

EPICS OF THE HUNGARIAN PLAIN

**FROM
JÁNOS ARANY**

**English and Introduction
by
ANTON N. NYERGES**

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PROEM

The Miraculous Hind

The shadows are long
on the pale and sapphire hills
of Potowatomi.
The cicadas are keening
on the high wind in the oaks.

I wait for
the white sleepwalker of the sky
deer eyes,
I detect them
in the dark tall grasses of night.
Two sleepwalkers we.

The shadows are long
on the pale and sapphire hills.

I followed her one night
fleeing into the Field of Burrs
a prairie people
transplanted into the sky.
And ever since a burr sticks
on my centaur back.
I cannot be in peace...

the cicadas are keening
on the high wind in the oaks.

Nyerges

PREFACE

I intend this work as a reassessment of Hungarian epics and their place among the basic stories of the world. Thus far they have been seen from the viewpoint of the literary historian, baroque and romantic influences, and this interpretative emptiness has played into the hands of a benign neglect for ancient and elementary traditions. The Introduction and the transformation into English of four of János Arany's epics provide the insights of cultural change and patterning as the basis of a new approach to the centuries-old background and history of the Hungarian epic.

Here we see Hungarian poetry in its uniqueness. While the traditions and ideologies of industrial classes everywhere meet mounting problems, Arany's viability is living proof that the people who produced him shall have a real voice in determining the conditions of their industrial future. Arany's significance rests in his sane involvement with life as he tells the story of the peasant evolution.

For kindly assistance in obtaining illustrative materials, I wish to thank the Petőfi Literary Museum, including all illustrations not here otherwise identified, the Hungarian National Museum (7-flanged club), the National Széchényi Library (King Louis the Great from the Illuminated Chronicle), National Gallery in Budapest ("Sword of God" by Béla Iványi Grünwald), and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Attila's or Charlemagne's sword).

Anton N. Nyerges

INTRODUCTION: AN EPIC JOURNEY

The three major epic poets of Hungary - Zrínyi, Vörösmarty, and Arany - based their works on written sources, medieval chronicles, and history. Zrínyi and Arany, in addition, had access to oral traditions by virtue of their family background and the environment in which they lived. All three were highly conscious of performing a task to preserve a glorious past and shape a new future, and they used their materials consciously to this end.

This palimpsest of oral tradition, chronicles, written history, and philosophical interpretation was used by all three with an artistry that augurs for the survival of these works as living literature. Their survival is further secured by the fundamental significance of all these epics in their search for new syntheses of Hungarian civilization. This is what the Hungarian epic is - a continuum, an experience. Its actual composition began only 300 years ago; like the Persians, the Hungarians did not turn to epic (or lyric) composition until the very existence of the territorial state was threatened. But its materials extend into the matriarchal and pastoral past of the people; it is probably still being composed. There is no “steady, old Väinämöinen” in the Hungarian epic - only immigrants in space and time.

It may seem strange to include Miklós Zrínyi (1620-1664) - this remarkable aristocrat, strategist, statesman, soldier, political scientist, baroque poet, and product of a Counter-Reformation education - among space-time immigrants. But that he was. His home and lands were situated on the farthest frontiers (végvárok - border fortresses) of the Hungarian Kingdom, where Moslem Turks and Christian Europeans had faced each other across an indeterminate frontier for over a century. His great-grandfather (also Miklós Zrínyi) had defended the border fortress of Sziget in 1566 until he perished along with the last man rather than give in. This courageous defiance resulted in large losses to the enemy and indirectly the death of the great Sultan Soleiman II, and thus it was a long time before the Turks were able to mount another large-scale offensive. It was an event of world, or continental, importance; and Miklós Zrínyi, the poet, selected it as the subject for his epic, *The Peril at Sziget*. He wrote it as a young man in 1645-1646 and with it laid out his program for the expulsion of the Turks, the deliverance of Europe, and the restoration of dismembered Hungary as a unified state on the absolutist lines of the Renaissance King Matthias Corvinus.

Only a man of the limes could have had so daring a vision, especially when the only Hungarian hope seemed to be the Hapsburgs. But Zrínyi acted with realism. Politically, he became increasingly disenchanted with the Hapsburgs - who were primarily concerned with the peril from Paris - and looked about for an international answer and a social one, for he hoped to bring the serfs into the liberation army (after his death both happened); intellectually, he followed up his epic with political and military treatises and publicistic articles that are among the masterpieces of European prose; and militarily, he organized an army as Ban of Croatia and also took over command of the central troops with impressive results whenever Vienna was under a particular Moslem threat. Europe watched the developments with deep anxiety and bated breath.

The Turks were still in much of Hungary when Zrínyi was killed on a boar hunt. But his commitment to the Hungarian language (he could have chosen Latin or possibly Croatian) and to a unified Hungary was a critical development in the history of the country - not only in the

sense of its ultimate survival but also in the development of a frontier personality as part of the national character. This is the epic journey that Zrínyi started.

In structure and composition, *The Peril at Sziget* is a synthesis of the European epic. Zrínyi drew on all available models, ancient and medieval, for ideas; the mythology, essential to the epic tradition, he took from Christianity, the ancient classics, and folk materials. In addition to family archives and oral tradition, he made important use of published Hungarian sources - historical lays by Sebastyén Tinódi (c. 1505-1556) and others, and the monumental history of the Turkish wars by Miklós Istvánffy (1538-1615), who first linked the story of isolated border fortresses resisting the Turks to the idea of a coherent epic. He knew and used a heroic poem "Siege of Sziget" written about 1570 in Croatian by Brno Krnarutic. There was no question of imitation in all this, but a demonstration of Hungary's unity with Europe as a people with its own unique experience.

János Arany fittingly saw a "wild majesty" as characteristic of Zrínyi's poetry. Stylistically, however, Zrínyi's deliverance of narrative poetry to rhyme (aaaa!) may have left the spirit in thralldom, with reformers ever since disparaged as un-Hungarian. (While most Hungarian rhyme is actually assonance, a language like English is expected to translate Hungarian poetry with "real" rhyme, not assonance. The penalty, otherwise, is the un-Hungarian charge. On the other hand, the best known Hungarian translation of the Kalevala is in rhymed couplets!) In metrics, however, Zrínyi undertook the subjective liberation of the spirit by departing rather frequently from the "mandatory" 6/6 division of the 12-syllable line which he employed. This led to a century and half of polemics as to the nature of Zrínyi's true intent with these "aberrations", or of possibly his "mistakes".

Looking back over more than 300 years, there is something unbelievable about Zrínyi. Unanswered is the question of what kind of synthesis is possible between Zrínyi's era and the industrial (post-industrial) world. The 19th century writer Kálmán Mikszáth saw the problem in his novel *New Zrínyi Epic* (*Új Zrínyiász*), where the hero of Sziget rises from his grave to find himself in the 19th century business and industrial environment of Budapest. He is adaptable, becomes a bank director, but remains alien to a world where wealth and politics are the new forces. A better understanding of this synthesis may well be the central problem facing the Hungarian intellectual tradition. Parallels exist elsewhere. It is almost conceivable that Winston Churchill could have won the Nobel Prize for an epic in heroic couplets. It is almost conceivable that the 20th century White House really could have been identified with Camelot. But neither actually happened.

After Zrínyi, the epic remained quiescent in Hungary until the 19th century. But throughout the latter 17th and early 18th centuries, when the independence struggle shifted from against the Turks to the Hapsburgs, there was so much activity in the field of popular poetry (circulated in manuscript form) with political objectives that a return to the epic form and an attempt at a new synthesis was inevitable. This popular poetry is known as *kuruc* poetry (*kuruc* being the name of the anti-Hapsburg fighters, mostly unemployed soldiers from the border fortresses and fugitive serfs eager to acquire free peasant status). They deal with the savage joys of camp life, the miseries of outlaws, and battles lost and won. Some are among the finest creations of Hungarian poetry. Gradually, the border fortress tradition merged into the fugitive or underground (*bujdosó*) tradition, and became as such an integral part of Hungarian resistance.

Some of the songs deal with Ferenc Rákóczi, leader of the anti-Hapsburg war from 1703-1711. It could have been expected that Rákóczi might become the central figure in the new Hungarian epic. But a number of factors militated against this. Rákóczi himself became an exile (*bujdosó*) and it would have been difficult to find a link between the underground and epic traditions. In the 19th century, the cultural offensive drew abreast once more of the tradition of last-ditch resistance, and a fortress concept reappeared increasingly in the field of ideas and creativity.

One hundred and eighty years after Zrínyi's *Peril at Sziget*, Vörösmarty (1800-1855) wrote a new epic of the Hungarian experience in *The Flight of Zalán* (*Zalán futása*). An earlier work of his, a play entitled *A bujdosók*, had dealt with a popular theme of the underground; but with his epic Vörösmarty turned the willing eyes of his countrymen from underground, even border fortresses, to the glorious period of the Conquest when the tribes of demigods headed by Árpád put the Bulgarian King Zalán* to flight and conquered the Danubian basin for the Hungarian nation. He was stimulated to complete the work by the reception accorded to Gergely Czuczor's *Battle of Augsburg* (*Augsburgi ütközet*), a romantic epic in hexameters which appeared in 1824 on the Hungarian victory over the Germans in 910 A. D.

Like Zrínyi's epic, *The Flight of Zalán* was intended to have a universal significance - the Hungarian struggle against the Hapsburgs was a part of the struggle of peoples around the world against tyranny and despotism - like the Greeks, for example, who were still fighting for independence from Turkey as the Hungarians had, in the 16th and 17th centuries. But by the early 19th century Hungary had regained at least some of the national unification Zrínyi had called for. Now what was needed, Vörösmarty believed, was to stimulate "an impotent age" with confidence in the Hungarian heritage, which was far older than the history of the Hapsburgs. And too, the Hungarian heritage was based not on absolutism (here he departs from Zrínyi) but the communion of free and equal men with roots in the people's deepest past. Vörösmarty's epic was a synthesis for which the spirit and ideas of the French Revolution provided the framework. It was basically a Fortress Hungary continuation of the old border fortress concept.

For his source material, Vörösmarty went to the oldest surviving text on Hungarian events before the time of King Stephen - the *Chronicles of Anonymous* dating from the early 13th century. Earlier chronicles, going back to 1060 A. D., were lost except insofar as they survived in extant texts. The *Chronicles* start with the origin legends, proceed to the election of Prince Álmos to lead the Seven Tribes into the Danubian basin, tell of the wandering to the

* A new outlook is mirrored in Attila József's "By the Danube" (1936):

I am the world - everything that once was:
the many peoples who waste one another.
The conquerors are victorious with me in death,
and the agony of the conquered torments me.
Árpád and Zalán, Werbőczy and Dózsa;
Turk, Tatar, Slovak and Romanian are mingled
in my heart which is in debt to the past
for a calm future - modern Hungarians!

Translation by A. Ny.

new home, and describe the gradual conquest of the land under Árpád. They preserve some of the oldest oral traditions of the Hungarians although the chronicler condemned the “untrue stories of the peasants; and the silly talk of the joculars” (igricek).

Vörösmarty wrote in the classic hexameter and became its undisputed master in the Hungarian language. While the hexameter was familiar earlier, Vörösmarty’s use of it made it an “indigenous” form, which has been used by Hungarian poets down to modern times. Vörösmarty’s sensuous music has intoxicated generations of Hungarians, including Sándor Petőfi, who sang “...where the stately Danube flows like an epic of Vörösmarty.” The change in 180 years from Zrínyi’s “four-cornered” or border fortress stanza to the elegant hexameter was not accidental and revealed much about the developing national character.

When Petőfi was killed by Cossacks on July 31, 1849 at Ispánkút, it was actually in one person the death of the old fortress concept and the rebirth of an even more ancient one in new form - the individual among new ideas and environments of his own creation. “I hear the song of a lark again” Petőfi wrote during a lull in battle, in the most telling recognition of his dual role.

With János Arany, the setting of the Hungarian epic was transferred to the Great Plain, where it received its most characteristic form and content. János Arany (1817-1882) wrote his first epic, *Toldi*, in 1846, only 21 years after Vörösmarty’s *The Flight of Zalán*. He also wrote three more epics completing the last one, which was begun years earlier, in 1879. Thus their composition spans the 1848-1849 War of Independence, which Hungary lost to imperial Austria and Russia. It is difficult to imagine a less favorable period than 1849-1867 for epic composition, given the time perspective, appreciation of the heroic, and feel for universal significance that it demands. But the four epics are marked by a unity among themselves and a logical continuity in respect to the epics of Zrínyi and Vörösmarty. Arany has frequently been called the most Magyar of Hungary’s poets. If this is so, it is due to his calm historical and cultural perspective in the face of desperate calamity. This is not to say he did not know periods of bitterness and disillusionment, especially evident in *The Gypsies of Nagyida* (A nagyidai cigányok, about a rebellion doomed to failure, written in satire on the abortive 1848-1849 Revolution). But it was an epic outlook that characterized Arany’s creative life.

The internal unity of Arany’s four epics is found in the personalities of the heroes - Toldi and Buda/Attila. The former is representative of the strengths and weaknesses of the Hungarian people; the latter of the character of leadership which emerges from the Hungarian personality and society. Their historical continuity - the link to Zrínyi and Vörösmarty - is found in the reassurance they provide for the national future. Like other great epic poets, Arany dealt with the past but with direct relevance to the present. However, where Zrínyi anchored his work in a stylized border fortress personality and Vörösmarty in a collective of heroes, Arany turned dynamically to the theme of character development. He thus put the Hungarian epic on the psychological and dramatic plane, and thereby advanced this narrative form to where it may never have been before in a national setting. The Toldi Trilogy deals with the prowess of the Magyar character and its continuing promise, provided it is tempered with discipline and control. In the Buda/Attila epic, too, the explicit struggle is with an internal flaw in Attila’s character. But Buda’s deterioration and demise is the real tragedy (as Arany rightfully indicates with the title) - and the failure of his people to grasp a concept of society whose time had neared. This is made evident in the First Canto when Buda addresses the assembly of chiefs and uses commercial metaphors almost as much as military to an uncomprehending

audience. Buda's weaknesses are less his than those of his people; and the same may be said of Attila's strength and flaw. Arany outlined and started to draft two more epics on the story of Attila's descendants, wherein he undoubtedly would have continued to treat the psychological problems of leadership.

The foregoing "didactic" material emerges without intrusion on the grand flow of events. On the surface of the four works, there is the brilliance we are accustomed to in the best epic poetry - the movements of vast armies, the throne, journeys to distant places, and mythology. By contrast, there are lonely scenes on the puszta; women in the bedroom, household, convent, and on the hunt; mother-son relationship; and more of humor (especially from Bence, Toldi's servant) than is usual in epics. Like no one else, Arany expresses virtually everything known about traditional Hungary and its values. Herein lies the "world significance" of his epics. There is no trace of Zrínyi's deliverance of Europe, hardly of Vörösmarty's link with the world forces against oppression. "The ancient house... need not gaze on a wide country and the world. Let it look inward like a truly wise man on itself" (*Toldi's Love*). The Prague adventure and the Naples military campaigns described in *Toldi's Love* have dynastic but little national significance as compared to the defense of Sziget and the Conquest. The continued unfolding of the heritage itself is the thing of vastest importance.

Arany's non-Hungarian sources for his Hun epic, *Death of Buda*, were Ammianus Marcellinus' *Rerum Getarum Libri XXXI*; Jordanes' *De Getarum origine actibusque*; Amédée Thierry's *Histoire d'Attila*; Priscus Rhetor's *Excerpta de legationibus*; and the Nibelungenlied. As his major Hungarian source, Arany made extensive use of the medieval chronicles of Simon Kézai dating from the latter part of the 13th century. Kézai used an earlier 13th century chronicle as his source, but added a story on the common origin of the Huns and Magyars. Although earlier writers, Hungarian and non-Hungarian, had raised the question of the common origin of these two people, it was Kézai who first developed it into a full-blown thesis.

The myth of a common Hun and Hungarian destiny rests on three legends - the Miraculous Hind, the Sword of God, and the Turul.

Simon Kézai's Chronicle tells the story of the Miraculous Hind as follows: Hunor and Magyar were Ménrót's (Nimrod's) first-born sons. Leaving their father, they dwelt in separate tents. But it happened one day as they hunted on the puszta that a hind suddenly appeared and, as they pursued, she escaped into the moors of the Meot (Azov). She disappeared completely, and they searched for long but without success. As they wandered over the moors, they found it suitable for grazing. They returned home and with the consent of their father migrated with all their animals to the Meot. The province neighbors on the home of the Persians, and is surrounded by a sea on all sides except for a very narrow ford; there are no rivers, but still an abundance of grass, trees, fish, fowl and game. Exit and entry are very difficult; once settled, they did not leave for five years. In the sixth year they wandered out and accidentally came on the wives and children of Belár's sons, who had left them unguarded. They kidnapped and bore them off, with their belongings, into the moors. As it happened, the two daughters of Dúl, King of the Alans, were among the children. Hunor took one to wife, Magyar the other. It came to pass, however, after living for long on the moors, they grew into a great nation so that this land was neither able to nourish nor hold them all.

The Sword of God is a widespread motif in the legends of nomad-warrior (Scythian) peoples. The legend of its discovery through a heifer and lowborn young herdsman is recorded in Priscus Rhetor. According to a Hungarian version, a saber now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is the Sword of God, which belonged to Árpád or Álmos at the time of the Conquest of the Carpathian Basin and was passed in the middle of the 11th century as a gift to a Bavarian prince. In the German story, this weapon was presented by Harun al-Rashid to Charlemagne, and it became known thereafter as the imperial coronation sword.

According to Kézai, Turul, the totemistic falcon of the Huns was on Attila's coat of arms. Anonymous (earliest Hungarian chronicler) relates that Álmos' mother (Emes, daughter of Onedbelia and wife of the Scythian leader Ügyek) dreamt the Turul descended on her, and she conceived (819 A.D.) In her vision, a well sprang and glorious kings flowed from her womb who thrive, however, in another land. Both Attila and Ügyek (father of Álmos and forbear of the Árpád dynasty) are reckoned as descendants of Magog.

The question of the truth and untruth of these legends (and modern evidence, as might be expected, has pointed out their untruth) could hardly have occupied Arany very much. He must have been well aware that epic poets frequently write of other peoples with a later significance for their own - the Beowulf poet, for instance. Arany accepted Kézai's thesis, poetically, and used it. To raise esthetic, literary or cultural objections would raise similar doubts about the merits of a good part of the world's cultural and religious heritage. It only need be admitted (and Arany undoubtedly would have freely done so, to judge by the evidence of his letters) that Buda is even more of a book epic than Beowulf. But it may be less so than many others.

That Arany transmuted a "Hun legend" into a Hungarian epic is most profoundly true in his dramatic handling of the events, the age-old concern of great Hungarian writers with the relationship of the governors and the governed, and with the processes of political and social stability and change. But it is most spectacularly evident in Arany's use of the theme of horses and riding, which brings both the Huns and the Hungarians under one cultural horizon. Children ride on "hobbyhorses of reed"; Ildikó's "luxurious litter" swings between horses as she lolls on silken pillows; spell-struck horsemen pursue a lovely doe; beautiful women mount their steeds at dawn for the hunt; the greatest Rider of all, the War God, drives his chariot at night while all the world is asleep; a lonely pair of couriers thread their way reluctantly to Attila through the mazes of the Tisza; Detre, the loner, rides at midnight and comes on a secret; Buda's bribed followers frequent his court "arriving at the hub or leaving for the rim" like spokes; and a horseman disturbs the ants that are "firecrawling" in the veins of the amorous queen. This is Hungarian poetry in its uniqueness and greatness. It should be noted that a generation or so later Endre Ady used this same theme of horse, rider and vehicle with an effect that is one of the marks of his genius. Moreover, he carried farther than anyone, including Arany, the demonization of Hungarian history.

Steeped as his artistry was in the past, Arany takes the epic journey into its consciously modern phase. But since Arany the world has shrunk and the mind has expanded in a change vastly greater than from Zrínyi to Arany. How will the national traditions, epic or lyric, fit into the new conditions? One can hardly expect a great poetry to develop any more within a traditionally national framework.

Two internationally known writers - Paul Ignatus and György Lukács - have projected the Hungarian epic to contemporary times. Ignatus says that it is “impossible for anyone without a fair knowledge of the Hungarian language to appreciate [Arany’s magic] because of his subtle and complicated use of syntax, rhythm, and shades of meaning.” This is in accord, in the stylistic sense, with the views of the traditionalists, still anchored to the four-cornered past, who point to Arany’s exploitation of the rhyme-rich language as evidence of his inimitability. They are prone to believe Arany saw the plains with “God’s eye” and expressed what he saw in unique language. A famous Finnish linguist was reportedly dissuaded from attempting a translation of *Toldi* after being convinced by an enthusiast that it was impossible to translate the very first line. The linguist turned his talents to the more conventional poetry about knights and tournaments which is found in *Toldi’s Love*. This diversion of talent may have resulted in a disservice to European civilization. Long and endlessly repeated, the myth of stylistic and cultural untranslatability, although perhaps not shattered, is being made doubtful by the broadening availability of study materials and resources in languages other than Hungarian. Ignatus half condemns Vörösmarty’s epic with its heroes in leopard-skin as “silly” and of no further consequence to modern Hungarian development except for the verbal music. With the “silly” charge, he closes the circle with the chronicler who condemned the silly talk of the jocalators.

Lukács makes out the political and social change of course in 1945 as the beginning of the actual realization of *Toldi* in the lives of the Hungarian people, but he regarded the pre-1945 history of Hungary as generally unsuitable for the development of a literature which could gain international recognition. Lukács is expressing a dogmatic point of view. Arany’s greatness rests ultimately on the fact that he maintained his artistic integrity despite the vast contradictions of his lifetime, and that he mastered his role in a way that makes him the true symbol of modern Hungary’s cultural flexibility and coherence, a truly remarkable achievement for anyone, especially since the contradictions of his lifetime included the spread of the industrial revolution and the retention of a peasant rather than the acquisition of a middle class national outlook.

For all that, Lukács may be right - if the Hungarian spirit can continue to be confined in fortresses, and a longstanding seclusionism might augur this. But in a fact of life as significant as the transition of political power from one social group in Hungary to another (pre-1840’s, post-1840’s, and post-1949) the 20th century has seen innovativeness moving also to Hungarians living abroad (Ady, Bartók, and many creative scientists). It could be a mistake now to continue thinking in terms of old limitations. The new situation may not yet be fully understood either inside or outside political Hungary, and even in the limited field of the epic the interplay of cultural flexibility and coherence has scarcely been probed. The Hungarian epic has been seen, if at all, from the viewpoint of the literary historian, baroque and romantic influences on an innovativeness and coherence that supposedly never was. It is an emptiness of criticism that plays into the hands of benign neglect and cries out to be filled by a generation that is free of dogma and understands the processes of cultural change and patterning.

Anton N. Nyerges

DEATH OF BUDA

A Hun Legend

First Canto

BUDA SHARES THE THRONE WITH HIS BROTHER

The leaves are falling from the old tree of time in layer on layer on the land below. I walked the fallen leaves and paused in thought. I found this written on an ancient leaf.

Bendeguz was buried in Keveház, and also Rof, the brother of Buda. And now Buda, middle son of three, ruled over all his father's realm.

On the lowland between the Tisza and the Danube by the Zagyva river, Buda's tent darts from a low hill to the azure sky. This was the city, this was Buda's royal house, his palace tent of wooden art.

This city is not confined by massive walls, or put together of motionless stones. It serves not as a haven of the weak but a nest from where power swoops.

You would believe it an elfin palace that a breeze might puff away. The tent-poles sprout from the ground, as it were, high like a tower and showy - the flower of the Puszta.

From there, Buda guards his flock in peace and mildly rules the strong nation of Huns. Like a father, he provides honest laws for all. He shares in the happy feasts and makes his offerings to God.

One day he summoned his chieftains all, to counsel and sacrifice called them. The great, the wise ones sat row on row in the tent with walls of embroidered gold.

Prince Attila his younger brother came, and the aging warriors of their father Bendeguz - old Szilárd, Bulcsu, Torda the ancient táltos, the cooper Szömöre, and Álmos the judge.

The alien Detre lurks in the rear, and does not sit on a high divan as a vellein. He has presence but is submissive, and a smile of deference masks his face.

When all were gathered and many more, fathers of Hunnish tribes and heads of legions, each shining forehead fixed itself on Buda, who greeted the chieftains with these words -

“Give homage to our ancient God, who rides on his war chariot above the clouds. He visits arrows of fire on the wicked; but the good he rewards with two full hands.

“Where can a man turn for counsel, above all if he sits by himself on the throne?... Cares and troubles lash his soul, he bends in the wind like a tree on the mountain top.

“Who dares say, ‘I shall do this, and it will be good, bring repute to my land and myself? We let fly our arrow - a lesson from everyday life -, the wind blows and it never hits the mark.

“Action is a vicious horse, lets the master mount and his mouth be guided by the bit. But he shies at every trifle, rushes into fire and flood, and pitches his rider off at last.

“One rule I know in man’s affairs which may lead most likely to success - wise and sober moderation. This is the river bank which checks the torrent of our deeds.

“When a merchant’s wares are swinging on the scale, truth sits at the rod’s middle. A judge calms the parties with moderation, softens the blow as he confides.

“Rightness is there and peace rests there between the hovering balance of weight and counterweight. When rivers meet, they roar in mingling - and then flow silently on.

“My kind of man, as guest, does not exceed moderation in food and drink. Whatever does no harm, he does; whatever is excess, he avoids. In respectable old age, he will be the father of his nation.

“I have long been under such commandment - the word of God - not only now but ever and before, to divide my kingly realm in two. And now this charge of old has fallen due.

“Why partake of the bountiful feast with single mouth? Why deny one who is of my blood? Judging as a judge and measuring as a merchant, I would fear to give a judgment like that.

“The Empire of the Huns will not be reduced if power is split at the summit. A forked tree is a spreading tree, though one trunk may grow to greater height.

“I shall pour out the fullness of my power today and greet my brother as a king. Like this, the kindred waters of two streams flow equal. Two weights are enough to hold the balance true.

“I do not think glory will fade if I light one torch with another. In a partition by kinsmen, flame does not die from flame. In truth, they shine with a fuller light.

“I can lead the multitude in peace. You, like a leashed war horse, will spring at the call to arms. You, my brother, be the sword, and I the scepter, May God now crown good deeds with good.”

So saying, Buda rose and from his waist handed the heroic sword to Attila. All approved his wise words, his deed because they loved his younger brother more.

Buda, Attila, and the council orders went to the sacrifice and the swearing with blood. A high altar stood heaped up in the courtyard, the sacred sword fixed at the very top.

With solemn words, the gray-headed Torda took down the sword and opened a vein in Buda's arm. Then he turned the bright blade on Attila, whose blood too poured into the judge's basin.

Then they led out a pure white stallion - spotless,
unbroken by a bridle and untouched by a rein - led
him on a halter from the stall where the sacred
animals of the altar were fed.

The old priest held the sword awkwardly like a knife
and stabbed where the breast swells. As he pulled out
the blade, the blood spurted. A purple ribbon stained
the white breast.

The horse collapsed. The garabonc priests - like a
crowd of vultures hacking up a new carcass - strip
off the hide, cut out the entrails and place them on
the altar for the seers.

But neither táltos nor other watchers of the signs
foresaw God's truth - foresaw this day would sire
the days of blood for generations to weep and mourn.

The judge joyfully lighted the pyre, and the flame
stretched its tongue flickering into the heavens.
A high song of praise sounded from the circling
hosts, and mighty horns replied with a volley.

Szömöre filled his vessel with pure wine, and gave
first to Buda. Silence held the tongues of all the
heroes, and then with cup raised high spoke he -

“Hear my prayer, Lord of War, whose name is ISHTEN.
Be true to me as this my oath is true, never to
denounce this solemn oath, never make war on my
brother Attila.”

He poured wine from the full vessel on the altar,
and waving the cup a bit saluted his fellow king.
He sipped a little. His brother took the great
eternal oath like this -

“Hear, too, my prayer, Lord of War, O Ishten, Do
not help me ever if I reject this solemn oath and
make war on good Buda my brother.”

He drank to this, and then he rose up and dashed
all the wine remaining on the altar. The hissing
embers smoked, terribly angry flames snaked out.

Old Torda was startled. But the others turned their minds elsewhere, to the merry toasts. They drank and feasted until midnight, happy that Buda and his brother made this partition.

Second Canto

DETRE'S ADVICE

Next day, the spring morning of the season awoke reeling on the good Hun warriors. Outside, the radiance and happiness of earth and heaven shone. Inside, the light of the mind struggled with fog.

Outside, the golden sun is splashing like a peacock proudly fanning his tail. Wavy white clouds, the swans of the sky, float on a mirror of heavenly blue.

The horizon is pure as glass, and nowhere blocks the eye. A tiny breeze laves it with cool currents, here and there a silvery insect flutters.

Buda sees all this from the eaves of his tent, sees it as through a cloud or billowing dust - the golden day a faded yellow and God's glorious world absurd.

Inside, a new worry flogs and plagues his mind, a grim soberness slithers coldly across it. What he did afflicts him, and what he left undone regrets. Whatever he does, it seems, is misdome.

And now comes the warrior Detre of Bern, as was his morning custom, to greet his lord. Detre saw the heavy mood, the ashen face, and aptly inquired about his health.

And after that he begins, weaving phrase to phrase - "Wisdom grows on an old man's tongue, but who matches this with deeds for all his days, him shall I call a great wise man.

“Yesterday you counseled moderation in food and drink, and without complaint. But today your brain regrets. You gnash your teeth, knowing if you told anyone, he would pity you with a smile.

“I beg your royal person take not my frank words ill. Your faithful vassal I am, as I was your father’s. Three generations of Huns have seen me now.

“At the great battle of Keveház by the waters of the Tárnok, and later at Cezumor, we were overwhelmed with a flood of arrows and spears, and I became a prisoner of war by Bendeguz your father.

“Since then I have served you. I confess I once hated to hear the name of Hun. Fire and water are not such sworn enemies as were Hun and Goth.

“At first, we carried the main battle at Tárnok, flinging many dark Hun faces into the valley. Good Keve was no more, or Kadosa, or Béla; but the Saxon Detre’s blade still flashed.

“At Cezumor, we battled anew. Bendeguz swooped down from the misty heights of Hunbérc. His arrow is still in my brow implanted - and ever since my name’s Detre the Iron Brow.

“I fought your father until my strength faded, my blood ebbed, and my muscles snapped. At last he held out his hand, he of the iron grip, and I was well pleased by the honorable offer.

“He did not send me into slavery as a prisoner of war or undersell my people among the Huns - in his court he took me with a princely rank to serve him well with counsel and sword.

“And the homeless people, the free and ancient Goths, still survive, and are happy. They live and multiply in peace under your wing. They are not broken under the yoke and they are all right, poor people.

“Shall I not repay so many good deeds with good as long as I can, with strength; as I breathe, with words? Bendeguz often, and also Rof, would seek old Detre’s counsel and were never sorry.

“Now I tell you (do not take it ill) that your new wisdom made a foolish start; for sober as your words appeared, your yesterday’s deed was mad.

“The rod of your speech swung on balance, but what you did was foolish and rash. You shot your arrow in haste and blindness. You mounted your charge - take care now it does not throw you off.

“What manner of counsel is this? Whoever heard of such a thing! One empire with two heads? Can you let one rein drop from your hand? Never such counsel from sober mind!

“Do we put two saddles on a single horse? Can two riders sit astride one saddle? One sheath is not enough for two knives, is it! What manner of brain ever thought this up?

“God gave man limbs by pairs, but only one head to rule the body. One crane leads the flock at the tip of the wedge. The hive swarms with one queen bee.

“This is the way of the world. But you who are wiser twisted the regular order of things - for you, books are a lie, and the annals of time are vain.

“Hunor, your ancestor, did not divide his power. Did Bor, his son, ever make a partition like this? After him, Keve, Kajár, Béla, wise Keled, and Dána all sat on One throne.

“Thus Apos, Zombor, and all your stock, are praised in song on your people’s lips. Thus Bendeguz and Rof, whom you followed, ruled alone the Empire of the Huns.

“But you, more wise than they (think of it backwards), yesterday divided your royal person in two. Unlucky man! Great harm will come of this - your brother is flesh and blood - you the shadow.

“I do not blame your brother; he loves you, but is fierce and restless like a wild steed - he can be mastered if you hold the halter bravely. But if your hand is weak, he will plunge - and you had it.

“You rejoice this partition comes from brotherly love.
No! it springs from silly weakness. This is what the
sailor does (they say) in a foul storm calming with
his esteemed cattle the waves.

“You weakened the fullness of your might, to redeem
a half at half the price. Unhappy man! There is no
place for a half-and-half partition here. When the
powerful sun rises, the moon fades.

“May God deny me to see the end, for blood will be
this bargain’s price, a great deal of blood. I hope
you do not learn at your expense; but if a sacrifice
is needed, you will be the lamb.

“My old age keeps me for sorrow alone, my powers
are loosely stretched like a wet string on the bow.
Like a cricket on the puszta, my thin voice trembles.
I cannot save what is doomed to die.”

This is how the princely Detre closed his speech.
Buda could not find a proper reply for long. As when
an eagle swoops into another’s eyrie, the wings of
fright flapped wildly in his heart.

At last he spoke in a hollow voice, faltering in two
directions - “What shall I do?... Your counsel - he
said - is late, too much for grief, too little for
action.” Now wise Detre of Bern bent nearer.

“Guard against Attila’s fame,” he said. “Buda falls
as Attila builds. And the song which spreads his
name on flying wings will be your dirge.

“Guard against his seeing your heart’s weakness.
Fear is the fountain where arrogance drinks, whips
up its thirst, and nurses a grudge until dauntless
cunning breaks its horns.

“Both of you rule - he as much as you. Make sure
from the start that he does not become more. The
banks contain the river to a level, but let it rise
a finger’s breadth and the floods burst.

“Two may fight equally at first; but when one goes
under, he will hardly come out on top again. If a
stone starts to roll downhill, it will not stop until
it hits the bottom.

“Right off be watchful he does not crowd you off
the common throne. It will be bitter slipping from
the narrow edge, grasping to keep from falling
to the ground.

“Out of brotherly love and softness, do not yield
what is yours. When one horn of the bow is loose,
the other, though stubborn, kicks to the side.

“I do not say your brother means evil, but he will be
too much for you if he finds you weak. He is carried
by his own will and a running tide - like a galley
catching the wind.

“I have said enough. Accept my counsel. I go lest
Attila see me here. I love him, too, but I fear
for Buda because I have lived the life of far-
seeing age.”

With these words the old hero turned to his tasks,
leaving Buda’s soul to toss alone, and toss it did
like a bark on the waves as he revolved Detre’s words
from beginning to end.

Third Canto

THE COUNSEL MEETS REVERSE

Attila fleets the time at Buda’s camp, where pastimes
and true affection hold him. He lives in one of Buda’s
finest palaces, hardly preparing to depart for home.

He takes his pointed dagger, a golden dirk, and indites
a letter, an appealing one, on a soft rosewood slip.
He writes with love and sends with love. Love’s desire
gives it birth.

He writes to Ildikó, mother of Aladár and first among
his women, bidding his consort in courtly raiment to
come quickly and pass the time in pleasure at Buda’s
court.

Buda’s wife, Gyöngyvér, urges her, he adds, to come
and show Aladár, her first-born son. His own heart
languishes for his absent child and the flames of
love deprived.

Spring is reborn in garments of green and greets a world that is all happiness. Attila's season is revolving too - his spring a-flowering, his blood and milk overflowing.

To a joyous toast he is summoning, writes he, the Hun nation, first to the hunt and then the feast, where he awaits his dear wife with love's desire.

Attila now appears before the open door of the tent, and the hero Detre's glad to find him in this humor; bent and gaunt himself, his body hardly bears a sword, but his words he spins with a subtle mind.

"How happy is the man," he said, "who is well served by health and the dark red ripeness of the male, and who knows he will father many sons. A good outlook on life never leaves a man like him.

"But an old man is only a thorn on the branch, seeing he is not wanted on this earth. He grumbles here and there, rustling like a dry weed. I am a guest, he feels, no one detains.

"They are tired here of me, too. I feel they are waving me on. I would gladly become a guest at Odin's, eat the meat of his game, help drink his mead, and joust rejuvenated before his house.

"But the Norns may have forgotten me, no one else of my age is alive. My sons have died before me in battle, and my dear grandsons, who fell in the wars with Bendeguz.

"They are gone, strewn here and there, and I myself have passed to childhood's second round. Like an infant in his cradle, I helplessly watch the world above flow by.

"My arms are old; but see I can and well enough - the many things that were and the little of change, for nothing in my eyes is ever new in this world, nothing I cannot show a model for.

"I have seen the sun, moon and tent of the eternal sky are the same as yesterday, and also the hazy Mátra. But man's works never endure, his artifacts perish, and he himself is mortal.

“I have seen the vanity of human things, the quick ascent and rapid fall of many, the death of kings, the doom of empires conceived in glory and ended in cruel defeat.

“I have seen the troubled unraveling of a golden peace as we raised our cups in a toast. And then out sword! Fix lance!... The people’s right hand which gives the pledge is running with blood.

“I have seen truth transformed to lies and noble pearls to pebbles, mead to vinegar, felicity to sadness, and fearless faith to crying mistrust.

“The blood of brothers as it changes into water or poisonous bile, I see forever. The hush-hush message betrays - guard against whoever squeals in the ear.

“Such words break unity up, pry into fissures, stealthily work an edge into hairlines until it splits and crumbles. Beware, I say, against that sort of talk.

“To Buda I have also said the same, for he is older and not as sincere. Like an oldish man, he grows weak and is always trembling - shakes to his soles at any little wind.

“A weak man secretly fears the strong, conscious of the coward he is. He keeps a wild vigil on his more venturesome comrade. Whoever can do harm will, he believes.

“To praise you in his presence is an offense, he weighs his shortcomings in secret. He frets and dwells on nothing else. The wind of your fame fans his smoke in a downward draft.

“Does your mind misgive a change in Buda since you share his light as king? He looks askance, withdraws, and drinks his glad wine in lonely silence.

“He has for long feared the shadow of your name. You have become a problem for Buda your brother, ever since the people took you as a boy on their lips and their songs of glory on the wing.

“He is hurt by the spreading sapling of your fame.
Old and young often name you with fondness, many
name you with fondness, love you who are the pride
of the whole nation’s eye.

“The pride of others, a speck in his. You are become
unwittingly the cause of his blindness. He himself
plucked his wing and divided his power. The fearful
one was hurt by his fear itself.

“Who can divide equally the tide, or mark with a
ruler the boundaries of air? Who decides where and
for how long the sun will shed light? Him let share
his empire and throne!

“Neither love nor loyalty begot the deed, only a
smallness of spirit. If he does it, he fears; if he
doesn’t he still fears. He cuts one finger off,
as a start, and wants it back.

“A finger? he could put up with that. But who can
undo what has been done? Therefore his heart is full
of grief and suspicion, and he trembles like an aspen
without the faintest breeze.

“I know you love him well, your generous soul is a
proverb among the Huns. Your word is an oath - not
to speak of your trust! Your mind will not shift with
a change of Buda’s mind.

“But rub long enough and dry wood bursts into fire,
human passions flame more quickly. And were you God,
your ears would tire listening forever to ‘Buda this,
Buda that...’

“Therefore I warn you beware of the snake; beware,
I say of whoever squeals in the ear. He will carry
Buda’s word, and add to it. With a smooth hand he
will untie the knot the two of you tied.

“If you would remain at your brother’s side as king,
a parting word of counsel I give. All Attila will
never fit beside him. From now on, be half the man
you were.

“Share the glorious and good, but bear the ills
yourself. This way, you may fit on his throne
though a great heart ill suffers the shackles of
patience.”

