



# IVAN FRANKO

ON THE 90-TH ANNIVERSARY  
OF HIS BIRTH AND THE 30-TH,  
OF HIS DEATH

ASCHAFFENBURG 1946

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The Teachers Association  
of D. P. Camp "Pioneer"  
in Aschaffenburg

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Vignette by B. Boc'urkiw

Steinbeckdruck Aschaffenburg

Ivan Franko\*) is usually considered only second in importance to Taras Shevchenko as regards his position in Ukrainian Literature. Though he suffered during his life even more than Shevchenko — some call him the Ukrainian Laokoon — he differed from him advantageously by producing besides satires — which Shevchenko created, too, his excellent humorous works.

He suffered by being a peasant's child of exceedingly observing attitude, who experienced very early in life, injustice towards himself and others — and that has been proved by his child stories. This peasant child would see only justice and in his studies he devoted himself entirely to acquiring truth. He saw everywhere injustice, convenience and a predominance of material influences, and observed that even those, who by their very vocation, were expected to guard against injustice, were not worthy of the confidence placed in them, looking only towards their own benefit.

Ivan Franko was a pupil of positivism though, above all, he was essentially a Poet whose soul sang in accordance with the course of his life. This was reflected in his works. We see the Giant's steps in his production. Even in the beginning he gave valuable works, heightening his creations more and more in value with the advancing years, only, however, for this growth to break down tragically towards his life's end.

We divide the Poet's principal works into four periods of creation as follows:

- 1.) "The Servant" (1876); "Quarriers" (1878); "Botokuds" (1880); "Quite Down" (a Story, 1880); "Sahar Berkut" (a Novel 1882); "The Jewish Melodies" (1882/3); "Boryslaw Stories" (1883); "Boa Constrictor" (1884); and "Idyll" (1886).
- 2.) "The Landlord's Jest" (a Poem, 1889); "Prison Sonnets" (1889); "The Death of Cain", (a Poem, 1889); "Reynard the Fox" (an

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\*) The present author is much obliged to Director S. H. Cary for having seen this pamphlet. V. B.

- Epos, 1890); "Withered Leaves" (a Lyrical Drama, 1893/6); "The Stolen Luck" (a Drama, 1893); "The Teacher" (a Comedy, 1896); and "Foundations of Society" (a Novel, 1894/5).
- 3.) "My Emerald" (Poetry, 1898); "The Great Anniversary" (a Scene, 1898); "Ivan Vyshensky" (a Poem, 1900); "Moses" (a Poem, 1905); "Semper Tiro" (Poetry, 1906); and "Aprocrypha and Legends from Old Ukrainian Manuscripts".
  - 4.) Critical studies and the new editions of his works.

We have indicated only the more important works of Ivan Franko, because "he alone created such valuable works as to exceed the powers of a large group of ordinary men. He superceded all our authors and cultural writers by his diligence" (Vladimir Doroshenko).

to a higher state in life.

Before outlining some features of Ivan Franko's creation, we desire to give you a general impression of his life history. Ivan Franko was born on the 15-th of August, 1856 in the Western Ukraine under Austria, in the village of Nahuyevychi near Boryslaw, widely known for its Petroleum wells. His Father was a peasant-blacksmith. He died in the ninth year of the Poet's life. To his Father's memory, the son dedicated his excellent poem "The Landlord's Jests". From his Mother, who died shortly afterwards, the Poet inherited his love of song, "which strengthened him in his troublesome life". She told the Poet that only by working could he be saved and raised

The Poet attended the Secondary School in Drohobych, and lived with a joiner. The Ukrainian story writer, Michael Kociubynsky wrote in a sketch, that Ivan Franko was at that time bound to sleep in a coffin through lack of a bed. His good teachers were a scientist, Verhratsky, and a teacher of the Ukrainian Language, Horbal.

Having passed through the Secondary School Course, he went, in 1875, to Lemberg to study at the University there. After a short time he obtained the post of Editor of a Student magazine, in which he published many of his own works.

