The landowners (Masters) usually leased the business rights to whiskey-associated enterprises for a share of the profits.

CANTO V

By Christ, was there an exclamation!
Back then, who *didn't* agitate?
Milords themselves, for their orations,
Were jailed for starting demonstrations,
While they with raging remonstrations
Bewept the world that serfs were paid
By th'government to kill the Masters!¹
Some blamed the Jews for these disasters,
Some blamed the Jesuits for the same,
Yet others' views were more emphatic:
They each some communist, fanatic,
Or emissary held to blame.

And in the midst of all this ragging,
The peasant stood, his shoulders sagging,
Both dumb and blind, but grim to all.
And why not? After centuries of quiet,
Belike a monstrous roaring squall,
He rose when no one could descry it,
And with his brothers, in a flood,
Bedamped his native land with blood.

Indeed, 'twas overmanifested
That some dark force, our lives to reap,
On purpose, from the blackest deep
Of th'nation's soul, of shame divested,
Nor fearing God, had roused from sleep

1. Here Franko is referring to the Polish gentry's drive for an independent Poland. The Austrian government attempted to thwart this with all the means at their disposal, even going so far as to stir the peasants against the gentry.

Its blackest passions and aborted
The nation's wisdom, and distorted
Its feeling, and endeav'ed to keep
Dumb hands for bloodshed lifted higher.

And though since th'fell Tarnowski Fire²
A year had passed, and though somewhere
Along th'Vistula lay Dembowski,³
And though Cięglewicz⁴ couldn't dare
To instigate, though us to scare,
In Lviv⁵ they hung the Pole Wiszniewski,⁶
Still, time and time there'd shoot a flight,
Throughout the land, of sharp emotion,
And all were tensed for more commotion,
And offered God each morn devotion
For sparing them another night.

Belike a wounded, healing patient
Who's suffered through an operation,
Awake, asleep — he always shakes;
A touch of ice will make him tremble,
E'en though the cause he can't dissemble —
He naught knows but his body's aches;
So did our land, by yearly stages,
Its strength from th'massacre⁷ regain,
So did the throes of dying ages
Inflict it deep with shock, and pain.

2. The Tarnowski Fire—the Mazovian massacre of 1846. The Polish gentry, preparing a revolt against the Austrian government, agitated among the peasantry for assistance. To foil this action, the Austrian government started playing on the social differences between the gentry and the peasants, and eventually provoked, in 1846, the so called Mazovian massacre, where the Polish peasants began slaughtering their Masters.

3. Edward Dembowski (1822-1846) — a Polish revolutionary democrat.

4. Kasper Cięglewicz (1807-1886) — noted Polish partisan, circa 1830. Known best for his antipathy toward Germans, as well as for his rabid hatred of serfdom. At the time during which this story takes place, he was in prison, in Kufstein.

5. Lviv — major Ukrainian city.

6. Teofil Wiszniewski, (1806-1847) — a Polish revolutionary leader, hung in Lviv by the Austrian government.

7. The Mazovian massacre of 1846.

And one more thing did spark contention:
Though none of us, through all those days,
Joined willfully in any frays,
(Of Horozhany⁸ I will mention
That there the gentry paid the bill,
And due in large to own free will,
For firing first upon the peasants.),
And on occasion took a stand
To give the Lords a helping hand,
(Before the mobbed Mazovian presence):
Still, in Ukraine, the serf was eyed
With that same measure of suspicion
That serfs within their Masters' vision
Were given on the Polish side.

The Masters thought: "What happened then,
Could well occur today again,
More so — we stand on th'foreign side."
Thus rampant rumors ne'er abated,
And kept the Masters tense, abraded,
Distending tensions to a spear.
Like gloomy stormclouds' apparition,
Portending lightning, causes fear,
For most Milords throughout that year
A fresh revolt was in the vision.

It's thus no wonder when he'd seen
This attitude's initiation,
And heard the serfs had stopped routine
Frequenting of the Jew's shebeen,
Migutski roared: "It's agitation!"

But whom to blame? He quickly thought
Of ev'ry bolder, brighter peasant
That e'er before this eye had caught —
But he could think of no infraction,
Which any one of these had done,
That implicated rebel action.

8. Horozana — a Ukrainian town on the Dniester river (in the present-day Lviv oblast), scene of a famous revolt against a local Master.

Wherewith he asked, did someone run
Through town and rouse dissatisfaction?
Some commissar, perhaps? As well:
Did any summon secret meetings,
Distribute notes or other readings?
No, negative. "Now what the hell?"
Migutski raged and hither, thither,
Around his rooms aflame did pace,
E'er shooting glances which could wither,
Dark scowls disfiguring his face.

When then he leaped in exclamation,
And smashed himself upon his brow.
"You fool!" he cried, "this situation
Has cost you days of contemplation,
And still you missed the why and how!
From way beyond the umpteenth border
You'd spot the guilty saboteur,
But whom to blame for this disorder
You couldn't up till now infer!
Why, th'most important emissar
Is sabotaging, instigating,
O Sapperment! Warum nicht gar?⁹
Why it's the priest that's agitating!"

9. Oh, Devil! And why not?

CANTO VI

Our priest was pacifistic, old,
(Ordned in Lutsk¹), of clergy dated,
Benign, (though poorly educated),
That lived and worked within the fold
Beside their peasants, that regarded
With fear the Lords, and bowed with guarded,
Respectful mien when one would pass,
And ever felt their court'sy thwarted
By th'Lords' contempt and lofty class.

And though the Master ne'er derided
These priests aloud, he nigh them glided,
And ne'er confessed and ne'er confided;
And if some point would rise, requiring
The priest's assistance (by conspiring),
He'd curtly call him to the manse,
But spoke outside with him, askance.

The only thing these priests were given
By being ordained was they were riven,
By law, from serfdom's shackling bands;
The'd spot their plot of earth in town,
And with what gifts men laid them down,
Sustained a living with their hands.
The oldster surely never guessed it,
Nor did from wildest dreams infer,
That there could come a charge so twisted;
That by the Master he'd be listed
As some subversive saboteur.

1. Lutsk — a Ukrainian city and an important religious center.

It came! For years, with dedication,
He'd worked, unweid, for us in town;
When once, by whim, he came around
To turn his hand to education.
Though he himself was not too learned,
When he began to feel that leading
A plow was past his strength, he'd yearned
To verse the village-youth in reading.

And so without another thought,
He took the kids and made it happen;
In spring in gardens them he taught,
In winter — in his modest cabin.
In teaching them, he scorned the tack
Of firstly learning how to letter;
Perhaps because when asked to back
Some simple point, he'd prove his lack
Of schooling, — or — he thought it better
To teach impromptu. He assailed
Their eager interest with stories,
In telling which, he never failed
To steer their thoughts to works of nature,
To th'God-made things which bless this world;
And with his gifted nomenclature,
He always new delights unfurled.
He always had an answer ready
For ev'ry question, grand or petty,
And could contrast it with the wild,
To show some goodly moral in it.
He knew the way to rouse each child,
And with his words completely win it;
To help it use its mind and sight,
Its thoughts to voice with guiltless reason,
And thus the children, with delight,
Bedraggled, barefoot, flocked aright
Toward the school — like lambs that sight
A spring in summer's arid season.

But that's not all that made this be,
For it was not so much the lessons
That pulled them o'er to th'pastor's knee,
As did his hospitality,
His pleasant mien and mannered presence
That blessed their meals, where they would sit

Belike a fam'ly closely-knit;
The children there would round assemble,
And, laughing out, their faults dissemble;
The pastor then, to humor them,
Would praise the one, berate the other,
Command to bow, then not to bother...
The children listen, and in them —
Inured to hunger ev'ry gloaming,
To smoke and cold and parents' groaning,
And to the rap each cheerless morning
On th'windowpane the shouted warning:
"You want the whip today? Arise!"
Inured to watching neverending
Despair of elders, t'all their rending,
Distressful, grief-exhaling sighs, —
In them, by him remaining longer,
Where all is clean and still and cheering,
Where evil words are far from hearing,
The light of reason waxes stronger,
And pleasure lights despondent eyes.

They dine, then out they dash with praises,
And run and play, then pause to rest;
It's then that learning proves its best:
They gather twigs and fashion mazes
Resemb'ling print upon the sand;
The priest emerges, book in hand,
And there they cluster all around,
Perusing it with eager gazes,
And with familiar letters found,
Build words — to form familiar phrases.

I know not but that God endowed
Each man with some important treasure:
One gets a mind that conquers doubt,
And doesn't find its match or measure;
Another, thoughts that soar about
Like eagles, mounting clouds at leisure;
Yet others' gifts are hands of gold —
Whate'er they see, their hands can fashion.
But pray, what gift do people hold
Who teach with such a gentle passion?
It seems to me that for their call
It's love they're granted most of all.

Throughout my life I've sat with teachers,
 With many men I've lived throughout,
 But never one had all those features,
 Not one was half as well endowed
 To teach with all that pastor's measure.
 God rest his soul! How well he stirred
 The doubly-unexpected pleasure
 At Easter, when our boys in chorus
 With stalwart song the service aided;
 And from the krylos² one by one then,
 Th'Epistle chanted, all unaided!
 Response was like you've never heard!
 Their moms were weeping: "Such a wonder,
 For ages, ages, hasn't ocured!
 Lads! Not for naught they've grown up for us!
 The oldster! Taught them this! And under
 Such difficulty! Into sudden
 And joyous groups the people parted,
 Debating hard upon some way
 Of helping out the priest, in pay.
 But ha, they'd hardly talking started,
 When Master's ferrets, on the lurch,
 Were fast apace to th'Master's palace,
 (Milord, himself, avoided church,
 So's not to share with "pigs" the chalice).
 And thus with Mass being o'er, the blessing,
 Migutski's page runs up the walk:
 "Hey priest! There stands a matter pressing!
 The Master wants you for a talk!"
 They started off. The crowd grew quiet.
 A tautness crystallized the air.
 We felt the dawn of dim disquiet,
 Portending pain unsought, unfair.
 We started out t'escort our pastor
 Together, but — he shook his head.
 "No need to aggravate the Master."
 He crossed himself, and calmly said.

2. Section of church in the Byzantine rite where the deacon sits during service.

He went. With Easter baskets, nervous,
 We all await him by the gates. —
 When shortly, he returns, and states:
 "A happy Easter! Saints preserve us!
 You haven't sought your homes as yet?
 No, don't be scared! There stands no threat!
 Milord but asked how dared I venture
 To start a school — subversively,
 Without submitting it to censure.
 I answered: 'That — was not my venture,
 I only wanted to — for free —
 To change th'illiterate condition.'
 'I can't deny you my permission,'
 The Master snarled, in time, to me,
 'But let me tell you, helpfully,
 Abandon this imprudent matter!'

'I wouldn't have begun it, Sir,'
 I answered him, without a stir,
 'If I had not received, by letter,
 The consistorium's³ decree:
 To teach the youth — not only reading,
 But schools to start, where they be needing.'

'Oh is that so? We yet shall see!'
 Replied Milord, then flicked his finger
 To show that now our talk would cease!
 So don't be scared! And ev'ry singer, —
 Or vet'ran old, or rank beginner, —
 Tomorrow night — to me for dinner!
 Now fast disperse, and no one linger!
 And happy Easter! Go in peace!"

3. Regional governing body of the Uniate church.

CANTO VII

And from that day there sprang to fore,
Between our own Milord and peasant,
A taciturn, tenacious war.
For we'd received an earful pleasant
That Easter morn — the first we'd heard
Of something he could not refuse us!
And here for ages we'd demurred,
Like fallen autumn leaves we'd stirred
Before the storms of his abuses.
Before, one didn't twitch his hand,
Or *breathe* without Milord's command.
And if one tired of playing martyr,
Of th'hopeless state and hopeless life,
Of th'constant woe, and empty larder;
He fled the land to foreign strife,
Forsaking folks, and home and wife,
To hardships growing ever harder.
Then: "Can't deny you my permission!"
This meant — there's something over him,
That e'en to *him* is pretty grim,
That threatens even *his* position.

So hearing this the people brightened,
Infused with dawning hope's elan.
That very eve discussions ran
From hut to hut, and few were frightened.
"We'll school our youth! Enough abuses!
Migutski doesn't dare refuse us!"
So hummed each serf, by rum'r empowered,
(Though up till then he'd only cowered),
"We have to build ourselves a school!
Is mine so low his sole endeavor

Must be to bear a yoke forever,
For all his life Migutski's fool?"

But, truth to say, there too were many
(Among the older), who to any
Such brassy statements called a bluff:
"Now why are you so all-excited?
'He doesn't dare!' — You sit and cite it!
Just wait, and he will dare enough!
Here, better shorten your discussions,
Or suffer painful repercussions
In pay for your rebellious talk
And your bravado!"

This deflated

To some extent the boist'rous lips;
For many were the backs abraded
With burning scars from Master's whips.
But as we judged it stunted vision
Without the woods from wolves to hide,
We came at last to this decision,—
We'd wait awhile, with this provision:
We'd let our commissar decide —
Should we erect a place for schooling,
Without the Master's formal ruling?

The commissar was German-born,
'Though aging, e'er in constant hurry —
A comic sort. Oft, early morn,
On driving into town, he'd scorn
To stop at th'Master's manse. His surrey,
He'd park across the peasant's gutter,
Inside, while bolting borsch and stew,
He'd start to talk: "I like," he'd utter,
"Ukrainian pessant, he is true!
Your bret I'm eating 'leffen year.
Und now I like you! You are dear.
But nasty Lords are liffig here!
Dat's bad, in plain und simple language.
But if Migutski make you moan,
Den come to me, und fúr your lankwish,
I'll make dat rascal howl mit ankwish,
Und know his fingers to der bone!"

I don't know why, but he detested
With all his might the upper class.
Perhaps their airs to him suggested
That they contemned him, held him crass.
Indeed, he'd feel within their presence
Belike an orphan in a crowd,
When they would start to jeer aloud
About the "schwabs"¹ and "German peasants",
To leave him scarlet-faced and cowed.
Then, too, they quietly related
A story from his youthful years;
How once Milords had left him faded,
Near death, in shame, and frightened tears.
Theirs was, perhaps, a truthful scoffing
That once some Lord, for some strange offering,
(Or for the ale that he'd been quaffing),
Had neatly pinned his youthful ears.

He still was young — the year by year
Advancing stead'ly in position,
And e'er quick gentry to endear;
And this because of his ambition,
One Master's daughter fair, to court:
She, taking schooling in the city,
Had snared the lad, being bright and pretty,
Approachable, and smart, and witty, —
"A star," — 'twas said — "upon the sward."

So using pull in higher places,
He got to work this Master's cases,
And oft did visit at the manse,
Which then provided him his chance
To entertain this Master's daughter;
And though he ne'er overtly sought her,
It chanced, one time alone he caught her,
And blurted ere she could disparage,
That he desired her hand in marriage.

Manusia gasped, with pleasure flustered;
And then, with voice as rich as custard,
She blushing her answer mustered:

1. Derogatory name for a German.

"Pomów pan z mamcią,"² 'n quickly fled,
The commissar with hope impaling.
Then, soon, with tatted skirts a-trailing,
Her mother swirled to him and said:
'Wiem to że pan ma się do Manusi.
To bardzo dobrze, ale musi
Pan z ojcem mówić, bo bez niego
Nie decyduję sama tego."³

So, after bowing nervously,
He went to th'Master's study, sweating.
From there he readily could see
The Master gambling, peacefully,
With guests around a dinner-setting.
He sat and, apprehensive, waited,
Until, enspirited and sated,
The guests departed. Playfully,
Milord then hailed his kitchen lackey:
'Hey, Mike! Come here! And make it snappy!
Go get some sausage, fetch some lard,
Two glasses and some ale — the hard;
And then run quickly down to th'stable,
'N tell Harry there, in charge of stores,
To bridle up the comm'ssar's horse
And hitch him by the gran'ry gable."

These things the lackey quickly did.
Milord then took a chair and slid
O'er by the commissar 'n began
A friendly, boist'rous conversation.
The commissar attended, wan,
While gulping ale, which swiftly ran
Inside his glass by th'Master's suasion.
The latter though, kept mum his stand
On giving up his daughter's hand.

And so they drank until, anon,
The lackey called the horse was ready.
Milord politely urges on:
'No pij pan jeszcze do połowy!"⁴

2. "Speak about it, Sir, to my mother."

3. "I've heard, Sir, that you've proposed to Manusia. That's wonderful, but you'll have to speak about it with her father, because I cannot decide the matter by myself."

4. "Drink up, Sir! To the half-mark yet!"

