

eyelashes two restless black eyes beamed forth: like coal, that is partly aglow.

Sir Magistrate was surprised that Topándy had such a young sister.

"My guests," said Topándy, presenting the servants of the law to her ladyship.

"Oh! I know," remarked the young lady in a gay light-hearted tone. "You have come to put in an 'execution' against his lordship. You did quite right: you ought to treat him so. You don't know the hundredth part of his godless dealings. For did you know, you would long since have beheaded him three times over."

The magistrate found this sincere expression of sisterly opinion most remarkable; still, notwithstanding that he took his seat beside her ladyship.

The table was piled with cold viands and old wines. Her ladyship entertained the magistrate with conversation and tasty tit-bits, meanwhile the lawyer was quietly drinking his glasses with the host,—nor was it necessary to ask him to help himself.

"Believe me," remarked her ladyship: "if this man ever reaches hell, they will give him a special room, so great are his merits. I have already grown tired of trying to reform him."

"Has your ladyship been staying long in this house?" enquired the magistrate.

"Oh, ten years already."

("How old could the lady have been then?" the magistrate thought to himself: but he could not answer.)

"Just imagine what he does. A few days ago he put up an old saint among the vines as a scarecrow, with a broken hat on his head."

The magistrate turned with a movement of scorn towards the accused. It would not be good for him if that, too, came to the ears of the Court.

"Do not speak, for you do not understand what you're saying," replied Topándy by way of explanation.

"It was an ugly statue of Pilate, a relic of the ancient Calvary."*

"Well, and wasn't that holy?" enquired the flashing-eyed damsel.

The magistrate began to rise from his chair. (Her ladyship must have had a curious education if she did not even know who Pilate was.)

Topándy broke out in unrestrained laughter. Then, as if he desired by an earnest word to repair the insult his language had given, he said to the lady with a pious face:

"Well, if you are right, was it not a gracious act on my part to give a permanent occupation to such an honest fellow, who had been degraded from office; and as he was bare-headed I gave him a hat to protect him against changes of the weather. However, don't treat our friend to a series of incriminations, but rather to that deer-steak; you see he does not venture to taste it."

Her ladyship did as she was told.

The magistrate was obliged to eat: in the first place because it was a beautiful woman that offered the viands to him, secondly because everything she offered was so good. He had to drink, too, because she kept filling his glass and calling on him to "clink" with her, herself setting the example. She drained that sparkling liquor from her glass just as if it had been pure water. And those wines were truly remarkably strong. The magistrate could not refuse the appeal of her ladyship's beautiful eyes.

"Forbidden fruit is sweet." The magistrate experienced the truth of the saying keenly, in so far as one may place among forbidden fruit the *déjeuner* of which a man partakes in the house of a godless fellow, destroying his appetite for the ensuing dinner to which he is invited by a pious man.

* Many such Calvaries exist in Hungary: they may be seen by the roadside, and are used as places of pilgrimage by pious peasants and others: there is always a picture of Christ crucified or a figure of the same.

The courses seemed endless: cold viands were followed by hot, and the beautiful young damsel could offer so kindly, that the magistrate was powerless to resist.

"Just a little of this 'majoraine' sausage. I myself made it yesterday evening."

The magistrate was astonished. Her ladyship busied herself with such things? When the sausage had disappeared, he made a remark about it.

"Yet no one would imagine that these delicate hands could busy themselves with other things than sewing, piano-playing, and the turning over of gold-bordered leaves. Have you read the almanacs of the parliament?"

At this question Topándy burst into loud laughter, while the lawyer covered his mouth with his napkin, the laughter stuck in his throat: the magistrate could not imagine what there could be to ridicule in this question.

Her ladyship answered quite unconsciously:

"Oh! there are some fine airs in it: I know them. If you will listen, I will sing them."

The magistrate thought there must be some misunderstanding: still, if her ladyship cared to sing, he would be only too delighted to listen.

"Which do you want 'Vienna Town' or 'Rosebud'?"

