Mor Jokai

A Hungarian Nabob

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CHAPTER I.

AN ODDITY, 1822.

It is nasty, dirty weather outside there on the *puszta*;1 the sky is cloudy, the earth muddy, the rain has been falling for two weeks incessantly, as if by special command. There are inundations and submersions everywhere; rushes are growing instead of wheat, the stork is ploughing, the duck is fishing all over the precious sea-like expanse. "This judgment weather began on St. Medardus' Day, and will last now for forty days longer, but if it does last, I know not where we are to find the Noah to save man and beast from a partial deluge."

[1] For the meaning of this and all other Hungarian words used in the text, see the glossary at end of book.

This melancholy reflection was made by the noble Mr. Peter Bús, whom a cruel fate had called to be a perpetual wrangler with guests on the cross-roads of the famous county of Szabolcs, for he was the innkeeper of the "Break-'em-tear-'em" *csárda* there. That worthy inn owed its name, not to its ancestors, but to its own peculiar merits, for no traveller could possibly reach that sweet haven till he had had endless spills and been nearly torn to pieces. This was especially the case at such times when the floodgates of Heaven were open, and it naturally occurred to a man's mind how much better it would have been to have had floodgates on the earth instead, for then you would not be brought to a standstill on the dike between two ponds, with the ground so soaking wet beneath your feet that there seemed nothing for it but to stick there till you grew old, or carry your waggon away with you on your back.

It was drawing towards evening. Mr. Peter Bús was coming home from his fields on horseback, grumbling to himself, but softly, for he grudged taking his pipe out of his mouth merely for the sake of what he was saying, which goes to prove that pipes were invented in order that man may have something to stuff his mouth with, and thus stop from swearing so much. "All the hay has gone to the devil already," he muttered, "and he'll have the wheat too! The whole shoot has gone to the deuce!" For the innkeeper of the *csárda* does not live by only doling out wine, but is a bit of a farmer besides, and his business is no sinecure.

While he was thus murmuring to himself, a dubious-looking being of the feminine gender, of whom it was difficult to judge whether she was a spouse or a scullery-maid, appeared at the extreme end of the dike, which led towards the River Theiss.

"Isn't there a coach coming along there?" she said.

"So I'm to be saddled with guests on an infernal day like this, eh! It only needed that," said Peter Bús, grumbling still more. He did not look in the direction indicated, but hastened into his pothouse to strip off his saturated pelisse before the fire, and swear a little more. "When our store of bread is gone, I don't know where I am to get any more from, but I don't mean to starve for anybody."

At last, however, he condescended to look out of the window, drying the sweat from his brow the while, and perceived a carriage a good distance off, drawn by four post-horses, struggling along the dike. He made a gesture of satisfaction towards it with one hand, and said, pleasantly, "It won't get here to-day." Then he sat him down in front of his door, and, lolling his pipe out of the corner of his mouth, looked on in calm enjoyment, while the coachman cursed and swore at the four horses on the far-extending dike. The lumbering old vehicle on its high springs swayed to and fro from time to time, as if it were on the point of toppling over, but a

couple of men kept close to it on each side, and, whenever a jolt came, they clung heavily on to the steps to keep it steady, and when it stuck fast in mud up to the axles of the wheels, and the horses came to a standstill, they would, first of all, shout till they were husky at the horses, and then, buckling to, dig the whole conveyance out with sticks and staves, raise the wheels, clean out the spokes, which had been converted into a solid mass of mud, and then proceed triumphantly a few paces further.

Mr. Peter Bús regarded the dangers of others in the spirit of a true predestinarian. Frantic cries and the cracking of whips reached his ears from time to time, but what business was it of his? It is true he had four good horses of his own, by the aid of which he might have dragged the coming guests out of the mud in the twinkling of an eye, but why should he? If it were written in the Book of Fate that the carriage would safely arrive at the *csárda*, it *would* arrive, but if it were preordained to stick fast in the mud and remain there till dawn, then stick fast it must, and it would be wrong to cut athwart the ways of Providence.

And at last all four wheels stuck so fast in the mud in the middle of the dam that it was impossible to move either backwards or forwards. The men were hoarse with shouting, the harness was rent to pieces, the horses lay down in the mud, and the weather began to grow beautifully dark. Mr. Peter Bús, with a lightened heart, knocked the ashes of his pipe-bowl into the palm of his hand. Thank God! no guest will come to-day, and his heart rejoiced as, passing through the door, he perceived the empty coach-house, in which his little family of poultry, all huddled up together for the night, was squabbling sociably. He himself ordered the whole of his household to bed, for candles were dear, put out the fire, and stretching himself at his ease on his *bunda*, chuckled comfortably behind his lighted pipe, and fell reflecting on the folly of people travelling anywhere in such dripping weather.

While Mr. Peter Bús was calmly sleeping the sleep of the just, danger was approaching the house from the other, the further side. In the direction of Nyiregyháza there was no dike indeed, and the water was free to go up and down wherever it chose. A stranger venturing that way might just as well make his will at once, but those who knew the lie of the land, could get along more easily than if there had been a regular road; indeed, there were coachmen who had loafed about the district so long and learnt to know all its boggy and hilly turnings and windings so thoroughly, that they could make their way across it late at night in any sort of vehicle.