In 1877, together with other members of the Editorial Staff, he was arrested, being accused of carrying on Socialist propaganda and also of having intercourse with the distinguished Ukrainian scholar, Michael Dragomanov, from the Eastern Ukraine, whom the Austrian authorities deemed to be a Leader of some secret International socialist organisation. Ivan Franko was sentenced to 10 months imprisonment without being proved guilty. Franko was imprisoned on two further occasions, namely in 1889, when he was retained in jail for three months without any legal argument, and again in 1889, before the Land elections in order to intimidate voters lest they should poll for the Radicals. Simultaneously there were arrested a great number of progressive Ukrainians and Poles. The worst consequence of these imprisonments was the fact of being shunned by his own countrymen and even of being expelled from cultural Societies.

Ivan Franko, in the meantime, became an Editor of magazines and contributor to several papers. While visiting Kiev for the second time, in 1886, he married. In the years from 1886 to 1897 he joined the Polish democratic daily "The Lemberg Courier". During this association Franko learned to know how the Poles understood collaboration with the Ukrainians.

Perhaps it is not out of place if we mention here that Franko influenced by M. Dragomanov, and being an enthusiastic reader of "Progress and Poorness" by Henry George, wrote a programme for the Polish and Ukrainian socialists, which, under a changed title was edited by the Polish socialist Limanowski at Geneva in 1881. Franko also took an interest in economical questions, diverting attention to co-operation; he elaborated an economical discourse the theses of which were approved by an Economic Conference in 1883. In 1890, he was one of the promoters of the Ukrainian Radical Party which he left for the Democratic Party in 1899. But in the new party he was no more active and in a short time he left it, becoming an "above party" man, an intellectual Leader of his Nation. From external occurrences we notice his taking a degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the famous Slavonic linguist Jagich in Vienna in 1892; his

qualifying as a University teacher of Ukrainian Literature in Lemberg in 1894, though he was not approved by the local Government in this new position.

From 1898 Franko worked exclusively for the Ukrainian culture, taking upon himself the Editorship of "The Literary Herald", besides working in the Ukrainian Publishers' Association and in the "Proceedings of Shevchenko Scientific and Literary Society" in Lemberg. The disease contracted by Franko in 1892, showed itself in the paralysis of both hands in 1908, and changed quietude into incessant hurry: doctors, hospitals, journeys to sea, amongst other things, became a fact of his life.

We mention, now, two brighter incidents in Franko's life, namely the 25-th and 40-th anniversaries of his literary career (1898, 1913). From his first festivity we remember his speech, ever worthy to be read by those who take an interest in his creations. On the occasion of his 40-th anniversary, the Ukrainians collected a greater sum of money and many Ukrainian and foreign scholars devoted their essays to his honour.

We notice that his marriage with a Kiever lady was not happy, as she suffered from a nervous disease and later died in a sanatorium for lunatics. Franko had four children. He died on the 28-th of May, 1916 in Lemberg, and the Ukrainian community distinguished his grave by a monument of a quarrier in accordance with the Poet's early poetry indicating that he was a quarrier for progress for his Nation. It may be that in the course of centuries he will remain only a cultural quarrier, but to his contemporaries he was one of the greatest champions of culture in the history of the Ukraine. His contemporaries may justly claim, that through him they gained exceedingly in National knowledge. According to Ostap Hrycay, Ivan Franko, by his works and activities, "put a window to Europe for the Ukrainians".

The same essayist mentioning Barrett Browning, Charles Dickens, and Ada Negri, who threw light on the social evil of their

epoch, maintained that in the 19-th century the Ukraine brought forth the greatest poet of the social evil in Ivan Franko. There the critic seems to bear in mind such works of Franko, as "The Servant", "Quarriers", "Quite Down", "Boryslaw Stories", "Boa Constrictor", "The Jewish Melodies", "Prison Sonnets", "The Landlord's Jests", etc.

