CHAPTER VII

THE SECRET WRITINGS

ONE evening Lorand came to me and laid before me a bundle of papers covered with fine writing.

"Copy this quite clearly by to-morrow morning. Don't show the original to any one, and, when you have finished, lock it up in your trunk with the copy, until I come for it."

I set to work in a moment and never rose from my task until I had completed it.

Next morning Lorand came for it, read it through, and said: "Very good," handing me two pieces of twenty.

"What do you mean?"

"Take it," he said, "It is not my gift, but the gift of someone else: in fact, it is not a gift, but a fixed contract-price. Honorable work deserves honorable payment. For every installment* you copy, you get two pieces of twenty. It is not only you that are doing it: many of your school-fellows are occupied in the same work."

Then I was pleased with the two pieces of twenty.

My uneasiness at receiving money from anybody except my parents, who alone were entitled to make me presents, was only equalled by my pleasure at the possession of my first earnings, the knowledge that I was at last capable of earning something, that at last the tree of life was bearing fruit, which I might reach and pluck for myself.

I accepted the work and its reward. Every second day, punctually at seven o'clock in the evening, Lorand

* *i. e.*, A printed sheet of sixteen pages.

would come to me, give me the matter to be copied, 'matter written, as I recognized, in his own hand writing,' and next day in the morning would come for the manuscript.

I wrote by night, when Henrik was already asleep: but, had he been awake, he could not have known what I was writing, for it was in Magyar.

And what was in these secret writings?

The journal of the House of Parliament. It was the year 1836. Speeches held in Parliament could not be read in print; the provisional censor ruled the day, and a few scarecrow national papers fed their reading public on stories of the Zummalacarregu type.

So the public helped itself.

In those days shorthand was unknown in our country; four or five quick-fingered young men occupied a bench in the gallery of the House, and "skeletonized" the speeches they heard. At the end of a sitting they pieced their fragments together: in one would be found what was missing in the other: thus they made the speeches complete. They wrote the result out themselves four times, and then each one provided for the copying forty times, of his own copy. The journals of Parliament, thus written, were preserved by the patriots, who were members at that time,—and are probably still in preservation.

The man of to-day, who sighs after the happy days of old, will not understand how dangerous an enterprise, was the attempt made by certain young men "in the glorious age of noble freedom," to make the public familiar, through their handwriting, with the speeches delivered in Parliament.

These writings had a regenerating influence upon me.

An entirely new world opened out before me: new ideas, new impulses arose within my mind and heart. The name of that world which opened out before me was "home." It was marvellous to listen for the first time to the full meaning of "home." Till then I had had no idea of "home:" now every day I passed my

nights with it:—the lines, which I wrote down night after night, were imprinted upon those white pages, that are left vacant in the mind of a child. Nor was I the only one impressed.

There is still deeply engraved on my memory that kindling influence, by which the spirit of the youth of that age was transformed through the writing of those pages.

One month later I had no more dreams of becoming Privy-Councillor:—then I knew not how I could ever approach my cousin Melanie.

All at once the school authorities discovered where the parliamentary speeches were reproduced. It was done by the school children, that hundred-handed type-setting machine.

The danger had already spread far; finding no ordinary outlet, it had found its way through twelve-year-old children: hands of children supplied the deficiency of the press.

Great was the apprehension.

The writing of some (among them mine) was recognized. We were accused before the school tribunal.

I was in that frame of mind that I could not fear. The elder boys they tried to frighten with greater things, and yet they did not give way: I would at least do no worse. I was able to grasp it all with my child's mind, the fact that we, who had merely copied for money, could not be severely punished. Probably we never understood what might be in those writings lying before us. We merely piled up letter after letter. But the gravest danger threatened those who had brought those original writings before us.

Twenty-two of the students of the college were called up for trial.

On that day armed soldiers guarded the streets that led to the council-chamber, because the rumor ran that the young members of parliament wished to free the culprits.

On the day in question there were no lessons—merely the accused and their judges were present in the school building.

It is curious that I did not fear, even when under the surveillance of the pedellus,* I had to wait in the ante-room of the school tribunal. And I knew well what was threatening. They would exclude either me or Lorand from the school.

That idea was terrible for me.

I had heard thrilling stories of expelled students. How, at such times, they rang that cracked bell, which was used only to proclaim, to the whole town, that an expelled student was being escorted by his fellows out of the town, with songs of penitence. How the poor student became thenceforth a wanderer his whole lifetime through, whom no school would receive, who dared not return to his father's house. Now I merely shrugged my shoulders when I thought of it.