"Both," said the host, "and into the bargain the latest parliamentary air, 'Come Down from the Cross, and Fly to the Poplar-tree.' But let us go out of the dining-room to hear the songs; the forks and plates are rattling too much here: we'll go to my sister's room. There she will sing to the accompaniment of a Magyar piano. Have you ever seen a Magyar piano, my friend?"

"I don't remember having done so."

"Well, it is beautiful: you must hear it. My sister plays it wonderfully."

The magistrate offered his arm to her ladyship, and

the company entered the next room, which was the lady's apartment.

It was an elegant, finely-decorated room, with mahogany and ebony furniture, richly carved and gilded, with huge glass-panelled chests, and heavy silk curtains yet there was a striking difference between this room and those of other ladies; all these expensive draperies, as far as their form and ordering was concerned, did not at all correspond with the usual appanage of a boudoir.

In one corner stood a loom of mahogany, richly inlaid with ivory: it was still covered with some half-finished work, in which flowers, butterflies, and birds had been worked with remarkable refinement.

"You see," said the lady, "this is my work-table. I am responsible also for that table-cloth on which we breakfasted to-day."

Indeed she had received an unusual education.

Beside the loom was a spinning wheel.

"And this is my library," said the lady, pointing to the cupboards against the wall.

Through the glass panels was to be seen a host of every kind of culinary bottles. On the bottom shelf the great folios; every kind of vinegar that grows in hot-houses; the second row was full of preserved cucumbers; and then on the top shelf different sorts of confitures in brilliant perfection; last of all, a row of fruit extracts was visible, in colors as numerous as the bottles that contained them.

"A magnificent library!" said the lawyer. But the magistrate could not yet clearly make out what kind of lady it might be, who called such things a library.

The heavy velvet curtains, which made a kind of tent of the alcove, also had their secret: the young lady raised the curtain and said naively,

"This is my sleeping place."

An embroidered quilt laid out on a plank, nothing more.

Indeed, a curious, most remarkable education.

Beside the bed stood a large copper cage.

"This is my pet bird," said the fair lady, pointing at the creature within.

It was a large black cock, which rose angrily as the strangers approached, and crowed in an agonized manner, shaking its red comb furiously.

"You see, this is my old comrade, who takes care of me! and is at the same time my clock, waking me at daybreak." And the lady's look became quite tender, as she placed her hand on the wrathful creature. At her gentle touch the bird clucked his satisfaction.

"When I go outside, he accompanies me, loose, like a dog."

The black monster, as long as he saw strangers, only noted in quiet tones the fact that he had remarked their presence, but as soon as Topándy stepped forward, he suddenly broke out into a clarion cry, as if he wished to arouse every hen-roost in the property to the fact that there was a fox in the garden. Every feather on his neck stood bolt upright, like a Spanish shirt-collar.

"He will soon be quiet," the young lady assured the guests:—"for he will listen to music."

So we are about to see the Magyar piano? It was but a "czimbalom."* It is true that it was a marvellous work of art, inlaid with ebony and mother-of-pearl; the nails on which the strings were stretched were of silver, the groundwork a mosaic of coloured woods; the two drumsticks lying upon the strings had handles of red coral; the stand on which the "czimbalom" rested was a marvellously perfected specimen of the carpenter's art, giving a strong tone to the instrument; and before it was a little, round, armless chair covered with red velvet, its feet golden tiger-claws. Yet it was certainly strange that a young lady should play the "czimbalom," that country instrument

*The peculiar and characteristic Magyar instrument which is indispensable to every gypsy orchestra, taking the place of harp and piano. It is in the form of a zither of large size, played with padded sticks, and forms the foundation of these wandering bands.

which they are wont to carry under the covering of a ragged coat, and to place upon inn-tables, or up-turned barrels.—Here it appeared among mahogany furniture, to serve as accompaniment to a young lady's voice, while she herself with her delicate fingers beat the melody out of the plaintive instrument for all the world as if she were seated beside a piano. Incongruous enough, for we have always thought of the "czimbalom-artist" as a gawky bushy-bearded fellow with the indispensable short-stemmed clay-pipe—all burned out and being sucked only for its bitter taste.

