
MARYA

A Tale of Ukraine

ANTONI MALCZEWSKI

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

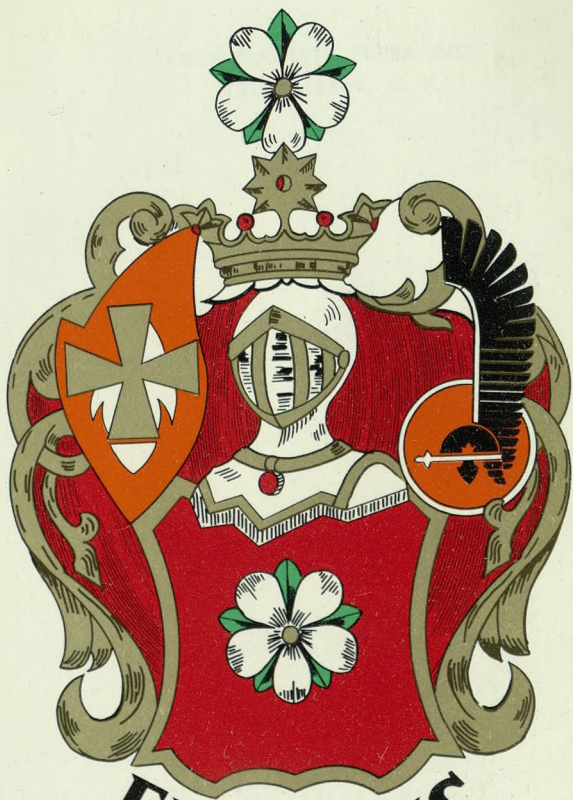
To Professor Roman Dyboski, Professor of English in the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland's most illustrious ambassador of good will to England and America, must go the honor of having been the first one to encourage the translators to undertake this work.

To Dr. Marja Patkaniowska, Assistant in English in the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, we extend our thanks for valuable suggestions and for making certain minor modifications in the completed text.

We wish to thank also the Very Reverend Stanisław Kruczek for the generous help given us by him in the course of a pleasant voyage to Poland on the *M. S. Polonia* in the summer of 1933.

ARTHUR PRUDDEN COLEMAN
MARION MOORE COLEMAN

New York City,
December 15, 1935



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MARYA

A Tale of Ukraine

BY

ANTONI MALCZEWSKI

*Translated from the Polish from the final text as edited
by Józef Ujejski*

BY

ARTHUR PRUDDEN COLEMAN

and

MARION MOORE COLEMAN



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FOREWORD

Antoni Malczewski (1793-1826) was a native son of that very steppe-land with its billowing grasses and its melancholy winds which constitutes the setting of *Marya*. Like Vaclaw, the hero of this tale, Malczewski too was a Byronic figure, a youth of brilliance and charm who blossomed but to have his promise blighted by the chill wind of an unhappy love.

Malczewski's sole claim to immortality as a poet rests upon this tale of Ukraine which he called, after its lovely but ill-fated heroine, *Marya*. The poem was published in the year 1825, scarcely a twelve-month before the poet's untimely death.

We have made this translation of *Marya* into English with two types of readers in mind: the hosts of Americans of Polish origin who have not yet learned the language of their forefathers, in the hope that *Marya* may stir in them some chord of memory long lain mute; and students of the Romantic Movement in literature everywhere in order that they may trace out the Byronic impulse as it develops here in the clash of temperaments and wills on the fair but blood-stained borderland of the east.

Marya is pronounced Mār-ya, with the y as in yes, and the accent on the first syllable.

Dedicated
to
Józef Ujejski

CANTO I

All is strangely twisted here
Upon this poor old earthly sphere,
And he who would some pattern see
Perishes, nor e'er finds harmony.

—*Jan Kochanowski.*

I.

HEY! thou Cossack, whither on thy fleet-hoofed horse are
flying?

Yonder hare that skims the steppe art spying?

Or, heartsick of meditation, dost thou strain

To free thyself, to race the charging winds of the Ukraine?

Perhaps unto thy love who on some distant plain awaiteth
thee,

Murmuring thy melancholy air, thou fl'ist impatiently.

For thou hast pulled down thy cap and loosed the rein,

And now a cloud of dust hangs thick above the plain.

Thy tawny face is shining with some ardor half-concealed,

And joy, like sudden light from darksome field,

Breaks, when thy charger, wild but curbed like thee,

Stretching his neck, bursts through the winds that lure him
free.

Yon Black Sea Cossacks with the squeaking carts, Run!

Hide!

The scions of the steppe will thrust your salt aside.

And all you little black birds with your friendly greeting,

Who circle overhead and look about entreating,

Quick! Tell your secret to the Cossack, fly!

Before you circle 'round he will rush by!

II

ON, on they speed, amid the sun's departing glow,
Swift as couriers of the Gods they go,
And still from far away persists that steady beat,
And over all the wilderness broods silence, dark and deep.
No voice is heard of merry squire, nor knight, upon this
plain,
Only the rushing wind that sadly stirs the ears of grain,
Only from all the graves the sadly murmured story,
The tale of those who sleep amid the tokens of their glory.
Music, wild and mad . . . madder still the chorus runs;
Words the Soul of Ancient Poland cherishes for future sons.
When here a single rose marks all their ancient glory,
Whose heart, whose, breaks not at man's despairing story?

III

NOW flew the Cossack horseman over gorges dread and
deep,
Where wolves are like to hide themselves and Tartars vigil
keep.
His racing steed he guided straight past a well-known hill
Where ancient ghosts are lurking and spectres watching still.
His cap he doffed before it, three times his bosom crossed,
Then, like the wind across the steppe, horse and Cossack
passed.
No phantom frightened his charger, impatient to go on,
He only snorted, gave a kick, and like a flash was gone.

The dark Boh draws its silver thread across the granite plain,
And now the faithful little steed has sensed his Cossack's
game—

The osiers hide dread foemen, the osiers by the mill,
But the nimble little charger knows at once his master's will,
They fly o'er flowery meadows, through thistles sharp and
keen,

As swiftly as the mountain goat, as lightly as a dream,
Bent low above his saddle, like arrow poised for flight,
Close lies the nimble Cossack, against his horse pressed
tight,

So through the empty, trackless waste the steppe-king seeks
his goal,

Steppe and Cossack, horse and night, a wild, unfettered
soul.

And who would fain forbid him this hour of revelry?

He's gone! His native steppe-land will enfold him tenderly.

IV

ON, thou Cossack horseman! On, where duty calls!
Yon ancient, hilltop castle hides a change within its
walls:

Pan Voivod and his son so long at odds with one another,
In kindly tone of late have talked the matter over;
But still—for long the anger and injustice were not dead,
The hearts of both were poisoned, former concord fled,
And tears of hopeless love were mixed with tears of flaming
pride,

Frequently and hotly,—passion burned on either side.

But now, 'tis changed inside the castle, grievances and anger
gone,

Splendor gleams more brightly, ancient brilliance is reborn;
Lately, 'midst his vassal flock, his servants' retinue,
Amongst his clustering pages, his knighthood old and true,
Through lordly halls and chamber that grief so long had
closed,

Bedight with shining splendor, once more Pan Voivod
strode.

And everyone cried out his joy to see him there again
But Vaclaw, not himself, concerned the father then.

Upon his tranquil countenance no token must reveal
How deep his heart was moved; his arm must be of steel—
His noble name—fair words for all the people to remember—

But what was in his heart—must lie deep buried there forever.

And now, from his necessity or through sudden stir of
tenderness,

He finds relief from too long pain—and in his son's caress.

For when in quiet conference the two some matter weigh,
A smile across his earnest face is always seen to play.

And in his eyes there shines again a deep and joyous peace,
As when to long desire there comes at last a sweet surcease.

As when, upon some journey, some arduous feat of will,
For want of couch one rests his head against a soft ant-hill.
Rests his head? Ah, no, not rests but lays his
weary brow

Where a thousand wicked stings no moment's respite will
allow.

V

TILL late at night the castle was livened with noisy song,
Till late at night the trumpets rang, the toasts kept
thundering on.

Old customs came to life again, and splendor as of old,
While massive tables glittered with silver and with gold.
And even the master's cellar, like the master's ancient heart,
Burst wide, and old Hungarian wine caused jests and wit to
start.

While merry tunes, struck up anon amid the happy bustle,
Made music fill the livelong night and all the vaulted castle.
All night till early dawn the painted faces on the wall
Of ancestors in solemn row surveyed the boisterous hall.
And now their dead eyes sparkled, like embers from the
ashes,
And now they smiled at the drinking throng, and moved
their old moustaches.

VI

THOUGH lips be lighted up with joy, still eyes are dark
with worry,
For deeply, deep within the heart the worm of guilt is busy.
And when some merrymaking brings together happy folk,
And Pride or Flattery laugh—it strikes a mocking note.
So in the ancient castle—far down its carven aisles
Night already now has marshalled in her dark and shadowy
files.

The clarinets are silent; Joy enwrapt in Slumber's veil,
The screech-owl on his tower drawing out a funeral wail;

Yet still, in yonder lonely room, atop the castle's wing,
Where broods the valiant Voivid, eagle-eyed and grim,
With eye that from its wrinkled lid flashes sudden beams,
Like jewel, leather casèd, where Pride undaunted gleams,
Still the sound of footsteps—still the breath of sighs,
One and then the other, through the vaulting seem to rise.
This chamber none dare enter, save by the master bid,
There his secret purpose burns, lonely, deeply hid—
Hopelessness sweeps over him—strength has strangely fled,
Through all the darkness of the night he paces with tem-
pestuous tread,
Groping, as if in Night's black breath, a sudden hand to
find,
To clasp in bloody compact, or purge his tortured mind.
When on his burning, restless sight a horrid vision flies,
When the lofty chamber stifles him with suffocating fires,
He flings a narrow window wide, he gazes far below,
Toward where his bravest warriors, with banners row on
row,
Have gathered for the combat at his command this day.
He hears the wak'ning trumpets, the tumult of the fray,
The lively horses snorting, the armor's clinking sound,
He hears the boisterous Hussars, to battle gaily bound.
For them the rosy Sun Maid, rising from her couch on high,
The gleam of her golden tresses lighting up the morning
sky,
Who, as she lifts her lovely brow and winks her dewy eyes,
In the glitter of their steel notes her own fairness with sur-
prise.

