[Three Hungarian Stories]

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FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 21 1/2 Morton St. New York

DATE November 7, 1938

SUBJECT THREE HUNGARIAN STORIES - “THE 'SEVEN-PLUM-TREE’ NOBLEMEN”

1. Date and time of interview November 3, 1938

2. Place of interview 509 E. 79th St.

3. Name and address of informant Anca Vrbooska 509 E. 79th St. N. Y.C.

4. Name and address of person, if any who put you in touch with informant.

(See previous interviews)

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 21 1/2 Morton St.

DATE November 7, 1938

SUBJECT THREE HUNGARIAN STORIES - “THE ‘SEVEN-PLUM-TREE” NOBLEMAN”

1. Would you like to hear about “Thursday”? This, happened during the reign of good Queen Maria Felicia, who was rulor of Hungary when Slovakia was part of Hungary, about the year 1760. The peasants of a certain village, who were at that time servants and compelled to do a good deal of labor without money for the petty village nobility and the priests, and consequently had not enough time to till their own soil, decided to send a delegation up to the court of the Queen herself, whose benevolence was widely spread and believed in among the peasants of Slovakia. So they send up this delegation to ask the good Queen to grant them every Thursday a release from all labor for these petty magnates and the priests.

But after the hard journeys which took days and days, and after coming to the beautiful big city of Vienna, and finally being admitted for the presence of her majesty, the Queen herself, the simple peasants became slightly confused, so that the stuttering spokesman who was supposed to present their case, managed only to say these words:

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“Your Highness, we are from the Village N. We work very hard for the magnates and the priests. Will Your Highness grant us every Thursday in the week?” And Her Highness said: Yes, they will have a Thursday every week. But they had to continue working just the same for their Lords. Because they didn't ask for a release from work, but asked only for every Thursday!

So when they wanted to tease the Slovak peasants, they would say, “Well, you asked for Thursday every week, and you got it.”

You see the spokesman he was stuttering and he didn't know what to say to this gracious Queen with all her beautiful robes sitting so elegantly on her throne.

But the way I explained it to myself, these village peasants went to Vienna, and when they got to Vienna, they saw there was no chance to see their Queen, and they came back to their village and told this story that the Queen granted them a Thursday every week. I suppose they became muddled, and timid, and decided to tell the villagers this story about their audience with the Queen, so as not to appear to have entirely failed.

But anyway there is a sequence to the story. After the Queen supposedly got word about this confused petition, she granted the children of the villagers every week a free Thursday from school. In fact I never went to school on Thursday. And this custom was preserved until 1918, and no children had to go to school on Thursdays. 3 11. Well, this is really based on partial truth. I mean all the Hungarian legends are. But I tell you about this one... This one has been printed. Anyone can use it, but no one can claim the authorship, for it grew up from the people. It has been printed in childrens’ school books, and I remember hearing the teacher read it to us in school, the lower grade school.

It dates back to prior to 1848, and there was then still serfdom in Hungary.

In a certain village, there lived a petty gentryman, a sort of squire. He was a very good-hearted, generous fellow, but he loved his wine, and he really could afford to drink for he

had vineyards and they grew very famous grapes. One just could not blame him that every once in a while he would drink a few glasses to much and that would prevent him from going to church and listening to the minister's sermon.

The minister, on the other hand, was a very sober fellow who really had it in for, what shall I say, men who really preferred their wine to God's word. At first in private conversations he used to represent these petty magnate for his, what shall I say, his un-Christian habit. But when he realized that his words, although they were listened to, were unheeded, he decided to bring the matter before the public.

And so, one day, when the squire wasn't drunk and went to church, what did the sober-minded minister do? He delivered the sermon directed against drunkards, and especially against drunkards 4 who get drunk on Sunday and miss their church services.

And he said very tactfully: “I don't want to point my finger at the person who does that in this village, but all of you know who it may be.”