The commissar complied, distressed,
Then, terse, reworded his request:
"No jakże pan dobrodziej myśli
W tej sprawie, co mowifa pani?"⁵
"O proszę, proszę, towar tani!
Dziś jeszcze, teraz, zaraz w nocy
Zaradzę wszystko co w mej mocy,
Byśmy na dobre oba wyszli."⁶

Then having him these words afforded,
To th'waiting stallion he escorted
The commissar and helped him scale.
He slapped him on his knee sincerely,
And mumbled something, not too clearly,
And ere the commissar could settle,
He plucked a thorny sprig of nettle,
And rammed it 'neath the horse's tail.

"Farewell then, Sir! God's mercy ever!
And speed to you in each endeavor!"
He cried and whistled. Th'stallion flailed
His hoofs and bolted, screaming madly.
The commissar, behaving badly,
Did not return the merry parting;
But grabbed the mane and, shaking badly,
Went thund'ring off along the swarding.

He sped along, the horse in choler,
Until a ditch flashed underfoot;
He then got thrown, but hard and good,
And passed right out, in pain and dolor.
They found him there at break of day,
And wheeled him home upon a dray;
Therewith he suffered through a battle
With death — he lost his healthy carriage,
And coughed for five years after then.
He swore that he would ne'er again
Approach a horse, or scale a saddle,
Or turn to Polish girls for marriage.

5. "So, what do you think, Sir, about the matter your wife mentioned to you?"

6. "Oh, please, please, the goods are cheap! I shall immediately, even tonight, do everything in my power to ensure that we both come out ahead."

And for the Lords from on that date,
A bitter-deep, relentless hate
The comm'ssar nurtured, nothing muffling.
He shunned their social life and throws,
But always, when the chance arose,
Engaged with them in fiendish scuffling.
And ranked he was to show his mettle,
For close to prefect⁷ did he class,
Thus not a single day would pass
That he would not be called to settle
Some tangled, complicated kettle
Between the Masters and the mass.

So it's no wonder that so fully
He kept the Lords in raging throes,
And peasants came to seek him duly
For his advice on all their woes.
And what the gentry didn't intention
To try to get him booted out!
They'd raise the governor's attention
With lengthy plots, wherein they'd mention
That he subverted, that in doubt
Their ownings stood, that by his pushing,
The serfs were set for revolution,
And didn't work as e'er they ought.
But all their letters got arrested,
The commissar was ne'er molested,
And no one gave it second thought,
For in the sector all was still.
Too, those Milords who did the blaming,
But cast themselves in careless framing,
The commissar cared not a shill.

And so it was to him we sent
Our delegates. His visage brightened
When he discerned that we were frightened
To build a school: "Go right ahead!
Build! Go ahead! Don't worry, pessants,
If Master stops you, such unpleasants
I'll make, dat he will bang his head!

7. Prefect — district elder, subordinate to the governor.

Ja, build! Tsissar⁸ make formal ruling,
Dat ef'ry town profide für schooling,
Dat ef'ry serf to books be led!"

These words to us felt much the same
As water does to 'wilting flower;
It seemed that God, in all His power,
Had graced the town. When back we came,
We straight'way started conversations,
And plans, and taking up donations,
As if Milord did not exist.

Hey, hey, but quickly we discovered
The fence we'd jumped another covered!
Migutski soon unearthed the gist
Of our commotion. Twenty leading
Promoters of the "school proceedings"
He summoned, quickly, to his yard;
Then had them on the ground prostrated,
And had to each administrated
A score of lashes, fast and hard.

And then he said: "What's this I'm hearing?
Your Lordships here for schools are steering?
That's wonderful! Aye, carry on!
You've started gathering donations?
Well, those were my considerations!
Were they too few? But say it! G'on!"
These words through gritted teeth he sounded,
And with a smile; then, stage by stage,
He changed, his lips grew stiff and rounded,
His face and eyes turned red with rage.

"Ha, bastards," then he snarled, "in fetters!
A school you want? I know what stakes
You're pulling for. It's not for letters,
It's freedom here you're seeking! Snakes,
Not serfs! You think: 'I'll sniff at school,
Then who will dare to try and pull
Me out to work again?' — Get out!!

8. Tsissar — the Austrian emperor (Kaiser). In this translation, tsissar is accented on the last syllable. The Ukrainian pronunciation stresses the first syllable.

And don't restart these stupid matters,
Or else! And as for further clashing,
If of that idiotic school
I hear once more, then in rehashing,
I'll serve you such a salty thrashing,
You'll hold your sanity in doubt!"

But here the Master made his error:
He meant to break us with the blows,
But riled us up. "If death's disposed,
Then die we shall!" the cry arose,
"But he shall pay for trying terror!
Our right to justice isn't slipping!"
And straight' way our complaint we mailed
About his willful public whipping.
Anon the district court assailed
Milord with inquests; 'n though he shouted,
His preference for whips was routed,
Thus soon a new-built school we hailed.

But here again distresses sprouted.
We had to find a teacher, too,
(The pastor had too much to do).
But ev'ry time we'd find a tutor —
Migutski then, no fuss, no muss,
Would get him drafted, spiting us;
Or talk him into being a suitor
Inside the manse; or else by railing,
He'd scare him off; or, all this failing,
He'd send his lackeys during schooling
To perpetrate malicious fooling,
To drive the children out of class,
To clean the manse, and snip the grass.

But we in turn would not surrender,
In court complaints we'd always tender;
The commissar our saint became.
In many ways Milord he branded,
And in him bitter foe he landed.
For e'er for all Milord would blame
The "filthy schwab". For long did bubble
Their emnity, till once some trouble
Conspired to take it off the ice:
One tea it got them both invited;
The "schwab" espying, in a trice,

The Master sprang and swung his hand;
And ere acquaintances could right it,
The comm'ssar's face he'd soundly panned.

A scandal rose, and hard to guess it
How th'Master managed to supress it.
The commissar, though, long did nurse
His insult; biding time, he waited,
And fin'lly, in the end, repaid it;
And so the Master got it worse.

For 'couple years this spatting faltered.
The meanwhile, things in town grew altered
To some extent. The aging Jew —
Expired. But th'one that came in lieu
Was slyer still. 'Twas he did proffer
A "plan" to swell the Master's coffer:
To cut the price of whiskey down.
"For one, their drinking will compound.
Too, fewer serfs to fight will offer, —
In drink their discontent will drown."

And sure enough, this profit-pulling
Pulled scores of victims to the ground.
While in the bar, all profit-minded,
The Jew assailed the serfs: "You're blinded!
Your galech⁹ leads you by your nose!
For shame! Why cram your kids with schooling?
Why fight Milord and suffer for it?
Why for some silly school endure it?
It serves no purpose, devil knows!"

And thus, in ripple after ripple,
The hellish blight spread out to cripple
Each home in turn. It soon was found,
The unanimity at meetings,
Which used to reign, was fast receding.
Too, school attendance dropped. The town,
Assumed an air of hopeless glooming,

9. Yiddish for priest.

(Except for drunken voices booming),
And daily out its labor ground.
It seemed, that great illumination,
Which rose to bless our little nation,
Was vanished, gone, without a sound.

CANTO VIII

But then, for no apparent reason,
There sprang a social change of season,
The singing stopped, the drinkers thinned.
The people's spirit weirdly faltered,
But though their work remained unaltered,
Migutski straight'way caught the wind
Of trouble nigh. No explanation
Could he at first uncover for
The cause of this contamination,
Some demon's work had dragged to fore.

But being sure that no one other
Than th'aged priest was instigating,
He, snooping, soon found mitigating
Events which tied with one another:
Whenever fun'ral guests were shriven,
Or birthday parties, christ'nings given,
Or e'en at meals, which to enliven,
The priest'd get asked to, he would start
The one same sermon: "Children, whiskey,
Is drink with which you all should part.
To anger God with booze is risky!
That evil brew is blinding you!
It's evil, and, the Devil's spread it.
Yourselves but pity! Winter's due,
And you are lacking boot and shoe;
The Jew's got all of you on credit!
At least your children's chances weigh!
Untutored, hungry, sickly, naked...
What will they grow to be? Today,
Not dark, but knowledge holds the sway.

Today it won't suffice to make it
Through life by plowing earth, but knowing,
The language'll mark the fruitful showing,
The wit to fight and not get sunk!
The brains to know both foes and neighbors!
Now what rewards will bless the labors
Of ignorants, who're also drunk?"

Too, those of th'Master's lackeys prated,
Who once or twice to Mass had made it,
How in the sermons, e'er again,
The pastor temp'rance promulgates,
And vendors, drunks, and bars berates,
And warns it's time to well begin
To war with whiskey; and, to spurn it.
Milord, when this from them did learn it,
Was thunderstruck: "So that's his game,
'It's time to war with booze, and spurn it!
And what should I then, maybe burn it?
Or maybe beg my pigs to earn it?
Perhaps to him it's all the same,
But not to me it's so, oh no!
It's robbery! Why he is reaching
Inside my pockets with his teaching.
Why, he is damming up the flow
Of half my income. Hey, you duffer,
Not Satan even this would suffer!

"Go fetch him! Now!" Migutski crowed.
Then after giving out the orders,
Around his splendid living quarters,
He, raging, spat, and sat, and strode.
The priest, being summoned, quickly made it
To th'Master's rooms and, bowing, waited
l'th'doorway, baring first his head.
He stood and stared, afraid, impassioned,
His visage strained and turning ashen,
As if his heart had turned to lead.
And from above, with hate-filled vigor,
At that pathetic, fear-filled figure,
Milord as at a serpent glared.
He spat, and on with measured measure,
Kept pacing, pacing at his leisure —
The priest just stood and trembled, scared.

At last the Master stopped his pacing
And grated out, the pastor facing,
The following, with biting tone:
"Hey, priest, are you completely crazy,
Or is your brain becoming hazy?
Or has it through with trash been sown?
Why is it here you're always set
To shove your neck inside my net?
Can it be possible your bosses
Have placed you as the pastor here,
To have you all your people steer
To undermine my gainful process —
To steal from me, and cause me losses?"

The priest recoiled from such a lacing,
And crossed himself, his pulses racing,
But ever kept the Master facing:
"It seems you were misled by lying."
He ventured feebly.

"What? By lying?
Who'd lie? And why? Is it a lie,
That in your Sunday catechisms
You plague your pigs with aphorisms,
And then, for temperance to try,
Throughout the week with them you bicker?"
"It's true, Sir!"

"Well, and when your sty
Accepts these words of yours, then what
Becomes of all my trade in liquor?"
"That's not my business."

"Ha, you scut!
It's not your business! And deflating
My source of cash, and agitating,
Is that your business?"

"Please, Milord,
I do this not by own volition,
I do this only in accord
With my authority. My mission
Precludes me taking up positions
On serfs' concerns on th'wordly plane.
But o'er their souls to watch, to guide
Their lives with honesty in stride,
That, please you Sir, is my domain."

"Eh, babble on, you holy phony,
Your babbling's nothing but baloney.
But I repeat, and once for all:
Of this dumb war you've lit with liquor,
Don't let me glimpse another flicker,
Nor me, nor th'people! Let it fall!"
"I'd gladly cease my deeds prospective,
I wouldn't even have begun,
If I had not been ordered on
By th'consistorium's directive."
"God damn, the what?" Migutski screamed,
And leaped as if some shivered pellets
Had cut his foot. Those putrid prelates
Us all of gentry've doubtless deemed
To send to th'poorhouse! But produce it,
This your directive. I will use it,
So witness God, to bring them low!
I'll even disregard expenses
To drive this district to its senses!
To our tsissar himself I'll go!"
"The consistorium's directive
I can't produce, " the pastor frowned,
"It came, a church-to-church connective,
I didn't write its number down."

"Ha, scoundrel!" roared Migutski, glowing
With rage, "You lie! At last you're showing
Your character! No such directive
As you've described has passed 'connective'
Before your eyes. For, hear me say,
Such letters, writs, and sim'lar things
That you receive, your deacon brings,
Compelled, to me without delay!
Ha, what a scoundrel! There you stand,
And speak rebell'ious lawless speeches
From day to day t'your peasant band,
Then hide behind your church's reaches!
And oh how innocent he angled:
'I wouldn't even have begun!'
Abide, I'll teach you, trickster's son,
With whom you've so discreetly tangled!"

But, strangely, that abrasive bawling,
The angry, cutting, biting tone,

Which should perforce have forced a falling
Of th'pastor's fire and sent him crawling,
His spirit splintered to the bone;
Completely otherwise affected
The priest — it served to make him strong.
He straightened up, his scared, dejected
Expression strengthening; then coolly
He met the Master's eye, and fully
He bowed and spoke: "If I was wrong,
And did indeed illegal action
Commit, I take the blame for all!
My deeds were done i'th'satisfaction
Of God's commands. I'm growing older,
And death is perched behind my shoulder.
No longer can you me appall
With threats, to force me to inaction.
My conscience guides me over all!"

He spoke and bowed again politely,
Then took his leave, discretely, lightly,
Milord just stood and gnawed his fist.
"Just wait! For your adroit demerit,
I'll pay you back in spades, I swear it!"
He o'er and o'er in anger hissed.
He cursed the priest to Hell and Devil,
Then, cutting short this raging revel,
He started to consider ways
Of realizing his decision —
His rage was such, that soon his vision
Was swimming in a teary haze.
He soon deduced retaliation
For th'pastor's preaching and oration
Was not so easy to achieve.
To beg the consistor'ium's leave
For vengeful action heavy-handed, —
To have the pastor reprimanded —
This suited not the Master's billet.
To have the district court receive
A suit against him? — No, damnation!
To take it their would surely kill it.
Why, there the commissar's the power, —
He'd tear the shirt right off his back.
"No", — mused Milord, — "the only track
That seems, is free to me this hour,

Proceeds to Lviv. There sources dwell,
The congress, legalized defenses, —
New contacts, parties... I can sell...
My turnip-crop to meet expenses...
My wife — she'll find it entertaining,
For long she's been to me complaining
How sick she's grown with boredom here.
And I'll be able, too, to tell it
To th'governor himself, to spell it
All out...for him. We once were near,
And friends! Was not I oft his host
When he in Sambir¹ held the post
Of commissar? Just wait, you, pastor!
And all you scum! You all I'll plaster
To th'walls! I'll grind you till you throb!
And naught shall bring you your salvation,
Nor pleas, nor tears, nor cantillation,
Nor that accursed, toothless schwab!"

1. Sambir — a Ukrainian city in Galicia, on the left bank of the Dniester.

CANTO IX

Milord and kin for Lviv departed,
(In clouds of dust from where they started).
And now the town revived again,
As if some grim oppressing sorrow
Had passed. Though now the Master's men
Could well command a worse tomorrow
Than yesterday — that's just the way
Of human nature — change delights it!
That night gives way to day — excites it,
Unchanging scenes alone are gray.
Albeit worse, but make it differ!
And though the slaving might be stiffer
With th'Master gone, the boon is felt,
Throughout the tension seems to melt,
And all grows easier to live for.

The pastor, meanwhile, isn't sleeping,
But constantly, throughout, is keeping
His war with whiskey warmly steeping —
He wants the town to swear it off.
The people hear and, silent, scoff;
The thought to them seems strange and sweeping:
"A peasant swearing whiskey off?"
Some, too, were frightened by the story
That they'd be forced to break the oath.
"Who knows for sure?" they stammered, loth
To act, "Perhaps the inventory¹

1. The document outlining specific duties and obligations of the serfs under the existing quasi-feudal system.

Says peasants whiskey have to quaff?
'Twould then be crime to swear it off!"
And all the priest says — comes to naught,
An oath, you know, is nothing shoddy!
One stands to loose both soul and body!
The pastor, all his efforts fraught
With failure — with inspired persistence
Requested, (seeking skilled assistance),
For th'commissar to lend a hand.
The commissar did all but slaver
When fronted with this happy favor
By th'priest: "Ja, so. You should haf planned
Dis action long ago, I'm tinkin';
Dies serfs are gut, dey work deir soil,
But till dey stop deir whiskey-drinking,
Vergeblich², lost, shall be deir toil."

Therewith they both collaborated
On when, and how, and what to do;
The comm'ssar even cash donated,
Deriving pleasant satisfaction
From thinking how the Master's action
Would suffer, once they banned his "brew".
And so one Sunday, soon thereafter,
The church was empty'ng, Masses through;
The crowd, with habit customary,
Stood grouped before the cemetary,
Exchanging friendly news and laughter,
When, in a trice, somebody spotted
The comm'ssar's equipage, which trotted
Around the corner into view.
'Twas he, and uniformed; a-beaming,
He neared and bowed, his buttons gleaming:
"Hello, und how are you dis morning,
Okay?"