For them the fragrant breezes which blow with fresh delight
On the tresses of the maidens and the plumage of the knight;
For them the little birds that chirp a tender roundelay,
As lightly with their beaks they brush the tears of dew
away;
For him . . . such pleasures never! nor must his warriors
see his face.
So he plunges where the darkness lurks, into the room's
embrace,
Like the terrifying visions fear makes man forever see
Through all the long and sleepless night . . . that dawn
sets free.

VII

SIGNALS ring, trumpets blare, horseshoes clatter,—
Faithful as a shadow to every noble master
Stands each standard-bearer ready; then, like sudden flash
They glide between the narrow gothic gates with noisy
crash.
Under the gloomy arches, like beat of steady rain,
The endless hoofbeats echo till they strike the yielding plain.
More softly then, more softly, they sound, nor ever stay;
The echo comes more dully, each beat more far away.
Now out upon the open plain—where soon th' enormous
sun
Circles in the heavens—with boisterous joy they run.
Bathing like young eagles in each golden stream of light,
Impatient to win glory for their banners in the fight.
All their myriad plumage, e'en the stones are lustre-clad,
And a thousand little rainbows deck the armor of each lad.

Victory is in the flash of each swift, cunning eye,
Faithfulness and Valor from each heart's rock blossom high.
Now foremost in the cavalcade there rides a haughty youth.
Who is he? What good fortune, what blushing fame, for-
sooth,
Do those fair, flaxen locks conceal? More fair, a hundred-
fold,
Than the rosy tints of Nature before the day is old,
And sweeter far and clearer than glittering praise can say,
The lustre, welling from his heart, enlivening the day.
That smile wherein is captured such high, ecstatic whim
As lights the face of one who hears the heavenly cherubim.
He rides a fleet-hoofed charger; along the stream's steep
bank
He leads those silent cohorts in order, rank on rank.
They vanish in the dense ravine, then, circling the defile,
Once more their fine heads lift again in long, unswerving
aisle.
The youth upon the hilltop now issues a command—
Behind the nimble Cossacks they rush, a charging band;
Of footprints from their unshod hoofs in that deserted place,
The Wind and Dew, like playful boys, soon scatter every
trace.

VIII

THE silent, solitary fields,—the knights have quickly
passed—
Like heart bereft are lying, by yearning grief held fast:

For eyes that scan that lonely plain, inquire where'er they
may,
Will ne'er find motion, ne'er find rest, wherever they may
stay.
And now above the harvest fields long, slanting sunbeams
lie,
A crow with raucous caw and dismal shadow hurries by,
And often in the steppe grass the cricket's chirp is heard,
Silently, as if it were the air that lightly stirred.
How is it? Can the Past not find in all this wilderness
Even one ancestral monument to soothe its wretchedness?
To ease the burden of its woe what object can be found?
Nothing so winding earthward, it dives into the
ground,
Its ancient armor there to find, long eaten up with rust,
And nameless bones that long ago had crumbled into dust.
There, springing from the ashes it beholds the swelling grain,
And worms at work among the dead that fertilize the plain.
But above the fields unheeding it wanders aimlessly
Like Hopelessness, without a haven, goal or boundary.

IX

BENEATH an ancient linden the Sword Bearer was
dreaming;
He carried in his faded head the weight of bitter mourning:
Though now the black of his *župan* matched his silver hair,
He once had served his fatherland in colors bright and fair.
His fatherland! whose name in war and council seat,
And hotly fought elections where angry forces meet,

With clean white flame had always burned, like bird unto
the sun

Over his pulsing heartstrings in ecstasy had run

But exaltation has darkened, its golden day has passed

The flower has died, and misery remains alone until the
last.

He dreams a shroud of menace has covered like a veil

Past sorrows, present griefs and all, within its dreadful pale.

But still! so long as breath endures within his ancient breast,

So long the flame of stubborn pride shall not engulf his nest.

And while his gloomy *župan* covers strength enough to
breathe,

His withered hand shall wield again the sword in case of
need.

But then? He dreamed, the Old Sword Bearer, upon his
brow writ plain

A look of anger and contempt, a look of proud disdain.

X

THERE stands beside him someone but why does
such a cloud

Of deep, engulfing misery her youthful face enshroud?

Her gown is not well-fashioned, no flowers her breast
adorn,

Her eyes are ever downcast, her very garments mourn.

Upon her face lies anguish, her brow is sad and still,

Only the smile of Patience seems her woeful eyes to fill.

Or if now, of a sudden, 'midst shadows black and deep,

Some old remembered memory brings roses to her cheek,

'Tis faintly, like the pallid glow which now and then the
moon

Might cast, when full, on cheek of statue wrapt in gloom.

A fair and noble figure, one who toward the company

Of angels e'er advances, 'circled by their purity.

But ah! the devastating breath of worldly ecstasies

Has chilled her love's unfolding bud, like frost the autumn
leaves.

So is it when the wind has stricken down upon the way

A being destined heavenward, on whom Earth's shackles
prey.

Her heart is seared within her . . . though she sparkles as
the dawn,

She is a shell, like all the fruits that in the Dead Sea spawn,

Beneath whose tempting color, with toil and painful care,

The traveler seeks nectar . . . and finds but ashes there.

A tender, gloomy sweetness hovers 'round her every line.

But of her bitter anguish no tears, no cries give sign.

No stormy grief, no conflict is in her gentle sigh,

A silent emptiness she seems, the tomb where dead hopes
lie.

One time the lamp of happiness had flickered in her eyes,

It had gone out . . . its fading smoke upon her face still lies.

XI

BESIDE him, o'er the Book of Life, the bride was stand-
ing there,

Like gentle dove, affrighted beneath some searing glare,

Wherein her faith shone clearly and her wings, torn with
unrest,

Were trembling, while afar from land she sought a shelter-
ed nest.

And, as above the glitter and pride of earthly things
God's eye beholds more tenderly Humility's white wings,
And the heart no longer trembles that close to Heaven is
bound,

So fell a drop of soothing dew upon her aching wound;
Her eyes upraised to Heaven, she breathed a single word,
Surcharged with all the passions that in her bosom stirred.
That moment Past and Future, seeking long each other's
way,

Met like two loving sisters in one revealing ray.
And she, that lucid moment, beheld with opened sight,
How grief-torn she was straying, struck down by sudden
blight.

Like one long cooled of passion and purged of earthly fear,
Her soul unto its heavenly source yearned quickly to draw
near.

How sweet 'twould be to vanish from all this noise and
strife,

To lie in the embrace of Death, to 'scape this bitter life!
And one who at that moment had seen her face aglow,
Had watched one noble purpose through the sad Sword
Bearer flow,

Had known those branching lindens, those ancient cos-
tumes seen,

Whose fashion is conducive to reminiscent dream,

And one who might have witnessed how perfumed radi-
ance now
With chaplets of the martyr entwined each suffering brow,
That one, himself transporting to some 'forgotten day,
To some historic corner, some country far away,
To Jordan's far-off margin where beneath an ancient palm,
As he sat with Hebrew fathers in communion long and calm,
In that mysterious union of suffering and fear,
Would sense the same relentless Hand, unfathomed, ever
near,
That sendeth and diverteth rewards and punishment,
Sense too the deep anxiety of such a race of men
As even at their happiest know evermore such need
As only Heaven can satisfy, when unto Heaven they plead.

XII

“FATHER, too long a round of tender thought has now
Been holding me, while always on thy brow
A steady storm of misery has beat;
Whenever Joy has twinkled there it has escaped like fleet
Ethereal flashes leaping from the clouds to mountain height,
Whereon the clouds, wind-driven, quickly hide its glancing
light.
O why cannot your gray head rest, grief-torn,
Here now upon my breast fear not no longer
do I mourn,
As once when in these arms, worn out, you slept,
To waken bathed in tears your daughter wept.

Ah, cruel sport of fate! the yellow sprout with poisoned
food
Has fed the oak that by her side so staunchly stood!
Emotions, bolted tight so long, burst through the stout
Confinement of my courage, and flowed violently out.
How painful, looking back, to see Despair's approaching
face
And be unable e'en a footstep to retrace.
How bitter always to be so hemmed in,
And even offer poison with the hand that would give medi-
cine.
O father, father dear, O must it always be my destiny
Never to become a source of happiness to thee?
Bitter was thy daughter's fate . . . but that is past—
See now, how sweet a light envelopes her at last,
See how, upon her face a smile is wavering, more gaily than
before,
It seeks to waken thee to happiness as in those days of
yore,—
Those childhood days, forgotten now,
So dear, so transitory years! I can remember how
My darling daddy would sink down in gloomy mood at
night
Until his daughter's merry laugh would put his gloom to
flight.
Her joy would steal into his heart, slowly for a while,
Then suddenly his face would clear, and he begin to smile.
What has the maiden done, alas, with all her magic power?
At first she drove the clouds away, but now she makes them
glower.

And whither has the little rivulet now fled?

It hated its own unworthiness and sought the lake's deep
bed.

Our beautiful canary . . . ah, when will he come back?

He wished to gild his wings in fire . . . nor will return,
alack!

So long as he who dwelt from the beginning in my heart,

Even when no marriage rite had set our lives apart,

So long as he was moved in sweet and tender wise

To murmur noble sentiments and lose himself in sighs,

Ah! just to feel my little self his life's consuming need,

Was more than earthly happiness, was paradise indeed.

He whose enchanted touch unwound the bud where dreams
lay deep

Enfolded, he who wakened it from sleep,

Who drank of its refreshing dew and left such tears of
gratitude

Upon the blossom as no brush of Time shall banish, how-
soever rude,

So long as he, my love, the darling of my soul,

Breaks not the ties that our entwined fortunes hold,

But faithful still remains to virtue, love and memories,

And even 'mid love's ruin its broken fragments sees,

For me the lid of life is still ajar,

For still his thought of me, though sent from far,

Will find into my dead emotions its unerring way,

And like some wondrous balsam will preserve them from
decay.

The woeful sacrifice, the bitter pain

Of parting I shall bear, resignedly, until our spirits twain

In heavenly realms shall be forever 'twined again,
No more the world to see . . . but kindlier Heaven!"
She spoke: as when the dregs of green
And stagnant water, suddenly disturbed, are seen
To stir, so from her heart rose thoughts, tear-steeped,
Stirred feelings that had lain quiescent long, entombed deep.
"To be a captive of the bearded Turk for me were better
fate

Than watch my daughter wither, and impotently wait.
'Twere better to be buried in some dungeon, fatal spot,
Than follow the unravelling of thy sad marriage lot!
But Poland is not lacking in all that manly band
Alert to hasten, blushing, to seek their lady's hand,
In youths who, like their fathers, would bend the knightly
knee

And once, for all their lives, accept her wreath as dowery!
No, Marya, do not sigh, no slurs my words reflect.
A valiant youth and virtuous he, his valor I respect.
But, ah! his father's arrogance my very bosom sears,
And now this heart has sprung to life at Marya's bitter
tears,

My sword will no more glitter with vain and empty light,
The holy picture on its blade will blind his very sight!
Do not our *szlachta* cherish the duty from of old
To kindle with the sword the fires of Friendship that grow
cold?

Friendship! at the Sejm our men ne'er once stood side by
side,

And when he spoke our Veto! loud and long was cried!

And if our country's danger and contracts long agreed
Had not, that fatal moment, sent me hurling 'gainst the
Swede,

And if thy guileless mother (God cherish her above!)
Had not, beneath her kerchief, hid the secret of thy love,
And, clothing it with tinsel, in the way that women do,
Had not conspired this union, 'mongst her ladies' retinue,
In the mounds of my ancestors foes had found no place to
hide,

Nor foothold in my household whence to spread their ruin
wide!

But what is left? The Reaper has swept away my wife,
My daughter, all I have, has drenched with tears her life.
The ancient sabre cannot understand such heavy blows,
It shrinks from its disgraceful fate, it shudders at its woes.
Has he my child unto his heart in tenderness once pressed?
Or let her youth, her charm ever stir his breast?
No, straightaway, contemptuous, he drives her from his
sight,

And now in Rome endeavors to annul the marriage rite!

Ah! better so! That leaves my hand untied!

Our youth will quick come forward and after them I'll
ride,

And though my soldiery be few, sweet mercy we shall
pray,

And when the strife is ended yonder bells will ring that
day."

He wiped his tired brow, his cap more tightly drew,
He waved his tired hand, and bowed the head where dark
thoughts grew.

XIII

OUTSIDE the gate the fleet horse paws the ground, the
village dogs bark loud,

Whence rides the Cossack horseman, wrapped in all this
dusty cloud?

Dismounting like a flash, his rein across the fence he
throws,

Then, twirling his moustaches, inside the courtyard goes.

Upon that steaming face stern days have 'graved their
memory deep.

The Cossack's bow is simple, his murmured greeting brief.

Though he seems a poor subaltern to the servants' company

His heritage is noble, a free-born Cossack he.

And when with proud demeanor he asks to see the lord,

He looks a very ruler among the guiding horde.

His every move is agile, he walks with easy grace,

For his muscles have been tempered by the winds that
sweep the waste.

His hat of stoutest ram's skin, whene'er the Cossack turns,
Like martial banner flashes, like leaping flame-tongue
burns,

Among the ragged underbrush, the lindens on the wall,
Whose shade and strange uneasiness upon the peasants fall.
As he seeks the old Sword Bearer, guided by that retinue,
His horse outside keeps neighing for the Cossack good and
true.

"Dost bear some word?" "Aye, master, to thee I should
have come

Before the hens were cackling, for all night long I've run,

But the devil scattered storm-clouds above the windy plain.
May God Himself protect thee and her ladyship from pain!"

"A pity they have come so late . . . these tidings that you
bear;

Whose Cossack are you, anyway, that men and devils fear?"

"O are you not acquainted with the ancient Red Caps'
fame,

Who serve their knights from birth? I come in Count Vac-
law's name!"

The old Sword Bearer reads: in Marya's timid, quivering
gaze

Not only vain curiosity . . . but life's tumultuous maze.

Her bosom lifts and trembles as on an unknown wave

That may bear heavenly sweetness or fearsome storm pre-
sage.

Her flaming face is covered, as terror makes her start,

By that fair but fateful pallor that marks a wounded heart.

"Let horse and Cossack tarry within my manor gate.

This letter must be answered at once, and while they wait!"

The Cossack did not seem to note the thunder in that word,

Into Marya's lovely eyes he gazed a moment, deeply stirred,

Then bowed before their lordships, and when the time had
come

The Cossack and his guides withdrew . . . chattering
gaily on.

XIV

"**W**HOE'ER can probe men's motives? If't be no
treachery,

This word, my darling Marya, spells happiness for thee.

For here Pan Voivod writes me, in words of honeyed sound,
We must forget resentment, no longer nurse our wound;
Regretting his offenses, not only does he plead
Affection for his daughter-in-law, but summons her, indeed,
Unto his home and adds that now his long unworthy
son

Shall strive by valorous merit if her blessing may be won!
That son he fain would offer in this time of martial need
To prove him fully worthy of her by knightly deed.
And now that the Tatar is raging across our borderland,
He bids his son defend thy charms and make a knightly
stand!

That he may boast before the world, his cap with laurel
brave,

That her whom he knows how to love, her likewise he can
save!

Today he leads his troops to war." "Then shall I see him
pass?

Dear God, what ecstasy! O father, hear my heart beat fast!
But what are all these battles for? Indeed the very sight
Of Vaclaw's noble face is proof he is a dauntless knight.
Though men like stern Pan Voivod how rarely do we see!
Straight out admits his guilt still something troubles
me

So pale I am, dear father, my face may him affright,
Perhaps he'll be offended or wounded by my sight.
Perhaps I should adorn myself, put on a dress more gay . . .
The fairest woman in the world must Marya be today!"

"Wait! Wait! no pike was ever caught by flourishing the
net.

We still may have to play our cards and play them subtly
yet!

I too would join these horsemen and drive the Tatar out . . .
Then why sit dreaming here . . . somehow his face I cannot
rout.

I see his knightly warriors . . . yet still it seems to me
That somehow old Pan Voivod has contrived some trick-
ery!"

But now the silver trumpet spills its message on the air,
The noise of armed men is heard and echoing sounds from
where

Already certain troops have passed and more will follow
late,

While some of the most ardent knights are chafing at the
gate.

"Vaclaw!" cries Marya, swift as arrow through the skies,
Her figure, mourning-clad, unto her knightly lover flies.

XV

WHAT alchemy, good fortune! how quick it can en-
hance

The glow on noble forehead, on gracious countenance!

How in a single glowing look break suddenly alight

The youthful dreams that circumstance so long had seemed
to blight.

And o'er the clear, transparent depths of comfort quick
distil

The tender, buried hopes that his enraptured bosom fill,

Bold and proud yet gentle after devastat-
ing storm,
Now ruddy in the rainbow gleam on which his fate is borne,
With a certain noble ecstasy beating through his veins like
fire,
He gathers in his hungry arms the goal of his desire.
He takes her trembling bosom in his comforting embrace,
And with quieting caress of fear disperses ever trace.
"Be off, my gilded servant, and take my charger too,
Lest sight of him affrighten the fragile bird anew.
And thou, good Sir, rest easy, if my advice thou'dst seek . . .
A tear is starting in thine eye, and rolling down thy
cheek
Perhaps the thought of battle already makes thee ill
But Marya, ah, my Marya, her heart is happy still,
With the happiness of women, for whom life's sweet
moments rare
Are like the radiance of the sky though thunder threatens
in the air."

XVI

"**B**UT, son-in-law!" the Sword Bearer, a-sudden, with
moistening eyes,
A-gleam with joy, is saying, where, above, the linden sighs,
"I know in this fierce universe the wind that solace brings
Has scarce been more than welcomed than, capricious, it
takes wings;
Manfully I shall bear myself our time will soon be
gone,
I too shall bring my forces, nor tarry here too long.

For truly it is spoken: the duty of a knight
Is hard, and harder still when love would woo him to
delight.

But after stormy tumult, in this interval of peace,
'Tis safe to celebrate our joy above a bounteous feast.
Since guest so dear, so welcome, has honored us at last,
The bowls shall soon be clinking, no longer shall we fast,
So, Marya, sit not idle, in flushed confusion there,
Prepare the board with lavish hand, nor spice nor savor
spare.

Bring out the fruits and sweetmeats, the ginger, saffron,
bay,

For is he not a noble knight who honors us today?
Myself, I shall select the wine, and when in dazzling bliss
The sun 'neath yonder water has sunk his golden disc,
If then to all my planning no fatal blow is dealt,
While Tatars drink the evening dew, I drink my new son's
health!

And now I bid you all farewell: with anxious worry gone,
Success seems even sweeter . . . with valor luring on!
I must prepare my warriors, must arm without delay,
For when the silver trumpet sounds, we mount . . . and
then away!"

XVII

HE went: upon the cold, bright sheath that cased the
plumed knight
Was resting Marya's pallid face, enshrined in misty light.

Her tresses draped his shoulders, for the chill, the armored
breast,
Cannot enfold the fair one, though warm the hand may
press.
But the love-intoxicated heart rests ever on the steel
Of sternest armor softly, nor doth its hardness feel.
From Vaclaw's flaming countenance his keen and hungry
eye
Drinks in her lovely vision, beclouded by a sigh.
Her charms his rapt eyes measure,
Lest Time have robbed his treasure
But no, the soul-sprung blush he long had known on
Marya's face
Will never die till Death shall all of life erase.
But when he saw her mourning robes, the gloom that
clothed delight,
Beheld the startling pallor that 'round her cast its blight,
The tender smiles she gave him shot through with darts
of pain,
And knew the unshed tears that slowly spread their creep-
ing stain,
The joy that quick enveloped him and her pallid presence
there
Was weaker, fainter, whiter than the plumes our warriors
wear.
"On yonder steppe, when stormy passions in my bosom
played,
I used to wander until twilight cast its bluish shade.

No single star shone over me to guide my wayward feet,
And home my lonely horse would fight his way through
wind and sleet.

