

Frigyés Karinthy

Please Sir!

Title of the Hungarian original: Tanár úr kérem

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(The Foreword was translated by Mari Kuttna)**

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Foreword: Dream and Reality

All Karinthy's writings have the violent, blinding brilliance of a spluttering Christmas sparkler. He wrote several thousand sketches, hundreds of stories, a few novels and two volumes of poetry. He experimented with literary forms and techniques: plays, philosophical studies, anecdotes, reviews, articles. But no matter what he wrote, his message was always as fresh and sensitive as the first flash of the idea which inspired it. One could say that his real medium was the idea, the instant spark.

An outline of some of his ideas is enough to show that he was among the bravest of writers. In looking at the world, his eyes always caught the cobwebs, the lies, and he wrote with the startled impatience of the man who wants to clean up everything at once.

His bitter-sweet material, his pain-killing drug, was youth: its dreams, its shining, snow-white, stain-resistant faith; the beauty, clumsiness, the splendour and the failure which is the essence of youth. Sooner or later, every writer writes about youth; but

Karinthy never really leaves it alone, he comes back to it in his books again and again, to that wonderful realm which haunts one's dreams with a recurrent feeling that the best of life is past.

Just before his death, in his last book, he wrote: "All my life I had a vague feeling that I must get something done, that I should go back for it. I have left something out, and this something is of the greatest importance... This nagging, urging command often came. But what was it, this thing I should have done?"

Karinthy's underlying assumption is that youth accepts no compromise. But it doesn't accept the law of gravity, either: gravity which weighs dreams and flights of the spirit down to earth. He describes things with a double vision, in such a way as to emphasize their twofold existence: the greatest matters appear minute when circumstances change; things that are sublime can be ungainly, the solemn can be clumsy and often funny. The secret of his effects of surprise is that he used both kinds of material: the dream, and always, shimmering through the dream, reality.

Some of Karinthy's notebooks were found after his death. In these he jotted down his first ideas, whenever he used one, he crossed it out at once. But even the ones which are left undeveloped are splendid as promises.

One such jotting reads: "Humour is the whole truth." This might have served as the motto for *Please Sir!*, one of the world's unforgettable, unfading books. Unfading, in spite of the fifty years which have elapsed, and in spite of a series of educational reforms. It reaches to the raw centre, the never-congealed experience, through which we have all passed at the time of our greatest sensitivity, in the state of highest tension, in our teens.

For is there anyone who has never crept along silent, deserted school corridors, when classes had already begun, who had never been struck by the dark terror of being fatally, irrevocably late? And is there anyone who does not recall the deadly, frozen silence before opening an exam paper, when the one subject not properly covered turned out to be the compulsory question? And who did not, especially in Hungarian schools where examination is carried out by oral tests, try to shrink behind his desk, become annihilated, step out from life just this once, while the teacher was rustling his notebook to call the next to be examined? And who has never tried to explain a school report at home, and who has never been tempted to sell a textbook second-hand, at a time when pocket-money seemed far more desirable than a grammar?

These were the great moments of life; and Karinthy, even in his early work, is a grand master of prose. He does not have to set the scene-there is never a superfluous word - we are in the thick of it at once, at explosion point. Every situation he creates chokes the reader in a suddenly tightened noose of memory.

All his props are terrifyingly authentic: the unpleasant, arrogant clichés of the A- essay, and its sibling, the naive, stupid, honest C+. Last year's Natural History, too, which could be sold, if only page 178 were not missing, and if the moustache-trainer on the walrus could be rubbed out. The sense of exam funk is totally convincing, as is the relief when it is all over; the countless exculpatory lies, the compromising scrawls on the blackboard-his entire armoury of familiar objects, familiar feelings.

He never spends more than a quick line or so on anything, for the inner discipline of his narrative dictates precision. But Karinthy can evoke characters in a sentence or two - Neugebauer, the Man Who Failed, or Mr. Schwicker, who failed him... This is genuine

sleight of hand, the inimitable dexterity of the great portrait painters, to select from a hundred facts and details the one which is eerily characteristic and completely significant, the one which reveals all. Two such masterpieces emerge when the Good Student and the Bad Student are tested.

But the author does not merely portray these stumbling, gawky, funk-ridden, eternally self-exculpating youngsters. His dream, his ideal, is the reckless, wild, uncompromising and aspiring spirit of youth which rises to accuse his own manhood: why was I not the first to reach the South Pole, why was it not I who invented the aeroplane? why did I not lead my country to the barricades? The brightness of these regrets shines through the jokes, the marks, the A- and C+ essays of Please Sir!; this longing emerges in a faint, distant glimmer. And between the lines, there is the tragic realization that the whole truth turns into humour all too easily: the brave dreams, the wild pathos, the great desires are part of real life. But when the dream is embodied, the flesh is revealed as mortal, the body is clumsy, the dream glimmers too far away and the limbs are suspended from the gymnasium bars. "Hanging from the Apparatus" is probably the finest sketch in the book.

But each story illuminates, moment by moment, the secret passage from reality into the other dimension, fantasy; and it illuminates the aching, painful closeness of the two. And during this illumination, his humour releases our ingrained fears in sly, wicked laughter.

Endre Illés

Introduction

I stole into the building across the yard. It must be around half past nine: the passages now ring empty and deserted, only now and then, as I pass each closed door, do my ears catch a low humming, and all of a sudden my heart sinks deep inside me and very seriously. On the second floor, to the right, next to the common room, is the classroom of 6b, its door thrown open to let in a little fresh air. I take off my hat and thrusting it in my pocket, I warily slink through the door, bowing towards the teacher's desk while looking the other way, and creep noiselessly to the back of the room, where, in the back row, next to the stove, there is an empty seat. The master never looked towards me, so it's all right. He dismissed the whole interruption with a wave of his hand, thinking that I belong to this class: he is apparently under the impression that I am the boy who went out five minutes ago. Noiselessly, I walk round the spittoon and the litter-bin. I step over half a bread-roll, and turning carefully, I sit down in the last desk. A sandy-haired, freckled boy is sitting next to me - Why, yes! Oh, yes! I nearly cry out loud with joy and surprise and happiness: Why, it's Büchner! What-ho, Büchner! Lord, what an inconceivably long time since I last saw him! The places I have seen, the horrible dreams I have had, all this time. But now I'm home again, back in good, old genuine Reality, my own real life, which I had left so reluctantly. Ah, I'm home again: this is me - Frigyes Karinthy, of Form 6b. Why, of course, what a silly dream I've had, to be sure. Suddenly, all the familiar smells come back to me. I am trembling as I reach into my desk and pull out an exercise-book. For a moment it seems as if my eyes were playing tricks on me, but then I read distinctly - my name - then '6b' and - 'Hungarian Exercises'.

"Ah, Büchner, my old friend: How are you, dear carrot-tops?" Büchner gives me a somewhat puzzled look. He can see no reason, he means to say, why I should be so happy. Well, and how could he? Psht! he says, with a shove in my ribs and an angry sidelong look. Why, of course: here I am, making all this racket when there's this oral test going on in front of the blackboard - ("Who are the fellows being questioned? Ah, it's Steinmann and Bódog.") - and *he* is going to smart for it. But I say, Büchner, old top - Why, I can't restrain my delight, don't you see. Büchner says he can't understand how anyone can be such a bloody fool, he says. Why on earth are you grinning like a lunatic, you know very well he's got it in for me, and now he believes it's me fooling around and that's what you're finding so ruddy funny. Why can't you keep quiet, anyway? Psht! Not so loud!

Now listen, Büchner, old pal - I've had such a stupid dream, and I'm now so damn glad to realise it's been only a dream. I dreamed that I was no longer sixteen, and many years had passed and all kinds of muddled and messy things happened, you know, and it all turned out quite different from the way I now picture to it. You know I dreamed that I'd passed my finals - just imagine! ("And you're *happy* it was just a dream, you blinking idiot? I wish to goodness I'd got over it already!") - Well, as I said, I'd passed my finals and entered the School of Life, which Mr. Lenkei talks so much about. Now, I can't tell you exactly how many classes of the School of Life I had passed but it had very many, I'm sure, and it was ("Psht! Don't shout! He may look this way and call me. He'll do that, the way he's picking on me.") - Well so, so it was that I'd turned twenty-seven and happened to be sitting in a café and was not feeling at all happy - fancy that! To think how I've longed to be twenty-seven lately... Well, as I said, I was sitting in a café, and I *had* become a writer, as I've been wanting to become one, and I'd published lots of books, and knew Sándor Bródy personally, and would be chatting with Ferenc Molnár like anything, and be mobbed for autographs and all that; and yet - just imagine - in spite of all that, I wasn't happy. Isn't that strange? In short, it turned out that once you'd put the final exam behind you, things weren't getting as good as you'd figured they would be. Now, as I was sitting in that café - it was raining and everything looked sad and gloomy - then and there, in my dream, I started thinking about things, and it occurred to me that it was just not possible that I was twenty-seven and that everything was working out the way it did. And then, in a flash, it all came back to me about my class and I remembered that, as a matter of fact, I had plenty of work to do: I was supposed to do the figure for geometry, brush up the history, and meanwhile I've got to think of my future - the future, which would be just wonderful, since, after all, I was still only sixteen. In short, having carefully considered all things, it became quite clear to me that I must have been dreaming and moreover the dream I was seeing was not a beautiful and glorious dream, but a rather unpleasant and imperfect one. It then occurred to me that the best thing for me to do was to try hard and wake up and go through the geometry and then come to school. I pressed my head against the rain-splashed window and made up my mind that I would look at my real life, here in the secondary school, and see it in quite a different light. I would not think of it as all that miserable any longer, full of boredom, and depressing, but I would keep my eyes open to discover in it all that is amusing and fun, pleasant memories and being young and that I would take a better look than ever before at everything that I can now see clearly from the distance of time, and would once again show it to you, dear friends, pupils in various Secondary Schools, and remind you how colourful and weird and alive it all is, how full of memories, and full of hope.

(1913)

Seven a.m.

Krrr... Brrr...

What's that? Wha-what's that? What's this infernal ringing? Is it a fire? It must be the fire brigade... I ought to tell Erzsi to put out the light. The cupboard must have caught fire.

Krrr... Brrr...

No!... it's the alarm-clock... It's the alarm-clock ringing... but then it must be half past six now... Time to get up.

That's impossible - I only turned in a short while ago! What day is it today?

Wednesday? Hungarian, German, Maths, Geography, P. T. That makes five. It's all right. In that case I can sleep another five minutes yet.

Hungarian, German, Maths, Geography... Whew! I haven't done my map yet... I've sketched it in pencil, and now I ought to go over the Frontiers of Hungary with India ink... Phew! I ought to go over the Geography and Hungarian. I ought to get up. There's to be a test today... Dere's to be some testioning... teshoning... do-day...

Lord! What's this? You aren't going to fall asleep again? You can't do that, you know. There's going to be a test... The teacher - Mr. Mákosy - and the Frontiers of Hungary...

"Now look, Bauer, you want to keep cool, you know. Want to keep cool, Bauer. Mustn't do anything in a hurry, you know... Avoid acting in a harum-scarum manner. This getting-out-of-bed business can be managed with your keeping your shirt on, so to speak - managed with a steady hand - after due preparation... Why, even as he led his troops in a suicidal assault against the besieging Turks, *Zrínyi* didn't charge out of bed just like that! He made appropriate preparations to do so, of course..." "Sir, please, sir, I *have* done the homework..."

"You don't need to stick your leg out from under the blanket, into this cold air... Of course, socks are important when you want to get up... But you want to proceed with caution, Bauer. Proceed with caution... That's right... You pull them nicely back under the blanket... You say you got to stick your legs out for that?... Nonsense. You can pull them on under the blanket just as easily... There, you see?" ... "Phew! There's a rush of cold air on the side now... Ahoy, sir, the bed's sprung a leak! Oh, Captain Nemo, sir, she is going down... The leak's got to be stopped... Ah, that's good."

That's done at last. Now I've got them on. Difficult piece of work, it was. Let's have a few minutes rest now. I've turned the corner, anyway, now I've only got to put on the shoes and the clothes, so I can take a few minutes rest after this effort. It's vital for me to have some rest because I am sick. "Dear Sir, - I hereby certify that, owing to an indisposition, my son cannot attend classes this morning. - Yours respectfully, Károly Bauer."

