

music—to just this kind of music—were all spotlights for the observer who looks for the *patrin* of the Romanies in the modern social labyrinth of the West.

(*To be continued.*)

III.—O DROM LE LOWARENGO

RECOLLECTIONS OF LIFE AND TRAVEL WITH THE LOWARA

By JAN YOORS

(*Continued from Vol. XXXVIII., p. 18*)

5. AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE

I wake up in the early morning hours. The moon is high and full. In the distance fires are still burning and the chill night breeze carries the smell of burning wood. At the furthestmost boundary of the encampment an impressive troop of horses stand and sleep. Several hundred men, women and children are asleep in the open all around us. The hour before daybreak, with its diffused mysterious light, has for me an ever new enchantment.

When the day really dawns dozens of dogs begin to bark and howl. The horses shift their places, become restless and panicky. Harsh voices shout and swear. A dog yelps in pain while the others give tongue even more wildly. A shot is fired in the air, and a dozen mounted police officers stand outside the camp. It is very early and nobody seems to react for a while. Then a very old woman hurries forward, chasing the barking dogs away with a stick and by throwing stones at them, which she picks up as she walks. She speaks in a high-pitched voice and tries to appease the accursed *shangle* (police officers). They only shout louder, but the vicious-looking dogs stand guard, barking furiously, and prevent them from entering the camp or coming near the many reclining Gypsies, who pretend to notice nothing at all and do not move. For a long while the shouting goes on. The old woman understands very little of the vernacular, or at any rate pretends not to do so. I can hear her shouting back at them in Russian, Greek, broken German, Neapolitan, interspersed with

pure Romany curses and insulting remarks. The dogs continue to bark and growl.

The police, unable to gain access to the camp, go away to come back later when the men will be awake and up, for despite their loud shouts the Gypsies prefer not to be too rash by provoking the numerous dogs to attack the officers. If one dog, infuriated, were to spring forward and attack, all the others might follow its example, and the consequences could be unpleasant and specially humiliating.

Several hours later the police return and are met by a group of husky Rom, headed by Pulika and Čukurka, followed by growling wolf-hounds. Pulika greets them and, after having identified himself as 'the king of the Gypsies,' asks for a special interview with the commander of the nearest police station in order to obtain temporary permission to retain our camp in this place. He will not allow himself to be interrupted by anyone. 'This is the eve of a great religious feast among my people, the feast of the patron saint of all Gypsies,' he says, having recourse to Romany mystification to impress the foolish *gajé* and to obtain the authorization to settle down for a week or two. Putting his hand in his pocket he takes out a big handful of gold coins. With a clever display of showmanship, he says that his people are wealthy, peaceful and honest, that all they want is permission to fulfil their religious obligations in peace. 'We are not like some of those other Gypsy bands who are dirty and steal and quarrel and fight and make a general nuisance of themselves. We are good and decent people,' he declares, 'and we are prepared to leave as many pieces of gold as security and to prove our goodwill, as the honourable head of the police force may indicate.'

Other Rom display several more handfuls of gold coins. A middle-aged man of the Trokešti shows them a thick bundle of bank notes. The mounted police officers are almost convinced. They relax a little and talk about the weather and ask, with a touch of envy, about the distant countries we have visited in recent months and about the economic conditions we have found there. They admire our horses and make an effort to show us their understanding of horsemanship. This creates a sudden and unexpected bond between us. The mounted police officers depart and suddenly the whole camp becomes full of activity. Several dozen fires are soon lit in an instant and thin cork-

screws of transparent, blueish smoke rise into the clear morning air.

