

Translator's introduction

I, Aloisie Rychlíková, born on 31 December 1896, am writing this book so that our next generation can see how we lived, and what good or bad happened in our village.

Thus starts a graphic and quite remarkable account of what it was like to live in the south Moravian countryside in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century. It outlines the known history of the writer's family and village down to 1942, based on archival material, family tradition, local record books, her grandmother's memories, and her own personal experience, and then gives a first-hand account of what happened subsequently: the latter part of the Second World War, the passage of the front line through the village in 1945, the post-war reconstruction during 1946-47, the disastrous harvest of 1947, the Communist take-over in 1948, the collectivization of agriculture, the brief political thaw of 1968, and the subsequent Soviet-led invasion and repression. All this is written in a simple and direct style, with family, village, and national events juxtaposed as they occurred, and with occasional anecdotes describing things which the writer thought worthy of particular note. The volume which is translated here takes the story down to 1974, and I am told that there are three further volumes, written by herself for a few more years and then by others, which carry it forward to the present day.

The writer produced this diary for her descendants, and as soon as I saw it I wanted to put it into English for the benefit of what has become the collateral English branch of the family. However, while I will certainly accept the responsibility for what follows and mine has always been the last word, it would be quite wrong for me to claim all the credit. My wife Sue and my daughter Megi have both suggested readings which I have been very happy to adopt, and several people have clarified the background and interpreted some of the regional terms for me: Megi's husband Luboš, who is the writer's great-nephew, Luboš's father Josef, her nephew, and my former teacher Anna and her husband Jiří, who come from much the same part of Moravia and from broadly similar backgrounds. Additionally, Josef has lent me his copy of Rostislav Vermouzek's *Těšany od nejstarších pramenů k socialistickému dnesku* ("Těšany from its earliest origins to the socialist present"), published in an edition of 2000 copies in 1975, and this has been invaluable in establishing and clarifying the context. A comparison between it and the diary suggests that it is not free from minor error and some of its content reflects the political climate of its time, but it appears to deal fairly with earlier periods, and I have taken what it says at face value in the absence of conflicting evidence. I have also made use of the writer's transcriptions of two local record books, the first covering the years 1698-1874 and the second the years 1927-37. All this has helped to sort out passages where the dictionary is silent or unhelpful, or where the writer assumed local knowledge which a foreigner translating sixty years later does not have.

In 1938, Czechoslovakia was notoriously regarded in Britain as "a little country a long way away". Those who read this diary will learn what a small but by no means atypical part of it was really like.

The place : location

The writer's village, Těšany, lies some 20 kilometres to the south-east of Brno, just before the basin around Brno starts giving way to the hills to the east. The modern road E51 from Brno goes through Telnice and Moutnice to Těšany, and continues past Borkovany and Klobouky towards Hodonín in the valley of the Morava. However, this through route dates only from the 1840s. The historical core of Těšany, still the heart of the village, consisted of a manor house, some related buildings, and two rows of houses leading away north-north-west towards Nesvačilka, set back from a brook which used to pass through the middle of the village.

This brook rises in the hills some three kilometres away to the south-east and flows in through a deep gorge, and to ensure supplies when it was frozen the inhabitants sank wells into the sides of the ravine and roofed them over to protect against dirt and pollution. Further deepening of the wells hit a powerful spring. This was surrounded by a stone terrace, and they started to call it Skalka (a diminutive of "rock" or "cliff"). It became the village's chief water supply. The brook itself seems to have become rather polluted over the years, and the section passing through the village was culverted in 1929-30.

A second brook important to Těšany rises in the hills to the east, passes around the north of the village, and used to power the mill (which was at the Nesvačilka end of the village). It was blocked by

a fierce storm in 1861 and the contemporary record book says that a new course was cut for it, but it would seem that this was merely the regularizing of its original line and not the creation of an entirely new one. Further work was done on it in 1966-67.