It must have been close upon midnight, for the cocks of the "Break-'em-tear-'em" *csárda* had begun to crow one after the other, when a light began to twinkle in the twilight. Twelve mounted men were approaching with burning torches, with a carriage and a waggon in their midst.

The waggon went in front, the carriage behind, so that if a ditch presented itself unexpectedly the waggon might tumble into it, and the carriage might take warning and avoid the spot.

The bearers of the torches were all heydukes wearing a peculiar uniform. On their heads were tschako-shaped *kalpags* with white horse-hair plumes, on their bodies were scarlet dolmans with yellow facings, over which fox-skin *kaczagánys* were cast as a protection against the pouring rain. At every saddle hung a *fokos* and a couple of pistols. Their *gunyás* only reached to the girdle, and below that followed short, fringed, linen hose which did not go at all well with the scarlet cloth of the dolmans.

And now the waggon comes in sight. Four good boorish horses were attached to it, whose manes almost swam in the water; the reins were handled by an old coachman with the figure of a *betyár*. The worthy fellow was sleeping, for, after all, the horses knew the

way well, and he only awoke at such times as his hands closed upon the reins, when he would give a great snort and look angrily around him.

The interior of the waggon presented a somewhat comical sight, for though the back seat did not appear to be occupied, in the front seat two ambiguous looking individuals were sitting with their backs to the coachman. Who or what they were it was difficult to make out, for they had wrapped themselves up so completely in their shaggy woollen mantles, or *gubas*, and drawn their hoods so low down over their heads, that they had no resemblance to anything human. Moreover, they were sleeping soundly. Both their heads were jig-jogging right and left, and only now and then one or the other, and sometimes both at the same time, would be thrown backwards by the jolting of the waggon, or they would bump their heads together, and at such times would sit bolt upright as if determined to say, "Now, I really am *not* asleep!" and the next instant off they were nodding again.

The body of the waggon was fenced about with large baskets, whose rotundity warranted the suspicion that they must be stuffed with plenty of all sorts. The basket on the back seat moved slightly now and then, and, therefore, might fairly have been assumed to contain some living creature, which the two gentlemen held in high honour or they would not have given up the best seat to it. Presently a more violent concussion than usual tilted the basket over, when, after a desperate struggle, the mysterious something poked out its head, and revealed to the world a beautiful greyhound. So it was to him that precedence belonged! And this he seemed to be quite conscious of, for he sat up on his haunches in the waggon, gaped majestically for a moment, then condescended to scratch his aristocratic ears with his long legs, shook his steel-chain collar, and when an impertinent nocturnal gadfly attempted to cultivate his acquaintance by force, plunged into a determined contest with it, and snapped at it vigorously with his

teeth. Tiring at last of this diversion, he turned his attention to his sleeping companions, and being in a condescending humour, and observing that the lankiest of the two sleepers was nodding at him, the humorous greyhound raised his front paw and passed it over the face of the slumberer, who thereupon murmured heavily, "Pah! don't taste it, your honour!"

And now let us have a look at the carriage. Five full-blooded stallions were harnessed to it, and all of them were tossing their gaily decked heads proudly. Two of them were beside the shafts and three in front, and each of the three had jangling bells around his neck, to warn all whom they might encounter to get out of the way. On the box sat an old coachman in an embroidered *bekes*, or fur-pelisse, whose sole instructions were that wherever he might go, he was not to dare to look into the carriage behind him under pain of being instantly shot through the head. We, however, who are in no fear of having our heads blown off, may just as well take a peep inside.

Beneath the hood of the carriage sat an aged man wrapped up to the throat in a wolfskin *bunda*, and with a large astrachan cap on his head drawn down over his eyes. Inside it one could make out nothing but the face. It was a peculiar face, with eyes that looked strangely at you. An errant spirit seemed to dwell in them; they spoke of a mind that had been destined for great, for amazing things. But fate, environment, and neglect had here been too much for destiny, and the man had grown content to be extraordinary in mere trifles, and seemed quite surprised at the wonderful expression of his own eyes. The whole face was fat but colourless, the features were noble but puckered up in bizarre wrinkles. This, with the heavy eyebrows and the neglected moustache, caused repulsion at the first glance; but if the man looked at you long enough, you gradually got reconciled to all his features. Especially when he shut his eyes and sleep had smoothed out all the lines and creases of his face, he wore such a patriarchal expression that one

involuntarily thought of one's own father. But what made him look still more remarkable was the peculiar circumstance, that crouching up close beside him sat two peasant girls; two chubby little wenches, from the seriousness, not to say anxiety, of whose faces it was possible to conclude that no mere idle freak had lodged them there by the side of the old gentleman. The cold wet night froze the blood in the veins of the aged man, his wolfskin *bunda* could not keep him warm enough, and, therefore, they placed close beside him two young peasant girls that his dilapidated organism might borrow warmth from their life-giving magnetism.

All night long he had been unable to get any rest, any pastime in his distant castle, so at last he had hit upon the idea of knocking up the landlord of the "Break-'em-tear-'em" *csárda*, and picking a quarrel with him at any price. The insult would be all the more venomous if he woke him in the middle of the night, and demanded something to eat and drink immediately. If the fellow cursed and swore, as he was pretty sure to do, he should have a good hiding from the heydukes. As the innkeeper was himself a gentleman, the whole joke would possibly cost about a couple of thousand of florins or so, but the fun was quite worth that.