We harness our grey fiery stallion to a light two-wheeled cart and, forcing the animal into a sharp trot, we depart to the nearby city. At crossroads and bifurcations we leave trail signs. These are called *vurma* (which, literally translated means trail) or *patra* (leaves or branches), since they always consist of materials that will be inconspicuous to the *gajé*. Sometimes in wooded parts, small branches are broken and left hanging, pointing in one direction, at the height of a man sitting on the driver's seat on a wagon. There are special signs indicating such specific messages as: 'speed up travel and join us'; 'follow us'; 'assembling for *Kris*'; 'Rom died, burial ahead'; 'do not stop around here: local police and population hostile to Gypsies'; 'turn back and tread softly,' etc. The leaving of such trails of information covers whole territories with an effective intelligence network. It is a major offence among all Rom, and punishable by the *Kris*, to neglect to pass on vital information about possible dangers to fellow Gypsies. If a travelling unit gets involved with the justices of the country and finds out that this is the result of mischief, in any form, done by a band travelling ahead of them who did not leave indications essential to the security of others, the culprits will be called before the *Kris* and made to share whatever expenses the others may incur in the way of fines, damages, restitutions or lawyers' fees.

6. A GYPSY CHIEF'S RELATIONS WITH THE GAJÉ

Pulika takes his guests to 'his' coffee rendezvous. Wherever Pulika goes he makes friends and leaves behind a succession of friendly inns, coffee-rooms and saloons where he is welcomed and received as an old friend by the owner. He spends more lavishly than any other customer they have ever had, bringing along his entire band of followers. When Pulika takes over a place in this fashion it is under his protection and no Gypsy woman or girl will dare bother the customers there with fortune-telling, begging, unpleasantries or tricks. Whatever is broken or damaged (accidentally or otherwise) by adult or child is paid for in full by Pulika, without question or protest. All who know him trust him. I have often seen him borrow huge sums of money from his *gajé* friends, without security or written agreement of any sort,

in order to buy horses or meat and food for his camp followers. He has become just as much a legend among all Gypsies as among the many *gajé* and local police forces with whom we have come in contact throughout many lands.

Later in the day the Trokešti join us. They possess no light carts as we do and therefore their menfolk all travel together in one single heavy covered wagon, put at the disposal of the group by its owner, whose wife and children accompany him though they remain in the background. Pulika buys beer by the barrel, or, if bottled, by the crate and his own people serve it. Afterwards Rupa, my sister Keja and some other girls join us. They have walked from the camp to the nearest telephone booth from where they have ordered a taxi-cab to bring them to the inn. Most gallantly one of the men offers Rupa a glass of brandy but the maidens remain outside. After a while Rupa leaves the men and, after exchanging a few quick words with her husband Pulika, goes away, accompanied by the girls, to buy the necessary victuals for a festive and truly Romany meal to be provided by them at the present inn and to be served by them on the spot. The *gajó* owner knows Pulika's particular idiosyncrasy and lets him take over the entire management of the place, for which he knows he will be rewarded in kindly fashion.

Our light *taliga* cart shuttles to and fro between the camp and the inn, fetching more guests, taking back others, and carrying food and drink to those staying at home. To the old folk these extravagances of eating away from camp and in a *gajó* place are highly unorthodox, though they take into consideration the fact that the food is prepared by our womenfolk, with a strict observance of Lowari tradition of clean and unclean, and the sending of a generous share of the food to all those absent from the banquet at the inn.

Meanwhile two police inspectors have come to the camp to see the Chief of the Gypsies, but they find only women and children. There are a few old men, but none of them speaks the language of the country. Several little boys volunteer to take them to Čukurka and the other men. They are emboldened by the joyous mood about them, and are only too happy to find a suitable pretext to join the feasting men. The representatives of the Law are received kindly and offered food and drink which, however, they cannot accept, being on duty. Pulika, as a perfect

host persuades them none the less to drink to his health at least one symbolic drink. A crowd has formed in the street and eagerly watches the Gypsies in this seldom witnessed genial mood of theirs. The police inform us that we are allowed to remain in this locality for a period of ten days on condition that no complaints about Gypsy mischievous behaviour are received from the permanent inhabitants.

The welcome news about the 'ten days truce with the police' spreads throughout the camp. Women, in their twos and threes, carrying their half naked children sideways on their broad haunches, invade the nearby villages and towns, in an orgy of peaceful shopping. Soon the suspicions of the *gajé* are allayed and they rejoice in this unexpected but welcome increase in business. The women and girls buy dress material, dozens of yards at a time. They buy chairs and carpets, cooking pots, wash-basins, tallow candles and oil lamps. They buy spices and groceries. The camp looks like an ant heap in full activity. Arrangements are made with nearby farmers to pay for the use of pastures for the horses. Firewood is purchased. Under the present conditions of the truce the Rom gladly pay up, and in ready cash, for many a thing which at almost any other time they would have acquired by the vagrants' licence to plunder.

