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SONGS OF THE SLAV

TRANSLATIONS FROM
THE CZECHO-SLOVAK

OTTO KOTOUČ



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PREFACE

Although the Czecho-Slovaks have a great literature, particularly rich in poetry, but very little has been introduced to the American public. This has perhaps been due mainly to the fact that the Czechs did not possess their independence and consequently were considered an insignificant nation submerged within the shadows of the former Austro-Hungarian empire. Since the World War has resulted in liberating oppressed nationalities, and Czecho-Slovakia has again regained her ancient independence, undoubtedly a greater opportunity will be offered to learn more about the language and literature of that liberty loving people.

As is usually the case with a nation held in subjugation, so with the Czecho-Slovaks, their poets kept alive the national spirit until their liberation. The purpose of this little volume is not only to present a few specimens of Czecho-Slovak poetry, but also to show how Czecho-Slovak poets kept the fires of Liberty" burning, while awaiting "dawn's redemptory glow." For, in the words of Jablonský,—

“Ask thou what's more beautiful,—
Hither lay thy right hand:
'Tis the heart, beloved son,
Beating for native land.”

Preface

Of the poets herein represented, Jan Kollár, the Slovak poet, is known as the poet of Pan-Slavism. Vítězslav Hálek was the forerunner of the modern school of poets, instilling idealism and enthusiasm into the then newly resurrected national life. Svato-pluk Čech has the distinction of being the most popular of all the Czech poets. Petr Bezruč, "first bard of Bezkyd, and the last," is the Mountain Poet of (Lower) Silesia. Blowing into a "dying flame," he has kept alive the Czech national spirit of that region against the combined efforts of the Germans and the Poles. J. S. Machar is the leading poet of Czecho-Slovakia in the present day.

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SONGS OF THE SLAV

THE DAUGHTER OF SLÁVA

JAN KOLLÁR

Canto III. Sonnet 62

A hundred times I spoke, but now I call
To you divided, O Slavonians!
Let's be a whole and not a part in clans;
Be one in harmony or naught at all.

A dove-like nation we in scorn are styled.
But doves you know are come of such a stock
That loves to live within a common flock,
And so may you apply this trait reviled.

O Slavs, thou race of many fragments!
United forces e'er results will show,
But waste and dry the circling currents.

O Slavs, who are of many heads a race!
The wise indeed a death no worse can know
Than life that sloth, void, darkness doth embrace.

Songs of the Slav

Canto III. Sonnet 110

What will become of Slavs in hundred years?
What will the whole of Europe come to be?
Slav life, just as a mighty flow appears,
Shall everywhere extend its boundary.

That tongue, which German henchmen falsely low
Proclaimed a tongue of slaves to all around,
Shall 'neath our rival's palace ceilings sound
And even spoken be by lips of foe.

Sciences shall likewise Slav channels see;
Our people's customs, dress and music will
On both the Seine and Danube modish be.

O would that I had rather been born when
The Slavs shall rulers be! Or better still,
I shall then rise up from my grave again.

EVENING SONGS

VÍTĚZSLAV HÁLEK

I

“Unmeet it is for man to lack
In song,” once God in judgment spake,
Created man a poet then,
And bade him this allotment take:

“So long as thou liv’st know no peace,
But only learn of pain instead;
And disappointed too in hope,
In tears eat thou thy daily bread.

“Torn be thy heart and bled from wounds,
But thyself only see thy bleeding;
Though hounded over every bound,
Love thou but all the more and sing.”

It is us singers’ common lot,
The world may only know our songs,
To know what prompted us to sing,
To none within this world belongs.

II

O Lord, of every claim to gift
I have, my soul here now I free;

Songs of the Slav

But leave to me the gift of song,
That only do I beg of thee.

If thou shouldst take my gift to sing,
Naught longer then is life to me;
And gav'st me Fortune for my song,
I care not fortunate to be.

III

Whoever plays with golden strings,
Him honor more than thyself even;
For know that God did love thee so,
He needs must send him thee from heaven.

'Tis terrible when plague and want
To God's chastisement must belong;
Of punishments the greatest though,
Is when a nation lacks in song.

That race indeed has yet to die,
That had its prophets still to sing;
And every song that's born in heaven
In even death new life doth bring.

IV

Cast ye not stones at your prophets,
For like the birds bards are alone:
They never will return to him
Who casts but once at them a stone.