"Yes, thank you, Sir!"

"Okay!"

2. In vain.

But I haf brought a word to say.
A small, a friendly word of warning,
To you my friends. Your honored priest,
I hear he tries to start you tinkin,
To haf you swear to stop your drinking,
I like dat tough! Pay heed, at least!
Haf coorage! I was told you worry
Dat Lord will make a noise und flurry?
Niks draus!³ Chust let him try to make!
You tink der Master is permitted,
By law, to make you whiskey take?
Niks draus! Don't worry! Gott forbid it!
Now listen, our tsissar is willing
To make content each one of you!
To give you stock, und land for tilling,
Und schools for education, too!
Und our tsissar — now really pay
Attention: — wants to gif you freedom!
Now if you don't decide to meet him
Halfway by sob'ring, 'Ey!' he'll say,
'No freedom yet! Dey do not rate it!'
Is clear? Each fact I knew, I stated!
Und now it's up to you! Good day!"

'Twere futile, children, to effect it,
To tell you how these words affected
Our village-folk, from near and far:
"Th'tsissar himself denounces drinking!
To give us freedom here he's thinking!
What boot Milord and Moische's bar?"

'Twas as if thunder rolled through town.
The people thronged with breathless tension.
'Twas as if all were drugged by mention
Of imm'nent freedom. Dazed, they wound
Up going as one to th'pastor's bowers,
And soon around his hut were swarmed,
Like bees around a bloom of flowers.
And soon the sep'rate voices formed

3. No chance.

Into a din, o'er which ascended
The phrases: "Freedom! Freedom, father!
We'll soon be free! Soon none shall bother
Our lives! Th'tsissar himself extended
This gift to us! To him we owe
Our lives! Now peal the bells and station
Your cherished oath's administration!
We all, both young and old, hereafter,
Shall swear to you and God to go
Through life without intoxication!
We mean to rate our liberation!
Come, father, please! It's what we're after!"

The pastor paled. It fairly cowed him,
Not knowing what had changed us so.
But all the joyous shouts about him
Were proof that we, deranged or no,
Were serious in our intention.
He'd naught of any freedom heard,
But well recalled how th'Master stirred
The fear in him, and in his mention —
To drive the district to its senses,
He'd go and seek th'tsissar's consensus —
The priest saw fearful consequences.
For well he knew, poor soul, inside,
That to the Master had he lied;
That no such order had been given
By th'consistorium, to teach
The serfs they shouldn't drink, and never,
An oath of temperance to preach.

The priest with th'foll'wing fear was riven, —
That if the Master really tried to,
He could discredit him forever.
He knew St. George's⁴ staff would side to
Support Milord. Indeed, the first
To cast a stone'd be his own order,
On his "unlawful", righteous lark,
And that, unbid, they'd be the worst

4. St. George's — the Catholic cathedral in Lviv, seat of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in western Ukraine.

At mocking him. 'Twas this did spark
The priest to fear: Let one uprising,
A real one, stir against the Master,
And there would then be no surmising
On who to blame, no cool apprising
To analyze the dire disorder;
Milord would simply point: "The pastor,"
And lo, the pastor's o'er the border!

So leaning on his cane he waited,
And held his peace. A long duration
Of time passed by before the loud,
Disordered din of th'village crowd
Died down. "What's with you?" then he stated,
"Here, children, children! God be patient,
What are you up to? Where, what sort,
Of freedom did you all envision?"
"Envisioned? No!" came back th'retort,
"But, real, in ev'rybody's vision!
Why not an hour has passed since
The Sir commissar, his badge displaying,
Has told us so! You aren't saying
That he would lie to us?"

"Ah-ha.

And what was it he told you? Ha?"
"He said what you've been saying, father,
He told us all — to sober be;
Then added, were we worth the bother,
Th'tsissar would want — to set us free!"
"And then what else?"

"Then nothing, really."

"You fools, you fools. And that's how freely
You change his meaning? Empty gourds!
That our tsissar'd unshackle many —
Sweet God — is true! The question's *can* he?
How long ere can he? Hear me, plenty!

"Deliberate on this yourselves:
Whoe'er at home three sons affords,
Would wed them all — with rich provision;
But not at once — 'twere stunted vision,
For they'd get each a small division,
And he himself'd have empty shelves
Once winter came. Thus, in the nation,

The tsar's⁵ the sire. Three sons he boards,
The serfs, the army, and the Lords.
All three he sees with equal pleasure,
For all to his exalted station
Are useful, 'n to the nation's measure.
And thus the tsar has each one tended
In such a way that all stay well;
To give you freedom would be splendid,
But then, who knows, the Lords, offended,
Might band together and rebel!"

"Rebel? Just let us spot them trying!
And Satan, e'en, won't catch them flying!
Must they be taught by us anew?"⁶

"Ah, see yourselves, how you've degraded,
How little you'd appreciate it,
That freedom, when I hear from you
Such threats of vengeance! No, my people,
Your pride in strength is truly feeble!
No slaying, no revenge desires
Th'tsissar from you. You should concede him
Your fate entire. He'll give you freedom,
You may be sure, when time conspires!
With violence, though, 'gainst my instruction,
Believe me, friends, you'll just compound
Your enemies, and end up bound
Along the road to self-destruction."

The serfs grew gloomy faced and hounded, —
No doubt unpleasantly resounded
These words to them. But what to say?
They saw the truth i'th'pastor's fable:
Th'tsissar would gladly strike the label
Of serf — were he but only *able*.
Too, they stood gloomy-faced and hounded,
For know, their bodies still resounded
From beatings from the Master's staves.

5. "Tsar" — the tsissar.

6. Reference to the Mazovian massacre in the Lent of 1846.

And, sure as fire, their bodies pressed them:
"Stay, brother, back, pretend you're smitten,
Until in black on white it's written
That we're no longer serfs and slaves."

And so the pastor's flock addressed him:
"So tell us, father, what to do?"

"Do children? Pray to Heaven! Too,
Stay calm and wait, avoid dissension,
For sure the tide will turn your way!
And too, to no one should you mention
The things the comm'ssar spoke today."

"All right, we'll do as you're suggesting!
But still, the whiskey's got to go!
Our worth as men th'tsissar is testing,
And we our best will show him! So!
Today, this instant, we stand ready
To swear till death to sober stay!"

"May Heaven keep your motive steady,
And help you beat temptation's sway!
But it's at best a grueling question:
An oath, my children, 's not a joke!
Now why not follow this suggestion?
Here, Philip's fast' is fast approaching;
Let each of you t'himself resolve
To drink no more, all wrongs to solve
With peace and love, your foes' encroaching
To fast forgive, and make them friends;
To fight away from bad impressions,
And bravely bear what Heaven sends
In punishment for our transgressions.
And then, when Christmastime is done,
Whoever finds himself progressing,
Shall thrive to me, and thereupon,
Accept the vow, with Heaven's blessing.
Thus shall you, children, still be spared
For sixty days of more probation.
Be sure to spend them so your nation

7. Church fast preceding Christmas.

Will see you standing pure, prepared,
When New Year's comes. Who can envision
What this new year shall bring our way?
So those of you with true decision
To swear, be back on New Year's day!"

The crowd grew still, deliberated,
Then, bowing low, in answer stated:
"So let it be! We take the stake!
We'll tread along the path you've laid us;
But, though they torture us, degrade us,
No whiskey henceforth shall we take!"

CANTO X

The end of '47 broke,
With wintry calm. Each fiercely heavy
Expanse of snow turned hard as oak.
The district's ev'ry brook and levee
The ice cut through from crest to ground.
The forests crackled, iced to th'marrow,
And ev'ry morn there could be found
l'th'snows a frozen little sparrow.
The end of '47 broke...
Predicting woe. Each sign portended,
That naught would come to e'er revoke
That evil order, painful, burning,
Which our blood-spattered backs bespoke.

The evening sun had not descended
When there rang out a tinkling sound;
And o'er the bridge approaching town
The Master's sleigh was spotted turning —
All bundled up in quilts and furs,
Milord and Lady were returning.
That sound and sight at once dispersed
Throughout the town a frightened burst —
The fright of chicks a cat discerning.

And whispers spread like leaves igniting,
"What news on his return from Lviv?
What kept him? Did he really go
Before the gov'rnor to recite
Complaints against us?" In addition,
"How did the governor react

To his complaints?" Thus, fear inciting,
The rumors spread like superstition,
And soon with gloom the town was racked.

And at the manse, that very minute,
Each heart was finding panic in it,
To clamor, chaos all did fall.
The servants, pale, agog, were all,
Athrash like flies in boiling water.
For with the sudden loss of hauteur,
Each saw the myriad sins behind him,
And softly all the saints implored:
"Impair his senses, deafen, blind him,
So he will miss my errors scored.
But just this once, the last one, really,
I'll work all chores and dinners freely,
If just this once I'm spared the sword!"

And thus the Master, gloomy, brooding,
Returned to home — a wolf enraged.
It seemed he'd lost some weight, and aged.
Was his endeavor so denuding,
Or did some grief bereave him so?
He changed his garb and started pacing
Throughout his rooms, precisely tracing,
As was his wont, his hand through th'air,
As with a whip — to strike a blow.

At length he called, into his lair,
With bell, a page, and bade him go
And fetch the overseer; "Call him,
And hurry! Stop, you idiot! Call him,
And when you've done it, go and see,
That Moish' is summoned here to me."

The overseer came. "Apprise me!"
"Your Lordship, ev'rything is swell!
The wheat, if God have all go well,
Within the week, it won't surprise me,
We'll have in stores. From lambs — the score
That here were born since you departed..."
"Well, this is fine, these things you've charted.
Tomorrow they'll be all regarded

By us. But now I'd rather more
Be told how th'village did endure,
And whether any trouble started."

"The Lord be praised, not e'en a grumble,
The village-crowd was peaceful, humble,
And did its work. 'Twould be a sin
To carp." Migutski's lip grew thin
On hearing this. But hardly stopping,
He turned and strode along the floor.
The overseer ventured more:
"One task we didn't come to terms
With yet, however, was the chopping."
"Which chopping do you mean?"

"The worms,

Had through the timber started cropping,
And you approved to clear it out."
"Ah yes! You mean this wasn't finished?"
"But no. On your estate throughout
Too many chores were left. The lab'ers
That owed you work their chores had finished;
The others had to, for their labors,
Be paid to finish graining wheat.
So all-in-all 'twas hardly meet
To organize a crew. Some felling
We did at first, but now — no telling,
The snows have hit us."

"Very neat!"

Migutski snarled, and like a beet
He reddened, — "No, let not those cattle
Get cold, by God, let's keep them limber!
And let the worms devour my timber!!
Well, nicely have I left my chattel
In hands like yours! Begone! I'll come,
And look at all myself, in sum."

Then proudly th'Master waved dismissal.
The overseer, bowing steeply,
Withdrew, and, with a muted whistle,
Just shook his head and muttered deeply:

"A nasty change is in the making!
Our Master's temper's shot to shards.
He must have gotten quite a baking
In Lviv for sure! Not once, from cards,
Or ball, no matter how injurious,
Has he returned so mad and furious."

But even more the oldster faltered,
And started worry'ng even more,
When he observed how nimbly, spryly,
How like some pup or kitten, slyly,
The Jew approached the Master's door.
"The Master's ear! That filthy Judas,
He doubtless slinks with spiteful cause!
Some luckless soul he means to bury,
Some confidant, no doubt, this Brutus
Intends to slay with clacking jaws.
Well, he'll get far, he will, the Master,
With such a friend! Well, there's no hurry.
We'll see what happens. But perhaps, —
Not vict'ry faster, but disaster,
Will from the Jew's asides elapse."

And meanwhile stooped, obeying orders,
The Jew into the Master's quarters
Made way, not stopping e'en to knock.
Milord, from out his window peering,
His back to th'Jew, remained unhearing,

Nor turning once, belike a rock,
A long long time. The Jew stood ready,
And bowed away without a word.
But time to time Milord observed
Him in a mirror, while he truckled.
Time flew — the Jew's spine rose and fell,
(He knew what pleased the Master well!)
Until at length the Master chuckled,
And spun around: "Enough, already!
Or Moish', you'll turn into a bell.
Approach! Your back I'm tired of viewing!
Now sit and tell me what's been doing."

"Ah, all is wretched, noble Master!

We're quickly heading for disaster!"

"We are? How so?"

"Milord's not heard?

The serfs a bold revolt are staging!
They've lately all as one demurred
To touch a drop. Like some contagion
They shun my bar. Ah, weh ist mir,¹
I've thought that I'd go bankrupt here!"
The Master smiled. "Now, Moish', stay stable.
God's good, and things are hardly bad,
When you're so nice and, truth be had,
Are hardly looking like a table!"
With this he poked him in the navel,
Atop a belly round and full.

"Ah, Master jests, as he is able!
But no, the times today are cruel!
It won't be long, and all our frolic
Will turn to grief when we're deposed.
Has Master heard? The local galech
Has egged the serfs to open war!
Has Master heard? They're all disposed,
Tomorrow morning, at attention —
The instant services are o'er —
To swear from whiskey full abstention!"

"What's that? Tomorrow?" roared Milord,
And leaped as though he'd sat on thistles.
"The priest? He still his damned epistles
Is spreading round? Be damned his gourd!
Der Teufel drein!² I'll bring him sorrow!
The vow, you say, is due tomorrow?
I'll vow their asses, rest assured!"

"And is the Master," further prated
And bowed the Jew, "aware whose hand
Has pushed the serfs to take their stand?
Oi weh, the good old days have faded!"
"No, tell me, who?"

1. Woe is me.

2. "To the Devil!"

"The serfs related,
The commissar had paid a call,
And by the church declared to all
That our tsissar desired to free them,
But just was waiting for the day
When to a man he'd sober see them.
Oh if you'd seen! At that display,
'Twas such a cry sprang into being, —
I even contemplated fleeing!"

"So! Th'overseer didn't say
Not e'en a word about these matters
To me. Well, fine, we'll know from now
Whose trust we can regard, and how.
I thank you, Moish'! I'm penning letters
Straightoff to Lviv. And while we're waiting
For their return, continue baiting
The serfs — unearth the facts and all.
And see that witnesses are mustered.
And of reprisals don't be flustered!
As yet the heavens didn't fall
So that the priest can push me under.
We'll end up grinding them asunder!
But deftly, slyly!"

 "I will call."

Spoke Moish' and bowed into the hall.

CANTO XI

The starlit sky was barely graying,
The morning stars' demise displaying,
And all the town was dreaming, when,
Aroar, the belfry bells began
Their Matins-summons loudly making.
The folk, in answer, all about,
Inside their huts start slowly waking,
Like stars, the lights start slowly breaking....
Then slowly, solemnly, throughout,
In coats and furs against the weather,
In heavy hats, and boots of leather,
Toward the church the people go...
From far away is heard the croak
And crunch of snow, like thudding dusters,
And over bobbing heads, in lusters,
The breath exhaled expires like smoke.
Hair, beards, mustaches sharply glow
With hoar, that freezes, hard as oak.
They move along in groups and clusters,
But silent, silent — to a man.
It seems, each one among them musters
His thoughts to face some task at hand.

And so it is: today they're taking
Their vows — it's New Year's day today!
And, like the soldier, in a fray,
Each, striding on, feels deep inside him,
That what he's doing will provide him
With bitter grief, that here he's making
A stand against a heartless foe!
That ere he carries his intentions,
The Master's rage and Moishe's vengeance

Will bring him boundless pain and woe.
But all were minded, come what may,
To suffer through, to even lay
Their lives, if they, in doing so,
Could worth and right to freedom show!

Hey, hey, was there a moment splendid!
I still recall it clear today:
Our wakened unity ascended,
And under fire annealed, and rended
Each obstacle, and strong, transcended
Each smallest break within its way.
Enough 'twas for these few impressions
Of freedom nearing to bestow
That fire on us. Each stood to go
And fight, prepared his land, possessions,
E'en life for freedom to forego.

But oh, that moment lasted sparely!
Such blessed moments happen rarely
In nations' lives, in lives of men.
If through each coming, sterner morrow,
We'd only made such moments more,
The spirit of this once we'd borrowed,
Oh, brighter far'd be our tomorrow;
And blunders, errors by the score,
Would ne'er be causing worthless sorrow....

We neared the church. A novel worry!
It's closed! Outdoors the frost is strong —
Outside we can't remain for long.
"Hey, sexton! Open up, and hurry,
The doors are locked!" the people shout.
The bells grew still, he down descended,
And spoke: "Bow down your heads — it's ended!
Just cross yourselves, and turn about,
For me to open up — is out!"

"What? Why? And how?" the people cried.

