

of Gypsies in this city could 'make a living at their ancient trade of coppersmithing and get off relief.' This sheet-metal repair shop, called 'The Romany Coppersmiths,' was opened at 214 Bowery, New York City, on June 26, 1939, through money raised for rent, equipment, and running expenses by private philanthropists. Steve Kaslov was in charge as senior managing partner, and the form of organization was a simple partnership with each worker signing as a partner. The shop was operated under the sponsorship and guidance of the Special Committee until May 15, 1940, when they decided that 'the experiment was no longer justified, since at no time during the eleven months it operated were sufficient orders received to meet the expenses.' Steve Kaslov, however, was not convinced that the shop could not be made financially successful, so then assumed entire responsibility for its further operation. But he, too, gradually found that the demand for the art of coppersmithing as practised by the Gypsies had largely passed. Old cooking utensils are now more often discarded for new than mended, and cartons are generally used in place of tin cans. In fact, mechanization has superseded handicraftsmanship in America and all the world over.

Then came the World War. And in the summer of 1942 Steve Kaslov, although he still claimed to be the supreme ruler over all the 'Russian' Gypsies in the United States, was sent to a Federal penitentiary for swearing to draft boards that certain of his unmarried youths were married. Such compulsory confinement is enough to break the heart of any Gypsy, but Steve Kaslov's spirit is indomitable. He has not yet come to the end of his Gypsy trail, and in the post-war world he still has hopes of a happier future for his people.

III.—REMINISCENCES OF THE LOVARA

By JAN YOORS

(The adopted son of a Gypsy Chief)

No. 1. LOVARI CHILDREN

I WAS perhaps six years old when for the first time I heard somebody speak about *gitanos*. I was lying on my tummy in the middle of my father's big studio and was drawing. At that time I would draw for days on end all the fantastic things of which my head was full: giants, kings, princesses, robbers, knights and fabulous animals. My days were too short to put it all down.

One evening my father was talking in his own so very enthusiastic way, about his youth in Spain to some friends. I only started taking notice of what my father was saying from the moment he started telling about a little *gilana* whom he had

met on the pilgrimage of Rocío and who had played a great part in his childhood. From the picture my father drew of the little Gypsy, she must have been exceptionally pretty, exceptionally intelligent, and she was only six years old, which was also the age of my father when he met her. What attracted my attention was, that she was exactly my age also; this above all made me feel very near to her. There was also her strange name, Pepita, and then, that she was a *gilana*. That evening my father told many things about the *gitanos* of Spain, a thousand stories about them. I did not know what they really were, but I believed they must be beings of sublime beauty and intelligence, superhuman, near to the angels. From this moment I developed an immense love for this royal race which haunted the dreams of my childhood.

I had grown up till then as an only son in an imaginary world, with as central point that sacred spot where my father conceived and carried out his huge stained-glass windows full of gorgeous colours. In these windows all the warmth of the sunshine of Spain, all the splendour of the far-off Seville where my father was brought up, were reflected. And I was full of wonder and homesick as only little children can be.

One night, some years later, a procession of caravans passed through the avenue of our Belgian home and my father said: 'These are Gypsies.' They were passing quickly, too quickly in the approaching darkness, and a great sadness came over me when they were gone. During the night in my dreams I saw them pass and pass again, and with them was Pepita—and Pepita was my age. I was nearly twelve then.

The next day, coming back from school where I had in vain tried to assimilate Latin, our Czech nurse, Teta, told me quite by chance that she had discovered a Gypsy encampment that morning, and having noticed that I seemed interested she thought I might like to see it. And she told me about the Gypsies of her land, some beautiful stories to which I listened eagerly. Teta added that the Gypsies of her country make big camp fires at night, burn whole trees in them and dance and sing round the tall flames.

This increased my desire to see these things at close quarters. I wanted to meet these Gypsies. I was able to control my growing curiosity for a whole day, but on the following evening I decided to wait no longer. Our poor Teta by that time had grown quite alarmed and started now to tell me truly terrifying things about these vagabonds' kidnapping of children. Teta was a kind and faithful nurse, but here she showed herself a bad pedagogue and a still worse psychologist. More than ever now I was decided to go in search of the Gypsies. I was no more a small child that could be frightened by such nursery tales.

