

The Poetical Works of Taras Shevchenko. The Kobzar. Translated from the Ukrainian by Constantine Andrusyshen and Watson Kirkconnell. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964. (Katerina, pp. 14–33, Mary, pp. 514–31.

KATERINA
TO V. A. ZHUKOVSKY, 6 IN MEMORY OF
APRIL 22, 1838

My dark-browed beauties, fall in love,
But love no Muscovite,
For Moscow troopers aliens are,
And court in your despite.
A Moscow trooper loves in jest
And jestingly will leave you;
When he returns to Muscovy,
His parting will deceive you.
If you were one, the care were less,
But there's a mother too
Who gave the pretty maiden birth;
To death the shame she'll rue.
The heart will wither and yet sing
For pleasures sweet and rash;
But people will not hear your heart,
They'll judge you to be trash.
So, dark-browed beauties, fall in love,
But love no Muscovite,
For Moscow troopers aliens are
And court in your despite.

Her father's and her mother's words
Young Katie shunned anon.
A Moscow trooper gained her love
Her own heart urged her on.
Enamoured of a lad she grew;
In the garden they would meet,
Until her reputation's loss
And ruin were complete.
Mother to supper calls her in,
But deaf in her delight
Where with her Moscow lad she plays
She passes all the night.
And many a night his eyes and cheeks

With kisses she would pillage,
Until at last her evil fame
Was spread through all the village.
Let wicked people speak their will
About her gentle sin:
She is in love and unaware
That evil has crept in.

Bad news arrived—the trumpets rang
Their call to march away;
Her soldier is to Turkey gone—
Her braids her fall betray.
A kerchief on her head she wears
Yet pain she'll not perceive
Since for a lover, says the song,
It is a joy to grieve.
The handsome lad had pledged his word
That if he did not die
He would come back to her again—
And wedding bands would tie:
Katie would be a trooper's wife
And would forget her sorrow;
Meanwhile let all the people talk—
Joy would make bright the morrow.
She does not grieve on that account
Yet wipes away her tears,
Although the maidens on the street
Reject her with their sneers.
She does not grieve and yet her eyes
A tale of teardrops tell
As she at midnight takes her pails
For water from the well,
So that revilers may not see
The darkened path she's taken;
Beneath a cranberry bush she stands
And sings a song forsaken.
She'd sing her heart out at the well;
The cranberry seemed to weep;
Then home she went, content at heart

Since slanderers were asleep.
 Does Katerina still not grieve?
 It doesn't cross her mind!
 With a new kerchief on her head,
 To watching she's resigned.
 Thus Katerina waits and waits,
 And half a year has passed,—
 A sudden nausea she feels
 And pangs come keen and fast.
 Katie is sick; she scarce can breathe;
 But when her pains grow mild,
 A cradle in the ingle-nook
 Helps her to rock a child.
 The women in their malice mock
 Her mother with abuse;
 They say the troopers will return
 And of her home make use:
 "You have a lovely daughter!
 What deeds she must have done,
 Since yonder, in the ingle-nook
 She rears a Russian's son . . .
 A lovely babe she has acquired . . .
 Perhaps you taught her how! ..."

May evil fortune seize you all,
 You wicked babblers now,
 Just as it has the maid you mock,
 The son who marks her vow!
 O Katerina, luckless dear,
 What woes your days vouchsafe!
 Where under heaven will you go
 With such a tiny waif?
 Who in the world will sympathize,
 Now that your lover's left you?
 Even your parents are estranged,
 Unfeeling words have cleft you!
 Now Katerina's strength returns;
 Sometimes she views the street
 As through the window-gap she peers
 And rocks her baby sweet:
 She looks, and looks, but sees him not!

Will he return no more?
 Out in the garden she would weep,
 But neighbors vex her sore.
 Yet after sunset, up and down
 The garden paths she's found;
 She bears her infant in her arms
 And casts her glances round:
 "Just here I used to wait for him,
 And here my words he'd note,
 And there . . . and there . . . my son, my son!"
 The speech choked in her throat.

The berries and the cherry-trees
 Are in the garden green;
 As once of old, so now again
 Is Katerina seen.
 Though she came out, she sang no more
 As she was wont to do,
 When waiting under cherry-trees
 For the young lad she knew.
 The dark-browed maid no longer sings
 But curses her ill fate;
 And meanwhile all her enemies
 Speak venom at her gate.
 Daily they forge their evil talk.
 How may she still such chat?
 If only he she loved were there,
 He'd put a stop to that!
 But he, alas, is far away—
 And does not see or hear
 Defamers laughing her to scorn
 Nor see her falling tear.
 Perhaps her lover has been killed
 Beyond the Danube shore;
 Perhaps in Moscow now he courts
 Some pretty maid once more!
 But no, her darling is not dead.
 He is alive and sound . . .
 And where could such fair eyes as hers,
 And such dark brows, be found?
 Across the world, in Muscovy,
 Beyond the sea, God wot,
 No peer of Katerina lives—

But sorrow is her lot! ...
 Her mother gave her lovely cheeks
 And sparkling hazel eyes,
 But could not give her in this world
 Good fortune's happy prize.
 Without good luck, a pretty face
 Is like a flower undone:
 By sunlight scorched, tossed by the wind,
 And plucked by everyone.
 Continue then to wash your face
 With floods of tears and woe!
 The troopers back to Muscovy
 By other highways go.