The sexton, in return, replied:
"No sooner I'd the bells untied,
When th'Master's captain, on the double,
Came, grabbed the keys, and sped aside."

The crowd just gasped: "New woe to greet us!
What new and unexpected trouble
Does th'Master pose? Perhaps he tells,
Himself, that he will thus defeat us?
He wants to fight with God to floor us?
He dares to lock the church before us?
Hey, man the belfry! Sound the bells!
Ring out alarm! Bid all to gather,
We'll stop, with force, this Master's act!
We'll make him choose if he would rather
Desist, or keep his bones intact!"

And in response the bells resounded,
The people milled and screamed and pounded;
Like fire their rage was flaming keen
Within their eyes and words and mien!
The threats and curses fly, and: "Hey!
Hey, smithy, run and get your hammer!
We'll smash the cursed lock away!"
The women wail amid the clamor
As for the dead. The din is sheer,
Unearthly noise, unchecked, unguarded.
'Twas thusly, children, how we started
That forty-eighth, (the famous) year!
Then, round the bend began appearing
A passel of the Master's crowd,
Who, armed with whips and stepping proud,
Toward the churchyard started nearing.
The clamor dropped, all strained in hearing
For what the Master had to say.
Their leader thus, in full display,
Came up and: "People, what's the matter?
Why choose you here this morn to gather?
And why such bellowing unholy?"

"Unlock the church! Return the keys!"
In answer, like a stormy breeze,
Roared back the crowd, "Today is holy!"
"Is what? You fools! What dolt decreed
Such rot? Today is ordinary!
The priest? His brain is growing airy!
The stupid fool can't even read!
Milord is smarter! Start dispersing!
Be off — for daily work be nursing!"

Be back with axe and saw and sleigh —
We're going to clear the woods today!"
The crowd stopped cold. And thoughts were scary:
Today is truly ordinary?
Could all of us have gone insane?
But no, the scoundrel's making merry!
And in a trice, like sudden rain
That springs in summer, like the forest
That groans when th'hailstorm rages hardest,
The crowd that had in doubt stood by,
Broke out in thundering reply:

"Go lie to th'dogs in Master's stables,
You filthy, lying, fawning fraud.
But feed us not your stupid fables!
With you the pastor never gnawed
The bones beneath your Master's tables!
But look, what th'rascal's here contesting!
To work, he says, on New Year's day!
Or could this be the Master's "jesting"?
May he beware! On such a mount,
He'll not get far along his way!
This deed with God, not men, shall count!"

"And I repeat: begin dispersing!"
The lackeys' leader backward led.
"The keys are at Milord's. He said
That no amount of screaming, cursing,
Or threats would make him turn his head.
About revolt he doesn't worry. —
If you revolt, he'll summon troops.
So I repeat: disperse, and hurry!
Ere you end up yourselves the dupes!"

"And let him summon cannon, mortar!
But, though we all our lives forsake,
Not e'en one step from here we'll take!
What's this, to slave each day to order,
Then have him steal our only quarter,
The right to say our prayers? Hey!
Break down the doors! We'll make them rate us!
May they inside annihilate us!
Hey, lackeys, from the gates away!"

But th'lackeys kept their heads about them,
And braced so it was hard to rout them,
Around their lines a thickness grew,
At first they laid their whips about them,
But then, hemmed in, they took without them,
To fists... The tension rises through.
Already, o'er their battling kin,
The people in the rear begin
To roll up snow, and, at the raiders,
To hurl it. Rage was growing rife.
Here, there, in hands gleamed out a knife,
And one could hear: "Let's kill the traitors!"
And maybe we'd that famous year
Of forty-eight with blood have christened,
If, as our eyes with murder glistened,
The priest'd not stood to interfere.

Amidst the noise, the screams and friction,
No one had seen him, as he came,
Amongst us — when at once, aflame,
And in his hands the Crucifixion,
That stood outdoors, he sprang up nigh,
Threw up the Crucifixion high,

And cried, in stern and ringing diction:
"God shield you, children! Have you been
Pössessed by Satan's emissary?
What are you, tartar, janissary,
That here by Heaven's sanctuary
You've brought such violence into play?
Is this the place to fight and riot?"

"It wasn't we began the fray!"
The crowd cries, "Look, the church's border
The Master's blocked, and gives the order
That we must work for him today!"

"The Master's wrong, I don't deny it.
He binds his soul in mortal sin!
But does it follow, from his action,
That you no less a stern infraction
Should make in turn, and here begin
With violence God's estate debasing?
No, children, you are God disgracing."

"But 'twas in praise of God that we
Rebelled — with open honesty!
Must we accept this new intrusion?
If so, the Master, in conclusion,
To sharpen stakes for us will start!
No, he should live so long, the vermin!
You tell him quick with th'keys to part!
And if he doesn't mind your sermon,
Then we will tear these doors apart!"

"You fools, you fools! May God excuse you
This blasphemy you speak today!
Do you expect your rage will weigh
In Heaven's favor? With abuse you
Decided praise to give to God?
Have you the sacred words forgot:
If danger threatened Heaven's regions,
Then God could summon countless legions
Of Heaven's angels in defense?
No, children! God commanded thence
To mind the law, to love your neighbor,
And e'er t'obey authority."

"So we should go today to labor?
But that — a mortal sin would be."

"No, you'd be working through coercion,
And God will not account it wrong!"

"But, priest, you too must come along
To work with us on this excursion!"
The lackeys' leader blurted out.
"I?" cried the priest, like stung recoiling,
"I? I? Am I not freed from toiling,
By law?"

"No, priest! There stands no doubt,
The Master clearly told us: go,
Go drive the serfs to work below,
And see the priest is brought along!"

"It shall not be, as here we're standing!"
The crowd cried out, — "No, father, no.
Be not afraid, You shall not go
With us to work. We're off demanding
At once your rights in district court!"

We'll at the elder's feet report
Your case and ours against the Master!"

"No, children," th'aged priest replied,
"It shall not be! Court not disaster!
If here the Master makes us ride
Today to work, then, children, truly,
'Twas God that helped him thus decide;
'Twas God allowed him t'act so cruelly,
So that he'd soon be paying duly
For his display of sinful pride.

And this I tell you all, and clearly,
The Master chose to sin severely,
He chose upon this holy day,
To lock the church on us, his neighbor,
To drive us off to do his labor, —
So let it be! And those, I say,
Of you that live, shall see him pay!
But we, my children, must be free
Of rage, and o'er his prideful showing,
Forego the bad mistake of throwing
Ourselves in sin — that worse would be.
To Master's strength let's make concession,
And with our meekness leave th'impression
That we are nobler men than he.
Today your vows you would have spoken.
Now think you all that I'd allow
For you to take a sacred vow,
If you the church's doors had broken?
Let's shoulder this new trial coldly,
And I repeat to you, and boldly,
That God will credit it to you!
Are not you all aware that morning,
When stars the sky are still adorning,
Is when the frost is harshest, too?
But though it coats the windows thickly,
That's just the very sign that quickly
The sun will rise and melt it through."

And strange — these words, they seemed to make
The people, as if shaken badly,
React all-sullenly and sadly,
Their vision eastward casting madly

As if in hope for th'gloom to break.
The sky, though, bright with stars ere morning,
As soon as early day was borning,
Into a foggy murk had stirred;
And midst the pines across the heather,
A chilling, mounting roar was heard.
And th'priest no sooner'd spoke his word,
When, indicating frightful weather,
The aspen near the graveyard's side
Began so loudly creaking, shaking,
That all like children started quaking,
And with a groan together cried:
"Let God decide! We're through despairing!
We go to start for work preparing!"

CANTO XII

Hey, howling, raving, struck the weather!
The icewind thundered from the east;
Like th'captured steed across the heather,
To freedom springs, from bonds released.
Now glances back, the heather pawing,
Now neighing, rears with leap and bound,
Now springs so hard he scores the ground
Acanter, gallops circles round,
Then screams again, abruptly drawing.

So did the wind, with clouds of snow,
Sweep in from open fields and plaster
The town. With each tremendous blow,
It filled each footprint full below,
And howled, and roared, as though to show
Its own displeasure at the Master!

But even fiercer sobs and sighing
Throughout the village one could hear:
The old, the kids, the wives were crying,
The storm compounding thrice their fear.
For they the tempest all regarded
As Heaven's warning from the sky.
And how they wept when off we started
For work, how soulful rang their cry,
'Twas made as if for death we'd parted,
I'll ne'er forget it, till I die!

But, ha, in vain the ululations!
The Master speaks — the world obeys.
Already, near the hitching stations,
Are heard the lackeys' barks and brays.

And, thus, below the blizzard's presence,
From th'stations one by one the peasants
Emerge, despondent to the core.
The horses champ, their eyelids wringing,
And gasp against the blizzard's roar;
Each driver's bundled up with furs,
And here the wind is leeward flinging
The sleighs, or blasting backward, stinging,
Its fury making breaths reverse.
But ha, the Master's will could weather
A hundred blizzards o'er the heather!
That will, which like some evil curse
Hung o'er our heads, and sought to bind us.
And thus along that stormy mile,
Our empty sleighs moved out in file,
And th'blizzard swept the tracks behind us.
Just faintly, barely, now and then,
Above the roar, a spectral singing
Assails the ear. Its bells are ringing!
Sweet Lord! Out there, in churches men,
Are celebrating! Lights a-blazing,
The incense hazes, upward blown,
The people sing, and th'deacon's phrasing...
And we — thrice damned! To us alone
Is being denied this day of praising!
So each one, having heard the sound,
His whip aside with caution tosses,
And, getting both his gloves unbound,
With heavy sighs devoutly crosses
Himself, and prays.

When look behind,
From th'parsonage a sleigh has started,
Within, the pastor, being guarded
By lackeys. Thus, the Master's mind
Is set indeed to make him labor!
But how? Had he in Lviv persuaded
The governor to give permission?....
No wonder he was so belated,
And these Milords have fox's vision....
'Twas thus we thought, and doing so,
With new despairs ourselves assaulted.
When fin'ly someone hollered: "Whoa!"
The manse! And by its gates we halted.

And by the gates Milord was standing —
In Polish boots, broadshouldered, tall,
In hat and fur, blackmaned, commanding,
And darkeyed. At the blizzard's squall,
He sharply flicked, his eyes ashine,
A whip, as if the wind to throttle,
But really he was counting off
The sleighs that passed him all in line,
Kept swigging whiskey from a bottle,
And to the peasant's bow and doff,
Returning not a single sign.

At length the pastor he detected,
Being followed by a lengthy train
Of those whom he had long suspected
As instigators-in-the-main.
He smiled, and stepping o'er the snow,
Approached the path and shouted: Whoa!"
The sleighs stopped dead. All feigned a hearty,
Deep bow. Milord's smile never faded.
"Well, gentlemen," he loudly stated,
"At least today you weren't tardy?
Did no one get intimidated
By th'wind, and stay behind t'evade it?"

"No all have come!" the captain came and
Before the Master made th'aside.
"Aye, so it is! Or he'd be fried!
Ey, he'd be beaten just like Haman!
Now, citizens, reveal, to me, please,
Why all your tricks? When will you meet and
Decide to give this town some peace?
Meseems, you've been too rarely beaten,
Or no unseemly birds and bees
Would still inside your heads be humming!
Apprise me, all your majesties,
What's this I hear about your drumming
Some kind of vow? Do you desire
A whipping for your ev'ry member?
Ey, I'm not God, but I'll conspire
To feed you such a taste of fire,
That e'en your g'andsons will remember!"

He spoke this, then he raked us o'er
With hawkish eye, then, open-eyed.

As though he hadn't seen before
The pastor there, he neared his side.
"Your Worship," says he, "what a wonder!
You too have come to work for me?
Ah, splendid, splendid! Th'serfs are under
A decent pastor, here it's truly:
Where th'flock proceeds, there follows he.
Well, welcome! We accept you duly."

At this the priest, his diction shaken,
Still with nobility replied:
"Our mighty Master is, we've taken,
Today in humor. God supplied
Milord with joy — God bless the bearer!
Just pray, dear Master, strongly pray,
That God does not, this coming day,
Reverse your happiness to terror!"

The Master flinched, as though he'd got
To 'serpent's fang a close exposure.'
"What, what's that, priest, you said there, what?"

"I say but that, what with composure,
Each Christian person here may hear.
Whom God imbues with pride so daring
That e'en for God he ceases caring,
It's sure that then he's to a glaring
And deadly chasm drawing near."

"You'll sit and mutter threat'ning phrases?"

"No, Sire, no threat I'm intimating,
'Tis Heaven's truth I'm merely stating,
Which maybe's unbeknown to you."

"Teach those that stupid are, as you,
But feed me not your stupid graces."

"I'll gladly give Milord his due
For wisdom, but the question raises:
Did with his wisdom he construe
This holy day to thus debase us,
The church to lock in all our faces,
And have us all to work impressed?
Ey, Master, Master, step more slowly,
And don't opine your wisdom holy!
Why, if I hadn't thrown my breast,

The crowd from rightful anger keeping,
Before your lackeys, then, who knows,
If by the church this very second
These raging winds and swirling snows
Would not be o'er their corpses sweeping
In pools of blood! Milord, but reckon:
The world for all has borders laid,
Without which all its order loses,
And no one can, not having paid,
These borders cross whene'er he chooses."

"Heh, pretty sound your preachings, priest! —
But strange indeed from you I find them:
For ev'ryone you've words, but least
Of all yourself you choose to mind them.
Did I not clearly tell you: know,
And act within your priesthood's 'borders',
Your stupid school aside to throw,
To stop inciting serfs' disorders?
And look! You've since, it seems, begun
From ev'ry inch of skin to flay me!
The serfs for freedom wait as one,
My whiskey, though you skin them, shun —
The Jew refuses shares to pay me.
What plan you, ha? For me to go
Through life beneath a beggar's banner?
No, priest! Again I tell you, no!
I'll teach you in a diff'rent manner!
Too soon did you 'n that cursed schwab
For freedom here begin preparing!
'Tis thus I'll show you and your mob
That, though you all your fangs be baring,
I'm Master here! And from today,
You be in deed the peasants' neighbor!
You knew to drain my wealth away,
Repay me with your hands in labor!"

"That here Milord's the lord is truly
A fact — but there's a higher Lord.
To your great strength I truckle duly,
But here and now apprise you, coolly,
That you're coercing; in accord,
My state from serfdom frees me fully,
Th'tsissar's own law Milord is breaking."

"O'er legal ground it's senseless raking,
For law is not your mind's profession.
You saw the inventory e'er?
Therein it's clear: each priest partaking
From peasants' lands a double share.
From this I draw, with clear discretion,
That this his land is peasants' treasure,
Thus from it th'normal corvee measure
My privilege it is to draw."

"Aye, that were so, but th'only flaw
Is that the inventory poses:
'From tax and corvee free' above it."

"He's only free, who's worthy of it!
Still, if your dignity supposes
That you've been treated here unfairly,
Then sue in court, and there I'll fairly
My rights support. But now, at hand,
I'm still the Lord, and my command
Obey you shall! Enough oration!
Now off and start the operation!
And lively now, with vig'rous grips, —
In case they're not, my lackeys' whips
Will fill you with determination!
Hey, off with you, now! Single file!
I'll join you there in 'little while!"

CANTO XIII

With groans and roars the forest wheezed,
Like some ferocious, starving beast,
And, armlike, whipped its ebon branches
Awind, with sweeping scrapes and heaves
As, sleigh by sleigh, despondent, anxious,
We passed below its gloomy eaves.
What weird and scary thoughts descended
Upon us then, it seemed as though,
Toward some curse our way we'd wended,
Some realm of shadow-haunted snow,
From which fore'er we'd stand suspended,
And barred, as if from jail, to go.

What weird and scary sounds ascended
From out beneath our axe-ripostes,
O'er copse and chasm the echoes blended,
As though their clapping throes intended
To summon witches' hordes and hosts.
And each we knew, this day was holy,
And this, our sacrilegious sound,
Would cast who knew what dire, unholy,
Misfortunes o'er the world around.

But, ha, scant time was there to fluster,
When ev'ry move or thought we muster,
The Master's hirelings' eyes curtail.
Thus we ourselves, to hide inside us
Our fears, assault the trees beside us,
So fiercely, chips and shivers hail...
We hew and hew, our teeth aclench and
Pretend these trees are all th'most trenchant,

The grimmest foes we've ever known.
Here some the timber bark in sections,
While others saw it, make collections,
And pile it up in stack and cone.

The priest was by the crew commanded
To drag the branches naked-handed,
Together with the strongest youth.
"In Heaven's name!" aghast we shouted,
"Do you expect this man can rout it?
Are you bereft of conscience, ruth?
But see, his feet are barely dragging,
And here are hidden pits, and snagging,
His failing strength will hardly do!"