The two brooks, although flowing to different outlets, come to within a couple of hundred metres of each other at the mill, and a cut joining them was made in the sixteenth century. The modern map shows two further developments, not mentioned in the text and presumably post-dating it: the northern brook is now dammed a kilometre to the east of the village to form a small reservoir, and the southern brook is now diverted to the north on the outskirts of the village and flows into the northern one.

The land associated with Těšany covers a total of slightly over 1600 hectares (16 square kilometres), elongated towards the north. This was more than could be conveniently managed from the village centre, and the manor house was supported by two outstations: Šinkvický Dvůr, formerly Horní (Higher) Šinkvice, three kilometres to the north-east, and Šaratský Dvůr, formerly Dolní (Lower) Šinkvice, four kilometres to the north-north-east. Each appears to have housed a small staff mainly employed in looking after animals. Šinkvický Dvůr had originally been accompanied by its own village, but this had been deserted by the middle of the sixteenth century; Šaratský Dvůr appears always to have been an outstation.

The place : history

The word "Těšany" does not itself appear in the dictionary, but it can be plausibly related to the verb "těšit", which means "to please", and the writer prefaces her transcription of the 1927-37 record book as follows:

In an old legend, it is said that a knight called Mutina once had his seat at Moutnice. This knight was very fond of hunting in the neighbouring woods, especially on the eastern side. Here on the plain beneath the gentle hills he took his greatest pleasure, and so he called this place Těšany and founded a settlement here.

Whatever the truth of this may be, the earliest surviving written reference dates from 1131. This date is given by Vermouzek, who cites the source document, and in the 1927-37 record book, the latter apparently quoting a 1909 book *Kloboucký okres* ("The Klobouky district") by Karel Jaroslav Bukovanský.

Vermouzek devotes a dozen pages to the early history of the village and its owners, which ended with a major discontinuity when the original village was repeatedly ravaged and largely depopulated during the Thirty Years' War (1618-48). It was subsequently resettled, and its general plan (manor house and associated buildings at the south-east end, village houses along the brook, mill at the north-west end) seems to have persisted until a new row of houses was built in the 1780s. This new row was built at the lower end of the village, roughly parallel to the northern brook and some little way in from it, and its back gardens backed on to this brook. The writer was born in one of these houses, and moved to a house a little further along after her marriage. Vermouzek has a photograph of the street as it was in 1928, but the houses in which the writer lived are in the distance and cannot be identified.

The nineteenth century saw steady growth. A second mill, called Hastrmánek (probably derived from "hastrman", water-sprite), was built on the northern brook in 1805 in order to grind corn for the manor estate (the original mill, although one of the estate buildings, was at the far end of the village). In 1836, the village had 775 inhabitants (369 men and 406 women, 729 Catholics and 46 Evangelicals) in 137 houses, and they kept 121 horses, 171 beef animals, and 2,105 sheep. In 1870, it had 975 inhabitants in 164 houses; in 1907, it had 1,114 inhabitants (1,109 Czechs and 5 Germans, 1,043 Catholics, 67 Evangelicals, and 4 Jews). The population was to remain roughly the same in the twentieth century (a 1960 census counted 1,267 inhabitants, a 1970 census 1,174), but the number of houses continued to increase. 23 houses (numbers 232 to 254) were built during 1921-27, and the highest house number mentioned in the text is 315.

The 1927-37 record book, apparently quoting Bukovanský, lists the tradespeople active in Těšany in 1907 as two smiths, three cobblers, four tailors, four carpenters, two wheelwrights, two bakers, one butcher (alas, no candlestick maker), one roofer, one painter, four tavern keepers, and one midwife. There were also two manor houses (Těšany itself and Šinkvický Dvůr), two mills, a post office, and a police station with three men.

Těšany always stood at a crossroads, though the roads were not always as they are now. The original main street continued towards Nesvačilka, Žatčany, and eventually Brno. This is now a metalled road,

as is the road north-north-east past Šaratský Dvůr with an offshoot to Šinkvický Dvůr, but the old road east to Borkovany is still an unmetalled track, and the old road to Nikolčice and the south is not now a through route at all. These have been superseded by the main road from Hodonín to Brno, now E51, which was cut through by imperial command in 1839-40 to enable the swifter movement of troops. This anticipated motorway logic, going round the villages instead of through them. It still bypasses Borkovany and Klobouky and originally bypassed Těšany also, passing just to the south behind the back gardens of the houses at the top end, but the village has since grown along and across it..