So he called up his serving-men, and made them harness horses and light torches, and set off through the pathless darkness with twelve heydukes, taking with him everything necessary for eating and drinking, in order to have a banquet in honour of the jest as soon as it was accomplished, not forgetting to carry along with him the three personages who chiefly ministered to his amusement, and whom he sent on before him in a separate waggon, to wit, his favourite greyhound, his gipsy jester, and his parasitical poet, all three of whom made a nice little group together.

Now, worthy Mr. Peter Bús was famous far and wide for his peculiar sensitiveness to insult; the merest trifle was sufficient to

lash him into a fury. A heyduke, therefore, was sent on in advance, who rattled at his windows like a savage, and bellowed at the top of his voice—

"Get up there, you innkeeper fellow! Get up, get up! You are required to wait upon your betters, and look sharp about it!"

At these words Peter Bús bounded to his feet as if he had been shot from a gun, snatched up his *fokos*, looked out of the window, and perceiving the brilliant array of serving-men, who lit up the whole house with their torches, instantly guessed with whom he had to do. He now grasped the fact that they wanted to make him fly into a rage for their especial amusement, and resolved for that very reason not to fly into a rage at all. So he hung his *fokos* up nicely on its nail again, thrust his head into his sheepskin cap, threw his *bunda* over his shoulders, and stepped out.

All the newly arrived guests were already inside the courtyard. In the centre, surrounded by his bodyguard, was his lordship, in a large *attila* with gold buttons, reaching down to his knee; the circumference of his body constrained him to hold his head a little thrown back, and he supported himself with a gold-headed Spanish cane. It was now quite evident how ill that scornful, mocking expression of his became his face, and wholly distorted its naturally jovial character.

"Come nearer, sirrah!" he called to the innkeeper in a loud imperious voice. "Throw open your apartments, and make ready for our entertainment. Give us wine, tokay, and *ménes*; give us also pheasants, artichokes, and crab salad."

The innkeeper humbly took off his hat, held it in his hand, and replied with the utmost calmness and *sangfroid*—

"God hath brought your lordship to us; I will serve you with everything you command. I would only beg of you to pardon me for

not possessing either tokay or *ménes*. My pheasants, too, have not yet been fattened up; and as for my crabs, they have all been drowned in this great deluge, as you may see for yourself. And I suppose your lordship will not give me for my kitchen the two crabs I see here?"

This last sally was directed at the scarlet uniforms of the heydukes, and diverted his lordship's attention. He was pleased to find the innkeeper rising to the level of the joke. He had not expected it, and was all the more amused.

Meanwhile, the gipsy jester had poked out his black phiz, which vied with that of any nigger, and, flashing a row of white teeth at the innkeeper, began to tot up on his fingers what he wanted.

"All I want," said he, "is a dish of bird of paradise eggs, served with the fat of a sucking deer, and a brawn of pickled salmon spawn. I never eat anything else."

"Then I am sorry for that lordly belly of thine. A little gipsy-ragout is at your service, however," replied Peter Bús.

"I beg your pardon," cried the gipsy, "but that is my kinsman, and you are not allowed to roast him."

His lordship fell a-laughing at this insipid jest. Such witticisms formed no small part of his amusement, and because the innkeeper had humoured him, his intentions towards him had completely changed.

"Then what *can* you give your guests?" he resumed.

"Everything, my lord. Only, unfortunately, what is mine is all gone, what will be mine is far off, and what should be mine is nowhere."

His lordship was so pleased with this circumlocution of "nothing" that he burst out laughing, and, wishing to immortalize it,

exclaimed—

"Where is Gyárfás? Where is that poet fellow skulking now?" And yet the worthy fellow was standing close beside him with his hands folded behind his back, and with his pale, withered, parchment-like face peevishly regarding the whole entertainment. "Look alive, Gyárfás! Quick! Make a verse upon this inn, where people can get nothing to eat!"

Mr. Gyárfás cast down his eyelashes, drew his mouth up to his nose, and, tapping his brow with the tip of his finger, delivered himself of this extemporized verse—

"If thou bring not to eat with thee hither, All empty the plates stand before thee. The fast of this house is eternal; The Turk will not visit this shanty."

"What's the man talking about! What has the Turk to do with this *csárda*?"

"He has a great deal to do with it," responded Gyárfás, placidly, "inasmuch as the Turk needs to eat, though he does not always get the chance, and therefore would not be likely to come here where he would find nothing, so the verse is perfect."

The Nabob now suddenly turned towards the landlord.

"Have you a mouse on the premises then?"

"They are not mine, my lord. I only rent the house. But as there are plenty of them, I don't suppose the ground landlord will begin an action at law if I take one or two."

"Then roast us a mouse!"

"Only one?"

"Plague on such a question! Dost thou take the belly of a man for the abyss of hell, to think that one such beast is not quite

enough for it?"

"At your service, my lord," said the innkeeper; and he immediately called the cats into the room to assist him, though he had only to move a few stones away in order to be able to pick and choose his mouse quite as well as any cat could have done it for him.

