

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

## **My Friendly Epistle**

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*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.

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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 Dnipro 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.

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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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