I asked the advice of my mother and that same evening I left the house by myself, my cheeks glowing with joy, in search of the famous encampment. It was not far, and from a distance I could see the red glow of the big camp fire throwing its light on the huge yellow caravans perched on their high wheels. Some-

times the flames would shoot high up and give the old caravans most fantastic shapes worthy of Haroun al-Raschid's fabulous nights.

I perceived oriental princesses draped in riches and colour. They were covered with jewels precious and rare. I closed my eyes, my heart beating at the discovery of so much beauty. Suddenly a hoarse, plaintive cry went up from somewhere and disturbed my dream. It was repeated, to stop abruptly, and then went up again prolonged and magnified. A woman who was crouching near the camp fire, and had cleared her voice in this strange manner, started to sing. And then I heard for the first time a Lament, the Lament of the Nomadic *Rom*. The mirage of the Orient had vanished, and into the depth of my soul I absorbed the lament for the nomadic existence of the *Rom* in all its reality. I ran away. I had learned enough for that night.

When I came home, I went up to my mother to tell her about the new world I had discovered and the emotions by which I had been overwhelmed. My parents were deeply interested in my discoveries, and ever since that evening followed with love and understanding the experiences of their big son of twelve. For this I will never cease to be grateful to them.

The next day at school all my good-will did not suffice to follow the lesson properly. In the evening I hastened to the wood where the encampment was, sheltered by a cluster of big trees. My parents followed me from a distance. (It was, I must say, the only attempt they ever made to meet 'my' Gypsies.)

How great was my sorrow when I discovered that the place was empty. The *Roms* had departed as mysteriously as they had come a few days before. A little heap of warm ashes, soft and grey, was the only thing left to remind me of them. A pale moonshine was making a hard white outline to the big black trees and a homesick nightingale was singing his complaint of infinite sadness. I said to him: 'Certainly thy sadness must be as great as mine: Whom art thou lamenting, my friend?'

But a few weeks later there was once more a Gypsy camp and I succeeded in getting very close to it and then getting acquainted with its children. I soon discovered that these were not the Gypsies I had seen the first night, for these were not as beautiful nor as wealthy. The heavy yellow caravans were the same certainly, but how different they looked without the glow of the camp fire. I was sadly disappointed but I did not want to acknowledge it to myself. There were no little fairy-like princes as on the first night. There were only little beggars. But, nevertheless, there was a bond between us. We were of the same age. Those upon whom I looked as my new friends had a brown skin and black hair and they wore rags. (And what rags!) But all the same I could only see them as privileged people, for they could run about barefooted, and obviously were not compelled to have a daily bath, nor even wash or comb their hair if they did not feel like it. That was what one calls freedom, with no school to attend, no Latin, no algebra!



LOVARI CHILDREN

All these boys had travelled in different countries, could speak several languages and were boasting about it. But I also could speak a few languages: French, Dutch, German and Spanish. Excited by their jeers and wanting to outdo them I boasted that I could speak Latin and enquired if they could. As a rejoinder they answered that anyhow I could not understand nor speak a word of *their* language and never in my life would. 'Why would I never be able to?' But on that point they remained obstinate: 'A *gájo*¹ can never learn to speak Romani!' Already at that time the mere suggestion that something might be impossible to achieve exasperated me. If never before a *gájo* had spoken their language (and on that point they were quite mistaken) I was resolved that I would.

A boy who belonged to the 'bigger-than-I' ones, and who was called Nanoš, seemed quite specially to have something against me, because I had said that I would learn his language. He suddenly got up, neared me with a threatening look in his face and savagely assaulted me. Being a well-bred little *raklo* I pretended that I would not fight with him. I was perhaps afraid at the moment.