And here I may say, by the way, that a mouse is such a nice pretty little animal, that I cannot conceive why folks should hold it in such horror. It is very much the same thing as a squirrel or a guinea-pig, which we keep in our rooms and pet and play with; nay, it is cleverer far than they. What a delicate little snout it has, what sweet little ears, what wee little pets of feet! And then its comically big moustache, and its quick black eyes like sparkling diamonds! And when it plays, when it squeaks, when it stands up to beat the air on its hind legs, it is as clever and as comely as any other animal in the world. Nobody is horrified at a crab being cooked, nobody flies in terror when snails are served up at table, yet they are both far more horrible animals than a mouse. What, then, is there so horrifying in the idea of cooking a mouse? Why, in China, it is the greatest of delicacies, a lordly dish for epicures, and they feed it up in cages with nuts and almonds, and serve it up as the choicest of savouries!

Nevertheless, the whole company was persuaded that the very idea of such a thing was the most exquisite of jokes, and every one laughed aloud in anticipation.

Meanwhile, while Mr. Peter Bús threw open a large barn-like room for his guests, the heydukes had unpacked the waggon, and dragged into the light of day cushions, curtains, camp-stools, and tables; and in a few moments the empty, resonant room was changed as if by magic into a sumptuous apartment. The table was piled high with silver goblets and dishes, and, reposing among the

ice in large silver pitchers, flasks of carved Venetian crystal with long necks seemed to promise something seductive.

The Nabob himself lay down on the camp bedstead prepared for him, his heydukes drew the large spurred boots from his feet, one of the peasant girls sat by his head stroking continually his sparse grey hairs, while the other sat at the end of the bed rubbing his feet with bits of flannel. Gyárfás, the poet, and Vidra, the jester, stood before him; a little further off the heydukes; the greyhound was under the bed. And thus, surrounded by gipsy, heydukes, jester, peasant-girls, and greyhound, lay one of the wealthiest magnates of Hungary!

Meanwhile, the mouse was a-roasting. The innkeeper himself brought it lying in the middle of a large silver dish, surrounded by a heap of horseradish shavings, and with a bit of green parsley in its mouth, the usual appurtenances of a very different animal.

Down it was placed in the middle of the table.

First of all, the Nabob offered it to the heydukes one by one. They did not fancy it, and only shook their heads.

Then it came to the poet's turn.

"Pardon, gratia, your Excellency! I am composing verses on him who eats it."

"Well, you then, Vidra! Come, down with it, quick!"

"I, your Excellency?" said Vidra, as if he did not quite catch the words.

"Yes, you. What are you afraid of? While you were living in tents, one of my oxen went mad, and yet you and your people ate him!"

"True; and if one of your lordship's hogsheads of wine went mad I would drink it. That's another thing."

"Come, come, make haste! Do the dish honour!"

"But my grandfather had no quarrel with this animal."

"Then rise superior to your grandpapa!"

"I'll rise superior to him for a hundred florins," said the gipsy, scratching his curly poll.

The Nabob opened the pocket of his dolman, and drew forth a large greasy pocket-book, which he half opened, displaying a number of nice blood-coloured banknotes.

The gipsy squinted with half an eye at the well-crammed pocket-book, and repeated once more—

"For a hundred florins I don't mind doing it!"

"Let us see then!"

The gipsy thereupon unbuttoned the frock-coat which it was his master's whim he should wear, contracted his rotund, foolish face into a squarish shape, twitched the mobile skin of his head up and down once or twice, whereby the whole forest of his hair moved backwards and forwards like the top-knot of a peewit, and then, seizing the horrible animal by that part of its body which was furthest from its head, and thereby raising it into the air, pulled an ugly, acidulous face, shook his head, constrained himself to a desperate resolution, opened his mouth, shut his eyes, and in an instant the mouse had disappeared.

The gipsy could not speak, but one of his hands involuntarily clutched his throat, for it is no joke to swallow a four-legged animal at a gulp; but his other hand he extended towards the Nabob, gasping with something like a sob—

"The hundred florins!"

"What hundred florins?" inquired the humorous gentleman. "I

said I'd give you a hundred florins? Nonsense, sir. You should thank me for providing you with such a rare dish which your grandfather never ate, I'll be bound to say, and would have paid for the chance of it."

It was a screaming joke, no doubt; yet suddenly the merriment ceased, for the gipsy all at once began to turn blue and green, his eyes threatened to start out of his head, he sank down on his chair unable to speak, but pointed convulsively to his distended mouth.

"Look, look, he's choking!" cried several voices.

The Nabob was terribly alarmed. The joke had taken a decidedly serious turn.

"Pour wine into his throat to wash it down," he exclaimed.

The heydukes speedily caught up the flasks, and began to fill up the gipsy's throat with half a bottle at a time to assist the downward progress of the worthy mouse. After a long time the poor fellow began to breathe hard, and seemed to recover slightly; but his eyes rolled wildly, and he was gabbling something unintelligible.

"Well, take your hundred florins," said the frightened Nabob, who could scarcely contain himself for terror, and wished to comfort and compensate the gipsy on his return from Charon's ferry-boat.

"Thank you," sobbed the latter, "but there's no need of it now. It is all up with Vidra; Vidra is dying. If only it had been a wolf that had killed poor Vidra; but a mouse—oh, oh!"