Days go by, days spent in endless *pačiva* and merrymaking, in friendly social intercourse with *gajé* and police alike. The Gypsies behave like gentlemen. The full and multi-coloured long skirts, the jet black hair and bare feet of the Gypsy women (who are covered with massive gold coins) are becoming part of everyday life and some people (innkeepers, butchers and general store-keepers) sadden at the thought of these nomadic guests breaking up camp one day, and departing suddenly without regret. For years the *gajé* population will keep alive the memory of this short period and turn it into nostalgic legend. At night groups of boys and girls on bicycles come to the big camp and stand at a distance, watching the activities around the fires, and wondering about the strange people we Gypsies are. They dream romantic and restless dreams about our free and expansive way of life, which only too frequently they mistake for the sordid licence, that they themselves may long for in their secret hearts.

Soon the ten days' truce nears its end: it is due for expiry tomorrow. Then the old police régime will be in force again. We

will be unrelentingly compelled to move on, and to revert to our customary tactics to dodge continual police vigilance. Our large group of wagons will be forcibly broken up and dispersed in different directions. Two or three wagons at most will be allowed to travel together, until one day again we will be able to join up with many other small travelling bands and enjoy another brief spell of large scale *pačiva* and of Romany social life at its best.

The commanding officer comes in person to the camp to see Pulika. They are now on very friendly terms. He has had a lifetime of more or less unpleasant experiences enforcing the law in connection with nomadic bands of Gypsies and others, but seldom has he come across a chief who keeps his word when making a truce, and one who has the necessary authority to make the great number of families under his leadership adhere to the pact agreed upon. The officer has had the opportunity recently of observing Gypsies at his leisure and on their best behaviour. Once or twice he came at night time, sat down on some old crate beside the fire of one of our headmen and watched the singing and dancing, full of wonder and half revealed sympathy. Whenever the occasion arises Pulika and Čukurka (and for that matter most of the headmen of smaller units), try, more or less successfully, to establish better relations with the representatives of the national police force of the country through which they happen to be travelling. Indeed Pulika's and his brother's lifelong endeavour is to bring the problem of the nomadic Gypsy tribes into the limelight.

7. THE STATUS OF NOMAD GYPSIES

The majority of Gypsies I have lived with were stateless and therefore they possessed no validly endorsed passports. At different times temporary identification papers were issued to them by the Central Security Office of a specific country, which, however, did not give them an official legal status of any sort. They were regarded as illegal immigrants and were only tolerated for a hypothetical transit period. Most of the time they could not be easily expelled (although expulsion seemed to be the ultimate desire of every country in which they happened to be sojourning), for the reason that no neighbouring country would admit them officially. If, and when, they themselves wanted to travel to another country, they would go to the

police or customs office nearest to the one border they were anxious to cross, and openly declare that they were under a threat of extradition from the country in which they were then stopping. Often by this means they would receive invaluable help, *sub rosa*, in illegal border crossing. Once having penetrated into the other country, the control on the border just crossed would be strictly enforced, thus preventing the new host-nation from re-extraditing them or, in their turn, smuggling the Gypsies back again into the land they had left. If there was no legal proof that the Gypsies had come from country X, there was no legal way of forcing X to take them back. This proof had to be obtained from the Gypsies, who by the answer they provided could thus manage to ride the surf as they themselves wished. This way of travelling is of course attended by many inconveniences and brings about much inevitable unpleasantness. No country in Europe in those days seemed to want any Gypsies at all, so life was a constant game of cat and mouse.

