HUNGARIAN DANCES

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LONDON
SIMPKIN MARSHALL LTD.
Stationers' Hall Court, E.C. 4

HUNGARY
DR. GEORGE VAJNA & CO.
28 Váci-utca, Budapest IV.

Translated from the Hungarian
by Sydney H. Sweetland

Printed and made in Hungary by Athenaeum Ltd. Budapest

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Photo : K. Viski.

Waiting to be asked to dance.

Preface

«Oh, Hungary, how may I
The beauteous dance describe?
Exists there on earth another race
That can rejoice and grieve like thee?
It must be seen, it must be felt
As Hungarian hearts alone can feel.»
J. Arany.

Over a hundred years ago August Ellrich, German genre painter of taste and with a special interest in folk-lore wrote a book after travelling in Hungary, «Die Ungarn wie sie sind» (Berlin, 1831), in which, speaking of the Hungarian dance he says:

«... Steps, turns, movement, postures, all are arbitrary, left to the taste and genius of the dancer. The dance does not consist of the regular well-defined steps, one, two, three, four, of the minuet, nor is it the monotonous rotation of the waltz, but an individual dance inspired by an idea. People never appear more inane than when dancing the minuet or waltz — and this is but natural. It would be impossible to see more animated expressions than those on the faces of Hungarian dancers. This again is natural, since the Hungarian dance is poetry, whereas the waltz and minuet are mechanical. The mechanic can produce an automaton which dances the minuet to perfection or waltzes incomparably, but he can never produce one to dance in the Hungarian style or that can compose a melody.

«... Every bit as admirable as the play of the feet and the convulsive movements, turning and twisting of the body is the play of feature of the Hungarian dancer. To waltz perfectly the dancer must turn round and round for several hours or whole nights without permitting the serenity

of his countenance to be ruffled and taking not the slightest notice of his feet. The Hungarian dance, however, owes a great real of its beauty to the accompanying facial expressions (Mienenspiel).

«. . . The description of the gestures and mien of even the common people presents no easy task, for every dancer is inspired by an idea — be it what it may — which seeks to express itself in his gestures and leaps. The fact that the Hungarians are a warlike people is clearly revealed by their dances.»

The Hungarian dance, indeed, presents the dancer with unusual possibilities for moulding and arranging its elements to suit his mood. The most impressive Hungarian dance, founded on historical tradition, is also the most typical and characteristic. It is always danced by men, and is not a display, but a lyric dance which expresses itself in movements prompted by changes of emotion and passion. The invisible bonds that hold it to the traditional form is the peculiar rhythm of Hungarian music, the distribution of the accent.

The Hungarians have an exceptionally well developed sense of rhythm, which is expressed in other fields of their art, and perhaps even in their savoir vivre. This is no empty boast of the Hungarian nation itself, but has been noted by impartial observers. Billroth, the world famous professor of medicine of Zürich and later of Vienna, discovered as a result of tests carried out with troops stationed at the former Monarchist garrisons at Vienna (Deutsche Rundschau, Vol. 84.) that the percentage of men who could not keep time while marching, or who could not learn to march to music was 33% among the Slovaks and Poles, 20—30% among the Rumanians and Bosnians, 2% among the Germans and Czechs, and 0·1—0·2% among the Hungarians.

Thus we see that the sense of rhythm of the Hungarians is 200—300 times greater than that of the Rumanians or Bosnians, or 15—20 times more developed than that of the Germans who are excellent musicians. And this shows itself not only in marching to music but in all those arts where rhythm is of importance. And it is most strikingly observed in the dance. This will be illustrated in examples chosen at haphazard.

J. Arany, the greatest Hungarian epic poet, who knew and depicted the soul of the Hungarian people as no one else, described the strange unity in the dance for couples — between the latter and the music, which unity really existed, — in the following way: «A hundred couples moving all at the same time . . . soon there will be an endless labyrinth, a throng, interwoven, a medley undefinable in which the dance will have as many forms and fancies as there are couples . . . yet the steps of all are governed by the same law, the same rhythm . . .»

Such an «undefinable» medley cannot be described in choreographic language, since the movements are never repeated by the dancer. Hence our book is not for the purpose of teaching dances. Furthermore, at a time when the talking film provides a perfect technical medium for presenting dances, such an attempt to teach might be regarded as an anachronism.

Nor does this book aim at completeness, if by completeness we understand dealing with everything, even if sketchily, since the space permitted is somewhat restricted. Rather have we attempted to give an idea — by means of examples — of the historic atmosphere which permeates the Hungarian dancing tradition, of the psychological relationship between the Hungarian people and their dance, of the connection existing between traditional Hungarian music, popular poetry and literature on the one hand, and the dance on the other,

and last but not least, of the link which despite all peculiar traditions, links the Hungarian dance with Western Europe.

The Hungarian dance is as characteristic of the nation as its language or music, — nor can it be separated from the latter. Even as the Hungarians absorbed certain western European elements into their language and music, so they assimilated western dancing elements, some of which have been better preserved by them than by the peoples from whom they originated.

The greatest supporters of Hungarian dancing traditions are the people of the villages. But since the most characteristic of Hungarian dances demand a special talent, these dances are not to be found everywhere. A good dancer is just as rare as a good singer or a good story-teller. A singer needs an ear for music in addition to a voice, and a dancer requires, besides legs and a feeling for tradition, also a flexible body, easy moving and expressive arms and hands, and the suitable accompanying facial power of expression, to say nothing of the necessary practise and of those innumerable external conditions which the Hungarian Dominican nun — whom we shall quote later — laid down four hundred years ago.

Most of the good dances and dancers, together with a profusion of national costumes affected in dismembered Hungary, are to be seen at their best in the capital, Budapest, in the days round about August 20th, the day commemorating the first Hungarian King, Saint Stephen (1001—1038). For on this day the representative troupes of many villages assemble in Budapest to give displays of their music, songs, festive customs and dances.

Photo : K. Viski.

In some places the dance is begun by the women, who form a close circle and, always to the accompaniment of their own singing, either revolve in a circle or sway right and left.

The Sin of Dancing

A Hungarian Calvinist preacher of the 17th century referred to his fellow-countrymen with bitterness and sarcasm as «dancing Hungarians». After the disaster of Mohács (1526) and throughout the Turkish occupation it was the universal conviction that God had punished the Hungarians for their sins by sending the Pagans, and parallels between the respective fates of Hungarians and the Jews of the Old Testament were never more in fashion than at that time. These sentiments were most beautifully expressed by the 18th century war-chief and epic poet, Nicholas Zrinyi who, in his epic poem on the «Danger to Szigetvár», wrote that God, after casting a casual glance at the world «noticed the Hungarians in particular, and ordered the Archangel Michael to visit them with his plague, the Turks, for those one-time worthy Hungarians degenerated into self-willed, haughty Scythians». (Since the Middle Ages it had been custom of the educated Hungarians to style themselves — though this was an historical error — «Scythians», of which the Hungarian form was «szittya».)

Among many sins the dance was also mentioned. The great national disaster — the fateful punishment, and by no means the first or the last — occurred in 1526. The year before, Francesco Massaro, the Venetian Ambassador, referring to the young King of Hungary, had written, «he thinks only of having a good time and ballar tutta la notte» (dances all night). He was the first of whom the term «dancing» was used in a derogatory sense. When, after the disastrous battle of Mohács, the King fled, an Hungarian nobleman, forgetful of the respect due to a king, shouted at him: «Tu rex, you damned dancing King, perdidisti

regnum Hungariae.» (You King, you damned dancing King, you have ruined Hungary !) In 1582 the dance was mentioned by a Calvinist preacher as among the sins prevalent throughout the country.

Before the Reformation, however, a pious Hungarian nun wrote : «The Saints dance in Heaven and so will mortals when they get there, because all that is required for dancing is to be found there.» According to her, the necessities are «a beautiful, bright and peaceful place, food, drink, and a beautiful, strong, light body . . . All these are to be found in Heaven and that is why the learned men declare that the Saints dance. And will there be music there?» — she asks, «Will there be violinists, lyrists, drummers and cymbalists there?» «There will be !» she answers simply and with conviction, «Moreover, they will sing while dancing.»

The Catholic Church in Hungary, as elsewhere, was not — as may be noticed from this extract — hostile to the dance. Even as late as the 18th century a great Catholic orator, after stating that there would be dancing in Heaven, asked : «Who, therefore, dare deny that there will be dancing there? Those who are consumed with a desire to dance should see in this yet another reason for wishing to go to Heaven !» It was the same man who said, «Life in this world is but a dancing-school.» Nevertheless, the leaders of the Catholic Church occasionally uttered protests against the dance. «The young people begin the dance with such enthusiasm that they only stop when they have dislocated their hip bones and put every other bone out of joint. They become more exhausted from dancing than from threshing wheat all day in a barn.»

But, in fact, it was only the strictly Puritan Calvinist preachers who were the implacable enemies of the dance. Their hatred of dancing was given the following official expression at the Herczegszőllős synod in 1576. «The

Photo : D. Fényes.

Many skirts are a sign of wealth. — They billow in rhythm with the movements of the beautiful dance.

dance, which is unseemly for respectable Christians to practise, shall henceforth be prohibited everywhere by all schoolmasters, and a schoolmaster shall be dismissed if he or any member of his household dance.»

At the time of the Turkish occupation, when the Hungarian nation was between two enemies — the Turks and the Germans — and on the brink of destruction, and when the dreaded morrow was ever imminent, the dance became a form of consolation, a mask whereby grief could be concealed. «Nunquam vidi, nec audivi regnum ullum maiori gaudio et tripudio pariturum, quam Hungariam.» (I have never seen nor heard of a country facing destruction amid greater rejoicing and dancing than Hungary.) wrote a nobleman of the time. Only those acquainted with the history of Hungary can understand the full meaning of the expression «weeping-merrymaker», and how Fate could be faced with laughter and dance. In those rough times the individual went to his death without fear, and sometimes even with a jest, and the nation as a whole bore itself as gallantly. It is on record that Hungarians who had been impaled calmly smoked their pipes, and Peter Bornemisza, a 16th century preacher, mentions a prisoner strutting defiantly and even dancing before his executioner.

But the contempory preachers could not understand a situation which might well be compared to a condemned cell, and saw in the dance only the cause and not the consequence of tragic events, and went so far as to propose that «all the violins found shall be broken in two and hanged on the nearest willow tree; violinists shall be hanged alongside their violins but upside-down and dancers shall be pegged out on the ground».

It was against all precedent to have guests and not to dance. There was, indeed, a common saying that «without dancing it is more like a funeral feast», though it must be

admitted that even today there is dancing at funeral feasts and in those times there was even more.

These priestly rebukes and threats, however, have served at least one useful purpose. The writings of the priests have preserved for us certain characteristics of the Hungarian dances and their curses have had little effect on the dancers, past or present. A long poem published about 1670 and probably written by a Calvinist preacher bears the turgid baroque title, «A knotty stick for the purpose of straightening the backs of those striplings who in form resemble men but in dancing and capering are like goats and kids, and for describing their offensiveness when prancing», and which, at the end, showers curses on all dancing Christians :

«... curséd be the Christian
That takes part in a dance.»

But this poem with its long title, although inspired by malice and expressed in highly uncomplimentary language, records that the Hungarian dancer bends his trunk «shakes his head and inclines his neck, tilts his hat over one ear kicks like a tired horse, sticks out his chest, makes his eyes sparkle, opens his mouth now and then to shout «hejje ! hujja !» or «hopp-hajja !», jumps about, stamps out the rhythm, slides, swings his legs energetically, etc.» The description finishes somewhat maliciously :

He waves his arms about and claps
His hands like a showman at a fair.
His hands are never still, never quiet,
In this resembling the executioner
At Pozsony. Many look
At him in their wickedness,
And loudly laugh at him as if
He were one of Vienna's fools.

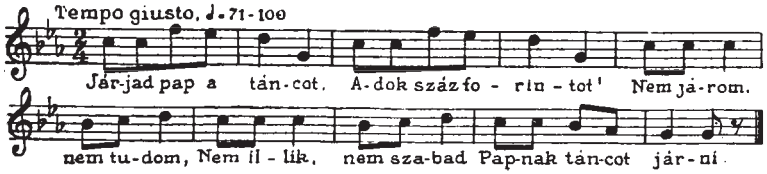
Dancing after the haymaking. — A romantic composition drawn by Charles Lotz in the 19th century.

But the hail of gibes and curses had no effect on young or old. In a song-book published in 1672 we read that the old, «even if they cannot dance with their legs try do so with their hands on the benches», or in other words, beat time with their hands, thereby setting a bad example. As long as the priest or the schoolmaster is present at a feast (wedding) the aged make a great show of piety and talk of repentance, but no sooner are they alone than they begin to shout:

«Where are you, ye young people?
Why don't you come and dance?
'Tis a funeral feast, no wedding,
If ye don't leap about.»

The more they are reprimanded the more stubborn they become, saying quite candidly and without shame: «We shall only dance the more, just to make the priests angry».

For centuries the people fought this battle against the priests in their own way, often in verse and song, and anyone interested in the reaction of the people to prohibitions can still hear the following little song at Kalotaszeg, in Transylvania.



«I'll give thee fifty crowns
O priest, if thou wilt dance.»
«I can't, 'tis not allowed,
'Tis unseemly for a priest
To caper and to prance.»

«I'll give thee six fine oxen
O priest, if thou wilt dance.»
«I can't, 'tis not allowed,
'Tis unseemly for a priest
To caper and to prance.»

«I'll give thee a fair maid
O priest, if thou wilt dance.»
«I will, for 'tis allowed,
'Tis seemly for a priest
To caper and to prance.»

The people retaliated how and when they could...

The Experience of a Foreigner

In 1792 a German officer in Hungary for the first time happened to be staying in Pest and seeing the Hungarian dance, immediately wrote a letter to the Viennese newspaper, «Historisch-politisches Journal der kaiserl. königl. Erblande» in which he spoke of the «indescribable effect» which it produced on him. The letter with its title is here reproduced exactly as it was published in the above year. The accuracy of his observations are of great interest and correspond to Hungarian general opinion. He comments on the power of the dance to express moods, on its manliness and dignity, on the spontaneous improvisations of the dancers, on the costume that forms part of the dance and on the military origin of the whole.

But let this eye-witness of long ago speak for himself.

The Hungarian National Dance. A letter from a German officer residing near Pest.

«I have always longed to visit Hungary, and now my wish has been fulfilled. When I had been here but a few days I was invited to attend some festivities which were

An illustration dating from 1822 of a dance at a place on the Danube below Budapest.

to be held on an estate in the neighbourhood of Pest. A lady of rank was giving a wedding feast for her personal maid who was to marry one of the stewards on the estate, and among the many friends from Pest who were invited was a young man whose acquaintance I had made in Vienna. This young man persuaded me to accompany him which I did somewhat half-heartedly, as the lady in question was quite unknown to me. All my doubts and self-consciousness disappeared immediately I observed the cordiality and friendliness with which she received me. This spirit of hospitality seems to be characteristic of the Hungarian nobility.

After lunch we repaired to the room where the celebration was to be held and where the relatives of the bride and bridegroom had already assembled. As we entered the room they began the Hungarian National Dance. This was the first time I had ever seen it, and it is really impossible for me adequately to describe the effect it produced. The dance was a perfect representation of the nation. The long trousers worn by the Hungarians denote a race which is at home on horseback. Indeed it is only the hussars who can be described as the national army, for the Hungarian infantry regiments are composed of men of all nations. But among the hussars there are very few foreigners and the Hungarian language as well as other national traits thus remains purer there than anywhere else. The dance portrays furthermore a people to whom riding is an everyday occupation. The dancer must of necessity be spurred, since it is from the clicking of the spurs, which the dancers strikes together to the rhythm of the music, that the dance derives the keynote of its vitality. The Hungarian dance presents us with a man who feels himself free from all restraint, for he sways his body, swings his legs, dances solo, takes hold of his partner, turns her from left to right and from right to left as and when he wills and in the most natural

manner in the world. At the same time the dance is characteristic of a race of serious-minded people. There is little scope for compliments in the dance. The dancer takes his partner by the hand, makes one or two slow movements with his legs and spurs, releases her, dances alone as long as he wishes, when his partner must do likewise, takes hold of her again, whirls her round and round, and then both dance alone again.

The real Hungarian dance begins slowly and gradually grows faster and faster. It is actually much more suited to a serious face than to that of a young puppy even if he does cut artistic capers. Moreover, in the faster movements the excitement is more serious than jolly, and never for one moment does the dancer lose his gravity. Indeed, he seems to emphasise the freedom and independence of his movements mentioned above by greater vigour and boldness. I have noticed that the men often dance by themselves without women as partners — and in those dances of which the swinging of the legs and the rhythmical clicking of the spurs are the foundation women are not indispensable. Women are not conspicuous in this dance because they do not fulfil the above mentioned requirements of the Hungarian dance, their movements being monotonous, whereas the movements of the men are of striking variety. The fact that the Hungarian dance can be performed without women, and that to render it correctly the dancers must be spurred and clad in the short military tunic, confirms the idea that I formed at the beginning — that it is essentially a war dance. It would appear to me that this dance was invented by men, who, dismounting from their horses, laid aside their sabres and began to stretch their legs to recover from the strain of hard riding, and as the music grew wilder, abandoned themselves to their mood, gaining renewed courage with which to meet new dangers from

the excitement. This and similar thoughts occured to me when I first saw the Hungarian national dance, which, I have heard, the King of Naples and the royal princes in Pressburg enjoyed watching.

I am giving you here my observations while they are still fresh in my memory.»

The Dance of the Heyducks

In 1669 Brown[1], the English traveller, passed through Hungary and in the description of his journey wrote: «Before I came into Hungary, I observed no shadow or shew of the old Pyrrhical Saltation, or Warlike way of Dancing, which the Heyducks practise in this Country. They dance with naked Swords in their hands, advancing, brandishing and clashing the same; turning, winding, elevating, and depressing their bodies with strong and active motions: singing withal their measures, after the manner of the Greeks.»

The earliest mention of this dance is in connection with the peasant revolt in 1514. When John Szapolyai, afterwards to become King of Hungary, captured George Dózsa, the leader of the rebels, he added to the pains of the latter's torture by making the rebels «dance the enlisting dance, alias the heyducks dance». We may well believe that the enforced dance of the rebels was not the real military dance of the heyducks!

One of the most brilliant performances of the heyduck dancers was undoubtedly that given at a display in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1615, by the members of an interesting

[1] Edward Brown: A Brief Account of some Travels in Hungaria, Servia, Bulgaria (etc.). London, B. Tooke, 1673.

Hungarian delegation. It is a well-known fact that already in the Middle Ages Hungarians had visited foreign universities in great numbers. The delegation in question went to Wittenberg on Imre Thurzó (whose father, George, had been an undergraduate at the university) being elected honorary Rector Magnificus by the university council in 1615. For the great distinction conferred on his son, the Hungarian nobleman expressed his gratitude by loading many carts with presents of Hungarian origin, and, as was the custom at that time, he provided an adequate escort to accompany the valuable gift. The escort, numbering about 100, consisted of men from one of his castles, the majority of whom spoke excellent Latin. To these he added a troupe of the best of his dancers, whose speciality was the heyduck dance. And so departed the heavy waggons and their escort, among whom were masters of the heyduck dance, all dressed in their rich Hungarian apparel. The citizens of Wittenberg, somewhat taken aback at the unexpected arrival of such a body of strangers, shut the gates of their city, but learning that the delegation had come to pay honour to the new Hungarian Rector Magnificus, they flung open their gates and with due ceremony the Hungarians entered the city to the strains of music. It is natural that among the musical instruments the pipe was to be found, for, up to the 16th century it was to the notes of the bag-pipe that the Hungarian cavalry charged, and, as we shall see below, the pipe was quite in keeping with the earlier calling of the heyducks. With the carefully chosen food and drink brought from home, the Hungarians prepared a magnificent feast for the whole university and the several hundred notabilities of the city. «The table being cleared, dancing began, and it was especially in the «heyduck dance» with battle-axes and swords, and performed in very swift, varied, harmonious movements, that

such amazing skill was exhibited that the citizens of Wittenberg could not conceal their admiration.

That the Hungarian dancing troupe should have perfected itself in this dance in particular, and that the German university town should have admired this dance most were partly due to the fame which the Hungarians had won in defending Europe by keeping the Turkish invading armies continually occupied. It is enough to quote here the lines with which Nicholas Zrinyi (1620—1664), poet, soldier and statesman, ended his great epic poem, «The Danger to Szigetvár».

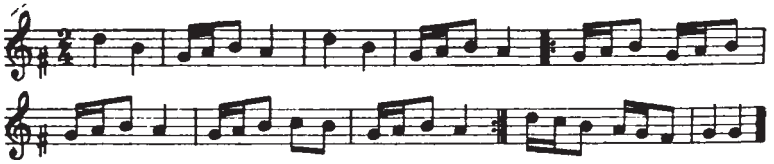
«I seek my fame not only with my pen,
But also with my sword so feared by men;
And all my life I'll fight the Ottoman moon,
And gladly for my country die, be it late or soon.»

The Turkish frontier was the scene of continual fighting, and for more than a century and a half rumours of this warfare had captured and held Europe's attention. The warriors on this frontier thus enjoyed European renown and the following was sung by Valentine Balassi (1551—1594), the heroic knight-troubadour of the 16th century:

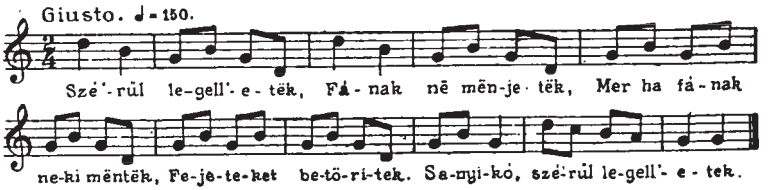
«For glory and fame,
For honour and name,
They sacrifice everything;
Of manhood and valour,
They're models for all,
These men of whom we sing.»