"Shut up!" the Captain bellowed, spitting,
"We're following the Master's bidding.
Keep pulling, parson!"

We withdrew,
And on, again, in raging silence,
Beneath the blizzard's howling violence,
The timber-felling flames amain.
But we observe how indiscreetly
The lackeys laugh as, worn completely,
Our little pastor faints with pain,
His burden straining to sustain.
The scoundrels chortle on, ignoring
His stately age, his priestly state,
On him they concentrate their goring:
"Pull harder, priest, the Master's late!
And when he comes and finds you lounging,
Then you and us he'll both berate!"

But all in vain the oldster fumbles
With efforts new — his arms collapse
Beneath the branch, his efforts lapse.
With almost ev'ry step he tumbles,
Then up, somehow, again he stumbles,
But all in vain. Such bitter raps
Are not for him! For long we waited,
And watched the crew as they degraded
And ruthlessly abused the priest,
And how he meekly e'er in silence,
With lamblike nature bore the violence,
A-struggling like a driven beast.

Then fin'ly: with a helpless throw,
He limply sinks upon the snow
Beneath a branch he's firmly grasping,
And lies, his breath already rasping;
And still the lackeys goad him on!
Like jackals by a corpse they tarry,
And poke him, prod him, while they harry:
"Enough your lounging on the lawn!
Go move the wood before it's gone!"

And then — what was it that befell us?
Was it the tempest's surging malice?
Was it some timber's creaking cry?
Or was it — lightning striking nigh?
Or did, perhaps, in us some feeling,
Which had, since morn, been there congealing,
Dissolve and burst into the light?

Enough that, moved, with time suspended,
With axes and topirs¹ extended,
We surged, with screams the tempest rended:
"You animals! Inhumans! Right!
Enough of blood you've sucked and plundered,
And persecuted us, and sundered!
'Tis here your bloody reign is ended!
To death with them! Together smite!"

Was it the wind or evil demons
That sped us, fed us grim appearance —
Enough, that in a flashing bound
We'd all the Master's crew surrounded
As with a fence, and held them bounded
With our ferocious presence round.
Our blades of tempered steel were swinging
But inches o'er their clustered press.
"Kneel, scum!" we cried, our voices ringing,
"Right there's the priest! Who must confess,
Confess at once your fell condition,
And quickly offer God contrition,
For none of you shall leave alive
This place today!"

1. A type of axe indigenous to the Carpathian region of Ukraine.

Their pulses quickened.
The lackeys froze, with terror sickened;
With such a raging, lightning drive
We'd hit them, that they brooked no notion
Or thought to offer us resistance;
Fear, terror, strangled their emotion
So strongly that (to our assistance),
None dared resist, or there for sure
We would have finished him completely.
Themselves unknowing what, or for,
They bowed their heads together neatly,
And at our feet themselves they threw;
'Twas '46 for sure — its bloody
Events and terrors, doubtless muddy,
Before their eyes were born anew.

"Good neighbors, brothers! Grant us quarter!
What are you doing? Think you, we,
Do all these things delib'rately?
Don't you, as we, transgress the border
Before the one same Master's order?"
"You lie!" our angry cries responded,
"For we to work are forced, and ridden,
But you have hired yourselves unbidden
For Master's work, to him you've bonded!
Aye, now we brothers are, and neighbors,
But what are you in daily labors?
What words to us do you evoke
When, held beneath your hands, and gripping,
Beneath your kicking, staving, whipping.
Our bodies bleed from ev'ry stroke?
Enough of it! Our stifled cry
Has broken free! And may we perish,
But we shall teach your kind to cherish
Our rights! Now pray, for here you die!"

"Ha-ha-ha-ha! Now who'd have though it?"
Asudden someone nigh applauded.
"Ha-ha-ha-ha! A pretty view!
But look! The masters-overseers
Are learning how to crawl, in tears,
Before the serfs! And timely, too!
For shame, good Sirs! Your honor's peeling!
Arise! Enough your fervent kneeling,

Or soon the snow will wet your pants!
And why these serfs, against their praxis,
Have circled you around with axes?
Are they preparing for a dance?"²

It was Milord. It seemed, he'd sprouted
From th'ground itself, so quick he'd crowded
Amongst the throng; in fur so grand,
In Polish boots, and whip in hand,
As always, proud, but void of anger,
For e'en an impish smile with languor
And hidden mirth his visage spanned.
As one we froze. The loudest thunder
From clearest skies could not have vied.
The mindless rage which forced our stride
But moments past, completely died.
And we grew flustered, as if under
A cloak of guilt, as though we'd been
At petty stealing apprehended;
And thus, as guilt replaced chagrin,
Our axes down to ground descended.
And th'Master, ever haughty, smiling,

Stepped calmly out toward our middle,
And with a scornful glance did riddle
His crew. They each, recov'ring breath,
Stood trembling, shifting weight in silence,
Suppressing fear with nervous violence,
And giving thanks to God, in silence,
For being spared a brutal death.

And th'Master jeers with loud derision:
"Well, Sirs," he says, "who would expect?
The serfs were teaching you religion!
Devoutly did you genuflect!
Well, that is nice, such fine behavior
Is ne'er in vain! And to our Saviour,
The act of worship's always fair, —
As long as one with true devotion
(These words he voiced with stressed emotion)
Concedes to God his soul in prayer!"

2. Sarcastic allusion to a well-known Carpathian folk-dance, done by men wielding axes.

The crew stood dumb, like beasts in cages,
And now the Master turned to us:
"You stupid fools, to fluster thus!
More stupid, even, than courageous!
'Twas I your fealty did test,
As tests his son a loving father,
And you react as though possessed,
With axes up, and set to slaughter;
You idiots, 'twas just a jest!"

We stood, in answer grim, unspeaking,
Our gazes driven t'ward the ground.
And th'Master: "On your own you're bound
To certain doom! Like sheep you're streaking
With mindless blindness o'er the brink!
And why? I'll tell you all the reason:
Here evil mongers, speaking treason
And holy lies, have made you think
That soon you're being emancipated,
With dues and serfdom abrogated,
Is this not so? Now tell me, come!"

The crowd stood dumb. "Well, well, stay dumb!
But I know all. The only trouble,
Is all these serpents, speaking double,
Have lacked the grace one point to drum:
How proves one that it's time to free him?
For this I'll tell you what obtains:
The only one deserving freedom
Is he who discipline sustains!
And so I thought to test your mettle,
To see if rate you freedom yet;
I thought with jest the test to settle,
And now I see, that ere the medal
Of freedom's yours, you've long to pedal
The road to wisdom in your head."

The crowd stood dumb. Without a warning,
The captain then approached the Master,
And bowed. "Your pardon, Sir! Since morning,
We drove ourselves, e'er harder, faster,
Like windswept leaves above the water,
Full twice into the face of slaughter!
And 'twas a jest, the Master's jest!

No, gracious Master, faithful crews
Do other Masters greatly treasure,
And risk them not, for jesting's pleasure,
To peasants' fists and deadly brews.
Why we in wits would lack deployment
Within your service more to strive;
We henceforth thank you for employment —
May God without us help you thrive!"

The Master gaped — no answer making,
It seemed the captain's bitter breaking
Had cast asudden this affair
Into a whole new light completely;
But still the mirth reposed repletely
Upon his lips and in his stare.
When, suddenly, among the peasants
A moan was heard, and someone's presence
Was marked by 'waving hand — the crowd
Drew round; then back, by th'burden bowed,
The priest brought o'er before the Master;
He'd lain throughout th'entire disaster
I'th'snow supine, and seeming dead.
And corpselike pale he was, ashiver,
Like one who's stabbed been; in his head,
His eyes with dimming light did quiver,
And barely audibly he said:

"Milord did jest, like 'loving father
Will try his sons, their hearts to test!
Did thus, in turn, the Master bother
With God, in innocence, to jest?
And was it jest, today's devotion
To block from God, the Mass to stay?
And was it jest, with such commotion,
Against the law, without emotion,
That I was martyred here today?
This all was jest. For this your "jesting",
I shall, Milord, in Heaven's court
Draw up complaints. I'll there be resting,
Ere morn, — you too, ere next year's festing,
Shall there be summoned to report.
Your chattel shall, through thieves' dependents,
Without a trace, like chaff disperse,

Your house shall fall, your sons, descendants,
This evil jest of yours shall curse."

These — neither threats nor imprecations,
Like blindfold-caused discolorations
With gloom the Master's vision rent.
He trembled, facial muscles drawing,
Stood, tugged his chin, his lip agnawing,
Then fin'ly barked: "Your brain is bent!
A mindless dotard's senseless blaring!
Now, hey! For home begin preparing!"
And he withdrew. And so we went.

CANTO XIV

Like nightmares born of heavy dreaming
Were all these things that chanced to fall
That day on us; the blizzard's screaming,
Our raw emotions' frenzied streaming,
The Master's "jest", the pastor's fall.
And when we left the woods together,
Without a sound, and gazed about,
It seemed as still as death; the weather
Had flung its snowy quilt throughout,
Above, a cloud as gray as paper
O'erstretched the sky, the wind was down;
Just barely seen was distant vapor
Of smoke from houses back in town.

And after all we'd seen we found
Within our hearts a heavy graying
Of sadness deep, — the dying pains
Of all our hopes and all our praying,
It seemed that God Himself was saying:
"Forevermore you'll live in chains!"

Beneath this brunt of sorrow grueling
We slowly homeward took the lead,
Like some depressed cortege. Indeed,
'Twas so in part — for we were pulling
The priest. His life did fast recede
From out his mouth, like 'scarlet flower,
He'd turned as cold as th'air around,
His heart beat slowly yet; no power
He'd left to talk, just low did sound:
"Farewell, my children! And forgive!
To God the punishment relinquish!
Concede to darkness till the dark
Shall God with light Himself extinguish,
And set you free!"

But well we knew,

In spite of what the priest inflected,
That this was not the time to yield;
For as we passed the Master's field,
We glimpsed his servants while they drew
And barred the gates — he thus was frightened
That we'd asudden get enlightened,
And tear him, for his "jest", in two!
But we in peace the mansion skirted,
And t'ward the parsonage diverted;
The priest we lifted from the sled,
And warmed him, put him into bed;
A grievance then we quick perfected,
And with it potentates elected
For district court at once to head.

'Twas such a New Year's we were given!
The service never came to pass.
Instead of joy, our hopes were riven;
And ere the nightfall all, en masse,
Filed by the pastor's bed, regarding
That face so dear, and then imparting
Their final kiss in tearful parting.
He still, as passed the eventide,
Breathed shallowly, with vision faded,
And when the sky in dark was bathed,
He quietly and gently died.

But that what M'lord with fear regarded,
In no way with the pastor passed;
Contrariwise, 'twas now at last
That with Milord the waltzing started.
No sooner we'd our grievance sent
To district court — when 'twas reported,
From th'Master two against us went:
The first one stating we'd supported
An armed revolt, and fixed to slay
His crew, to burn his manse away;
The second one for Lviv intended,
And claiming th'commissar around
Is bruiting slavery is ended,
And keeping peasants' hopes suspended
With speeches, that he's agitating,
To violent crimes is instigating —
For this one witnesses were found.

For truly Moish' had, slyly stalking,
Induced some people all to say;
With artifice, as was his way,
He got some drunken serfs to talking,
And from them, piece by piece did pick
What th'commissar had spoken! Quick
Did all commotion die away
On hearing this; we took to walking
To work in silence, stepping light,
And e'er alert for trouble pending.

And then — asudden, late one night,
We quailed as if from doom descending:
Along a village street in flight,
The Master's sleigh was spotted racing,
(Official bells its harness gracing),
Toward the mansion. At the sight,
The rumors started rumors chasing:
"Who? Why?" By morn 'twas known afar —
From 'nearby manse, by invitation,
An elder and his commissar
Had come to launch investigation.
And so they started calling in
The people. Soon 'twas past contesting
That not for naught was th'elder guesting
Inside the manse, 'n with him his thin,
New commissar. They so divided
The work between them that the elder,
Reposing in the mansion's shelter,
It seemed did nothing day to day
But gamble, hunt, and drink and gambol;
While th'commissar, as deaf as clay
To people's tales of cruel injustice,
And caring naught for rights or justice,
Without emotion or despite
Sat calmly and, with cool composure,
His inquisition led aright;
And with his cold obtuse exposure
He drove the town entire to fright.
He queried slowly, with intention,
And gave each answer full attention,
But placed his words in such a fashion,
That folk, unskilled to fight the pull,

Would blurt, in tears, th'desired confession.
He was yclept: "The bony ghoul."
He did with skill each case determine,
The answers jotting down in German
Whenever something bad was proffered
About the people — hate, contention;
But not when something bad was offered
Wherein Milord was brought to mention.

There's no denying, we were bludgeoned
In these his protocols throughout:
How set we were to swear abstension
On New Year's morn, then sparked the tension
By th'church; how, later, in a rout,
We almost slew the crew. In letters,
'Twas all depicted — to a tee.

But how Milord his liquor vended,
And e'er against our school contended,
And how on New Year's, as in fetters,
Belike an antichrist had he
To work impressed us — not a smidgeon.
And thus in turn each witness languished.
"We're heading sure for bitter anguish!"
The people spoke with gloomy vision.

The elder, guesting all those days
Within the manse, with stoic gaze
From time to time this "work" regarded,
But never read a protocol;
He wearied, fin'ly, of his role,
And Saturday, with pomp, departed.
While th'commissar, like sleazy weather,
For still a week hung o'er the town,
His "protocols" with patience spooling;
That he, it seemed, like veins was pulling
From people's breasts. He meant to tether,
It seemed, us all with ill renown.

'Twas Sunday eventide, discreetly,
A few of us i'th'deacon's house
Had gathered, hoping thoughts to rouse.
But speech was strained, as we'd completely
Abandoned hope to win the matter.
A sudden storm'd begun to batter

The house's walls, when in the hall
Arose a sudden noisy clatter.
The deacon's spouse investigated;
And — in the commissar paraded!
Our dear one, whom the Master hated;
He bowed and spoke: "Good eefning, all!"

We paused in our surprise, but he,
A careful look around him taking,
Just smiled, and, hissing thoughtfully,
Sat down and spoke no further greeting,
Save, after minutes passed, conceding:
"Oo, what a storm outside is breaking!"
At this the questions started flowing:
"Good evening, Sir! And how's it going?
What prompted you through town to pass?"
He hissed again, and smiled a little,
Then leaned out o'er toward our middle:
"Well, well, you'ff made a pretty mess!
I know of all! I'ff been descrying
Dose protocols. If you were dying,
You wouldn't lie to safe your skin!
Mein Gott,¹ die tings dat dere are written!
If you were tortured, roasted, bitten,
You couldn't squeeze more bad derein!"

We answered that the comm'ssar noted
But certain things, to which he'd led;
But what he wrote — he never read.
"Tsissar himself derein is quoted!"
The commissar with horror said.
"I know of all! Und long I tought;
Here, take dis paper I haf brought!
Rewrite it so, und don't be slow,
Den bid your potentates to come,
Und send it straight away to Lviv!"

And then a note that he had penned
He gave the deacon, told him how,
And what to write, and how to state it,
And where to send it indicated,
Then hissed again and, in the end,

1. "My God"

Declined a drink with formal bow;
Then bid farewell, and out paraded.
What followed makes a short narration:
Not wasting time, we spread apart
Throughout the town, with animation,
And ere the morn, our delegation
Had galloped off with th'information;
So hard, it seemed they had a station
Of wares to sell at Monday's mart.
But though we made as little sound
As e'er we could about their going,
There still among our folk was found
Some soul who brought the thing entire
To Moishe's ear. We'd had no showing
In things like this before, no knowing,
That we'd been tampering — with fire.

Hey, into rage and frenzied swearing
Did Master fly in morning's glow,
When Moishe, not a minute sparing,
Had told him that a delegation
Had gone with grievances to Lviv.
He gnashed his teeth in consternation;
Then straight'way bid his lackeys go
On horseback, fast as they were able,
With letters of his private label,
Throughout the district far and near:
"Whoever spots this delegation,
Arrest it, under approbation,
And send it straight to district jail."

'Twere vain to tell you of the fear
In which the town entire did quail
Throughout each coming fateful day!
With what a fear and trepidation
We waited news to come our way,
Of who could win the confrontation:
Would we succeed in our assay?
Or would they catch the delegation?

The foll'wing week we get the shock:
They've caught them! God, at that disaster,
How we recoiled! The hardest rock
Would sure have trembled. And the Master,

Now bold, turned cocky and content
When told a friend of his (no bother)
Three days ago had caught them, spent,
And under guard had had them sent
Not o'er to jail, but "home to father".