Vítězslav Hálek

A nation seeks God's punishment
When unrevered its bards it wrongs;
And direst is the curse of God,
Whenever he withdraws his songs.

A poet's heart is truly pure,
And likewise from all wrath apart,
And from his heart whate'er he sings,
That carry thou within thy heart.

v

A hundred years passed 'ere I came
Upon the grave that once was mine;
The sexton sang my song and piled
My bones with others in that shrine.

"O sexton, find for me that heart
From which you snatched the song you sing!"
The sexton wondered long and sought,
Save bones he could not find a thing.

Then from his grave he rose and spake:
"That, sir, with us no difference makes,
Ten hearts can'st thou perchance possess,
The grave wastes all of them it takes."

He finished digging, and I sighed:
"O heart of mine, there thou didst end."
The sexton as consoling adds,
"When hearts stop song, so all doth tend."

SONGS OF THE SLAVE

SVATOPLUK ČECH

I

Slaves.—Good it is to rest the weary body in the
light of the moon
'Neath the palms here. Feasting over, our custo-
dian sleeps now;
Sit down 'mongst us, tuneful comrade, and thy
sweetly sounding strings tune;
Let thy song reveal the golden thoughts spun in
your dreamy brow.

A Slave Girl.—Sing of flowers and stars!

A Young Slave.—Praise sing thou to a maid's fair
form and eye.

Another.—Ring the bells of jest.

An Old Man.—Disclose the deeds of ages long
gone by.

The Bard.—Other themes by far to-day resound
through my unhappy soul,
Like the roar and rumble of the storms that o'er
the heavens roll.
Far from these are flowery adornment, girlish grace,
and heroes' pride:

Svatopluk Čech

Sighs, groans, gnash of teeth and clash of chains
now in my themes abide.

Slaves.—Clash of chains is but a common strain
to us, yet play and sing;
Subdue thy voice, lest our sleeping lords and guard
the whip to you bring.

II

Well then, burst through lips obstructing,
Storms, that through my bosom roll,
Thoughts, that flash like rays of lightning
Through the darkness of my soul,
Fire of Shame and Wrathful Teeming,
Rouse my string from idle dreaming
And its heavy swoon control!

Hatched my songs not in a nest weighed
With scented tresses softly pressed,
Warmed them not the heart of maid
Dreaming sweetly on my breast.
Flashed were they through weary head
When 'neath haughty blows of fists, red
Flushed the cheek with blood compressed.

Yea of blood and tears and gall,
When times were bad, they were born;
When I saw the tyrant install
Tortures on my brothers forlorn;
When I gnashed my teeth in vain

Songs of the Slav

As the brutal beadle in disdain
Laughed at us suffering and worn.

I know there'll be no gratitude,
I know many of you will say,
In the tortured croaking rude
There's no art or beauty's lay,
Above troubled turmoil's time
Should the singer strive to climb,
To the sunny height's clear way.

'Tis the truth perhaps, but freely
How may soar one to the sky,
When on breast he feels painfully
Heavy night's hobgoblin lie?
No other strain with me abides
Until storm in soul subsides;
Sing no other strain can I.

III

Of a slave begot, gave
Me birth likewise a slave;
Childhood's lullaby song
Was but clash of chain,—
Through my life extended
Rusted shackles sounded
Morn till nightfall along
Life's deserted main.

Svatopluk Čech

Scarce felt my nape at length
Youthful power and strength,
Yoke of steel was firmly
Bound about my neck:
Taught to bow my head low,
Kisses did I bestow
On the lash that smote me:
Brow beat earth at beck.

I, a weakly slave, grew
'Mongst my brother serfs true;
Chains for jewels clinked just
At each sister's side;
And where'er my gaze dwelt
Anger, shame, pain I felt,
As with heads bowed to dust
Slaves dwelt nation wide.

Ill did I bear my fate—
My bond's music grate,
Chasing from my cabin
All the charm of life.
When with stormy feeling
I sought my lyre's healing,
In my song accursed, din
Of my chains was rife.

Still my eye would often beam
With a flickering gleam:
I would strain my ear past
Woods and streams along:
I deemed that yon somewhere

Songs of the Slav

Triumphs 'neath the heav'ns there,
Flies our hollow at last,
Freedom's sunny song.

