ADAM MICKIEWICZ’S “DIGRESSION (USTĘP)”

 *From* “FOREFATHERS’ EVE (DZIADY), Part III”

The Road to Russia

Across the snow, through ever wilder land,

Like desert wind the lone kibitka[[1]](#footnote-1) flies;

And like two questing falcons, my sad eyes

Circle above the glistening waste unspanned.

Borne by the storm, they cannot reach the shore,

And under them the angry waters roar:

Nowhere they have to fold their wings and rest;

They feel their grave is on the ocean’s breast.

No cities and no mountains meet the eye;

No works of man or nature tower on high:

The plain lies bleak and barren to the sight

As if it had been fashioned yesternight.

And yet sometimes a mammoth comes from here,

An ancient sailor that the Deluge brought,

And in a strange speech that the peasants fear

Relates that long ago these lands were wrought;

That in the days when Noah was alive

Traders from Asia here were wont to roam—

And yet a book will now and then arrive,

Stolen by bandits from a Polish home,

Which says that these bleak plains, today so drear,

Mothered great peoples that went forth from here.

And as the Deluge swept across the land,

Leaving no pathway in its raging strife,

So hordes of people crossed it, band on band,

Leaving no traces of their mode of life.

Yet on the Alpine mountains far away

They left their mark in that long-distant day;

And farther still, upon Rome’s monuments

One reads of those bold robbers coming hence.

This level plain lies open, waste, and white,

A wide-spread page prepared for God to write.

Will he trace here his message from above;

And, using for his letters holy men,

Will he sketch here his writ of faith again,

That all the human race is ruled by love

And offerings remain the world’s best prize!

Or will that fiend who still the Lord defies

Appear and carve with his oft-sharpened sword

That prisons should forbid mankind to rise,

And scourges are humanity’s reward!

The wind roars o’er this barren, white expanse

And lifts the snowdrifts in a ghostly dance,

But this white, swelling sea does not grow black:

Called by the storm, it rises from its bed,

Then, as if swiftly petrified, falls back

Upon itself, immense and white and dead.

At times this vast, engulfing hurricane

Sweeps from the very poles; unchecked and swift

As far as the Black Sea it scours the plain,

Piling its swirling snow-clouds drift on drift.

Oft it engulfs kibitkas in its path,

Like Arabs smothered by the simoon’s wrath.

Above the flat, white surface of the snow

Great towering walls of blackish color soar:

These are the pines and spruce; row on row,

That stand like islands or a dreary shore.

These mighty trees have here and there been cut,

Stripped bare and laid together, side by side,

To make strange forms, a roof and wall, a hut:

Such are the dwellings where the people hide.

Still farther on these heaps by thousands rise

Upon the plain, identical in size:

Their smoke drifts out like hat plumes on the air,

Like cartridge boxes their small windows shine.

Such houses here march in a double line;

There form a circle, there a hollow square.

This regiment of houses, squat and brown,

Is called with conscious pride a district town.

I meet the men who dwell within this land,

Broad-chested, great of strength, a stalwart band;

And, like the trees and creatures of the North,

They pulse with life and health that knows no pain:

But every face is like their home, a plain,

A waste on which no inward light shines forth.

Their hearts, like underground volcanoes, throw

Upon the cheeks no flame of fierce desire.

Their moving lips reflect no ardent glow;

No wrinkled brows fade with the dying fire

Seen on men’s foreheads in more favored lands,

O’er which have passed, through many weary years,

Such strong traditions, sorrows, hopes, and fears

That in each face a nation’s history stands.

And here the eyes of men are large and clear,

Like their unstoried towns; no storm-tossed heart

Makes anguished glances from their pupils dart

Or hopeless sorrow in their depths appear:

Viewed from afar they seem austere and great;

But near at hand, empty and desolate.

Each body is a web, a coarse-spun roll,

In which there sleeps a caterpillar’s soul,

Ere it transforms its tiny breast for flight

And weaves and tints its wings to fairy guise.

But when the sun of liberty shall rise,

What kind of insect then will greet the light?

Will a bright butterfly soar from the earth,

Or a dull moth, of dark, uncleanly birth,

Fair roads stretch out across this barren land:

No merchant industry devised their way,

Nor peasant footprints deepened day by day.

The mighty tsar put forth his royal hand;

And if he pointed at some Polish town,

Or at the walls wherein a lord abode,

Village and castle straightway were torn down,

And his might strewed their ruins with—a road.

Through fields these roads are hidden by the snow,

But in the forest their smooth surface gleams.

Straight and unending to the north they go;

Amid the trees they shine like mountain streams.

Who travels on these roads? Here swiftly ride

Snow-powdered troops of Russian cavalry,

And there are seen dark ranks of infantry,

With wagons, guns, kibitkas at their side.

By edict of the tsar this regiment

Comes from the east to fight a northern foe;

That from the north to Caucasus is sent:

Whither they march, or why, they do not knew—

And no one asks. Here a Mongolian

Is seen, with slanting eyes and puffy face;

And there a homesick Lithuanian,

With pallid brow and slow, uncertain pace.

Some men have bows, some English muskets hold;

The Kalmucks carry bowstrings stiff with cold.

Their officers?—A German in a coach,

Humming his Schiller’s sentimental lays,

Whacks on the back the men as they approach;

A Frenchman, whistling his brisk Marseillaise—

A strayed philosopher—seeks a career,

And asks the Kalmuck chief, who stands near by,

How they may get supplies most cheaply here.

What if from famine half that rabble die?

Then they can plunder half the treasury;

And if the deed is hidden carefully,

The minister will grant them an advance,

The tsar a medal for their skilled finance.

Now a kibitka suddenly flies by:

The ambulances, guns, and guards who ride,

Rush madly from the road as it comes nigh;

Even the leaders’ wagons draw aside.

Still on and on it flies: the gendarme whacks

The driver with his fist; the driver thwacks

The soldiers with his whip; the throng gives way;

The wheels crush anyone who dares to stay.

Whither?—Who rides within?—No one will ask.

The gendarme speeds on some important task:

Surely he rides on orders from the tsar.

“Perhaps that gendarme travels from afar,”

A general suggests. “He may have brought

The King of Prussia, France, or Saxony,

Or other German whom the tsar has caught,

And royal power has him in custody.

Perhaps a greater criminal is there;

Perhaps Ermolov[[2]](#footnote-2) is the enemy!

Although he site in straw so wretchedly,

How proud that captive looks! How brave his stare

A famous man! Behind him wagons throng:

Even his court attendants share his fate!

And see their eyes—their glances bold and strong!

I thought they were the first lords of the state,

Were generals, were chamberlains of the court.

See, they are only boys, who look so proud!

What can this mean? And whither flies this crowd?

They are some monarch’s sons of ill report.”

Thus softly speak the leaders, great and wise,

As toward the capital the carriage flies.

The Suburbs of the Capital

The capital approaches, one can tell.

On both sides of the wide and splendid road

Are palaces wherein the mighty dwell.

Churchlike, with cross and dome, stands this abode:[[3]](#footnote-3)

There statues hide beneath the straw and snow;

Here, graced with Grecian columns in a row,

A summer house, in style Italian;

Next, mandarin kiosks, found in Japan,

Or, from the classic times of Catherine,[[4]](#footnote-4)

Ruins fresh-made in classic farm are seen.

Of varied orders, varied kind, each home,

Like beasts that in their varied countries roam,

Stands caged within its fence, a sullen guest.

Onlyone form is missed among the rest,

A palace showing native style and line,

Their native child, built from their own design.

How marvelously are these buildings made:

On islands in a swamp the stones are laid!

If theaters were desired in Rome of old,

The people yielded forth a stream of gold:[[5]](#footnote-5)

The servants of the tsars, heartless and bold,

To raise their gorgeous brothels from the mud,

To build these monuments unto our pain,

How many false, pretended plots were foiled;

How many guiltless men banished or slain,

How many of our lands robbed or despoiled;

Until with Litwa’s blood, and Ukraine’s tears,

And Poland’s gold they purchased lavishly

All that the fashionable world reveres,

To dress their ornate dwellings stylishly;[[6]](#footnote-6)

And with champagne the buffet floors were wet,

And trodden down with step of minuet.

Now all is silent here.—The city calls

The tsar in winter, and the courtly flies

Follow the scent of carrion to their prize.

Only the winds dance now within these halls.

Unto the city with its court and tsar

Speeds the kibitka.—Snow is on the ground,

The clocks have thundered twelve from near and far,

And now the winter sun is westward bound.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The spacious heavens their vaulted depths unfold,

Cloudless and silent, empty, pure, and cold;

Quite colorless, a pale, transparent sky,

As lifeless as a frozen traveler’s eye.

Above that city which we now draw near

Rise fairy castles gleaming in the sun;

Pillars and walls and balconies appear

Like hanging gardens reared in Babylon.

From out two hundred thousand chimney-throats

Upward the smoke in straight, dense columns floats;

These like Carrara marble gleam and shine,

Those glow like rubies with a rosy light.

Aloft the summits perish and unite,

And into balcony and arch entwine,

While roofs and walls of pearl ascend the skies,

Like those illusive cities that arise

From out the Great Sea’s waters, calm and clear,

Or in the Libyan desert haze appear:

These from afar the weary travelers see—

They ever seem at hand and ever flee.[[8]](#footnote-8)

But now the chain is down, the gates swing wide;

And questioned, searched, and passed, we are inside.

St. Petersburg

In ancient times of Italy and Greece,

Beneath a temple men sought calm and peace,

’Mid holy trees, a wood-nymph’s spring below;

Or on the heights took refuge from a foe:

And thus was builded Athens, Sparta, Rome.

In Gothic days, beneath a baron’s tower,

Where it might be protected by his power,

The humble peasant built his cottage home.

And where some navigable stream flowed by,

Towns, small at first, with ages towered high.

These cities were by reverence inspired,

Or for defense or trading were desired.

How did the Russian capital begin

Why did the Slavic thousands emigrate

To these far-distant corners of the state,

Torn from the ocean floor and from the Finn?[[9]](#footnote-9)

This scanty soil yields neither fruits nor wheat;

The cutting winds bring merely snow and sleet.

Here heat and cold alike are too severe,

As fierce and fickle as a despot’s mind.

Men did not choose such lands; a tsar inclined

To these vast swamps and bade his subjects rear

A city not for their use, but for him,

A tribute to a tyrant’s cruel whim.

In these loose, shifting sands, this swampy waste,

He bade a hundred thousand piles be placed.

What though a hundred thousand peasants died!

Upon the piles, upon their trampled forms

He built his firm foundation; other swarms

To wagons, ships, and wheelbarrows he tied,

To bring vast loads of stone and mighty trees

From distant lands and over northern seas.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Recalling Paris, straightway he desired

Parisian squares. And then, having admired

The quays of Amsterdam, he built his own.

Rome had, he heard, great palaces of stone—

And here they stand. Venice, sublimely fair,

Which, half within the sea and half on land,

Swims like a siren-maid with dusky hair,

Greatly impressed the tsar. Straightway he planned

To dig canals throughout this dreary swamp,

Hang bridges, and float gondolas below.

He now had Venice, Paris, London’s pomp,

Save for their beauty, charm, and inner glow.

The architects repeat a famous phrase,

That Rome displays the labors of mankind,

While lovely Venice was by gods designed;

But he who views St. Petersburg will find

That such a pile demons alone could raise.

The streets run to the river, side by side,

Like mountain passes, long and straight and wide.

The houses, brick or stone, are huge and gray,

Clay set on marble, marble laid on clay;

And all as uniform in roofs and walls

As is an army corps, newly equipped.

From every housefront here a signboard calls:

Amid so many tongues, such varied script,

The eye and ear find Babel. “There,” one tells,

“A Khan of the Kirghiz, a Senator,

Head of the Polish Office, Achmet dwells.

“Here Monsieur Soco,” states another door,

“Gives lessons in Parisian French. He plays

Bass viol in the band; he overlooks

Distilleries and schools; he also cooks,”

A signboard over yonder sounds the praise

Of great Piaeere Gioco,[[11]](#footnote-11) known to fame

As sausage-maker for the maids of court,

Who keeps a ladies’ school of great report.

That lengthy sign bears Pastor Diener’s[[12]](#footnote-12) name,

A knight of many orders of the tsar.

Today he preached a sermon on the theme

That by God’s grace the tsar is pope, supreme

As lord of faith and conscience’ guiding star.

He likewise calls the Anabaptist bands

And the Socinians and Calvinist;

That, as the Russian Emperor commands

And his ally, the Prussian King, insists,

They all accept a new religious rite

And into one new faith and church unite.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Here “Ladies’ Clothes”; “Sheet Music” there we read,

Or “Children’s Toys,” or “Knouts,” or what you need.

The carriages that in the streets are seen,

Despite their bulkiness and rapid flight,

On gleaming runners vanish from the sight

Like silent phantoms on a magic screen.

A bearded coachman cracks his whip with pride

Atop an English coach! The wintry clime

Paints beard and garments with a silver rime.

In front two little boys on horseback ride,

In sheepskin coats, true sons of Boreas;

They whistle shrilly and the rabble flee.

Sleighs scatter and allow the coach to pass,

Like flocks of ducks before a ship at sea.

Here all men run, urged by the biting chill;

Nobody chats or looks about or stands;

Their eyes are closed, their faces pale and still;

Each chatters with his teeth and rubs his hands.

The warm, moist vapor that their lips exhale

Leaves in the frosty air a long gray trail.

Seeing these thronging masses spouting smoke,

One thinks they must be chimneys on parade.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Beside the crowding common herd of folk

Move two vast columns in slow promenade,[[15]](#footnote-15)

Like church processions, or like floes along

A river bank, by rushing waters tossed.

And whither goes this slowly dragging throng,

This herd of sables, heedless of the frost?

This is the fashionable walking hour:

Who cares though wintry winds blow cold and keen?

For after all, here may the tsar be seen,

His empress, and the mistresses in power.

Officials, ladies, marshals make their way;

First, second, fourth, in even sets they pass,

Like cards thrown from a gamester’s hand in play,

Kings, queens, and knaves, the mighty ruling class?

Court cards and common cards, both black and red,

Fall to this side and that. Alike they tread

The splendid street, magnificent and long,

The mighty bridges, granite-lined and strong.

First the officials come, the men of note.

One wears a partly open warm fur coat,

’Neath which four cherished decorations lie.

What though he freeze, if but his crosses show!

He seeks his equals with a haughty eye,

And being stout, crawls beetle-like and slow.

Then come the guardsmen, fashionably dressed—

Each flaunts a wasp-like waist and bulging chest—

Like moving pikes, parading jauntily.

Next walk the functionaries of the town,

With cautious glance deciding whom to see,

Whom to avoid, and whom to trample down;

Each head bent low, and bowed each pliant spine,

They crawl like scorpions in human guise.

The ladies gleam like splendid butterflies,

With bright-hued cloaks and hats of brave design;

Each glitters in Parisian elegance,

Her small foot twinkling in a fur-lined shoe,

Her face crab-red and snowy white of hue.—

The court rides off; the groups cheek their advance,

For now the nobles’ carriages draw near,

Like boats by swimmers in a narrow bay.

The first throng has already drawn away,

While those on foot have scattered in their rear.

Hard-racked by coughs, a man may reach his door,

The while he groans; “How fine this daily walk,

For I have seen the tsar and bowed before

A general and held a page in talk!”