And the whole "czimbalom" playing is such a jest, so grotesque; the player's arms jerk and wave continuously; his whole shoulder and head are in perpetual motion; whereas, with the piano, the five fingers do all; the artist's relation to the piano is that of my lord to his children, whom he addresses from a far-off height; the czimbalom-player is "*per tu*" with his instrument.

But the young lady had the grace of one born to the instrument. As she took the sticks in her hands and struck a chord upon the outstretched strings, her face assumed a new expression; so far, we must confess, there had been much "naiveté" in it, now she felt at home; this was her world.

She sang two songs to the guests, both taken from what are called in our country "Parliamentary airs;" they used to break forth in "juratus" coffee-houses, during the sitting of Parliament, when there was more spirit in the youths of the country than now.

The one had a fine impassioned refrain: "From Vienna town, from west to east, the wind hath a cold blast." The end of it was that the Danube water is bitter, for at Pressburg many bitter tears have flowed into it, "Which the great ones of our land have shed, because Ragályi was not sent to be ambassador." Now patriots are more sparing with their tears; but in those days much bitterness was expressed with the air of "Vienna town."

The other air was "Rose-bud, laurel," which had also a pretty refrain; it is full of such expressions as "altars

of freedom," "angels of freedom," "wreaths of freedom," and other such mythological things. How the strings responded to the young woman's touch, what expression was in her refrain! It was as if she felt the meaning of those beautiful "flosculi" best of all, and must suffer more than all for them.

Then she introduced a third parliamentary song, the contents of which were satirical; but the satire was purely local and personal, and would not be intelligible to people of modern days.

Topány was inexpressibly pleased by it: he asked for it again. Someone had ridiculed the priests in it, but in such a manner that no one, unless he had had it explained could understand it.

The magistrate was quite enraptured by the simple instrument; he would never have believed that anyone could play it with such masterly skill.

"Tell me," he asked her ladyship, not being able any longer to conceal his astonishment, "where you learned to play this instrument."

At these words her ladyship broke into such a fit of laughter, that, if she had not suddenly steadied herself with her feet against the *czimbalom* stand, she would have fallen over. As it was, her hair being, according to the fashion of the day, coiled up "à la Giraffe" round a high comb, and the comb falling from her head, her two tresses of raven hair fell waving over her shoulders to the floor.

At this the young lady discontinued laughing, and not succeeding at all in her efforts to place her dishevelled hair around the comb again, suddenly twisted it together on her head and fastened it with a spindle she snatched from the spinning wheel.

Then to recover her previous high spirits, she again took up the *czimbalom* sticks, and began to play some quiet melody on the instrument.

It was no song, no variations on well-known airs; it was some marvellous reverie; a frameless picture, a landscape without horizon. A plaint, in a voice rather playful over something serious that is long past, and

that can never come back again, avowed to no one by word of mouth, only handed down from generation to generation on the resounding strings—the song of the beggar who denies that he has ever been king;—the song of the wanderer, who denies that he ever had a home and yet remembers it, and the pain of the recollection is heard in the song. No one knows or understands, perhaps not even the player, who merely divines it and meditates thereon. It is the desert wind, of which no one knows whence it comes and whither it goes; the driving cloud, of which no one knows whence it arose, and whither it disappears. A homeless, unsubstantial, immaterial bitterness . . . a flowerless, echoless, roadless desert . . . full of mirages.

The magistrate would have listened till evening, no matter what became of the neighbor's dinner, if Topány had not interrupted him with the sceptical remark that this lengthened steel wire has far more soul than a certain two-footed creature, who affirms that he was the image of God.

And thus he again drew the attention of the worthy gentleman to the fact that he was in the home of a denier of God.

