

August

A HUNGARIAN QUEEN OF FRANCE

The wedding of Princess Clemence, sister of Charles Robert, King of Hungary and *Louis X*, King of France on a summer day in 1315 was the first joyous event for years after a period of tragic and strange happenings in France.

Louis, was the eldest son of Philip called the Fair, King of France whose handsome looks concealed a particularly cruel and greedy character. In 1314 Philip destroyed the Order of the Templar Knights and had their leaders executed on false charges. This was in order to acquire their considerable fortune. The Grand Master of the Order courageously defended the innocence of the Templars even at the stake, before his execution. Before his death he pronounced a curse upon the king and his family "to the thirteenth generation".

Soon after his execution strange and frightening things began to happen to the royal family. It became known that the wives of the king's three sons had had long-time scandalous love affairs with the nobles of the court. Philip had all three wives thrown into prison and some of their lovers executed. Then he himself died as a result of a mysterious hunting accident. His oldest son, Louis succeeded him. As his adulterous wife could not be crowned Queen of France, he had her assassinated in the prison. Then he sent his envoy to Hungary to ask for the hand of the sister of the powerful and respected king of that country, Charles Robert.

Princess Clemence who was 18 at that time was a descendant of the Hungarian Arpad Dynasty and of the Anjou royal family of Naples. She was born in Naples but her parents died soon after her birth. She was brought up by her grandmother, Mary, Queen of Hungary, daughter of the Hungarian King, Stephen V and niece of the three saint daughters of King Bela IV. Queen Mary gave her two grandchildren; Charles Robert and Clemence, a good Christian and Hungarian education. Charles Robert then inherited the Hungarian throne in 1307 and Clemence went with him to Hungary.

Charles Robert's court at Visegrad became the centre of refined Western culture and Christian Hungarian humanism. Such was the fame of this great king that the King of France sought to strengthen his shaky empire through marriage and alliance with the powerful Anjou-Hungarian dynasty.

Princess Clemence proved much more than just a beautiful young bride. She knew nothing of the sinister tragedies of the Capet family but took pity on the sick-looking, disturbed and frightened Louis who seemed to be much older than his 37 years. The French historians give us an enthusiastic description of her beauty and tell us of the luxurious Hungarian ship which brought her to France and describe her fabulous dowry in detail, including the solid-gold dinner set decorated with the Hungarian

coat-of-arms in jewels. The French historians call her “Clemence de Hongrie” — “Clemence of Hungary” and the Paris court kept referring to her as “The Hungarian Lady”. It is obvious that her Hungarian ancestry was more important than the Anjou family connection.

We are also told how she introduced the refined manners of Naples and Visegrad into the world of violence and intrigue which was the Paris royal court at that time. She ordered her courtiers, for instance, to use forks at the dinner table, as was the custom in Hungary, instead of their fingers and hunting knives, as was the French custom then.

Having learned her husband’s dark secret, she endeavoured to heal the soul of this unfortunate man with Christian charity. She also turned her attention to the plight of the poor and sick of her new country. Her charitable activities, resembling those of her ancestor, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, soon made her a beloved and popular consort of the hated king. This was a rare thing in France, where foreign queens have rarely been popular. Her very name, “Clemence” which means “benevolence” in French seemed to suit her well and soon she became known as the “Benevolent Queen.”

Under her influence, Louis began to regain his health and his peace of mind, especially when he learned that Clemence expected a child - hopefully the heir which Louis had so much desired.

It was then that the real curse of the Capets struck. Suddenly Louis died of mysterious stomach pains. It was rumoured that the mother-in-law of his younger brother had poisoned him in order to secure the throne for her family. Soon after the king’s death his son was born. He was to be baptised and crowned John I five days after his birth. At the moment of the baptism the baby suddenly shivered and died. The chronicler notes that the baby was held by his Godmother at that moment, who was none other than the mother-in-law mentioned before...

After the double tragedy Clemence moved into the monastery-castle Temple in the heart of Paris. There she mourned her husband and child in prayer and works of charity. She took no further part in the political life of France but she must have observed the tragic developments in France, the downfall of the Capet dynasty. Louis was succeeded by his two brothers who both died childless, and under “suspicious circumstances”. They were the last members of the direct line of the Capet dynasty and they were followed by the Valois branch of the family. The first Valois king was - curiously enough - the son of the intriguing lady suspected of having arranged the premature demise of the last Capets.