That's not likely, though. All the same, perhaps I ought to go over the Geography and I ought to go over that thing with India ink... But why should I get up for that?... For one thing, I read through it once yesterday, and I'm going to get up in a few minutes, anyway, and take a look, so it makes no difference now. Silly. Besides, the whole thing is only one page all told. And I'm indisposed, to boot. Not only will I go over that thing, but I shall repeat the stuff right here in bed; I'll repeat it by heart, the way I read through it last night... For it is not to laze away my time that I'm still in bed - No, sir. I'm lying here

in order to revise the Geography... It is vitally urgent business that's keeping me in bed... It must be seen to at once, this lying-abled business, for I suppose it'll be seven o'clock now...

Well, then. Hungary borders, in the south, on the Danube and Serbia... and the Rumanian... Dalmatian... and Serbia... and the capital of Serbia.., and the Serbia of capital...

"Start afresh, Bauer, you poor blighter." "Sir, please, sir, I *have* prepared my lesson. I have learned it, but I have forgotten it." "None of your cheek, Bauer. You are being tested, and you've jolly well got to say something. You are rather weak on Serbia, and the school-report conference is sitting already. Shut up, Bauer."

"Yes sir, the school-report conference is in session, on the Serbian frontier, and deliberating. They're only waiting for the commander to arrive and then the battle will begin straight away. Well, what *is* the capital of Bosnia? Shut up, Bauer. Sit down here, next to this gun. Now you are Chief Gunner and it's up to you to defend the Hungarian frontier."

Oh, all right. If it's me who's got to defend it, then let them give me a thousand fine, seasoned cowboys, each of them armed with a movie camera. Then I'll show them, I will. "Forward, ye valiant men! Up and at 'em! Give Bauer a horse!"

"Now!... Our forces are already advancing into Serbian territory... I think, Mr. Headmaster, this fellow Bauer, after all, *is* the right man to defend the frontiers of Hungary. He's had bad marks in Mathematics, true, but he can do as many as twenty eagle-wings on the gym bars - the very thing that's required of him as Commander-in-Chief. Now go in, Bauer, dear boy... Go and take Serbia... It's your only chance to improve your bad marks."

"It's all right with me, sir. Do you think my general's uniform will do, sir? So. Well - Follow me, boys! You, Mr. Mákossy, sir - you shall be my A.D.C... . But be sure you get my orders right and keep your mouth shut... That's right. Now get on my horse behind me and intercept all bullets flying this way... I'll give you what for. None of your cheek, sir! Sir, you haven't prepared anything, sir. Well, what is the capital of Serbia? Can you tell me that? Of course you don't know. Well, the capital of Serbia is Budapest - Yes - Because I'm going to occupy and annex it to Hungary. Sir, you sit down, sir. You get a bad mark from me, sir."

"Now where *is* Serbia? Where on earth is it? It must be *somewhere*, I am sure, but I can't find it. Oh, oh, sir, please, sir, I can't find Serbia, and if I can't find it, how can I occupy it?"

"Of course you can't find it, you rascal. How could you when you've forgotten to outline the frontiers of Hungary on the map in India ink? Because you've failed to do so, one cannot see the point where Serbia begins. Our troops are waiting at the border and daren't cross it for fear they might walk into the India ink before it's dry."

"Bauer, you blackguard, this is your doing. Just you wait! Off with your head! Off with your head! Executioner, chop his head off with that cigar-cutter. Quick!"

"Oh, oh, please, Mr. Executioner, I *have* prepared my lesson. Oh, Erzsi! Erzsi! Help!"

"Yes. What's the matter?... What! Are you still in bed? Why, it's eight o'clock now. Mr.

Bauer has already left for his office."

Golly! I've slept in again!

Phew! There'll be the devil to pay for this! Good job I've already got my socks on.

I Am Late

At eight, the day is still misty, and the chances and probabilities of the day ahead are taking shape, blurred and stumbling, in my sleepy head. Life is fraught with mortal dangers for the secondary-school boy, it is a going to war that's renewed daily for eight consecutive years; at eight o'clock sharp every morning, he dashes into the fluctuating battlefield of chance, among cunningly set traps, and fatal, decisive events. He sustains wounds and inflicts them. Sometimes he is left to bleed to death. Next day, he rises from the dead to start it all over again.

Every morning he has to have a new arsenal and a new strategy, the result of astute and infinitely complicated considerations that cover a hundred and one causes and effects.

This morning, his weapons are somewhat incomplete; therefore they have to be selected with much care.

First period - Mathematics. We have reached the subject of irrational equations, but have not yet got through the topic in the last lesson. Chances of being tested - 25 to 27 per cent. This small percentage takes account of the fact that lots of boys haven't had a chance to better their bad marks yet, and that Fröhlich is an unstable character, an unequal-tempered, weak-willed person who yesterday may have believed sincerely that he would go on with his demonstration next time, but would now, all of a sudden, and without meaning it, begin to test the boys. You have to reckon with pathological symptoms like that, which are found in the hidden recesses of the human soul.

Today being Wednesday - oh, dear - Mathematics is followed by two hours of geometrical drawing. My sepia is missing and so is my curved ruler, whereas they are going to take an inventory of them today. Guttmann has promised to give me a gamboge, and I'm going to ask him for it. Refinement of Vörösmarty's Idiom. Ah, yes, Refinement of Vörösmarty's Idiom. Yes, to be sure. I know that's the stakes for today - double or quits. I've only gone over the second part of it as yet, but we have ten minutes' recess twice before the Hungarian period. That makes twenty minutes. Now, before I get to school, I'll revise the first part in my mind as I go, which will leave me with a net gain of fifteen minutes. During that time, I'll go over the Refinement of Vörösmarty's Idiom like a whirlwind, ask Guttmann for the gamboge, and even run through the History. I can't find my exercise-book. ("Dear Sir, - Owing to a slight indisposition today, my son was unable to prepare his homework in Mathematics. Yes, Sir, the treatment of my son's delicate constitution will take quite some time, and during this time he has been advised by our family doctor to abstain from doing any work in Mathematics.")

Ah, that's nothing. That's just daydream. Impracticable fantasy. The stark reality is quite different. To face stark reality, one has to have perseverance and determination, and presence of mind. And, again, one needs that fellow Guttmann, from whose exercise-book one will copy the whole thing in a mere five minutes. Though precious little good it will be to me to have the homework ready when I don't know a bean about compound

interest. Yet if we're going to be tested, that's the subject we're going to get, and no mistake. Now stop this dreaming and be a man of action!

And now - drat it - I'd better hurry up. This gentleman who is coming the opposite direction - I usually meet him at five past eight. Now let me think. Now let me put my thoughts together, for the moment is drawing near. Well, so all I need to get hold of is some sepia and a ruler. On the other hand, there is Vörösmarty, who, as we all know, preserved our native tongue in its classic purity. His words - er - umpty-tumpty with crystal-clear perfection. What is it his words do? Good gracious, why, I don't even know *that*! Quick, I must take a look and see what it is that the poet Vörösmarty's words do with crystal-clear perfection. And Louis the Great! My sainted aunt! Oh, c'me on, stop getting everything mixed up. In words of crystalline purity Vörösmarty asked Guttmann for the gamboge. And what if Guttmann should refuse to hand it over? In that case "Dear Sir, - I beg to inform you that my son was indisposed this morning and as a result was incapable of bringing with him the gamboge." There is one more possibility left; namely, that something may catch fire. Or one of the masters may die, and the whole form be sent home after ten o'clock. Now what's this? My heart is beginning to beat again. There is not a single soul outside the school gates. The whole building is suspiciously, menacingly silent. They aren't...?

No. No!... That's impossible. After all *that* couldn't happen to me. In any case, I had better hurry.

On the first floor - silence... The walls do keep silence, echoing my footsteps.

There can be no doubt: the terrible, the unimaginable thing has happened - the class bell has gone.

Now one more chance remains: that Mr. Fröhlich may not yet be in the room. I steal through the empty corridors and tiptoe to the door.

Cautiously I press my ear against the keyhole. The bitterness of resignation curves my lips down: the monotonous unbroken silence behind the door tells me everything.

Now there is nothing more I could do. Maybe he hasn't put my name on the list yet. I open the door slowly. Mr. Fröhlich never says a word, only a cruel kind of satisfaction crosses his face as modestly and politely I drag myself to my desk. A subdued murmur of horror passes through the class. Slowly, Mr. Fröhlich takes out his watch and glances at it. I thrust my books into the drawer. Büchner, who is sitting next to me, leans over towards the blackboard, his cheeks aglow with a profound and insatiable thirst for the mathematical sciences. I alone can see his lips move slightly to left, in my direction, and I alone can hear his hissed words: -

"He's put you down as absent."

I draw my lips to right. I stare fixedly ahead; my face assumes an expression of irrepressible interest in the totality of the mathematical sciences. I mumble between my teeth: -

"Is he going on with the stuff?"

Büchner mumbles to left: -

"No. Oral test."

I Sell My Books

"Are you taking all these books with you today?" asks my father, then, seeing me nod my head with resignation, begins to lash out, in German, at the school to my aunt, who is also present. Humbugs, all of them, he says. They edit expensive and new books in which you can find nothing new, and make the parents buy them.

A fat lot I care. My only thought is to get out into the street. I turn into Múzeum Boulevard and Károly Boulevard. This is the street - a whole string of second-hand bookshops. I walk along, with the exercise-books under my arm, and in a leisurely manner, as if I was sitting at home, I leaf through the book - the crucial Book. I am an old hand at this sort of thing: on my way to school, I am in the habit of swotting my lessons up. I even write sometimes that way.

Now let me see. This is last year's Natural History, fifth edition, considerably improved and revised. I have considerably revised it myself - its back cover has parted from the parent body and disappeared. Never mind. The front cover is adorned by a geometrical drawing. Page 178, unfortunately, is missing. On the Skeleton of Man (Figure 87) - alas - I have with a very hard pencil drawn a top-hat and a pipe: I have been unable to erase these. And on the walrus, last year, when I was still a callow youth and never thought of the future - I then painted on its face a moustache-trainer in India ink! I have tried to erase it, I rubbed at it hard, true, but little use: the walrus wore through and the moustache-trainer still shows all the same. And in what moment of moral irresponsibility did it occur to me to rub sandstone powder all over page 172 until it became as thin as silk-paper? That longish, pentagonal piece which is missing from the middle of the Statistical Map of the Animal World - that's all right. I remember that one. I was then constructing an aeroplane and I needed rough paper. But I really ought not to have scalloped the Table of Contents all around - in a hard, sweaty labour - and then roll it up on a thin stick, so that it is now absolutely impossible to flatten it out: it keeps curling up.

On the whole, however, it is a very pretty book. Viewed like this, from a little distance, through half-closed eyes, it looks a very trim, tidy book. Well, I mean it has been *used* - you can see that. But for all that it's such a nice, modest-looking, decent book. The price of a new copy is 2 koronas, 70 fillérs. I'll point out to that man that if he goes over the cover with the eraser, he'll be able to sell it for a new book. He'll have cheated a little - what does it matter? If he asks about the price, I'll ask one korona; if he doesn't, but just mentions a sum, then I'll ask twenty fillérs more.

For a minute or two, I am standing in front of the shop-window, studying the terrain through the glass. He is a short old man and is now studying a picture through his spectacles. I'll let him have it for ninety fillérs. He is a serious-looking old man.

I go into the shop quickly. He is now talking to another man: as I come in, he shoots a sideways look at me, but doesn't say hello. He knows his man. Loth to disturb him, I wait patiently. I cough. Suddenly, my heart fills with an infinite sense of sad defeat. In my mind, I caress the old man's soul gently, with tearful acquiescence. Oh, you cold, callous old man, why can't you show some understanding for a poor, unhappy young student who for weeks now has been longing desperately and with flagging hope to be able to buy a little chocolate, a piece of rubber which could be made into a catapult, some of those new-style transfers, a paper building set - and money - oh, lots of money: one korona, two

- money for its own sake! You see, I do understand you, you old man. I realise - Oh, I do realise that you don't make any money out of it; that you are rather hard put to it to do this; and that this book is dirty. And, do you see, I will let you have it for 70 fillérs.

Meantime the old man continues to talk with the other man. He never speaks a word to me: he and I, we understand each other. Suddenly, he reaches his hand sideways and I place the book into it. While talking with his customer, he turns the book over between two fingers. With awful disgust, he opens it... Oh, dear... He has opened it right on the walrus, of all pages... And there is that page with the sandstone powder... I'll let him have it for sixty, hang it all.

He throws it on the table.

