

THEATRE • LITERATURE • ARTS

HUNGARIAN JUBILEES

by

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In regard to theatrical culture, Budapest, for the last four decades, may be certainly rated among the leading factors. Some of its stages are quite as notable and known in theatrical circles all the world over as for instance the "Comédie Française" or the "Burgtheater". A number of Budapest actors would count among the best at first-class theatres of any European metropolis. Hungary may equally boast of playwrights who have achieved celebrity and whose plays are being performed in all quarters of the globe. Besides Budapest possesses a musical culture of her own, backed with enthusiasm, perseverance and success both by the Royal Opera House and by the Musical Academy, giving to the world famous composers, conductors, great masters and singers.

This year's season of the Budapest theatres has also not been void of important and resounding events though Hungary's two greatest dramatists Francis Herczeg and Francis Molnár have not come out with new plays to the utter regret of the public, looking ever forward with great expectation, interest and confidence to any new work of these two authors. Instead the great men of the present, it was the greatest Hungarian dramatist genius of the past, *Emeric Madách*, who spoke to the audience from the stage on the occasion of a double jubilee. Fifty years have elapsed since his powerful work, "*The Tragedy of Man*" was performed for the first time on the stage upon the initiative of the then famous director of the National Theatre, *Ede Paulay*. Besides it was in the month of January of the current year this chef d'oeuvre has been performed for the 500th time at the National Theatre of Budapest. We have no reliable statistics as to how often the tragedy was given in country-theatres: certainly many thousand times. We know further of performances abroad which, however, failed to bring the success this majestic work so well deserves. It was only at the time of the Hungarian jubilee, in January 1934, that Madách's tragedy set out on its victorious road to fame in world-literature, with the truly brilliant performance at the "Burgtheater" — a residence of the Muses hallowed by tradition — where it was acted before an enthusiastic, enthralled audience within the frame of a dramatic cycle of large conception.

Madách's work is entitled "The Tragedy of Man": it comprises the tragedy of mankind. Adam, the first man, represents humanity at large; he is torn from the unconscious, blissful paradisaical state by Lucifer, the eternal tempter. Adam has to stand on his own legs in order that he may stumble the more often; he is awakened to consciousness by Lucifer, so that he may experience for himself the uselessness of all honest striving, the failure of noble ideas — the common fate of all great men: disillusion, deception, martyrdom. Lucifer puts Adam to sleep and, in a series of dreams, discloses to him the course of world-history from the time of the Pharaohs, leading him through Hellas and Rome, Byzantium and Prague, the French revolution and London of to-day to the Communist State of the future, to the growing cold of the Globe. At last the dreams come to an end: Adam awakens and asks himself with whirling brain: what is the sense of all that he has seen — what is the sense of life in general? In utter despair he thinks of committing suicide, when Eva whispers in his ear her secret: she is to be a mother. Now, indeed, suicide would be useless because all the suffering, misery of mankind needs must continue in his son. Adam surrenders to fate and prostrates himself before God whom he has abandoned. The Lord has mercy upon him and, at the end of the poem, the comforting sentence is heard from above: "Hark to Me, Man! Strive on, strive on, and trust!"

No doubt the "Tragedy of Man" was greatly influenced by Goethe's "Faust". In unimportant details a certain similarity is certainly to be detected. However Madách's conception is not only original and absolutely independent of Faust, but also much more comprehensive and built up on a much larger scale. It does not describe merely the fate of a single — though no doubt interesting and brilliant — personality, but depicts the fate of mankind in general. Faust and Manfred are in closer relation with each other than Faust and The Tragedy of Man. Taine, the famous French aesthetist, places Lord Byron's dramatic poem far above the Faust: as for us, we dare not go so far. Still we may confidently put down two theses. First: it was in Madách Hungarian poetic and philosophical genius reached its height. Second: this height is so majestic that it has the right to be rated among the summits of the most prominent creations of world-literature. The perfect translation of M. *Eugene Mohdcsi* is paving the way for Madách's tragedy on German stages, while the excellent interpretation of Messrs. *Ch. H. Meltzer* and *P. Vajda* is pursuing the same goal in regard to English theatres.

