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IVAN FRANKO

MOSES

Translated from the Ukrainian



Alexander Archipenko: IVAN FRANKO

(Sculptured for the Cultural Garden
in Cleveland, Ohio)

MOSES

POEM

BY

IVAN FRANKO

.....

Translated from the Ukrainian

by

.....

86805

With a biographical sketch of Ivan Franko

by

STEPHEN SHUMEYKO

.....

1938

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PREFACE

1.

When we think of a poet we should think of the man that is reflected among his own words as if he was writing them on an indestructible mirror. But every man is part of a social group and therefore the genius of a poet lies in his art of portraying on that mirror-like background as much as possible of the society of which he is a part: of the people's problems and their aspirations.

Since we are human we follow the natural law of least resistance: we always enjoy the thoughts that are pleasant—pleasant dreams, pleasant times, pleasant lyrics and music, in short: "all's well that ends well"—than thoughts of struggle, thoughts of "stark reality" which discomfort us. In settled nations where peace prevails that is very true of poets who have produced masterpieces supplying the needs of those human cravings for pleasure. But all in life is not peace, however, and there are those who must battle for the fulfillment of their dreams, who although loving peace, have to fight for it. And, so, it is inevitable that in the outstanding representatives of an unsettled nation we get portrayals of physical and spiritual struggles.

Ivan Franko is such a representative figure of the Ukrainian nation.

Forty years of hard unappreciated work devoted to his people left Franko broken down in health, at times almost broken in spirit, but never in his faith in the young people and the future of his nation. It seems, therefore, most befitting that he should have taken the theme of that biblical figure, Moses, as the medium through which to portray his own life-long struggle for the betterment of his people. That is the background of his poem "Moses."

Outside of the stirring "Prologue" or rather dedication, the poem could well be divided into two sections: the physical and the spiritual. The material obstacles that he fought all his life are depicted in the first half and the spiritual struggles that encountered him are beautifully portrayed in the second half of the poem. Although a thorough review of "Moses" would entail a great deal of biographical comment, it may be advisable to point out some salient features of the poem.

After the first three chapters devoted to the setting of the stage we begin to feel the atmosphere of a father scolding his children. The children are Franko's contemporaries who constantly were placing obstacles in his way—who constantly grumbled when he attempted to wake them up from their lethargy which permeated his era. But like Dathan and Abiram, the leaders of the opposition were crushed and the people eventually were led on by Joshua, the followers of Franko, in the direction pointed out by their teacher.

The scolding begun in the fourth chapter grows to a sharp reprimand in the ninth. The transition between the ninth and tenth chapters

is a very touching scene. It shows the man behind the pen; it shows the outstanding characteristic of the writer—the power which enabled him to sacrifice his life for a cause, and that power was his love for his people. Knowing all their faults, but understanding all their virtues he leans upon them for support and solace in the darkest moments of his life—he has a trust in his people, believing that their common sense will prevail at the end.

It is certain that Franko was the guiding hand at a crossroad in Ukrainian history. Whereas the elder opposition refused to be guided by him, to listen to him—the youth flocked to him for guidance. So we hear him advising the youth in the eleventh chapter.

It is from the twelfth chapter on that we get to understand and appreciate the man in all his misery and glory.

Devoting all his life to his people who, dormant under the spell of foreign propaganda, resist all his efforts to be led in the right direction, Frank begins to question himself—begins to doubt as to whether he, himself, was following the right road. Could it be that his opponents were right? If only he was certain. At times he felt so depressed in spirit that he was ready to accept the opposition's views veneered with logic. He almost gave up struggling—in fact, admitted defeat.

Thus we find him at the end of chapter eighteen.

Yes, he felt defeated—but only for a while. He realizes that what appeared to be logic was nothing but alibis for self-satisfaction coming from those who are willing to sacrifice everything and every one for their own gain. And so he picks up in spirit and carries

on the banner of a cause which drew the youth in his footsteps bearing the imprint of his spirit; his idealism and love for his people.

Accused of impiety (to say it mildly) we see here a man of such strong devotion to his Master, the inner guiding hand, that religion, as practiced and propagated by some, pales in the light of his creed. If love and understanding is not the basis of our religion then it is time that we discard whatever poses as such.

It is said that when the original manuscript was submitted to the publishers it was without a prologue. At the suggestion of the publishers that some kind of an introduction would be appropriate, Franko brought back, the next morning, the "Prologue." If there ever was anything written with the sincerity that Franko poured into this dedication, I have yet to see it. It is worth one's while to read it in the original.

If we would draw a lesson from "Moses" it could be—that true conviction is worth all sacrifice if it is founded on love, understanding and sincere devotion.

This translation was started some years ago and various chapters of it have been printed in past numbers of Svoboda. It was my hope that some day I would be able to devote to it enough time to eliminate whatever drawbacks it seems to present to me. However, the various times that I have re-read the text never failed to draw my attention to additional corrections. Bearing this in mind I realized the futility of trying to bring it up to the letter of the poem's spirit. On the whole, I believe, the spirit and buoyancy of the original has been maintained fairly well.

It is appropriate at this time to admit that much of the credit for my efforts in this work are due to the contagious fiery zeal of Dr. L. Myshuha and the calm advice of Mr. M. O. Hayvoronsky—both friends, the donors of many suggestions.

If the translation gives some of the readers the pleasure that the translating had brought me, the time and effort spent on it was worth it, and if it should influence some of the young folks to take a sincere interest in Franko, then I will feel repaid in full.

W. S.



“MOSES”

By IVAN FRANKO

PROLOGUE

(Dedication)

My people, tortured, overpowered,
And like that beggar at the cross-roads
With human scorn, as if with scabs, all covered!

Your future frightens me and my soul renders:
From shame, which will incense next generations,
I cannot sleep—my bed is one of cinders.

Is it inscribed on some gigantic metal tables
For you to be the muck of all your neighbors,
The teams for pulling them all dressed in sables?

Are you forever destined with this vial
Of hidden anger, meekness, resignation
To those who have betrayed you in your trial,

Who swore you into treacherous alliance?
Are you not fated with that precious moment:
The day of your unmeasured might's defiance?

Have all those many hearts in vain been burning
For you with love, the noblest they could offer—
That sacrifice from which there's no returning?

Have heroes shed their blood just to be praised
in story?

Will not your prairies bloom with health and
beauty,
And everlasting freedom shine in glory?

Are all your sayings to be thought as sterile,
When power, mellowness, and wit is present
And all which any soul needs to be virile?

And are your songs which ring with laughter,
sorrow,

To be forgotten with their loves' misgivings
And hopes and rays of a happy gay tomorrow?

Oh, no! You are not doomed just to dejection
And tears! I still believe in will, its power,
In your uprising day and resurrection!

If one could but create a moment's fraction,
And then a word which would in such a moment
Inflame the people into life and action!

Or just a song with fire and living passion
Which would grip millions and lend them wings
For action leading them to self-expression!

Yes, If!... But we on whom all worries settle,
And torn apart with doubt, with shame inflicted,
We are not fit to lead you into battle!

But the time will come, once obstacles are
hurdled,
When you will shine among the greatest nations:
Will shake the Cauca's (1) while with Beskid (2)
girdled.

Black Sea will echo with your liberation
And you'll behold, once being your own master,
A home of joy and fields of consolation.

Therefore accept this song, which, although
cheerless,
Is full of faith—and frank although not pleasant;
A debt to your great future, though not tearless.
To your great genius this is my humble present.

June 20, 1905.

1. Caucasus Mountains

2. Mount Beskid of the Carpathian Mountains

CHAPTER I

For two score years did Moses wander
Through a desert, in a halting line,
Before the people of his tribes came near
The boundary of Palestine.

Though here are sands and Moab's naked cliffs
Are staring, painted russet-red,
Not far away the Jordan river winds
And flows through groves with pastures clad.

At Moab's feet, on sterile plains and sands,
The Israelites are camping now;
To cross those tops, even to look beyond,
Unwillingness will not allow.