II

Her father at the table sits,
 His head is in his hands;
 He does not watch the world about:
 Deep grief he understands.
 And near him, on a long, hard bench
 Her aged mother sits,
 And speaking through her struggling tears
 The daughter thus she twits:
 "It's quite a wedding we have had!
 But tell me, where's the groom?
 Where are the candle-bearing maids,
 The men who grace the room?
 In Muscovy, my daughter dear!
 Go, then, to find them there!
 But never tell a living soul
 You had a mother's care.
 Curs'd be the hour and curs'd the day
 That ever you were born!
 If I had known, I would have risen
 And drowned you before morn:
 A viper should have been your mate,
 A trooper takes its place . . .
 My daughter, O my daughter, once
 A blossom full of grace!
 A berry or a darling bird
 I loved and reared you up;
 But now with grief, O daughter mine,

You fill my bitter cup!
 Is this your recompense? Then go
 And see your trooper's mother!
 My counsel you have laughed to scorn:
 Go, listen to another!
 Go then to Moscow, seek her out,
 And stand not weeping thus,
 Be happy among strangers there
 But come no more to us!
 Do not return, my erring child!
 In that far country stay! . . .
 Ah, who will shroud my face in death
 When you have gone away?
 Who then will mourn and weep for me
 As one's own child should do?
 Who'll plant a red cranberry bush
 Above my grave but you?
 When you are gone, whose loving prayers
 Will aid my sinful soul?
 My daughter, O my daughter dear,
 My child who brought me dole,
 Depart from us! . . ."

To bless the girl

The strength she scarcely found:
 "May God be with you!" And, as dead,
 She tumbled to the ground.

Then spoke her father: "Now, poor lass,
 What are you waiting for?"
 But Katie fell down at his feet
 And wept with sobbings sore:
 —"Forgive me, dearest father,
 Forgive me for my sin,
 My dear grey dove, my falcon dear,
 For thoughtless I have been!"
 —"May God and all good people here
 Have mercy on your grief!
 But only when you've prayed—and gone—
 Will my heart know relief."

She made an effort, rose and bowed,
 And silently departed,
 And thus the aged pair were left

And thrust in wealth your snout,
 I yet shall bathe my soul in tears
 And pour my sorrow out;
 I'll drown in weeping my distress,
 With tears my fate I'll greet,
 And trample down my servitude
 With my own naked feet!
 Then only will I happy be.
 And wealth can have its fill,
 When my poor heart at last is free
 To roam about at will!

III

The screech-owls cry, the valley sleeps,
 The tiny stars shine out;
 Along the road, like tumble-weed,
 The gophers rush about.
 All the good people are asleep,
 Each weary in his way:
 One tired by joy and one by tears—
 Night holds them in its sway;
 The dark has covered all of them
 As might a mother good.
 Where has it cuddled Katie close?
 In cottage, or in wood?
 Do sheaves upon the harvest field
 Her and her babe engulf?
 Is she beneath a forest log
 On guard against a wolf?
 Dark brows of beauty, would that none
 Had such a gift innate
 If through your leading one must bear
 So terrible a fate!
 What later hardships will she meet?
 There will be more distress!
 She will encounter yellow sands,
 Strange, hostile men's address,
 A winter fierce will come at her ...
 And should she meet that one—
 Will he his Katie recognize
 And greet his little son?
 With him the beauty can forget

Hard roads, and sands, and grief;
 For motherlike, he'll welcome her;
 As brother, give relief . . .
 What happened then, in course of time
 We all shall hear and see;
 But meanwhile, I'll inquire about
 The road to Muscovy.
 That road is far and long, my friends!
 I know it all too well!
 My heart is chilled to think of it,
 I tremble at its spell.
 I've measured it with my own feet—
 May none that fate compel!
 "He lies," you'll say, "the charlatan!"
 (But not while I am there.)
 All that he does is waste his words
 And vex folk with his fare."
 Much truth there is in what you say!
 Why should I plague your ears
 By pouring out unnumbered woes
 Together with my tears?
 What good is it? Since every man
 Has troubles of his own,
 So let the wretched chatter go!...
 And meanwhile I am prone
 To good tobacco and a flint
 So that I may relax;
 It's really bad to talk of griefs
 And fate's ungodly cracks!
 The devil take it! It were best
 That I should now compile
 Where Katie and her son Ivas
 Are wandering all the while.
 Beyond the Dnieper, past Kyiv,
 Beside a dark oak grove,
 The carters of the raven sang
 As down the road they drove.
 There likewise a young woman walks—
 Perhaps from pilgrimage.
 But why is she so sorrowful?
 What tears her eyes engage?
 Her single garment's patched and worn;
 Small baggage can she keep;

She bears a staff, and one arm holds
 A little lad asleep.
 She meets the carters on the road;
 Her child they must not see;
 She asks: "Good people, whither lies
 The road to Muscovy?"
 —"To Muscovy? You're on it now.
 And are you going far?"
 —"To Moscow. For the love of Christ,
 A coin, if kind you are!"
 She takes a kopeck, trembling much;
 So hard it is to take!
 Why does she then? . . . Her mother love
 Begg for her baby's sake.
 She burst in tears; then made her way
 To Brovari to rest
 And bought her son a honey-cake
 With such a coin unblest...
 Thus on and on the poor soul walked
 And many a night her child and she
 Slept out beneath a hedge. . . .

Just see what lovely hazel eyes can do:
 Beneath an alien hedge they make you weep!
 Therefore, young maids, let this admonish you
 That on your trooper's trail you need not creep
 And try to seek him out, as Katie does . . .
 In such a case, don't ask for censure's cause
 Nor why, by night, you'll find no home to sleep.

Don't ask, my dark-browed beauties,
 For people will not heed,
 And those whom God on earth afflicts
 They will afflict indeed . . .
 Whichever way the wind shall blow,
 The folk like reeds will bend;
 On a poor waif the sun may shine
 But warmth it will not send . . .

If people only had the power,
 They'd cover up the sun
 Lest on the ophan it might shine
 Until her tears were done.

Wherefore, dear God, should she be found
 A daily sufferer?
 What has she ever done to them!
 What do they want of her?
 To see her weep . . . Alas, dear heart!
 Nay, Katie, do not cry!
 Show not your tears, endure your grief
 Until you come to die!
 And lest together with your brows
 Your beauty disappears,
 In forests dark before the dawn
 Then wash yourself with tears!
 And if you do—then none will note,
 Nor scoff with glances knowing;
 And so your heart will feel relief
 As long as tears keep flowing.