The railways passed Těšany by. The main line from Vienna to Brno passed a mere dozen kilometres to the west, but the nearest the railway came to Těšany itself was at Sokolnice, on a branch line south-east from Brno (and reached most conveniently by a side road from Telnice). Even this was out of action for a period in 1945 and the mail had to be picked up from Křenovice, some twelve kilometres away on the road past Šaratský Dvůr.

The place : land ownership and village structure

In pre-communist days, there were four levels of land ownership.

At the top were the lords of the manor. These appear always to have been German-speaking (Moravia was ruled from Vienna from the 17th century until 1918), whereas the language of the village was Czech.

At the next level were villagers who held significant amounts of land: "tracts" (approximately 14 hectares), "half-tracts", and occasionally "quarter-tracts". There is no exact English equivalent, and for present purposes I have coined the word "tract-holder" for them. I use the word "hold" rather than "own", because the relation was essentially a feudal one; until the 1780s, tract-holders owed substantial dues to the lords of the manor not only in rent but in kind and in labour, though these were largely commuted to money payments in the 1780s and almost completely so in 1848.

Tract-holders had a legal status, but in practical terms the main factor distinguishing them from the rest of the villagers was the possession of horses. A tract-holder could in fact be quite wealthy; his relation to the lords of the manor may have been one of servitude, but he may well have had employees of his own (until the 1780s, the holder of a full tract had to work with a pair of horses on the manor estate for six days each week from St John's Day to St. Václav's Day, June 24 to September 28, so he needed at least a second pair of horses plus driver for his own land), quite apart from the labour provided by the members of his family. In 1787, Těšany had 37 tract-holders, 12 holding full tracts, 24 half-tracts, and one a quarter-tract, and these figures were to remain generally the same throughout the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. Matters became more fluid after independence from Vienna (there were land reforms in 1922 and 1924), and the writer starts to use a different word for villagers with significant amounts of land. There is still no exact English translation, and for present purposes I have coined "land-holder".

At the third level were the smallholders. The writer and her family were among these. Typically, a family owned one or more small fields, and these were passed on from person to person by gift or inheritance. For draught animals, smallholders normally used their cattle.

At the fourth level were those who had no land of their own and worked elsewhere. However, it all seems to have been very flexible. If a tract-holder or smallholder had more land than the members of his family could till, he might let out the surplus; if a smallholder had a surplus of family labour, he might rent land from others; and it seems to have been far from uncommon for the son of a smallholding family to learn a trade and go out to work, only to give up his trade and take over some or all of the family land when need arose.

A typical Moravian village is compact: a sign "So-and-so" as the road enters it, houses cheek by jowl along the main road and perhaps on some side streets, and a sign "end of So-and-so". Těšany was no exception. There was some infilling, but in general it appears that building was strictly controlled, and that if you wanted to build a new house there were only one or two designated "building places" where you could put it. Even the tract-holders lived in ordinary houses in the village, not on their tracts of land.

But while a typical village house may seem modest, appearances can be deceptive. It may have only a single storey, but it may well have a cellar, and the land behind it may go back a long way. Not only will this give space for garden crops and fruit trees, but it will contain the barn, the stable in the case of a tract-holder, the cowshed, the pigsty, and perhaps even some dower accommodation so that the older generation can live with the current family without being on top of them. The English words "garden"

and “back yard” do not give anything like the right impression, and a man who earns his living as a “gardener” may well do so by cultivating the crops in his own garden for sale or barter and not by working for payment in someone else's.

The land around Těšany was divided into 19 named areas which I have called “sectors”, with an average size of 80-85 hectares though they varied widely both in size and in shape. Vermouzek lists them and gives an 1826 map purporting to show where they were, but it is difficult to relate his names and descriptions to the positions as shown. They tended to be treated as units even in pre-communist times (all the fields within a sector would be fallowed together), and were natural units for the subsequent collectivization.