At other times the least rebuke would break my spirit, and drive me to despair; now—I was resolved not even to ask for pardon. As I waited in the ante-room, I met the professors, one after another, as they passed through into the council-chamber. Fittingly I greeted them. Some of them did not so much as look at me. As Mr. Schmuck passed by he saw me, came forward, and very tenderly addressed me:—

"Well, my child, and you have come here too. Don't be afraid: only look at me always. I shall do all I can for you, as I promised to your dear, good grandmother. Oh how your devoted grandmother would weep if she knew in what a position you now stand. Well, well, don't cry: don't be afraid. I intend to treat you as if you were my own child: only look at me always."

I was glad when he went away. I was angry that he wished to soften me. I must be strong to-day.

The director also noticed me, and called out in harsh tones:

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* Warden of the school.

"Well, famous fiddler: now you can show us what kind of a gypsy* you are."

That pleased me better.

I would be no gypsy!

The examination began: my school-fellows, the greater part of whom were unknown to me, as they were students of a higher class, were called in one by one into the tribunal chamber, and one by one they were dismissed; then the pedellus led them into another room, that they might not tell those without what they had been asked, and what they had answered.

I had time enough to scrutinize their faces as they came out.

Each one was unusually flushed, and brought with him the impression of what had passed within.

One looked obstinate, another dejected. Some smiled bitterly: others could not raise their eyes to look at their fellows. Each one was suffering from some nervous perturbation which made his face a glaring contrast to the gaping, frozen features without.

I was greatly relieved at not seeing Lorand among the accused. They did not know one of the chief leaders of the secret-writing conspiracy.

But when they left me to the last, I was convinced they were on the right track; the copyers one after another had confessed from whom they had received the matter for copying. I was the last link in the chain, and behind me stood Lorand.

But the chain would snap in two, and after me they would not find Lorand.

For that one thing I was prepared.

At last, after long waiting, my turn came. I was as stupefied, as benumbed, as if I had already passed through the ordeal.

No thought of mother or grandmother entered my

* The czigány (gypsy) is celebrated for his sneaking cowardice, and his fiddle playing, he being a naturally gifted musician, as any one who has heard czigány music in Budapest can testify.

head: merely the one idea that I must protect Lorand with body and soul: and then I felt as if that thought had turned me to stone: let them beat themselves against that stone.

"Desiderius Áronffy," said the director, "tell us whose writing is this?"

"Mine," I answered calmly.

"It is well that you have confessed at once: there is no necessity to compare your writing, to equivocate, as was the case with the others.—What did you write it for?"

"For money."

One professor-judge laughed outright, a second angrily struck his fist upon the table, a third played with his pen. Mr. Schmuck sat in his chair with a sweet smile, and putting his hands together twirled his thumbs.

"I think you did not understand the question, my son," said the director in a harsh dry voice. "It is not that I wished to know for how much you wrote that trash: but with what object."

"I understood well, and answered accordingly. They gave me writings to copy, they paid me for them: I accepted the payment because it was honorable earnings."

"You did not know they were secret writings?"

"I could not know it was forbidden to write what it was permitted to say for the hearing of the whole public, in the presence of the representative of the King and the Prince Palatine."

At this answer of mine one of the younger professors uttered a sound that greatly resembled a choked laugh. The director looked sternly at him, rebuked with his eyes the sympathetic demonstration, and then bawled angrily at me:—

"Don't play the fool!"

The only result of this was that I gazed still more closely at him, and was already resolved not to move aside, even if he drove a coach and four at me. I had trembled before him when he had rebuked me for my

violin-playing; but now, when real danger threatened me, I did not wince at his gaze.

"Answer me, who gave into your hands that writing, which you copied?"

I clenched my teeth. I would not answer. He might cut me in two without finding within me what he sought.

"Well, won't you answer my question?"

Indeed, what would have been easier than to relate how some gentleman, whom I did not know, came to me; he had a beard that reached to his knees, wore spectacles, and a green overcoat: they must then try to find the man, if they could:—but then—I could not any longer have gazed into the questioning eyes.

No! I would not lie: nor would I play the traitor.

"Will you answer?" the director cried at me for the third time.

"I cannot answer."