"He's wise, that Stas', he's truly wise!"
The Master said, "and acts with presence!
Hey, quickly summon all the peasants,
So that in front of all their eyes
Their potentates can get their presents,
So fear of me in them may rise!"
They summoned us — from duties feudal,
From home, from work, the old, the young,
The pris'ners' families were flung,
At Master's word, i'th'foremost row,
So they could get to see the show, —
Their wretched fathers treatment brutal.
So their descendants e'er might know,
That warring with the Lords is futile.

And thus they brought them over, tied,
Exhausted, all their strength expended,
Bedraggled, pale, unkempt, untended,
And when they reached the Master's side
He waved his hand and cried puissantly:
"Into the snow with them! And straight
Prostrate and beat them black and blue
Till I say stop!"

Then noncholantly
He started whistling. And the crew
Thus sent the luckless wretches sprawling,
And four on each with vigor bound:
One pins the head without ado,
One pins the legs, the other two
With all their might commence to mauling.
At first there wasn't heard a sound
Save that of blows, for to the ground
Their mouths were pressed, and at the violence
They couldn't scream, just thrashed around
And writhed, like slitted worms in silence.
The Master whistles, and the blows
Keep coming down. Their blood already
Is spurting from beneath their clothes,

While from beneath the very snow
Their muffled screaming surges steady.
Milord keeps whistling, cool and heady.

And then the kin of those below
The lackeys' heels surged forth unheeding,
And flung, with rending sobs and pleading,
Themselves before the Master's feet.
He whistles on, with cool conceit.

One wife, with trembling lips extended,
On knees before his feet descended;
Her dearest one from pain to save,
She th'Master's feet to kiss intended,
That boot of his with tears to lave —
And he, still whistling, with his toe,
Swung back and smashed her mouth defenseless.
So hard she overturned and, senseless,
Sprawled gushing blood upon the snow.

At last, when seconds seemed like hours,
And th'tortured screams began to drop
From dead'ning pain, 'twas uttered: "Stop!"
They lifted them, their bloody showers
With snow erasing; still, their powers
Were gone, afoot they couldn't stay —
The lackeys had to keep them standing.
"Well," turned Milord to them, demanding,
"Have you been taught to Lviv the way?
And have you found how sweet the wages
When with a Lord a serf engages?
You'll soon discover even more!
From me 'twas just the first donation,
In jail you'll get another ration.

"Now take them, lads, to th'proper station,
The stable, 'n tie them by the door
Around a single ring, and feed them!
Then, later on, again we'll meet them,
And ask them all about their trail
To Lviv. We'll question them a little,
And when they've answered ev'ry riddle,
We'll haul them off to district jail."

We stood in shock through this oration,
And not a sound. His degradation

Had shattered ev'ry expectation
And hope in us. What could we do?
To fight the Master we're unable,
To set our tale at th'gov'rnor's table
Is out — save if itself it flew,
And th'elder to Milord is true.
We naught could do but stand aquaking,
(Except escape, our homes forsaking,
And all on foreign mercy staking).

And th'Master, to completely screw
His vict'ry down, in our direction
Himself addressed, with proud inflection:
"You've all observed the kind of pay
I give to rebels? Even better
Shall you discover, to the letter,
How I can pull and pluck away.
Complain away who feels a martyr,
And I will manage even harder
To tickle back. Who means to play
Here with his skin — let him be wary!

"And one more thing. Your comm'ssar ranted
That soon your freedom here'd be granted
By our tsissar, — or some such story.
The dues your commissar will get
For this, you'll all be seeing yet, —
But now I tell you, on the scene:
Heed no one's words on liberation,
For they bring not emancipation,
But woe. Nor the tsissar, nor e'en,
In Heaven God, without restriction,
May take and reassign my share.
Th'tsissar's is not the jurisdiction!
Nor God, nor the tsissar may dare
To give away what isn't theirs.
So heed these words I tell you now:
Don't even dream of freedom nearing!
Forget petitions, pleas, and prayers;
For while I'm Lord, 'twon't be appearing,
To you, lest I myself allow!"

Thus sacrilegiously he sounded
His speech, then back to th'manse retired.
It seemed the words that he'd propounded

Were voiced by him to get us mired,
As if with stones, in fear; but strangely,
When he was done, our hearts grew fired.
"You blind, blind fool!" our thoughts accorded,
"You think that all the world in view
Lies in your hands, while fortune strangely
Is leading you both o'er and through? —
You'll least expect it, when your halter
Of sinful pride will snap in two!"

And we were calm, nor did we falter,
As, after 'couple days had passed,
Our poor plenipotentiaries were,
Half-live, on th'beaten road amassed
And driven off. With cheering pleas were
They off escorted and exhorted:
"Fear nothing, brothers! God is good.
He'll see our enemies are thwarted,
He knows that overlong they've stood!"

Nor did we feel dismayed on learning
That to the district-seat had sped
From th'governor's a summons burning:
"The commissar to Lviv must head!"
Milford did all but wag his tail:
"They've stopped the schwab in his endeavor!
They'll stick him down so deep in jail
That he'll, perhaps, stay blind forever!"
And though at this we sorrowed greatly,
There burned in us one hope innately:
That God and freedom would prevail!

CANTO XV

At last that cursed winter ended,
The last of all our winters curst,
Soon Eastertime, apace, descended, —
Ere Holy Thursday we'd immersed
Ourselves in getting acres ready.
'Twas Holy Saturday already —
Before that great important day,
Our one, our only Easter Sunday.
And I each minute of this one day
Remember, as if yesterday....
It happened.

 In the morn we'd started,
The frost still lay unthawed aground,
To ready wheat which would be carted
To th'acreage and sown. We wound
Up working till the early luncheons
Before the grain was fin'lly done.
"Hey home you go, and on the run!
And quick return with hoes and truncheons
And harrows back to th'square and stand!"
Thus did Milord himself command.

We hurried home, to th'luncheon table,
And quickly snacked on what was there, —
Then rush as fast as we are able.
Apace with people throngs the square;
The men with harrows, sacks for sowing,
The women armed with tools for hoeing,
And e'en the youngest boys were out
With hauls, with which the harrows waiting
Would in the fields be steered about.
And thus we stand, anticipating,

Like soldiers standing at parade;
The captain through the throng is wading,
Our head count taking, and allotting,
Where who would work, who whom would aid.

When glimpse! — a cart, its pony plodding,
Emerges round the forest's tip.
By th'driver sits a footman, nodding,
While th'driver cracks, in time, his whip.
And in the seat — good God in Heaven!
It's he — the commissar, the same
One who'd supposedly been driven
In Lviv to jail. O'er us there came
A daze, our hearts accelerated,
'Twas as if some before-unheard,
Or horrible or joyful story,
We suddenly to hear were fated.
The captain, even, though unstirred,
Had also stopped and softly reckoned
Beneath his breath: "God knows what for he
Is coming back! At least in part
It must be something bad." The second
That we were spotted from the cart,
The comm'ssar thwacked the footman's back;
The youngster jumped, too dazed to reckon,
And almost landed on the track,
Below the cart. But quick he rallied,
And scratching, for an instant dallied,
Then bent toward the wagon's bed,
Raked back the straw, 'n with tender caring
Pulled something out, like 'giant bread,
Bewrapped with rags. We stood, astaring,
In open wonder. Fin'lly down
The footman jumped, swung th'object round,
And like a barrel it suspended
Across his back, the rags unflung —
Behold, a drum! Hey, how he swung, —
Like hailstone's crash, like thunder's bash,
Like rumbling hooves the echoes blended
Across the town. Apace upended
The town entire. From ev'rywhere,
The people, shouting, bear and tear

Toward the sound, to spot the trouble.
With shouting throngs was on the double
The cart surrounded.

"Quiet, hey!"

The commissar resounded loudly,
Then rose to speak, withdrawing proudly
A parchment from his coat.

"Today,

To read you dis I was imparted.
Und carefully, I ask, rekard it,
Dat it's decree from our tsissar!"
Then on the comm'ssar rambling started,
In German. Th'people, mouths ajar,
On toes rise up, and strain in hearing,
But nothing lends it any sense!
E'er now and then sounds heavy sighing,
Men cross themselves, the heavens eyeing,
And gape, unmoving like a fence.

And th'commissar, with gleeful pleasure,
Reads on and on with hurried measure,
A-screaming out the foreign words.
He ended. "Well, was clear who heard it?"
"No, darling Sir, not e'en a wordlet!"

"Oh you, you stupid, brainless birds!
Your freedom, your emancipation,
You don't construe?! Now hear you me!
From May der tird, to all der nation,
Der great tsissar proclaims — you're free!
Your feudal chores he all does seffer,
Your tides¹, und dues, — he trows away.
Your work shall be your own endeffer!
Und one more ting, you'd guess it neffer:
Der district elder, now, today,
Your potentates from jail dispenses.
Well, understood?"

All silent are.

"Well understood, you, lacking senses,
Dat standing are like stupid fences?"

1. Tithes.

Hey, 'vivat' yell für our tsissar!"
All silent are. Apace, politely,
Our elder bowed and, stepping lightly,
Approached the commissar and plead:
"Your pardon, Sir, that we're accepting
Your news like this. The Master said
That all you spoke could happen never,
That you yourself'd be forced to go
To Lviv — to sit in jail forever;
That our tsissar could ne'er bestow
Our freedom, that it's Master's chattel."

"Oh stupid head, like empty rattle!
Was Master's gain to tell you so.
Die Lords are by tsissar afforded
No loss in dis. Dey're all awarded
Für losses by der royal weal.
Und I, his page, who'ff been forbidden
To tell you lies, keep nothing hidden.
You'ff seen, you know what means dis seal?"

"May our tsissar live long unburdened,
And may you, Sir, be also guerdoned
To live amongst us long —but we,
Have lately been so often bitten,
That we're afraid that once again
We'll end up on the ice, asmitten.
And so, good Sir, we ask you, then:
Proceed with us toward the manse,
And there, to th'Master, read your missive,
Permit him on the seal to glance;
And then, if he remains submissive
To what you've read, we'll all believe it. —
We'll then with gratitude receive it;
And then to our tsissar we'll offer,
In pay, our love, our life, our coffer,
And help his reign to bloom and grow!"

"It's gut, der ting you just haf spoken!
Let's go to manse und dere betoken
Milord himself. Let's go! Let's go!"

CANTO XVI

Milady and Milord were lazing
At breakfast in the yard when we
Approached them through the postern, raising,
A noisy, deafening commotion.
The commissar, complacently,
In front strode. Mimicking his motion,
The footman trailed, his drum ablazing.
Milady paled, rose up to see,
And at the sight, too ghastly for her,
She gasped and wrung her hands in horror,
And then with more than hurt, with more
Than sad reproach she cast her vision
Upon Milord. His own condition
Was hardly calm on seeing us pour
Inside his yard. But more he quivered,
With fervid rage he almost barked,
When he discerned which wight had sparked
The meeting. Th'commissar! Delivered
From Satan's claws again unmarked!
By God, this time he'd see him slivered!
But meaning first to calm his spouse,
The Master languidly and proudly
Arose and came to us, then loudly
And fiercely drawled: "You've packed my house.
Now why?" With this he chose to stage
His back i'th'commissar's direction,
With would be innocent omission
Ignoring him. At this rejection,
The footman loudly banged his drum;
And th'commissar turned red with rage.
The instant th'Master started some
New thing to say, with harsh inflection
He shrieked: "Bei our tssissar's commission!"

(His voice like chalk on slate did strum).
The Master spun. "Ah, comm'ssar, mercy!
You're here so seldom! Well, wie geht's?¹
And how was Lviv? This terminates
Your trip? Well, what does our tsissar say?"

"I'm reading der tsissar's proclaim,
Der seventeenth of April dated,
Of current year! Und in his name,
From tird of May ist abrogated
Upon all pessants serfdom's claim;
Die feudal dues are freed die same,
Und land is giffen free to pessants.
Und all die Lords dis law affects,
Der weal shall pay for ill effects. —
Dis is tsissar's specific pleasance!"

"O Sapperment! Warum nicht gar?"²
The Master shrieked, like adder-bitten,
"The great tsissar! He speaks — it's written!
A present from the great tsissar!
A present for the serfs. How gracious!
And for to give those non-rapacious
And noble serfs a cost-free meal,
From us he has to rob and steal,
To take from us what stands regarded
As ours by will of God! What real,
And gracious goodness! Thus he's started
To woo the peasants' love and zeal!
Ah, well, we're dumb, we need the schooling!
We're weak, we have to mind his ruling!
But tell me one thing only, pray;
Is there within that missive stated:
When serfs with Lords get aggravated,
They them should capture, bind and slay?
And are endorsed therein impalings,
Rapines and holocausts and flailings,
And robberies of all the rich?"

-
1. How's it going?
 2. Why not? To the Devil!

"Herr Schlachziz!"³ th'commissar retorted,
"Herr Schlachziz, mässigen Sie sich!"⁴
Tsissar has ef'ryone awarded;
Und robberies, or swords, or sticks,
And here in edict nowhere mentioned."

"And what of 1846?"

"Herr Schlachziz, you are all intentioned
To tink der worst! It's time, I figure,
You left dat 46 alone!
Yourself, die Polish Lords, mit figur⁵.
Were first on serfs to pull der trigger,
Around your neck you on your own
Pulled tight der noose! Ja, ja, Herr Master,
If had your serf a human stand,
Den he would not take brand in hand,
But he would shield you from disaster!
But ha! Dat's not what's in your head!
For serfs is daily whips und bending;
But den, when serfs' refofts are led,
Your *heritage* requires defending!
Und now, when our tsissar, by law,
Both Lord und serf alike is treating,
You scream he dares your rights withdraw,
Und serfs into refofts is leading!
No, Master, now are diff'rent tunes!
Der serf's not blind, he little misses,
He sees what yours is, und what his is,
Der Bauer, Master, ist für uns!"⁶
On Lords der law has turned der table!
Und if some wolfs on us will bound
To raid our newly-founded stable,
Den faitful dogs will here be found,
Who'll twist deir ears so hard around,
Dat dey foreffer shall remember!"

3. Sir Noble.

4. Sir Noble, get a hold of yourself!

5. Vigor.

6. The peasant, Master, is ours!

"O Sapperment! The times are gray,
If all is going to dogs today.
And there are many round aslinking!
But you, dear Sir, are wrong in thinking
That any of these stupid slogs
In any way resemble dogs.
For faithful dogs revere their Master,
And faithful dogs, when starts the battle,
Arise and shield him from disaster!
No, these aren't dogs, but swine and cattle!
You don't believe me? Go and try
To give my dogs a further reading
Of your decree — you'll quick espy
How eagerly they'll give you greeting!"

"Herr Schlachziz!" th'commissar, offended,
In anger squealed, puffed out his cage,
And raised his hand — but late! For rage
Had taken o'er the Master's thinking...
He stamped and shrieked, his face distended
And turning red, and in his stares,
Unholy sparks began aplaying.
"Der Teufel derein!" The filthy, stinking,
And cursed schwab to mouth me dares!
Hey lads, who strong is, grab this braying,
Insulting ass and drag his pate
Inside the kennel 'n lock the gate,
And let him read my dogs his missive!
And you, you slogs, — (He swung around
To face us.) — shall again I pound
Your backs for you? You through through my pocket
What demon flashes? Hey, reserve!
Shut all the gates, a meal I'll serve
To all who're here! Bring out the lashes!"

We froze as one. And ere we knew
What happened next, stout lackeys two
On th'commissar their hands were slapping;
And though he struggled, yelled, and plead,
On tiptoe o'er the ground he sped,
His coattails in the wind aflapping.

CANTO XVII

The Master kept a kennel tended,
As he a hunting often went,
And was, to boot, a marksman splendid.
A lot of money had he spent
On all his dogs. Around the stable,
Abutting on the gran'ry gable,
Reposed the kennel. 'Twas a fence
Both high and roofed, which round surrounded
A field of booths; therein abounded,
And howled the canine malcontents.
There were some hundreds there a-barking,
Of divers breeds and varied marking,
Retrievers, bulldogs, danes, borzois.
Some tied on chains a watch were keeping,
While others, spent, in booths were sleeping,
Yet others tore and slavered, leaping,
With gusto howling, making noise.
These dogs but thrice a day were nourished,
With scraps, to keep them undernourished,
To faster chase and hunt the game;
No person dared to enter near them,
Or scratch or pet them, all did fear them,
Except their keeper, old Ephraim.
By chance, if any pass their fixture,
Then howls and roars that motley mixture,
Enraged, it eats the dirt below.
'Twas thus not strange, that at that vicious,
Undreamt of and malicious throw,
At that command, insane, adrenal,
To cast the comm'ssar in the kennel,
We all stood dazed, as by a blow.