Within their ragged and wind battered tents
The lazy nomads are asleep
While sheep and oxen gnaw the thistle food,
Their eyes aflame and sunken deep.

That with its wonders their long promised land—
The gem they are to retrieve,
Awaits them just beyond those naked hills
Not one is willing to believe.

For two score years their prophet spoke to them
About that promised fatherland
But all the greatness, beauty of his words,
Was lost among those grains of sand.

For two score years did Jordan's sapphire stream
And valley, then unparalleled,
Entice and chase them o'er the desert sands,
Like some mirage which they beheld.

But losing faith, in time, the people cried:
"It is not true, the prophets lied!
The desert is our home and here we will die!
How long then must we wait and why?"

And so they stopped to expect and to hope,
To strive and new goals to attain,
And messengers to send, and even stopped
To look in that direction — as in vain.

Thus day by day in Moab's still ravines:
Above, the sun looks down in wrath
While Israel is dreaming in its tents —
A life comparable to death.

The Hebrew wives alone are working now;
Some roast their meat as supper nears,
While sheep with oxen gnaw the thistle food
Which try their efforts and draw tears.

And in the fields the children played their games
Which caught the elders' breath, as bold:
With cities built of sand and manned they fought
In battles that surprised the old.

Quite often, half asleep, the fathers watched
And each one shrugged or shook his head;
"Where could they learn, where did they get
those games?"

Inquiringly the elders said.

"Why, in the desert we have never seen
Or heard of pranks with such odd roles;
Could it be that the prophet's very words
Have gripped the children's blood and souls?"

CHAPTER II

But in this dreaming tumult there is one,
Within his tent, who cannot sleep
But on the wings of steadfast thoughts and grief
Soars far beyond those mountains steep.

'T is Moses the Prophet, by all forgotten;
'T is time's now feeble aged slave
Who, without children, herds, without a wife,
Alone is standing by his grave.

All that he had in life he sacrificed.
For one idea, one just cause,
And suffered, shone, and flamed throughout his
task,
And labored for it without pause.

Like a storm did he tear his people
From Mizraim and slavery,
And from the closeness of the prison walls
Was leading them to liberty.

And like the soul of all their souls combined,
He very often did ascend
To peaks of unknown heights of ecstasy
Which faith and inspiration lend.

And on the turbulent waves of their souls
In days of trial and of drought,
Quite often, also, did he sink with them
Into abysmal depths of doubt.

But now his voice — which has grown faint
from age —
The inspirations long since dead —
Has lost the power over the fathers' sons
That over the fathers once it had.

The inspirations long since dead —
To them is just a fairy tale;
The meat of their herds and butter and cheese
Is all the favor they will hail.

That their fathers from Mizraim have fled —
Their long migration through the sands,
To them is nought but foolishness and sin
And people's ruin in strange lands.

Now Dathan and Abiram hold the reins
Through discontent, in which they breed,
And to the prophet's words their answer is:
"Our goats are hungry and in need!"

And to his call to them to march ahead:
"Our steeds have not a single shoe."
To promises of conquest and of fame:
"The foes are fierce and many, too!"

To gain of pastures and new, fertile land:
"We are quite satisfied right here!"
Then, when the God-sent message he brought up:
"Keep still, deceiving mutineer!"

And when he warned them with Jehovah's ire,
Whose arm does everybody reach,
Abiram had forbade him even to dare
"To make a sacrilegious speech."

And at the meeting of the Israelites
With honors paid at Baal's knee
The noisy Dathan managed to obtain
From them the following decree:

"Whoever makes prophetic claims and then
Talks nonsense which he thinks is wise,
And promises the unenlightened mass
God's anger or some paradise;

“Who dares to preach rebellion and unrest,
To urge the people from their way
And beckons them beyond unfriendly hills
Where ruin gapes and stalks for prey,

“He, as example to the rest of them
Who have from reason been dethroned,
Shall, without a hearing, be found guilty
And by us all bespat and stoned.”



CHAPTER III

The eve approached and in a gentle breeze
The day long heat did slowly tire
While over the hills the skyline seemed to flame
Like some gigantic distant fire.

Like that awaited shower from above
A coolness everywhere had spread
And action soon prevailed in all the tents
Which recently in sleep were clad.

From every nook, over stony winding paths,
With jars which they had made from clay,
The dark-eyed daughters of the Israelites
With rhythmic strides begin their day.

With jars perched gracefully upon their heads
They're walking slowly toward a bluff;
With skins in hand some go to milk the ewes
Which for themselves have not enough.

The older of the children jump around
Like little rabbits of the plains:
They race each other, shout and cheer, or shoot
From bows made out of father's canes.

From this and yonder tent one plainly hears
Girls' laughter merged with angry cries;
A song of grief comes drifting from afar
On waves of dusk, and slowly dies.

And now the elders, fathers of them all,
Have left their steeds for open air
And all their eyes are centered on the hills,
Then they observe the plains with care.

Is there by chance a movement in the hills
Which would betray some lurking foe?
Perhaps some evil spirits of the north
Have sent a hurricane to blow?

No, all is quite; so they start to talk
About those common daily themes:
“Our ewes are giving us less milk each day,
And the lambs look underfed, it seems!

“Besides, that thorny fodder that is left
Will not suffice the beasts’ demand...
It seems that we shall have to venture forth
In search of better pasture land.

“To Media Abiram does advise
While Dathan wants to go beyond,
And Moses? He, no doubt, will keep his peace
If of his life he’s really fond.”

Then all at once there rose a warning cry:
Each friend turns to his neighbor’s call;
The tents are pouring out a varied mass
Of human beings, small and tall.

What is it? Have they trapped some roaming
beast?

A foe is making his descent?...
No, Moses! Look! ’T is Moses that came out
Into the open from his tent!

Though years and all his suffering, in pair,
Are bending him into a bow,
His eyes, those clouds with their potential fires,
Are burning with a sparkling glow.

Although his hair, now, is as white as snow
On top of that old hoary frame,
His head is crowned with beams of silver rays
Like shafts of wisdom and of fame.

And now he is heading for the holy tent
Which stands in the middle of the square
Extending its four corners of belief
To earth's four corners of despair.

In the middle of this tent there lies a chest,
Once copper bound from knee to knee,
And in it rest Jehovah's ten decrees:
The codes of triumph and of liberty.

But for a long, long time no one has dared
To pass the threshold any more;
A fear is guarding it each night and day
As would a dog his master's door.

Beside the temple, on the morning side,
Imbedded, lies a massive rock;
By custom fixed 't is usual to speak
To all the people from this block.

Upon that boulder Moses now ascends;—
The people gasp and stop all still:
Could this be true? Is he to prophesy
Against the people's spoken will?

And we will be obliged to stamp and crush,
To cut away a dying tree,
To kill one whom our fathers used to call
God's messenger of victory?

There, on the outskirts of the gathered mass,
His anger turns Abiram red,
While people in the middle of the crowd
By Dathan with contempt are fed.

CHAPTER IV

“The other eve, my poor deluded lambs,
You held a meeting most absurd,
And that is just what I have meant to say
As introduction to my word.

“By your decree you meant to seal my lips,
To lock my soul within this frame?
That reason, in itself, is quite enough
For me to contradict your aim.

“Now listen you, descendants of the blind,
Take heed and store it in your head:
Should you deprive a living soul of breath
The stones will echo what you dread!

“Last night you all had sworn not pay heed
To any words that come to you
From lips, not mine, these earth begotten lips,
But from Jehovah's, just and true.

“Beware, or in a manner all His own,
Speaking to you what is in store,
His uttering will hundred-fold surpass
The desert's rumbling thunder roar.

“For from His words the mountains quake,
And to their peal the earth succumbs;
Your hearts, like leaves consumed by autumn
fires,
Will shrivel tiny crumbs!

"The other night you had condemned revolt?
How uselessly your breath was spent —
Because against the foolish judgements passed
Your hearts are with rebellion rent.

