

## IV.—O DROM LE LOWARENGO

RECOLLECTIONS OF LIFE AND TRAVEL WITH THE  
LOWARA

By JAN YOORS

*(Continued from Vol. XXXIX, p. 158)*

## 18. THE MILOŠESTI

THE heavy wagons are lined up a few feet off the road and on both sides of it. The small fires are lit on the spaces left open between the wagons. We rattle past the first few fires before we realize that this is the camp. With an effort we stop the skittish horse on the spot and look around slightly dazed, as if just waking up from a strange dream. Some men pick up burning sticks, poke the fires to make them flare up and holding burning pieces of wood high above their heads and, shading their eyes with the other hand to pierce the darkness, step forward to identify us. Young barefooted boys have grabbed the halter of the horse to prevent it from moving forward. Many large, dark eyes observe us intently from every side. We stand upright on the *taliga* but wait to jump down. They have to look up at us and in so doing show the whites of their eyes. Loudly we shout the customary exchange of greetings fit for present and similar occasions. Starting with '*Na daran, Rom sam wi ame*' (Do not fear, we too are Gypsies)—the 'do not fear' meaning nothing more nor less in fact than a friendly interpolation. Out of the darkness many men's voices shout '*Devlesa avilan*' (With God you came), to which we shout back '*Devlesa araklam tume*' (it is by God's help himself, that we have found you).

We jump down and let the young boys take care of our horse and cart. We follow the torch-bearing men to a camp-fire a little further down the road. Here most of the men of the camp seem to have assembled. We go through the usual and rather lengthy procedure of official greetings and well-wishings followed by a check up on genealogy, and a long period of questioning. Food is plentiful, and good drink flows profusely. This is the *kumpania*



of Miloš whose wife is called Rosa. He is the son of Yojo and the younger brother of my Uncle Čukurka and Pulika, my father. This night we spend among our own people. The fires have been put out early and all is peaceful along the road. They do not want to attract too much attention from the local population or police. To-morrow, very early, they want to break up camp and hurry to join Pulika's *kumpania* and merge with his band. They crossed the borders illegally and want to avoid friction and trouble with the authorities. We sleep like logs and dislike waking up early again. But we help break up camp and indicate the general direction in which to proceed.

While the wagons roll along the road the women make the early morning coffee. We drink our few cups in the wagon of old man Bakro. He is a man of over eighty years, and was a widower who took a young wife from the Kalderaš tribe a few years back, and has several young children by her. After thanking them both for their hospitality we jump off the moving *vurdon* and stand by the roadside watching the others roll by. A small but sturdily built four-wheeled peasant cart goes past us. It has a strange-looking canvas-covered superstructure, which is windowless. We remember having passed it yesterday. It belongs to Kalia, our first cousin and youngest son of Miloš the Chief. We run a few steps after it and put one foot on the turning wheel, and crash inside. We cheerfully greet him and crouch down on the huge eiderdown which almost fills the whole inside space. We drink more strong, black coffee. In this fashion we spent the first few hours of the early morning, chatting and drinking coffee, gradually moving from the front of the line of caravans to its rear. I feel slightly dizzy from drinking too much coffee and not eating, also from lack of sleep and too much talking.

The Milošesti have come recently from Sweden and Denmark and Holland. They are very clean and well fed. Many of the younger men wear skipper caps and marine blue or black sweaters. Some walk in noisy wooden clogs. Something in the way the women dress puzzles and bothers me, but nearly half a day passes before I discover the incongruity of it. Their long and full skirts are cut from material which they bought recently in Holland during one of those typical Lowara shopping safaris. The material is 'batiked sarong' imported from Java, Celebes and Bali. For a while we walk alongside the last wagon in the line.

At the rear of each large *vurdon* is a kind of extension or rack. The oversize manger of the last wagon is filled with freshly cut clover and grass. Succumbing to the temptation we climb on to the suspended rack and stretch out unobserved. For hours we lay there dozing in the hot sun, overcome by a gentle nausea from the constant rocking and the smell of tar from the newly built roads. Swarms of small summer flies hover over us. We have one full day's journey ahead of us, if not more, to catch up with Pulika's band. Then, at least, we shall cross his trail and follow it, since they have been forced to travel on. The sun is too hot. We pull some freshly cut clover over our heads and face and sink into a semi-conscious state of non-existence. Once or twice the whole caravanserai stops. Kore goes to see what has happened but he does not come back and I make no effort to break the spell that has overcome me. I am not aware of hunger or thirst although it must be late afternoon by now and I have not yet broken my fast except for quantities of strong coffee consumed early in the day. An unseen cuckoo repeats his mysterious call at regular intervals. From different directions other cuckoos reply in varying tones, but at the same, precise, clock-like intervals.