"It's an old edition," he says. "And it's torn. Some pages are missing."

Everything goes black before my eyes.

"This is what they use in Markó Street School," I says with fierce defiance, and choking.

"I know," he says and goes on talking to that other man. I am cut dead.

For several minutes, I am hovering hesitantly. Inhuman bitterness is pressing down upon my chest. At last, I speak.

"You can have it for fifty," I says softly.

The second-hand dealer continues to talk with his customer. His answer comes two minutes later, when I never even anticipate it.

"Forty fillérs," he says, but never looking my way.

A brief calculation. That's not enough even to buy a seat at the pictures. However, the moment is decisive. Be bold and quick, and take the plunge - After me the deluge. With an abrupt movement, I whip out my brand-new Stylistics, a book I still need.

"How much would you give for this one?"

The total of one korona and sixty fillérs is paid me at the till. Ah, he did want the Stylistics - he wanted it badly, the wretch. The devil. My Stylistics for this year - I daresay he needed it, he did. He jumped at it, snatched it from my hands, didn't leave me time to reflect.

What'll I do now?

What'll I do? What *can* I do? I clutch the money in my fist.

Tomorrow, I'll buy my Stylistics back. I'll get one korona out of Dad to buy a ruler, add that to this money and then buy the book back.

Tomorrow, I'll take on some job, addressing envelopes or laying bricks. Tomorrow, I will go and enter service as ship's boy.

Tomorrow, I'll get back my Stylistics.

The Good Student Tested

The Good Student's place is in the front row: there he sits, flanked by a boy on either side - the Good Student Steinmann. His name is something more than a mere word denoting one individual. It's a symbol. This name is known to as many fathers as there are boys in the form: "How come Steinmann can learn it?" thirty-two fathers ask thirty-two sons at home. "You'd better ask Steinmann to explain," the fathers advise, and the sons do go and ask Steinmann. Steinmann knows everything in advance, even before it has been explained. He is known to be a regular contributor to mathematical reviews, and knows mysterious words such as are taught only at the university. There are things which we other fellows know too; but the way Steinmann knows them - why, that's the certain, the only right way, the Absolute Way of knowing those things.

Steinmann is being tested.

It was a moment of extraordinary solemnity. The master has been taking an awfully long time to study his form-register - a deadly suspense vibrates through the whole class. When, at some later date, I had read the history of the Reign of Terror in France and come to the passage where those of the prisoners of the Conciergerie who have been sentenced to die are called upon to stand forth, this was how I always imagined it. The last gasp for breath in the final, lethal effort to overstrain one's brain - there are two more seconds to go: in this time, with lightning speed, each boy recites in his mind the propositions of the geometrical progression. "Sir, please, sir," you say to yourself, "I - I *have* prepared the lessons." ("Dear Sir, - I beg to inform you that, as he was feeling sick yesterday, my son was not in a position to do homework.") One boy bends over his copybook, ostrich-fashion, to avoid being seen. Another stares the teacher fixedly in the eye, trying to mesmerise him. A third, a nervy chap, this one, becomes utterly unstrung and shuts his eyes: let the axe fall on his neck. In the rear row, Englmayer goes into full hiding behind Deckmann's back: he's not here, thank you, and hasn't heard about anything; let them put his name down among the absent pupils, put him on the list of the dead and let him be forgotten - peace on his ashes. He has no desire to join the battle of public life.

The teacher turns two pages. Maybe he has reached the letter K. Altmann who at the beginning of this term had his family name changed to the Hungarian Katona, now bitterly regrets this rash act. Soon, however, he draws a deep breath: suddenly, the teacher stops leafing through the pages and shuts his register.

"Steinmann," he calls, quite softly and surprisingly.

A deep sigh of relief. An atmosphere of solemnity. A sense of the extraordinary. Steinmann rises quickly - the chap next to him jumps up and stands modestly and politely to one side while the Good Student clambers out of the desk: like some body-guard, he is a silent and secondary participant in a momentous event.

The teacher is solemn, too. He sits on his chair sideways, putting his fingertips reflectively together. The Good Student proceeds to the blackboard and picks up the chalk. The teacher reflects further. So the Good Student picks up the sponge and starts to wipe the blackboard quickly. The act is charged with immeasurable dignity and self-confidence: it is meant to convey that he has plenty of time, he doesn't have to rack his brains, he does not funk; that he is always prepared and that, even while an oral test is pending, he tries to do something useful for the community - indeed has the time to think of public neatness and the peaceful evolution of mankind - and wipes clean the

blackboard.

"Let me see," says the teacher, drawling his meditative words, "We will find an interesting problem..."

The Good Student coughs; he does it politely and with infinite understanding. Yes, of course. Some interesting problem. Something to suit the interesting situation.

As he now gazes at the teacher, seriously and with warmth, he resembles a lovely countess who has just been proposed to by a count, and who, before replying, looks with profound understanding and sympathy into the count's eyes, well aware that this look enralls him and that he already senses with tremulous joy that the answer is going to be a favourable one.

"Let us take a cone," says the Count.

"A cone," says Steinmann, the Countess. But even this is said with so much understanding and intelligence as to make it clear that nobody else knows how very real a cone it is that we are taking. I, Steinmann, the foremost student of this class, am taking a cone, having been charged by the community as the best qualified person to perform this act. As yet I do not know for what purpose I have taken this cone, but you may rest assured, all of you, that whatever happens to this cone, *I* shall be there to tackle it.

"Or rather," says the teacher abruptly, "let's take a truncated pyramid."

"A truncated pyramid," echoes the Good Student, even more intelligently, if possible, than before. Why, his relations with a truncated pyramid are just as firm and friendly, if condescending, as they are with a cone. What, to him, is a truncated pyramid? Ah, you can't possibly mislead him: he knows very well that a truncated pyramid is just as much a pyramid as any normal pyramid - an ordinary pyramid such as even an Englmayer is capable of visualising - the only difference being that another pyramid has been cut off from it.

The performance is brief. This is a colloquy conducted in clipped sentences: the teacher and the Good Student understand each other. By and by, they drift into an intimate dialogue - the rest of us have long ceased to follow them. It is now a matter between those two - two kindred souls communing with each other before our reverent eyes, in the ethereal atmosphere of differential equations. In the middle of a sentence, it strikes the teacher that they ought not to be conversing at all, that this is supposed to be a test, a judgment on the pupil's progress. The Good Student doesn't have to finish the sentence. Why finish it? Has there remained a morsel of doubt about his ability to finish it?

Modestly and demurely, the Good Student sits down at his desk. The next minute, he listens with keen interest to the deplorable stuttering of the next one to be tested, A particular word spoken by the latter sends a sarcastic and discreet smile flitting across his face, and furtively he tries to catch the teacher's eye, hoping to exchange another flicker of understanding. This sarcastic smile is designed to indicate that he is fully aware that the blighter's talking perfect rot, and that only he knows what ought to have been said.

The Bad Student Tested

No, he couldn't possibly have guessed that it was coming today. Ah well, he did have it coming to him, of course, he did. What's more, he even dreamed of something like this last night - but in his dream he was tested in Hungarian. True, it seemed as though Mr. Fröhlich was in charge of Hungarian too. In his dream he dispatched the whole matter promptly - he answered questions about parallel lines and was awarded an Alpha Minus.

When his name is called, he cannot believe his ears. He looks round: some miracle may yet come to pass; maybe it was just hallucination, a nightmare, that he heard *his* name called, and presently he will awake from this dream. He now scoops up a lot of exercise-books from his desk and, while walking down the short lane between the rows of desks, is turning over in his head: "Ayplusbeebyayminusbee equals aysquareminusbee-square." He's going to be asked that. He feels sure that's what he's going to be asked. "If he asks anything else, I'll change schools and pass a supplementary exam and then take up a military career."

Meanwhile he stumbles and drops his exercise-books. While he is busy picking them off the floor, the usual laughter - this time unbanned, for the Bad Student is beyond the social pale and may therefore be sneered at freely - rings out behind his back.

The teacher sits down and puts his notebook on his table. He looks at the boy. Convulsively, the Bad Student keeps repeating in his mind, "Ayplusbee..." He picks up the chalk. The teacher looks at him.

"Have you prepared anything?" he asks him.

"Sir, yes, sir, I have."

Oh, yes. Why, of course he has. Even the convict who's been sentenced to death prepares himself for what is to come: he receives the extreme unction and has his hair cut off.

"If so, then write."

The Bad Student turns to face the blackboard.

"Beesquare minus plusminus secondroot beeminusfourayceebytwoay."

Submissively the Bad Student begins to write, echoing the figures. He keeps writing, and sees the proposition just as he saw it at home when he fell asleep over it without gathering the faintest idea of what the whole thing was supposed to mean. Yes, he has some vague idea that this is a quadratic equation. But as to how it'll work out... Well...

He writes at a leisurely pace, a fine calligraphic hand. He thickens the stem of the figure 4. He carefully wipes off a bit from the fraction line - for this, he makes a special trip to the window to get the sponge. You gain time, with this. The bell may ring in the meantime. Or something may happen. His performance on the platform isn't going to be a protracted affair, anyway. Now he'll just chalk up this one thing more, and then lay on the sign of equality, taking his time. Yes, so far he's been doing it like other, better, beings; like any good student. Now he still adds " a^2 ". In the military school (the thought flashes across his mind) you have to get up awfully early in the morning. But then they may make you a lieutenant in the end. You may get posted to Fiume.

All this while he has been writing in a leisurely manner, and he's not through with it yet.

An outsider who might happen to be watching the performance might be led to suppose that this is a good student proving his mettle at the blackboard. For one who is in the know, however, to see a fellow taking such infinite care in delineating the tail-piece of the figure 2 is significant enough. Deadly silence reigns. The teacher sits stock still. Now one simply has to say something.

"The equation of the second degree..." the Bad Student begins intelligently, narrowing his eyes and watching the blackboard intently.

"The equation of the second degree..." he repeats, in the manner of one who repeats his words not because he doesn't know what he's going to say but rather because from the vast storehouse of things he has to say he wishes to select and weigh that which is most correct.

The teacher, however - oh, he is only too well aware of the meaning of all this.

"Call that being ready?" he snaps, harshly and dryly.

"Sir, please, sir, I *have* prepared the lesson."

Now *that* he did get out with lightning speed, in a voice that was trembling with murderous defiance, with desperate rebellion.

The teacher (with sweeping gesture): "Well, let's have it, then."

The Bad Student draws a deep breath.

"The equation of the second degree is derived from that of the first degree by multiplying the equation as a whole..."

Now he's talking. He is saying something. He was expecting to be interrupted in the middle of his second sentence - and steals a glance at the teacher. The latter, however, stares, his face set, neither approving nor denying him. He does not speak. Yet the Bad Student knows very well that what he is saying cannot possibly be right. Why on earth doesn't the teacher say something, then? This is terrible. His voice begins to falter. Suddenly, he perceives that the teacher is picking up his notebook. At this, he turns pale and rattles away at a dizzying clip:

"The equation of the second degree is derived from that of the first by... Sir, please, sir, I *have* done the homework."

"Ernő Polgár," the teacher announces in a loud voice.

What's that?

Is someone else already being called? Is he himself finished and done for? What's this? Is it just a dream?

"The equation of the second degree..." he begins anew, menacingly.

Ernő Polgár climbs briskly the platform and has already picked up the other piece of chalk at the other end of the board.

"The equation... Sir, please, sir, I *have* done my homework."

He receives no reply. He now stands there, alone in the crowded classroom, on an island. He doesn't go back to his place yet, for no one has told him so far to get back to his place. He feels hollow and disreputable, a social outcast. He hasn't been told, no, not a word. His oral hasn't ended yet. Should he now walk back all the way between the rows of desks? No, he prefers to hang on here, looking silly, his faltering hands messing about with the wreck of the unfinished equation like an aviator who has crash-landed going over the cracked cylinders of his engine. Meanwhile the other boy has begun to speak. He is talking about some parallel lines. That too sounds so odd, so strange... like everything else they have been studying here for years... studying cheerfully and buoyantly and boisterously... and of which he has never understood anything, having coasted along on the few detached sentences he has managed to pick up.

And so he stands and stands, hoping against hope and politely listening to what the other boy is saying. Now and then he nods approval so as to indicate, in this way at least, that he *has* done his homework, that he "knows his stuff." At times, he even timidly chimes in, indulging in the self-deception that the question has been addressed to *him*, but only in a low voice so he won't be sent back to his place. Now he discreetly stops, looks and listens. He leans forward. He takes part in the show, passes the chalk, and dances attendance in general on the other boy. He even prompts the fellow, loudly, with the design, not of helping, but of showing the teacher that he prompts and therefore knows his stuff. In a word, he refuses to give up.

Suddenly, his strength ebbs away. He stops short and once again thinks of the military school. Like distant words the noises around him reverberate in his gloomy mind... the crackling of chalk... Faces become blurred, and, for a moment, a clear vision of the Infinite looms before him, just as the other boy has stated that it is the place where parallels meet. He sees the Infinite... Big, bluish thing... a small house bearing, on one side, at the top, the inscription "Entrance to the Fourth Infinite." Inside the building there are clothes-horses and on these the Parallel Lines hang up their hats, after which they enter the room, sit down in their forms and cheerfully greet one another. The Parallel Lines, yes. *They* meet in the Class of the Infinite, of Understanding and Kindness and Brotherly Love - the class he will never reach. That "upper form" which, owing to "unsatisfactory progress," he will never achieve.

The Man Who Failed

The Man Who Failed has been lingering in front of the door of the staffroom for a long time. All the boys have gone home by now; the masters, too, have been leaving one by one. "Goodbye, sir," he had said politely, bowing his head, some twenty times running. He is waiting for Mr. Schwicker. Oh, yes, he's been waiting for Mr. Schwicker since eleven o'clock: he is going to talk to him briefly and calmly and in a cool tone. "Sir," he will say to Mr. Schwicker; "the life of a human being is at stake. I want to prevent a catastrophe. I suppose that you do not want it to happen, either, sir. You know very well how the thing had happened. - Let us speak openly, man to man. On that occasion - yes, you know when that occasion was - when I referred to Henry VIII, I was perfectly aware myself that it was not Henry VIII but Richard III and would have corrected myself the next moment, because Henry VIII had just somehow slipped out. However, you - and I do not want to censure you; I am just establishing the bare fact - you immediately told me to sit down. Whether you were acting in accordance with law and custom, we shall not ask: I want this affair to be settled privately between you and me. We will go into the common

room here, and you will strike out this unsatisfactory mark as well as the word 'deferred' below it. When that's done, we shall part like men. You may be surprised to hear me speak like this - Well, let us say no more about it. That you and your colleagues have misjudged my character - I have my reticent disposition to thank for that, I know. I have had no reason to open my mind so far. Besides, what could I have talked about in an environment that could not understand me?" This is what the Man Who Failed is going to say; and Mr. Schwicker, having listened to him in amazement, will stop abruptly, look with a profound understanding into his eyes, then, with a blush, shake his hand. "Neugebauer," Mr. Schwicker will say; "you have said enough. I understand you. Let me see that school-report of yours. You have taken me for a cold-hearted man. However, I have been unaware of the true qualities of the man I have had to deal with, Neugebauer."

Yes, that is the way the Man Who Failed is going to talk to Mr. Schwicker. Why, then, does the Man Who Failed draw back in alarm every time the door is opened? It is now getting on to two o'clock and he promised to be at home by eleven o'clock, bringing his school-report. Oh, how he wishes Mr. Schwicker would come soon. Or does he? Why, he doesn't want to go home at all. Has he got a home, the Man Who Failed?

But here comes Mr. Schwicker... Yes, he is now talking over his shoulder - it's impossible to address him right now. No, this isn't the moment, either: he is now walking towards the staircase. Go on, follow him and speak to him as he goes down the stairs. No, not on the stairs - you can't do that: it's not good manners. You'll have your chance outside the porter's lodge. However, the porter is standing at his cubby-hole, so that's off - you can't do it here... But - ho! In another minute he'll have left the building and then...

"Sir, please, sir... Please, sir..."

"Well, what is it? What do you want?"

"If you please, sir - er - It says here..."

"What's the matter? What's your name?"

"Neugebauer."

"Ah, yes. You failed the exam. Well, go home, my boy, and prepare for your second go in the autumn."

"Sir, yes, sir."

"A little studying during the vacation won't harm you."

Neugebauer is grinning politely.

"Sir, yes, sir. Good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye."

The Man Who Failed bows and scrapes, then starts walking along the boulevard. There is no point in his walking there, for he has nowhere to go. His recent interview with Mr. Schwicker has left behind not disappointment, but only a dull, lethargic sort of feeling. Was it not obvious from the first that it would turn out like this, after all? He did not *mean* to see Mr. Schwicker. What's he got to do with these people, anyway? What else

remains to be done? Why, yes. There are those few streets he's going to walk down - several shops - a few wry, virile thoughts about the folly of existence and the vileness of the human race... Then that trifling business. Should he leave a note? What for? Perhaps a few lines, something to this effect: "Better to be the first man in Utica than the second in Rome..." Mmph. Was it in Utica that Caesar said that? No, he isn't sure he said that there... That place was the scene of something else - he knew, but has forgotten what it was... He will write this: "Better to be second in death than first in life..." Yes, that is undoubtedly a very fine sentence, though he understands little of what it actually means. Never mind, *they* will understand it... the wretches... Well, so they should. Better to be first in the grave...

A little rainbow-coloured cloud vibrates before the eyes of the Man Who Failed. His heart is in his mouth, and suddenly realises that all the time he has been thinking these thoughts he has been singing almost aloud the tenor part of the march of the speech-day gym display, which he had learnt by heart:

*Arise, ye loyal sons of th' nee-ayshun,
Take the arena, take the field -
Tacka-tha-feelda, tacka-tha-feeld!*

He has been singing it, skipping along and dashing his oilcloth bag against the houses as he went. Moreover, he's had a disturbing feeling, an idea of having forgotten to do something, something which has to be arranged before anything else. What was it? oh, dear, what was it? Yet, this morning, he resolved firmly to... A glass ruler? No. Steam-turbine?... No. He can't even dream of that, for the time being - until he has raised the five koronas - and when will that be, Oh Lord! The first day of next month, at the earliest... Oh, he remembers it - *A pencil-sharpener...* and - and one more thing - yes, *mustard-sausage!*

Mustard-sausage! His mouth waters at the thought. Hasn't the thing a quaint name! What on earth can it be? It's a brown, gnarly sort of thing, hanging in the delicatessen - must be heavenly. Something that's both mustard and sausage. That's off, for the time being. You can't have everything at once... Jellied trouts - that's a dream for the future. How much money have I got - let me see. That's eight and three, then six sixpences, one fillér - maybe one could palm it off for a sixpenny bit. Altogether, little less than three koronas.

Two minutes later, he has bought himself the pencil-sharpener, and in another two minutes the Man Who Failed is inside the delicatessen. "I want thirty fillérs' worth of that," he says, and as he points it at the particular goods his dirty small finger is trembling and he feels a lump in his throat. Suddenly, he is seized with fatal recklessness, a heady resolve. "And I want a quarter pound of cooking chocolate... That'll do, I think... Also, some Gruyère, for twenty... I want twenty-five fillérs' worth of that red thing... Salmon?... I want some of that, too..."

They do up each item neatly and he lets them do it, although he knows very well that there is no need for it, as he is going to open it all under the nearest doorway. Two koronas and ten... Here you are... He gets several sixpenny pieces back.

In the doorway, he opens the packages and tucks them all into his pockets. He begins with the Gruyère: he breaks big lumps off it, in his pocket, and shoves them into his mouth with sudden jerks of his hand. It almost makes him choke and he turns purple. After that, he polishes off the mustard-sausage... then, the salmon... It feels as if there

were rocks in his stomach. Never mind - let it all go. The chocolate comes next. Ah, this is good; it's warm and sweet and crumbling. That's finished, too. But his stomach feels terribly heavy, so now he ought to have something light... something refreshing. "How much is that orange?" It's expensive, of course, the last of the season. Doesn't matter. What else is left? He still has nine pennies - what could he buy with that? "Give me some honey crunch, for nine pence."

And now he is walking along here: the Man Who Failed, walking along Nefelejcs utca - Forget-Me-Not Street. How did he get here? It doesn't matter. He walks on, down the long Nefelejcs utca, looking into doorways, with something weighing heavily inside him... He does not know whether it's his stomach, or his heart... He is surrounded by a lethal vacuum, a meaningless existence, a world of cold injustice. Some plaintive, monotonous sound accompanies him, doggedly, never-ending, not to be get rid of, causing internal torment.

Arise, ye loyal sons of th' nee-ayshun...

He is chewing hard at the clammy, gum-like stuff, swallowing hard and choking as spittle and tears are mixed in his throat.

Hungarian Composition

I - A C Plus Paper

Petőfi's Lyric Poetry

Sándor Petőfi, Hungary's celebrated great poet, also occupies a prominent place as a lyricist in this land flowing with milk and honey, which he pictures so wonderfully in his descriptive poems.

The most important feature of Petőfi's lyric poetry is subjectivity. In János Arany, on the other hand, it is objectivity that we see gaining the upper hand.

Whereas, in Petőfi, the naive popular note becomes thrown into relief; in Arany, the popular note is relegated to the background, to be replaced by refinement of diction, which, as a matter of fact, is not wanting in Petőfi's beautiful poems either.

In Petőfi's lyric poetry, we find the following points of poetic beauty, viz.: (1) Rustic simplicity; (2) national Patriotism; (3) Types and Characters; (4) filial Love for his mother; (5) love lyrics; etc.

Petőfi always aimed at subjectivity and was eminently successful in his efforts, as his poems go straight to the heart both of the humblest folk and the splendid, bright halls of stately mansions.

In his poems we see him singing the praises of the lovely Alföld, the Great Hungarian Plain, rippling "with golden ears of wheat resplendent" which no one else beside him did have such great aptitude to describe. As he writes in his beautiful poem beginning.

Thou art fair, O Alföld, fair at least to me...

Nevertheless the Alföld is not the only place he shows himself so apt to describe: he also

describes the river Tisza and he draws a fine portrait of the "good old landlord" by which term we are to understand his own father.

Simplicity is played up even more in another poem where a shepherd is pictured riding a donkey, whose low stature causes the shepherd's legs to reach to the ground. Suddenly, he (the shepherd) learns that his loved one is dying and so he makes haste to get home so as to be able to find her still alive. However, when he gets home, all he finds is her lifeless body from which her soul has already departed. In his great bitterness and despair what could he have done but the only thing possible to him under these circumstances, namely, he brought down his big stick hard on the donkey's head. Now, here we see demonstrated a fine instance of the simplicity with which the shepherd hits the donkey over the head in his own grief.

On the other hand, Petőfi has also written some poems in which he sets up a contrast; as, for instance, in his poem "I called in at the kitchen...", where he writes that at the sight of the fair maiden there, his burning pipe went out whereas his heart, cold before, kindled fire. Whereas, that is, the moment before, his pipe had been burning, now it is his heart, recently cold, that is burning. The very contrast, as we see, is splendidly evident in this brief piece.

That is Petőfi's lyric poetry, which plays such a great role amongst the poets of the world, to the glory of this beautiful country and nation with rippling golden ears.

Ferenc Skurek
Form 6b

II - An A Minus Paper

Petőfi and Lyric Poetry

The time is: New Year's Eve, 1823. Outside, feathery snowflakes are dancing softly in the air. The local butcher's heart swells with joy indeed at Kiskőrös, for a son has just been born to him, on this hallowed night of the New Year.

It is quite a small baby. Its dark eyes, which as yet admire the damp rafters of the shabby-looking room without a care in the world, it presently shifts onto its mother, and cannot take them off her... She bends over the infant with tender love and, with solicitude typical of true mothers, adjusts the hard (?) but white pillows of the cradle.

Has this mother any premonitions? As yet, she could hardly suspect that the innocent little infant reposing in the tiny cradle is the great Sándor Petőfi of later years...

Petőfi! As I am writing his name, my enthused brain teems with a thousand memories... Beautiful poems echo and resound which we read and re-read at home, in the midst of our loving families, and at school, where our esteemed master has given such a fine elucidation of the hidden beauty of these poems. And while we were listening to his lessons, we saw like visions in our mind's eye the sunny Great Plain, the little scattered farms, the romantic outlaw, the *betyár*, the shepherd and his donkey - But who could hope to be able to enumerate them all!

In Petőfi's lyric poetry, it is the subjective element that fires us most with enthusiasm; by contrast, in Arany, it is a serious, objective tone that gives food for manly thought.

Oh, Petőfi, our great Poet, our pride, with one hand holding the lyre and the other the sword of battle, may you rest in peace in your crumbling forgotten grave under the sods of the Segesvár battlefield!

Rezsó Goldfinger
Form 6b

We Split Our Sides with Laughing

The whole class is possessed. In the morning, as we came in, we found a new litter-bin in the classroom. It's a fine, big, varnished litter-bin, and we soon found out that it is wide enough to accommodate one boy quite comfortably.

The litter, it goes without saying, was removed from it and spread out nicely on top. You have to have an artistic instinct for that. All along the rim, you put breadcrusts, spaced out evenly; a large piece of baconrind, set up like an ornamental object, is placed at the centre. Every boy gives a helping hand and we contribute old bits of iron and broken pens to the junk-show, and prospective visitors are charged admission by Deckner.

During the second morning recess, there is a sudden outbreak of label-sticking. At first, a brief note appears on Kelemen's back, informing the public that the bearer considers himself an "ass" and wished to advertise the fact in this manner. Then someone confidentially whispers to Kelemen that it has been decided to stick a notice to Roboz's back. This then is quickly done by no other than Kelemen himself. Roboz has been laughing with us at Kelemen's tag for the last five minutes. Kelemen is already burbling with laughter, screwing up his eyes - the roar of laughter mounts, it's swelling into a hurricane - and the more those two laugh at each other the more wildly we are laughing at the two of them.

Then someone invents the following game. You pick out, say, Auer, who happens to be engaged busily writing something. You run up to him, out of breath, in an apparent fever about some good news, and grab him by the arm. "Come on... quick..." you splutter at him, and drag the fellow along with you. Auer is completely flustered. "Wha-what's the idea? What's happened? Where're we off to?" he asks, stepping out briskly, excited and alarmed. Without replying you drag him along, panting, towing him down the passage and rushing him up the stairs to the third floor. A variety of possible explanations flash with lightning speed through Auer's mind. His uncle has arrived from America. The head's sent for him, because the masters have held a conference where it has been agreed that this fellow Auer's quite an exceptional genius, such as the spirit of the times brings forth but once in each century, and so his school certificate plus a scholarship of one thousand koronas will be handed over to him forthwith, accompanied by a ceremonial address, to be delivered by the headmaster in the common room. The Minister of Education has sent for him; he is now in the common room; he came specially because someone has submitted to him Auer's latest essay on Hungarian Literature, which was read amid tears in Parliament, and he has now come as the representative of the Government to shake hands with Auer. The drawing-master has sent for him, for a wealthy art patron has by chance seen his free-hand drawing entitled "Stylised Shape of Leaf" and proposes to purchase it for thirty thousand koronas and set it up at the Municipal Art Gallery. "I'll let him have it for twenty thousand," Auer reflects hurriedly as they reach the fourth floor, out of breath. Here, the dispatch-runner, who has never said a word, lets go of Auer's arm, and starts quietly down the stairs. Puzzled, Auer turns

towards him. Down below, bunched at the bottom of the staircase, is the whole class to a man, roaring with laughter. For a minute, Auer stands rooted to the spot. "Idiots," he says angrily, then starts his ignominious descent. Two minutes later, he fairly bursts his sides with laughter as he watches Roboz being put through the same process.

Meantime Wlach has sketched a portrait of Mr. K  k  rcsin on the blackboard represented wearing a pair of pants and a top-hat and making a report to the emperor Joseph II on the conduct of the class. Joseph II is picking his nose and hands a bottle of insecticide to Mr. K  k  rcsin, who thanks His Majesty and takes a swig at the bottle.

Zajcsek shouts complaining that they don't let him do his homework, and in the end he ups and sits down inside the new litter-bin, pulling the lid over himself, and then bursts into song, in a high falsetto voice. At a given signal from Wlach, the boys fall silent and stand up as when a master comes in. Zajcsek pokes his head out of the bin in alarm, under the impression that the teacher has come into the class. Howls of laughter. Zajcsek spits over the rim with contempt and disgustedly pulls the lid over himself.

Now, suddenly, Mr. K  k  rcsin actually arrives. Deadly silence reigns: all of a sudden, we all think of Zajcsek, who is crouching inside the chest. However, this time Zajcsek won't be taken in, and does not budge.

And now begins a period of horrible agony. The whole class has become one great quivering diaphragm pressed downwards with absurd force by deadly laughter. Glowing cheeks throb with the hot fever of stifled laughter, and veins swell in all foreheads. The boys double over their desks. Silence; but underneath, there lurks the ghastly spectre of a possible explosion and silence is provocatively singing in our ears. And there are some desperate, dare-devil rotters in the back row who are deliberately stretching this critical atmosphere to its breaking-point. Young L  bl has gone down on all fours and is creeping about in a leisurely way under the desks. He has crept all round the class and grabbed our legs one by one. The litter-bin stirs suspiciously. In a loud voice, Mr. K  k  rcsin is expatiating on the fine achievements of Joseph II. I get a poke in the back, and a rasping voice whispers into my ear: "Look out! L  bl is coming under the desks. He's now under the fourth row." Everybody tries to sit on his legs: our lips are trembling with suppressed laughter. I am trying desperately to listen to the teacher in order to divert my imagination from what's going on. Enthusiastically, Mr. K  k  rcsin expounds what a fine gesture it was of Joseph II to withdraw all his decrees by one stroke of the pen. "Smart boy, Joe Number Two," Englmayer, in the rear desk, says in an incredibly deep belly voice. Auer draws in his breath sharply: L  bl has just reached him and pinched his leg. "Look," someone by my side remarks, "K  k  rcsin's had one leg grow shorter than the other."

My eyes all but pop out of their sockets. Now... this is the end... one minute more... now the explosion will come... At this moment the teacher indulged in a little pleasantry.

"I say, Auer," he says. "I wish you would stop squirming and wriggling like a cheese-hopper!"

No author of slapstick comedies ever had such an effect on his audience. The laughter that greets this is like a flooded river bursting its dam. Relieved and wheezing, we howl and shriek for several minutes. The teacher watches with amazement and smiles indulgently: he comes to the conclusion that he has a keen and irresistible sense of humour.

My Experiments

The month of November passes under the magic sign of Magnetism and Electricity. The bench in the Physics Lab is permanently cluttered with machines and disks, with batteries, inductors and dynamos. Awe-inspiring things have been happening. Pollatschek is told to mount a stool which has glass legs, and then they send through him an electric current, so that sparks start flying from him, and his hair stands up on his head. Mr. Müller explains that Pollatschek, as a human body, is a Good Conductor. Standing on that stool, Pollatschek, as behaves a good conductor, looks demure and saintly: carried on the wings of the electric current, there flashes across his mind the dimly joyous thought that after this performance Mr. Müller will surely better his Three Minus mark to a Two. He can't possibly be such a bad student after all, he reflects - Why, he is even now doing a neat job, conducting the electric current! He has a hazy notion that the electric current wouldn't pass through a chap that doesn't understand about physics; that the electric current is in the teacher's service and as such knows all about the state of affairs in the form and about the Master's form-register.

On my way home, I buy a magnet. It can do some amazing tricks, this magnet; still, I am not satisfied with the results. Then and there I make up my mind that I will straighten the horseshoe-shaped metal as soon as I get home, and drill a hole in its middle with - er - with, say, Dad's pointed paper-knife (or, maybe, with a pair of scissors?) and turn the thing into a compass needle - a gyro-compass, mind you, so it will show the true direction even when pointed directly down. For, who knows, a big earthquake may come, and our house would list over like a ship - and still I would know the direction. How nice it'll be. I resolve with enthusiasm that from now on I will always carry a gyro-compass on me.

My brain is seething with exciting schemes as I get home. I'll prepare a Heron's ball, for sure, and will build Magdeburg hemispheres, too, if you care to know. Also a Leclanché cell.

I find nobody at home except my younger sister, and I plunge into a spirited elucidation of the Torricellian vacuum. "Well, what do you think keeps up the 70-centimetre column of mercury?" I ask her scornfully. "Yes, you don't believe it? Now watch. I fill up this glass with water... I place a sheet of paper under it... Now watch: I'm going to turn the whole thing upside down and the water won't spill... Well, all right... it's spilled this time, but only because... Why, of course, you have to place the paper *on top* of it, not underneath, I forgot that."

But failure never discourages me. I rub a comb, making it pick up bits of paper. My sister, however, gets my temper up by saying that those bits of paper only stick to the comb because it is dirty.

I pass on to the Leclanché cell. This is a rather complicated business. It's all right about the preserving jar, but where am I going to get tinfoil? Brass would do too - if only you could melt and remove the bathroom faucet! Yes but such an action is bound to meet with difficulties. Also, I am not quite sure that I should be able to bring home to my parents the importance of my discoveries and make them see that these discoveries do call for certain sacrifices and self-abnegation on their part.

However, there is something else I *am* going to do: I'm going to pump the water out of the water-can - sure I am. And I'll provide a demonstration of atmospheric pressure -

I certainly will! I get down to brass tacks right away and dash off the design of my air-pump on a sheet of paper. Fantastic utopian projects captivate my imagination. I will pump the air from the whole room - Yes, I'll get the air pumped out of here and then all objects in here will lose their force of gravity.

Mari, our maid, thinks that what I *am* going to get, she says, will be more a box on the ears administered by Dad than any air pumped out of rooms unless I remove the vinegar and the lumps of coal I've put in the mortar. People are beginning to look askance at the natural sciences - but then you can't make revolutions without overthrowing the existing universal order, can you? "Why, don't you people believe in what Newton and Copernicus tell us? Well, look here. Let us say that this lamp is the Sun, the celestial body moving in free space. Look, I place this magnet here: it shall represent the pull of gravitation. Or, rather, let not the lamp be the Sun - let the magnet be the Sun and let the lamp just be the Earth. Now then. It's like this. Now then. Now imagine that this magnet here (which is the Sun, isn't it) - right here where I'm holding it - that this magnet stands fixed on this spot. It now illuminates the left side of the lamp, doesn't it?... Oh, come, Mici, don't be so confoundedly thick-skulled. Of course it is now so that it's this thing which illuminates the lamp, not the other way round, because the lamp's supposed to be a dark body... Now then. How long do things stay that way? They only stay that way, you see, until the Earth - meaning the lamp - turns. But that alone won't get us anywhere. For if it only turned round and round on an axis but otherwise stayed fixed, we'd only have nights and days alternating but wouldn't have any seasons. However, Earth's got to move - it's got to orbit... It's got to get moving, goddamn it!... Well! You see? That's the way the Earth moves... That's how it's supposed to move - Yet it does move!

"Well, I'm sorry. It's not my fault that the lamp's come off, you know. It was badly fixed: That screw - it didn't hold. As for the action of the ungrateful and unappreciative judges in denying me my dinner and locking me up in the maid's room instead - Why, that was to be expected. They did the same thing to Galileo. But you can't hide truth under a bushel, you know. *Eppur si muove!*"

I Explain My Marks

Well, it's like this.

To begin with, this report is not the real thing yet. This is just a kind of printer's proof - a sort of impress copy they've handed out to me for *the time being*. That today is terminal report day is neither here nor there. The other boys - they *have* received their school report actually, but mine had to be sent in to the Ministry because a couple of mistakes had been found in it which call for urgent correction. Why, yes. Incidentally, the matter is coming up before the School Reports Control and Amendment Conference, where it will be considered by a School Inspectors Mid-Term Meeting. The form-master, as he handed me the report, made a little speech: he was somewhat embarrassed and said he was sending his regards to you, Dad. "Well," he said, "I should like you, my dear Bauer" - that's what he said - "I should like you to explain to your parents that some regrettable error has occurred in connection with your report card. Some wrong entries have slipped into it, you know. Unfortunately," Form-Master said, "as we are obliged under the provisions of the Stamp Board Procedure Statute to issue this school report anyway, I must ask you, my dear Bauer, to - to make it clear to your parents that this thing here is just a kind of provisional document, a sheet of paper, you know, whose statements have

no importance whatever. I want you to tell your parents that I am frightfully sorry for this error and that we *will* draw up your real school report before long. For the time being, I must ask your parents to sign this one, as we have forwarded all the relevant material to the police, who need to have this one signed for the purposes of the investigations they are making. But make no mistake about this: this is a mere formality. The Chief of Police has written personally to the Maritime School at Fiume, asking them to find out how this thing here's got into your school report... this - er - cipher here, for History. Although it is just an ordinary numeral as any other numeral," - it means that I've been questioned in History four times - "yet it might give rise to some misinterpretations."