Then they heard the mid-day curfew, which made the black cock, with fluttering wings, begin his monotonous clarion, for all the world like the bugle call of some watch-tower, whose *taran-tara!* gives the sign to its inhabitants.

At this the lady's face suddenly lost its sad expression of melancholy; she put down the *czimbalom*-sticks, leaped up from her chair, and with natural sincerity asked,

"It was a beautiful song, was it not?"

"Indeed it was. What is it?"

"Hush! that you may not ask."

The lawyer had to call the magistrate's attention to the fact that it was already time to depart, as there was still another "entertainment" in store for them.

At this they all laughed.

"I am very sorry that it was my fortune to make

your acquaintance, on such an occasion as the present," said the young officer of the law, as he bade farewell, and shook hands with his host.

"But I rejoice at the honor, and I hope I may have the pleasure of seeing you again—on the occasion of the next 'execution'."

Then the magistrate turned to her ladyship, to thank her for her kind hospitality.

To do so he sought the young lady's hand with intention to kiss it; but before he could fulfill his intention, her ladyship suddenly threw her arms around his neck and imprinted as healthy a kiss on his face as anyone could possibly wish for.

The magistrate was rather frightened than rejoiced at this unexpected present. Her ladyship had indeed peculiar habits. He scarcely knew how he arrived in the road; true, the wine had affected his head a little, for he was not used to it.

From Topándy's castle to Sárvölgyi's residence one had to cross a long field of clover.

The lawyer led his colleague as far as the gate of this field by the arm, sauntering along by his side. But, as soon as they were within the garden, Mr. Buczkay said to the magistrate:

"Please go in front, I will follow behind; I must remain behind a little to laugh myself out."

Thereupon he sat down on the ground, clasped his hands over his stomach, and commenced to guffaw; he threw himself flat upon the grass, kicking the earth with his feet, and shouting with merriment the while.

The young officer of the law was beside himself with vexation, as he reflected: "this man is horribly tipsy; how can I enter the house of such a righteous man with a drunken fellow?"

Then when Mr. Buczkay had given satisfaction to the demands of his nature, according to which his merriment, repressed almost to the bursting point, was obliged to break loose in a due proportion of laughter, he rose again from the earth, dusted his clothes, and with the most serious countenance under the sun said, "Well, we can proceed now."

Sárvölgyi's house was unlike Magyar country residences, in that the latter had their doors night and day on the latch, with at most a couple of bulldogs on guard in the courtyard—and these were there only with the intention of imprinting the marks of their muddy paws on the coats of guests by way of tenderness. Sárvölgyi's residence was completely encircled with a stone wall, like some town building: the gate and small door always closed, and the stone wall crowned with a continuous row of iron nails:—and,—what is unheard of in country residences—there was a bell at the door which he who desired to enter had to ring.

The gentlemen rang for a good quarter of an hour at that door, and the lawyer was convinced that no one would come to open it; finally footsteps were heard in the hall, and a hoarse, shrill woman's voice began to make enquiries of those without.

"Who is there?"

"We are."

"Who are 'we'?"

"The guests."

"What guests?"

"The magistrate and the lawyer."

Thereupon the bolts were slipped back with difficulty, and the questioner appeared. She was, as far as age was concerned, a little "beyond the vintage." She wore a dirty white kitchen apron, and below that a second blue kitchen apron, and below that again a third dappled apron. It was this woman's custom to put on as many dirty aprons as possible.

"Good day, Mistress Boris," was the lawyer's greeting. "Why, you hardly wished to let us in."

"I crave your pardon. I heard the bell ring, but could not come at once. I had to wait until the fish was ready. Besides, so many bad men are hereabouts, wandering beggars, 'Arme Reisenden,'* that one must always keep the door closed, and ask 'who is there?'"

"It is well, my dear Boris. Now go and look after

*Poor travellers.

that fish, that it may not burn; we shall soon find the master somewhere. Has he finished his devotions?"

"Yes; but he has surely commenced anew. The bells are ringing the death-toll, and at such times he is accustomed to say one extra prayer for the departed soul. Don't disturb him, I beg, or he will grumble the whole day."