Clemence died in 1328 - the very year the last Capet died and the first Valois was crowned. By that time she was all but forgotten - except for the poor and the sick on whom she had spent all her fabulous fortune.

Thus the short reign of the Hungarian Queen of France brought a little Italian sunshine and a touch of Hungarian humanism, into the dismal, violent world of 14th century France.

A BITTER LESSON IN POLITICS

On the 10th of August, 955, a Hungarian army was defeated by the German forces at Augsburg in Bavaria.

In the 10th century, the Hungarians were still considered intruders by their powerful neighbours, the German and Byzantine Empires. The leaders of the young Hungarian state decided therefore to assert their rights in the Carpathian Basin. For more than 50 years they fought *deterrent, preventative campaigns* against the two empires. The campaigns were intended to weaken the central power of each empire by assisting rebel vassals against the emperor. The success of the campaigns also enabled Hungary to obtain a position of strength from which to negotiate with their neighbours on equal terms. We could call these campaigns “wars to prevent wars” - and as such they compare rather favourably with the “wars to end all wars” of the 20th century.

The most successful general of these campaigns was Bulcsu. In addition to his military skill, he was also a skilled diplomat. He established an alliance with the Bavarian ruler, Duke Arnulf, who married Bulcsu's sister. Arnulf fought the German Emperor, Otto, in alliance with Bulcsu. When he died, his son, Conrad, continued his struggle against the emperor. He asked his uncle, Bulcsu, to help him. Bulcsu hastened to his assistance with 8,000 Magyar soldiers.

Conrad, however, made peace with the emperor and the two decided to destroy the Hungarians. They ambushed Bulcsu's army and defeated it at the River Lech, near Augsburg. The few survivors were put to death, including Conrad's uncle, Bulcsu and his fellow-commander, Lehel.

In spite of this bitter lesson in international politics, the policy of the “campaigns” (or “raids”) paid off. The Magyars had proved that they could be useful allies and dangerous enemies. A few decades after the disaster, the grand-daughter of the victor of Augsburg married the heir to the throne of Hungary.

Hungary had joined the European community.

Janos (John) Hunyadi, the greatest Hungarian soldier died on the 11th of August, 1456.

This legendary hero who survived countless battles died of the plague which he contracted during his campaigns.

He was the son of a minor Hungarian official in Transylvania. Hunyadi served in the king's guard and rose eventually to the rank of commander of the Hungarian forces at the southern frontier. His victorious campaigns on the Balkans contained the Turkish advance for decades. By 1444 he had pushed the Turks back to the south of the peninsula but without the help of the western nations he could not entirely chase them from Europe.

During the infancy of King Ladislas V he acted as Hungary's Regent. After the capture of Constantinople (today Istanbul) in 1453, the Turks set out to conquer Hungary and beyond her,

Christian Europe. Hunyadi again repulsed the Turkish advance in the famous Battle of Nandorfehervar in 1456 - but died two weeks after his great victory.

Hunyadi was the paragon of the Christian Magyar knight whose religious devotion equalled his military prowess.

His opponent Sultan Mohammed said of him: "We were enemies, but nevertheless, his death grieves me, for the world has never known a greater man."

August the 13th is the feast of Saint Irene, daughter of the Hungarian King, Saint Laszlo. Irene - in Hungarian Piroska, was married to the Byzantine Emperor. One of her sons, Manuel eventually occupied the throne of Byzantium as the last great ruler of that declining empire.

After her husband's death, Irene retired to a convent, and died there in 1133. She is buried in Istanbul (Byzantium) in the Greek church built in her honour.

Balint Bakfark, the composer and lute-player, died on the 15th of August, 1576. He visited several Western countries where he became known as "Orpheus Pannoniae". His compositions were published in Hungary and abroad during his lifetime. It was through these collections that the West first became acquainted with Magyar melodies, which inspired many contemporary compositions under such titles as "Ungarescha", "Ungarischer Tanz" and others.

Dr Ignac Semmeiweis died on the 17th of August, 1865.