When my head I would lift,
Low again would it drift;
On in shame and sorrow
Years succession gave.
Clings the yoke still to me
And the eye waits vainly
Dawn's redemptory glow:
I will die a slave.

My head e'en now bends low,
White locks my temples show;
Hopes no longer attain
Autumn's riper hue,—
Shackled my hands I know
Curséd the yoke I'll never o'erthrow,—
In my grave shall that chain
Rest beside me too.

XVI

Oft here and there freedom is an empty name,
And liberty a hollow, idle sound;
Yet day by day 'mongst us feels this watchword
 same
Each heart with stormy throb anew rebound;
Where'er one's gaze doth fall, 'tis writ in fire there,
And round about eternally it peals;
Each morn we breathe a sigh for this our first care,
At night our final prayer with it deals.

Svatopluk Čech

Whene'er the boundless sea draws us from afar,
And free the wind doth toss our locks apart;
Whene'er the steeds that roam the plain, know no
bar,
With flowing mane on the horizon start;
Whene'er before our gaze proud soars the eagle
And flaps his wings in bluey heights above:
The fettered hand the while then shakes its shackle,
And quivering the lips with "Freedom" move.

O Freedom, like a wondrous myth art thou borne
Enchantingly to us from times now wan:
Dim as an echo of paradise forlorn
That sleeps concealed within the heart of man.
Our spirit grown with chains in one scarce trusts
too
That more than rumors could these tidings be,
That what in yonder distance dawns was true,
That we were once a nation of the free.

Thou didst appear within the tales of childlore
A shining fairy with a star above
Whene'er the grandsire read chronicles of yore;
Wast thou and thou alone youth's own true love,
Thy sunny gaze did ever before him beam,
And dreams of thee his martial moments filled;
For thee his shining sword he drew in dream,
In dream his warmest blood for thee he spilled.

In slav'ry's night wast thou a star to man,
Though far, though unattainable, alas!
'Twas thou that through his thoughts forever ran,

Songs of the Slav

The goal of all his hopes to thee did pass;
And as a promised land beckst thou afar
The head that's gray, when wrapped o'er chains in
 dream;
And e'en on dying eyes earth's last rays are
United with thee in a twinkling gleam.

O Freedom, let be that with lapse of time came
Thy name to lose its tone, once pure a part;
Let greedy egoists desecrate thy name
Who must suspend thy emblem in their mart;
Let be that slanderers of true liberty
Weave thee upon their flag in false acclaim;
And those who at length escape the yoke, wildly
Then throttle other nations in thy name:

To hold thee ever pure in our hearts we seek,
Taught constantly thy fuller worth to know
Through rain of blows, the sting on the sunken
 cheek,
And rapacious hands that grasp all from us so.
The blows that day by day are dealt with lash,
The thorns that daily pierce our brow,—all see
Each after each through the soul thy image flash,
And from the depths the sigh wells, "Liberty."

O Freedom, daily, thy opposite beneath,
We learn thy full and lustrous charm to admire,
In that hollow moan, in the gnash of teeth
With which we gnaw our bit our life entire.

Svatopluk Čech

When foreign heel can trample our nape in dust
And every comer scorn and torture deals,
The lips are closed 'neath hangman's lash unjust,
Though through the heart storm's longing, "Free-
dom," peals!

XVII

When dark above the earth the piling clouds clash
Like raging hosts of Satan in array,
Their shields with thunder peal and fiery swords
flash,
Then forth on high my fettered hands I lay:

Rise up, O Storm, in all your horror and might,
The elements' eternal rage awake!
Let earth be tumbled down in ruin, fire, night;
The sea and rivers' floods the lowlands take!

Whate'er our master's is, destroy speedily,
Tear soil with waves, the meads to wastes condemn,
Shake blossom from its branch and fruit from
palm tree,
Break, fell, disroot with might each graceful stem!

Burst high his golden dome with muffled pealings,
Consume the master's stately home with fire,
With raining gravel of his marble ceilings
Crush low the tyrant and his hosts of hire!

Songs of the Slav

May foe with wrathful elements too unite,
And round with steel and fire-brand rage and rend,
Let be who will, success attend still his fight:
Our lord's assassin then will be our friend!