"Ho ho, that is a fine statement. Perhaps you don't know the man?"

"I know, but will not betray him."

I thought that, at this answer of mine, the director would surely take up his inkstand and hurl it at my head.

But he did not: he took a pinch of snuff from his snuff-box, and looked askance at his neighbor, Schmuck, as much as to say, "It is what I expected from him."

Thereupon Mr. Schmuck ceased to twirl his thumbs and turning to me with a tender face he addressed me with soothing tones:—

"My dear Desider, don't be alarmed without cause: don't imagine that some severe punishment awaits you or him from whom you received the writing. It was an error, surely, but not a crime, and will only become a crime in case you obstinately hold back some of the truth. Believe me, I shall take care that no harm befall you; but in that case it is necessary you should answer our questions openly."

These words of assurance began to move me from

my purpose. They were said so sweetly, I began to believe in them.

But the director suddenly interrupted:—

"On the contrary! I am forced to contradict the honored professor, and to deny what he has brought forward for the defence of these criminal young men. Grievous and of great moment is the offence they have committed, and the chief causers thereof shall be punished with the utmost rigor of the law."

These words were uttered in a voice of anger and of implacable severity; but all at once it dawned upon me, that this severe man was he who wished to save us, while that assuring, tender paterfamilias was just the one who desired to ruin us.

Mr. Schmuck continued to twirl his thumbs.

The director then turned again to me.

"Why will you not name the man who entrusted you with that matter for copying?"

I gave the only answer possible. "When I copied these writings I could not know I was engaged on forbidden work. Now it has been told me that it was a grievous offence, though I cannot tell why. Still I must believe it. I have no intention of naming the man who entrusted that work to me, because the punishment of me who did not know its object, will be far lighter than that of him, who knew."

"But only think, my dear child, what a risk you take upon your own shoulders," said Mr. Schmuck in gracious tones; "think, by your obduracy you make yourself the guilty accomplice in a crime, of which you were before innocent."

"Sir," I answered, turning towards him: "did you not teach me the heroic story of Mucius Scævola? did you not yourself teach me to recite 'Romanus sum civis?'

"Do with me what you please: I shall not prove a traitor: if the Romans had courage, so have I to say 'longus post me ordo idem petentium decus.'"

"Get you hence," brawled the director; and the pedellus led me away.

Two hours afterwards they told me I might go home; I was saved. Just that implacable director had proved himself the best in his efforts to rescue us. One or two "primani," who had amused the tribunal with some very broad lies, were condemned to a few days' lock-up. That was all.

I thought that was the end of the joke. When they let me go I hurried to Lorand. I was proudly conscious of my successful attempt to rescue my elder brother.

CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Her ladyship, the beautiful wife of Bálnokházy, was playing with her parrot, when her husband entered her chamber.

The lady was very fond of this creature—I mean of the parrot.

"Well, my dear," said Bálnokházy, "has Kokó learned already to utter Lorand's name?"

"Not yet."

"Well, he will soon learn. By the bye, do you know that Parliament is dissolved. Mr. Bálnokházy may now take his seat in peace beside his wife."

"As far as I am concerned, it may dissolve."

"Well, perhaps you will be interested so far; the good dancers will now go home. The young men of Parliament will disperse to their several homes."

"I don't wish to detain them."

"Of course not. Why, Lorand will remain here. But even Lorand will with difficulty be able to remain here. He must fly."

"What do you say?"

"What I ought not to say out. Nor would I tell anyone other than you, my dear, as we agreed. Do you understand?"

"Partly. You are referring to the matter of secret journalism?"

"Yes, my dear, and to other matters which I have heard from you."

"Yes, from me. I told you frankly, what Lorand related to me in confidence, believing that I shared his enthusiastic ideas. I told you that you might use your knowledge for your own elevation. They were gifts

of honor, as far as you are concerned, but I bound you not to bring any disgrace upon him from whom I learned the facts, and to inform me if any danger should threaten him."

Bálnokházy bent nearer to his wife and whispered in her ear:

"To-night arrests will take place."

"Whom will they arrest?"

"Several leaders of the Parliamentary youths, particularly those responsible for the dissemination of the written newspaper."

"How can that affect Lorand? He has burned every writing; no piece of paper can be found in his room. The newspaper fragments, if they have come into strange hands, cannot be compared with his handwriting. If hitherto he wrote with letters leaning forwards, he will now lean them backwards: no one will be able to find any similarity in the handwritings. His brother, who copied them, has confessed nothing against him."