The place : crops, animals, economics

The land around Těšany lies at a little over 200 metres above sea level, and most of the soil is good. There are regular references to wheat, rye, barley, oats, maize, and potatoes, and also to “řepy”, which when unqualified I have always interpreted as “beet” though one of my dictionaries gives precedence to “turnips” (the writer sometimes makes a distinction between “sugar beet” and “beet for animal feed”). There are occasional references to other crops, but sunflowers, now prominent in the region, are not mentioned. Fodder crops were of course also grown, in particular “jetel”, which my dictionary translates as “clover” but which seems more naturally interpreted as the local word for hay while still growing in the field (Sue, whose mother kept goats, tells me that “clover hay” is the best you can get), but these do not normally appear in end-of-year summaries of farm prices. Vines were grown on the hills to the north-east from at least the seventeenth century, though vine-growing went into decline in the second half of the nineteenth century and had stopped altogether by 1918; we shall read about its resumption in the text. There were also fruit trees and garden produce, but the latter is not normally singled out for special mention.

Animals, particularly cows and pigs, were of course kept (there seem to have been few sheep in recent years), and in earlier years much of the land was used for pasturing. Some land was indeed used only for this purpose, being fit for no other, and when the crop rotations included a fallow year the cattle were routinely turned out on the fallow land. In later years, the land available for pasturing became much reduced, partly by the introduction of crop rotations without a fallow year and partly by the draining of meadowland. In pre-communist days, arable fields were tilled individually, but pasturing (driving the animals to and from the pasture and fallow land, and watching over them while they were there) was always done communally.

Work on the land in pre-mechanization days was of course grindingly laborious, and success or failure was very much in the lap of the gods. The first Těšany record book and the diary both report major summer storms which did great damage to crops, and late spring frosts could be even more damaging. There were also attacks by predators and disease. The potato blight which was to hit Ireland in 1846 reached Moravia a year earlier and persisted, and by 1846 corn prices had increased more than six-fold from 1842 levels. Again, in 1863 there was no rain until August 16, and a severe frost on June 4 caused great damage to crops. The resulting poor harvest forced even the wealthiest tract-holders to resort to moneylenders; in the words of the record book, “Mortgage contracts sprang up like mushrooms, and people were greatly cheated.” The next year's crops were relatively good, but this was not enough to help those who were already bogged down in debt.

The place : local administration and public buildings

There were various local officials, of whom the most important was the “purkmistr” (the spelling varies) up to 1848 and the “starosta” from then until 1945. I have translated the latter as “mayor”, even though in England we normally use this term only for larger communities. From 1848, there was also a “tajemník”, whom I have rendered as “secretary”.

In 1945, the term “starosta” disappeared, and his role was taken over by the chairman of the “local national committee”. (There were four levels of administration, a “local national committee” covering the village itself, a “district national committee” covering the adjacent group of which the village formed a part, a “regional national committee” very roughly equivalent to an English county council, and the “national assembly” or parliament.) The writer normally abbreviates “local national committee” to the equivalent of “LNC” or “loc. nat. comm.” and I have usually translated it as “village council” for ease of comprehension, but sometimes she gives it its full title with an apparently sarcastic intonation and I have followed suit.

There were various bodies responsible for law and order. At the lowest level was the village servant or "policajt", whom I have translated as "constable". He lived in the village, and seems to have dealt with day-to-day matters; in particular, before the installation of a loudspeaker system in 1948, it was he who walked up and down the village banging a drum to make important announcements. More serious law enforcement was performed in earlier years by the "četníci", whom I have translated as "police" though this may give rather too gentle an impression (at one point they are described as facing striking workmen with fixed bayonets), and of course there was the Gestapo during the war. After the war, the police became the "National Security Corps".