You ought to know that Mr. Mangold, our history master - he is only a deputymaster in our school and isn't even authorised to give marks, because he's got to pass an examination in marking at the Central University first. All he is authorised to give is "deputy marks," which should be interpreted differently - a Two for a One and a Four for a Two. When he has passed his examination, the marks will be corrected to real marks in all school reports. Now, for the time being... he wishes to tell you he is sorry... for the time being... and he told me to tell you that I was tested in History four times: once I got Two Minus underscored; once I got One; once, Three Plus. You add all that up, then take the geometrical mean, and it gives you a mark Two Plus underscored. The first time I was tested on Joseph the Second, but the bell was rung on my reply. The second time, he wanted to hear me on the Right of Succession; I spoke of the League of Schmalkalden, and I did see that he entered a One Minus, but afterwards he lost his register.

Now, Physics. Well... In Physics, I was tested as early as last November. Er - he asked about... er... around the Sun... I said on an elliptical orbit, with the Sun being in one of the focuses, and that this was Newton's work. But now he mistook me for the boy next to me, who has Three Minus in Physics, and he entered that next to *my* name in error. I complained, and then the register was shown to the teaching staff, and they said he *had* indeed entered the mark next to *my* name instead of Csekonics's in error, but that it was now impossible to correct this error or else he would run into trouble with the Government. And he begged - *prayed* - that I leave it as it is for the time being and agree - for his sake - to being given mark Three this time: he would better it to One by the end of the year without my ever being tested during the coming term. He did in fact get down right away and entered mark One on my birth certificate and obtained the Chief Inspector's signature to it.

Algebra... Well, Mr. Fröhlich is down on me in Algebra - I can't help that. You had to solve the equation with the aid of the indefinite coefficient, and when he called on me and when I told him that you multiplied with λ and then the second equation would cancel out, then the second equation did *not* cancel out. It did not, of course, because you ought also to have multiplied with x , only old Fröhlich had overlooked that; and then I told him that you ought to have, and when he saw that he hadn't known that, he felt ashamed and told me to get back to my desk, and he's been down on me ever since because I knew my algebra better than he did, and has refused to give me a chance to make good; yet it is laid down in the law that every boy must be given a chance to make up for his low mark by January or else his mark will become null and void. Why, even Steinmann - he is tops in our form, you know - even he's said that I could denounce old Fröhlich if I would. I would not - he has the knife into me anyway. And yet, you know, in the written test I got the same results as Steinmann did in his.

I got mark Two for General Conduct because if you've got three marks Three they mustn't

give you mark One for Conduct. In that case, they'll draw up a special report for General Conduct, and this'll be sent to the boy's parents by post.

Oh, that!... That is not a *three!* That is a *two!* It's only that our form-master has a funny way of writing two: he happens to write the base of number two on top, you know... You - you only have to sign your surname, sir... No, no use your coming over to the school these days... You see, they've unhinged the entrance-gates... They've rebuilding, you know... No gates now... Can't go in... Takes about a fortnight...

The Girls

The girls go to Vadász Street School: we boys often meet them at about one o'clock as they come surging into the boulevard, for ever giggling and whispering to each other. They have red and blue ribbons plaited into their dangling pigtails. They join hands, three or four of them, or link arms; one of them whispers something, quietly, at which the whole lot begin to titter.

I eye them with dislike and envy, and perplexity. What sort of nonsense can they be laughing at all the time? And why are they whispering? As soon as any two girls get together, they start whispering. They must be laughing about something I don't know. I turn grave, and, filled with distrust and uneasy feelings, raise my eyebrows: There must be some profane, cynical thing in this world, something shady that they alone know, and that's what they're talking about all the time. They will give me scornful, insidious looks, then run away. What on earth could it be?

For they must know about something I don't. Otherwise they are stupid and dull; they collect neither plants nor insects. Not postage stamps, either. Neither do they make Leyden jars or Magdeburg hemispheres. On one occasion, we observed an eclipse of the Sun - the shadow cast by the Moon passing in front of the disk of the Sun. For days I had been making preparations anticipating the event: sooting up bits of glass and all that, waiting all agog with excitement for the day that had been fixed by the astronomers. When the dark notch bit into the bright sun-disk I exclaimed exultantly, enraptured - then, with the sooted-up glass in my hand, looked for someone to tell what was taking place a thousand million kilometres away, in outer space. There was nobody around, except two girls I knew in the next room, so I ran over and invited them excitedly to come quick, as the magnificent show was only going to last a few minutes. It was impossible to persuade either of them to come into the front room that opened to the street and look - they were sniggering over some nonsense, and they sneered at me. Ah, please leave us alone, they said. Enraged and gesturing, I explained to them what a great and rare phenomenon it was that was taking place, and that it would be over in a minute. But all you have to do is come into the front room, I shouted, exasperated. They replied by saying some rot with some double meaning. One word in particular made them burst into tears. They didn't come. They didn't come to see the eclipse.

But just what *can* it be? For there is something going on. There must be something everybody knows except me; something which makes people treat girls as if they were privileged persons - and they know it. I was still quite a little slip of a boy when my relatives used to say to me things like this: "You permit the young lady to stand while you are seated yourself? For shame! A fine young gentleman you'll make when you grow up." And I was obliged to get up from my comfortable chair and give it up to that little monkey in her lace dress. My cheeks were burning with shame and anger. Why? I asked

myself. Why? What stupid and wrong and unjust preference is this? If I'd smack her face she would fall off her chair. But she - She is free to slap *my* face and humiliate *me* just because she is weaker than I am and, for this reason, I must not, of chivalry, hit her back? Don't they see she knows this and laughs at us as she snuggles down into the arm-chair?

Why? Why? What can be the reason?

Nobody hurts girls. When they are still little snivelling second-form bastards, teachers stop calling them by their first names. They never get rapped on the head, and people speak to them courteously. Senior girls are addressed as "miss," even at school. Younger masters, when they meet them in the street, greet them first - Incredible! They are surrounded with sweetness and tenderness. But *I* got such a bad punch in the chest yesterday that I'm still breathing with difficulty. If I told anyone about it, the reply would be: "Serves you right. You should have boxed his ears. Shame on you!" "Why, he started it... Does nobody defend *me*?" "For shame! Defend a big boy, indeed! You'll make a poor show when you join the army."

Oh, yes - the Army. We are being prepared for it in gym classes, in P. T. and in parades and processions. That'll be a tough job, I know; I've been told, over and over again. The cold bunk - the knapsack on your back - dazed marches - rifle and bayonet... It's all very noble and inspiring, to be sure. I long to do it, too... But why just us? You've got to defend your country. Those who won't risk their lives for their country are a yellow, shameful lot. Now what about THEM? Why aren't *they* yellow and shameful? They would not dream of risking their lives. They giggle, they give themselves airs, and yet nobody says they are yellow and shameful - Far from it! Rather, they are set up as ideals for us. "You've got to defend the women." Those frail women! "For king and country - and for women!" Are girls kings, then?

Why? Why? Why?

Why this favouritism, this discrimination, this indulgence, always and in everything? Why? Why? In the tram, you are supposed to give up your seat. You are supposed to offer them the cream of everything. Whenever they happen to drop something, they just stand there, nonchalant and leisurely, as if it were a law of nature that I must bend down to pick it up. From the age of eighteen onward, they get their hands kissed by men as if they were revered bishops with a lifetime of work and blessing behind them. Walking in the street, you are supposed to let them walk on your right. But why? What is it they give you? What do they do? Why are you supposed to show respect for them? They are ignorant and stupid creatures, and they are lazy and idle. As they grow up they live a life that is all play and fun; then they marry, and from that time on they live on their husbands, who do all the work for them. They have taken a free ticket for life by having been born; by contrast, we men are compelled to toil and moil and fight for every minute of our lives, again and again to justify our existence, by the sweat of our brow.

But why? Why?

There is some idle talk among the boys at school about an obscene and stupid thing. No, it's absurd. Nonsense. Impossible. There's some mystery behind all this, to be sure. But it's insane to suppose - it's impossible - that all the mystery should be *that*. Why, it is a silly joke... childish. Surely, the Torricellian vacuum is more exciting than that? Or a Leclanché cell?

Why? Why?

I have an idea that one day I shall find out about this business. I'm frightened of that day. That day, I shall lose myself in the grey crowd: on that day I shall realise that I am just the same as the people I meet in the streets. That day, I shall forget The Form, and the Leclanché cell, my collection of plants. On that day I shall have forgotten my own self.

My Diary

5th Sep.

With another school-year starting I begin a new diary. Turn over a new leaf. Today was the first day at the old school. Form-master: Lenkei (though this is not yet a cert.). Same pack of teachers (more or less) as last year. Wait & see how it turns out. For the time being, am seated in the third row. That blinking idiot Benkó came & urged that I join the lit. & deb. club. Am not such a damn fool. I've made up my mind that from now on I'll record everything in my diary. Tonight, we paid a visit to Aunt Angi. Pretty lousy party, it was. Sun rises 6.15 min., sets 5.45 min. Lunch: Meat-broth, Boiled Meat & Boiled Shredded Veg. Marrow. Am now sitting in the front room, under the lamp, & writing.

30th Sep.

The first meeting of the Literary and Debating society was held today. Chairman: Mautner; Dep. Chman: Gelléri; Secretary: Székely - a chap from the eighth form; Treasurer: Várnai. I was made a Committee member with 6 votes. Prizes have been set for: a narrative poem; an essay; verse speaking and a mathematics paper. I am the only fifth-form boy on the Committee, only holding a honorary membership, but on the jury all the same. Lunch: Mushroom Soup, Minced Meat, Rice Pudding. Last week, visited Commerce Museum. Saturday: the Urania cinema. After that, Sunday. Monday, school finishes at 12 o'clock noon.

6th Oct.

Martyrs of Arad - No school today. Ducked the memorial ceremony. On way home, ran into Gárdos. He said the Head had made speech, followed by old Földessy, on The Martyrs. Sebók had recited poem. He said there was a change in the time-table: Tuesdays, 9 a.m. to 10 a.m., History instead of Physics. Gerő is to give up his appointment on the staff. In the afternoon, I bought the sepia, the compasses & eraser, & have got 57 fillérs left. Have done the projective geometry drawing. I did it real good, but in the end ink ran out of tracer. Rubbed it out somehow or other. I've decided that from now on I'll always carry a compass. Am now sitting in the front room that looks out on the street, but at the sideboard, because the table is loaded with freshly ironed linen that's been delivered. We're going to have dinner in a few minutes. Had Poppy-seed Strudel for lunch.

2nd Nov.

I have decided that from now on I'll record more important matters in code. Substitute next but one letter in the alphabet for every letter of my sentences. Rmbyx g aykc x apmnnpc gl nfwqugaq. Or spell the words backwards. Tog nirolf morf yddad rof gniyub relur tub evah nwolb ti. Today have finished reading "Comedians of Love" by Jókai - It's

terrific! In "Captain Grant's Children" have reached the bit about cannibals. Quite readable story. A lit. & deb. soc. meeting tomorrow. I am in for the verse-speaking competition, may also put in for the essay prize. We had a jolly good laugh this morning. Old Prém got mad and asked me what rubbish I was reading while he was explaining, and then I produced it, and then it turned out that it was his book, the one he has written. Am doing well in geometry, but must improve further before Xmas. I've clinched mark One Minus in Hungarian. Composition - Two Minus but we are to write another essay yet. Am awfully curious about my forthcoming school report.

6th Dec.

Uránia, a picture called "The World of Ice." I liked the sawfish. We raised a slow clapping, & then the Head yelled down from his box, saying he would send the whole school packing if we didn't stop it. Gárdos & I were nearly tickled to death: after each picture we imitated animal-cries & bird-calls & would exclaim "O-oh! Vurry nice!" "Wahnderful!" & loud exclamations of admiration until the reader became quite proud and from the way he would look about him, triumphantly, after each picture you might have thought he was the chap who had painted it. Have borrowed Verne's "Hector Servadac" from the library, & am going to read it tonight. In the afternoon went to the rector's garden & picked mulberry leaves for my silkworms. Oh by the way: the Emperor of China's been done in, & there's going to be a whacking big revolution. They certainly are an unruly lot, the Chinks. Am now sitting in the back room. There'll be no school tomorrow. Have gone through history, & finished the projective geometry drawing: Projection of Cone onto First Plane. A tough job, that was.

14th Feb.