A few lads wandered in that crowded place,

Unlike the others in both garb and face.[[16]](#footnote-16)

They scarcely glanced at all the passers-by,

But viewed the city with astonished eye.

Upon the summits, walls, foundation-rocks,

Upon the gratings and the granite blocks,

They fixed their gaze as though to ascertain

Whether each brick were solid as it lay.

Hopeless, they dropped their arms, as if to say,

“To overturn them man will strive in vain.”

Thus musing, they went on.—Konrad[[17]](#footnote-17) alone

Of the eleven stayed. Pale-lipped with hate,

He laughed, raised his clenched fist, and struck the stone,

As though he summoned down a vengeful fate.

Then quietly he stood, arms crossed on breast,

Deep plunged in thought, and on the palace wall

His sharp and knife-like glances came to rest.

He seemed like Samson[[18]](#footnote-18) then, after his fall,

When, captured by deceit and tightly chained,

He brooded how revenge might be attained.

On Konrad’s quiet brow a sudden shade

Fell like a pall upon a coffin laid.

A ghastly darkness touched his proud, pale face,

As though the evening, dropping from the sky,

Sought first his pallid cheek and blazing eye,

Then spread its veil o’er the surrounding space.

On the right hand of the now empty street

There stood another man.[[19]](#footnote-19) No traveler

He seemed, nor exiled Polish foreigner,

For, giving alms to beggars, he would greet

Each of the men by name who sought his aid,

And ask how wives and children fared. Alone

At last, he leaned against the coping-stone

And, lifting up his eyes as though he prayed,

He gazed above the towering palace wall;

But he had not that pilgrim’s stern, rapt eye;

He dropped his glance at every cripple’s call,

And every veteran’s appealing cry.

He stood, hands raised to heaven, long in thought,

His gentle face with hopeless pity fraught.

He gazed as might an angel, tenderly,

When, sent to purgatory from above,

He sees whole nations writhe in agony,

And suffers with them through his perfect love,

Foreseeing how far-off is their release

To lasting freedom, heavenly bliss, and peace.

He leaned against the coping, weeping low;

Hot tears ran down and perished in the snow:

Each tear will be remembered by the Lord,

And each will gain a vast and sweet reward.

It was already late: that lonely pair

Stood separated, musing, till at last

Each of the other had become aware—

And each watched closely as the moments passed.

At length the older man, as he drew near,

Said: “Brother, I perceive you standing here

Alone, a foreigner, perchance in need.

Command me in God’s name, what is your plight!

I am of Polish blood and Christian creed;

I greet you with the Cross and with the Knight.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

Konrad, his thoughts too inwardly inclined,

Shaking his head, fled swiftly from the quay;

But on the morrow, when his frenzied mind

He ordered, and refreshed his memory,

He rued his treatment of that kind

Unknown. If e’er they meet again, he will atone:

For though he cannot recognize the face,

Yet something in the voice and manner seems

Strangely familiar, that he cannot place.—

Konrad perchance had seen him in he dreams.

The Monument of Peter the Great

Two youths stood deep in talk one rainy night,

Beneath one cloak, hand closely clasped in hand:

One[[21]](#footnote-21) was that pilgrim from a western land,

An unknown victim of the tsar’s grim might;

The other was the famous Russian bard,[[22]](#footnote-22)

Beloved through all the northland for his song.

Although their friendship had not flourished long,

They were united by a great regard.

Their souls soared over earthly trials and woe,

Like twin crags jutting from an Alpine peak:

Though separated by a roaring creek,

They scarcely hear the tumult of their foe,

While each to each their towering summits lean.

The pilgrim mused on Peter’s awesome mien,

While gently thus the bard explained the scene:

“To the first tsar, of mighty fame and deed,

Great Catherine here a monument decreed.[[23]](#footnote-23)

So this gigantic image of the tsar

Bestrides the bronze back of a mettled steed

And waits for space where he may ride afar.

But Peter could not rest on Russian ground;

His native land was small for such as he:

His pedestal they sought beyond the sea.

From Finland’s shore they tore this granite mound,

Which, when the empress speaks and waves her hand,

Floats o’er the sea and runs across the land,

And falls into its place at her command.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The mound is ready now, and forth he goes,

A Roman-toga’d tsar who rules by blows:

His charger gallops up the granite steep,

Rearing its body for a mighty leap.

“In ancient Rome there shines in different guise

Marcus Aurelius, the people’s pride,

Who first made his name famous far and wide

By banishing the nation’s crafty spies.

When he has shamed the plunderers at home

And on the Rhine and the Pactolus’ banks

Has overwhelmed the fierce invaders’ ranks,

Homeward he turns his steps to peaceful Rome.

Fair, calm, and noble is that brow, aglow

With thoughts of all his people’s happiness.

He lifts with dignity his hand, as though

His thronging subjects he were now to bless;

And on his reins he drops his other hand,

To cheek the zeal that in his charger burns.

You guess that in his path the masses stand

And shout: ‘Our father, Caesar, now returns!’

Amid the throng he fain would slowly ride,

With a paternal glance on every side.

The steed’s mane stands erect, its fierce eye rolls;

But knowing that it bears a well-loved guest,

The father of unnumbered Roman souls,

It checks its ardent spirit’s fiery zest:

The children can approach their father’s knee.

Along the road the steed strides evenly—

It will advance to immortality.[[25]](#footnote-25)

“His charger’s reins Tsar Peter has released;

He has been flying down the road, perchance,

And here the precipice checks his advance.

With hoofs aloft now stands the maddened beast,

Champing its bit unchecked, with slackened rein:

You guess that it will fall and be destroyed.

Thus it has galloped long, with tossing mane,

Like a cascade, leaping into the void,

That, fettered by the frost, hangs dizzily.

But soon will shine the sun of liberty,

And from the west a wind will warm this land.—

Will the cascade of tyranny then stand!”

The Review of the Army

The baiting-place some call this mighty square,[[26]](#footnote-26)

For here the tsar trains dogs to bait the bear;

The dressing-room say others tactfully,

For here the tsar fits on his royal suits,

Ere, flanked by cannon, pikes, and musketry,

He sallies forth for lesser kings’ salutes.

A vain coquette, preparing for a dance,

Gives less time to her mirrored form and face,

Rehearses no such air, such cloying glance,

As does the great tsar in that public place.

Others see here the spot where locusts breed;

They say that here the tsar matures the seed

Of clouds of grasshoppers, which on their birth

Will from this square fly forth and seize the earth.

A surgeon’s whetstone it is sometimes named,

For here the tsar removes his lancet’s rust,

Ere forth from Petersburg his arm is thrust

And by his slashing is all Europe maimed.

But ere he tries how deep the wound may go,

Ere he finds means to stanch the bloody flow,

He outs the pulse of sultan and of shah,

And drains the life blood of Sarmatia.[[27]](#footnote-27)

This oft-named place, renowned and vast and bare,

Officials know as the reviewing-square.

The hour of the review is ten o’clock,

And to this square the silent townsfolk flock.

It seems a white lake with a dusky shore;

Each jostles past his neighbor to the fore.

Like sea-mews o’er the waves there flit about

A few Don Cossacks and dragoons on guard;

Their pike-butts deal each curious head a clout,

On each protruding neck their whips fall hard.

Men who, like frogs from swamps, have crawled ahead,

Draw back their brows and necks in swift retreat.

A rumble sounds afar off, muffled, dead,

Like thud of flail or like a hammer’s beat:

That is the drum, the regimental guide.

In perfect step the ranks march side by side,

All clad as one: the fat, the short, the tall.

Afar, the green shows black against the snow;

Like rivers, dark and smooth, the columns flow,

And like a lake the square absorbs them all.

