

Song of the Midsummer Sabbath

When in the Crab the Sun doth grill,
When nightingale no more may trill,
In Czarnolas the times require
We light midsummer's sabbath-fire.

Then did the company draw near
The bonfire's blithe and roaring cheer:
Three flutes chirped out a lusty song,
Through orchards echoes it prolonged.

When all were seated on the turf
Up jumped twelve maids, their waistbands girth
With magic mugwort – twice three pairs,
All clad alike in festive wear.

All trained to lilt a languid lay,
And unsurpassed as dancers they;
So would they each in her turn sing:
And let the first her song begin:

First Girl

O, sisters! While the flame burns bright,
And room's left free, so that we might
Come to the fore, join in a ring,
Then let's our festive ditties sing.

O, beauteous night, let us thy power
Protect 'gainst storm or sudden shower:
The time has come to watch all through
This night outside till morning dew.

So have we by our dames been told,
And they from theirs this lore did hold,
That after dusk on St. John's Night
The sabbath-fire must kindle bright.

Young folks, my warning be your guide,
And by your fathers' custom bide;
Let ancient feast be festive e'er,
As it hath been so everywhere.

Of old were feast-days never shunned,
Yet never was work left undone;
The earth was rich in its bounty,
For God is pleased by piety.

But now for ever labour we,
And feast-days never favoured be;
We strive only to earn and earn,
But scant's the gain that I discern.

For either hailstorms heavy pelt,
Or scorching sun destroys such wealth;
Each summer smaller harvest reaps,
And all things waste in prices steep.

If thou shouldst toil both night and day,
Without God's help will thy assay
Be turned to naught. In God ye must
For plenitude of harvest trust.

In this our confidence must rest,
Let not our minds fond care oppress.
The times of wealth will once more come:
Man's course on earth is not yet run.

Now let's this famous even keep,
And as of yore this fiery heap
Till very daybreak let's enhance
Not without song, not without dance.

Twelfth Girl

Country pleasant, country calm,
Who can ever voice thy charm?
All thy virtue, all thy leisure,
In one moment, who can measure?

In thy harbour's honest profit,
Far from all that us'ers covet,
Godly is the husband's strain:
Bless'd and certain is his gain.

Some would wander with the Court,
Or upon the seas disport

Where the wind the sails will play,
And Death in ambush lurks one step away.

Some there be with tongues for sale,
Counsel by the pound purvey;
Some their gain with blood must pawn,
Risk their necks to Fate's sword drawn.

But the ploughman tills his field;
From this labour's yearly yield
He th'entire household feeds,
And provides for all their needs.

His the orchard that bear fruit,
His the honey bees accrue,
His the wool when sheep are shorn,
His the lambs all, newly born.

He makes hay in mead and field,
Brimms the barn with harvest's yield;
Then, when winter's crops are sown,
By the hearth we'll sit at home.

There, with lute and sundry song,
We'll strange hist'ries hear anon;
And anon the lively jig in mirth,
And the chase-dance round the hearth.

So the hunter lays his snare,
Steals to peep at game in lair;
When at night his trap he sets,
On the morn the prize he gets.

So the angler sets his line,
Off the river's shoal he'll dine.
Water-fowl around he hears
Calling out their chirpy cheers.

While his beasts by bankside graze,
On the pipes the shepherd plays;
Through the coolness of the shade
Sylvan fauns will hop in glade.

Thus the thrifty housewife cares
Supper want no thing of fare;
Such her thrift and industry
That buying's ne'er necessity.

She herself counteth her kine
Back from field at eventime,
And at milking lends a hand,
Helps her husband all she can.

All his offspring gather near,
Stooping o'er their grandsire's beard;
They'll to small needs accustomed grow,
Modesty and virtue know.

Dawn afresh would break once more
All its gleam on sea, before
My praise should cease, O, country!
Bless'd thy virtues, bless'd thy bounty!

© Translated by Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa