

HUNGARIAN CULTURE

by

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When single nations unfold the energies slumbering within them they are at the same time promoting the progress of humanity at large. After all, in its essence, all culture is national culture some special creations of which may, however, possess values such as to be ranked amongst the common spiritual goods of mankind. From the historical viewpoint, every nation has only then the right to live the life of a separate, individual people, if it shows itself capable to augment the world's cultural stock, to defend and develop it. This mission is every nation's real "raison d'être".

The Magyar nation settled more than a thousand years ago in the Danube basin and, with well-developed political intuition, was the first to establish on this territory a firmly founded State, accepting Christianity and endeavouring to introduce a higher grade of civilisation. This civilisation was defended by Hungary for many centuries against the onslaught of the Tartars and Turks, protecting thereby the civilisation of the West too. Amidst never-ceasing struggles Hungary developed her civilisation parallel with the West in the domains of education, sciences and arts. During the comparatively peaceful period of the XIXth century, after having recovered from the wounds inflicted by the struggle for life lasting for centuries, Hungary did her best to come up with Western civilisation.

The beautifully growing, flourishing tree of Hungarian culture was split in two by the world-war and the dictatorial Peace Treaty of Trianon following it. Thus Hungary — the country whose Prime Minister, Count Stephen Tisza, as since has been established by documents, was the only one among the statesmen of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy who opposed the war at the Crown Council — has been deprived of three quarters of her territory and of two thirds of her inhabitants, with something like three and a half millions of Magyars forced under the rule of foreign, much less civilised peoples, and that in a way contrary to the Wilsonian principles. By the Peace-Treaties following upon the terrible collapse, not a single nation was as tragically dismembered as Hungary. Let some dry statistical data speak for themselves. Prewar Hungary had 2958 Kindergartens of which 1215 were left: 16.929 primary schools and 532 middle-class schools the number of which on Hungary's territory after the Trianon Treaty decreased to 6435 and 532 respectively. Training colleges for teachers dwindled down

from 92 to 51 and secondary schools from 264 to 131. The half-a-century old, richly equipped University of Kolozsvár (now Cluj) was seized by the Rumanians and its teachers expelled from this purely Hungarian Transylvanian town. The Czechs behaved in the same manner with regard to the newly founded (in 1912) University of Pozsony, seizing at the same time the properties of the Budapest University: these, however, have been restored to Hungary by the High Court of International Justice of the Hague.

However, as soon as the nation came to from this most terrible catastrophe of its history, it was first of all on cultural grounds that it tried to regenerate itself and to pave the way for a brighter future. After the collapse, the unswerving will of this crippled nation set out — in spite of economic difficulties — to erect new cultural institutions, to enlarge and ameliorate the already existing ones, filling them with a new spirit. One of the outstanding aims of the present cultural policy is to increase the number of primary schools, more especially to render possible the schooling of children living within the districts of wide-apart farms: from 1926 to 1931 as much as 5000 new primary schools have been called into being and provided with teachers. Adult education too has been energetically entered upon: more than 1500 libraries have been made accessible to the populace, in order to raise the educational standard of grown-ups, labourers and craftsmen, enabling thereby Hungarian agriculture and industry to compete with other countries. Cultural democracy is doubtless the soundest basis of political democracy: it is this principle the present Hungarian policy of education is keeping in mind. If the large foundation of the social pyramid is well educated, the social building cannot but stand the firmer, production becomes more expert, thriftiness is bound to increase and the danger of revolutionary movements becomes more and more remote. The intensive and extensive education of the masses is true, active democracy — and not the democracy of catchwords.

The reform of secondary schools consists mainly in the introduction of modern languages as subjects of instruction: besides German, English, French and Italian are being taught. At present quite a number of secondary schools are teaching to the pupils the English language, making them acquainted with the achievements of English civilisation. Instead of

the lost Universities, Dismembered Hungary has inaugurated two new ones at Szeged and Pécs.

Ever since her existence, Hungary has been in close touch with the centers of civilisation of Western Europe; in the middle-ages already Hungarian young men used to visit in great numbers Western universities. True to the spirit of this tradition, the State now endeavours to enable talented young scholars to enjoy the benefits of international scientific life in European and American Capitals by lavishly distributing scholarships and by establishing Hungarian colleges (Collegium Hungaricum) abroad. The great number of scholarships and the promotion of university education in general, though demanding great sacrifices from the nation, are due to the conviction that universities and high-schools are called upon to train in the domains of economics and social sciences as many experts as possible of international intellectual horizon. The rays of civilisation ever come from above: from universities they shine on secondary schools, from secondary schools on primary schools.

Hungary's scientific life of the present is but a sequel to the past. At the beginning of the XIXth century the Hungarian pupil of the celebrated Gauss, John Bolyai was the first to construct a non-Euclidian geometry. Alexander Körösi Csoma was the first investigator of Tibethian languages: a worthy memorial has been erected for him by the English in Darjeeling. The studies of Baron Joseph Eötvös on the political ideas governing the XIXth century enjoyed great authority throughout Europe. The experiments of his son, Baron Laurentius Eötvös, in regard to gravitation and geo-magnetism were

recognised as absolutely original and, besides, of far-reaching practical importance. It was a Hungarian, a Budapestian Professor of medicine, Dr. Ignatius Semmelweis who disclosed to humanity the means of averting puerperal fever. The importance of the explorations in Asia of Arminius Vámbéry and Aurel Stein is recognised all the world over, while the geological studies of Louis Lóczy have opened some new perspectives to the scientific world. One of the greatest explorers of the Islam was Ignatius Goldziher. And the living are following the path cut out for them by their forerunners: quite a number of Hungarian scientists are lecturing in universities and working in institutes of researches abroad.

In the same way the Hungarian nation has acquired for herself an honourable place in the history of international arts. Hungary, having given to the world a musical genius like Francis Liszt, may boast at present of quite a number of virtuosi (e. g. Vecsey, Szigeti etc.) and composers (Hubay, Dohnányi, Bartók and Kodály) who are ranked among the first all the world over. In the domain of fine-arts the thread spun by Michael Munkácsy and Michael Zichy has been taken up by the great Hungarian painter, Philip László. The works of Hungarian playwrights are being performed everywhere in the world.

It is to the power of mental forces the totally disarmed, fettered Hungarian nation is trusting, hoping to recover by these forces the liberty and strength it once possessed and, therefore, doing everything to increase and cultivate the education and the professional training of the Hungarian people.

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