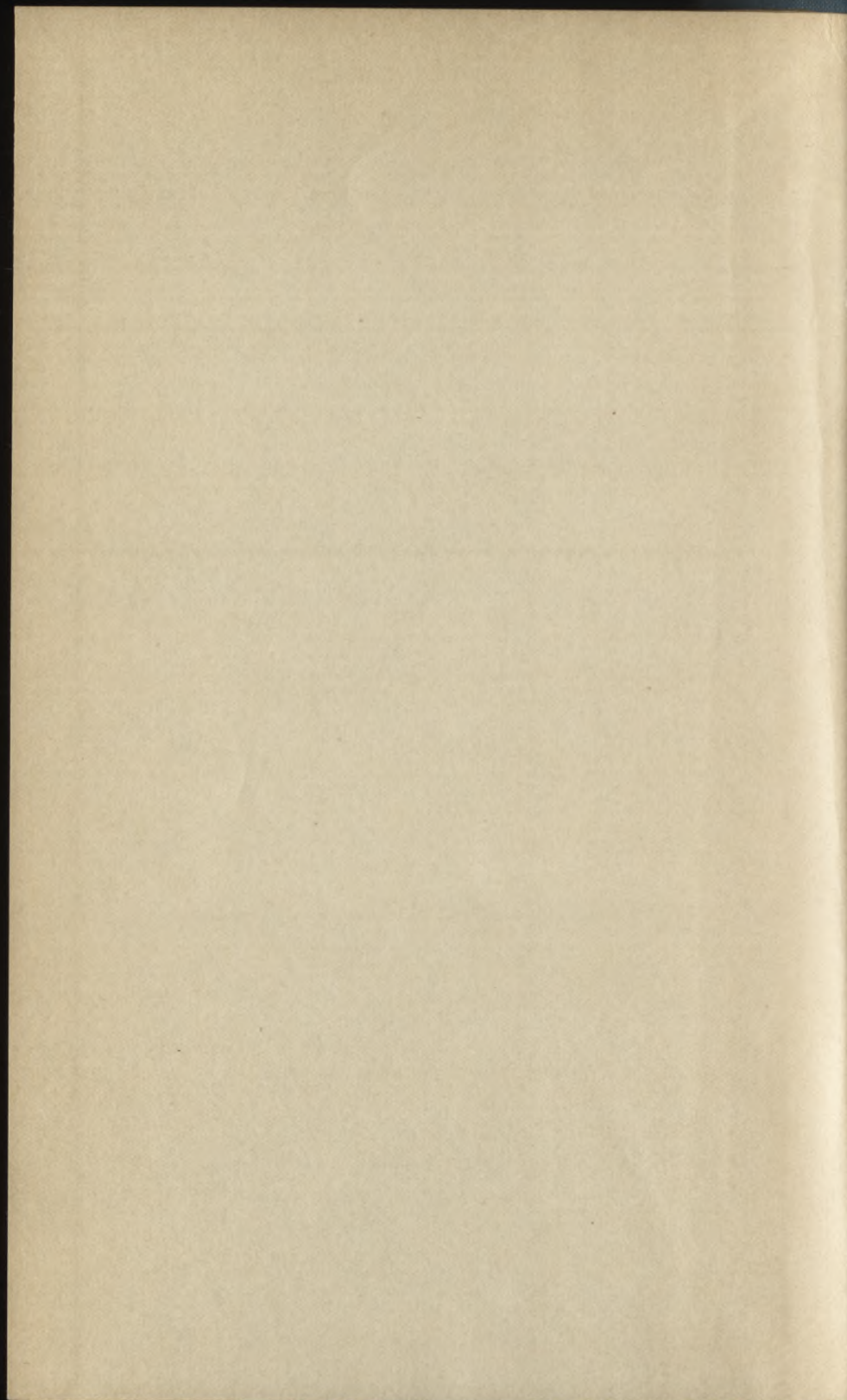
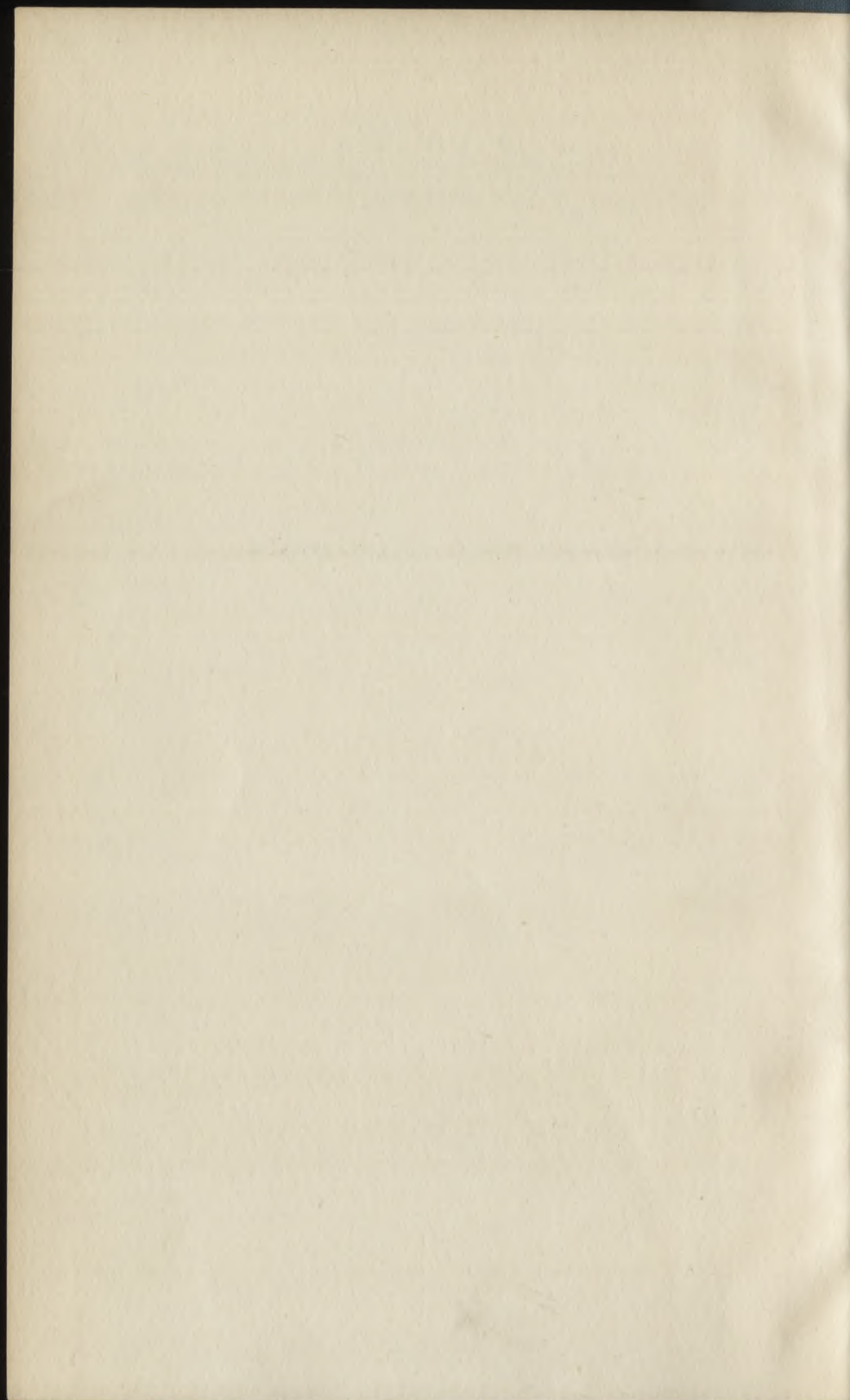
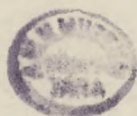


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HUNGARIAN BACKGROUND







LÁNCHÍD, BUDAPEST

Hungarian Background

by
ADAM DE HEGEDUS

With Eight Illustrations from Photographs

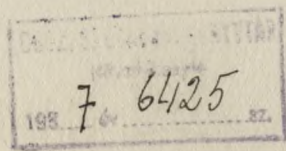


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First Published 1937

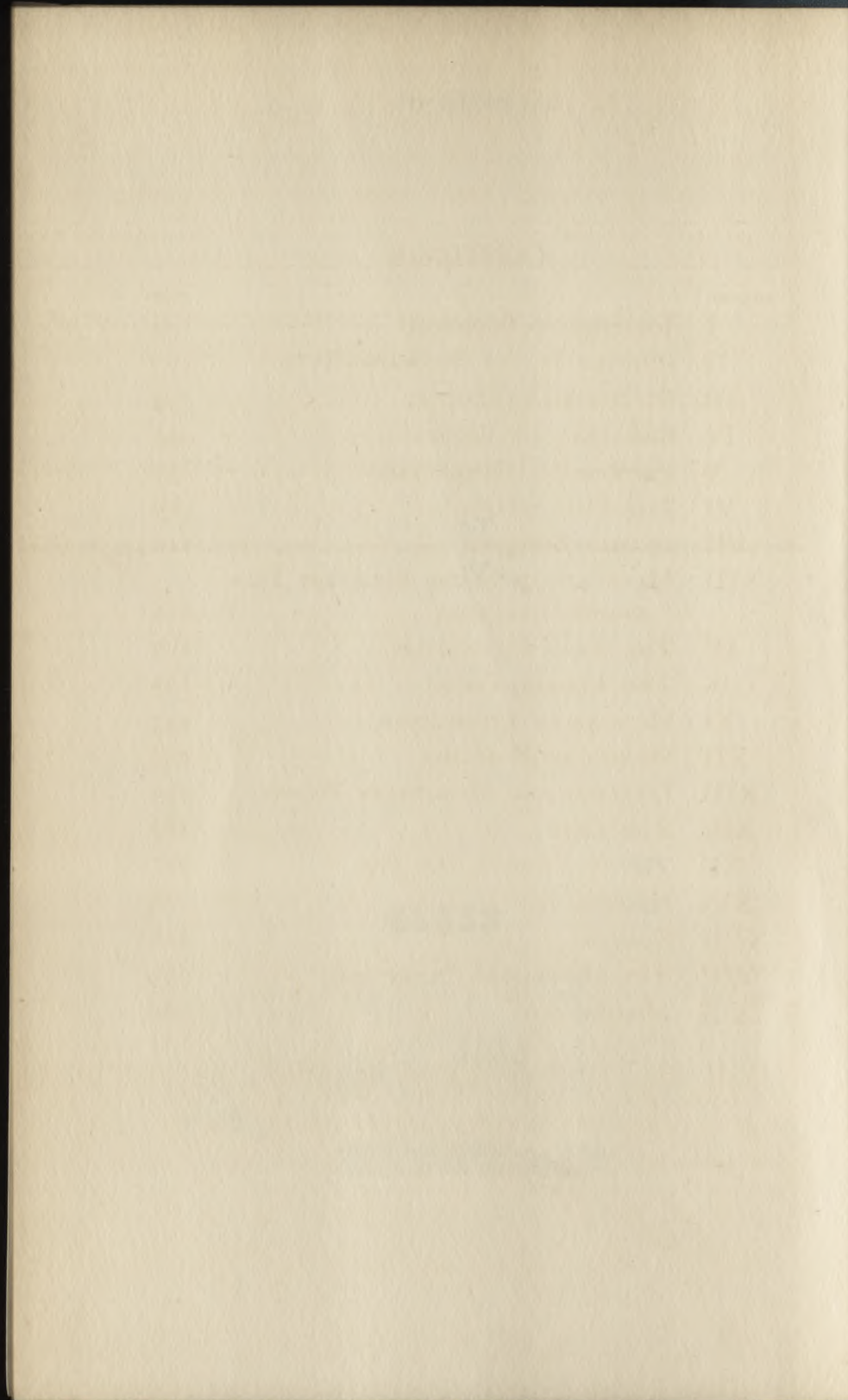
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HUNGARIAN BACKGROUND

CHAPTER I

JOURNEY TO BUDAPEST

At four in the morning with Linz behind us, I was still travelling on credit. I had left London with a suitcase, a portable typewriter, a raincoat, a ticket as far as the German-Austrian frontier, and a few pounds in my pockets. To travel from London to Budapest, via Ostende and Germany, is to me as much a matter of routine as for a commercial traveller to go to Liverpool or Manchester.

I took no foreign money with me. In Belgium they accepted English silver, in Germany I sold my last half-crown and decided to spend the night at a hotel on the Austrian frontier where there would be an exchange office. But when I arrived at the Austrian frontier – towards one in the morning – I found that if I were to spend the night there I would be unable to get a good connection. I made a rush towards the station exchange so that I should be able to pay for my ticket from Passau to Budapest. To my horror it was locked. The situation seemed serious. Here I was on the frontier with no railway ticket and no Austrian money to pay for it. And the train was moving. I jumped on and entered a compartment,

where I found a Tyrolean in his native dress. I explained the situation and tried to persuade him to buy two or three pounds. He said he had no money on him, and in any case he would go to prison if he bought foreign currency without a permit, but as regards my ticket I had no need to worry. The station exchange would be open at Linz and I could buy my ticket there. 'We are not so *accurate* in Austria,' he said cheerily as he took off his waistcoat. He bade me good night and promptly went to sleep.

The conductor to whom I explained the situation smiled and also said there was no need to worry. I would have time to change my money at Linz, so I went to sleep with an easy heart. With such an easy heart that I overslept myself and only woke up when we had actually left Linz. The conductor agreed that it was as well I had slept on, as the exchange had not been open. I would have time in Vienna.

So I was actually travelling through more than half present-day Austria without a ticket or, as I said in the opening sentence, 'on credit'. I don't wish to point a moral or give this as an example of the Austrian Spirit, but I am certain no such thing can happen anywhere in the world, except in Central Europe.

.

For the first time I began to reflect that this visit to Hungary was different from those of the past. A Hungarian who had spent a quarter of his life of twenty-nine years in London, I had never previously returned to my native country with any object beyond a holiday, a visit to my parents and another to my editor asking him to raise my salary as his London correspondent. Ever since I established myself in

London and became British, journeys to Hungary were associated in my mind with the idea of holidays and visits to one's birthplace.

This time, however, I was not on holiday. I was on business. I was travelling to Hungary in order to write a book about the country. Not, however, a guide-book. I wanted to see Hungary through new eyes, acquired in England. In short, this book is intended to be the record of a sentimental, and sometimes cynical, journey to my country of origin.

The train came to a sudden halt. We were at the Hungarian frontier.

The immigration officer did not look at my name on the passport. He merely opened it with well-trained fingers at the exact page where he required it should open, put a rubber stamp on it and recorded the fact that I had entered Hungary. Then he said 'thank you' in English. The customs officer was even more polite. Seeing the blue passport in my hand he said 'Hungarian Customs', obviously the only two English words of his vocabulary. I automatically replied in English that I had nothing to declare. He smiled, and I knew at once that I might as well have said, 'It is raining in London' or 'Little Audrey laughed and laughed -' Still smiling, he clicked his heels slightly, gave me a smart salute and was gone. I smiled too. It was true, I had nothing to declare. No explosives, no drugs, no cameras, no spirits, tobacco, cigarettes - and what was more important in the eyes of Hungarian customs - no English tea. Yet I felt rather awkward at his almost submissive politeness. I felt a little like a traitor. I would have liked to run after this young peasant-looking lad with the Hitler

moustache, grab him by the shoulders and say to him in fluent Hungarian:

‘Look here, old chap, the whole thing is a bluff. No matter what the blue passport under the Lion and the Unicorn says and what Sir Samuel John Gurney Hoare “requests and requires” in it. I am just as much a Hungarian as you are. We were born in the same country, we are of the same solitary Magyar race, we speak the same language. According to law we were duly inoculated two months after our birth. We went to school at the age of six, we learnt the same poems, the same bits of Hungarian history. We laugh at the same jokes. We learnt to honour and respect the same red-white-green flag, the same king, the same national institutions. We were told that we were so few that we must regard each other as brothers and sisters. I am afraid I did not follow this last maxim in the course of my life, but still – So don’t treat me with such deference, don’t take me so frightfully seriously. Go on, avail yourself of the powers entrusted to you by the laws and regulations of His Excellency the Hungarian Minister for Finance, just as you did years ago, questioning me, searching me, trespassing among my most private and personal belongings, among shirts and suits, which grew to be so much mine that they would feel ill at ease on anybody else. Just as you did years ago (do you remember?) not smiling and clicking heels and saluting, when instead of the blue passport with the Lion and the Unicorn you saw in my hands that olive-brown affair, with the apostolic double cross, the emblem of the Four Rivers, supported by the two morose angels of the Hungarian Holy Crown.’

But what would the innocent young man with the Hitler moustache say to this sudden outburst? We are compatriots, but not in the eyes of the law. We were alike and yet very different. He might think I was like one of those people who, gnawed by remorse, complexes and inhibitions, send their conscience-money to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Or he might think I was off my head. So I said nothing, but looked at the few whitewashed houses around the tiny provincial station of Hegyeshalom. So this was Hungary!

Then suddenly, as the officials left, the deserted train became animated. Doors were pulled, people moved about, there came a long peal of laughter from one of the compartments. I heard Hungarian spoken rather loudly and slowly, as country folk speak it. A youngish man came into my compartment and having glanced at my suitcase, addressed me in broken English and gave me a tourist propaganda leaflet about Budapest, which I accepted and tried to read with what he must have called 'the polite indifference of the English'.

I made a little tour of the train. I always like to do that when I travel in Hungary, reflecting that Ferencz Molnár, the dramatist, once said that the various compartments of a Hungarian train resemble the make-up of a daily newspaper. In one you may hear a political lecture which sounds like a leader; in another a discussion on foreign affairs, in the third what may be called 'Home News' – scandals, murders, unusual happenings; in the fourth, economics; while in the last, what may be regarded as an instalment of a serial story. . . .

The average Hungarian is a good talker and has little reserve.

This time the train was fairly empty. There were a few old women with huge hampers, but knowing that the conversation of old women must be pretty much the same all over Europe, I returned to the corridor and looked out of the window. The journey from the Austrian frontier to Budapest is not very inspiring; what is now the north of Hungary is rather flat and bare, especially from the window of a train. I ought really to have made the journey on the Danube from Vienna, which gives a magnificent, if perhaps slightly theatrical, view of too much romance and too much natural splendour – or perhaps this is only my natural reaction to far too many ill-worded advertisements and hackneyed camera angles. But in that case my journey would have taken a much longer time and, as I have said, I was not on holiday. So I returned to my compartment and began to read *The Times*, which I had bought in Vienna early that morning.

At Győr two middle-aged men came into my compartment. Having settled themselves down, they looked at the paper in my hands, then with a surprisingly quick scrutiny, examined my suit, my tie, my suitcase, my hat in the rack, and must have decided I was British, as one of them said to his companion, 'There are hundreds of English people coming to Budapest this year. . . .'

My eyes were on the column 'Wills and Bequests', but my mind was agitated. I was expecting them to say something about me. It would have been interesting to hear the truth, spontaneous and outspoken. It is a great spiritual adventure to be present un-

known, unseen or, as in my case, unsuspected, when people talk about you. I should have loved to hear the truth about myself, if not quite directly, at least not behind my back. I felt the agitation of the eaves-dropper.

The other man smiled and said:

'I say, this fellow here looks very much like Lord Harmsvert, or however you pronounce that name. Maybe it's he incognito. One never knows.' Then they laughed again.

I pretended to be much interested in the agony column of *The Times* and tried my best to look like Mr. Esmond Harmsworth, to whom the Hungarian evidently referred. But the effort, to my dismay, brought no result. As a topic of conversation I was exhausted: my two unsuspecting compatriots made no further reference to me. Instead, they began to talk about the varying fortunes of a mutual friend of theirs. In less than fifteen minutes I learnt practically everything about the absent friend, whose first name was Zoltán: his early youth, his ambitions, his problems, his mental make-up, his natural history. Everything except his surname. But are surnames important, except from the point of view of those novelists who hold that a certain type of man must have a corresponding name. I swear that Soames Forsyte could never have been called Pendennis.

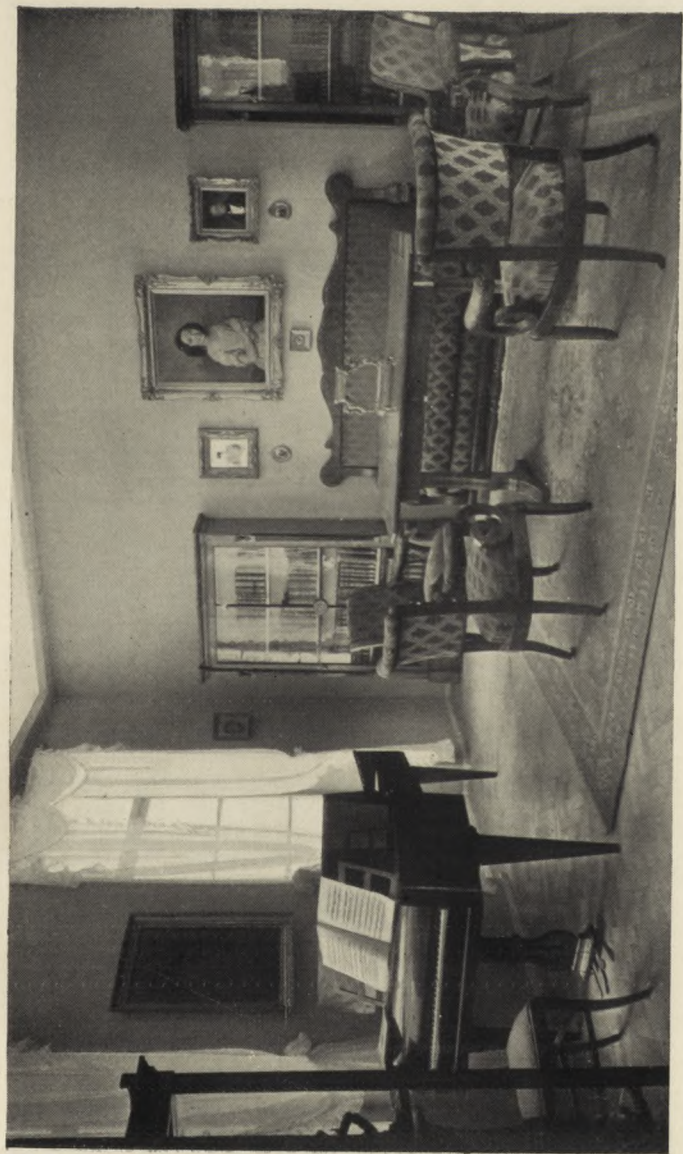
It was so curious to visit a country where one could understand every word spoken, a mother-country and yet to a certain extent foreign. To the average Englishman the spectacle of Hungarian life appears to be like that strange dumb show, a foreign sound film without explanatory sub-titles. He cannot quite

follow the story and he inevitably makes his own readings, his own interpretations. He is a little embarrassed and feels like an outsider when he hears laughter over a joke he cannot understand. His emotions, his values are all wrong. He is inclined to laugh and express sorrow in the wrong places.

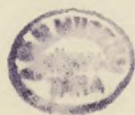
Having listened to their conversation, I established the fact that one of them was a native of the Lowlands, an essential Calvinist and possibly a retired officer, the other a native of Budapest, obviously a minor state functionary. In my mind's eye I already saw the houses in which they lived, the women they called their wives, and I visualised the things they liked and disliked.

.

Later I again regretted not having taken the Vienna boat and arrived in state. On emerging from the Keleti Station or 'Budapest-East', the first impression one receives from that dark building reminiscent of gasworks in the English Midlands is far from being favourable. The station square is large and spacious, too large and too spacious, and the great thoroughfare leading from it towards the Danube looks provincial and shabby. I admit that Victoria Station is also rather ugly and very dull, but it is always crowded and has an indescribable intimacy. Victoria Station always seems to me to offer an ideal setting for the opening of a French novel in the early years of the present century. It is neither pleasant, nor welcoming, yet it has some of the warmth of the poetry of everyday things. The Keleti Station in Budapest, on the other hand, is a little frightening and very depressing. It offers no intimacy and no associations



BIEDERMEYER FURNITURE



except rather sordid ones. The morose bronze figure of Gábor Baross, the great Hungarian Railway minister, turning his back to the station he gave Budapest, seems to confirm one's mental attitude towards it. The great man seems to wash his hands of the building. His bronze lips under his bushy moustache seem to murmur: 'I'm not responsible.' Personally my favourite station, because of its associations, is the *Gare D'Orsay* in Paris.

I took a taxi of the tiny variety which you cannot find anywhere else but in Budapest. They are originally designed for two persons, but I am certain that those two must be either as thin as skeletons, or lovers.

It was a pleasant sensation to travel in a taxi which could fulfil its function of quick transport without having to obey the dictates of stupid coloured lamps. Traffic in Budapest is ill organised, yet taxis take you anywhere in less than no time.

On the way I welcomed the quick succession of familiar landmarks: houses and shops and streets and squares, the chrome yellow of the municipal tramcars, their bells contributing to the orchestra of noise in nervous sharp 'a's, the colour and the smell of Budapest.

A friend of mine who is also interested in smells once said that Budapest has a definite smell of chicory about it, just as Vienna smells of pastries, Berlin of burnt sugar, Brussels of vanilla and London of suet puddings. He is not quite right about London, but absolutely right about Budapest. The various smells of the town certainly result in something like the smell of chicory.

The tiny taxi drove through the Erzsébet Bridge, the loveliest bridge on earth, and we were in Buda

under the grey cliffs of the Gellért Hill. Then it turned sharp towards the *Tabán*. That word in Turkish means bottom or sole, in this sense the foot of the mountain. It was given to the district under the Gellért Hill by Turkish pashas who ruled Buda for long centuries up till about 1680. The old *Tabán* was one of the most picturesque parts of Buda. It contained absolutely no antiquities or lovely old houses. In fact, it was almost like a slum, but an attractive slum like those of a French or Italian port bathing in rich sunshine and under blue sky. It was a curious sight with its dilapidated old houses climbing the hill. The *Tabán* was full of the poetry of the early twentieth century, lyrical variety, especially on summer evenings or at sunset in autumn when the watery pale mists of the Danube cover it with a benevolent hand, hiding its shortcomings and making it look just a trifle unreal.

The whole district was condemned and pulled down. The area occupied by those tiny houses in streets with names like Golden Goose Street and White Eagle Street is to be transformed into a huge public park mounting the hill. The change surprised me. The multitude of little shrivelled-up houses have disappeared and I saw instead workmen busy excavating or laying out the formal gardens with their flowers and shrubs and pine-trees and grass. When completed it will result in the whole Buda side being intersected by a belt of green grass and flowers about the width of Hyde Park, only very hilly and much longer.

Then I caught sight of the Royal Castle on top of the Vár with its turquoise green domes, the little ornamental garden of a long deceased and bountiful Mr.

Horváth who left it to the children of Buda. But – as always happens – elderly officers took possession of its walks and benches. Then I saw a flash of the old Tunnel under the Fortress framed by green leaves. The taxi stopped in front of a house in Attila Street. I was home.

.

The room my parents gave me is in an old house overlooking a sunny yard with small formal gardens and two large chestnut-trees, which bar the view to the baroque domes of the Royal Castle on the hill. The house is old, not old enough to be historically interesting, yet it has the charm of practically every old house on the Buda side. When one is inside one immediately understands the real meaning of the expression 'those more spacious days'. Its rooms are something like fourteen feet high, with double-winged doors ten feet high as though designed for a banqueting hall. There is an imposing round white stove in the corner, which is too big to be impersonal. I well remember these stoves, familiar fixtures in the background of my childhood. The fire in them makes a deep gurgling noise. (I used to reflect that the fire 'laughed inside them'.) They came into fashion in the time of Queen Maria Theresa, when Hungary was rich in forests, but now, when they burn a dirty brownish Hungarian coal, which smells like a sulphur bath without its beneficial effects and often explodes, the stoves must feel miserable.

I love the somewhat heavy baroque shapes of these stoves, yet on the whole I prefer the English fireplace with its invitation cards and Dresden china on the mantelshelf. It is, as we all know, very unpractical

for purposes of heating, yet it makes the arranging of furniture far less of a problem. The Hungarian stove in a corner makes a room look always a little out of proportion.

The double windows of the house are also ten feet high. They open in the middle, like so called 'french windows', but they are double. In Central Europe they are really needed, in such a climate of extremes, for the layer of air between the two panes ensures coolness in summer and warmth in winter. Apart from that, before the advent of refrigerators people of the Hungarian middle classes used to keep their milk and butter and cheese in the narrow recess between the two panes in winter. In summer they kept them in the mouth of the stove.

The floor is inlaid parquet, and has to be polished nearly every morning with beeswax, which the maid applies with a brush tied to her bare foot. This work makes the domestic problem of Hungary rather acute.

The furniture of my room belonged to the so-called 'Biedermeier' period of the 1830's, a Viennese version of the French furniture still under the influence of the *empire* style. Solid veneered pine with inlaid ornamentations, like Georgian bedroom furniture. The shapes are really lovely, if not so elegant as those of Jacobean walnut, and much heavier than Georgian mahogany. This furniture served my family for the best part of eighty years, though of this time it spent forty years stored in some lumber-room till the end of the War. Before that, it was considered so hopelessly old-fashioned that nobody would buy it and it was replaced by modern furniture, frightful faked Louis Quinze pieces and more frightful, if genuine, *art*

nouveau, which is now thrown out of the house. My parents were glad that they found the rejected old pieces in garrets and disused wine-cellars and were not forced to pay large sums for them as some of their friends had to do.

This demand for antique furniture seems to me universal in Europe. It is certainly not unconnected with snobbery, but there is a deeper reason. People with a little taste will no longer put up with machine-made furniture which at the end of the nineteenth century was cherished by all and sundry, and at the same time they are suspicious of the style considered 'representative' of to-day.

It should give some comfort to the English to know that the furniture of the Victorian period was not unique in being pretentious and uncomfortable. The second half of the nineteenth century was an unhappy period for furniture all over Europe. It bore the same desperate characteristic of having been made by people who took absolutely no interest in their work. And the turn of the century was not more happy in taste. I well remember its relics in interior decoration made in the spirit of Walter Crane, William Morris, and the *Yellow Book*.

It must be admitted that living one's life among old furniture is a dreadful admission of the fact that our age is incapable of rivalling the products of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in creating something which is at the same time beautiful and comfortable. Yet apart from the very rich who can afford to experiment no one can do anything about it. Modern furniture is very expensive if one is not satisfied with what one can buy in the arty and crafty streets of Chelsea

and Notting Hill, and it takes the genius of people like Lady Melchett to design a modern dining-room around Greek vases and furnish a house down to the minutest detail to produce the supreme elegance of Mulberry House – undoubtedly the best of its kind in London.

CHAPTER II

POLITICS IN THE SWIMMING-BATH

AFTER I had slept for twelve hours I decided to go for a swim. It was my first for five days and I felt its effects very badly. I am a fairly regular though not very accomplished swimmer. Three or four times a week I swim about a quarter of a mile with quite surprising speed, but in a style which leaves authorities of the crawl with an anxious sympathy for me. I was so successful in teaching myself to swim that even the united and untiring efforts of half a dozen of my regular swimming companions in London could never correct my style. This is quite unique. I swim like a butterfly, which may be an original way of swimming, but neither economical nor attractive. I hold my head in a curious position, as if I were a star-gazer, and the movement of my legs produce an effect as if I were drowning. I am so fond of swimming that the very first inquiry I make in a strange town usually concerns the whereabouts of the swimming-baths. It is from these baths that I usually get my first impressions of any foreign town.

In Paris they are few and forbidding : hence my frequent bad moods over there. In Berlin I used to go to a grand establishment in the *Gartengasse*, a municipal swimming-bath. It is huge, all marble, light-green tiles, chromium and glass. With its hundreds of

young German boys and girls and a few philosophic-looking old men, it gives the impression of a Greek Gymnasium in the heyday of Athens.

It has a replica in London – the Metropolitan Public Bath in Marshall Street, a few streets behind that other replica of the old East India House, better known as Liberty's. But just as the modern version of East India House would fill Charles Lamb with pious regret for the 'old familiar face', the Metropolitan Bath compared with the one in Berlin looks like a shy, poor relation. It certainly does not resemble a Greek Gymnasium. (One day there a young girl ran into me panting and lipping: 'I'm looking for six teeth on a plate,' a sentence you could not have heard even in the worst days of Athens.) Looking at it from inside I am the more convinced that the English, unlike the Germans, are not able to express National Grandeur when it comes to the building of a swimming-bath.

In Budapest there is quite an *embarras de choix* for swimmers. After all, the Hungarian capital rather prides itself on being a *Ville d'Eau*, a Spa on a huge scale, and printed literature is showered on the visitor.

It was a hot day, so I had the choice of going to the open-air pool at the St. Margit Island, the one of the *Cácsszárfürdő* owned by a religious order, to that bogus Renaissance Palazzo at the Town Park, or the St. Gellért.

I chose the last, though I knew it would offer little by way of exercise. It is an open-air bath with light-blue tiles and artificial waves. It is small, smart and cosmopolitan. It is definitely intended for the foreign tourist and it always smells of a curious mix-

ture of disinfectants and those brisk, tart, and expensive French scents which – as if to demonstrate that we live in a mechanical age – are no longer labelled by names but by numbers like symphonies and convicts.

At the St. Gellért physical exercise is only an excuse for social intercourse and to the showing-off the latest creations in bathing-suits. It has about as much to do with swimming as the Private View of the Royal Academy with painting and sculpture. But I knew I would be able to swim if I went early enough, and afterwards I could sunbathe and look for a few of my friends. I did both. I hardly finished with the first when I came across a young man: a sort of second cousin of mine – twice removed – who after a short hullo unfolded an important domestic problem, just as if he was continuing a conversation begun half an hour ago.

‘I hope you can help us to find a housekeeper,’ he said with utter despair in his voice.

‘But look here, I arrived last night from London, how should I be able to provide you with housekeepers,’ I wanted to say. But my curiosity was stronger.

I said: ‘But what has happened to Mignon? Your mother loved her so much. I thought they were inseparable.’

My second-cousin-twice-removed sighed:

‘Oh, you don’t know what has happened to us, and to Mignon. . . . By the way, you must not mention her name any more to Mummy as she will have a fit.’

After this he told me the story of Mignon. But I must first give a short ‘historical outline’.

Years before the War, Mignon, aged twenty-eight, was my second cousin’s grandfather’s secretary. When

the old gentleman lost his wife, he married Mignon. True to her name, in those days she looked like a sweet little butterfly and not a huge grey moth as she looks now.

Twenty years after the old gentleman's death, Mignon's circumstances became reduced, and the family took pity on her. In fact it was Mignon's stepdaughter, a woman ten years her senior, who took her to her house and engaged her as a sort of poor-relation-housekeeper. So Mignon, no longer the butterfly, took up her duties in her stepdaughter's house and proved herself an excellent companion and a blessing for the children, who adored her. Thus Mignon lived with her own stepdaughter, in the most perfect peace, beloved by all, and when I last saw them together, I thought nothing but death would separate them.

One day, however, something dreadful happened. Mignon was away on holiday at some small watering-place (it came out she was in the company of an elderly colonel), and her stepson-in-law went to his favourite café to meet a few of his friends. Here he accidentally dropped a handkerchief or something and bent to pick it up thus catching a glimpse of the under side of the large marble top of the café table. On it he saw engraved a weeping willow and some faint Gothic lettering. He looked at it more closely and found out that it was his own father-in-law's tombstone, reversed and turned into the top of a café table.

He made inquiries and it came out that Mignon, sweet, affectionate, but erratic Mignon, guilty Mignon, passionate Mignon, had committed the sacrilege of selling the beautiful marble monument of her late

husband to a second-hand dealer and had had an inexpensive iron cross put up to serve his memory. This was, however, not all. On the money thus raised, Mignon, the lost woman, had her hair marcelled and permanently waved, bought a new bathing-dress, smart beach sandals and with these went away with a gouty colonel to the above-mentioned watering-place, where she conquered him so completely that he married her a few days later.

The stepdaughter was naturally scandalised. She went to see Mignon in her new home and called her to account. The stepmother pleaded with her sweet smile: 'I am sure Sigismund would not have minded. He often told me I should follow my heart after his death, and what could I do, when my heart called? ...'

Regarding the tombstone, she replied that if it belonged to anyone, it was to her, the widow. In his will her husband left her everything movable and immovable, and of these the tombstone was the only thing of value. The stepdaughter, however, was by no means satisfied. She called Mignon a whore, and with some faint analogy, a hyena, and threatened her with an action. This latter plan, however, she dropped after her husband told her that in the eyes of the law Mignon had been the rightful owner of the tombstone, and the only result the lawsuit could have would be to make them completely ridiculous. So all that could be done was to ask the owner of the café to have the inscription on the reverse side of the table-top erased.

.
Then I came across another friend – a politician

and a well-known sportsman in his time. He was full of the Hungarian victory at the Berlin Olympic Games. He was enthusiastic and in this respect not at all different from everybody else I met during the first days after my arrival in Budapest. The town was burning with Olympic fever, as an English friend of mine put it. Hungary in those days was extremely Olympic conscious. People literally did not talk about anything else. The town was beflagged and be-ribboned and as jubilant as if it was celebrating a coronation or a great national feast like Victorious Peace. Hungarian papers gave such prominence to the various articles of news from Berlin and published so many photographs about the events, that an Englishman, had he been able to read Hungarian, would have noted with some misgivings that Hungarian papers in those days devoted more space to sporting events than did his own papers.

Two-thirds of the average paper was taken up by Olympic Games. They had the most supreme news-value. Hungarian papers even forgot to quarrel with each other. The attitude of the country was that of an English Saturday afternoon during an important sporting event.

'Well, England is naturally taking an enormous interest in the events of Berlin now,' my friend stated rather than asked.

'Not enormous,' I said. 'It is naturally *news* in England, but there is nothing compared with the attitude over here.'

'Oh, come, come,' he said, 'you don't mean to say that England takes less interest in sports than we do.'

'Well, yes and no. She certainly takes less interest

in the Olympiade, as such, than Hungary seems to do. You must not forget that the English in sports have passed their – let us say – “Romantic Period”. Sports, as such, are less of a novelty for them than they are for Hungary, because they took to them much earlier, consequently, sports are more universal in England than in Hungary.’

He smiled.

‘So you mean to say that Hungary is not a sporting nation?’

‘I would not say that, I would say that she is in the process of becoming one. I shall explain what I mean. . . . Don’t forget that sports, as such, are a by-product of civilisation – of an industrial civilisation. They are a necessity as well as a pleasure. Why does a business man or anybody who works with his brain play tennis or golf after he has sat at his desk most of the day? Because he needs bodily exercise. Why doesn’t the average peasant, the farmer, the agricultural labourer go in for sport? Because he does not need it. Well, Hungary is an agricultural country. Fifty to sixty per cent of her total population are peasants. Now, just look at the sporting nations; their peasantry is negligible. Only seven per cent of England’s total population is engaged on the land. . . .

‘Hungary has taken to sports later than England, for example,’ I continued, ‘because her industrial civilisation is of later date. That is why I said that she is just becoming a sporting nation. And this implies a good deal. In England a good many men and women go on playing games as long as they are capable of it. In Hungary that is still an exception. Also in England amateur games to a very large extent are played for

their own sake, for the love of the game and not because it may offer social rewards or fame. In short, in Hungary, sports are less of an aim in itself than in England.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, to put it bluntly, sports in Hungary are more or less "record breaking"; the aim is a great achievement, sport with an ambition behind it. That's what I call the "Romantic Period".'

The politician-sportsman nodded, then said:

'But still, you must understand that sports are excellent propaganda for us Hungarians. Every sporting record is given world-wide publicity. . . .'

'Yes, certainly,' I replied. 'I fully understand that, and I know that sports in Hungary are in the service of the country's foreign propaganda, but I am afraid its value is a little overrated in Budapest. You must not think the world will make such a great fuss of a Hungarian victory in fencing, or wrestling, or water-polo, as all that.'

'Yes,' he cried, 'but you cannot deny that the fact of Hungary being third among all nations of the world in Berlin is a great achievement. After all we are preceded only by Germany and America. The first is a country of seventy millions, the other almost a continent in itself with a hundred and twenty millions. We are a nation of nine millions. . . .'

'Of course not. Hungary is a small and poor country and even supposing that her athletes had some luck in winning, it was a miraculous achievement to gain fifteen victories. But you must not imagine that England is a decaying, played-out country, because she was seventh or wherever she finished. This only

means that the English are not interested in record breaking. They don't need to call the attention of the world to themselves because that attention is already called. They don't need any propaganda. At the same time I must say the Hungarian government is doing something for a very noble and well deserved cause, when instead of ministerial handshakes or gold medals or honourable mentions, or orders, it comes to the help of the needy victors. It must be a dreadful feeling for a Hungarian athlete to come home after the jubilation, after the victory, after the feeling of triumph, to realise that he is a clerk out of a job, an unemployed mechanic, who after the show is over can go away in rags to look for work. The government deserves all praise for not forgetting about practical problems as well. I hear that one of the champions is being employed as a clerk at the post office ; the other, who is an unemployed mechanic, is given a job at a State subsidised engineering works. That, I think, is very touching.'

'Well, the government is only doing its duty. It would be a dreadful shame on us if it did not do its little bit.'

'And, of course, I must say that the reception of the victors was impressive. I hear that his village is naming a street after Harangy, the boxing champion, and that another village is unveiling a statue to the swimming champion. . . . Just as in ancient Greece.'

'Oh, now you are being sarcastic. You lived too long in England, I suppose - But now may I tell you something, my lad, which you might have overlooked. You might make fun of our attitude, of our response, you might make brilliant remarks about our

frantic state, you might say we are off our heads, you might go back to your beloved England and tell your beloved English friends about the "Mad Foreigner". You may say we are exaggerating, that we are emotional, that we are Oriental, and you may say anything you like and you will be wrong. This "Olympic Fever" you see around you in Budapest, all these flags, and the Press and the wireless going mad can only be understood by those who know of the terrible tragedy that befell us after the War. We were sentenced to death by the Peace Treaties and in the last twenty years we would have committed suicide, or would have gone completely off our heads if, from time to time, we had not received a sign, a promise, a reminder which has restored at least a bit of our self-confidence, which gave us assurance that we have a right to live. . . .

'You were too young in 1920 when we as a nation had fallen from the top to the bottom and felt that there was no way out, no English "muddling through"; we felt we should never be able to stand up again. So now if you see this gigantic jubilee, this tumult and shouting, it is not only an expression of our national pride, but it means that we are yearning to get up again and also that we have just discovered that we have the strength to get up. The Olympiade has given us back our faith in ourselves. . . . That is why we are so happy, so mad with joy. . . . It is the first triumphant cry of the man who thought he would remain a cripple all his life and discovered he could walk again.'

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I give my friend's view to the full, and I fully agree with what he said. It explains much about the

general Hungarian attitude towards the new conditions under which the country is living. I shall, however, refrain from saying anything about the problem of the revision of the so-called Peace Treaty of Trianon. This is an extremely complex, delicate and difficult problem, which could only be approached by knowledge and experience and never by enthusiasm and zeal. On this problem there are a good many authorities in England and Hungary – competent authorities – and there is no book on post-War Hungary in which this problem has not been intelligently or stupidly treated. The authors, for the most part, maintain that one could not write a book on Hungary without touching this problem. I venture to challenge this statement.

CHAPTER III

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY

I MUST say that I have never been able to experience those supreme pleasures connected with early rising with which Coleridge and his generation of poets made us familiar. Yet I had to get up at the impossible hour of half-past five in the morning, and even then I had to hurry, as after breakfast I was to climb the hundred and four steps of the Fortress of Buda in order to take my seat in a window of the Hungarian Treasury.

It was August 20th and St. Stephen's Day in Hungary – the greatest annual national feast, with a unique procession in the Fortress. Like Londoners who spend a life-time without ever seeing the Lord Mayor's Show, I had heard a good deal about St. Stephen's Day, but I had never actually seen the festivities during the seven years I had lived in Budapest.

St. Stephen, as I assume is well known, was the first king of Hungary, in the beginning of the eleventh century. A truly great figure of an age of which we know little, and also a tragic figure. I wish I knew more about this remarkable statesman and leader of the church instead of those little bits of historical gossip I learnt at school, as there are fine studies of his life and work written according to modern and pragmatical historical methods. But there is no trick, no

device, no Lytton Strachey brilliance which could make eleventh-century history palatable to me. That particular period of history leaves me absolutely cold and so I can merely repeat what, in Hungary, is regarded as part of one's general knowledge.

He made Hungarians Christians, and with this he made them Europeans. As a tribute to his missionary work the Pope sent him a crown, which now, after nine hundred years, still remains the official crown of Hungary and has quite a unique constitutional significance. These facts have already been mentioned in many an English book about Hungary and I repeat them merely because this book comes out in the Coronation year and the difference between the Crown of England and that of Hungary is very important. In England, just as in other kingdoms, the king's crown is merely a jewel. No matter how lovely the English State Crown is with its lilies and splendid workmanship, it has little constitutional importance. King Edward VIII became king at the moment of his father's death and George VI at the moment of his brother's abdication, regardless of the imposing act of the coronation, and furthermore could be crowned with any crown in Westminster Abbey. In fact, it was quite customary in England to have a new crown made for each monarch. In Hungary, according to Constitution, not only is the king obliged to have himself crowned, but during the ceremony must use the so-called 'Holy Crown' of St. Stephen. This Constitutional point has always been obeyed, except in the case of Joseph II, that brilliant and most unfortunate Habsburg, who regarded himself as too 'illuminated' and had corresponded too much with Voltaire to obey

such traditional nonsense. The country, very unwillingly, had accepted his rule for ten years, but always referred to him as the 'King With the Hat'.

Besides the crown, the spirit, and the institutions, Stephen left behind a very tangible heritage: a little shrivelled right hand, a tiny fist with its mummified fingers, found years after his death in his coffin, in perfect condition. The rest of the body became dust, but the right hand remained there as a silent message for posterity. At the court of examination held in Rome for Stephen's canonisation this curious find was one of the premises in his favour.

It is a lovely story and has all the perfection of material for a magnificent religious legend. It was the symbolic significance of the hand – and furthermore a right hand – which was part of the miracle. Let us imagine for example – without the slightest intention of poking cheap fun at such a deeply revered national tradition – what would have been the case if the pious monks who opened the grave had found another, less familiar, less exposed and less significant part of the human body. Or supposing they had found the left hand instead of the right one. It would still have been a miracle, but its universal appeal could not have been so intense. Not even if they had found his heart intact (an even more miraculous phenomenon from a biological point of view). The hand, the right hand, is the most perfectly artistic symbol connected with an active man – a great architect of state.

The hand, 'The Holy Right' as it is called, is preserved now in a gilt case, in the shape of a Gothic cathedral and is carried in the procession on August 20th, which is a national holiday. The feast is an

ecclesiastical one and is arranged according to the Roman Catholic ritual with a procession from the Royal Castle to the Coronation Church; but the whole country takes part in it, regardless of religion. Stephen was not a Roman Catholic, as in the eleventh century there were no Roman Catholics, only Christians and non-Christians.

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All the roads to the Fortress were closed at daybreak by the police and I had to show my ticket to at least six policemen before I could reach the neo-Gothic palace of the Treasury.

In spite of the early hour there was an amazing number of people in the streets. On the side of the street leading up to the Coronation Church various tourist agencies had raised rows of seats for spectators. Mostly foreigners. I saw a charabanc load of American ladies running towards the seats with relish. Englishmen took their seats with the expression they take with them to Ascot, when they cannot go to the Royal Enclosure, yet make up their minds to have a good time in spite of it.

Tourist traffic has given a new lease of life to well-established old feasts, which in their countries of origin otherwise maintain a quiet shyness of publicity. This is a modern note. In these days it seems anything is enough excuse for travelling agencies to organise personally conducted tours around it. I really cannot understand why brilliant American tourist agencies did not issue posters last summer with the slogan, 'Come to Spain and See the Revolution.' We might expect a great development in this respect in the near future.

