Additional Poems By Joseph Freeman Essay, Research Paper

TO THE OLD WORLD

If your forefathers have been wise and brave,

And lit a thousand lights, it little matters:

You are an aged king before his grave

Whom his own folly has reduced to tatters.

While the world tumbles down about your head,

Your royal cloak, inherited of old,

Slips from your shoulders by a broken thread,

And gathers dust into its woven gold.

There let it lie, entangled in itself.

Write the last footnote to your history,

And, laying the volume on Time’s iron shelf,

Sit back to muse on days that are to be,

When laughing boys, turning to sober men,

Shall build your ruins into a world again.

(1921)

PRINCE JERNIKIDZE

Prince Jernikidze wears his boots

Above his knees; his black mustache

Curls like the Kaiser’s; when he shoots

Friend and foe turn white as ash.

The movements of his hands are svelt,

Ivory bullets grace his chest,

The studded poignard at his belt

Dangles down his thigh. The best

Dancers in Tiflis envy his

Light Lesginka’s steady whirl,

He bends his close-cropped head to kiss

The finger-tips of every girl.

Over the shashleek and the wine

His deep and passionate baritone

Directs the singing down the line,

And none may drain his glass alone.

When morning breaks into his room

He dons his long Circassian coat,

Marches to the Sovnarkom

Knocks at the door and clears his throat,

Opens the ledger with his hand,

Bows to the commissars who pass,

Calls the janitor comrade, and

Keeps accounts for the working class.

(1926)

BALLAD OF TAMPA

When after dinner you smoke, gentlemen, remember

Tampa leads the world making clear Havanas: Mexicans,

Cubans, Urugayans, Porto Ricans are your vassals;

Ybor City, Palmetto Beach, West Tampa sweat, ache, starve,

For the azure smoke-ring exciting tonight’s new lay.

Dull-eyed sallow elderly women stand confuted

In the factory-tomb banding, wrapping, boxing.

Machines monotonously clock the minutes;

Gossamer of cellophane automatically embraces cigars.

No, says the woman-worker, I don’t count cigars packing;

There’s no time, no time; we get used to it;

One look tells us how many there are;

No time . . . no time . . . no time.

Bastard houses, colonial and Spanish, lean

Over Ybor City’s narrow Seventh Avenue, memorial

Of antithetic races flowing to the New World’s shores.

Here the home of Tampa’s proletariat winds its lank

Streets under balconies. Labor yokes all races; voices

And awnings shout Martinez, Cohen, Carducci! But O

Beloved flaming faces of Latin America, passionate

And stern, whose eyes burn with remembrance

Of a hundred battles with the world wide foe.

Going home, gentlemen, we find no architecture;

Home is an old broken wooden box patched

With tin or paper, naked within, maybe a hard cot;

Maybe, O petit-bourgeois luxury, even two; maybe

A decrepit icebox, a table limping on three legs;

Shacks whose faces grow black with worry.

Where will the rent–two bucks a week—come from?

The workers, having forgotten under the chronic

Fake smile of the Blue Eagle the feel of labor,

Do not recall the names of conquistadors

Who first touched Tampa’s shores; let the Chamber

Trumpet to a posterity of tourists the memory

Of Pamfilo de Narvaez, Hernando de Soto

The immense teeth and spectacles of Teddy.

We know only the third republic, the Roosevelt

Who flashes trecherous promises through a cataleptic gain.

We remember, gentlemen, the great strike of Thirty-One

When we marched to the factory of Sanchez y Haya

And on the water tank high above Ybor City

Nailed the red flag with hammer and sickle.

We remember, too, the terror, the cops who wrecked

The face of our leader Hy Gordon, cracked their pistols

Through his wrist-bone broke our Union.

Let us go, then Comrades, to the Communist meeting;

Go in silence; the forgotten man is forgotten,

he Reds remembered; they are here illegal,

Foregathering secretly in private homes.

Tiptoe up the stairway one by one.

Order, compa?eros; Comrade Lopez has the floor.

The terror grows, we have no work, we starve;

Our wives and children hunger; those who still

Labor aridly in the factories (robbed

Of the traditional readers) face new wage-cuts;

The cops ravage meetings; jail, beat, deport

The bravest, wisest workers, those

Who know the road to freedom from this hell.

The factory gates are closed to Negroes:–

Let the black bastards die, let them all die,

Let the blessed Blue Eagle dedevour these rebellious worms,

But let it preserve our profits!

Compa?eros, we shall not die; our ranks are but

A platoon in that vast army, throughout

The world which carries high the proletarian banner

Fighting through blood and terror toward the goal.

We who once raised the red banner over Ybor City

Shall do our part indeed, striking the needed blows

For an America of work and thought for all.

Where soil, factory and machine; art,

Philosophy and science; love itself

Shall be with bread the portion of the people.

Mankind looks forward, but the hurt look back:

Broken of will, distracted and afraid,

They who have had no childhood but the rack

Shall yet be judged for what they’ve done or said.

And if their feet, once crucified, now drag,

We’ll nail them once again upon our scorn:

When mankind marches, let the weak not lag,

Cursing the time and place where they were born.

The past dies, save for those whom it has broken;

They will remember whom the world has maimed.

Let them be silent! Things must not be spoken

Which hide deep in the thought of man, ashamed:

Or, if their lips are bitter and inflamed,

Let them speak all by symbol and by token.

New York

1925

In this black room, midnight and morn are each

Aeons away; the open window brings

The sea’s insistent roar against the beach;

Loud in the night the hollow bellbuoy flings

Skyward its melancholy monotones;

Above the clamor of the breaking waves

Far off its lonely clapper moans

Like some despairing idiot who raves

Crawling on hands and knees through empty streets

To doors that seem familiar, there to weep.

While one unconscious twisted knuckle beats

For succor, for compassion and for sleep,

He rends the silence with a final cry

To which the stubborn night makes no reply.

New York

November 1931

The hordes that battle for the world’s domain

Sweat impatiently within each camp;

Once more the bloodsoaked earth roars with the tramp

Of armies thundering across the plain.

And now again the long eternal rain

Shall drum in darkness taps upon the damp

Cracked bodies, or the yellow lonely lamp

Of night glow on the entrails of the slain.

And we who once awoke from the slow dream

Of peace and childhood to behold the sky

Broken asunder by the flaming steel

Of shells whose death came with a monstrous scream,

Shall this time, having lived, know how to die,

Rifle in hand, to make a just dream real.

New York

December 1931