Such was her fate, young maids—he'd had his fun
 And then abandoned Katie, and forgot.
 Distress is blind, and mocks at anyone;
 And people may discern, yet pity not.
 "Nay then," they say, "let the poor creature cower,
 For from her folly she deserves this plight!"
 Take care, my dears, lest in an evil hour
 You have to trudge to seek your Muscovite!

And where is Katie wandering now?
 A hedgerow was her bed;
 And rising early in the mom,
 Towards Muscovy she sped.
 Then suddenly the winter comes.
 Snow sweeps across the plain;
 In bast shoes and a single shift,
 She presses on amain!—
 She trudges onward; lifts her eyes-
 Something far off she sees . . .
 Perhaps some Russians come this way . . .
 Her heart feels wild unease.
 She rushed, she met them, and she
 "Good friends, can you not show him,
 My dark-haired lover, in your band?"
 Said they: "We do not know him."
 And then, as Russians always do,

They laugh and mock the maid:
 "Why, what a wench! Our lads are stout!
 They ply a fertile trade!"
 But Katie looks at them and says:
 "You, too, are like the rest!
 Weep not, my little son, my grief,--
 Let all be for the best!
 I will go on—I can endure ...
 Perhaps I'll meet him yet;
 Then, dear, I'll place you in his hands,
 Though death my path beset!"

The snow-storm with great roars and groans
 Across the stubble went;
 While Katie stood amid the fields
 And to her tears gave vent
 At last the storm grew tired out,
 And yawned and shook its head;
 Though Katie felt like weeping more,
 She had no tears to shed.
 She gazed upon her little child;
 She washed him with her tears;
 A flower moist with morning dew
 Her little son appears.
 She glanced around and saw the wood
 In darkening shadows jut;
 And at its edge, beside the road,
 She seemed to see a hut
 "Come then, my son, it's growing dark
 Perhaps they'll take us in;
 If not, well pass the night outside,
 As oft our lot has been.
 Beside the hut we'll make our bed,
 Ivan, my piteous son!
 But where, my baby, will you pass
 The night when I am gone?
 My darling son, with dogs you'll be
 Outdoors in weather bleak!
 Though vicious dogs will bite your hands,
 At least they will not speak
 In mockery and human scorn . . .
 They'll eat and drink with you! . . .
 Alas, how sad a lot is mine!

Whatever shall I do?"

An orphaned cur has fortunes far more fair
 And meets with kindlier greetings than this other.
 Though he be beaten, scolded, chained with care
 No one will speak with scorn about his mother.
 But Ivas will be mocked from earliest days,
 Before he talks, he'll know derision's edge.
 Who is the wretch at whom the watchdog bays?
 Who sits in naked want beneath the hedge?
 Who guides a blind and surly beggar's pace?
 His only asset is his lovely face
 Yet men will mock him for that privilege.

IV

In the low valley at the mountain's base,
 Like hoary grandsires with a lofty face,
 Oaks from the Hetman era proudly pose;
 By a small dam the willows stand in rows,
 Ice holds the little pond in grim embrace
 Save for a hole to which the bucket goes.
 Like a metallic disk, the sun shows red
 And through the cloud appears to be aflame;
 The wind is gathering strength, its blows to shed!
 A universal white on earth is spread,
 And dull sounds in the wood the wind proclaim.

The snow-storm roars and whistles;
 Its whine the branches lifts;
 And like a sea the broad white fields
 Roll on in snowy drifts.
 Out of his hut the woodman comes
 To make his morning rounds;
 Impossible! The driving snow
 Has smothered all the bounds.
 "Ha, what a beastly storm it is!
 My tasks, I can't surmount them!
 Let's go inside.... But what are those?
 So thick a fiend must count them!
 And why the devil are they here
 As if they owned the place!
 Come, lad, and see the Muscovites

With snow on every face!"
 —"What? Muscovites? Where are they then?"
 —"Leave off that crazy look!"
 —"Where are the Muscovites, my dears?"
 —"Out there, just take a look!"
 And Katie rushed to meet the troops;
 Her heart was all a-stir.
 —"Tis clear that Muscovy has dealt
 Most cruelly with her!
 For she does nothing all night through
 But call her Muscovite."
 Over the stumps and drifts she runs,
 All breathless in her flight.
 She halted barefoot on the road
 And wiped her face confiding;
 The band of Russians nearer drew,
 And all of them were riding.
 —"Ah, heavens! What will happen now?"
 She runs . . . and to her view
 Their chief comes riding at their head!
 "Ivan, my darling true!
 My dearest heart, my precious one,
 Where have you stayed so long?"
 She clutches at his stirrup-straps
 But in aversion strong
 He pricks the charger with his spurs.
 — "Why do you run away?
 Have you forgot your Katharine?
 Can you her face survey?
 Just look at me, my own dear love,
 Just look at me, I plead:
 I am your sweetheart, Katie, see!
 Why do you spur your steed?"
 And! while he urged his charger on
 As if he knew her not—
 "O stay, my darling!" still she cried.
 "Ill weep no more, God wot.
 Do you not know me, Ivan dear?
 Do you not Katie know?
 I swear to God I am your Kate!"
 Quoth he: "You fool, let go!
 Come, pull the crazy woman off!"
 —"Dear God! Ivas, my dear!

And would you now abandon me?
 Your love, you swore, was sheer!"
 —"Take her away! Why have you stopped?"
 —"Who, me? Take me away?
 Oh, tell me why, my precious love,
 You will not with me stay.
 We met of old in garden paths
 After the day was done;
 Yes, I am Katie, who has home
 Your darling little son.
 My very own, my only one!
 At least be kind to me!
 I shall become your servant maid . . .
 Another's you may be,
 Love all the women in the world!...
 I shall forget our love
 And that in bastardy I bore
 A son that love to prove . . .
 In bastardy ... what shame it is!
 Why must I suffer so?
 Abandon me, forget me quite
 But don't your son forego!
 You will not leave him? Ah, dear heart!
 Seek not to fly from me!
 I'll bring your son to see you now!"
 She set the stirrup free
 And sought the cottage.
 She returns,
 The infant in her arms
 Unswaddled quite and all in tears
 At all the day's alarms.
 —"Now, here he is! Just look at him!
 Alas, what have you done?
 Fled! Gone! The father has disowned
 His son, his very son!
 Dear God above! . . . My little child,
 What are we now to do?
 O Muscovites, beloved friends,
 Take him along with you!
 Forsake him not, good people all!
 An orphan claims your nod.
 Come, give him to your officer,
 His father before God!