Then a young woman who was suckling her baby near by got up and intervened. She evidently wanted to avoid my lodging a complaint against them for violence. She did not want my father to see the gendarmes about this and so get the Gypsies driven out. She took my friend Nanoš firmly by the arm and pushed him towards a caravan. From all sides men and women who had heard the turmoil were stretching out their necks and looking at me with their piercing black eyes in a very unfriendly way.

Was my 'adventure' already to come to an end? Before disappearing into his caravan Nanoš, in a paroxysm of rage, turned back on me for the last time and, ferocious in his powerlessness and humiliation, spat at me this ultimate insult, which I did not understand: *Dav búle čo múi!* (I will spare the translation to those who do not know the Romani language, and will only state that this is an obscene insult of great force.) '*Dav búle čo múi!*' The sound of my own voice startled me. I had mechanically repeated the sounds which I had just heard, parodying the rhythm and the inflexion of the voice. It was not out of scorn. These were my first words in the Romani tongue. All the angrily contracted faces expanded into a smile. The *Roms* seemed to like such an answer.

From inside the caravan where my young enemy had retired came the sound of crockery being smashed and then a sound of smacking.

In the meantime the other little ragged fellows took me with them and we ran to a meadow where their horses were grazing

¹ In his transliteration of the Lovari dialect M. Yours uses *i* to represent the French sound of that consonant [=ɛ], and *dj* to represent the sound of English *j* in 'judge' [=dʒ]. For a full Vocabulary of Lovari, with an introduction on its phonetics and grammar, members should consult *JOLS*, (3) xi, 124-187.—Ed.

in peace. We lay down in the tall grass and after having played and wrestled a little they gave me my first lesson in their language. I can still remember clearly the first words I learned in the late afternoon of that glorious day. Among them were: *ságglo* 'gendarme,' *love* 'money,' *ébrav* 'I steal,' *gájo* 'a non-Gypsy' (which is a denomination heavy with contempt), *más* 'meat,' and *grášt* 'horse.' Each of these words was for these boys rich with significance and actuality and I felt the importance these conceptions had in their young lives. Words like: *Kár, mǐj, dáv búle, zára, géšto, lindíko* were among the first my zealous young teachers thought it their duty to enrich me with. They all took great interest in my education and would roar with laughter at each word which I pronounced correctly, at each intonation that was after their taste.

By the time the first lesson was over we had become great friends, and for weeks I frequented my new school, neglecting often the lessons of my old one. Soon I got to know the Romani names of nearly all the members of the group, those names which are carefully kept from strangers and intruders. The boys disclosed their names to me without any restraint. But when I attempted to learn the name of this or that grown-up I received elusive answers or no answer at all; then there would be a silence and I would feel that the boys had become very cool to me.

Then I came to understand that although our games brought us together and although my friends showed pleasure in being with me, I would all the same remain for ever a *gájo* to them. One day little Lactši, a boy of eight, having noticed that I tried to get to know the *Románo anáv* of the different Gypsies belonging to the group, told me in all seriousness that his uncle, whose most beautiful physique had attracted my attention, was called *Kár porádo* and his wife *Mǐj lóli*! I allowed myself to doubt it. I have often noticed this habit the Lovara share with all Gypsies, of deceiving the *gájo* with regard to names by giving him as the real surname of some *Rom* a word of 'double entendre.'

This camp will remain in my memory for ever, for it was here that I met Putzi. Putzi and I became friends, real, inseparable friends. His father was a man of lofty stature and he had the demeanour of a chief. He was always well dressed and wore handsome massive gold rings of great value. Putzi was a boy full of confidence and simplicity. He had no 'arrière-pensées.' He told me his father's name was Pulika and also that he was the chief. Rupa, my friend's mother, was tall and very handsome, she was full of impressive dignity but had nothing haughty about her. She was covered with jewels and gold coins. Their beautiful new caravan filled me with wonder, and their four colts were marvels. I assumed that my friend's parents must have great possessions, fabulous treasures. They had always choice food and there was abundance of it. In the vicinity of their encampment the ground was littered with empty bottles that had contained beer, wine and spirits.

