

To My Fellow-Countrymen, In Ukraine and Not in Ukraine, Living, Dead and as Yet Unborn

My Friendly Epistle

Taras Shevchenko

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his
brother, he is a liar.
I John iv, 20.

Dusk is falling, dawn is breaking,
 And God's day is ending,
 Once again a weary people
 And all things are resting.
 Only I, like one accursed,
 Night and day stand weeping
 At the many-peopled cross-roads,
 And yet no one sees me.
 No one sees me, no one knows,
 Deaf, they do not hearken,
 They are trading with their fetters,
 Using truth to bargain,
 And they all neglect the Lord, –
 In heavy yokes they harness
 People; thus they plough disaster,
 And they sow disaster...
 But what shoots spring up? You'll see
 What the harvest yields them!
 Shake your wits awake, you brutes,
 You demented children!
 Look upon your native country,
 On this peaceful eden;
 Love with overflowing heart
 This expanse of ruin!
 Break your chains, and live
 as brothers!
 Do not try to seek,
 Do not ask in foreign lands
 For what can never be
 Even in heaven, let alone
 In a foreign region...
 In one's own house, –
 one's own truth,
 One's own might and freedom.
 There is no other Ukraina,
 No second Dnipro in the world,
 Yet you strike out for foreign regions,
 To seek, indeed, the blessed good,

The holy good, and freedom,
 freedom,
 Fraternal brotherhood. ... You found
 And carried from that foreign region,
 And to Ukraine brought, homeward-
 bound,
 The mighty power of mighty words,
 And nothing more than that. ... You
 scream, too,
 That God, creating you, did not mean
 you
 To worship untruth, then, once more,
 You bow down as you bowed before,
 And once again the very skin you
 Tear from your sightless, peasant
 brothers,
 Then, to regard the sun of truth
 In places not unknown, you shove off
 To German lands. If only you'd
 Take all your miserable possessions,
 The goods your ancestors have stolen,
 Then with its holy heights, the Dnipro
 Would remain bereft, an orphan.

Ah, if it could be that you would not
 return,
 That you'd give up the ghost in the
 place you were reared,
 The children would weep not, nor
 mother's tears burn,
 And God would not hear your blas-
 pheming and sneers,
 The sun pour no warmth out upon the
 foul dunghill,
 Over a land that is free, broad and
 true,
 Then folk would not realize what kind
 of eagles

You are, and would not shake
their heads over you.

Find your wits! Be human beings,
For evil is impending,
Very soon the shackled people
Will their chains be rending;
Judgment will come, and then
shall speak
The mountains and the Dnipro,
And in a hundred rivers, blood
Will flow to the blue ocean,
Your children's blood... and there
will be
No one to help you... Brother
Will by his brother be renounced,
The child by its own mother.
And like a cloud, dark smoke
will cover
The bright sun before you,
For endless ages your own sons
Will curse you and abhor you.
Wash your faces! God's fair image
Do not foul with filth!
Do not deceive your children that
They live upon this earth
Simply that they should rule
as lords –
For an unlearned eye
Will deeply search their very souls,
Deeply, thoroughly...
For whose skin you're wearing,
helpless
Mites will realize,
They will judge you, – and
the unlearned
Will deceive the wise.

Had you but learned the way
you ought,
Then wisdom also would be yours;
But thus to heaven you would climb:
“We are not we, I am not I!
I have seen all, all things I know:
There is no hell, there is no heaven,
Not even God, but only I and The
stocky
German, clever-clever,
And no one else beside...”
“Good, brother
But who, then, are you?”
“We don't know –
Let the German speak!”

That's the way you learn in your
Foreign land, indeed!
The German would say: “You are
Mongols”.
“Mongols, that is plain!”
Yes, the naked grandchildren
Of golden Tamburlaine!
The German would say:
“You are Slavs”.
“Slavs, yes, Slavs indeed!”
Of great and glorious ancestors
The unworthy seed!
And so you read Kollar, too,
With all your might and main,
Safarik as well, and Hanka,
Full-tilt you push away
Into the Slavophils, all tongues
Of the Slavonic race
You know full well, but of your own
Nothing! “There'll come a day

When we can parley in our own
 When the German teaches,
 And, what is more, our history
 Explains to us and preaches,
 Then we will set about it all!"