The responsible legal officials in control of the border lands would treat the Gypsies with the utmost severity, enacting every regulation strictly according to the letter of the law in order to scare and discourage these Nomads in such ventures, and, if one *kumpania* had succeeded in crossing the border, to prevent any further invasions that might have been planned by other groups. Migrations of this sort usually happen periodically and on a more or less massive scale. The various motives behind such mass movements are very complex and beyond the scope of the present article. But I can remember Nomad bands being caught by border patrols of the country into which they were trying to infiltrate and being prevented from returning by the police of the nation they had just left. These Gypsies were then forced to camp and live in a sort of No Man's land.¹

They were thus deprived of the possibility of earning a living in any way and were forced to subsist by begging, a wretched way of life. These were the times when the women and young girls would be plagued with dishonourable proposals from *gajé*. They would resist fiercely, but life was made miserable for them. At such times it was the unspoken rule that all young women and girls should appear utterly unkempt and in rags, with hair un-

¹ Cp. the fate of a large migratory band of Polish Gypsies who tried to cross the frontier into Germany recently (described in *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* of February 19, 1959).

combed and every appearance of neglect. Certain offensive stories about the repulsive ways of Gypsies living in filth and dirt and penury can be traced back to the use of such stratagems of self-defence in times of stress. The Gypsies claim that in circumstances of duress, thus artificially created by the gentiles, they have no alternative left but to fall back on the practice of stealing for their very subsistence.

After this digression let us return to Pulika who sits by his fire and drinks coffee with the police officer. Proudly Pulika hears the commandant praise the perfect behaviour of his clan, and their honesty and cleanliness. He admires their horsemanship and physical prowess. He wishes he could speak as many languages as they do and adapt himself as easily to ever changing circumstances. He envies them their extensive and adventurous travels and their unique gift of always enjoying life to the full. In a gracious show of playful courtesy, Pulika replies that all he envies is the commandant's official status and the privileges attached to it, and that, if his wishes could be realized, he, Pulika, would grant all Gypsies freedom, peace and an abundance of the fruits of the earth. He has forgotten that we are no longer in a land of lavish, if authoritarian voivodes, whose sole wishes are law and whose eccentric and romantic moods may prove a Gypsy's temporary blessing. Hours later Pulika still sits by his fire. He is alone. He has not shared with anyone the good news. Tomorrow we will move a dozen miles towards the town of Y, to set up a camp for a few days alongside the stream, after which short interval we will be granted another truce of ten days at the present locality and we will return here. Pulika smiles, he is satisfied with the present, he has trust in the unknown and has no anxiety for the future.

S. A NEW CAMP AND A STORMY NIGHT

Early the following morning the camp is cleared, as one by one the heavy wagons are led away, dragged by fiery horses. The vans sway heavily on the uneven twig-covered ground. They rock by fits and starts. The first wagons are settled down on the new site, beside the flowing river, before the last ones have left the old encampment. Spread out over the whole twelve miles' length of the winding road, heavy vans are travelling in single file. The wagons of the Trokešti and ours travel in mixed order since we

form one happy homogeneous group, without rivalries, tension, or marked personal dislike. To reach the new site one has to pass a stretch of break-neck downhill slopes. The younger men stand waiting, ready to hang on to the rear of the wagons to slow them down, while others put long freshly cut poles between the spokes of the high wooden wheels to reduce the speed downhill. The air is penetrated with the pounding of hooves and the whinnying of frightened rearing horses, with smoking nostrils, and thin fiery manes flying in the wind.

The new camp is set up. The wagons are spread in an irregularly shaped half circle. A few fires are lit and thin columns of smoke rise into the clear air. The new camping site by the river is much cooler than the previous one. Nearby the flowing water is gurgling. The horses stand in a spongy grass patch low down by the river. Towards the middle of the night we start having rough weather. It is pitch dark. We jump out of bed and rush outside to brace the swaying wagons with long solid green poles against the 'upcoming' gale. We make sure that all fires are extinguished. The young women hurriedly put inside the vans all small utensils usually left in the open, such as cooking pots, basins, and pails, that might be carried away by the wind. All loose hanging tarpaulins are fastened and solidly pegged to the ground. We fetch the horses from their grazing by the river to the camp, where their individual owners tether them at the back of their wagons. A sudden sharp gust of wind frightens an old grey mare belonging to young cousin Kalia, who is married to Malika. The mare gives us some trouble before we can subdue her. We crawl back into bed, under the big soft silk-covered eiderdowns which the women have put inside the wagons. The windows and doors are protectively closed, but through the short chimney pipes, protruding from the wagon roof, the wind is jeering. The wagons shake and swing. Horses pull wildly at their chains at the rear of the van, and through the thin wooden wall of his own *varde* a man is alternately shouting short rhythmic sentences to quieten the frightened animal and then cursing it. In the distance sudden loud cries are heard, but soon the howling wind drowns all other sounds. The windows, doors and stove-pipe rattle continuously. A tarpaulin which has torn loose, flaps in rapid erratic cadence. Old newspapers, pieces of clothing, left outside or forgotten, are noisily carried away by the wind, and