Take him! ... for I shall leave him too,
 Just as his father did,—
 May evil fortune never fail
 His future to forbid!
 In sin your mother brought you forth
 A curse to her abode.
 Grow then, to know the scorn of man!"
 She placed him on the road:
 "Stay here, and for your father wait!
 I'll look for him no more. ..."
 She sought the woods like one possessed!
 The baby, sad and sore,
 Wept where it sat. . . . The Muscovites
 Indifferent passed by.
 Twas just as well. By evil fate,
 The woodmen heard him cry.

Barefooted through the woods she runs,
 And waves her arms and screams,
 Curses her lover's treachery,
 Then whispers, then blasphemes.
 At last the forest's edge she sought
 And cast a glance around,
 Then hurried till the pond she reached,
 And paused without a sound.
 —"Almighty God, receive my soul!
 My flesh, ye waters blurred!"
 Then in she leaped. Beneath the ice
 A gurgling sound was heard.
 The dark-browed beauty, Katherine,
 At last her goal had gained.
 The cold wind blew across the pond—
 And not a trace remained.
 In boisterous winds that break the oaks
 No true misfortune lies;
 Nor is it sheer misfortune when
 A wedded mother dies;
 Those children are not orphaned quite,
 Though she has met her doom:
 Good reputation still remains,
 And comfort in her tomb.
 If ever wicked people vex
 Such tiny orphans' part,

They shed their tears upon her grave
 And gain relief of heart.
 But he who's left a lonely waif,
 Of mother's love bereft,
 Who's never by his father seen—
 What hope in life is left?
 What comfort has a bastard child?
 What voice will bring relief?
 Kinless and homeless, he must face
 Hard roads, and sands, and grief. ..
 His face is lovely as a lord's,
 But was conceived in sin!
 His mother's beauty lives again . . .
 Would it had never been!

V

A kobzar blind, for Kyiv bound,
 Sat down to take a rest;
 And tiny satchels hung about
 His tiny servant's breast.
 This little child beside him there
 Is dozing in the sun,
 While the old minstrel's quavering song
 Of Christ is never done.
 Whoever walks or drives will pause
 And buns or cash will add
 To the old man; young women give
 A copeck to his lad.
 Often at this poor waif they stare,
 By rags and beauty struck.
 "His mother gave him looks," they'd-say,
 "But did not give him luck!"

A-down the highway to Kyiv
 There comes a coach and six,
 And in the coach a lady rides,
 Her spouse and all their chicks.
 It stops before the beggars there—
 The dust becomes less dim.
 And Ivas to the window runs
 Because she beckons him.
 The lady gives the boy some coins

And marvels at his face.
The husband glanced, then turned away ...
The villain knew that grace,
He recognized those hazel eyes,
Those dark brows from the past,
The father recognized his son
And turned away aghast.
The lady asked him for his name:
"Ivas." — "A boy robust!"
On goes the coach, and Ivas stands
Deep in a cloud of dust.
Then, counting up their gathered coins,
The wretches rose in pain,
And praying in the morning light
Trudged down the road again.

St. Petersburg, 1838

MARY

A POEM

Rejoice, for thou hast restored those
who were conceived in shame.

Acathistus, to the Most Pure Mother of God, ikos 10

O my resplendent Paradise, I place
My hope in you and in your tender grace,—
And rest in you my yearnings and my plaints,
O holy Sustenance of all the saints,
Mother most blessed, most immaculate!
I pray, I weep, I cry in sorry state:
Look down, Most Pure One, on these blinded slaves
Benighted and despoiled by evil knaves;
Vouchsafe to them your martyred Son's own
strength
To bear their crosses and their chains at length
To the extremity of pain and death!
O worthily extolled by my poor breath
As Queen of Heaven and Earth, I pray thee send
Upon their anguished sighs a peaceful end!
O Most Benevolent, I then shall sing
My gentle gratitude for everything
When the poor villages bloom forth in calm,
And I shall chant a soft and cheerful psalm
In honour of your holy fate. But now—
As a poor, humble soul's most humble vow—
I pour you out my tears with ardour true,
The last poor mite my life can offer you.

I

In Joseph's house, a simple servant-maid,
Mary grew up. (Her holy master's trade
Was that of carpenter or cooper good.)
She budded into comely maidenhood,
And soon became mature in vital power
And blossomed sweetly like a crimson flower
In a poor dwelling that was not her own
But to a peaceful paradise had grown.
The carpenter would often leave his plane
And chisel, and to gaze in joy was fain
Upon the maid as if she were his child.

An hour would pass: her beauty still beguiled
His dreaming eyes; he watched her, sweet and small,
And thought: "She has no relatives at all,
No parents with a cottage of their own;
In this world she is utterly alone!...
I wonder if her heart affection feels...
Surely my death is not yet at my heels!"

Meanwhile behind the hedge she sat recluse,
Spinning the white wool for a warm burnoose
For him to wear with joy on holy days;
Or she would take her goat and kid to graze
And, though the way was far, to take a drink
At broad Tiberias's peaceful brink.
Such was her joy, she could but laugh with glee;
And Joseph, as he sat in vacancy
And silence, did not check, for mercy's sake
Her happy plan of going to the lake.
She walks and laughs; and still he sits in vain,
The sorry man, forgetful of his plane.
The goat would drink its fill, then graze awhile
While the girl stood there fixed, without a smile,
Beside the grove, and gazed with sad accord
Across that mighty Basin of the Lord.
Tiberias," she said, "broad King of Lakes,
Tell me the destiny that overtakes
My future with old Joseph. Tell me, pray!"
Like poplars in the wind, her form would sway.
"I'll gladly be a daughter to his age
And with my strong young shoulders will engage
The burdens that his years too great have found."
Then so intent she cast her glance around
From her fine shoulders: sure no tongue could tell
The heavenly beauty that had been concealed
And by the falling garment was revealed!...
Harsh fate, however, in a prickly thorn,
Assailed her beauty and her flesh was torn.
Ah, what a woe was hers!...