I shall return later to the amazingly clever reproductions of the Hungarian past around the Coronation Church, and now I shall say nothing further about the Treasury building beyond the fact that it looks more of an early *Chateau de la Loire*, than its extremely realistic functions should suggest. The inside of the building is thoroughly modern, of the modernity of 1910. I was led through various corridors and up stone stairs covered with red carpets till I reached the room where a window was allotted to me. It was rather high. The building of the Hungarian Treasury is at least ten times as large as that of its rich relation in Whitehall, to which phenomenon I shall also return in a chapter in which I intend to give reasons for this apparent megalomania of public buildings in Hungary.

The view from the window was good. I could see the meandering old worldly high street of the Fortress district to where the huge dome of the Hungarian War Office obliterated the view of the Royal Palace behind it.

Under us was the baroque memorial of the Holy Trinity. When I saw it last time it was in a very bad condition, its stucco decorations crumbling; since then it has been repaired. It is about the size of an English market cross, only it has a constitutional importance, as during the coronation the king takes the oath standing on its steps.

There were few awnings and still fewer national flags in the houses, the feast of St. Stephen and the procession still has the intimate, provincial air of a family gathering. That I like very much. I am glad the procession is in the very early hours and that it takes

place through the narrow thoroughfares of the Fortress where they cannot have more than a certain number of spectators, and thus don't allow it to be degraded into a personally conducted spectacle.

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There were cars arriving at the Coronation Church bringing invited guests who for the occasion had to wear the Hungarian Gala Dress, military uniform or tails. Yes, tails, with a white tie and a black waistcoat, that ridiculous attire for any occasion except the ball-room, which still remains the Gala Dress of the Continent. Up to the last twenty years people still wore it at weddings in the morning, till the smart set of Hungary introduced the sensible morning coat from England. In France where people are more conservative in this respect I saw an eminent medical specialist, complete with heavy black beard and *Légion d'Honneur* in his buttonhole, read a paper on appendicitis to the assembly of an international medical congress, at eleven in the morning – in tails.

There were quite a few people wearing the National Gala Dress, which remains, it seems, one of the very few medieval native dresses surviving on the Continent. In England their number is still many. There is the Peer's Robe in particular. The Hungarian Gala Dress is reminiscent of the parade uniform of all hussar officers all over the world. Hungarians are rather proud of the fact that cavalry soldiers of the whole of Europe came to adapt their old native uniform. The word 'hussar' is of Hungarian origin and must be one of the very few Hungarian words in the English vocabulary. In its country of origin it is spelt *huszár* and probably comes from the word *husz*

meaning twenty. The old hussars of Hungary were cavalry units of twenty.

Over the tunics, which are of coloured brocade, a mantle is worn hanging over the left shoulder. It is short and is of coloured velvet with embroideries in the form of lovely old Hungarian motives and is hemmed with fur. This mantle is called *Attila*, which only shows that the habit of calling dress after the famous is not a particularly English fashion. England has its 'mackintosh', its 'raglan', its 'havelock', and Hungary has its *Attila* and forty years ago called sponge bag trousers after an old baron, a famous beau by the name of Podmaniczky.

The dress is completed by wine-red breeches and high boots with simple gold braiding at the top. The shape and cut of the dress is uniform, but individual taste and tradition is shown by colour of the tunics and the mantle and by the workmanship of the wide and heavy gold chain around the neck with which the mantle is kept in position. These usually differ in workmanship, in age, and in the use of semi-precious stones. The cap, too, is different. It is usually of velvet with egret feathers in front.

The dress, of course, is very heavy and I remember friends of mine sweating at weddings under it, casting envious glances at my more sober morning coat.

This Gala Dress is worn on various occasions. For the opening of Parliament, for aristocratic weddings, for installations of high officials. Cabinet ministers also wear it when they take the oath, but I believe they go in morning coat when they tender their resignation.

A hundred years ago it was quite customary to wear

it during the session of the National Diet, then it was gradually regarded as too heavy and expensive to keep up.

This national Gala Dress, by the way, is called *Diszmagyar* (in Hungarian *Disz* means gala). I was glad to note that neither in the bearing nor in the movements of the guests arriving, was there the tiniest suggestion of Hollywood.

It must be admitted that it is difficult to wear a historical dress, if not exactly with dignity, at least in keeping with its unusual forms and colour. Since the eighteenth century men's wear became what is called sober and functional. Up to that time well-to-do people of both sexes were very much alike in splendour. It is no wonder that man has lost touch with costumes; they cannot always wear them on the stage and Hollywood men in historical dress usually look like Wall Street dressed up for a fancy-dress party.

It is also the official Gala Dress of Hungarian diplomats – and they are thus the only European members of the Diplomatic Corps who at functions don't wear the Cosmopolitan embroidered tails with the three-cornered and plumed hat. Hungarian diplomats, however, are not allowed to wear any colour except black – as a protest against the Peace Treaty of Trianon.

I don't know if Hungarians have quite so much of native dignity as they are usually credited with by those who like to see ways they themselves cannot practise; but wearing historical uniforms is still a living tradition in Hungary. It is in the blood.

The church bells began to ring and from the distance appeared large, coloured ecclesiastical flags, which seemed to float over the crowd. The procession came

extremely slowly, the music from the band was quiet and subdued – an old Hungarian hymn to St. Stephen, instead of the usual opening bars of Beethoven's *Sank Stephan*. The procession from the distance looked funereal.

Nuns came at the head in six different kinds of uniform. After the military band, there came a procession of priests. A stocky young fellow carried a huge golden cross.

Wearing the admiral's blue gala uniform and carrying his three-cornered hat, came the Regent, a Protestant, bowing right and left to the greetings of the public. After him members of the cabinet in the Gala Dress around the two or three Hungarian Habsburg Archdukes.

Then came the relic carried by priests in its gold and glass case, surrounded by about a dozen guardsmen in the most picturesque uniform on earth.

Next came the Primate of Hungary, holding his cardinal's hat in his hand, his long purple cloak carried by a page. Then more priests and more soldiers, and a group of peasants in carefully selected and genuine native dresses. That was all. The whole procession did not last more than four minutes. A similar event in England would be more theatrical, more colourful, more deliberate, more carefully rehearsed, more of a show. The procession of St. Stephen is, however, not poor in comparison. It is only on a much smaller scale. And this is what it should be. After all it is not a revue.

The following day I saw letters to various editors mildly complaining that the public of the hired seats was seen eating sandwiches just at the moment the

procession reached them. The tourist organisations were censored for letting people eat in public. Would the correspondents be relieved if I should inform them that during King George V's coronation an elderly peer or two kept various foodstuffs inside their coronets and did exactly the same, though not in the supreme moment. Witness to this is Miss Sackville-West in *The Edwardians*. I am sure King George V would not have minded had he known it, but St. Stephen was a great stickler for etiquette.

CHAPTER IV

BUDAPEST — A REVIEW

THE name 'Budapest' is an abstraction, it is purely a geographical and administrative term, meaning the Hungarian capital and a well-advertised holiday resort. In reality it does not exist. There is only the right side of the Danube called Buda and the left called Pest.

The Danube between the two towns is about a quarter to half a mile in width, but the gulf which separates the spirit of the two banks is an enormous one. So great that it cannot be measured in terms of long distance, but in the more suitable terms of time. The difference between the two banks is about seven hundred years. Buda is nine hundred years old — possibly more; Pest at most is two hundred.

In the geographical centre of Budapest there is an old-world bridge spanning the river. It is perhaps more lovely than useful, being narrow and not very suitable for modern traffic. Its two arches made of noble, old stone are reminiscent in line of the *Arc de Triomphe*, and it is like an early nineteenth-century mezzotint come to life with its wonderful proportions of light and shade. It also looks extremely English. The man who built it was an English engineer, Adam Clark, the same man who built Marlow Bridge across the Thames. His name is comparatively unknown

in his country of origin; but in Buda there is a sweet old-world square called after him and Clark's name always appears, if not on the main pages, at least in the footnotes of the most interesting chapters of modern Hungarian history.

The bridge is called *Lánchíd* — a bridge supported by chains — and it is a symbol of many things.

Adam Clark was invited to Hungary by Count Széchenyi, the genius behind Budapest and modern Hungary, to connect Buda with Pest and thus bring about a town of the two more or less separate parts.

The magnificent figure of 'The Greatest Hungarian', as even in his lifetime he was called, would make a wonderful subject for an English biography, all the more so as Széchenyi was influenced by England when he began to reform his country.

Yet, save a few aristocratic families, whose grandfathers had entertained him in their country houses, Széchenyi's name now is only known in England through the fact that a remote kinsman of his was for a time quite recently Hungarian minister in London.

This is mainly because of the more picturesque figure and glamorous personality of Kossuth. The great rival leader of the Hungarian idea, the champion of liberty, became the best known Hungarian name for Englishmen for two generations. Taking refuge in England after the fiasco of the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848-9, he was received there with the same enthusiasm that had been accorded to Garibaldi a few years earlier. Palmerston made friends with him against, or perhaps in spite of, the will of Queen Victoria, and for quite a long time England regarded him as a 'hero'. His landing at

Southampton was a very popular event. Looking at issues of the *Illustrated London News* of the fifties, one is astounded at the extent of England's excitement over his arrival. In one of these prints top-hatted and heavily-bearded Englishmen embrace him and Englishwomen are seen kissing his hands.

History tells us that he made a public speech in London which resulted in the resignation of one of the ministers in the Palmerston cabinet; and long after he left England for the better climate of Italy, where he died at the extreme old age of ninety-two. I am certain that to this day every educated Englishman over fifty knows Kossuth's name. Yet nobody knows Széchenyi's. For England he was only a young aristocratic visitor who went to see his social equals, rode and hunted, fell in love with a lady and was refused. He did his great work after he left England. This great man, on the borderline of madness and genius, is only known to those few who are interested in general European history of the nineteenth century.

It was Széchenyi who made Budapest what it is to-day. Connected by Clark's bridge, early in the fifties, Buda and Pest became one, and the capital of Hungary. From this it is obvious that Budapest has not a long history and that the two towns still retain their separate existences.

As a capital the two towns first emerged into one towards the end of the eighteenth century, when there was a primitive floating bridge between the two banks and it was called Pest-Buda. Then the names were reversed. It became Buda-Pest with a hyphen, and high principled Englishmen christened it '*Buda-Pesth*' obviously reflecting that such a promising little capital

of a long-suffering country cannot start its life under such unhappy auspices as being called pest. (For students I may say that both of these names mean the same thing: an oven for burning lime. Also that Pest is pronounced 'Pesht'.)

The growth of the town was surprisingly quick. At the end of the eighteenth century Pest had 30,000 inhabitants and Buda some 25,000. In fifty years this 55,000 trebled itself, in 1870 it was 300,000, in 1896, when Budapest became the centre of great festivities, commemorating the *Millennium* — the thousandth anniversary of Hungary's foundation — in the presence of the Kaiser, the Prince of Wales and half a dozen other royalty, the number of its inhabitants was already over 600,000. Before the War it was just under a million, and it reached the million mark a few years ago. It is the seventh biggest town of Europe, a fact I must enlarge on, as few people fancy that Budapest is much larger than Rome, Madrid, or any of the Scandinavian capitals.

If the Hungarian has an unspeakable pride in Budapest, which is much stronger than the 'civic pride' of Birmingham and is similar to the ecstasies of all Frenchmen for Paris, he is justified. Budapest is perhaps the greatest work Hungary has ever done, and if we consider in what circumstances, after those terrible wars of independence and series of minor and major national dramas it was brought into being, out of practically nothing, in a country which even in those happy years before the War was a very poor country, it may be said that no other nation could have achieved such a magnificent result.

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Budapest is generally regarded as one of the most beautiful towns of the world. Let us see to what extent this is justified.

Large towns, capitals, can be imposing but are seldom beautiful. They are too man-made, too deliberate, too artificial. London is a delightful city, with a charm of its own, but few people would describe it as beautiful. Large towns, as a rule, lose practically all their contact with nature and for their inhabitants and visitors nature is reduced to the sky and to the changes of the weather – not the seasons. Such towns are best at night.

The beauty of Budapest is manifest at any time of the day. If one sits on the river embankment, one can watch sunset and daybreak. Every hour has its attraction.

Nature's contribution to Budapest is great; in other words it should be said that 'the town was built in a happy position'. The picture of the town from the river is magnificent. It has often been described in the English language by authors who had more rapture, enthusiasm and zeal than a suitable vocabulary. This picture is extremely difficult to describe, because its beauty is over life-size. It is too romantic, it is too magnificent, too much like a perfect theatrical *décor* to be described by any direct method of description. It should be analysed rather and the impressions conveyed in what Henry James called 'the indirect approach'. The adjectives of the direct method, 'magnificent', 'divine', 'wonderful', all seem hackneyed, cheap and out of place.

Built on the banks of a wide river, one side is surmounted by a group of high hills with silhouettes of



PEST



still higher hills in the background. You can see the romantic white rocks of the Gellért Hill, and over it the merciless, Reckitt's blue of the sky; it looks as if nature had imitated art; the art of the nineteenth-century theatrical *décor*.

The Danube forms a curve at Budapest. The curve is very mild, like a modern stylised S. There are two islands, at the entrance and exit. The island on the north is nearer to the town's centre than the one in the south. The former also is a tiny island compared with the latter, which is so big that it has separate towns and villages.

Right and left from the antique contours of the Chain Bridge are four more bridges connecting the two towns. It is very difficult to imagine bridges spanning the width of eight, nine and ten hundred feet being lovely, yet the bridges of Budapest with their brave arches are perfect from the point of view of modern engineering as well as from an aesthetic point of view. One admires them beyond their utility, feeling that even if they served no useful purpose, they ought to be there to complete the picture.

One is dark grey with spread eagles of bronze on its pinnacles. The next one is olive-green leading up to white rocks and forests. The Chain Bridge is weather-beaten greenish-brown like that supreme colour of old City churches, and the fourth, whose centre leads up to the emerald island of St. Margit, is grey and white, like any of the bridges over the Seine, only twice as long.

From the Buda side, the top of the Gellért Hill, or from the romanesque bastion corridors of the *Halászbástya*, a few hundred feet over the river, one sees the

river-bank from the opposite side. Two miles or so of an embankment illuminated by thousands of little lamps like an immense nightly procession of glow-worms. Behind them are church spires low and tall, Gothic, Renaissance, modern, in various colours, and the huge domes of the Parliament building.

From here the Danube looks like tarnished silver and the lamps seem to vibrate through the haze.

If one, however, tries to examine man's contribution to the beauty of Budapest, the result is not so satisfactory. The two parallel embankments are beautifully laid out. After all, nature has pointed the way, and man only had to be careful not to spoil the harmony. Unlike the Thames, the river in Budapest behaved well, did not become sluggish and thus did not compel Hungarians to act as if they were ashamed of her. Budapest is proud of the Danube, London does its best to keep her river out of sight. The embankments on the Essex side are tolerable, but the picture of the Surrey side with its factories, ugly walls and chimneys, and its lack of air, is a depressing sight. London's waterfront, the river which made the English capital what it is, is spoilt for ever by these repulsive constructions.

The embankments of the Danube are two long promenades stretching undisturbed for miles, never built on, never out of sight for a minute. One can walk along either of them the whole length of Budapest. In geographical descriptions one reads that the Hungarian capital is built 'on the two banks of the Danube'. This statement should be taken without any reservations. London is built on the banks of the Thames only in a literal sense, especially if we look



at it from the centre. There London lives in the Essex and Middlesex sides and few of those inhabitants ever cross the bridge except to go to the County Hall (for the renewal of a motor licence) to visit a sick nanny or butler at St. Thomas's Hospital, or to accompany a foreign visitor to Southwark Cathedral (the route being previously looked up on the map).

In Budapest both sides have the same social importance. Buda at present is considered a little smarter to live in than Pest, perhaps because it offers more air than the almost entirely flat Pest side; it is also quieter, and with some imagination one can say that it is in 'the lap of nature'. Yet Pest is much larger; it may not have an historical air, and the elegant proximity of palaces and ministries, but it has the smartest hotels with one exception, the best shops without exception, and all the theatres.

If, however, the Danube, and with it the hills of Buda, are shut out of view by the tall houses of Pest, the foreigner no longer feels he is in Hungary, the coloured hoardings on the walls and the hundred other landmarks of the town will make him conscious he is on the Continent; if he knows more about it, the view will make him conscious that he is in a central European town, but there is little which could tell him he is in Budapest. Beyond the imposing river front, Pest looks very much like any large town of Central Europe: Berlin, Dresden, Prague, Vienna, the streets of Pest have little individuality.

Pest has little past, yet somehow it also lacks youth. Certain parts of it look like mouldy, gimcrack Victorian furniture, neither antique nor yet modern; neither pleasing to the eye nor comfortable. It is a

typical product of the architecture of the eighteenth-seventies – a dreadful period, resembling the worst parts of Berlin. Like the German capital, it was quickly built, but unlike the German capital it is ugly because of its contrast with the fairy tale magnificence of Buda.

It is entirely the work of man. Nature, it seems, has lavished all its gifts on the other side, and man did not seem to make good use of his opportunities. Or perhaps could not. When Budapest was made the capital and was developing at that terrific speed into a metropolis, Hungary was a poor country. It still felt the sad results of the frustrated War of Independence and a series of economic crises.

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At the time Pest was built Hungary was an agricultural country to an even greater extent than she now is. Most of the inhabitants of the quickly-growing new town were recruited from the country and these people, naturally, had no pre-conceived ideas of how a town should be planned and the houses built. They had no tradition to guide them. There was only a great dislike in them for the dust, the mood, the gloom of the country with its essentially primitive state of affairs and its deadly monotony. To be poor in the country – in any country – is to most men less bearable than being poor in a town: a large town in particular. And the country folk who invaded Budapest partly as builders but mostly as tenants were so pleased to be 'house-owners' in the Hungarian capital, to live there, walk in paved streets, ride for a few pennies on the tram, to have electricity or gas in their rooms, to have water coming from the tap, to be sent

bread every morning by the baker instead of making it themselves, in short, to lead an urban existence to which hitherto they were not accustomed, that few cared whether the growth of the town was beautiful and sensible, or whether the house in which they lived had a soul as well as a body.

These facts are written with large letters on practically every street and practically every house in Pest.

Poverty resulted from the fact that Hungarians, just like anyone else on the Continent, had already moved into blocks of flats in the seventies. The private house on the Pest side has gradually become an exception as it has everywhere, in the centre of big towns, London included. Then economy worked out for itself a type of tenement house which later became typical of Central Europe. It has a corridor opening into a small courtyard, and thus most Budapest houses are built in the form of a square U. They are not so austere as the London slums of to-day, which belong to clearance schemes carried out in the eighties; in a sense they are worse because they are pretentious. In Budapest slang they are called 'Rent Barracks', but in looks they resemble highly ornamented prisons.

The open corridors run all round the house over the tiny paved court, story over story with wrought-iron balustrades. The doors of the larger flats open from the landing, the others from the corridor.

The old 'Rent Barracks' of Budapest are better in a way than the new ones. Even if their bathrooms are antiquated, the flats are spacious, rooms numerous, windows and doors very high and not out of proportion. They could always be altered to suit individual requirements. They are also solidly built.

The houses which were, however, built in the twenty years preceding the War, are revolting. There are few rooms to a flat, rooms are small, ceilings low (but still higher than in England) and the rooms themselves, in spite of the large windows, are dark, because the building regulations had allowed the street to be in width half the height of the houses.

All the more attention was given, however, to their façade. Just as if the owner or the architect wished to make good his sins against common sense and comfort or wished to camouflage the misery of the interior by making the visible side of the houses cheaply ostentatious and vulgar as if wishing them to resemble palaces. Palaces, housing the misery of a middle class which to the superficial observer appears to be not yet existing and yet already decaying. Palaces whose façade is made of mortar and cement. On them are domes and spires and turrets and cupolas, balconies and caryatides and misshapen mythological forms, imitation marble and imitation stone and imitation bronze in a lavish array. Some of them call themselves straightaway 'Rent Palaces' – a significant euphemism of perhaps a more revolting, more shattering and filthier lie than the Bijou Residential Flatlets of London or the pretentious misery of the lodging-house behind a dull but respectable Kensington façade.

The result of this almost perversely bad arrangement and almost ridiculous lack of comfort of the majority of the houses of the period is that in October and April – the two Budapest quarters – there is quite a migration all over the town. Lorry after horse-drawn lorry carrying cheap, ugly and pretentious furniture. The whole town seems to move from

its old home into a new one, only to start the whole madness over again the following year. It is reminiscent of something like a tragic game of musical chairs on an ugly tune, whose *leit-motif* is the vicious circle of poverty.

It is therefore such a relief, such a grand escape to see the oasis of a finely-built house in the grey desert of Pest. There are some, perhaps even too numerous to mention, yet the general effect is that of ugliness. Most of the houses are covered with mortar and a particularly revolting colour at that. Pretention again. How much more I prefer the downright rudeness with which the poorer quarters of London seem to shout that they are of discoloured red brick. They look what they are, with their 'don't-care-a-damn' attitude, and with a commendable English frankness they don't want to mislead you.

A glance on the map of the Pest side shows that streets were laid out with a ruler in hand, though that ruler must often have slid. There are two belts of boulevards beginning and ending at the river as well as avenues intersecting them.

The planners of Budapest about a hundred years ago had a glorious chance of laying out a whole town on a more or less virgin territory, beyond those two small districts which are now the nucleus of the Pest side. The opportunity was ill used. And poverty cannot be blamed for everything. It must have been a soulless lack of invention and practical sense coupled with a greed to get the most out of the investment, which had contributed to much ugliness in Pest.

The rule is that streets on the Pest side are very

narrow. This particularly refers to the newly-built parts, as the nucleus of the town is much older, was not deliberately planned and in time naturally grew out of proportion. The accepted standard all over the world, I believe, is that the street should be at least three-quarters as wide as the height of the houses. In side streets of Budapest, however, the width of the street is never more than sixty or perhaps seventy per cent of the accepted width. Sometimes even less. Consequently they look like empty canals and in the first two stories of the houses the occupants must have their lamps lit practically all day.

Behind this ugly crowding is the Town Park. A welcome change again. It is larger than Hyde Park and airy, and beyond it the streets mark the beginning of a still newer Budapest, which has with its more sensible planning, every chance of being a corrective to a bad beginning.

CHAPTER V

PERSONALLY CONDUCTED

A FEW days after my arrival at Budapest I made up my mind to make a tour of the town. A tour not at all reminiscent of those regularly organised by various tourist agencies with charabancs, guides, trumpets, and sandwiches in a box. I wished to make a sort of spiritual tour. Not so much houses and streets and famous landmarks as the 'spirit' behind them.

I started my tour in Buda, as the first three districts of the old ten divisional units of Budapest are the three parts of Buda. They are respectively called Vár, Viziváros, and Óbuda. In English, Fortress, Water-town and Old Buda.

I have already said that the distance between the two banks can only be expressed in terms of time. Buda has a very old history and is full of it. Pest has only a short one and does her best to forget even that, as if she were ashamed of its brevity. Perhaps she is.

It is natural that Buda should be the more conservative, the more provincial of the two, and Pest the more liberal, the more cosmopolitan. Buda is more genuine, more representative of Hungary than Pest.

It has often been said that most European capitals are unrepresentative of their respective countries. That is true as far as Paris and Berlin are concerned,

but it is certainly not true of London. Contrary to popular legend, London still remains one of the least cosmopolitan capitals in the world. England is implicit in London, but Hungary is only implicit in Buda.

Pest – youthful, vital and cynical Pest – could never bring Buda under her influence. She tried it, but the attempt only resulted in spoiling a certain amount of Buda's architecture. Otherwise Buda resisted. The two towns still speak two different languages.

When Buda became 'smart' as a residential quarter, the wealthy man of Pest, buying his house or moving into a flat reflected: 'We shall show Buda.' He, however, never had the chance to show anything to Buda. The town was not interested. Instead, in a few years the newcomer became one of its citizens and acclimatised himself almost completely.

For the typical inhabitant of Buda, crossing the river is still something like a little excursion. He is still a little suspicious 'visiting' Pest. Because it is a 'visit' and nothing else. If he was born in Buda, he will only visit Pest when his business necessitates his going there.

Buda is modest and exhibits a shy reserve in matters of ideas, standards and politics. You can't be 'modern' and 'progressive' there, or at least you must do it extremely quietly. Buda has been laughed at a little by Pest for being mannered and self-conscious, and the town answered with a glance. 'A furtive glance,' as Victorian novelists said.

I took the funiculaire to the Fortress. In my time this journey used to be nothing short of a comic occasion. We used to make jokes about it with our friends

who lived in Buda and who made it every day. It was in the hands of extremely old men, who seemed to have been the survivors of the Hungarian War of Independence or, at least, of the Bosnian War of the eighteen-eighties. Their movements were hesitating and desperately slow. The whole business of getting up to the Fortress seemed like a well-rehearsed yet apparently spontaneous scene in a burlesque, which was rewarded by loud guffaws of appreciation by the public. Some of the pensioners were deaf, others gouty, and all wore large waxed moustaches as part of their uniform. Yet nobody, not even the angry and impatient people of the Pest side ever complained. They somehow fitted the aristocratic atmosphere of the Fortress and looked like old servants in some extremely noble house trying to keep up tradition in spite of everything.

The journey over the precipitous hillside took some thirty seconds, the preparations, on the other hand, occupied the best part of ten minutes. It was true they had to synchronise with the other side of the funiculaire coming down, but even then it was vastly amusing.

First of all you went to the niche (four times as big and as imposing as the box office at Covent Garden) and took your ticket. Then you presented yourself at that curious vehicle, which looked like a cross between three huts joined together and the plaster cast of some prehistoric monster. It had three separate compartments, each housing about eight people. One had to wait till all the twenty-four people embarked. Then one of the elders climbed up coughing and out of breath with an antique iron poker in his hand and

pulled in the doors of each compartment, not without some difficulty, as the doors were rickety. After that he climbed down very slowly, went to a mouthpiece leading to the engine-room below, and grunted 'Kész' (ready). Then, to give his words more emphasis, he produced a toy trumpet from his pocket and blew it. It sounded exactly like the accompaniment of a Punch and Judy show. There was deadly silence for the best part of a minute, finally broken by a mysterious buzz from the depths. Then another minute's complete deadly silence. When suddenly, and without warning, the whole antiquated monster began to move very quickly, then immediately slowed down, while all the time you expected the whole affair would fall down from the slope of the steep hillside. Yet somehow it always escaped falling down. It struggled up, meeting half-way the other vehicle coming downwards, from the upper station.

And to crown its absurdity this romantic caricature is called *Sikló*, which means 'glider'.

Since those days the *Sikló* has gone through a welcome change. It was painted a gaudy yellow, like municipal tramcars, the elders were replaced by a group of younger people, but even these look like Chelsea pensioners in mufti – and the performance is less farcical now.

On emerging from the vehicle I found myself in the large square formed by the eastern façade of the Royal Castle, the War Office, the town house of the Archduke Joseph and the lovely old building of the Prime Ministry.

The Royal Castle has been well described by various guide-books. I only wish to add what they usually

leave out, that no other royal residence in the world has that unique situation crowning a hill with gardens descending to the river. I know that its position is often compared with Windsor or Edinburgh, but neither of those castles is built into the contour of a capital where it is seen no matter which way you approach the town.

The Prime Ministry is a large square building slightly reminiscent of the Athenæum Club, with its Greco-Roman friezes encircling the façade. It is a little lower and I should say about fifty years older. It is also larger than that delightful London landmark built by Decimus Burton, consequently exactly twice as large as Nos. 10 and 11 Downing Street thrown together. It was the town house of the famous Count Móricz Sándor, that dare-devil horseman, who used to drive his four-in-hand up the steep hills of the Fortress. The staircase of the house is imposing. It was ordered by Sándor to enable him to climb up the stairs on horseback. This was not a mere figure of speech, as the Count was often seen dismounting on the first floor.

In the Fortress district there is not one single house which could not offer a similar story, stories, moreover, which happen to be genuine, about their former owners. This is the oldest part of the town and remained more or less intact for the best part of three hundred years. Most of the façades are baroque, a slightly simpler version of Viennese baroque, and painted ochre yellow, and very light shades of pink, green or grey, with front gates large enough to admit a carriage and pair, and with lovely green shutters.

The Fortress always has been an aristocratic quarter

and always will be. The coats of arms on the houses might change, the owners might have more money and fewer ancestors, but in a generation or two it will be forgotten that their patent of nobility was only granted by Francis Joseph.

This is because the Fortress is really in the centre of the town, yet it lies so high that it is completely isolated. Its difficulty of approach will always save it from the modern fate of other haunts of aristocracy, like Berkeley Square, from becoming a quarter for luxury trades.

In certain respects it recalls Whitehall on a hilltop, as it has some four or five ministries and other state departments, but it has not the traffic and the noise of Whitehall. Here you can still have a genuine conception what 'aristocratic quiet' really means. It somehow inspires good manners; those who walk its cobbled stones seem to go on tiptoe, a little awestruck.

I like its evenings in particular, when the old gas-lamps give the discreet and pleasant illumination of the dining-room in an English country mansion. I should like to spend my old age in the Buda Fortress, even to die there, but I should go mad if I were compelled to spend the rest of my young manhood there. In short, I would not like to 'live' there. The Fortress is an escape from the 'vulgarity of the world', that very 'vulgarity' I like so much.

As I passed the building of the Foreign Ministry, I heard the bell being rung in its courtyard. I knew from the old days that it announced the arrival of the Minister to his officials.

Then I was in the Uri Utcza - which means Gentlemen's Street. Quaint old names like this are

typical of Buda and give a sort of index to the town's character. The City of London and Westminster still have a few of these, like Threadneedle Street and Birdcage Walk, but Buda, I think, must be a treasure-house for the collector of odd names, together with Paris (where my particular favourites are *Rue des Quatre Fils du Président Doumergue* and *Rue du Vieux Colombier*). In Buda there is Goose Street, Fortune Street, Ladies Club Street, Spinster Street, Comet Street, Golden Goose Street, Silence Street – to give only those whose old-world charm is not spoilt by translation.

Gentlemen's Street – I never heard of a street corresponding so exactly with its name – took me to the Coronation Church and the Treasury, from one of whose windows I watched the St. Stephen's Procession. Here, air is 'historical' in the fullest sense of the word, yet 'history' is only an artificial effect created in the last fifty years.

The Gothic façade of the Treasury, most of the upper part of the tower of the Coronation Church and the Fisher's Bastion in its entirety, were built in the last forty years. Yet there is not one single mistake about them. They are reproductions of a past, whose genuine relics were devastated in the Turkish wars, leaving Budapest in such desperate poverty for ancient monuments that in the eighties quite a movement started to provide the capital with an architectural past.

These four or five buildings here are not fakes. They were built of first-rate material, by artists who could make an imaginary journey into the Hungarian past and could reproduce from ruins and descriptions the atmosphere of bygone centuries.

Why did they not raise modern buildings if the old ones were devastated? This is difficult to answer, but I think it was most sensible. After all, 'modernity' in 1880 meant the fashionable tendencies of those days, whose buildings now are generally regarded with a sneer. Look at the buildings of the eighteen-eighties all round the world. No wonder the architect mistrusted his own age and went to the past for inspiration. Why did not Sir Charles Barry early in the fifties make a design for the Houses of Parliament more in keeping with the tendencies of the age? It is true that the English fifties were dominated by a conception of neo-Gothic, yet at Westminster there is none of that monstrosity with which that name neo-Gothic is now associated. Just look at northern English town halls built in the period. Should the palace of Westminster be burned down again as it was in 1834, the new house, I am sure, would be more suitable for its purpose and happier in its interior architecture than the present building – yet a traditional Gothic.

The Coronation Church – which is generally known in Budapest as Mátyás Church – must have been in a bad state when Schulek, that genius of an architect, was given the job of restoring it early in the seventies. The church, I believe, is practically the only one in Budapest which can demonstrate Hungarian history from the earliest date to the present day, with a practically unbroken line. The first church was built in the eleventh century, but there is practically nothing left of it, as it was destroyed by the Tartars. After the invasion, King Béla IV – that brilliant and most sympathetic monarch, who had to rebuild a wholly devastated country in the thirteenth century – caused

to be built on the spot a cathedral in the Romanesque style. Then the church was left in peace for a few hundred years. Practically every king of the subsequent reigns added to it, and by the time of Mátyás I – the Renaissance king, who created quite an Italian court in Buda – it became Gothic.

In those years, late in the fifteenth century, the church must have been a fine example of the period's best architecture, as the democratic king was at the same time a *bon viveur* and a fine connoisseur, and engaged the best available Italian workmen to do it. The plan of the present church is more or less identical with the Italian design of the fifteenth century.

Then came the Turkish invasion lasting for two hundred and fifty years, which again devastated the country, ruined practically everything and left nothing but a few 'Turkish' baths at the foot of the Gellért Hill.

The church, however, luckily escaped devastation. The Turks turned it into a Mosque. The interior of course was ruined, but they were too comfortable to touch the exterior. So it remained more or less intact all through the Turkish domination, after which the Habsburg king of Hungary gave it to the Jesuits late in the seventeenth century. The Jesuits, of course, had their own architecture – a kind of simple baroque, universal in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy. They were, however, luckily again too comfortable to ruin the church by transforming it too much. They simply walled in the huge Rose Window on the front, hid the stone lacework of Gothic, pulled bits off the Renaissance tower and whitewashed the whole building. In fact they 'tidied it up'.

It can well be imagined what raptures of joy Schulek had when under the dirty plasterwork and whitewash of that poor country church, he found the magnificent shapes of a royal cathedral. For a time he did nothing but scratch and scratch, blessing the Jesuits for not having made a 'thorough job' of the transformation. His joy was similar to what an inspired person might feel scratching the paint of some dreadful Victorian lead-coating off a Grinling Gibbons staircase.

The 'excavation' finished, he had the remains of the Gothic cathedral in front of him. Then, with a magnificent inspiration, he added a little to the entrance and completed the steeple of the church to a height of 240 feet. The other steeple at the left side of the entrance he left as it was.

Schulek I always think of as a typical figure of Hungarian Renaissance. This, of course, sounds a little ridiculous, as he lived in the second half of the nineteenth century, but the Time Machine he used for his pilgrimage to the past was so perfect that his work never for a moment impresses one now as being spurious – or at best that of a mere epigon, a reproducer. He was a Renaissance mind living in the second half of the nineteenth century.

This is all the more evident if we look at the Halászbástya – the Bastions of the old Fisher's Guild of Buda, that white stone frame, which gives a perfect setting to the church over the hillside.

When he restored the church he had a good deal of the old building to work on, but in the case of the Bastion he only found a few red bricks forming a sort of wall over the hillside. So he had to build the whole Bastion with its cloisters roofed with cross-arched vault-

ing, bordered by ramparts and ending in conical towers. All this he had to do out of his imagination. And the Bastion completes his masterpiece of restoration. Nobody but an expert of the architecture of that period can say that the Bastion was built forty years ago. It is so magnificently simple, medieval, yet so strikingly in keeping with local conditions and atmosphere that Buda has no reason to regret the old Bastion. It looks as it must have looked when 'new' in the sixteenth century.

What enormous discipline of mind that man must have had not to be lured by the latent desire of all artists to give 'themselves'. He did not give 'himself'. He gave the exact mind of a Renaissance architect. The moments during which the final plans were born must have been moments of reincarnation, when the soul of a medieval architect moved into the body of a man living in the nineteenth century.

From the corridors and balconies of the Bastion there is a perfect vista of the two towns. Needless to say, the vista would be lovely however the Bastion had been built. That vantage-point lying so high gives a perfect view : the river, the green island, the bridges, and beyond them a mass of houses that is Pest.

At night when the Bastion is bathed in slightly green floodlighting and the air is full of that curious bluish quality (which I don't admire in Rackham illustrations, but adore in Buda), the Bastion has an atmosphere of that concealed and suppressed eroticism, which one never feels anywhere except in London — the town with the all-pervading atmosphere of unsatisfied desire.

I left the Szent Háromság Square and among tiny

seventeenth-century houses I found my way into the so-called Bastion Promenade, on the other side of the Fortress. So called because on that side there is no bastion, only a long promenade overlooking the valleys and hills of Buda. Officially that promenade is called *Count István Bethlen Promenade*, which fact may be a little shattering for a foreign visitor. Count Bethlen was in office as Prime Minister when the Promenade was called after him, and to this day is still happily alive. European politics will still hear about him.

With this I only wish to point to that curious factor of Budapest life: the cult of personality. It is an unusual feature of Budapest that most of the streets on the Pest side are named after famous men, perhaps even more so than in Paris, though Hungarians share with the French an amusing accuracy in naming streets; they always put surnames and also the title on the board. When they named a street after Petőfi, the greatest Hungarian poet, they carefully named it Sándor Petőfi Street, when after Kossuth, it became Louis Kossuth Street. There is also a Count Eugène Zichy Street.

In England this is rarely done (the only exception I believe is John Carpenter Street in the City); they never say Arthur Duke of Wellington Street, but simply Wellington Street, and even in cases like Pitt Street, where nobody knows after which Pitt, father or son, the street was named.

England otherwise does not know this typical continental feature of the 'Cult of the Personality', and when I wrote in an article for a Hungarian paper that there is no street in London named after Shakespeare,

Disraeli, Darwin, Chamberlain, Turner, Blake, Keats, Gainsborough, and even the 'Cockney' Charles Lamb, a reader wrote to my editor asking him not to let me defame England. With his typical continental respect for the memory of the great he simply could not believe that a nation could still venerate the memory of a great man if it does not name a street after him or erect a statue to him.

Count Bethlen was not alone in being able to walk in a street named after him, as a few years ago Count Apponyi (of the League Assembly) and Mme Blaha the famous actress, were still alive, both of whom were allotted a Square in their life-time. When I asked why it was done in their life-time someone said that Hungary is such a poor country that it could not offer anything else as a tribute to their great work.

Nothing has changed on the *Count Stephen Bethlen Bastion Promenade* since I saw it last. It still has its lovely provincial intimacy and its huge chestnut-trees. There are, as if by tradition, always young students sitting on the benches overlooking the Vérmező, and that wide valley which the south of Buda forms between its numerous and lovely hills.

They sit here in the shade of the chestnut-trees on sunny afternoons poring over their books and looking up whenever a girl passes.

I saw the same lean and nervous looking Roman Catholic priests in their long black cassocks racing up and down the promenade, reading their breviaries as they ran. And I saw the same old women as I left them ten years ago, in dresses and hats one can only see otherwise on Private View Day at Burlington

House, only their eyes are less like birds of prey. An old officer passed, his sword hitting the cobblestones rhythmically at each step, till he became conscious of it and put the hilt under his arm. In short, my re-visiting the Fortress was a glorious 'As You Were'. I would have been very sorry if I had found a changed Buda.

The Vár is as different from the rest of Budapest as if it were fifty miles from it. But it is also different from the rest of Buda. It is immersed in its past, it is living in a curious and most delightful imperfect, a sort of *passé indéfini*. The ideas of the present century only reach it slowly and discreetly pruned. It is charming, old-world and, being slightly provincial, it is a little suspicious.

The Vár is a little backwater of Hungarian history. It lies much higher than any part of the town. No wonder its inhabitants, like all mountain dwellers, have developed a little discreet superiority.

I came down the very steep and narrow stairs which connect the Fortress with the so-called Krisztina Town. This district has the same sweet, provincial atmosphere as the Fortress, but it is not aristocratic, and together with the Fortress, in spite of its silence it escapes that strange deadliness which is such a curious feature of all English cathedral closes.

I met a party of German tourists obviously coming from the hills of Buda. Few capitals live in such a close proximity with nature as Budapest – especially the Buda side. Here one need not struggle through terrible suburbs and more terrible slums to get into the country. From Buda this is a matter of minutes and one is in a glorious woodland of oak, chestnut,

birch and pine. And what pretty names these places have: *The Valley of the Wolves*, *Ilona the Belle*, *The Pearl of Buda*, *Turk's Perish*, *Cool Valley*, *Rustling Wood*. It is true I have rather a mania for local names and an annoying habit of trying to translate them into English and thus squeeze them dry of their native charm.

This close proximity of Budapest to nature often results in strange occurrences in the streets. In the gardens of Buda may be heard the screech of an owl – even a Siberian owl is not a great exception – and those who recognise it don't always run to write a letter to the editor about it. Trippers to the forests near by have often come across frightened and lonely foxes and cubs. Once a young deer was seen, too frightened to run away, in one of the busiest thoroughfares of Buda. And the unfortunate deer was not a fugitive from the Zoo. He came from the surrounding forests.

But the loveliest and most amusing story is that of the wild boar in Szent György Square in the Fortress. Well, wild boars are very scarce in post-War Hungary, which has lost nearly all its big forests. But in spite of this, about six years ago a great sensation was created all over Budapest by the sudden and strange appearance of a well-developed wild boar in, of all places, the small formal garden adjoining the Prime Minister's house. There he was, panting and looking round wildly, and frightened under-secretaries, dropping their eyeglasses, ran amok into the Premier's private rooms to report the case. The Press of course made use of such a splendid opportunity. There were long and exciting reports and long leading articles about this strange visitor. One paper – a staunch

supporter of the government – gave a witty commentary, saying that the boar was probably placed there in secret by the opposition with the idea of frightening Count Bethlen, in the same way as an imaginative American youth tried to do away with a more successful rival of his by smuggling a man-eating shark into the latter's private swimming-pool. The gossip snippets of the opposition papers commented that the boar was really a token of esteem from a loyal supporter of the Premier, who, realising how little time there was left by pressing affairs of state, for Count Bethlen to indulge in his favourite pastime of shooting, had prepared a charming surprise by placing in his garden a splendid wild boar, which the Premier could easily shoot from a window of his palace.

A day after the incident it came out that the animal was seen by various inhabitants of the villages near Buda on its way to the Premier's house. I think this is a good illustration of how near the Hungarian capital is to nature – even if wild boars remain remarkable exceptions in the streets of Buda.

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I crossed the Erzsébet Bridge to go to the fourth district. It is called Belváros, which means Inner Town, in other words City. This was the nucleus of the Pest side. It is still the smallest and incidentally the smartest part of Budapest. It corresponds to Mayfair in many ways. It has the smartest shops and, like Mayfair it 'is not what it was', and is slowly becoming a quarter for shops, smart offices, dressmakers, beauty parlours, milliners, shoemakers, schools for dancing. Residentially, Mayfair is perhaps holding its own a little more. After all, the south side of



PART OF THE HALÁSZBÁSTYA



Mayfair is, so to speak, still intact. Park Street and its tributaries are still innocent of commerce; there is Grosvenor Square and, of course, the Mews. There are no mews in the Belváros of Budapest and, anyhow, Hungarians would not make such a concession to their snobbery, even if there were any. The main street of it is called Váci Utca, which inhabitants of Budapest who have never been to London affect to compare with Old Bond Street. Actually the comparison is not very far-fetched. Váci Utca, like Bond Street, has the smartest shops in Budapest that sell things without which we could easily lead a tolerable existence, but what a dull life it would be, devoid perhaps of colour and certainly of desires and that lovely feeling of material possession.

Váci Utca and its side-streets have the best shoemakers. I don't know whether Hungarian shoes have the fame they deserve; they certainly are excellent.

It might be a little ridiculous to admit after eight years of residence in London that I have not yet found a shoemaker in the capital of a country that leads in sartorial elegance. I do know who the best shoemakers are in London. I think I knew their names even before I could speak English. I am poor, but I am careful of my appearance. As long as I live I shall not be able to get rid of my Hungarian snobbery, that one must be well dressed in order to succeed in life – until one becomes rich and can afford to be neglectful. I believe that the English have more or less the same views on the subject.

I know the products of the best London shoemakers. They are splendid in every way, but their prices are exorbitant to us. I know that the pair of shoes for

which they charge three or four or perhaps five guineas are well worth the price, yet I make it a point to have all my shoes from Budapest. The style is exactly the same as in St. James's. I would not suggest that they are better, the highest praise I can give to Budapest is that they are *equal*. The material is exactly the same as used in London, imported English or imported German leather – the best available on the market. Yet – and here is my point – these Hungarian shoes are thirty to forty per cent cheaper than the price of those in St. James's, in spite of the imported material. The difference is, of course, in the comparative poverty of Hungary; and the very low wages paid to their skilled workmen.

My shoemaker has quite a huge portrait gallery of international celebrities on his walls, many more than a fashionable London hairdresser. Among his customers is Professor Voronoff and among his ex-customers is M. Stavisky.

I also like him for his rhetorical dissertations on footwear. He is so patently enthusiastic on Budapest shoes in general and his own in particular. He gives a dissertation about them with his hand raised and with his face spiritualised, just like M. Léon Daudet singing the praise of French wine with his typical *provençale* fervour; ready to die for them at any moment.

Hungarian leather is also good, but it is not always available in Hungary. It goes abroad; chiefly to London.

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The Váci Utca has another feature to distinguish it clearly and sharply from Bond Street, of which Hungarians seem unaware. It is a fashionable promenade.

Heaven knows why people of Budapest have made this narrow thoroughfare – planned as Old Bond Street in the eighteenth century and patently unsuitable for purposes of strolling, chatting and lounging – a promenade or, as they call it, a *Corso*. Perhaps because it is very central, but I think it is a subconscious snobbery to walk along the street of the smartest shops, with the *arrière pensée* of creating the impression of being busy shopping there.

During summer the *Corso* is transferred a quarter of a mile further north, to the Danube embankment, which nature and men seem to have deliberately planned for 'the most beautiful promenade of the whole world' (the quotation is from a hundred foreign descriptions, including English). It is about a mile long and is fairly wide. It stretches just like the *Promenade des Anglais* in Nice in front of the best hotels, and on the other side is the river with the gorgeous panorama of Buda. One must live some time in Budapest before the feeling of walking on a huge stage with over-life-sized and hundred per cent romantic *décor* wears off.

The promenade at both sides is bordered by rows of chairs, which are always filled at about five in the afternoon. There is music here and the chairs almost blend into those of the cafés, arranged with small tables under canvas awnings. Should these canvases be in vivid colours with stripes, with advertisements of various *apéritifs* and should the waiters be a little dirty and rude in their manners there would be no difference between this scene and a typical street in Paris. Here the awnings are of a sober ochre or light green, no stripes, no advertisements; and Budapest waiters are famous for their manners. They seem to

me like servants employed by some Oriental potentate. I think they must all have taken correspondence courses in thought-reading.

The public on both of these promenades are extremely well dressed. In this respect I am not referring so much to women, as they, with tiny differences, are usually well turned out all over the world in smart places. I am referring to men. At certain hours these two promenades seem like huge unprofessional parades of men's wear. Not only that the men here are well dressed, in good taste and with a sense of harmony, but they also walk like extremely well-paid and well-trained male mannequins. They have a special way of walking up and down these two promenades. Not simple lounging, which would, of course, imply a certain carelessness. No, in these promenades they walk with well-rehearsed movements, as if specially designed to show off their suits. Their steps are even, and they seem to know the exact spot where they will place their feet at the next step. Their tread is also elastic, as if they wanted to demonstrate the 'magnificent flexibility' of the soles of their shoes. How gracefully they balance their stick or umbrella and hold their gloves! No, they could not do better even if they were paid for it. Also, nobody could greet friends or acquaintances in a more beautifully formal manner than these people. In England, people with a sweet clumsiness put their index finger to the brim of their hat, or only incline their heads a little and smile. On the Budapest *Corso* greeting one's friends is a major operation. First they see that there is enough room in the crowded street to carry it out. Then with a movement almost like a slow motion picture they lift

the right hand, grip the brim of the hat with firm and inspired fingers, and move the headgear till it reaches the level of the shoulder. They also might make a tiny bow forward – this is rare – or give a facial expression of deep respect and not say a word. Their faces remain solemn. No one could bestow greetings in a more dignified manner except perhaps nineteenth-century royalty.

The hat is replaced carefully on the head. But since in the *Corso* practically everybody knows everybody and the operation is repeated every two minutes it really is hard work, and friends of mine complain that their hats are soon ruined.

