

SHEVCHENKO
AND
WOMEN

Women in the Life and Work
of Taras Shevchenko

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

ANY man who arouses a down-trodden nation of over forty million people to take new hope in their struggle for independence, is certain to arouse interest in others. The major impetus to the present Ukrainian movement for national freedom is traced directly to Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian poet. Considering his short life as a whole and his very short life as a free man (free only nine years of his life) when he was physically able to express himself, Shevchenko has contributed more to the gradual resurrection of the Ukrainian nation than any other figure in Ukrainian history. His words are the guiding slogans of a nation of people striving for the freedom we enjoy in this country.

There is hardly a Ukrainian who does not know Shevchenko the poet and champion of human rights, but few people know him as a human being, and still fewer realize what an important part women played in the life and the creative work of this Ukrainian genius.

Invited to speak before a Ukrainian young women's club, Dr. L. Myshuha, editor of the Ukrainian daily newspaper "Svoboda," chose as his topic "Shevchenko and Women." The in-

terest it aroused, especially among Americans of Ukrainian descent, has justified this translation which is meant for the benefit of those who do not read Ukrainian. It was found advisable to modify in it the introductory chapter and to delete several paragraphs and verses throughout the original Ukrainian text which was published separately.

It may be that some Ukrainian readers will want to refer to the complete original poems. For that reason I make references to them, using the Ukrainian titles—since there is no complete translation of Shevchenko's "Kobzar." The dates and the locations added to the references will help the reader to appreciate the conditions under which Shevchenko worked.

W. S.





TARAS SHEVCHENKO AS A YOUNG MAN
(From an etching by himself, 1860)

THE BARD OF UKRAINE

It was in 1914, when in czaristic Russia the government forbade the observance of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Taras Shevchenko, that an aged peasant deputy, Mershchi, stood before the Russian Duma and said: "Everything that has been said from this rostrum, everything that has been written in the last few days about the popularity of Taras Shevchenko among the Ukrainian people, all that is nothing in comparison to the reality of how the common Ukrainian peasant population loves and respects this poet. Whoever was at the tomb of Shevchenko may have seen how the peasants en masse travel to that mound in order to pay tribute to the earthly remains of their beloved poet; may have seen how with bared heads they sing and recite the creations of Shevchenko; may have seen with what piety they enter the chamber where hangs the portrait of Shevchenko; may have noticed how they talk before that portrait as if they felt the presence of a great spirit, and how they walk on tip-toes and talk in whispers. Only in churches do the people behave that way. Whoever was in a Ukrainian village may have seen that practically in every house there hangs in the place of honor, all decorated with embroidered scarfs, the portrait of Shevchenko and before it lies the

‘Kobzar.’ And practically every literate and illiterate person knows this Kobzar by heart. Whoever knows this will not say that only the intelligentsia-separatists are interested in the commemoration of Shevchenko. In this celebration are interested all the Ukrainian people who sacrifice their hard-earned money for the erection of the memorial to the poet. For almost fifty years the Ukrainian people have been celebrating Shevchenko’s anniversaries. As a rule, requiem Mass is held, while here and there plays or literary lectures are given.”

And further on this deputy went to ask why it was that the government forbade the people even to pray for this Christian, this Taras. “Why? Is it because Shevchenko was a peasant poet, having come from the peasants; is it because he is, as the bureaucratic circles would say, a muzhik poet? . . . But, gentlemen, everything has its limits. You may deny the people education, close all our libraries and educational centers. You may take from the school libraries in Ukraine all the popular publications about village farming, about cooperatives, about hygiene . . . and all of this because they were written in the people’s language. You may prohibit the children in school from singing their beloved folk songs and from reading the Ukrainian translations of Krylov’s fables. And in the end, you may prohibit the erection in Kiev of the memorial to Shevchenko, but, dear Sirs, there is no human power that can prohibit a people to love him whom they have deified. I think that it is time in Russia to recognize what the whole world has recognized already. It is time to recognize the fact that

Taras Shevchenko, himself, has already built a memorial to which the people's path will never overgrow with weeds."

That is how in the Russian Duma in Petersburg, sixty-three years after the death of Shevchenko, the memory of him was defended by a descendant of one of those slaves whom Shevchenko had in mind when he wrote:

... I'll glorify
The mute, down-trodden slaves
And as a sentinel o'er them
I'll place the mighty word.'

With his "mighty word" Shevchenko defended the "slaves" and at the same time came in defense of the woman — the greatest victim of the then prevailing social system.

The Village: Paradise and Hell

Taras Shevchenko was born on March 9, 1814, and grew up in the village of Kyrylivtsi in Ukraine: a village "like an Easter egg," a village which was so beautiful that Shevchenko himself describes it as "it seems that God Himself is watching over it." On a hill stands a green and shady grove. From cherry orchards peek the chalk-white dwellings. Lengthwise and across the village run two broad roads with cherry trees and drooping willows planted on both sides. To one side of the village, in a deep gorge,

shimmers a silvery narrow stream, and by the gorge the cherry orchards proudly sway, while at the foot of the hill the apple and pear trees bid welcome with their swaying branches. And over this gorge, this grove, and this stream a canopy of blue reigns supreme.

It is here, by the gorge, that there stood "a little hut within a grove, right by a pond beyond the village green," yes,

'Tis there my mother clothed me oft
And wrapping me was often singing,
Pouring her songs with grief a-ringing
Into her babe'

One would think that Shevchenko grew up in a paradise, but:

.....In this dell,
This humble home, this paradise,
I witnessed hell. Here kin and neighbors
Were naught but slaves of feudal labors —
No time to heed the prayer bells.³

In this home, when Shevchenko was only nine years of age, poverty and work sent his good companion, his thirty-two year old mother, to her early grave. How much he felt the loss of his mother is best given to us by Shevchenko in his story "Blyzniata" (Twins):

"Christmas Eve is a children's holiday among all the Christian people, but all celebrate it in some different manner: among the Germans with a Christmas tree, the same among the Russians; but among our people, right after the Christmas Eve dinner, the children are sent with

bread, fish and stewed fruits to the nearest relatives, and the children, upon entering the home, say: 'Merry Christmas! Father and mother have sent by us to you, uncle, and to you, dear aunt, the holy dinner'; then they are seated ceremoniously behind the table which as a rule is covered with dainty foods, and are entertained like grown-ups, after which they exchange bread, fish and stewed fruits — and with ceremony are sent off. The children go to other relatives, and so, if relatives are many, they return home early before the morning services begin (to be sure, with many presents and coins which are tied like buttons in their shirts). This pretty custom appeals to me very much. Our relatives were many. As a rule we were placed in the sleigh and carried from relative to relative all night long. I remember one sad Christmas Eve in my life. In the autumn we buried our mother and on the following Christmas Eve we went with the customary dinner to our grandfather and having said: 'Merry Christmas! Father and . . .' all three of us burst into tears — we could not say 'mother'."

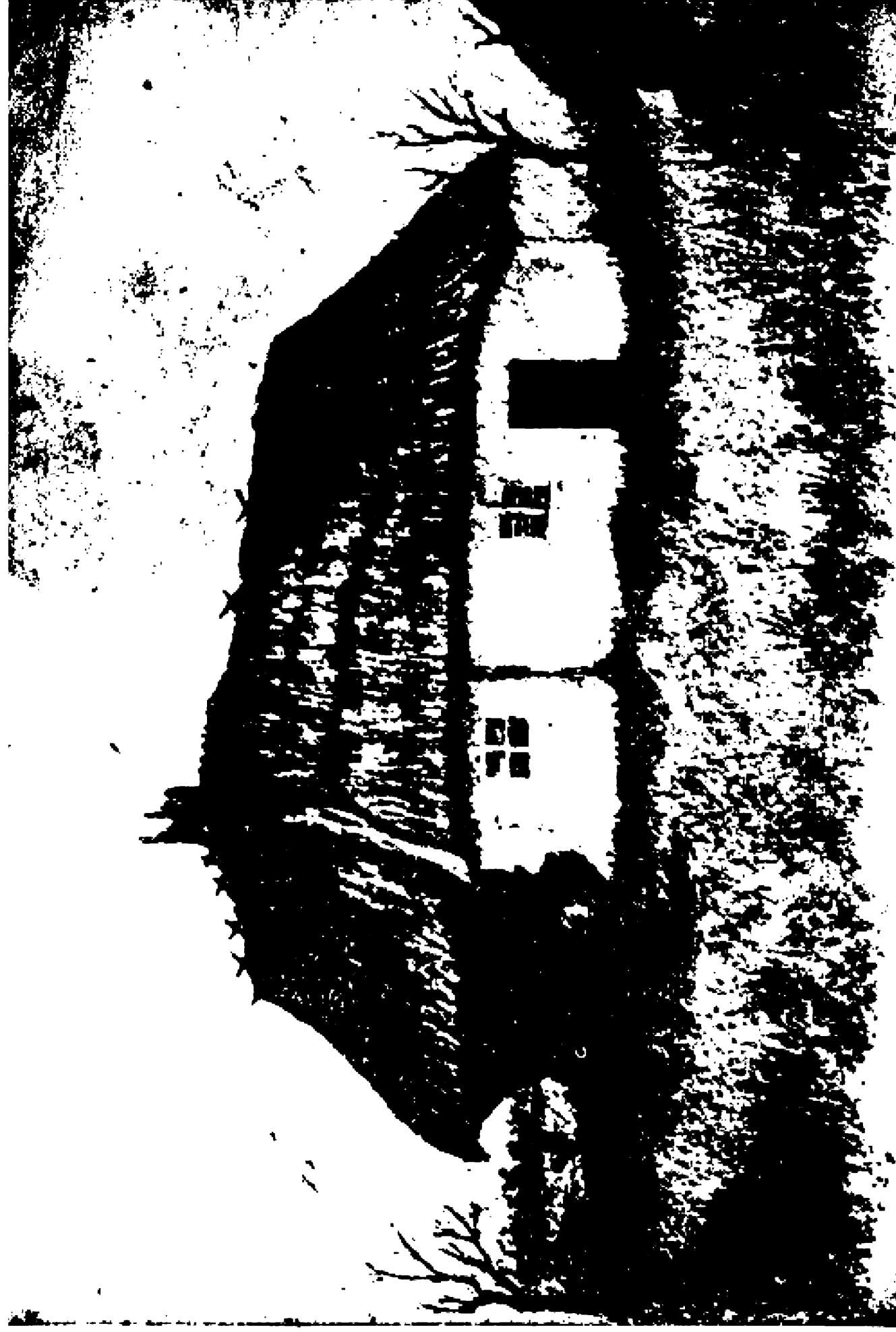
After the mother died, there came into this household a stepmother with three of her own children, and "whoever has seen a stepmother among orphans, even from a distance," Shevchenko wrote later in his story "The Princess," "it means that he has witnessed hell in its most disgusting form," because "there was not an hour among us that we did not cry and quarrel, there was not an hour that father and the stepmother did not quarrel with each other."

Stephen, the stepbrother, stole three coins from the soldier who was quartered in the house and the stepmother insisted that the guilty one was Taras. They bound his hands and feet and beat him. Even his little sister Irene cried and begged him to confess. Under pressure he admitted that he stole the money and buried it in the orchard. They dug but could not find it, because he had never stolen it in the first place. Again they whipped him.

"Tears rush to my eyes," wrote Shevchenko later, "when I see:

Upon some village green, a tot,
Just like a twig from off a tree,
Who sits there pointing his bare knees
While propped against a fence—in dreams,
To me it seems that he is I—
My youth returned to haunt my eyes."

Shevchenko had one very good companion in his sister Catherine. When as a lad he went to seek "the iron pillars that support the sky," and not having found them was stealthily returning home late at night, he saw how Catherine was standing by the door and watching the gate, awaiting him. Upon seeing him, how gladly she exclaimed, "He came, he came!"; then, grasping him in her arms, she seated him by the table with the words, "Sit down to eat, you vagabond." After supper she led him to his bed and having covered him and kissed him she smiled and again called him a "vagabond." But young Taras did not sleep. He was thinking: he could not fool his brother Mykyta because



THE HUT IN WHICH SHEVCHENKO WAS BORN
(From a drawing by Shevchenko)

that one had been already in Odessa, but Catherine he would fool yet; he would tell her that he really did see the pillars that support the sky. To this good sister of his he later dedicated his poem "Kateryna" (Catherine).