With this renown went an interest in all things pertaining to these Hungarian heroes. It is small wonder, therefore, that not only the fame of the dreaded battle-sword spread, but also that of the Hungarian war-dances in general and of the heyducks' dance in particular, which

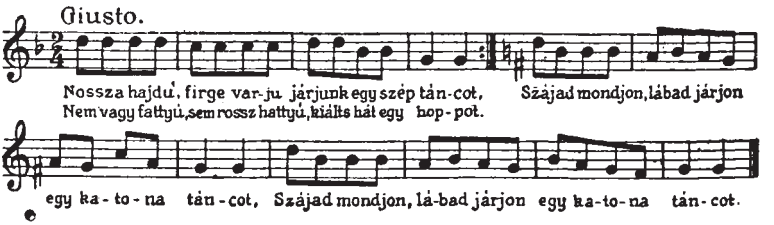
was so admired by the citizens of Wittenberg when it was performed at the end of the feast given in honour of the Hungarian Rector Magnificus in 1615. Proof that the dance of the heyducks had been heard of before the arrival of the Hungarian dancing troupe is found in a manuscript dated 1558. This manuscript entitled «Tabulator Buch auf dem Instrument Christianus Herzogh zu Sachsen» is at present in the royal library at Dresden. As far as we know the music of the dance was recorded for the first time here. According to John Csiky who made an extensive study of music, the tune to this old heyduck dance was:



This is how the song is sung by the people today:



In Hungary the melody was unfortunately not recorded until 1704, when Julius Káldy arranged it thus:



Soldiers' dance : a heyduck soldier dancing a solo. An illustration dating from the beginning of the 18th century.

At the same time two verses were set down:

«Come heyduck, you nimble crow
And let us dance a little.
You are neither rogue nor swan,
So shout a dance word loud.
Shout with your mouth, dance with your legs
A real soldiers' dance.

Come here, Panduj,[1] where is Viduj?[1]
Play the music on Bagi's pipes.
Spare not the pipes, nor mercy show
To any part of it.
For Peter Kiss will strike his soles
Against another's foot.

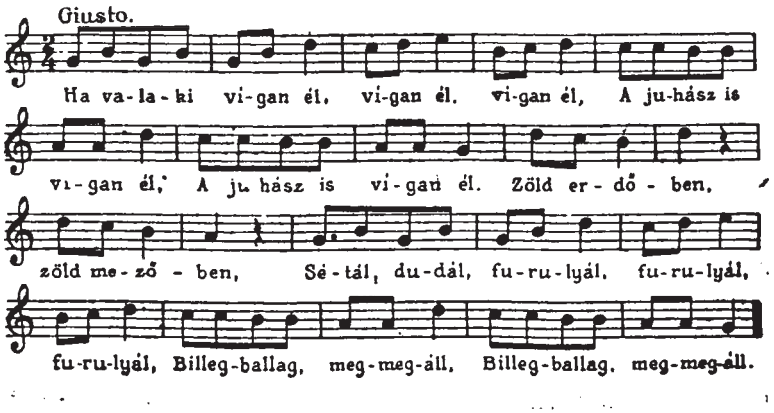
As we see, the heyduck dance had not only music but also words, was not only danced with the legs but also «spoken with the mouth», gayly and jestingly. But to dance it was by no means a joke. Not merely because it was danced with a heavy sword, but also because its movements must have been extremely difficult. This is borne out by an illustration which appears in Birckenstein's work, «Erzherzögliche Handgriff», 1686, where, before the castle of Kaproncza, three heyducks, i. e. «nimble crows», are seen dancing with drawn swords, two of them doing the squatting dance, and the third leaping in the air. The music, however, is no longer provided by the pipe, but by the so-called «tárogató» a Hungarian wooden wind-instrument resembling the clarinet although somewhat larger in size.

Who were the «heyducks»? Or rather what does the word mean? It first cropped up in the history of the Hungarian language about 1500 in the form «haydo» or «haydow»

[1] Gypsy names

(pronounced hoidoo) which is the substantive derived from the exclamations «haj, hej !» which were used to shoo animals although the verb form came into existence before the noun. The «hajdos» or «hajdus» themselves were, as is shown both by the origin and the meaning of the word, shooters or drivers of cattle, herdsmen who drove the considerable surplus of cattle bred in Hungary to the markets of the west. Formidable, stalwart, rugged fellows whose duty it was to defend their herds against the attacks of vagabond soldiers, robbers and prowling wolves. They formed an invaluable class with an occupation peculiarly their own, but they were at times — especially when the breeding and the marketing of cattle were undergoing a crisis — left wholly without means of sustenance and were only too willing to join some army in which they made formidable fighters, though nearly always foot-soldiers.

They were thus originally herdsmen and it is for this reason that later the pipe became the instrument most suited to them. Even today the pipe is made by herdsmen, especially by shepherds.



If anyone has an easy life,
Then surely 'tis the herdsman ;
He walks around, plays on his pipe,
Saunters idly, stops when he likes.

Since the heyducks were originally drovers, we might expect to find traces of their dance among those practised by the herdsmen. It is true that the heyducks still live in Hungary, an entire group of towns in the neighbourhood of Debrecen being known as «hajdúság» (heyduckhood) — indeed the whole county is referred to as the county of the heyducks — but these survivors, though descended from the old heyduck soldiers who settled there in 1606, have forgotten and no longer practise this famous dance. They have substituted the ploughshare for the sword, and therewith more peaceful simple Hungarian dances for their old war dance.

The Recruiting Dances

The Verbunkos[1]

Before the introduction of general conscription an army was raised by «toborzás» or «verbuválás» which we might call the luring of lads into the army. As early as the 16th century even foreign countries obtained hussar regiments from Hungary — land of peerless horses and horsemen — and subsequently this practice was followed by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The business of finding recruits was left in the hands of experienced hussar officers. Thus in 1688 Leopold I, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, charged Count Adam Czobor to form two hussar regiments, for which an agreement was drawn up. This

[1] Pronounce : verboonkosh

method of recruiting persisted till the middle of the 19th century, and it is for this reason that it has survived in the tradition of the people as well as in the records.

Youths appearing suitable for military service, which was hard even in those days, were induced to enlist by fair promises and irresistible devices. An amazing system of seduction was soon perfected, the chief part in which was played by music and dancing. There was no surer way of captivating the sons of the «dancing nation» than by that art which for them had an attraction they could not resist, and which made them easy victims once they had come under its alluring influence. For this reason the professional recruiting gangs were composed of the most graceful and handsome lads, and above all the finest dancers who could be found.

When it happened that cities or other municipalities were compelled to supply a certain number of soldiers, they too maintained their recruiting gangs who, in the 18th century, were known as «receivers», since it was their duty to receive the recruits.

How was this merry method of finding recruits operated? What was this bewitching of youths like? We can reconstruct the scene from the description given by an Hungarian hussar officer of the 18th century. The thing which decided most of the naive country lads was the rich flood of promises poured into their willing ears, for even if they believed but half of what they were told, this half sufficed to seal their fate. Yet nearly everyone knew the wisdom of the proverbs «never trust the recruiter, the gipsy, or the merchant», and «a merry morning dance may be followed by an evening of sorrow».

The mere appearance of the gang was alluring enough, let alone the endless stream of praise sung of a soldier's life and the effusive compliments paid to the lads.

Usually nothing lower than a colonel's rank was promised to the prospective recruit, silver coins were pressed into his hand, a shako decorated with ribbons was placed on his head with the remark that the King could not wear the crown to better advantage, and that it was easy enough to see that there would be no finer lad in all the King's army. He would be able to find a sweetheart so beautiful that the very angels in heaven would appear to be mere buffalo calves in comparison. Their favourite catchword was «this is an easy life», which — at any rate during the recruiting period — was true enough. The waverers were reassured as to the future. There would be no more to do then than they were doing at the moment, eating, drinking, dancing and squandering money. And should there be a war, what would be their lot when it ended but filling sacks with gold? Any one of them, by lifting his finger, could become a Lord Lieutenant, a Justice of the Peace, a Bishop or even an Excellency in Vienna, but did there exist a hussar who would covet such vanities? No! The gentlemen who were in those positions now would be left to lick ink from paper, for the hussar's was the much finer calling of bathing the sword in the enemy's blood!

He who entered the dancing ring, accepted the silver thaler, shook hands with the recruiting sergeant, donned the hussar shako, allowed the hussar sword to be buckled round his waist, was immediately attired in military uniform and thus became a soldier of the King. With a little luck he might become a recruiter himself, especially if he were a fine, strapping lad! To him too, might happen the things mentioned in the old verse:

The captain was leaving the church,
I stopped and looked into his eyes.
His corporal he addressed thus:
A fine lad is he and is worth

Many newcomers, for he is
A Hungarian. His place shall be
Among the dancing soldiers,
The recruiters for the King's army.

«Hungarian and not a newcomer» was no idle phrase inserted for the sake of the rhythm, for a Hungarian newspaper of 1789 which should have been free of any poetic flights of fancy reported that «His Majesty's recruiters have arrived, among whom no Slovaks, Germans or red-haired men are to be found». To become a hussar it was necesarry to be a Hungarian. Even the hussar regiment of His Majesty, the Emperor of Austria-Hungary, was composed entirely of Hungarians, and such a regiment could not be spoilt — according to the taste of the age — by having red or fair-haired soldiers in it. This same verse goes on to tell us how «this handsome lad» upon becoming a recruiter immediately starts his work by wandering through the streets with his comrades to the strains of loud and noisy music :

When we reached the captain's quarters
We formed a ring of twelve :
The captain with his honoured guest
Stood at the open door.
And when he saw how I did dance
With unsurpassed skill
He ordered me to dance alone
To show what I could do.
And all the people hurried there
As fast as they could come.
They said : «How well this handsome youth
Doth dance and leap and skip.»
Such figures did I dance for them,
Their eyes sprang from their heads.
And excelling all musicians
I beat time with my spurs.

Very effective, of course, were the striking uniforms of the period, and the almost incredible skill with which the dancer clicked his spurs to the rhythm of the music.

His suit was richly braided,
His rowels like large plates ;
His meerschaum pipe large as a bowl.
He danced, and dancing, spake.

The verse quoted above mentions that it was the solo dance which caused the eyes of the onlookers to start from their sockets. M. Csokonai Vitéz (1773—1805), the great Hungarian lyric poet of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, recorded that an Englishman staying in Vienna at the time of the Napoleonic Wars counted no fewer that 300 different figures in the dance of the recruiters who happened to be in Vienna at this time. An important part of the dance was the ejaculation of so-called «rhythms», or short, rhymed, witty dance verses, which were shouted to the rhythm of the music, and which reflected the mood prevailing at the moment. This verbal accompaniment is usual even today. To these «rhythms» we shall return later. In perfect harmony with the recruiters' dance were such verses as these :

I drink no water when I dine,
Emperor Francis pays for wine !

Should he desire to brag of something else he might shout :

And the rowels of my spurs
With carnations are adorned.
When my sweetheart sees them, she
Will run with roses after me.

When inspired by national pride — it must be remembered that only Hungarians could become hussars — he would parody this verse :

> And the rowels of my spurs
> With puliszka are adorned.
> When a Rumanian sees them, he
> Will run with curds after me.

(To make this intelligible it should be noted that one of the favourite dishes of the Rumanians, who are mostly shepherds and herdsmen, is puliszka — a porridge of maize flour — mixed with curds prepared from sheep's milk.)

It seems that in the 18th century the dancing recruiters went about in bands of twelve. They formed a circle for dancing, in the middle of which the corporal took his stand. Music might be supplied by the pipe, the «tárogató», or even by some other wind instrument, although in the majority of cases the gang brought their own gypsy musicians with them who were generally attired in some sort of military uniform.

In the first half of the 19th century, Gregory Czuczor (1800—1866), after a detailed analysis and investigation of the Hungarian dance, wrote a comprehensive description of the recruiting dance. It may be that the fact that his grandfather had been a famous recruiting corporal was of as great value in his work as his studies. The account, dated 1843, is as follows : «We have taken up our positions in the market place of a small country town where a crowd, mostly composed of peasants from the neighbouring villages is collecting. On our ears fall the joyful shouts of the noisy throng mingled with the melodious notes of the tárogató, while here and there above the heads of the crowd we catch sight of panaches of cock's feathers. Suddenly our attention is drawn to the arrival of the recruiting gang which is

An illustration of the Recruiting Dance dating from 1816. The peasant lad has had the hussar's shako put on his head and the sword girded on his waist. Clinking glasses seals the contract.

surrounded by a number of youths from the different villages. At their head marches the sergeant, strutting with true military precision and rigidity and with the determination of a man who fully realises the gravity of his task. He does not dance, hop about, or click his heels, or shout while marching, yet every movement, every step is in a perfect rhythm with the music. His cane beats time as it rises and falls, and after placing his sword beneath his left arm, he even contrives to walk so that his sabretache strikes his legs rhythmically. Three or four paces behind him march the recruiters with the corporal whose stately bearing marks him out from among the others even before his braided shako and hazel stick proclaim his rank. He is conspicuous for his official, pompous air which contains a touch of aggressiveness, and for his easy, measured dancing steps. Less serious than his superior, less lively than those under him, he advances with well-marked steps, acting as fugleman, for it is one of his duties to lead the dance. It is for this reason that his steps are simple yet extremely characteristic. Beside and behind him the lads perform their more intricate movements, striking their ankles with their hands and clapping. Thus they enter the market square where the sergeant, finding a suitable place, stops, leans on his cane and gives a sign. Immediately the men form a circle, in the middle of which the corporal stands. The gypsies, usually dressed in uniform, strike up a new tune and the recruiting begins. During the first verse the men either remain in their places and click their spurs, or walk round in a circle in order to get some knowledge of the rhythm and of any peculiarities of the tune, all this to prepare, as it were, for the dance proper. Then follow some slow movements, usually in a predetermined order, but otherwise in a sequence decided upon by the corporal. Each man keeps his eyes on the corporal and his vis-à-vis.

The peculiarity of this part of the dance is in the disciplined movements which are somewhat less complicated than those which form the later part. Eight beats of the music are so divided that the dancers do two steps to the right, one to the left, again two steps to the right and one to the left, finishing up with two steps which bring them back into place again. After five or six verses in slow measure they come to the more intricate part of the dance where more speed and vigour are exhibited and where leaping upwards and sideways forms an integral item of the dance. This together with the rattling of the sabres as they toss to and fro and the aimless swinging of the sabretaches, gives us a perfect picture of the heroes' dance Like the violent emotions which it reflects, this exuberance does not last long and both the dance and the music soon return to their former dignified sedateness The dance continues in this way, gliding from one mood to the other, two or three times, until finally the sergeant gives the order to stop and the merry troop moves on.»

In this description it will be noticed that the slow movements are referred to as being danced in a predetermined order, but if this is not the case then in an order decided on by the corporal. Thus it is apparent that in this 19th century form of the recruiting dance some sort of system existed and it was from this that the slow movements of the dances gained their disciplined, military character. The brisker movements of the dance retained that peculiarity which is the feature of all Hungarian dances: the right of the dancer to improvise according to his talent and mood. He may make use of the ideas of other people, or, if he is of an original turn of mind himself, he may invent new figures. One, and only one restraint is imposed upon him and that is the rhythm of the music to which he must conform, and this rhythm is also produced by his spurs.

The Hungarian recruiting dance won fame for itself among the neighbouring nations, even as the dance of the heyducks had done centuries before. The German poems «Die Heidenschenke» and «Die Werbung» by Nicholas Lenau (1802—1850), and «Der fahrende Poet» by Karl Beck (1817—1879) tell of the wonder and glory of this dance. The recruiting dance of Colonel Simonyi's hussars thrilled the French people who saw it, even as the heyduck dance had impressed the citizens of Wittenberg. On another occasion, Alexander, the Tsar of Russia, complimented Corporal Miska Kakas on his solo dance, not only by rewarding him with 100 gold coins, but also by remarking, «Cette originalité est quelque chose sublime et incomparable !» And the Tsar of Russia certainly had opportunities to see famous Cossack dances which the German, Count Hoffmannsegg (1794), and Francis Liszt (1859) had compared to the Hungarian dance, both, it may be said, doing so without the slightest justification. The Cossack dance, which, as is well known, is danced by two men, presents quite a different picture to Hungarian eyes, as may be seen from the poem of that humourous Hungarian poet John Nagy (1790):

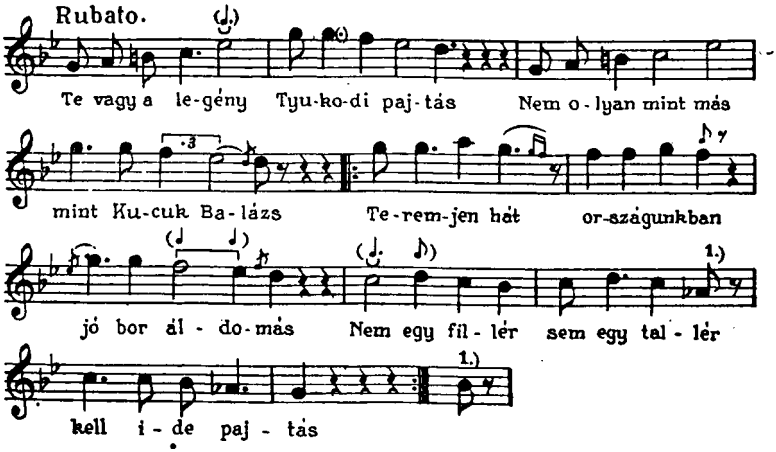
Look, comrade ! see how mad this world of ours becomes :
For two dancers this great house is scarce large enough.
.....
Tell me, dear comrade, tell me what this thing can be,
What kind of dance is this we see before us?
I believe it is the Cossacks' dance, world renowned ;
And, faith ! what other answer can there be,
I'd sooner say it was a magpies'dance
For they in such a fashion jump and leap and hop.

In the 19th century the recruiting dance was also popular among the upper classes, and tunes bearing this

title were composed by J. Lavotta, A. Csermák, M. Rózsavölgyi and by the gypsy, J. Bihary. The recruiters, however, found such special tunes superfluous, since any Hungarian tune played by the gypsies was sufficient for their needs. According to the 18th century verse, part of which is quoted above, two famous gypsy bands, one conducted by Sugár and the other by Hiripi «stroked the seasoned timber», that is, played the violin to suit the recruiters. Nevertheless, it was even then the custom for certain dances — at any rate on special occasions — to have their own specific tunes.

Recruiting itself had not always enjoyed the popularity it did in the 19th century. To make this perfectly clear, we shall have to digress slightly. In the 17th century the Hungarians saw their national existence, their love of freedom, menaced by two hostile people, by the Turks in the East and the Germans in the West. Their apprehension concerning the future and the blind, reckless courage with which they fought for all they held dear were depicated in the «kuruc» poetry which flourished in this era of ceaseless warfare against two enemies. These poems together with the peculiar tunes that were composed for them give us a deep insight into the soul of the Hungarian people, burning as they were with the inextinguishable flame of a passionate love of independence and a desire for a free national life. One verse of this type comments on the miserable, dangerous life of the soldier of this period (1672):

> The poor lad's blood is cheap, and he is hired
> At two fillers a day. This he cannot spend.
> Between two pagan forces he is wedged.
> For one country shall his blood be shed.



Your are the lad, comrade Tyukodi
Not like the rest, like Balázs Kucug.
There is good wine and feasting in our land,
Two thalers you must pay, good comrade, not two fillers.

After the decline of the Turkish power there still remained one enemy, the Germans. But there were certain Hungarians who desired to restabilise the country with German assistance. These, too, were classed as enemies and were called «labanc[1]» Hungarians. So we find the «kuruc» soldier encouraging his comrades to fight the Germans and the «labanc» Hungarians.

Come comrade, let' s seek out the labanc vile
And in our sorrow smite him with the sword.
Because this heathen our sweet land despoils.

This «kuruc feeling», which lasted more than a hundred years, explains how after the defeat of Francis Rákóczi, the Hungarians who had been reared on kuruc traditions hated wholeheartedly the recruiting for soldiers who were to

[1] Pronounce : lobontz

further the aims of «foreign» Austria. This hatred continued till the end of the 18th century, when the Hungarians first began to regard the recruiting system with favour, and finds outlet in the following satiric recruiting verses composed in 1754.

Come, comrade, be a soldier!
It's a thing you'll not repent.
You'll get fourpence, and when you've
Bought a drink you'll have nothing.

Yellow knee-boots and red trousers,
Are things discarded by the Queen.
And you'll have a fashionable coat
Cut open at the back

Instead of knee-boots you'll have new-fangled shoes,
And they will be cut open in front.
You think they'll always be so,
But they'll soon be patched and worn.

Existing Forms of the Recruiting Dance

The Székler Legényes (Youths' Dance)

After the War of Independence of 1848—49 had been lost, as a result of Russian aid being given to the enemy, the Austrians abolished the old form of recruiting and introduced conscription. This meant the end of professional recruiters, and vigorous dancers were no longer in demand for state service, indeed, they were no longer respected, esteemed, pampered and taken on journeys as was formerly the case. The alluring performances of professional dancers which

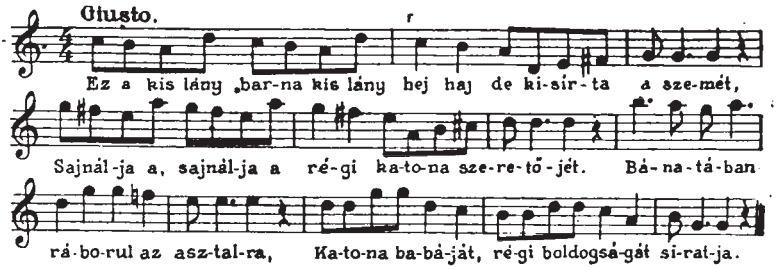
Photo : S. Gőnyey.

One figure of the form of the Recruiting Dance as danced in the Kiskunság, the region between the rivers Danube and Tisza.

could formerly be seen throughout the country, died out, along with the perfect examples of stately Hungarian male dances which also afforded an opportunity for learning. But those who had recruited as young men in the forties still danced their old brilliant dances in the eighties when overflowing with high spirits, and in some places the younger generation could still see these old recruiters and learn their dances and they did learn them, even if — as unfortunately was always the case — not in that complete form in which they were practised earlier. The old standard no longer obtained. No longer was the dance inspired by inner feelings and emotions, the dancers no longer wore the dignified military uniform, no longer was there keen competition in seeking recruits, or official acknowledgement which might mean the granting of a sergeant's star. All these things had spurred the old recruiters to exert to the utmost their strength, their knowledge, and their stately bearing. Their grandchildren lacked these incentives, and saw nothing in the dance beyond something which could be and was transformed into a simpler dance without any harmful changes. Another reason for the decline was that the recruiting dance required a whole troop which had been selected from among the best dancers of the regiments, but which now was chosen from the not too numerous band of lads and young men dancers of one small village.

But even in this degenerated form much of the old picture, the former spirit, and the harmony of movement has been preserved. This is also true of the disciplined freedom, of the rhythm, music, and of the elements of the dance itself, even though it has mostly become a regulated dance like that creation of the dancing masters, the so-called «körmagyar» (Hungarian circle), or like the similary regulated «csárdás» that came into fashion in the forties, and which is the drawing-room form of the peasant couple dance.

The recruiting dance and its name have been preserved chiefly in the upper Trans-Danubian district, in the neighbourhood of Győr and in the great Cumanian villages in in the region between the Danube and the Theiss. These dances have, however, been regulated, and this regulation is always accompained by simplification so that the dance may be more easily learned. Thus the dance degenerates from an exhibition of professional skill into mere formality, and what formerly gave scope to individuality and improvisation expressive of momentary moods is almost negligible. Notwithstanding, the performances of the recruiting dance given by the inhabitants of the village of Kony are still remarkable, as are also those of the inhabitants of Kunszentmiklós and Kiskunhalas. One tune to which it is danced at Kony is:



There's a maiden, brown-haired maiden, heigh-ho ! her eyes are red from weeping,
She's lamenting, she's lamenting her soldier love of other days.
In sorrow lies her head buried in her hands,
And for her soldier love and by-gone happiness she grieves.

As we go eastward we find even more traces of the circular male dance, which may be regarded as belonging to the group of recruiting dances, although in these parts (Transylvania, etc.), the term «recruiting» does not exist. Such dances are usually called «legényes», although other names also exist. Certain ignorant of the true facts, have

Photo : I. Kovács.

The Legényes Dance of the Székler-Hungarians, recently renamed Csürdöngölő. Danced in the county of Udvarhely, Transylvania.

recently attempted in literary form to foist the name «csürdöngölő»[1] on to the Székler legényes. Though there is no proof that these dances derive their origin direct from the old recruiting dances, they yet give us some idea of the recruiting dance in the days of its full life and vigour, when the dancers were not under the direction of tired and would-be-wise elders as is the case today. In the old days, within the flexible framework of the dance, everybody was inspired by his own talent and fancy, thus making the ensemble in high degree fresh, lively and variable, and the improvisiatons were carried to such lengths that it was impossible for a man to dance twice in exactly the same way.

The most complete forms of the «legényes», the recruiting-like circular dance, have been preserved by the Székler Hungarians, who for nearly a thousand years guarded the frontier on the south-eastern slopes of the Carpathians, and who enjoyed special privileges which made them more or less independent. Even today they are one of the most Hungarian groups of the whole Hungarian nation, both as regard military prowess and their trait of preserving Hungarian traditions. According to their own traditions they are descendants of the Huns of Attila, and were the original settlers in and civilisers of the territory they now occupy. Today they are the most easterly representatives of that western European civilisation which they defended for so many centuries. As a result of the post-war Treaty of Trianon, by which the Balkan territories were enlarged, they have been handed over to Balkan civilisation. Their Hungarian language, their music and epic poetry are gems in Hungarian popular culture. Their peculiar collective male dance is one of the most precious relics in Hungarian dancing traditions. This also, like the high spirits that inspire the dance, is today dying out. Their collective male

[1] Pronounce : chure-dunguler.

dance is known as the «legényes», since all the participants are usually lads (lad = legény), and as a rule their dancing entertainments open with this dance. In recent literature, as mentioned above, it is referred to as «csürdüngölő». «Csür», is the name given to the large barns in the yards of the Székler Hungarians, in which corn was threshed by hand. (Döngölő: means to stamp). These barns are the most suitable places for holding a dance. Whenever a new barn is built a ball is held in it so that the threshing floor shall be well stamped down. A dance lasting all night is sufficient to ensure the floor being quite flat. Thus the name «csürdüngülő» is jestingly applied to any Hungarian Székler dance. This humorous collective name naturally includes the «legényes» also, although the latter is often called «figurázás» (figure-dancing), since it is in this dance that the Székler Hungarians find opportunity to exercise their skill and talent in creating new figures.

Dance figures so intricate
That your metal heels show sparks,

says the Székler dance-word, when the dancers are urged to do figures. When the dancers take this advice the result is as described in the 18th century:

And such figures did I dance before them,
That they gaped at me with open mouths.

Inasmuch as the figure, i. e. element of the dance or at least a composition of several elements, is always different, individual, and unusual, and is very seldom repeated in the same form, it always comes as something new to the surprised onlooker. If the dancer keeps to the rhythm of the music and succeeds in his tricks, he is rewarded by such peculiarly

Photo : Zs. Bátky.

Dance of the young lads in their resting time during the harvest. Danced in Kalotaszeg in the county of Kolozs, Transylvania. — (The gypsies are sitting near the wall.)

Hungarian words of praise as «kivágja a rezet»[1] (does his utmost) and «kirakja a pontot»[2] (carries off the palm).

The Székler «legényes» has special tunes of its own and its music is intrumental but there is no verbal accompaniment to the melody. The words referred to as belonging to it are only dance words, as the tempo of the dance and tune is so fast that to sing to it would be almost impossible. Words mentioned together with the tune are, for example:

My boots are made of pig-skin,
My father brought them from Sükő.

Just as the recruiting dance is begun by the corporal, so is the Székler «legényes» begun by the best dancer, who stands in the ring formed by the others. Each man in the ring has opposite him the person with whom he dances in special harmony. For a time those in the circle only give heed to the solo dance of the individual in their midst, until the latter urges them, with dance words, to begin. Such are:

Come lads be merry and gay,
I will help you on your way.

This barn is far too small for me,
Like the quail I'll fly away.

According to Marián Réthei Prikkel, an observant and learned investigator into the story of the dance, the more common elements of the dance figures, which of course cannot be described in full, are: «... the dancer leaps high into the air, and while falling strikes his ankles together two or three times; or he squats suddenly on the ground

[1] Literally: knocks out the copper.
[2] Literally: displays the point.

and then bounds into the air like a rubber ball. The chief activity lies in the quick movements and twisting of the feet, and if these movements are not quite up to ballet level they are nearly so. The feet are turned now and then to the beat of the music as legs kick out to right and left. What is most striking is the lightening speed with which the dancer touches the ground first with his heel then his toe. Thereupon one leg is «wrapped round» the other in snake-like fashion. The dancer spins round first on one heel and then on the other as if intent on boring holes in the ground. He jumps up, bends forwards, backwards and sideways, walks on tip-toe, and then whirls round and round as if in a rage. During most of the figures the feet are continually struck together, so the dancer wears thick metal heels (extending up the inner sides of the boots) which, when struck together, produce a loud clash and not infrequently, sparks. It seems that this has replaced the old clicking of the spurs. The most beautiful part of the dance is perhaps the play of the legs in the knee-boots which the dancers wear. These are struck several times in rhythm with hard, strong palms. It is more euphonious than mere slapping, as in the children's game, where two children standing opposite each other clap their palms together in rhythm. The dancer strikes not only the legs of his boots but also his thighs or even his arms. The variety is increased by the snapping of the thumb and middle finger, and by his clapping hands. The dance words that are shouted now and then also contain interjections, but are always in harmony with the beat of the music : hipp-hopp ! hipp-hopp ! hip-hop-hop ! etc. At the beginning of the dance the body is erect with hands on hips. Later, when the swiftly changing figures cause the body to lose its stiffness, the hands assume their ornamental role, and are flung up and down, and the head and trunk sway to the music. The

Photo : S. Gőnyey.

One of the movements of the Legényes Dance in the Kiskunság : the dancers meet and turn aside.

dancer attempts to get as near the gypsy musicians as possible, and if they do not actually vie with each other, they nevertheless dance for the gypsies, who become excited in sympathy and even shout encouraging words. There is no other dance where such harmony exists between musicians and dancers as in this one».

It is but natural that such movements, requiring every ounce of energy and demanding much from both nerves and skill, cannot be of long duration. No one, however strong and skilful, can endure such an exertion for more than ten minutes (and seldom as long). Thus the exhausted competitors leave the centre of the circle one after another, or choose partners of the opposite sex, with whom they can dance more slowly and without figures, as a recreation, but to the same quick tune, until everyone, gypsy minstrals included, grows tired. Then the solo-dance changes imperceptibly into the «járatos» (walker) or «forgatós» (turner) which more or less correspond to our «slow csárdás».

Herdsmen's Dances

Since the heyducks were originally herdsmen, we must seek the origins of their dance in the highly developed art existing in the traditions of the herdsmen. The early herdsmen, who went about armed in order to defend their flocks and cattle, later became soldiers — as we have said — and this change of profession was particularly noticeable at the time of the Protestant wars of liberty. It was but natural that, having changed their calling, they should also change their dance from the peaceful herdsmen's dance to the more military heyduck dance which, like the still existing recruiting dance, developed into an orderly dance in obe-

dience to certain commands where the separate figures followed one another in a predetermined order. The song accompaniment to the Transylvanian heyduck dance, recorded in 1705, from which two verses are quoted in the chapter headed «The dance of the Heyducks», contains passages which are clearly remnants of orders issued in the course of the dance:

Shout a dance verse...
Boots, turn round...
Forward the feathered ones...
Within and without, attention...
Stamp quickly...
Keep not too far to the left...

We may therefore assume that at the end of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th the soldier-like heyduck dance had absorbed certain military features, and was directed by a leader. There is, nevertheless, no reason for supposing that the most Hungarian characteristic of the dance — improvisation — had disappeared, nor was it absent from the military dance which was practised a hundred years later, i. e. the recruiting dance.

To decide whether there is any connection between the ancient military dances and the herdsmen's dances we must first examine the history of the herdsmen, who are an extraordinarily conservative people, and if we find that they have a traditional dance in which weapons play a rôle, we have one link connecting it with the heyduck dance, since we know that the latter was danced with swords. Paul Esterházy, who later became Palatine, relates that he took part in the heyduck dance performed before the King at the Parliamentary session in 1647. «Then with two naked swords in my hands I had to perform the heyduck dance, at which I was an expert.» We have already men-

tioned that 12 years later Brown, the English traveller, also saw this sword-dance of the heyducks. An illustration from the 17th century is still in existence.

As early as the 15th century it is recorded that the dance of the heyducks — that is, the dance of the earlier soldiers — and that of the herdsmen were in some way related. N. Istvánffy, the historian (1535—1615), writing of B. Balassi, the greatest Hungarian lyrical poet and one of the foremost representatives of the Hungarian ideal of chivalry who during the Turkish wars died a hero's death at the siege of Esztergom, mentioned that in 1572 at Pozsony he danced the herdsmen's dance to the great delight of the Emperor-King and of the Royal Princes. Here are Istvánffy's own words: «The table cleared, the young soldiers and grown-up sons of the noblemen began to dance in the hall of the house. Among them was the 22 year old B. Balassi, whose father, John, had recently been pardoned by the King, who carried off the laurels in that dance, which is really peculiar to our shepherds but which is considered by foreigners as a national Hungarian dance. Imitating Pan and the Satyrs, he squatted low on the ground alternately bringing his legs together and kicking them apart and then leaping into the air.» Thus B. Balassi proved even more expert than the «young soldiers» who must have been exponents of the heyduck dance, for, if they danced at all, this must have been one of their dances.

What was this herdsmen's dance like when examined more thoroughly than is permitted by the sketchy description of this historian eye-witness, who, being at that time royal usher, must have been near the King? Unfortunately we do not know. One of the chief values of popular tradition is that is gives us some idea — though often hazy — of forms which after a long life were forgotten and which seemed often to be altogether lost. Musical records and the

musical traditions of the people are often found to coincide, proving that traditions do sometimes preserve the essentials of the original form intact through the centuries. It was in the first half of the 19th century that scientific observation and reports of popular traditions were first made, and today research into folklore is still more highly developed. It is these records that throw light upon the past.

In 1845 a prominent Hungarian scientific journal, the Athenaeum, described the herdsmen's dance thus: «The herdsmen . . . make merry to the accompaniment of unique songs, music and dances. The musical instruments used are the bagpipe, the flute and occassionally, the clarinet-like «tárogató». Their singing resembles the music of the bagpipes inasmuch as it is droned. Their dance — at any rate in the forests of Bakony — is characterised by incessant stamping. As stamping the dance is today a characteristic of the swineherd only, this dance is often referred to as «the swineherds' dance» . . . Here is a short description of the dance itself. The music produced on the bagpipe or the long flute is quite different in rhythm from that of the recruiting dances or the brisker Hungarian dances, and is so compelling, that when listening one is seized by an almost irresistible desire to stamp, the beat being so pronounced. In the faster dances a man stands opposite a woman, but here two men stand face to face and stamp. Each twirls a stick or a glittering axe between his fingers, sometimes at an alarming speed. They throw their weapons to one another so that it sometimes happens that some are empty-handed, while others show their skill by wielding an axe in each hand. They place their sticks on the ground and jump over them from left to right and vice versa, everything being done to the rhythm of the music. Some squat with their sticks placed at the back of their knees, others dance round and round those sitting thus, or even leap over them.»

It is of special interest that in this description it is stated that «the herdsmen make merry to the accompaniment of unique songs, music and dances», for this corresponds to what Istvánffy wrote of B. Balassi's dance in the 16th century: «it is a speciality of our shepherds» and added that it was only foreigners who considered it a national Hungarian dance. Why were the latter of this opinion? It was doubtless because the herdsmen or heyducks (heyduck is a word derived from hajtó, hajdu[1] = cattle-driver) who in the 16th and 17th centuries drove thousands of herds of cattle to foreign markets, and even arranged a bull-fight in Nürnberg, preferred the herdsmen's dance when abroad, for it gave them an opportunity of exhibiting their extraordinary skill in handling their weapons. Thus it was more a desire to display their skill in brandishing their weapons than a wish to show what their legs could do that led them to prefer the herdsmen's dance. What were their weapons? Staves and axes. Today it is only the cow-herds who carry staves, the swineherds prefering the axe. The shepherds carry their thinner crooks. They are all proud of these implements, carrying them even when not attending their flocks and herds and regarding them as their emblem or symbol. For this reason they are often of great beauty and many of them veritable masterpieces of peasant decorative art. An axe can only be considered really beautiful when it is well burnished, and the swineherd sees to it that the blade of his axe is always bright, «like a mirror» being no exaggeration, for the swineherd uses his axe as a shaving-mirror. The axe was furthermore the weapon of the former heyduck soldier who wore it suspended from a ring in his belt.

Although those ancient enemies of the swineherd, wolves and robbers, have disappeared, there still remains

[1] Pronounce: hoidoo.

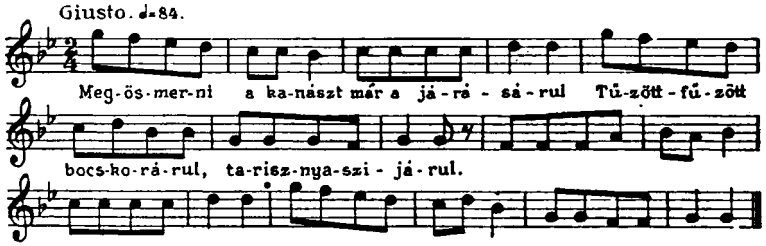
one crafty foe with which he has to contend, namely the boar, which even today may prove a dangerous enemy. How much more dangerous was it in byegone times when pigs were kept in open pasture land and when they were almost as savage as the wild boar. In order to guard against attack the herdsman had always to be ready and skilled in his movements, especially in using his weapon, the axe. Thence the swineherd practised incessantly, wielding and throwing his axe, as soldiers in peace time do military exercises and play games. When the herds gave little trouble, as in autumn and winter when the pigs fed on acorns, the swineherds spent hours on end throwing their axes from various distances at tree trunks with such skill that the axe remained embedded in the trunk. It was quite common for these men to knock out the tusks of the boar — over which they would jump if necessary — or cut off one of its ears merely by throwing the axe. In short, the swineherd was as skilful in throwing his axe, which was always kept sharp, as the knife-thrower who practises his art for money.

Since in the old military dances — such as the heyduck dance which was performed with one or more naked swords — the sword was very effectively wielded and played an important aesthetic role, it is only natural that the swineherds, with their skill and artistry in handling their weapons, should make the play of their weapons the most important part of their dance. It is true that they swing the legs and stamp, yet it is the wielding and throwing of their weapons which gives their dance that «peculiar herdsman quality» alluded to in the 100 years old description and in that given by an eyewitness of the 16th century. In other words, this «peculiar herdsman-like quality» is but natural skill perfected while guarding their herds from danger.

Since the boar is tamer as a result of the high level attained in breeding animals in Hungary, and since the

wolf is no longer to be feared, performances in axe throwing as well as the swineherds' dance have become rarer. The Hungarian sword, once famous throughout Europe, has retained its supremacy solely because the sport of fencing is indulged in. But axe-throwing and axe-wielding is unknown as a sport. In a short time, alas !, this great art will be but a memory.

Most traces of the herdsmen' dance are to be found in the wooded mountains of Bakony, Mátra, and Bükk. One form of the dance has three participants. Two face each other, each bearing a shining axe, while the third stands on one side. A hat representing the pig is placed between the two. A well-known tune to this dance is:



The words are:

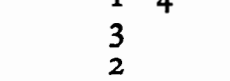
The swineherd can be recognised
By the way he walks,
By his patched-up sandals,
By his curious satchel.

Is the swineherd at home ?
Or can I see his wife ?
I don't want the swineherd,
I want to see his wife.

They then sway their bodies from the hips to the rhythm of the music (♩♩ | ♩♩ etc.) the legs motionless. The axe is grasped in the right hand by the middle of the handle.

For every four beats the extended right arm describes an ellipse in clockwise direction, and simultaneously with each two beats the hand grasping the axe traces a reclining eight thus: Meanwhile, the third man, who is squatting on his heels, tries to remove the «pig», that is, the hat — no easy task with two axes whirling close above the said pig very near each other yet never clashing. The play of light on the whirling axes lends special beauty to the dance.

In another variation the boar is represented by a person. Here too, the axe is wielded throughout, but the «boar» pursues the swineherd who retreats step by step to the music (one step for every quarter note), the following movements being made with the left leg:



The movements of the right leg are symmetrical to these. Finally the swineherd «kills» the boar by striking the ground beside it with his axe. In yet another version the boar, a youth with an earthen vessel on his head who is completely covered in a sheet, is «killed» by the swineherd who actually cleaves the boar's «head» (really the earthen pot). This particular variation is for the diversion of wedding guests.

In the swineherds' dance there are also other movements: the axe is passed swiftly from under the right to under the left leg, is thrown from one partner to the other, the dancers squat and kick out their legs alternately, sometimes they leap into the air striking their ankles together, while it occasionally happens that they fling themselves to the ground etc. with great agility. That it is extremely difficult to dance in a squatting position was observed by the German genre painter, Ellrich, who travelled in Hun-

Photo : S. Gőnyey.

The slow movement of the Shepherd's Dance. — It is danced over crossed sticks.

gary, 1819—1825. In his book «Die Ungarn wie sie sind» published in Berlin, he described how the squatting dancers advanced on tip-toe, kicking out first one leg and then the other. A similar account by Stephen Gerlach remains to us, who wrote the following lines in his diary in 1573: «Coming down from the castle (Pozsony) we went to watch the Hungarian dances. The dancer, who dances alone, gesticulates in a wonderful manner: first he flings out his arms and then his legs. Then he walks erect, then crouches on the ground, shouting at every step or jump.» Shouting is an integral part of the swineherds' dance to this day, and if the dance is held in a house it usually ends by the dancer flinging his axe at the beam across the room with such skill that it remains fast in the wood.

A favourite dance of the herdsmen which is also popular among the shepherds, is one in which two axes, or two shepherds crooks, are placed on the ground in the form of a cross, and the steps of the dance are done in the four spaces so formed in the following order.

2	3
4	1

The Borica Dance

In what was perhaps the most eastern corner of Hungary in pre-Treaty of Trianon days, lies the town of Brassó, in the neighbourhood of which, nestling on the edge of a wide tract of country containing several countries, and which is inhabited by Transylvanian Hungarians, are seven

little villages inhabited by a curious tribe of Hungarians who take their name from the villages, for they are always referred to as the «Csángos of the seven villages». (The word «Csángó[1]» is also used to denote the Hungarians in Moldavia and the Bukovina, though in character and customs they bear no resemblance to the Csángós of the seven villages.) Here in the seven villages the «borica» had its original home, though whether the folk there today still feel inclined to dance we do not know. A few decades ago, however, they were a happy light-hearted people. On one occasion according to an old Csángó legend, they owed their salvation to their dance.

Many centuries ago, possibly as early as the days of the Tartar invasion (1241—1242), they were one day celebrating Whitsun and singing songs appropriate to that season:

What day is this, what day is this ?
It's the first day of Whitsuntide.
Tomorrow will be, tomorrow will be
The second holiday.
Andrew wears a nosegay,
His wife doth dance right well.
The husband is worth silver,
The wife her weight in gold.

It was a holiday, the peonies were in full bloom, the air was full of the promise of spring, and everyone, especially young people, were care-free and gay. Was there ever a more seasonable time to sing this little verse:

No fond mother gave you birth,
On a rose-bush you did grow.
On a Whitsunday at dawn
You first saw the light of day.

[1] Pronounce: Chahngo

But suddenly from the direction of the Bodza Pass (in the Carpathians) shouts were heard, and a band of fierce Tartars charged upon the terrified dancers of the seven villages, surrounded the lads and lasses who but a few moments before had been gaily singing and dancing and dragged them away towards the pass. Before reaching it, however, the Tartars halted to rest, and as if repenting the harsh treatment they had meted out to their captives, they removed the shackles from their legs and encouraged them to dance. Possibly they had heard about the dancing abilities of their prisoners. The frightened Csángós began to dance, but timidly and bitterly, yet with a skill and beauty not to be expected except of those who know that they are dancing with their loved ones for the last time. The Tartars were much impressed by the dance and as they watched began to lose their ferocious spirit. The couples danced on, each moment the dance grew more beautiful, more bewitching, the nosegays which the lads wore in their hats and which the girls carried in their hands fell unheeded to the ground, giving colour and enchantment to the green meadow. The Tartars sat spellbound hardly noticing when the dancers vanished and returned to their villages, leaving nothing but a vision behind them. Yet something more than a vision remained, for the flowers which had been so carelessly dropped, miraculously took root and to this day the meadow near the Bodza Pass is covered with beautiful garden flowers, and from the time those lads and lasses danced there so bravely this meadow has been known as Leánymező (Girls' meadow).

From this legend of Leánymező we learn that the Csángós even in those far-off days, were excellent dancers. But who can think what the dance was like at that time? Of their present dances, however, the most interesting is undoubtedly the «borica». The mere fact that it is danced

but once a year — just after Christmas on Innocents Day (December 28th) — proves that this dance once formed part of some feast-day celebration, and was some traditional rite with a meaning of its own. Today the positions are reversed. The dance serves as an occasion for practising other peculiar customs. It should be stated that earlier the «borica» was performed some time during Carnival.

Not every Tom, Dick and Harry can be a member of the «borica» dancing group, which usually numbers sixteen including the leader, although it can be performed by any even number of people greater than this. Youths are specially chosen for the dance ; their selection is dependent on their skill and it is as difficult to be a participant in the «borica» as in the «kállai-kettős».

In accordance with ancient custom the dancers wear the traditional dress : high hats decorated with bright coloured ribbons, and silk scarves across the back and chest. They carry axes bound with ribbons and fixed to the side of each leg, just below the knee they wear three rattles, and their boots are spurred.

The group is led by a man of maturer years, who carries the crown of a pine-tree which is decorated with ribbon and fruit and resembles a small Christmas tree. He is followed by the musicians and the leader of the dance on whose heels come the «borica» dancers. This dignified group is surrounded by a number of jesters in wooden masks adorned with cocks' feathers. Bells jingle at their sides, they are armed with wooden swords and whips, and they cut foolish capers, crack jokes, and hold back the gaping crowd. The so-called «spit-bearers» bring up the rear of the procession and on their spits they carry gifts, for it is the custom to present the «borica» dancers with cakes, bacon and other good things from which a hearty meal is made when the dance is over. The crude antics of

the spit-bearers are very amusing. They make a huge snowball and shovel it into the oven, one of them goes down on all fours and a sledge is placed on his back, a companion sits on the sledge and goes through the movements of sleighing. These absurd, crude jokes provoke the onlookers to loud laughter. Suddenly a diversion is created by four of the masked jesters. To the accompaniment of shrieks and yells, they begin to strike one another, and one of them, the weakest, is thrown to the ground. The other three immediately spring upon him and pretend to cut him to pieces with their wooden swords. Then repenting of their wickedness, they wring their hands and weep... Suddenly a brilliant idea occurs to them and they start blowing the handles of their whips. This has the desired effect, for their victim begins to show signs of returning life, staggers to his feet, and with the help of his companions even manages to walk a few paces. But they soon get tired of supporting him and commence to flog him with their whips, making them crack loudly, and the man who but a few minutes before was unable to stand alone makes off with a most enviable speed.

The side-play of the jesters is not particularly striking among the many tricks and antics, and it may be considered as the remnant of some primitive initiation ceremony. In the primitive puberty festivals the adolescent figuratively died, and on his resurrection crossed the threshold of manhood. The Hungarian Csángós of the neighbouring district of Moldavia — who do not, however, dance the «borica» — also have masked jesters, and among their jokes is one in which casks are carried on a cart or sleigh and in each cask a youth — naked except for the furs in which he is wrapped — is hidden. From time to time these youths leave their hiding-places and after running about naked in the snow retreat to their furs again. An Hungarian investi-

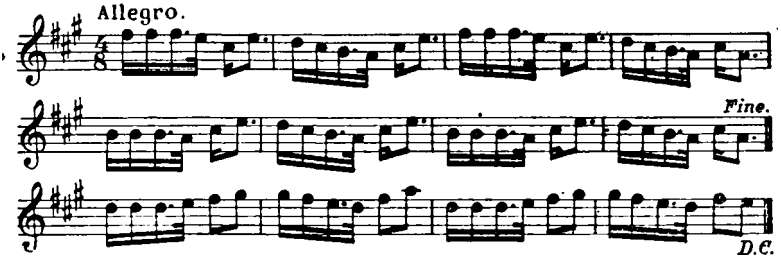
gator regards these two phenomena as parts of the ceremony of the figurative second-birth and sees in them a connection with the corresponding elements in the myth of Dionysius. It should be mentioned that the «borica» is only danced in the courtyard of the mayor of the village, or in the courtyards of the houses in which live marriageable girls.

It is probable that many elements of the «borica» dance came to Hungary from southern Slav districts where many similar dances exist. The name «borica» itself points to a Slav origin, for in the Slav languages «borica» means «little pine tree». (It will be recalled that the troop is led by an elderly man bearing the decorated crown of a pinetree). It is also possible that the word once denoted the leader of the dance, «vatáf», and the word used for the iron spurs worn by the dancers, «pintin», is also of southern Slav origin. A very plausible theory, and one which covers all the facts, is that the Hungarians took the dance from the Rumanians who have undoubtedly an ethnological relationship with the spirit and characteristics of the Balkans. Nevertheless, it is most probable that the dance came from the Bulgarians who lived in that part of the town of Brassó known as Bolgárszeg (Bulgarian quarter). In the old days the seven villages of the Csángós belonged to Brassó. Thus the «borica» with its attendant customs was once part of the festive rites of a specified feast-day, although the meaning is no longer clear. It thus has a special interest, but it is also remarkable because of its regular, disciplined movements, and because the participants are carefully selected. It no longer resembles the southern Slav dances, thought it may be compared with the Hungarian recruiting dance. Both have a dance leader, in both dances a circle is formed, orders are given, and each dancer follows the movements of the man opposite. The improvisation which is characteristic of Hungarian dances has no place in the «borica» and has been replaced by a military

precision, and regular pre-arranged movements. The dance has that grave, dignified solemnity which marks the recruiting dance, and both are composed of slow and brisk parts which regularly alternate.

The «borica» consists of four parts: 1. the single ; 2. the double ; 3. the triple ; 4. the Turkish «borica». The elements of the «single» are very simple : heel-clicking, swinging the legs backwards, swinging them from left to right and from right to left, and clicking the spurs. When the circle has been formed more variety is added since the dancers also turn to the right and to the left. The «double borica» is composed of the same movements in regular sequence, but each is done twice, while in the «triple» each individual movement is repeated three times. The Turkish «borica» shows nothing new either, but in accordance with the precepts governing Hungarian dances this last part is danced much more quickly than the three preceding movements, which are allegro, and no matter how cold the day even the best dancer perspires freely. It is possible that the Turkish «borica», like similar Turkish dances, was once more of a mime dance than it is now, and furthermore that the double and triple parts differed from the single not only as regards the repetition of the movements but also as regards the choreographic structure, and each part may have been known by a separate name. This may be inferred from the fact that the «borica» has three different tunes, one for the first part, one for the double and triple, and one for the Turkish «borica». As stated by an observer, the melodies are «simple but peculiar», and it is possible that they correspond to the three tempos which characterise the Hungarian dances, and to which an old proverb refers, «let there be three dances».

This is the melody of the first part (the single borica):



The instrument originally used was probably the lyre-like «koboz», which was very popular among the Csángós of the seven villages, though the only Hungarians who use it now are those in Moldavia. According to those engaged in musical research the tunes to the «borica» were composed for such musical instruments as the lyre and harp.

The Csárdás*

This is the name by which the Hungarian dance is known to foreigners, yet it is only one among the many names which the Hungarian gives to the various forms of the art of dancing. Although in the Hungarian language there are at least fifteen words for «dance», is it the foreign word «tánc» which is generally used. This word is of the same origin as the German «Tanz» and the English «dance». It is also interesting to note that although in old records more than sixty Hungarian dances are mentioned by name, the word «csárdás» is not among them. Thus it is obvious that either the dance or the name is of recent origin. Those who have closely studied the matter assert that the «csárdás» is made up of the most characteristic movements of the Hungarian dance, and that in general it provides sufficient

* Pronounce: Chardarsh

Mid-nineteenth century picture of a dance. This so-called Csárdás, a peasant dance without fixed rules, was already then very fashionable among the upper classes.

scope for exercising that art which is the soul of the Hungarian dance: the expression of individuality and spontaneous improvisation. The dance itself is therefore no doubt Hungarian. Linguists, on the other hand, declare that the word «csárdás» was recorded for the first time in 1835. Thus the name can be of but recent origin. Those who danced it, however, did not know it by this name, and from the beginning of the last century to about the forties the upper classes preferred foreign dances, or a simple kind of dance resembling a refined recruiting dance more like the minuet, to the art of their ancestors.

The flame of Hungarian national consciousness never burned more brightly than in the forties of last century, years which saw the war of liberty and its disastrous end. The golden age of national consciousness and democratic watchwords also gave rise to a renaissance of the dance, and not only the costume, poetry and music of the peasantry, who are the true preservers of national tradition, became popular but also their dances. Dance teachers began to teach Hungarian as well as foreign dances. This was surely no easy matter — to teach something that lacked any set rules, something for which an innate talent was essentially necessary. But as it turned out, they did not even attempt this, but produced a «regular» Hungarian dance of but few figures and which could easily be taught and learned. This, though but a pale reflection of the true Hungarian dance, was at any rate something which, coming after so many foreign dances, denoted an honest effort at better things. Upon its opening in 1837 the Hungarian National Theatre announced in its program not only its intention to support the Hungarian dance (ballet), but also the introduction of a dance which, on account of the difficulties presented as regards the spirit thereof, might be called Hungarian. As late as 1843 a critic wrote that «it is true that since the

opening of the National Theatre of (Buda) Pest Hungarian dances have been presented. But what dances! Knees are knocked together, the dancers slither on their heels, indulge in magpie jumps, there is turgidity, here a figure has been taken from the Cossack dance, there a trick has been stolen from the ballet, and Heaven knows what other goat-like capers are cut, likely to cause the dancers to sprain their ankles».

The Hungarian dance became fashionable in society in 1840, when at the sumptuous midnight supper given on January 9th by the most exclusive social circle, the Nemzeti Casino, in honour of Franz Liszt, «Hungarian songs were sung, and several youthful guests of both sexes undertook to dance the Hungarian dance, which was received with loud applause». It is this particular evening — so momentous in the history of the Hungarian dance — which is known as the «immortelle-soirée», because each of the sixteen maîtres de ceremonie carried an immortelle in his hand as a distinguishing mark. According to the notes of a contemporary reporter «Mr. Liszt clapped among the loudest and seemed to rejoice in the fact that he had started a new epoch in this sphere of our (Buda) Pest entertainments, as this is the first time in the existence of the Nemzeti Casino (founded 1827) that Hungarian national dances have been danced there.»

We are uncertain whether this dance was «regular» or «irregular» though it was more probably the former, that is, it had been produced by the Hungarian teachers of dancing from the traditional elements of the Hungarian dance. It may have been «irregular» only as regards the sequence of the movements, for these may be changed by the dancer according to his taste, such changes being permitted by the spirit of the Hungarian dance.

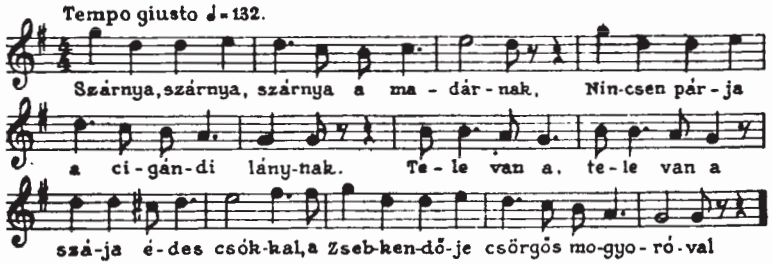
In an account of a ball in 1842 we read that «the noble

Countess Gy. K. was the first who at the invitation of our brave countryman, Baron V., was so gracious as to open with him the then still «irregular» Hungarian ball-room dance. Later the dancing-masters undertook the transformation of this «free» dance into a «regular» dance. The «irregular» dance was the traditional Hungarian peasant dance, and it was the more or less standardised form of this which was finally christened «csárdás» by the upper classes.

What is the meaning of the word «csárdás»? In origin it was a Turco-Persian word meaning a structure on four legs; later — during Turkish rule in Hungary — it meant one of the small high watch-towers used by soldiers on the frontier for look-out purposes. In Hungarian «csárda» signifies «public-house» or «inn», and «csárdás» means «innkeeper», or as a rule something appertaining to the inn, and in general to things that are the reverse of fashionable We read in a article of the year 1844 that the Hungarian dance, which up to that time had been called «irregular», had been renamed «csárdás» because it was «the same dance which could be seen on Sundays danced by peasant girls in even the most wretched csárda».

It is certain that today, the age of swiftly changing fashion in international dances, the sum total of Hungarian dance traditions is, for the upper classes, contained in the «csárdás». The peasants still have many dances of their own and they alone can dance as the spirit of the Hungarian dance demands, but even they cannot always attain this high level. This does not mean to say that among the upper classes there is no one capable of dancing in the true Hungarian way, and that there is no dissatisfaction with the anaemic, lifeless affair taught as the «csárdás» at dancing schools. On the other hand, its most simple elements and rhythm can be learned by a foreigner in a few minutes. The

rhythm can even be learned beforehand since any of the more lively Hungarian folk-songs provides suitable music for the «csárdás.» One of such tunes, chosen from many hundreds, is:



The wings, the wings, the wings of a bird,
The girls of Cigánd are matchless
Their mouths are full, are full of kisses sweet,
And their handkerchiefs of rattling hazel-nuts.

The «csárdás» today consists of two parts : a slow and fast part. But both can be danced to the same tune provided that the difference in tempo is sufficiently marked. But the tempo of both parts, especially in the cities, is exposed to the caprices and lack of discipline of the gypsy orchestras, and this applies more particularly to the fast part. The fast part is what Franz Liszt referred to as «danse frénétique, danse échevelé», and it throbs with the unbridled boundless passion of the «csárda», which carries away the dancer who abandons himself to the mood of the dance. It was above all in the fifties and sixties of last century that Hungarian society as a whole was carried away with enthusiasm by the «csárdás», as at that time it was one of the ways of demonstrating nationalist feeling in face of Austrian tyrany. It was also in those years that at a society ball given in Losonc the «csárdás» was the only dance throughout, and the guests danced it all night to the same tune !

Photo : R. Balogh. (M. F. I.)

A dance in the village of Érsekcsanád in the southern part of the country.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the age of romanticism, the Hungarian dance favoured by the upper classes was different. Everything proceeded in «perfect order»: «they first lined up in rows» and danced «with great dignity» and «with Asiatic solemnity». This was a relic of the Baroque age. Abbé Revérend, chargé d'affaires of Louis XIV at the Court of the Hungarian Prince of Transylvania in 1689—1690, wrote (putting the words in the mouth of an Hungarian nobleman) of the Hungarian dance of this period: «All our Hungarian dances are nothing more than what are called in France «branles» or «contredanse». The dancing couples hold each others'hands, the first couple leading the whole row. The first couple then start with slow steps, becoming a little more lively, and finishing up as in the gavotte, where the man embraces the lady behind him and twirls her round several times without, however, falling out of the semi-circle while doing so, so that in a large hall seven on eight dancers revolve with their partners while the remainder retain the semi-circle».

At the beginning of the 19th century an effort was made to regulate the «csárdás» on these lines, but in the second half of the century this effort met with strong opposition from the new fashion: naturalism.

Even as the upper class returned during the 19th century to the dance of the peasants, which they refined and «regulated» to a certain extent, so the people in their turn adopted certain things from the upper class. This mutual exchange had apparently been going on for a long time, and not only in the 19th century when popular democratic ideas were in favour. In the 17th century the «Ungarischer oder Dacianischer Simplicissimus» wrote that the Hungarian aristocrats were not so haughty as those of other nations. During the dance the soldier takes the lady from her husband's arms, and the master of the house dances

with the serving-maid. Peter Apor, who described and greatly admired old Transylvanian Hungarian customs, also wrote in the 17th century that «When a rich or noble youth was in high spirits and wanted to dance, he sent somebody down to the village to collect the village girls, had them brought to his house, and then all danced quite seriously, sometimes until daybreak».

Thus, for centuries, the Hungarian nobility had occasion to prevent them forgetting old national traditions which are always more faithfully preserved by the people, while, on the other hand, — as regards the dance — the people were able to learn the finer, more elegant and polished form of the dance, which was earlier known as the «palace» from.

Words to the Dance

The union of music, song and dance has been safeguarded not only in memory and tradition, but also by the custom still obtaining at the present day of interspersing the dance with verses. The dance in our time is performed to the accompaniment of instrumental music and the verses, usually short and mostly consisting of two of three lines but at the same time pregnant of ideas, are shouted (not sung) to the rhythm of the music, giving, as it were, more character and feeling to the ever-changing mood of the dance. In the verses, humour, defiance, satire and self-praise of the dancer himself find expression, as well as praise of his partner and village. No logical sequence is followed, the dancer commenting on these things as they occur to him, or in accordance with his desire to proclaim some fact. Many references are made to the dance and its

Photo : R. Balogh. (M. F. I.)

A children's dance-game. Most of the childrens' games preserve the ancient unity of song-and-dance.

component parts, to wine, to the gypsy musicians and the music, to the old and the young to those present and those absent, to the married and the unmarried, and very often to the clumsy dancing of those from neighbouring villages — each and all as dictated to him by fancy or by an urge to tease.

The dance, if performed tediously, without zest or individuality, is criticised with the contemptuous, jeering words:

«Olezánc»,[1] like the German dance!»

Nevertheless, there is no need for impatience as time is needed for the muscles to work smoothly, and for the dancers to reach the correct degree of animation. It is only the young inexperienced dancers who begin impetuously; this is not approved of, the watchword of the day being «go gently». Should any dancer start off in too great a hurry he is immediately ridiculed in the following verse:

The little ox, the tiny yoke
Spanned for the first time today.
Everything will soon be broken.

This gaily imparted reprimand does not mean that the dancers should begin as if weary of life and its pleasures, for then follows the gibe:

Shuffling along as old men do,
Without spirit you dance too.

Should the attainment of the necessary fervour be unduly protacted, some older and renowned dancer assists with his art in stimulating the lads, crying:

[1] Olezanc is a humorous corruption of the German alles eins = all the same.

Come my lads, do not shirk
I will help you in your work.

He then exhorts them to hold up their heads, to be dignified and ardent, and to «strut about like the men of Győr».

At the same time the dancer is not to be supercilious, haughty or arrogant, since even the people know that everything has a limit, as was so admirably expressed in the classical era by «ne quid nimis», and if the dancer fails to show restraint he receives a mild caution :

Oh dear me !
How stuck up.

The dancer, therefore, should have dignity, without being stiff. It suffices not that the legs do their part ; the art of the Hungarian dance lies not only in the legs but also in the whole body and comprises the harmonious movements of the latter with the rhythmic co-operation of the arms and legs:

Swing your legs, your arms must whirl.
Dance dance ! keep close to the girl !

The Hungarian dance adheres to the above-mentioned precept, not only in the solo dance of the men but also when performed by couples, since the men free their partners when, and for so long as, they feel inclined. Thus their hands are free and they can again take hold of their partner when they wish :

Hold the girl, make her turn,
Make her leap and make her whirl.
Let her skirts spin and twirl.

Photo : D. Fényes.

In the fervour of the dance.

But when he sets his partner free he has a few words to say to her which we might call the «dance monologue». This must be beautifully expressed and in its proper form to his partner who fixes her eyes on his and follows his every movement while the onlookers, though sympathetic, are ready to pounce on any mistake. At this stage it is again the legs that play the chief part, the whole body swaying, swinging, turning and bending. The legs seem to take on a personality of their own and we almost expect them to reply to the injunction issued to them by their owner:

Ye lower legs turn and bend,
Do not let your sinews rend.

Don't be afraid, show what you are capable of! It isn't work, it's play, and there's nobody to be afraid of as in the common round of life!

Kick out my legs! kick out now!
When there's no one here
Who dare say how?

Now it is only the dancer who gives orders to his legs — that is if he is in a position to do so. On an uneven floor in an «earth house», where the floor is nothing better than earth which has been trampled in, the legs cannot perform their part so efficiently and smoothly as on a wooden surface. Thus it is only right for the dancer to warn them:

Now my legs do not stumble,
Though the floor be e'er so humble!

The legs sometimes work splendidly, the dancer being hardly able to keep up with them, but if he can, he at once boasts of it:

Now my legs move faster still!
I can still keep up with you.

If the desirable harmony of strength between the legs and their owner exists, then all that is needed to show what can be done is sufficient room, and if the dancer is sure of himself he may ask for room:

More room! more space! I'm feeling jolly,
And now will show you a piece of folly.

«Folly» in this instance means the man's cleverest, impromptu, individual dance. If there is room enough the time has come to do «steps so intricate that sparks fly from the metal heels of the boots».

But even when dancing with a partner the male rejoices when he finds a clear space in the hall, an opportunity not to be missed:

I make my heels click when I dance.
Now sweetheart on this small clear space,
We'll dance and turn and whirl and race.

Now the time has come for such dance words:

My trousers are three cubits long,
Like the wind we'll dance along.

And at such moments the girl «has her hair blown by the wind». The girl, too, is expected to do her part at such moments or words like the following are flung at her:

If so wearily dance you must,
May your legs become dry as dust!

Of course all legs are not alike, some being strong and some weak — even when they belong to the same trunk.

Photo : D. Fényes.

Sometimes during the dance the man sends his partner spinning away from him. She returns to him as soon as the «pirouette» is finished.

The stronger is highly praised, the dancer caressing it while shouting:

This of my legs is stronger far
Than this which does my dancing mar.