"Don't be a fool, man! You'll take no harm from it. Look! here's another hundred. Don't take on so; it has quite gone now! Hit him on the back, some one, can't you? Bring the venison on now, and make him swallow some of it!"

The jester thanked them for the thump on the back, and when they set the venison before him, he regarded it with the doubtful, ambiguous expression of a spoiled child, who does not know whether to laugh or to cry. First he laughed, and then he grumbled again, but finally he sat him down before the savoury cold meat, which had been basted with the finest lard and flavoured with good cream-like wine sauce, and began to cram himself full with morsel after morsel so huge that there was surely never a mouse in the wide world half so big. And thus he not only filled himself, but satisfied the Nabob also.

And now, at a sign from the Nabob, the heydukes carried in all the cold dishes they had brought with them, and shoved the loaded table along till it stood opposite the couch on which he lay. At the lower end of the table three camp-stools were placed, and on them sat the three favourites, the jester, the greyhound, and the poet. The Nabob gradually acquired an appetite by watching these three creatures eat, and by degrees the wine put them all on the most familiar terms with one another, the poet beginning to call the gipsy "my lord," while the gipsy metaphorically buttonholed the Nabob, who scattered petty witticisms on the subject of the mouse, whereat the two others were obliged to laugh with all their might.

At last, when the worthy gentleman really believed that it was quite impossible to play any more variations on the well-worn topic of the mouse, the gipsy suddenly put his hand to his bosom, and cried with a laugh, "Here's the mouse!" And with that he drew it forth from the inside pocket of his frock-coat, where he had shoved it unobserved, while the terrified company fancied he had swallowed it, and in sheer despair had soothed him by making him eat and drink all manner of good things.

"Look, Mat!" said he to the dog, whereupon the greyhound immediately swallowed the *corpus delicti*.

"You good-for-nothing rascal!" cried the nobleman, "so you'd bandy jests with me, would you! I'll have you hanged for this. Here, you heydukes, fetch a rope! Hoist him upon that beam!"

The heydukes immediately took their master at his word. They seized the gipsy, who never ceased laughing, mounted him on a chair, threw the halter round his neck, drew the extreme end of the rope across the beam, and drew away the chair from beneath him. The gipsy kicked and struggled, but it was of no avail; there they kept him till he really began to choke, when they lowered him to the ground again.

But now he began to be angry. "I am dying," he cried. "I am not a fool that you should hoist me up again, when I can die as I am, like an honest gentleman."

"Die by all means," said the poet. "Don't be afraid. I'll think of an epitaph for you."

And while the gipsy flung himself on the ground and closed his eyes, Gyárfás recited this epitaph over him—

"Here liest thou, gipsy-lad, never to laugh any longer, Another shall shoulder the fiddle, and death shall himself fiddle o'er thee."

And, in fact, the gipsy never moved a limb. There he lay, prone, stiff, and breathless. In vain they tickled his nose and his heels; he did not stir. Then they placed him on the table with a circle of burning candles round him like one laid out for burial, and the heydukes had to sing dirges over him, as over a corpse, while the poet was obliged to stand upon a chair and pronounce his funeral oration.

And the Nabob laughed till he got blue in the face.

While these things were going on in one of the rooms of the "Break-'em-tear-'em" *csárda*, fresh guests were approaching that

inhospitable hostelry. These were the companions of the carriage that had come to grief by sticking fast in the mud of the cross-roads, for, after the men and beasts belonging to it had striven uselessly for three long hours to move it from the reef on which it had foundered, the gentleman sitting alone inside it had hit upon the peculiar idea of being carried to the *csárda* on man-back instead of on horseback. He mounted, therefore, on to the shoulders of his huntsman, a broadly built, sturdy fellow, and leaving his lackey in the carriage to look after whatever might be there, and making the postillion march in front with the carriage lamp, he trotted in this humorous fashion to the *csárda*, where the muscular huntsman safely deposited him in the porch.

It will be worth while to make the acquaintance of the new-comer, as far as we can at least, as soon as possible.

From his outward appearance it was plain that he did not belong to the gentry of the *Alföld*.

As he divested himself of his large mantle with its short Quiroga collar, he revealed a costume so peculiar that if any one showed himself in it in the streets in our days, not only the street urchins but we ourselves should run after it. In those days this fashion was called the mode *à la calicot*.

On his head was a little short cap, somewhat like a tin saucepan in shape, with such a narrow rim that it would drive a man to despair to imagine how he could ever catch hold of it. From underneath this short cap, on both sides, there bulged forth such a forest of curly fluffy hair that the rim of the cap was quite overwhelmed. The face beneath was clean-shaved, except that a moustache, pointed at each end, branched upwards towards the sky like a pair of threatening horns, and the neck was so compressed within a stiffly starched cravat, with two sharply-pointed linen ends, that one could not so much as move

one's chin about in it. The body of this gentleman's dark green frock-coat lay just beneath his armpits, but the tails reached to the ground, and the collar was so large that you could scarce distinguish its wearer inside it. He also had double and triple shirt frills, and while the brass buttons of his coat were no larger than cherry pips, the monstrously puffed sleeves rose as high as his shoulders. The wax-yellow waistcoat was almost half concealed by the huge projecting ruffles. The whole costume was set off by hose *à la cosaque*, which appeared to amplify downwards, bulged over the boots, and were slit up in front so as to allow them to be stuffed therein. Above the waistcoat dangled all sorts of jingling-jangling trinkets, but the boots were provided with spurs of terrible dimensions, so that if a fellow did not look out he might easily have had his eyes poked out. Such was the martial mode of those days, at the very time when no war was going on anywhere. The finishing touch to this get-up was supplied by a thin tortoiseshell cane with a bird's head carved in ivory, which a beau with any pretensions to *bon ton* used regularly to twiddle in his mouth.