Catherine got married and Taras lost his good guardian. However, the youngest sister, Irene, was also kind to him. She used to hide Taras from his stepmother and would bring him food, unknown to all the rest. When it became uncomfortable for him he used to run away to his sister Catherine who lived in another village, Zeleni Dibrowy. Later on, when Taras became well known, his sister Catherine related to a visitor the following: "We called him a vagabond, dear lady—honestly! It often happened that he would creep quietly into the house and get on the bench and sit there quiet as a mouse. One could never get from him any information as to whether he had eaten anything. It used to be that he would wander through the fields, through Pumpkin Valley or over the meadows and by the burial mounds. One time, when he came home, he simply fell down like a pebble on the bench and immediately fell dead asleep." And the third sister, Mary, who was blind, was very kind to him. When the deacon with whom he was learning to read was practically starving him, the blind sister would hide pieces of bread, taken from the table at meal time, and would deposit it in a certain place in the orchard. Having obtained a free moment, Taras would sneak into the orchard to get the bread and would run back to school, fearing to cross the path of his stepmother.

The tender relations between Shevchenko and his youngest sister, Irene, may be best seen in his poem "Sestri" (To a Sister).

Avoiding the impoverished poor dwellings
Of gloom along the river bank,
My thoughts were: "Where will I be resting
And what on earth will be my fate?"
And then I dreamt: I look and see
Within an orchard on a hill
And skirted with a flowering plot,
Just like a girl, a little hut.
The Dnieper has spread way-way out
And shines with glory all a-glare.
Within the orchard 'neath a tree
And shaded by its leaves, I see
My one and only sister, there;
That tranquil saint of fortitude
Who's resting, as in paradise,
And from beyond the Dnieper's glare
Awaits me with her pleading eyes.'

The First Love

In the thirteenth year of Shevchenko's life, while he was grazing sheep beyond the village, he suddenly felt extremely happy. This was the first ray of love penetrating his heart; an innocent and an unconscious love, but powerful enough to leave its trace throughout his life. These feelings Shevchenko paints later when as a poet he relates how it all happened to him. He was minding the sheep, when all at once the sheep, the heavenly sky, the village, — everything, faded from his sight. Taras looked at the lambs but they were not his lambs; and

I turned to see the village dwellings —
But there were none that I could claim,
For God bestowed upon me nought;
And many tears trickled down,
Bitter tears . . .⁶

It was then, when Taras was overcome with tears, that "she" came.

. At the roadside,
Not far from where I stood,
A girl was picking hemp
And heard my sighs and sobs;
She came to me to seek
The cause, then wiped my tears
And kissed me on the cheek.⁷

and with this kiss

It seemed as if the sun shone forth,
As if the world and all there was —
The fields and woods—were mine to keep;
And we, with merriment, went forth
To water someone else's sheep.⁸

This girl, Oxana, who picked hemp, does not leave Shevchenko's memory throughout his life. In all the women that he met during his lifetime, he always unconsciously searched for that something which would remind him of his "pleasant, curly Oxana."

Shevchenko mentions this Oxana again in his poem "To Oxana K." written in 1841 in Petersburg — in the memory of what happened in the distant past.

.... Oxana, kindest of all strangers,
Remember that orphan of years gone by
Who, though dressed in tatters, used to feel
 happy
Whenever he saw your beautiful face;
The one whom you without a word
Had taught to speak with eyes and soul;
With whom you laughed and grieved and
 wept;
To whom you often sang "Petruś"?
You do not remember! Oxana! Oxana!
And here I am weeping and grieving till
 now.
I shed all my tears o'er my Marianna
But at you I'm looking and for you I pray.
Think of me Oxana, my kind, gentle
 stranger,
And bless with your kindness sister
 Marianna!
Don't forget to smile while singing of
 Peter
And just—as if fooling—recollect the
 past.⁹

He mentions Marianna and Petruś (Peter) in his poem "Chernytsa Mariana" (Mariana the

Nun) 1841, where the former finds it impossible to believe that those who once have loved each other could ever live apart. No, it is only the blind kobzars (wandering bards of Ukraine) who would admit such a thing possible,

Who, blind, know no better;
Because they're blind and do not see
The eyes of the maiden . . .¹⁰

who is so deeply in love, that:

Even in the grave mound
I will turn and whisper:
"Dearest, my beloved!
Yes, I love you in this new world
Just as in the other."¹¹

That is the love of the poet for his unforgettable Oxana.

An eminent critic of Shevchenko, Paul Zaitsev, wrote about this Oxana in his article entitled "The First Love of Shevchenko": "Thus his first love affair left in the soul of the poet an everlasting impression, and never will that tender flower, that unfortunate curly-haired Oxana die in the wreath of his glory."

The poor orphaned boy was given to a sexton. The sexton whipped him and forbade him to cry. The young lad, while whipped, was obliged to keep still and read clearly the fourth commandment. That is how Taras was taught to read. Shevchenko reminds us of this in his story "The Princess." "Tell me, my good people, was there ever on earth such a giant who could lie quietly throughout a thrashing and at the same time read unfalteringly the fourth com-

mandment?" But he forgave the sexton: "You, unfortunate one, knew not yourself what you were doing. You were beaten that way yourself, so you whipped me and in your sincere simplicity saw in it nothing wrong. Peace be with you . . ."

In such a school of poverty and ignorance, of abuse by the village sexton, the village painter, and the village priest, did the early years of Shevchenko's life pass by. He could never forget that this youth flew by without any happiness.

Shevchenko, while still a boy, was brought to the attention of his lord, Basil Engelhardt, whose son, Paul, wanted a livery servant. Inept in the various tasks assigned to him, Shevchenko was sent to help in the kitchen. His constant neglect of work for sketching, which he pursued at every opportunity, brought about repeated punishment. Eventually his ability in drawing was brought to the attention of his master and he was appointed the domestic painter—in keeping with the custom of the times.

Eventually, as his lord's valet, he went with his master, Paul Engelhardt, to Vilna, Lithuania. There, Engelhardt decided to make out of Taras a domestic portrait painter and so he sent him for training to a well known portrait painter, Franz Lampi.

Freedom

In Lithuania, in Vilna, Shevchenko met a Polish girl, Dunia Haszowska, a seamstress by vocation, but a free woman—while Shevchenko was a slave. This seamstress, who worked very hard for a living, was to him something of a new experience. Thoughts began to circulate through his head: "Why should not we, unfortunate serfs, be just as free as other people?"

The seamstress was a nationally conscious Polish girl. She requested that Shevchenko learn the Polish language because she refused to speak in any other. She was also absorbed with the Polish revolutionary ideas. She knew that there was a Polish uprising brewing and quite often spoke about it to Shevchenko. She was very kind to Shevchenko. She sewed his shirts and pressed his cuffs and neckties. To a poor orphaned serf she was another world—and so Shevchenko fell in love with her.

But Shevchenko's master did not remain long in Vilna. Running away from the field of the Polish uprising the master took his slave with him to Petersburg. Here Shevchenko was sent to a painter by the name of Shyraev.

This happened in the year of 1832, when Shevchenko was eighteen years old.

It was here, in Petersburg, that there occurred an incident which was a turning point in the poet's life. One day Ivan Soshenko, a Ukrainian by birth, was passing down a path of the Summer Garden when, by chance, he came across a lean, not a very clean looking young man. He had sympathetic and intelligent eyes and was

sketching the statue of Saturn shown as devouring its own child. This youth was Taras Shevchenko. That is how Shevchenko got acquainted with a countryman from Ukraine who took enough interest in him to acquaint him gradually with other well known Ukrainians who lived in Petersburg, and later acquainted him with the famous Russian poet, Basil Zhukovsky, and the famous at the time painter, Karl Bruelov. Shevchenko entered a new world—artistic and spiritual, and through the people who composed this new world his freedom was bought on April 22, 1838, for the sum of 2,500 rubles collected from auctioning a portrait of Zhukovsky painted by Bruelov for that particular purpose.

It was on April 22, 1838 that Shevchenko's face for the first time brightened with true happiness. In his own words: "In this glorious and eternal nature there are many, many beautiful things; but the glory and wreath of eternal beauty is the face of a man satisfied and happy."

Freedom gave Shevchenko an opportunity to continue and to round out his education. Within a year he received a silver medal in the Academy of Arts. He painted, sketched, and read. Reading Walter Scott's "Woodstock" he commented: "I was especially interested in the scene where Charles II, Stuart, hiding under an assumed name at the home of Baron Lee, confessed to the baron's daughter, Julia, that he is the king of England and offers her the honorable place of a mistress at his court. A majestic expression of appreciation, indeed."

“Do not marry, or you will perish,” young Shevchenko was advised by the famous Bruelov who himself at that moment was marrying an unusual beauty whose voice, according to Shevchenko, was “so sweet and charming that I listened and did not believe myself that I was listening to the voice of an earthly mortal being but to some ethereal goddess. Whether it was the magic influence of her beauty, or whether she actually sang that well, I could not say for certain, but even now, occasionally, I seem to hear her charming voice.”

The recent serf was now tasting new life in Petersburg. There he met “those clever fellows from the great world who poured wit as if it came from their sleeves and knew vaudeville couplets without number.” He went to the masquerades, ate at luxurious restaurants, and spent money recklessly.

One day he dined with the Bruelovs. The wife of his tutor seemed to him unusually charming and welcoming. Everything appeared peaceful until the next day when Bruelov greeted Shevchenko with the following words: “Congratulate me! I am not married!” and added, “Yesterday after dinner, my wife went to the Zavervieds and has not returned since.” That tragedy brought much grief to Shevchenko’s beloved tutor.

He studied French and attended lectures in physics. But he was troubled with incidents like the following one which he relates in his story, “Artist.”

“On the same floor on which I live, there moved in recently some official with his family: a wife, two children, and another poor soul, a

pretty fifteen-year old girl. How I found out all this, I will relate to you right away.

You remember well your past quarters. From a small entry, the doors opens to a common corridor. One day I opened this door, and just imagine my surprise. Before me stands a beautiful girl, embarrassed and blushing to her ears. I did not know what to say to her and, silent for a while, I bowed to her and she, covering her face with her hands, ran away and hid behind a neighbor's door. I could not understand what it all meant and after long surmisings and deductions I went to my class. I could not make any headway with my work. The next day she met me on the steps and blushed as she did before. I, also, stood still like one that is thunderstruck. She smiled, but so sincerely, so innocently that I could not help burst out laughing. Suddenly someone's footsteps cut our laughter short. She placed her finger to her lips and ran away. I went up the stairs with all the dignity I could muster and came to my room more mystified than ever.

The thought of her tormented me for a couple of days. Every so often I would go out into the corridor with the hope of meeting my unknown friend, but she, although coming out into the corridor, would hide so quickly that I did not even have a chance to nod my head in her direction, to say nothing of greeting her.

Thus a whole week went by and I began to forget all about her. But listen to what happened next. Sunday at ten o'clock in the morning, Yakim came to see me and guess whom he brought with him? My mysterious dirty-faced

beauty. 'I caught a burglar in your house,' he said, smiling. I glanced at the puzzling mischievous girl and became just as embarrassed as the caught culprit. Yakim noticed it and let go of the girl's hand and slyly smiled.

But the freed beauty did not run away as one would expect, but remained at her place and, adjusting on her head the kerchief and her hair, glanced around and exclaimed, 'I thought that you were sitting and painting right against the door, and you were in the next room.' 'And if he were painting right against the door?' asked Yakim. 'Then I could peek through the keyhole and watch him paint.' "

For a long time this young mischievous girl did not leave the mind of the young artist. She would run into Shevchenko's workshop several times a day: run in, chirped and flutter about as gay as a bird.

Once he had to call in a model. The neighbor's girl ran into his room, laughing and happy as usual, but when she noticed the model "she suddenly became numb, then uttered a cry and like a tigress jumped upon the model"—and became a model herself.

Once a friend asked him, "What may all these visits of your mischievous girl lead to?" at which the artist trembled but quickly regained his composure and answered, "In my opinion—to nothing." Then the friend added, "Take care of her, my friend, or beware of her. Do as you feel, only remember and never forget that a woman is a sacred and an unabusable object, and at the same time so fascinating that no will-power can resist her charm. Only the feeling of

the highest angelic love, only that alone can safeguard her from disgrace, and us from eternal remorse."

Having won a new prize in the academy, the artist ran from the academy to his dwelling and beaming with joy began to kiss his neighbor, Mrs. Mykhailova. Shevchenko relates that all this happened on the stairway, but in his opinion "there was nothing wrong in this, although thank God nobody saw it." Even then Shevchenko could not bear to have a woman's feelings hurt or her character besmirched, because: "To a woman, no matter who she may be, we owe, if not respect, at least decency."

He wracks his brain as to what to give this girl whom he was teaching to read. "They say that romance novels are not good for young girls to read, but really I do not see what there is wrong about them. A good romance sharpens the imagination and ennobles the heart, while a dry, though maybe a wise book, not only does not teach anything but even drives away desire to read."

At that time world-reared women appealed to Shevchenko because "Everything about them, from their words to their nations, is in such an even agreeable harmony." But all in all Shevchenko preferred the family life of the common people because, as he himself claimed, among them he felt perfectly at peace.

Everybody was taking a liking to this recent serf. Everybody was kind to him. Bruelov dined at his apartment. And yet, regardless of it all, he felt downcast at times. During such hours only his charming pupil-model had an

encouraging influence over him. It was then that he would have been so willing “to unfold to her his suffering soul; to flow open, to melt into tears before her.”

One thing saddened Shevchenko. His pupil on whom he relied so much did not like to read. During a whole month she hardly read half of “Robinson Crusoe.” “I must confess to you that such indifference was very bitter to me, so bitter that I began to repent for having taught her to read. Of course I did not tell her that, I only thought so, and she, as if she had espied my thoughts, next day finished reading the book and in the evening by the tea table related to her indifferent aunt all about that eternal creation of Defoe—and with such spirited sincerity and in such detail that I was ready to kiss my pupil.”

Kobzar and Haidamaky

It seemed that the life of the capital had engulfed Shevchenko in a whirl. The Academy, the famous painter who became his tutor and friend, famous poets, friends and acquaintances, luxurious restaurants with good wines and good music, beautiful and cultured women’s companionship, the theatre and ballet—all must have enticed him a great deal.

It is reasonable to think that the mind of the recent serf should have been in a daze, and therefore it is interesting to know what Shevchenko thought of himself at that time: “You dress yourself well, go to the theatre,”

he wrote, then, "listen to concerts, live among good, thoughtful people: in one word, you bask in a paradise — but what is happening there, at your home, in Ukraine?"

In such moments, which grew as time went by, he threw aside his brush, his associations. He locked himself up and composed verses. The first poetic work he wrote was "Prychynna" (Bewitched), a ballad about a girl who wanders by a grove beside a pond and waits for her young Kozak lover who left her with promises of returning within a year, and whom she has given up for dead. Why this injustice to the young people, and why to an orphan?

.... Oh God, Almighty!
Why do you punish her innocent youth?
Because she gave her heart away
To a Kozak lad? Forgive the poor orphan.
Whom is she to love? Without a kin,
She is just like a bird in a strange land.¹²

The fact that Shevchenko composed verses was known by his friend, Hrebinka, a Ukrainian poet, who in a letter to another Ukrainian writer, Kvitka Osnovianenko, in the year 1833, wrote: "There is, here, a countryman of ours by the name of Shevchenko, and how eager he is to write verses! When he writes something, one might as well sit down and gape with admiration..."

And it is no wonder that Hrebinka wrote what he did when we consider that young Shevchenko in the twenty-fourth year of his life, having just come into freedom, composed a

poem which begins with this description of nature:

Roaring, the groaning Dnieper stretches;
The whining wind with anger raves
And lofty willows which it catches
Bow to the rolling mounting waves.

The pallid moon in mystic motion
Is peeking from behind its shrouds
And like a skiff out on the ocean
Comes up and sinks behind the clouds.

The morning heralds are yet resting
And everywhere calmness reigns,
While in the grove the owls are calling
And branches creak and creak again.¹³

which, set to music, has become one of the most popular of the Ukrainian songs.

One day Peter Martos, a wealthy Ukrainian landowner of Poltava, whose portrait Shevchenko was painting, picked up off the floor a piece of paper covered with verses. Word by word he found out that Shevchenko not only painted but wrote, as well. Martos read other verses and became so enthusiastic over them that he undertook to publish them at his own expense.

In this manner there appeared in Petersburg, in 1840, a little book entitled "Kobzar," a collection of Shevchenko's poems. Reading it, Kvitka wrote that his hair stood on end and that he pressed the "Kobzar" to his heart because the thoughts expressed in it lay heavily upon his soul. For, as Shevchenko wrote:

There was a time when cannon roar
Re-echoed through Ukraine,

When Zaporozhian lads knew how
To rule their own domain.
Ruling nobly, they, with courage,
Gained freedom and glory —
But that has passed, and what is left
Are graves to tell the story.¹⁴

Into this first collection entered Shevchenko's ballad "Topolia" (The Poplar), about a girl who fell in love with a Kozak who went away and perished. The poet advises the girls to:

Be loved and love with tenderness
Just like your heart dictates.¹⁵

because he believes that:

The heart alone knows best
Whom it shall love! ¹⁶

and that life is incomplete without love, because:

Without true love the daily light
Is like a rival's greeting,
Without a lover all is still
And yet the heart keeps beating.¹⁷

That is why this girl does not listen to her mother and spurns her wealthy but unwanted suitor. To her mother's advice that:

"You will lord o'er others,"
she replies:

"I don't want to rule o'er others,
I don't want another;
With the scarfs that I have gathered
Bury me, dear mother!" ¹⁸

In this first collection, the “Kobzar,” there is another poem “Kateryna” (Catherine) in which the mother tells her daughter to leave the house with her infant which was born out of wedlock, and to go into the world to seek the father of the child. She tells her to go and never to return. The girl’s mother, obedient to the harsh moral code of the Ukrainian village, refuses to retain the wrongdoer at home. The mother faints, and the father, when Kateryna falls to his feet and begs for forgiveness, replies:

“My Almighty God forgive you
And the folks remember not!
Repent to God and go to your way —
’Twill ease our heavy lot.”¹⁹

This harsh moral code was a necessary evil that helped to prevent the Ukrainians from losing their identity through centuries of oppression by the foreign invaders and occupants of their land. Although Shevchenko realized it, yet he was touched by its cruelty.

In silence Kateryna leaves her home. From under a cherry tree she takes a bit of earth which she wraps and ties to her cross and walks through the village:

Kateryna’s weeping —
Tucking the shawl o’er her shoulders —
While her babe is sleeping.
Turning back to see her village —
Her lonely heart breaking,
She bows her head in despair
And bursts into tears.
Just like a poplar tree she stood

Beside a trodden way,
And like the dew before the sun
Her tears could not stay.

Behind those tears of bitterness
The world is void to her,
She hugs and kisses her dear son
Whom even sobs can't stir.
And he, that wee angelic tot,
Knows naught and nothing heeds
But with his tiny hands just seeks
The bosom that he needs.²⁰

Encouraging the poor unwed mother, Shevchenko advises her not to bear a grievance against the people who bow to irresistible forces. The people sway just like those willows: they bow whichever way the wind may blow — and punish those whom God has punished:

Dear Kateryna, do not weep,
Don't show the people any tears
But suffer unto death!
And that your color may not wane
And eyes may glow with years,
Within some shaded nook at dawn
You bathe yourself with tears!
Weeping alone, none will see you
Nor laugh at your sorrow,
And the heart will rest a moment
While your tears are flowing.²¹

And he realizes the lot of the child, that poor little unfortunate victim of circumstances: Stranded mongrels somehow make a living, And at times such orphans get praises on earth; They are curst and beaten, often denied freedom,

Yet, you will find no one to question their birth.
But Ivan they'll question, yes, question him
early,
Long before the youngster gets a chance to
speak.
At whom do the dogs bark in the village byway?
Whom naked and hungry, do you often see?
And who leads the beggars? Boys without a
name.²²

Girls! Love as your hearts dictate, but at
the same time mellow your passions with reason
that you may not have to seek the stranger as
did poor Kateryna. That is the advice that Shev-
chenko left to girls.

In the midst of pleasant people but in a
foreign land, Shevchenko's heart longed for
Ukraine:

Ukraina, Ukraina,
Mother, dearest Mother!
When I think of you, my homeland,
My heart pains with anguish.²³

The poet's heart ached because the world
did not care how shackle-bound was Ukraine
which like an orphan wept by the Dnieper River.
His heart wept because she was seen only by the
foes who had enslaved her and were gloating
over her, to which he answered:

Gloat ye bitter foeman!
Gloat your fill, for all will perish
But our fame will never,
Never perish, but will cherish
To relate the story:
Who's in error, who used terror,
Wherein lies our glory.

Our lore and our folk songs
Will never die, never;
That's the glory — our glory,
Ukraine's fame forever! ²⁴

Shevchenko felt that no one would feel or understand his expressions of sorrow and his thoughts, there, in Petersburg, in the capital of Russia which had enslaved Ukraine. Therefore he sent all those thoughts, embodied in this first book of his, into Ukraine.

Go into Ukraine, my children,
Into Ukraine . . .

because:

There you'll find the hearts more cordial,
Words sincerely spoken,
There will you find truth more hearty
And, perhaps, some glory. ²⁵

One year after "Kobzar" first went into print, there appeared in Petersburg, in 1841, Shevchenko's greatest poem "Haidamaky," which was based upon the Ukrainian people's uprisings in 1768 against the Polish lords, against the foreign feudal oppression. For out of the old Kozak freedom and glory nothing remained but ruins, where:

..... The people die:
Children are without a God or friend —
The Kozak youth, the sons and daughters,
The beauty of the Kozak land,
Are held in bondage. ²⁶

He portrays the destruction throughout Ukraine under foreign Polish rule.

Ukraine is flaming to the sky;
Through villages the naked children
Weep for their fathers.

Faded leaves

Are rustling over lifeless meadows,
The clouds are drowsing, sun's asleep,
The villages draw howling shadows
Which scent the corpse²⁷

And here, in between these scenes, Shevchenko weaves in his ever-present Oxana. Here she comes to her lover, the orphaned Jarema, who is impatiently waiting for her.

And willows bowed to listen
To their conversation.
What words did flow. No, girls,
'Tis best you do not know.
I will not tell you at this time —
For you might dream about it all.
Why not just let them go away
As they had come together,
So quietly that none may see
The mounting myriad
Of tears that the girl had shed
Or those sincere ones of the lad.²⁸

This Oxana falls a victim to the wantonness of the Polish nobility and therefore Jarema seeks vengeance for the people's wrongs and for his Oxana.

"Kobzar" and "Haidamaky" instantly covered Shevchenko with fame throughout Ukraine. Everybody realized that a genius had appeared. Among the educated circles in Ukraine, won-

ders were attributed to a person who — a serf to the twenty-fourth year of his life—having gained freedom wrote, in Ukrainian, thoughts which, as Kvitka, an eminent Ukrainian writer himself, said, “made the reader’s hair stand on end.”

In 1843, Shevchenko follows his poems to Ukraine. He left Ukraine as a fifteen-year old ragged and unkempt slave. He was returning as a matured man with a high forehead, dark-gray deep-set eyes, a small mouth, his bushy hair combed to the left, his chin clean shaven and dressed well with a stylish kerchief tied around his neck—and a coat for which he paid 100 rubles!

Fourteen years ago not a soul in Ukraine had paid any attention to him; now as he entered his native land he was escorted, as an honored guest, even to the princely palaces. That is how, on various occasions, Shevchenko visited the home of Prince M. Repnin, the former Governor General of the Kiev province, who had fallen into disfavor with the Czar on account of his liberal views.

(The wife of Prince Repnin was the granddaughter of Kyrylo Rozumovsky, the last hetman of Ukraine. In the Russian ministry, in Petersburg, Prince Repnin was accused of Ukrainian separatism — of intending to separate Ukraine from Russia, and to proclaim himself as its hetman. The Prince was himself an opponent of serfdom and stood for the old Kozak laws and traditions. This explains the reason why the recent serf, Shevchenko, was a welcomed guest of the Repnins.)

Princess Repnin

At the home of Prince Repnin, the twenty-nine year old recent serf, Taras Shevchenko, met the thirty-five year old Princess Barbara Repnin, a highly educated and very pleasant woman, a person brought up in wealth and luxury whom a friend, Peter Seletsky, described as quick, energetic, kind, witty, pleasant and likeable, and "the providence of the poor and the unfortunate."

The princess described her first meeting with Shevchenko in a letter written to her spiritual father, Charles Einer of Switzerland, as follows:

"One day last year during the month of July I went with my mother to the park. Very likely it was about six o'clock. She wore her great big hat with a veil, as usual. I did not look about so we did not know what was happening in the sky. We had not taken a hundred paces when we met Kapnist with another person, unknown to me. Kapnist said, 'A thunderstorm is coming, look at the sky.' And true enough: heavy black clouds seemed to be ready to burst over our heads. Mother, however, would not give in; perhaps we would be able to make the circle. While we were yet talking, the storm burst and a downpour followed. Kapnist seized mother's arm and ran ahead and I slowly followed; but the stranger remained . . . When we came home Kapnist returned to the park for his friend. I went out on mother's balcony and soon noticed the two returning, drenched to the skin. Kapnist, who lived with us during part of the summer because of his ill son, requested permission

to show his friend, a painter, the paintings in the living room. Naturally the permission was granted, and it was only then that I learned that this stranger was an artist-painter and a poet; furthermore, even a greater poet than a painter—and that they call him Shevchenko. Memorize that name, my dear teacher; it belongs to my stardom. In the evening Kapnist came to tea alone and with that charming diction which makes him so pleasant in spite of his ugliness began to relate to us about Shevchenko, about his originality, about the fact that he is a poet even in his external motions."

Then the princess described the life of Shevchenko and said that he came from a family of serfs. But what it meant to be "a serf...that," wrote the princess, "a Swiss, son of a free nation, would not be able to understand."