Mistress Boris conducted the gentlemen into a large room, which, to judge from the table ready laid, served as dining room, though the intruder might have taken it for an oratory, so full was it of pictures of those hal- lowed ones, whom we like to drag down to ourselves, it being too fatiguing to rise up to them.

And in that idea there is much that is sublime. A picture of Christ in the mourning widow's chamber; a "mater dolorosa," in the distracted mother's home; a "kerchief" of the Holy Virgin, spotlessly white, like the glorious spirit, above the bed of olden times, are surely elevating, and honorable presences, the recollections which lead us to them are holy and imperish- able, as is the devotion which bows the knee before them. But a repugnant sight is the home of the Phar- isee, who surrounds himself with holy images that men may behold them.

Sárvölgyi allowed his guests to wait a long time, though they were, as it happened, not at all impatient.

Great ringing of bells announced his coming; this being a sign he was accustomed to give to the kitchen, that the dinner could be served. Soon he appeared.

He was a tall, dry man, of slight stature, and so small was his head that one could scarce believe it could serve for the same purposes as another man's. His smoothly shaven face did not betray his age; the skin of his cheeks was oil yellow, his mouth small, his shoulders rounded, his nose large, mal-formed and unpleasantly crooked.

He shook hands very cordially with his guests; he had long had the honor of the lawyer's acquaintance, but it was his supreme pleasure to see the magistrate to-day for the first time. But he was extremely courte-

ous, not a feature of his countenance betraying any emotion.

The magistrate seemed determined not to say a word. So the brunt of the conversation fell on the lawyer.

"We have happily concluded the 'execution'."

That was naturally the most convenient topic for the commencement of the conversation.

"I am sorry enough that it had to be so," sighed Sárvölgyi. "Apart from the fact that Topándy is un- ceasingly persecuting me, I respect and like him very much. I only wish he would turn over a new leaf. He would be an excellent fellow. I know I made a great mistake when I accused him out of mere self-love. I am sorry I did so. I ought to have followed the com- mand of scripture, 'If he smite thee on thy right cheek, offer him thy left cheek also.'"

"Under such circumstances there would be very few criminal processes for the courts to consider."

"I confess I rejoiced this morning when the commis- sion of execution arrived. I felt an inward happiness, due to the fact that this foe of mine had fallen, that he was trampled under my feet. I thought: he is now gnashing his teeth and snapping at the heels of justice that stamp upon his head. And I was glad of it. Yet my gladness was sinful, for no one may rejoice at the destruction of the fallen, and the righteous cannot be glad at the danger of a fellow creature. It was a sin for which I must atone."

The simplest atonement, thought the lawyer, would be for him to return the amount of the fine.

"For this I have inflicted a punishment upon my- self," said Sárvölgyi, piously bowing his head. "Oh, I have always punished myself for any misdemeanor, I now condemn myself to one day's fasting. My pun- ishment will be, to sit here beside the table and watch the whole dinner, without touching anything my- self."

It will be very fine! thought the lawyer. He is de- termined to fast, while we have taken our fill yonder. So we shall all look at the whole dinner, without tast-

ing anything,—and Mistress Boris will sweep us out of the house.

“My friend the magistrate’s head is doubtless aching after his great official fatigue!” Sárvölgyi said, hitting the nail right on the head.

“It is indeed true,” remarked the lawyer assuringly. The young official was in need rather of rest than of feasting. There are good, blessed mortals, whom two glasses of wine immediately send to sleep, and to whom it is the most exquisite torture to be obliged to remain awake.

“My suggestion is,” said the lawyer, “that it would be good for the magistrate to repose in an armchair and rest himself, until the cleaning of the cloister is finished, and we can again take our seats in the carriage.”

“Sleep is the gift of Heaven,” said the man of piety: “it would be a sin to steal it from a fellow-man. Kindly make yourself comfortable at once in this room.”