She softly trod
Along the water's edge and on the sod
She found a burdock plant... Its broad, green leaf
She plucked; like a rimmed hat it gave relief
Upon her pretty, melancholy head.

Lovely and blessed; then with silent tread
She disappeared within the shady grove.

O never-setting Sun of human love!
Most pure of women! Fragrant lily blossom!
Within what groves, in what dark valley's bosom
And in what unknown caves will you aspire
To hide yourself from that intensest fire
Which without flame will melt your heart in woe
And without floods will sweep it down below
And drown its precious musings one by one!
Where will you find a refuge? There is none!
The fire is lit, it cannot be put out!
Red-hot it rages, and its flames to doubt
Your dauntless strength will prove of no avail;
That fierce and quenchless wildfire will assail
Your blood and bones; you will be stricken hard
And following your Son with love's regard
You will be forced to pass through fires of hell.
The future of your spirit knows right well
Your fate and in your eyes foreboding peers.
But do not look! Dry your prophetic tears,
Bedeck your maiden brow with lily blooms
And clustering red poppies' richest glooms,
And fall asleep beneath a maple's shade
Before the account of anguish must be paid!

II

Evening comes on, and like a vesper star
Mary emerges from the grove afar,
Bedecked with flowers. Remote Mount Tabor shines,
As if with gold and silver in its pines,
Dazzling the eyes with rapture in the height;
Mary lifts holy eyes in meek delight
At that resplendent mountain; with a smile
She sought the woodland's margin to beguile
And as they walked, she broke into a song:

"O paradise, my grove's dark paradise!
Shall I in youth, dear God, to Heaven arise
And savour its delights before your eyes?"

She ceased, and sadly glanced about her there;
Into her arms picked up the kid with care;
And cheerfully sought out the cooper's dwelling.
The poor girl as she walked, with grace compelling,
Played with the kid as with a child in arms
And swayed and rocked it with her gentle charms
And kissed its face and lulled it to her breast.
It, quiet as a kitten, lay at rest:
It did not frisk, or bleat, but nestled soft
And gently played. Some two miles to the croft
She carried it, half-dancing in delight—
Nor was she wearied in the gathering night.

The old man, pensive at the hedge, awaited
The child for a long time. As she belated
Arrived, he greeted her and gently said:
"Where, in God's name, have you so long been led?
Let us go in, my dear, and take our rest
At supper with a young and cheerful guest.
Come, my dear daughter!" — "Tell me, who is he?"
—"He comes from Nazareth, and stops with me
Over this night. He tells me that God's grace
Descended yesterday upon that place,
On old Elizabeth; she's borne a son;
It seems old Zacharias calls him John!
And that's the news...."

Upon their eyes did lighten,
Out of the hut, dressed in a snowy chiton,
Their guest, unshod and washed, and seemed to shine
As with bright hues angelic or divine.
Majestic at the threshold was his greeting;
He gently bowed to Mary at their meeting....
The guileless girl felt something strange inside,
As the guest shone there in seraphic pride.
Startled, she glanced at him in panic mild
And clung to Joseph like a frightened child.
Then in a spirit of meek courtesy
She bade the young guest welcome, and made plea
With gentle glances that he come within.
Then water from the well she went to win,
Cool and refreshing; and to give them ease
She served them for their supper milk and cheese;

While she herself, of food and drink a scorner,
 Just humbly sat in silence in a comer,
 And looked, and heard, with wonder on her cheek,
 That rare young visitor enchanting speak.
 His holy words fell upon Mary's heart
 Where tremors hot and cold alike did start.

"Never in all Judea," he began,
 "Has that occurred which all today shall scan.
 Of a great Rabbi now the words are sown
 On a new field,—we'll reap them as our own
 And in the barn shall store the holy grain.
 I go forthwith to make my message plain
 Before the people's face." And Mary there
 Inclined before the messenger in prayer.
 A lamp's light in a sconce is softly blinking
 While blessed Joseph sits in pious thinking....
 The twilight of the dawn its radiance shows;
 Sweet Mary with a pitcher then uprose
 And to the well prepared to make a sally.
 After her went the guest. In the small valley
 He overtook her."...

Down the shady path,

Before the sun had poured its golden bath.
 On to the lake she followed, unaghast,
 The Herald of Glad Tidings as he passed—
 And finally, as up the path she clomb,
 In mighty gladness she came wandering home.

III

Then Mary for that youth her vigil keeps,
 And as she waits for him, she sadly weeps;
 Her girlish cheeks, her eyes and lips grow pale.
 —"How you have changed! Your youthful
 beauties fail,
 Mary, my precious lily!" Joseph sighed.
 "A change has come upon you, deep and wide!
 Come, Mary, let us marry, I entreat
 (He could say: Lest they stone you in the street,
 Yes, slaughter you without a single qualm.)
 And we shall keep our small oasis' calm."
 Then as she for the trip prepared in haste,

Mary wept bitterly. Onward they paced;
 He bore upon his back, whence none would pluck it,
 His satchel, with a newly coopered bucket;
 This latter he would sell, to buy his bride
 A fine new kerchief and to earn beside
 Such money as would meet the nuptial case.

O blessed ancient, rich in peace and grace!
 And not from Zion was this mercy shown,
 But from your humble hut, to fame unknown.
 For if you had not succoured the Most Pure,
 We to this day, poor slaves, would still endure
 In lingering bondage to the pangs of sin.
 Ah, torment! What deep sorrow man is in!
 It is not you, poor wretches, blind and sore
 And meek in spirit, I am sorry for,—
 But those who clearly see in their domains
 The axe and hammer and yet forge new chains.
 You will be slain, ye murderers of men's souls,
 And where your welling blood its scarlet rolls
 The dogs will slake their thirst.