He spoke. But for all his cunning, he blundered. He looked terrified at Attila whose eyes flashed with pitiless lightning; and choking on his own voice he threatened him -

“I do not know whether he will sit at Odin’s table who today hangs high on the gallows before my tent, without sentence, foul flesh for the flying ones.

“But this one thing I tell you, old man. If you try to drive a wedge between us again, I will see you before my palace dying a gruesome death. Be it as I say, by Ishten.”

The old man fell groveling on his knees and begged his lord for pardon, kissing his garments, the hem of his ample robe, and wetting its fringes with tears.

He swore he did not mean it, nor did he think like that - the heedless words poured from his mouth one after the other; an old man chatters and is quick with advice, talks and does not know when to stop.

Bendeguz and Rof are living witnesses, that is, if living they would quickly bear witness whether in word or deed he ever plotted against the Huns.

Such excuses faltered from the old man’s lips, and the generous soul of Attila yielded. His anger subsided, died away; his generous heart could not bear him wallowing below.

“Stand up, old man,” he said, helping him to his feet. “I punished you, didn’t I, with infernal words? No more I’ll dispraise you. Pass unafraid. You are not banished from my tent hereafter.

“What you brought out about Buda my brother, there may be good in it too. A partition like this is vexed. But if self-ruled, the stronger yields... I say old man, you need not fear for us.”

With this Attila let the Saxon go. Now he remembered the letter to Ildikó. He ties the fancy silken box with a Hunnish puzzle, which only he and his lady know how to undo.

He ties it with a wish. - Detre walks away, shame
burning on his pale waxen cheeks. "Haughty Attila,
good, good! Even though it was hard," he muttered to
himself, "the wedge is in!"

Fourth Canto

THE HUNT

Hear the younger king of the Huns command the bloody
sword go up and down the land, summoning all who bear
arms mount and assemble in battle order at Buda's
camp.

The fierce sword sallies like fiery lightning; on
widening waves the summons spread; and the signal
is passed to distant posts; horsemen advance the
word at breakneck speed.

Like a thunder crack in the wilderness, dying and
swelling from forest to mountain and hollow, the
news spreads from tanya to tanya.

One day is enough, or two - but surely three for
the sword to reach the farthest bounds. And round-
about the neighboring people tremble - O whom do
the ogres arm against!

But joy is bubbling in the land of the Huns. Long
indolent, life clamors again. Like a slap of fresh
water on the sleepy face of the sloven, the call -
to battle - refreshes the soul.

Old men remember dim adventures long discovered,
and the songs. Dead scars tingle in changing weather,
and memories revive at the news of war.

The seasoned warrior tends calmly to his tasks,
speaking seriously and seldom, thereby doing more;
he curries his shining steed, sharpens his saber,
and gives his weapons a terrible mien.

But the young men, unused to battle and reared in
peaceable Buda's years, dash, break, run, jump
here and there like proud young stallions from
the feeding trough.

The women are all busy with their tasks in camp,
unspinning the party-colored yarn and embroidering
a husband's cloak, his clean and lovely suit.
But secretly they weep and sigh for their lord.

The children mimic war, shooting arrows and fighting
with spears from their hobbyhorses of reed. Sword and
shield is the game; they play awake and asleep -
this is how Attila goads the nation on.

The host is gathering at Buda's camp, covering the
plain puszta far and near. Tent tops multiply on
the grass outnumbering molehills on green meadows.

The hero Buda looked all around, and as far as his
eye could see and more, this was the scene. Turning
his head slowly right and left, he speaks to the
old Saxon at his side -

"I do not know why this people are gathering now, or
how to judge my brother's orders. We are at blessed
peace all around, and nowhere do the Huns have
enemies of whom I know.

"Nor did I counsel war, to tell the truth, because
when peace reigns the scepter is mine. It is wrong
to harry my people from their flocks, diluting with
war my cup of peace.

"But what kind of war is this rushing up so blindly?
I think it is a game, a sort of hunt; you still hear
old men tell stories that sometimes our fathers used
wiles like these.

"Yet I fear he will regret what he does. A second
time the army will ignore his call, although really
in need, and Attila himself be put to shame."

At this the gray-headed Detre gently admonishes -
"Well, well, your brother knows what he does. This
is something new for the people, and having gathered
for war they will feast and hunt with greater zest.

"No wonder this game is not to your liking. You
will see in the end what a man he is. And you will
say to yourself - 'Where is King Buda? I only
trample his vacant shadow in the dust!'"

This was their exchange. But what cares Attila for such, or what people say. He sits on his steed from dawn to dark; the first to rise and the last to sleep.

He exercises his troops, trains them on the fields in sunshine or storm. More than anyone else, he endures the rain, the hunger, the fatigue; his thirsty palate is parched for fasting.

He orders his men under colors by clans, regroups them by arms. Seven clans he orders, as old custom requires, and then divides all seven again.

Army grows out of army, troop by troop. He sets the lancers and archers apart, the simitared chariots and the mounted knights, the batteries of assault and the other machines.

He signals his commands by bugle all day long - arrow swift they leave their post, return on sign, out of chaos making order again.

The bugle blows - to clans! then the men divide into seven great tribes by clans. The bugle blows - to battle! now they proceed according to arms.

Oil and water, though mixed, will part; everyone returns to his kind again. No matter how Attila mingles his troops, they reassemble as quickly as he desires.

And like a magician playing tricks with a wondrous stroke of the wand, Attila revolves the troops and makes his magic with a motion of the hand.

Sometimes a warrior - like a bleating lamb between two flocks - will lose his place. Too bad for him if Attila detects!

Sometimes the warriors flee in a rout, running across the meadow this way and that, only to rally like a huge patch of birds before they alight.

Sometimes he swings the whole army like a gate, each unit fanning out on the oblique; like children playing on a whirligig - one end on a hinge, the other free.

And again like a good herdsman with whip in hand,
the long line coils, looping at the middle and
snapping at the end - pity on whomever it comes
lashing down.

The king breaks his army in day by day and sometimes
rouses the men from sleep at night. Or else, at supper
the bugle may blow with the very first bite.

But having driven them long enough, he grants relief,
receives them as his guests, refreshed with ample
meat and drinks. Who thinks at times like that of
bodily strife!

They drive great herds along the plains; if one head
is slaughtered, another takes its place. Thus the huge
army lives on beef and praises well fed their lord's
abundance.

They do not mention any name but his - Attila, the
only sovereign king of the Huns. The least feels
superior, thinks himself greater for Attila's might.

Once a drop of water, the selfsame Hun's now proud
of being the sea. Often they speak his name, I say.
King Buda's dead, and buried belike.

It is up to him - Attila the people's one king, or no?
But his faith's no breeze or arrow on the wing. His love
for good Buda stays proper as ever.

When the army's trained and works like heaven's command,
he marshals the troops before Buda's palace, and entering
alone he addresses his brother like this -

“Brother, do not resent this strategem of war! I had
worthy cause for keeping it concealed. You gave me
a sword, and I looked it over. I brandished it -
is it suited for battle?”

“It cuts well. But come out now, review the troops,
show your royal person to the host. Tell them it
is not a season for war, but the hunt and peace,
and the Mátra is teeming with game.”

He spoke warmly and clasped Buda's right hand. But
Buda's mind was lashed by waves, uncertain until
Detre sent him a secret wink.

Then he embraced his younger brother in faith, his eyes filled with tears, his soul leaping for joy. They led his best steed to the tent, and he presented his royal person before the host.

Once they wheeled at Buda's word, and twice (his brother whispering one signal after the other). He beheld with wonder how the troops unwound as he gave the signs with his own right hand.

He would have gazed on perhaps but when a troop of horsemen charged him with loosened bridles and pointed pikes, he gave it up in disgraceful fright.

Four paces away the horses stopped stock-still. But the lightning of mistrust flashed in Buda's soul, and he would have fled if Attila, who was at his side, had not detained him with a smile.

But Buda had no more liking for the game, ashamed of his weakness a moment ago. He proclaimed aloud the joys of peace, as the mighty Attila supplied the words.

Hearing the sudden news of peace and a chase on the Mátra, the people began to laugh in joy, cheering for Attila loud and long.

The whole camp rose up with one terrible cry, and the deaf earth reverberated at its new lord's name - Attila, Attila, Attila the King.

He sat with his army at the feast and sent them out at the break of day where the Bükk and Mátra loom - but that is still another story.

Fifth Canto

CONTINUATION

Ildikó rode up like the dawn, her face a full-blown rose and her hair the sheen of gold. She came from the East, where the dawn is born, the light and happy love of Attila her lord.

Her luxurious litter sways between two gentle steeds
as she lolls on the round and silken pillows. Aladár
capers beside her, his face and eyes aflame for a
glimpse of his father.

On the two sides and two rows behind, a hundred ladies-
in-waiting ride. Their canopied veils are sweeping the
ground, their faces flushed with the pleasure of the mount.

As the Way of the Hosts is studded with stars and cuts
through heaven's vault with a pearly light, so their
floating trains half reveal the earth, and the starry-
eyed girls sparkle between.

But precious too the glitter of gold and jewels,
the sifting scruples of light from harness to steed;
it shines into shadows everywhere like fire, and
proudly looks back when the sun looks down.

Behind, grotesque camels waddle along like giant geese
stretching their necks. They are laden with treasures
and a treasure's worth - tent-cloth, carpets, dear
fabrics, and stuff.

Then the servants come, mixed rows of brown, dragging
like shadows in the dust. And from her tent, Gyöngyvér,
Buda's wife, watches the parade as I described.

She watched in secret through the narrowed slit,
standing in the shadows of her cascading drapes.
She clapped her soft little hands, and these words
skipped from her involuntary lips -

“Who does this woman think she is? What sort of queen?
As if she were the only one, and there were no other
- as if she were a born queen of her line, and not
yesterday's moth of Buda's kindness.”

Meanwhile, Attila hugged his son and led his dear
wife inside with an embrace; he sent the maidens to
their quarters in the palace, and spoke to his wife
as he sat before her -

“How lovely you are, my joy, my pride! More beautiful
today than when you first entered my palace and,
peerless woman, you were mine!

“A host of suitors had gathered for your hand, pale though you were for mourning your first husband. Gallant princes and champions sent you treasures tendering proposals of their love.

“But you, young widow, wept for Siegfried, and would not bloom to another’s wooing like a bud that repines at the scattering of an early sunshine day.

“You remained like that with the early passing of your sun, withering at the untimely loss of your love. Before you knew, really learned, you had to mourn it like something passed.

“But since you are my wife, I find you more beautiful with every embrace. A woman is lovely when her face is misted, her eyes full of tears, but loveliest of all is the flush of love.

“Bloom then, be fulfilled, my beloved rose! Strew me with your petals, my tender joy. Let your lips suck, long suck my lips, I would be glad to die in your embrace today.”

She did not reply but gave her flaming face to the kiss, her half-opened eyes, her tiny dimpled chin, her two round arms, and smooth white shoulders.

They enjoyed each other until the hot noon sun rode the skies. And then they fetched Aladár from the horses and almost divided him in two with love.

The father tossed the little bundle in the air, the boy laughing and panting, “Do it again!” The mother watched, anxious but proud because her son was not afraid.

Then his father raised him on the shield of his hand. “Grow big,” he began, “great king of the Huns. Like leaves that chequer the parent trunk, your glory will gild my own with shade!”

He spoke. She wept tears of joy, and then chose for herself a more splendid dress, time now to call on Gyöngyvér, and proper to greet her elder lord.

She sent gifts to smooth the way - three camel-loads and the wonderful beasts not long ago brought from southern sands; soft Persian wool and woven Hindu silk.

Then the two went to the hero Buda's where the palace glitters behind a carved palisade. Buda and Gyöngyvér hastened forward to greet them, waiting at the entrance for the royal pair.

Quickly the eyes of the women clashed, but only as long as a first glance may last; and coolly they took each other in - dress, shape, body and soul.

Then Buda's wife, arms spread, received her guest with a shower of kisses. And Ilda was beaming at her elder sister's side, shedding the honeyed morsels of her words.

Gyöngyvér takes Aladár in her lap (he hides from her kisses and wipes them off). She praised him for being so big and good-looking. "Happy mother," she said, "with so handsome a son.

"I fear my eye may cast a spell on him. But come in my palace, and let's be sisters." So saying, she led her in. The two men followed in an amiable calm.

Then Attila, who saw the kindness of Buda's wife and how they loved the wife he loved, grew glad in his great heart, and with a smile said -

"Why did I think of this game of war! To grant our women merry sport beneath rippling tents in the cool Mátra while the summer sun's ablaze.

"Well, let us set out in the dew of dawn with all our retinue and all our women. Let them see the commotion of the hunt, and feast upon the proud wild prey."

Buda's wife clapped her hands in joy, and Buda himself could think of nothing against. They ordered the court to pack for breaking camp in the cool of dawn.

A bustle and flurry everywhere - they furl up the tents on posts and stakes, they collect the carpets and costly treasures, they kneel on the packs and tie them with skill.

The gold and silver vessels they pile in a heap. The old steward runs to and fro. What shall he do with all this stuff? a radiant flood of glasses, bowls, and plates, the banquet dishes of landed kings.

The women fret, large clouds wrinkling their brows for many a trifle. Many things will be remembered on the way. What is needed will be left, what is not will be packed.

The servants open the winter pits filled with golden millet from loamy fields. They raise the boza and kám in skins, and ample wine, soul of the feast.

Harnesses lie around, polished to a shine; coaches are ready for hitching to their mettled steeds. Beasts of burden are tethered, horses groomed, and the camp has sprouted numberless hands and feet.

Buda's camp is like a depot. Who thinks now of food or drink or sleep? Flickering torches scurry all night, and elbow darkling the shadows.

Next day as they reached the foot of the green Mátra, they pitched their tents hard by - Buda on a round hill, his brother a little lower; a large stream refreshes the site.

Down in the flat land, in a shady stand of oak, the army swarmed as though laying an ambush. Here and there camp-smoke clings to the forest like mountains puffing their pipe before a rain.

That day and night they rested. Then Attila gave orders for the hunt - and on a swift steed he scoured the hollows of the valley or sighted from on high the slopes of the Mátra.

As when reapers take parcels of billowing grain and windrow the fallen crops - here the pieces stand, there it is bare - the sickle advances, stroke by stroke devouring the fields;

So Attila parcels the Mátra, preparing to drive the game from hill to hill, ringing the great wilderness with bands of men who will lay the quarry low inside.

Let no quarry slip away, he orders from the foothill,
but forbidden now to hunt beyond the ring - the first
is always "King Buda's game". Attila himself to Buda
yields this prey.

These are the orders he gave for morning, and then
his army dispersed, each man to his post. He mounts
up beside his elder brother, and they go a-hawking
with their women.

Next day a cry of beaters resounds in the valley.
On earth or sky the game are imperiled - here
harried by arrows and there by falcons. Their wings,
their nimble feet grow leaden.

A sally of sound takes the silence eternal, the air
is close with the rumbling noise. Shouts, a clatter
of shields, and the infernal war cry huj! huj! -
this strange new word terrifying the prey.

Attila calls then on his brother Buda, the great king
of the Huns, to take the first game. Next is Attila,
and then all the chiefs. The others follow, making
a frightful kill.

Ay, what animals fell that day! bear, buffalo, wolf,
and a mountain of fox. They move the forest dead
on spears, feasting long into the old night.

The people are busy around the blazing pyres,
roasting whole cattle on the spit, big-headed
buffalo and antlered stag. The casks are sprung.
Story and song are chanted, gurgling sweetly.

Buda makes glad with Attila in his tent, and Lady
Hilda serves him wine as Gyöngyvér waits on her
younger lord, a gracious Hun lady in word and heart.

Meanwhile, minstrels pluck the lute, rekindling the
memory of an ancient legend. The song sings of
Hunor and Magyar, from whom the Huns and Magyars
sprang.

How they set out from ancient Asia, through Ishten's
miracle, from the home of their forbears; how they
followed the hind to Scythia and became the fathers
of two nations.

Mirth pulses through the whole camp until the sky
wagon turns its shaft earthward. The fires wink,
and only a hum is heard from the slumbering host.

But the lovely song of the lute awakens Hunor, who
comes with generations and generations of his sons.
The leaves stir wherever they step. Holy is the
night of manó - grass, tree, flower, hush, hush!

Sixth Canto

LEGEND OF THE MIRACULOUS HIND

*The lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song's aloft from mouth to mouth.
The grass is green on ancient graves,
and warriors wake to valiant lays.*

*The warrior twins whom Enéh bore,
Hunor and Magyar, mount once more,
amid the hunters' cry and din,
the sons of Ménrót, ancient kin.*

*Each brother culls out fifty men,
a hundred warriors follow them.
And as in war's pursuit and gain,
they draw the bow on nimble game.*

*In pools of blood the quarry's laid,
the roe and hart they deftly raid.
The fallen stag is left behind,
and they pursue the antlered hind.*

*They hunt the hind at breakneck speed
beside a lonely salty sea,
where the wolf and where the bruin
would prowl uncertain to their doom.*

*The savage lion and the pard
howl in the puszta loud and hard;
the yellow tiger whelps her young
and eats them when by hunger stung.*

*The lark is soaring, and the songs
of Enéh's twin and comely sons.
The lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song's aloft from mouth to mouth.*

*The sun is sinking in a shroud,
building a pyre on cloud to cloud.
The fleeing hind they still pursue,
and then it vanishes from view.*

*As daylight sank they had arrived
the waters of the Kur beside,
where on the shores of grassy green
the steeds may graze along the stream.*

*And Hunor said - let us alight,
water our steeds, and pass the night.
And Magyar said - then with the morn
let sound again the homeward horn.*

*But ho you warriors, ho you men!
What strangest region are we in?
The sun is sinking in the east
and not like elsewhere in the west.*

*A warrior said - it seems to me,
it sank upon the southern lea.
But no - another warrior speaks -
it's reddening on the northern peaks.*

*And by the shore they now alight,
water the steeds, and pass the night,
ready to waken with the morn
and sound again the homeward horn.*

*A breeze arose in cool of dawn,
and soon the red horizon shone.
And look, the hind has crossed the stream
skipping across the verdant green.*

*The lark is soaring, and the songs
of Enéh's twin and comely sons.
The lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song's aloft from mouth to mouth.*

--- ---

*They swam across the river Kur,
the puszta there more wild and drear,
and you will never come across
a drop of dew, a spear of grass.*

*The earth is hunched, the soil in lumps,
and soda sweats from sterile clumps.
You cannot drink the water there,
it reeks of sulphur everywhere.*

--- ---

*And still, and still when morning came,
they were impelled to chase the game
like thistle by the tagging wind,
a bird its shadow on the wing.*

*The lark is soaring, and the songs
of Enéh's twin and comely sons.
The lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song's aloft from mouth to mouth.*

*The Desert and the Don they wake
as far as Meot's spreading lake.
They penetrate the farther isles
of marshes with mud-bottomed guiles.*

*There's the hind - a misty breath,
with fog behind and fog ahead.
And if they glance to plains or skies,
she vanishes before their eyes.*

*"Hallo! hallo! where is the game?"
One shouts aloud, "Right here she came!"
"Now here she is!" a second call.
A third, "She is not here at all!"*

*They pierce to every hidden nook
and prod the brush by every brook.
They stir the lizard and the grouse,
but here the hind has found no house.*

*Then Magyar spake, "Ah, who would know
the way that leads back to our home?
The sky is perfect everywhere.
O mother! mother! we'll perish here."*

*Then Hunor spake, "Let us remain!
Let's strike a tanya, make our home.
The grass is silk, the water sweet,
and honey drips from hollow trees.*

*The rivers here are bright with fish,
the tawny game a tasty dish.
The bows are taut, the arrows swift,
and booty - our adventure's gift.*

*The lark is soaring, and the songs
of Enéh's twin and comely sons.
The lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song's aloft from mouth to mouth.*

--- ---

*In dark of night the rhythms breathe
across the puszta, across the heath.
The pipe, the drum, the music streams
as though from heaven, as though in dreams.*

*The faery girls are housed in tents,
they entertain with song and dance.
Their walls are spun of misty rain,
and that is how they entertain.*

*And not a man's permitted near;
these mortal girls are passing fair,
the daughters of Belár and Dúl
attending there a faery school.*

--- ---

*The test is hard - you kill a man,
bewitch nine youths with magic hand,
entice them into coils of love
and stay yourselves the game above.*

--- ---

*The lark is soaring, and the songs
of Enéh's twin and comely sons.
The lark's aloft from bough to bough,
The song's aloft from mouth to mouth.*

--- ---

*And Magyar spake - this magic fife
tingles, o brother, my marrow and life.
And Hunor spake - my blood, it stirs
with shadows of those virgin girls!*

Hey, at them warriors! head them off!

--- ---

*The lark is soaring, and the songs
of Enéh's twin and comely sons.
The lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song's aloft from mouth to mouth.*

*Loveliest of all, the daughters Dúl
to Hunor and to Magyar fell.
And then the hundred warriors shared
the hundred girls, and well they fared.*

*The Hunor line begat the Hun,
the Magyar line the Magyar nation.*

*They spread to Scythia then their rule,
abundant empire of King Dúl.
Since when, O mighty heroes both,
your fame's aloft from mouth to mouth.*

Seventh Canto

THE LEGATION

The Eastern Emperor sent an envoy, meanwhile, to pay his respects to King Attila. Mounted on a swift steed he rode with his lord's greetings, seeking Attila with his escort.

Up the Mátra they came with their guides, pitching a tent in the valley apart - then on to render Attila honor, but not a word or sign toward Buda.

Shining presents they brought, weapons ornate in gold and gems, and a fardel of coins in purses stamped and weighed by the pound.

They entered the tent, permission granted. The ambassador spoke in his elegant tongue. Though Attila understands with ease, he commands an interpreter to serve between.

“My lord, the Emperor,” the envoy said, “sends his gifts and greetings. He offers his true friendship and loyalty, and calls for an alliance with the nation of Huns.

“He has heard the far-flung glory of your name and your lordship over all this nation. He commanded his servants to tell of his delight in your deeds, and he wishes you good fortune.

“He does not want to live at war, but in good neighborly state. He will open markets, as many as you desire, in his cities along the Danube.

“He offers his brotherly good will in still another way - the King of the Huns shall be the Emperor’s brother. He will often discover ways to give gifts; or, if you request perhaps, yearly payments.

“He would waive his tax (he shifts his line as Attila pierces him with the gimlet of his eyes). If you would take up arms to guard his empire, you too will increase in fame and wealth.

“He has heard reports of your mustered army’s might with which you filled your neighbors’ ears. He does not know whom your great army prepares against, but hear the message he sends with our mission -

“A country runs by yours beyond the right bank of the downward flowing Sava; the people are the Illyrians, and these inhabitants have rebelled against their lord and mine.

“He could crush them with a stamp of his foot, but his armies are elsewhere needed. And in matters of faith he knows only travail by day and night for many are the heretics to burn at the stake.

“If then - and this is his message - you make his rebels obey once more, you as well as he would profit. We come empowered to make this offer.”

Attila understood the envoy's words. "Have you seen King Buda?" he asked. And when he replied with a "no", Attila delivered a stern rebuke, knitting his eyebrows into a frown.

"It would be seemly for the Emperor and his envoy to know the days of our kings. No one has heard as yet of King Buda's death. He governs supreme the affairs of the Huns.

"Go right now and make there, too, your request with gifts. I shall be present, as befits his colleague, the loyal sword by his side."

The envoys bowed, the leader asking for leave to speak. When the king relented in his anger and gave permission, the envoy spoke thus softly -

"With King Buda we have naught to do in this matter. Our Emperor commanded we see Attila. Through him only can we finish, said he, our mission. Or else, we rather depart for home.

"Who would cling," quoth he, "to an uprooted tree? Or to sparse tendrils on a crumbling stone? Buda has been, but Attila shall be. Forgive me, my lord, for speaking this plain."

Attila appeared annoyed with this talk, and yet he could not be angry in his heart. His emotions battle a moment. "Return," he ordered, "when I summon again."

He proceeded himself to mighty Buda. When he entered, his brother turned his back. And as Attila prepared to speak, Buda stared aslant into space, and burst out saying -

"Why do you rush here boasting of this! Arrogant Attila, I see what you are aiming for. What can I do in emissary affairs? I am no colleague of yours, I am a nothing!

"Oh, would that I no longer walked on earth to see myself decline like the morning shadow. Now let him swallow, lap up everything to whom the world's power is only a slurp!

“Here I look on - in patience, apathy, peace.
And startled awake I ask - Am I still me? Ha!
Or did that other one sit in my place? Am I a
soul who haunts my very own throne?

“But all the more no I say! I say all the more no!
I shall cry out and make everyone know. I claim
my right by oath. Or else - or else!... the string
snaps, and you are what you were.”

Attila's blood boiled and surged in his head like
a torrent. His ears ground like a mill - his lips
shook a bit, and the words.

“Shut up, you imbecile with water on the brain,
weakling, coward, suspicious wretch. As if I had
reason to walk a crooked path! As if I would cross
my word with a guileful mind!

“And what are you? A thistle on the roadside, and
my slightest whim the wind! If I but will it -
it was, it isn't... now!” With that, Attila strode
off like a blast of lightning in the sky.

He sends the mission forthwith to his camp, where
he keeps his court and royal palace; a guide rides
on a speeding stallion ahead. In camp, they prepare
to welcome their guests for the talks.

He sulks himself like a sullen cloud, swirling all
day in the fog of his wrath. By nightfall it lifts,
and he goes composed at dawn to Buda's tent -

“Brother, I was angry because you were ill-tempered
and made terrible charges. I come to give you my
hand and ask you to forget. But first listen to what
I have to say.

“You judged me wrongly with plotting against you.
I rebuked the envoys for their offense. But they
refused to come, and I myself have hastened here.

“To you the Emperor did not send them, it is true,
and at his command they came straight to me, perhaps
because I am in charge of martial affairs. Whatever
the reason, I am not to blame.

“They brought many gifts. I divided them justly and keep them in my tent in separate heaps. Since I was the one to divide, come now and you be the first to choose.

“Or you divide and let me choose. The value of this mission, brother, lies not in gold and gems, but in an alliance worth more by far than gems and gold.

“We have treasures enough, or can always win them in war. But a pact like this is priceless. Better to support a crumbling empire with our men than fight a sound one until we are spent.

“Whoever is reduced to accept my help becomes my servant; his actions thereafter are by my wish. Whoever is used to walking with my help walks not on his own legs, or soon falls alone.

“You charge me with greed for power! Right, but not for vain and vulgar praise. I want the Empire of the Huns to grow, strike roots of power in other lands.

“Power overflows or subsides like water and never stands still at middle level. If a nation is weak and does not grow, it declines and topples on your neck, prop it no matter how you may.

“I hear through spies what the Emperor does and therefore propose to accept the pact. I shall... but, brother, not against you! Give me your hand, brother, as a well-thought reply!

“Why if nothing else, the gain is there. I will squeeze the Emperor for a yearly tax, and now our young men by training for war will make themselves rich with booty, too.

“Yield then, to my sensible plan, and let my will be your consent. Let no one say - blood contends with blood, Attila and Buda will not agree.”

He spoke with force, but calmly. Buda silently gave his hand, not as though from understanding but overshadowed, he sensed, by Attila's presence.

This he sees - his brother offers half a share; he thinks of what they will gain from war. Yesterday, indeed, Attila hurt him, but now he entreats - it is easier to leave off, be angry no more.

Someone has reported in his ear how grimly his brother rebuked the envoys. And so he awakens slowly to the warmth of trust like dead coal at the touch of living embers.

Then Attila clasped Buda's hand tightly, sought to hold Buda's eyes in his own. Buda looks into their open mirror, and straight toward Attila's tent they go.

From her tent Gyöngyvér saw the brothers walk by two in amiable love; she opened wide her big brown eyes and stood there gazing like a far-seeing idol.

Buda turned for a backward look, saying to his wife - "Come with us, my dear. Yesterday you did not visit your little sister Hilda. Lazy! and you need go lightly a scant three steps.

"You miss little Aladár, I know that too. If we had such a son, you would not give him up at any price, for gold and silver, or for all the world. But we pray in vain for a happiness like that.

"Come then, enjoy him, and dispel Ilda's boredom day to day. You could always well spend your time with her, you the hostess, she the well-loved guest."

The queen started at these words, smiling on her younger lord as she went. But she was stunned, such the day's miracle, for Buda had complained of all that happened the day before.

Ilda knew nothing of all this, only that yesterday her lord was depressed. Now lowering her rosy cheeks to her son's she showed his father coming far down the way.

Like a fledgling bird flushed from a rosebush, Aladár runs and runs from his lovely mother's lap. The bush remains waiting - bosom open for the tiny fugitive's return to the faithful nest.

He runs faster and faster on his little feet like a quail in the grass. Straight to his father the comely child darts, intending to leap right in his arms.

But like a net that hovers over a butterfly's flight, Gyöngyvér seeks to intercept him with a kiss. He suspects a trick, twisting and dodging aside on the run.

His aunt pursues him with passion and desire, a thirst for kisses in her large dark eyes. As she watches from far, Ilda cries for laughter until it hurts.

When Gyöngyvér catches up, the child is smiling from the haven of his father's embrace. Mischievously he smiles aside at his aunt, who shows embarrassment on her serious face.

"Get down quickly," Ilda chides her son. "Bad boy! Is that nice? to do such a thing? Go right now to your loving auntie!" And the child readily obeys.

He gained his goal, and now no longer cares. He gives himself up like a patient doll, lets Gyöngyvér kiss him where she will and lead him homeward gently by the hand.

At home they entertained all night, celebrating the happiness of this day, these two heroes and their wives - this is how peace was made between Buda and Attila.

Eighth Canto

ATTILA HAS A DREAM

Amid their cups, Attila says to Buda - "Two days of rest the Mátra game enjoyed. Tomorrow let us start, for the weather is fine; and then we need prepare for war.

"I shall recall the envoys from my camp that you may pursue the talks and to what end I lead them. Every day I shall lay it all before you.

“Now we shall climb the mountain wilds and scour the slopes of the cool valleys - for two weeks or three, but not the whole long summer as I wished.”

“So be it, but come on and drink!” said Buda with a light heart. “Leave tomorrow’s cares. Come, my sister; come, my wife, and pour another drop. Never have I seen such, such two beautiful women!

“Smile, you two golden apples of the puszta! An old man’s breast is full of desire, too... But brother, do you mark this wine? it tastes better and better - like milk, a little does no harm.”

So Buda empties his breast of care, raising the bowl-like goblet in his hands. He does not put it down but holds it encircled, always smiling now this way, now that.

To him Hilda and Gyöngyvér do not respond; they fawn on Attila, begging to join the morrow’s chase with the women of the court and falcons fleet.

All four sat at one table together, Buda at the head, his brother, then the two women. Many other small tables are set in rows around the tent.

Dressed in white, the Hun chieftains drink - the táltos, the judge, and the rest. Detre, too, makes glad - four at a table with the soul of wine and heart of song.

Only Bulcsu, the chief, sits by a cup of misery scorning the newfangled wine. “My father and grandfather drank only brood-mare’s milk. I’ll not give it up for the juice of weeds.”

“Let common soldiers drink it!” Szömöre whoops. “Let him milk the mare who grooms her himself. King Attila has wine aplenty. A true hero’s mettle is born in wine.

“Gold is a rare, precious matter; wine is a rare spirit. Attila has aplenty of both wine and gold, the mare’s whey - huj, to hell with it.”

As evening hastened on into night, Attila arose
with goblet in hand - "A toast now to the guests.
With me let everyone drink, and then each and all
return home to sleep.

"We have reveled enough. Tomorrow we'll need our
strength for the morning chase." So saying, he
emptied his goblet to the bottom. This example
pleased and pleased them not.

And still they left, Buda the last of all, turning
back for a word here and another there as he went
shedding one by one the cares of his heart, and
at last Gyöngyvér pulled her lord gently away.

Wake, O graceful dawn who sheds a rosy light! A cool
morning breeze is stirring your breast. Wake, O
skylark from the warmth of your nest! The first glow
of dawn is lovely in the sky.

Rise up, crowned sun! a song is greeting you. Blare
out, bugle of war, wake the host with your blast.
Soft wind, dawn, bugle, lark, host, and sun! Rise,
all of you, all! Attila is already up.

Attila arms himself swiftly as though for battle,
thirsting for the work at hand. No task's too small
for him, and thus no task's too big.

He walks in the vanguard and directs the ranks; he
commands by name, scolds, and prompts. He knows all
his warriors. His eyes are discipline and his voice
a spirit.

Like a ball of string the army unwinds tying a human
loop at the foot of the mountain. The multitude makes
a noose for miles around like this - without a rustle
or horse's whinny.

Buda, too, rose up at the bugle's blare. He could
use a bit of yesterday's humor. The two women, Ilda
and the other, more manly than he, mock him from the
saddle as he yawns away.

A woman is beautiful at morning - her calm face
like gentle dawn, a fresh morning wind, a light
dew, or the bloom on a fruit; her voice huskier
than the song of a thrush.

She is more beautiful at morning on a steed, in a girdled gown, a falcon on her cupped shoulder. She trills like a nightingale, full of desire and joy, her martial movements cleverly inept.

But Buda sees all this like the blind man a rose. He does not enjoy the color but feels the thorn. He grumbles at the teasing of the women. But they all proceed; and beyond, the mountains rise.

Then Attila gives his army of beaters a sign, a silent signal running all along the open valley. A shout bursts like flame and spreads. Row on row they stand on guard, no game escapes from here.

The young men burst up the slanting hill on foot, and the cavalry guards the outer rim - upward a wide and grassy plateau, here and there bushes, low and full of berries.

First of all, hear of the bear's boldness and how the wives he entertained of Attila and Buda. Grizzly and huge, he rose ponderously on his two hind feet, dealing out blows as the beaters approached.

He shatters the first dense rows shaking the arrows off like tow. The lances fail to pierce, the cudgels glance off and he never reels. But the beaters reel apart at a swipe of his paw.

Opening holes row on row, he shambles downhill, unheeding of pikes or shouts. They try a hundred times to bring him down, but he only ambles on bumping his boisterous song as he goes.

He flings himself into the cavalry, and the women scream. Then Attila said - "Phew! Don't be afraid! Come on, Bruin! If you want to sing, then dance to the tune."

His strong horsehair lasso from the saddle he throws over the bear's neck; he draws it taut and tugs him along behind the horse. The bear would rather not - but what if Attila says so!

Where the hollow of the valley is broad and open, he spurs his steed and rides the bear helplessly around and around. The wildness, it now seems, ebbs from the beast. It is sheerest fun for all to watch.

This is how Attila fags the captive beast until
an ugly tongue rolls out from his panting mouth.
Attila narrows the circle on the run and commands
the beaters at last to truss him up.

Their pleasure done, Ilda and Gyöngyvér remained
in the valley with their favorite falcons. Buda
rode up the mountain, Attila in the lead seeking
an easier ascent for his brother.

As when the fertile Tisza flows over the brim of
heaven and earth, the skies and waters mingle in
a terrifying ball, and only an island tip appears
in all this tide;

So the peak fills with lumbering beasts of the wild,
bellowing bulls, a hundred different kinds of herds,
here sheep, there horses as though Noah chose this
place to build his ark.

Such is the island on the Mátra, I imagine. The poor
wild things seek refuge there as a flood of arrows
and shining spears drive them on, and the shields
create a terrible din.

You could see the haggard wolves in anger hunched,
gnashing their fangs at the iron ring. Tusks boars
splinter the white birch in helpless rage.

You could see bull buffaloes - with the whole
herd - rushing from one end to the other, lovely
trembling heifers in the center hiding from the
uproar a bit.

Now Attila says, "My brother, don't forget - you
can slay some easy game there among the stags."
Then Buda bethought himself and spurred his steed,
Attila following a distance behind.

And all the tárogatók resound. A skin drum booms
with the beat of a club. The air is rent by a
hundred blasts of the horn, signaling the royal
hunt has begun.

Buda could easily slay a fallow deer or stag, but
how embarrassing in Attila's sight! He felt the
sting of his brother's words, and turns his fire
at the buffalo herd.

He aims his spear against an enormous bull - galloping out front with bristling mane. But his eyes are dazzled, his right arm trembles, and the weapon glances from the shielding horns.

The wild beast rages - straight at Buda! ripping the hot guts from his spike-brown horse. Sideways it plunges with a shudder and pins King Buda's thigh underneath.

Oh, if I only had one word to picture one moment like this! - all too well Attila saw Buda's dire danger and was nearest by also to lend a hand.

But horrible vision, the fiendish Ármány rises between the king and his younger brother standing. He looms like a tower above the hero, horrendous that form for him to behold.

His tusk is swinging low, his eyes bloodshot; and lightning forks from his tongue. His mane hurls a flame, every serpent of his beard, hanging to the waist, is crested with blood.

His shield's a crag, a sheer mountain side. His terrible broadsword he holds in one hand, jerks with the other Buda's head, yanking it with a hideous grin at Attila.

Then like a raven speeding across the sun, a shadow flies over Attila's true soul - better to abandon his brother to death rather than his own patience be tried forever.

But seizing forthwith his dogwood spear, he attacks God's evil foe. "Ármány," the hero cries, "cannibal Ármány! Be not overweening when you count on Attila.

"Slaying, I shall not slay you; - your mother gave you no birth for a carcass. With a wound and pain I'll maim you forever!" He drove speaking. The awful one vanished, and the weapon struck a blank.

To his brother's side he came as the beast was finishing him off with his knees and, bellowing at the smell of blood to the skies, brought to a head the vengeance he desired.

A thrust of the lance, the bull collapsed, and his blood poured out black; the rest stampede at the kill, white crests up the shoreline running shoulder over shoulder.

Now like a beater wielding a stout stick, Attila twirls his murderous war club - and with a sudden hole in the ranks, the herd turns around and shows its heels.

The others do not look idly on from the distance, but hasten to the rescue; they all hurry to lay a hand on the horse and draw the king to his feet.

Not badly hurt but freed like this, Buda embraced his brother and fell on his neck - "Never, Attila, never!" he could only mumble, and still Attila knew what the heart meant to say.

And then he clasped his brother's hand gently. "For us," he said, "let this be enough today. Let us now leave the game for others to slay. Come, we will see how our women go a-hawking."

But behold, something has arisen between Gyöngyvér and Ildikó, an astounding brawl, all for no cause. Both had sent their falcons up for a single dove at once.

The falcon of Buda's queen rose straight like an arrow from the sinew. But the other - he scarcely opens a gap when down he swoops on Gyöngyvér's bird.

He attacks, claws, and scatters the warm feathers dripping with fresh blood. They hear a screeching, but the fight's unseen - a freckle only in the shiny air.

Suddenly a rent falcon drops in the lap almost of Buda's queen. She picks it up - looks, caresses, and moans as her tears burst forth.

"Ilda, guileful Hilda, ruthless Krimhilda! Look, your hawk has killed mine off. Now look." She held it up. But with a laugh her sister struck the bird from her hand, and trampling on it said -

“Bird for bird, I can give a hundred. What a shame to bawl over such a trifle! Fie! Anyone with a bit of sense would not.” This does not serve to calm the queen.

“What do I want,” she said, “with your bird if you cannot revive my precious Turul hawk! I have neither son nor darling daughter. Only this bird had I in all the world, and now it’s gone.”

Ildiko’s face flamed, her beautiful brow shone like blood on snow. “Don’t scream, you crazy fool!” her sharp voice rang. “You are not a baby or a sprig of a girl.”

“Don’t ever call me old!” Buda’s queen retorted. “Speak softly in my presence, you queen by someone’s favor! I do not know which of us is older by a day! Or who is nastier in speech than you!”

This is how they wrangled, both speaking at once. Attila and Buda arrived amid such strife. With difficulty, they drew out the queen’s complaint, and Buda in anger said -

“Woman! leave off, do you hear me, or else you’ll suffer bitter rue. While Attila was now saving your husband’s life, what are the two of you up to!”