Sometimes it happens that not the leg but the foot refuses to obey the orders issued by the owner. Then they are exhorted (when it is a case of a heel-toe dance where the changes from toe to heel must follow rhythmically):

Sway on your feet.
Rock from heel to toe!

Many dance words are used at this phase of the dance, where the man completing his solo, expects his partner to rejoin him:

Get a move on! come to me,
Nearer, nearer, my ruby!

Come, my rose, if you love me,
If you don't then let me be!

Come this way, not that my dear,
There are better meadows here!

The woman who draws too far away from her husband, who is also her partner, is reproached with this gentle, jovial remark:

Come wife, by your lawful husband stand,
Don't wander off to an unknown land!

When the festivities are their height, reference is often made to the devil in some such little verses:

Keep it up and dance all day,
Till the devil takes you away!

May the devil take him,
And never put him down

It is not wise to make jokes about the devil, nor to speak of him, for great misfortune may result if he approaches or if he lies in wait for the coming of his hour, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Desecration of Feast Days

It is said to be unwise to speak of the devil and that he who transgresses Divine laws by dancing out of season should be particularly careful, as retribution will follow. It is forbidden to profane by dancing either the church, the cemetery or the Divine Service held on feast-days. Who is so bold as to do so, will surely find that the torments of hell await him.

Once on Lady Day long ago the youth of a Hungarian village were dancing to music, which was, indeed, rank folly. The music swelled, the dancers capered merrily. Suddenly a «white woman» appeared who merely asked the musicians: «Are you playing?» «We are», they replied. «Well, play on.» But to the dancers also, she had a word to say: «Are you dancing?» «We are», replied those merry-makers. «Well dance on», and with these words she vanished.

And with such vigour did they play and dance that the very house shook and the plaster flew off the walls. But the candles burned steadily on without decreasing in size, while both men and house were enveloped in clouds of smoke and soot.

The uncanny phenomenon of candles burning yet remaining unconsumed is regarded as a bad omen. The candle as time indicator plays an important role in Hungarian folklore. At weddings, for instance, candles are lighted and when they burn out the bride is led away dancing from among the guests. Now, it is only in the traditional children's games that the following little wedding song occurs :

To him the maiden be given
Who with vigour tucks up his sleeves.
From my house I shall not go
Till four candles are burned low.
When the fourth has burned right out
Then, my darling, I'll come out.

But on this occasion the candles refused to burn out, but merely burned and burned, symbolising, as it were, the eternal nature of the dance. They poured forth clouds of smoke and covered everything with soot until it seemed that the devil had already begun to rain upon earth the sulphur and darkness of Hell. And the unfortunate merry-makers danced on and on until their feet dropped off, when they danced upon their stumps until Death released them from their torments Who could this «White Woman» have been, who by her mysterious words had caused these feast-day profaners to dance themselves to death? According to story, it is certain that one Sunday morning towards the end of Carnival in the year 1764, the devils themselves, disguised as musicians, appeared in a village inn although at that time «no one knew who they were». The mysterious visitors merely said : «As long as it pleases us to play so long you must dance,» and these unfortunates also danced themselves to death in great torment.

Such legends concerning the profanation of feast-days are known throughout Europe. One such legend was recorded

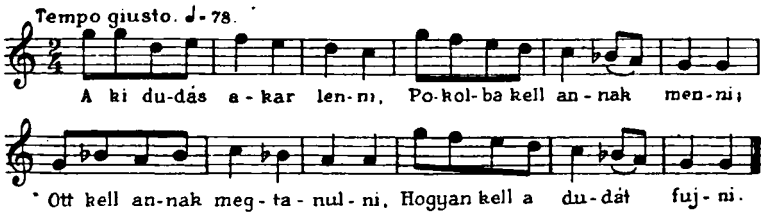
by William of Malmesbury, the English historian, as early as the 12th century. The spell that was cast upon an hysterical group of German dancers was removed in the 11th century by St. Heribertus, Archbishop of Cologne, after they had undergone a year's suffering. Profane dances were mentioned in the interdictions of the Synod as early as the 5th century.

Scholars have pointed out that the origin of these profane dances is to be traced to religious sources, since the church and cemetery dances once had their place in religious festivals just as song and music have now. Their patient elimination has been the work of nearly two thousand years. St. Augustine stated that orgies were the relics of pagan festivities, and according to the Christian faith all profane and blasphemous traditions have been preserved by the powers of Hell. Thus it can only be the devil who appears from time to time to destroy the souls of men, and therewith God's work, the Church and all her true followers.

One variation of the Hungarian legend of the profanation of feast-days by dancing has been immortalised in verse by J. Arany, epic poet of the Golden Age of Hungarian popular national literature, whose poem is worthy of the Shakespearean ballad. The legend runs as follows:

On hearing the bells calling them to the House of God on Whitsunday morning, the people have gathered silently and devoutly in church. A brilliant sun, like a rose at dawn, flames in the sky, and the fire of the Holy Ghost seems to pervade Heaven and earth. Suddenly a fiendish din is heard near the church, and sounds of cursing and the obscene laughter of bestial orgies begun the preceding night shatter the peace of the Sabbath morn. «Where is a musician, a fiddler or even a piper? Quick! Hurry! Who will fetch one?» And then, most opportunely, as if sent by some mysterious power, a squint-eyed, hideous, hairy old man

appears on the scene, carrying his bagpipes under his arm, the two goat horns of his pipe seeming to be his own. Scarcely has he appeared than his fingers speed lightly up and down the pipe. «Go on! Play! Play!» cry the merry-makers. «But, gentlemen», says the cunning old stranger, «there is Divine Service in the church.» «What the devil has that to do with you, you old infidel! This holiday is ours to keep or to desecrate or to curse — thus says *our* God!» The piper leers slyly and begins to play softly. Everyone begins to dance; the music swells, and the dance grows wilder. But when they have had enough, they ask the piper to stop, but he only plays the faster. The revellers grow tired. First one and then the other wants to sit down. They are called home to dinner, but alas! they cannot go, being compelled to caper unceasingly. They curse the piper and strike at him with their fists; but they meet only empty air. The news of this wonder spreads through the village like wind-fire. The master comes for his servant with a pitchfork, but the pitchfork remains fast in his hands; daughters and sons come for their fathers, anxiously, desperately imploring them to return home. But it is all in vain, they cannot break the spell. Son, father, husband, all have become sober and wish to leave. Night draws on, and the wretched dancers hold out their hands in supplication. Tears of blood roll down their cheeks, but the dance continues, its devilish fervour holding them in a grip of iron. When the hands of the clock-tower approach midnight, the smell of burning sulphur is noticeable, and the whole group of dancers is carried off — like dust in the wind — to the bottomless pit of Hell. We should remark here, however, that their suspicions should have been aroused soon after the appearance of the piper, and they might have avoided eternal damnation had they remembered the universally known fact that,



He who wants to be a piper
Down to Hell must find his way.
There to spend his time in learning
How upon the pipes to play.

Each good soul shall praise the Lord!

The Kállai Kettős

This wonderful Hungarian dance was first alluded to by name in 1674 in a satirical poem:

Some time ago so weak were you that you could hardly breathe,
And now you dance, to our surprise, the kállai kettős with ease.

The famous Hungarian poet, Gvadányi, who lived at the close of the 18th century, wrote in 1790:

Once more I'm young and gay: once more have I the chance,
To do the kállai kettős and the Slovak squatting dance.

The quotation is from a satire, the person addressed being so far recovered from a poor state of health that he can dance even the «kállai kettős». The second couplet also lays stress on the excessive vigour of a performer who says that he can once again do the «kállai kettős» which, judging by the fact that it is mentioned together with the Slovak squatting dance, can hardly have been less exacting than the

Photo : S. Gőnyey.

One of the figures of the Kállai Kettős. Danced in Nagy-Kálló, the place from which it takes its name.

latter which as we know, is extremely difficult and at one time formed part of the Hungarian military dance.

The name «kállai kettős» is now used to mean the double (i. e. danced by two people) dance as practised in Nagykálló, in the country of Szabolcs, although in form it no longer resembles that referred to in the above quotations, since it does not belong to the group of difficult, acrobatic dances. It is not the intensity and vigour required that make the dance famous today, but its unique beauty and dignity. It is probably called «kettős» (double, twofold), because it is danced by a couple (man and woman). In byegone days this could hardly have been the case and it must have been some double dance, now long forgotten, of the rough soldiers of the castle of Kálló, the more so, since it is the man who takes the initiative in the Hungarian dance, the woman being, to use a musical term, no more than a minor accompaniment. J. Arany the epic poet, who had the deepest knowledge of the Hungarian soul and of Hungarian life in the middle of the last century, wrote of the male partner :

> Alone, for long he moves about, and
> His eyes are ever on his partner fixed,
> Who every movement follows faithfully
> And who, everywhere, for everything,
> Doth to him look and on him doth depend,
> Regarding him as doth the moon the sun
> From whom her own pale light she doth obtain.

The woman has no opportunity for acrobatic feats, for even when she circles round with the man she does so in a «fairy-like» manner :

> And the woman turns round with him, but
> Through the air she seems to float, as if
> No longer on her feet she stood, but were
> Supported by her skirt's long folds.

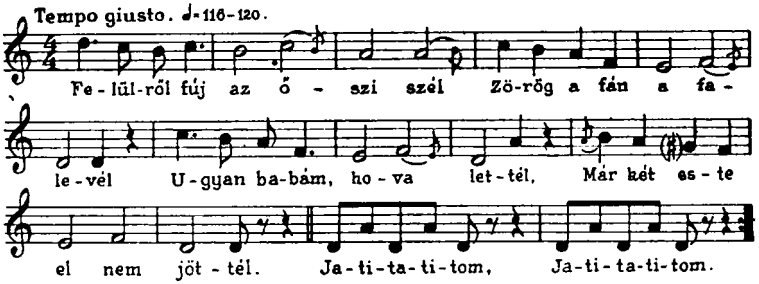
The «kállai kettős» of today is — at least as regards the double side of it — scarcely the same dance which, in the 18th century, was regarded as proof of the daring and herculean strength of the male.

But it has nevertheless, retained something of the spirit of those ancient times and that is a gift and talent for dancing unequalled by any other group of the «dancing Hungarian nation», and which is displayed — at least by the man — in his remarkable suppleness, dignified bearing, the harmony of movement, in his power of seeming to float through the air and, above all, in the exceptional dignity of the whole dance.

The «kállai kettős» is actually a display, the aesthetic requirements of which demand more than merely a perfect knowledge of the dance movements. A well-grown figure, a handsome face, dignity, charm, and the ability to alternately show both defiant pride and extreme tenderness are also essential. It is thus easy to see that the dance is not suitable for everyone. Only those who reach the traditional standard participate in it, and those who indulge in it today exhibit, both to their own delight and that of the onlookers, the artistic talent they have inherited from their forefathers.

In essentials the «kállai kettős» differs but little from other well-known Hungarian dances, such difference as there is lies in the admirable execution. Its peculiarity lies in the fact that it has a special melody with words to be sung by the dancers themselves. Hence it follows that the tempo is not so tempestuous as that of some dances, although, like most Hungarian dances, it consists of both a slow and a quick movement.

The tune to the slow part :



The words are :

The autumn wind blows from above,
The leaves do rustle in the trees.
My darling, where have you been?
Two evenings you have not been here.
Hm, hm, hm, hm, hm,

Two evenings you have not been here —
Perhaps you fell into a ditch?
Lads. I did not fall into a ditch,
I have fallen in love with you.

I have fallen in love with you
You know you're ever in my heart.
Girls. You have never, never loved me
You have only made believe.
(the lads cry: Not love you ?
Of course we do !)

You shall tell me what you thought
When at first you 'gan to play.
Lads. I thought of nothing else but that
I should kisses untold get.

Girls. You were false, and false remain
I always, always anger you.
But me you can easily console,
If you embrace and kiss me.

In the evening I spied on you,
Someone sat upon your knee.
Lads. Whoever may sit on my knee,
You alone are in my heart.

My darling now doth spurn me,
For empty, empty is my purse.
My dearest one turns from me,
But holds me tightly chained.

No apron hath she, nor a skirt,
She hath but two pale cheeks.
But only these words doth she say:
«He loves me, and he loves me not».

Girls. Don't mock me with such impudence
A lad worth two of you loves me.
Lads. I spoke in wrath, not from my heart,
Forgive me then, my dear sweetheart.

Girls. I'll forgive you dearest one,
If you're always true to me.
Lads. In the church with sacred oath
They'll unite us all our lives.

Lads and Girls.
My dear, you shall not go from here,
Till this candle doth burn out.
Of all in life there is too much,
Except of love — there's not enough.

The musicians begin slowly, with expression. The couple stand face to face and do not dance on the first line, but only sing and sway rhythmically. On the second line they draw apart and approach each other, and after a few steps, turning their feet to right and left, they embrace and whirl

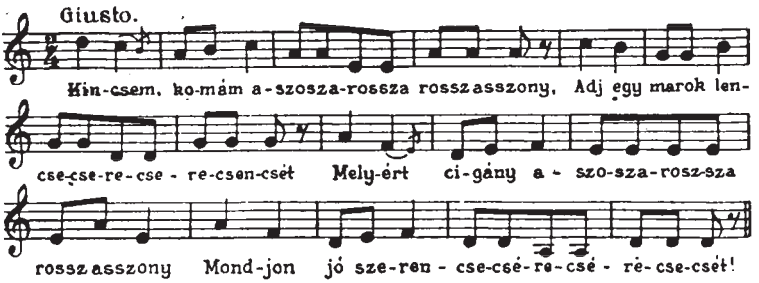
Photo: D. Fényes.

After the dance.

round. During the abandonment following the movement where the couple entice each other, words are uttered, short phrases usually on the fickleness of women.

The quick movement varies but little from the slow movement. Its tempo is naturally faster, there is more frisking about, more gaiety, the dancers are more animated and the words are more sarcastic.

The melody:

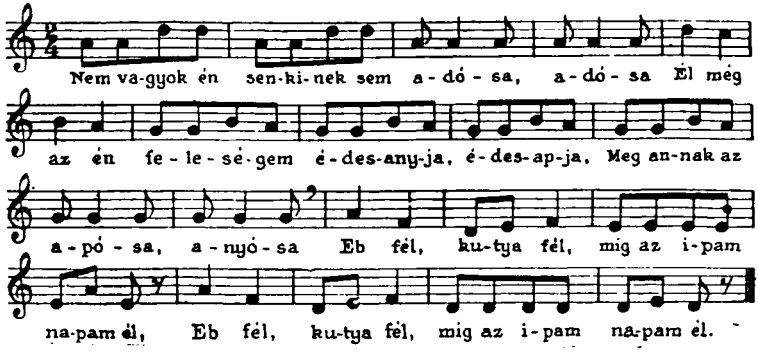


The words:

Godmother of my child, you bad woman,
Give me a handful of lentils.
For which the gypsy sorceress
Will tell me some good fortune.

I dare not out
Or stand before my door.
Because they said
I am a prisoner of love.

But I am very ill
And easily can die.
On your account, my dearest one,
My face doth waste away.



I have no debts, no debts have I.
My wife's mother and father live.
And the former's mother and father-in-law.
I don't care who troubles has, I have none
As long as my mother and father-in-law live

Let us not forget the clicking of the spurs which, in the «kállai kettős», forms part of the musical accompaniment, and to which that famous old poet Gvadányi refers in the lines:

I danced, and such a master of the dance was I
That every sinew, every vein that I possess
Did turn as if on pivots they were fixed, till
My two spurs to the music's rhythm clicked.

A Pillow Dance

In Hungary as in western Europa it is but the last traces of the original pillow dance that have survived at the present day. This dance, like many others, found its way into Hungary by way of Austria. Incursions of this nature from the same quarter have been occurring for centuries in

spite of protests, often expressed in verse. In the course of the 18th century — which is branded in history as the Denaturalisation Period in the intellectual life of Hungary — this western ever-open door was flung wide. A «kuruc» poem of 1718 deplores this fact :

Come if you can
You kuruc man,
And dance the damned minuet.
Step out haughtily,
Standing on tip-toe
Make snake-like figures as you go.

The popularity of foreign dances was considered a threat to Hungarian nationalism. Another poem protests against the importation of the Styrian dance from across the Danube :

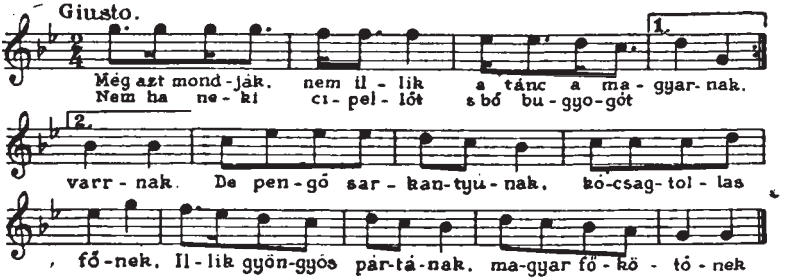
So be it
We shall grow accustomed,
We shall be inured
To the German dance.

Our spurs we shall not need
To click when we dance,
So let's throw them away.

The big eagle,
The big cock
Is already across the Raab.
Where are his claws?

And indeed, «the big eagle, the big cock», the double-headed Austrian eagle, had set to work to suppress as effectively as possible the flame of Hungarian national consciousness. It was feared that the Hungarian tongue would suffer the fate of Erse. Even among the upper classes the Hungarian language found little favour. Since the soul

of Hungary differed so much that from of Germany and since her nationalism was despised, we can well understand her sharp protests. A contemporary poem sung out of sheer defiance to the tune of a Hungarian dance, laments:



It is said that the dance becomes not the Hungarians.
And when they are clad in shoes and galligaskins 'tis true;
Give them spurs, egret-feathered hats, pearly bonnets
And Hungarian hoods, then you will see what they can do.

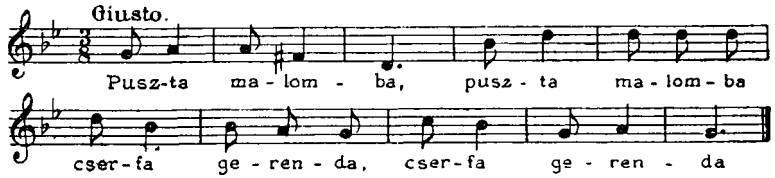
Another poem reflecting the popular feeling of the time praises the Hungarian dance and ridicules foreign dances:

The French they dance with mincing steps,
The Germans are too reckless;
Variety is quite unknown
They dance and sing in monotone.
The melancholy English dance
Is far too complicated,
The only dance is the Hungarian dance,
The dance of St. David.

Notwithstanding criticism, the imported pillow dance is found even now in some Hungarian villages, even if «variety is quite unknown» and even though it is not «the dance of St. David». We leave it to those to whom the western form of the dance is familiar to decide how much

has been added to it by the Hungarian people. The pillow dance — a round dance — remains true to its origin, being more in the nature of a game than a dance when compared to some Hungarian dances. A circle is formed — men and women alternately — and the dancers join hands. The circle then revolves first to the right then to the left. A solitary dancer, armed with a pillow, revolves in the middle of the circle and selects from the circling ring a dancer — naturally of the opposite sex — before whom be places the pillow on which he kneels, receiving a kiss as a reward, whereupon this dancer moves to the middle of the ring.

Tune :



Words :

On an old oak beam
In a lonely mill,
The she-owl walks
When all is still.

A white turtle dove
Behind her creeps,
Asking her softly
Why she weeps.

«You white turtle-dove
Why shouldn't I weep?
My cradle is at home,
My child cannot sleep.

And now in the cradle
My poor child doth lie,
My poor little child,
I'm sure he doth cry».

«Why are you weeping
O little turtle-dove?»
«Why shouldn't I weep?»
Said the bird of love.

«I have left at home
In a locked chest,
My little pearly bonnet,
And it is my best.

My best pearly bonnet,
My dear pearly bonnet.»

Incidental Dances

Most incidental dances do not possess any special choreographic structure, but only form an integral part of some festive occasion as, for instance, poetry or music. We might even say that even today there are popular customs which are expressed, or at least accompanied, by that ancient trinity, poetry – music – dance. Today most of these dances are no longer a special expression of the mood of the occasion — that is dances showing a special choreographic structure and practised in connection with the customs they refer to, but this does not mean that such was not the case in the past. Today the customs themselves are rudiments difficult of explanation, and have lost most of their original significance. The words in the accompanying verses are but fragmentry and can be understood only with difficulty, and

Photo : S. Gĕnyey.

«Singeing the bride»: women dance round the fire and make the bride jump over it. The custom is symbolic of purification and is similar to the one practised on midsummernight (St. Ivan's Eve).

only traces of the music originally belonging to these words have survived. Nevertheless, these incidental dances are not without importance since the part formerly played by dances in ancient rites shows itself in these customs, even if the dances are no more than an apparently meaningless capering. The final stage of many of the fragments is to be found in children's games. Thus the idea of healing with drums, with great din and dancing, and by falling into a trance, — all of which are part of the cult of Shamanism, has been preserved in the following children's game:

Stork, stork, turtle dove,
Why is your leg covered with blood?
A Turkish child did wound it,
A Hungarian child shall heal it
With bagpipe, drum, and reed-violin.

After these lines the children indulge in noisy skipping, striking at one another at random. Just as formless is the extraordinary, noisy skipping of the regős[1] (minstrels), when, at the winter solstice, they go from house to house offering to unite couples by black magic and to bring about fertility by sorcery. As much without form are the unrestrained revels of masked revellers at Carnival, or the dance of the herdsman who, on St. George's Day (April 24th) appears at the farmer's house before the herd is driven to pasture and goes from one house to the other carrying a bunch of twigs with which he strikes the inhabitants, thereby ensuring health and profilic breeding for their animals.