A hundred Homer’s mouths, O Muse, I ask,

In each a hundred French tongues for my task,

Also the pens of all the bookkeepers,

That I may mention all these officers,

There colonels and subalterns, brave and fine,

And honor all the heroes of the line![[28]](#footnote-28)

But they look all alike, this dauntless band!

Monotonously, side by side they stand,

Like horses lined up at a trough to eat,

Like all the ears bound in a sheaf of wheat,

Like fields of hempstalks covering the land,

Like lines in books, like furrows straight and long,

Like talk in a St. Petersburg salon.

Yet here among the Muscovites appears

A group six inches taller than the mass;

Like stars on horses’ brows, letters of brass

Shine on their caps—these are the grenadiers.

Of such tall regiments I noticed three;

Behind stood shorter heroes, row on row,

Like cucumbers that in a garden grow.

To mark the troops among this infantry

One needs a naturalist’s ability

To glance at squirming swamp-worms as they pass,

Distinguish them and place each in its class.

The trumpets blare! Forthwith the cavalry

Rides in, a varied lot: uhlan, hussar,

Dragoon. Helmets and caps and hats we see,

As though it were a hatter’s gay bazaar,

With all the wares spread out to catch the eye.

An armored regiment comes riding by,

Like samovars set trimly in a row:

The horses’ heads, like spouts, stretch out below.

These troops, so variously armed and dressed,

Are best distinguished by the steeds they ride,

For all the newer tactics so decide,

And thus with Russian custom coincide.

The theory great Jomini[[29]](#footnote-29) expressed,

That mounts, not men, produce good cavalry,

Has long prevailed in Russian policy.

A good horse of the guards will always buy

Three Russian soldiers[[30]](#footnote-30) fit for doughty deeds,

While horses meant for officers come high,

Costing four times as much, since for such steeds

One gives a dancer, lute-player, or clerk,

Or in expensive times a cook, perchance.

Nags broken down, unfit for finer work,

Including such as drag an ambulance,

If set at stake when faro-addicts play,

Are held as worth two women any day.

But note the troops. A black troop led the way;

The second, too, was black, but bobbed of tail;

Two were of bay; one yellow, sleek and pale;

Two sorrel, then the eighth, a mouse-like gray;

The ninth was tall, the tenth of middle height;

And then a second bobtailed black rode past;

The twelfth had forehead marked with spots of white,

While with a raven’s plumage gleamed the last.

Of cannon, forty-eight drove on the scene;

Then twice as many caissons rumbled by

In all, perhaps two hundred, as I weep.

To estimate exactly with the eye

Amid such multitudes as they advance,

One needs, Napoleon, your keen, shrewd glance,

Or yours, commissioner of shell and shot.

You, heedless of the troops that crowd the spot,

Survey the caissons and appraise the whole:

From each you know what cartridges you stole

Now the green uniforms have clothed the square

Like grass that decks a meadow in the spring.

Only a caisson rises here and there,

As ’twere a mighty swamp-frog slumbering,

Or yet a field-flea with a greenish back:

Near-by a cannon, darkly threatening,

Squats like a spider, fiercely strong and black.

Each spider has four legs set in the rear

And four in front: each leg, in foreign mode,

Is called a bombardier or cannoneer.

While this vast insect sits upon the road

In sleepy ease, each leg moves off apart:

You think the belly from the crowded square

Will rise like a balloon into the air;

But when this cannon rouses with a start

From out its dreams, summoned by a command,

As a tarantula[[31]](#footnote-31) whose nose is fanned

By someone’s breath draws in its legs in fear,

Ere it inflates its body to spit out

Its poison, with each forward cannoneer

The gun makes rapid motions near its snout;

Or as a fly, which, soiled on face and feet

With arsenic, sits washing itself neat,

Then backward throws its two front legs and twirls

Its rear ones, while its hind parts fall and rise,

At last throws sideways all its legs and lies

Briefly at rest—then forth its poison hurls.

The soldiers stand and gaze. The tsar is here!

With him are seen a few old admirals,

A throng of adjutants and generals;

He rides in front, his train keeps to the rear.

The group is strangely splotched with every hue,

Like harlequins: upon their coats[[32]](#footnote-32) one sees

Small portraits, buckles, monograms, and keys;

One has a scarf of yellow, one of blue:

More circles, stars, and crosses they display

Than there are buttons on each brave array.

Thus they all shine, yet not with their own light;

They gleam but in the Little Father’s[[33]](#footnote-33) sight;

Each general is but a tiny worm

That on St. John’s Eve glitters brilliantly:

For when the tsar’s regard has reached its term

These wretched insects fade amazingly.

They do not die or flee to foreign shores,

But no one knows what swamplands they defile.

A general goes boldly to the wars:

What if a bullet strikes?—the tsar will smile.

But when the tsar shoots with ungracious eyes,

The doughty general fades, sickens—dies!

More oft amid the courtiers you will see

Stouthearted stoics. When their hour is past

They do not cut their throats[[34]](#footnote-34) or pine and fast,

But to their country palaces they flee

And write from there: to the high chamberlain,

A royal mistress, or a lady friend

The liberals to a coachman may unbend.

And slowly they gain favor once again.—

Thus will a dog, thrown from the window, die;

A cat miaouws but on its feet alights,

Seeks out once more a path to enter by,

Crawls through some hole and reasserts its rights.

The stoic, ere he win the royal smile,

Talks to his friends with democratic guile.

The tsar’s gold-collared uniform is green;

Without a uniform he ne’er is seen.

’Tis as his hide—without it he were flayed.

Thus many tsars have flourished—and decayed.

When from the cradle crawls a future tsar,

The babe is gorgeous from that very day

In jackets fit for Cossack or hussar,

And has small whips and sabers for his play.

Learning to spell, he flourishes the blade,

And indicates the letters with its aid.

When tutored[[35]](#footnote-35) in the dances of the court,

He waves a tiny rhythmic whip in sport.

As he grows up, it is his great delight

In his own room to drill a little squad,

Command them to the left and to the right,

And train them for review—and for the rod.

Thus every youthful tsar has learned to rule.

Hence Europe fears and praises them. How fine

To men of yore seemed our Krasicki’s line:

“The sage was right, but strength was with the fool!”[[36]](#footnote-36)

May mighty Peter’s luster ne’er grow dim:

This wise *Tsaropaedia*[[37]](#footnote-37) sprang from him!

He laid out for the tsars the road to fame;

Seeing the styles on which wise Europe dotes,

He said: “This great land I will make the same;

I will shave beards and trim off lengthy coats.”

He spoke: boyars’ and princelings’ skirts straightway

Were clipped as garden hedges are in France.

He spoke: muzhiks’ and merchants’ beards that day

Poured down like leaves on which the hailstones dance.

Great Peter ordered drums and bayonets,

Erected prisons, trained troops of cadets.

He introduced the minuet at court,

Forced highborn dames to grace society,

Strengthened his long frontiers from sea to sea,

And with a chain elosed up each Russian port.

He formed a senate; he established spies,

Passports, and ranks; he farmed the spirit tax.

He washed the peasants, shaved them, clad their backs,

Armed them, and filled their pockets with supplies

Of rubles, so that Europe cried, surprised:

“Tsar Peter has made Russia civilized!”

All that remained for later tsars’ desires

Was to hint lies to venal cabinets,

To succor despots with new bayonets,

To instigate some massacres and fires,

To enter foreign lands on plunder bent,

To pay their foreign guests a stolen fee

And win applause in France and Germany,

And to appear a strong, wise government.

Wait, French and Germans, but a short time more!

When in your ears the tsar’s ukases roar,

When on your bent necks hails of knout-blows fly,

When flames from your fair cities light the sky,

Then will you cease to praise and to adore.