"Eh, ventre bleu! eh, sacré bleu!" exclaimed the new-comer (so much, at any rate, he had learnt from Béranger), as he kicked at the kitchen door and shook his saturated mantle. "What sort of a country is this? Hie, there, a light! Is there any one at home?"

This marvel brought forth Peter Bús with a light, and after gaping sufficiently at the new-comer and his servant who had thus broken into his kitchen, he asked, with an alacrity to oblige by no means corresponding to his amazement, "What are your commands, sir?" His face showed at the same time that he meant to give nothing.

The stranger murdered the Hungarian language terribly, and he had a distinctly foreign accent.

"Milles tonnerres!" he cried, "can't you speak any other language here but Hungarian?"

"No."

"That's bad. Then where's the innkeeper?"

"I am. And may I ask, sir, who you are, whence you came, and where you live?"

"I own property here, but I live at Paris, and what devils brought me hither I don't know. I would have gone on further if the mud of your roads hadn't stopped me. And now give me—comment s'appelle ça?" And here he came to a stop because he could not find the word he wanted.

"Give you what, sir?"

"Comment s'appelle ça? Tell me the name!"

"My name, sir? Peter Bús."

"Diable! not your name, but the name of the thing I want."

"What *do* you want, sir?"

"That thing that draws a coach, a four-legged thing; you strike it with a whip."

"A horse, do you mean?"

"Pas donc! They don't call it that."

"A *forspont*?"2

[2] Relay of horses: Ger. *Vorspann*.

"That's it, that's it. A forspont! I want a forspont immediately."

"I have none, sir; all my horses are out to grass."

"C'est triste! Then here I'll remain. Tant mieux; it will not bore me. I have travelled in Egypt and Morocco. I have spent the night in as deplorable a hut as this before now; it will amuse me. I will fancy I am in some Bedouin shanty, and this river here is the Nile, that has overflowed, and these beasts that are croaking in the water—comment s'appelle ça?—frogs? oh yes, of course—these frogs are the alligators of the Nile. And this miserable country—what do you call this department?"

"It is not a part of anything, sir; it is a dam, the dam of the cross-roads, we call it."

"Fripon! I am not speaking of the mud in which I stuck fast, but of the district all about here. What do they call it?"

"Oh, I see! They call it the county of Szabolcs."

"Szabolcs, eh? Szabolcs? C'est parceque, no doubt, so many *szabos*3 live in it, eh? Ha, ha! That was a good *calembourg* of mine, c'est une plaisanterie. Dost understand?"

[3] Tailors.

"I can't say for certain, but I believe the Hungarians so called it after the name of one of their ancient leaders who led them out of Asia."

"Ah, c'est beau! Very nice, I mean. The worthy magyars name their departments after their ancient patriarchs. Touching, truly!"

"Then, may I ask to what nationality you yourself belong, sir?"

"I don't live here. Bon Dieu! what a terrible fate for any one to live here, where the puddles are bottomless and a man can see nothing but storks."

Peter Bús turned to leave the room; he was offended at being treated in this manner.

"Come, come, don't run away with the light, signore contadino!" cried the stranger.

"I beg your pardon, but I am of gentle birth myself. My name is Peter Bús,4 and I am well content with it."

[4] Pronounced *Bush*.

"Ah, ah, ah, Monsignore Bouche, then you are a gentleman and an innkeeper in one, eh? That's nothing. James Stuart was of royal blood, and at last he also became an innkeeper. Well, tell me, if I am to remain here, have you some good wine and pretty girls, eh?"

"My wine is bad—'tis no drink for a gentleman—and my serving-maid is as ugly as night."

"Ugly! Ah, c'est piquant! There's no need to take offence; so much the better! 'Tis all the same to a gentleman. To-morrow an elegant lady of fashion, to-day a Cinderella, one as beautiful as a young goddess, the other as villainous as Macbeth's witches; there perfume, here the smell of onions. C'est le même chose! 'tis all one; such is the streakiness of life."

Mr. Peter Bús did not like this speech at all. "You would do better to ask yourself where you are going to lie to-night, for I am sure I should very much like to know."

"Ah, ça, 'tis interessant. Then is there no guest-chamber here?"

"There is, but it is already occupied."

"C'est rien! We'll go halves. If it is a man, he need not put himself out; if it is a dame, tant pis pour elle, so much the worse for her."

"It is not as you think. Let me tell you that Master Jock is in that room."

"Qu'est-ce-que ça? Who the devil is Master Jock?"

"What! have you never even heard of Master Jock?"

"Ah, c'est fort. This is a little too strong. Folks lead such a patriarchal life in these parts that they are only known by their Christian names! Eh, bien, what do I care for Master Jock! Just you go to him and let him know that I want to sleep in his room. I am a gentleman to whom nothing must be refused."