Shevchenko left with the Repnins a pleasant impression from the very start. Even during his first visit he sang to them Ukrainian songs and Princess Repnin, mentioning his singing, said that "Shevchenko's soft and trustful voice gradually permeated my soul."

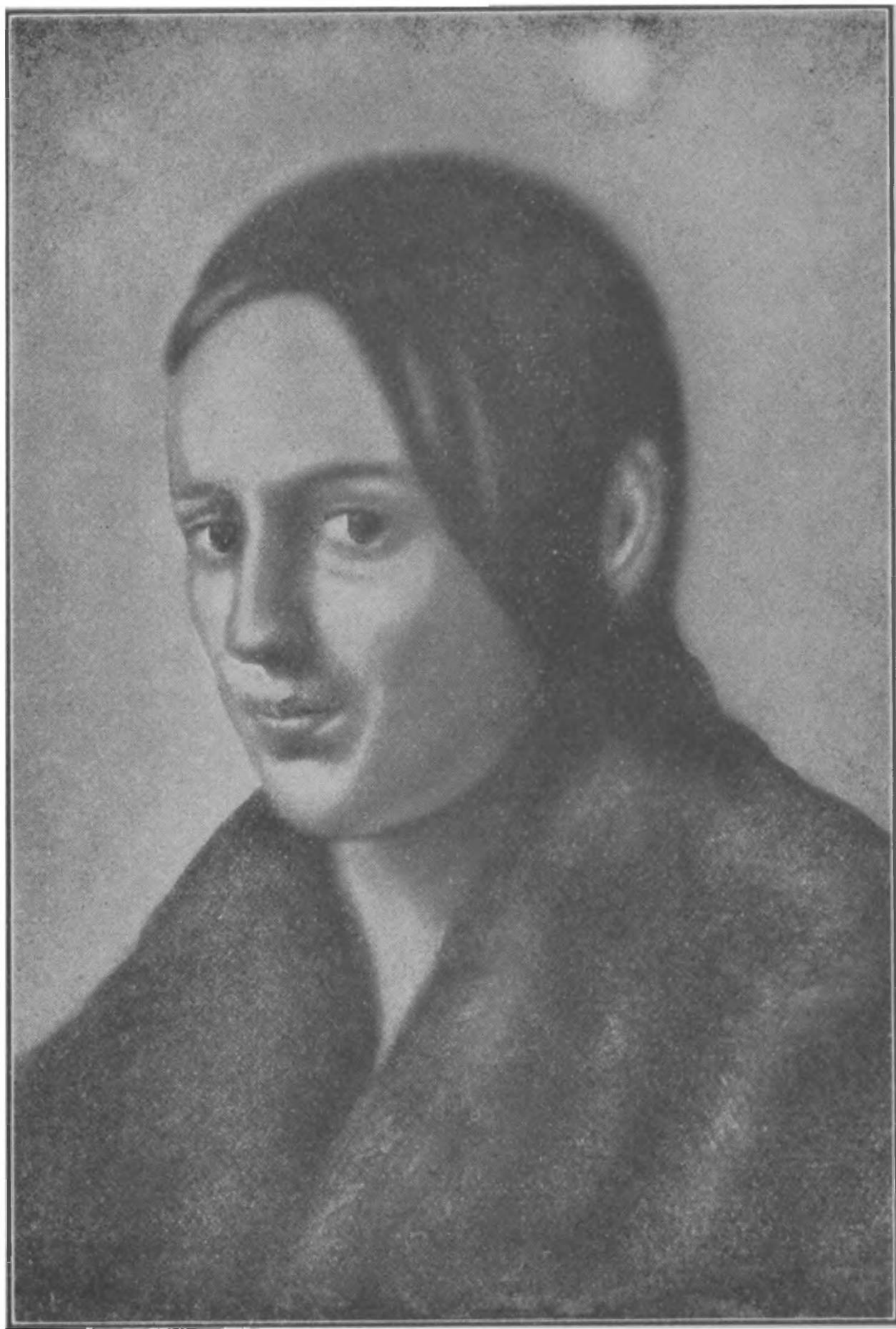
Shevchenko soon became the outstanding figure at the Repnins and at other manors which he happened to visit. The ladies spoke of no one but of him. Some, because it was in style, and others because of women's coquetry. But Princess Barbara looked at him with different eyes. Here is how she described her emotions when listening to Shevchenko reading his poem "Slipa" (The Blind Girl): "and now he begins to read—if I could only convey to you all that I lived through during that reading:

what feeling, what thoughts, what beauty, what charm, and what sorrow. My eyes were constantly moist with tears, and that was fortunate because I would have had to cry out aloud if my emotions had not found this exit for themselves. I felt an agonizing grief within my bosom and after the reading I did not say a word. You know that in spite of all my talkativeness, in times of emotional excitement I lose the ability to speak. And what a soft and charming manner of reading. It was a gripping music that sang melodious verses in our pretty tongue which is so adaptable to all expression."

How Shevchenko moved the princess with his personality and his readings may be seen in what she wrote further. "Before sleep I prayed so deeply, I loved the world so sincerely, I was so good—I'm afraid even better than I actually am."

On the other hand she was disturbed by the fact that Shevchenko seemed to pay more attention to Glafera, a pretty, flirtatious close friend of the princess. This annoyed her. She wished him well, wished to help him herself, and at the same time felt jealous. All that is related in a story, written by the princess, in which under the name of Berezovsky is hidden Shevchenko and under the name of Vera breathes Barbara Repnin, while Sophia represents Glafera.

It may be well to mention that the blonde curly haired Glafera, a ward of the Repnins, appealed to Shevchenko for the additional reason that she had artistic talent and was a painter, also. She made several drawings of Shevchenko which have been preserved to this day; and her



PRINCESS BARBARA REPNIN
(From a contemporary portrait)

sister, Elizabeth, left some fine verses about Shevchenko. It is recorded that Glafera was entranced when she listened to Shevchenko's readings. Princess Barbara describes her as follows: "She is intelligent—very intelligent, good, quick to grasp, and is unusually gifted with an understanding of that which is beautiful."

In this story there is a ball given at a princess' home. In spite of all the activity the men appear tired and bored. The women talk about everything but what is actually on their minds. Into this boresome atmosphere enters life: Berezovsky appears. A general loud "Ah" greets the smiling young man. He bows to this one, answers that one, shakes hands with a third and smiles to still another. Vera is dancing. But floating through her waltz she belongs only superficially to those who take part in the gayety. They sit at a table. Berezovsky bends over Sophia, whispers to her, and she "blushing and smiling, answers that the poets are accustomed to speak pleasantries," to which Vera sullenly remarks that, "Fortunately there are poets who do not lower their talents to such nonsense, leaving such occupation to the salon chaperons." But this does not help because another beauty, Olga, and a glass of champagne draw Berezovsky into further conversation which worries and enrages Vera, because she has realized that he could be great, and with all her soul she wanted that he should always and in all things be great"; because he was a poet in the full meaning of the word, because "...with his verses he conquered all, he drew tears from the eyes of both the old and the young, the level-headed and the hot-tem-

pered. He became fascinating while reading his own wonderful creations; his musical voice poured into the hearts of the listeners all the emotional feelings that overwhelmed him at the time. He was gifted with more than a talent. He was gifted with genius, and his sensitive and kindly soul tuned his flute to the highest and the holiest."

"It was impossible not to love him," says Vera. And how "she used to pray to God that He may bless the beloved poet with genius, that He would help him attain the high goal assigned to him, that He would bless with rays of fame and fortune the earthly highway of her hero whom she asked only to believe in her own conditional friendship."

Berezovsky knew about Vera's attitude toward him and so "was certain of the steadiness of her feelings and on his part did not make any attempts to cater to them and support them." This sign of coolness grieved the princess. It grieved her all the more when she heard her friend laugh at Berezovsky's courtship of Sophia. She is told that the girl is a countess, beautiful and wealthy, while "...He? Who is he?" Vera, unable to control herself, answers with emphasis that the Countess Sophia is not worthy of the serf because he is "a genius full of goodness, a noble soul—he is all poetry."

That is how Berezovsky appeared to Vera. She loved him sincerely—not only as the intelligent good man with a passionate soul which bound her to "him with confidence, but as the ray of her native land."

She did not want to see him in the company of wasteful and drunken young men, nor

in the company of empty-headed flirtatious women because "he is fascinating with the genius in his high and open forehead." She always wanted to see him when "the bright flame burns in his eyes," because then "he is truly wise and good . . ."

"Having once seen him in his greatness, I wished him to be constantly holy and glorified so that he would spread truth with the strength of unequaled talent—and wanted that all this would happen through me."

And how happy she was on the occasion when, after having asked Shevchenko if he knows how to converse with the angels, he sat down and composed a verse in Russian about a good angel, and dedicated it to her. That time she could not restrain herself from kissing Shevchenko — on the forehead. She told her mother all about it—"except about the kiss."

But as time went on the breach between Shevchenko and the princess seemed to widen. She complained in a letter that Shevchenko was not talkative with her, that he avoided her, that they both "have the appearance of two lovers after a quarrel." And "finally he became so reserved and so cool toward me that, on account of it, I not only felt sad but even became ill." But in a few days Shevchenko came and kissed her hand "with such tenderness and sincerity that my heart felt happy again."

The mother of the princess did not pay any attention to all this. She was sickly and had never thought that the relationship between her

daughter and the recent serf would extend so far as to have the princess kiss a serf. But others noticed it, especially Kapnist, the friend of the House of Repnin as well as of Shevchenko. It was he who warned the princess and told her that she proceeded very egoistically when she did not consider the consequences of her relationship with Shevchenko, to which she retorted that she had thought of it well, and considered the warning justifiable. However, she only wanted to be a friend, a sister to Shevchenko and that in the thirty-fifth year of her life she was able to control herself. But Kapnist warned her that "age does not prove anything, and when a woman and a young man call each other sister and brother there is always a sign of danger," wrote the princess in her diary.

At another time Kapnist told the princess that he knew that Shevchenko was certain of the princess' love for him. Therefore, at the first opportunity, she related to Shevchenko all about her feelings toward him and told him that she "could sincerely love his wife whenever he married," that she "wanted him to be good, clean and great." But when after that conversation Shevchenko became cool and silent or indifferent, she became irritated anew.

Once, a nobleman, a seeming friend of Shevchenko, insulted him by reminding him of his serfdom. When Shevchenko read this insulting letter to the princess he was touched to tears. She related her feelings as follows: "To see a man weep and especially when you love him, to feel that he was insulted, is extremely painful. I did not know what to say, what to do to encourage him. I rested his head on my bosom,

embraced him, kissed his hand—would have kissed his feet.”

The relations between Shevchenko and Princess Barbara were such that, as she wrote, “I spoke with him several times and each time brought my affection more and more to the surface. He answered me at times with warm sympathy but never with ardor.”

Shevchenko called the princess “sister.” He spoke to her frequently through the intimate “thou.” But this, according to the princess, should be understood differently with Shevchenko, because, “Shevchenko is a child of nature... However, he has a lot of tact, kindness and respect for everything sacred, therefore he is courteous to all, respectful to the elders—and all love him.”

According to the princess, Kapnist was certain that she loved Shevchenko and that she had lost her head over him—the princess herself claimed that she was much bound to him.

“If I saw,” wrote the princess, “love from his side, perhaps I would have answered with passion...” As it was, Shevchenko moved her so deeply that she “forgot the Bible, became slovenly and negligent in prayers.”

Again, in her story, she admitted that Shevchenko (Berezovsky) “could have become the choice of my soul, but now it is certain that my feelings toward him are no more than that of friendship... But,” she continued, “I do not need his love. I only want to see him happy, famous and good.”

Princess Barbara knew various European languages, as was the custom of the time, but knew not her own native tongue of Ukraine.

Under the influence of Shevchenko she began to study the language of the serfs, her own native tongue, so that she could better understand the words of Shevchenko and get acquainted with the whole beauty of his poetry. Together with Shevchenko she suffered over the fact that people groaned in slavery, darkness, and poverty, and deeply felt Shevchenko's protests against the Czarist regime.

I Was Everywhere and Wept Everywhere

In journeying through Ukraine, Shevchenko observed the hell of serfdom from which he had emerged. "I was everywhere and wept everywhere," he wrote. In his village he learned about the tragic fate of his beloved dark-eyed Oxana. He described it, later, in 1849, in his poem "We Grew Up Together . . ."

".....Is she,
Oxana, still alive?" I ask
My brother quietly, and he:
"Which one?"
"The one with curly hair,
The one with whom we used to play."
"Why do you look so sad today?"
"I am not sad..."
"She, simple-hearted,
Followed the soldiers * quartered here.
Whereto she had departed no one knows.
Yes, she returned within a year —
Her tresses gone — she had a child.

Whenever the moon was full and high
She'd sit against a fence and often
Coo just like a bird, or cry,
Or softly sing; and while cooing,
She was oft seen her hair undoing...
Then, once, just where or what the cause
No one can say, she left these places...
Just went astray, yes, lost her senses...
And what a pretty girl she was!"²⁹

Having returned from Ukraine to Petersburg, he could not shake off the impressions which he had gathered in Ukraine. Before his eyes stood the poor widow, "Sova" (The Owl). It was one of the many curtains of injustice which he had witnessed in Ukraine. He portrayed a widow who hung all her hopes on her only child. This boy absorbed all her attention and care. She rocked him at midnight and sang him to sleep:

Lullaby my baby,
I have asked, and maybe
What the bird has spoken
Is a kindly token.³⁰

For a bird had told the widow that she would prosper — because her son would grow up

As tall as a tree,
And healthy, graceful,
And happy he'll be.³¹

When the boy did grow up, however, the boys in the village were chained in irons, that is, they were conscripted into the army. Being a widow, she was entitled to retain her son, but

All the lads who are rejected
Are boys of the wealthy.

This one is a cripple so can't go,
This one is not healthy,
That one's cross-eyed or is lame —
And so with the others:
All lack something, all not wanted,
All rejoin their mothers . . .
But the widow has one son
And he's fitted for the gun.³²

And so the son went to serve the Czar. No news came from him for a year, two, nor ten years. The old widow went to work, prayed, wept, and waited. Finally, unable to bear the strain, cursing everything on earth, she became insane.

As time went on, it became more and more painful for Shevchenko to write. It seems that no one sympathized with his thoughts.

All are deaf and all are bending
And resigning o'er their chains! ³³

he wrote in his poem "N. V. Hoholiu," dedicated to that famous son of Ukraine, Nicholas Hohol (Gogol). He doubted whether under such despotism as ruled at the time

. In Ukraine will roar
The cannons of freedom.³⁴

His heart grieved. Why do you grieve? Shevchenko asked himself in his "Son" (A Dream) and answered:

" Why? Have you no eyes!
Are you deaf, that you don't hear the people cry?
Then look and closely watch! And I will fly
Way high above that curtain of the floating
splendor

Where none, for breathing truth, is termed
offender,

Where the lament and human laughter is not
heard.

Look yon! In this paradise, which you are
leaving,

They're tearing off a cripple's only rags —

They're stripping off his skin, because they need
To clothe the growing lords.

And yon they crucify

A widow for the tax, and lead away from her

Her one and only hope, her only son, in chains,

Her only boy is for the guns conscripted —

Because he could be seen.

And there by a fence

A bloated baby, blue with hunger, is to die

Because, in feudal labor, the mother cuts the
rye.

And yonder—see? Oh, eyes, be damned!

You should have withered early with the tears!

That is an unwed mother with her child

Seeking some food and shelter from the storm;

Her parents have refused to see her

And even beggars shun her form.³⁵

This demoralization of the peasants by the nobility added to the national poverty which Shevchenko saw in Ukraine. In this same poem Shevchenko branded despotism, accused czarism for the people's wrongs, cursed the Czar, Peter the Great, who had imprisoned and starved to death the Ukrainian Hetman Pavlo Polubutok, and denounced Catherine II who had ruined the Zaporozhian Sitch (the Kozak organization located on the Dnieper River).

This is "The First" who crucified
Our Ukraine; the other
Is "The Second" who had finished
The poor orphaned mother.*

On March 22, 1845, Shevchenko concluded his studies at the Petersburg Academy and obtained the diploma of a "Free Artist." Again he went to visit Ukraine. And again the poet complained that the people groaned in chains.

The year 1845 was the year of his greatest productivity, and his greatest revolt against the social order built upon lies and injustice. It was his prophecy that eventually •

Ukraine will arise from slumber
And will lift the fog of bondage;
Truth on earth will then prevail
And the children born in bondage
Will arise and pray in freedom!³⁷

This was the time when Shevchenko announced his "Zapovit" (Legacy). Because this poem has been the rallying call of the Ukrainians since its publication, it is presented here in its entirety. It is a call to all Ukrainians — and the Ukrainian womanhood has rallied to its command through its ever-growing organizational activity.

When I die then have me buried
And arraigned within a mound
'Neath the open sky of prairies,
In Ukraine, my native ground;
That the steppes and river windings
And the birds a-soaring
I may gaze on, I may listen
To the Dnieper roaring.

When the foeman's blood shall vanish
From the river shallows
In the thirsty sea — then, only,
Will I leave the fallows
And the hills and fly to heaven
To my very Master
With my prayers. In the meantime
I know not a Master.
Lay me down and wake from slumber,
Rend your bonds asunder!
With the evil blood of foemen
Check their brutal plunder;
Then, as free, respected kindred,
With your unity not broken,
Don't forget me with a tender
Word, though softly spoken.⁸⁸

At the same time Shevchenko pictured the different types of women sufferers. In "Lileya" (The Lily) he came to the defense of the unfortunate girl with the illegitimate child, a victim of wanton feudalism whom the people tormented: cut off her long hair and laughed at her. But after death, God transformed that unfortunate girl into a wonderful lily which is so proudly displayed in palaces. And so the poor soul asks why the gods had changed her into a white flower:

To make the people happy —
The ones who deflowered
And killed me and mother?⁸⁹

And how much mother love and sacrifice Shevchenko poured into his "Naimytchka" (The Hired Woman) who, for the sake of the child whom she had forsaken at the home of some

strangers, became their hired woman without disclosing her identity. She denied herself the food she needed and yet she suckled the baby; and at night, no matter how worn and tired she felt she always heard the baby breathe. Marko, the boy, grew up. He was about to get married and, since the foster-mother had died, he asked the servant to stand up for him in place of the mother. The mother-servant, however, refused for fear that the wealthy people would snicker. She bore that burden of silence through many years but, on her death bed, at the last moment, she finally confessed:

“Please forgive me . . . outside this home
I have not known another . . .
Forgive me, my . . . my son!
I . . . I am your mother!” ⁴⁰

The mother, in “Vidma” (The Witch), forgave even the nobleman who had seduced her, who exchanged her daughter for a hound and lost her son at cards. When the lord was dying, she even placed a candle in his hands, made the sign of the cross over him and prayed “Our Father . . .”

At that time Shevchenko was in the prime of his entire career, and so his friends wanted to elevate him still higher. Unbeknown to Shevchenko, Anna Barvinok, the wife of the famous Ukrainian writer, Panko Kulish, offered her jewelry and heirlooms in order to send the poet into the world, especially to Italy, so that he could finish his studies in painting there.

Princess Repnin collected funds for the publication of "Zhyvopysna Ukraina" which Shevchenko was to have edited, and tried to obtain for the poet a position in the Kiev University. She corresponded with the poet and encouraged him when his poetic flight seemed to descend. She tried to convince Shevchenko that he should have felt very fortunate and happy because there were so many honest and warm souls who wished him well.

She was concerned about the welfare of Shevchenko. She dissuaded him from wasteful company and suggested to him a list of people with whom he ought to get acquainted because, as she wrote to Shevchenko, "among such friends everything beautiful and noble that is in you will flourish all the more; you will feel better and all you sincere friends will feel happy."





**SHEVCHENKO AS A SOLDIER IN THE
DISCIPLINARY BATTALION**

(From a drawing by himself)

Arrest, Sentence and Exile

That was the time in Russia when no murderer or wrongdoer was watched and searched for as much as was a new book. Shevchenko's poems, from which emerged terrible blows at the oppressors of the enslaved masses, appeared at a time when such words as "constitution," "deputy elections," "people's will," and "needs of the working classes" were forbidden by official decrees.

The fate of the writer who had the courage to ignore these decrees was well described by Alexander Hertzen, in a book published in London, in 1853, about "Social Relations in Russia." He wrote:

"A sad and frightful fate awaits any of us who dares to raise his voice over the limits established by the Czar's decrees. A relentless fate drives him to his grave, no matter who he may be: poet, ordinary citizen, or a philosopher. And the history of our literature is a list of martyrs or an announcement of the punished . . .

"Ryliev was hanged by the order of Nicholas I, and Pushkin was killed in a duel at the age of thirty-eight. Griboedoff was murdered in Terregan. Liermontov was killed in Caucasus on the duelling field at the age of thirty. Venetinov died as a twenty-two year old lad because of the prevailing social conditions. Koltsov was tortured to death by his immediate surroundings at the age of thirty-three. Bielinsky died from cold and hunger, having attained the age of thirty-three. Poliezhaev died

in a military hospital after a forced eight-year service in the Caucasus Mountains. Bariatinsky died in exile where he suffered for twelve years. Bertuzhev died in the Caucasus at a very early age . . .”

All this Shevchenko heard about and knew very well. But the frightful fate of the others did not intimidate his spirit nor halt his protest against oppression and exploitation. Instead, in his poems, he protested against the ravaging policies of the governing regime more strongly than any of those punished writers, and even stronger than all of them combined.

The consequences of this were evident. One day, when through the efforts of Princess Repnin and other friends he was granted a position in the Kiev University, he was arrested. This happened in Kiev on April 5th, 1847. He was immediately taken from Kiev to Petersburg and there his trial began.

Sitting in the fort-prison, far from Ukraine, and waiting for the verdict, Shevchenko was not concerned so much with what would happen to him as with what might happen to his beloved native land. The second stanza of the following poem, which is very popular among the Ukrainians, is considered by many as a sort of Shevchenko's prophecy that Ukraine, on account of her natural wealth, will gain her independence only through active, militant resistance.

’Tis all the same to me — whether
Or not Ukraine will be my home
Or, while I wade in distant snows,
I’ll linger in some memory —
’Tis all the very same to me! . . .

But all the same 'twill never be
When double-dealing evil neighbors
Will lull Ukraine and, having robbed her,
Will awaken her in flames...
To me 'twill never be the same! "⁴¹

In this prison he wrote such beautiful verses
as "Wechir" (Evening):

A little orchard by a dwelling
With June bugs humming overhead;
With merriment the girls do tread
As ploughmen homeward are returning
While mother waits to have them fed.

The kin are eating by the dwelling;
The evening star peeks o'er the bough;
A daughter serves with knitted brow
And listens to what mother's telling —
If but the nightingale would allow.

The mother placed beside the dwelling
Her little children in their nest —
And with a dream herself is blest.
All's still. Only the girls and warblers
Seem to forget it's time of rest."⁴²

In this prison he sang the griefs of a soldier
whose beloved Hanusia is seduced by a young
nobleman: the griefs of a serf who may not
even marry without the consent of, and a price
paid to, the girl's master.

He grieved for Ukraine and called to his
brothers to

Love to the end your native land,
Love your Ukraine!.. When time is
mocking,
When suffering and death are knocking,
Pray for her to The Guiding Hand; "⁴³

At the trial the chief of police, Count Orloff, made the accusation that Shevchenko "composed Ukrainian verses of a seriously, rebellious nature," that "in them he cries over the enslavement of the unfortunate Ukraine and acclaims the Cossack freedom of the hetmanship days," and that on account of that "he gained among his countrymen the fame of a great Ukrainian writer, and for that reason his verses are doubly harmful and dangerous." Count Orloff went on further to say that with those Shevchenko's poems, so beloved in Ukraine, there may be born in Ukraine "the conviction about the well-being of the hetmanship days: that the return of those times would be very fortunate, and that Ukraine could exist as an independent nation."

For that, Shevchenko was given the following sentence:

"The artist Shevchenko, for composing rebellious and to a great degree unbefitting verses, being a person of strong bodily constitution, shall be sent as a private to the separate Orenburg corps with the right of full service. The authorities are to be notified that he is to be guarded in every manner from writing rebellious and scandalous works." And under the decree, Czar Nicholas wrote in pencil, in his own hand: "To be under the strictest observation, having been prohibited to write and to draw." This, what Count Orloff called, "merciful sentence" was read to Shevchenko on May 30, 1847.

In a letter to Princess Repnin, Shevchenko wrote: "On the thirtieth day of May they read

to me my confirmation and I was no longer a professor of the Kiev University but a plain soldier of the Orenburg barracks . . . You would surely burst out laughing if you saw me now. Just imagine the most clumsy barrack soldier, unshaven, with unkempt hair and long whiskers — and it will be I. It is funny — yet sad. What else is there to do? It must be God's will. It seems that I have suffered little in my life. To tell the truth, all my past griefs have been child's tears in comparison with the present unbearably bitter ones. And the worst of it all is that I am prohibited to paint, to say nothing about writing (outside of letters), and there is so much to write."

To this the Princess answered: "No, I would not laugh but would weep if I saw you now, and would pray to God to grant me words with which to encourage you, to raise your soul above your bitter fate . . . if it depended on me, then, having opened my letter, you would be filled with benevolence which would refreshen you, strengthen you, and you would happily and humbly bear your cross . . . How well I understand your torture need not be painted! With God's permission, everything will change. . . . Just remember that many are praying for you, that although they are distant from you they think and watch after you."