"Because into that heart Jehovah placed,
Like yeast into unleavened dough,
Creative powers which will spur you on
To where you were ordained go.

"The other night you had considered peace
As that most blessed human state;
But has your mind consulted over this
With God, your Master Ultimate?

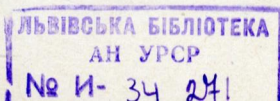
"Was it in quest of peace that He had led
The soul of Abraham from Haran, then,
Into the lands He promised to his seed,
The open fields of Canaan?

"Was it for peace that He had led them through
That land of promised domicile,
And drove them with those seven years of want
Way down south to the banks of the Nile?

"If He intended keeping you in peace
Just like the corpse within a crypt
Then you would even now be groaning, yoked,
And by Egyptians kicked and whipt.

"That is the reason I will talk to you,
Not from myself, but what is right,
That you may know the impropriety
Of quarreling with God, Our Light!

"Because Jehovah's mighty bow is set
And on that bow-string, which is taut,
Is placed an arrow all in readiness —
And you are the arrow to be shot.



“And when the arrow is aimed to meet its goal
And sharpened for its vital deed,
Is then the time for the arrow to retort:
“Enough, it is peace now that I need!”

“And since you swore last night to listen not —
In the name of a woman’s mould —
To any promises or prophecies
Or warnings which you may think are bold,

“Then I must speak to you, in spite of it,
About the very things you rile:
Again will I remind you what will come
And prophesy and warn a while.

“And you will listen though your anger burn
And torture you from skin to bone;
And I would like to know who will be first
To raise his hand, to throw the stone!”



CHAPTER V

"The words about Jehovah's patronage
You have foresworn to treat as frail,
Therefore, as if to simple stubborn babes,
I will relate to you a tale.

"How once upon a time some trees had met
Within a valley's broad expanse:
'Now that we met let us choose, in all good faith,
A king, in that word's broadest sense.

" 'A leader that would bring protection, fame,
And bring us hope and dangers quell;
One who would be our master and our slave,
Besides our goal and path as well.'

"And so some cried: 'If choose, then let us
choose —
Except that all our names are one;
Let us give the right to that there cedar, yon,
That hugs the sides of Lebanon.'

"And all the trees agreed to what had seemed
The best made choice, and went to plead:
'Come down from your proud height and come
to us
To occupy our ruler's seat!'

"But to this plea the cedar then replied:
'What, what is that, that you request?'
You want me to abandon, just for you,
My mountains and protected nest?

“That I should leave, just on account of you,
My freedom in this world, behind,
And being free that I should go and serve
A gathering without a mind?

“‘You think that by bequeathing me a crown
You would do favor unto me?
I am, as is, the beauty of the land,
The Lebanon’s majestic tree’.

“And all the trees, downcast at heart, returned—
To meet a palm and plead again:
‘We have grown up together, you ’re our kin,
So come to us and start your reign’.

“To that the palm replied: ‘My fellow trees,
What are you thinking of, to ask
That I should rule you; was I born
With shady leaves for such a task?

“‘Should I, with my life giving sap, each day
Be basking in the sun for naught;
Should the fruit of my seed, by those in need—
Both man and beast—in vain be sought?

“‘Let there reign on your throne whoever will
But I won’t occupy the seat;
I much prefer to feed and to console,
And shade the needy from sun’s heat.’

“And so dejection overcame the trees,
Their minds astounded and weighed down:
That neither cedar nor the haughty palm
Is willing to assume their crown.

“ ‘Let’s beg the pretty rose! To her sweet
charm

The world in ecstasy does nod;
She is, without a crown, the queen of plants,
The ward and protege of God.’ . . .

“ ‘Let’s beg the oak!’ But the oak with his mane
Is like a busy man of means:
He is occupied with branches, trunk and roots,
With leaves and acorns which he weans.

“ ‘Let us appeal, then, to the birch!’ But she,
All dressed in silk as white as snow,
Has spread her pretty tresses in the air,
Her pining head a-drooping low.

“Then someone, though it seemed to be in jest,
A youth no doubt it was that said:
‘It looks like we should ask the blackthorn yet,
Perhaps the blackthorn will be glad.’

“And so the trees, without a minute’s pause,
Unanimously all agreed
And started pleading with the thorny bush
To be the ruler of their creed.

“And the blackthorn replied: ‘It was indeed
A very good and sound advice;
I’ll occupy the throne and take the crown
Without you even asking twice.

“ ‘Indeed, I’m not like that there cedar tall,
Nor look as stately as the palm,
And will not praise myself just like that oak
Nor birch-like weep, appearing calm.

“ ‘My task will be to conquer fields for you
While for myself I will not try;
I’ll spread along the surface of the earth
That you may tower to the sky.

“ ‘The entrance to your presence I will guard
With ever ready prickly thorns,
And all the deserts I will decorate
With blossom that all danger scorns.

“ ‘And I shall serve the rabbit as a nest
And for the birds provide abode:
That you may grow and prosper with your
growth
While I will perish by the road.’ ”



CHAPTER VI

This story every Hebrew listened to
With eager and expectant ear;
“And now,” said Moses, “that you have heard
my tale,
I will unfold it — make it clear.

“Those trees are nothing but the races of the
earth;
The king who did their minds but fill
Is the selected one, His servant, son,
Who executes Jehovah’s will.

“When Jehovah perceived the humankind
That grew like saplings on the field,
He looked into the soul of every one
And read the fate that each did wield.

“Observing them He delved into their souls
To find their nature and their aim,
And searched to find a representative
Whom He for His own son could claim.

“And He did not select the haughty ones —
Who pound the sky with empty words,
Who raise their ever-threatening heels
And drive their kin just like some herds.

“Nor did He choose the wealthy, money-mad,
That plunder earth for what they can,
Who build the stately mansions for themselves
With gold and sweat of other men.

“Nor those who, though attractive to the eye,
Keep jingling on the strings of lyres
And crave eternity in marble, songs,
For talents born in human fires.

“He disregarded all the glory, fame,
The reigning over earthly nooks,
And all enticements of the arts, and all
The wisdom of the dusty books.

“But like the blackthorn that among the trees
Is unimposing to the eye —
Its flowers and its seeds don't bring the fame
For which the others like to vie —

“So is the God-selected race on earth:
The poor among their wealthy kin;
For them to tread where honors fly around
And grace's pace, would be a sin.

“Among the worldly they are not the wise
Nor hero worship do they hail;
At home, their motherland, they are just guests;
The wanderers of every trail.

“But, in their soul, the reader of our hearts
Has placed a treasure — to be heard:
That they may be, just like the torch at night,
Disseminators of His word.

“For their unbounded wandering in life
He granted them the most He could:
He gave them His commandments and His
pledge —
To strengthen them as if with food.

“But our Jehovah is a jealous God,
With threatening and angry ways !
For, what He has once clasped to His heart
Is not for someone else’s praise.

“Therefore He clothed His servant with His love :
An armor which protects and warns
And keeps trespassers from approaching close
Just like the blackthorn with its thorns.

“And He made him as threatening and sharp
As is that stinging nettle plant
So that just He, Himself, could breathe, inhale,
The soul’s most aromatic scent.

“And a terrible message He gave him,
Under a sacred heavy seal,
To be carried into the distant future
Despised by brethren for his weal.

“Woe to the messenger that lingers
And falls asleep while on his way,
Or disregards the holiest dispatch
And with the seals begins to play.

“Then, someone else the message will acquire,
Will take it from loafer’s hand
And speed away, attain the highest goal
And have the crown in his command.

“But happy will be he who His dispatch
Delivers quickly and on time;
Because Jehovah will reward him well —
Acclaiming him through every clime.

"Oh Israel, you are that messenger
And future ruler of what be!
Why don't you try to realize your task
And His commandments, willingly?

"Your kingdom come is not born of this earth;
Unmeasurable is your fame;
But woe to you, if once you should be sullied
By any earthly gain in shame!

"For then, instead of being the salt of the earth
You will be the soil's worst depraver;
Instead of favors to give out, you 'll be
Yourself unworthy of a favor.