"A likely tale," observed Peter Bús; and without saying another word, he put out the light and went to lie down, leaving the stranger to seek out for himself the door of the other guest's room if he was so minded.

The darkness was such as a man might feel, but the merry singing and howling served to guide the new-comer to the chamber of the mysterious Nabob, who went by the name of Master Jock; why, we shall find out later on. The fun there had by this time reached its frantic climax. The heydukes had raised into the air by its four legs the table on which the jester lay, and were carrying it round the room, amidst the bellowing of long-drawn-out dirges; behind them marched the poet, with the table-cloth tied round his neck by way of mantle, declaiming d—d bad Alexandrine verses on the spur of the moment; while Master Jock himself had shouldered a fiddle (he always carried one about with him wherever he went), and was dashing off one *friss-magyar* after another with all the grace and dexterity of a professional gipsy fiddler, at the same time making the two little peasant girls dance in front of him with a couple of the heydukes.

At this moment the stranger burst into the room.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "I have the honour to salute you!"

The tumult instantly subsided. Every one gazed open-mouthed at the stranger who had suddenly appeared in their midst, and

saluted them with such affability. Master Jock let his fiddle-bow fall from his hand, for though he loved a practical joke to excess, he did not like strangers to see him at it. But the new-comer was not a stranger for long, for the jester, surprised at the sudden silence, looking up, and perceiving a gentleman attired not altogether unlike himself, thought fit to come to life again, and, springing from his bier, rushed towards the stranger, embraced and kissed him, and exclaimed—

"My dear brother, Heaven has surely sent you hither!"

At this mad idea the laughter burst forth anew.

"Ah! ce drôle de gipsy!" said the stranger, trying to free himself from the gipsy's embraces. "That's quite enough; kiss me no more, I say."

Then he bowed all round to the distinguished company, wiped away all traces of the gipsy's kisses with his pocket-handkerchief, and said—

"Do not derange yourselves on my account, ladies and gentlemen; pursue your diversions, I beg! I am not in the habit of spoiling fun. I am a true gentleman, who knows how to prendre son air in whatever company he may find himself. I have the pleasure of introducing myself to your worships as Abellino Kárpáthy, of Kárpát."

And with these words he whistled into the hollow end of his cane, flung himself with a noble nonchalance into one of the camp-chairs, and threw one of his heavily spurred feet over the other.

This speech fairly astonished the company. Even Master Jock now sprang from his seat, and, resting the palms of both hands on his knees, regarded the new-comer with amazement, while the gipsy went down on all fours and began sniffing around him like a

dog.

At length Master Jock, in a solemn, drawling voice, exclaimed—

"What! that gentleman a Kárpáthy? Do you know what it means to bear the name Kárpáthy? That name which has a line of thirty ancestors behind it, all of whom were *főispáns* and standard-bearers; that name which is as sonorous as any in the kingdom! Bethink you, therefore, of what you are saying, sir! There is only one Kárpáthy in the world besides myself, and him they call Bélá!"

"Le voilà! That's just myself," said the stranger, protruding one of his legs in front of him, and beating time with the other to an operatic tune, which he whistled through the hole in his stick until he had quite finished it. "I was born in this barbarous land, and the father who bore me—ah, ça! not my father! comment s'appelle ça?—that one of my parents who was not my father, I mean."

"I suppose you mean your mother?"

"Yes, yes, of course! My mother, that's it! Well, my mother was a noble dame, and well-educated, but my father was a bit of an oddity who dearly loved his joke. But the greatest joke he ever perpetrated was when he christened me, his eldest son, Bélá, and made me learn Hungarian. Bélá, forsooth! Now, *is* that a proper name for a gentleman? Luckily for me, my father died betimes, and I went with my mother to Paris. My name displeased me, and as the most fashionable name just then happened to be Abellino, I changed my name Bélá into it. On the other hand, I could not forget the Hungarian language. But it does not matter. I know the nigger lingo just as well. It is no disparagement to a real gentleman."

"Then why, may I ask, are you travelling about here?"

"Ah! venir ici de Paris, c'est tomber du ciel à l'enfer! ('To come

hither from Paris is to fall out of heaven into hell!') C'est merveilleux, wonderful, that men can live here at all. Ah, mon cher heyduke, sure I see something cooked. Be so good as to bring it nearer; put it on the table, and fill my glass for me. A votre santé, messieurs et mesdames! And to your health in particular, Monsieur Jock!"

Jock had listened patiently to this harangue. His eyes followed attentively every movement of the stranger, and a sort of resigned melancholy gradually stole over his features.

"Then what brings my lord hither—out of heaven into hell?"

"Hélas!" sighed Abellino, drumming a march on his plate with his knife and fork. "An unavoidable piece of business. A gentleman who lives abroad has many necessities, and my father only left me an income of a mouldy four hundred thousand francs. Now, I ask you, how can a man live decently on that? If a man wants to do honour to his nation, he must, before all things, cut a decent figure abroad. I keep going one of the first houses in Paris; I have my own meute and écurie; my mistresses are the most famous dancers and singers. I have travelled in Egypt. In Morocco I abducted the most beautiful damsel of the Bey from his harem. I spend the season in Italy. I have an elegant villa on the shores of the Lake of Como. I have whole folios written of my travels by the best French authors, and I publish them as if I had written them myself. The Académie des Sciences has elected me a member in consequence. At Homburg I have lost half a million francs at a sitting without moving a muscle of my face. And so my mouldy four hundred thousand francs have all gone, interest and capital alike—where?"