Where now may rest

The person of that strange, elusive guest?
 He might at least have come to view with us
 These nuptials worthy and most glorious,
 Involuntary too! But naught is heard
 Of him or the Messiah of his Word,
 While people seem to wait and look intent
 For some unique, miraculous event....
 But Mary! Hapless one! What heavenly nod
 Are you awaiting from Almighty God
 And from His people? Nothing will you see.
 Even that messenger has ceased to be.
 See, a poor carpenter, his heart unshut,
 Leads you in marriage to his humble hut.
 Pray, and be thankful that this worthy man
 Has not abandoned you to Moses' plan,
 And does not to the crossroads drive you out,
 Where zealots would destroy you, past a doubt,
 With brickbats, had not Joseph with affection
 Afforded you his succour and protection!
 The people whispered in Jerusalem

That in Tiberias, cold men of phlegm
 Had crucified or butchered in black bias
 The herald of the prophesied Messiah.
 "Him?!" Mary uttered. And with joyful breath
 She walked the homeward road to Nazareth.
 And Joseph's holy spirits likewise soar
 Because his maiden in her womb now bore
 The blessed soul of that celestial youth
 Who had been crucified for heaven's truth.
 And thus they homeward walk in mutual gladness,
 Yet live in marriage with a certain sadness.
 Upon the porch, the carpenter is making
 A sturdy cradle; while, her spirit aching.
 Mary the most immaculate still sits
 Beside the window and intently knits
 Upon a tiny shirt, though gazes stray
 To see if someone walks along the way....

IV

"Ho, is the master home?" (They hear a shout.)
 "An edict is by Caesar given out
 That you, this very day and hour, must go
 To Bethlehem. The census wills it so!"
 The heavy voice moved on, and did not dally;
 Only its echo lingered down the valley.
 And straightway Mary undertook to bake
 A batch of flat-cakes; as the need bespake
 She gently in a satchel loaded them
 And followed the old man to Bethlehem.
 "Save me, O holy Power, gracious Lord!"
 Was all she uttered. As in sad accord
 They walked along such poverty them smote
 That they must drive with them their kid and
 goat,—
 No one at home remained with whom to leave them,
 And on the journey there might come to grieve
 them
 The baby's birth, and the poor mother's thirst
 With milk to drink must then be interspersed.
 The animals, betimes, some pasture find;
 The father and the mother walk behind.
 Softly and gently they began to talk.

—"The high-priest, Simeon," amid their walk
 Spoke Joseph, "has advised me recently
 This prophecy of things that are to be:
 The sacred law of Abraham and Moses
 In the Essenes¹ its second birth reposes';
 And he declared,—'I surely shall not die
 Until the blest Messiah meets my eye!
 Child, do you hear? Messiah is to come!
 Nor shall we find his gospel burdensome."
 —"He has already come,' sweet Mary said.
 "And we have seen him, as he visited."

Then Joseph found a flat-cake in the basket
 For her: "Your strength, you must not overtask it.
 Take, eat, my child, lest you of hunger clem!
 For it is still quite far to Bethlehem.
 I, too, shall rest here from my weariness!"
 Down by the road they sat, thus to address
 Their noon-day meal. And as they ate and drank
 The blessed sun to westward swiftly sank
 And vanished, and night's darkness filled the fields.
 Lo, what a miracle the zenith yields!—
 Unknown was such a wonder of the night!
 The carpenter was startled at the sight—
 A comet from the east in flames arose;
 Past Bethlehem its trail obliquely goes,
 Flooding with light the meadows and the hills.
 But Mary does not rise—for she fulfils
 The accomplished tune and bears a little Son,
 That precious and incomparable One
 Who saving us from slavery was sent
 And who, most holy and most innocent,

¹A Hebrew religious sect, to which, it is thought, Jesus Christ belonged. Its members formed a congregation apart from the hypocritical Pharisees and the formal Sadducees, and preached brotherhood and equality among men. Their lives were based strictly on the Holy Scriptures, which they investigated thoroughly and whose moral precepts they followed scrupulously.

Was crucified to save us all from sin.
 Not far off from the road that they were in,
 Some herders who to pasture drove their kine '
 Observed them, and took up the babe Divine
 And his poor mother, and their lives to save
 Carried them tenderly to their own cave;
 And the poor shepherds, as the thing befell,
 Named the dear little one Emmanuel.

Up very early, ere the sun was seen
 At Bethlehem, upon the village green,
 The people all assembled, whispering
 That some transcendent and celestial thing
 Would come to Judah's folk; their clamours rise
 And then subside.—"Ho, men!" some shepherd
 cries
 As in he hastes. "The words of Jeremy
 And of Isaiah have now come to be!
 For among us poor shepherds, us, I say,
 Messiah has been born but yesterday!...
 Cheers on the common rose, all unrehearsed ...
 "Messias! Jesus!" And the crowd dispersed.

V

After some time, a ukase and a legion
 Came from Jerusalem to greet the region
 From Herod; and an outrage then occurred
 Such as no age before had seen or heard:
 All tiny babes lay swaddled and asleep,
 Warm water for their baths their mothers keep—
 But vainly!... For the legion did not come
 To bathe a little child in every home.
 Instead, the ruthless soldiers rinsed their knives
 In blessed blood that flowed from children's lives!
 Such is the carnage that this morning brings!
 Look well, O mothers, to the deeds of kings!

But Mary did not seek to hide from view
 With her dear child. Great glory be to you,
 To you poor people, shepherds of that day,
 Who welcomed them, and hid them safe away,
 And saved our Saviour when King Herod smote!

They gave them meat and drink, a sheepskin coat,
 Warm garments for the journey and its shifts,
 And the poor fellows added to these gifts
 A milch she-ass, of disposition mild,
 And on it placed the mother and her child
 And by a secret pathway led them down
 By night to meet the road to Memphis-town.
 Meanwhile the comet, that celestial fire,
 Shone tike the sun before them to admire;
 It marked that Egypt-road the ass must run
 With gentle Mary and her new-born Son.
 If ever in this world, on any track,
 An empress rode upon as ass's back,
 The empress' world-wide fame would likewise pass
 To rest upon the gentle mother-ass.
 But this one, as the Memphis-road she trod,
 Once bore the living, veritable God!
 And yet, sad, long-eared wretch, a poor Copt sought
 To purchase you from Joseph; ere he bought,
 You died, however: and perhaps it's true,
 The long, hard journey was too much for you!