When bade to worship with becoming grace,

Siberia, kibitka, knout, ukase,

You then, perchance, will seek to entertain

The tsar with a more modern, stern refrain.

Between the ranks the tsar, a bowling-ball,

Rushed in, enquiring of the health of all.

“We wish you health,” his warriors whisper low:

A hundred bears might growl and rumble so.

An order slipped between his teeth and dropped,

Intact, upon the high commander’s tongue;

Then forth from lip to lip the word was flung,

And, falling on a far-off sergeant, stopped.

Then sabers clattered, firearms clicked and groaned;

The square, like troubled waters, surged and moaned.

Whoe’er has seen, upon a man-of-war,

A huge iron kettle used for making mush,

When from a pump great jets of water gush

Into it, while a group of sailors pour

The meal from four stout casks, and paddles dance,

Stirring the mixture till it seethes with glee:

Whoe’er has seen the Deputies in France,[[38]](#footnote-38)

A hundred times more turbulent and free,

When in their midst a project has been east

And the debating-hour is drawing nigh:

All Europe, starved from a protracted fast,

Thinks freedoms will be fed here are she die;

From mouths, like pumps, new liberalisms sluice!

Someone at first suggests our Christian creed;

The Chamber, growing noisy, will not heed:

Somebody mentions freedom; ’tis no use!

Someone at last brings up the sad abuse

Of helpless peoples, tsars, a despot’s reign;

“Order!” the wearied Chamber shouts again.

The finance minister runs in at last

With a well-pruned new budget to be passed;

Begins a speech that sounds of great import,

On duties, rates, red tape of varied sort.

The Chamber boils and bubbles, spurts and cries,

And casts its hubbub to the very skies.

Nations take comfort; cabinets take fright,

Till they perceive, with an embarrassed blush,

’Twas naught but taxes caused this verbal flight.

Whoe’er has seen that kettle full of mush,

Or that wild Chamber, he will understand

What turmoil rose in that vast soldier throng

When into it was flung the tsar’s command.

Three hundred drums responded loud and long;

And like the Neva’s ice that cracks and drifts,

Into long columns falls the infantry.

Rank after rank advances solidly,

While each commander his great voice uplifts.

The tsar stands like the sun; the regiments

Revolve like planets on the heavenly stage.

The tsar lets loose a pack of adjutants,

Like dogs from leash or sparrows from a cage:

Madly they shout commands and madly ride,

Official voices rise on every side;

The bass drums bark, musicians pule and whine.

Now anchor-cable-wise the infantry

Unwinds and whips out to a cord-like line;

By regiments the walls of cavalry

Advance and form a rampart-like design.

But what bold, fierce maneuvers then took place:

How the fleet cavalry, like conquerors,

Flew toward the infantry at furious pace,

As, when the trumpet sounds, a pack of curs

Attack a bear tied in a baiting-ring,

Emboldened that a rope its snout confines;

And how the infantry, now shriveling,

Put forth its arms, as startled porcupines,

To awe a growling dog, advance their spines;

How the mad cavalry, with great furore,

Reined sharply in, stopped short of the attack;

And how they trundled cannons up and back;

How both in Russian and in French they swore;

How this man won arrest and that a blow;

How others froze and sank down in the snow;

And how the tsar won plaudits with his show—

I feel the fruitful richness of the theme!

I need but sing it to win great esteem;

But like a bomb, my poor muse, in mid-flight,

Falls and expires in rhythm as dull as prose,

And in the midst of that stupendous sight,

Like Homer when the gods fall out, I doze![[39]](#footnote-39)

By now all the maneuvers had occurred

Whereof the tsar had ever read or heard.

The uproar of spectators had grown less:

Now topcoat, fur coat, uniform, and dress

That had showed black around the close-packed square

Were crawling slowly homeward, unobserved.

The place retained a frozen, wearied air;

And in the palace lunch was being served.

Foreign ambassadors from near and far,

Who, paying boredom and the frost small heed,

Always attend reviews to please the tsar,

Exclaiming, “Marvels! miracles!” at need,

Already the two thousandth time had cried

(The ardor new, the compliments antique)

That in his tactics was the tsar unique,

That he had mighty leaders by his side,

That who had not beheld could ne’er be told

The fire and courage of these warriors bold.

The conversations ended with a sneer

At arrogant Napoleon’s career,

Then each man sought his watch with furtive eye,

Fearing more trots and gallops might be nigh;

For the sub-zero coldness pinched and gripped,

And ennui strangled them, and hunger nipped.

But still the tsar gives orders to repeat;

His gray and black and yellow cavalry

Full twenty times he has advance, retreat;

He makes once more a wall of soldiery,

Once more compresses it into a square,

And once more spreads it fanwise on the snow;

As an old gamester still with loving care

Stacks, shuffles, deals to an imagined foe:

Although he is deserted and ignored,

He watches and enjoys how each card falls.

But e’en the tsar himself at last was bored,

Turned sharp and hid among his generals.

When he had left, the army held its pose,

And for some minutes stood and slowly froze,

Until at last the drums and trumpets spoke.

Two hundred columns, horse and foot, awoke,

Flowed into near-by streets and sank from view.—

How changed they were, how totally unlike

Those rushing Alpine streams[[40]](#footnote-40) of turbid hue

That leap from crags and roar and twist and strike,

To meet within the placid lake’s bright breast:

There they will purify themselves and rest,

Then glitter gently in new beds and roll

Their emerald waters toward some distant goal.

These soldiers entered fresh and strong and white;

They went out drenched with sweat, a sorry sight:

Exhausted, blackened with the melted snows,

Soiled with the mud that from the ice-cracks rose.

Now actors and spectators both had fled,

And in the lonely square remained the dead,

Twenty in all. This white-clad one, you know,

Was from the cavalry; you cannot guess

The sort and color of that other’s dress,

So crushed he is and trampled in the snow.

Some, standing column-like before the lines,

Have frozen, pointing out the tsar’s designs;

For a mistake this wretch endured the pain

Of gun-butt blow and fell among the slain.

Servants of the police collect them all,

And give them, hurt or slain, one burial.

This lad had broken ribs; a cannon-wheel

Had torn that other’s flesh and crushed his bones:

His bloody entrails stained the muddy stones;

Thrice lie screamed out an agonized appeal.

“Be still, you fool!” his major cried aloud;

“The tsar observes us!” Terrified and cowed,

He clenched his teeth. They brought a cloak in haste

To cover him. For when the tsar is faced

With sudden death so early in the day

And, empty-stomached, sees flesh streaming red,

Courtiers observe he seems no longer gay,

But seeks the palace cross and vexed instead.

There they await him that the court may eat,

But he retains no appetite for meat.

The last poor chap set everyone agog:

Let this man threaten him or that man flog,

He dared oppose his august general,

And, groaning loudly, cursed the very tsar!

A crowd, surprised by the unwonted brawl,

Pushed toward this hero-martyr from afar.

He bore the leader’s orders, says report,

And like a steed bewitched his horse stopped short,

While charging squadrons galloped from behind.

Both horse and rider pitched into the road,

While over them the living torrent flowed.

But horses are less vicious than mankind:

As over him the racing troopers flew,

One horse just struck him with its iron shoe

And broke his upper arm. The jagged bone

Pierced through his uniform and could be seen

As white as any corpse against the green.

His face was livid, but he made no moan

Nor lost his strength: now heavenward he raised

His other arm, and summoning the throng

That on his tortured features gaped and gazed,

With earnest voice he counseled them full long.

And what about? No one dares say a word.

For fear of spies his startled hearers fled

And to their questioners discreetly said

That only broken Russian had they heard,

But that indeed one phrase had carried far:

“The tsar, the tsar,”—something about the tsar.