Later I discovered that from their side my friend's parents

had taken great pride in me. They had from the first understood that I was the son of a 'count,' and that 'Monsieur,' my father, who possessed great wealth, lived in a castle built in feudal times. I avoided saddening their hearts by telling them that my father was an artist possessing, as sole wealth, his talent, his visions and his immense 'amour de la vie.'

When I close my eyes I clearly see Putzi as he appeared to me in those days. He was tall for his thirteen years, slender and strong. I can see still his large brown eyes, radiant with affection, and his little face with regular features; his good little round face. As long as I knew him he was invariably wearing loose, dark brown corduroy trousers, and round his young hips a wide band (*dori*) of cloth with a dark red background, on which were little white flowers like stars, replaced the belt. His light shirt was wide open on the breast. His sleeves were rolled up, always. Round his neck a purple scarf, of which the colour had been faded by the rain and the sun, enhanced his sunburnt beauty and made him look sturdier still. A fisherman's cap cocked on one eye completed his dress. Although his father was a chief and wealthy, Putzi was always barefooted. I know how I used to envy him for this at the time.

Ten years have passed already and it seems to me as if it were only yesterday that my friend showed me his amulets and his treasures, which consisted of little strips of cloth (*múleggi dóri*) in gay colours, tied in little tight knots that are relics of ancestors and beloved ones who are no more. He explained to me that the *Múle* ('spirits of the members of the tribe who have died'), if they are favourable to you, can each of them protect you against a specific evil. When danger is near, it is enough to unfasten the *múleggi dóri* and evoke with ardour him or her to whom the little piece of cloth once belonged. He admitted that often he had been saved from disaster that way.

To-day in a corner of my pocket-book I keep a little piece of red cloth strewn with a pattern of tiny white starlike flowers tied in a tight knot, which I never undo, and I often pray for my very dear friend who has left us.

* * *

During the last month of his beautiful short life my friend Putzi told me all a child of his age could know. What he understood and felt about the spirit and the soul of his race he passed on to me, and I, only a child myself, absorbed and assimilated it. How I managed to do so still puzzles me to-day.

Putzi's father was a progressive Chief. He loved his people and dreamed of new developments for the life of the race. But what caused this radiant joyful boy moments of great suffering was to feel the contempt the *gáje* ('the Others') had for his people.

Though he and I were great friends we were very different. While he craved for knowledge and was eager to learn, I, at that date with the real mentality of a Gypsy child, only dreamed of freedom and escape from study; but what we two were to each

other is beyond superficial understanding. All he possessed Putzi would share with me. His generous nature was so rich that he could afford to give without stint. It is through him that I was granted at first the wealth of his parents' friendship, then the affection of his relations, and finally it was through him that there came to me the devoted love of all his people. When we parted, in tragic circumstances, which I will relate in due course—as also my adoption before the *Lovarengi Kris* (the council or tribunal of the Lovara)—he passed on to me his privileges and I took his place in the midst of his tribe. Since then his name has become mine, our two personalities melted into one: it is I who am now Putzi, the son of Pulika.

The friendship of this young Romani boy was my first link with the stimulating life of these nomads. For life among them is indeed exalting and abounds in supreme joys and unfathomable grief, in high expectations and bitter disappointments. My encounter with the Lovara on the road of life led to events of such a nature that I have had to prepare the recital of them most carefully for this *Journal*. At the moment I cannot disclose their purpose, but their importance was proved in later years.

In the caravans and under the tents the nomads of to-day are now whispering many things: unimaginable hopes are being raised which may sound incredible, but they are not impossible of realization. And one who is temporarily separated from these Gypsies feels weighing on him responsibilities towards a people who look upon him as one of their own on whom great hopes were founded. Since Putzi gave me his position his responsibilities came to rest on me, and I owe him a debt. He sowed and I owe him the harvest. I am now Pulika's beloved son, his race has put their faith in me and they all look forward to the future.