"True enough; but I am inclined to think that he has not destroyed everything he has written in this town. Once he wrote some lines in the album of a friend. A poem or some such stupidity; and that album has somehow come into the hands of justice."

"And who gave it over?" enquired the lady passionately.

"As it happens, the owner of the album himself."

"Gyáli?"

"The same, my dear. He too thought that one must use a good friend's shoulders to elevate himself."

Madam Bálnokházy bit her pretty lips until blood came.

"Can you not help Lorand further?" she inquired, turning suddenly to her husband.

"Why, that is just what I am racking my brain to do."

"Will you save him?"

"That I cannot do, but I shall allow him to escape."

"To escape?"

"Surely there is no other choice, than either to let himself be arrested, or to escape secretly."

"But in this matter we have made no agreement. It was not this you promised me."

"My darling, don't place any confidence in great men's promises. The whole world over, diplomacy consists of deceit: you deceive me, I deceive you: you betrayed Lorand's confidence, and Lorand deserved it: why did he confide in you so? You cannot deny that I am the most polite husband in the world. A young man pays his addresses to my wife: I see it, and know it; I am not angry; I do not make him leap out of the window, I do not point my pistol at him: I merely slap him on the shoulder with perfect nonchalance, and say, 'my dear boy, you will be arrested to-night in your bed.'"

Bálnokházy could laugh most jovially at such sallies of humor. The whole of his beautiful white teeth could be seen as he roared with laughter—(even the gold wire that held them in place.)

My lady Hermine rose from beside him, and seemed to be greatly irritated.

"You are only playing the innocent before me, but I know quite surely that you put Gyáli up to handing over the album to the treasury."

"You only wish to make yourself believe that, my dear, so that when Lorand disappears from the house, you may not be compelled to be angry with Gyáli, but with me; for of course somebody must remain in the house."

"Your insults cannot hurt me."

"I did not wish to hurt you. My every effort was and always will be to make your life, my dear, ever more agreeable. Have I ever showed jealousy? Have I not behaved towards you like a father to a daughter about to be married?"

"Don't remind me of that, sir. That is your most ungracious trait. It is true that you yourself have introduced into our house young men of every class of society. It is true that you have never guarded me

against them:—but then in a short time, when you began to remark that I felt some affection towards some of them, you discovered always choice methods to make me despise and abhor them. Had you shut me up and guarded me with the severity of a convent, you would have shown me more consideration. But you are playing a dangerous game, sir: maybe the time will come when I shall not cast out him whom I have hated!"

"Well, that will be your own business, my dear. But the first business is to tell our relation Lorand that by ten o'clock this evening he must not be found here: for at that hour they will come to arrest him."

Hermine walked up and down her room in anger.

"And it is all your work: it is useless for you to defend yourself," said she, tossing away her husband's hat from the arm-chair, and then throwing herself in a spiritless manner into it.

"Why, I have no intention of defending myself," said Bálnokházy, good-humoredly picking up his rolling hat. "Of course I had a little share in it: why, you know it well enough, my dear. A man's first business is to create a career. I have to rise: you approve of that yourself; it is a man's duty to make use of every circumstance that comes to hand. Had I not done so, I should be a mere magistrate, somewhere in Szabolcs, who at the end of every three years kisses the hands of all the 'powers that be,' that they may not turn him out of office. * The present chancellor, Adam Reviczky, was one class ahead of me in the school. He too was the head of his class, as I was of mine. Every year I took his place: at every desk, where I sat in the first place, I found his name carved, and always carved it out, putting mine in its place. He reached the height of the 'parabola,' and is now about to descend. Who knows what may happen next? At such times we must not mind if we make celebrated men of a few lads, whom at other times we did not remark."

*Every three years new magistrates and officials were elected to the various posts in the counties.

"But consider, Lorand is a relation of ours."

"That only concerns me, not you."

"It is, notwithstanding, terrible to ruin the career of a young man."

"What will happen to him? He will fly away to the country to some friend of his, where no one will search for him. At most he will be prohibited from being 'called to the bar.' But it will not prevent him from being elected lawyer to the county court at the first renovation. * Besides, Lorand is a handsome fellow: and the harm the persecution of men has done him will soon be repaired by the aid of women."

"Leave me to myself. I shall think about the matter."