occasionally thud against a tent or wagon. Dogs moan and shiver and dash about seeking better protection. At last the wind drops and a sudden invasion of empty silence contrasts with the grandiloquent noises of the previous storm. The hushed 'aphonic' lull is more disquieting than the blasts of the gale. For a few moments I can hear the excited chatter and babble of the river and a distant peal of church bells telling the time of night. A baby starts to cry not far away. Suddenly everything is blotted out by the deafening drumming of a cloudburst on the wagon roofs not more than a few inches away from where we lie in bed listening and wondering, and fully aware of nature's dramatic happenings. I lie on my back and gradually feel the tension leave the sinews, muscles and nerves of my body. The night is dark. My ears are no longer strained to catch the sounds from outside. My mind yields to the hypnotic streaming rhythm of the rain until, without detectable transition, I glide into a sound sleep.

The next morning we light a fire inside the stove instead of outside in the open, for the whole camp-site is mud-covered and swampy. Most of the Rom sleep late and little enthusiasm is displayed for the new day. We wash ourselves on the wide foot-board at the front of the wagon without even climbing down, and dash back inside to enjoy the comfort of strong, black and very sweet coffee. Some boys from another family come running through the mud. They climb into our wagon, politely greet the older people and accept the hot coffee offered them. They bring us news about the other people in the camp and the damage done during the night. Together with them, after having put on heavy leather riding boots, we set out to look after the horses. The earth is soggy and smells strongly. We rub and brush the horses vigorously and race them round and round to warm them up after the cold and wet night in the open. We give them a feed of oats and let them drink. Then we cover them with khaki army blankets. The men are busy repairing the inevitable damage done to wagons, tents and tarpaulins. Soon the ground fog lifts and the sun comes through. The sky is clear and a new day lies ahead of us once more. The women go far away down the river to wash clothes. In one corner of the camp young children are challenging one another in a dancing contest. The little boys, barefooted and in colourful rags wriggle and squirm, shake and hop with perseverance and zest.

9. AN EXPEDITION TO TOWN

I accompany Pulika to a nearby town where he is taking some horses to a dealer with whom he has been doing business for a long period. Every time Pulika travels to this part of the country he faithfully calls on this horse-dealer friend of his and usually does good business with him. The *gajó* in question is a very fat man, red-faced, loud-voiced and a hard drinker. His friendly dealings with the Gypsies have gained him a reputation for mystery, and perhaps even for cunning. Pulika sells him three horses for cash and exchanges one for a good-looking plough-horse.

We leave carriage and horses behind and hang around town for a few hours. Pulika visits a number of old 'contacts' and picks up mail from the 'poste restante' department of the local post office. Some letters have been lying here for many weeks, some for months and they have come from practically all over the globe. They are simply classified as 'Gypsy mail' without differentiation of the names of the addressee, since one and all have in large letters GYPSIES on them. They are tied together in one huge bundle. I go rapidly through the lot, roughly classifying them. Those addressed to Pulika under the name of '*Petalo*' are bound to be from close relatives, others may be addressed to Peterlow Vadosh, Columbus, Valdes or an imaginative variety of other names, each giving a clue as to the sender of the missive. There is mail for many other members of the group, from Iran and Turkey, Rumania, Greece and North America, from France, Spain and Austria. One letter is from South Africa: it is addressed to Hansi son of Tchompi,¹ and the last time we heard from him he was in Spain, en route for Spanish Morocco. Pulika takes the letter and asks me to read it to him. It contains news about Stevo (nicknamed the African, sometimes also referred to as Diamond Jim) having made a small fortune and going to the United States of America soon for a short stay of a year or so. After this he plans to come to Europe to visit his many relatives and extend to them the honour and pleasure of extensive *pačiva*. Pulika will see to it that the news spreads the Romany way. It will soon reach Hansi, son of Tchompi. It will travel in wagons along the roads of Europe. It will be repeated at crossroads and sent out from country to country, whenever a long-distance