And here, with hand and mouth, he intimated in pantomime that it had all dissolved itself into thin air.

Master Jock continued to regard the juvenile *roué* with a look that grew stonier and stonier, and involuntarily, unconsciously, a

deep sigh escaped from his breast.

"Nevertheless, that was nothing," continued the young dandy, with a self-satisfied voice. "So long as a man has a million he can easily spend two millions; 'tis a science readily learnt. All at once ces fripons de créanciers, those villainous creditors of mine, took it into their heads to ask me for money, and when one began the others were not slow in following. I cursed them; but that did not satisfy them, so they went to the courts about it, and I had to leave Paris. C'est pour brûler la cervelle! It was enough to make me blow my brains out. Mais v'la! Fortune favoured me. It chanced that a kinsman of my father's, a certain John Kárpáthy, who was very much richer than my father——"

"Aha!"

"A mad, doating old fellow, of whom I could tell you a thousand follies."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. He never budges from his native village; but he has a theatre in his castle, in which they play his own comedies; he sends for the leading prima donnas, simply that they may sing boorish peasant ditties to him; and he keeps a whole palace for his dogs, who eat with him from the same table."

"Anything else?"

"Then he has a whole harem of farmyard wenches, and *betyárs* similar to himself dance with them and him till dawn. Then he sets the whole company by the ears, and they fight till the blood flows in streams."

"Nothing more?"

"And then his conduct is so very eccentric. He can't endure anything that comes from abroad. He does not allow peas to

appear on his table, because they don't grow on his estate. They are for the same reason not allowed to bring coffee into the house, and he uses honey instead of sugar. Mad, eh?"

"Certainly. But do you know anything else about him?"

"Oh, I could tell you a thousand things. His whole life is an absurdity. He only did a wise thing once in his life. When I was at the very last gasp, and nothing in the world could save me but a rich uncle, this Hungarian Nabob, this Plutus, one night crammed himself up to the very throat with plover's eggs, and died early in the morning. I was immediately advertised of the fact."

"And so I suppose you have come hither to take over the rich inheritance without delay?"

"Ma foi! nothing else were capable of bringing me back into this detestable country."

"Very well, my pretty gentleman, then you may just clap your horses into your carriage, and drive back to Paris, or Italy, or Morocco if you like, for *I am* that half-crazy uncle of yours, that rich *betyár* of whom you speak, and I am not dead yet, as you can see for yourself."

At these words Abellino collapsed; his arms and legs grew limp and feeble, and he involuntarily stammered in his terror—

"Est-ce possible? Can it be possible?"

"Yes, sir, it can. I am that John Kárpáthy whom the country folks jokingly call Master Jock, and who likes to be so called."

"Ah, if only I had thought a little!" cried the young gentleman, leaping to his feet and hastening to grasp his great-uncle's hand. "But, indeed, evil-minded persons described my only uncle to me so differently that I could not picture him to myself in the shape of such a gallant, noble gentleman. Milles tonnerres! let nobody in

future dare to say in my presence that my dear uncle is not the finest cavalier on the continent! I should have been inconsolable if I had not made your acquaintance. Capital! I was looking for a dead uncle, and I have found a living one. C'est bien charmant! The Goddess of Fortune is not a woman for nothing. I protest that she has quite befooled me!"

"Enough of this sort of flummery, my sweet nephew; I don't like it. I am used to rough, plain speaking, even from my heydukes. I prefer to have it so. You, my good nephew, have come hither from a great distance to inherit my estate, and your creditors no doubt will be marching after you in regiments, and now you find me alive. A little aggravating I take it, eh?"

"Au contraire, as I find my dear uncle alive, it will be all the easier for him to show himself amiable towards me."

"How? Explain yourself!"

"Well, I do not ask you for a yearly allowance, ce serait bien fatigant for us both. My proposal is that you pay my debts in a lump sum, and there shall be peace between us."

"Hum! Most magnanimous! And if I do *not* pay them, I suppose war will be declared?"

"Come, come, my dear uncle! You are pleased to be facetious! Not pay, do you say! Why, 'tis only a matter of one or two hundred thousand livres or so, a mere bagatelle to you."

"Well, my dear Mr. Nephew, I much regret that you think so lightly of the estate which was won by the valour of your ancestors, but I am quite unable to help you. I also am in want of cash. I also squander it on follies, but on follies of purely home growth. I have a whole mob of comrades, heydukes and ne'er-do-weels, at my heels, and anything over and above what I spend on them, I scatter among the bumpkins who till my fields, or, if a foolish whim seize

me, I build me a bridge from one hill to another. But I certainly do not waste my substance on opera-dancers, nor am I given to abducting Moorish princesses, or clambering up pyramids. If you like eating and drinking, you shall always have as much as you like of both at my house, and you may also choose you there pretty girls to your heart's content, who will look every bit as picturesque as your Morocco princesses, if only you trick them out finely enough. Moreover, if you have a mind to travel, this kingdom is quite big enough. You can ride in your carriage for eight days at a stretch without getting to the end of my property. But send money abroad I will not; we don't carry water to the Danube."