

LESIA UKRAINKA

ON A FIELD OF BLOOD

(Dramatic poem)

A remote locale in the vicinity of Jerusalem. From under the gravelly clay, amid thorny thickets and reddish weeds which grow in the saline soil, a small field has been cleared, upon which a few contorted red-bark trees remain interspersed. A man, gaunt and haggard, but naturally stocky and strong, is digging up the field with a large hoe, frequently removing rocks from the ground, stopping from time to time to wipe the perspiration from his face.

An old man, a pilgrim, is walking past the field, along a path which diverges from the great Jerusalem road. The pilgrim breathes with difficulty and leans heavily on a staff as he walks, since the day is hot. Tied to the top of the staff, an empty calabash sways and rattles.

Hearing the clatter, the toiler glances around for an instant, but immediately resumes his work.

PILGRIM: (stopping near the labourer):

"May the Lord bless your labour,
my brother!"

(The worker is silent, relentlessly continues working, ignoring the wayfarer. The pilgrim softly to himself): "He probably is deaf." (Louder):

"My friend!

I beg you earnestly, give me a drink of water!

Although I have not yet walked very far,

Yet already I drank all my water— it is hot, you see,

and the calabash is small."

THE MAN: (points to the water jug, hidden amongst the weeds)

"There, you may take some."

PILGRIM: (cravingly approaches the jug, and drinks for a long while; then, having quenched his thirst)

"May the Lord prolong your life,

for having rescued mine." (again the man gives no sign that he heard

these words)

"Tell me, where do you draw water here?"

I will go and replenish mine and yours....which way

should I go for water?"

THE MAN:

"That way." (points his hoe in the direction from which the pilgrim

came, and again bends down to his labour)

PILGRIM:

"Back.....well, you know,

my son, forgive me, an old man,

I am worn out from walking all these long years,

my legs have become sluggish."

(sits down under a tree at the edge of the field)

"The distance is far

for me to get home. I am from Galilee.

Actually, I went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem,

I have family there ~ a sister and aunt —

where I shared paska with them. And you, my son,

are you from Jerusalem?"

THE MAN: "No.....(hastily). From Jerusalem!
Of course! Perhaps, where do you think I'm from?"

PILGRIM: "Oh, I don't think anything. I just asked....like that...
And this field.....is it yours?"

THE MAN: "Naturally, it is mine. Whose should it be?"

PILGRIM: "Oh, what a strange remark you make!
Now I only asked, because I remember,
That when I was on my way to Jerusalem
this piece of land lay fallow
and this field, it seems, was not here,
though people, for the most part, had already finished
plowing their fields and gardens. Just recently
did you buy this land?"

THE MAN: (reluctantly) "Oh.....recently."

PILGRIM: (surveys the tract of land with a farmer's observing eye)
"And how much did you pay for it?"

THE MAN: (with the same reluctance) "Not much."
(with dejected derision) "You, perhaps, wish to buy it from me?"

PILGRIM: (good naturedly) "Oh, no, why would I need it? I am not one
who lives in these parts.
But, most likely, land is costly
around Jerusalem?"

THE MAN: "Depends for whom."

PILGRIM: "Well, that is, you mean, depending on the soil."

THE MAN: (angrily) "Not depending on the soil, but for whom!
That is what I said, and that is what I mean."

PILGRIM: (a little perplexed with his tone, stands up. With restraint:)

"I understand. You, apparently, are poor,
so it was hard for you to have raised the money
to pay for the land. A rich man
would probably have said: 'this land is cheap' -
So, now have I understood you?"

THE MAN: (abruptly) "I do not need your understanding.
You had a drink of water, you have rested,
Well, then, go."

PILGRIM: (drew back somewhat offended, but then reconsidered)

"No, after all is said and done, I cannot leave!

Your words are harsh, but your heart is good.

Truly your water has beneficial powers,

It has restored my strength.

I should bless you

like a father would his own son."

(moves toward the man, raising his arms for a blessing)

THE MAN: (hurriedly, as though with fear) "Stop, old man!