It was an extremely difficult process to make oneself comfortable on that apology for an arm-chair; it seemed to have been prepared as a resting place for ascetics and body-torturers: still the magistrate sat down in it, craved pardon,—and fell asleep. And then he dreamed that he saw before him again that laid-out table, where one guest sat two yards from the other while all round holy pictures were hanging on the walls, with their faces turned away, as if they did not wish to gaze upon the scene. In the middle of the room there was hanging from the ceiling a heavy chandelier with twelve branches, and on it was swaying the host himself.

What a cursed foolery is a dream! The host was actually sitting there vis-à-vis with the lawyer, at the other end of the long table; for Mistress Boris had so laid the places. And as the magistrate’s place remained empty, host and guest sat so far apart that the one was incapable of helping the other.

At last the door opened, with such a delicate creaking that the lawyer thought somebody was ringing to be

admitted:—It was Mistress Boris bringing in the soup.

The lawyer was determined to make some sacrifice, in order to maintain the dignity of the “*legale testimonium*,” by dining a second time. He thought himself capable of this heroic deed.

He was deceived.

There is a peculiarity of the Magyar which has not yet been the subject of song: his stomach will not stand certain things.

This a stranger cannot understand: it is a “*specificum*.”

When Vörösmarty sang that “in the great world outside there is no place for thee,”* he found it unnecessary to add the reason for that, which every man knows without his telling them:—“in every land abroad they cook with butter.”

A Magyar stomach detests what is buttery. He becomes melancholy and sickly from it; he runs away from the very mention of it, and if some sly house-keeper deceitfully gives him buttery things to eat, all his life long he considers that as an attempt upon his life, and will never again sit down to such a poison-mixer’s table.

You may place him where you like abroad, still he will long to return from the cursed butter-smelling world, and if he cannot he grows thin and fades away: and like the giraffe in the European climate, he cannot reproduce his kind in a foreign land. Roughly speaking, all his neighbors cook with butter, oil and dripping: and “be harsh or kind, the hand of fate, here thou must live, here die.”†

The lawyer was a true Magyar of the first water. And when he perceived that the crab soup was made with butter, he put down his spoon beside his plate and said he could not eat crabs. Since he had learned that the crab was nought else but a bee-

* From the celebrated *Szózat* (appeal) calling on the Hungarian to be true to his fatherland.

† Also from the “*Szózat*.”

tle living in water, and since a company had been formed in Germany for making beetles into preserves for dessert, he had been unable to look with undimmed eye upon these retrograde monsters.

"Ach, take it away, Boris," sighed the host. He himself was not eating, for was he not atoning for his sins?

Mistress Boris removed the dish with an expression of violent anger.

Just imagine a housekeeper, whose every ambition is the kitchen, when her first dish is despatched away from the table without being touched.

The second dish—eggs stuffed with sardines—suffered the same fate.

The lawyer declared on his word of honor that they had buried his grandfather for tasting a dish of sardines, and that every female in the family immediately went into spasms from the smell of the same. He would rather eat a whale than a sardine.

"Take this away, too, Mistress Boris. No one will touch it." Mistress Boris began to mutter under her breath that it was absurd and affected to turn up one's nose at these respectable eatables, which were quite as good as those they had eaten in their grandfather's house. Her last words were rather drowned by the creaking of the door as she went out.

Then followed some kind of salad, with bread crumbs. The lawyer had in his university days received such a dangerous fever from eating such stuff, that it would indeed be a fatal enterprise to tackle it now.

This was too much for the housekeeper. She attacked Mr. Sárkölygi:

"Didn't I tell you not to cook a fasting dinner? Didn't I say so? You think everyone is as devout as you are in keeping Friday? Now you have it. Now I am disgraced."

"It is part of the punishment I have inflicted on myself," answered Sárkölygi, with humble acquiescence.

"The devil take your punishment; it is me that will come in for ridicule if they hear about it yonder. You become more of a fool every day."