XVIII

Our master too designed for us our god,
And even bids us to believe
That god had placed within his hands the rod,
Our arms within their bonds did leave.
Abase yourselves, O bow yourselves,
Before the Lord of starry dome!
Abase yourselves, O bow yourselves,
Before the lord of earthly home!
Humility, obedience,
Alone heaven's gates will open;
And for the master reverence,
Is the soul's most precious token.

Humanity's noblest feeling, perchance,
Is thus within the slaver's grace;
Within his God's eternal countenance
Is carved his domineering face.
His priests too in adulation
With stooping backs his praises say
In song and in emulation.
They are the pillar of his sway:
Upon each head destruction send
That will but raise itself more free,
And his success with prayers attend,
And bless his rod in piety.

The lips of a pious prophet once taught
Equality of all men,
And shattering the chains of a slave sought
To bind all with love's bonds then.
But his disciple's cunning clan
Upset his laws and his command,
Extols to us the sacred plan,
Although coerced its legal stand,
Rejoices with its filthy gain
Along with friendly lord's acclaim,
And so it consecrates the chain,
Mockingly, in the Master's name.

O God of ours, Thou our true God, give heed!
Thou God of slaves that are poor,
Who decks His altars not with gold indeed,
Nor priests in silken vesture;
Who reigns in nature's own beauty
And in the heart-throbs of the simple,
Thou, O great God of Liberty,
Lift up Thy hand so powerful,
Release us from our ancient shackles,
Raise high our heads up from the dust,
And to the world in Freedom's temples,
Proclaim Thy laws so true and just!

Songs of the Slav

XXIII

I stand at dusk upon a cliff, 'gainst which mid
rumble of rain
And smoke is dashed in roaring spray the water's
vast hurricane.
Just as a bird that seeks in vain for rest the isle's
seclusion,
My gaze dips gloomily in mists, of clouds and
waves confusion
Which dark extends ahead into unbounded space
and which teems
Belike a witches' caldron with waterspouts and
seething streams.

As here I stand and backward gaze, in slav'ry
groans the land there;
I gaze ahead, there the threatening elements mad
strife prepare.
A tempest wild draws nigh; e'en now blows the
wind my locks about,
While the voices of the storm my chain's eternal
clash o'erhout.
But I those fettered hands forth to the coming
deluge extend,
And my cheeks, like maids on kisses bent, to the
lashing winds I lend:
Welcome, storm. Your ghastly sight but promises
redemption only,
And in your rumble and roar, 'tis freedom's song
saluting me.

Svatopluk Čech

And now suddenly a sparkling mist begins to fill
my eyes;
I feel how my throbbing temples burn with sudden
fire; how rise
From my bosom to my trembling lips fantastic
murmurings,
And how my soul soars to future realms on
thought's prophetic wings.
There's a twinkling, glimmering, dawn, beyond
that mass of clouds and spray,
Just as if through them were breaking forth the
heavy birth of day.
The angry sea clothes itself in a ruddy, weirdly
beauteous glow,
As if in the broad water's stead blood and only
blood did flow.
The lengthy crests of monstrous waves, rain dashed
into spray anew,
Raging waterspouts and bursting clouds,—all are
a bloody hue;
And crash and din deafen the ear, as when in the
battle's fray
Clash countless spears and lances of raving armies
without array.
But anon the drumming of the storm grows still,
the seething ceases,
The sun's golden shield, peeping from the rosy
vapors, increases.
Victorious day rends the clouds and mists in flow-
ing tatters,
Just as in flying fringe are torn the battle-worn
banners.

Songs of the Slav

The scattered hosts of darkness flee; silent grows
the stormy scene;
Blue is the sky, blue is the sea, gold the atmosphere
between.

But what do I behold? A new strand there. The
sun's smiling form
Of coming years illumines another world reborn
from the storm.
And yon palm's gorgeous growth of green, glisten-
ing with fruit of gold,
Surveys its pleasing charms in the deep blue water's
peaceful fold.
The country round with 'bundance beams—blos-
som, grain and grape of vine;
And there in gratitude urgent work and merry
song combine.
All hands are free from fetters, pleasant is the
laborer's brow,
Nowhere custodian with whip, nor sleek the slave-
holder now;
Nowhere glistens the savage soldier's lance and
spear, nor appear
The white folds of the Brahman's robe hypocrit-
ically near;
Nowhere is writ in colors diverse the mark of
caste,
'Tis the happy native land of brothers equal and
free at last.