Ivan Franko commenced writing while still a Secondary School pupil. Some of his poetry of that time was published. When in the last class he began to write a great poem of which the theme is similar to his novel "Sahar Berkut". On the basis of this youthful work the composer Latoshynsky wrote his opera the "Golden Ring". The nature descriptions, the delineated personages indicate the highly talented author. This work still makes good reading for youthful people. This early creation period shows a social tendency. His nation is called "servant" to other nations. In his "Quarriers" he summoned young folk to serve his own people, with the very conviction that better times would come after their deaths. In 1880 Franko wrote a National Anthem: "No More", which calls Ukrainians to aspire to a self-government. As the activity of Franko meant cultural reconstruction, so this Anthem may be deemed the beginning of political regeneration (especially that of the Western Ukraine where it has become most popular).

From this first period we want to remind you of two matters. Franko described then the Ukrainian California in his "Boryslaw Stories" as well as in "Boa Constrictor". In his poetry Franko referred to the hard fate of the petroleum-well labourers. In a Poem titled "Maxym C'unyk", Franko remembers his countryman who died in Boryslaw working in a petroleum-well. Not being properly built, the well collapsed. The hurried labourer called for help for nine hours, but nobody helped him, neither bosses nor labourers. In what circumstances Franko was bound to work, you may see from the fact that, when he requested the Publishers' Association to publish his translation of the world-known work "The Dead Souls" by N. Gogol, they refused to do so.



From 1887 Franko contributed to the Polish daily "The Lemberg Courier" and he did so for ten years. But he did not cease working at his native literature, which he proved by such of his works as "The Landlord's Jest", "The Death of Cain", Reynard the Fox", "The Stolen Luck", "Withered Leaves" etc. In the last mentioned work he attained the heights of lyrical poetry as well in form as in contents. As to the form, he revealed the secret known above all to Shevchenko: how to use the elements of the popular poetry in his creations. In "Reynard the Fox" on the foreign basis, Franko gave essentially a national work, the best work for the Ukrainian children; a work equalled only by few in world literature. Franko being still unsurpassed for his expert knowledge of the child soul, himself having had a hard family life, wrote works for his own children. — We find his philosophy of life in such of his poetical works as "My Emerald" and "Semper Tiro". The hundredth anniversary of the Ukrainian literary regeneration, Franko commemorated by his valuable work "The Great Anniversary". We are still bound to mention two works of this Ukrainian genius, namely his "Ivan Vyshensky" and "Moses". In the first poem the Poet commemorated the Ukrainian church champion of the 17-th century and in the second he sang of the Old Testament prophet Moses. In reference to "Moses" the distinguished Ukrainian critic and linguist Professor Dr. V. Simovych stated that "this was the most valuable work created by Franko in poetry, the most powerful and the best, since the death of Shevchenko in the Ukrainian literature".

Franko was not only a poet but also a story-writer, novelist, dramatist, satirical poet, fabulist, sociologist, philosopher, historian, linguist, political writer, translator, and social champion. Only such a talented man as Franko could comprise so many different ranges of culture and life and produce valuable works in each domain. Already in his school years Franko knew by heart Shevchenko's whole poetry and Goethe's "Faust". The poet Rylsky wrote: "Franko heard voices from below, and from behind the clouds".