Of course there was a general chuckling. Now our squire was a very proud person. He left the church in a state of indignation, and he called in his coachman, and he said to him:

“Listen, John! Here before you, I make a solemn vow never to enter that church again, nor ever to listen to that minister preaching until we get a new clergyman for our village. But if ever you should find me listening to that minister, I order you to put me on the “... you know, what do you call that...there's a very good Hungarian word for it: Deres...it sort of looks like a bench which they use for flogging of servants who are disobedient to their masters...yes, a “pillary”, or whipping bench. And so here the squire was ordering his servant to put him on the whipping bench and give him 25 lashes, if he was ever caught listening to that minister again.

Well, after a few months elapsed, a very dear friend of our squire in another village, happened to die. The squire went off to witness the funeral services. So there he was and

listened to the sermon of one minister, and then another minister delivered also a very sad speech which made him begin to weep. He was so much overcome by grief that he didn't even recognize that the speech that made him weep was really delivered by the minister of his own village.

As they were riding home, he asked the coachman: “Tell me, John, who is that minister who delivered that sad and beautiful oration?”

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And John say, “Oh, it was our own dear Minister X.”

“Come on,” said the squire. “Get a rod...” (I mean, when you cut off from a tree a stick and it bends...yes, a switch...” and give me those 25 lashes.”

That is the end of the story. It was printed for children for that reason that here was a nobleman who, if even he was accidently guilty, he kept his promise. He had the coachman give him 25 lashes. See, he was a man of his word. And the story meant to teach children the value of a word of honour, I suppose.

[111?]. There was a nobleman in Hungary, who was so much in love with his cook, that he would never never eat anywhere else except at home. But as much as he was pleased with her cooking, he was just as much displeased with her temper. Because she really had a viscious temper.

Every once in a while, at the slightest provocation, or no provocation, she would just start banging around the pots and pans and the lids and simply declared that that day she's not going to cook “and you can go out and eat in the restaurant and catch an indigestion!”

Moreover, she would even threaten to leave him, leave him for good. So the poor nobleman, being so much in love with her cooking, lived in a constant fear of losing her, and with that the delicious meals she used to prepare for him.

Well, this life went on for years, and it wore him out quite a bit, so one day he simply decided that he was going to make an end to her constant threats and tricks, and tie her down so she 6 simply won't be able to get away from him, and will be forced to cook for him.

Of course, he could do this only in one way: by marrying her. And after that, of course, she won't be able to say to him, “Well, I'm not going to cook today,” or “'m going to leave you.”

The loyal wife will be forced to obey him and cook his meals and that's all there's to it!

So to the great amazement of his other wealthy colleagues (many of them were members in the Hungarian parliament) he married her, willing to face even social ostracism for the sake of a good meal!

Well, after the wedding day, an usual, he went out to perform his duties, and noontime, was rushing back, thinking, “Ah, now at least he will find a peaceful home and good food on the table.”

[-?]And those good meals will go on forever and forever.

He came home, and behold, the stove was unlit, no food on the table. So he goes to his wife and says, “Well,” says, “what about the food? Didn't you cook today?”

And what did she say? “Would you, the son of a noble family, permit your own wife to do the cooking? From now on I'm through with cooking for good, and if you want to eat, you better get for us a cook!”

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NEW YORK

FORM D Extra Comment

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NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

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SUBJECT THREE HUNGARIAN STORIES - “THE 'SEVEN-PLUM - TREE’ NOBLEMEN”

Upon being asked if there was any intrinsic difference between Slovakian and Hungarian folk-tales; in her opinion, Informant replied:

“Yes, there is definitely a difference in this way: that the heroes of Hungarian folk tales very often are noblemen, while the heroes of Slovakian folktales are usually poor artisans or peasants. And even if the hero of the Hungarian tale happens to be a peasant, he usually would seek, what shall I say, the favour of his superiors, and try to become sort of their equal, that is regard them always as benevolent masters.

On the other hand, the Slovak heros of folklore would regard their masters as their oppressors, and try to outwit or ridicule them ..you see?”

Asked the reason for this difference, Miss Vrbowska replied:

“Very simply this: that the Hungarians were the rulling nation of Hungary and most of the noblemen were Hungarian, whereas the Slovaks were, as a whole, a peasant nation without nobility...I mean, they were the subjects....”