Then for me, Marya, thou didst shine, like radiant morning
sky,

Thy light it was that led my footsteps evermore on high.
How fortunate I am that from the knights who 'circled thee,
Thy tender hand was always given in confidence to me.

How blessed that through thy heart, thy sympathetic eye,
The whole of Life, its secrets and its loves I could descry.

Whence rises now the cloud of grief that with sinister
breath

Is choking me that covers thee with dark and ugly
threat?

Oh, why cannot the thorns of life along *my* pathway grow
And leave the sweetest blossoms through *thy* fleeting spring
to blow?

Whatever I have had is torn away thou even have
been wounded less,

For thou belongest evermore to Heaven my home the
wilderness.

The blackness of my thoughts had almost driven me
To turn the sword of vengeance 'gainst things held sac-
redly.

But then, with stern Pan Voivod it is not well to jest,
And one who takes his challenge can scarce his sword
arrest.

The castle of my fathers would have flamed in ruin wide,
And many another castle with kinsmen's blood been dyed.

On my heart this smoke and ashes would have fall'n with
bitter pain,

But to thy side, O Marya, I'd have rushed through blood
and flame.

Fear not that frenzy all is gone at thy beloved sign,
And sooner even, when he first acknowledged thee for mine.
A single word of his and all my bitterness was gone,
As if in all the universe no soul had done me wrong.

Now, having taken up the sword whose gleam I ne'er un-
veil

For private cause but that for thee and country shall
not fail

And mounting my fleet-hoofed charger, who often across
the plain

Has borne me ah! how hopefully I sallied forth again!
These lindens, how refreshingly they burst upon my sight,
I thirsted for their coolness with passion and delight.

Thou knowest not, who givest all without a thought of
fame,

'Thou canst not know, Oh Marya, what a wild heart is to
tame!

A heart that yearns for virtue, remembering the while
The pleasantness of ancient charms that lure and still
beguile.

But, Marya, art thou ailing? thy figure, pale and wan,
Already has the look of those who unto Heaven belong,
And anxious premonitions my quick caresses fill
I hesitate; I ask myself dost love me, Marya, still?"

"Does Marya love thee, darling? Then have I given no sign?
Unseemly 'twere to love thee more, beyond such strength
as mine.

The fragile heart of woman, though she all her powers
employ,

Can bear no fuller measure of unexpected joy.

And if the Tatar horde should ride in dazzling armor near,

And if their deadly arrows should whistle in my ear,

'Twould be so sweet, so easy, for nothing should I sigh,

If clasped in thy embrace to Heaven I might fly!

Her love? Oh, canst not clearly see

The world is not complete for her away from sight of
thee?

That Heaven for her is empty too without thy memory?

When oft, above the Book, in silence lone at night,

My passion I have bowed before the great Creator's might,

As if to stifle thought of thee, in prayer to find relief,

A sound has often thundered, like the echo of thy grief;

Perhaps dear God will punish such wild, unthinking love,

And send a Tatar arrow to strike thee from above.

Dost see yon ray of sunlight? How from the trembling leaves

It draws its clear, dividing beam between our own two
heads?

See how it grows more lively, see it dance and gaily dart,

Oh, how, when we were joined, can it still keep us two
apart?

In vain, in vain, my darling, . . . though heart beat one
with heart

For see! the ray bows with the leaf, to keep our lives apart.

Amid war's exaltation, the blare of trumpets blown,
Do not forget, beloved, that the ray of thy renown,
Though clear today and brilliant, even as the sun is bright,
Though dazzling in the evening air, is doomed to end in
night!

Oh, let them bury Marya first in dungeon's gloomy light!
Can it not be, dear Vaclaw, that, though thou'rt warrior
true,

Enduring, bold and steady, thou wilt be mindful, too?
And when my eyes are blinded and gouged with misery,
The thread of my unhappy life will soon unravelled be.
And when a sigh escapes me from midst of mortal pain,
Ah, can it be my Vaclaw of my passion will complain?
To share thine every pleasure, to soothe thine every sigh,
To have no thought without thee, with thine every will
comply,

To be the comfort of thy days, thy triumphs to adorn,
To live for thee and in thee, and from thy breast when torn,
To see that final moment amidst the deadly pain
The mark of lasting happiness upon thy face remain,
To die, but in thy memory to live, a holy fire,
This is the sum of Marya's love, the whole of her desire.
As soon as thou returnest my harpstrings I shall tune,
And while we linger fondly beneath the pallid moon,
Ah, then a tender harmony our love renewed shall tell,
In music never dreamed before, in notes of magic spell.
But now those baneful trumpets out there begin to blow . . .
Oh, Vaclaw, leave me not again! Take me, when thou must
go!"

XVIII

SURRENDERING to his sweet embrace and bending
above him there,
Such anguish trembling in her eye as mortal scarce can
bear,

Such pallor on her countenance, her shoulders shaken with
passion,

She caught him to her aching breast with tenderest com-
passion.

And when from her caresses he tore his will again,

The struggle rent his very heart, so violent the strain.

Remain with her he must not, sacrificing fame,

Nor were it meet to swoon for love, exposing her to shame.

But, Oh! what heavy sorrow, what woeful misery,

Before his sweetheart's passion to declare his constancy!

He scarce had time to say farewell, for now his leave was
spent

Nor could he draw the parting out in long and vain lament.

The trumpet calls to glory, he must rejoin the host,

The fluttering standards warn him lest victory be lost.

He rose put off his darling eyes lit with fearful
light

Her pale and throbbing little hand his ardent lips pressed
tight,

As if within its tender curves, so pregnant with desire,

He could imprint the passion that set him, too, on fire.

He went: composing his anguished face before his loved
one's eyes.

Gone, now, his glittering figure, the sound of his footstep
dies.

Before he scarce has vanished grim Solitude creeps nigh,
And often, as she muses, breaks the silence with a sigh.
Down through the fallow ground of Hope the roots of
sorrow bore
And sorrow's thorny branches grow up with wormy core.

XIX

YOUNG Vaclaw mounts his fleet-hoofed steed but
anxious is his eye,
His charger leaps, alert to go, he reins him up close by.
The old Sword Bearer mounts his steed, but joy is in his
eye,
He sits his leaping charger and circles 'round close by.
Behind them sound the trumpets, ahead the standards
glance,
The knights, like startled covert, impatiently advance;
The youthful warriors caper as they face the Tatar foe,
One in loyalty and rank, glide onward, row on row.
Hussars and cuirassiers, then next the Cossacks ride,
While the servants in confusion the frightened horses guide.
Now see the chubby children peep from underneath the
thatch,
Let laughter light their faces as the soldiery they watch!
Perhaps this knightly foray this wild fruit soon will
pluck
Yon mother, who salutes, farewell to her, and luck!
Fear not the clank of armor, nor dread the clash of spears,
The ardor of the Polish knight will soon be damped with
tears!

Behind them in the village their passing leaves but dust;
the sound

Of trumpets lurks awhile . . . that too will soon be
drowned.

Now quick the cloud has settled, yet often still is borne
From out the dusty distance the noise of battle horn.

Then quiet—as when Death has 'graved the heart with its
design,

And emptiness and vain regret—as 'tis in Marya's mind.

Now she raises her fragile figure high and higher still,

But nothing sees, save leaden clouds, wind-driven 'cross
the hill.

She falls upon her knees, and lifts her hands in prayer,

Her Heav'n-directed eyes distilling tears of dull despair.

Then quiet—as whenever prayer toward Heaven has sped,

And emptiness and yearning grief—when happiness has
fled.

On Conrad's stricken soul exhaustion prest
And stupor almost lulled it into rest.

—Byron

CANTO II

I

“**L**UXURIANT grows the flower of the steppe, then
lonely dies;

Unsatisfied, across the plain rove hungry eyes;
And he will find, who there seeks comfort in an anguished
hour,

The heavens cloudy and the wild steppe berries sour.
Go rather to the land of myrtle and of cypress,
Where golden suns clothe each succeeding day in gladsome
dress.

In yonder purer air find clearer sight
And every breath an amorous delight.
There laurels bloom and Heaven is more kind
Above the painted land, and thought springs free from the
untrammelled mind.

From the facades of shapely edifices men of ancient fame,
White-clad and boastful each of his historic name,
Invite the lonely to explore enchanted ruins where abide
Heroes and gods . . . where spiders hide.

There, if thou hast within thy soul a love of ancient things,
Thou may'st refresh thyself in those eternal springs,
And there, mayhap, find sweetness in despair, in grief de-
light again,

Like smile on lips beloved in mortal pain.

But go not to the steppe when thou'rt bereft
The steppe holds only graves no other thing is left.
The wind of the Ukraine has blown the rest away
Thou canst but sit at home and listen to old Cossack tales
today!"

"But come, my boy, come, tell me where you go
Are you returning from the Holy Land that you are griev-
ing so?"

"Oh, no I am a stranger within my native nest,
And Death has carved its livid scar upon my wretched
breast—
I have eaten all the bitter, poisoned cakes the world can
offer,
Such the burden on my heart, for that I suffer.
And when I laugh, 'tis only penance, done by rote,
And when I sing, I hymn a dismal note.
For on my face eternal pallor has been born,
And from my savage soul has joy forevermore been torn.
Fate's deadly spell rears up dark thoughts in midst of splen-
dors fair,"

"What is it, then, you seek, O youth?" "To flee Despair."

II

THE youth got up, but there beside the fence he still
remained
For no one shared the misery of which he had com-
plained
He, even, who beside the gate had just been moved to stay,
Opened his eyes in wonderment and turned the other way,

Toward where in varicolored dress, with loud and boisterous cries,
Masked figures were approaching that struck him with surprise.

I.

"Who does not know the old Venetian carnival?
All night, all day,
So mad, so gay!
Masked faces all and he who queries why
This is or that is answered by
A mirthful call.

So live today,
And love, be gay!

The ancient Doge, the dashing Harlequin,
And light coquettes the revelry begin,
While matrons, priest and swindlers, all
Cry, Let's be free!

Yon secret boat
Across the water watch it float!

That noise, that mirthful call
Who does not know the mad Venetian carnival?

II.

Now here we fly with bells and sleighs,
All night, all day,
So mad, so gay!
All masked, and if you try to see
Who this one is or that, the face will flee
Laughing away!