Why are men so well dressed in the Budapest *Corso*, like young courtiers in mufti? And why has the Budapest *Corso* such unique qualities of elegance? I think I can tell you, but please don't think I say so for the effect of the paradox. They are supremely smart because they are very poor; the elegance of the Budapest *Corso* is a direct consequence of poverty.

Men all over the world have vanities, but these vanities vary. Their characteristic quality is, however, that they tend towards exclusiveness. Where people are rich, the smartest always have pursuits of vanity which are not easily accessible to the majority. The rich in England yacht, hunt, have expensive luxury cars, buy villas on the Mediterranean, fill their houses with antique furniture and old masters. The keynote of these vanities is that a great part of the pleasure is derived from the admiration and envy of others.

Since the discovery of machine processes in England,

smartness in clothes is accessible to practically everybody who cares for it. Result: dandies have disappeared. The rich man says to himself: any man can be as well dressed as I am if he cares, that's all right. Then I leave it to him. I shall therefore be slovenly – sitting in my Rolls I can afford to be slovenly when I have a villa in Cannes. That is why there is no successor to Beau Brummel. And that is why Bond Street is not identical with the *Corso* of Budapest.

The typical smart loungers of the last-mentioned place, are comparatively poor people with a fixed salary or pension, or even without it. They have no cars, no villas (not even at the Lake Balaton), they don't hunt foxes in Hungary or wild beasts in Africa; they can't even afford to go abroad. Their only claim to exclusiveness to smartness, is their vanity in clothes. This is why they look like courtiers in mufti. Besides, they have not even got a rich wardrobe. They have three or four suits which were made on deferred terms, from imported English cloth after long deliberations and studies of shop windows. They do their own valeting. (Some young men still put their trousers under their mattress, as in my early youth.) Their ties and hosiery are also English, or extremely good foreign material. They pay exorbitant prices for them, naturally more in most cases than in London, as there is a middleman's profit and heavy customs. So they buy two or three ties in a year and nurse them carefully. Oh, those various tricks young beaux of Hungary play to lengthen the life-time of their hardly acquired clothes.

This 'smartness' in dress is not solely typical of Hungary. I learnt in time that mankind, especially

the white peoples of Europe, are shatteringly alike in mentality, and that if we removed climate, and other conditions of life, the effect of such things as 'inheritance' and 'blood' are tiny and negligible. Have you seen the Cockney porter of Covent Garden market, the office boy, the young English workman in his Sunday best? He is in many instances, of course, a caricature of his betters; he has little class-consciousness, he wears his blue serge, his double-breasted waistcoats, his extremely wide, absolutely horizontal shoulders, his painfully pointed triangular toe-caps, with a feeling of pride, and on Sundays walks along his own promenades with the illusion that he is as good as his betters.

Illusion is the keynote of the loungers' behaviour in the Budapest *Corso*. To a great extent they dress smartly for their own pleasure. This is natural. But Budapest is a curious mixture of provincialism and metropolitanism, everybody knows absolutely everything about everybody. They are not so foolish as to believe that the people who see them on the *Corso* and whom they greet with such studied care believe for a moment that they are superior to what they are. No, but they believe it *themselves*. It is an illusion which must not be shattered as long as they measure the narrow pavements of the Váci Utca or walk on the glorious stage of the Danube embankment. It is a mental holiday. They are only physically present, their mind is away in England, in London, in a London they never have seen, and in a London which never existed, which they have created themselves, a London lovely but as devoid of reality as Mr. Arlen's Berkeley Square, complete with its nightingales.

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The Danube Embankment is a non-stop variety show. Beginning at *apéritif* time in the afternoon it goes on till midnight. Like everything in Budapest it is at once provincial and cosmopolitan. People who were lucky to get a seat can look at what Mr. Maugham calls 'the spectacle of life'. It is a splendid spectacle, its partakers could not do it better if they were paid for it. Hungarian women are perfect exhibitionists; there is no English self-consciousness, no shyness of publicity, no fright. They are also well dressed, even in proportion to their menfolk. They are no better dressed than women in Paris or London, but if we consider with what sacrifices, with what sleepless nights these dresses were conceived we must give them a *prix d'honneur*.

Till nightfall this typical Budapest amusement goes on; it is excellent, and again it is excellent because it was called to life by the inventive resource of the poor. Towards nine the crowd gets thinner. Most people sit and a few walk in front of them. Still fewer walk on the higher pavement beyond the row of seats. This little thoroughfare is curiously deserted at night, and people are always looked at. I like to go there myself because it is less crowded than the rest of the pavements, but my friends asked me to keep to the other side. They told me that this tiny strip after ten o'clock is the preserve of those who are sexually unorthodox and of unsuspecting provincials, foreigners, in short, those who are not familiar with the code-words of the Hungarian language.

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The fifth district is called Lipótváros - Leopold

Town. It is the continuation of the City and is thoroughly built on. It is also a part of Budapest, which can safely belong to Vienna – if the names over the shops were changed into German. For the outward observer walking its streets there is little here which would remind him that he is in Budapest and not in Vienna. Especially if one is in that little inner core of the Leopold Town stretching from the Chain Bridge to the Parliament.

Most of the houses here were built in the forties of last century, consequently they are not in that sad characterless style that came later. They have the same solid modesty as those in Vienna. The architects were the same or, if not, at least trained in the same school. In these houses practically everybody speaks German and most people read the only newspaper of Budapest which is printed in German – the *Pester Lloyd* – a newspaper of terrific respectability published twice a day, highly informative and the only Budapest paper which would correspond to the similar national institutions of the whole of Europe. When we were children we used to think that its editors all worked with little black taffeta caps on their heads, wore elastic-sided boots, gold-rimmed pince-nez and, when nobody was looking took snuff. I would even swear they had cuspidors in the corners of the rooms.

Yet in spite of its respectability, its small circulation and its not exactly blameless German, the paper still has a wide influence over business life in Hungary and remains the only paper of Budapest from which the foreigner who does not know a word of Hungarian, can at least obtain a hint about the meaning of that curious dumb show, the life of Budapest.

The Leopold Town to a certain extent still reflects the attitude of its benevolent maiden aunt – the German paper. It is, on the whole, a well-to-do, prosperous quarter with its accompanying solidity and respectability. It always looks a little askance at the more showy, more flippant, more vital atmosphere of the Teréz and Erzsébet districts. The money was largely made here fifty years ago or more; it was not made easily and it is still preserved.

This district has most of the banks, the bigger business houses, the older of which at some places still have their boards in two languages, Hungarian and German – a relic of the times when business men in Budapest spoke more German than Hungarian.

A few steps off the Suspension Bridge there are those narrow streets reminiscent of empty canals, which the old inhabitants of the Leopold Town (who were in their youth perhaps apprenticed in London, Liverpool or Manchester) affect to call 'City'. The comparison is not far-fetched. This little corner with streets named Idol Street, Eagle Street, Bank Street, Scales Street, Moon Street, Bath Street, have actually some resemblance to 'the glorious square mile'. In the centre there is a huge cathedral whose neighbourhood is as sadly built in as St. Paul's, consequently a good view is not easily obtained. (To see St. Paul's properly one must go to the other side of the river and view it from the waterfront of Southwark.)

Like the City of London, this was originally a residential quarter and is now full of bankers, wholesalers, publishers, etc. It even has the same curious smell and is quite dead and deserted on a Sunday. When I first walked along Cheapside I thought com-

merce and banking must have the same smell all over the world. Its houses are solidly built and, like the City of London, it has some little oddities, the survival of which in the modern world gives such a charm to this otherwise rather drab quarter. In London there are some curious side-streets and little alleys with old trees; in the Budapest City they have a few lovely old fountains in the courtyard, usually classical nudes in the style of which Mr. Shaw said that 'they could not produce even an aphrodisiac effect on the *pruriently* overclothed Victorians'.

The City of Budapest is, however, very small, and it has no lovely old churches with façades black and yellow, and it has no history to speak of, a hundred and fifty years at most. The Cathedral itself, which is named Bazilika, is about sixty years old.

The Szabadság Square, which is pre-War, is quite an oasis after the dead respectability of the City. The Stock Exchange and the Austro-Hungarian (now National) Bank are in this square. How impressive those two buildings are! Built in that architecturally disastrous period the first decade of the present century, they luckily escape being ridiculous, and cut extremely fine figures. When I arrived in London with their pictures in my mind, I was taken aback by the tiny provincial-looking London Stock Exchange and the then one-storied quaint little edifice of the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street. I remember writing an article about them saying that they had no 'presence' and that one ought to go to Budapest to learn how to impress people. This was, of course, a joke. Everybody in the Szabadság Square of Budapest knows about the English characteristic of understatement, and

there is no one in the whole country who would not jump to give those two sumptuous buildings for the tenth of the business done in their two equivalents in London. Both of these buildings are of a smarty yellowish stone, and compared with the houses in the City of London, are almost surgically clean.

The hugeness of these two buildings is typical of all public buildings in Budapest. A foreign visitor looking at them might think Hungary is at least four times as big as England and twice as populous. They all seem to have been built as a *geste* to show the world that we are not the last town in it. Yes, Hungary in the last fifty years has suffered from a great inferiority complex. For the first time in hundreds of years it tasted liberty and knew what it meant to be an independent kingdom. Compared with other countries the result is not quite so ridiculous and unpleasant as it might have been.

It is true that these public buildings were built in the years of the prosperous peace, when Hungary was three times its present size and two and a half times as populous, but even then its Parliament would have been too large and too sumptuous a building. As it is, standing on a huge imposing square and overlooking the river, it is exactly as large as the Houses of Parliament in London, if not larger. The site and some of its architectural construction must have been suggested by Barry's design. The Hungarian Parliament, the building which foreigners know from illustrations of Budapest, is built in neo-Gothic, mixed with other influences. It is the same colour as Westminster, and it achieves a completely authentic appearance, and

Hungarians are perhaps justified in being inordinately proud of it.

The square otherwise is well planned. It is spacious, and now that all the four sides are built in, it is really imposing, with the lovely neo-classical building of the Supreme Court, perhaps the best public building in Budapest. Some misguided critics tried to compare it with the *Palais de Justice* in Brussels. Since many English people have been in Brussels and in that otherwise lovely little capital have seen that monstrous edifice which is much worse than the Albert Memorial put on top of the Albert Hall, I hasten to correct even the slightest suggestion of this disastrous comparison.

The Supreme Court of Budapest, which is known as *Curia Regis* – just like the old English name for the highest court in the country – was, it seems, deliberately planned to be a lovely building. It has a most magnificent marble staircase and an entrance-hall planned obviously with a thought of giving a suitable setting for the laying out of defunct Ministers of Justice and eminent judges. True, Hungarians are masters in the art of laying out their great men.

The building, considering that it was raised in the worst period, is really outstandingly lovely. It serves the purpose of an imposing palace for justice, with its inscription *Justitia est Regnorum Fundamentum*, and with its good statuary. Its large court-rooms give suitable backgrounds for important trials, and make up for the fact that Hungary is one of those very few countries where judges never wear a gown, a wig or a cap, but perform their functions in ordinary clothes and bare headed. But these halls and staircases took

up all the space so thoroughly that the Right Honourable judges now have to work at home, few of them having private rooms.

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The sixth district is called Terézváros – Therese Town – a district more ambiguous than any in Budapest. Its central part is overcrowded, progressive, loud, thoroughly emancipated and ugly. Its outer part on the borders of the Town Park used to be, and to an extent still is, the smarter residential quarter of Budapest. It was the quarter of commercial millionaires, the more successful descendants of those who built Pest. It may be compared with Park Lane, if for nothing else that it is slowly dying out. Smart people now all try to move to Buda.

The Terézváros is similar to the Seventh district, which is called Erzsébetváros – Elizabeth Town. There is a little difference of course. It is still newer; its inhabitants are still more progressive, loud and ‘emancipated’. A typical inhabitant of Pest would know the difference at once. But it is not very interesting. It is less than the difference between Bayswater and Kensington.

I don’t know if it would be fair to suggest that the characteristics of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh districts are that they are almost entirely Jewish, but people in Pest say that this makes all the difference. According to statistical information the percentage of Jews by religion only, is something like seventy per cent here.

The eighth district is Józsefváros – Joseph Town. This is perhaps the most ‘Hungarian’ of the Pest side. It has a romance of its own. I don’t know why it

always reminds me of that little corner of Marylebone minus its Adam houses, where cars seem to go more quietly (as if they felt that their owners were ill), where every house has a dozen little brass name-plates and whose smell of iodoform must be their *leit-motif*. It has most of the clinics and hospitals and there live most of the famous specialists. Hungarian doctors (along with Austrians and Germans) are famous all over the world. I don't know whether the fame is merited. Perhaps it is in proportion to the poverty of the country. I remember a discussion once with an American surgeon in London comparing the Hungarian with the English doctor. He said that the English doctor is admirably trained, yet manages to be just a trifle inhuman. His method is usually to cure the disease and not the patient, consequently taking more interest in the case than in the sufferer. This may be true, but I certainly don't agree with my American friend that the average English doctor is almost furious if the patient is not sick according to the outlined, approved and generally recognised symptoms of the disease. I personally like English doctors with their sweet pompousness and perfect bedside manners. Like most Hungarians I have a blind belief in medical men and medical science and to me Harley Street looks very human.

The Józsefváros is mostly inhabited by the Christian intelligentsia. I shall come to the question of gentiles versus Jews later on. It is a sad district and it has poetry. Not in vain did Ferencz Molnár write of its atmosphere. His book about schoolboys of Pál Street in the nineties has come closer to the Hungarian mind than *Tom Brown's Schooldays* could have ever come to

the minds of English boys; and yet he always makes me doubt him when I see his purely commercial plays flop repeatedly in London, with their overpowering routine and altogether anachronistic atmosphere. But for his schoolboy novel everybody forgives him for anything else he has written.

The other poet who sang the praises of the Józsefváros as a young man, is Dezső Kosztolányi the most important literary man of Hungary.

The Ninth district is called Ferenczváros – Francis Town – poor, bleak and passionate. For a long time it seemed to me not to belong to Budapest at all. It somehow enjoyed a sort of mental extra-territoriality and it took me some time to understand its voice. That was after I had made a thorough ramble through Paris and found the suburbs of Ménilmontant and Belleville with their ugly houses and with their people. ('From under his bowler hat his brilliantined dark locks glitter,' says my friend L. Szabó, the Hungarian essayist, in his admirable little diary of Paris. 'The narrow-shouldered ready-made suit covers an athletic torso; in his mouth the stump of a cigarette. With eyes half shut and mercilessly glittering he stands on the edge of the pavement and quarrels in a husky voice.') Or perhaps I am wrong. The Ferenczváros after all is poor, but its houses are clean and could never be quite so forsaken by God and man as Ménilmontant.

The next districts ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen are a little outside Budapest proper and do not concern us.

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD SCHOOL

I LUNCED by myself in a small restaurant in Buda and afterwards went to revisit the old military cemetery of Viziváros, where I used to go out on summer afternoons to prepare for my examinations. Quiet learning and preparation for examinations in the minds of Hungarian students have for long generations been connected with old disused cemeteries. When a student, my father used to read while walking along the winding roads of the cemetery of Kolozsvár, treading the same footpath which before him was trodden, book in hand, by my grandfathers and great-grandfathers.

Old cemeteries have their poetry. They have a quiet sweetness of their own, they awake a feeling of life over overpowering death more than anything else. They have long lost their contact with awe and tragedy, gloom, morbidity, pain and transience, and are reminiscent of nothing but life.

New cemeteries, of course, are forbidding, especially if they are big and more especially if they are in a Protestant country. Looking at any Berlin or London cemetery with their unhealthy, materialistic gloom hanging over them, lacking all mystery, all poetry, all beauty, just like jerry-built semi-detached villas along new arterial roads, one can quite easily understand

why the Protestant mind has taken so readily to cremation. But even in England an old disused cemetery with its Georgian urns and weeping willows and mossy green marble slabs with Gothic inscriptions can be lovely. Even closed in by high and dirty walls in London they retain a sweet country churchyard air.

The old military cemetery of Viziváros which we used to visit during our school years had the loveliest surroundings imaginable, being laid out on a hilly slope with its lovely baroque memorials to eighteenth-century colonels and marshals and simple marble and wrought-iron crosses for sergeant-majors. The trees which completely hid the mausoleums, as big as a decent sized lodge attached to a large English country house, were wild, uncouth, and had not been cut for fifty years. The picture presenting itself was like an early nineteenth-century mezzotint of the Romantic School, only more romantic and uncouth and wild than any painter's or etcher's imagination could have dared to conceive. And this cemetery was within twenty minutes from the centre of Buda. This most perfect escape into not only 'nature' but an exotic primeval forest is too fantastic to be described. One had to see it to believe it.

It was almost as if I read the obituary notice of one I loved dearly to see in Hungarian papers that the Budapest town council had decided to doom all the old cemeteries of Buda, to give notice to the dead, and to make order among the trees with axes and saws.

The roads in these cemeteries were grown in with dense, luxuriant foliage, green with the emerald

dampness of English grass in early summer, and overpowering rusty crosses and marble slabs, whose colour was that magnificent dirty yellow which ranks Apsley House, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and the Reform Club among my favourite London landmarks. These roads, almost lost beneath the thick foliage, were familiar places of rendezvous for the youth of Buda. They walked among the graves arm in arm, then sat down on a derelict and rotten bench and compared the problems of their private lives. Hatless, absent-minded, book in hand, walked solitary students, murmuring, repeating, memorising German or Latin or Hungarian text and verse. Dates of kings' births and deaths, of treaties and battles, the law of tort, the maxims of the wise Emperor Justinian, the claims of the child still in its mother's womb, the reactions of syphilis to the puncture of the spine, the inflammations of the larynx and the poetical philosophy of Percy Bysshe Shelley.

The dead, it seemed, were only an excuse in this garden which was formerly devoted to them. Their bodies had long become particles of earth and made it extremely fertile. Majors became acacias; old colonels beeches, young subalterns dandelions. It was full of the all-pervading aroma of rotten leaves and fresh flowers, and its atmosphere was charged with electricity, with life in its many variations, with desire, with fright and tension of the coming examination and the various madnnesses of puberty.

There were no old men to be seen in those roads, they seemed to be completely the monopoly of youth. Curiously enough, most of the young people I met there during my student years were particularly good-

looking and healthy specimens. With what firm and yet light tread, with what nonchalance, they walked over old graves, arm in arm with their girls, touching their breasts with their arms, as if by accident. These were the days when I first fully understood what the 'Healthy Materialism of Youth' really meant.

I remember May afternoons, when I was tired or bored by swotting and unable to resist the temptation to concentrate on things more interesting than the Battle of Magenta, Tacitus' *Agricola* or the northern tributaries of the Rhine, and we used to read the inscriptions on weather-beaten marble slabs. I knew the grave in which Adam Clark, the bearded English architect of the Suspension Bridge, was buried with his daughter Iphigenia. Then there were the mausoleums to explore. Almost hidden by various creepers and holly and overgrown trees, like the castle in which The Sleeping Beauty waited for her deliverance, stood among others the early nineteenth-century Gothic building of Count Gyulay. The first peep through the keyhole was always a terrible shock to a new sight-seer. In the dim lights in front of the altar you caught sight of two figures standing on the stone-flagged floor turning towards the altar. Then if you did not run away with a scream you discovered that the two figures were life-sized stucco statues, one, I remember, dressed in the uniform of a hussar officer of the Napoleonic wars.

But there were more shocking discoveries than that. One afternoon the keeper's son told us that a few years back they opened a grave at a family's request. They found a huge coffin of elaborate design, supposed to contain the remains of a nineteenth-century

general, and to their horror, after forcing open the lid, they found no remains of a body, only bricks and straw. . . .

The waiter in the restaurant told me that the old cemetery was already evacuated, the trees cut and preparations made for formal gardens to be laid out, so with sad resignation I made my way towards my old school on Márvány Utca.

The Old School. I have lived in England long enough to know about the institution of the English school, its isolated world – an island on an island with its traditions and loyalties and fancies and snobberies. The expression The Old School or My Old School means nothing on the Continent. In Hungary it would be interpreted that the school building itself or the institution was ancient. There is no personal feeling about them.

There was a time – when I was a newcomer in England – that I felt sorry I was not brought up in an English school. In fact, this feeling, this consciousness of having no roots, no tentacles and no background in England, in those unenviable years of a young foreigner concentrating on becoming English and fitting himself into a niche, grew so strong with me that at the age of twenty I joined a London troop of Boy Scouts.

The Hungarian school is not an isolation, not a separate world, a retreat, an escape. The boy is not separated from the benevolent or evil influence of his home. The Hungarian son coming home for his holidays does not feel rather like a stranger, shy in his unaccustomed surroundings. He does not speak a

different language, beyond a little schoolboy slang. There is no attempt by his parents to thwart his strong, wild Hungarian individuality. The schools in Hungary do not concentrate on the training of character only. In some cases they might pretend to do so, but in most cases it is admitted quite openly that they only give a bare outline on which the boy's character should be moulded, otherwise it mainly concerns itself with a strongly humanistic instruction. And this it does well.

The reason why I shall enlarge here on the subject of education in Hungary is because I do not think there is any other Hungarian who, through the force of circumstances, went to so many types of schools in various parts of the country as I did.

The fact that I went to so many different kinds of schools was not, as it might be imagined, because I was such a difficult case that no school could put up with me for more than a year, but because of the personal circumstances of my family.

I was destined to go to a gymnasium – the Hungarian (and German) name for the college or public school preparing for the university. That name in English is synonymous with parallel and horizontal bars, sandbags, punch-balls, and Colonel Blimps trying to get rid of their superfluous dignity. In Central Europe it is devoted to learning. Incidentally the English terminology of derivation is the more correct, as *gumnazo* may mean exercise, but *gumnos* in itself definitely means naked body.

Every Central Europe gym. has eight classes. Their curriculum, text-books and the method of teaching is absolutely uniform all over the country.

They all begin to teach Latin from the first year, German from the third, Geometry from the fourth, Physics from the seventh, and teach Philosophy in the last. They use the same text-books and their pupils know, or at least ought to know, exactly the same things at the respective year. The classes are numbered first, second, third – eighth. One enters the first class after one has finished the prep. school at the age of nine and a half, and leaves the eighth at seventeen and a half or eighteen, usually for the 'varsity.

If one says 'So-and-so's son is in the fifth class of the Gymnasium,' a Hungarian at once knows that the boy in question is about fourteen to fifteen years of age, that masters for the first time in his life don't address him in the second person singular, but in the more formal 'you', and that at present he is encouraged to appreciate the beauties of Ovid and the lighter verse of Heine and Goethe. Such uniformity of system does not exist in the English equivalent, the Public School. There one enters the school and leaves it, one passes exams. and gets educated, and every school has its individuality, its traditions – and its slang. There is no numbering by years, but instead there are forms or 'divisions' with mysterious names like 'shell' and 'remove'. The only class which may give an idea of the boy's age and development is the 'VI Form', which is the same in almost every public school.

Years ago I remember trying to write a comprehensive article on the English school system for a Hungarian paper – and failed. There is no comparison. But let us return to a short survey of my school career.

I was destined to go through the routine of the Gymnasium, enter the University and try to get into the Foreign Office or to become a lecturer at the University.

Half-way – when I passed the exam. at the end of the Fourth class and knew ‘little Latin’ and absolutely no Greek, my father suddenly changed his mind. Or perhaps it was not so sudden. My mother came down to breakfast one morning and said: ‘I could not sleep a wink last night. Your father has been changing his mind about your career all over the room.’ It was 1920 and after the War which Hungary lost. The chances of ever succeeding in a professional career suddenly became rather remote. There came a reaction in Hungary among professional men and civil servants regarding their children’s education. Those who had a little land promptly said ‘back to the land’, and those who had no land to speak of said go in for a practical profession. Practical and realistic professions in those years were, of course, commerce, trade, banking, vocations which our class in Hungary so far had always looked upon as something a little inferior to us. They were left to the Jew, the Greek, the Armenian and the German.

So my father decided to send me to the ‘Commercial School’ at Kolozsvár. That institution is again typical of Hungary. In countries which make their living out of commerce, the boy learns the trade ‘from the bottom’ or ‘at the counter’, starts by licking stamps or, according to the new fashion, goes to a Public School, and after it gets into trade with some pull.

In Hungary the country which still has an almost religious belief in school certificates and diplomas one

'prepares' oneself for a commercial career just as if one made up one's mind to become a divine, in a special school which has four classes, and takes four years to finish. It has more school subjects than any other type of school I ever heard of; it is rather snobbish and very expensive.

In that school, whose first class I entered at the age of fourteen, we learnt more about the theory of commerce than a practical Englishman or American could possibly learn in a life-time. Its masters were righteous and serious-minded scholars who all graduated at universities and were bent on preparing us for the realities of life. In this school preparing to make us future shopkeepers, bankers, etc., humanism hung with its heavy hands, and what one might call 'the reality of life' was carefully kept from us, as if it were a contagious disease. Masters went on talking about the changing world, but their primary consideration exhausted itself by the desire that we should know all about the history of commerce, including the orders of Louis XIV and XV, the policies of Colbert, mercantile laws under the Tudors, the Stuarts, and the Hanovers. We learnt about Jeremy Bentham and Robert Owen and about the theory of Manchester Socialism. We also learnt French; for a year we had some French commercial correspondence – letters asking for a price quotation in a style which in comparison would have made a Chinese Ambassador burn with shame for his rudeness. And also – in order not to forget the principle that we must be Well-Educated-Business-Men – we learnt the tales of Lafontaine and the various fine points of French grammar.

Then we were taught Commercial Geography – sensibly and intelligently. It was then that I learnt the most watertight and intelligent facts about England. Then Physics, purely theoretical and as difficult as if we were being trained to become consulting engineers, and chemistry, which I again liked, as it was well demonstrated. And political economy and commercial law.

Then there were the practical subjects: book-keeping, correspondence and commercial arithmetic; these were taught in such a boring and theoretical manner that I for ever regretted the time I spent over them.

When, at the end of the first year, I left, we came up to Budapest and I was sent to a new school, maintained by the Budapest Chamber of Commerce, the most expensive in Hungary and of extremely high standards. I was there two years. At the end of the second year my father came to the conclusion that the school certificate I would receive would be of little use for a commercial career, so the next year he sent me to yet another school. There I passed the final examination and received the certificate. But instead of letting me enter the commercial world he promptly engaged a tutor to enable me to pass the special examination of the Public School. It was like the return of the Prodigal Son. For five months I worked hard learning Latin again and higher mathematics and Hungarian history and Philosophy. By the end of the year I passed the exam. with honours and the chairman of the examining committee said, commenting on my thesis in Hungarian literature, that he had never seen such a clear and concise state-

ment and strong critical style from a boy of seventeen. And added that he hoped I would take up a literary career. That, I believe, is the only advice I ever took from my elders and betters, and have regretted it ever since.

After that I went to the University.

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I have no less than four old schools to look back upon. Of these four I preferred the fourth and last. I was only there a year, yet looking back this was the one where for the first time I made real friends with masters and boys, and the only one which, in the end, I almost regretted leaving.

The building is in Buda, and in 1910 was the last word in modern school planning. It is surprisingly small, and has such a tiny court or ground for physical exercises that it would cause an English Public School man to faint.

I arrived there every morning at eight, from the beginning of September till the middle of June (the official school year of Hungary) and left at one, after five hours of work to go home to lunch and to prepare the lesson for the next day.

It was early in September and early in the afternoon that I went back to see the school. The trees which were planted there when I was a schoolboy had grown almost out of proportion.

And it was not without some palpitation that I climbed the stairs and some curious association of the subconscious made me run up them. I always used to run up these stairs for fear of being late. In front of the headmaster's room I saw a few boys standing and waiting for the declaration of the result of some

examinations. They looked more grown up, more manly and of more independent spirit than the boys I used to go to school with. One even had a little moustache.

Without asking my way I went straight up to the second floor to 'Class Four', our old schoolroom. It was empty and at once I smelt the familiar smell of oil and varnish and other familiar smells of the days I spent there.

Nothing had changed. The room was still as bare and devoid of any ornament as it used to be in my time. By the blackboard (it used to have some trouble with its cords, just like some windows in old houses in London, and chalk used to make a curious wailing noise when one wrote), there is the National Creed, framed on the wall, which is still read twice every day before and after school:

'I believe in God. I believe in a Fatherland. I believe in God's Everlasting Justice. I believe in the Resurrection of Hungary. Amen.'

No, nothing has changed. I went to my old desk (the first row on the right), where I used to sit with a boy named Probstner. His father was a *concierge*. The desk is painted dark green and on its board I discovered the familiar scratches and inkstains and erasures of twelve years ago. And here my predecessor, a boy whom I never met and not ever likely to meet, cut during a dull lesson the name of his girl. 'Rózsí', with lettering extremely fine considering that he could not have been more than eighteen when he did it, and also the fact that he had to do it extremely

carefully as the master's desk was exactly opposite to his, being in the first row.

The school servant (we called him beadle) came up and told me that the headmaster was ready to see me. It was so curious to cross the once familiar threshold which we only crossed awestruck ('see me in the office afterwards'), and more curious that I still retained a certain shyness and self-consciousness when my hand was warmly gripped and I was offered a seat by the director, still a youthful man, but no longer the martinet he used to be.

'Yes, I was very severe with you all, wasn't I? I know it myself, but you needed it all, a disorderly lot you were. . . . I do like your articles in —' he said, without any obvious connection. And when I said good-bye to him he gave me a copy of his booklet called *Thrift in Everyday Life*.

I kept reading it later on when I went home. It was a booklet for which the most suitable adjective would be well-meaning. Indeed the most well-meaning book I ever came across.

On one of its pages it said:

'It is practical to change the position of one's shoelaces as often as possible. Make a mental note of it and do it at least twice a week. This way you can double the life-time of your shoelace and save money.'

On another page:

'You often find that the sides of your box of matches are worn out completely, while you still have a few matches in the box. It is much more economical to strike one's matches vertically across instead of horizontally.'

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As I was going out of the building I came across a young man whose face seemed familiar. He was our French master. He recognised me at once. It was still early in the afternoon, so I accompanied him to his house.

He said he was teaching at another school now and only came to the 'old school' to visit a colleague. Then he told me the story of the cow, which I must record here.

In view of the economic conditions of Hungary, it is quite customary on the part of the younger generation of schoolmasters to call their pupils' attention to the hard facts of life. My ex-master apparently does it quite regularly during his lectures. He talks about the poverty of the Hungarian farmer, about unemployment and the rest. Last year his teachings had quite a surprising result. Boys of his class, a few days after the final examination, announced that year they did not want the usual banquet, but they would collect the money and spend it on a cow which would be given to an agricultural labourer with many children. The cow was actually bought on the class's small contributions, and that year there was no examination banquet.

I smiled when the master told me the story, and reflected that I always disliked the habit of examination banquets, with their drinking and singing and the false enjoyment of smoking a cigarette under the very nose of men who yesterday were one's own schoolmasters in almost Olympian heights. I remember I did not even go to our own banquet.

Then he told me of the poor lot of the Hungarian

schoolmasters. They have to be educated up to the age of twenty-three, five years of which are spent at the University – and when, with some luck, or pull, and after, with extremely hard work, they succeed in getting an appointment, their salary starts at the equivalent of three or four pounds a month – and before they retire, they are lucky if they receive as much as fourteen or fifteen pounds a month. By which time they are over fifty and probably have a family.

‘But how do you manage?’ I asked him. ‘In England a policeman gets something like four or five pounds a week. A responsible position and a hard life the London “Bobby” has, it must be granted, yet I wonder if in his different sphere his position is quite as responsible and his life is as hard as the average schoolmaster’s. Not to speak of the difference in their education.’

He smiled.

‘Well, of course you know that the standard of living is considerably lower here than in England. One might rent a furnished room for less than thirty shillings a month and have a decent lunch for one-and-sixpence. Hungary, on the average, is about thirty per cent cheaper than England, yet even then – well, my salary would be the equivalent of two pounds a week, considering everything – for a university man who is thinking of getting married – Well, let us talk about something else, if you don’t mind.’

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As may be gathered from this book, Hungarians have a great belief in education, by which they actually mean academic instruction. This belief is so strong,

almost religious, in fact, that it already has its ridiculous side in the veneration of diplomas and school certificates.

There cannot be any other schoolboy on earth, not excepting the French and the German, who would be compelled to fill his head with so much and such diverse book-learning as a Hungarian. The result is that the Hungarian middle classes have a very high standard of general culture, and are all fairly good conversationalists. With this we arrive at General Culture as interpreted by Hungarians. In its main outlines it is more or less the same as General Culture in England or all over the world, but in Hungary it is very wide and is shared by the entire middle class. A typical feature is that it insists on the ability to speak foreign languages. Those who cannot speak foreign languages in Hungary don't say, 'I'm sorry that I can't speak French,' but are so genuinely ashamed of themselves that they can hardly find words for their defence.

Then one must know one's geography, one's history. Before the War one had to visit conscientiously all museums when one went abroad; one must have read all the major works of the world's literature and know a good deal about music and the fine arts.

In short, this culture is typified by the fact that it is with the exception of languages and geography, perfectly useless – that is to say, it is *real* culture. It does not matter in Hungary if a cultured man knows nothing of the most elementary facts of economics and chemistry and biology – in short, of the sciences that really matter.

This principle of General Culture was taken so

seriously in my time that people who did not possess it were regarded as boors, no matter to what social class they belonged, nor what fine manners or high characters they might have. Moreover, a cultured man must have a university degree. This insistence by the end of the War resulted in a nation-wide regard for university diplomas. The only degree one can receive at a Hungarian university is that of doctor, consequently any Hungarian who passes his university degrees is a 'doctor' with the exception of those who have attended the University of Economics. Abroad they are quite suspicious when it comes out that every other Hungarian is a doctor of some sort. It might create the impression that the degree is easy to earn, and that it corresponds to a simple English B.A. In reality the Hungarian doctorate, with the exception of that of Doctor of Political Science (which is naturally the most common), means five to seven years' fairly hard work, and a good deal of money.

Even after the War, when conditions have changed, one often hears comments on, say, a successful business man (in undertones of profound astonishment and a little concealed envy): 'Just imagine, So-and-so has not even got a school-leaving certificate. It is true – I am not exaggerating. He has *not* got one,' as if the person concerned were seen at a dinner-party wiping his nose with his coat sleeve.

Then spelling! The religious seriousness with which it is taken! If it transpires that a grown-up person who is not certified insane is in the habit of making spelling mistakes, he is regarded with the same silent contempt that London Society would regard someone with an ill-concealed Cockney accent. Robert Louis

Stevenson, for that matter, would not have had a chance in Hungary. The editor or publisher to whom he submitted his MSS. would have stopped reading them, regardless of their literary merit, at the first spelling mistake, and would have pronounced him a philistine, not worthy of any intelligent interest. It is true Hungarian spelling is child's play compared with English or French.

A school or a university certificate is such a vastly important thing in Hungary, and falls into the scales with such weight when a young man applies for a job, that there were cases of students' suicide on account of unfavourable school reports and certificates, and perhaps more sensibly and with some imagination a young man some years ago shattered all Hungary when it came out that his excellent school certificate was forged by himself, with the aid of stolen forms and a reproduced rubber stamp. He went to prison for it, and several people are annually brought to court who pose as men with university degrees. In England I must say this crime is extremely rare. An Englishman might pose as an Ex-Public School Man or as a Captain of the Army or as an aristocrat – a foreign count for choice, but he never – even remotely – poses to be an educated man.

Hungary realising that she is a small and often misjudged country, a country which is often labelled Oriental or regarded as backward, has taken with zeal to culture, with an anxious endeavour to excel in the very thing in which the West thought her to be lacking. This movement was started in the seventies, and it was thus that, after the War, there were established more universities in Budapest than there were

before when Hungary was almost three times the size of its post-War successor. It was thus that they established Hungarian colleges in Vienna, Rome and Berlin taking for them luxuriously built private palaces. It was thus that Count Klebelsberg – of the tombstone fame – has spent a huge sum of money on an Ichthyological institute on the Lake Balaton, intended to be a scientific body studying the life of fresh-water fishes, and to be quite unique in the world.

Hungarians are childishly proud of their culture, and it must be said that this native pride has little to do with the pre-War German superiority of their *Kultur* (which became a term of abuse in England) though both, I believe, come from the same psychological root of a marked national inferiority complex. In Germany it was manifest in an inverted form and became a superiority complex, whereas in Hungary it is latent and much camouflaged.

Its effects are often amusing. Hungarian middle-class society, for example, was thoroughly shocked a few years ago when an otherwise charming Englishman of very noble birth came to visit the country, stayed at a big hotel, was entertained, went to a shoot, and declared in the Press that he felt 'thoroughly at home'. The shock was caused by the fact that the august personage refused to go to a quite well-arranged Hungarian museum. 'What?' exclaimed Hungarians, 'he does not think we have any culture! . . . Or perhaps the English upper class only shoots, hunts and fishes, has a good time, and has no leaning towards higher things!'

And to this very day there is still a feeling general among Hungarians that in Hungary the foreigner

solely admires the strange, the unusual, the exotic. Particularly the British. It is true Hungarians by now must realise that this admiration towards a romantic and exotic Hungary has developed into an important tourist traffic, and that the quaintness of Hungary is an important export item – *invisible exports* – as fashionable economists call it – but it will take quite a long time for the average Hungarian to realise in his heart of hearts three things:

(a) That one does not generally go on a holiday to see things such as the old-fashioned places of interest, like museums and picture galleries – of which one has an adequate supply in one's own country.

(b) If the average Englishman hears the word *museum* he immediately associates it with that sinister repository of things of unparalleled magnificence and utter worthlessness of the British Museum – the largest and richest and the most ill-arranged museum of the world. Miles and miles of second-rate Greco-Roman vases, then suddenly something of breath-taking loveliness, when one is already worn out.

(c) That there is no such thing as 'International Culture' or 'General Inheritance of Educated Mankind' or if there is, people are afraid to talk about it. And as regards 'International Spirit', it is just now, let us say – out of fashion.

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This Hungarian aspiration towards culture is undergoing a change. Henri Bergson and fashionable modern philosophers with their new type of the unintellectual as predominant in our age prove themselves to be useful accomplices and providers of excuses for the younger generation, that is to say, people

some ten years younger than myself go less to museums and concerts and picture galleries. They think that culture, especially the old-fashioned kind, is in a way a drug – which to a certain extent it is – and that it is less important than health and practical knowledge. The old-fashioned culture among the younger generation is regarded with a little witticism as the Treasure of the Poor. So the word *highbrow* and its equivalents with their hideous implications have not yet arrived in Hungary, but they are coming. I might find them on the Danube Embankment on my next visit.

CHAPTER VII

PEARLY BOUQUET

ONE Sunday evening I went to the Municipal Theatre to see the performance of the *Pearly Bouquet*. The *Bouquet* has been gathered from the flowers of the old traditions of the Hungarian village: a performance of folk-dancing and a show of native customs.

I use the word folk-dancing with misgivings. There are hundreds of Englishmen who share with me my undisguised horror for the artiness and craftiness of these sinister attempts which in England have their dreadful associations with olde English half-timbered houses, mass-produced pewter, Bloomsbury produced inn-signs, and that pimply, bespectacled and anaemic quality which hangs with its nerveless hands over the movement for 'Ye Preservation of Rural Englande'. I, for one, share the view of Mr. Evelyn Waugh that it is inevitable that English taste, confronted with all these menaces to its integrity, should have adopted an uncompromising attitude to anything the least tainted with ye oldeness.

But folk-dancing in Hungary is not part and parcel of Ye Preservation of Olde Hungarie; it is still a significant part of Hungarian life, though not in the urban areas and still less in Budapest, as we must not forget that the gap between urban and rural Hungary is very wide indeed.

Folk-dancing in a northern and industrial country inevitably appears a parody or devoid of vitality because it is excavated, brought back to life with which it no longer has any contact, and performed by those who have nothing to do with its traditions: by the urban intellectual. In Hungary it is the peasant lad and lass who dance them with a sense of rhythm, with a dignity, with a feeling, with movements directly inherited from their ancestors.

It is true there is some 'preservation' about folk-lore in Hungary, some interference; but this latter takes the form of an officially sponsored movement whose chief aim is that there should be no interference. It interferes with those who wish to interfere: the well-meaning but folk-loristically uneducated intellectual. And this work is well done.

M. Béla Paulini, who brought a handful of his peasant dancers as a sample to the International Festival of Folk-Dancing in London, has done an important work by introducing them first to the public of Budapest. The work of selection, of authoritative criticism and the pruning of elements which were not genuine, was difficult, and the performances are still being criticised for minor details by authorities on folk-lore; yet they are really the very best the Hungarian village could offer.

Hungary's most unique and perhaps most important attraction for the foreign tourist is certain aspects of the life of the Hungarian peasant. I use the expression certain aspects rather deliberately. Peasant traditions are partly dead and partly decaying all over Europe, and Hungary very naturally could not escape the results of the industrial revolution of the nineteenth

century and the social revolution of the twentieth. Of the lovely old native traditions many have perished, yet even in its remains, in its ruins, it is without comparison in Europe.

It still has life, movement and colour, customs still kept up, primitive music, poetry and art still alive and vital: in short, a certain, let us say, exoticism which is still an integral part of certain Hungarian villages.

Certain villages! One must not imagine that all Hungarian villages could provide magnificent shows with their quaint dresses and colourful local customs, partly because many districts of Hungary never had any, and others were forced long ago by poverty or civilisation or, let us say, half-civilisation, which asserted itself by a sense of shame to discard them for mass produced garments of our standardised age. Nor must one think that it is always essentially the far away, hidden village which managed to preserve its ancient traditions. Some of the places of rich ethnographical interest are quite near Budapest.

The Municipal Theatre, where the performance of the *Pearly Bouquet* was given, is huge. It is reminiscent of the inside of a hangar decorated for a royal visit at a flying festival with crimson and gold. It was originally built on sensible and purely functional, but extremely generous, lines as a People's Opera House, but people were not interested in opera to the extent that the optimistic founder had hoped and the theatre never prospered. After the War some lessees tried to brighten it up by lavishing the purple and gold of the eighteen-eighties on it, only to make it more forbidding. Several enterprising men lost their money in it, and after various suggestions to the municipality that it

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should be turned into a swimming-bath, into a central meat market, that it should be pulled down and the ground made into a park, it now gives an excellent background shelter for the annual performances of the *Pearly Bouquet*. The auditorium was completely packed and even the foyer – reminiscent of a wholesale butcher's shop with its imitation marbling and its immense hooks for hats and overcoats – was full of people.

In the foreground of a *décor* in the traditional Hungarian style, with its simple and expressive ornamentation – brilliantly suggesting the background of the atmosphere, village after Hungarian village performed their old native dances.

There was a place called Kocsola which brought its Swineherd Dance, and its Leaping Dance full of obvious symbols. Then the village of Hollókő appeared with an interesting part of their local marriage ceremony called 'Welcome with the Wreath'. Then Szany – a village I had already seen when I visited Transdanubia. They have lovely dresses. Women wear different colours according to the various ecclesiastical feasts and I liked the men's embroidered waistcoats. They told me that the length of the braiding on each waistcoat is over 120 yards. The dance was their Whitsun Dance – involving the very old tradition of the *pásztorböske*, dressed effigies of a man and a woman standing on a cart-wheel. When they pull the affair along the two figures seem to dance in a circle.

Then came the village of Polgár with its 'Slapping Dance' – young lads of extremely fine physique slapping thighs and boots, clapping the rhythm with their palms.

Sioagárd, an excellent wine-producing village near Lake Balaton, gave an impression of its Wine Harvest Festival, at the end presenting the vineyard owner with a lovely primitive crown made of vines.

The other villages followed in rich profusion, villages I knew, and others I had never heard of, marriage festivals, harvest dances, a lovely old scene of Conscripting Soldiers in eighteenth-century Hungary. Dances full of colour, vitality, ingenuousness, a strange yet attractive rhythm and quite open symbols which a Freudist would have loved to explain and analyse.

It was something one had never seen before. It was not a theatrical event, in fact nothing to do with reviews, tableaux, shows and operettas. All these conceptions at once seemed conventional, forced and false to us, together with their *décors*, their uneventful and anyhow plagiarised hits, their artificial world. It was the primeval power of the Hungarian village tumbling headlong out of a gigantic cornucopia on to the stage. It was shattering, staggering, it was a glorious *embarras de richesse* – and – I really ought to be more Hungarian to find more enraptured, more burning, more glittering adjectives to describe what I saw. Music and dance and traditional verse, which spoke of the undisturbed peace of the fields and forests of Asia: of the mysteries of the youth of a people spent in the adoration of strange gods, of strange secrets modern science could not yet explain. How could they remain so intact, so fresh, so magnificent, so untarnished through a thousand years or more; how could they still be a living reality in a civilised country with its typical institutions, typical cares, desires and problems

of the fourth decade of the twentieth century, is a mystery to all of us.

If one must employ the technical vocabulary of the theatre to them it may be said that the performance was an 'all star cast' – every one of these peasants was a born dancer and every one a true artist.

Surveying these unsophisticated, vital movements, it is easy to find the obvious reason why folk-dancing all over Europe is on the wane and why the civilised man dances to the rhythm and orchestration of American negroes. The answer is obvious. The most important characteristic of folk-dancing is that it is a community dance like reels and the quadrille, and is dependent on shared feelings of a group of people, and has not the privacy of the modern dance. Besides, all folk-dancing is difficult, even involving physical strength; the figures are intricate and become monotonous unless done by people who have it in the blood and in an atmosphere from which they must not be divorced. Their tunes and their symbols have nothing to do with the conditions under which the average civilised man lives – they have no international spirit. Also, they need a great deal more room than a fox-trot.

Yet it is interesting to note that there are actually two primitive regional dances: the tango and the rumba, whose civilised, westernised and rather falsified versions found their way to the modern ballroom – though it must be admitted they have not a wide popular appeal. The explanation is that these two folk-dances are international because both have strong erotic symbols.

There is only one Hungarian dance which is meant

to be danced by couples, the *csárdás* – in fact the only Hungarian dance which is known abroad as such. The *csárdás* is universal in Hungary, everybody dances it, and most Hungarians are convinced that it is very old, but authorities have recently come out with the shattering truth that the tradition of the dance is at most a hundred years old, and that contrary to the meaning of its name (Inn Dance) has pervaded the village from the ballroom to which it has been introduced as a civilised and simplified form of some old Hungarian dance. As it is danced now it sometimes reminds me of Swedish Gymnastics to quick music, only a little more monotonous and it offers little beneficial effects.

I noted that the gipsy bands which accompanied the dancers were dressed in simple black, with black silk braiding and wore conical hats – the traditional dress of the Hungarian gipsy in the villages. In the town they wear dinner-jackets and never those horrors of red hussar uniforms they are pitchforked into abroad – chiefly in England – as if to give emphasis to the fact that they are a romantic people. Just as if an English language instructor in Budapest would be forced to wear the dress of a Beefeater or the bearskin of the Coldstream Guards – or kilt and sporran if he were a Scotsman.

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In this book there is next to nothing about Hungarian music and still less about the gipsies. I love Hungarian music, but having no musical education I am unfamiliar with its technical vocabulary, besides there is no other Hungarian subject which is so well known abroad. And as regards the gipsies and their life,

those have already been treated by several people, among them Professor Starkie; besides, I dislike the gipsy. I know I am ungrateful, yet in my defence I must say I don't divulge this in order to create a little sensation at such a reasonable price. These dark fellows mean a good deal to Hungary. They are an almost inseparable part of what one may call a Hungarian background. To thousands of foreigners they are the symbols of Hungary and to hundreds of thousands of delightful and well-meaning but uneducated foreigners they are identical with Hungarians; in their minds the gipsy, so to speak, is just another name for Hungarian. Gipsies in Hungary are an interesting and colourful race, to some people the very incarnation of romance, some of them have real intelligence – and a real musical intelligence too. Some of them are brilliant. Even if at times they prostituted Hungarian music, they kept it alive and made it generally known all over the world, even before wireless was invented. And yet I remain aloof and dislike them. I dislike their gaudiness, their vanity, their unreliability, their immorality, and their lack of discipline – the contrary of which is an integral part in the mental make-up of all true artists. In short I am intolerant towards those particular vices which, to my best belief, I do not share with them.