"Instead of liberating all the world
From tortures, chaos, and from fright,
You'll be just like that measly stept-on worm
That for its very life must fight."



CHAPTER VII

Then rose Abiram and half spoke, half sneered:
"Your Highness, Moses, did not fail
To brace us with encouragement and fright
Through your quite entertaining tale.

"Be thorns among the races of the world!
For such a favor we, indeed,
Should recognize, in your Jehovah, Him
Who should be master of our creed.

"To be His messenger is honor, too!
And what is more, to be His constant post
Into the distant future so unknown,
I'll say, entices us the most.

"That is the fate of that hard ridden ass
That totes the grain, and even pelf,
So that some stranger may enjoy the loot
While he walks hungry by himself.

"The Hebrews are not yet deprived of sense;
They still deserve a better fate,
And they will get it when they honor Baal
And praise Astarte not too late.

"Let your Jehovah thunder at His will
There on that cliff bound Sinai Mount;
Our Baal will lead us to the land of wealth
And power which are all that count.

"Jehovah may be easily content
With thistles, with a single thorn;
Astarte's hand will lead us to the groves
Where bounty of all kind is born.

"Our destination 's eastward! To the land
Where sun first shows his morning face,
And westward to your promised Canaan
We will not take a single pace.

"All that is clear! To talk about it more
Would only be a waste of time;
But now, considering our last decree
You have committed quite a crime.

"What shall we do? To stone him? Ruin-age!
A waste of effort and of strength;
Perhaps he may be able yet to serve
The Israelites for some time's length.

"It seems that he is very capable
In pasting stories out of air,
So let us make him our common nurse
And place the children in his care."

His words brought peals of laughter from the
men
And with the tumult's laughing cry
There spread among the mass an angry sound
As though a thunder rumbled by.

But Moses calmly answered to his words:
"If so, Abiram, let it be!
For what is fated to be hung in time
Will never drown in any sea.

"Your eyes will never rest on Canaan
Nor eastward will you ever trudge,
From this here place not only forth, but back
You will not have the strength to budge."

A deathlike stillness enveloped them all
And wiped from off their lips all mirth
While fear gripped Abiram as he stood
Expecting miracles on earth.

But nothing happened! Abiram laughs
Out loud! Joined by the tumult's cry
There spread among the mass an angry sound
As though a thunder rumbled by.



CHAPTER VIII

Encouraged now bold Dathan took the reigns:
"You warn and prophesy in vain!
Now I will tell the truth which you no doubt
Will never want to hear again.

"Admit! Were you not sent to Egyptian schools
For training so that you could be
A very able tool to forge our bonds
And check our pride and liberty.

"Admit! Were you not present in their court
To hold a council, and one day
Did not the priests entrust you with a plan
To lead the Israelites away?

"Admit it now! Did not Egyptians have
An old belief which did maintain
That a tree and its twelve branching limbs
Would be the downfall of their reign?

"They all, the Pharaoh and his priests, knew
well
That those twelve branches and their ranks
Were Israel's twelve families that grew
And prospered on the Nile banks.

"And so they quaked with fear because, in
spite
Of all their torture and ill blood,
That Israel was growing, gaining strength,
Just like the river's yearly flood.

"All knew that when a Hebrew mother clasps
The first born baby to her heart,
That very day in some Egyptian home
A first born with its life must part.

"But how to counteract it no one knew,
Not one knew how this ill to meet
But you, the traitor of our rising race,
Who fell before the Pharaoh's feet,

"And said: If you will give me a free hand
To lead them through the desert sands
I'll wear them out, dry out their growing
strength
And make them eat out of your hands.

"And you have kept your word — have led us
all
Just like a foolish herd, to flight —
And all: to punish us with misery,
To Pharaoh's unperturbed delight.

"How many people did the desert claim?
This desert with its cliff bound womb
Became to thousands of poor Israelites
Their last abode — a sandy tomb.

"And now when of the numbers of our clans
Only a handful has been left,
When in the sands the Israel's great might
Is of all hope and strength bereft;

"When our courageous spirit ebbed to nought
Just like that brook on summer day,
And our vigor, once as hard as flint,
Has changed to moist and pasty clay,

“You want to lead us to this Canaan
As if into some lion’s den,
For is not Pharaoh sovereign of all
These lands, their princes and their men!

“It is insanity to force ourselves
So willingly into a snare!
Shall we give battle here or foolishly
Repent and ask for favors there?”

“Oh, Dathan, Dathan,” Moses then replied,
“Don’t nettle so your brain, my son!
Your haughtiness is vain, for, Canaan
Your eyes will never rest upon.

“And, what is more, I will tell you Dathan, no
Since for it you did so entreat,
At death you will not have a crumb of earth
On which to rest your weary feet.”

“Hey, Hebrews!” Dathan cried, with anger ri
“Have you not sworn at Baal’s knee!
Has memory departed so that you
Forgot the other day’s decree?”

“To stones! He is jeering at us now, the sa
As he did often in the past;
Better that he should perish all alone
Than have him mock us to our last!”

“To stones! To death with him for his
contempt!
Better that he should perish all alone!...”
But wonder as one may, not one did move
To be the first to throw a stone.

And Dathan, quickly orienting self:
"Get out! Get out and go away!
Before our hands get filthy with your blood
Just at the closing of the day!"

And like a madman the raging mob cried:
"Get out! Get out this very day!"
Which echoed from the mountain walls and
cliffs
And slowly drifted far away.



CHAPTER IX

With brows beknitted, Moses raised his head
And tearing the silence asunder
Gave way to the words that rent the air
Like peals of heavenly thunder.

“Woe unto you! You blunderheaded slaves,
Creations of conceited tools,
Permitting yourself to be blindly led
By stupid and ambitious fools!

“Woe unto you, rebellion nursing minds!
Since you have left the banks of Nile
Against the things which are for your own
 good
You have resisted all the while.

“Woe unto you! You restless fiery brands,
That stubbornness can never hide;
This very opposition, like a wedge,
Is always tearing you inside.

“Just like that nettle plant you burn the hand
That weans you like the bird its brood,
And like that bull you chase the one that seeks
To find new pastures for your food.

“Woe unto you! Having been made by God
His choice of all the humankind;
This greatest of His gifts will be your curse —
The heaviest that you will find.

“Because when God with His benevolence
Will visit you another day,
The messengers and prophets which He sends
You will try, with stones, to chase away.

“For every drop of blood that will be shed
By any of His faithful sons
Jehovah will revenge himself on you,
Your children, and their little ones.

“For He will humble you and torture you
Till you from agony will cry
And in your misery will swear to do
His will, which now you so defy.

“And when the bitter punishment shall pass
And your necks shall harden again,
A series of misdoings and of griefs
Again will take you in its reign.

“Woe unto you because, in disregard,
For ages you will fill this school, until
You learn to treasure the commandments,
To read Jehovah’s book of will !

“I see your picture: a shepherd in the woods
Stripping the beech tree of its rind
Then, soaking, drying, ramming it to free
And leave all waste and chaff behind,

“And thus: until that sponge will soften to a
puff
And will have strength, and will not stint
The energy to very quickly grasp
The flowing spark sent by the flint.

“You, Israel, are that unbeaten bark!
It is you Jehovah will so maul
Until you soften to puff and catch
That spark of God’s redeeming call!

"You will go to your goal as willingless
As cattle go to plough the land —
Woe unto those unbending stubborn necks
On which will fall Jehovah's hand!

"You always look into the distant past
And look for highways yet to meet
While, all along the way, o'er shrubs and
 stumps,
You stub your evershifting feet.

"You're like that horse that is running
 amuck
Into a gorge, with impulse blind,
And someday to come you will change your
 crown
For bondage which you left behind.

"Beware, that Jehovah may not retract
The promise you so oft have heard;
Lest He decide to take into account
Your stubbornness and break His word!

"Beware lest out of you He make a scare
For other people to avoid
Just like a mutilated colored snake
That 's perishing along some road!"