“Oh, the bitter rue I already know of black sorrow,” cries Buda’s wife. “I shall never reach a good end, I know that - never, because of this woman and her lord.”

And Attila soothes his own ruffled, angry dove with a gentle voice meanwhile. “Give your falcon to Gyöngyvér,” he urges. “A pet for a pet - and the feud will end.”

She seemed to yield to the soft words. Her falcon arrives to a golden leash, and she takes it in her dewy hands. Toward her aunt she steps, wrings the neck and flings it murdered at her feet.

With great trouble the two heroes toiled to keep the trifle from exploding at least. The quarrel came to a halt as they brought at last their women to embrace.

And yet like hurt children who leave off crying,
although they feel the heartache throbbing on inside,
their eyes smile and lips chatter, but the hurt
within they do not want to stop.

The hunting though comes to an end this day, and
revels follow like the day before. Attila hosted
his warriors at the feast, and then lay to rest
by his reposing wife.

The stars ceased to flicker on earth - all eyes
were closed, the campfires died. But the great
tent of heaven, deepening above, shone everywhere
- the eternal being awake all night.

Behold, the old Ishten, eye and sun of the earth,
lord of hosts and father of earth, water, and eternal
fire, trainer of men in a fleeting life, sat in his
tent on a golden armchair.

The hanging carpets of the sky were drawn, and he
listens to the panting of mortals everywhere. He
looks with steel-mirrored eyes into the deep of things,
and keeping a calm watch put his thoughts to graze.

With shield leaning idly against his throne, he rests
his left elbow on the arm; he lowers his brow on a
finger-tip, the whiteness of his beard overflows
the deep.

His right hand, the sinews a bit swollen, rests on
the sword's hilt, studded with rubies; at his foot,
a quiver on the steps of the throne with the terrible
burning arrows of heaven.

As his eyes examined the round earth, they came to
rest at last on Attila's dream. His grave old face
brightened creating a rosy hue on the sky - and
gave birth to the northern lights.

"My servant, Attila the hero, is sleeping soundly.
Now I must change his useless dream; and from the
wretched fogs of the mind, plunge him into a purer
dream of his destiny," he said.

"The time is come for, see, he conquers himself and
fights with zeal. Today he triumphed over Ármány
and saved the life his brother Buda wearies of.

“The time is come to possess his empire as is written from time eternal in secret wedges on the Tree of the World - Lord of all if Lord of his Flaw.

“Let be fulfilled what must be! Good or evil, let the future come! Today I pledge Attila for the great deeds - and gird his waist with the Sword of God.”

He spoke - the great majestic person rose up and solemnly entered his gala storehouse of weapons. He chooses a sword engraved with secret writing no living mortal might ever decipher.

His servants harness two steeds of wind that graze on fire; he grasps the glittering reins, and Ishten himself drives his shining war chariot as he descends in the thunder of the sky.

He stops his horses at Attila’s tent and quietly enters where the lord of earth is asleep. He girds the dreamer with the sword and gallops away on the chariot as he came.

The soft air clatters but speeds him on like waters skimmed, grating and howling under the violence of wheels, so great the force so swift the speed.

Many awake from their sleep on far-off fields, pull the covers up to their ears, and sleep a deeper sleep at awakening dawn - no earthling may ever see the Lord of Hosts.

Ninth Canto

THE SWORD OF GOD

In the morning Buda’s wife flew to her husband, screaming like a gull that smells the storm. “Old man, don’t sleep,” she cried. “They’re thick as hand and glove over there.

“Táltos, wise men, seers, and altar-tender assemble with their magic songs. Soothsayer, wizard, whoever is adept, says his incantations; priests, spellers of dreams, and a whole army of such.

“I always told you so, but what was the use - I have been watching since dawn! Great things are happening in your brother’s tent - And you, O king, they are letting you sleep!”

Buda rose at once, rubbing his eyes. “What’s that, what did you say?” he asks with trembling lips. And then he reels away to find out from the good hero Detre what is going on (who if he knows).

It is true the soothsayers are gathering in Attila’s tent, seers who tell the future by signs. Attila summoned all, old Torda first, and presented them his miraculous dream.

“Wise old men,” he said, “the gates of knowledge! On earth guardians of God’s portals! Listen to my dream, venerable seers. Was it good? Was it bad? You unravel the meaning of it.

“I dreamt last night (as I often do!) I was a child playing with my toy soldiers, in my long-haired youth, within the bustling courtyard of my father, the hero Bendeguz.

“My playmate, the boy Aetius was there, princely son of a Roman family. Two armies were marshalled from the sons of the Huns, and the two of us led the opposing hosts.

“We played for a while with instruments that inflict no wounds, blunt and innocent weapons. In craft and cunning we competed, fighting now in Roman and now in Hunnish style.

“But of a sudden all the swords turn keen, soaking the grass with blood in serious war. A battle cry resounds. The skies darken, and the blue arrows of the War God blaze in thunder.

“And behold! An old gray man in pure white radiance descends straight at me. He girdles my waist with a mighty sword. I felt the weight, the pressure of the belt.

“For a moment, as if wide awake, I touched the sword - it was still there. The gray man stood before my bed in a light from where I saw the roof of the tent.

“But the dream darkened - I trod the air like one who swims the sea alone and far away. High overhead, without wings, I sailed on the air, the sword naked in my right hand.

“A crown of forests roared below me. The West poured out great flowing rivers. Men grubbed the earth like ants, and the ungrazed mounds of earth were black.

“Great cities rose of stone - and I swooped down again and again and destroyed them to the foundations. At once I cut down city after city with the sword. Now, wise old men, what does this dream foretell?”

A long silence followed as they sank into their beards. Attila turned his eyes from one to the other, and Torda at last raised his voice -

“So it is! since time, since the beginning of time according to the numbers three times seven, the prophecy has passed from generation to generation and every old táltos has left it for his sons.

“While keeping silent, I turned in my mind the circles of long revolving years. And behold, the three times seven is fulfilled this year! The táltos’ true tongue is no longer tied.

“Seven hundred, seven tens, and seven are the years after which the Sword of God will come to light. And the hero to whom God gives it, through a miracle, may possess the world.

“Rejoice! happy signs are swimming in the sky. You are the hero, you son of Bendeguz! I do not know where this sword, and how - but it shall be yours before this holy year has fully passed.”

No sooner did the old priest close his lips, the tent of Attila flapped at the door. Chief Bulcsu entered with a servant boy whose face bespoke great things to tell.

A sword was in his right hand, naked and curved. “That’s it! That’s it!” Attila cried. Like a wind shaking a grove of trees, a roar arose, and then Bulcsu told his story.

“King! a little while ago this boy came - see he is a lowborn herdsman - bowing down to my stirrup he greeted me as I rode over his field.

“Then he told of unbelievable things - this morning as his herd wandered over the tract, he saw his favorite heifer was lame, the blood in her hoofmarks staining the grass.

“He went right off to learn the cause and thought to find some thorn or rock or bone - but behold, he came on a piece of iron at last, sticking up like the tip of an instrument of war.

“At first he leaves it there, goes off (to pick iron from dust is poverty’s mark), but regretting he hastens back lest his cattle come to harm once more.

“Now behold, the sword’s tip has risen twice as tall! He reaches out, it bursts into flame. He is terrified and runs away. When his fears are stilled, he returns a third time to look again.

“He tiptoes nearer, his heart pounding terribly hard. He pauses again and again - should he go on? or not? He stands on tiptoe and peers ahead - I tell it as me he told.

“From a distance he sees, like sedge from the lake, the shimmering sword above the grass. As though it came fresh from the burnisher’s hands, the gold was untarnished, the steel unstained.

“No longer daring now to approach the sword, he runs recognizing my horse from far. He tells me. I warn him to speak the truth. He beckons and leads me, I go along.

“Oh, what a miraculous sight for a human eye! Only the hilt was buried still in the ground. No flame smote my right hand - it yielded lightly. Here it is, wear it, you my king, as beseems your glory!”

He spoke and the young herdsman earnestly confirmed it, shaking his long hair bleached blond by the sun. His palm, too, shook with a great reward. And now the soothsayers scattered round about.

Attila, though, enters the armory to vest the sword;
miraculously it fits into the most beautiful sheath.
He puts it on, draws it out, whirls it in his hand.

He strikes three times to the four mother winds -
the east, the west, the north, the south. The iron
winged through the air like a buzzing top, and the
towering soul of Attila spoke -

“Stars fall, earth shakes - it is come, the year of
wonders. Behold me, behold me, hammer of the world! I
shall drive the nations under my heels - the earth
has no other lord but me!”

He spoke, and hung his lovely treasure on a nail. Then
the Hun leader left to inspect his troops. The whole
army has learned the wonders of heaven, and they kneel
as before the divine.

The great tidings make everyone drunk with joy, but
Buda's heart is full of sorrow; and Gyöngyvér, troubled
with cares that swell her grief, repeats incessantly,
“Didn't I tell you so!”

But Ilda, seated at her work on the other side, heard
every word through the carpet wall. She laid down the
needle from her soft little hand; and when her husband
left, she took down the sword.

And she said to her son - “Come here, my little one,
my hope so tiny but waxing tall. My green tree, my
golden light - here is your inheritance, look at it,
my little son.

“Oh, a husband is a mother's strong support - from
day to day. But she knows he may fall. She puts her
hope in her own male child. Her faith lives on and
grows in her child's growth.

“On fortune's lap my need to fear I learned - my
husbands are riven early from my side. Quickly my
first husband I lost; his male embrace I learned
in a cry of woe.

“Once bitten by a snake, you shun the lowly lizard;
a heart dark with mourning fears a shadow. Me they
bit, my kinsmen, and hooded my bridal head with
black.

“Oh, what they did to my heroic husband! I loved him with a girl’s love while he lived. I love him dead, and I love him now; when they bury me, I shall go on loving in the grave.

“They lured him on a chase and cut him down. They flung his mangled body at my door; while I was weeping the death of my beloved lord, they sank his hoard in the whirling Rhine.

“Then in my mourning with suitors they plagued me, whom they brought all hours of the day. The prince of the Huns was the very last, and this gave birth to the thought of my revenge.

“I saw him as a dragon in human form, a howling wild beast on an alien desert. This is the kind of man I wanted, and gave my hand on it - he would take revenge upon my brothers.

“But I found Attila noble and great, the one after Siegfried I could really adore. With him this woman’s heart would be happy if it were not the old coffin of my perished love.

“I know he can take vengeance in an honorable war. But I don’t want it that way! I want treachery and ambush, the bloody corpses disfigured in death.

“Or should Gunther, the false, fall in fair battle? Should Gernot’s wicked soul be despatched to Odin? Should Hagen, who foully stabbed my lord, die in honor at Attila’s arm?

“No, my two dear brothers, kings of the Rhine! No, Hagen. I weigh fairly the price. Let it be detestable as the crime, and all the Nibelungs die betrayed!

“Let their beakers be filled with blood, the guest bed their coffin; and the secure hostel aflame at night bury in ashes the assassins of my lord.

“Come, come, my little boy, this you still cannot understand. You only play with the sword, trying to gird it. When you are the king... may vengeance grow tall like you in the shadow of long forgetting.

“For that is why I gave you birth in an anguished love; it was on my mind when he conceived you. When I carried you, I always bore this burden. I planted it from my heart into yours forever.

“You are closer to me than Attila, my husband - flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood. A terrible vengeance though you take for your mother, no deed were more glorious, none more true.”

He really did not understand what his mother said; he dragged the heavy sword by the belt like children will a little wagon in the tent, and he smiled now and then at Krimhilda’s words.

Then his mother, with fondness to please, bore a hole in the belt at the middle. She buckled it on his tiny waist, Aladár was happy when the sword clanked behind.

Up and down the tent and out in the field, down the breast of the valley and up the hilltop, happily he sailed the sword on the waving grass. His mother watched from under the eaves.

He was not far from Buda’s tent when the weapon tripped him from behind. He fell headlong and gashed his face upon a rock. It happened Buda’s wife was passing by.

As she saw him, her heart gave a bound, pity wells in her soul mingled with anger. She quickly runs and lifts him from the ground, these the words that rage on her tongue -

“The damn mother watches - the damn mother stands by. Damn the woman who spoils her child like this, even puts it in his hands and lets him sport. That kind has no feelings really.

“She whelps her child like a wild animal, and then what does she care if the little soul’s lost, let her sex be fulfilled, her couch, and she no longer worries about the dangers to her son.”

She screamed like this as she wiped the blood clean in her veil. But Hilda came running when he fell and snatched him angrily from her arms.

“Don’t touch my son!” she snipped her words in two.
“Don’t you teach me how to raise a child, barren you!
If you were any good at it, you could have one yourself.
A barren woman’s odious in my eyes!”

“Barren I am not! Don’t you call me that! I have
let my servant girls go in to my husband,” screamed
Buda’s wife as she hid her face. The rest of her
words were choked by sobs.

Ilda laughs proudly like a victor. Hearing the uproar,
Buda must come. His wife he sees weeping, the other
one laughing. Before he arrives, he begins like this -

“What’s going on, sister? Today like yesterday? Like
this forever? Like this every day? I am a kind man,
but when I am angered... Now woman, leave
in peace what is mine.

“For your sake I scolded her yesterday. But I shall
put up with it no more, never. Understand? I am still
a king and master of my own house...”he said, and
threatening he shook his pudgy fist.

Hilda the Queen snapped back at him too, and then in
her rage she burst into tears. And in the heat of
quarreling they did not see that Attila himself is
drawing near.

He comes like a sudden thunderstorm, looming behind
them like a dark cloud. He puts his hands on Hilda’s
lovely shoulders - she falls back on her husband’s
heroic breast.

Standing a while without word or gesture, he stared
a long deep stare from Gyöngyvér to Buda and back.
At last, he spoke with a calm voice like this -

“Home, my good Ilda, we shall go today, this day, this
hour to our royal home. There you are the first of
royal women, and who would dare to make you weep!”

“We’ll still bear this. She is to blame, not we. From
now on, I will have nothing to do with King Buda. At
home I shall be the lord of my good troops. Let Buda
command whomever he can.”

Saying this, he lifted up his son. Without even a nod he simply went away with Hilda. Buda stood there long gazing like an idol at the empty place.

That day, that hour, the brightly woven rows, the towering tents of Attila, flapped in the wind. But by evening, his court having left, that great hill and valley were standing bare.

Tenth Canto

ATTILA GOES TO WAR

Attila did not leave Buda without thanking his good Scythian troops, and on his way that day he guided his mount where the army gathered for games of war.

He stood, as a king, before the mustered troops. His voice was strong, but without shouting he spoke. The very least soldier heard, as though near, great Attila's voice from his rounded chest.

He came to bid farewell, he said, and send them home with love. He praised them as a whole and praised them as one. He reproached no one for any event in the past.

He called them fathers, called them sons; he called them brothers, young and old. And everyone he addressed took pleasure in the name, felt himself in person honored.

The hunt is now ended and all are free, he said, to return to their loved ones and their homes. At this the men rejoice, embracing in fond fancy their waiting wives.

But Attila returns to the course of his speech, makes known his mind's made up for war. He relies on chosen men, he says, to remain at his side of their own free will.

As when a big stone splashes into a lake, there follows withal a momentary noise, and silence. A moment the multitudinous army foamed, and then "let's go" the cry that charged a thousand ways.

They are no longer lured by a widowed love, or dreams of gentle family ties. They want to fight by Attila's side, come home with glory and with gain.

But they quiet down at the king's calming words. The whole army, he promises, will assemble in time, but now - a game to train and practice the young in arms.

“Noble young blood of the proud Hun clans! I shall shape you now in the mold of my hand. Let your fathers marvel - ‘One empire ruled we, but they all the world!’”

Next day the young troops - he commands - shall follow him, a veteran with every ten by arrow lot shall ride. To Bulcsu Attila entrusts this task, then wheels his fallow horse and rejoins his wife.

But King Buda sat in his loneliness within a corner of the palace like a spider, weaving a web of grief in a dark nook day to day.

One morning his wife Gyöngyvér says to him as she put down her needlework amid a plop of tears; she deftly lines her materials up, but turns her back as she starts to speak -

“What's a man worth who yawns all day sitting on the addled eggs of his thoughts! He wastes his time, and hatches nothing. Such a man is dead before he dies.

“The blind can see and the deaf can hear King Buda's works are come a cropper. But he goes on trusting from day to day, slouches in sorrow, eating, sleeping and putting on weight.

“Are you a man? You'd only like to be. Are you a king? Shame! Where's that one man of yours who rises to defend you? All, down to the last, have gone over. To him Bulcsu gives the miraculous sword!

“Him too you raised, a serf, and gave your sister to wife. Now he too puts the sword - this is gratitude! - as if you didn't exist, into another's hand.

“Or do you too take sides, Ishten, God of War? Are you smiling and applauding at Buda’s shame? Do you look on the King of Huns as an empty puppet? Do you present the gift to the feet, not the head?...

“He did not give it as a gift to one man, or as a toy to a crazy woman’s child. He gave it for the good and glory of all the nation - and you are the first in the land, the King.

“First! Then strike out and stand at the very front. King, do not let yourself be trampled in the dust. Rally an army, make ready - or are you unconscious waiting for it to crash on your head?

“Bitter regret is on the wing and claps you from behind. I always see it in my terrible dreams - always feel the horror of it when I wake! I feel it now in my blood, and a chill envelops me.

“Man, move somewhere while there’s time. The chariot of destiny, do you hear, is screeching - begone. Stand aside! or it will run you down dozing and feasting amid fat cares.”

Good Buda was slowly angered by these words. He opened his mouth more than once to reply. Then like a man enraged, he jumps up and stabs the ground with his staff.

“That’s enough,” he howls, “no more of that! Don’t keep prodding me, you wyf of the Fiend! If you go on railing at me like this, I’ll show you on yourself which of us is the man.

“You are to blame for this, your evil tongue. Two women can never make it side by side. And you now chide me as though I were not plagued without that by fangs of grief.

“Short of brains, a woman easily provokes a fight, but has no counsel when the harm is done, and lays aside the knot she tangled. Leave that up to the man’s brain!”

Gyöngyvér fell silent at her husband’s words. She never heard the likes of it in the days of their happiness when he always spoke in a kind and gentle tone. Now she wept at the rudeness of his speech.

Buda called his chieftains to counsel and prepared his soul darkly for a grave decision. But only a few came scraping their feet, the others had left to call on Attila.

Torda was not there, nor Szalárd, nor Bulcsu; even Detre, the foxy adviser, was gone. Szömöre, the cooper, was on the way with four or five hesitant serfs.

They assemble toward noon and sit down in silence, one here, another there. And the eloquent vacancy is filled with the void of old remembered crowds.

Buda bursts out in an unseemly rage, blames the innocent for the guilty. With harsh words he rebukes the present for those who are not.

“Did you make it? How about that! Hard, wasn’t it now! You’d sooner be, I know, over there with Chief Bulcsu and the old táltos, and all the other traitors.

“I know your minds are on betraying me, you have a foot in the stirrup. For you, King Buda and his word are worth this much! You are anxious to join the rebel Attila.

“But Buda will still flourish, by God he will. He will command, not complain like an old crone. He will sound out, his voice will be heard far off, and many proud necks will break or bow.

“Who’s that powerful one? What’s his right? I made Attila whatever he is. I spat him out - and if I stomp on his head... What do you say, you haughty lords, to this?”

Not a soul replied; they looked at one another and shrugged. But Buda puffed himself up a bit more and wretchedly stoked his anger again -

“You’re silent? Are your voices stuck? Your rules and good counsel in shreds? Well then, I’ll talk, but not to the empty winds - let those hear who live and the still unborn.

“Buda shall no longer be a laughing-stock, by Heaven. My envoys will set out to Attila at once. Szömöre, as the senior, you shall be spokesman. This I command you say to that rebel -

“He is tied to me by blood-oath, a vow by Ishten. No mortal wit deceives the God of War - no craft, no courage, no headstrong force. Far as God allows, no farther may he go.

“I drank of his blood, and he a drop of mine - to reign with me in peace, the younger brother whom I lifted with a kinsman’s goodness from a low branch to my side.

“But he thanks me with this perfidious plot. He crams my pillow with cares, and I wake unrefreshed at morning grappling with yesterday’s troubles.

“Not a week, not a day was he faithful to me since I truly share my rule with him. He raised an army straight away and kept me in alarm. The sword I gave he turned against me.

“War and peace, the office of power, he arranged behind my back. He deals with envoys and prepares for war. My share in all this - gall and wormwood.

“Give him then, cooper, my message - he dare not move with my fine young troops. I do not care whatever else he has done - otherwise, what I gave, I can take back.

“Also tell him boldly, I want it so, that the proper place for the Sword of God is my tent. He is not to swagger and keep it for himself - it belongs to the head and not the feet.

“He did not give it as a gift to one man, or as a toy to a silly woman’s child. He gave it for the good and glory of all the nation, and I am the first in the land, the King.

“Therefore he must disband my warriors to their homes; gird not the Sword of God on his waist. Otherwise our pact I shall undo, strand for strand, and undrink my vow that was sworn with blood.”

With this, Buda dismissed his council, first naming Szömöre's mate for the mission. The orders walked out of the tent, one by one, in silence, and departed with a dead murmur.

All day Buda's soul drives itself like a pendulum, a swing set in motion by someone's hand. Like froth, his anger lathers until his strength gives out.

But when his blood calmed at eventide, a great fear displaced his anger. Fear and distress gouged his heart like a wound that often hurts not when but after it was gashed.

He slows his steps as he paces the palace, stopping now and then while he muses. At night like a child cuddling to his mother, he speaks discouraged to his wedded wife like this -

"I tremble, Gyöngyvér, I tremble and shiver with cold for today's step may hasten my loss. My envoys bear a grave message to Attila, I fear the weight will fall back on myself."

On hearing these words, Queen Buda opened wide her lovely brown eyes, raised calmly her mournful mien, and spoke with sympathy like this -

"Come, my dear husband, come! Sit down beside me. Put your sad head on mine - like that. I once shared with you the joys of youth, let me now be a helpmeet in your troubles.

"You erred; anger advised to your own distress. Don't fear, Buda, it's not too late to alter. Post at once a rider on your steed and recall the messengers from their course.

"It is rash to provoke Attila with words alone, for he is joined, you see, by stubborn, deceitful warriors. Build an army, I say, while he's off to war, and you'll not be alone when he returns.

"Your caves are cached with silver and gold. Why hoard dead chattel? Your forbears passed it on to you. But what do you intend it for? When you die, it will be his, you have neither daughter nor son.

“Or do you save that in the end he may despoil me?
Give it away! some to this man and the rest to that.
Who does not freely give of his love will become
a faithful dog for money.

“Give plenty, and promise still more to the chieftains;
they will come to your side, you’ll see. Now summon
those envoys home. Then do not grieve, dear husband,
do not worry at all!”

So spoke the queen with shrewd and affectionate words,
awarding in the end her old one a kiss. Buda returned
it grateful and aglow, and then hurried off to order
the couriers recalled.

But Szömöre and his companion were flying well on
their way. They forded the Tisza on their horses
at night and continued on the misty, on the endless
plain eastward.

Quietly they covered the great distances, listening
to the clatter of hooves on the emptiness of silence.
At last Kadarcs (it was he) could endure no more the
hollow stillness.

“My friend!” he addresses the judge. “Why wordless
save perhaps with the horse? In council it is you
who always opens with the word, tells droll stories
at the feast, makes us double up with laughter.”

The cooper replies - “What about that!... Would I
were dumb born, or a dwarf fool rather than have to
tell Attila this whatsoever, draw down on myself
his wrathful eyes.”

Seldom talking, they pass that night into the next
day along the marshy mazes of the Tisza. It was
noon before they rode a ridge from where Attila’s
camp they see, and his own huge tent.

As from the distance one approaches a hive of bees,
he sees a few insects flitting here and there - a
thickening swarm, a darting dance, and then a buzz
and zoom.

The hive booms; in and out the door a thousand
shining bees are crawling back on back. So teem
the swarms of busy men as Attila’s town looms up
ahead.

Buda's camp, I think, is nothing compared to these crowds that come and go and these palaces of Attila that stretch for miles into the fields, towering into the heavens.

This is a great range where unbroken stallions run; a vast field betwixt where warriors train; palace on corral and palace on corral - it would be hard, indeed, indeed, to count them all.

At the camp's outer edge stood the servants' tents with poles of plain fir notched. Farther in, the tents were finer, the joints fitted smoothly with a plane.

The palaces of the chieftains are clustered here and there - so many proud, so many royal homes. Town within town passes into fields, with green stretches of distance between.

Women dwell in their secluded towns and rule over their courts. Krimhilda passes swiftly, if she desires, over a hanging corridor to her lord Attila's tent.

All this is work of marvellous craft. The awl argues dead trees into blossoms and new leaves, unlike before, painted in oil and unfamiliar colors.

The leaves are blood-red, the blossoms gold; branches twist into hissing dragons where green birds perch silently, birdlike bells tinkling in their stead.

In the center on a high hill is Attila's tent, the topmost point shaded by the ancient Turul, tremendous wings spreading for a flight, and wrought of solid gold by its maker.

The columns flow to the ceiling, coiling like tendrils now this way now that, the wood plated with gleaming gold, and velvet tapestries swelling between.

Describe it, but there is no such quill, and the eye too would dazzle at the scene; it all shines like a fabled world - so miraculous the forms and so curious the colors.

People are moving in and out wherever they can; the crowds are teeming, and that noble animal, the horse. All turns on the will of a single man, the pleasure of Attila and the thoughts of his mind.

Now there is a festival, solemn holidays for a week - in the morning, an offering to God with the new Sword; then a tournament of heroes, ending in a feast; at night, a bout with the champions' wine.

Here are the joys of three holidays at once - a parting cup for Attila's war; the dedication of the Sword of God; and a glittering reception for foreign envoys.

They came from Asia's farthest ends, in great numbers the kindred people who hold together with the Huns under one head and live between the ocean and the shore of the Etel river.

The Bessenyő, Bolgár, Jász, and Kazar, the fortress Kun who guard their camps with moats nine deep, and the flat-tongued Palóc - all send their tokens of friendship, showing homage to the empire of Attila.

They came with presents, none with empty hand, but with the land's most precious jewels; sable and ermine from northern skies; dear woven fabrics, on camels, from the south.

And Magyar came also, the Hungarian chief who rules a great country beyond the Etel river, sends a gift like no other - fitting to sing its praise in song.

Numberless wild stallions born of wild dams roam the plains by the waters of Etel. The mares are served of stallion fiends, the flaming winds, and fleeting lightning.

The Magyars capture the mounts they need, flinging the flying noose - a dangerous game in which the angry herd may overthrow often rider and horse.

With a company of men, Magyar wrangles a whole herd (unheard of thing!) and sends them on to King Attila as a present. The fame of this great drive will long resound.

Longhair young men crack their whips rounding up the stallions on a stormy run. Their tame mounts outdo the wild, whirling around like a vortex or heading them off.

Snorting and whinnying, the animals herd together. They stamp and bite and rage - but never a gap. They huddle their small fine heads like hillocks, but the whip soon stings them forward again.

And like a bleak whirlwind on the puszta a cloud of dust pursuing, spinning and advancing both at once, the stallions run, the guards hurtle on.

Driven headlong, they cross many lands, often swimming over swollen rivers. They are sometimes permitted a chance to graze, but if they do not pause, the drive begins all over again.

This is how they reach the plain near Attila's camp. Many were watching all along the way. "The Hungarian stallions," everyone calls them, and songs still sing their fame.

Attila accepted the gift with pleasure and received the kindred nation with all his heart. He praised the chief and people, receiving them as one in body, receiving as one in blood.

Before departing for war, they held great festivals every day, this one the last; Attila feasts with the envoys and makes decisions in between - he never dreams of passing these on to Buda.

As Buda's men arrived, the heroes were drinking of the old cups at the feast's ending - not with song but entertained by wretched Cerkó's wit.

Cerkó was a dwarf, humped and ugly. Among the tall warriors this stunted slave was a laugh. Aetius sent him as a gift to Attila, and often he turned a camp song from melancholy to merry.

Now too, Zángó was plucking a melancholy lay on his lyre recalling the death of Keve, Béla, and Kados. All the heroes wept, but laughed at once at Cerkó, the dwarf, who spoke these hodge-podge words -

“I chased, my lords, the whinny of a calf, I killed a cough in the dream of a hare. I shot a straw at a sparrow’s shadow, I crammed my bag with an old tree’s squeak...”

He began and drew peals of laughter. But the king’s mouth broke into no smile. He sits on a high dais ripening his thoughts and lets his winey men make merry with the dwarf.

That moment Szömöre entered, a stamp of anguish on his brow - Shall he or shall he not deliver Buda’s message?... No, he won’t! and with that he puts an end to his troubles.

He could have ended them sooner, but lost his way, the rascal - wading in the mazes of the Tisza, a messenger idling with the message.

When Szömöre’s old comrades saw him, there was a burst of laughter and shrill cries from the Hun chiefs. They took it as a joke seeing him stand confused - “O cooper, tell us what news you bring.”

But anxiously he cast his eyes aside, turning them where the somber Attila sat. They laughed at this and all his other moves - “Wise cooper, come drink and tell us something funny!”

“Respectful greetings to Attila the King! Does my lord give me leave to drink and jest?” Szömöre began. Attila nodded, and Szömöre spoke after a sip of wine like this

“Envoys of the great King Buda we come...” At this a hearty laugh arose again (only Detre sharpened his foxy ears), but someone growled - “You’re missing, my lords, missing something!”

Loudly the cooper and with a serious face he spoke, but only aroused their merriment more. Sternly he relayed the command of Buda - and they laughed at the manners he mimiced.

When he came to the part where Attila dare not wage war with the troops or the Sword of God, they roared with laughter, and Attila retired to his adjoining tent.

Szömöre had to keep on drinking now to wash down his big joke. But he only sobered up all the more, worried at what the king would do.

And true enough, Attila summoned the cooper that very day before the last drink of the feast. He shrinks from looking the king in the eye, but feels their anger through his eyelids burning.

“You fox! it was smart of you - your tail’s not snipped. You knew how to gild Buda’s folly. But I would not recommend,” King Attila speaks, “that you or anyone try it again!”

In supplication, the vassal bent over Attila’s hand disclaiming any purpose of ill; no more, he said, would he return to Buda, remaining as long as he lived Attila’s servant.

“No,” Attila speaks, “you must reverse your tracks! Tell Buda to send no more messages like this, for I will put him down, in disgrace, like my old clothes. Lucky if he escapes disaster and grief.

“As for the Sword of God... It’s mine! Who else’s? It’s time will come to harvest the world! Until then sheathed it stays in my tent. Bear this reply to Buda from his Lord.”

The cooper was happy at an outcome like this; next morning he lightly mounted his horse. And Attila moved his youthful army on, rejoicing at the open bridge to glory.

Girls on his great path strew flowers, and women float an arch of fluttering veils. Away, away they go, off to war with music as on a nuptial ride.

Eleventh Canto

BUDA BUILDS A CITY

King Buda now opens up his cache working by night,
an old and faithful servant by his side. They dig
to the tunnelled bottom of the tent, where gold and
silver shine into view.

The buried treasures tumble from the tomb. Whoever
once saw them is no more; and the workmen they slew,
sealing up the secret of their lord.

Homeward from Attila, meanwhile, Detre the old
Saxon spies the light of a burning torch. He
is surprised the king is about so late, suspicious
of what is going on inside.

Reining his horse in the midnight dark, the old pile
of bones gingerly dismounts. He leaves his steed
with the reins thrown back. At Buda's he is free
to come and go as he will.

Now, too, raising the tent-latch, he says, "Good
evening, good luck in your work." Startled on his
knee, Buda glances up and seeks to cover the hoard
with his hands.

But quickly he sees and recognizes Detre; from him
he has no cause to hide. It is too late anyway, nor
does he really mind - he would like to begin by
trying the old Saxon out.

"Gold!" he says. "Treasure! I have some too, you see
no beggar rendezvous is old King Buda's yet! And
still his friends are wary, waiting on crumbs that
fall from alien boards.

"O Detre! if everything - I never would have believed
it - you too a traitor to Buda? Howling with his
enemies in one den and drinking Attila's wine, you crow
'Perish Buda! Perish Buda!'

"What do you wish? Feasting? Enjoy yourself in my
palace day or night like the god Odin. Do you want
gold and gems? Take them! Whatever pleases your eye,
wink! and they will fly to your beckoning.

“Only remain faithful with your counsel of old. Protect my person with the iron-clad host of Goths. For see, I perish, such his arrogance, if we postpone in rallying our friends to arms.”

At this, the gray-headed champion gloats over the king, “Do you really think I would sell myself at a price? Yours the treasure, mine the soul! I shall do, it says, what I judge the best.

“I look with sadness on the rift between you. I warned you from the start with heartfelt words. But you would not listen, or Attila. And now the sword will hardly stay in the sheath.

“It were better I go than choose sides. Why should I meddle in a brothers’ war? What are the feuds of the Huns to a Goth? We bow to him, yes, who proves the stronger.

“I was always faithful, and still am. No one can deny it - as long as Buda ruled, and Rof, and his father; one king at a time I always served; but with two kings ay, ay, that is something else.

“Attila is powerful, he can ruin me; you, too, can if I join him. For no one knows how the dice of war may fall when you rouse to vengeance the Norns.

“The Huns now side with Attila, but once the brand of war flares up... for envy and revenge have long lain suppressed... I dare not join Attila either.

“He is now the strong one, you the weak; but you may grow strong as well. Victory belongs with the Sword of God. Who knows what you are secretly thinking of?

“Neither with counsel nor even less with arm poised will I help you or the other. Home to the camps of the gentle Goths I go, and wait there in peace for the outcome of it all.”

The champion Buda was not prepared for this reply - “O Detre,” he shouted, “you hypocrite Detre! I expected a defender of my just cause, but you only care for your own skin, I see.

“Whom can I win with silver and gold if an old friend ends up like this! How shall I rally the people back to my flag if the first to run are my old friends!”

“There’s a way,” replies Detre, “to these things. You don’t catch a bird with drums or shouts. No use looking for a traitor with gold, saying ‘Here! be loyal.’ Who’s that stupid?”

“No one is so cheap that you may say - ‘I bought you, didn’t I, with my treasures.’ Gold like that would be despised - no one will even sit by you. He will not look back in his haste to make off.

“But if you give with a hidden design and for free, you need not fear your gift will be lost. He will pay without suspicion the presents are guiding him on.

“If you want his heart to rage with pity, he feels more compassion weighted down by gold. Or if you want to prove his sense of wrong, the weight of your silver will count for more.

“Treasure revives dead gratitude, or an old hate. It scores a new wound where the scar has healed. It crooks the straight and rights the crooked - but you must cleverly use a cover.”

Good Buda’s mouth gaped, his eyes widened. “O Detre! I do not understand. What shall I do? Teach the untaught. But in plainer language - I’ll reward you for this, if never before.”

That whole night until the break of dawn, Detre talked and the other listened. He left at daybreak, scarcely sooner - never again to be seen in Buda’s tent.

He went and aroused from their morning sleep all his followers at the court. With his troops he set out homeward, to his own people where they are settled in colonies ringed by iron.

Scattered like islands, this foreign nation can never stir against the powerful Huns. But they live by their own laws, not in bondage. They have their own chiefs, Detre is one.

On his way or on arriving home, the old Saxon runs his secret couriers to these chieftains. He alerts them - be on guard with your armies, for now great times are in the offing.

Day to day, this alien people go on with their life, innocent as before. But a bold look in the eye tells a lot, and shines with a hope of liberation.

This is how they prepare. Meanwhile, the hero Buda secretly calls the Huns, summons the chieftains one by one, steals on them like this with his precious gifts -

“Brother, you never come my way, you stay away too, too much. I could die, for all my kinsmen care, since I made Attila a king; while he contrives to make us one king less.

“It is best, oh, to dispose what I have before my death. We never know what fate will bring tomorrow. Why should he down it all - look, this one’s for you. May it lend you kindly memories of myself.”

To others - “How are you, my old crony? We are left behind, isn’t it so? You and I both, no? The times are new, and people; the whole world is new. If an old man does not yield, they push him out.

“It was not like this in the days of Bendeguz and Rof, under whom you served - but that was then! What does Attila care about blood once shed!... But take it - this is Bendeguz’s, what’s left of his treasure.”

Some he addresses - “I no longer dare invite you to a feast, old boy; the cup is flat. Attila is suspicious - of you as well as me. You do right! Be wise and avoid me in the future as well.

“What use are goblets and bowls, gold and silver, for a Buda who is not the king? Believe me, Attila would like to get his hands on them. Take these, my friend, as souvenirs of happy days!”

To some he says - “This is a secret I’m telling... Don’t be afraid! It can’t cause you trouble with Attila, even though he wants me out of the way which is not just - but if it has to be!

“Man dies only once! I don’t care about myself. But I do pity my wife, he may plunder her portion. All I have is here. Put it away for her, I ask you, and be the guardian of poor Gyöngyvér, my wife.”

So he spoke with others who, Detre had slyly learned, were inclined to revolt. (He had long weaved his own secret plot) and he turned in their names, knowing the Huns.

Some Huns (but when is a great tree without a shadow!) envied King Attila. Some feared the swift rise of his power; others thought him prouder than before.

He follows only his own mind, some say, and acts on will. He disregards old customs and encourages the new. Others find the discipline an oppressive burden although they applauded at first.

Those who grew lazy by the peaceable Buda see for Attila they must fight forever. They would rather give their heads for once and all in battle than do without a life of ease again.

Others remember Attila may once have wounded them either by some word or deed. Or even if not wounded, they might still be offended. Never do the mighty know what offends the weak.

A few feel Buda is right, secretly tormented by the justice of his cause. Many fear the confidence of the common man - how tall this may help Attila grow!

One gold incites; the new another. One is a born plotter, another driven by envy steeped in gall; still another is hot of blood and always rebels.

For man is a man, then too like now - he was delighted and shocked at Attila’s stature. Buda finishes with everyone under fine colors, using the words the hero Detre put in his mouth.

When a breeze is born in the blind heat of noon, a fine dust first flutters on the road, and then the silvery aspens slide in a silent belly dance.

...Where did you come from, roamer of the sky? Or
were you born of a sudden at my feet? My face hardly
feels your breath, but there I see you laving in
the dust.

Now the forest rustles, the pool ripples. A willow
waves the long shadow of her hair, tosses leaves;
swings her arms, and soon her whole slim body sways.

Here and there a grove roars sweeping to the ground
and the sky vault is littered with scudding clouds.
Lightning leaps from the scabbard. I hear, it seems,
its distant rattle.

So the news spreads in the camps of the Huns - in
muted talks, wine cups, the toasts of the great. How
does it rise? travel? who adds to it? who starts it?
The air itself may scatter it about.

First the praise of Buda sounded, the good old times,
and the long leisurely wedding feasts, - free food,
no work, and merry wine; and more than that, the soul
of Buda, good and gentle.

Those who dared not mention Buda for months, now
go with him wherever. He rejoices that his words
find an open ear, or they speak up if he starts
to say a word.

When two whisper together, neither knows that Buda
crossed the other's palm. And both are emboldened,
believing many others are now on his side.

Courage it gave, and increased their daring, confidence
their cause was just - "I took his gold," they secretly
say, "but only of course for the common good."

"Yes indeed... (the stubborn Scythians yearn for Buda's
reign with words like these) yes indeed, our word was
honored when we the high vassals were the king's own
peers.

"We could go there like home, uninvited; stand up when
we wished, sit down unbidden; when we made a request,
our tone was a command. Buda asked us when he gave
an order.

“Because he was humble, unproud, and meek - gentle, kind, amiable and human. He was compliant, yielding, faithful; but just too, and wise. He was not wilful in the very least.”

Another feigns anger and plucks a meaner tone -
“He had no right, he didn’t know what he was about raising his brother to the throne and giving away what was his not to give.