Now Mirth awaits!
Flings wide the gates!

Cracovians and Pilgrims, the one with somber glance,
And even Jews and Gypsies pair up and join the dance.
While fortune tellers, devils, and the honest tradesmen clink
The merry glass together and drown their cares in drink.

The flashing sleigh
Quick bears them all away!

That gayety, that mirthful call
Who does not know our Polish carnival?"

"Oh, no you can no more go in no carnival shall
enter there

Pursuing Tatars is the old Sword Bearer now, the court-
yard bare."

So did the old retainer halt th' emboldened revelry,
To prove again his firmness, his ancient loyalty.
But when the masqueraders 'gan a merry tune to beat,
To shake their noisy rattles, to skip on dancing feet,
To don fantastic costumes, weird headdresses put on,
A lively sight, those faces dead, a nimbly flashing throng . . .
While color clashed with color and dark succeeded light,
And merrily the dancers hurled themselves in noisy flight,
Inside the old man's buzzing head a thought began to
dance

He wondered, and a puzzled look covered his counten-
ance

He laughed at the Jews and the Gypsies, the Fakirs and
Devils all,
Hunggrily he watched their steps, their rhythmic rise and
fall,
While the masks that danced before him twinkled merrily
and near,
And their strange, uncanny measures clothed his curiosity
with fear.
Till suddenly one chalky face from its gashed lips blew on
a horn
He stood with hands grown limp as sharply the notes were
borne,
As, accompanied by the tuneful flute, the voices of the
throng
Poured forth in jangled chorus this harsh, discordant song;

“Alas, on earth Death’s hand sweeps everything away
The worm is hatching in the fairest rose today!

And when the clouds of Care begin to roll
And thunder threateningly,
And when Misfortune takes its toll
Even from the noblest, fairest soul,
Until it bows in misery:
O, let the hand of Evil for a moment hide,
Stiletto wounds know not recovery
In Death, at least, let then these words be cried,
Return at last,—Tranquility!

For on this earth Death’s hand sweeps everything away
The worm is hatching in the fairest rose today!

But when the Dove, Heav'n's triumph over life,
That foul disease, has fled this vale below,
So that another languishes, devoid of will to strife,
So that his cheek is faded and swollen big with woe,
And candles mark his loss, with funereal glow,
Let none, to still the loss, the misery,
Sing paeans loud of victory
Unless he cry before the end this livening refrain:
Thine Angel shall return—return again!

On earth Death's hand sweeps everything away,
The worm is hatching in the fairest rose today!

When one unselfish rushes to another's help,
Can he no more escape the precipice himself?
Joy flourishes not long inside the breast of Jealousy,
Though Good and Evil in the selfsame bed may lie,
The final court shall be a heavenly.
Perhaps in troublous time the sternest head
May harbor thoughts of Heaven that will burn.
Then from well-wishing lips let this refrain be sped:
Return, O Happiness,—return!

For on this earth Death's hand sweeps everything away
The worm is hatching in the fairest rose today!

And he who, wandering in a distant place,
Shall come to Friendship's well-remembered home
And there expect to melt his sorrow in a long embrace,
But, seeking the remembered, longed-for face
In every corner of each empty room
And feeling always a mysterious sense of doom,
Dejected and with eyes that haunted burn,
Cries out, Return, O Hospitality, and banish gloom!
The master will return—return!

For on this earth Death's hand sweeps everything away,
The worm is hatching in the fairest rose today!"

“God rest his blessing on ye! How can ye spirits be!
With all those varicolored masks so confident and free;
Portend ye something new? Or like the sea-gulls have ye
 come,
That ’round this house, for whole long months, like tops
 have often spun?
We pray his Lordship’s quick return, yet though he’s far
 away,
Good wine and feather beds shall lack for none of ye this
 day!”
They entered, bowing, two by two, in through the court-
 yard gate,
Then, looking round and crowding close, there long de-
 liberate.

III

THE sun had made his slow descent from heaven’s lofty
 stair
And now was painting all the grayish clouds with fiery
 glare;
And having sea and land with vibrant yellow light carest,
Upon his splendid throne was flaming in the west.
No longer earthward does he stare with full, offensive gaze,
But looks about him tenderly, with yearning, gentle rays,
And in the quick farewell before he leaves the western
 skies,
He allows himself a moment to be seen by mortal eyes.
He lingers at the edge of space, just loiters there a while,
Lest he deny some creature the refreshment of his smile.

Then steals through every window pane into the smallest
room,
With longing look as of a friend who planned a journey
soon.
A purple cloak then flinging over all the rosy clouds,
His bosom chaste he plunges deep where Nature quick en-
shrouds.
Then Night, with jealous finger dark'ning every trace of
day,
Drags after him his evil cape, black treason to o'erlay.
But where is the old Sword Bearer? Is't not long since the
time
He promised, when the war was done, to drink his joy in
wine?
To let the gladness of his heart be held in bounds no more,
To make his daughter smile again, to feast his son-in-law?
A goodly throng has gathered already 'gainst that day . . .
What then can be the reason for his wearisome delay?

IV

FROM the moment when the vision of his purpose had
been clear,
The moment he had felt his horse beneath him warm and
near,
The moment when the trumpet call through every nerve
and vein
With throbbing, thundering madness had brought back the
past again,

And he saw brave youth around him and heard the noise
of war,

The snort of highbred horses, the clash of arms afar,
To combat with his son-in-law from then he'd yearned to
ride,

Like hoary mountain eagle with his eaglet at his side.
From the moment when his fancy, turning backward in its
flight,

Had seen the Tatar murders, a hideous, bloody sight,
Disdain had lit his wrinkled brow and fire his ancient eye,
His cap had sat more jauntily and Death had longed to fly
From his right hand, his ancient soul been shaken,
And in the old man's grizzled beard each hair had seemed
to waken.

He scarce had left the village when his sword unsheathed
flew,

And glancing 'round so sternly as to pierce a coward
through,

His eye surveyed the valiant ranks, with joy his heart fair
burst,

As he summoned to attention all the ever-thickening host,
"Nobles, brothers, hearken! Thou'rt ready, that I know,
With lightning sword and valiant hearts to fall upon the
foe.

But if there be among thee one who would spare the life
Of any pagan dog or one whom Tatar dance affright,
Let that one hie him homeward on a good-for-nothing jade,
Else later I shall paint his eyes with my own sabre blade.

Then quickly, boldly, wield thy blades and drive thy lances,
all!

Have faith in God, trust the sword, then their pates will
fall

Like grain that sparkles golden beneath the sun today,
And tomorrow will lie withered when the scythe has had
its way.

But none can eat his *řasha* quietly unless he knows
How to cut down the locusts when the call to battle blows.
Go quietly, go cunningly, until the trumpets blare,
Then headlong plunge and show them 'tis a Pole who
slashes there!

And each of ye remember to catch a fish for me!
Then onward, brother *szlachta*, on, noble men and free!"
His son-in-law beside him, he rode at the column's head,
And talked of warlike strategy as on their way they sped,
Considered well the word of spies, thought out how best
they might

Join strength with strength in combat, their forces best
unite,

And snatch from onslaught triumph; then if the Tatars
stood,

How, by pretending flight, to bathe their pagan heads in
blood.

Intently Vaclaw listened, every nerve within him woke,
Ever feature showed he heeded what the old Sword Bearer
spoke.

And whoe'er had seen their picture would have said some
painter rare

Had portrayed from contradictions an intriguing concept
there:

For Reflection marked the younger, Life the elder of the
pair.

V

HAVING passed the dusty village they pursue a track-
less way,

That leads them ever deeper whither Solitude holds sway,
Where the Steppe-Wind is the Sower and Time ploughs
out the fruits,

Where Greed reaps not the harvest, nor careworn Labor
stoops,

Where alone and still and blessed the charm of that virgin
land

Blooms on in secret loveliness, undisturbed by mortal hand.
There Heaven enfolds the riders, deep in that billowing sea,
Whose myriad colors sparkle in lush fertility.

The leader, wise old seaman, one eye on the sun in his haste,
Soars at the head of his army across the lonely waste.

The tall steppe grass is broken, each weed and flow'ret bows
As the hoofs of the steaming horses tread on their fragrant
brows.

But through the old gray whiskers no tender odors rise,
No rapture for Nature's loveliness in that fierce heart now
lies.

War is its only master, War only that bosom stirs,
And love for the very dust of these fields, revenge for
pagan slurs.

He does not let himself be lured to ill-advised attack,
Though snares are all about him and the hated Tatar track,
Through every field and thicket shows traces of Tatar horse,
Bears evidence of tricks designed to lead them from their
course.

The canny old Sword Bearer smiles at every well-laid snare,
They cannot fool this huntsman tracking Tatars to their
lair!

Soon, his troops assembled together, with purposeful design
He separates his forces, leaving part of them behind,
Nods his head and doffs his cap to those who shall remain,
Then leading on the others flings himself across the plain.
Above their flying plumage waves of tossing thistles roll,
In a moment steeds are hidden as in a flaming bowl,
In a moment warriors' heads through all that blood-red
thicket ride,

In a moment caps and banners vanish in that ocean's tide.

VI

BUT Vaclaw, lord all-ruling 'midst the wandering
steppe's expanse,

Bears now a roving will, and thought has changed his
countenance.

Vaclaw the wild, the brave, the match for Nature's fiercest
mood,

Watching the eager warriors, can only dream and brood.

Loudly sings the wind, the wind he loved in other days,

Wherein he bathed with keen delight the eyes he scarce
can raise.

Dejected, gloomy, pensive with presentiment, and lost
In meditation, he forgets his faithful host
But why? Himself knows not, save only this: that Fame,
Bedewed with Marya's tears, before his vision will remain;
Knows only that within his heart has crept a sudden dread,
As if one drew a shroud across a man arising from his bed
And left him there affrighted, with all his courage fled.
But now, with quick impatience he shook his golden hair,
As if to rid it of the chilly dew that sparkled there.
He nudged his fleet-hoofed charger to bear him swiftly on,
As if he wished the spectre of Misfortune to be gone,
And in his clouded eyes that moment flashed the sudden
light
That marks a spirit rescued from Dejection's horrid blight.
All lurking griefs were kindled in that flaming victory,
And on his face there shone the light of immortality.
Some thought, some bitter memory, some apparition gray,
Some sorrow, weakness, phantom, had led his thoughts
astray.
Whatever the fates had marshalled activity to fight:
'Twas gone, henceforth his Love shall be the Duty as a
Knight
Ah! had some Evil Spirit, gloating o'er his people's plight,
Torn for a while the curtain of the future from his sight?
Or did the strings made sensitive by Marya's gentle love,
Played by Misfortune's hand with baneful prescience move?
In battle he may fall? Whate'er the end may be,
Nor sword nor love of country shall he relinquish easily!