Originally I intended to devote a chapter to the private life of the Hungarian gipsy, but after I had started gathering material, I gave it up. I regard even their public life as entirely uninteresting.

But the real reason why I dislike them is the various associations their very name conjures up. To me the gipsy means a member of the decaying Hungarian

middle classes, spending night after night at musical cafés or restaurants, drinking wine or home-made champagne and practising various kinds of Hungarian specialities which used to go under the name of *virtus*. The word is used in its Latin original, but it is easy enough to understand why Hungarians never translated it, even mentally, into the native Hungarian equivalent of virtue. *Virtus* in Hungary means acts displayed in that romantic country with which Hollywood made all of us familiar. Sometimes the country is intended to be pre-War Russia (thick tobacco smoke, heavy snow-fall outside the restaurant, Grand Dukes in lovely uniforms, lovely girls in low-cut dresses, Balalaika, Ochroneska, Rubatschka, Vodka, Caviare, revolver shots, raptures, Volga Boatmen and much crying), or sometimes it is Romantic Hungary (Blue Danube, Pusztá, Czárdás, gipsies dressed as hussars, hussars dressed as musical-comedy extras, great noblemen and lovely girls, Tokay and wild horsemen and much love-making).

The picture, of course, was given in the best Hollywood tradition, but in both countries it had some realistic ground. Thus in Hungary it was *virtus* to call the gipsy leader to one's table and direct him to accompany one's singing of folk-songs; to dance the *csárdás* solo and snap with the fingers and shout, to discharge his revolver into the mirror on the wall, to jump into the double bass, to kiss the gipsy leader when you are in the topmost mood and stick a hundred *pengő* bill on his damp forehead, drink wine and heavy spirits, and finally pay for everything when the dawn appears, and go home hiccuping and crying over a misspent youth.

This dreadful picture in my mind is for ever accompanied by the languorous Oriental embroideries of the gipsy music.

Virtus has disappeared from Hungary and now this horrid parody of having a good time is very rarely followed. A few old idiots lament its passing and mumble something about 'traditions'. They ought to know that this 'very Hungarian' and 'very old tradition', this 'virtue', has not more than eighty years behind it, when Hungarians tried to drown their sorrow in these Slavonic indulgences over the fiasco of the War of Independence and the suppression of Hungary by the Habsburgs. They have gone and found their way to Hollywood.

And now I must say in fairness that with my misgivings about gipsy music, I am not very original. Knowingly or otherwise I share the feelings of my contemporaries: educated young men of Hungary between twenty and thirty-five. For them the gipsy is nothing but an accessory, a theatrical property of the past, minor or major and a useful item in foreign tourist traffic. The gipsy is not a composer, he is an interpreter, not an artist, but a very brilliant craftsman. He has certainly contributed to Hungarian music by playing it in his own interpretation, and while it is fair to say that he has fulfilled an important function by preserving the primitive music of our Hungarian ancestors for us through six hundred years, yet his interpretations are not always happy and often result in a complete falsification of the original.

To what extent his interpretation distorts the original is easy to notice, when he renders a piece of modern and international dance music of any origin. He

misses the rhythm – perhaps its most important agent. As he plays, it is perhaps pleasant for the ear, but one cannot dance seriously to it. It is true that the gipsy orchestra is essentially a string orchestra with an occasional clarinet or two, but he could not produce the essential rhythm of the jazz even if he were asked to. Unfortunately, he is often asked to. He should really stick to the *csárdás* or the waltz, where nobody can surpass him, and should not attempt modern music, dance or otherwise, but should try to keep up the tradition of those lovely old Hungarian folk-songs he himself contributed to save from complete oblivion.

Even these I prefer to hear in distant Hungarian fields or vineyards, sung by peasant lads and lasses as they work; but unfortunately nowadays they too often sing jazz.

CHAPTER VIII

MEDITATIONS ON THE BUDAPEST TELEPHONE-DIRECTORY

ONE morning I wished to ring up a friend of mine in Budapest. His name did not appear in the telephone-directory, yet I went on for quite a long time scrutinising those serried columns and reading bits of its contents.

I find that many people share with me the occasional incapacity to resist the temptation of reading bits of volumes haphazard. Volumes, like dictionaries, lexicons, encyclopedias and directories which, by their very nature, are not meant for purposes of straightforward reading at all.

Now that Mr. Aldous Huxley has openly confessed that he often opens the *Encyclopædia Britannica* at random (just as we always suspected), I must myself confess that I derive similar pleasure in reading bits out of all telephone-directories in the world. For those barren leaves give interesting reading beyond their strictly utilitarian aim. Their careful economy of words often let strange associations loose in my mind. A name and address alone can often give a start to the imagination. They do not only supply a mine of suitable names for the hurrying novelist, but give background as well.

The Budapest telephone-directory in particular

must be one of the most interesting telephone-directories in the world. Those who can read Hungarian could find in it the most interesting clues to the importance of social values in Hungary. The London directory with its taciturn abbreviations requires certain moods for reflection over its contents; the Budapest one is a mine of potted biographies, without being designed to be so. Reading a page at random, I find:

KIRÁLYFALVY de Királyfalva, Mme Ferencz, née Clotild Kis de Ormostót and Pécs, tobacconist, widow of retired Colonel of the Royal Hungarian Hussars.

Do not these lines unfold the history of a life, even to those who do not know that Hungarian lady, or those who do not even know Hungary? She is obviously a lady of rank, to be more exact a member of the *petite noblesse*, who, having married a man of her own standing, became a widow and like so many widows of officers, now supports her pension by keeping a tobacconist shop.

Needless to say, in Budapest just as all over the world you have to pay extra for the insertion of each additional line into the directory, yet the widow of the retired Colonel of the Royal Hungarian hussars did not spare any expense to make public, practically all the facts of her life. The reason for this painful accuracy is that Hungary has a most meticulously constructed social hierarchy for which there is immense reverence. Everybody in the country must fit into a specific social niche, even after their death. On tombstones one often reads:

Mme Sándor Farkas – a lawyer's widow. This, I be-

lieve, is a fine example of bringing a principle to its logical conclusion.

And then there are Hungarian visiting cards. They are quite a treasure for those engaged in social research. Before the War their size was the exact opposite to those in England. A man's card was large, three times as large as the standard form of an Englishman's visiting card, and the lady's size was small. Now they are about the same size. Almost as large as a modestly-sized postcard. The card as a rule is not engraved, but printed or lithographed. It exhibits the name in full; if there are titles – and practically everybody who has a card has a title or finds one in Hungary – these are of course, included. Occupation is detailed under the name. If a state functionary or a soldier, the words 'Royal Hungarian' inevitably appear. If the owner of the card is a nobleman (we have already said that card-owners are often such) he does not spare any expense to have his full coat of arms engraved in the left-hand corner.

This may appear highly amusing, since an Englishman does not exhibit his coat of arms on a visiting card. Members of the upper classes may have their coats of arms on their silver or their motor-cars; but then, few Hungarians have motor-cars. Much fewer than those who have coats of arms.

It has often been said that Hungary is a country where everybody, mildly or otherwise, tries to appear higher on the social scale than he really is. The majority of Englishmen are referred to as Mr. and all Frenchmen as Monsieur. France has succeeded in a more or less perfect democracy of social as well as epistolary address, referring even to its dukes as Monsieur.

The approximate equivalent of Mr. is Ur in Hungarian, used as a postfix. Mr. Jenkins would be Jenkins Ur. There is, however, a qualifying attribute attached to Ur, as if it is used as a separate noun it means gentleman and if it is articulated (Az Ur) it means The Lord.

To call anybody of any social standing Ur in Hungary added to his surname would be considered a grave social insult. One speaks in this way to social inferiors. If you address him you must not bring his name in at all. You must call him Ur by all means, but you must put this monosyllable after a word qualifying either his office, military rank, degree of University, or title. He is sure to have one, and thus you must call him Mr. Counsellor, Mr. Secretary, Mr. Lieutenant, Mr. Doctor, Mr. Count, etc.

The English way of calling him simply Colonel, or Doctor, or Count, would be equally wrong. If you are not a man of consequence you can't even call a constable a constable. You must call him Mr. Constable.

These are, however, only colloquial addresses, the epistolary ones and their occasional ramifications into colloquial ones are more complicated and misleading. Nowadays this is not such a serious matter in Hungary, where people no longer fight duels over the insult of being wrongly addressed. So I shall only enlarge here on the outlines of social hierarchy, which is somewhat reminiscent of the classes of Chinese mandarins.

The people of Hungary – male or female – as separated from the working class and the peasants belong to three distinct classes, *Nagyságos*, *Méltóságos* and *Kegyelmes*, the third being the highest.

The exact translation of *Nagyságos* is Your Greatness; it seems extremely feudal and has a little Oriental touch. In reality it is the lowest title. It shows that its bearer is just 'in' with the skin of his (or her) teeth.

Who is *Nagyságos* in Hungary? It would perhaps be easier to answer it in the negative. Who is not? Practically everybody is entitled to have that adjective as an epistolary address who is not a peasant or a member of the proletariat, in short, everybody who is entitled to be addressed as Esquire in England. An Englishman who is addressed Esquire in England would be addressed in the following way in Hungary: *Nagyságos Gladstone William Ur*. (I forgot to mention previously that Hungary is the only country in the world where the Christian name always *follows* the surname; I remember old translations of Dickens in my youth in which the author was referred to as *Dickens Charles* or, still better, *Dickens Károly*, and I remember *Shakespeare Vilmos*, translating the Christian name into Hungarian.)

The number of those called *Méltóságos* is considerably smaller. In this otherwise ridiculous social hierarchy Hungarians have here established a very sensible equality. This address is accorded not only to aristocracy but to all civil servants over the rank of Ministerial Councillors, to soldiers between the rank of colonel and major-general, High Court judges, professors of the University, in short, everybody who is over the famous 'Fifth Class of Salary'. This mysterious classification, which must have been borrowed from the grades of Chinese mandarins, is very well known in Hungary. Absolutely everybody whose office has even the remotest connection with the State must

belong to one of the eleven classes of remuneration. The first is the Prime Minister and the last is the junior secretary in some tucked away revenue department, whose greatest ambition in life is to climb the social ladder successfully. The ladder, unofficially of course, is referred to as 'the ladder of the asses'.

Méltóságos otherwise means Of Dignity, or Your Dignity, but it corresponds with the English Rt. Honourable. The amusing part, of course, is that this address is shared by the wife as well, and she thus becomes Dignitarious Lady. She is addressed as such and deeply hurt if accorded a lower category.

The highest address is *Kegyelmes*. Hungarians usually translate it Excellency, but it really means Graceful or Your Grace. This is the most coveted title and its bearers are limited. It is accorded to all cabinet ministers, field marshals, privy councillors, who share it with their wives and retain it all through their lives, long after they have ceased to 'excel' or be 'graceful'.

Since the exaggerated importance attached to one's rank still goes on in these times of hurry, some Hungarian firms with huge correspondence try to solve the question of correct epistolary address in a very brilliant way, which must satisfy absolutely everybody. On their envelopes they print the three grades of address one after the other and fill in the name. They, however, never cross out 'that does not apply', they leave it to the addressee himself or herself who will select the address dearest to his or her heart. The inventor of this method should have a statue in Budapest, or in the more approved Hungarian fashion, have a street named after him.

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Hungary may not have a king, but she is in all probability the last kingdom to go. People still love titles dearly, and with the true romanticism of nineteenth-century Irishmen, they often prefer them to wealth. Especially the older generations. If for example the government wishes to make an old civil servant happy, it does not give him a bonus or raise his salary, but puts him into the already mentioned 'Fifth Class of Salary' and he becomes Dignitarius. Needless to say, the government very often makes this promotion by giving only what is known as 'character' of the Fifth Class without any rise in the salary. This makes any Hungarian thoroughly happy. At least their servant calls them 'Your Dignity'.

This, of course, has resulted in the fact that Hungary has no less than six hundred generals (that monstrous regiment) which must be an achievement even in comparison to certain South American republics, where, it seems, the lowest rank is that of colonel, and where every third member of the army is a general.

The fact is that Hungary welcomed all retired officers of the huge army of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy after the dissolution of the Empire, and Hungary now seems to be the last refuge for elderly generals of a Dual monarchy of fifty million inhabitants.

The same applies to civil servants. There cannot possibly be a treasury anywhere in the world which has to bear the burden of such a huge army of bureaucracy as Hungary. There they are all drawing miserable salaries, all dependent on the government, yet they

form the majority of the Hungarian middle class, which has only come to being in the last eighty years. Before 1848 Hungary was very much like pre-War Russia, which had only two main classes, the nobility and the peasants.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRAM-CONDUCTOR

I AM perhaps not old enough to appreciate the poetry of the out-of-date and uncomfortable. I loathe tramways, and when I am compelled to board one I am always reminded of the double misfortune of the poor, forced to waste so much of their only treasure time.

Once or twice I have travelled on London trams, but like riding a camel, they always made me a little sea-sick. The continental trams are not so uncomfortable. In Paris they are dark green and in spite of their more than stuffy atmosphere escape being depressing. In Berlin, with their creamy-white exteriors and desperately clean interiors, they look like ambulance vans. In Budapest they are painted a bright lemon colour and their benches are hard wood, yet they are spotlessly clean.

Budapest, by the way, is one of the cleanest towns of the world. Cleanliness with them is partly due to the fact that they are a vital and healthy race and partly to that curious inferiority complex which I have already mentioned. The first, I believe, is unnecessary to explain. It is well known, that all vital, healthy and comparatively primitive races are clean, and that dirt is always a sure sign of degeneracy. The second reason is rather more curious. Hungarians,

especially educated ones, are always haunted by a strange fear lest their country should be labelled 'Oriental' or a 'Balkan country' by people of the west. So they fight against this with all their might. One of the results of this attitude is that desperate, almost surgical cleanliness of Budapest.

How many times have I heard the following typically bitter remark:

'We Hungarians cannot afford the incredible dirt of Italy – say Venice. That town has succeeded in raising over its accumulation of dirt, the Vendramini Palace, the San Marco, the Salute and hundreds of other architectural treasures. There dirt is almost becoming. We have nothing like those, so we must offer cleanliness as a new attraction to the stranger.'

This reminds me that foreign tourist traffic has an interesting effect on the organising country, as to a certain extent it forces people to change their habits of life. Most towns and countries inevitably become self-conscious in the face of tourist traffic, and their life must surely lose a certain amount of privacy. The Swiss for instance – the nation which has lived out of its tourists for generations seem to have no private life at all, and it always takes something like a scientific investigation to find their national personality.

I thought of this while sitting on a Budapest tram going into town to keep an appointment. Suddenly, out of the blue, I met Tibor. Tibor is a Hungarian Christian name, very old and cannot be translated, just as 'Kenneth' or 'Nancy' or 'Evelyn' could not be rendered into any other tongue. I was at school with Tibor in Budapest. His father was a railway engineer who died early, and I heard that Tibor had

great difficulty in providing the money for his examination fees at the University. Then I lost sight of him completely.

And now I saw my old schoolmate in the dark grey uniform of the conductors of the Budapest municipal trams, with the large leather bag hanging from his neck as if it were 'a pack of his troubles'. I said, 'Servus Tibor'. He smiled and whispered: 'Servus, Adam,' with misgivings.

'Servus.' An expression I must explain. It would be interesting one day to write a book on the new sense of some old expressions, borrowed usually from the Latin. 'Servus' is a typical example. In Hungary and in certain parts of Austria and Southern Germany, it is a greeting amongst intimates. Originally it had a very polite meaning, when the Hungarian upper classes with those of Central Europe talked and wrote in Latin, the official language of pre-nineteenth-century Central Europe. It was then a greeting of two words, 'Servus Humillimus' (Your Humble Servant); later on the second word was dropped, and together with it humility, and the first word became familiar greeting of the upper classes. Now, of course, it is general, but it always involves using that second person singular, which has long ago disappeared from the English language.

He told me that he had heard I was living in London and that he had also read a few of my articles. We arranged a meeting on his next half-holiday.

He turned up in mufti - he was almost smart. He was a little self-conscious, and blushed, but I pretended not to notice.

Then, on the terrace of a Budapest café a typical

Hungarian tragedy of the middle class unfolded itself.

Working in a miserably ill-paid job as a clerk and supported by his mother, he saved enough to pass his exams at the university and finally received the degree of Doctor of Law. As soon as the hard work was done and he was hoping to get into a better job he had two sudden tragedies. He lost his job and lost his mother.

Seven terrible months he spent in search of a job, but there was no hope. He had neither connections nor, strangely enough, any special qualification. There are, in these days, so many young men in search of a job who have degrees of Doctor of Law, of Philosophy, and also of Medicine, that it has no advantage whatever.

He would have been glad to take any kind of job in a government or municipal department, copyist or anything. But there was no opening.

Then he thought of the tramways, where conductors were so ill paid that there always was a chance of a job. Even there he met with unexpected difficulties. They told him to apply later, and nothing would have happened had he not had the luck of coming across the father of one of his schoolfellows in the tramway company's office. After a week in the municipal soup kitchen, he was engaged.

He told me that among his fellow-conductors there are still some twenty university men, among them four fully qualified medical doctors, who had the alternative of becoming country doctors, supplementing a miserable livelihood by performing illegal operations, or becoming tram-conductors. So now they are selling tickets till midnight, then they go home and read

borrowed medical papers, not to let their knowledge rust.

‘And what do you think you will do?’ I asked.

He smiled. ‘God knows. Next year I shall have a rise, that is to say if I am not thrown out of the job. Then I shall go on being a conductor till –’

‘And what do you do after you have finished your work?’

‘Oh, the usual things conductors do, you know. I go home and mend my socks, or read the papers. Sometimes I go to the cinema. The only thing I do which may be unusual for a tram-conductor is that sometimes I go to a public library to read a few new books on economics.’

‘Economics? Are you a socialist?’ I asked.

He smiled.

‘No. I was at one time, just out of bitterness, then I came to the conclusion that Socialism is not an effective force to solve this monstrous injustice, done to me and to so many other people. The whole system is wrong. There must be a new system –’

‘So you believe in dictatorships?’

‘To be honest, I believe in anything which would give me a decent job. I hope I am not being unreasonable if I say that my present job is not decent. Or that perhaps is not the word for it. It is not suitable, not a job which would correspond with my qualifications.’

‘I know what you mean. You mean that there is no shame attached to any kind of work, physical or otherwise, only you are made for better things.’

‘Yes, and one more point. I must openly confess to you, that other people’s misfortunes leave me utterly

cold. I am not a cynic you know. . . . But remember what Keynes says. (He pronounced the name 'Keens'.) By the way, how d'you pronounce that name?"

'Kayns,' I said. 'You could not know that, as there is no rule for the pronunciation of English names.'

I smiled. Here was a Budapest tram-conductor who is a reader of John Maynard Keynes's books in his spare time, and who is at the same time troubled by the problem of how to pronounce his name correctly. I said:

'Yes, I remember what Keynes says, "When people are deeply concerned with their own misery, they quite naturally lose their interest and sense of sympathy for other people's misery" – or something to that effect.'

'But let's not talk about this miserable problem, as there is not the slightest chance of any solution. Tell me about yourself.'

That was Tibor, the railway engineer's son, the University graduate, Tibor, the Hungarian gentleman again. And when I called for my bill I had to struggle with him to prevent his paying it.

There are hundreds of Tibors in Budapest.

CHAPTER X

THE LOCKED DOOR

FROM London, Hungary is thirty-four hours' journey by railway, about forty-five by car, and twelve by aeroplane; yet she is and will remain as distant from us as if she were further than Australia – as if she were on a different planet.

One goes to Budapest and, contrary to one's usual expectation, finds a town which is only slightly different from any other continental town. Its inhabitants are dressed like the rest of the civilised world and their visible attitude makes one guess that they are faced by the same problems as the rest of Europe. The country and its inhabitants might compare favourably or unfavourably with our conceptions of foreign places, yet beyond the comparative familiarity of the surroundings one feels that in Hungary one is spiritually deaf, just as if one looks at a film in Portuguese or Russian without English subtitles. In France, Switzerland or Spain, even if one has less than a smattering of their language one is able to understand at least a portion of what the natives talk, or at least able to distinguish a theatrical placard from a notice to taxpayers. The names of the streets and squares, the inscriptions on public buildings and statues, over shops and on front doors suggest something, at least not utterly unfamiliar. In Hungary, in certain

respects, one feels as far away from one's accustomed surroundings as in Russia with the additional torture that Hungarians in writing use the very same Latin characters as in England. One goes to one's hotel and looks at the taps over the washstand. One is labelled *hideg*, the other *meleg*. They obviously mean hot and cold, granted, but which is which. One must find it out by trial. It is thus only the obvious physical aspect of things which helps one in this strange land, a few words like 'hotel' and 'telephone' which are international and the fact that most Hungarians speak at least one additional language.

Hungary is about the most isolated country in Europe, and its strange language is the lock on the door. To find a key is difficult and for the most part one must be satisfied with a skeleton key. But all the same Hungary seems to have remained isolated from the rest of the world. Hungary had found her means of contact with the rest of Europe, which is not a Locked Door to her. She has procured a skeleton key by learning their languages.

The Hungarian language is strange, as it does not belong to those three well-known European groups of the Aryan or, more scientifically, 'Indo European' linguistic family; which are known as Germans (or Teutons) Latins (or Romanesque) and Slavs. In that ocean of Aryan speech, spoken by nearly five hundred million people of Europe, lie the tiny little islands of the fourth group, which are known to linguists as the *Finno-Ugrian* group. Some of the Islands are up north: Finland, Estonia, Lapland, the other is in Central Europe surrounded by Austria and some Slavonic races: that is Hungary.

And these tiny little islands are as far from each other in language as they are on the map of Europe. Their degree of relationship is different from the three other groups. It may be said that Italian and French or the Dutch and the German are brother and sister languages or that the English and German are first cousins; Hungarian and Finn, however, are only second cousins several times removed. The similarity between Hungarian and Finnish has now only a purely scientific or sentimental interest.

It is a general belief in England that Hungarian is a difficult language to learn. To be frank about the matter, it must be said that for a grown-up person who makes a systematic study of a language, who has to take lessons, any language, dead or alive, is difficult. It is perfectly unnecessary for me to enlarge here on the difficulties both French and German present to an English person, in spite of direct blood contact and a close relation of the system of the tongues (in the case of the German) and in spite of, to a certain extent, an identical vocabulary and closely related literary traditions (in the case of the French).

When one wants to learn a language beyond making himself understood – for which purposes English is the easiest language in the world – every language is easy and difficult at the same time. It is all very well to read in English reference books that *'the dominant characteristic of the Magyar languages is a loose linking of modificatory syllables to verb or noun, without any detriment to the identity of these extra elements'*. This means that the Hungarian does not for example say, 'in my house' but says the equivalent of *housemyin* in one word. Furthermore, it is all very well to read that learning

the Hungarian language '*means not merely the learning of the strange vocabulary, but also the re-shaping of many fundamental concepts of language*' – as these 'modificatory syllables' (to be scientific) don't amount to more than a dozen or two, and one could learn them in a week; and then one discovers that all the additional difficulties on top of the familiar ones (such as irregular verbs) become slight when one sees that in Hungarian the accent invariably, always and without exception is on the first syllable, that spelling is almost absolutely phonetic, that there is only one past tense and only the neutral gender (just as in English).

With these I might create the impression that Hungarian is a very easy language and that it ought to oust English or French, to become an international tongue. First of all I repeat that there are no easy languages for the serious student; secondly, languages do not become international because they are easy to learn or beautiful of sound. All these are negligible qualities. People simply discover that a certain language is more *useful* than the rest and they learn it. That is all.

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The isolation of the country in its language has resulted in the fact that every educated Hungarian speaks at least one foreign language; some speak two or three. I don't know whether they are good linguists or not. There is a popular English belief that Poles, Russians and Hungarians are good linguists and that the English are hopeless. This is nonsense. Poles, Russians, and Hungarians speak foreign languages because they have to learn them when they are very young, at an age when learning a foreign language

offers no difficulty. And the Englishman if he gets rid of his self-consciousness, makes a fairly good linguist. (The worst and most hopeless linguists in Europe are the French, that very nation which takes such a superhuman interest in its own language, with the result that there is no Frenchman who cannot speak French properly, and very few who are not absolutely familiar with the intricacies of French grammar. I wonder if the same applies to more Englishmen than we would care to admit.)

There is a movement in Hungary which, just like the German movement aims to *Magyarise* words of foreign origin. This of course will – and already does – result in the language becoming even more isolated. Needless to say, some of the recommended ‘Hungarian’ expressions are so patently ridiculous that they won’t stay. It is no use calling ‘auto-taxi’ *géperező-bérgőcs* (mechanically propelled hire-vehicle) as everybody will call it by the old short concise name. There are, however, better attempts, *Magyarising* for example the word ‘incognito’ into *rangrejtve* (rank concealed), which in magyar is quite a sound and pretty expression.

The Hungarian Broadcasting Company employs a reader who goes through every prose lecture and cuts out non-Magyar words if there are good substitutes. And there is also still an open competition (written out some time ago) for good Hungarian substitutes for words like the following: sport, humour, style, realism, epigram, tragic, comic, etc. – with quite a nice sum of money as a prize.

The language naturally has its dialects; some of them are attractive, others monotonous and ugly, yet

there is not the slightest difficulty in understanding them at once. From the point of view of the language Hungary is much more homogeneous than most European countries.

English people usually find Hungarian speech 'strange but attractive'. In this, I am afraid, I am completely disqualified from giving any judgment. The Hungarian usually speaks from his throat and the words have a perfect balance – that is to say in the majority of Hungarian words each consonant is sandwiched between two vowels and vice versa – no wonder that the language is so patently suitable for the telephone. And this balance between vowels and consonants does not make the language monotonous as Hungarian has more vowels, or to be exact, more vowel modifications, than most European languages. At the end of the sentence the voice is invariably dropped.

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In the Hungarian vocabulary there are hundreds of words contributed by nations with whom the Magyars came into contact throughout their history. To the Turks they owe practically all their words relating to agriculture, trees and domestic animals.

From the Slavs they learnt expressions relating to the house and its various parts, to various professions and also those concerning religious life.

Thousands of words are from the German, from the Italian, Norman-French and from the Latin.

The English to the best of my knowledge, received five words from the Hungarian vocabulary (hussar, shako, Magyar, Tzigane, paprika), and repaid them with about a hundred and fifty, like sport, turf, jockey, trafik (traffic), budget, humór (humour), club, etc.

It is interesting to note that most of the borrowed French words in Hungarian are similar to their English equivalents, in fact all words borrowed by the Hungarians from the French were borrowed also by the English like *mester* (maitre, and master), *malom* (moulin and mill), also various others.

There are three most misleading Hungarian words which look exactly like English words: *test*, *eleven* and *ember*. Their strange similarity, however, is just mere accident, they have no English origin and respectively mean body, lively and man. *A test eleven* in Hungarian means: the body is lively. It is pronounced 'O *tesht al-aven*'. We used to play jokes with them on our English friends, pretending Hungarian is very much like English.

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Hungarians therefore had to find the skeleton key to the locked door of Europe surrounding them. They found it early. So the country is closer to the rest of Europe than might be imagined. Hungary never surrounded herself with a wall of China: she could not have afforded it. She went through the same spiritual influences as the rest of Europe – as a rule, later. And Hungary has produced a literature which is unique in Europe. It is not a literature of splendid beginnings but of sustained force. All great literature has contributed to its development by inspiring shapes and forms, lending grounds for philosophies, subjects, and technical tricks. The literature of this tiny little country is enormous: comparatively richer than English literature – the richest in the world. It is like a lovely garden completely hidden and only seen by the few. (A misleading factor is that every writer of

any importance in the world is translated into Hungarian. There are no less than ten different versions of *Hamlet* alone in Hungarian – which might lead people to believe that foreign literature is exported into Hungary as the country is poor in letters. No; the reason for this is what I said before: Hungary's isolation is one-sided and she goes on turning the skeleton key in the European door.)

That this rich and vigorous literature, which offers quite as much as the more familiar and better known literatures of the world, should be a hidden garden, that the Hungarian poet, so to speak, should sing to himself, is a sad tragedy. But then, poetry is not interesting. It has a past and it will have a very great future, but it has no present. And here I must say that I am perfectly disinterested. I have never written a line of verse in my life and it is not likely now that I ever shall. But from a safe distance I cannot help extending my sympathy to poets, for all those I come across suffer like chemical workers, bakers and divers from the typical 'Occupational Disease' of their trade.

CHAPTER XI

HUNGARIAN LITERATURE

'I AM in a great difficulty,' I said to my friend the Hungarian literary critic, with whom I was sitting on the terrace of a café on the Danube Embankment. 'As you know, I am writing a book on Hungary and I should like to put in a chapter on Hungarian literature.'

'What is the difficulty?' he asked, lifting his eyebrows, like two moustaches of generous proportions – they are clerical eyebrows – 'You are a literary critic and I should have thought that on such a subject you could write with ease. It would be merely a question of selection. . . .'

'No,' I said. 'You cannot imagine how difficult a subject it is. Just imagine an English chapter-heading *Hungarian Literature* or *Hungarian Letters* in a book about Hungary which is meant for the general reader. The very title is on the verge of the ridiculous. I don't think I could give you more than four or five subjects concerning which one could count with so much certainty on the average English reader's almost complete lack of interest. . . .'

The clerical eyebrows formed themselves into two huge question-marks:

'What? You who have lived in England all these years come to tell me that English people are not

interested in Hungarian letters? . . . The nation with the greatest literature in the world and with the greatest literary interest! The nation whose literature has been an unbroken line since Chaucer. . . . Explain your paradox. . . .’

‘It isn’t a paradox,’ I answered. ‘I don’t mean to say that it is because the same thing has happened in England as on the Continent, and in Hungary in particular, namely that both the thinker and the writer – hitherto regarded as prophets – have been rudely pushed off their thrones, have lost their social prestige and have been degraded to the position of struggling artisans and craftsmen, who are only respected if they make as much money as a well-to-do greengrocer. That I don’t say because such is really not the case in England. The English author has not been dethroned simply because he never has been enthroned. The English public respected Arnold Bennett, for example, perhaps not so much because he wrote half a dozen books which have a chance of survival, but because they saw in him a most successful business man who earned tens of thousands a year by discovering new genius every week as a critic. And I am certain that even Shakespeare was in exactly the same position towards the end of his life – that is to say when the public discovered that he existed: he was regarded as a well-to-do lessee of the Globe Theatre. In short, the English author never went through the shameful process, which is all the more shattering because it took place before our very eyes.’

‘You mean to say that the English did not notice the tragedy of the thinker and the literary man in the last twenty years?’

Exactly. Will you please note what I have already said, broadcast, whispered and shouted to all and sundry in Hungary: that the English have never lived in exactly the same historical – or if you like, calendrical – period as we have on the Continent. And that they still don't. In certain respects they live in 1896, in others in 1976. In certain things they are lagging behind us, in others they are far in advance of us. This applies to literature as well. Books in England have for a long time been a commodity. Publishing and bookselling in England are as much business as selling soap. The average English bookseller is a business man, intelligent or stupid, careful or rash, imaginative or dull, successful or unlucky, he is a business man. He *does* know about his business, he is often an admirable business man – and that he admits. But he is nothing like the average continental bookseller, who is a walking encyclopedia, a scholar and often a wit.

'Now then,' I continued 'English books are a commodity which people very rarely buy. Among civilised countries England is conspicuous by having the smallest number of bookshops –'

'You must be mad if you say they don't read. . . .'

'That's just the point: they do, but they don't buy books. They borrow them from the library. The English lending library is quite unique. It has great advantages and handicaps. . . . Anyhow, it is a national institution.'

'So that's why English books are so well-produced, so well-bound, well-printed. . . .'

'Exactly. The first impression given by the average English book is that it is so costly that the average man

could not buy it, even if he were inclined to be a book-buyer. This same average Englishman regards books as a second-rate commodity; he acquires them in the same way as he buys his razor-blades, his photographic films, his cigarettes. . . . And the average English author delivers the goods, he gives him thrill, escape, amusement, carefully veiled indecency, pious commonplaces – and never less than seventy thousand words. . . .’

‘You mean to say the English have created quite a peculiar literary form?’

‘Well, yes. There is a commodity on the English market which I call “the fiction commodity”. Its uniform price when it first appears is seven shillings and sixpence. It is a novel and it is, more or less, guaranteed to be over seventy thousand words. If not, money back.’

‘But what happens if the author cannot fill the required number of pages with his story. There are hundreds of plots and themes which could not be written as short stories and yet would not require seventy thousand words. You simply could not spin them out. What then?’

‘Then, if you are the average English author, you either don’t get published, unless your story is so exceptionally good that the publisher would take a chance, or you spin out your story to the required length, bore the public for its money and infuriate the reviewer. Are you surprised when you read an English review saying, “I read every word of it,” which means that the book was so exceptionally good that the reviewer did not follow his usual routine of merely reading a few chapters. . . .’

'But surely you are talking about a commercial kind of novel, common in every country. . . .'

'No, I am not. But I must explain something. The English "fiction-commodity" is an admirable product of its kind. It is "British Made", and as well turned out as a golf-club, a tennis-racket, a pig-skin suitcase, a dinner-jacket or a motor-car. It is usually good in technique, in characterisation, very often in style, and is so civilised that unless you know the ropes you don't discover that it is mere commodity till you have read at least a third of it. And that is the majority of the English output. Authors you don't know and have never even heard about.'

'Then what about people like Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, and the Powys Brothers; what about Lawrence, James Joyce, the Sitwells?'

'Well, that is real English literature, and these authors are *comparatively* unknown in England. They are read by tiny little cliques. Tiny – I said – but they are only tiny compared with the size of England and the enormous number of English-speaking people. Real literature in England has always been the private affair of tiny little isolated coteries. . . .'

'Why?'

'Oh, can't you see. England has not a general culture like our educated men's, or those of Germany or France. The English are the most civilised nation on earth, but have little general culture.'

'An admirable state.'

'It is. A general high level of civilisation is better than what we Hungarians and a few other nations on the Continent have – a comparatively large class of cultured people separated by a wide gap from the rest

who have a shockingly low standard of civilisation. . . . And besides, real literature will never reach the masses in England because the average real literateur in England is as frightened of writing about the obvious as a rural dean would be if asked to write a one-act play on Lesbianism for an amateur performance by his parishioners.'

'That I know. I read my Huxley, thank you. . . . Well, anyhow, I can see your difficulty in writing about Hungarian literature, but surely the English have translations of Hungarian books.'

'Yes, but with a strict application of the commodity principle. They have translated and published novels by Bus Fekete, Molnár, Zsolt Harsányi, Körmendi, Madarassy, Földes and so on. . . .'

'You mean to say all our pot-boilers and semi-pot-boilers?'

'Yes. The English imported these books from Hungary in the same way as they imported other Hungarian export-articles, like artificial silk stockings, live-stock, grain, fruit, Christmas turkeys, and mineral waters.'

'But didn't they notice that, apart from the fact that these are mostly commercial writers, they do not even attempt to perform an important function of literature in the international sense: to give conceptions of the country from which they come?'

'No, because as I already told you, the average Englishman does not read novels to be informed about foreign countries. They are not like us who made Galsworthy a best-seller in Hungary, because we wanted to know how the Forsytes ate, drank, breathed, dressed, made love. We continentals always have

"points of view" in reading a book. The English have none.'

'So you mean to say nothing has been published in England of our major authors. . . .'

'Very little. I can count them on my fingers. Well, of Dezső Kosztolányi, who was after all our greatest imaginative writer – do you agree, by the way?'

'I do.'

'Well, of his writings they have published *Nero*, the picture of the mad emperor as a poet. And nothing else. His masterpiece, *Anna Édes*, has been turned down by publisher after publisher. Occasionally a short story of his comes out in a magazine. Say one every other year, and that never in a widely-read magazine.'

'Then we were lucky because Aladár Kunz's *Black Monastery* was published too. That has been the greatest real literary success of any Hungarian book in England so far. At eight shillings and sixpence they sold over fifteen thousand copies. Remember, Virginia Woolf rarely sells that number. . . .'

'Surprising, because *Black Monastery* I always thought a sort of caviare to the general as it was written about a French internment camp. I never thought it would appeal to the English.'

'I know. You come across exceptions like that in England. . . . Then they published two novels by Lajos Zilahy.'

'Which?'

'*Two Prisoners* and *The Fugitive*.'

'Were they successful?'

'Yes, especially *Two Prisoners*. It still sells. Then

they brought out one of Hatvany's books. It is called *Bondy Junior*. I think that was a failure. . . .'

'Pity, it gives such a good picture of the eighteenth-eighties in Hungary. . . . I think that's the lot. In the last eight years. . . .'

'You mean to say none of our younger writers are translated, none of our classics?'

I shook my head.

'No. The only Hungarian classic who was a success in his time in England was Maurus Jokay. The other day I looked him up in the British Museum catalogue. He was apparently a popular author in England in the nineties. At least ten of his hundred novels have been translated into English. Now naturally nobody reads him, except people who have to be satisfied with the books they find on the shelves of the average English public library. Curiously enough most of these libraries have novels by Jokay. All that lovely romantic stuff we used to adore as children. . . .'

The critic said:

'But surely you must be wrong. I heard that *The Tragedy of Man* was brought out, and English critics compared it with Goethe's *Faust*. . . .'

'Yes, that book was brought out in English. In fact two publishers brought it out in two different versions, but I must tell you the most hideous truth. Our greatest classic, *The Tragedy of Man*, which is to us what *Paradise Lost* is to an Englishman, was brought out and subsidised by the Hungarian Minister for Education.'

'Well, one must face facts. But what about our moderns?'

'Oh, how many times must I tell you that none are

known in England. Zsigmond Móricz, Frigyes Karinthy, Sándor Márai. None of these.'

'And what do you think is the reason?'

'I think it is partly because they are not civilised enough for the British public; because they have not the compulsory slickness of the conventional English novel. And partly because their most powerful and difficult style needs a translator who is, if not actually an artist, like Scott-Moncrieff, the man who translated Proust into English, must be of unusual skill and with a highly disciplined mind. The main factor, however, is, I think, that our representative authors are not accessible in any language except in Hungarian. English publishers have not got Hungarian readers and, furthermore, publishers have got to consider that a translation, no matter how ill-paid, must always be a costly business. An English publisher does not get some of the best authors in the country to translate foreign books for a pittance, as we do. The average English author either can't speak foreign languages or even if he can, he would not sacrifice his time for "mere translation" as the public inevitably would regard his work. . . . And now, honestly, couldn't you help me with my problem of "putting it over" to the English reader?'

'What do you mean exactly?'

'I told you. I don't wish to give a catalogue of names to my readers, a catalogue of strange names into the bargain, a catalogue of names which are difficult even to pronounce; names whose background is strange, but not strange enough to be attractive – or perhaps too strange to be attractive. It would be no use to tell my readers that Babits, for example, is,

as a poet, "erudite yet elegant" – in the style of the old-fashioned description of Hungarian literature – for the English reader would be quite justified in replying that he does not care whether Babits is "erudite yet elegant" or not. . . .'

'In that case I think you would be better advised to apply some personal touches. Say, for example, that Kosztolányi used green ink, like Osbert Sitwell, and that Babits types poetry while smoking a Turkish *chibook* pipe which is twenty-four inches long. Couldn't you do that?'

'No, because these writers are unknown to the British public. You are right that the Englishman likes those personal touches, but the writer whose personality is "touched" must be a famous one. Thus at the *Sunday Times* book exhibition last year the public viewed with interest Byron's wedding-shirt, Thackeray's favourite chair, Dickens's smoking-cap and Galsworthy's Nobel Medal. It was an admirable collection. I felt that only two things were missing from it.'

'What were they?'

'The stick with which Sir Thomas Lucy gave a hiding to Shakespeare, and the swimming-dress in which Byron swam the Hellespont, but I admit it would have been difficult to procure them, in spite of the great English respect for relics. But now, seriously, what I actually want is to give a sort of quintessence of Hungarian literature. What is specifically Hungarian in it? Just an idea of what Hungarian literature is like.'

The clerical eyebrows gave an impatient twitch, then the expression of the face became calm again:

'Well, in that case you have to say the following to your English readers. Listen carefully. In Hungary any writer who is not a strictly commercial entertainment-monger is inevitably classed and judged from the political point of view. With much justification. We are a politically-minded nation and thus the writer is an essentially politically-minded man, even if he knows nothing about the practical application of political theories and does not belong to any party. Thus there are two classes of writers. There is a Right Group and a Left Group. People belonging to the Right are mostly elderly men, they are perhaps not progressive and not of universal appeal. Some of them are strict Catholics. They maintain the principle that Nationalism is one of the roots of Hungarian literature. This principle is obvious to anyone who knows our history and our geographical position. The Right Group is approved by the majority in parliament. (Here you must mention that since the War Hungary has been ruled by the same conservative coalition and that a change of Premier or even of Government merely means the change of a face – not of a system. The party is stronger than its leaders.) Now then, say that these Right Group writers are not universally interesting with the exception of three or four. Ferencz Herczeg for one. He should be known in England for his brilliant historical novels. Then Zilahy, who is known in England, and Cécile Tormay who –'

'Oh, by the way, I quite forgot that Mme Tormay's books have been translated into English, and at the time had a distinguished success. . . .'

'Well, then. Will you say that these conservative

Right Group writers are read mostly by the gentile intelligentsia of Hungary and the richer, and more-or-less assimilated, Hungarian Jews. Then we come to the Left Group. They are younger and more progressive. They were often attacked for non-adherence to the Nationalist principle, or for being so "Nationalistic" that they are out to reform Hungary and do not spare their language in harping on the faults of the country. Writers of the Left Group are better known in England. They are more universal and perhaps they produce a more or less urban literature, more concerned with the town dweller than with the peasant. . . .'

'It would be quite incorrect to say that, as you have Móricz, who made his name as a peasant-writer, and among the younger ones you have Illyés who is himself a peasant. . . .'

'Quite right. Will you say then that they produce an urban (or rather "metropolitan") plus peasant literature, whereas the Right Group is more or less provincial in outlook. How about that?'

'Yes, that would do. And - ?'

'Then you mention a few authors. Say that Móricz is our most robust, most original, most Hungarian author, a pugilist with the sensitiveness of an Aeolian harp, with a wonderful feeling for words and a splendid original and forceful vocabulary. Then there is Sándor Márai. He is perhaps the most popular of the young generation, a disciple of André Gide and Huxley, yet more vital, more concrete, more -'

'- of a journalist,' I added.

'Well, perhaps that's the word. . . . Then mention Kosztolányi, the most imaginative Hungarian writer.

Say that to understand him "makes one indulgent of human weaknesses". Say that in England he is already known a little and that he is the Hungarian writer who first and foremost ought to be known widely in England, for he lends himself to translation and he is universal. And this I think ought to do. As for title call it "Duet". . . .'

'Or "Monologue for Two Voices",' I said meekly.

'That's right, and then your reader won't notice you are writing about a dangerous subject till he comes to the part where I begin to speak about Hungarian literature and then of course he will become so interested that he won't be able to put the book down. . . . Well, good-bye. Will you pay for my coffee. . . .?'

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My friend was gone and I looked through the scribbled notes I had made during the conversation. The picture was not clear yet. He had said nothing about the mentality of Hungarian literature. What is specifically 'Hungarian' in it?

I remember a discussion with an English literary critic over a Hungarian novel, which he had reviewed. He said that it reminded him of some Russian writers. The Hungarian background impressed him as so much akin to that of pre-War Russia. I reflected that this judgment was to a great extent due to the strange sound of Hungarian names, and reflected that even an inspired and imaginative critic as he was, could miss the significance of a book almost completely because his knowledge of the civilisation which produced it was insufficient. It is true that a good many Hungarian writers have no restraint, that they are not civilised, in the sense that they are too spontaneous,

but that is perhaps not typical as some of the best Hungarian authors are reserved, well-disciplined, and have furthermore a definite constructive ability. Moreover, Hungary *has* something in common with pre-War Russia.

It is still a largely agricultural country with the typical problems and conservative mentality of the peasant in its national make-up. Also, it has a comparatively small middle class and there is still much power in the hands of the landed aristocracy. Yes, but on the other hand, the Hungarian peasant is more civilised, more of a European citizen than any Russian peasant could ever be. And the urban population now after the War is more conscious of the peasant's mentality, is not living such a separate existence as the Russian middle class lived before the War.

In fact, the peasant of Hungary is very much in fashion now. This may be a superficial interest taken by the urban population in his old customs, his folklore art, his dances, and in his mentality in general – in short, anything quaint, picturesque and exotic. But it will inevitably result in the restoration of the balance between peasant and town dweller.

Then the landed aristocracy in Hungary is not quite so overbearing; it is not dwelling on such divine heights over the peasant; is not so indifferent, as Russian princes – so similar in outlook to French aristocrats – before the revolution. True, there are still a few bad landowners remaining in Hungary, curiously enough among the younger generation, but they usually come in for a good deal of censure from the national Press.

And the Hungarian peasant is not metaphysical

like the Slavs, nor does he live in that religious ecstasy of pre-War revolutionary Russia, which is still, after eighteen years of 'education', a living reality. With few exceptions – among the older generation – he can read and write and, through his religion – either Roman Catholic or Protestant – he is more akin to the West of Europe than those of the Greek Orthodox faith could ever be in spite of all the real and imagined similarity of the tenets and ritual of that sect to those of the Church of England.

CHAPTER XII

WOMEN IN HUNGARY

ONE afternoon a friend of mine arrived from London. He had been to Budapest many a time before and thus I was spared the tiring job of showing him round the town. One evening we dined at an open restaurant on the St. Margit Island. The place has an English name, and it is laid out in such a fashion that the *de luxe* foreign visitor finds himself completely at home, no matter what country he belongs to. It is a very international-looking place with its jazz band, its guests dressed for dinner, its French menu, and all its other arrangements. Were it not for its waiters attired in spotless white jackets, like dental surgeons, it might be any open-air restaurant along the Riviera or in Switzerland.

As we were waiting for our food, my friend said in an undertone:

'I like that cocotte in the lovely white frock over there.'

I smiled. I remembered discussions with him sitting as we were now at certain restaurants in Paris and London, Nice and Cannes, when we played a curious game of spotting such women, who are – as the French brilliantly put it – only in contact with half of the world (that is to say men), and are therefore called *demi-monde*. How is it, I wonder, that we two

young men, unmarried but otherwise leading more or less respectable lives, and being neither clairvoyants nor yet gynaecologists, could at once without any hesitation distinguish between the better-class courtesan and the respectable but modern woman. My friend, being in a frivolous mood, answered that it was because in these days it is the courtesan who is sparing in the use of make-up, it is she who is quiet, dignified in manners, behaviour and dress, and not those who are technically (or socially) Gentlewomen.

This was, of course, a witty generalisation, but it has more than the customary grain of truth in it. With reference to Budapest at least it is true.

The Hungarian courtesan makes quite a desperate attempt to create the impression of being, if not a lady, at least a respectable woman. She insists that she is one, and is usually accepted as such – or at least there is a pretence of accepting her pose, which apparently satisfies her.

This, I believe, is because Hungary is a very well-behaved country – in the *worst* sense of the word. Conventions – for Hungarians and not for foreign visitors – seem to be much stronger than they are in England – only they are of a different kind. It may be that the invisible influence of the Roman Church extended even to that forty per cent of Hungary's inhabitants which does not recognise the supremacy of the Pope, but the behaviour of women seems extremely restrained to anyone who comes from the West.