“Buda cannot give us a partner king without asking - ‘Do you want this, my nation?’ Let an assembly be called which will not leave it there. Get back his powers whether he agrees or not!”

Thereon, they heap abuse and curses on the chiefs - Torda, Szalárd, Bulcsu, the judge, and the cooper. They sound the names with fists clenched, blaming them for Buda’s partition of the throne.

Many are stricken aghast at their own words, at Buda’s disgrace, his jeopardy as he abjectly tells in naked terms the stark distress of his body and soul.

Most are horrified Attila does not keep the eternal oath he swore with his heart’s blood. Now is the time for all to guard against the fall of the Huns as a nation.

Now talk like this won’t remain at the top. Clan by clan, it runs wild among lesser men, sets out like a snowslide and gathers, story giving birth to story - the people bewildered at the madness of their chiefs.

They are like a large stud of horses under a gathering storm and lightning in early summer; forgetful of their contented grazing, they suddenly skitter nervously about.

Some stretch their long necks, sniff the storm with flaring nostrils; others kick up their flying tail, take alarm at their own hoofbeats, scud away and return.

There are no wattles, or protecting eaves. Two, three horses cross their necks and wait with trembling flanks for the great time when the heavens will burst asunder with stone and flood.

Such is the commotion among lesser Huns; their minds confused, order breaks down. Knots of men huddle together, smell blood, and wonder what dreadful times are coming.

The War God Ishten proclaims the death of Buda with miraculous signs; a comet plows the darkness of heaven. The northern flares lift up dripping swords in blood.

Ghastly events must befall, the sun is eclipsed by day and the moon by night. The children of the Huns are in darkness. May it not be a sign the whole host is lost!

Many horrible monsters are born of women and beasts. Blood-hideous the springs and fowl. Blood milks from the veins of Kabala's udder. The pale dead walk abroad at night.

The War God Ishten gave simple men these signs of Buda's death, warned Attila to protect the people - but they, poor mortals, do not understand.

To ward off disaster, the Sky's prophecy foretold the calamity that sped Buda to his ruin - this the wretchedness of human fate!

Buda's camp is now less forsaken and stark, people tramp the tall grass once more. First under cover of night they come, and then by day. First one at a time, then several at once.

Stirred to life, Buda's steeds tune to a neighing stream of callers. The hungry find cheer at the campfires in the court. All crowds are crowded, all brilliance bright.

When ants go a-raiding, a few scouts are sent from the nest until at last the entire hill. Teeming they surge this way and that.

So was the road to Buda's camp busy with people speeding up and down. They hasten spokewise into the realm, arriving at the hub or leaving for the rim.

Troops guard the royal person of the king within the palace, the supporters of Buda's party provide their share of men; and night to night the clan fathers take their turn in sleeping there.

Hope deludes King Buda himself; his legs and arms are drowsy no more, he feels, with age. Conceit froths him up like empty winds the foam; he moves lightly and gads about - a young man again.

This is how a reed-born bubble floats here and there a while, brighter at every turn and bursting at last, a nothing drop of water.

Seeing the big crowds that gather as if paying him tribute, giving of their strength and adding to his - like that Buda feels a power in his body.

"Look, Gyöngyvér, my wife," he smiles, "I am not ancient, is was only melancholy and haggard care. My muscles are rippling with the strength of iron - really I could fight Attila himself."

"Ah," she replies, "you stab at my heart. No more of such senseless talk, do you hear, or else this first fruit of fortune will turn away, much less save your lonely head from Attila."

But even then Buda could not refrain from mouthing his unfortunate speech, sitting among the lords and panting from wine - "You shall see me, all of you, take on Attila!"

He brings up his deeds as a youth again and again - how he fought against the savage Gepids. He relives his war days, judges victory over Attila no more than a nothing.

But the warriors ponder well, Buda present or without, in the palace, on the gallery outside or on the road as they come and go.

It was easy until now to jump the ditch and boldly take Buda's side with words. But how will it end? And what of the beginning? There was a great deal to confer on this.

At first the words come loud and fast, the ring-leaders proudly flinging boasts - they would rather hurl their defiance to heaven than curbing their spirit acknowledge Attila.

But many are scandalized, the wiser recoiling at talk so fiercely steep. They measure where the disastered fell and say - "I'm not leaping after them!"

Their speech turns cautious, doubt misgives and fear stirs. A hundred counsels and a hundred various minds - Buda's cause washes away like a wave-worn cove.

And wherever they lay their heads together, one head more is always present. Not many see, but those who do are savage-stricken - it is the face of Attila, the avenging monster!

Like yellow leaves slipping silently away on an autumn wind - pale of visage they turn, and one by one pass the horrible vision wordless by.

A lost cause, they say, they long have known. Their words turn back those still arriving. Only the far committed must stand their ground at Buda's side.

Wouldn't Attila know of Buda's deeds? He does, his partisans report. But he waves his hand, belittling the tales like brushing little flies away.

Men there were enough on Buda's side to call their position hard and strong - with leadership and counsel, or were Attila not so vastly superior.

They fall apart though with different counsels; and their fire, one might fear, would die in smoke. At last the counsel which reason denies is given by their common fear.

"This is a camp on the open field," they say. "We'll never have a brave existence here - let us build a city, stone on stone like many others in the land of the Setting Sun."

Everyone welcomed these words. Buda and the others proposed they build the city, complete if they could, before Attila returned.

There was an ancient city on the right bank of the Danube which had fallen to the swords of Keve and Béla. Its towers, bastions, earthworks are now in ruin, humbled by the Huns who invaded there.

The roof was burned to ash though the walls still stand mouldering slowly away. A rude and simple people live in the halls where the winds prowl from the north and south.

It leaps to the mind of everyone who saw it ever, and right off imagination rebuilds the ruins. The breaches repaired and the ditches cleared, let us move Buda's camp over there!

Everyone bustles at Buda's word to put the whole town on the road. Buckles are loosened, joints undone - no trace remains of Buda's old court.

Skilled hands undo the hinges, sturdy shoulders bear the weight of rafters, tent-poles fall, stakes are dug up. And only ditches remind one of Buda's old camp.

The town is quickly on axletrees, huge wheels, and rolling cylinders. A herd of oxen draws and the camp sets out. Now only the winds of the Mátra wander there.

Arriving slowly to the Danube, they fashioned numerous rafts of beams. Floating from one bank, they reach the other - men on horses' tails, cattle on rafts.

With whips they drive the wretched of the earth, the alien horde, to raise the city, the workers in stone and lifters of blocks.

They haul boulders for a hill, they labor day and night, they stuff up the hungry gaps in the walls, and push the towers, at the four corners, to the sky.

Faster than you think, they rebuild the fort, they carpenter the gates of enormous logs. They set the drawbridge with pulleys and hoist, and gird the bottom with a terribly deep moat.

After walking over the grounds, King Buda builds his wooden tent on the great stone palace. The Huns draw a cope over the top once ravished roofless by fire.

Buda's camp which was, is no more. Who wants may look on high erected pavilions pranking in the sky, this is how they built of a sudden Buda's new town.

Twelfth Canto

DEATH OF BUDA

My song is now hovering over its nest, and Buda's revolving sun is swiftly setting. It is dusk, dusk... late for the bird - don't you see how long the shadows are?

Buda's dark night is funnelling up. A resting place only on the road to fate? New songs, new deeds are waiting to be sung if only God grants the poor minstrel power.

To Attila I turn where he keeps putting off the war, cooling his passion. He ransacks his soul for delays - and dreads the furious outburst of his wrath.

Perhaps Buda will come to his proper senses; his party perhaps will crumble (it is already split); his soul perhaps he will conquer with patience and distill his resentment drop by drop.

Attila subdued the rebellious Illyrians quickly, by fear alone and little pouring of blood. He waged an unseen war of terror - his fame overrunning armies, conquering fortress walls and gates.

Affrighted, the people laid keys before his feet; he took hordes of captives and high hills of ransom. All paid him homage sending him hostages; his power trampled through the streets of cities.

The Emperor, though, withholds the promised wages, frightened by awful reports on Attila's conquests of the imperial lands, of Huns who deal with people as their lords.

He demanded Attila deliver the hostages, captives;
vacate the empire at once; take his army back to
the dwelling places of the Huns, and only then would
he give what he earlier promised.

Attila flared up in proud anger - real or feigned,
he best knows himself. Feigned and real perhaps, for
the demand was offensive to deliver first and wait
for a payment.

But he delays, I say, because of Buda also. His
spirit tosses in care and anger. He still needs
to train the youthful army - he sees the pleasure
they would take in battle.

Blaze off! he attacks without declaring war, replies
to the Emperor like a terrible guest. Deep into the
Empire he strikes with seven prongs - the army surges
like a tide, whirls like a vortex.

He scorches, robs and burns wherever turning. He
draws whole regions behind in billows of smoke.
He plunders their wealth, drives their people off,
leaves only the foraged surface of an empty earth.

They collect taxes ten and twentyfold. They cannot
manage the vast flood of booty. Purple is traded off
as never before with six-foot halberds for measure,
or piled up and burnt if there are no takers.

True, the Emperor sends envoy on envoy offering to
swell the payment of tax. But Attila turns a stone-
deaf ear, refusing the ambassadors before his face.

He waits for winter when rivers beat their own
bridges of ice, and he will pound on proud Byzantium's
gates - but I must follow the course of events
in turn.

King Buda prowls about at home, still moody and unsure
behind his walls. He gazes out on the eastern steppes
- his realm how vast, his lair how small.

A wild beast when first encaged finds neither room
to stretch nor rest. He paces up and down a few steps
this way and back, and with a prod he vainly butts
the bars.

This is how the Hun sovereign walks among his walls,
writhing in the torment of mind more than body. Sitting
or standing or lying or sleeping, *that* will not rest -
it storms in his dreams.

From the battlement he looks out one day brooding
over the plain unhappy and alone, where Buda's camp
once stood and Attila's in the distant mist.

He suddenly strikes his brow, his eyes narrow and
fix upon one point - in his soul not the air. And
throwing back his head, he cries aloud -

“O God of War, Ishten, you sent this idea from
heaven pitying my ruin. Or did someone tell it
me waking - in an unremembered dream? No, God of
War, you did now this very moment!

“Huns all would rally round me at once, and I too
would be invincible with this sword, if ever I put
my hand on it - I, King Buda, as God willed!

“But who will dare?...” As he spoke, Kanyaró and his
people flashed before his eyes; though camping as a
party of Buda, they were not allowed in, only outside
the moat.

Kanyaró was not the head or father of a clan; he
leads the dregs of the Huns and alien peoples, who
rob and burn the fields of friend and foe, kill
fathers, mothers, and sleeping guests.

This band never dwells under tented shacks. They are
swarthy from the rain, cold, and heat; their skin is
hardly skin but a tawny bark. The saddle is their bed,
and hearth too for steaming meat.

In times of peace (this army though is never at peace)
it hides out on the fringes plundering and plaguing
aliens and Huns alike. In war they gallop out front
sowing terror for miles.

Now to Buda's side they came like vultures, naming
their price as gallows and gold - the one to gull,
the other to gain. Though reluctant to grant it, Buda
sorely needed help.

Buda now summons the army's head, most horrid chief of an ugly people. Among the handsome Huns, never was one so odious as to resemble whom I describe.

Nature distorted him with a flask head and pug nose, but he made himself still more hideous - disfiguring the flesh on his face to fill his foes in battle with greater dread.

Bristles grew awry and sparse on his scarred cheeks and lips; his tiny eyes gleamed from their deep socket like piercing daggers; his voice was a dog's - a raw, rough yap.

With such, King Buda enters into talks, calling him on the field apart - "I shall see, Kanyaró, whether you have the hero's heart to enter Attila's premises by night.

"A sword hangs there - you will know it (the sheath was his father's, he told him the signs). If secretly ...bring it to me, you will earn its worth in silver and gold."

Kanyaró was taken unawares, pondered for a long time, but at last he brightened up with daring for a deed that was evil and great. His mouth was more horrible than ever as he grinned and uncouthly uttered -

"You'll get it. But give me gold, plenty of it. I'll risk it, but then pfh, pfh! I'm not hanging around for Attila. If he snaps me up, a hundred Hadurs, whoreson dog, cannot save me, not he or his sword!"

"Go, go, Evil One! Ármány!" Buda spoke in fright. "I fear him you dared blaspheme will smite you dead, here, or on your way, with his burning shaft; - or you payment for the sword I reject."

That very day Kanyaró ranges his men, and they thread through the night on the way without a road. By day they sleep in marshy holes, dreading the revenge of every true Hun.

And as the third night turned on that day, they met by Attila's towering camp. Their leader posts them here and there, and he alone stalks his way inside where they sleep the first sleep of night.

But Krimhilda, Attila's beautiful wife, was sweetly thinking of her absent husband. She was still awake, and sleep teased her as she sent the turtles of her sighs after her lord.

Her swan white body tossed on a bed of foam, her soul afloat on a sea of desire. She was weary of Aladár's little panting breath, round about her the carpeted night was close with clinging shadows.

Suddenly she hears the snort of a steed below. She cries in joy - a messenger! she leaps up, looks around. Someone hitched a stallion at Attila's door. "Oh, who else, but my dear lord himself!"

She throws a haphazard veil over her slender body, ants of love firecrawling in every vein. She starts across the hanging corridor, but half way over stops in fright.

Strange the man, uncouth of form, who comes from the palace and leaps on the horse. "Who's there at this hour?" This does not stop him, and her shriek pursues him like a hawk's.

Immediately all the sleeping guards rise up. Kanyaró whistles thrice on his two fingers; the famished wolves break forth at the signal, and many who sleep awake to eternal night.

And so the fighting in blood is crowned with success. But Kanyaró does not dare rifle the tents for booty. He orders his men to scatter - be off, to the borders! Alone he delivers the sword to Buda.

Next day King Buda shows it off with joy and pride to all the council. He boasts of receiving it the night before by a miracle. But they hear credible news from Attila's camp.

From there the news spread everywhere, meeting with Buda's different report that he won the sword in a miraculous way. Not a man in all the land believes.

Buda's party would desert him if they could only escape Attila. Their new confidence dies in a pale despair. What help in a sword that is sneaked away!

Hilda sends a courier to Attila reporting when the sword disappeared, and where - at Buda's. O - ai! ...it was the first time ever they saw (he said not one word) that red face pale.

He turned white withering to a ghostly green; and then his blood raced. He leaped from his seat, ready to act, and thundered in his deep voice - "We are departing for home."

He summoned the Emperor's envoys and let them lay their tribute at his feet. He released as proper the captives and hostages, setting the day and hour to return.

And like the wind of a flaming storm, the report of the angry Hun's coming roars ahead; everywhere people shudder and imagine the terrible disaster about to fall on Buda.

As though mountains split and heavens cracked, as though the axletree of the world collapsed, this they imagine, or some greater disaster Attila's wrath may bring, and Buda's wrongdoing.

Many Hun chiefs, heads of tribes, are already on the way to meet their lord. But no one dares speak up for Buda, or steal in Attila's heart a word of pity.

Detre, too, is there preening his loyalty (silently cursing at Buda's nothingness while his soul wanders darkly in the future). With him are all the other foreign kings.

Up to Keveház, Attila leads his troops; there he sacrifices. He reaches Érd, turns toward the river and Buda's new city; his army appears on the heights of Tétény opposing the town.

Hearing this, Buda quickly orders shut the gates. With a huge crossbeam the lock is reinforced; above the dizzy height they raise the bridge. The parapets bristle with arrows and spears.

"Swimming as a fish or flying as a bird," the king says, "the son of man only enters with a miracle here. Come from anywhere, the earth will end. Go wherever, the ground will gape."

But Attila was now near, and with his army occupied the whole mountain range. He immediately sent an envoy to the gate proclaiming loudly from below -

“Where is King Buda? Let him listen himself. Attila sends me, lord of all the Huns. With his armed host he is camped on every peak; he counts this nest as a heap of down.

“He will hurl mountains into your moat, trample highways up the walls of your ramparts. Whoever lives inside, consider dead. Father and son he shall put to the sword.

“But if you hail him, bringing the Sword of God, hurl your gates from their hardware into the dust, and once through your city his people march, this last time he will accept you with a kinsman’s heart.”

“No gates, no sword!” Buda cried with passion. “Only across my body he and his people enter! But if he comes entreating, I shall receive him in my former grace, the rebel.”

Attila understands, with a laugh, the reply -
Ha ha! He chooses a good sword from his armory, sets out girding it as he goes. All the lords follow him, beseeching in his wake.

Do not go, this is a plot. By Hadúr, where are you going! They are a whole camp. You are a hero, but still one man. The Huns touch the hem of his robe, but the sparks from his eyes wildly warn them away.

Coming down to the fort (this is Old Buda now) Attila sharply commands - open up the gate. They lower the bridge, they open up; behind, the bar falls home.

Buda waits for his brother on the wall. Even far off the blood red cloak terrified him. His hair stiffened beneath the helmet. The mortal net was closing about his eyes.

He wants to say it, but he cannot speak - do not let him near, cut down this man who comes alone. But no one would dare obey the king - they stand still like statues of stone.

As Attila comes nearer, his eyes shoot lightning, his body swells until it almost bursts; his eyes are wrath, his walk is wrath, the very air between them compressed.

Attila's hand is empty, but poor Buda's blood runs cold. The Sword of God - involuntary weapon - he quickly bares in his defense from fierce Attila's, misgiving though his final hour is come.

Attila too draws a sword, without a word, but with a deathly cry. They struggle. The two camps watch from above and below; and from far, the clangor of combat trails behind.

Buda is duelling not with the Sword of God (for in his hand the steel is merely steel). As a man in his name's defense he fights, a warrior in his youth and the somber close of his life.

As they pounced again, for the third time, Attila sent Buda's sword flying. That was it. Buda left his back unguarded as he shunned death's stark face.

Screeching once more, Attila darts forward, thrusts his sword through the shoulders to the breast. The Buda who was sinks with his face in the dust, and a terrible silence crystallizes in the air.

Ishten, God of War, seeing from on high, weeps for the Huns a great tear, saying - "Ay it is numbered, they are already numbered - the generations of his people from Attila onward.

"God he could have been on earth below, but too great for a mortal such a temptation," he said. And wiping a tear, he resigned himself to that law which is hard and everlasting.

Meanwhile, from the tower of the high palace the widow hah! of Buda rushes down. Tearing the serpents of her red brown hair, she runs with mouth afoam screaming before she reaches there -

"Ilda, haughty Hilda! ruthless Krimhilda! A curse on you! You shall not escape it. Never live to know the joys of your son. Let your murderous husband's line die out with him!

“Give up the son in anguish you bore in anguish. But do not rejoice as *then* you did. Let him you bore to life die a ghastly death!...” She wailed and sank as though dead upon her lord.

Attila came to himself at the woman’s throes of pain, and shuddered hearing the name of his wife. He stared at a little point before his feet in blood and spoke in a voice of hollow dark -

“Do not curse, you monster! no guilt has she in this. The child’s innocent of his father’s deed. Your curse will not retrieve him from Keveház... his funeral and burial there will be royal.”

With a moan, the woman buried her tearless eyes and her face into the wound; all her ladies wept. Now a Hun chief who sided with Buda raises the miraculous sword.

He carried it, handed it over to King Attila; the others stood silently behind. The hero shudders as he touches the hilt, but speaks right out as he looks around the circle -

“Hun lords, why stare! This is my deed alone. It is done. I dealt severely but justly. The door is wide open now to mercy - and I blame no one for the past.

“Huns! I raise God’s Sword and invoke that while the world endures it stand by the nation’s empire, name and glory!... and eternity to eternity it will never
end.”

NOTES

I

Buda Shares the Throne with His Brother: in the Greek sources Bledas, Blidas, and in the Latin sources Bleda, the older brother of Attila. The Hungarian Chronicles use simply “frater” without distinguishing seniority.

Bendeguz: father of Buda, Attila (and Rof); son of Torda.

Keveház: house of Keve, burial ground of Hun rulers.

Zagyva: right-hand tributary of the Tisza river.

palace tent of wooden art: reported by legend and described by Priscus Rhetor, envoy sent by the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II to the Huns in 448 A.D.

Szilárd (Szalárd, Szoárd), *and Bulcsu:* of apparently Altaic origin, still preserved in Hungarian as place and personal names.

Torda the ancient táltos: chief priest or wizard. The táltos was an extraordinary person, born with distinguishing marks. In addition to being a wizard, the táltos was also a fighter for justice.

the cooper Szömöre: the cooper (kádár) was the priest-judge authorized to preach the judgment of God and deal with all matters of dissension and punishment for offenders.

Álmos: man’s name meaning interpreter of dreams.

Detre: Dietrich - historically Theodoric, king of the Eastern Goths, who after the battles of Tárnok (near Potentia in the Tárnok valley) and Cezumor (Cetium or Cetii Murus) became, according to legend, a hostage at the court of Attila and continually prompted the Huns to war against the western peoples. After the death of Attila, he stirred dissension between Attila’s two sons Aladár and Csaba, and prepared the collapse of the Hun Empire.

field the sword awkwardly: the priest traditionally held the sword like a knife with the end of the hilt next to the little finger.

garabonc: sorcerer (cf. ne-cromanc-er).

Ishten: Isten, Hungarian for God.

II

Detre of Bern: Bern, i.e., Verona.

Tárnok: the Battle of Tárnok took place on the right bank of the Danube. The Roman/Goth legions led by Matrinus (Makrin), governor of Pannonia, were taken by surprise because they

believed the Huns could not cross the river. Keve, the Hun chieftain, however, had wine-bags emptied and inflated, and used these for the crossing under cover of night. Keve fell, and the Romans/Goths managed to win. But it was a Pyrrhic victory. Led by Bendeguz, the Huns pursued them to Cezumor in Austria and shattered their remnants in a decisive battle. Theodoric was taken prisoner, and his people become taxpayers of the Huns. This story is told by Arany in *Keveház*.

Hunbérc: bérc, Hungarian for “peak”. Located near Cezumor.

Hunor, Bor, Keve, Kajár, Béla, Keled, Dána, Apos, Zombor, Bendeguz, and Rof: an enumeration of Hun chieftains.

Detre the Iron Brow: when an arrow pierced his brow at Cezumor, he did not take it out but simply broke it off and fought on.

III

He... writes a letter: The Germans in Attila’s empire wrote in runes. The Huns apparently had no script. Attila’s scribes were Roman.

Ildikó: Attila’s wife, Siegfried’s widow. She reared her son Aladár to exact vengeance for the murder of her husband Siegfried by her brothers.

Gyöngyvér: “pearl sister”, a pre-Christian Hungarian name.

Odin: supreme god, lord of the Valkyries in German mythology.

Norns: Germanic equivalent of the Roman Parcae, or Fates.

I do not know whether he will sit at Odin’s table: One who has lost his life by hanging could not be seated with Odin after death and would be left to the kites.

IV

tanya: a small camp, later an isolated farmhouse.

Four paces away they stopped stock-still: the act was a custom among nomadic horsemen designed to display skill and test the leader.

V

But you... wept for Siegfried: see note on Ildikó above, Third Canto.

boza and kám: beverages mentioned in the Chronicles.

huj! huj!: ancient war cry as reported in the Chronicles.

manó: a pre-Christian word of unknown origin describing the supernatural.

VI

Legend of the Miraculous Hind: see Introduction.

Enéh: wife of Ménrót (Nimrod) and mother of Hunor and Magyar.

Kur: river in Transcaucasia.

Meot: Maeotis, or the Sea of Azov.

tanya: here, a temporary abode for one who lives a wandering life.

Belár: a name linked to the Bulgarians of the Volga region.

Dúl: ancestor of first Bulgarian dynasty.

Scythia: the steppes of southern Russia inhabited by nomad warriors.

VII

Eastern Emperor: Byzantine Emperor.

Illyrians: Southern Slavs.

VIII

brood-mare's milk: when fermented, a strong alcoholic drink.

tárogató: ancient Hungarian woodwind instrument.

Ármány: speculatively, from pre-Christian mythology.

Turul: totemistic bird; see Introduction.

Sword of God: see Introduction.

IX

Aetius: the last great Roman commander; worthy adversary of Attila.

Stars fall...: Arany notes that the Hungarian Chronicles write: “Stella cadit, tellus tremit; en ego malleus orbis!”

X

The awl argues dead trees into blossoms...: “The use of tree-trunks as columns supporting a light roof, especially of a portico, survives still in parts of Persia, especially around the Caspian coast.” *The Legacy of Persia* ed. A. J. Arberry, Oxford, 1953 (1963) p. 17.

Turul: see Introduction.

the death of Keve, Béla, and Kados: Hun chieftains who fell in the Battle of Tárnok; see note on Tárnok, Second Canto.

Gepids: a Germanic people conquered by Attila along with the Goths; Arany credits Buda with the conquest. After the collapse of Attila's Empire, the Gepids occupied most of Hungary east of the Danube.

XII

Hadúr: War God.

Érd, Tétény: places near the Danube.

TOLDI

“Now I recall the times gone by,
good Miklós Tholdi of bygone times.”

Ilosvai

Like a herdsman’s fire blazing on autumn nights
across the vast sea of the puszta, the face of
Miklós Toldi flares before me over nine or ten
generations of antique time. I see, it seems,
his towering form and the thrust of his lance in
scorching battle. The thundering sound of his voice
I hear you would now conceive as the wrath of God.

This was the man, when needed, who stood his ground.
There is no one to match him now in the seven parts
of the realm. If he were to rise up and walk among you,
his works would appear a sorcery. Three of you would
never withstand the weight of his club, his sling or
spear. Your blood would run cold at his terrible
shield and the spurs he wore upon his boots.

First Canto

“He took in one hand an enormous rail
and pointed at the road to Buda.”

Ilosvai

The sun shrivels up the sparse alkali flats,
parched herds of grasshoppers are grazing about -
not a new blade in all the stubble, not a handbreadth
of green in all the broad meadows. A dozen laborers
or so are snoring under the stacks - all their work
is going fine, but the big haywagons loiter there,
empty or only half loaded with hay.

A lanky sweep dandles its skinny neck into the well
and spies for water - imagine a giant gnat sucking
the blood of old earth. Thirsty oxen mill around
the trough, making war on an army of flies. But
lazybone Lackó hangs on the hands, and who’s to scoop
the water up?

As far as the eye can see on bleak earth and sky,
one workman alone is on his feet. A whopping side-
rail sways on his brawny shoulder lightly, and still
not a trace of beard on his chin. He stares far,
far down the road as though to depart this village
and land for other fields. A live warning, you
would have thought him, planted at the crossroad
on a shallow hill.

Dear little brother, why stand in the blazing sun?
Look, others are snoring under the hay. The kuvasz,
too, is lolling there, his tongue dangling out, not
for all the world would he go a-mousing. Or have you
never seen a whirlwind like this? It kicks up the
dust for a fight, licks the road at breakneck speed,
a smoke-stack belching on the run.

But no, he does not care how it sifts the road
from end to end - through a tower of dust erected
by the wind, proud weapons glitter, proud troops
ascend. A cloud of sighs rises from his heart like
those hazy troops. And bending forward, he stares
and stares as though heart and soul were fixed
in his eyes.

“Neat Hungarian cavaliers, shining knights! How beat
and bitter am I to see you. Where are you bound? How
far? Into battle? To gather flowers for a wreath of
glory? Are you riding against Tatars, Turks? To bid
them good night forever? Ah, if I too, I too were
only riding. Neat Hungarian cavaliers, shining knights!”

These were the thoughts that furrowed into Miklós
Toldi’s soul. His head churned, and his heart was
wrung with sadness because he too was the son of a
knight. György, his false brother, was reared as
a companion of the royal heir. He lives it up in
the royal court while Miklós mows and rakes with
the hired hands.

Here they come, the mounted men of the Palatine
Laczfi, and at the head of his proud troops Endre
Laczfi himself. He sits with martial bearing on
his fallow horse, braids of gold on his robe. In
his train dashing young men ride in fancy saddles
on stamping stallions. Miklós stares and stares,
not knowing his eyes are sore for staring so hard.

“Hey peasant, where’s the road to Buda?” Laczfi asks disdainful and cold. The word cut to Toldi’s heart, which jumped so hard you could hear it. “Hm, me a peasant!” he fumes. “Well, who but me is lord of this village and land? Maybe György Toldi, my foxy brother, setting dishes at the court for King Louis?”

“Me a peasant, me?” With that he brought down a terrible curse on György Toldi’s head. And then he lightly twirls the pole, grabbing one end like a little stick. With a single hand he raises it up long and straight, pointing out the road that trails toward Buda. Arm hardening into iron, and himself, he extends the rough-hewn timber straight as a rod.

When they behold Toldi with the long pole, the Palatine and all his troops look on astounded. “This is a man in his own right, whoever he is,” speaks Laczfi. “Who will take him on, boys? Or who will point like that the sorry faggot this boy is using to show the road?” What a comedown, what a shame. They mutter and bluster, but who dares to match a peasant boy!

Who would ever enter the list with a thunderstorm, the wild and windy gloom? And who would joust with the fiery wrath of God, the flashing and sizzling shaft of God? Pick a fight with Toldi if you long for God’s dear kingdom. And what a fate awaits whoever falls into his hands, wailing himself back into his dead mother’s arms.

They pass by in long closed lines. The whole army is talking about Toldi. Everyone has a good, kind word for him; everyone turns him a smiling face. One says - “Friend, why don’t you join up for the battle? Young men like you have a high price there, believe you me.” Another says in pity - “Too bad your father was a peasant and you, dear brother, are too.”

The army passes, echoes die - one enveloped in dust the other lofted on the wind. Toldi shambles homeward, deep in melancholy. The range trembles under his heavy footsteps into the far distance. His walk is a sullen bull’s, his eyes the brown midnight. In his mad rage he blows like a wounded boar, the rail almost crumpling in his iron hands.

Second Canto

“When György Tholdi returned from Buda,
he often rebuked his younger brother.”

Ilosvai

Miklós wrestles with himself in the rawness of his discontent. But things are happening at home in Nagyfalu - perhaps the house is burning, the chimney is smoking so hard. A bucket waves welcome on the brooding sweep. Piglets squeal and mewl; calves and lambs bleat. A dreadful judgment reigns over the small livestock. The womenfolk, even the ailing, bustle about. The kitchen is busier than a little market.

A servant pours water into a six-gallon bucket. When it boils and runs over, she quickly dips a fowl in, plucks it, and grabs off the socks. To keep the little lamb from sweating, someone strips off his fleecy hide. And someone else bastes a spare rabbit, making it drip with lard.

Another is swinging a piglet above the flame, shaving it down to the skin. They bring wine in flagons and goatskins, and bread in a beechen vessel...

What does the hullabaloo mean in a widow's house where merry-making is long out of style. Is this a funeral feast for Lőrinc Toldi's widow? Or has fate brought her to a second wedding? Has she tired of her lonely widow's bed and given the fading flower of her life to another?

This is neither a funeral feast nor the dawn of a second wedding. This cooking and baking is for someone else, this banqueting for someone else - György, the first-born, is home on a visit...

György Toldi was a great lord with splendid cattle and plenty of money to fill his liver with pride, knights, armed retainers, snorting stallions, and a big pack of dogs. With forty men he came, a rank rout of locusts who will devour half the ready yield while György will pouch the other half.

He greeted his mother coldly, although she poured out her soul for him “Well, where’s that other one?” he asks with reluctance. No one would imagine he meant his brother. “He is hauling hay with the hired hands, the little one. I’ll send for him -” But György cried, “No need!” No need, and these two words stuck like a knife in the mother’s heart.

No need? But though unwanted and unbidden, the boy enters unawares, his heart still like a fiery cauldron, scaling with shame and anger. And still - what a miracle! - he does not utter one hard word. A something masters the loathing of his soul, a something I cannot express.

Seeing him, he suddenly opens, impulsively, his arms. But György only elbows him away and arrogantly turns from the brother of his own blood. The mother’s eyes are brimmed with tears as with quavering lips she steps before her stone-hearted son, stroking his arms and stroking his head. She is hopeful, but György rebukes her harshly like this -

“That’s fine, mother, call your lap dog, guard your precious child from the wind. Dip him in milk and butter, don’t deny him a thing, and he’ll grow up a big dumb dolt. It is harvest time in the fields, but that’s not to his master’s taste. Like a hound, he smells a fat dinner and higgledy-piggledy he leaves the hands.

“This is how you always cried whenever I said that nothing would come of him but a big lout; he’s not even fit for a peasant, he likes to loaf although he could stand to work, he’s strong as an ox. Now you can show him in the window - every day he puts on meat and fat to delight his mother...” György speaks with a laugh at which Miklós rises uttering a long, dull cry -

“Every word in your mouth is a curse and a lie! Not a letter of truth exists in your charge. I know too well what lurks behind your bush. May God love you as much as you do me! I am unfit for a peasant, unfit for a knight, and among the hired hands I am least of all. You are jealous because someone shares your bowl, and you would drown me, if you could, with a spoonful of water.

“Not to be under anyone’s feet, I am ready to go this very day. The road is open a hundred miles this way and a hundred that, I am ready to go this very day. But whatever is mine, I’ll take from here. Now give me, brother, all that is mine - my rightful share of this estate - my money, my steeds, my weapons. Beyond that, God bless every man.”

“Here’s your share, boy, don’t say you didn’t get it!” György shouts and cuffs his face with a resounding clap. Now Miklós Toldi is not endowed with a pigeon’s liver, and a spirit of vengeance takes his soul. His eyes like steel are sparkling fire, and he prepares a blow with the bones of his fist. György retreats, frightened to death - this could be the very last stroke.

And this blow would put him in a cool hole, where he would never again eat God’s bread, and like a broken bone between two slats of wood he would never repair unto judgment day. But as the younger attacks, the mother darts between them with a shriek, shielding György though protecting his brother.

The enormous youth now dropped his arms, sadly lowered his head and eyes. As though awakening with a chill, he went reeling from his father’s house. He gave himself up to sorrow and silent anger, and sat in the farthest corner of the yard. Putting his head into his hands he wept, but not a soul was there to hear at all.

Third Canto

“He was enraged at his younger brother,
who slew his favorite retainer.”

Ilosvai

There was no grief in the ancestral house where they wore themselves out eating and drinking. But when good György Toldi rose from the board, his men all twirled their spears. Young blood, old wine danced in their veins as the wooden spears whirled in their hands. They were bantering and laughing in finest fettle like wild colts.

After gorging himself, György Toldi reclines in the old armchair. From under the eaves he watches with pleasure the games they play. When he sees his brother Miklós alone at the foot of the yard in his sadness, the brute impulse of his soul rises, and his big-headed boys he eggs with these words -

“Hey you, there’s a bastard sitting by himself, beak under wing in his dejection. Does he cower, or has he croaked? Let’s see if he can fly. We’ve got to beat the fence around him!”

As when a hare is let among dogs, the wild boys leaped at the words. They bang on the picket fence, and Miklós is silently grieved at the affront. It is easy to grasp, not only with the mind but with hand and fist, that the crude sport is meant to get his goat, and sometimes they almost graze his head.

Toldi put up with it though not in peace, and the great soul wrestled with his rage. He mastered himself at last and suffered with disdain the flunkies who were mocking him. These people would have been mere straw to his wrath which was like Samson’s, of whom it is written that with a jaw-bone he slew a thousand heathens.

Toldi stood it, stood it as long as he could. He took his revenge by pretending not to notice, and did not even wiggle an ear at the clatter. But when a spear grazed his shoulder, he rose in a terrible rage, grabbed up the millstone on which he sat and hurled it among the gibing followers of György Toldi.

The heavy stone flies. Who knows where it is going to land? Run if you can, Miklós, run! Your head is under the headsman’s sword. Water cannot wash off a murderer’s name! You will go wild, wandering far from the paternal house like a stag that is driven from the herd - a stag who gores his rival and is cast out himself by the others.

The stone cleaved the air and delivered stark death to a noble warrior. His body was squashed as in an oil-press, dark sap trickling from the mangled flesh. The dusty earth greedily licked it up, and a deathly veil covered his eyes. The blow that snuffed out his life was painful to all, but not to him who perished of a sudden.

György was enraged at the loss of his retainer, and mourned. But it pleased him that his brother played into his hands with a murder. The cloak of law and justice will now cover his design and its crooked course. To undo his brother in the name of a judge, he gave strict orders to seize him forthwith.

Fourth Canto

“Miklós’ mother misses him sorely,
secretly sends him food and drink.”

Ilosvai

As the wounded hart flees into a shady forest with his fiery pain, for a stream with cooling waters and balm to tear on his wound - Oh, but the bed is dry and he cannot discover the healing balm; his body is torn by every branch, his body is ripped by every thorn, and he is more faint now than he was before -

So Miklós plunged on. Sorrow sat on his neck and dug spurs into his ribs. His heart bounded in his breast like a horse locked in a burning stable. He hid by a stream, he hid in the reeds, and found no place to lay his head. He looked for solitude but found no cure for the sickness of his soul.

Like the wolf fleeing a shepherd, he flung himself into a large, dried-up bog. But every reed whispered - you are the loneliest in all the world. His bed was of dry reeds, his pillow a clump. His tanya was roofed by God’s blue sky until night took it under her wing and drew a tent of darkness above.

Sweet sleep chanced by like a mantled moth but dared not settle on his eyes for long, or until the bloom of rosy dawn. It was afraid of the mosquitoes, afraid of the rankling reeds, more afraid of the wild things that clatter in the bog, the distant noise of the pursuing knights, and most afraid of Miklós Toldi's heavy cares.

But in the dappled dawn when the mosquitoes dozed off and the clatter died, it stole down unfolding two wings over his eyes. And then it kissed his lips with a nectar of sleep gathered from poppy for the night, a sleep so enchanting saliva rolled from the corner of Toldi's mouth.

But pangs of hunger envied this too, rousing him soon from his morning sleep, goading and lashing as he wandered the fields of grass up and down. He hunted for the nests of field birds - wild duck, lapwing, mew, and coot - broke into their homes and robbed them clean, putting his hunger to sleep with their speckled eggs.

Thirst and hunger stilled with wild bird eggs, he was buffeted on the waves of his future. Where should he go? What should he do? Good God! His feverish soul has nowhere to turn. It would be easy to go, easy to hide, but his mother would always stay in his mind. Ah, if she failed to hear from him, her heart would break.

Three days he tormented himself like this, on the third day he heard a rustle - a wolf he thought, but did not raise his arms for he knew only a brother could do you harm. It was Bence though, the old faithful servant, sent by his mother. Bence fell on him crying and after a while spoke these words -

“Ah, God bless you, how glad I am to find you. For three days I searched and combed this ocean of reeds never thinking to see you again. How are you, my dear boy? Are you hungry? Didn't the beasts eat you up in these wilds? Here is my sack, take it and eat, here it is! a roast, a loaf of bread, and wine.”

With that the faithful servant put his fist to his eyes, then wiped it on his coarse shirt. He knelt to the ground, put down his pouch, and one by one unpacked all that was inside. He spread a table, a make-do one of the empty pouch and cover. He set down the bread, the flask, and the roast, and graced it with two apples at last.

Then he drew out a shining knife and offered it to the young master. Toldi sliced up the loaf of bread and ate it with the hearty meat. How Bence, the old faithful servant, enjoyed the sight - better than eating himself! His mouth moved as if chewing, and now and then a tear trembled on a lash of his eye.

When Miklós had sated his hunger, Bence twisted the neck of the flask. It squeaked and spurted blood on the back of the old servant's hand. Bence toasted his master with the red wine, first pouring a swig and wetting his whistle. As he handed the flask to the young man with his right, he wiped off his mouth on the front of his shirt.

The wine fired the old man's spirit. How his heart expanded! How his tongue loosened! He started by talking about Miklós' grandfather, whom he served as an ox-driver long ago. And then he turned his talk to Miklós' father, mother, brother György, and at last to himself. The words would have come forth until the end of the world, but Miklós interrupted him at last like this -

“How it hurts to listen! Stop, I ask you, stop this painful talk. In the past, whilst shelling corn by the fireplace, I would gladly listen until judgment day. How often you retold the stories of my father's knightly deeds, how many an evening until midnight. And then how long it was before I would fall asleep! I could not even close my eyes until dawn.