¹ See *JGLS*. (3) xv. 140.

telephone call is made possible by favourable circumstances and the availability of points of contact. There are many letters for many other people with enough news of the entire Gypsy world to compose a fascinating chronicle of these wandering tribes.

On the way back to the camp Pulika and I pick up a large barrel of local foaming beer, a case of brandy and half an ox to let the whole *kumpania* share in the Lowari way the proceeds of their headman's successful business deals. In Romani there is a saying which is casually pronounced at the beginning of such a festive meal and libation: it runs: 'May you all enjoy your fill of this food, drink and pleasure, and may it prevent you from eating jealously because of our financial success this day.' When Lowara travel, temporarily, in one large single unit, it is considered gracious manners to share all profits; this is traditionally done by giving a community banquet followed by libations, song and dance. In a travelling unit of some importance and prosperity, as the one described above certainly was, there are days when a number of married men, with wives and children, make a substantial gain and combine efforts in arranging for plentiful food and entertainments. Under these circumstances the only ultimate profit a man has from his daily earning is not the accumulation of money or wealth but the accumulation of goodwill from his fellow Gypsies who, temporarily, form part of the same *kumpania*. The goodwill thus acquired will build up a reputation for him, which will be spread abroad to his credit and prepare for him pleasant relations with other groups he may meet in future travels. Besides this, a Lowari is a born host and it gives him great pleasure to share what he has with people of as many other tribes as possible. It gladdens his heart to see the half-naked camp urchins eating like young tigers. Good food plays an important part in Lowari life. Perhaps this is because they are a wandering group, expelled and persecuted as unwanted elements, often forced to travel when food is scarce. They live mostly in the open and have their wagons to travel in as shelter when the weather makes open air living less convenient. They do not worry excessively about either clothing or shelter. Food and drink, therefore, become the focal point for their attention and preoccupation on the material plane. After a day in the city, with its narrow stone paved streets, red brick houses, closed windows and tense, bored, repressed-looking inhabitants it is

good to be again in the open, to feel the sun and wind, to gaze at extending horizons, to smell the smoke of the wood fires and see the earth and the river.

(*To be continued.*)

IV.—GYPSY BEAR-LEADERS IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA

By PROFESSOR T. P. VUKANOVIĆ

I. INTRODUCTION

IN the Balkan Peninsula the Bear-leaders form a separate group among the Gypsies, by reason¹ not only of their social status but also their mode of life and their occupation.* The present paper is based on my own personal studies of these people during the period 1936-57, as well as on the expert scientific literature available about them; but, unfortunately, a large number of my relevant illustrations and notices were destroyed during the Second World War (1941-5). None the less I hope that this article will serve to stimulate further researches on this special group among the Gypsies of other European countries and other Continents.

II. LEGENDS OF THE ORIGIN OF THE BEAR AND THE MONKEY THROUGH PARTHENOGENESIS

Among the Balkan Gypsies, especially the Nail-makers of Aleksinac (Serbia), the following legend concerning the origin and dancing of the bear was still extant at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries:—“A virgin girl (*detarbjandi*) became pregnant without sexual intercourse with a man. She was horrified at this, and so ashamed that she decided to throw herself into a river. But when she came to its bank the water began to recede, so that she could not come near enough to it to jump in. Then a man rose out of the water and said to her: “Girl, do not deplore your pregnancy for you are about to give birth to an animal that will be able to work as a man does.” So

* Cp. B. Gilliat-Smith, *Report on the Gypsy Tribes of North-East Bulgaria* (JGLS. (2) ix. 47, 97).—ED.