These encouraging words came to Shevchenko at a time when the need of them may be judged by the following words written to this same friend: "In the past I looked at the animated and the still world as at the most perfect portrait, and now it seems the eyes

have changed: no line, no color — I cannot see anything. Could it be that the feeling of beauty is lost to me forever? And I cherished it, catered to it so much!"

In the Kirghiz Steppes and by the Aral Sea

Shevchenko's letters, quoted above, were written from the Orsk Fortress, situated in a silent desert which the Kirghis tribesmen called "the terrible place." That is where Shevchenko was exiled. The commander of the post notified the poet that he would be whipped at the post if he disregarded the rules laid down to him: that is, if he attempted to write or to draw. He was thrown into a filthy hovel among soldiers who found pleasure in obscenity. And thus the days were spent, as Shevchenko says, in exposing "an old fool to daily training." Despite these circumstances Shevchenko managed somehow to write a few verses which he hid in the calf of his boot. In this manner was preserved a whole cycle of his exile songs which are superb creations of Ukrainian lyric poetry. They are full of longing for native land, full of minor chords such as:

The sun is hiding: hillsides are fading,
The fields are calm: birds in their nests;
People are happy thinking of rest.
But while I'm gazing my heart is flying
To some dark orchard in Ukraine."

And the thoughts of the poet wandered from the dreary Kirghiz plains to the Ukrainian village.

A village! And the heart feels rested .
In our beloved Ukraine a village
Is like an Easter egg; when seen
The village is a vale of green.
An orchard blooms around each home
While on the hill a mansion bows
As if in wonder. And around:
The poplars spread their tiny shields
While there lie woods and groves and
fields,
And beyond the Dnieper, rest blue hills.
In every village there's God! ⁴⁵

Here, by this blessed village in Ukraine there lived a princess, "Kniazhna" (Princess), whom God had blessed with freedom, wisdom, beauty and a heart—but denied her love. And she wanted so much to taste the joy of love — even if only for a moment. You see, the prince was a drunkard so how could she love him — and

Life is so dreary and so cold
When one has not a heart to hold.

But the good God had blessed the princess with joy, because:

To see him first and then embrace
And kiss the one and only face,
And hear the first cry after birth!
Oh, children, children, children!
The greatest blessing known on earth!

The princesses, as rule, know only

.... To bring forth their children,
But about the babies' rearing
Princesses know nothing.

But Shevchenko's princess took care of her child herself.

Herself she made the shirts
Embroidering with silk each sleeve
With which she had her child dressed,
And bathed and lulled her babe to sleep,
And fed it with her breast.⁴⁶

The beautiful daughter grew up—the image of her mother. The mother died and her unfortunate daughter fell victim to the drunken prince — her own father.

How this wanton victimizing of the unprotected women angered Shevchenko may be seen in his poem "Warnak," 1848, where he described the vengeance of a serf on the nobility which was responsible for his girl's seduction.

I cut whatever smelled of "nobles,"
Unmercifully, without thought...

And here, again, the picture of his own unfortunate Oxana stood before his eyes. He saw her portrait as part of the picture of the native village and asked God why he was not allowed to finish his days in that village with his dear Oxana; then, that village with all its poverty would have been paradise compared with what he was living through at the time.

Princess Repnin sympathized with Shevchenko in his misfortune, tried to encourage him, and at the same time made various attempts to better his conditions. She ventured to write a letter to Count Orloff and begged him at least to let Shevchenko paint. In her letter to Orloff, she wrote: "...I stand before you, dear sir, as a representative of the unfortunate Shevchenko. Knowing him as I do, I can testify that no matter what his guilt may be, he has been punished enough by being exiled in the army away from his native land; therefore it seems hardly necessary to add to his suffering the refined cruelty of forbidding him to paint. I believe that you will understand, dear sir, that knowing Shevchenko as I do, knowing that he is the only one of his kind in this world, I feel it my duty to do everything possible to lighten his plight. To attain this aim, I have no other course but to appeal to you to obtain for him the permission to paint. I am asking this favor from you with my arms crossed upon my bosom! Although as an individual by myself I do not mean anything, yet, as the daughter of my father, I feel I have the right to speak for the unfortunate..."

And these are the Easter Greetings sent by her to Shevchenko in exile:

"May Christ arise within your soul, my dear Taras Hryhorievich; may He bless your soul; may holy blessings shine forth from your heart!"

Countess Glafera, who at one time was, as Shevchenko expressed it, his "sun," does not forget the exiled poet, also. Sending her "sincere and living sympathy" for the New Year (1848) she wrote, "What could I wish you for the New



SHEVCHENKO IN HIS YOUTH
(From an oilpainting by himself)

Year? God's blessings, suffering, and tears to refreshen and melt the spiritual emptiness of your life . . ."

To Shevchenko such letters were his only comfort during those trying times.

In the spring of 1848 he was sent with a research expedition to the Aral Sea, but those expeditions resembled military marches and in comparison with the hard life at the fort were worse than anything before. For a year and a half he could not correspond with anybody or receive any letters. During this period the princess thought that he had forgotten her. But as soon as Shevchenko returned to Orenburg he immediately sent a letter to her in which he wrote: "God forbid you to think that I could have forgotten you, my dear Barbara Mykolaivna." And his spiritual conditions may be best judged from the following words: "Just imagine! For practically three years not a single idea, not a single inspired thought — just prose and prose, or better to say, just steppes and steppes! Yes, my dear Barbara Mykolaivna, I am surprised myself at the change coming over me; now I do not seem to be either sad or happy; but, on the other hand, I seem to have a spiritual peace, a moral calm approaching the cold-bloodedness of the fish. The future does not exist for me. Is it possible that constant misery could so pitifully change a person?"

The correspondence of Shevchenko was closely watched. When Orloff found out that Princess Repnin was corresponding with Shevchenko, he wrote to her about it, saying: "Your correspondence with Shevchenko, and also the fact that Your Highness has already appealed to me to

intervene in his behalf in order to lighten the burdens of that common soldier, show that you have taken quite an unbecoming active interest in him—considering his spoiling and lax traits.” He finished the letter with a threat that if the princess did not cease to correspond with Shevchenko, she was to expect serious consequences.

From that time on there are no traces of correspondence between Shevchenko and the princess. Other letters did not reach him, either. He was left alone with his thoughts and with the poor Kirghizmen among whom he lived. He could not see the Ukrainian village, and the Ukrainian word was denied him. Only the evening star remained with him—the same star that shone in Ukraine, and so he turned toward her:

Thou, evening glory of the sky!
Arise above the hill
And we will talk, just you and I,
About the things we will:
About the setting of the sun
In our beloved Ukraine,
About our villages and nymphs,
And then—the same again.⁴⁸

As if in a dream he saw how

The moon was smiling at the stars,
And on a tree a nightingale
Was sending out a sweet refrain
Of thanks, to God, across a vale—
And all this happened in Ukraine.⁴⁹

From the village he turned again to the rulers' palaces. In his poem "Tsari" (The Czars), he branded the wantonness of David and his son Amon; he accused Volodymyr the Great for the seizure of Rohnida and the murder of her father, Rohvolod; and then, again, he ran away from the palaces to the peaceful village:

Come to the village: there live people!
Where people dwell—there all is well;
There we will live and thanks we'll give
To God, and love our common kin.⁵⁰

It is there in the village that poor Mykyta, a handsome youth, but the poorest of all, is watching the sexton's pretty daughter "Tytarivna" (The Sexton's Daughter), and:

His face all tense, he takes —
His only coin which he possessed
And pays for the music; then
He asks the sexton's haughty girl
To join him in a dance.
"Away from me, thou vagabond!"
She answered with a laugh,
And then, "Are common servant girls
For your kind not enough?"
The sexton's daughter laughed again
At him who made that one request;
Before the people she had scorned
The man who was but humbly dressed.⁵¹

Yes, she scorned him before the people, but on returning home she could not eat or sleep, because:

Of all the wonders on this earth
The greatest is the heart:
With things which yesterday it scorned
Today it would not part;
It wants that something so much so
All reservations melt.
That is the way the hungry heart
Of this proud maiden felt...

and so:

Beware, my girls, and do not laugh
At those who may be not your equal,
Or you may be the subject of
The sexton daughter's sequel.⁵²

And with this background the poet portrayed further the tragic life of the sexton's daughter.

But the call of the village is ever-present. Another portrait, and again of nobility. Shevchenko realized that the nobility would have liked to accuse him of insincerity, by saying:

... He lies
Because he is himself a slave —
Uneducated homeless knave.

to which Shevchenko replied:

It isn't true! Why should I lie to you!
I am not sorry I'm no lord,
But angry am, with sorrow deep,
At you, enlightened Christian horde.
Why even beasts won't do unto the sheep
What you, who piously so pray,
Do to your brothers every day.⁵³

And as example the poet depicted a lazy, wealthy land owner who, though married to a beautiful wife and the father of two beautiful children, demoralized the villages and everywhere left behind him unwed mothers with his begotten children. No one sympathized with those mothers and their children, with their tears and hardships. "Yet I," says the poet:

While telling you about their plight
Weep for them all.

Oh God of Right!

Endow my words with holy might,
To penetrate the people's hearts,
To make them shed a tear or two
That mercy may radiate
Their hearts, and silent grief — their eyes,
That they, with them, may sympathize.⁵⁴

But the poet's prayer seemed to be in vain because:

As long as villages
With nobles will exist,
You're bound to see the victim of
The wanton feudalism.⁵⁵

Again the Ukrainian village! He could not forget it. The village:

Where mother used to swathe me tight
And hold me close—and through the night
Would work, to buy a candle light
Which she, while praying on her knees,
Would place before the Virgin's niche
And beg, with prayers full of pleas,
To make her baby's future rich.⁵⁶

He could not forget the Ukrainian village, where:
The people must have gone stark mad:
They join the feudal labor crew
And bring their youngsters with them, too.⁵⁷

the Ukrainian villages where:

.... Throughout the famed Ukraine
People to slavery are chained
By crafty lords.⁵⁸

But if one did not look at this evil and poverty, then:

There, everything seems peaceful, good
And prospering throughout Ukraine;
The Dnieper River in its lane,
Just like the youth of babyhood,
Is radiating love and charm
Throughout the whole Ukraine,
While villages in green array
Spread out along its plains;
And, in their way, the villages
And people, too, seem gay.
Perhaps all this would be quite true
If all the traces of that crew
Of lords would vanish from Ukraine.

Yes, life in this world would be pleasant
even in this village, if fate was more kind to
those living in it. Even to the poor girl, life
would be more endurable if she had someone
with whom to share her heart.

Other girls at entertainments
Dance around in pretty raiments,
While I must pine and crave...
Without love, with hopes departed,
I am waning, hungry-hearted —
Just a daily working slave.⁶⁰

That is the way with the poor girl. However, very often, the rich girl does not fare any better:

Though wealthy I may be,
Though pretty I may be,
But having no one for a mate —
What good is life to me!

It is so hard to live apart,
With none to love; and how one loathes
To dress in silks and fancy clothes
And yet be just a lonesome heart.⁶¹

Oh, Fates! I might as well go drown
And finish in the sea
Since love, the thing I always crave,
You have denied to me.

When girls embrace with boys, and kiss,
And whispers charm their ears,
And what they live through at the time —
I'll never know, I fear.

Will never know. Oh, mother!
It's terrible to think
That one must spend her life alone
Upon a loveless brink.⁶²

And how unforgettable are those moments of sincere love:

The blissful valley that was ours,
The rolling ground, the rising mound,
The bright and peaceful evening hours,
And all our dreams, and spoken themes —
I never can forget . . .
But, what of it? We were not set
And left each other like we met.⁶³

Marry? What for? To worry about a family? Is it not better to live without any worries, to dress like a prince, and to enjoy life: wine, women and song? Yes, but what will happen when the old age begins to knock?

The youthful years have flown by —
Have gone the happy years,
And there is none with whom to trust
My heart and chilling fears;
For there is no one at the door
To keep the home-fires warm,
And not a soul to hand the glass
When illness twists my form.⁶⁴

The poet realized this and felt very bitter. He wanted to find a woman's heart which would have understood him:

I have a great and open heart
Yet none with whom to share it.
Thou hast—Thou hast denied to me
The fortunes of the youth,
Thou hast denied—denied to me
The love of fleeting youth!
Thou hast not mated my young heart
With that of some sweet lass!
And now, at last, all that is past;
My youthful nights and days,
Without a trace of happiness,
Have simply passed away
In my exile.⁶⁵

After all, what is life without love? But without the true, sincere love! That is why in "Petrus" (Peter) he stressed:

Love each other, children, early!
There're many in this world to love.