In deathly silence and with sullen moods
The words were caught by every ear
While in their bosoms something breathed in
 gasps
Like winds that warn of a storm that is near.

CHAPTER X

The restful crimson ball of daily light
Was sinking o'er the hills, to be
Just like that swimmer, who, bereft of strength,
Is disappearing in the sea.

Over the cloudless sky began to drift
A melancholy strain out of the east
And then, an agonizing cry was heard:
The howling of a preying beast.

Something human and soft began to quake
Within the aged prophet's heart,
And from their heights his soaring thoughts
For just a moment did depart.

Must he forever pound their ears with cries
Of punishment which they detest?
As if it was a cold and hungry child
He felt a tug within his breast.

"Oh, Israel, if you but only knew
The pain that's tearing me apart,
If you but knew, just knew my love for you —
A love that fills my aching heart!

"You are my kin, you are my only child,
You are my honor and my fame;
Your future is my prayer, you are my soul,
Your destination is my aim!

"I have given you my life and all it meant
With an unshatterable zeal;
You will progress through centuries to bear
The imprint of my inner seal.

"But it is not that I just love in you
The things that but reflect myself:
The finest everything I had and knew
I'm placing gladly into you.

"Oh, Israel, forgive me for my sin,
For saying something none should dare:
I love you so that often I'm in doubt
If God Himself shows better care.

"For, children He has millions, and they all
Of His protection get a share —
While I have only you, and you alone
Are all for which I will ever care.

"And when Jehovah, cut of all of them
Has chosen you to serve His aim,
I, without choice, your servant have become
Just due to my consuming flame.

"And when your working strength is wanted by
Our Master, of the kings The King,
For my own self, I do not want from you,
My Israel, a single thing.

"And when He wants the incense-burning done,
With constant reverence and praise,
I will accept from you ingratitude
And any wounding scornful phrase.

"Because I love you dearly, not alone
For your good nature, true and deep,
But for the wrongs you do and other faults
Though over them I often weep;

"For that persistent stubbornness of yours,
The haughtiness with which you trod,
Which, having strayed its foolish way,
Refuses to give ear to God;

"For the untruthfulness of your quick tongue,
Your indiscriminating soul
Which grasps and holds unto the earthly wealth
As if it was the highest goal;

"For the immodesty your daughters show,
Their loving ways, intriguing eyes;
And for your cherished customs and your
tongue,
And merry laughter and your sighs.

"Oh, Israel, my only child and soul!
Pray to Our Maker and believe!
As much as I am bound to you by love
I must be taking now my leave.

"Because I feel my hour is coming near:
The termination of my plan;
And be what may I must, I must yet reach
The borders of our Canaan.

"I hoped so much to enter there with you
Midst thundering roar of trumpets blown,
But God has humbled me and so it seems
That I shall enter all alone.

"I wish that I could, now, by Jordan's side,
Be stricken down just as I stand,
That I may only rest my aged bones
In that beloved Promised Land.

"And there will I be waiting for the time
When on the hilltops I may see
How, like those babes that trace a mother's
steps,
You all will come to follow me.

"My longing I will send to follow you
And tug your conscience till it yields,
Just like that dog that, with his barking, calls
His master to the hunting fields.

"And I am sure that all of you will come
Like river floods that onward bear;
But in that famous march of yours don't stop
To ask for me...I did my share.

"So onward, onward bear and forge ahead
And let no one your progress sever!
Oh, Israel, thou offspring of my heart,
Farewell! Farewell forever!"

CHAPTER XI

When he had left the camping grounds behind,
The mountain tops were yet aflame
And from the west the purple spread its arms
Which beckoned him to reach his aim.

While shadows crouched behind the mountain
 crag
And spread its talons o'er the plain
In the heart of the exile something wept:
"Never will I return again."

Yon come a-running Hebrew children, youth
Which had been playing in the sands;
Surrounding Moses they began to grasp
The prophet's coat and aged hands.

"Oh, Grandpa, where are you going at this
 time?
Why don't you stay with us—it's late!
Look, come and see the great big wall we
 built,
With its towers and big strong gate."

"That is fine, my children, keep building your
 wall!
But this is not the time for me;
I am going to inspect the wall of life
Surrounded by a deadly sea."

"Oh, Grandpa! Look, way yonder, in that gorge
We killed a scorpion today!
And over there we caught three rabbit babes
While mother rabbit was away."

"That's good, my little ones! The scorpions
You kill and fear you do not need;
Although it is not right, yet after all
It is a beneficial deed.

"Not right because the insect wants to live
As well as even you and I,
And just because he has been gifted with
A baneful tail, must he die?

"But these poor tiny rabbits you return
And do not take them any more
Because their mother will be crying! Why!
You did not think of that before?

"You must be merciful to every thing
That lives, no matter what it be;
For we should never trifle with a life;
More priceless thing you 'll never see!"

"Wait a bit longer, grandpa, don't leave yet!
Come stay a while with us! Sit down,
And tell us the adventures that you had!"
They pleaded tugging at his gown.

"Tell us about the time when you were young;
All the excitement that you had
When on the Horeb hilltops and between,
You tended sheep for grandma's dad.

"Just how you came to notice on that hill
The bush that burned and flame endured,
And how you heard a voice come from that
bush —
A voice that frightened and assured."

"I have no time, my children, to relate
What you are asking, in detail;
You see, the dusk is dragging night behind,
And daily light begins to fail.

“But there will come a time when all of you,
In life's inevitable urge,
Will see before your eyes a burning bush
As I did on that distant ridge.

“Your hearts will fill then, with the sanctity
Of that untainted morning dew,
And from the grandeur of the flame you 'll
hear
The mighty voice say unto you:

“‘Discard the bondage of your daily strife
And fearlessly come unto me,
Because I want to send you to a task
Too mighty for the weak to see!’

“Do not extinguish that most sacred fire,
So that, when you will hear the call,
You will be able to sincerely say:
I 'm waiting ready, Lord of All!”

A long, long time the children pondered fast
Over the man's strange, touching speech,
While he himself, without a sound, went forth
Into the spreading shadow's breach.

A long, long time the silent children felt
A void that comes at a sorrow's height,
Until the outline of his silhouette
Was lost completely in the night.



CHAPTER XII

"I am enveloped by a solitude
As deep as is that boundless sea,
And with its breath it fills my lonely soul
And efforts do not set it free.

"Oh, I have been acquainted long with her,
This gentle unaffected prude —
Throughout my life no matter where I went
I always walked in solitude.

"Just like that wandering planet do I fly
Right headlong into an abyss
And feel the touch of but one hand, within —
That steady guarding hand of His.

"Silence throughout: the lips are keeping peace—
The word is doomed before its birth,
Yes, but for Thee, who speaks within my heart.
I would, long since, have parted with this earth.

"It is only Thee, Jehovah, that my heart
Is seeking with its lonely hopes;
Speak unto me once more, as Thou didst then
On those inspiring Horeb slopes.

"The journey, Father, that Thou hast foretold
Is coming to a closing end,
And now I'm facing thee again, alone,
As at the starting did I stand.

“For two score years have I strived and taught,
Imbued with naught but Thee above,
In order that the slaves may be a race
That would be worthy of Thy love.

“And like that blacksmith did I temper them,
Their hearts and souls, for forty years —
And in their estimation I deserve
Nothing else but stones and mocking jeers.

“And just at the time when we were about
To step into The Promised Land!
Oh, Knowing One, were those results a part
Of some great scheme that Thou hast planned?

“A sorrow grips my lonely heart at times:
Perhaps it is a fault of mine?
Perhaps I have, myself, not heeded right
Those ten commanding laws of Thine?

“Father Jehovah, I have prayed with tears,
I am weak and words are failing me!
Please give this message to some one else
More worthy of this legacy!

“A doubt is prying right into my heart,
A penetrating stinging dart;
Almighty One! Please speak to me, did I
To satisfaction play my part?!”