And though the chilly mist of death bedim his eager eye,
Nor on his sword nor on his heart shall trait'rous rust e'er
lie!

Now, as a stream that suddenly is blocked in its hurrying
course

Tears out its rocky channel and beyond its banks outpours,
Or as a frenzied steed whose bonds deliberate hands unbind,
Released, strikes sparks from every stone and races every
wind,

Vaclaw, restored from gloom once more to healthy light,
And having exorcised the spectre of himself a craven knight,
More eagerly, more madly, now seeks his fearful blade.
His eyes are sure and threatening as his hand on its hilt
is laid,

While his voice is like the thunder and his look is proud and
brave,

As there rings from his charged body, "Thy prize shall be
the grave!"

VII

ANXIETY and pain and misery beset this life below,
And tears flow oftener in secret than we know;
The madman who with boisterous mirth drowns out his
moan

The world pronounces happy, him alone.
But when the mind that unto purer impulses would rise
And from the wreckage of its hopes seek nobler enterprise
Discovers those he trusts contriving some deceit
And every step beset by pitfalls and abysses deep,

Or sees the mother bird with food for nestlings beat her
wings

At boys who frighten her with snares and slings,
Or sees the mark of torture on countenance so fair,
Then even Courage wrings its hands in uttermost despair,
And soon, from out the myriad wounds that pierce his
ravaged heart,

A nest of hissing vipers forth upon the world begins to
start.

When Anger seizes Innocence, to quench his frenzied thirst,
Taking not only life but maiden honor first,
Then not alone the Present in infamy rolls by,
But even the Future creeps in sight, poisoned and awry.
For whom? For her, that Angel-Spirit whose destiny is
curst

For giving sweets to creatures that knew no more than
thirst.

When every noble thing and true is blighted here below,
The sufferings of hell itself 'pass not this earthly woe
Pain consumed his heart as the excruciating truth
Poured its boiling water on the gentle-hearted youth.
Yet those who followed after him across the dazzling sea
Paid only scant attention to their leader's misery,
His own thoughts each was thinking, yet in each separate
mind

There rose one thought in common, with the others inter-
twined:

That each of them was ready, with sword uplift in hand,
To hurl himself unthinkingly at Death, at one command!

They rode in silent order, each horse on another close,
The crossing feet, the beating hoofs, in regular cadence
 rose,
The twisting line responsive, alert to its leader's will,
They followed where Vaclaw led them, over each lonely
 hill,
Through vast unmeasured harvests where one plain meets
 the skies,
And beyond in the azure distance another plain would
 rise.
Up from the lapping grasses, like a cloud they would come
 in sight,
And they seemed in the fading distance like Knights of
 the Wind in their flight.

VIII

BUT what can be seen from the hilltop? or what from
 the valley nearby?
Billows of smoke shot through with sparks that higher and
 higher fly
Columns of smoke that bend and twist in the gloomy at-
 mosphere,
Clouds that are bloody and black as they rise and disappear.
And what may be heard from the hilltop? Down in
 the nearby vale,
Tears and moans from the straw-thatched huts, a long and
 anguished wail
That circles around and strikes the heart with a terrible
 shuddering sound,
And lifts in a sigh of sympathy even the breast steel-bound.

“Attention! Fly to arms, ye men! Loose the standard high!
The Tatar is looting the village! Cut them down or die!”
Springing like sudden fountain, th’ infuriated knights
With awful roar descended down from the lofty heights,
Knowing that when a robber band engulfs a village in fire,
And the people, frightened and helpless, die on that bloody
pyre,

There is no time to comfort them nor save the fruits of
their toil,

Nor skirmish single-handed with the Tatars for the spoil.
Already, warned by sentries, the wary Tatar Khan,
His band attuned to the dance they love, himself is leading
them on.

Yonder, behind the village, they cover the spreading land,
The grove on the left, at the right a stream, in crescent
form they stand.

Vaclaw’s swift eye takes in the sight and knows in
sudden breath,

That a doomed, an ill-advised attack can only end in
death

Retreat through the burning village? But warriors cannot
fly

From the course that is ordained for them, to conquer or
to die.

“Who will, now let him follow!” and deep his spurs were
prest. . . .

His horse leaped into the fiery mass recoiled
drew back his breast.

For horse knows not such courage as Vaclaw did not
lack

And how could Polish troops desert their leader in attack?
They plunge into the furnace, the flames that lick and
play

Right through the red-hot ashes pursue their solemn way.
And now behind the village, hearing a quick command,
The scattered host assembles, in order ranks they stand.
Then while the trumpets thundered, with loud and fearful
clang,
The angry hoofs of the horses in discordant clashing rang.
And all the eager chargers and all the leaning men
Were swept away in a maddened rush by Glory and Re-
venge!

IX

BOLDLY the battle was joined that day; the Tatar host
was there

With crescents and horse-tail *bunchuks* brandished in the
air

Heavy furs worn inside out, mighty bows drawn tight,
Faces swarth and grim, moustaches drooping, black as
night,

Features dark with anger, eyes that leered from tiny slits,
Wherein the cruelty of beasts with human venom sits

A look of utter wildness revealed the kind of foe.

But neither flames nor widening steppe nor arrows whistling
low

Made aught of fearful impress upon those Polish hearts,
But rather fired them on to face with scorn those Tatar
darts.

Fast as the driven storm they flew, but ere those arrows yet
Had struck the Christian lances or hostile horses met,
While they made the famed half-circle, drew up in eastern
plan,

The rear of the Tatar wing against our own wing ran:
"Allah hu!" rang out their cry and a thousand companies
Let loose their poisoned arrows against their enemies.

"Hurrah!" the faithful answered as they tore through that
flying cloud,

As they sped on the wings of falcons straight into the Ta-
tar crowd.

Still on they come, . . . and closer 'gainst hostile ranks
they push,

A forest of bristling lances, a roar, a crash, a rush.

Screams and groans and the clash of arms 'mid clouds of
dust arose,

And the pierced wall of the Mussulmen broke before
Christian blows.

The horses trample the fallen . . . like serpents the lances
and spears,

As he rolls beneath their horses' feet, the horrid infidel
pierce.

Battle's frenzy fills them; blood flows and the fierce steel
flies,

While everywhere Death is busy, closing the glassy eyes . . .

But it all lasts only a moment when all of a sudden there
pours

From the flanks and the pregnant distance a horde of un-
measured force.

Time for the Polish host to die; they answer young Vac-
law's call

Inspiring his men, arranging, he sends them to battle all.

But in the welter of conflict, wherever each tries to ride

He finds a whirlpool of bodies that block him on every side.

They strain, they slash, they murder, with mighty blows
they hack,

Each Christian matched with pagan ten and hundreds on
his back

A rushing together of stubborn hosts, with awful shrieks
they clash

A cloud that gathers from every side, pierced by the sword-
blade's flash.

X

AMID the crowd of infidels that blocked him from his
own,

Without support or hope or friend, unwitnessed and alone,
Young Vaclaw battled dismally; he sought nor prize nor
fame,

But only that he might not die accused of coward shame.
He thrust at Death, he longed for Death, for in him seemed
to speak

A voice like that of gentle Dove held in a Vulture's beak.

Such was the burden of his thought; but now from swift
alarm

Or fear, or from the slashing of Vaclaw's strong right arm,
The mob that had been pressing his form into a knot
Had drawn away a little and left a vacant spot.

Now they recognize the leader in confusion fall upon
him

Flying forward, each in turn, to die they dare not
win!

And when his blue eyes noticed the carnage he had wrought,
When he saw the maddened circle withdrawing as he
fought,

The strange advantage saddened him, for suddenly he knew
Then even with Death so close at hand, his wish might not
come true.

Why had they not one arrow within their quivers left
That with its lizard poison could pierce his heart bereft?

Alas! they are retreating he is afraid of life
He charges after their cruel forms, baring his breast to
pagan knife.

But wait, now wait upon the stage
Rides out the brown-skinned Khan, all purplish-red with
rage.

Sensing some unknown power is conquering his horde,
He notes the scourging blows all falling from a single
sword.

He tears away at his ruddy beard, his popping eyes shoot
flame,

His maul gapes wide as he bellows, "Horrible! For Shame!"
Against a single Christian a thousand pagans dash,
Scimitars above their heads, they fly, to cut, to slash!

XI

WHAT trumpets were those that were playing beyond
the forest wall?

What fresh recruits advancing with high, impassioned call?

What knight is this who slashes crookedly about,

As forward he is riding, 'midst death and fearful rout?

His charger scarcely treads the earth; his face is torn with
pain,

His sparse gray hair unfolds on the wind with light like
comet's mane.

And in all his flowing motions, his stern, impassive grace,

His fleetness unrestrained, his mad, unbridled pace,

Like that of lioness with young by human foe beset,

Who leaps with frenzied courage when she perceives the
threat,

Or mother, long bereft of hope for exiled son's return,

Whose eyes, when she beholds him, with tender passion
burn,

Both lioness and mother he, that day, the ancient knight . . .

His sabre glittered in his hand, he rode with speed of light.

Vaclaw, startled, eyes ghost-ridden, sees him reining at his
side,

Then forward the old Sword Bearer and his son-in-law both
ride.

Their men press close behind them . . . Aha! you naughty
Khan!

You first we send our greeting . . . We hail you first
. . . . Lead on!

Headlong they fly together, while Pole and Tatar watch

In tense anticipation the grim, death-dealing match.