“What was, is no more; what was good, is passed. Another pen is writing. My fortune has turned for the worse. I have become a murderer, become a fugitive. Ah, who knows when I will clear my name again. But I believe God will not forsake an orphan, he the provident father. My own blood may cleanse me of the crime my dear brother writ on my brow.

“I was not born, I know, to live a frog among these canes. Nor was I born a hired hand, sickleman, or hauler of hay for anyone’s son. Now I only wait for twilight to come, the light to leave the fields; then I will put the land for a wallet on my back, and not even the wind will bring you a report of me.”

Bence grew sad at these words, sorry his young master planned to hide. He kept silent a long while, and then he burst into tears, making crosses with his fingernails on his boots. At last he spoke and asked master Miklós not to take it ill but really he thought it foolish to rush into a fugitive life.

“You see, my good little master, György will leave for Buda in three days or four. Then whatever happened will be forgotten, and you shall be the little king in all the province. Would you really abandon us, good servants all, who loved you like our own child? Would you abandon Bimbó and Lombár, the right-hand oxen of the team? In seven markets of the land you won’t find the likes of them.

“Would you leave behind all the good times? In the mill, who will lift the sacks in pairs? Who will wear a millstone on his arm for the miller boys to wonder at? Do not go, dear boy, do not go away and leave all Nagyfalu in misery. Ah, don’t desert the ancient Toldi house, do not push your dear mother into her grave.”

This is how he pleaded, but Miklós took little heed and shook his head whenever he did not like what was said. But as Bence brought up his mother at the end, it was like rolling a stone on his heart. For long he did not reply, he only stared into the murmuring reeds, and he stared and stared until at last a large, warm tear sat on the lash of his eye.

And as though he were wiping the sweat from his face, he brushed the unbidden guest with his palm. The tear slid slowly down his little finger to the ground, as he turned to Bence with these words - “Tell my mother, good Bence, her son’s star is now eclipsed. She will not hear of him for long, his name they will bury as though he were dead.

But he will not be dead, only like someone deep in hiding who is risen after certain time and people hear of his marvellous works. She will hear of me still, and when she does even babes will be stunned. My mother's soul will leap, but she must not let her heart burst for joy."

This was the message Miklós sent. Then the faithful servant put the empty flask into the pouch. He carefully wiped the shining knife and folded up the canvas napkin. He threw the pouch over his shoulder, said goodbye and started on his way. He wanted to leave, he wanted to stop. He often looked back and was swallowed at last among the trackless reeds.

Fifth Canto

"Miklós was a fugitive on stream and reed."

Ilosvai

The sun sank beyond the marshy reeds and left a large red cloak on the sky. But the night took strength, soon pulled it in, and wrapped the sky and earth in a cloth of black. And it studded the sky with coffin nails, a billion shining stars. At last, it rounded up the lovely moon and placed it at the head like a silver wreath.

Miklós set out on the unfamiliar way and pierced deeper and deeper into the bog. But tugged as though by a thong, he could not tear free from the thought of his mother. Again he looked back, and again. But why, with not a creature there to see? Still he looked, and after a little while turned homeward to take his last farewell.

As he was returning, wending his way, the bottom of the bog sank at a certain place and he stumbled in a wolves' lair where two whelps started whining like little devils. Miklós was sorry and petted the poor lonely things like a shepherd, when training, strokes a komondor pup.

Too bad he did so, it was only to his harm. The reeds at his back suddenly rustle; the mother wolf leaps with a terrible howl, and the two wrestle. She rears up again and again on her hind feet and claws at Toldi's face - a clapper of teeth in a palate of blood, a gleam in the moonlight like sparks.

But Toldi handles himself smartly and deals blow after blow with his fists. Blood gushes, from her mouth and nose, the large glazed eyes are terribly swollen. Her tongue bulges out, bloodied with her snapping teeth. The foul saliva froths like a mad dog's, never has one seen a madder beast.

Toldi, at last, begins to tire of it. He does not spare his legs and sends her flying with a long kick like a bull whirling horns. The beast arches over the bog. Haggard reeds and drooping with a thud, she groans.

But look, as though the devil burrowed into her, she rolls over and jumps to her feet. She yowls in sore rage and attacks again with her razor teeth. She sinks her claws into Miklós' shoulders, opens her mouth two spans wide by his head, and anchors her two hind legs on his knees, the devil take such merciless vermin.

And this might go, but here's the rest of it. The mate comes howling and attacking from behind. Now what, Miklós? You can't handle this! With a thousand lives, you would still be killed. Never mind! When things go bad, he's got the grit. He'll make it, don't worry. They won't eat him up.

As she clawed and mauled him, he grabbed her throat with his two hands. Her claws gave, and the strength faded from the ham of her knee. Her eyes popped, full of bloody tears. Her green tongue hung out like a long colter. Her life did not escape, it was penned inside - and her maw was fixed in a wide open gape.

Toldi grabbed her up, swung, and struck the male as he leaped. He regained his feet in a rage. Toldi knocked him down again, and he snapped at his mate from where he lay. He would have risen once more, but Miklós beat him to it and slugged with the she-wolf so hard he will never get up until the world comes to an end.

After this narrow call, Toldi rested a while on a clump. The whelps were dead, trampled beneath his feet. Their mother and her mate lay farther away. The round moon shone on them brightly and looked coldly down into the bog with its face distended like a golden skillet.

Miklós was turning his thoughts in his mind though I could not say he was really sorry for the wolves. His thoughts were on another wolf, an ill-natured brother who wanted to devour him. But why? Why be his hangman and not his brother? When did Miklós ever do him harm? Why sharpen his fangs for his own good brother?

György comes out bested compared to a wolf. The beast of the field protects his lair, attacks only when provoked. Or if his hunger drives him to kill, once appeased he harms no one. Though he devastates the herds, his own kind he spares.

But his own brother, his own brother, who can say why he wants to kill? Can he quench his thirst only with blood or by driving his good brother from their property? What if the bloodthirsty brother got his comeuppance like the wolves? Or is the breath of life more fixed in man? Is this why a final night has yet to fall on György?

Hold on, Toldi, hold on, your intent is on murder. Do not fling a bloody prey to your revenge. Know the blood of a murdered brother clamors up to the heaven of heavens for vengeance. Know if you were to slay your brother, it would be your own eternal life you destroyed. Do not fear. God is in heaven and sees the truth. Leave him the work of justice.

Now as if with a sudden thought, he rose and strode to the beasts. He flung them over his shoulders and started on a dangerous journey into the night. Furiously he plunged through the wilderness of reeds and tunnelled a winding track as he went. The two wolves dangled at his heels, he never glanced back all the way to his mother's house.

Sixth Canto

“György Toldi’s mother pitied Miklós.”

Ilosvai

The moon is bright on the Nagyfalú steeple, and the white Toldi house gleams on the edge of the grass, behind it an orchard as green and large as some Alföld woods. A tiny door opens on the garden from the widow’s bedroom, a rosemary in the window where Miklós is on the watch.

He threw, on arriving, his wolves on the wet grass. He tiptoes, as if stealing, to the outward door of his mother’s room. He listens quietly but hears only the ticking of a worm in the lintel. He is poised to knock, but catches himself - undaring he hesitates, hand on latch.

Why in the world so afraid? He would take dragons on any other time. But now he is worried a rustle may startle his mother. If he scares her, she might fear open the door or window; she may scream, and they would have no chance to talk together.

He lifts the wolves to his shoulder and walks around to the other side. Every living being, inside and out, was at rest, the dogs too asleep in the shed. The door’s ajar. He sees György’s bed where the moon spreads a large white sheet. And beneath the eaves, the sleeping guards are stretched in rows.

The whole world is asleep. Miklós does not waver long. Laying the wolves on the doorsill, he gathers up the lances leaning against the wall and pins the guards on the ground to hold them fastened when they awake. He enters the room. Ah, the devil will take György Toldi if he hasn’t by now.

Miklós watches by the mosquito net as he snores his living breath in and out. One squeeze of the hand, and though he had a hundred souls, he would fall silent and snore no more. But Miklós speaks - “I could kill you if my soul prompted, and you would deserve it, but for this once I will do you no harm. Only that I came this will let you know.”

With that he took the two wolves in his arms and laid them by the old bedstead, saying - Hushaby, hushaby, lullaby, your brother is sleeping close by. And he himself entered the adjoining room where his mother sat in her mourning gown. She had laid her hands on the table and lowered her head.

Sleep lurked there in vain, for it could not break through her sorrow. At last it enticed her with a trick, borrowing the guise of an ague. It squirmed down the nape of her neck, ran down to her heels and up again. It made her stiff, it made her reel. This is what it took to put her asleep.

Even so, it lasted only a bit, as a quiet knock aroused her from sleep. She awoke in alarm, but Miklós reassured her with these words - “Dear mother, do not be alarmed. I bring no harm on the house. I walk at night like a ghost, but they would kill me, you know, if I came by day.”

At these words, the widow no longer feared, and she embraced him closely. A fillér is tiny but would not fit where she missed planting a kiss upon his face. “Ah, to see you again. I never thought I would, I despaired, almost died. But my God, don’t let me speak so loudly - your brother’s next door.”

This is all, and she would say no more if she were on the wide Hortobágy. There too she would clasp him, her heart uneasy, lips locked in a long mute kiss. Miklós could feel her atremble on his breast, she might fall unless he held her. But he was terribly aroused, too, and could speak only after a good long while.

He tried to compose himself, but what was the use! It seemed someone were piercing his nostrils with a pin, or grating horseradish - this is how it wrung his nose. He wept on the face of his beloved parent, and like two brooks plunging from the mountains together, their tears commingled.

At last, Miklós stilled his heart, and he stroked his mother’s gray hair with his eyes. He composed himself, and straightening up he mastered somehow his lamentable mood. And he spoke to his mother these words - “Leave kissing me now. Every hour is measured as though by contract. I come to bid you now farewell.

“I cannot hope to remain here because of György - God put him wherever he will. I fear that in the end I might be a killer... But no, never! I’ll not even say it. But this much I’ll say, do not worry, lay your fears aside. I do not leave you to stay forever. The creator, I believe, will spare me till I return.

“I feel great strength in my arms, and I shall not waste it in shed or mill. I have heard of my father’s brave deeds. Should I alone be a disgrace to my line? I shall go up to Buda as a champion warrior. There I will show something to the king, something that cannot shame my brother, only split his spleen with envy.

“And that is why I beg you, my dear mother, never worry, never cry. Why weep for one who hasn’t died when the departed themselves do not remain dead...?” He would have continued, but the dogs bayed below. With this he knew he did something amiss.

The dogs were enraged at what else but the wolves in the yard. Soon the servants will wake, and he made the rest of it short - “I have no more time. May God bless you. May God bless you in this world, and bless you in the next, I desire it from my heart.”

“Bless, bless!” ...was all his mother could say. Who or whom, she only knew in her thoughts. She knew who searches every heart would know every one of her desires. And when the child separated from her breast! The tongue of man cannot describe her anguish. Her soul, it was not ungrappled but ripped out at the house.

The dogs, meanwhile, whined and howled, and with an ugly barking came to the door. The guards struggled to their feet somehow. György awoke at the awful noise. “Who was here? What was here?” they bawled as they came across the wolves. “It was Miklós! No one else could! After him! After him, the devil take it!”

Like a nest of angered hornets, this is how to picture the house. They ran against one another on the big verandah, they dashed here and there on horseback and foot. Where to? Where are they fleeing? No one knows. Left and right they rush like mad. Cursing something awful, György at last makes off and the others tumble along behind.

Does the widow hear the clamor of the chase, the blast of horns, the yelling, the yelping? She hears a shout - head him off! head him off! But does she know it is Miklós they are hunting for? No, she does not know at all. When Miklós disappeared, she fainted on the unslept bed - God knows how long she lay as if dead.

Seventh Canto

“He took great pity on the woman’s sorrow,
and said he would avenge her wrong.”

Ilosvai

When there is no one in the whole world to befriend you, do not lose heart for the Lord will appear at your side. See how he stood by Toldi as he shrouded the moon in a heavy cloud and there was such darkness nothing was visible. The sky roared terribly, thundered and lightened - God’s wrath struck a hajdú who died on the spot without a moan.

György Toldi did not take lightly the thunder whirling above his head. He had his scattered dogs recalled with a blast of the horn, and all his men gathered behind. Wet to the marrow, they straggled home at last when it was almost morning. But György was chagrined most sorely of all for his plan did not pan out.

Miklós covered ground that night facing lightning, wind and rain. When dawn lifted the fog, he found himself on a bleak desert. Who was his companion on this desolate puszta? the sun behind him swimming in a blue sky - it overtook him, passed him by, and left him in a clammy and unfriendly night.

Three times it passed. On the fourth, he saw high mountains at noon shimmering in the délibáb. Miklós gazed in admiration for he had never seen the likes of it - the mountains, that is, and not the mirage. He hastened, hastened onward though weary. Toward nightfall he saw the Castle of Buda, and before the sun sank he reached the famous and glorious fields of Rákos.

Rákos borders on Pest, and Miklós encountered night by a cemetery with a fresh grave looming in the dark. Whose it was little concerned Miklós, but Almighty God - he saw his dear mother in a long gown, bending by the grave over a pair of crosses.

But not really his mother, only her living image. Her bitter weeping would melt stones. Then why should Miklós not pity her since his heart was softer than stone? He was moved to compassion, and approaching he asked for whom and why she wept. And the widow (for indeed she was) replied, bitterly weeping -

“Ah, my son, do not ask what has befallen me. Today I buried my two sons, who were killed on the Danube island by a foreign warrior. May God never save him from the fires of Hell.” She spoke brokenly, and could say no more, for her tongue was muted by sobs. She knelt on the black mound moaning over the two crosses.

This went on a long time. Miklós waited for her bitter tears to stop. At last they did, or so it seemed as she sobbed less strongly, moaning only a bit. Then he said to her - “I hear as I hear your plaint, but cannot make it out, I confess. Two of your sons were killed, but by whom and why? If killed, is there no one to take blood for blood?”

She straightened up and overcame her cruel suffering. Thin of face and wan was she; only her two large eyes shone darkly. “Blood for blood you say. There is no one to pity me in my sorrow. My heart is bleak like the barren fields where the scythe has reaped the heads of corn.”

Toldi said - "Do not weep, your two brave sons will rise no more. But may God not be my God if I do not take vengeance on the warrior. Now I ask you (and see not in vain) tell me the story in God's truth. I have a widow mother at home and feel a compassion for dear women like you."

The sad woman took heart and told how it all happened - A foreign warrior blusters on an island in the Danube, possessed of frightfully good luck. He brags, whirls his weight about, and speaks with contempt of the Hungarian nation. Many fighters challenge him for life or death, and leave mourning widows and orphans behind.

Yesterday her two knightly sons faced him, no pair could match them in half the land, and none in all the world. And now they are resting in a single grave! The world is terrified of the cruel warrior, and no one is left to fight though he appears on the morrow with boast and blasphemy.

After he heard what happened, Miklós said no more of his intention. He bade her goodby and went toward Pest, turning great deeds in his mind. He hurried from street to street as though he knew every step of the way; but he was only rambling round and round, bread in his pocket and house on his back.

Eighth Canto

"...The king...
if Miklós were kept at home, would deem it a loss."
llosvai

György Toldi thought it out well (to make a long story short) he thought it out, I say, and plotted to lay hold of his brother's property. And so it came about that he arrived in Buda to dig Miklós a pit at the court of King Louis. Dismounting, he immediately went up to the king and tuned his pitch.

“Your Majesty, it is bitter to report what I must as sore duty. Bitter because blood is not water, and once a brother always a brother.” Here he broke off and, as though violently sobbing, dabbed at his eyes with a kerchief. He rubbed them raw red, and yet the king could not perceive a tear at all.

The king said - “I never heard you had a brother. You did not bring him up to my court? Never showed him, never presented him?” György replied - “Oh, Lord my King! It is to my shame and sorrow, but he is not worthy of your good grace (and he sighed heavily).

“When Miklós was about ten, our poor father died. I tried to take his father’s place and rear him, as is proper, to be a good knight. But he was a wastrel and stupid, with no spirit for good. He remained at home a betyár, a peasant although extremely strong. But what’s the use of it? He is lazy and forever in trouble.”

The good king replied - “Well, indeed, that is too bad, but still you were ill-advised to remain silent. You say he is very strong. Then it is strange he has no will to fight. But late is not lost. Bring him up, bring him, I ask you, and let me see him. He will learn, you will see, at my school. If not, he may pass as a man in the ranks.”

“Thank you, thank you for this kindness, Your Majesty, and for such faith in my undeserving brother. But ah, it is too late. My brother is a lost soul, who has committed a murder! Ah, that I must open my lips for a lament like this, but some days ago he killed a well-loved retainer of mine...” György spoke, and with a moan he leaned on a stone saint. The king looked, and suddenly his face clouded up.

He did not tell György why, nor did György ask. They were still for a long time until the king at last broke the silence - “I have a way to grant him pardon. Bring him up as soon as you can to Buda. A Bohemian warrior is duelling on the Danube island, and many a brave knight of mine has fallen at his hand.

“Let your brother come up and take him on. He will either win or die. If he wins, he is a good lad worthy of pardon. If he loses, he will have paid for his crime.” This is what the king said, but the good-hearted brother was still unhappy. He sighed - “Ah, it comes too late for my brother, who is fled as a fugitive wandering in the world.

“Who knows where he is? He skipped the house and said goodbye to the gatepost. All trace is lost; the good God knows whether he’s dead or alive.” This is how György lamented, full of deceit, and false in body and soul. He showed the white of his teeth, and went on like this -

“In the eyes of the law and the world, he is done. I know his worldly inheritance is my due - I could even seize it, take it as my right if this is what I wanted. But some people would say György Toldi was out for his brother’s portion. Look! he drove him off and seizes his land.

“But God save me from taking it like that and spare me the slanders of the world! Who would vouch against his attacking and killing me for his loss? This I do not want, it were badly advised. But I place it on the footstool at your throne - Let Your Majesty decide who is more worthy, as you deem, and grant him the royal boon.”

György Toldi spoke and bowed low. The king saw into his design and detected exactly the thought it concealed - a royal letter would help oust his brother were he ever pardoned and reclaimed his share.

His Majesty the King smiled coldly, trapping György like this in his own words - “Good, I will accept the property of your brother, and as the one more worthy, I will give it to you. But on the condition you kill the Bohemian warrior tomorrow and impale his head on the castle top. This is how you may win my royal seal.”

György Toldi reddened deeper than a broiled lobster. The bright day fogged up, the wooden statues danced. It would have taken little for him to faint. A chill ran through him, he shook with a cold sweat. His face was pale, with less blood than a mosquito might need for a single bite.

At long last, he spoke, sadly replying to the king - "I say, I do not want my brother's wealth. I renounce it not to burden my soul." He spoke like this and bade His Majesty goodby. He went home and fell down a-tearing his hair, raving and beating his brow. The servants watched and wondered whether he was fit to be tied.

Ninth Canto

"The bull bolted, and the rope broke in two...
They gave Miklós a great deal of liver."

Ilosvai

A bright moon is shining on the streets of Pest, chimneys gleaming high in the moonlight. The rooftops huddle below shingling in shadow almost all the walls. You would think they live in attics, and that is why they raise the roofs so high, wall on wall and the top twice begun anew.

Weary after much wandering, Miklós rested at last on a bench watching the fine folks - gentlemen, ladies, young ladies in passing; and he gazed on until sated. Then he hung his head remembering he was without money or food. He had lived four days on nothing but roadside mushrooms.

Suddenly he heard a piercing cry, a scream. What is it, he wondered - a fire, a flood, a scaling of the castle walls? It was some other disaster though - a wild bull bolting down the narrow street, fleeing from the slaughterhouse he escaped somehow. He bellowed and bawled as he smelled the blood that poured from his ears and ran down his breast.

The butcher boys fled in panic, lasso in hand. Only from a haven did they think to call the dogs; then they sicked six strong mastiffs after the bull. These were not at all loath, snapping at the withers and ears as they leaped along.

When one bloodied his ear and it hurt, the bull bellowed terribly and shook the pendants off. The dogs sailed into the air and fell from the walls with a thud. The pieces of ear that stuck in the mouth they chewed in anguished rage.

The butcher boys shouted - "catch him! catch him!" But the mad beast whirled, and when a dog came near he sent it flying. He shied one into an adjoining yard, gutted another with his horn. The butchers (well, what else could they do?) commanded sternly - the dead dogs.

But the bull, like a roaring storm, looked neither up nor down the road. He attacked whomever he found ahead or behind, and everyone fled an absolute death. The women scream in near despair. The men shout "head him off, head him off!" But no one would face him; they would crawl, if they could, in an auger hole.

Toldi held his place, stood calmly, and waited for the bull in the middle of the street. "What do you want, kid! Are you crazy? Don't you see the mad bull running right at you?" Miklós saw him of course. "Go on and shout," he thought to himself, letting the words fly past his ears - it was time to see to the bull.

As quickly as the bull saw Miklós, he screeched terribly pawing the dust. And then he whirled dirt with his horns as though he were aboard a threshing floor. He planted his feet, horns lowered for the fight. "He's had it, he's done for! ai, ai!" they shouted from the windows on that street in Pest.

But no, course not! Miklós stamped his foot and shouted with a terrifying voice. At this welcome the bull recoiled, and Miklós nabbed him; drew him to the slaughterhouse, holding him by the horns. He called on the butchers to come and take him. They emerged at last, heavy ropes and lassoes in hand.

They tied him to a heavy beam and bound horns to forelegs. The crowd scattered, and the butchers retired into a little shed to sleep. Miklós sat down by the slaughterhouse, thinking to bunk for the night, his pillow a rack and his blanket the light of the moon.

But the butchers would not let him rest. They shoved out a hunk of liver and told him beat it in his mother's pain. "Do they fling alms to one who saves hundreds and hundreds of lives?" he thought and left it on the ground. A hungry dog came up, and Miklós let him take it.

Then he went down the street. Many places they whispered, "That's the one who seized it by the horn." Many places he saw a figure or two step back from the window or doorway. And then the shutters slammed, or a key grated in the gate. Everything was silent, cold and cruel. "Where will I ever," says Toldi, "find a hearth that is mine?"

How many things came to his mind! his mother's dear face when he took farewell, as she hung on his neck and smothered him with burning kisses. Then too the silent dead of night, then too the moon gleaming like this; and then too he was shut out by all the world, and no one gave him a place to sleep for the night.

Leaving his mother's face, his thoughts flew to the old widow as she wept over the cross and wrung her hands for her two sons the wild warrior killed. He thought of his vow and sighed - "Oh, how can I enter the lists tomorrow? Where are shield, armor and weapon? Would the warrior accept my challenge?"

"Oh, why should he? He will laugh me off, mock me, scorn me. Or maybe they won't even let me in. Get out of here, old rags, they'll say when I show up." And this thought saddened him deeply. He walked slowly down the street, sighing. He stopped again and again staring at the ground as if searching for something at his feet.

At last he looked up, his face now bright. He began to walk fast, almost run. He went, went straight to the cemetery where a little while ago he met the weeping widow. It is easy to guess he was after the weapons and armor of the two young men. "I'll put them on," he said, pleased with the thought. But this promise of luck forsook him too.

He walked up and down the graves but found not one lost soul. Where could he search for the widow's house, thousands of people live in Budapest? He sees that all he wants is in vain, his solemn vow in vain - both he and his oath a nothing, and fate a mischievous child who plays with him.

And since the living would not take him in, he rested in the tanya of the dead. The mound was wet with the dew of a cool night, weeping instead of the kin. He looked up at the sky, the highway of the heavens, and thought sadly of his fugitive life. Hope was like a bird about to depart from his heart.

Tenth Canto

"György Tholdi's mother told the servant
to set before Miklós in his need
this loaf of rye."

Ilosvai

Credit lost when awake, fickle hope enticed him now with sleep to sweeten his wretchedness. Toldi was victorious in his dream over the warrior and won the king's pardon for his crime. A dear pearly weapon gleamed in his hand, and happiness in his mother's eyes.

He heard pounding hooves, and the dream fled. Toldi looked into the lovely moonlight. He could have seen far, but no, the rider was skirting the cemetery eaves. Who was it? He could not believe his own eyes as he recognized old Bence. "Hey, who's there? Where are you heading? Is it you, old Bence? My God! it can't be! What a stroke of luck!"

Bence, the honest servant, tried to insist he was someone else, but Toldi tore him from the horse and kissed away every speck of dust on his wrinkled face! Bence understood none of this, he knew a ghost leaped on him from the grave. Miklós long lectured the old servant before he could grasp it at all.

After he understood though, he would not forget until the day of his death. He would never forget, good Lord, how he was frightened by the great fortune, how he only half believed his eyes, how he fingered Toldi's bones, and how the tears streamed from his old eyes like a shower from God's cloud.

They rejoiced, comforted each other for a good while, then Miklós told all that happened since he left. Of course, that was not all for with every tenth word he asked about his mother. "How is she my dear mother? Is she sick? Is she grieving for her lost son? That other one, is he still over there living it up? He's mistreating my poor mother, isn't he?"

But Bence said he should not despair for his mother. György departed next day, and she is distraught no more. Nor have sorrows broken her heart. She would like to see Miklós no matter what. If she learns where he is in this wide world, she will visit him, she promised, if it means traveling fifty miles.

"She told me to find you, Miklós my dear soul, be your faithful servant, and take care of your needs. Wherever you wander, I shall be at your heels and help in your troubles..." This is what Bence said - and how much more! Who could put it into words!

They decided to sleep there. Bence fed his horse. He had fodder and bread on the horn of his saddle, for Bence was not put out by a burden like that. A large pouch also hung from the horn. Bence reached inside to his elbows, pulled out something, and said - "Here you are. Here, my child, I have brought you the dandiest loaf of bread."

"Your dear mother sent it, she kneaded and baked it, she ordered me lay it unbroken in your very own hands." He handed it over, and a knife. Miklós fell to slicing - but it was the strong blade not the bread that broke apart.

The old man marvelled “How in the world did the droughty ride fan it so dry!” He looked at it, fitting it as though to glue the parts together. But with a loaf of bread in hand, Miklós was not about to starve. He broke it open without delay - and a chunk of iron fell from inside.

Bence picked it up, saw a casket, not a piece of iron. It opened up easily for there was no lock. He looked in, stared with mouth wide open - those were coins, not two or three, but since living on earth (and he had eaten most of his allotted share of bread) he never saw so many, he avowed.

What about Miklós? Wasn't he happy? Of course he was, terribly happy and he jumped for joy, turning tomorrow's plans in his head - how to buy weapons and vestments! How behead the warrior Mikola! how this, how that. He saw innumerable how's, he saw innumerable beautiful things.

After long rejoicing, they sat on a mound counting. One by one, Toldi took the coins and nestled them in the cup of Bence's hands. And then Bence said - “You old palms! You never held the likes of this though you often itched. Now don't let me talk or we'll make a mistake.” But no, it came out a round number, exactly a hundred.

“Now listen, my good Bence. Put this away, here are ninety-nine, but the hundredth I'll keep where it's easy to find. We'll drink it up. My spirits, see how high they are.” The faithful servant wanted to resist, but on his saddle the canteen's dry - dew on the outside and tinder on the in.

Nearby they came on a ramshackle csárda. Untidy and tattered this ancient inn, it would be right at home on the Hortobágy flats. A thirsty well sweep idled in the front, and beside it Bence hitched his horse. Toldi entered, striking his head against the lintel in the dark.

“Hey, keeper, where are you? What the rantum scantum! Are you dead or asleep. How about a lamp?” “Sure, I'm up (what whirlwind blew him in here?). What do you want, an itce or a pint?” “An old gallon can or not a drop!” The innkeeper hemmed away at this, thinking to himself - now here's a guzzler for you.

Bence carried the sack into the house, and Miklós, I tell you, enjoyed his meal. He shoveled it in so fast his jaws could hardly keep it up. No three men could ever match him. When the wine arrived, he buckled for a fight and turned the can half way up. Bence protested it was too much, "For God's sake, it'll harm you."

"Harm or no, I don't care, and it's hardly any business of yours. When man's happy, his mind's a drag. Let's bury it today, here - have a drink, here take it!" With that he handed the gallon to Bence. The old man's hand trembled. He drank, but warily and slyly counted every drop.

While these things were going on at the table, twang! the cymbalo sounded by the kemence. An old player asleep in the nook stood up on hearing guests arrive. Toldi grabbed up the wine and leaped to the center of the floor. He fell to drinking and dancing, and the house almost collapsed. Bence kept protesting, "It'll harm you, watch out."

"Harm or no, I don't care! haj rá!" And he turned the old bumper up high in the air. "Let your horse brood, his head's about right. I haven't had such fun in a hundred years. Innkeeper, another gallon! and for the old one a pint, the gallon's heavy and his hands unsteady." The keeper obeyed, and Bence sipped slowly and properly from the pint.

"Haj rá! haj! let us keep the wake of sorrow. Our innkeeper's nodding, let's drink up his wine! Drink, old cymbalo, I'll sprinkle you." "Pour it in me instead, my lord, or I shudder." "Drink your own for free! Listen, innkeeper! Do as if you were drinking." "My lord, won't this be harmful?" "If that's all you can drink," said Miklós, "let the earth soak it up like this, look here!"

And he poured the wine out on the dirt floor. Bence shook his head, and added "what a pity!" But Toldi kept stoking his dance and beating his head against the beam. In his good spirits he screamed, he drank, he danced - and drank another long draught again. But the old companion kept his cool, and the wine from the pint emptied slowly.

At last he nodded and scolded Miklós no more. His head drooped and pulled him down to the bench. The kemence ran away, Bence tipped over, and that is how the old servant gave up. Toldi, too, had enough of fun and put his head on the table in his two big arms (on his bare arms you could see the swollen veins). This is how he fell asleep, and this is how the great child slept.

Eleventh Canto

“One of us must die here today, you know,
and a dead man doesn’t need a boat.”

Ilosvai

The dawn put its red cloak over half the sky. Vain though it was in velvet, it would not avoid looking into the ramshackle inn. With one eye it peered through a cleft of the window, and saw only the player asleep on the bench. Outside, the old servant was grooming the good steed Rigó.

And then the dawn looked about in Pest and Buda and admired itself in the wide Danube. The waves of the river reddened, and a brown boat was crossing at the middle. Toldi, who else, was at the oars ruffling the waters far around, the shiny mist drizzling as from a red cloud of coral.

Toldi swiftly crossed the wide waters and tied his boat on the Buda shore. He stepped out quickly in search of what he wanted - beautiful, golden weapons and vestments, and ornate trappings for the good horse Rigó, his favorite steed at home.

He bought what he was after - a shield, beautiful and large; a dolman on which the tailor did not leave a spot plain of golden piping; a helmet, armor, and a seven-flanged club; a pike, a lance, and many other weapons forged by the very best smith in Buda - weapons trimmed with silver, gold; one word tells as much as a hundred - he bought them all.

Returning to the csárda, he buckled on his armor and twirled the star-flanged club in his hand. The sun climbed over the brim of the sky, and its eye caught on the young man's finery. Nor was Rigó caked with yesterday's dust and mud. Now he was shining black and the sunlight jetted his hair.

And when they put his jaunty harness on, how fine he looked, how he sparkled, how he gleamed. When his good master Toldi bestrode him, he looked himself over and began to dance. Then, hop! and like the footed wind he bore Toldi off with wild and unforgiving speed. Bence plodded behind in tears for his little master left without even a goodbye.

Meanwhile, what was happening on the banks of Buda? Listen and I shall tell that, too. The king's pavilion was pitched of pure azure silk, golden tassels hanging from the sides as big as my fist - or do I understate? It stood without a compeer where the lordly pavilions rose boldly side by side.

Large, overstuffed armchairs laid with velvet and laced with gold were neatly arranged; no one could imagine a more beautiful setting. An old throne stood in the middle studded with precious stones and clawing the ground with golden nails; it too was covered with velvet.

The pavilions were surrounded by a palisade which common people were forbidden to cross. Outside, soldiers and masses of people devoured the vacant pavilions with their eyes. The palisade stretched in two lines down to the Danube, a gaping expanse between, big enough for a cattle market, but cattle were not admitted there.

On the bank of the Danube they raised a large flag, a boat, gaily bedecked, tied to the pole; on the Pest side too a flag above, a boat below. The river is a broad avenue hedged with men. In the middle, an island rises, a deadly isle, living for weeks on blood like a bloodsucking leech.

The big warrior appears from the Buda side, prancing on a large horse within the palisade. He curses horribly and defames the Hungarians, claiming no one dares to challenge him. But suddenly from Pest a joyous roar and commotion - a strange knight on a black steed gallops up to the flag and asks for leave to joust.

His beaver is down, and from the peak a white plume flutters. Toldi (who else) removes it, and quickly the king's knights appear at his side. As was their office, they row to the Buda shore with the plume. The Bohemian feather is red as blood - and the tokens of the gage are exchanged.

The whilst, messengers sped to the castle. The king descends with the noble orders. The two warriors set out, by boat, and landed each at the tilting ground. Touching soil, Miklós kicked his boat upon the wide Danube. It skimmed the waves as though on skates and slammed its nose on the banks of Pest.

The warrior asked why he sent it coasting free on the Danube. "A single boat will bear one man alone," replied Miklós. "One or the other here must die, and a dead man has no need for a boat." As he spoke, he clasped his hands in earnest prayer, calling on God.

And then he spoke, "Knight, give me your hand - you never hurt me, or I you. Even though you may hate me, you have less than a bare hour. And on his death bed who is not forgiving?" Then the warrior reached out with his gauntlet to crush the hand Toldi offered. He saw it coming and beat him to the friendly gesture.

Gathering his terrible strength he gripped the hand in a horrible vise. The glove crumpled, flattened out, every bone was crunched. As when it thaws and icicles drip from the eaves in spring, blood trickled from the warrior's finger tips - and he was awe-struck by Toldi's frightful power.

And then Toldi haled him by the hand pulling him about with his fearsome strength. The warrior's bones crackled, and his sinews wilted. He sank to his knees before Toldi begging - "My dear son, do not desire to take my life. I will give you all my wealth, the dear cattle of my dozen boys, and all that I own."

Toldi relented in his heart “So be it,” he replied. “I will take your cattle, not for myself but the mother of the two knights you killed. Now I give your life as alms. But first solemnly swear that though your country were flooded by the sea, never will you set foot on our land again.”

In terror, the champion agreed. The two went quietly down to the boat, embarked, and the perfidious warrior poised, arm upraised above Toldi’s back. Seeing him in the watery mirror, Toldi snatched the sword from the treacherous hand. “Mercy, pardon!” with a cry the great warrior sank to his knees. “Go ask of God - here’s one for the road.”

And he granted the cheating warrior eternal mercy, beheading him with a single blow, the big sword dripping red with blood. They applaud, they shout, they wave their flags. The high hills of Buda re-echo the cheers.

Twelfth Canto

“The king chose him to his royal guard,
granting a stipend for twelve horses.”

Ilosvai

When the frightened warrior fell to his knees at Toldi’s hand, His Majesty the King was greatly pleased and tears of joy rose to his eyes. He spoke to the lords at his side like this - “I do not think the Bohemian will fight tomorrow. He has met a man who teaches how one slanders and abuses the Magyars.

“But that champion, who is he? Don’t you know him, Toldi? Who does? I cannot imagine who he is. There is not a worthy knight in my country I do not know by name. Strength like his I never saw. I fear he will turn out other than Magyar, unbecoming though for someone else to uphold our honor.

“But Magyar or not, he has saved the Hungarians from a serious blow. His reward he will receive, and richly. I shall grant him the share that belongs to Toldi’s brother, the murderer.” György remained silent. He looked about to see if the others heard. The lords whispered and purred, gloating his brother was a criminal.

After Miklós severed the warrior’s head and showed it on his sword, His Majesty the King commanded twelve golden knights to accompany him back. They left on a boat with pennons flying and returned with him amid great pomp. The king spoke - Champion, lift your beaver, tell us your name and show your knightly face.

Miklós fell at the king’s feet and said - “O Your Majesty, I am not a champion, only a fugitive. How did I become one? Only he knows who knows all. I do not know how I erred into killing. My brother drove me out into the world. I have come to report my crime, and wait to be pardoned or punished.”

Miklós spoke like this forthrightly to the king. He raised his beaver. His face was pale to red, betwixt joy and sorrow. The king liked his handsome young looks, and asked him gently - “Aren’t you really Lőrinc Toldi’s son?” At this, Miklós nodded.

Then His Majesty the King turned to the lords and made this pronouncement - “Lords! my faithful knights! Listen closely for what you will now hear is important. This knightly youth is the brother of György Toldi, and György has been busy digging him a pit, shutting off his inheritance, denying him the family name.

“I know all his tricks, I have gotten to the bottom of them. He reared his orphan brother as a peasant because he saw and envied the great strength of the boy. He feared Miklós’ strong arms would hide his own fame in a mist, for - but his own wicked soul knows why he did not rear his brother to rank.

“I know he also incited Miklós and that is how he came to slay a youthful tormentor. The servants told how he sought to hunt his younger brother down. Isn’t that right, György Toldi? It is! Why a king, unless he surveys what everyone does? To impute so many evils to a brother, who did so much on his own!”

Great applause followed the king's words, rare wisdom for one so young in years. György Toldi's head sank, and he could have crawled into the ground for shame. The king cast his eyes now on Miklós, patting him kindly on the shoulder. He spoke gently - "Young knight, stand up. Your brother betrayed you, but no more.

"I grant you pardon here on earth. Ask God, and I hope he will grant his forgiveness, too. Possess your property in peace when it falls to you. I know it never was a better man's. And that your neighbor be not your enemy, your brother now offers you his share. Disloyal brother, isn't that so? Do you understand, you promised the ancestral property to your brother?"

György stared with glazed eyes at the king. How would he dare say no to his words! The king's eyes flashed, a terrible anger darkened his brows. "All right," says the king, "is the answer yes? All right! Write out the deed today. Now having tried you, I state - do not ever let me see you at my court again."

Now Miklós spoke - "Your Majesty! I do not want the least of my brother's property. I will not even claim what is mine. Let it be yours, my brother, and the desire of your miserly heart be fulfilled. Now I only ask Your Majesty to accept me in your army as a common soldier. God is good, he gives good - my sword, will provide what I need."

The great king replied, "Do not be such a child. How could I take you as a common soldier? I choose you to my royal guard and as of today grant you a monthly stipend for twelve horses. Saying this he unbuckled a beautiful sword studded with diamonds and gilded with gold. He handed it to Toldi, saying, "Here, put it on!"

The king could have said and given nothing which would bring Toldi more pleasure. He would not exchange it for money or land; for this he would scorn the coffers of Darius. He wanted to thank the king but found no words. The sovereign was not offended for he understood the language of a simple heart.

That there be nothing missing from his joy and all his heart's desire be fulfilled, his mother he saw approaching from the palisade as though his dream were starting all over again. He forgot everything, ran toward her, and took her carefully into his armored embrace. Neither one spoke a word, cried, or smiled. Only old Bence wept at their back.

At last the great joy pressing on their hearts raged itself out like a pregnant cloud, and a shower of tears fell from their eyes. Heart lightened, Toldi's mother spoke these words - "Wonderful child, conceived of my soul, at last I may see once more your lovely face. How beautiful you are! How it becomes you to be a knight! As if God created you for none other than that."

Miklós said - "Did I not foretell that sooner or later I would be a champion? But I do not owe it to my own strength. I owe it to the unbounded mercy of God. Now György and I shall exchange dwellings. He shall go to Nagyfalu and I shall live here. In time he too will learn to like me; if not, let it spite him until he is buried in his grave."