The Hungarian summer is certainly hotter than the English, yet even on the hottest day in Budapest I only saw three women who wore no stockings: an

Englishwoman, a young Hungarian countess and a servant girl. Roman Catholic bishops in Hungary are busy condemning make-up and painted fingernails in their pastoral letters and sermons and they are often listened to, mainly because – unlike some English non-conformists – they chide their flocks in a most charming manner. Their sermons are delivered in the most elegant and intelligent style. Most Roman bishops in Hungary are very broad-minded, unlike the Protestant Savonarolas who tour the sea-side of Sussex and jump on immorality with a whoop of delight – and this may partly account for their success with the female sex.

The general relation of men and women towards each other in Hungary is exactly opposite to that of English people. In Hungary there is slightly less freedom between the sexes. Women have hardly any independence and men seem to have more than in most countries.

Convention is much harder on women in Hungary and less hard on men than in England. This may be due to the somewhat provincial character of Hungarian life, or perhaps to the fact that Hungary is comparatively near to the east, with its conception of harem life. Convention still makes it more or less compulsory for women to get married, even though it does not reduce them to the position of mere housewives. The practical application of adapted ideas takes indeed a long time. On paper Hungarian women have every reason to call themselves emancipated. Since early in the eighteen-eighties they have been allowed to enter the universities and to practise as doctors. After the War the legal profession was

opened to them. They got the vote at the same time as their sisters in England, and the first Hungarian woman entered parliament in 1920. Yet in reality their position is still backward when compared with that of women in the countries of northern Europe, though certainly more advanced than that of women in Italy or Spain. Though there is no law to forbid it – as there is in Hungary – Englishwomen cannot enter the diplomatic service and cannot rise to high positions in the Civil Service, nevertheless they are to be found in most other branches of public life in well-paid situations and in leading positions. If women get any job in Hungary it is usually an inferior one.

The reason for this is, I believe, that the average Hungarian regards women more as decorative units, prospective wives or mistresses than as potential equals in life. Besides there is a slightly greater proportion of men in Hungary than in most European countries. All over Europe there are generally slightly more women than men, on account of the mysteries of the birth-rate, the comparative delicacy of male babies, and as a result of the World War. In England, moreover, there is an additional and important factor – that of the almost purely male emigration to the colonies.

Hungarian men are usually regarded as romantic or at least gallant. These are peculiarly English labels. The truth is that if one could compile statistics about romance and romantic behaviour it would disclose the startling fact that in amorous life (Hungarian romance usually refers to this) there is less romance in Hungary than in England. Even long before the War, in those much-talked-of 'golden years

of peace' the average Hungarian considered the dowry very important. Now romance is almost completely the preserve of the rich. How ice-cold an intelligent and sober Hungarian can be! . . .

If being romantic, however, interprets sexual behaviour in code-language, then Hungarians deserve the label. By nature they are passionate like most Central Europeans, a little more perhaps than the German and the Austrian, and perhaps less than the Slavs. Moreover, they are too healthy-minded to hide their feelings, sensual or otherwise. They certainly suffer little from inhibitions and complexes.

In their attitude towards their animal passions they certainly do not belong to the repressionist type of mankind. They yield to their emotions in every way of life, but doing this they show a certain moderation, not so much perhaps as the German and the Northern Latins, but certainly more than the Slavs. They give way to their passions in rather an attractive way. It is because of this that the average Hungarian woman appears to be less civilised than the average English-woman. Used as she is to courtship, the Hungarian certainly regards most men who approach her as hunters. And this is responsible for something almost tragic. That delightful English institution, the 'platonic' friendship, is almost completely unknown in Hungary.

Such friendship is even more impossible if one of the parties are married. One cannot very well take a married woman to any public place without inviting comment, and thus putting her in an embarrassing position. This is not because Hungarians are provincial in their outlook. (In Hungary Mrs. Grundy

never wears trousers.) And not because Hungarians have poisoned tongues, but simply because they are not yet as civilised in this matter as the English. Women have little freedom and still less confidence.

Thus the institution of chaperonage dies hard in Hungary. A first-year debutante in England is generally not allowed out without a chaperon, but she gradually becomes independent, whereas in Hungary she only attains independence when she possesses a marriage-certificate, or reaches the age of forty.

This strict convention has only been relaxed since poverty forced daughters of the middle class to seek employment. Then the young woman had to put her pride into her pocket and fight for her bread. It has often been a bitter fight, and a tragic one; and she has often been the victim, not of temptation, but of her own subservient position in relation to her employer, especially if she was poor and pretty. In the country she is even more under the power of the estate manager or of practically any man in a responsible position. The ancient *jus primae noctis* by virtue of which the lord of the manor could force the pretty peasant brides of his estate to spend the first night of marriage with him has been abolished for long centuries, but what was in those days feudalism is now the relation of the rich to the poor.

The attitude of the upper classes and their hangers-on is different in these matters. Not because the very highest and the very lowest are classes that don't care, but because the upper class in Hungary, just as in every other country has travelled a good deal, acted long as the interpreter of new ideas and conceptions in social relations as well as in other things as practised in other

countries, and that its habits and ways of life conform to the habits of its social equals all over the world. In the circles of Hungarian aristocracy one sees little in behaviour which might strike one as backward or out of date, except their general attitude to their servants.

And now about Hungarian gallantry. It certainly flourishes outwardly. A Hungarian greets a lady by raising her hand to his lips. She is much petted, cajoled, courted just as if she were a debutante – *une débutante prolongée*. She still hears most flattering comments on her beauty and charm, even on her dress. Whether she believes it to any extent or not at all must depend on the individual. She usually does not, but she expects it all the same.

Even if he does not actually kiss a lady's hand a gentleman's verbal greeting to a lady is always '*Kezét csókolom*', which means, 'I kiss your hand'.

These fine manners are symptomatic of the fact that there is little frankness and sincerity between the sexes in Hungarian life. Men's manners are often so fine that they must make an intelligent woman feel that she is regarded as sweet and lovely but mentally inferior to the man. The result is you cannot talk to the average Hungarian woman in the same way as you talk to the average Englishwoman – that is, with certain obvious reservations, almost as man to man. The English friendliness between the sexes is almost unknown in Hungary. Even the word friend, when applied to a woman, is not devoid of unpleasant associations. If you say that a woman is a friend of yours in Hungary it usually implies that she is your mistress and you are thought a cad for divulging the

fact. In this respect matters have slightly improved now. In these days they would not always think you a cad or grossly indiscreet; they would say that you were suffering from anglomania.

This incongruity between tradition and progress is all the more curious as the man who observes all these superficially-fine eighteenth-century customs is usually as advanced in his ideas and as modern, illuminated and progressive as any Western European. Women, in spite of their generally high culture in Hungary, naturally cannot be expected to be as advanced as their menfolk. This gallantry does not encourage a great deal of independence of thought. So in Hungary you may look for (and are sure to find) wonderful mothers, faithful wives, also women of great spiritual powers, of great intellect, women of taste, of charm, and ladies bountiful, but you rarely find women of great enterprise. Hungary has women Olympic champions, but she has no heroines of transatlantic flights or female African explorers. She has had her Florence Nightingales, but no Hester Stanhopes. She has had Jane Austens, but no Jean Battens. And the fact that Hungary is a poor country, where only a few people could produce the necessary money for great, but perhaps not strictly utilitarian enterprise, is not entirely responsible for the fact that her women do not excel in such achievements.

And it must be said that the average Hungarian woman does expect gallantry: not merely a casual respect on the part of the man, but a particular respect. She expects the man to say, 'I kiss your hand,' or even to execute the threat. She expects him to have over-polite manners and to be a flatterer, only to be frank

and sincere on request, and even then carefully sincere, not to shatter illusions. I don't think I am far wrong in drawing the conclusion that she expects it and is hurt if this particular respect is not extended to her because she regards 'gallantry' as a substitute for all that she loses, or imagine she loses, in independence, or in chances to succeed if she remains unmarried. 'If she is so easy to satisfy she should have gallantry,' says the average Hungarian. Only he puts it in a more forceful way.

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This attitude, of course, is completely changed towards foreigners in Hungary – especially towards the English. I know this not so much from hearsay but from personal experience. I am often introduced to Hungarian women as an Englishman by mistake. I naturally do not protest against the error as I wish to see what happens. It is very interesting. One naturally must make some discount for one's personality, but still my experience convinces me that the Hungarian attitude towards the English is extremely flattering. Hungarians think them romantic, an adjective which I can only make credible by calling attention to the primary basis for romance which is remoteness, strangeness, and slight familiarity with a certain background. I know it sounds very amusing for an Englishman to hear that there is a country where he is regarded as romantic, but Hungary is not alone in this. It is in fact an almost universal Central European belief. Only the interpretation of the word is different. In England romance usually means love under a starry heaven, away from the conventions of the home – an almost essentially simple way of exist-

ence. In Hungary it is love under the foggy sky of London in the W. 1 district, and an existence essentially far from simplicity. The average Hungarian is sick of simplicity or of Bohemianism. His romance is that of the poor. He is craving for a more intricate, more conventional, more mechanised existence.

Apart from the aura of romance, which may be vanishing in these days of swifter communication, the Englishman is regarded as the representative of a country which for the last hundred years has served as a national ideal for Hungary.

The romance and attraction of France, on the other hand, is almost completely gone from Hungary. She rivalled England for many years. Now the French are more or less ousted. It is true that the Peace Treaty of Trianon is responsible for the fact that Hungary has become disillusioned by her franco-philia; she learnt first to dislike the Frenchman instead of regarding him merely without passion. Yet the reason, I believe, is more complicated than that. It has a good deal to do with the general – and perhaps temporary – acceptance by the French of the fact that they have lost their domination over international thought. Paris is no longer the capital of Europe (London is not yet, but she has a good prospect of obtaining that position), and French thought to-day appeals only to the select few who understand it absolutely fully and do not approach it with sentiment and zeal. Even French writers, the protagonists of the *esprit*, are conscious of this withering of the *gloire*.

The place of France – as a land of promise – is now entirely taken by England. All the more because the interest and the attraction is of an early date. It has

been revived and now it is flourishing. Hungary generally takes a great interest in foreign countries, but she takes more interest in Britain than in any other country. Her people certainly know an astonishing amount about England, even if this knowledge includes much which is trivial and insignificant. The letters I receive in my capacity as a newspaper correspondent in London provide evidence on this point. Hungarian interest is naturally superficial, as the general public – even if it has received such good academic instruction as Hungarians do – is not expected to take an interest in things which are necessarily a little abstract and involve much meditation. By this I mean that it may not, for example, be easier to say in a Hungarian article that the British judge wears a wig and a scarlet gown – contrary to the Hungarian judge, who must be about the only one in Europe who executes his duties without these regalia – than to explain why his lordship does it, explaining about the background and the traditions behind it. Such an explanation could never have such a wide general appeal as a plain graphic statement of an unusual fact.

I do not know how much to discount of the average Englishman's frequent declaration to the effect that he feels 'completely at home' in Hungary. I do not doubt his sincerity, but I am certainly conscious of his tendency to use little beyond the cliché stock of his vocabulary, of his desire to please me, and of the additional fact that on holiday the average man tends to draw comparisons at the expense of his own country. Under normal circumstances he enjoys himself, he usually has time on his hands to become conscious

of the charm of things which may also be present nearer home. All I would say is that the conditions which will enable him to feel at home and to forget for quite a long time the adage of 'no place like home' are present in the Hungary of to-day.

Perhaps more. In no other country can he feel quite so much that he is regarded as a person superior to every other foreign visitor, and in no country can he feel with certainty that this respect is not due to his country's collective prosperity or to his individual (and comparative) wealth. The average American may have more cash, still the average Englishman remains the most favoured. And in making this distinction Hungarians must be given credit for showing their preference for the Englishman in such a tactful and subtle way that few people notice that there is such a distinction.

This makes me think of a statement by an English authoress of tales of adventure, made in one of her books. She wrote: 'The English are not popular abroad, except in circumstances *de luxe*.' I wonder if she included Hungary. I do know that places whose inhabitants are accustomed to generations of well-to-do English visitors, such as Paris, Switzerland or Egypt, almost resent a poor Englishman. But in Budapest it seems there is no coldness in the welcome given to the poor Englishman. If he is English he belongs to the Chosen Race.

Few Hungarians have that amazingly well-developed 'social sense' so typical of some English people – mostly women – that wonderful quality of being able to sum people up, to find their proper social background, to know at once from signs, hidden as

if they were masonic, whether they 'belong' or not. Hungarians certainly have the same ability if the person concerned is a compatriot or a continental foreigner, but in the case of the English they are hopeless.

I was once introduced to a middle-aged Englishman in quite a smart house in Budapest, where he figured as a company director from London. He was given a cordial welcome, was a little fussed over and regarded generally as a guest of honour. I happened to know the circumstances of the company director fairly well (without his knowing me), and I knew the company whose affairs he 'directed' in his capacity as a senior clerk (three hundred a year and a bonus). He was not a 'younger son' or a 'public-school man', whom changed times forced to face facts.

The 'director' did not know me and in point of fact he did not take the very slightest advantage of his position. He was simple, direct, spoke little and was polite. He was, perhaps, rather a dull individual.

I think this was what misled the Hungarian family. After all, they had only a limited knowledge of English, and they had heard so much about the 'nicest people' in England being so utterly simple in their manners, in their dress, in conversation. They heard that 'real gentlemen' talk so little about themselves, and that 'people on the top are so direct and simple'.

The son and daughter of the family – it turned out – met him at a swimming-bath, met him again, made friends with him and asked him to the house. They naturally did not ask who he was and his jocular hints at his profession were interpreted to the effect that

he was an influential business man, who had perhaps previously learnt the art of wearing a silk hat to perfection at an exclusive seat of learning.

I, of course, did not say a word to the family about his social position. They were left to find out for themselves. I did not blurt it out to show my 'superior knowledge', because he was nice and kind, and furthermore he was a well-meaning individual who became convinced of a theory that Hungarians knew no class distinction 'when they like you'. Why should I shatter such a favourable opinion of Hungary? And why should he not, for the first time in his life, feel a grand person? Why should he not satisfy all the *superiority* complex he might possess?

I did not tell the family, though I knew them intimately, because the truth would have been shattering. I would have told them if they had had ambitious plans about him, if they had given him a good time in the hope that they would be asked to visit the Scottish moors or stay at an ancestral mansion somewhere in Dorset. But this Hungarian family entertained a sweet, romantic snobbery about their 'prominent Englishman', a *l'art pour l'art* snobbery, without any afterthought, a snobbery which is rare now, and is only kept alive by particularly sweet maiden aunts in South Kensington boarding-houses (late of Harrogate and Cheltenham).

No, the Hungarian family did not notice those tiny little things from which English people would have deduced everything.

It is true I was itching to say something, when the mother of the family asked what I thought of 'their Englishman'. She put the question as though they

had been entertaining royalty. I said he was pleasant but rather dull.

'Dull?' repeated the lady with a sigh. 'He is frightfully dull. But then Englishmen of really good families are all very dull, aren't they?'

'I don't know,' I answered innocently. 'I have met one or two who were not. . . .'

'Yes, he is dull,' she continued. 'As a matter of fact, my husband could hardly keep from yawning (I hope Mr. Jenkins did not notice), but he is the best type of English gentleman. And the English like us, don't they?'

I said they did.

CHAPTER XIII

DANCING AND HUNGARIAN WOMEN

THE following evening I found my way again to the 'International' Restaurant at the Margit Island. This time I was asked by an American hostess to dine and dance. I was seated next to an English-woman, beautiful, witty and a perfect dancing partner. The restaurant was more crowded than during the previous night. The little bulbs scattered all over the dried grape leaves of the roof were trying their best to obliterate the stars. It was early in September and already there came little whispers of the wind from over the river. I said that the place would have given a perfect setting for a Somerset Maugham novel. 'Precisely,' she said with a noncommittal expression on her face, 'and that is why one doesn't like Maugham novels.' Then I asked her to a dance.

There are few things I like better than dancing. Should there be any need for an explanation or even an excuse I venture to say that I am a Hungarian, and that I belong to the post-War generation. Hungarians are generally associated with dancing and music just as the British are with the kicking, grabbing, hitting and tossing of balls of various sizes and materials.

My early youth was spent in the days of the 'dance craze' and I shared the prejudice of my contemporaries that this label was stuck on the nineteen-twenties

by those whose happy youth had been spent before the War, and we did not care. We lived our lives to the time of fox-trots and concentrated our ideas in tango-rhythm.

Dance music still accompanies my life. From time to time it fades away like the beating of a tired heart and becomes distant as when you hear nothing from the orchestra, but the dim wailing of a solitary saxophone, yet it is ever present, and dancing remains one of the few of my recreations.

I dance, if I may say so, in the purest, the very purest amateur spirit. I do it neither for its possible social advantage, in which case I would have to take a few dancing lessons, nor as a corrective to corpulence, when I should be well advised to give up dancing – and the sooner the better.

I believe that dancing is an ideal recreation for literary men, but these, I am sorry to say, do not avail themselves of my suggestion, on the contrary, they do their best to ruin the reputation of their tribe in general when it comes to dancing.

During the last ten years I have danced practically everywhere and with every nationality and social class, religion, and colour. I have got to know the world through the way it dances, just as *gourmets* know it by its dinner-tables.

I have danced in London: in hotels where there are so many people that you cannot hear the band properly or so few that you develop an inferiority complex. In other hotels where the sham Louis XV furniture, the dresses and the conversation lull one into a dream about the nineties (have they ever been 'naughty?'), and in others where decoration, dress and conversa-

tion make one anxious for the future of the British Empire. In hotels where everybody is old and nobody can dance, and in other hotels where everybody is young and nobody can dance either. I have danced in night-clubs, whose proprietress spent an average of six months of every year in prison, and in night-clubs where the proprietress ran Girl Guides in her spare time. I have attended 'deb' dances, in very polite geographical regions of London, where the hired butlers look like pre-War ambassadors, and where one hears so many lies and sees so much sham that the fake Gainsboroughs and Tintoretos on the walls seem shy and innocent. And finally I have danced at the 'Palais' – but we will come to that later on.

I have also danced in France. At the *Meurice* and *Carlton* at Paris, and in very small, very smart, very expensive and very inferior places in Montmartre, and in those little taverns where students hop and turn around St. Michel and Montparnasse, on the strength of a glass of beer. I have visited *Bullier*, where shop-girls and less successful mannequins used to go, and elderly gentlemen on pretence of '*absorbing-the-atmosphere-from-a-purely-literary-point-of-view*' asked them to a dance. And I have been invited to dances given by the *Faubourg*, whose daughters are not allowed to use make-up, and their fathers acted as additional chaperons with little red ribbons in their buttonholes.

I have danced in Nice, at the Casino, where little shopkeepers lose their five francs on the 'boule', under the illusion that they are playing roulette at Monte Carlo and losing *Louis d'ors*. I was taken to dance beneath the *Promenade des Anglais* under a canvas sky, where the fashion was to wear pyjamas and sandals,

and where great expanses of bronzed naked flesh loomed up before one's eyes at every turn. On the floor at Juan les Pins one night I twice bumped into Mr. Michael Arlen, and over a table at Cannes I saw that leaning tower of irony, wisdom, and gloom, Mr. Aldous Huxley. I also remember a sailor's bar in Marseilles, where the only instrument was an asthmatic accordion which gasped:

*'En parlant un peu de Paris
Tout est clair et tous vous souriez.'*

I have danced in Genoa, in an *American Bar*, in Milan in a *Hungarian Bar*, and in Toledo in an *International Bar*, and at other Spanish places, where the stars through the window looked far too theatrical to be real.

I have also danced in Berlin – that was pre-Hitler, – in dance-halls small and large and in places where only men were present – some of them dressed as women.

And for that matter I have danced in Munich, in Dresden, in Frankfurt, in Zurich, in Vienna, in Budapest, in Prague and also in Dublin, in Birmingham, and in Glasgow. In Staffordshire I was asked to a Hunt Ball, in Tedworth to another Hunt Ball, and in Dorking to a third Hunt Ball. And if I never actually danced in Yokohama and Lima, Boston, Reykjavik and Mandalay, I can assure you that I have danced with some of their inhabitants. Did dancing teach me anything? Did I derive any information from it as well as pleasure? I believe I did.

A famous Viennese authority on handwriting once said that writing is an expression of one's personality

in so far as it is the result of certain movements of the individual. 'If we examine the movements themselves,' he continued, 'we can draw just as many conclusions from them as if we study their result on a piece of paper.' In support of his theory he watched the movements of racehorses before the start of a race and backed one which moved according to his satisfaction. It won. Now this is perhaps a too finely spun argument and too far-fetched, but it has some truth in it. You can see a good deal from the movements of people dancing, and your deductions will not always be wrong.

Intellectuals, freethinkers and 'Clever People' as a rule dance absent-mindedly, as if they were for ever concentrating on the possibilities of forgetting a gas-tap left on in their flats. Musicians, on the other hand, are always bent on subconsciously criticising the rhythm of the band. They are uncompromising and impatient.

On actresses I have to be rather hard. Those who take part in straight plays are all right, but those who sing or dance are beyond hope on the floor. Musical-comedy actresses are bad dancers, and of ballerinas it is difficult to say anything without coming up against the law of libel. What is wrong with their dancing? Everything! Their sense of rhythm, their attitude, their movements. They either drag you or they weigh themselves on you, though you may not particularly wish to take part in an acrobatic turn.

I can quite understand that. It is what you call an 'industrial disease' with them.

As regards height, we all know what a pleasant sight a man over six feet, dancing in perfect unison with his

partner, can afford. But people over six feet seldom dance well; as a rule, abominably. The best dancers are usually recruited from among people who are under six feet. The fact that shorter people are generally more ambitious than taller ones is well known. They wish to 'grow' always and everywhere, and in dancing as well.

The same applies to the fat and the lean. You can see that an experienced dancer will often choose to dance with women who are inclined to be endowed with considerable architectural proportions in preference to the pencil-shape. Fat women very often belie their volume and dance lightly as fairies with an excellent sense of rhythm which is, as a rule, a sign of mental peace and excellent digestion, whereas the more fashionable figure often seems to take root and one seems to need at least one-horse-power to move them.

The 'strong, silent man' is usually a bad dancer, but one should never generalise. . . .

And now let us survey dancing Europe.

Latins as a rule are temperamental dancers. They are for ever embarrassing one with intricate steps and passion gets hold of them so much that they overtake the band, which is reduced to a mere accompaniment. A good dancer should dance to the tune the band calls. Moreover Latins usually dramatise their movements and expressions. They show a preference for the rumba and that modernised and civilised *danse de ventre* known as *biguine*. Their dancing resembles acrobatics. They lower their arms, which is not comfortable and tends to stiffen their movements. French girls are often difficult to dance with. Spanish girls, however, are

blessed with an enormous sense of rhythm, and are restless and impatient as greyhounds before a race.

Among other groups of European people, Teutons dance much more smoothly and with a greater sense of reserve. Germans and Scandinavians invariably dance well. They take everything seriously, dancing included. Hungarians and Poles are supposed to be good dancers which is really miraculous considering the inferiority of their dance bands.

And now where is the best dancing in Europe to be found? Unhesitatingly I say: in England.

My friends abroad or even in England will feel hurt and disapproving when they hear this, but their feelings will be unjustified. They have only seen Representative Britain dancing at the Best Places, and they should note that Representative Britain is only very rarely 'representative' where dancing is concerned. They should note, moreover, that at the Best Places people do anything but dance. There wouldn't be room, anyhow.

If you want to see the best dancing in Europe, you have to visit the 'Palais'. You have to go to the suburbs of London or of the large industrial towns of the north.

At first glance you may find the atmosphere 'democratic', but you soon come to the conclusion that it is the reverse. It is almost despotic or, if you like, dictatorial.

It may not even give the impression of a place of amusement in spite of its gay decorations, its splendid floor and the coloured lights. You find none of the cheeriness of a West End affair. The 'Palais' is surprisingly quiet: apart from the intervals there is little

conversation and its manners are almost as stiff as those of a late Victorian Court. If you expect the reverse or try to practise it, you will soon feel an outsider. . . .

Here, dancing is the thing. Dancing with even rhythmical steps and graceful turns. Here people know how to hold themselves; that the upper part of the body should just move the necessary amount and not an inch more. They are light on their feet as they glide across the floor with silent steps. One hears as little noise as during a performance by the best *corps de ballet*.

They dance with more than intelligent interest and ambition: they dance with an almost religious devotion.

And why is the standard of dancing so high at the 'Palais'? Because for these people dancing is the one single pleasure, distraction, recreation, a sole and narrow road to 'smartness'. The hunting field, the weddings at St. Margaret's, Westminster, the Royal Enclosure, Wimbledon, and the dances in Mayfair squares, only exist for them through camera angles, and are usually associated with a visit to the hair-dresser and the dentist.

In the 'Palais' they are really themselves. When the band strikes up and the couples glide over the floor noiselessly, under lights that change their colour every second, they are lulled into a dream. Their ordinary humdrum existence is forgotten for the moment; they feel far away from space and time, and the illusion is not disturbed rudely by conversation or failing technique. It is a moment when inspiration comes, the heart beats faster and even the plainest girl looks pretty. The dance is the thing.

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We compared notes over this subject with the Englishwoman. She said it was remarkable how well Hungarians danced considering the low quality of Hungarian bands. I explained to her that dance-bands on the Continent are generally below the level of the best English bands – and explained furthermore that in Hungary this is purely a question of money. The average leader of a Hungarian jazz-band receives something like one twentieth – that is to say, five per cent – of what the London ‘star’ leaders earn. In England the dance orchestra leader is the most over-paid professional man.

And this is a little tragic in Hungary – a musical country – but then, Hungary is a music-producing, music-exporting country. It consumes less. It is quite surprising how many operettas and musical-comedies and tunes this tiny country is responsible for. But you must hear their tunes in England or America.

Then I danced with a Hungarian girl. Even if I had not known she was Hungarian I would have recognised her response to my lead. She was accustomed to uneven steps and to a certain amount of acrobatics, such as skaters do, but she, like all Hungarian girls, had what I call ‘intelligence’ of dancing – but I am getting too technical. . . .

And even if I had not known she was a Hungarian I would have spotted this at once. It is very difficult to take stock of the things which, so to speak, give people away, because one is constantly wandering into the wilderness of generalisation. It is a curious observation on the average woman of Budapest, that she does most things in life, (except really important things)

with over-emphasis, with a studied care which seems to be more important than the act itself. In other words in her everyday movements she is not purely functional, she slightly dramatises everything she does – sometimes well and effectively, sometimes with such over-emphasis that it has the effect of a cheap pose, a cheap affectation copied from a third-rate American film. Yet it is permanent; with the majority it is almost second nature.

The Hungarian girl next to me took her cigarette case out of her bag, extracted a cigarette and lighted it on her neighbour's lighter. That is what actually happened – and should this sentence have been part of my confession as a witness before a court, I would have said that it contained everything essential. Yet the sentence in question is only a very bare outline. It is not graphic at all. Much more happened than this simple act of lighting a cigarette. SIMPLE! She took out a cigarette, played with it a little in order to see if the tobacco was dry enough, then pressed the oval shape of the cigarette between her two fingers, till it became round, like a Virginia brand. Then – not at all in a hurry – she put it into her mouth and looked round among her neighbours. (As I noticed later she had a lighter in perfect working order in her bag.) Her neighbour quickly produced his lighter and offered it. Then came the second act. She approached the little flame, cigarette in mouth, then finally when it was lit, she shut her eyes and let out the first puff with an expression as if it had been opium – showing a row of pretty even teeth. It was exactly like a slow-motion picture.

Then she went on smoking in the same way, with

great care that the operation should give her an opportunity to show off her fingers, her fingernails, her emerald ring, her bracelet, her intelligently rouged lips and her teeth. Needless to say the cigarette only appeared in her mouth for brief seconds.

A minute later I thought of these things in retrospect when the Englishwoman performed exactly the same act and gave me a standard of comparison. She produced her large cigarette-case, quickly opened it, offered me a cigarette, took one out herself, tapped it gently against the table and was already feeling for her lighter when I offered mine. Her movements were economic, absolutely functional and businesslike. She performed them like a man and yet lost nothing of her femininity.

Then the other Hungarian girl returned from the floor with her partner and sat down. The operation again took place. Again it was reminiscent of a slow-motion picture. She did not sit down; she took her seat, she took it with grace, like a queen – when queens were a hundred per cent queens. It was a highly pontifical operation – nothing like the economical movements of the Englishwoman.

It was then that I reflected on practically all her functions (except the really important ones); I saw her – the woman of Budapest – walking. She walks proudly, a little floating over the pavement, elastically, slightly swinging. Walks always as if she were promenading, never hurries sulkily like the Parisienne – and quite unlike the exercised even tread of the Englishwoman. Then I saw her eating – another opportunity to display her hand and fingers; to powder her nose, to talk. I saw her reading, driving a car, playing

bridge. She was always a little self-conscious exhibitionist – always ready to call attention to herself.

Yet all these are attractive qualities for people who are not cross-grained carpers like myself, and it must be said that Hungarian women almost completely preserved their personal identity in our age, when under the influence of films women began to be dreadfully standardised all over the world. One very rarely sees two Hungarian women alike. They may wear the same dress, have the same fashion of doing their hair, yet they will still retain their marked personality. They offer a magnificent variety. To know thirty different Englishwomen is to know the average Englishwoman; this number exhausts all possible types. In Hungary there must be at least three hundred different types or more.

This little ‘something’, this ‘little plus’ which may be called in scientific terms a ‘demonstrative disposition’, lends such an attractive character to the woman of Budapest – even to the ugliest, to the most unimportant. As a rule, nowhere except in Paris can women wear their clothes with so much *chic* as in Budapest.

It is she – the Budapest woman – who is the most perfect agent in the country for the importation of foreign ideas, right or wrong. She is less critical than the men of the Pest café. She does not mind a bluff – if it is an attractive one. To the slightly provincial Budapest she is the cosmopolitan spirit.

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The orchestra played a *csárdás* – obviously at public request. I like to watch this westernised version of the national dance of Hungary. I was taught how to do

it when I went to a dancing class (patent-leather shoes, carefully brushed hair and shiny nose), but I have not danced it for ages and I am not sure whether I could do it well. In England it is usually spelt *czardas*, which is a curious compromise between phonetic spelling and utter nonsense. It is actually pronounced, 'Chardash', both 'a's' being as sharp as the 'a' in the word 'lark'. Judging by its name, it obviously comes from the *csárda*, which means inn. It was a peasant's dance and was only promoted to the ballroom at the time of the great national revival of the eighteenth-thirties – just as eightsome reels, the kilt and the sporran became universally fashionable with the Scottish nobility after Queen Victoria's visit to the Highlands.

It looks simple enough, two steps right and two steps left, the girl resting her hands on her partner's shoulders and he gently grasping her waist, but we all know how difficult apparently simple things can be. The *csárdás* is full of unexpected twists and it is so Hungarian that no one but genuine Hungarians could do it. I am talking about men, because the floor was crowded by English and Americans, who all wanted to dance it on the spot. Our hostess went to dance it with a young Hungarian airman; a Hungarian girl promptly asked Lord Sackville who, knowing what a gentleman's duty was, went on to the floor with utter resignation, but soon learnt the dance. I asked Mrs. William Randolph Hearst – by the way, a very good dancing partner – and yes, blood will tell, I managed to remember the old familiar dance again. I was a little ashamed of myself that an American lady should pick up its rhythm quicker than I did, but I soon got into it.

Then I saw my friend the very tall Hungarian painter on the floor among the dancers. For a time I thought he was standing there, as if he wanted unsolicited to judge the standard of the dancers. Then I noticed that he was moving with the crowd.

'I say, Márton, why are you dancing alone?' I asked as we reached him.

The lanky artist turned round and I discovered that he was partnered by a lady who literally hardly reached the bottom of his shirtfront.

I only hope that she was unable to understand Hungarian.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAFÉ

'The idea of Pest was associated in my mind with a huge musical café, where frighteningly wise and desperately well-informed people would sit all day. People who knew absolutely everything about each other. Everything unimportant and unpleasant.'

- ALEXANDER MÁRAI.

ONE afternoon I decided to go to a café to see a few English newspapers. After some hesitation I went into one on the Danube Embankment, mainly because I had found out that there was no music there.

I went with slight misgivings and a feeling of being grown-up and independent. These feelings were due to the fact that when I lived in Hungary as a boy, though not actually forbidden to go to cafés, my father gave me to understand that it was not quite the right thing. When at twenty I made my entry into life, I would gladly have visited them, but I was then in London where, to my regret, there were no cafés. When I say there are no cafés in England I am naturally excluding those unfortunate places of refreshment, so prevalent in these days of ribbon-development which have usurped the name. Consequently I had to show that I was of age by indulging in vices which were more in keeping with my new surroundings.

I had always known that the café in Budapest was something of a national institution, not so much because the Hungarian tends to live his life more in

public than the Englishman, in whose country anything of any importance takes place within four walls, but because of Hungarian poverty. Poverty, as will be gathered from this book is one of the most striking features of Hungarian life; it is a Hungarian *motif*, and one must always bear it in mind before forming a judgment on practically anything in the country.

For a large section of the inhabitants of Budapest the café is a second home – in many cases it is the first actual home being degraded into a mere nightly retreat. The café offers warmth, comfort, cheaply-luxurious surroundings, life and colour and movement. It also offers all the newspapers and some of the finest coffee in the world.

I was a little surprised to see that the life of these places is still what it was ten or twelve years ago, when I paid my furtive and frightened visits to them, trembling lest I might bump into one of my schoolmasters. Budapest is still known as the 'Town of Cafés' and the café *habitué* is still a living fixture.

Take, for instance, the man sitting at the next table reading French newspapers in a despairing manner and making notes on a slip of paper. Ten years ago I saw him sitting at the exact spot, reading the same French papers with the same expression, only on his face there were fewer of those mysterious lines and corrections with which nature seems to try all the time to improve on its original conception, till one day like an impatient author crossing out a sentence, with an angry stroke of his pencil she finishes with us. The man is a journalist and the slips of papers on which he works are known to his profession as 'dog's tongues'. The 'dog's tongues' curiously enough, were supplied

by the waiter. The waiter could also supply pen and ink, notepaper, post cards, envelopes, postage stamps, aspirin, bisurated magnesia, short-term loans, and friendly advice. Also ideas for articles and plots for short stories.

This is meant quite seriously. His profession has made the waiter alert and thoughtful, all over the world. He knows a good deal more about humanity than a hairdresser or a psycho-analyst. He inevitably forms ideas, he inevitably learns about the mental attitude of many different types of people. In Budapest, where privacy is by no means a primary necessity of life, he becomes almost a thought-reader.

Some waiters are said to have the making of a novelist in them. Making, of course – shall we be frankly brutal? – is nothing. What is important is the power of communicating things. The waiter has that, too. And he has it in a forceful and interesting way, only his form of art, his medium is not the orthodox one. He does not write: he talks. He is a *causeur* and not a *conteur*.

He sums up his patrons in a few seconds and is rarely wrong in his estimates, and he is ready to part with information on the slightest provocation. No wonder the unfortunate journalist regards him as a useful friend, cursing the sinister order of the modern world in which newspapers must be published every day, regardless of whether any real news is available.

You cannot astonish the Budapest waiter. He knows more about you than you may even guess or would care to admit. You could not disturb his self-possession by asking him to put a dash of kangaroo's milk into the coffee, though he may not always be in

a position to comply with the request. In Budapest he is the pick of his profession and if he gets into any trouble it is never because he is dull or slow witted, but often because he is too clever.

He is furthermore the only waiter in the world whose uniform – the regulation full dress coat – stands for something more than a livery. The tails seem to be part of his body – wings which make him fly in body and mind. He is surprisingly quick.

He bowed deeply as he came up to my table.

I ordered a *capuziner*, meaning coffee with a dash of milk, which makes its colour a dark brown like the cassock worn by Capuchin monks – and I asked for *The Times*.

He came back in less than two minutes, bringing my coffee, according to Central European custom, in a glass. He also brought no less than three glasses of iced water. I smiled and, looking at the tray on my table, reflected that it was a typical Budapest 'still life'. For in no other town in the whole world do they bring you three glasses of water with one cup of coffee. I know two Englishmen who discussed the subject for hours trying to find out what the number of glasses signify. Why water? And why three glasses? And why not a bottle and an empty glass? I told them it was a local custom, but I could go no further into the explanation of this deep and dark Hungarian secret. The man you may see ordering coffee and asking for glasses of water abroad from a slightly astonished but polite waiter is sure to be a Hungarian or an Austrian. For a mysterious reason he always drinks water after his coffee. One glass after the other.

After I had finished with *The Times* and had seen

the customary letters to the editor on the August habits of the wrens and the woodpeckers in Sussex, I knew that nothing could be wrong with England, so I drank my coffee. It was excellent, as coffee generally is in Budapest. I may have vices, but the one I indulge in most and the one I feel most conscious of in England is coffee-drinking. I am devoted to it and feel miserable without it. Curiously enough I developed this habit in England, hardly a suitable place. In my days of despair in London I used to meditate a good deal on the various perverse machinations by means of which this excellent beverage becomes foul and quite unsuitable for human consumption. There is one thing which I still cannot understand about English coffee. Why do the English insist on drinking it? If it is barred and regarded as unsavoury or bad for the health or immoral – an alien invention – why don't they take steps to prevent its consumption in the same way as they control the traffic in hashish and morphine? They have not yet done so. Under the names of the Henry's, the Edward's or the George's, there are no laws against coffee in the Statute Book. It is free from any restrictions, and is being drunk in large quantities in public. More, it is advertised.

The question why it is so unpalatable is, I believe, easy to answer. It is a hard fact and a challenge. Coffee as a rule is bad in England, because coffee-making is a much more complicated process than tea-making, and requires that sympathetic attention, of which the average English cook is incapable. Tea can be used the moment it is taken out of the caddy, while coffee has got to be roasted and ground, and both of these processes have pitfalls for the indifferent. It

does not need inspiration but it certainly needs great care in the making. Roasting must not be underdone – after all, coffee is not beef – nor should it be burned. One should add a little butter and so on. . . . I know all this, because in my despair I am forced to make my own morning coffee. I am told I make it successfully.

English people begin, with a sigh, to talk about the hardness of London water, which they say is patently suitable for making the best tea in the world but it ruins coffee. I am sorry to say that I have to wave this argument aside. I never want to drink better coffee than I am offered in most good luxury hotels and restaurants in London. The accent is on *luxury*, because the more the hotel falls below the luxury standards the more British the coffee becomes.

Oh, how many a splendid dinner-party has been spoilt for me – the coffee fiend – on account of that liquid. One goes to a lovely home in London or in the country. Everything is traditionally splendid, there is magnificent carved panelling in the dining-room, old masters carefully lit, beautiful women, in lovely frocks, around the table, and charming and most inspiring conversation. The dinner is prepared by a major artist; the host is a noted connoisseur of wine. There are excellent cigars: some kept in glass jars to prevent them from getting dry.

The ladies rise and the coffee is brought in by the butler. One hears him whisper, 'That is hot milk, sir,' then one pours it out. The colour looks suspicious, one leans over it and carefully – that no one should notice – smells it from a distance. Another evil omen. One puts the sugar in, stirs it, then raises it to one's

lips and wishes to cry out in despair. The whole lovely atmosphere of the party is ruined. The coffee is foul. It is weak, watery, thin, dirty of colour and tastes like burnt varnish.

I don't think I am alone in my grievance. Hundreds of English people who recognise the pleasures of coffee join me with their anxious and native sympathy. Balzac used it to induce inspiration and ruined his health with it, just as Schiller was known to dip his naked feet into iced water for the same purpose and became rheumatic. Goethe was more moderate: he kept rotten apples in the drawer of his writing-desk, and kept smelling them while he wrote. I think I prefer Balzac's method, in moderation, however.

Since I became addicted to coffee as the result of a fortnight's stay in the English country house of an American hostess, I have made quite a little study of coffee all over Europe. Belgian coffee is excellent, even on those little Belgian steamers between Dover and Ostende, where one's mind is usually occupied with other thoughts than appreciating coffee. The Belgians, I suspect, put quite as much chicory into it as the French, whose coffee has a definite flavour. (Oh, if one could only bring a Parisian café to London, a café complete with its *café crème avec brioche* and with its waiters who, when they are not rude, comb their hair behind the bar in public. By the way, it should not be essential for the waiter to be rude or to comb his hair in public – but we must accept the rough with the smooth.)

German coffee is still good – even if it is a little thin – a huge pot of coffee with a tiny jug of milk and sugar (carefully packed in oil-paper).

But good coffee, really good coffee, inspiring coffee, vitalising coffee can only be made in Central Europe and Italy. There it is supreme.

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I really ought to be, perhaps, a little more thrilled or perhaps impressed, sitting in the café. The Budapest café was the cradle of much of modern Hungarian literature. At least of the literature that goes under the label of Budapest. Much of it was written in this atmosphere of smoke, gipsy music, mirrors, marble tables and many trinities of glasses of water. For a time the young writer and the journalist made it his only home. He sat there all day long, meditated, read the papers, then towards the evening asked the waiter for a 'dog's tongue' and began to work. It was so much his home that the café was the only place where he was sure to be found between certain hours; where he was on the phone, and where he made appointments. Even his letters were addressed *care of* the café, just as an Englishman might have them addressed care of his bank.

I don't think the tradition still fully persists. There are now few writers who could only be found in their own particular café, which in those days – though not officially – were called 'literary cafés', and advertised *literary hors d'œuvre*. Now writers are more sensible; they take exercise; they shave every day and lead a bourgeois life. A few of the older generation, however, still live in their favourite cafés. Perhaps for old times' sake. It is reputed of Molnár – the successful playwright – that through the habit of years, his best work is still done in a café. I personally don't believe this, as with the exaggerated personality cult of Buda-

pest, the café would organise itself into a sight, under the slogan 'See Molnár at Work'.

But then there is Sándor Nádas, who still must spend a good deal of his time at the Café New York, an old café with a long literary tradition. He is the typical representative of the spirit of the Pest café, those little *bons mots*, that peculiar slang, those extremely witty paradoxes, cruel, to the point, with a little of Heine's superiority and *Weltschmerz*, Jewish and consequently to a certain extent international. Yet it is unique. It may be translated and adapted into English, yet it fails as all those plays failed in London which were typical products of the Budapest café spirit. Molnár's failure in London and enormous success in New York is typical of this.

Nádas is a reporter of that spirit. His writing is amusing, a little impertinent, a little superior, a little nostalgic and extremely direct. More, I often feel he is taking liberties with the reader. But he is so confidential, and the way he grips the mental button on one's mental coat, makes one inclined to forgive him everything.

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Oh, how wise, how well informed those typical *habitués* of the Pest café are. Somebody, who hates them, says 'they don't know anything, but they know everything better'. They do. I remember meeting one or two on my holidays – after I had spent two years in London. Within five minutes it came out that I knew nothing about London. I felt it was indirectly suggested I had never been to England at all or if I actually had been, it was only a very slight, fleeting visit. Then came the point.

I complained that as a newspaper correspondent the purchase of at least half a dozen newspapers a day made a serious inroad on my income.

'Now, look here,' said one of the wise guys, 'don't try to be superior. Tell us the truth – that you want to send in a large bill for expenses pretending you have to buy those papers every day. After all, I don't think you are such a fool as not to go to a London café where you can read any newspapers any time free. . . .'

I remained silent. In those days I had not the nerve to give these people such little pieces of information as:

1. There are no cafés in London.
2. There is only one café.
3. Even in that single café, one cannot order the waiter to bring the papers, as there are no papers there, unless the customer brings them in himself.

You can't impress the café-man of Pest. He is smarter than that. He is wiser. He is superior. He is not taken in by anybody or anything. He would die of shame if he had to admit that he was admiring, adoring, loving something. 'We are not taken in easily by bluff.' How many times have I heard that phrase used by the wise guys of Budapest. If they go to London, they seem to make up their minds that they won't be taken in by any bluff. I remember being forced to show one of them around London. 'These mangy little English trains,' he said when we shook hands at Victoria. 'How dirty London streets are!' when I took him to Piccadilly Circus. Then in an ill-advised moment I took him to the zoo. He was almost insulted. 'What!' he exclaimed, 'you call that anaemic little cat a lion? Well, just come back to

Budapest and see ours. . . .’ He found the giraffes too short, the elephant too small, the rattle of the rattlesnake too quiet, and the tigers too smelly. I was desperate. London failed him and I made myself seem pitiful.

Then, I remembered Caruso’s failure in Budapest – the memory of which still fills the man of Pest with something like the pride of a supreme intellectual achievement. It happened a few years before the War that Caruso came to sing in Budapest and was indisposed; the café booed and hissed. They would never forget that. They are proud of it still. They are not proud of the fact that they saw Caruso but of the fact that Caruso failed and that they could hiss.

In other respects this enormously strong critical instinct, this iconoclasm, is perhaps beneficial in one sense. The Hungarian actor and musician goes through such agonies, becomes so frightened by the vitriolic tongue of Pest that if he does not shut up altogether he usually works very hard and is much appreciated abroad, as no foreign public can be as murderously critical as that of Pest.

It took us some time to realise that this attitude, all this superior cynicism, is merely a mask; a poor ragged mask, not even close fitting enough to hide an almost complete embarrassment and fright towards the mysteries and questions of life. I was angry with them because I am enthusiastic and curious by nature, in short a ‘provincial’, and I felt childish in a desperately grown-up Budapest. It took me some time to discover that cynicism and irony with them was a means of self-defence against the hardships of life just like the American’s ‘keep smiling’ and the Englishman’s

optimism and sentimentality, serve the same aim. Yes but how much more sympathetic the English attitude is. At least to me it seems so. I must confess I have always been a little sentimental, but optimism, intelligent optimism, I tried to learn from the English.

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A few tables away from me I saw a well-known Hungarian painter. I knew his face but I never really cared for his work. His neo-classical pictures to me, always suggested advertisements offering cures for various common diseases such as constipation and anaemia. The reason why I became interested in him now was because he stared so desperately in front of him, not even seeing the women parading on the *Corso*. (With Hungarian painters I understand this to be a sign very grave indeed.) I asked the waiter. He knows everything and everybody.

No, the painter had not lost his political connections, through which he received commissions for so many celebrities and orders for frescoes for public buildings. No, something much worse had happened to him.

I was all ears.

It came out that the painter was recently commissioned to build an altarpiece for a new church in the country and everything was going on in the most perfect manner. He was doing two of the apostles, when one day his otherwise punctual model – one with a head like St. Peter – did not turn up. He sent for him and it came out that this pious-looking old man had been wanted by the police for the previous six months for various thefts. He was arrested. The painter – a resourceful man – tried to continue the work. It was out of the question to find another model, the

picture was in a very advanced state, so he tried to sketch him during the trial in the course of which St. Peter was sentenced to two years' hard labour. The work was, however, during the trial, still not enough for the painter, so he applied to the prison governor to let him go to the prison and continue work there. The governor refused his application on the ground that sitting for a picture while in prison is not in keeping with the law relating to Hungarian criminal procedure. The painter was still persistent; he pulled wires and finally succeeded in getting the necessary permit to visit the man in prison. He went with brush in hand and a superior smile on his face, only to find to his horror that St. Peter's head was closely cropped and his beard cut off.

I was just leaving the café when a man came up to me and asked for my copy of *The Times*, in a pleasant Hungarian voice. I looked at his face, his bald head, his heavy glasses, and answered him in English:

'Yes, you may have it, Mr. —'

It was only then he recognised me. He was the man who first taught me English (and is partly responsible for this book). I offered him a seat and we talked. I thought that I was a welcome reminder of his country in the same way that even a crumpled letter in the gutter with an English postage stamp on might awake echoes in one's mind.

I remembered the first lessons, even the very first, when one afternoon in February 1926 I went to the school and met him in a small cubicle, just twice the size of a confessional. He was the first Englishman with whom I ever got into contact. He had changed little since then. He still has that slight London

accent (I should imagine Battersea or Clapham) which I can spot so much more easily now than I could ten years ago. He still wears blue serge and no hat. But he has forgotten that I must have been his most desperately slow-witted pupil, who could never manage to grasp the intricacies of unrelated clauses. (I still cannot.) And during the course of the conversation I discovered that he speaks English badly, he will never lose his accent; he uses the wrong expressions. The extent of his vocabulary is very limited and he is often at a loss for words. It seems we, his pupils, have completely plundered him of all his English knowledge, leaving him only enough to cover the bare necessities of life and his simple spiritual needs.