When not besmirched with thoughts of gain
Such willing love, blest from above,
Will always live in your abode,
And during life and strife will be
Your one companion on the road —
Here and after.⁶⁶

At such moments Shevchenko saw before
him the picture of a Mother. To him

The word “mother” is the greatest,
The holiest of words! ⁶⁷

because:

On this our earth, with beauty blest,
There is no beauty to surpass
The beauty of the mother-lass
With her small baby at her breast.⁶⁸

Denied the Only Favor

Shevchenko's years were passing by in his
exile. His youth flew by just like a storm. Ill-
ness was gradually undermining his once healthy
body, and longing and grief were extinguishing
his last hopes of returning to Ukraine. All
hopes of his prayers coming true were fading:

And I had wished so little from
Almighty God: only a home,
A cabin in a grove set high,
Two poplars reaching to the sky
And dear Oxana at my side,
So that the two of us could stand
Upon the hill and hand in hand
Could watch the Dnieper and the grounds,
Look on the golden colored fields
And on the scattered ancient mounds.⁶⁹

The poet asked the authorities for a favor: "I beg of you one favor—permission to draw." They refused it. Not only that, but the central authorities were informed that he wrote verses and drew in secret. A new arrest and another trial followed. The Czar himself followed closely the trial and warned the authorities for having neglected their charge: having permitted Shevchenko to write and sketch. Following this trial there followed another exile into a worse desert, the Petropavlovsk Fortress. Here he lived in complete silence for seven full years. In this way the czarism of Russia was killing the greatest poet of Ukraine at the height of his creative ability.

The years went by. On February 18, 1855, Czar Nicholas died. To his throne succeeded the young Czar Alexander II, a pupil of the poet Zhukovsky who was the friend of Shevchenko. Amnesty was granted to all political prisoners, but Shevchenko was not set free. It is said that the old Czarina could not forgive Shevchenko the fact that in his poem "Son" (A Dream) he referred to her as

Just like a mushroom dried within —
So lanky and so thin.

and

... Like a heron in the swamp
So does she plume and jump.¹⁰

Women in the Exiled Poet's Imagination

But just the same, the times had changed. There flashed a tiny ray of hope for freedom, for a new life, and perhaps even a family life.

It happened that the command of the fort was taken over by a humane and cultured person, Major Uskov, who came with his family which consisted of a young wife and their little daughter. Shevchenko's plight was eased somewhat in that he was not watched so strictly, and therefore he was allowed to write a little — if not in Ukrainian, at least in Russian. He became a frequent guest of the family and eventually painted the portrait of the young wife, Agatha.

While painting he observed her closely and saw in her the portrait of a woman, which he noted as follows: "What a wonderful and unusual creation is a virtuous woman! She is the brightest pearl in the necklace of all creations. If it was not for this alone, which is so close to my heart, I would not know what to do with myself. I have fallen in love with her, divinely — purely, with all my heart and soul. Do not for a moment, my dear friend, suspect a shade of any sin in this pure love of mine."

However, when a person under the influence of a pretty young woman begins to idealize her, we may be certain that love is taking root. But when such idealization pertains to a married woman, then one cannot wonder if it should become a topic of gossip. And so it happened with Shevchenko and Agatha. They became the topic of conversation among the officers stationed

there. This resulted in a social rupture. Agatha avoided Shevchenko's company and began to frequent the entertainments and parties arranged by the officers at their quarters. That hurt Shevchenko very deeply. But this blow made him look at women more soberly, although he admitted that no person could live without love — especially an artist:

“Love is the creative fire in the soul of a person, and everything created by a human being under the influence of this divine feeling has on itself the stamp of love and poetry. Although this is very fine, it has its one objection: these flaming souls (artists and the like), oddly enough, are not very exacting in their love, and therefore it frequently happens that a true devotee of beauty comes upon an idol morally so hideous that kitchen smoke would be an ample offering before it, whereas he burns the finest of incense.”

And so Shevchenko, writing to a friend, was afraid that the artist friend might “in the footsteps of world genii, enslave his own gentle and sensitive soul to some skirt-draped Satan”; and then “good-bye art and science, good-bye poetry, and all the charms of life: good-bye, forever!”

At one time Agatha had awakened in him a desire for a domestic life, but having been already disillusioned, he wrote.

“Oh, how beautiful it would be if only the world genii could get along without family happiness! Think of all the great creations that would remain on this earth for the betterment and joy of humanity.” Yet he admitted that even “a genius, the same as our common

brother, of necessity needs the home fire and a family circle." Because a genius needs a calming rest, and "such sweet rest may be known among the children in the company of a sweet and loving wife."

But is it possible for a beautiful woman to brighten one's life? Shevchenko says, "Yes, it is possible. God has created her for that, but she, or rather we, have conspired to change her noble and divine purpose, and have made out of her a soulless, lifeless idol. Her one feeling, egoism, born in the self-consciousness of her beauty, has drowned out all other feelings. When she was yet a baby we gave her to understand that in the future she was to tear apart our hearts and set them aflame. True enough, we had only gently implied, but she picked it up so quickly, so deeply felt and understood her future power that from that day on she became the innocent coquette and eternal follower of her own beauty. The mirror is her only friend in her troubled and solitary life."

However, "The privileged beauty cannot be anything else but just a beauty: she can never be a chaste and loving wife nor a good and gentle mother, nor even a passionate lover. She is a wooden beauty and as such it would be most unreasonable to expect anything else from wood. That is why I advise to love those pretty statues from the distance and never to approach them close; and all the more reason why we — especially the artists, should never marry them; and that applies in general to men who have dedicated themselves to science or to art. Whenever of necessity an artist needs a beauty for his beloved art then we have for that purpose

models, dancers, and other mistresses of trades; but at home, he, as well as anyone in general, needs a good loving wife and not a privileged beauty. Such a beauty may for a moment brighten the home of a God-loving man with bright and drowsing rays of happiness, but then this momentary joy is like that meteor which flashes by and leaves no trace behind. A beauty, like the true actress, needs a crowd of followers, and whether they are true or false in matters not to her, so long as they are followers . . .”

The Amnesty and the Return

Finally, through the efforts of his friends and followers, among whom was the wife of A. K. Tolstoy, Shevchenko's amnesty was granted, and signed on May 2, 1857.

Shevchenko was as happy as a child. But with this joy came doubt. Having returned from exile, would he be able to write and to paint? At times he felt that the restrictions placed upon him had completely destroyed his talent. In his “Diary” at that time he noted the following: “Augustus, the pagan, exiling Ovid among the savage Goths, did not forbid him to write or to paint, but the Christian, Nicholas, forbade me the one and the other. Both — executioners, only one of them was a Christian, and a Christian of the nineteenth century.”

Having regained liberty, it seemed to him that all those misfortunes which he had lived through had purified his heart. In his letter to the wife of Tolstoy he wrote: “Just like gold exposed to fire, like that child from its bath —

so do I emerge out of that foggy purgatory to tread upon a new and blessed road of life. And I call this: true happiness . . . ”

During his return he met the mother of his friend Kostomarov who was also imprisoned with him in the Petersburg fortress and who was also banished. Shevchenko remembered how that mother, “blackier than the blackest earth,” suffered for her son. With her in mind, Shevchenko wrote the longer poem “Neofity” (Neophytes), in which he compared the blood-thirsty Roman, Nero, with Czar Nicholas. The poem itself is built upon the idea of all-forgiveness. Against this background appears the mother of the neophyte Alchide. In order to have the power to describe the suffering of this mother, Shevchenko appeals for help to the Mother of God.

Oh, Holy of the Holiest,
Thou, merciful and Blessed Mother
Who with Thy Son have blessed the earth!
Please send to me the holy word,
The voice reborn of holy truth,
And with the wisdom of a saint
Enlighten them and give them youth!
And I'll relate the griefs she had:
About the streams of bitter tears
Which that poor mother had to shed —
The same as Thou! ¹¹

And then he tells:

How there in Italy did grow
A little girl endowed with beauty,
So pure and holy seemed her beauty
No fairer lily do I know. ¹²

and how:

'Twas not long after, that this beauty
Assumed the mother's blessed duty:
The caring of her infant son.⁷³

Eventually the son becomes a neophyte and follows the teachings of Christ, which results in his imprisonment. The mother sees how in the Roman Colosseum, at a signal of the mad Nero, the savage and hungry beasts are let out among the Christians gathered there, among whom is her son, Alchide. The mother sees how:

... A leopard
Jumped upon the open stage...
A pace, a growl... and blood was spilled —
The blood of saints...⁷⁴

so, grief-stricken:

She rammed her head against the wall
And, seemingly beyond recall,
Fell down beside the gate.⁷⁵

But she does not die. On regaining consciousness the mother of the martyr takes up the ideas of her son and goes to prolong her son's battles: to spread the word of Christian Truth.

At the time it seemed to Shevchenko that his exile had destroyed his talent, but having regained his liberty he wrote a poem in which he presented the ideal of the wife-mother so nobly that it may be classed as a literary pearl.

The pleasant company into which he was drawn while waiting in Nizhni-Novgorod for his permit to return to Petersburg, the dinners, theatre parties, and the general respect with which Shevchenko was greeted even among the

aristocrats, could not lead him away from the old paths of life.

He was fascinated by a young dramatic actress, Catherine Piuniwna, and in a letter to her admitted that "to be your husband would be to me the greatest of joys; to forget you will be very hard." The young actress thought of capitalizing this acquaintanceship with Shevchenko for her own career — while the poet thought of finding happiness with her. Disillusionment followed, but fortunately it was not a lasting one.

Regarding his liberty, the poet could not resist the attack on the "corporals" — the czars. In "Yurodowy" (The Madman), he wonders if he would see a George Washington in our Ukraine:

When will our Washington appear,
With just and human laws?

but, full of faith, cries out:

And yet he must appear! ⁷⁶

It was the faith in the ultimate dominance of truth upon this earth that was Shevchenko's guiding light throughout his life.

'Tis only when the truth, Almighty,
Shall come upon this earth to rest —
Though only for an hour at best —
That teeming souls will part their lips
And words will burst out like a stream,
And desert wastelands, parched and dry,
Washed by this wholesome flowing stream,
Will reawaken; merrily
The brooks will flow, and ponds, bedecked
Around with woods and grazing herds,
Will liven up with merry birds."

Having obtained the permission to return, Shevchenko hurried to Moscow where his old friend, his guardian-angel, Princess Repnin, was awaiting him. The doctor warned him not to go out on account of his weak eyes, for which he was treated, but he visited the Princess "on the sly." It was only then that she aroused in his heart the stronger currents of emotion. It was only then that he realized that his friendship could turn into love. But it was too late then because it was not the young, healthy and dreamy poet of long ago who met the princess, but a prematurely aged man broken down by a long exile. It is no wonder that out of that meeting with the princess there remains only the following short mention in Shevchenko's "Diary": "She seems to have changed for the better; she has become more full and seemingly younger." And that is all. She had grown younger, while he had become an aged broken man—another tragic note. The princess, however, remained his friend till the end, and always mentioned his name with reverence.

Freedom

Finally Shevchenko arrived at Petersburg to see his friend, Lazarovsky; the friend who attended most to his needs during his exile. Shevchenko lost no time to thank Lady Tolstoy for her help, but at their warm meeting could not express a word. Count Tolstoy gave a dinner in Shevchenko's honor during which the Russian writer, Nicholas D. Starov, in his speech brought out the following: "We may say that

we are happy to see Shevchenko, who, among the frightful, killing conditions in the grim walls of the stinking barracks, did not weaken spiritually or fall into despair, but retained his love for his fate — because she is merciful. This is a noble example for all of our artists and poets. This alone is sufficient to make Shevchenko immortal. Permit me to raise a toast of thanks to Shevchenko who with his suffering upheld the holy faith that no methods and circumstances can vanquish the truly moral nature of a man."

In Petersburg Shevchenko found a Ukrainian colony. There he met the famous Ukrainian woman writer, Maria Markovich, whom he considered to possess the best command of the Ukrainian language. But Ukraine was calling him. He was longing for a home along the Dnieper and for a family life. This may best be noted in his letter to the wife of Michael Maksymovich: "I have asked you to find a mate for me. If you do not, then God himself will never do it, and I will die a bachelor, away from home. During this summer with God's help, I will be in Kiev on St. Michael's Hill, where you just place my beflowered princess under some maple or some willow tree and I will go to dance and meet her there." And sending his picture he begged her "...not to show it to the girls because they will get frightened—will think that I am the father of some outlaw, and none will want to marry such a savage. In the meantime quietly inform some pretty maid to gather some embroidered scarfs and plant no squash within her garden." (It

was an old custom in Ukraine to present a suitor with a squash as a sign of refusal.)

Eventually the poet left for Ukraine. There he visited his sister Irene. Sitting under a pear tree with his head resting on her knees, he listened to the story of her bitter life.

The Polish nobles made accusation against him. He was arrested again, but, fortunately, was released.