He was born in Buda, Hungary, in 1818. After graduating from Pest and Vienna, he worked as an assistant at the Vienna Maternity Hospital. At that time *puerperal fever* killed a large number of women in childbirth. Semmelweis began to study this killer of young women. He discovered that the fever was caused by a bacterial infection, carried by the nurses and doctors who assisted at childbirth. Thus, he discovered the nature of bacteria long before Pasteur. He immediately ordered that the nurses and doctors should wash their hands before examinations and operations. The mortality rate in his division dropped dramatically. When he disclosed his findings and asked his superiors to introduce similar measures throughout the hospital, the Austrian doctors ridiculed his assertions and rejected his suggestions. The hospital authorities had already been angered by his insistence that he was Hungarian, in spite of his German name, and that he insisted on dressing in the Magyar style. Now their professional jealousy worsened the situation. Semmelweis was denied promotion or facilities to continue his research, let alone permission to publish his findings.

So, he moved to the *Pest Maternity Hospital in Hungary*. Here he was able to carry out his innovations and to considerably reduce the mortality rate of the young mothers. However the jealousy and hostility of the Austrian doctors made it impossible for him to make his doctrine known to the medical

world. In the dual Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, Vienna exercised dictatorial control over the medical profession. His treatises and studies only reached the medical world after his death.

He died at the height of his career at *the age of 47, ironically from an infection*. He was a victim of the very disease which he had fought at the expense of his fortune, his health and his peace of mind. The Western world has since acknowledged Semmelweis contribution to science. *Lord Lister*, the father of modern surgery paid this tribute to the Hungarian physician: "Without Semmelweis my achievements would be nothing. *To this great son of Hungary surgery owes most.*"

The medical best-seller of Morton Thompson: "The Cry and the Covenant" describes Semmelweis' struggle dramatically.

The only world jamboree of the Girl Guide movement took place in Hungary in August, 1939. Ten thousand girls from all over the world met at this "*Pax Ting*" ("*Peace Rally*"). *Their gentle plea fell on deaf ears: Europe was already rushing toward World War II*

On the 20th of August Hungarians all over the world remember their first Christian King, Saint Stephen (Istvan), who reigned from 997 to 1038.

He was the son of the last paramount Prince of Hungary Geza. Istvan married Gisela, the daughter of the Duke of Bavaria and sister of the future emperor. On his father's death, Istvan became the ruling Prince of Hungary. In 1000 he asked the Pope to recognize him as an independent Christian King. Pope Silvester II sent him a crown and bestowed upon him the title of "King by the Grace of God", thus acknowledging his independence from the Holy Roman (German) Empire.

Istvan established a Christian hierarchy and set up a central state organization based on the division of counties, rather than on the Western-type feudal system. He invited educated and skilled people from abroad to settle in Hungary and he granted them privileges. In his "*Admonitiones*", written to his son and heir, he advised the future king to welcome foreign "guests" in order to enrich Magyar culture by their contributions. At the same time, however, he proudly acknowledged the ancient historic heritage of the Magyar nation: "Preserve everything that is Hungarian. Without a past a nation has no future..." he wrote to his son.

He maintained friendly political and family ties with many European rulers, such as the Emperor, Saint Henry, his brother-in-law. One of his daughters, Agatha, married Edmund the Ironside's son, Edward and became the mother of Queen Saint Margaret of Scotland.

Unfortunately, his only son to reach adulthood, Imre, died in a hunting accident. King Stephen's death was followed by a period of internal strife.

He died on the 15th of August, 1038. His *Holy Crown* has remained the symbol of supreme authority in Hungary.



Dr. I. Semmelweis



MOHACS

On the 29th of August, 1526, Sultan Soliman (Suleiman) destroyed the Hungarian army at Mohacs.

During the first decades of the 16th century, the weak king Ul~aszlo (Vladislas) II and his child successor, *Lajos (Louis) II (1516-1526)* left the government of the country to the barons who took no notice of the increasing danger of Turkish invasion. In an orgy of self-destruction, the nation's leaders

fought each other for power and refused to pay taxes or to bear arms in defence of Hungary.

When Sultan Soliman “the Magnificent” set out in 1520 to conquer Europe, the once powerful Hungary could only oppose small mobile units in the south, recruited and commanded by the heroic archbishop, Tomori. The king was unable to mobilize the private banderia of the barons. Young Lajos II then wrote to the other Christian rulers of Western Europe, asking for help against the Turks. The two “very Christian Kings” of France and Spain (the Emperor) were fighting each other. The French King was the ally of the Sultan in any case. The King of England, Henry VIII regretted that he could not send help as he was “having domestic problems” (a typical British understatement). Hungary was left alone again.