"I shall be deeply obliged to you. But, remember, please, ten o'clock this evening must not find here—the dear relation."

Hermine hastened to her jewel-case with ostentation. Bálnokházy, as he turned in the doorway, could see with what feverish anxiety she unlocked it and fumbled among her jewels.

With a smile on his face the husband went away. It is a fine instance of the irony of fate, when a woman is obliged to pawn her jewels in order to help someone escape whom she has loved, and whom she would love still to see about her,—to send him a hundred miles from her side.

Hermine did indeed collect her jewels, and threw them into a travelling-bag.

Then she sat down at her writing-table, and very hurriedly wrote something on some lilac-coloured letter paper on which the initials of her name had been stamped; this she folded up, sealed it and sent it by her butler to Lorand's room.

Lorand had not yet stirred from the house that day; he did not know that part of the Parliamentary youth, gaining an inkling of the movement against them, had hurried to depart.

* As explained above.

When he had read the letter of the P. C.'s wife, he begged the butler to go to Mr. Gyáli and ask him in his name to pay him a visit at once: he must speak a few words to him without fail.

When the butler had gone, Lorand began to walk swiftly up and down his room. He was in search of something which he could not find, an idea.

He sat again, driving his fist into his hand: then sprang up anew and hastened to the window, as if in impatient expectation of the new-comer.

Suddenly a thought came to him: he began to put on gloves, fine, white kid gloves. Then he tried to clench his fist in them without tearing them.

Perhaps he does not wish to touch, with uncovered hands, him for whom he is waiting!

At last the street door opened, and steps made direct for his door.

Only let him come! but he, whom he expected did not come alone: the first to open his door was not Pepi Gyáli, but his brother, Desiderius. By chance they had met.

Lorand received his brother in a very spiritless manner. It was not he whom he wished to see now. Yet he rushed to embrace Lorand with a face beaming triumph.

"Well, and what has happened, that you are beaming so?"

"The school tribunal has acquitted me: yet I drew everything on myself and did not throw any suspicion on you."

"I hope you would be insulted if I praised you for it. Every ordinary man of honor would have done the same. It is just as little a merit not to be a traitor as it is a great ignominy to be one. Am I not right? Pepi,—my friend?"

Pepi Gyáli decided that Lorand could not have heard of his treachery and would not know it until he was placed in some safe place. He answered naturally enough that no greater disgrace existed on earth than that of treachery.

"But why did you summon me in such haste," he enquired, offering his hand confidently to Lorand; the latter allowed him to grasp his hand—on which was a glove.

"I merely wished to ask you if you would take my vis-á-vis in the ball to-night following my farewell banquet?"

"With the greatest pleasure. You need not even have asked me. Where you are, I must be also."

"Go upstairs, Desi, to the governess and ask her whether she intends to come to the ball to-night, or if the lady of the house is going alone."

Desiderius listlessly sauntered out of the room.

He thought that to-day was scarcely a suitable day to conclude with a ball; still he did go upstairs to the governess.

The young lady answered that she was not going for Melanie had a difficult "Cavatina" to learn that evening, but her ladyship was getting ready, and the stout aunt was going with her.

As Desiderius shut the door after him, Lorand stood with crossed arms before the dandy, and said:

"Do you know what kind of dance it is, in which I have invited you to be my vis-á-vis?"

"What kind?" asked Pepi with a playful expression.

"A kind of dance at which one of us must die." Therewith he handed him the lilac-coloured letter which Hermine had written to him: "Read that."

Gyáli read these lines:

"Gyáli handed over the album-leaf you wrote on. All is betrayed."

The dandy smiled, and placed his hands behind him.

"Well, and what do you want with me?" he enquired with cool assurance.

"What do you think I want?"

"Do you want to abuse me? We are alone, no one will hear us. If you wish to be rough with me, I shall shout and collect a crowd in the street: that will also be bad for you."

"I intend to do neither. You see I have put gloves on, that I may not befoul myself by touching you. Yet you can imagine that it is not customary to make a present of such a debt."

"Do you wish to fight a duel with me?"

"Yes, and at once: I shall not allow you out of my sight until you have given me satisfaction."

"Don't expect that. Because you are a Hercules, and I a titmouse, don't think I am overawed by your knitted eyebrows. If you so desire, I am ready."

"I like that."

"But you know that as the challenged, I have the right to choose weapons and method."

"Do so."