You've made a good beginning,
 Following the German precepts
 You have started speaking
 So that the German cannot grasp
 The sense, the mighty teacher,
 Not to mention simple people.
 And uproar! And the screeching:
 "Harmony and power too,
 Nothing less than music!
 As for history! Of a free
 Nation 'tis the epic...
 Can't compare with those
 poor Romans!
 Their Bruti – good-for-nothings!
 But oh, our Coclezes and Bruti –
 Glorious, unforgotten!
 Freedom herself grew up with us,
 And in the Dniro bathed,
 She had mountains for her pillow,
 And for her quilt – the plains!"
 It was in blood she bathed herself,
 She took her sleep on piles
 Of the corpses of free Cossacks,
 Corpses all despoiled.

Only look well, only read
 That glory through once more,
 From the first word to the last,
 Read; do not ignore
 Even the least apostrophe,
 Not one comma even,
 Search out the meaning of it all,

Then ask yourself the question:
 "Who are we? Whose sons? Of what
 sires?
 By whom and why enchained?"
 And then, indeed, you'll see for what
 Are your Bruti famed:

Toadies, slaves, the filth of Moscow,
 Warsaw's garbage – are your lords,
 Illustrious hetmans! Why so proud
 And swaggering, then do you boast,
 you
 Sons of Ukraine and her misfortune?
 That well you know to wear the yoke,
 More than your fathers did of yore?
 They are flaying you, cease your
 boasts –
 From them, at times, the fat they'd
 thaw.

You boast, perhaps, the Brotherhood
 Defended the faith of old?
 Because they boiled their dumplings
 in
 Sinope, Trebizond?
 It is true, they ate their fill,
 But now your stomach's dainty,
 And in the Sich, the clever German
 Plants his beds of 'taties;
 And you buy, and with good relish
 Eat what he has grown,
 And you praise the Zaporozhya.
 But whose blood was it flowed
 Into that soil and soaked it through
 So that potatoes flourish?
 While it's good for kitchen-gardens
 You're the last to worry!
 And you boast because we once

Brought Poland to destruction...
 It is true, yes, Poland fell,
 But in her fall she crushed you.
 Thus, then, your fathers spilled
 their blood
 For Moscow and for Warsaw,
 And to you, their sons, they have
 Bequeathed their chains, their glory.

Ukraina struggled on,
 Fighting to the limit:
 She is crucified by those
 Worse-than-Poles, her children.
 In place of beer, they draw
 the righteous
 Blood from out her sides,
 Wishing, so they say, to enlighten
 The maternal eyes
 With contemporary lights,
 To lead her as the times
 Demand it, in the Germans' wake
 (She crippled, speechless, blind).
 Good, so be it! Lead, explain!
 Let the poor old mother
 Learn how children such as these
 New ones she must care for.
 Show her, then, and do not haggle
 Your instruction's price.
 A mother's good reward will come:
 From your greedy eyes
 The scales will fall away, and you
 Will then behold the glory,
 The living glory of your grandsires,
 And fathers skilled in knavery.
 Do not fool yourselves, my brothers,
 Study, read and learn

Thoroughly the foreign things –
 But do not shun your own :
 For he who forgets his mother,
 He by God is smitten,
 His children shun him,
 in their homes
 They will not permit him.
 Strangers drive him from their doors;
 For this evil one
 Nowhere in the boundless earth
 Is a joyful home.

I weep salt tears when I recall
 Those unforgotten actions
 Of our forefathers, those grave deeds!
 If I could but forget them,
 Half my course of joyful years
 I'd surrender gladly...
 Such indeed, then, is our glory,
 Ukraina's glory!...
 Thus too, you should read it through
 That you'd do more than dream,
 While slumbering, of injustices,
 So that you would see

High gravemounds open up before
 Your eyes, that then you might
 Ask the martyrs when and why
 And who was crucified.
 Come, my brothers, and embrace
 Each your humblest brother,
 Make our mother smile again,
 Our poor, tear-stained mother!
 With hands that are firm and strong
 She will bless her children,
 Embrace her helpless little ones,
 And with free lips, she'll kiss them.
 And those bygone times will be

Forgotten with their shame,
And that glory will revive,
The glory of Ukraine,
And a clear light, not a twilight,
Will shine forth anew...
Brothers, then, embrace each other,
I entreat and pray you!
1845, Vyunishche

Source of English translation of the poem: Taras Shevchenko. "Song out of Darkness". Selected poems translated from the Ukrainian by Vera Rich. London, 1961, p. 74 – 80.

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