When the Turks captured the few Hungarian forts defending the southern frontier, the king eventually managed to raise a small army of about 25,000. He bravely set out from Buda to face Soliman’s well-equipped army of nearly 200,000. The Hungarians moved to the south of the Transdanubian region, near the confluence of the Danube and the Drava and waited there for the Turks. They calmly watched the Turks as they struggled across the swampy flats with their heavy cannons - 300 of them. Someone suggested that the light cavalry should attack the Turks while they were still among the swamps, but the leaders rejected the idea. It would have been unfair and unchivalrous to attack the poor Turk while they were having such problems on the Hungarian terrain. So they let the “guests” establish their positions on the southern elevated side of the plain, install their heavy artillery and arrange the disposition of the troops. They also waited for the Sultan to complete his noon prayers.

Then, when the Turks seemed to be ready, the small Magyar army attacked. Such was the fury of the first attack that the Turkish lines were broken. The young, impetuous king took command of his guard and led them against the faltering Turkish lines. In that moment, the Turkish lines fell back and the charging Magyars ran into the murderous fire of the Janissaries’ muskets and the 300 heavy cannon. 20,000 Hungarians died in less than two hours. The king, heavily wounded, was escorted by two bodyguards. As he was crossing a flooded river, the heavy armour dragged him down and he drowned. With him died on the field of Mohacs the prelates and high dignitaries of the nation.

The Sultan could hardly believe that this small army was the national army of Hungary. He cautiously moved to the capital, Buda, found it undefended, sacked it and then returned to Turkey with 100,000 captives. For 15 years after this disaster, Hungary remained unoccupied by the Turks. But the disaster at Mohacs broke the Magyar soul. Never again did historic Hungary regain her complete independence and power.



STRANGE ANNIVERSARIES

The Turks never actually ordered the Hungarians to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of Mohacs as "Hungary's National Day of Liberation". Still, some interesting events happened on the anniversary of this great disaster.

On the 29th of August, 1532 - three years after the Battle of Mohacs to the day, a minor Hungarian-Turkish battle ended with a strange result.

On this day the Turkish siege of the Hungarian fort of Koszeg ended in what, for lack of a better

term, we must call a "draw".

Sultan Soliman (the "Magnificent"), having decided that the Hungarians constituted no danger, anymore, ordered his army to attack the heart of the Habsburg Empire, *Vienna*. He moved with his troops through Croatia and, western Hungary against the Austrian capital. Near the Austrian border stood the small fortified town, Koszeg. It was defended by 38 soldiers and a few hundred peasants who had fled to the fort from the Turks. The commander, *Miklos Jurisics*, was loyal to the Habsburg King of Hungary, Ferdinand. He refused to surrender and managed to defend the fort successfully for almost four weeks against the vastly superior Turkish force.

By the end of August, the Turkish leaders began to worry about the approach of autumn. The Turkish army, accustomed to warmer climates and using camels to move its heavy equipment, could not move or wage war in the cold, rainy, muddy weather. So the Sultan ordered his commander to end the siege without delay. The commander, who happened to know Jurisics personally, arranged a secret meeting with the Hungarian captain. As a result of this meeting the following "arrangement" was made: a small Turkish detachment entered the fort (unopposed), planted the Turkish flag on the highest tower of the fort (alongside the Magyar flag) while the Sultan and the rest of the Turkish army held prayers of thanks for the "capture" of the fort.

Then the entire Turkish army packed up and moved toward Vienna in haste. The Hungarians then held their own thanksgiving in the fort and put the Turkish flag up in the church as a war trophy. Soliman had little benefit from the "compromise" capture of the fort. By the time his army reached Vienna, the empire had collected a large force to face the Turks. As the autumn cold was coming too (the Austrians' ablest general), Soliman returned to Turkey.

On the *15th anniversary of the Battle of Mohacs, in 1541*, the Turkish capture of the undefended castle of Buda, the capital, signalled *the total Turkish occupation* of central Hungary.

On the 40th anniversary of Mohacs, in 1566, the great conqueror, *Soliman the Magnificent*, the victor of Mohacs *died* during the siege of the fort Szigetvar a few miles from the scene of his great triumph.