Reports were current that the trampled man

Was but a lad, a Lithuanian,

The scion of a house both proud and great;

That from his school he had been seized by force;

That the commander, with accustomed hate,

Had said, on giving him an untamed horse,

“Now let the Polish cur beware his fate!”

They knew not who he was, and from that time

Men spake not of the name but of the crime.

Ah, when they search thy conscience, tsar, to find

That name, no more recalled by humankind,

The devil will reveal it amid throngs

Whom thou hast cast ’neath horses or confined

In mines to blot them out and hide their wrongs.

Upon the morrow from the square were heard

A dog’s dull howls.—A black patch stained the white.

When men dug down, the corpse was disinterred

Of some poor fellow who had died that night.

Half peasant and half soldier he appeared,

With close-cropped head but with a long, full beard;

He wore an army coat, a cap of fur,

And seemed the servant of some officer.

Upon his master’s cloak of fur, slumped low,

Awaiting orders, he was left to freeze,

And now the drifting snow had reached his knees.

His faithful dog had sought and found him so.

He dared not use the cloak, so cruelly nigh,

To keep from freezing! Snow concealed one eye;

The other, open though congealed, was cast

Upon the square: thence had his master passed!

His lord has bade him sit; he will obey

And, ordered to be still, will move no limb,

Nor rise until the awful Judgment Day,

Keeping in death the faith reposed in him.

For still he grasped the garment jealously,

To guard it from whatever thieves might be:

His other hand he warmed within his breast.,

But clutched the cloak with fingers swollen and bare.

His lord made no inquiry and no quest:

He was too cautious, or he did not care!

He was some officer on tour, they said,

A new arrival in the capital,

Who went not to parades on duty’s call,

But to display fresh epaulettes instead.

Perchance a dinner followed the review,

A lady’s wink that his trained eye had caught,

A call upon a gamester whom he knew,

And o’er the cards—his serf escaped his thought.

Perchance both coat and man he would disown

In order not to show he had a cloak

And could not stand the cold like other folk,

While tsarish flesh endured without a groan:

The world would say: “To the review he brought

A coat! How odd! A liberal in thought!”

Poor peasant! Such dumb, patient bravery

Is merit in a dog but sin for thee!

And thy reward Thy lord will smile and say

That, dog-like, unto death thou didst obey.

Poor peasant! Why should tears flow forth from me,

And my heart throb when I recall thy fate?

Poor Slav, I grieve for thine unhappy state!

Poor nation, I deplore thy tragedy!

Thy heroism is naught but slavery.

 The Day Preceding the Inundation of

 St Petersburg in 1824[[41]](#footnote-41)

 Oleszkiewicz [[42]](#footnote-42)

When winter makes the sky glow cold and clear,

It turns dark blue; black spots of frost appear,

Like those that mark a dead man’s frozen face,

When near a stove is placed the stiffened clay,

And, drawing warmth, not life, to its embrace,

It breathes forth only vapors of decay.

Warm winds began to blow—Those towers of smoke,

That airy city of gigantic size,

That vision of enchantment, thinned and broke,

And fell in ruins from the darkened skies.

Smoke flowed in rivers through each street and square,

Mixed with warm vapors in the close, damp air;

Before night fell, the snow’s relentless thaw

Had buried pavements ’neath a Stygian flood.

Sleighs fled away, and carriage and landau

Cast off their runners; wheels splashed through the mud.

But in the humid, smoke-filled, murky night

The carriages and cabs are lost to sight;

Only their lanterns wander to and fro,

Like flames that over marshlands dance and glow.

At dusk our youthful travelers walked beside

The Neva’s shore. They choose the eventide,

For thus they shun the stern official eye,

And in the empty street will meet no spy.

Engaged in foreign chat they strolled along;

At times they gently hummed some foreign song:

Then they would pause and look around for fear

Someone was listening. Not a soul was near.

Humming, they loitered on the path atop

The Alp-like quays that to the water drop,

Until they halted where a roadway led

Down through the granite to the river’s bed.

And there below they saw a man who bore

A lantern, standing on the lonely shore:

No spy, for something in the stream he sought;

Nor ferryman—who sails o’er ice by night!—

Nor fisherman, for in his hands was naught

Except a sheaf of papers and his light.

The lads drew near: he did not glance about;

A rope, sunk in the water, he pulled out,

Counted the knots, and jotted down a note;

He sought to plumb the far depths of the stream.

The ice threw back his ghostly lantern’s gleam,

Flooding his weird, white ledgers as he wrote.

Above the candle’s glow his face was bowed,

As saffron-tinted as a sunset cloud:

A handsome face, noble of cast yet stern.

His ledgers with such industry he read

That, hearing steps and voices overhead,

Who it might be he did not seek to learn;

He only seemed to ask, nay, to demand,

Strict silence by a movement of his hand.

His gesture was so startling and so grim

That, though the lads stood almost over him,

Whispering, gazing, laughing silently,

They all grew still and dared not disobey.

One looked into his face and cried, “‘Tis he!”

‘Tis who?—A Pole, an artist in his day,

But now become a sage in occult lore,

For paint and pencil he employed no more:

The Bible and the cabala he read

And even talked with spirits, it was said.

The painter, rising, closed his mystic text,

And mused aloud: “Those who survive this night

Will see great marvels of Jehovah’s might:

This is the second test, beware the next!

The Lord will shake the fair Assyrian throne;

The Lord will shake the walls of Babylon.

Lord, ere the third test come, let me be gone!”

He spoke and left the travelers alone,

Climbed slowly upward, carrying his light,

And soon behind the wall was lost to sight.

None could explain the message that he gave:

Some laughed in scorn but others were amazed;

All cried: “How strangely conjurers behave!”

Then for a moment more they stood and gazed,

Till, noting how the stormy night had sped,

With hasty step each traveler sought his bed.

One lad alone dashed up the steps and ran

Along the quay. He could not see the man,

But merely glimpsed his lantern from afar,

A twinkle like a pale and distant star.

Although he had not seen the painter’s face,

Though his friends’ comments he bad scarcely heard,

Yet had the mystic voice, the startling word

Thrilled him. Now could his recollection place

That voice, heard once before; with all his might

He ran on blindly through the stormy night.

The lantern, carried swiftly, winked and tossed;

Grew smaller, in the misty dark seemed lost,

As though it had gone out: it stopped at last

In a great square, amid an empty space.

To reach his goal, the lad increased his pace.

He saw a heap of stones, impressive, vast;

And on one block he saw the painter stand.

Quite still amid the shades of night he stood:

His shoulders wore no cloak; his brow, no hood;

His arm was raised, the lantern in his hand,

And from the angle of his light it seemed

He gazed upon the palace of the tsar.

There at the very end one window gleamed

And glittered: he observed that earthly star,

Whispered, as though the heavens to invoke,

Then raised his voice, as to himself he spoke:

“Thou art not sleeping, tsar! The night is still:

Thy courtiers sleep, but thou seek’st rest in vain.

The Lord hath sent his angel once again

To warn thee sternly not to flout his will.

Yet still the tsar seeks sleep, his eyes shut tight;

And soon deep sleep will come. In days of yore

His guardian angel warned him o’er and o’er

With yet more dreadful visions of the night.

“For once he was a man, be was not vile;

Slowly he fell into a tyrant’s role:[[43]](#footnote-43)

God’s angels left him, and his aging soul

Sank ever deeper under Satan’s guile.

This last faint urge, with gentle counsel fraught,

He thinks a trifling dream, a thing of naught.

His pride each day his flatterers will increase

Till under Satan’s heel his crimes shall cease.

 “These wretched serfs who in their hovels cower,

And not the tsar, will first meet punishment:

For lightening, striking a dead element,

Smites first the lofty mountain and the tower;

But in the worldf of men this is reversed:

It strikes the lowly and the guileless first.

 “’Mid quarrels, lust, and wine they fall asleep,

Poor corpse-like skulls, to waken in the morn!