He talked freely, yet it was curious he was not in the slightest degree interested in what was going on in England. He still reads English papers, but I have a suspicion he only does that to brush up the English necessary for his lessons.

He has not become a Budapestter, but he is definitely part of the picture. He lives a curious extra-territorial existence. He has not been to London for twenty-five years and now it is not likely that he will ever go back. He must be over sixty and my father says men over sixty can rarely endure even short changes of scenery and surroundings.

He refused my 'gasps' and politely asked for a Hungarian cigarette.

CHAPTER XV

THY NEIGHBOUR THE JEW

A FOREIGN journalist once visiting Budapest asked a Hungarian colleague to show him round the Jewish quarter. The Hungarian answered that there was no Jewish quarter, and with the characteristic irony of Budapest added: 'The whole town is a Ghetto.'

This, of course, is an aphorism and cannot be taken literally, yet there is much more in it than the customary grain of truth. Budapest has a few districts which are mainly populated by Jews, poorer Jews mostly, but apart from that they are scattered all over the town.

Of the total population of Budapest more than twenty per cent is Jewish, consequently every fifth person is a Jew and Budapest must be one of the largest Jewish towns in the world. Bearing this in mind, it is no use pretending that there is no Jewish Problem in Hungary and in Budapest, though it is by no means as serious as people in a frightened Europe verging between two totalitarian ideologies, Communism and Fascism, might imagine.

About a hundred years ago the proportion of Jews in Hungary was, roughly, about the same as in any other European country. In the course of Hungarian history they were sometimes welcomed, at other times

attacked; there were pogroms and Jew-baitings just as in France, Italy, Germany, England and Spain.

This old Hungarian Jewry, some of whose members must have lived there for centuries, became thoroughly assimilated with the majority of the race: they became good Hungarians. Some even left their religion, intermarried with gentiles and apparently became absorbed. These Jewish 'aborigines' of Hungary had culture, good manners, personal charm and solid business principles, just like the centuries-old Jewish population in any Western European country.

Then came the deluge.

The bulk of European Jewry, as we all know, has taken refuge in the Russian Empire, chiefly in the territory of present-day Poland and Ukrania, where they lived for centuries in utter misery. The incapable Russian administration could not solve the problem, and in the sixties and seventies of last century they started an emigration scheme on a large scale. Millions of them went to the United States, while others tried to take refuge in Germany and in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose liberal governments refrained from any restrictions of immigration whatsoever.

In these days Kálmán Tisza was Premier of Hungary. (Father of the great Count Stephen Tisza, the statesman who tried to prevent Austria-Hungary entering the War.) The elder Tisza was a man of considerable ability, yet at the same time one who would tolerate graft and political corruption in order that his party should return to parliament and that he himself could remain Prime Minister of Hungary for more than fifteen years in succession. If in Hun-

gary there is a Jewish problem it is very largely caused by Tisza's desperately short-sighted policy and his enormous vanity and ambition to rule.

In the eighteen-fifties there were already some quarter of a million Jews in Hungary; in thirty years' time they had doubled their number, and before the outbreak of the War there were over a million in the country.

The position was somewhat similar in Austria and in Germany, though considerably fewer Jews found their way to the latter country, as Germany by then had already changed over to industrialism and capitalism, providing in consequence, less opportunity and fewer openings for the incomer – Jewish or otherwise. And apart from that, Germany was, to a certain extent, always anti-Semitic.

It was thus long before the shameful anti-Semitic movements of the years after the War that there was already a Jewish Problem in those two large countries forming Central Europe.

These facts must be known in order to understand the position of the Jews in Hungary and the attitude of the public towards them. The Hungarian is not definitely anti-Semitic, yet he is conscious of the fact that in these days every fifth person is a Jew in the Hungarian capital, which percentage would not perhaps mean quite so much if Jews could be divided proportionately in each social class, and did not, as they do, monopolise almost the entire trade and finance of Budapest and Hungary.

This, of course, will easily explain and account for the fact that practically every gentile in Hungary is conscious of the Jew and can spot him at once.

Most Hungarian Jews obtained quite well-sounding Hungarian names as a consequence of that very optimistic and illusory theory of the eighteen-nineties, which regarded a 'Hungarian' name as the first-rate qualification to good citizenship. It had little to do with Jews, only in respect of the fact that most Jews in Central Europe had German names as a consequence of the well-known order of the Emperor Joseph II. Till the end of the War this illusion of the Hungarian name was quite a nation-wide disease in Hungary. It was part of Hungary's national inferiority complex, just as the enforcement of German-sounding names for nouns like telephone, hotel, automobile were parts of Germany's inferiority complex.

A Budapest newspaper of slightly imperialistic tendencies started a campaign to make it the duty of every 'True Hungarian' to have a Hungarian name. The author of the articles was Jenő Rákosi, a well-known Hungarian journalist, an excellent leader-writer, but himself of Schwabian-German origin, who, till the age of twenty-four, answered to the name of Kremsier. It was in this period that thousands of Hungarians changed their old and quite respectable name indicating a Slavonic or German origin. Many of these were Jews, perhaps even the majority, who readily submitted to the reckless jingoistic bullying of the period.

It is interesting to note that Western Europe in the end of the nineteenth century was saved from this what-is-in-a-name illusion? The French and the English in a way were more sensible to doubt the true-blooded patriotism of people with a foreign

name. In England, for example, nobody has ever thought worse of a person whose name was Lutyens, Vansittart, Max-Mueller, Strakosch, Schuster or Goschen.

In present-day Hungary it is rather difficult to discuss the Jewish question, even in general. Jews (especially the uneducated ones) are quick to see in every remark, even in purely scientific observations, the signs of bias, of malice and slighting. Their reaction, to a certain extent, is easy to understand. Few races in the course of their history have suffered quite as much as the Jew. This might have contributed to the development of their great qualities; it might have been responsible for their dexterity in various things, but it is certain that sufferings of the past have filled them with an inferiority complex of marked degree. There is a tendency, especially among Hungarian Jews, to feel that they are inferior to the Hungarian and that they have to achieve great things to be regarded as equals. The result is often striking achievements or a sad conflict with themselves and a *débâcle*.

Yet the Jews belong – it may be said without false generalisation – to a grown-up race, and they are conscious of their faults. Jewish stories all over the world are coined by Jews themselves – the best ones are anyhow of Semitic origin – and in Budapest there is a comic paper which is entirely composed of Jewish stories, few being flattering – edited by Jews.

Similarly, there are two music-halls in the capital where the items most popular with the public are various skits on Jewish character, whose authors and performers are all Jews. I often wonder if being a

grown-up nation results in being intellectually masochistic. . . . The English, in this respect, show a striking similarity to the Jew.

The Jewish problem of Hungary culminates in the interesting fact that the country has two middle classes. There is a gentile middle class and a Jewish one, and the latter is not much smaller than the former. They live separate existences.

That the Hungarian middle class had a different development from that of most European countries is explained by Hungarian history. The country was prevented by the Turkish wars and the subsequent Turkish invasion up till the end of the seventeenth century from developing a manufacturing or commercial middle class. Historically speaking, the Hungarian had remained outside the gates of the reality of life when the Turk conquered the country and almost succeeded in destroying its native culture; and the door was slammed again in front of her when Hungary became partner of the Dual Monarchy with Austria. For centuries in Hungary the soldier who had defended the country on the battlefield, and later on, the lawyer, who had to wage long battles over the green table and in parliament to defend the country's rights – often its independence – against the Habsburgs, had become vitally important and consequently most honoured and respected vocations. It is therefore not surprising that they remained so, when in Western Europe they had lost most of their significance, though even in Hungary they did not retain much of their historical importance. Tradition proved to be too strong, the aura of romance remained too glittering for them to face the new realities of life.

The sons and grandsons of soldiers and lawyers naturally felt little aptitude for commerce and industry, and when their land, their last premise of reality, was gone, Hungary found herself faced with a problem: to create, to invent, a new profession for large layers of a middle class which was a middle class in little else but name and tradition. It was the Liberal government of Kálmán Tisza who tried to solve the problem by creating a colossal civil service, making it a preserve of the old Hungarian middle class, sons of landowners and soldiers, who lost the earth from under their feet after the revolution of 1848 and the subsequent series of financial crises in the fifties and sixties. The qualification for the civil service was gentile middle-class origin, a university degree, possibly a Hungarian-sounding name and connections with the government. It was natural that this monstrous regiment of civil servants, which is still a huge financial burden to the country, could not have been well paid, and consequently, though quite scrupulous, they were not up to the efficiency of, say, German civil servants. This class of people coupled with those who still retained their land, gentile business men, professional men and a few manufacturers, form the gentile middle class of Hungary.

The Jewish middle class, on the other hand, is of much later origin. Its tiny nucleus was formed in historical Hungary, but it really came into being at the time of the so-called *Admission Act* of 1869, which in its single sentence ('The Israelitic inhabitants of the country are hereby declared equals in the free exercise of all civil and political rights with the gentile inhabitants of the same') has given complete

emancipation to the Jews, ten years after British legislation had emancipated them, and ten years before Italy passed a similar measure.

Finding trade and banking – occupations which the gentile Hungarian in those days still regarded as below his dignity – a, so to speak, virgin territory, Jews naturally took possession of them. This large class of Jews with its great material and spiritual power soon started its fight, perhaps not so much for individual uplift as for the enforcement of its particular views and opinions towards life in general and social ethics in particular. These views in many cases were absolutely identical with those of the gentile middle class, in others, they proved to be alien and often unpleasant.

This expansion on the territory of culture in Hungary by Jews was very largely achieved through their acquisition of the Press. In the years before the War practically every newspaper in Budapest was already under Jewish control. The staff of the papers need not necessarily have all been Jewish or of Semitic origin, yet the spirit the papers expressed inevitably reflected the ideas of the owners and editors.

Some of the contributors to these papers accidentally achieved little short of world fame through what in the years after the War were called 'The Hungarian Theatrical Export'. Before the War Budapest had about half a dozen playwrights – all of whom started as journalists – whose plays were successfully performed in most countries of the world. These authors were Jews without exception and the key to their success could be found in the explanation that the mentality of the average middle-class theatre-goer

is practically identical in every European country with the possible exception of England, and that their uniform and foremost requirement is entertainment.

The best-known playwright of Budapest of the period was Ferencz Molnár, the first Hungarian who has, so to speak, called the attention of the world to the fact that Hungary has a literature. Contending with this fact is the reactionary post-War point of view to the effect that Molnár has given a false picture of his native country in his plays. This contention is somewhat illusory. Molnár has never given any idea of Hungary at all. If he had, it was an idea – a picture – of Budapest, and at that it was to a great extent an idea of the Budapest of his own café circle. He was, and still remains, a most brilliant theatrical craftsman. Every sentence he wrote grew out of the stage and could only be fully appreciated when performed on the stage. He was, and is, a playwright very much like Noel Coward, or perhaps even more like Pinero. And perhaps it was due to Pinero's and Coward's success that Molnár, acclaimed everywhere, could never have any success to speak of on the London stage.

The rest of the 'export-dramatists': Vajda, Lengyel, Biró had even less success in England than their uncrowned king.

Another and perhaps more important aspect of Jewish intellectual expansion is the exportation of new foreign ideas into Hungarian intellectual life and the fostering of original talent. Jewish intellectuals all over the world are first-rate literary and artistic discoverers. Without Georges Brandes, for example, Ibsen could not have reached to such wide ranges of

the public as he did. The foundation of a Budapest literary weekly, under the very significant name '*Nyugat*' (West) was responsible for much of the best of modern Hungarian literature.

This great intellectual domination has come to its abrupt and inevitable end with the Communist revolution in Hungary following the short-lived radical-liberal-republican government of Count Mihály Károlyi. The revolution, begun in Budapest, was to a certain extent the private particular revolution of the town. Gynically speaking it was the private revolution of the Budapest café and in reality it was that of radical intellectual circles. Most of these radical leaders and all the leaders of the subsequent Commune were Jews, and this was the turning-point where Jewish assimilation in Hungary came to its temporary end.

The revolution – a shameful work of the unscrupulous and of the bookish theoretician – was quenched. There were in its wake rather indiscriminate outbursts of anti-Semitism with Jew-baitings for a short time but this period marked the beginning of the present-day attitude towards Jews on the part of Hungarian gentiles. The ten months of Commune has changed Hungary's outlook and mentality perhaps even more than the four years of the War.

The most important achievement of this reaction was the birth of the so-called *Christian Press*: some three or four newspapers, which came to existence round about 1920. Their collective title is somewhat misleading, as the principles of the new Press, which soon became vigorous, had little to do with religious life. True, the Roman Catholic Church had its share

in its foundation, but the name was rather intended to denote that this new Press was to serve the interests of a spiritual nationalist, gentile Hungary, as opposed to the international materialist, Liberal, radical, Jewish spirit of the rest of the Press. The Jewish Press became bourgeois-radical-liberal, then more and more nationalist in outlook, though it took a long time before its undoubted part played in the revolution and the Commune was forgotten and forgiven.

The Jewish problem of present-day Hungary is centred round these three facts: the part the Jews played in the Communist revolution in Hungary, the rule of Hungary's trade and finance by Jews, almost amounting to a monopoly, and some of the Jewish views on social ethics as opposed to the majority view – regardless of the fact whether Jews in their particular opinion are right or wrong.

The present generation of Hungary is of opinion that the fault of creating this Jewish problem lies very largely with the Liberal policy of Hungary in the mentioned period. They hold that responsible statesmen in power ought to have known that a small minority of Jews in a country is a definite blessing. With their intellectual agility and alertness they act as leaven, they become perfectly assimilated and contribute their old and rich traditions, their inheritance and experience to those of their adopted country. When Jews, however, invade a country – as it had happened in Hungary – coming from inferior surroundings, they are something of a mixed blessing. They remain detached, unwilling to give up their racial independence, they do not assimilate and will inevitably constitute a country inside a country. They

become almost chauvinistic and their racial pride takes on unpleasant forms. Their otherwise admirable quality of tribal or national team spirit almost resembles a dangerous rivalry against gentiles. They often lose their mental equilibrium and, so to speak, don't let the gentile succeed in his own country.

Apart from this, their inherent capacity for work, their great industry and enormous ambition (inspired by their inferiority complex) their pluck, make the Hungarian jealous. These are, however, minor matters. The reason for enmity against Jews is mainly because a large majority of them in Hungary have turned back on their old national traditions (perhaps through persecution, in which case there is a complete vicious circle of anti-Semitism) and consequently look upon the traditions and institutions of their new country with an icy rationalism or from a purely utilitarian point of view. This often reveals itself in their making fun of old national traditions and institutions, which generally are accorded a particular national respect. And this is all the more dangerous because the joke is as a rule a brilliant one.

The other Jew, a comparatively small class, which is all the time conscious of its separate national entity, which remains a close adherent to his religion, would naturally turn against the interests of any country if he imagined it endangering the interests of his own race. He is a Jewish nationalist and as such he is understood and respected. He should have his own country, possessing it without interference.

The fault, however, to a certain extent, also lies with Hungarians. Many of them who are conscious of the Jew, can see only one kind of Jew: a necessarily

unpleasant one. This is a grave mistake, yet it is fair to say that this prejudice is not solely typical of Hungary. Most anti-Semites all over the world belong to that type. Contrary to this prejudice Jews, like any other race or nation, are composed of individuals, and the individuals are different. They may have their faults, just like other races, yet for these blame should only be placed on the individual and not on the community.

There definitely is a fairly virulent anti-Semitism in Hungary. It is all the more unpleasant because it is quiet, because it takes the form of social disapproval and refusal to admittance. No matter how much importance and power the Jew may have, he is not accepted socially. He may buy his entry into certain circles. A well-connected and well-established Jew might, after some courting, purchase his way into the gentile middle class, might be accepted in their modest houses by people who are financially, intellectually and in practically every way his inferiors. This is a most humiliating and shameful aspect of Hungarian life. If a Hungarian is rich and well connected through marriage or otherwise, the Jew has no chance of getting acquainted with him socially. This is again another section of the vicious circle. At the height of his success the Jew in Hungary knows that he is admitted to society on suffrance, that it is his money and perhaps intellectual gifts which have opened the doors to him. This is a tragic factor in his life, he tries to laugh it over, but it is too deep not to leave a permanent mark on his personality.

The discriminating gentile, the gentile who would offer a genuine friendship based on mutual ideas and

old associations and utterly lacking any ulterior motive, is rare in Hungary – though he exists. Most mixed marriages between gentile and Jew are based on financial considerations.

This sad struggle with the stubborn social resistance of the ruling classes in Hungary has created quite an interesting type of man. He is known as the 'Ornamental Goy'. He is a typical fixture of parties given by prosperous Jews. Usually a member of a distinguished but impoverished gentile family, he rather prides himself to be liberal, understanding, or mondaine, and has a good time at the possible price of being gradually cut by his gentile equals.

The attitude of those Hungarian aristocrats who are still prosperous is exactly the same as that of the gentile middle class. They do not acknowledge the fact that during the last years of his reign Francis Joseph had made a few Jews barons. No matter how cultured, how charming, the new baron is, how high his character and moral standards, their doors remain closed to him. If he has any desire to rise in the social world he can only satisfy it by mixing with a few penniless aristocrats – that is to say, by entertaining them. Otherwise there is only art open to him if he has any talent. If he loses his head he will turn into a left-wing radical or a communist or into a sexual pervert, which often happens.

The club system, which Count Széchenyi tried to introduce from England to Hungary, could never take root in the new soil. Hungarians by nature are not an associative race unless forced by circumstances beyond their control, and do not like clubs. Budapest has three clubs of high social standing and these three

have not more than four Jewish members between them. Even these 'Jews' were born Roman Catholic.

This system of strong anti-Semitism is entirely wrong, besides being uncivilised. It is no use suspecting or accusing Jews of not having nationalistic feelings if one excludes even those members of their community who in every respect are equals to the best of the non-Jewish community. I have many Jewish friends in Hungary and all over the world, whom I prefer to the average gentile, because I have more in common with them in mentality and in other respects. The point of view which was adapted long before the War is ridiculous and even dangerous with its stiff generalisations and is based on that universal superstition, that all Jews are identical. On the contrary, they are a race and as such they are like any other race in the world with virtues and vices, perhaps with typical vices and typical virtues, yet one must always judge the individual and not blame him for the faults of others - perhaps even of the majority.

CHAPTER XVI

NEWSPAPERS

THE first thing that must be said about the Hungarian Press is that there are more newspapers in Budapest than in London. This statement, of course, would be true of any continental capital; relatively or actually they all have more daily papers than the English capital, so it would perhaps be easier to say that London has *less* papers than the Continent.

London has altogether three evening papers and nine national newspapers to whose number the *Manchester Guardian* should be added. Budapest, on the other hand, has twelve morning papers and no less than seven evening sheets, and this number would about correspond with the ratio of other continental capitals.

Naturally these papers have a small circulation and some of them struggle hard for bare existence. At the same time there is no party, however small, which has not an organ representing its interests.

Newspapers, as so many institutions in Hungary, are not money-making concerns. This is not because there is little money to be made in Hungary, but because few of them were intended to make money. The huge newspaper organisation with large circulations, where the most important consideration appears to be the investment and the dividend is almost un-

known in Hungary. The Budapest Press is still what so many of the older generation of English journalists call with a sigh a Press with 'real journalism' in it.

Foreign ideas to increase circulation have often been tried in Budapest, but the introduction of prize-money (£1,500 must be won), gift schemes, insurance and various other benefits could not break the essentially Hungarian trait of seclusion and pronounced individuality. It is for this reason that in Hungary there are no 'masses', only large multitudes of individuals, voters, taxpayers, peasants, and other categories involving tens of thousands. But there is no uniformity of thinking. Hungarians regard this as sheeplike.

In London there is a 'serious' Press and a 'yellow' Press; in Hungary the distinction is quite different. Since the end of the War, about half a dozen papers made their appearance and referred to themselves as the 'Christian Press', and to the rest as the 'Jewish Press'. Serious people call the first group 'national' and the second 'liberal', but this is merely polite code-language.

It is extremely difficult to say what the difference is between the two groups, as it is not always necessarily a difference in outlook. Hungarian papers since the War grew almost uniformly nationalist. One may shout louder than the other, but they all proclaim their great love for their country and their anguish over its varying fortunes.

The Christian Press is quite as ferocious as the Jewish in its attacks, but the former perhaps is a little provincial in outlook, a little less lively in its presentation of news, and usually lags behind in newspaper technique. It may perhaps be true to say that the

former is more combatant, more politically-minded than the second, but this is very nearly a generalisation.

The Hungarian paper, gentile or Jewish, is a curious combination. It may be said to be a 'hold all'. It fulfils more functions than information and amusement. It is a friendly uncle and aunt, adviser, teacher, high priest, lawyer, doctor and jester in one. Its contents are varied and colourful. It is natural that the popular paper all over the world has this tendency – in England in particular, where its features seem to be more popular with the reader than the rest of its contents; yet nowhere in the world do papers succeed to such a perfect degree, amounting almost to a monopoly, as in Hungary. The average English newspaper-reader usually reads bits of his paper, obtains his information or amusement – and throws it away. In Hungary the papers are read religiously from cover to cover (it is true they are small and have few advertisements); then they may be lent to friends.

They are really good papers. Full of colour, with well-written articles, and are certainly worth the money they cost.

Yet this goodness, this wonderful all-roundness of the Hungarian paper, is a tragic fact – and the public pays a heavy price in the end. The popular daily paper in Hungary has killed or rather prevented the coming into being of the political weekly review, one of the most important features of English journalism. These have a hard time even in England, and one of the most interesting of them incorporates no less than four in one, but it is hoped that the four surviving weekly reviews will prosper. Such reviews don't

exist in Hungary and that in itself betrays the one-sided state of the average Hungarian's orientation in politics. Because the Hungarian daily paper has so many magazine-features it is only natural that magazines do not prosper in Budapest. They are comparatively large in number, but they are all struggling hard for existence, except one which, though originally a theatrical weekly, is another 'hold all', incorporating features of all types of magazines. This weekly paper everybody condemns, everybody sneers at, everybody makes fun of, but everybody reads it. Journalists and writers are particularly critical of it – they never read it – yet all of them write for, or have at some time, written for it.

It is, naturally, poverty which made the Hungarian papers what they are. The average Hungarian could not afford to read periodicals, magazines, weekly or monthly reviews – there are many who can't even afford to read books and are quite well satisfied with the cheap paper-bound fiction – trash – usually translated trash and often English trash, which is offered for the equivalent of two or three pence. Poverty has contributed in another way towards the high qualities of the Hungarian newspapers. On their regular staff they employ well-known poets and writers working for a salary, fixing their eyes on galley-proofs instead of on the stars.

The literary man featured in the newspapers is quite an international custom, but in Hungary, save for a few well-to-do writers who are occasionally featured in the usual manner, the literary man is not a feature. He is, as a rule, a working journalist, and among the writers and poets to-day living in Hungary

there is not a single one who, if not actually employed on a paper, has not for some time been connected with a daily by being a regular contributor, editor or assistant editor.

In Budapest every newspaper office is full of literary men – needless to say embittered literary men, writing articles on subjects towards which most of the time they are almost completely indifferent, becoming mouth-pieces for a party they don't even know, attacking another party they don't know either. Their brilliant ideas and original thoughts that ought to have been made into a poem or an essay become paragraphs in the gossip column. And if they are not robust enough they think with a sigh of novels and essays and poems which will never be written. Also if they are not sufficiently well balanced, they think with spite of novels, essays and poems written by others, especially by the dilettante. (He must have a bad time in Hungary.) But that is not all. There are papers which employ poets on their staff as sub-editors – to give suitable headlines to news-articles, or to re-write the copy of the young journalist who has an 'eye' for news but not the pen to write it up.

The pen the literateur lends to these articles will – no matter how hard it is – become worn out in time. Few poets survive the newspaper office.

And since I am a literary critic by profession, let us make a review of the average Hungarian daily paper. It is small in format just like German papers, about the size of the *Evening Standard*, and is between sixteen to twenty pages on a weekday and twice this number on Sundays. (Hungarian papers don't appear on Monday.) Under the colophon it gives

the editor's name in large characters; this is not to say that the Hungarian editor is vain, unlike his English colleague, who succeeds so completely in hiding his name from his readers. In Hungary the law relating to the Press compels the paper to print two names: that of the so-called 'Responsible Editor' (usually the assistant-editor) and that of the publisher (usually the printer) who are actually responsible for any article which appears anonymously.

The front page displays an almost complete lack of advertisements and looks like being little short of sacred territory. It is devoted in its entirety to the leading article, which most people read. This 'leader' is much longer than the longest in any English Sunday paper. It is usually brilliant, witty, and to the point, with a great deal of punch in it. With its length, it is reminiscent of an extremely agile elephant performing the most delicate ballet turns. It always escapes being boring, either by its well-selected subject or by its short staccato sentences and good style.

Foreign news appears on the second page. But still no sign of advertisements. They only appear on the third page, the upper half of which is the continuation of foreign news. In the lower half, under a black division line, which seems to suggest that here seriousness is terminated, there is a short story, which costs the paper ten shillings – sometimes fifteen and very rarely twenty. It is of literary standards and as a rule meant to be amusing. It must be a sign of my ingrained pessimism that even in my very early youth I was unable to derive any mirth from them. They have not changed since.

On the fourth page begins the more sensational home news: usually court news, which morning papers treat with a uniform solemnity.

These continue according to their nature for a few more pages. Then towards the middle come parliamentary reports between advertisements.

This is followed by the more sensational foreign news and the letters from foreign correspondents. Then more advertisements and snippety news in brief, intersected by a solitary column in which there is a daily essay by one of the literary slaves attached to the paper. It is very often a masterpiece and would merit a more distinguished publication.

Then comes the theatrical page. Bordered by advertisements and snippety news there are one or two longer critiques of theatrical or musical events. The tone is not always dignified, but it is always brilliant, intelligent and of a high standard. It is a really serious criticism, such as one comes across in English weekly reviews and as long as those in *The Times*. Its excellent properties don't give away the fact that the author – a good critic – has in the same afternoon already written an article which appeared among the Home News or overhauled a political report or is exhausted because in the morning he had to correct two dozen essays of his pupils at the school where he is employed as a master.

A welcome fact of these pages is the almost complete lack of Hollywood news. The private lives of stars and their in any case doubtfully reliable intimacies, leave the Hungarian reader completely cold. This is quite as conspicuous as the lack of that nauseating cheap smartness with which the popular Press else-

where helps its uneducated reader to continue his existence in false dreams.

On weekdays there is one single sporting page, two or three pages dealing with financial news, followed by a serialised novel – a universal feature of all Hungarian papers. This novel again is of high quality, either by the best available Hungarian novelist or by a foreign author of literary standing.

There is, however, one more feature of the Hungarian Press. It is not regular, but quite general: attacks on the rival paper. To read the two papers concerned at such times is highly amusing. Their language seems to be the direct descendant of that used by Dr. Johnson during his frequent literary brawls, only since it is in Hungary, it is more pointed, more imaginative and less crude. The 'nationalist' paper usually refers to the 'liberal' as '*Traitors of the Boulevard*', and the latter snaps back with '*The Tottering Fortresses of Dark Reaction*.' On such occasions they usually make a thorough exploration of their opponent's past history, and warm up anything unpleasant they might find there. After the venomous article is written the journalist goes to his café, where he, as often as not, meets the member of the rival paper – maybe just the author of the spiteful article – they shake hands and sit down to play cards at rather high stakes.

On Sundays the papers grow to twice their size, and then it is that they assume the mantle of the perfect spiritual companion. Then they publish articles on everything under the sun.

There are only two Budapest papers, which are in any way reminiscent of English papers – the serious

ones in particular. They are papers of information of high standards and a little frightening dignity, and both of them are struggling hard in spite of a government subsidy. It has been suggested to me as an explanation that there are not enough readers in Hungary to keep alive a paper which merely serves the purpose of information. I wonder. Personally, I find them very dull.

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In one more respect Hungary might appear to be a veritable paradise for journalists, and that is in the mildness of the law of libel and the similar mildness of the criminal procedure with which the Press is treated. In a Hungarian paper, with due respect to decency and to obvious considerations of the paper's policy and other arrangements, one can say practically anything one likes. The only limitation to this liberty is the government of the day. There is no censorship in Hungary, but if the government regards Press criticism as unfair it can easily hit back by raising special tariffs against the paper-supply – imported from abroad.

In England the severity and capriciousness of the law of libel has already created a quite prosperous trade in blackmail. It is not surprising that the popular Press has to explore the avenues which are left free – such as the reporting of divorce cases.

Hungarian papers do not report divorce cases at all, as there divorce has not the social stigma it has in England. In Hungary you are not forced to go through a shameful procedure in order to get rid of your partner. The law is tolerant enough. One can file a petition for desertion, and if the suit is not de-

fended and there are no complications one can obtain a decree in less than ten months.

Most divorces are granted for desertion even if the reason is something else. Desertion in Hungary is as much a divorce convention as adultery in England. But divorce has no news-value and it is interesting to note that most people go through the divorce court because of poverty.

Besides, there are not very many divorces in Hungary. The fact that it is comparatively easy to obtain, that it has little social disadvantage, except from the Church's point of view, and that legislation is cheap in Hungary, has the contrary effect to what one might expect.

But here are two interesting stories to show what one may write about in the Hungarian papers. The first has been published in a highly respectable Budapest paper. It runs as follows:

'Mr. So-and-so (giving full name) the well-known (giving profession) is busy writing his memoirs. He, as is well known to his most intimate friends, some months ago underwent a most successful rejuvenating operation performed by Professor Voronoff. Indeed, his rosy cheeks, his youthful appearance, give no indication whatever of the fact that Mr. So-and-so is over seventy years of age.'

The other story is more amusing, though the paper in which it actually appeared is less respectable – as it might well be imagined.

It happened some years ago that a young Budapest journalist, with a good eye for news-value, went to Berlin to write a series of articles on eminent Hungarians who had achieved fame in the German capital.

He interviewed the Great Film Producer, the Operatic Tenor, the Famous Architect, the Inventor, the Oriental Traveller, the Well-Known Dramatist – in short, the most prominent members of the large Hungarian colony in Berlin before 1932. Thus it happened that his attention was drawn to the Professor. The Professor was an old Hungarian specialist (he is dead now), a great name in international medicine, and one of the leading authorities on venereal diseases. He became director of a clinic in Berlin, and though he had a great practice, all he really cared for were his lectures, his books and his researches. One could not imagine a more unworldly hermit.

The young reporter called and, addressing the old gentleman in his native Hungarian, asked for an interview. The Professor was very much taken by the request. He never read papers, except medical ones, consequently he had a very great respect for journalists. He was almost in tears, he thought it was a great honour bestowed on him. He thought it was to be an indication of a nation-wide recognition, a tribute to his work, just like the medals, diplomas and – yes – the order he received from the Kaiser. (Oh, well, where did he put the order with that coloured ribbon?) He had vaguely heard about the 'Power of the Press' and was a little beyond himself, like a child. Then with the modesty of a true man of science, he thanked the young man warmly and said that his person really was hardly worthy of such an honour, but he would be glad if he could personally show his young visitor round his clinic.

Then he remembered that in five minutes he was to perform an urgent operation, so he asked the young

man to take a seat and offered him a cigar. 'I hope these medical papers won't bore you,' he said and promised to be back in half an hour.

The young reporter did not let himself be bored by the medical journals. He did not even look at them. There was something more interesting on the Professor's desk to attract his attention. He noticed the great man's diary open on the desk. He thought it would yield interesting background to the article and read the page where it was open. He almost cried out. In the bold legible writing of the old man, he saw the name of one of the best known German film-stars as a patient. Now like a madman with pencil and note-book in hand, he began to turn the leaves of the journal. On practically every page, there was a treasure: a great name in finance, politics, in the theatre, literature. Moreover the list was international. By the time the Professor came back apologising, the young man had already gone over the last five years of the journal. His note-book was full. . . .

The beauty of it was that the editor of the paper to whom he sent the article entitled *Hungarian Talent has the Whole World's Famous Men Among His Patients* was away on holiday and the deputy editor, an admirer of young talent, brought out the article without altering a word. I am told that along with the names of the patients sometimes even the respective disease was mentioned.

CHAPTER XVII

SZEGED

IT was a hot day when I arrived in Szeged, but somehow I felt it could not be otherwise. Days in that town are somehow always associated with heat in my memory, with heat, sweat and a growing fear before examinations. I was at Szeged University and my doctorate of law was given to me in that town. And that University, the Royal Hungarian Francis Joseph University of Science, as it is officially called, is in turn closely associated with my family. It was first established in my native Kolozsvár, early in the seventies and its first director happened to be my grandfather who had by that time, after the reconciliation with Austria, been released from the Austrian military prison, where he served a long sentence for taking part in the War of Independence.

My father and three of my uncles had also received their degrees from the same university, which after the Peace Treaty, when Transylvania was allotted to Rumania, was moved to Szeged. So I must look upon the place as the 'Old School', yet when I left school I was not sent to Szeged University for sentimental reasons or for tradition's sake. My father then had the idea that I should work under his old friends, the professors from Kolozsvár and, having graduated, that I should try to get a post as a lecturer in International Law.

I duly took my degree at Szeged, then I came to London to read International Law – and never returned to Hungary except for visits and never touched law again. That, however, is a long story.

In those days I did not like Szeged. It was Hungarian, yes; yet so completely foreign to me and devoid of both the lovely traditions of Transylvania and the liveliness of Budapest. It had its charm, too, but I could never appreciate it.

Present-day Szeged actually is one of the newest large towns of Europe. It is about sixty years old. In 1878 the River Tisza inundated the town during one terrible night and swept away practically all its houses, and drowned thousands. It was a horrible tragedy and it must have impressed the world at the time in the same way as the earthquakes of Messina and Lisbon did before the War. As a disaster the Szeged flood was more terrible and tragic than the Great Fire of London. As far as one can ascertain from Pepys the fire went on for several days, whereas the flood swept Szeged in less than twenty hours. Besides the town in 1878 had more houses and, I should imagine, more inhabitants than the City proper in 1666, which was alone affected by the fire.

There was, of course, a great appeal made for the rebuilding of Szeged. I don't know if people in the eighteen-eighties were more charitable than we are, but I do know that in the eighties they were generally more emotional, and not so hardened by a series of everyday tragedies as we now are. So many shattering things happen in our day that we develop an unconscious attitude of self-defence, and so few happened sixty years ago.

Many people of all nationalities contributed and the town was built on what was regarded as the last word in town-planning in the eighties. The plan, it seems, must have been very ambitious as the planners tried to build up a miniature Paris on the banks of the Tisza. Well, the river is about the same size as the Seine, but the town is only reminiscent of the *Ville Lumière* when one sees it on the map. It has its system of Boulevards and its streets were made with ruler and compass. They are wide and well laid out, yet the houses in them were made of poor materials and are devoid of life. In spite of this ambitious planning the town remains what it always must have been – a huge village, now of over a hundred thousand inhabitants, at the Southern corner of the Great Hungarian Plain.

Szeged was ruined by the Tisza and rebuilt by Tisza, this time not the river, but a Hungarian nobleman Lajos (later on Count Lajos) Tisza, a brother to the Liberal Prime Minister of Hungary and uncle to Count Stephen Tisza, Hungary's War-time Premier.

I was a little astonished and very depressed the first time I set foot in Szeged. It seemed a large, dusty and very indifferent town. In those days after the War it was rather neglected: houses in want of repair, municipal trams rickety and few, public gardens devoid of flowers. Its inhabitants spoke my native language, yet with what I considered an ugly accent. I felt I was abroad but the visit was neither pleasing nor exciting. That was an obvious reaction. I lived fourteen years in Kolozsvár, a town of very old and very noble traditions. The old capital of the Principality of Transylvania, it was quiet, dignified and aristocratic.

True, Kolozsvár never has been democratic, and to me now, looks like a sleepy little cathedral town.

After the quiet dignity of Kolozsvár and the fresh and vital cosmopolitanism of Budapest, Szeged offered a poor contrast. It appeared to have no traditions, no beauty, no lovely old churches and houses and odd corners and quaintness. It had no aristocracy. It was dull, flat, hot and dusty. A peasant village.

When I first came to England I fell in love with Winchester and Salisbury. I should imagine because they were reminiscent of Kolozsvár, sleeping in Cathedral closes over their past history.

But I have changed since. I no longer take any interest in towns Where Every Stone Speaks Of the Past. I prefer towns where stones don't speak of the past, but leave their inhabitants to speak of the present. And I got to like Szeged and the Alföld towns.

The Plainland towns may be less attractive from the architectural point of view than the old towns of Hungary, but these overgrown villages are real and representative of modern Hungary, of modern Hungarian life, just as Bolton and Stoke-on-Trent are representative of a more real England than York or Wells.

That is why I am not going to revisit lovely old towns like Esztergom, Szombathely or Pécs which compare quite favourably with Winchester, Lincoln or Canterbury. Hungary makes its living out of towns like Szeged, in the same way that England makes hers out of Birmingham.

And now I must confess that I never for a moment consider an industrial town of the Midlands dull. I

might consider it ugly, monstrously ugly and dirty, incredibly dirty, yes; but always full of life and never dull. It is my nature to prefer people to houses and scenery. This, of course, does not mean that I would like to take up my permanent residence in Stoke-on-Trent – a town I know well and like very much – but I should certainly prefer it to life in a Cathedral town, no matter how much I was in love with Gothic England when I first arrived. Then, I was the Average Foreigner. I made the same mistake as the Average Foreigner solely associating England with a land 'green and pleasant', with Tudor half-timber and pewter and oak. But since then, I am afraid, I have seen so much of this Ye Oldeness and too many pitiful and unintentional parodies of a no doubt magnificent past that even the genuine leaves me suspicious.

In these Midland towns I see an England which, as far as 'Foreigner's England' goes, is exclusively mine. I see adventure, I taste life, I smell it, I feel it in every minute.

Beyond their dirty walls and adenoidal accents I fancy, suspect and imagine a life more full, and more virile and more English than anywhere else. This is my England. It has its own history no matter how short, its own past and its own traditions no matter how stiff. It has its own art and literature. Incidentally it is a literature which is quite new to the rest of England. It has nothing to do with the mad and bad countryside, it has not 'gone to earth' nor is it smart and cosmopolitan. It is young, but it has already found its voice and started on its way towards success. It will be worth while taking into account, for the future letters of England – it seems to me – will



ARCADES, SZEGED



come more from the Industrial Midlands than from Cathedral closes of the South.

It was these things I reflected on while I walked along the familiar streets of Szeged towards the hotel by the university. The Boulevard I passed was called Londoni Körut. It has not the slightest resemblance to London and an unsuspecting British visitor might think it fantastic and grossly incongruous to call that provincial Hungarian thoroughfare London Boulevard. Yet there is a deeper story behind that name. The street was named so out of gratitude for long forgotten Londoners of the eighteen-eighties, who opened their money-bags when Szeged came to terrible grief. There is also a Paris Boulevard and a Rome Boulevard with a similar story.

Then I came to the Dome Square. I had not yet seen it, but had seen many photographs of it and read accounts of its building, some of them damning Count Klebelsberg the late deputy and Minister for Education for spending so much of the money of a poor country on luxuries. When I last visited Szeged in 1928, this square was just being built. The huge cathedral was already there, but still unfinished. It was big, incredibly big, and did not promise much. It gave the impression of a giant edifice built by children out of red and white bricks, of a sort of stone Meccano set. I heard its story. It was originally designed by Schulek, the builder of the Fisher's Bastion in Budapest, the only modern Hungarian architect who could live in the past and produce the air of the past as well. His plan was lovely, like all his plans, but the city fathers had a great quarrel over its execution. It happened just before the building operations were

started that the Jews of Szeged had built their Synagogue, a building much larger than Schulek's conception. The City Fathers thought it would be a terrible shame on the Catholic town to have its most important church smaller than the Synagogue. So they gave orders to alter the plan, and make it much bigger. The architect, however, did not satisfy himself by simply enlarging the plan, but added to the original conception out of his own mind. He put a curious addition to the middle of the nave and to the back of the transept, which is only apparent if one looks at it sideways. It was he who was also responsible for the red and white arrangement. Foreign visitors usually say it is essentially representative of the town which exports the famous Szeged Paprika all over the world.

The Dome or, as the people of Szeged officially call it, the Votive Church, has the newly-built arcades around it forming a square as large as the Piazza of San Marco in Venice, and is now the stage for open-air performances. (These are quite good and interesting, and attract many foreign visitors to the town.) The stone-paved square is very well proportioned and the arcades are lovely, built of good material and quite without any air of the spurious. Yet they are not Hungarian, and have as little to do with Szeged as the fairy-tale rococo of the Zwinger and the rather heavy rococo of Potsdam and Sans Souci has with Dresden and Berlin. August the Strong and Frederick the Great were both passionate Francophiles and were dreaming of a Saxon and Prussian Versailles and Fontainebleu. Count Klebelsberg in his fine but rather erratic Latinophile mind tried to bring Venice

to his beloved Szeged. The result is exactly the same. The Zwinger is lovely to those who have never seen Versailles and the Dome Square of Szeged is magnificent for those who never set foot in Venice.

Under the arcades around the square there is the national Pantheon of Hungary. It is an open-air Pantheon, and as such it is a great improvement on those Pantheons, repositories of the glorious sons of the nation, that I have so far seen. The *Kaisersgrube*, the vault of the Habsburgs in Vienna with its sumptuous sarcophagi and its simple coffin of Napoleon's son looks like a stage set for a nineteenth-century royal tragedy. The Pantheon in Paris, with all due respect to the *gloire française*, looks like a warehouse of the great. It is as dead as they are. They also cannot be separated from the atmosphere of visitors, trippers, tickets, guide-books, photographs, whispers, in short, the accompaniment of all such places. They are sights without being planned to be so. The open-air Pantheon of Szeged is to a certain extent built as a sight, yet it has none of the unpleasant associations of sights.

Along the walls there are effigies of the great of Hungary. It was a good idea that the orders for these memorials were not given to one or a number of sculptors and also that those responsible for its planning gave orders that no two should be alike. The result has the air of a historical vista, as if they had been put there in various periods. There is Kossuth and Rákóczi and Petőfi and Jókay and the rest, but the sculpturally best memorials – it seems to me – are devoted to those Hungarians who are not known by the foreigner. There is for example the monument

of Apáczai Csere, the seventeenth-century philosopher. A skeleton dressed in the garb of the sixteen-forties holding a book in his bone hands, a skull with its empty eyeholes looking into eternity. He was a disciple of Descartes and the author of *Little Hungarian Logic*, a book which is as interesting regardless of its subject as Walton's *Compleat Angler*. The monument is most striking and its artistic conception is interesting. The sculptor figured him as a skeleton since there is no likeness left of the great man to posterity. I must say I like it as much as I like the much larger and more important statue of the Unknown Historian of the thirteenth century, King Béla III of Hungary, whom an inspired sculptor staged among historical buildings as a bronze monk sitting on a bench with his hood pulled right over his face.

Behind iron grills there is the Oriental sarcophagus of Sándor Körösi Csoma, the romantic Hungarian traveller who went to Tibet to find the relatives of Hungarians, at the end of the romantic eighteenth century. He compiled the first Tibetan dictionary and every English Orientalist knows his name (though I wonder if they pronounce it right). Besides being a scholar, he was an agent to the British government and when I read about his life he seemed to me to have much in common with Colonel Lawrence. He died in 1847 in Darjeeling and is buried there under an English tombstone erected by the British government. He is dressed on his memorial as a Buddhist monk with curly capped slippers asking, in his inscription, his fellow-countrymen 'to search and seek as no other nation has so rich connections with the Asiatic cradle of all European nations as the Hungarian'.

Then I saw a figure of my childhood as a statue. It was Professor Apáthy of Kolozsvár, the great zoologist and friend of my father, who became associated with national politics and after the War made a stillborn attempt at the conciliation of the Rumanians. He died in utter misery. And now, as I see his smiling face of bronze, I remember quite clearly as a child trying to keep in step with my father and the Professor in their long walks across the fields talking politics. My father always disagreed with him but liked his company. All I knew about him was that he tortured dogs for purely scientific reasons and later on when they died had their skins made up for his shoes. ('They won't last long,' said my uncle, who only considered the act from the practical point of view.)

Later in the afternoon I returned to the square to see it in the mellower tints of the day. It was lovely, with its violet brownish colour reminiscent of dry cocoa mixed with ground sugar. An elderly bare-headed Cistercian monk walked in the silence of the afternoon up and down the paved stoneway reading his breviary. I had the frivolous idea of thinking that he was sent out by the municipality specially in the afternoons to give the square a more genuine historical air, like the hired *apaches* in post-War Montmartre restaurants. No, the square, no matter how lovely, is an escape from Szeged: not Szeged itself.

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Then as I went out to see the Bishop's Palace from the other side, I passed the famous memorial tablet. It is a famous tablet, nay a notorious tablet, but you must be a Hungarian or at least must have been able to read Hungarian newspapers in the years 1928-31

to understand the joke behind it. It is a simple marble slab carved with the arms of Count Kuno Klebelsberg and the Latin inscription *Comes Cuno Klebelsberg Te Saxa Locuntur*. Count Kuno Klebelsberg These Stones Speak of You. Those who are not Hungarians or were ignorant of the Hungarian Press between 1927 and 1930 would think this a tribute to a dead statesman, who gave Szeged that splendid square. And now comes the joke. The memorial was erected when the now defunct Count Klebelsberg was not only still vigorously alive and kicking, but still a deputy for Szeged and Minister for Education. Newspapers of the Hungarian opposition vigorously proclaimed that the noble Count was not only responsible for the erection of his own monument, but that he commissioned it himself on public money. There was quite an uproar in the Chamber of Deputies, the Count was mockingly attacked, the Council of the University made a hurried declaration at once that it was they who commissioned it out of gratitude, but this was no good. Irreverent public opinion still went on laughing at the expense of the unfortunate Count Klebelsberg – a great man in a period of Hungarian history which was predominated by mediocre statesmen. He was extremely ambitious and when he wished to humanise post-War Hungary, he was earnest and sincere. I know he was more than humanly vain, but I don't believe he ordered his own epitaph. And in any case a stone tablet like that could not have cost more than an ordinary tombstone.

There is another memorial tablet which this time depicts the late Count sculpturally. This is a relief on the wall of the Chemical Faculty, behind which wall

Professor Szentgyörgyi in his laboratory has recently discovered Vitamin C and actually produced it out of Szeged Paprika.

On this memorial the Count is seen with the council of the university and the leaders of Szeged laying the foundation-stone of the Square. Naughty gossip calls this '“Klebi's” Entry Into Heaven'. It is actually made of a dark silvery metal and the figure of the Count in the foreground is reminiscent in effect of Sickert's portrait of Lord Castlerosse, in which, according to a brilliant observer, the noble lord is seen in the process of materialisation.

I had lunch at the same restaurant that I used to go to when I came down for the examinations and I was glad to find there was Filled Paprika on the menu. Paprika is Szeged's speciality, though abroad that vegetable is closely associated with the whole of Hungary. I am rather reluctant to write about paprika, as Hungarians don't welcome seeing its name printed in foreign books. They say – often rightly – that foreigners find that this vegetable is most representative of Hungary, that they so to speak reduce the whole country to it, remaining ignorant of all others of which the country likes to be proud. Its name has found its way to foreign newspaper articles – mostly to French weeklies, whose inaccuracy, by the way, must be traditional, to comic songs, plays and novels. Paprika. Hungarian paprika. It is mentioned in musical comedies and Mr. Geoffrey Moss has given it as the title of his Hungarian novel, which is as representative of Hungarian life as the average Hollywood film is representative of anything but itself. So Hungarians see red if they hear about it abroad, but this

is not because the colour of paprika is actually pillar-box red.