"And you will find it quite natural that I have no intention of being pummelled into a loaf of bread and devoured by you. I recommend the American duel. Let us put our names into a hat and he whose name is drawn is compelled to shoot himself."

Lorand was staggered. He recalled that night in the crypt.

"One of us must die; you said so yourself," remarked Gyáli. "Good, I am not afraid of it. Let us draw lots, and then he whom fate chooses, must die."

Lorand gazed moodily before him, as if he were regarding things happening miles away.

"I understand your hesitation: there are others whom you would spare. Well, let us fix a definite time for dying. How long can those, of whom you are thinking, live? Let us say ten years. He, whose name is drawn must shoot himself—to-day ten years."

"Oh," cried Lorand in a tone of vexation, "this is merely a cowardly subterfuge by which you wish to escape."

"Brave lion, you will fall just as soon, if you die, as the mouse. Your whole valor consists in being able to pin, with a round pin, a tiny little fly to the bottom of a box, but if you find an opponent, like yourself, you draw back before him."

"I shall not draw back," said Lorand irritated; and

there appeared before his soul all those figures, which, pointing their fingers threateningly, rose before him from the depths of the earth. Headless phantoms returned to the seven cold beds; and the eighth was bespoken.

"Be it so," sighed Lorand: "let us write our names." Therewith he began to look for paper. But not a morsel was there in his room: all had been burned, clean At last he came across Hermine's note. There was paper too, that the water mark might not betray him. no other alternative. Tearing it in two,—one part he threw to Gyáli, on the other he inscribed his own name.

Then they folded the pieces of paper and put them into a hat.

"Who shall draw?"

"You are the challenger."

"But you proposed the method."

"Wait a moment. Let us entrust the drawing of lots to a third party."

"To whom?"

"There is your brother, Desi."

"Desi?"—Lorand felt a twitching pain at his heart: —"that one's own brother should draw one's death warrant!"

"As yet his hand is innocent. Nor shall he know for what he is drawing. I will tell him some tale. And so both of us may be tranquil during the drawing of lots."

Just at that moment Desiderius opened the door.

He related that the governess was not going, but the stout aunt was to accompany "auntie" to the ball. And the "fraülein" had sent Lorand a written dance-programme, which Desiderius had torn up on the way.

He tore it up because he was angry that other people were in so frivolous a mood at a time when he felt so exalted. For that reason he had no intention of handing over the programme.

Hearing of the stout aunt, Pepi laughed and then began to feign horror.

"Great heavens, Lorand: the seven fat kine of the

Old Testament will be there in one: and one of us must dance with this monster. One of us will have to move from its place that mountain, which even Mahomet could not induce to stir, and waltz with it. Please undertake it for my sake."

Lorand was annoyed by the ill-timed jest which he did not understand.

"Well, to be sure I cannot make the sacrifice: it must be either you or I. I don't mind, let's draw lots for it, and see who must dance this evening with the tower of St. Stephen's."

"Very well,"—Lorand now understood what the other wanted.

"Desi will draw lots for us."

"Of course. Just step outside a moment, Desi, that you may not see on which paper which of our names was written." Desiderius stepped outside.

"He must not see that the tickets are already prepared," murmured Lorand:——

"You may come in now."

"In this hat are both our names," said Gyáli, holding the hat before Desiderius: "draw one of them out: open it, read it, and then put both names into the fire. The one whose name you draw will do the honors to the Cochin-China Emperor's white elephant."

The two foes turned round toward the window. Lorand gazed out, while Gyáli played with his watch-chain.

The child unsuspectingly stepped up to the hat that served as the "urna sortis," and drew out one of the pieces of paper.

He opened it and read the name,

"Lorand Áronffy."

"Put them in the fire," said Gyáli.

Desiderius threw two pieces of lilac paper into the fire.

They were cold May days; outside the face of nature had been distorted, and it was freezing; in Lorand's fire-place a fire was blazing. The two pieces of paper were at once burnt up.

Only they were not those on which the two young men had written their names. Desiderius, without being noticed, had changed them for the dance programme, which he had cast into the fire. He kept the two fatal signatures to himself.

He had a very good reason for doing so, and a still better reason for saying nothing about it.

Lorand said:

"Thank you, Desi."

He thanked him for drawing that lot.

Pepi Gyáli took up his hat and said to Lorand in playful jesting:

"The white elephant is yours. Good night." And he went away unharmed.