The Sword Bearer toys with the Tatar . . . strikes, then
suddenly coils back,
Then crowds his adversary with full and sharp attack.
He bides his time awaits his chance then deals
one mighty blow
That buries a Christian iron in neck of pagan foe.
The head, swept off by a single stroke, falls with a thud
to the ground,
The mouth still tries to gasp a word, the quivering eyes look
round,
The head still rolls and twitches, its light soon flickering
out,
From the trunk that sits the horse, unmoved, gurgling
bloodstreams spout.
A wail goes up from the infidels, they flee, while their
chieftain's horse
Flees too with the rest of the routed horde, bearing his
master's corpse.
Panic seizes the Tatars, the trumpets thunder their part
New knights rush up to the massacre and weary knights
take heart.
A flash of fire, a shriek, a groan and then a neigh of
fright
But dusty Glory will clothe the fray in Beauty radiant
white.

XII

BRIEF and fierce the struggle . . . some casting their
arms at their feet;
Some flung themselves on the gory field, while the rear
pursued the retreat.

Across the trampled battlefield were creeping bloody stains,
Where Polish knights were lying with Cossack and Tatar
remains.

And just as he had fallen each dying warrior lay,
While his horse, as his soul sped heavenward, wandered
lost all day.

Turbans and caps alike were strewn about in the dust of
the plain,

Only the faithful sword lay close, its blade a bloody stain.
O thou whose life has been vouchsafed through ancient
bravery,

Come, listen to the joy of war, the cries of victory!
See how, amongst the slain, where worms scarce wait the
final breath,

Bemoustached knights rejoice that they have won a noble
death.

And grimmest brows grow brighter, with smiles and joyous
cries,

Portentous in their meaning as when thunder rocks the
skies.

Come, tremble not, 'tis noble to stand where heroes rest,
Where Valor, fertilized with blood, blossoms in each breast.
And if it wakes within thee naught but coward's dread,
If to thy country's service by their sight thou art not led,
So that, in case of need, thou would'st resign whate'er be
dear,

Go, search thy very deepest heart, thyself then only fear,
Come, press thy woolen caftan close to those breasts steel-
bound,
Press tightly, with a grateful heart, and kiss each holy
wound.

XIII

THERE was a hillock on the forest's edge; and green its
wooded head,

While all around the fragrance of the wild thyme spread;
Atop the hill were birches, robed in shining white,
That wept whene'er the wind went stealing through their
tresses light,

And Shades of Ancient Virgins that guarded each a buried
knight.

There, below their slumber, dusky balsam wreaths
Both victor and the vanquished have drawn for rest and
peace.

So runs the universal law: for ecstasy the toll is bitterness,
And struggle, tedium, shame and glory, end alike in weariness.

Yonder the dying battle fires are once more bursting into
flame,

With sudden ghoulisn flash illumining the battlefield
again

Behind, the sun, where hidden by the forest it had stood,
Was marvelling upon the awful splendor radiated by the
burning wood.

A thousand colors flashed at once while ravens over-
head

Went flying in a dizzy course, screaming above the dead.
The sentries still kept watch beyond the fires was
heard the clash

Of bustling hosts; the horses as they crunched the grass

Sounded like jarring armor in the distance, while the eagle
white,

The Sword Bearer himself, though gray, yet bathed in
Glory's light,

Baring his steaming head, sat down beneath a birch to
rest

And sitting there these words to gloomy Vaclaw he ad-
dressed:

"My son, to call my love for thee no father's love
were vain

Son's place thou long hast held with me, have now the
name!

Today again our lives upon a happy reel are wound. . . .

Our Vaclaw has been spared The Tatars are put
down

Our fair Ukraine is calm once more, for long, God grant 't
may be!

Beyond my poor desserts Good Fortune seems to favor
me

But when a soul achieves what it desires and seeks no
more

Come now, thy face, is't not too sad for face of conqueror?
See how lovely is the moon that swims above the top of
yonder hill!

Enough of martial glory, Vaclaw, relax thy warrior will!
To horse then on to where it is thy gentle wife awaits,
And all thy loyal servants long to greet thee at thy gates.
I'll play the sentry here, and with the break of dawn
My hoof will clang good-day and swiftly I'll be gone.

Come, mount, thy nimble charger chafes to bear thee quick
away!

Farewell, God's blessing go with mine, and follow thee
this day."

XIV

THE words were scarcely spoken when straightway Vac-
law rose and grasped

The old Sword Bearer's hand in his and held it firmly
clasped;

Whereon the rough old warrior his own with fervor seized.
Forward then, horse and rider leapt through the shadowy
trees.

Weary, the old Sword Bearer murmured his rosary,
While over the plain rode Vaclaw, and fair as a god was he:
A radiance as of silver on hair and armor fell,
While over all the billowing grass there lay the moon's
white spell.

How beautiful it is through Nature's blessed peace to ride,
To hasten, though with downcast heart, to reach a loved
one's side;

To greet each sight new risen with memory afire,
To race each welcome vision with passionate desire;
To hear familiar voices rising from the distant dale
The croaking frogs, a murmuring stream, one lonely night-
ingale,

In music melancholy, lively, sensitive or bold
Their secrets to th' awakened heart they tenderly unfold;

To smell the fragrant perfume distilled from every flower,
Whose airy clouds of loveliness dark thoughts can over-
power

Now Vaclaw's spirit lightens as if suddenly set loose,
Now soars to its Creator, as from earthly chains it rose.
So Nature, kindest mother, brings solace to human night . . .
Now every object smiles again and all the world is bright.
So to the murderous battle-sword oblivion creeps nigh,
On Vaclaw's lips shines kindliness, forgiveness lights his
eye.

So forth with joy he hastens, as if some sudden strain
Of thunder had that moment torn his life's full sail in
twain,

With tempest lacking power across this world to sweep,
That only o'er the clammy grave would madly roar and
weep.

And so he passed the steppe but now the holy dream
Which plunges earthborn children from ecstasy to pain,
From ecstasy too brief, brought ghostly Memory again,
To wake the unremembered Past; the scented draperies
Held shudderings the crowding visions deep, pro-
found unease.

"Faint and lovely and defenseless he could see her stand,
Caressing ivy doomed to wither, robbed of a defender's
hand;

Here flourishes no fruit so sweet; Why? scarce had he re-
turned

Than he could see the paradise he recklessly had spurned

Was sacrificed to Fame, who hath no gifts wherewith her
sons to grace,
One half so fair as smile on loved one's face.
If only he had trusted what the Fates had given and had
no fear
But when the storm of anger had passed over and the sky
was clear,
Anticipating not how drearily for her the hours would pass,
He'd lightly torn himself from joys he held within his
grasp."
Now faster and faster onward, leaping over each ditch
and weed,
Glides with clanging hoofbeat the form of his outstretched
steed.
And the roar of the foaming courser, the flashing warrior's
sight,
Awakened a sleeping villager and burst the mantle of
night.
Ha! Ha! but before he could rub his eyes or steady his
pounding heart,
The knight had gone, but his spectral trail still made the
old man start.
On and on flew Vaclaw happy and fearful and sad,
Beautiful, terrible, all at once, a mortal, in the truth,
the lad!

XV

A GAINST the gate the charger now leans his foaming
breast,
And neighs, and sniffs the air, its portent as if to test.

But though the moon shines clearly, there is not a soul
about,

No yeoman who with eager foot comes running nimbly out.

"Ah, well, 'tis late . . . so let them sleep!"

Mused Vaclaw as his hand was fastening his steed.

Then, warmed by such a thought as caused his very heart
to swoon

That it would beat upon his own beloved one's bosom
soon

And bathed in brightness such as rises when new pleasures
overpour

Old fears, the youth impatient stood before his dear one's
door.

The memory of old caresses sprang to sudden birth!

Only a little while — and he shall be the happiest man on
earth

In heaven, too he knocks a second time
and thrice!

Three times a watchful echo with hollow answer flies

Is silent then, the only sign of movement or of life

Which, drowsing there, awaited the returning knight.

No hurrying steps, no burst of sudden cries,

No light all dark and quiet the tight-barred castle lies.

How deep must be their slumber! Impatience cannot wait.

It counsels a single sabre cut will open wide the gate!

But from that inviting counsel Vaclaw shook his impulse
free

To heighten *her* disquietude that he might curb his own
anxiety?

Nay! rather in his bosom let stormy tumult cease,
That never it might reach her, nor e'er disturb her peace.
He knocked again, more weakly, for in his heart now welled
A sense of utter holiness, forgetfulness of self.
He stole away deep quiet wrapt him 'round,
Stopped suddenly was that some human sound?
He looked full at the moon and, wondering, noticed how it
cast

In black, distorted shape his own vast shadow on the grass.
How sweet, how quietly her heavenly course is run!
Is it because she has her eyes turned ever toward the sun?
The warrior bowed his head, and as he pondered there a
while,

It seemed to him across her face had run a mocking smile.
So dreaming sadly on perhaps not dreaming then,
In that chaos of emotions wherein grief and fear suspend
Together with the memory of love and happier hours,
Stealthily he groped his way around the silent house,
So deaf and dead and quiet where his precious treasure lies,
Like some accursed castle that in Arab tale might rise.
But what is that? When hope of getting in had almost died,
He noticed something moving in a chamber at the side,
Saw a window open over it a curtain light
Hung there to guard the sleeper from prowlers of the
night.

It seems, that fluttering curtain, to scoff at the timid wind
That pushes it outside the room and straightway draws it in.
O what fire is coursing through his knightly veins!
What gleam of happiness his fair cheek stains!

How to resist mad thoughts? How bid them all be gone?
None could but model knight or stone!
Nor one nor other he though in war a hero known . . .
And true in love and grateful he stands inside the
room.

XVI

UPON the bed that lay in order there before his eyes,
Her arms wide-stretched above her head, the sleeping
Marya lies.

But Comfort does not soothe her troubled rest
As if released from Misery that long had pierced her breast
She seems, the suffering still plain upon her livid face,
And all her figure lying still as Death within that dismal
place.

Her glowing curls are tossed in careless disarray
To charm one's lover none would 'range them such a way!
All sadly puffed and bloated she, and big with sudden pain,
As if she'd struggle to cry out, to call for help, in
vain,

For as she cried some higher power must have stopped her
lips.

The room is pale with moonlight and through the window
flits

Across the victim's half-shut eyes a single searching ray,
Gently, as if the touch of ghostly maid upon her lover lay.
So there is our lovely Marya—before her stands her knight!
He brings her earthly happiness — and does he fear the
sight?