#### 19. A GREAT REUNION

Shortly before nightfall we reach Pulika's encampment. The newcomers settle down amid great rejoicing and cries, and the creaking of the heavy wagons being driven off the road and on to the waste land. Miloš and Pulika have not seen each other for nearly seventeen years. They are deeply moved by this reunion. A night of excitement and joy follows, with songs and toasts and memories of old days. The following day Pulika orders us to break camp. This is done in a joyous, competitive hurry. We secretly wonder where Pulika is planning to take a band as large as this one. A few hours later we are settling down on an ideal site where we have never stopped before, so far as any of us young boys can remember. The grass is green and plentiful. Water flows near-by, there is an abundance of dry dead wood and the place is screened off by trees and underwood on nearly every side. The vague dirt-track leading to it ends in a *cul-de-sac*. This is a spot so well hidden and deserted, that, I guess, we could live here for weeks undetected and in peace. Nevertheless



Pulika advises that the wagons should be parked alternately, one of ours and one of the Milošesti, so as to make it look and feel more homogeneous in case of a police inspection; the men of Miloš's group will thus be able to fade away and hide out safely in the surrounding woods, while our men and boys take care of the deserted wagons and women and children who remain. Pulika will assume the sole responsibility for all present and provide cover for those absent. After the great *pačiva* the group will split up and travel in units of three and four wagons, intermixed until such time as the Milošesti are able to travel by themselves, having learned the vernacular and customs, and having adjusted themselves to the country's economic possibilities and limitations as seen from a Gypsy point of view. Ways and means will have to be found in that time to arrange, more or less, their legal status. After the great *pačiva*, too, when their turn for hospitality arrives, the Milošesti will feed us on all kinds of fish. They will prepare huge cauldrons of orange-tinted fish soup, reminding one of the French meridional bouillabaisse. We watch the proceedings with mixed feelings and the distrust often displayed by the Lowara towards all kinds of fish as potential food. Old Bakro produces a rarely used silver samovar. The habit of tea drinking is most unusual among the Lowara, tea being the customary beverage of the Kalderaš. Lyuba, Bakro's wife, is a middle-aged woman and actually a Kalderskinia. The tea she serves to us is good and strong, and she bakes the most delightful poppy-seed cakes with honey. For several days the Milošesti feed and entertain us. Sea food is their staple diet and to avoid hurting their feelings we live on lobster and crab meat, on shrimps and endless varieties of seafish. But for some strange reason we dislike and distrust the great sea and the food it provides us with in the stews of the Milošesti.

Meanwhile, Pulika makes his preparations for the greatest of all banquets. Once the camp is established, Pulika sends out his *taliga* to a near-by city to fetch barrels of beer, cases of whisky and cognac, also live pigs and geese and tobacco in abundance. It is Pulika's intention that the *pačiva* which he is about to give to his younger brother Miloš should become a legend among all the tribes. He wants it to become a living monument to Lowari brotherly loyalty and hospitality. Čukurka fully assists Pulika in his many duties as host. The *taliga* comes and goes, bringing

provisions, firewood, beer, and hard liquors. For this occasion large quantities of vegetables are bought: runner beans, sauerkraut, tomatoes, onions, and olives. On the fringe of the campsite several younger men are killing pigs, while a group of women take care of the geese and dozens of fat chickens. From the city slaughterhouse Yojo brings in a whole steer. The big fire is blazing with long planks of hickory cast into it, and a young man is swinging his axe, trying to split some heavy logs on which he is standing. Wedges are placed in the widening split and are driven deeper until the tree-trunk snaps, and then another is tackled in the same fashion. Over many fires heavy cast-iron kettles are gurgling and sputtering. Men and women are rolling cigarettes for themselves from tobacco, freely handed around. An old woman smokes her blackened, short pipe, tacitly scorning the use of the little sheets of yellowish paper and the cigarettes made with them. Young children beg for half-smoked clumsily shaped cigarette ends which they avidly finish when successful in their hunt. Hordes of dogs hang around, yelping and fighting. Wild-looking little girls in badly fitting but gaily-coloured long skirts and blouses crouch by a fire baking potatoes. Their bluish-black hair hangs loose indicating that they have not yet reached the age of puberty.