There is also a special form of round dance, in which the dancers hold each other, which undoubtedly has some connection with sorcery, and from its form must have been at one time a form of protective magic. A closed circle, or generally a circle of any kind, be it formed figuratively or

[1] Pronounce: ragersh

merely marked out, is the best method of defence and security. Even today many children's games are circular in form, the participants holding each other to make the circle and moving round. Moreover, the popular girls' dance in which the dancers clasp hands is a round dance even today. The method of holding hands varies. The dance itself is usually very simple, two steps in one direction and one step in the opposite direction and thus the circle slowly revolves. This circular dance always has its own special song which the dancers sing. In some places entertainments for both sexes begin by the girls doing their circular dance. Presently the young men swoop down on them, break up the circle and select their partners. Traces of the ancient kolo-like dance, which was performed by both sexes dancing together, have been preserved, especially in the southern parts of the country. Furthermore, in the «hard csárdás» of the inhabitants of Cigánd, traces of the «trioform» dance have been preserved. This «trioform» dance is performed by two women and one man, and was very popular among the upper classes of the western regions in the Middle Ages, being a real dance (as we understand dancing today), for it replaced the former circular dance (choros, chorea, carole). Nor did the Hungarians «dance» (that is, in couples) until this new dance took the place of their former round dances. This evidently occurred during the historical age of Hungary, hence the use of the foreign word «tánc» to express this idea. Apart from this the Hungarian only «walks» his dance. It may be safely assumed that the special round dances, danced exclusively by men and practised at the beginning of popular entertainments, are the remnants of more ancient round dances. Among these latter is the recruiting dance. An interesting form of the older circular dances which were closely connected with the cult of sorcery may be seen pictured in a traditional though conventionalised way on an

object fashioned from antlers which was later used as a gunpowder-horn. This pictorial representation is not peculiar to Hungary but is found among all the peoples of the Carpathians and its history can be traced back to prehistoric times.

As the originally merely practical aims lost their significance these magic dances gradually became inspired by purely artistic motives. It was also in this way that most of the other incidental dances lost their former ritual significance. Of such were the baptismal dance, the dance celebrating the boy's attaining manhood, and more particularly dances accompanying certain phases of the wedding ceremony. There are certain places in Hungarian country districts where the wedding has at least twenty phases (the whole lasting for several wecks) many of which are concerned with dancing. The most important of all these is the bridal dance in which every male must dance with the bride, thereby «greeting her with the dance». In civilised countries it is the custom to drink a toast, goblet in hand, but on these occasions the bride is toasted by all who dance with her. The purpose of this «toasting» is no longer so clear today, but that it was formerly the custom not only to drink to the health of absent ones but also to dance to it, is well illustrated by the following story: A Hungarian noblewoman, Magdalen Országh, writing to another, Elisabeth Thurzó, on the occasion of M. Zrinyi's wedding in 1564, says: You ask whether I danced to your health there? I danced twice, and the more beautiful dance of the two was danced to your good health, and the other to my own. And I danced both dances with the bridegroom».

There is also a bolster dance where the bride's bedding is carried by young married women, a bed-making dance, and a shawl dance, in which the bride presents the participants with shawls made by herself. The climax of all the

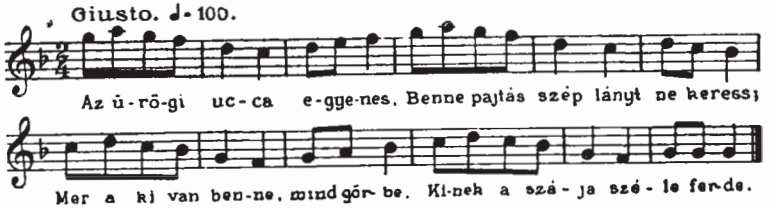
dances then follows, and of the wedding mood itself, i. e. «dancing the bride to bed», which takes different forms in various parts of the country. One variation as practised in the country of Nógrád puts the following lines into the mouth of the best man when the time for the bride to retire arrives :

The gentle bride tells me that she
Cannot see her brideroom among us,
She'd like to join him in his bed
If the groomsman will allow.

The groomsman naturally gives permission, and the gypsies strike up the «putting-to-bed» song :

When the bride is laid to bed
The bridegroom's thrown into Hell,
O, my snood, my snood, my pearly snood
I Il put you on the shelf, dear ribbon.

Another «taking-to-bed» song with humorous text:



To the accompaniment of this song the bridesmaids dance the candle-dance. The attending of the bride to bed with torches or candles was a form of rendering homage known already in classical times, but on the other hand it is a custom intended to hasten proceedings, since the bride must have retired before the candles carried by the dancers burn low enough to «scorch their fingers». This «time fixing»

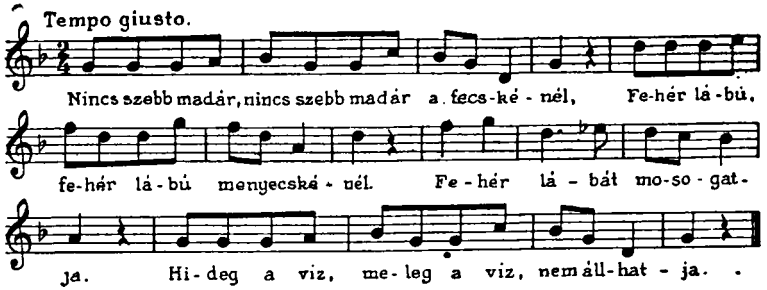
Photo: S. Gőnyey.

Girls in the Christmas Bethlehem play — the Hungarian shepherd's version of a mystery play — dancing round the old shepherd.

significance of the burning candles has been retained in the verses of the children's game which is played at weddings, as shown by the example quoted in the chapter headed «The Desecration of Feast Days».

In some variations of this dance the best man lights all the candles with great ceremony, reciting a different verse for each while different couples dance as every candle is lighted.

The «putting-the-bride-to-bed» dance is followed, when the guests are in the after-midnight mood, by the dance of the (female) cooks. This customs still obtains in the Sárköz in the county of Tolna. The cooks are equipped with the utensils of their trade, which they strike together. This is nearly always danced to the same tune which flows on indefinitely, but only by women who balance a glass of wine on their heads. One of the favourite tunes of this dance is :



There is no more beautiful bird than the swallow,
There's nothing more beautiful than a bride's white foot,

The white foot she washes.
Hot or cold, the water she cannot bear.

These dances for special occasions, and the peculiar words and tunes suitable for special purposes must be imagined together with the special dress, which was highly decorative at ordinary weddings and multi-coloured at

peasant weddings, since the peasants have still preserved their traditional costumes. Of the old wedding costumes, particularly of the bridal dress, something has been preserved to our own age among church property. It was at one time the custom to present to the church as souvenirs the bridal dresses which often cost thousands of pengős. This was particularly the case during the Renaissance and the period of Baroque splendour in the 16th and 17th centuries. Several churches asked for the bridal dress of the daughter of General Batthyány. The Abbess of Nagyszombat, for example, wrote to the general: «We beg you to present our church with the bridal dress of the gentle lady for memory's sake. If you should have disposed of the bridal dress of the sweet lady to some other church we beg you to honour us at least with her petticoat . . .»

It is thus that wordly customs, and the concrete objects of these customs, which today seem merely secular, betray the source from which they once came, i. e. religious ideology and its institutions.

Dances of the Craftsmen

Although what is characteristic of the most typical Hungarian dances has been preserved by the herdsmen and peasantry, and although those recruiting dances which developed from the former military dances have survived among the nobility and, in general among those of the upper classes who love and respect national traditions, yet we shall touch briefly upon those craftmen's dances which have retained a closer link with certain dances of a Western European character. For more than a thousand years the

Hungarians have been patrons and cultivators of the worthy qualities of western culture and kept pace with the West even in the Middle Ages. The Hungary of Louis the Great, of Sigismund or of King Matthew, was in no wise inferior to any contemporary European state. Though Hungary's development had several times been arrested by unparalleled national disasters, yet nothing in the long run could impair her vitality or will to create. Nay, the eternal struggle seems to have steeled her. The life of the Hungarian has nearly always been as described in the Hungarian phrase: «one hand on the sword, the other on the plough», or as the Székler, taught by fate, expresses it: the husband, far away with his sword, at home with the plough the wife.

Troops of artisans and miners were brought into Hungary as early as the reign of the first Hungarian King, Saint Stephen (1001—1038), and the tradesman of the medieval Hungarian towns were mostly immigrants from the west. They brought their trades with them but also their mode of life, and where they settled in great numbers they have preserved their language to the present day.

The laws of the Hungarian Guilds prescribed that apprentices should travel and during their wanderings these apprentices picked up much which pleased them and of which they could boast when they returned home. But things gleaned so long ago were slowly assimilated in their new environment to the Hungarian national character, even if they have retained much of their own originality. Thus the western investigator in Hungary will find traces of many things no longer to be found in the West although they were once common there. There is an interesting mixture of progress and conservative preservation of tradition in the Hungarian. (Perhaps Kaunitz, the famous Austrian statesman at the beginning of last century, had something like this in mind, or perhaps he was thinking

of certain traditions preserved despite foreign influences, when he said: «Only the English and the Hungarians have a national character.»)

To illustrate to what extent assimilation to the Hungarian has taken place even in those townspeople who have kept their original western racial peculiarities up to the present day, it is sufficient to mention the dress of the citizens of the ancient Transylvanian Saxon cities. They adopted the Hungarian style of dress as they did the Hungarian way of cooking, but on the other hand they have retained their Saxon language.

How did the Hungarian townspeople strike an English visitor in the 18th century? We read the following article in a Hungarian newspaper of 1789: «Not long ago two English travellers passed through our town (Komárom). As I was accompanying them across the market-place when both Catholics and Protestants were leaving church, they noticed about fifty people, gentlemen and tradesmen, dressed in sables and marten. They were extremely astonished and ask whether all were retired hussar officers. When I informed them that these people were noblemen of Komárom and that was the usual dress of the Hungarians they replied: «We have always heard that the Hungarians are very martial. Their dress shows it, for even those who are not in military service dress in this hussar fashion.»

This interchange was naturally mutual. Is this noticeable in the dances? Yes, very much so in the dancing traditions of the artistans. Two of the three tunes to the coopers' dance, which will be described below, are of decidedly foreign origin. It is possible that the dance consists of equal proportions of native and alien characteristics, but when we consider the natural dancing talent of the Hungarian, it may be that one third is foreign (German) and

Photo : T. Várkuty.

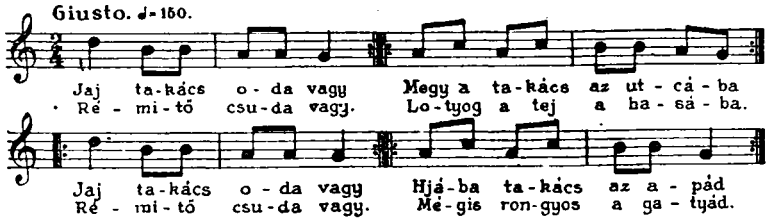
The Bottle Dance, danced, especially at weddings, by the cooks.

two thirds are Hungarian. Who can decide this point when there is no possibility of making an adequate comparison.

But let us examine some of the craftsmens' dances. We have already said that before 1744 the Hungarian furriers of the town of Brassó in the south-eastern corner of Transylvania, indulged in a peculiar dance with drawn swords. Wearing tight-fitting trousers, old fashioned military tunics and tasseled shoes, they practised a dance which consisted of both running and dancing steps. In this dance they would sometimes pass under each other legs, leap in the air from time to time, and finally fight one another, each man defending himself with a shield. The tradesmen were formerly skilful with weapons as was but natural when we remember that it was the custom that parts of the walls and ramparts of old cities should be defended against aggressors by certain guilds. (The defence of the beautiful Fishermen's Bastion in Budapest was at one time the duty of the Guild of Danubian Fishermen.) Furthermore the furriers always had at hand the tool with which they softened raw hides in the primitive days of their trade and which made a formidable weapon. The festive dances were also practised by the Saxon furriers of Brassó, perhaps in accordance with the customs they had brought with them from their old home by the German Mosel. It has actually been recorded that they danced them at the inauguration of the new Lord Lieutenant of the county of Brassó. That they were prohibited in 1744 may have been due to the fact that the generation which had seen serious fighting on the battlements was dying off and the succeeding generation, lacking practice in the use of arms, may have done considerable injury to each other.

As the furriers were wont to dance their celebration dance with swords (or to use the Hungarian word for their

tools, «scythes»), so evidently the weavers danced with some object characteristic of their trade, e. g. a piece of woven fabric. The following tune and lines have been chosen from the various weavers' songs.



You weaver, you are done for,
A terrifying miracle are you.
Through the streets walks the weaver
The milk in his stomach shakes.
You weaver you are done for,
A terrifying miracle are you.
Why was your father a weaver
If your trousers are all in rags ?

Yes, when machines began to vomit forth textile goods weavers were certainly «done for», they became ragged not only in England but also in Hungary, and it is possible that this song is an ironic variation of some former weavers' dance. The dance is usually performed by one man, but sometimes by two, who face each other. Standing on one leg, first the left and then the right, they hop rhythmically, one hop corresponding to one beat. In their hands they hold a handkerchief which — on the last beat of the music — they pass under the right and left thighs alternately, from one hand to the other and which they hold high in front of them. This is repeated twice, while hopping on the right leg and twice when doing so on the left, eight

Photo : S. Gőnyey.

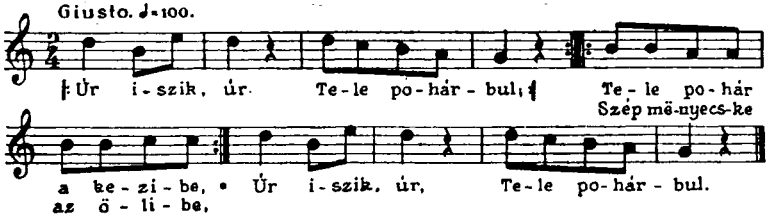
The Candle Dance. It is danced at weddings when it is time for the young couple to retire. The custom is called «putting the bride to bed».

beats in all. The hopping continues throughout. This dance practised in the trans-Danubian district is also met with in the region between the Danube and the Tisza, where it is danced in a similar way and to similar music, though it is called the «cap-dance» from the high sheepskin hat, which is snatched and held aloft instead of a handkerchief. It is possible, that in this district it was at one time the dance of the hatters.

In the region of Hegyalja, the range of mountains where Tokay wine is grown, which, according to the old saying is so fine that it revives even the dead, the coopers' dance is performed. Where a nectar of such unusual powers is produced, not only the wine-growers, but also the coopers may frequently be in a mood to dance this unique dance, which is worthy of that remarkable wine. The traditional dance is practised mostly at vintage festivites by five participants, the sixth being charged with swinging the glass.

The form of the coopers' dance which exists in Erdőbénye is that which was practised by the coopers in the mountain range of Tokay, and may be divided into fourteen parts. At the opening of the dance the dancers, each carrying a hoop painted in the Hungarian national colours, stand in a row and then run round with skipping, running steps in time with the music until the leader stamps his foot. Thereupon the direction is reversed. This is repeated three times, the circle becoming smaller and smaller. At first the hoops are held low, then high up. Later each man holds the hoop of the man following him, then each jumps over the hoop placed on the ground by the preceding dancer. Two others hold up their hoops forming a triumphal arch and the rest pass beneath, holding their own hoops high, the direction of the procession being determined by the two forming the arch turning round. Then follows the swing. When the leader stamps, they form a circle, each

man looking inwards, the hoops held as to seem interwoven, and in this position they go though the movements of sawing, the circle, however, revolving three times. Then to the accompaniment of a new tune the interwoven hoops are lifted high and lowered slowly to the ground, while they sing :

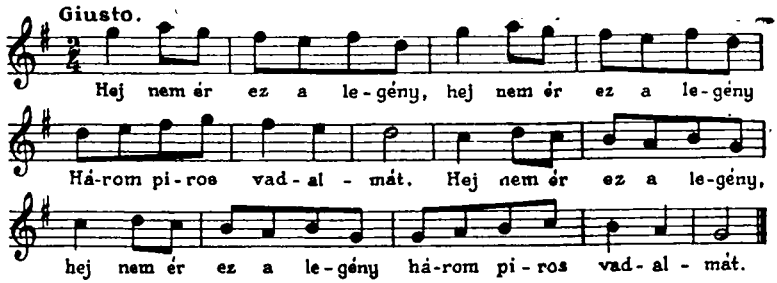


The gentleman drinks, Oh, the gentleman drinks from a brimming glass,
A full glass in his hand, a sweet maid on his knee,
The gentleman drinks, Oh, the gentleman drinks from a brimming glass.

This is sung three times and the hoops are raised and lowered also three times. The glass-swinger, with a stirrup-shaped hoop in his hand, takes his place is the centre of the circle when the hoops are raised for the first time. After repeating these movements three times the dancers place the hoops on the ground so that regular intersecting geometrical figures are formed, from which some are selected for the dancers to tread in. They then all run round first in one direction, then in the other. They play with the hoops in this and similar ways, until finally a large circle is formed. The hoops are held high, the glass-swinger again takes his place in the middle of the circle with his stirrup-shaped hoop and sings: «The gentleman drinks from a full glass». At the same time he places a little tumbler-like glass, brimming with wine, on the horizontal base of the stirrup and the rest begin to sing :

Photo : S. Günyey.

One of the craftsmen's dances: the Cooper's Dance. Their handicraft is symbolized by the barrel hoops and the glass of wine on a hoop on the floor.



Oh, this lad is not worth, oh this lad is not worth
Three red crab apples,
Oh this lad is not worth, oh this lad is not worth
Three red crab apples.

This song is, of course, also played by the gypsies. But the swinger finds this yet one more reason for showing, that «the lad» is not worth three crab apples, but «a glass of the best wine». Then he swings the stirrup-shaped hoop, on which the glass rests, but is in no way fastened, to describe a figure eight in the air, holding the upper end of the stirrup between his middle and forefingers. For a time he exhibits his skill standing, then still swinging the glass he goes down on his left knee, places his left hand on the ground and supporting himself thereby, turns over until he is nearly on his back. (The stirrup and the glass in full swing all the time.) This action he then repeats in reverse order and finally stands up again. For a time he continues swinging the glass. The show has been succesful. Not one drop of wine has been spilt from the glass and this gives rise to such enthusiasm that the dancers round him clash their hoops triumphantly together. This is the finale of the coopers' dance.

The single phases of the dance clearly show that in the main it represents that part of the coopers' trade where

the master and his apprentice or apprentices place the hoops on the casks while moving round them.

Every trade has such characteristic phases, which lend themselves to choreographic presentation, and which are suitable for mime dances and ballets. The most succinct and charming collection of these characteristic movements is to be found in a children's game known in Hungarian as: «Let everyone practice his own trade.» Ten adults show the children (naturally only in pantomime) how the joiner, blacksmith, carpenter, chimneysweep, cooper, furrier, bootmaker, etc. work, and the selected most typical movements or rôles are assigned to the various participants in the game. The moral and educational value of this game is that everyone should practice his own trade, and that the child, who has a talent for mimicry should not imitate his neighbours, each of whom has a different trade, when performing the task assigned to him.

A Peasant Ballet

The richest source of folk dances resembling ballet is to be found in children's games. Among the maturer peasantry such dances are seldom found — or to be more precise, pantomime accompanied by song and music — in which the movement and the mimicry have a clear significence, and in which, inspired by a love of artistry, the orderly sequence of the movements combines to give a perfectly balanced form to the whole dance. Such esthetic principles may have inspired the sword dance, of which only fragments now exist, and traces of such principles are to be found in the Hungarian recruiting dances which belong to the group of war dances. That the latter are

considerably older than that mentioned below — of which varieties are found in other European countries — is proved by the fact that only fragments have been preserved. The choreographic tradition — like all other traditions — passed from one people to the other, which is of interest, inasmuch as it enables us to see how those parts retained by each nation have been adapted to the spirit and traditions of the country in question.

Such adaptions and borrowings usually reach the mass of the people via the more educated classes, and it is here that they undergo their first modifications. Owing to the nature of this subject, the peasant ballet given below can hardly have emanated from the upper classes, as it shows in mime how the farmer produces, and its point is the mimicry of arduous toil. Particularly well suited to expression in song and dance are those three phases of productive labour which can be expressed in the quickest of movements:

The words:

I should like to know how the peasant,
I should like to know how the peasant,
How the peasant sows his oats.

Showing by imitating the movements,
This is how he sows his oats,
This is how he sows his oats,
Sows his oats so slowly.

I should like to know how the peasant,
I should like to know how the peasant,
How the peasant reaps his oats.

Showing,
This is how he reaps his oats,
This is how he reaps his oats,
Reaps his oats so slowly.

I should like to know how the peasant,
I should like to know how the peasant,
How the peasant threshes oats.

Showing,
This is how he threshes oats,
This is how he threshes oats,
Threshes oats so briskly.

I should like to know how the peasant,
I should like to know how the peasant,
How the peasant sells his oats.

The dancers then shake hands (a deal is concluded in rural Hungary by the respective parties shaking hands) and the dancers sing:

This is how he sells his oats,
This is how he sells his oats,
Sells his oats at the market.

I should like to know how the peasant,
I should like to know how the peasant,
How the peasant spends his gold.

Now they go through the motion of drinking, singing the while:

This is how he spends his gold,
This is how he spends the gold,
The gold he earned so hardly.

Different forms of the Dance of Death

The 46th article of the Buda Synod of 1279 charges the parish priests «not to suffer the people to dance either in the churchyard or in the church itself.» Historians

Photo : S. Gőnyey.

«Singing woman» complete with lantern, knapsack and bottle of wine, about to set off to a wake or funeral feast.

maintain that such Synod interdictions were renewed from century to century, even long after the people had abandoned such wicked practices, thus the strict injunctions were devoid of all justification. At the time of the Buda Synod there were certainly countries where such prohibition would have been superfluous, but Hungary was not among them. As late as the second half of the 19th century the «dancing Hungarians» celebrated — in one village at any rate — a funeral not by dancing in the church itself, but certainly by doing so at the graveside, after the funeral ceremony. In earlier days this custom was undoubtedly far more prevalent. The following is quoted from the «Ungarischer oder Dacianischer Simplicissimus» (1684): «Afterwards I went with my master to the funeral of a landowner. The ceremony ended with a dance which was somewhat sad and often accompanied by weeping and wailing, yet at times was quite gay. Some wailing women sang and wept to the tune.» The same writer records that at another funeral the deceased was represented by one of the mourners and all present danced with him in turn to the strains of the dance of death.