Aye, young and beautiful Marya — but ah! how changed
her form!

Already, in her bosom, has th' accursed worm been born?
Not long does Vaclaw stand erect in stupor and surprise,
His spirit quickly thrusts aside the trembling and the
sighs

He bends above her pallid brow, he joins his lips with hers,
And all the sweetness of his heart into her own he pours.
Dear Marya, art thou then cold and dumb?

There is happiness for both us now: Echo answers —None!
Marya, darling Marya, 'twas for thee I fought this day!

Father will bless our union now: Echoes answers, — Nay!
His tenderest caresses wake no recognition in her eye.

Distraught with love could she but answer with the
solace of a sigh!

Her head falls limp upon his breast, as lifeless as a stone,
And striking there his armor wakens a hollow moan.

He shouts, cries out for help, runs through all the empty
house.

But all his frenzied rushing only echoes serves to rouse.

Then back he comes, more hopeful, mayhap the open air
Will drive away the heavy gloom that holds the maiden
there.

But when from off her couch her slender form his strong
arm takes,

Into what fearful motions her stricken body breaks!

It knows no pliant suppleness as weighs so lightly down,
But from its limp abandon her fate is quickly known.

The hanging arms, the lifeless head, the already stiffened
feet,
All make a fearful sight, yet still to him how sweet.
"Water, water," cries the knight, with loud and crackling
cry,
And thrusts the massive door aside, his frenzy mounting
high.

XVII

DOWN in the heart of the thicket a gentle motion stirs,
The leaves are pushed apart and then a cap appears.
A head looms up, and someone lurking can be seen,
Someone who, silent, hidden, waiting there for long had
been.
A youth who there had lingered, on the old world's plight
to dream.
With searching look he gazes straight into the warrior's
eyes.
The latter marks his faded youth with quickening sur-
prise
Charm, or terror is it, that in this creature lies?
I know not: only as he rose, this creature began to speak:
"O knight seek not for water with such madness and
despair.
Earth's charm long since has vanished from yonder body
fair.
Those horrid masks, united in a treasonable bond,
The bosom of your Lady drowned in yonder pond,
And that which once is gone
Can never be reborn.

Now all the household, lords and ladies, peasants, pages, all,
Have followed in pursuit, while some the priest and old
wives call;

So now the house is silent, but ere the dawn's begun,
Muttering, cleansing, chanting, the servants of Death will
come,

And he who trusts himself into their hands,
Forever will be held by their relentless bands!

Forever! cruel, wretched sound, so oft
The echo of despair from heart grief-tossed.
In love, in friendship, on life's every wave
Repeated, true, yea, even in the grave.

For whoso once humanity shall spurn,
Unto humanity shall nevermore return."

Then, raising on his toes his figure slight,
The more to reach the stature of the knight,
He whispers in the warrior's ear his tale, and as each part
was told

Black and blacker clouds across his visage rolled.
Then suddenly his brow a look of thunder wears,
A flash of anger, of contempt, like sudden lightning flares,
Until there stirs within him that wild, that frenzied gloom
Which sees a single object, his adversary's tomb,
And crumbles every holy tie in the fires of its own mad hell,
When even in the nearest heart it sees black poison's spell,
Till finally within him leaps an uncontrolled greed
For blood . . . shrieks . . . bells . . . the flame from his
breast is freed . . .

The flame which lights the smoldering torch of old domestic strife

And even in one nest, its own, takes toll of life for life.
There lies the keenest torture that ever his heart has pressed:
The death of his dearest happiness by hand that should have blessed.

Now Vengeance moves him righteously,
And Grief and Frenzy stir him uncontrollably.
They strike at him in concert: then flashes through his gloom

The most engulfing thought of all: Unchangeable her doom!
Ah! far less terrible *his* lot, that one by serpents torn,
That prey of cruelest torment: the doomed Laocoön!

XVIII

A SINGLE stroke has robbed the knight of everything on earth,

His Virtue, Happiness, Respect for those of his own birth.
No more can he waken smiles again upon the sleeping face
Of her whom he had chosen love of family to replace,
Whose lustre, clear and tender, with pure, angelic ray
Had clothed false friendships, empty hearts, and banished them away.

So lonely the stricken Vaclaw remains on a desert track,
Reflecting now how Marya's loss would turn that desert black.

In silent grief he stands before her there, alone,
As if before his darling's grave, transformed to shaft of stone.

For the threat of evil purpose and the sight before his eyes
Have robbed his anguished spirit of relief in tears and sighs.

This bitter thought alone recalls him ever to his woe:
O why did I forsake her? Why trust these others so?
And when upon her swollen face poor Vaclaw seemed to
see

What anguish she had suffered ere Death had set her free,
His first regret, his final, from stiffened lips was forced:
Their happiness, his own with hers, forevermore was lost.
And only then did Vaclaw's heart begin to beat again.
Covering his face with both his hands he wept like child
in pain.

Not long . . . his heart, betrayed but lifted up,
Was darkened that same moment by dart from poison's
cup:

His once exalted spirit now for its watchword takes
Such slogan as so often to shame a wronged one wakes.
Is then this vibrant youth become a part to shame of earth?
Ask rather, and with reason, what here is virtue worth?
Where something sweet and noble can bloom so brief a
while,

Where death of one's own parent children's hand does not
defile,

When those who boast affection and loud their love pre-
tend

Enjoy their victim's misery, their hands to Envy lend,
Where exalted aspirations and ideals are doomed to fail,
While Hypocrisy e'er vaunts herself in Virtue's shining
veil,

Where all the sweetness left to man is flight from this
world above,

Plunged in the mutual rapture of hearts entwined in love.

XIX

OVER the dark and gloomy forest of tortured human
souls

For some a cloud of Torpor ultimately rolls

Leaf after leaf is shed, and finally, with autumn's blighting
hand,

Worm-rid and dead and stripped like all the trees they
stand.

For others passion gathers in great thunder-clouds: lightning
tears

The ominous blackness open and all life's secret forces
bares.

Fair weather quickly shines again and it begins to seem

As if, the storm blown over, there had come a happier green.

But he who looks more closely, beneath the superficial calm,

Can detect the char and odor of a fire still burning on.

Aye, when, for fire in lightning-riven tree, was ever wind
to blame?

And who dare raise his hand to quench the lightning-kindl-
ed flame?

A heavy undergrowth spreads furiously that flame with its
fatal toll,

That ravages the dark and gloomy forest of the soul.

What life can hold for Vaclaw after this abysmal day

Would be awful to conjecture and difficult to say.

Over his heart now let that bloody curtain rest

Enough, why strip it off and bare the wounded breast?

While out of all his stricken state this solace he may gain:

That Flame, not Time, in his case will devour the ruin and
the pain,

So, with heart uplift to heaven he falls upon his knee,
Then, with his little new-found friend . . . or is he enemy?
He carries the lifeless body back to the fateful room.
Their misty eyes are guided by fitful rays from the moon.
There Vaclaw for the final time prepares his poor bride's
 bed,
And tries with tender effort, stayed by Modesty, to spread
Her members, hair and garments in orderly array,
For gossips, e'en in death, will find unfriendly things to say.
Then with longing glance at face of her whom he has loved
 so dear,
Such look as purges grief away but holds the promise clear
Of sure reunion . . . with the attention of Despair
He graves his memory deep with sight of Marya lying
 there
Then cuts the air with his glittering sword that whistles
 fierce and bold,
And on whose hilt the grave itself will not relax his hold,
Then strides away . . . his countenance no longer lined
 and sad.
He leaps on a horse and rides away, and with him rides the
 lad,
Who is the youth with weeping eyes who rides with him
 this night?
The Spirit of his Fate? An angel? Satan? who joins his
 flight?
Will he follow him in misery and share his every pain?
Who knows? . . . he clings to the rider as together they
 skim the plain.

XX

O VER the Ukrainian church three cupolas arise,
 And the old Ukrainian women mingle their prayers
 with sighs.

Some schoolboys toll the bells, they pick up a coin that
 way

Hasten, all good people, is it burial or christening today?
 Inside the shrouds, the catafalque, the coffin and in
 rows

That pierce the blackness the pallid light of candles glows,
 But see that noble figure among the mourners pressing
 round

Does he not lie, a lifeless corpse, prone upon the ground?
 And is his knightly breast not soiled with dust as there he
 lies?

And will his crushed humility let no complaint arise,
 Though he lies in dumb devotion, a figure beaten low,
 And the weight of too long torment his weary senses know?
 Pale as the candle gleam that flits across his face,
 Sad as the funeral dirge that echoes through the place.
 But from the lowly posture where his faith has bid him lie,
 Still bright as the glowworm's brilliance shines the old man's
 eye.

Alas! 'tis the old Sword Bearer's gray and stricken head.
 Not long ago he lost his wife now his daughter lies
 there dead.

For that he'd swung her cradle just to lay her in the
 ground,

For that he'd bought her silver cloth to make a funeral
 shroud.

'Twas strange he felt no sadness when they carried her
away,
As if his soul already was with hers in Heaven that day.
And so he tarried after with never a sigh nor
moan
His faded lips he offered in affection up to none,
There was no sign of tears in his quick eyes that one could
see,
And afterward no more with men, but God, he seemed to
be.
Thereafter, at a certain hour each day, he'd steal away
alone,
But when the guard would call him he would always wan-
der home.
Till once, when, after midnight he had not yet returned
And Vigilance, alert, with hope no longer burned,
Then the trumpets fluttered wildly and from sleep as from
a sling
The knights shot forth to help or to avenge this unknown
thing.
They found him in the churchyard close to his daughter
and his wife,
Kneeling beside the double grave that held the whole of
his life.
The same old sweetness on his lips, but Age now on his
brow,
The pallid face, the burning eyes unchanged as ever now.

With his cap and his moustache a very scarecrow for the
foe

And still the old black *župan* but when the trumpets
blow

And all their distant echoes across the steppe-land creep,
He does not lift his sabre, nor waken from his sleep,
But ghostly silence hovers where three grave-mounds mark
the plain,

And deep and mournful yearning sweeps the billowing
Ukraine.