There was an initial house numbering in 1771, after which houses were numbered in the order in which they were built. Vermouzek lists the house numbers as they were in 1787. No. 1 was the mill, and Nos. 27-34 were various buildings connected with the manor estate (in particular, 27 was the tavern, 28 covered the manor house itself plus the courtyard buildings, brewery, and gamekeeper's lodge, 31 was the school, and 33 the smithy). No. 70 was a house provided for the village herdsman, and No. 71 was Šinkvický Dvůr (Šaratský Dvůr appears not to have been included). The tract-holders lived in Nos. 13-26, 35-37, 39-57, and 73, and Nos. 78-100 were the houses built in 1787.

The original Těšany school was a one-class affair, and the schoolmaster lived on the premises. Schooling appears to have been nominally from 6 years old to 14, though children of 12 and older were excused attendance from April until the end of October so that they could help with field work. The school had expanded to three classes by 1883, but classes were huge (the school roll in 1906-07 was no less than 292) and equipment primitive (writing was on slates until the third class, when the use of pens and exercise books was encouraged). I have read elsewhere that half the soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian armies in the First World War could not read or write, and on this evidence it is easy to see why not. In later years, things were to improve, and Těšany had a "měšťanská škola" (roughly equivalent to our secondary school) from 1932. This took the older children from Těšany itself and from some neighbouring villages, the previous school becoming a primary school. In 1953-54, the two were combined as a "nine-year school" (6 years old to 15). This was the basic educational unit in communist times, though smaller communities continued to have only a primary school and to send their older children to a nine-year school elsewhere.

And of course there were places of refreshment. These provide not the least of a translator's problems, because a Moravian "hostinec" is rather different from an English pub, and eventually I decided to use the old word "tavern". The original Těšany tavern, No. 27, will presumably have sold beer from the estate brewery, spirits (the estate had its own distillery), wine when available, and food after the custom of the region, and being at a crossroads it will have picked up some passing trade as well as serving the village.

The book

The present volume consists of 460 large pages, and is in three parts. Again, I quote:

The idea of writing this book was given to me by our village record book. This book, started in 1700, was given to me for safe keeping in 1942 by our village secretary Leopold Vahala, who perhaps suspected that the German police known as the "Gestapo" would soon deprive him of his freedom. When reading it, I had to sort out writing in Gothic characters, in places now almost illegible. And I decided to copy it out for our family.

The copying of this first Těšany record book occupies the first sixty pages of the diary, and then comes a section, almost as long again, in which the writer outlines the history of her family, taking material from the record books (both the first book as mentioned and the 1927-37 book, a copy of which she was also keeping), from the local church registers and the regional and national archives in Brno, from family tradition as told to her by her grandmother, and from her own memory and experience. The point at which this finishes is not explicitly identified, but the physical appearance of the manuscript suggest that it occurred not later than August 1942. After this, we appear to be dealing with a contemporary record, written up as events occurred or very shortly afterwards.

Technical notes : translation

This is primary source material, and the translator's duty is to be as accurate and neutral as possible. This is not always easy.

The Czech language has no articles, and the translator is always having to decide whether to insert "the", "a", "some", or nothing at all. Sometimes it makes a difference. At one point, the writer's father leased "breeding of bulls", but did he lease "the bull stud" (implying that the village only had one) or "a bull stud" (implying that it had several)? I guessed "the" and a subsequent reading of Vermouzek confirmed that this was the correct interpretation, but not every case is as easy as this.

Even in the absence of articles, Czech and English words do not pair off one for one, and almost every qualifying adjective or adverb demands a measure of judgement by the translator. The writer describes a frost as "silný" (literally "strong"); was this a sharp frost, or a hard frost, or a severe frost, or what? She describes the weather during a certain month as "dost destivý", but would we have said "fairly rainy", "quite rainy", "rather rainy", "pretty wet", or something else? All these interpretations are defensible, and others besides. In all such cases, I have taken a view, based on common sense and on how frequently and in what contexts the phrase appears, but I wasn't there when the original words were written and a certain amount of conjecture is inevitable.