* * *

But after this digression I must go back to the early days of my acquaintance with the Lovara. For several weeks I had been living in a kind of inner solitude, for no caravans had come our way to halt under the shadow of the lofty trees in our wood. At school I was working without much enthusiasm, and on top of it all we had started to study Greek! I was floating. There was only one thing I could cling to and that was my fertile imagination that would take me wherever I wanted to go. In this way I tramped the roads and searched the woods, whence my teachers would call me back to order. Often I must have seemed an enigma to them. If only they had known, they would have understood.

Then, on a certain autumn day of 1934, Miss Betsie Hollants, my parents' intimate friend, dropped in to see us. She was at that time secretary to Mr. Sap, Minister of Public Works in Belgium, and was returning from a tour through the country. She was one of the few who knew in what I was interested, and she told me that passing through Zele, the birthplace of her mother, she had remembered that each year at this time the

Gypsies come on a pilgrimage to the grave of one of their 'Kings,' buried there.

I coaxingly kissed my mother and my father and left to join the pilgrimage. Zele is a little old Flemish town on the left bank of the river Scheldt and has a much frequented horse-fair. In days gone by it was the meeting-place of such vagrants as thieves, robbers, and beggars of white race, called in Flemish 'Kramers-volk,' who spoke among themselves a special language known under the name of 'Bargoensch' (also referred to by my grandparents' cook as 'Kramerslatijn'). Some very old people of Zele can still remember these glorious times and quote words, scraps of conversations and sayings from this strange tongue, which is fast disappearing.

Having arrived at Zele I tried to gather some information from different people as to where the Gypsies could be found. The women I asked shrieked with horror. The men courageously offered to escort me, and inquisitive little old ladies enquired what reason I had to look for Gypsies. There was some whispering about 'warning the police,' about a golden watch the Gypsies might have stolen, and a little child they had kidnapped. In hushed voices people were telling one another about a death dance the Gypsies carried out on their 'King's' grave: frightening stories of fights and glistening knives in the moonshine. Something was whispered also about charms and maledictions. I carefully retreated to the background and only when darkness had come, and the anxious little town had gone to rest, did I venture to set out to find the encampment. When I arrived there, beer was flowing and most certainly spirits were not lacking. The men were quarrelling in loud voices and a little later I could hear steady sobbing; they were embracing each other, moved to tears. The men, drunk at first and furious, were now gradually quietening down and becoming melancholy. I recognized Kalía and his elder brother Lúlu and a little further away Bidčeka, their other brother. I stepped nearer to the blazing camp fire and greeted the gathering. Lyúba the widow, a witch 103 years old (at least this is the age of which she boasted when telling fortunes in a whining voice), seized me savagely by the hair and forced me to drink a cupful of spirits.

While I was swallowing the fiery liquid I heard her explain that this orgy was held in honour of *P'áro Púti o Múlo*. This old Gypsy was the late husband of my hostess Lyúba; he was the ancestor of the Pútešti and the same person as the famous 'King' of the Gypsies mentioned by the people of Zele, who was buried in their town.

A reddish mist went up before my eyes. I became drowsy and a feeling of great melancholy and discomfort came over me. From a remote corner somewhere I heard the voice of a fat woman calling me. Sadly I turned my head: I was exhausted. The fat woman was turning round and round, ascending and descending, appearing and disappearing.

In the end the fat woman, who had never left the fire near

which she had been squatting all the time (it was burning a little to the side of her caravan), sent me her two daughters Kéja and Málá, who were about my age. They led me by the arm and, looking both serious and sad, took me up to their mother. The fat woman, whose name was Károl, was Pulika's sister. She gave me a thick hunk of bread and half a roast chicken, and added to it several big red peppers (*pipárka*) which she kept in a bottle of vinegar. An hour later we were in the midst of a long talk, and in her deep voice she began growling at that old *čoxáji* (witch). 'Old Pútzi,' she said, 'who is buried quite near, God forgive his sins! was a great Lovari.' He was a remote cousin of hers, but old Lyúba, his widow, was a hated *Čurarkinia*,¹ an accursed *Drizárkinia*.