Svatopluk Čech

Peacefully in those throngs are mingled diverse
speech and color,
The beggar does not wind in rags, nor wastes his
wealth the idler;
Gone are the wretched huts, tidy homes though
plain are everywhere;
And where a stately palace proudly towers to the
skies, not there
Is a haughty egoist's abode, opens wide its gates to
all;
The people's parliament deliberates free their rise
and fall;
From there the glow of knowledge spreads about
a benevolent light,
Ennobling the human feelings, there in art soul
finds delight.—
The clash of chains has wakened me, the beautiful
dream is effaced,
So sadly interchanged, by the present shame and
woe replaced.—

But no! 'Twas not a mere illusion of my o'er-
yearning dream.
I know that the morning star of those better days
will yet gleam;
That the greater part of that vision's splendor will
be fulfilled,
Though from my aged neck to shake the yoke, I
shall not be willed.
My silvery gray head will bow unto the dust of
a slave;

Songs of the Slav

Slaves too will cast the handful of earth to my
fettters in my grave.

But, you, O younger comrades, ere your course
shall know time no more,

You shall ascend with happy tread upon freedom's
sunny shore.

Then may the rude fist with whip around about
in darkness reign.

But let each cherish faithfully for the future that
blessed refrain;

Let all minds be united by the bond of our great
endeavor,

And till time bids thee to action, gather your forces
together;

All peoples free shall fraternize, the bonds of slaves
will fall,

And our flag too, O brothers, will wave in the
clear heights o'er all.

ONE MELODY

PETR BEZRUČ

Bad verse at times I write, I know,
I'm read but little luckily,
Into a dying flame I blow,
Though laughs at me nobility.

At times a silent song I sing.
If bad the note, forgive me, pray,
A miner black to work I cling
From Saturday to Saturday.

In stormy times, when roaring sounds
The jam of thought and fantasy,
In dismal monotone abounds
For me the selfsame melody.

On my people's nape 's one dragon ill,
One fist about their throat is twirled;
And from my verses one dactyl,
One sorrow stares into the world.

SILESIAIAN FORESTS

Thou art as I, Silesian Forests!
Sorrow clings to thy trunks and crests;
You look depressed and you look severe,
Just as my thoughts and my songs appear.
Spine falls from thee in the night and the mist,
Tears of a race in subjection list.

Fallen art thou by the ax at Vienna's wish,
Slowly you perish, peacefully you perish,
Silently perish, thou pine forest sea,
Endless, Silesian sorrows are ye.

A RED BLOSSOM

In a dark window, in a gray flower-pot,
Frowned a rough and thorny cactus.
Once on a morning
Red was the chalice that burst from the stalk,
Red was the blossom.
Came to us once a poet whose view differed,
Who adored fragrant and gorgeous roses.
In sounding distichs
Praised the rose and proudly censured
That ruddy blossom.
There are rough souls that have trod life's path
alone,
Thorns and prickles enveloped them entire.
What did their hearts hold?
Bloomed they but once and bloomed they at night,
look!
Red was the blossom.

YOU AND I

Out of my way now:
Black are my hands and damp is my clothing.
Only a miner am I, to-day noble thou;
Thou'rt from a palace, a hut is my dwelling.
Frigid's the cap I wear, with a visor on,
Orphans' lamenting prayers do not follow me;
Eaten up fields for them have hares of thine.
Heartless and soulless thou'rt, lightning smite thee!
I am from Bezkyd, thralldom and sorrow's son.
I slave in foundery, I slave in thy mine,
Gall seethes in my veins, but still I slave,
I catch thy logs on the foaming river's wave.
Black am I, poor am I, sweat pours from my brow,
Children in Bezkyd weep not on my account now.
Widows oppressed I not, nor did I seize their share,
And so a beggar am I, a noble thou to-day.
Did you arrive in the mountains? Then take care.
Frigid's my cap. Get thee out of my way.

70,000

There 're seventy thousand of us
Before Těšín, before Těšín.
A hundred thousand Germanized,
A hundred thousand Polanized,
A holy peace rests in my heart.
When we remain but seventy,
Of thousands only seventy,
May we live?

They're digging seventy thousand
Graves for us all before Těšín.
At times some one sobs to the space
Above. His plea remains unfilled:
A foreign god laughs in his face.
And bluntly we gaze in a flock
How they place our heads upon the block,
As ox at slaughter of an ox.