Rest ye, dull beasts, in slumber sunken deep,

Till the Lord’s wrath awake you like the horn

Of forest hunter whose swift sword lies bare

A path of slaughter to the wild boar’s lair!

 “I hear —afar—! The storm-winds raise their heads

Like polar monsters from their icy beds:

Already they have spread their cloudy wings;

They mount upon the wave, its strength unchained.

I hear—! Now the deep ocean, unrestrained,

Chaps on its icy bit, strikes out, and springs.

Now to the skies it arches its moist neck:

Now—! Still one chain, but one, holds it in check,—

Soon that will part! They strike it blow on blow.—”

 He spoke; then sensing his lone auditor,

Blew out his candle and was seen no more.

Thus had he gleamed and gone, foreboding woe,

Like an ill omen, smiting suddenly,

Then passing by—an awesome mystery.

 THIS DIGRESSION

THE AUTHOR DEDICATES

TO HIS RUSSIAN FRIENDS[[44]](#footnote-44)

 To My Russian Friends

Do ye remember me? When musing traces

My friends’ deaths, banishments, and baffled schemes,

Ye also gather, and your foreign faces

Have right of citizenry in my dreams![[45]](#footnote-45)

Where are ye now Ryleyer’s[[46]](#footnote-46) noble shoulders

That once I clasped, now by the tsar’s decree

Hang slowly rotting where a gibbet molders;

A curse on folk that murder prophecy!

The hand Bestuzhev,[[47]](#footnote-47) that brave knight and poet,

Stretched out to me, is torn from sword and pen;

On mine-pit toil the tsar’s commands bestow it,

By Polish mates in a Siberian den.

Others,[[48]](#footnote-48) perchance, endure a fate more dire;

 Someone, perhaps, seduced by gifts of state,[[49]](#footnote-49)

Betrays his free soul to the tsar for hire

 And bows today on thresholds of the great.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Perchance with venal tongue he lauds the tyrant,

And revels in the martyrdom of friends;

Smeared with my blood, he curses the conspirant,

And boasts of horrid deeds as worthy ends.

If far to northward, from a new, free nation,

These sad songs come to you on soaring wing,

Above your land of icy desolation

They’ll herald freedom, as the storks the spring.

Ye’ll know my voice! For while I was in fetters,

I duped the despot, crawling like a snake,[[51]](#footnote-51)

But shared my thoughts with you, as abettors

Shielded my dove-like frankness, for my sake.

Now to the world I pour this poisoned chalice—

A bitter tale sucked forth from burning veins;

My country’s blood and tears compound its malice;

Let it corrode—not you, friends, but your chains!

If one of you cry out, his plaint unsteady

The barking of a dog shall seem to me,

Chained up so long that he at last is ready

To bite the hand that gives him liberty.

This translation originally occurred in the Appendix to Wacław Lednicki [1891–1967], *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman: The Story of a Masterpiece*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1955. According to page 102 it is taken from *The Poems of Adam Mickiewicz*, translated by various hands and edited by George Rapall Noyes, New York, NY: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944, pp. 337–368. The individual poems constituting the *Digression* have been translated in collaboration with Professor Noyes by the following persons: *The Road to Russia*, *The Suburbs of the Capital*, *St. Petersburg*, *The Monument of Peter the Great*, *The Review of the Army*, and *Oleszkiewicz*, by Marjorie Beatrice Peacock; “To My Muscovite Friends,” by Watson Kirkconnell.

1. In an earlier note to *Forefathers’ Eve*, Part III, Mickiewiez explained this term as follows: “The *feldjäger*, or imperial field-shooters, are a kind of gendarme. They are employed primarily in hunting down persons of whom the government is suspicious. They usually travel in kibitkas, wooden carriages without springs, narrow and flat, higher in front than behind. Byron refers to them in *Don Juan*. [Canto IX, stanza xxx.] A gendarme usually scarcely imagine the terror that prevails in every house at the door of which the sound of the post bell is heard.” Cf. *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz*, edited by G. R. Noyes, p. 455. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A. P. Ermolov, a famous Russian general, Mickiewicz added the following note to this line: “The common folk of Russia are fully convinced that the tsar is quite equal to carrying off any other monarch in a police kibitka. And in very truth it is hard to say what answer a *feldjäger* would receive in certain states if he came on such an errand. This much is certain, that Novosiltsev was wont to repeat: ‘There will never be peace until we so organize Europe that one of our *feldjägers* can execute identical orders in Wilno, Paris, and Stamboul with equal ease.’ The removal from authority over Georgia of General Ermolov (by Nicholas I), whose name was very popular among the Russians, was regarded by them as a more important event than a victory over some petty king in Western Europe. We need not wonder at this idea of the Russians. Let us remember that His Princely Highness the Duke of Wurttemberg, when besieging Danzig with the allied armies, wrote to General Rapp that a Russian general was equal in dignity to a king, and might assume that title if such were the will of the emperor, See Memoirs of General Rapp.” Cf. *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz*, p. 468. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It has been proved by W. Ciechowski that the poet described here Tsarskoe Selo. The line “Churchlike, with cross and stone,” etc. refers to the so-called Pavilion in its park; “A summer house, etc.” refers to the famous imperial palace. Cf. Dziadów, *Część Trzecia*, edited by W. Borowy (Warsaw, 1920), p. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The poet alludes to the development of classicism in Russian literature during the reign of Catherine II. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “These words were spoken by the king of the Goths when he saw for the first time the Coliseum in Rome.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mickiewicz alludes here to the policy of the ruthless confiscation of property, works of art, libraries, etc., by the Russian government in the Polish provinces annexed by Russia. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mickiewiez added the following footnote: “In St. Petersburg during the winter, dusk begins about three o’clock.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “In northern cities on cold days the smoke rises skyward in fantastic forms, making a spectacle similar to the mirage that leads astray sailors on the sea and travelers on the Arabian sands. The mirage counterfeits now a city, now a village, now a lake or oasis; all objects can be seen very distinctly, but it is impossible to approach them; they always remain at the same distance from the traveler—and at last they vanish.” Cf. *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz*, p. 469. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “The Finns inhabited the marshy shores of the Neva, where St. Petersburg was later founded.” Cf. *loc. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “Many historians describe the foundation and the building of St. Petersburg. It is a familiar truth that inhabitants for that capital were driven to it by force, and that more than one hundred thousand of them died during the time of its construction. Granite and marble were brought in by sea from distant lands.” Cf. *loc. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In Italian this name means “pleasure” and “sport.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In German, “servant.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “ Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “The confessions that have separated from the Catholic Church enjoy special protection in Russia: first, because their adherents readily pass over to the Greek faith, following the example of the German princesses and princes; second, because their pastors are the beat support of despotism, by instilling into the populace a blind obedience to the secular authority, even in matters of conscience, in which Catholics appeal to the decision of the Church. It is well known that the Augsburg and Geneva confessions united into one church at the command of the King of Prussia.” Cf. *loc. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “During intensely cold weather the steam from the mouth becomes visible, forming a column often several feet in height,” Cf. *loc. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. On the Alexander Square (W. Ciechowski. Cf. Borowy’s edition, p. 211). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The poet alludes here to the young Poles exiled to Russia whose imprisonment and trial preceding this exile form an important theme in the dramatic section of *Forefathers’ Eve*, Part III. Thus, this allusion, like several others, serves to unite the Digression to the main part of the work. For the English translation of *Forefathers’ Eve*, Part III, see *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz*, pp. 245 ff. For comments on this work see my *Life and Culture of Poland* (New York, 1944), pp. 182 ff., and my *Russia, Poland and the West* (New York and London, 1954), pp. 310 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Konrad is the main hero of *Forefathers’ Eve*, Part III, and was also exiled to Russia. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. A recurring poetic image which creates another link with the main part of *Forefathers’ Eve*, Part III. See Scene 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The poet alludes to Jozef Oleszkiewicz (1777–1830), a Polish painter and mystic living in Petersburg at the time of Mickiewicz’s stay there. He played a great role in Mickiewicz’s spiritual development. He was a high Masonic dignitary, and probably it was through him that Mickiewicz was introduced to the circles of those who later became the Decembrists, mentioned in Mickiewicz’s dedicational poem attached to the *Digression*. He was also noted for his philanthropic deeds. In *Forefathers’ Eve*, Part III, Scene 8, lines 629-632, Konrad is told:

“A distant, unknown road you soon will go,

You’ll be in throngs of great folk, rich and bright:

Seek out a man with mind of still more light.