By nightfall the lavish banquet starts and lasts for many, many hours. At Pulika's invitation all the men assemble in his tent. A low table has been improvised, six or seven feet long. It is covered by a cloth of bright colourful flower-patterned dress material. From end to end stand plates with chunks of roast beef, pork, fowls, and ham, deep bowls of vegetables and sauerkraut with rice, stuffed cabbages, fried potatoes and abundant and wonderful salads and mountains of bread. Large jugs of beer circulate and are constantly refilled at the overflowing barrel on tap. The table is studded with bottles of red and white wine, and at one side of its stand a number of cases of dark bottled beer for those who want it. Our young men attend to the guests and keep filling up glasses, cups and silver tankards. The guest of honour, the host and the older men sit at one end of the table. They drink from spectacular silver beakers called *tartai*. They also have massive silver forks and knives, mostly for display, since all present prefer to eat with their fingers in true Romany style, and most of them also use their own hunting knives to



cut the meat. The pepper pots are in constant demand and so are the many tall glass jars containing hot peppers in vinegar. There is also an abundance of herbs and spices, olives, capers, pickles, mustard and horse radish. There are piles of fresh fruit : juicy, yellow or orange slices of ripe melon, grapes, French candied fruit, raisins and currants, sugared dates, almonds and figs. Besides all this there is an extravagant choice of imported cheeses. Strong black Turkish coffee follows, which is drunk from tiny cups with glasses of clear cool water. After this comes cognac and ' Marcs ' and Hollands gin in brown earthen jugs, which the younger generation among the newcomers seem to prefer. The very old men drink vodka and Hungarian apricot brandy.

Unsolicited a wild song then bursts forth, aesthetically disturbing in its strangeness. It brings a sobering note to the almost too long drawn-out indulgence in food and drink and merry-making. A general attentive silence underlines the singing of the young boy and the significant words of the song are repeated and passed on to one's neighbour in a low voice. Some pensively shake their heads in approval as if saying : ' Hear, hear.' The song is beautiful, the words are forcible. The mood has suddenly turned into an intense contemplative one. Old Bakro who belongs to the *kumpania* of Miloš, then sings in his deep strong voice with a slight quavering, which brings out the full emotional impetus of the words he sings. For a long time he chants and it has the impact of a ritual. The moon is rising and a strange impression overcomes me of sharing in an ancient rite. The men, women, children and young people around me are in a near trance of enchantment. When old Bakro sings no more the spell of his last chanted phrase remains with the pervading effect and glow of a sustained concluding note. The moon is now full and low over the woods. In a near-by tree-top an owl is hooting. All around us the woods sing and millions of crickets chirp in exulting unison.

## 20. A DIRGE IN MEMORY OF THE DEAD

Pulika embraces old Bakro and thanks and blesses him. They drink together and to each other and to all those present, to those still to come and to the Dead ones too. The glasses and beakers are filled once more but this time for all to drink only to their dead ancestors. Pulika slowly tilts his silver beaker while he

utters prayers to his father Yojo in a low rumbling voice : to his Uncle Dunci, to all other deceased members of his father's *kumpania*, to the dead of his own *kumpania* and of the *kumpania* of his brothers. Slowly he spills the libation on the dark earth which absorbs it. Čukurka adds his prayers to those ancient Dead whose names by now we all have forgotten. Miloš and Bakro join in. The words spoken are simple, direct and sincere, and therefore poignantly effective. A very old woman coughs drily a few times. Then her voice suddenly breaks out in a lament for the Dead. She is the sister of several of the dead chiefs of old and it is mainly of them that she chants now.

The *Mulengi Djili* or Lowari dirge is exceedingly beautiful and moving. It tells of experiences commonly shared that bind the living to the dead, it tells of their moral influence, their lives and deeds which have contributed so much to the *kumpania* of the living ; it also tells how they, the Dead Ones, live on in the hearts and the memories of those here present. It humbly begs for the strength to live as they lived and to die as they have died, generous and true men. The old woman stands upright and seems to be gaining in strength and stature. Her voice grows full and powerful. Her eyes are filled with pride, authority and strength. We, the young ones, wonder at this strange metamorphosis in the soft-spoken, slow-moving old woman with her dark wrinkled face, whom everybody (including the older people) call Mamio (granny). This, however, is as she must have been. This is as the legends about her describe her, when Yojo, our grandfather and Dunci were alive, and when Putzi the Dead One roamed through foreign lands and Tula went to the Far East via Siberia and was never heard of again. This is as she was when Čompi spent a fortune in Spain and North Africa and when the Kalderaš went to the Americas. She belongs to those legendary days. She talks to the Dead and for a while they and their old times live again in the present, as an inspiration and a vision for us all. She sings and talks to them intimately. Many of the events she tells about happened so long ago that only the elders remember vaguely and wonder about them. They thank her and bless her in suitable form and offer her Pulika's own beaker. But she goes on singing more and more inspired. The old people want to embrace her and soothe her and make her end her lament. They are afraid of the exhausting after-effects of the great strain she is putting on herself.