Southern Moravia is not academic Prague. The writer uses some regional words which are not in my dictionaries, and even when a word is in the dictionary the translation may not be applicable to the present context. In such cases, I found myself acting almost as if I was solving a difficult section of a jigsaw puzzle, trying to find an interpretation which was true to the grammar and made sense. Most of my provisional interpretations have now been confirmed or corrected by Luboš, Josef, Anna, or Jiří, but one or two difficulties remain. If a word appears only once, any reading is necessarily conjectural; if it appears two or three times and the same reading fits each context, confidence is increased, but as a matter of principle I have made a note (sometimes in square brackets [...] within the text, sometimes separately in Appendix C) wherever there is an element of personal judgement of which the reader should be aware. The problem is most severe in relation to pests and diseases of crops, which are routinely referred to by names unknown to the writers of my dictionaries (and if a pest or disease does not occur here, there won't be a British name for it anyway, though there may well be an American, Australian, or South African name). It is therefore possible that what I have translated as say "mildew" might in truth have been something quite different, but while any such error is to be regretted I don't think it will have affected the value of the translation as a whole.

Czech is not an easy language to write even with the aid of a modern word processor. The present text was written in the unyielding medium of pen and ink, sometimes no doubt when the writer was tired or subject to distraction, and it contains errors; the grammar is sometimes inconsistent, and there are one or two places where it seems to me that a word must have been left out. Some of the inconsistencies have been smoothed out in a later hand, some have not. Where the text as it stands is difficult and a simple adjustment gives a natural and straightforward reading, I have made the adjustment silently; in all other cases, and in particular where I have decided to translate as if a word had been left out, there is a note either in square brackets or in Appendix C. I have also put notes in a few places where the reading is a startling one but the text seems to me to allow no other.

There are inconsistencies in the spelling of proper names, both of places and of people. I have left these as I found them. The place names could have been adjusted to conform to the modern map, but this would not necessarily have been correct for earlier days (anyone who tries to follow the fictional peregrinations of the good soldier Švejk on a modern map will find that at least three of the places through which he passed are now spelt slightly differently), and in the case of a personal name which appears only twice there is no way of telling which version is correct. In theory, the level of inconsistency in proper names should give an indication of the level of inconsistency and minor error to be expected in the text as a whole, but in my opinion it exaggerates; quite apart from any errors which I may have introduced myself, there are more inconsistencies in the spelling of proper names than in any other area. There are also inconsistencies in the placing of forenames and surnames, the surname sometimes being put first, but these I have adjusted.

The writer uses capitals for the names of people and villages, but not for names of sectors of land, parts of the village, industrial and commercial enterprises, and branded goods. Inevitably, I started trying to translate these names as if they were ordinary words, and sometimes the result made at least temporary sense (for a particularly simple example, "vinohrady", literally "vineyards", is also the name of one of the sectors of land around Těšany, and the sector continued to be called by this name even during the period when vine-growing had lapsed). I think all these have now been picked up and

corrected, but one or two may have slipped through.

The writer did not speak German, and German names tend to appear in phonetic Czech spelling with Czech inflexions. I have removed the inflexions, but have not attempted to recover the original German spellings. Some of these can be found in other sources, but others cannot, and there is always the risk that what appears to be a transcribed German name is in fact a genuine Czech one and should be left firmly alone.

I have left the various measuring units as I found them. The units of money down to 1918 were the gold piece and the krejcar, with values 60:1 in earlier years and 100:1 later, and after 1918 the Czechoslovak crown (koruna) and haléř, again with values 100:1. What it would buy at any particular time will appear in the text. Liquid is normally measured in litres and fractions thereof. Dry goods are weighed by the kilogramme (kg) and decagramme (dkg, 10 grammes), and in larger quantities by the "cent" or "quintal", which is sometimes denoted by "q" and is equated in various places to 100kg, and by the "waggonload", which in a note at the end of 1948 is equated to 100 cents (10 metric tons). Land is sometimes measured by the are (100 square metres) and the hectare (ha, 10,000 square metres), but more common is the "measure", which used to be the standard unit by which small fields were sized and which several entries equate to a fifth of a hectare (so it is a little under half an acre). Temperatures are always in degrees Celsius. The sugar content of grapes is also normally measured in degrees, but in one year percentage signs are used instead; the meanings are apparently identical.