"And now, my dear Desi, you must go home," said Lorand, gently grasping his brother's hand.

"Why I have only just come."

"I have much to do, and it must be done to-day."

"Do it: I will sit down in a corner, and not say a word; I came to see you. I will be silent and watch you."

Lorand took his brother in his arms and kissed him.

"I have to pay a visit somewhere where you could not come with me."

Desiderius listlessly felt for his cap.

"Yet I did so want to be with you this evening."

"To-morrow will do as well."

Lorand was afraid that the officers of justice might come any moment for him. For his part he did not mind: but he did not wish his brother to be present.

Desiderius sorrowfully returned home.

Lorand remained by himself.

By himself? Oh no. There around him were the others—seven in number: those headless dead.

Well, fate is inevitable.

Family misfortune is inherited. One is destroyed by the family disease, another by the hereditary curse.

And again the cause is the "sorrowful soil beneath them."

From that there is no escape.

A terrible inheritance is the self-shed blood, which besprinkles the heads of sons and grandsons!

And his inheritance was—the pistol, with which his father had killed himself.

It were vain for the whole Heaven to be here on earth. He must leave it, must go, where the others had gone.

The eighth niche was still empty, but was already bespoken.

For later comers there was room only in the ditch of the graveyard.

And there were still ten years left to think thereon! But ten years is a long time. Meanwhile that field might open where an honourable death, grasping a scythe in its two hands, cuts a way through the ranks of armed warriors:—where the children of weeping mothers are trampled to death by the hoofs of horses:—where they throw the first-born's mangled remains into the common burying-pit: perhaps there the son will find what the father sought in vain:—those who fled from before the resting-chamber of that melancholy house, on the façade of which was to be read the inscription, covered by the creepers since days long gone by.

"Ne nos inducas in tentationem."

CHAPTER IX

AGED AT SEVENTEEN

How beautiful it is to be young! How fair is the spring! Yours is life, joy, hope; the meadows lavish flowers upon you; the earth's fair halo of love surrounds you with glory: a nation, a fatherland, mankind entrusts to you its future; old men are proud of you; women love you: every brightening day of heaven is yours.

Oh, how I love the spring! how I love youth! In spring I see the fairest work of God, the earth, take new life; in youth I see the fairest work of man, his nation, reviving.

"In those days" I did not yet belong to the "youth:" I was a child.

Never do I remember a brighter promise of spring, than in that year; never were the eyes of the old men gladdened by the sight of a more spirited "youth" than was that of those days.

Spring began very early: even at the end of February the fields were green, parks hastened to bedeck themselves in their leafy wings, the blossoms hastened to bloom and fall; the opening days of May saw fruit on the apple-trees; and prematurely ripe cherries were "hawked" in the streets, beside bouquets of late blooming violets.

Of the "youths" of that year the historian has written: "These youths were in general very serious, very lavish in patriotic feeling, fiery and spirited in the defence of freedom and national dignity. The new tendency which manifested itself so vividly in our country was reflected by their impetuous and susceptible natures with all its noble yearnings, its virtues and excesses

exaggerated. The frivolous pastimes, the senseless or dissolute amusements that were so fashionable in those days were abandoned for serious reading, gathering of information and investigation of current events. They had already opinions of their own, which not rarely they could utter with striking audacity."—I could only envy these lines of gold; not one word of them had any reference to me: for I was still but a child. During a night that followed a lovely May day, the weather suddenly changed: winter, who was during the days of his dominion, watching how the warm breezes played with the flower-bells of the trees, all at once returned: with the full vigor of vengeance he came, and in three days destroyed everything, in which man happened to delight. To the last leaf everything was frozen off the trees.

On this most inclement of the three wintry May evenings Lorand was standing alone at his window, and gazing abstractedly at the street through the ice-flower pattern of the window-panes.

Just such ice-flowers lay frozen before his soul. The lottery of fate has appointed his time: ten years his life would last; then he must die.

From seventeen to twenty-seven is just the fairest part of life. Many had made their whole earthly career during that period.

And what awaits him?

His ardent yearning for freedom, his audacious plans, his misplaced confidence; friends' treason, and the consequent freezing rigor, where were they leading to? . . .

Every leaf had fallen from the trees. Only ten years to live: the decree was unalterable.

From the opponent, whom he despised, it is not possible even to accept as a present, that to which chance has once given him the right.