I can quite see the Hungarian point, yet at the same time I must say I see the point of those foreigners who make a fuss about it. The things of which Hungarians are proud such as their thousand-years-old Constitution, their famous poets, their scientists, their statesmen are no doubt things of which any nation could be proud, but at the same time practically every nation has an adequate supply of them. Besides the fact that they are not unique, they are not visible or tangible either, whereas paprika only grows in Hungary and it is visible, tangible and also eatable. So Hungarians ought not to be so sensitive about it, all the more as contrary to the Scottish haggis (of which the Scot in turn is a little self-conscious), it is an important export article.

Paprika, this curious bayonet shaped shiny red vegetable was planted by the Turks in Hungary. It begins its life dark green, then when it is ripe it turns dark red. Then it is taken off its stalk, hung in the sun to dry and when dry, ground very fine. Abroad it is often mistaken for cayenne pepper, though it is different from it in a hundred ways. It is one of the most important features of the Hungarian kitchen. There are scores of excellent dishes which are made with it, but one has to be as careful with paprika as with ginger, for in large quantities it burns the mouth.

The *Töltött Paprika* I ordered actually is made of young and not yet ripe paprikas of which only the skin is used after the seed has been cut out. It is filled with minced meat and is served in its own delicious juice seasoned with red pepper. It is a lovely and rich dish

and is on the menu of practically any Hungarian restaurant in the summer. Personally, I find it rather heavy.

That was the reason why I did not order the famous speciality of Szeged *harcsa*, the Tisza fish, served in a stew of paprika and cream, a dish like the Marseillaise *Bouillabaisse*, only it is not a mixture of fishes but of one single fish, an extremely fat one, caught in the Tisza. I knew that I would never be able to exercise my faculty of observation after a meal in the good old Hungarian fashion, and I had a job in front of me that afternoon, to see some of the Szeged *tanyák*, the well-known Hungarian Plainland Settlements.

Szeged, as regards its area, must be the largest town in the world. The site is actually some five hundred square miles. This, however, should not be taken quite seriously. The fact is that most of the towns of the Hungarian Plainland are so situated that about half of the population lives outside what one might call the city proper. These people live around the core – the city – on farms, the *tanyák*. The original meaning of the word according to the Hungarian dictionary is ‘resting-place’, ‘halting-place’ or ‘camp’. And these words correspond with the history of the *tanya*. The *tanya* system came into being during the Turkish wars, when it was dangerous for the people of the Plains to live closer together in towns. So they scattered themselves trying to render their houses and lives less vulnerable.

The system was found convenient after the Turk had left Hungary, and the Hungarian peasants went on living on their farms. A century or two later when several people left the town and moved to their small

property outside, the *tanyák* were officially attached to Szeged. For the town council this move meant a few roads, a suburban railway and for the *tanya* dwellers a good deal of expense in the way of taxation. But now, on paper at least, they are town dwellers.

The bus took me over the bridge on the Tisza – an ordinary iron bridge, which I only mention as it happens to have been built by Eiffel of Eiffel Tower fame. The city proper is artificially heightened, built round the river and is reinforced as a precaution against a possible inundation and a repetition of the tragedy of 1879. From the air Szeged looks like a modern fortress on a gigantic scale.

The houses of urban character were soon left behind and I was in a large unending village, with its dusty streets, geese grazing in the fields and those small thatched and whitewashed houses typical of practically any Hungarian village, which look as if they had been built temporarily like large tents made of stone. They all had their verandas, and their angry little white dogs. Over the thatched roofs there hung long deep red rows of paprika, and golden yellow maize, not so much as a decoration to the otherwise bare façade of the house, as serving the useful purpose of desiccation.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HUNGARIAN PLAINLAND

THE following morning I took the train to Hódmezővásárhely, the town with the longest name in Hungary. Even Hungarians, with their love for long names, find it too long and refer to it simply as Vásárhely, which means market-place.

I went to Vásárhely because I wanted to see the typical Hungarian farmstead settlements of the *tanyák*. This book, I am afraid, is unrepresentative in the Baedeker sense of travel books. I have not been to Debrecen, the second or third biggest town of Hungary, nor do I intend to go there, or to its adjoining prairie the *Hortobágy*. And I neglected my opportunities of visiting well-known places like those round the Lake Balaton or the small baroque towns of the west. This book, after all, is the record of an individual journey, and it has no 'author's route' marked by a dotted line on its endpapers. For the author, a self-confessed individualist, has gone his own way according to his fancy. His interests he does not share with those of former travellers to Hungary, not so much because he likes to be different, but simply because by his inclinations he takes more interest in people than in scenery, and as for sights he regards them with suspicion and is inclined to be facetious about them, when they come his way.

But Hódmezővásárhely has fascinated me ever since I learnt its long name in a school book of Hungarian geography. To my mind it always was the embodiment of the Hungarian Plainland – the *Alföld*; a little exotic, a little strange and essentially Hungarian. I knew that by going there I should make an excursion into a Hungary practically unknown not only to the rest of the world, but to me as well. I knew I was going to meet people who are my compatriots, or my ex-compatriots only in language, and a few of the old loyalties. It was like a man born and bred in Sussex setting off to visit Northumbria for the first time.

I called on a young surgeon to whom I had a letter of introduction. He lived in a pleasant bungaloid house among a collection of local pottery and earthenware. He had just finished with his last patient and he asked me to have breakfast with him. It was no use saying that I had already breakfasted at Szeged, he insisted that I should drink at least a cup of coffee.

We talked about pottery, and I told him that being a native of Transylvania I took a great interest in earthenware goods of the Plainlands.

He tossed up his head as I pronounced the word Transylvania: 'Where were you born exactly?' he asked.

'At Kolozsvár,' I said.

'So was I,' he said, smiling; then after a minute he turned to me again with some excitement:

'Wasn't your father High Sheriff of the county?'

And thus in less than two minutes we had begun a thorough stock-taking of our mutual past. Detail after detail emerged from the dark forest of his memory. He even remembered how as a child of twelve, to-

gether with my sister, I had played a trick on some French and English medical men attending a congress in the town, whom my uncle had invited to luncheon. As the guests arrived for lunch we greeted them at the gate and told them with dreadful seriousness, that it was an old family tradition of my uncle that everyone attending lunch in his house should go to his bathroom first and take a bath. The two English doctors, of course, simply rushed to the bathroom with the pleasure of an unusual discovery in 'Romantic Hungary'. They thought it was indeed quaint that a foreigner, not generally associated with the thought of ever taking a bath, should have such an unusual and contradictory tradition in his home. Their example was followed by three Frenchmen and great was the surprise of my uncle, when he by chance entered his bathroom only to find there a bearded French authority on Tropical Diseases.

I am afraid I could not remember all the details, as the story of that morning – eighteen years ago – is still strongly associated in my mind with the greatest hiding I ever received from my father.

The surgeon was sorry that my time was so limited, as he wished to show me round the town and its surrounding settlements, but he himself had very urgent and important business to attend to.

'Are you going to cut someone to pieces?' I asked.

'On the contrary,' he laughed, 'I am going to prevent two people from cutting each other to pieces. . . .'

'You mean, you are acting as a second in a duel?'

He nodded, and I at once understood the importance and urgency of the business. I am still Hungarian enough to know what an 'affair of chivalry' is.

The more sensational English papers still devote space to duels in Hungary, and the country is still the background for these 'affairs of chivalry' or 'affairs of honour', though these may not inevitably lead up to a duel.

Duels still survive in Hungary to a certain extent because of the national temperament, when in the west of Europe they have long become romantic echoes of the past. A century ago they were frequent all over Europe. Hyde Park was as noted as a duelling ground during the Regency as Primrose Hill or Ken Wood fifty years later. Then the north of Europe gave up fighting duels. In England people like the late Lord Kimberley and Sir Philip Champion de Crespigny, were about the last Englishmen to challenge people to duels.

In defence of Hungarian duels it must be said that people still fight duels – less frequently it is true – in many a continental country. Once I saw an old newsreel presenting a pistol duel between a French composer and an Opera director on account of the latter's rejection of the former's opera, but that was fought before the War. People still fight occasional duels in Germany, Italy, Austria and Poland, though Hungary still takes the lead.

Naturally duels are fewer than they were say ten or fifteen years ago, yet they are still part and parcel of the nation's mental make-up. The Law is a little impotent regarding them, especially when those people become involved with them, whose real duty would be to make law, instead of infringing it. Hungarian law for that matter forbids duelling, but its provisions are not very strict. In case of death, duels are re-

garded as cold-blooded manslaughter, but no one has ever received more than six or seven years' hard labour for killing his opponent, and after having served the sentence the culprit suffers no more social indignity for having been imprisoned for duelling – provided the cause was just – than an Englishman would for 'being under the influence of drink while in charge of a motor-car'.

Duels still survive in Hungary also because the law, protecting the honour of the individual, is inadequate. As I have mentioned before, it is entirely different from the English law concerning libel and slander. And besides there are a good many cases where no law could offer adequate remedy.

Most duels in Hungary in these days are political. The so-called Act of Immunity offers protection for the member of the Hungarian parliament just as it does in any other country, to allow him to say anything he likes inside the chamber. And Hungarians are an easily excitable race, who in the heat of argument would say things to each other for which a reproof from the chairman of the session for 'using unparliamentary language', or the ejection of the member, or perhaps the suspension of his right to attend for, say, a week, offers no adequate satisfaction to the injured member. It is then that two deputies would have an 'affair of chivalry' which might end in a duel. Such a thing, of course, could never be imagined in England, though a duel fought with cavalry sabres between Sir Henry Page Croft and Mr. Attlee or a pistol duel between Messrs. Baldwin and Churchill would certainly lend colour to the dull routine of Westminster.

I myself fought a duel at the age of twenty, when

I was still at the university. It was my first duel and, I may say, my last.

It is of interest to note that the person with whom I had fought is now also living in London. We often laugh about it and when we mutually complain about the sordid economical outlook we reflect that we would be better off if we had the sum we had spent on the duel.

The affair happened on the *Corso* – the Danube Embankment of Budapest. We quarrelled over something and he pushed me. I knew him well and did not attribute any importance to the matter, till a few hours later one of the company came up to me saying that I must fight or at least ask for an explanation.

‘What?’ I said, startled, not knowing whether he was joking or not.

‘Yes, yes,’ he said impatiently, ‘I know you are old friends, but you know how people would talk. It is all quite simple. You send your seconds to him and the matter will be settled in a few hours.’

In those days I was not only young, but had never been outside Hungary, and attached an almost super-human importance to what people of my acquaintance thought of me. I hurried to procure two seconds. I called on a friend from the university and on an officer of the army. The two took the business into their hands and, according to the rules, called within twenty-four hours of the offence at my offender’s house. He then appointed his own seconds, and the four men sat together in cafés and private flats for two long days, completely neglecting their various personal businesses, their families, wives and mistresses. ‘Affairs of chivalry’ are sacred to a true Hungarian.



WELL ON THE GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN



Smoking endless cigarettes and drinking coffee – at the expense of my adversary (as it came out later) they decided at the end of the second day that there was no offence. Whereupon they signed and sealed an official protocol and sent copies of it to both of us. I thought that was the end and I felt inordinately proud. I had satisfactorily settled an ‘affair of chivalry’. In the course of my physical and mental development, I possessed, in turn, rabbits, a wrist-watch, a stamp collection, a camera, a bronze medal for being second at a club boxing-match, a dinner-jacket, and finally a signed photograph by the most famous prima donna of the day. And now I had also an ‘affair of chivalry’. I felt I was pretty near to perfection.

Next day, however, as I lounged in the Danube *Corso* basking in the sweet sunshine and reflecting that now I was definitely on the map of the *Corso*, as people must have heard about the affair, I came across two young men who said with a pained expression that people were whispering about me.

‘Whispering what?’ I asked.

‘That you were actually hit publicly on your head by an umbrella, that the umbrella in fact was broken on your head, that you fell on the ground, and that you got up and ran away and did not challenge your aggressor to a duel.’

Heavens! Now I knew from personal experience what the words ‘Oriental Imagination’ really meant.

My head was in a whirlwind. I thought of social ostracism with all its consequences. I shall be regarded as a coward, an outcast, I thought. No gentleman will ever speak to me.

‘And what am I to do?’ I asked finally with despair.

'Quite simple,' said one of the young men as if I had asked his advice about changing gear on an Austin Seven. 'You must not be satisfied with the apology. Demand satisfaction with a fighting weapon. . . .'

'But how?'

'Oh, you innocent lamb. Haven't you ever heard about an "affair of chivalry", or haven't you ever read a *Duelling Code*?'

'I'm afraid I have been extremely busy lately with reading other kinds of Codes, such as the *Code Napoléon* and the *Code Civile*. You see I shall have to sit an exam. next month -' I said with some acidity for having been talked to as if I were a boy of six.

He, however, did not see the point (I saw him again only a few days ago in Budapest, and he is still incapable of appreciating a joke unless he sees it in a comic paper) and said with great seriousness:

'In that case there are two lines of action for you to take. You either challenge your two seconds to a duel each for not having settled your affair in a satisfactory manner, or, which is much simpler, you appoint two new seconds and ask for full satisfaction.'

'Oh, damn it. May I ask you to call on him then. If I find another person to go with you - ?'

'I shall be glad,' he said with a most important expression. He was twenty-two.

I found another second, a major this time, who went along to the house of my unsuspecting aggressor and asked him to appoint his seconds. Then again four men sat together in cafés, private rooms of hotels, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee - this time at my expense - and after an afternoon's deliberation

they ruled that the person concerned actually *did* insult me, and that according to the principles of the *Duelling Code* we must fight a duel.

Then they investigated the matter further. They found that my adversary was not at the same time my creditor (in which case I would not have been eligible to challenge him to a duel). Finally they decided that the duel would be fought in two days' time with ordinary cavalry sabres and with 'light bandages', at ten in the morning at a fencing-school.

In the meantime I was given a few fencing lessons by a university friend of mine. I have never fenced before, though both my grandfathers were fencing champions in the seventies. My friend taught me a few simple tricks; he showed me how to parry various attacks; the best position in which to stand so as to offer as little target to the enemy as possible.

I naturally made a great secret of the whole affair, including the training, which lasted three days. I fenced for two to three hours a day, and took it very seriously. After all, this was a matter of honour! By the third morning I had such a stiff arm that I could hardly lift it up to take my hat off, still less to fight a duel.

At home I pretended that my arm was all right, and in secret I put a towel round it dipped in cold water during the night. My friend gave me a massage. It hurt like hell.

Then came the day of the duel. I was told to wear tennis shoes and a pair of dark coloured trousers fastened with a belt. Early in the morning I went to the fencing-school and met my seconds, who were waiting for me with an expression of enormous

solemnity. They introduced their friend the surgeon to me. He was a pink-cheeked young man fresh from the university who had never yet attended a duel and felt very pleased and excited about it. He produced an enormously large medical bag, which gynaecologists would only carry when there is a strong probability that the patient is likely to give birth to twins. From it he took out a white linen sheet, laid it on a table and sorted out no less than twenty-two kinds of various surgical instruments, the kind one sees in the shop-windows in Wigmore Street. As I learnt later, he brought the whole set with him, which was given to him by his father as a Christmas present and had never been used before. He produced no less than four lancets, several pincers, large packets of catgut, and huge surgical needles, which were very probably made to sew up horses after veterinary operations. Also he took out a surgical saw for amputating limbs, then reflecting that this latter would probably not be required, he put it back in the bag with almost unbearable resignation.

My adversary had not yet arrived. I saw his two seconds looking impatiently at their watches. I learnt later that he would have been disqualified had he been a quarter of an hour late. Finally he hurried in with his surgeon, apologising to his seconds and mine, whereupon we were taken to two separate rooms to undress.

I was stripped of my shirt and, with the help of the servant in the gymnasium, they fastened a leather protector around my neck which almost choked me. This was called a 'simple bandage'.

Then I put on my tennis shoes and followed my

seconds to the gymnasium. I was terribly excited but not afraid. For a time I had the feeling one anticipates in the dentist's chair, but in the next second I reflected that I was in no way defenceless or inferior to my opponent. I had a sabre in my hand – and both of my grandfathers were fencing champions in the seventies.

My adversary – as I learnt later – had exactly the same feelings but when we were actually standing opposite each other and being offered swords which were previously cleaned by a piece of cotton wool soaked in carbolic acid, we became as animated as if we had heard a lovely tune and had seen our favourite dancing partners in the opposite end of the room. Rather carelessly I lowered my sword and played it even more carelessly against the floor as if it were an umbrella, just at the moment when my friend the major, who was appointed to be the leader of the duel, had begun to address us, fencing mask on his arm and sabre in hand. He gave me an angry look, then asked my doctor to clean my sword again. Whereupon the young surgeon rushed to me with a piece of cotton wool, as if it were a question of life and death.

Then the major said:

‘Gentlemen! Duelling is strictly forbidden according to Hungarian law. Will you make peace between you?’

This I knew already to be a purely rhetorical request, and a merely conventional appeal – I think I read about it in a novel, and was much offended when my seconds on the previous day told me not to take any notice of it. Whereupon we both smiled and gave the major a slightly contemptible look. (‘No,

sir. We are not cowards. Blood alone can clean our honour.')

'Your silence I shall interpret as a refusal,' the major continued. 'We, your four seconds have decided that you will fight a duel here and now with so-called "light-cavalry" sabres until the total physical exhaustion of either of you. . . .'

Then he went on giving details of the rules, which I had already heard the previous day. We were too excited to listen to him, but we pretended that we were very much interested. The major finished his monologue by declaring that he left it to our honour not to start till he gave the signal and, pulling his wire-netted mask over his face and lifting his sword high up in the air, he shouted as if he were commanding a brigade:

'Gentlemen, at it!'

In those days I had spent my afternoons training for the 440 yards, and at the moment I heard the command I jumped towards my adversary as if I had heard the starter's word. He was just saved by sheer luck. I would have slashed him across the head. He was so much taken aback that he did not notice that I had forgotten to put the thumb of my left hand into the hook of my belt behind – as was hammered into my head by the instructor. He could have cut my left arm right off, had he been a better fencer.

'Halt,' shouted the major, so loudly that we almost dropped our swords. He ran up to me and pulled me back to my former place for a reason which will remain for ever a mystery to me.

We were again waiting for his signal, when I caught sight of several young men I knew from the Danube

Corso hiding discreetly behind the parallel bars by the walls of the gymnasium. It was quite a custom among the *jeunesse dorée* of Budapest to escape from the university lectures in the mornings and watch a duel, discussing its fine points as if it were cock-fighting or a similar sporting event. I was naturally a little proud. At the age of twenty every Hungarian is a fearless exhibitionist.

Then we ran at each other again, were stopped, battled vigorously again. It did not seem exciting at all.

In the fourth round, in a moment when I failed to practise my instructor's infallible parry, I was hit on my right shoulder. I hardly felt it. Yet after a shout from the major, at which the doctor rushed to me, it was discovered that the tiny cut was bleeding. He patted it with a brush dipped in iodine. Then he grabbed my wrist and gauged the beat of my pulse.

'Eighty,' he said to the other doctor, who replied: 'Eighty-five,' meaning the pulsation of my adversary.

Then we went on.

After a time the duel became dull routine, like a very uneventful tennis-match with a dreadfully even score. I became quite daring now and tried to hit my adversary on the head, but my desperate efforts were all parried. He obviously had learnt the same 'infallible parry' the previous day. It only resulted in my breaking my sword on his – which as I learnt later when I came to pay the bill, cost me ten *pengő*s extra.

After the fourteenth round or maybe the fifteenth our pulses were taken again. This time mine was ninety-two and his a hundred and four. His doctor

went up to the major and told him the traditional formula: in his opinion his patient was in such an excited state that he would not take any further responsibility if the duel was allowed to continue. Whereupon the major, after a short council with the other three seconds, decided that in his opinion the two parties had satisfied the code of honour and that the duel was terminated on the 'final exhaustion' of my adversary.

This of course should not have been taken too literally. My adversary, just as well as I, could have gone on fighting for another half an hour. (The duel which seemed to have taken place in ten minutes actually lasted thirty-two minutes.) But there was a provision and a generally accepted convention that if there was no serious wound, the duel should always be terminated by the 'total exhaustion' of the one who was challenged.

We, the two opponents, did not shake hands after the duel. I was angry with him, perhaps because I thought he alone was responsible for the whole trouble, or perhaps because I had not managed to cut him.

When I returned to the dressing-room I was met by four or five young men who came out from their ill-concealed hiding places. They all came up to me and slapped my shoulder – preferably the one messed up with iodine. It was like a scene in a theatrical dressing-room after a successful first night. I dressed quickly and went up to the doctor and asked him what I owed him. He laughed and said that he would not take any money. He was obviously too pleased at having been asked to give 'surgical attention' in the

first duel of his life. Whereupon I shook hands with him. And a handshake each was the only reward I could offer to my two seconds, but they were apparently satisfied with that. In fact, the major asked me in undertones if I had enough money to pay for the duel.

In those days in Hungary – after the War – one usually gave nothing to one's seconds for their assistance beyond shaking their hands. Before the War, however, and in case of rich people having a complicated affair, it was usual to give a cigarette-case with the date of the duel engraved inside. Sometimes gold cases were given, but even in the years before the War it was mostly silver. My uncle, who is regarded in his country town as a supreme authority on 'affairs of honour', has among his three dozen cigarette-cases two platinum ones – one studded with diamonds – and no less than five gold, all given to him for services rendered in duels.

Next morning I received my bill. It was fifty *pengős* – something like three pounds. I decided to tell my father about it. I called on him at his office in the Treasury and told him all about the affair, showed him the impressive protocol and asked for fifty *pengős*. Without a word he took out his wallet and gave me the sum. I was more than surprised, as hitherto my father has always been very strict about financial matters, and I received less pocket-money than anybody else I knew, but now he opened his wallet with such a swiftness and handed the bill over with such a solemn expression, as if he were not my own father, but a pre-War ambassador rushing to the assistance of one of his colleagues. In secret he obviously

laughed and was a little proud of me. A typically Hungarian father.

Two years later I unexpectedly met my former adversary in London. After the duel we made it a point to cut each other in the street, though we must have met twice a day. Here, however, at the A.A.A. championship at Stamford Bridge, we rushed towards each other without any further ado, shook hands and, as if nothing had happened, promptly began to discuss the chances of the Hungarian champion against Lord Burghley in the 220 yards.

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I reflected about my first and very probably last duel as I walked along the hot and dusty street of Hódmezővásárhely. My friend the doctor had already gone to sit in the lounge of the local military club with three other gentlemen, to mend someone's honour. In these days 'affairs of gallantry' usually end in protocols, for even if people have that forty or fifty *pengős* to spare, which a sabre or pistol duel inevitably costs, they usually have better means of investing it.

We were to meet for lunch and he advised me to spend the rest of the morning at the local museum. I followed his directions with a heavy heart. I do not like museums and as regards 'local museums' I leap if I hear them mentioned. This may be a sub-conscious revolt in me against my Hungarian upbringing, which insisted not only on 'general knowledge' but also on 'general culture' of which the conscientious scrutiny of museums formed a vital and inevitable part, or perhaps because I spent too much of my first five months in London in the British

Museum. With the conscientiousness and system of a German doctor examining a patient to whose bed he is summoned day after day I entered the Grecian portals of Montague House and plunged into what I was told was 'British civilisation'. It took me years to discover that the British Museum is about the most unhappily arranged museum in the whole world.

There was absolutely nothing to do till midday. It was Sunday in easily the dullest town of Central Europe, and it was hot and dusty. The museum, I reflected, will at least offer a shelter against the elements. So I went there. The collection was housed in a small building, distinguished from its neighbours by an enamelled board outside the front door modestly announcing its existence. I rang the bell and waited wiping my forehead. A uniformed attendant opened the door and asked me politely what I wanted. The question appeared to me a little unusual. What did I want in the local museum? To play golf or take a Portuguese lesson or have my tonsils out. . . . He looked at me with such a kind attention, with such a joyful anticipation of pleasure, that I saw at once that all he really wanted to hear me say was, 'I want to see the collections.' I was not wrong in my quick conclusions, for as soon as I uttered these magic words he opened the door wide and let me in, with an expression on his face like that of the porter of a Turkish *Maison Tellier* when he discovers that the visitor is a pasha in mufti. I asked him whether they had many visitors.

He shook his head as if he were ashamed.

'Few people come this way, sir. You see it's summer. . . .'

'And do they come "this way" in winter?'

'No, sir, because we are mostly shut then. You see we have central heating only in the public library adjoining.'

Whereupon I followed him to the first floor with a feeling that I was going to inspect a secret museum all by myself, a museum of wonderful exhibits whose existence is only known to a chosen few. The mad king of Bavaria must have experienced such an emotion when he asked Wagner to conduct an opera for him alone.

Opposite the narrow staircase there was a lovely old wooden pulpit, carved obviously by local peasants and painted in colours, which must have been vivid in the early eighteenth century when they were fresh, but now they resembled faded, old hand-painted English calendars with their rich flower pictures. It was obviously taken from a Calvinist church on the *Alföld*. Their pulpits up to this very day are usually made in the shape of the calyx used for Holy Communion, with a narrow winding staircase leading up to it, and over the head of the pastor there is the cover of the calyx, also carved in wood and supported by girdles from the ceiling. The Roman Catholic Church usually has for its pulpit a more elaborate arrangement. The priest as a rule is never seen climbing up the steps after the hymns are sung, but appears from a secret door cut in the wall, whose workings I used to admire in my childhood in the same way as I admired the concealed lever he pressed under the small niche over the High Altar whose cover disappeared as if by magic and brought into sight the glittering Eucharist. Our own Calvinistic ritual was

devoid of all these mysteries, but it took me a long time before I came to appreciate its wonderful simplicity.

Next to the pulpit there was a row of panels, obviously the squire's family pew, carved and painted in the same way as the pulpit. They were really lovely, but in places showed the unmistakable signs of the beetle.

The museum was small and was mostly devoted to local ethnography. There were cabinets full of the local earthenware, primitive but interesting glazed wares. There were some brandy jars shaped a little frivolously in the form of the Bible, with various inscriptions. Most of the brandy bottles in their curious shapes had some lettering on them and most of the inscriptions were amusing. 'I made this bottle not for my own use but for that of my friends. Drink a good draught, my friend. I dare you to.' So ran one of them. The other inscription contained an interesting curse: 'He who steals this, I wish him to sink so low as to become a gamekeeper to a gipsy' – which must be the greatest contempt in the eyes of the Hungarian peasant.

The words on many of the jugs and plates were amusing in their rather heavy Plainland humour, but none of them contained such expressions as one finds on saucers or plates and ash-trays of more intricate and lovely designs in Brittany. When I saw a collection of them in France, painted that lovely pink with primitive Louis XV designs under their crackled enamel, I wanted to buy many of them, only to discover on reading the words that they would not do justice even to my not over-respectable household.

It was, however, most unexpected to see one of these Brittany plates in the country home of an extremely proper English vicar, with an inscription that would have made even the *habitués* of Aristide Bruant's now defunct cabaret blush. I should imagine the object was not given to the reverend gentleman by a naughty squire's daughter, but by a sweet and pious country spinster ('a souvenir from a visit to Quimper') – who, like the presentee, had a great capacity for kind thought and a limited vocabulary for the baser kinds of French *argot*.

I gave the man a small tip and left the museum. It was noon and still too early to turn up at the restaurant, so I walked along the wide main street of the town rather aimlessly. It was very hot. It seemed to me much hotter than when I arrived. It is true that heat had, as a compensation, produced lovely local melons and beautifully shaped pumpkins, but my agricultural interests were at the moment negligible.

I came to the Calvinist church and entered it. The service was still going on. Though this was my first visit to a church of my own persuasion in the Great Hungarian Plain, I failed to detect any difference between its atmosphere and the ones in my native Transylvania. The pastor in the pulpit looked like a prosperous north-country English manufacturer, save for his simple black *moirée* robes. By his voice he must have been an extremely strong man, just like one of the Old Testament prophets in their prime, and compared with him the average English country vicar looked like a refined Roman Cardinal minus his purple, lace and gold. Now I came to understand fully what Matthew Arnold described as

'muscular Christianity'. The pastor spoke at the top of his voice, yet he spoke very slowly. Had I been a genuine Englishman, not able to understand what he was saying, I would have been led to believe that he was just about to excommunicate the whole of his congregation for their sins. I liked the thundering pastor, as he reminded me of sermons in my childhood, when on Sundays Old Tárkányi – an educated peasant with the degree of doctor of philosophy – used to thunder under the arches of the lovely old church at Kolozsvár, where the whole school had to appear. I remember that all Calvinist pastors shouted in the pulpit as if they took the word 'protestant' too literally. Sometimes they frightened me, and the comparison with the Roman priest with his careful and well-rehearsed movements, with his smooth tongue (like a buttered knife) and with the uniform expression on his face reflecting at the same time humility and superiority, the heritage of the medieval Latin spirit, was very much to the latter's advantage.

Now, however, while my mind ran into long-forgotten channels leading back to my past, and as for brief moments I experienced the lovely sensation of *temps retrouvées*, I preferred this simply dressed, middle-aged man with his manly, frank, candid appearance. ('Ours is a manly and a true Hungarian religion,' said my uncle who had married a Roman Catholic. I fully understand the first part of the statement, but I cannot see why Calvinism would be nearer to Hungarian mentality than Papacy.)

That moment, I felt, not for the first time, but quite distinctly, a Calvinist, and very much at home. In London I go to church infrequently and then I always

attend a Church of England service. There I am vaguely conscious of being a Christian, but here in this almost austere church among Plainland peasants with their women all dressed in black, I was conscious of my typically Protestant sins, which are many, and of my typically Protestant virtues, which are, alas, few.

When he finally came to the end and gave the Blessing, I felt a little remorse, just as in old times when, instead of listening to the words of the pastor, I made a mental excursion into the past.

Then they sang a Psalm – one I knew well. It is called, 'We had our Faith in Thee from the Beginning,' and its simple and lovely tune is, I believe, seventeenth century.

The exit of the congregation was not a very interesting sight. They were dressed in Sunday black, which must be quite an international colour in Christian countries for church-going, and save for their high top-boots, which were magnificently black and shiny and stiff, there was nothing out of the ordinary about their attire. The *Alföld* is the part of Hungary which was the first to discard its native dress – if it ever had one in the sense that some other parts of Hungary still have theirs – for the slavish uniformity of the drab international attire.

The market-square in front of the church was full of men gathered together, smoking their long cherry-wood pipes, talking and spitting. If I recollect rightly, these gatherings on Sundays on the Great Hungarian Plain were called 'Spitting Clubs' in my childhood. Spitting, with the Hungarian peasant, is by no means a strictly biological and frivolous activity. Spitting with him means reflective thinking and

offers a relief from the strains of sustained reflective efforts. 'He who spits meditates', would be the Hungarian peasant's version of '*Cogito Ergo Sum*'. Besides there is really a great difference between spitting by sheer necessity or in anger and spitting, so to speak, for the pleasure of it. Spitting for the pleasure with the Hungarian peasant is something very old, almost an ancestral habit, frivolous yet essentially rural, like the English ostler's no doubt more civilised habit of chewing a straw. For him it is an expression of independence and superiority. Similarly a true-blooded Englishman would keep his hat on in every conceivable place, except in church, so as to give forcible documentation to the fact that he belongs to the oldest free race on earth.

At school we much admired a boy for his splendid technique in spitting. He was a rough fellow, a landowner's son from the country, who was brought up with peasant lads and his habits were distinctly rural. The way that boy could spit was simply a marvel. He had a magnificent sense of distance. He could spit into any target like a shooting champion. Yet, he said, he was a mere bungler compared with their coachman, who could spit through a wedding-ring held at the distance of six feet. He tried to teach me how to spit like 'a real man' but I could never manage it. True, I was not technically minded even when I was a boy.

This 'Spitting Club' on Sunday mornings is, of course, the proper place for discussing the world's affairs. I spoke to a few men and was amazed at their clear, concise ideas on the subject.

Hungarians are a political nation: not only because

in Hungary, as in the rest of Central Europe the influence of political factors is as strong as in Latin countries, or perhaps even stronger, but because in Hungary politics are nationally the great personal concern of everybody. People do know about political factors and political events, and though in some parts miserably poor peasants regard the 'gentlemen's business' with a quiet resignation and apathy, they generally take more interest in politics than the average Englishman. They have clear, well-defined and surprisingly well-expressed political views which they are ready to divulge at the very slightest provocation. They form a most curious contrast to the average English electorate. The latter – in my personal opinion – is not politically minded. England may be one of the most important factors in international politics, it might play a very important part in the shaping of the world's destiny, yet the average Englishman leaves politics voluntarily to the professional politician. The British politician may be bitterly abused by the electorate, might be called by him incapable, slow and short-sighted, yet he enjoys a trust and loyalty on the part of the electorate which appears to be almost religious.

'In Hungary you cannot go far in politics if you only have "character",' a friend of mine told me once when we compared political England and political Hungary. 'I naturally don't mean to say that we do not require our politicians to have character and honesty, but I mean that we require a good deal more, and that we have always required a good deal more, even when we were not in this unfortunate situation after a lost war and a lost peace.'

A General Election, or even a by-election is always a great national event. True, in these days people do not literally fight over it, as they did a few years before the War, when the party agent usually received a black eye or retired with a broken arm or leg. But practically all of the electorate knows what is at stake. A curious comparison with an English General Election, when hundreds of the electorate of a prosperous Midland manufacturing town don't even know that the General Election is on and that they, free citizens of Britain, have political rights as well as duties to exercise. I remember canvassing for a friend of mine among the dirty furnaces and potteries in Arnold Bennett's country, when people, open-minded, kindly, frank and thoroughly delightful, people of the Industrial Midlands, whom I love, offered me a cup of tea in their modest homes and very politely, and with more curiosity than interest, asked me – and for that matter also my fellow-canvassers – to tell them what were the respective tenets of the National Government and of the Labour opposition.

I do not wish to draw any conclusions from this or point to any moral. I am not sufficiently politically educated or politically intelligent to say whether the English or the Hungarian attitude is the better. All I can do is to mutter with the humble deference of the ignorant that the English attitude reflects the mentality of a country which is a hundredfold, nay, a thousandfold, happier than unfortunate Hungary. I have to jump to the inevitable conclusion that it is indeed a happy state of affairs when a great country can be governed by the select few, the few politically trained, educated, politically intelligent, who are so

much trusted that a great percentage of the electorate does not even bother about the means through which they get into the chamber.

It is true, the greatest part of Hungary (that is, with the exception of the towns) sends its representatives to parliament through the thoroughly out-of-date system of the open ballot. This, of course, is a sad reflection on Hungary, as it reduces the country to something little better than a partial dictatorship, but the still sadder state of affairs is that the successive governments all promised the electorate the reform of franchise, that is to say, general secret ballot. But what actually has happened in the last sixteen years is that suffrage was extended to women and that about thirty to thirty-five per cent of the total electorate could elect its representatives by means of the secret ballot.

The political-mindedness of the average Hungarian, rich and poor alike, seems to me to be closely interwoven with the fact that in Hungary the State is practically omnipotent. This is perhaps a relic of the Supreme State of the Habsburgs, when Hungary seemed to be nothing so much as their colony or private property. This condition, so close resembling the modern post-War totalitarian states of Europe, has always been so in Hungary. 'Always' in this connection means the beginnings of modern democracy. The State was, and still is, all powerful, and its executives have enormous powers. Hungarians grew up to be less independent; not exactly serfs or slaves to the State, but, rather, like children under guardianship. The State of Hungary, more or less, looks upon them as infants who have to be cared for, who

don't exactly know what is good for them and occasionally have to be made happy against their will. Consequently, in Hungary, the State is not a much-feared ogre parent, or an iron-willed cruel step-mother as she inevitably becomes under a totalitarian government, but a parent from whom his incapable children expect practically everything. They love the State and abuse it, they respect it and criticise it, but in reality they cannot manage to make one single step without it.

The State has enormous and powerful organisations. It monopolised the railways, early in the eighties, when Communism was nothing but a theory; it controls practically all schools in the country; it runs the Budapest Opera and two national repertory theatres (with great sacrifices but very efficiently), it has built and maintains hospitals, which, if they were left to be supported by 'voluntary contributions', would have been closed a few weeks after opening their doors. But the State goes further than this: it owns a few factories, hotels, housing estates, agricultural properties, in short, in a way becomes a rival to private enterprise.

To the maintenance and upkeep of all this the State has an enormous number of functionaries, comparatively more than in any other European country, but of this I have already written in another chapter.

The executives of the State have enormous powers. A Cabinet Minister is a man with an almost unprecedented authority in Hungary compared with the holder of a similar portfolio in England, who is always a little nervous of the permanent heads of the Civil

Service. In Hungary he has them practically under his thumb.

My friend was already waiting for me at the restaurant when I came in. The 'affair of chivalry' had been peacefully settled, ending in a mutually signed protocol and the two parties, together with their seconds, were already celebrating the peace made between them, at another restaurant.

I had clear soup, which was excellent save for a little too much pepper in it and a *Gulyás*, a dish which is invariably spelt as *Goulash hongroise* abroad. That I don't think to be a mis-spelling. The Hungarian 'ly' is difficult to pronounce, and the above must have been an attempt to 'westernise' an exotic word. For students I may say that the word actually is pronounced *gooyash*. Well, this *Gulyás* at the restaurant of Hódmezővásárhely was a little too much flavoured with *paprika* to my taste. It has always been my experience that people of the Great Hungarian Plain make generous use of condiments. An eminent Hungarian authority on nutrition once remarked that this is probably due to the efforts of the poor of the Plains to diminish their appetite. If this is true one could perhaps understand why the poor in England have such a great preference for pickles, vinegar, and ginger, three requisites of the English kitchen which always put me into a temper, even if I smell them in the distance.

After the *Gulyás* I had a sweet which is known in Hungary as *almásrétes*, and in England by its German name of *Apfelstrudel*. It was crisp, light and delicious.

There was, however, no time to discuss the various

fine points of the Hungarian kitchen, as my friend urged me to finish as quickly as possible. The car was already waiting to take me to a neighbouring *tanya*, the owner of which, according to my friend, was quite a remarkable man – a sort of peasant superman.

I met him after lunch. He was an elderly man, dressed in the Hungarian peasant's Sunday black, with high boots, a soft white collar and no tie. According to Hungarian ideas he was quite a well-to-do man, in fact, through his wealth, he did not strictly belong to the peasant class. And he had an air about him which is closely associated in my mind with agricultural aristocracy all over Europe: namely, a curious understatement in behaviour and dress. He could have gone to a first-rate tailor in Budapest and could without any strain have maintained the good average European standard in clothes, yet he appeared quite like any other peasant. A Hungarian would have attributed this apparent simplicity to the close-fisted stinginess of the Hungarian peasant. He would have been wrong. Tamás Kenéz, for that was his name, as I learnt later, was a man of careful thrift and unusually hospitable. No, the point was deeper and more universal than the Hungarian would have thought. The big Hungarian landowner is usually slovenly in his attire and anyhow very simply dressed; he lives a well-ordered, almost frugal, existence. In this respect he is a spiritual brother to all big landowners throughout Europe, including the English. One has seen those members of the House of Lords who are usually referred to as the 'backwoodsmen', living on their vast ancestral estates (and with money to keep them up); yet they go on wearing their weather-beaten old

tweeds, their antique mackintoshes and their Jacobean brogues, are frequently badly shaven and, except for their bearing, look generally inferior to their own well-turned-out gamekeepers. Their butlers, with pre-War ambassadorial dignity, of course, definitely appear to be improvements on their shabby masters.

The journey by motor-car was very short, and Kenéz *Ur* kept on talking about his hobby, which later in life turned out to be such a profitable source of income for him – the drilling of artesian wells, a device much welcomed in the general dryness of the *Alföld*. He had discovered the drilling technique by himself, made one or two wells on his own land and was soon invited to places as far off as the vicinity of Vienna to drill them for other people.

His *tanya* was about four or five miles from the town. In the old days when the *Alföld* was just recovering from the devastation of the Turks, the towns on the *Alföld* lay at such great distances from each other that the owners had to ride or drive several miles to reach their property. So they usually built little huts, or *tanya* for themselves to spend the whole day there when necessary. Later these huts or cottages were enlarged, the owner of the estate had permanently moved to his land, and there arose thousands of little farmsteads all over the *Alföld*, each owned by an individual farmer. This naturally brought about an isolation reminiscent of the inhabitants of the deserts or the vast steppes, but it also brought about unique local traditions and an interesting primitive civilisation. I must, however, point out that, contrary to a delightful English traveller whose zeal was stronger than his scholarship, who published facts about the 'thousand

years old civilisation of the Hungarian *tanya*’ seasoned with those adjectives one usually associates with the prose of Mrs. Rosita Forbes, that this particular kind of Hungarian Plainland settlement is, at the most, a hundred and fifty years old.

It was after we were shown the place that I saw that Kenéz *Ur* was more than a remarkable man. Lord Shrewsbury, whose gardens at Ingestre in Staffordshire are so much admired, has a bronze bust raised to him with the inscription ‘He Made the Desert Smile.’ I think old Kenéz would certainly deserve another for himself, after he was below ground. He certainly made the desert smile too, though in a different way from the diminutive Versailles of Ingestre.

The land on this part of the *Alföld* is extremely dry. A good way from the River Tisza, it is not surrounded by hills or forests, but by a vast steppe-land, consequently its rainfall is negligible. The great canalisation scheme of the Plain of which Count Széchenyi had dreamed a century ago, had never been executed, perhaps because Hungary could not afford it. And one could see with one’s own eyes what a difference that would have meant for the country. We were in September and the neighbouring fields and meadows were simply dying of thirst. The leaves of clover and maize looked scorched and were an unhealthy colour: only the giant sunflowers, turning their black-and-tan faces towards the sun, were apparently enjoying the almost African heat. The Kenéz *tanya* looked like an Arcadian oasis. Behind the pretty house, reminiscent of a South American *patio*, there were huge artificial lakes, like green mirrors, full of water, with gold and green frogs basking in the

fiery sunshine on their backs and performing acrobatic leaps on our arrival. There were two or three artesian wells dug as deep as three hundred feet into the soil, and beyond them a model irrigation scheme with its Van Gogh colours and delineation.

Then we went to the orchard. It was a pattern of efficiency – almost painfully perfect.

There were huge apple-trees with a full load of fruit, as if they were ordered by their owner to yield each year such and such a quantity under penalty of extermination, with each fruit neatly wrapped in a little white parchment bag to preserve it from insects and birds. Then there were pears as big as cantaloups and dusty golden apricots as big as pears. It looked altogether too splendid, too well run, too much of a place where nature was subservient to a Plan. I thought it was only in places like California that fruit farmers had these little paper bags for each fruit and turned the whole orchard into something like a preserve of dull Christmas-trees.

Then we went further to see his vineyard. Since the place was hotter than the rest of Hungary, which would normally have its grape harvest some time in October, the grapes at the Kenéz *tanya* were ripe. He asked us to eat off the vines 'as much as we could'. Needless to say I took the chance, not so much because I was hungry, but because it must have been some ten years or even more since I last ate grapes off the vine. Lovely, small and extremely sweet Hungarian grapes they were, still warm from the sun and covered with that lovely waxen dust one always admires with Dutch still-life. The description of their colour is more suitable transcribed in painting than in prose.

There was that yellow *Malaga*, like dull gold, that greenish muscatel, like Scandinavian glassware and the large bluish-black berries of the *Izabella*, like the full lips of a negress.

While I ate them I thought with a little despair of those fantastically expensive imported grapes one eats in London. They please the eye, like most fruit on sale in England – 'The Englishman eats with his eye,' said Kenéz – they would do well as placards for the 'Eat More Fruit Movement' or for illustrations of school-books on natural history; they may be considerably larger than these Hungarian varieties, but they have neither taste nor aroma, smell, flavour – no personality, in fact. Yes, grapes and most fruit sold in London are perfectly impersonal of taste, impersonal as the accent of a telephone operator. They have no soul in them and tell you no story.

While we were making a splendid supplementary meal of fruits I thought of the unusual qualities of the man who had made the place what it is now. In his own way he was perhaps a genius, who had made all this wonderful fertility, this Biblical richness, out of the surrounding desert. Here I saw an example of the Hungarian self-made man, something like a Hungarian equivalent to a British captain of Industry. His work is naturally on a smaller scale – after all Hungary is a small country. And it was not a shoe-black factory, a furnace or a pottery he had made, since Hungary is not an industrial country. Yet he had something mysteriously similar to his distant English relations a generation ago. In his own way, no doubt, he was a strong and perhaps harsh individualist, with the convictions of the Protestant. He

was careful and thrifty and, no doubt, occasionally stiff when a question of money arose. Of his income he only spent a few pence on himself, the rest he re-invested into fresh and well-chosen schemes, just like the Victorians, and he worked with the sweat of his brow when an easier pace would have done just as well. I should imagine he curses rather freely during the week but goes to his Calvinist church on Lord's Day, where he sings the Psalms so loud and so well that much of his bad language may be forgotten by Him above. He gave a generous dowry with his daughter, who married into the lesser middle classes of Hungary – just as his Victorian equal married his daughter to the penniless squire's son. Even his moustache and his bearing are reminiscent of Those Who Made The Industrial Midlands What They Are.

The world indeed seemed very small for me, for a moment, and its inhabitants very much alike, but, I repeat, only for a moment. In a minute I was smiling to reflect how the profession of the journalist, whose main occupation is to write about things which are only true for twenty-four hours, comes to form and deform one's character and how the temptation to put down a sentence that looks well in print might induce one to sacrifice for its sake the realities of life. Old Kenéz is a type, yes. There are, I hope, several people like him in the Country of the Four Rivers, yet he is an exception among farmers – a fine exception, I must add, and I wonder if his name will go down to the footnotes of the history of Hungarian agriculture in the same way as the names of Midland Industrialists came down to us. True, Hungary is about a generation behind England in many things,

but I am certain that the chronicler of his doings will not look upon him with the eyes through which Mr. Priestley surveyed the doings of the generation of his fathers. That chronicler, I am certain, would not find too many dirty eggshells and too little omelette as a result of Old Kenéz's activities. In fact, I am certain he would write: 'Had his neighbours all, or many of them, been like him, had they possessed the same resourcefulness, the same ingenuity and industry and, perhaps, the same luck, Hungary in the third decade of the twentieth century would not have been the struggling little country she was, but a prosperous second Denmark or Holland on a slightly larger scale.'

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I heard a whip cracking in the neighbourhood. In the deadly silence of the Great Hungarian Plain it sounded like gun shots in the distance.

'To chase the birds away,' he explained, and shook his head.

'We take all the trouble to have a good fruit crop; sweat practically the whole year round, pray that hailstorms or the early frosts will not ruin it, and then when the fruit is ripe these cursed pests come and have a banquet. Oh, would that they might be hurled into the Cauldron of Beelzebub. . . .'

'Aren't scarecrows any use then?' I asked.

He shook his head and laughed.

'No, sir. Hungarian crows are too good for that. They know. They know them so well that they make fun of the simple-minded man who puts them up, because, if you please, they even perch on them.'

As we left the vineyard and came to the plum-trees

that were staggering under the load of their ripe fruit, we saw the man busy with his long whip. The thing was almost as high as himself and its whip proper almost as long as the handle. I had not seen a Hungarian whip since my very early years in the country and asked the lad to allow me to crack it. He handed it over with a smile, at which my friend, the doctor, naughtily took to his heels. I, however, at once remembered the technique of it, which I learnt as a child from our coachman, and cracked it once or twice.

The lad smiled.

'Pardon me, sir. You must have had a Hungarian mother.'

'Well, yes,' I answered, rather confused, 'and a Hungarian father. I *am* a Hungarian. Why?'

'I thought so, sir, for nobody but us can crack these whips that way. The other day some German farmers came out to see the irrigation plant and some Americans – yes, I think they were Americans. They all said they had never seen a Hungarian whip and all asked me to let them crack it – but, well, they must have done it in their own way. . . .'

'Well. Yes. But who told you I am not a Hungarian?'

'Oh, the way you are dressed, sir. You are English, aren't you?'