You’ll know him; he will greet you in God’s name.”

(Cf. *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz*, p. 329) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The arms of Lithuania are a mounted knight, so that the stranger’s greeting is: “I greet you as a Christian and as a native of Lithuania.” Cf. *ibid*., p. 470. In the first draft this line was different: “I greet you with the sign of the Eagle and Boos.” This was a Masonic greeting. The (White) “Eagle” was the name of the Polish Masonic lodge in Petersburg of which Oleszkiewicz was the master. “Boot” was a word with which the Masons of the second degree were greeted. This is the only concrete proof that .Mickiewicz might have been a Mason himself. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mickiewicz. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Pushkin. See above, pp. 25–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “On the monument to Peter is the inscription, *Petro primo Catharina secunda.*” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. “Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “This line is translated from a Russian poet whose name I do not remember.” Mickiewicz refers to V. G. Ruben, a minor writer of the eighteenth century. See Wacław Lednicki, *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman: The Story of a Masterpiece*, 1955, p. 24, and p. 149 n. 17 of the Appendix. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “The colossal equestrian statue of Peter, designed by Falconet, and the statue of Marcus Aurelius that now stands in Rome on the Capitoline Hill are here faithfully described.” See above, pp. 23-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This is the so-called Mars Square in Petersburg. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The poet alludes in these two lines to the wars of Nicholas I against Turkey and Persia and his reprisals against Poland. See pp. 104, 107–108, above, for Pushkin’s glorification of these wars. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. An ironic play with lines found in Book II of Homer’s *Iliad* and Book VII of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Baron Henri Jomini (1779–1869), Swiss general and author of famous works on military matters. He served first under Napoleon, but in 1813 he allied himself to Russia. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “The horses of the Russian cavalry are handsome and command a high price. Horses for the soldiers of the guard often cost several thousand francs, while a grown man of the proper height may be bought for one thousand. During the famine in White Russia women were sold in St. Petersburg for two hundred francs apiece. I must confess with shame that some Polish landowners of White Russia supplied goods of this sort.” Cf. *Poems by Adam Mickiewicz*, p. 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “Tarantulas are a species of large, poisonous spiders that build nests over their burrows. They are found on the southern steppes of Russia and Poland.” Cf. *loc. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “The Russian decorations, including their various classes, the imperial monograms, and the so-called buckles indicating the years of service, number about sixty. Sometimes twenty marks of distinction glitter on one uniform.” Cf*. loc. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. A poetic license of the translator. Mickiewicz wrote: “But in the master’s eyes,” meaning “in the eyes of the tsar.” [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Mickiewiez added the following footnote: “A few years ago one of the court officials cut his throat because at some court function he was assigned a lower place than he was entitled to according to the hierarchy. He was the Vatel of Russian officialdom.” Vatel, steward of “the great Condé,” committed suicide in 1671, heart-broken over some deficiencies in a banquet and entertainment held in honor of Louis XIV. Cf. *loc. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “In the Hermitage, the St. Petersburg picture gallery, is a portrait of the tsarevich, heir to the throne. The painter, an Englishman named Dawe, has portrayed him as a child in a hussar’s uniform, with a whip in his hand.” Cf. *loc. cit.* George Dawe (1781–1829) was, beginning in 1819, the court painter of Alexander I and Nicholas I. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. A paraphrase of a line from the satire *To the King* by the Polish poet Ignacy Krasicki (1735–1801). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. A play on Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* (*The Education of Cyrus*). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The following passage is based on Mickiewicz’s impression of the French Chamber of Deputies, which he visited in 1831. Pushkin probably read these lines with satisfaction. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. An allusion to Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, line 359. “I am indignant whenever good old Homer dozes.” The phrase in Polish is literally: “Like Homer in the battle of the gods I doze.” “The Battle of the Gods” is the title of the Book XXI of the *Iliad.* [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Mickiewicz here describes Switzerland from his personal recollections of it. He was there in 1829–1830. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Wacław Lednicki, *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman: The Story of a Masterpiece*, 1955, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Mickiewicz added the following footnote: “A painter well known in St. Petersburg for his virtues, his deep learning, and his mystic prophecies.” See note 19 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. “The poet has in mind Alexander I, who in the first period of his reign (1801–1825) was actuated by liberal and humanitarian ideas, but who betrayed these ideas toward the end of his reign. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. In Polish, “Przyjaciołom Moskalom”—“To Muscovite Friends.” The appellation *Moskal* is a derogatory one. Therefore, the meaning of the line as well as of the title of this dedicational poem is: “To Enemy Friends.” [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The first stanza alludes to the author’s exile in Russia and to his friendly relations with Russian society. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Kondraty Ryleev (1795–1836), a poet and a leader of the Decembrists. One of

the five conspirators hanged on July 25, 1826, by order of Nicholas I. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. “Alexander Bestuzhev (1797–1837), also a Decembrist sentenced to exile in Siberia and later in the Caucasus, was killed in a battle in 1837. He was also a famous writer under the name of Marlinsky. Mickiewicz did not know that although Bestuzhev criticized Pushkin’s anti-Polish poems—he accused him of “worshiping the golden calf”—he was willing to join the Russian army against Poland in 1830–1831. He expressed the hope that Poland would be annihilated forever. Cf. Wacław Lednicki, *Pouchkine et la Pologne*, p. 155 and pp. 161–162. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Probably Pushkin and Zhukovsky only. Khomyakov’s poem, written in an idealistic Slavophil tone, and including some criticism of Pushkin’s aggressive anti-Polish poems, could not have hurt Mickiewicz. Cf. Wacław Lednicki, *Pouchkine et la Pologne*, pp. 158–159. V. A. Zhukovsky (1783–1852), Russian poet and tutor to Alexander II; A. S. Khornyakov (1804–1860), a famous Slavophil, a poet and thinker. Both he and Zhukovsky were close friends of Mickiewicz. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. These two lines, and the first line of the next stanza, probably allude to Pushkin. There is no doubt that Pushkin understood them as an allusion to himself, the more so that in November, 1831, after the publication of his anti-Polish odes he received an appointment in the foreign office with a salary of 5,000 rubles. In Wacław Lednicki, *Pouchkine et la Pologne* the author tried to show that Pushkin’s anti-Polish poems were a genuine expression of his views and that he did not write them for any personal advantages. Nevertheless, Pushkin would not have been able to deny the fact of the reward. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This line alludes to Zhukovsky. It was a direct answer to a stanza in his ode in which the Russian poet said:

“Bow your banners,

Brothers, as duty commands,

Before the new glory of the throne

And hail the tsar.”

(Cf. Wacław Lednicki, *Aleksander Puszkin*, p. 174) [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Mickiewicz probably alludes here to the fact that the second edition of his *Konrad Wallenrod*, which was written while he was in Russia and contained thinly veiled references to Poland’s enslavement by Russia, was prefaced by a humiliating tribute to Nicholas I. Mickiewicz was forced by the censorship to include this tribute which was naturally quite alien to his real feelings about the Tsar. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)