

perhaps I ought to beg the gentleman to come to table!"

The apprentice, accustomed to the mistress's ways, took a chair. But he had not swallowed three mouthfuls before the mistress bade him call in "that ne'er-do-well out there."

Sandu shyly wished them good day, but of all those sitting round the table he only saw the master, and by his side the mistress, whose eyes seemed to scorch him and make him lose his presence of mind.

"What is your name?" the master asked him.

"I am called Sandu Boldurean."

And in a low voice he told where he was born, with whom he had learnt the trade, and how long he had worked, but during the questioning he scarcely raised his eyelids. He grew confused at once when the mistress screamed at him:

"But you'll ruin your hat turning it round like that in your hands. Put it down somewhere and speak up so that a man can understand what you are saying."

Sandu felt the blood go to his head, and hardly knowing what he was doing he hung his hat on a bolt on the door.

"And you worked only with one master?"

"Only one. See, here is my work-book," and with some haste he drew out the handkerchief, unknotted it, and held out his "work-book" to the master.

"Let me see too," said the mistress, snatching the book from her husband's hand. "After all, it's no wonder this idiot stayed in the same place; and who knows what kind of a master it was?" she whispered to her husband.

He would have replied that it was a very good thing for a workman to have stayed so long with one master, for most tanners worked in the same way, and only here and there were the hides dressed differently; but he was ashamed to say so before the workman, and so he busied himself by looking through the book.

Sandu broke into a sweat; when he held out the book he felt his soul was full of joy at having got so far, but little by little, especially when the mistress took the book and whispered to her husband, his heart seemed turned to ice.

What would he say to him? Supposing he found something bad? Supposing he did not give him work? These were the questions which passed through his mind and which he could not answer, although he knew his book only spoke well of him, and that the master required a workman because it was autumn when business is in full swing.

A great burden seemed lifted from him at the master's words:

"Good, I will engage you. How much did you get from your late master?"

"I worked for him for four years and had a salary."

"What a lot of talk! We will give you one and a half florins per week without washing, and you can stay, though probably in the army you have forgotten all you knew about work," the mistress broke into the conversation, as she rose from the table.

It was the signal for the two workmen and the apprentice to return to their work.

Sandu stood transfixed. Only the master and a child of six or seven years of age remained in the house, as the girl and the mistress went into the passage to see to the dinner things.