CHAPTER XIII

Then, at his side he felt a voice, which seemed
To be a stifled laughing sound
As if someone was walking by his side
Though nothing could be heard around.

And then, his ears caught some whispered words
Resembling hisses of some snakes:

"The bud of folly always propagates
But barbs which rend the heart with aches.

"And when one finds the issue of its stock
Too heavy to be borne alone,
'T is easier to transfer onto God
The weight which rightly is his own."

MOSES

"Someone is speaking! Or is this perhaps,
My own, with woe unsettled, mind?
Or does this mocking of my prayer here
Come from a demon of some kind?"

VOICE

"So now you are beginning to have doubts
Of your reformatory spree?
Yet, forty years you were sure and led,
Though blindly, yet courageously!"

MOSES

"Some one is speaking! But why all the beads
Of perspiration on my head?
Afraid? No! No! But this is burning me
Right through the heart, like molten lead!"

VOICE

"With your unlimited ambition's pride
You shoved your people off their way
To mould them to the pattern you desired.
Is this the time for your dismay?"

MOSES

"Who are you that refuses to be seen
And to be shaken off my back?
I only feel your penetrating gaze
From which my soul is turning black!"

VOICE

"What is the difference as to who I be?
To one who could command the sea
What is more pertinent than who, and what
Is if my words are true or not!"

MOSES

"No, it is not true that I started my task
Out of ambition born of pride!
It was to the sight of my people enslaved
That my heart could never abide."

VOICE

"Because you felt related to the slaves
You were humiliated! True?
You wanted to remould them into such
As would be pleasant unto you."

MOSES

"Yes, from those valleys of mirk and of fright
I craved to raise them up to me,
To there where I have stood, upon the heights
Of honor, love and liberty."

VOICE

"Yet at the time you did not seek advice
Of God who sent them there below —
Till now, when you have fallen, do you ask
If he would help you in your woe."

MOSES

"No, no, in this endeavor I was forced
And led by His almighty will:
The Horeb flame revived a stumbling soul
With understanding, on that hill."

VOICE

"And are you certain that the flame you note
Took place at all near Horeb slopes,
But only in your too persistent heart,
In your unreasonable hopes?"

"Perhaps the voice that led you to attempt
This march, which yet did not expire,
Did not come forth from any burning bush
But was your own internal fire?"

"Because the human passions blind the sight,
And cravings are deceiving charms
Which to the eyes present a world of gods,
Like those mirage enticing arms.

"It was this craving howling in your soul,
Just like that beast of prey in rage,
And nothing else, that made of you the one
They called their leader and their sage!"

MOSES

"Enough! My solitude is amplified
A hundred-fold with this address!
Who are you, my foe?"

VOICE

"Azazel I am called
The demon of the wilderness!"

CHAPTER XIV

Darkness throughout — except the stars above
Which idled with their twinkling lights
While Moses, guarded by their feeble rays,
Was slowly rising to new heights.

Through darkness he was led by different
sounds
Over the land without a trail:
Once by the weird hyena howl below,
Then by a serpent's swishing tail.

And like that hero, stopping not, he went
To meet the foeman face to face
Although a raging battle with himself,
Within his heart, was taking place.

"That yearning," something queried his heart,
"The offspring of my shame and pains?
That 's what I thought to be the burning bush
That bade me brake the people's chains?"

"That yearning was the superhuman force,
The unextinguishable flame
That had created in the troubled mind
Jehovah's message and his name?"

"That yearning to alleviate their pain
And save them from another's wrath —
Is that the sin for which I now deserve
Expulsion by my kin, and death?"

"It is not true! Beware and don't distort
Your soul to please a moment's doubt;
That yearning is a sanctity! But what
If sin in there began to sprout?"

“Were you not their leader once, and of their
souls

And bodies master from the start?

Are you sure that your authority did not
Devour those yearnings in your heart?

“Were you not to them a Pharaoh’s duplicate,
Or worse — considered as a whole,
Because with your control you reached beneath
Into their conscience and their soul?

“It is not safe to take a stand against
The run of natural events;
It is so easy to mistake one’s whim
For some command from Providence.

“And what if during forty years you were
A maniac of godly news
And in place of giving them the truth
You fed them with your narrow views?

“Perhaps midst tortures as Egyptian slaves,
Once multiplied throughout their lands,
They, growing stronger, might have taken hold
Of all the country in their hands?

“In leading them into the desert land
From homes where they have lived that long,
Did you once think; perhaps in doing this
I may be doing them a wrong?

“What does it mean to offer liberty
To masses void of all regime?
Is that unlike uprooting some great oak
And letting it drift down a stream?

“And did not Dathan tell the truth, before,
That having left the banks of Nile
They do not have the willingness or strength
To look for other homes worth while?

“Oh, Jehovah, speak unto me again!
Did I fulfill Thy will aright,
Or was I just the plaything of my grief
And blindness, in my constant plight?

“Oh, Jehovah, speak unto me! Doest Thou
Arouse that oratoric gift
Just in the passions of our souls, in dreams,
And in our blood on ire adrift?”

But Jehovah kept silent; only sounds
Of evil tidings blocked his trail:
At first the weird hyena howl below,
And then a serpent's swishing tail.



CHAPTER XV

The sun was rolling up a mountain side
Just like a huge and crimson wheel
And with its rays, as if with darts of gold,
Was piercing through the morning seal.

In this array the highest of the hills,
Just like a king in tinted red,
Was growing taller every moment
As the sun was climbing to its head.

And on the highest of the mountain peaks,
Upon a rock protruding stage,
A motionless and lonely figure stands
Like some colossus of the age.

Above all earthly turmoil and its noise,
The figure outlined in the sky,
Stands he, a symbol of humanity,
His arms outstretched and held up high.

In oriental glory of the sky,
With a crown of radiating beams,
His giant silhouette is visible
Throughout the plains where life now teems.

And from the Hebrews' tents of teeming life
The troubled gaze of every eye,
Like messengers, is running to the man
Who's silhouetted in the sky.

"It is Moses!" went the cry from lips to lips
Though in a hesitating way;
But utter they cannot what in their hearts
Is causing them so much dismay,

It is Moses in prayer that is standing there
In silence conversing with God.
And that prayer is prodding the heavens:
Flashes of lightning with each prod.

Although his lips are set and do not talk,
His face is lifted to the sky
And in his heart are agonizing words
That burn and shout to Him on high.

The beaming sun is rising to its peak
Beneath a canopy of blue
While Moses stands in his deep reverence
Retaining a forboding view.

The demon from the south is sending forth
Fatigue to settle over the clime
While Moses as if lifted by some hands
Seems to be rising all the time.

And slowly settling to the earth, the sun,
Departing for another day,
Casts huge and creeping shadows from the hills
Upon the plains and far away.

And from the figure on the mountain top
A huge and spreading shadow fell
Way down upon the Hebrews' tattered tents —
A lonesome father's "fare ye well."

A stream of fear rushed through the waking
camp:

“Oh, God, let 's hope he won't invoke
A curse upon us now, because it would
Eliminate us in a stroke.

“Such prayers tend to quake the world
Down to its very inner bone,
And melt the cliffs of granite just like wax,
And even shake Jehovah's throne.

“And should he curse us at this moment, now.
And in the west the sun should wane,
Then, from this night the people of this land
Will never see the light again.”



CHAPTER XVI

Meanwhile as Moses struggled with himself
In his attempt to gain his ground,
The night enveloped all the hills — and he,
Bereft of consciousness, fell down.

And when he touched the earth the mountain
shook

With every out-protruding rib,
While he lay motionless just like a babe
That is rocked to sleep within its crib.

Some melancholy tune came humming by,
A song that drifted through the air
As he was gently rocked, to lull his pains,
By some soft hand that stroked his hair.

And then he heard the quiet whispered words:
“Poor soul, unhappy son of mine!
So this is what your life made out of you —
Has made you pay this cruel fine?

“Is it so long ago that I had weaned
And led you with a guiding hand ?
I brought you up into the world for this:
A suffering without an end?