By now it had become very late but nobody was thinking of going to sleep. Round fat Aunt Károl's fire, that was kept going with twigs, ten children had gathered. They were huddling close together to be warmer, and Lálá (Aunt) Károl was telling *paramiči* (fairy-tales). It was there that for the first time I heard the story of the mosquito (*o Tzinzári*) and also the witty legends of the Creation as told by the Gypsies.

The hours went by. I was feeling the damp rising from the earth on which we were sitting or half lying, but I seemed to be the only one to notice it. The other children who were fraternally leaning against me were glowing with the good warmth of healthy young animals. When the last fairy-tale had been told, the children one after another stretched their limbs like young cats, scratched energetically their tufty hair, and after a polite *Máy láši či rát, Lálá* (good night, Aunt), they retired discreetly into the darkness.

Kéja and Málá brought out the big *dúnha* (eiderdowns) and made their beds under the stars (*Lašarenas o čan ávri*). Károl allotted me a little corner under her son Miloš's eiderdown, where four or five little ones were already nestling. I slipped inside, completely dressed and a little uncertain.

Autumn had come and it was raining stars. It was all beautiful beyond words. I asked Miloš who was lying next to me how one said star in Romani. He replied *i čirhay*, but when I pointed with my finger to a falling star he became very gloomy. Miloš reproachfully said: '*Móre!*' (an ejaculation often used in Lovari), 'each star in the sky represents a man on earth. When a star runs away it means that a thief takes to flight and when you point to it with your finger you cause him to be arrested. My cousin Koré has gone out to-night with Kalía's son. And they have not yet come back.'

Thereupon Miloš turned round and a little later I heard his regular and gentle breathing: he was enjoying the calm sleep of those whose conscience is at peace. The night was clear and

¹ *Čurara* is the name by which the members of this tribe call themselves. *Drizárkinia* (derived from *driza* 'a rag') is the name full of contempt the *Lovara* and the *Kalderasa* give them. They have a very bad reputation, and not without reason. They are very numerous in Scandinavia.

beautifully quiet and the sky bright with stars. Outside it was cold, but under our *dúnha* it was very warm and cosy. The smell of the autumn leaves was strong and the noises of the night were more and more audible. Far away a watchdog on a farm was barking and I could not help thinking of the falling stars and those they were representing.

At the far end of the encampment Lyúba, in a dismal voice broken with sobs, was singing a dirge for *O Puro Pátzi o Múlo*, who at that time of the year was haunting the minds of his people.

(To be continued.)

IV.—TWO 'ERLIDES' FAIRY-TALES

Collected and edited by B. J. GILLIAT-SMITH

INTRODUCTION

THESE two sketchy fragments are in the 'Erlides' dialect, like all the Sofia fairy-tales published by me in this *Journal*. They were dictated to me by Naida, the wife of Pashi Sulyof. He had dictated all the others, but was then unable to dictate these tales. Had he done so, they would doubtless have come up to the standard of those already published.

It may be remembered that he was a Sofia carrier—a 'hamal' (a Turco-Bulgarian word from the Arabic *hamál*). According to his wife and his comrades, Pashi had broken his back through covetousness. He had been unwilling to share with others the money received for moving a heavy safe, preferring to take on the job alone. The safe was successfully hoisted on to his back, and he was staggering along when he slipped on a curb-stone, and the weight of the safe broke, or dislocated, his spine. He lived on for about a year, unable to move, and in great pain.

His wife was of the same tribe as himself, and spoke the same dialect. Slight differences in her speech may nevertheless be observed. Where she said: '*dujé čirklén*' her husband would have said almost certainly: '*doné čirklén*.'

The manuscript is on paper belonging to the Majestic Hotel, Bucharest. It is in pencil, and taken down hurriedly. It is undated, but it must have been dictated in October 1915. I cannot remember the circumstances, beyond the bare fact that Naida dictated it, that she seemed to grow tired of each tale before the end, that she wound them up hurriedly, but not altogether incoherently, and that she showed considerable resentment against her husband owing to his misfortune.

I remember visiting him once during those days of October 1915, when Bulgarian mobilization was in full swing and Sofia swarmed with Germans. The meeting was a painful one, made