This is how the heroic child loved his mother. His heart was never wounded by the arrow of love. He never knew an enduring friendship with a woman, and he never in his life entered on marriage. He became a mighty hero. The enemy fell to him like grain. He fought for the powerless, for his king and country. They wrote chronicles of his wonderful works.

No one could withstand his wrath, but he would give his shirt to a friend. When the land was at peace, he was happy to enjoy the campfire with his merry friends. He did not leave much cattle, land or treasure; or children quarreling over their inheritance. But still unmatched by all the chattel of the world, the glory of his name remains alive forever.

NOTES

I

Ilosvai: Péter Selymes Ilosvai, 16th century minstrel, Arany's source.

lazybone Lackó: a traditional peasant expression for summer idleness.

side-rail: "vendégoldal", literally guest-rail, for a cart-ladder to increase load capacity.

kuvasz: Hungarian shepherd dog.

village and land: "határ", an evocative word, something like but more than "countryside".

IV

His bed was of dry reeds...: how the hero falls asleep is a convention of epic poetry; here it also tells of his troubled lot (see also Ninth and Tenth Cantos). The saliva rolling from the corner of the sleeper's mouth is a wonderful bit of unconventionality.

tanya: a temporary abode for one who lives a wandering life.

V

komondor: Hungarian shepherd dog.

VI

Alföld: the great Hungarian Plain.

rosemary: symbol of remembrance and constancy.

fillér: the smallest Hungarian coin.

Hortobágy: the plains (puszta) near Debrecen.

VII

hajdú: free peasant-warrior (descendant of cattle-drovers).

délibáb: mirage on the puszta.

VIII

betyár: outlaw (mostly villagers who chose this life in protest, and were regarded sympathetically in the peasant tradition); bad man (in the Establishment tradition).

X

csárda: country inn.

itce: about a fifth of a gallon.

cymbalo: musical instrument related to the dulcimer.

kemence: a mud oven constructed as part of the room and provided with benches.

haj rá: interjection (hurrah).

TOLDI'S LOVE

First Canto

“Then times moved with a quiet flow.”

Ilosvai

The Magyar looks back, with a sigh looks back on your shining days, you glory of the old bygone. On the stubble fields of his ancient fame, he now only gleans - a tale at most. Worn rudely by sorrows, I turn my burning soul to the past for comfort. I while the time away with those who lived of old - what life denies, the dead deliver.

Toldi comes to my mind, whom in my youth I sang in a light song - a simple song, unadorned perhaps but welling from the heart, warm and clear. Oh if - not for glory or fame, not to bargain with the world for gain, but to be young in song - oh, if I could only sing like that once more!

Young King Louis sat on his father's throne attended by his lords and knights. He reigned in Buda, in the new palace which rose its head in enchanting splendor. Toldi served beside the king himself, passing the time in games of war and drinking. His coat of arms showed a fallen warrior's head, and eleven young lords served under him.

The rumblings of war died away, peace sprouted like an olive branch. The champion rested according to mood and desire, gathering strength for harder days. But Louis shunned the cushioned throne, for his great soul would give him no rest - I shall go and make a tour or two, he said. Am I not the chief steward of the land?

He spoke to no one, preparing for his journey in secret. He donned a shabby dolman and a threadbare shepherd's coat; with an old hat on his head and a halter on his shoulders, he nestled on a clumsy nag. Disguised as some plain injured man, he went searching for his stolen horse. All that he saw and heard he stored in his craw - complaints wherever; the people's burdens; and how they deal justice to the man who is poor.

Three days he wandered. On the third evening he stopped at a village end to rest, where lay a beautiful meadow, a field like velvet. He dismounted thinking to feed his horse. The sun lay its head down to rest and drew a red quilt over its face. Now where is his own bed, where shall he sleep? He asks a kind bush to lend him room.

The last dwelling in the village was a large white house. He went there to unbridle and to water his horse. The gate was open, not really open but widely sprung from the hinge. Dogs attacked him with a nasty charge. But a lovely girl by the well called out, and obeying they slunk off one by one with a growl.

Then the king said - "Beautiful maiden, I am a traveler. May I have leave to water my horse?" She replied - "Of course you may, poor man, but where are you heading so late? It were better you rested yourself with us. Tomorrow, in due time, you may set out again." And she spoke her sweet words with a look so lovely the king felt a flutter in his breast.

But the traveler replied - "I crave your pardon, never have I been in such a fine house. I can find lodgings elsewhere - a lord for lords, the poor for the poor." The master heard him from the porch and interrupted with this sort of command - "Yes indeed, my little brother, but not always so! If night finds you here, sleep here."

With that he motioned, and a servant appeared from behind - "Péter, hitch the horse in the stall. And you, my friend, come with me into the house. You are not leaving, so help me!" This Magyar kindness pleased the king - they went into the big room, not the small one; he sat the guest at the head of the table; no use protesting, he would grant no peace.

“Piroska, my angel,” her father speaks, “bring some wine in the white pitcher!” Beautiful Piroska obeyed, washed out the vessel, and brought the good wine in. “Come, dear daughter, be so kind,” he urges, “and offer the guest some wine.” She sipped to his health, and suddenly left the room. Her face was red, but not from that little bit of drink.

While Piroska busied herself in the kitchen, the talk flowed in the inner room. But when the meal was set, all three sat down - at the head, the guest; by his side, the master; facing the king, at the foot of the table, Piroska. If she only knew who the traveler was, she would die embarrassed for the supper she made.

But there was as much as eye and mouth could want - fine lettuce head with fat mutton; good hot cakes with curd; strawberry and cherry; honey fresh from the comb, pure as gold, redolent of scented flowers; excellent wine of the Érmellék - and the bloom on the happy face of the beautiful girl.

All this made the king very happy indeed; he was about to show himself - his heart was so open, it was hard to refrain from pouring it all out. The secret of his soul, the ethereal veil, will flutter away slowly like a shadow. And then he thinks - but what if I frighten them? Why should I bring this good scene to an end?

“You know, my little brother, you haven’t asked my name. If you ever heard of the old Rozgonyi...” The master went on - “But now it is time to empty the pitcher to our health; the health of others; our own well-being; the constancy of our new friendship; our country, our king... but one thing more - what is your esteemed name, my brother?”

The traveler replied - “May God grant you long life! The Rozgonyis are famous here, they are rich, they are knights of whom I heard again and again ever since I was a little child. Their oak forests are large - villages, pusztas, stallion herds, and bristled stock. My good lord is exactly of that kind! May God keep him for the good and joy of our land.”

He drank to it, and then told this story (quickly thinking as he drank) - "Ah, I don't really boast of my name; I am a poor man although noble born. I've been well-nigh ruined with three traces left empty by robbers, and ever since my land's unplowed and unsown. I cover much ground but have not found my horses.

"Otherwise my residence would be the Apáti, and when I am at home György Csuta is my name; Csuta now although my father argued that until his death (beguiling wine, how you free the tongue). The poor old man argued, I say, that our family descended from the Árpáds, on the distaff side. He resented it that no one believed him ...God's wound, my lord, do not laugh at me!"

Master Rozgonyi replied - "You know what - I have been looking at your features and I saw right away in the movement of your eyes you are a nobleman, not a losing peasant. Who knows, who would dare say he thinks so? The rim of the wheel goes up and down. Many old noblemen are in peasant boots today. It may happen yet they will make you king!"

They laughed heartily as though at a jest, and the beautiful girl left the room with a smile. György Csuta (this is what I call him now) said - "Hm, me a king? hardly, hardly... but between you and me, I could find some fault with the king we have -" "what!" cries Rozgonyi. "My little brother, sir, listen!..." And he pounded the hardwood table.

The king laughed - "Well, well, my dear lord... but this is true, your daughter is gorgeous - her walk, her figure, one in a million! She sways and swings like a stalk of lily." The master looked at him and wondered - is he a suitor? But when the guest did not lower his eyes, he sighed aloud and replied like this -

"Ah," he begins, "shall I tell or not? What is the use - everyone has his troubles and complaints, and I have no remedy for mine - this only daughter is my joy and sorrow. She is the beauty of my joy, goodness, soul of my soul, the apple of my eye, the jewel of my house, the lily of my garden - but all to no use, all to no avail."

He paused a bit, wiping his eyes. “My cup is really full - a new king, a new law. Now a father without a son may not bequeath his daughter the inheritance from his father’s side. This is the cause of my grief, my bitterness. Sluggards will wrangle over my fine estate, strangers who never offered me a glass of wine, or a good word.”

He brooded a while, but brightened up at a sip of wine and then advice and encouragement from his companion. After some thought Louis begins - “Have you been to Buda with this matter, my good lord?” He shook his head no; truly he had not, and did not know why Louis asked.

But let me tell what is on the king’s mind, and what he hinted at with his question. His thoughts were in Buda on bold Toldi, and they came and went - flying like a golden shuttle from Toldi to Piroska and back again. He wove them together with a golden thread and smiled to himself - what a pair they will make!

“Well now,” I say again, “take my advice, go to the king and say to him humbly - “My lord, my sovereign, I am so and so; I come to Your Majesty with this request. In name, I have a daughter but not a son to whom I may bequeath my land. Make her in law, Your Majesty, my son, and deed my property to her.

“But since the king is still young (not a single day older than myself, I think) he is, I hear, a lover of tournament sport... Let me tell you something and do believe it. Do not request, my lord, that he do it for free. Propose to hold a tournament (you have means) with this beautiful Piroska as the prize. And I hope it will yield results this way.”

The master was gladdened - “Hey, what blessed advice. Why not if I know it would do! Wouldn’t I pick and choose among wealthy suitors! There would be enough of them to chop in our milk. O my little brother, my little brother, believe me, I would look at the man only. I would look for nothing but personal bravery. I would give the precious prize to the victor in the games.”

His eyes shone, his face glowed as though he were urging the guest - "Come my lord, if you like Rozgonyi's daughter, step forward, show you are no weakling." But the king had other thoughts on his mind, his heart already sparkling in a happy love - as the sun reflects new suns on earth, the happy want to see others happy.

A good long while they stayed up talking of this and that and everything else - then at a late hour, when the king was tired, Piroska made his beautiful bed - for her father and herself in the front of the house, and separately for their guest in the adjoining room - an ornate, canopied, four-poster bed, and she drew the mosquito net apart.

But before the swollen pillows could lure his royal eyes to sleep, before he lay in the bed, which sweetly beckoned with a pure hue and smell, he took a parchment from his bag, wrote, sealed it with wax, a signet ring on a bit of wax, worth though at least that much.

When the king woke at the break of day to settle with the master (it was hard to do for the master's heart was full of kindness); when he said goodbye twice, even thrice, and they gazed after him down the road until the dust itself settled, the girl found this letter lying under a pillow; she started to read it aloud, but the words caught in her throat.

"Piroska Rozgonyi, daughter of Pál Rozgonyi, shall inherit her father's estate as the son, sole heir, owner of all, the pride and preserver of the Rozgonyi name. He will hold a tournament on Pentecost day, and the maiden will be his who shows himself the bravest, for this is found to be proper and good by LOUIS, King of Hungary."

"Who shows himself the bravest!" When she came to these words, beautiful Piroska's blood flooded to her face. It set something going - not in her head but right in her joyous heart. The house was suddenly small, the ceiling low - out, out-of-doors to see the sky! She must sprinkle the flowers in the garden. Her father always says mornings are drenched with dew.

She wishes by her flowers, rushes on - what are flowers to her! Across the garden, down the orchard slope to the banks of the Tisza she wanders without a goal. The sun departs from the meadow with a kiss, the waters awaking with the fire of its love; and between the broad bright sky and the waves, the great puszta shines like a narrow green ribbon.

She paused to look at her watery image; the tightness in her heart relaxed in the open. Tears flowed from her eyes, and the shining drops mingled with the sister pearls of dew. She drew a deep breath, and it helped ease the heart; she filled her lungs with the spicy air of spring; behind, she heard the cooing of a turtle, and the sweet laughter in turn of the mate.

Listening to the bird and gazing on the shimmering waves, she thought of nothing - but the bravest one. Once she saw Toldi at a tournament of champions, but forgot him then for long stretches of time. She saw him a moment and forgot him for years. But the long forgetting was all in vain - a ray of hope and the once-seen picture leaps to life.

He appears in the water, sky and sun. Wherever she looks Toldi's image is there. And when she shuts her eyes, he still outstares her. O sweet dream of the heart, were it not only a dream! Moment, brief twinkling moment, would you never passed! If the rose were only forever red, never died! Love, love how blessed you would be!

But there is a prickle in the sweetest rose - "Will the proud one fight for me (she wondered to herself), he for whom the girls sigh in vain? for whom every girl's heart breaks? They follow him like sunflowers, but he tramples amongst them with his horse; or like the sun, cares nothing for the little girls."

It would be no use to tell at length how she fretted over that letter, the letter and not to speak of the writer. How much she wondered, the lovely marriageable girl. But Pentecost was near, the days passed by grace of God. They waited impatiently, they prepared - we shall soon see, but let's leave this for a little while.

Second Canto

Argument: Pentecost arrives and the day of the tournament at Keszi, Rozgonyi's estate. Toldi accompanies King Louis reluctantly under orders. The ceremonies begin with a mass in the little chapel, and for the overflowing crowd under blue skies. Aware Toldi is disinclined to compete for the maiden, his ungainly tent mate and hanger-on, Lőrinc Tar, proposes that they exchange weapons and armor. Toldi agrees. He and Tar are built alike, but Tar notes he is left- and Toldi right-handed. Toldi reassures him - "I shall fight with my left. Leave it to me." Fighting under Tar's colors with feigned awkwardness, Toldi readily overcomes two contestants. He throws the third, but forgetful for a moment uses his right hand for the final thrust. Piroska observes, recognizing him, and throws back her veil for a better look. Toldi looks on her and immediately feels a twinge of remorse. Meanwhile, a troop of horsemen arrives, headed by King Louis' envoy, with a message from the emperor (Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia). In the ensuing activity, Toldi returns to his tent, warns Tar to respect and take good care of his bride-to-be, and rues the act that sullied his knightly shield. The envoy reports insulting remarks from the emperor, who demands that King Louis go to Prague and pay homage and a tax. The king dismisses him and returns to witness the conclusion of the games as though nothing happened. Piroska is in despair, but for maidenly modesty does not expose the deceit. She declines a champion of her cause who suspects the trick, asserting - "I *want* to be Lőrinc Tar's wife." The tournament feast follows. At the head of the table, the king teases Piroska - "Are you still in love with György Csuta?" And then seriously - "It did not depend on me. Nothing came out as I wanted. But no matter! He deserves his good luck. It was my father Károly (Charles Robert of Anjou), who reared him as a page." Toldi sits alone at the foot of the table, drinking and brooding. Word passes around that war is imminent with the emperor. After the king and the ladies leave, Toldi raises a gallon - *haj rá*. Wildly he drinks and dances until morning, overturning benches and tearing down columns like a one-man war.

Third Canto

Argument: Next day the guests depart from Keszi, and the king returns to Buda. Unaware of his daughter's dilemma, Rozgonyi promises the king to take her shortly to the capital. Toldi asks and receives permission to return to Nagyfalu and visit his mother for a day. Suffering from a hangover and self-contempt, he saddles up and leaves his companions; having forded the Tisza, he rides for miles across the plain. His head clears up, but he cannot escape the face he saw unveiled at the games. As towns, castles, and villages recede, he reaches Nagyfalu at sunset. The aged mother had grown homesick living with Miklós in Buda. When György was killed by a wild boar, she returned to Nagyfalu and reared György's little daughter, Anikó.

The venerable lady did not dream what joy this day
would bring. She sat by a window, but saw little
from there, at the most the yard and the small
animals. For this is how the ancient house was set,
and deemed proper by the one who built it there
- it need not gaze on a wide country and the world.
Let it look inward, like a truly wise man, on itself.

Now the old lady heard a pounding of hooves, and joy winged through her heart. "Oh, Miklós," she stammered and ran to greet him, in her hurry not finding the latch of the gate. But before her uncle turns the corner, lovely Anikó, György's marriageable daughter, runs to meet him, runs, runs. She leaps into the stirrup, her kisses cracking like a whip.

Miklós left her playing with Pejkó and went to his mother with a beautiful greeting. He kissed her first on her pale forehead before he climbed the three steps of the stairs. Ascending, he bent down, mouth welded to her hand. The poor dear mother kept kissing him on his clothes where his heart was beating inside.

Then they went into the big house, arm in arm - why say what a feast there was! The mother is beside herself over Miklós! The servants live it up in the cellar, pantry, and kitchen. Bence, the old Bence, was the cellarer. Now he showed his really clever self - who waits for wine? one trip does it and he never goes twice.

But he never drank much himself, turning over a father's cares in his mind. He drank as was his wont to forget his troubles, or show his friendly manners. But when he saw nothing was lacking and no one asked for more food or wine, he told his son, a booby of a boy, they were calling on Toldi together.

And he begins - "Since I know my mind, I have eaten my bread in this house. I was a bad youngster, tiny like my fist. I remember we plowed the Told puszta with six oxen. I wielded the whip, my father the plow ...But why spin it out? Hey, what a crop grew on that earth - you won't see the likes in today's small world.

"My poor father was still alive, his name too was Bence. When this one was born (I see the simple get fancy names) I said - let him be Bence. He's big, here he is, come on closer. He's a bit bashful, like young servants are. Ah, my lord, you know what? do you still remember when we went to see the king?

“You were much younger than my son now, but taller and better built. How often we said - what a man (we meant you) he’ll be when he grows up. I wanted you to be a soldier, or something. You would not leave your mother though. But here you are, that’s how it is! - I told you - look what a man I made of you!

“I don’t know what the devil’s come into this boy either. He wants to be a soldier, or what! He’s always throwing it up to me - I won’t be a peasant, I’ll run away, father, if you try to make me stay. Here he is, Honorable Sir! I ask you to take him in your care - a father for a father, a guide for a guide, God bless Your Grace.”

Miklós smiles to himself at the simple speech, and revolves the matter in his mind. Should he take Bence? Or is he better off here at the handle of a plow, and never roaming? But with three blows of the table knife Anikó dubs Bence a knight, and bursting into laughter tows him in the servants’ room.

Then she runs through every nook and corner of the mouldy closet bringing forth old clothes her uncle outgrew long ago and cast them off. Anikó searched the rubbish until she managed to put an outfit together; and she presented it to Bence, prodding him to put it on that very day, right then.

Meanwhile, the mother’s anxious eyes detect her son’s heart is deep in sorrow, his humor a golden smoke and the darkness showing through more windows than one. She senses his sorrow like a scar the storm, or a bird that finds nowhere to rest. Nothing is more honest, oh, than a mother’s heart and eyes.

She smooths the loose curls on his shoulders. “What’s wrong? what happened?” she asks, urges him to talk. Her voice is virgin honey - dear son, my soul, my flower, my dove, what’s wrong? what happened? a tear begs in her melting eyes, waiting for the sorrowful news before it falls. Her trembling voice, her face, her compliant body - all sheer sympathy, heart, and trust.

Seeing this, he cannot command his heart. Like molten bronze it resists but runs hard with giving and flows in a flood of bitterness. He falls on her loving breast, lowers his head on the twin sources of his life, cries and sobs like a child it seems - shameful or not for a full-grown man.

And he lamented how it turned out with that girl. Toldi's mother quickly wiped his tears - no, she cannot share this; she passed through it long ago and only briefly. She reproached him - "Come, don't be a child! I knew... one imagines danger... One girl is not the whole world, there are many others - all more beautiful, like roses on a bush."

This is not what Toldi expected. His troubles a nothing! He was ashamed he could have been so weak. "Never for me!" he said. "Not even if she's made of gold. No, my mother, no! And I shall forget her too. Only let me buckle into battle again, whirl my sword, hurl my spear! and the battle cry thundering around me, she will vanish from my mind like last year's snow."

When a stormy sky weeps itself out, the wind turns and the clouds clear. Toldi showed a face like this to his mother - but at that moment the young Bence stepped in the room. A sword flapped on his thigh, a cloak on his shoulders, licked clean as a paynim, a parfait knight. He stood stock-still like a signpost, burst into words, quavering only a little -

"My sweet knight, I beg your pardon, a helmeted warrior from a foreign land, I think, awaits Your Grace by the steps, challenges you to a duel for life or death." Toldi suspected something right away - "What the dickens!" He runs out as he is, runs on the porch - and there indeed is an armored knight ready to duel him in the moonlight.

Miklós saw the weapons were his, with Anikó his niece playing the rogue. She holds the enormous lance in her left hand and the strong bright sword in her right. But Miklós frowns wildly, rolls up his sleeves, frees his arms, and rushes forward unarmed. The foe takes to heels, steps three times, and stumbles in the heavy armor.

“You whelp! you daughter misbegotten of stone - Toldi’s mother cries running up for pity. She picks her up, asking again and again - are you hurt? your elbows, your knees? She’s not hurt at all. But they laugh and joke, now they will have something to talk about tonight. Anikó teased her uncle too; and secretly smiling he said -

“This girl is saucy, and she senses something - Mother, why don’t you marry her off? Or is there in all Sárrét no one who can whack her good at least once a week?” ...Anikó looked at him slyly and snatched the lute from the bed; and knitting her lowered brows she sang this song with a clear, strong voice -

*Our daughter’s not for marrying off,
she’s hard to please and quick to scoff,
blinking left and blinking right,
she always keeps her heart from sight,
not for marrying off.*

They passed the time like this, talking sweetly late into old night. Among his own, Toldi’s cares lighten, while a short sleep draws him to Piroska. The early dawn finds him awake; and saying goodbye, he sets out for Buda followed by many a “blessing” and “good luck.” Bence ambles behind on his fallow horse.

Argument continued: Meanwhile, King Louis arrives in Buda and relates to his mother Erzsébet all that happened. She is furious at the imperial message and angrily urges, enjoins her son to exact revenge. Then the king orders his chief scholar, János Küküllei, to research the archives and determine whether Hungary ever paid tax to another realm. Also, he summons twenty-four senior officials to assemble in Buda. When the appointed day comes, he meets with them and calls on János the priest to read the document - “The Hungarians never paid feudal dues, not a pike, not even a filler (the smallest coin); she has anointed her own rulers ever since the first Saint and King.” Louis’ father (Charles Robert), he continued, was accepted by Hungarians freely from the hearts of his people and not from the hands of the Pope; therefore, Louis has just cause for breaking the peace. The twenty-four elders agree. The lords call for revenge and resolve to gather as an army in Trencsén on Saint Lawrence Day. Leaving, the lords carry the news throughout the land; the whole country rises in arms. The king summons Toldi and pronouncing his name three times asks - “My son, if you had to fight alone could you still defend me, your king, until help arrived?” Toldi replies yes. The king enjoins him to secrecy and sends him to recruit the finest young men in the land. Toldi obeys gladly “urged on by a royal secret, nourishing on an adventure to come; and while recruiting in seven counties, he forgets Piroska at last.”

Fourth Canto

Argument: All the knights, the flower of the country, ride to Trencsén. Huge loaded wagons and carriages roll day and night along the highway. The knights rest in good houses feasting and drinking. The common people stare in wonder at the strange procession and the unwarlike pomp. King Louis, too, sets out on his golden horse, followed by a small, brightly colored cavalcade. His courier, meanwhile, is speeding to Prague with a cunning letter stating Louis is on his way bearing gifts, but would cross the border only if the emperor, in a sealed letter, granted him free passage. The emperor is mystified, but suspects a trick. Learning that the Magyars are mobilizing at Trencsén, he calls a meeting of the seven electors and four other princes. He paints a dark picture of the security situation on the Hungarian border (“they recognize neither God nor human law, they rip babies from the mother’s womb for pleasure - remember Attila and Jenghiz”) and asks for help. They are inclined, however, only if the emperor grants a bull guaranteeing their rights. The emperor agrees to do so - when he has time. The princes speculate over Louis’ letter and are prone to believe the Hungarian king is acting from fright, and therefore no danger exists. A bishop intimates it will be easy to take Louis captive and compel him to sign an agreement to pay his feudal dues. Remarking with a wink he would never have thought of that, the emperor asks who will grant absolution for such a deed. The bishop twirls his thumbs without replying. The princes agree among themselves not to give the emperor troops until they see the Golden Bull. On arriving at Trencsén, Louis holds a secret council with his inner circle of most trusted men. He presents them with his plan to proceed with a small selected group to Prague and meet the emperor face to face. Horrified at the personal risk to the king, the lords would rather take Prague by storm. But the king sticks to his plan, claiming the situation calls for a different device. Toldi raises his fist and taking three steps forward proclaims - “Why fear? I’ll be there, me, me!” But the lords are still not reassured, and Louis reveals more details of the plan - himself the first to enter Prague with his select men; followed by wagons and carriages, with all the drivers, keepers, and servants - actually warriors disguised in Italian livery; and arms smuggled into Prague under the cover of gifts and equipment. The young lords are now won over, but the elder Lajos Hédervári protests that such a trick by an invited guest would be an act of betrayal. His eyes flaming, Louis replies that his spies report the emperor means to take him, the guest, captive; and thus the strategem is warranted. The elders dare oppose the plan no longer, but anxiously urge the king to choose his men with great care and take Toldi as his servant. “Count on me,” cries Toldi, “count on me. I shall be the king’s stone fort - even more, his fort and garrison in one.” It is agreed that Laczfi-Apor, at the head of the main body, will give the king a two-day start, burst into Moravia, and proceed to Prague by the nearest route. Laughing at one another, the Magyar knights don their Italian guise. Toldi looks himself over, saying - “My bare thigh is enough to scare me. It makes no sound or noise in walking. A cat or girl could wear this get-up.” The king crosses the border with a great clatter of wagons and disorder to let the host know who is coming. Louis is met by an honor guard, who are not impressed by the entourage. They are attracted, however, by the wine-wagons, and on Louis’ order the Hungarians let them roll out a barrel every night. Louis is received with pomp and circumstance. His “softness and amiable compliance” are reported to the emperor, who sends him a message to bring tax and gifts on the morrow to Hradcany Castle as suits a prince paying homage. Seated at a feast, Louis replies to the envoy - “Good enough. Let’s drink to it. I did not come here to hide.” The envoy leaves; the emperor’s men drink themselves dead drunk. Outside, the Hungarians line up their wine barrels on the Prague square like cannons on a battlefield. The Hungarians pretend to be on guard, but at a sign release the wine first to the officers and then to the common soldiers. When the emperor’s men are in a defenseless

stupor, the Hungarians occupy the city gates. In the morning Prague awakes to martial sounds, and the people panic - "The gates are lost, there is no escape. There are no guards, the enemy's everywhere!" All Prague is clotheslined. Louis meanwhile decides to act before they know there is only a handful of Hungarians in the city.

As he spoke, the king leaped on his yellow horse followed by men in sable and golden capes, dolmans lined with chained armor, and fancy sheaths with damascene steel. Nor does Toldi leave his star-flanged club behind. And he carries the writing instruments of the king like a servant - carries the club in sheepskin with pieces of wax hanging out big as my fist.

On reaching the gate, they saw it was locked - not with a key, but bars - iron crosspieces and poles inside hammered fast with big-headed nails. Toldi dismounts, examines - "Let me raise it a bill" He puts his shoulder against the ridgepole. Stone and iron split, his own bones crackle as he brings down the gate and the great corner wall.

Louis ordered the guards at his quarters to let no one depart or enter that day. And still someone skipped out by a duct or down dented stones of a jagged wall. And when the king and the orders were mounting the marble stairs of the palace, he pushed his way on the heels of the procession, mumbling "Praha, Praha."

"The devil! it's too soon," Louis frets. "We'll be in peril if he works his way in. I know my men dispersed their camp, but Charles can hardly know." Toldi listens carefully to the words of his king, and caresses softly the intruder with the parchment roll. He wobbles down to the bottom of the steps and dies right there of a sudden stroke, the word "Praha" sticking in his throat.

Below, the emperor's knights puzzle over the case. One says - "He fell down drunk." Another swears, "The Magyars, he said, have occupied Prague." But this can't be. They prod him, he will never utter a sound again. They fuss and fret - should they report it or not? At last they send someone to check it out.

Behind his king, the faithful Toldi clutches his club. The long-crested beret is tight, his temples beat as they go - the beginning is bad, but what about the end! Three anterooms swimming with shining halberds - and they struggle through the ranks by a narrow passage closing like waves behind a boat.

Inside the great palace, armed guards are posted along the halls. In the middle the emperor sits on his golden throne like an ancient god; above him, the sun, the moon, and cherubim enchased in damask, diamond, and gold. On two sides, the ten crowned kings in order. The emperor himself does not speak, he looks - looks Louis in the eye.

Louis stares back without bending his knee or bowing his head, neither he nor his knights. The King of the Magyars stands straight and silent. Toldi whispers from behind, "Let's get out of here!" He digs into the royal heels until blood flows. This too Louis endures quietly. His ken is steady, and he is silent, the King of the Magyars.

Miklós thinks Louis is frightened. But the king is waiting for the dice to fall, waiting calmly for his star to turn. Fortune, look kindly on the daring king! Tired of standing eye to eye, the emperor bids the herald - "Go summon him nearer. Ask why he comes without a word, in our presence, knee unbent and head unbowed."

The herald proclaimed these words, but Louis pays the servant no heed. He stares all the harder into the emperor's eyes, lets not a sound fall from his lips. The great emperor is annoyed now and says - "King Louis, imperial vassal! Step closer, pay homage as obliged, and then may you take your place at my side."

Louis does not reply, he merely stands there - but suddenly far back among the guards a stir, an excitement, battle-axes and helmets bobbing on the waves. And at last they see the cause of the commotion - a warrior, faint and clotted with blood, sinks more than kneels before his emperor; moaning and crossing himself, he speaks after heated urging -

“The whole camp is swamped! The whole country! Our armies captured, our men scattered or killed! They burst into Moravia yesterday before dawn. We did not stand - no use, the force is too great! They hewed many to death; and the castle robbers killed many more, may God punish them! The Magyars are coming - with pillage and plunder. They are a great tide, a miracle if they aren't by now in Prague.”

The nightmare begins and the emperor himself turns green and yellow. He is still not himself when Job's post arrives announcing the fall of Prague. He turns his head aside, moaning and wailing. He raises his hands to shield himself against the news. The Magyars rattle their swords - Louis proudly confronts the emperor like this -

“Let me know why you summoned me, troubled me from my distant country. Here I am! I ask, and now give your reply - “Shall the King of the Magyars bring a tax again?” Meekly the emperor turns to his guest - “My son, a joke's enough for a joke. Though you are upset, calm the wrathful flame. Cool the rage of the seething Magyars.”

“Here's my hand, on brother loyalty, take it and spare as a friend these kings and my cities. Let us not be enemies. Let us make peace that will last. I shall put it in writing - if God were not to bless me with sons, Moravia and Bohemia shall be yours if you take, in time, my daughter as consort.”

Louis too offered his hand in peace, but Toldi angrily shook his mane - he has no taste for a bloodless peace. He draws his club forth and shakes it in their faces - “Believe me, all you eleven kings. Do not serve Louis your lord like that, or I'll crash those golden crowns in your heads!”

At this, Louis smiles and speaks - “Well, well, old man! Easy does it. This is what he's like! He speaks his mind and does what he says. We can't handle him either. Better we make our peace, and quickly.” The contract, the peace was soon signed, and then every corner of the palace is filled with merriment. Louis had his gifts brought to the portico - now it is voluntary, and gladly he gives.

Three days and three nights he passes the time with the other crowned personages. They marvel at Louis' mind and heart, greatly respecting the King of the Magyars. On the fourth morning, he takes to his horse and sets out, the army happily jogging beyond the gates of Prague. Whoever tells the story of his deeds fits it happily into the common whole.

You will search for this Prague adventure in vain - which the emperor, you know, did not put in chronicles. They do not boast of it in Germany or Bohemia. But let them not shout - this story's not true! The golden lips of legend reported it far and wide, and wove this deed of Louis in a wreath. If someone were ever to doubt my word - Péter Ilosvai wrote it up in a book.

Argument continued: Halting on the way home, Louis rewards his men by merit. The faithful Toldi receives the Castle of Szalonta. But the champion is less than happy as he proceeds on his melancholy way home, his heart and mind only on Piroska. He has had enough of war and strife. The lion, too, has a mate and cave. Should he alone be consumed like a phoenix? Returning home, he will immediately seek out Rozgonyi and ask for Piroska's hand. Then he will fall on his knees before the king, have the outcome of the duel annulled, and win his prize. Thinking to himself like this, he hears a scream in the forest. He sees a wisp of white and hears the beat of a horse's hooves. He spurs his mount in pursuit of the rider, who speeds into a castle on the cliff-top - Toldi swiftly behind. He pursues him on foot up the castle steps, room to room. All at once the floor gives, and Toldi drops out of the light of day.

Fifth Canto

Argument: Piroska Rozgonyi resolves to marry Lőrinc Tar though her heart should break, not only for revenge on Toldi but also on herself. Her father does not notice her secret melancholy, which she proudly hides. He looks on her with pride for having raised the fortunes of his house. Every day for weeks he goes hunting with Tar, their house guest, who is more interested in property than love. At last, the day arrives to leave for Buda. The simple people of the village crowd around Piroska to say goodbye and bless her for the journey. King Louis welcomes Piroska and takes her to the right wing of the palace to present her to his mother. The queen is holding court surrounded by the daughters of kings and high lords. Piroska kneels before the queen, who receives her kindly and assigns her as the roommate of Örzse, daughter of the Bosnian king. Retiring to their room, the two girls make friends. Perceiving Piroska's own deep but hidden sorrow, Örzse reveals she is hopelessly in love with the Magyar King. Piroska bursts into tears, but does not confess her own secret. As days and nights pass at the court, she watches and waits in vain for Toldi. Half unconscious, meanwhile, Toldi lies in the dungeon. Awakening and staring into a formless night, he hears a voice from the trap door above, and the speaker identifies himself as Jodok, son of the knight Toldi killed on the Danube island. Jodok reveals he had staged an abduction to lure Toldi into the castle. Jodok's younger sister Jodova joins in hurling curses on Toldi's head. The emperor meanwhile learns that his troops, routed by Laczfi-Apor without a fight, had been attacked by

castle robbers who killed or enslaved them. He vows to wipe the robbers out personally leading his army. But in the castle there is a surprising event. Jodovna, infatuated with Toldi, secretly lowers food and wine into the dungeon. His energy restored, Toldi seeks for a way out with his sword and great strength, but fails. The trap door opens and Jodovna, revealing that she is the source of the help, offers to kill her brother provided Toldi takes her as his wife or mistress. When Toldi curses her, she slams the trap door down with a scream. Toldi is near madness and starvation when one day soot and sparks rain down on his head. He howls like a lion, the trap door opens, and a rope is lowered. His rescuers inform him that the emperor has taken the castle, ordered Jodok and Jodovna hanged, and commanded the castle be destroyed. They heard Toldi's voice in the nick of time. Brought before the emperor, Toldi asks for permission to avenge himself on the robbers who are still alive and free. The emperor gladly agrees, and Toldi leads off an army while Piroska waits and waits for him to return. At last, she embraces Örzse one night and begs her to learn where Toldi is. Now Örzse knows the cause of her sorrow. Secretly, she initiates inquiries. She learns that Toldi's armor-bearer, Bence, is in camp; she summons him and asks questions about the whereabouts of his lord. She learns that he saw Toldi pursue the giant knight into a castle, but has not seen him since. After waiting for him in a csárda for three days, he moved into camp. Piroska flutters like a dove that has been shot down. Toldi's adventure tells her that his most trifling problems are of greater importance than returning and begging her forgiveness.

How often on ghastly nights she glimpsed the hero lying before her in blood or frozen on distant mountains, abandoned, forgotten, unwept over to the end - and unburied! But again another moment comes more terrible than the first, one thought more bitter than all turns the other agony into peace - "He's alive, alive, but living with someone other than you."

Her two virgin breasts, how they stormed - now what should Rozgonyi's daughter do? A plan races wildly in her mind, the speaker herself hangs it on a "but."
"Yes, indeed... oh but! Do you know what?... Ah but! Will you tell the queen?" "No," replies the other, fast and bold, "not even if I were her daughter, I the motherless girl, the orphan."

Örzse took her friend's hand and said - "You are right, it is a sin here for a girl to feel! nothing here but finery, a cold ceremonial pomp. Or you must be a hypocrite from day to day. Bewray one thought with hue or sigh, and only let the queen suspect...! She was never young in her life, I believe.

"I know a way to freedom - but you are timid, all girl. You wouldn't dare, would you... in the bloom of youth...? Unhappy one! Live, go in a cloister! You will win the queen's praise, and with a word throw off your bridal yoke. It would unbind you though you were his wife. No other way can I find."

“Oh,” cried Piroska tears welling from the soul. “I will not put that old man in his grave! He would have died long ago - hope for an heir, the birth of a grandchild keep him alive. Now the king’s clemency inflates a hope to restore the sunken glory of his house - with this bubble his life would burst...! My heart I gave though this hand wrenched it out.”

And seeing no refuge on earth or escape to heaven from the works of fate, this fair creature, this Piroska, began her training to duty. She stared into that dark course until little by little her eyes were used to mist. And she forced a smile to her face until the light penetrated her heart now and then.

She scarcely took heed of the wedding before, now it seems she hurries it up. It’s been on for weeks, and only now what a preparation - all the women busy sewing, stitching, and Piroska would make a day of night. She spies the smallest gusset, bustles about, gives orders, now sews now rips a seam - oh, if she could only forget!

But when the plunging stone of giant certainty came, the very last night, she fell on her virgin bed crying like a well that runs over, “Mother, oh my mother!” the words quell forth. “Why did you leave so soon! Or if you had no choice, why did you leave your little orphan!

“If you were alive, oh, I would be too. What happened would never happen. But what can a girl do, an orphan untaught, abandoned, alone among hard-hearted men! Oh, from that bliss look down, look down; if there is a balsam drop of earthly hope, mercy, compassion for my sake, let peace into my unhappy heart!”

And praying heavenward by a peep of light, she grew calm. But she must make ready, too. The young girls were chattering merrily in her ear, such events are puppet shows for them. They dress her with probing, clever hands, imagining impossible things about happiness. They believe a bride need only be an angel, and immediately she goes to heaven.

That day they make an eternal vow to him who hangs on the cross before the altar. The queen is present with her radiant court, Rozgonyi's proudly there with the heroic Tar. Piroska was near to fainting. She took strength from her father's gray hair. "With my heart, with my love!" she mumbles. She went to him... God grant these words be true! Amen.

In the sad season of falling leaves, Toldi rode slowly homeward lost in thought - he had destroyed the robbers to their last castle; now his anger was cooled, and his heart was still and cold. The emperor's letter and pearly gift were in his pouch, but who cared! He dropped his eyes to the horse's hooves as though hopelessly looking for all the time he lost.

He asks the feathered tribes what he dares not of men. He trembles for news, he trembles from it. He charges, though chained, into danger but faces the wind from Buda with fear. Don't speak, mournful winds! Dry leaves, don't whisper! Too soon he will hear what is already too late, how far apart they are rent, that girl and he!

Arriving in Buda, he avoids the court and heads for his little house in an out-of-the-way corner, where Bence waits indolent while his lord's away; and the keeper, the little cobbler, strums his zither. Toldi neither asks nor hears of anything new, although Bence is coughing with good news to tell. As if he dared not even speak, cunningly he started counting his pieces of gold.

Toldi ignores him a while, then can stand it no more - "Well, no-good, where did you get all that money?" Bence handed it over - feel it, look. "Oh, my lord," he said, "everything has its turn. Someone came, my lord, looking for you, its turn had come. Where they like the master, they like his dog... But I'll keep quiet, I'm the no-good."

Unasked, Bence reveals that someone is terribly in love with Toldi - someone, and who! not just any kind of girl - a young lady, and what's more the daughter of the Bosnian king! Toldi almost died of fright. He knew that Piroska was living with Örzse. "Was someone else with her?" he asked in anguish. "There was - the girl who was married in church the other day."