On the Nile's banks, having been duly bathed,
 The Child is sleeping, peaceful and well swathed,
 Under a willow on the fertile ground.
 The blessed mother in the reeds around
 A cradle out of osiers is weaving;
 And as she fashions it, her heart is grieving.
 Joseph now builds a hut of wattles light
 To serve them as a shelter from the night.
 Beyond the Nile, the sphinxes sit like owls
 Whose horrible dead eyes in marble scowls
 Look down upon it all; behind them stand,
 Across the vast expanse of naked sand.
 The pyramids, arrayed in single file
 Like Pharaoh's guards along the ancient Nile,
 And seem to those oppressors to make known
 That God's new justice rises for his own,
 That it has dawned already on the earth—
 Let them take heed of that new age's birth!

Mary now works for wages with a Copt
 In spinning wool; by like employment propped,

Saint Joseph in a pasture works as herd;
 To earn enough to buy a goat he stirred,
 So that the Child might have his milk to drink.
 A year passed by. And by the river's brink,
 Under a thatched roof-cover near the shack,
 That blessed holy cooper bent his back—
 Without a thought, industriously he joins
 The barrel staves to hoops about their loins,
 Humming at work. Poor mother, what of you?
 You do not weep or sing; your thoughts pursue
 The painful problem how to train your Son
 That he the path of righteousness may run
 With holy feet. You'd save him from the strife
 And all the hardships and the storms of life ...

Another year went by. Beside the cot
 A goat is grazing, and the Child a-squat
 Plays with a little kid upon the porch;
 Meanwhile the mother, in the suns that scorch,
 Sits on the step beside the cottage door
 And at a loom spins wool to fill her store.
 Meanwhile the old man comes, bearing a flail
 Silently past the hedge; he'd borne for sale
 A stack of little barrels to the town
 And from the selling price he's now brought down
 The boy a honey cake, for his dear wife
 A simple kerchief for her daily life,
 And for himself good leather, fit in style
 To cobble boots. He rested for a while,
 And said: "Dear daughter, Herod is no more!
 Worry no longer. For the night before
 He gorged himself so much on victuals fried
 That on the morrow he took fits and died.
 This tale they tell me. Let us now return
 To that small paradise for which we yearn,
 Let us go home, my child!"—"Let us indeed!"
 She said, and to the river went with speed
 To wash her Son's small shirts before the trip.
 The goat and kid played on the dooryard strip,
 And Joseph, on the porch, amused his Son
 Until the washing of the shirts was done.
 Then in the hut he supplied up the leather
 Before the journey. In benigntest weather

They rose before the sunrise; each one bore
 A satchel on his shoulder from their store;
 While slung between them, in the cradle sitting,
 The Child they carried in their second flitting.

VI

Somehow they reached their home, in misery.
 Would that no person ever had to see
 What they beheld! Their tiny grove's sweet grace,
 That once was their delight and dwelling-place—
 They could not recognize where once they toiled:
 It, and the cottage, all had been despoiled.
 Within its ruins they must pass the night.
 To the deep vale rushed Mary for a sight
 Of that old well where, in a day more blest,
 She had beheld the bright, angelic guest...
 Gross weeds, the nettle and the prickly thorn,
 Around the well had grown in sullen scorn.
 Mary, what woe is yours! Pray, darling, pray!
 Harden your strength with suffering this day,
 Temper your fortitude with bleeding tears!
 The poor soul, in that well, as down she peers,
 Is almost drowned. What dread calamity
 We slaves who through her Son redeemed might be
 Would have sustained! Because that little Child
 Would have grown up, unmothered and defiled,
 And we hereafter never would have known
 Justice in life and freedom as our own.
 But she revived; she smiled in bitterness;
 And then let fall the tears of her distress.
 Down on the well-curb flowed that blessed grief;
 And there they dried; the woman felt relief.

The aged widow, good Elizabeth,
 Lived with her little son in Nazareth,
 That little son whom we have named before;
 Some relative she was from days of yore.
 Early one day the hapless Mary fed
 Her child, and dressed him, and with Joseph sped
 To Nazareth: a visit must be paid
 Upon the widow, who might need a maid,
 A servant-girl to live and work with her.

To this new home the Child they now transfer,
 And there he throve and there he used to play
 With little orphaned John the livelong day,
 Till he grew quite a child. Once on the street
 When with two little rods they chanced to meet,
 They took them home, as children oft desire,
 To serve their mothers for the kitchen fire.
 Homeward they walk, so cheerful and so hale,
 It was a joy to watch them down the trail.
 The small Boy took the other rod from John
 (Who'd sought to ride a hobby-horse thereon),
 And made a cross of them and carried it
 Homeward, you see, to show he too was fit
 For carpentry. But Mary at the gate,
 Meeting the Child and prescient of fate,
 Fell swooning to the ground, appalled by loss,
 When she beheld that little gibbet-cross:
 "A bad and evil man, a cruel one,
 Taught you to make a thing like that, my Son.
 Don't do it any more!" He, a mere child
 And innocent, checked by his mother mild,
 Threw the small gibbet quite away, and wept;
 For the first time her breast did intercept
 His child-tears. Then her courage seemed to harden.
 She took the Child; she led him to the garden;
 And there among tall grasses in the shade,
 Kissed him, gave him a cookie she had made,
 While he, close-cuddled, played a little while
 Till in her lap he slumbered with a smile,
 A tiny cherub lulled in paradise.
 Then on her only Son she casts her eyes
 And softly mourns: an angel is asleep,
 And lest he waken she all care must keep!
 By accident she loosed a scalding tear
 That like a glowing spark went tumbling sheer
 Upon the boy's cool face, and he awoke.
 Quickly she dried her tears and sought to joke
 So that he would not notice, but alas
 That ruse of her affection failed to pass
 Her small Son's scrutiny; he gazed at her
 And burst out weeping, for he could not err.