And these ten years, with what will they begin? Perhaps with a long imprisonment? The time which is so short—(ten years are light!) will seem so long *there!* (ten years are heavy!) Would it not be better

not to wait for the first day? To say: if it is time, take it away: let me not take the days on lease from thee! The hateful, freezing days.

Why, when nature dies in this wise, man himself would love to die after her.

If only there were not that weeping face at home, that white-haired head, mother and grandmother.

In vain Fate is inevitable. The eighth bed was already made;—but *that* no one must know for ten years. Should someone learn, he might perpetrate the outrage of occupying earlier the eighth niche in the family vault; and then his successor would have nothing left but the church-yard grave.

What a thought, a youthful spring with these frozen leaves!

He did not think for the next few moments. Is it worth while to try to avoid the fate, which is certain? Let it come. The keystone of the arch had been removed, the downfall of the whole must follow. His room was already in darkness, but he did not light a lamp. The dancing flames of the fire-place gazed out sometimes above the embers, in curiosity, as if they would know whether any living being were there: and still he did not stir.

In this dim twilight Lorand was thinking upon those who had passed away before him.

That bony-faced figure, whose death face he was painting,—his ordinary physiognomy was terrible enough: those empty eye-sockets, into which he fears to gaze:—suppose between these two hollows a third was darkling, the place of the bullet that pierced his forehead!

Lorand now knew what torture must have been theirs, who had left him this sorrowful bequest, before they could make up their minds to raise their own hands against their own lives! with what power of God they must have struggled, with what power of devils have made a compact! Oh, if they would only come for him now!

Who?

Those who picked the fruit that dared so early to ripen?

Yes, rather those, than these quiet, bloodless faces, in their bloody robes. Rather those who come with clank of arms, tearing open the door with drawn sword, than those who with inaudible step steal in, gently open the door, whisperingly speak and tremblingly pronounce your name.

"Lorand."

"Ha! Who is that?"

Not one of the dead, though her robe is white: one far worse than they:—a beautiful woman.

It was Hermine who opened the door and entered Lorand's room so silently, with inaudible steps. Her ball-robe was on her: she had dressed for the dance in her room above, and thus dressed had descended.

"Are you ready now, Lorand?"

"Oh, good evening: pardon me. I will light a candle in a moment."

"Never mind about that," whispered the woman. "It is quite light enough as it is. To-day no candle may burn in this room."

"You are going to a ball," said Lorand, masking the sorrow of his soul by a display of good spirits: "and you wish me to accompany you?"

"Fancy the thought of dancing coming into my head just now!" replied Hermine, coming so close to Lorand that she could whisper in his ear. "Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, thank you. Don't be alarmed, there is no danger."

"Indeed there is. I know it well. The danger is in the hands of Bálnokházy: therefore certain.

"What great harm can happen to me?"

Hermine placed her hand on Lorand's shoulder and tremblingly hissed:

"They will arrest you to-night."

"They may do so."

"Oh no, they may not, kind Heaven! That they shall not do. You must escape, immediately, this hour."

"Is it sure they will arrest me?"

"Believe me, yes."

"Then just for that reason I shall not stir from my place."

"What are you saying? Why? Why not?"

"Because I should be ashamed, if they who wanted me should draw me out from under my bed in my mother's house, like a child who has played some mischief."

"Who is speaking now of your mother's house? You must fly far: away to foreign lands."

"Why?" asked Lorand coldly.

"Why? My God, what questions you put. I don't know how to answer! Can you not see that I am in despair, that every limb of my body trembles for my fear on your account? Believe me, I cannot possibly allow them to take you away from before my eyes, to imprison you for years, so that I shall never see you again."

To appeal the more to Lorand's feelings, and to show him how her hands trembled she tore off her beautiful ball gloves, and grasped his hands in her own and then sobbed before him.

As she touched him Lorand began to feel, instead of his previous tomblike chillness, a kind of agitating heat as if the cold bony hand of death had given over his hand to some other unknown demon.

"What shall I do in a foreign country? I have no one, nothing, no way there. Everyone I love is here, in this land. There I should go mad."

"You will not be alone there, because the one who loves you best on earth, who worships you above all, who loves you better than her health, her soul, better than heaven itself, goes with you and will never leave you."

The young man could make no mistake as to whom she meant: Hermine encircled his young neck with her beautiful arms and overwhelmed his face with kisses.

Lorand was no longer his own. In one hour he lost his home, his fortune, and his heart.