And without heeding the wrath of a stormy night,
Toldi tears and rushes like a wandering soul. He
wrestles with the wind on Buda's open streets, a
snowy rain hisses and stings on his cheeks. Like
the wind that blows the flawing sleet, his passions
are sweeping up and down. The naked tempest tears
his breast, his hair is beating on the waves of
a dark tide.

Like a hungry wolf circling the sheepfold, clawing
the ground and kicking in rage, he watches outside
the Rozgonyi house, where the silent cold stones
incite his anger. He runs off and returns, over and
over again. He drubs and drills the wall with his
head. O what if he should see poor Lőrinc now! Do
not let him, good Lord, fall into Toldi's hands!

Argument continued: Toldi and Lőrinc meet on the street. Toldi seeks to avoid him, but Lőrinc runs up eagerly. He invites Toldi to spend an evening with his wife and himself. At first, Toldi rejects the invitation and reminds him of his warning not to mistreat Piroska. But Toldi is drawn to accept, helpless as though he were in a maelstrom. The evening starts with no outward incident although much inner commotion. But when Lőrinc carves the roast pig awkwardly with his left hand, Toldi takes the knife. Incited by some mischievous devil, the wine, or her long suppressed feelings, Piroska asks her husband why he spares his right hand which served him so well in the duel. Without thinking, Lőrinc strikes her across the mouth. He looks at Miklós standing there with the carving knife and with Toldi in pursuit runs to the nearest door and leaps out the window into the street. Piroska intercepts Toldi, lays her head on his breast. He says - "Come, come with me, I shall take you away on my steed where the wind and the sun will not find us - I'll defend you against a whole land, the world!" Piroska disentangles herself like a fly from honey and beseeches him - "Defend, O knight, the honor of a woman!" Toldi knows she is asking him to defend her against himself, and for the first time he realizes how hideous was the deed he committed. His farewell is a long bitter moan, and he flees from Piroska's house.

Sixth Canto

Argument: Left alone, Piroska berates herself for her defiance, her girlish unruliness. Why did she not send Tar away, why not have faith in Toldi, who - she now knows - loves and worships her. If she had not listened to the voice of revenge, everything would be different. But now she has played out her life and her happiness. When her husband comes home that night, he does not dare take it out on her for fear of Toldi. Piroska shudders at the sight of him, and hatred snakes through her heart. She realizes for the first time how much she despises this man she vowed to love. Meanwhile, Toldi returns briefly to Nagyfalú but finds no comfort in his mother, no cheer in Anikó, and he moves on to his newly gained castle at Szalonta. Here he passes the days in sorrow. Nothing interests him. What he starts one day, he drops the next. One day he works madly on rebuilding the old castle, the next day he goes out hunting. He wearies of all this and spends the winter carousing with companions and

entertained by women who come to the castle, some willingly some not. The ugly news reaches his mother. At first she does not believe the rumors, but at last she has old Bence take her to Szalonta to see for herself. Toldi is drunkenly watching a lewd dance when the young Bence whispers that his own father and Toldi's mother are coming. Toldi looks out the window and sees his old mother turning into the castle. His mind clears, and with one glance at the disorderly scene he slips down the backstairs like a shadow, leaps on his horse, and flees into the night. Not finding her son, she drives the revelers from the castle and cleans it up. She waits a week for her son to return; and then she entrusts the keys to the keeper and sadly returns to Nagyfalú. Toldi hides out in the bog, sick at soul and full of self-accusations. But he is filled with defiance - if he has lost his honor, let him be dishonored before his mother, too. He criss-crosses the trackless fields and arrives somehow in Buda. He goes to his house and sends the keeper to Lőrinc Tar with a message to appear in armor for a duel at dawn on the Danube island, on pain of being beaten to death on the street like a dog. Lőrinc rejects the challenge, and putting on his coat of mail he hides in his house for days. Finally, he goes to the palace and throws himself at the feet of the king. He says that Toldi wants to kill him, that Toldi inveigled him into a deal to duel for Piroska, and now he regrets it and is madly in love with her. King Louis can hardly believe it of Toldi; he asks detailed questions, and finally convinced he says - "Hereafter neither you are a knight nor Toldi. Your coat of arms shall be torn from you, and from him. You may go. You have saved your skin!" The king then issues orders to have Toldi seized, as a highway bandit, and thrown into prison. But Toldi is already hiding in the forests. He steals into Buda from time to time, hoping to lay his hands on Lőrinc. And one night they meet as Toldi rounds a corner in Buda below the castle. Toldi drags Lőrinc down to the bank of the Danube, throws him into a boat, and rows him across the river. Half way over, Lőrinc leaps out and the boat tips. Miklós dives, brings Lőrinc up and swims with him to the island among woods, where he lays him down in a clearing. Toldi allows him a long rest and then armed only with a sword he calls on Lőrinc, fully armed, to the duel. With no alternative, Lőrinc fights hard, the best he can. At last Toldi pierces him beneath the arm, and he dies a sudden death. Toldi flees by boat to Buda and overland into the forests. The nuns on the island, who could have witnessed the duel, find the body and send word to the Rozgonyi house. The servants place the body into a boat and lay it on the floor of the verandah. Piroska sees her husband, screams and falls dead. By the time old Rozgonyi arrives, the two are laid on the bier. He falls sobbing on his daughter's body and goes mad. They tear him away by force. They close the two bodies in coffins, with gems and jewels, and place them in a vault on Mount Gellért. Twenty men roll a huge stone on it. That night Hincz and Kuncz, two dishonest locksmiths, steal there. They manage the many locks, but not the stone. Talking it over, they hear heavy footsteps. It is Toldi - they run away. Toldi puts his shoulder against the stone, raises it. He enters. A small lamp is burning from the ceiling, left behind to die a slow death. It casts a doleful light on the bier, Lőrinc on the right, his wife on the left. Toldi raises the coffin lid, he falls on Piroska - and she awakes. She asks, "Where am I? Who is this?" In mad ecstasy, Toldi cries out - "You are mine, you who belonged to another, you whom life and the altar envied of me. Now the hand of death returns you. You are mine, mine, and never will you be anyone else's. Come with me!... I shall take you away, your angel, to heaven, an eternal new life and blessed love! Be dead to the world, and live only for me..." Piroska looks at him in horror and curses him, her husband's murderer - "There is blood between us even in the grave. Be accursed, Toldi, and accursed I too!" Miklós runs blindly out, and Piroska falls into a faint again. Toldi returns at dawn to take her from the grave, but finds the vault bolted. He sits by the entrance in helpless agony, then returns to the wilderness. Before his return, the two robbers had come back and stolen the jewels while Piroska was still in a faint, and then reported to Rozgonyi that they saw Toldi rob the grave. Rozgonyi returns

to the vault and finds his daughter alive. He is delirious with joy. Piroska allows herself to be led away like a living corpse. On hearing of the events, the king orders the high sheriff to bring Toldi to Buda dead or alive. The Bishop of Esztergom pronounces a curse on Toldi and anyone who shelters him. It is charity, he proclaims, to kill him and not at all a sin.

Seventh Canto

Argument: King Louis receives word from Charles of Durazzo, an Italian duke, of the murder of his brother Prince Endre in Naples. Endre and his wife Johanna were by contract with the late king heirs to the vacant throne; but Johanna, who was jealous of her power and hated her husband, wanted to prevent Endre's ascension by any means and conspired in his death. King Louis prepares for a campaign into Italy to punish Johanna and regain dynastic control over the throne of Naples. A catalog of Hungarian knights and troops.

Eighth Canto

Argument: Toldi's mother goes up to Buda to ask Erzsébet, the queen mother, to intervene with King Louis on Toldi's behalf, but Erzsébet refuses. Then Toldi's aged mother decides on going to Naples as a pilgrim to petition the king directly, but Anikó persuades her to let herself and the younger Bence go instead. Anikó and Bence leave with a group of pilgrims, but change enroute into the disguises of a knight and page according to previous arrangements. Piroska becomes a nun in a cloister on the Isle of Hares. Örsze intends to do likewise, aware King Louis plans to bring his bride from Naples. After wandering many long hard days, Toldi comes to a monastery in the Bakony forest, where he is permitted to stay as a brother to perform menial work, and is jocularly known as frater Mikola. But when a priest arrives and nails the bishop's curse on the gate, Toldi flees. Meanwhile, Anikó and Bence seize the two grave-robbers, Hincz and Kuncz, near Venice after overhearing them discuss their robbery of the Rozgonyi vault. They lead the two robbers to the doge, who despatches them to King Louis accompanied by an envoy. Louis' army captures Aquila which Durazzo had incited to resistance. King Louis again receives a letter from Durazzo; it is evident he is conspiring to seize the throne of Naples. Amid double-dealing with everyone concerned, he pretends to be friendly to Louis, who knows, however, that after Johanna's marriage to Taranti, for whom she conspired to murder Endre, Durazzo eloped with her sister Maria, Louis' intended bride. Taranti and Durazzo form an alliance of convenience against Louis. Anikó, Bence, and the doge's envoy overtake Louis at Aquila and relate their story. But the king refuses to grant Toldi pardon because the grave robbery was only one of the charges besides murder and violation of the knightly code. Identifying herself as György Toldi's son, Anikó asks and receives permission to stay and fight by Louis' side. Meanwhile, Toldi flees to Bohemia and joins a group of flagellants. He shaves his long hair and dark beard to the skin. He bares his strong shoulders and scourges himself until he bleeds. From village to village, from city to city they go, carrying the tidings of the Black Death. They torture themselves until the soul shudders; this is how Miklós Toldi performs his penance.

Ninth Canto

Argument: The Magyars capture Sulmona. Louis and his advisers discuss the next move in the campaign. It is decided to split the army, swollen with mercenaries, one part to the south, the other to the east, and the king in the middle. Cola Rienzi (leader of a popular movement in Rome hostile to the Pope and the magnates - now in hiding) is taken by the mercenaries, whose leader suggests Louis turn Rienzi over to the Pope to win his backing for the throne of Naples. But Louis, who spent student years in Rome, rejects the suggestion, talks with the fugitive about the City, and then sets him free. Meanwhile, in accordance with the rule of the flagellants, Toldi, without revealing his name, confesses to one of his fellows - an "Italian" lutist who says his name is Szeredai because he was born on Szerda (Wednesday) but is a descendant of the exiled Zács family. Toldi relates the story of Piroska and his subsequent wretched life. During the confession, they fall behind the flagellant troop. When the two catch up, the flagellants are camped in a valley indulging in gluttony and all manner of sexual license. Wrathful over their hypocritical behavior, Toldi whips and beats them hip and thigh until they are all dispersed. The lutist is amazed at his strength and says he must be Cola Toldi, of whom people are singing in the market places. Toldi replies. "Call me frater Mikola." They decide to travel together westward toward Bohemia. They encounter a colorful train of horses and vehicles. One of the carriages is mired in a ditch; Toldi lifts it out and puts it back on the road. The passenger is the emperor, who immediately recognizes Toldi. When Toldi says he is a fugitive looking for haven in a monastery, the emperor invites him to "serve with me until your king takes you back - there's plenty of hunting in the woods here for days." They put Toldi up in the royal castle, and in company of the emperor he spends delightful days hunting. But Toldi - why he does not know - must go on, and putting on his cowl he leaves with the lutist, who would lief stay. Toldi suggests they put on a disguise and go help Louis in Naples. The lutist agrees. Pejko, his steed, reappears like a *táltos* (magic horse). The two companions turn southward.

Tenth Canto

Argument: The siege of Canossa. The king personally leads an attack up the walls. Disguised as a monk, Toldi follows and saves him from a falling rock, and in the trench where they fall protects him with his shield. Believing the king recognized but refused to acknowledge him, Toldi disappears and from a hutch made of boughs keeps abreast of events through Szeredai. Meanwhile, Piroska, now an abbess, writes to the king from her deathbed beseeching pardon for Toldi, testifying he did not visit the grave to commit a robbery but to avenge a *woman*; it was a more than fair fight in which Tar, according to the nuns who were hidden witnesses, had the advantage of full armor. Piroska withdraws the curse she pronounced in the burial vault. The bishop, too, recalls the ecclesiastical curse and asks King Louis to grant Toldi pardon.

Eleventh Canto

Argument: Durazzo strengthens his forces by hiring Werner, a mercenary leader whom King Louis had cashiered for plundering. Having taken Canossa, Louis resumes his campaign of conquests. Halted by a flooded stream, he scouts about, and comes on a hutch where he sees

two horses and Szeredai. The king orders him to swim on horseback across the water and probe whether the army might ford it. At the risk of losing his own life, the king saves Szeredai from drowning with help from Pejkó, who brings back the two of them. While Louis enters the hutch seeking help, Toldi secretly bears Szeredai away and administers him aid. Receiving a report that Durazzo, accompanied by a small force, is moving south from Benevento, Louis quickly decides to intercept him personally with 300 chosen men. Toldi and Szeredai set out to find the king. Seeking to aid Anikó (whom he rescued as she was borne unconscious on her runaway steed), Szeredai unwittingly penetrates her disguise, but she enjoins him to secrecy. Louis' armies encircle Aversa, where Durazzo and Taranti are trapped. Johanna is aboard a boat in the port of Naples prepared to flee. She leaves her infant son behind whom Louis secures and sends back to Hungary. Seeking to avoid surrender although the outlook is hopeless, Durazzo incites Taranti to challenge Louis to a duel. Louis accedes, and the arrangements are made. Unbeknownst to Taranti, however, Durazzo arranges for Werner to ambush Louis at the site with 50 men. Duelling with Taranti, Louis is wounded in the thigh by one of the hidden assailants. Toldi comes to the aid of the king driving off the assassins. Ashamed of the treachery, Taranti discontinues fighting the Magyar forces and flees to Naples, and to Johanna. Louis orders his men not to enter the town - he has reports of the Black Death. The leaders are ordered out. In a hall where Prince Endre feasted before his death, Louis gives a banquet for the Italians and Magyars at the end of which he orders Durazzo executed, thrown from a window, and left unburied (like Endre).

Twelfth Canto

Argument: King Louis receives Piroska's letter. Relenting, he asks György Toldi's son (Anikó) to inform Miklós he will be pardoned if he appears before his king. Not knowing her uncle's whereabouts, Anikó prepares to return home. Pejkó reappears and takes first Bence and then Anikó to Miklós Toldi. Anikó and the lutist meet again. The Hungarians, meanwhile, are growing restless at Aversa. King Louis broods over Durazzo and the unburied corpse. Reports of the Black Death, many ill omens, volcanic activity at Vesuvius. Louis sees Durazzo in a dream begging for the burial of his body, foretelling that Johanna will escape Louis' punishment. Louis passes among his men as a common soldier and overhears complaints, charges, talk of dissidence, unhappiness over Louis' treatment of István Laczfi-Apor, the well-liked Magyar chief, whom the king suspected for his failure to take Durazzo, secretly present at the siege of Troia city. Louis comes across the lutist Szeredai, whose life he saved, singing a sad song about Klára Zács, his ill-fated relative who was dishonored by the queen's brother; in revenge, Klára's father attempts - the song goes on - to kill her and the king, but only succeeds in cutting off four of the queen's fingers before he himself is killed; the queen demands in return that the whole family be wiped out. Returning from the camp, Louis orders the lutist thrown into prison. Maria, Durazzo's wife, appears, and Louis lets her have the body. He reproaches her for not having waited for him, shows her a letter from the emperor informing him of the death of the princess, Louis' other intended. Anikó informs Toldi of the king's offer. He shrugs his shoulders and says - "I know he is a king and I a worm - but never shall I *ask* him for pardon." Bence brings word of Szeredai's imprisonment. A messenger of the king arrives commanding Toldi be present at a military ceremony on the morrow. He supplies Toldi with new armor, minus a sword. At the ceremony, the king first forgives Laczfi-Apor naming him regent, and then he grants Toldi pardon, acknowledging the hero twice saved his life and had suffered sufficiently for his sin. He girds a handsome sword

on Toldi's waist. When Toldi and the king are alone, Szeredai is brought before them. He tells the story of his exile, which began because his mother was a sister of Klára Zács. The king despatches a letter to the bishop requesting that the whole family be pardoned. Toldi requests that Anikó be made legally a son so that she can inherit her father's property, and Louis agrees. The army's spirit returns. Half remains, half moves on with Louis at the head and takes Naples. Rome receives Louis with a warm welcome. Louis receives a letter from his mother that the infant son of Johanna has died, buried at Visegrád. The Pope's judgment is that Johanna must indemnify Louis with 300,000 gold pieces, but may keep the Crown. Louis rejects the arbitration. A part of the army remains to continue fighting, the rest returns to Hungary. The court led by the queen mother goes down to Segesd to meet the returning army. Toldi's mother is also present. The king greets the queen mother and casts an eye on Örzse, who is dressed in black as a novice. But King Louis reverses her intent, marries her, and thereafter is less prone to foreign adventures. A happy meeting of the Toldis, the Bences, the lutist. They go up to Buda. Toldi hangs up his armor and cowl in his house. Anikó and the lutist receive the blessings of Toldi's mother. Miklós swims out to the Isle of Hares hoping to catch a glimpse of Piroska, but only comes across her grave on which he plants four young firs. They all return to Nagyfalu, and then on to the Castle of Szalonta, where the wedding of Anikó and the lutist is celebrated. Anikó and her husband remain in Szalonta, the mother returns to Nagyfalu and Miklós Toldi to Buda.

NOTES

I

what is your esteemed name, my brother?: it is a convention of heroic poetry that when a visitor arrives, he is welcomed and fed before being asked his name.

III

János Küküllei: member of lesser nobility, royal vice chancellor, author of a contemporary chronicle on the reign of King Louis.

IV

the elder Lajos Hédervári: tricks and stratagems were not considered suitable to the open Magyar character, and thus the old Hédervári and the young King Louis of Anjou are presented as having varying value systems.

VIII

Isle of Hares: Margaret Island.

TOLDI'S EVE

First Canto

“The king was incensed at Tholdi once...
three years he never entered the court.”

Ilosvai

Nature's head has turned an autumn gray, the dew to frost, and the leaves are falling. The sun runs a shorter course from day to day and sleeps longer when done. He pauses on the horizon's farthest edge and beckons the old - "I'm waiting for you!" At this, many an old man shakes his head, but one by one all go to rest.

He paused like this now too; looked back like this. The field was smooth, the heavens clear. The field shone with a million tiny suns; wherever he looked he only saw - it's you! Here on the mirror of a pond, and the fish that leap; there on a tiny insect and the gossamer in the grass; everywhere, everywhere as far as his eye can reach, the old sun sees his kith and kin.

He looked many ways and knew for what, but he stole now the loveliest eye on Nagyfalú and Toldi's garden in the village - perhaps on the dying foliage of autumn? perhaps on the shadows that fall and say a long farewell to the sun? perhaps on the dock-tail chestnut who sadly grazes the tall weeds wherever he may?...

Perhaps on this, perhaps on that... perhaps on the stone cross in the earth at the foot of a knoll... Neither on this nor that - but Toldi, the old man, kneeling by the burial mound. Not a strand of black is left in his hair, his fine silver beard reaches down to his belt, his fine white beard clasped in his folded hands as he kneels.

He prays there, silent and pensive, sometimes a glistening tear on his lower lid; and though his lips stir, ever so rarely, never a sound comes forth. The snows of life have driven over his head. His winter is cold now, but clear and serene; three years since he no longer looks on the court but seeks a better promised land.

Three years passed since the aged knight drew the king's ire on his gray head for knocking the court, its silken ways, graceful customs, and Italian splendor. The palaces were a thorn in his side. He forever grumbled "I don't belong here" until taking him at his word the king sent him away - and Toldi went home to die, the rumor of his death now making the rounds.

The old house was mouldering, streaked with rain and hacked by the old eagle time. It forefeels the day of its decay longing for the soil with every stone. Little winds blow shingles off in their maiden flight. The windfather will take it on in the end, gore it crashing to the ground.

The window is still there which opens on the garden, but not the rosemary which bloomed in it once. There's the little door, but warped of life; the worm was starved out long ago. The latch is rusty; the hinges creak and cry at every turn as though hurt. But Bence cleverly knows the trick, ups the door as he opens it.

Bence was Miklós Toldi's old brave bearer of arms, who followed his lord into many a battle, a familiar of death the reaper. Now he stoops with the burden of kindling on his back. Hah, how old he grows, one foot in the grave. He looks like his father, the old, old Bence; the father who gave not only his name but the loyalty of his character to his son as well.

The old bearer stopped on the threshold as he caught sight of Toldi through the narrow cross. He laid his finger on his lips to guard against the whisper of a cough. He kept his eye on the horse, it needed water - then Toldi rose from beside the grave, beckoned to Bence, and ordered him bring a hoe and spade at once.

The servant could hardly believe his ears, and oh he wanted to ask him why. The sowing season had already passed, nor was the garden planted these twenty years. He wondered but went; and rummaging in the rubbish of four rooms, he came across a spade and hoe. He carried them down - struck the spade into the ground and looked with inquiring eye at his lord.

But Toldi scarcely glanced up. He took it and laid out a small stretch of grass - four paces long and half the number wide - simple to measure it with a spade. Bence looked on, wondering to himself what Toldi was doing on top of the mound - one dig for someone who sees the light of the sun no more.

It set Bence to thinking hard how to draw Toldi out. He knew his answers are rare, he hardly replies once every hundred words. And so he did not dare ask - he only looked, now at him now at the fresh earth, the dovegray hair on Toldi's head, the black earth in the narrow trench.

He thought at last of a way to start, and reaching for the spade he spoke like this - "Let me, my lord; it does not become me to stand by and watch with folded hands. I have not dug a grave for many a year..." He stopped and cocked an eye on the master, waiting for a yes or no.

But Toldi was not in a mood to hand it over. Not a word did he say about a grave, or anything else. His face was calm as a frozen lake no earthly wind may ruffle. This face did not tell a thing to Bence. In truth it worried him all the more, and like a distant cloud on a windswept sky, told of a lowering danger.

When Toldi did not give up the spade, the faithful servant picked up the hoe. The work trickled and flowed without a word until at last the long silence wearied Bence. But even more, the secret fear kept gnawing him - you need a grave when someone dies, and without a death why dig?

And still he did not dare speak plain, circling from a wary distance only - "My good lord, solemnly and saving your presence, I cannot believe we are digging a grave. True, it looks like one cut to a man in length and breadth and width; and when we dig the depth, a corpse may sleep the sleep of night.

“But by the heaven’s holy angels! Who’s to lie there, where’s the corpse? We laid out bodies neatly once to dry like sheaves on the fields of battle. We had the dead and dug no graves. In all our house now, there is no soul to bury but us.”

Bence paused a bit, wiped the sweat from his face, and rubbed it from the hollow of his hands to grip the hoe more firmly. He gave Toldi a chance to reply, but old Miklós was still in a silent mood. To save time, Bence returned to the groove of his speech -

“One death we had, dear to us in life, and in her peaceful grave these many years - our dear lady, Lórinč Toldi’s wife, whose name is engraved upon this stone. The letters are worn - no wonder, forty years are gone since then, mouldered by the rain - but let it moulder, for who’s to read it soon anyway...”

On hearing these words, Toldi straightened up and looked over the simple mound. Long, long his eyes lingered on the mossy stone above his mother’s grave. But he was silent as though mute. He looked at his old armor-bearer, without anger in his eye as if saying - “Speak up, I will not harm you.”

And Bence spoke, for he saw that he alone would talk that day. “My dear old father, good old Benedek! God grant you rest in the grave. God grant you rest in the dust of dying because all your life you were loyal and true, faithful to him whose bones lie mouldering where you sleep at his feet.

“Your grave we covered a long time ago too - how many new years in the annals since then! - you do not even want another, this grave we dig may be your son’s.” The servant was deeply stirred as he spoke brushing a tear from his misting eyes. Toldi looked on the little mound over the other Bence’s remains.

The grave hardly showed beneath the cross, beneath the mound; the eye may have missed it but for the mat of weeds and burdock. Toldi looked and remembered all he loved the poor dead man for, but he was still silent as though mute, and once more he put his foot on the spade.

The work flows on and on, they dig, dig without a single word. The work flows on and on, the end is in sight; and still, Bence only suspects what he has dug. Now pressing Toldi, he speaks up again - "Oh, perhaps this grave is for György, perhaps they collected his far-flung bones, and my lord intends to bury them here...?"

"What silly chatter! I myself know how foolish it sounds. Don't I know of György Toldi's evil end on a wild bear hunt? his ugly death at the claws of the beast? Two crows flying from a far-off ravine picked his eyes out. The wolves that trailed along pulled straws for his body, that was the end of a wicked brother and son."

The hole was dug. Toldi stood at the bottom, white hair and beard still showing. Bence smoothed the ground, kneeling to reach the bottom of the pit. Toldi looked up and spoke - "Bence!" "What do you com...?" he asked, waiting for the rest. He waited a long time for his lord's words, and at last old Toldi began like this -

"Bence, old bearer of my arms, honest servant, listen to me - we have eaten much bread together, and salt. Old comrade, listen to this. The many changes of life I once saw and now the last decline I see of my days. Among the rows and rows of harvest I walked, and now my own head awaits the scythe - and death.

"Louis, proud Louis, King of the Magyars! I too was loyal but received no thanks. In your heart you knew who and what I was, but you bashed my head in for telling the truth. May God grant you and our country stronger hands than mine. May he grant a better adviser than I was and could have been - God knows how long.

"Now no one binds me to the living. Whoever did are resting in this cool ground. My sword is dark with three years' rust, which the blood of the foe will never wash off. I could have gone on, but now that's over, and the country has no need for me - no need for the ear of ripened grain, more for the weed and whoever raised it.

“Bird of passage, my soul, about to leave for a warm home. You see the world is frozen over! I am a cold and run-down shelter. This is my grave. A few empty days, and then - you, my dear friend, bury me. Bury me here, without a marker but this handle of the spade.”

Bence listened to what Miklós said, took it to heart, especially the last. He wept, his face hidden behind the arm of the cross. Sorrow welled from his soul; he was softer of heart than his lord, whose eyes look calmly from their socket like a tarn.

Like a burning city; the evening twilight invests a vermillion sky. Then the flames died and what remained was ash and soot - the darkness of night. The splendid palace of the sun fell into ruins, bleak and cold. A shapeless owl nested there for the night, screeching his call of death.

But good Toldi turned his mind elsewhere - a rider was pulling straight up to the house. The old hedge-row died out long ago, no need for him to circle the place. He saw Bence and rode up asking for his lord. Lost for words, Bence pointed to the gaping hole.

The horseman began like this - “To you I come, my great and good lord Toldi. I come as a courier with news from the shining Castle of Buda. Your good old friends remember you, the old hero; remember your many wonderful deeds, and send me with these words -

“Go, my son, go János Posafalvi, and visit old Toldi. Learn if he is sick or a-dying. Sick or a-dying, unable to raise an arm, or swallowed in a grave. Tell him if sick, it is best he die; if dead, let him turn seven times in his grave - tell him the valiant Magyar exists no more, his ancient glory on the distaff side.

“There is a tournament now in Buda, a shining tournament of warriors. Many a Magyar has fallen, but the Italian still stands. The sun shines on him and his world. Magyar! for you the night falls, for you good night. He carries the shield he won - and a coat of arms, our country’s beautiful coat of arms. It is for sale, a small ransom not of gold or silver - only a little bit of blood.

“But in all our land you will not find a spoonful.
Ours is cheap, commands no price, and pours on the
thirsty castle square for free. He returns home with
our coat of arms, proud like a peacock...” “To hell
he goes!” cries Toldi. “Old eagle, be young again,
you have no time for death!”

And speaking these words, the gray knight leaped from
the grave as though young again, his soul an angry
sea boiling with a volcano’s fury. And he said -
“Tell my old friends you saw the ancient fighter
in the bowels of a grave, but his soul will return
to take vengeance on the knight.

“Go, Bence, curry my dock-tail chestnut. Renew me with
food and drink. Twist open the swollen bung in the
cellar and bring the old wine that makes me young. You,
Posafalvi, be my guest. Stay overnight, darkness falls
on a lonely horseman. Be my guest. Witness in God’s
truth how the Magyar drinks and makes merry in his
sorrow.”

Then they went inside. In the large room Toldi made merry
and drowned his anger, wrestling with the wine and
trying its strength. And he overcame, keeping his feet
while Bence and the other lay soaked on the floor.
Toldi too tumbled at last on an old bearskin - sleep
brooded over his eyes like a shadow racing on sunlit
meadows.

Second Canto

“They all fell to an Italian knight.”

Ilosvai

Dawn, the shining faery, did not sit out next day
on the doorsill of heaven. Perhaps ill and abed,
she peered out neither morning nor night. The puszta
was covered by a thick mist, loath to move up or down,
a close heavy fog that weighs on the soul and hangs
as a burden.

Toldi went on the way with his servant. He was dressed in heavy clothes - his body in an autumn mist and his soul in an angry cloud. Now and then with a "hmm" he cleared his throat or sighed. Great was the sadness that weighed on him; great the three-year-old hanging on his neck, heavy for even the powerful Toldi.

"The old eagle has gone wild," he thought to himself, "but many days like this will come when they will seek me out and would gladly buy my old arms and rusty weapons with the little word - pardon. But he can grant it all he wants - if he refused before, now it is too late. I wear a mouldy collar of weariness on my neck. My body's broken, my soul lies slain!"

Noon came, but the sun did not shine. Night comes without a moon to light it up, without a sliver of a moon or grain of star where the night sees itself. At last a cool breeze flapped and drove the idle mist away, keen wind of a red dawn on the third day of Toldi's journey.

Buda Castle awakes in its own clamor, in the famous court of old King Louis. The tournament is on, or would be if the knights showed up, at least one. Many - and how many - had turned up before, all forced to leave in humiliation. Though the Italian inflicted no mortal wounds, he lay ten knights a day in the dust.

He was big of body, great of strength; his black steed could hardly bear him, shield and weapons were burden enough, but most of all he was big of bone. Haughtily he pricked his steed back and forth; holding the coat of arms aloft, he badgered the crowd and jeered. His heart was a blown-up blister, and he taunted them again and again with biting words -

"I am no oaf of the sea for the crowds to stare at. Nor was I led here on a leash to be shown like a wild bear dancing. I do not even conjure well - now why be caught in a mob like this? I only know a single trick... If anyone dares, let him come and I'll give him a look.

“But who would? who dares crash his frailness on a rock...? Let’s not dawdle our time away... its price is up. Better go home and tend to your knitting. This coat of arms I am taking with me, it’s mine forever. - G’night, Hungarians, it’s only morning, but I am leaving your castle square.”

Like a maddened herd at the smell of blood bellowing, the frenzied crowd broke and charged at the warrior. Their baleful bellow was more terrible than thunder. You see but cannot hear the gnashing of their teeth. They buck one another like waves, and falling at the paling it groans.

The king stood up in his ornate pavilion, his lips atremble, his brows furrowed, eyes livid with lightning, face flushed. But suddenly two youthful knights appeared, born and reared of a single mother. Exactly alike from head to toe, they speak to the king with grace and manners -

“We crave pardon, our gracious king, for appearing in your presence with idle speech. But we are wroth in blood, burning in our souls at this dreadful shame. Look, a villain adventurer has won the games and taken our country’s coat of arms with its four bands, seven lions on the four silver bands, a crown and a cross, and three mountains green.

“We respect and honor the Italian at home, but he should not overreach himself in our Magyar land. Let him pick no quarrel with us, laugh at us, for we shall wax angry, no longer respecting the person. Let him not look down from the tower of flesh that is his. Let his eyes not be deluded by the dice of luck - where is glory in childish play? Let him score it up - this affair will end in tears.

“Or is he arrogant because no one wanted to enter the lists? No one has, for when the nation’s honor is at stake it is not a game. I do not want to play when the Magyar is wroth, does not desire to disgrace his country - shame and mockery are the rewards of defeat, but glory to the man who dies for his land.

“And so, our gracious king, we pray for leave to face the spiteful knight, face him not only in joust but, as it beseems, for life and death. It is not a game when the nation’s honor is at stake. The reward of defeat is a shameful life, but glory to the champion who dies for his land.”

While one spoke, the other nodded his head as if speaking too. The people listened devotedly, and the king granted their request. The Italian drew his sword, looked it over; and twice whetting the shining blade along his arm, he wheeled and swept his eyes over the great throng.

The people took no notice of the Italian knight, paid no heed to his shining sword. Now they believed in victory; they knew the name of the handsome youths - not only the name but the father, and their fame as valiant knights. Soul light shone from every eye as they entered the lists.

The two are of the ancient Gyulafi line who sprang from one stock the same day and hour, twin offspring of one mother and alike in eye, in heart, in mind. If one pines, both wither like fruit on a single vine - they were harmonious in the least of their desires, drank from one cup, slept in one bed.

Loránt was older - if only by minutes, and sometimes when jesting took pride in it. Bertalan, his brother, was taller by a hair’s breath. Sometimes they bantered over this a bit, their only rivalry until they matured and each asked his own.

At the fair age when a young man delights in a girl, enchanted by all that is girl, when he wears on his breast the airy trifles she flings aside; when - O briefest paradise of life! - a flower, a footprint, a spear of grass, a look, a nothing... will bring her to mind and kindle firelight in the heart;

When they arrived, I say, at that fair age, both fell in love with one girl, Rózsa, daughter of Pál Kende, who was prouder of her, he the father, than of his ancient line. He would give her to the one her heart might choose, but between the two she could not decide. Drawn to each in the same degree, their twofold love she returned alike.

Loránt said again and again that being older he would give way. But Bertalan said that being younger he could wait. A hundred times they called on her to choose, but never once did she lean to one or the other. At last the father intervened with strong counsel and set the day for decision three years hence.

The appointed years passed, but time did not lessen their love. Both had sought for death, but found only fame, renown, and glory. Everyone knew the two crests swirling at the front in danger and war; recognized the two swords side by side and faithful as a pair of eyes on looking at a single scape.

They were present when the people of Poland knelt for the second time before Louis the Great, drawing his sword for the last time and bending the anger of the Lithuanian rebels. They were present when proud Venice - bride and favorite of the Adriatic Sea, treasure house of the earth and ruler of the world - begged the Magyar swords for peace.

They were present at the battle of Naples where *that woman* received the reward of her bloody guilt, the long unpunished wife of Louis' brother, Endre. Now God's avenging hand overtook her with the dreadful weapons of four wrathful Magyars - her name... better she had none... let it be lost the wretch forever!

The appointed three years passed but did not lighten Rózsa's anguish. Sadly she gave her final reply - "Two cannot love me, one I cannot choose." But I leave behind the thread of my story. Hah! how the people surge, how the lists swarm! The Italian is waiting only on my song. His steed is proudly prancing, and he speaks with a frown -

"Boys, this place is not for you. Run now or this steed will trample you down... Why did you leave home without telling where? Your mother's looking and crying for you." This is how he mocked them, but the two knights did not scare. They snatched the blood-red crests from their helmets and sent them with a stern message -

“Tell him, the wretched soul, to hold in check his slurs. Whoever fights with his tongue is a child, we cannot match him in sticking it out. But if he is disposed and has courage to duel like a knight - these are our crests. Tell him choose one and pin it on his helmet, an easy choice - both mean death.”

On hearing, he burst into laughter and pinned both crests to his helmet where the wing of an eagle darkened from the peak. He pulled out two tiny plumes and sent them back with this mocking reply - “Both of you come, or as many for whom I manage a tuft.”

But the Magyar knights refused to attack as a pair. They drew arrows, and Bertalan's was the longer. He embraced his brother, turned to the charge at tilt. The steed swam, it seemed, on a blue sky, as the lance was lowered and firmly at rest. Man and horse and lance shot out like a long and winged arrow.

The big knight sat - an immovable cliff that spurns the approaching storm. The steed was rigid to the peak of his pricked up ears; but when Bertalan was only five paces away, no more, he wheeled as if by will to the left. The rider tilted, and the lance passed under the armpit of the Magyar knight.

The valiant Bertalan plunged from his horse. The fine steed snorted and ran riderless away, never stopping until it threw saddle and harness. Grieved to witness his brother fall, the other knight loosened the charger and galloped up with his unsheathed sword.

He dealt a great blow at the helmet of the foe, but harder the stroke though dealt by the left, which parried the thrust. Loránt's sword sprang apart, and only the hilt remained in his hand. The shining blade arched and buried itself in the sand.

When he blocked the blow with his strong left arm, the giant knight raised the heavy lance in his right (heavy to others, but to him only a dream) and he speared the unlucky youth in the shoulder. He pulled; Loránt followed - his neck caught on the iron bill. He pitched forward, ankle in the stirrup; the balky horse broke into a run.

The plunging steed would have fled, God knows where,
and crushed the youth's head on stones for thirsty
sands to lap his splattered brain. But the Italian
knight did not wish him an ugly death. He aimed his
long lance and hurled it into the charger's breast
- the animal tottered and sank to the ground.

The king's physicians now hastened forth to take the
fallen into their care. They comfort the youths, and
sustaining them on a shield carry them to a still place.
They wash the wounds with sweet water, smear them with
precious ointment and bind them. When they leave, dear
sleep comes - most skilled physician in all the world.

But the very best physician, the very best nurse is
a soft cradle, a swaying boat, or a river bordering
life and death, one bank on this side and the other
on that. The youths parted for opposite shores of
this river. God willed it so - Loránt awaking to
life and love, Bertalan to rest in a peaceful grave.

Third Canto

“He hurled his huge lance high in the air,
and King Louis asks who can he be.”

Ilosvai

The Italian remained alone on the field, strolling
proudly up and down. He was not a bit spent, not a
hair on his head out of place, and much less was he
wounded at all. The herald gallops in mounted upon
a white horse. He wears a cloak as ample as a sheet,
spangled with silver and gold, sewn and embroidered
with many a noted coat of arms.

“Magyars,” he calls, “Knights-at-arms! Knights-errant!
and other men! The gates are opening to life or death,
our coat of arms will soon be regained.” He spoke and
opened the high palisade gates. Thrice he blew the horn,
thrice proclaimed, “The gates are open to life or death,
our coat of arms will soon be regained.”

A buzz runs through the crowd, they look left and right for a champion to show. The gates are open, the horn sounds, but no one appears to fight a duel. One by one the Italian picks up his arms and withdraws from the gate. The king too stands up angry and ashamed, prepared to leave with the other lords.

Now the gate-keeper blows his horn, and a clatter of hooves echoes from afar. The king pauses, and the lords. The people wait and watch once more with soaring hope. An enormous monk gallops up on a chestnut horse, garbed in a rough and hairy cloth that reaches from the top of his head to his heel, and around his waist a heavy rope.

His face is dark in a red cowl drawn to the nose, and his mouth is hidden behind a moustache and white beard floating like a pennon on the back of the wind. That lance in his left hand... you would think it was a puszta sweep, it's that long, I say, not pliant but strong as a wagon rail.

A huge saber hangs loosely from his side and reaches below the big stirrup that once showed copper but now is green. On either side of the pommel, two enormous pieces of iron - a battle-axe and war club, terrible instruments, ghastly and grisly, on which the gypsy spared no iron.

This is the armory he carries. But coming behind what a character too - "There he goes," they laugh looking his way, "rusty porter of a rusty knight." On his left, he was concealed by a cavernous shield, more than enough for a watering trough. He's loaded for freight, not self-defense. They never sorted all this to the bearer's size.

A rusty-headed pike sticks out behind the shield; it would be broad enough for a spade though split in half. Two bull slings hang down on the saddle's either side; these giant sandals were weighted with boulders as big as my head.

The arrows lay behind the saddle, each as long as a winged spear; the sturdy crossbow was strung on the old man's shoulder, a frightening scene to see. In his right hand, he held a pair of naked irons on the ready, true feringi swords, long and curved and broad, enormous of nature, and scabbed with rust.