This morning they gave me a bad mark in the form record because old Jákó claimed that I had written a crib on my cufflink. But it wasn't a natural history crib at all, but a German one. Never mind, I'll ask the head-master to strike out the entry. Have read Shakespeare's "Hamlet" today; it is a very good tragedy from the great British poet's pen. Been in the dumps all day today. Couldn't even feed the silkworms. Why, when you come to think of it, does one live anyway? "To be, or not to be: that is the question," as Shakespeare says, in "Hamlet." I was thinking that it is a shame how youth is slipping by, and that I should never again be so contented and happy as I was in the third form. Alas, life isn't all that much fun at all!... But enough of this.

Hanging from the Apparatus

So, my muscles are as yet underdeveloped, and my chest narrowish - I'm well aware of it. But you can have no idea of what I've got in me. I've only an inkling of it myself, and a tremor runs through me whenever I feel the light touch of my tight gym-shirt against my skin and jump about on rubbersoled feet in the woodshavings which cover the gymnasium floor. True, Wlach goes round lifting eight-stone weights, and Miklós Bányai can do the Forward Grand Circle on the horizontal bar; but it's only brute force that they've got, you see. Blind instinct. By contrast, what *I* have in me is Strength of Mind. Bányai is unable to grasp the conjugation of the verb *savoir*, and as for Wlach - the fellow has made me do his algebra for him often enough. I am a man of a different stamp. I understand science and - for the time being - cannot do a shoulder-stand on the bars. Not yet. But what happens if I do master it one day? In that case, a miraculous being will have appeared on the world's stage: a prodigy who makes Jókai's characters seem

ordinary, commonplace people by comparison. Imagine that you were reading one morning, in the paper a new item: "An inconceivable and magnificent lecture had a devastating effect on the astonished public gathered at the Municipal Concert Hall yesterday. A young man hitherto completely unknown (*here follows my name*), turned up on the platform and proceeded to deliver, in flawless French, a lecture entitled 'The Meaning of Life, Expressed in Equation of the Second Degree,' in which he solved the mystery of the world - a feat the greatest minds have been struggling unsuccessfully to achieve. All this he performed with splendid elocution and delivery that brought celebrated actors and actresses present surging, in tears, towards the dais, anxious to shake hands with the barely-sixteen-year-old genius. The youth, however, smiled modestly and calmly, and, with a surprising movement, jumped on to the table, performed a handstand, then, turning three somersaults above the heads of a thunderstruck audience, caught hold of the iron bar overhead, and, after performing several dizzying cart-wheels, leapt across a distance of nine metres to land on a stove - still in handstand - and in this posture continued his lecture, in a cool and suave manner, finally resolving the magnificent problem... '

I'm hanging from the apparatus.

You are surprised at this because you just cannot imagine that it is possible for somebody to have achieved all-round perfection. You are old and hidebound, believing that the world we'll have tomorrow will be the same old world you have always known, and forgetting that the day will come when one has to sit for one's finals. You cannot imagine, to give you another example, that you may have, one day, a prime minister (it would go against my modesty to breathe his name) who, one day, after announcing in Parliament, in a cool, impassive voice, that, as the result of a number of carefully thought out diplomatic manoeuvres he has refrained from discussing before (for he is not a man of many words), he has succeeded in annexing Britain as an ordinary colony of Hungary, and that he is taking this opportunity to apprise the House of the fact; - Well, as I say, after explaining this in a cool and impassive tone, ignoring the shouting, jubilant Members who want to carry him round on their shoulders, suddenly he takes up a fencing posture and, right there, on the premier's rostrum, employing a formidable, hitherto unknown jujitsu hold, floors the Australian world wrestling champion whom the British opposition treacherously hid under the rostrum in order to assassinate the greatest European. You people cannot imagine a man delivering, in the morning, in his capacity of Academician-in-Chief, a lecture before an audience of university professors and, in the afternoon, winning the world titles in backstroke swimming and hanging on the horizontal bar, only to bow, in the evening, at the National Theatre, before an admiring audience that acclaims the 500th performance of a play written by the same youth with hurricanes of applause. This extraordinary youth did not invent the moon rocket for he is adept enough at rounders to make his living by it. As a matter of fact, he is a virtuoso of the game. From time to time, this extraordinary young man has the habit of scoring, with a gesture of nonchalance, thirty-two goals against FTC or MAC - a combined team of those two leading soccer sides cannot stand up to him, although he takes the field against them single-handed (or single-footed?).

I'm hanging from the apparatus.

Oh, well, the fact is, for the time being I need a bit more practice, of course. The soul may be ready, but it lodges in a frail body; and the apparatus was invented by crafty men. The climbing pole is slippery, and I may tell you from first-hand experience that it's considerably less readily climbable on top, towards the end, than it is at the start;

although a cursory inspection may induce you to assume that it's of equal thickness, and of equal smoothness, at every point. Besides, Bauer, this dirty swine, always jumps to the thinner pole, leaving the thicker one for me. After the fourth grip, or the fifth, your *Weltanschauung* undergoes a change: while still standing on the floor, you were thinking differently, but now, suddenly, it comes home to you with perfect clarity that it would be childishly vain to think it as a great misfortune if Bauer reached the top first. You don't want to be overhasty. There are reckless, irresponsible people who, in the high jump, roll up their sleeves, make a powerful dash, take off from the springboard, hurl themselves" ceilingwards - and often knock off the bar. I do not indulge in vain hopes. In the beginning, of course - you have to make allowance for youth and impetuosity - I too will look to the future with confidence, measuring with hawk-like eyes the distance and the height of the bar. I start off with short steps... gather headway... and already see myself clearing the bar. Yet at the last moment in front of the bar I am overcome by wise resignation. "What rot," I think, and humbly, a shrinking violet, walk under it with a bowed head, in the meek and resigned manner of a man who never had the slightest intention of jumping, who only wanted to take a walk.

I'm hanging from the apparatus.

When all is said and done, come to think of it: the whole thing is idiotic - this whole establishment, where everything is calculated to prevent, as far as possible, any part of the human body to remain where God intended it: where no effort is spared to make one's limbs occupy, if possible, a position such as the organs in question have never dreamed of in their lives. Both my legs are flinging about in the air; my knees turn outward; my wrists are twisted inward; my hair's hanging into my eyes; and blood is rushing to my head. The floor swings up to the ceiling, and the walls perform a handstand. And in addition to this disgusting and absurd state, while I'm trying, with tongue hanging out, to re-establish my equilibrium and to drag my stomach over the thin metal bar, absolutely in the dark about whether I am nearing the earth or the star-spangled firmament. On top of all this, somebody - a savage-looking man - keeps bellowing something in my direction. "Hollow back!" "Hollow back!" he bellows; and my blood-hazed mind suspects only dimly what he may mean by those words: You're expected to draw in something; yes, you're expected to draw something back and straighten something; but what it's supposed to be - whether my legs or my waist or my hips; and, even if I knew, just where I'm supposed to look for the limb in question; - You can't expect me to answer all that in this state I am in. I give a kick - forwards or back? Doesn't matter - I open my mouth and shut my eyes - disgusted and despairing, I let go of the apparatus, and fall back on the mattress with a thud. Thank God. You may laugh - I don't care. To hell with the P.T. display, the whole competition, first prize and all. It's only for monkeys.

The Council of War

Far be it from me to pretend that I have anticipated the momentous events which are now happening. No, the sole purpose of the present treatise is to throw light upon certain happenings of which, as far back as 1898, I was, broadly speaking, an observer and, to a certain extent, an active participant. I have no idea of the measure of importance my notes may have for a pragmatic history of the World War; for my part, however, I should never be able to appease my conscience, were I to keep to myself, out of cautiousness or modesty, some facts which came into my possession by accident, but

whose historical significance may be too great to permit me to neglect their publication with the complacent excuse that I was not fully aware of such significance.

I am therefore making public all that I know about the incident, without drawing conclusions or making a comment; my account, though it may be unsystematic and informal, is nevertheless candid, with names and dates given. As for the rest - that is the question of how far the information supplied by me may go to explain and cast light upon current developments - I leave that at the discretion of people better qualified than I am to decide such matters: politicians and historians. I will try to be brief and stick to bare facts.

My acquaintance with Rogyák began in September 1898; our connection, however, did not achieve any degree of intimacy until the November of the same year, when, owing to certain administrative measures (which have no relevance to the issue), I was relegated to the sixth row of desks, to the fourth seat from the right. The desk behind my back, but rather to the left, was occupied by Tivadar Zsemlye, while Singer sat in front of Rogyák. This circumstance, as you will see presently, is of crucial importance to the whole affair.

The essential point is, however, that by November I had come to be on terms with Rogyák so intimate that he would talk to me quite confidentially about his political attitudes, although, at the time, I had not the faintest notion of the programme that remarkable man had drawn up. It took the intervention of various decisive events to make me realise that what we had here were not just political convictions or beliefs, but an overt programme and a radical plan of action.

I heard of that decisive event at the end of November. One morning I found Rogyák engaged in excited and hot discussion with Singer. He was leaning forward over his desk and they were talking in whispers and with lively gestures. Singer looked very grave, and talked little, but I felt sure that he was making statements of vital importance. My arrival made them stop. I was not offended by such evidence of distrust, since at that time I was not yet sufficiently in on the matter (they continued to be cautious with me for some time) to be drawn into a discussion on the merits of the matter. During the ten-minute recess, I ran into Rogyák in the corridor. On this occasion I tactfully put a few questions to him. He was visibly embarrassed and gave an evasive answer. I found Singer somewhat more communicative. I found that the Rogyák v. Zsemlye affair, long threatening to erupt into a crisis, had taken a turn that morning when a settlement was already becoming impossible through purely diplomatic channels.

For some time past, I had been aware of the existence of irreconcilable differences of opinion between Rogyák and Zsemlye. Rogyák, as party chief of the radical cause, accused Zsemlye of pan-hooligan aspirations. (You ought to know that at that time the hooligans were maintaining a veritable reign of terror in the Józsefváros district and their far-reaching influence was making itself felt even in Rigó Street.) There were rumours alleging that their spies had wormed their way into our midst, having enrolled in the fifth and sixth forms as if they were genuine Students. Zsemlye expressly denied having any political connections with the hooligans; such hooligan contacts as he might have were entirely of private character and were not hurtful to the vital interests of Rigó Street. On the other hand, several times during recess, Rogyák made some too-easy-to-understand allusions, reminding Zsemlye of the dangers inherent in underhand practices of this kind, with the result that relations between them were becoming increasingly delicate. This morning, in the classroom, the two of them quite abruptly flared up over a seemingly minor matter. This time Zsemlye, in the heat of his emotion

forgetting the need for discretion, flung a threat at Rogyák and his comrades, saying that on leaving school at six o'clock, hooligans armed with clubs were going to attack the Form.

Later on, realising the extraordinary importance of his rash statement, he tried hard to unsay what had been said, protesting that he had no part in that business, was not informed - authentically speaking - of the whole matter, and had only been told about it. Rogyák ignored this point, broke off negotiations with Zsemlye forthwith, and retired to hold a consultation with Singer.

That was how matters stood at eleven o'clock in the morning. I managed to piece together an overall picture of the situation from snatch remarks - Singer and Rogyák, alive to the responsibility of the difficult hours, maintained the utmost reserve in their comments on the situation. Before eleven o'clock, during class, I had received Marconi-nudges sent over the desk by Zsemlye calling upon me under penalty of honest Injun to wait for him at the entrance gate when classes were over: he had some communication of extraordinary importance for me. I did not yet have a clear enough grip on the situation to be able to discern the European consequences of a possible conflict which would have broken off diplomatic relations between the hooligans on the one hand and Rigó Street on the other; even so, my instinctive reaction was that on this matter I must side with Rogyák and his friends; and for this reason, when Tivadar Zsemlye invited me to enter into negotiations with him, I gave him an elusive answer.

Rogyák, who had been witness to my loyal behaviour, said nothing, yet I felt that his confidence in me had been considerably strengthened. With courteous if brief gravity such as I have never seen a statesman display ever since, he told me later that, if I had no objections, he should welcome my company at twelve o'clock, in Mária Terézia Square, where he and Singer were to meet in an "advance council of war" (that's the way he put it) to discuss the action they should take.

It was with a pounding heart that I turned up at the appointed time and place. The thought that I had thus come to be at the centre of such momentous happenings filled me with tremulous excitement and a sense of pride. Nevertheless, I strove to conceal my excitement, seeing the grave - almost scornful - composure with which those two grandiose men were discussing an action of such tremendous importance. Although I did not quite see all the implications of the affair, I tried to imitate their resolute, assertive manners, secretly feeling ashamed - though never admitting this - at my failure to comprehend all their technical terms.

