

An Incident that occurred during Minister Trnka's Tour of Inspection

The best possible proof that the loyal Austrian patriotism of the Czech people has not been lost is afforded by Minister Trnka's tour of inspection. They did the Minister pretty well on that tour. As he himself says, he consumed twenty-eight geese, forty-six ducks, fifteen hares and a hundred and twenty partridges. And to follow the geese, ducks, hares and partridges, his hosts had served him up a series of scrolls making him an honorary citizen of their respective towns.

Truly, it was a triumphal progress. Everywhere, banners in the Habsburg colours of black and gold had fluttered out to greet him.

Maids of honour, priests, firemen, mayors; all had trembled and stuttered as they addressed him, or he them.

And so he travelled on from one inn to the next, his officials drew up maps and schedules, and everywhere he made notes, as for example: 'Pardubice: mayonnaise. The eggs should have been fresher.'

And then one day - whoosh! His car went up in flames in Mladá Boleslav and all his schedules, maps and notes with it, and all that was left to the Minister were his memories of those good Czech folk and their patriotic loyalty, memories that raised many a chuckle in the ministerial soul. Such as, for example, the memory of Štěchovice.

A Minister of the government is a great sensation for Štěchovice. Until that time, there was not a single Štěchovician who had ever seen a minister, much less spoken to one.

Picture them now, then, entrusting the village schoolmaster with the task of standing in a punt and pronouncing an Address of Welcome as the Minister arrived.

The Štěchovicians are sticklers for ceremony where Distinguished Visitors are concerned. They resolved that the teacher would have to greet the Minister with an address composed in verse.

The schoolmaster sweated buckets. He climbed every hill in the vicinity, seeking out the most beautiful and secluded spot available, so that he might devote himself in peace to the task of poetic composition.

At last, it is said, he found a cave in the Bojanov valley. And to that

cave, for three days, they sent his food and drink by the hand of the village policeman.

And in these three days he gave birth to the following Address:

Your Excellency's boat most ardently we hail,
As o'er the stream from Svatý Jan you sail;
May your face shine, Your Worship, with good cheer,
All Štěchovice waits, Your Lordship, for you here.

The great day arrived. He had had these lines written out on a piece of fine paper, had put on his best dark suit and a top hat, and now he stood there, this glorious bard, perched on the edge of the punt and his face pale with expectation, strained longing eyes in the direction from which the ministerial boat was to come.

And here it came and the mortars boomed and the eyes of the whole community turned and fixed themselves on their bard.

As the Minister's boat was laying up alongside the punt, the latter pitched and the schoolmaster went flying. And there he was swimming around in the water, eyes bulging and calling out to the Minister: 'Please don't be angry, Your Excellency, the water's nice and warm!'