He went looking for a piece of land on the banks of the Dnieper where he would have liked to build a home. True enough, how nice it is to have a home:

... If in that home

The voices sound from morn till gloam.

But in order to have someone with whom to spend the evenings in pleasant conversation, Shevchenko wanted to marry his brother Bartholomew's young servant-girl, Kharyta. His brother and others insisted that he should not marry her because the uneducated girl would not understand the ways of the learned. Nor was Kharyta very willing to marry "a nobleman" because, as she said, she did not want to change one bondage for another.

Returning to Petersburg, Shevchenko entertained the thought which was born during his exile when he wrote to Princess Repnin that he wanted to "depict the mother-heart of Mary, Mother of Our Saviour." Out of this wish was born the poem "Maria" (Mary). In this poem the life of Mother of Our Saviour does not correspond to that presented in the Gospels, but the portrait of the Divine Mother does not suffer on account of it. To Shevchenko, Mary was

the divine strength of all the saints. He appeals to Her for help.

Behold, Oh Blessed Queen! and see
This dispossessed humanity:
These slaves, and lend them strength and will
To bear their chains, and like Our Friend,
Your Son, to bear the cross until
They reach the goal — the common end.⁷⁸

Shevchenko's Mary is the mother whom elderly Joseph saves from disgrace and from being stoned to death. Shevchenko's Mary is the thoughtful mother whose attention is all centered on the welfare and character of her son.

You do not sing nor do you weep
But sit alone and deeply think
Of how to teach and lead Him on
A holy path — Your Holy Son;
How to protect and save his life
From evil ways and earthly strife.⁷⁹

Shevchenko's Mary is the mother who goes to drudge at work in order to bring up properly her child.

. . . . In the shade;
There on the grass, in a quiet spot,
She fed her hungry little tot
With just a biscuit, freshly made;
And he, well—he just played and played
Till, tired out, he placed his head
Upon his mother's knees—to sleep
In slumber calm and deep —
A cherub smiling in its bed;
And o'er the dreaming only boy
The mother looks with eyes of joy
And softly weeps; the angel sleeps⁸⁰

Shevchenko's Mary is she who understands her noble son:

She saw the things that he had done,
She heard the words that he had voiced,
And overcome she oft rejoiced
While looking at Her Son.⁸¹

She is the humble mother who:

... Would, so quietly, retreat
To fetch some water from the well
With which to offer him a drink
And bathe his tired aching feet
Then, she would shake his dusty cloak
And mend whatever hole was there
And then would sit, most anywhere,
To watch him lie in peaceful sleep.
Oh, Mother! Blessed of the Blest!⁸²

And when Christ was crucified, then Shevchenko's Mary gathered the frightened pupils of her son; and when they were gathered around her:

Their fears vanished just like dust
Before your all-consuming trust.⁸³

"Glory be to Thee, Our Mother," sings the poet. Glory to Thee for having bolstered the spirits of your son's disciples, for being instrumental in their going out into the world, in order to

Spread love and truth throughout the world.
And Thou, with grief upon your heart
And wandering from day to day,
From hunger perished on the way.⁸⁴

This "Maria" of Shevchenko was and is, to this day, the reason for an accusation of profanation which is aimed against the poet. But this Mary, according to one of Shevchenko's critics, came from under the pen of the poet "...im-

maculate and holy. The poet prays to Her in words as good as those in the prayer books . . . She became divine through the unexpressible sorrows and unsounded sufferings with which Shevchenko's 'Maria' climaxes the portraiture of all his mother suffers."

The Tragedy of Bachelorhood

Shevchenko could not resign himself to the idea of getting old alone, without a family, without a loving wife. One day the following incident occurred. In the home of Kartashevsky, where literary figures such as Turgeniev, Nekrasov, Markovichka and Kulish used to gather, they decided to surprise Shevchenko. There was a servant girl at that home, a serf, Likeria Polusmakova; a girl with beautiful long hair, dark eyes and unusually pretty face. They dressed her in a beautiful Ukrainian costume in which she was to serve at the table at the time when Shevchenko would be among them. In this manner they expected to make Shevchenko a pleasant surprise on foreign soil — especially since the girl, Likeria, came from Ukraine and spoke in Ukrainian.

This surprise affected Shevchenko so much that in a short time he fell in love with the pretty girl about whom it was said that "her head was intelligent, but her soul was black." He had decided that it was necessary for him to marry a serf in order to manifest the fact that he always was and always will be "by birth and by spirit, the son and brother of our unfortunate brother." He paid no attention to the fact that the young girl, although a serf, was a



LIKERIA POLUSMAKOVA
(From a drawing by Shevchenko)

clever coquette who was more interested in his presents than in him and who meant "to see the world" which such a marriage afforded. According to Alexander Kulish, Shevchenko, in his imagination, created for himself an ideal and "does not want to look through the common eyes." This serf appeared to him as the representative of the enslaved Ukrainian nation, although in reality the girl was not interested in his work or his ideals but only wished and dreamed of marrying Shevchenko as a means of going to Paris. Shevchenko did not fall in love with the girl that she was. This he soon found out and the realization was a heavy blow to his already hard-tried soul.

He realized that:

The years of youth have flown away . . .
From hope, which used to warm, this day
Blow chilling winds.

The winter's come!
Alone within a chilling dwelling,
And no one whom I should be telling
Or asking for a word or two —
And not a single thing to do.

unless:

. . . to wait,
But never to anticipate.⁸⁵

In such moments Shevchenko left his quarters and wandered nightly through the streets of Petersburg. And here again he saw the woman as a victim of the wanton city, a victim of the ugly social conditions.

The night was foggy, very cool,
And down the Neva river-stream

Were slowly drifting what did seem
Like ice floats, underneath the bridge.
And I—it was quite late that day —
Was walking, coughing on the way.
I looked and saw before me: girls.
Each one of them was someone's daughter
Who now was led to worse than slaughter,
By some demented maniac
Who staggering was chasing them
As if corralling home some sheep . . .
What is the matter with this world?
And where is justice? Woe to all!
The naked and the starving souls
Of little girls are driven like
A flock "to pay the last of debts"
To feed the filthy city nests!
Will judgment come? Will czars, their tools,
Be tried and punished on this earth?
Will people ever see the truth?
They should . . .⁸⁸

The Last Chord

Having foretold that there must come a time when truth will prevail, the poet struck the last chord, the premonitory warning of his coming end.

Is it not time for you, my friend,
To offer me your invitation
To leave this foolish vers'fication
And so prepare for the day
When we must start on our way
To that some other world of quest;
Thereto we'll tramp to live and rest . . .

We're tired now and not so tough.
Yes, we gained some sense (at what
expense!);
I think we've had enough.⁸⁷

On his birthday, March 9, 1861, when his friends came to greet him with best wishes, the watery swelling was approaching his heart. He could not sleep. Early in the morning his servant helped him to dress and led him down to his workroom. Crossing the threshold the poet swayed and fell to the floor. He died in terrible pains without the fulfilment of any of his hopes: neither the liberation of the serfs nor that little favor which he begged of God—a humble shack along the Dnieper and his Oksana at his side. Not only that but even his prayer:

At least to die, as my last will,
Beside the Dnieper on a hill.

was not fulfilled. He died away from his native soil.

A Single Tear

A week after his death a proclamation was read whereby serfdom, against which Shevchenko fought so courageously all his life, was abolished. Later, his remains were transferred to Ukraine.

When Shevchenko's coffin was being transferred from Petersburg to Ukraine, Kulish, one of the men exiled with Shevchenko, in eulogizing him, said, "Oh Poet, thou art ours, and we are thy people who with thy spirit will breathe forever and ever."

He was buried in Ukraine, by the Dnieper River. A little cabin was built beside his grave. Only his Oxana could not be buried beside him. But the place of this one Oxana is taken by millions of Oxanas of today who are reared up in the noble words of Shevchenko, full of a great and mighty feeling: a feeling of great love for beauty, freedom, truth, and love toward fellow-men.

On the fiftieth anniversary of Shevchenko's death an old woman of noble birth, Anna Barvinok, voiced the happy moment of her life when once in her lifetime she had the pleasure of kissing the hand of a slave: "God has blessed me at least with being able in this way to declare my faith in thee, our martyr."

That is how after his death an old white-haired woman remembered him who, compiling his thoughts during his life, wished nothing more than that some maiden would but shed a single tear over them.

Just a maiden's single tear
And the world is mine.⁸⁸

But there is no doubt that just as long as women live on this earth and learn to understand and feel the spirit of Shevchenko's creativeness, so long will they shed tears. In the words of that other literary figure of Ukraine, Ivan Franko: "In world literature there is no poet who became such a consistent, such a fiery, and such a conscious defender of the women's right to a full and human life" as is Taras Shevchenko.



NOTES

¹⁾ „Подражаніє XI Псалму”, February 15, 1859, Petersburg.

²⁾ ³⁾ „Як би ви знали, паничі”, 1850, Orenburg.

⁴⁾ „І золотої й дорогої”, 1849, Kos-Aral.

⁵⁾ „Сестрі”, July 20, 1859, Cherkasy.

(6-8) „Мені Тринацятий минало” 1847. Fort Orsk.

(9) „Оксані К...ко”, November 22, 184- Petersburg.

(10-11) „Черниця Маряна”, 1841, Petersburg.

¹²⁾ „І причинна”, 1838, Petersburg.

¹³⁾ „І причинна”, 1838, Petersburg.

¹⁴⁾ „Іван Підкова”, 1839, Petersburg.

¹⁵⁾, ¹⁶⁾, ¹⁷⁾, ¹⁸⁾ „Тополя”, 1839, Petersburg.

¹⁹⁾ ²⁰⁾ ²¹⁾ ²²⁾ „Катерина”, 1838, Petersburg.

²³⁾ „Тарасова Ніч”, Nov. 6, 1838, Petersburg.

²⁴⁾ „До Основ'яненка”, 1838, Petersburg.

²⁶⁾ „Думи мої, Думи мої”, 1841, Petersburg.

²⁶⁾ ²⁷⁾ ²⁸⁾ „Гайдамаки”, 1841, Petersburg.

*) In the original it is written “Moscovites” which properly meant Russians but commoly meant Russian soldiers.

²⁹⁾ „Ми вкупочці колись росли”, 1849, Kos-Aral.

³⁰⁾ ³¹⁾ ³²⁾ „Сова”, May 6, 1844, Petersburg.

³³⁾ ³⁴⁾ „Н. В. Гоголю”, December 30, 1844, Petersburg.

³⁵⁾ ³⁶⁾ „Сон”, July 8, 1844, Petersburg.

³⁷⁾ „Суботів”, October 21, 1845, Mirhorod.

³⁸⁾ „Заповіт”, December 25, 1845, Pereyaslav, Ukraine.

³⁹⁾ „Лілея”, July 25, 1846, Kiev, Ukraine.

40) „Наймичка”, November 13, 1845, Pereyaslav, Ukraine.

41) „Мені однаково”, May, 1847, Petersburg Prison.

42) „Вечір”, May, 1847, Petersburg Prison.

43) „Чи ми ще зійдемося знову”, May, 1847. Petersburg Prison.

44) „Сонце Заходить”, 1847, Orsk Fortress.

45) 46) „Княжна”, 1847, Orsk Fortress.

47) „Варнак”, 1848, Orsk Fortress.

48) „Княжна”, 1847, Orsk Fortress.

49) „Сон”, 1847, Orsk Fortress.

50) „Царі”, 1848, Kos Aral.

51) 52) „Титарівна”, 1848, Kos Aral.

53) 54) 55) „Марина”, 1848, Kos Aral.

56) 57) 58) 59) „І виріс я на чужині”, 1848, Kos

60) „Як би мені черевики”, 1848, Kos Aral.

61) „І багата я”, 1848, Kos Aral.

62) „Не тополю високою”, 1848, Kos Aral.

63) „І широкою долину”, 1848, Kos Aral.

64) „Не хочу я женитися”, 1848, Kos Aral.

65) „Заросли шляхи тернами”, 1849, Kos Aral.

66) „Петрусь”, 1850, Orenburg.

67) 68) „У нашій раї на землі”, 1849, Kos Aral.

69) „Не молися за мене”, 1859, Orenburg.

70) „Сон”, July 8, 1844, Petersburg.

71—75) „Неофіти”, December, 1857, Nizhni-Novgorod.

76) „Юродивий”, end of 1857, Nizhni-Novgorod.

77) „Подражаніє Ісаїї, Глава XXXV”, March 25, 1858, Petersburg.

78—84) „Марія”, October 24—November 11, 1859, Petersburg.

85) „Минули літа молодії”, October 19, 1860, Petersburg.

86) „О, люди, люди, небораки”, November 3, 1860, Petersburg.

87) „Чи не покинуть нам, небого”, February 14—25, 1861, Petersburg.

88) „Думи мої думи мої”, 1839, Petersburg.



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