Singer began by giving us an outline of the general situation. Zsemlye's utterings this morning led one to conclude that the hooligans had committed an act of treason (the word "treason" cropped up very frequently at this council of war), and as a result Rigó Street found itself at the moment in a state of combat emergency with both Tivadar Zsemlye and the hooligans, who had already, at the beginning of the school-year, delivered secret threats of attacking Form B with underground pistols. We could not put up with this any longer if we did not want to have hooligans armed with knives fall upon us in the dark one night and take our scalps. Responsibility for the critical situation fell on Zsemlye - at this point, steps would have to be taken immediately.

At Singer's words, Rogyák, speaking with a nonchalance that really chilled my spine, declared that he was ready to fight a fatal duel with Tivadar Zsemlye, in the presence of tribal chiefs who would be invited - but of course only in English. He stood firm on that point, and also insisted on it that Zsemlye should be searched before the duel by two war

lieutenants to make sure he was not wearing a mail shirt - it would be an act of treason if he was, wouldn't it. Singer nodded in agreement, and casually remarked that he had long been anticipating an act of treason; and, as his father possessed huge underground ironworks in the Bakony hills, he had already arranged for preparing eight thousand pieces of waterproof armour which could be worn under one's singlet without anyone noticing it. For several months now, workmen had been making things hum, and the first consignment was due to arrive one of these days. Should the hooligans, through some act of treason, have got wind of the ploy, and obtained armour at some place for themselves - well, he had not overlooked such contingency and had ordered several hundred iron suits, iron boots, iron trousers and iron singlets to meet the emergency. As for the fatal duel, he approved of it, making this only reservation that the lieutenants should be dropped, and rangers invited in their stead, as they were people who could be trusted better.

At that time I was a somewhat timid young chap and for a goodish while dared not open my mouth. Realising, however, that *if* I didn't my prestige was bound to sink very low, embarrassed and blushing, I started to speak. I suggested that perhaps it would be better if we caused Zsemlye to be decapitated. After all, once it was declared that an act of treason had indeed been committed, there should be no objection to such course.

Although their faces registered no emotion, I was astonished to see - I was aware of this - that the council of war were surprised at my suggestion. Singer replied to me in a lengthy speech, explaining that while it was obviously not a bad idea as ideas go, the trouble was, such a thing could not be done without declaration of war or else it would be (he searched at length for the expression that follows) - or else it would be an ambush. Rogyák immediately seconded this view. He entered into a passionate argument, asserting that from the point of view of "honour and integrity of character" it was absurd to "start an ambush" (the words are his); there was a special way to do that. Besides, an ambush was rather a ticklish matter: you needed a special agreement for that, and lots of conditions, all of which you would have to clear up, and at the moment he was not quite sure if we had a right to have recourse to an ambush against hooligans. This matter should have to be gone into more fully, and he was going to consult his friend the Commander, whom it was his habit to see in the evening, and who was his adviser on difficult matters of warfare. However, lest treason would once again spoil everything, he suggested that we start a battle instead of an ambush, and start it without delay.

Singer seconded the motion. Now there remained only some matters of form to be decided. In the first place, there was the question of standards. Singer promised to bring with him the standards next morning, together with the rubber-stamp that was needed as a seal (which his father had made long before and kept on his writing-desk in anticipation of the day it would be needed). At this point, Rogyák remembered another difficulty. "Where are we going to get a mascot prey?" he asked. Why, while you didn't possess a prey you couldn't even get down to the business, so to speak, of starting the battle. For a moment, Singer was perplexed. Here I once again spoke up, and suggested that perhaps we might obtain our mascot by taking up a collection. No sooner had I spoken than I regretted my rash interjection, because, suddenly, both men fell silent, looked at each other, and smiled with scorn. Once again I blushed and stammered in embarrassment that that was not what I meant, whereupon Rogyák, speaking in an off-hand tone of paternal benevolence, explained to me that a mascot was not something you could get by collection, as it was a bloodthirsty animal and was usually led on a chain into battle by two constables advancing at the head of the columns, alongside the standards.

We agreed on this. After the council, Rogyák administered the Oath of War, pledging us to commit no act of treason.

At nine o'clock the following morning, I inquired of Rogyák about the state of the war. He replied that Singer had failed to receive the consignment of suit of mail because the ship that brought the equipment from the Bakony hills had run aground.

Later on, he informed me that the whole thing had to be postponed indefinitely, because before Christmas, while we were still in the dark about the documents, the whole project was incompatible (or something like that). However, he could assure me that preparations were in progress all along the line. The movement was steadily gaining ground, our flag *was* done and ready, and it was known all over America. Our projected alliance with California was a certainty, and he was biding his time to launch, in all quietness and unobtrusively, the worldscale fight.

That is all I know of the Council of War of 1898. For years, I didn't concern myself with the matter. In 1899, I registered for the first form of secondary modern and for several years after I was occupied with my studies. The momentous events that have been taking place have put me in mind of all that I have described here. As regards the tracing of connections between those events and current developments, I leave that, I repeat, to people better qualified than I am.

I Tell Lies

A friend of mine asked where we lived. I was unable to give him the exact name of the street, but assured him that it was the most expensive street in Budapest. As he continued to ply me with questions, I informed him, with some reserve, speaking with the reticence of one reluctant to discuss his private affairs, in a reply that was none the less graphic for being brief, that we had made this place our domicile only a few years ago, having previously occupied a modest castle in the Bakony hills, with the appertaining stud-farm and two wigwams. I felt sure that my friend was ignorant as to the nature of a wigwam, and was annoyed to find that he refrained from asking, pretending to know.

Anyway, my friend failed to ask: what was more, he proceeded to talk about himself, telling me that they had just bought a bath-tub. I nodded airily, and remarked that, though we already had four bath-tubs at our place - one in the dining-room, one in the study, and two in the wigwam - still, so I understood, my people were going to purchase another five, two of which were fitted with a magic lantern, and with a little device with which the bath-tub could be made to move about while one sat in it: walk, spin round and even a little bit - ever so slightly, you know - rise in the air.

On being reminded that our wigwams were supposed to be in our castle in the Bakony, not in Budapest, I explained to him that our home here was only provisional, and that our castle was in the process of being redesigned and reconstructed in the American style. I remarked that I had studied America for several years for this, having been charged with this trifling business by my father. My sire had placed at my disposal a small but durable steamship - the whole thing was not larger than this bench here; but, frankly, I did not need a larger one anyway; the important thing was that my brave little machine had kept the sail going fast and faster, and so I made the voyage in a matter of a few months. I admitted quite frankly (for I didn't believe in telling lies) that I no longer had the little steamship, as we had sent her to a shipyard, where they were trying to stretch

her a bit.

I would probably have stopped here (for at that time I was not yet a lover of many words, nor was I given to boasting) - but I could not help it: my friend was inquisitive and wanted to know about my rank on the boat. I couldn't help smiling at such naiveté, and with guarded but not unfriendly condescension explained to him that on that ship there were no ranks or ratings, and that I claimed none. Besides, on the occasion of an earlier sea voyage (which I did not intend to describe now) the rank of Rear-Admiral had been conferred on me together with the stripes, and I was perfectly content with that.

My friend was interested to know if I had ever come across any pirates? I good-naturedly explained to him that pirates only raided sailing ships; and while I *had* had my modest share of adventure of that sort, they had been connected solely with highwaymen and murderers, whom my father and I had chased in the forests of Bakony. Under the influence of these memories, recalled from the past, I recounted a remarkable chase we had had. On that occasion, riding two dapple-grey mares, we had been pursuing twelve robbers and four murderers, who climbed a tree in an attempt to give us the slip. Then my father shook the tree and kept on shaking it until four robbers and - if I remembered aright - one murderer dropped down. Three of them we took home and tamed, and trained them to do odd jobs about the house.

I could see that my friend was impressed by what I had told him about my father; I therefore asked him to tell nobody about these things, as I hated being badgered with questions. On one occasion my father had stopped two railway engines with one hand, and on that account we were now finding ourselves in hot water: those engines had turned out to belong to the enemy, and the incident had brought my father plenty of trouble. If he (my friend) were prepared to pledge that he would indeed not tell anyone, in that case - under the seal of secrecy - I would reveal to him that the King himself had been compelled to intervene in the matter. One morning he called at our Bakony castle in person - I once again warned my friend to let this go no further, as it might have grave political consequences, should anyone find out about it. Well, then, if he really was interested to know about trifling matters like that (matters to which I attributed little importance) - Well, to cut a long story short, the King called and earnestly pleaded with my father to stop annoying the enemy. My father pleaded his honour, but eventually came to terms with the King. Just what they agreed on I couldn't possibly know, for they had not included me in their conference. Besides, I had had to tend some ice-machines, for in those weeks we ate ice-cream all day. I mentioned it not as if it were anything out of the ordinary; for, to tell the truth, we usually had ices and chocolate for breakfast, but in those days we would have ice-cream for lunch as well.

My friend listened to me with close attention. When I finished, he showed me a piece of glass with which you could see letters larger than they really were. I smiled and said that I knew the instrument well: Why, we too had one - a piece - er - ten feet large. When you looked into that disk of glass you would see a printed letter enlarged to the size of a small house. We would frequently look through it at the stars. Oh, yes, that was a very appropriate question. Yes, we would also watch the star Mars through that glass. How large we could see it? Well, not too large... As large as... maybe... a playground. But you could mark out every thing very distinctly and clearly.

Oh, yes, they were quite interesting, the things we saw there. Mars, he ought to know, was peopled mainly by ants, each of them as large as a human being here on earth. There were mail-clad ants and flying ants; and, I could tell him, there happened to be a great

commotion there just then. Two kinds of ants lived on Mars, red ants and black ones. These two kinds of ants happened to be at war with one another.

I had no opportunity that day to tell my friend *any* details of the war, but on my way home I marshalled my thoughts in connection with red and black ants, so as to be able to give correct answers to my inquisitive friend.

The following day, when my friend once again brought up the question of the magnifying glass, I was pleased to be able to inform him that the night before - just for his sake - I had with the aid of my handy telescope closely investigated the war of the ants. The state of the red ants was now fair enough, I said: they had taken up positions behind a large hill and were preparing to cross the river in closed ranks, under the leadership of the King of the Red Ants, who had under his command eight hundred million red ants. Upon his inquiry, I promised him to make a careful survey of the position of the black ants as well by the following morning, and report to him in greater detail on the King of the Black Ants - who already inspired strong sympathy in me with his spirited and intrepid defence in a mountain pass where he had been taking a walk, lost in thought, when he was attacked by a sword-brandishing Red Ant who suddenly jumped from a cave.

As I was going home, my thoughts kept going back to the King of the Black Ants. His conduct in facing up to the Red Ant made an inexpressibly profound impression on me. I realised that such behaviour required not only tremendous bodily strength and courage but, as a matter of fact, conscientiousness of a high order, such as would move a monarch to implacable severity in the face of wicked and treacherous attacks; just as it would dispose him to charity and compassion vis-à-vis his own subjects.

I felt certain that sooner or later the King of the Black Ants would win, but I didn't tell this to my friend. I was aware that the sweeping victory of the King of the Black Ants would make its full impact upon him only if he had followed him through his whole ordeal of tribulations. I told him that the war that was raging between the red and the black ants would form the subject of a gigantic epic; that this epic was going to be recorded in a book the size of a building; that the pages of that book would be turned by means of machinery, and you would have to mount a bridge in order to read them. One page would be large enough for the entire story of Robinson Crusoe to be written down twice over on it. The *War of the Ants* would run into four thousand and two hundred pages.

That day, on my way home, I elaborated some details in my mind, so as to have my material ready the following day. Two ants would conspire to betray the King of the Black Ants. They would meet in a dark valley, and raid the royal palace at the dead of night. Luckily, the Queen of the Black Ants would be awake, and she would warn her husband. The camp would be alerted at once, and the army moved off under the leadership of the two first lieutenants towards the coast.

It was of this winding black legion that I told my friend the following day. The beams of the westering sun gleamed on the wide expanse of the sea in the distance... Wildly romantic hills and unbounded plains alternated as the army was marching on. In the depth of the forests, hiding among the trees and in the shade of shrubbery, were the red ants, watching the enemy. It was but a matter of only a few hours before they would break cover... Grim and ominously cool, the swarming, crawling black army descended upon the valley...

That's how I became a writer.