“What many wrinkles on your forehead, now!
How you have aged: bent like a bow!
The hair which with affection I caressed
Has turned from grey to white as snow.

“And yet there was a time when you did rush
To take in everything a part!
See, what you have come to? Tell me, now, my
son,
How many wounds are in your heart?

“Poor little one, my child, to see you so!
What you have lived and suffered through;
And even now — all day beneath the sun!
Where will this plodding lead you to?

“In prayer! You would like to ascertain
Your people’s destiny afar
Into the future — praying even now?
Misguided son — how blind you are!

“Here, off this precipice I ’ll throw a stone;
Accelerating it will go
From shelf to shelf along the wall beneath
Way down into the gorge below.

“Here it will leave a chip, another there,
Flying away from every shelf —
And does anyone know where every chip
Will fall and satisfy itself?

“I maintain: even Jehovah does not know!
And even though you pray and cry.
The chips from off those stones are bound to
reach
The places in which they will lie.

“The law and steering force lies in itself:
Within itself lies that great force
Which made the chip of stone just what it is
And found its resting place and course.

“As powerful as your Jehovah is
This force is not within His might,
And not a single flying chip of stone
Will he arrest throughout its flight.

“And take the pollen seed: with naked eye
Its tremor you can hardly see,
Yet even that Jehovah won’t attempt
To change from what it’s bound to be.

"Nor, can He will that particle of life
To travel any other way
Then that over which the inbound power leads
From birth to its redeeming day.

"And that is a pollen! What, then, can one say
About a being manifold:
Where every soul contributes to the flight
The impetus of its own mould.

"Have you heard the song about Orion,
The giant who vision had none,
And who to regain the use of his eyes
Had wandered in search of the sun.

"And on his back he lugged along a guide,
A joking youngster full of pranks
Who, showing him the road to take, made sure
To lead him nowhere, for his thanks.

"Make sure to lead me to the sun, my boy!"
So west he trudges in the morn;
At noon the wily chap is carried north
And to the east at dusk is borne.

"Thus Orion kept walking on and on
Imbued with faith in that great light,
Full of thirst with the hope that soon the sun
Is bound to come within his sight.

"Over mountains and seas he keeps moving
With mighty strides through every clime
And does not know that he is burdened with
A smiling lad who bides his time.

"This Orion is all the humankind;
With might and strength within its soul
It hurries in an effort of despair
To some unseen and distant goal.

"It always loves the unattainable,
Believes the most in thing least known:
To reach the most fantastic of its dreams
It treads on treasures of its own.

"It plans beyond its strength to execute —
Its goals don't tally with its acts,
And all the plans and works are laughed at —
By a lad — the logic of pure facts.

"And just like that man, deprived of his sight,
Believing what an agent speaks,
The mass pursues what's out of reach
And reaches what it never seeks.

"And you are praying! My poor little child!
Where is your reason, your self-esteem?
You may as well be asking of the foam
To dam the waters of the stream!"

CHAPTER XVII

At first there was something in those words
As clear as the water of a spring:
Some soothing spirit seemed to drift from them
And pure contentment seemed to bring.

But then, just like before a storm, there came
A feeling of depressive heat,
And then a fear began to grip the soul —
As darkness grips a youngster's feet.

And Moses started, and with what was left
Of his last strength, got on his knees
And rising, said: "Why do you torture me
And do not let me rest in peace?"

"You 're not my mother! In your very words
I cannot find a trace of love.
You 're not my mother! Azazel, it is you,
The evil spirit of despair!"

"Be damned by Him who made you what you
are
For saying what you did to me!
I don't believe a word you say! You lie,
Immortal even though you be!"

Then to his ears drifted the words:
"Oh child, thou offspring of a plight!
You curse me with His name when I myself
Am but a part of His great might.

"What does your humble cursing mean to me?
Why, you would perish from despair
If you but knew a hundred-thousandth part
Of what I know, and knowing — dare.

"You curse when in your blindness you were
touched
Just by a tiny ray of grace
In which live I and He above, beyond
The boundary of time and space.

"Here, let me open up a little more
Your human, visionary-dam:
Look at the country which was promised once
By Him to father Abraham."

And all the west lit up with crimson red,
And Palestine, the promised land,
Spread out below the top where Moses stood
Like some strange curtain made by hand.

And then, unseen, the seeming friend of his
Began to whisper in his head:

"Look yonder! See that black mirror down
below;
That is the sea benamed the Dead.

"And on that side, the haughty mountain peaks
Which shrug their shoulders at the sky
And bunch together in a crooked line:
That 's where the cliffs of Carmel lie.

"See to the north the Sion hills? That 's where
The Jebusites a camp have found,
And should one shout out loud from off the hill
The Amorites will hear the sound.

"That silver ribbon is the Jordan stream
Which vents into that salty sea
And at its mouth lies Jericho which preys
On wanderers, to get a fee.

“That is the only valley in the place;
Yet into it the Amonites
Are crowding on this side, and right across
Are camping some Canaanites.

“And to the east lie hills and mountain tops
With level stretches here and there
While to the north you see a little lake
And lofty mountains everywhere.

“That, as you see, is all of Palestine:
The sheep and barley raising land!
Mount Carmel to Kadish, which, so to speak,
Could be enveloped by a hand.

“There is no easy access to the sea
Nor welcome highways through or by;
Where is there room for people to progress,
To live, to grow, to multiply?”

And Moses answered in a sullen voice:
“He, who gave water out of stone,
Will change this land to paradise on earth,
A land where want will not be known!”

CHAPTER XVIII

Again a whisper with a stifled laugh:
“A strong belief will move a hill!
But take a look at those unfolded views
Of what is bound to come, and will.

“See how your clan is moving to the front
And crosses Jordan’s bed of mud;
It is taking Jericho and everywhere
Is wading in a stream of blood.

“And now, just for a piece of Palestine,
Blood is shed, in battle, between
The Amorites, the Hebrews, Hittite tribes,
Amelekites and Philistine.

“That is the Hebrew kingdom! Now, just think
What blood it will have cost, and tears!
And to the world it will have meant as much
As would a fly to a horse’s ears.

“Without a chance to develop itself
It slowly will disintegrate
In order to become an easy prey
For neighbors filled with greed and hate.

“Now look! You see those shadows coming on
From yon Damascus and Halan —
That’s Asshur coming to bring Israel
Its ruin and ensuing end.

“And now look yon upon those crimson fields
Where death is reaping one by one:
They are the sons of Judah smitten by
The growing frightful Babylon.

“Jehovah’s temple is in flames...and that,
Resembling locusts on the field,
Are thousands of survivors bound as one
Who to captivity must yield.

“Hear the lament? That, weeping on the ruins,
Is the only sage of Hebrew womb
Who counceled to submit to Babylon
And keep alive within its tomb.

“What stench of desolation !... But again
The dawn is breaking through the night...
Out of the thousands that went forth, look,
now,
How few are coming from their plight.

“Now, see that little stirring group, way yon,
Where the walls ’round Salim course:
New people, a new god, a temple new,
Crowned by a new and unknown force.

“It grows and it struggles in poverty
But wherever it goes it takes root,
And like that lowly and unwelcome thorn,
It buds through every spreading shoot.

“Above its head world storms are passing by
In a kaleidoscopic view:
Empires tumble, kingdoms rise and fall —
Like phantoms with their retinuc.

“While growing in its corner it conceals —
Steady in determination —
A hate, for all who disbelieve its cause,
And positive damnation.

“And just on account of another god!
That scorn is the hardest of all;
See how it grows and gathers by the steps
Of that majestic temple hall!

“The seed of scorn bears nothing but contempt.
Look yon! At a tyrant’s command
Come forces to annihilate your clan
And raze its cherished fatherland.

“Hear the knocks? Those are the martial steps
Of those armed legions come to stay,
Which tramp Judea’s fields into dust
And devastate what ’s in their way.

“Hear the splash? Those are the foemen’s
knives
Which drain, with zeal, your people’s blood.
Hear the cries? Those are the Hebrew girls
Dragged by the horses through the mud.