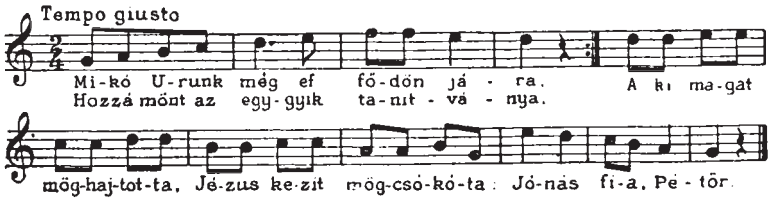
In one village (Pécska) on the Great Hungarian Plain, the custom of dancing on the graveside lingered on until the '70's of the last century. Church injunctions were quite ineffectual, not even succeeding to the extent of inducing the mourners to postpone their dance until they were outside the gates of the cemetery. They merely waited until the departure of the priest and then in sheer defiance danced in the graveyard itself. Thus it was but natural that they should dance at the feast following the burial, above all if the deceased were unmarried, for the dead — as was their right — had to celebrate a wedding accompanied by dance and song in order to prevent their returning to haunt their old homes. In the 18th century a Transylvanian

nobleman celebrated the death of his unmarried daughter — whom, he said, he had married to Christ — by dancing all night.

The funeral-feast dance has been preserved to this very day, even if it can no longer be compared to those of which a Calvinist preacher of the 17th century wrote: «It is difficult to know which is a house of death and which a house celebrating a wedding, for the funeral feast has become an occasion for unseemly, immodest, wicked revelry and drinking.»

Today, even if the mourners themselves do not dance, the «wailing-woman» or «singing-woman» whose duty it is to sing sacred songs over the body on the bier, does so. At the funeral feast she places a bottle of wine on her head — as the cooks do in the cooks' dance — and dances to the tune of a half-sacred, half-secular song, the «Wedding of Cana». This may be the dance «quite sad, and accompanied by weeping and wailing» — and yet half gay — to which the «Simplicissimus» refers at the end of the 17th century, although at the time not only the old wailing women took part, in it but also the guests. This remarkable song is a strange mixture of devoutness and profanity, of sadness and levity.

The tune:



One variation of the song sung at Ujkígyós, on the Great Hungarian Plain, mentions the Virgin Mary as dancing with Peter and runs thus:

When our Lord on earth did walk
There came to him one of his disciples,
Who bending low,
Humbly kissed his masters hand.
'Twas Peter, Jonah's son.

Master, Thy Mother her greatings sends
And begs Thee to come to her at once,
Because the best man awaits
An answer to his invitation
To the Cana wedding.

Immediately Jesus hurries homewards,
While Peter, having lost his stick,
Could not proceed
And soon lagged far behind
His master Jesus.

When Peter got home with his stick,
The best man had already departed,
Because Jesus had promised
That He would attend
The Cana wedding.

As the evening grew silently night,
Jesus visited His disciples
To tell them to set out,
Lest they should be late
For the Cana wedding.

They awaited Him with great respect,
Though all were longing to dance,
But when Jesus entered
Everyone rose
At the Cana wedding.

«Praised be the Lord!» cried Peter
All answered: «For ever be He so!»
We have come as we promised,
And hope we are not late
For the Cana wedding.

Great was the rejoicing at the Cana wedding.
Jesus sat at the table's head,
With Maria on His right,
His disciples on His left,
At the Cana wedding.

When the supper was at an end
The women stood in a row;
The gypsies struck up
Music for the dance
At the Cana wedding.

Then they began dancing with their partners,
Old Peter with the Virgin Mother
«Dance you holy woman, Anna's daughter!
Make your skirt whirl swiftly
At the Cana wedding!»

The wine had very many foes
Who attacked it with great vigour,
Till the tap, overworked,
Refused to give another drop
At the Cana wedding.

To prevent the gaiety from being destroyed
Jesus spoke to the best man, ordering him
To fill the bucket with water
And bring it to Him
At the Cana wedding.

They bring the bucket of water to Him,
And Jesus, glancing at it,
Gives it to an old man
To taste for himself!
At the Cana wedding.

And lo! a miracle of miracles has happened!
The best man was struck all of a heap
When he, too, tasted the wine
And found it so good
At the Cana wedding.

They bring six more buckets of water
For Jesus to turn into wine,
At His bidding the cold water
Became the choicest of wines
At the Cana wedding.

When the Jews did hear of this,
They invited Jesus to all the weddings
To make wine for them.
But Jesus did not desire to go
To more weddings.

The Girl who was Danced to Death

The Punitive Dance

A jolly Hungarian writer of the 18th century, J. Gvadányi, gave it as his opinion — only after retiring from his service in the army as a general — that «. . . the dance is but a great commotion which is beneficial to the health . . .»

The young, however, do not regard the dance from this salutary point of view, although they may say in jest that they dance because «the soles of their feet itch», and the only cure for such itching is gypsy music. The gypsies and the cymbal player fulfil all expectations. The many vivid features of a wedding count — at least in the eyes of the young — for next to nothing, it is the dance and nothing but the dance that is of any importance. They can scarcely wait for the voluble best man to reach the passage in his speech referring to the dance.

«Start dancing all you young men, women and girls,
The cymbal is twanging, come, come, get a move on!
The movements of the dance enhance the beauty
Of the Hungarian, especially if he trips and patters.

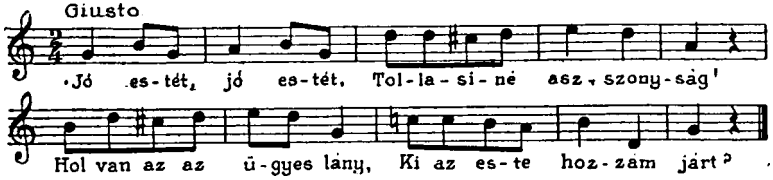
If danced by a well-suited couple the Hungarian dance
Is throughout the world unsurpassed.
Therefore, get ready, lads! Form rows for dancing!
Make the girl leap and jump! Let her skirts whirl!»

The scene is more complete if we visualise the multi-coloured picture presented by the dancers and spectators as described by this same voluble best man: «I see that your house is adorned with . . . carnation-coloured girls, with rosy young married women, with velvet-coloured old people and with violet-coloured lads.»

After such a vivid picture of the dance, who would imagine that it could be a means of punishment, that affronted self-esteem and injured pride choose the dance hall as the place of vengeance and the dance as the means of obtaining satisfaction? But this is actually the case. The punitive dance is reserved for the girls, the young men settling their differences in their own way, although not infrequently in the dance room. The milder, but at the same time bitter humiliation to which the girl is subjected, especially if she has insulted the young men en masse, is being «played out». The musicians strike up, spurs jingle, the dance begins, dance words are occasionally shouted and the condemned girl, having no idea that any sentence has been passed on her before the dance began, dances also; her partner beckons to the gypsies and then guides her towards the door closely followed by the gypsies. The door flies open and the girl is soon outside only to see the door close upon her. This punishment is not fatal, at least that is not intended, and there is a way to make amends.

The truly fatal punishment is being «danced to death». Whether it has really occured or not, it is impossible to say for certain, but Hungarian popular tradition acknowledges and sings the tragic stanzas of this element of international ballad poetry. The song is sung throughout the country,

and there scarcely is a more popular ballad. Many versions of both words and melody exist round Lake Balaton and among the mountains of Transylvania. What is the truth about the sad, «dancing death» of the daughter of the petty constable of Sári? (In other versions, Betty Tollas, or daughter of the magistrate of Sári.)



In another version the young men come to the petty constable of Sári to invite his daughter, Kate, to a wedding :

«Oh mother, I won't go,
I know 'twill not please me,
For of John Árvadi
The wedding day 'twill be.»

«Kate, Oh Kate my daughter,
Put on thy skirt of silk,
Thy crimson boots so neat
Put on thy dainty feet.

A score of golden rings
Shall thy hands adorn.
Thus thou shalt break the heart
Of thy beloved sweetheart.»

The girl then goes to the wedding where John Árvadi invites her to dance, at the same time ordering the gypsies :

«Play, you gypsies, till noon !
From noon till evening play !
From evening until dawn
Till we greet the smiling morn.»

«Let me go, let me be,
Or surely I must die!
This silken skirt so fine
Doth to my body cling.»

«What care I, shouldst thou die,
Or from this world thou goest?
If mine thou canst not be,
No other shall have thee.

Play, you gypsies, till noon!
From noon till evening, play!
From evening until dawn
Till we greet the smiling morn.»

«Let me go, let me be,
Or surely I must die
A score of golden rings
On my swollen fingers press.»

«What care I, shouldst thou die,
Or from this world thou goest
If mine thou canst not be,
No other shall have thee.»

«Let me go, let me be,
Or surely I must die
For in my crimson boots
The blood hath now congealed.»

«What care I, shouldst thou die,
Or from this world thou goest?
If mine thou canst not be,
No other shall have thee.

Play, you gypsies, till noon!
From noon till evening, play!
From evening until dawn
Till on her bier she's borne.»

Photo : Hung. Nat. Mus.

A peasant illustration of the Ballad of Mariska Sági, the girl who was danced to death. A carving executed by a shepherd on the lid of a wooden box containing his shaving mirror.

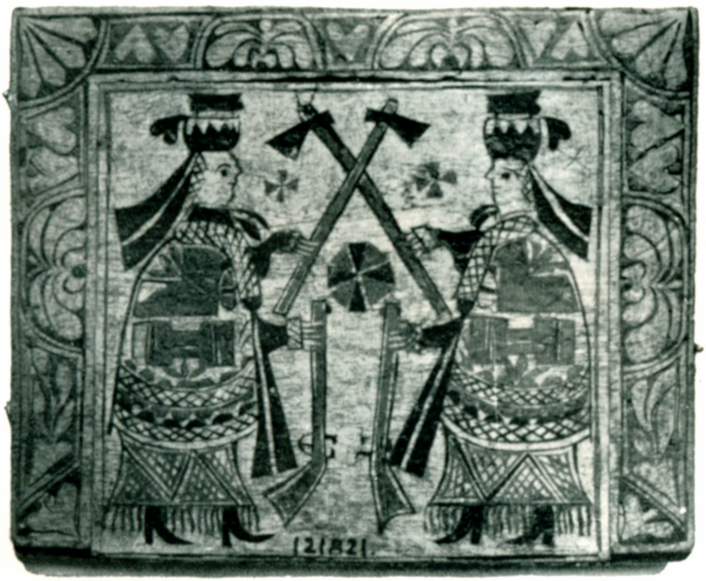


Photo : Hung. Nat. Mus.

The Weapon Dance of the Bakony swineherds, also carved by a shepherd to ornament the lid of a wooden mirror-case.

«Oh coachman, bring the coach
And swiftly homeward drive
Mother, open thou the door,
The double lattice door.»

On arriving home she goes straight to bed, but never recovers from the strain of her non-stop dance, so that her sweetheart only sees her again when she is lying on her bier.

Curséd is the father
The mother, twice cursed is she
Who let their only daughter
Go forth so easily.

They let her go at even,
They sought her not at dawn,
And only on the third day
Homeward, dying, she found her way.

Musical Instruments

Although gypsy music is preferred throughout the country even in the smallest village, yet, when opportunity offers or necessity demands, the people dance to music supplied by instruments that are peculiar to the peasants, for the gypsies never use them.

Spurs are one of the most interesting of these unusual instruments. Of course they originally formed part of the normal riding equipment, and we can take it that the Hungarian word «sarkantyú» (spur) is but the low vowel variant of «serkentyű» which is derived from «serkentő» (stimulant, encourager). It is a feature of the Hungarian language that hundreds of words exist in two forms, one with the high

vowel, the other with the low vowel, the meaning being more or less different. Such words are: gyúr-gyűr (to knead, to rumple); karom-köröm (claw, nail); dagad-deged (to swell); kavar-kever (to mix); forog-pörög (to turn, to turn swiftly). No one hearing the word «sarkantyú» ever thinks of the origin of the word «serkentő», that is, the object by which the horse is encouraged. There was a time when spurs formed part only of the privileged costume of the nobility, serfs being forbidden to wear them. Noblemen wore them with pride, even if they had lost everything in the world but their «dogskin» (parchment) proving their rank and their spurs. The people ridiculed these poor nobles as «semi-spurred» nobles, also nobles of the «seven plum-trees», since this was often about all the estate round the house contained. Although spurs of the standard type were forbidden, those of different form, made of circular metal plates could scarcely be prohibited, or if they were, as happened occasionally, the dancers fastened brass-rattles the size of walnuts on both sides of the leg, just below the knee, as did for example the «borica» dancers of the seven villages. These metal heels would also serve in case of need. The clicking of the spurs which impelled the German officer who saw it in 1792 to write about it, is an essential part of the Hungarian dance. When at the peasant wedding the best man says,

> Gypsy leader stop your violin,
> And let the clicking spurs stop too,

he expresses the equal importance of the instrumental music, in the narrower sence of the term, and the clicking of the spurs. That excellent old doctus poeta, Csokonai Vitéz, gave it as his candid opinion, that in the Hungarian dance the man

> Unless like soldier dressed and spurs doth wear
> Is the laughing stock of all the others.

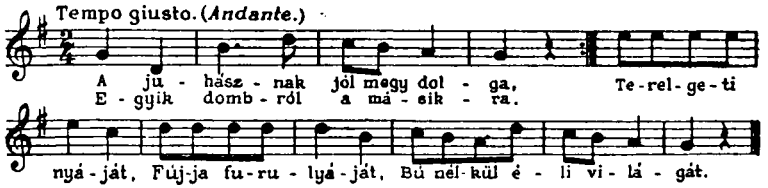
Photo : D. Fényes

A very ancient instrument: the swineherd's horn made from the horn of an ox.

Of the drum-like instruments there is one which is known by various onomatopoetic words, and which the Moldavians call the «bika» (bull). This instrument, now used only by the «regős», who at Christmas time go masked from house to house, is to the peculiar orchestra of the «regős» (pron. raggash) what the contra-bass or the drone of the bagpipe is to the other orchestras. The skin or bladder of some animal is stretched across the mouth of a tall wooden or earthenware vessel. A reed or tuft of horse-hair about six inches in length is placed across the centre of the taut skin, and when stroked with wet fingers or hand, it emits a deep note, resembling the bellowing of a bull.

Among wind instruments, there is the flute-like «whistle» which has six stops and which is made of reed, bone, wood or even of hemlock. In some parts of the country, especially in the southern Transdanubian district, not only are these foot-long whistles used, but also the so-called «long whistles» which are indeed of such length that the player can only with effort reach all the stops even with fully extended arms. There are also «double-flutes» of which but one part produces any sound. The player hums into these flute-like instruments when playing and thereby supports, or as one might say, accompanies the sound produced in the instrument with that produced in the larynx.

The bagpipe is very rare nowadays, but it is still met with in some places, especially in the Mátra mountains, in southern Transdanubia and on the southern bank of the Tisza. It was once common throughout the Transdanubian district and was much in use among the shepherds, who were expert in making it. It was as popular as the flute, as is indicated in the following song:



The shepherd leads an easy life,
Without sorrow doth he live.
He playes his flute and from one hill
To another slowly drives his herd.

When of his flute he doth get tired
To his bagpipe he doth turn, and
Blows his sorrow into the sheep-skin
From whence it is thrown to the winds.

The dance word demanding music was not always addressed to the gypsies, but also to the pipers:

Uncle Stephen, work a miracle
Keep your bagpipe full of wind.

In the song of the traditional Christmas carol singers who go about in biblical get-up, carrying the Bethlehem-box, the bagpipe is often mentioned as one of their musical instruments:

Let's proceed to the sound of the bagpipe,
Let's walk to musical strains.
Come Andrew, take your bagpipe
And I shall take my flute.
Alle — Alleluia!

That the bagpipe was once a favoured music-maker is proved by the fact that even the haughty, supercilious recruiting gangs used it, as can be seen in an illustration which dates from the beginning of last century. Earlier still, in the

Photo: S. Gönyey.

Swineherd playing the Transdanubian «long flute», a five-stopped, low-toned instrument. The man's axe is under his arm, his water-gourd hangs from his belt and his shepherd's wallet from his shoulder.

17th century, it was much favoured by the Transylvanian princes, until it gave place to the «Turkish-whistle» (a clarinet-like wood wind), as a result of the forced and prolonged contact between Hungarians and Turks, while up to the middle of the 16th century the pipe provided military music for the Hungarian cavalry, the hussars. It is possible too, that it supplied the music for some of the poorer parishes, at least the livelier Christmas songs. Traces of this custom seem to have been preserved, as for example in the following lines :

Dobos, bring your bagpipe
And play a pretty tune
To cheer the Holy Mother ...

One thing is certain, however, that the Hungarian humourously christened the bagpipe the «Slovak organ», as in like manner inferior fish was ridiculed as »Slovak perch-pike» and the frog called «Slovak crayfish».

The oldest of the trumpet-like instruments are the «fakürt» (horn) and the «tülök» (a kind of horn). The «fakürt» which is from half a metre to two-and-a-half metres in length, can be made in two ways.

A suitable piece of wood, pine, birch, poplar or elder is split lengthwise. The two halves are hollowed out and then fixed together again by wooden hoops. Or in the Transylvanian fashion it can be made by rolling the horn from the bark of the limetree. It is then soaked in water to make it swell, and prevent too much wind escaping. (Hence it is often known as the «water pipe» on the Great Plain.) The mouthpiece is then fitted into the thinner end.

The Székler «tekenőgordon» is one of the oldest form of instrument in which the strings are plucked. A string is stretched across an oblong hollow of beech, but the result is useless for producing melodies. In the country of Csík

the peasants dance for hours on end to the music of one violin and the «tekenőgordon».

Hardly a trace remains of the more developed string instrument, the «koboz», «kobza»; yet according to a 17th century account, «even the children played nothing else». It has been described as a short-necked instrument with eight strings, while that used by the Moldovian Csángós resembles a lute in shape. It is not without interest to note that in the country of Heves a wide-mouthed vessel made from a gourd and used for storing eggs is also known as a «koboz», hence it may be inferred that the first form of the «koboz» was, as in many other parts of the world, a system of strings fastened across a gourd.

The «tekerő muzsika» (rotating music) or «tekerő hegedű» (rotating violin) resembles a neckless bass viol, although it is somewhat smaller in size. The body of the instrument has a removable lid beneath which the tunable strings, usually four in number, are stretched. On a surface, at right angles to the strings, is a wooden wheel, which on being turned, causes the strings to give out notes In addition to the melody-producing strings there are one or two non-variable (monotone) bass-strings, which form the accompaniment. Along the outside edge of the instrument is a chromatic keyboard by which the vibrating length of the strings can be shortened at will. The strings are sounded by turning the spindle of the wheel which touches the strings. It is this wheel which gives the name «tekerő» (rotating) to the instrument. It is, however, also known as «the music of the Holy Ghost», «tekerőlant» (rotating lyre), «beggar's lyre», «peasant's lyre» and onomatopoetically «nyenyere». It is, however, an instrument which is rapidly falling into disuse.

The most widely used and the most popular peasant instrument is the zither. Its enormous popularity is perhaps due to the fact, that, with a little skill, any youth can make

Photo : S. Gőnyey.

Swineherd playing the bagpipe. (On the right, his Hungarian puli dog.)

one. A stringed instrument to be held on the knees, the melody is produced by plucking the strings. It is usually in the form of a parallelepiped. It is also played by girls.

The composition of a dance orchestra varies with the possibilities and the occasion. It is not improbable that in the distant past the drum, the clarinet-like pipe and the violin were played together. Traditionally the Hungarian people have no knowledge of music for several voices, hence it is most unlikely that the different instruments of the old orchestras had their own separate parts. Even today we notice that when the music is supplied not by gypsies but by an occasional orchestra of peasants, the parts are all the same and the only difference is that each instrument has its own octave. This was the subject of a pamphlet entitled: «Ungarische Wahrheitsgeiger» published at Freyburg in 1683 and according to this treatise a complete Hungarian orchestra included a bagpipe. In 1880 the «Leipziger Allgem. Musikal. Zeitung» described a Hungarian orchestra which was formed on the gypsy pattern: «Hungarian national music is usually played on one or more violins, a bass viol, and a pair of cymbals. Such instruments as the bassoon, oboe, and bugle are never used. It seldom happens that the orchestra consists of fewer than three members, and it is still rarer to find more than eight or ten. Of these one or two play first violin, another plays the bass violin, while the rest, with the exception of the cymbalist, play second violin.» This form of orchestra has persisted to the present day, the greatest change being sometimes the addition of a clarinet.

It is needless to add that dancing is also often performed to the accompaniment of song. This is often to be witnessed in country places, where the girls form a circle, moving slowly round and round, dancing to their own songs when the music stops.

The Gypsies

The Hungarian dance stands in no greater need of special musical instruments than any other dance, nor are any peculiarities demanded for playing these instruments. The one essential is rhythm, which exists in song, violin, pipe or flute solos, and can also be produced by implements which were designed for other purposes. The Hungarian cavalryman, the hussar, or the nobleman who liked dancing, all had at hand the means of producing rhythm-spurs. Nor were the women slow in finding instruments for the melody — such as it was — to which they could dance. Tinódi, a 16th century Hungarian epic poet, writing of the women of his time recorded :

> Two battered pans together they beat
> And to this music they rave and leap.

So we see that «two battered pans» suffice to generate the rhythm which is all that is required.

In the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, however, gypsy orchestras came into favour and today in the large towns the word «gypsy» is almost synonymous with «musician». Nowadays nearly every village has its gypsy band, even if it is only a «plasterer» or «sticker» band, so called because during the week the gypsies who form it practice their trade of making mud bricks and plastering or sticking mud on walls, indulging in their musical talents only on Sunday. Such an orchestra consists of one, two or three members. A band of more than three members is rare in small villages.

Where the poverty of the dancers prevent them from adequately rewarding the adult gypsies, or where the latter for some reason or other refuse to play, the «sucking pigs»

Photo : Á. Garay.