Propped by bristling weapons, the horse lags slowly behind. But the other one, the frightful monk, soon neared the gaping crowd. They stared; exchanged looks and kept still. They opened up a wide passage as when the Red Sea divided, and shoulder on shoulder the waves watched in silence.

But when the servant jogged up at last, they burst into a laughter that grows louder and louder with mocking of the old man. One asks, "How much for all your junk, uncle? What about selling it, we're the customers here?" "Cousin, the cracked up washtub, is that for sale?" A half scream higher - "Come, hang it on display."

To a letter, old Bence heard it all (need we waste words on who he was?), heard the gibes and pretended not to understand. He tried straightening his back and managed only to throw his neck out of joint. He bethought himself of his sprightly youth, tried to do what then he could.

He twirled his moustache, and it falls back limp, the shako inverted to a walrus. He jerked the reins, the poor beast almost sat on his rear end in fright. The roguish boys romp all the more at such conceit - O good heavens! "Beware, beware the wild steed, run hard as you can or now you die!"

Bence looks askance left and right; he would like to curse but does not dare. He furrows his brow and thinks - "Who cares about these blathering fools." Chest out, he ambles on like a pigeon. Pursued by laughter, dignity would fit him ill with a pisspot on his ragged old head instead of a rusty helmet.

The frumpy robe is dribbling with forks and tails; his trousers would do, but - horrors - how bare his knees, and not a speck of yellow on his yellow boots - in a flea market this would be the oldest pair. But his spurs are scabby yellow enough, as if treasure hunters dug them up.

He would strut on, but the confounded horse suddenly stops and will not go either this way or that -
“Get up, get up!” he commands, but the fallow will not move, his hooves are glued down to the sticky ground. Bence looks back - “What the devil!” Four or five funsters are dragging stoutly on the horse’s behind. In anger, Bence forgets his fear and hurls these words of his wrath -

“Rascals, caitiffs, robbers who attack a man by daylight. No-good rotten punks, why didn’t ya try that twenty years ago! If I could only swing these old arms like then, ya wouldn’t be laying it on so heavy. Now, too, I could show ya who is more of a man if I didn’t have all these arms in my hands.”

Poor gentle old man, you only harmed yourself, and now the stones come pelting down on your shield. The warrior Bence cowers, pulls in his neck and saves his crown. “Hit him, hit him, there goes the turtle!” The youths play their game, and it would have gone on, but the terrible monk heard their taunting cries.

He heard, looked back, and motioned without a word; he raised his fighting spear on high and shook it. As when a schoolmaster idles his switch and the class falls silent, the screeching died. For all they’d say Bence could walk on the top of his head.

All eyes turned to the ancient monk, who was jumping his horse on the lists. The chestnut steed is not heavy, but his bones are big; he is finely groomed and shining. This is an animal of noble blood, happy to prance how he will. He bears the knight with heed; God did not make him either for the trace.

The monk wheeled about on his steed; hurled the heavy lance high in the air, and caught it - or only twirled it on his fingers like a baton. The heavy rod roared as it propelled the wind. It looped like a large saucer above his head; it looked like a boy’s weaving the tip of a fiery stick.

The people are awed and gape at the strength of the knight. They whisper of magic, mutter in mistrust - “This art we see is not of God.” One almost sees the monk for Toldi, but thinks him too old for such a ponderous weapon. Another says with a “so help me” old Miklós is dead - I was there at the funeral.

Many blow strange rumors up, or hearing none, gladly invent one and pass it on. One makes up a story the uncanny monk is dead Toldi's soul. Fear's contagious, and unbelievers shudder, too.

The king asks if not Toldi, who? "You told me the old eagle no longer lives, but from where could one exactly like him come? Whether I look at that huge frame, white head or terrible strength, I see the old Miklós. Where could his living image come from?"

The lords looked at one another, but said nothing. Their faces showed they were perplexed; not one dared to raise a voice as they waited for the other to speak. At last one said - "His moustache and beard may be a disguise, like his clothes. An old man can handle weapons, but swiftness like his belongs to youth.

"And the old Toldi - it was reported widely at the time, you may hold me to it - did not live long after departing the court for his rough and reckless talk. Did he take his crime heavily to heart, or was it old age that stilled his blood? Whatever it was, no one who walks on earth saw him again with human eyes."

The king shook his gray locks, a mist of sorrow in his eyes. "I know," he said, "I know. I remember the much regretted command "depart." I was weak I remember to face the truth - old Toldi was crude but loyal, bitter medicine in a rough wooden spoon.

"Then too... but I can no longer recall his words - I remember he turned out to be right. As soon as he left, I was sorry, and how gladly I would have granted him pardon. But all of you said he carried the king's anger into the grave... this falsehood I would forgive if now my faithful servant were only alive."

The king sank deep into thought, but suddenly he brightened and his face cheered up - he not only sees those muscles are strong but also hears old Toldi's thundering voice. For while the king was speaking with the lords, Toldi thrice rode up and down the lists; but pacing no more, he pulls up in the center and blasts at the people standing around -

“How long must I keep circling like a horse treading corn or a beast with the staggers? Or do you think that I lost my way and blundered here in spite of myself? Do you think I am looking for a way to escape? By thunder, is there no guy here to face up to it when I come to fight!

“Doesn’t he understand...? Where is he? Let him come out now and show off his strength! Or has he slipped away with the coat of arms, ashamed to have won it at so light a cost? Oh, why doesn’t the Castle Hill open and swallow this herd of stupid sheep! Wasn’t it enough your fathers left a free coat of arms behind - must they rise from the grave to defend it?”

The monk shouts out like this, and clearly enough. The knight stands aside and pretends not to see him. Hah, why show himself ready to fight? But he feels ashamed with all those eyes upon him. He leaps on his horse, which buckles under the weight, and he advances to the center with a terrible curse - “Old priest, what do you want here? Are you tired of living?” “Your last rites I bring, sweet knight.”

With that the two strong champions clash. Toldi sways in the saddle left and right, left and right drawing the mouth of his well-trained horse and easily avoiding the tilted lance. The other thrusts into empty air, like a spinster passing the eye of a needle.

The giant knight turns suddenly angry - “Damn his soul, does he want to make fun of me? The lance he lets idle upon his shoulder... Defend yourself - for your end is come when I lay to!” His lance misses as before, but the Italian closes in and takes Toldi by surprise with the sword - his hairy cowl is rent, and the people moan in terror - “O monk, you had it!”

It would be dreadful, or perhaps not at all, for Toldi might have died easily without even a sound. But Toldi has a steel helmet under the cowl and knew many hacks like this before. He draws out his sword, the other quickly deals him three sharp blows - with the last ring, the sword snaps leaving only a stub in the giant’s hand.

The monk draws on all the strength God gave him.
The blade swoops half way to the enormous neck;
he will never die if this blow is less than mortal.
But seeing his foe without a sword, Toldi checks
the terrible stroke and shouts to Bence - quickly,
for the knight another sword.

Bence obeys and returns with the sword. Now a long
duel begins - arm against arm, blade against blade.
These weapons are twins, and neither gives up. Twice
they clash and twice they rest, and now for the third
time charge again. Toldi himself wonders seeing he
spends his strength in vain.

Angered, he strikes a blow that would have counted
in his youth. The other parried, and now both the
blades were notched halfway in. The giant could not
hold on, his muscles ripped - and the pointed sword
teetered to rest in an upright post.

The Italian jumped - how lucky! for now the monk
strikes so terribly hard he is wrenched aside and
barely holds his seat. Toldi pronounces an oath,
snatches his club (weighing fifty pounds or more)
and hurls. The other suspects, flattens himself on
the horse's mane and, let him thank this, escapes
his death.

The visiting knight turns swiftly around; his eyes
are bloodshot, and he is drunk though not from
wine. Whether he lives or dies, he does not care.
He attacks, his horse rears, his lance darts like
lightning. He wants, it seems, to run over his foe.
But Toldi will not let him come that close. He
fixes his lance against the warrior's breast, and
rider and mount go sailing on their back.

Then old Miklós jumps from his horse, and runs at
the knight with his weapon drawn. The king would
yield - "Mercy," he shouts; but too late for Toldi
swings the axe with a downward blow. He leaps back
on his horse, beckons to Bence, and is quickly lost
amid the crowd. In awe the people stare after him
until the two disappear in a nearby street.

After great silence, a murmur arises, at first in single, inquiring voices (by strands, one might say), and only questions, but no replies are heard - "Who was this? Who was it? a devil or monk? Why didn't he show himself to the king? Why didn't he pay homage? Or has he no want for earthly reward, earthly fame...?"

The noise grows louder, chaff of many words, but at last the herald blows his bugle - the funnel of the winding brass resounds, the noise dies, and everyone stares. The herald cries out - "If there be one who dares say he knows the ancient champion, let him come boldly forward, and if he tells the truth, he will be rewarded by His Majesty the King."

Immediately János Posafalvi steps forth, and bending his knees he says to the king - "Your Majesty, I dare state on oath I know the powerful warrior. Night before last I took him word our coat of arms was in foreign hands. I ate and drank with him, and I saw him dance - let me never return home if this be not Toldi."

With this he instilled a spirit into the king, and as reward received two fine estates. To the lords who sit behind him the king says - "Prepare his golden writ." And then he chooses elderly men in splendid dress from among the lords, sends them after Toldi charging them strictly - "Go call him back, do not leave him behind on any account."

The people grow impatient with waiting though and run after Toldi with a cry of joy. The castle almost turns over in their wildness, one would think they are chasing to a fire. The king himself is not in the mood to wait below. He wants to welcome Toldi in private; he is not certain two of four eyes will stay dry - and that is why he retires to his room.

Fourth Canto

“Praise and respect were the monk’s.”

Ilosvai

Miklós Toldi and his old servant forded the Danube and were riding in the fields of Rákos - Toldi ahead and Bence behind in silence. Nor do you hear the clatter of hooves where horses sink ankle-deep in sand. No tracks ahead and none behind, or soon wimpled away by the northern wind.

Old Toldi rides slowly, brooding as he goes. Who knows what he is thinking? A still river is deeper than a babbling brook. Nor has Bence spoken the entire way. But he cannot bear to be silent for long - let Toldi speak first, and he knows how to keep it going.

He drew up beside his lord as though by chance. Then he coughed (an old manner of his) and prattled to his horse. But this, too, he gave up seeing it was to no avail. They wended their way a good long piece until suddenly Miklós burst out saying -

It was worth digging - see, they don’t even know us, Bence. Soon they will make a legend of me and say - “We believe this, and we don’t.” Then he paused a bit, or the words stuck; if we went on, he would surely burst into tears. Now too a lone tear may slowly swell over the white lashes, he hopes not, of his eye.

Toldi needed little time, only as long as a wink or two, to master his heart, and then he spoke - “They place me in the chronicles before my time; they see and seeing do not believe. They think my old arms may do too much? By the arrows of thunder! whom may it be too little for?

“Proud King Louis, you foxy old man, you! Once you had a better eye and knew my arms. You recognized the guard who shielded you with his body in many hard-fought battles. Now you don’t know me, do you, although you see my strength? Hm, how could you know every old monk? You shrug your shoulders - Old King! a wily fox is not more fox.

“Or did you think I would crawl like a worm and beg for pardon? Why should I, like a child beaten by his boorish parents without cause? Ask for pardon, I although it was his offense? Bence, you see what he made of me! My soul is dark like a shadow. I am as though I walk on earth no more.

“How did I offend when I spoke out boldly upbraiding the king for his degenerate court? You may scarcely find a Magyar knight there, only monkeys hopping girlishly about. It hurt me to see him turn Magyars into foreign dolls. I told him to his face - King, you cannot do that! If old virtues are corrupted, why be anointed then by the world?

“Old age is not what buries me; as you saw, my hand still wields the ancient sword. My ills, if any, are hardly a torment. It is this mouldy sloth, oh, that kills me! I do not long for the king’s pardon - but Louis I loved... and I still do. My soul is drawn to him... But who cares? Burrow away, old man - die, do not open your lips to a complaint.”

He forced these last words; as when pouring forth from a narrow neck, water bubbles most at the very end - this is how his voice came out. As he said that, he quickly turned around, drew the cowl over his eyes. He looked straight into the eye of the wind for long, and the great dust soaked up the tears that ran down his cheeks.

From Pest, meanwhile, the crowd comes with a clamor and a cloud of dust. Spying him, they shout, “Toldi, our Toldi.” They crush one another to catch a glimpse of him. They surround him, block him off, and hail him with signs and words, however they can.

From the cavalcade a lord rides up, “Miklós Toldi! the king greets you. Your pardon has been ready these many years, no need was there to win it once more. He would willingly grant it not once but a hundred times. They said you are dead. Now we know it’s untrue, come and accept the pardon that with a willing heart he gives.”

He spoke like this and reached out a friendly hand. Toldi hesitated, his eyes glassy as though he could not believe it all. Wherever he looked, everyone's face and everyone's eye was shining with joy. Only he, behold I say, looks with doubtful eyes - no use, he does not dare be happy any more.

At last the spirit fires him; his eyes light up and he gives his right hand. But as though to hide his joy he murmured in his emotion like this - "Oh, my old beard, unwanted guest, the king invites me now to where the young may make fun of me in Buda, but the king commands and I must go.

"If you check your anger and instruct the youth now growing to manhood, I shall adorn you with pearls, as my good beard. But if you shame yourself, I shall pluck you out hair by hair and fling you on the dung heap in the city square. Show yourself, my gray beard, worthy of gold and pearls!"

The people nod at one another in approval, and there is no end to all the cheers; they throng around Toldi, pressing and crushing the lords in splendid dress who surround him. A crowd gathers around old Bence - poor, gentle old servant, he almost dies for joy! "I told you," he boasts, "this is how it would be!" In truth, he never foretold a thing.

They take him by the hand, ask questions, make his acquaintance - "What the Uncle Bence, do you remember when here and here - you know?" And they told of things the good old man never even heard. "How are you, Master Bence? I hardly recognized you." "My fellow, the king will give you a village now." "You really deserve it, so help me - the country can well afford the price."

Bence did not know which way to look, he hasn't hands enough to shake them all. And he would need fifty mouths to answer every question. He only smiled here and there, fingering with his left hand the buttons on his cloak; meanwhile, his right hand passes among the people - he was overcome, poor man, overcome by joy.

Pressing and pushing, they would not give way. The crowd grows, dreams not of dispersing. Those beyond speaking range shout out - "Long live Bence! Long live good Bence!" "Is the old Bence all right? Let's see the old bones!" "Did some crazy fools stone him?" "Who hurt Bence, the devil fiddle them? They're fit to hang from the gallows."

"Where is old Bence, Toldi's lancer? Let's raise him up and let everyone see him!" "Raise him up, raise him up, there are plenty of us - So, so, all together, swiftly, swiftly!" With that, they fall to as hard as they can, and hoist Bence and his horse high up on their shoulders; at first the horse squirmed, then gave up - because he was tired anyway.

The poor servant all but shivered seeing how God prospered his works. He is two heads bigger, that much he shows - one the horse's and the other his. He looked right and left, forward and back - "My God, my God!" this is all he could say. "My God, my God! just think how wonderful!" he stammered. "I would never have believed it."

Riding ahead with the lords, Toldi almost forgets all his cares. He keeps looking back and smiles at Bence's triumph, with envy maybe. But why? He knows whom they really do it for - when guests are few, dogs are fed well, too. Toldi had known his share of glory... but never before as on that single day.

They ride into the city, and the streets are lined with crowds. If His Majesty the King himself were coming, he would not draw such a host of lookers-on. But these do more than look, their mouths are open - "Long live Toldi! Long live!" they cry. The sound swells and dies - even the bare walls echo "Toldi" from far.

Every window is open and filled with heads, so many that only few could see. Young men sit astride every beam in rows, and cheer. Others climb on chimney tops wagging like scarecrows. Wherever the sound, thick or thin, nothing is heard but "Toldi, long live Toldi!"

Old Miklós' face brightens up, no patches of sorrow now - like the sky when the clouds break at evening, the sun looks back with a reddening glow. Who cares it will sink soon? A bright hue spreads over valley, mountain, plain - and the raindrops on the meadows are a million pearls not tears.

Wherever he looks he sees a hundred, a thousand eyes shining his way, hats waving, and arms upraised like wings of rejoicing souls. Ardent women flutter kerchiefs from every window. They call his name, which is lost in the roar like the buzz of a lonely bee when it thunders.

Then like a shower, young daughters of old autumn rain down flowers, garlands and evergreen, which like a good name lives on in death. It rains on him, the steed before and behind on the road, from Pest to Buda until reaching the castle, where Toldi stops and addresses the lords -

“My dear good friends, whom once I taught the skills of war, leave me a little while. Report that Toldi will soon reappear - I own nearby a homely house, which these three years I never saw. Now like a good master, let me see whether the stones were loosened by the storms.

“I shall take off this frock, my shield is rusty too, and a good bath will do myself no harm. The arena's uncarpeted and covers the fighter's face with dust. I too may be taken by show and turn into a palace man... some gaudy rags... ah, never mind, my friends! you'll see how fine I'll be fitted out.”

The lords would not have believed Toldi, would have suspected a ruse; and they would not let him go had they ever known he broke his word. Now too they trust and leave securely, reporting to His Majesty the King. Meanwhile, cries of long live and applause follow the old knight and his faithful servant home.

Fifth Canto

“King, did I not esteem my knighthood more,
I would dash your head with my seven-flanged club.”

Ilosvai

Old Toldi's house was not a palace familiar to the guile of paint and gloss. But it was enough for the old knight to vent his joy and anger when camping in Buda. The house is silent and vacant; now and then a coughing... but the old keeper only starts, and the hoarse walls pick it up and echo on.

Toldi entered with Bence behind. The keeper peered out and drew shut the gate. Outside, the crowds watch for every sign of life. They stare at the tumble-down house. Never did they look their fill at a shelter like this and better, or give it another glance... but all in vain, for the owner does not hurry out.

The gray knight opened the door into one of the rooms and looked happy - no carpets, tapestries, or other furniture of the day. Row on row weapons darkened the walls. A string of worms was chewing the oak table. Bearskinned benches lined the walls, not beds, dear couches or easy chairs.

Still looking about in joy, Toldi felt he was among old friends. The rusty arms beamed like shaggy bruins. He passed his eyes along a line of deadly blades - “My old sword, how long since I saw you last! How are you, my old lance? And you, my spear and pike? How red with embarrassment in your rust!

“Bence, my old friend, polish these poor things to a shine. You too are a rusty old instrument of mine. Polish one another, let it rub off. We must shine, old man, shine once more! Why shouldn't a sword be bright though battered! Do not grieve, do not grow gray, my dearest friend. Saint Martin's summer is still to come.

“I have been dead, too. I was not alive, for three years I entertained a ghost - I want to live now, Bence my friend, live as a man who lives a good life! I shall fling my cares aside like this hood and bid the last three years goodbye. I have three times three remaining perhaps, and may they be friends of joy.”

He spoke and with the words “now go to hell!” flung the hood into the farthest corner! lucky it was frieze not iron or surely it would have cracked. He took off his helmet and vest of mail. He ordered a kalpak and cloak from his wardrobe, where his clothes were no worse than a little wilted.

Dusting Toldi’s cloak, Bence pulled a short club from the sleeve. “Put it back, Bence, without it I won’t leave the house. When dogs growl, what is there to frighten them off?” So he spoke. He was soon dressed - to the day he never used a mirror, and still his dark green cloak became him, he was finer in appearance than many spruce young knights.

He starts on his way to the court. He wants to avoid the boodle, pestered by their ways and loath to go with a great hullabaloo. As though escaping from his own court, he slips through a small backdoor into the street. He goes boldly up to the new palace. No one recognizes him, or a few may only suspect.

King Louis is waiting, waiting for old Toldi to open the door. He paces up and down the room, impatient with the leaden pace of time. The old Miklós he longs to see. But not so the merry pages, they while the hours away with noise and fun, play the harp, and banter in the halls.

Many young lords serve there - the Losonczi, Maróti, Bánfi; Kanizsai, Szécsi, Kont, Balassa, Csupor, and the great and famous Laczfi-Apor; many of the lesser noble families are there for refinement in the court of Louis; and young men from abroad in exchange for Magyar youths.

Many were also at Pécs, where Louis lit the torch of learning; many were in Paris and Bologna at their expense or with royal stipend. They brought home lovely fruit from the tree of knowledge, the good as well as the bad, for though the unplanned mind is a bludgeon, it may be tooled to a double edge.

The young men study without neglecting the body; they need biceps like their fathers and brains, if possible, which are better developed. This was the king's plan and mind. But now the youths are at play - some sing, some jest, some argue, and one plays this song upon the harp -

*The king, the great King Louis speaks -
lay on, my vassal Endre, fast;
and gird the sword upon your waist.
The Tatars have invaded Moldva,
this province of our borderland -
take ten thousand Székely horsemen,
seek out the Tatar, where he's found.*
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So went the song. They all listened to the end - some looked for faults; some did not like it here, others there; some thought the old Tatar gabbled too much. "It is boring, in short, like a Lenten sermon; good wine's worth more, so is a young married woman. Hey, who knows a lively song?" they shout. And right off a pug-nose boy begins -

*Long ago - in a ditty
it happened in this Buda city
in a house - whoopee, whoopee
in a widow's house, O whoopee.*

*Miklós Toldi loved the bidy,
and she laughed - O you silly.
Whoopee-O he loved the bidy,
and she laughed - O you silly.*

*"Visit me, I say, my Toldi,
if I say, come you boldly!
Whoopee-O I say, my Toldi,
sup with me and come you boldly.*

*"Miklós Toldi, darling one!
what about jumping one?
Whoopee-O, jumping one -
in the corner, darling one.*

*"My silk is pinned upon the wall,
a lion pictured on the shawl.
Whoopee-O - up the wall,
jump upon the silken shawl."*

*“Sure I’ll jump, my little toots,
let me first pull off my boots.
Whoopee-O pull off my boots,
let me jump, my little toots.”*

*Miklós Toldi, I must tell,
out into the street he fell,
through the window out he fell,
and everybody laughs like hell.*

When the song ended, the wild youths doubled up for laughter. They clap the pug-nose on the back - “That’s bad, drop dead!” They laugh aloud - “This never happened!” “How did it go again? Play it once more, old boy.” And pug-nose begins, the others follow. But the door opens, the hero enters - and all at once the noise dies.

It is hard to stop a runaway wagon, harder a spirit once aroused. The youths cannot hold back for long on seeing his blue-red face, his puffy eyes. The wasps begin to buzz again. One shouts - “Phew, what a musty smell!” “Look at the old miller!” whispers another. “Look, they hit him on the head with a sack of flour.”

A third rejoins - “That has to be a fisherman, look, a fin or beard of corn on his chin.” And still another, “Cousin, what do you want with the white-feathered goose?” And behind Toldi’s back the song is resumed. But alas for whosoever joins. A twist of his sleeve, and they fall like summer grass - many injured, three dead right there.

What a fright, a wail from the living and a moan from the dying. Toldi rushes enraged to the king and thunders these words - “King, did I not esteem my knighthood more, I would dash your head with my seven-flanged club. Next time you’d teach your little whelps not to make fun of this old knight’s head.”

He spoke and the walls shook. He raised his big-headed club, his face a raging fire the snows on his head could not quench. In ghastly anger, he tramples over the youths who are pouring in - and he goes. They scatter as before a bull pawing the dust.

Doesn't the king understand what happened, and why?
He only half believes what he sees and hears. His
eyes follow the departing knight, his ears deafened
with all the din. When he understands at last, his
blood runs cold, he grimaces and shouts with a hand
on his heart - "Seize Toldi!" "Death on his head!"

Sixth Canto

"And Miklós' bones are still buried there,
his boldness known to all the world."

Ilosvai

Now I return to Bence, who stayed at home, and the
great things he meanwhile did. The gentle old man
worked up a sweat - sweeping, dusting, and poking
a hundred ways. He wiped the scrappy weapons one after
the other, put one down and picked up another. He
flailed about - for a future order's sake creating
a great disorder.

The keeper was there, but he only gazed on; this too
was more than enough for him, for Bence's great spirit
was like a violent storm. He hummed an old song of
which he forgot the words. Outside, the fallow horse,
poor beast, whinnied in tune, impatient for his fodder.

Now Bence begins, speaking to the keeper, "Go, nuncle,
and hitch the horse in the stall. There are oats and
hay aplenty, spread it out. It was left these three
years, if you yourself didn't eat it. Hitch them to
the rack and feed them I say - I have no time, see
I have a thousand things to do." The keeper waited for
more guidance, but Bence was scrubbing the floor.

Outside he pondered his entrusted task and eyed the
horses from a respectful distance - "Holy Father,"
he wonders to himself, "what should I do? It bites
from the front and kicks from the back." The honest
cobbler never rode a horse although he sewed sandals.
But he's given that up since he multiplied his eyes
from two to four.

He used to work with horses, that's to say, the hide.
The fiercest steed that came to hand he subdued right
there! Like Satan from hell, he galloped his knife
along the horse's back. He scissored, ripped, and
sewed, the master then - but now he reaches for the
rein with trembling hands.

He tried and tried until he was used to his fright.
Once a man's familiar to fear, courage is not long
in coming. A boldness settled in the little man's
heart, not such as wins battles - that's too much -
no, only enough to hitch a horse in the stall.

He hitched them up and spread their oats and spread
their hay. But when it was ready, the horses snorted
at the invited meal. They whinnied, they neighed and
all to no use, for they would not eat of the precious
stuff. The cobbler marveled at this great event - why
and how could this ever be?

At last he couldn't stand it and reports to Bence
the horses won't eat. Bence interrupted his task
and hurried to behold the miraculous event. "What
the thunder! have you lost your marbles, nuncle?
You haven't removed the rein and bit." And Bence
laughed until he was faint and there were stitches
in his side.

The keeper could have eaten his own hands and feet
for not having the brains to see. Then he thinks -
what good are brains, his hands were afraid. This
cheered him up as Bence laughed right in his face
unbridling the horses and returning to his task.

Bence was starting to work when his lord entered
in a rage - "My damned wrath!" he muttered
choking, his voice drowned in a fit of anger. He
flung his club on the table and staved the wood
in. Ai, this was - ai, this was the end of his
strength! His legs totter, his head reels.

Bence knew that something was ill. He saw his
master's bloodshot eye and the taut vein like a
rope on his temple. Now the color drains from his
face, his lips twitching and turning blue. His
knees bend - Bence runs and holds him lest he fall.

Bence struggled with him to a bench. The great knight could no longer walk; his arms were limp, his back gave in. The anger which wiped enemies out like God's curse was penned inside mauling him like a mad lion its trainer.

Bence heard the clock strike. His tears run and fall on the cloak. Toldi stares, stares - the faithful servant turns aside again and again wiping his eyes. At last, God gives him strength before the dying man - he takes a deep breath, and forces himself to speak these words of cheer and comfort.

“What hurts you, my dear good lord? For I see you are troubled and something is wrong - is it nausea, a headache, a chill which is unsettling your worship? I know a good cure, I tried it myself and speak not false - drink a cup of peppered wine... your chill will leave like yesterday's bad dream.

“Before, when something was wrong, your backbone or lumbago, I was the doctor and cured you quickly. The bone I set that was out of place. Shall we try it now? No... what about a gentle massage as though I were coddling a broken egg...?” He spoke, and what is more he believed it, the poor old man, that the rub would bring him ease.

“Leave off, Bence, leave off,” quietly Toldi whispered. “You aren't making fun of me, are you? Nothing will help me any more, my comrade, neither good intention nor skill of science.” Now Bence looked straight at him, and behold, like the breath on a shining sword or bloom on ripe fruit, a veil fell over the pupil of his eye.

The faithful servant can stand it no more, he bursts into tears harder than before; he covers his face and turns from the dying man toward the window. He glances by chance into the street. Holy God! the house is surrounded. But before he can say it, Allaghi, captain of the guard, steps into the room.

The captain motions the others not to follow; he enters himself and says - “Miklós Toldi, you are my prisoner! You have committed murder, brought shame on - polluted the royal house with blood. In the king's name, knight, follow us.” Bence pointed in anguish at the dying man; no need though, for the captain saw and spoke in a hushed voice now -

“Oh, why couldn't I bring a better message than this? But if you want to send word or a plea in your troubles, I shall be your spokesman by the king.” Saying this, the captain stepped to the knight, bent over him with a look of pity on his face. Now for the first time, Toldi turned his eyes on him, and these are the words that faltered from his breast -

“Tell the king, your mighty lord, to leave me only for an hour. My prison awaits. I go freely where someone not of earth will judge me.” He turned his eyes aside, his lips still moved - moved and sighed as in prayer. Simon Allaghi runs off with the report - “Toldi is near to death, my lord, and sends this message -

“He sends this message to my gracious lord - leave him be in the hour of his death. His prison will be a grave where he goes of his own free will; no earthly judge passes judgment on him.” The king is shocked and cries - “Almighty God! Is this his end? On the day of his glory - abandoned and ill - disgraced and dying? Fetch my cloak.”

And whirling a cape around his neck, he commanded be taken to Toldi's house, the captain of the guard in the lead, behind him the king followed by a faithful servant or two. His habit does not reveal he is king; they would laugh at one who claimed him so. The passers-by who chance to look greet not the king but the captain.

Whether they doff the hat or not, what does the king care? He pulls his cloak lower over his face, goes as fast as his weak legs carry him. He fears he will find the knight is dead. But he arrived - and the joy in his anguish was to arrive in time. Happiness may shine in the bleakness of sorrow like a bright rainbow on cloudy skies.

The king sits on a chair by the dying man, bends over him, and speaks to him by name. Toldi was in the half sleep which would soon weigh him down and drop him into death. He was aroused at the voice - he recognized it - and looked at Louis with deep large eyes. He recognized him - but as though uncertain where he was, he gazed from one ceiling beam to another.

The king spoke - "Don't you know me, Toldi, my old friend? Why do you turn your eyes away? I am the king - not he who harmed you - I, Louis, talk to you, your good old friend. Think back, look at me, don't turn your eyes away. Say only one word, no more - whatsoever - my name - who knows where and when we'll meet? We cannot part without a last farewell."

Toldi came to and gathering all his strength raised his head a little. He strained to turn toward the king and put out his hand, which was cold as ice. And then softly and clearly he said - "What a dream I had! I was already dead. How glad I am you are here - you revive my soul. I cannot die without talking with you.

"Oh, my friend (now let me call you this), forgive me if I ever crossed you; if I was rough, if I was crude, do not weigh every word; forgive me for my good heart's sake. I was punished anyway. But all that is ended. Gone are the many lovely hopes. But whatever is passed is dead, lost - the vigil of memory will die the same.

"I could make a last testament - why? I have precious little. And to whom, if I had more? I have no heir... only a faithful servant. Take him to your heart - and the Hungarian people. Love the Magyar, but do not polish him," he spoke, "his strength, his ways, his rough outer bark. What profits smoothness and good polish? A flitch of wood is hard to break."

Saying this, he sighed and sank back again, his right hand in the hand of the king; his eyes were steady but glazed like horn. The king replies to his words like this - "Why wouldn't I take the old servant in my care? and the Hungarians, the people, whom I always loved? I stretched their empire to the shores of three seas.

"I always tried, truly unto my limits, to win esteem for my Magyar people, respect in war, peace within and without the country's borders. I am not boasting, that is not why I say it... My God! must I justify it - especially to you, we both know how I loved the Hungarian people.

“Was it love or hatred when I began smoothing the virtues of the nation, and I wanted the people to shine in splendor, be my pride and not my shame?... Time drives swiftly on - runs its course - if we mount, it moves us on; if we stay behind, it will not wait; the world changes; what is strong grows weak; and what was weak grows strong.

“Time drives swiftly on, it does not wait. We die, the old die away, and only the fame of our strength remains - a new people, a new generation grows up conquering with reason, not physical strength. The mind of man has discovered, you know, a simple powder which sows death on armies. Toldi or no Toldi... they all fall - the power of reason conquers in that little powder!”

He spoke and looked in the dying man’s face - ai, he was dead, his chin had fallen; but their hands were still clasped like twining branches, one dead. The living hand withdrew. A long silence followed. The king wept. Bence drew behind the door, poor man, and cried.

Meanwhile, the calm red light of the sun sank to a winter rest; the rainbows faded from the window, and the high hills drew a veil over it. The king saw to Toldi’s funeral and how he was to be buried - his house a simple coffin, but of iron to tell of his strength.

And that same evening, a procession of torches sets out from Buda Castle in the twilight mist. From a distance, you would have thought all the stars were solemnly following Toldi on his way. In the cavalcade, the hearse rolls with Miklós Toldi lying under a cover of iron - beside him Bence on the coach step, racked with grief.

The people fill up the avenue like a river, every square and winding alley a little brook. And like water that feeds from a brook into the river, the people flood from one into the other. Everyone is still. They follow silently to the fields of Rákos, where the hearse stops and they lift the coffin on a covered wagon.

The burning torches are all darkened but four that light the road to Nagyfalu. The people remain covered in darkness. They follow the four torches into the night with tearful eyes as far as they can see. And then they turn homeward in little groups, retelling the deeds of the departed hero.

By the third day, on a cloudy evening, a mound rose over Miklós Toldi's body, strewn with the fallen leaves of the old garden. The grave was unmarked by costly bronze or marble. Bence was the memorial standing at Toldi's feet - he struck a spade into the earth and leaned on it. The sky covered the grave with new snow.

NOTES

I

dock-tail chestnut: “kurta pej”, horse with docked tail and cropped mane to keep from snagging on bushes and branches; a grooming not needed in royal parks.

V

The king, the great King Louis speaks: a poem entitled *Szent László* (Saint Ladislas). It tells how the saint-king rose from his tomb, mounted his brass horse and rode off to win a victory over the Tatars saving the country and leading to a conversion of pagans.

JÁNOS ARANY: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

János Arany was born March 2, 1817 on the Hungarian Plain to small-farm parents, the youngest of ten children of whom only he and the eldest survived. He lived there for the first 43 years of his life, principally in two agrarian towns - his birthplace Szalonta (a town founded by free peasants - hajdús) and Nagykőrös - and in the city of Debrecen as a student with a bent for literature and language. At the age of 19 years, having read widely, largely on his own, he dropped out of school without a diploma and became an actor. From 1839-1849 he was a village notary in Szalonta; and a school teacher in Nagykőrös to 1860.

His passionate interest in the legends of the Hungarian past was nourished, beginning with early boyhood, in the above surroundings. For an imaginative and impressionistic picture of his early years see Jenő Docy's "Arany, A Boyhood Scene," Budapest, Genius, 1929. Throughout his lifetime, he left Hungary only three times, once to Vienna on a notarial task and twice to Karlsbad for his health. But he was at home in ancient and European civilization, wrote commentaries on outstanding writers, and translated important works (Aristophanes and Shakespeare) into Hungarian.

Returning to Szalonta from his adventures as an actor, he found his father blind and his mother dying. Conscious stricken, he undertook to live the life of an ordinary human being, giving up his artistic and poetic dreams. He married an orphan girl, became a father, and worked with modest results to acquire some property.

It was under the influence of a colleague from Debrecen, István Szilágyi, who was newly assigned as school principal in Szalonta, that he returned to literary activity. By 1845 he published his first poetic work, *The Lost Constitution* (a satire on the politics of the nobility) and then in 1846 *Toldi*, with which he won the Kisfaludy Society (rallying point of the intellectual movement) award and the friendship of Sándor Petőfi. Soon thereafter, he undertook the writing of *Toldi's Eve*, which was eventually to form the concluding portion of the Toldi Trilogy, his life's masterpiece.

During the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848-1849, Arany served as a national guardsman, but most important of all he wrote lyrics of a freedom-fight character. After resigning as notary when the town could not pay the salaries of its officials, he entered state service with positions in Debrecen and Pest. With the collapse of the struggle, he returned to Szalonta, hid out for a while from the Russians, and at the end of 1849 accepted a post briefly in the district administrative office. But with the repression conducted by the Hapsburgs following the Revolution, his status was an uncertain one, to say the least, and he resigned.

Having lost his position and prospects at Szalonta, Arany accepted, after working as private tutor, a teaching position in Nagykőrös, where he started anew and lived from 1851 to 1860. During this phase of his life he published *The Gypsies of Nagyida* (1852), an allegory celebrating a doomed rebellion and satirizing weaknesses that led to the Hungarian surrender at Világos in 1849; a section of the Csaba (Attila-Buda) trilogy, which was never to be completed; *Toldi's Eve* (1854); *The Welsh Bards* (1856), an allegorical ballad about the poets beheaded by Edward I for refusing to sing to his glory, and written in satirical response to an

official approach for a tribute in honor of the still uncrowned Francis Joseph's projected visit to Budapest. Arany was elected to the Academy in 1855, and to the Kisfaludy Society, as secretary, in 1860. He suffered from the mid-1850's on with a nervous condition - depression, headaches, earaches - described in some detail in his letters.

Arany moved to Pest in 1860 as editor of a new literary periodical. *Death of Buda* appeared in 1864. He became secretary to the Academy in 1865. His daughter died the same year, and his mental health deteriorated further. His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1867, and in this same year of the Compromise with Austria he was named to the Order of Saint Stephen. He also published his translations of *Hamlet* and *King John. Toldi's Love*, which he began in 1863, appeared in 1879; he thereby fulfilled a long and difficult commitment rounding out the Trilogy. In 1880, he published the Comedies of Aristophanes in three volumes on which he had worked for three years. Most significant for his poetic evolution, however, he wrote lyrics which are some of the most exciting in the language. He died October 22, 1882.

Throughout his life, János Arany remained shy, almost diffident. He was born to his parents in their advanced age, and the poet himself observed that this may have affected his personality. While engrossed in a world of epic and ballad imagery, he was at the same time realistic and industrious, carefully husbanding property and placing the welfare of his young family (the Arany's had a son László - poet, collector of folktales and literary historians - and a daughter) above his own personal aspirations. In his semi-autobiographical *Bolond Istók* (Dumb Steve) he portrays himself as an antihero.

Arany's labors as a notary, schoolteacher, Academy and Society secretary, editor (and even something of a landowner, business man and lender!) leave one almost incredulous about his own literary productivity. His vast work load, which he carried conscientiously, was in conflict with his literary labors, often accomplished on the principle of *nulla dies sine linea*. Very likely this had much to do with his poor mental health as he approached his forties. But there is something more significant here, too. Arany had a self-effacing nature although he wrote, especially in his old age, outstanding subjective poetry, which however he was reluctant to publish. Throughout his life he would have preferred, evidently, to be a *Lönnrot* collecting the Magyar Kalevala - but Hungary by then had no equivalent of Karelia. Herein is the basic contradiction of Arany's work - between the demands of a subjective life and of a strong but besieged culture. Arany's outlook on his art as a basically collective value was paralleled in the career of Zoltán Kodály, who was born in the same year Arany died. Ady and Bartók represent the innovative side of the Magyar spirit, Arany and Kodály the integrative. Tragically, they were not infrequently differentiated by compatriots as "un-Hungarian" and "genuinely Hungarian."

Arany is regarded as the most Magyar of poets. Economy and beauty of diction have seldom been more fittingly wedded. He had an enlightened dedication to Hungarian traditions over his long lifetime and was one of the first to portray artistically the sober character of the Magyar people. Arany is a progressive great in the peasant or popular tradition. His ties to the past and the Plain came from his concern for a world of equality more like Hungary knew with its "Asiatic" and Anjou kings prior to the conditions leading to Dózsa's revolt, and the suppression of the serfs in Eastern Europe.

Although he wrote much more, the extent of Arany's greatness will be measured by his epics. His role as a great contributor to this literary form is secure, if not widely familiar in the

world. Unlike anyone, he returned the epic to the extraordinary common from where it originally sprang, and thereby led attention to a way of humanity long neglected. That Arany maintained his artistic integrity despite the vast contradictions of his lifetime makes him the true symbol of the cultural coherence and flexibility of modern Hungarians. His importance in a global sense is his sane involvement with life as he tells the epic story of the peasant evolution.

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