"Say what is on your tongue, my good Boris; heaven will order you to do penance as well as me."

Mistress Boris slammed the door after her, and cried outside in bitter disappointment.

The lawyer swore to himself that he would eat whatever followed, even if it were poison.

It was worse: it was fish.

We have medical certificates to enable us to assert that whenever the lawyer ate fish he promptly had to go to bed. He was forced to say that if they chased him from the house with boiling water he could not venture to put his teeth into it.

Mistress Boris said nothing now. She actually kept silent. As we all know, the last stage but one of a woman's anger is when she is silent, and cannot utter a word. There is one stage more, which was imminent. The lawyer thought the dinner was over, and with true sincerity begged Mistress Boris to prepare a little coffee for him and the magistrate.

Boris left the room without a word, placing the coffee machine before Sárkölygi himself; he did not allow anyone else to make it, and occupied himself with the preparations till Mistress Boris came back.

The magistrate was just dreaming that that fellow swinging from the ceiling turned to him, and said "will you have a cup of coffee?" It did him good starting from his doze, to see his host, not on the chandelier, but sitting in a chair before him, saying: "Will you have a cup of coffee?"

The magistrate hastened to taste it, with a view to driving the sleepiness from his eyes, and the lawyer poured some out for himself.

Just at that moment Mistress Boris entered with a dish of omelette.

Mistress Boris with a face betraying the last stage of anger, approached the lawyer:—she smiled tenderly.

It is not the pleasantest sight in the world when a

lady with a plate of omelette in her hand, smiles tenderly upon a man who is well aware of the fact that only a hair's breadth separates him from the catastrophe of having the whole dish dashed on his head.

"Kindly help yourself."

The lawyer felt a cold shiver run down his back.

"You will surely like this!—omelette."

"I see, my dear woman, that it is omelette," whispered the lawyer; "but no one of my family could enjoy omelette after black coffee."

The catastrophe had not yet arrived. The lawyer had his eyes already shut, waiting for the inevitable; but the storm, to his astonishment, passed over his head.

There was something else to attract the thunderbolt. The magistrate had again taken his seat at the table, and was putting sugar in his coffee; he could not have any such excuse.

"Kindly help yourself . . ."

The magistrate's hair stood on end at her awful look. He saw that this relentless dragon of the apocalypse would devour him, if he did not stuff himself to death with the omelette. Yet it was utterly impossible. He could not have eaten a morsel even if confronting the stake or the gallows.

"Pardon, a thousand pardons, my dear woman," he panted, drawing his chair farther away from the threatening horror: "I feel so unwell that I cannot take dinner."

Then the storm broke.

Mistress Boris put the dish down on the table, placed her two hands on her thighs, and exploded:

"No, of course not," she panted, her voice thick with rage. "Of course you can't dine here, because you were simply crammed over yonder by—the gypsy girl."

The hot coffee stuck in the throats of the two guests at these words! In the lawyer's from uncontrollable laughter, in the magistrate's from still more uncontrollable consternation.

This woman had indeed wreaked a monstrous vengeance.

The good magistrate felt like a boy thrashed at school, who fears that his folks at home may learn the whole truth.

Luckily the sergeant of gendarmes entered with the news that the unholy pictures had been already erased from the walls, and the carriages were waiting. He too "got it" outside, for, as he made inquiries after his masters, Mistress Boris told him severely to go to the depths of hell: "he too smelt of wine; of course, that gypsy girl had given him also to drink!"

That gypsy girl!

The magistrate, in spite of his crestfallen dejection, felt an actual sense of pleasure at being rid of this cursed house and district.

Only when they were well on their dusty way along the highroad did he address his companion:

"Well, my dear old man, that fine lady was only a gypsy girl after all.

"Surely, my dear fellow."

"Then why did you not tell me?"

"Because you did not ask me."

"That is why you lay on your stomach and laughed, is it?"

"Naturally."

The magistrate heaved a deep sigh.

"At least, I implore you, don't tell my wife that the gypsy girl kissed me!"