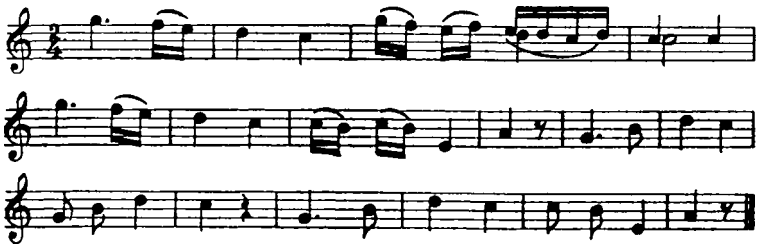
A « cortorar » gipsy-woman. A section of the gipsies still lead a nomadic life in tents.

orchestra, composed of gypsy striplings, will answer as subtitute, the important factor being that the musicians shall be gypsies.

It is well worth mentioning something of this interesting people, who, coming first to Hungary, eventually spread over all Europe.

The great Hungarian composer and pianist, Franz Liszt, who based many of his immortal compositions on Hungarian folk songs, stated his theory on the relationship between the gypsy and Hungarian music and dance like a typical Bohemian, inasmuch as he did so without a thorough research into either Hungarian or gypsy music. He like many another European was misled by the Hungarian custom of dancing to «gypsy music» and being entertained by «gypsy musicians». But by these expressions a gypsy band is meant, that is to say, an orchestra composed of gypsies who, however, play Hungarian national music.

It is true that the gypsies have their own individual melodies and songs, and this applies more particularly to those nomad tribes who have been less influenced by receiving hospitality from the inhabitants. But this music has no true connection with that of the Hungarian people:



Mor - ro dav - la, coss com - mass yoy,
Ke mon dass - tool phob - bor - rass, yoy,
Mor - roo dav - la co - ka bore yoy,
Koy nosh - chi hoo - chilom pore - doll

Dear God punish whom thou willst, oh!
Thou hast punished me enough, oh!
Thou shouldst punish this fence here, oh
For I can't get over it.

The gypsies have remarkable powers of adapting themselves to the spirit of the nation which harbours them. Thus in Serbia they play Serbian music, and in Roumania they entertain the people to melodies which are purely Roumanian in origin.

There is nevertheless in the gypsy temperament and soul — permeated with a Levantine-Balkan spirit — a certain lack of self-control, a restlessness, betraying an Eastern origin, and these qualities occasionally temper their music even when it might appear that there has been a complete assimilation of their own art and music to those of the country in which they have taken up their abode.

Each European nation know them by a different name. The English call them gypsies, the Spaniard «gitanos» both of which point to the belief in an Egyptian origin. For the same reason the Saxons in Transylvania ironically call them «Egypter» as well as «Zigeuner», and Hungarians likewise in jest speak of them as «Pharaoh's sons». The French at first gave them the title «Bohemians», the Dutch at one time referred to them as «Ungarn» (Hungarians) and the Swedes dubbed them «Tartars». Thus we see that they received their name either from the place they came from or from the people of whom they were believed to be descendants. They call themselves, however, «rom», which means «man» and from which the English word «Romany» is derived, but at the same time they make a distinction between the nomads, «cortorars» (tent-dwellers), and those who have settled, the «glatachorra» (poor of speech). The etymology of designations like the Hungarian «cigány» still remain dubious.

Late 18th century picture of a gypsy band. — The cymbal (in the middle) is an important instrument in the gypsy orchestra; on it are played both tune and accompaniment. — Oil-painting by an unknown artist.

When they departed from those parts of the Balkans which were under Turkish domination in the 15th century, they migrated to Hungary via old Roumania in large numbers, and from Hungary they spread over Europe, reaching Hamburg in 1417, Rome in 1422, Paris in 1427 and London in 1430. Possessed of active imagination, untempered by such a thing as conscience, they invented pious and wonderful stories for the superstitious and credulous Christians of Europe. The axiom laid down in the Hungarian proverb that «one should never trust a recruiter, a gypsy or a merchant» was at that time unknown and was only born later of bitter experience. They posed as Egyptian pilgrims who were compelled to wander the face of the earth for two years in order to seek forgiveness for the vile deed of omission committed by their ancestors, who had refused Jesus refuge when he was fleeing from the wrath of Herod. The Hungarian gypsies explained the reason for being condemned to eternal wandering as follows: «As Christ was suffering on the cross, a party of gypsies passed by. Being iron-smiths — as many of them are to this day — they could quite easily have taken their pincers and extracted the nails from Jesus' bleeding body. But instead of this they stripped His blessed body of the last remnants of apparel which the Jews had left Him.»

A band of strolling gypsies appeared in Bologna in 1422, and their leader, Andrew, Prince of Egypt (Duca di Egitto) imposed on the Italians by relating a charming fairy-tale of how, when his country had been occupied by the Hungarian king, he, in his rage, had forsworn the Christian faith. Later, however, he repented of his heathen act and with his four thousand subjects had returned to the Christian Church, and the Hungarian king had ordered them to do penance by making a seven years' pilgrimage, and they were on their way to the Pope at Rome. Such

stories were plausible enough and easily swallowed by the Europeans of those days who were truly ignorant of matters pertaining to geography and ethnology, so the gypsies were given a warm welcome and loaded with gifts. When, however, their true character became known, the people whom they had deceived lost no time in seeking vengeance and the gypsies' lives became far from pleasant. For this reason the Hungarian proverbe says: «the gypsies will know hard times yet.»

There were even some wandering tribes who stated that they had fled from Little Egypt, where the country was so over-populated that the misery of living there was no longer endurable. There may have been some truth in these statements, for the environment of the towns of Epirus and Nicodemia were formerly known as Little Egypt, and it is just possible that the gypsies reached these parts and settled there for several years. In light of these facts, the names «gypsy», «gitano», «Pharaoh's people» find a certain justification.

The country of their true origin was India. This is proved by the fact that they speak an Indo-Aryan language which is related to the «Scindh» dialect. The first to observe the Indian origin of the gypsy tongue was the Hungarian Calvinist theologian, Stephen Válvi, who studying at Leyden university in the middle of the 18th century, became interested in the language of some fellow-students who had come from Malabar. On his return to Hungary he found that the gypsies living in Győr could understand nearly every Malabar word which he had recorded.

Fundamentally the gypsy is supercilious, boastful, undisciplined, irresponsible, haughty as only beggars can afford to be, and to all of these traits must be added his two most dangerous gifts, a vivid Eastern imagination and a plausible tongue which charms its hearers into believing

the most impossible things. These qualities induced them to enter Hungary from the Balkans by fording the lower Danube under the «king» and three «princes». This ragged caravan proceeded to the world-renowned capital of Hungary, Buda — the Budapest of today. Here they broke up and wandered through Europe. «King» Sindel's caravan reached Regensburg, «Prince» Michael travelled via Münster, Augsburg, Zürich and Barcelona. «Prince» Andrew went to Paris by way of Innsbruck, Bologna, Rome, Genova, Marseilles and Lyon, while «Prince» Panuel led his people through Prague, Dresden, Hamburg and Rostock. Thus they divided Europa among themselves. But along their route, where possible, they left behind some «maliyas» (tribes), «gykkiyas» (clans) under the leadership of the most vociferous chiefs and «soybidshos». Their routes were marked by the usual princely signs which could be easily read by other gypsies: by horsehair, cut twigs, marrow-pips and straws. These indicators are known as «sykoyimoko», «childerpen», »sikerposskero». The whole world was theirs even at that time, as it is their inheritance today.

A Hungarian nobleman returning from the hunt, stops at the end of the village where the «cortorar» gypsy has his tent and begins to reproach the gypsy with having as many children in his tent as one would expect to find in a kindergarten, «What ugly little brats you have», he says to the gypsy. «Sir, if you could see them through my eyes, you would find them beautiful». «And what will this litter of brats inherit?» «Sir, for them there is the whole world, who could inherit it if not they?» replies the old man with deep conviction.

And there are truly enough of them for every country and even the village has its share. Some are blacksmiths, some make whitewash brushes, others are tinkers while

others make wooden spoons and troughs and yet others are horsedealers. The womenfolk turn to such callings as sorcery, juggling and fortune-telling by cards, all are wise in the lore of misfortunes, pestilence, illness and love. If a village becomes too hot for them, they vanish into thin air, nor do their reappear before putting a respectable distance between themselves and any who may be seeking revenge.

Jidov sor tsigna patcheerta
Ondra vasha, ondra mola

(I live like the little lark
Who owns the woods and fields.)

Theirs is a real «Bohemian life», «eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die», and their disregard for the future is expressed by the Hungarian proverb: «better a sparrow today than a bustard tomorrow».

Order-arder jidov beshov
Sor a chora, tsigna mosshah ;
Konna martiban ovvel
Vorrakoy mon orrockel.

(I live like the little mice
Here in winter, in summer there
And at life's end, death
Will find me somewhere.)

But the «glatachorra» long ago abandoned this wild Bohemian life, and by settling down thoughtlessly took up the burden imposed upon them by society. It is true that in many cases their ancestors were compelled to give up their roving life, having been expelled from the tribe by the «forrosh monooshangra» (great winter meeting of the males of the tribe) for some unpardonable crime, such as stealing from a fellow gypsy.

For over 500 years the Hungarians have lived in close contact with the gypsies ; thus they have had innumerable opportunities to get thoroughly acquainted with their mode of life and in particular with that of the «glatachorra». The word «cigánykodás» (gypsyism) was coined centuries ago to denote such ideas as «to practise sorcery», «cunning», «slyness» and «fraud». The gypsies have the reputation of being child-like, inconsistent, unreliable, sly, half-witted, lazy, fond of fun yet ridiculously haughty, and are treated accordingly, while many jokes are made about their transparent cunning, their unpractical way of living, and about the wonderful powers of imagination residing in a body clad in rags. Many phrases and words expressing undesirable qualities or inferiority have their origin in the word «cigány». Thus the Hungarian speaks of someone as having had his «speech forged on a gypsy anvil» and means thereby that the words have little in common with the truth, though nicely expressed, they are merely poetry or more simply still : all lies. This is equivalent to the old saying of «a gypsy lie from a gypsy anvil», but such lies fortunately cause no more unpleasantness than a «gypsy flea» (a spark from the anvil). To denote inferiority or defects the Hungarian often prefixes the word gypsy : gypsy wheat, gypsy beans, gypsy faith, gypsy tobacco (gypsy marriage, i. e. concubinage), gypsy grapes, gypsy daybreak (7—8 o'clock), gypsy ague, and gypsy chill. The professional gypsy musicians living in the villages and towns, especially those living in the big towns, lead the usual civilised life, though not without retaining many of their original qualities, both good and bad, as well as their poorly developed language, «glatachorra».

At the end of the 15th century, Beatrice, the Italian wife of Matthew, King of Hungary, had her own gypsy musicians. The Diet of Hatvan in 1525, a year before the

disaster at Mohács, officially engaged a band of gypsy musicians. We see that even at this early time the gypsies who had settled in the country were among other things musicians, at first using the fashionable instruments and later chiefly string instruments.

The irresponsible, adaptable, mimicking nature of the gypsies enabled them to mould their unsettled nature to the extreme temperament of the Hungarians, and to conform their art to the songs and dances of the Magyars with their abrupt changes from a dignified, slow measure to a wild outburst. The gypsy found it easy to accustom himself to the traditional merrymaking of the Hungarians, in which melancholy and gaiety go hand-in-hand.

The Hungarian word «cigányozás» (gypsying) expresses much more than being entertained by gypsy music. It means that the gypsies themselves are considered as co-partners in the revelry where the tempo of the music is varied (rubato) to suit the momentary mood of the revellers, as is also the part played by separate instruments. This type of entertainment is known only in Hungary. The behaviour of the gypsies on such occasions is often touching. They are admirable for their selflessness, for their courtesy and care, for the sympathy they show, which though generally sincere, is sometimes feigned, and for the manner in which they hide their self-consciousness. Striking, too, is the solo «cigányozás», i. e. the Hungarian reveller who gives a spontaneous display, in which he forgets himself, and in which movements, gestures, words, songs, whistling, hissing, dancing, and drinking all have their part. In addition to all this he teaches the gypsies new songs, tells them what to play, keeps his eye upon them and directs them in their playing. It is a rare phenomen, yet he who has not seen it cannot know what a carousal can be and why the carousing itself is of least importance. All the failings of the

gypsies are forgotten, all their treacheries are forgiven them when they begin to play from the depths of their hearts, bringing joy and forgetfulness for the sad, the disillusioned and the weary. Their playing as an artistic recital captivates and thrills and gives a strange form to the Hungarian popular music they play, so that even those whose musical education is of the highest, great composers and musicians of the world, have been charmed by its unexpectedness.

Although the Hungarian loves the gypsies above all, especially when being entertained by them, yet there come times when he is annoyed with them. It is then that he looks for other musicians. As long as two hundred years ago it happened that at a banquet held in Komárom in honour of «internal and external councillors» at the time of the elections of officials, the music was supplied by trumpeters, and not by gypsies. However they discovered later that they preferred the gypsies, so the town council passed a resolution that henceforth «trumpeters shall be dispensed with at dinners for gentlemen, and gypsies provided.» But the gypsies abused the confidence reposed in them, chiefly by making too free with the wine and getting gloriously drunk, so that the council came to a new decision a year later to the effect that henceforth «gypsy musicians shall be dispensed with at dinners for gentlemen, and trumpeters provided.»

The gypsy musician has a style of recital of his own, and the foreigner hearing Hungarians songs — which are unknown to him, — does not notice those deficiencies which are characteristic of it. Only when he hears music with which he is familiar, such as pieces of international reputation, operas and fashionable operettes, does he realise that the interpretation is somewhat peculiar.

With the exception of music played at such entertainments as mentioned above and dance music, which is really

applied music and not music for its own sake, the only kind of gypsy music which the musically educated classes enjoy is their rendering of Hungarian popular and popularised tunes.

Real gypsy music is orchestral, and the orchestra consists of both wind and string instruments. The cymbal is the chord producer is the indispensable mainstay of the band. Besides the violin of the «primás» the clarinet with its extravagant variations is the conductor. The orchestra, or as it is called in Hungary the «cigánybanda» (gypsy band) takes its name from the «primás» (leader, first fiddle). Thus we speak of the bands of János Bihari, of Marci Banda, of Jancsi Rigó. Each band naturally plays the same popular tunes and songs over and over again, but the mere fact that the band has a special name, means that a different colour will be given to the playing, that a new individuality will appear in the rubato, in the improvisation, in the instrumental colouring, in the ornamentation and interpretation. And though this individuality touches some chord in the Hungarian soul, yet its roots lie deep in the hearts of the wild, restless gypsies. It is this capriciousness, this distinct personality which makes the «primás» such an important person, and the respect which his band accords him is in direct proportion to the quantity of his talents in this direction. This gypsy method of free interpretation, by the way, has done considerable harm to the real Hungarian peasant music, since, by satisfying the demands of the middle-classes, who so far were without musical education, it retarded the rise and artistic development of true Hungarian peasant music. It has also spoiled the Hungarian dance to a certain degree, by its lack of discipline, by its restlessness, and especially by the arbitrary changes effected in the traditional tempo. In accordance with the precept «let there be three dances» the Hungarian dance

consists of three parts, and it is in the third part, that the effect of the gypsy mode of recital is most evident. By their wild playing they have rendered this part, the fastest, almost undanceable. It may be that Franz Liszt had seen the wild stampede caused by the gypsies, and had this in mind when he wrote of certain parts of the Hungarian dance as the «danse frénétique, danse échevelée». The method of dancing the finale of the «csárdás» which came into vogue last century and is known as being «forged on a gypsy anvil» was caused by the gypsies playing in such a murderous tempo that they even lost control of their instruments. This lack of discipline in the gypsies has, of course, also been duly noticed by those who have composed dance verses to meet the case:

Play on gypsy to the end
Don't rush it, don't hurry it

In accordance with tradition the gypsies use no music, nor do they know how to read it. They play entirely by ear and it is usually sufficient for them to hear the tune but once. For this reason they do not realise that music has a form which can be put on paper, and destined for a long life. Despite their freakishness in recital, it must be admitted that, by following a by no means simple, popular style, they have helped to preserve many old Hungarian musical customs, though the true credit for the preservation of old songs and melodies must go to the Hungarian reveller, who told the gypsy what to play and who, if the tune were unknown, sang it or whistled it till the musician could reproduce it. The memory of the gypsy is furnished with a complete repertory of Hungarian songs, and from this jingle of tunes new melodies are created. Nearly every renowned gypsy «primás[1]» has composed melodies of his

[1] Pronounce preemarsh.

own. We know for certain that in the golden age of recruiting, when military music was fashionable, J. Bihari (1764—1827) composed a recruiting tune which was published in Vienna somewhere about 1804—1807 under the title: «Ungarische Tänze oder Werbung». It was however scored by another, since he himself was ignorant of manuscript music. Only legend has it that the girl primás, Panna Cinka, was also a composer, but there is not sufficient evidence for assuming that she composed the song entitled «Gypsy Panna's Song». Of the latter day primáses the one with the greatest talent was Pista Dankó of Szeged.

The enormous popularity which the gypsies enjoyed had its beginning in the period of national regeneration and romanticism at the end of the 18th century, and at the beginning of the 19th, and reached its zenith at the end of the latter. The Hungarian music which characterised the Romantic Age was that played for the recruiters, and a fact that contributed greatly to the success of the recruiting was the music of the gypsies. This was the time when the gypsies were allowed to wear military uniform with red trousers which, in their eyes, constituted the most handsome gift that could be bestowed on them. Their pride and arrogance reached celestial heights when they possessed these symbols of greatness. Many anecdotes have grown up among the Hungarians about this article of wearing apparel, which the gypsy esteems so highly. In the past there were naturally countless pairs of red trousers which were sufficiently worn to be given away to the gypsies, for, as is well-known, these garments formed part of the military uniform of the Hungarian hussars up to the Great War. The following is one of these many anecdotes:

A gypsy had somehow managed to obtain a pair of red trousers and wishing to make a great impression on the villagers, he decided to go to church on the following

Photo : Festi Napló.

Mr. John F. Montgomery, the American Minister in Budapest, listening to the music of Imre Magyari's gypsy band. The leader of the gypsies usually leaves his band on the platform and mingles with the audience, chiefly in order to find out what they wish to hear.

Sunday arrayed in all his glory. When Sunday came he donned these outward and visible signs of his worth and purposely arrived in church somewhat late, as he wished to be certain that the whole village would be congregated there to gape and admire. At the moment he arrived the parson had just announced the hymn and it so happened that as he entered in his red trousers the whole congregation rose to their feet. The gypsy surveyed them haughtily with the remark: «Sit down, sit down, I was once as poor as you are now!»

The gypsy bands touring foreign countries affect the braided Hungarian uniforms (which is explained by the fact that they played an important part in the recruiting), and secondly, though not less important, the red trousers. Thy gypsy bands playing at the home in Hungary wear no such distinctive uniform today.

At home, where the gypsy music wells up from the heart and appeals more to the hearts than to the ears of the listeners, these outward signs can be dispensed with, the more so, since every tune has memory-awaking words, which are just as familiar and popular and which move the hearers to just as sentimental or joyous moods as the melodies.

Is there any other country which has appreciated this homeless, turbulent, wandering Bohemian people as much as Hungary? Is there a country in the world other than Hungary which can boast of a Latin epitaph to a gypsy girl? The epitaph on the death of the gypsy, Panna Cinka, runs thus:

Nam seu Styriacos malles, seu teutonis orbes,
Seu quibus Francus, prompta, superbit, erat.
Praecipue Hungaricos (vah nunc quoque ... stupesco)
Fors prorsus magica moverat arte choros.

(A Styrian dance, or French, or German,
They were all the same to her: any could she play.
But the Hungarian songs (oh! my soul is still amazed)
She rendered with a power most magical.

And apart from Hungary which has erected statues in memory of the «glatachorra» gypsies, John Bihari and Pista Dankó, is there any country which can speak of statues to gypsy primáses?

The two bronze statues to the «glatachorra» gypsies reflect Hungary in a favourable light, for whereas the other peoples of Europe treated the poor, wandering gypsies little better than animals, the Hungarians offered them hospitality and helped them to produce something really unique: «Hungarian gypsy music». The gypsies with their musical talent were, of course, necessary to this and the love which, for many centuries they have borne for their violins which is expressed in the following beautiful gypsy poem:

No jonov ko dodd mro hoss,
Niko mollam monga hoss,
Meera goolla doy merdyoss,
Peeronni mon preglyoss:
Oova to, haggadeeva,
To soll mindig posh monga.

(No father did I ever know,
Nor had a friend to care for me,
Long, long ago my mother died,
And my sweetheart did deceive me.
Only you, my beloved violin,
Comes with me everywhere, faithfully.)

Bibliography and Notices

The most comprehensive work on Hungarian dances, especially from an historical point of view, is *Marián Réthei Prikkel's A magyarság táncai* (Dances of the Hungarians), *Budapest, 1924,* — with many pictures and music. The author of the present volume is indebted to this fine work for the greater part of his historical data.

In the fourth volume of a copiously illustrated work compiled by several Hungarian scholars, *A magyarság néprajza,* (Ethnography of the Hungarians) *vol. I.—IV, Budapest, 1934—1937.*, *Sándor Gönyey* and *László Lajtha* (Vol. IV.) give a description, with many pictures, and the music of characteristic Hungarian dances. This Hungarian work is supplied with an ample bibliography.

The relics of certain dances which have survived in children's games are best described in *Áron Kiss's Magyar gyermekjátékgyüjtemény* (Collection of Hungarian children's games), *Budapest, 1891,* — with music.

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A comprehensive study of Hungarian folk music, together with a rich collection of words and music, is given in *Béla Bartók's Das ungarische Volkslied, Berlin, 1925.*

Many data referring to Hungarian dances may be found in certain Hungarian scientific journals, particularly in a publication of the Hungarian Ethnographical Society entitled *Ethnographia,* which has been published regularly since 1890.

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The painter *Ernő Barta* has published a series of coloured etchings of Hungarian dances.

The tunes published in this book were collected by the following students of folk songs:

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Csiky, János: 30 p. (1)
Herrmann, Antal: 175 p.
Káldy, Gyula: 30 p. (3)
Kodály, Zoltán: 118, 119 p.
Lajtha, László: 47, 86, 106 p.
Réthei Prikkel, Marián: 52 p.
Tóthpál, János: 80 p.
Seemayer, Vilmos: 30, (2) 136, 140, 143, 150 p.
Volly, István: 111, 115, 116, 129, 164 p.