But she sings on. With sweeping movements of the arms she rejects all their devoted attentions, while at the same time her voice heightens and swells, overruling all vocal objections and loud benedictions. Her singing still gains in force. It surges as powerfully and irresistibly as a spring tide. Long after, many of us wonder how so much power and inspiration could pour forth from apparently so old and decrepit a woman. She talks to the old ones about the present generation, she exhorts and she censures. It is as if she wants to give herself up completely in a lavish and powerful last breath. Eventually she collapses and falls to the ground surrounded by all her clansmen. Gasping for air the old woman drinks a glass of the supposedly life-giving champagne, which Zurka and I have fetched from the town. The distant look in her large old eyes, however, tells that she is no longer with us in heart and mind. For a short period we are privileged to keep her with us. Then one day she will depart, leaving behind her own unmistakable trail and ahead of us a timeless inspiration for all the trail-blazing to come.

Thus on my travels with the Lowara have I seen the birth of a myth and the release of ethical forces.

(Concluded)

## V.—RECORDS OF GYPSIES IN THE EASTERN COUNTIES OF ENGLAND

By the late ERIC OTTO WINSTEDT

PROCLAMATIONS such as that against Gypsies in Norfolk in 1817, published by Dr. Black in *JGLS.* (2) viii. 242, generally seem to follow some increase in the number of Gypsies, or persons travelling as Gypsies, or—what probably comes to the same thing—some increase in the crimes committed by or attributed to such travellers in the locality. A similar proclamation was made at the winter sessions at Oxford in January 1792 against 'Gypsies and other disorderly persons sleeping in camps and hovels' . . . 'many felonies having been recently committed in Oxfordshire and its neighbourhood, by persons of the above description'; and, in the proclamation issued in the newspapers

threatening constables with prosecution if they did not apprehend vagrants, it is stated that their number had 'very much increased in this county'.<sup>1</sup> On this occasion my notes from local papers, showed that the year 1791 had been characterized by the arrest of exceptionally numerous bands of Gypsies in Oxford and the neighbouring counties. Again in 1820 the Worcestershire magistrates issued injunctions for the arrest of 'vagrants such as wandering beggars, gypsies and the like', on the ground that they 'are known as the perpetrators of numerous depredations committed in the county'.<sup>2</sup> I have no evidence of the truth of the charge in this case, but the wording implies an increase in such crimes.

The date of the Norfolk proclamation is interesting. Hoyland writing at much the same date and noting the presence of large bands at various places in the North of England, suggested that the expulsion of the Norwood colony in 1815 might be responsible for the distribution of Gypsies in other parts of England:<sup>3</sup> and, though his evidence was slight, his suggestion does seem to tally with the facts presented by further accumulation of records and by genealogies and traditions of the Gypsies themselves. Not that one expulsion from a place ever drove Gypsies away permanently; but that expulsion was not the first. There had been previous attacks on the colony in 1797 and 1803, and one may be sure that the reports of those attacks stirred up other officious magistrates and constables in the neighbourhood of London to rout the Gypsies in their parishes. Nor was the tendency confined to London. As we have seen, there were other attacks on Gypsies in the home counties in 1792, and at much the same date began the enclosure of commons. The effect would seem to have been that Gypsies, who spent a large part of their winter round London, went permanently to some other part of the country. Most of the Lees, Lovells and Hernes of Wales and northern England, who never come near London, trace themselves back to ancestors who used to haunt the London district up to about the nineteenth century. I was tempted therefore to see how far such records—regrettably few for the eastern counties—as I had collected from registers and newspapers supported an invasion of Gypsies into East Anglia about 1800; and though the results were very vague, as they must be from haphazard collections, made in the case of newspaper extracts chiefly from papers which