'But look here, man. I *am* a Hungarian, just as much as you are. And I am now speaking Hungarian to you, am I not? English people can't speak Hungarian, can they?'

'You don't say so, sir – ' and he opened his eyes wide.

'Of course not, you idiot,' said Kenéz *Ur*, and slapped him on the back. It was as if he had hit his

hand against a solid oak chest covered with a dust sheet. The lad gave a confused smile.

‘Why, I always thought they did. . . .’

I laughed and reflected that in his person I had met the Happy Men of the legends, for the first time in my life. And here was my chance to procure his shirt, the cure that was recommended to the legendary king against unhappiness, whereupon His Unhappy Majesty went out to search for the happy man, and when after years of wanderings he actually found him, it came out that the happy man had no shirt. In the modern Hungarian version of the legend this lad would probably refuse it to me, reflecting that he had only one shirt, and therefore could not afford to part with it.

CHAPTER XIX

MEZŐKÖVESD

IT would be idle to pretend that in the course of a Hungarian journey an excursion to Mezőkövesd is off the beaten track, as this village, on the northern borders of the Hungarian Plainland, is well known to tourists all over the world by its peasant art of unique qualities. There is no town in Europe or America to-day where the embroidered cushions, table mats or kerchiefs of Mezőkövesd, with their rich colours and original design, would not be known. Many Englishwomen wear blouses decorated with Mezőkövesd motives – sometimes without knowing it.

And the village of Mezőkövesd is definitely a sight, which is starred in guide-books as an important item of Hungarian tourist traffic. Information bureaux in the Hungarian capital are full of its advertisements just as the show cases in hotel lounges are full of its products.

Huge charabancs arrive at the village every Sunday in the summer bringing hundreds of foreign tourists who all prepare themselves for the grand opportunity, that glorious fifteen minutes in the early afternoon, when before evensong the youth of the village parade in front of the Roman Catholic church. It is all over in fifteen minutes, and it is a grand sight. Richly embroidered pinafores, pleated skirts, gaily

coloured kerchiefs and blouses move about and glitter in the dusty golden atmosphere of the Hungarian summer. They are watched by lads who, according to a mysterious and inexplicable tradition of all lads of all villages, stand idle by the walls – as one says it in Hungarian, ‘stop the walls from coming down’. And the lads themselves are not lagging behind in splendour of dress either. Over the traditional *gatya* that extremely wide pair of canvas trousers of the Hungarian peasant, which from a distance always look like skirts, they wear beautifully embroidered waistcoats of velvet and a similarly embroidered pinafore which almost touches their high and well-polished top-boots. But the most original, the most unusual and the most gloriously amusing part of their attire is their headgear. They wear tiny little hats, in shape reminiscent of bowlers worn in the old days by English family doctors and now mainly by Mr. Winston Churchill, only with a crown much higher and of soft material. The crown is almost entirely covered by two layers of wide green ribbons of silk as well as gold embroideries. Furthermore, it is extremely small and looks almost like those tiny hats worn by music-hall comedians of those more easygoing days when such oddity of dress proved enough to send the audience into a roar of laughter. It creates the impression that the lad of Mezőkövesd wears a hat a good two sizes smaller than his head, tilted at a rakish angle and supported from falling down by a little elastic ribbon.

The difference between the splendour of the lads and lasses is very little, thus making us wonder over the curious phenomenon of the modern note in the

way civilised communities are dressed, where the male is subdued in shape and colour, especially in highly civilised communities, like England.

As a phenomenon this is only typical of the last hundred and fifty years of civilisation, as we all know that up till the end of the eighteenth century there was little difference in splendour of line and colour between male and female garments.

A visit to a place like Mezőkövesd inevitably makes us realise that men's dress ought to undergo a reform which would result in something not only suitable to climatic conditions, sensible and comfortable and simple, but also not devoid of colour and altogether less dull than the things we wear now, especially when it comes to evening wear. Women's fashion has made long strides towards comfort, hygiene, and sense in the last thirty years; it has also become much cheaper and consequently more democratic, while men's dress remains practically the same as it was thirty years ago. There is a slight tendency in England in these days to wear lighter and gayer colours than was the fashion immediately after the War, but I fear that instead of becoming gayer men's colours will become more subdued and dull in the years to come.

There is an opinion among authorities on folk-lore in Hungary that Mezőkövesd and its products are rapidly being spoilt or have already been spoilt by the commercial spirit, inevitable when such a village becomes a touristic sight and its products part of Hungary's exports. The opinion is to a great extent justified. If one looks at the lovely embroideries made some twenty or thirty years ago in various museums, including that of the village itself, it is im-

possible not to realise that the style of Mezőkövesd in the years after the War has gone through a very unhappy transformation. The centuries-old primitive art of the place has during these twenty years become industrialised, commercialised and rationalised. Colours have become gaudy and not very harmonious, and the general effect of dress is slightly suggestive of parrots of sub-tropical climates. Some of them are enough to give the Hungarian connoisseur a shock when he sees them.

Yet tourist traffic and the commercial spirit in its wake seems to me to be a necessary evil at Mezőkövesd. True, it contributes to the prostitution of Mezőkövesd art, as it contributes to the prostitution of all peasant arts, and anything original it exploits. Though a very frivolous comparison, it is impossible not to think in this connection of the old story that the Bohemians, Artists, Models and Apaches of some of the smart Montmartre cafés, were all hired and dressed up for the evening by the enterprising proprietor. *The Bloodthirsty Apache*, *The Starving Artist*, *The Typical Parisian Bohème*, whose appearance started such curious associations in the minds of the unsuspecting English and American tourist, were all unemployed waiters, clerks, actors and so on, hired to provide the place with an atmosphere. Three years ago, when the crisis was already acute in Paris, a French friend of mine visiting me in London bitterly complained: 'Just imagine, we have such a bad time that Corsini (the owner of a Montmartre café) has given notice to all his Apaches and Bohèmes.'

Yet what would Mezőkövesd be without the evil spirit of tourist traffic? A village, just like any other

in Hungary, which would gradually cast off even the remains of its lovely native dress for the proletarian uniform of factory-made jackets, long trousers, shoes, and hideous caps.

There is already a tendency that way. Hungary perhaps is still the richest country in native dress, yet she cannot escape the general tendencies of the age. In industrial countries like England or Belgium, people no longer even remember the native dress of the peasant, and in the Scottish Highlands, as we all know, the native dress was resurrected by the Scottish upper classes after Queen Victoria's visits, and the kilt and sporran to me have a faint air of chauvinism, nationalistic pride and a little artificiality: perhaps a natural reaction against the dulling effects of industrialisation.

Besides, at some places the peasant, even if he could afford the native dress, regards it with a growing contempt. The ordinary humdrum attire with all its hideousness suggests to him a sense of a higher civilisation, more respect, a feeling of being no longer a peasant but someone different from his betters only in occupation and income.

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I arrived at the village at the early hour of half-past eight. Early for me, as Mezőkövesd, like all Hungarian villages, rises at four or five in the summer. This was not my first visit; I had already been there some eight years ago. Since then the State Railways had had a waiting-room furnished at the station in the local style with country-made carved furniture painted in gaily-coloured patterns, complete with an old white-washed stove in the corner of the room. Though not

exactly in the orthodox *matyó* style, it is an unusual and refreshing sight among the familiar furniture of all railway waiting-rooms, which are so much alike all over the world that nobody could take them for anything else.

The village itself is about three-quarters of a mile from the station and there was a derelict car and two or three horse-traps around the station building. I walked all the way. It was very hot and Mezőkövesd, like all Hungarian villages, is very dusty, but I did not mind. I had not been to a Hungarian village for a good many years, and walking is the only way to see them properly. The huge village common through which I made my way was bordered by acacias – the familiar tree of the Hungarian Plain. There were hundreds of geese, apparently without anybody watching them, and as I approached they made a frightened rush and a loud noise to announce my arrival. Yet there seemed to be no one about to notice my presence, and there was apparently no life in the houses sleeping in the shadow of enormous square haystacks in their yards. There were not even dogs about. I would have liked to see the *puli* or the *komondor*, the two famous breeds of the Hungarian village of which I had heard so much. Perhaps it was just as well. Hungarian dogs generally are dear only to their proprietors and regard the stranger with contempt. The small windows of the houses were all carefully shut and curtained. Ventilation, it has always seemed to me, is a monopoly of the rich.

The houses in this village are surprisingly small and primitive, no different from the houses in any other Hungarian village. They all have long, narrow

verandas supported by wooden columns, which offers shelter against the sun and the rain, and most of them are whitewashed under a thatched roof.

On some of the courtyards there were large heaps of multi-coloured pumpkins, some round and orange coloured, others long and green, some spotted with brown dots, others again smooth. A few had quite exotic Oriental shapes. They were lovely, and I reflected that they ought to be seen by enterprising interior decorators and made use of as ornaments with their splendid colours and unusual outlines. The odd and almost exotic flowers of the ordinary garden leek are already a fashion in the white Georgian urns of a few London drawing-rooms, since Lady Mount Temple has discovered their decorative possibilities and promoted them from the seclusion of a Hampshire garden to her most original drawing-room in Gayfere House.

Then I passed melon fields with green water-melons as much as two feet in length, creeping on the ground. The Hungarian calls them 'Greek' melons with their crimson insides and innumerable black seeds, but it is probable that the Turk originally planted their seed in Hungary, together with those of the pumpkin.

I passed an old *gemeskut*, the typical and much described well of the Hungarian village. A bucket hanging from a long pole which is kept in position by a weight on the other side of a much thicker pole. The lowering of the bucket into the round and deep opening of the well needs some strength. I brought up some water and remembered my difficulties twenty years ago when I was on holiday from my prep. school trying to bring up a bucketful, the operation

almost resulting in my falling into the well, some twenty-four feet in depth.

The well was lined with red bricks, and where the water touched them the bricks were covered with dark green moss. I helped myself to some water. It was very cold and a little yellowish, yet it tasted good.

Finally I found myself in the market-square, on which the village church casts its distorted shadow. There were two or three foreign cars standing in the shade and a Cockney chauffeur sleeping by the steering-wheel of a dusty Bentley.

I entered the church, a Roman Catholic one. Mezőkövesd is almost entirely Popish. The very name *matyó* by which the inhabitants of Mezőkövesd and a few neighbouring villages, and their products are called, very probably denotes a Roman Catholic island in the otherwise Protestant countryside.

The church was big and on its ceilings there were frescoes in the modernised, dull version of ecclesiastical baroque. It was packed full. Men were on the left and women on the right on separate benches; and even the two large balconies of the choir were full (in Catholic churches on the Continent the choir is usually above the heads of the congregation). A young chaplain was in the high pulpit, which was reached by a concealed entrance from the wall. He had a pleasant voice with the slightly local accent of the county.

But the congregation which filled the church might have been that of a village in Spain or Southern Ireland, for, except for a few shopkeepers in town clothes and some gendarmes and soldiers in uniform,

everybody was dressed in silky black. All the women wore black kerchiefs on their heads, black aprons over their black dresses, and their men were dressed in that Sunday-going-black of the Hungarian peasant, which clearly shows that they inherited their senselessness in best clothes from their betters. The assembly looked distinctly funereal. I kept wondering what on earth could have happened to the most splendidly colourful Hungarian village, that every single member of its congregation should turn out in such gloomy attire. Had the mayor or the Lord Lieutenant suddenly died and were they now attending his funeral? Then I looked round and saw that the congregation belonged distinctly to the older generations and that I had come to the so-called third Mass. The old people of Mezőkövesd, as indeed of any other Hungarian village, consider it a little frivolous to be dressed in gay colours. Then I learnt that the younger generation attends Mass at seven in the morning. They told me that the youth of this village would come again to evensong at three in the afternoon.

It was quite a gloomy sight to see this senior congregation pour out like huge black beetles into the bright sunshine. The menfolk did not disperse after church, as at the two sides of the church there appeared the village criers in their soldierly dark-blue uniform of the county of Borsód, with the drum of their offices hanging from their necks. I had not seen a town crier in Hungary before, but I recognised him at once in spite of the fact that changed times had robbed him of a presumably more attractive uniform and degraded him into an ill-paid little servant of Hungarian jurisdiction. As a matter of fact I have



MEZÖKÖVESD



not seen any town crier in the world, though I would be glad to see one in England wearing a long red cloak and three-cornered hat, bell in hand shouting 'Oyez'. These two unromantic town criers read the orders of the high official of the walk of the county. Later on I saw the official himself. His office is usually translated into 'sheriff' in English, lacking a better expression, yet this is a mistake. The official in question is called 'Judge of the Servants'. He is at the head of the county jurisdiction at each 'walk'. A 'walk' is something like the old English 'hundred'. In the old days his office was that of *honoris causa*, like the High Sheriff in England still is, but now he is little more than a fairly well paid civil servant.

The two town criers seemed to rival each other in reading out the various orders and advertisements of the 'Judge' about schooling and taxes and plots for sale in the West side of the village of Tard. They read them as quickly as possible while at the same time maintaining the dignity of their office. On the other side of the church one could hear the crier catching up his rival, reading the words in unison for a minute or two, then leaving the other behind and reducing him to a mere echo. The list was long. There were some two dozen items on it, and the old men in black listened to them in great patience under the positively glowing sun, not so much out of respect for authority, but regarding it as a special Sunday treat. After all, so few things can happen on an ordinary Sunday in Mezőkövesd.

It was towards eleven that the crowd dispersed, and there remained only a few people on the market-square together with a number of old women sitting

behind gigantic towers of water-melon under yellow canvas. It was too early for lunch, so I went round to see how the village lived. It was, it seemed to me, the moment to see the private life of Mezőkövesd.

According to authorities this village has doubled the number of its inhabitants in the last fifty years. This is all the more surprising if we bear in mind that there is not a single factory or other institution in Mezőkövesd, or for that matter, in its neighbourhood, which by creating opportunity for work could have accounted for the migration of any strangers to the village. This enormous multiplication is the sole result of natural causes and only means the poverty of the village; richer peasants have, as a rule, fewer children than the poor ones. And also it can only mean the enormous vitality of its people.

A master of the local school on whom I called explained to me that this unusual and unhealthy growth of the population is one of the tragedies of the famous village, as during the last fifty years the opportunities for work remained almost identically the same. About ninety per cent of the inhabitants are earning their living out of the land, and Mezőkövesd has exactly twice as many inhabitants as the average of Hungary's population for the square mile.

According to my informant the village is about the most conservative in the country. Their culture is the rather stiff formalism of the old local traditions. The Hungarian peasant for that matter is pretty conservative. His teacher is nature, whose laws have not changed since the beginning of time, but in Mezőkövesd conservatism is greater than elsewhere. Nobody knows why. Perhaps because the place was

always isolated, a little island on the borders of the Plainland and the mountains. This helped them to produce a native art, which is unique in Europe, yet it contributed to their great backwardness. Their customs are almost tribal customs and their traditions handed down from father to son, are almost religiously observed. Compared with theirs the much-criticised conservatism of the English farmer is a mild and almost sentimental ritual. And school education does not seem to have any effect on the inhabitants of Mezőkövesd. When they leave school, they lapse inevitably into their old prejudices and traditions – often into strange superstitions.

We went to see some of the houses. Last time I visited Mezőkövesd I was taken into the house of a well-to-do peasant. It was solidly built and was magnificently clean, its rooms airy and large. I remember the owner's wife telling me that English visitors often came to see them. Such a show place did not interest me this time, as what I actually wanted to see was the real Mezőkövesd under the façade of the famous embroideries. My guide took me to a quarter inhabited by the landless agrarian proletariat, who spend most of their time away from the village working on the fields of other people. These have the most populous families: very often six or eight children or even more.

The house we entered was so low that a man of six-foot-three would have bumped his head on the ceiling. The roof was thatched, the floor of beaten earth, and the windows not larger than a man's size in handkerchiefs. The peasant dressed in respectable black was a very charming individual and told me that he had

eight families, that word meaning children, in the vocabulary of the Hungarian peasant. He used to work in the neighbouring village and was paid in kind, but since last year he could not find any work.

The nourishment of the family was mostly bread, which the wife baked herself. I was offered a piece; it tasted very good. Bread being one of the most important items of the Hungarian peasant's menu, it is specially good. My Hungarian friends say it is the best on earth.

Since there were only two rooms in the house, the mother and three children slept in one room, the four elder children in the other, while the father with the eldest son slept outside, in the stables in winter and in the yard under the haystack in summer.

Yet, in spite of their comparative poverty the eight children all seemed happy and vigorous and two of the girls were extremely good-looking. The mother, however, showed signs of the hardship that had been her lot all through life. I estimated her age to be between forty-five or fifty, but to my surprise her real age was thirty-five.

She showed me some of her embroideries. They were not of first-rate quality: a little too gaudy in colour and lacking originality in the patterns, but the workmanship itself was worthy of Mezőkövesd. She was working for a firm in the neighbouring town of Miskolc, which paid her fifty *fillérs* for a whole day's work. Considering general living conditions in Hungary, price-indexes, gold standard, currency restrictions, protective tariffs and the economic crisis in general, or anything you like, she does not get more than the equivalent of ninepence in English money for

a whole day's work. And considering everything, she said she was better off than many people.

It was one o'clock and I went to one of the inns to have dinner. The principal meal all over Central Europe is the midday dinner, eaten at varying times between twelve and half-past two. The higher up one is on the social ladder, the later one eats dinner. Peasants have it at noon and rich people round about half-past two. It is a very unpractical system compared with that of western Europe – as a heavy meal in the middle of the day makes the rest of the day difficult to turn to the best advantage. Dinner, which Central Europe calls supper, and eats between seven and nine in the evening, is a meagre affair compared with an English dinner.

Food at the inn was fairly good, but the price was as high as any of the better-class restaurants in Budapest. They gave us huge hunks of bread, sufficient for four well-grown Englishmen. Yet it did not prove to be enough for the officer who sat at the opposite table, separating two English ladies and their chauffeur – the latter being the most respectable looking man in the whole room – as he asked for more. Between the courses he produced a fountain-pen and a number of picture post cards and began to write. A true Hungarian cannot leave his place for any distance – say twelve miles – without sending one of these post cards to various friends. I hope the industry is flourishing.

Then, in order to make the atmosphere more typically Hungarian a *czimbalom* was produced out of nowhere, and four young gipsies came in to play in black alpaca suits, known in Hungary as *lűszter*. The origin of this romantic word is the unromantic town

of Leicester. They tuned their instruments for at least twenty minutes as carefully and with as much devotion to detail as if they were preparing for a rendering of the overture of *Parsifal* or of *Pelléas et Melisande*. Then with the pride of their musical culture and with an expression on their faces as if they would like to say 'Now just listen to this,' they played *The Music Goes Round and Aroound*. The respectable chauffeur was too much occupied chasing flies from his apple turnover to listen. Then the band, without any psychological reason, broke into *Åse's Death* from *Peer Gynt* – a tune to which I personally dislike eating apple turnover. Then as a contrast they played a Hungarian quick *csárdás*, which seemed to invigorate everybody in the room, including the flies, which now came in swarms all round my head. It was no use chasing them as they returned with the determination of an insolent commercial traveller in a music-hall turn.

From the ceiling there hung four long ribbons of flypaper, already thickly populated. These Central European insect-mortuaries are not very pleasing to the eye, especially during luncheon, yet here they were serving a useful purpose.

By the way, flies! My mother often told us the story that in her youth in my grandmother's house it was quite a fashion at coffee time in the afternoon to have a young servant girl standing in the corner of the veranda or in the garden where they had coffee under the trees, to chase flies with a huge branch of green leaves. It was a difficult operation, as ladies' hats were much larger than in our days and it often resulted in upsetting coffee cups as well as hitting people on the

head. As a matter of fact I would not have minded anybody chasing flies, while I was eating.

After lunch the proprietor gave me the visitors' book and asked me to write a few lines. It was a thick volume full of unsolicited testimonials from tourists of all nationalities. The French and Italian entries were long and magnificently grammatical, the Americans were less grammatical; one made up for this with a definite lyrical quality. The English were short and concise. Yet few visitors were satisfied simply by signing their names. Even Beverley Nichols put 'A Home from Home' over his signature.

It was still too early for evensong as I left the restaurant, so I walked about among the houses. Then came the rain. It was typical of the Hungarian summer, being both unexpected and generous. I had hardly time to take shelter under the veranda of a house, when a young man dressed in Sunday black, but wearing a beautifully embroidered shirt, asked me to step in. We had a talk. He was tall and his features were fine. Dressed by a good tailor, nobody would have known that he did not belong to the upper classes. I thought of Count Keyserling's book on Europe, in which he rather ambiguously says that the Hungarian is about the only aristocratic race in Europe. He used the German expression *Herrenrasse*. If he met people like this young man I don't wonder. His vocabulary was wide and his expressions always to the point. I was a little proud of him. He was a pure Hungarian, an agricultural labourer who was paid in kind for the hardest and the most poorly paid work on earth, yet he had dignity, self-respect and charm. And as I listened to his words I suddenly reflected that he was

my compatriot. He spoke the same language as I, only more forcibly, using some of the lovely old Hungarian words I had long forgotten or had seen only in print. My compatriot! It may sound silly to think of it. After all, in this country I have at least nine million compatriots and I never before thought of them in this connection.

But we were something more than compatriots. We were almost relations. My ancestors in the sixteenth-century were peasants and, as such, were serfs, till one of them made a good soldier and was given a title by George Rákóczi – Prince of Transylvania, and married an heiress. My father served the country as High Sheriff and so did my grandfather, after the revolution of 1848 when he was an officer of the hussars. Before him there was a long line of 'Judges of the Servants', soldiers, Lord Lieutenants, but they all lived on the land; the land which is no longer Hungary. Yet it is in our blood. My father's first act after he was expelled from his native town by the Rumanians after the War, was to buy a vineyard in the vicinity of Budapest where he spent all his free time, from the Treasury, reading Horace and Ovid in the original. And even I, town born and bred, cannot suppress a strange feeling when I am in the country. With peasants I maintain a tacit understanding as if we were members of a secret society. Their way of dressing, in many places and their vocabulary is dangerously akin to that of the industrial proletariat. Especially if they have no land of their own. Yet they are not members of the proletariat. They all love the land and wish to possess some of it.

I asked the young man why he was not dressed in the

traditional dress of the village. He smiled and said that it was too expensive. After the War most people gave up wearing it, except the very rich (the very rich in Mezőkövesd meaning anyone who has over fifty *hectares*). It was also unpractical being heavy and it was anyhow not much use as, after their marriage, men usually sell it – an interesting problem for those interested in sexual fetishism. It is only the women who keep it up till they grow ‘old’ – which with these people is about forty-five.

The rain continued. From cloudburst it transformed itself into a slow, steady drizzle, reminiscent of October rain in London. It formed puddles across the road. I reflected I would miss the procession after evensong.

The young peasant asked me if I had been to the *Matyó House*. I said that I had looked at it, and had a suspicion that the lads and girls waiting on the guests at meals were not real *matyós*.

‘No. They are not,’ he said. ‘They aren’t strangers, mind you, as when the restaurant was started they engaged a few of the young unemployed workmen from the village, selected the tallest and best looking and dressed them up. Some of the girls are, however, real *matyós*,’ he added with unconcealed pride.

During our talk – which lasted an hour – he opened his mind to me completely, not concealing anything. I knew he told the truth, and I knew also that he would have spoken the same way to practically anyone whom he regarded as his superior, if they met with his approval. He told me he would have liked to become a tram-conductor or a policeman in Budapest. Practically any agricultural labourer in Hungary

would like to become a tram-conductor or a policeman in Budapest in these days, which desire I fully understand. Maybe during one of my future visits I shall see him on a Budapest tramcar or in the street controlling the traffic. I am sure he would do both of these jobs well.

The rain did not stop but it was possible to walk through the street and I returned to the market-square, which was now full of foreign cars. I went to the *Matyó House* in the garden of which some fifteen couples were dancing *csárdás* under the trees. It was a curious sight to see *matyó* lads in their splendid dress dancing *csárdás* with elderly English and American women. It was not for the first time that I realised how difficult it is to perform the apparently simple Hungarian national dance.

The best sight of course was the elderly American business man wearing rimless eyeglasses and dressed in plus-fours dancing something with a *matyó* girl, which he imagined to be the *csárdás*.

The *Matyó House* in Mezőkövesd is an obvious show place, catering for the foreign visitor. In the large dining-room a party of Dutch riders were being entertained by a local committee. These international riding-tours are very much in fashion now in Central Europe. Last time I was in Austria I came across a Swedish party on its way to Stamboul – obviously riding in the footsteps of their king Charles XII.

For the official reception on behalf of the county of Borsód the 'Servants' Judge' arrived in his coach with his hussar in the traditional dress sitting by the coachman. Oh, those old hussars of the Hungarian county. They are not really soldiers, and are only

called hussars on account of their lovely uniforms reminiscent of that of the Hungarian hussar. They perform the duty of a flunkey: they accompany the judge or the Lord Lieutenant wherever he goes, just like the Lord Mayor's powdered footmen. Yet he knows what a soldier's life is, as by tradition he is usually an old soldier, and, also by tradition, he wears a moustache which is at least twice as long as the normal size of the pre-War British sergeant-major's.

He was dressed in lovely cherry coloured red, with white braiding and long rows of tiny silver buttons, and he looked very much like an eighteenth-century Hungarian mezzotint. He is the last representative of the old traditions of the Hungarian county. Looking at him one understands what *Comitas Nobilis* – the noble county – really means. He wore the arms of the county on the huge leather purse, strangely reminiscent of a Scottish sporran except that it hung by his right side. He wore a sword on the same side, as long as a spit to roast an ox. And there was something in his gait that seemed to say, 'Look at me, I am the last living representative of the old spirit of the Hungarian county. I am the last to stand for power and dignity. And even I go before the candle of the century is out.'

Somewhere in an old chest-of-drawers my uncle has the blue and red uniform of his old hussar, who served him when he was Servants' Judge and successor to my father after the latter was promoted to be High Sheriff in Kolozsvár. When my uncle was forced to leave Transylvania after the Peace Treaty, he brought the old uniform to Budapest with him as a keepsake. My father recognised in it the same uniform he himself ordered for his hussar in the eighteen-nineties.

And while I looked at the old servant standing like a statue in the gateway waiting for his master, I reflected about the old county. It is completely gone now, but in the early years of the present century, I still managed to catch a glimpse of it.

I was born in the County Hall of Kolozsvár and spent the first thirteen years of my life among those noble and much respected walls. The county in those days was something like a little kingdom within the kingdom. It had an independence and much dignity. I remember the meetings of the county assembly in that august council-chamber decorated by the full-length portraits of past Lord Lieutenants. There was a Bánffy, I think, an Esterházy, a Bethlen or two, a Teleki, mostly Protestants with a gait which reflected the centuries of authority that went into their making. And from the balcony I remember seeing my father dressed with the other officials in the national Gala Dress resting his right hand on the hilt of his sword and shouting into the deaf ear of old Count Esterházy – the Lord Lieutenant, who lost an arm in '48.

Yet the spirit of the assembly in spite of all its feudal atmosphere was very liberal. That very council-room in the year of my birth saw rotten eggs and inkpots thrown in the direction of Count Teleki – the Lord Lieutenant of the Héderváry government, loyal to the last drop of blood to the Habsburgs. Resistance against the 'Austrian' was the centuries-old tradition of the Hungarian county and a council-meeting was always an outpouring of gravamina and ills and indignities. Lately, I imagine they did it out of habit. At the end of the room there was the full-length portrait of old King Francis Joseph with his side-whiskers,

wearing the Holy Crown of St. Stephen, but on the opposite wall there was Prince Rákóczi who led the counties against the dynasty. And between them the council of the noble county of Kolozs.

That old county, of which I still saw the remains, was a piece of reality, no matter how much like a nineteenth-century engraving it appeared to be. The officials on the platform and the county squires sitting opposite them, were real characters of flesh and blood. In our county they were mostly Calvinist-Protestants or Lutherans, but all over Hungary they were men of solid principles who had authority, intelligence, driving force, originality, bite and gusto. True they were a little eccentric; true they were heroes of too many anecdotes which the whole county laughed at; they were rather narrow in their puritanical ways and stubborn towards progress. They were not what we might call easygoing people, yet I cannot help feeling that they were more solid, more full, independent and original than the generation which came after them, no matter how efficient and business-like it is.

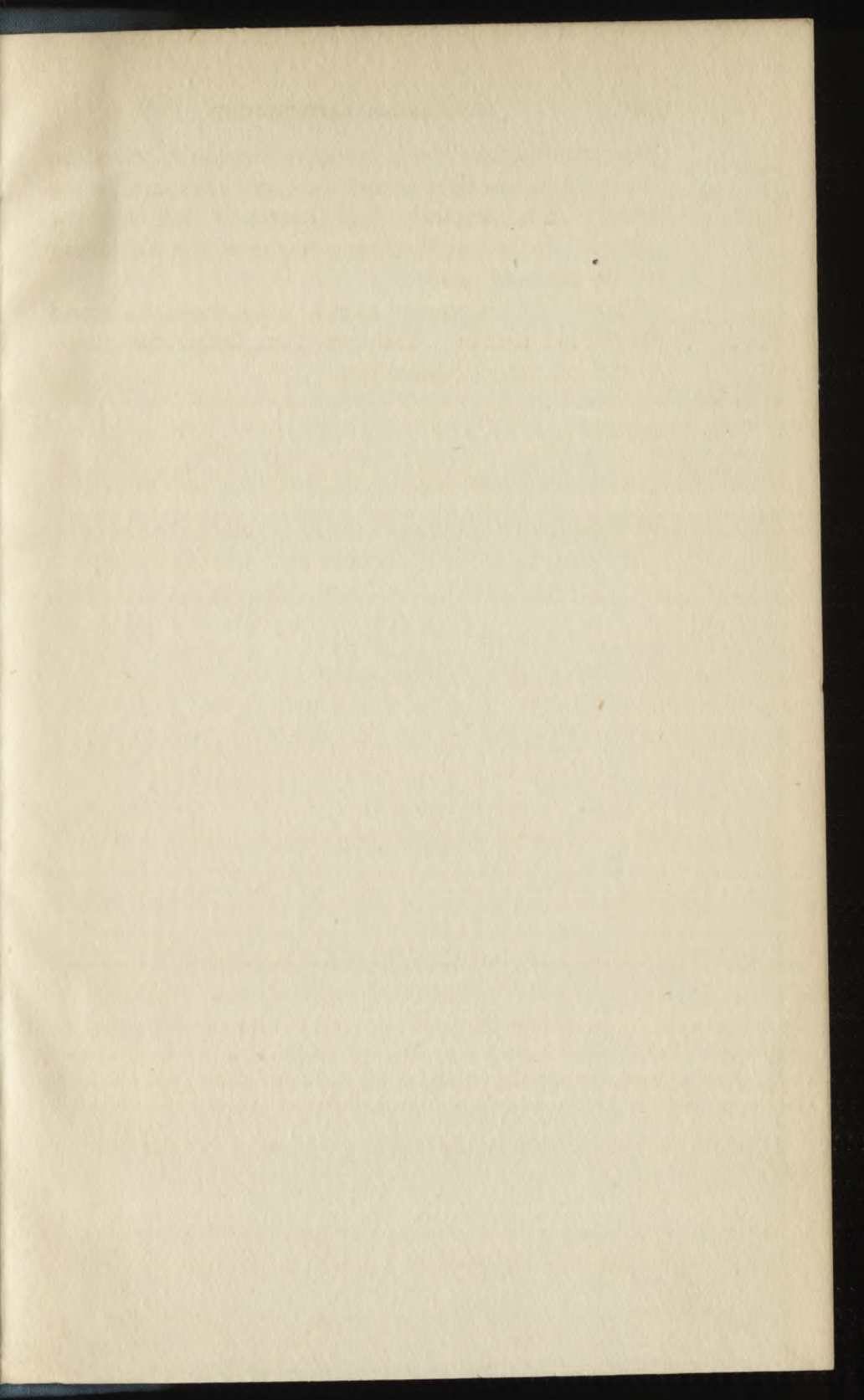
This Judge of the Servants, for example, who now arrived to receive the group of Dutch horsemen at the roadhouse of Mezőkövesd, was a youngish man, intelligent and efficient-looking, but he looked very much like a civil servant from Whitehall with his clean-shaven face, his fair hair and his respectable black jacket with striped trousers. He seemed to me an extremely efficient cog in a wheel and nothing else.

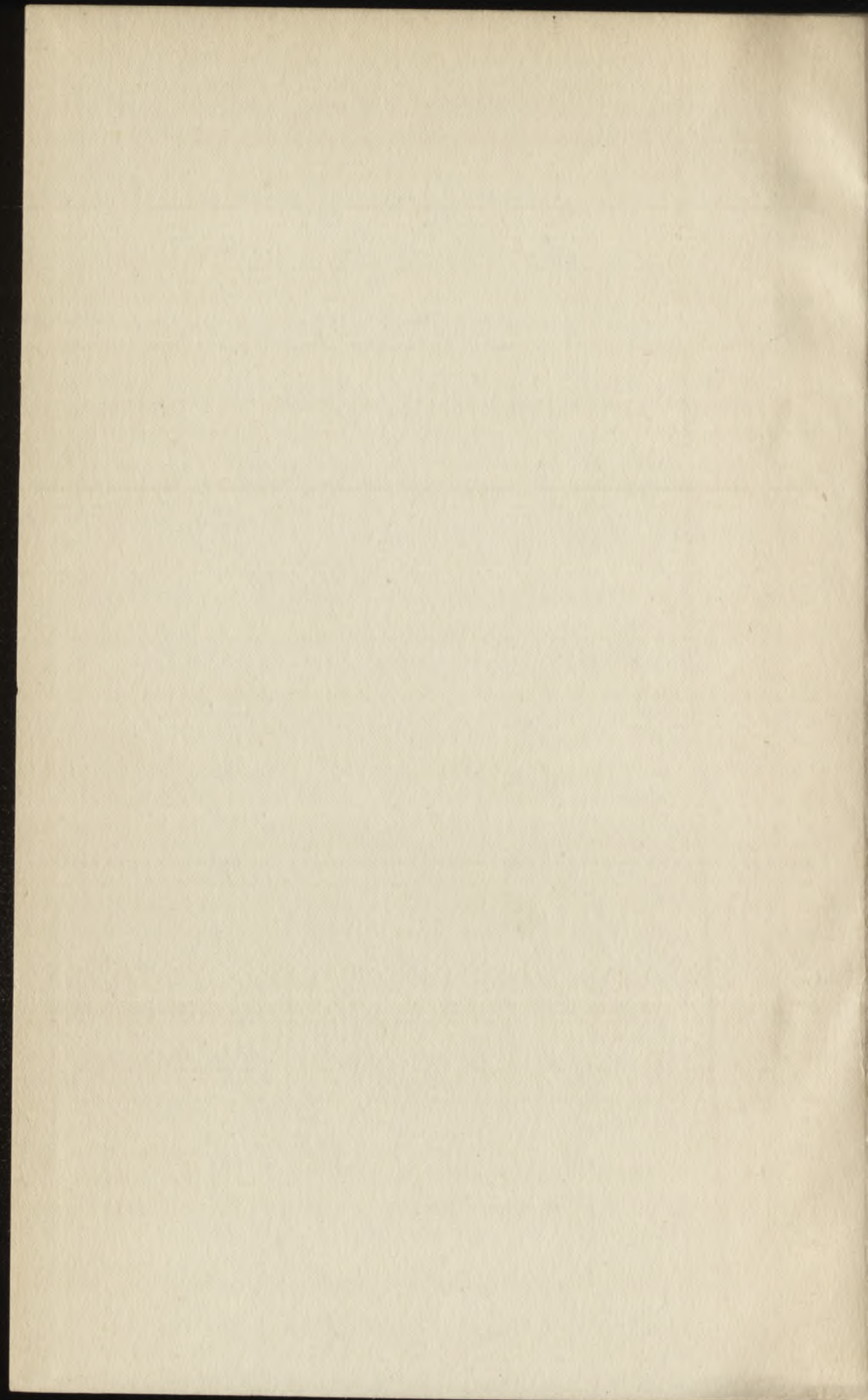
No, the dignity, the nobility, the grandeur of the Hungarian county is gone. It is progressive now; it is efficient. The quill pens and the pounce boxes and the rabbit coursings of my grandfather's time, and all

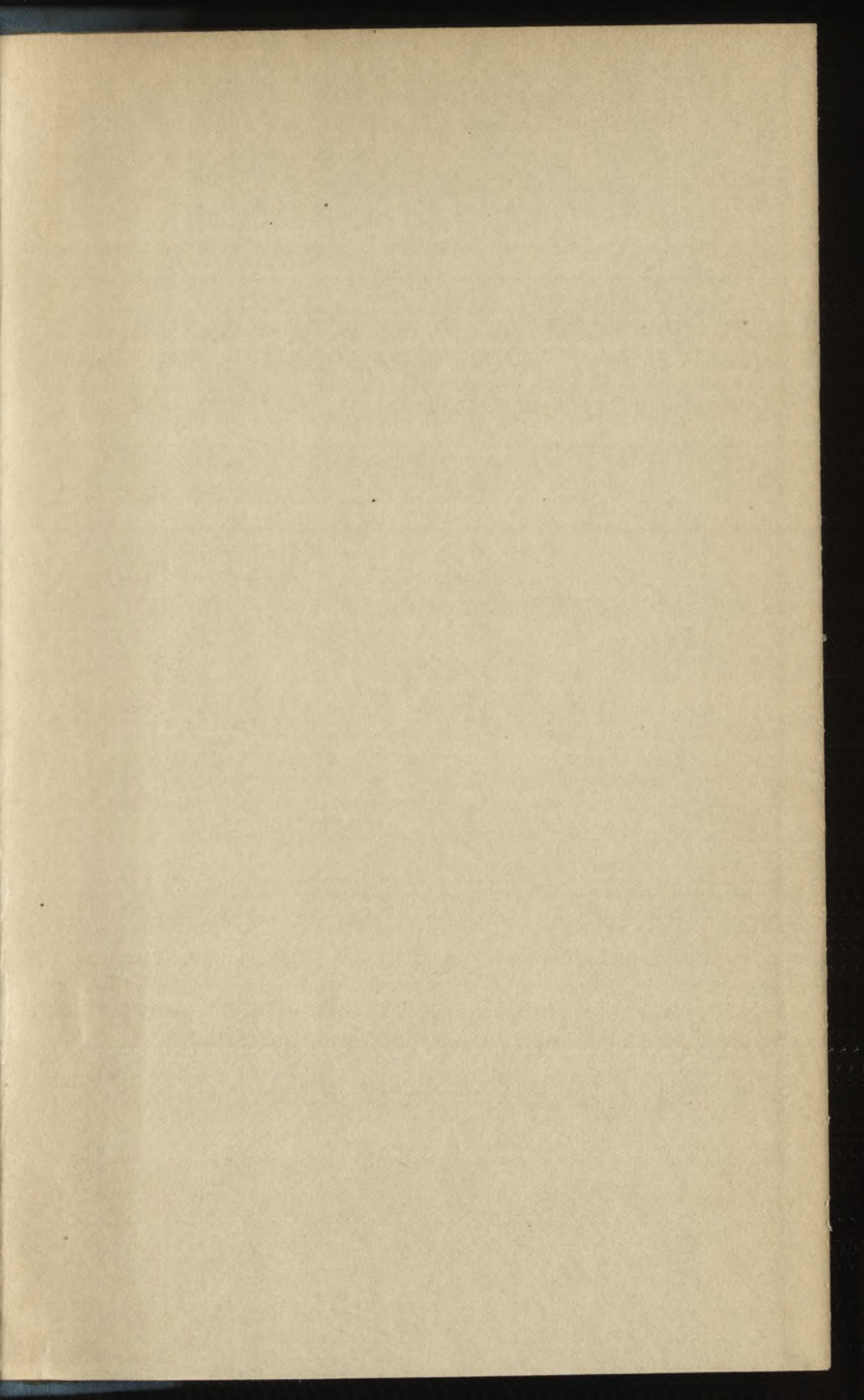
that primitive yet lovely conservative spirit, reared on the classics, has disappeared for ever. Perhaps for the better. Who knows? And before I left for the station I looked at the living statue of the old hussar in the gateway again.

Again his look seemed to say, 'I am the last to stand for the old county. And even I go, before the candle of the century is blown out.'

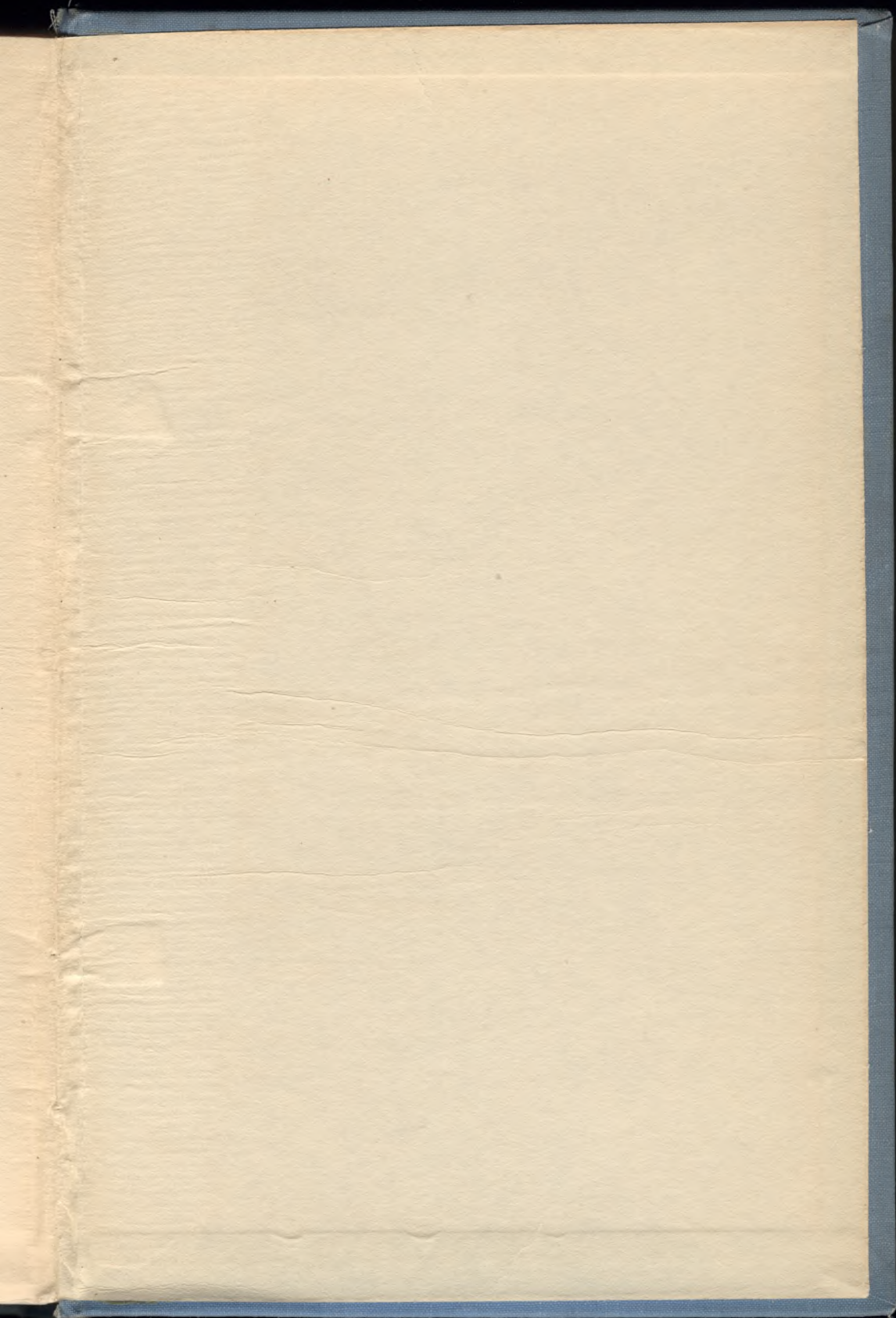


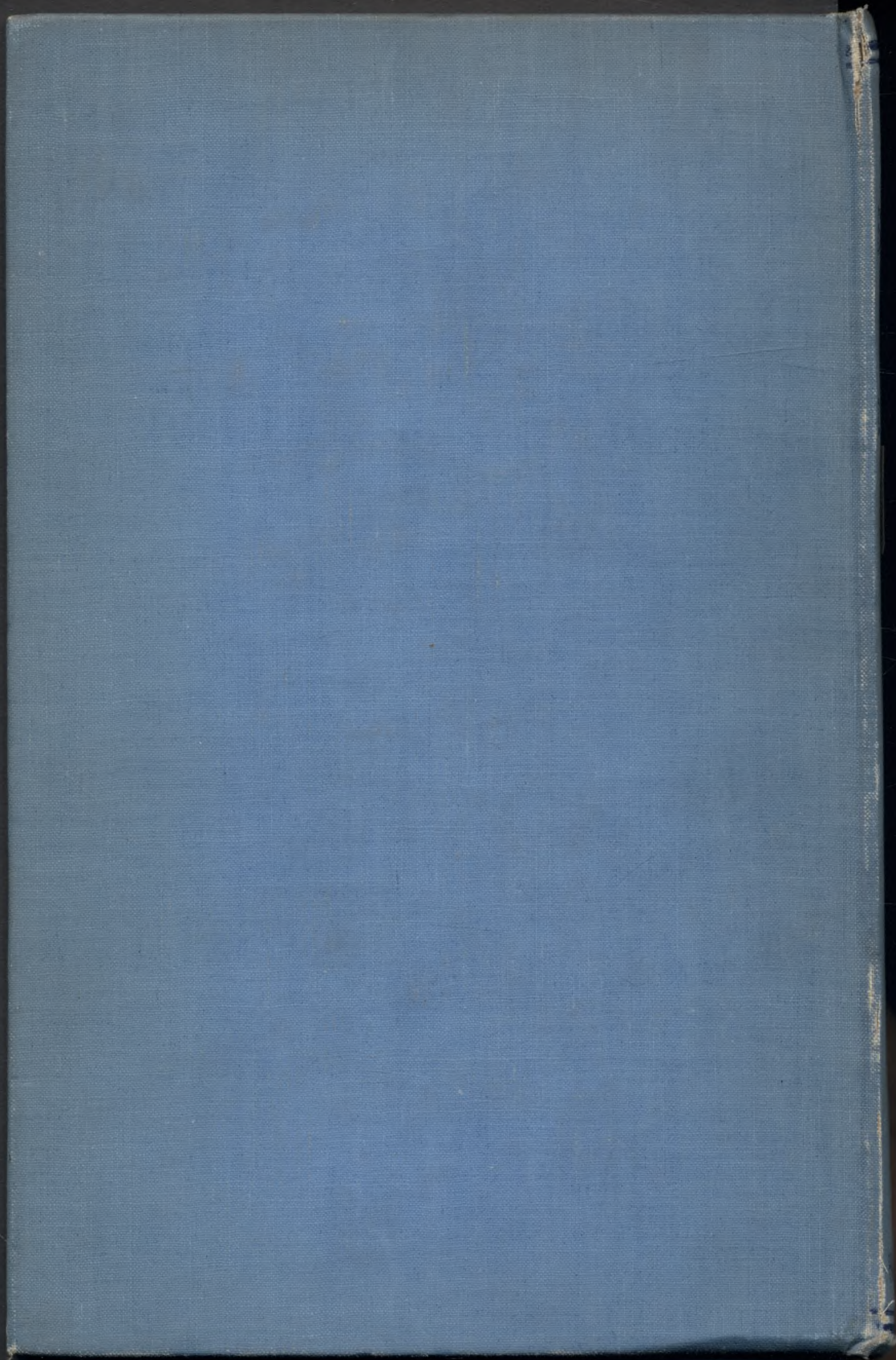






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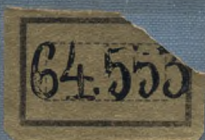




HUNGARIAN
BACKGROUND



ADAM
DE HEGEDÜS



HAMISH
HAMILTON