The Master fumes, his anger blinding;
While on, like millstones gravel grinding,

The kennel rumbles. Thereupon,
Arose an awful roar, disorder, —
This meant the Master's heartless order
Was done, the commissar had gone
Inside the kennel. Dumbly posing,
The lackeys stand, the kennel closing,
And laugh like fools. Then in a trice,
There rose o'er all an awful squealing,
The canine yowls and howls outpealing,
And turning all our hearts to ice.
"Help! Safe me! Help!" — with anguished violence,
The screams rang out — then broke in silence.
That silence lit us like a spark.
"Hey, save him!" out we roared, unbeaten,
"Destroy the kennel! On the mark!
At once! The commissar's been eaten!"

And how it happened, Heav'n be jury,
It seemed that sudden thunder pealed,
'Twas how we threw ourselves, with fury,
Upon the dogs. The mansion reeled
From our assault. In scarce a minute,
Nor fence nor post was standing in it.
The roofs, the booths — all lay in shreds!
Of dogs, the mostly fierce and fiery,
We on the spot destroyed entirely...
Screams, snarlings, bloodied clubs and heads,
Sulfurous oaths, blows heavyhanded,
All merged into a deaf'ning, lame
Cacophony — may Heaven grant it,
You never live to hear the same!

Both far and wide went speeding through
Podeelya's¹ and Pidheerya's² vastness,
The news of how the dogs we slew
Upon the day our freedom glistened.
Of how with "doggish" blood we christened
Our liberty. There's naught to say!

1. A Ukrainian province.

2. A Ukrainian province.

Our folk are quick, they cherish humor;
Some scholar brought them once a rumor
About a French Bastille, a fastness,
Wherein once men were put away,
They'd ne'er again see light of day.
And only once that cursed prison
The French had splintered to the core,
'Twas only then their sun was risen,
And freedom entered through the door.
Our people caught this up, the story:
"We'll have at least a 'Kennel' gory
For our 'Bastille'!" throughout did go;
And many laughed at that thereafter.
But on the scene, in truth, to laughter
We weren't drawn. We hunted after
But one thing. All we did was crow:
"The commissar! Where lies he bleeding?
And where's the missive he was reading?"

In vain we searched both high and low!
And soon we all were very shaken:
Could be the dogs devoured him so
That e'en his ev'ry bone was taken?
When glimpse! Unless we're all mistaken,
A movement in the straw! O ho!
We dived at it and flung apart
The straw in haste — 'Twas he! And breathing!
He'd thrown himself, with pounding heart,
Aground and scuttled on the double
Inside a booth, his legs in part
Still sticking out; he'd held like glue
That sheet our liberty bequeathing,
And shook with fear throughout. With trouble,
We pulled him fin'ly into view.
The wretch just groaned with anguish through
On rising; like a ragged curtain
His trousers hung from th'dogs attack.
His flesh was torn, too; gash and puncture
Adorned his legs in front and back
With pouring blood, — and it was certain,
That he'd have died within that juncture,

If he'd not leaped — with blind reaction —
Inside that booth, or if from rest,
We hadn't leaped — with lightning action —
To end that awful, Master's "jest".

"To Master! Oo! To Master take me!"
The comm'ssar groaned, "Oo-oo, oo-oo!
Jetzt wird ersehen!³ Each wound he make me,
Will be in court like witness two!
It's now I'll show him here who's lowly!"

And thus, he, helped by us, commenced
Toward the mansion, limping slowly,
His eyes and teeth with anguish tensed.
Ho,ho! But th'Master wasn't slow!
He sensed, perhaps he'd acted wrongly
In "dogging" th'commissar so strongly,
And that we sought him not for show.
So with his servants in he darted,
And shut his gate, and locked and barred it;

And then, with rifle hard in hand,
He by his window took a stand.
Such violent show of armed infraction
The commissar expected ne'er;
He neared, and pointing at (with care)
His mangled legs, shrieked loudly: "Dere!
Is dis old-Polish court'sy showing?
Herr Schlachziz — dat was stupid action,
For you! And for dis little jesting,
I'm now, dis minute, you arresting!...
What's dis? Are you in army going?

But not of that was th'Master thinking,
He drew a careful bead, unblinking,
On th'commissar, and bellowed: "Run!
Run fast and far, you schwabbish bastard,
Or else you'll be in seconds plastered
By bullets from my eager gun!"

3. Now he'll see!

At this new threat, his wounds forgetting,
The commissar, one shriek a-letting,
Leaped fast, as from a snake, aside.
He landed, looked around, then halted,
For into safety had he vaulted,
And only then to th'Master cried:
"Herr Schlachziz! Now you threaten? Splendid!
For dis your threat which you'ff extended,
We'll settle later! I repeat:
In name of law, o'er all important —
You're now arrested! Here concede —
Und chutch⁴ will haf your sentence shortened."

"Come on! Arrest me! By the score!"
Migutski snarled, and made a motion;
And from each window at us bore
A gleaming rifle barrel. — War!
There rose at this a great commotion.
The comm'ssar paled and ceased to shout,
At loss for further conversation.
But, speaking firmly for the crowd,
Our elder, stepping forth, avowed:
"We, Sir, can win this confrontation!
The great tsissar today has knelled
Our liberty — we must assist him!
Our Master has today rebelled, —
And we for that possess a system
With which to bring the scoundrel low!
What say you, people!"

"Ho-ho-ho!"

The people boist'rously retorted, —
"In Horozhana we rëcorded
The way to coax them from their holes!
Prepare a fire! Get straw a-burning!
We'll soon, in minutes, have them turning,
And here with us, or there in coals!"
At this the comm'ssar whitened fully,
And, trembling, fell upon his knees,

4. Judge

"O please!" he shrieked, "O peasant, please!
But just dis once, der last one, truly,
I beg of you to do me turn,
Und leaf der Master be! Don't burn!
Make calm yourselves! To home return!
Und leaf him! Dey in court would sue me,
For burning — if you burn him out,
Den ef'ry one will scream und shout
Dat I haf caused it! Help you'd do me,
By guarding him till my return.
I'll take him den in my possession!
For now, desist mit your aggression!
To home return, und mit discretion,
For no one else of dis must learn!"

We calmed ourselves. "Thus let it stand!"
We thought, "It seems Milord is fated,
That e'en his en'mies him abet."
"Well, is our freedom, Sir, as stated!"
"You don't beleef me still?"

"We've set

Our hopes, God knows, and hate to doubt it!
But we've endured through so much terror,
And for't so often been in error,
That now we must be sure about it."

"O tortured peasant! Tortured land!"
The comm'ssar sighed, his head descending, —
"So many kriefs he's known, und woes,
He won't beleef his eefil's ending!
Still, if you doubt me, I propose
You send your men to district elder,
Und ask him dere if I was lying!
Besides, you'ff seen Milord defying
My words — from him you now haf shelter!"

"So let it be! We'll send right now
Our men on mounts, to find out how
We merit!" in reply we worded.
And then the comm'ssar's wounds we treated,
And bandaged him, and saw him seated
Upon his cart; then in a horde,

Escorted him away politely,
And, as he left, we him assured
That we would act both wisely 'n rightly.
On coming back, the manse we skirted,
But posted guards, and them alerted
To watch the manse 'n the cloistered Lord.

CANTO XVIII

Our Easter! God above — no doubting,
That ne'er in hist'ry might be found
An Easter happier — or better!
From daybreak: bustling, clamor, shouting,
Into an anthill turned the town,
Aswarm with people. All together,
As one attended Mass. And when
"Khrystos voskrehse"¹, throbbing, faded,
Then ev'ry voice with sobbing grated —
From which the church reverbed again...

It seemed that countless years we'd waited,
And fin'ly triumphed, fin'ly made it,
To see Him rise — unfettered men.
And in our hearts we felt arise
A lightness and a joy so splendid,
That each of us, it seemed, was ready
To all the firmament and skies
To sing and shout: "Our evil's ended!"
Both friends and foes were freely shaking,
Embraces, kisses, giving, taking,
And all the while the bells could burst!
And here the youths, like drunks behaving,
Cavort around and scream, dispersed,
"There's no more Master, no more slaving!
We're free, we're free, we all are free!"
And th'little kids, their elders eyeing,
Themselves go on carousing, crying,
Like darting quail-chicks o'er the lea.

1. "Christ is arisen", a Ukrainian Easter hymn.

And when the holy service ended,
Toward the graveyard did we stir;
'N as many hundreds as we were, —
To ground each one of us descended,
And thence, in ringing chorus, blended
That great inimitable hymn,
"Tehbeh, o Hospody, khvalym!"²
With thunder's roar went forward leaping
The lofty words' revered vibration,
But th'ending of the cantillation
Was smothered with unfettered weeping!

'Twere futile, children, to recite it,
To recreate in full array,
The things that, on that glorious day,
These eyes of mine with rapture sighted!
The crowd, it seemed, had taken drugs:
Old men like boys jumped round each other,
O'er there a man his horses hugs,
And kisses each one like a brother,
And speaks to them like they were men.
And there the girls, one after th'other,
Pull kerchiefs from their heads asmiling,
And, bowing deeply, them are piling
Before the Virgin. E'er again,
A greeting rings, each heart to bolster:
"Christ is aris'n, and serfdom's birth
The Devil took!" And there an oldster,
The oldest living man in town,
Has hurled himself against the earth
Beside an ancient headstone brown,
And hugs it hard for all he's worth,
And bellows hoarsely; "Father, father!
We're free! Oh papa, answer me!
Why you a hundred years did smother
In thrall, yet hated to forsake it,
Expecting freedom soon. Now see!
We're free! Poor man, you couldn't make it,
But now — for us — it's meant to be!

2. Laudamus te.

Of all your fam'ly not another
Shall Master drive inside his sty!
Come down and take me to you, father,
Your son in freedom now may die!"

When then, the priest being barely through
With blessing Easter breads, and praying —
We spot a sight: What comes in view
Toward the town? With coats agraying,
Bright buttons gleaming in the sun,
And shining blades above aglancing,
A pond'rous horde, with sword and gun,
Is on with heavy tread advancing.
An army! Grandly throbbed the drums,
Like stones upon a pond they sounded.
And there — my God! — I stared astounded:
Among the troops — our Master comes!
He strode, his arms behind him twisted,
His face toward the ground, as one
Who curses life, the world, the sun,
And stands ashamed. With heavy fisted
And heartless force the footman held him
By ropes which round his back were spun, —
Belike a bullock being run
To marketplace. And in the back,
The comm'ssar in a cart was trailing;
He smiled as, o'er the rise ascaling,
He glimpsed the church, the clustered pack
Of people, who agape beheld him
With fear and wonder — like a fey,
Undreamt-of sight.

The soldiers wended
Their way to us, and once they ended
Beside us, th'comm'ssar shouted: "Hey!
Hold up, Herr³ sergeant!"

"Halt!" extended

The sergeant's voice. "Der Easter's best!"
The comm'ssar then to us did say.
"Well, pessant, now haf I impressed
On you you're free! At last, tank Heffen!
Und here's your Master! I haf driffen

3. Master.

Him here in case you want to tell
To him goodbye, und wish him well
For treating you so nice! No blinking,
Make haste, because it might be long,
Until next chance will come along,
For he'll be busy by me drinking
Dat beer, which he himself did brew,
Und long he won't return to you!"
But we just stood and stared, unspeaking;
Contempt, and fear, and joy did glide
In circles through our hearts inside;
And all our eyes, as one, were seeking
The Master's face. He stood there tensed,
His visage dark, as if he'd sensed
That Fate at last had touched his station.
But not a single declamation,
Nor jeer, nor curse, nor sly accost,
Came out of us. What sense mistreating
Him caught and bound, what sense in beating,
When he without our words was lost?

Aye, we were still, but full of fire
Was th'commissar; his legs still hurt him, —
So much, his teeth he gnashed with ire,
And we could see his main desire
Was just to wrack Milord with woe.
We knew that into town he'd spurred him
For just that reason — for to show
Him off to us — and why he'd handed
His footman ropes to drive him so.
He now the Master reprimanded:

"Herr Schlachziz! See, dose pessants dere,
Dat 'schwein'⁴ you called, and did mistreat dem?
Dey're better men, mit souls more fair
Dan dose like you! Dough chained you meet dem,
Dey don't desire to curse und jeer,
Und, dough you, heartless, tore und beat dem,
Dey'ff pardoned you — to me is clear!
Ey, peasant, peasant, chen'rous peasant!...
But I, Herr Lord, am more severe!
When I get mad, it's pure unpleasant!

4. Pig.

He is ein fool, Herr Lord, whose hand
Is stretched for more dan he can handle,
Who stands up high'r dan he should stand!
Und once some fool mein hide has tanned,
Den he should light to Gott ein candle,
Und fall inside my clutches neffer —
Or he'll remember dem foreffer!"

At this, like 'beast that's caged and branded,
The Master spun and, twitching, handed
The commissar a such malicious
And burning look — with face so vicious,
The latter paled.

"Hyena! Vermin!

Revoltig, curst, inhuman German!
Has not your tongue yet withered dry?
Have not you had enough of feeding
Upon my woe, my spouse's pleading?
Did not her tearful, anguished cry,
As you with ropes on me were setting,
Fulfill your thirst for anguished sound?
You shoved her, knocked her to the ground.
You trash! You aren't worth her letting,
A single tear! You spawn of jackals!
E'en now these dogs you're stirring up,
To finish us, to tear us up!
My wife is weak, and I — in shackles!
But no, I trust in God! Your plenum
Shall, like the stormcloud, soon have passed!
To th'elder lead me now, and fast!
More strong is God than schwabbish venom!"

"Ha, ha, Herr Schlachziz!" roared aloud
The commissar, — "To Gott you'ff bowed?
Sehr schön!⁵ Und when were you conferted?
It's not been long, der story goes,
Dat you before dese pessants' nose
Shut church, den dem to work diferted!
To lead, we'll lead you, ja — to elder,
Dere's plenty time — no need to tear;
Und, while you wait, you'll taste der shelter

5. Very nice!

Of prison life und prison fare!"
With this, he gave the sergeant orders,
And th'sergeant hollered to his crew:
"Marsch!"⁶

"Well, you pessants, watch your borders!"

The comm'ssar then to us imparted,
And down the road the column started,
And quickly vanished out of view.

6. March!

CANTO XIX

The Easterdays sped on. And very,
And weirdly strange it seemed: no more
Were lackeys coming to the door,
No more were they the windows drumming,
Enforcing Master's work. Though sure,
In dreams, sometimes, they still keep coming,
On waking up — it's all contrary:
The people work at own behest
In all the fields, their laughter's ringing,
The heavens sing, and all are singing...
Comes noon — reclines, with heaving breast,
The worker by his bulls to rest;
While lunching, round he looks, ahumming,
To spot, perchance, a foreman coming;
But then, afresh his freedom feeling,
Toward the sunny heaven's ceiling
A lilting song of joy he pours, —
He stops, looks round again, then roars:
"Hey grief of ages, may you smother!
And may the Devil rip your mother!"

The mansion, though, like under cover
Of evil spells sits grim and still
Amongst its flowers. No one's will
Was stirred by this to go uncover
What happened there. The liberation,
The spate of private work, elation,
Kept ev'ryone too busy running;
But we observe: the help lie sunning
Themselves outside, their plows are still,
The yard is silent, not a trill
Of spoken word, or shout, or hustle,
No toasts, no guests, no parties' bustle, —

They've vanished as if blown asunder
By storming winds. And into town,
From th'mansion no one comes around.
How God's events can us astound!
Two tiny words; "you're free!" — and wonder!
In no time flat a mile-high mound
Between the manse and us is found!

The Sunday after Easter ended,
The Mass being through, we grouped before
The church, and soon were talking o'er
Our thoughts about the recent violence,
And where our future hopes extended,
About the threats of pending war, —
The Poles, and their unbowed consensus
To group in Lviv in self-behalf;
Their National Councils, and Defences:¹
Men cross themselves, and others laugh...
When then our elder shouted: "Silence!"
"My honored friends," he quick did add,
"Permit me but a short oration!"

All silenced.

"God has crushed the bad,
And granted freedom t'all the nation.
Our thanks to Him!" — he doffed his hat
And crossed himself, and so did we.
"We're happy now, because we're free.
But we should not, in our elation,
Forget the people who have dropped,
Through our good luck, from former glory.
My brothers, here we know the story,
Milord's in prison!" Here he stopped,
And coughed, — "Well, as we know, our Master,
Did often sport with us, it's true,
And for his 'jests' he got his due.
But, brothers, in his hour of woe,
His loved ones also face disaster.