As a great poet Franko cannot be assigned to one literary tendency. In prose he is deemed to be a realist. Here he should be a faithful follower of Zola whose works Franko liked to translate. "The accuracy of representation, writes one critic, was a corner-stone of Franko's aesthetics". Another critic, in our opinion, better caught the poet's mode of viewing things in literature: "Franko very well understood the social foundations of literary creation; in a psychological analysis he was highly skilled, too." Franko had his own points of reviewing. In 1898 he published essays titled: "The Secrets of Literary Creation" and in following years: numerous essays on contemporary Ukrainian and foreign writers in "The Literary Herald". He remains as a literary critic as yet unsurpassed. Only Nicholas Zerow struck some new notes in this sphere. The Polish critic Feldmann, reviewing Franko's essay on a novel "East and West" by Pidesha, observed that the essay of Franko was more valuable than the reviewed novel. The already cited V. Simovych thus wrote about Franko's influence: "Writers inspired by him (scil. Franko) thoroughly regenerate our literature and out of the seemingly poor Galician ground bring forth gold and jewels (Stefanyk)". Out of the numerous critical works of Franko, Professor M. Vozniak deems his „Apocrypha and Legends from Old Ukrainian Manuscripts“ one of the best contained in our literature. As a political writer Ivan Franko was versatile and threatening. He was a very good orator, and only owing to official misuses did he fail to become a member of the Country legislative body.

During his life Franko edited several magazines and books. He was an editor of such authors as Shakespeare (in Kulish's translations with introductions and commentaries of his own), Shevchenko, Fed'kovich, Samiylenko etc. By his translations and by recasting foreign works he enriched Ukrainian literature by the great works of world literature. He translated Roman and Greek works as well as works out of Indian and Arabian literature. He translated works from German, French, English, Spanish, Russian, Polish, Czech, Serbian, and Bulgarian. He diligently pursued the development of foreign lite-

rature and gave a detailed account of his studies in "The Literary Herald". He wrote also in Polish, Russian, Czech, and German languages about Ukrainian cultural achievements. — More than ten composers set music to Franko's works: there is one opera, some symphonies, and many songs.

Nearing completion, we want to say a few words about Franko's relation to socialism and to religion which has been neither well considered nor explained. Ivan Franko wrote on socialism in 1898 thus: (cited by V. Simovych in his edition of "From Heights and Plains" by Ivan Franko, Kiev-Leipzig, 1920: "I avow that I never was a confessor of this religion (scil. socialism), founded „on dogmas of hatred and class-warfare and was courageous enough in defiance of laughter and mockery of its adherents to bear highly the banner of the old, truly human socialism, based on the ethical and highly human education of the people, on progress, and on the diffusion of general knowledge as well as of science and criticism, on national freedom, but not founded on party dogmatism, or on despotism of leaders. Neither was it founded on bureaucratic regulations of the whole future of mankind, nor on parliamentary swindling, which should bring us in time a brilliant future." Such views expressed almost half a century ago are identical with the ideas which the democracy of our time has the good sense to realize.

The youthful works of the poet's "Sturm- and Drang-period", as we can call the period of his University studies, could evince some impiety in the Poet. But he cannot be named atheist when referring to his whole life and creation. The man who chanted praises of labour, meaning labour for our fellow-men, and saw in labour his aim of life, was not an atheist. His most remarkable works were based on religious motives. I mention here only: "The Death of Cain", "Ivan Vyshensky", and "Moses". The love of his fellow-men has been praised as an aim of life in "The Death of Cain" as well as in "Ivan Vyshensky". Moses advises his nation not to aspire after material but after spiritual goods. Moses was punished with untimely death because he lost belief in his mission provided by God.

The writer who devoted so much time to studying the old Ukrainian literature, often connected with the Holy Scriptures, as no other Ukrainian writer; who studied the Holy Writ, having mastered the Hebrew language, was not an atheist.

Ivan Franko being essentially a poet and social champion by birth, was a religious man. And even the church representatives found in Franko a very favourable delineator. Think of Franko's description of priests in "The Landlord's Jests" and in a story "Pestilence".

Ivan Franko, still living, could enjoy a great appreciation: he was elected a member by many Ukrainian and foreign literary and scientific associations. The Russian University of Charkow conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Were the Ukrainian language better known to the world (notwithstanding the political situation of the nation), Ivan Franko would in all probability have received the highest literary award, the Nobel prize, for his entire creation, and for his activity, because he was one of the few Ukrainians who certainly deserved it.

VLADIMIR BEZUSHKO