The translation does not include the writer's transcription of first Těšany record book. Although she cites it as her inspiration and starts her work by copying it out, it is not properly part of the diary as such, and its coverage is very uneven and stops at 1874. I have made a few references to it above and there will be more in what follows, but the years it covers amount to barely a fifth of the known history of Těšany, and although an important source for pre-diary years it is in truth only one of several. But the writer undoubtedly performed a valuable service in copying it (Vermouzek, who had access to the original, cites it repeatedly), and had the original not survived the war historians would now be very grateful to her.

Technical notes : editing

The text is simply and vividly written, and only basic editing has been necessary (it was like a breath of fresh air to come from the worthy but dry text of the record book to the lively directness of the writer's own words). Since this is primary source material, any significant editing of content would have been inappropriate, but I have removed references to a few matters which I think should remain private within the family, and information about people still alive today is normally restricted to what is already on official record or otherwise generally known. I don't think any of these omissions has reduced the value of the book as a historical source, and I would stand by them even if they had. I have also removed or clarified a fair amount of minor topographical detail. To a reader already familiar with the neighbourhood, "down by so-and-so" is immediately meaningful. To a reader not so familiar, it is merely a distraction; either he tries to guess or he stops and looks it up on a map, and neither is conducive to smooth reading. I have therefore normally suppressed such detail, or, if its presence appears essential, have added a note (either silently or in square brackets) saying where the place is.

The book is untitled, and the present title is editorial. There are headings in the text at the beginnings of most years from 1919 and of all years from 1936, but the division into chapters is editorial, as are most of the pre-1936 section divisions and those within 1945, 1948, and 1968 (the subheadings used when recounting the Moutnice incident of 1888 are in the original). Paragraphing is normally editorial, as is the insertion of blank lines within the text. Judgement would in any case have been needed where a full stop comes at the end of a line, since the writer does not indent paragraphs, and I quickly decided that the advantages of breaking and combining paragraphs as their substance seemed to demand would outweigh any objection on academic grounds. Very occasionally, I have altered the order of a couple of items or sentences to bring related matters closer together, and I have moved what is now the final paragraph relating to 1948 from its original position before the paragraphs giving the corn quota and the prices of goods (a change which I am sure the writer would have made herself had she been writing out a fair copy).

The original text was written piecemeal, and wanders between the past and the present tense. I tried reproducing the tense of every verb as in the original; I tried moving everything to the continuous present tense; I tried moving everything to the continuous past tense normally used for English narrative. It quickly became clear that the last of these would provide the least distraction and let the reader concentrate most easily on the substance of what was being said, and I adopted it as the best

solution. If a detailed academic statement of the original tenses is thought necessary, it could be provided as a separate exercise, but I think it would serve little point.

Stylistically, the writer uses neither colons nor semicolons, separates main clauses only by commas, and sometimes runs sentences together with no separation at all. I saw no point in trying to reproduce all this in the translation. A certain amount of routine editing was needed in any case in order to remove minor repetitions, and I quickly decided that it would be best not to try to mimic the writer's style in detail but to write as simply and naturally as possible in my own, concentrating on accurately presenting the substance and trying faithfully to convey any significant overtones. I have however followed the original in denying myself colons and semicolons from here onwards, and I hope this will help to convey the simple directness of the writing.

All in all, I like to think I have edited no more heavily than the writer would have done herself had she been revising the text for publication with the aid of a modern word processor. She might well have done more.

The writer

I never met the writer, but Luboš knew her well and speaks of her with warmth and affection. She seems indeed to have been a remarkable lady. She had no formal education beyond what the village school could provide, and we have already seen how limited this was. Luboš tells me that her teachers wanted her to go on to further education elsewhere, but she was the eldest of a large family and she was needed at home. But in these days of universal education to 16 and ever more widespread education to 21 and beyond, this book provides yet another salutary and perhaps disconcerting reminder that what a writer needs is not a lengthy academic education and a briefcase full of paper qualifications but a natural gift for telling a story – plus, of course, a story that is worth telling.