1. In 1848 the Poles carried through a revolt in Lviv. Their "National Council" was the main political organ behind this revolt. The "National Defence" was the Polish army. Both of these bodies were explicitly pro-Austrian (the head of the National Defence, General Wybranowski had his rank from the Austrian army), but implicitly held the interests of Poland (especially of the Polish gentry) as foremost.

Milady oft, as all we know,
Assisted us, and from her husband,
She oft with tears would keep him past her,
Away from us"...

"That's so, that's so!"

All shouted back, — "She's not like others!
She's innocent!"

"Thus, on to go,

I would opine, my honored brothers,
That 'twould be sin, were we to throw
Her husband's blame, and penance, on her.
Have any of you called upon her
This week? Inquired about her?"

"No!"

"Nobody went? The manse's so quiet,
It well could be that trouble's nigh it...
And after that, what here befell,
She's probably afraid to face us;
And doesn't deem we wish her well.
It thus would not, I think, disgrace us,
My brothers, if we took the lead,
And sent a few of us, with speed,
To cheer her up. And if it's needed,
To even help her in her need.
'Twill be in Heaven highly heeded!"

"Aye, aye," — the answers did resound, —
"Go on and visit her, — the elder, —
And Yakiv (here they me selected),
And Michael, Sam — you're now elected,
Now go! How awful it would sound,
If here Milady pined in terror,
And we refused her aid or shelter,
And let her servants rob and scare her!
No, let the past be laid to ground,
It's clear that we should now attend her;
Go on and tell her all the town
Shall work for her for free, and tend her,
Until her husband shall return!"

"Aye, brothers, thanks for your concern!"
We, as we crossed ourselves, imparted,
And quickly for the mansion started.

My God, the changes we discovered
On walking in! It seemed a storm
Had hit the place, or nay, some form
Of plague. The stores stood all uncovered,
With doors ajar, and in their stalls,
Unfed and thirsty beasts were bawling;
While th'servants round like drones were crawling,
Their whispers hissing through the halls.
The plows and harrows, with the hauls,
Were still asprawl around the square,
Where we a week ago had left them.
Inside the kitchen all stood bare;
The scullions, though it's noon, were napping.
The stove stood cold, and ringed with tracks.
From somewhere nigh a rhythmic tapping
Assails our ears... We move toward it —
And find the coachman, face contorted,
Who, with his wife, with spike and axe,
With all their might stand fiercely chipping
The Master's statues' gilded stripping.
They paled with fear, our presence seeing,
And dropped their tools and started fleeing;
But there was nowhere they could bear.
"Be calm," the elder at them beckoned,
"Where would you run to? Stay a second!
We seek Milady!"

"She's in there,"

The coachman at the bedroom nodded.
From there resounded soulful, blotted,
Despairing moans. Our hearts inside
Turned cold as ice. What tragic story!
Just yesterday they had such glory,
Such riches, pulchritude, and pride, —
All turned to this! We softly entered
The bedroom through the side and centered
Our eyes upon her. She, at first,
Could not perceive us, — she was lying
Upon her bed and softly crying,
Her face all pale, in grief immersed.
"That you, Oryna?" (This Oryna
Was th'only person who had been a
Devoted maid, and chose to stay.
She fed the Lady, tried to cure her,
And cared for her, and fended for her, —

But she was just this once away, —
She'd gone to town with bold insistence,
To beg the people for assistance.)
We neared the bed and uttered: "Nay!
Milady, you are pale, and ailing!"

She peered at us and shuddered, veiling
Her eyes in fear: "Ah, woe is me!"
She moaned, her body slowly bending,
"This means my life at last is ending!
You've come in here to finish me!"

"At ease, Milady, gaze upon us!
And fear us not, we've nothing on us!
We've come to you with open hands.
The town has sent us, we are ready
To help you out, to hold you steady,
In any way your state demands."

The Lady stared at us, unblinking,
As if unsure we stood in view:
"Is this the truth? You've not been drinking?
Can you be humans, can in you,
Disgraced, beset upon, and beaten,
There still be human hearts that care?
Oh, God! Why have I now been given
To see this truth? Now from this day,
My life shall be an endless glare
Of guilt, that I, so cold, unheeding,
Allowed on you such woe, such beating,
When I could all have turned away!
And you're not drunk? Your grief, your bleeding,
Do not prevent you giving aid?
Oh, God reward you! And in leading
My life from now — though it's receding —
I shall retain in highest grade
This gracious deed of yours forever!
And I'm so wretched, poor, today!
And ill! My servants, in a day,
This mansion from its goods shall sever;
My Lord's in prison far away!...
Oh, God reward you, that this rubble
You've come to help me get unmade!
God grant it, that when you're in trouble,
You too will get from others aid!"

And then Milady started weeping,
And fell upon the pillows, keeping
Her face toward the bed. Behold!
We didn't talk for long, or tarry,
But sent a page to town to carry
A summons t'all our young and old.
The elder called the help and shook
Them through with questions: all they took
Was soon retrieved. The town physician
Was called; the womenfolk, arriving,
Began the rooms to recondition,
Some lit the stoves, some took to hand
Preparing soup. The men, debating,
A daily working order planned,
Where all, by pairs participating,
Would come to work the Master's land.

Milady in a week recovered.
Of all the help that round had hovered,
Oryna only stayed. The rest
Were fired by us, their crimes discovered.
Of all the farming chores that pressed,
The greater portion we completed.
Yet all the while, with sighs repeated,
Milady walked amongst us, lone,
Without a word, distraughtly weeping
Whene'er she'd call to mind the sweeping
Events and griefs that she had known.
But there were other reasons vying
Which caused her daily frequent crying:
She'd heard no news about Milord.
"How was he now? Where'd he been taken?
Could he have died in jail, forsaken?"

And thus three weeks went by the board
From Easter. To a formal meeting
Milady calls us all, with greeting.
We went and, as we used to, clustered
Before the manse, our gazes mustered
Upon the porch. But out toward
Us calls Milady, us inviting
Inside her mansion's welcome lighting...
We enter, gaze around us, — Lord!
Great tables, topped with silver, flicker,

And shine with crystal; by the walls
Stand barrels full of beer and liquor.
We gape, and our Milady calls:

"Be seated, people! Hence is banished
Our past — afresh we all begin:
The peasant's time of grief has vanished,
For Lords, it's time to mend our sin.
I'm well aware, how harshly, cruelly,
My husband toyed with you, and played:
Yet you in turn so nobly, fully,
Delivered me from doom descending,
When all the very worst was pending,
When no one else would give me aid!...
And now you're here, my only plighted
Companions, protecting wards,
And brothers. Please, be not despited,
If I to you again appeal
For help. But now — you're all invited
To sit with me and share this meal.
Forever gone are serfs and Lords, —
As friends should we forever deal!"

And then she sipped the first libation
And passed, as was our wont, the chalice
Into the elder's hand, and bowed.
"May Heaven grant throughout the nation
That men may conquer hate and malice,
And turn to love, like here!" she vowed.

"May Heaven grant, in ev'ry palace,
That Lords may learn with men to live!
For when with kindness we are treated,
Then kindness in return we give!"
The people graciously retorted.
And then the cup, throughout the crowd,
From hand to hand around cavorted,
Until we each had quaffed and bowed.

Therewith the Lady joined the table,
Depressed, avoiding drink and meat, —
We see she's fighting tears, unable, —
And we ourselves desist to eat.
The silence grows. Therewith exploded
A spate of sobs! We fly toward

Milady's side, to try and cheer her,
But she, so we could hardly hear her,
Just sobbed: "My spouse! My poor, poor Lord!...
Where is he now! My friends devoted,
Has no one brought some news around?"

"No, no one!"

"It's — as if he'd drowned!
Oh God! Three weeks he's held by others!
I've lain here sick, and dissipated,
And night and day for him I've waited,
And not a word! Beloved brothers,
Assist me! Something's wrong, and badly!
For though the comm'ssar hates him madly,
He doesn't hold the district chair —
The elder's still his senior there!
And th'elder knows us, oft he came
And ate and played here, hunted game, —
It seems so strange that he's permitting
This man to keep my husband sitting
In jail so long! Oh God, oh God!
How painful lays Thy wrathful rod!"

And here deep sobs completely shook her.
But, on she went, though long it took her:
"So what am I to do, or plan?
Should I seek help in Lviv, Vienna,
Or should I go and beg, or pen a
Submissive letter to the man
Who's jailed my husband, just to savor
His vict'ry. Shall I beg for favor,
Or justice? Tell me — what to say?"

We shook our heads, a-staring at her.
But then our elder ventured: "Nay,
O gracious Lady! In this matter,
Milord's at odds, for he incurred
The comm'ssar's wrath. The comm'ssar's taken
The elder's place! Myself I heard
The elder being summoned sternly
To go to Lviv. Thus, here's my word:
In Vienna you'd be lost, forsaken,
And Lviv, is not an easy journey;

And once those bureaucrats begin
Their papers sorting, signing, blotting,
Then our Milord could finish rotting
Without a glimpse of light or kin.
No, I would choose another way:
Prepare yourself to make a journey,
And we shall come and aid your mission,
The commissar we'll go petition;
And thus, perhaps, without attorney,
We'll win Milord from jail away."

Milady, list'ning, quickly brightened:
"Oh thank you all, my grief you've lightened!
May God keep all such ills from you!
I shall remember this forever!...
Until I die I'll thank you ever
For your assistance, kind and true!"...

CANTO XX

Around his prison-quarters grimy,
Minute, unlighted, dank and slimy,
The Master, harshly breathing, strode.
Both rage and grief his shoulders rode,
A grated slit below the ceiling,
Belike some rheumy eye a-healing,
Peered down into the cell askew,
And all the world, forbidden, shining,
The sun, the sky, — its fleecy lining
Upon a gorgeous sea of blue,
It flashed at him, and stung, and lured him,
And like a serpent's fang it gored him...
And on he paced, his soul on fire,
Belike a beast its prison learning;
Now cursing, now to Heaven turning,
Now coughing with his chest entire.

My God, how changed was his appearance!
In something less than thirty days
The prison caused the disappearance
Of half his self. The prison haze
Had from his eyes erased their twinkle,
They spun, and roved, without a rest.
Above his brow a heavy wrinkle
His visage furrowed, through his chest
He coughed, e'er now and then a-spitting
Out blood. "Just after his arrest,
When he arrived," — this was imparted
To me by turnkeys at the jail —
"He'd not believe that he was sitting
Inside a cell. But soon he started
To scream, and then the walls to scale.
He paced and paced his grated cage
And smashed the walls, as if to gauge
His strength, then set his head to beating

Against the bars, and did no eating,
But hurled his food around in rage.
For three whole days he starved, unsleeping,
And always kept the elder calling;
But th'elder far away was keeping —
He was, just then, his things a-hauling
To Lviv. In time, becoming feeble,
The Master started to accept
His meals, though still he rarely slept,
And ever begged us, almost wept,
To bring him news about his people.

But we his pleas could not accept, —
The comm'ssar warned us off. No kidding.
He chose the cell where th'Master slept —
The very worst, and meanest-fitting...
Then, too, he also had him kept
Inside all day, just once at eve,
A fifteen minute walk permitting."

'Twas eve. The Master's solitary
The turnkey opened with a heave.
"Your walk!" he barked. The Master quickly
Emerged, his hat in hand. "How dare he," —
He hissed with rage, — "that cursed schwab,
How dare he jail and then suspend me
Without a hearing? Why so strictly,
Am I being held? Why won't he send me —
Some news? That he my health did rob —
Is nothing, but my wife! Oh, Heaven!
That pagan, might, who knows, have driven
His serfs into a rage, to burning —
My house is ashes on the lawn!...
And she inside it, dead and gone!...
Oh, quick now, aye, I'll have you turning
Upon a spit, you Satan-spawn!"

These heavy, roiling machinations,
Beset and burned his heart and patience,
And he, his hands clenched, visage grim,
Around the yard kept pacing, running...
When glimpse! The commissar is coming,
And warders four along with him.
The commissar approached at leisure,
Agrinning at Milord with pleasure...

That grinning made the Master start
As if a knife had pierced his heart.
And waiting not for what the German
Had come to tell him, out he smote,
And grabbed the comm'ssar by his coat
And shook him, crying: "Monster! Vermin!
Have not you had enough to claw?
Has not my woe yet stuffed your craw?
If not, then kill me now, determine
My fate at once!"

"Hey warders! Near me!"

The comm'ssar yelled, away withdrawing.
And here the warders grabbed the Master.
The comm'ssar, loose, began haw-hawing:
"Ho-ho, Herr Lord, such jesting, dear me,
Ach, what sport! Hey, you there, hear me!
Herr Kerkermeister, Bank heraus!"¹

Migutski paled. "What's this you're doing?
I am a Lord! You'd dare?...How...How"...

"O please, I tink you're misconstruing!

We haf a constitution now!

Und all beneat dis prison's ceiling

Are equal. Warders, legt ihn platt!²

Let Master taste what he's been dealing!

Legt ihn, und twenty! Good und hot!"

And all in vain the Master strained,

It fell, by th'constitution's seal,

That he got dealt the very same,

That he so oft himself did deal.

He rose, his visage pale, bizarre,

Belike a corpse. Just, dripping slowly,

The blood with red his lips did mar.

And, too, in blood his eyes were playing,

Displaying rage and fires unholy.

He slowly neared the commissar

1. Warden, bring out the bench!

2. Lay him flat!

And hissed: "All right, and now start praying,
For I shall never let this by,
I swear to you, for this you die!"

"Consider well, Herr Schlachziz, Master,"
The comm'ssar quietly replied,
And shook his head from side to side, —
"Gedenken Sie, was Sie da sprechen!³
Don't say such tings, dey are Verbrechen!⁴
Dey are a threat! Your own disaster
You made yourself, your snout, your views,
Yourself got into trouble talking!
I here was chust dis minute walking
To bring to you some welcome news.
Your wife — she's in mein office, waiting,
Mit dose whom you'ff been long degrading, —
Your serfs, — dey trafelled all dis way
To beg for you. Dey're stupid pessants,
But good, Herr Lord! Your wife was stating
To me how good was all deir presence,
Und how dey helped her day to day
In ef'ryting. Refuse I couldn't,
Und down here came, my wounds, my falls
To all forgiff you, dough I shouldn't.
But dat, when you chust chumped on to me,
I couldn't oferlook at all.
Die Ordnung⁵ here's die same for all!
Begone, Herr Master, from dese walls,
Und try forget you effer knew me!"

But wond'rous wonders! What was said,
That voiced the Master's liberation,
Not only didn't bring elation,
But seemed to sadden him: his head
Bent slowly down, his gaze grew faded,
His step, till then so animated,
Became unsure. It seemed as though
He found it hard his senses keeping.

3. Think, what your're saying!

4. Crime.

5. The rules.

He started out away to go,
Then stopped, gazed back, — and violent weeping
Began to shake him to and fro.

Now why his tears? Because they beat him?
Or was't because he got his freedom?
Or did he sense his death was near?
Or did, perhaps, his conscience soften
From th'peasants' goodness, whom so often
He'd brutally inspired to fear?...

'Tis here my little tale is ended.
What happened after — in a trice
I can complete. Too late had mended
The Master's conscience. Grief, and jail,
Had so undone him and unmade him,
That his physique would not suffice
To keep him up. An ultimatum
His doctors gave: that he must sail
To Italy, for baths and sunning,
And balmy climes. What else to do? —
It's off and sailing, time's a-running!
But who turn for money to?
Ho-ho, and what about the Jew?
Why, Moishe's anxious, through and through!
The moment that he heard the Master
Was seeking cash — he came like rain...
(But through the recent, dire disaster
He stayed away, and plied his drinking,
And with the servants kept a-linking,
A-buying up their loot, and then,
Reselling it for giant gain.)
And thus that Judas came a-slinking
With bags of money and — a pen;
And th'Master, barely twice a-blinking,
Was holding contracts signed in red,
And ere the reaping season started,
To It'ly our Migutskis fled.
Their children off somewhere they carted,
And locked the manse. And Moishe spread
His cash in loans.

The summer sped, —
Milady wandered back a widow —
Milord, en route, to death had bled.

She dwelt in mourning, sad and lonely,
And spoke with no one, Moishe only
Would always to the mansion head,
And hang around her, share her bread,
His contracts holding. Two years wound...
This way. One day Milady started,
And packed her bags and, lone, departed;
(She spoke with none, with no one parted),
And disappeared from sight and sound...
And Moishe mortgaged up the town.