And marquis Gero is so rich:
Give casks to us for seventy,
Give casks for thousands seventy.
A half of us will Germanize,
A half of us will Polanize,
A hundred lips will peal for thee:
Hail, marquis Gero, hail to thee!
But first before we perish thus,
May ruddy wine intoxicate us,
Bond-woman, daughter, man and son,
Before Těšín, before Těšín.

ON GOLGOTHA

J. S. MACHAR

It was the third hour when the cross was raised
Betwixt the crosses.

Red from exertion
The soldiers sat upon the much trampled
And bloody ground. They parted His raiment.
And for the coat which was without seam they
Cast lots.

And many of the multitude
Passed gazing up at Him and wagged their heads
And said, Ah, come down from the cross! For
Thou
Didst style Thyself king! Thou, that wouldst de-
stroy
The temple and then build it in three days
Well, save Thyself!

Stood by also chief priests
And scribes with long and flowing beards, and said
Amongst themselves: True, true, He saved others;
Let Him then save Himself now.—There also
Were many women looking on afar,
Who ministered to Him in Galilee,
Salome, Mary, and Magdalene, and who
Came up with Him unto Jerusalem.

Crucified, naked, shorn, He was numbered
With transgressors. And crusted blood clung to
His scourged body, while ruddy streams oozed from

J. S. Machar

His hands and feet and dripped upon the ground.
His dying eyes gazed out into distance,
Across the white city, hills and woodlands,
And ridges of the peaceful peaks in whose
Lap lie the blue waters of Galilee.

He bowed His head.

A winged rustling reached
His ear. 'Twas not the Father's angel with
Refreshment's chalice for a weary soul—
An unclean spirit with its batlike wings
Outstretched upon the air flew unto Him.
He had to suffer Satan to sit on
His cross, lean toward His head. For faint within
Him was His spirit and weak to resist.

And Satan then said: Woeful Sufferer,
Upon Thy cross of wood we meet again!
To-day the last time. 'Tis settled to-day.
The battle has been fought.

Rememberest Thou
Three years hence, when I carried Thee yon in
The wilderness upon a high mountain
And shewed Thee mighty kingdoms, promised
Thee
All of the glory of this world, shouldst Thou
Fall down and worship me? Thou didst refuse.

Songs of the Slav

Thou wouldst proclaim the coming kingdom of
Heaven to the weak, wretched. Thou wouldst be-
stow

Imperishable gifts upon clean hearts.
Thou wouldst show humble souls the way into
Thy Father's glory and erase the curse
Of Adam from each generation's brow!

Thou didst go to Thy death quiet, resigned,
Just as the lamb that openest not its mouth.
Thou pourest out Thy blood even like the dew
To moisten Thy young and early sprouting seed.

Jesus of Nazareth, behold the throngs
That surge continually about Thy cross!
Not long ago, when Thou didst enter in
The city in triumph, they strewed palms 'neath
Thy colt, cried praises unto Thee, and then
Proclaimed Thee David's son. For they thought
'mongst

Themselves the kingdom of God was at hand,
The cherished time of milk and honey was
Now come. And then Thou didst refuse again.
The disappointed throngs next in anger
Cried, "Crucify Him!" into Pilate's ears.
And now they come and wag their heads and say:
Here the king of the Jews is crucified.
Let Him save Himself. He would be the Son
Of God. But God seems to forsake Him now.

And God forsook.

J. S. Machar

Behold that heaven where Thou
Didst deem He reigns in all of His glory!
Cloudless, serene, it smiles quietly on
With its insensible blue smile. As 'twas
Before, so 'twill be after Thee. So too
The fowls flying the air and every beast
Inhabiting the earth has lived and lives
According to one law, that is my law.
The strong forever shall absorb the weak.
'Tis so with man. And this whole wide, wide
world
Is my kingdom. Because I am the Life.
I rule. I sit enthroned in hearts, in souls.
No one shall ever banish me, nor Thou,
Nor Thy Father. Thy kingdom of God is
A dream. That dream I leave to man for e'er!

Behold, how calmly Rome's centurion
Speaks with the scribe in white beneath Thy cross!
'Twill ever be thus. They are now heirs of
Thy words, Thy dreams. One shall change his
idols,
The other his Jehovah for Thy name,
And on the world shall live as I ordain.