“And yonder a mother is gnawing at
The flesh fed by her own poor breast
While thousands die from hanging on the cross.
The flower of Judea’s best.

“Once more Jehovah’s temple is in flames
And this time is the last in train,
Because what that hand lays to ruin once
Will never rise to life again.

“Once more captivity is swallowing
The few survivors of the past;
No more will they adorn the native land,
For this departure is their last.

“And Israel’s bright star will fade away
Never to shine for them again,
While the scorn, born at the temple hall,
Will fly the winds and never wane.

“You hesitate and doubt? You don’t believe?
Oh yes, I ’m sure you will, my friend!
That is the paradise your kin will find
On settling in that Promised Land!

“And you have strived to reach it! Tell me, now,
Do you believe it still worth while?
And maybe you will want to pray again
That they may reach their domicile?”

And aged Moses dropped his head in grief:
“Woe unto my despairing sorrow!
Are they predestined to be slaves of time —
Never to see a new tomorrow?”

And then he fell to earth, his hands hard
clenched:
“Jehovah fooled us like a herd!”
The demon’s laughter drifted through the air
Reechoing his every word.

CHAPTER XIX

At once a raging thundering roar was heard:
The mountains shook, and all around
Jehovah's messengers came passing by,
Each with a different warning sound.

A dismal threatening wall of clouds arose
Between the hidden earth and skies,
And the mother-night crept in, consumed with
 hate,
Casting around her frightful eyes.

And blinking, through the darkness of the wall,
Her penetrating flashing eyes
She grumbled like that mother who in haste
Berates a youngster for its lies.

With awe and fear did Moses listen to
That conversation of the clouds —
But no, his heart could not detect the Voice
Which may have spoken through those shrouds.

A deafening report of thunder-clap;
His hair stood up, his face turned meek,
His heart stopped beating as he gasped —
But still Jehovah did not speak.

The winds began to whistle 'round the cliffs
And their unwelcome angry note,
Like a groan, was gripping at the soul — but
 still
Jehovah's voice seemed quite remote.

And rain and hail began to pelt the earth
And a chill enwrapped the mountain side,
And in its feebleness the human soul
Began to battle with the tide...

Then, calmness; the streams began to burble —
Like sobs conceived in human care;
The misty warmth brought aromatic scents
And almond perfume soothed the air.

And in this warm and floating mistiness
There was some power, so unique
That Moses felt it with his heart and knew
It was Jehovah come to speak...

“Jehovah fooled us? And since when did we
Come to an agreement, do you think,
And in the people's presence, sign and seal
A contract bonded with a drink?

“Did you ever see any of my plans
Or read what is written in my book?
Have you forseen and positively know
That I would break my word? Now look!

“Faint hearted sheep! Why, you did not
begin
To move within your mother's womb
When I had counted every hair of yours,
Your every breath from birth till doom.

“Before the faithful Abraham had left
The soil of Ur to Haran land
I knew his children and their destiny
From his beginning to their end.

“Your land is poor? Too narrow and too tight
And is not much of any prize?
Did you forget that small is every crib
No matter what the baby's size?

“The time will come when I will lead you forth
To pains and labor without rest,
As does the mother, when the time is ripe,
Wean every baby from her breast.

"Here, on this miserly and sterile land,
You are to grow just like that thorn
And gain the necessary fortitude
For that great change that will be born.

"Oh yes, how well I know your sturdy souls
With their unsatiable ways!
On fertile land, no doubt, you would grow fast—
Beset with appetizing trays!

"Your body and your soul would so get used
To licking each and every dish
That Mammon would decoy you to his net
Like that returning home-bound fish.

"Why, in Egypt you groaned in slavery
While relishing what you did eat...
You will always feel it coming up, and belch
Not once from that Egyptian meat.

"And having sprung from that new native land,
With fetterless unshackled hands,
You will disseminate, to conquer all
The life and treasures of the lands.

"But I will place on all that you will gain
A heavy and relentless curse
Which, in its time, will bring you only grief
And worries led from bad to worse.

"Whoever wins the riches of the earth
And cherishes them above all,
Will find himself their servant and their slave —
Will lose all treasures of the soul.

"The master of his riches and their slave —
Paid for with blood and with disgrace,
In order to increase them he, himself,
In time will undermine their base.

“Like the leech that, feeding on human blood,
Is apt to perish with its hold,
So will you in your greed repent your ways
When stranded on the sea of gold.

“And in that sea of gold you will find yourself
Forever thirsting and in grief,
And from the bread of gold that you possess
No mouth or soul will get relief.

“And you, in time, will be my witnesses
Spread out throughout the different lands
That I choose only those that feed the soul
And not the palms of itching hands.

“Whoever feeds you only with some bread
Will with that bread himself decay;
But he who satisfies your hungry souls
Will always be my protege!

“That is where you will find your promised land:
The soil of boundless glory, pride;
So, as the people’s leader, you have been
A very narrow-sighted guide.

“That is where the glory of your future lies —
Of all the realms the finest part;
This Palestine is nothing but a gift
With which to offer you a start.

“It will only be a memory, a dream,
A longing without any end,
So that my people, looking for it, will
Become the masters of all land.

“And since, for a moment, you dared to doubt
The meaning of my spoken will,
Having once seen the promised ratherland
You foot will never pass this hill.

“Here will your bones be bleaching in the sun
As an example of dismay
To all who always strive to reach the goal
And slowly perish on their way.”

CHAPTER XX

A stark anxiety, spread over the hills
Just like a shadow of the night,
Is sowing thought, and on the plains below
Is spreading longings from its height.

It strews afresh the flowers and the leaves
Which faded, once beneath the snow,
And in the soul, again, is raising cries
Which have been silenced long ago.

What, yesterday, was looked upon with scorn—
Today with love is all esteemed;
What, yesterday, was trampled and bespat —
Today with sanctity is deemed.

Within the Hebrew camp, that night was spent
In fear with feelings all on edge;
At the break of the dawn they all looked up
Upon that overhanging ledge.

“Why, he is gone!”...And that “gone” was like
death
That haunts a guilty fugitive;
They all now felt that something disappeared,
Without which none of them could live.

It was that something, indiscernible,
Which fed their hearts with constant fire;
It was the thing that led them to a goal
Without which life would be too dire.

And so a boundless feeling of their guilt
Enveloped their cemented soul
And all the camp, as if by charm, was numbed
And of all motion lost control.

They all stole glances at each other's face, —
Their feet kept shifting without end —
Like murderers caught in the very act
Of killing a beloved friend.

A stamping sound! Is that a hurricane?
Perhaps he prophesied the truth?
It is Joshua, the herdsmen's chosen prince
Who is followed by the faithful youth.

They drive the herds and seem to be in haste —
Perhaps it is a foe's attack?
No, they are prodded by Jehovah's will:
That nameless feeling at their back.

From spiritual hunger, solitude,
From chos of the past they flee,
While Joshua is rending his command:
"To arms! To arms and liberty!"

And like an eagle did his cry soar forth
Above the tumult's silent head,
Reechoing from gaping hills: "To arms!
Retreat is closed but for the dead!"

A moment more and all will come to life
From that involuntary spell,
And none will know what in that flash of time
Had shattered the hypnotic shell.

A moment more and Joshua's command
Will be a hundred-thousand cries,
And from the lazy nomads, in a flash,
A race of heroes will arise.

A din of drums will come—their marching feet
Will knead to mud the desert sand,
And proud Abiram will be stoned to death
While hanging will be Dathan's end.

Across the mountains they will fly like birds;
The Jordan waters will be strown,
And the walls of Jericho will melt away
Before the sound of trumpets blown.

Thus will they wander through uncertainty,
While full of yearning and dismay,
To pave the highway for the human soul
And slowly perish on their way.

END

Lviv, January to June, 1905.

Translated by Waldimir Semynyna.



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IVAN FRANKO

MOSES

Translated from the Ukrainian