She either earned or borrowed (somewhat grimmer)

A silver coin to buy a little primer.
 She would herself have taught him how to read,
 But did not know her letters. So, indeed,
 She took the boy to school with the Essenes;
 But for his life's behaviour, she found means
 Herself to teach him justice, grace, and truth.
 Now John, the widow's son, like him in youth,
 Would copy him and both attended school,
 Bending together to their master's rule.
 Never with other children did he play
 Or bustle round; all by himself he'd stay
 Alone in the tall grasses near the town
 And whittle a rough peg to smooth it down:
 In tasks like this, avoiding passion's moil,
 He helped his saintly father in his toil

VII

Once, when the boy was seven, it befell
 (By that time he could carpenter quite well)
 That the old man, while resting in his nook,
 Wondered for what career his son might look,
 What sort of master he would prove to be
 And whether life would grant him equity.
 Taking some buckets and some porringers,
 Father and mother and this Son of hers
 Went to the fair, in great Jerusalem.
 Though it was far, a better price for them
 Could there be sought.
 They came; spread out their wares.
 Father and mother, at this best of fairs,
 Sit there in hope and try to sell their stuff.
 But where's the Child? He seems to have run off..
 His mother seeks him, weeping—not a trace
 Can she detect of him in any place!
 Then to the synagogue she went to pray
 The Lord most merciful to help that day
 To find her Son; then, sudden chance permitting,
 She sees a Child among the rabbis sitting,
 Her own small Boy, all innocent and pure,
 Who teaches them a good life to assure,
 To love mankind, defend the truth, and die
 For justice, which denied brings misery!

—"Woe to you, teachers and high-priestly tribes!..."
 And all the Pharisees and all the scribes
 Gaped at his words, while Mother Mary's joy
 Welled up ineffable to hear her Boy!
 Messiah, God on earth, her eyes had seen....

His parents sold their wares and breathed serene
 In temple courts a prayer of thanks to God
 And joyfully in the cool night they trod
 Their homeward path. The holy children grew,
 And side by side their school-room lore they
 knew;
 Meanwhile their blessed mothers gazed with pride
 Upon their sons. When school was laid aside,
 Both down a thorny path their way explored:
 Each, as a fearless herald of the Lord,
 The sacred Truth on earth would prophesy
 And each for Freedom's sake was doomed to die!..

John went to witness in the wilderness;
 While your dear Son, O Mary, would profess
 His message among men; you also went
 And followed after, for his cherishment.
 Joseph, your blessed spouse, you had forsaken
 In an old hut, by alien breezes shaken;
 And along hedges wandered on in awe
 Until at last you came to Golgotha....

VIII

For everywhere the holy Mother walked,
 Saw her Son's deeds and heard him as he talked;
 And trembling silently, felt overdone
 By joy profound as she beheld her Son.
 Oft on the Mount of Olives he would rest;
 While proud Jerusalem, in marble dressed,
 Lay spread before him, Israel's high-priest,
 In crimson-gold brocaded robes—at least
 It seemed such, but it ranked, by all report,
 A gross plebeian of the Roman sort!
 An hour, even two, would pass him by,
 But still he would not rise, nor turn an eye
 To where his Mother sat; at times he wept

In gazing where Judea's city slept.
 She, too, would weep; but sometimes sought a well
 Deep in the valley where cool waters dwell
 And softly brought an urn, in noontday heat,
 With which to wash his weary, blessed feet.
 Or she would offer him a drink, to lighten
 His thirst, or shake the dust from cloak or chiton,
 Sew up a hole, and quietly return
 To sit beneath a fig-tree; her concern—
 Most blessed Mother—constantly discloses
 Her thought of how her mournful Son reposes.
 But suddenly the children all come running
 Out of the city: without guile or cunning,
 They loved him well, and after him would go
 Along the city streets, and were not slow
 Upon the nearby Mount to seek him out.
 So now they came. Said he: "O happy rout
 Of babes most holy and most innocent!"
 Rising to meet them, he above them bent
 And kissed and blessed them all; and like a child
 Played with the little ones, serene and mild;
 Then put on his burnoose, and so was fain,
 With all the little children in his train,
 To seek Jerusalem and there declare
 The tidings of his Truth beyond compare.
 To the unjust he spoke with holy breath:
 They heeded not that Word, but wrought his death!

And as they led him to be crucified,
 You, with those children, at the highway's side,
 Stood openly. (Although those mouzhiks dear,
 His brothers and disciples, fled in fear.)
 "Follow him not, lest with him you must go!"
 She warned the little children. In her woe,
 She fell down on the highway as if dead.

And so your only Son, the babe you fed,
 Was crucified. And after you had rested
 Beneath a hedgerow, of all fear divested,
 You sought the road to Nazareth once more.
 The widow had been buried, years before,
 By kindly strangers, in a pauper's grave;
 John lay beheaded in a dungeon-cave;

Joseph no longer lived; in your distress
You thus remained in utter loneliness.
Such, wretched woman, was your tattered fate!
His brothers and disciples weakly wait;
Saved from the hangmen's tortures, they converse,
And hide themselves away, and then disperse ...
And you were forced to gather them together....
Thus did it happen when, in sodden weather,
They came, one night, to mourn about your feet,
You, greatest among women, from your seat
Scattered like chaff their sorrows grown absurd
In the pure power of your flaming word;
In their poor souls you thus instilled the merit
And mighty motion of your holy spirit....
Glory to you, O Mary, and great praise!
Those men rose up in holiness; their ways
Dispersed to every corner of the earth,
And in the name of Him you brought to birth.
Of your afflicted Son, to every land
They carried Truth and Justice, hand in hand;
While you, beneath a hedge, in tears again,
Soon died of hunger in the grass. Amen.

St. Petersburg, October 24 to November 11, 1859