Why didst Thou not then take all those kingdoms
And this world's glory from my gen'rous hand?
Thy youthful life would not have thus been spent
In shameful torture. Happily couldst Thou
Have lived and brought millions Thy happiness.
But what bring'st Thou? Death and discord
Thou spreadst.

Songs of the Slav

Thou fallest first. And for Thy name, Thy
dreams,
Hundreds upon hundreds shall spill their blood
On crosses and arenas and scaffolds.
And when 'twill seem Thy dream has been fulfilled,
Then in Thy name, and only in Thy name,
The carnage shall go on. So far as eye
Can see, there rows of flaming pyres extend
Where sacrifices are burned in Thy name;
And in Thy name numberless wars shall rage,
And in Thy name cities and towns shall burn,
And in Thy name countries shall be laid waste,
And in Thy name curses shall be uttered,
And in Thy name there shall be slavery
Of body and of spirit.

For behold
The centurion and the scribe! The one
Shall murder in Thy name, the other bless
Him in Thy name. Wretched millions shall pay
For Thy dream with their most precious estate,
Their lives.

And o'er the blood that is thus spilled
Thy dream of God's eternal kingdom and
Heaven's glory shall rise up like a phantom
That shall reward the dead. A lure to them
In life thruout and on till ends the world!
Why then didst Thou not take all those kingdoms
And glory of this world? For life is mine.
I am the life, the lord of all below.
And forever I sit in hearts, in souls! . . .

And then forthwith Satan arose and spread
His great, dark, batlike wings, that extended
With swiftness of the wind in distance vast
And ghastly great. O'er Golgotha entire,
O'er city and valley and o'er the hills,
O'er regions round about, o'er distant peaks,
O'er waters blue of lakes of Galilee,
O'er realms beyond afar and seas remote,
There was projected then a dark, black veil.

And there was darkness over all the land,
Which trembled then.

And in the end Jesus
About Him gazed and with a loud voice cried:
Elói, Elói, lama Sabachtani,
And yielded up the ghost. . . .

A FANTASTIC BALLAD

Its first night now away from wealth's gleam,
The graceful form of that proud belle,
Cold, 'neath its flowery mound, in deep dream,
Within its casket there did dwell.

And weird the moon from heights above viewed
The night, by breath of fragrant bowers
Made tremulous; the light, livid-hued,
Slept soft on grave and cross and flowers.

When suddenly upon that mound—lo!
The buds upon each twig and shoot
Began to burst, and each flower tapped slow
Upon the casket with its root.

“Admit me now to that fair cheek,” spake
The rose, “to drink a bit of blood,
My bud begins to ope; for its sake
I seek to have her color's flood.”

The violet whisp'rs low in the gloom:
“My root shall pierce her eyes of blue,
There shall the hue be drawn for their bloom,
Since bursts my throng of buds now too!”

J. S. Machar

“And I,” the tender lily speaks, “want
My flowers that precious gloss to own
That 'dorns her breast of snow. Pray, recant,
O Casket! Hear the plaint I moan!”

“The lips purple!” the peony cries;
The rosemary, “The hair’s sweet scent.”
“O casket, grant our prayers. Sudden rise
Our throngs of flowers in bloom. Relent!”

“To let this belle thus fade in her tomb,
In blinding night—a sin at best.
We’ll lift her to the sun, and she’ll loom
Aloft upon each gayest crest!”

And with a sinister chuckle, slow
The hemlock rose—before all hid:
“I seek the heart. Didst ye forget? Ho!
The poison for my flowers I bid.”

A SONNET OF THE PAST

You sigh as backward gazest thou:
Ah, after all times then were best.
But, my dear friend, be not depressed,
You said it then as say you now.

And in that "then" not otherwise,
You longed for only what was past.
Thus further back you will surmise,
Till reach you swaddling clothes at last.

And in those clothes perhaps you'd prate,
Couldst thou but speak or meditate,
Oh, but times then were better still.

'Tis fate's old witticism ill.
So, it may be a better fate
When hearts will cease to meditate.

A SONNET OF LIFE

How strange and feverish the haste appears,
With which our modern living flies.
Gaze back adown the row of bygone years
And you begin to feel a longing rise.

As if you rode a train that could not stop
Or knew not whither it was rushing thee.
As regions pass thee by, perchance you'd stop,
But then a stop impossible would be.