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Not only the theatre but Hungarian literature too celebrated a jubilee during the season. *Francis Herczeg*, the leading man in Hungary's literary world, celebrated his 70th birthday in full vigour of body and mind. This memorable day was considered a festive event by the whole of the Hungarian nation. And not merely Hungary alone, but all those civilised nations entertaining a spiritual community with Hungary joined in the celebration. The great author himself contributed to the festive character of the jubilee by publishing the first volume of his "Reminiscences", containing the interesting and instructive perceptions of a poetic mind, the sincere confessions of a true man.

This first volume relates the childhood and youth of Francis Herczeg, at the beginning with charming, dewy simplicity, with the sweet, unconscious smile of early memories kept fresh. Reading on, we find ourselves face to face with the youth trying to find himself, friendless among friends, full of go and bursting emotions, a prey to boundless passions. As a matter of course an autobiography has more or less to be self-centred: however Francis Herczeg's sharp eye, his sound judgement, his coolness mixed with mild irony makes him perceive quite a number of figures who played either an active, or a passive part in his youth. He does his best to show the reader these figures clad in the garb of simple truth. And yet all of them bear the imprint of the poet, nay, of the painter: unobtrusively reality melts into poetry and poetry gilds over reality. It is, indeed, wonderful reading. The story of a child, not written for children. The story of a youth, not to be ranged among the books for the young, because it offers ample occasion to ponder to grown-ups too. The Hungarian reading public is waiting with eager expectation for the sequel of the "Reminiscences".

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At present *Sigismond Móricz* is the most weighty individuality among Hungary's literary men. Born of a family of small-craftsmen, he became famous through his sketches of the Hungarian peasant, depicting him with warm colours, yet with scrutinizing eyes. As time went on, his interest went a step farther up on the social ladder and centered upon the provincial middle-class: the Hungarian gentry, the official of local administration, the physician, the lawyer, the engineer, the teacher, the parish priest. Sometimes, for a change, he risked a successful excursion into the Hungarian past: his novels and plays of historic subject created quite a sensation, not only because of the accuracy with which the atmosphere of the age is rendered, but also because of the deli-

cious human touch of their heroes, with all their failings and human frailties.

Lately he transferred the scene of his novels to Budapest. But, curiously enough, he remained a writer of the province: the atmosphere of the country seems to envelop him as well as the figures of his fiction. Men and women struggling between two different worlds: necessity, the Great War, the economic crisis forced them to come to the Capital, where they feel extremely uncomfortable. The cage is too tight and this new world very painful to support. They feel homeless, without roots, wandering about in the large city without friends, torn away from their relations. They seem to suffocate in the low, small rooms where they miserably live. Sigismond Móricz last novel "The Wife puts in a word" dates from this last period. It is indeed a piece of life as it is to-day, with all its coldness, its struggles, dreariness, yet glittering with the poet's healthy humour, his smiling wisdom which discovers in the millionaire the profiteer, in the pushing reporter the writer gifted with brilliant imagination and in the lodger of the backroom smelling of poverty a fairy or an angel. The great British novelists, Dickens and his followers, saw and showed life in this way: in a white light and dissolved into the seven colours of the rainbow, sublimely idealised, yet with a sincerity bordering on harshness and with uncompromising righteousness.

The romantic opera, „Anna Karenina“ a composition of *Eugene Hubay*, the 75 years old composer and virtuoso, is going to arise from its ashes on the stage of the Budapest Opera-House with the concurrence of Mme. *Maria Németh*. Thus a Hungarian opera-singer of world-fame is going to place her art at the service of a Hungarian composer, equally known and appreciated all the world over. Thus there can be no doubt as to the result. Eugene Hubay began his brilliant career in France and Belgium as violin virtuoso and teacher of music. Later on he transferred his home to Budapest in order to assume the direction of the violin-course at the Musical Academy founded by Francis Liszt. It was the name of Hubay which gave glamour and power of attraction to these courses. It was he who moulded into great masters quite a number of violonists, such as Vecsey, Joseph Szigeti, Ladislas Szentgyörgyi, Stephen Pártos. It was the charm of his name which attracted to Budapest pupils from America and Australia. Now that he is director of the Musical Academy, the inward strength of the institute has augmented, its standard becoming higher and higher. Hubay: this name speaks for itself and is of international value. And it is the name of a Hungarian who with all he has done in the course of his manifold activities has earned nothing but glory, dignity and fame for his country.

OSZK

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