A few friends now ride in the car with you,
A few fleet girlish glances you behold,
They leave as others then in turn will do.

At length thou'rt weary,—all a sameness takes,
You feel the heart is quickly growing old
And fills with longing when remembrance wakes.

TO MY MOTHER

My mother, aft long rows of years I plant
To-day a sonnet 'neath thy name of gold.
Only a sonnet where hymn I should chant,
But verses, where should sacred prayers be told.

Ah, one must tread adown the path of woe
And bury much in many storm accursed,
Curse all that once he would have fondled so,
Despair, and oftentimes in weeping burst.

Then ridicule he must cynically
That frivolous, yet frightful song of life,
To accent the word "mother" properly.

And loathsome must that song to him remain,
To say he hears forever in the strife
That "mother" sound as a sacred refrain.

J. S. Machar

THE SPIRAL

OR

ON THE DECLINE OF A CENTURY

A spiral is a regular endless curve beginning at the center and running in diverging rings continually in a circle so that the distance of a point on any one revolution from the second is as great as the second from the third and so on.—A Definition of a Spiral.

It was ages ago.
'Twas the moment perhaps
That Darwin describes:
White was the beast
That suddenly raised
Her head on high,
Stood firm upon
Her hind feet
Gazed up above
To the shining ball
In its vault of blue,
Gazed all around
On luxuriant earth,
On the fruits thereof
And all its creatures.
A mighty feeling
Of dominion and strength
Stirred her to the depths.

Songs of the Slav

And from her breast
First welled the joyous,
Broad, powerful,
Victorious: I,
Which seemed to her
The final center
Of things all around.—
And from the white beast
At that time arose man.

And life began.

The embittered power
Of afflictions and pains
(Which unbeknown
Each "I" enclosed
As a soul within)
Drove them on and on.
Life fled before it
As flees the hare
From the light weasel
Which sits at its throat.
From a small point
Life flew in a curve
Of broad expanse.
The curve unwinds,
Unwinds and unwinds
In a whirling spiral
Along which man rushes,
Impelled by pain
And strengthened by hope
Of peace and brighter aims.

And the spiral spreads
Through space without bounds,
Without depth and height,
Without breadth and length,
On into the unknown.

The embittered power
Of afflictions and pains
Impels it onward.
It crumbled souls,
Created gods,
Crushed masses,
Established kings,
Impressed the steel
Into the hands of man
Which he in turn
Plunged into himself;
Led spirits into
Sciences' labyrinth
And to streams of art,
But nowhere to fortune.

Mankind rushes along
The whirling spiral
Through space without bounds,
Without depth and height,
Without breadth and length,
On into the unknown.

Counseling gods,
That gave not fortune,
Overturned thrones,
That gave not fortune,

Songs of the Slav

Blood that was shed
And brought not fortune,
Sciences and arts
Where man found not fortune,
All lies casts aside
Along life's frightful way.

A monster huge
Of bluish color,
And called the past,
Creeps aft mankind,
Devours it all
With mighty jaws,
And, insatiable,
Grows day by day.

Mankind rushes on
And ever onward.
And again new gods,
And new kings,
And new battles,
And new arts,
And new sciences,—
And again all lies
Behind him far
In the spiral's path
As the monster's prey.

And the spiral spreads and spreads
Through endless space.
And wretched mankind
Thus chases fortune.
Joyful cries at times

J. S. Machar

Sound from a hundred throats,
And strained nerves
Tremble with bliss.
Wretched mankind!
Some sort of phantom,
Fata morgana,
Glittered somewhere for thee
In the boundless desert!

Wretched mankind!
The following hour
Again art thou further on,
Ahasuerus of thy fable,
In thy flight!
And the deceitful phantom
Will find itself in the jaws
Of the bluish past,
As all things else!

And the spiral spreads and spreads.
The nineteenth circle,
Which we call enlightened,
Runs into the twentieth.
'Tis an age of steam,
Chemistry and physics,
And a god grown old,
And several kings,
And rows of fine battles,
And full of knowledge,
And nerves unstrung,
And of vain hopes,

Songs of the Slav

And full of misfortune
As all the rest.

The embittered power
Of afflictions and pains
Drives us from it
Onward and onward
Along the whirling spiral.

That bluish past
With gigantic jaws,
With a great belly,
Follows in our footsteps.
It will at least find
A profitable spoil.



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